The Good Childhood Report 2024

Summary

The Children's Society

"Always believe in yourself."

Introduction

The Good Childhood Report 2024 is The Children's Society's 13th annual report on the wellbeing of children and young people in the UK.[1] It explores what children and young people are telling us about how their lives are going. This is called their subjective wellbeing.

> "Wellbeing is how we're doing as individuals, communities and as a nation, and how sustainable that is for the future."
>
> **What Works Centre for Wellbeing[2]**

Measuring children's wellbeing is important because it allows us to identify what aspects of their lives, or what groups of children, need further support. This evidence informs work to identify and address the changes that are needed to ensure that children and young people can be supported when they experience low wellbeing.

This report summarises the main findings from The Good Childhood Report 2024,[3] including:

- trends in the subjective wellbeing of children aged 10 to 15 in the UK
- findings from The Children's Society's household survey in 2024 (children and young people aged 10 to 17), for our own wellbeing measures and from questions asking how families were faring with the economic challenges currently facing the UK
- comparisons between the wellbeing of 15-year-olds in the UK and across Europe.

This report also includes a brief overview of The Children's Society's headline calls for action – policy recommendations informed by findings from The Good Childhood Report 2024 and additional consultation with children and young people. The Children's Society's separate publication, **A national roadmap to a good childhood: Policy briefing**, sets out specific policy calls and steps that policymakers need to take to overturn the decline in children's wellbeing.[4, 5]

[1] The report mainly uses 'children' to refer to the 10 to 15 age range, and 'children and young people' when talking about children aged up to 17 years old. However, at times the word 'children' has been used to cover the broader 10 to 17 age range.
[2] What Works Centre for Wellbeing. What is Wellbeing? [Internet]. n.d. [accessed 2024 May 8]. Available from: **whatworkswellbeing.org/about-wellbeing/what-is-wellbeing**.
[3] See The Children's Society. The Good Childhood Report 2024. The Children's Society: London; 2024.
[4] The Children's Society. A national roadmap to a good childhood: Policy briefing. The Children's Society: London; 2024.
[5] Unless specified otherwise, in this report 'we' refers to The Children's Society.

Data sources used in The Good Childhood Report 2024

There is currently no widescale and regular national measurement of children's subjective wellbeing, which is something that The Children's Society has been calling for.[6] The Good Childhood Report 2024 uses three robust data sources to report on children's wellbeing.[7]

Understanding Society (UK Longitudinal Household Survey)[8]

Understanding Society is a large survey involving thousands of households in the UK. The sample is representative of the wider population, which means that the findings provide an accurate picture of people's lives and experiences. The study follows the same households over a long period of time (this is called a longitudinal study).

Adults, and a cross-sectional sample of children aged 10 to 15 who live in their households, are interviewed each year.[9] The latest data available (wave 13) are for 2021/22, when **1,766 children completed the youth questionnaire.**

The Children's Society's annual household survey

The Children's Society's annual surveys include a minimum of 2,000 children and young people (aged 10 to 17) and their parent or carer in the UK. The children and young people who take part in the survey are chosen to match the UK population on four criteria: their age, gender, the region or country of the UK that they live in, and their household's socio-economic group.[10]

In 2024, **2,056 children and young people took part** in the survey (in April to June), telling us how they felt about different aspects of their lives.

PISA (the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment)[11]

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) runs a survey every three years[12] across a large number of countries and economies around the world. The latest PISA results are for 2022, when nearly 700,000 15-year-olds across 81 countries and economies took part. **In the UK, 12,972 pupils completed the survey.**

The UK was not able to meet all sampling requirements for PISA 2022, which needs to be taken into account when using findings from the survey.[13]

[6] For example, The Children's Society worked with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing and the Gregson Family Foundation to build the case for national measurement of children's wellbeing in 2019, and published a report on teachers' views on national children's wellbeing measurement in schools in 2023. See: The Children's Society. Case for children's wellbeing measurement [Internet]. 2020 [accessed 2024 May 9]. Available from: **childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/the-case-for-childrens-wellbeing-measurement**, and The Children's Society. Teachers' views on national children's wellbeing measurement in schools [Internet]. 2023 [accessed 2024 May 9]. Available from: **childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-12/Teachers-polling-Main-report.pdf**.

[7] To note, all three sources only allow for male and female gender analysis. It is not clear how children who identify differently (as trans, non-binary, or with other gender non-conforming identities) might answer the questions on gender currently included in these surveys. Unfortunately, even if other options were added to these surveys, sample sizes are too small to allow for analysis of findings for those young people who do not respond male or female. In addition, as household surveys, Understanding Society and The Children's Society's annual survey necessarily exclude children who do not live in a home environment. Finally, while recent Good Childhood Reports have presented analysis from Understanding Society data that looked at the experiences of children and young people from different ethnicities, due to some issues with the categorisation of ethnicity data in the latest Understanding Society dataset, it has unfortunately not been possible to include breakdowns by ethnic groups in this year's report. The Children's Society acknowledges these limitations and will continue to explore how we can better represent the experiences of different subgroups of children in future research. For more detail, see The Good Childhood Report 2024.

[8] For further details, see: Understanding Society. The UK household longitudinal study [Internet]. n.d. [accessed 2024 May 9]. Available from: **understandingsociety.ac.uk/**.

[9] A small number of 9- and 16-year-olds were also included in some waves and are also captured in the analysis presented in The Good Childhood Report 2024.

[10] This is based on the social grade of the main income earner in their household.

[11] For further details, see: OECD, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) [Internet]. n.d. [accessed 2024 May 9]. Available from: **oecd.org/pisa/**.

[12] To note, the latest PISA wave was planned for 2021, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, was postponed by one year and took place in 2022.

[13] The UK was one of a number of countries and economies that did not meet all sampling requirements for PISA 2022. For this reason, the data needs to be treated with some caution, and it is not advisable to conduct separate analysis for the four UK nations. Further detail is available in The Good Childhood Report 2024, and in: OECD. PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education [Internet]. 2023 [accessed 2024 May 9]. Available from: **oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2022-results-volume-i_007f7d8e-en**.

Trends in children's subjective wellbeing over time, from Understanding Society

The Good Childhood Report 2024 looked at children's responses to the Understanding Society survey to assess how wellbeing is changing over time, for all children, and by gender.

In 2021/22, **children's (aged 10 to 15) mean scores for happiness with their life as a whole, their friends, appearance, school, and schoolwork were all significantly lower than when the survey began** in 2009/10. Family was the only aspect of life where there was no significant difference in children's average happiness compared to 2009/10.[14]

In 2021/22, on average, **children were most happy with their family, and least happy with their appearance.** In terms of proportions, **almost one in six children** (15.6%) **were unhappy with their appearance** (that is, they scored below the midpoint of the scale for this measure).

As highlighted in last year's Good Childhood Report, the latest Understanding Society data continued to show concerning patterns for girls.[15] Girls' mean happiness scores for each of the six measures were significantly lower in 2021/22 than in 2009/10. **In 2021/22, girls were also significantly less happy on average than boys with their life as a whole, their family, their appearance, and their school.**

Understanding Society asks 10- to 15-year-olds in the UK how they feel about:

Life as a whole

Family

Friends

Appearance

School

Schoolwork

[14] The means presented in The Good Childhood Report 2024 and in The Good Childhood Report 2023 differ slightly from those presented in previous Good Childhood Reports (up to and included The Good Childhood Report 2022), due to a change of approach to the weights provided in the Understanding Society datasets available from the UK data service.
[15] See The Children's Society. The Good Childhood Report 2023 [Internet]. 2023 [accessed 2024 May 7]. Available from: **childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-09/The%20Good%20Childhood%20Report%202023.pdf**.

Most recent findings on children and young people's wellbeing from The Children's Society's household survey 2024

The 2024 survey, conducted in April to June this year, offers very recent insights into how children and young people (aged 10 to 17) in the UK are feeling about their lives.

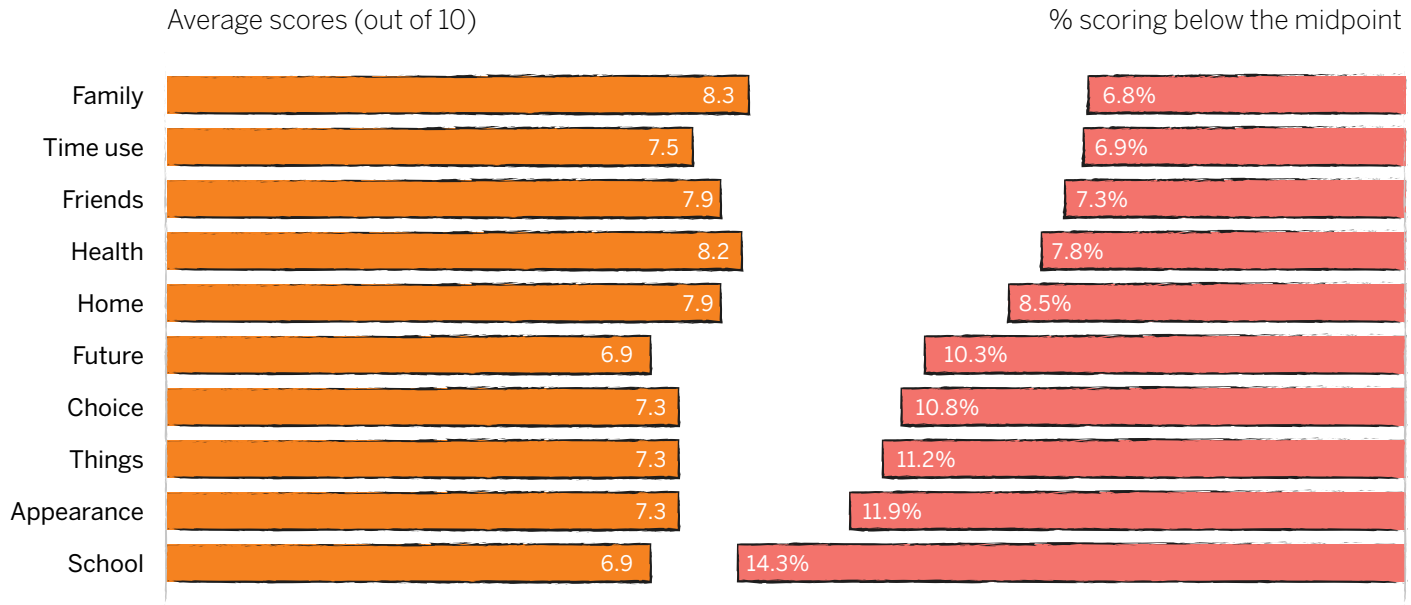
The Children's Society's annual household survey asks children and young people how happy they feel about 10 different aspects of their life, shown in figure 1: this is called the **Good Childhood Index**.[16]

In 2024, children and young people were, on average, most happy with their family.

More children and young people (14.3%) **were unhappy** (or scored below the midpoint of the scale) **with school** than with the nine other areas of life they were asked about.

The Good Childhood Index also includes a measure of overall life satisfaction (made up of five different questions).[17] In 2024, **11% of children and young people who took part in the survey had low wellbeing** (that is, they scored below the midpoint on the measure of overall life satisfaction).

Figure 1. Latest figures from the Good Childhood Index for children (aged 10 to 17).



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 23, April to June 2024, children aged 10 to 17, UK, weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including 'prefer not to say').

[16] The Good Childhood Index was developed by The Children's Society and is made up of 10 single-item domain measures which ask children about their happiness with specific aspects of life, as well as a multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction. For further information, see The Good Childhood Report 2024.

[17] This is based on responses to a multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction, based on Huebner's Student Life Satisfaction Scale. See: Huebner ES. Initial development of the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale. School Psychology International. 1991; 12: 231-40.

Cost of living

When asked how worried they were about a list of nine broader issues in society, **more children and young people said they were worried about rising prices** – two in five (41%) children and young people were 'very' or 'quite' worried about this issue.[18]

In light of current concerns about the economic difficulties faced by many families in the UK, additional questions were included in this year's survey for parents and carers, and children and young people, about households' financial situations and their impact on children and young people.[19]

Parents and carers were asked whether they had struggled to afford a list of eight items and experiences for their child taking part in the survey over the last 12 months.[20] **Over half** (53%) **reported that they had struggled to afford a holiday away from home,** and **over two in five reported struggling to afford activities outside of school** (43%) **and celebrations on special occasions** (41%).

Understandably, as shown in figure 2, **larger proportions of parents and carers whose households were identified as being in financial strain** between January and March 2024 **struggled to afford all eight items** (compared to those who were not in financial strain).[21]

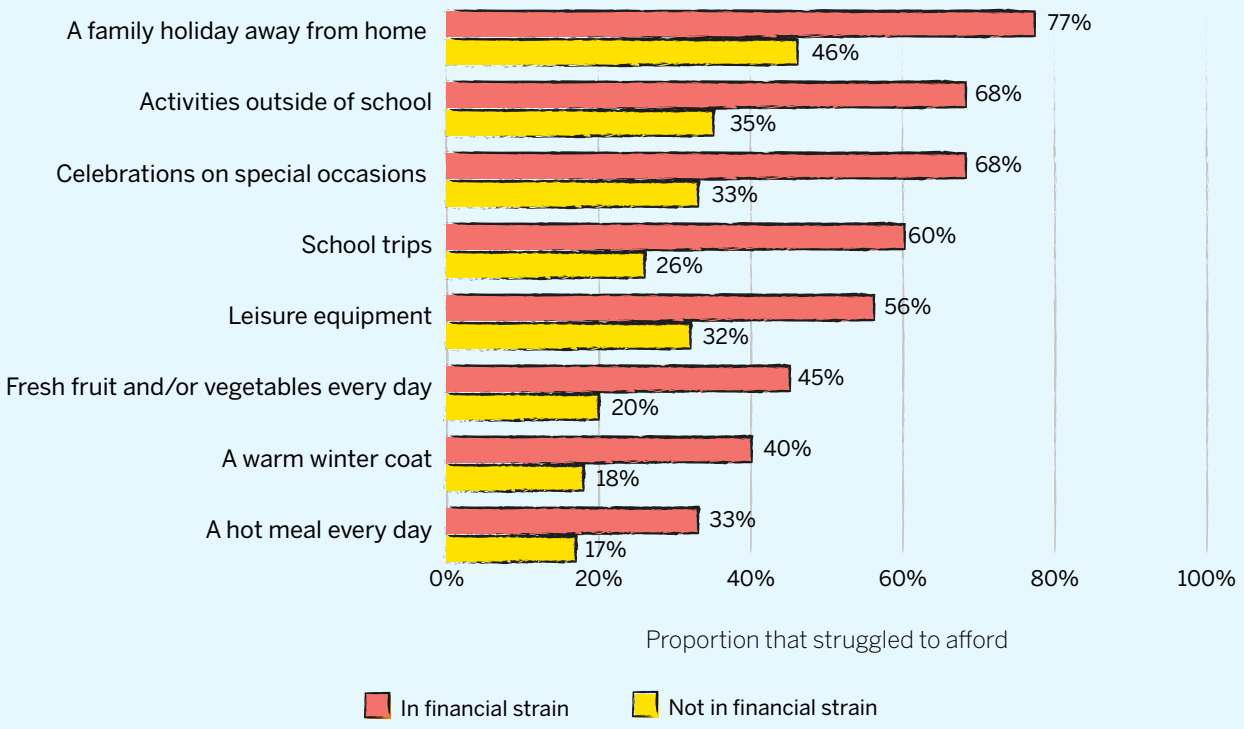
[18] The other issues that children and young people were asked about were the following – listed together with the proportions of children and young people who were 'very' or 'quite' worried about each: crime (35%); the environment (33%); online safety (31%); inequality (30%); new illnesses/pandemics (29%); homelessness (26%); refugee and migrant crisis (26%); and unemployment (21%). Rising prices were also children and young people's top worry in last year's survey (May to June 2023).

[19] This follows on from our Feeling the strain report, published in November 2023, that explored the day-to-day impact of cost of living increases on children's lives based on results from our 2023 household survey. See: The Children's Society. Feeling the strain: The impact of cost of living rises on family finances and wellbeing [Internet]. 2023 [accessed 2024 June 12]. Available from: **childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/feeling-the-strain**. See also The Good Childhood Report 2023.

[20] Four response options were offered: 'yes', 'no', 'not applicable' and 'prefer not to say'. Less than 1% chose 'prefer not to say' for each of the eight items listed; these were excluded from the analysis. The proportion that selected 'not applicable' for each of the eight items varied from 1% for celebrations on special occasions up to 18% for leisure equipment.

[21] Households were defined as being in financial strain when they reported that they had found it 'quite' or 'very' difficult to manage financially between January and March this year. This was 23% of parents and carers. By comparison, households were considered not to be in financial strain if parents and carers reported that their households were 'living comfortably' (10%), 'doing alright' (35%) or 'just about getting by' (32%).

Figure 2. Proportion of parents and carers struggling to afford items and experiences for their child (aged 10 to 17) in the last 12 months, by household financial strain.



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 23, April to June 2024, parents and carers of children and young people aged 10 to 17, UK, weighted data. Excludes 'prefer not to say' responses for items and financial strain questions.

Children and young people were asked a small number of questions related to their household's financial situation.

- **Almost one in five** (18%) **children and young people were** 'often' or 'always' **worried about how much money their family had.** This was **just over two in five** (41%) **when looking at children and young people living in households in financial strain** (compared to 13% of children and young people not in households in financial strain).
- **Half** (50%) **of all children and young people reported that not having money had stopped them from doing something they wanted to do** in the past six months at least once or twice, like going out with their friends or going on a school trip.
- **One in six** (17%) **children and young people living in households in financial strain had low life satisfaction**, compared to just under one in 10 (9%) of children and young people living in households that were not in financial strain.[22]

[22] Bivariate comparisons (2x2) were made using chi-square tests between those in households in financial strain and those who were not, by low life satisfaction (excluding 'not sure' and 'prefer not to say' responses). Only associations that would be significant in a random sample ($p<0.01$) are reported.

Comparing children's wellbeing in the UK with other European countries, based on PISA results

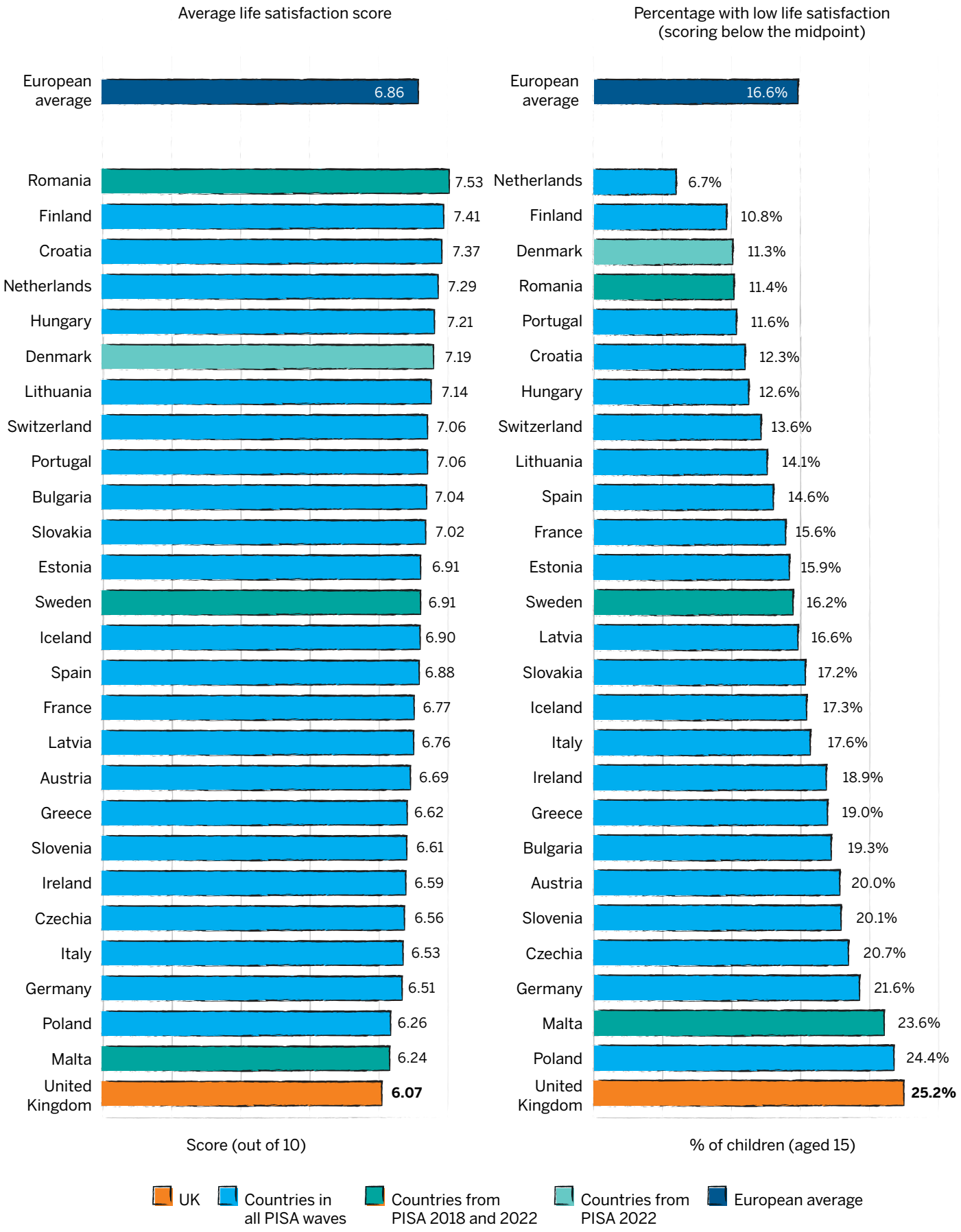
International data from PISA 2022 provides an opportunity to compare the wellbeing of pupils aged 15 in the UK with that of 15-year-olds across Europe.

As shown in figure 3:

- **In 2022, the UK had the lowest average overall life satisfaction among 15-year-olds across 27 European countries.**[23]
- The UK was also the country with the **highest proportion of 15-year-olds** (a quarter, or 25.2%) **reporting low life satisfaction** (or scoring below the midpoint of the scale) in 2022.

[23] This includes all the European PISA-participating countries who are members of the OECD and/or of the European Union. The European average presented in figure 3 is the average of all 27 countries included in the analysis available in the 2022 data. Colours have been used to indicate which years data were available for each country. Blue indicates that data were available for 22 countries across all three years (2015, 2018 and 2022); dark green shows the three countries (Romania, Sweden and Malta) that had data for 2018 and 2022 only; and light green shows the country (Denmark) that had data for 2022 only.

Figure 3. Life satisfaction (age 15) in Europe and the UK in 2022.



Source: PISA, 2022. Weighted data.

Note: In addition to the European average, countries are ranked in terms of best to worst life satisfaction scores.

Further analysis looked at differences between groups of children across these 27 European countries.

In terms of gender:

- **There were differences in life satisfaction between 15-year-old girls and boys both in the UK, and on average across Europe.** In the UK, girls' average life satisfaction declined between 2018 and 2022, while boys' average life satisfaction remained broadly stable (this is after a large decline for both boys and girls between 2015 and 2018 in the UK). On average across Europe, the decline in life satisfaction over the 2015 to 2022 period was also larger for girls than for boys.
- **One in five** (19.8%) **boys and almost one in three** (30.9%) **girls aged 15 in the UK reported low life satisfaction** in PISA 2022. These proportions were higher than on average across Europe, where this was one in eight (12.2%) for boys, and just over one in five (21.4%) for girls.

In terms of socio-economic differences:

- **The UK was the European country with the largest gap in average life satisfaction between the 25% most advantaged and the 25% most disadvantaged 15-year-olds.**

Finally, comparisons were made between the UK and other countries across Europe for other areas of life linked to wellbeing that are included in PISA 2022.[24]

Based on 15-year-olds' responses to PISA 2022, **the UK performed less well than other countries across Europe on:**

- **food deprivation:** the UK was the country with the fourth highest rate of food deprivation[25]
- **levels of physical activity:** the UK had the fifth highest rate of pupils reporting no physical exercise before or after school
- some measures related to school experiences, like **school safety**[26], **school belonging**, and **long-term school absences**[27]: notably, the UK had the second highest level of bullying in Europe.

The UK fared better compared to other countries across Europe on:

- measures of **family support**: the UK ranked seventh highest for 15-year-olds' ratings of family support-related measures
- some measures associated with digital resources, like **availability of digital resources at home**[28], and students' agreement with **regulation of digital devices in schools**[29] (for which the UK ranked fourth and sixth highest respectively).

[24] Comparisons presented here looked at all 27 countries unless otherwise stated; for measures where data were not available for all 27 countries, footnotes below detail the number of countries that had data available. For more information, see The Good Childhood Report 2024.
[25] This comparison looked at 21 countries.
[26] For different measures related to school safety, the number of countries with data available varied from 23 to 27.
[27] This comparison looked at 23 countries.
[28] This comparison looked at 24 countries.
[29] This comparison looked at 24 countries.

Conclusions: what have we learnt?

Children and young people who are currently growing up in the UK are doing so in challenging times, from schools being a recurrent area of concern for their wellbeing,[30] to long NHS waits when they need support.[31] In addition, the recent Covid-19 pandemic was followed by large increases to the cost of living that have pushed many families into financial hardship, with a record number of UK children now living in poverty.[32]

Within this wider context, The Good Childhood Report 2024 presents the latest data about children and young people's wellbeing, both in the UK and in comparison with Europe. This allows us to highlight areas of children's lives, and particular groups of children and young people, that need attention. This evidence also informs The Children's Society's work to identify and advocate for the changes needed to ensure that all children and young people can access the right support at the right time when they are experiencing low wellbeing.

Data from Understanding Society (10- to 15-year-olds) once again show that children's average wellbeing was lower in 2021/22 than when the survey started (in 2009/10) for five of the six measures – life as a whole, friends, appearance, school, and schoolwork.

The only measure with no change (compared with the first survey) was happiness with family, which remained the area of life that children were most happy with in 2021/22. This is a positive finding, as previous research has shown that family relationships are important to children's wellbeing.[33]

Looking internationally, data from the PISA survey worryingly show that in 2022 the UK was, as in the 2018 survey, at the bottom of the European table for children's average life satisfaction (at age 15).[34] The continuing pattern of lower life satisfaction among UK 15-year-olds suggests that UK children may be struggling more than children in other countries, and that improving their subjective wellbeing may represent a bigger priority here than elsewhere across Europe.

Socio-economic inequalities also continue to be an important worry in this country.[35] International comparisons based on PISA 2022 show the UK also at the bottom of the table when looking at the gap in average life satisfaction between the most and least disadvantaged 15-year-olds, pointing to greater inequality here than elsewhere across Europe. The Children's Society's own annual household survey also found that, in 2024, UK children and young people (aged 10 to 17) living in households in financial strain were more likely to have low life satisfaction than their peers in households not in financial strain.

[30] See, for example, The Children's Society. The Good Childhood Report 2022 [Internet]. 2022 [accessed 2024 May 7]. Available from: **childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/GCR-2022-Full-Report.pdf**, which further explored children's experiences of school; and The Good Childhood Report 2023 for the most recent data. In addition, school absences have become an area of particular interest in recent years, with the Children's Commissioner's report Missing Children, Missing Grades (November 2023) finding that school absences have become endemic in Key Stage 4, and that poor attendance has a dramatic relationship with attainment. See: Children's Commissioner. Missing Children, Missing Grades [Internet]. 2023 [accessed 2024 July 4]. Available from: **childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/missing-children-missing-grades/**.

[31] The latest data from the Children's Commissioner highlighted long NHS waiting times, with, in particular, over 270,000 children (28%) still awaiting further mental health support after a referral, and less than half of those with a probable mental disorder having received at least one contact from Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) within the year. See: The Children's Commissioner. Children's mental health services 2022-23 [Internet]. 2024 [accessed 2024 June 26]. Available from: **childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/childrens-mental-health-services-2022-23/**. For further detail, see 'Ambition for the future' section below.

[32] The latest official statistics by the Department for Work and Pensions revealed that a record 4.3 million children were living in poverty in the UK in the financial year ending 2023. See: Department for Work and Pensions. Accredited official statistics: Households Below Average Income: an analysis of the UK income distribution: FYE 1995 to FYE 2023 [Internet]. 2024 [accessed 2024 May 7]. Available from: **gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2023/households-below-average-income-an-analysis-of-the-uk-income-distribution-fye-1995-to-fye-2023#children-in-low-income-households**.

[33] See, most recently, The Good Childhood Report 2023.

[34] See The Good Childhood Report 2024, and: The Children's Society. The Good Childhood Report 2020 [Internet]. 2020 [accessed 2024 May 3]. Available from: **childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Good-Childhood-Report-2020.pdf**.

[35] For an exploration of the links between poverty, financial strain and children's wellbeing, see, for example, The Children's Society. The Good Childhood Report 2019 [Internet]. 2019 [accessed 2024 June 12]. Available from: **childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-08/GCR%202019.pdf**, and The Children's Society, 2023a.

In addition, The Children's Society's annual survey found that, like in 2023, rising prices were still the top worry for children and young people in 2024 (from a list of nine issues in society). It also showed how households' financial situations can affect children and young people, with half reporting that not having money had stopped them from doing something that they wanted to do, and striking proportions of parents and carers struggling to afford items and experiences for their child. In particular, a holiday away from home was the element that a larger proportion of parents and carers struggled to afford.

Previous Good Childhood Reports have found that children's experiences of school are an area of particular concern. Once again, school was the aspect of life that more children and young people completing The Children's Society's annual survey in 2024 were unhappy with. Some measures related to their experiences at school (at age 15), like their sense of safety, sense of belonging, and long-term absences, were also areas where the UK fared poorly compared to other European countries in PISA 2022. These findings add weight to conclusions in past Good Childhood Reports that additional focus is needed to improve children's experiences at school, to support their overall wellbeing.

In contrast, a finding that provides some hope is that family support (for 15-year-olds) was an area where the UK performed well compared to other countries across Europe in PISA 2022 results.

Finally, looking at specific groups of children, the latest data from both Understanding Society and PISA continue to highlight worrying patterns in girls' wellbeing. Both sources identified a decline in UK girls' happiness over time, as well as girls being less happy than boys with their lives. In addition, PISA data found girls (age 15) in the UK to be less happy than their peers in Europe, with the decline in their life satisfaction between 2015 and 2022 larger in the UK than on average across Europe. Girls' unhappiness needs to be looked at further so that it can be understood and addressed.

The challenges presented in The Good Childhood Report 2024 highlight the urgency with which action must be taken in response. The next section summarises The Children's Society's call for action, which was developed with input from children and young people.

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Ambition for the future

Children and young people deserve better. Year on year, findings that UK children's wellbeing is in decline cannot go on. Decisive action and national leadership are needed to overturn the decline in children's wellbeing. We know that these experiences are not lived in a vacuum. They are influenced, exacerbated and compounded by societal challenges. The pandemic, rising levels of poverty, concerns over young people's safety, the climate emergency and other stresses have put a strain on young people's lives and can prevent the experience of a happy and fulfilled childhood.

Additionally, the mounting pressure on statutory and voluntary sector services means they are struggling to meet children's needs. Data from the Children's Commissioner has illustrated the ever-growing crisis facing children's mental health services, with hundreds of thousands on waiting lists and less than half (49%) of those with a probable mental health condition receiving at least one contact with Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) in 2022/23.[36] This is unacceptable. Not only does it leave far too many young people waiting in line without any support, it also means that services designed to provide early intervention support are unable to do so as they plug the gap of unmet need at crisis point.

For far too long a piecemeal approach to addressing these challenges has failed to materialise into improvements to children's wellbeing. There is an urgent need for a targeted, strategic and long-term vision for children and young people. The findings documented in this report and the clear message from children and young people is that a national mission is required to overturn the decline in children's wellbeing.

Policy landscape

The 2024 UK General Election result marks a substantial moment of change, and with any change comes an opportunity to reset and refocus. The various political campaigns during the election period demonstrated a broad consensus on the need to focus on, and invest in, children's wellbeing and mental health. However, it also evidenced the lack of urgency and ambition to address this. It is now for the new Government to act on their manifesto's recognition of the importance of children's wellbeing, and up to the whole of Parliament to come together to deliver changes in the best interests of the younger generation.[37] Opportunities to tackle the challenges documented in this report are presented by a new policy agenda, including the forthcoming Children's Wellbeing Bill and Child Poverty Strategy announced in July 2024.[38, 39]

[36] Children's Commissioner, 2024. More detail is included in footnote 31 above.
[37] Labour Party. Labour Party Manifesto: Change [Internet]. 2024 [accessed 2024 July 10]. Available from: **labour.org.uk/change/**.
[38] Prime Minister's Office. The King's Speech 2024 Background Briefing [Internet]. 2024 [accessed 2024 July 17]. Available from: **assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6697f5c10808eaf43b50d18e/The_King_s_Speech_2024_background_briefing_notes.pdf**.
[39] Prime Minister's Office. Ministerial taskforce launched to kickstart work on child poverty strategy [Internet]. 2024 [accessed 2024 July 17]. Available from: **gov.uk/government/news/ministerial-taskforce-launched-to-kickstart-work-on-child-poverty-strategy**.

Prior to the election, the past year delivered progress on some issues, while also being a year of missed opportunity on others.

- In February 2024, it was announced that the Shared Outcomes Fund would provide 24 **early support hubs** with almost £8 million funding to support young people's mental health and wellbeing through easy access community hubs.[40]
- In September 2023, the Government published its five year **suicide prevention strategy** and action plan. Children and young people are recognised as a priority group that require tailored and targeted support.[41]
- Following a lengthy Parliamentary process, the **Online Safety Act** was passed in October 2023, with the aim of making online spaces for children and young people safer.
- Reform of the **Mental Health Act** was not passed during the recent Parliament – a missed opportunity to reduce inequalities and provide better connection between acute and community mental health care. A new commitment to reform the Act was mentioned in the King's Speech in July 2024.[42]
- The **Major Conditions Strategy**, the ambitious replacement to the dropped Mental Health Plan, did not reach full publication and implementation, failing to capitalise on the extensive insight provided from children and young people during consultation.[43]
- Some reforms were introduced across Children's Social Care following the Government's response to **Stable Homes, Built on Love** in September 2023.[44] While this included a national framework and changes to the Working Together statutory guidance, the overall pace and scale failed to address the needs of families, particularly regarding early intervention support.[45, 46]
- The Welsh Government's draft **Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy** includes proposals to improve the transition between child and adult mental health services, support the delivery of whole-school approaches and use wellbeing measures for children and young people as a national indicator.[47]

[40] Department for Health and Social Care. Extra funding for early support hubs [Internet]. 2024 [accessed 2024 July 10]. Available from: **gov.uk/government/news/extra-funding-for-early-support-hubs**.
[41] Department for Health and Social Care. Suicide prevention strategy for England: 2023 to 2028 [Internet]. 2023 [accessed 2024 July 10]. Available from: **gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england-2023-to-2028**.
[42] Prime Minister's Office, 2024b.
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Recommendations

In order to overturn the decline in children's wellbeing, **the new Government needs to commit to a national roadmap to a good childhood.**

These policy recommendations are summarised below, and fully set out in The Children's Society's separate publication: A national roadmap to a good childhood: Policy briefing.[48] They require targeted investment and support for initiatives that are proven to work, alongside a reinvigorated and ambitious step in better understanding children's wellbeing and committing to addressing the issues that children tell us about.

Over 200 children and young people shared their experiences, expectations and aspirations on what needs to change to improve children's wellbeing to inform the development of these policy recommendations. Throughout the implementation of these recommendations, ongoing collaboration and co-production with children and young people is essential.

To overturn the decline in children's wellbeing and set a path to a good childhood, the UK Government must:

Prevent Crisis

Ensure early intervention and preventative mental health and wellbeing support is in place for children and young people before they hit crisis.

This includes:

- Funding and supporting a national rollout of early support hubs in every local community, providing young people with a space to access the right support at the right time, without waiting in line.
- Rolling out Mental Health Support Teams to every school in England as part of a long-term commitment, to ensure every child benefits from a whole-school approach to wellbeing, with an offer of additional support when needed.

Prioritise Children's Wellbeing

Elevate children's wellbeing to a national priority in recognition of children's happiness being a crucial marker of a successful society.

This includes:

- Leading a national mission to improve children's wellbeing, coordinating efforts across Government with the Prime Minister having overall responsibility.
- Introducing a national measurement of children's wellbeing, conducted every year to ask every child about their wellbeing, helping to guide the national mission and inform policy and local delivery.

End Child Poverty

Eradicate child poverty so no child experiences worry or unhappiness due to their financial situation and no family goes without the essentials.

This includes:

- Legislating for a Child Poverty Act, setting binding targets to end child poverty in the next 20 years via a coordinated cross-government effort.
- Ending the two-child limit and benefit cap to pull 300,000 children out of poverty.

[48] The Children's Society, 2024.

Improve Girls' Wellbeing

Establish a dedicated mission to understand, and address, worrying levels of unhappiness amongst girls.

This includes:

- Collaborating with children and young people through co-produced research to understand the primary drivers of girls' continuous low wellbeing and developing solutions to address them.
- Tackling wellbeing challenges with an intersectional approach, that takes account of the differing experiences of children and young people.

Reform the School Experience

End unwarranted pressures on children in school to prioritise their happiness and health alongside academic achievement.

This includes:

- Improving school culture with improved monitoring of bullying, alongside enhanced pupil voice opportunities, to eliminate bullying from school life.
- Curtailing the 'learn to test' and exam culture by reforming school assessment and placing pastoral support and wellbeing on par with academic progress to unlock children's potential and happiness.

Let Children Play

Enrich children and young people's lives through providing improved, and safe, spaces for leisure and play so they can explore interests, socialise and develop friendships.

This includes:

- Rebuilding communities for young people by requiring a safe provision of spaces within each community to enable young people to socialise.
- Increasing and protecting opportunities for children and young people to be active, engage in creative activities and socialise at school, in recognition of a need for emotional, social and healthy physical development alongside academic progression.

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Acknowledgements

The Children's Society is grateful to the University of Essex for making data from Understanding Society available via the UK Data Archive and UK Data Service. However, the University of Essex, the UK Data Archive and the UK Data Service bear no responsibility for the analysis of these data.

Understanding Society is an initiative funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and various government departments, with scientific leadership by the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, and survey delivery by NatCen Social Research and Kantar Public. The research data are distributed by the UK Data Service.

Our thanks also go to the OECD for making PISA data available for use. We would also like to thank Dr Jose Marquez for his collaboration as guest author of chapter 3 of The Good Childhood Report 2024.

The Children's Society also wishes to thank:

- the young people who took part in the cognitive testing for the new and revised questions for The Children's Society's household survey 2024
- the young people (and their parents and carers) who responded to The Children's Society's household survey 2024
- the young people who took part in our consultation work for this report, and supported its dissemination.

Finally, we would like to thank the What Works Centre for Wellbeing for generously gifting The Children's Society a financial donation from their closing resources, in support of our Good Childhood work.

"Help young people flourish."

Teenagers' needs are being ignored, with those who face abuse, exploitation or neglect only receiving help at crisis point.

We reach teenagers where they are to tackle the struggles they face today, providing complete support that's specific to them, and challenging the government to deliver policies that will continue to protect them. Because teenagers are children too, and a future of hope and happiness belongs to every one of them.

Together, we can set a path to a good childhood.

Scan here to download and view The Good Childhood Report 2024 publications.

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Citation:
Chollet D, Turner A, Marquez J, O'Neill J, Moore L.
The Good Childhood Report 2024.
The Children's Society: London; 2024.

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Charity Registration No. 221124. 2024516b/0824.

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