Migrants’ Destination Choice

War-Torn Refugee Seeks Job

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Yale, UCLA, and Princeton

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Asylum claims to European countries are at their highest since records began; most asylum applications went to Germany.

Sources: The Economist, Eurostat, Frontex
How Do Migrants Choose Destinations?

Most of what we know comes from cross-national studies of where migrants end up.

But, ethnographic research suggests that there is a lot of chance in where migrants actually settle and whether they make it to their destination.

Further, a lot of factors co-vary—ease of asylum, state of the economy—making it difficult to disentangle what drives migrants’ destination choices.

Our study asks migrants themselves what drives their choices before they reach their final destination.
Our Argument

- Migrants, and especially those fleeing violence, value stability and security of person
  - Ease of asylum
  - Political environment
  - Labor market conditions

Alternatives

- Migrants prioritize cultural ties or welfare benefits
  - Large Muslim populations in host countries
  - “Bogus refugees” focus on access to the social welfare state

Empirical Implications

- Stated reasons for choosing a destination
- Forced-choice conjoint experiment
Research Design

- Survey of $\approx 750$ recent migrants in Turkey and Jordan, and $\approx 750$ non-migrants (IDPs and residents) in Syria and Iraq
- Battery of questions about reasons for migrating, experiences of violence and transit, political knowledge, social networks, attitudes toward migration, and embedded experiments
- Some basics: the sample is 67% male, mean age of 33, 92% Sunni Muslim, 30% with college education
Survey Sites

Istanbul and Gaziantep, Turkey; Amman and Marfaq, Jordan; Idlib, Syria; Erbil and Duhok, Iraq.
Sampling and Data Recording

No census of migrants or households to sample from so our best effort to approximate a random sample:

- In Turkey and Jordan, enumerators went to places migrants tended to congregate and approached every 5th migrant and rotated locations every few hours.

- In Syria and Iraq, security precautions prevented surveying in public spaces. Instead, we did a household survey in which enumerators followed a skip rule.

Enumerators worked in mixed-gender pairs and used mobile devices (some Qualtrics online and some off-line). Many problems with data uploading, but little evidence of systematic error.
Most People Don’t Want to Migrate

Less than 10 percent of Syrians in Syria, but 38 percent of Syrians in Turkey want to reach Europe.
One respondent on why he wants to migrate: “For Angela Merkel.”
Family connections, employment conditions, welfare benefits, and country wealth are the main draws to particular countries.
Conjoint Experiment: Design

- Opportunities to work/No work
- Many/few anti-immigrant political parties
- Access/no access to social welfare benefits
- Slow and hard to get asylum/Quick and easy to get asylum
- Small/large Muslim populations
Weird bug in software meant that we were unable to capture the conjoint experiments from all respondents.

Conjoint sample
- More women
- Younger
- Fewer non-migrants & internal migrants
- Slightly more pre-migration income (but not wealth), more education, greater religiosity
Conjoint Experiment: Main Results

Work matters most followed by the legal process and welfare eligibility.
Work matters even more for those that suffered the worse violence.
85% of migrants think that they will have a good or very good chance of being allowed to stay in Europe

- Legal conditions, then, are in many ways constant in the non-experimental questions
- Legal conditions vary in the experiment, increasing their salience
Conclusion

- Humanitarian migrants “look” like economic migrants: they want to work, but most also want to go home.
- Asylum procedures can affect job prospects: Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Lawrence (2016) find that refugees who wait in limbo for longer are less likely to find a job.
- But the answer may not be asylum: refugee policies can be reformed to promote work and eventual return.
  - More temporary work permits
  - More assistance in repatriation, and especially employment assistance upon return.
Thank you!
Not much difference by skill
## Gender

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<tr>
<th>Work:</th>
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<th>Women</th>
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<tr>
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<td>employment opportunities</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welfare Benefits:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>benefits</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim Population:</th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>●</td>
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<tr>
<td>few parties</td>
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<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy and fast</td>
<td>●</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Change in Pr(Preferred Destination) (Gelmanova, 2015)

- Little difference by gender

## Appendix: Additional Conjoint Results
### Worsening Violence in Past Week/ Week before Leaving

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### Change in Pr(Preferred Destination)

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Appendix: Additional Conjoint Results
Worsening Violence in Past Month/ Month before Leaving

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**Source:** Data from <cit: source>
Reason for Leaving

Left for Economic/Family Reasons

- Work:
  - lack of work
  - employment opportunities

- Welfare Benefits:
  - no benefits
  - benefits

- Muslim Population:
  - small
  - large

- Anti-Immigration Parties:
  - many parties
  - few parties

- Ease of Asylum:
  - difficult and slow
  - easy and fast

Left Due to Fear

- Work:
  - employment opportunities
  - lack of work

- Welfare Benefits:
  - benefits
  - no benefits

- Muslim Population:
  - large
  - small

- Anti-Immigration Parties:
  - few parties
  - many parties

- Ease of Asylum:
  - easy and fast
  - difficult and slow

Appendix: Additional Conjoint Results
Not much difference by religiosity; Muslim population and anti-immigration parties still do not matter
Support for the Hijab

Appendix: Additional Conjoint Results
Appendix: Additional Conjoint Results
Ethics Conjoint

Country of Origin:
- Afghanistan
- Iran
- Iraq
- Syria

Religion:
- Christian
- Muslim

Education:
- High School or less
- Bachelor's degree
- University degree

Reason for Leaving:
- Death threat
- Fear of torture
- Poverty
- War

Gender:
- Man
- Woman

Change in Pr(Preferred Immigrant)
Appendix: Additional Conjoint Results
Elderly Family Members/ Elderly Respondent

- Work: lack of work, employment opportunities
- Welfare Benefits: no benefits, benefits
- Muslim Population: small, large
- Anti-Immigration Parties: many parties, few parties
- Ease of Asylum: difficult and slow, easy and fast

Appendix: Additional Conjoint Results
Respondents with and without Children

Appendix: Additional Conjoint Results