The Dynamics of Refugee Return

Syrian Refugees and Their Migration Intentions

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Research Questions

How do refugee crises end?

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4. We gather representative survey data on return and study its drivers with observational and conjoint analysis

Theory

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Theoretical expectations:
What drives refugees' return intentions and preparations?

Pull factors in Syria:
Safety, control, economic well-being, services, networks

Push factors in Lebanon:
Economic well-being, services, social well-being, networks, legal status
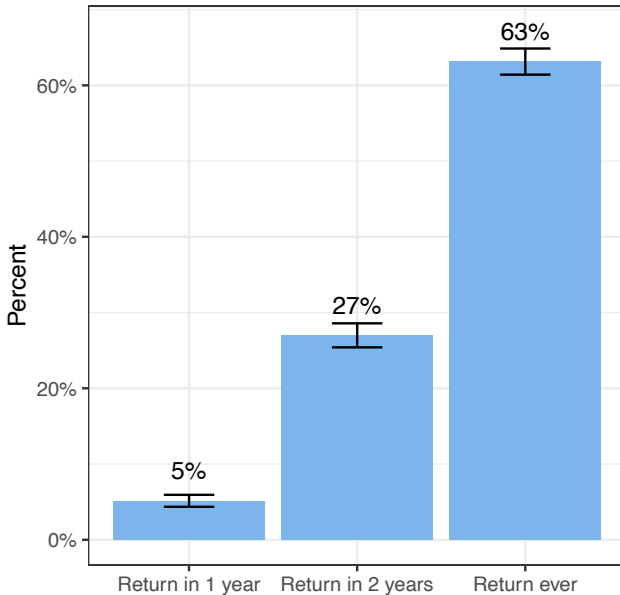
Mobility Costs and Information

Research Design

Survey Design

- Nationally representative survey of $\approx$ 3000 Syrian refugee heads of household

- Conducted between August and October 2019

- First stage: stratified sample along two dimensions: prevalence of Syrians and sectarian component of Lebanese

- Second stage: random walk within each locality

- Measured household characteristics, predictors of return, return intentions, and included a conjoint experiment

Findings from Survey

Return Plans and Expectations

Predictors of Intentions and Preparations

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Study relationship between return intentions and plans and respondents' situation in Lebanon and Syria, based on numerous survey variables

Used survey questions to create indices that measure four different categories:

- Pull factors in Syria
- Push factors in Lebanon
- Mobility costs
- Information

Pull factors in Syria

We use five different indices of pull factors in Syria

1. Physical safety in hometown

2. Control of hometown in Syria

3. Economic prospects in hometown

4. Services provision in hometown

5. Personal networks in Syria

Push factors in Lebanon

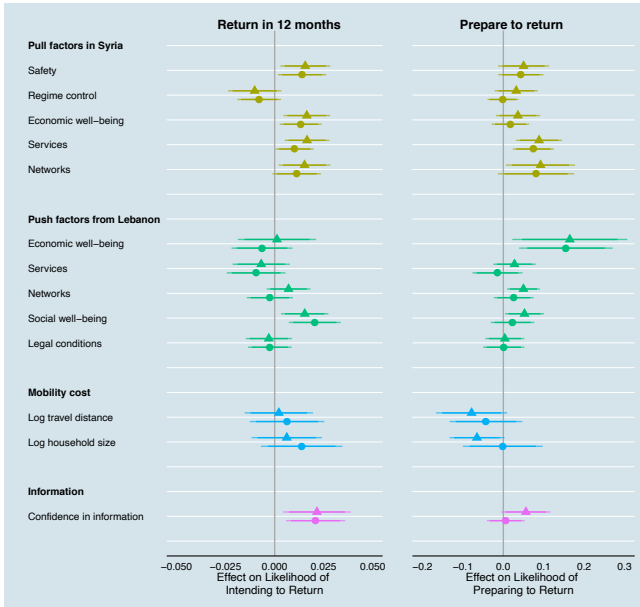We use five different indices of push factors in Lebanon

1. Economic well-being in Lebanon

2. Access to services in Lebanon

3. Personal networks in Lebanon

4. Social well-being in Lebanon

5. Legal status in Lebanon

Mobility cost and confidence in information

We also examine how mobility costs and access to information are correlated with return intentions and preparation

1. Travel distance + household size

2. Access and confidence in information about place of origin

Predictors of Intentions and Preparations, All Results

Conjoint Experiment

Conjoint Experiment

Read to respondents a description of a future situation in Syria and Lebanon. We randomly varied the following features:
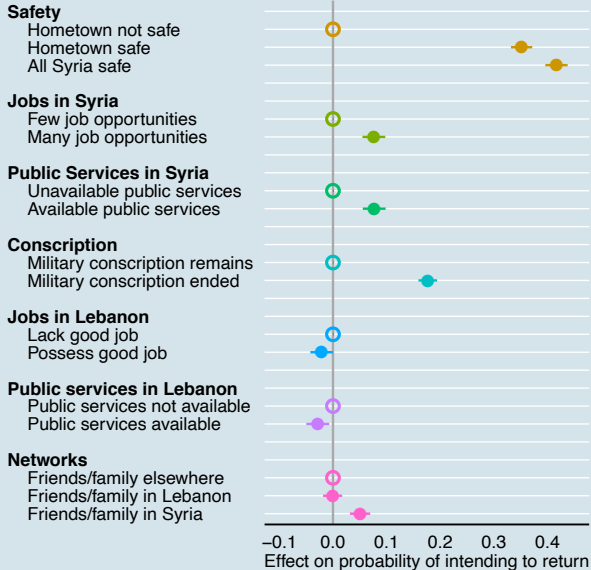
- Security situation in Syria
- Economic prospects in Syria
- Services in Syria
- Conscription
- Economic prospects in Lebanon
- Access to public services in Lebanon
- Family and friend network

Example:

Imagine that one year from now, **all of Syria is quite safe**. It appears that in [insert hometown], there are **many job opportunities.** As for conscription, military conscription **is still in place**. In Lebanon, health centers and schools are **available and affordable.** Finally, regarding your friends and relatives, **most of them are in Syria.** Under these conditions, would you return to Syria?

Conjoint Experiment – All Results

Safety
- Hometown not safe
- Hometown safe
- All Syria safe

Jobs in Syria
- Few job opportunities
- Many job opportunities

Public Services in Syria
- Unavailable public services
- Available public services

Conscription
- Military conscription remains
- Military conscription ended

Jobs in Lebanon
- Lack good job
- Possess good job

Public services in Lebanon
- Public services not available
- Public services available

Networks
- Friends/family elsewhere
- Friends/family in Lebanon
- Friends/family in Syria

−0.1   0.0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4

Effect on probability of intending to return

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Results Overview

- Relatively few Syrians said they plan to return by October 2020 (5%). Most want to return in long term but not soon

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- Predictors of return intentions, in decreasing importance:

  - Safety conditions in Syria
  - Economic conditions and availability of public services in place of origin
  - Networks of family and friends
  - Conditions in Lebanon

Key Takeaways

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- Efforts to push refugees to return are unlikely to be effective

- Humanitarian organizations should focus efforts on supporting refugees in host country while improving conditions in place of origin

- Credible information dissemination seems important