

# *Should I Stay* **OR SHOULD I GO?**

What Drives People to Relocate  
or Ultimately Stay Put



→ SURVEY CONDUCTED BY IPSOS

# Many of us romanticize the idea of moving to a new city to start fresh yet still feel the pull of our current zip code.

So, what factors actually convince people to pack up and make the move? Conversely, what are some of the reasons why people decide they're living the good life right where they are and ultimately stay put, renewing their lease for another year or keeping their house off the market?

**Understanding the factors that influence moving decisions is helpful** for communities interested in attracting top-level talent, building more diverse neighborhoods and enjoying the economic growth that comes with an influx of new residents. It can also shed some light on how communities can retain talented residents, incentivizing them to grow their careers where they currently live.

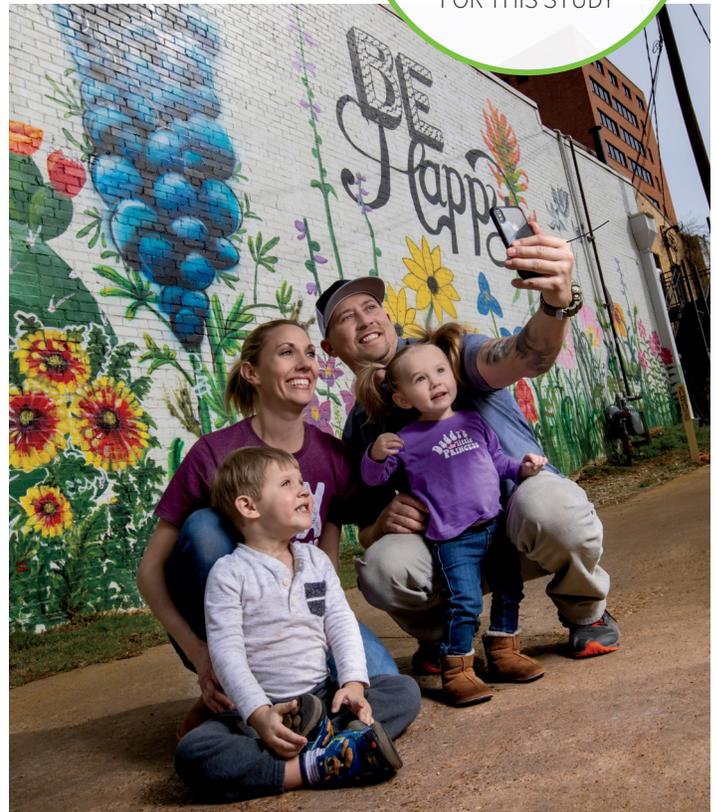
The pandemic and remote work allowed people to move anywhere, and many Americans are doing just that. Surveys from freelance marketplace Upwork indicate that 2.4% of Americans – nearly 5 million people – have moved because of remote work since 2020. In the same time period, remote job postings have tripled, according to findings from labor market data company Lightcast. Add in skyrocketing inflation and a topsy turvy real estate market, and Americans are scrambling the map. The phenomenon raises interesting questions: What's the compass guiding these relocation decisions? Sunnier skies or brighter career opportunities? Being able to save money as costs rise? For people staying put in their communities, what keeps them there?

Livability.com identifies what makes communities great places to live and tells the stories of their compelling assets. A June 2022 survey commissioned by Livability assesses what influences people's relocation decisions not hypothetically but in actuality – what has spurred them to move or not move throughout their lives, and what are their upcoming plans and considerations when it comes to relocation in the near future.

## We examined questions like:

- » What are the common concrete reasons behind people's decisions to move or not move, both pre- and post-pandemic?
- » What might change someone's mind who was considering moving?
- » For people who haven't moved in a while, why have they stayed? What keeps them in their current community, or is it mainly inertia?
- » How can communities draw new talent and keep existing talent close to home?

WE SURVEYED  
**1,004**  
AMERICAN ADULTS  
FOR THIS STUDY



The survey, conducted by leading market research firm Ipsos, asked 1,004 American adults, diverse in terms of income, ethnicity, age, employment status and other demographics, about their relocation decisions – the ones they've made and plan to make. For our study, we defined relocation as a move more than 50 miles away from where the respondent previously lived.

Livability then crunched the numbers and analyzed the data to find key insights that reveal why people stay and why they move. To give context to the findings, we gathered anecdotes from people who recently moved to new cities, are seriously considering a move soon or have recently changed their mind about leaving their current community. We also include guidance on how communities can use this information to attract and retain talent and market themselves.



## Nearly half of respondents said they plan to move (or are seriously considering it) in the next 12 months.

**In an uncertain environment of rising costs,** continued health concerns and debate over whether remote work is here to stay, people are scrambling the map. Half of the respondents in our research said they're planning or seriously considering a move in the next year.

Some of the top motivations for moving include getting closer to family, finding a more affordable cost of living or simply looking for a fresh start in a new place.

Those earning less than \$100,000 a year, as well as those younger than 55, are among the most likely to make moves in the next 12 months. Amongst our respondents, more African Americans and Hispanics are planning to move than Caucasians. Also, more people with children are willing to move compared to those without, which gives cities an opportunity to tout their family-friendly amenities such as standout schools, safe neighborhoods, great parks, community festivals and more. Our research shows African Americans, more than Caucasians, are moving to find a better place to raise a family in the next year.

“My husband and I would like to move back to Wisconsin, where we both grew up, this year so that our kids can be close to their cousins and we’ll have child care support from our parents. It’s something we’ve been thinking about doing since our daughter was born, especially since we didn’t get to see our families much during the pandemic. The challenge will be in syncing up our job hunt.”

– **Sarah W.**, Aurora, Colorado, pediatric nurse who has a 2-year-old and is pregnant with her second child

“We moved from Oklahoma City to San Antonio in July 2021 because of military orders. Though we don’t have much say in when or where we move, we do have control over our housing. We can either live in military housing on the installation or find our own accommodations in the local area. We have older children, so schools are typically the most important factor when choosing a neighborhood. We always check school review websites to learn more about class sizes, average standardized test scores and extracurricular activities. We also check out the area for parks, open space and other recreational offerings. We love to be outdoors, so easy access to outdoor activities is a must for our family.”

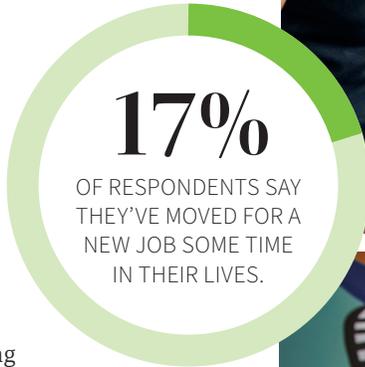
– **Becca S.**, San Antonio, Texas, freelance writer and military spouse

KEY INSIGHT #2

# New jobs are the top reason people move throughout their lives.

**Regions with major corporations hiring as well as an ecosystem to support entrepreneurs are well positioned to attract top talent.** That's because 17% of respondents say they've moved in the past for a new job, making it the top reason people have relocated.

- » Another 16% of respondents relocated in the past to pursue educational opportunities or to go to college.



If your community doesn't have the presence of a college or university, exploring satellite campuses and partnerships with state institutions can help promote economic growth. As an example, Castle Rock, a fast-growing city south of Denver, Colorado, is home to the ACC Sturm Collaboration Campus that allows residents to earn an associate degree from Arapahoe Community College and a bachelor's degree from Colorado State University but in a small, close-to-home learning environment.

Interestingly, while cost consistently ranks as a No. 1 factor for people considering future relocation, it only ranks fifth as a reason why respondents have actually moved in the past. Only 11% of respondents say they have moved for reasons related to cost. However, note that participants were asked to think about their entire lives in their response, and perhaps cost differences were not as stark between areas of the country in years past as they are now.

"I graduated high school during the pandemic and took a gap year, which turned into two gap years and counting because I didn't want to pay tuition if I wasn't going to get a full college experience. I'm trying out cities in Utah, Colorado, California and Arizona, basically places where people love the outdoors. Eventually, I want to go to college for an environmental sustainability program, but I kind of did things backward and am starting a business first."

- **Jack J.**, who is looking to start his own adventure travel company after working as a snowboarding instructor and guide for whitewater rafting trips



## Top 4 reasons respondents have relocated in their lives:

A new job .....	17%
Education or college.....	16%
To get closer to family.....	16%
To make a fresh start .....	16%

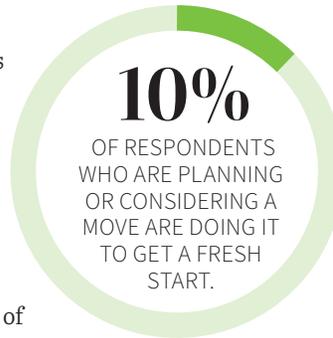
KEY INSIGHT #3

# Simply wanting a ‘fresh start’ is a major relocation factor.

Wanting a new start is another top factor that influences people to relocate, with 16% of respondents saying they’ve made a move in the past for this reason. Ten percent of respondents who said they plan to, or are seriously considering a move, in the next 12 months cited a fresh start as part of their reasoning.

In our group of respondents, men were more likely to move for a fresh start, and more people under the age of 55 have moved due to this reason.

Communities with amenities that suit “a new chapter” should consider marketing this angle. For example, those who are moving because they want a new start might be interested in networking groups for young professionals and other easy ways to meet people or may be interested in adult education programs to help them retool their skills. For others, a fresh start might mean interest in parks, trails and outdoor amenities that fit into their goals of an active lifestyle.



“We sold our house in Maryland and moved cross-country to San Diego to help take care of our grandbabies. We love the active outdoor lifestyle and spending time with our grandkids at the museums and parks in Balboa Park.”

– **Richard A.**, San Diego, California, retired structural engineer who moved with his wife in February 2022 to be closer to their daughter and son-in-law, who work full time and have three kids under 5

KEY INSIGHT #4

# Eight in 10 respondents have lived in their current community for five years or longer.

If you can attract residents, there’s a solid chance of keeping them.

Communities may have an opportunity to market any unique niches or amenities they possess, as only 2% of respondents said that they believe their “community offers something I don’t think any other community would.”

When asked what specific aspects of their current community make them want to stay, respondents indicated the most important factors were **feeling safe (47%)**, **affordability and value (39%)**, a support network of **family and friends (38%)**, ease of **getting around/lack of traffic (22%)** and **climate or outdoor amenities like beaches, mountains or hiking (22%)**.

## Here’s what respondent’s said when asked why they’ve stayed in their current community instead of moving away:

They like where they live.....	56%
Being close to family .....	40%
Perceive moving as costly .....	31%
Say moving is a hassle .....	28%
I don’t think moving would increase my quality of life .....	26%
It would be difficult and time-consuming to rebuild somewhere new .....	20%
I need to stay here due to my work industry or career field .....	11%
My work isn’t flexible and keeps me here .....	10%
I have children and don’t want to disrupt their school, activities .....	10%
My spouse can’t move .....	7%
My community offers something I don’t think any other community would ..	2%

KEY INSIGHT #5

# Family matters.

**Family connection heavily influences moving decisions:** Not only does being closer to family have a boomerang effect that brings people back to an area where they have roots, but proximity to family also deters people from moving away. According to our research, those in the Midwest display a greater tendency to move to be closer to family compared to those from the Northeast or the South.

Of those who are planning to move in the next year, 11% cite a desire to be closer to family as a motivator. More males are moving to be closer to family, and those under the age of 55 will be moving at the greatest rates to be closer to family. Also, in our survey group, more Hispanic people are moving to be closer

to family compared to Caucasians.

Communities have an opportunity to market spousal assistance programs that provide career enrichment and job-finding services to ease moves for married couples who relocate because one partner received a job offer, but the other is subsequently back in the job market.

Meanwhile, nearly four in 10 people say their proximity to family and friends is a factor in why they want to stay put.



“I was looking at colleges on the East Coast but decided to save money and stay in state. Spending so much time at home during the pandemic made me really close to my family, and I like that I’m able to come home on the weekends to go to my siblings’ games or have dinner with my family. Depending on the job market, I might make my first move after I graduate.”

– **Emily R.**, Boulder, Colorado, college sophomore studying business

KEY INSIGHT #6

# Cost was both a top factor for would-be movers who changed their minds and a top incentive for people to stay put.

**About half our respondents said they have seriously considered a move they didn’t end up executing at least once in their life.** The most common factor deterring them? Cost or affordability concerns.

When asked what would most likely change their mind about moving away, “a financial or other lucrative incentive” won out – 44% said this might make them choose to stay. However, 36% said nothing would change their mind, and female survey respondents were less likely to change their decision to move

compared to males. Individuals 55 and older are also less likely to change their relocation plans.

Meanwhile, those with children are more likely to change their minds about a move they’re contemplating.

These findings could help communities expand their incentive programs. Programs across the country like Tulsa Remote, Northwest Arkansas Council’s Life Works Here Initiative, West Virginia’s Ascend WV and Choose Topeka in Kansas have offered

financial incentives for workers who relocate. But should there also be cash incentives or tax breaks for top talent who stay put?

In addition to offering financial incentives to remote workers and new residents, it’s worth exploring benefits that may help retain current and perhaps longer-term residents.

“After reading about a relocation program (in a Southern state), our family took a road trip and fell in love. However, we decided to postpone our move because of the housing bubble – in the past 12-18 months, we’ve seen the prices of homes nearly double in our favorite area, and that’s not sustainable, not to mention gas for a place you have to drive. We’re hopeful that the housing market will right itself by 2023, and we can purchase both a home and property for my business, Awesome Enterprises.”

– **Jacqueline S.**, New York, owner of a communication-based personal leadership company that works with women of color



## More than half of respondents would choose a community of similar size if they decided to move.

**Amid the pandemic, many speculated that people were trading big, urban cities for smaller, wide-open spaces.** But the numbers now show something different:

- » About six in 10 respondents said if they were looking to move, they'd choose a community that was similarly sized to their current one.
- » Those earning more than \$50,000 a year were more likely to move to a community that's about the same size compared to those earning less.
- » Those with college degrees prefer a community similarly sized to their current zip code.
- » Populations younger than 34 tend to choose bigger communities to move to, and older populations prefer communities that are either similarly sized to their current city or even smaller.
- » Those earning less than \$100,000 a year are more likely to seek smaller communities compared to those earning more, which could speak to the perception that dollars stretch further in small to midsized communities.

Regardless of size, communities have an opportunity to market their best amenities. Proximity to an airport, cultural institutions, pro or minor league sports, Broadway shows, cosmopolitan dining scenes and abundant trails are perks that aren't exclusive to big or small communities.



### THE TAKE AWAY

It's no secret that the pandemic, plus ensuing remote work and rising costs, sparked changes in where people choose to live and created opportunities for communities to draw new residents.

However, despite the increase in relocation, there's still a large swath of people who have stayed put despite sweeping change and uncertainty. It's key for communities to consider this group as well – the talent already residing in their backyards – and what keeps these individuals as longtime,

or even lifelong, citizens. Current and future residents are important when it comes to building your ideal workforce and community, and the findings outlined here provide insight into how your area can understand and appeal to both of these key groups in a time of rapid change.

## We celebrate what makes your community unique and appealing to potential new residents and businesses.

Livability Media is a full-service media and content marketing company that helps cities, regions and states attract talent and business investment.



Drawing millions of users each year, Livability.com showcases what makes communities great places to live and appeal to people considering relocation. Through proprietary research studies and engaging daily content, Livability.com highlights community amenities, education, sustainability, transportation, housing and more.



For its annual **Top 100 Best Places to Live**, Livability.com ranks more than 2,000 cities based on cutting-edge research about what truly matters to potential relocators, including affordability, career opportunities and diversity.



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