Happiness Survey 2023: Results
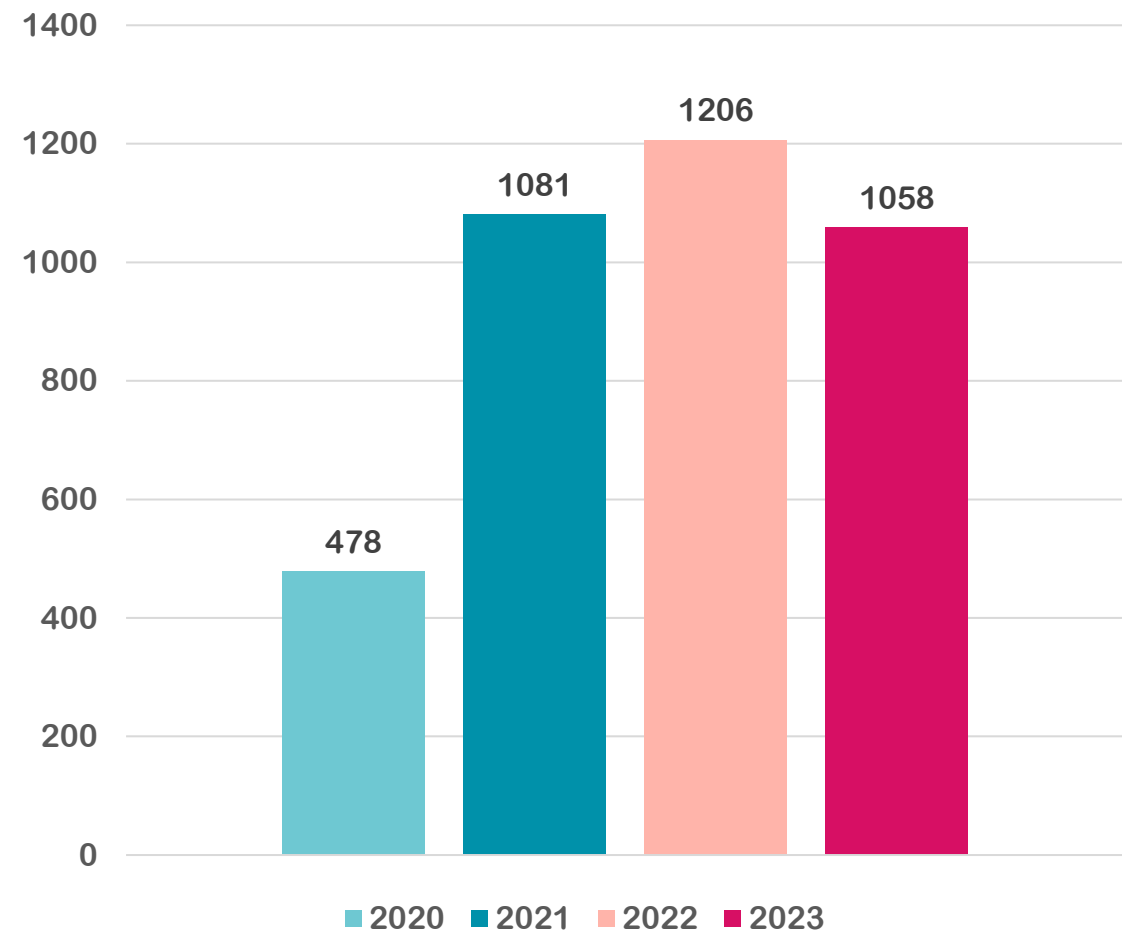
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03/2024

MARKKU OJANEN
Emeritus Professor of Psychology
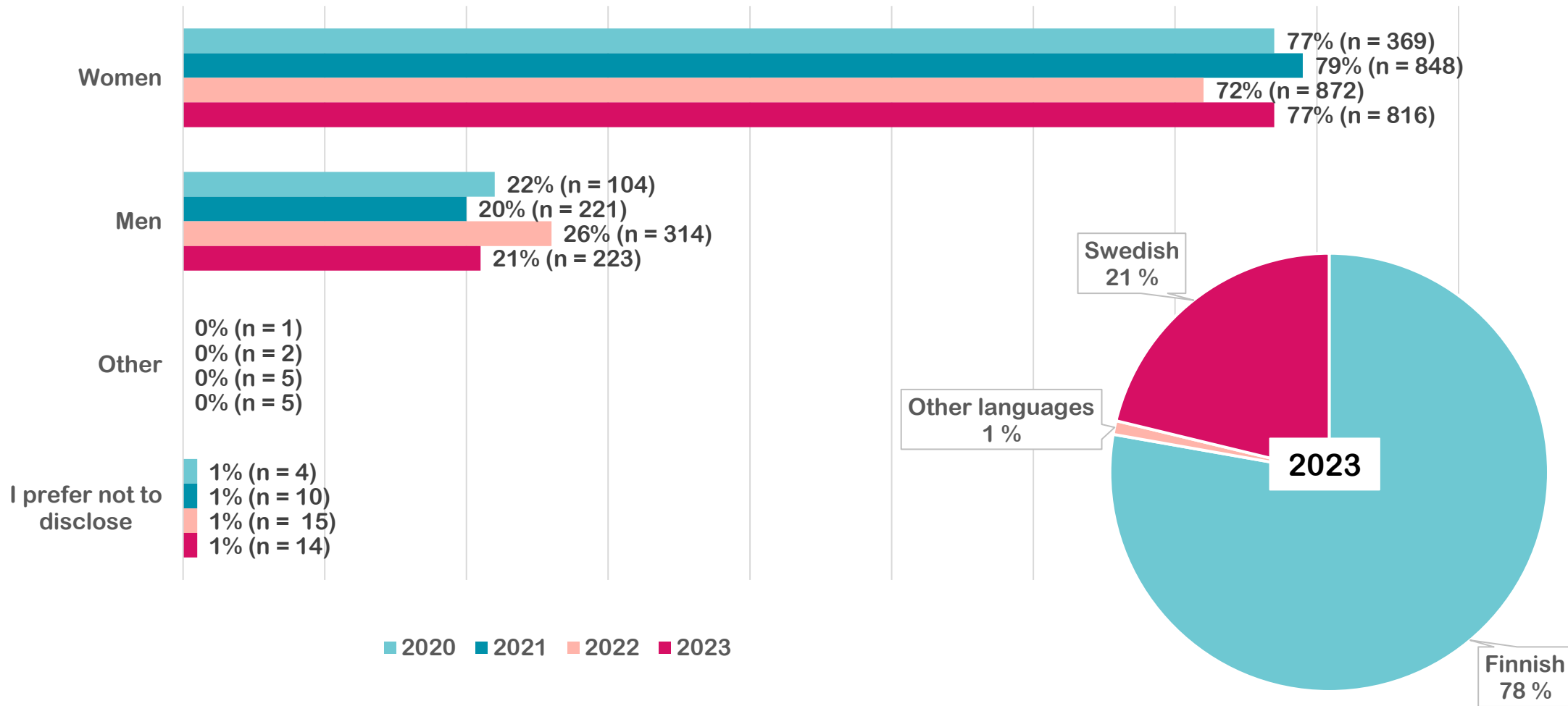
SÄDE STENLUND
MD, PhD

Development of the Number of Survey Respondents

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Gender and Mother Tongue

Women
- 77% (n = 369)
- 79% (n = 848)
- 72% (n = 872)
- 77% (n = 816)

Men
- 22% (n = 104)
- 20% (n = 221)
- 26% (n = 314)
- 21% (n = 223)

Other
- 0% (n = 1)
- 0% (n = 2)
- 0% (n = 5)
- 0% (n = 5)

I prefer not to disclose
- 1% (n = 4)
- 1% (n = 10)
- 1% (n = 15)
- 1% (n = 14)

■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023

Swedish 21 %

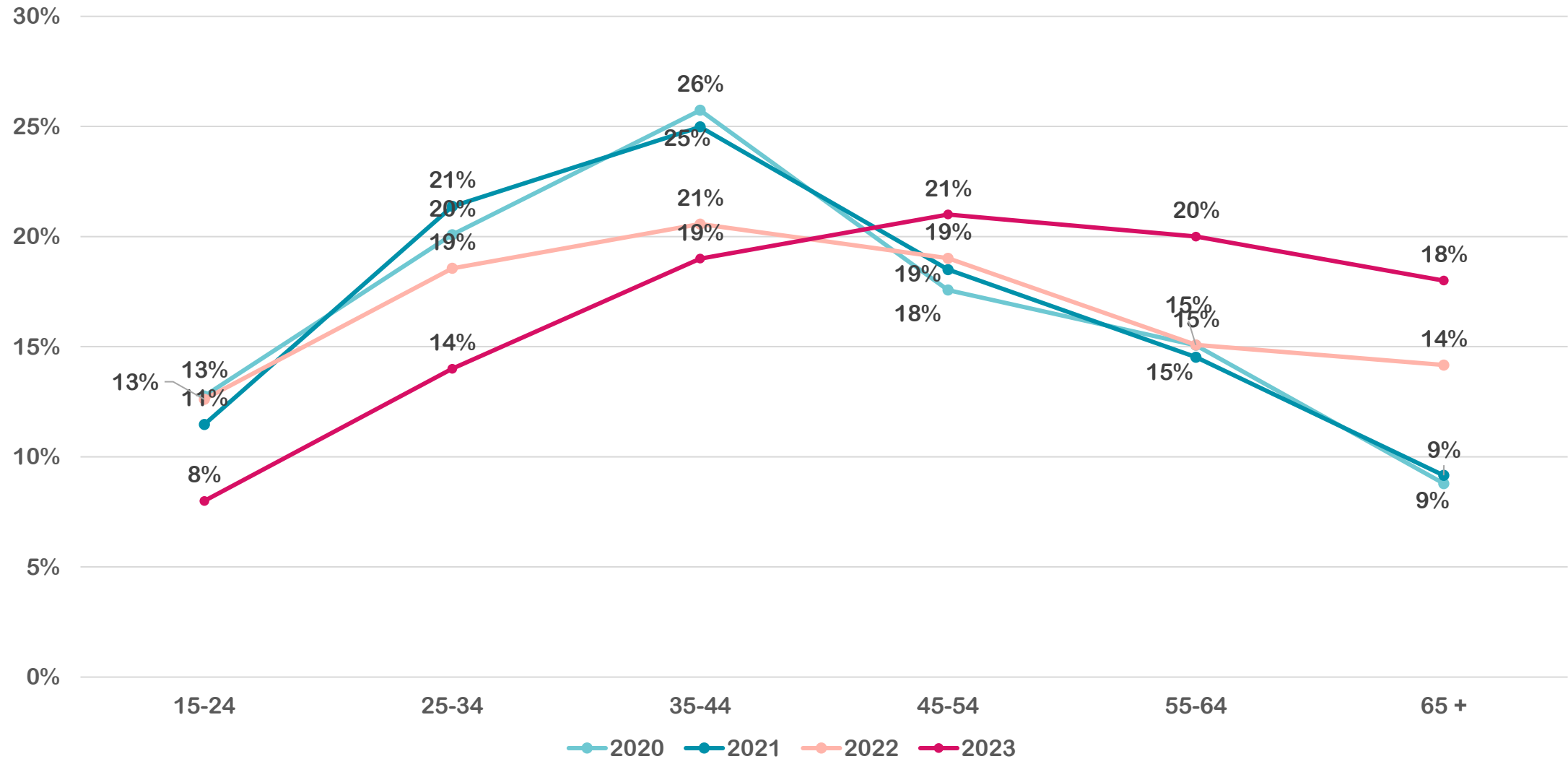**Other languages 1 %**

2023

Finnish 78 %

The proportion of women has remained the same every year. There should be more men among the respondents. There is reason to suspect that the sample does not adequately represent the men from Vaasa.

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Age

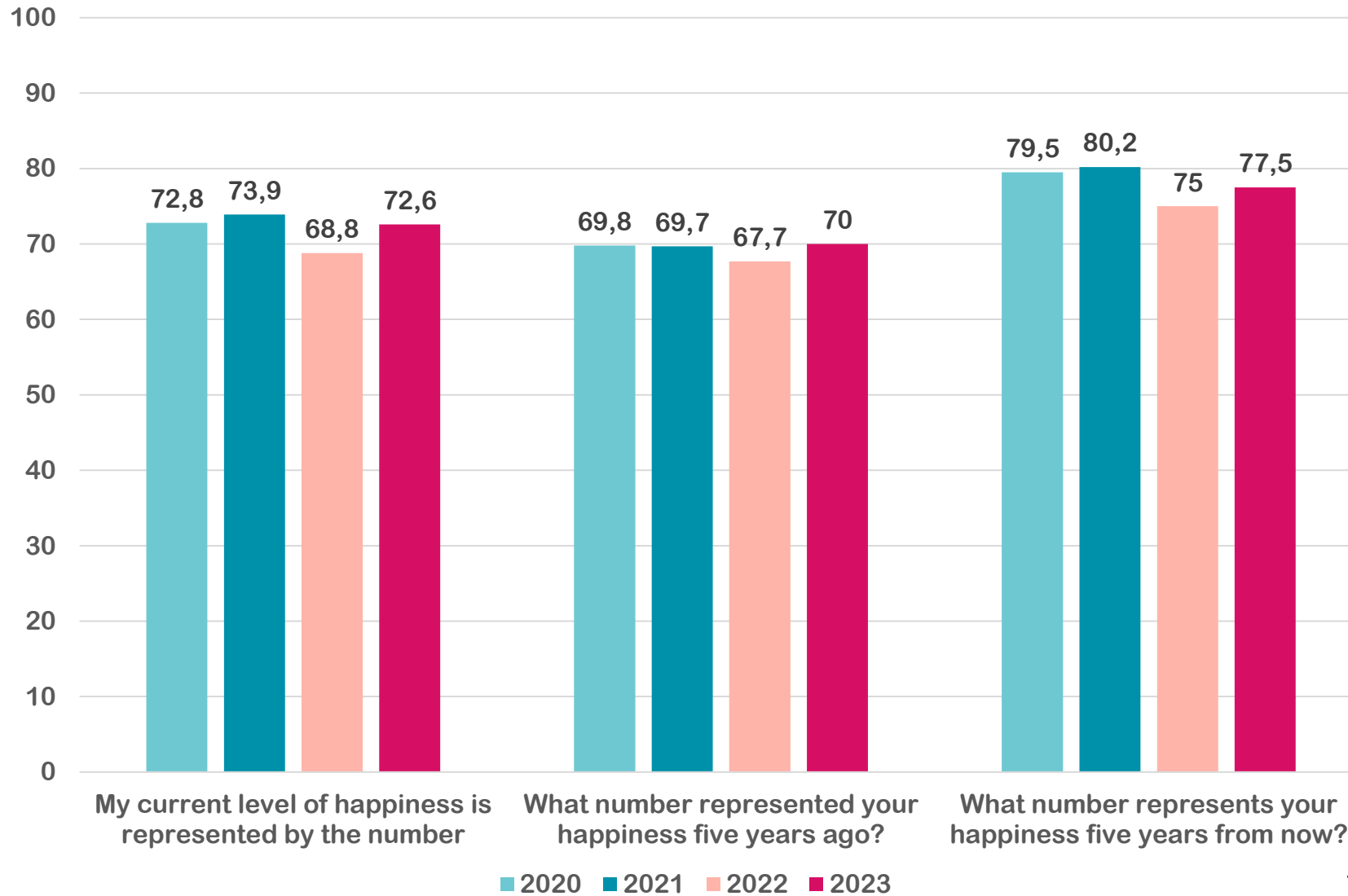**Mean age: 2023: 46,0 years, 2022: 46,2 years, 2021: 42,5 years**

The age distribution is moderately even, although there could have been more young respondents. The proportion of the oldest age groups has been slightly larger in the last two years compared to the previous two years.

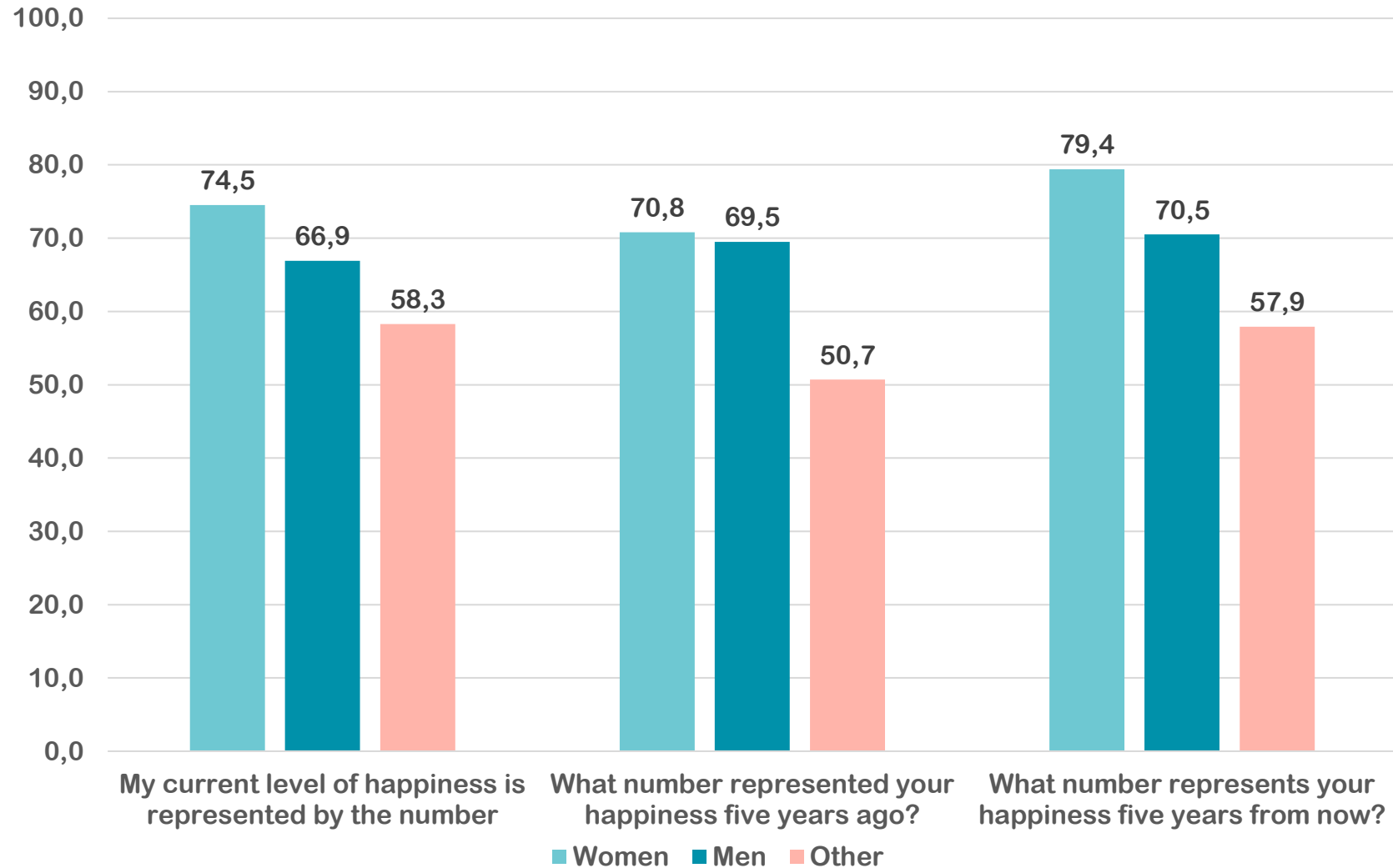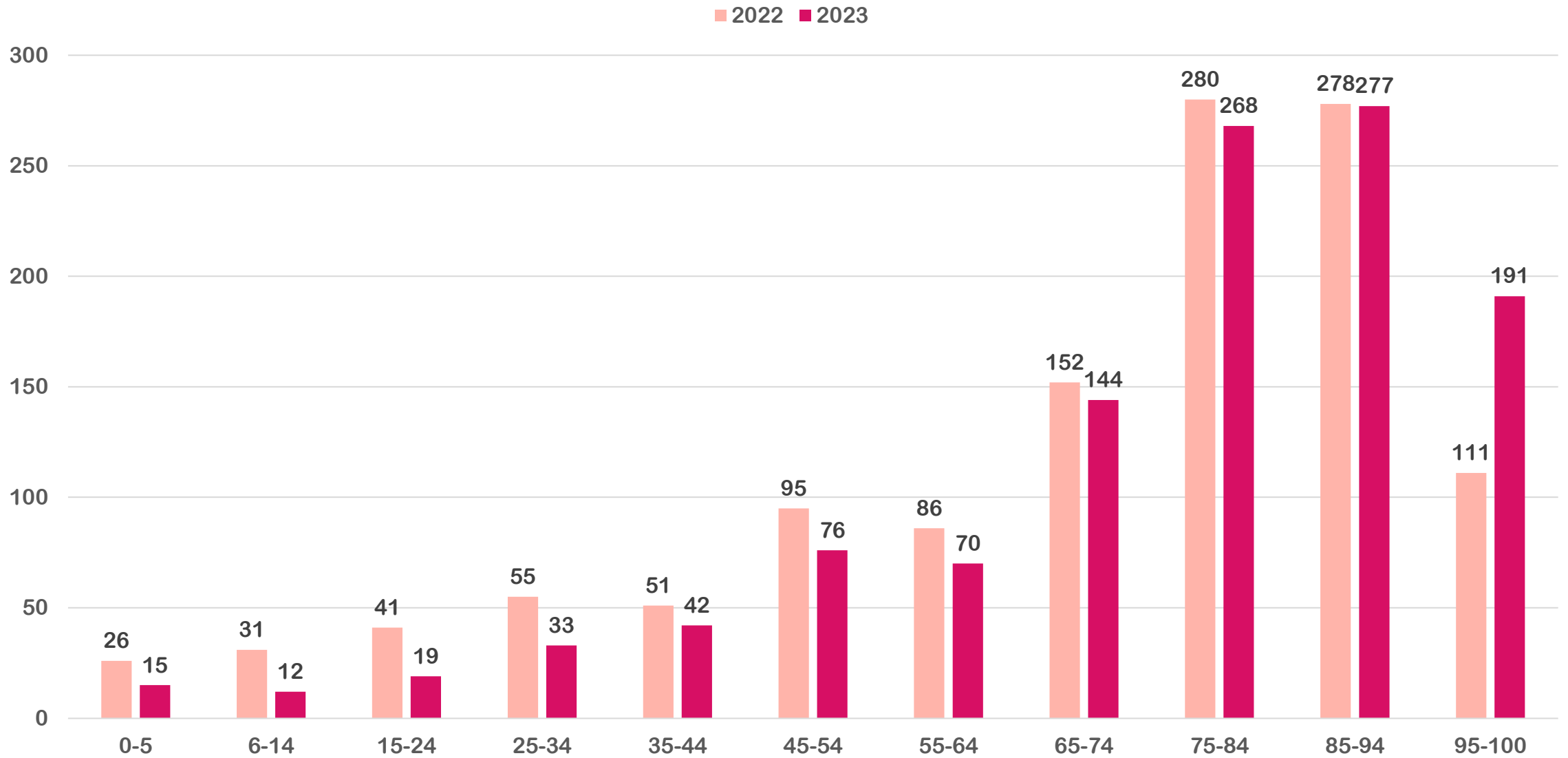# Results

Happiness by Gender

The results for men are surprising: their current happiness is notably lower than that of women. However, the future looks better for both men and women. It is unusual that men were happier five years ago than they are now. Due to small group sizes (5+14) in the "Other" group, I combined the options "Other" and "I prefer not to disclose" into one group. Of these two, assessments from the "I prefer not to disclose" group were more negative than those from the "Other" group alone. The ratings were noticeably lower than those in the men's and women's group. I am fairly certain that the group of men is selective.

	Women	Men	Other
My current level of happiness is represented by the number	74,5	66,9	58,3
What number represented your happiness five years ago?	70,8	69,5	50,7
What number represents your happiness five years from now?	79,4	70,5	57,9

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Distribution of Happiness

Satisfaction with Different Aspects of Life

	Marriage/Relationship	Leisure time	Friendships	Living environment	Livelihood	Work or studies	Health	Housing
2020	74,6	68,6	71,4	76	64,7	62,8	73,1	77,5
2021	82,8	70,9	72,7	77,7	66,3	68,5	73	79,5
2022	81,7	69,8	69,2	73,8	60,4	63	70	75,4
2023	80,7 -1,0	73,1 +3,3	71,2 +2,0	76,6 +2,8	63,6 +3,2	64,1 +1,1	71,9 +1,9	79,1 +3,7
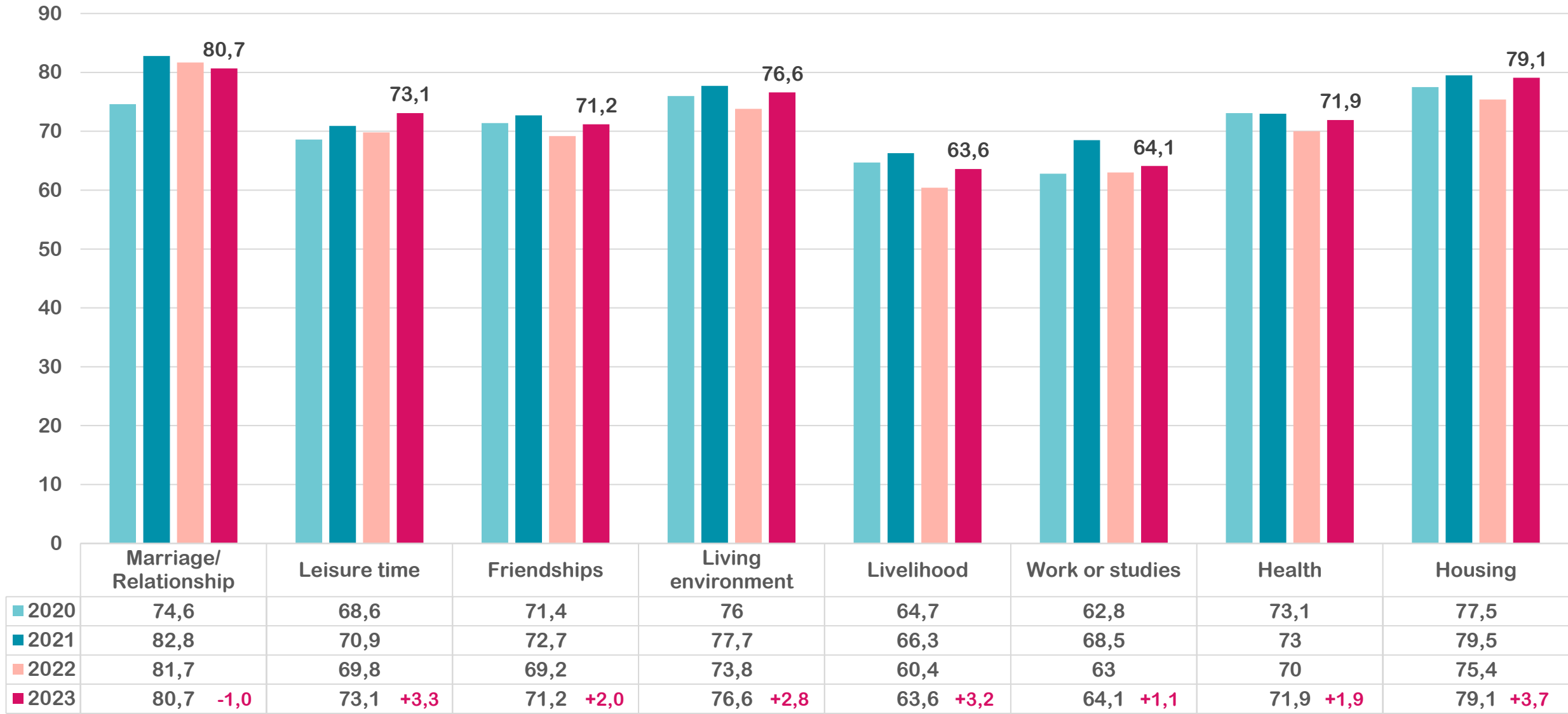
■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023

Correlations of Satisfaction Factors with Happiness 2023

Marriage/Relationship	.43
Leisure time	.55
Friendships	.50
Living environment	.62
Livelihood	.56
Work or studies	.49
Health	.56
Housing	.59

- Satisfaction ratings correlate strongly with each other. In these studies, there is always a halo effect present (in all studies, not just this one). This means that assessments are very comprehensive. When things are going well, they tend to be rated positively across the board; when things are going poorly, they tend to be rated negatively across the board. Causal relationships cannot be inferred from these results because the measurements were taken at the same time. Either satisfaction is assessed positively, leading to happiness, or happiness leads to positive assessments of satisfaction factors.

- Correlation of the marriage/relationship scale is lower than others. The correlations of this variable are surprisingly lower compared to other quality scales. This suggests that it may be its own separate source of satisfaction.

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Wellbeing Variables
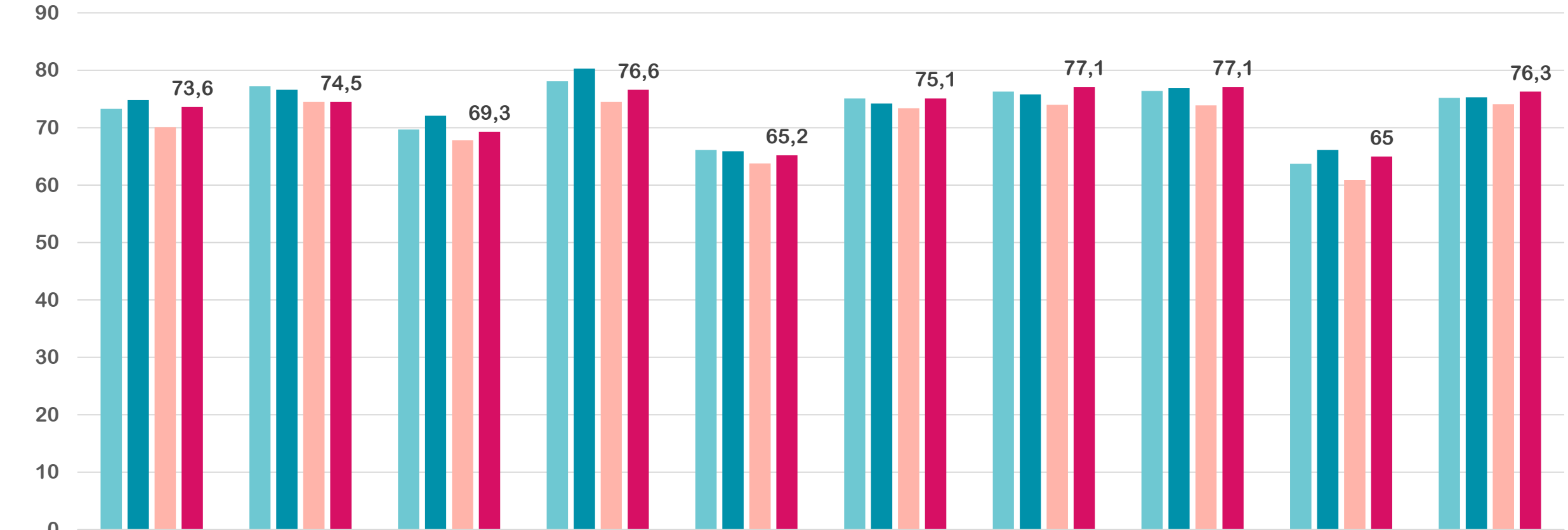
	Hopefulness	Love	Experience of appreciation	Safety	Challenges in life	Self-acceptance	Life management	Meaningfulness of life	Fairness of life	Mental balance
2020	73,3	77,2	69,7	78,1	66,1	75,1	76,3	76,4	63,7	75,2
2021	74,8	76,6	72,1	80,3	65,9	74,2	75,8	76,9	66,1	75,3
2022	70,1	74,5	67,8	74,5	63,8	73,4	74	73,9	60,9	74,1
2023	73,6 +3,5	74,5 +0,0	69,3 +1,5	76,6 +2,1	65,2 +1,4	75,1 +1,7	77,1 +3,1	77,1 +3,2	65 +4,1	76,3 +2,2

2020 2021 2022 2023

Correlations of Wellbeing Variables with Happiness 2023

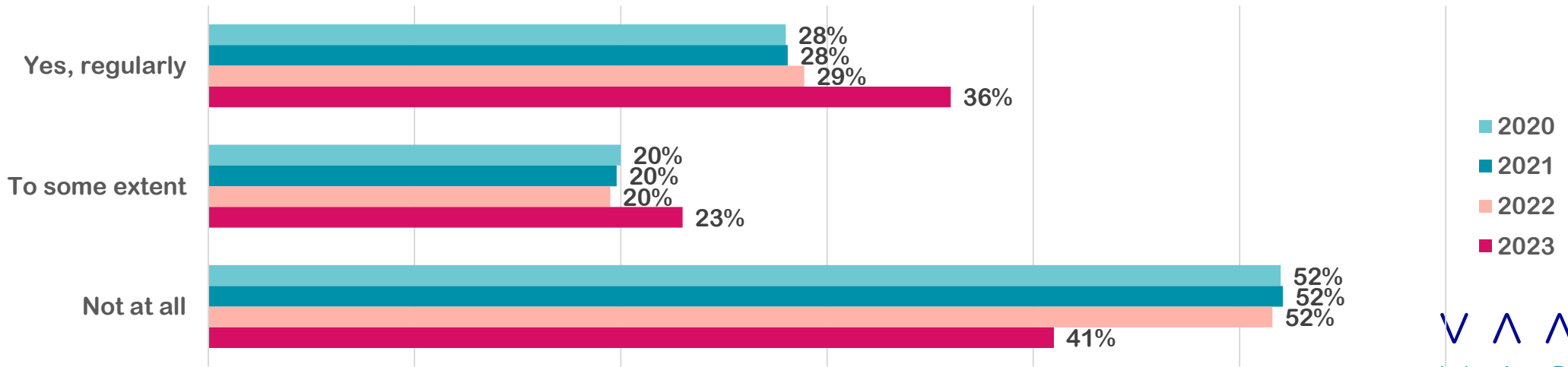|	
Hopefulness	.72
Love	.54
Experience of appreciation	.68
Safety	.59
Challenges in life	.34
Self-acceptance	.54
Life management	.59
Meaningfulness of life	.71
Fairness of life	.65
Mental balance	.60

- Happy individuals experience all these wellbeing components.
- The exception is experiencing challenges because it is not as strongly related to happiness as the others. Whether there are few or many challenges, it does not have a significant impact on the experience of happiness.
- The highest correlations were found with hopefulness, meaningfulness, and appreciation. These factors have also shown a strong association with happiness in international studies.
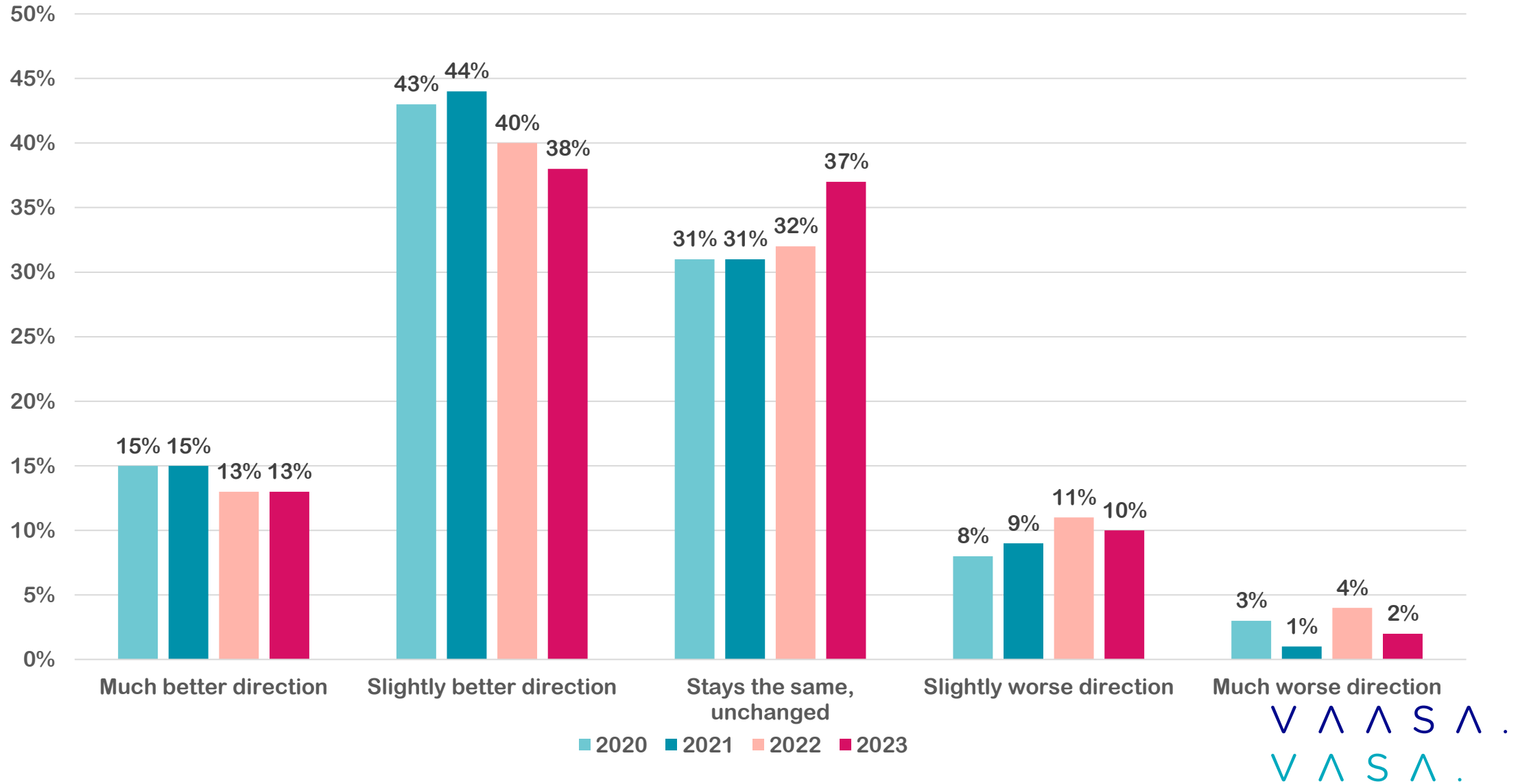
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Do you participate in volunteering or regularly provide financial or material assistance to any association?

Yes, regularly
- 2020: 25%
- 2021: 24%
- 2022: 26%
- 2023: 30%

Not at all
- 2020: 41%
- 2021: 37%
- 2022: 39%
- 2023: 33%

To some extent
- 2020: 34%
- 2021: 39%
- 2022: 35%
- 2023: 36%

Legend: ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023
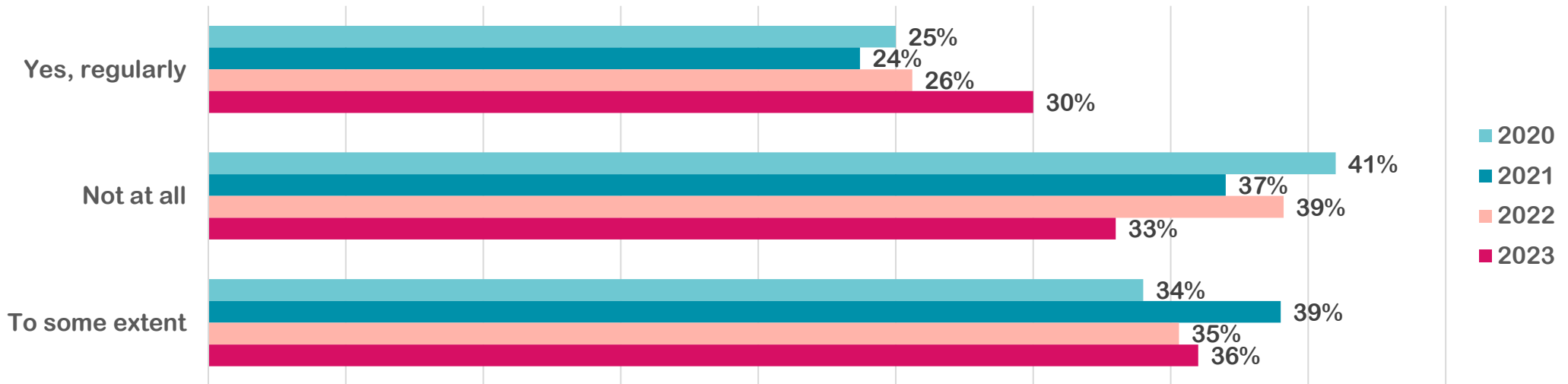
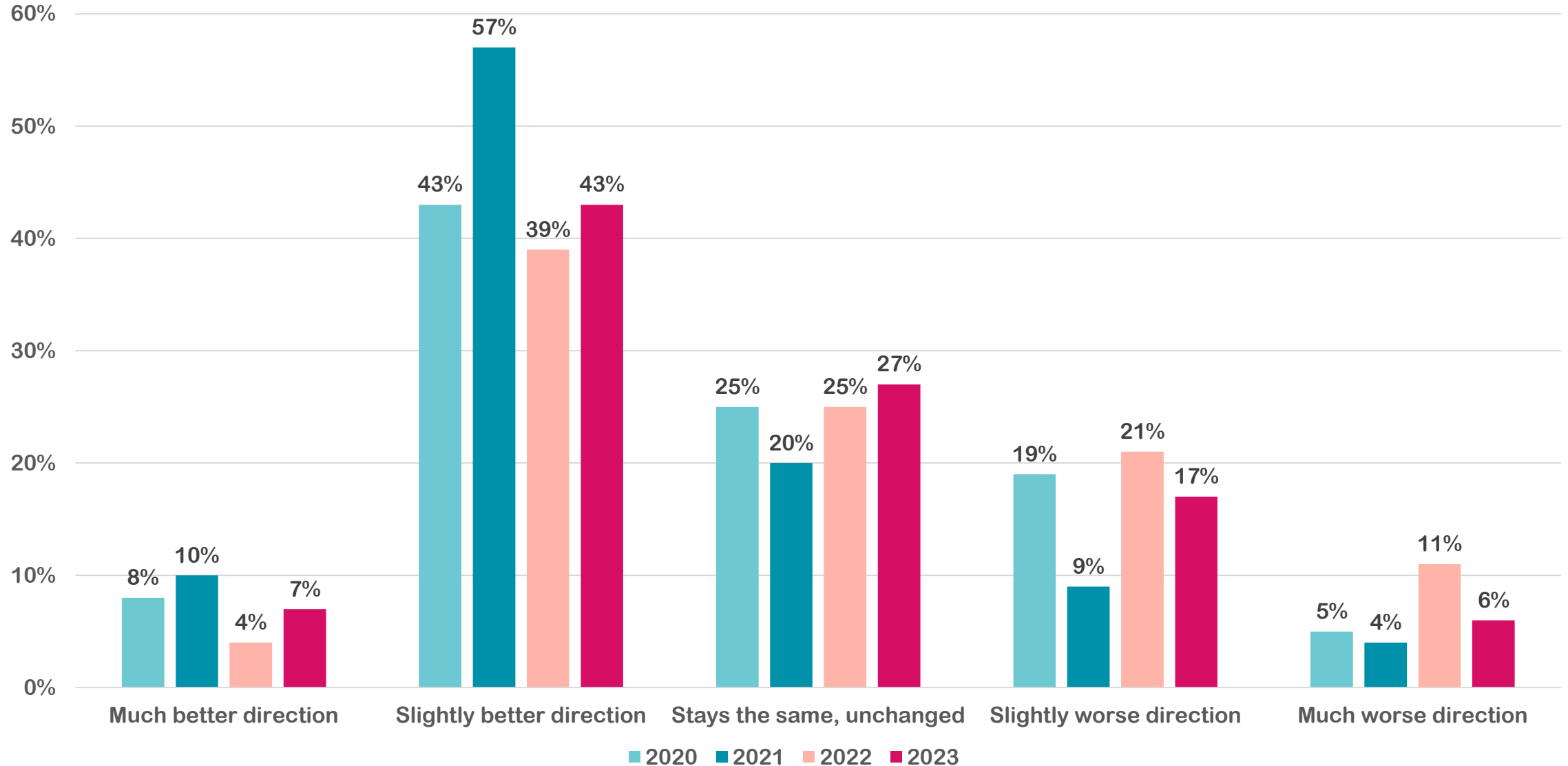# Do you actively participate (at least a couple of times a month) in the activities of an association or hobby group?

Yes, regularly
- 2020: 28%
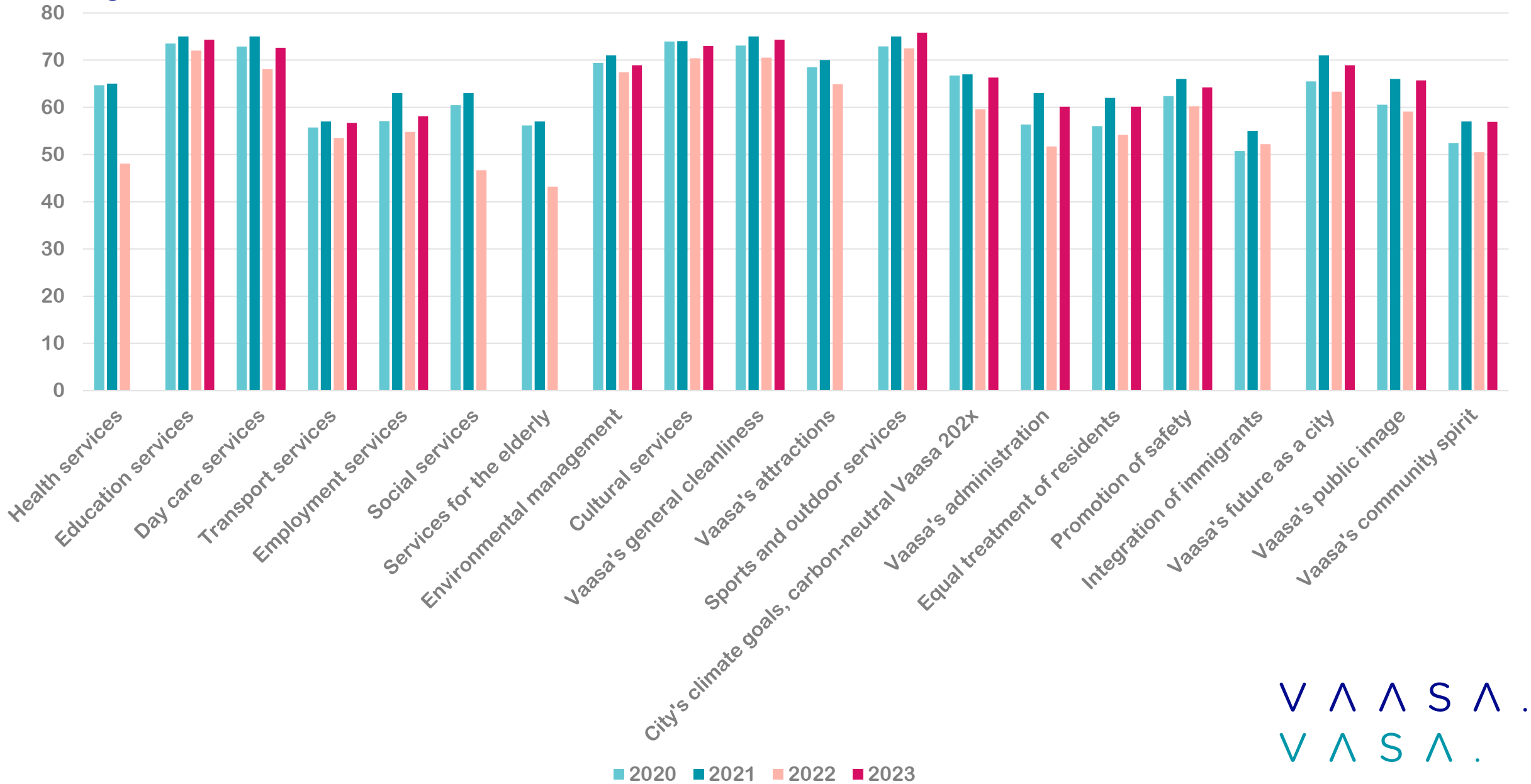- 2021: 28%
- 2022: 29%
- 2023: 36%

To some extent
- 2020: 20%
- 2021: 20%
- 2022: 20%
- 2023: 23%

Not at all
- 2020: 52%
- 2021: 52%
- 2022: 52%
- 2023: 41%

Legend: ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023

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Which direction does your life seem to be heading at the moment?

Bar chart showing responses by year (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023):

Response	2020	2021	2022	2023
Much better direction	15%	15%	13%	13%
Slightly better direction	43%	44%	40%	38%
Stays the same, unchanged	31%	31%	32%	37%
Slightly worse direction	8%	9%	11%	10%
Much worse direction	3%	1%	4%	2%

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Which direction does the City of Vaasa seem to be heading at the moment?

	Much better direction	Slightly better direction	Stays the same, unchanged	Slightly worse direction	Much worse direction
2020	8%	43%	25%	19%	5%
2021	10%	57%	20%	9%	4%
2022	4%	39%	25%	21%	11%
2023	7%	43%	27%	17%	6%

City of Vaasa's Services

Services

	2020			2021			2022			2023			Change 22/23
	Mean	Answers	"I don't know" answers	Mean	Answers	"I don't know" answers	Mean	Answers	"I don't know" answers	Mean	Answers	"I don't know" answers	
Health services	64,70	437	41	64,7	1020	61	48,1	1115	91	-	-	-	
Education services	73,51	361	117	75,3	825	256	72	900	306	74,3	805	253	+2,3
Day care services	72,88	226	252	74,6	517	563	68,1	571	635	72,6	521	537	+4,5
Transport services	55,73	351	127	57,2	835	246	53,5	940	266	56,7	759	299	+3,2
Employment services	57,08	224	254	62,9	483	598	54,8	591	615	58,1	473	585	+3,3
Social services	60,47	230	248	63,2	514	567	46,7	680	526	-	-	-	
Services for the elderly	56,14	217	261	57,3	519	562	43,2	669	537	-	-	-	
Cultural services	73,95	412	66	74,4	944	137	70,4	1033	173	73,0	918	140	+2,6
Sports and outdoor services	72,89	446	32	75,2	988	93	72,5	1052	154	75,8	921	137	+3,3

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Culture

Evaluations have returned to the levels of 2020 and 2021 after the dip in 2022.

	2020			2021			2022			2023			Change 22/23
	Mean	Answers	"I don't know" answers	Mean	Answers	"I don't know" answers	Mean	Answers	"I don't know" answers	Mean	Answers	"I don't know" answers	
Environmental management	69,42	354	124	70,9	781	300	67,4	914	292	68,9	808	250	+1,5
Vaasa's general cleanliness	73,10	468	10	75,2	1066	15	70,5	1171	35	74,3	1023	35	+3,8
Vaasa's attractions	68,49	444	34	70,5	1034	47	64,9	1119	87	-	-	-	
City's climate goals, carbon-neutral Vaasa 202x	66,73	249	229	67	556	525	59,6	678	528	66,3	564	494	+6,7
Vaasa's administration	56,37	323	155	63,1	634	447	51,7	768	438	60,1	658	400	+8,4
Equal treatment of residents	56,03	377	101	62,0	849	232	54,2	969	237	60,1	810	248	+5,9
Promotion of safety	62,39	356	122	66,5	781	300	60,2	895	311	64,2	793	265	+4,0
Integration of immigrants	50,74	290	188	55,2	548	533	52,2	718	488	-	-	-	
Vaasa's future as a city	65,50	431	47	71,2	972	109	63,3	1108	98	68,9	942	116	+5,6
Vaasa's public image	60,56	440	38	66,6	1010	71	59,1	1132	74	65,7	980	78	+6,6
Vaasa's community spirit	52,44	425	53	57,2	922	159	50,5	1039	167	56,9	899	159	+6,4

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Correlations of Happiness with Service Ratings 2023

Education services	.54
Day care services	.52
Transport services	.36
Employment services	.49
Environmental management	.45
Cultural services	.46
Vaasa's cleanliness	.42
Sports and outdoor services	.49
Vaasa's climate goals	.40
Vaasa's administration	.49
Equal treatment	.55
Promotion of safety	.53
Vaasa's future	.52
Vaasa's public image	.49
Community spirit in Vaasa	.48

These correlations likely reflect more a person's level of happiness than the effects of services on happiness. Happiness is to such an extent a result of genetic factors and the immediate environment that only truly poor services affect happiness. That is not the case in Vaasa.

It must be remembered that not everyone has used the services. The number of "I don't know" responses varies greatly. Almost everyone responds to questions about cleanliness, health (except in 2023), attractions, public image, and sports and outdoor services. Day care services only concern families with children, but apparently many have still responded even though they do not currently have children.

It is difficult to assess the subjectivity (perceptions) of service evaluations. One can hypothesize that a high correlation with happiness indicates that one's own mood has influenced the evaluation. However, the correlations were very similar.

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Variable Sets

Satisfaction is the average of eight aspects of life, and wellbeing is the average of ten wellbeing factors. It is surprising how similar results these three ways of asking provide. The somewhat weaker results in 2022 remain mysterious, although the mortality from COVID-19 was higher that year than in the previous two years. The war in Ukraine may also have had an impact.


	Happiness	Satisfaction	Wellbeing
2020	72,8	71,1	73,1
2021	73,9	73,9	73,8
2022	68,8	70,4	70,7
2023	72,6	72,5	73

■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023

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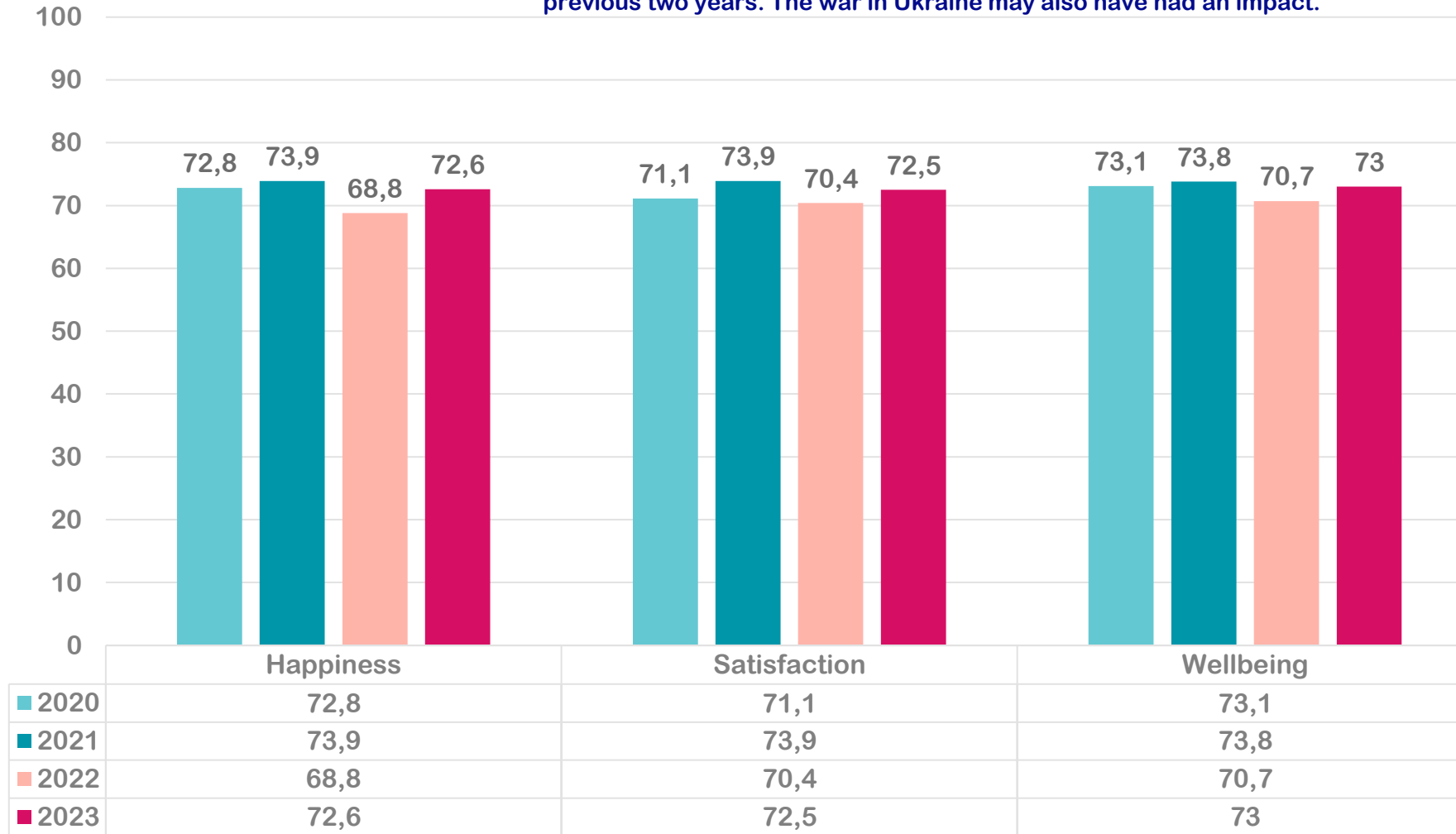
Variable Sets

Let us now take a look at four key assessments over these four years. I chose livelihood, health, safety, and hopefulness. These may explain the drop in 2022. The first wave of COVID-19 began in February 2020. The war in Ukraine began on February 24, 2022.
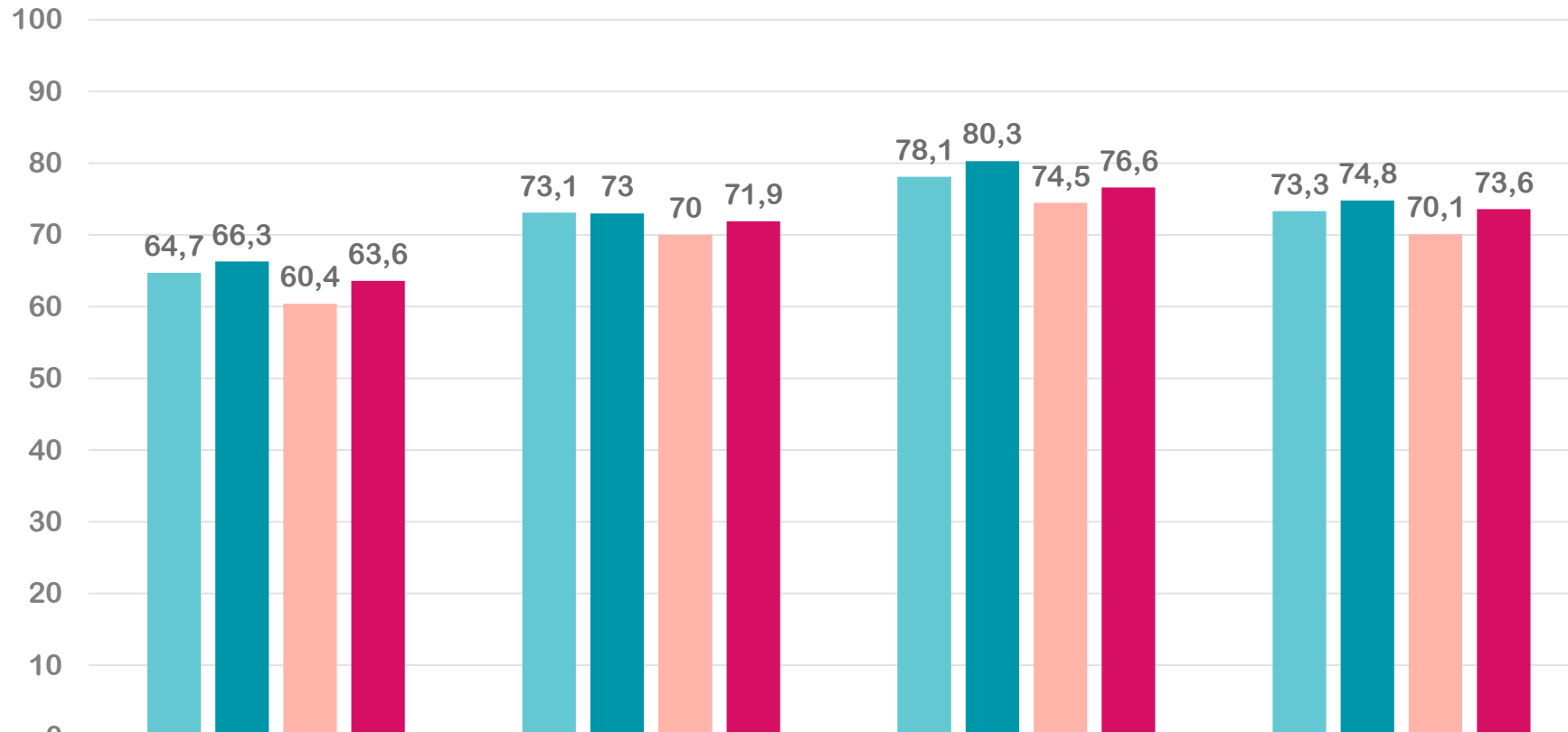
The drops in safety and livelihood from 2021 to 2022 were quite significant, so it is possible that the combination of the coronavirus and the war in Ukraine led to this negative change. Another explanation could be the selection of individuals expressing negative assessments in the sample. This hypothesis can be tested by looking at how some services were evaluated in 2022.
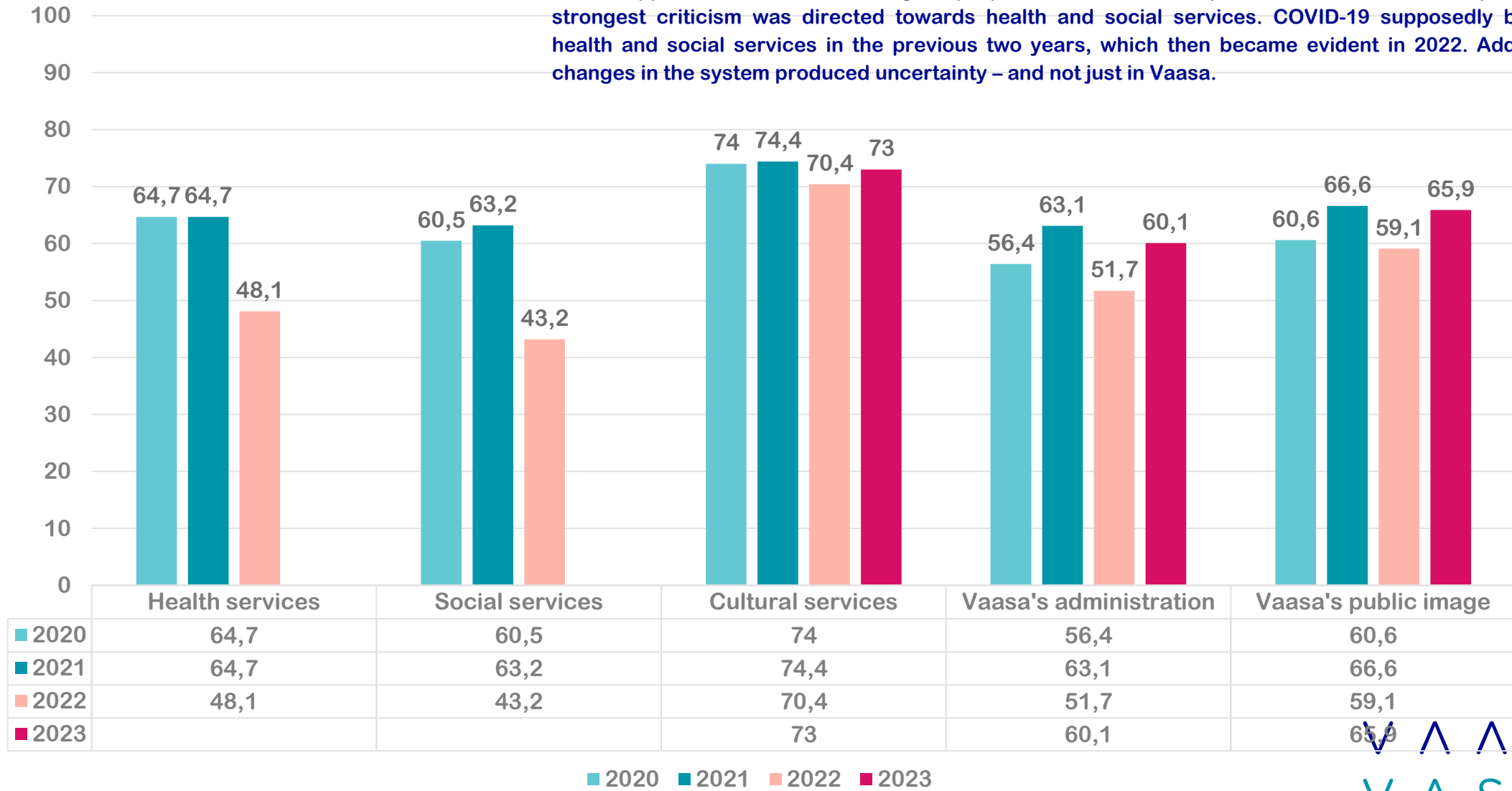
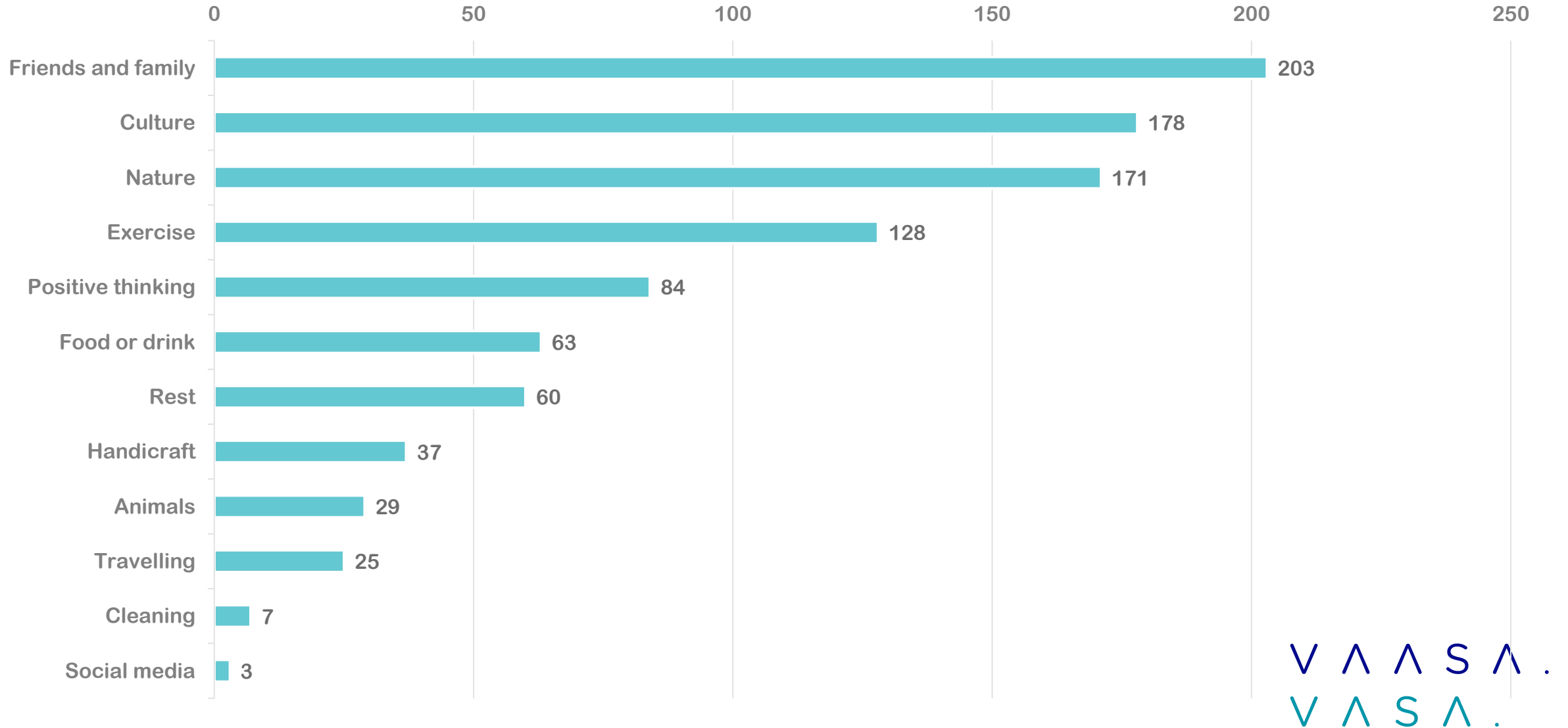|	Livelihood	Health	Safety	Hopefulness
2020	64,7	73,1	78,1	73,3
2021	66,3	73	80,3	74,8
2022	60,4	70	74,5	70,1
2023	63,6	71,9	76,6	73,6

■2020 ■2021 ■2022 ■2023

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Variable Sets

Assessments of health and social services deteriorated significantly from 2021 to 2022. Assessments of Vaasa's administration also declined significantly. If the 2022 sample has more critical respondents compared to other years, one would expect this to be reflected in cultural services and public image as well. However, the drop in these areas was significantly smaller compared to previous years. Thus, there is some support for the idea of a higher proportion of critical respondents in the 2022 sample, but the strongest criticism was directed towards health and social services. COVID-19 supposedly burdened health and social services in the previous two years, which then became evident in 2022. Additionally, changes in the system produced uncertainty – and not just in Vaasa.

	Health services	Social services	Cultural services	Vaasa's administration	Vaasa's public image
2020	64,7	60,5	74	56,4	60,6
2021	64,7	63,2	74,4	63,1	66,6
2022	48,1	43,2	70,4	51,7	59,1
2023			73	60,1	65,9

2020 2021 2022 2023

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Do you have any effective methods that you use when you're feeling down and in need of cheering up? What methods do you use then?

Method	Value
Friends and family	203
Culture	178
Nature	171
Exercise	128
Positive thinking	84
Food or drink	63
Rest	60
Handicraft	37
Animals	29
Travelling	25
Cleaning	7
Social media	3

What Do The Assessments Tell Us?

**How can the results be interpreted and
how reliable are the assessments?**

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Life Management and Belief in the Future

There were several questions about these.

1. Happiness is more in one's own hands than dependent on external factors.

2. The majority have achieved what they have aimed for (almost completely or completely).

3. The majority believe their own life is heading in a better direction.

4. Happiness five years from now is projected to be significantly higher than it is currently.

5. Ratings for hopefulness are high (2023: 74/100).

Activity

About one-third are active helpers and participants, and the same number are passive. There is a positive perception of exercise: approx. 60% exercise several times a week. Perhaps this has been slightly overestimated? VAASA.

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Means to Happiness

Many things have support. Advice is not necessarily followed, yet guides and instructions are read and listened to. Why is this done?

Neither a simple life nor chasing after money interest people. The most important thing is to understand the significance of small things and to maintain a positive mindset. For many, even pleasures are important. There are also supporters of tranquillity of mind and adhering to virtues.

Happiness Thieves

On average, residents of Vaasa had 2,3 happiness thieves in 2023. The most significant ones were pains and aches, excessive sensitivity, and pressure for efficiency. There were also plenty of other thieves.

- The only exception was excessive alcohol consumption (5%), which seems quite small. However, half a million Finns drink so much that it poses a health risk. Perhaps they are not among the respondents, though.

Shyness and sensitivity are problems for many.

Persistent financial difficulties lower happiness the most. Also, injustices experienced in adulthood lower happiness.

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What Kinds of Things Lower Happiness in 2023?

1.	Unemployment	46,8
2.	Financial difficulties	63,3
3.	Studies	64,0
4.	Age 15–24	64,1
5.	5+ happiness thieves	65,0
6.	Injustices in adulthood	66,7
7.	Male	66,9
8.	Childhood insecurity	67,8
9.	Violence from a loved one	68,0

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What To Pay Attention To (1/3)

- Happiness has rebounded from the slump in 2022 to a good level (72,6/100).

- Happiness is still very much dependent on oneself (43%).

- The sense of security remains high (77/100). Differences between age groups are quite small. The exception is the age group of 55–64-year-olds (74/100).

- Volunteering and exercise have slightly increased after the pandemic.

- The means to happiness are very similar every year. It is clear what people find useful. The most popular has been "Understanding that happiness is about very small moments of joy that come when they come". This attitude may explain Finland's top position in international comparisons. It is a very modest assessment of what happiness is about.

- The worst happiness thieves have been pains and aches, excessive sensitivity, and pressure for efficiency in all four years. The fewest responses concern excessive alcohol consumption. Persistent financial difficulties have increased in 2022 and 2023 compared to the previous two years.

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What To Pay Attention To (2/3)

- Regarding happiness thieves, the factors that most significantly lower happiness are persistent financial difficulties, injustices experienced in adulthood, childhood insecurity, violence from a loved one, and excessive shyness. A small surprise is that their impact is not very significant. An even bigger surprise is that pains and aches, excessive alcohol consumption, and significant losses do not reduce happiness. The last-mentioned issue, however, may not be as current as the other two. Regarding a loved one's death, the majority recover well over time. Regarding alcohol, a somewhat cynical thought comes to mind: "I drink too much, and yet everything is fine!"

- Excessive sensitivity has been prevalent in all research years, but it has not affected happiness ratings. Pressure for efficiency is also commonly complained about, but the happiness of those who have highlighted this aspect is roughly the same as others.

- Increase in the number of happiness thieves reduces happiness, but only when four of them are mentioned. This may indicate people's ability to adapt to their problems. After all, illness and problem statistics speak volumes; according to studies, every other Finn has some serious illness or problem.

- The decline in service ratings in 2022 has almost returned to the level of 2021.
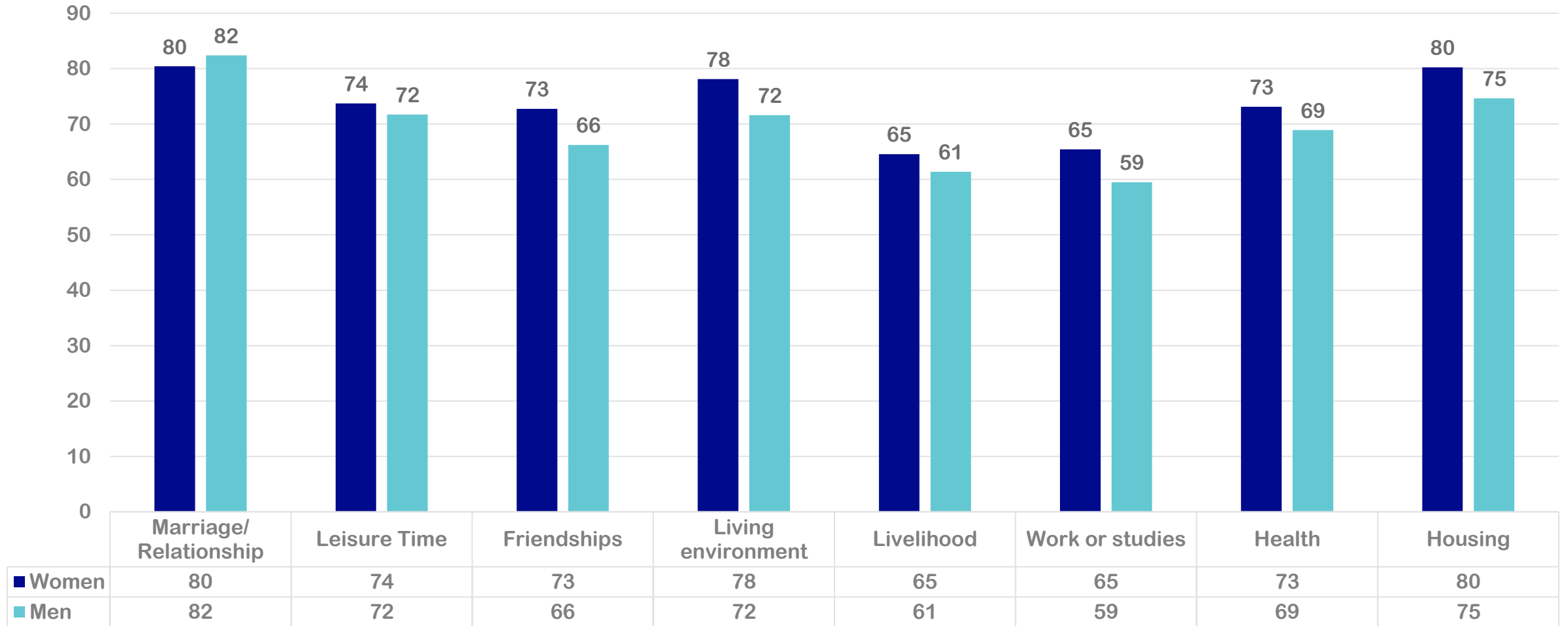
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What To Pay Attention To (3/3)

- A person living outside the City of Vaasa is puzzled by the ratings given to attractions in all the happiness surveys. From an outsider's perspective, better ratings could be given to this aspect. Perhaps the residents of Vaasa have become accustomed to them.

- The halo effect may also be indicated by the fact that the correlations between happiness and services are quite high. When one is happy, the services also seem good. Of course, the effect can also go the other way around, from services to happiness. The correlation of fair treatment to happiness is the highest (.55).

- The assessment of the City of Vaasa's future once again leans quite clearly towards a positive direction (50%; 32% negative).

- Pessimism regarding one's own life has still slightly increased since 2022. Nevertheless, there were 51% optimists among the respondents. This is one of the few questions where respondents' ratings are more negative when comparing 2022 and 2023. It may involve burdens from previous years.

- Still, it is surprising how many believe they have achieved what they have aimed for in life. In 2023, 51% of respondents answered that they have achieved what they have aimed for in life "almost completely" or "completely".
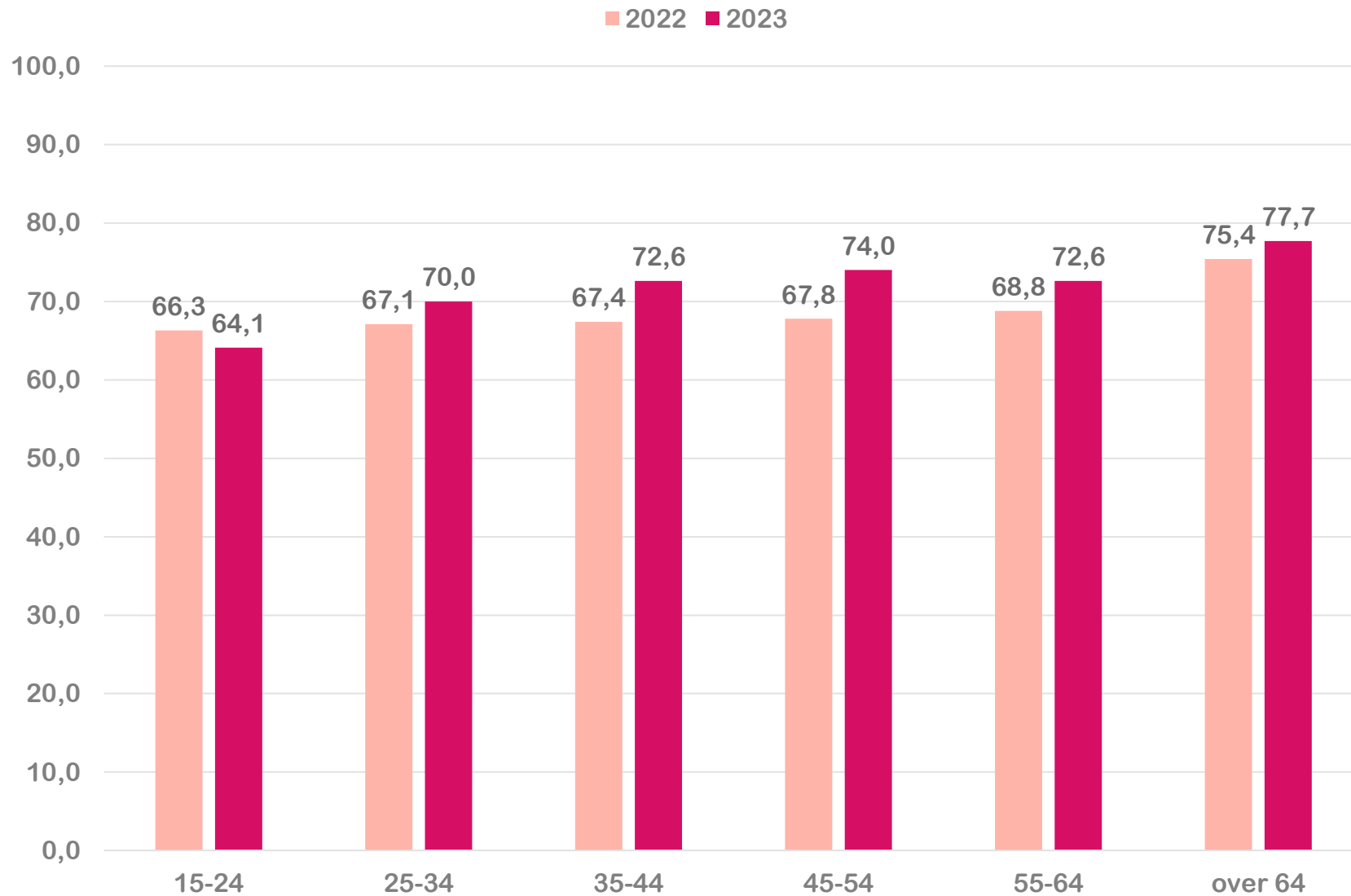
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Comparison of Background Factors

Satisfaction with Different Aspects of Life

	Marriage/ Relationship	Leisure Time	Friendships	Living environment	Livelihood	Work or studies	Health	Housing
Women	80	74	73	78	65	65	73	80
Men	82	72	66	72	61	59	69	75

■ Women ■ Men

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Happiness

Happiness Five Years Ago and Five Years From Now
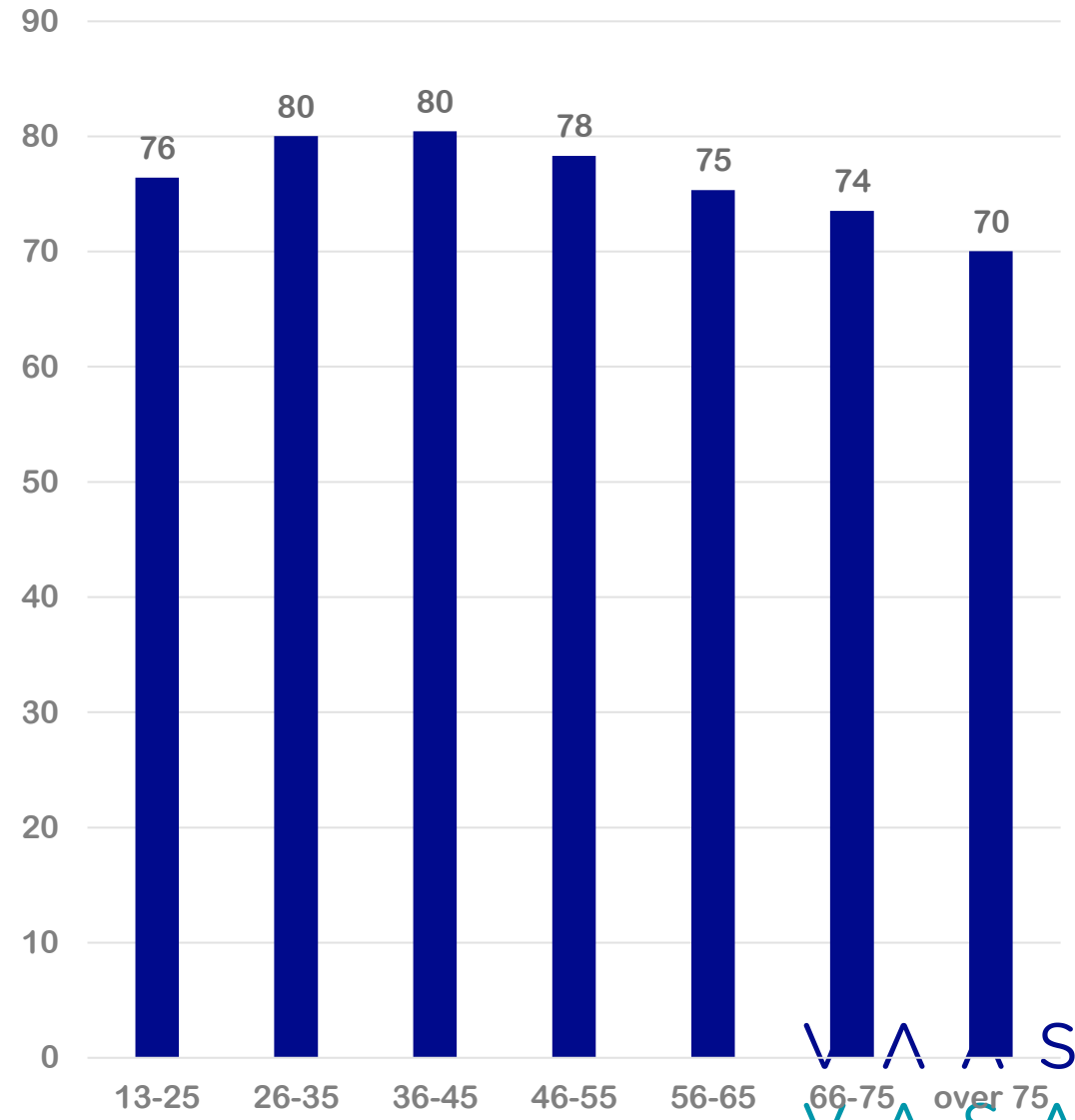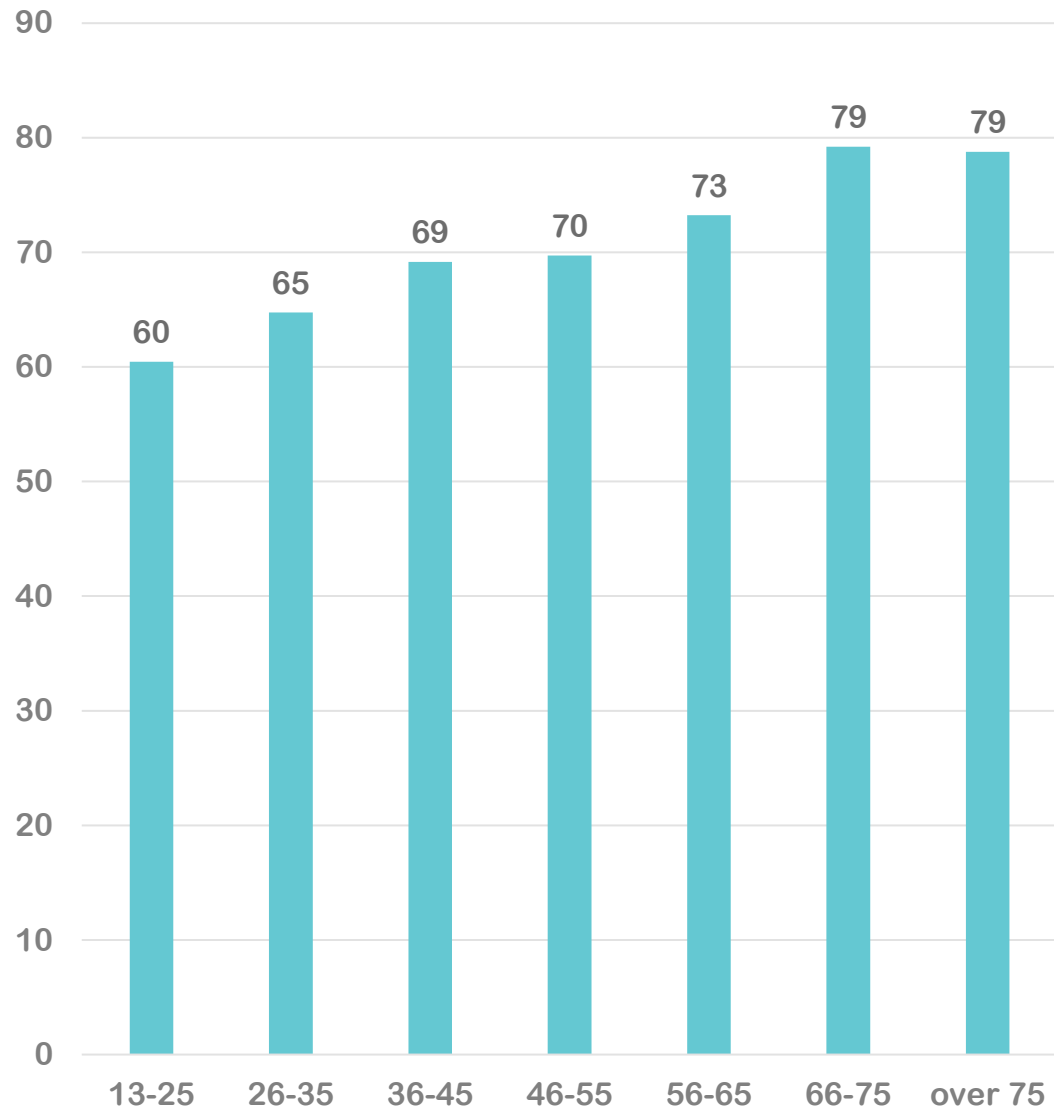
Happiness

Respondents' mother tongue: Finnish 731, Swedish 295, Other 67
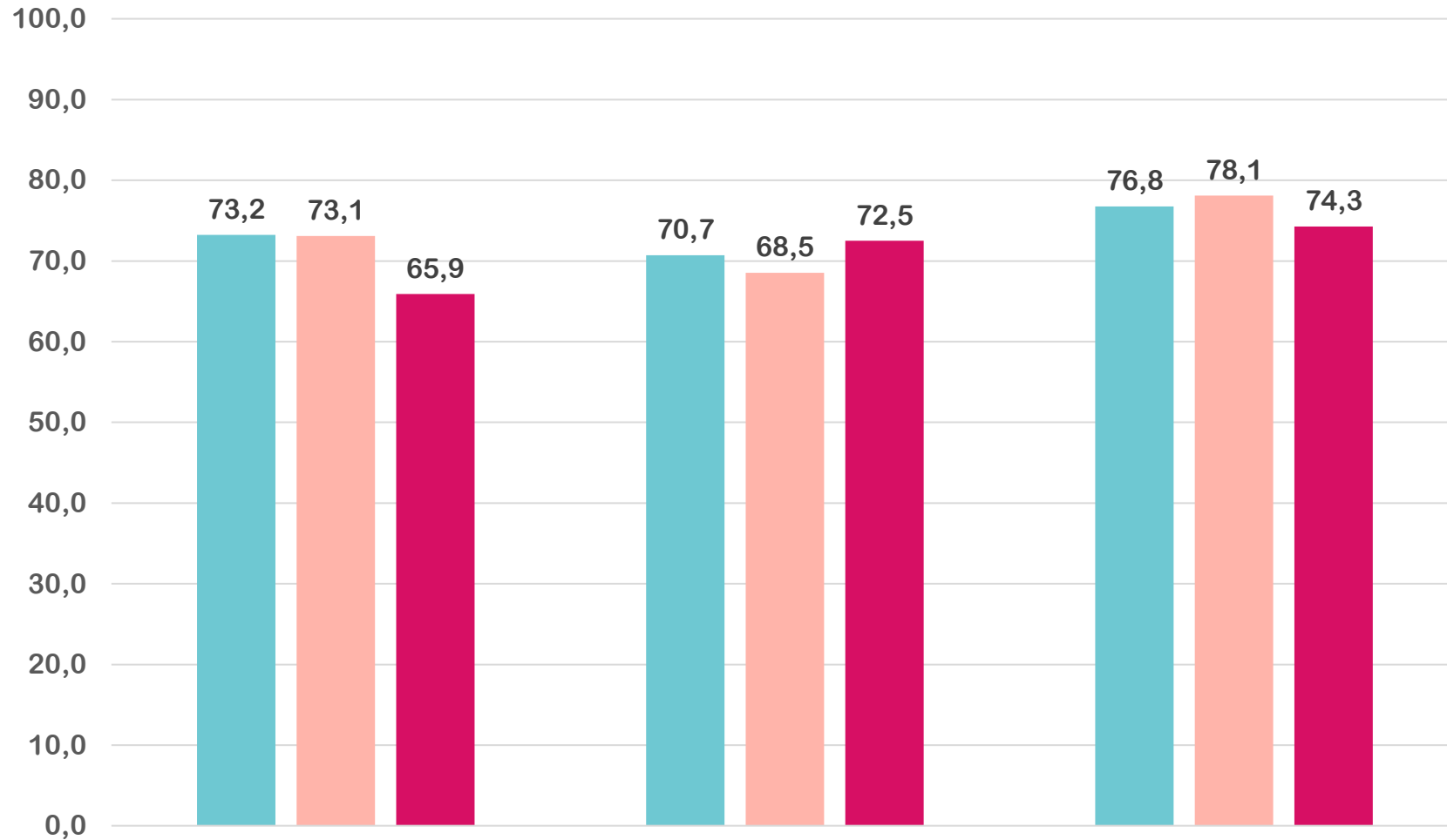
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Satisfaction with Different Aspects of Life

	Marriage/ Relationship	Leisure time	Friendships	Living environment	Livelihood	Work or studies	Health	Housing
Finnish	80	73	72	77	66	64	73	79
Swedish	83	74	73	78	60	66	71	80
Other	82	69	64	73	56	61	73	77

■ Finnish   ■ Swedish   ■ Other

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Summary 2023

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1. The results are very similar whether the survey inquires about happiness, satisfaction, or wellbeing. Assessments clearly lean towards the positive direction.

2. Among the wellbeing variables, optimism (.72) and meaningfulness (.71) correlate most strongly with happiness.

3. Happiness of the youngest age group remains lower than that of other age groups, as in previous years.

4. Residents of Vaasa are very satisfied with their marriage/relationship (81/100). The quality of housing and living environment is also appreciated (79/100 and 77/100).

5. Ratings for livelihood and work/study are only satisfactory (64/100 and 64/100). This may be explained by the percentage of unemployed individuals (4%), as the happiness of the unemployed was only 47/100. Students rated their work more negatively than those employed. Part-time work also decreased happiness.

6. Those who stay at home to care for children are the happiest (77/100).

7. Despite the war in Ukraine, the average score for security is high among the wellbeing variable (77/100).

8. The effects of COVID-19 are difficult to assess. The employment situation has remained fairly consistent across samples, and there have not been drastic changes in livelihood (with the most negative ratings seen in 2022). The employment situation in Finland has steadily improved over the past four years. Support for businesses facilitated retaining employment.

9. In 2022, ratings for services were negative compared to other years (especially regarding health and social services). In 2023, ratings were again very similar to those in 2020 and 2021. The dip in 2022 could have been due to congestion in health services, which reflected in other assessments as well. Another explanation could be that the respondents included highly critical assessors.

10. There were no differences in happiness between Finnish- and Swedish-speakers.

11. Men's happiness was significantly lower than that of women. This does not align with other Finnish studies, although women's happiness is often higher than men's.

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