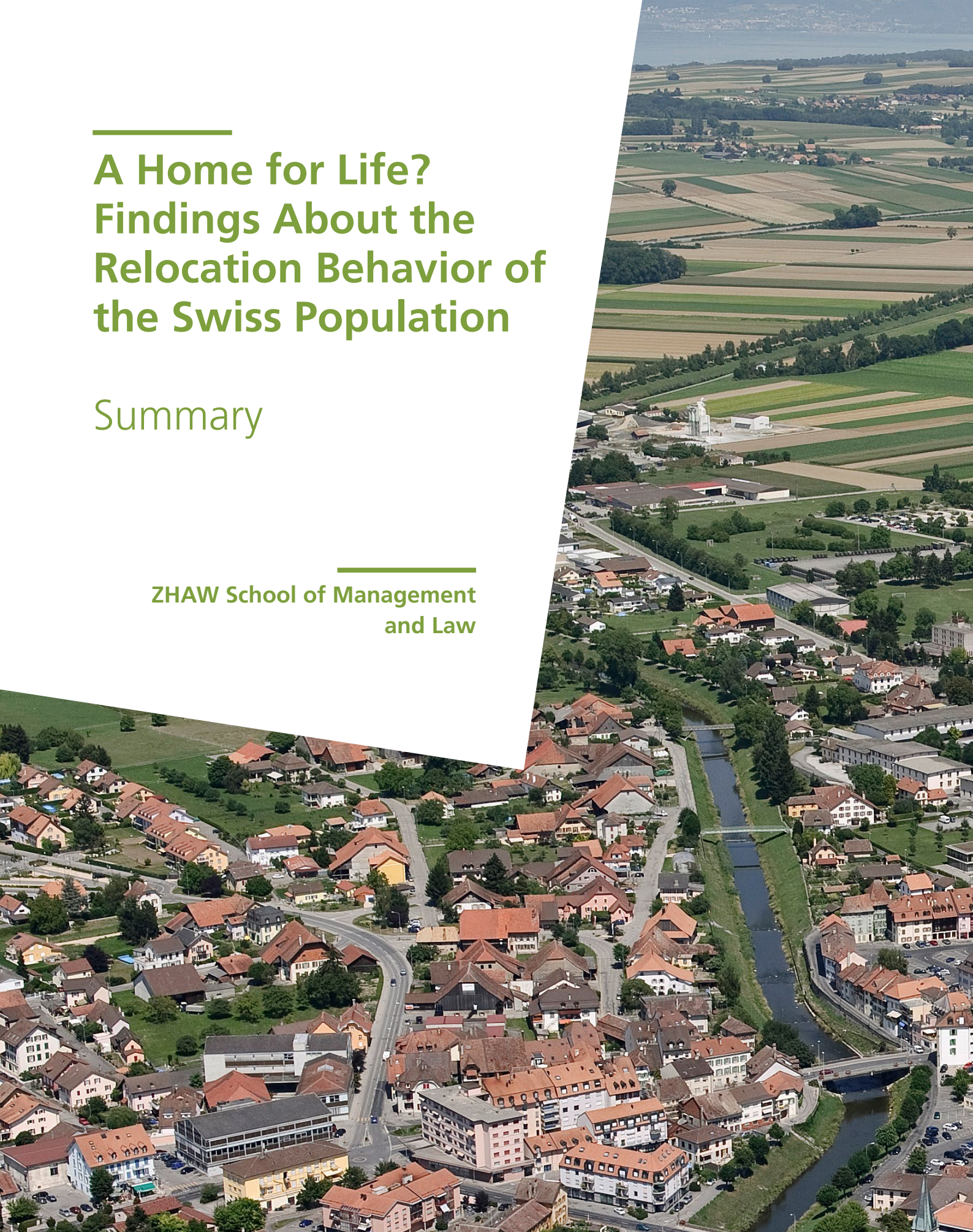

A Home for Life? Findings About the Relocation Behavior of the Swiss Population

Summary

ZHAW School of Management
and Law



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Note

This summary and the management summary of this report are available in German, French, Italian and English. The complete report is available in German.

The report reflects the views of the authors, which do not necessarily correspond to those of the commissioning parties.

Cover Image

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Summary

INTRODUCTION

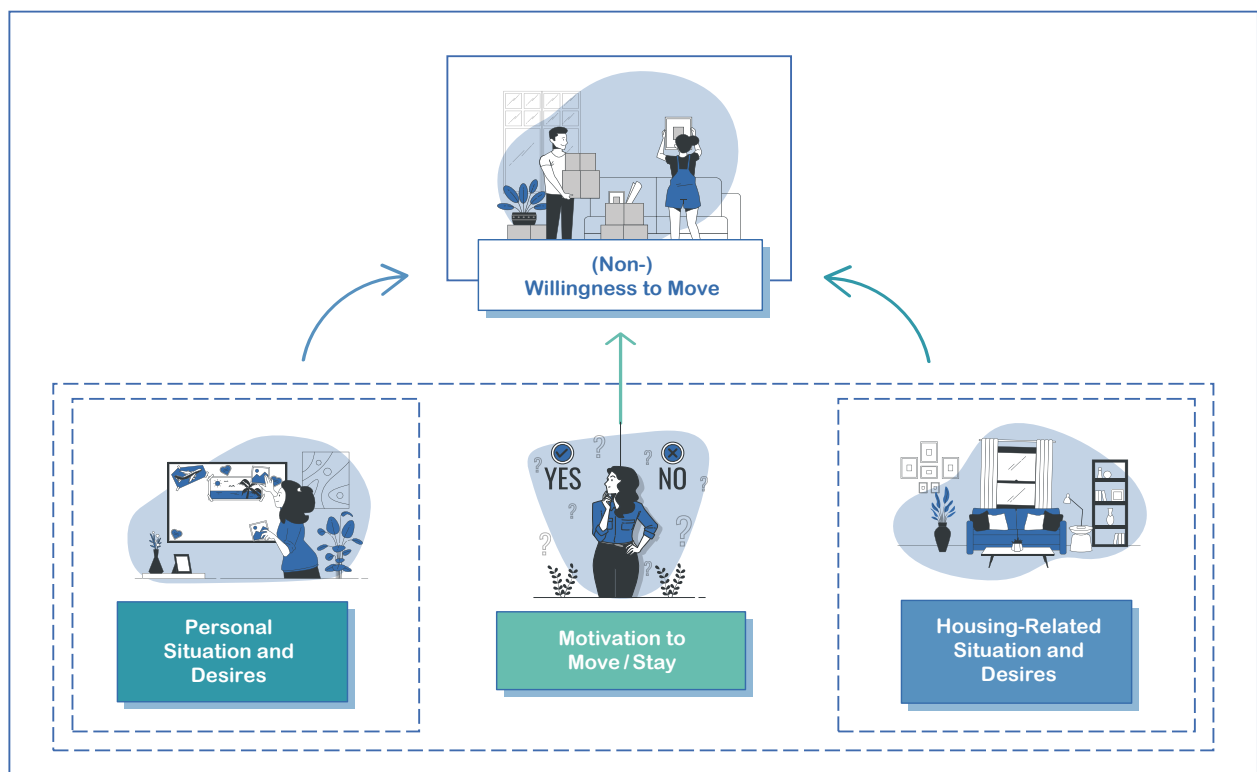
According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2022), the **actual relocation rate** in 2021 was 10.1 percent. This means that only one in 10 people moved in 2021. However, it is not enough to look only at the explicit rate or the willingness to move. To better understand relocation behavior, it is also necessary to identify its **influencing factors**. Schneider (1997) emphasized that «relocation occurs when living conditions and housing conditions clash and, in addition, financial resources are available to bear the corresponding costs». This study analyzes the motivators of why a person moves (**motivation to move**).

Conversely, however, it is also important to understand people's **motivation to stay**. Clark, Deurloo, and Dieleman (2008), for example, emphasized that relocation studies pay too little attention to the stages characterized by stability. Another study has shown that in Europe, people

will move an average of only four times in their lifetime. In Switzerland, this is 5.6 times (OTS, 2015). So what ties the Swiss to their current homes, and what prevents them from moving?

Based on these findings, a better understanding of residential mobility and its influencing factors can be gained. In addition to the motivation to move or stay, we have surveyed and analyzed people's **current situation as well as their desires, both personal and housing-related**.

This is the second study of the series. Study 1 focuses on what constitutes the dream of home ownership.¹ In Study 2, the focus, among other things, is on homeowners, but it also includes tenants to give a comprehensive picture of residents' (non-)willingness to move. The overarching goal is to increase housing flexibility. The third and final study in this series will identify fields of action and propose solutions.



¹ See Study 1: [Homeownership in Switzerland: Why Owning a Home is a Dream of Potential Homeowners | ZHAW digitalcollection](#)

Study Design

The quantitative data was collected in February and March 2023 using an online survey written in German and French. A total of 1,094 residents in German- and French-speaking Switzerland took part. The survey is representative concern-

ing age (with an age range of between 18 and 69 years) and gender. It shows the home ownership-tenancy ratio and includes all regions of Switzerland (except Ticino). These factors were ensured using quotas, which correspond to the distribution of the Swiss population.

FINDINGS

Willingness to Move

In 2021, some 10 percent of people living in Switzerland moved into a new home, as shown by the relocation statistics of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2022). Willingness to move is higher with 45 percent of the respondents in this representative study planning to move. However, this willingness decreases with increasing age and as people's obligations and dependencies (children, home ownership) increase. A move in Switzerland is a well-considered event: The majority of those willing to move take more than two years to find a suitable new home.

Personal Situation and Desires

Life events can be seen as important drivers of change. The first step was, therefore, to identify the main (potential) relocation triggers:

- **Family events are key relocation triggers:**

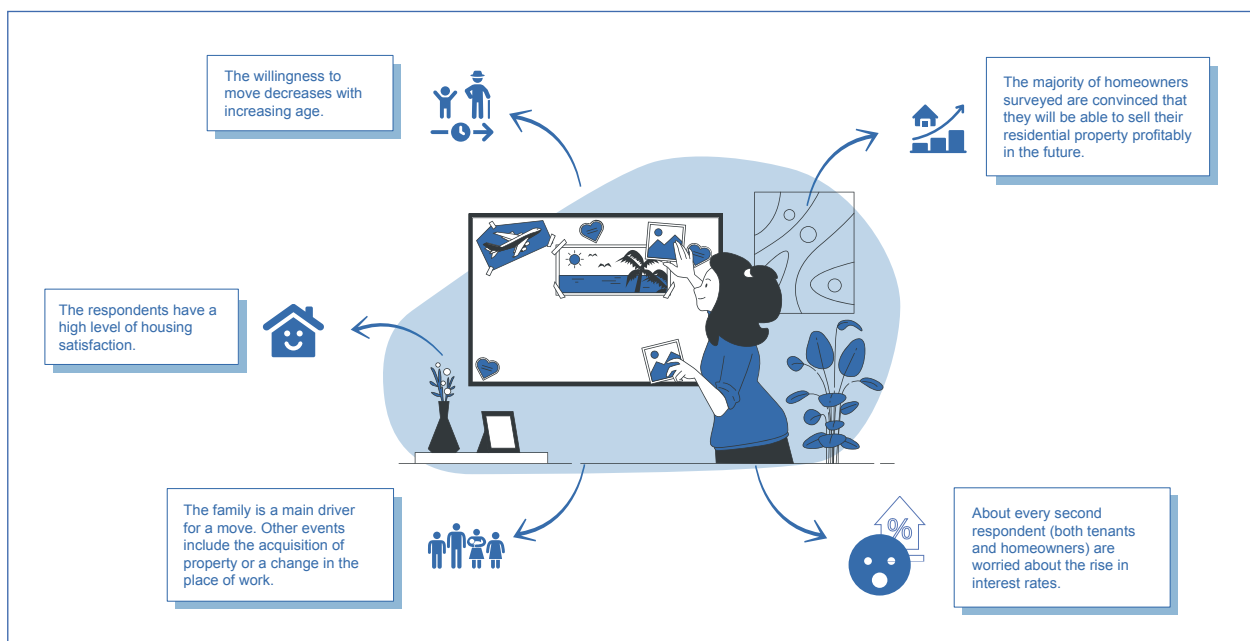
Starting or expanding a family was named one of the most important triggers for moving. While "starting/expanding a family" particularly affects people up to the age

of 39, "children moving out" and "retirement" were also mentioned as important reasons for moving among people over the age of 50. Some individuals were unable to identify any of the above events as moving triggers. For them, the willingness to move may be based on personal changes in needs (e.g., housing satisfaction).

- **Events related to home ownership increase the desire to relocate:**

Starting/expanding a family increases the willingness to move to a large extent. In addition, events related to the affordability of a home are also relevant. As a result, the acquisition of a home, the attainment of sufficient wealth (e.g., through inheritance), and lower real estate prices lead to an increased desire to move. Very few events have an inhibiting effect on the desire to move: Only the higher mortgage interest rates were described as inhibiting by 40 percent of respondents.

In the second step, our research focused on respondents' personal situation at the time and their dreams for the future to determine factors influencing their willingness to move.



The following picture emerged:

- **Housing satisfaction is high:**

Housing satisfaction is generally at a high level. By comparison, homeowners and those reluctant to move, including the older generation, showed a higher level of housing satisfaction in the survey. Thus, housing satisfaction is negatively correlated with willingness to move: Lower satisfaction is associated with a higher willingness to move.

- **A decrease in the value of residential property is not expected:**

The majority of the homeowners surveyed are convinced that they will be able to sell their homes for a profit. This is also reflected in the fact that only a minority expects a financial loss in value or is afraid of a drop in demand for residential property. Home ownership continues to be perceived as stable in value. In particular, the perception of possible falling real estate prices and the threat of a

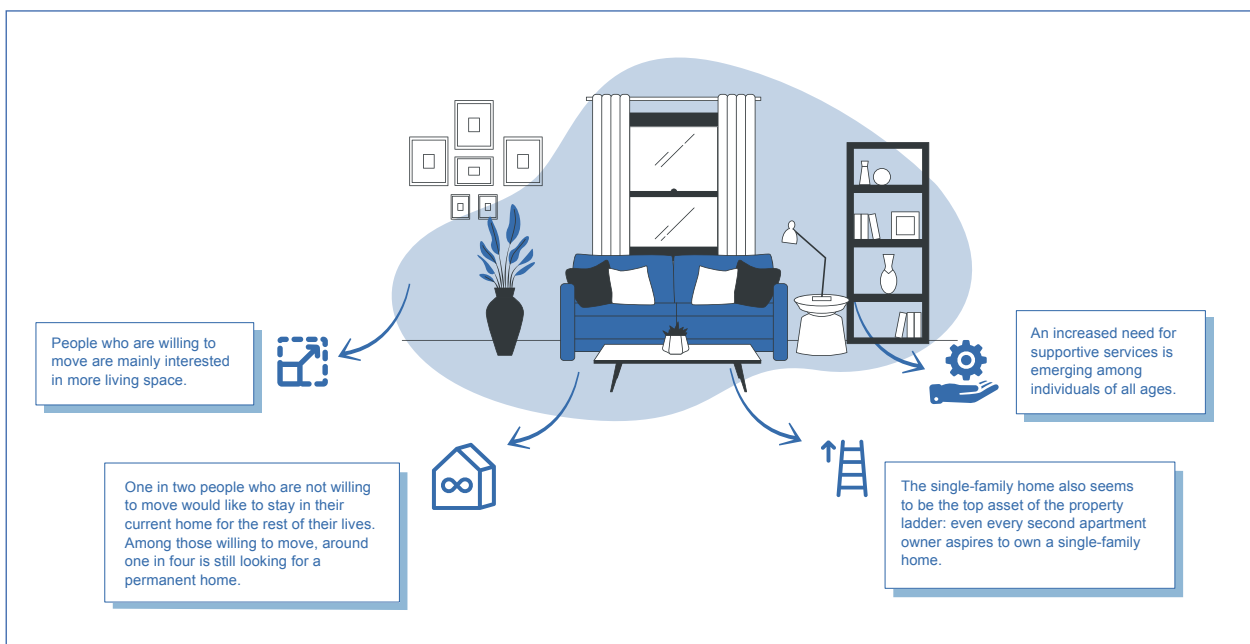
drop in demand differ between homeowners who are willing to move and those who are not.

- **Interest rate development leads to uncertainty:**

About every second respondent, both tenants and homeowners, expressed worry about rising interest rates. Younger homeowners, in particular, are afraid that they will no longer be able to afford their homes in the future. The willingness to move also depends on respondents' assessment of the future: For example, homeowners who are willing to move are more likely to be afraid that they will no longer be able to afford their home ownership or that they will lose it because of the market situation. With their intended move, they are thus acting proactively.

Housing-Related Situation and Desires

In addition to people's current personal situation and desires, the factors influencing housing were also analyzed. Of particular relevance in this case were the people who are



willing to move. The aim is to determine what future housing situation they would like to have. The following findings emerged:

- **Reluctance to lose living space:**

Compared to people who are reluctant to move, people who are willing to move currently occupy smaller apartments. The majority of them seek to increase the size of their living space, often to a level similar to those who are not willing to move. Only a few respondents expressed an interest in reducing their living space, predominantly those belonging to the older generation.

- **Desire to be a homeowner:**

Around three-quarters of those willing to move currently live in rented accommodation. The younger a person who is willing to move is, the more likely they are to want a single-family home as their next form of housing. A single-family home also appears to be the top priority in terms of people's "real estate ladders" or housing paths: One in two apartment owners aspires to own a single-family home. Once the step into home ownership has been taken, only a minority of respondents decide to return to a

rental situation. Thus, the unwritten law "once home ownership, always home ownership" largely applies.

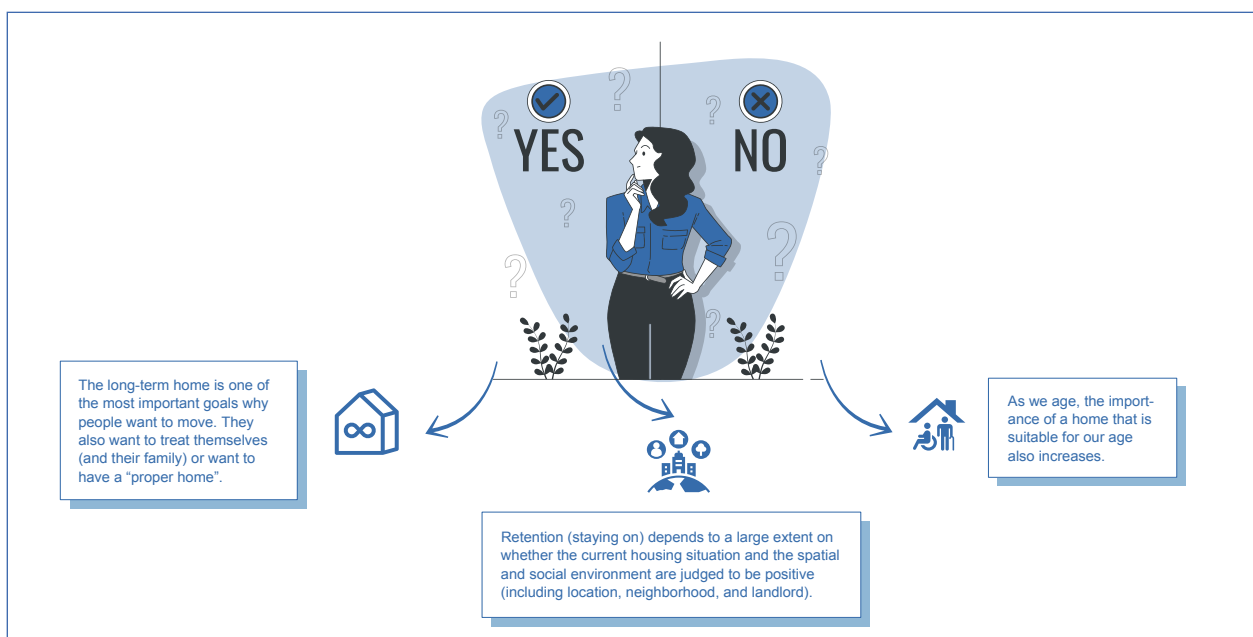
- **Desire to have a permanent home:**

People who are not willing to move have been living in their current homes longer and would like to continue to do so: One in two people who are not willing to move would like to stay in their current homes for the rest of their lives. Among those willing to move, around one in four is still looking for such a home.

- **Desire to have some support:**

An increased need for supportive services (including concierge services) is emerging among individuals of all ages. Depending on the stage in life or the form of living preferred, intergenerational or urban living are also options.

The study results show that there is a tendency to keep or have more. In many cases, a move is also associated with climbing the next step on the real estate ladder, either by aspiring to a larger home or moving up to a perceived better form of housing. Downsizing in terms of housing space and type of housing is only implemented to a limited extent.



Motivation to Move or Stay

- **A long-term solution and personal well-being are key factors in moving:**

The desire to find a long-term home is one of the most important reasons to move. In addition, many people want to spoil or reward themselves (and their families) with a nice place to live, a proper home. Finding a more reasonably priced home, therefore, is not a priority. However, it is still a relevant criterion for every second person who is willing to move.

- **The spatial and social environment are factors in staying:**

Whether to stay or move depends to a large extent on whether the current housing situation and the spatial and social environment are judged to be positive (e.g., location, neighborhood, and landlord). From a financial perspective, many homeowners see their home as an investment for their retirement, which prevents them from changing their place of residence.

- **Their children's relocation behavior is a factor in staying for the older generation:**

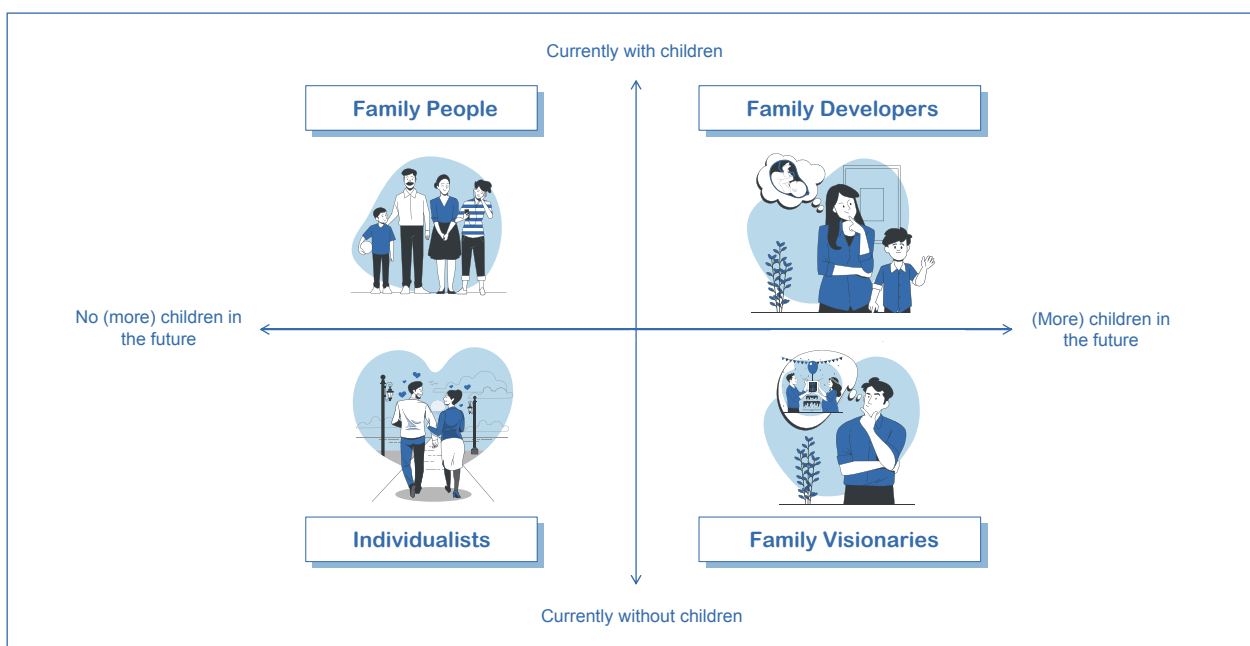
Compared with the older generation, the dimensions "a good home for my children" and "proximity to my place of work" are particularly pronounced for the younger generation. In contrast, the importance of a home that is suitable for one's age increases with age. The sedentariness of their children influences the motivation of the over-60-year-olds to remain where they are.

Focus Areas

Various focus areas were identified to highlight important aspects. First, the family planning stages were examined in more detail using corresponding typologies. Next, downsizing was analyzed in more detail. Finally, homeowners were asked further questions to gain a clearer understanding of their current situation, their aspirations, and their motivation to remain homeowners.

The Family

Four family types were identified based on people's family



situations and their plans concerning children. While “Individualists” have no children and do not wish to have any in the future, “Family Visionaries” are still childless but plan to have children one day. “Family Developers” have children, but their families are not yet complete, and “Family People” have children but do not plan to have any more. These family types are briefly described below:

- The **Family Visionaries** are the youngest age group. They are still at the beginning of their family planning and housing paths. Only around 14 percent own their own home and only a third occupy more than 3.5 rooms. They appear to be restless: Although almost one in two has only lived in their current home for one to two years, 71 percent are looking for a new home.
- The **Family Developers** are in their active family planning phase. They have started a family and would like to expand it further. The majority (71 percent) are married. Family Developers show a high propensity to move, but they are also quite established in their current homes. 41 percent have lived in their current home for three to five years and 45 percent are homeowners.
- The **Family People** belong to families who have completed their family planning. They have children and are not planning to have any more. The average age is 51. This group shows a particularly low willingness to move. 69 percent of respondents stated that they do not want to move. At 47 percent, Family People have the highest home ownership rate and occupy a lot of living space. 80 percent live in homes with more than 3.5 rooms.
- The **Individualists** appear as outliers in the family typology. Compared to the other types, which can be clearly defined by their family situations, they are more difficult to grasp. They have an average age of 51.5 years and a low willingness to move. This is based, among other things, on their personal, social, and residential environment. If

they are looking for a new place to live, however, a long-term home is very important to them.

Downsizing (less living space)

According to behavioral economics, people do not like to give away what they own. With this in mind, our study takes a closer look at downsizing with regard to living space. The desire to downsize affects particularly the older generation, provided they are willing to move at all. Events such as the children moving out or retirement tend to serve as triggers. In particular, age-appropriate, cheaper, and lower-maintenance housing was also cited as a motivation to move.

Home ownership

- **The freedom to design one’s home is a driver for continued home ownership:**

Homeowners particularly value the flexibility to design their home, which they want to continue to be able to do. Interestingly, homeowners who are willing to move and who would like to continue living in their own homes in the future seem to attach a higher social value to home ownership, which they tend to see as a sign of status.

- **There are no extensive remodeling plans:**

The majority of homeowners surveyed want to address low-key remodeling tasks in their homes. Plans include, above all, individual (energy-related) remodeling projects and landscaping. However, around one-third of those not willing to move do not want to make any changes and are thus more passive than homeowners willing to move.

- **Financial support by family is needed, but hardly increasing:**

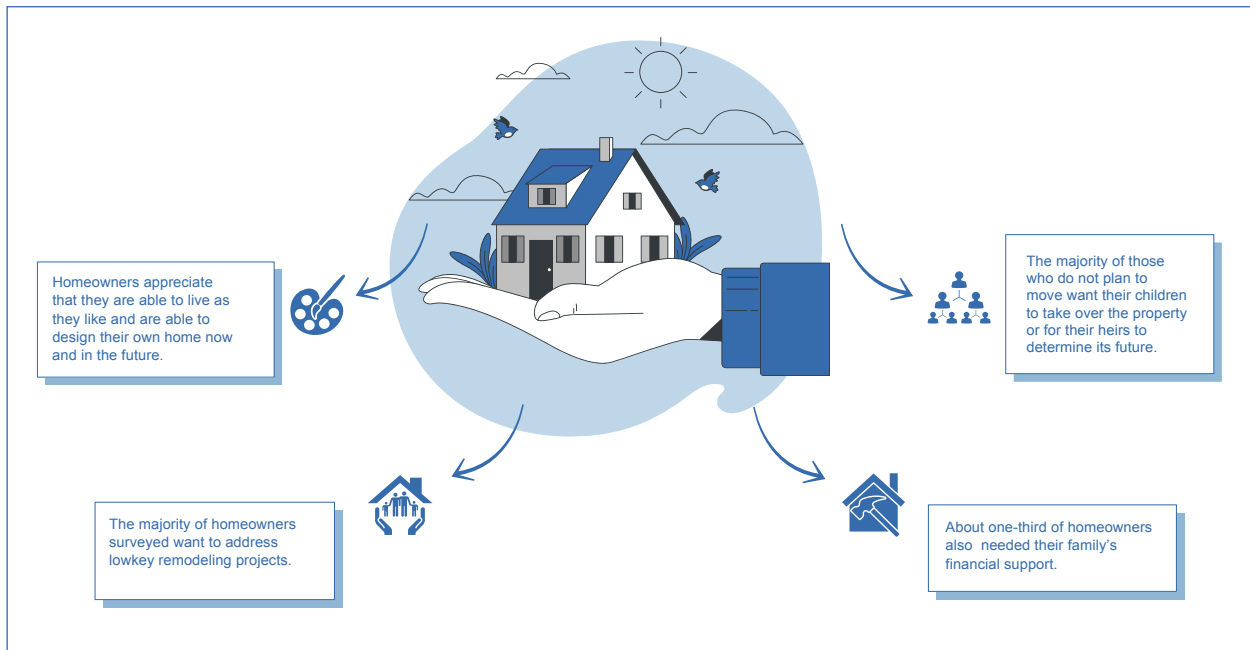
The majority of respondents’ homes were financed with cash or savings. However, around one-third of homeowners also required financial support from their families. This figure has been largely constant in recent years. For around half of all homeowners, accrued pension benefits are also an important source of financing to achieve home ownership.

- **The home should stay in the family:**

The majority of those who do not plan to move want their children to take over the property or for their heirs to determine its future. Those willing to move prefer to sell the property to a third party, while just under a quarter would like to rent it out. However, one-third of those surveyed do not yet have any concrete plans for what to do with their property.

- **The selling price is the main selection criterion:**

Two things are especially important to people who wish to sell their residential property: the highest possible selling price and a buyer they like. Further contact with the buyer, however, tends to be avoided.



CONCLUSION & OUTLOOK

The current study shows that 45 percent of the people surveyed are willing to move. This means that every second person in Switzerland can envisage moving in the near future. A further 25 percent do not currently want to move but are open to the idea. Only just 30 percent of respondents are completely settled and do not want to move either now or in the future.

In reality, however, it becomes apparent that the willingness to move reaches its limits due to the complexity of a move as well as the associated uncertainty. From this, an **intention-behavior gap** can be identified: Even if the willingness to move exists, a certain inertia prevails. The intention is thus only realized to a limited extent.

However, one major driver that also leads to willingness and results in concrete behavior can be identified: It is the family planning phase. The expansion phase starts once there is a family. A growing family is a strong incentive for people to increase their living space. The consolidation phase, however, is again characterized by the challenges mentioned above (complexity and uncertainty, among others), although **downsizing** does not only refer to living space. A change of residence can also be accompanied by the loss of precious memories, the need to sell valued objects, or even the loss of social contacts. The latter, for example, can lead to the decision not to move. The provocative question arises: Better never to own than to lose?

In addition to increasing living space, however, the **housing path** or climbing the “housing ladder” is also important.

Based on the survey results, this may to some extent be driven by social norms in Switzerland. Owning a home seems to be desirable. Once someone is a homeowner, they will be reluctant to go back to renting. While the older generation is unwilling to give up their home, the younger generation in particular is looking to buy a home. As a result, demand and supply are not in harmony – and the question must be asked whether other forms of housing might not be better suited to certain phases of life.

Based on the above, the third study will therefore further investigate the following questions:

- **Intention-behavior gap:** What are important moments and events when planning and implementing the consolidation stage? How to proactively create a more flexible living space so that the home does not have to be sold?
- **Downsizing:** What (added) values can be associated with the consolidation phase or with downsizing so that it becomes more attractive to the affected householders? For example: What support services would be welcomed?
- **Housing path:** How can a person’s housing path be reevaluated and reimagined? For example, can new ownership concepts (including lease-purchase or temporary home ownership) influence the housing path? What is the additional space used for (including in the expansion phase)?

