Impacts of Housing Assistance on Syrian Refugee Resilience during COVID-19

Samuel Leone (University of California, Berkeley)

December 2020

With Edward Miguel (University of California, Berkeley), Sandra Rozo (University of Southern California) & Emma Smith (Harvard University)

Motivation

- 22 million refugees reside in low- and middle-income countries, more than the population of Sri Lanka.

- 17.5 million of them reside, not in camps, but in host communities.

Motivation

- Researchers have produced little evidence on how best to support refugees renting housing in the private market.

- COVID-19, which has confined people to their homes and caused financial distress, makes the need for evidence even more acute.

Motivation

- We ran a randomized impact evaluation of a housing-assistance program for Jordan's Syrian refugees.

- The housing experiment is similar to others like the Moving to Opportunity and Family Options studies but is the first (to our knowledge) focused on LMIC refugees.

Context, Design & Implementation

- Jordan has 655,000 registered Syrian refugees, which is 6.5% of the country's population.

- 4/5 reside in the host community; 1/5 reside in camps.

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- **Current Work**: What are the effects of rental subsidies on *refugee* outcomes like economic well-being, health, and education?

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- **Future Work**: What are the effects of rental subsidies on *host-community* outcomes like housing prices and social integration?

Context, Design & Implementation

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- **Low Subsidy**:
  ~$400 toward reduced-rent housing, plus a solar water heater.
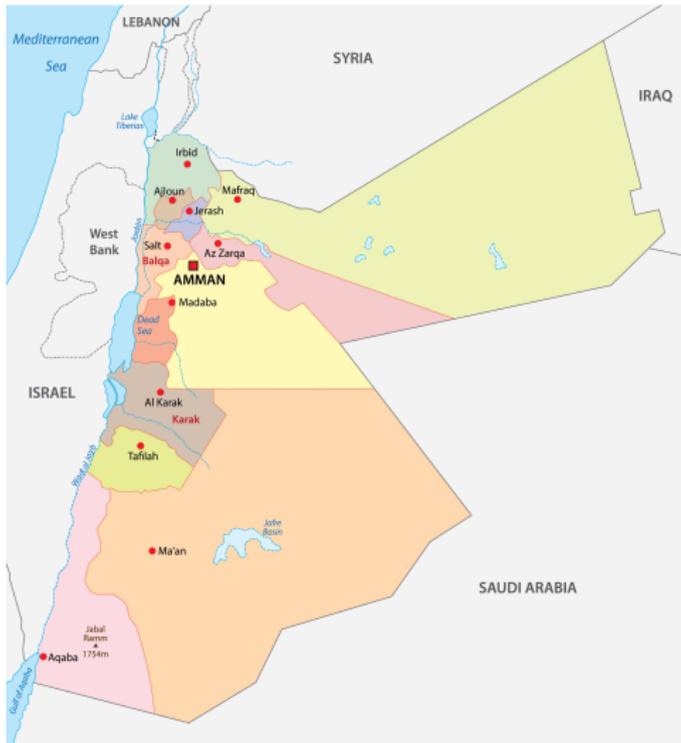
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The subsidies were for existing housing, i.e. no refugees moved.

Context, Design & Implementation

Randomized treatment/control among 334 localities in the northern governorates of Irbid and Mafraq, just south of Syria.

Context, Design & Implementation

Coordinated with the longitudinal Syrian Refugee Life Study (S-RLS) to collect the following data:

- Consumption and expenditures.
- Credit and savings.
- Labor supply and earnings.
- Physical and mental health.
- Children's education.
- Migration.
- Marriage and fertility.
- Community groups and social capital.
- Experience with bribery, crime, and harassment.
- Risk, time, and social preferences.

Context, Design & Implementation

- **Aug.-Sep. 2020**: Conducted a "midline" phone survey to collect data on how our intervention has affected refugee resilience during COVID-19 (N=2,312).

- **Sep.-Dec. 2021**: Plan to conduct the endline in-person survey once all subsidies are dispersed and once COVID-19 mitigation makes it easier to detect labor-market effects.

Context, Design & Implementation

- Achieved a **high response rate** of 86%, due to persistent follow-up.

- Achieved **baseline balance** on 18 of 19 measures, indicating successful randomization.

Descriptive Statistics & Preliminary Results

- Present descriptive statistics and noteworthy (statistically significant) preliminary results.

- Continue to evaluate the impacts according to a registered pre-analysis plan.

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- Treatment **lowered** the share of households taking out loans during the lockdown.

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- Treatment **lowered** the share of individuals displaying symptoms of clinical depression.

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- 4 in 5 households had school-age children not engaged in daily learning activities at the time of the survey.

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- Treatment **raised** the share of households whose children were engaged in daily learning activities.

Thank you!

leone@berkeley.edu

Photo Citations

- Photo #1. Creative Commons. World Bank Photo Collection. "Daily life in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan."

- Photo #2. Creative Commons. EU Civil Protection & Humanitarian Aid. "Supporting Venezuelan migrants and refugees in times of coronavirus."

- Photo #3. Creative Commons. USAID Images. "Window into refugee camp."

- Photo #4. Norwegian Refugee Council. Alisa Reznick. 2015.

- Photo #5. Norwegian Refugee Council. Georg Schaumberger. 2014.

- Photo #6. WorldAtlas. "Governorates of Jordan Map."