

An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road that curves through a dense, lush green forest. The road is light grey and has white markings. The surrounding forest is thick with various shades of green trees. The ground between the road and the forest appears to be reddish-brown soil or dirt.

**nccr** →  
**on the move**

**Second Survey  
on Transnational Ageing  
(TAS II)**

**First results about  
the Swiss abroad**

## Presentation of the survey

The “fifth Switzerland” is highly populated, with 788'000 Swiss living abroad in 2021. According to the Swiss Federal Office, about one quarter of Swiss abroad is retired. This proportion increases over time faster than any other age class mainly because of population ageing and migration abroad at retirement or just before retirement.

The first Transnational Ageing Survey (TAS I) was about people 55+ living in Switzerland and aimed at highlighting international mobility practices and the reasons that motivated them. The second Transnational Ageing Survey (TAS II) focuses on the international level, looking at the life and mobility practices of Swiss people 55+ living abroad.

This survey was carried out in several countries around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, from October 2020 to the end of summer 2021. It was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) through the research hub nccr – on the move.

This flyer briefly presents a selection of the results we obtained.

## The survey at a glance



**Aim: get to know the fifth Switzerland close to retirement or already retired**  
This survey investigates the life abroad of Swiss people 55+.



### Around the world

This survey focuses on Swiss people living outside of Switzerland.

With 10'000 envelopes sent around the whole world, proportional to the size of the Swiss population in the different regions of the world, the survey had an extremely high response rate: 47%!

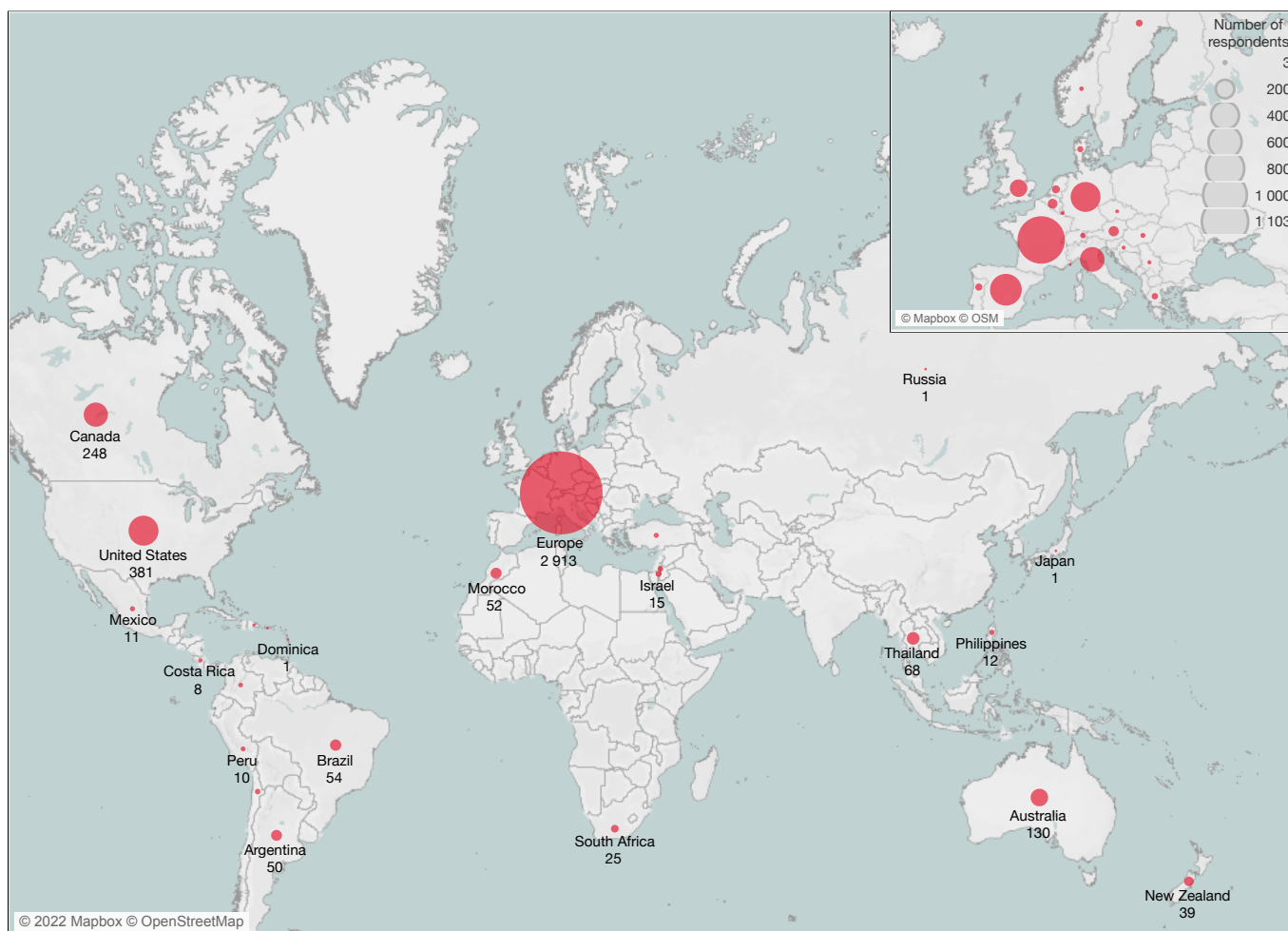
We have received the answers from Swiss people living in more than 43 different countries.



### 4'689 people participated

Among the several people that participated in the survey, 69% also have another nationality than the Swiss one.

## Map of the number of respondents by country of residence



Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nccr – on the move

## A fifth Switzerland close to retirement or already retired, well integrated abroad, and informed about Switzerland

The fifth Switzerland close to retirement or already retired is a population made up of several nationalities that travel regularly to other countries in the world. This population has already experienced, for the most part, one or more migrations and has been living in the country of residence for more than 30 years without necessarily being born there. The survey has also found 700 persons that have moved for the last time for retirement in the country where they currently live. The population of the fifth Switzerland is diversified and part of it (20%) is made of Swiss offspring born in the country of residence for several generations, who have never lived in Switzerland, but who travel regularly, for the most part, to other countries. Consequently, the majority of the fifth Switzerland feels like locals or cosmopolitan people. This is probably explained by the long stays in the countries where our interviewees live (>30 years for 66% of the respondents).

Most of the respondents participate in local cultural events and meet mainly people who have lived in their current country of residence. The participation in local political activities is however low (10%).

The links to Switzerland are strong and are expressed through different practices. For example, a quarter of the respondents meet mainly people who have lived most of their life in Switzerland, 18% participate in activities organized by groups and associations of Swiss abroad, and 73% have hosted a person of Swiss nationality. In addition to this, 22% of respondents have bought Swiss SIM cards for their mobile phones. Almost three quarters of respondents are informed about Swiss news, and about electoral campaigns (45%), by regularly reading a Swiss newspaper or a newsletter or by visiting websites about Switzerland. Information does not always translate into active electoral participation, but 35% of respondents nevertheless participate in Swiss votes.



**74,3 %**

usually read a Swiss local or regional newspaper, a newsletter or visit websites to stay informed with the current situation in Switzerland.



**21,9 %**

have already bought Swiss SIM cards for their mobile phone to communicate with loved ones in Switzerland or for other reasons.



**44,5 %**

have searched for information about election campaigns and referenda in Switzerland via newspapers, conversations with family and friends, or the red voting booklet.



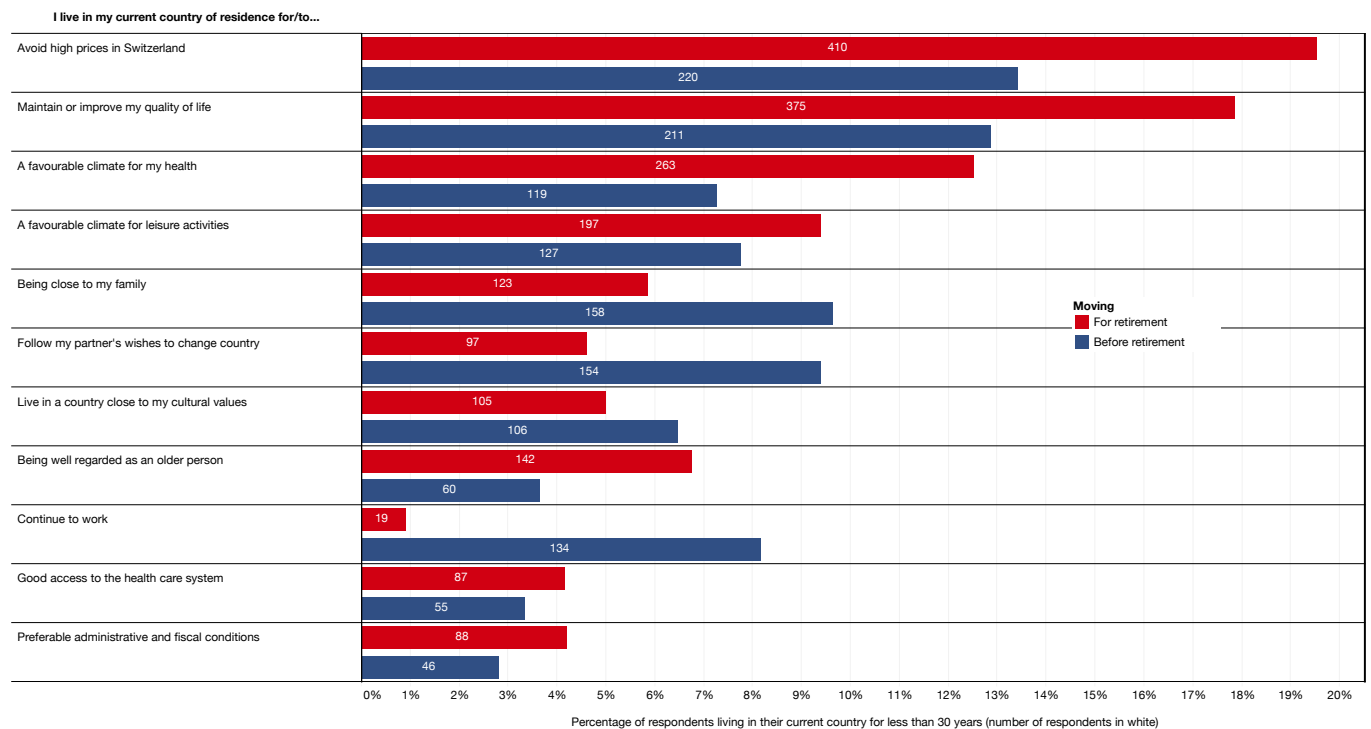
**35,2 %**

participate in Swiss referenda and elections. The number of people who vote is therefore lower than the number of people who stay informed about political issues.

## Living in Switzerland or abroad? The deciding factors: prices, quality of life and climate

Among the reasons selected by people who have arrived in the country of residence at adult age and especially for retirement, there are mainly the difficulty to live with high prices in Switzerland and the wish to keep or improve the living conditions. Indeed, most respondents estimate they spend less than when they lived in Switzerland. A mild climate good for health conditions and leisure activities is also searched by people who migrate for retirement. People who migrated before retirement mention relatively more often the fact of being close to the family, the wish to follow the partner, and to keep working.

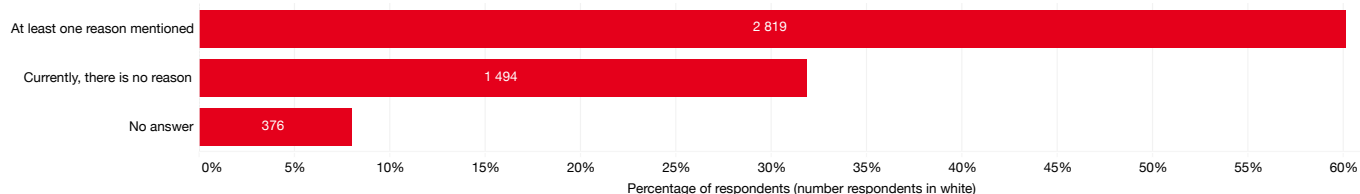
## Reasons for living in your current country depending on the time of the move



Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nccr – on the move

Our data show a variety of profiles of respondents. About two third (65%) are already retired, with a small percentage (14%) who have a paid ancillary activity. Among all the respondents, about one quarter has gone into early retirement mainly to enjoy the rest of their lives. Among the respondents who are still professionally active, almost half express the desire to spend their retirement in the country where they live and about one quarter would like to be in between different countries, including Switzerland. One third of respondents does not consider going (back) to live in Switzerland in the future nor see any reason to do so.

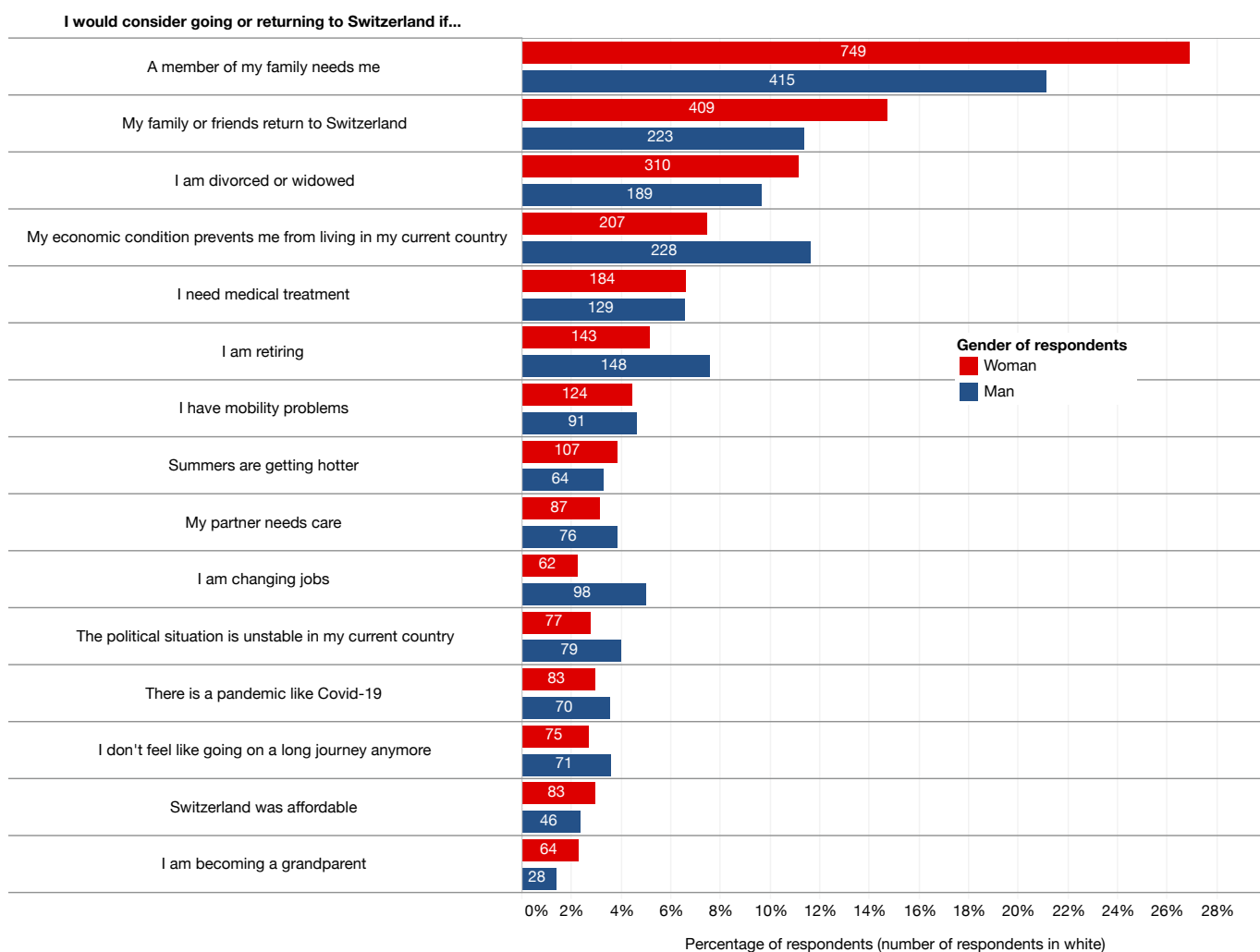
## Consider a reason to go to or return to Switzerland



Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nccr – on the move

On the other side, among those who would like to go (back) to Switzerland, the reasons are: care needs of family member(s), mentioned especially among female respondents, friends, and the risk of becoming divorced or widowed. The fear of an unstable economic situation in the country of residence would be a reason to go back to Switzerland mainly for male respondents, who could imagine going back for retirement. Among all respondents, departures linked to concerns about climate change, the evolution of the pandemic, care needs, and the political situation of the country of residence are mentioned only by a small minority (<10%).

## Reasons for returning or going to Switzerland by gender



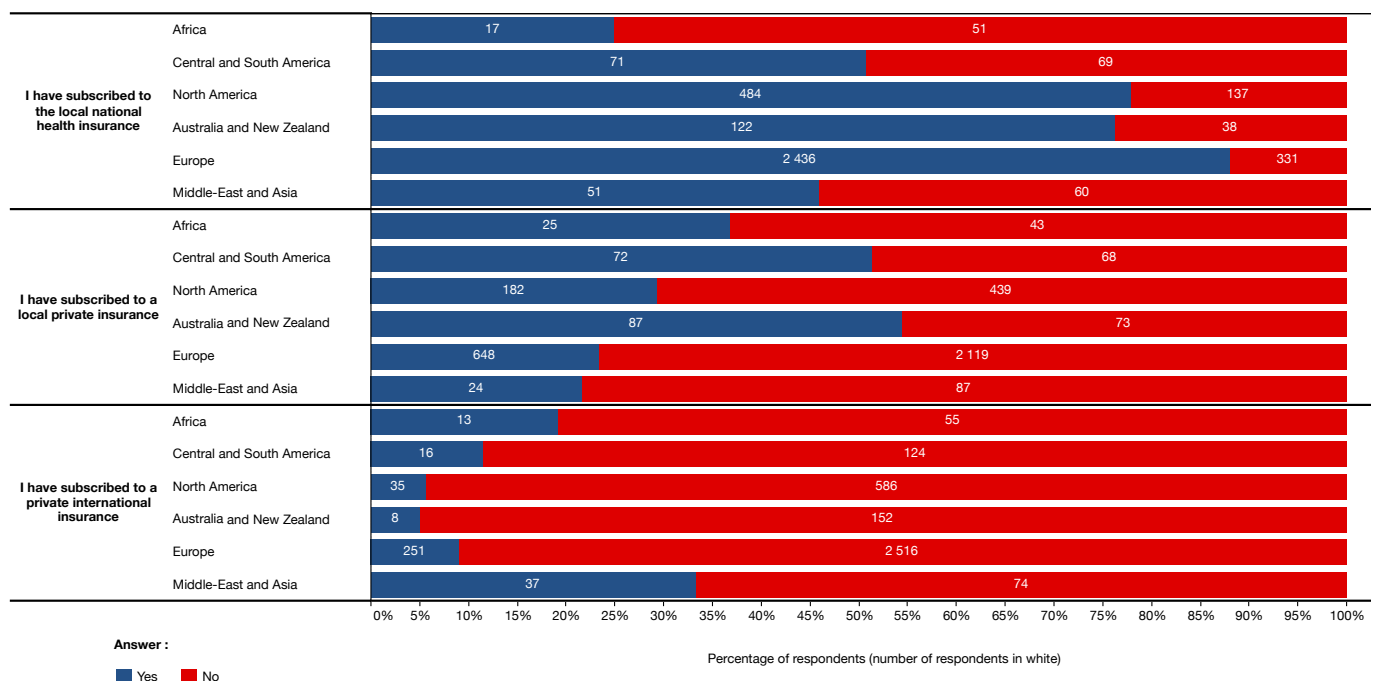
Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nccr – on the move

## Trust in the local health system

The majority of respondents declare themselves in good or really good health, with only 5% saying they are in bad shape. Despite this fact, 35% of respondents suffer from a chronic illness or a long-term disease. In addition to this, 14% of those who went into early retirement did so because of their health problems, 4% because of the health problems of a family member, and 8% because of burnout or fatigue.

In terms of health management, 80% of respondents are registered with the national health system of the country of residence, and this percentage is higher in Europe. The attained age is also important to have access to the medicare system in the United States, as indicated by most respondents living in the USA. A quarter of all respondents have subscribed to a private local insurance, mainly in Central and South America and in Oceania, and a bit less than 10% have a private international insurance, mainly in the Middle East and in Asia.

## Subscription to health insurance by continent of residence

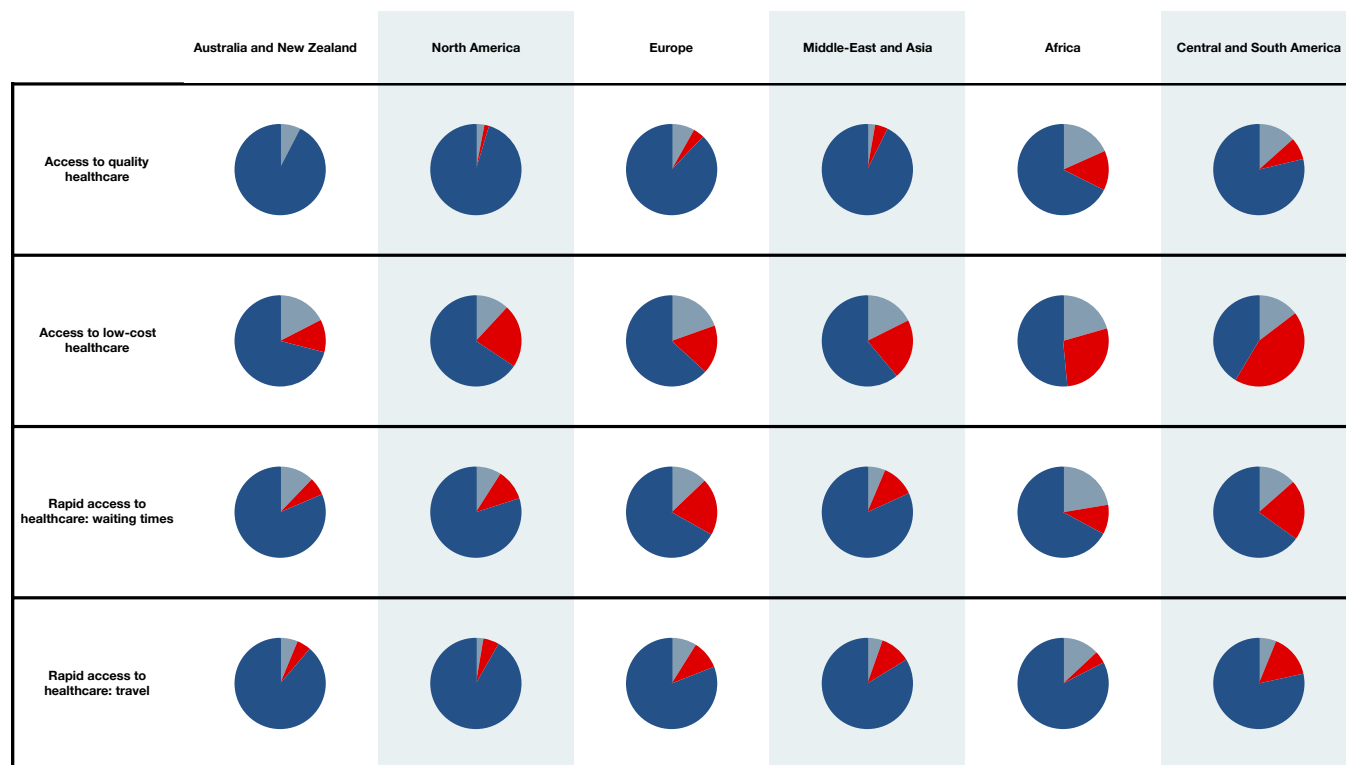


Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nccr – on the move

In general, more than 80% of respondents do not see problems in the health system in terms of proximity, quality of care, received information, and the language spoken by the care providers. The main concern regarding the health system in the country of residence is the price paid for care, followed by the rapidity of access, mainly in Central and South America and Africa. Finally, the waiting time is of some concern to respondents in Europe.

In case of illness or accident, more than half of respondents would go to a public hospital, slightly less than a third would go to a local private clinic, and 6% would go to Switzerland, as we have seen in the reasons to go back to Switzerland. However, travels to receive care remain generally rare. A small number of respondents has already gone to Switzerland to receive healthcare treatment: 214 for hospitalization, an additional 129 people for medical consultation, and 36 for ophthalmologic care.

## Access to health care by continent of residence



Answer

■ Yes
 ■ No
 ■ I do not know

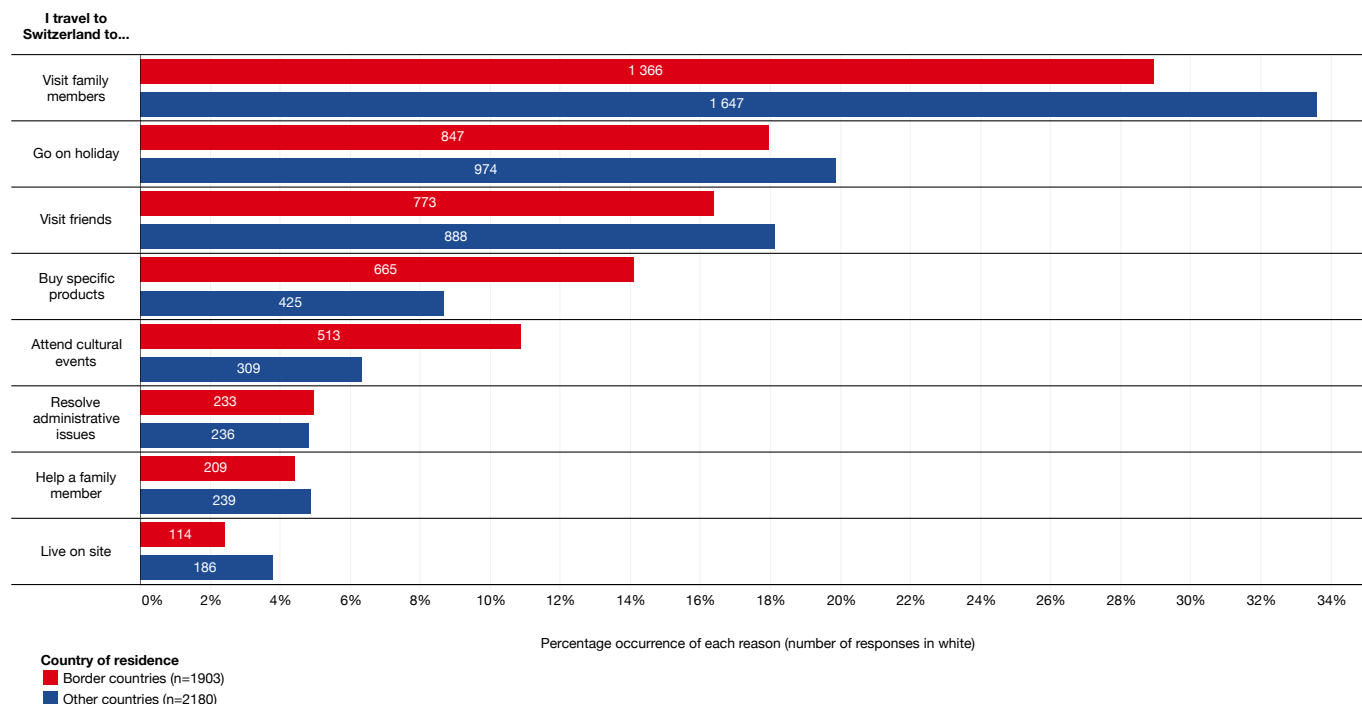
Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nccr – on the move



## Travels to Switzerland to visit the family and international travels to get away and know other cultures

Almost all respondents visited Switzerland at least once in their life. The reasons to go to Switzerland are mainly to visit the family, spend holidays or visit friends. Many respondents from neighbouring countries go to Switzerland to buy products they cannot find elsewhere or attend cultural events. A bit less than 5% of respondents travel to Switzerland to live there for part of the year, at different periods of the year, or mainly during the summer.

### Reasons for travelling to Switzerland by country of residence

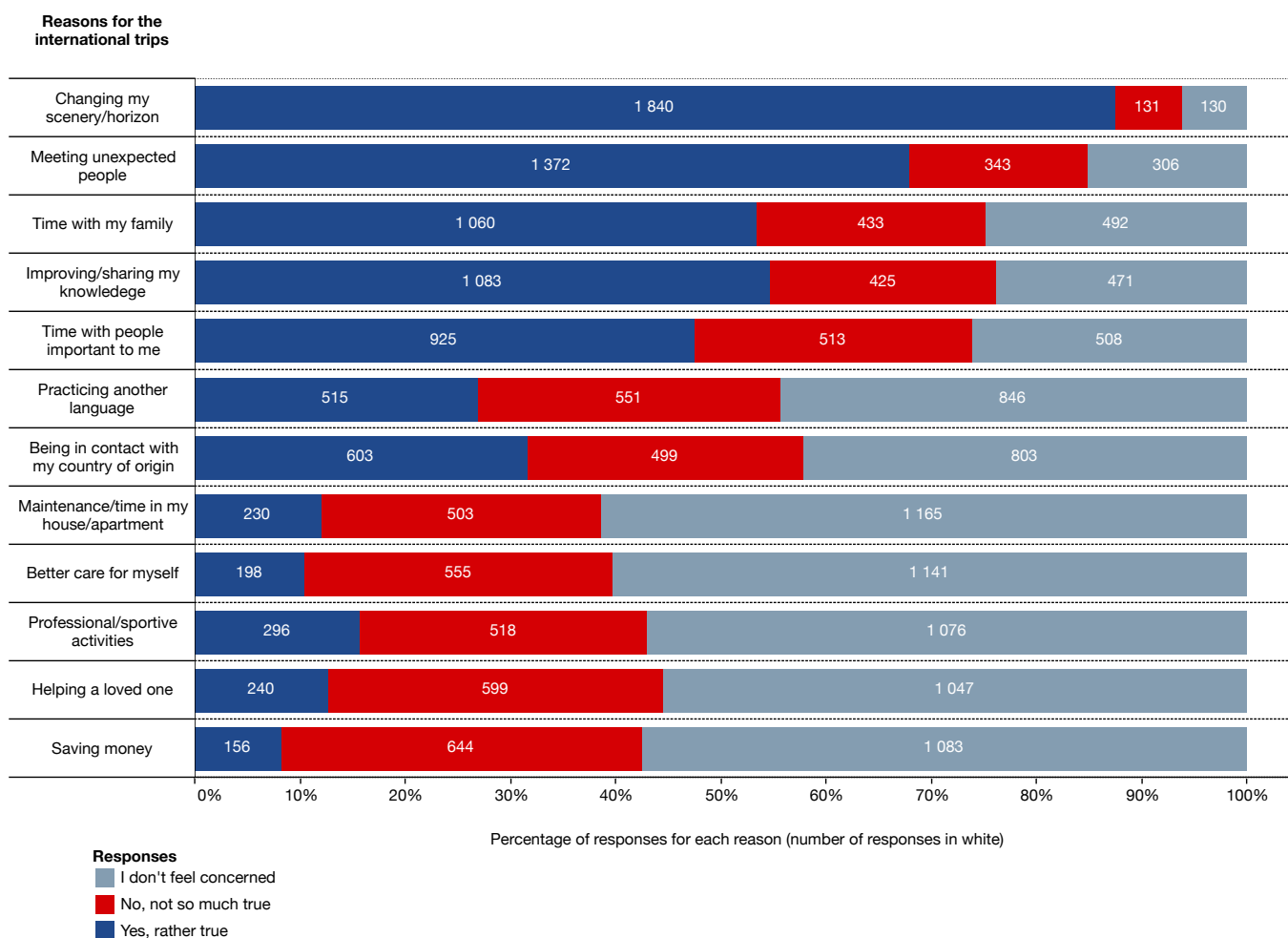


Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nccr – on the move

More than half of respondents would like to go more often to Switzerland, and they do not do it mainly because of economic reasons and the pandemic.

Half of respondents travel regularly also to other countries than Switzerland, and for several reasons. Getting away and having a change of scenery is the main reason followed by a desire to meet people from other cultures and realities. Improving and sharing their knowledge, and spending time with the family or with other important people for the respondents are the reasons mentioned by 40–50% of respondents. For about one third of respondents, it is also important to keep in touch with their roots and speak their native language. Among the least frequently cited reasons, there is the development of a professional activity or practicing a sport, the help given to a close one, enjoying a house or an apartment, getting medical treatment in another country, and saving money.

## Reasons for travels to countries around the world (Switzerland excluded)



Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nocr – on the move

## The long-term impact of the COVID-19 health crisis on international mobility intentions

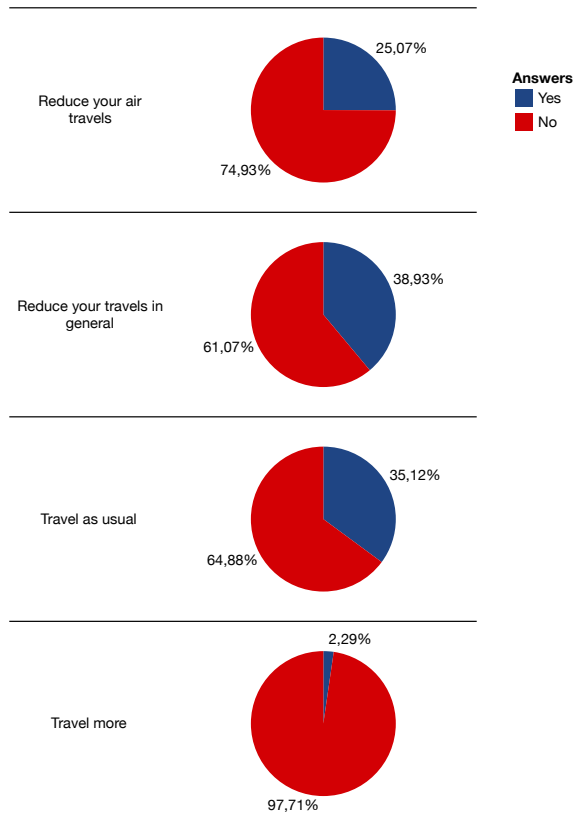
The second survey on transnational ageing (TAS II) contains several questions regarding the feelings about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. In a hypothetical scenario, only 157 people have answered that they could in the future move/go back to Switzerland in case of another global pandemic like the Covid-19 one. After the experience of this health crisis, 144 respondents are indeed planning to move to Switzerland, 27 to Europe, and 19 to a country outside of Europe. In addition to this, 15 people took an early retirement plan because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, on the totality of the almost 4'700 respondents, there have been very few changes linked to the pandemic regarding the place of residency and the main activity of the people we interviewed.

Respondents mentioned however many changes in international mobility that will probably continue after the health crisis: 25% of respondents plan to reduce their travels by plane and 39% will reduce their travels more generally. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, the contacts with the family members that do live in the same country as the respondents by telephone, SMS, Facebook, Skype, or other social media have increased for 38% of the respondents, while the frequency of personal contacts has declined for 66% of the respondents. When the respondents do not live in the same country as (the members of) their family, the favorite means of communication to have a good time/say hello are vocal calls either by telephone or on the internet (around 50% of respondents, for example, uses WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom or FaceTime),

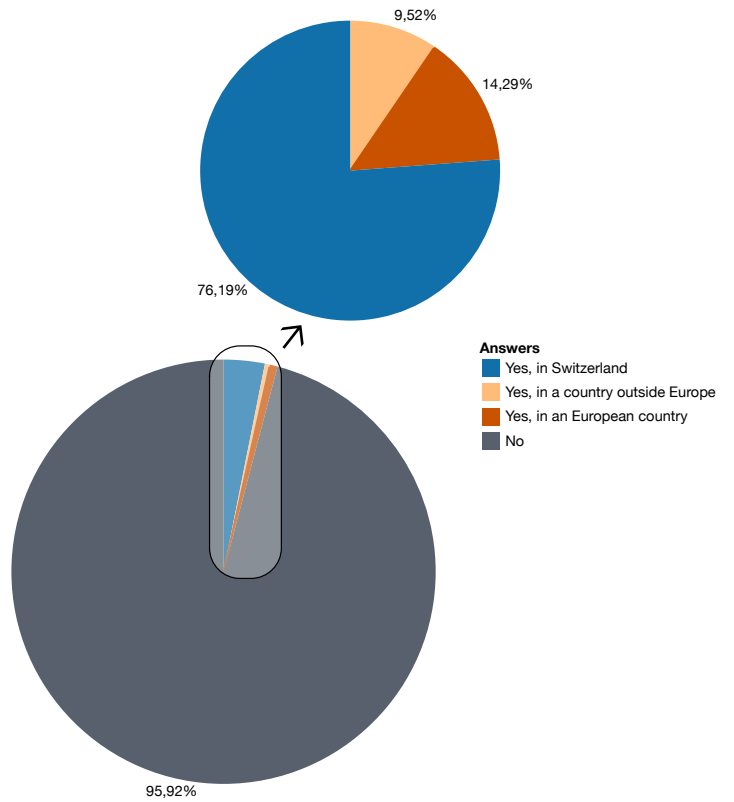
followed by messages on social networks (almost 40% of respondents), and postal cards/ letters (30% of respondents). Emails are preferred to share information on a given topic, while daily life advice is shared through voice calls on the internet.

### The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on respondents' international mobility

How will you travel after the Covid-19 crisis?



Do you plan to move to another country after the Covid-19 crisis?



Data source: second survey on transnational ageing © nccr – on the move

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

[nccr-onthemove.ch](http://nccr-onthemove.ch)

We are extremely grateful not only for your trust in our survey, but also for the time you dedicated to this study, your rich testimonials that made us travel also when travelling was not possible, and all your encouraging messages that we received during the pandemic! Thank you very much!



Eric Crettaz, Mihaela Nedelcu, Livia Tomás, Eva Fernández G.G., Laura Ravazzini  
We also thank Maxime Mailhot for the graphs of this flyer.



For more information about the survey and the scientific studies of the nccr- on the move, please visit our [website](#).



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[Article for the Revue Suisse](#)

[Webpage of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office about the Swiss abroad](#)

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