

Insights from Switzerland: The Migration- Mobility Survey



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Explore more data from the Migration Mobility Survey here:
<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/nccr.on.the.move/viz/Migration-MobilitySurvey-Exploration/Survey>

The Importance and Legacy of the Migration-Mobility Survey

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Filling a Knowledge Gap

The Migration-Mobility Survey (MMS) emerged at exactly the right moment, and for reasons that remain compelling today. When the nccr – on the move was first established, its researchers quickly identified a gap in Switzerland between the political salience of migration and the weakness of the country's tools to understand it. Switzerland was, and remains, one of the major immigration countries in Europe relative to its population. Yet knowledge about migration often relied on partial statistics, fragmented evidence, and administrative categories that were not designed to capture the growing complexity of contemporary mobility.

Further, international migration no longer simply means settling permanently in another country. Rather, it now takes various forms, often characterized by repeated moves, temporary stays, or links to several countries. These new forms of migration raise important questions about integration models and the living conditions of the people concerned. Switzerland is a particularly relevant case for addressing these questions, given its high proportion of foreign residents, the diversity of its population, and the close relationship between its economy and international migration.

The challenge was therefore not only to produce more data, but to produce better data: data capable of following migration journeys over time, linking migration to labor markets, family life, integration, mobility, citizenship, and ties across borders, and translating these complex processes into indicators that could inform research, policy, and public debate. In this sense, the MMS should be understood as more than a survey, it is part of a broader effort to better understand migration and make that knowledge useful beyond academia.

From Ambition to Implementation

This broader program was already visible in the NCCR's early planning. The ambition was to improve methods and data for measuring migration to, from, and within Switzerland; to develop user-friendly statistics; and to create a monitoring system capable of capturing forms of movement that are often overlooked, such as circular migration, temporary stays, onward mobility, and changing forms of settlement. The nccr – on the move's ambition was translated into a concrete proposal for a longitudinal survey of immigrants in Switzerland.

During the development of the survey in 2016, several methodological questions arose, starting with who the survey should study. It quickly became clear that such a survey was not well suited to studying people in the asylum sector. The focus therefore shifted to people who had arrived in Switzerland for reasons other than asylum. People who had arrived as children, and whose migration trajectory had largely depended on their parents' decisions, also fell outside one of the survey's main objectives: to understand the individual mechanisms driving migration journeys. Those who arrived after retirement were likewise excluded, since their migration dynamics were likely to differ significantly from those of most immigrants in Switzerland.

The target population was therefore defined as people who had arrived in Switzerland after the age of 18 and who were of working age at the time of the survey. Finally, because the survey sought to focus on contemporary migration movements, it included only people who had been living in Switzerland for less than ten years. Although this decision to restrict the target population can be debated, it allowed us to examine certain themes in greater depth and to develop a relatively coherent questionnaire.

The second question that arose concerned the topics to be included. Quite naturally, we designed a questionnaire focusing on arrival in Switzerland, employment, family life, integration and life in Switzerland. A short module on education was also included, as was another module on naturalization. Additional topics were introduced in the different survey waves at the request of the research teams of the nccr – on the move: These included, for example, transnational entrepreneurship, the impact of Covid-19 on migration flows, and strategies for coping with discrimination. Thus, the survey questionnaire evolved between the first wave in 2016 and the fifth wave in 2024.

A Swiss Parallel to Other European Efforts

The MMS also belongs to a wider set of tools designed to inform migration policy over time. A useful comparison is Germany's SVR Integrationsbarometer, even if the two were developed independently. The SVR instrument measures the "integration climate" towards people with a migration background. The MMS developed a parallel logic for Switzerland, but from the migrants' point of view: it follows trajectories, resources, intentions, attachments, constraints, and experiences among newcomers themselves. If the Integrationsbarometer captures the social climate of reception, the MMS captures how mobility and settlement are experienced in everyday life.

A Lasting Reference Point

While migration issues are highly politicized in Switzerland, the MMS has contributed to grounding public debate in empirical evidence, rather than narratives of crisis, anecdotes, or politicized assumptions—contributing directly to evidence-based policymaking. It has informed integration policy by identifying what facilitates integration, which groups face exclusion risks, and what drives naturalization decisions; it has informed labor-market debates through data on skills, occupational downgrading, career trajectories, and return intentions; and it has documented the transnational ties migrants maintain with their countries of origin.

The survey further shows how the migrant population as a whole is changing over time by reproducing standardized indicators every two years, some of which are presented in this volume. This allows scholars and policymakers to distinguish durable transformations from short-term fluctuations. Finally, the five waves of survey data constitute an exceptional resource for the analysis of migration and provide a national baseline that is essential for future research and policy debate. In a field where public debate often moves faster than empirical knowledge, the MMS has offered a way to slow down the argument, ask better questions, and make evidence available.

The Legacy of the MMS

The legacy of the MMS should therefore be understood broadly. In research terms, it has become a shared empirical infrastructure for the study of the migration-mobility nexus. In policy terms, it has helped ground discussions in evidence. In infrastructural terms, it has generated open data, strengthened cooperation with the Federal Statistical Office, and supported the development of the Migration-Mobility Indicators. In public-debate terms, it has helped turn knowledge on migration into something visible, recurrent, and discussable rather than episodic.

Its most important legacy is therefore not a single finding, however important individual findings may be. Its legacy is the creation of a national reference point: a baseline against which future changes in migration and mobility can be measured, interpreted, and publicly debated. If the MMS is preserved, documented, reused, and further developed, it will remain one of the most durable outputs of the nccr – on the move. It will allow future researchers not only to ask what migration looked like in Switzerland between 2016 and 2024, but also to understand how mobility, settlement, integration, and belonging changed over time.

Methods at a Glance

Philippe Wanner, University of Geneva, Deputy Director nccr – on the move

Survey waves and participation

The MMS was carried out in five waves, in autumn 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022 and 2024. The first wave included 5 976 participants, compared with an initial target of 4 400. For the later waves, the target was 6 800 participants, and the achieved sample sizes were 7 730 in 2018, 7 393 in 2020, 7 207 in 2022 and 6 981 in 2024. The decrease in the number of participants is explained by adjustments to the sample size in order to not exceed 6 800 interviewees. The survey was conducted by the Link Institute (now YouGov), as were the subsequent surveys.

Who was included

The survey focused on people born abroad who arrived in Switzerland at age 18 or older, were 24–64 years old (working age) at the time of the survey, held one of the eligible residence permits (B, C, Ci, L or FDFA), and had arrived in August 2006 or later. In the first wave, the team also aimed to include equal numbers of men and women, as well as a balance between people who had arrived within the past year and those who had arrived one to ten years earlier. These two balancing criteria were dropped from the second wave onwards.

Which nationalities were covered

In 2016, the survey focused on 11 nationalities or groups of nationalities (strata): Germany, Austria, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, North America¹, India, West Africa² and South America³. To make sure that each group was well represented, more people were selected from some groups (over-sampling) so that around 400 interviews could be collected per group. From 2018 onwards, the design expanded to 17 groups by adding Poland, other Eastern European EU/EFTA member states⁴, other Western European EU/EFTA member states⁵, non-EU/EFTA Balkan countries⁶, other Asian countries and other countries⁷. Moreover, the strata “Western Africa” was extended to all African countries. This broader stratification remained in place until the final wave. However, for the analyses presented in this book, a different categorization of countries, based on geopolitical criteria, has been adopted.

1 Canada, United States.
2 Benin, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Cape Verde, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Saint Helena.
3 Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.
4 Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia, Estonia, Lettonia, Lithuania.
5 Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Island, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Chyprus.
6 Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey.
7 Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint-Kitts and Nevis, Australia, New Zealand.

How people were selected and contacted

A sample of 12 600 addresses was provided by the Federal Statistical Office. These addresses were drawn from the Population and Housing Register (SRPH). The sample was drawn on the assumption of a 30% response rate. Selected people received an invitation to take part, with the option of answering online or by telephone. The invitation was sent in the language of the place of residence and, where possible, also in the language of the country of origin, using French, German, Italian, English, Spanish or Portuguese; if this was not possible, English was used. People then received two reminder letters. In the second wave, the reminder letter for the Polish sample was translated into Polish because of the low response rate. From the second wave onwards, email reminders were also sent when an email address was available.

How people were followed over time

Participants were also invited to join a panel, meaning they would be contacted again two years later; after one year, they received a Panel Care Letter to update their address. Thus, from the second wave onwards, the survey included both returning participants (panel sample) and new participants to keep the sample up to date (refreshment sample).

What was asked

The questionnaire focused a wide range of migration-related topics, including arrival in Switzerland, employment, family life, integration and life in Switzerland. It was adjusted from one wave to the next to reflect the interests of the researchers of the nccr-on the move. At the same time, the main themes of migration and integration were included in all five waves, making it possible to compare results across time.

What to keep in mind

The panel suffered from very high attrition. Some participants moved away or could no longer be reached between the drawing of the sample and the survey fieldwork, or between two survey waves. As a result, more than 5% of invitation letters did not reach the intended recipient. Further, the questionnaire was available in six languages, but some comprehension difficulties were observed among communities speaking other languages. Despite these challenges, which are common in surveys of mobile populations, the MMS produced findings that are relevant for both public debate and policymaking, and which you can explore further in this book.

Glossary

Other EU/EFTA: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Hungary, Cyprus, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

Other Europe: Albania, Andorra, Monaco, Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus

Other OECD: Turkey, Chile, Canada, Mexico, United States, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand

Asia: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bhutan, Brunei, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Taiwan (Chinese Taipei), China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Jordan, Cambodia, Qatar, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Oman, Mongolia, Nepal, North Korea, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Syria, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Palestine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Latin America: Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Belize, Honduras, Jamaica, Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela, Dominica, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Kitts and Nevis

Africa: Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Kenya, Comoros, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Zambia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Chad, Tunisia, Uganda, Egypt, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Western Sahara

Secondary I: Lower secondary education, usually the first stage after primary school.

Secondary II: Upper secondary education, usually the stage after lower secondary and before higher education.

Tertiary: Education beyond secondary school, such as university or other higher education.

Migration year intervals: The periods used to group respondents according to the year they first arrived in Switzerland.

Survey year: The year when the respondent took part in the survey.

Chart values: All values presented in the charts are percentages. For visual clarity, the percentage symbol (%) has been omitted from the chart labels.

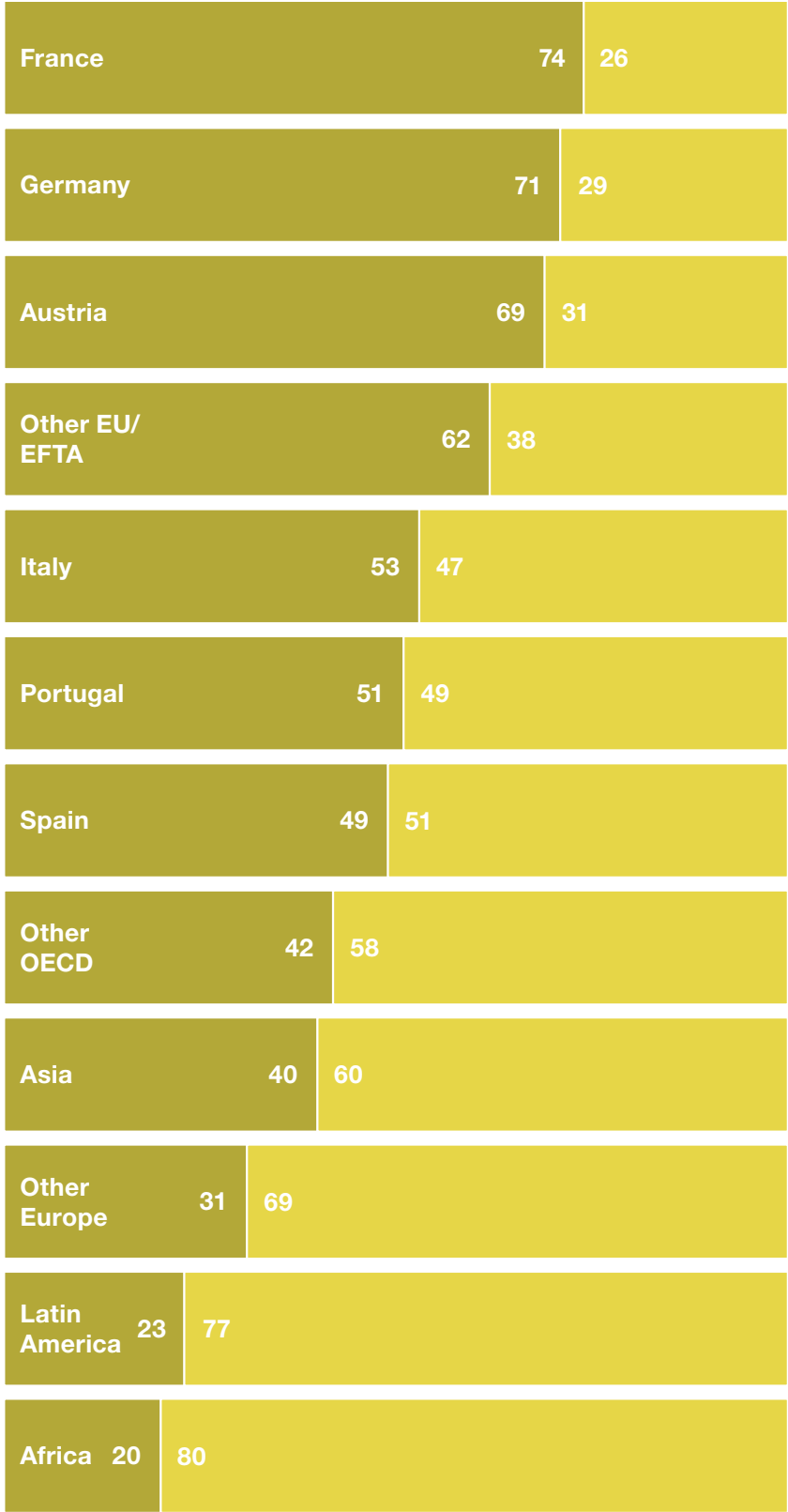
Quotations: All quotations are from respondents to the Migration Mobility Survey.

1 The Journey to Switzerland



Citizens from neighboring countries are more likely to arrive in Switzerland with a job

Job secured before moving to Switzerland, by country of origin in 2024

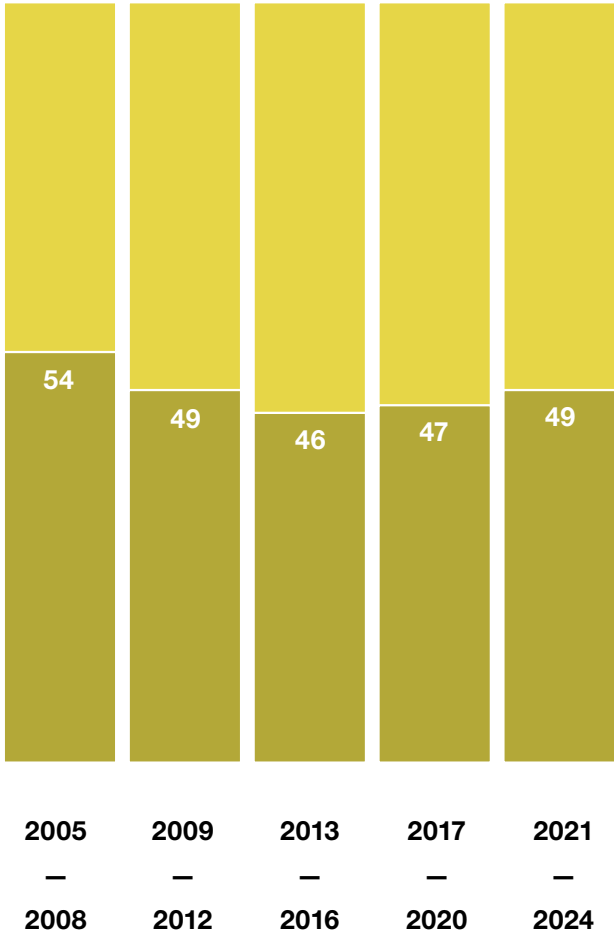


With contract
Without contract

“My wife is depressed because she can’t find a suitable job in Switzerland for more than a year. She has never even been invited for an interview. She never had any problems finding a job in Russia. Many of my expat acquaintances experience the same problem.”

Almost half of migrants arrive in Switzerland with a work contract

Employment contract or job offer in Switzerland at the time of moving, by migration year intervals in the 2024 survey

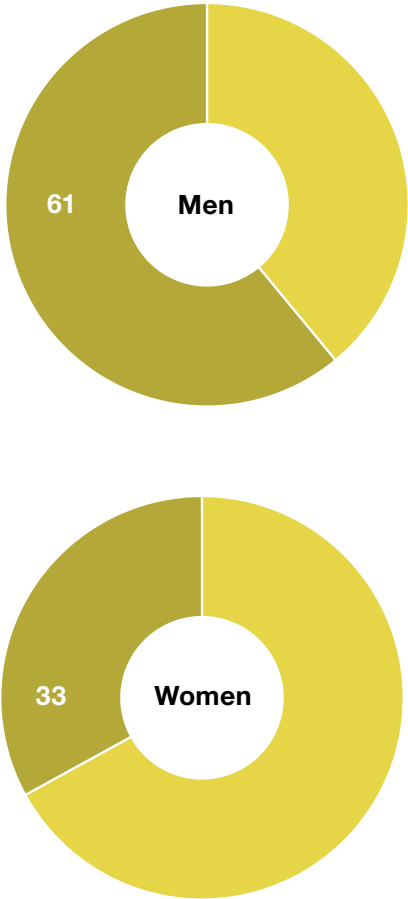


With contract
Without contract

Nearly half of all migrants surveyed in 2024 (47% in 2024) arrived in Switzerland with a job contract or offer. Fewer did so in the 2010s, when migration was driven by the economic situation in southern European countries. Men arrive with jobs much more often than women: 61% vs. 33%. French migrants top the list at 74%, followed by Germans (71%), Austrians (69%), and Italians (53%). Residents of neighbouring countries arrive with contracts more frequently. Non-EU migrants face greater challenges: only 20% from Africa, 23% from Latin America, and 40% from Asia have work lined up upon arrival.

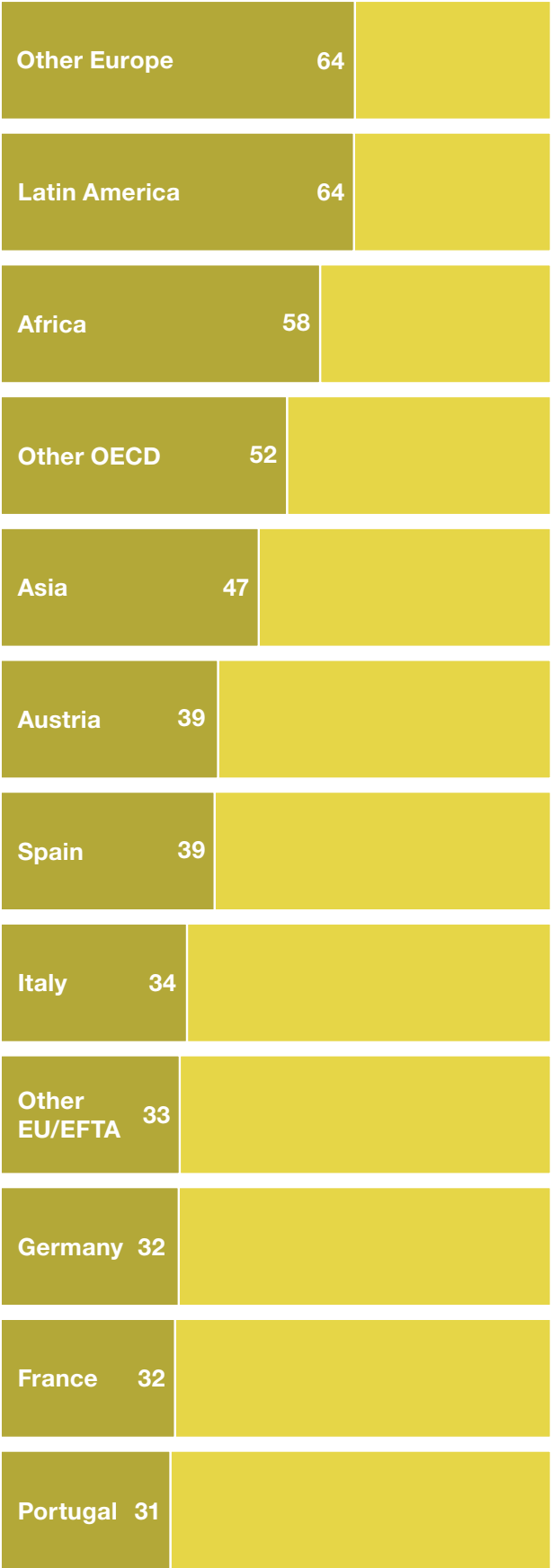
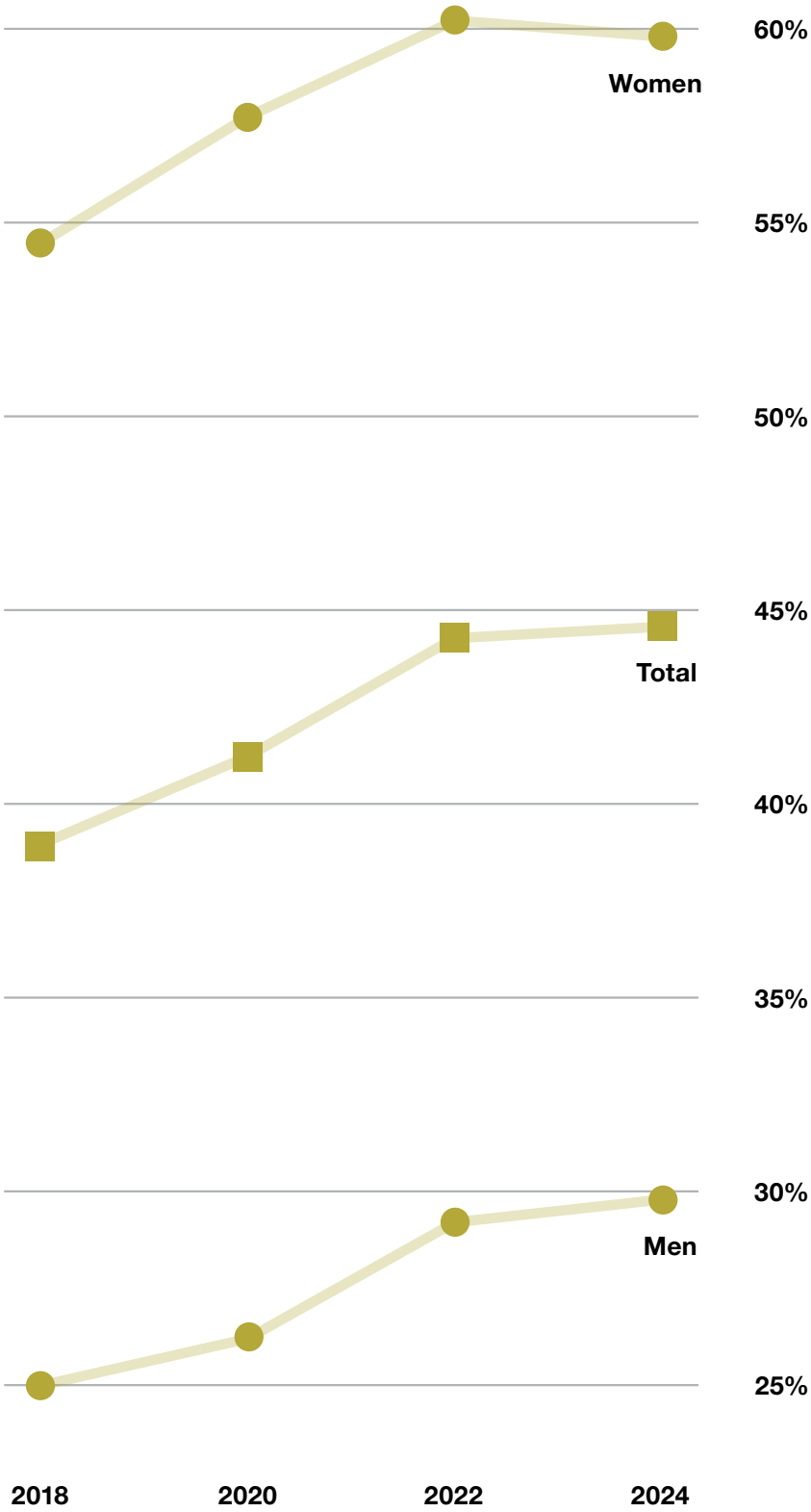
The employment contract, twice as common among men as among women

Employment contract or job offer in Switzerland at the time of moving, by gender in 2024



Increase in the share of people reporting family-related reasons for moving to Switzerland

Share of people reporting family-related reasons for moving to Switzerland, by survey year

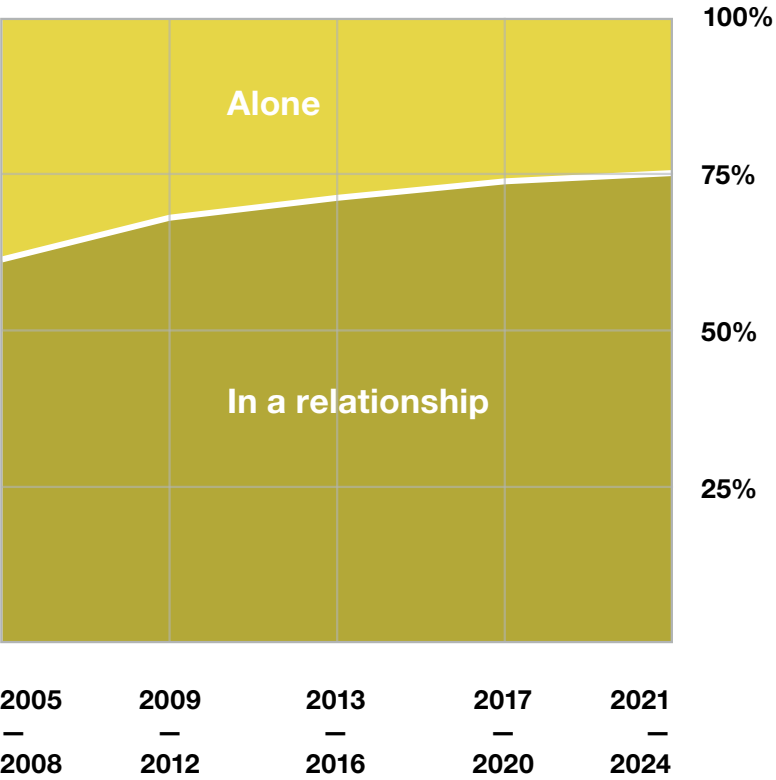


Family-related migration more common among non-EU Europeans, Africans, and Latin Americans

Share of people reporting they came to Switzerland to start or accompany family, among other reasons, by country of origin in 2024

Self-declared motives of migration often overlap with work and differ from official records. Family reasons motivated 45% of migration to Switzerland in 2024, up from 28% in 2016. Women cite family reasons far more than men: 60% vs. 30%; both genders show increases over time. Other Europeans cite family 63% of the time as a reason for migration, Africans 58%, and Latin Americans 64%.

People who arrived recently (2020–2024) came as couples more often (73%) than people who arrived earlier (64% in 2006–2009). Asian migrants arrived as couples 75% of the time, and other European migrants (those not part of the EU/EFTA) 74% of the time. Even so, couples rarely arrive together—only 19% do in 2024. In most cases, as seen across the survey waves, one partner migrates first (32%).



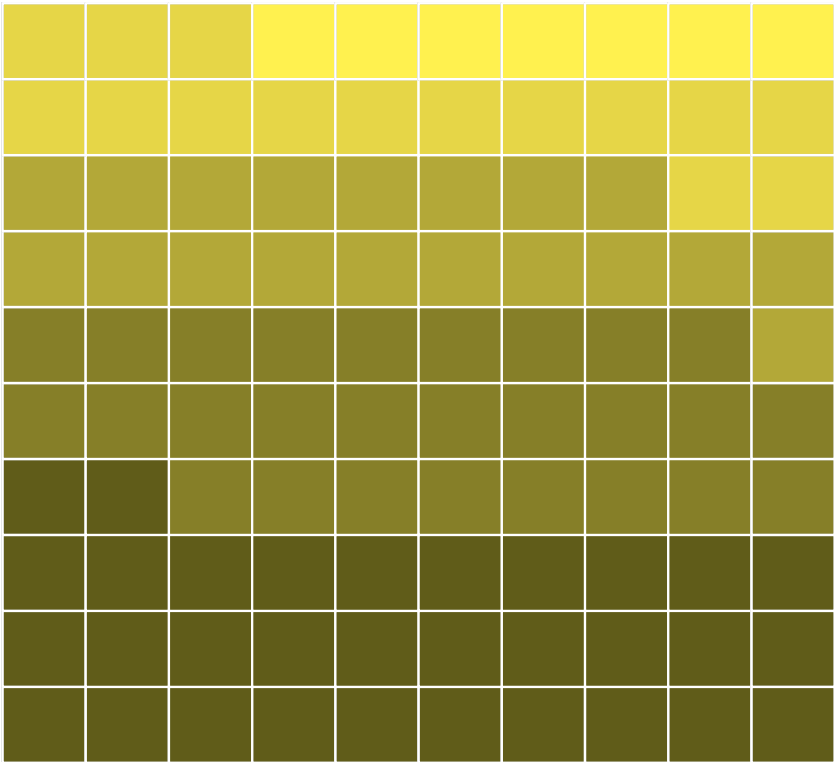
Recent migrants more often arrived as part of a couple than those in the early 2000s

Share of migrants in a relationship at time of arrival, by migration year intervals

Those from neighboring countries more often migrate alone

Share of migrants in a relationship at time of migration, by country of origin in 2024

In a relationship		Alone
Other OECD	80	20
Asia	75	25
Latin America	74	26
Other Europe	74	26
Africa	72	28
Portugal	71	29
Other EU/EFTA	69	31
Spain	68	32
Italy	67	33
Austria	67	33
Germany	65	35
France	58	42



Migrating as a couple: only 1 in 3 move together

Out of 100 couples, status at the time of migration in 2024

- Moved together: 32

Partner already in Switzerland: 27

Partner moved before: 19
- Partner moved after: 15

Partner has not moved yet: 7

“Discriminatory hiring practices against women is a huge problem. I cannot begin to tell you how many times in interviews I’ve been asked do I plan on having more children, who will take care of my child when I am working, etc.”

A Closer Look at the Data

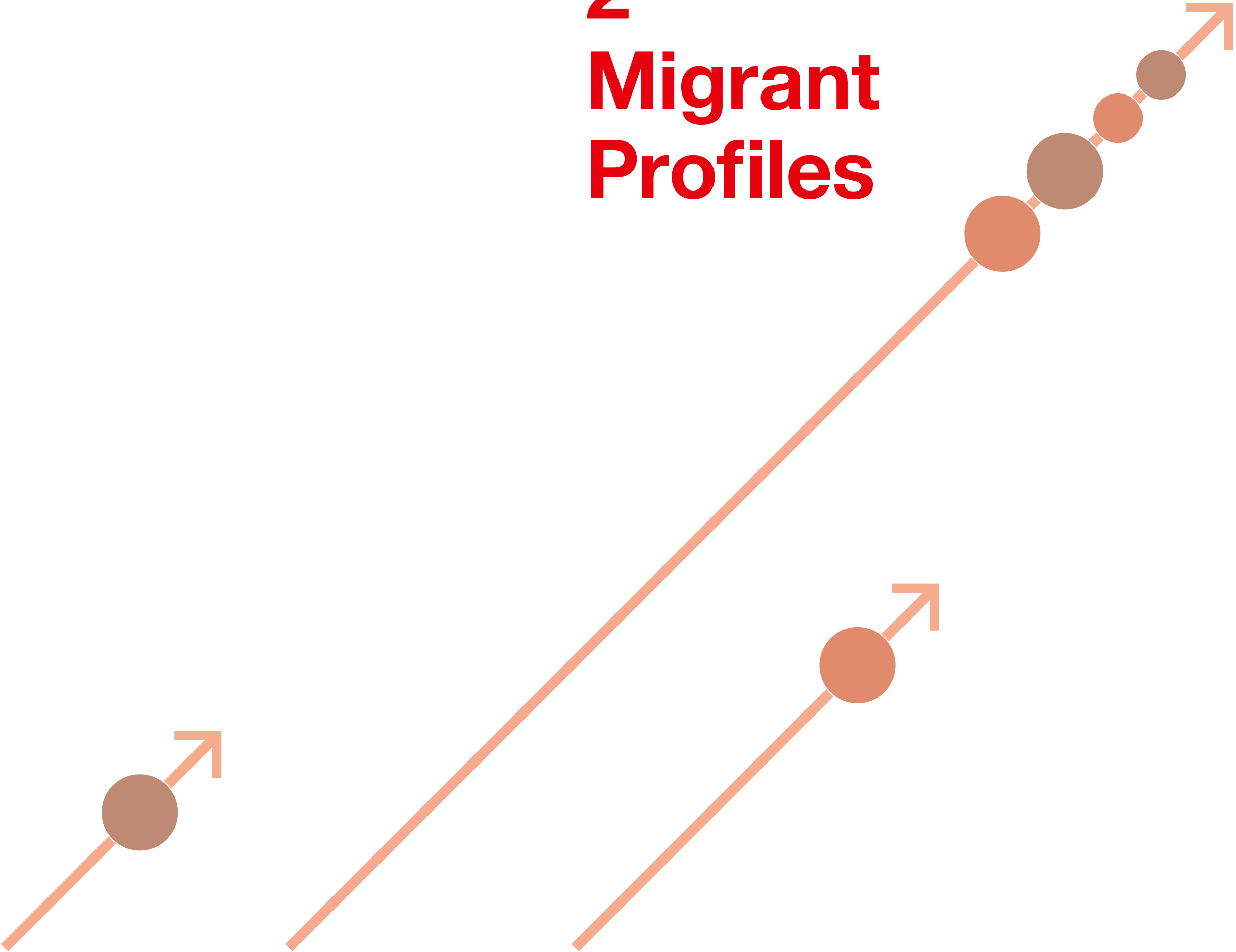
Melinda Dinh, University of Geneva

Women and men migrate to Switzerland for very different reasons, and those motivations significantly shape long-term professional outcomes. While men are more likely to arrive in Switzerland with a job contract, women frequently arrive via family reunification. This initial entry channel shapes what follows; even years after arrival, women experience lower labour market participation and higher rates of downward career mobility.

These disparities are not just incidental, they reflect the intersection of restrictive migration policies, rigid labour market structures, and prevailing social norms. For nonEU nationals, family reunification is one primary entry route, which often entails delayed labour market access due to the complex qualification recognition and ill-suited policies. Furthermore, the persistence of the “male breadwinner” paradigm within Swiss institutions tends to marginalise the economic identity of people who migrate for family reasons. By framing them primarily as dependents, the system limits their professional aspirations and reinforces their secondary status on the labour market. Both policy frameworks and academic discourse have long marginalised their professional trajectory through a lens of dependency.

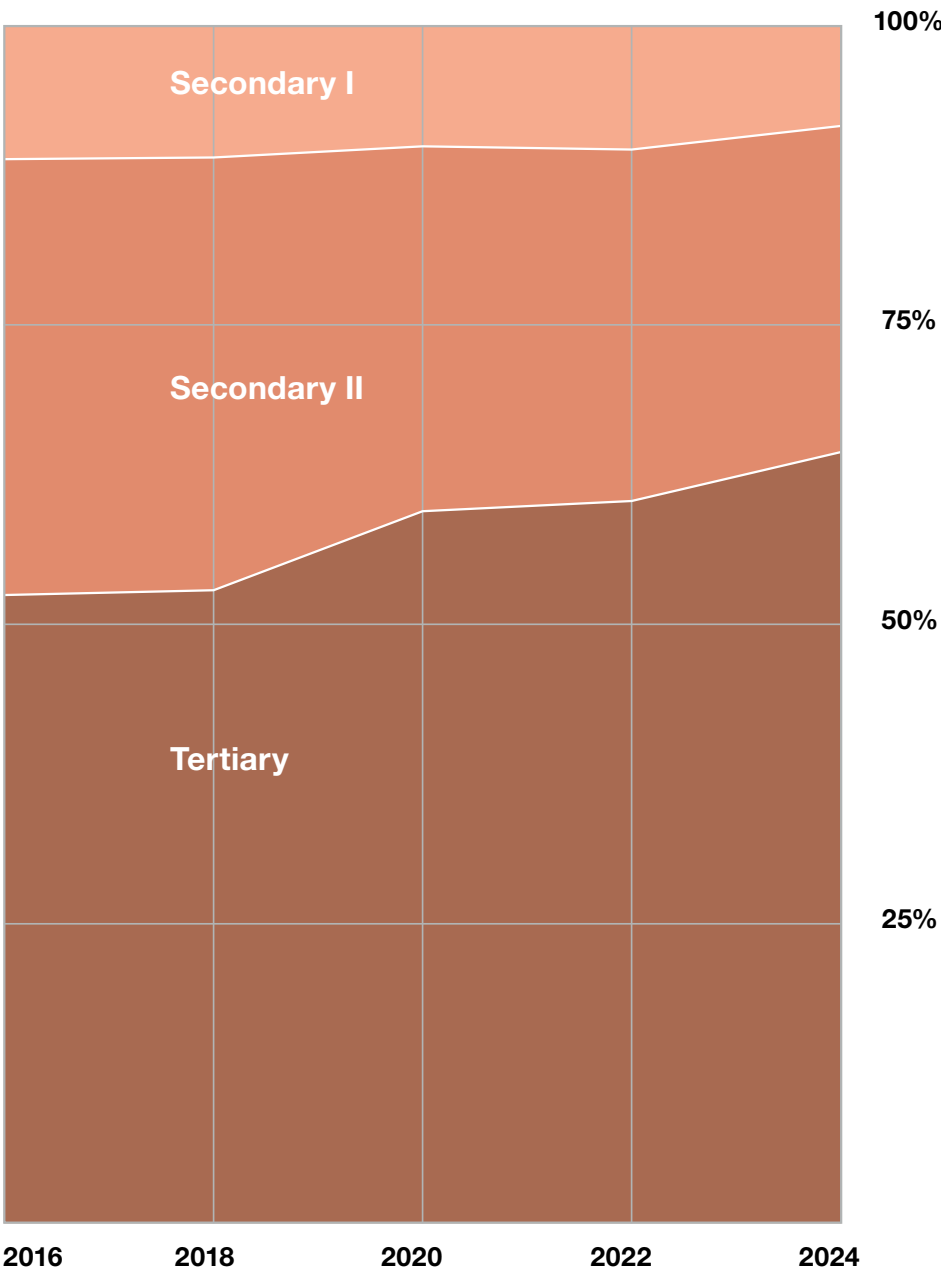
This creates a systemic paradox: despite Switzerland’s acute shortage of skilled labour, it underuses many of its highly educated migrant women. Addressing this “brain waste” requires a shift from viewing family reunification as a private domestic matter to recognising it as a critical economic entry point. Thus, recognising foreign qualifications and easing access to professional opportunities would support gender equality while allowing Switzerland to capitalise on the diverse talent already present within its borders.

2 Migrant Profiles



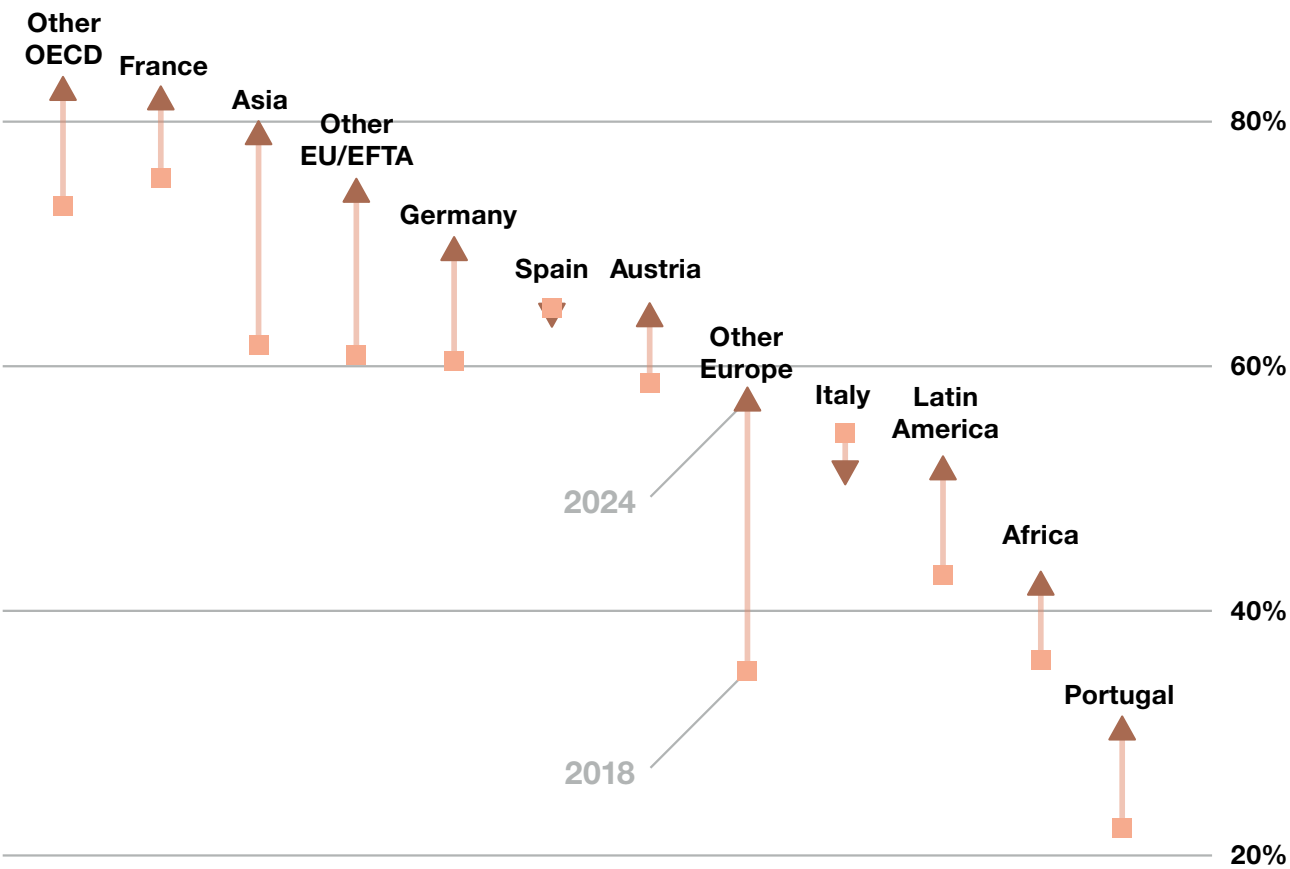
Increase in highly skilled migration

Highest level of education attained, by survey year



Migrants from OECD countries most likely to hold tertiary degrees

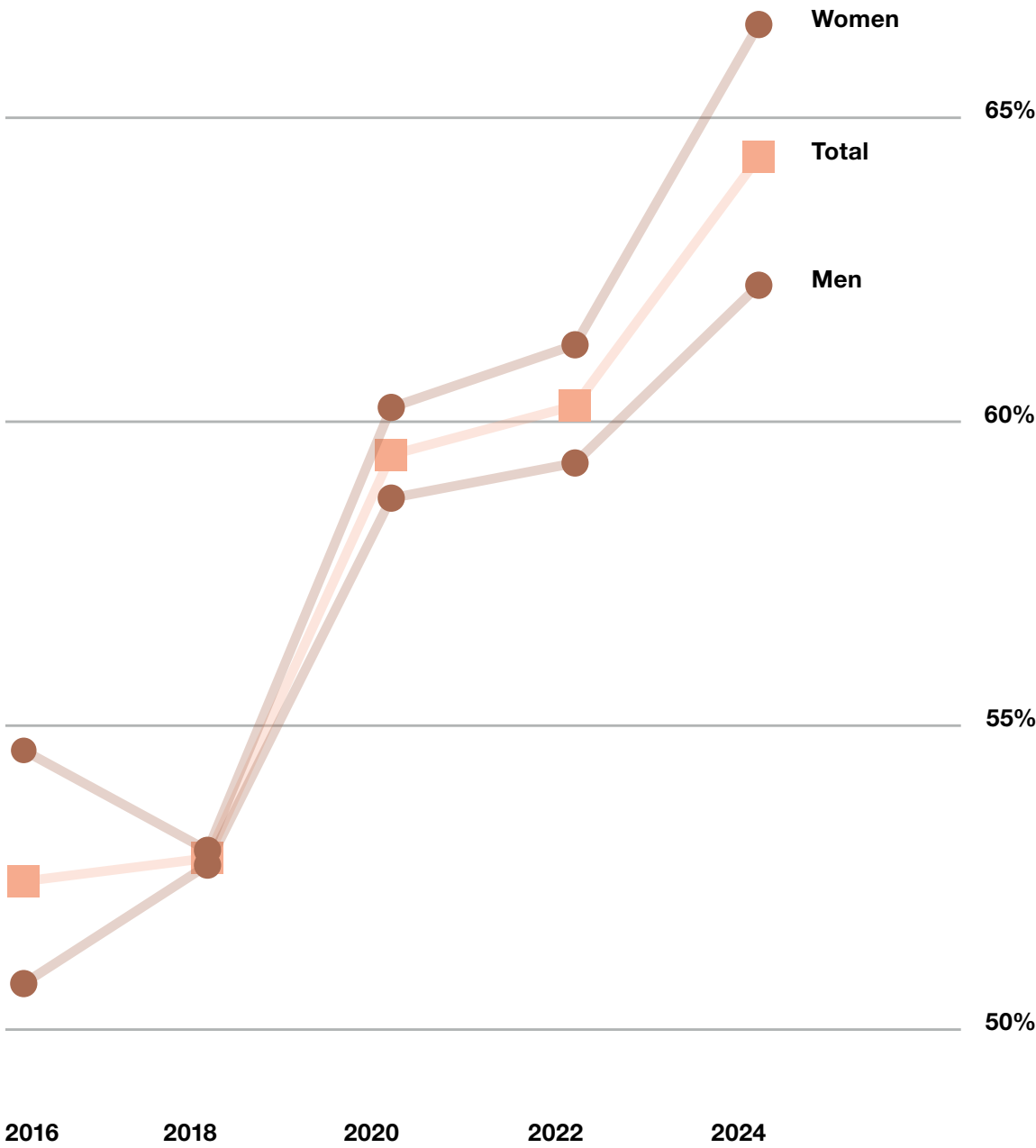
Change in tertiary education rate between 2018 and 2024, by country of origin



More than half of migrant households (52% in 2024) have 3 or more people—usually couples with children. This share has grown steadily from 44% in 2016. People living alone make up just 16% and this number keeps falling. Men migrants live alone almost twice as often as women migrants (20% vs. 12%). Europeans are most likely to live solo: Germans (22%), French (22%), Italians (23%). Non-Europeans live in bigger households: Asians (62% with 3+ people), Africans (58%), other Europeans (59%).

Women migrants more qualified than men

Share with tertiary education, by gender



A Closer Look at the Data

Philippe Wanner, University of Geneva,
Deputy Director nccr – on the move

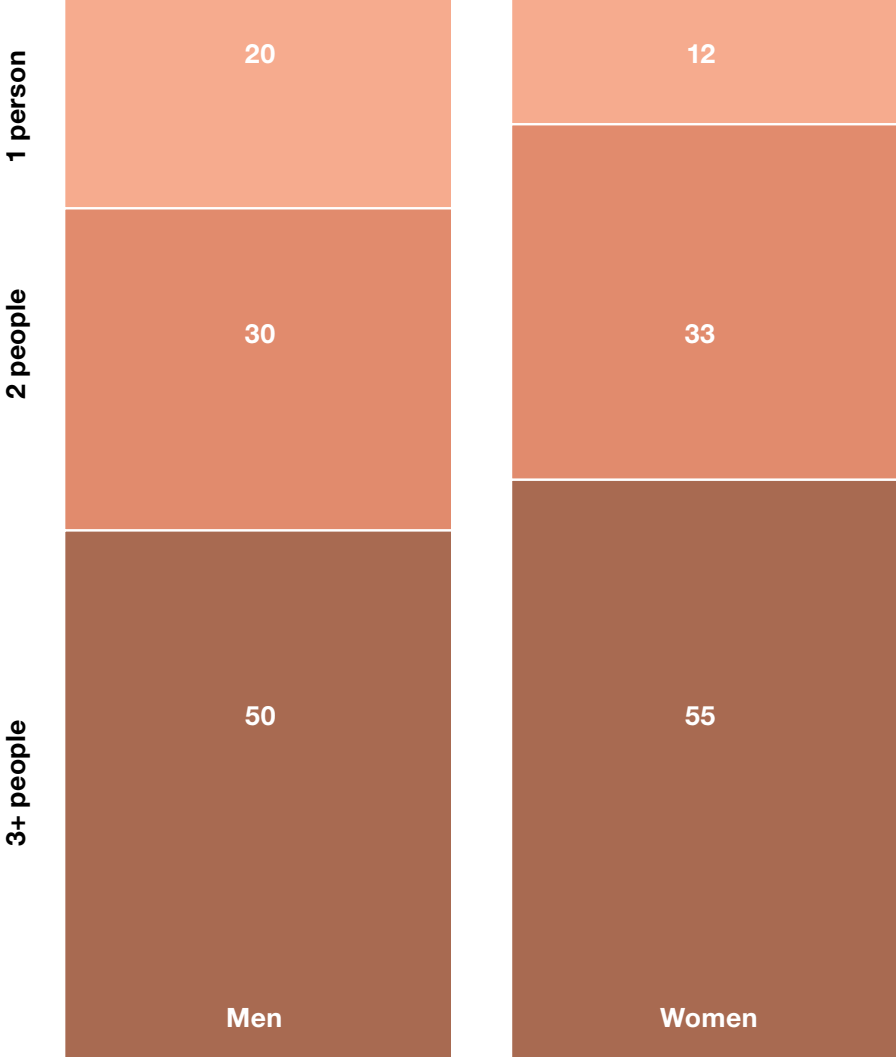
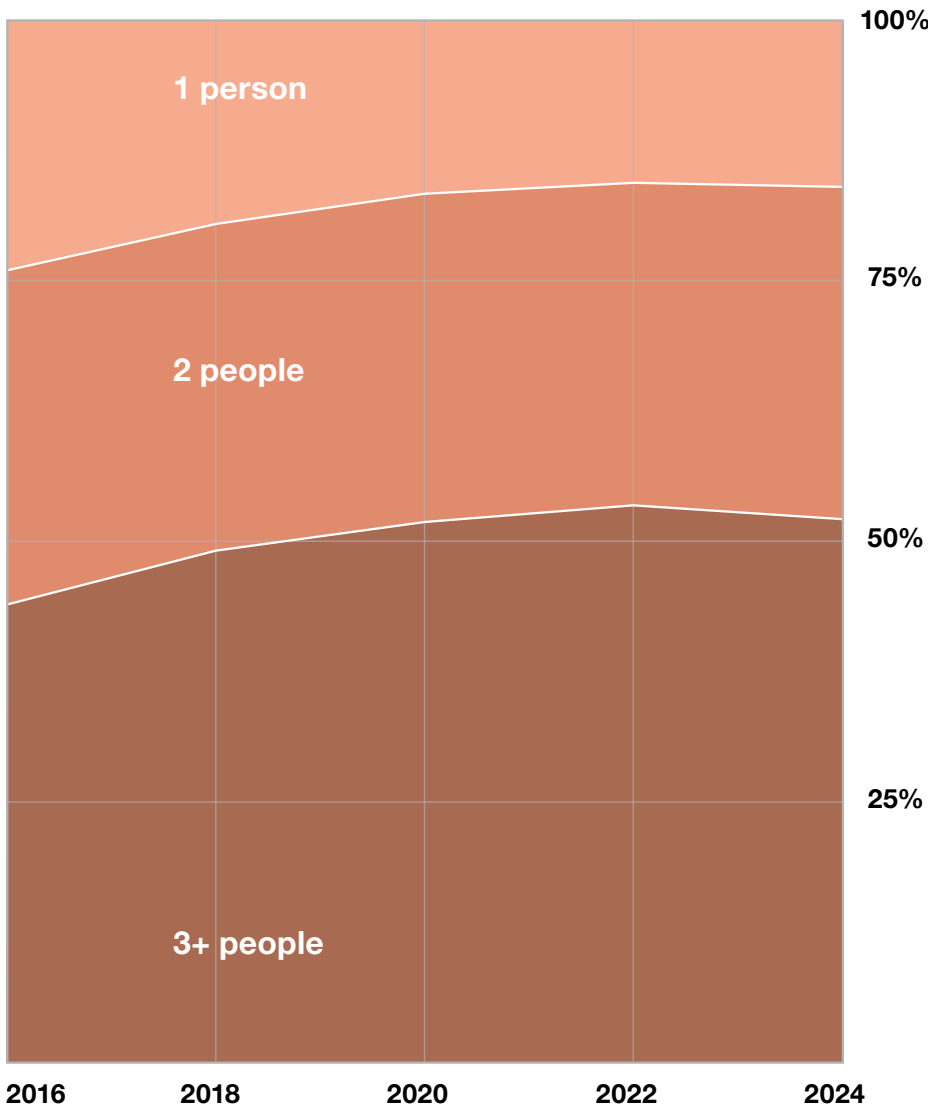
Until the early 1970s, migration to Switzerland was characterised by individual workers leaving their families in their country of origin. Gradually, however, migration began to involve an increasing proportion of families. This trend is linked to changes in migration policies and to increasingly skilled migration occurring later in life, by which time families have usually been established. Consequently, the vast majority of those surveyed live as couples, with or without children—a proportion that has been rising since 2016.

Individual migration primarily involves nationals from neighbouring countries such as Italy, Germany, France and Austria. This is less common among people from non-European Union countries. These differences are linked to how migration is organised. For nationals of neighbouring countries, migration may be experienced as a temporary arrangement at a young age, with frequent returns to family members remaining abroad or in the country of origin being possible. For nationals of distant countries, opportunities to return are fewer, and migration is more often accompanied by the relocation of the family unit.

The structure of the Swiss labour market explains why men are more likely to live alone in Switzerland. They are often young men from neighbouring countries who work in low-paid seasonal jobs in sectors such as hospitality, catering, agriculture and construction. They have limited opportunities to bring their families to Switzerland.

Over half of households have three or more members

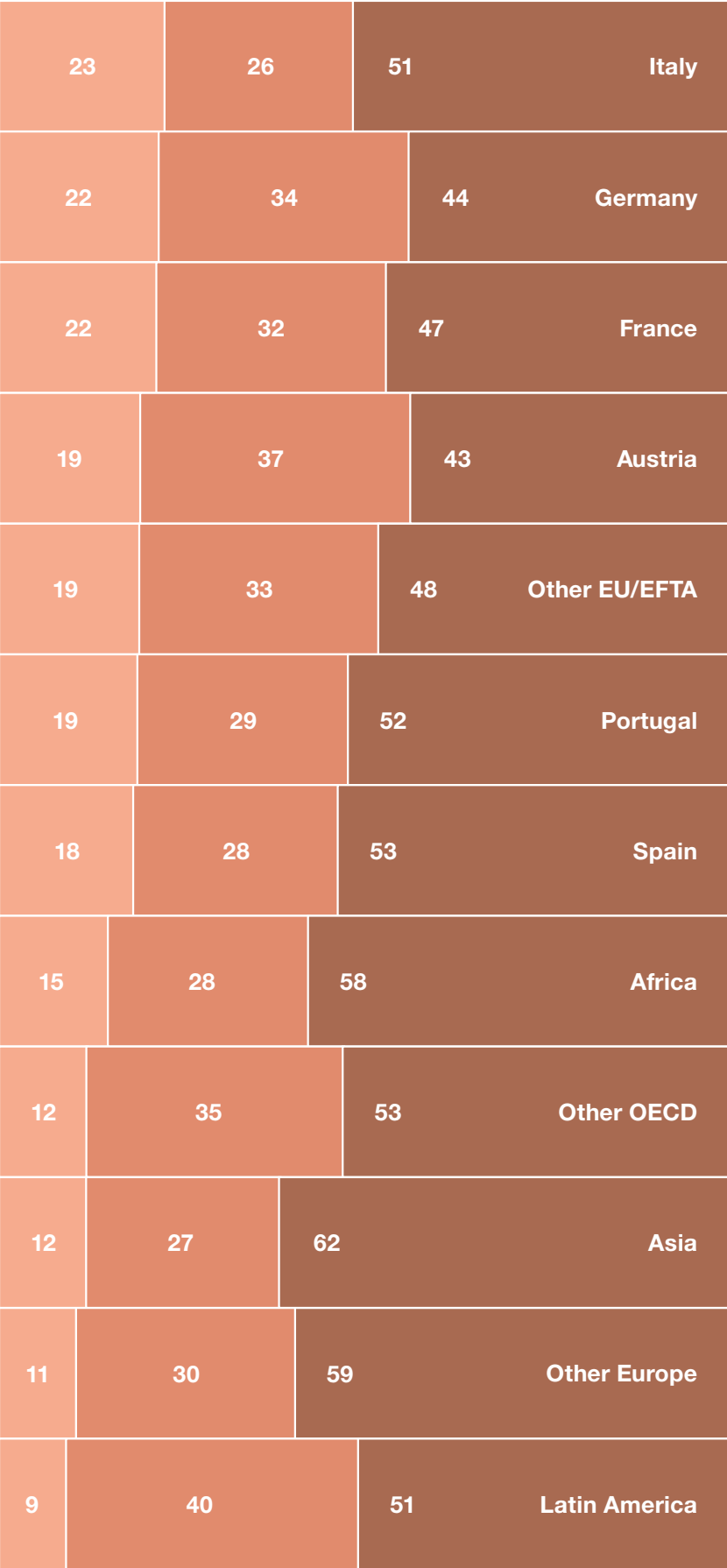
Number of household members



Men are more likely to live alone than women

Number of household members, by gender in 2024

Recent arrivals are more highly skilled overall compared to early cohorts. Two thirds of migrants (64% interviewed in 2024) have university-level education, up from half (52%) in 2016. Women arrivals are slightly more educated than men (67% in 2024 vs 62%). The range in education levels across countries of origin is wide: other OECD countries lead with 82% holding a university degree, followed by French (82%) and German migrants (69%), while Portuguese have the lowest rate at just 30%. Other European arrivals from Eastern Europe and the Balkans saw the strongest gains, rising from 34% university-educated in 2018 to 56% in 2024. Asian migrants reached 79% in 2024, Africans 42%, and Latin Americans 51%. Italians saw a decline from 55% in 2018 to 52% in 2024, while Spaniards held steady at 65%.



1 person 2 people 3+ people

**Higher proportion
of people living
alone among
citizens of the
European Union**

Number of household
members, by country of
origin in 2024

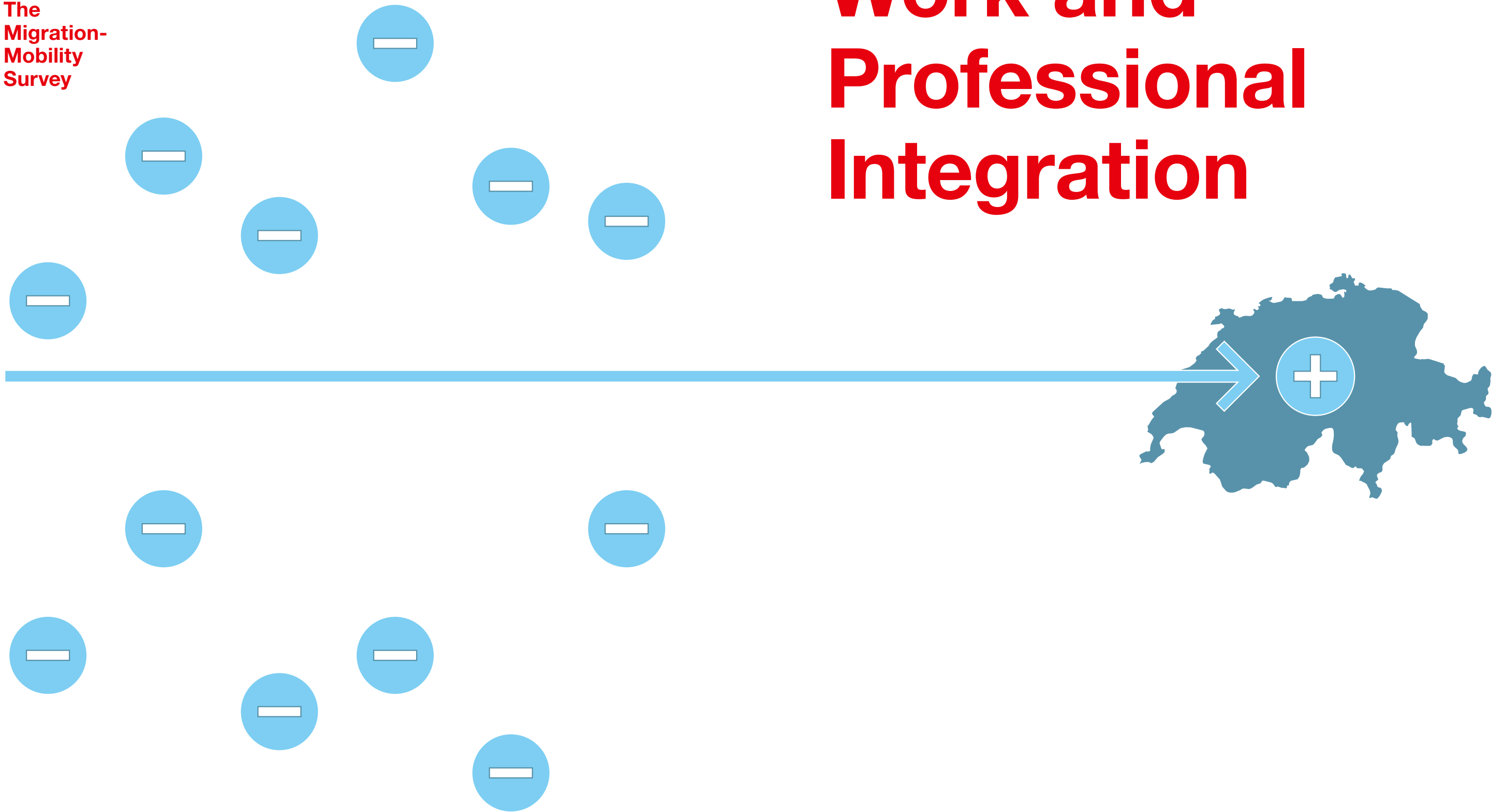
A Closer Look at the Data

**Philippe Wanner, University of Geneva,
Deputy Director nccr – on the move**

From the end of the 20th century onwards, Switzerland’s economy underwent profound changes, characterised by a rapid shift towards the service sector and increasing specialisation. This resulted in a mismatch between the labour market’s demand and the domestic supply. This led to a growing influx of highly qualified specialists working in high-value sectors of the service industry. The influx of talent continues to grow, leading to a steady increase in the proportion of survey respondents with tertiary qualifications. This is particularly true of women, who tend to be more highly qualified than men.

However, there are still professional opportunities in Switzerland for those with medium or low qualifications, resulting in heterogeneous migration in terms of educational attainment. For several decades, a pattern has persisted whereby certain countries, such as Portugal and, to a lesser extent, Italy, supply a moderately skilled workforce, while other countries, such as the United States and Canada, provide the Swiss labour market with a highly skilled one. This pattern is perpetuated by migratory flows through recruitment networks, such as multinationals organising the circular migration of their highly skilled managers, and companies in low-value-added sectors replenishing their workforce through migration chains (where migrants already settled in the country help new arrivals from their region).

3 Work and Professional Integration



Perceived professional improvement varies by gender and age

In 2024, with migration, the professional situation was:

By gender



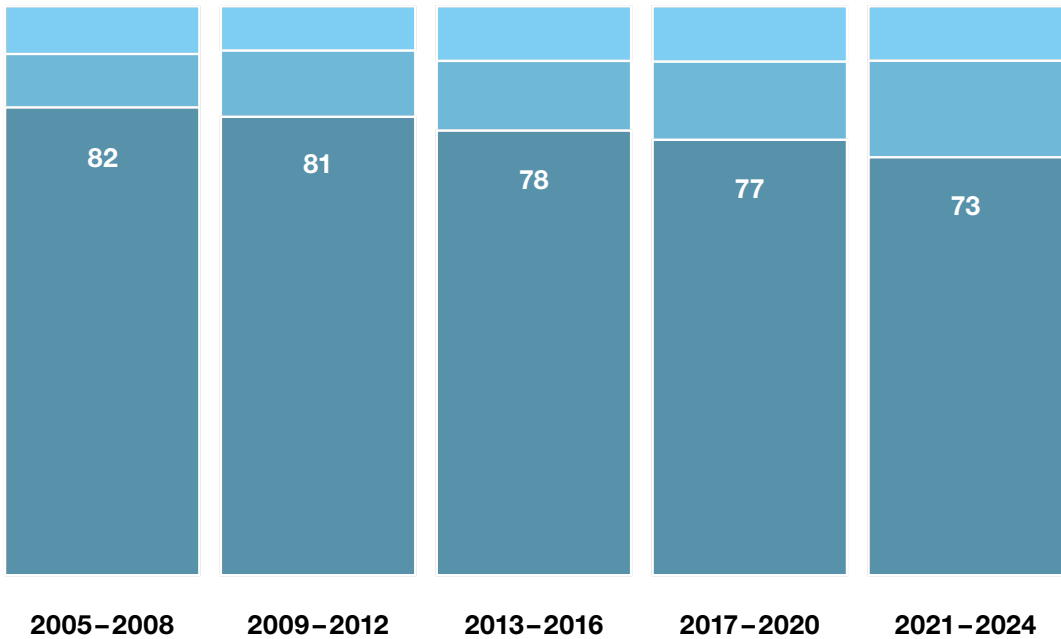
By age



“In Switzerland, working conditions are much more humane: flexible schedules, respect for employees and job security. It is completely different from what I experienced before.”

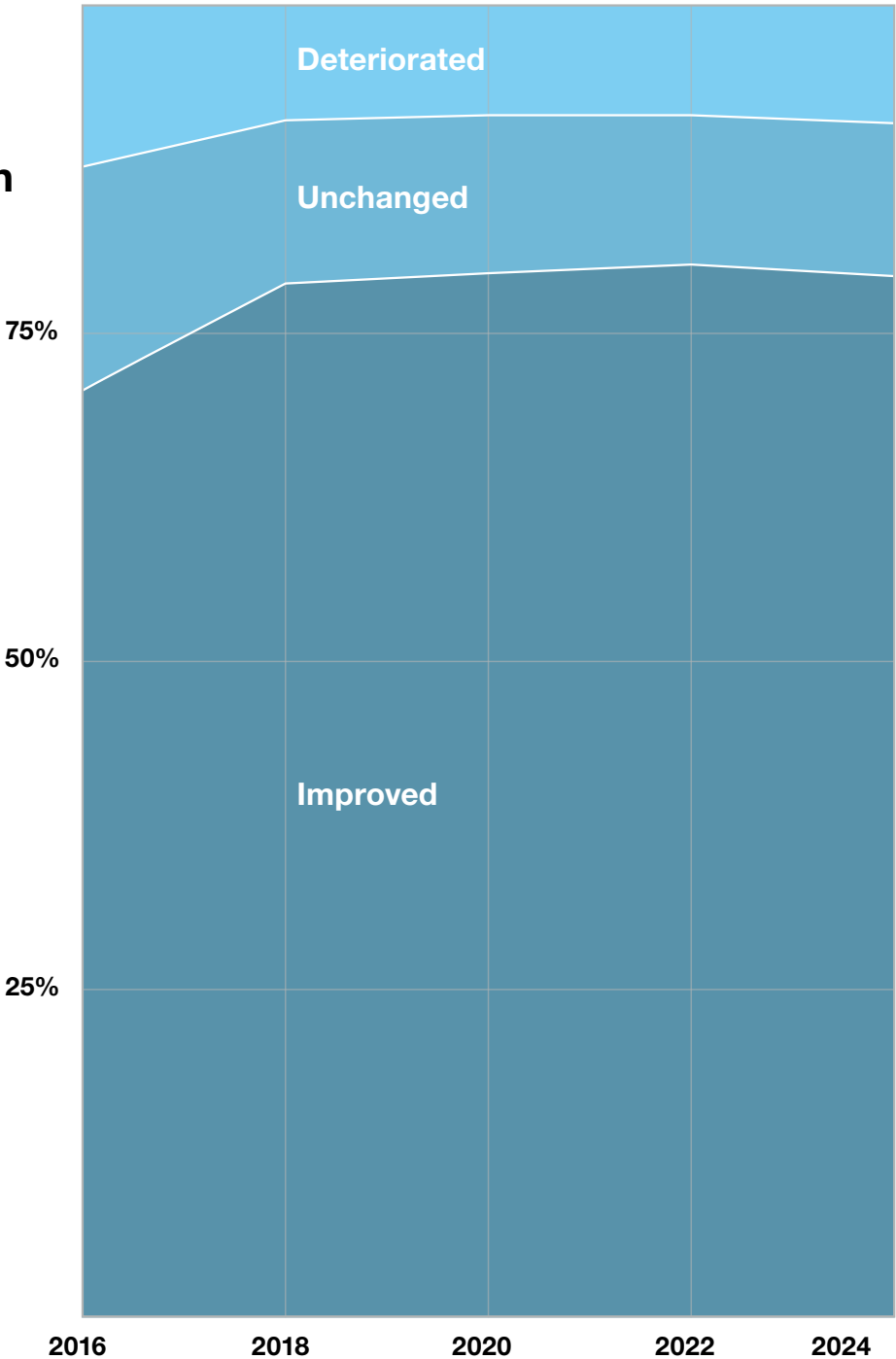
Long-established residents report more perceived improvements in their professional situation

Labor market outcomes in 2024 vs. pre-migration status, by migration year intervals



A majority of people perceive an improvement in their professional situation with migration

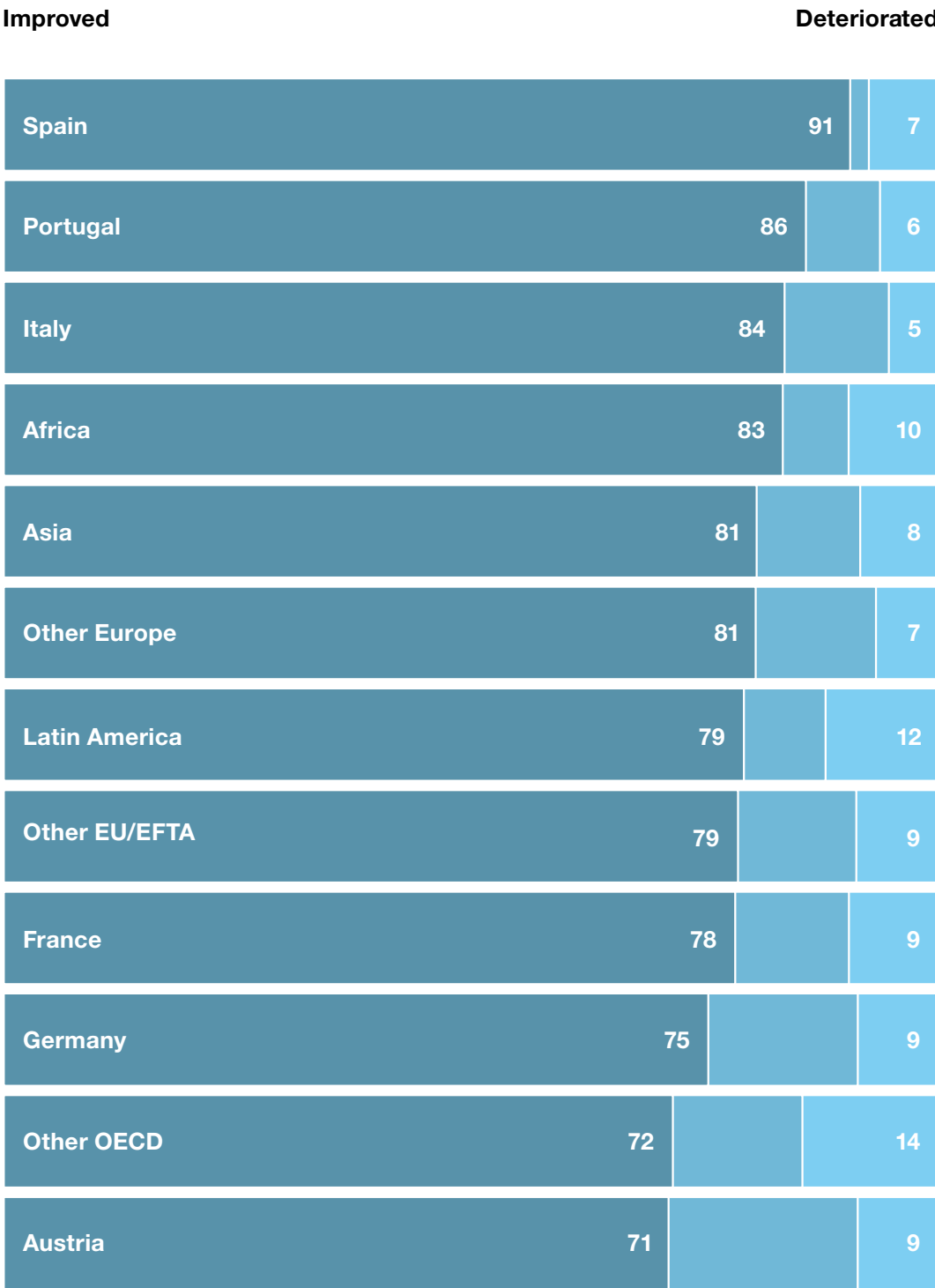
With migration, the professional situation was:



Four out of five migrants working in Switzerland (79% in 2024) perceive their jobs in Switzerland as better than the ones they had before moving. This positive view has stayed steady since 2018. Among nationalities in 2024, 91% of Spanish migrants report improvement, 86% of Portuguese migrants, and 84% of Italian migrants. At the other end, only 71% of Austrian migrants and 72% of migrants from other OECD countries say they perceive their work situation as improved. Men migrants report improvement more often than women migrants (82% vs 76%). Younger migrants aged 24–40 see the most progress (83%), compared to 76% for those over 40. Those who arrived before 2010 have the highest rates of perceived improvement in their employment situation (83–86%), while newcomers from 2020–2024 reach just 74%.

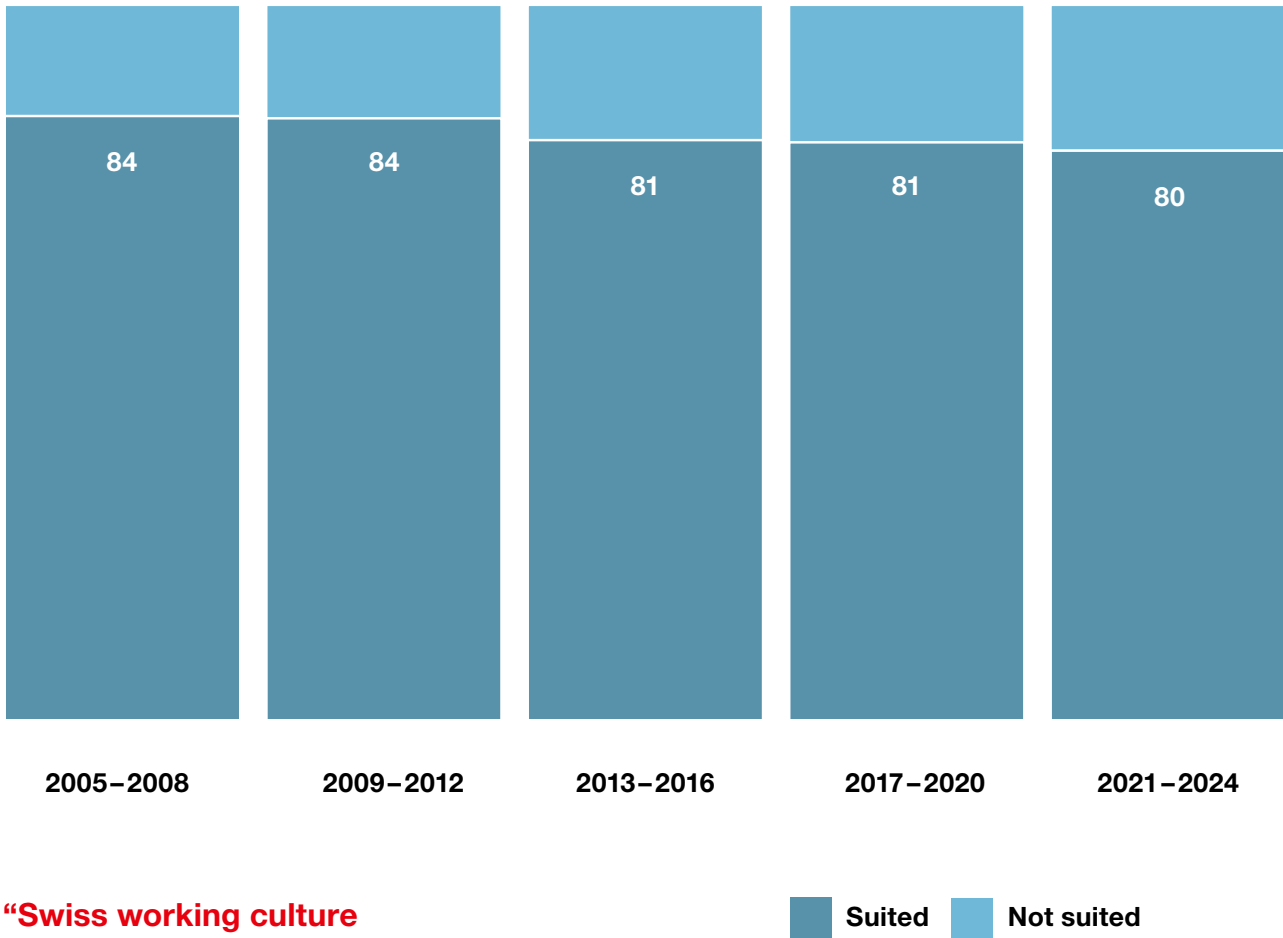
Improvement in professional situation varies by country of origin

In 2024, with migration, the professional situation was:



Early migrants report a better skill match for their jobs

Share of people who consider their education is suited to their job, by migration year intervals

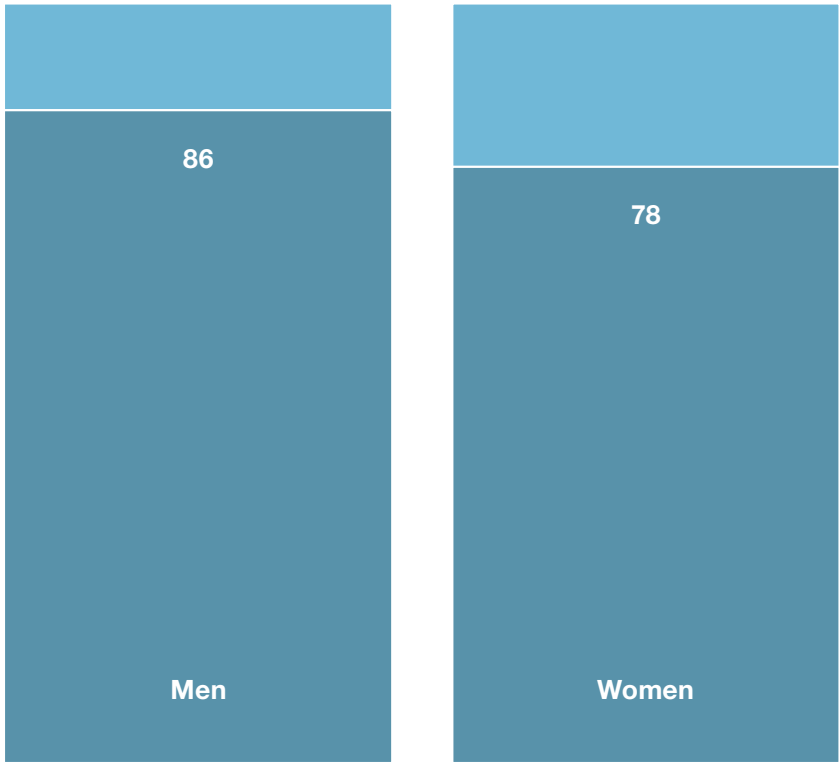
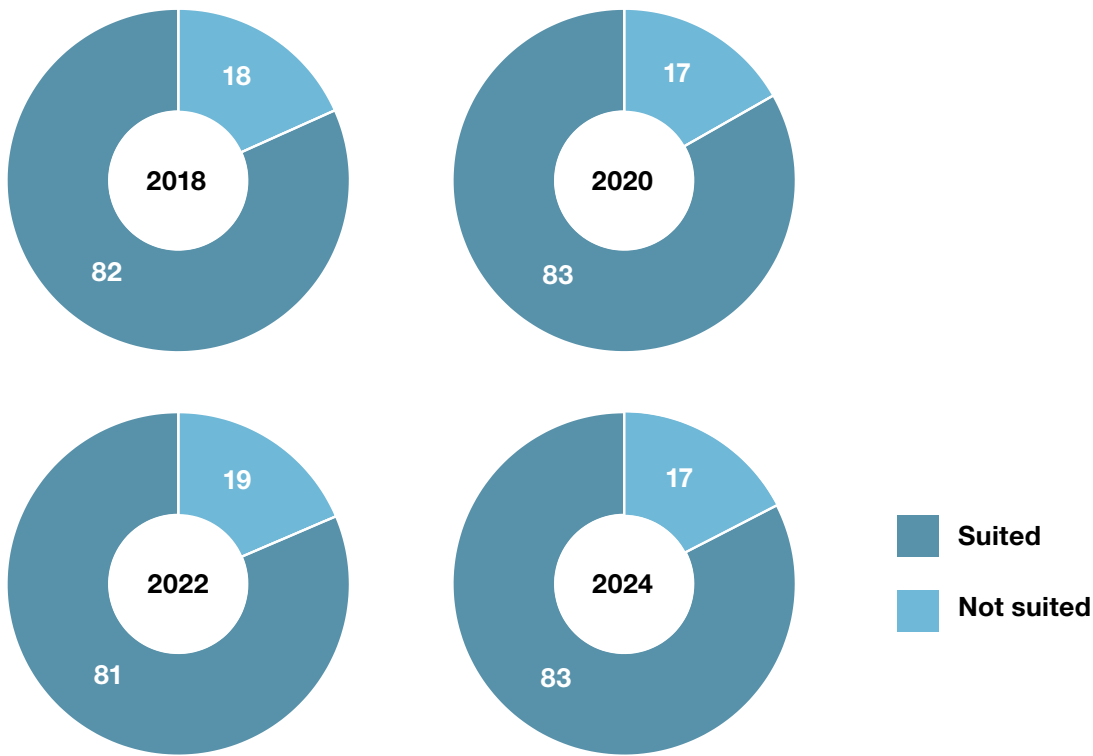


“Swiss working culture is one of the best I have experienced. There is trust between employers and employees, good social protection and a strong respect for personal time.”

Eight out of ten working migrants (83% in 2024) feel their education level fits well with their current job in Switzerland. This share has remained stable at 82–83% since 2018. German and French migrants report the best fit (92%), followed by Austrian migrants (90%) and Asian migrants (86%). Other Europeans report the lowest rate of skill-matching at 71%. Men migrants feel their skills match their jobs better than women migrants do (86% vs. 78%). Migrants who arrived early, from 2006–2009, report a better skill-match at 89%, compared to 81% for those arriving from 2020–2024.

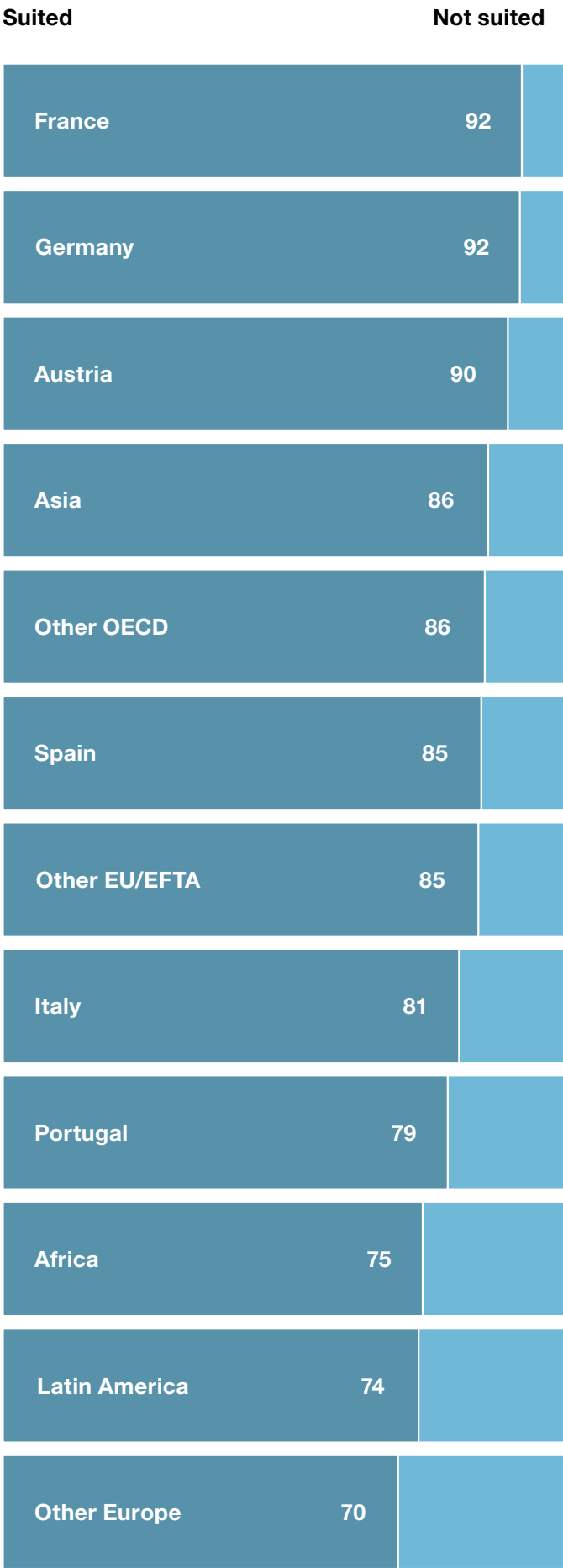
Most people consider their education suited to their job, with little change over time

Share of people who consider their education is “suited” vs. “not suited” to their job



Men more often view their education well-suited to their job

Share of people who consider their education is suited to their job in 2024, by gender



Migrants from Germany and France are more likely to consider their education suited to their job

Share of people who consider their education is suited to their job in 2024, by country of origin

A Closer Look at the Data

Flavia Fossati, University of Lausanne

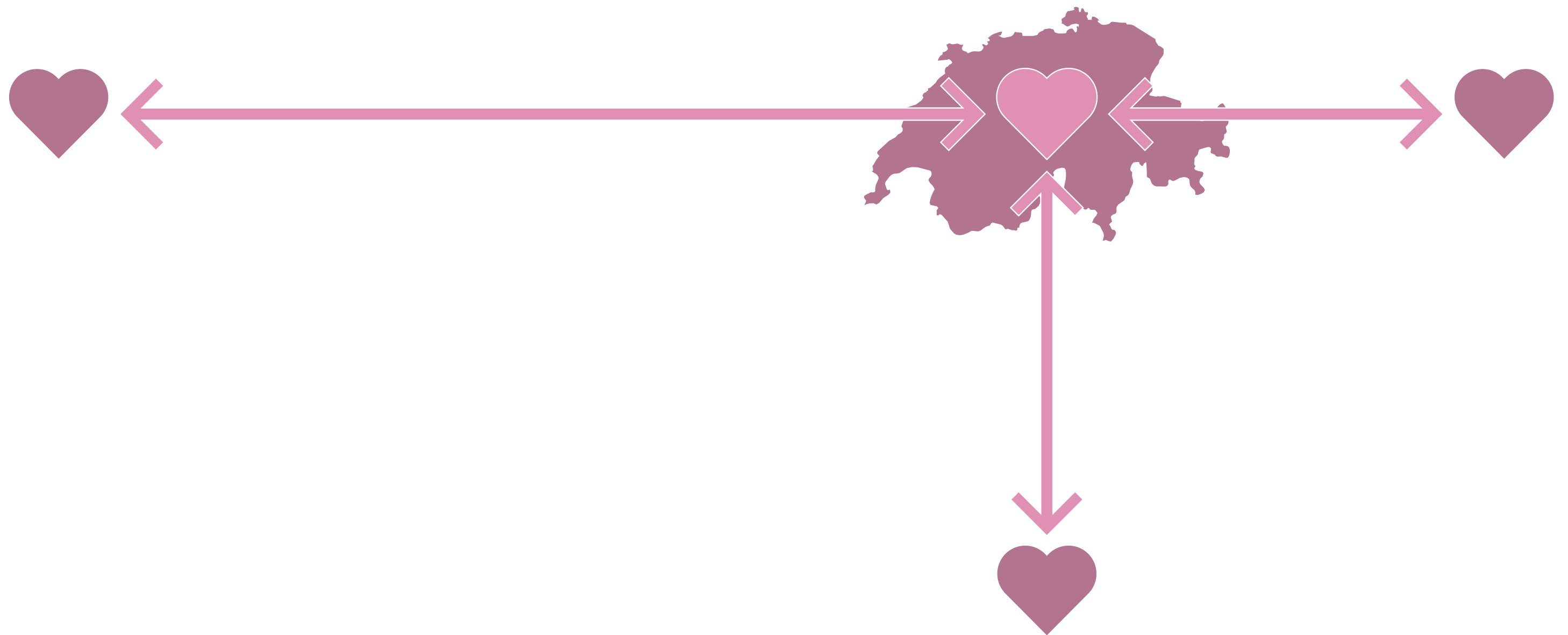
Since the 1990s, the Swiss labour market has become increasingly demanding in terms of qualifications, particularly in high-value service sectors. This explains why most migrants report an improvement in their professional situation after moving, as their skills are generally well matched to available positions. This is especially true for migrants from neighbouring countries and other OECD nations, whose qualifications are often recognised more easily due to similar labour markets and long-standing bilateral agreements.

However, this positive trend is not universal. Migrants arriving through family reunification often face a harder path: without a job secured in advance, they are more likely to experience delays in entering the labour market, and in some cases a downgrading of their skills relative to their qualifications. Language barriers and the non-recognition of foreign diplomas also play a role in these disparities.

Gender differences persist as well. Women report lower job satisfaction and weaker skill-job matches than men, a pattern often linked to limited childcare options, which can push some women into part-time work or roles that fall short of their qualifications. Older migrants, meanwhile, are more likely to report a deterioration in their professional situation, reflecting broader patterns of age-based discrimination in the labour market.

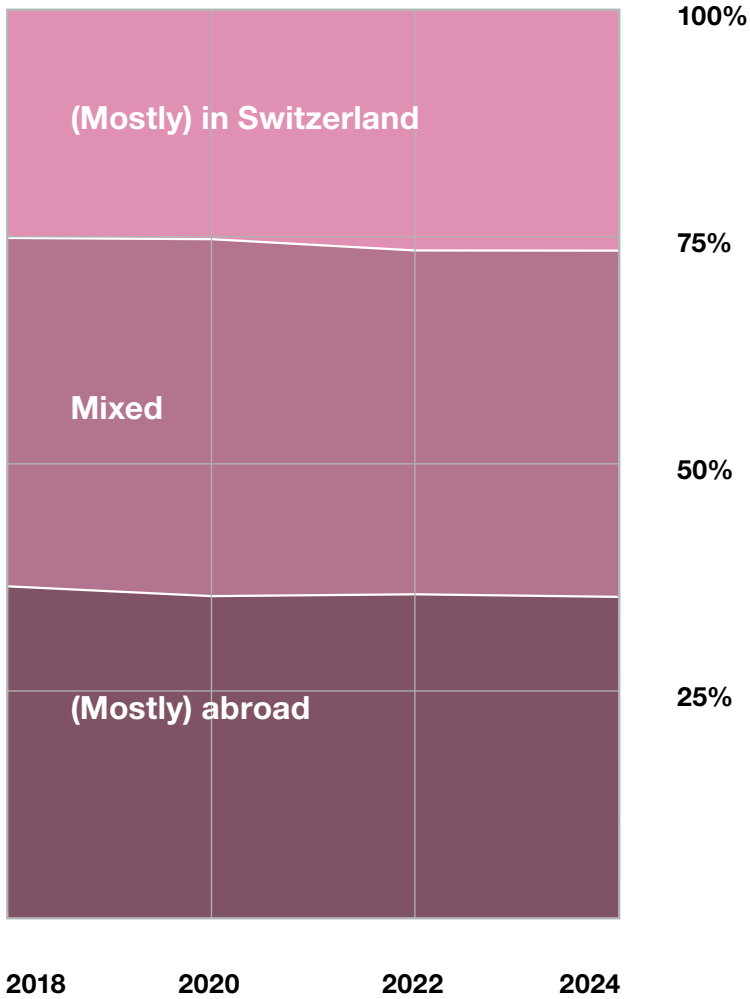
Finally, origin shapes outcomes in different ways: while migrants from Southern Europe and other close neighbours may encounter a gap between expectations and reality, highly skilled migrants from Asia and other OECD countries tend to find strong matches in specialised sectors. Facilitating the recognition of foreign qualifications and improving access to childcare could help more migrants realise their full professional potential in Switzerland.

4 Living Conditions and Social / Family Life



The location of friends' residence shows little change between 2018 and 2024

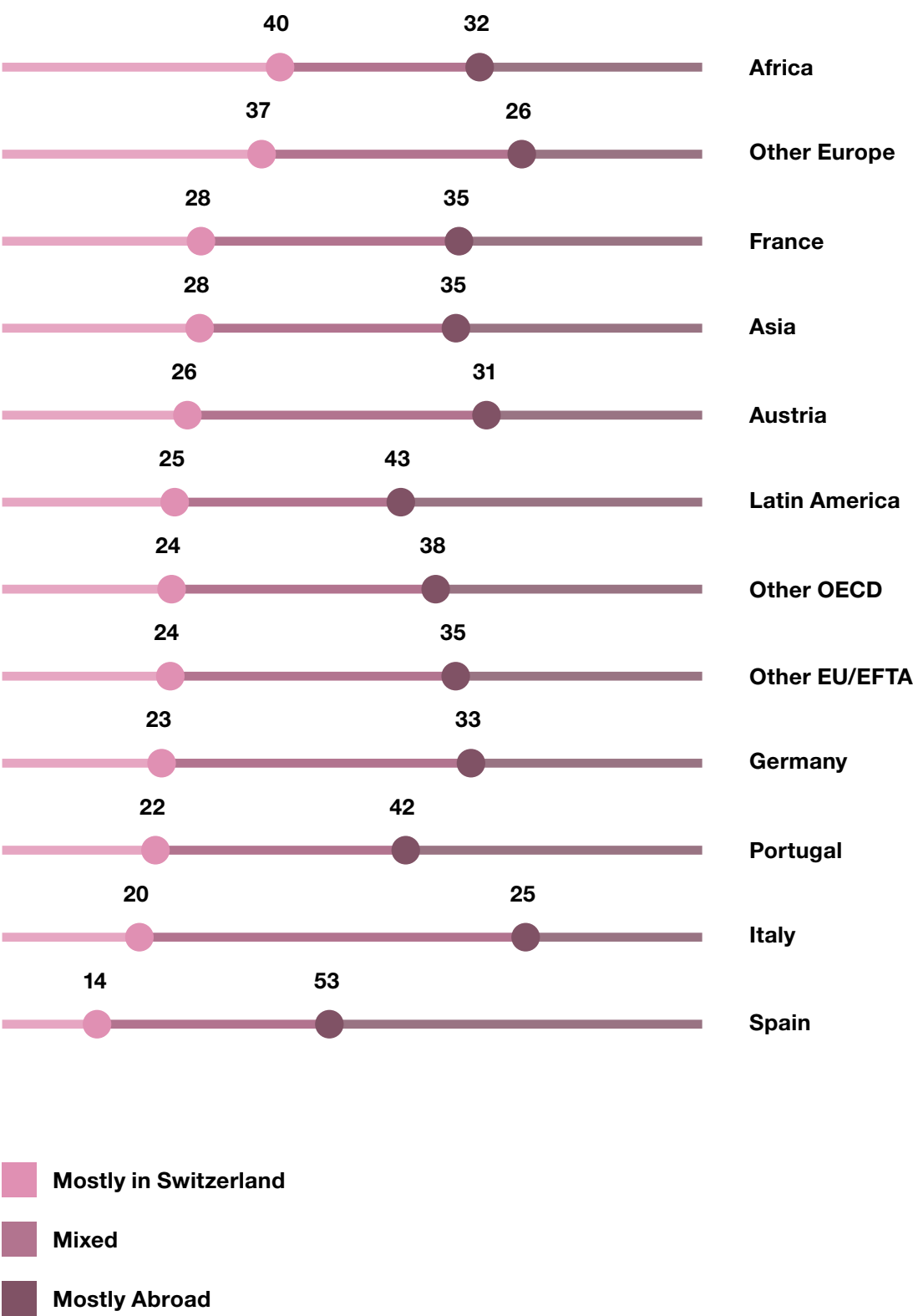
Friends' place of residence: mostly in Switzerland, mixed or mostly abroad, by survey year

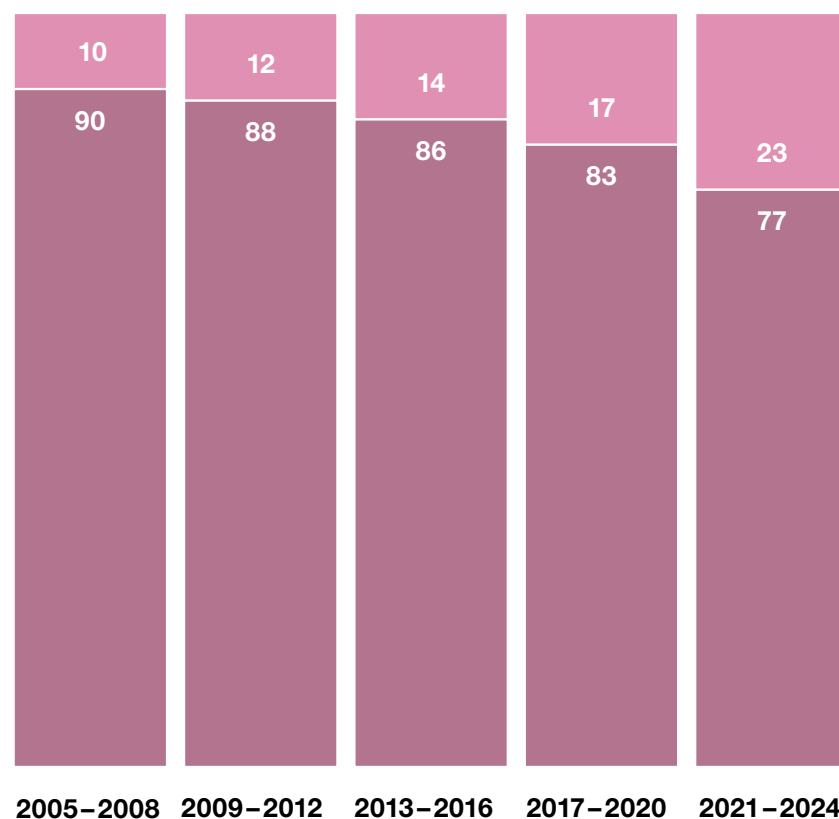


Most migrants in Switzerland have close friends living both in the country and abroad. In 2024, 27% have most of their friends in Switzerland, 38% have friends in both places, and 35% have most friends abroad. This balance has stayed steady since 2018. People who live in Switzerland longer tend to make more friends here. New arrivals from 2020–2024 still have 52% of their friends abroad. Those who arrived before 2010 report having only 22% of friends abroad. Italian migrants have friends evenly split between Switzerland and abroad (55% mixed networks). Spaniards keep most friends abroad (53%), as do Portuguese (42% abroad). Overall, 88% of long-term residents have someone local they can rely on for help, compared to 78% of recent arrivals.

Spaniards, Portuguese and Latin Americans tend to mostly have friends in their country of origin

Friends' place of residence in 2024, by country: mostly in Switzerland, mixed or mostly abroad





Most respondents have someone in Switzerland they can count on. Especially those who arrived long time ago compared to recent arrivals

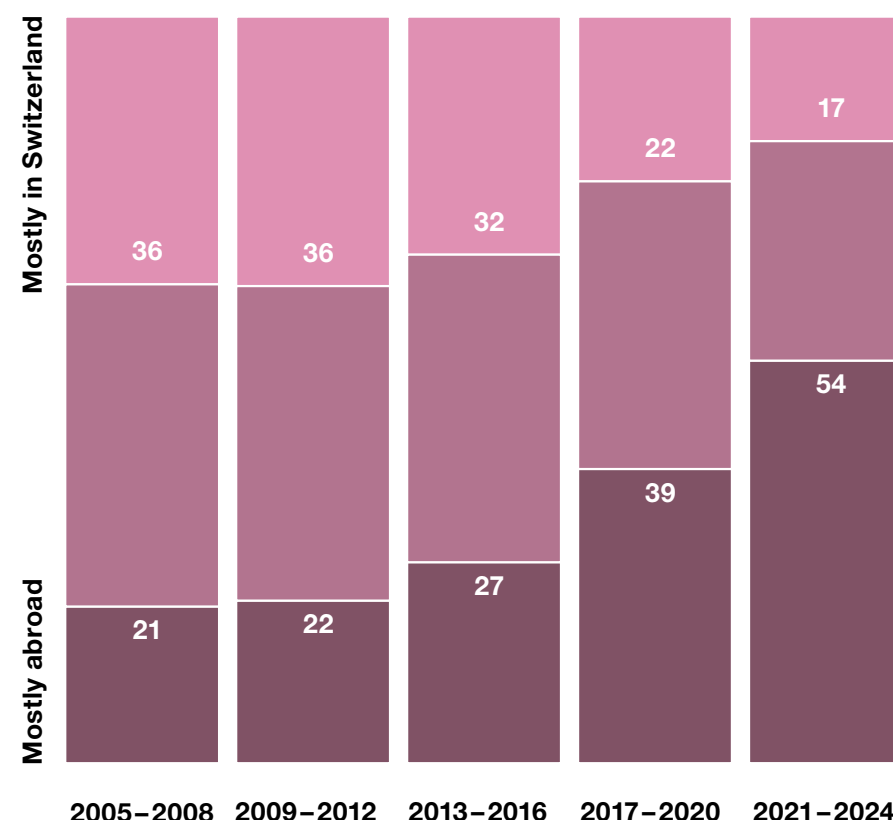
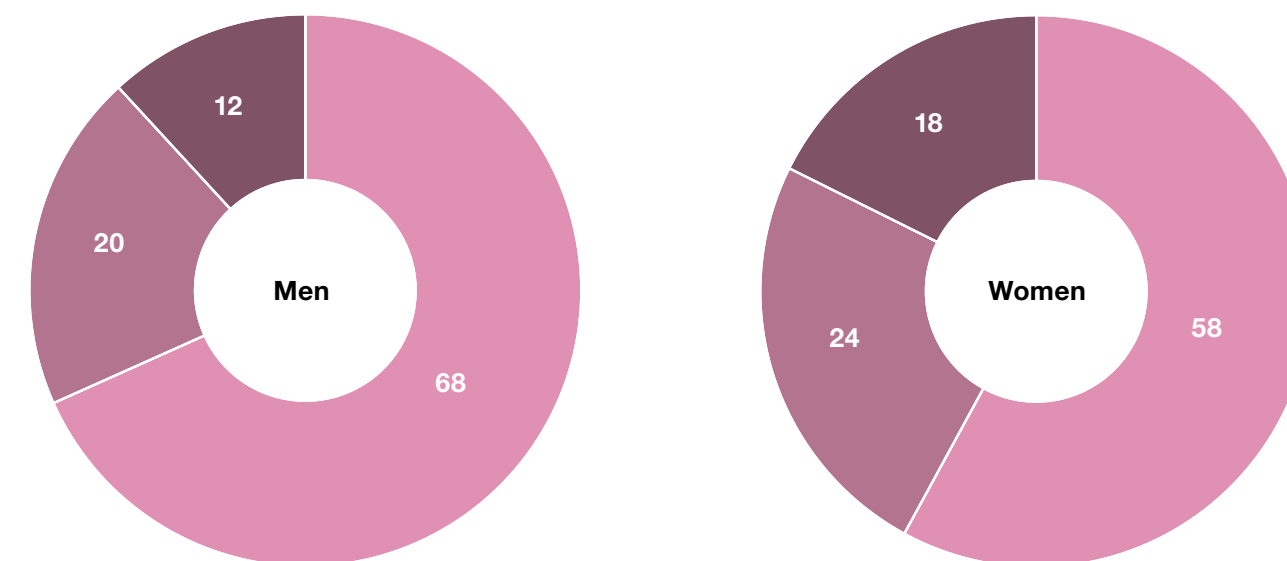
Presence, yes or no, of a person to count on in Switzerland in 2024, by migration year intervals

Yes No

Homesickness is more common among women than men

Reported homesickness in 2024, by gender: weak, moderate or strong

Weak
Moderate
Strong



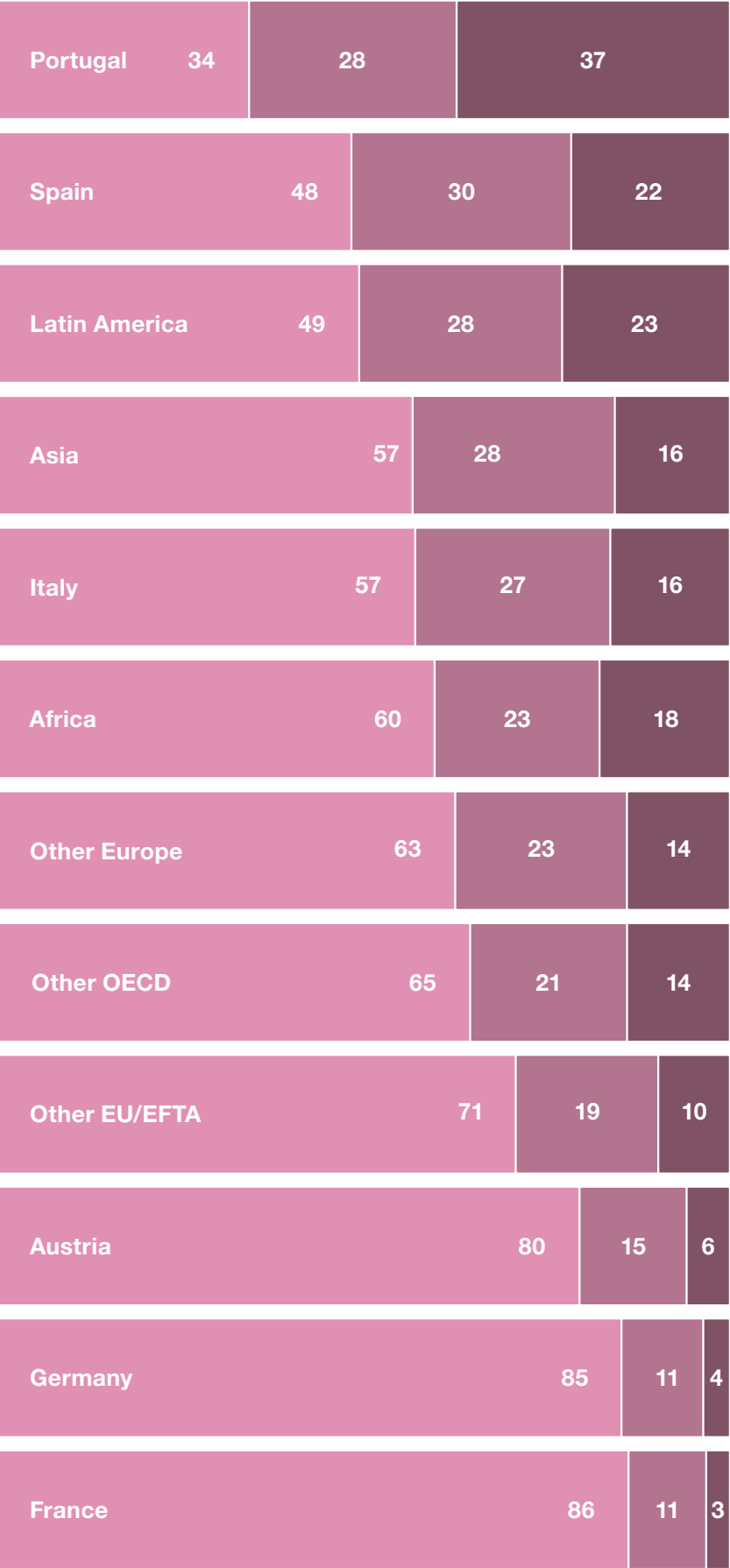
Friends' place of residence differs by respondents' migration history

Friends' place of residence in 2024, by migration year intervals

Mostly in Switzerland
Mixed
Mostly Abroad

Homesickness affects women migrants more than men: 18% of women feel it strongly in 2024, compared to 12% of men. Portuguese migrants struggle most with homesickness (37% feel it strongly). Spanish migrants report 22% strong homesickness, and Latin American migrants 23%. New arrivals from 2020–2024 feel homesick more often (19% strong feelings) than long-term residents from before 2010 (just 8%).

A majority of migrants (78% in 2024) visited their home country in the past 12 months. This is down from 86% in 2018 but recovered from 67% during COVID in 2020. Those who come from far away visit less frequently—53% of African migrants and 55% of Latin American migrants made the trip home. Most (67% in 2024) received visits from family or friends from their home country, up from 48% in 2020.

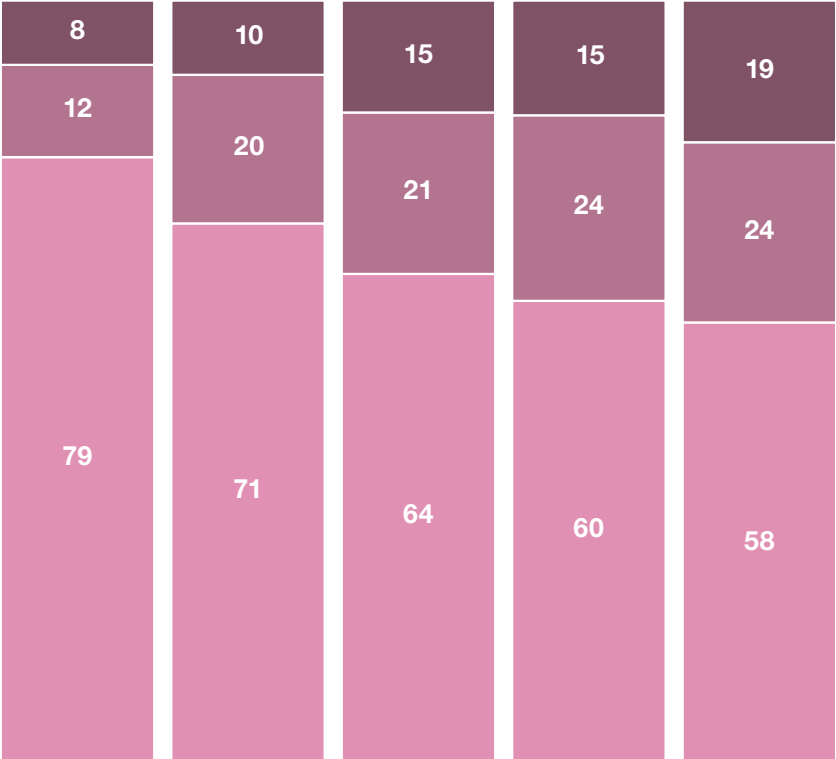


People from Portugal, Spain and from far away countries tend to feel more homesick

Reported homesickness in 2024 by country of origin: weak, moderate or strong

- Weak
- Moderate
- Strong

“Even after many years in Switzerland, I still maintain very strong ties with my home country. My family, closest friends and part of my cultural identity remain there.”

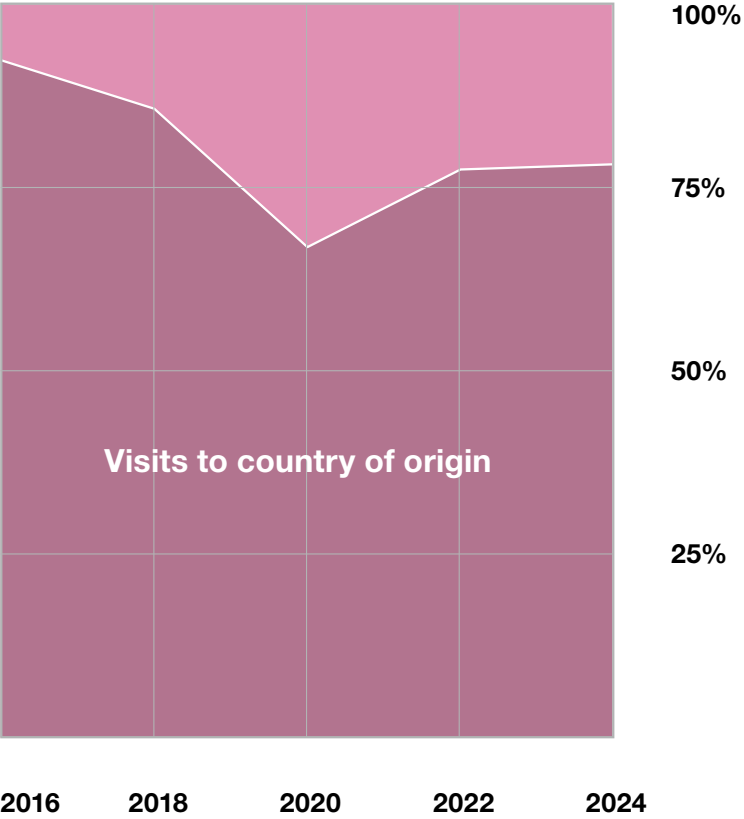


People who migrated more recently tend to feel more homesick

Reported homesickness by migration year intervals: weak, moderate or strong

- Weak
- Moderate
- Strong

“Thanks to social media and regular trips, I remain very connected to my country of origin. I speak with my family almost every day and I still participate in social life there.”

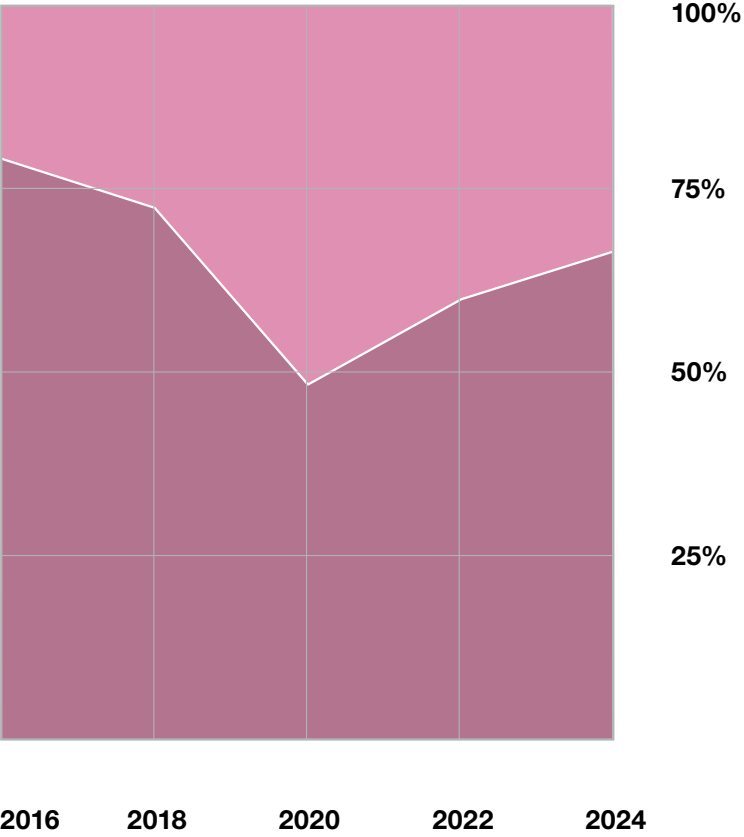
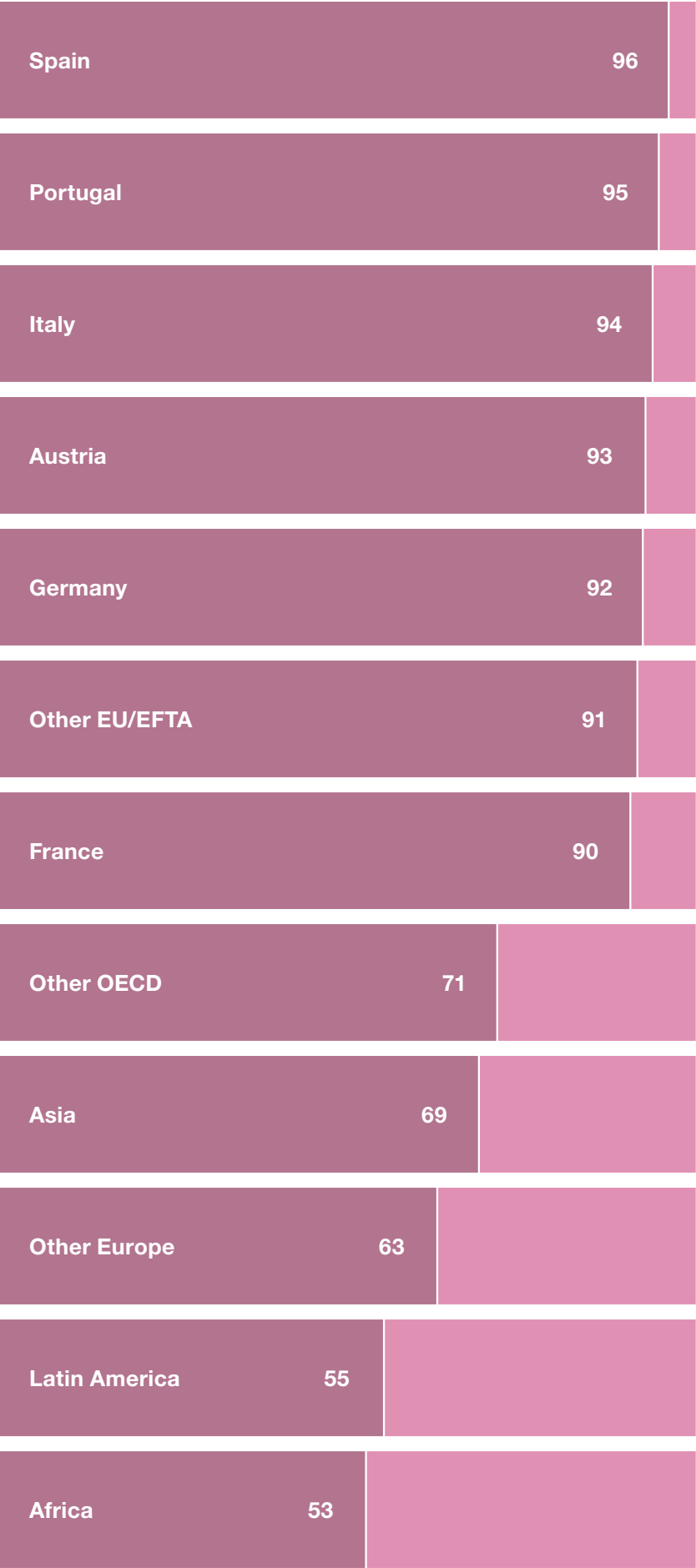


Visits to the country of origin dropped in 2020 and have not returned to pre-pandemic levels

Share of respondents who have visited their country of origin in the last 12 months, by survey year

Visits to the home country decrease as distance increases

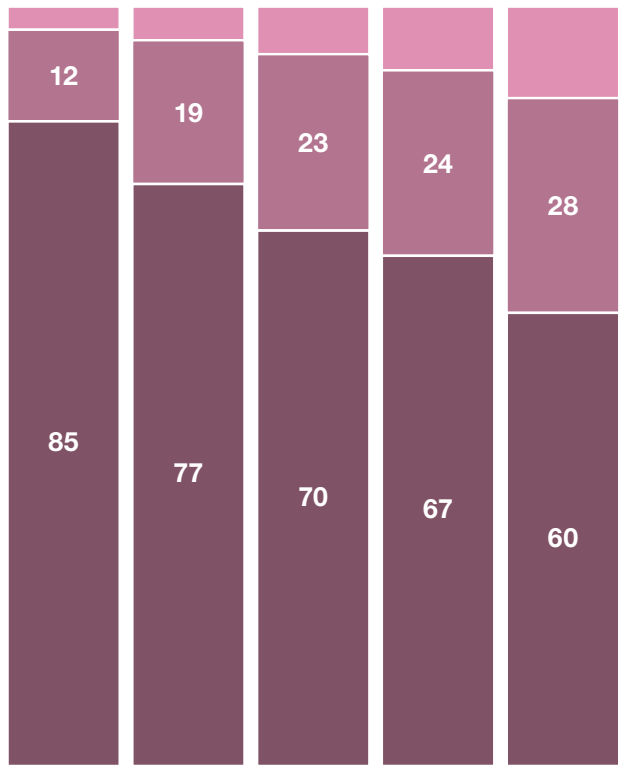
Share of respondents who have visited their home-land in the last 12 months, in 2024



... a similar decline was observed in visits from relatives from the country of origin

Proportion of respondents who received visits from relatives from their country of origin, by survey year

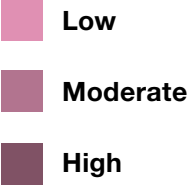
Interest in the news from



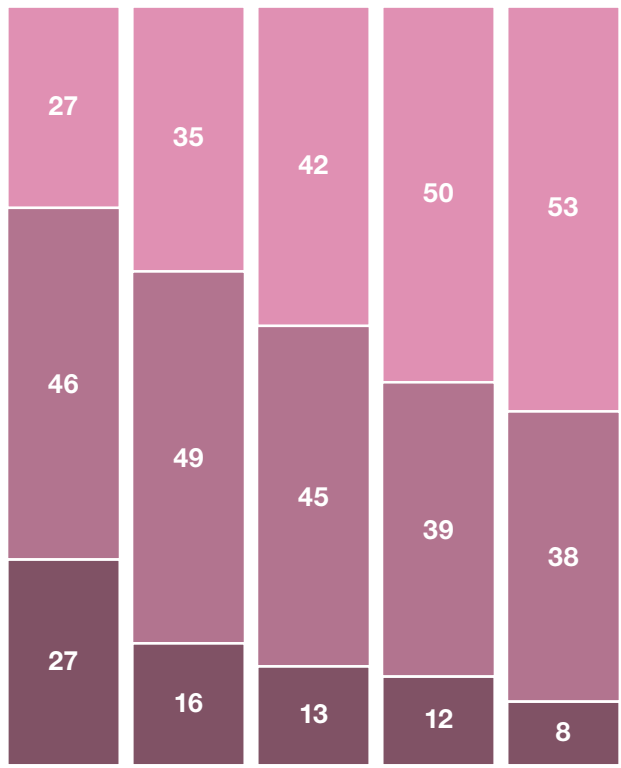
As time of residence in Switzerland increases, interest in local news and politics grows while interest in the home country's only moderately declines

Level of interest: low, moderate or high, by migration year intervals, in 2024 survey

Switzerland



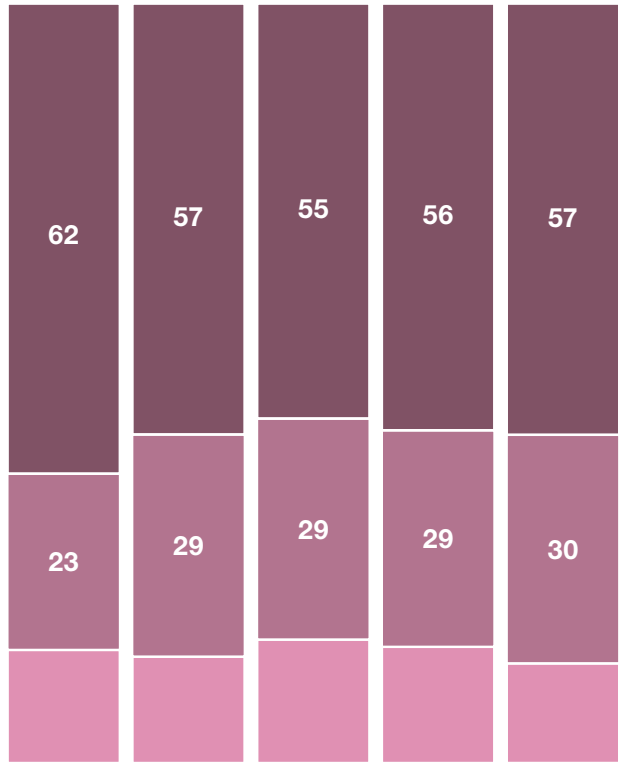
Interest in politics from



The longer migrants live in Switzerland, the more they follow Swiss news and politics. Eight out of ten long-term residents who arrived before 2009 (85%) show strong interest in Swiss topics. Only 60% of recent arrivals from 2020–2024 feel the same. Interest in home country news stays steady for migrants whether they arrived recently or many years ago, ranging from 56% to 62%.

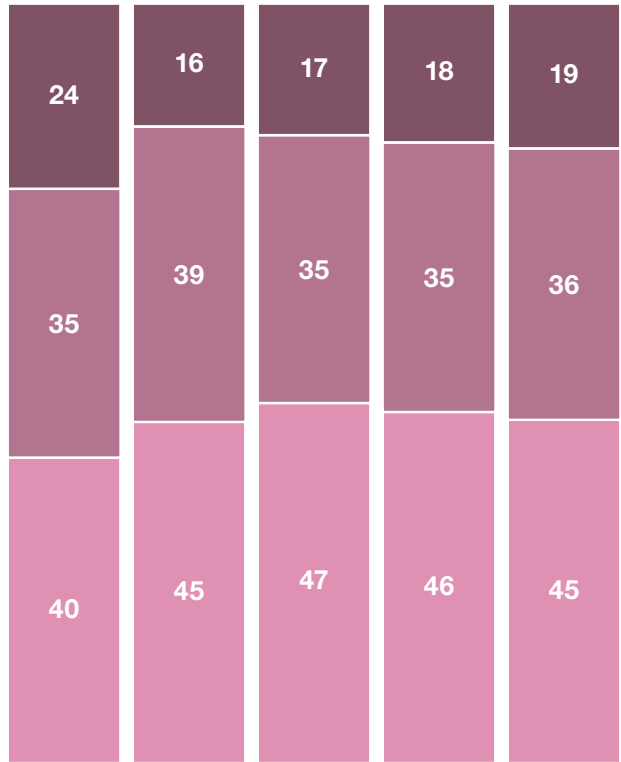
Switzerland

2005 — 2008
2009 — 2012
2013 — 2016
2017 — 2020
2021 — 2024



Home country

2005 — 2008
2009 — 2012
2013 — 2016
2017 — 2020
2021 — 2024



Home country

A Closer Look at the Data

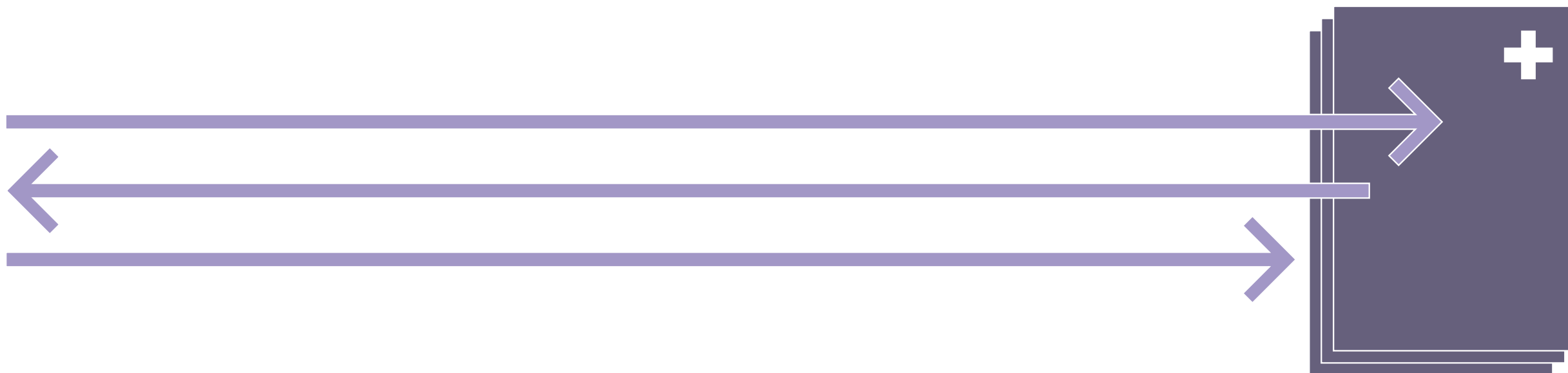
Roxane Gerber, University of Geneva

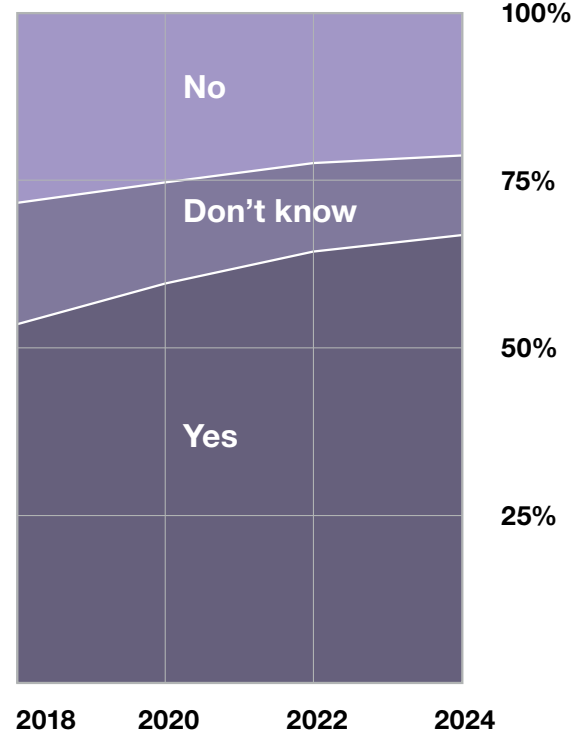
Migrating to a new country is rarely an individual experience. Family, friends, and broader social networks play an important role in migrants' lives and trajectories. While some migrants move together with partners or family members, others maintain long-distance relationships and social ties across borders, sometimes over many years. Migrants often build lives that span multiple countries, where relationships in Switzerland and in the country of origin coexist rather than one replacing the other. This helps explain why even long-settled migrants rarely abandon ties abroad entirely, even as local networks grow over time.

Distance plays a structuring role in this balance. For migrants from neighbouring countries, frequent travel keeps ties abroad active without competing with relationships developed in Switzerland—explaining why EU nationals combine high home-country visit rates with manageable levels of homesickness. For migrants from more distant regions, geographic and financial barriers to travel can deepen homesickness, even when strong support networks exist in Switzerland; this suggests homesickness is not simply a function of local integration, but also of the ability to physically bridge the distance.

Interest in Swiss news and politics rising with time in the country may also signal a deeper process: as migrants develop a stake in Swiss society—through work, family, or naturalization plans—they invest more attention in local affairs, without necessarily disengaging from their origin country. This dual engagement, rather than a linear shift from “there” to “here,” better captures how migrants build belonging over time.

5 Belonging, Inclusion, Discrimination





The share of people, interested in naturalization is gradually increasing

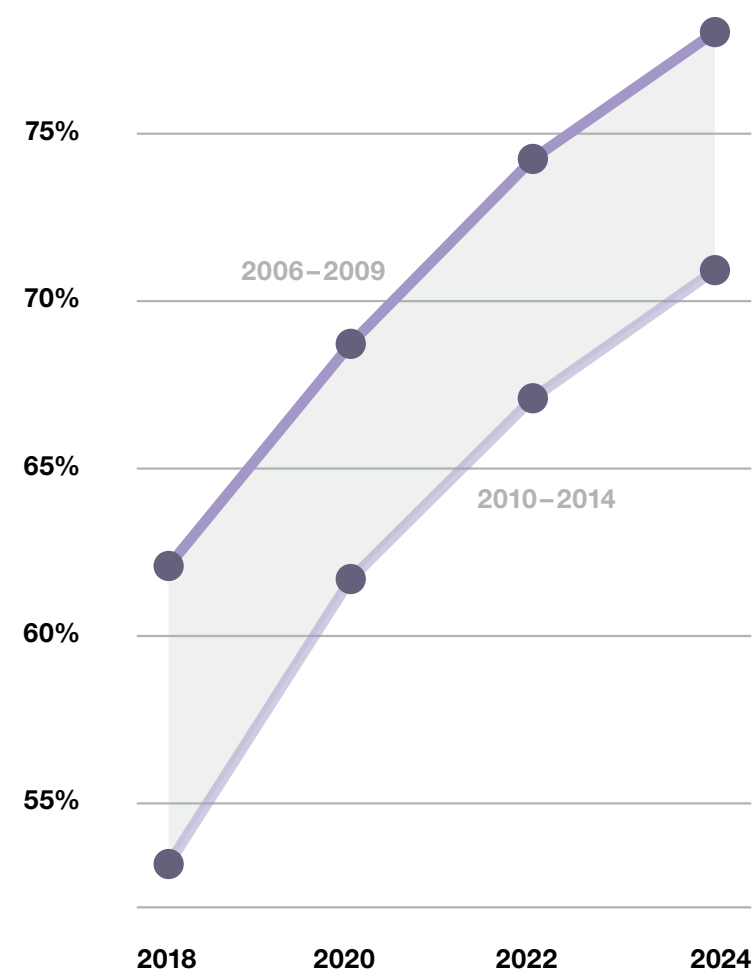
Do you plan to apply for Swiss naturalization in the future?
By survey year

“Obtaining Swiss citizenship was important to me because it made me feel fully accepted and part of the country where I live and work.”

A steady increase interest in naturalization over time spent in Switzerland

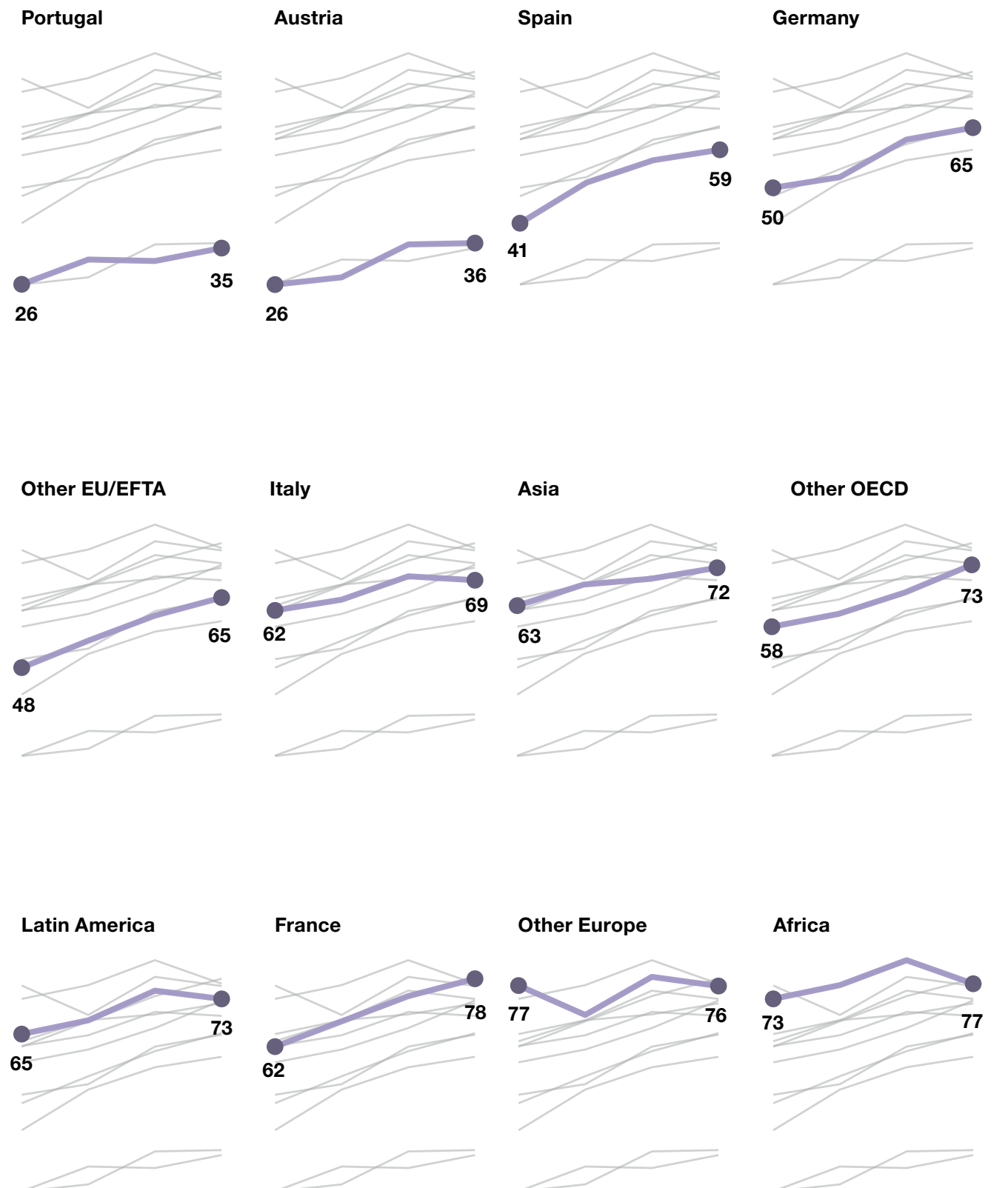
A steady increase interest in naturalization over time spent in Switzerland

“The naturalization process is long and demanding, but it represents a real recognition of our integration into Swiss society.”



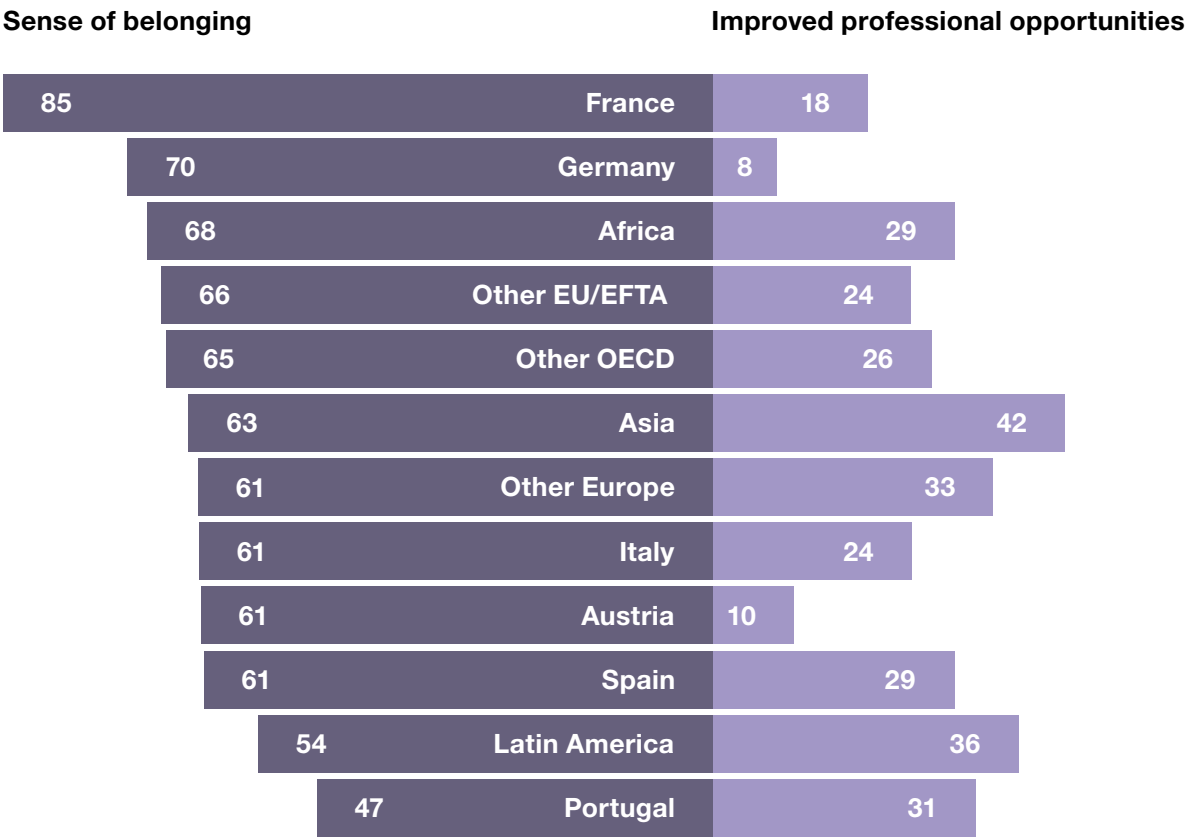
Interest in naturalization varies by country of origin

Share of people intending to naturalize, by country of origin from 2016 until 2024



Sense of belonging is a great driver of naturalization than career advancement

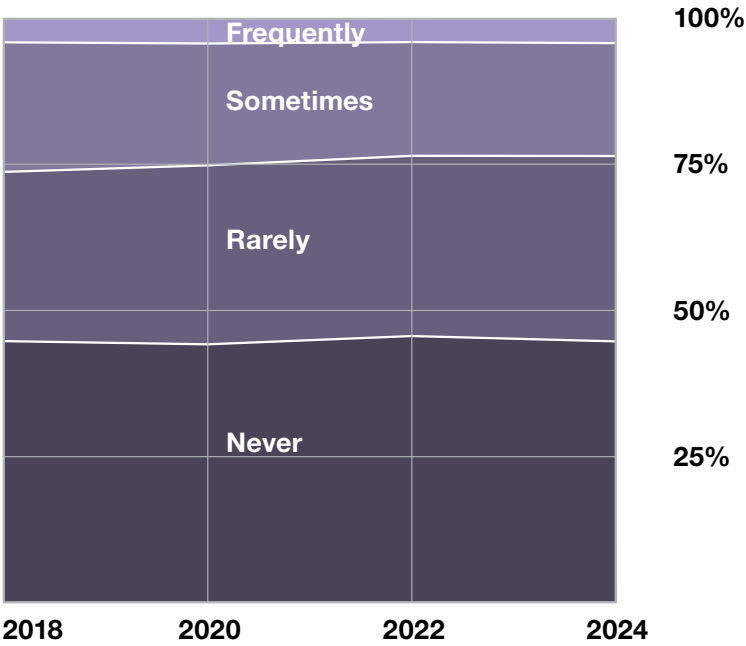
Proportion of people citing “a sense of belonging” versus “improved professional opportunities” as reasons for seeking naturalization, 2024 (multiple responses allowed)



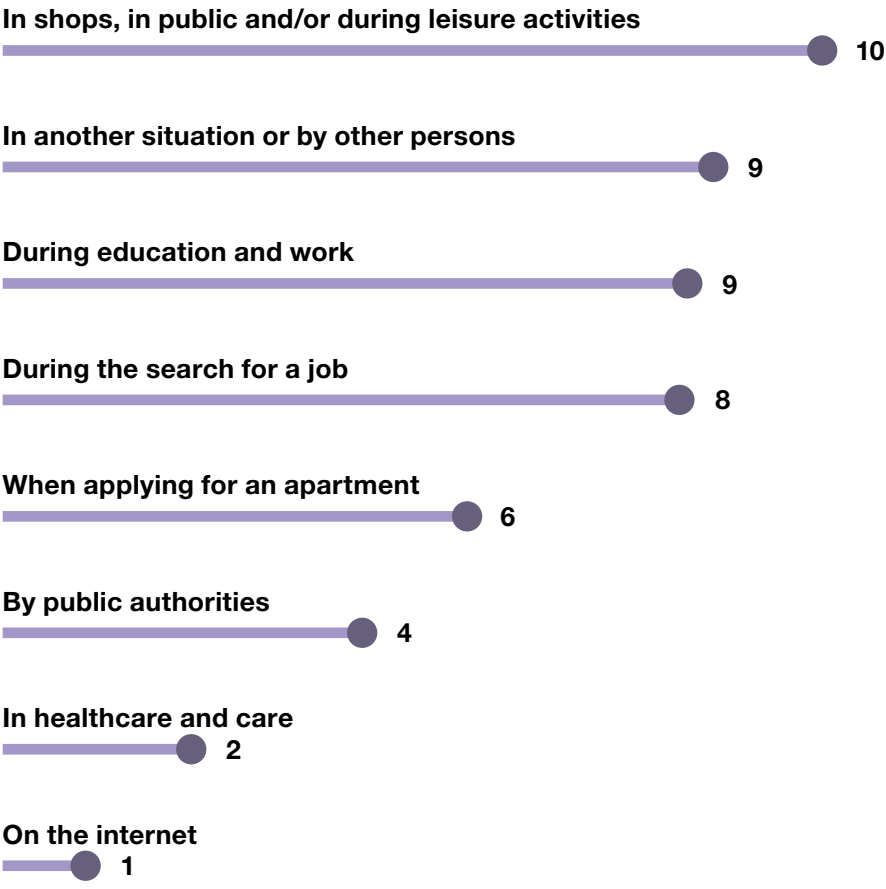
Interest in Swiss citizenship has increased markedly among migrants. In 2024, 67% said they intended to apply for Swiss citizenship, or were already in the process. This share has grown steadily from 40% in 2016. The longer migrants stay in Switzerland, the higher the interest in naturalization. Among those who arrived before 2009, 78% are interested in applying. For those who came between 2010 and 2014, it's 71%. French migrants want Swiss citizenship most often (78%), followed by migrants from other European countries (77%) and African countries (77%). Austrian migrants (36%) and Portuguese migrants (35%) show the least interest. These differences are likely related both to national citizenship laws—for example, restrictions on dual citizenship (i.e. for Austrian citizens)—and to different expectations regarding return migration. A sense of belonging to Swiss society is one of the main reasons given for wanting Swiss citizenship, although its importance varies considerably across groups: from 47% among Portuguese respondents to 84% among French respondents. Better professional opportunities are also mentioned, especially by respondents from Asia, Latin America, Africa, other European countries, and Portugal, with shares ranging from 24% to 42% depending on the group and if their nationality allows free movement.

Discrimination rates remain stable, affecting over half of respondents

Experiences of prejudice or discrimination in the last 24 months, by survey year



“Despite being well qualified, I often felt treated differently because of my foreign background. Sometimes you feel that you have to prove yourself twice as much as others.”



Discrimination is more frequent in institutional settings than in public life

Discrimination incidents in the last 24 months, by survey year

Discrimination in public life primarily affects non-Europeans, while at work of school it cuts across a wider range of nationalities

Share of all respondents who reported discrimination in the past 24 months, by survey year

Public activities	Education and work	Other situations	Search for a job	Applying for an apartment	Public authorities	Healthcare and care	Internet	
20	7	11	13	10	5	3	2	Asia
13	11	9	14	9	7	3	1	Africa
10	10	14	11	8	3	4	0	Portugal
13	10	9	7	5	7	4	1	Other OECD
12	10	13	9	3	5	3	1	Latin America
7	11	10	7	6	5	2	0	Spain
5	11	9	9	4	4	2	1	Italy
6	10	6	7	6	5	1	1	France
5	6	8	10	5	4	2	2	Other Europe
10	8	8	7	5	4	2	1	Other EU/EFTA
8	10	5	4	4	3	1	0	Germany
5	4	4	3	3	3	1	0	Austria

More than half of migrants (55% in 2024) say they faced discrimination or unfair treatment in the past two years. 45% of migrants report never having experienced it, 32% rarely, 19% sometimes, and 4% often. These rates have stayed steady since 2018. Discrimination happens most often during free time activities or in public places—10% of all migrants surveyed report this. About 9% faced it while job hunting or at work and in school. Fewer cases happen with health services (2%) or public authorities (5%). Portuguese migrants report discrimination most often in public (10%) and when renting apartments (35%). Asian migrants face it frequently in public settings (20%). Non-European migrants encounter discrimination across many situations, while European migrants report it more at work.

A Closer Look at the Data

Gianni D'Amato, University of Neuchâtel,
Director of the nccr – on the move

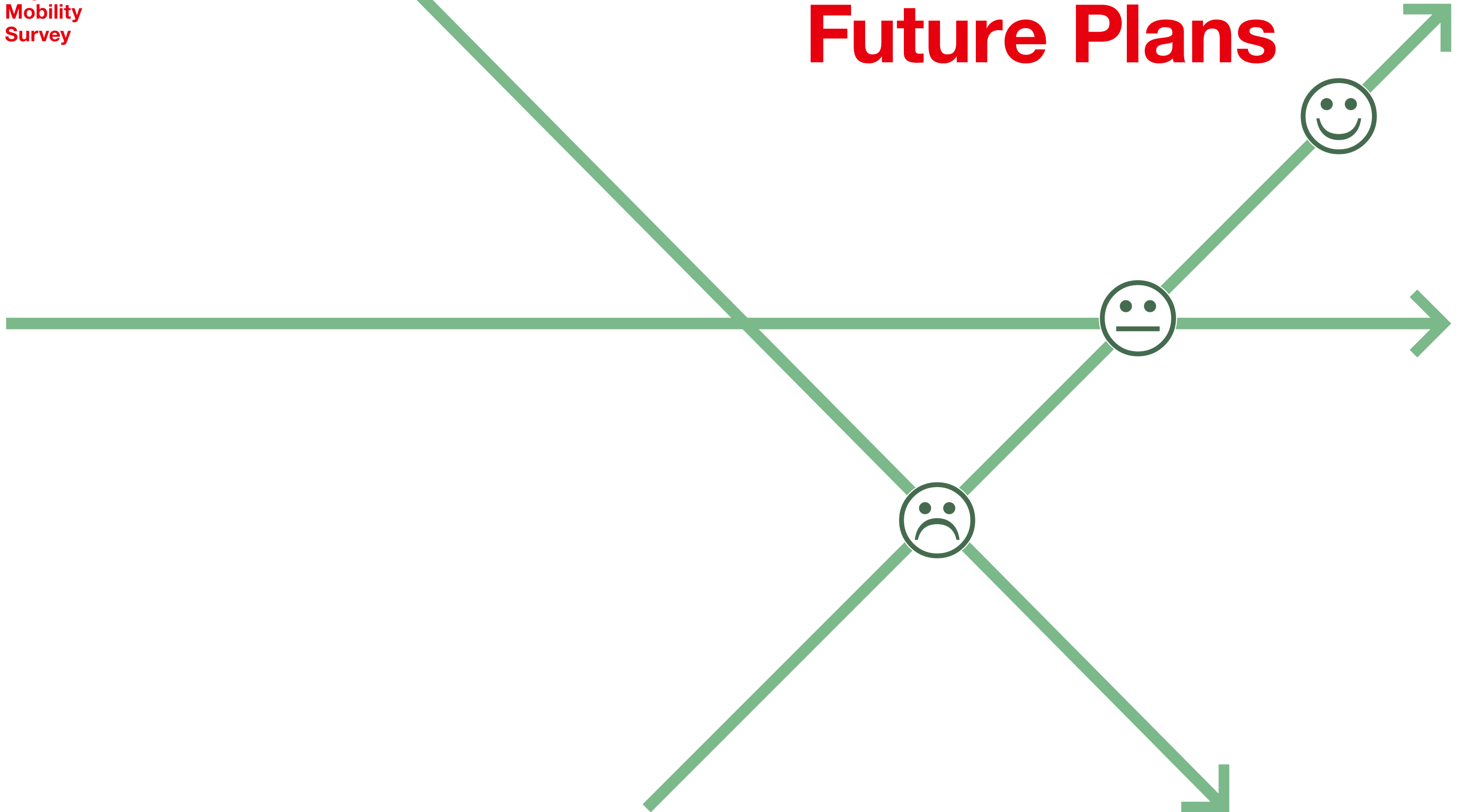
Naturalization and discrimination capture two complementary dimensions of incorporation into Swiss society. Naturalization measures migrants' willingness to transform long-term residence into formal membership. It is not only a legal step, but also a symbolic claim to belonging, participation, and recognition. The strong and growing interest in Swiss citizenship suggests that many migrants do not understand their stay in Switzerland as merely temporary or instrumental. Over time, settlement, family life, work, and social ties translate into a desire for political and civic inclusion.

At the same time, discrimination reminds us that formal inclusion and lived belonging do not necessarily coincide. Experiences of unfair treatment in public space, at work, while looking for housing, or in contact with institutions show that access to Swiss citizenship does not automatically remove social boundaries. The findings resonate with research on structural racism in Switzerland, which has shown that unequal treatment is not limited to individual prejudice, but may be embedded in institutional routines, discretionary practices, and historically shaped perceptions of origin, culture, religion, or visible difference.

Taken together, these two indicators highlight a central paradox of integration. Many migrants seek citizenship because they feel attached to Switzerland and wish to belong more fully. Yet discrimination continues to mark unequal access to recognition and opportunity. The data therefore allows us to see citizenship not as the end point of integration, but as part of a broader process in which legal status, social acceptance, and equality must be considered together.

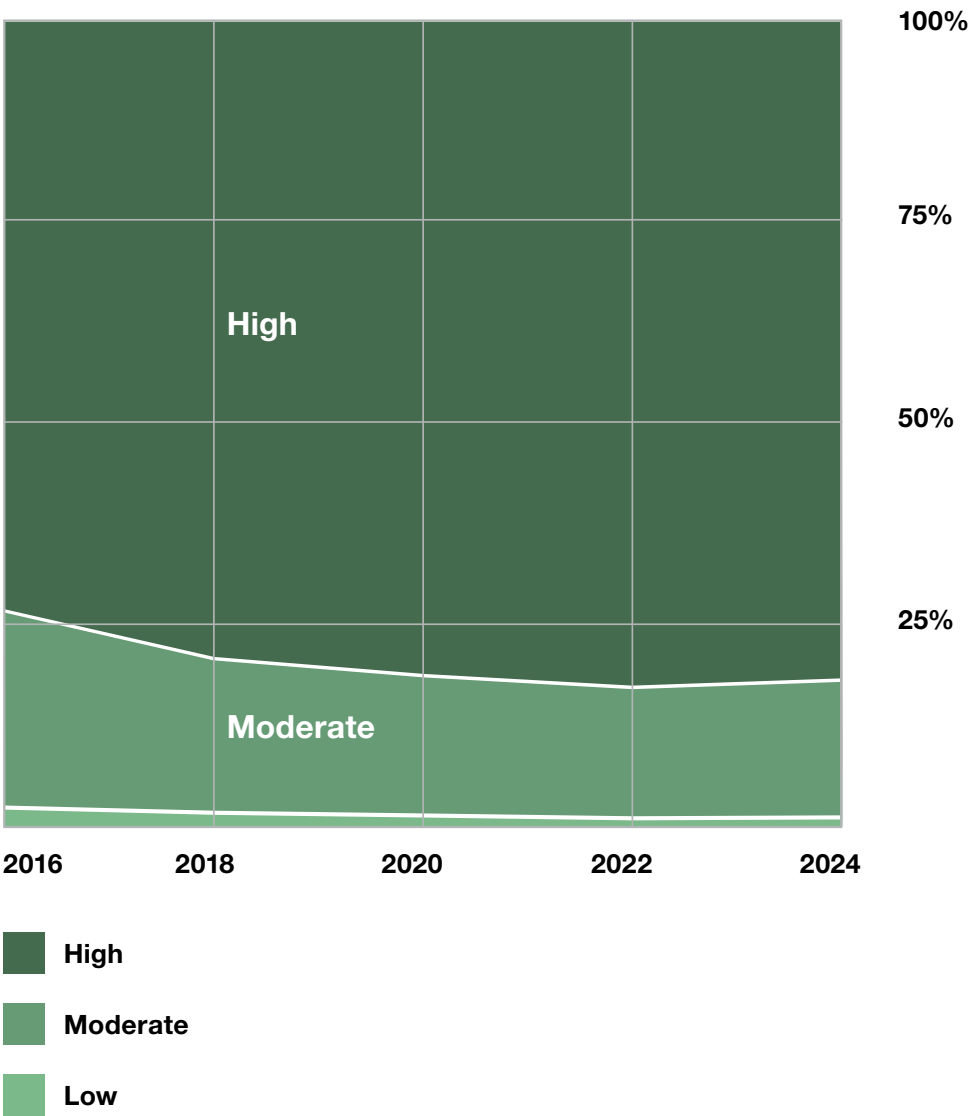
“There are still many prejudices against foreigners, especially in the job market and when looking for housing.”

6 Satisfaction and Future Plans



Four out of five people are satisfied with their decision to migrate to Switzerland, with little change over time

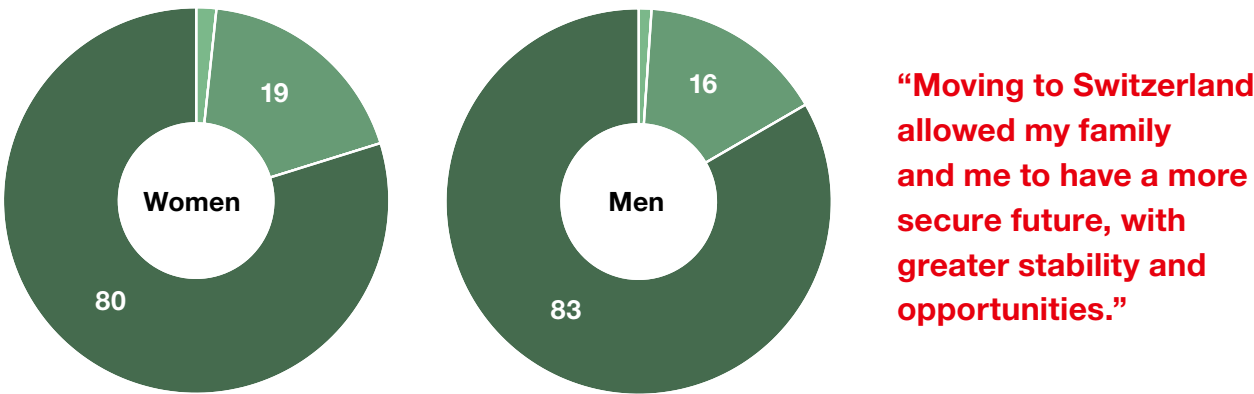
Level of satisfaction of moving to Switzerland, by survey year: high, moderate or low



More migrants want to stay long-term in Switzerland over time. In 2024, 52% plan to remain here, up from 42% in 2018. The share who wants to leave fell from 17% in 2018 to 13% in 2024. One third (35% in 2024) still don't know their plans, down from 41% in 2018. French migrants most often want to stay (64%), followed by migrants from other European countries (69%) and African countries (65%). Portuguese migrants plan to leave most frequently (38%). Spanish migrants remain most undecided (44%).

Women are slightly less satisfied than men with their move to Switzerland

Level of satisfaction of moving to Switzerland, in 2024 by gender



People intending to naturalize and with higher education are more satisfied with their move to Switzerland

Level of satisfaction of moving to Switzerland, in 2024 (high, moderate or low), by intent to naturalize: yes, undecided or no

Yes	86	13
Don't know	73	25
No	71	25

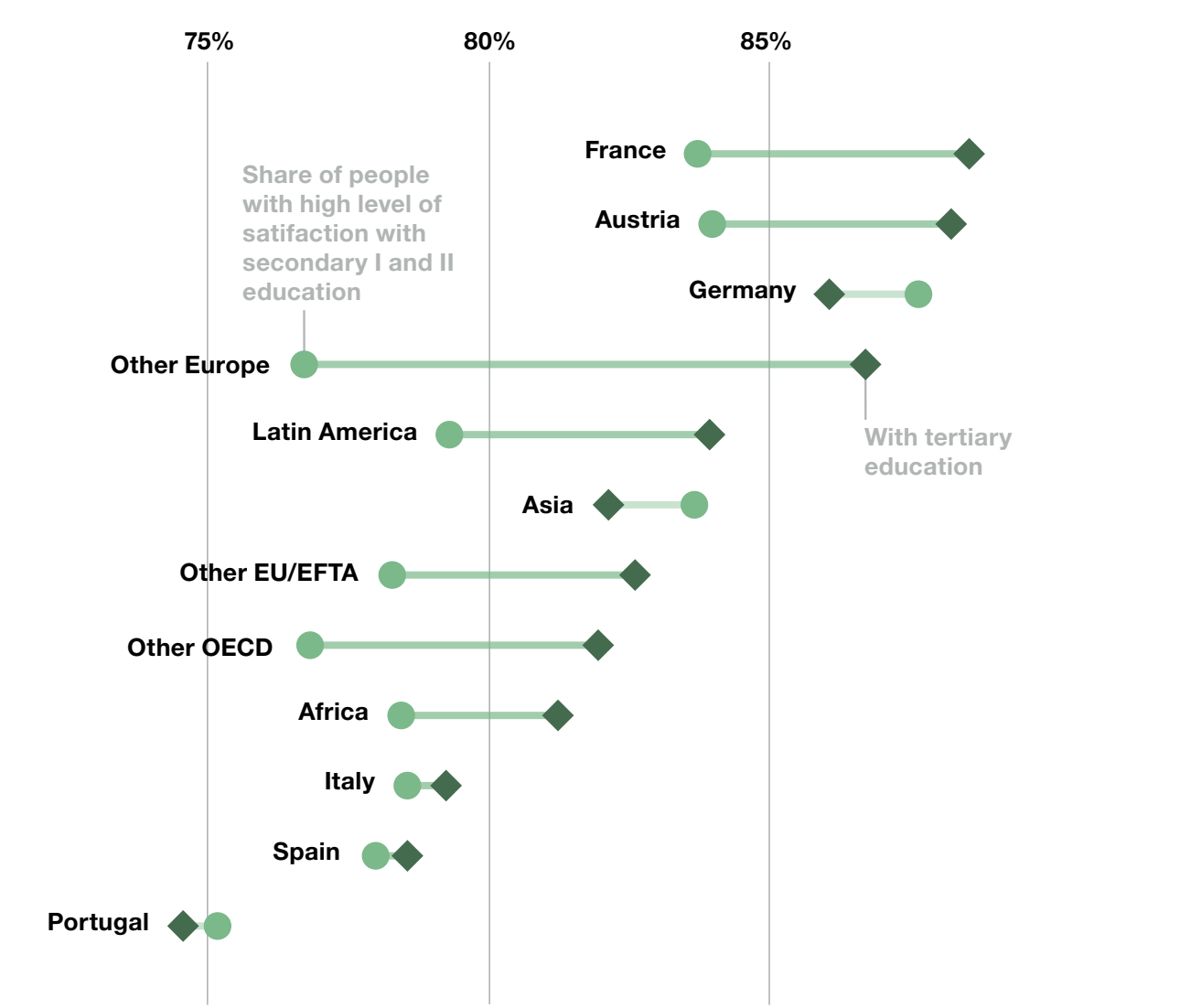
Level of satisfaction of moving to Switzerland, in 2024 by education level

Tertiary	83	16
Secondary I and II	79	19

“I no longer see my future in my country of origin. Switzerland has become my home and I would like to stay here permanently.”

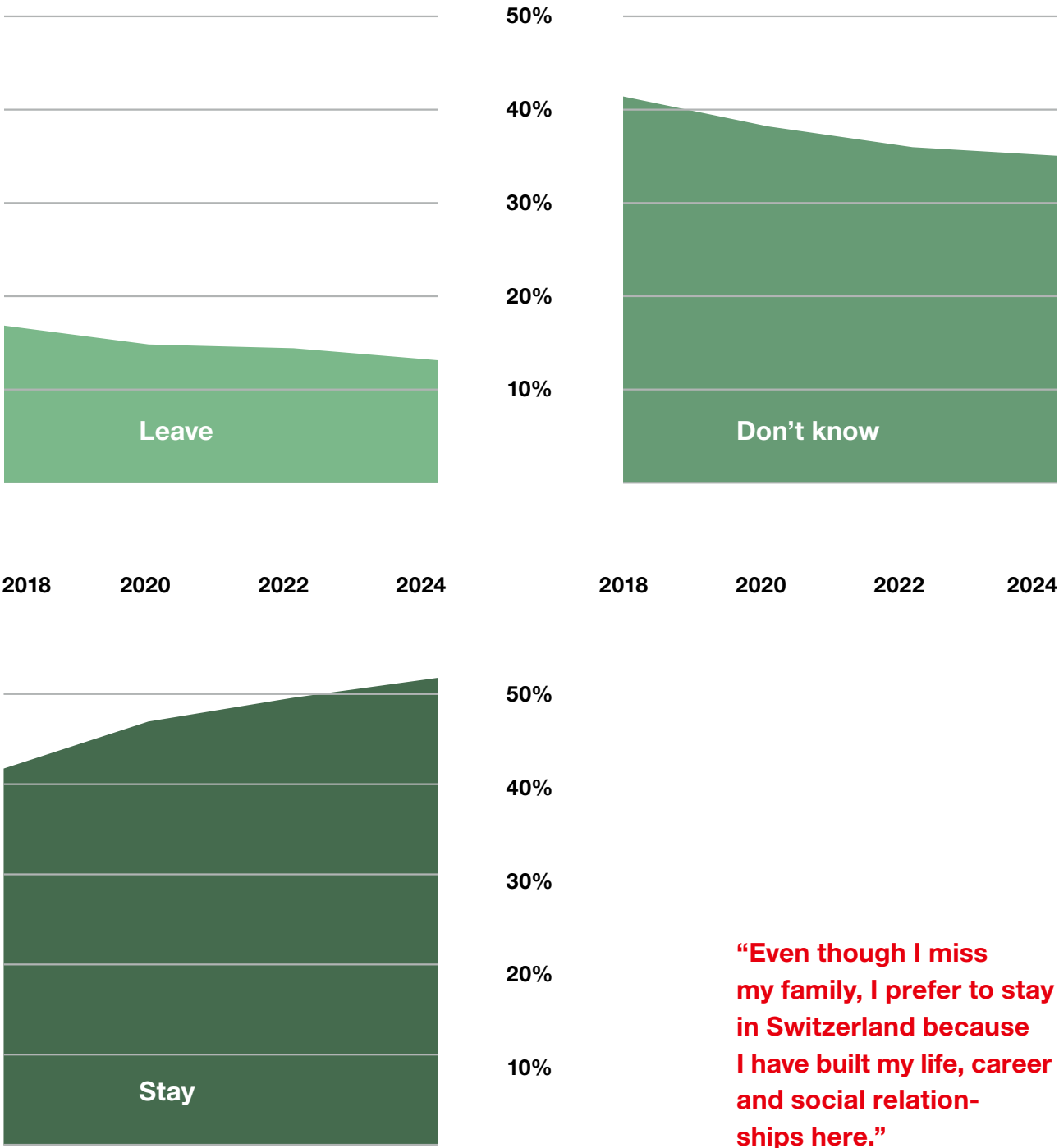
People originating from Southern Europe are generally less satisfied with having moved to Switzerland

Proportion of people with a high level of satisfaction according to their education level (secondary I and II or tertiary), in 2024 and by country of origin

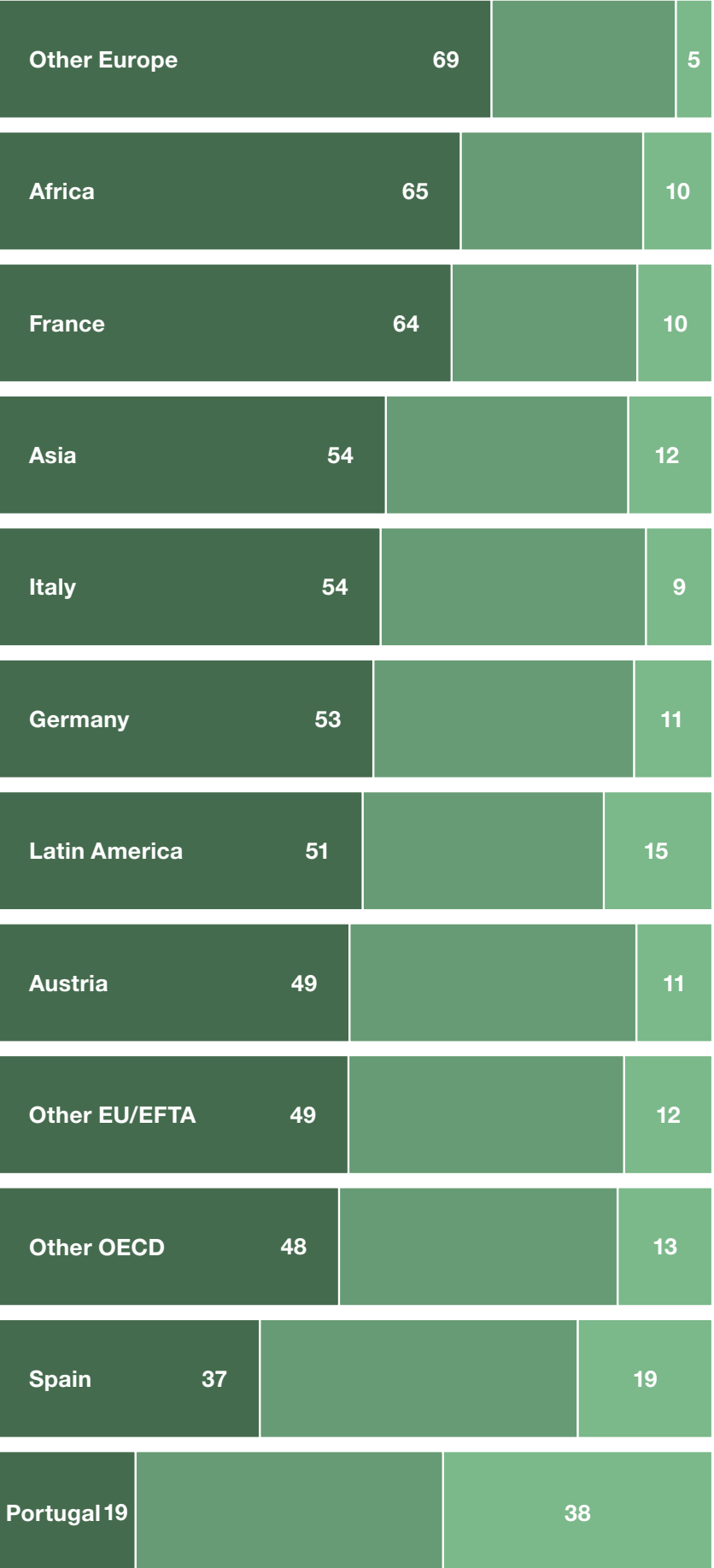


More people are planning to stay in Switzerland

Share of respondents intending to stay in Switzerland, leave or who are undecided, by survey year



“Even though I miss my family, I prefer to stay in Switzerland because I have built my life, career and social relationships here.”



Intentions to stay in Switzerland vary significantly by national group

Share of respondents by country intending to stay in Switzerland, leave or who are undecided in 2024

- Stay
- Undecided
- Leave

A Closer Look at the Data

Angela Paparusso, Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies (CNR-IRPPS)

Improved employment opportunities, increased safety, and greater societal acceptance have solidified migrants’ long-term plans in Switzerland. Intentions to stay rose steadily, even during the COVID-19 period, as departure plans and uncertainty declined. Nationality shapes these differences: this suggests different migration expectations and time horizons, with Southern Europeans more often viewing migration as a shorter-term or reversible project.

Satisfaction with the decision to migrate is markedly higher among migrants intending to naturalize and among those with higher educational attainment, patterns consistently observed across Europe. The literature shows that both naturalization intentions and education are positively associated with satisfaction, reflecting positive selection processes and more successful integration paths.

Migrants from Southern Europe report lower satisfaction levels, which appear less strongly linked to education. This may reflect origin-specific factors, including stronger economic or social ties to the country of origin and greater challenges in economic and social integration. Cultural factors may also matter: cultural distance and language barriers could contribute to lower satisfaction among migrants from Portugal, Spain, and Italy.

Overall, these trends underscore the central role of integration. Economic opportunities and a sense of belonging foster long-term commitment, while targeted support for specific migrant groups could enhance retention and satisfaction. Well-designed migration and integration policies may therefore help reduce disparities across national groups and promote more durable settlement trajectories.

nccr on the move

National Center of Competence in Research –
The Migration-Mobility Nexus

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