

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE: Impacts on international migration

Climatic change, as reflected in natural disasters and long-run changes in precipitation and temperature, has no discernible *direct* impact on international migration. That is one of the conclusions of research by **Michel Beine** and **Christopher Parsons**, to be presented to the NORFACE migration conference at University College London.

But their study does find that natural disasters lead to increased rates of urbanisation in developing countries – in other words, to internal migration. What's more, while natural disasters and shortfalls in precipitation have no direct impact on international migration, there is strong evidence that they significantly affect differences in labour market conditions between migrants' origin and destination countries.

In other words, climatic factors *indirectly* affect international migration, at the very least through economic channels. Michel Beine, one of the authors of the study, says:

'Our work certainly does not serve to deny the effects of climate change, but rather seeks to understand better the mechanisms through which climate change affects international migration.

The research analyses the key determinants of international migration globally over the period 1960-2000, accounting for economic, political, social, demographic and climatic or environmental factors.

The findings show that once all other classes of determinants have been taken into account, no additional effect on international migration (in the medium to long run) can be attributed to natural disasters or changes in precipitation and temperature.

These findings hold even when considering those countries that are particularly vulnerable to climatic change – hot countries, those reliant on agriculture, those located close to the equator and those with fewer water reserves.

Focusing solely on developing countries as destinations, however, the research does find some evidence that shortfalls in precipitation constrain international migration from origin countries that rely more heavily on agriculture and spur movements from those countries that have few ground water reserves.

The former result suggests that accessing funds required to surmount the costs of international migration, which can be substantial, might be key; some that wish to move might therefore become trapped.

The research highlights the fact that terms such as 'environmental migrants or refugees' are misleading and existing estimates of such movers that are often cited to number into the tens of millions are unhelpful. The channels through which climatic change influences international migration – for example, through labour market channels – highlight the extent to which migrants adapt to the circumstances they face.

Michel Beine adds:

'From a policy perspective, adapting to climate change seems crucial. While we increasingly experience the effects of climate change around the globe, it is this process of adaption that we must better understand so as to best mitigate the adverse effects of environmental change.'

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'Climatic Factors as Determinants of International Migration' by Michel Beine of the University of Luxembourg and Christopher Parsons of the University of Oxford can be accessed at: http://www.cesifo-group.de/DocDL/cesifo1_wp3747.pdf

The study was largely funded by the Foresight Global Environmental Migration project.

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