Foundation

Global Safety Evidence Centre

World Risk Poll 2024

Focus On:

Migration in a warming world

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1. Summary

Migration has always been part of human life, but the forces driving it are changing. Economic pressures remain a constant, the search for stable work, secure incomes and a better future, yet climate change is now reshaping the calculus of where people feel they can safely live. As floods, droughts, heatwaves and rising seas intensify, the line between economic migration and climate-driven displacement is increasingly blurred.

This Focus On report draws on World Risk Poll data from 2021 and 2023, combined with the Gallup World Poll's question on migration desire, to explore the forces shaping modern migration: the enduring pull of economic opportunity, the growing push of climate instability, and the structural geography that constrains both. By overlaying the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) index, the report also asks how preferred destinations align with climate readiness. The analysis captures desire to migrate, not actual movement, and is limited to international rather than internal migration.

1.1. Key findings

- Economic insecurity is the second most commonly cited threat to personal safety worldwide, surpassing crime and violence and behind only road traffic accidents. More than a third of people globally say their household could not survive for more than a month if they lost income.
- Climate concern has increased sharply, 6% of people saw climate change and severe weather as the biggest threat to their personal safety in 2023, the highest level since the Poll began. Furthermore, people who view climate change as a very serious threat are nearly twice as likely to want to migrate as those who do not.
- Climate concern and financial resilience shape where people want to go in different but complementary ways. Climate concern steers destination choice qualitatively, pulling aspiration away from regions seen as climate-exposed, particularly the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and towards destinations seen as more secure, most notably North America, Northern and Western Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. Financial resilience shapes the range of destinations that feel reachable, with the more secure reaching for Europe and the Antipodes and the less secure looking more often to nearer regional options.
- But when we ask how far people aspire to climb the climate-resilience ladder, measured as the ND-GAIN gap between current country and preferred destination, climate concern itself adds almost nothing. The dominant drivers are structural. Origin-country income is by far the strongest predictor: people in low-income countries aspire to the largest leaps in climate readiness, while those in high-income countries show much smaller gaps simply because there is less room to climb. Financial precarity adds a meaningful further push in the same direction.
- The strongest climate-ambitious aspirations are therefore held by those least able to act on them. People in low-income countries, and those who could not sustain their household for a month without income, consistently aim for the largest leaps in climate resilience; yet face the greatest structural barriers to reaching the destinations they prefer.

The central question raised is whether, and how, the widening gap between aspiration and access can be addressed; so that migration in a warming world can be a choice rather than a necessity imposed by circumstance.

2. Introduction

Migration has always been a defining feature of human history. For millennia, people have moved in search of better opportunities, whether for work, education, safety, or a more secure and prosperous future.

In the modern world, economic pressures are among the most consistent drivers of migration: limited job opportunities, wage disparities, and unequal access to resources often compel people to seek better livelihoods elsewhere. The aspiration for a better life remains a powerful motivator, shaping migration flows both within and across national borders.

However, in the 21st century, another force is rising in urgency and scale: climate change. As global temperatures rise and extreme weather events become more frequent and intense, the environmental conditions that support stable communities are increasingly under threat. Floods, droughts, wildfires, rising sea levels, and heatwaves are displacing people at unprecedented rates[1]. In some regions, these climate-related events are not occasional disruptions but persistent and escalating challenges that make traditional ways of life unsustainable.

The interplay between economic migration and climate-induced displacement is becoming increasingly complex. These factors often overlap, amplifying each other in ways that are not always easy to disentangle.

Understanding this complexity requires data that captures both the scale of the challenge and the perspectives of those most affected. The Lloyd's Register Foundation World Risk Poll is an ideal tool for this purpose. As the world's first truly global study of how people think and feel about risk, it gathers insights from people in over 140 countries, including regions often overlooked in global analyses. Unlike top-down models, the World Risk Poll builds stories from the bottom up, illuminating how individuals perceive and respond to risks in their daily lives, whether those risks are environmental, economic, or both. This human-centred approach offers a rich, granular view of migration motivations and allows for more responsive, informed policymaking.

This Focus On report draws on World Risk Poll data from 2021 and 2023, combined with the Gallup World Poll's question on migration desire, to explore two of the forces shaping modern migration: the enduring pull of economic opportunity and the growing push of climate instability. By examining where and how these factors intersect, we aim to better understand the evolving nature of human mobility and to inform policies that are responsive to both the aspirations and concerns of migrating people and their destinations.

Scope and limitations

Before presenting the findings, it is important to set out some key parameters and limitations of this analysis. The migration polling data used throughout this report captures desire to migrate internationally, that is, whether respondents say they would like to move to another country permanently if they could. It does not measure migration within countries, such as rural-to-urban movement, which in many contexts represents the more immediate and common response to both economic hardship and climate-related disruption. Internal displacement and relocation are critical dimensions of climate mobility that fall outside the scope of this analysis but warrant dedicated attention[2].

2.1 The rising weight of economic insecurity

Globally, economic resilience remains precarious for a large portion of the population. In the 2023 World Risk Poll, 13% of people reported that their household could survive for less than a week without income, up slightly from 12% in 2021, while an additional 24% could manage for less than a month, compared with 22% in 2021. These figures show that more than a third of people worldwide would struggle to meet basic needs beyond a few weeks if income were lost.

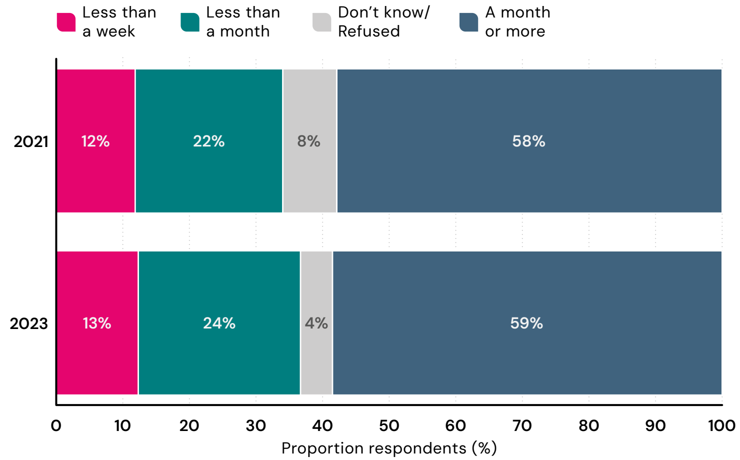
The share of people able to cope for a month or more has remained steady, rising only marginally from 58% in 2021 to 59% in 2023. This persistent lack of a financial buffer for many underscores the importance of economic security in shaping individuals' ability to respond to shocks, including climate-related disruptions. In the context of migration, limited economic resilience can intensify feelings of instability and influence the need or desire to seek opportunities elsewhere.

As well as measuring household financial resilience, the Poll asks respondents to identify what they believe is the greatest risk to their own safety, without any prompting. This open-ended format captures raw, unfiltered perceptions, revealing the risks that feel most immediate and personal. In both 2021 and 2023, 6% of respondents cited not having enough money as the greatest threat to their safety. This steady response over time underscores how deeply economic insecurity is felt, not simply as a hardship but as a direct risk to personal safety and wellbeing. It reflects a lived experience in which the absence of financial resources threatens the ability to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, security, and healthcare.

Concern about the general economy, including inflation, job scarcity and national financial instability, grew from 5% in 2021 to 7% in 2023. Concern about the general economy is more abstract than personal hardship, but it suggests that people are increasingly aware of the wider economic forces shaping their daily lives and future prospects. When combined, these two categories, not having enough money and the general economy, accounted for 13% of all responses in 2023. This makes economic insecurity, in its various forms, the second most commonly reported risk to personal safety globally, surpassed only by road traffic accidents.

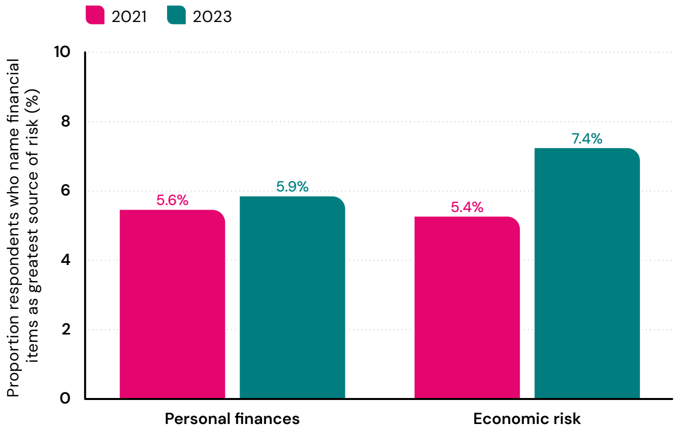
Importantly, this marks a shift in the global risk landscape. Combined economic concerns overtake crime and violence as the second most frequently cited threat to personal safety. This change highlights a growing awareness that insecurity is linked to both physical danger, and increasingly to financial instability that undermines people's ability to live safely and with dignity. In the context of migration, this shift is of interest as people may now be driven to move not solely by violence or disaster, but by the sustained and deeply felt risk of not being able to afford to stay.

Chart 1: More than a third of people worldwide could not cope financially for a month without income



"Suppose you lost all of your household income and had to survive only on your savings or things you could sell. Would you be able to cover all of your basic needs, like food, housing, and transportation for [period]?"
Source: World Risk Poll 2021, 2023.

Chart 2: Economic insecurity has overtaken crime and violence as the second most cited risk to personal safety



"In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?" (open-ended). "Economic" combines responses citing personal financial hardship and the general economy.
Source: World Risk Poll 2021, 2023.

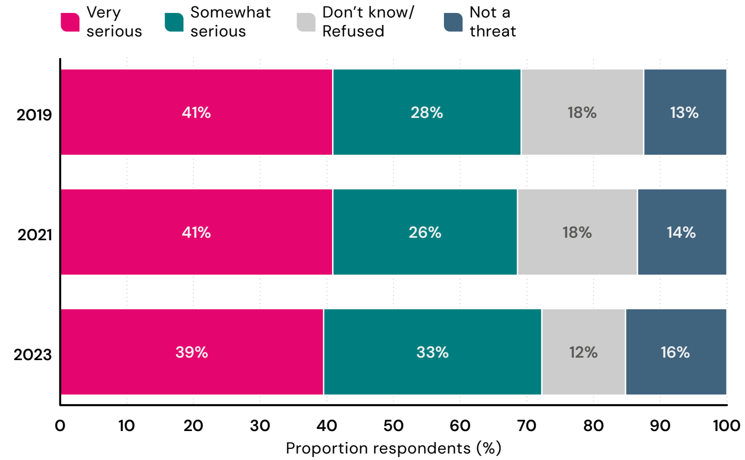
2.2 A more decisive view of climate risk

Global perceptions of climate change as a threat showed some notable shifts between 2019 and 2023. The proportion of people who view climate change as a very serious threat to people in their country remained consistently high, falling only slightly from 41% in both 2019 and 2021 to 39% in 2023. Meanwhile, the share describing it as a somewhat serious threat grew steadily, rising from 28% in 2019 to 33% in 2023. This suggests that while the most intense concern may have softened slightly, broader awareness of climate risk is expanding. Uncertainty also declined, with don't know/refused responses dropping from 18% in 2019 to just 12% in 2023. There was also a modest increase in the proportion of people who see climate change as not a threat at all, rising from 13% in 2019 to 16% in 2023. Together, these shifts indicate a global population becoming more decisive and polarised in its views on climate risk[3,4].

These trends are echoed in responses to the Poll's open-ended question about the greatest risk to personal safety. In 2019, 4% of respondents identified climate change or severe weather events as their top safety concern. This figure declined to 3% in 2021, likely reflecting the dominating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public consciousness. However, by 2023, concern rebounded sharply, with 6% naming climate change or severe weather events as the greatest risk to their personal safety. This marks the highest recorded level of unprompted concern about climate-related risk since the Poll began. It shows that climate change and its visible manifestations in severe weather are not only widely acknowledged threats when people are asked directly, but increasingly feature prominently in their own risk hierarchies, even when no options are suggested.

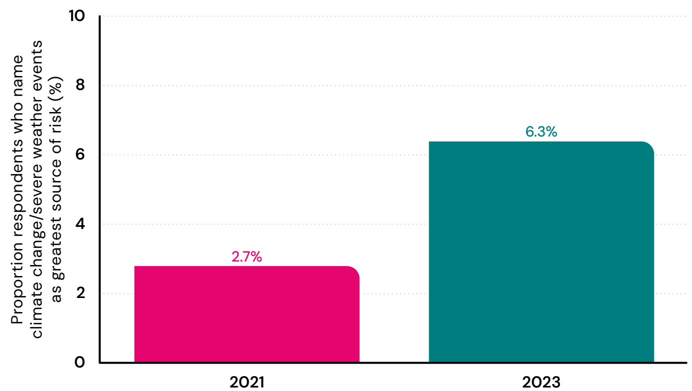
This resurgence suggests that climate impacts are being felt more directly in people's lives, or at least more visibly linked to personal safety and wellbeing. As extreme weather events, food insecurity and displacement become more common, public concern appears to be catching up. In the context of migration, these shifts matter. They suggest a growing portion of the global population no longer sees climate change as a distant or abstract issue, but as something that may increasingly inform decisions about where, and how, they can safely live.

Chart 3: Global views on climate change are becoming more decisive, with fewer people unsure



"How serious of a threat is climate change to the people in this country in the next 20 years?"
Source: World Risk Poll 2019, 2021, 2023.

Chart 4: Concern about climate change and severe weather as greatest source of personal risk reached its highest recorded level in 2023



Share naming climate change or severe weather events as the greatest risk to their personal safety. "In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?" (open-ended).
Source: World Risk Poll 2019, 2021, 2023.

3. Who wants to leave, and why

The Gallup World Poll poses a simple question which provides enriched insights when combined with our World Risk Poll: would you like to move to another country permanently, if you could? This question goes beyond measuring actual migration to capture a broader sense of aspiration, dissatisfaction, and imagined futures. By focusing on desire rather than action, it opens a window into how people around the world perceive their current circumstances; economic, environmental, or otherwise, and what drives them to envision a life elsewhere.

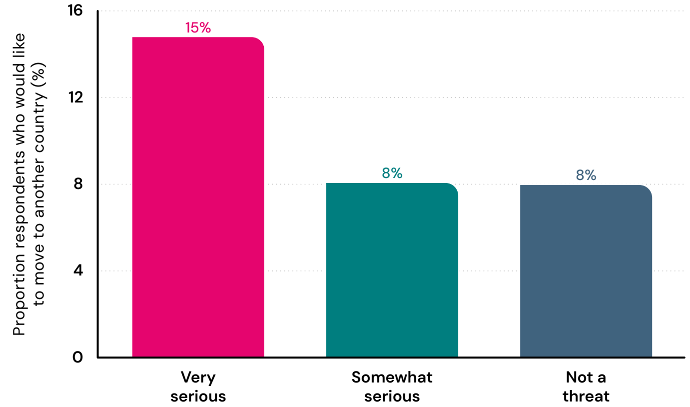
For all following analyses data from the 2021 and 2023 Polls are blended together to provide the maximal sample size.

As noted at the outset, the migration data used in this analysis captures expressed desire to move to another country permanently, not actual migration. Many people who express a wish to migrate will never do so, due to financial constraints, visa restrictions, family ties, or other factors. The figures should therefore be read as measures of sentiment and perceived pressure; they indicate where dissatisfaction and aspiration are strongest, but they do not predict migration volumes. The analysis is also limited to international migration desire and does not capture internal movement within countries, which is often the more common and immediate response to both economic and environmental pressures.

The migration question is drawn from the Gallup World Poll, which is fielded in a subset of the countries covered by the World Risk Poll. The analyses that follow are therefore based on the intersection of the two samples, and regional and global totals should be interpreted accordingly.

There is a notable relationship between how individuals perceive the threat of climate change and their willingness to consider migration. Among those who see climate change as a very serious threat, 15% say they would prefer to move to another country. This compares to just 8% among those who see it as a somewhat serious threat or not a threat at all. While the majority in all groups - 85% or more - still express a preference to remain in their current country, the data suggests that heightened concern about climate change is associated with a notably greater openness to international migration. As climate-related risks become more immediate and visible, particularly in already vulnerable regions, these shifts in perception may point to evolving attitudes that could, over time, influence migration patterns.

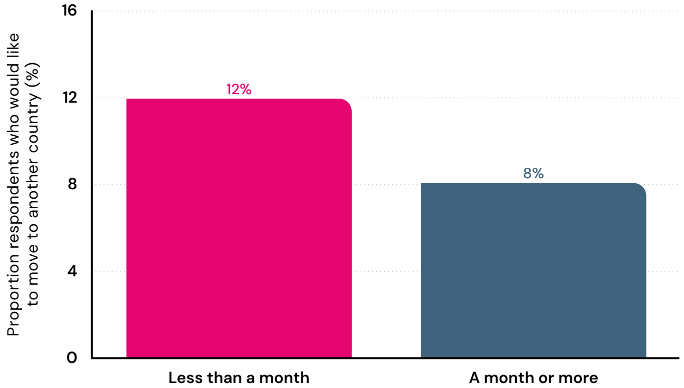
Chart 5: People who see climate change as a very serious threat are nearly twice as likely to want to migrate



"Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?"
Sources: Gallup World Poll (migration); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (climate concern).

Economic resilience also plays a notable role in shaping people's attitudes toward migration. Among individuals whose households could survive for a month or more without income, only 8% express a desire to move to another country. This rises to 12% among those whose households could manage for less than a month. Although the majority in both groups still prefer to remain in their current country, the difference suggests that financial insecurity is linked to a greater openness to international migration. However, it should be noted that this association does not establish causation; many confounding factors, including age, region, and education, may also play a role and would need to be controlled for in further analysis.

Chart 6: Lower financial resilience is associated with a greater desire to migrate internationally



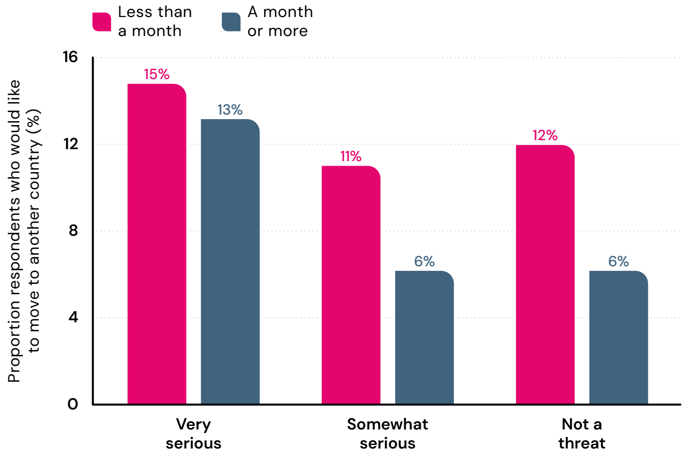
"Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?"
Sources: Gallup World Poll (migration); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (financial resilience).

When both climate threat perception and economic resilience are considered together, a clearer picture emerges of how these two forces may relate to migration intent. Among those who do not see climate change as a threat and could manage for at least a month without income, only 6% express a desire to migrate. However, when financial vulnerability is introduced, among those who could manage for less than a month, that figure doubles to 12%, even with no perceived climate threat.

A similar pattern holds among those who do perceive climate change as a somewhat serious threat: migration desire increases with both heightened concern and reduced economic resilience.

Among those who view climate change as a very serious threat, the desire to migrate is relatively high in both economic groups, 13% among the more financially secure and 15% among those less financially secure. While the increase is modest, it may suggest that financial vulnerability can heighten the impact of climate concern on migration desire, even when that concern is already strongly felt.

Chart 7: Migration desire is highest where climate concern and financial vulnerability meet



"Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?"
Sources: Gallup World Poll (migration); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (climate concern, financial resilience).

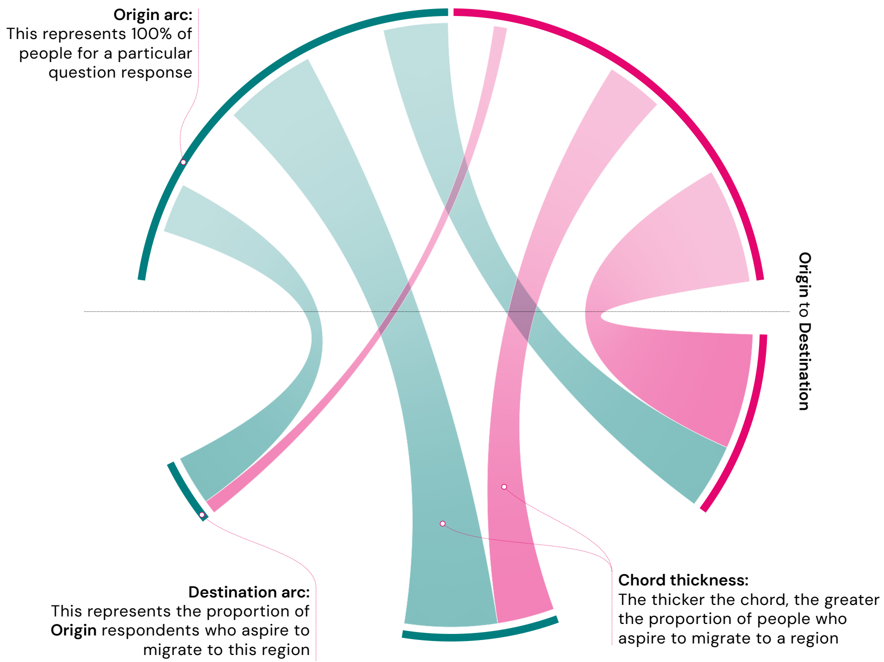
These differences may appear small in absolute terms, but they are consistent and meaningful. The data suggests that people may be more likely to consider leaving their country not simply because of climate change or poverty alone, but when both risks are felt simultaneously. It is at this intersection, where environmental risk meets economic precarity, that migration pressures may be most concentrated.

Knowing that people want to migrate is meaningful, but to fully understand the pressures and potential impacts of migration, it is equally important to explore where they hope to go.

4. Where people want to go

4.1 How to read the chord diagrams in this section

Globally, far more people express concern about climate change than do not. Because the groups we are comparing are very different in size, the chord diagrams that follow show each group's destination preferences as a percentage of its own total, so each group sums to 100%. This lets us compare the shape of each group's preferences rather than their absolute size.



The basic structure. Each chord diagram is built around two sets of segments arranged in a circle. The first set are the experience groups we are comparing, for example, people who view climate change as a threat and those who do not. The second set are the destination regions, the regions of the world people might prefer to migrate to. Each respondent who said they would like to migrate is represented by a ribbon connecting their experience group to their preferred destination.

The number of experience groups varies between the diagrams in this report. Some compare two groups based on a single factor, such as climate concern. The final diagram compares four groups, combining climate concern and financial resilience. The destination regions are the same throughout.

The width of each ribbon shows how popular that destination is for that group. A thick ribbon between the climate-concerned experience group and Northern America means a large share of climate-concerned respondents named Northern America as their preferred destination. A thin ribbon means few of them did. Because each experience group has been rescaled to the same total, ribbon widths are directly comparable across groups: a thick ribbon from one experience group and a thin one from another tells you those groups are diverging on that destination.

Statistical tests in this section

The following section uses a small number of statistical tests to check whether the patterns we see in the data are likely to reflect real differences between groups, or could plausibly have arisen by chance.

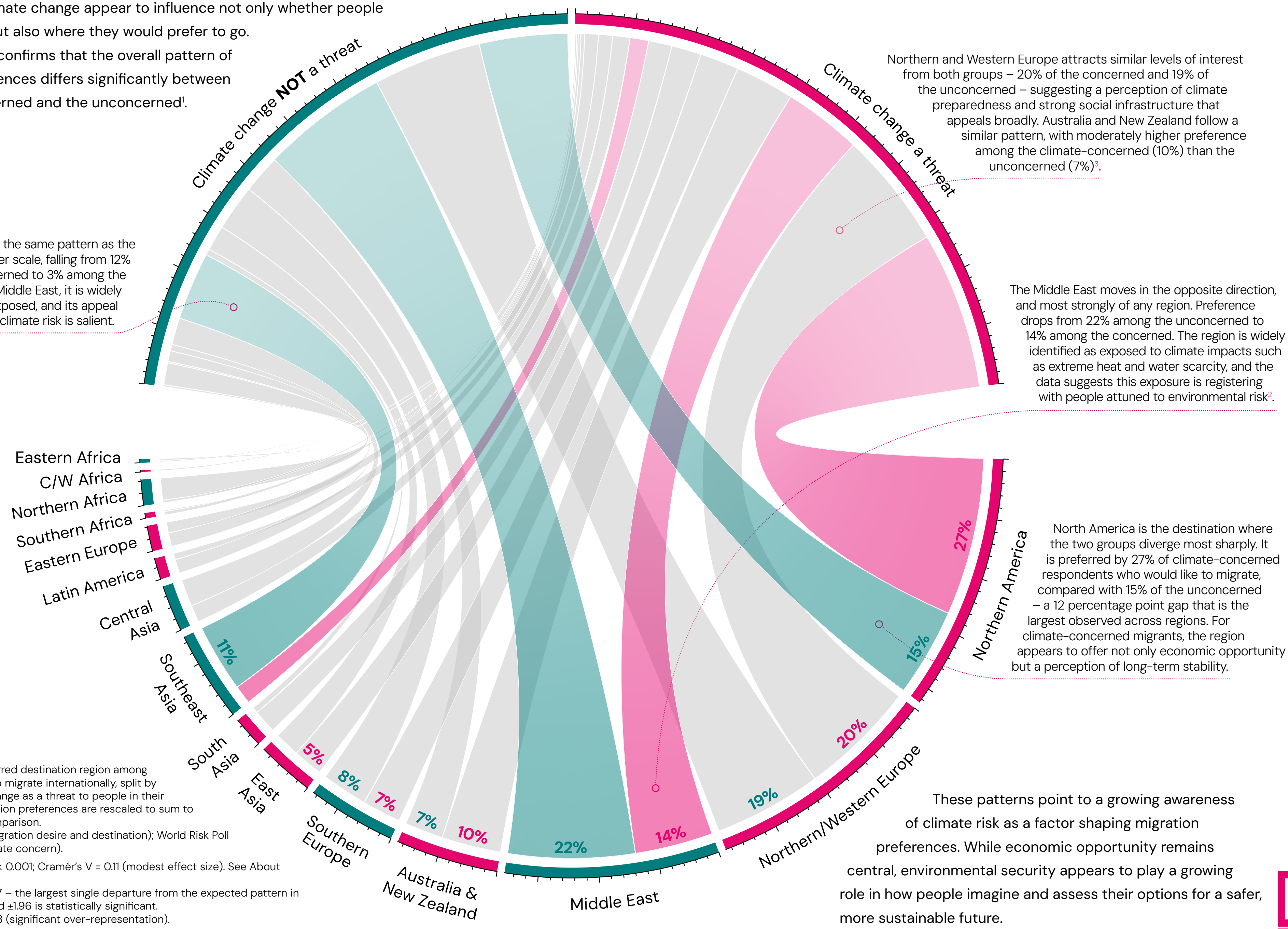
Statistical significance and the p-value. When we compare two groups, such as the climate-concerned and the unconcerned, we want to know whether any difference between them is genuine or could simply be the product of random variation in who happened to be surveyed. The p-value is the probability of seeing a difference as large as the one observed if, in reality, there was no difference at all. A p-value below 0.05 (a less than one-in-twenty probability) is the conventional threshold for treating a difference as statistically significant. A p-value below 0.001 (less than one-in-a-thousand) means the result is very unlikely to be a coincidence.

Comparing groups across categories: chi-square and Cramér's V. When we want to know whether two groups distribute themselves differently across a set of categories, for example, whether the climate-concerned and the unconcerned prefer different migration destinations, we use a chi-square test. The test produces a p-value indicating whether the overall pattern of difference is statistically significant. Cramér's V then measures how strong that association is, on a scale from 0 (no association) to 1 (a perfect one). Values around 0.1 indicate a small but meaningful effect; values around 0.3 a moderate effect; and values above 0.5 a strong effect. Cramér's V values in this analysis are typically modest, which is what we would expect when individual factors like climate concern operate alongside many others.

Identifying which differences matter most: standardised residuals. When an overall pattern is statistically significant, standardised residuals help identify which specific group-and-destination combinations are driving it. For each combination, for example, climate-concerned respondents preferring Northern America, the residual measures how far the observed share departs from what we would expect if climate concern and destination choice were unrelated. A value beyond ±1.96 indicates a statistically significant over- or under-representation. Larger values indicate a stronger signal: a residual of 8, for example, points to a combination that departs very strongly from the expected pattern.

Chart 8: Climate-concerned migrants favour Northern America; the unconcerned more often look to the Middle East and Southeast Asia

Perceptions of climate change appear to influence not only whether people wish to migrate, but also where they would prefer to go. Statistical testing confirms that the overall pattern of destination preferences differs significantly between the climate-concerned and the unconcerned[1].



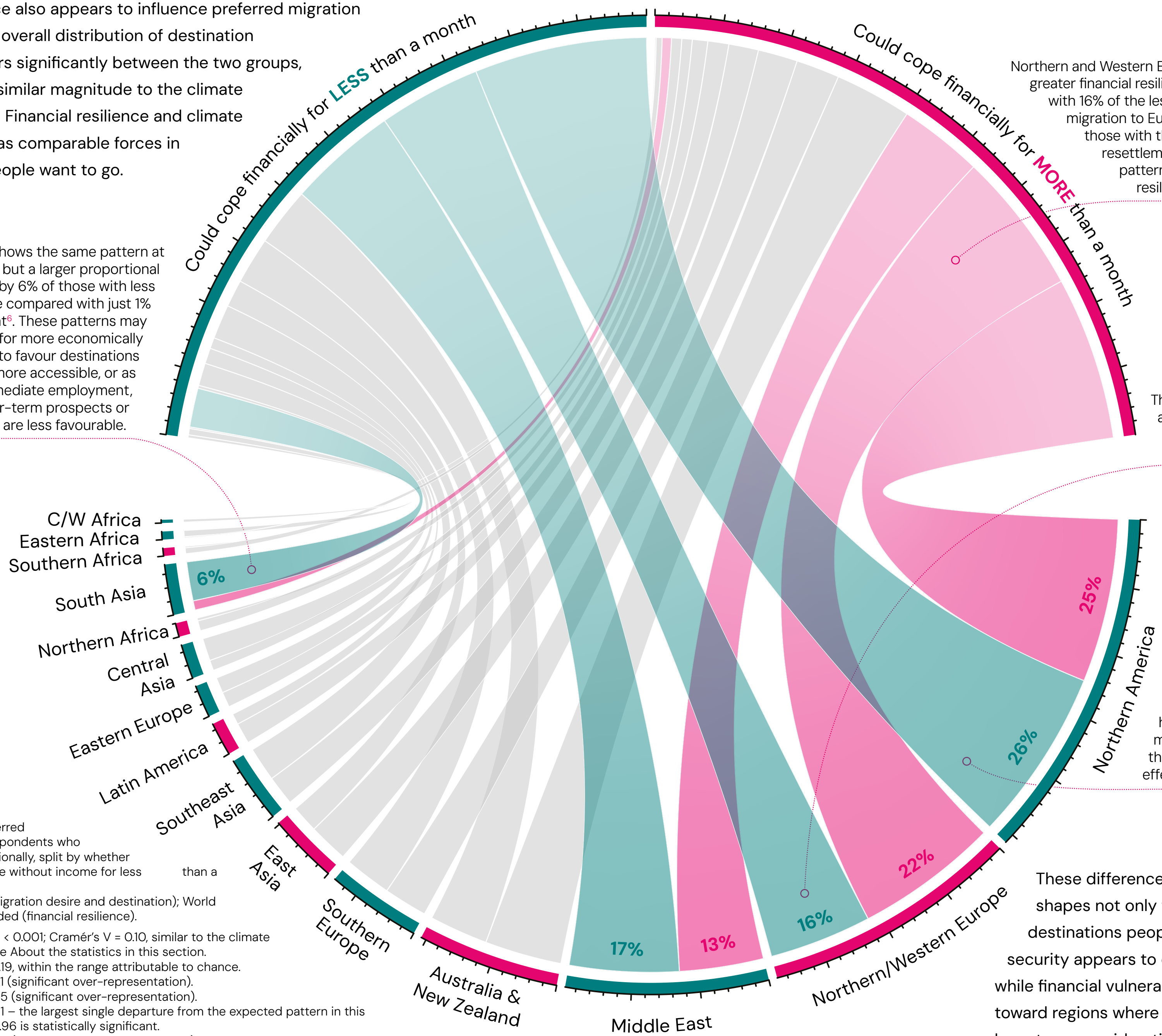
These patterns point to a growing awareness of climate risk as a factor shaping migration preferences. While economic opportunity remains central, environmental security appears to play a growing role in how people imagine and assess their options for a safer, more sustainable future.

Chord diagram showing preferred destination region among respondents who would like to migrate internationally, split by whether they view climate change as a threat to people in their country. Each group's destination preferences are rescaled to sum to 100% to allow like-for-like comparison.
Sources: Gallup World Poll (migration desire and destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (climate concern).

1: Chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 110.7$, $p < 0.001$; Cramér's V = 0.11 (modest effect size). See About the statistics in this section.
2: Standardised residual = 8.07 – the largest single departure from the expected pattern in this analysis. A residual beyond ±1.96 is statistically significant.
3: Standardised residual = 2.08 (significant over-representation).

Chart 9: Financially resilient migrants reach for Northern and Western Europe; the less secure look more often to the Middle East and Southern Asia

Financial resilience also appears to influence preferred migration destinations. The overall distribution of destination preferences differs significantly between the two groups, with an effect of similar magnitude to the climate concern analysis[1]. Financial resilience and climate concern emerge as comparable forces in shaping where people want to go.



Northern and Western Europe is more strongly preferred by those with greater financial resilience, with 22% expressing interest compared with 16% of the less secure[3]. This may reflect a perception that migration to Europe is more accessible or sustainable for those with the means to support themselves through resettlement. Australia and New Zealand follow the same pattern, preferred by 12% of the more financially resilient and 9% of the less secure[4].

Southern Asia shows the same pattern at a smaller scale but a larger proportional gap, preferred by 6% of those with less financial resilience compared with just 1% of the more resilient[6]. These patterns may reflect a tendency for more economically vulnerable people to favour destinations perceived as more accessible, or as offering more immediate employment, even where longer-term prospects or climate exposure are less favourable.

The Middle East moves in the opposite direction, and most strongly of any region. Preference rises from 13% among the more financially resilient to 17% among the less secure[5].

North America holds broad appeal regardless of financial circumstances. It is preferred by 25% of those whose households could meet basic needs for a month or more without income, and 26% of those with less than a month of resilience – effectively the same figure for both groups[2].

These differences suggest that financial resilience shapes not only the ability to migrate, but also the destinations people feel are within reach. Economic security appears to expand the range of viable options, while financial vulnerability may steer preferences toward regions where short-term opportunities outweigh long-term considerations.

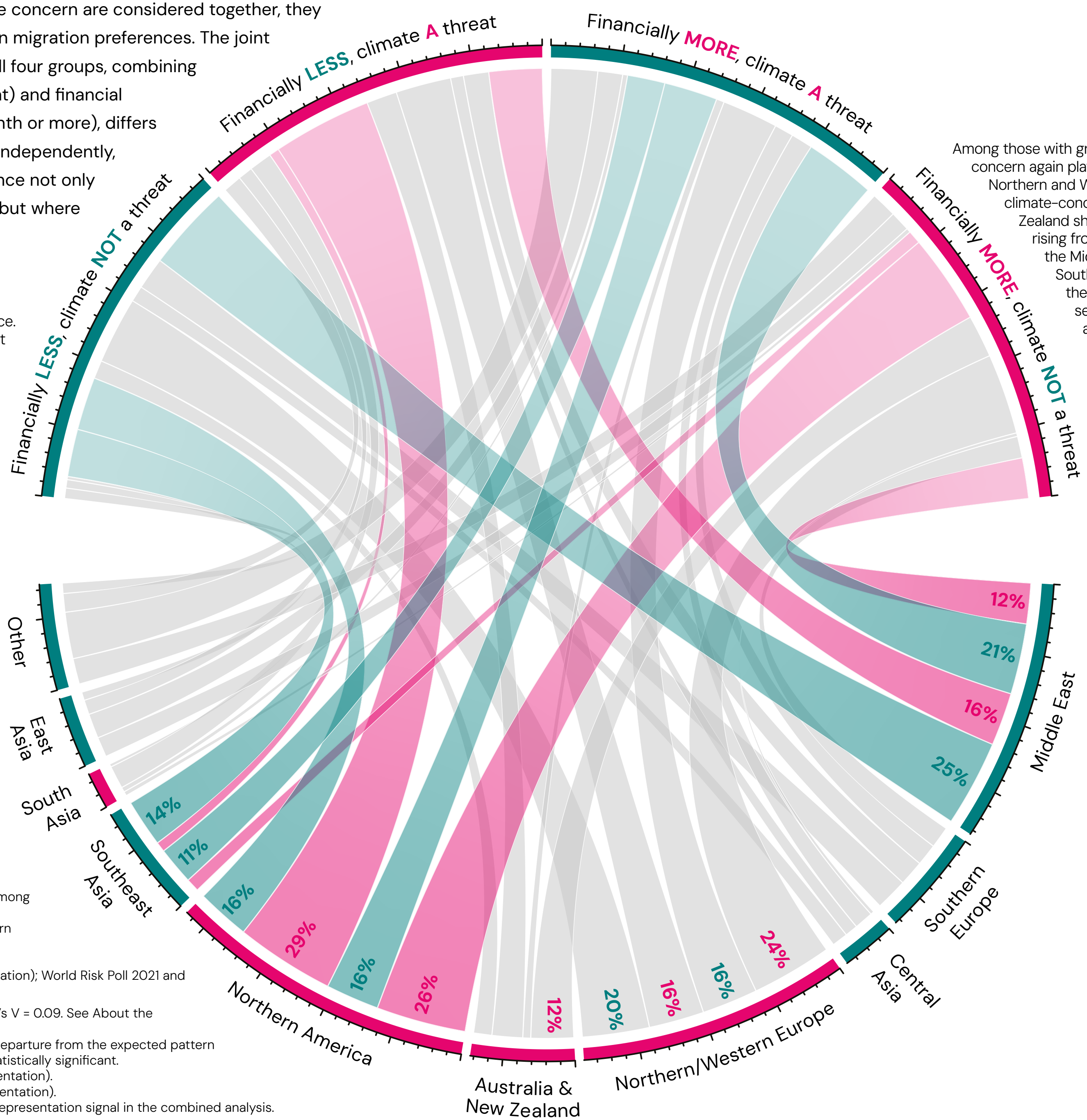
Chord diagram showing preferred destination region among respondents who would like to migrate internationally, split by whether their household could manage without income for less than a month or a month or more..
Sources: Gallup World Poll (migration desire and destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (financial resilience).

1: Chi-square test, $x^2 = 96.8$, $p < 0.001$; Cramér's $V = 0.10$, similar to the climate concern analysis ($V = 0.11$). See About the statistics in this section.
2: Standardised residual = −0.19, within the range attributable to chance.
3: Standardised residual = 3.41 (significant over-representation).
4: Standardised residual = 2.55 (significant over-representation).
5: Standardised residual = 6.51 – the largest single departure from the expected pattern in this analysis. A residual beyond ±1.96 is statistically significant.
6: Standardised residual = 5.07 (significant over-representation).

Chart 10: Climate concern consistently steers aspiration away from exposed regions, regardless of financial means

When financial resilience and climate concern are considered together, they reveal a powerful combined effect on migration preferences. The joint distribution of destinations across all four groups, combining climate concern (threat / not a threat) and financial resilience (less than a month / a month or more), differs significantly[1]. Rather than operating independently, these two factors combine to influence not only whether people consider migration, but where they feel able, or willing, to go.

Among those with lower financial resilience. Respondents who are not concerned about climate change most commonly favour the Middle East (25%) and Southeast Asia (14%), regions that may be perceived as more accessible or offering more immediate economic opportunity. The Middle East preference among this group is the strongest single signal in the entire analysis[2]. Among the climate-concerned within this same financially vulnerable group, preference for these regions falls substantially – to 16% for the Middle East and just 3% for Southeast Asia. North America emerges as the clear alternative, with preference rising from 16% among the unconcerned to 29% among those who perceive climate change as a threat – a 13 percentage point increase. Northern and Western Europe shifts in the opposite direction, from 20% to 16%. These patterns point to the strong influence of climate awareness, which can override the typical economic constraints that often guide migration preferences for those with fewer financial resources.



Among those with greater financial resilience. Climate concern again plays a defining role. Preference for Northern and Western Europe rises sharply among the climate-concerned, from 16% to 24%[3]. Australia and New Zealand show the most dramatic shift in this group, rising from just 2% to 12%[4]. In contrast, interest in the Middle East declines from 21% to 12%[5] and Southeast Asia falls from 11% to 4%, mirroring the patterns seen among the less financially secure but from a position of greater choice and capacity to act. North America holds steady, preferred by 16% of both groups – suggesting that for this segment, it is already seen as a default destination offering a balance of opportunity and perceived climate stability, regardless of shifting risk perceptions.

Chord diagram showing preferred destination region among respondents who would like to migrate internationally, split into four groups combining climate change concern (threat / not a threat) and financial resilience (less than a month / a month or more without income).
Sources: Gallup World Poll (migration desire and destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (climate concern, financial resilience).

1: Chi-square test, $x^2 = 204.8$, df = 27, $p < 0.001$; Cramér's V = 0.09. See About the statistics in this section.
2: Standardised residual = 9.70 – the strongest single departure from the expected pattern in the combined analysis. A residual beyond ±1.96 is statistically significant.
3: Standardised residual = 4.41 (significant over-representation).
4: Standardised residual = 2.98 (significant over-representation).
5: Standardised residual = –7.11 – the strongest under-representation signal in the combined analysis.

4.2 What the data suggests

These results suggest that financial resilience and climate concern work in tandem to shape not just the likelihood of migration desire, but the geography of aspiration. Climate concern consistently steers people away from regions perceived as environmentally vulnerable, particularly the Middle East[5] and Southeast Asia, and toward destinations seen as more secure, such as Northern and Western Europe and Australia and New Zealand. Financial resilience expands the range of destinations considered viable. Those with fewer resources may be forced to weigh trade-offs between short-term opportunity and long-term risk, while those with greater means appear more able to prioritise environmental safety. Both factors operate as comparable forces in shaping where people want to go, with effects of similar size and consistent direction. The geography of aspiration that emerges is convergent: a small set of destinations, North America, Northern and Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, pull strongly across both groups.

These regional patterns offer valuable insight into how people weigh economic opportunity against environmental risk, but they also raise important questions. Are perceptions of climate-safe havens grounded in actual climate resilience, or shaped more by reputation, media, or economic influence? Understanding whether migration intentions align with real-world climate risk is critical for policymakers and planners alike. Moreover, the relationship between financial resilience and climate concern warrants deeper exploration. Do economic constraints shape how people perceive climate threats, or does awareness of environmental risk influence how people assess their financial vulnerability? Unpicking these connections will be essential to understanding how future migration patterns will evolve in a world facing both growing inequality and intensifying climate impacts.

5. Seeking safety: the pull of more climate-ready countries

The analysis of ND-GAIN scores uses a different set of statistical tools to those introduced earlier in the report. Estimating the size of an effect: regression coefficients. Where we compare average outcomes between groups, for example, the average difference in ND-GAIN score between someone's current country and their preferred destination, we use regression analysis. A regression coefficient tells us how much the outcome changes when a particular factor changes, holding other factors constant. A coefficient of −2.83, for example, means that the group in question shows an ND-GAIN gap that is 2.83 points lower than the comparison group, after accounting for other variables in the model. Each coefficient comes with its own p-value, which tells us whether that specific effect is statistically significant.

Testing for combined effects: interactions. A regression can also test whether two factors amplify each other beyond what they would do separately. This is called an interaction. If the interaction is statistically significant, the two factors compound: their combined effect is greater than the sum of their parts. If it is not significant, each factor operates independently of the other. The analysis in this report uses a survey-weighted regression, which adjusts for the fact that some respondents are more representative of the global population than others.

Reading the forest plot. The coefficient plot in the regression section displays each predictor's estimated effect as a point, with a horizontal line showing its 95% confidence interval, the range within which the true effect is very likely to lie. If the line crosses zero, the effect is not statistically significant. Predictors whose lines sit clearly to one side of zero, with narrow intervals, are the strongest and most reliable drivers of the outcome.

As before, these tools tell us how large effects are and how confident we can be in them, but they do not establish causation. A statistically significant association between financial resilience and destination choice, for example, does not in itself tell us that one causes the other.

To explore how perceptions of climate and development influence migration preferences, we draw on the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) index. Produced by the University of Notre Dame, this index scores every country in the world on two dimensions: how vulnerable it is to the effects of climate change, and how ready it is to adapt[6]. A higher ND-GAIN score signals a country that is better equipped to withstand and respond to climate pressures, typically wealthier, more institutionally stable, and more resilient to environmental shocks.

By comparing the ND-GAIN score of respondents' current country with that of their preferred destination, we can ask a simple but revealing question: are people actively seeking to move to more climate-resilient environments? The short answer is yes. Across every group in our analysis, people consistently aspire to move to countries with higher ND-GAIN scores than their own. This preference for more climate-ready destinations reflects not only environmental awareness, but also the broader pull of stability, development, and opportunity that higher-scoring countries tend to offer.

The more interesting question, however, is what shapes the size of that ambition. Are people who are most concerned about climate change reaching further toward climate-resilient destinations? Does financial vulnerability sharpen or dampen that drive? And does it matter where you come from? The answers, it turns out, are both surprising and telling.

5.1 What climate concern does, and doesn't, predict

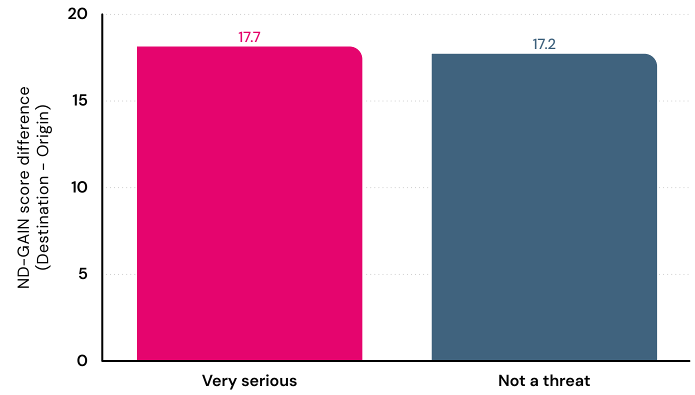
At first glance, one might expect people who view climate change as a very serious threat to be most deliberate in seeking out climate-resilient destinations, effectively voting with their feet for a safer environmental future. The data does not support this. When comparing those who see climate change as a very serious threat (average desired ND-GAIN improvement: +17.7 points) with those who do not see it as a threat at all (+17.2 points), the difference is marginal (just 0.5 points) and not statistically significant[i].

To put this in plain terms: knowing that someone is deeply concerned about climate change tells us almost nothing about how climate-ambitious their preferred destination is. Both the alarmed and the unconcerned are seeking similarly more resilient places to live. This suggests that the choice of where to migrate is driven by factors that cut across levels of climate awareness. The pull of economic opportunity, existing family and community networks, language, and the practical realities of which destinations are accessible all appear to matter more than environmental concern alone.

Breaking the ND-GAIN score into its two sub-components reinforces this null result. Readiness gains sit at +0.22 for those who view climate change as a very serious threat and +0.23 for those who do not see it as a threat at all. Vulnerability reductions sit at -0.13 and -0.12 respectively. The differences are negligible in both directions, and what small split there is runs mildly counter to expectation: the climate-concerned aren't reaching for destinations with stronger adaptive capacity than the unconcerned, and the marginal edge they show on lower exposure is too small to carry weight. People who are deeply concerned about climate change are reaching for essentially the same blend of readiness and reduced vulnerability as everyone else.

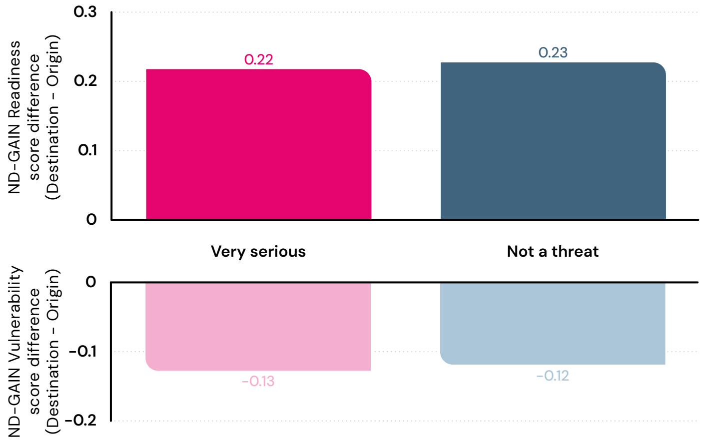
i - (coef = -0.53, p = 0.591)

Chart 11a: Climate concern alone does not translate into more climate-ambitious destination choices



Average difference in ND-GAIN score between respondents' current country and their preferred migration destination, split by level of climate change concern (very serious threat vs. not a threat at all). A higher value indicates aspiration to a more climate-resilient country. Difference between groups is not statistically significant.
Sources: Gallup World Poll (destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (climate concern); ND-GAIN index, University of Notre Dame.

Chart 11b: Readiness and vulnerability gains do not differ across climate concern groups



Average difference in ND-GAIN readiness and vulnerability sub-scores between respondents' current country and their preferred migration destination, split by level of climate change concern.
Sources: Gallup World Poll (destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (climate concern); ND-GAIN index, University of Notre Dame.

5.2 Why financial precarity matters more

Financial resilience tells a strikingly different story. To measure this, we asked respondents how long their household could manage financially without income. Those who said less than a month, the most financially precarious group, show an average ND-GAIN improvement of +19.0 points between their current country and preferred destination. For those who could sustain themselves for a month or more, that figure drops to +16.2 points. The 2.8 point difference is statistically significant[i], meaning we can be confident this is a genuine pattern and not simply the result of chance.

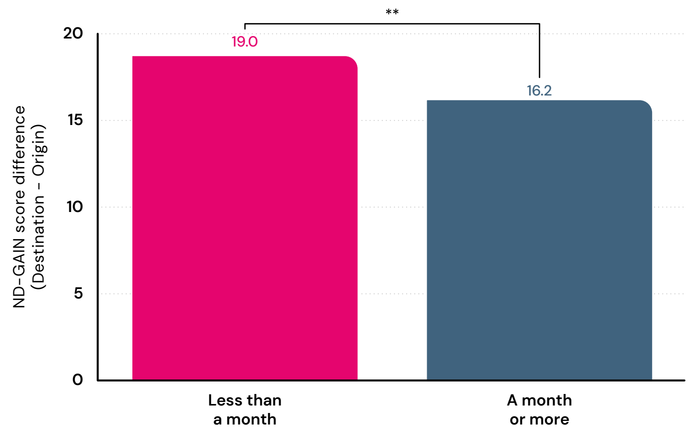
This finding inverts conventional assumptions. One might expect that people with more financial security would have greater freedom to be selective, choosing destinations specifically for their climate resilience. Instead, it is those with the least financial cushion who want to make the biggest leaps toward less climate-vulnerable countries. People who cannot sustain themselves for more than a month without income are consistently setting their sights on destinations that are substantially more climate-prepared than where they currently live.

The most likely explanation is that financial precarity and environmental vulnerability tend to go hand in hand. People with fewer economic resources are more often living in countries with weaker institutions, greater exposure to climate shocks, and less capacity to adapt. For them, migration isn't a choice about lifestyle; it's a structural response to where they live, and the gap they're trying to close is correspondingly large. Those with greater financial resilience, in comparison, may already live in relatively stable environments, giving them the luxury of weighing a broader range of destination factors beyond safety and resilience alone.

The sub-score breakdown shows that this larger ND-GAIN gap is not a one-sided story. The financially precarious aspire to a readiness gain of +0.24 points, compared with +0.21 for the more secure, alongside a vulnerability reduction of -0.14 points compared with -0.12. The differences between groups are modest on each component, but they pull in the same direction, and together they account for the headline gap. People with less financial cushion are not simply chasing wealthier destinations or simply fleeing more exposed ones; they are reaching, in equal measure, for places that are both better equipped to adapt to climate change and less exposed to its effects in the first place.

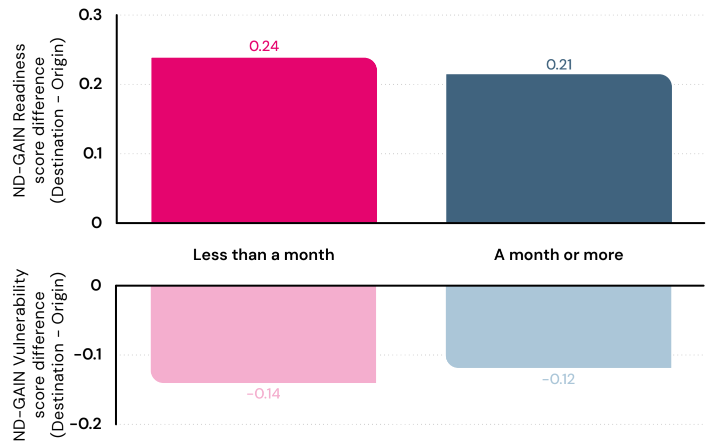
i - (coef = -2.83, p = 0.002)

Chart 12a: The most financially precarious aspire to the largest gains in climate resilience



Average difference in ND-GAIN score between respondents' current country and their preferred migration destination, split by household financial resilience (less than a month vs. a month or more without income). A higher value indicates aspiration to a more climate-resilient country. Difference between groups is statistically significant (p = 0.002).
Sources: Gallup World Poll (destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (financial resilience); ND-GAIN index, University of Notre Dame.

Chart 12b: Both readiness and vulnerability improvements are larger for the financially insecure



Average difference in ND-GAIN readiness and vulnerability sub-scores between respondents' current country and their preferred migration destination, split by household financial resilience.
Sources: Gallup World Poll (destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended (financial resilience); ND-GAIN index, University of Notre Dame.

5.3 Two pressures, one direction

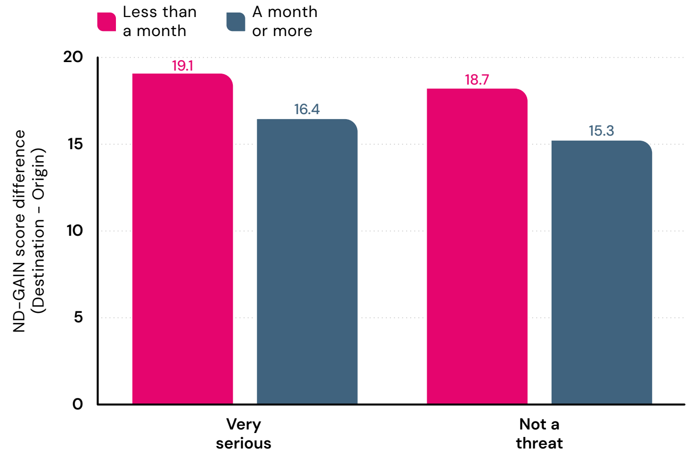
When climate concern and financial resilience are examined together, the picture adds nuance without fundamentally changing the headline. Those facing both pressures, very serious climate concern and less than a month of financial resilience, show the highest average desired ND-GAIN improvement of +19.1 points. Those who are financially secure and unconcerned about climate show the lowest, at just +15.3 points. The two intermediate groups fall in between.

However, the interaction between these two factors is not statistically significant[i]. In statistical terms, an interaction tests whether two factors amplify each other's effects beyond what you would expect from each acting alone. Finding no significant interaction means that climate concern and financial precarity do not appear to compound each other in a synergistic way, essentially each factor operates independently. Financial precarity pushes people toward more climate-resilient destinations, and climate concern adds a small but insignificant nudge in the same direction, but the two together do not produce a stronger combined effect than their individual contributions would suggest.

The sub-score patterns confirm where the work is being done. Readiness gains line up cleanly along the financial-resilience axis: the two precarious groups sit at +0.24 and +0.25 points, the two secure groups at +0.21 and +0.20, with climate concern adding nothing. If anything, the unconcerned-but-precarious group shows the largest readiness ambition of any of the four. Vulnerability reductions tell a similar story, with one small caveat: the doubly-pressured group (climate-concerned and financially precarious) shows the largest reduction at -0.14 points, while the other three groups cluster between -0.11 and -0.12. That hints at a faint additional pull from climate concern on the vulnerability side when it overlaps with precarity; but the gap is small, and the dominant pattern across both sub-components is the same one the regression identifies: financial precarity does the work, climate concern does not.

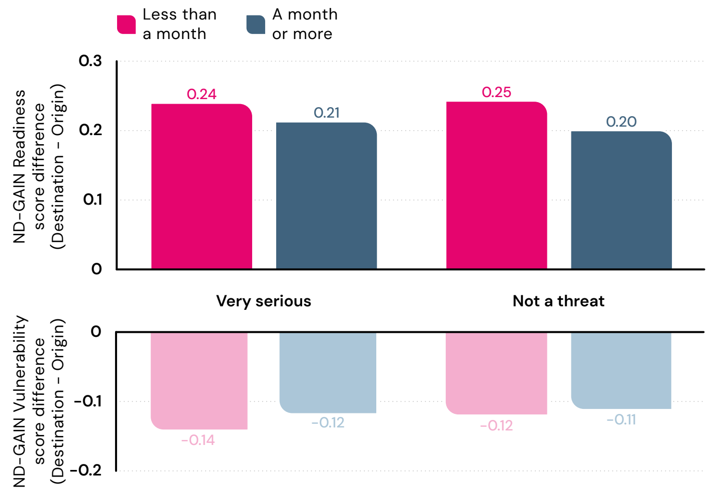
i - (coef = -0.63, p = 0.746)

Chart 13a: Financial precarity, not climate concern, is the dominant driver of climate-resilient destination choice



Average difference in ND-GAIN score between respondents' current country and their preferred migration destination, split into four groups combining climate change concern (very serious threat / not a threat) and financial resilience (less than a month / a month or more without income). A higher value indicates aspiration to a more climate-resilient country. Interaction between climate concern and financial resilience is not statistically significant.
Sources: Gallup World Poll (destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended; ND-GAIN index, University of Notre Dame.

Chart 13b: Financial vulnerability drives climate-readiness ambition

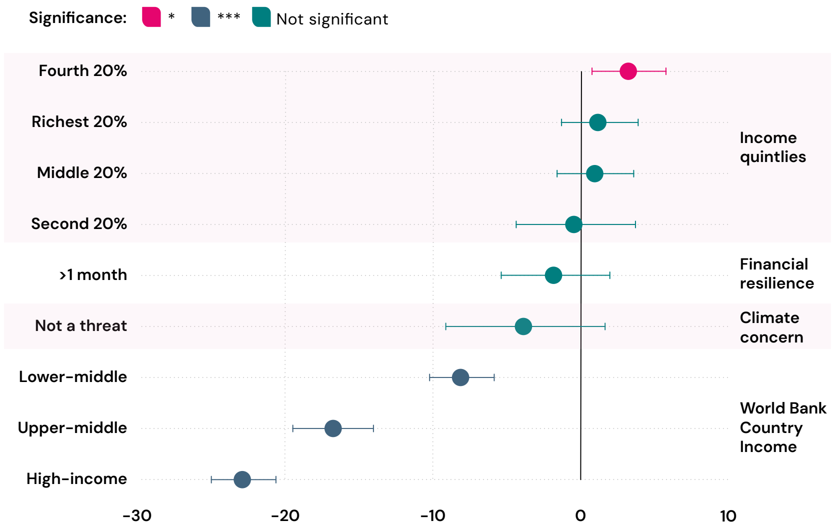


Average difference in ND-GAIN readiness and vulnerability sub-scores between respondents' current country and their preferred migration destination, split into four groups combining climate change concern and financial resilience.
Sources: Gallup World Poll (destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended; ND-GAIN index, University of Notre Dame.

5.4 The structural ceiling: where you start shapes how far you reach

To understand the deeper structural forces at play, we ran a more sophisticated analysis, a survey-weighted regression, that allows us to examine multiple factors simultaneously while holding others constant. In plain terms, this lets us ask: once we know where someone comes from and how wealthy their country is, do climate concern and financial resilience still explain anything? The results reveal that the most powerful predictor in our model is not individual attitude or circumstance, but structural geography.

Chart 14: Origin country income is the strongest predictor of climate-ambitious migration aspirations



Coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from a survey-weighted regression of the ND-GAIN gap between respondents' current country and their preferred migration destination. Predictors include World Bank income group of origin country (reference: low income), personal income quintile within country, climate change concern and household financial resilience.
Sources: Gallup World Poll (destination); World Risk Poll 2021 and 2023, blended; ND-GAIN index, University of Notre Dame; World Bank income classifications.

Personal income quintile, where someone sits in the income distribution of their own country, plays no significant role. Whether a respondent is in the poorest or richest fifth of their national population, their aspiration to reach a more climate-resilient destination is broadly the same once other factors are accounted for. Individual wealth within a country does not meaningfully drive climate-oriented destination ambition.

Origin country income classification is the dominant force in the entire analysis. Using World Bank income group categories[7] (Low, Lower middle, Upper middle, and High income) we find that people from higher income countries consistently aspire to destinations with smaller ND-GAIN improvements relative to their origin. Compared to respondents from low income countries, those from lower middle income countries show a 7.5 point lower ND-GAIN destination gap[i] , those from upper middle income countries show an 11.9 point lower gap[ii], and those from high income countries show a 20.2 point lower gap[iii].

This reflects what we might call a structural ceiling effect. If you already live in a country with a high ND-GAIN score, one with stable institutions, strong adaptive capacity, and lower climate vulnerability, there is simply less room to move up the climate-resilience ladder. Conversely, those in low income countries face the largest gap between where they are and where they want to be, and their preferred destinations reflect that distance.

One particularly notable finding from the regression concerns respondents from upper middle income countries. Among this group, those who perceive climate change as a very serious threat actually aspire to smaller ND-GAIN improvements than those who do not[iv]. This counter-intuitive result may reflect the constrained migration options available to people in these countries. Even if they are acutely aware of climate risk, viable pathways to significantly more climate-resilient destinations may be limited. It may also reflect the fact that upper middle income countries are themselves increasingly climate-capable, reducing the perceived need to reach dramatically further up the resilience scale.

i - ($p < 0.001$)
ii - ($p < 0.001$)
iii - ($p < 0.001$)
iv - (coef = -4.97, $p = 0.005$)

5.5 What this analysis tells us

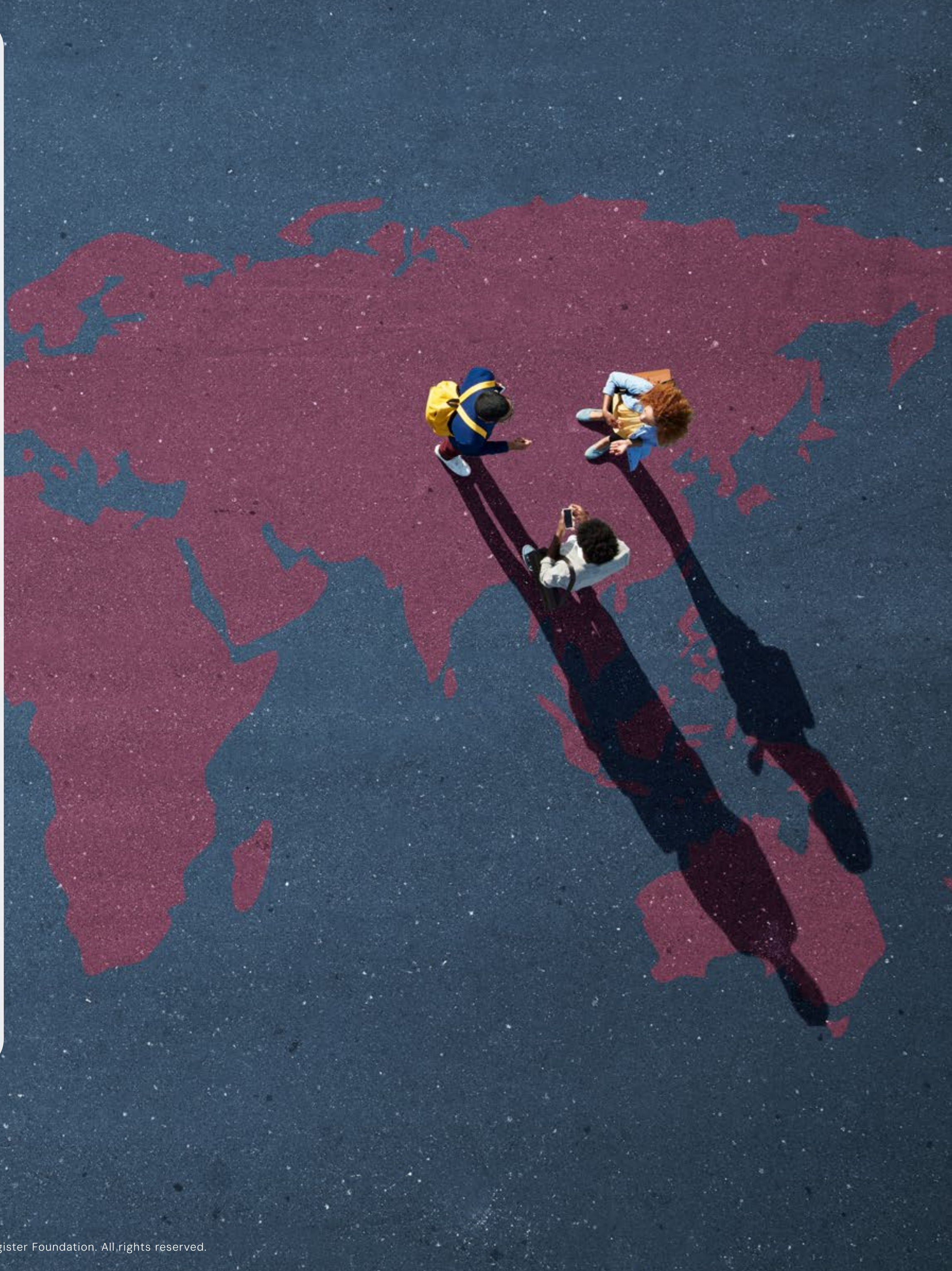
These findings offer a picture of climate-oriented migration aspiration that is more structurally determined than individually motivated. The strongest predictor of how climate-ambitious a person's destination preferences are is not how alarmed they are about climate change, nor how personally wealthy they are. It is where they come from. Origin-country income is the dominant structural force, shaping both the size of the aspiration and the room available for individual risk perceptions to influence it.

Financial precarity adds a meaningful and statistically significant layer on top. Those with the least economic resilience are consistently more ambitious in their destination preferences, likely because their vulnerability is both environmental and economic, financial precarity and exposure to climate shocks tend to cluster in the same places, and because the consequences of staying are more acute. To a significant degree, then, the financial-precarity effect can be read as a within-country echo of the same structural geography that origin-country income captures between countries.

Breaking the ND-GAIN gap into its readiness and vulnerability halves confirms this from a second angle: both halves move in the same direction at once, and both are driven by financial precarity rather than climate concern. The climate-concern null result holds at the level of the two halves as well as the overall score, with no hidden readiness or vulnerability signal that the composite figure is masking.

Climate concern adds surprisingly little explanatory power to the size of climate-resilience ambition once these structural factors are taken into account. This does not mean climate concern is irrelevant to migration, the earlier sections of this report show clearly that it reshapes which destinations people choose, pulling aspiration away from regions perceived as exposed and toward those perceived as safe. But within the set of destinations people consider, climate concern does not push them to reach systematically further up the resilience ladder. The size of the leap is set by where they start; the direction of the leap is shaped by what they fear.

This has profound implications for how we think about climate-related migration policy. The people with the strongest aspirations to move to more climate-resilient destinations are also those least equipped to act on them, living in low-income countries, with limited financial resources and constrained migration pathways. If and how the gap between aspiration and access should be bridged may be one of the defining policy challenges of the coming decades[8,9].



6. Conclusion: Migration aspiration through the lens of risk

This analysis reveals that migration intent is shaped not by a single pressure, but by the layered and compounding interaction of environmental awareness, economic vulnerability, and structural geography. People do not simply decide to move, rather they weigh the risks of staying against the promise of what lies elsewhere; and increasingly, climate resilience is part of that process.

Across every group in our analysis, people consistently aspire to move to countries that are more climate-prepared than their own. This is not a niche preference of the environmentally conscious few. It is a broad and consistent pattern that cuts across income levels, regions, and risk profiles. The ND-GAIN index proves to be a meaningful lens through which to understand these aspirations: higher-scoring destinations are systematically preferred, and the size of that preference varies in revealing ways.

The report's findings can be organised around a single distinction. Two questions about migration aspiration give different answers. The first is which destinations people aspire to. The second is how far up the climate-resilience ladder they aim to climb. Different forces dominate each.

On the question of which destinations, climate concern plays a decisive role. Among those who view climate change as a serious threat, North America is preferred by 27% compared with just 15% of those who are unconcerned, a 12 percentage point difference that is the largest observed for any region. Conversely, regions perceived as more climate-exposed, particularly the Middle East and Southeast Asia, see sharp declines in preference among the climate-concerned. These patterns persist across both financially secure and insecure groups, suggesting that climate awareness consistently redirects aspiration toward perceived safety. Financial resilience adds its own filter on the same question: it shapes which destinations feel within reach, with the more secure reaching for Northern and Western Europe and Australia and New Zealand, and the less secure looking more often to the Middle East and Southern Asia.

On the question of how far, however, climate concern adds almost nothing. The most powerful driver of how large a climate-resilience leap people aspire to is structural rather than attitudinal. Where someone comes from, specifically the income classification of their origin country, determines more about the magnitude of their climate-resilience ambition than their personal income, their level of climate concern, or even their financial resilience. People from low-income countries aspire to destinations with higher ND-GAIN scores than their own, while those from high-income countries show far smaller gaps. This is partly a ceiling effect: those already in resilient countries have less room to move. But it also reflects the compounding disadvantage of living in places where environmental and economic vulnerability reinforce each other.

Financial precarity emerges as the most significant individual-level predictor of overall climate ambition, layered on top of origin-country structure. Those who could not sustain their household for more than a month without income aspire to more climate-resilient destinations than those with greater financial buffers. This challenges the assumption that environmentally motivated migration is primarily a choice of the informed or the affluent. In reality, it is often those with the fewest options who are reaching furthest, not because they have more awareness, but because they have more urgency.

Climate concern gives aspiration its direction, consistently pulling people away from regions seen as exposed and toward those seen as stable and resilient. Structural geography, with origin-country income reinforced by household financial precarity, sets aspiration's scale, determining how dramatic a leap people are reaching for in the first place.

The implications run in two directions. The first concerns the gap between aspiration and access. Those with the strongest and most climate-directed aspirations are also those least equipped to act on them, facing the greatest structural barriers to reaching the destinations they seek. If and how this gap should be bridged, so that more climate-secure destinations are viable options for the most vulnerable, may be one of the defining challenges of the coming decades. The second concerns where the leverage lies. Because the size of climate-migration aspiration is so strongly tied to origin-country conditions, investment in climate resilience in the most vulnerable geographies has the potential to shrink the aspiration gap at its source, so that migration can remain an individual and societal choice, not a climate-enforced necessity[10].

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