

# **Thriving Children and Young People**



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**The  
Children's  
Society**

# The Children's Society





# Our vision

## **A society built for all children**

This is the world we seek to create; the day our vision comes true is the day we celebrate and close The Children's Society because our work is done.

We won't rest until we've achieved our vision. Where together with young people and our supporters, we've created a society built for all children. Where hope is alive in every child.

# Our goal

**By 2030, we will have overturned the damaging decline in children's well-being, setting a path for long lasting growth**

This is our big, bold focus to drive our energy and efforts over the next ten years. It will advise everything we do and every decision we make to help us take a giant leap towards our vision.

In the decade ahead we are determined to make sure this generation of children have a better childhood. So we will set out to build a happier, safer society for young people to grow up in, where they can look forward to their futures with more hope.



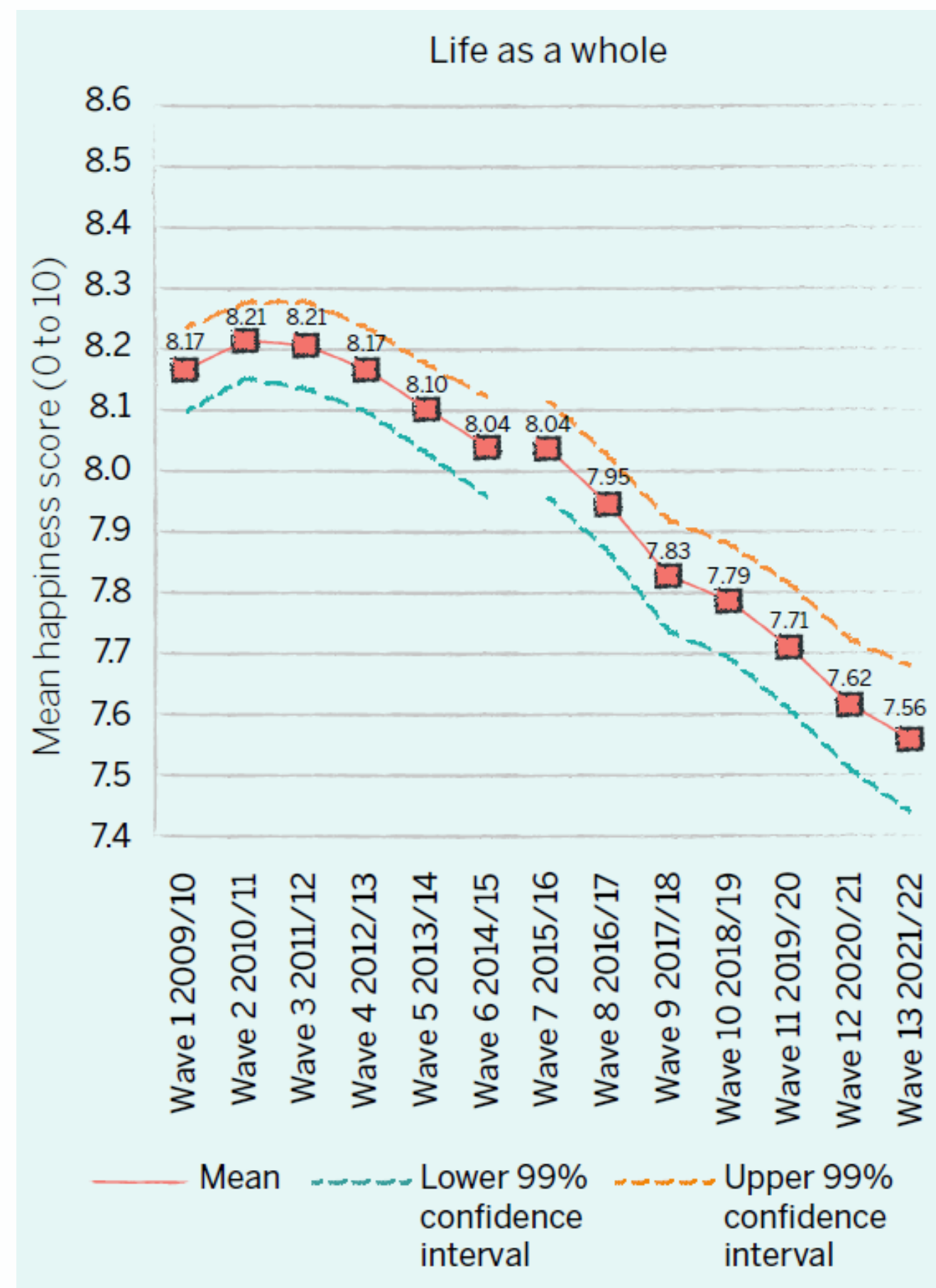
# The Good Childhood Report 2024





# Trends in the wellbeing of 10- to 15-year-olds

Figure 2. Trends in 10- to 15-year-olds' happiness with life as a whole, UK, 2009/10 to 2021/22.



In the latest wave of the survey (2021/22):



Children's average happiness with their **life as a whole, friends, appearance, school, and schoolwork** was **significantly lower than when the survey began** (2009/10).



There was no significant difference in children's average happiness with their **family** (comparing to 2009/10).

# Gender trends in 10- to 15-year-olds' wellbeing

The latest Understanding Society data (2021/22) show concerning patterns for girls (aged 10 to 15).

Trends over time by gender:

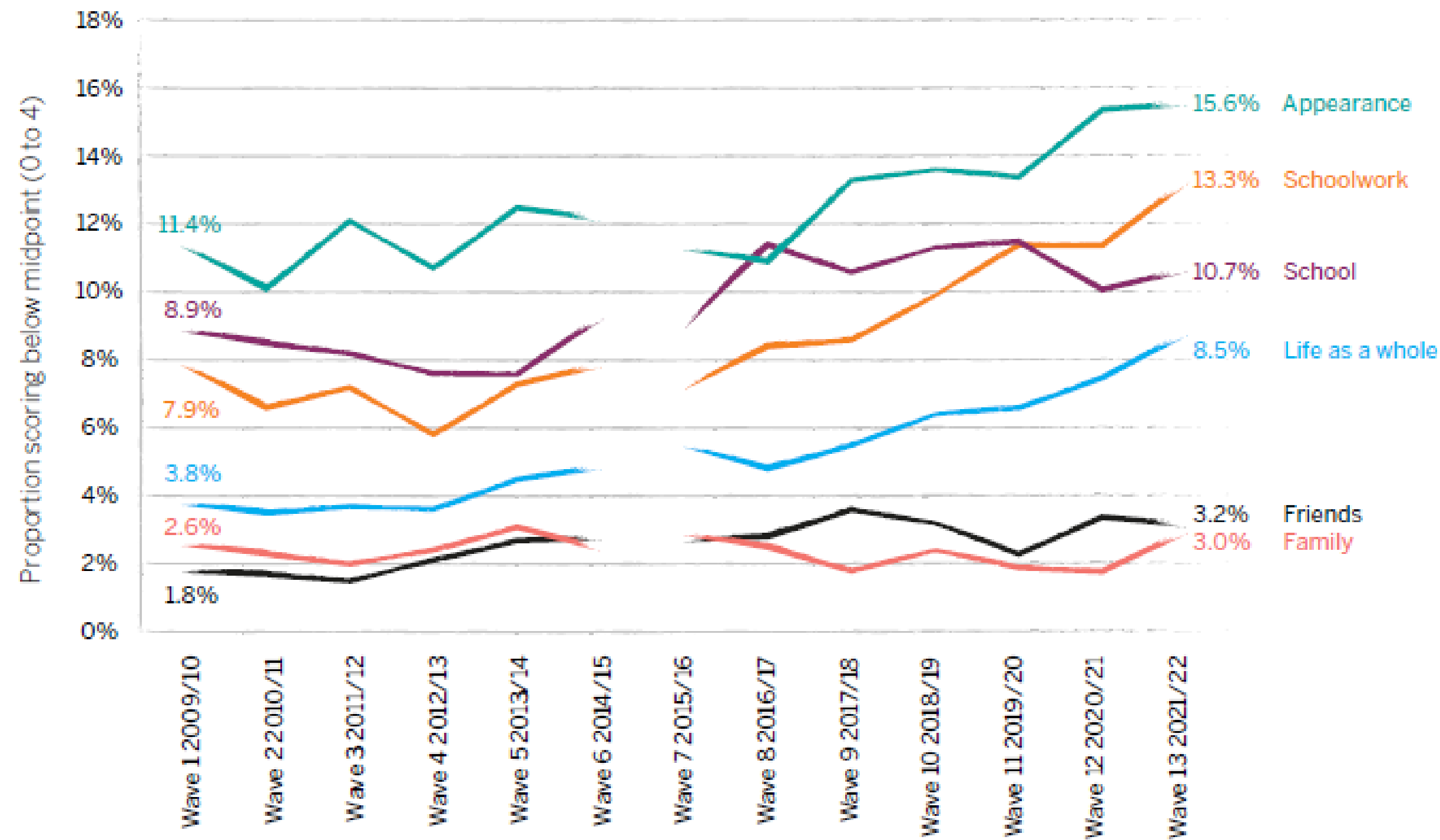
- **Girls' mean happiness scores were significantly lower** in 2021/22 than when the survey started in 2009/10 for all six measures (**life as a whole, family, friends, appearance, school, and schoolwork**).
- In contrast, **there were no significant differences in mean happiness scores for boys** for these measures when comparing 2021/22 data with 2009/10 data.

Gender differences in the latest dataset:

- In 2021/22, **girls were significantly less happy on average than boys** with their **life as a whole, family, appearance, and school**.

# 10- to 15-year-olds unhappy with different aspects of life

Figure 3. Proportion of 10- to 15-year-olds with low happiness for life as a whole and five different aspects of life, UK, 2009/10 to 2021/22.



**Proportions of 10- to 15-year-olds unhappy, by gender:**

- For **girls**, a larger proportion (**22.6%**) was unhappy with **appearance**.
- For **boys**, a larger proportion (**11.5%**) was unhappy with **schoolwork**.

Source: Understanding Society survey, children aged 10 to 15, UK, weighted data.

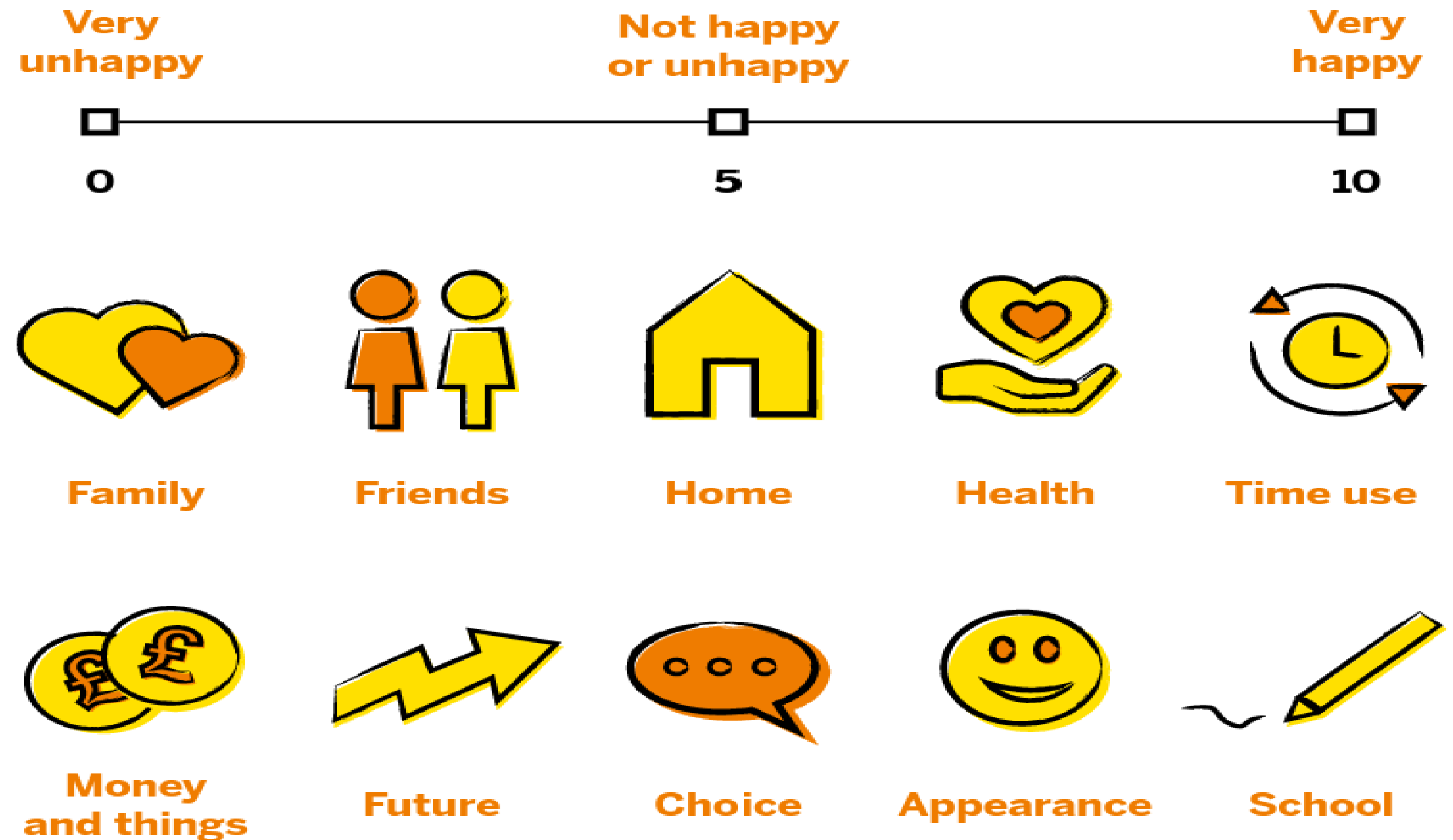


# **Latest figures on children's subjective wellbeing**

**(from The Children's Society's annual household survey 2024)**



# The Good Childhood Index (GCI) domains

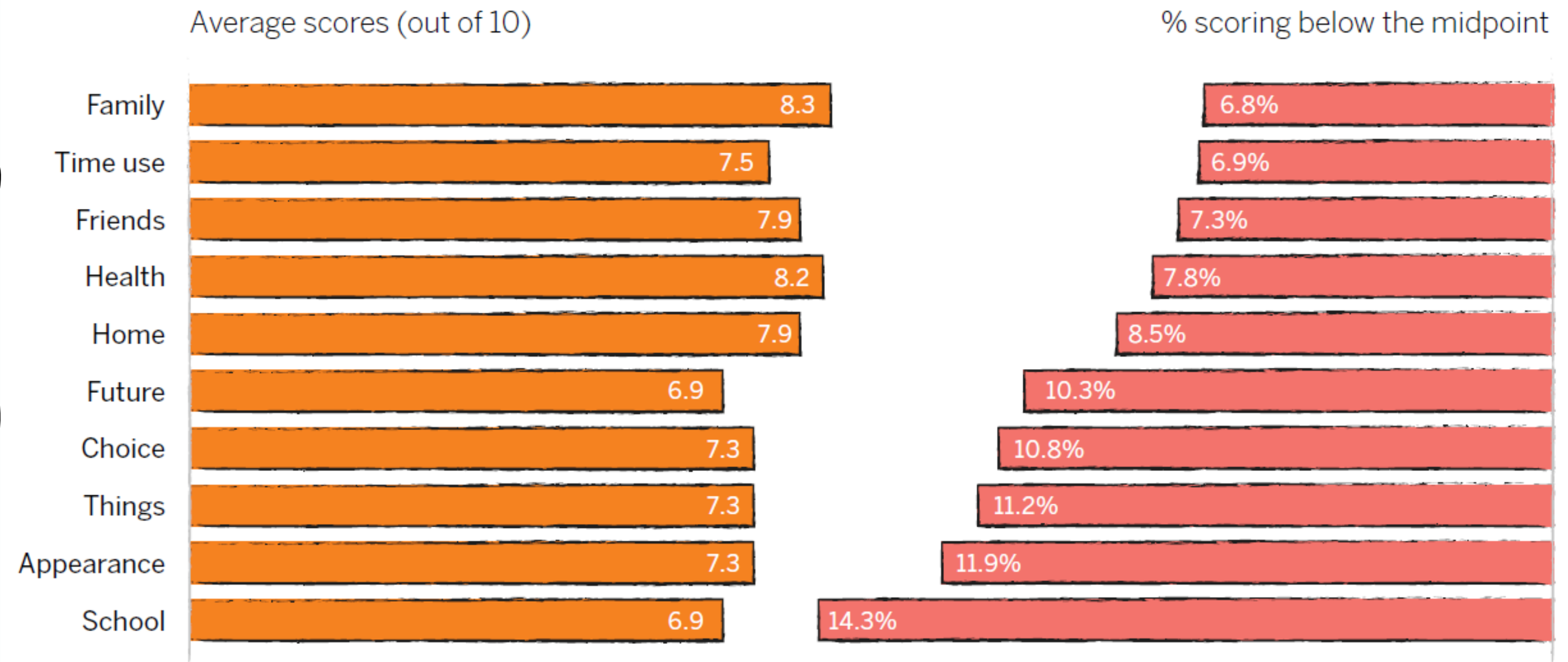




# Good Childhood Index: 10- to 17-year-olds' wellbeing

Figure 4. Latest figures from the Good Childhood Index (10- to 17-year-olds), 2024.

In 2024, **11%** of UK 10- to 17-year-olds had low wellbeing on our multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction.



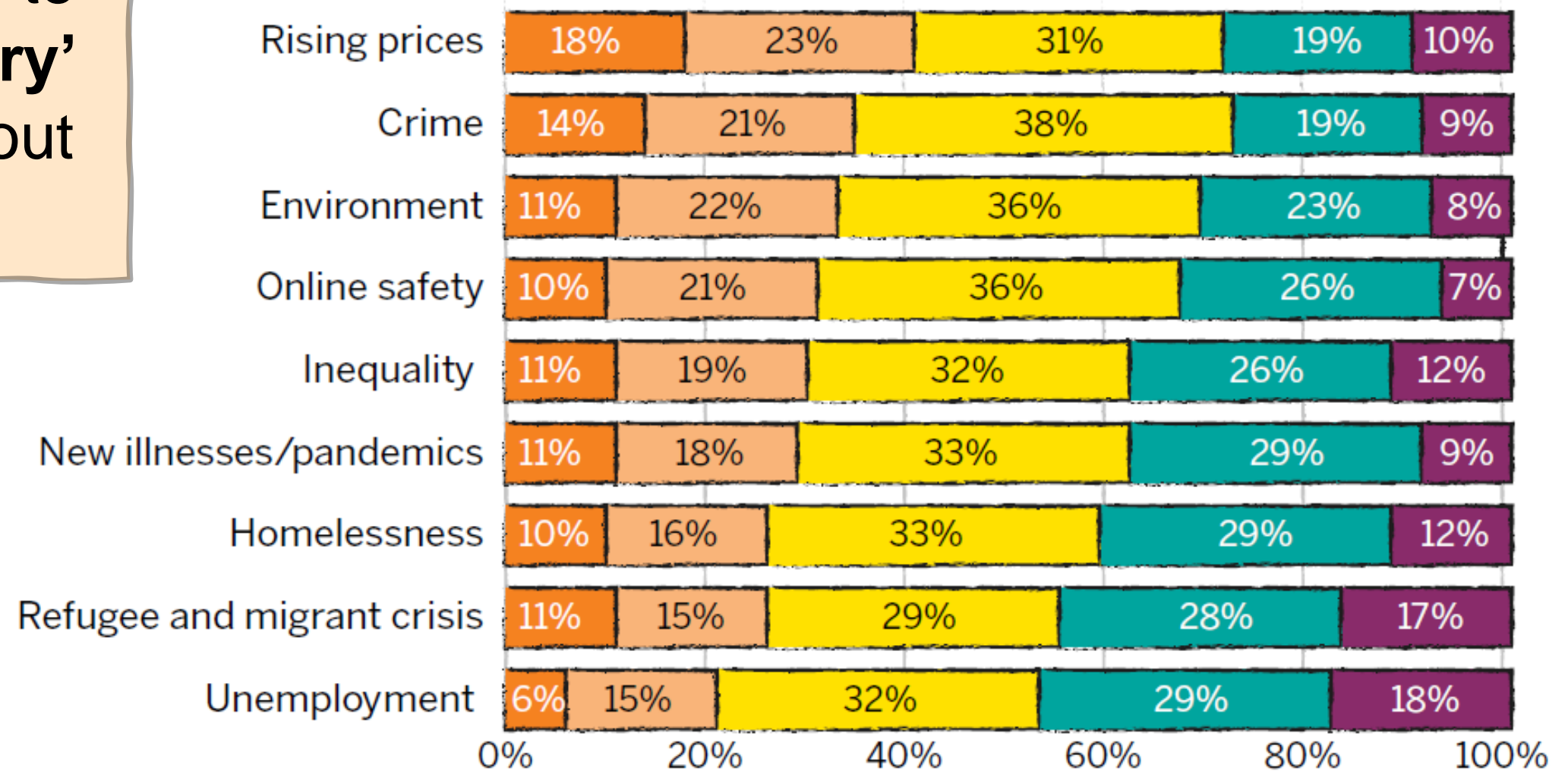
Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 23, April to June 2024, children aged 10 to 17, UK, weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including 'prefer not to say').



# Topical issues: 10- to 17-year-olds' worries about broader societal issues

Two in five (41%) 10- to 17-year-olds were 'very' or 'quite' worried about rising prices in 2024.

Figure 5. Extent of 10- to 17-year-olds' worry about broader issues, 2024.



Proportion of children

Very worried    Quite worried    A little worried    Not at all worried    Not sure / Prefer not to say

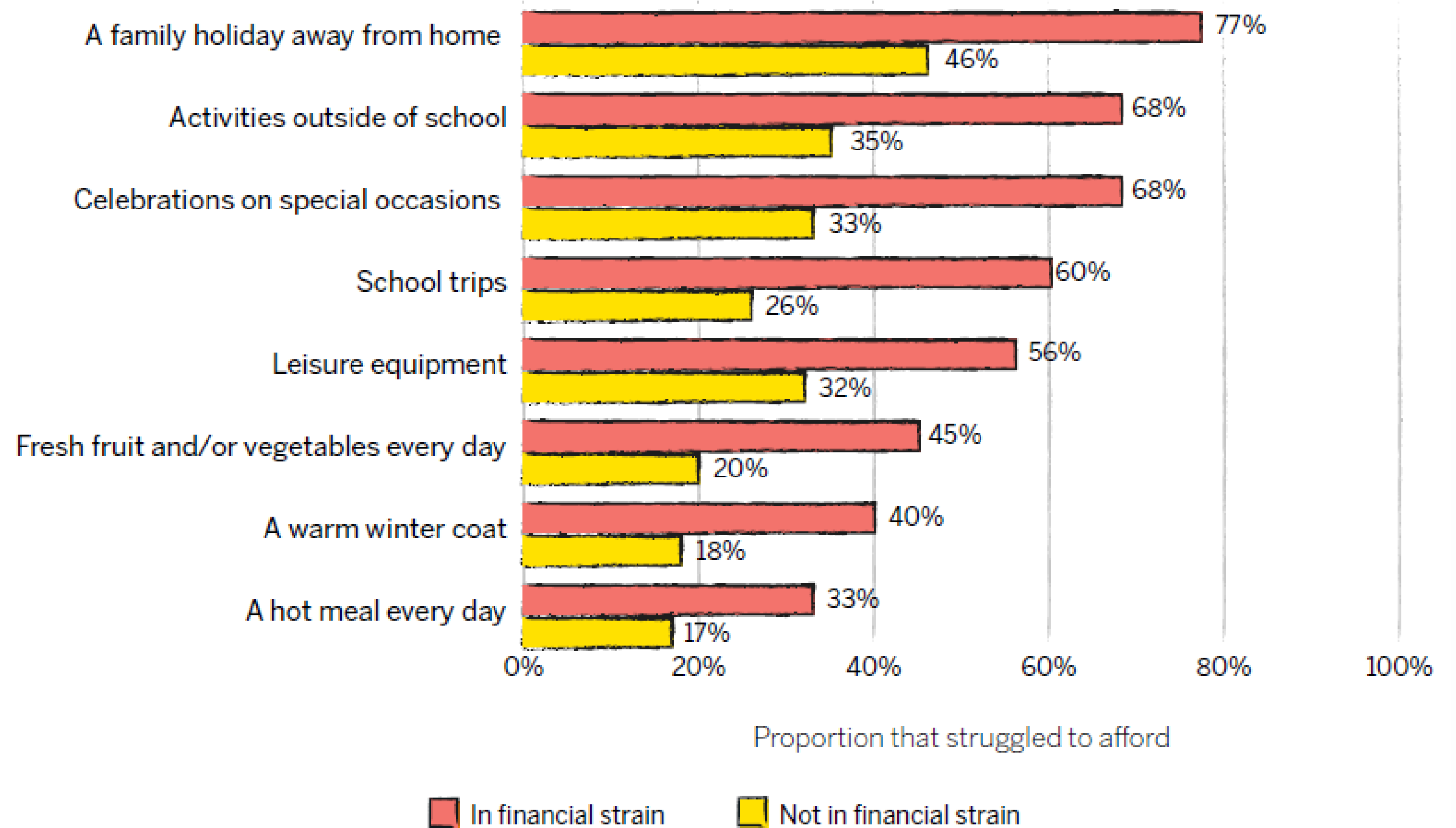
Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 23, April to June 2024, children aged 10 to 17, UK, weighted data.  
 Note: Percentages for each item may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

# Topical issues: cost of living (1)

**23%** of parents and carers had found it 'quite' or 'very' difficult to manage financially between January and March 2024, which indicates that their households were in **financial strain**.



Figure 6. 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, 2024.





## Topical issues: cost of living (2)

### Looking at children and young people's (aged 10 to 17) own experiences of 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 **those living in households in financial strain**.
- **Half** (50%) 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 those living in households that were not in financial strain.

# **Comparing 15-year-olds' wellbeing in the UK with other European countries**

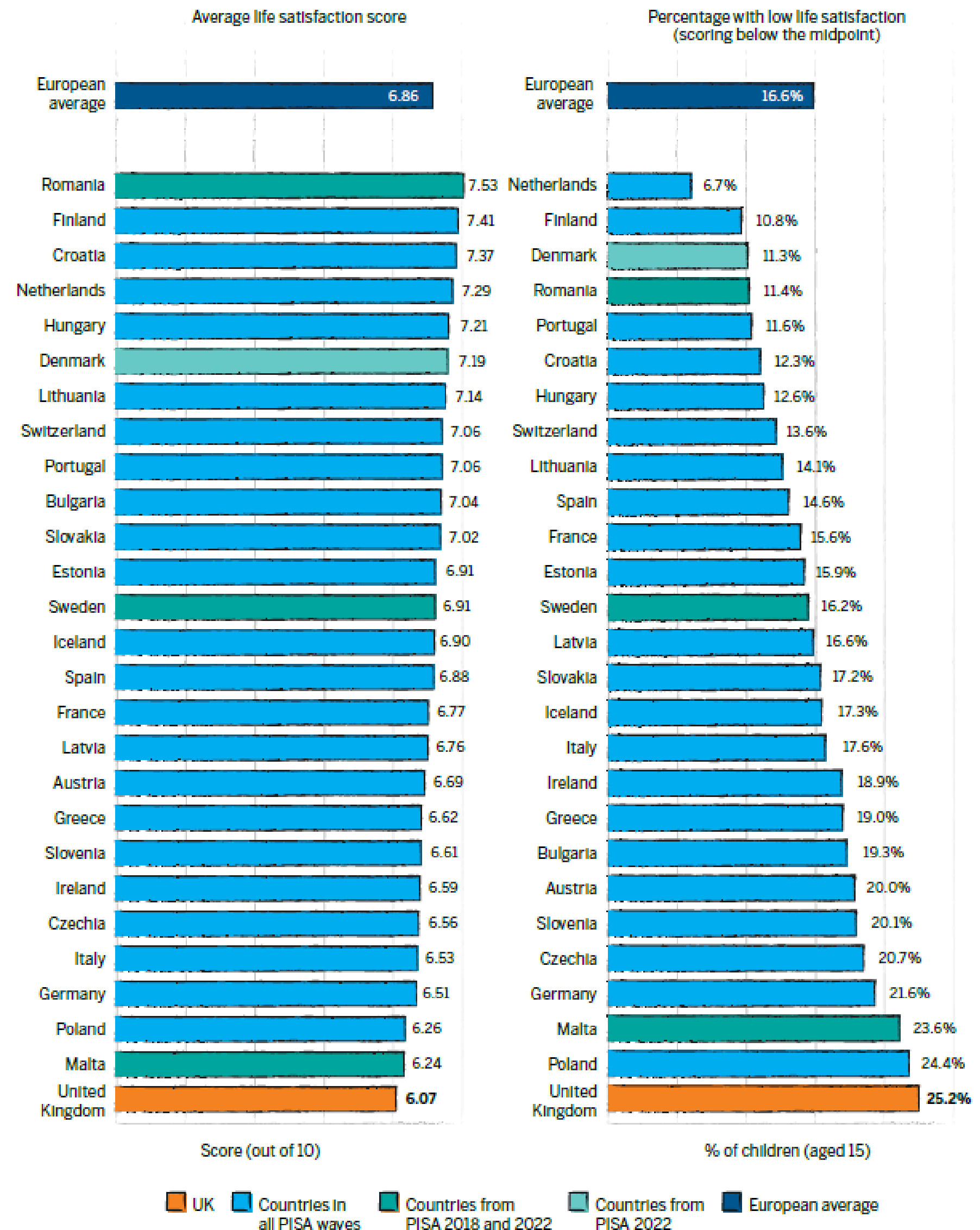
**(based on PISA 2022 results)**



# Life satisfaction at age 15 in the UK and other European countries

Figure 7. Life satisfaction at age 15 in Europe and the UK, 2022.

- In 2022:
- the UK had the **lowest average life satisfaction** among 15-year-olds across 27 European countries.
  - the UK also had the **highest proportion of 15-year-olds reporting low life satisfaction (25.2%)**.



Source: PISA, 2022. Weighted data.

# Life satisfaction at age 15 in the UK and other European countries: gender and socio-economic differences

## Gender differences:

- In the UK, **one in five** (19.8%) **boys** and **almost one in three** (30.9%) **girls** aged 15 reported **low life satisfaction** in 2022.
- In comparison, this was one in eight (12.2%) boys and just over one in five (21.4%) girls on average across Europe.

## 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.**





# Risk or protective factors for wellbeing in the UK compared to other European countries

Based on 15-year-olds' responses to PISA 2022:

The UK **performed less well** than other countries across Europe on:

- **food deprivation** (fourth highest rate of 15-year-olds reporting no money to eat at least once a week in the last 30 days)
- levels of **physical activity** (fifth highest rate of pupils reporting no physical exercise before or after school)
- some measures related to school experiences: **school safety** (including second highest level of bullying in Europe), **school belonging**, and **long-term school absences**.

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

- measures of **family support** (ranking **seventh highest** for 15-year-olds' ratings of family support)
- some measures associated with digital resources: **availability of digital resources at home**, and 15-year-olds' agreement with **regulation of digital devices at school**.

**How schools can promote a  
good childhood for all, so  
children thrive not just  
survive**

- **Schools need to make mental health and wellbeing a priority**
- **Schools should publish a wellbeing strategy for staff and students**
- **Wellbeing should be an integral part of curriculum**
- **Programmes should be in place to support children's wellbeing**
- **Reflect on the 5 ways of wellbeing in school life**
  - **Connect, Be Active, Be creative and play, Learning, Take notice**
- **Children should be encouraged to speak about mental health and wellbeing**
- **Strategies should be developed to support the most disadvantaged students will struggle most with wellbeing**



# **Policy recommendations: A national roadmap to a good childhood**

# Ambition for the future

## Children and young people deserve better.

- The findings documented in The Good Childhood Report 2024, and the clear message from the children and young people who took part in our consultations, show that a national mission is required to overturn the decline in children's wellbeing.
- Decisive action and national leadership are needed to develop a targeted, strategic and long-term vision for children and young people.
- This is why The Children's Society have published **A national roadmap to a good childhood** – a call for action on how Government can work towards overturning the decline in children's wellbeing.
- The roadmap sets out six concrete steps for the Government to take so that every child is happy, healthy and safe.

**Over 200 children and young people** shared their insights and experiences to inform the development of our policy recommendations.

# Headline recommendations

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

- **Prevent crisis** to ensure early intervention and preventative mental health and wellbeing support is in place for children and young people.
- **Prioritise children's wellbeing** to elevate it as a national priority in recognition of children's happiness being a crucial marker of a successful society.
- **End child poverty** so no child experiences worry or unhappiness due to their financial situation and no family goes without the essentials.
- **Improve girls' wellbeing** to better understand the worrying levels of low wellbeing amongst girls.
- **Reform the school experience** to end unwarranted pressures on children and to prioritise their happiness and health alongside academic achievement.
- **Let children play** to enrich children and young people's lives through more opportunities to play, be active and socialise.



# Prevent crisis

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

## Early Support Hubs

The Department of Health and Social Care should fund and support a national rollout of early support hubs, providing young people with wellbeing and mental health support in the community. These hubs are tried and tested, including by The Children's Society, and support young people before crisis.

## Mental Health Support Teams

The Department for Education should ensure universal coverage of Mental Health Support Teams in schools, so every pupil benefits from a whole school approach to wellbeing alongside a counsellor with the MHST+ model.

# 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.**

## National Mission

The Prime Minister and Cabinet should lead a national mission to improve children's wellbeing with a Cabinet Committee coordinating work across Government.

## National Wellbeing Measure

The Prime Minister and Department for Education should introduce a national wellbeing measure, surveying all young people on their wellbeing annually to inform national and local policy and practice.

# 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.**

## Child Poverty Act

The Government should introduce a Child Poverty Act to set binding targets to end child poverty via a cross-government effort.

## Two Child Limit

The Department for Work and Pensions should end the two-child limit and benefit cap to pull 300,000 children out of poverty.



# Improve girls' wellbeing

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

## Informed by Lived Experience

The Government Equalities Office should invest in co-produced research to understand the drivers of girls' continuous low wellbeing before enacting an action plan to address this.

## Intersectional Approaches

The Government should take an intersectional approach to addressing children's wellbeing, both at a national policy level and in supporting local service delivery.

# Reform the school experience

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

## Address Bullying

The Department for Education should improve data collection and monitoring of bullying alongside enhanced pupil voice to eliminate bullying once and for all.

## Mental Health Support Teams

The Department for Education should end the 'learn to test' culture, reforming assessment in school to unlock every child's potential and placing wellbeing on par with academic progress.

# 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, develop friendships and socialise.**

## Rebuild Communities

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should rebuild communities for young people, introducing play sufficiency legislation and supporting local authorities to enhance recreational facilities for young people.

## Time in School

The Department for Education should increase and protect opportunities for children to be active, engage in creative activities and socialise at school to prioritise emotional and social development.



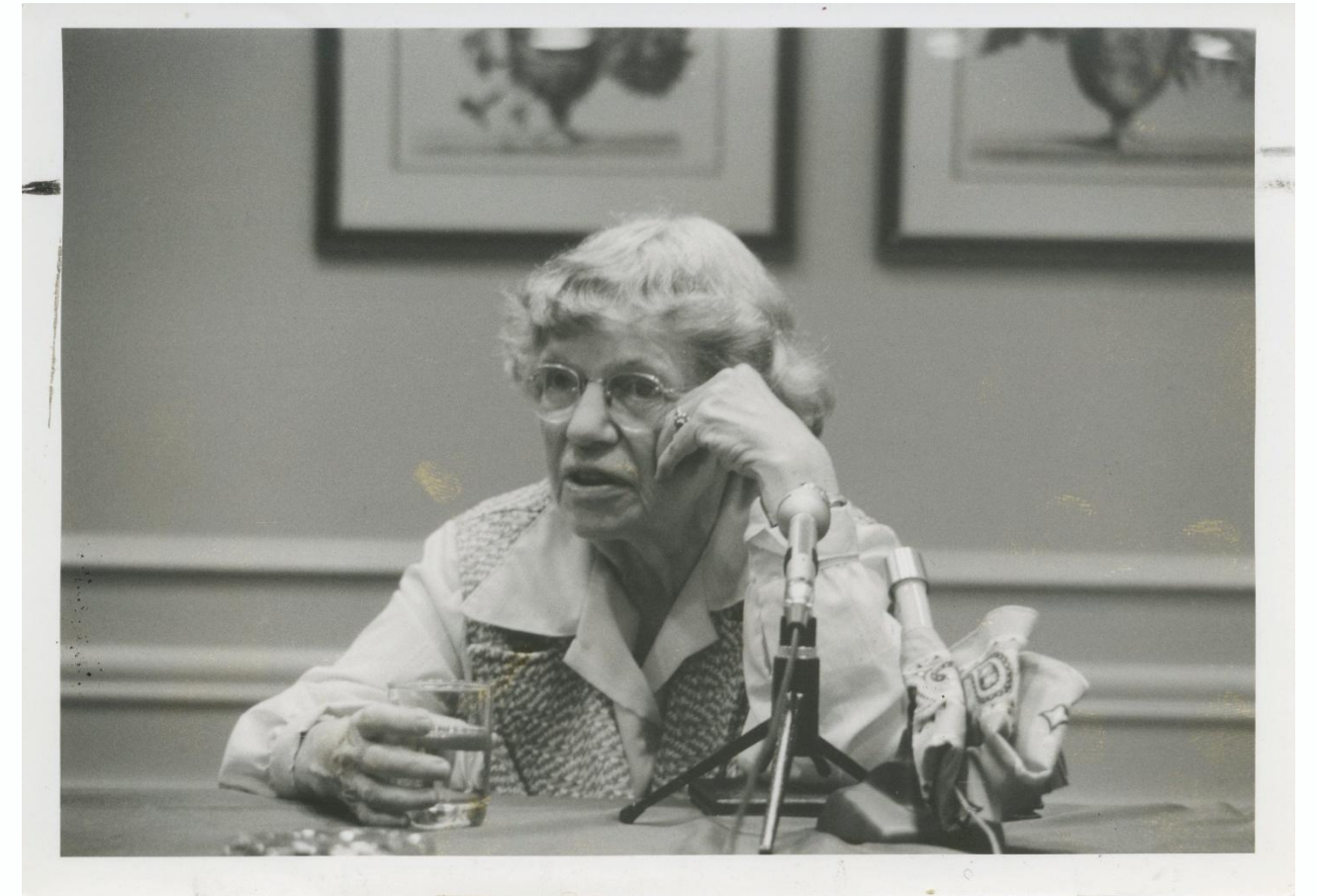
It is better for society to build  
stronger children than fix  
broken adults

Frederick Douglass



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has

**Margaret Mead**



The world is only ever changed  
by hope filled people

Rebecca Solnit





**Thank you for listening**



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

**Get in touch: [researchteam@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:researchteam@childrenssociety.org.uk)**

## **Questions for reflection in table groups**

- What struck you by the findings of the Good Childhood Report?**
- What chimes with your experience in schools?**
- What wisdom can you share about how your school promotes children's wellbeing?**