


# Exploring Migration Motivations from Developed to Developing Countries: A Study of American Emigrants to Developing Countries

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the motivations and challenges faced by American emigrants by focusing on the stories of 12 individuals who moved to developing countries. Through an in-depth analysis of social media videos produced by the CNBC Make It program and the migrants, the study provides firsthand insights into their decision-making processes and the factors influencing their choices. Our findings reveal that economic opportunities are not the primary driver of early decision-making. Instead, motivations for migration are deeply rooted in social and psychological aspects, such as detachment from home communities and personal growth and fulfillment. Economic considerations, including the ability to earn income from the U.S. (through online work, retirement, or passive income), become relevant for geographic arbitrage only after the decision to migrate has been made. Having an income from home country, combined with the lower cost of living in developing countries, enables Americans to achieve financial independence. Notably, tax benefits are a low priority, contrary to popular belief about tax avoidance as a motivation. Therefore, migration from developed to developing countries is primarily a personal decision driven by a desire for change, adventure, creativity, and self-discovery.

**Keywords:** Sociopsychological Factors, Personal Growth, Geographic Arbitrage, U.S. Migration, Developing Countries

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## 1. Introduction

This study investigates the economic, sociological, and psychological motivations behind the migration of individuals from the United States, a developed and prosperous nation, to developing countries. This study primarily focuses on economic incentives, such as geographic arbitrage, which allow individuals to maximize their financial resources by capitalizing on differences in cost of living between their home and host countries. This strategy not only enhances purchasing power and potentially accelerates the attainment of financial independence (Fieber, 2018).

Migration is an inherently complex and impactful phenomenon that influences social structures, cultural dynamics, economic developments, and political landscapes in both the origin and destination areas. This complexity is especially pronounced in migration from developed to developing regions, where people move from wealthier to relatively poorer countries. This transition can have significant financial, cultural, and psychological effects on migrants, affecting their budgeting, mental health, and emotional well-being.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted motivations that prompt individuals from the U.S.—a country often idealized for its wealth and opportunities—to relocate to developing countries. By exploring these motivations, this study seeks to shed light on the potential advantages and challenges faced by migrants, thereby offering valuable insights into how migration impacts individuals' lifestyles **and financial planning**. This analysis not only contributes to the academic discourse on migration but also assists potential migrants in making informed decisions.

Most of the existing literature examines migration as a form of migration from developing countries to developed countries (van der Mensbruggh & Roland-Holst, 2009; Solano & Huddleston, 2021). This is logical given the association between developing countries and relative poverty, which prompts migration toward developed countries. The primary focus in this literature revolves around measuring countries' benefits and drawbacks, particularly concerning the migration of skilled labor (Skeldon, 2021), national security concerns (Abdullayev et al., 2023), the impact of institutions (Arif, 2020), and push–pull determinants (Urbański, 2022). However, there is a noticeable dearth of research on migration from developed to developing countries. Moreover, economic, sociological, and psychological aspects are an underexplored contribution to the literature. In this paper, we will focus our attention on individuals who have successfully made this migration, aiming to uncover their motivations.

## 2. Literature on Migration

### 2.1. Economics Aspect: Geographic Arbitrage

Geographical arbitrage has long been employed by global companies and can also be advantageous for individuals seeking financial and personal improvement (Fieber, 2018). Global corporations reap various benefits from geographic arbitrage, primarily through lower-cost labor markets. For instance, many technology companies have shifted their operations to countries like China, India, and the Philippines, where labor costs are lower than those in the United States or Europe (Friedman, 2005). This strategic move allows firms to trim labor expenses while maintaining high levels of productivity and quality. Geographic arbitrage is an unexplored field of economic geography and lifestyle migration (Kelly et al., 2019; Benson & O'reilly, 2009).

On an individual level, geographic arbitrage becomes a means to optimize one's lifestyle by residing in a location that aligns with their budget, freeing them from income constraints. Individuals may opt to live in a foreign country where their savings yield greater value, affording them opportunities to travel more, pursue hobbies, or invest in personal development (Ferris, 2007).

Geographic arbitrage empowers individuals to seize greater control over their time and finances by relocating to lower-cost areas (Karlgaard, 2004, 2006). This strategy serves as an individualistic counterpart to corporate offshoring, where companies capitalize on lower labor costs abroad to attract higher-earning consumers in more expensive locales (Hayes, 2014). Both approaches exploit global economic disparities to maximize financial benefits.

The positive economic impacts of relocating include a lower cost of living, increased savings, the generation of passive income through the sale or rental of homeland assets, active income through business ownership or expat work, the opportunity to work remotely, and potentially lower taxes. The concept of geographic arbitrage is intriguing because it allows individuals to leverage their purchasing power, potentially facilitating earlier retirement or remote work while enhancing their overall quality of life.

Geographic arbitrage also facilitates various forms of international movement, including international retirement migration, in which individuals use their retirement funds to acquire a more affluent and culturally diverse way of life (King et al., 2021).

Geographic arbitrage provides attractive options for individuals from wealthier locations. As an example, in our research, a former San Diego resident who is now living in Bali, Indonesia, has experienced the advantages of geographic arbitrage. Bali, a popular destination for digital nomads and expatriates, offers an affordable cost of living, scenic beaches, and a lively culture. Compared to San Diego, expenses for housing, food, transportation, and other necessities are typically much lower in Bali, allowing for potential savings. Bali's beautiful beaches, tropical climate, and vibrant culture contribute to an enhanced quality of life compared to San Diego. Additionally, Bali boasts a growing community of digital nomads and entrepreneurs, offering both networking and business opportunities. The resident claims to live a luxurious life on a budget of US\$2,500 per month. San Diego, ranked as one of the most expensive cities globally by the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2022 Worldwide Cost of Living (WCOL) survey, has significantly higher rent, restaurant, and grocery prices than Bali, according to Numbeo, a website offering cost-of-living comparisons worldwide. Despite the high cost of living, many people continue to reside at San Diego and other expensive cities without considering geographic arbitrage. However, selling a house or similar asset and investing the proceeds in a 4% 30-year U.S. dollar Treasury bills can provide substantial passive income (USD 3,000 per month) to support a comfortable lifestyle without having to work. Additionally, residents of San Diego may face up to 37% federal taxes, 12.3% state taxes, and 0.74% property taxes. In California, residents may pay half of their income in taxes (IRS, 2022; balancemoney, 2022). For individuals with passive incomes or remote jobs, moving abroad can offer them a better quality of life while saving significantly on taxes. For instance, the Bali digital nomad visa allows remote workers to live and work in Indonesia without having to pay taxes (Euronews, 2022). If people were economically rational—*homo economicus*—they would follow this mathematically robust approach and move from San Diego to Bali. In this paper, we explore whether the primary motivation for those who relocate is economics.

Indeed, geographic arbitrage enables people to live their best lives, travel the world, escape the 9-5 rat race, build wealth, and achieve financial independence. Interestingly, those benefiting from geographic arbitrage are not primarily motivated by the cost of living and higher savings; tax considerations, however, should receive much higher attention. Mancinelli (2020) asserted that the self-fulfillment project of digital nomads aligns with the ideology of entrepreneurship, enabling them to leverage their privileged nationalities to navigate the global inequalities of the capitalist system through geographic arbitrage.

The objective of achieving financial independence and early retirement involves a meticulous reduction in expenses and debt, the accumulation of assets, and eventually departing, if desired, from the workforce to rely on investments (Taylor and Davies, 2021). Financial independence, as defined by Robin and Dominguez (1993), denotes the economic capability to fulfill basic needs through passive income. It grants the freedom to be where and when one desires without dependence.

The question of how much is needed for financial independence has been explored by numerous scholars (Bierwirth, 1994; Bengen, 1994, 1996, 1997; Ferguson, 1996; Cooley et. al., 1998; Fisker, 2017; Pfau, 2018). While the answer depends on factors like location, spending habits, and life expectancy, a general recommendation is that individuals should save to cover living expenses for several years (Pfau, 2018). Bengen (1994, 1996, 1997), using US financial data from 1926-1993, established a sustainable withdrawal rate of 4% over a 35-year period, adjusted for inflation, using a portfolio of 50-75% equities and 25-50% long-term bonds. Despite the passage of more than two decades and various financial crises, evidence supports the continued validity of these studies (Pfau, 2018). Bengen (2017) mentioned in an interview that, with tax advantages like those of the private pension system (e.g., 401k), the rate could potentially reach 4.5%. According to the 4% rule, the required asset amount is 25 years of an individual's annual expenditure.

Even if an American needs to reside in the United States for employment, achieving financial independence can happen much earlier through geographic arbitrage because the required amount of wealth differs. In addition, employees face significant threat of job loss. For example, in 2023, approximately 50,000 software engineers experienced job reductions at five major tech companies in the U.S. (Indiatoday, 2023). With careful financial management, those who saved from their substantial salaries might have avoided reentering the job market by considering a move to developing countries, either by living off their savings or working remotely if they desired.

It is crucial to recognize that the decision to pursue geographic arbitrage hinges on an individual's profession, lifestyle, and goals. Before making such a significant move, conducting thorough research to evaluate the potential benefits and drawbacks of relocating to a specific destination is vital. While Bali may be an excellent option for some, others may prioritize a more luxurious lifestyle that this island cannot offer. Portugal, with its exceptional infrastructure, has become an attractive destination, especially for those seeking a tropical or Mediterranean climate. In addition, Panama, Argentina, Mexico, and Montenegro offer unique advantages and are worth considering.

It is essential to note that various destinations can be compared, such as Manhattan to Dubai or Oklahoma to Belgrade, depending on individual preferences. For Americans inclined toward Western cultures and beliefs, Europe could be

an ideal destination, offering a soft landing. Despite the common assumption that living in Europe is more expensive, most European countries, excluding the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark) and financial centers (UK, Ireland, Switzerland, and Luxembourg), are more affordable than the United States (Dalmatian Mapper, 2023).

For a family of four, the average cost of living in the United States is \$3,522. In comparison, in Portugal, it is €1,972; in Croatia, €2,153; in Spain, €2,267; and in the Netherlands, €3,198 (Dalmatian Mapper, 2023). In each case, a higher quality of life can be achieved at a much lower cost, especially when considering tax benefits and free university education within the EU.

Given these significant opportunities, a pertinent question arises: Why do people from developed countries hesitate to move to developing countries? Within the EU, which has a population of 446 million citizens and the freedom to live and work in any EU country without restrictions, few people take advantage of opportunities for geographic arbitrage between developed and developing European countries. For instance, a software developer residing in Frankfurt, Germany, where the cost of living is high, could potentially relocate to a city like Granada, Spain, where the cost of living is lower. This move would allow them to save on housing, food, and other expenses while maintaining their income. Similarly, retirees residing in high-tax countries like France could opt to move to countries with no income taxes, such as Portugal, to preserve more of their retirement savings. However, despite the potential benefits, only 2.9% (13.7 million) of EU citizens currently live in another EU country.

Relocating to a lower-cost location allows individuals to enjoy a better quality of life for the same income. This strategy empowers individuals to navigate the global map to their advantage, allowing them to choose locations that align with their personal preferences and lifestyle goals. Geographic arbitrage serves as an individualistic exit strategy, reducing reliance on high-cost structures and providing greater control over finances, time, and lifestyle.

## 2.2. Sociological Aspect

This review explores the sociological impacts of migration, focusing on identity formation, social integration, and the interplay between migrants and host societies. Migration studies often employ several sociological theories to understand the multifaceted impacts of moving from one locale to another.

Push-Pull theory highlights economic disparities, political instability, and social tensions as push factors, and better living conditions, job opportunities, and safety are pull factors' (Lee, 1966; Urbanski, 2022).

Transnationalism focuses on the sustained tie that migrants maintain with their home countries while integrating into their host society (Basch et al., 2020).

Assimilation and multiculturalism examine how migrants integrate into host societies and the extent to which they retain their cultural identities (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Bueker, 2021).

The migration process is intrinsically linked to the concepts of identity and cultural hybridity. Migrant identities are often hybrid, incorporating elements from both the home and host cultures (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 2015; Bhandari, 2022; Ullah, 2024). This hybridity can lead to the creation of unique subcultures that enrich the cultural tapestry of the host society but can also lead to identity crises among migrants, influencing their social integration and mental health.

Social integration of migrants is a critical aspect of sociology, influencing policy decisions and community dynamics. argues that while diversity can initially lead to lower social cohesion and trust, over time, inclusive societies can foster deeper intercultural understanding and solidarity (Putnam, 2007; Morgan et.al., 2021). Additionally, the formation of ethnic enclaves can provide support to new arrivals but may also hinder their integration into the broader society (Portes & Manning, 2019).

Migrants often contribute significantly to the economy of the host country, filling labor shortages, and creating new businesses. Studies that debate the economic impacts of migration, with findings suggesting that while short-term labor market disruptions may occur, long-term benefits include increased innovation and economic dynamism (Chiswick, 2018), Borjas (1985), Arellano-Bover & San, 2020). However, social mobility among migrants varies widely, being influenced by factors such as education, race, and the legal framework governing migration. The challenges associated with migration include xenophobia, discrimination, and unequal access to resources, which can exacerbate social division.

Policies aimed at improving integration, such as language training, equal employment opportunities, and anti-discrimination laws, are crucial. Additionally, international cooperation is essential to address the root causes of migration, such as conflict and global inequality.

Most sociological research on migration has focused on integration challenges in the destination countries. However, scant discussion is available in the literature about the cultural issues that arise in countries of origin. It is important to acknowledge that cultural disharmony within the United States can drive individuals overseas to seek opportunities.

This paper demonstrates that internal cultural conflicts and feelings of disconnect with prevailing societal norms can motivate Americans to explore life beyond their national borders, viewing international relocation not merely as a change in physical locale but as an escape from cultural discord and an opportunity for personal realignment.

### **2.3. Psychological Aspect**

This review explores these impacts with a focus on mental health, identity formation, adaptation strategies, and intergenerational effects. Psychological studies on migration often use several key theories to understand migrants' mental health challenges and coping mechanisms.

The anthropotive stress model describes the stress experienced by people moving to a new culture, highlighting challenges such as language barriers, discrimination, and cultural alienation (Berry, 1997; Berry & Hou, 2021).

Social identity theory examines how migrant identities are shaped by their membership in social groups, influencing their self-esteem and social interactions (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Ecological systems theory examines how different environmental systems affect the development and psychological well-being of migrants (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Crawford, 2020).

Migrants often experience a higher incidence of mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These issues can be intensified by traumatic migration experiences, such as fleeing conflict or disaster, and by challenges in the resettlement process, such as isolation and discrimination. A meta-analysis by Lindert et al. (2009) indicates that the prevalence of mental health issues is significantly higher among refugees and asylum seekers because of cumulative pre- and post-migration stress.

Identity formation is a crucial psychological process shaped by migration. Migrants often navigate a difficult transition between maintaining their cultural heritage and adapting to new cultural norms, which can lead to identity conflicts. Berry (2005) showed that successful cultural integration—achieving a balance between heritage and new cultural identities—leads to better mental health outcomes compared to assimilation or separation.

Despite these challenges, many migrants exhibit remarkable resilience. Psychological resilience in the context of migration encompasses the ability to maintain or regain mental health despite experiencing adversity. Factors contributing to resilience include strong family bonds, community support, and positive host-society reception. Jafari (2020) emphasized the role of social support and community networks in facilitating migration adaptation and resilience.

The psychological impact of migration can span generations. Second-generation migrants may face different challenges than their parents, such as negotiating dual cultural identities or dealing with parental expectations versus societal norms. Research by Zhou and Bankston (1998) suggests that second-generation migrants often struggle to balance the cultural expectations of their parents with the pressure of assimilating into the host culture, which can impact their mental health and social integration. Addressing migrants' mental health needs requires culturally sensitive healthcare services and policies that recognize the unique stresses faced by this population. Community-based interventions, access to mental health services, and anti-discrimination policies are crucial for supporting migrants' psychological well-being.

Much of the psychological research on migration primarily addresses the challenges faced by migrants in their destination countries. However, this view overlooks a crucial aspect of migration experience: the psychological motivations rooted in the country of origin. In the context of migration from developed to developing countries, this study will analyze how a significant number of Americans harbor serious concerns about feeling trapped by the societal and cultural constraints of their home country. These concerns drive the pursuit of new opportunities abroad, where people hope to not only discover different lifestyles but also potentially liberate personal and professional environments.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1. Design**

Qualitative content analysis is a widely recognized systematic approach for analyzing qualitative data. The approach involves identifying patterns, themes, and concepts in the data to generate meaningful insights and understanding (Lindgren et al., 2020). Our aim is to understand people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors through interviews and observations. Content analysis was used to condense and abstract a substantial amount of textual data and directly extract participant messages without imposing a researcher's viewpoint to gain fresh insights into the study phenomena (Agafonoff, 2006). Content analysis was used to condense and abstract a substantial amount of textual data and directly extract participant messages without imposing a researcher's viewpoint to gain fresh insights into the study phenomena (Gupta et al., 2018).

To address the study's central question, "What are the motivations and challenges that drive American emigrants to relocate to developing countries?" it is noteworthy that more than 11 million people—mostly from developing countries—apply for the American green card lottery each year, with fewer than 1 in 200 applicants being accepted (US Department of State, 2024). What motivates Americans to migrate to developing countries, leaving behind countries that are considered highly desirable?

### 3.2. Setting and Participants

The study focused on individuals' previous experience of migrating from developed to developing countries (Table 1). The research methodology utilized a video ethnographic approach, which involves using video recordings to study people's behaviors, practices, and cultures within their natural environments. This method captures real-time interactions, settings, and social dynamics, offering rich, visual insights that are often more nuanced and detailed than traditional ethnographic methods, which typically depend on observation and interviews. Our focus was on participants' experiences as featured in the CNBC Make It program. Through these videos, we observed their stories and lifestyles—from their favorite coffee shops to their homes—in both the U.S. and developing countries, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of their contexts. By focusing on experiences, the study aimed to avoid any demographic or socioeconomic biases (Young, 2015; 2022). This approach allowed the researchers to examine individual motivations and experiences that led each individual to migrate rather than solely examining broad demographic characteristics such as age or income. By considering the unique circumstances of each participant, including factors such as family circumstances, job opportunities, and personal preferences, the study aimed to capture a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By emphasizing individual experiences, the researchers sought to present a complete and more detailed picture of motivation.

CNBC Make is a dedicated section of CNBC that was launched in 2016 and focuses on personal finance and entrepreneurship. The company aims to educate and inspire its audience about financial success, covering topics from deciding to land a dream job to investing in retirement. With conversational and authoritative content, CNBC Make It taps into CNBC's extensive access to successful business figures, providing insights and advice that are akin to those of a knowledgeable friend. Its mission is to guide readers toward significant financial milestones and encourage a prosperous life. The platform, which became a standalone website with a unique design in 2019, continues CNBC's legacy, which was established in 1989 as a leader in business news and financial market coverage globally. The CNBC Make It team comprises over 30 professional journalists and video producers stationed in New York City, with additional correspondents located in Los Angeles, London, and Singapore.

CNBC's Make It offers several opportunities to explore geographic arbitrage. First, the program features real-life stories of individuals who have moved to developing countries to save money and improve their quality of life. Second, the business-oriented feature of CNBC provides economic insights into geographic arbitrage, which refers to the practice of maintaining a high standard of living at a lower cost. Third, social media platforms have provided opportunities for individuals to share detailed experiences with geographic arbitrage. We further investigated the motivations behind migration by examining the YouTube channels of these emigrants in CNBC Make It who have moved to developing countries. Specifically, we aimed to elucidate the stories, experiences, motivations, and contexts of American emigrants from diverse demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Each story is unique—whether it is someone moving to Bali or another to Bangkok—spanning various occupations from entrepreneurs to retirees and including individuals of all ages. Despite this diversity, their underlying motivations reveal several common patterns.

Regarding financing, some individuals continue to work as freelancers and serve their clients in the United States, while others sell their assets and live off the returns.

In qualitative research, the saturation point determines the number of participants required for the study. However, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) found that between 9 and 17 participants is statistically sufficient, provided that the participants are homogeneous in terms of subject, geography, and culture. In this study, professional reporters interviewed 12 U.S. citizens (from the same culture) about their experiences of migrating to developing countries for affordability (same topic). According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), it is necessary to increase the number of participants when heterogeneous elements increase (e.g., moving from developed countries to develop ones). The participants were coded as x1, x2, ... (Table 1). In this research, we reach saturation.

**Table 1.** Migrant List

	From	To	Source of income
X1	Columbus (grown up), San Diego	Bali, Indonesia	social media marketing business
X2	Lufkin (Texas), San Antonio	Queretaro, Mexico	Website developer
X3	New York City	South Africa	Passive income
X4	Midwest	Pattaya, Thailand	Passive income accumulated over 28 years (sold his house)
X5	Ohio (grown up), California (work)	Batum, Kuala Lumpur, Belgrade	Passive income (sold his assets in the USA) and re-invested in his business to the western country's clients
X6	California (grow up), Portland (work)	Lisbon, Portugal	Passive income
X7	Miami	Costa Rica, Portugal	Real estate, a influencer
X8	Did not declare	Philippines	Influencer
X9	Wisconsin	Bangkok, Thailand	Web developer
X10	New York (born) Santa Cruz (live)	Mazatlán, Mexico	Social security, freelancers, royalties
X11	Los Angeles	Bangkok, Thailand	Passive income + coaching for living abroad
X12	California Bay Area	Mexico City, Mexico	Passive income + coaching for living abroad

### 3.3. Data Collection

For qualitative analysis of geographic arbitrage, data were extracted from participants' experiences (Young, 2022). In 2022, CNBC conducted face-to-face interviews to extract the experiences of individuals engaged in migration. The interviews were conducted to explore the challenges faced by migrants in fostering social connections and to elicit their personal experiences with immigration. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and included an interview about their lives in developing countries.

The data collection continued until data saturation, at which point no additional data were found and the researcher could not develop a new category (Faulkner, 2003). The categories appeared to be saturated regarding their properties and dimensions after the 10th interview. However, two additional interviews were conducted to ensure that no new data and conceptual codes emerged. In qualitative methods, the number of researchers is typically determined by reaching the point of saturation, which was achieved with the 10th participant, at which point no new categories emerged; instead, existing categories were merely reinforced through repetition from earlier participants.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

All interviews were conducted via social media. After each interview, the content was transcribed on YouTube. The transcription process involves the following four steps:

1. The text was read multiple times to obtain an overall understanding of the content.
2. Meaning units were identified and coded.
3. The codes were grouped into subcategories based on their conceptual similarities and differences.

4. Subcategories were compared, and latent data content was identified to form the main categories (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Example of the category formation process (Grouping)

Quotation	Code	Subcategory	The main category
<i>I want to experience new things and travel.</i>	X3	Adventure	Non-Economic factors
<i>The bottom line is that staying here in the U.S. as comfortable and safe .....that moves us toward the challenge.</i>	X6	Adventure	Non-Economic factors
<i>You know, it feels really good as soon as I get on the plane (heading to Amsterdam). I feel like all my anxiety has just melted away, and then I feel</i>	X7	Adventure	Non-Economic factors

### 3.5. Trustworthiness

We took several steps to ensure the quality of the study. The following steps are included

- Adequate sample size
- Member checking
- Constant comparative method
- Detailed reporting
- External review
- Maximum variation sampling

We believe that these steps have helped ensure that our findings are credible, reliable, confirmable, and transferable.

### 4. Findings

Our main finding indicates that **non-economic factors play** a more significant role than **economic factors in** motivating migration from developed countries to developing countries. Therefore, economic factors, such as geographic arbitrage or tax avoidance, play a secondary role. Migration from developed to developing countries is not mainly a financial but personal decision. The participants cited sociological and psychological reasons such as the following:



- A desire to detach from their home country's culture (Cultural Detachment) (4.1.)
- A desire to seek adventure and creativity (Creativity & Adventure) (4.2.)
- Desire to find fulfillment and happiness (Fulfillment) (4.3.)

Considerations related to economic factors (such as geographic arbitrage and cost of living) emerged only after the decision to move was made.

- A desire to live a cheaper place without sacrificing quality of life (Cost of living) (4.4.)

These findings suggest that moving is not a financial decision. It is also personal, motivated by a desire for change, adventure, and self-discovery. Participants thought two main reasons for their lack of migration from the U.S.

- Afraid of leaving American comfort (Comfort Zone) (4.5.)
- Selling hard assets (selling properties, business) (4.6.)

Moreover, the participants suggest that getting tuck with American comfort is the primary reason, and selling hard assets and finding new ones in new locations are secondary.

According to Americans who have moved to developing countries, the secret to success is to adapt to the foreign culture and find a place to live.

- Adapting foreign culture (4.7.).

#### 4.1. Reasons for Migration I: Cultural Detachment

When individuals move from the United States to live abroad, they often experience a detachment from their home country. Detachment from one's home culture refers to a process in which an individual distances themselves from the cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors that they grew up with and are associated with their place of origin.

Detaching from one's home culture can lead to **feelings of alienation, confusion, and loss**. Some individuals may experience a sense of detachment from the U.S. culture even before they leave their home country, such as **first-generation migrants from Argentina (currently settled in Portugal)** to the United States, who may not fully integrate into American culture.

*My family came to the U.S. when I was about 11, and so I never really established solid roots there. . . never felt like home x6*

**Racial discrimination** is particularly harmful to Black Americans, and it may be a reason why some Americans choose to leave the United States. A black American settled in Bali recounted his childhood in the U.S.:

*Being a person of color, I felt that there were certain times in my life when I just didn't feel valued as a black person growing up in the Midwest. Bali doesn't have the same history as America with racism and discrimination — in my opinion, they're more accepting of foreigners and people from different backgrounds ... people just look at me as a fellow human being, not a Black man always felt left x1*

**Political division** in the U.S. can play a role in detachment because it can create a sense of disconnection and alienation from one's own country and society. When individuals have strong political beliefs that are not shared by a significant proportion of the population, it can be challenging to feel a sense of belonging and connection to that society. Additionally, political division can lead to social tension and conflict, which can cause individuals to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in their own country.

*Every time there is a national election, half of the population threatens to move to Canada. There are intense political divisions x7.*

The **US healthcare system** is complex and expensive. Many people in the US do not have access to affordable healthcare, which can lead to financial hardship and poor health. **Gun violence** is a major problem in the US. Every year, thousands of people are killed or injured by guns. This can lead to feelings of fear and insecurity in the public. **The gap between the rich and the poor** in the United States is growing wider due to wage differences. **Consumer culture** is sometimes associated with materialism, in which the pursuit of material possessions and wealth is prioritized over other values. The notion that access to certain goods and services is linked to social status (keep up with Jones) can be seen as problematic and contributes to divisions within society. **Work stress** (rat race) can lead to resentment and hopelessness. This includes long hours and limited vacation time; this can negatively impact individuals' well-being and work-life balance.

*The dysfunctional healthcare system, the gun violence, the consumer culture, the constant anxiety and Rush of the rat race, and keeping up with the Joneses I mean there's plenty of issues that go on in the United States x7.*

*I still do not relate or identify with many topics of conversation and the wants and desires of many people in my community. I'm not **interested in shopping** and don't want to **talk about politics**. I don't have any office politics or work drama to talk about. **I'm not interested in gossip**, and*

*there's a lot of people here of course, but I just really miss the conversations that I have with Travelers and with locals in other countries. I'm also a bit weirded out by the whole consumer demand cycle in the U.S. (Valentine's day, 4th July,) x8*

## 4.2. Reasons for Migration II: Creativity and Adventure

In their home country, individuals perceive certain limitations in career advancement and express concern about feeling stagnant. Their motivation to move abroad is not driven by an expectation of higher incomes or career progression. Instead, they are driven by the potential for **spiritual growth and personal development** as compelling reasons to pursue geographic mobility. They seek opportunities to **broaden their horizons, expand their perspectives, and experience personal transformation** by embracing new environments and cultures. Their desire for **self-improvement** and pursuit of a fulfilling life were significant factors motivating their migration decisions:

*My parents wanted me to become a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. I wanted a creative life; one that was filled with travel, art, and opportunities to meet people from all corners of the world. X1*

Traveling and living in various countries is an adventure that involves **trying new things, challenging** one's comfort zone, and enhancing creativity.

*I want to experience **new things** and travel x3.*

*The bottom line is that staying here in the U.S. as comfortable and safe as it might be is a sort of death trap and that goes for living anywhere; we would feel we were done ready for something **new and different** that moves us the challenge x6:*

*You know, feeling really good as soon as I got on the plane (heading to Amsterdam) I felt like all my anxiety had just melted away x7*

***Traveling and seeing** that the way we work ourselves to death in America is not common around the world made me realize that I could have a **different life** if I made the choice to have a different life. x12*

Traveling and living in other countries can contribute to **personal development** in many ways. It can help individuals learn **new things and develop new skills**. It can also help them to gain a *better understanding of themselves and the world* around them. The desire to step out of one's comfort zone, explore new opportunities, and challenge oneself can all be important psychological factors that drive decisions to move abroad.

*I am not saying that traveling is going to solve all of my problems; I mean it probably will create more new and different problems that I didn't have when I was living at home, but one thing that travel can do is that it can give you a **new perspective**, it can give you a little bit of a reset and a fresh start in life, and I know that each time that I've traveled to a new place and each time I've made a big change it's always resulted in **personal growth and learning**. I mean **travel to me is the best real-world education** but it's also **the best education about who I am in this world** and the longer that I stayed in the US and in my daily routine the more I felt like I was losing that sense of connection with the outside world outside of my local community and the more I started to forget who I was x7.*

*I grew up in a small town with not too much trouble, not too much adventure, and not too much drive to achieve exciting things, so I always had the idea that I wanted to get out. . . more traveling gave me some inspiration to explore some new places x9.*

**Location-independent work provides opportunities for creativity by offering flexibility, freedom, and the ability to work in new environments and surroundings.** This can help individuals **to break free from routine and familiar surroundings, which can be a catalyst for new ideas and inspiration.** The ability to **work in different locations** can also lead to **new experiences and exposure to different cultures**, which can broaden one's perspective and inspire new ways of thinking and problem solving.

*Just me hundreds of millions of people have found a new sense of work freedom of location freedom and they are taking advantage of it so whether you're moving throughout your country or throughout the world **so many millions of people have been freed from the cubicle have been freed from the office** and are working remotely and this is an unprecedented time in history where even in the past year or so upwards of 50 countries have announced new remote work or digital Nomad visas that allow people to apply to live there for one to five years at a time if you earn an online income and so this is a very exciting time to be alive you have a one in three or four quadrillion chance of being born at this time and so I think it's time to seize the day.x7*

Moving abroad can be a **call to critical thinking and independent judgment**. This suggests that blindly following the opinions and beliefs of the majority can be problematic because they may not be based on sound reasoning or evidence. Instead, it encourages individuals to step back, think critically, and reflect on their own beliefs and opinions rather than simply accepting the views of the majority. The idea is that by pausing to reflect, individuals can arrive at a more informed and authentic perspective that is true to their values and beliefs.

*I don't want to live a normal life. I'm much more interested in what people like **Mark Twain** have to say about it, which is that if you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect. I don't know about you, but I've had plenty of time to pause and reflect*

*over the past few years. All of my friends and family and people who don't understand why I would leave a good thing for the unknown I just have to say that **it doesn't matter how good your life looks on paper it doesn't matter how good your life looks from the outside what really matters is how you're feeling on the inside** so did I make the right decision by packing up all of my stuff and setting off around the world again with a one-way ticket I don't know you know if you were to ask me right here right now I would say yes I'm feeling very at home here in Amsterdam and I'm very much looking forward to my next destination of Portugal I think that time will tell but regardless of where I go next I hope that you will join me here on the journey.x7*

### 4.3. Reason for Migration III: Fulfillment

In their home country, some may experience a sense of stagnation and loss of direction or purpose. If a person does not have clear goals or a sense of purpose, they may feel **directionless and unfulfilled**.

*After working for 28 years and one day, I woke up and decided **I wasn't happy** with my job, I wasn't happy with my life, I wasn't happy with the city, and I wasn't happy with the way the country was going x4.*

*I didn't realize **how unhappy** I was and how much it manifested itself in my body. When traveling, I saw how other countries and societies treated work; how in America, we are so focused on what you do and how that defines who you are x12.*

They are **trapped in their homes**, which they see as places of destruction. They are miserable and want to change their lifestyles **before they die**.

*I don't know how much I'll live. X4*

*I was 50. I was looking at what was ahead of me in my life and **I wanted to change**. I really wanted to be happy, and I needed to find work because the internet had upended my career in journalism, so I tried to **think outside the box** x10*

A migrant settled in the Philippines has criticized the work culture in the United States, saying that people there are too focused on working long hours and earning money to buy luxury items, rather than prioritizing **work-life balance**.

*People will spend their extra hours working harder to earn more money and to pay for these expensive Lifestyles instead of using those extra hours to spend with friends and family and at the gym taking care of their health, and as a result, you won't get a work-life balance x8.*

Another opportunity offers more occasions for a *specific hobby or interest*, such as a beach town for surfing enthusiasts or a mountainous area for hikers and skiers.

*The pace of life is much lower in many other countries. I have time for my hobbies. x8*

### 4.4. Location Decision: Geographic Arbitrage

**Their common statement was that they only considered the economic benefits of a move after they had settled in.** The primary reasons for this are cultural detachment and personal growth (creativity and fulfillment). This suggests that **they did not factor in the economic costs and benefits (geographic arbitrage) before they started their journey**, even though there were many potential economic advantages to moving. High taxation is at the bottom of the list when moving decisions.

Moving to a location with a lower cost of living to **save money on housing, food, transportation, and other expenses is a viable strategy**. For example, an American who moved to the Philippines explained that he could eat a delicious meal for the cost of just tips in the US.

*I started traveling the world in these cheap countries. I saw the price differences and how much lower the cost of living is outside the US. For example, in Southeast Asia, you're in Thailand, Vietnam, where I've been in the Philippines. If you're eating at a local place, you're spending less than 10 dollars to sit down at a restaurant and have a meal and drink. In a casual restaurant I've been eating recently in the Philippines, it's \$1.00 per item, so you get chicken, and then you get vegetables, and you get another side. In the United States, **tips** are even more **expensive** than food costs in the Philippines.*

Creating a budget is essential for realizing potential savings from the move. For example, an American expatriate living in Mexico City provides a useful case study. According to this expatriate, it is possible to retire early in Mexico City with \$660,000 in bonds and equity, maintaining a monthly budget of \$2,300 (annually \$27,600). This fits Bengen's 4% rule of return on assets ( $\$660,000 \times 0.04 = \$27,600$ ), which balances income and expenditures. One of the advantages of living in developing countries is the lower cost of living, which means that the total assets required can also be reduced.

*I looked at my investments and I had about half a million dollars saved and invested, and I knew I was going to get another hundred fifty thousand in stocks from a company I used to work for. I knew I had about **six hundred and sixty thousand** because I knew I didn't want to go back to work. . . . In a typical month, I spend about **23,000 dollars** to live in Mexico City. x3*

A migrant from San Diego says his savings have increased significantly since he moved to Bali. The cost of living in Bali is much lower than in San Diego. **A spacious ocean view condo for \$1000 per month, which would cost him at least twice as much in San Diego.** He can easily eat out for \$20 per day, which would cost him at least twice as much in San Diego. He is saving a lot of money while enjoying his lifestyle.

*Since moving to Bali, I have been able to spend more on travel, dining, and other hobbies as well as increase my savings. I'm never worried about money anymore because Bali has a much lower cost of living than the U.S. X1.*

*Moving abroad helped save me a lot more x2.*

A resident of Belgrade from the United States describes this strategy as purchasing property without incurring debt and benefiting from the much lower prices of nearly all goods and services. Additionally, buying a house in a central location eliminates the need for a car.

*The idea of living overseas, buying a property without debt, enjoying a lower cost of living, better-quality food at a much lower price, and perhaps not needing a car — that's a great way to stretch your dollars or euros times five. X5.*

The **cost of living in a luxurious lifestyle** varies significantly from city to city. For example, a migrant can **rent a full-service condo in a trendy district in Bangkok for \$2700 USD per month. In Manhattan, the average rental price for a one-bedroom apartment per month is US\$450, not including utility charges, flat service charges, and extra services such as cleaning and laundry** (Rentcafe, 2023).

*I pay 2700 a month in a very trendy district, which includes amenities including all utilities, electric Internet, as well as cleaning and laundry. It's a very full service. I find that it removes a lot of my life admin time and allows me to be more productive and have a lot more free time x9.*

*Accommodation is crucial. The expenditure on good quality housing is much cheaper than the one in the U.S. X3.*

Moreover, the cost of **an affordable condo in Bangkok is 390 USD per month and 280 USD in Pattaya, which includes amenities such as sports and entertainment facilities, a swimming pool, and a doorman.** This is comparable to the cost of a condo in South Florida, which can cost up to \$2,000 per month.

*I am here in downtown Bangkok. This place is called life Asok Rama 9. It's right by a couple of great malls. There's the job fair market, which is one of the hippest and most popular nightlife markets in Bangkok. It is a beautiful location; you can walk to the market in a few minutes and you're right downtown. The best-selling features of this building are by far the pools, gyms, and co-working space. I pay 14,000 Baht -390USD-. X11*

*The luxurious, modern sports, entertainment facilities- condo with ocean view in Pattaya, I paid 280USD. In the US, I would pay much more for ocean-view condos. X4*

**In a Mexican seaside resort town, the most expensive house costs \$420 USD per month, while the average rental fee is \$200-USD per month.**

*This apartment that I have now that I pay 420 a month for is the most expensive place. I have lived in Mazatlán for 15 years, and usually, my rent has been around 200 USD. I wanted to be in central historical, I wanted to be close to the ocean, I wanted to be able to walk to restaurants and cafes that I wanted to go to x10.*

Because of the many geographical opportunities available, Americans may not need to own valuable assets or earn international income to maintain a good quality of life. **Social security payments and additional revenue can be sufficient.** For instance, an American retiree who relies solely on social security payments and now resides in Mazatlán, Mexico, vividly describes the potential benefits of geographic arbitrage. By choosing a location with a lower cost of living, one can potentially save a significant amount of money and achieve financial independence:

*The truth is, I wouldn't be able to afford to live in the U.S. anymore, not with just my social security and the little extra money I get. So, living here in Mexico, being happy, and affording the things I want in my life is a blessing. x10*

*It is a combination of social security, some royalties from book sales, and a little bit of freelance writing, and it's between \$12,000 and \$14,400 a month x10.*

Homeowner association (HOA) fees in South Florida are notoriously high, and residents often complain about how they are increasing drastically. According to a recent study by the National Association of Realtors, the average HOA fee in South Florida is \$250 per month.

*I bought a condo just over 2 years ago in Florida. **The HOA fees were 315 a month. Now I'm paying 505 a month.** Just crazy. In the United States, I have a wonderful house, but **I live to pay my bills.** X4*

A digital nomad couple who recently spent time in both Estoril, Portugal and Boca Raton, Florida, commented on the significant difference in the cost of living between the two cities. They noted that the cost of accommodation in Estoril is only 3.5% of that of a luxurious unit in Boca Raton. The couple said that they were surprised by the difference in prices, especially considering that both cities are considered luxurious destinations. They said that they were able to find a spacious and well-appointed apartment in Estoril for just \$1,000 per month, while a similar unit in Boca Raton would have cost them upwards of \$30,000 per month.

*Greetings from Portugal...I remember vividly back in the early 2000's going with a buddy of mine who was an realtor in the Boca Raton area and looking at different properties...East of 95 where going for 30k...Condos...H.O.A. fees etc... insane...Been an legal resident here since 2016...I rent an 1 bedroom condo in one of the most expensive areas of Portugal, Estoril...Total cost a month...€700 euros split by my gal and I...No fees...Just peaceful and relaxed living...Get Busy Living!*

In many developing countries around the world, it is possible to purchase a full meal made with fresh ingredients for around \$1.50. This is not possible in the United States or Europe, where the cost of food is much higher. The reason for this difference is due to a number of factors, including labor cost, transportation cost, and food safety regulations.

*There are amazing versions of fresh food all over the country where you can get a full meal that's freshly made of fresh ingredients for around fifty dollars, and you can't really do that anywhere in the United States or Europe x9.*

A resident of Belgrade described geographic arbitrage as a way of moving to a location with a **lower tax rate** to keep more of their income.

*If you've got problems paying 40% of your business profits in tax that's a problem and you grow your business a lot slower than you could and there's probably a competitor who's incorporated Malta, they've got 35 percent more cash to play with at the end of the day if they're at the same profitability they can reinvest that and grow faster x5.*

Moving to a location with **lower healthcare costs** can help individuals save money on medical expenses. For example, a resident of a Philippines explained how expensive hospital bills can be in the United States even for simple procedures.

*When I come here (the U.S.), sometimes I go to the doctor. I went to a specialist last time I was in town, and the out-of-pocket cost was 210 dollars just to meet with this specialist. We decided to do some blood work to check some blood levels, and the nurse casually came into the room. I don't need to go to the lab. She drew my blood. They said they'd send me the results didn't even mention a price a couple weeks later I get a bill in the mail from Lab Corp for 330 dollars that's 540 dollars just for them to tell me I was fine, which is absolutely absurd. This isn't the case in other countries x8.*

Non-economic opportunities include moving to a location with better **gastronomy, weather, or natural beauty** to enjoy a higher quality of life. It is interesting to note that he does not just find the quality of life in Bangkok to be a little better; he believes it is **much better** in almost every category.

*The quality of life in Thailand compared to the United States I'd say for ninety percent of things is much better x9.*

#### 4.5. Constraint on Moving I: Comfort Zone

What prevents people from taking action? According to emigrants, the comfort zone is their main factor. While it can be a place of ease and familiarity, **staying in one's comfort zone can hinder personal growth and prevent new and rewarding experiences.** By avoiding challenges and sticking to what is known, individuals may miss opportunities for self-improvement and growth. This can result in **feelings of boredom, frustration, and unfulfillment, as well as a lack of progress toward personal and professional goals.** In addition, staying within one's comfort zone can **limit the development of new skills** and perspectives, which are crucial for personal and professional development. Therefore, stepping outside one's comfort zone and embracing new challenges and experiences can lead to personal growth, increased self-awareness, and a sense of accomplishment.

*I could not do before (moving) because **I built a comfortable zone in the city, job, and house.** X4*

*I thought maybe I was getting a little bit too **comfortable.** I started feeling again like maybe I would never leave. I mean I had my friends there and my family there. I had my stuff there. **I bought furniture, I rented an apartment, I signed a long-term lease, I bought plants. I started growing tomatoes on my balcony** x7*

*Anyone is uprooting themselves from a **settled and comfortable situation** in pursuit of that new beginning that promising next location even for motivated nomads like ourselves. This is a hard undertaking there's still a weight to living where we do and quite a process ahead in transplanting ourselves to somewhere new; there will be many challenges for sure x6.*

Change can be difficult for individuals. **There are two main types of resistance to change: cognitive and social.** Cognitive resistance refers to an individual's **reluctance to accept or adopt new ideas** or ways of doing things due to deeply ingrained beliefs, perceptions, and habits. Resistance can be difficult to overcome because it is often based on unconscious assumptions and biases.

*I have lived in Miami, which many people consider being the perfect place on the planet. A town that is so high in demand that people from around the world spend upwards of a million dollars per bedroom to call my neighborhood their home despite all of that I left but not without some regret you know being out here on a Monday morning and just paddling around the islands in front of my house it seems crazy to leave like why would you leave such a beautiful paradise like x7.*

Social resistance refers to collective resistance to change within a group due to shared values, norms, and practices. This type of resistance can be even more difficult to overcome than cognitive resistance because it is often supported by group culture. Both cognitive and social resistance to change can arise from **a fear of the unknown, a lack of understanding the benefits of change, or a feeling of comfort with the current status quo.**

*Announce a decision of this magnitude is that you will get met with many pushbacks. friends my family everyone was like why like why would you leave this beautiful life that you've created this beautiful place so many questions and I couldn't answer all of those logically or rationally it was mostly just a feeling that this chapter in my life was closing and it was closing fast and it was time to move on a problem that many of the naysayers face when you're telling them about your plans to make a big life change like quitting your job or moving to a foreign country is that they are stuck in the status quo there's two main problems facing modern day humans are physiological and evolutionary programming and also our societal and cultural programming you see both of these sets of programming are too keep us safe and to help maintain the status quo and the species for that matter and so to break out of that is very difficult x7*

Being too comfortable can lead to a lack of personal growth and fulfillment. When people **become too comfortable** in their routines and surroundings, they may **stop trying new things, taking on new challenges, and exploring new opportunities.** This can lead to feelings of **stagnation and boredom** and a lack of progress toward personal and professional goals. While comfort can be a source of security and stability, it can also prevent people from **achieving their full potential and living a fulfilling life.**

*I think that things go deeper than just the surface of living in a beautiful place living in a very comfortable place and living an idyllic existence and if comfort brought happiness, then billions of people would be really happy and so even though I definitely appreciate where I live and it's going to be Bittersweet to leave, I still think that it's the right time and it's the right thing to do x7.*

When people become too comfortable with their current circumstances, they tend to resist change, which can lead to **feelings of fear and uncertainty about the future.** The fear of getting stuck is rooted in the belief that change may disrupt the comfort and stability to which they have become accustomed, and they may not be able to adapt to a new situation. This fear can be especially pronounced when the change involves significant life transitions, such as starting a new job or moving to a new city, as occurs in the case of migration.

*Give up a lot of the comfort and convenience and feeling of Safety and Security that I had developed over the past few years, but what starts to happen after you've lived in one place for a long time, and maybe you can relate to this is that you start to feel stuck like the longer you've lived somewhere, the harder it becomes to leave x7.*

**Overcoming the fear of getting stuck** requires developing resilience and a **growth mindset**, embracing new experiences, and learning to adapt to unfamiliar situations. Both making a move and remaining stagnant entail opportunity costs, and the decision to take action depends on weighing these costs. In essence, change occurs when the negative consequences of staying the same outweigh the fear and uncertainty associated with initiating change. The underlying concept suggests that individuals must reach a threshold of pain that motivates them to act rather than relying solely on their desire for a better future.

*It took me a whole another year of thinking about moving before I actually went into action, and I think this is because of a quote that I think comes from Tony Robbins, where he says that change only happens when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the fear of taking action x7.*

Indeed, Belgrade residents argue that individuals tend to **underestimate the extent of frustration they encounter in their home country.** Several factors have contributed to this phenomenon. First, individuals may have become **accustomed to the frustrations and challenges of their home country, normalizing them as part of their daily lives (familiarity bias and perception of control).** Consequently, they may not fully understand the extent of their difficulties until they venture abroad and experience a different environment. Second, **a strong sense of loyalty and attachment to their home country can hinder individuals from acknowledging its flaws and problems.** They may perceive acknowledging the frustration and **difficulties as disloyalty or unpatriotic**, impeding their ability to address these issues (**social desirability bias**). Third, **a lack of information or awareness about other countries** and the

opportunities that they offer can contribute to this underestimation (**lack of awareness**). Individuals may be unaware of alternative options that could potentially alleviate their current frustrations and difficulties.

*I think that we probably underestimated how many challenges and frustrations we had in our own country because it just feels natural that when I lived in the United States, you had plenty of frustrations x5:*

Interestingly, he also claimed that different types of frustration exist overseas. Selecting the frustration type might help guide migration.

*The frustrations kind of hit you a little bit harder because it's a different culture, it's a different way of responding, you know in some countries people just naturally late, and so it's kind of frustrating like why are you an hour late don't move to that country if you don't want people being late, you know x5.*

When making a migration decision, individuals consider **the benefits they hope to obtain and the frustrations they can tolerate the most**. The key issue here is **adjustment flexibility, which refers to the ability to adapt to new and changing circumstances**. It involves being able to adjust one's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in response to changing situations and cope with challenges and stressors. Individuals with high adjustment flexibility are able to change their approach as needed, remain open to new information and perspectives, and effectively manage stress and uncertainty. They are often able to **handle change and uncertainty in a positive way and are more resilient when facing adversity**.

*The difference between the overseas and home countries is adjustment. People in their homeland were already accustomed to the problem and accepted it. Life is perfect; you can build your business or social life anywhere X5.*

#### 4.6. Constraints on Moving II: Adaptation of Culture

Migrants have pointed out that American culture is linked to **comfort in many aspects, such as house size, cars, and language**. A Thai resident stated that he had made an effort to adapt to foreign languages and cultures. Although he works remotely and can live with English, he describes his **language adaptation** efforts as follows:

*As far as language barriers are concerned here in Bangkok, you **can definitely get by with English, especially in the more central, more touristic areas**; however, learning **Thai has been a huge advantage**, the Thai people really appreciate it, and as a foreigner, you can really **engage in the culture and have a better life** if you do have some level of Thai. I think **it's important to respect locals** in any place that you are a guest and again the Thai people really appreciate it as well and your life is better; **it's really a win-win to practice the local language** x9.*

Adaptation to community and culture is another important factor to consider when deciding where to live, along with the cost of living and quality of life. Finding a friendly and accepting community is especially important when moving to a developing country. Residents of Thailand and Mexico often praise their communities for their warmth and friendliness.

*Thai people are much different than in us. It's a much friendlier, more relaxed, and more inviting culture. It is generally a culture that is interested in meeting foreigners and different people, and it's just a very welcoming place x9*

*Mazatlán is known throughout Mexico as being really friendly people, and they are really x10*

#### 4.7. Constraints on Moving III: Selling and Finding Houses

Selling properties abroad can be inherently stressful, particularly when aiming to achieve the desired price. The selling price of a property is significantly influenced by the state of the market, and in cases where the market is saturated or the economy is sluggish, individuals may be compelled to sell at a lower price than they originally anticipated. Moreover, property prices can be sensitive to fluctuations in mortgage interest rates, adding further complexity to the selling process.

*I tried to sell the house while the mortgage rate rose (in 2022). I have to drop the price of the house twice. X8*

Finding suitable accommodation in a new country presents another significant challenge during migration. New settlers often encounter difficulties in navigating local real estate markets, which encompass unfamiliar laws, regulations, and customs. To address this need, many migrants create informative videos discussing the local property market, showcasing available houses and even providing virtual property tours, aiming to assist others contemplating a similar move. It is advisable for individuals to initially consider renting a property, allowing them to gain a better understanding of the local property market before making a long-term commitment.

*We stayed in Airbnb for a week before moving our apartment to better understand the local market x8.*

Additionally, we must consider the constraints of geographic arbitrage, which can lead to price rises in emigrated locations related to housing supply. Affordability can be disrupted when the practices of arbitrage for digital nomads increase in certain locations, such as Lisbon. Rental prices have made it difficult for people to maintain their lifestyles (Koh, 2021; Caminero and McGarrigle, 2021). For example, Lisbon has become a popular destination for young entrepreneurs and digital nomads who work in creative industries. As a result, these cities may no longer be able to accommodate the growing number of migrants (Jung & Buhr, 2021; Tulumello & Allegretti, 2021).

### 5. Conclusion

According to this research, sociological (cultural detachment, alienation) and psychological (creativity, fulfillment, personal growth) factors are the primary drivers of migration from developed countries (Table 3). Most studies highlight that migrants face challenges related to identity formation, social integration, and adaptation in their destination countries. However, there is a significant motivator for Americans considering relocation abroad that is less commonly addressed. Many Americans feel entrapped in a “comfort zone” due to the predictable and routine nature of life in the United States. This perceived stagnation inspires a desire to relocate as a means to unleash creative potential and enhance the enjoyment of life. Moving to a new country is seen not just as a change of scenery, but as a transformative experience that promises renewed inspiration and a fulfilling lifestyle. Our findings suggest that American emigrants leave the United States mainly because of sociological and psychological dissatisfaction, which often stems from a lack of fit with American culture, politics, consumption, regulations, relationships, and values. Individuals often migrate to develop mentally, spiritually, and personally.

We anticipate that individuals facing economic constraints, such as barely making ends meet, high housing prices, and high taxes, will continue to remain in the US unless significant sociological or psychological disconnections occur. Contrary to popular media portrayals, high taxes are not a primary reason for U.S. citizens leaving the country. Significant detachment and a sense of unfulfillment must occur to trigger migration.

**Table 3.** Reasons for leaving the United States

Cultural Detachment (feelings of alienation, confusion, and loss).	Creativity	Fulfillment
Consumer culture	Broaden horizons	Trapped in their home
Unfit culture	Expand perspective	Change their lifestyle before death
Racial discrimination	New experience	Work-life balance.
Political division	Transformation	Perform hobbies and interests
The US healthcare system	Self-improvement	
Gun violence	Trying new things, challenges	
Income inequality	Learning new things	
	Develop new skills Discover yourself Discover the world	
	Free from routine/familiar surroundings	
	Inspiration	
	Critical thinking	
	Independent judgment	

Our paper introduces an alternative approach for individuals aspiring to retire early or achieve financial independence, particularly those who find themselves insufficient funds in the United States (developed countries) (Table 4). Our analysis demonstrates that Americans can achieve financial independence and potentially retire early by leveraging



geographic arbitrage. Relocating to countries with lower living costs can extend savings and significantly enhance spending power. Furthermore, for those engaged in remote/online work, there is an opportunity to preserve a substantial portion of their income. This approach not only sustains individuals’ financial well-being but also accelerates their journey toward financial freedom. However, it is crucial to recognize that the decision to migrate is not driven solely by economic factors. The cost of living, financial benefits, and quality of life are considered after the decision is made.

**Table 4.** Advantages of Geographic Arbitrage

Low Cost of living and high quality of life in developing countries	Financial advantages
Housing and HMOs	Save money (low cost living and no keep-up Jones)
Food and Gastronomy	Retirement salary (the dollar is valuable)
Transportation and private sector:	Lower tax rate (
Healthcare (reasonable price and fast)	
Entertainment	
Non-debt purchase of property	
Living a luxurious life (condo, villa, resort)	

There can be several reasons why people choose not to relocate their lives even though geographic arbitrage works for better living with a lower cost (see Table 5). Based on the research results, people often find comfort in the familiar routines of their lives and are resistant to change. Societal and cultural norms can also influence people’s perceptions of limitations and what they believe are achievable. Many fear unknowns that they might encounter in developing countries. Additionally, some may not realize that they have the power to make significant changes in their lives. Successful relocation requires effort to discover the community and learn about new cultures and languages. Selling hard assets, such as homes and businesses, is not easy. Participants in the research noted this challenge when interest rates rose. Another obstacle is finding a suitable location in the new country because of the lack of familiarity with the local housing and business markets.

**Table 5.** Constraints on Moving

Comfort Zone	Adaptation of Culture	Selling Hard Assets
Beliefs,	Avoid new friendships	Selling high
Perceptions	Search community	Stress
Habits	Learning language	Mortgage interest rates as a
Resist new ideas	Discover the culture	percentage
Fear of the unknown		Unfamiliar local real estate
Status quo		
Avoid questioning		
Accustomed frustrations in the home country		
Familiarity		
Loyalty and attachment		

**Ethics Committee Approval:** This statement confirms that the study exclusively involved the analysis of publicly available data, and no direct experimentation or interviews were conducted with the participants.

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