

International migration and shifts in subjective well-being

A longitudinal study using German panel data

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Background

International migration is a critical life event that impacts many facets of the lives of individuals in the course of their move.

To capture the full range of individual consequences of international migration, scholars study subjective well-being (SWB) as a global assessment of individuals' life situations.

However, studies still struggle to find out how international migration itself influences the SWB of individuals because of lacking longitudinal data that includes actual migration events.

Objective

We study how international migration leads to shifts in SWB of individuals using panel data that includes migration events.

We investigate whether migration-related changes in SWB vary with the extent to which individuals can influence their migration decision.

Methods

- 5-wave panel data, 2018-2022 (data from GERPS)
- Probability-based sample of internationally mobile Germans
- Target group: Migrants – Germans who returned to Germany shortly before the panel and emigrated during the panel
- Control group: Stayers – Germans who returned to Germany shortly before the panel and stayed during the panel
- Analytical sample: 344 migrants and 4,021 stayers
- Method: Fixed Effects (FE) regressions

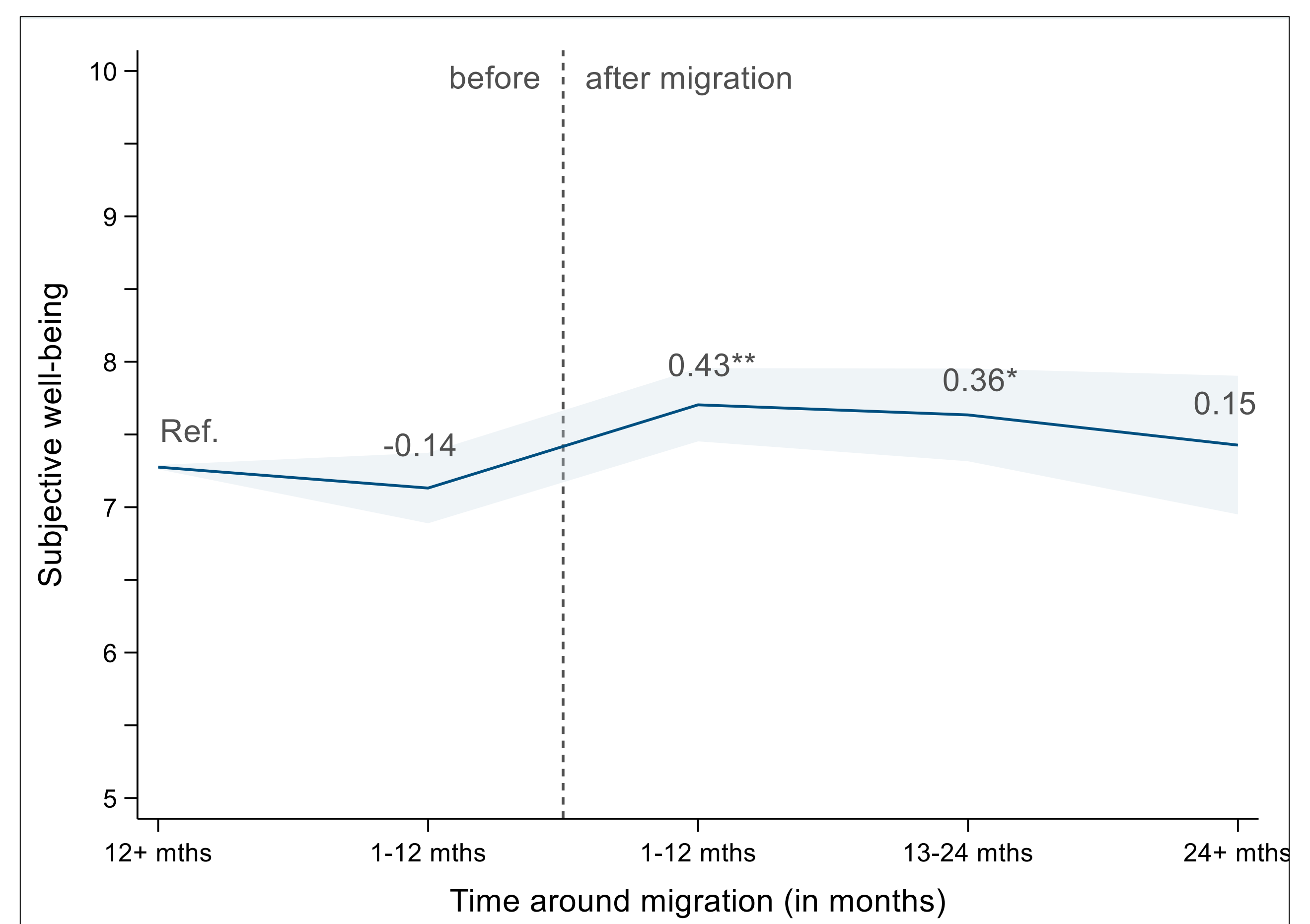
Conclusion

The results show that international migration is associated with an increase in SWB. It remains increased in the first years after the move compared to the pre-migration reference level.

We found substantial variation in SWB after migration based on the influence individuals can exert on their migration decisions.

Results

Figure 1. Shifts in subjective well-being with migration



* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Note. Stayers are included in the reference group (Ref.).

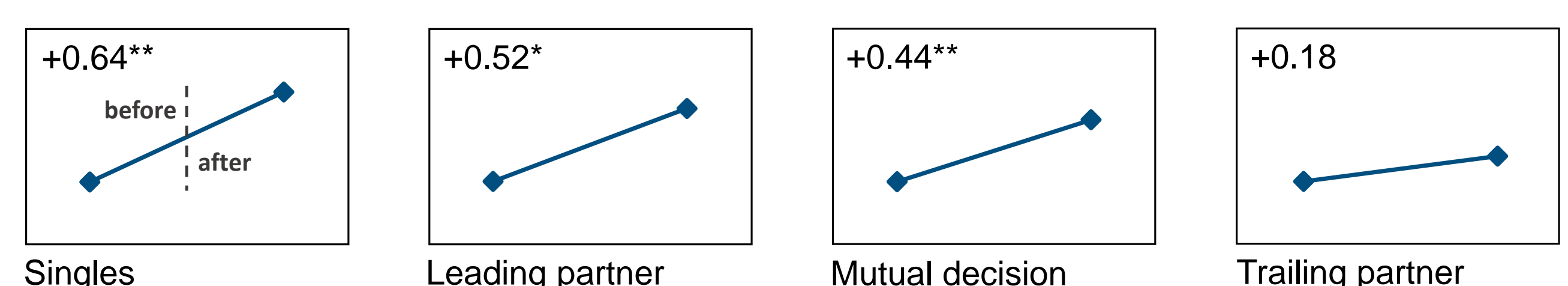
Hypothesis 1. SWB increases with migration. The increase could reflect positive net returns to personal investments or a period of euphorism. **(confirmed)**

Hypothesis 2. SWB dips shortly before migration. The dip may be the reason why people to move or reflect planning stress and anticipation of the disruptive event that lies ahead. **(confirmed)**

Hypothesis 3a. SWB continues to rise after the move abroad. By building a new life abroad, the accumulated returns are reflected in the SWB. **(not confirmed)**

Hypothesis 3b. SWB declines following the move abroad. Increases in SWB are only transitory. **(confirmed)**

Figure 2. Increase in subjective well-being with migration by the extent of personal influence on the migration decision



* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Hypothesis 4. SWB increases the most for singles, followed by partnered individuals who lead the decision, decide mutually, and follow their partner. The greater the influence of individuals on their migration decision, the greater their self-interest in migration, and with it the gains in SWB. **(confirmed)**

The Data

- Ette, A., Décieux, J. P. P., Erlinghagen, M., Genoni, A., Auditor, J. G., Knirsch, F., Kühne, S., Mörschen, L., Sand, M., Schneider, N. F., & Witte, N. (2020). German Emigration and Remigration Panel Study (GERPS): Methodology and Data Manual of the Baseline Survey (Wave 1). <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25013.42720>
- Visit www.gerps-project.com for more information on the project and its unique data

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