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Beyond the American dream: unveiling the complexity of young people's (im)mobility in Governador Valadares, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the often-overlooked phenomenon of immobility within migration studies, focusing on the Governador Valadares Region of Brazil. Despite the region's history of significant outmigration to the United States, there needs to be more investigation into why some young people remain in their communities instead of pursuing the American Dream. Using ethnographic methods, the study surpasses simplistic dichotomies of mobility-immobility, recognizing that decisions to leave or stay are complex and influenced by various interconnected factors. By employing the perspectives of 'linked lives' and 'life-course situatedness', the study provides nuanced insights into how individual choices are affected by familial, social, and economic contexts over time. The findings shed light on the diverse experiences of young people while revealing the carry of involuntary immobility. Furthermore, it contests assumptions that remaining in a particular location signifies immobility or a lack of ambition. It contributes to a more nuanced comprehension of migration agency and well-being, underscoring the multifaceted nature of aspirations and capabilities. The results illuminate the intricate interplay between personal aspirations and the environment in shaping migration decisions, emphasizing the significance of viewing (im)mobility as a relational and temporally situated phenomenon.

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Introduction

In migration studies, there exists a well-recognized phenomenon termed the 'mobility bias', wherein scholarly attention has predominantly gravitated toward understanding the motivations driving migration, while aspects contributing to immobility have often been side-lined (Schewel 2019). The fundamental question arises: Why do people stay put despite the potential advantages they might accrue from migration, especially in peripheral economic regions where the incentives for migration are seemingly more pronounced? This issue becomes even more relevant in high-mobility contexts, such as the Governador Valadares Region of Minas Gerais (MGV) in Brazil. This region, known for its significant and normative international migration among

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young people, serves as a setting that is particularly relevant for examining the complex interplay between the reasons why young people remain and the prevailing migratory culture. The accounts of those who stay assist as a counter-narrative, revealing much about the social, economic, and personal factors that shape mobility.

Scholars have increasingly underscored the significance of delving into why people opt to remain stationary, thereby comprehensively elucidating human mobility patterns (Wyngaarden et al. 2023; Haas 2021; Stockdale, Theunissen, and Haartsen 2018). While immobility could be attributed to factors like resource scarcity, limited freedom, or challenges posed by migration policies (Carling 2002; Haas 2021; Schewel 2019), recent scholarship has shed light on the notion that individuals who opt to stay are not necessarily being 'left behind' (Mata-Codesal 2015), 'stuck', or deemed 'failed migrants' (Hofstede, Salemink, and Haartsen 2022). On the contrary, many individuals who remain in their current locations do so due to active and conscious decisions reflective of a genuine desire to stay rooted (Hofstede, Salemink, and Haartsen 2022; Mata-Codesal 2018; Stockdale, Theunissen, and Haartsen 2018).

Although immobility has gained recognition as a valid research subject, scholars have called for more substantial research. They argue that understanding why people stay may enhance our comprehension of why people leave (Schewel 2015). In this vein, Mata-Codesal (2018, 2) observes that one of the problems with immobility is that 'the label ... is imposed on heterogeneous situations, obscuring the many different ways of staying put and the wide variety of reasons, degrees of (in)voluntariness, and lived experiences of immobility'. Furthermore, current transnational perspectives in migration studies often focus on cultural adaptation in destination countries, neglecting the experiences of those who stay. Few studies delve into understanding the real impacts of different constellations of (im)mobility on youth experiences, including how contemporary processes of youth mobility are shaped by specific places under predominant political and economic regimes (Carling and Collins 2018).

This article contributes to this area of research by examining the practices and experiences of young people from MG, a region historically marked by international emigration to United States of America (U.S). Employing an ethnographic and actor-centred approach, the study aims to grasp immobility as a lived experience (Salazar 2021), considering various factors influencing (im)mobility. The analysis, conducted through in-depth interviews and participant observation, examines several potential reasons for remaining in a place, emphasizing the environment that frequently limits or promotes (im)mobility (Schiller and Salazar 2013) and exploring the diverse dynamics of mobility and immobility manifested in a transnational context (Salazar 2021).

The discovery points to the significance of employing a biographical approach to deepen the aspiration-capability framework, thereby improving our understanding of young people's choices about migration. By incorporating the concepts of 'linked lives' and 'life-course situatedness', this paper reveals new insights into how (im)mobility is influenced by temporally and relationally situated contexts. Moreover, the results refute the assumption that remaining in a place implies immobility or an absence of ambition (Ravn 2022). It provides more evidence for a nuanced understanding of migration agency and well-being, emphasizing that aspirations and capabilities are multifaceted and influenced by 'the environment. Finally, it defends the importance of research that adopts the holistic perspective to fully understand the dynamics of international migration and advance the theoretical debate on immobility.

Transcending dichotomy: conceptual approach to navigating the young people's migration-immobility dynamics

Migration and mobility, while often used interchangeably, are distinct concepts with different historical developments and discussions surrounding them. Migration refers to the contemporary physical movement of individuals across different locations driven by factors like poverty,

employment opportunities, or the desire for a better life. On the other hand, mobility encompasses not only the movement of people but also the flow of material, money, ideas, knowledge, and technologies. It recognizes that desires, obligations, cultural practices, and unforeseen life trajectories influence various forms of movement. Mobility focuses on the interplay between mobility and immobility, considering elements of both in social practices (Mejía and Scapin 2023; Salazar 2021).

Furthermore, the mobility paradigm shifts the emphasis from fixed boundaries to the experiences and meanings associated with crossing them. It looks at the significance of transgressing limits in shaping notions of belonging and non-belonging. Instead of contrasting stability and mobility, it examines the complex interplay of permanence and movement in social practices. This approach highlights that mobility is not solely geographical but also social, exploring the relationships between physical and social mobility. For instance, the narrative of migration as physical mobility is closely linked to the potential for social mobility. This paradigm provides a more nuanced and interconnected understanding of mobility and immobility, acknowledging their multidimensional nature and significance in contemporary societies. Thus, it challenges migration researchers to become increasingly sensitive to differentiated meanings and the power dynamics attached to migration processes, thereby influencing the direction and focus of their research (Schapendonk and Steel 2014).

As a result, in recent years, migration scholars have increasingly explored immobility and its determinants (Carling and Schewel 2018). The aspiration-capability framework (Figure 1), for instance, outlines two key reasons why individuals may choose to remain in their current places of residence, whether at the local, regional, or national level: (1) they may lack the capability to relocate, or (2) they may consciously prefer to stay (or accept staying). Capability constraints can arise from various sources, including political or legal factors like migration controls, economic challenges such as insufficient financial resources, social limitations like a lack of human or social capital, or physical barriers such as border walls and detention centres (Carling 2002). However, merely identifying these constraints does not fully elucidate the distinctions between voluntary and acquiescent immobility, for example. To comprehend these nuances, it is necessary to delve into why certain individuals or households remain in their current locations (Schewel 2019).

Hence, aspirations constitute fertile terrain for understanding the interplay of youth and 'transnational mobility', a term that refers to the movement of individuals or groups across national borders, often involving a change in their social, economic, or cultural status. The term'

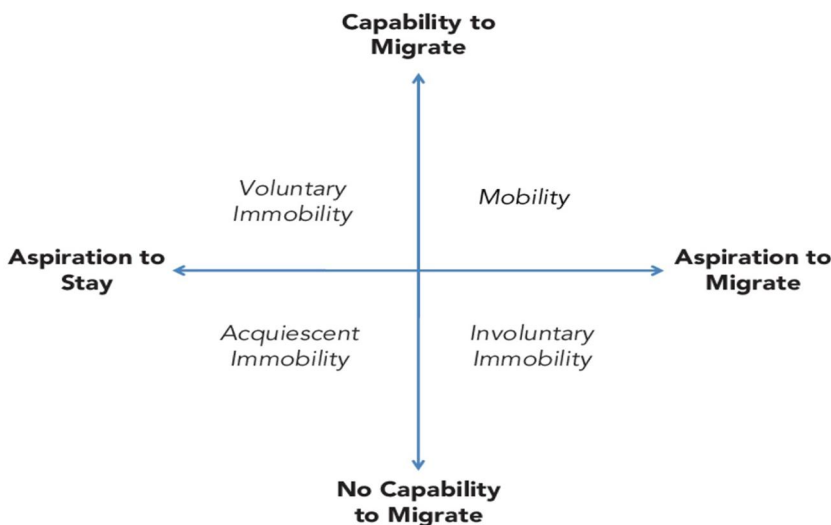


Figure 1. Aspiration-capability framework. Source: Schewel (2019).

aspiration' signifies an orientation toward a desired future, encompassing individual or collective projects, whether immediate or long-term, and involves imaginative, affective, and material dimensions (Huijsmans, Ansell, and Froerer 2021). It is subject to constant revision and often diverges from planned realities. This dynamic nature of aspirations underscores' active engagement, including envisioning possibilities, navigating trajectories, and confronting obstacles. That way, aspirations are deeply embedded in social contexts and shaped by interactions within the fabric of social life (Appadurai 2004).

This broach highlights the importance of the environment and specific encounters in moulding, altering, or constraining aspirations. It aligns with the relational approach, emphasizing the interconnectedness and relational nature of age-based categories, generations, and young people's agency within these frameworks. To elaborate, the relational approach posits that aspirations are not formed in isolation but are influenced by the relationships and interactions within a person's social environment (Huijsmans, Ansell, and Froerer 2021). Hence, in the context of rapid change and uncertainty, caution must be warranted in aligning future orientations with rational choice models that oversimplify the complexities of human agency and societal dynamics (Frye 2012).

Therefore, Cheung Judge, Blazek, and Esson (2020) emphasize the critical role of emotions in understanding young people's mobility experiences, especially regarding their aspirations for the future. Emotions drive their movements and significantly shape their identities, practices, aspirations, and social relationships, particularly within transnational mobilities. It is intertwined with temporal dynamics reflecting young people's attachments to their past, present, and future. Consequently, mobility choices are influenced by intergenerational relationships, a sense of belonging, and emotional ties to communities, places, and families (Waite and Cook 2011). Thus, some studies highlight the intricate intersection of migration and im/mobilities within families (Holdsworth 2013); Schewel and Sonja (2022), who inspected the motivations of young people who prefer to stay put in Ethiopia, India and Vietnam, showed that most youths prefer to stay for family-related reasons. It underscores the fundamentally relational nature of migration, where the lives of individual migrants are deeply intertwined with those of others (Holdsworth 2013; Laoire 2023). On this point, Hjälml (2014, 579) argues that staying 'does not occur in isolation, but it is connected to other life projects and people'.

In this way, this paper explores mobility through the lens of the 'linked lives' concept, which helps in understanding how life trajectories are configured by a person's ties, individual choices, exchanges, obligations, and relationships with family, household, and social networks (Coulter, Van Ham, and Findlay 2016). Additionally, it allows insight into how individual migration experiences often coincide or intersect with the migrations of other family members, giving rise to complex patterns of movement (Williams, Chaban, and Holland 2011). In this regard, Laoire (2023) argues that understanding intergenerational dynamics is crucial for comprehending how family relationships and interactions between generations shape migration patterns and vice versa. Exploring these dynamics allows us to elucidate the transfer of mobility capital and the circulation and evolution of migration narratives and identities across generations within transnational and migrant families. It enables special attention to examining how young people from migrant backgrounds engage with their familial migration histories and legacies (Laoire 2023).

Nevertheless, transnational mobility is more than just relational; it is also marked by disparities within a global context where unequal access to resources perpetuates differential opportunities for movement (Sheller and Urry 2005; Cranston and Duplan, 2023; Esson 2020). However, despite young people having relatively higher access to mobility resources due to their dynamic agency, they still encounter disproportionate scrutiny and constraints on their movement. Hence, an agency-based approach utilitarian perspective can overlook the intricate impacts of migration on this group and their families (Cheung Judge, Blazek, and Esson 2020).

In this regard, researching the agency of international migration through the capability proposed by Amartya Sen (Bonfanti 2014) is crucial. This approach is operationalized through the idea of human capability as individuals' abilities to lead lives they value. It emphasizes the importance of considering people's ability to function and achieve valuable outcomes rather than just their income or resources (Eichsteller 2021). Moreover, it considers various factors influencing people's capabilities, characteristics, social and economic conditions, and opportunities. It allows for overcoming the limitations of neo-classical economic theories, such as a deterministic approach, rationalism, and ontological individualism (Bonfanti 2014). This perspective is valuable for uncovering how young people's agency, individual aspirations, and 'the environment' play essential roles in their mobility decisions and well-being (Bonfanti 2014; Eichsteller 2021).

Thus, in order to consider the interplay between individual experiences and broader societal contexts in the decision-making migration processes of young people, this paper employs the concept of 'life-course situatedness'. This approach allows us to view mobility not as a static concept but as a dynamic phenomenon interlinked with life transitions and the environment (Coulter, Van Ham, and Findlay 2016). It recognizes the mobility of young people as a fluid process shaped by various life stages, contexts, and circumstances (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018). Moreover, it enables the analysis of the specific pathways and patterns of mobility young people encounter, considering how education, employment, family dynamics, social networks, and personal aspirations shape mobility experiences over time (Yoon 2014).

This conceptual framework provides a multifaceted understanding of young people's international immigration. It enriches our comprehension of mobility dynamics by highlighting the relational and evolving nature of their experiences and the diverse factors influencing their (im)mobility trajectories. Furthermore, it significantly advances the debate on capabilities and agency, emphasizing the importance of 'the environment' in shaping migration outcomes. This comprehensive approach provides a lens through which to analyse the complexities of youth mobility, laying the groundwork for more informed research in migration studies. (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018; Eichsteller 2021; Laoire 2023).

The methodological aspects and context of the research and methodological aspects

This paper draws from a wider ethnography project on young Brazilian international emigration from Governador Valadares Region of Minas Gerais (MGV), south-eastern Brazil. The empirical data of this article is based on ten months of fieldwork undertaken between March 2022 and December 2022. An interview guide with a semi-structured format was devised, employing a biographical approach to delve into the preferences and practices of young individuals regarding international migration. To comprehend the perspectives and lived experiences that shape decision-making processes regarding (im)mobility, a phenomenological approach was adopted in the essay design (Wynngaarden et al. 2023). This approach draws from only a few selected interview excerpts to highlight specific topics at the micro-level and introduce them throughout the paper in the form of vignettes. This method of analysing qualitative information proves advantageous in migration studies because, although it primarily centres on the individual, it does not prioritize factors solely at the individual level while disregarding the influence of the environment (Silva 2019). All names used in this paper are pseudonyms. Ethics approval was obtained from Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning at the University of Lisbon

Methodologically, excerpts from 14 interviews with young people between 22 and 29 who were in MGV at the time of the collection were selected (Table 1). Before each interview, the study was explained, and informed consent was obtained from the participant. Research ethics approval was obtained from the University of Lisbon Research Ethics Board. All names used are pseudonyms.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the interviewees.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital status	Occupation	No of children or dependents	Education level
Fábio	26	M	Single	Car Driver	1	Secondary
Gabriel	25	M	Married	Personal Trainer	0	Bachelor
João	27	M	Single	Architect	1	Bachelor
José	29	M	Single	Farmer	2	Bachelor
Júlia	27	F	Married	Speech Therapist	1	Bachelor
Laura	24	F	Single	Beautician	0	Secondary
Lena	30	F	Single	Housekeeper	0	Secondary
Maria	28	F	Single	Dentist	1	Secondary
Nanda	24	F	Single	Car Driver	0	Bachelor
Paula	25	F	Single	Beautician	0	Secondary
Paulo	27	M	Single	Tradesman	2	Secondary
Pedro	26	M	Married	Electrician	0	Secondary
Rafael	22	M	Married	Bricklayer	1	Secondary
Tulio	25	M	Single	Bank staff	0	Bachelor

These young people had one or more family members residing in the United States. During the interview, they were not engaged in studying but were occupied with employment. Their incomes range from 4 to 10 minimum wages. Thus, according to Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE n.d.), which employs the Criterion by Minimum Wage Ranges method to classify classes based on income brackets, these young people belong to Class C. However, various authors and institutions have described social classes in Brazil, with no single conception prevailing. Hence, for this work, the notion of Souza's class division, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, is more beneficial as it is not based on income levels or the Marxist-Leninist conception but on different sociability. Each social class has its method of raising and socializing children, and these differences generate social classes and their respective mentalities and worldviews. From this approach, these young people belong to the 'fighters' class', also called the semi-skilled working class.

According to Souza (2017), the 'fighters' class' is highly heterogeneous; it ranges from all forms of precarious work to small entrepreneurs and comprises 70% of the Brazilian population. It refers to a social group that struggles from poverty and faces significant challenges and hardships in Brazilian society. The members are characterized by their lack of economic and cultural capital and the absence of essential skills necessary for success in the social dynamics shaped by capitalist exchanges and bureaucratic state structures. They are depicted as trapped between the upper and lower classes and face profound challenges regarding social recognition, economic opportunities, and cultural capital (Gomes 2019). The concept reflects the ambiguities and struggles of their societal position, shedding light on the inequality in Brazil and the complexities of social stratification (Souza 2017; Gomes 2019).

Governador valadares region of Brazil: a hotspot for rethinking international emigration and (im)mobility

The history of emigration from MGv is deeply rooted, beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s as a response to economic challenges. This trend has continued and grown, with a notable portion of the region's young and economically active population choosing to migrate, often through dangerous routes across the Mexico-United States border (Assis and Siqueira 2009). As a result, MGv has become known as the Brazilian capital of emigration, with significant migration flows to the US, Portugal, and other European countries. Research from 1997 showed that 18% of households in the region had at least one international migrant, which had risen to 46% by 2007. In 2010, the IBGE identified MGv and its surrounding area as the region of Brazil with the highest number of emigrants in the U.S. (Figures 2 and 3).

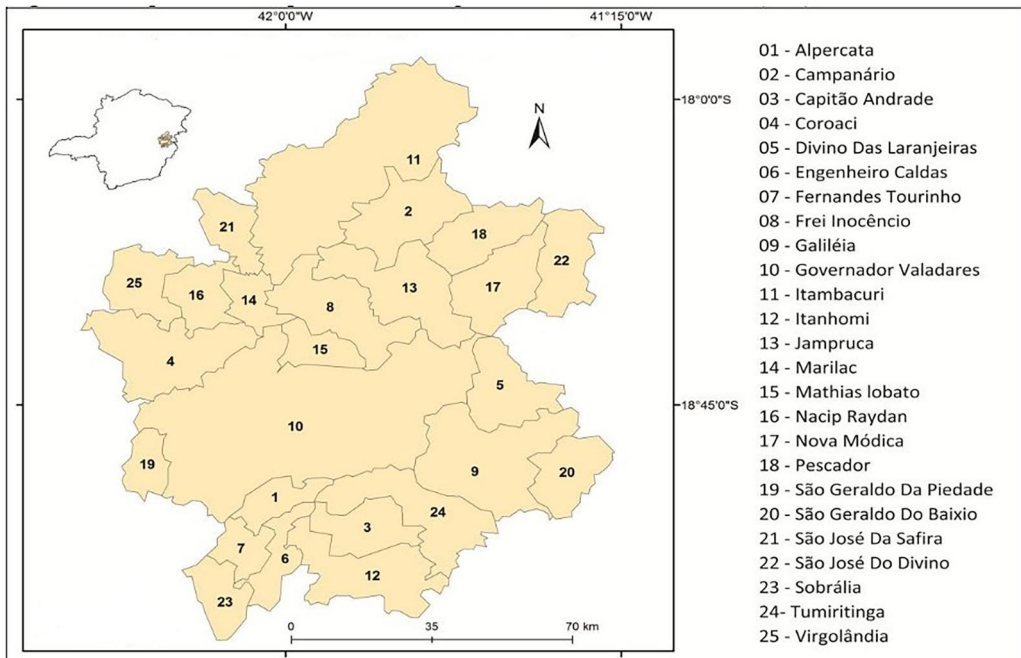


Figure 2. Map of the micro-region of Governador Valadares. *Source:* Cunha, de Araújo Gomes, and Fernandes (2017). Published with permission.

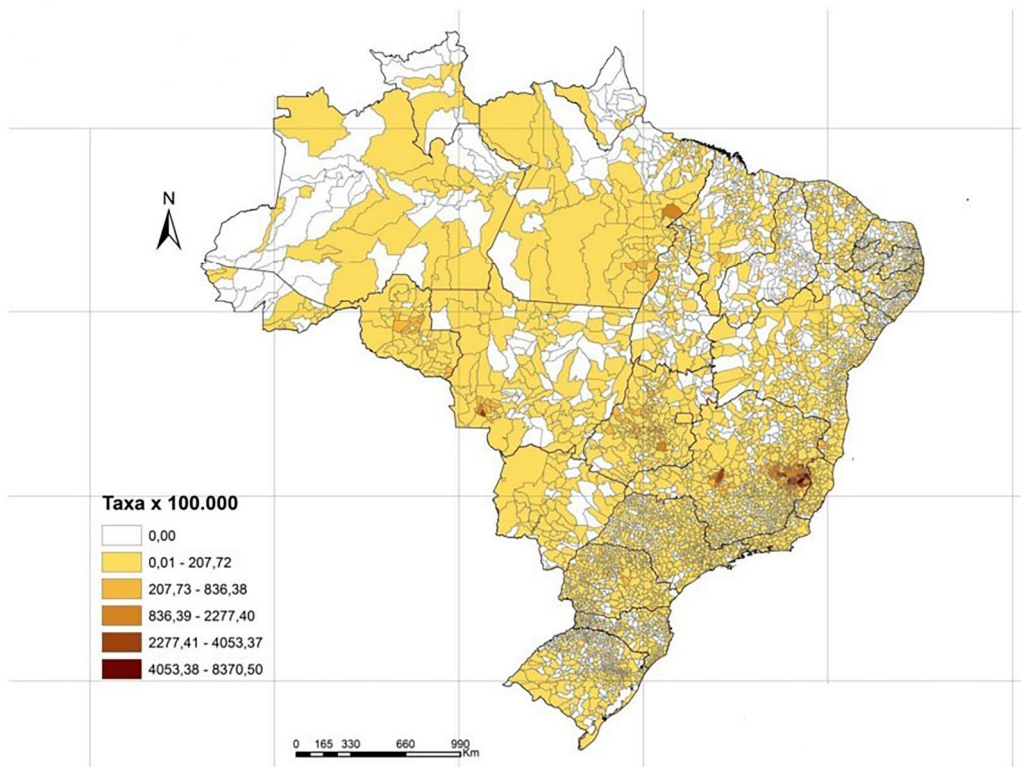


Figure 3. Emigration rate to the USA by county. *Source:* Prepared by Rocha A. H. A. Puc/Minas PPGG - Gedep/IBGE (2010) in Sousa et al. (2014). Published with permission.

For that reason, several studies have focused on MGTV to operationalise concepts such as ‘migratory culture’ or ‘migratory networks’ (Assis and Siqueira 2009). In MGTV, the influence of a ‘migration culture’ is evident in the social representations formed through daily interactions among community members, migrants, non-migrants, nationals, and foreigners. These representations often include elements and symbols associated with the American way of life. In regions where migration is seen as an economically viable and preferable option, this culture can significantly shape young people’s values, attitudes, and lifestyles. In MGTV, emigration is widely seen as a pathway to personal success, a belief that has become an implicitly accepted norm among a significant portion of the population. According to Reis and Renó Machado (2010), the international movement in this region is so ingrained that the prospect of transnational youth mobility has become normative, with young people expecting to live and work in a foreign country at some point in their lives.

The formation of a collective perception valuing expectations and life opportunities in American society has been facilitated by social networks established by various actors, including individuals, families, organizations, and the community, in both countries of origin and destination (Assis and Siqueira 2009; Margolis 1993). In MGTV, personal networks and direct access to mechanisms facilitating the migration project are evident. Fusco (2005) contends that the ‘cordial capital’ formed by ties of kinship, friendship, reciprocity, and solidarity helps to elucidate the concentration of immigrants from MGTV in regions like Boston. However, these networks have also created a well-organized ‘illegal migration industry’ (Fazito and Soares, 2015). Thus, the social perception of international migration and the associated opportunities for a desirable way of life have gradually disseminated to neighbouring municipalities over time (Figure 4).

Migration aspirations and capabilities: the narratives of young about U.S migration

In Valadólares¹ it is normal for people to leave quietly. I know various cases of youth who have gone to the United States. For example, I saw my neighbour in the street last week on Monday. On Thursday, on Facebook, I saw he was already living in the US. Sometimes I do not see someone I know for a week, and when I ask about them, they tell me they have gone to “America”. Some of my friends who have moved to the US in the last few months did it. He also adds: “It’s easy for a young person from here to get there if he wants to. It’s possible to pay for the trip later, when you get there and start working, you just need one contact and here everyone knows someone who takes them. (Fábio, 2022)



Figure 4. Common image in MGTV cities and countryside. Source: Own photographs (2022).

Fábio's narrative underscores the normalization of the migration phenomenon to the U.S. within the community, driven by economic motivations and a shared cultural perception of better opportunities in this country. Fábio recounts personal experiences of encountering neighbours who suddenly and quietly depart without attracting much attention and emphasizes the relative ease with which individuals from MGTV engage in this migration, particularly noting the successful movement of numerous young people in recent months. He attributed this 'ease' of international migration to the presence of supportive contacts who aid in the process, allowing for financial assistance during the trip and immediate employment upon arrival. Their observation highlights how the migratory culture in MGTV is fuelled by personal networks and the illegal migration industry, which has developed over time to facilitate and organize these population movements (Sousa and Fazito 2017). Similarly, it discloses MGTV as a pertinent setting for examining the common dichotomous picture of mobility-immobility in migrant studies. The context of MGTV allows for reflection on young people's migration decision-making, considering the environment, family dynamics, emotions, cultural norms, life course, and influences that shape their lives. Consequently, it permits the revelation of how desires, aspirations, and outcomes related to migration could vary significantly (Rodríguez-Pena 2023).

To leave or to stay? Between voluntary and involuntary immobility

Although Fábio recognizes the normality of this practice, he and three young interviewees say they intend to refrain from participating in this movement. Julia shares a similar perspective to Fábio, and their narratives underscore the significance of different life stages in shaping aspirations and capabilities for migration (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018; Yoon 2014). Fábio emphasizes the need to explore all local opportunities before considering migration. At the same time, Júlia acknowledges that opportunities in her country have enabled her to build a professional career and continue her studies. Their stories challenge the linear idea that migrating to another country is always the best option for a better life, highlighting that immobility can offer meaningful opportunities to build a comfortable and fulfilling life, particularly when combined with local resources and family and social ties (Mata-Codesal 2020). In this regard, the availability of opportunities, such as educational and work-related opportunities, plays a significant role in shaping these young people's sense of belonging and their decision to stay (Ravn 2022). Let's see what they said:

I do not have that "American dream" that many here hold. It does not make sense for me to leave a place where I belong to go to a place that is not mine to have a better life. It does not make sense to leave my country to go to a place that is harsh on people just to make money. Before thinking about leaving the country, I believe it is necessary to exhaust all chance locally. In Brazil, you also have the opportunity to have a better life. For example, I have a job and an economically satisfying life, and I am close to my family. I do not believe there are better opportunities for me outside. (Fábio, 2022)

I thought about going to the US when I was about eighteen, but then I thought better of it and gave up because I realised that I have more significant opportunities to have a life that makes sense living in my country, close to my family and friends. I investigated the job market for immigrants there and saw that most of the jobs were insecure. My job here allowed me to continue my studies and build a professional career in Brazil. I am taking advantage of the opportunities in my country to create a comfortable life. (Júlia, 2022)

These narratives shed light on competing views of what constitutes a fulfilling life and how young people navigate the environment to pursue well-being (Bonfanti 2014; Eichsteller 2021). For Fábio and Julia, leaving their homeland for economic gain in a foreign country does not align with their conception of a 'good life'. Thus, their narratives directly challenge the notion that immobility necessarily indicates a lack of aspiration or agency (Ravn 2022). Their stories demonstrate that remaining in one's home country can be a deliberate and empowered decision based on a comprehensive evaluation of 'the environment' and priorities. Rather than being passive or lacking in ambition, the immobility of these young people reflects a proactive choice to leverage local

resources, familial connections, and personal fulfilment over pursuing opportunities abroad (Hofstede, Salemink, and Haartsen 2022). It shows the importance of an agency-based approach to understanding migration decisions, rooted in the concept of human capability and well-being.

Likewise, discourses provided by Gabriel and Laura problematize simplistic ideas of migration versus immobility. While migration is often portrayed as a quest for opportunities and improved lives, their accounts shed light on migration's complexities and physical and emotional costs (Yoon 2014). They also emphasize the value of stability in their lives. Therefore, they admit that their aspirations diverge from many of their peers in MGV who aspire to international migration, and they recognize they have the most significant capacity to migrate among their peers, given Gabriel's possession of a tourist visa to the US and Laura's eligibility for US citizenship through her father. Despite these, they have chosen not to leave, understanding the far-reaching impacts that international migration can have on their overall well-being. They count:

I can go there (US) more "easily" than those who don't have a visa, but I can not remain living there quietly, as many of my peers believe. They do not understand why I am not going to America since I have a visa. Life here isn't easy at all, but it is your place. Here you can come and go, there you have to live like an animal, closed. There is no respect for you, and you are there irregularly. They can do whatever they want to you. They pay well but maltreat you, so the person only works and does not do other things because he is afraid of everything. Over time, this messes with your head when you see you are already sick, with depression and other things. My uncles who are there talk about the wrong side of living in another country. I know many people who come back, they come back old and sick and spend all their money on doctors and medicine. I don't want to sell my health as they did. (Gabriel, 2022)

I moved to Victoria. I lived there for two years. It was not perfect, and I wouldn't say I liked the experience of living in a big place. You do not know anyone, and people are indifferent. I found it very difficult to live. You feel emptiness and loneliness. (...) Moving here is difficult; imagine going to another country. (...) I see this emptiness in my relatives who live outside Brazil. They talk about how hard it is to be away. They say they work a lot, do not have time, and are always tired. I do not want to sell my health. Many are doing well financially but very poorly regarding physical and mental health. Why go out and die working? I don't want this for my life. (Laura, 2022)

These examples elucidate how the migration experiences within migrant families intricately shape the mobility decisions of young individuals (Laoire 2023). In this regard, Schmalzbauer (2008) demonstrated that as migrants often choose not to share their difficulties with their families, young people in this family tend to adopt middle-class educational, consumption, and employment goals shaped by material resources and facilitate opportunities by remittances. As a result, these young people exhibit ambition and optimism, firmly believing in the potential of hard work to achieve their aspirations. However, young people's narratives from MGV reveal a contrasting perspective by highlighting their knowledge of how their families experience the harsh and often inhumane reality of living in the United States.

Consequently, as these young people navigate their mobility trajectories, they are influenced by previous generations' stories, challenges, and aspirations. The familial migration legacies serve as both a guide and a reflection, impacting how they perceive opportunities, risks, and belonging in the context of migration (Laoire 2023). In this sense, both young note the adverse health effects of international migration and question the value of sacrificing health and well-being for financial success. Thus, their speeches offer a critical and realistic view of the complexities of migration and its impact, contrasting with the optimistic narrative of aspirations and achievements through migration (Mata-Codesal 2020). Furthermore, the narratives of these young individuals, who can be characterized as voluntarily immobile, challenge the prevailing scarcity narratives that drive emigration among their peers. They position themselves as active agents in making decisions regarding their immobility decisions. They stated:

People believe they must leave here to have things like a house or a car. The people believe in America; you will live "dreams." But, you can work here as much as possible and achieve your stuff. That is what I am doing: working and investing in my future here to fulfill my dreams. (Laura, 2022)

Here in the region, they have this belief... this mania... of talking about going outside Brazil because there is nothing here. It is not valid. If you want, you can have a quiet life here. I see that I have what my cousins have there, like a nice car. Here, if you work, you can buy it too. (Fábio, 2022)

The narratives above depict young people's varying perceptions of migration, well-being, and the complex interplay between aspirations and capabilities. While some prioritize stability and opportunity in their home countries, rejecting the allure of international migration, others express concerns about the adverse effects and sacrifices associated with moving abroad (Eichsteller 2021). Their stories underscore the significance of recognizing individuals' agency and the diverse factors influencing migration decisions, challenging simplistic dichotomies between mobility and immobility (Cheung Judge, Blazek, and Esson 2020). Additionally, their critiques of prevailing narratives about migration reveal the importance of 'the environment' and debunk the myth that international migration is the only way to a better life (Mata-Codesal 2020).

Therefore, the decision to stay can be just as strategic and dynamic as the decision to migrate, influenced by considerations of long-term well-being, stability, and the feasibility of achieving aspirations within the local context. Hence, the same underlying dynamics drive voluntary and involuntary immobility. Factors such as investments, temporal considerations, family ties, and agencies come into play. The young people's decisions, whether to stay or migrate, are influenced by the environment, their agency, and the degree to which they feel empowered to shape their futures. The following narratives of young people who want to migrate show the side of involuntary immobility, revealing the complex interplay between individual aspirations and the environment (Carling and Schewel 2018). Their stories provide insight into the strategies and challenges young people from the RGV face in achieving US migration. The first accounts of Nanda and Paulo underscore the privileged position of some young people in terms of accessing visas, primarily through familial connections, government employment, and entry into university programs (Canston and Duplan 2023). Let see:

I tried it once, two years ago, but it did not work. But now I will do it differently; I will do it as one of the guys in the group (WhatsApp) did. He opened a MEI (micro company) for a year (I already did this) and applied for a visa with the whole family. (...) Their parents, like mine, are government workers, which can help us; we are asked for a visa to go on vacation/visit the US as a family. The group (WhatsApp) still says it is easier for us here at the MGV to get a visa at the Consulate in Recife instead of Rio de Janeiro because we are less targeted there. We are thinking of trying there (Recife). (Nanda, 2022)

I am thinking about a way to get a visa to move. Some people in the group (WhatsApp) said the best thing is for me to travel to other countries first. I am going to Portugal for a few days, then to Spain, and when I have some stamps from different countries, I will ask for an American visa. However, they also say that some young people get a visa when they enrol in a university to do a master's degree. I still doubt what I will do, but I have already saved up to try to move. If I cannot go there, I may go to Portugal. (Paulo, 2022)

These explanations highlight how the local WhatsApp groups in MGV facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration among youths in MGV, aiding in their understanding of procedures, requirements, and possibilities for getting a visa. Thus, digital social networks emerge as a contemporary space where Brazilian culture's cordial capital that values interpersonal relationships and sociability finds modern parallels (Fusco 2005). However, though WhatsApp groups provide access to information and mutual support, these young people still face complexities and obstacles when seeking international migration opportunities (Cheung Judge, Blazek, and Esson 2020). Still, these examples demonstrate how young people explore various strategies to realize migration. It includes utilizing both financial and social assets, indicating that the ability to move (mobility) is associated with one's social status and the resources at their disposal (Carling and Schewel 2018). It underscores the substantial financial investments necessary to navigate the migration process effectively. These investments encompass various expenses such as visa fees, transportation costs, legal fees, and potentially bribes or other informal payments, particularly in the case of irregular migration routes.

Let's examine the cases of Lena, Rafael, and Tulio, who are different from previous youths who argued that they can not obtain a US visa to enter the country as regular tourists and that the only way to migrate is by crossing the Mexican border irregularly.

I will try to cross again for the fifth time. It is not easy, and I know better than anyone. But it looks like I will be able to go again (...) I do not pay anything; I procure about 3 or 4 people who want to go and have money to pay my friend, the coyote. I make a bridge between them so that my trip is free. (...) I am talking to a family of three adults and three children who want to move to the US, and they already have almost all the money (or guarantees they pay) (Lena, 2022)

Lena's story sheds light on the challenges and risks associated with irregular migration. The reliance on a 'coyote' or smuggler demonstrates the lengths to which an individual may bypass legal barriers to mobility. Lena's role as a facilitator highlights the interconnected networks and relationships that facilitate migration in MGV, often at significant personal risk (Esson 2020). Meanwhile, the narrative below of Tulio unveils the exploitative nature of some mobility schemes, where individuals exploit legal holes to facilitate migration in MGV. Furthermore, his speech shows how family relationships outline migration patterns (Laoire 2023). Tulio's reliance on his brother's suggestion and the experiences of others within his social network illustrate how migration narratives and strategies are circulated and evolve in MGV.

My brother went with the family a year ago in the "cai-cai" scheme². He (my brother) suggested I find a woman with a child who wants to go to the US. I will pay for their trip and put the child in my name like I was the child's father. A colleague of my brother moved there in this scheme. (Tulio, 2022)

Likewise, Rafael's narrative encapsulates the intricate interplay between aspirations for mobility, financial constraints, and social support networks (Carling 2002). His longstanding desire to live in the U.S. since childhood reflects a common among the young people in MGV aspiration for a better life often associated with migration to the U.S. (Margolis 1993; Assis and Siqueira 2009). The emergence of a baby prompts a reassessment of migration prospects within Rafael's family, particularly considering the support offered by relatives abroad. This situation exemplifies the importance of considering mobile transitions to explore the intersections between geographical mobility and the life transitions that young people experience (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018).

I have dreamt of living in the U.S. since I was little. I never got a chance to do that. It is expensive, you know? I have never been able to get this money before. You earn little, and life is tough here. My wife is feeling it now that we have a baby. Each doctor's appointment costs a lot, and we must leave it there. Before the baby, she never talked seriously about going there, but now she started to think better about it. She has relatives there who have offered us financial help to do this. They are always telling her to go and that they will help. (...) She, like me, sees how our families' lives are better there. So why stay? I have been talking a lot with her, and I always say that the best thing we can do for our family is to go to the U.S. We have to take the chance of cai-cai. (Rafael, 2022)

Thus, Rafael's concerns about your family's well-being and your hopes and fears about the future are fundamental aspects of his journey. It exemplifies the importance of an emotionally sensitive approach to understanding young people's migration experiences (Cheung Judge, Blazek, and Esson 2020). Furthermore, it highlights the influence of social networks and familial ties in shaping migration decisions as individuals navigate the complexities of aspiration and capability (Coulter, Van Ham, and Findlay 2016). However, despite the allure of migration, this narrative underscore the challenges inherent in realizing migration intentions, notably the transition from aspiration to action and the significance of 'the environment' in facilitating actual migration experiences (Carling and Schewel 2018).

These five cases of involuntary immobility underscore the pivotal role of agency in navigating the environmental constraints inherent in context. Their decision to pursue migration reflects a deliberate exercise of agency. It emphasizes the need to transcend simplistic dichotomies between individual agency and environment. As Carling and Schewel (2018) argue, understanding migration requires recognizing the intertwined nature of agency and structure, where each

shape and influences the other in a dynamic process of adaptation and decision-making. Thus, these narratives illustrate how individuals negotiate their aspirations within the structural realities of migration, emphasizing the nuanced interplay between agency and the forces of the environment in shaping migration trajectories.

However, the succeeding narratives shed light on the intricate nature of migration decisions, revealing that individual aspirations or the environment do not solely determine them. Instead, they reflect a nuanced interplay between personal aspirations and familial ties, and socio-economic factors (Haug 2008). Unlike previous interviewees, Paula and João express uncertainty about their desire to leave or stay. Their narratives illustrate the complex interplay between family obligations and a sense of duty, revealing how the linked lives influence migration decisions (Williams, Chaban, and Holland 2011). Thus, the duty to stay emerges as a compelling factor shaping their decision to remain in MG. This feeling of duty cannot be easily categorized as voluntary, as it arises from a sense of obligation or 'obedience'. Carling and Schewel (2018) argue that commitments like these can hinder migration and confuse the distinction between aspirations to stay and constraints on the ability to move. They said:

I am the only one living here. All eight of my brothers have left—two live in Portugal, and the others in the US. I have never considered the possibility of leaving. It is as if I had my duty to stay. I am the youngest. I do not have much choice. They left, and I, as the youngest, stayed behind. They always said you stay there taking care of the mother for us and always helped us have an organized and financially peaceful life here. I do not dare to leave my mother alone, and I know my brothers are calm there because I am here. (João, 2022)

My older brother went to the US, and I had no choice between staying or leaving. He had the right to leave, and I was obligated to remain because someone needed to be here to care for our older parents. Of course, this is unclear, but my parents always play: You will never leave us here alone, right? Like I must care for them. And this sense of duty does not allow me to think about my future in another country or far from my parents. (Paula, 2022)

Moving across (im)mobility categories

The stories of three other young people illustrate the importance of understanding the different life trajectories in studies of international migration and (im)mobility (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018; Yoon 2014). It highlights that migration decisions are not static but shaped by an ever-evolving series of influences and experiences. In this concern, the Pedro and Maria narrative reveals how, after attempting to pursue the 'American dream' and returning to Brazil, they went through a reflective and adaptive process evaluating their aspirations in light of the realities of their environment (Schewel 2015). Their case is as follows:

I have always wanted to go there (US), but it did not work out. (...) After being deported, I decided to try again, but it takes work. It is expensive financially and psychologically. (...) I realized that the best was thinking about my future here and not there. I am engaging with my goals here, so I took a technical electrician course and invested in this area of expertise. I have had my company for almost three years, and it is growing daily. I chose a good market niche here in the region: construction. It is good because migrants from there (the US) invest a lot here and because there is a lack of specialized labor here. So, I am well here, have a stable life, and do not feel like leaving here anymore. (Pedro, 2022)

I had just finished university when I decided to go to the US to try to live the "American dream", but it did not last long. (...) When I was on the flight back to Brazil, I thought about returning to the US. I did like to live there. But when I arrived at MG, I thought about it better. I started to "weigh" all the good things I had there and all the constraints, too. You Know? Crossing the border was a lot of effort, fearing being arrested and sent back without anything. I preferred to invest effort in the future here, with the help of my relatives from there. I went to college for a second time. I graduated in Dentistry a year ago. I am building my things here and do not think about leaving anymore. My dreams are built and made here. (Maria, 2022)

In both narratives, it is possible to see how these young people are getting along with the results of the constraint and transiting from involuntary immobility to acquiescent immobility (Schewel 2015). Pedro's journey exemplifies the capacity for change inherent in seizing local

opportunities. Likewise, Maria's story shows how young people reassess personal aspirations in the context of practical realities and familial. Her choice to pursue education and establish herself locally highlights the intricate interplay between migration choices and the support networks that shape individual paths (Huijsmans, Ansell, and Froerer 2021). These narratives reveal how migration and staying put relate to individuals' conceptions of a worthwhile life (Bonfanti 2014). It also shows the interaction between aspirations and abilities, showing how the perception of the feasibility of migrating or staying affects the development of aspirations.

In this regard, Mata-Codesal (2020) argues that migration and immobility are social constructions and that notions of a 'good life' vary throughout the life cycle and are heavily influenced by context. It reinforces that two-step models sometimes obscure this aspect by separating decisions of immobility or mobility from broader livelihood frames and strategies. Thus, these accounts reveal the importance of considering not only migration or staying put but also the specific circumstances in which these choices are made (Eichsteller 2021). Let's look at the case of José, who, after living eight years in the US carrying false documents, decided to go back to live in MGTV to wait for his American Green Card application process that he had applied for through his sister. Although the process could take a few years, he is willing to wait for it. He explains:

I was uncomfortable there using cold documents, so I decided to go back to the MGTV right after my sister got her papers, and then do the right thing. I knew this could take up to ten years. But waiting here for it was my best path I had because I could work my land and help my old parents. In addition, every month I receive a salary from the US, because before I returned to the MGTV, I lent money to my sister and my brother-in-law for them to invest in a rental property recovery business, and I became their partner in this business. All this helped me decide to come back and stay here while I wait for the green card process that my sister will give me so that I can return to the US and be able to move there on a regular basis. And that's why I'm staying here, waiting to return to the US, through the front door and not jumping over a wall. (José, 2022)

These narratives offer a view of the complexity of young people's mobility, highlighting the evolutionary dynamics of this phenomenon and its interconnection with life transitions, agency, and the environment (Bonfanti 2014). It shows how young people exercise agency, reflecting their capacity to navigate challenges and make significant life choices despite facing various constraints and challenges. In this regard, the individual perceptions of time play a fundamental role in how these young people assess their desires and capabilities for migration. The decision to stay is mainly borne out of subjective views of their ideal future selves. However, it also covers current and past views of circumstances (Huijsmans, Ansell, and Froerer 2021). Thus, these narratives show that abilities and aspirations do not exist in a dichotomies state; instead, they span a spectrum, and their manifestation is contingent upon the circumstances and contexts in which individuals aim to migrate (Rodríguez-Pena 2023). These stories stress the necessity of factoring in a myriad of elements, such as personal and family contexts, the life course, and environmental influences, when analysing decision-making processes associated with migration and immobility (Rodríguez-Pena 2023). That exemplifies the importance of moving beyond deterministic frameworks and adopting a comprehensive perspective of young people's migration on agency and well-being (Mata-Codesal 2020; Eichsteller 2021).

Discussion and conclusions

This paper responds to calls to place (im)mobility at the centre of research (Mata-Codesal 2018; Schewel 2019), contributing to demonstrate it is essential to discover the desires and capabilities of the mobility of people to understand why so many people do not migrate and also to debunk the static notions of migration (Schapendonk and Steel 2014). In this regard, the aspiration-capability framework introduces an opportunity to understand power differentiations in (im)mobility experiences. This paper, nevertheless, illustrates the significance of extending beyond the current framework by integrating the concept of 'linked lives' with the 'life-course situatedness' perspective. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay

between individual relationships and life phases and their influence on young people's actual migration or (im)mobility outcomes. In this regard, the narratives provided offer insights into the diverse and intricate aspects of the decision-making process regarding the migration of young people in MGV. They challenge the oversimplified idea of the 'American Dream', emphasizing how the concept of a good life is like a tapestry woven from the varying threads of the environment in which young people with different capacities find themselves. Thus, these accounts draw attention to the intricate relationship between aspirations, capabilities, and the environment.

The study contends that the linked lives and 'life-course situatedness' approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the meanings and consequences associated with experiencing (im)mobility (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018; Coulter, Van Ham, and Findlay 2016). This approach supports an understanding of the influence of the different variables in the decision-making of young people (im)mobility, thus granting 'more holistic apprehensions of the factors that are important to people when they decide to migrate or to stay' (Schewel and Sonja 2022, 18). Although the narratives only provided snapshots of young people's lives, this approach yielded valuable insights to help with problematizing dichotomies—mobility and immobility (Salazar 2021). It also added nuance to conceptualizations of classified typologies of mobile/immobile (Harris and Raffaetà 2021). This approach also allowed us to link the empirical study of mobility more closely to pertinent theory.

The stories demonstrated that for these young people from MGV, leaving or staying entails different reasons, meanings, and motivations. They also revealed how, inside a 'field of possibilities', they make decisions over time and employ their capabilities, looking for alternative routes and destinations or adjusting the desirable conditions for (im)mobility (Silva 2019). In other words, the narratives evidenced ways that young people from MGV exercised agency in practicing (im)mobility and revealed how they engage to some extent in the advantages of movements and global flows even when mobility opportunities and plans are rerouted and disrupted and when, for negative and positive reasons, they stay in place (Harris ad Raffaetà 2021). In this way, the data suggest the need to investigate not only young people's aspirations and opportunities for mobility, which might be wasted or enabled but also their ability to 'catch the wind' to leave or remain in place, depending on how the environment supports their capacities and hopes (Bonfanti 2014; Eichsteller 2021).

Apart from that, the examples of involuntary immobility of some young people from MGV allow opposing the notion that mobility is the motif of modernity. The narratives illuminated the complex capability constraints potential migrants face, revealing how those inequalities in access to and control over mobility are key features of globalization (Schewel 2019). Providing in-depth insights into how the desire/capability of immobility of these young people are blocked, produced, facilitated, and slowed down, the paper demonstrated that a thorough analysis of migrants' (im)mobilities supports us to uncover the spatial frictions, the emotions, and embodied efforts that are inherent aspects of transnational engagements (Schapendonk and Steel 2014). However, a significant limitation in this analysis is that we are unable to examine whether respondents who are in the voluntary immobility category have a realistic opportunity to migrate internationally and how lacking the ability to migrate might contribute to adaptive preferences (Debray, 2022)

Nevertheless, the study makes important contributions to addressing the 'mobility bias' in migration research, showing immobility is, in fact, a research category that is as complex as the category of mobility, and there is room for increasing and improving studies on human mobility (Mata-Codesal 2015). In this regard, this paper joins the call of other researchers who have highlighted the importance of exploring how young people's desire to leave or stay is affected and imbued by dynamics of mobility-immobility of their family migrant or not migrant members (Holdsworth 2013). Additionally, it suggests that future research offers insight into the adaptation mechanisms to understand better how young people cope with the consequences of involuntary immobility, especially in places where mobility is locally perceived as desirable based on specific underlying cultural, social, and economic norms (Debray, Ruysen, and Schewel 2022).

Notes

1. Valadólare is a wordplay in which the end of the city name, Governador Valadares, is substituted with the name of the official currency of the United States used in the plural, dólares. It is used frequently in the region.
2. Cai-cai scheme: Take advantage of in the Obama-Biden era policy of not separating immigrant families. In this strategy, the immigrant is accompanied by a minor to cross the US border. Afterward, they present themselves to immigration agents, who release them to respond to the deportation process in freedom.

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