Why Millionaires Are Moving Their Wealth Beyond Traditional Financial Centres

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Ask a wealthy family how they would cope with a 30% fall in equity markets and most will have an answer. Ask them what happens if the country that holds most of their life changes its inheritance rules, tightens capital controls or changes how it treats foreign residents, and the conversation usually goes quiet.

That gap is behind one of the biggest shifts I see in private wealth today. For decades, families kept their fortunes in one or two established financial centres and rarely questioned it. That is changing. It is not because those centres have stopped working. It is because more families now see that depending on a single jurisdiction is a concentration risk, the same kind they would never accept in a portfolio.

The shift is not about moving wealth from one country to another. It is about ensuring no single government controls everything about a family's money.

The rules can change faster than portfolios can

The UK shows how quickly this can happen. For generations, wealthy foreign residents planned around its non-dom regime. Then, in April 2025, the regime was abolished, and anyone resident in the UK for at least 10 of the previous 20 years became liable to UK inheritance tax on their worldwide assets. Structures built over decades had to be rethought within months.
That is what jurisdictional risk usually looks like. It rarely comes as a crisis. It comes as a budget speech, a consultation paper, or a new reporting rule, and by the time it becomes law, families with the fewest options have the least room to adjust.

Where the UAE fits

The UAE has become a central part of this conversation, and for good reason. It offers a strong business environment, good global connectivity, long-term residency, and in DIFC and ADGM, common-law courts and structures that families can use for holding and passing on wealth.

I would be careful, though, about how this story is told. "Zero tax UAE" is now outdated shorthand. The country introduced a 9% corporate tax in June 2023, and since January 2025 large multinational groups with global revenue of €750 million or more face a 15% minimum effective rate. Personal income is still untaxed, and that remains a real advantage. But a business owner who assumes everything here is tax free will be surprised.

The region has also had a difficult year, and the most sophisticated families here have responded calmly. Most are not leaving. They are adding a second residence or another custody location, treating the UAE as their anchor rather than their only base. In my view, that is the right way to think about any jurisdiction, including this one.

Wealth lives in more places than people realise

When I talk to families about diversification, I usually point out that their wealth lives in five places, even if they have only consciously chosen one or two. There is where they live, where their business operates, where their assets are held in custody, where the legal structure that owns those assets is set up, and

where their children will eventually live. Each choice carries its own legal and tax consequences, and they do not have to be in the same country.

Custody is the one most people overlook. Keeping everything with one local bank ties a family to a single regulator and a single banking system. Holding part of the portfolio with a large international custodian is a simple, low-key way to spread that risk.

The picture gets more complicated for families with ties to more than one country. An Indian family in Dubai, for example, must think about how much money can leave India each year, how many days they spend there, and whether they could still be treated as Indian tax residents. For these families, the order of decisions matters: settle residency first, then decide where assets are held, and only then build the portfolio.

Succession is often what pushes families to act, more than tax. Some countries impose forced-heirship rules, and others put estates through long, public probate. Here in the UAE, a non-Muslim family without a registered will can find default rules deciding how the estate is divided. A will takes a few weeks to put in place. Untangling things afterwards can take years.

Coordination, not relocation

The simplest way I can put it is this: live where you want, keep assets where they are best protected, and invest where the returns are. Those three answers rarely point to the same country, and that is fine, if someone is making sure they work together.

The next decade of wealth management will not be about which country attracts the most millionaires. It will be about which families have built structures that still hold up when a country they depend on changes its rules.