Job Search Assistance for Refugees in Jordan: An Adaptive Field Experiment

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Abstract

The world is facing the largest displacement crisis since World War II, yet little is known about how to help those displaced find work in host communities. We examine the impact of three interventions designed to tackle credit constraints, information frictions and self-control challenges on the employment outcomes and well-being of Syrian refugees and local jobseekers in Jordan. A key innovation is that we introduce an adaptive approach to intervention delivery. We use a variant of Thompson sampling and a hierarchical Bayesian model to assign interventions sequentially, targeted based on demographics and with beliefs updated using prior employment outcomes. This procedure is designed to maximize the number of participants finding work, in contrast with conventional designs that minimize the variance of treatment effect estimators. We evaluate the employment gains that are obtained thanks to this protocol and discuss its appliability to different research and policy contexts.
1 Introduction

We are running a large randomised control trial of several interventions to help Syrian refugees find work in Jordan. The interventions include; (i) financial support, (ii) information support, (iii) psychological support, and (iv) direct placement (cross-cut with a wage subsidy). Additionally, our project offers a methodological contribution on how to randomise treatment assignment in humanitarian and crisis settings. In these settings it is important to invest early in promising treatments and thus it is optimal to deviate from the initial treatment assignment as evidence about the relative effectiveness of various interventions accumulates.

We will have early results of the interventions available in January 2020 will be able to present these at the CSAE conference in March.

We have piloted the interventions on an initial sample of 1,700 refugees. We include below some key summary statistics about this sample. Some interesting findings emerge from this data: the refugee population we have reached is quite experienced, is actively looking for work, and has reservation wages in line with minimum wages. These findings are in contrast with popular narratives about a refugee population with low skills (as skilled individuals are supposed to have migrated on to Europe), and little desire to work at prevailing wages. They also illustrate why job search assistance may be a particularly effective intervention in this context.

2 Context

In this section, we present descriptive evidence on a sample of 1,700 Syrian refugees in Amman and Irbid.

Fact 1. Refugees in our sample have substantial skills: on average, 11 years of education and 7 years of work experience.

The average years of experience among the sample is 7.1 years, however 25 percent of the sample have an average of 1 year of working experience. Males have an average of approximately 9 years of experience while females have an average of 5 years of work experience.

Males have an average of 11 years of education while females have an average of 12 years of education. As much as 20 percent of educational backgrounds are in business and management fields. Ninety eight percent of respondents have at least a minimum primary education while 20 percent have at least a bachelor?s degree. Thirty percent of the sample have at least some word processing skills and 36 percent can construct a
few phrases in English. Tables 1 - 4 illustrate some descriptive statistics of experience and skills. Out of the sample, only 37 percent have a driving license.

**Fact 2.** *Salary and safety are key determinants of job quality and work preferences.*

Job quality is defined primarily in terms of salary and safety. 40 percent of the respondents report that the remuneration is the most important factor they consider when assessing the quality of a job. This is followed closely by 39 percent who report that working in a safe and comfortable environment is the most important factor.

Further, only 20 percent and 37 percent of our sample reported that they would consider living in a factory dorm and working night shifts respectively. The average distance respondents are willing to travel to work is approximately 43 minutes one way.

The average reservation wage in our sample is 256 JOD/month, close to the local minimum wage.

**Fact 3.** *A large fraction of the refugees in our sample is actively looking for employment*

On average, in the last 30 days, 43.4 percent of the refugees reported that they have looked for employment. Males were more likely than females to look for employment reported by almost 20 percent more even though there are 10 percent more females in the sample. The most common method of search for employment amongst the refugees tends to be through social connections and a site visit to the job location (e.g. through family, friends or acquaintances); this is chosen by approximately 18 percent of the job seekers. This method is followed closely by use of social media. Table 7 shows the distribution of search intensity between female and male job seekers.

**Fact 4.** *Women have substantial child care duties.*

The average number of children in our sample is 1.8 children. On average females spend 14 hours per day on childcare duties. This makes it difficult to find time to look for work and to take up work.

**Fact 5.** *Refugees have diversified sources of income, including own savings, self-employment and wage work.*

Data from our survey reveals that refugees make up a third of their income from family savings brought to Jordan. Additionally, almost a third of their main sources of income comes from self-employment activities. Roughly 17 percent of the income comes from waged employment. Another 6.9 percent is reported to be NGO assistance income. Surprisingly, only 0.9 percent of income is through remittances.