

Earning Dutch and living global

A case study of Dutch digital nomads and their housing pathways across three phases: pre, during, and post-digital nomadism



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P5 Presentation | Management in the Built Environment

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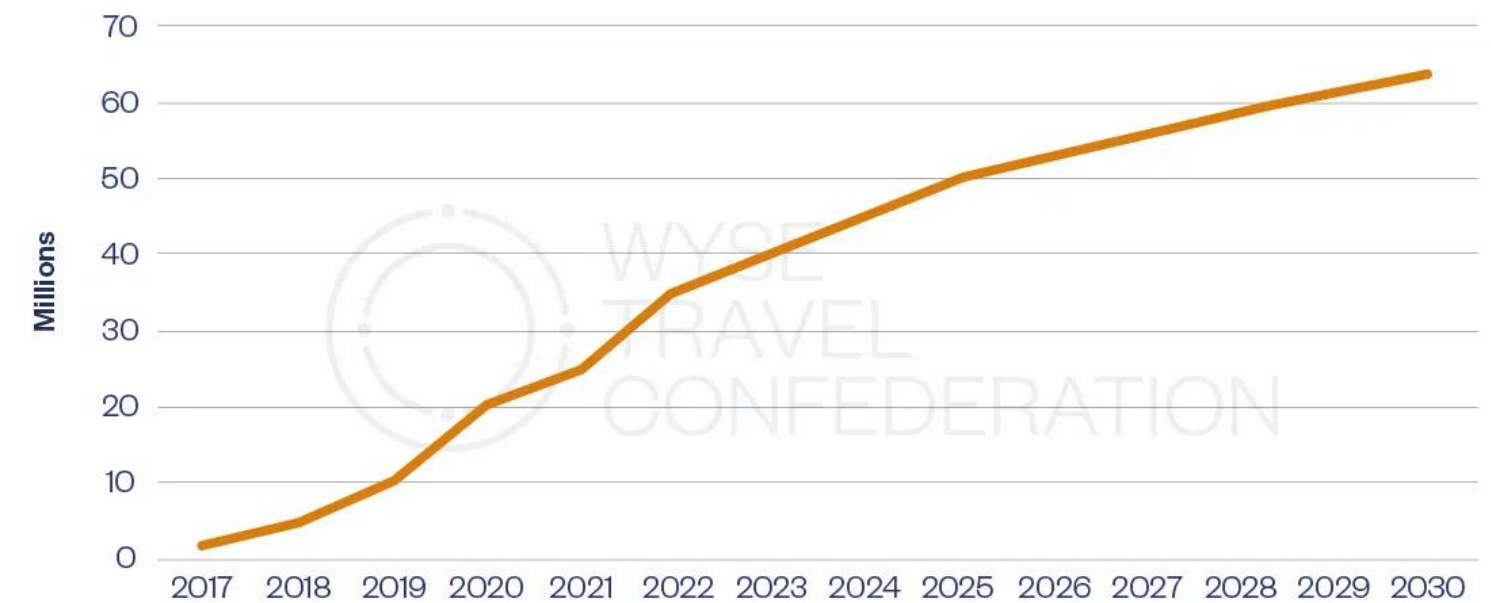
OVERVIEW

- Problem statement
- Research questions
- Conceptual model
- Literary review
- Methodology
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- Results
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- Conclusion
- Limitations & Future Research
- Reflection

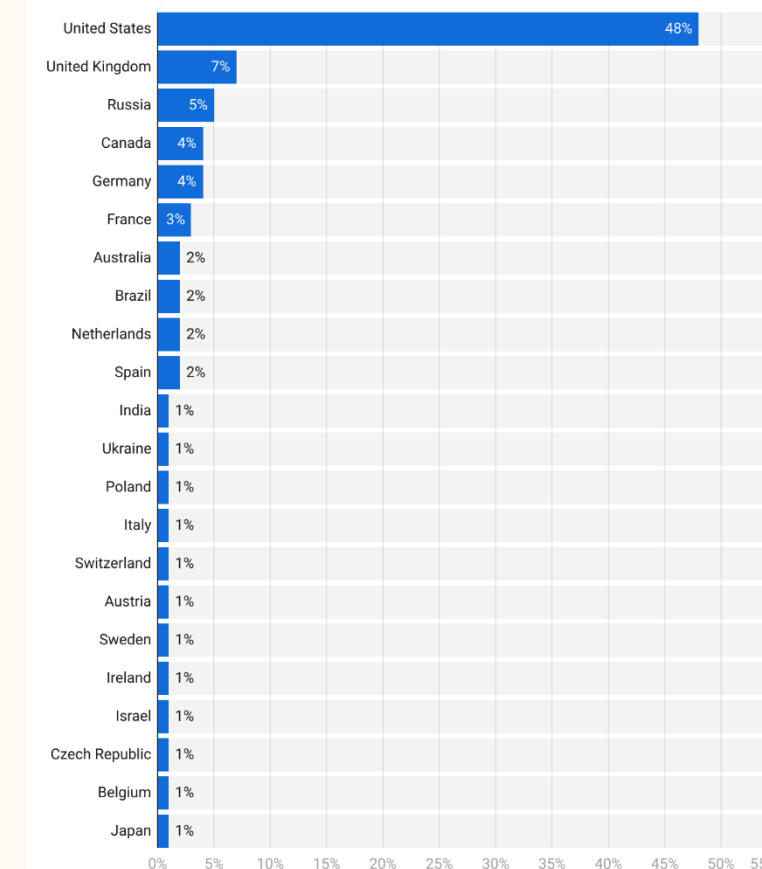
Problem statement

- Rising worldwide: digital nomadism is growing
- Gap: Dutch pathways under-studied
- NL context: high costs, tight supply, strict eligibility
- Frictions: push to leave; return blocked by affordability & bureaucracy
- Why it matters: mobile lives vs rigid institutions

Projected growth in the digital nomad market



Share of Digital Nomads Worldwide as of March 2023, by Nationality



Source: Enterprise Apps Today

Research questions

Main question:

How do the housing pathways of Dutch digital nomads develop and change across the three key phases: pre-digital nomad, during digital nomad, and post-digital nomad?

Sub question 1

What defines a digital nomad, and what motivates individuals in the Netherlands to adopt this lifestyle?

Sub question 2

What are the housing conditions and arrangements of Dutch individuals before transitioning to a digital nomadic lifestyle?

Sub question 3

How do Dutch digital nomads manage their housing in the Netherlands while living abroad?

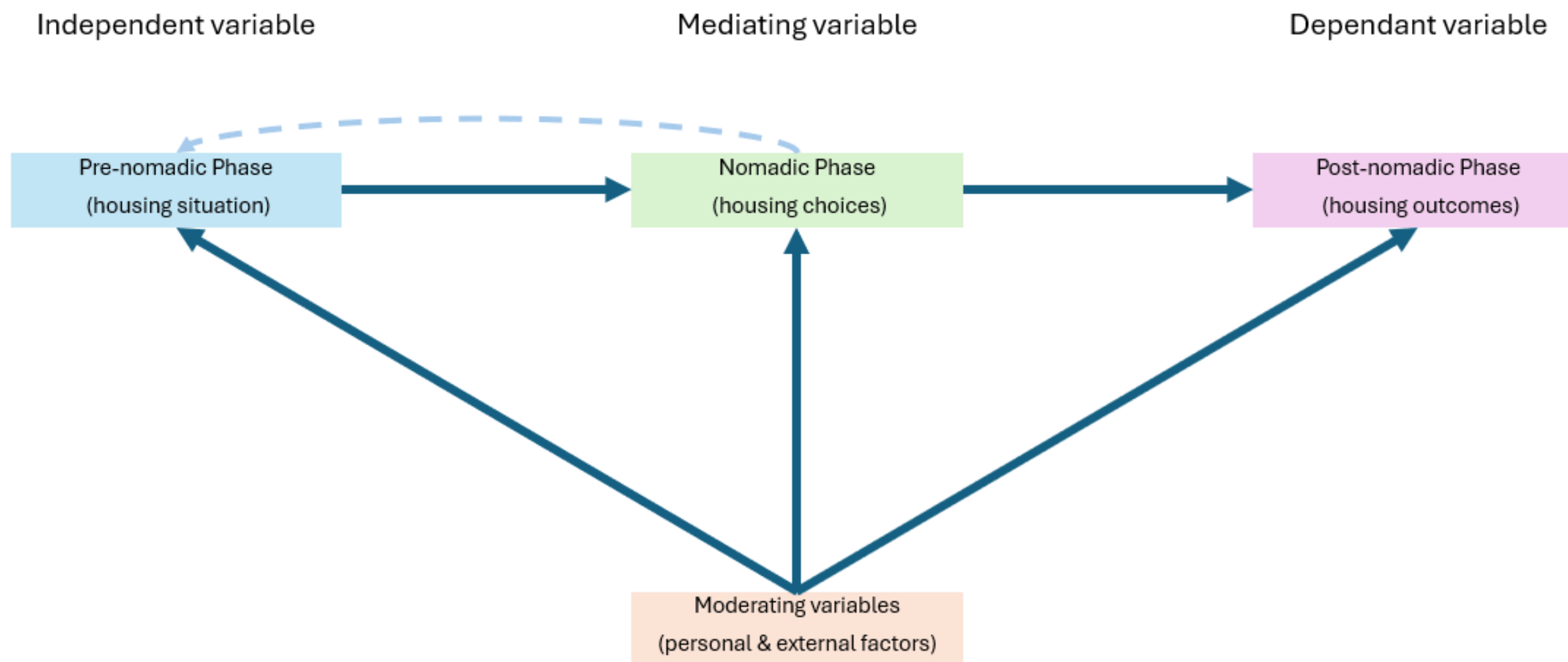
Sub question 4

What types of housing arrangements do Dutch digital nomads use abroad, and how do these experiences influence their housing expectations?

Sub question 5

Upon returning to the Netherlands, what housing preferences and decisions do Dutch digital nomads make, and how do these choices impact the Dutch housing market?

Conceptual model



- Sequence: Before → During → After. The starting point informs outcomes, it doesn't determine them.
- Moderators on the arrows: Personal (income, age, household) + External (market, rules, supply, prices).
- How to read it: Patterns, not causality; sample-based insights, not universal claims.

LITERARY REVIEW

- Rising nomadism, but few Dutch studies.
- Definitions matter: nomads ≠ expats ≠ remote workers.
- Housing paths are not linear; shaped by personal & structural factors.
- Hubs enable platform-based living; return often hybrid/uncertain.
- Gap: Dutch housing pathways across pre / during / post are under-studied.

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Methodology

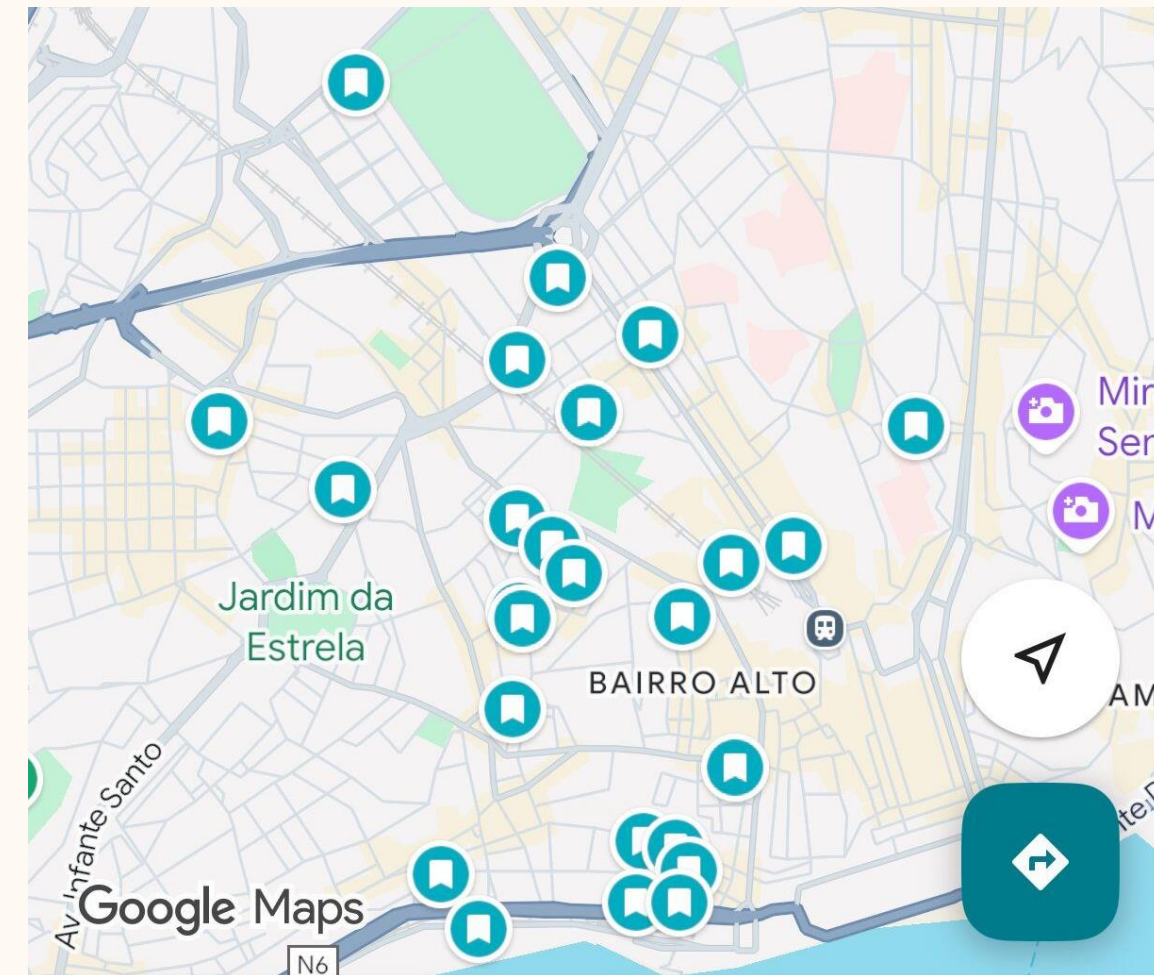
- Mixed-methods design → survey + interviews
 - Survey: 160 Dutch digital nomads
 - Channels: Reddit, FB groups, nomad networks
 - Focus: demographics, tenure, housing abroad & return expectations
 - Interviews: 14 in Lisbon (major hub)
 - Lisbon as entry hub = accessible, diverse Dutch presence
 - Topics: housing choices, strategies, barriers, future plans
- Triangulation: survey = patterns; interviews = depth & lived experience
- Exploratory
- Analysis
 - Survey → descriptive stats, cross-tabs (e.g. tenure vs housing outcome)
 - Interviews → thematic coding, synthesis across cases



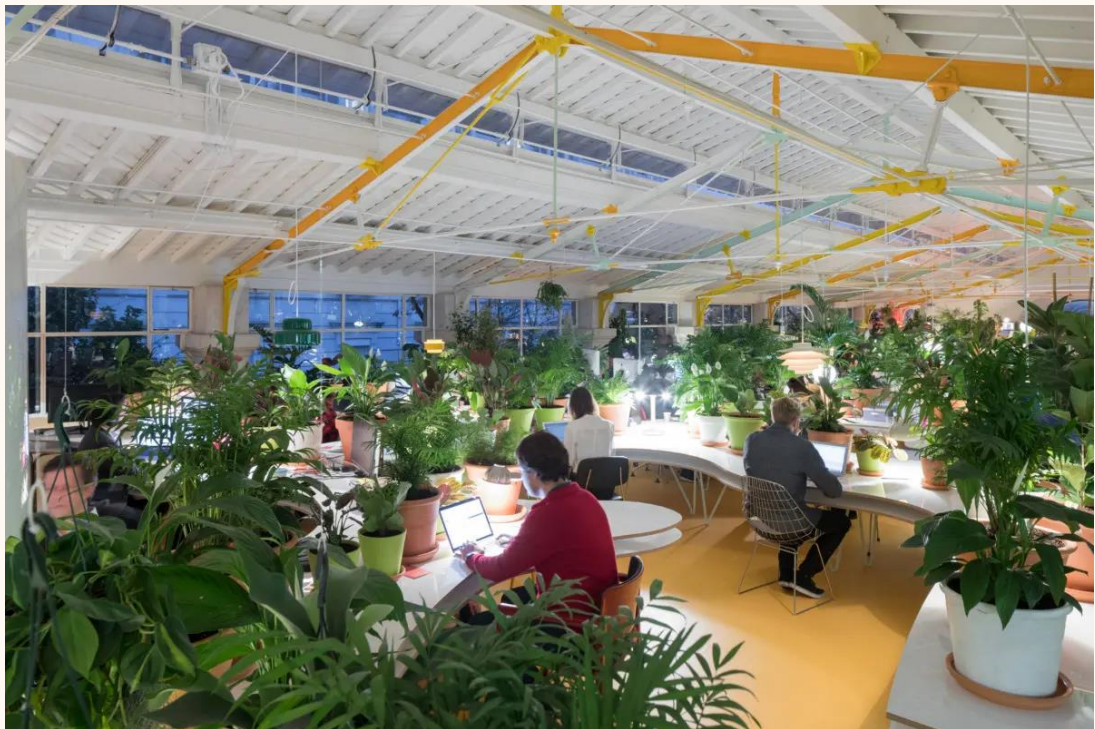
Name	Age	Profession
Anne	36	Branding consultant
Gregor	33	Content marketer
Stefan	37	AI start-up founder
Jesse	27	Content/UX freelancer
Bob	32	Cybersecurity specialist
Sven	24	Online tutor
Kim	26	Author
Bart	31	Crypto investor
Marijn	32	UX/UI, web design
Oscar	43	IT consultant and project management
Kosta	26	IT sales
Jelle	35	Travel agency
Wouter & Isa	41/39	Copywriting & family coaching
Martijn	38	IT services

Fieldwork in Lisbon

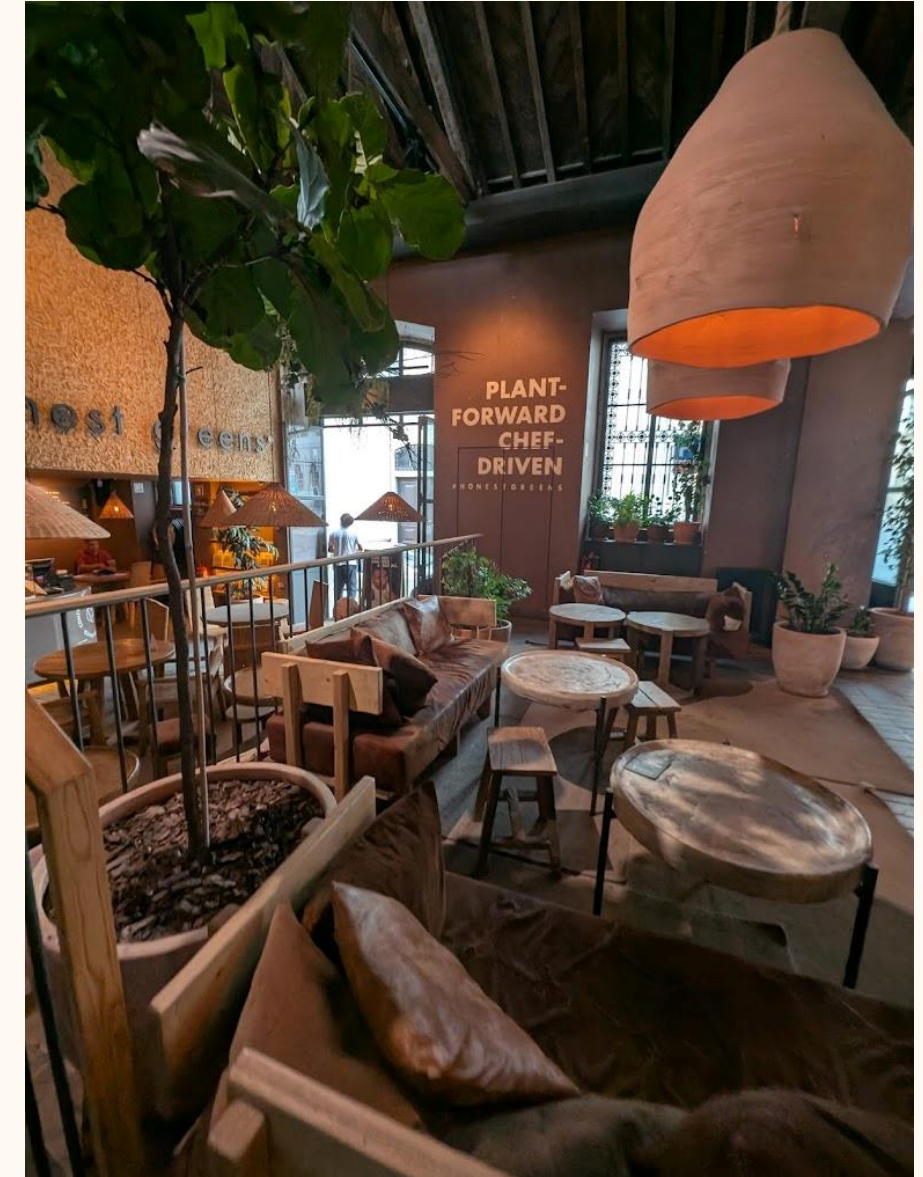
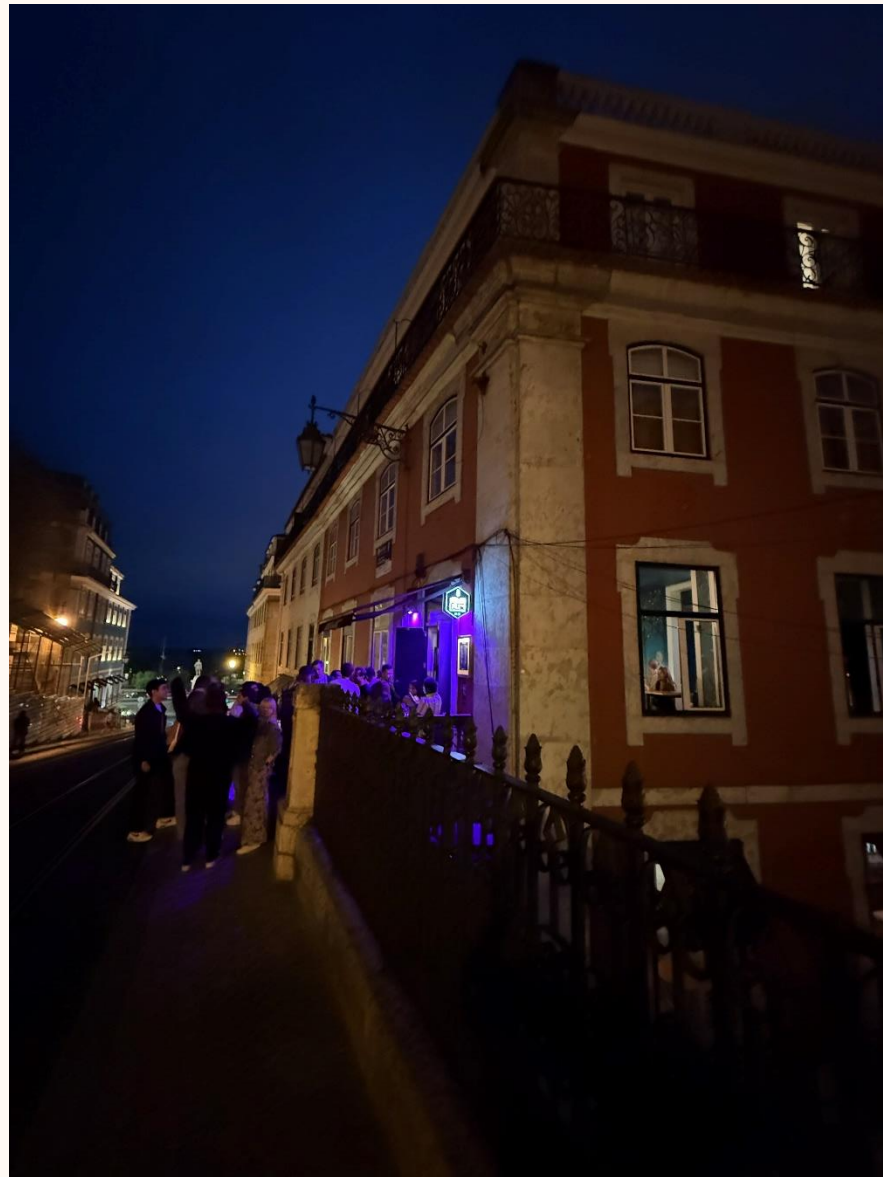
- Why Lisbon? → One of Europe's largest digital nomad hubs
- Dutch presence, easy access to respondents
- Fieldwork process
 - Stayed 2+ weeks to be in the nomad environment
 - Recruited participants via coworking spaces, events, and snowballing
 - Interviews, avg. 60–90 min)
- Added value:
 - Direct observation of housing & community dynamics
 - Rich stories beyond survey numbers
 - Credibility & trust through insider access



Fieldwork in Lisbon



Fieldwork in Lisbon

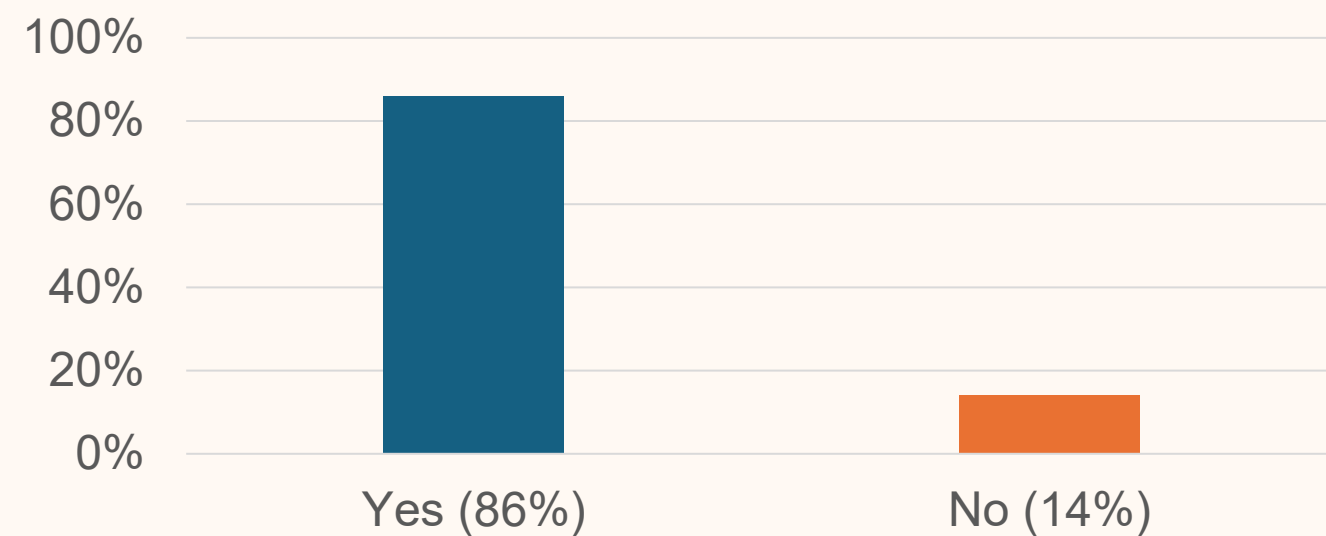


Results : General information

RESULT

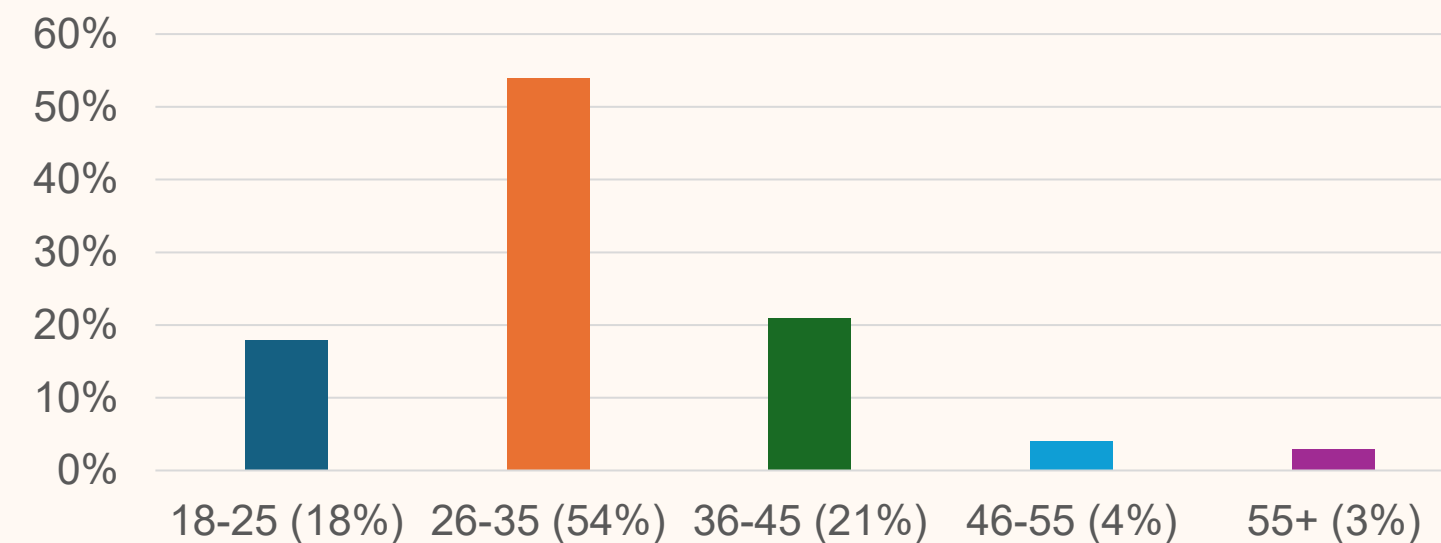
General info : Who answered? (n=160)

Self-identification of a digital nomad, n=160



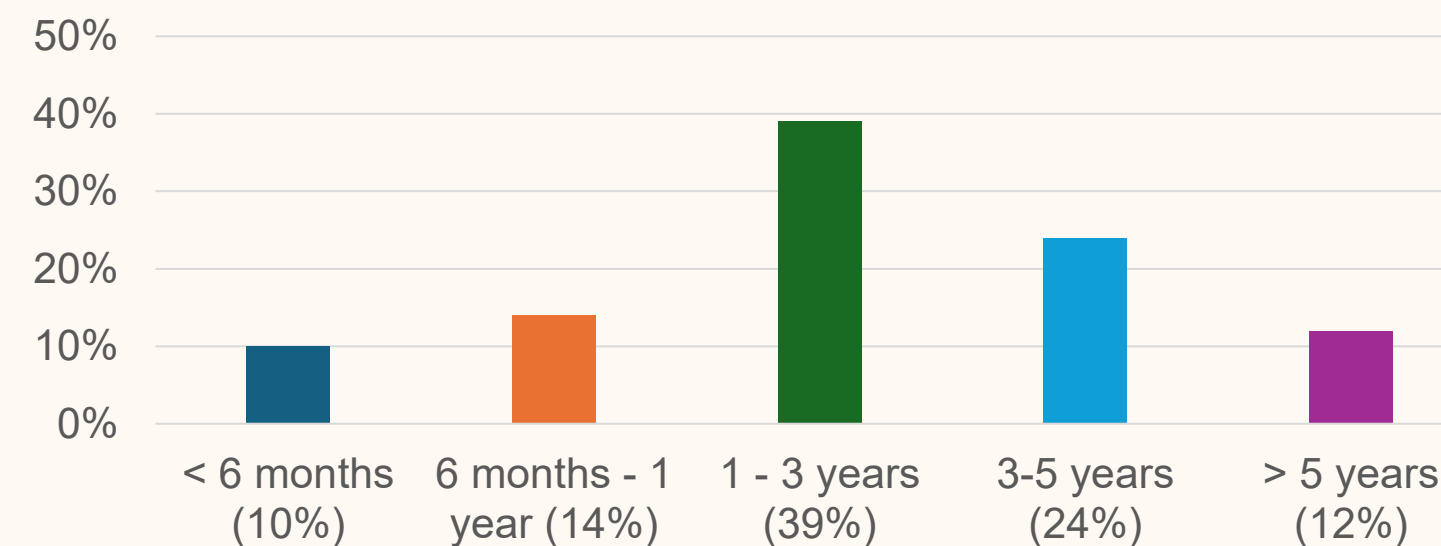
- Majority identify as digital nomads
- 86% yes and 14% no (marketing label, don't move around much anymore)
- *"I see myself more as a remote worker with a lot of freedom. Nowadays, I need more structure. I have a lease, a fixed workplace, and a routine. I'm not necessarily a nomad anymore, although I still live location-independently." – Stefan, 37, entrepreneur*

Age of respondents, n = 160



- Majority 54%
- Second 21%
- Third biggest, 19%

Time spent living as a digital nomad, n = 160

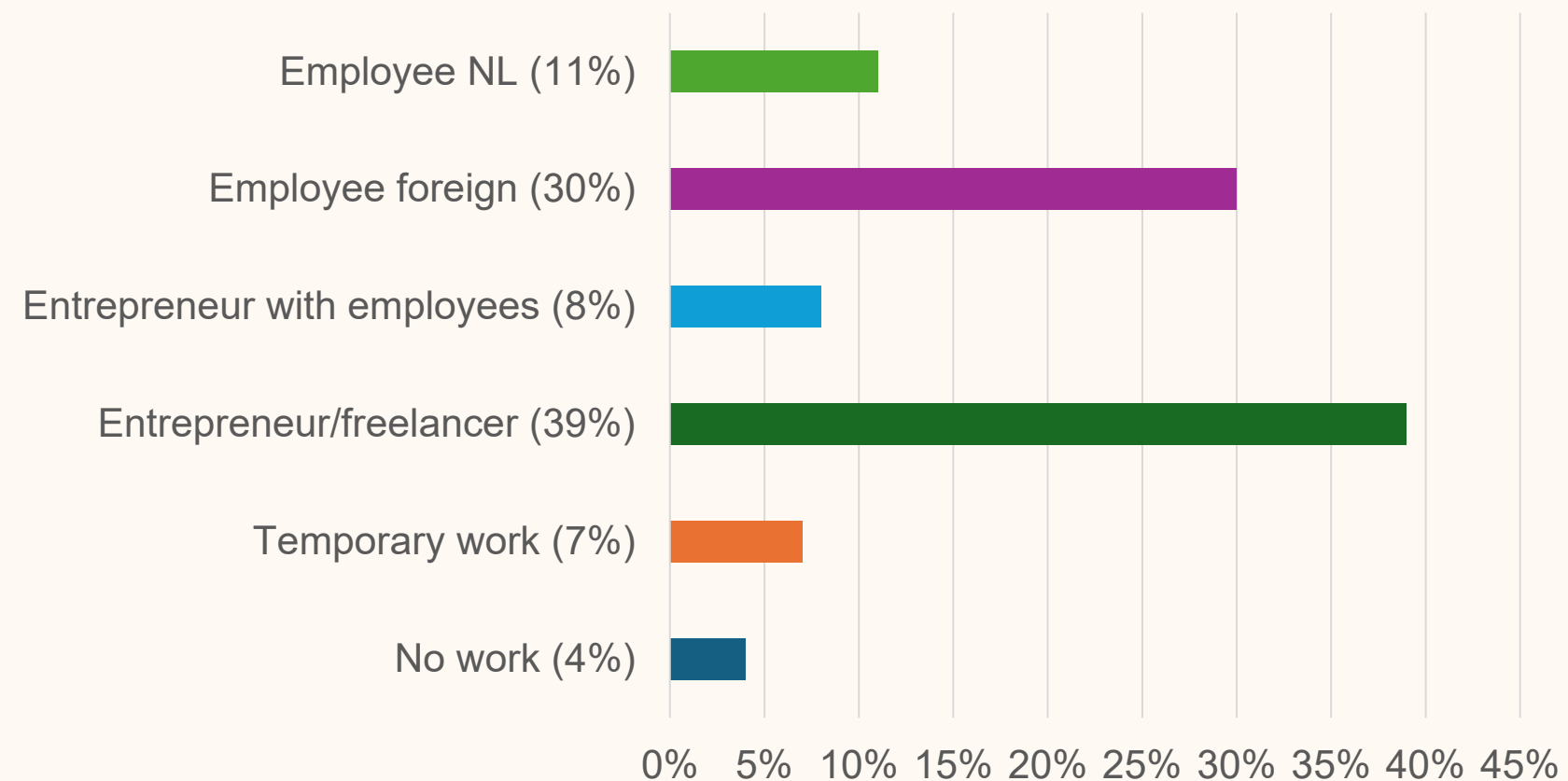


- Experienced group : many are 1–3 years into nomadism, with both newcomers and long-timers in the mix.

RESULT

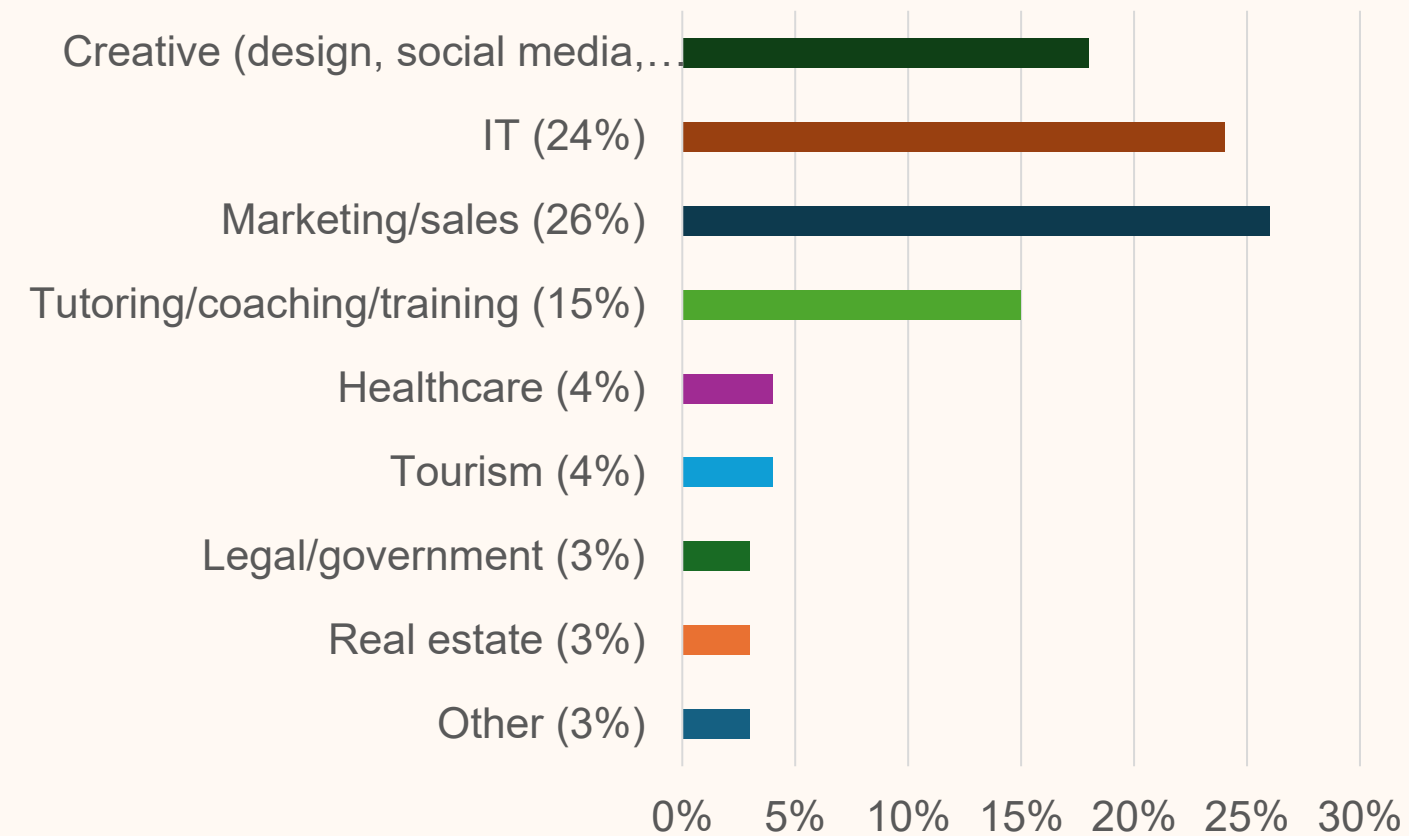
General info : Who answered? (n=160)

Employment status, n = 158



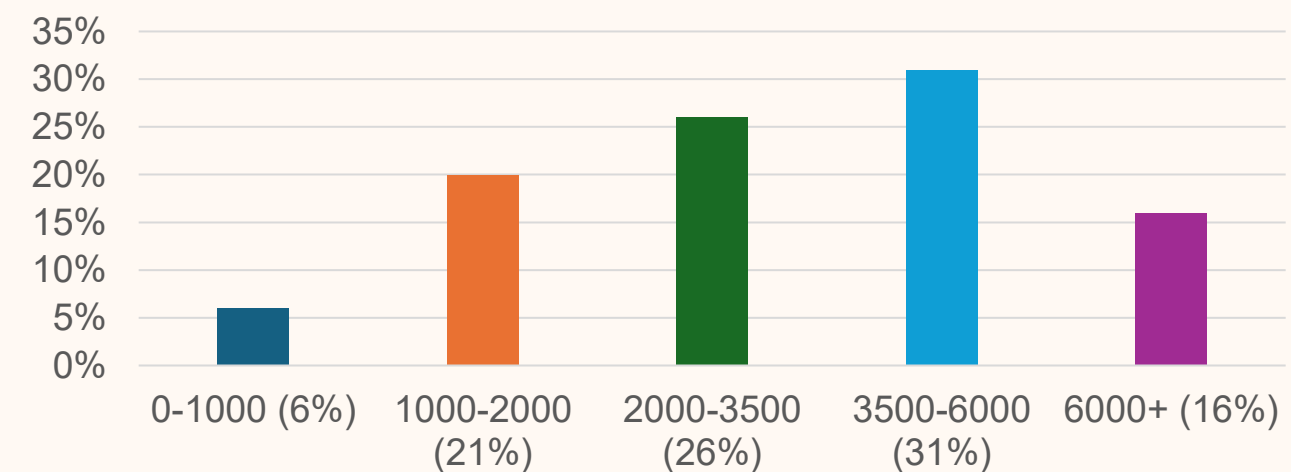
- Not just freelancers: a balanced mix of freelancers and remote employees

Field of work, n = 160



- Work clusters in marketing/sales, IT, and creative fields → roles that travel well and use platforms.

Average gross income per month in €, n = 159

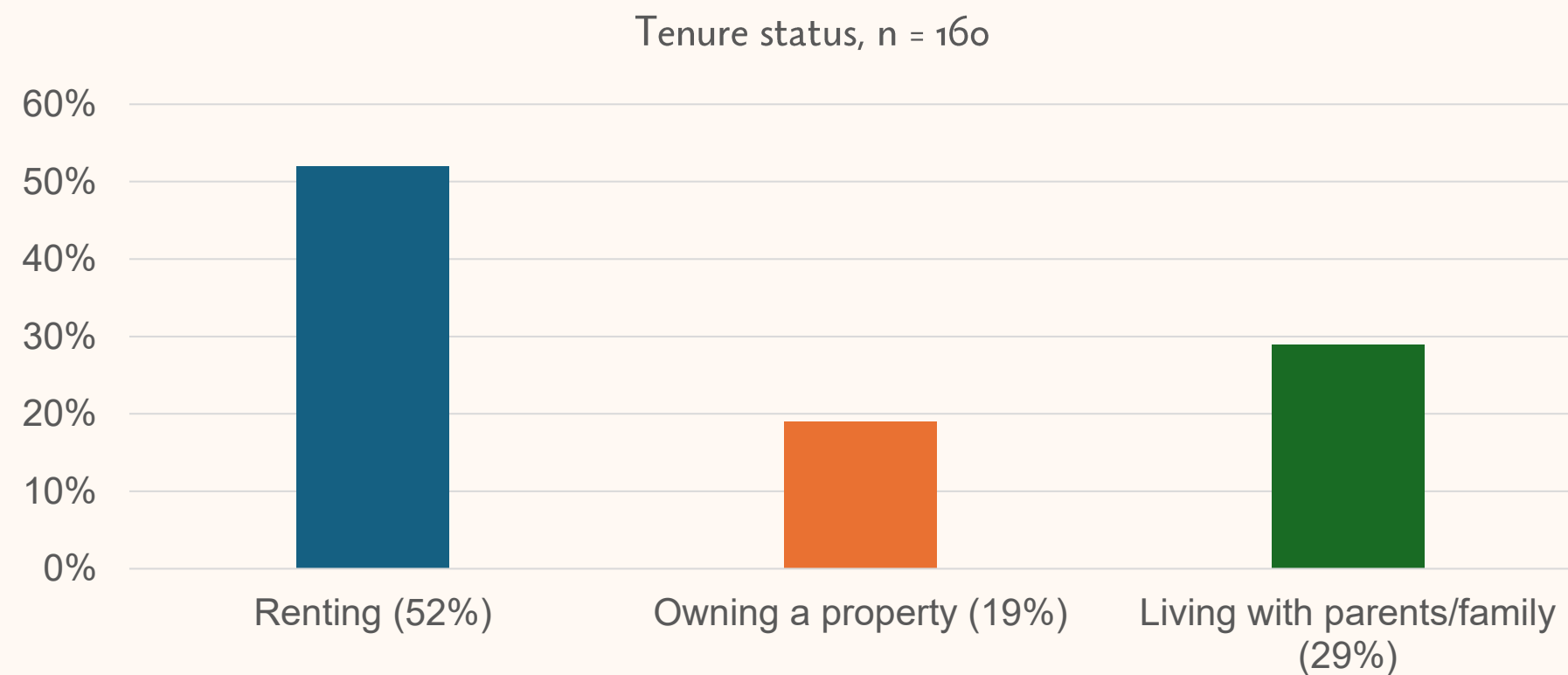


- Majority sit in mid brackets with spread on both ends

Results : Pre-nomadic

RESULT

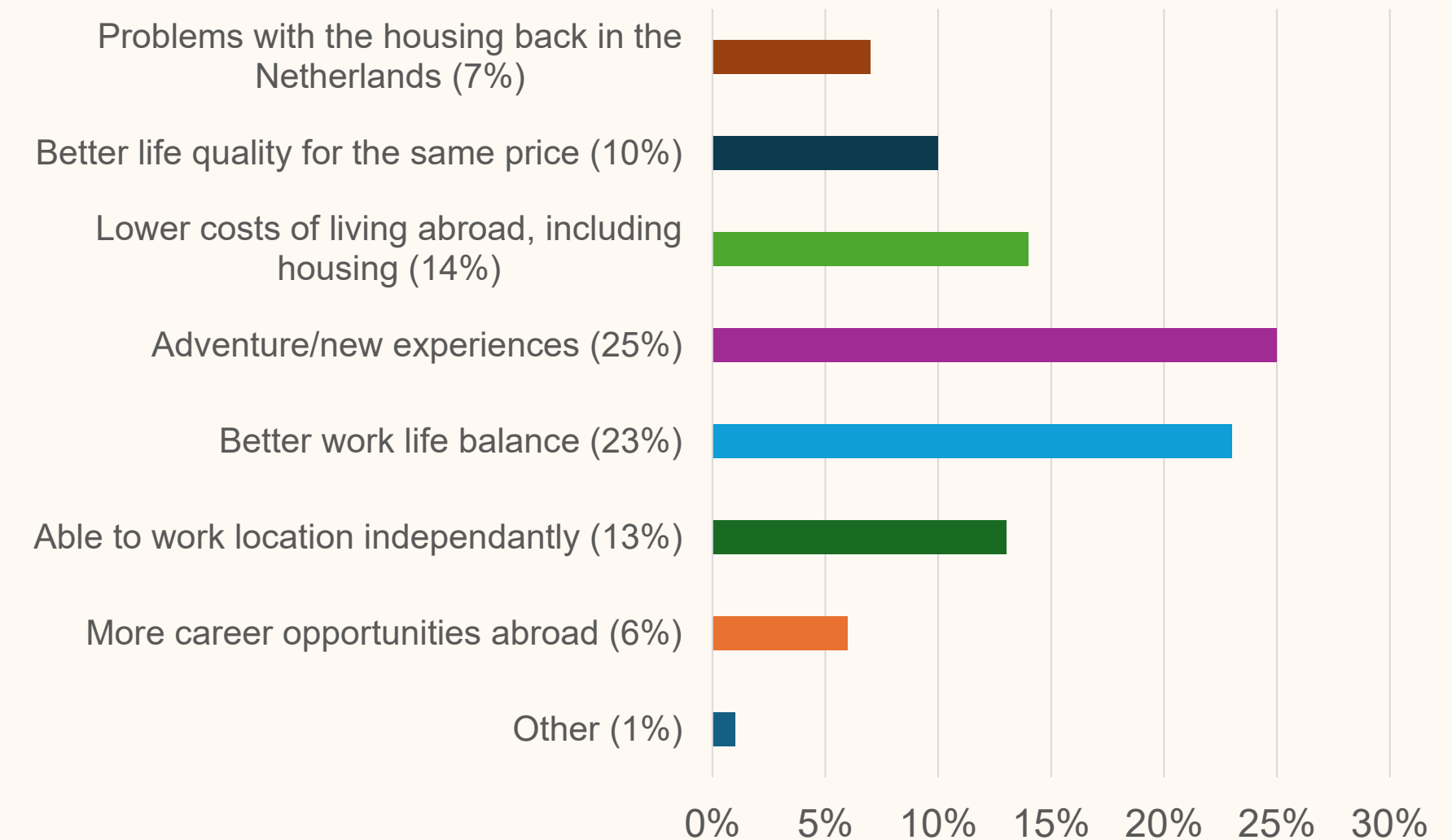
Pre-nomadic : Starting point & motivations



- Most start from renting or living with parents; ownership is minority.
- Top motives: autonomy/freedom ($\approx 42\%$), exploration ($\approx 26\%$); housing push is present but not dominant.
- Read as context, not causality (setup for later phases).

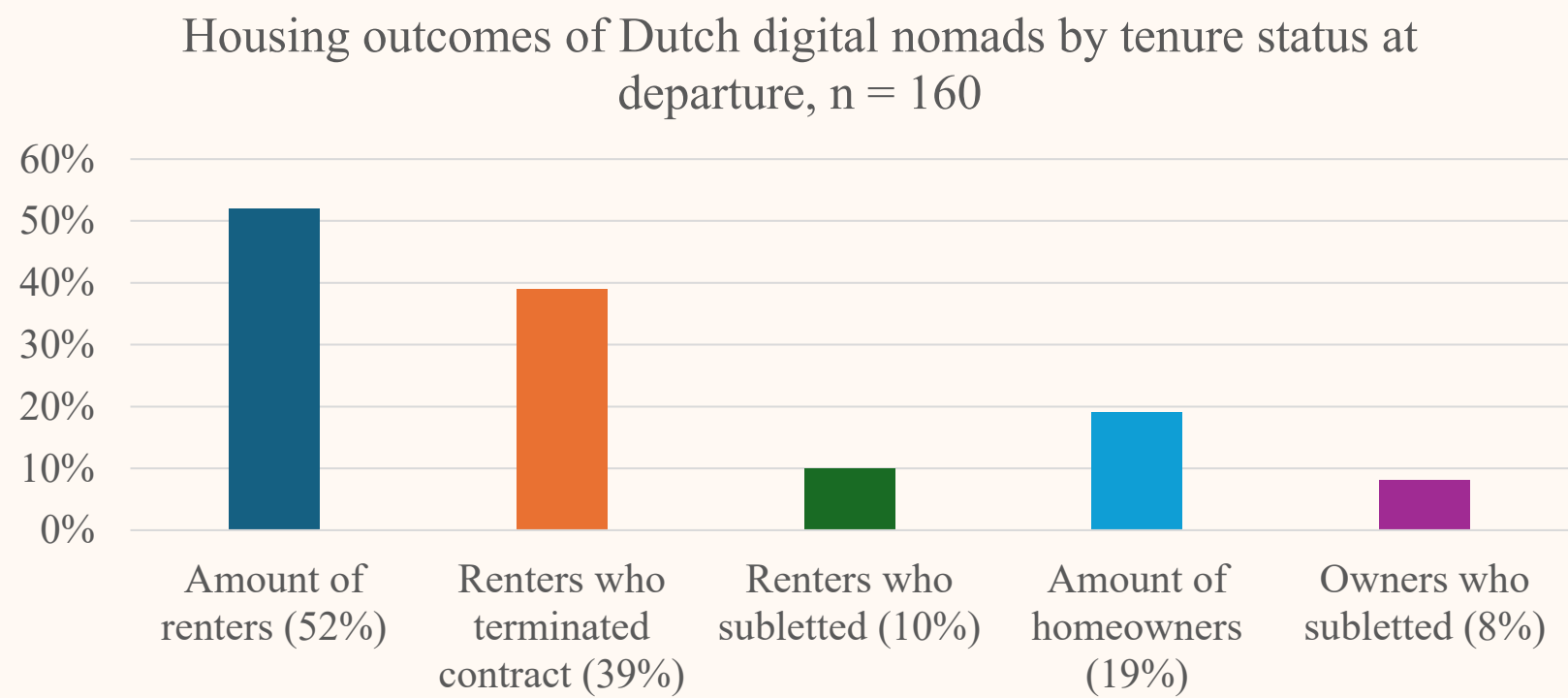
• *"In the Netherlands it felt like everything was work, mortgage, commuting. Here I can breathe and organise my time differently." – Oscar, 43, IT consultant*

Main motivations of becoming a digital nomad? N = 160



RESULT

Pre nomadic : What happened to Dutch housing at departure?



Tenure at departure ↓ x Housing outcome →	Gave up housing	Kept: not rented	Rented out / sublet	Sold	Not applicable	Total (N)
Parents/family (no independent home)	0	0	0	0	47	47
Renter	62	4	17	0	0	83
Owner	15	2	12	1	0	30
Total (N)	77	6	29	1	47	160

highly significant, $\chi^2 = 171.3$, $p < 0.001$

Main reason for leaving housing ↓ x → Housing tenure	No independent housing	Renting	Owning	Total (N)
Housing costs too high	8%	41%	8%	40
No suitable housing available	56%	32%	15%	58
Temporary situation	24%	20%	10%	31
No fixed base in NL wanted	13%	7%	67%	30
Total %	100%	100%	100%	159

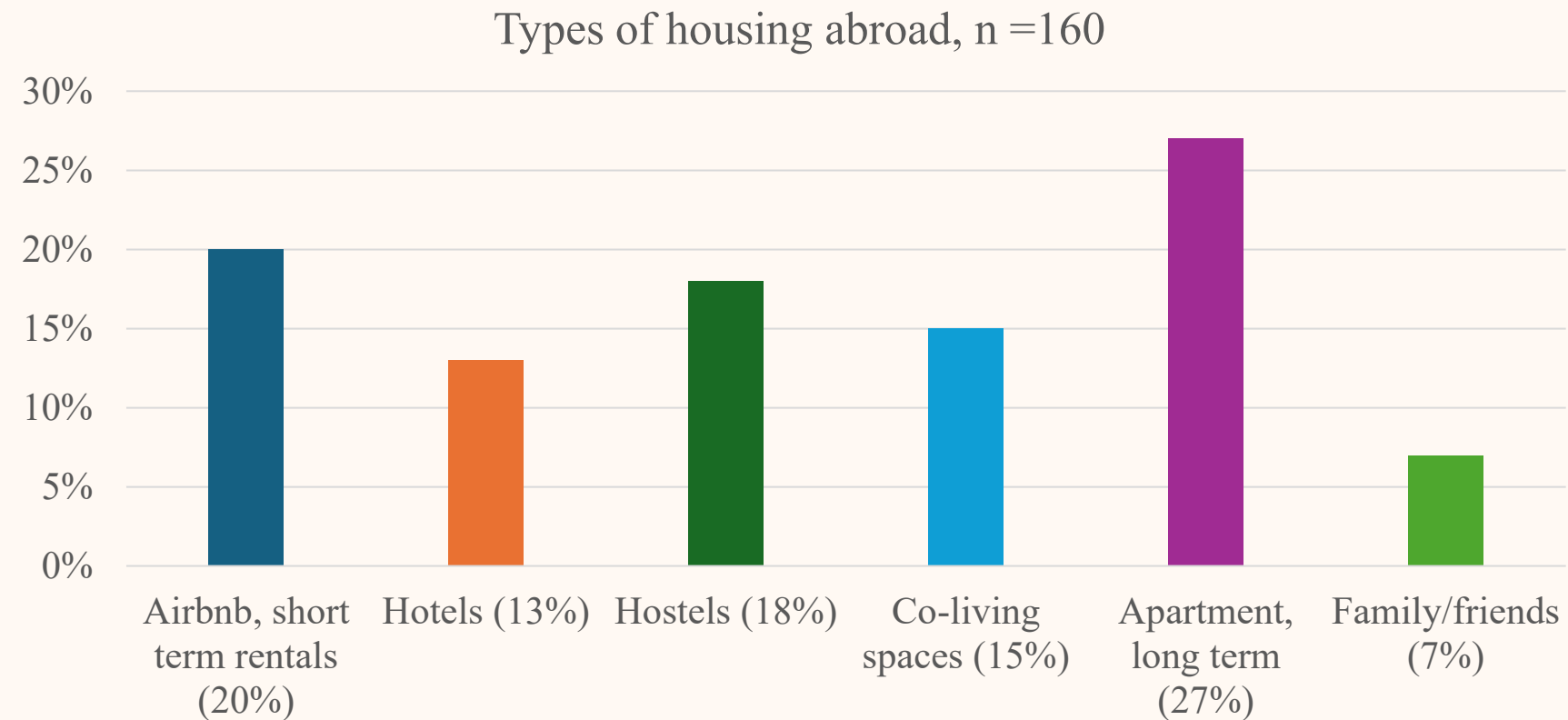
significant: $\chi^2 = 71.76$, $df = 44$, $p = 0.005$

- Tenure shapes patterns, not outcomes (exploratory).
- Tenants mostly ended leases; owners split between renting out and selling.
- Pattern by tenure: Renters → high costs (41%); Living-with-parents → no suitable dwellings (56%); Owners → give up fixed base (67%).
- Motives differ by tenure: renters mention high costs, those with parents lack of space, owners seeking freedom.
- Shows a structural break with the Dutch housing system.

Results : Nomadic

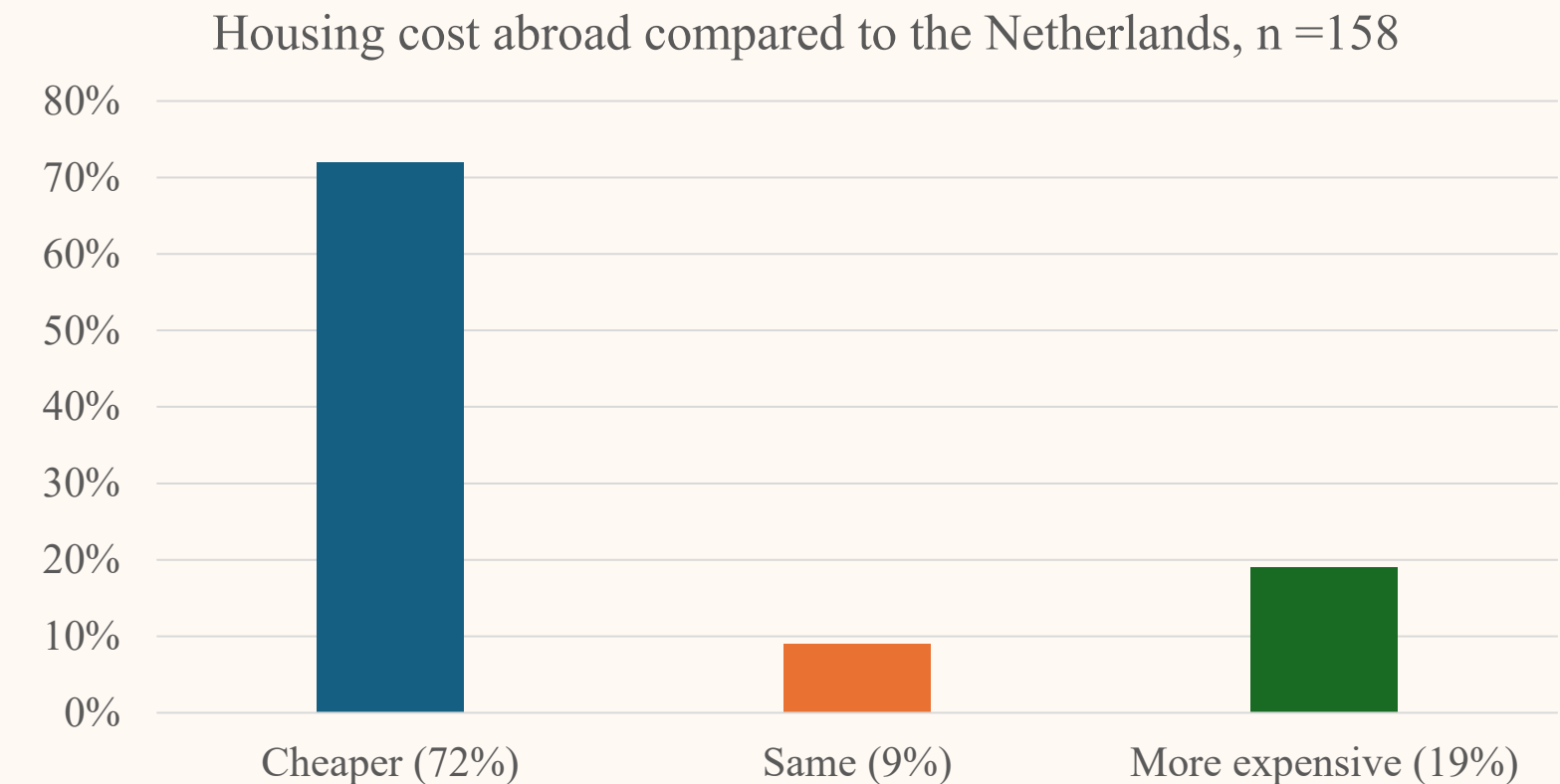
RESULT

Nomadic : Where do they live?



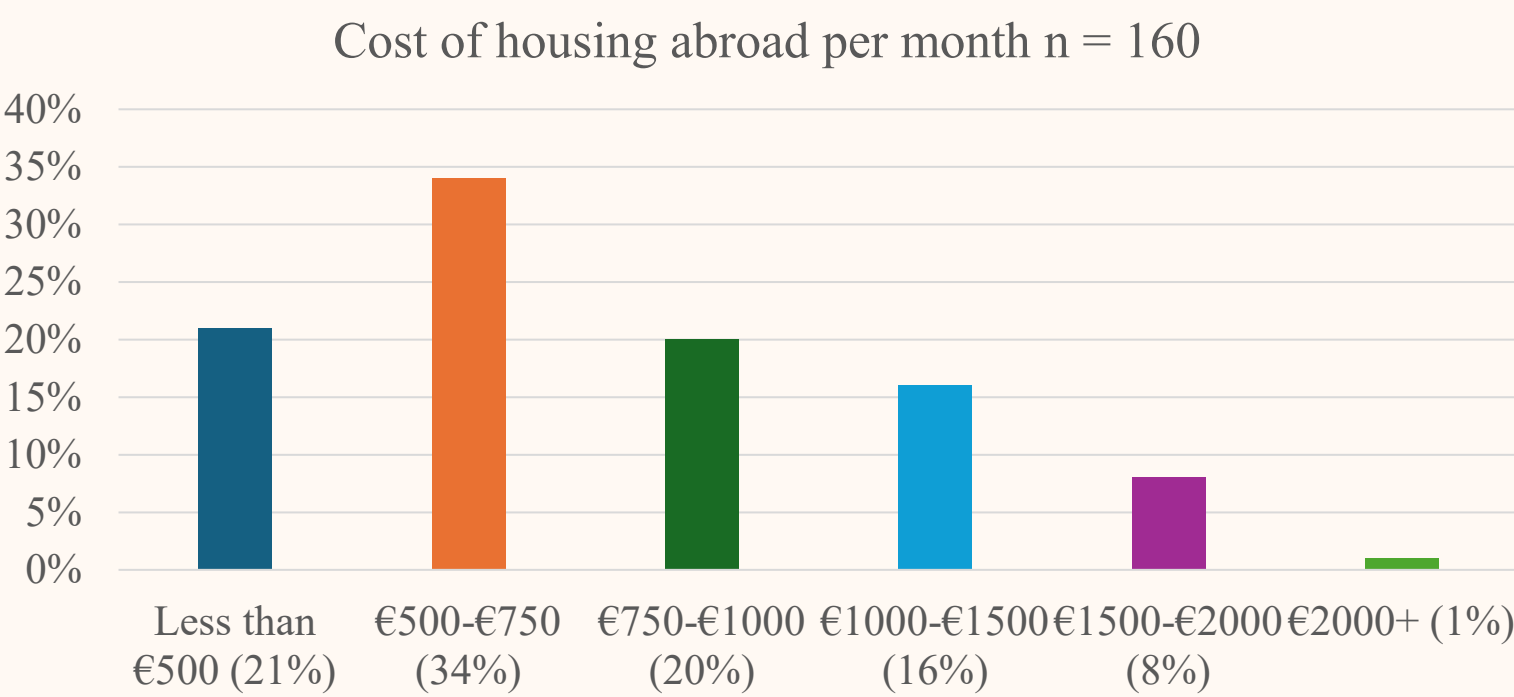
- Mix of independent rentals, Airbnb, hostels, co-living—no single model.
- Flexibility over permanence; combinations are common
- Sets up why platforms + networks matter next.

- *"I often book a short stay through Airbnb first to get settled and then look for longer-term accommodation through platforms such as Idealista or Facebook groups."* - Bob 32, cybersecurity expert



RESULT

Nomadic : Costs and access



Stay type ↓ / housing cost →	< €500	€500–1000	€1000–1500	€1500+	Total (N)
Independent rental	6	29	11	7	53
Short term rental (Airbnb)	3	19	2	2	26
Co-living	10	18	5	3	36
Hostel	11	8	3	2	24
Hotel	3	8	3	0	14
Other (friends/family)	1	2	1	1	5
Total	34	84	25	15	158

$\chi^2(15) = 21.02, p = 0.136 \rightarrow$ not significant.

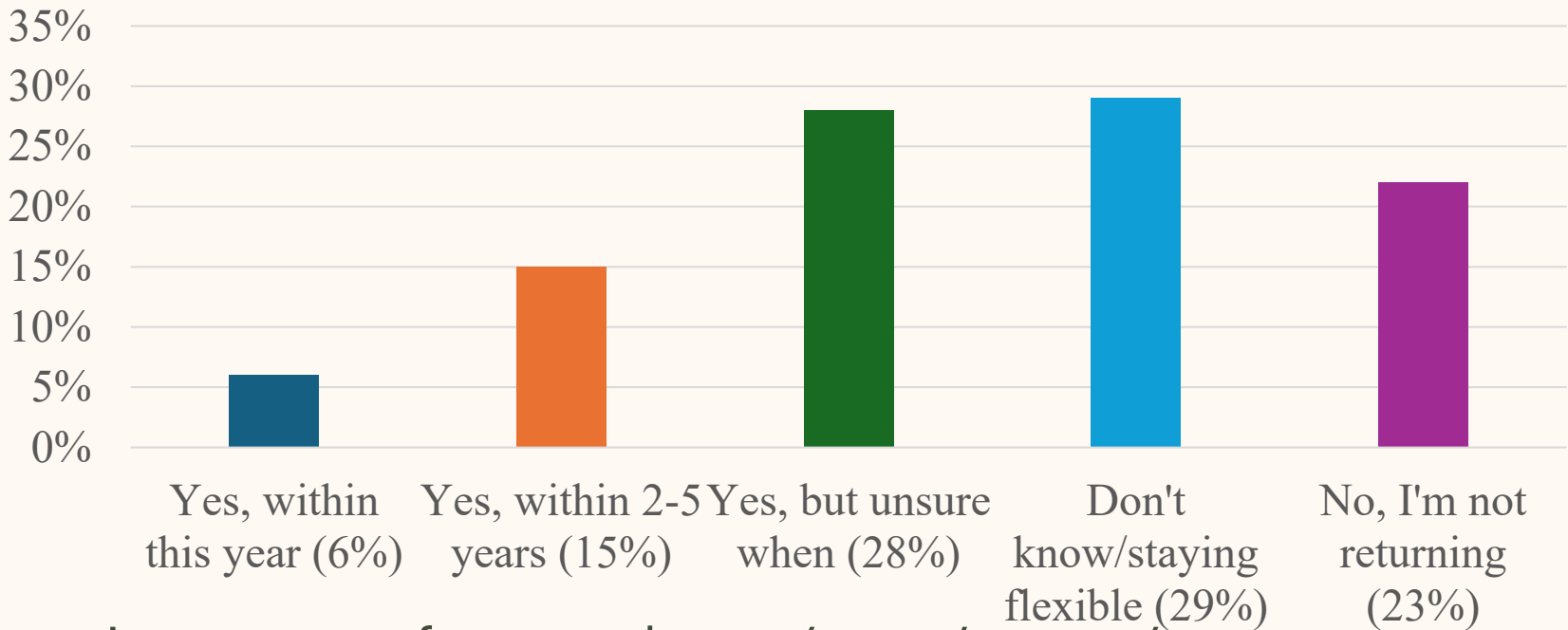
- Modal rent €500–750
- Costs range widely within each stay type.
- Both co-living and private rentals appear in lower and higher rent brackets.
- What does it show us? Housing costs are spread across all types of stays, type of stay does not determine cost level.
- *“I pay around €2,600 per month. That sounds like a lot—and it is—but for me, it's my home and my office. I sometimes receive clients or investors here. I'd rather pay more and know that everything is fine.” – Stefan 37, entrepreneur*

Results : Post-nomadic

RESULT

Post Nomadic : Return intentions & housing preferences

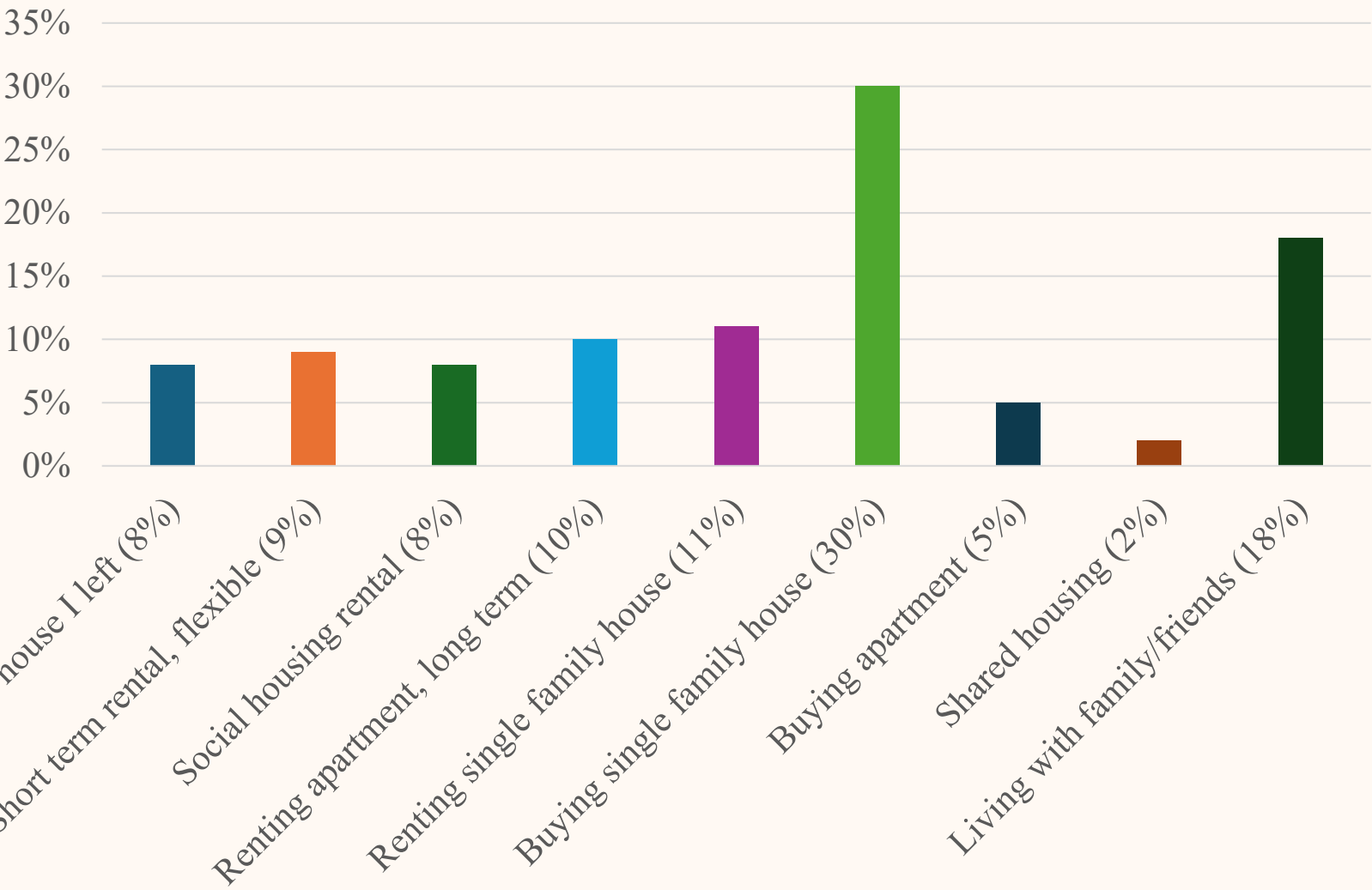
Return intentions to the Netherlands, n = 158



- Intentions are fragmented: soon / 2–5y / unsure / no return.
- On return, ownership is most named aspiration; also demand for short-term furnished.
- What does it show us? Nomads aspire to home ownership, but many face uncertainty and systemic barriers, making return far from automatic.

• *“I know it would be difficult, I expect the recognition of foreign income and affordability to be the biggest obstacles.” - Anne 36, branding consultant*

Housing upon returning, n = 158



RESULT

Post Nomadic : Who returns & who owns

Income ↓ \ Housing →	Ownership	Independent rental	Flexible rental	Shared housing	Social housing	Family/ friends	Return to existing home	No clear idea	Total
≤ €2000	11	6	5	2	5	13	0	0	42
€2000–3500	14	8	4	0	3	10	1	1	41
≥ €3500	29	19	5	1	4	6	11	0	75
Total	54	33	14	3	12	29	12	1	158

Significant: $\chi^2(14) = 29.23$, $p = 0.0097$

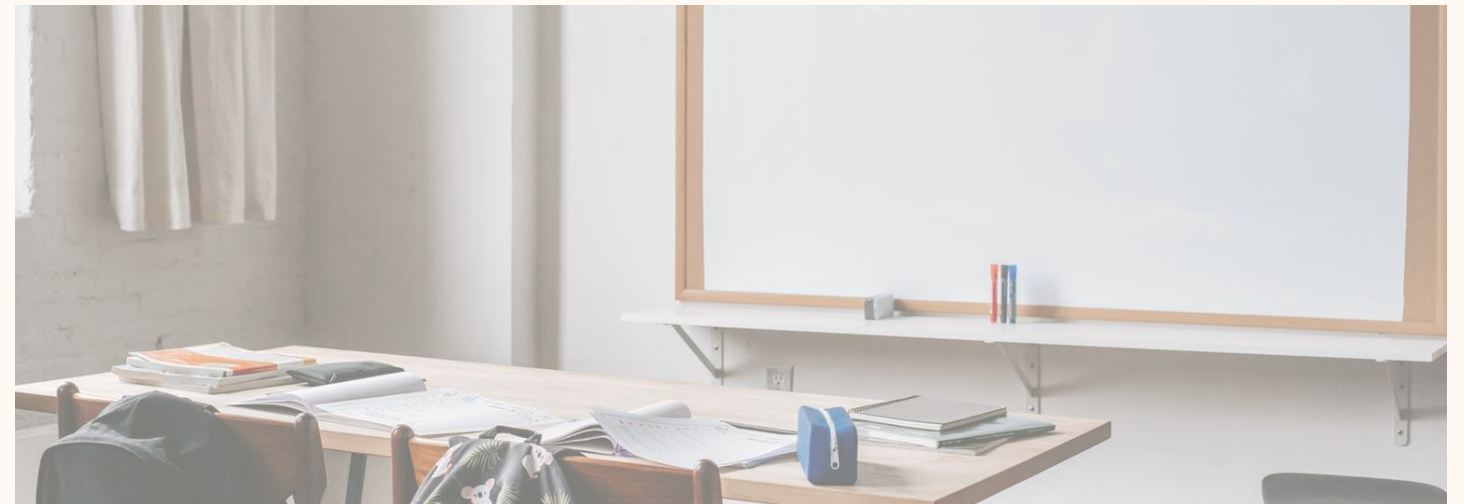
Return plans ↓ \ Housing →	Owning	Renting	Flexible/shared	Social housing	Family & friends	Total
Return ≤1y	1	2	0	0	7	10
Return 2–5y	9	4	3	3	4	23
Yes, not sure when	18	5	5	4	12	44
Don’t know / flexible	11	10	6	4	14	45
No plans	10	7	1	15	2	35
Total	49	28	15	26	39	157

Significant: $\chi^2(20) = 64.2$, $p < 0.001$

- Income seems linked to housing choices, but not strongly.
 - Lower incomes lean toward family, social, or flexible options.
 - Higher incomes lean toward ownership or private rentals.
 - Patterns blur the usual income housing link.
-
- Return horizon seems linked to housing ideas.S
 - Short-term: family or temporary rentals.
 - Mid/uncertain: ownership aspirations
 - No return: social or alternative housing.

Discussion

- Housing pathways seem fluid, influenced by networks and changing contexts.
- Flexibility may extend beyond travel, shaping how people define “home.”
- Institutional frameworks appear slow to adapt to mobile forms of living.
- This could suggest a widening gap between adaptive lifestyles and rigid systems.



Conclusion

Research question: How do Dutch digital nomads' housing pathways develop across pre-, nomadic, and post-phases?

Exploratory study: findings are indicative, not definitive.

Pathways appear adaptive, shaped by both freedom and constraint.

- Pre: Housing pressures may have contributed, but not the main reason to leave.
- During: Platforms help access, networks seem to sustain stability.
- Post: Return is fragmented; flexibility can shift from choice to necessity.

Overall: housing acts as a flexible resource rather than a fixed place.



Limitation & Future research

Limitations

- Case study focus on Lisbon → limits generalizability, exploratory
- Survey sample (n=160) small, attracted certain online group
- Post-nomad phase speculative (intentions, not outcomes)
- Reliance on self-reported data → risk of bias.



Reflection

- Academic: I learned how real data can add nuance to housing theory.
- Reaching nomads was challenging, but the interviews made the topic come alive.
- The mixed-methods approach worked well, surveys showed patterns, interviews showed people.
- Personal takeaway: housing pathways are more fluid than I assumed, shaped not only by housing market, but also life choices and desires.

The world is a big place, why stay in the same place?

THANK YOU

FOR YOUR ATTENTION