



Finnish Red Cross



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# Final report on a national food aid survey

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## **Summary**

The national food aid survey 2024 by the Finnish Red Cross is a continuation to the previous unpublished food survey from 2022. This year, a total of 700 responses were collected. There are more women (52%) than men (45%) among the respondents. Working-age people account for approximately 60 per cent in total, while the rest are either over the age of 65 (38%) or do not wish to specify their age (2%). Those who have been in need of food aid for an extended period of time, i.e. for at least one year, account for 48 per cent of the respondents, while first-time users of food aid account for approximately 17 per cent. The percentage of respondents who have been using food aid for at least one year has decreased and the percentage of first-timers has increased compared to 2022.

Some of the key observations made based on the data are that approximately 17 per cent of the respondents constantly have insufficient income for living, the cuts made to social security this year have increased the use of food aid among approximately 60 per cent of the respondents, and food aid activities have improved the well-being of a little over 70 per cent of the respondents. Approximately 26 per cent of the respondents say that they use food aid at least partly because they consider themselves to be an important part of the community. The reasons provided in the open answers for this sense of community include the volunteers' friendliness and treatment of people as equals as well as the opportunity to meet other people in the same situation in particular.

Based on the results, it would appear that unemployed and furloughed people, students, and families with children are growing groups among food aid users. The growth and diversification of the userbase pose their own challenges to food aid activities, which are currently struggling with decreasing food donations.

## Introduction

The Finnish Red Cross's food aid activities are implemented in several different forms in 146 branches of the organisation. Volunteers across Finland organise local food aid activities independently. The activities may be carried out in cooperation with local operators, such as stores, schools, central kitchens and lunch restaurants as well as other cooperation partners. A branch's food aid activities may be regular or provided as one-off help. However, there are challenges in the availability of food for distribution. For ecological reasons, stores and the food industry increasingly seek to reduce the amount of food waste. Food waste has previously accounted for a large proportion of the food aid distributed.

In addition to food donations, the Finnish Red Cross distributes material aid payment cards (€40/pc) funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) for paying for food and basic necessities in grocery stores. The payment cards are intended for low-income people who are in acute or prolonged financial distress. The payment cards are distributed as part of food aid activities and in cooperation with partners, such as social services and other organisations. The Red Cross's branches and cooperation partners identify and interact with beneficiaries locally.

Throughout Finland, food aid events are organised in combination with activities such as meeting place activities, financial and health advice as well as communal breakfast events that make use of food waste. The organisers of food aid distribution and participatory activities implemented in conjunction with food aid distribution also cooperate with other local operators. The objective is to meet local needs as well as possible and make use of the benefits of cooperation. New volunteers are also accepted from among beneficiaries who are interested in organising the activities. The number of people needing food aid has increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic, its long-term effects and the increasing cost of living caused by the Ukraine crisis. At the same time, the group of food aid recipients has grown to be even more diverse due to an increase in the number of unemployed people (see Akava Works 2024) and Ukrainian asylum seekers, among other reasons. In 2023, food aid activities interacted with beneficiaries approximately 216,000 times.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health published the Action Plan for Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion by 2030 during the previous government (STM 2022). The Finnish national goal established in the plan at the time was to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 100,000 people by 2030 compared to the 2019 level. The plan is for at least one in three of these people to be young people under the age of 18. According to the same action plan, there were approximately 838,000 people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Finland in total in 2019. The goals are based on the EU's goal to reduce the number of people at risk by 15 million people at the EU level.

On 26 September 2024, the current Finnish government issued the Decree on Awarding Discretionary Government Grants for Food Aid Activities (Government Decree STM/2024/98), which clarifies the Act on Discretionary Government Grants (27 July 2001/688). The Decree provides the following: "Discretionary government grants may be awarded to municipalities or wellbeing services counties that are responsible as the project manager for all aid activities in a particular area. A non-profit organisation may act as a partial implementer of aid activities in a particular area and be awarded a discretionary government grant under section 7, subsection 3 of the Act on Discretionary Government Grants (688/2001)." In practice, EUR 3 million per year has been awarded in discretionary government grants for food aid activities on a permanent basis (JTS 2024, pp. 64–65). This financial support funds the aid provided through congregations and organisations for the most deprived people as well as the development of this aid. Permanent funding also strengthens cooperation between different food aid operators. (SOSTE 2024a.) The Decree on Discretionary Government Grants entered into effect on 1 October 2024.

However, we must also take into account the cuts to social security, which limit the ability of people with a low income to make a living, and the impacts of which from the perspective of food aid were also examined in this survey. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has published a memorandum on the combined impacts of the changes to social security in 2024 and 2025: It is projected that the loss of income will be at least 1 per cent for 19 per cent of the population, 5–14.9 per cent for 5 per cent of the population and at least 15 per cent for 1.6 per cent of the population. (STM 2024, p. 21.) The same memorandum states that the decrease in income above all affects people living alone, single parents, students, unemployed recipients of income security, and unemployed recipients of basic security. (STM 2024, pp. 25–26.) However, the calculations presented in the memorandum do not take into account the potential employment impacts that would mitigate the relative reduction in disposable income (STM 2024, p. 9).

According to a food aid status update (2024), the number of food aid users increased in 2023, and it was anticipated in spring 2024 that the cuts would increase the demand for food aid and potentially the use of food aid by families with children. At the same time, the amount of food available for distribution will decrease further. On the other hand, the status update mentions the communal significance of food aid as a positive phenomenon. This survey by the Finnish Red Cross also set out to examine experiences of communality among beneficiaries.

Amidst this difficult situation, the Finnish Red Cross seeks to develop its food aid activities so as to best meet the needs of the beneficiaries. The development of food aid activities that support social inclusion is recorded as a goal in the Finnish Red Cross's action plan for 2024–2026. Social inclusion has also been a key theme of the Food and Inclusion project funded by Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA), which runs from 2022 to 2024. The Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health (SOSTE 2018) describes social inclusion and participation as an experience of belonging to something, and social exclusion as exclusion from participation. Social inclusion can take the form of trust, equity, appreciation and opportunities to influence matters in the community. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL 2023) divides social inclusion and activities promoting social inclusion into three areas as follows: social inclusion in your personal life, social inclusion in communities and influencing processes, and partaking in the benefits provided by your social environment. The first one refers to being able to live life in the way you want, while the second refers to belonging to groups significant to you and being able to influence the matters important to you. Partaking in the benefits provided by your social environment means opportunities to do things together with others as well as produce, share and enjoy these benefits.

The participation opportunities offered by food aid activities are very localised, but they also contribute to broader social inclusion in society. Crisp and Taket (2020, pp. 5–7) point out that social inclusion is essentially linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which include eliminating hunger and poverty from the world and reducing inequality, among other things. In Finland, food aid activities also seek to help reduce hunger and inequality at the national level, although it must be noted that food aid is only intended to be temporary aid. By bringing those in need of help together, food aid activities also provide an opportunity to find a community and peer support. According to Crisp and Taket (2020, p. 40), peer support is important as it allows people to process the difficulties and any injustices they have experienced and talk about them with one voice.

The Finnish Red Cross creates joy, hope and trust through its activities. The information provided by surveys allows us to develop our food aid activities to better meet the needs of those in need of aid. This report presents useful information on the userbase of food aid, the duration of and reasons for using food aid, the income of the beneficiaries, and the benefits of food aid to well-being and communality. The feedback and suggestions for improvement received from the respondents pertain to both food aid arrangements and perceived social inclusion. Everyone is involved in a prosperous community.



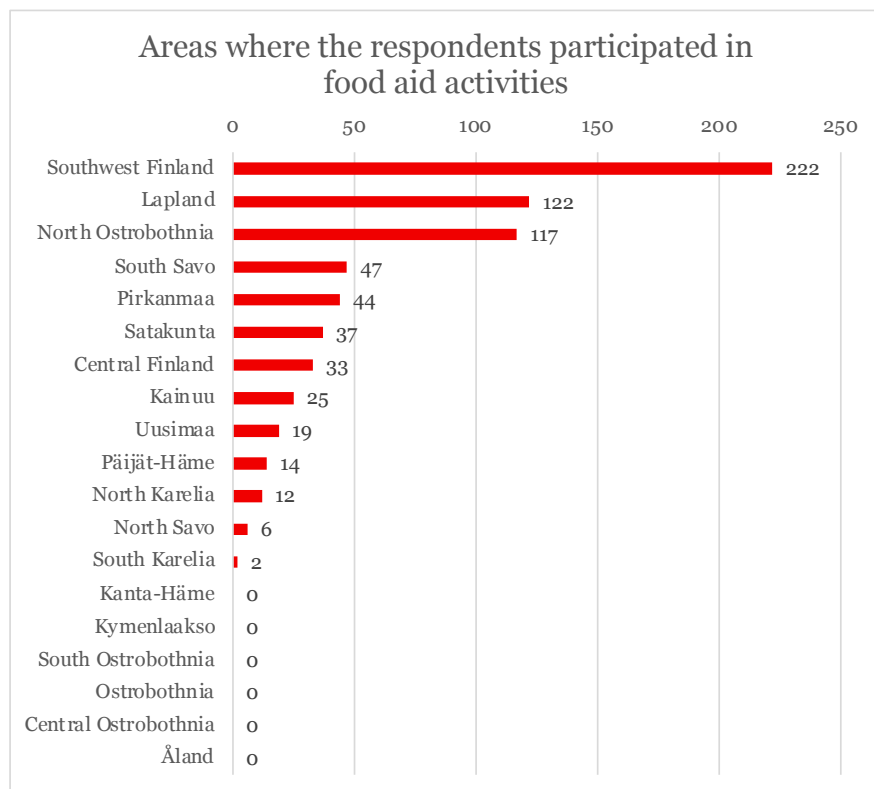
## Implementation of the survey

The food aid activities of the Finnish Red Cross aim to carry out a national food aid survey regularly. The national food aid survey of 2024 is the second of its kind; the first national survey was carried out in 2022, but it was not officially published. The purpose of this year’s national food aid survey<sup>1</sup> by the Finnish Red Cross was to study food aid recipients’ circumstances and well-being and the impact of participatory events held in conjunction with food aid. This provided valuable information on the personal experiences of food aid recipients regarding food aid activities as well as important feedback on the activities. For background information, the survey asked the respondents to specify their gender, age, level of education and household structure in order for different groups to be distinguished within the data, such as families with children, students and elderly people. The survey also examined experiences of communality and factors contributing to it. The survey was conducted nationwide and amassed responses from all of the Finnish Red Cross districts except Åland and Österbotten. The final number of respondents was exactly 700 people. The results of the survey can be leveraged in the development of food aid activities and to support decision-making.

The survey ran from 30 May 2024 to 23 September 2024, and responses were collected through both physical forms and an online form. Finally, the responses received on physical forms were also recorded through the online form in order to make the response data directly and easily processable. The survey was distributed in Finnish, Swedish, English, Ukrainian and Russian. Respondents also had the option to write down their answers in other languages, such as Arabic, online.

A good number of responses were gathered from around the country. As the recipients of food aid cannot be expected to know which FRC district they belong to, the survey asked them to identify the area in which they use food aid based on the regions of Finland. When examining the geographical distribution of the responses, we must keep in mind that food aid activities are organised more actively in some regions and less actively or not at all in others. As the responses were primarily collected by volunteers, it is good to keep in mind that different municipalities had different resources for carrying out the survey. It is also possible that the beneficiaries of food aid differ from each other in different areas with regard to their readiness to respond. The numbers of respondents are presented by region, in descending order, in Graph 1:

**Graph 1: Areas where the respondents participated in food aid activities.**



1 The national food aid survey form is available in its entirety in the appendices (Appendix 2).

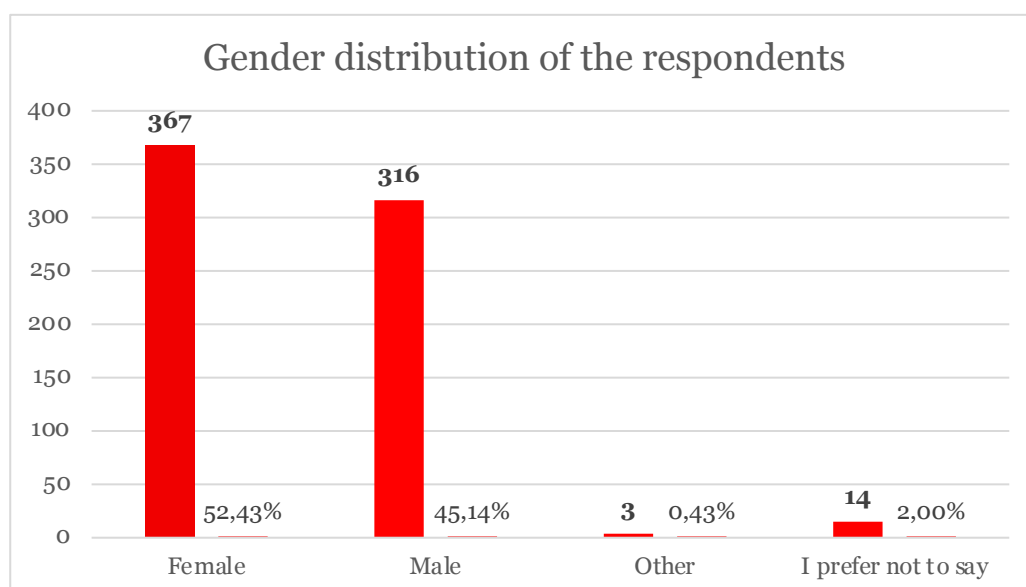
Graph 1 shows that clearly the highest number of responses was collected in Southwest Finland (222), Lapland (122) and North Ostrobothnia (117). No responses were received from Åland, South Ostrobothnia, Kanta-Häme, Central Ostrobothnia, Kymenlaakso and Ostrobothnia. The total number of responses, from 700 respondents, is still an impressive achievement and also a slight improvement compared to 2022, when responses were received from 639 people.

## Demographics of the respondents

The background information provided by the respondents allows the responses to be divided into various groups. For example, the questions concerning gender and age also included the option to not specify the gender or age if the respondents wished to do so. The responses show that the group of food aid recipients is diverse, although certain groups, such as pensioners, are overrepresented.

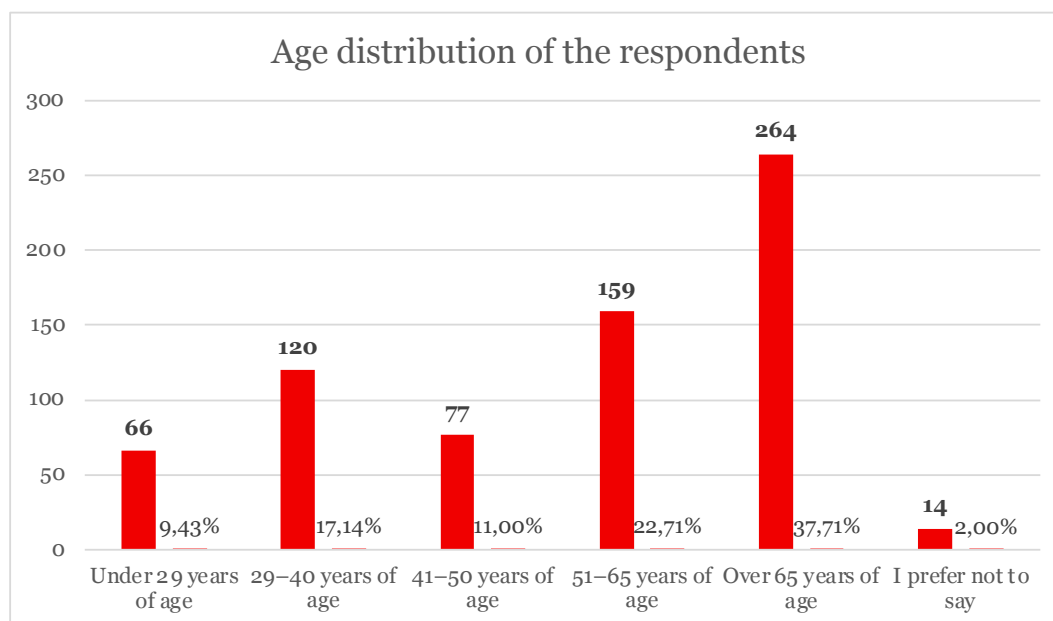
### Gender and age distributions

**Graph 2: Gender distribution of the respondents.**



Graph 2 illustrates the gender distribution of the respondents. There are slightly more women (52%) than men (45%), but both numbers are close to 50 per cent. There were also a few non-binary people among the respondents, and 2 per cent of the respondents preferred not to specify their gender. The difference between women and men is smaller than in the 2022 survey, where women accounted for 61 per cent and men 38 per cent. In 2022, there was one non-binary respondent and four people who chose not to specify their gender. These differences do not necessarily indicate an increase in the number of men or non-binary people as food aid users; instead, they indicate that the survey was able to reach such users better.

**Graph 3: Age distribution of the respondents.**

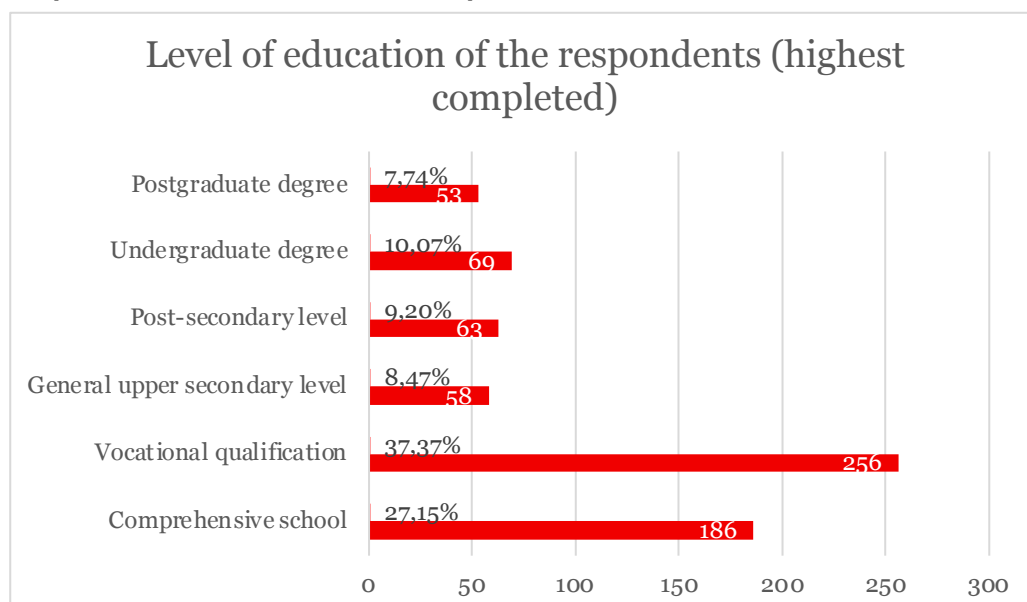


Graph 3 shows that there are a total of 422 working-age respondents, accounting for 60 per cent of all respondents. Among the working-age respondents, the 29–40 (120) and 51–65 (159) age groups in particular stand out. However, people over the age of 65 still form the largest single age group (264) and account for a little over one third of all respondents (37.71%). There were 14 respondents who did not wish to specify their age.

### Education, employment and household type

The survey also gathered information on the respondents' level of education, employment situation and household structure. Next, this report will go over all three of these areas both one by one and in relation to the other background information. The first area examined is the respondents' level of education.

**Graph 4: Level of education of the respondents.**





A vocational qualification (37.37%) and comprehensive school education (27.15%) are clearly the most common levels of education among the respondents, as shown in Graph 4. However, there is also a considerable number of highly educated people among food aid recipients, totalling 17.81 per cent of the respondents. A post-secondary education and a general upper secondary education are more common than a postgraduate degree but less common than an undergraduate degree. Of the 700 respondents, 15 left this question unanswered. Table 1 summarises the level of education by age group. The table highlights in bold the highest and lowest levels of education in each age group.

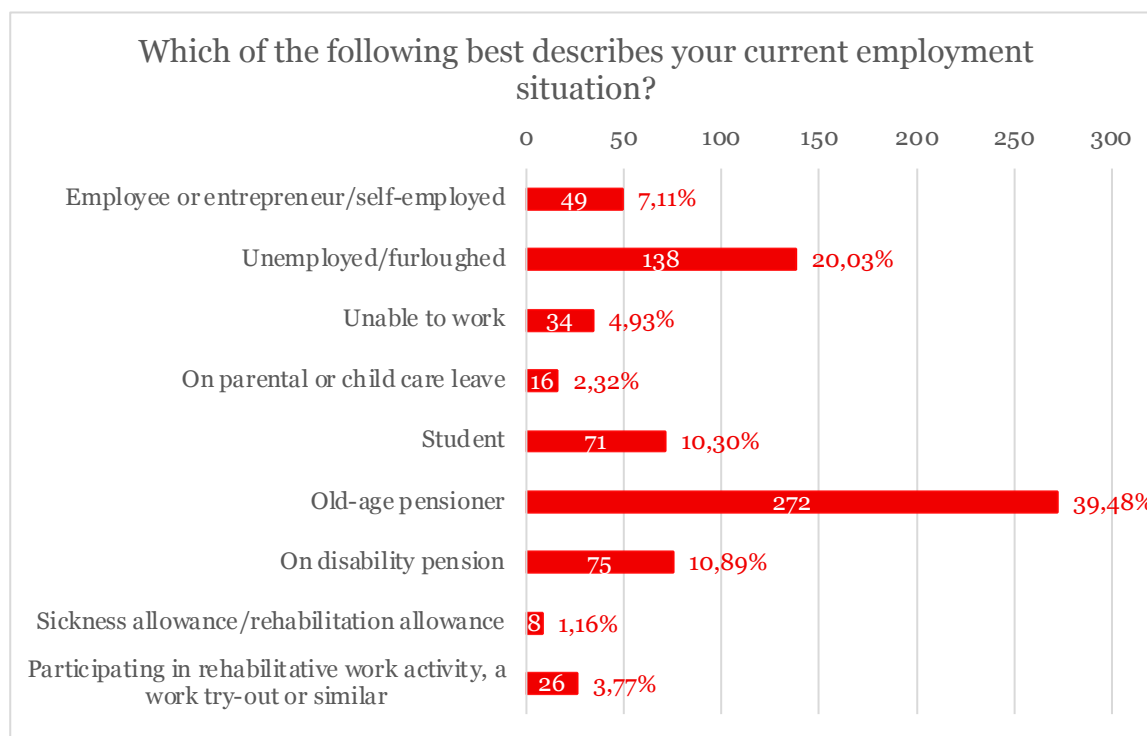
**Table 1: Highest level of education completed by age group.**

Age	Comprehensive school	Vocational qualification	General upper secondary level	Post-secondary level	Undergraduate degree	Postgraduate degree	Total (persons)
<b>Under 29 years of age</b>	24,6 %	<b>27,7 %</b>	21,5 %	10,8 %	13,9 %	<b>1,5 %</b>	65
<b>29–40 years of age</b>	12,6 %	<b>37,0 %</b>	11,7 %	<b>8,4 %</b>	18,5 %	11,8 %	119
<b>41–50 years of age</b>	14,3 %	<b>38,9 %</b>	10,4 %	<b>2,6 %</b>	18,2 %	15,6 %	77
<b>51–65 years of age</b>	22,4 %	<b>48,1 %</b>	7,7 %	7,7 %	<b>7,1 %</b>	<b>7,1 %</b>	156
<b>Over 65 years of age</b>	<b>39,5 %</b>	34,1 %	<b>3,9 %</b>	12,4 %	5,1 %	5,1 %	258
<b>I prefer not to say</b>	<b>70,0 %</b>	10,0 %	<b>0,0 %</b>	<b>0,0 %</b>	<b>0,0 %</b>	20,0 %	10

Table 1 shows that a vocational qualification is the most common or second most common option in each actual age group; as many as 48 per cent of the respondents aged 51 to 65 selected a vocational qualification as the answer. As people under the age of 29 have had the least amount of time to complete their studies, it is not surprising that respondents with a postgraduate degree account for the lowest percentage (1.5%) among this age group. Among respondents over the age of 65, approximately 40 per cent have specified comprehensive school education as their highest level of education completed. This may reflect the historical development in the population's level of education. The respondents who did not wish to specify their age are separated into their own group in the grey row, as the results are not comparable due to the small number of respondents.

The respondents were also asked about their current employment situation. Based on the survey results, old-age pensioners clearly account for the highest percentage among users of food aid. Graph 5 shows the distribution of the respondents' employment situations:

**Graph 5: Current employment situation of the respondents.**



As you can see in Graph 5, the most common employment situations among the responses are old-age pensioner (39.48%), unemployed/furloughed (20.03%), disability pension (10.89%) and student (10.30%). This question was left unanswered by 11 people. Old-age pensioners were also the largest group of respondents in the 2022 food aid survey (32.8%). In the new survey, 7.11 per cent of the respondents are employees, entrepreneurs or self-employed. The age and gender distributions of the respondents who are employees, entrepreneurs or self-employed are shown in Table 2:

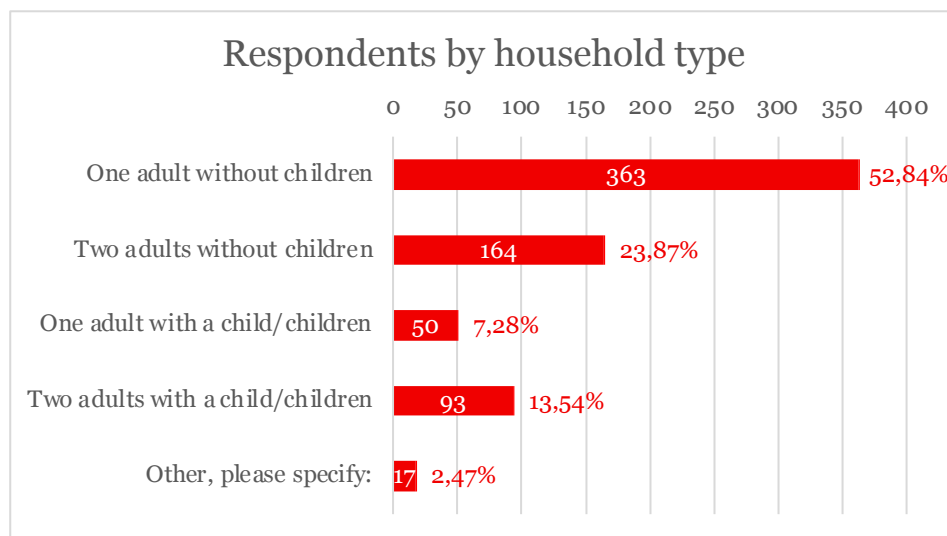
**Table 2: Respondents who are employees or entrepreneurs/self-employed.**

Employee or entrepreneur... (N=49)	Female (59.2%)	Male (40.8%)
Under 29 years of age	2	2
29–40 years of age	10	10
41–50 years of age	4	3
51–65 years of age	13	3
Over 65 years of age	0	2

Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents who are employees, entrepreneurs or self-employed are women (59.2%). This group only includes respondents who specified their gender to be either female or male. All of the respondents also specified their age. The majority of the respondents are in the 29–40 age group, but there is also a notable group of people aged 51 to 65 among the female respondents.

The survey asked about the household type particularly in order to show any use of food aid by families with children in the results. The distribution of household types in the data is illustrated in Graph 6:

**Graph 6: Respondents by household type.**



According to Graph 6, most of the respondents (52.84%) live alone without children. This is most likely affected by the fact that old-age pensioners and students account for a large proportion of the respondents. Households with two adults and no children account for approximately 24 per cent. Households with two adults and one or more children account for approximately 14 per cent, while single-parent households account for approximately 7 per cent. Therefore, a total of approximately 21 per cent of the respondents comprise families with children. However, it is good to keep in mind that households that do not officially have children may also have influence on children in the case of separated families and families in which only one of the parents has custody of the child.

Originally, there were 33 other household types specified, but when the empty answers are excluded and any answers belonging to higher categories are moved to the correct places, the final number of actual "other" answers is 17. The remaining answers include households with several adults (such as students living in shared housing), adults living with one or more grown-up child, adults living with their (elderly) parent, at least one unhoused person, and at least three households with children but no adults or an unclear number of adults. Additionally, there were four ambiguous responses that could not be interpreted for certain. The number of "other" answers belonging to other categories or expressed in an unclear way may be explained by factors such as speakers of other languages having wished to respond on a paper form not written in their own language. A total of 13 people left the question unanswered or selected the "other, please specify" option.

## Experiences with food aid

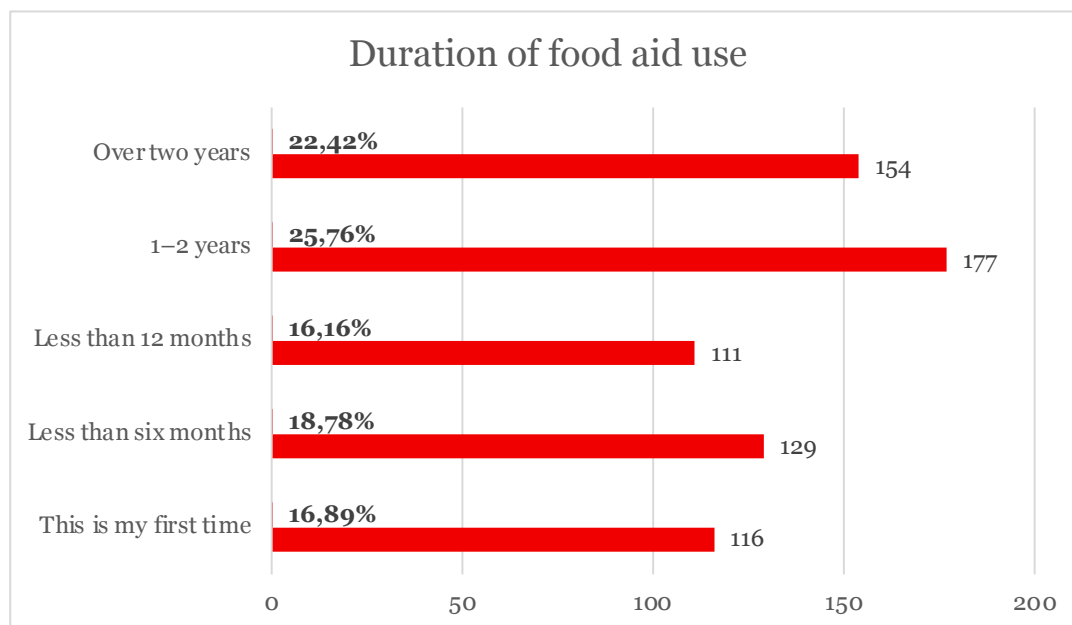
A diverse group of people in need of aid participate in food aid events. This survey sought to determine, indicatively, what types of backgrounds the people who use food aid have. The examination focuses on income, personal reasons to participate in the activities, and household types (such as people living alone, families with children) in particular.

### Using food aid

Donation-based food aid activities started properly in Finland in the 1990s. Finland's first food bank was also established and the EU started to provide food aid in Finland around that time. During difficult times, cutting from food expenses is often the easiest way for households to save money, and the demand for food aid activities indicates that not even a welfare state has been able to stop such situations from occurring. (Tikka, 2019, pp. 341–343.) The food aid activities in Finland are intended to provide temporary aid, but reports repeatedly indicate that some recipients use food aid regularly for several years.

Of the respondents to this survey, 25 per cent say that they have been using food aid for 1–2 years, while 22 per cent say that they have been using food aid for over two years. Therefore, it appears that almost half of the respondents need long-term food aid. The survey did not ask in more detail how long those who have been using food aid for over two years have used it. These statistics are presented in full in Graph 7:

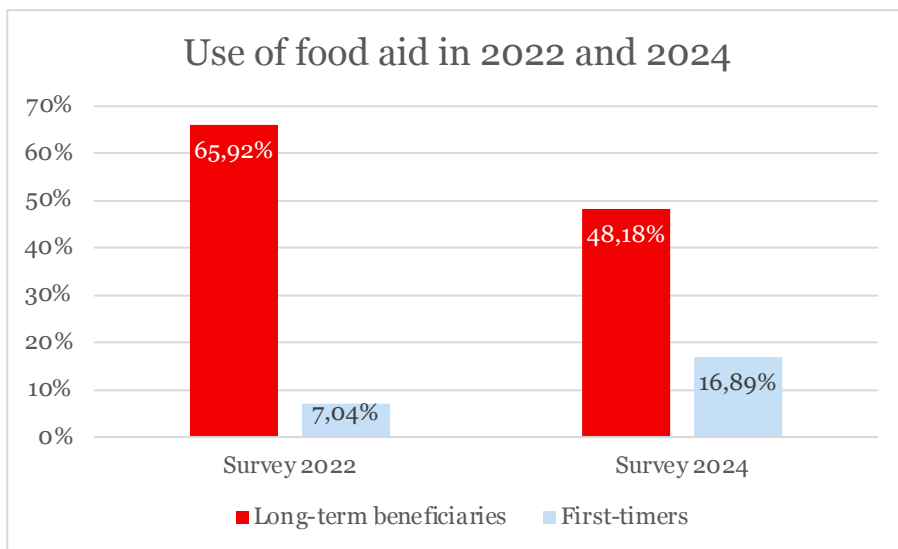
**Graph 7: Duration of food aid use.**



Graph 7 summarises how long the respondents have been attending food aid events. Although the largest percentages are at the top of the graph, the survey also reached people who have been using food aid for a shorter period of time. The third largest group (18.78%) is formed by people who have been using food aid for less than six months. People participating in food aid activities for the first time account for 16.89 per cent of the respondents, which is a few respondents more than in the group who have been using food aid for less than a year (but longer than six months), who account for 16.16 per cent. This question was left unanswered by 13 respondents out of 700.

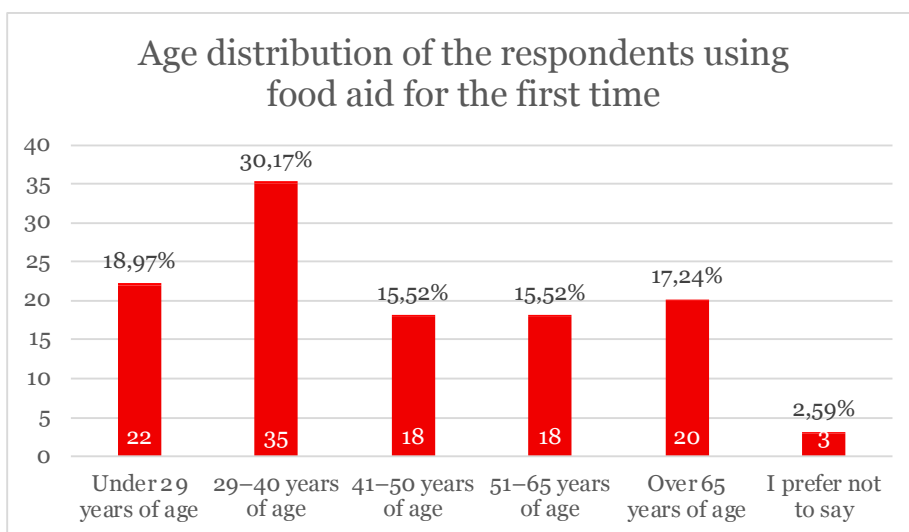
The results for the duration of food aid use clearly differ from the results of the 2022 national food aid survey. Among the total of 625 respondents in 2022, there were as many as 266 respondents (42.6%) who had been using food aid for longer than two years, while 44 respondents (7.0%) were first-timers. The number of people who had been using food aid for an extended period of time (for 1–2 years or longer than two years) has decreased between the surveys, while the number of first-timers has increased:

**Graph 8: Comparison of long-time beneficiaries and first-timers in 2022 and 2024.**



First-time food aid users are a special group in the sense that their responses can be considered to indicate what types of groups are growing among food aid users. There are a total of 116 first-timers, of whom 52 per cent are women and 46 per cent are men. Three respondents (approximately 2%) do not wish to specify their gender. The age distribution of the respondents using food aid for the first time is shown in Graph 9:

**Graph 9: Age distribution of the respondents using food aid for the first time.**



Graph 9 presents the age distribution of the first-timers. There is a relatively large number of respondents under the age of 29 and between the ages of 29 and 40 among the first-timers. While the first-timer group clearly includes fewer people over the age of 65 than the survey as a whole, they still form a large group in this category as well.

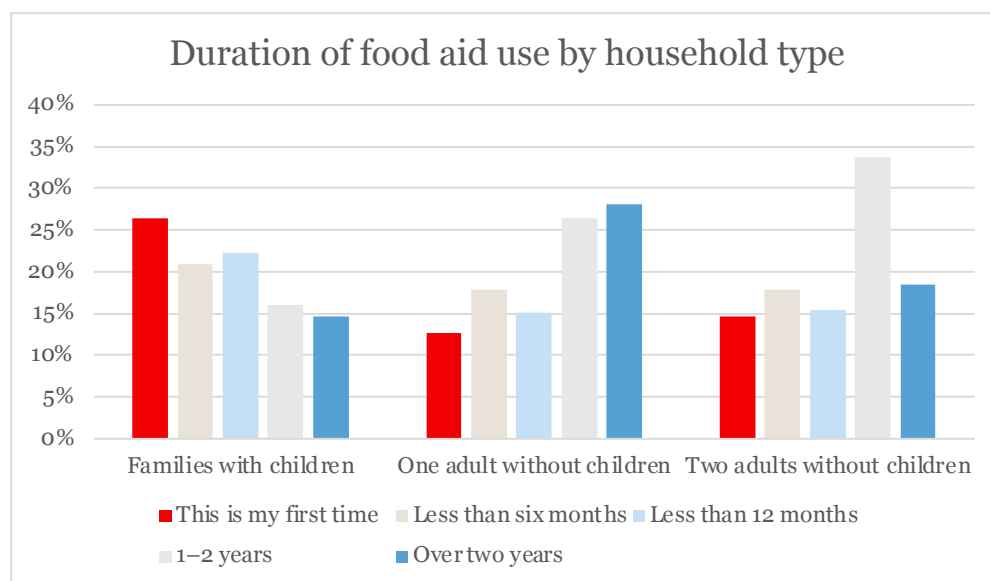
**Table 3: Employment situation of the people using food aid for the first time.**

	Number of respondents (114 in total)	Percentage
<b>Employee or entrepreneur, etc.</b>	12	10,5 %
<b>Unemployed or furloughed</b>	33	29,0 %
<b>Unable to work</b>	8	7,0 %
<b>On parental or child care leave</b>	2	1,8 %
<b>Student</b>	27	23,7 %
<b>Old-age pensioner</b>	20	17,5 %
<b>On disability pension</b>	4	3,5 %
<b>On sickness allowance or rehabilitation allowance</b>	1	0,9 %
<b>Participating in rehabilitative work activity, etc.</b>	7	6,1 %

Table 3 presents the distribution of first-timers according to their employment situation. The three largest groups are unemployed or furloughed people (29%), students (24%) and old-age pensioners (18%). Together, Graph 9 and Table 3 paint a picture of unemployed people under the age of 40 and students as one potential growing group of food aid users. Of the total of 116 first-timers, two people left this question unanswered.

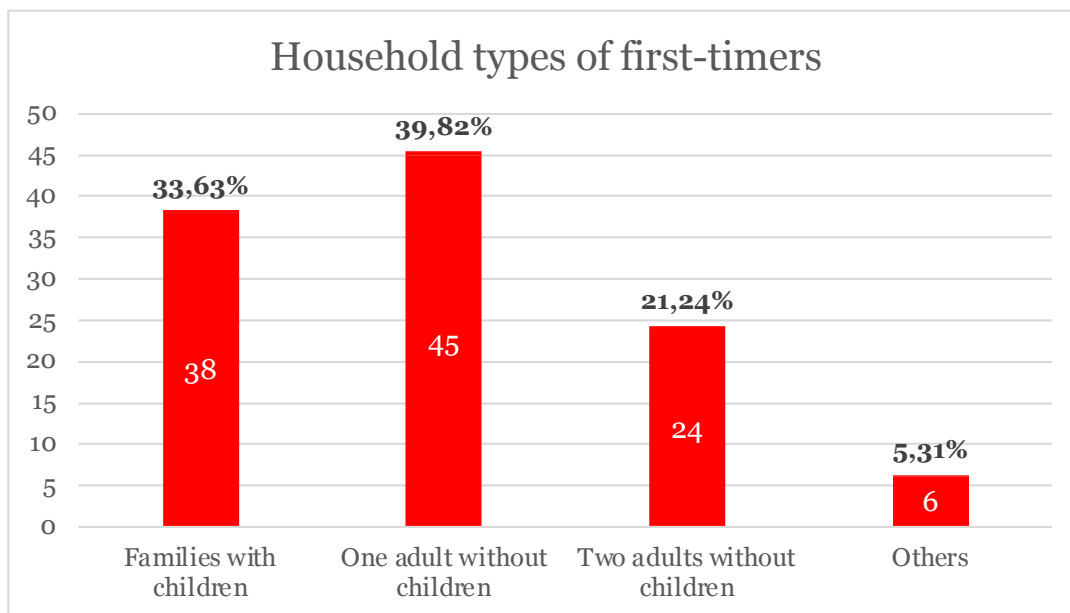
Among families with children, most have only recently started to use food aid. An examination of the entire group of respondents (Graph 7) shows that the majority of the respondents had been participating in food aid events for a year or longer. At the time of responding to the survey, most of the families with children were participating for the first time, as shown in Graph 10:

**Graph 10: Duration of food aid use by household type, with households with children combined.**



Graph 10 combines households with children. They cover households with one or two adults and a child or children as well as three "other" households that for certain have one or more children living in them on a full time basis according to the responses. The responses include 144 families with children, 357 households with one adult and no children, and 163 households with two adults and no children. There are only 10 "other" answers in this examination, and they have been excluded from the graph.

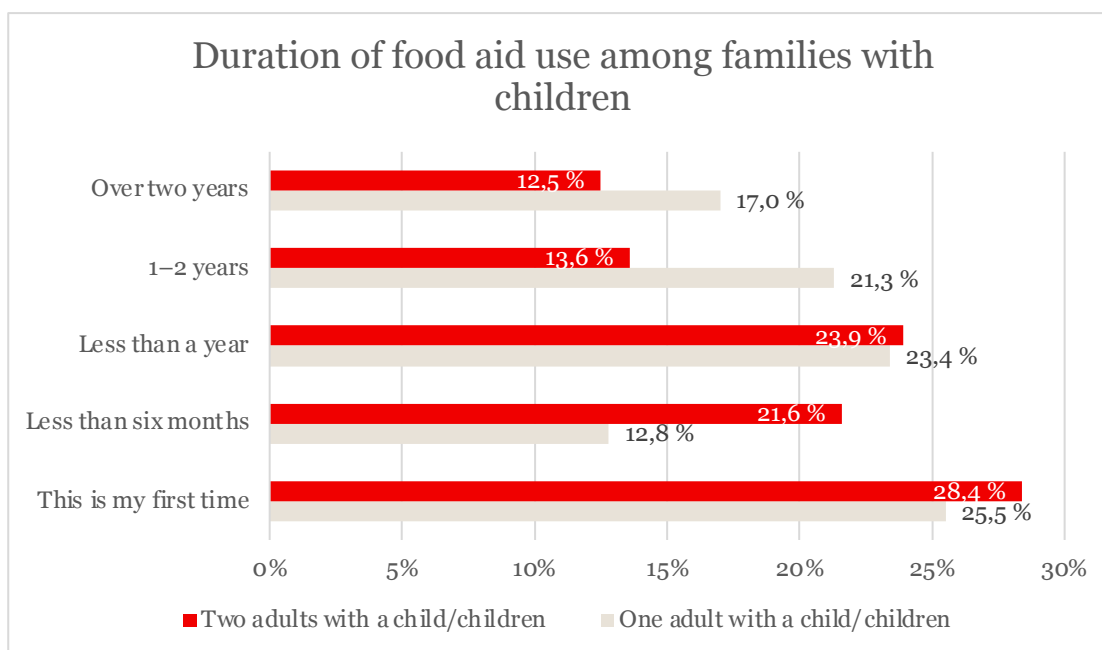
**Graph 11: First-time food aid users by household type.**



The household types of households using food aid for the first time are specified in Graph 11. Families with children account for as many as one in three of all first-timers. However, households with one adult are still more common (approx. 40%) among first-timers as well.

Households with children are examined further in Graph 12. Among families with a single parent, it is more common for families to have been participating in food aid activities for over a year (21.3%) or longer than two years (17.0%). Having used food aid for less than a year is approximately equally as common among both types of families with children (23.4% and 23.9%).

**Graph 12: Duration of food aid use among families with children.**

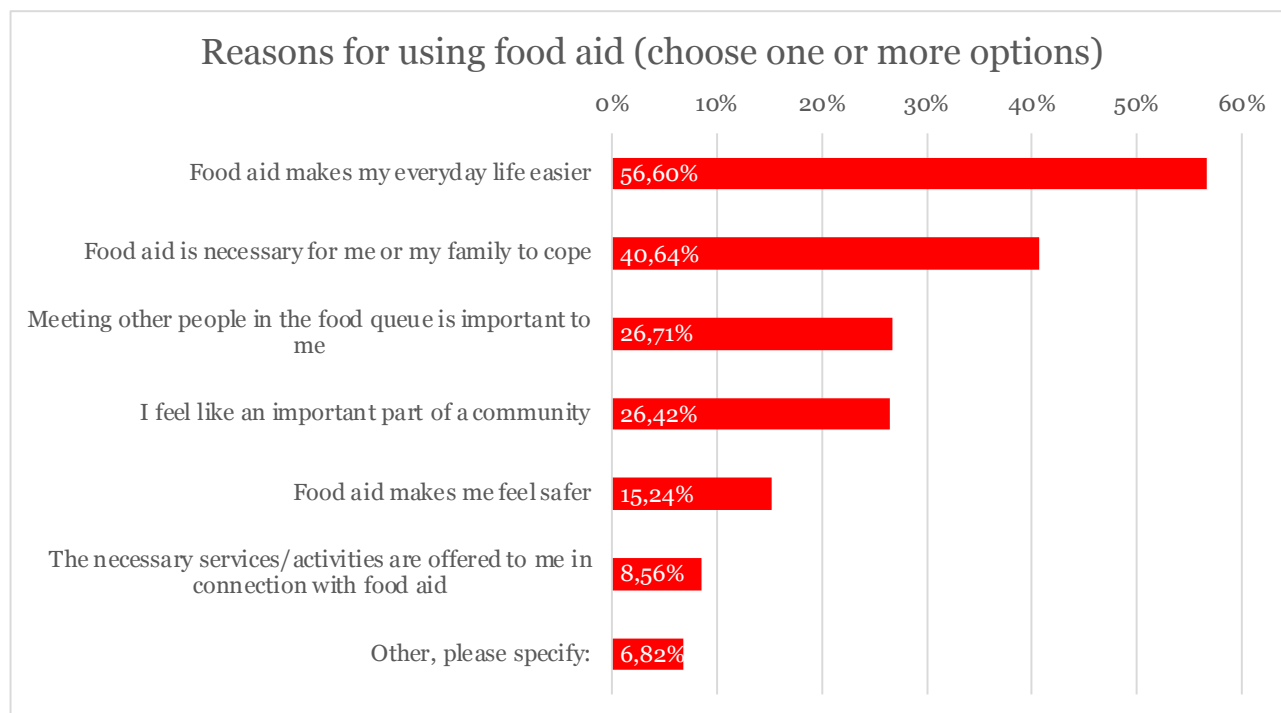


Answers in total: Two adults with a child/children 88. One adult with a child/children 47.

## Reasons for using food aid

The survey also asked about reasons for using food aid. Food aid activities seek to meet various needs, and by asking about people's reasons for using food aid, we gain valuable information on how the activities meet these needs. As the respondents were able to choose one or more suitable options, the percentages partly overlap. The results can be found in Graph 13:

**Graph 13: Reasons why the respondents use food aid (one or more options).**

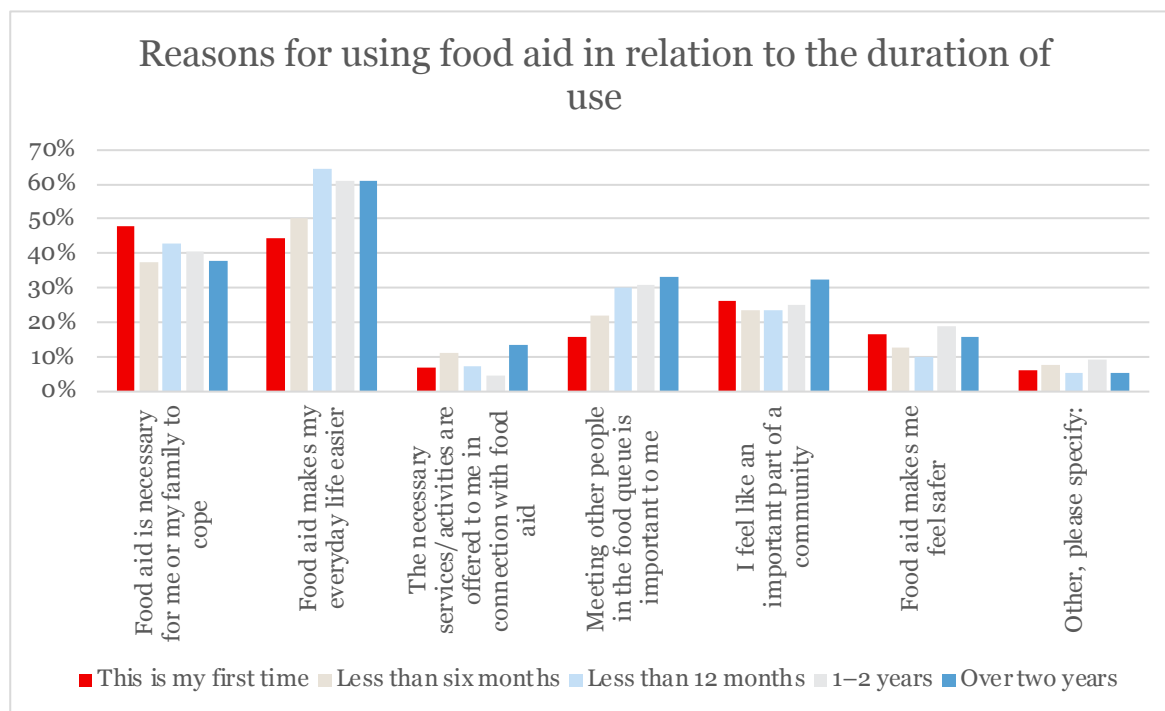


As can be seen in Graph 13, more than half of the respondents (56.60%) feel that food aid makes their daily lives easier. Of the respondents, 40.64 per cent feel that food aid is necessary for their own or their family's coping. Also, meeting other people in the food queue (26.71%) and feeling like an important part of the community (26.42%) clearly stand out. Of the respondents, 15.24 per cent feel safer thanks to food aid. 8.56 per cent feel that they have access to necessary services or other beneficial activities in conjunction with food aid. There were 11 respondents who left this question unanswered, bringing the total number of answers to this question to 689.

Reasons for using food aid can be examined from the perspectives of different groups. Relevant points of comparison chosen for this examination include how long the person has been attending food aid events, and their household type. Graph 14 shows that people participating for the first time in particular feel that food aid is necessary for their coping (47.83%). The option "Food aid makes my everyday life easier" is the most popular among those who have been participating for less than a year (64.55%), but it was also chosen by more than half of the respondents who had been participating for 1–2 years or over two years. Relatively few respondents consider the services organised in conjunction with food aid to be among their reasons for using food aid; this percentage was the highest among those who had been participating for longer than two years (13.64%). This may be affected by the fact that services are organised to varying degrees in different areas. Furthermore, beneficiaries do not necessarily always recognise their need for services, but they still benefit from the services. Meeting other people and communality stand out as reasons among those who have been participating for an extended period of time. However, surprisingly many first-timers feel that they are an important part of the community in food aid activities (26.09%). The respondents who have been participating for at least a year also consider a feeling of safety to be a reason for using food aid more commonly than the other respondents.



**Graph 14: Reasons for using food aid and how long the respondent has been using food aid.**

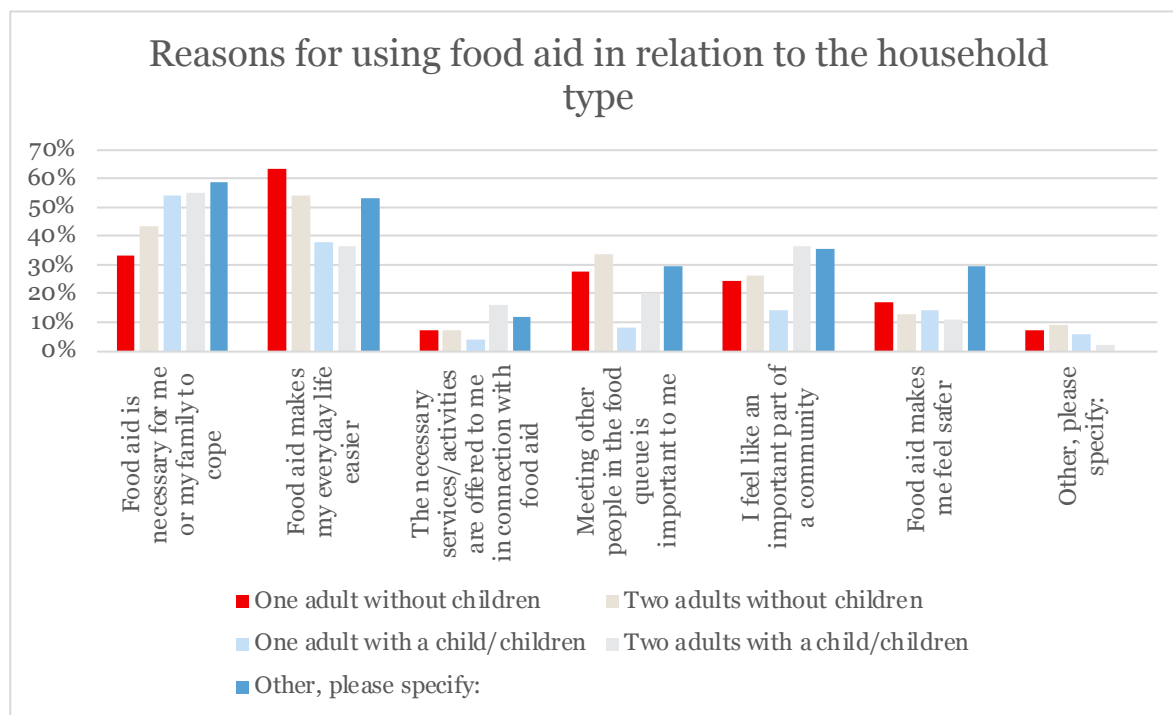


The numbers of respondents should be taken into account in Graph 14. There are 115 respondents participating for the first time, 128 respondents who have been participating for less than six months, 110 respondents who have been participating for less than a year, 176 respondents who have been participating for 1–2 years, and 154 respondents who have been participating for longer than two years.

By examining the household type, we can identify the reasons for using food aid among people living alone and families with children in particular. The numbers of responses by household type are as follows: 363 households with one adult and no children, 164 households with two adults and no children, 50 households with one adult and a child or children, and 93 households with two adults and a child or children. The number of other answers is 17.

Among people living alone and those who answered “other”, making everyday life easier and feeling safer stand out as reasons. Among the “others”, meeting other people in the food queue and feeling like a part of the community are particularly important. For the majority of the households with children, food aid is necessary for their coping (over 50%), and families with two adults and a child or children in particular feel that they are an important part of the community in food aid activities (36.56%). Families with two adults and a child or children also feel that they have access to necessary services/activities in conjunction with food aid more often than other respondents (16.13%). These results are presented in Graph 15:

**Graph 15: Reasons for using food aid in relation to the household type.**



At the end of Graph 13, it shows that approximately 7 per cent of the respondents wished to specify another reason for their use of food aid. There were a total of 47 such answers, but five of them were left empty. Here are a few highlights from among the other 42 answers:

***“Reducing food waste.”***

***“Ethicality; I pick up surplus food from schools but don’t use any other food aid services.”***

The ecological perspective is also important to some respondents. Some of the respondents to the survey have even mentioned reducing food waste as their only reason for using food aid, but these respondents appear to be from Southwest Finland, where food waste events have also been marketed more from an ecological perspective. Therefore, such respondents do not necessarily feel that they are actually using food aid. However, these respondents form a very small group among all of those who use food aid.

***“I go to pick up food for a person I’m assisting, as they can’t come themselves.”***

A few of the respondents state that they use food aid on behalf of another person. These persons may use food aid both due to their own need and on another person’s behalf, or they may use it specifically to help a loved one who has a low income or who is in the person’s care, for instance.

***“Healthy food, variety for meals.”***

***"I save in food costs."***

***"It feels silly to cook for one person."***

The healthiness of the food is also mentioned. Beneficiaries with a low income do not necessarily have the means to purchase all of the ingredients important for nutrition for cooking. On the other hand, the answers also indicate that people living alone do not always consider it to be sensible to only cook for themselves.

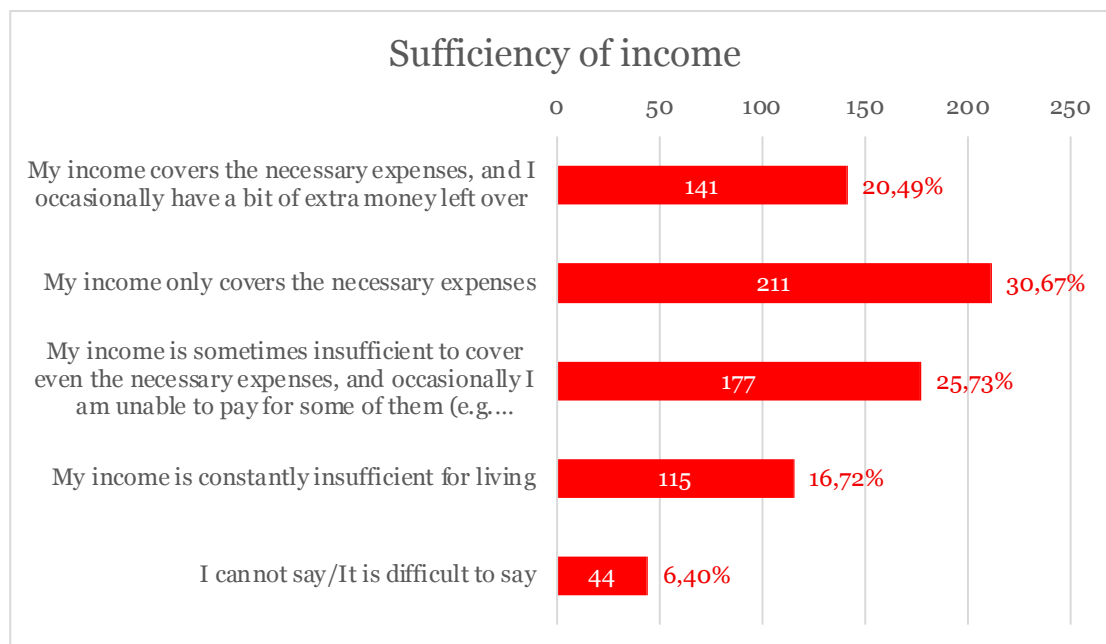
***"I volunteer with the FRC."***

Some beneficiaries participate in food aid activities as volunteers and are thereby not only recipients but also distributors of food aid. Volunteers who have transitioned from being beneficiaries to providing aid are an important part of food aid activities.

## Income

Those who use food aid were also asked about the sufficiency of their income as well as how the cuts made to social security this past year have impacted their personal finances. The financial situation of the respondents is presented in Graph 16:

**Graph 16: Financial situation of the respondents.**



As can be seen in Graph 16, the majority of the respondents feel that their income is only sufficient for necessary purchases (30.67%). A significant proportion of the respondents are even unable to pay for some of their necessary expenses (such as medication, food or bills) because their income is not even enough for necessities (25.73%). In contrast, one in five respondents feel that they occasionally have a bit of money left over after paying for the necessary expenses (20.49%). However, it is unknown how

often and how much money is left over. Those whose income is constantly insufficient (16.72%) are also not far behind. The overall conclusion is that a clear majority is able to scrape by and pay for their necessary expenses or is occasionally unable to pay for some necessities. There were 44 respondents who were unable to assess the sufficiency of their income, and 12 left this question unanswered.

There are clear differences between groups of respondents with regard to the sufficiency of income. The following tables examine the respondents' income in relation to their level of education, employment situation and household type.

**Table 4: Sufficiency of the respondents' income in relation to their level of education.**

Education	Sufficiency of income					Total (N)
	5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Comprehensive school or equivalent</b>	19,7 %	33,3 %	28,4 %	10,9 %	7,7 %	<b>183</b>
<b>Vocational qualification</b>	18,6 %	30,8 %	26,9 %	17,4 %	6,3 %	<b>253</b>
<b>General upper secondary level</b>	10,7 %	28,6 %	21,4 %	26,8 %	12,5 %	<b>56</b>
<b>Post-secondary level</b>	28,6 %	33,3 %	15,9 %	22,2 %	0,0 %	<b>63</b>
<b>Undergraduate degree</b>	20,6 %	23,5 %	32,3 %	16,2 %	7,4 %	<b>68</b>
<b>Postgraduate degree</b>	34,6 %	30,8 %	17,3 %	13,5 %	3,8 %	<b>52</b>

**5** = My income covers the necessary expenses, and I occasionally have a bit of extra money left over **4** = My income only covers the necessary expenses **3** = My income is sometimes insufficient to cover even the necessary expenses, and occasionally I am unable to pay for some of them (e.g. medicine, food, bills) **2** = My income is constantly insufficient for living **1** = I cannot say/It is difficult to say

Table 4 shows that the respondents with a postgraduate degree appear to have a more sufficient income than the rest of the respondents, as a total of 65.4 per cent of them are at levels 4 or 5 with regard to the sufficiency of income. People who have an undergraduate degree have the highest percentage of level 3 answers, i.e. they are more likely than the other groups to be occasionally unable to pay for some necessities. Respondents with a post-secondary education are very divided, as almost as many of them are in the level 5 group as of the respondents with a higher education, but as many as 22.2 per cent of them still feel that their income is constantly insufficient for living. Among those whose highest level of education is a general upper secondary education, the most common answer is that their income is insufficient for living (26.8%), while the least common answer is that they occasionally have a bit of extra money left over (10.7%). Among those who have completed a vocational qualification or a comprehensive school education, levels 3 and 4 in particular stand out.

**Table 5: Sufficiency of the respondents' income in relation to their current employment situation.**

Employment situation	Sufficiency of income					Total (N)
	5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Employee or entrepreneur, etc.</b>	31,9 %	34,0 %	23,4 %	6,4 %	4,3 %	<b>47</b>
<b>Unemployed or furloughed</b>	10,2 %	25,5 %	28,5 %	28,5 %	7,3 %	<b>137</b>
<b>Unable to work</b>	3,0 %	21,2 %	33,4 %	33,4 %	9,1 %	<b>33</b>
<b>On parental or child care leave</b>	18,7 %	18,7 %	56,3 %	6,3 %	0,0 %	<b>16</b>
<b>Student</b>	7,0 %	32,4 %	25,4 %	22,5 %	12,7 %	<b>71</b>
<b>Old-age pensioner</b>	30,5 %	35,3 %	19,3 %	8,9 %	6,0 %	<b>269</b>
<b>On disability pension</b>	16,0 %	30,7 %	30,7 %	21,3 %	1,3 %	<b>75</b>
<b>On sickness allowance or rehabilitation allowance</b>	25,0 %	12,5 %	37,5 %	12,5 %	12,5 %	<b>8</b>
<b>Participating in rehabilitative work activity or similar</b>	19,2 %	26,9 %	38,5 %	7,7 %	7,7 %	<b>26</b>

**5** = My income covers the necessary expenses, and I occasionally have a bit of extra money left over **4** = My income only covers the necessary expenses **3** = My income is sometimes insufficient to cover even the necessary expenses, and occasionally I am unable to pay for some of them (e.g. medicine, food, bills) **2** = My income is constantly insufficient for living **1** = I cannot say/It is difficult to say

Table 5 shows how the sufficiency of income varies between respondents in different employment situations. The respondents on parental or child care leave (sample size: eight people) and the respondents on sickness allowance or rehabilitation allowance (sample size: 16 people) are indicated in grey because their number is less than 20, which reduces the comparability of the results. The groups that appear to have the most sufficient income are employees/entrepreneurs and old-age pensioners, as more than 60 per cent of both groups chose level 4 or 5. With regard to old-age pensioners, however, we must also take into account that they may be used to getting by with lower expenses, although they may also be spending a relatively large amount of money on medication, for instance. Moreover, old-age pensioners form the largest single group of respondents to the survey, and therefore there may be greater variation within this large group.

Based on the results, being unable to pay for some necessary expenses (level 3) is very common. The highest percentages are accounted for by those participating in rehabilitative work activity or similar (38.5%), those unable to work (33.4%) and those on disability pension (30.7%) when the groups indicated in grey are excluded. Among employees/entrepreneurs, students and old-age pensioners, approximately 20 per cent chose level 3. Among students, as many as one in four are occasionally unable to pay for some of their necessary expenses. The groups that have the highest percentages of people who constantly have insufficient income for living (level 2) are those unable to work (33.4%), unemployed or furloughed people (28.5%), students (22.5%) and those on disability pension (21.3%).

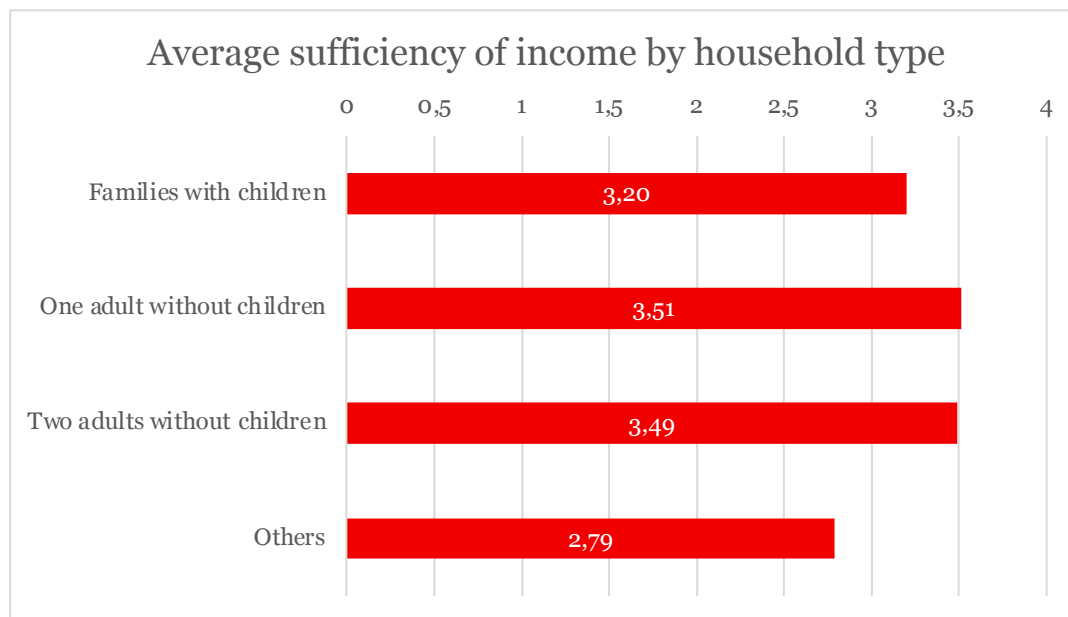
**Table 6: Sufficiency of the respondents' income in relation to their household type.**

Household type	Sufficiency of income					Total (N)
	5	4	3	2	1	
<b>One adult, no children</b>	20,5 %	34,1 %	26,6 %	13,9 %	5,0 %	<b>361</b>
<b>Two adults, no children</b>	27,0 %	26,4 %	22,1 %	17,8 %	6,7 %	<b>163</b>
<b>One adult with a child/ children</b>	10,0 %	28,0 %	28,0 %	30,0 %	4,0 %	<b>50</b>
<b>Two adults with a child/children</b>	15,6 %	28,9 %	28,9 %	17,8 %	8,9 %	<b>90</b>
<b>Other, please specify:</b>	11,8 %	29,4 %	17,6 %	23,5 %	17,6 %	<b>17</b>

**5** = My income covers the necessary expenses, and I occasionally have a bit of extra money left over **4** = My income only covers the necessary expenses **3** = My income is sometimes insufficient to cover even the necessary expenses, and occasionally I am unable to pay for some of them (e.g. medicine, food, bills) **2** = My income is constantly insufficient for living **1** = I cannot say/It is difficult to say

Table 6 presents the distribution of the sufficiency of income by household type. As there are only 17 "other, please specify" answers, the small sample size means that the results are not very reliably comparable. Households with two adults and no children have the most sufficient income: Of the respondents, 27.0 per cent say that they have extra money left over after paying for the necessary expenses, and 26.4 per cent say that their income only covers the necessary expenses. Among households with one adult and no children, the household's income only covers the necessary expenses for 34.1 per cent of the respondents, while 20.5 per cent of the respondents have extra money left over. Having extra money left over after paying for the necessary expenses is the least common among households with a single parent (10.0%). For 30.0% of single parents, their income is constantly insufficient for living. Among households with two adults, both those that have children and those that do not, the percentage of respondents who say that their income is constantly insufficient for living is the same (17.8%). However, it is clearly less common among households with two adults and a child or children (15.6%) to have extra money left over than among households with two adults and no children (27.0%). Presumably, families with children have more necessary expenses, which is why it is understandable for them to usually not have extra money left over.

**Graph 17: Sufficiency of income by household type, with families with children combined.**



**5** = My income covers the necessary expenses, and I occasionally have a bit of extra money left over **4** = My income only covers the necessary expenses **3** = My income is sometimes insufficient to cover even the necessary expenses, and occasionally I am unable to pay for some of them (e.g. medicine, food, bills) **2** = My income is constantly insufficient for living **1** = I cannot say/It is difficult to say

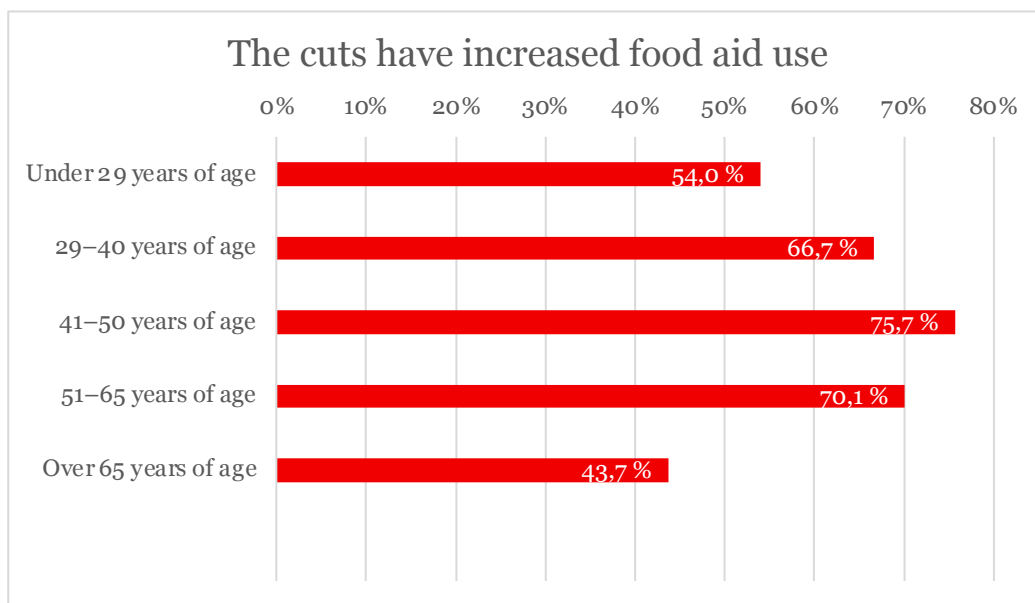
Graph 17 shows that the average sufficiency of income is lower among families with children than among households with one or two adults and no children. However, all of the results are close to level 3, meaning that the respondent is occasionally unable to pay for some of their necessary expenses. The respondents to this question include 143 families with children, 361 households with one adult and no children, 163 households with two adults and no children, and 14 “other” households. The families with children also cover three “other” households that have a child or children living in them on a full-time basis according to the answers.

## Cuts to social security

The respondents were also asked whether the cuts made this year (to housing and unemployment allowances, for instance) have increased their use of food aid (“yes” or “no” options). The cuts to social security have increased the use of food aid for almost 60 per cent of the respondents. To be exact, the answers were divided as follows: 58.9 per cent “yes” answers and 41.1 per cent “no” answers. This question was left unanswered by 34 people out of 700.

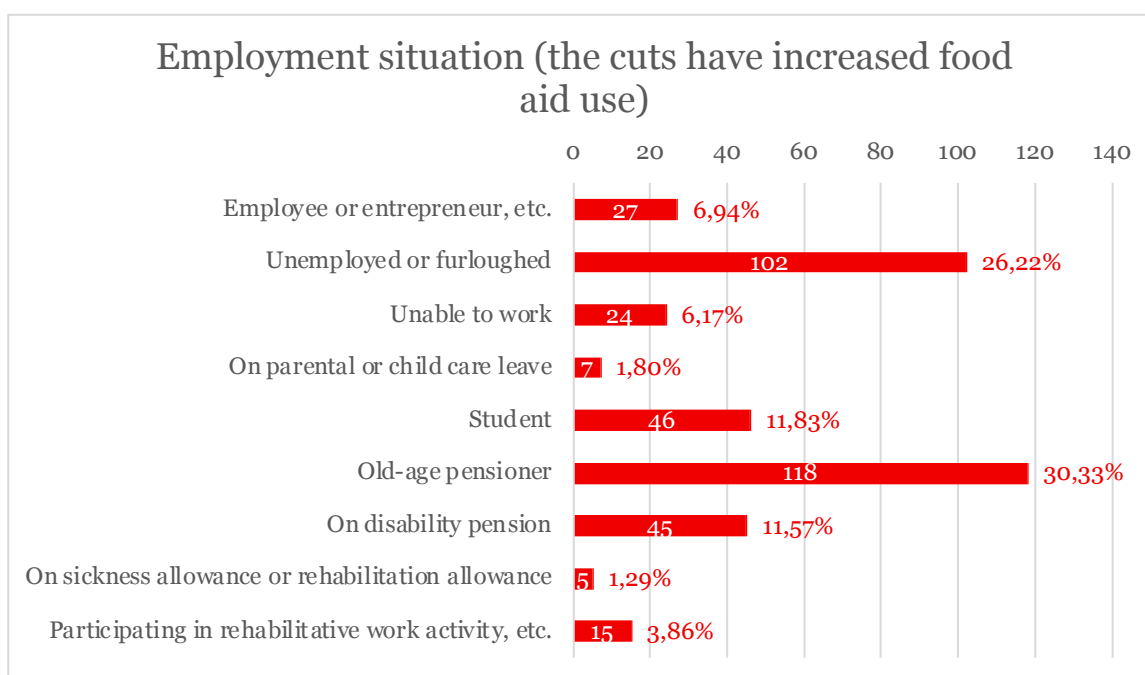
A total of 392 respondents answered “yes”. Of them, 49.7 per cent are women, 47.5 per cent are men, and 2.8 per cent do not wish to specify their gender. The respondents’ age distribution is presented by age group in Graph 18:

**Graph 18: Proportion accounted for by those whose food aid use has been increased by the cuts to social security of each age group.**



Graph 18 illustrates how the cuts to social security have increased use of food aid among the working-age respondents over the age of 40 in particular; more than 70 per cent of the respondents in both the 41–50 and 51–65 age groups responded “yes” to this question. More respondents in the 29–40 age group (66.7%) than respondents below the age of 29 (54.0%) say that the cuts to social security have increased their use of food aid. “Yes” answers were in the minority only among the respondents over the age of 65. As there are not enough respondents representing each employment situation for a corresponding examination to be sensible, this report first distinguishes the largest groups among the respondents who answered “yes”:

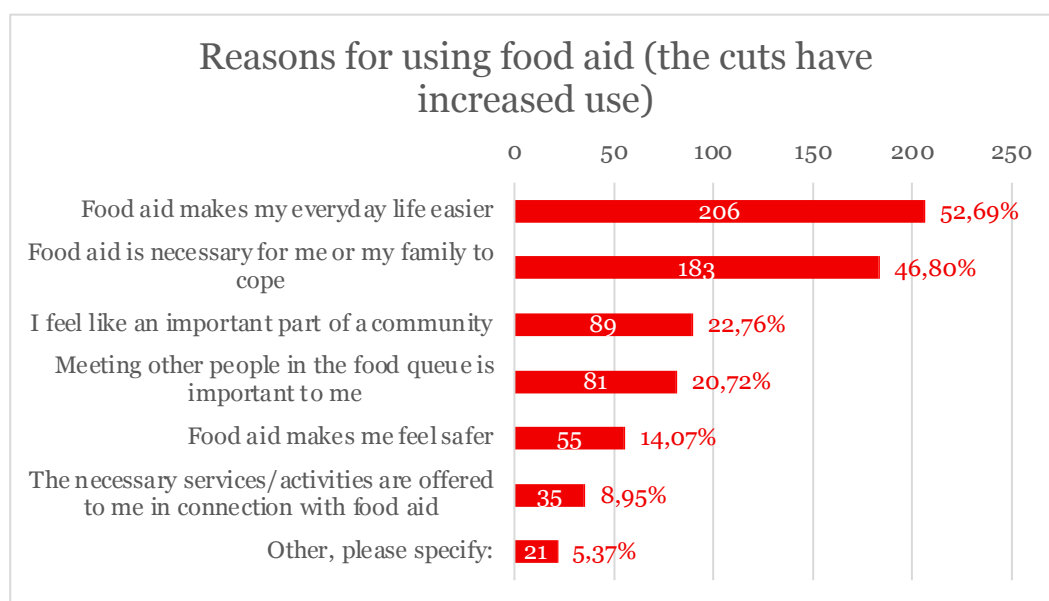
**Graph 19: Employment situation of those whose food aid use has been increased by the cuts to social security.**





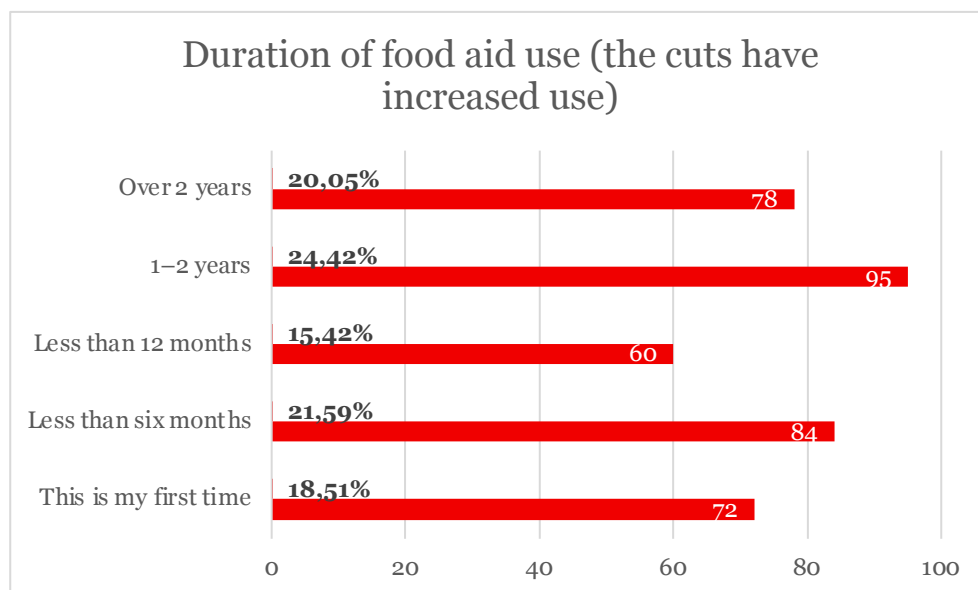
Graph 19 shows that among those who have started to use food aid more often because of the cuts to social security, more than half in total are old-age pensioners (30.33%) or unemployed/furloughed (26.22%). Among the respondents who answered "yes", there is also a relatively large proportion of students (11.83%) and people on disability pension (11.57%). The following can be noted about these groups when they are examined one by one: Of all respondents who are old-age pensioners (255), 118 answered "yes" (46.3%). Among the respondents who are unemployed or furloughed (136), 102 provided a "yes" answer (75.0%). The number of students (68) who answered "yes" was 46 (67.6%). Among people on disability pension (71), 45 respondents answered "yes" (63.4%). The numbers of respondents exclude those who left the question about the cuts to social security unanswered.

**Graph 20: Reasons for using food aid among those whose food aid use has been increased by the cuts to social security.**



As shown in Graph 20, those who answered that the cuts to social security have increased their use of food aid differ slightly from the results for the overall data (Graph 12) with regard to their reasons for using food aid. In Graph 13, 40.64 per cent of the respondents considered food aid to be necessary for their coping, whereas in Graph 20, the corresponding percentage is 46.80. The percentages accounted for by meeting other people in the food queue and feeling like a part of the community are slightly lower: they were both approximately 26 per cent in Graph 13, but they are 20.72 per cent and 22.76 per cent, respectively, in Graph 20. Use of food aid because the respondent feels safer thanks to the food aid is slightly lower in Graph 20 (14.07%) than in graph 13 (15.24%).

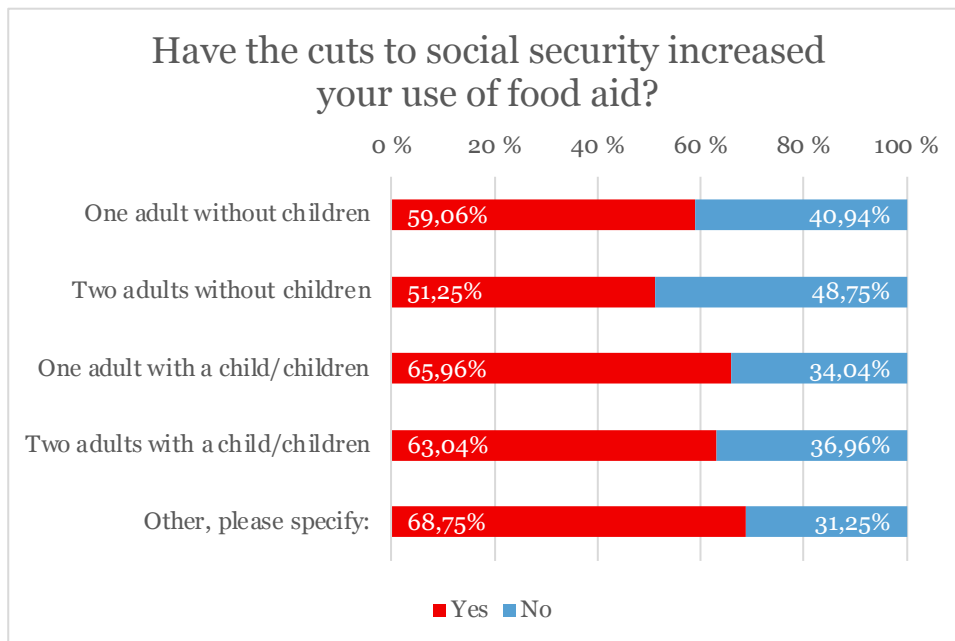
**Graph 21: Duration of food aid use among those whose food aid use has been increased by the cuts to social security.**



When we examine the duration of food aid use among those who say that the cuts to social security have increased their food aid use, we can note that having used food aid for longer than a year is less common and having used food aid for less than six months is more common than when we examine all of the data. Graph 7 shows that 22.42 per cent of the respondents have been using food aid for longer than two years, while 25.76 per cent have been using it for 1-2 years. These same responses account for slightly lower percentages (20.05% and 24.42%, respectively) in Graph 21. In contrast, the percentage accounted for by those who have been participating for less than six months is higher in Graph 21 (21.59%) than in Graph 7 (18.78%). Similarly, the percentage accounted for by those are participating for the first time is slightly higher in Graph 21 (18.51%) than in Graph 7 (16.89%). The total number of respondents who answered that the cuts to social security have increased their use of food aid and who answered the question about the duration of their food aid use is 389.

At this point, it is also good to briefly bring up the background of the "no" answers (274 answers). Of those whose food aid use has not been increased by the cuts to social security, 56.2 per cent are women, 41.6 per cent are men, and 1.1 per cent do not wish to specify their gender. There are no non-binary persons among those who answered "yes", but there are three of them among those who answered "no" (1.1%). Those who answered "no" stand out to a relevant degree in the data in that 50.7 per cent of them are old-age pensioners and 46.0 per cent use food aid in Southwest Finland. These figures are clearly higher than in the overall data, in which old-age pensioners account for 39.5 per cent of the respondents and 222 of the respondents (31.7%) use food aid in Southwest Finland. Finally, we will examine the cuts to social security by household type:

**Graph 22: Answers regarding the impact of the cuts to social security by household type.**



As can be seen in Graph 22, this year's cuts to social security have increased the use of food aid among the majority of the respondents across all household types. Among households with two adults and no children, the number of "yes" and "no" answers is almost the same. Single-parent households (65.96%) and other types of households (68.75%) most commonly answered "yes". However, as there are only 16 of other types of households, these figures are not very comparable. Households with two adults and a child or children are not far behind single-parent households, with 63.04 per cent of them having answered "yes". The corresponding proportion among adults living alone is also close 60 per cent (59.06%). Families with children appear to be the most likely to use food aid as a result of the cuts. When we examine all families with children collectively (also including the three families with children who chose the "other" option), the percentages are 64.08 for "yes" and 35.92 for "no". Judging by the answers, the "other" households include adults taking care of their elderly parents and at least a few foreign students, for instance. The total number of people who answered the questions about household type and cuts to social security is 657.

## Feedback on food aid activities

The respondents had an opportunity to provide feedback about the Red Cross's food aid activities. The survey garnered 232 suggestions for improvement, with the respondents bringing up practical challenges in the food aid activities but also commending and praising the activities. There were 208 respondents who provided free-form feedback. This subsection discusses the feedback concerning the core food aid activities, whereas the section on social inclusion and the impact of the activities will go over the feedback received on communality and participatory activities.

***"I can't say, no matter how much food you distribute, the lines just keep growing. The number of people in need of food aid keeps on increasing because everyone is cutting costs; there isn't enough money!"***  
*- One of the suggestions for improvement*

Many people wish that there was more food available more often. One of the respondents remarked: "Maybe it would be better to distribute food aid in larger amounts or more often, so that people could plan their lives beyond the next day." Another thing that indicates the increased need for food among those who use food aid is observations made at least in Tampere that some people who have come to pick up food aid have started to eat out of the bags of food immediately after receiving them (Yle 2024). The following topics were also brought up:

### 1 The food distributed

Several respondents wished that users of food aid would have more options available with regard to the products distributed because not everyone eats meat or drinks milk, for instance. On the other hand, some people wished for more milk products, sources of protein and salad, and more than one respondent wished for hygiene supplies or ESF payment cards for purchasing them.

There were also some mentions of the quality of the food, such as some people sometimes having received a bag of mouldy bread. However, there were few actual complaints, and this may also be affected by differences between local branches in the scope of their activities and cooperation networks as well as in how established they are. Additionally, the food and its nutritional value garnered several compliments, and warm meals in particular were praised at the service points that distribute them. A large number of the respondents also warmly welcomed the distribution of waste food from schools and

### 2 Distribution arrangements

Most of the answers were related to the functionality of the arrangements. In general, it would appear that the majority are satisfied with the arrangements, but the respondents also identified deficiencies and made suggestions for correction. Many of the respondents wished for improvements to queuing by means such as queue tickets and different time slots when there is a great number of people. The respondents also wished for more attention to be paid to supervision of the queues because people may push each other and persons with reduced mobility may have difficulties with lining up with other people, for instance. For example, one respondent points out that, currently, "the women are at a disadvantage" in the distribution of queue tickets.

Some of the answers also expressed doubts about the equality of distribution activities. One respondent writes: "The people distributing the food are sometimes too stingy and food goes to waste. When there is a lot of food available, they could distribute larger amounts of it. People usually have neighbours and friends who can help them use up the food." Because of how they are worded, these types of answers also imply that problems only occur occasionally and not all of the time. However, in order to maintain the Red Cross's image, it is important to maintain trust in the activities.

The respondents also wished to send the message that different schools in the same municipality should distribute waste food on different days to make the distribution activities better spread out. Additionally, some of the respondents commented that volunteers should take each other into account better and communicate more with each other in order to prevent uncertainty from arising regarding how many volunteers will be participating in the distribution activities at any given time, for instance. A few of the respondents also wished for a way to deliver food aid to those unable to come to the distribution locations in person.

### 3 Communications

There were some critical observations about how information about events is communicated. For instance, some respondents wished for better communication about changes to distribution times. A few of those who were participating for the first time also said that they had been guided to the events instead of finding the activities themselves. One respondent says: “– I didn't hear about it until I'd been living in that town for a year. Please also tell new residents where they can find help.” Of course, we must try to be effective in our communications, but it is very much possible that these answers pertain to isolated cases. New residents and immigrants may not necessarily see the advertisements or yet know how to look for local activities sufficiently efficiently.

All in all, the survey garnered diverse feedback and suggestions for improvement. Because it is not possible to identify the branch in which the respondent used food aid based on the data, it is not possible to attribute the feedback to the particular branch. Clearly, the respondents are generally satisfied with the food aid activities, but problems have been identified and they should be taken into account in the development of the activities. Organisers of food aid have also identified many challenges. Those who provided feedback also expressed concerns on behalf of the volunteers:

***“As long as you can handle it.”***

***“I hope that you will continue to provide aid at these locations.”***

## Section summary

The respondents' experiences with food aid activities indicate that all food aid is needed. Food aid is necessary for coping for approximately 41 per cent of the respondents. A great number of beneficiaries have a long-term need for aid, as they have been using food aid for at least a year (48% in total), but the comparison of the two surveys shows that the percentage of first-timers has clearly increased. The percentages of unemployed and furloughed people (29%), students (24%) and families with children (34%) are higher among first-timers than in the overall data. When we examine the assessments provided by the group of respondents regarding the sufficiency of their income, we can note that those unable to work (33%), unemployed and furloughed people (29%), students (23%) and those on disability pension (21%) in particular constantly have insufficient income for living. The group in which it is the least common to constantly have insufficient income for living is employees, entrepreneurs and self-employed people (6.4%), which is not a surprising result, but 23 per cent of this group as well are occasionally unable to pay for some of their necessary expenses. Approximately 59 per cent of all respondents say that this year's cuts to social security have increased their use of food aid. Several respondents write that they wish for food aid activities to be organised more regularly.

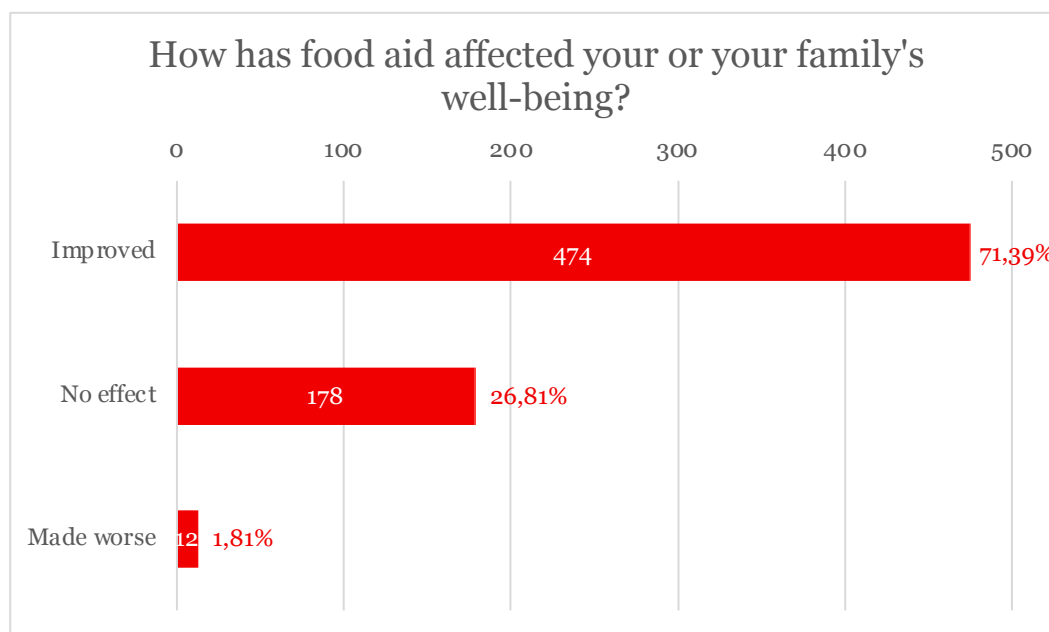
## Experiences of social inclusion and the impact of the activities

The impact of food aid refers above all to the impact on the beneficiaries' well-being. The food itself promotes the holistic well-being of the beneficiaries, but offering social activities in conjunction with food aid makes it possible to support psychosocial well-being in particular. For this reason, it is important to study the impacts on social inclusion and communality.

### Impacts of food aid on well-being

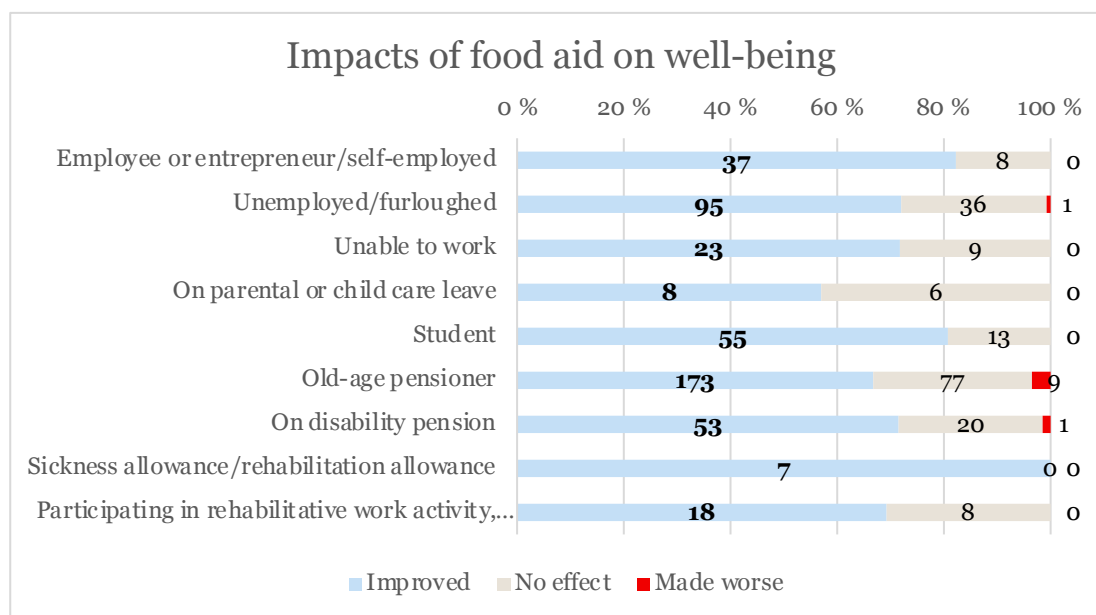
Through the survey, the intention was to find out how beneficiaries feel that food aid has affected their well-being. At the same time, any positive experiences can be interpreted as an indication of food aid being meaningful to the respondents. The impacts of food aid on well-being were examined simply by offering three different options: It has improved it – It has had no effect on it – It has made it worse. The answers are illustrated in Graph 23:

**Graph 23: Impacts of food aid on the respondents' well-being.**



As shown in Graph 23, 474 respondents, i.e. 71.39 per cent of all respondents, felt that food aid has improved their own or their family's well-being. There were 178 respondents (26.81%) who felt that there has been no effect on their well-being, while 12 (1.81%) answered that their well-being has worsened. This result is very positive and indicates that the food aid activities have been able to meet the beneficiaries' needs.

**Graph 24: Impacts of food aid on well-being by employment situation.**



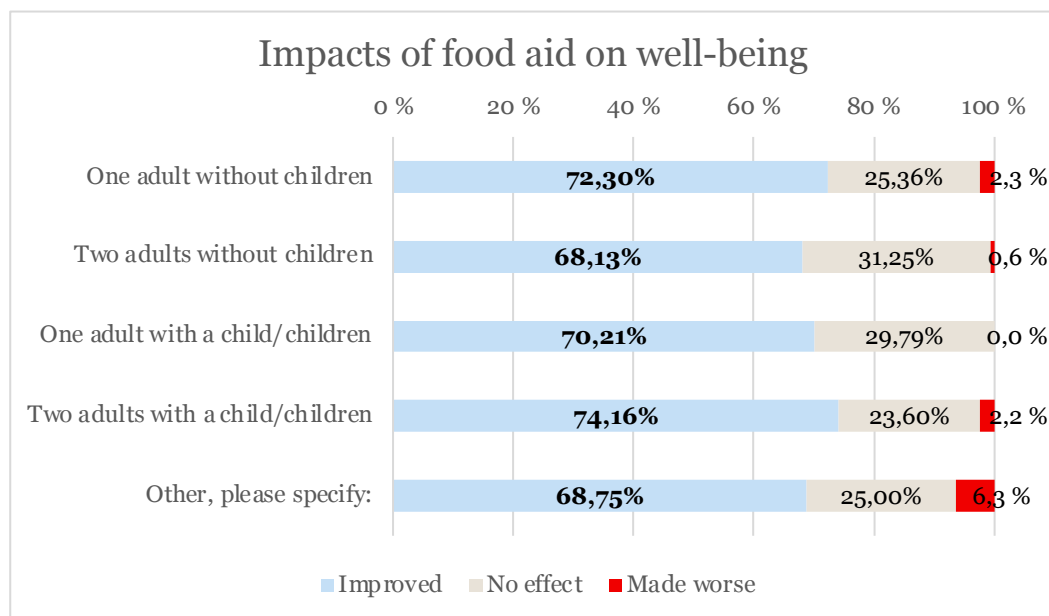
If we exclude the rows with a very small number of respondents (on parental or child care leave; on sickness allowance/rehabilitation allowance), food aid has most improved the well-being of employees and entrepreneurs / self-employed people, students, unemployed/furloughed people, and those unable to work, as shown in Graph 24. Old-age pensioners, people on disability pension and unemployed/furloughed people are the only groups in which someone responded by saying that food aid has made their well-being worse. Regardless, the answer "It has improved it" clearly surpasses the other options across all groups.

**Table 7: Impacts of food aid on well-being in relation to the cuts to social security.**

	Yes	%	No	%
<b>Improved</b>	272	71,96 %	190	71,16 %
<b>No effect</b>	97	25,66 %	76	28,46 %
<b>Made worse</b>	9	2,38 %	1	0,37 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 7 divides the respondents into two groups according to who answered "yes" and who answered "no" to the question regarding whether this year's cuts to social security have increased their visits to food aid. In both groups, food aid has improved well-being among approximately 71 per cent of the respondents. There are more "It has made it worse" answers (2.38%) among the "yes" answers but more "It has had no effect on it" answers (28.46%) among the "no" answers.

**Graph 25: Impacts of food aid on well-being in relation to household type.**



As can be seen in Graph 25, there are no major differences between household types with regard to the perceived impact on well-being. Families with two adults and a child or children most commonly (74.16%) answered that their well-being has improved as a result of using food aid. Correspondingly, households with two adults and no children have perceived the least improvement (68.13%). Once again, we must take into account the numbers of respondents in the examination of the results.

The respondents were provided with the option to explain in more detail how food aid activities have affected their lives or the lives of their family. These open answers bring up many themes already discussed previously, such as daily life becoming easier and the need for food, particularly warm food. Here are a few of the answers to the question about well-being that stood out:

***"It's a good addition to nutrition. I often plan the rest of my purchases according to what I receive from food aid."***

***"The products for people with allergies are more expensive, so I can purchase my own flour."***

***"It makes it easier to plan my meals for the week/day. Fish, vegetables and fruit = expensive; I rarely splurge on them."***

The high cost of food is brought up in many of the answers. Food aid makes it easier to obtain nutritious food, which in turn improves holistic well-being and health. This reinforces the previous observations about the reasons for using food aid and feedback about food aid activities.

***"A very good impact, I've already made new friends."***

***"For someone who lives alone, it's also a social event where you can meet and get to know different people."***



***“Meeting Ukrainian and Finnish people has an uplifting impact.”***

The respondents say that social relationships established through food aid activities increase well-being. Community spirit can arise both from getting to know other people in need of aid and interactions with volunteers.

***“The feeling that people care has increased.”***

***“This food aid makes my life easier and secure.” (response has not been translated)***

***“Food distributed by friendly volunteers nourishes both the body and soul –.”***

Food aid activities have succeeded in making several of the respondents feel cared for. The activities have also been able to increase the feeling of safety. Several of the responses also commend the friendly volunteers.

***“I have a little money left for my children’s hobbies because I don’t need to spend all my money on food.”***

***“I haven’t needed to borrow as much money from my friends.”***

***“It has impacted my own life and hopefully that of others mentally and physically – you can accomplish a lot with humour.”***

The social impacts mentioned also include children’s recreational opportunities and positive interactions with the help of humour in food aid activities. Food aid has also reduced the need to borrow money, which may improve well-being by reducing any shame that the recipient may feel.

***“I’ve received food when my bank account and fridge have been empty. I would probably have to steal food from the store to have something to eat.”***

***“I spend less money on food and am able to buy my prescription medication.”***

Another aspect that comes up in the answers is that food aid helps prevent those in a difficult financial situation from taking desperate actions, such as stealing food or not taking their prescription medication.

***“– they also introduce me to new products that I hesitate to buy in order to try them.” (translated from Ukrainian to Finnish and English)***

Food aid activities also introduce immigrants to Finnish food products.

## Feeling like an important part of a community

When the respondents were asked about their reasons for using food aid (Graph 12), 26.42 per cent of the respondents said that they use food aid because they feel like an important part of a community. The survey also asked the clarifying question, "What makes you feel like an important part of the community in the Red Cross food aid?" This question garnered a total of 154 answers.

***"Having nice people around me. A nice community and a group that I've become familiar with. I always feel welcome when I participate in the Red Cross's food aid activities."***

***"I feel like I'm similar to / in the same situation as the others who attend the event."***

***"I have the opportunity to support my community as a volunteer." (response has not been translated)***

The community spirit largely arises from interactions with other people in need of aid but also from the volunteers' ability to make people feel welcome. Some of the beneficiaries also volunteer for the benefit of the local community. Volunteers whose first language is something other than Finnish or Swedish and volunteers belonging to other minorities may have an opportunity to support their own communities.

***"I'm accepted as I am."***

***"The Red Cross workers are friendly, and some are even affectionate, impartial and appreciative."***

***"Trust."***

Some of the respondents talk about workers or personnel, but they are probably referring to the branch's volunteers. Showing appreciation and treating and interacting with people as equals are repeatedly mentioned as important sources of community spirit in the answers. Many beneficiaries feel that the community accepts them as they are. Trust is also brought up, but it remains unclear whether the respondent in question is talking about their own trust towards the food aid activities or trust shown towards the respondent. It is also important to note that the Red Cross's principles include neutrality, which means that the organisation is not committed to any political, ideological or religious movements.

***"Food aid is of great help to an informal caregiver. I have more time for housework. There are social interactions in the food queue."***

***"– you often even hear useful information."***

***"We can relax our minds. And my kids can do activities with international kids." (response has not been translated)***

Food aid activities also provide a place where people can take a moment to relax in the middle of their busy lives and where immigrants may be able to meet each other. Food aid may save time for people such as informal caregivers, and useful information may also be shared at the location.

## Feedback on communality and impact

The suggestions for improvement and open feedback are also interspersed with comments related to communality and impact. There were also some answers to the question "What makes you feel like an important part of the community in the Red Cross food aid?" that are fit to be considered as feedback.

***"I wish that those who visit distribution points would be given roles in the volunteer activities. That would increase social inclusion, improve functional ability and bring meaning to life."***

***"Perhaps more events for young people."***

Beneficiaries who have become involved in the activities as volunteers were already previously mentioned in this report. Some of the respondents wish for more opportunities to participate. Some respondents who do not speak Finnish or Swedish have asked in the open feedback how they can become volunteers. The suggestions for improvement also include requests for events for young people. Similarly, not all of the respondents among the adult population feel that they have much to talk about with food aid users representing different generations.

***"For people in poor physical condition who can't come in person! They can't get a bag or any of the other things."***

***"– 'a bit' challenging for someone with reduced mobility when there are stairs."***

It is pointed out in the feedback that there are people who are unable to attend food aid events in person. These kinds of vulnerable people are excluded not only from food aid activities but also from the community spirit that is created on location. Moreover, not all service points are accessible to people with reduced mobility who are able to come in person. On the other hand, in some areas food aid volunteers have brought food to people who are unable to come and pick it up in person.

***"Valuable volunteer work, even though many of those helped by food aid spend the money they save on tobacco, beer, drugs, etc."***

The answers also included some in which beneficiaries criticise other beneficiaries. One example they bring up is beneficiaries coming to distribution points under the influence of alcohol. Some of the respondents also have a suspicious attitude towards food aid users with an immigrant background. Of course, it is important to take into account actual disruptive behaviour, such as pushing.

***"Equal treatment of all food aid users (equity is a value of the FRC): It must be ensured based on the amount of food available that everyone who has lined up receives at least one full meal, and if food is scarce, people wearing FRC vests must inform those in line about the situation and communicate in order to decide how the limited amount of food will be distributed. Those distributing the food must not take food first. The activities should instil trust under all circumstances."***



A bit of criticism was also provided in relation to the themes of equity and trust. It would be ideal for the food to be distributed in equal portions, but this is not always possible. However, most of the respondents feel that the service is a success and many have found a community:

***“This beautiful Friday gathering we almost forgot all our worries by sharing a cup of coffee and chilling with friends around.” (response has not been translated)***

## Section summary

Approximately 71 per cent of the respondents say that the Red Cross's food aid activities have improved their well-being. The majority of the respondents in all groups formed based on the respondents' employment situation feel that the impact on their well-being has been positive. This proportion is over 70 per cent in all groups except those on parental or child care leave (less than 60%), old-age pensioners (less than 70%) and those participating in rehabilitative work activity or similar (slightly less than 70%). The corresponding proportion varies from 68.13 to 74.16 per cent between the different household types. The largest proportion (74.16%) is accounted for by households with two adults and a child or children. In their answers, the respondents explain that their experiences of communality in food aid activities are based on the volunteers' ability to face the beneficiaries and be considerate of them as well as the opportunity to meet peers who are in the same situation. Many say that they feel welcome at food aid events and are even able to relax in them. Nevertheless, there is still much work left to do in order to make the rest of those who long for a sense of community to feel good and perhaps even take part in the volunteer activities. Of course, we also respect those who are not looking for communal activities from food aid activities.

## Conclusions

### ***“Food aid has brought new relationships to my life.”***

The fundamental mission of the Red Cross is to help those who are in the weakest position and the most vulnerable, and humanity is the core value in food aid activities. We aim to meet every individual seeking help with respect and provide comprehensive support. Food aid plays a significant role in enhancing participation, a sense of community and well-being. Our goal is for people to feel valued and able to influence things within their community.

Approximately 60 per cent of the respondents to the survey are working-age people, while approximately 38 per cent are over the age of 65. Among the respondents, there are particularly many people living alone (approx. 53%), old-age pensioners (approx. 40%) and people whose highest level of education is a vocational qualification (approx. 37%). Women account for approximately 52 per cent and men for approximately 45 per cent of the respondents.

The Red Cross's food aid activities have improved the well-being of the beneficiaries. **More than 70 per cent of the respondents say that using food aid has improved their own or their family's well-being.** The majority of the respondents in all groups formed based on the employment situation and household type feel that their well-being has improved. Similarly, there are no clear differences in the perceived impact on well-being between those whose use of food aid has increased as a result of the cuts made to social security this year and those whose use of food aid has not changed at all. Of all of the respondents, 12 people (1.8%) answered that their well-being had worsened as a result of them using food aid.

In light of the results, the efforts to build a sense of community have also borne fruit. People do not only use food aid to receive food; other things identified by the respondents as important reasons for using food aid include meeting other people (approx. 27%), feeling like an important part of a community (approx. 26%), a sense of safety (approx. 15%) and the fact that useful services and activities are offered in conjunction with food aid activities (approx. 9%). It is also important to consider the holistic impact of food intake on well-being; nutritious food supports mental well-being as well.

The feedback commends the volunteers for their friendliness and for facing people as they are. For some of the respondents, using food aid is also an opportunity to relax for a moment amidst the troubles of everyday life. For some immigrants, food aid activities are a place where they can receive important information, familiarise themselves with Finnish food and become a part of communities.

From the perspective of social inclusion, the survey's results may be compared to the division of social inclusion and activities promoting social inclusion into three areas, as described in the introduction: social inclusion in your personal life, social inclusion in communities and influencing processes, and partaking in the benefits provided by your social environment. Food aid can support social inclusion in the individual's personal life because even a small amount of money saved provides the beneficiary with a few more options to spend their money in a way that is important to them. Communitarity and meeting new people through food aid activities can support the sense of belonging to meaningful groups. By giving the beneficiaries equal consideration and listening to their wishes, the volunteers support the beneficiaries' sense of living life in their own way as well as their opportunities to influence things in the community. Partaking in the benefits provided by your social environment is realised through joint activities, and beneficiaries who have become volunteers in particular also have an opportunity to share the benefits with others.

### **A large proportion of the respondents (approx. 41%) say that food aid is necessary for their coping.**

When asked about the sufficiency of their income, a total of approximately 56 per cent of the respondents said that their income is either only sufficient for the necessary expenses or not even all of those at times. Approximately 17 per cent of the respondents constantly have insufficient income for living. Approximately 21 per cent occasionally have money left over after paying for the necessary expenses. The amount of money left over was not asked about, but the amount saved is not necessarily sufficient to cover unexpected costs. Old-age pensioners in particular are known to live on a very tight budget in many cases, and they may occasionally have small amounts of money left over even from a small pen-

sion. This is also most likely apparent in the fact that almost as many old-age pensioners (30.5%) as employees, entrepreneurs and self-employed people (31.9%) say that they have money left over after paying for the necessary expenses.

Among the respondents, those who constantly have insufficient income for living account for approximately 33 per cent of those unable to work, approximately 29 per cent of unemployed or furloughed people, approximately 23 per cent of students and approximately 21 per cent of those on disability pension. Approximately 9 per cent of old-age pensioners and 6 per cent of employees or similar people constantly have insufficient income. Among households with one adult and a child or children, also called single-parent households, the households that constantly have insufficient income for living account for 30 per cent. It is also less common for families with children to have money left over after paying for the necessary expenses than households without children.

Use of food aid appears to be increasing, as **the proportion accounted for by first-time users of all respondents has more than doubled between the surveys carried out in 2022 and 2024** (7.0% -> 17.9%). There is a relatively large number of respondents under the age of 40 among the first-timers. Of the first-timers, approximately 29 per cent are unemployed or furloughed and approximately 24 per cent are students. Approximately 34 per cent of the first-timers are families with children, but adults living alone are the majority (approximately 40%) among first-timers as well. In addition to first-timers, we could examine growth in the group that has been using food aid for less than six months, but there may be great internal variation in this group depending on how many food aid events the respondent has attended. Some branches organise food aid activities more often, while others organise them less often. Moreover, the respondents do not necessarily attend every single event that they could attend, and some may only need food aid for a very short period of time.

**Almost 60 per cent of the respondents say that this year's cuts to social security have increased their need to use food aid.** Among those who answered like this, the reason for using food aid that stands out slightly more strongly than in the rest of the data is that the respondents consider food aid to be necessary for their coping (approx. 47%). The corresponding figure for the overall data was approximately 41 per cent. The only age group in which the cuts to social security did not increase the majority's need to use food aid were people over the age of 65 (approx. 44%). However, people over the age of 65 form such a large group of respondents that less than half of them is sufficient to constitute the majority among those whose food aid use was increased by the cuts. We must keep in mind that the cuts to social security have primarily affected pensioners in the form of a reduction in housing allowance, and this reduction, which is implemented in conjunction with an adjustment of the housing allowance, has not yet necessarily been realised at the time of the survey. Among the 41–50 and 51–65 age groups, more than 70 per cent say that the cuts have increased their use of food aid. The corresponding figure is 75 per cent among unemployed or furloughed people and approximately 68 per cent among students. Of families with children, approximately 64 per cent say that the cuts to social security have increased their use of food aid.

The growth of families with children as a group of users in food aid activities gives cause to think about the well-being of low-income families with children. The Children's Voice 2024 survey by Save the Children Finland was answered by 1,653 children and young people aged 12 to 17 from around Finland. Of all of the respondents, 5 per cent say that they do not have sufficient food regularly available at home, whereas among the children of low-income families this figure is 19 per cent. Of all of the respondents, 50 per cent are concerned about the future and 31 per cent are afraid of not finding work in the future. Among the children of low-income families, the corresponding figures are 71 and 51 per cent, respectively. (Save the Children Finland 2024.)

For its part, the Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health (SOSTE) published a survey in November 2024 in which 68 per cent of the employees in the social welfare sector, 85 per cent of the church social workers, 65 per cent of the national health and social services organisations and 45 per cent of the local health and social services organisations that responded say that they have noted a decrease in the ability to make a living among many or relatively many of the people that they have interacted with. According to the survey, the increase in housing costs and the expensiveness of food are major factors

in the decrease in the ability to make a living. Depending on the party in question, 41–79 per cent of the respondents deemed that the high price of food has greatly contributed to the difficulties with making a living among the people whom the respondents have faced. The cuts to social security were also taken into consideration in the survey: For example, 59 per cent of the employees in the social welfare sector deem that the reduction or termination of housing allowance has greatly contributed to the difficulties with making a living among the people whom they have faced. (SOSTE 2024b.) These observations support the observations made by the present survey regarding the increased need for aid among people with a low income.

**The need for food aid is greater than we are able to meet.** A large proportion of the respondents wish for more frequent and more regular distribution of food as well as material aid. **A total of approximately 48 per cent of the respondents have also been using food aid for at least one year**, which means that there is a very large number of people with a prolonged need for food aid. However, the amount of waste food distributed has decreased, and only a limited number of material aid payment cards are available for distribution. The despair among the people in need of help is evident in the answers and is the most strongly visible in the individual answers saying that, without food aid, the person would even be forced to steal food or stop buying their prescription medication. Stealing is a very extreme way to obtain food, and deciding not to buy medication could have significant health consequences. Medications may be a large expense for a person with a low income. Kela also does not reimburse the costs of medication unless the maximum limit on out-of-pocket costs is exceeded, and not all medications are included in the reimbursement system.

In the feedback and suggestions for improvement, some of the respondents commend the activities for their participatory nature, while others feel that it is insufficient. The food distributed is sometimes not as varied as the people in need of help would prefer, and some of the respondents wish for more fruit and vegetable products, for instance. A few of the responses call for meticulousness in screening the food products because there may occasionally have been spoiled products in the bags of food. The functionality of queuing systems gives rise to much contemplation; for example, some consider queue tickets to be a good practice, while others think that it does not work sufficiently well either. The success of the food and queuing is highly dependent on the situation, but, of course, the organisation must aim to implement a service that is as functional as possible.

Among the responses written by people who speak neither Finnish nor Swedish, a strong desire to participate in the volunteer activities also emerges. This may indicate that some foreign-language speakers have not found or been provided with understandable information about the opportunities to participate in the activities, or that the area in question may have had difficulties with involving them in the activities. Such opportunities should be taken into account in communications and the development of food aid activities in order to leverage the volunteer potential of people who speak neither Finnish nor Swedish.

When the need for food aid grows but the amount of food available decreases, the significance of social inclusion and communality in supporting the most vulnerable people is highlighted further. However, the primary motivational factor for those in need of aid remains receiving food for free or at least at an affordable price. Food aid in all of its forms is expected to remain an important part of the efforts to alleviate the financial difficulties of Finns with a low income, but food aid does not offer a resolution to the root causes of the problems. Nevertheless, food aid can support more permanent solutions by facilitating things such as the provision of advisory services by social workers in conjunction with food aid, as the underutilisation of social benefits has been identified as a problem that could be reduced (SOSTE 2023).

When considering future solutions and developing the food aid activities, we must also take into account that even the surveys do not reveal the whole truth. The surveys, just like the food aid activities in general, do not necessarily reach all of those in need of aid who are unable to come to the food aid distribution points in person due to reasons such as disabilities or feelings of shame. Moreover, not everyone who uses food aid necessarily wishes to respond to surveys. It is difficult if not impossible to gather information about the situation of such people. Furthermore, the impacts of the cuts to social security are not yet necessarily visible in full. Time will tell whether the need for aid will continue to grow.

The responses received to this survey offer valuable information about the situation of those in need of food aid and the context in which the food aid activities of the Finnish Red Cross operate. We take joy in the successes of the food aid activities and continue to develop the activities purposefully. The volunteers involved in and cooperating with the food aid activities are our most important resource, and we would like to thank them warmly not only for organising the food aid activities but also for gathering this survey data. We would also like to thank our cooperation partners with whom we organise food aid activities and participatory activities. Cooperation with the public sector will be highlighted even further now that the discretionary government grant for food aid is consolidated.



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Government Decree STM/2024/98. [Government Decree on Awarding Discretionary Government Grants for Food Aid Activities – Government](#)

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## Appendix 2: Survey form

### The FRC's national food aid survey

Compulsory questions marked with an asterisk (\*)

#### Purpose of the survey

The purpose of this Finnish Red Cross survey is to study food aid recipients' circumstances, well-being and the impact of participatory events held in conjunction with food aid. The survey is being carried out throughout the entire country, and it will provide up-to-date information about food aid operations from the recipients' perspective. The responses will be used to develop food aid further and, more extensively, as support in the decision-making that concerns food aid. Please respond to the survey by 23 September 2024 at the latest.

Your experience with food aid is invaluable to the Finnish Red Cross. The information you provide will help us shed light on the experiences and needs of food aid recipients. This is vital for the continuous improvements to the service. We thank you in advance for your responses!

#### Prize draw

A total of 20 food gift cards worth €30 each will be raffled off to respondents who have provided their contact details. There is a separate link at the end of the survey where you can enter your contact details if you would like to be entered in the raffle. This information will not be linked to your survey responses and will be erased after the raffle.

#### Information processing and data protection

The data collected through the survey will be processed anonymously and confidentially, in accordance with the Finnish Red Cross data protection policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). No personal information will be gathered from the respondents, and the dataset will be analysed in a way that does not allow individuals to be identified based on their responses. By submitting a completed survey form, you agree to the use of your information in the survey analysis and report.

#### 1. Your gender \*

Female

Male

Other

I prefer not to say



2. Which age group are you in? \*

Under 29 years of age

29–40 years of age

41–50 years of age

51–65 years of age

Over 65 years of age

I prefer not to say

3. In which area is the Red Cross food aid that you visit? \*

Uusimaa

Southwest Finland

Satakunta

Kanta-Häme

Pirkanmaa

Päijät-Häme

Kymenlaakso

South Karelia

South Savo

North Savo

North Karelia

Central Finland

South Ostrobothnia

Ostrobothnia

Central Ostrobothnia

North Ostrobothnia

Kainuu

Lapland

Åland

4. Highest level of education you have completed:

- Comprehensive school
- Vocational qualification
- General upper secondary level
- Post-secondary level
- Undergraduate degree
- Postgraduate degree

5. Which of the following best describes your current employment situation (select one):

- Employee or entrepreneur/self-employed
- Unemployed/furloughed
- Unable to work
- On parental or child care leave
- Student
- Old-age pensioner
- On disability pension
- Sickness allowance/rehabilitation allowance
- Participating in rehabilitative work activity, a work try-out or similar

6. Type of your household:

- One adult without children
- Two adults without children
- One adult with a child/children
- Two adults with a child/children
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

7. How would you describe your current financial situation?

- My income covers the necessary expenses, and I occasionally have a bit of extra money left over

- My income only covers the necessary expenses
- My income is sometimes insufficient to cover even the necessary expenses, and occasionally I am unable to pay for some of them (e.g. medicine, food, bills)
- My income is constantly insufficient for living
- I cannot say/It is difficult to say

8. How long have you been visiting food aid events?

- This is my first time
- Less than six months
- Less than 12 months
- 1–2 years
- Over two years

9. I visit Red Cross food aid because... (select one or more options)

- Food aid is necessary for me or my family to cope
- Food aid makes my everyday life easier
- The necessary services/activities are offered to me in connection with food aid
- Meeting other people in the food queue is important to me
- I feel like an important part of a community
- Food aid makes me feel safer
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

10. What makes you feel like an important part of the community in the Red Cross food aid?

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11. Have this year's cuts in social security (e.g. housing and unemployment subsidies) increased your visits to food aid?

Yes

No

12. How has food aid from the Red Cross affected your or your family's well-being?

It has improved it

It has had no effect on it

It has made it worse

13. Here you can specify in more detail how food aid from the Red Cross has affected your or your family's life.

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14. How would you develop Finnish Red Cross food aid activities?

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15. Open feedback

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16. I authorise the Finnish Red Cross to use anonymous quotes in communications and marketing. My quotes may be shortened if necessary. \*

Yes

No