

# Using survey experiments to explore refugee resettlement preferences\*

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# 1 Introduction

From its contemporary inception at the ratification of the 1951 refugee convention, formal refugee resettlement has been viewed as a centerpiece, durable solution to protracted refugee situations. The process was solidified in recognition of the poor performance of the international community during World War II in accommodating refugees fleeing Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Under the formal process, when registered with the the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in their first host country, refugees may request permanent resettlement in a third state. Refugees typically begin naturalization processes when resettled, meaning that this option reduces the likelihood of subsequent onward journeys. Providing resettlement places was viewed through much of the Cold War as an opportunity for developed states to demonstrate commitment to sharing the burden associated with refugee situations. However, the increase in numbers of refugees after the end of the Cold War and the concomitant spike in civil wars, and the growth in rhetoric (falsely) linking refugees and insecurity, have moved states to drastically reduce formal opportunities for resettlement.

We tend to think about resettlement in its formal sense as a process managed by the UNHCR in consultation with host and resettlement countries. However, much less is known (or asked) about the choices taken and preferences held by individual refugees when considering formal resettlement or its informal corollary, in which refugees take it upon themselves to relocate to a new country. In this paper we place the focus squarely upon the preferences of individual refugees and choose to examine these preferences across resettlement and relocation options interchangeably. We believe that this is important because given the paucity of opportunities through the formal resettlement process, there appears to have been an increase in refugees (and other forced migrants) exploring and pursuing informal opportunities to relocate from host countries to other third countries.

Herein, we take a step back from asking whether resettlement works or how more states might be encouraged to engage in the process and offer places for resettlement (see, e.g., Salehyan 2019). Instead, we investigate two important questions regarding refugee decision-making. First, what

factors affect whether individual refugees wish to resettle or relocate? Second, what factors affect to where refugees might prefer to relocate? Answering these questions requires that we focus directly upon uncovering more information about how individuals in existing host countries think about the potential for their next journey.

In this initially exploratory paper, we offer a preliminary expectation regarding factors that might be likely to deter or attract refugees to a potential relocation or resettlement destination. For this purpose, we draw liberally from the generous migration literature identifying general “push-and-pull” factors. Four general attributes of destination locations are highlighted. We expect that refugees are likely to be deterred (attracted) when there is the potential for them to (not) experience abuse at the hands of local populations, when it is (not) hard for them to find work, in the absence (presence) of kin diaspora groups, and when there are (not) restrictions on legal opportunities for their arrival.

We focus here upon Syrian refugees currently hosted in Lebanon and the preferences they hold regarding the potential for relocating to a third country (i.e., leaving Lebanon for a country that is not Syria). About a quarter of all refugees globally are from Syria and are hosted primarily in three countries: Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Lebanon ranks first globally with the highest concentration of refugees to citizens: at least 1 in 6 residents there is a refugee. Given Lebanon’s past with violence (a civil war that raged from 1975 to 1990 and subsequent phases of foreign occupation) and continuing issues with hosting Palestinian refugees, the Syrian refugee situation has only deepened the economic, political, and social problems facing this small state.

We draw evidence from nearly 2,000 responses to a survey that we conducted in Lebanon in the Summer of 2018. As part of a longer survey, we devoted a portion of questions to refugees’ preferences regarding future movements, including the possibility of relocating to a third country. Included within these questions was a simple conjoint experiment task in which refugees were presented with a series of paired destinations and asked to choose between them. There are good reasons to suspect that refugees may be reluctant to discuss such plans openly. Accordingly, we employ data from a conjoint survey experiment that is designed to reduce concerns about social

desirability bias, while also allowing us to randomize the characteristics of destination choices shown to our respondents (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). In conjunction, these two qualities improve our trust in the evidence gathered and, thus, our confidence in the conclusions we draw.

Our simple conjoint task reveals quite compelling evidence. Refugees are likely to be deterred from choosing to relocate to countries where they face the prospect of physical abuse, where they are likely to struggle to find employment, and where there are legal restrictions on their ability to bring their family with them or to arrive in the country legally. Perhaps more counter-intuitively – especially given “push-and-pull” logics of migration – refugees appear deterred by the presence of middle eastern, and especially Syrian, diaspora in the potential destination country. We suggest that this likely reflects the kinds of destination countries refugees have in mind; with countries with significant diaspora likely looking too similar to their current host country – e.g., we suspect they are picturing Turkey or Jordan under these circumstances.

Our evidence also reveals that preferences are conditioned by demographics, economic capacity, and prior experience of violence. Finally, we suggest confidence in our results is bolstered by the observation that these general effects are stronger amongst individuals who are not registered with the UN or have not requested resettlement, and those that nonetheless do desire to relocate. In other words, these are not simply individuals considering using formal resettlement processes made available by the UNHCR. In other words, whether or not the international community is identifying more durable solutions to protracted refugee situations, individuals most affected by these situations (the refugees themselves) certainly are.

## **2 Refugee preferences regarding relocation and resettlement**

In an effort to provide durable solutions for growing levels of forced displacement globally, the UNHCR promotes three durable solutions: local integration in the host state, voluntary repatriation to the country of origin, and resettlement to a third-country (typically one of about 30 “developed”

states). In this paper, we expand upon this third category of resettlement to consider a broader category of relocation to third countries. The informal corollary to the UNHCR's formal resettlement process involves refugees finding alternative means of leaving a local host country for new foreign destinations. The relationship between what we term (formal) resettlement and (informal) relocation is not well understood; nor do we claim to clarify this ambiguity here. Nonetheless, we think that this represents an area in need of greater analysis. In particular, we suggest that more needs to be known about individual refugees' preferences for relocation destinations.

Knowledge of refugee preferences for relocation, in general, is required because existing (formal) durable solutions are inadequate for handling the scale of contemporary, protracted refugee situations. In 2016, "only 2.5 percent of refugees (552,000) were able to return to their home countries . . . and even fewer, 0.8 percent (or 189,300), were resettled through formal settlement programs. An even smaller percentage (0.001 percent, or 23,000) were naturalized as citizens" in host countries (Ferris 2018). Since 2016, formal resettlement opportunities, in particular, having become vanishingly rare. The protraction of the Syrian civil war has encouraged a race to the bottom with states globally limiting resettlement numbers. At the heart of this problem lies the United States of America, which has greatly reduced the number of refugees being resettled from 96,900 in 2016 (or 52% of the global total of 189,300 resettled that year) to 28,000 in 2017 (27% of 102,800 globally). The UNHCR concluded that in 2018, just 55,692 of the 1.2 million refugees globally processed as eligible for resettlement were allowed to move to a third-country (UNHCR 2017). Estimates suggest fewer, again, in 2019.

As a consequence of this shirking behavior among developed states, the overwhelming burden of refugee-hosting is carried by developing states (Ineli-Ciger 2019). These tend to be countries, such as Turkey, Iran, and Kenya, that are neighboring civil conflict countries (e.g., Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia, respectively). There are numerous challenges faced by host and refugee populations in these contexts (Hynie 2018). There is commonly a scarcity of resources available to support the humanitarian needs of arriving refugees and/or to offset the cost to provision of social services to local populations. This generates dire conditions in refugee camps that threaten to

undermine host security (Milton, Spencer, and Findley 2013). As may also be the case rhetorically in developed countries (Dempster and Hargrave 2017), the resource burden faced in developing countries can mean that local populations struggle to accept refugee populations within their borders, especially given the large number of refugees in protracted scenarios (İçduygu 2015; Ghosn, Braithwaite, and Chu 2019).

Faced by conditions of inadequate resources and local populations resentment, it is not surprising that refugees hosted in these situations would look to explore formal and informal opportunities for resettlement and relocation. The growing tendency for refugees to seek relocation has resulted in them embarking on more treacherous journeys. Since 2015, the flow of refugees from Syria, as well as Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa, has increasingly affected western countries, as well. Most recently, we have witnessed growing numbers of refugees risking and losing their lives as they attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea to enter the various states of the European Union. For example, in the first quarter of 2017, almost 40,000 were detected as having crossed the sea to attempt the next leg of their precarious journey. However, more than 800 did not make it and were instead killed at sea. This recent spike in casualties among refugees transiting the Mediterranean Sea has highlighted the potentially deadly effects of government interventions, such as border closures and fortifications (see, more generally, Massey, Pren, and Durand (2016)).

What factors affect to where refugees might prefer to relocate? There does not appear to be a robust understanding of this preference. Accordingly, we this is where we focus our attention. In doing so, we rely upon the general, pre-theoretical framework of “push and pull” factors that dominates much of the migration literature in general (Massey and España 1987; Richmond 1988). Gravity-style models of flows between origin and destination countries dominate existing research into questions regarding when and why populations of forced migrants are likely to flee and to where they will flee. Push factors typically include ongoing conflict, persecution, extreme poverty, and dramatic environmental change (Schmeidl 1997; Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Moore and Shellman 2007).

Pull factors are those that influence to where refugees will travel. These are characteristics and conditions of countries that make them attractive potential destinations (or hosts) for forced migrants. On the pull side of the equation, countries become popular destinations on the basis of positive human rights records, economic opportunities, pre-existing diaspora populations, and generous asylum and social service portfolios (see, e.g., [Bocker and Havinga \(1998\)](#); [Neumayer \(2004\)](#); [Moore and Shellman \(2007\)](#)). We suggest that these pull factors are most credibly contributing to refugee decisions regarding future destination choices. This sole focus on pull factors is especially credible when focusing upon a common population of refugees all residing in the same host country.

Accordingly, we present the following general hypothesis:

**Hypothesis:** *Refugees are attracted to (deterred by) relocation destinations with low (high) levels of expected abuse, (few) opportunities for employment, (no) kin diaspora populations, and (restricted) legal opportunities for resettlement.*

Beyond these initial, specific expectations, we also anticipate that a refugee's preferences for relocation are also highly likely to be affected by personal characteristics, such as gender, age, marital status, and employment status. We anticipate that each of these characteristics ought to condition the specific effects of our set of four attractor/deterrent factors.

## **3 Research Design**

### **3.1 Survey Sample**

In order to explore factors affecting refugee decisions to potentially relocate, we drawn upon original data from a survey of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. We deployed a survey of Syrian refugees hosted in Lebanon between June and July 2018. According to the official statistics of the UNHCR, over 1,000,000 Syrians were living in Lebanon at that time and were located across all regions of the country, with 70% living in residential buildings and 30% in unofficial settlements and camps

(See Table 1 for distribution across the Governorates). We completed a sample of 2,000 surveys across all Lebanese governorates in a manner that was designed to reflect the official village-level records of refugee presence made available by the UNHCR. From this initial Governorate-level distribution, random neighborhoods were chosen. In each neighborhood, the enumerators then secured a first willing adult respondent in a local house. After this, they then skipped the next three houses to go to the fourth. This selection process to identify respondents was then followed in each new town selected. In unofficial settlements, the same method was applied; after the first tent was chosen enumerators skipped the next three before selecting a new respondent.

Table 1: Distribution of Survey Sampling Population For Syrian Refugees by Governorate

	<b>Refugee Population</b>	<b>Syrian Refugee Population</b>	<b>Sample</b>
North Lebanon & Akkar	251299	25%	503
Beirut & Mount Lebanon	287651	27%	545
South Lebanon & Nabitieh	117750	12%	232
Bekaa & Baalbek-Hermel	360733	36%	720
<b>Total</b>	1017433	100%	2000

### 3.2 Experimental design & analysis

In revealed preference choice methods (RP) observations are taken of real-life choice outcomes. In the context of a study of refugee movements, this would involve observing whether or not Syrian refugees in Lebanon chose to depart Lebanon and relocate elsewhere. This would require asking additional questions regarding motivation for the decision to relocate or not, including their perceptions of the threat of harm or access to social welfare. This would also require that the analyst trust that the responses offered are accurate and not affected by concerns on the part of the respondent to provide socially desirable answers (e.g., refugees hosted in Lebanon may not be entirely forthcoming about their reasons for staying in the country if they are concerned that the survey enumerators would share this information with local government officials).

By contrast, stated preference choice methods (SP) involve the creation of survey questions with hypothetical scenarios where the respondent must choose from various alternatives. The

alternatives are described by a set of attributes (e.g., the risk of harm) that are expected to influence the respondents decisions with the levels of these attributes (e.g., low or high) varying between alternatives. Similar to RP, the respondents choices are then related to the stated levels of each attribute in each choice occasion to estimate the impact of each attribute and level. Unlike RP, the key concern with SP is that they involve fictitious choices and so respondents may act unnaturally and not consistent with real-life choices. That said, the risk of misspecification and extraneous factors affecting the results can be mitigated as the choice situation is experimentally controlled and the experimenters are able to regulate all information provided to the respondents for the choice exercises. Furthermore, because SP involve hypothetical scenarios, which should albeit be realistic, choices resulting from conditions that may not be observable or are currently unavailable can also be examined (Louviere, Hensher, and Swait 2000).

Given the lack of research directly examining the question of refugee motivations to relocate, it is necessary to employ a design that allows us to examine various processes through which these preferences may be formed. Conjoint experiments, which are widely accepted in policy and marketing research and are becoming prominent in political science, present a particularly cost-effective way to do so in a single short survey (Ben-Akiva et al. 2019; Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). In conjoint experiments, respondents rate paired scenarios consisting of several attributes, which are presented over a series of iterations. Scenario attributes, which refer directly to the hypotheses posited, are randomly and independently varied across iterations. This allows us to isolate the causal effects of each attribute on the dependent variable of interest. Experimental designs which present respondents with a multidimensional choice, such as conjoint and vignette factorial surveys, are designed to mimic choices made in the real world (Ben-Akiva et al. 2019).

To determine the factors affecting Syrian refugees' preferences regarding resettlement, we designed a choice-based task, in the style of a conjoint experiment, within the aforementioned survey. In terms of the survey itself, it was presented to the participants in Arabic on a tablet computer using the survey software Kobo ToolBox. The participants were then asked to complete the questions (including the conjoint experiments) themselves; though if they required assistance or were unable

to complete it or any part of it, the enumerator helped by completing the survey or any of the questions alongside them. Due to the relatively large total number of questions in the survey, some sets of questions, including the conjoints, were randomly allocated across the respondents. In this instance, 25% of the respondents were assigned to receive the conjoint regarding the decision to resettle. As such, from the 1,751 respondents who completed the survey, 421 respondents received the ‘resettle’ conjoint.

The conjoint experiment being analyzed here regarded the decision to resettle in a third country from Lebanon. For this, participants were presented with the following hypothetical choice task scenario:

“Imagine you are faced with the following two choices for resettlement from Lebanon to another country abroad (not including Syria).”

Respondents were asked for their preferred choice from two alternatives. To prevent respondents from answering arbitrarily which can occur when they are forced to respond (Dhar and Simonsen, 2003), they could also respond with “do not know / no response” or directly choose not to respond by skipping any choice question. Based on the literature review and the goals of this study, the two alternatives, generically labelled as “Country A” and “Country B”, were described by four attributes: the level of abuse that refugees might expect to experience in the country; the ease of finding work there; the presence of a local diaspora; and the legality of resettling. The actual value for each attribute (for each alternative in each choice task) was randomly selected from one of three or four levels (depending on the attribute) as shown in Table 2. An example of one possible choice task is shown in Table 3. Each respondent was presented with five such randomly generated choice tasks (Bansak et al. 2018).

To analyze the data from the two sets of choice tasks, the statistical approach for conjoint analysis as developed in Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2014) is followed. Specifically, the average causal effect of an attribute level relative to another level, the average marginal component effect [AMCE], is estimated. This is possible due to the randomization of the attribute levels whereby the effect of a level on the probability of choice is estimated by taking the probability that

Table 2: Attributes and levels for alternatives in conjoint experimental design

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Levels</b>
<b>Level of abuse</b>	No verbal or physical Some verbal Some physical and verbal Frequent physical and verbal
<b>Ease of finding work</b>	Easy Moderate Difficult
<b>Size of diaspora</b>	Syrian diaspora Only Middle Eastern diaspora No Middle Eastern or Syrian diaspora
<b>Legality</b>	Resettlement for you and your family Resettlement for you only No legal resettlement so you would have to make your own way No legal resettlement so you would have to use a smuggler

Table 3: An example choice task from conjoint experiment

	<b>Country A</b>	<b>Country B</b>
<b>Level of abuse</b>	No verbal or physical	Some physical and verbal
<b>Ease of finding work</b>	Easy	Easy
<b>Size of diaspora</b>	No Middle Eastern or Syrian diaspora	Syrian diaspora
<b>Legality</b>	Resettlement for you only	Resettlement for you and your family

alternatives with that level, across all sampled levels of all the other attributes, are chosen compared to alternatives with a different (reference) level of that attribute, across all sampled levels of all other attributes. As shown in [Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto \(2014\)](#), the AMCEs can be estimated with a linear regression and this is done using the ‘cjoint’ package ([Strezhnev et al. 2014](#)) in R with the standard errors corrected for participants providing responses to multiple choice tasks (within-respondent clustering).

## 4 Results

Before proceeding to an analysis of our main conjoint tasks, we first explore the general factors affecting refugee preferences for resettlement. We view this analysis as contextual, providing

readers with an understanding of the general factors that appear to correlate with individuals' stated preferences for resettlement. For this purpose, we analyze responses to two questions from our survey in which we ask respondents about their potential plans for the next 12 months. The first question, stated in full, asks about their aspirations:

“Refugees in Lebanon have three alternatives: remain in Lebanon, resettle in a third country, or return to Syria. Whether or not you think you are able to do any of these things, which of these things would you LIKE to do? Please give me your first, second and third choice. Remember, I am asking only about your thoughts on the next year.”

We then followed this up by asking about what they consider they might be able to do:

“Putting aside your preferences for a moment, which of these things do you think would be EASIEST for you to do? Please give me your first, second and third choice. Remember, I am asking only about your thoughts on the next year.”

We model each of these binary outcomes (aspire to resettle and able to resettle) as logistic regressions, with staying in Lebanon as the baseline category for comparison sake in each case. We specify a standard model for both stated outcomes. This specification includes whether the respondents think the situation in Lebanon has gotten worse since their arrival; whether they know any individuals in major resettlement countries or regions (Germany, Canada, Greece, Sweden, UK, USA and Gulf states); whether the individual is registered with the United Nations and registered with the Lebanese government. All of these variables are binary. We also include an indicator of the length of time, in years, the individual has been displaced from Syria; the distance between their hometown and their current residence; and whether the individual considered themselves and their families to be in imminent threat when they left Syria. Finally, we include a rather standard set of demographic characteristics and variables capturing respondents' pre-war situations in Syria. This includes their gender, age, whether they have children, and their pre-war income, education, and whether they are currently (at the time of the survey) employed.

Table 4 details the full results of this initial analysis. The first column provides results for our model of refugee aspirations to resettle within the next year. The second column provides the corollary results for those who believe they would be able to resettle in the next year. We initially look for factors that appear to have an equal bearing upon aspirations and perceived ability, before exploring those that appear to have differential effects on the two outcomes. First, we find that individuals' desire to resettle in a third country is associated with them believing that the situation in Lebanon has gotten worse since they arrived. They are also more likely to want and believe themselves able to resettle if they know people overseas in resettlement countries. Furthermore, younger respondents are likely to both desire and believe themselves able to resettle, as are those that fled Syria because they perceived an imminent threat to themselves and/or their family members. Finally, we see that aspirations and perceptions of ability are lesser among those that have been displaced for longer periods of time.

Our model also reveals a number of factors that appear to have differential effects upon aspirations and perceptions of the ability to resettle. Individuals who have endured longer periods of time displaced from their homes have elevated aspirations for resettlement but are not more likely to believe themselves able to resettle. By contrast, those that are currently employed believe themselves able to resettle but do not appear systematically more likely to want this than their unemployed counterparts. Individuals who earned higher incomes prior to the war in Syria breaking out also appear, perhaps counter-intuitively, to believe themselves less able to resettle, as do individuals who are registered with the Lebanese Government. This suggests that perhaps they believe the government is monitoring their movements, precluding them from being able to relocate without this being noticed. Finally, we see that individuals who have been displaced for short periods of time, as well as those who access information about Syria less frequently, are both more likely to believe themselves able to resettle. This final pair of findings might indicate that they have yet to learn of the difficulties associated with this process.

Having established this baseline context for stated preferences regarding resettlement, we now proceed to exploring revealed preferences through our conjoint experiment. Figure 1 summarizes

Table 4: First Choice: Resettle, Baseline = Stay

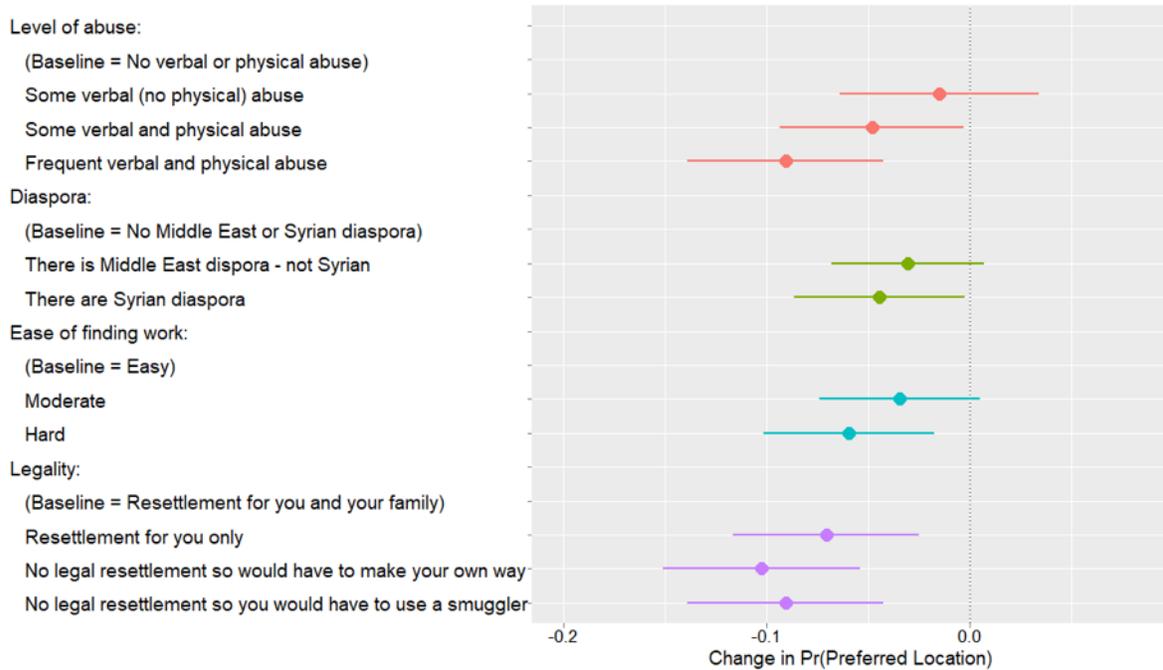
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Aspiration	Ability
	(1)	(2)
Sit. LBN Worse (=1)	1.335*** (0.253)	1.431*** (0.227)
Know Ppl. Abroad (=1)	1.386*** (0.453)	0.903** (0.372)
Displaced duration (Years)	0.111* (0.064)	0.090 (0.060)
Employed (=1)	0.010 (0.233)	0.389* (0.221)
Children (=1)	-0.137 (0.384)	0.087 (0.364)
Age	-0.022** (0.009)	-0.014* (0.009)
Pre-war income: \$201-\$500	-0.047 (0.299)	-0.600** (0.280)
Pre-war income: Greater than \$500	0.923* (0.529)	-1.594*** (0.360)
Intermediate school dropout	-0.126 (0.229)	0.039 (0.217)
Secondary school dropout	0.547* (0.317)	0.503* (0.281)
Secondary school & above	-0.023 (0.550)	0.003 (0.481)
Married (=1)	0.414 (0.397)	0.150 (0.376)
Registered with LBN Gov.(=1)	0.283 (0.303)	-0.786*** (0.277)
Registered with UN (=1)	0.012 (0.227)	0.300 (0.209)
Flee: Imminent threat (=1)	1.021*** (0.248)	0.482** (0.232)
Exp. displacement < 1 month	0.599 (0.416)	2.541*** (0.384)
Exp. displacement < 1 year	-2.475*** (0.335)	-1.661*** (0.309)
Exp. displacement > 1 year	-1.469*** (0.324)	-0.646** (0.292)
Distance	-0.001 (0.001)	0.00004 (0.001)
Freq. Info SYR: Weekly	-0.118 (0.283)	0.236 (0.262)
Freq. Info SYR: Less than weekly	0.334 (0.350)	0.657** (0.327)
Intercept	-0.654 (0.715)	-1.703** (0.667)
Observations	1,271	1,272
R <sup>2</sup>	0.274	0.256
Log Likelihood	-938.253	-977.438
LR Test (df = 44)	708.413***	671.453***

Note:

13 \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

the estimated effects for main, unconditional model, including each attribute value relative to the reference category for that attribute. This is a coefficient (or forest) plot of the AMCEs - or as explained earlier: the causal effect of the change in the attribute level from the reference level - with dots representing the point estimates and lines illustrating the 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 1: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate



The results show that each of our location attributes has a general deterrent effect upon potential resettlement location choice by refugees. First, the potential for refugees to experience abuse in the destination country has a clear deterrent effect. Importantly, though, this effect is only significant when involving physical (and not just verbal) abuse. Specifically, the refugees are statistically significantly deterred from resettling in countries where there is physical (and verbal) abuse and particularly when the abuse is frequent compared to where is no verbal or physical abuse. Specifically, they were on average 5% less likely to select a country if there was physical and verbal abuse ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 9% less likely if that abuse was frequent ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Second, and perhaps more counterintuitively to some readers, the presence of a Syrian diaspora in the destination country also appears to have a deterrent effect. They were 4% less likely to

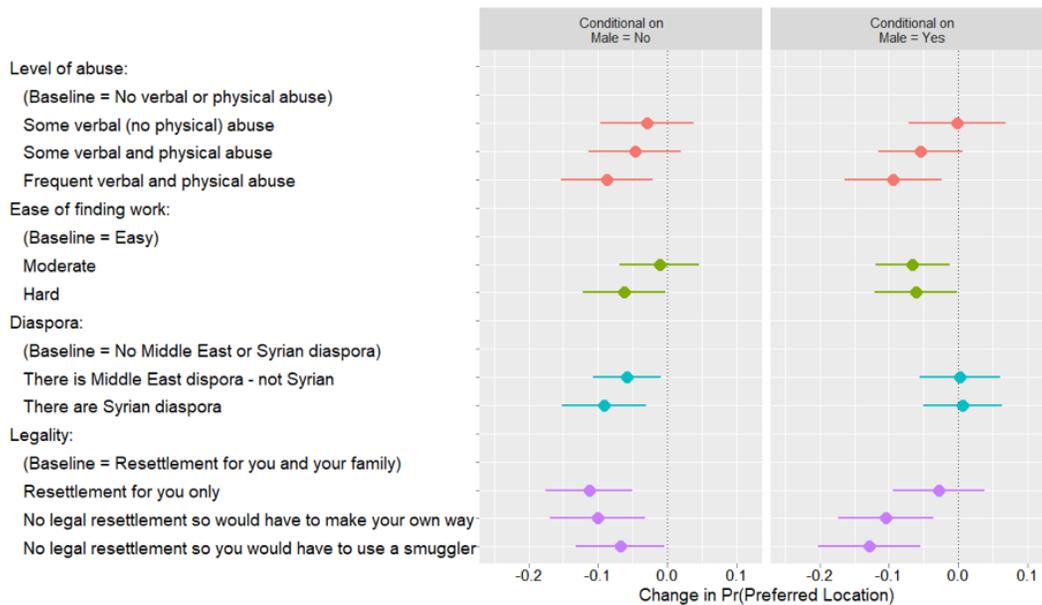
choose a destination if there is a Syrian diaspora currently living there, as compared to there being no Middle East or Syrian diaspora. We speculate that this is likely because refugees bring to mind a specific set of countries when thinking about large diasporas, including, e.g., Turkey and Jordan. They may not view these kinds of destinations as being sufficiently more desirable than their current host country, Lebanon.

Third, we find clear evidence that difficulty in finding work in the destination country serves as a strong deterrent to refugees considering resettlement, with refugees 6% less likely to choose to resettle in a particular country if it was hard to find work ( $p < 0.01$ ) compared to being easy to find work. Finally, it appears that legal restrictions on resettlement opportunities also have a strong deterrent effect. In terms of legality, the results show that refugees statistically significantly preferred to resettle in countries where it was legal for themselves and their family, compared to all other included options (all  $p < 0.01$ ). In particular, compared to this situation, they were 7% less likely to select a location if it was only legal for themselves to resettle there, 10% less likely if there was no legal resettlement and they had to make their own way there (without smugglers), and 9% less likely if it was not illegal but they would have to use a smuggler.

Of course, these initial, general effects are masking potential variation across types of refugees or the experiences that they hold. Accordingly, we next condition the conjoint outcomes on a set of demographic and experiential characteristics of the respondents. Figure 2 depicts variation in effects between individuals who identify as make (right hand panel) and those that do not (left hand panel). While both male and female respondents were similarly deterred by the potential for physical abuse in the destination country, men appeared to be more consistently deterred by any difficulty in finding work – women were only deterred once this level of difficulty was described as being hard.

The counter-intuitive finding on diaspora appears to be driven by women, who are less likely to select a destination if there exists a Syrian diaspora already. It is possible that women are more consistently thinking about relocation decisions for a family as a whole and, thus, believe that destinations with Syrian diaspora might be less likely to have resources available to support their

Figure 2: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate, by gender



arrival. This more communitarian perspective may also explain why women are highly deterred by legal restrictions on family arrivals whereas men appear not to be deterred in this manner.

Figure 3 then appears to reflect that our main effect findings are actually driven by married respondents, with those identifying as being not married apparently unaffected by any of our four sets of treatment attributes.

We next distinguish between respondents aged under 30 (“young”) and those aged over 30 (see Figure 4). Here we find that younger respondents appear to be more systematically deterred by the presence of kin diaspora in potential settlement destinations. At the same time, these younger cohorts appear not to be deterred by resettlement opportunities being only available to themselves (and not their family). These findings in combination might suggest that younger individuals (also less likely to be married and with a family) are more systematically motivated by the need to meet their own individual needs.

When we then distinguish (see Figure 5) between individuals on relatively low incomes (below median) and those on higher incomes (above median), it appears that the results separate in an intuitive manner. First, individuals on lower incomes are more consistently deterred by stated

Figure 3: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate, by marital status

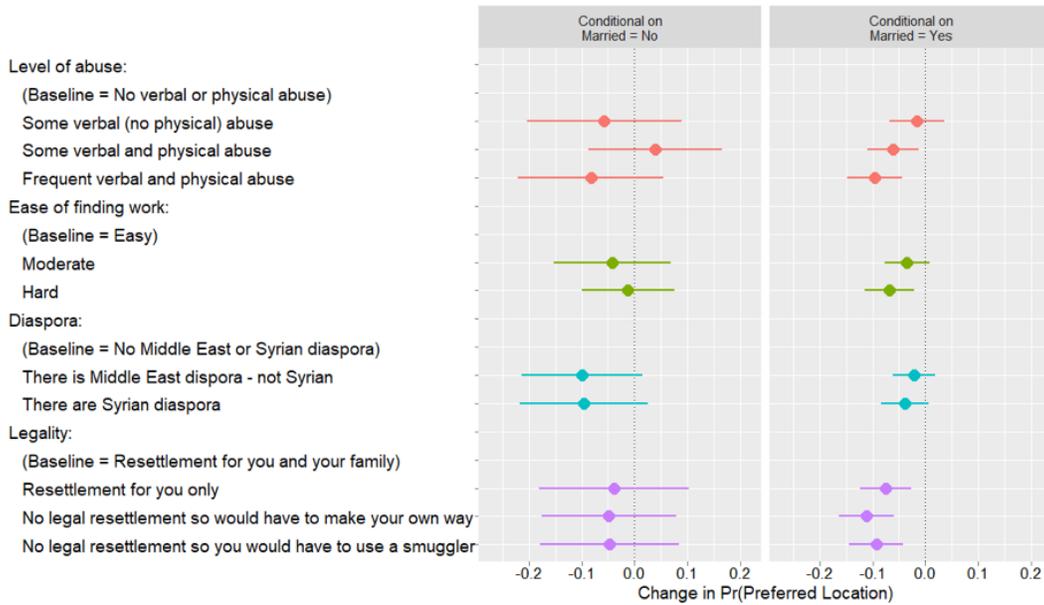
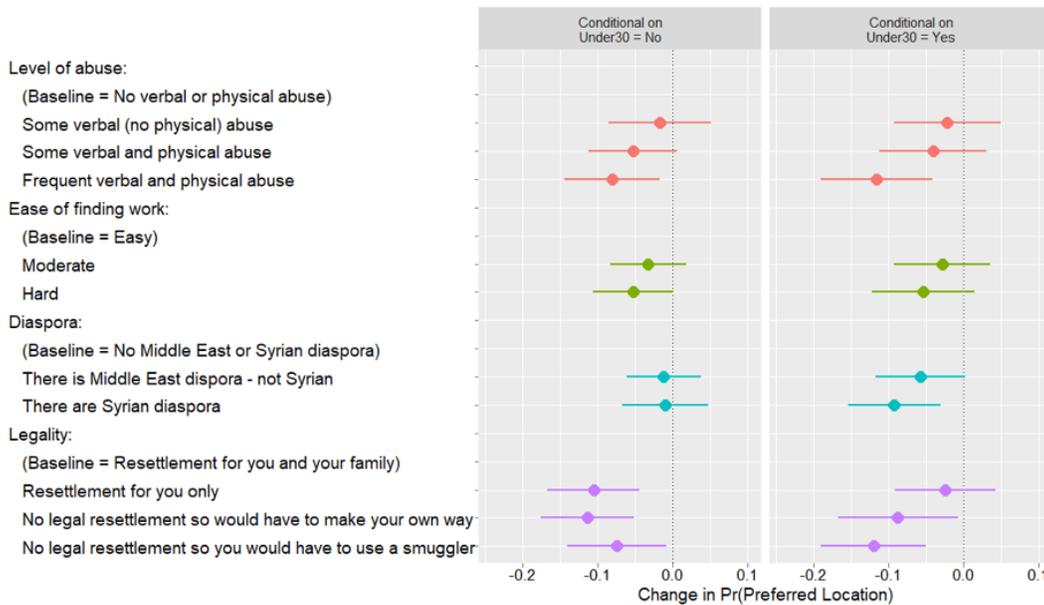


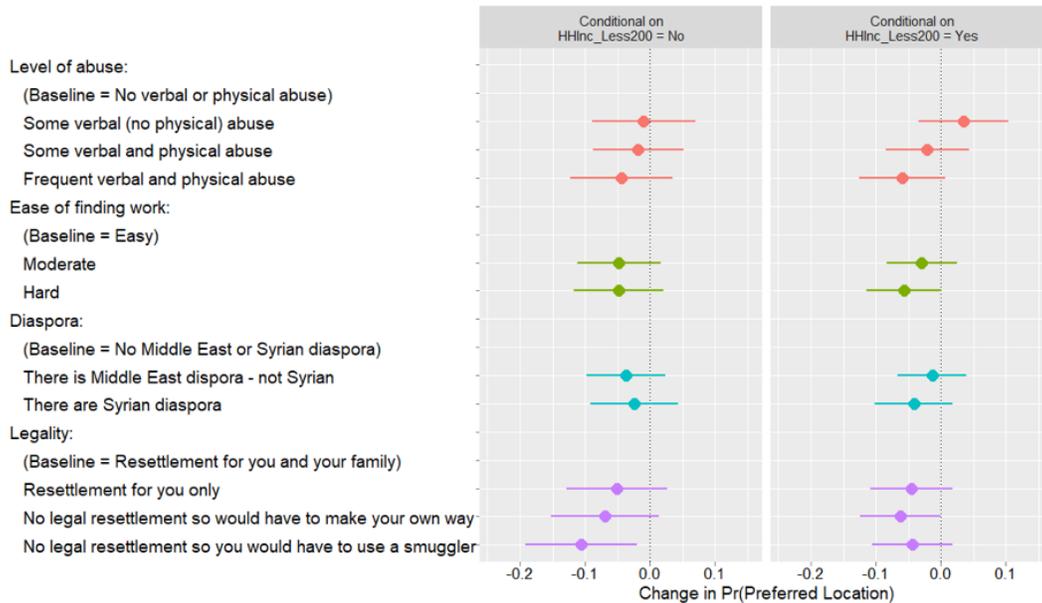
Figure 4: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate, by age cohort



difficulty in finding work in the destination country. Second, those from lower income households appear to be most deterred by having to make their own way to the destination country, whereas

those with greater economic means appear more deterred by the potential need to employ the services of a smuggler.

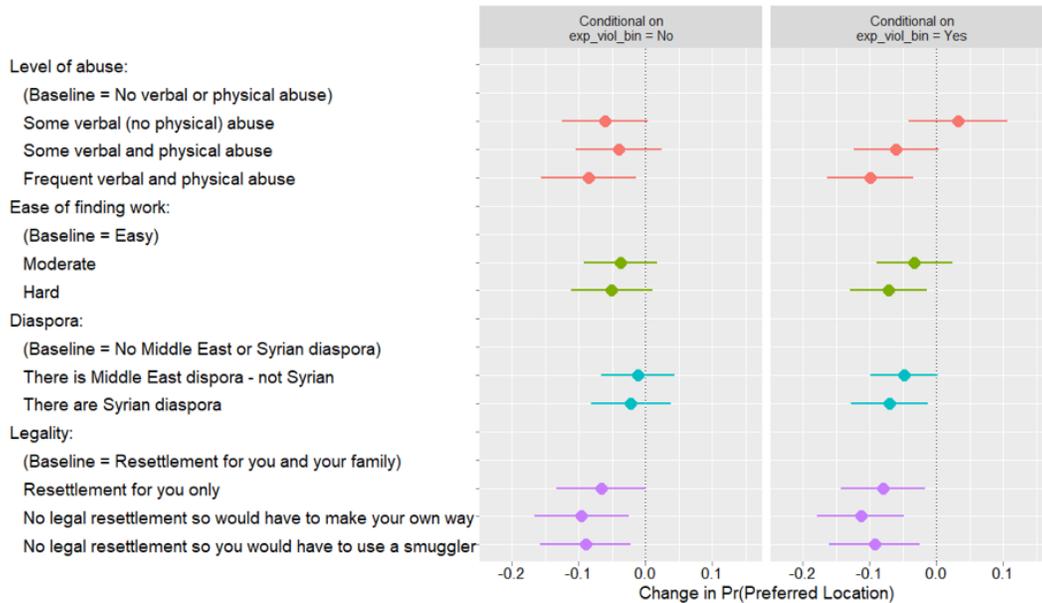
Figure 5: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate, by income



Our final test of differentiation distinguishes between respondents who identified as having been personally targeted by violence while in Syria and those that stated that they were not personally subject to violence. Here, in Figure 6, we can see that individuals that experienced violence prior to being displaced are most deterred by the possibility of encountering violence in the potential destination country.

Having shown both the aggregated and various disaggregated main effects from our conjoint experiments, we next explore three additional dimensions of the plausibility of our findings. Each of these plausibility tests are designed to directly address a real concern that readers may have with the design and wording of our conjoint. As noted in the question used for our conjoint tasks, individuals are asked about how factors might affect their preference to resettle, specifically. Given that this is the more formal term used by the UNHCR for a specific form of relocation, involving a robust vetting and selection process, if respondents are picturing the more formal process, their answers to our question might not be very useful for addressing preferences more generally regarding

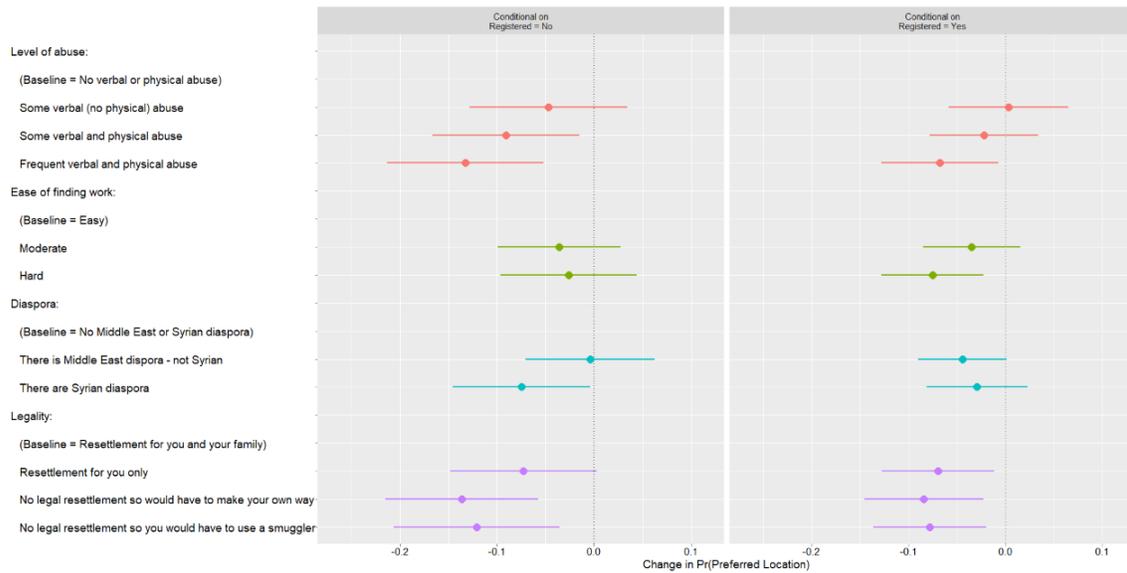
Figure 6: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate, by exposure to violence



moving or relocating to another country.

Accordingly, we explore the output of our conjoint tasks conditioned on answers to two other questions regarding the UNHCR and their formal resettlement practices. First, we ask individuals whether or not they are registered with the UNHCR in Lebanon. Our motivation here is simply that individuals registered with the UNHCR are more likely to think about resettlement as a formal process and, thus, given the numbers of opportunities through this formal process, not believe that they stand much chance of being formally resettled. Figure 7 demonstrates that the findings are mostly similar for those registered with the UN and those that are not. There are, however, two marginal differences that may be worth noting. First, unregistered individuals are actually more deterred by the presence of diaspora populations. This perhaps reinforces the ideas that these individuals – who are not thinking about the formal UNHCR process – may be picturing other nearby host countries, such as Turkey and Jordan, when they observe this cue. Second, registered individuals appear to be more consistently deterred by the difficulty of finding work in the destination country, which might reflect that they are generally more organized in their planning processes.

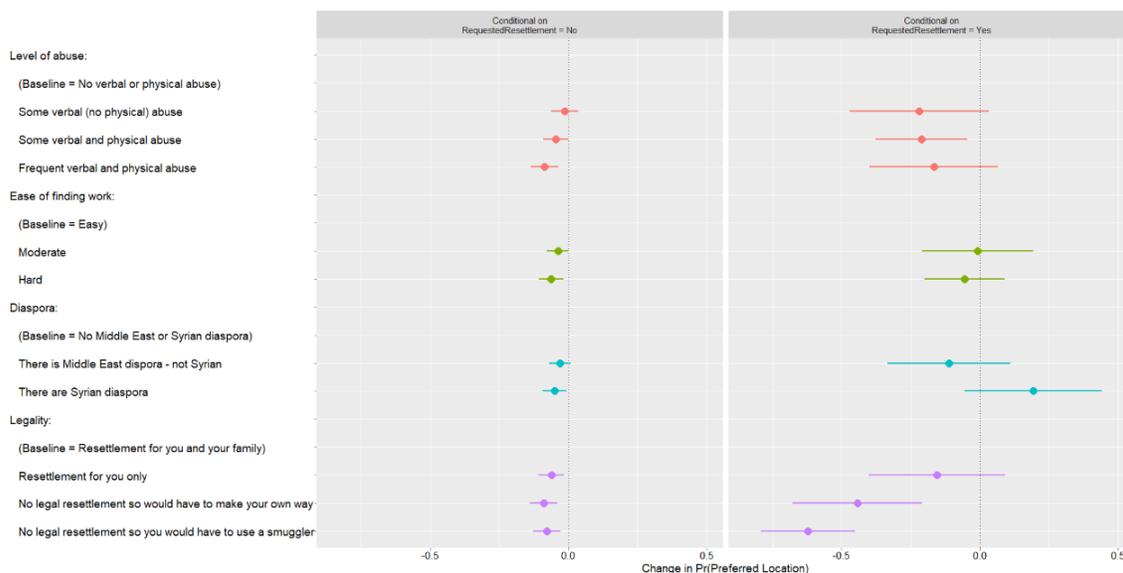
Figure 7: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate, by whether or not registered with the UN



Second, we seek an even more direct source of potential variation in understanding of resettlement opportunities and explore whether individuals who state that they have requested to be resettled through formal UNHCR processes demonstrate different or similar preferences regarding relocation countries than do individuals who have not requested formal resettlement. In this instance, there are relatively few individuals in our sample who have requested formal resettlement, resulting in just 47 conjoint tasks, as compared to 1736 tasks completed by individuals who have not requested formal resettlement. So, on the face of it, we might see these descriptives as evidence that individuals are not greatly varied in the likelihood with which they view the term resettlement as a formal process. Unsurprisingly, these tests appear to demonstrate that the minority of individuals who have requested formal resettlement are less likely to be deterred by the attributes included in our conjoint tasks. Indeed, the only attribute that seems to deter these individuals is the restriction of legal opportunity afforded the individuals.

Third, we condition the relationship by whether respondents have expressed an interest in moving to another country. Naturally, we might anticipate that not all refugees desire to relocate to a third country. Indeed, our findings earlier in this paper and elsewhere support the idea that many

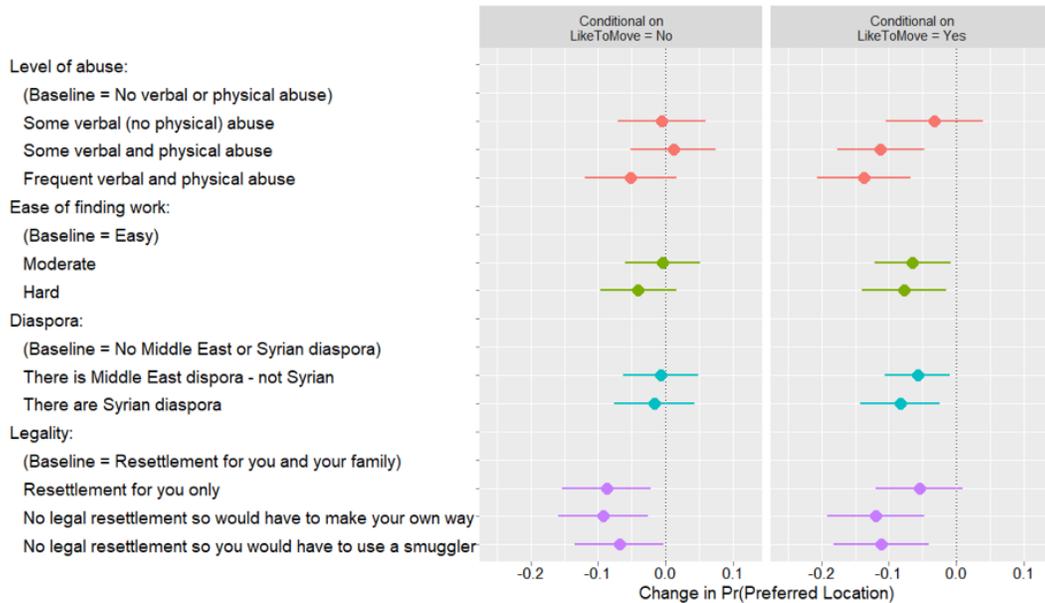
Figure 8: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate, by whether or not requested resettlement



individuals wish to remain in place in Lebanon until it is possible for them to return to their home or elsewhere in Syria. It seems important, therefore, to demonstrate that individuals with and those without a desire to relocate to a third country do, in fact, reveal distinct preferences in response to our conjoints.

Figure 9 demonstrates that respondents who do not desire a move to a third country are, indeed, less likely to be motivated or deterred by the factors listed in our question. Indeed, only questions about legality appear to affect the preferences on individuals who do not wish to relocate, with a lack of legal options deterring such a desire. By contrast, those who do wish to move elsewhere (in general) appear far more consistently deterred by the potential for experiencing abuse, difficulty finding work, and presence of a diaspora in the potential country of resettlement. We suggest this evidence boosts the plausibility of the findings detailed earlier regarding each of these potential deterrent factors.

Figure 9: Coefficient plot of motivations to relocate, by desire to move to a foreign country



## 5 Discussion

The international community needs to act urgently to provide more durable solutions to refugee situations globally. The vast majority (perhaps in excess of 85%) of the more than 22 million refugees globally are hosted in neighboring countries who initially opened their borders to provide temporary relief but now carry a disproportionate burden. With formal resettlement and repatriation numbers insufficient to provide viable alternatives to local hosting, we suggest that more can be done to understand the preferences held by refugees when considering relocating from their local host countries. This paper addresses this gap in our knowledge by seeking answers to the following research questions: First, what factors affect whether individual refugees wish to resettle or relocate? Second, what factors affect to where refugees might prefer to relocate?

We suggest that while the international community may be slow in responding to protracted refugee situations, refugees are frequently considering their options for relocation. While a small proportion may explore and apply for formal resettlement through the UNHCR, the majority that consider their next step will focus upon less formal alternatives, including returning home and sim-

ply relocating to a new country by their own means. We address this decision-making process by drawing evidence from a survey of nearly 2,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon that we conducted in the Summer of 2018. As part of our survey, we asked a variety of questions about prospective planning and preferences for relocating and resettling. Included within these questions was a simple conjoint task that asked respondents to choose between hypothetical locations for resettlement.

This simple conjoint task reveals quite compelling evidence. Refugees are likely to be deterred from choosing to relocate to countries where they face the prospect of physical abuse, where they are likely to struggle to find employment, and where there are legal restrictions on their ability to bring their family with them or to arrive in the country legally. Perhaps more counter-intuitively – especially given “push-and-pull” logics of migration – refugees appear deterred by the presence of middle eastern, and especially Syrian, diaspora in the potential destination country. We suggest that this likely reflects the kinds of destination countries refugees have in mind; with countries with significant diaspora likely looking too similar to their current host country – e.g., we suspect they are picturing Turkey or Jordan under these circumstances.

Our evidence also reveals that preferences are conditioned by demographics, with men, single people, and younger generations each displaying somewhat more self-interested and less communal preferences for resettlement. Furthermore, economic capacity and prior experience of violence also shape preferences regarding likely future economic opportunities and abuse, respectively. Finally, we suggest confidence in our results is bolstered by the observation that these general effects are stronger amongst individuals who are not registered with the UN or have not requested resettlement, and those that nonetheless do desire to relocate. In other words, these are not simply individuals considering using formal resettlement processes made available by the UNHCR. Indeed, it appears that these might in fact be quite the opposite – individuals who understand that they might not be eligible for the vanishingly rare resettlement opportunities globally but nonetheless wish to consider options for relocation. This suggests that whether or not the international community formulates a plan for re-housing refugees, they are highly likely to consider their options.

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