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The Dynamics of Refugee Return:
Syrian Refugees and Their Migration Intentions *

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The Dynamics of Refugee Return: Syrian Refugees and Their Migration Intentions

In order to understand how refugee crises end we require an understanding of when and why refugees return home. We study the drivers of refugees' decision-making using original observational and experimental data from a representative sample of 3,003 Syrian refugees in Lebanon. We find that conditions in a refugee's home country are the primary drivers of

return intentions. Refugees' decisions are influenced primarily by safety and security in their place of origin, their economic prospects, and the availability of public services. Personal networks and confidence in information are also important. By contrast, the conditions in refugee-hosting countries—so-called “push” factors—play a much smaller role. Even in the face of hostility and poor living conditions, refugees are unlikely to return unless the situation at home improves significantly. In addition to the data from Lebanon, we explore the generality of our findings using a second original survey of Syrian refugees in Jordan.

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