

EGU24-2160, updated on 20 May 2024

<https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-egu24-2160>

EGU General Assembly 2024

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The Tail End of Migration: Assessing the Climate Resilience of Migrant Households in Ethiopia

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Climate change is associated with increasing frequencies and intensities of extreme weather events. These can, directly and indirectly, shape human (im)mobility. While most research on migration in the context of climate change focuses on climate as a migration driver in origin areas, there is a gap in knowledge on the role of migration for climate resilience in the destination areas. This paper studies differences in resilience (resistance and recovery) to climatic shocks between migrant and non-migrant households in Ethiopia, a country that is highly exposed and vulnerable to climate change. We use longitudinal data from the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) conducted by the World Bank to construct a comprehensive Well-Being Index, which is used to analyze the impacts of climatic shocks and identify households that are more or less able to resist and recover from shocks. We use fixed effect panel regression approaches to model the impacts of climatic shocks on well-being over time for migrant and non-migrant households. Further explorative mediation analyses yield insights into mechanisms explaining differences between households. We find that migrant households have an overall lower climate resistance as they experience double as high well-being impacts when exposed to climatic shocks compared to non-migrant households. Climatic shocks significantly reduce the food security of all affected households and, in addition, negatively impact access to basic infrastructures and health for migrant households. Mediation analyses suggest that these differential climatic impacts are mainly driven by characteristics of migrant-origin regions, including poverty. Migrant households originating from less prosperous regions still face disadvantages even if they now reside in more prosperous regions. This contrasts the experience of non-migrant households whose resilience benefits from increased prosperity in their region of residence. While migrant households show a lower resistance to climate shocks, they recover faster from climatic shocks, which can be associated with diversified livelihoods and remittances that take time to unfold. This research is highly relevant to policy as it improves the understanding of underlying factors shaping differential vulnerability to climate change impacts and supports targeted interventions to increase the resilience of affected households.