

DIW Weekly Report

A policy bulletin from the German Institute for Economic Research

44 2025



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299 Report by Philipp M. Lersch, Selçuk Bedük, and Enrico Benassi

Parental influence on their children's homeownership remains high, but declining

- Homeownership rate in Germany significantly lower in younger birth cohorts
- Homeownership depends more on parental status than the European average
- Removing equity barriers for certain target groups could be useful



LEGAL AND EDITORIAL DETAILS

DIW BERLIN

DIW Berlin — Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung e. V.

Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße 58, 10117 Berlin

www.diw.de

Phone: +49 30 897 89-0 Fax: -200

Volume 15 October 30, 2025

Publishers

Prof. Anna Bindler, Ph.D.; Prof. Dr. Tomaso Duso; Sabine Fiedler; Prof. Marcel Fratzscher, Ph.D.; Prof. Dr. Peter Haan; Prof. Dr. Claudia Kemfert; Prof. Dr. Alexander S. Kritikos; Prof. Dr. Alexander Kriwoluzky; Prof. Karsten Neuhoff, Ph.D.; Prof. Dr. Sabine Zinn

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Cover design

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Composition

Satz-Rechen-Zentrum Hartmann + Heenemann GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin

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ISSN 2568-7697

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AT A GLANCE

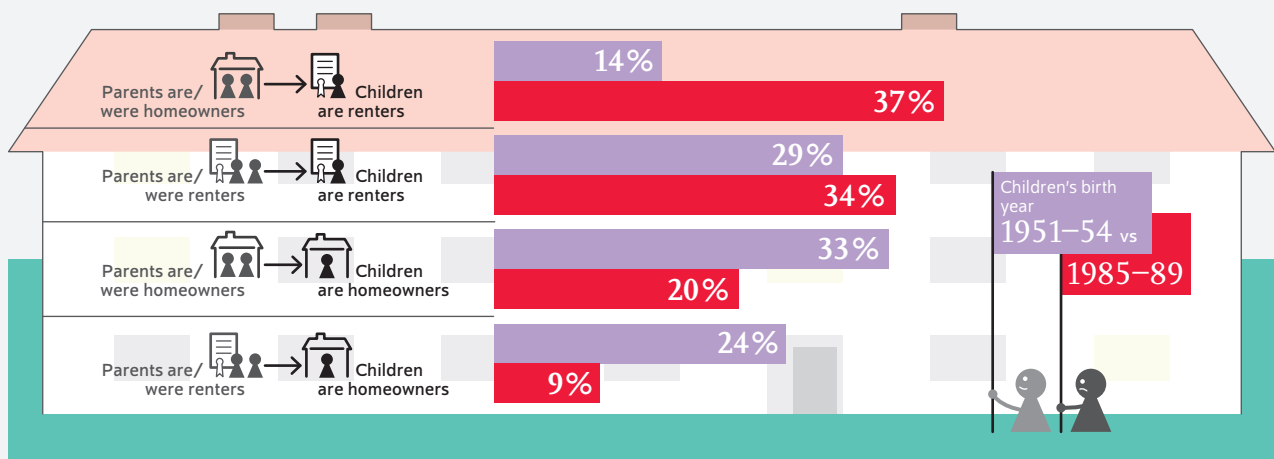
Parental influence on their children’s homeownership remains high, but declining

By Philipp M. Lersch, Selçuk Bedük, and Enrico Benassi

- Study uses EU-SILC data to examine the extent to which homeownership in Germany depends on the property status of parents and how it develops over time
- Homeownership rates are significantly lower in younger birth cohorts, with intergenerational mobility toward renting increasing
- The relative association between parental homeownership and children’s homeownership is weakening over time
- Homeownership—depending heavily on parental homeownership—is less common in Germany than in most other European countries
- To counteract this, it could be useful to reduce equity barriers for certain target groups such as young families

The chances of homeownership have decreased – regardless of parental housing status

Housing status of the 1951–1954 birth cohort and the 1985–1989 birth in percent



Sources: EU-SILC (2011, 2019, 2023); authors' own calculations.

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FROM THE AUTHORS

“It is important to provide housing that meets people’s needs, regardless of whether they own or rent. Since the likelihood of homeownership should not depend on family background, it makes sense above all to remove equity barriers.”

— Philipp M. Lersch —

MEDIA



Audio Interview with Philipp M. Lersch (in German)
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Parental influence on their children's homeownership remains high, but declining

By Philipp M. Lersch, Selçuk Bedük, and Enrico Benassi

ABSTRACT

Homeownership is far less prevalent in Germany than in most other European countries. This Weekly Report examines the extent to which homeownership in Germany depends on the ownership status of parents and how the association has changed over time. Homeownership rates are significantly lower among younger birth cohorts than among older cohorts. At the same time, intergenerational mobility toward renting is increasing: adult children of parents who own their own homes are more likely to move into rentals. Children whose parents rent are less likely to buy a home. The relative association between parental homeownership and children owning homes is declining significantly over time. However, unequal opportunities for homeownership based on family background remains an ongoing issue in Germany. In a European comparison, the homeownership status of children in Germany still depends relatively strongly on that of their parents. To counteract this, it could be useful to remove equity barriers for specific target groups, such as young families.

For most people, homeownership is the most significant form of wealth and central to wealth accumulation.¹ This is also true for Germany, even though its homeownership rates are low in European comparison. Further, homeownership is often associated with a better quality of life and a better living environment.² Thus, homeownership is particularly attractive for families with young children.³

At the same time, several factors in Europe have made it more difficult to purchase homes: increases in real estate prices—often exceeding real wage increases—alongside labor market changes—such as later entry into employment—and repeated crises that have increased economic uncertainty.⁴ In Germany, average real estate prices rose by 77 percent between 2011 and 2023.⁵ However, there are significant regional differences, with the greatest growth in metropolitan areas. Although prices have fallen slightly since 2023,⁶ it is increasingly difficult for young people to purchase their own home.⁷

However, rising real estate prices and other hurdles are less of an obstacle if sufficient parental support is available.⁸

1 Philipp M. Lersch and Caroline Dewilde (2018): Homeownership, saving, and financial wealth: A comparative and longitudinal analysis. *Housing Studies* 33(8), 1–32 (available online, accessed on October 14, 2025. This applies to all online sources in this report, unless otherwise stated).

2 Isaac Megbolugbe and Peter Linneman (1993): Home ownership. *Urban Studies*, 30 (4–5), 659–682.

3 Clara Helena Mulder and Michael Wagner (1998): First-time Home-ownership in the Family Life Course: A West German-Dutch Comparison. *Urban Studies* 35(4), 687–713.

4 Jo Blanden, Andrew Eyles, and Stephen Machin (2023): Intergenerational Home Ownership. *The Journal of Economic Inequality* 21(2), 251–75 (available online); Ellie Suh (2020): Young British adults' homeownership circumstances and the role of intergenerational transfers. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 11(3), 383–407 (available online).

5 Eurostat (2025): House price index (2015 = 100) (available online).

6 Konstantin A. Kholodilin and Malte Rieth (2024): Preise am Wohnungsmarkt stabilisieren sich. Nachfrage hoch, Angebot weiter zu knapp. DIW Wochenbericht No. 51/52 (in German; online verfügbar).

7 Caroline Dewilde (2020): Exploring Young Europeans' Homeownership Opportunities. *Critical Housing Analysis* 7(1), 86–102 (available online); *The Economist*, October 20, 2022: A global house-price slump is coming (available online); Elisabeth von Thadden (2021): Das teure Nest. *Die Zeit*, No. 6 (in German; available online).

8 Sait Bayraktar et al. (2018): Family formation, parental background and young adults' first entry into homeownership in Britain and Germany. *Housing Studies* 34(6), 974–96 (available online); Rory Coulter (2016): Parental Background and Housing Outcomes in Young Adulthood. *Housing Studies* 33(2), 201–223 (available online).

Such dependence on parents leads to inequalities among the younger generations. Thus, housing quality may depend on an individual's origins, with homeownership depending more and more on whether an individual's parents themselves are homeowners.⁹ This undermines equal opportunities in a key area of life.

This report uses European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data from 2011, 2019, and 2023 to examine the likelihood that younger birth cohorts own their own home in Germany given parental homeownership.¹⁰ Data after 2023 is not currently available, so more recent developments in the German real estate market are not taken into account. The EU-SILC surveyed individuals aged 31 to 59, asking them if their parents were homeowners when the individuals were 14 (Box). We compare the situation in Germany with other European countries, paying particular attention to differences across birth cohorts.

Homeownership is uncommon in Germany

The German housing market is unusual in comparison to other European countries, with much lower rates of homeownership.¹¹ Some 48 percent of German households owned their homes in 2023; far below the European average of 69 percent.¹² Further, in eastern Germany, homeownership is significantly lower than in western Germany. Germany's generally low homeownership rate is partially driven by its attractive and, in international comparison, relatively inexpensive rental housing. However, rents have risen significantly in recent years, even increasing more sharply than purchase prices.¹³ Tenants in Germany enjoy a high degree of legal protection and, in most cases, long-term secure tenure.¹⁴ Nevertheless, around three-quarters of Germans say they would like to own their own home.¹⁵

For most households in Germany, buying a house is a once-in-a-lifetime decision, whereas in other countries, such as the UK and the Netherlands, it is more common to purchase several residential properties.¹⁶ Given Germany's exceptionally high equity requirements, due to strict mortgage rules, individuals must save a long time before they can buy a

Box

Data and methodology

Data from the 2011, 2019, and 2023 waves of the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) are used. In these three years, respondents were surveyed about their parents' housing status when they were 14 years old. Respondents are considered homeowners if someone in their household is the owner of their current home. In this report, homeownership is measured at the household level in order to use the 2023 data, in which information on individual residential property is not available. The analysis covers people aged 31 to 59 in 31 European countries (27 EU countries plus Iceland, Norway, Serbia, and Switzerland). To minimize bias due to different stages of life, the sample is limited to people over the age of 30; outcomes show that intergenerational associations in homeownership barely change after this age. The question about parental homeownership is only asked of respondents under the age of 60. The focus is on individuals born between 1951 and 1989. In the 2011 survey wave, these are the cohorts born between 1951 and 1980, in 2019 the cohorts born between 1960 and 1988, and in 2023 the cohorts born between 1964 and 1989. In most analyses, these are grouped into five-year cohorts to ensure sufficient case numbers. The data is used with the provided weights. The intergenerational association for homeownership is calculated using a linear probability model (OLS) by predicting the children's ownership based on parental ownership, taking into account the children's age and the calendar year (relative mobility). Similarly, mobility rates in ownership status, for example, the share of children who own homes and whose parents were tenants, are calculated taking into account the age of the children and the calendar year (absolute mobility).

house—especially if they lack parental support.¹⁷ State subsidies in Germany for homeownership primarily help people who are already able to afford to buy a home without support, while people with limited financial resources are not assisted.¹⁸

Parental influence on the homeownership of their adult children

Parents influence their adult children's residential property in various direct and indirect ways.¹⁹ First, parents can transfer real estate directly to their children. Transfers during

⁹ Richard Ronald and Rowan Arundel (eds.) (2022): *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. 1st edition, Routledge, New York (available online).

¹⁰ This report was produced with funding from the Volkswagen Foundation: Selçuk Bedük, Enrico Benassi, and Philipp M. Lersch (2025): Trends in relative and absolute mobility of homeownership in Europe. Open Science Preprint dated July 16 (available online).

¹¹ Interestingly, the homeownership rates in the three German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) are the lowest in European comparison.

¹² See Eurostat (2024): Distribution of population by tenure status, type of household, and income group 2003–2024 (available online).

¹³ Kholodilin and Rieth (2024), *ibid.*

¹⁴ Konstantin Kholodilin (2020): Long-term, multicountry perspective on rental market regulations. *Housing Policy Debate*, 30(6), 994–1015.

¹⁵ Johannes Ewald et al. (2025): *Wohnen in Deutschland 2025*. Verband der Sparda-Banken e.V. (in German; available online).

¹⁶ Michael Voigtländer (2009): Why is the German Homeownership Rate so Low? *Housing Studies* 24(3), 355–372 (available online).

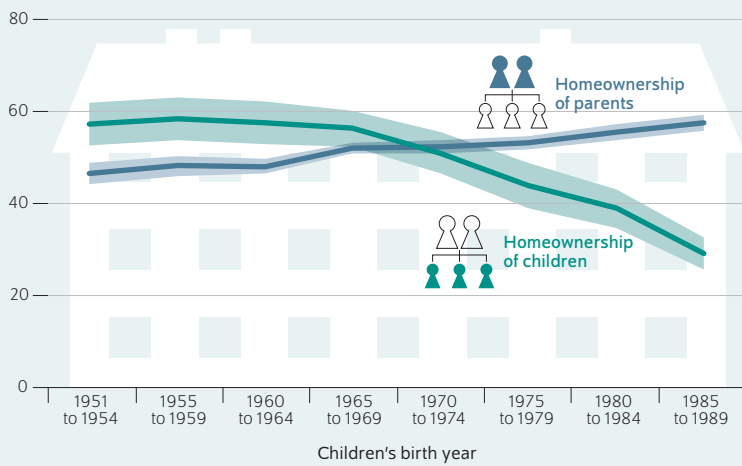
¹⁷ Claus Michelsen (2017): *Erwerb von Wohneigentum: Eigenkapitalschwelle für immer mehr Haushalte zu hoch*. DIW aktuell No. 2 (in German; available online).

¹⁸ Peter Gründling and Markus M. Grabka (2019): Staatlich geförderter Mietkauf kann einkommensschwachen Familien Weg in die eigenen vier Wände ebnen. *DIW Wochenbericht* No. 29, 499–506 (in German; available online); Claus Michelsen, Stefan Bach, and Michelle Harnisch (2018): *Baukindergeld: Einkommensstarke Haushalte profitieren in besonderem Maße*. DIW aktuell No. 14 (in German; available online).

¹⁹ Philipp M. Lersch and Ruud Luijckx (2015): Intergenerational transmission of homeownership in Europe: Revisiting the socialization hypothesis. *Social Science Research* 49, 327–342 (available online).

Figure 1

Share of homeownership by children's birth year
In percent



Notes: Individuals aged 31 to 59 who were born between 1951 (2011 survey wave only) and 1989; weighted. The shaded areas indicate the 95 percent confidence interval.

Sources: EU-SILC (2011, 2019, 2023); authors' own calculations.

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In older cohorts, children are more likely to own their homes than their parents. From the 1970 birth cohorts onwards, the trend reverses.

the parents' lifetime, which may also have tax advantages, are more relevant for children's entry into homeownership than inheritances, as transfers take place earlier in their children's lives. However, since many parents who own residential property only own the property they live in themselves—typically living there until death—other forms of parental financial support are significant. For example, parents can help by giving money, acting as guarantors for mortgages, or providing low-interest private loans. Parents who own their home are more likely to have the necessary funds for such support than those who are tenants because living costs for homeowners tend to be lower in old age.²⁰

Secondly, an association between homeownership among parents and children can also arise indirectly as education and earning potential are passed down between generations.²¹ Higher incomes among both parents and children make it easier to become homeowners. Thirdly, parents can pass on (financial) knowledge directly or indirectly, thereby encouraging similar investment decisions that lead to homeownership. Fourthly, parents can influence their children's ideas and wishes regarding housing by setting an example. Finally, the chances of homeownership may be similar for parents and children if they live close by, thus being in a similar market environment.

Homeownership rates in Germany are declining

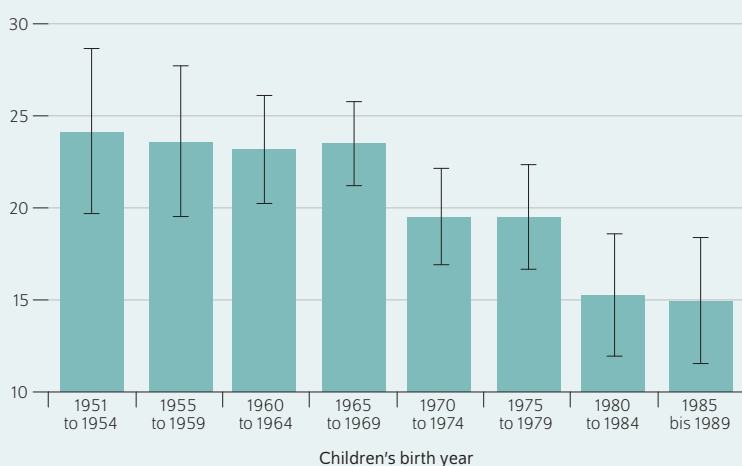
Over the past twenty years, homeownership rates among young adults in Europe and many other countries have declined significantly.²² Specifically, homeownership rates are declining among younger birth cohorts: they are increasingly less likely to be homeowners. This trend is also evident in Germany (Figure 1). In order to illustrate the transition over time, birth cohorts from 1951 through 1989 are studied in five-year increments after adjusting for age effects. Even in Germany, fewer and fewer young people own their own home, whereas their parents experienced the opposite trend, with increasing rates of homeownership.

It should be noted that the 1985 to 1989 birth cohort can only be observed up to the ages of 34 to 38. Some members of this cohort will acquire a home later in life. However, since the trend away from homeownership in the children's generation already begins in older birth cohorts, which can also be observed later in life, it is unlikely that this is purely an age effect.

Figure 2

Relationship between homeownership among parents and children in Germany

Average influence of parental homeownership on likelihood to own in percentage points



Notes: Individuals aged 31 to 59 who were born between 1951 (2011 survey wave only) and 1989; weighted. The horizontal lines indicate the 95 percent confidence interval.

Sources: EU-SILC (2011, 2019, 2023); authors' own calculations.

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The likelihood that children of parents who own their home will also be homeowners themselves decreases among younger birth cohorts.

²⁰ Another form of support is longer-term, free accommodation in the parental household. This option has a higher likelihood if the parents themselves are homeowners, as residential properties are generally larger and of higher quality.

²¹ Philipp M. Lersch, Maximilian Longmuir, and Daniel D. Schnitzlein (2024): Intergenerational persistence of wealth. In: Elina Kilpi-Jakonen et al. (eds.): Research Handbook on Intergenerational Inequality. Edward Elgar Publishing, 86–99 (available online).

²² Dewilde (2020), *ibid.*; Konstantin Kholodilin and Sebastian Kohl (2023): Social policy or crowding-out? Tenant protection in comparative long-run perspective. *Housing Studies*, 38(4), 707–743.

Children are now less likely to be influenced by parental homeownership

The following section explores the homeownership rates of various generations in association with the homeownership rate of their parents. For the 1951 to 1954 birth cohort, their likelihood of homeownership increases by about 24 percentage points if their parents were homeowners when they were 14 years old (Figure 2). To put this number into perspective, it is comparable to the influence of university education: if parents have earned a university degree in Germany, then their children are 37 percent more likely to also earn a university degree in Germany.²³

Up to the 1969 birth cohort, the association between parental homeownership and children’s homeownership remained stable. Thereafter, the influence declines. For the birth cohorts from 1970 to 1974 and 1975 to 1979, the likelihood of homeownership is still around 19 percentage points higher if the parents lived in their own property. For the next two birth cohorts—1980 to 1984 and 1985 to 1989—the likelihood is only 15 percentage points higher. This results in a relative fall in the association between homeownership among parents and their adult children of around 40 percent between the 1951 to 1954 birth cohort and the 1985 to 1989 birth cohort. It is important to take a closer look at the ownership constellations between the generations that contribute to this decline in the association over time.

One-third of homeowners have parents who own their home

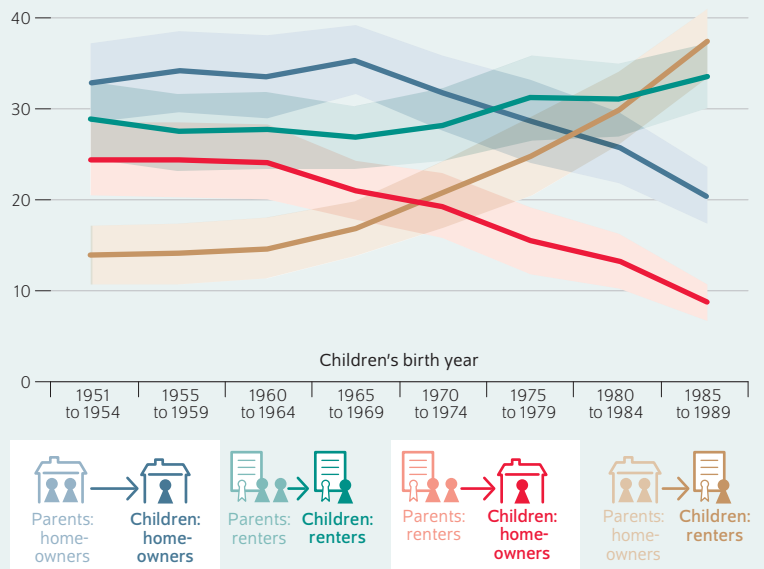
Four possible constellations between the generations can be distinguished in terms of homeownership: (i) parents and children are homeowners; (ii) parents and children are tenants; (iii) parents are homeowners and children are tenants; and (iv) parents are tenants and children are homeowners. While homeownership patterns between generations are stable in the first two groups, ownership patterns change in the latter two groups because the children have different ownership statuses than their parents (Figure 3).

For the 1951 to 1954 birth cohort, the share of those who are homeowners themselves and whose parents also owned their home is around 33 percent. They represent the largest group, followed by children and parents who both rent, at around 29 percent. Around 24 percent of children own their home even though their parents did not. Finally, around 14 percent of children do not own their homes even though their parents did. These shares remain relatively stable for the birth cohorts from 1955 to 1959 and from 1960 to 1964.

Significant changes began with the next birth cohort. The share of children who own their homes—like their parents—has fallen steadily, until only about 20 percent of the 1985 to 1989 birth cohort owned their home. Similarly, the share of

Figure 3

Share of people who own or rent their home, depending on their parents’ ownership status Mobility types by birth cohort in percent



Note: Persons aged 31 to 59 who were born between 1951 (2011 survey wave only) and 1989; weighted. The shaded areas indicate the 95 percent confidence interval.

Sources: EU-SILC (2011, 2019, 2023); authors' own calculations.

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The trend is toward renting—even among individuals whose parents are homeowners.

those living in their own home even though their parents were tenants fell from 24 to around eight percent. At the same time, the share of those who rent, even though their parents were owners, rises to around 37 percent. This group represents the largest share in the 1985 to 1989 birth cohort, whereas it was the smallest group in the 1951 to 1954 cohort. The share of those who rent and whose parents also rented is rising slightly from 29 to 34 percent in the last birth cohort.

Mobility opportunities between eastern and western Germany are converging

Since homeownership is significantly less prevalent in eastern Germany than in western Germany, and the transfer of property has historically been less significant in eastern Germany, homeownership mobility is considered separately for these regions of Germany. Only data from 2023 can be used to distinguish between eastern (including Berlin) and western Germany, as regional differentiation is not possible with EU-SILC data prior to this date. This means that older birth cohorts before 1965 cannot be evaluated.

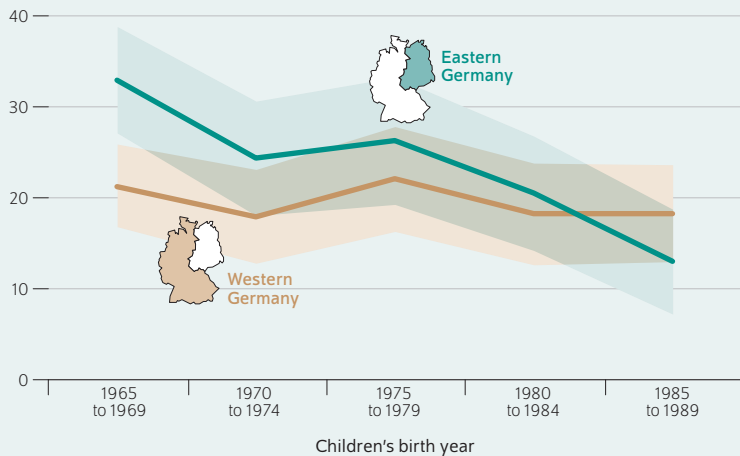
In the 1965 to 1969 birth cohort, the likelihood that children in eastern Germany own their homes is about 33 percentage points higher if their parents were owners than if they were tenants. In western Germany, the likelihood is

²³ Press release from the Federal Statistical Office dated June 20, 2024: Hochschulabschluss hängt stark vom Bildungsstand der Eltern ab (in German; available online).

Figure 4

Relationship between homeownership among parents and children in eastern and western Germany

Average influence of parental homeownership on likelihood of children's homeownership in percentage points



Note: Only individuals between the ages of 31 and 59 who were born between 1965 and 1989; weighted. The shaded areas indicate the 95 percent confidence interval.

Source: EU-SILC (2023); authors' own calculations.

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The likelihood that children of parents who own their own home will also own their own home has converged across eastern and western Germany.

only 21 percentage points higher (Figure 4). However, the gap narrows with subsequent birth cohorts. This convergence in mobility opportunities between eastern and western Germany is also seen in education, for example.²⁴ Further analyses show that the frequency of various types of homeownership mobility in eastern and western Germany is also similar, with similar trends across birth cohorts.

Family background more important in Germany than in many other EU countries

To answer the question of how Germany fares in comparison to other European countries in terms of mobility opportunities, instead of differentiating by birth cohorts, the association across all cohorts in 31 countries is studied using EU-SILC data. When looking at the relative intergenerational association of homeownership, Germany is at the top of the international rankings (Figure 5). Across all birth cohorts, the likelihood of children owning their own home increases by an average of 21 percentage points if their parents also owned their own home. Only Finland, Belgium, Italy, and Ireland have slightly higher values. This means that the family background of parents owning their own home is more

important for owning one's own home in Germany than in most other countries.

At the same time, however, the share of children whose property status changes in comparison to that of their parents (intergenerational mobility) is higher in Germany than in most other European countries. With 19 percent of children who own their homes even though their parents did not, Germany ranks in the top third of all 31 countries studied. With 22 percent of children being tenants even though their parents were owners, Germany ranks fifth among the countries.

Germany is one of only five countries in which the relative association between parental and child ownership has declined between the birth cohorts of 1951 to 1954 and 1985 to 1989 (Figure 6). Only four countries match this: Luxembourg, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Slovenia. The decline in the share of homeowning children whose parents rent is slightly above the European average in Germany. The increase in the share of German adult children who rent but whose parents own property, on the other hand, is well above average. This means that Germany stands out in a European comparison with a significant reduction in the likelihood of homeownership, even for those whose parents owned their own home.

Conclusion: Creating affordable housing based on demand

The results show that younger birth cohorts are significantly less likely to be homeowners than older cohorts. This decline goes hand in hand with an increasing number of people who are tenants, even though their parents were homeowners. A decline is also observed in the other direction: fewer people whose parents rented are buying their own home. Thus, in Germany, the relative association between parental homeownership and adult children in younger birth cohorts owning homes is weakening significantly. However, even among the younger birth cohorts, people are more likely to own their own homes if their parents were homeowners. These findings are evident in both eastern and western Germany. An international comparison shows that homeownership in Germany depends much more on the parental status than in other EU countries. At the same time, Germans' mobility into and out of homeownership is also above average.

Thus, unequal opportunity for homeownership among the younger generation due to family background persists, but is weakening. Owning one's own home is becoming less common, even if parents were homeowners. It is clear that younger generations in Germany, in comparison to their parents, lag behind in terms of access to homeownership, which raises questions of intergenerational equity.

An important question remains as to what extent the decline in homeownership among younger birth cohorts is also a reflection of changing preferences. Do young people want to live in rental housing less because they value the flexibility it offers? Changing preferences may well play a role. However, surveys providing evidence of a prevalence of a

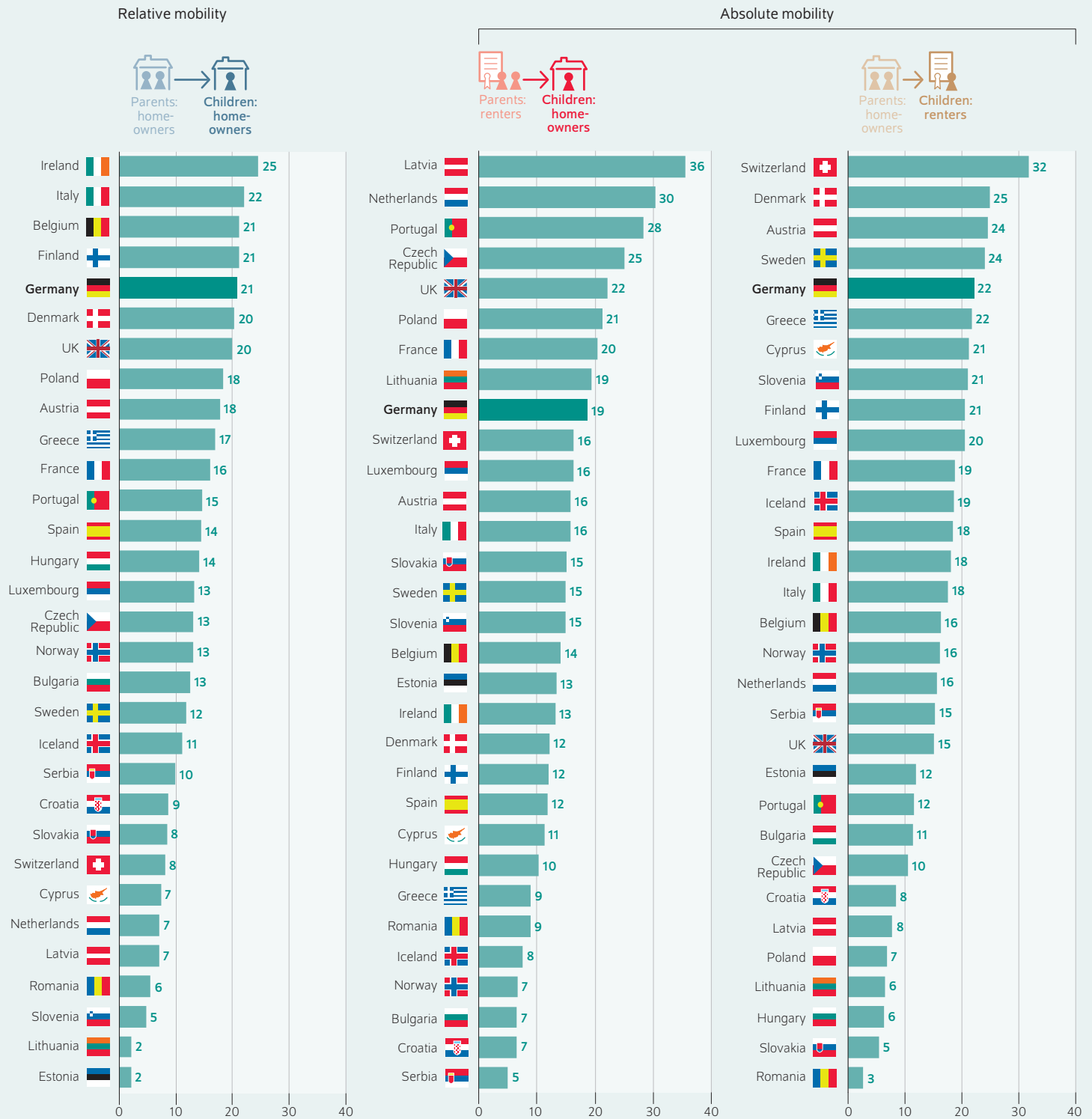
²⁴ Markus Klein, Katherin Barg, and Michael Kühhirt (2019): Inequality of Educational Opportunity in East and West Germany: Convergence or Continued Differences? *Sociological Science* 6, 1–26 (available online).

HOMEOWNERSHIP

Figure 5

Intergenerational mobility in homeownership in Europe

Average influence of parental homeownership on likelihood of children's homeownership (left) and share of homeownership (center and right) in percentage points



Note: Average across all survey waves; individuals aged 31 to 59 born between 1951 (2011 survey wave only) and 1989; weighted.

Sources: EU-SILC (2011, 2019, 2023); authors' own calculations.

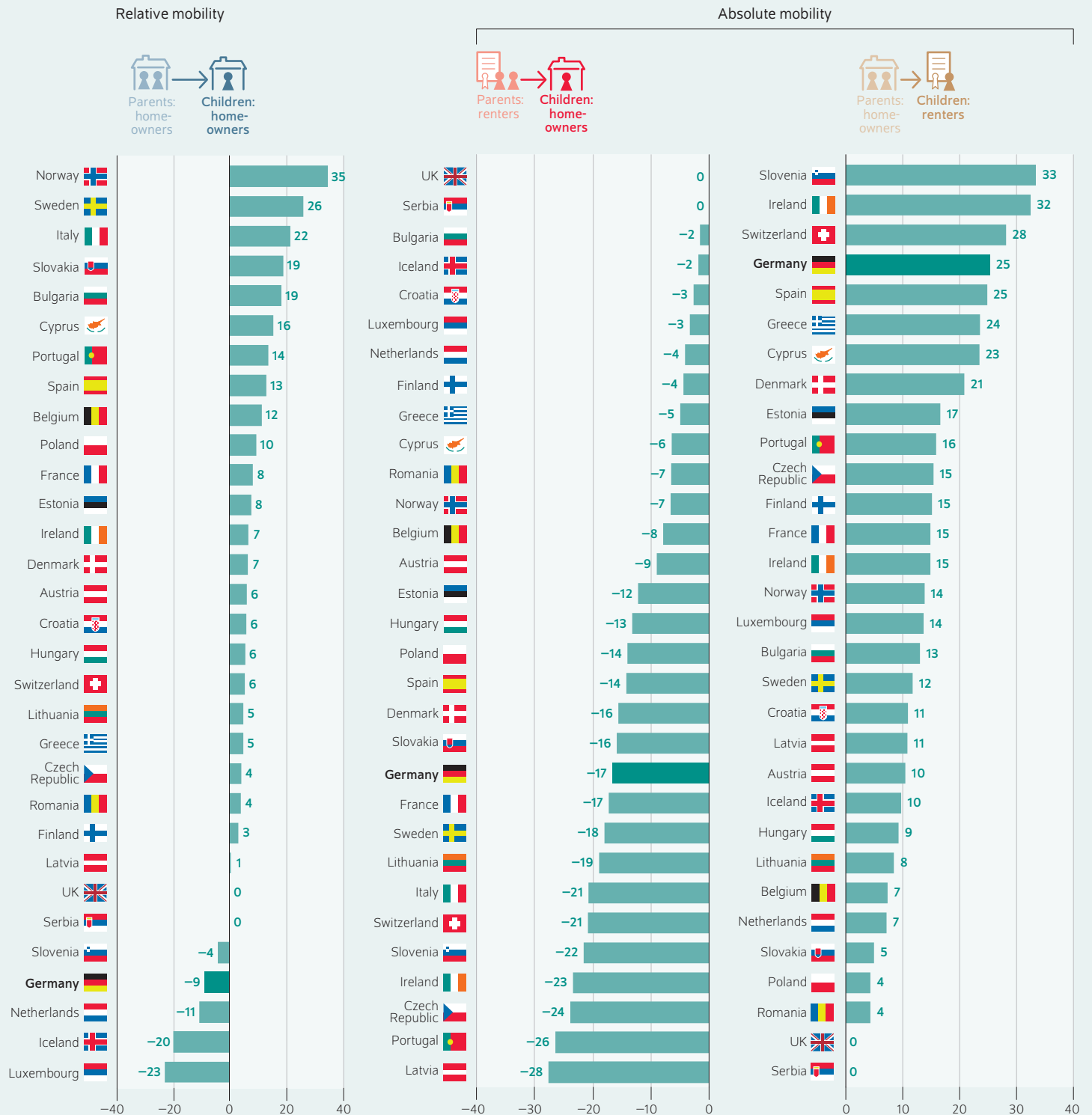
Compared to other European countries, children's homeownership status in Germany still depends relatively heavily on that of their parents.

HOMEOWNERSHIP

Figure 6

Changes in intergenerational mobility in homeownership in Europe

Change in likelihood (left) and share (center and right) of homeownership between the 1951–1954 birth cohort and the 1985–1989 cohort in percentage points



Note: Average across all survey waves; individuals aged 31 to 59 born between 1951 (2011 survey wave only) and 1989; weighted.

Sources: EU-SILC (2011, 2019, 2023); authors' own calculations.

In Germany, the likelihood of being homeowners depending on whether the parents are homeowners declines in younger birth cohorts.

desire for homeownership²⁵ suggest that this is not the only reason for the decline. Nevertheless, more research is needed on the changing of preferences. At the same time, the influence of real estate prices must also be kept in mind. Although prices have fallen in the last two years, there are many indications that they are already increasing again; thus, fundamental changes in the market environment are not expected in the near future.²⁶

Political action should not focus solely on homeownership and the political objective should not be to help everyone

²⁵ Ewald et al. (2025), *ibid.*

²⁶ Kholodilin and Rieth (2024), *ibid.*; Press release from the Federal Statistical Office dated September 24, 2025: Preise für Wohnimmobilien im 2. Quartal 2025: +3,2 Prozent zum Vorjahresquartal (in German; online verfügbar).

become homeowners. It is more important to provide housing that meets people's needs (e.g., in terms of size and location), regardless of whether they own or rent. To this end, a comprehensive strategy must be developed that gives people the freedom to choose when looking for accommodation, ensuring sufficient housing at affordable prices regardless of the decision to rent or to buy. Rising purchase prices can be just as much of an obstacle as rising rents. At the same time, homeownership should not depend on family background. To this end, it seems in particular sensible to remove equity barriers, for example through rent-to-buy schemes for young families.²⁷

²⁷ Gründling and Grabka (2019), *ibid.*

Philipp M. Lersch is Head of the Life Course and Inequality Research Group at DIW Berlin | plersch@diw.de

Selçuk Bedük is Departmental Lecturer in Comparative Social Policy at the University of Oxford | selcuk.beduk@spi.ox.ac.uk

Enrico Benassi is a doctoral candidate at the University of Oxford | enrico.benassi@spi.ox.ac.uk