



Life in uncertainty

Summary of national
dialogues in spring 2023

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**NATIONAL
DIALOGUES**



Contents

Abstract..... 4

1. Introduction 6

2. About the discussionsa 8

2.1 Discussions and organisers8

2.2 Material analysis.....9

3. Living in uncertainty.....10

3.1 Uncertainty in everyday life..... 10

3.1.1 Will my money be enough? 11

3.1.2 Do I have the skills and resources to cope at work?..... 12

3.1.3 What if I get sick? 13

3.1.4 How can I cope as a disabled person? 13

3.1.5 What kind of world will our children grow up in? 14

3.2 Uncertainty in the surrounding society..... 16

3.2.1 Confrontations and insecurity 16

3.2.2 Policy and decision-making 18

3.2.3 Future of the welfare state 18

3.2.4 Speed of digitalisation and artificial intelligence 20

3.3 Global uncertainty 21

3.3.1 Fear of war 21

3.3.2 Developments threatening democracy 22

3.3.3 Climate change, biodiversity loss and planetary capacity 22

4. Observations on the nature and impacts of uncertainty 24

4.1 Uncertainty is part of life..... 24

4.2 Uncertainty as an opportunity..... 25

4.3 Accumulation of uncertainty factors..... 26

5. Means to alleviate uncertainty 28

5.1 Fellow people and communities 28

5.2 Everyday activities, knowledge and skills..... 29

5.3 Strengthening values and agency 31

6. Conclusions on the dialogues 34

Abstract

The national dialogue "Life in uncertainty" of spring 2023 illustrates the experiences of living in uncertainty of approximately 660 people. The group of participants in the national dialogue was diverse, so the summary includes the voices of people from different age groups, professional groups and cultural backgrounds. Together, they form a comprehensive overview of citizens' ways of understanding and dealing with the present moment in which different crises follow one after another.

The summary is based on the notes that the organisers made on the contents of the dialogues which were then submitted to the operative core group of the National Dialogues. The information produced through these dialogues is unique. It involves people's personal experiences described in their own expressions and includes a wide range of perceptions, thoughts, emotions, memories and imaginations. For this reason, the dialogues offer a glimpse into many issues and phenomena, which would be difficult to obtain by other means.

In the summary, it is possible to read what uncertainty feels like in the lives of different individuals and the various meanings people give to it. At the same time, the experiential knowledge obtained from the dialogues show what kind of causal relationships the participants link to the uncertainties they have experienced. We get an idea of all the ways that uncertainties arising from economic, health or global crises affect people's lives. This also creates understanding of how the impacts differ according to individuals' backgrounds and life situations.

The most important observations of the National Dialogue of spring 2023 are the following:

1. The majority of the citizens who participated in the discussions feel that uncertainty has increased in their lives. Many feel that uncertainty has increased in daily life, in society and globally.
2. Another source of uncertainty is the perceived increase in polarisation in the society, and the national spirit is considered to be on trial.
3. Uncertainty treats people in different life situations differently. Uncertainties accumulate especially onto people living in an economically, socially or health-wise vulnerable life situation.
4. As a result of increased uncertainty, many feel that their faith in the future has deteriorated. Particular concerns about the future include the coping of children and young people, the erosion of the welfare state and its services, as well as global crises affecting the economy, wars, the state of democracy and the carrying capacity of the planet.
5. The most important factors that alleviate living in uncertainty are communality, everyday well-being skills and activities that lean on one's own values.

1. Introduction

The first National Dialogue was held in spring 2023 on the topic Life in Uncertainty. 61 organisers joined the discussions, including NGOs and associations, municipalities and cities, central government and educational organisations, foundations and institutes, companies and individual citizens. Together, these actors carried out 86 dialogues involving approximately 660 people representing different age groups, professional groups and cultural backgrounds..

The national dialogue template began to take shape in connection with the series of dialogues that have been implemented in recent years on different topics ([Lockdown Dialogues](#), [The Great Nature Dialogue](#), [Dialogues in Defence of Democracy](#), and [Immigration Dialogues](#)). The template was designed in its current form in spring 2022 in a working group appointed by the Minister of Local Government, which included representatives of central government, municipalities and civil society.

National dialogues have two key objectives:

1. Provide citizens with opportunities to meet and discuss important issues constructively and openly.
2. Create an understanding that benefits public administration and other actors and present a current situational picture of different societal phenomena, challenges and opportunities through the participants' experiences.

In addition, the aim of national dialogues is to strengthen societal trust, inclusion and the ability of different actors to handle matters through dialogue.

The national dialogue model is based on equal, open and transparent cooperation between the government and civil society. The activities are guided by the operative core group, which is responsible for coordinating the discussion series, producing the material offered to the organisers of the dialogues, inviting the organisers and their training, and producing and publishing a summary of the dialogues. Discussion organisers are offered training on the [Timeout](#) dialogue method and support material for organising and guiding their discussion.

Any organization or citizen may join to organise their own National Dialogues. The cornerstone of the discussion series are the over 30 actors who are committed to organising dialogues in their respective areas in each round of discussions. In addition, discussion organisers relevant to each topic are invited to participate in each round. The aim is to make sure it is possible for the National Dialogues to promote the voice of as many different groups of people as possible and especially bring out the voice of groups who are not otherwise heard in societal discussions.

In the future, two rounds of national dialogues will be organised every year. The selection of topics is guided by four criteria:

1. More multifaceted understanding of the topic is needed in Finland
2. The topic concerns a wide range of citizens at the national level
3. The topic does not exclude any particular group of people
4. A broader understanding of the topic also benefits the government

The dialogues for topic selection organised in December 2022 discussed many issues that concern Finnish society. Participants discussed issues such as young people's poor wellbeing, growing inequalities, the impacts of war, the spread of misinformation, the economic situation in Finland, digitalisation, the state of the environment and sources of hope in a world shaken by crises. The discussions were thoroughly recorded, and on their basis, the operative core group formed the umbrella theme for the first National Dialogue. "Life in uncertainty" was chosen as the theme, as many of the above-mentioned topics were connected by the increase, prolonging and accumulation of uncertainty. Thus, at the beginning of 2023, Finnish residents were invited to organise dialogues on the experiences and impacts of uncertainty in the lives of different groups and individuals.

This summary is based on the notes that the organisers of the discussions made on the contents of the dialogues which were then submitted to the operative core group of the National Dialogue. They provide an overview of the experiences of about 660 people living in uncertainty. The group of participants is diverse, so the summary includes the voices of people from different age groups, professional groups and cultural backgrounds. Together, they form a comprehensive overview of citizens' ways of understanding and dealing with the present moment in which different crises follow one af-

ter another. In the summary, we describe the views emerging in the dialogues on the factors causing uncertainty, their causes and consequences, and the means the participants described for coping with the uncertainties.

We hope that the summary will be read through a wide range of lenses. It is possible to discern different themes from the text (e.g. finances, health, safety and politics, among others). It can also be examined from the perspective of different groups of people (such as children and young people, older people, entrepreneurs or countryside residents). The participants and organisers of the dialogues can reflect their own discussions on the outputs and perspectives of the other dialogues. The various organisers of national dialogues can utilise the contents of the summary in their own activities and in planning their next dialogue. For the administration of central government, municipalities and wellbeing services counties, the summary provides an up-to-date overview of citizens' lives in uncertainty and versatile experience-based data to develop work and services in different administrative branches and to support political decision-making.

2. About the discussions

2.1 Discussions and organisers

86

Discussions

660

Discussion participants

The participants were

13-89

- year-olds

Discussions were held in

3

countries

Finland, Estonia, Nepal

43

cities

Espoo, Forssa, Heinola, Helsinki, Hämeenlinna, Iisalmi, Ikaalinen, Joensuu, Jyväskylä, Karjaa, Kerava, Keuruu, Kiuruvesi, Kouvola, Kuopio, Lahti, Lappeenranta, Leppävirta, Lohja, Mikkeli, Mynämäki, Nurmes, Oulu, Pielavesi, Pori, Pornainen, Porvoo, Ranua, Rautalampi, Riihimäki, Rovaniemi, Siilinjärvi, Suonenjoki, Tampere, Turku, Tuusula, Vantaa, Varkaus, Vihti, Tallinna, Tartto, Viljandi ja Katmandu

Languages of discussions: Finnish, Swedish, Estonian and English

Discussions participants included: school pupils, upper secondary school students, parents and parents of special needs children, people with different illnesses, people with disabilities, care home residents, unemployed people, pensioners, professionals and experts in different fields, teachers, social welfare and education sector professionals, museum professionals, employees and activists in organisations, managers and supervisors, product developers, civil servants, entrepreneurs, volunteers, immigrants, youth delegates and local councillors, city residents and people living in rural areas.

Discussions were organised by:

NGOs and associations: Autismiliitto ry, Erityislasten Omaiset ELO ry, Familia ry, Jalotus ry in cooperation with Kerava Library, Development Centre Opinkirjo (2 discussions), Local Activator LAG Mansikka ry (2 discussions), "Kohti tulevaa" project / Citizen Forum ry, The Threshold Association (2 discussions), Central Union for Child Welfare, the Association for Rural Culture and Education, MIELI Rovaniemen Seudun Mielenterveys ry / Rovaniemen Neuvokas, Mikro- ja yksityisrytät ry, Naistenkartano ry, Sivi Study Centre, Rovaniemen eläkeläiset ry, Sininauhaliitto / "Digiosallisuutta asunnottomille" project, The Finnish Youth Association ry/ Regional Office of Eastern Finland, Suomen Operaatio Libero ry, Finnish Roma Association ry, Guarantee Foundation / Martha Organisation / Vantaan yhteinen pöytä (2 discussions), Business Mentors Central Finland.

men eläkeläiset ry, Sininauhaliitto / "Digiosallisuutta asunnottomille" project, The Finnish Youth Association ry/ Regional Office of Eastern Finland, Suomen Operaatio Libero ry, Finnish Roma Association ry, Guarantee Foundation / Martha Organisation / Vantaan yhteinen pöytä (2 discussions), Business Mentors Central Finland.

State administration, municipalities and cities: Forssa City Library, City of Forssa, Heinola City Library, HUS Southern Cancer Centre, Kela (2 discussions), KEUDA, Keuruu City Library, Kouvola City Library, Lahti City Library / "Minun kuntani" project, Lappeenranta City Library, Mikkeli City Enterprise Otavia, Ministry of Justice / The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations Etno (2 discussions), National Board of Education, Ranua City Library (2 discussions), City of Rovaniemi (4 discussions), City of Rovaniemi and Rovaniemen eläkeläiset ry, Ministry of the Interior / Migration Department, Finnish Embassy Kathmandu (Nepal), City of Turku / Museum of History and the Future, Municipality of Tuusula / Halosenniemi, Ministry of Finance / Open Government.

Higher education institutions, foundations, institutes and spiritual communities: Aalto University Career and Recruitment Services and Alumni Relations Team (3 discussions), Deaconess Foundation / D-station Kannelmäki, Deaconess Foundation / D-station Kontula, Timeout Foundation (2 discussions), Humanities Students, IIAS (International Institute of Administrative Sciences, Finland), The Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation KVS (4 discussions), Puistokatu 4 & Timeout Foundation, Sitra (6 discussions), Savonia University of Applied Sciences as a part of the Puijo Summit event, Finnish Institute in Estonia (2 discussions), Svenska Folkskolans vänner (3 discussions), Turku Cathedral Parish.

Businesses and private individuals: Dialogi-Akatemia / Aretai Oy, Intonaattorit Oy (2 discussions), Kahvila IPI Oy / IPI Kulmakuppila, Liisa Vilkki, Mikael Järvenkylä – Roboline Group Oy (2 discussions).

2.2 Material analysis

Material consisting of discussion entries has been analysed in a data-driven manner. Both authors read the notes of all discussions in their entirety, after which we compiled a summary of the central outlines and perspectives. The material formed by the 86 discussion notes is extensive and rich and contains a large amount of information about the participants' unique experiences. We have not focused on analysing the special features of individual dialogues, but processed the entire material as a "big-picture dialogue" in which the voices of different groups and participants are in discussion with each other. In the text, we use a lot of direct anonymous quotes from the material. In this way, the reader can get close to the participants' voices and their own expressions when they describe their experiences of uncertainty.

The information produced through these dialogues is unique. It involves people's personal experiences stated in their own expressions and includes a wide range of perceptions, thoughts, emotions, memories, and imaginations. For this reason, the dialogues offer a glimpse into many issues and phenomena, which would be difficult to obtain by other means. In this summary, we can read what uncertainty feels like in the lives of different individuals and the kind of meanings people give to it. At the same time, the experiential knowledge obtained from the dialogues show what kind of causal relationships the participants link to the uncertainties they have experienced. We get an idea of all the ways that uncertainties arising from economic, health or global crises affect people's lives. This also creates understanding of how the impacts differ according to individuals' backgrounds and life situations. In addition to the experiences of uncertainty, the dialogues highlighted the means that the participants considered important in handling and mitigating uncertainty as well as strengthening trust.

3. Living in uncertainty

The dialogues clearly show that citizens feel the need to reflect on and analyse the uncertainty they have experienced and to understand the impacts of various uncertainties on their lives. Many dialogues began by mapping out the range of uncertainties. The participants reported on numerous uncertainties in *their daily lives* and in their *immediate surroundings*, at the *society level*, and *globally*.

A multitude of large and small uncertainties that affect the participants' lives were brought up. In the daily lives of the participants, uncertainty is related to financial coping, work, living with illnesses and disabilities, and the future of children and young people. At the societal level, uncertainty is caused by experiences of insecurity and polarisation, poli-

tics and decision-making, the future of the welfare state and the pace of digitalisation. The participants in the national dialogues also reflected on the global crises that cause fear and uncertainty: war, anti-democratic developments, climate change and biodiversity loss. In the discussions, these three levels of uncertainty are interlinked in many ways: global crises create uncertainty in everyday life, and on the other hand, everyday experiences affect how societal development trends and the global situation are perceived.

3.1 Uncertainty in everyday life

We start from financial uncertainty experienced by the participants, which is caused in particular by rising prices and interest rates. In working life, on the other hand, uncertainty is caused by concerns about the adequacy of one's own competence, increased workload and responsibility, and different transition phases. Particular uncertainty in the everyday life of the participants is caused by the participant's own or their loved one's illnesses, the availability of services as well as the realisation of one's own rights as a person with disabilities. In the dialogues, many also pondered about the kind of world in which children and young people are growing up today and how the digital world affects them.

3.1.1 Will my money be enough?

Numerous people who participated in the discussions highlight the **financial uncertainty** they experienced. It has many impacts on everyday choices, mental stress and faith in the future.

"It takes over your thoughts when you have to think about money all the time."

In particular, the rise in food and energy prices has hit the participants hard: *"the price of food worries me. I don't want to pay more and more on vegetables like cucumbers, and I chase after offers and travel further just to go to a cheaper shop"*. One participant describes how *"I have left tomatoes and peppers on the shelf"*. Electricity bills also feel unreasonable: *"My whole family has reduced electricity consumption by 40 percent, but the electricity bill is still about 50 percent higher. This seems unreasonable, and I don't understand what the point is."* One young person states that *"at home, we have not turned on the electric sauna stove all winter. My dad got a free wood-burning sauna stove, a tarpaulin and wood from somewhere, so he built a wood sauna in the yard."*

At the same time, some participants think that *"We could afford to reduce consumption. Even though we don't really have to, we have noticed how easy it has been to cut down on the electricity bill, how we could manage to cut the cost of groceries and grow things ourselves."* One of the participants states that *"the price of a bag of groceries per month has not increased as I'm not buying caviar. It's not a good idea to go to the store on an empty stomach. Making a list of what is needed is important to avoid impulse purchases."* Another one continues that *"it is a good time to teach future generations that you cannot have everything. Money doesn't grow in trees, and in some families, children know it."*

Some of the participants are hit harder than others by the increased prices. Especially with a low income without a possibility for additional earnings,

there are concerns about having enough money. One of the retired participants describes how *"over the past 20 years, my income has steadily gone down, while travel reimbursements are reduced and deductibles are rising. Pensions and state support do not rise at the same pace."* Students are also having a hard time: *"We are worried about the rising prices and inflation, how we can make a living while also studying at the same time."* As prices rise, even having a job does not always guarantee financial security because *"sure, there will be these index increases in wages, but they are not nearly enough to compensate for increased costs"*.

"Economic uncertainty is then reflected into stress and well-being and contributes to feeling bad", the participants state. Living in uncertainty also undermines faith in the future. Older participants are worried about *"how young people are considering if they still dare to start a family. Which will win: love or fear of how to get by if you have children?"* The younger people wondered, *"whether I will be able to buy a home and pay off the loan in the future."* The more general economic outlook is also a *"cause for concern. People are now used to saving and cutting back, and we will keep getting used to this even more. How will we get economic growth when people get used to saving and buying nothing? What will make people spend money when saving has been more important for a long time and costs have been cut?"*

In one discussion participants reflect on the fact that *"part of the current cost of living crisis is a middle-class crisis"*, when *"things that were previously certain have become uncertain for the middle-class in particular"*. *"For the poor, the decrease is less large"* and *"losing face"* is not part of it. One participant compares the crisis between middle-class and low-income participants as follows: *"We are not heating up the sauna because of solidarity due to the general situation, even if my electricity contract was inexpensive. At the same time, others take cold showers and save electricity because they have to."*

3.1.2 Do I have the skills and resources to cope at work?

There are many kinds of uncertainties experienced in the Finnish working life. Some of the uncertainties in working life mentioned by the participants are related to the social and global upheavals of recent years and their impacts on the future and working conditions in their sectors. On the other hand, **adequacy of competency, burden of responsibility and workload** are issues that almost everyone thinks about at different stages of their careers. In the light of the dialogues, it seems that uncertainty has increased in almost all sectors, but the impacts and challenges are different depending on whether you work in the public, private or third sector.

The rapid change in society and increasing demands make many people consider the adequacy of their own competence. *"I sometimes feel like everybody here is so cool and smart and that I don't understand anything about the things they're*

"My everyday uncertainties are related to work. How will I do at work, will I succeed?"

talking about and I just smile and nod," one of the participants describes their experience of uncertainty in working life. Another one says that they feel nervous in social situations and that they feel *"insecure in situations where they should be really confident"*. The participants are also concerned about *"that personal insecurity about myself, do I know how to and can I talk about my things as I should and can I take others into account"* as well as *"understanding the big picture and uncertainty that I should be an expert in these changes"*. Filling an expert's boots feels difficult when *"I'm still figuring out my role and I don't have a handle on the big picture"*. This causes *"an imposter syndrome - am I the right person to do the job I am doing now?"*

Different **transitions**, such as transitioning from studying to working life and starting a new job,

also bring out uncertainty: *"At the end of the day, everything has gone well, but I have felt horribly uncertain in those moments."* For others, *"exams, studies and graduating"* create uncertainty, for others *"the transition to working life causes grey hair"*. One of the young participants wondered: *"What if you can't go where you would like to go? Or if something bad happens to the field you want to be in?"* As working life and competence needs change, the participants also wondered: *"Will my studies carry me where I want to go, will they see the significance of my skills in the labour market?"* and, on the other hand, *"Is there enough demand yet for my speciality in the business world of today? Is the world changing fast enough?"*

The participants of the dialogues also talked about **uncertainty caused by workload**. One of them states that *"for me, tolerating uncertainty at work rose to a whole new level. When the uncertainty comes to your sleep and everyday life, you're quite deep in it."* A few participants wondered whether they could manage to stay in their work until retirement age: *"As a young person, you think about what to study and so on, but now you start wondering whether you can keep doing your work until retirement age."*

Especially entrepreneurs have been affected by the many uncertainty factors in business of the recent years, such as *"the deterioration of consumer solvency, increased interest rates and fluctuations in energy prices"*. Uncertainty is particularly uncomfortable for some of the sole and small entrepreneurs, whose *"entrepreneur's pension contributions are too high and yet the pension and social security are still poor"*, and who therefore *"feel that they are in the margins of society"*.

Uncertainties are also strongly present in NGO work: *"Finances are always uncertain with so many donors. Funding is usually available for a year, and we often only get information of it in the spring. Long-term planning is difficult"*. Those in organisation work feel that *"global crises have further increased the short-term nature of the work"*. However, at the same time, *"the importance of our*

work has only increased" and *"the meaning in and ideology of NGO work helps to cope in uncertain times"*.

Especially in the social, health and education sectors, *"we are worried that scarce resources, excessive workload and increased stress will have an impact not only on the practical possibilities of doing one's own work well, but also on the attractiveness of the entire sector in the future."* One of the participants says that *"I have always wanted to be in the care sector and now I'm starting to feel uncertainty as everyone is saying that everything is bad in the sector and that the work is so hard and so on. So, is it a bad idea to go study this field after all?"* The concern seems appropriate because the participants share how *"I have had to think about my personal coping in my vocation"*, they describe *"constant struggling"* with the shortage of employees and the coping of employees, or how *"it is not possible to do my work in peace and working as a manager causes me stress"*.

3.1.3 What if I get sick?

A large number of people with experience of serious illnesses in their own or their loved ones' lives as well as professionals who regularly encounter people with illnesses participated in the national dialogues. Serious illness always increases uncertainty in life, and in uncertain times, illness seems even more threatening than before. Global crises can also increase the uncertainty of people with illnesses and their loved ones: What if you run out of medicine because of a pandemic or war? What do potential power cuts mean for people dependent on mechanical ventilation? How can all sick and disabled people be brought to shelter if necessary?

Even just the possibility of falling ill can cause uncertainty and fear, especially if hereditary diseases run in the family. *"I'm worried about the situation: please check my memory and maybe I could get a pill that would slow it down"*, one person wishes. Many say that their biggest worry is *"not knowing who will take care of me."* The participants reflected on what it means when, as a result of illness or

ageing, you have to *"fully rely on someone else"*. One of the participants describes how *"my health challenges, disability and the role of an informal carer cause great uncertainty as I don't know how easy it will be to get help in the future. Care facilities and services are hard to find. You live in fear of what will happen and when."* As a result of an illness, the roles of family members may also turn upside down in a way that causes uncertainty: *"I am no longer the child of my parents, but I am the person who needs to take care of them"*.

A young person can also fall ill. The dialogues involved young people with cancer whose life had been interrupted by the serious illness. Information about the illness is needed quickly, as *"every minute of extra waiting increases uncertainty"*. When an illness hits at a life stage when a young person is still looking for a direction in life, uncertainty is not only about coping with the illness, but also about self-image, social relationships and dreams for the future. The possibility of death makes you think: *"Will I disappear from the world, will anyone remember me?"*

3.1.4 How can I cope as a disabled person?

Living with disability usually means that a person constantly needs support from other people and society. Disabled people who participated in the dialogues gave many examples of how the increase in societal uncertainty often multiplies among those living with a disability.

Although *"normal life issues cause uncertainty for everyone"*, participants with different types of disabilities recognise a number of issues in which *"there is already more of a disability spiral"*. Do basic everyday services work, when and in which situations do you need an assistant, do you get the necessary transport services and do they work, can you find a parking space, what if there is an obstacle on a familiar route, is the pedestrian crossing voice-controlled? In other words: *"the more uncertain services are and if accessibility hasn't been taken care of, the more uncertain life is"*.

In recent years, uncertainty *"has been exceptional"*, as major changes have been taking place, from wellbeing service counties to the energy crisis. For example, *"for people on the autism spectrum, changes are harder than for an average person"*, describes one of the participants, as *"uncertainty breaks the routines and thus breaks the sense of security"*.

"Living with a disability or illness creates uncertainty as you can never know what will happen."

One parent of a disabled child feels *"dependent on the ethical values of the employee if the child lives outside the home. It creates insecurity and uncertainty when you have to think about what kind of an employee happens to be working with the child."* More generally, *"parents feel uncertainty when they do not know how people will treat their disabled child"*. In particular, *"who will take care of the child when I get older and eventually leave this world?"*

Many uncertainties are also related to the employment of people with disabilities. *"I remember wondering if anyone would employ me ever since I was little"*, says one of the participants. Another participant continues that *"if we think of children and young people with disabilities, they are under a lot of pressure in terms of how to get to school, work, into society"*. One of the participants describes how they *"as a disabled person feel uncertain about the future, even though I have a really good CV and I am really good at my work"*. As a disabled person, you have to think about whether *"to put yourself forward, whether I should mention my disability in a job application, whether I should put my wheelchair in a picture in my dating profile. You think twice about how you do things, even if it would not matter, and you think about how others will react."*

When society is shaken by many crises, are the needs of different groups of people taken into ac-

count in decision-making? Participants with disabilities mentioned as a particular source of uncertainty *"how little some key politicians know about the everyday lives of people with disabilities"* and how *"people who make decisions are ignorant"*. One of the participants states that *"I see no other way than raising awareness, disabled people have to try to influence, to be visible (...) so that there would not be so many uncertainties"*. Another participant continues: *"In the best case scenario, this is a positive spiral when services work and people with disabilities can get involved and participation is possible, then we are visible, and we become a natural part of the human spectrum and our needs are noticed."*

3.1.5 What kind of world will our children grow up in?

Many conversations in the national dialogues revolved around how changes and crises in recent years affect children and young people. Many participants wondered about the kind of world the new generations will grow up in and what their everyday lives will be like. One of the participants describes how *"I have realised, since my own children have been very young, that they will grow up in a whole different world in a sense that their future is considerably more uncertain as their world has real threats, such as what will happen to the climate and the world"*.

The participants are concerned about changes in society, increasing demands, consumption culture and accelerating pace: *"Young people feel that there is too much of everything: too many demands at school, too much coronavirus, war, constantly new crises, and somehow they should also save the world"*. Changes and crises are considered to have an impact on the well-being of children and young people. The participants are concerned about *"how young people can cope when they have already experienced a pandemic, loss of nature and now a war"* and how *"news and all discussions about the climate change and globalisation affect young people and increase their poor well-being."*

Many parents and grandparents are particularly worried about the future of their own descendants: *"A pensioner does not have the greatest concern about themselves, but about the children and grandchildren who will have to go through all this while I have been able to live a good life myself."* One of the discussions focused on raising children and whether *"it is a good idea to bring children into this broken world"*.

Some of the participants feel that young people *"do not have faith in the future"*, but they also look at themselves: *"Did we not know how to give them that message well enough?"* Together, they state that *"it would be a good idea to give young people in particular the message that everything will be okay."* It is also important for parents to ask whether *"I am mirroring the way things have gone in my own life and how they should go the same way for them. They don't live in the same world as me. They're going into a different world. Maybe they are doing really well."*

"I wonder about the kids who are now growing up. How different the world is where they are growing up. What will happen to them?"

Particular concern in the discussions is expressed about the **impacts of the digital world on young people**. *"Do they know how to write and read anymore, but do you even need to know all this when you have machines?"*, asks one participant. Another one suggests *"to go to a lower secondary school and see how often you can make eye contact. See how many kids can squat. How many children can drive a bike, how many can ski, how many do long jumps, how many run"*. However, problems related to smart devices are not limited to children and young people. The adult population should also recognise their contribution to the issue. *"We have a considerable problem with how addicted people are to smart devices. I think it's a national problem"*, points out one of the participants.

Inequalities encountered by young people are also considered a major problem, which bothers both the young and adult discussion participants: *"Equality in the school world is not realised in large school groups, there is a lack of special support and inequality begins to grow"*. Many are concerned about racism, discrimination and bullying, and hope that every young person would be treated equally. Some participants are concerned about the poor well-being and substance abuse of young people: *"It is normal to take at least something and that ever younger pupils have to think about whether they should be taking it too, like others expect. And older kids and adults offer and get everything for them."*

However, not everyone has such a gloomy idea of the well-being and future of children and young people. For some, their belief in the future has been strengthened through *"meeting great young people"*. The participants have noticed that *"young people are so much smarter, their way of thinking is so different when you hear young people talk and solve problems. I wish we could listen to them as I know how much I have learned from young people"*. It may be that *"The world will gradually get better when such smart children become adults."*

Young people who participated in the dialogues recognised the concerns of adults, but the situation seems partly different through young people's own eyes. They are worried about the future but there are many ways to deal with it. One young person who participated in the discussion ponders: *"You don't have to worry about everything yet, but on the other hand, you think about whether you should be more worried and could you do more."* Another one has *"started thinking that now I can live my young life, and I don't need to think about and worry about those things all the time."* And does responsibility for the future lie, in fact, with young people? Should it not be the responsibility of adults? *"If today's adults do not take climate issues into account, what will happen to the future of us young people?"*



"Uncertainty and fear can feed prejudice and create opportune moments to simplify complex issues."

3.2 Uncertainty in the surrounding society

Discussions on everyday uncertainties often also extended to wide-spread societal phenomena. National dialogues discussed the increasing experiences of insecurity in the Finnish society, polarisations and the impacts of immigration and relationships between population groups on internal security. Uncertainty about the future of the welfare state emerged particularly strongly in the discussions. Several dialogues also addressed the government negotiations that were ongoing at the time and uncertainty related to political decision-making. There is also concern about the pace of national digitalisation.

3.2.1 Confrontations and insecurity

Participants in national dialogues feel that there is **a growing polarisation** between different people and groups of people. For one of the participants, *"uncertainty is brought about by conflicts between people. Especially if they are deliberately exacerbated and polarisation is sought, and there is no understanding or background provided."* Another one describes how *"people are becoming biased, polarisation increases, and aggression grows online and in the media. We are now using the kind of language that wasn't used 10 years ago."* Participants feel that such a *"strong polarisation between people and different social classes is new"*.

In the increasingly polarised atmosphere, *"Many people say that they do not dare to state their own views on social media, because they fear that they will get attacked and create conflict situations"*. At worst, this leads to *"creating bubbles when only those who dare, i.e. those who are the biggest fanatics"*, take a prominent part in the discussion and *"those in-between may not necessarily have the courage to participate"*. One of the participants offers the example of *"How easily people lump together and how they incite warlike enmity towards each other, how easily we condemn everybody, but every time we talk about the war in Ukraine, we incite it, add more fuel to the fire, it happens so easily that we do not even notice it."*

Some of the participants also feel **unsafe in their own living environment**. *"This used to be a safe, nice city. Nowadays, people complain about everything and office holders are speaking a different language than the residents"*, one participant describes their home town. Some fear increasing violence: *"Newspapers talk about violence, and moving around the city centre is challenging for older people. I even told my wife not to get talking to strangers."* Some participants also have personal experience of violence and harassment: *"I have to take a longer route and go home carefully when someone follows me"*.

It is also thought that the insecurity of minorities has increased. *"The society has become fragmented, social control has broken down, anything can be shouted at people"*, was stated in one discussion. One of the participants says that *"a lot of young trans people go to my hobby and I've heard that they are scared to walk on the street and of the risk of violence"*. One participant wonders how *"it is no longer a question of uncertainty, but of actual lack of safety. The situation is incomprehensible in a welfare state. What is happening here?"* People's indifference is disappointing and that *"the police can't do anything about it"*.

In several dialogues, the experiences of insecurity are linked to the rise of extremism. As people's sense of security weakens, extremist movements gain more support and this in turn creates more insecurity: *"There is no sense of security, and then we wonder why people vote for the extreme right. Who will have my back? If nobody does, it creates the conditions for an increase in extremism."* Some participants say that they are particularly scared of *"the rise of the extreme right in Finland"*. One of the participants states that *"it is scary that there are Nazis on the street again and no intervention"*. Another one tells that *"We were coming from a memorial service and came across some skinheads. They had returned to the streets. It was a big wake-up call - young men. Is this where we stand - from the point of view of poor well-being and exclusion?"*

In some discussions, **internal security and immigration** were linked: *"Internal security is the biggest challenge. How will we endure internally? How will we manage immigration, which is inevitable?"* Dialogue participants wondered particularly about the integration of immigrants into the Finnish society: *"There are also bad examples of immigration from other countries, which gives a knowledge base for us who are a little behind in this change. We have tools for integration. Those looking to recruit top talents should acknowledge that integrating into a new country requires family, and to be prepared that the recruit will bring two genera-*

tions with them. Everyone who has worked abroad knows the significance of family."

People working with immigration and ethnic relations also participated in the dialogues. At the time of the discussions, they were *"waiting nervously for the Government Programme"*. The fear is that *"resources will be cut; so far there have been a lot of appropriations"*. Participants also considered the preparedness of the reception system for asylum seekers at times of uncertainty, when *"situations are very different"*, and many factors have an impact on who comes to Finland, how and through what ways. Compared to previous immigration situations, the participants considered that *"this is a completely new situation when the arrivals are going to completely different places and jobs"*, and the next situation may again be different.

Some national dialogue participants are bothered by putting population groups into boxes and its impact on relationships between different groups: *"Ukrainians are good refugees, Russians are bad. Work-based immigration is good, humanitarian is bad. It's like they're in their own boxes. Every refugee who arrived here has a good reason for it and wants to find their place."*

"Fear and uncertainty shrink people and our existence and perspectives on matters", describes one of the participants. Another one continues how *"uncertainty and fear can feed prejudice and create opportune moments to simplify complex issues"*. This may lead to *"feelings of fear and uncertainty towards all ethnic minorities. Fear and uncertainty increase hate speech and easily also increase the number of hateful acts."*

3.2.2 Policy and decision-making

Many discussions criticise **aimless decision-making**: *“There is no clear vision or direction to go. A hypothetical example: funding for X is secured for one parliamentary term, then no longer secured, then perhaps secured again.”* According to some participants, *“even front-row politicians are talking nonsense and say conflicting things, saying one thing just to turn around and say the opposite thing to someone else”*. Not everyone trusts the integrity of politicians: *“Honesty is only an option for a politician, not a starting point”*. The gap between generations is also felt to be an obstacle to decision-making: *“Old politicians do not advocate for young people”* and *“I’m worried that the future of young people is decided by old decision-makers who only serve their own interests”*.

“Do we need more dialogue in politics?”

Whilst some of the discussion participants have doubts about *“The competence and goals of decision-makers - whether they primarily advocate for themselves, their party or the people”*, at the same time there is concern about *“the excessive criticism and insulting of people in politics”*. Some participants are *“worried that we can no longer elect sensible people to work for our benefit”*. That’s why many are asking: *“Do we need more dialogue in politics?”*

During the national dialogues, the at-the-time ongoing **government negotiations and the values guiding them** were the topic of several discussions: *“We are in an uncertain situation as we are waiting for the Government Programme and Government, their values and what they will bring with them”*. The participants have noticed that *“we are again talking about money and balancing, rarely about the integrity of society and the increasing inequality”*.

The publicly discussed cutting lists for public funds worry many people: *“Saving six billion euros - I’m scared of the new government, the Ministry of Finance has put out terrible policies, we will all wither, purchasing power will be lost and tax revenue will decrease”*. In another discussion, the participants thought that *“At the moment, as the experts of the Ministry of Finance are making their little calculations and presenting the worst-case cuts and talking about how much they want to save, and then the parties consider it (...) everyone is shaving billions and taking a hundred off there, a hundred off there like it was a race for who can cut the most (...) that is no way to build a society”*.

3.2.3 Future of the welfare state

The Finnish welfare state and its future became a key topic of reflection in the dialogues. Many of the participants are concerned about *“whether there even is such a thing as a welfare state anymore - has it eroded?”* This concern stems from different experiences in which **the society’s safety nets have failed or public services have not been available**.

One of the participants explains how *“my father had a heart attack and it took 15 minutes for the ambulance to come, it took him to the emergency clinic and he was there for six hours until he was sent home because there were too many patients there”*. Another one says, *“I have always been able to see the nurse before. And they always referred me somewhere if I needed it. Now I need to call them in the morning, and maybe they’ll call me back in the afternoon and sometimes they don’t call at all. If you put an assessment of symptoms on Maisa (a web client portal), they will not read it.”* A third participant describes *“the experience of the availability of services around our village. Banks do not work, but what about when Kela (social insurance institution) doesn’t work, now we are nervous*

“Is Finland a welfare state for everyone anymore?”

about health care in the wellbeing services counties.” Older people living in sparsely populated areas are also concerned about the deterioration of transport services.

The participants feel that in a welfare state, services should be equally available, but now *“the quality and inequality of health care and services for the elderly depend on where they live”*. The participants say that *“somewhere remote, it can take a long time to get help”* and *“in many places, the distance to the hospital is very long”*. Participants acknowledge that it is *“somewhat your own choice: if you want many services to be close to you, there is no other option but to live in a city or a large municipality. But things like basic health care should not be inaccessible even if you live in the middle of nowhere.”*

The parents of special needs children feel that nowadays they have to fight to get even the statutory services: *“You apparently demand too much for your child even if the services are statutory. Office holders should know about the services and help the parents, but the parents feel that getting help is challenging.”* Some have already become cynical and given up on getting help. One of the parents states that *“I no longer seek services because it takes a lot of effort and it is disappointing when you can’t get them despite everything”*.

Inequality is not only regional or specific to certain special groups. A person’s livelihood can also put them in an unequal position in getting services. One of the participants had their *“start-up business go bankrupt at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. I was in a situation where I had to think if I could keep my house or whether I would have to sell it (...) Even though we have this wonderful welfare society, it does not apply to the entrepreneur yet.”* Other entrepreneurs are also concerned that when setbacks strike or *“when I fall ill, can I get help if I need it?”*

The functioning of the recently established wellbeing services counties makes participants nervous: *“How will the social welfare and health*

care regions operate in the future, will the resources be enough and will there be any changes?” In some participants, *“the change in the well-being service counties creates uncertainty”* and they are worried *“that children’s and residents’ affairs will not be taken care of, as so many things are in a mess.”* Now we are in a situation where *“some wellbeing services counties are still in square one, and the harmonisation of salaries is a really big and difficult thing and requires money”*. Organisations are finding their shape, and *“just when you think you know who your contact person is, there is a different organisation and the bosses have changed”*.

The well-being and coping at work of public sector professionals were also talked about in the discussions. *“In my opinion, some 70 per cent of teachers are in the borderlines of a burnout(...), health care professionals are also about to drop”*, believes one participant. Another one describes how efficiency has been introduced from the *“business world that has all these leadership lessons that talk about quality and efficiency, and so on, and then the public sector has tried to stuff these ideas into their operations”*. It seems that *“cold calculations in the background have cut resources, i.e. money, and we’ve been told that you just have to make do with that, now get your work done.”* This has resulted in that *“previously, a nurse could focus on the nurse’s work, to encounter and to care. Now all that paperwork, recording and computer work take so much time, you don’t have time to do the actual care work.”* The key question is: *“How could we get such conditions for employees that they could cope with being there?”*

Other kinds of voices were also heard in the discussions. *“We believe that administrative changes have been the biggest ones, otherwise people are able to get treatment in the same way and the current services are kept”*, one participant believes. Another one wonders: *“Why is it the most widespread impression, or why is this talked about the most, how bad the current state of health care is, and yet at least at our own public health centre here in Helsinki, there is a large number of people who all are satisfied. The workers there are sat-*

isfied, and every time I go there, I have to thank them for how amazingly they are taking care of our things." In general, "maybe success stories are talked about with less fuss than failures, and it may then feed such negative feedback".

One question was asked many times in the dialogues: can the welfare state still be saved? One participant states that "I think it is up to the state to ensure well-being for its citizens, what could be more important? There is not enough talk about what well-being is and what it means to build it together. It is not enough to put a price tag on it and say that now we are cutting." Another participant feels that the dismantling of the welfare state is even considered an electoral asset: "Who dares to tell you that they are cutting or who cuts the most from here and there". The erosion of the welfare state increases uncertainty: "Will people get care, even my relatives who live far away? What does it require of you, do you need to move to take care of fathers and mothers?"

"How quickly will everything change, how fast should I be, how many things should I adopt?"

3.2.4 Speed of digitalisation and artificial intelligence

The digitalisation of society and the discussion on continuously developing artificial intelligence were also reflected in national dialogues. Many participants feel uncertain about how to not fall off the digitalisation wagon: "Technical development is staggering. How can you keep up?" Especially the rapid pace of change raises concerns, and one person even asks: "did digitalisation happen at an unsustainable speed?" Others, on the other hand, find it exciting how "innovations become a part of everyday life and work". The participants think that

"we are now at the forefront of the industrial revolution of creative industries and symbolic work, and the transformation affects many sectors, such as marketing communications, media, teaching". There are also related fears: "Will artificial intelligence take my job?", "to what extent will it start affecting social interaction", and "could it soon become smarter than humans?"

Several participants are concerned about "people who will get left behind in digitalisation in all age groups". Many older people do not know how to use smart devices, not even all younger people want them, and some people are excluded from digital development for other reasons. One of the participants regrets that "there is no discussion about how digitalisation is also a value choice: how much do you want to participate and who wants to digitalise everything? Certain groups have decided where we are going. Many groups have not been allowed to express their opinions, but digitalisation is considered to be a common consensus." One participant believes that "service providers have got off too lightly. Banks are a classic example. Banks went online but did not ensure that customers stayed with them through the change." Although it is feared that the elderly in particular will fall behind in digitalisation, one discussion turned the set-up around: "You don't have to be so worried about how older people will cope in the digital world. Nowadays, we should be more concerned about children and young people and their ability to cope in the real world."

3.3 Global uncertainty

The current global crises were strongly visible in national dialogues. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine raises fears among many participants, and the wider developments threatening democracy seem to also apply to Finland. At the same time, we are threatened by overlapping ecological crises, such as climate change and biodiversity loss. In many cases, this creates hopelessness about the carrying capacity of our planet and the survival of the human species, but some hope that common threats will trigger humanity to act

3.3.1 Fear of war

At the time of the discussions, the Russian war of aggression was on its second year and created a completely new kind of uncertainty among the participants: "It brings uncertainty, feeling of uncertainty, a kind of a negative undercurrent to everyday life, knowing that we have a huge neighbouring country that is acting a little crazy, so there is some uncertainty about how this situation can still escalate and how it will possibly affect my life." Another participant describes how "At first, I also thought that when Russia attacked, it would never attack Finland. Finland's all right. But then someone said that when you don't really know how crazy Putin really is, and he is a dictator, so what can you actually predict about his behaviour?"

Others talk about real fear instead of just uncertainty: "The fear and unbelievable feeling of how it is possible that people can be so bad. And how it all will end." Some of the participants have grown up in post-war Finland, which affects their experiences: "I have grown up under the feeling that a war might start at any second. I still have nightmares about attacks through the fence, and I constantly have the feeling that we could end up in war." One of the participants says that "I was born in the early 50s and I remember the Cuban crisis well and how my parents waited anxiously if a war was going to start and it was discussed daily in the family".

The media is criticised for "playing with our emotions. They publish dramatic clickbait articles that cause unjustified fear. When the war broke out, I felt unsafe." Another participant feels that the media is shoving the war on their face, "and we are all trying to cope with it. My coping method is blocking everything out". Another one has decided to focus on "only the things that I can control. I don't want to read about climate change, I leave Ukraine's worst news unread, my life is pretty light."

The Ukrainians who participated in the discussions, on the other hand, tell us how "We read the news every day and when we read that something good is happening, like our army moving forward, we are happy about it. If something bad happens (...), it makes you really sad." They tell us how "the noise of rockets and planes turned into ordinary things while living in the middle of the war, the brain gets used to it and gets tired, there was no hope". In Finland, "even fighter jet exercises caused fear" and "the snow falling from the roof has caused a surge of panic, like what's happening here, did something hit the house?". Ukrainians mostly just "wish that the war in Ukraine would end".

"How will this situation still escalate and how will it possibly affect my life?"

People living and working in Russia have also had to endure uncertainty as the continuity of their work is at stake at the same time as they are "balancing between their own safety and supporting Ukraine". Those with older family members in Russia are also worried "if action will be taken at the border to make access more difficult".

A few participants in the dialogues say that their relationship with "going to the army has changed". If "Before the war, the army was just something that you have to do, but nowadays I don't take in-

dependent Finland for granted". In this moment, the army means something completely different than a few years ago.

3.3.2 Developments threatening democracy

The war of aggression by authoritarian Russia against the democracy-oriented Ukraine has led many participants to reflect more widely on democracy and its challenges. One of the participants says that *"in my work, I have to justify the basics of democracy more and more often. It feels like populist and anti-scientific opinions are growing and getting stronger."* Another one fears *"that Western thinking, democratic life, is it gradually crumbling away?"* In the discussions, many state that *"an increasingly small proportion of the world's population lives in countries with a free civil society"*. In particular, the war initiated by Russia is perceived as *"something that is breaking the developments in Europe, NATO and the West. Detachment from the west is happening in both larger and smaller increments"*.

On the other hand, many feel that *"Democracy in Finland is strong and people believe in it"*. The participants in the dialogues also have faith in that *"we are smart and determined. Of course, we must change to become a more sustainable society. Even if there was a big problem, I think we could solve it if we keep everyone involved."* In the words of one of the participants: *"We can develop this society further. We do not need to just look at big problems from the sidelines and complain about them, but we can do something together and it creates hope and alleviates uncertainty."*

3.3.3 Climate change, biodiversity loss and planetary capacity

The national dialogues also addressed **ecological crises and the uncertainty caused by them**. *"Droughts and heat waves have been a distant thing but are getting closer to us"*, *"habitats are crumbling faster than we are used to"* and *"we have to worry about pollinators"* is predicted in

the discussions. For the time being, *"we are still safe here talking about the deterioration happening elsewhere"*, but *"when we run out of water, there will be new global migrations"*. There are also massive threats in the future: *"If tens of millions of refugees start coming here when they don't have water, what will it mean for Finland?"*

The participants are concerned that *"climate change and biodiversity loss will easily become ignored when we get stuck talking about these other crises"*. Some feel that *"climate change and related activities seem to take the back seat in political debate due to the coronavirus and war. Do people already tolerate uncertainty too well and thus not take action with regard to the climate?"* One option would be to *"turn important climate issues into security of supply issues"*. Sustainability solutions can also be given price tags: *"What does the reduction in pollinators mean in the fields in Kainuu? Should participation also be translated into the language of economy?"* However, this would *"also have its risk"*.

**"Do I have to change my own life?
Can I travel abroad, will there be
tourism in the future, how do I heat
up my home, can I still keep my
summer cottage, what kind of car
can I get, what is allowed, what is
frowned upon?"**

In many people's experiences, uncertainty arises especially from how ecological crises affect their lives: *"If you feel that your own lifestyle or routines are threatened, that probably creates uncertainty."* It is difficult to give things up, and participants are wondering about questions such as if they will be able to travel in the future, how they should change the operations of their company, or *"what sectors will disappear completely? What new opportunities are there from the perspective of entrepreneurship?"*

An important but difficult question is: *"What should I do? What's right?"* Many people *"continuously have a bad conscience; I don't have time to find out information, I don't understand, information becomes out of date - just when you learn a new operating model, you hear it's wrong."* This involves

feelings of guilt, but at the same time the oncoming change seems so great that *"you can't even fathom it, it's hard to think about the future"*.

The participants are balancing *"between optimism and scepticism"*. However, many people get the feeling that *"not enough is being done to solve problems"*. One of the participants wonders: *"How long do we get to and can live like this? Why have we lived so long in a cognitive dissonance in relation to the information we already know and why does it seem to be a political choice for some? How much should and could be changed in my life?"* Participants also ask: *"How can I stay optimistic in this situation when there are big, big things like this in the background all the time?"*



4. Observations on the nature and impacts of uncertainty

In addition to experiences of uncertainty, the participants of national dialogues reflect on the nature of uncertainty and its impacts more generally. The majority of the participants think that uncertainty is a part of life in one way or another, but there are differences in tolerance between different people. Some also see uncertainty as an opportunity for creativity and change, and even enjoy it. However, the dialogues show that people in different positions and life situations feel uncertainty in different ways. Uncertainty accumulates unequally.

"If everything is certain, we cannot find the perspectives of opportunities and openness."

4.1 Uncertainty is part of life

In the discussions, many asked that if we are now living in a period of uncertainty, then *"when was the period of certainty?"*. One of the participants expressed it as follows: *"There has always been uncertainty, everywhere and for everyone. You can only control how you feel about it and how you act."* Another one reflects that *"uncertainty is not new, but global and social uncertainty is now more visible and affects everyone because it is so visible and comprehensive and extends to our everyday lives"*. Through the coronavirus pandemic, *"the mainstream population also got the experience of what it feels like to live in uncertainty"*.

However, the participants have noticed that different people tolerate uncertainty in different ways: *"Uncertainty is permanent, but the ability to receive, tolerate and accept it vary"*. We are used to *"managing uncertainty"*, and we believe that *"when we follow the given information and do everything right, we are in control and nothing bad will happen"*. The elderly participants think that older people have gone through more crises, but younger generations have had it easy and therefore *"have been hit hard by this crisis"*. However, there are some life changes that can turn anyone's life upside down. One participant says that *"that is the fragility of life: your child is born healthy, and suddenly falls ill, no matter if you make good choices"*. One of the participants, on the other hand, explains how *"as a parent to a special child, my whole life is uncertain, and it is really about life and death on a daily basis"*.

The different difficulties have increased the psychological resilience of some participants: *"My resilience has increased through living as a parent of a special child for a long time. I tolerate uncertainty better than before."* Another participant has *"lived for many years in a much more complex world than Finland. That is why I endured the pandemic in Finland better."*

On the other hand, *"my tolerance for uncertainty depends on the environment"*. Different uncertainties *"cannot be compared, it is tied to the context of where we are"*. One of the discussions talks about how *"We as Finns will certainly look at this uncertainty from a completely different level than these Ukrainian mothers whose spouses have stayed behind to fight, and what their uncertainty is like"*.

4.2 Uncertainty as an opportunity

One of the dialogue participants describes how *"as a child, I would see a ditch and wonder if I could jump over it, or if it was possible to walk on ice. There was something attractive about all that. If everything was certain in games or when playing,*

for example, the end result would be really boring." Another one states that *"the best stories are open-ended, they are not black and white"*. According to a third participant, *"when everything is still yet to come, there are many opportunities in the air"*.

"If everything was certain, there would be no hope, there would be no opportunity to influence", the participants pondered. In other words, uncertainty can also be *"synonymous with change"*. And *"the more uncertain things are, the greater the opportunity to change"*. For others, uncertainties mean freedom, and they also involve *"temptation and willingness, but on the other hand, a fear of embarrassing yourself"*.

Uncertainty also provides an opportunity for growth and development: *"People can develop through uncertainty and crisis"*. Putting oneself in an uncertain and even vulnerable position *"takes courage, but can also be very rewarding"*. One participant describes how *"when going through difficult times, you gain confidence and learn to adapt. That I know I can survive."* Uncertainty develops *"the ability to find resources and move forward towards a new future"*. After difficult times, when *"you get through everything, you can reminisce about your survival through a gentler lens"*.

Many of the participants quote Too-ticky, a character familiar from the Moomins: *"All things are so very uncertain, and that's exactly what makes me feel reassured"*. Besides: *"How do we know what will happen in six months? What if everything gets better?"*



4.3 Accumulation of uncertainty factors

The participants in the national dialogues also discuss how unequally uncertainties are divided in our society. Uncertainty can only feel like an opportunity when the person experiencing it has sufficient resources and prospects for the future. For some people, uncertainties seem to accumulate unreasonably.

"For some people, even minor uncertainties cause great pain, but someone else can just keep going", the participants explain. There may be many reasons why "others are anxious and others see opportunities and are more willing to grab them. It probably also depends on the starting points." So, "when your life is on a good foundation, you will be better able to withstand uncertainty." The participants are aware that "when I'm in a good position, it is possible to look at uncertainty as an opportunity", i.e. "a good position protects from the negative effects of uncertainty". As nowadays change has become the norm, "some people thrive with it and even know how to utilise it", but "some people suffer from it, even more than before."

The challenge is that in our society, *"social problems and the challenges of health care accumulate onto the same people"*. The participants have noticed that *"those who do not have a network are on weaker footing, and have more layers of problems"*. And *"the further you have become marginalised, the more steps there are to take"*.

The participants have both personal experience and information based on scientific studies that *"the challenges and uncertainties of persons with disabilities accumulate"*. One participant illustrates this as follows: *"Anyone can encounter unemployment, etc., but in the case of persons with disabilities, it can have an impact on how they can pay for medicines or deductibles in order to receive the necessary treatment and rehabilitation"*. One thinks *"that for people with disabilities, so many is-*

"If there are many minor uncertainties, this may cause the camel's back to break."

sues have already accumulated and they live more cautiously, because you think that more terrible things will happen that you will have to solve (...) and that normal life already includes so much adjustment that you do not want more problems (...) when the uncertainty has already accumulated".

Being discriminated against also increases uncertainty: *"We should also bring up the minorities of minorities: if you are an immigrant and then also disabled, and also a member of a sexual minority, then you are burdened with more and more discrimination, which can create quite a variety of uncertainty."*

In dialogues, life and uncertainties in Finland are also compared to other countries. A participant living in another country in the midst of natural disasters tells us how *"earthquakes made people fear that the land could literally drop from under their feet."* Many people think that *"in Finland, society works better than in many other countries" and "life is, after all, good in the middle of everything. You can leave your house safely in the morning"*. The participants say that *"when you think about the world and the war in the grander scale, things here are good" and "the society stays together, even though there are crises around us"*. One participant summarises their thoughts on the relativity of uncertainty as follows: *"What is the uncertainty of an Ukrainian person like in the middle of the war as a mother, grandparent, child, father? What is the uncertainty of the unemployed in Finland due to crises, rising prices and rising loan interest rates? What is my state of uncertainty? It's on a scale; Maybe it's not that much uncertainty. If these are my biggest worries, my life is pretty good."*

The accumulation of uncertainties and inequalities affects all people in some way, because then *"the community is not doing so well"*. *"It is a good idea to be aware of one's own privileges and to 'even have a bad conscience", reminds one of the participants. "How to live with it and hopefully change structures?", the participants ask. In the dialogues, participants hoped for empathy and ability to put yourself in someone else's position.*





5. Means to alleviate uncertainty

The dialogue participants identified a number of things in their daily lives that strengthen feelings of trust and meaning in life and thus help to tolerate or reduce uncertainty. Contact with other people and participation in communities provide support in the midst of uncertainty. Daily routines and practising practical and emotional skills create stability in everyday life. Acquiring information and learning about things support many in uncertainty, but at the same time some of the participants consciously limit the amount of news they follow. Living according to one's own values, on the other hand, helps to move from hope to action.

5.1 Fellow people and communities

One thing that everyone could agree with was that **"being together reduces the feeling of uncertainty"**. The participants know that *"people are a resource for each other"* and *"at least one friend with whom to share your anxiety is really important"*. On the other hand, *"If you stay at home, the*

situation gets worse." One participant shares how *"You often notice that if something's on your mind and keep ruminating on it and feel like everything's going wrong, when you just open your mouth and talk about things, suddenly you find that they somehow start feeling more reasonable"*.

Participants think that *"It would be important for all people to have an environment that helps reduce uncertainty, not one that increases it"*. Even very small encounters in everyday life may prove meaningful. *"Community, friends, small friendly everyday actions for others"* create security and caring. *"The elderly need company and the participants feel hope and happiness when they are able to help"*, describes one participant. Another one tells how *"I get strength from family: children, grandchildren, grand-grand-children"*. For some, this support may also be available online: *"I have found social media to be useful. Growing up without the Internet, I did not know any children with disabilities and I had a great fear of the future. Now I use Instagram a lot and there are a lot of inspiring people and strong peer support."*

"We have a responsibility to be awake and build networks around us, not just around our own family", is reminded in the dialogues. The participants considered how *"we should all take more care of each other"* and *"talk together about how to be a safety net"*. Means for this could include community housing companies, residential facilities for different ages, cultural clubs, village schools serving as community centres and community meals: *"Why do we not invest more in things such as community meals? They are always full, the space runs out (...). Community meals are concrete and meaningful actions."* Equally, the participants have positive experiences of neighbourhood help: *"around our suburb, neighbourhood help does work (...), for example, caring for someone's cat or dog, helping with moving furniture, cleaning..."* Some have also noticed how young people's friend groups help each other with renovations and small communities flourish in neighbourhoods where *"you can really know people and experience being an equal part of something"*.

"People can stand almost anything when they don't have to do it alone."

The role of work communities is also important, and even there *"people's feelings can be taken into account and it is possible to have an idea of how people think about things. When we are aware of what these emotions are, they can then be tackled"*. One of the participants describes how *"my ability to tolerate uncertainty is better because of the strong support from my colleagues and how asking questions has been received, someone always gives me an answer or an expert comment. Even if I don't know, someone will. If it is actually one of us who knows, we have this "us" identity like we do it like this here."*

For people in difficult life situations, different services and the professionals working in them can

become a significant, supportive community. A young person with cancer who participated in the dialogues describes the significance of medical professionals in an uncertain life situation: *"I was very lucky that the nurse was the same throughout the whole treatment... We talked throughout the whole treatment. I felt relaxed. Friday became my favourite time of the week. I was always looking forward to getting to see the nurse and to go through my questions with competent staff, even though the treatment was ongoing. I'm glad I was able to talk about things I couldn't talk about at home."*

5.2 Everyday activities, knowledge and skills

The participants in the dialogues also share numerous examples of **everyday activities and skills** that support the feeling of security and good mood in the midst of uncertainty. Stability and relief in an uncertain life can be created through routines, crafts, exercise and outdoor activities as well as thought-out preparedness for crises, the appropriate amount of information and by practising emotional skills.

"I baked rolls when I couldn't sleep", says one participant, while for another, *"the knitting trend has brought comfort and breaks from concern"*. For some, walking and jogging contribute to a good mood and new ideas, while others forget about unpleasant things by spending time at the horse stables or with pets. For others, *"listening to music is therapy"* and another relaxes by playing video games. Exercising in fresh air and nature and spending time at the cottage soothes the mind, and going to the sauna feels good: *"when I wash myself, I wash my heart and it helps me manage uncertainty"*.

Also, *"Organising matters is also a way of managing uncertainty"*. Developing and maintaining routines *"creates trust and safety. At this time of the week, I do this, I eat my morning porridge like*

this. It is an everyday trick: I create and maintain routines.” Also all kinds of “daily saving”, such as recycling, growing things, fixing up and repairing, “contribute to the feeling of making more sustainable choices, strength and preparedness in a time of uncertainty”.

Many participants are proud of their **practical skills**: “Even if we lose electricity, I know how to light a fire and bake bread.” One explains how “we have prepared at home so that even if everything was closed for a couple of weeks, we would have enough food”. People living in rural areas say that “we have good basic conditions here as you can fish and hunt”. Also, “Heat and water are always available on the countryside when you have a fire-place and a well”. Together, many think that “the more skills and know-how you have, the less you fear uncertainty”.

Even at work, the participants have also had to consider **preparing for uncertainty**: “Preparedness, being systematic and drawing up concrete guidelines has also created security and confidence in coping”. In recent years, different sectors have had many lessons “learned about dealing with crisis situations”. As “you cannot predict the future with certainty, uncertainty can be tolerated by creating predictive structures and processes”, one of the participants describes their own field of work. Another says that they will soon participate in a “preparedness exercise in which you have to go through really uncomfortable situations, but you just have to tolerate uncertainty and practise. The more ready we are to live in uncertainty, the more confident we are in preparing for it.” A participant with military background, on the other hand, has “begun to prepare for the future by getting fit and considering how to otherwise prepare”.

Uncertainty can also be alleviated by **acquiring information and learning about things**: “when you are uncertain about something, having information helps”. For one person, “curiosity towards different phenomena has been a driving force”, another person wants to “get a handle of things intellectually”,

and a third person likes to examine “literature and expert views” in order to learn new things. Technology, innovation and “news about new scientific creations give hope”, but at the same time, “critical thinking, source criticism” is needed with so many different information channels.

Knowledge of history and a longer-term perspective also help **put things into perspective**: “It is good to notice from history that bad times will eventually pass”. One of the participants suggests that “you can always test your experience with a sense of relativity, i.e. is this significant in a broader perspective, even in a historical perspective?” Even though at this moment “it feels that these times are exceptionally crazy, there have been even crazier times”.

In addition to practical skills and learning more, many participants practise their emotional skills to “tolerate uncertainty, increase resilience and recognise communal and personal social needs”. Yoga and mindfulness exercises bring peace to some: “My nervous system gets overwhelmed really easily, and I go into a kind of a quivering state when I encounter stressful things, so all kinds of yoga and relaxation exercises are things that I try to integrate more into everyday life”. Another participant says that “I have practised working with my own thoughts a lot. I’m trying to bring them to the present moment when my mind starts to get out of control (...) It calms me down. Because the situation is rarely an emergency. Your mind just makes it seem like it.”

“The well-being skills of everyday life are something that I would like to see talked about more in this society”, suggests one of the participants, because “when we manage to improve everyday well-being, it helps with resilience and to withstand bigger storms”. The participants also remind of the importance of humour: “It’s important to be able to not be so serious, to talk about difficult things and even joke about them.” One person summarises: “humour saves in many situations”.

To support their well-being and manage feelings of uncertainty, many of the participants have decided to limit their way of following the news. “You can read news all day long and the language of the news is so extreme and unconditional”, some participants describe in the discussions. One of the participants demonstrates that “when you turn on the TV, there are unpleasant things.” Another person describes how “I have been following more war news. When you always see bad news, you have to look again to see if there are any good news - you gradually become numb to bad news.” A third person has “made the choice not to follow news but to protect myself. The news feed uncertainty and despair. You cannot completely shut yourself off from the world, but you can choose how much you want to follow what’s going on.”

One of the participants has decided to stop using social media: “Five years ago, I decided to stop using all social media. I left Instagram, left Facebook, left everything (...) A year ago, I decided to give up my phone, so I haven’t had a phone for a year (...) I actually feel much more a part of society now. At first, it was really hard to be without a phone, but eventually you get used to it and it really works.”

5.3 Strengthening values and agency

The participants also find support in uncertainty from **their values** which help stay on the right track even when life and the world are changing around us. “When you have your own values and the compass is very clear, you know what you want and what you are going towards”, the participants describe. “Ethical and moral approach to things” reduces uncertainty. “When you act according to an ethical or moral code, it makes it easier”.

A key value for many participants is **helping others**: “In volunteer work, I feel that I am helping many young people. I’m a safe adult, I listen and I see them. When you have experience in mental health matters, you can talk to young people and

hopefully they can get help and support from that. When you have received help and support in the past, you also want to give it to others.” Helping is rewarding: “when you see that someone has taken even a small step forward, not to mention the big ones”. It feels good to “feel needed”. Volunteering makes one of the participants happy: “my faith in people has grown so much”.

Some of the participants find support for uncertainty in **faith in God**: “Believing in God and fate help me. There’s something bigger, and life will carry you. Even if things seem challenging, I try to think that there is a higher power behind it and something will come of it.” One participant describes how “the technical, mathematical, economic world alone is not enough, some kind of spirituality is needed”. The power of prayer makes people feel stronger, and “people are praying for me, too, and I appreciate it”. One summarises that “when you are a Christian, you can count on it and that is the foundation of life. Uncertainty would feel much more uncertain if there was no faith that everything would end up well.”

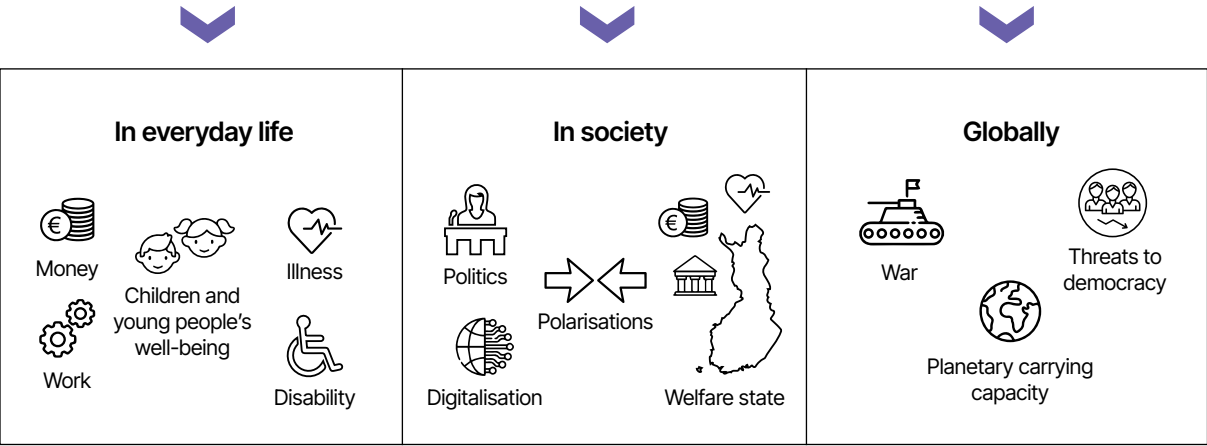
Many other participants also recognise trust as the opposite of uncertainty: “confidence that tomorrow will carry and resources will be sufficient”. For example, the coronavirus pandemic seemed scary, “but at the same time we had something fundamentally in common, we were encountering new things together”. One participant, on the other hand, recalls how scary it was to allow their children to travel alone for the first time, but at the same time “you just have to trust that everything will go well”.

In ecological challenges, some of the participants are confident that “companies will take things seriously”, as “the green transition is actually seen as the new business model of the future with huge potential”. Previous successes, such as preventing ozone depletion and reducing acid rain, create hope that problems can be solved, and now we are in the process of “hydrogen, geothermal and other energy transformations”.

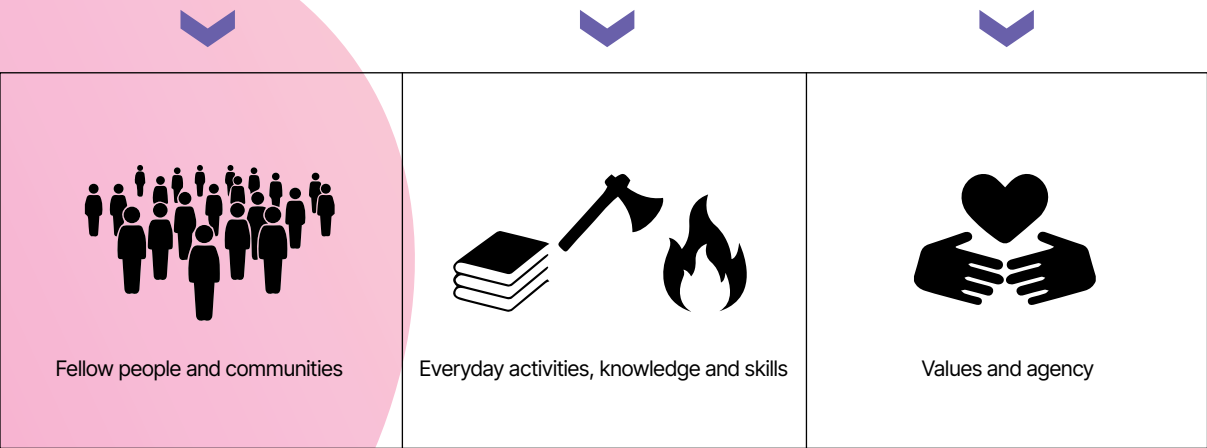
In some discussions, the aim is to translate ideas “from hope to action”. This is based on the experience that “in the midst of uncertainty, agency and taking action are the most important things. For example, I could tackle the crisis in Ukraine concretely by volunteering.” In the discussions, many ask how to, for example “enable young people to do things for a better world? Young people are tired of resilience, they say that message has already been

heard, young people need help to take action.” The question is “how would it be possible to link the focus to the activities and strengthen the ability to solve problems of different types and on different levels? If a person becomes empowered, they will also start seeing solutions.”

Sources of uncertainty



Alleviating uncertainty



6. Conclusions on the dialogues

The following conclusions can be drawn from the dialogue material.

The national dialogue of spring 2023 shows that **the majority of the citizens who participated in the discussions feel that uncertainty has increased in their lives**. Many feel that uncertainty has increased in daily life, in society and globally. In daily life, uncertainty is related to financial coping, work, living with illnesses and disabilities, and the wellbeing of children and young people. At the societal level, uncertainty is caused by experiences of insecurity and polarisation, distrust in politics and decision-making, concerns about the future of the welfare state and the pace of digitalisation. The participants in the national dialogues also reflected on the global crises that cause fear and uncertainty: war, anti-democratic developments, climate change and biodiversity loss. As a result of increased uncertainty, many feel that their **faith in the future has deteriorated**.

The dialogues also make visible how uncertainty treats people in different life situations differently. Uncertainties accumulate especially onto people in an economically, socially or health-wise vulnerable life situation. Although uncertainty is also seen as a source of opportunities, uncertainty can only feel like an opportunity when the person experiencing it has sufficient resources and prospects for the future. This is not the case for everyone.

The most important factors that make living in uncertainty easier are **the sense of community, everyday wellbeing skills, and value-based activities**. Fellow people and communities offer support in everyday life, practical actions and

skills create stability, and acting according to one's own values creates hope and meaningfulness. In addition to strengthening everyday emotional and well-being skills, which play an important role in the discussions, there are indications in the dialogues that strengthening people's mental flexibility alone is not enough. At the same time, it must be possible to encourage and support people (especially young people) to get involved in activities that strengthen their values and help them make an impact. Acquiring information and getting acquainted with things also supports many in uncertainty, but some of the participants consciously strive to limit the amount of news they follow for their own well-being. This raises the question of knowledge and hope as well as the relationship between emotions and action in people's lives. It also raises questions about the role of media as a processor of factors that cause uncertainty.

The national dialogues of autumn 2023 will be conducted on the theme *"Together and alone"*. The aim is to deepen our understanding of the role that fellow people and different communities play in the well-being of citizens in a time of uncertainty. According to the participants in the first national dialogue, *"shared humanity makes me feel stronger"* and *"the closeness of people brings hope and alleviates uncertainty"*. Even bigger concerns are lighter to bear together, and discussing helps to understand both other people and complex questions: *"Maybe, therefore, national dialogues are so important as they help us together understand complex issues or give them space"*.

Authors

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**NATIONAL
DIALOGUES**