

# The Dignity of Humanitarian Migrants: Explaining Migrants' Destination Preferences

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## Abstract

How do migrants fleeing violence choose where to go? Prior studies argue that asylum seekers select countries based on countries' wealth and access to welfare benefits. We argue instead that humanitarian migrants prioritize dignitarian concerns, avoiding countries that grant generous welfare benefits but limit the ability to work, and instead seek places where they can provide for themselves. Using the concept of dignity, we explain humanitarian migrants' preferences over destinations in Europe with an original survey and embedded conjoint experiment of over 1400 Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian migrants and focus groups with Syrians living in Istanbul. We show that humanitarian migrants prioritize work opportunities over other common concerns like welfare benefits, anti-immigrant sentiment, and ease of asylum, and that they tie work to their own sense of dignity.

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# Introduction

During the European Migrant Crisis, asylum applications to the EU skyrocketed (UNHCR 2014). Yet, not all European destinations were equal: Germany and Sweden were at the top of the list of preferred destinations for many. What is it about these two countries that attracted (and continue to attract) so many asylum seekers?

Many European politicians argue that it is the generous welfare state. For instance, Austria recently cut welfare payments for immigrants and refugees in hopes of deterring additional migration.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, both Sweden and Germany have generous welfare states but they have also had relatively robust economies with low unemployment; less restrictive asylum procedures, especially around the ability to work; had existing populations of Muslim migrants (if not many Syrians or Iraqis prior to 2014) that might provide a cultural network; and, prior to the influx of asylum seekers, relatively low levels of support for the far right.<sup>2</sup> Thus there are several factors that could explain why so many migrants apply for asylum in Germany and Sweden.

How do humanitarian migrants (i.e. those fleeing situations of war, persecution, conflict, or natural disaster) make their destination choices? In this paper, we examine the migration preferences of humanitarian migrants when they think about making secondary moves. We assume that when these migrants make their first move — either internally or internationally — they prioritize safety. Many, but not all, humanitarian migrants make secondary moves: the most recent data from UNHCR shows that 10.5 million people have sought refuge in the developed world, which for most would have been a secondary move, and, although there is not much data on it, there are likely many humanitarian migrants who have made sec-

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<sup>1</sup>BBC. "Austria unveils plans to cut benefits for immigrants. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44281683>.

<sup>2</sup>While positive attitudes toward non-EU migrants has fallen in Sweden since 2014 from over 70% to just over 60%, it has actually increased in Germany to over 40% and the EU as a whole. See: [https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/07/25/european-xenophobia-reflects-racial-diversity-not-asylum-applications?utm\\_source=NEWS&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=2nd+section+2nd+story+the+economist&utm\\_campaign=HQ\\_EN\\_therefugeebrief\\_external\\_180726](https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/07/25/european-xenophobia-reflects-racial-diversity-not-asylum-applications?utm_source=NEWS&utm_medium=email&utm_content=2nd+section+2nd+story+the+economist&utm_campaign=HQ_EN_therefugeebrief_external_180726).

ondary moves within the developing world.<sup>3</sup> In this paper we examine the how humanitarian migrants rank different country characteristics when they decide where to go or whether to stay where they are.

Humanitarian migrants are unique because circumstances beyond their control forced them to migrate. Being forced to leave their homes makes them not just economically vulnerable, but also affects their sense of self-worth. Losing their community and livelihood puts them in a vulnerable position of dependency, which is often humiliating. In turn their desire to regain control and agency over their lives affects their migration choices. We argue that humanitarian migrants look for destinations where they can be self-sufficient, restoring their sense of dignity. Empirically, we expect migrants to prefer destinations where they can achieve this goal primarily based on two factors: the ability to work and the ease of receiving asylum, which can open job opportunities and provide legal stability. Rather than seeking benefits, humanitarian migrants seek opportunities.

We test our argument in the context of the European migrant crisis of 2014-2016. The civil war in Syria and incursions by ISIS in the region produced the largest global refugee crisis since World War II. While most refugees stayed in the region, over 1 million Syrians and over 100,000 Iraqis moved to Europe.<sup>4</sup> Of the more than 1 million migrants who reached Europe by sea, fewer than 5% stayed in the first European country they reached. They often bypassed relatively wealthy countries, like Austria and Denmark, to apply for asylum in Germany and Sweden.<sup>5</sup> We thus examine a situation in which many (but not all) humanitarian migrants have at least thought about moving onward.

To test our argument, we fielded an original survey in 2016 to over 1,400 Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and non-migrants in Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. The survey included both observational questions about destination

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/pgm\\_2016-08-02\\_europe-asylum-04/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/pgm_2016-08-02_europe-asylum-04/).

<sup>5</sup>Eurostat. "Asylum in the EU Member States Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015 Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis: top citizenships." Eurostat News Release. 44/2016.

choice and a conjoint experiment to test the relative importance of different factors. We followed our survey with focus groups and interviews of Syrians living in Istanbul in 2017. We found that while the location of family was a factor for the relatively small number of migrants who had family abroad,<sup>6</sup> humanitarian migrants overwhelmingly were concerned about the labor market and their ability to rebuild their lives. The focus group participants echoed these sentiments, focusing on the ability to provide for themselves as a matter of dignity. While the Syrian population is more educated and slightly wealthier than the average humanitarian migrant, we found little difference in the results by skill or wealth, suggesting that our findings generalize to other contexts.

Our paper contributes to our understanding of migration by fleshing out how humanitarian migrants have distinct preferences over locations that driven by many factors, including a sense of dignity. Our research complements some but contradicts existing explanations of migration motives. The neoclassical economic model focuses on expected wage differentials between countries as a driving factor; we add to this by explaining *why* the ability to gain employment matters to the migrants' sense of self-worth in addition to their economic well-being. Our paper also complements work on networks; we examine a context in which many of our migrants had few existing networks in Europe to draw upon and instead were "migrant entrepreneurs." Our focus groups showed the importance of networks in preventing migration as well: networks in Turkey provide an economic and emotional safety net, affecting the choice to move onward. Finally, the paper contradicts political claims and the views of many citizens in wealth countries that migrants seek welfare benefits.<sup>7</sup> We find that while access to benefits in the short run to help get settled is important to humanitarian migrants, relying on the state over the long term is seen as demeaning to migrants' dignity.

This paper also makes a methodological contribution in the study of humanitarian migrants. Existing research on refugee flows looks at the countries where asylum seekers end

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<sup>6</sup>There are only about 1 million Syrian refugees in Europe in comparison to the about 5.5 million in the countries surrounding Syria and 6.3 million who are internally displaced. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/>.

<sup>7</sup>See Gerber et al. (2017) and Hanson, Scheve and Slaughter (2007) but see Goldstein and Peters (2014).

up.<sup>8</sup> These studies assume that migrants applied for asylum in their ideal location. However, interviews show that unexpected factors often change where asylum seekers go (Day and White 2002; Rossi and Vitali 2014). We therefore explore migrants' preferences directly, in many cases before they settle in their final destination or while they are contemplating a second move. This approach also avoids problems of limited or biased recall.

An analysis of migrant destination preferences is critical to understanding the politics surrounding migrant crises. Far-right parties and many citizens of wealthy countries assume that migrants move to gain access to welfare benefits, while many left-wing parties argue that choices about welfare benefits have no impact on migration flows. Empirical analysis from the perspectives of migrants helps to differentiate these competing claims. Additionally, understanding which country features matter most to migrants can help formulate policy that takes their needs into account, rather than only the recipient states' preferences. In particular, we find that most migrants want to return to their home countries, but they put a strong value on opportunities to work in the interim. Policies that provide temporary work permits for humanitarian migrants, rather than permanent asylum, may be preferred by both migrants and receiving countries.

## Defining Humanitarian Migrants

Many scholars have noted the limits of the term refugee, which is a limited legal construct created at the end of the second world war. For at least three decades, scholars and practitioners have noted that there is a false dichotomy in the distinction between voluntary migrants and refugees. Hein (1993) notes that the factors that lead individuals to leave in both cases are often the same, resulting from unstable nation states. Further, the belief that refugees spontaneously leave while economic migrants carefully plan their migration is also not born by the evidence (Hein 1993).<sup>9</sup> The structural factors like violence and poverty

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<sup>8</sup>E.g. Blair, Grossman and Weinstein (2019), Moore and Shellman (2007), and Neumayer (2004).

<sup>9</sup>Even early, Kunz (1973) noted that refugees may make anticipatory and acute movements.

motivate people to explore migration; those normally labeled refugees do not simply rush out, but seek out information and tend to be well-informed about their destination options (Holland and Peters 2019).

Labeling has real-world consequences, including the right to receive citizenship and benefits, that are available to some but not others (Zetter 1991). In using the term refugees, then, it is believed some people have more legitimate reasons to migrate. The term of refugee, however, can create stigmas, which Zetter (1991) explains that shape people’s identity, leading to alienation or second-class status. We will return to this point when we discuss the dignity of migrants in the theory section, but for now we note that focusing on refugees leaves out a large subset of people who are, for all intents and purposes, in the same situation.

To move away from that dichotomy that is not realistic, and often has dangerous policy consequences, we chose to focus on all types of migrants that left for reasons outside their control, leaving violence, extreme poverty, or a natural disaster, regardless of whether they qualify for legal refugee status. Henceforth, we refer to them as *humanitarian migrants*.

## **Context: The European Migrant Crisis**

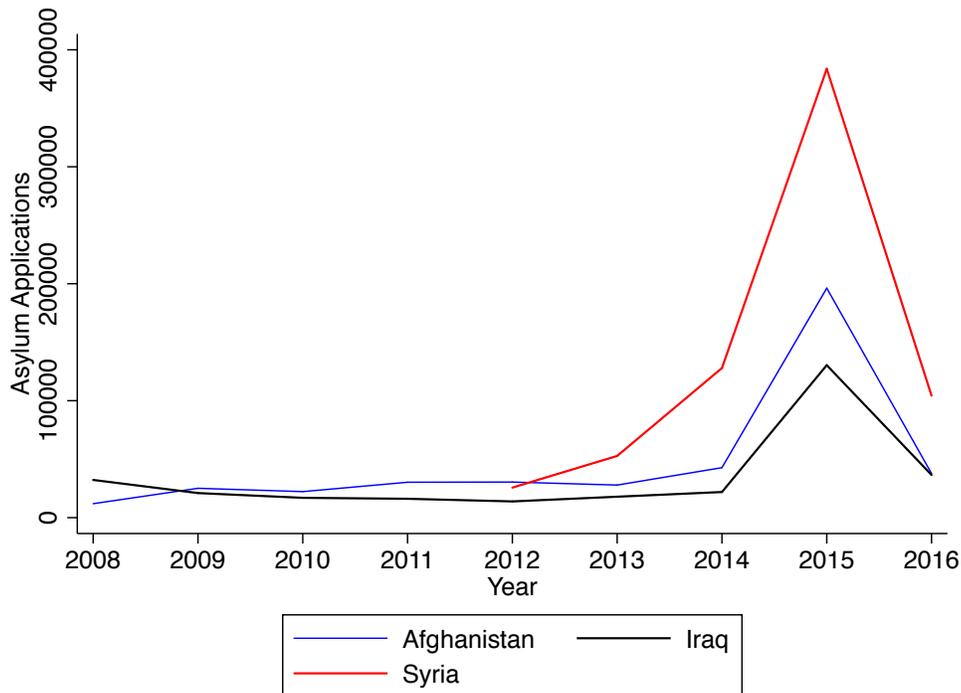
The Syrian civil war has produced an enormous outflow of refugees, with an estimated 13 million people displaced (7 million inside Syria and 6 million outside). Of those, almost one million have gone to Europe in search of asylum. Along with Syrians, asylum applications from Iraqis, Afghanis, and a host of other nations reached record numbers in 2015 in many European countries (Figure 1). Most migrants traveled through Greece in hopes of reaching Northwestern Europe, especially Germany and Sweden.

While media attention has centered on migrants reaching Europe, millions of Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian migrants stayed in Middle East. Conventional wisdom has it that they stayed behind because they lacked the funds to migrate to Europe.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as we describe in

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<sup>10</sup>See for example, “Most Syrian refugees are just too poor to flee to Europe.” *Washington Post* 30 September 2015.

Figure 1: The Increase in Asylum Applications to the European Union, 2008-16



Source: Eurostat. Statistics only available through the first quarter of 2016.

more detail below, many migrants *chose* to stay in the region.

The choice of destinations in Europe also raises questions. For instance, Germany attracted the majority of asylum applications (158,657), while similarly wealthy countries with larger Muslim populations, like France (3,553 applications), received very few. Officials from the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) even traveled to Munich to persuade refugees to settle in France and relieve the pressure on Germany.<sup>11</sup> The focus on Germany is puzzling if we focus on benefits as the main motivator. Austria offered more generous allowances to asylum seekers (up to \$422 per month in 2015) than Germany (up to \$216) and similarly, Denmark (\$937) offered more than Sweden (up to \$270). Yet many migrants passed through Austria to get to Germany or Denmark to get to Sweden. Finally, within the Middle East region, Turkey has attracted far more refugees than

<sup>11</sup>“Non, Merci,” *The Economist*, Jan. 30, 2016.

Jordan or Lebanon, which are both Arabic-speaking countries where daily life presumably would be easier. The next section considers how existing explanations make sense of these choices.

## Existing Explanations

Research on migration largely focuses on *why* individuals choose to migrate, rather than *where* they go. Nonetheless, this literature offers insight into migrant choices. Neoclassic economic explanations suggest that migrants balance economic returns (wages and employment) against the costs of migration. Similarly, the new economics of migration literature argues households mitigate risk by diversifying their portfolio of locations, preferring locations with relatively high wages, low unemployment, and low prices to maximize remittances. Overall, economic models suggest that migrants choose relatively wealthy, low-unemployment countries. But they tell us little about how migrants choose between two wealthy, low-unemployment countries, say Germany (4.6% unemployment in 2015) and the UK (5.3%), or why they prefer a country that has higher unemployment, like Sweden (7.4%) or Turkey (11.3%; Eurostat 2016).

An alternative approach, developed by sociologists, examines how networks facilitate migration and channel migrants to some locations over others. Previous migrants provide information and funds to migrate and support once the migrant arrives, which lowers the costs and risks of migration (Massey et al. 1993). The hard part is explaining how such snowballs start. While there are large North African and Turkish populations in Europe, there were few preexisting Syrian communities in Europe prior to 2011 when fighting broke out. Thus, while migrant networks may impact migration decisions once a sufficient number arrive (Day and White 2002), they cannot explain why migrants initially select one country over another or how those with weaker ties make their choices.

Finally, politicians, especially from right-wing parties, argue that migrants move to coun-

tries with greater social welfare benefits, a concern that is echoed by some citizens in wealthy countries (e.g. Gerber et al. 2017). Humanitarian migrants often have lost substantial resources: their possessions may have been destroyed and/or they left their homes quickly, making it difficult to convert immobile assets into liquid ones. Humanitarian migrants therefore may be more reliant on welfare benefits. Given the high stakes of migration decisions, migrants may pay attention to differences in access to benefits that provide some economic security. Paradoxically, then, the politicians who criticize “bogus refugees” for depending on social welfare benefits may be criticizing those most in need.

Nonetheless, it is not clear that humanitarian migrants prioritize access to welfare benefits. Empirical evidence for this claim is limited (e.g. Zavodny 1997). When choosing among developed countries, migrants may perceive few differences in benefits. Moreover, as we discuss next, research on the welfare state suggests that individuals often avoid welfare instead valuing of work and self-sufficiency.

## **Theory: The Dignity of Humanitarian Migrants**

We seek to explain the destination preferences of humanitarian migrants primarily when they choose whether to make a secondary migration from a place of safety (sometimes within their own country, but usually a neighboring country) to a final destination. Some humanitarian migrants may have had a location in mind prior to leaving their home; but many likely decide whether and where to move once they reach a relatively safe location. As Crawley and Skleparis (2018) highlights, refugees can form and change their preferences over the course of their migration. Regardless of when migrants make these decisions, we argue that migrants’ decisions are guided by preferences to maintain their dignity and rebuild their lives.

While dignity has been defined in many ways, most definitions share two aspects: status and self-sufficiency (or autonomy). A growing body of studies shows individuals reject

policies in their economic interests to preserve their social status. For instance, Kuziemko et al. (2014) show a tendency towards “last-place aversion:” low-income individuals oppose redistribution because it could differentially help the group just beneath them. Relatedly, McClendon (2018) shows that a desire to maintain social status can lead individuals to reject Pareto-improving economic policies, such as housing subsidies to one’s neighbors.

Dignity is normally tied to self-sufficiency or autonomy and work therefore plays a central role (Rosen 2012).<sup>12</sup> As Margalit (1998, 249) argues, “People consider their work valuable when it enables them to support themselves through their own labor without being dependent on the goodwill of others. Work gives people the autonomy and economic citizenship that preserves their human dignity.” Likewise, sociologists have found that work is tied to notions of status and autonomy; most notably, Lamont (2000) argues that working class whites stress their self-sufficiency as a way to maintain their dignity, even as they struggle economically. Nor is the tie of work to dignity a notion that is only found in Western thought; Ali (1988, 576) notes that, “work in Islam is considered a virtue in light of mans needs and the necessity to establish equilibrium in ones individual and social life.” Waldron (2012), citing Gewirth, further argues that dignity denotes the right to make claims on the state.

The reverse of dignity is social humiliation and dependence. Margalit (1998, 234) notes that pity results from a loss of self-esteem and autonomy: “If people are in control, they are not pitied even when they are in severe distress.” Individuals do not like to be pitied or viewed as victims. For instance, unemployment is politically demobilizing because individuals lose their self-sufficiency and prefer to stay out of social view. Individuals who qualify for welfare benefits may forgo them due to the associated humiliation. For this reason, work on welfare regimes often consider not simply the level of assistance offered, but also the status connotations of receiving welfare benefits (Esping-Andersen 1990).

We argue that dignity is a key element in explaining the behavior of humanitarian migrants. Humanitarian migrants suffer a major loss in social status and autonomy. Most

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<sup>12</sup>Political and legal theorists often discuss the need to preserve the dignity of dependents, such as children and the disabled, who cannot make claims for themselves.

humanitarian migrants led relatively normal lives prior to the events that led them to flee: they held jobs, provided for themselves and their families, and were members of a community. Their lives are upended and they have to flee their homes, leaving behind not just property but their entire way of life. Leaving their homes leads them to become dependent on governments, international institutions, charities, or other agencies for shelter, food, basic services, and legal recognition. This state of dependency is often humiliating for people who are used to being self-sufficient. In this way, humanitarian migrants differ from many (though certainly not all) economic migrants.

We argue that the choices of humanitarian migrant are informed by the experience of loss of dignity, especially because they have to depend on others. In many ways, humanitarian migrants are oppressed, at least as conceived by Young (1989). While humanitarian migrants are not necessarily exploited, they are often powerless — in that they must live and work under the authority of others (often UNHCR and other humanitarian groups) without having much autonomy themselves — and marginalized when they have no access to work, school, or other major social activities (Young 1989, 261).<sup>13</sup>

These experiences of loss of dignity, powerlessness, and marginalization drive humanitarian migrants to make choices to end their state of dependency, which many experience as humiliating. Generous benefits do not serve to end this state of dependency, as they continue to marginalize the migrants, and as such migrants will prefer work over benefits. Indeed, many scholars show there is a strong correlation between unemployment and depression. For example, a decade long study of South Asian male migrants in Canada showed that unemployment was a strong predictor of depression (Beiser and Hou 2001). Further, unemployment is a major daily stressors for refugees, with significant impact on their mental health (Baranik, Hurst and Eby 2018; Miller and Rasmussen 2010). Similarly, in her interviews with hundreds of Syrian migrants, Wendy Pearlman found the concern with dignity clearly voiced: “We don’t have a problem with death. Our problem is life without dignity.

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<sup>13</sup>They also are likely to suffer from cultural imperialism as they are stereotyped and yet invisible and suffer from random violence and harassment (Young 1989, 261).

If we'd known what was in store for us, we never would have come" Pearlman (2017, 299).

The implication is that humanitarian migrants will prioritize destinations that help them regain their social status and independence. We expect a concern for dignity to have three empirical implications. First, migrants will prioritize destinations where they can work (and this may include working under the table) over those with generous benefit packages. Second, humanitarian migrants will value their legal status. While legal status has been shown to matter for all types of migrants (Fitzgerald, Leblang and Teets 2014), the recognition accorded will be especially salient for humanitarian migrants. Dignity is a matter of social status and legality confers status. Notably, the desire for legal status may involve not pursuing refugee status. As we return to below, "refugees" often are viewed as deserving of pity even by those who are legal (e.g. Convention) refugees. Humanitarian migrants may want legal stability without the status connotations associated with being a refugee. The desire for secure status thus implies that humanitarian migrants will choose a destination that offers relatively quick and easy asylum when they choose among countries with different asylum procedures.

A related hypothesis is that humanitarian migrants who have been physically threatened or victimized should be the most concerned about their legal status. Legal status provides security against deportation, which should be a strong concern for those physically threatened or harmed. Becoming vulnerable affects all migrants but those who experienced physical violence experience a stronger violation of their dignity and would thus place additional value on their legal status to avoid further exposure to violence.

Third, a concern with dignity has implications for the types of welfare benefits that humanitarian migrants desire. Migrants may want assistance to get back on their feet and integrate into productive society, while resisting benefits seen to promote dependence. In other words, they care about welfare benefits that allow them to become self-sufficient, including housing assistance, job training, and language classes. They also may accept welfare benefits that are provided to all members of a political community, such as health

or education. In contrast, migrants' desires to restore dignity to their lives will make them less likely to pick destinations where they must rely on public assistance for the long term, even if such assistance is generous.

These empirical predictions may differ from neoclassical explanations for destination preferences. Neoclassical accounts assume that individuals maximize their economic well-being and would be indifferent between income coming from work and welfare of equivalent monetary value. Given that work requires effort, they may even prefer the "easy" cash from the welfare state. In this case the prediction of neoclassical theories will differ from ours, as respondents would prioritize welfare benefits. On the other hand, a neoclassical account may predict a preference for work over benefits when work leads to a significantly greater income than that acquired by benefits. In our focus groups, we would expect that respondents would mention the much higher income they receive from work if this is the case.

By building off sociological theories that emphasize the psychic utility of work, we argue that on top meeting their basic needs or improving their economic status, humanitarian migrants want to be independent and restore their dignity, and this will be an important factor that shapes their preferences. Nonetheless, a dignity concern complements the neoclassical concern as in both cases individuals seek income in order to live their lives.

Our account also compliments neoclassical accounts in that we emphasize that legal risks may shape destination preferences. In a rational choice model, the chances of deportation factor into where migrants choose to go. Likewise, we expect that humanitarian migrants value legal security. In some cases, desires for legal security conflict with work. For example, some Syrians turned down jobs in the formal economy in Jordan because these tied their status to their employment, increasing the likelihood of deportation if they were fired or quit (*Putting Syrians To Work In Jordan Is Easier Said Than Done* N.d.).

We also build on sociological theories in holding that family and religious communities shape an individual's sense of social status and thus destination choices. Those with family abroad are more likely to want to join them overseas. Individuals may also want to move to

countries with large numbers of co-nationals or from similar cultures, with whom they can more easily relate. It is also possible that humanitarian migrants avoid others from their home country for fear of discrimination or reprisals.

In sum, our theory adds a layer of understanding to existing accounts that explain how migrants think about their potential destinations to understand another of the important factors that shape how migrants process their destination choices.

## Research Design

To test our argument that dignity concerns help drive migration decisions, we fielded a large survey of humanitarian migrants from Syria and Iraq, who had moved to transit countries (Turkey and Jordan), were internally displaced persons (IDPs), or had stayed home but due to violence likely consider migrating. The survey included both observational questions and a forced-choice conjoint to understand the relative weight of different factors in migration choices. We followed up on the survey with focus groups and interviews of Syrian migrants in Istanbul.

Our study differs from existing studies of destination choices, which are often based on cross-national refugee flows. These studies find that asylum seekers go to countries that are wealthier, have a higher rate of asylum, less support for the far right, and share cultural ties with past waves of migrants from the sending country (e.g Neumayer 2004). Yet examining outcomes conflates preferences with factors outside of a migrants control that affect the outcome: migrants might not seek asylum where they want to, but in a location they can reach. In the case of the EU, they may be caught in a transit state and be forced to apply in that state. Further, many factors cluster together at the national level making it difficult to disentangle what drives choices. Our research design tries to overcome these problems by studying migrant preferences potentially before they arrive at their final destinations.

## Study Setting and Sample

We fielded our original in-person public opinion survey in Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria in summer 2016. The survey was administered by an independent survey firm with Syrian enumerators and gender-balanced teams to the extent feasible.<sup>14</sup> In total, we surveyed 1431 respondents.<sup>15</sup>

Constructing a sample of migrants in transit and displaced peoples is complex because it is a population in flux. Very basic statistics from UNHCR are available about the nationality and gender of migrants, but even these statistics may be misleading, considering how quickly the migrant flow changes. Given the constraints, we attempted to create a high-quality convenience sample of migrants living in urban and rural areas outside of camps. We sampled in locations where we were likely to find many Syrians and Iraqis in Turkey and Jordan and locations that had substantial internally displaced populations and safe access in Syria and Iraq. These included Gaziantep and Istanbul, Turkey; Amman and Mafraq, Jordan; Duhok, Iraq; and al-Atareb and Idlib, Syria (Figure 2).<sup>16</sup>

To select respondents, enumerators used two strategies. In Turkey and Jordan, survey teams rotated among a dozen sites, selecting randomly from among sites where migrants gather to create a more representative sample. Enumerators used skip rules, surveying every tenth migrant that they met in public areas. In Syria and Iraq, security concerns prevented enumerators from surveying in public areas. Instead, they conducted household surveys, randomizing the first house and then following a skip rule of every fifth unit.

Our survey is not representative of the entire migrant population. However, it does offer a high-quality convenience sample in a very complex, violent environment. Compared to many other surveys that rely on snowball sampling and chain referrals (as done by even top international organizations like IOM (2016)), every effort was made to randomly select

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<sup>14</sup>In Syria, the survey firm could not use female enumerators due to active conflict and restrictions on women's movement.

<sup>15</sup>A pre-analysis plan was registered with EGAP before the survey was fielded.

<sup>16</sup>Appendix Section 2 provides details on the site selection and sampling.

Figure 2: Map of Survey Sites



interviewees and capture a snapshot of the population. Our sample is similar in demographics to the UNHCR statistics at the time (Appendix Section 2).

We supplement the survey with focus groups and interviews with Syrian community leaders in Turkey. Focus groups were divided by gender and age. We selected community leaders with diverse profiles, ranging from business owners to NGO workers to youth organization leaders. The conversations were conducted by trained moderators in Arabic, recorded, and transcribed.<sup>17</sup>

## Empirical Strategy

To examine the destination preferences of migrants, we use descriptive survey questions, a forced-choice conjoint experiment, and qualitative interviews. Our descriptive questions asked respondents whether they wanted to migrate to another country or wanted to stay

<sup>17</sup>Additional details on participants' recruitment and demographics are included in Appendix Section 3.

where they were and the reasons for this choice. We also asked a series of questions about the conditions when respondents left their homes (or their current conditions for those who remained) and a battery of demographic questions.<sup>18</sup>

We use a forced-choice conjoint experiment in which respondents chose between hypothetical destination countries. As noted above, many attributes cluster together in the real world; in a conjoint experiment, we can allow each of these attributes to vary independently and thus understand their relative importance in shaping decisions. Conjoint experiments have been used to understand opinions on immigration in host nations (e.g. Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015), but to our knowledge, this is one of the first conjoint experiment conducted with migrants.

We ask the following: *Below you will be given information about two hypothetical countries where you could seek to settle permanently. Which country would you prefer to settle in?* We included three different attributes to test our argument that migrants seek destinations in which they can restore their dignity, including labor market conditions, the length of the asylum process, and access to social welfare. We also include two attributes to test hypotheses suggested by the literature including the extent of support for anti-immigration political parties, which Fitzgerald, Leblang and Teets (2014) found predicts destination choices of economic migrants, and the size of the Muslim population, as a rough proxy for social networks and/or concerns about cultural similarities.<sup>19</sup> Each attribute has two levels to increase statistical power, sacrificing some conceptual nuance. The attributes are:

- *Anti-immigration parties*: Small/large anti-immigrant political parties
- *Social welfare access*: Access/no access to social welfare benefits
- *Muslim populations*: Small/large Muslim populations
- *Legal process for asylum*: Slow and hard to get asylum/quick and easy to get asylum

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<sup>18</sup>See Appendix Section 4 for the survey instrument.

<sup>19</sup>Prior to 2011, there were few Syrians in Europe, meaning that their networks were likely small.

- *Labor market conditions*: Opportunities to work/no work

The attributes of the pair of countries were randomly assigned. In any given pair the level of the attributes might differ or might be the same between the two countries. This feature along with the presentation of multiple attributes reduces any social desirability bias, as respondents have multiple reasons for choosing one country profile over another (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014, 27).

Prior to fielding the survey, we held a focus group with Middle Eastern (mostly Iraqi) refugees in conjunction with a refugee resettlement agency to ensure our attributes and levels could be easily understood. Figure 3 provides a screen shot of the conjoint.

Our first prediction is that work will be the most important attribute so that humanitarian migrants can regain their dignity. The social welfare system may be important to refugees as many migrants require assistance to get back on their feet, but work should be a higher priority. An alternative explanation is that asylum seekers seek access to the social welfare system above all else (Neumayer 2004; 2005; Shellman and Stewart 2007).

Our second hypothesis is that migrants seek destinations where getting asylum is easier. Asylum provides a pathway to make claims and work. We also predict this will be a stronger motivation for individuals who experienced physical violence. We operationalize experiences with violence using questions on the types of violence that took place in an individual's neighborhood in the month prior for those still in Iraq and Syria, and in the month prior to leaving for those in Turkey and Jordan, including: barrel bombs, airstrikes, mortars, snipers, car or roadside bombs, chemical weapons attacks, humanitarian conscription, sexual assault, kidnapping/disappearances, executions, arbitrary arrests, or corporal punishment. From these responses, we created an index of the total number of these dangers experienced and split the sample into terciles. It is important to emphasize that almost all respondents experienced substantial violence and migrants cited violence and generalized fear as the reason for their initial move.

A limitation of the survey analysis is that we have a less ability to probe the respondents'

Figure 3: Screenshot of Destination Conjoint Experiment

Q367.

يوجد لدى البعض خيارات معينة فيما يتعلق بالمكان الذي يرغبون بالعيش فيه بالنهائية في حال قرروا الهجرة إلى أوروبا. سنقوم تالياً بإعطائك معلومات عن بلدين افتراضيين لاختيار أي منهما تفضل العيش فيه. ملاحظة للباحث: سيتم وضع المعلومات على نموذج وسيتم تزويدك بالصور. في حال كان المستجيب لا يستطيع القراءة، فقم بقراءة التوضيحات الموجودة تحت الصور...أعلى خمسة صفوف

جولة 1

	الدولة 1	الدولة 2
Work	فرص العمل	عدم توفر العمل
Anti-Immigration	عدد قليل من الأحزاب التي تعمل ضد المهاجرين	عدد قليل من الأحزاب التي تعمل ضد المهاجرين
Benefits	تتوفر ميزات الرعاية الاجتماعية	لا تتوفر ميزات الرعاية الاجتماعية
Ease-of-Asylum	عملية الحصول على لجوء سياسي سريعة وسهلة	عملية الحصول على لجوء سياسي سريعة وسهلة
Muslim-Pop	عدد السكان المسلمين كبير	عدد السكان المسلمين كبير
STOP	STOP	STOP
Country-of-Origin	العراق	إيران
Religion	مسيحي	مسلم
Education	شهادة جامعية	شهادة بكالوريا
Reason-for-Leaving	تهديد بالموت	خوف من التكنذيب
Gender	رجل	امرأة

- الدولة 1  
 الدولة 2

*Note:* Screen shot is taken from the survey preview on a computer to show the entire table. Due to technical issues, this conjoint experiment was presented with another conjoint. It is not possible to show the entire table on phones so respondents only saw the relevant conjoint when answering the question.

answers. Our qualitative interviews with community leaders and focus groups with migrants living in Turkey allow us to understand the reasoning behind these choices. We asked about their destination choices, including intentions to stay in Turkey or move to a new destination, reasons for selecting that country or staying, work status, access to benefits in Turkey, family connections in Europe, and whether they considered themselves refugees. We coded the content of each comment in the transcripts to understand patterns in the responses

(see Appendix Section 3 for the questions used to structure the interviews and coding).

## Results

### Descriptive Evidence

Our descriptive results provide both checks on the external validity of our survey and evidence for our argument. We asked respondents if they wanted to migrate to Europe and to which destination. First, a surprisingly small fraction of respondents hope to reach Europe: just 27% want to migrate to Europe in our sample.<sup>20</sup> This is in line with actual migration of Syrians; the one million in Europe represent only about 15% of Syrian refugees and less than 8% if we combine refugees with IDPs.

However, there is substantial variation across our interview sites: less than 10% of respondents in Syria want to migrate to Europe, 38% in Turkey, 32% in Jordan, and 41% in Iraq. Understandably, Syrians who have stayed through five years of fighting and tremendous violence want to stick it out. In our open-ended questions about their decision to stay, many cited a sense of nationalism. For example, one respondent said: “We did not start a revolution just to leave.” These data suggest that for many of our respondents they had made their final destination choice and that their responses reflect their reasoning to stay where they are rather than simply reflecting their preferences.

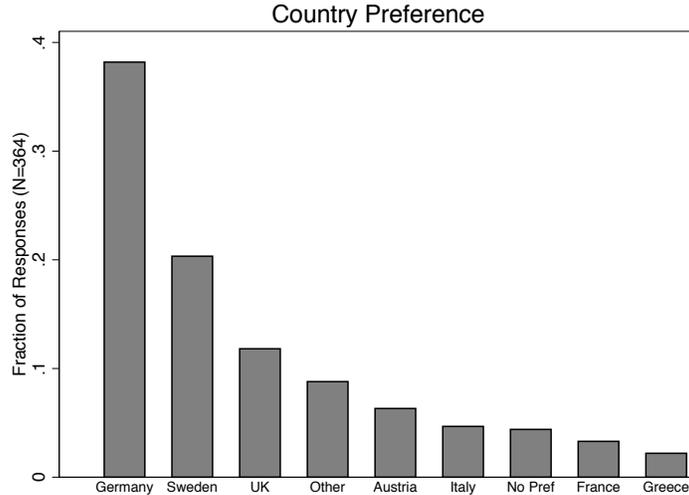
Similarly, those abroad wanted to return home if possible. We asked migrants in transit whether they would return to their home country “if the fighting were to end this year.” Amazingly, 89% said that they want to return and 83% find it likely or very likely that they eventually will return to their home country.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is not the case that all migrants want to reach Europe or that they only are limited by their finances or opportunities to make the trip.

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<sup>20</sup>Fabbe, Hazlett and Sinmazdemir (2018) also finds that close to 90% of respondents ideally want to live in Syria in 5 years and that less than 20% listed Europe as their first or second choice.

<sup>21</sup>This is similar to what Fabbe, Hazlett and Sinmazdemir (2018) found as well.

Figure 4: Destination Choice



Respondents' stated desires to return home are confirmed by their behaviors. Of those who left their home countries for Turkey or Jordan, only 12% have applied or plan to apply for resettlement to Europe. The vast majority explained their choice not to apply as the result of wanting to return home (51%) or wanting to stay in Turkey temporarily (29%) or permanently (9%).<sup>22</sup> While skepticism about the resettlement process could explain these responses, this does not seem to be the case: 52% of migrants thought that it is likely that applicants would be resettled and very few (5%) have attempted to cross to the EU with a smuggler.

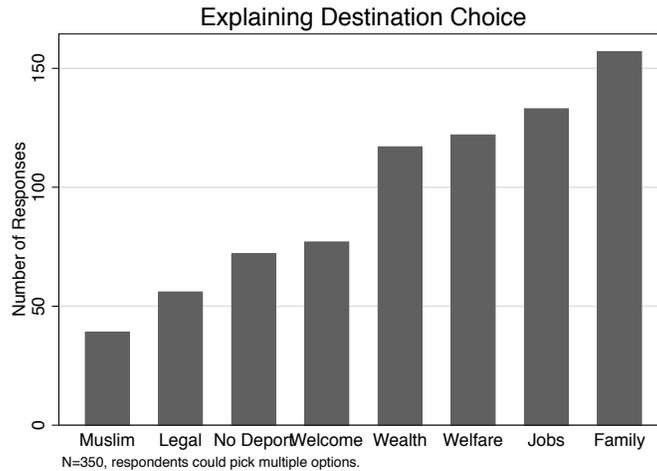
Second, among those who want to go to Europe, a majority wanted to migrate to Germany, followed by Sweden, in line with data on actual asylum applications (Figure 4). The least popular options were France and Greece.<sup>23</sup> When asked why they picked a given country, respondents with family members abroad unsurprisingly listed that as a major factor (Figure 5). Beyond family abroad, migrants listed jobs and wealth of the country along with access to welfare as a priority in line with our argument.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, migrants worried

<sup>22</sup>The remaining minority thought they were not eligible, an application would harm their chances to stay in Europe if they went with a smuggler, or they would be unable to choose where they were resettled.

<sup>23</sup>These results also are consistent with IOM's study of Iraqi migrants in Europe: 47% of Iraqi migrants in Europe wanted to reach Germany, 14% chose Finland and 10% chose Sweden (IOM 2016, 9).

<sup>24</sup>These findings contrast slightly with surveys done of migrants who already reached Europe. IOM

Figure 5: Explanations for Destination Choice



less about whether there was a large Muslim population or, more generically, a welcoming environment for refugees. Issues around the legality of migration, such as whether it is easy to gain legal status to stay permanently or whether the government deports migrants were chosen less frequently. One explanation for this finding is that migrants were surprisingly optimistic about their chances to stay in Europe: more than 80% believed that they would be able to stay permanently if they got to Europe.

In sum, the observational results provide some confirmatory evidence for our theory. First, it is a myth that all migrants are trying to reach Europe or that they want to stay permanently. The majority want to return to their home countries where they could rebuild their lives and restore their dignity. Second, as can be observed in actual migration patterns, those who want to migrate to Europe prefer Germany and Sweden. Third, migrants explain these preferences based on their perceptions of the labor market, welfare state generosity, and wealth of the host country and, for those with family abroad, their family connections. Cultural affinity and legal procedures are listed less often in selecting a destination.

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surveyed Iraqis who reached Europe and they named the ease of asylum (43%) as the main reason for selecting a given country destination, followed by friends and family (27%), easier to reach (11%), easier to get a visa (11%), and cheaper to reach (8%) (IOM 2016: 9). Yet, most of the IOM's respondents in Europe said that their reason for leaving was to find work abroad, suggesting that work was an important determinant of location choice (IOM 2016).

## Conjoint Experiment

We now turn to our experimental results. Due to technical problems capturing the attribute levels along with non-response, not all respondents have usable responses. Nonetheless about half our sample, 814, answered the conjoint experiment: 413 in Turkey, 107 in Jordan, 161 in Syria, and 133 in Iraq. More women, younger respondents, and more migrants saw the conjoint experiment. Respondents were also slightly poorer, slightly more educated, and slightly more religious than our full sample.<sup>25</sup>

### Results on the Full Sample

Figure 6 presents the results of the conjoint experiment for all respondents. To analyze the conjoint experiments, we followed the procedures laid out in Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) to recover the average marginal component effects (AMCEs) for each attribute level. The outcome variable is the (binary) choice between two hypothetical countries.<sup>26</sup> The dots represent the point estimate and the lines represent the 95% confidence interval for the AMCEs. Dots without confidence intervals are the reference categories.

Similar to the non-experimental results, we find support for our first hypothesis that the labor market conditions in the destination country have the largest effect. Shifting the labor market conditions from a lack of jobs to many employment opportunities increases the probability that our respondents choose the hypothetical country by 11 percentage points ( $se = 0.01$ ). The effect of the ability to work has almost twice the magnitude of the eligibility for welfare benefits and the ease of gaining asylum, the next largest effects.

Consistent with our second hypothesis, but in contrast to the descriptive data, the ease of gaining asylum has a relatively large effect as well.<sup>27</sup> A change from a slow and difficult to

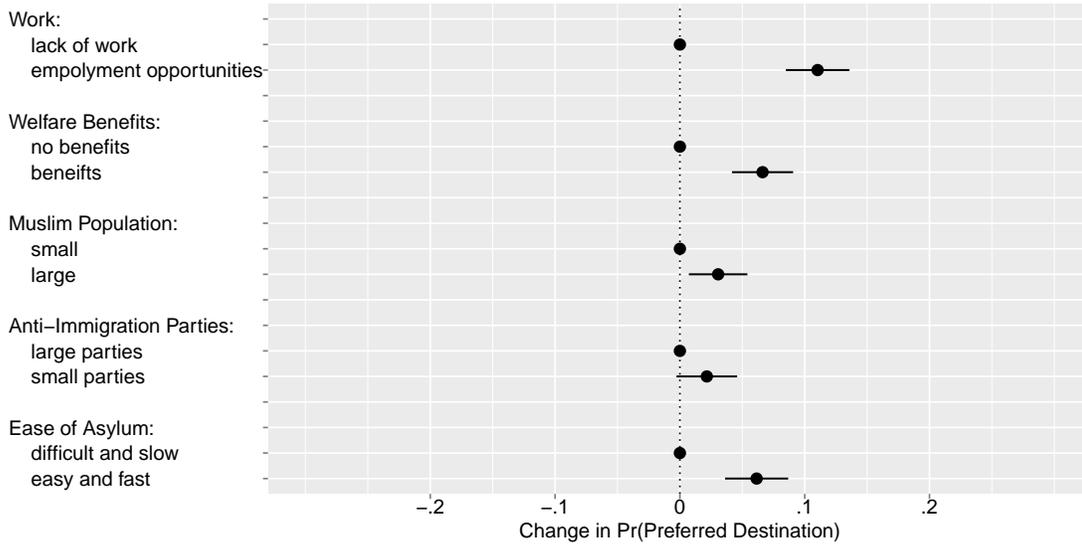
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<sup>25</sup>Appendix Table A1 on page 4 lists the demographics for those who successfully took the conjoint and those who did not.

<sup>26</sup>We also analyzed the average marginal interaction effects following Egami and Imai (2016) and found that no interaction was statistically or substantively significant.

<sup>27</sup>These results are consistent with data from the IOM (2016) on the reasons that Iraqis in Europe chose the destination they did.

Figure 6: Conjoint results



an easy and fast process increased the probability of choosing the country by 6 percentage points ( $se = 0.01$ ). As noted above, one possibility for this divergence is that our survey respondents were very optimistic about their chances to stay in Europe. Given this optimism, they may not have listed legal treatment as a key factor, since, in their minds, these features do not vary much. It was only when prompted to make a choice between two different legal regimes (and possibly more radical ones than they believe exist in Europe) that the ease of asylum began to matter.

We also find some support for our third hypothesis that humanitarian migrants want access to the social welfare system to rebuild their lives. Ability to access the welfare state has a similar sized effect on destination preference as legal status. Thus, is not the only or largest factor that humanitarian migrants prioritize, lending support to our argument and against claims that refugees mainly seek welfare benefits. The effect of work, legal status, and welfare on the choice of hypothetical countries is also consistent with a neoclassical approach.

We find less support for theories based on networks (proxied by the size of the Muslim population) or the anti-immigrant environment: both the size of the existing Mus-

lim population and the support for anti-immigration parties are smaller and in the case of anti-immigration parties is (marginally) not statistically significant at conventional levels ( $p = 0.08$ ). While it is possible that there are heterogeneous preferences over being in a large Muslim community based on religiosity, we find little evidence for this interpretation.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that migrants prioritize the ability to support their family, followed by the ability to gain legal status and associated welfare benefits.

Given that our sample is 67% men, we might be concerned that the results, and especially the importance of labor market conditions, are driven by gender. Yet, the results hold when we split the sample by gender (Appendix Figure A1, page 4). Another potential concern about these results is that the ability to work was listed as the first attribute. We fielded a second conjoint experiment and randomized the order of the conjoint experiments. If attribute placement affected our results, the effect of the first attribute should be larger when the destination choice conjoint appeared last, when respondent were most likely to satisfice. We find no effects based on the experiment order (Appendix Figure A10, page 8). The first attribute on the other conjoint experiment also did not have a larger point estimate than other attributes (Appendix Figure A9, page 8), suggesting that the placement of the attribute is not affecting our results.

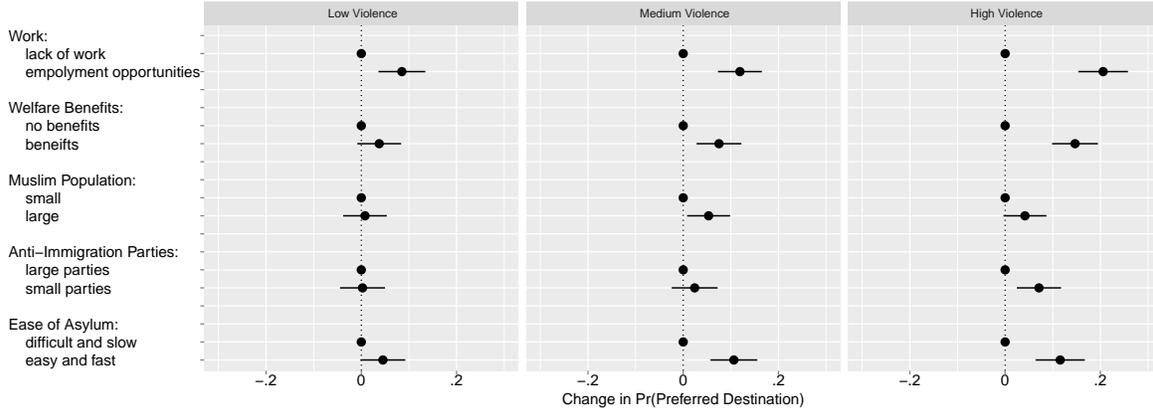
### **Heterogeneous Effects by Violence**

Next, we analyze our hypothesis concerning heterogeneous treatment effects based on violence. We argue that work and legal security will be most important to those who have experienced the most violence personally, who should place the strongest weight on concerns about dignity. Indeed, we find that those who have suffered the worst violence want to move somewhere they can regain their dignity and work most. Figure 7 presents the results based on experiences of violence. Those who suffer the most violence were most moved by opportunities to work. Increasing the opportunity to work from a lack of work to substantial

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<sup>28</sup>See Appendix Figures A6-A8, page 7.

Figure 7: Conjoint Results by Experience with Violence



opportunities increased the likelihood that those who had faced the most violence would choose the hypothetical country by 21 percentage points ( $se = 0.03$ ). For those who faced a moderate amount of violence, the change was just 12 percentage points ( $se = 0.02$ ) and for those who faced low amounts of violence, it was 9 percentage points ( $se = 0.03$ ). If the large effect of work opportunities was a product of its placement in the conjoint, we have no reason to believe that the placement would have disproportionately affected those who had experienced great levels of violence. This result also casts some doubt on the hypothesis that respondents are prioritizing work simply due to income maximization as we have little reason to think that those who have suffered more violence would have a greater desire to maximize income.

Ease of asylum also had strong effects on those who experienced more violence. For those who were affected by high or moderate violence, a change from slow and difficult asylum procedures to fast and easy increased the probability of selecting the hypothetical country by 12 ( $se = 0.03$ ) and 11 ( $se = 0.03$ ) percentage points, respectively. For those who suffered from only a few forms of violence, ease of asylum had a smaller effect (5 percentage points) that is not quite significant at the 95% level ( $p = 0.06$ ).

Similarly, we find that those who suffered the most violence are most likely to prioritize access to welfare benefits. Welfare benefits had about twice the effect on those who suffered

high levels of violence than those who suffered a moderate or low amount. In fact, welfare benefits had no statistically significant effect on those who suffered from the fewest types of violence.

Those who suffered the most violence were also the only group that was concerned with the strength of the anti-immigrant parties and the size of the Muslim population. For this group, a change from large anti-immigrant parties to small ones increased their probability of choosing the hypothetical country by about 7 percentage points ( $se = 0.02$ ). In contrast for the other two groups, the point estimate of the AMCE is close to zero and not statistically significant. The effect of Muslim populations is basically zero for those who experienced low levels of violence but increases to about 4 or 5 percentage points with a high exposure to violence.

We conducted several robustness checks using different questions on violence. First, we ask respondents whether violence has gotten worse in the last week, month, and year for those at their usual place of residence or had gotten worse in the last week, month, and year before migrating for those who had left. We find largely similar patterns (Appendix Figures A2-A4, pages 5-6). Second, we examine the differences between those who said they left for reasons of generalized fear or targeted violence (or, for those in Syria and Iraq, said that they faced these threats) and those who said that they left primarily for family or economic reasons. Again, the results are similar (Appendix Figure A5, page 6).

### **Other Heterogeneous Treatment Effects**

Finally, we examined whether there were additional heterogeneous treatment effects and found few.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that respondents with children, elderly respondents, and respondents with elderly family members might care more about access to the welfare system, as they are more likely to use it. We find no such effect (Appendix Figures A11-A12, page 9). We also found no statistically significant differences by skill level (Appendix Figure A13,

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<sup>29</sup>We preregistered these tests.

page 9). If any thing, high-skill respondents value access to the welfare system more than low-skill respondents. Finally, there is little difference between those with much and little political knowledge (Appendix Figures A14, page 10).

In sum, the evidence provides support for the idea that experiences of violence heighten work and legal stability due to victims' stronger need to be self-sufficient. Those who faced the greatest exposure to violence prioritize employment the most. This suggests that real refugees — those most likely to be granted refugee status due to their direct experiences of violence — seek not just legal security but jobs as well.

## Focus Group and Interview Analysis

We use our qualitative interview data in two ways. First, to give a sense of topic frequency, we coded the statements of the participants into different topic areas (see Appendix Section 3). And second, we probed the reasons and concepts behind our subjects' choices to stay in Turkey or desire to move elsewhere.

Consistent with the results from the conjoint experiment, the most commonly mentioned topic was jobs (about 12.5% of the comments). These included statements about the ability (or inability) to get a job in Turkey and in Europe; how labor market conditions affected the choice to come to Turkey; and about the quality of jobs in different locations. As one community leader captured a common view, “Most of [those who want to leave] are young people. They can't find decent jobs here, they can't get married because they are barely living the single life here.”<sup>30</sup> The second most common topic concerned the cost of living (5.6% of comments), especially the high cost of rent in Istanbul (2.5% of comments).

The importance of work to migrants' dignity was clearest in responses contrasting government assistance and work. The participants were asked what government assistance means to them and what types of government assistance they had heard that European governments offered to refugees. Participants focused on four different types of government assistance:

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<sup>30</sup>Community Leader 7, In-person interview, 15 August 2017.

health care, housing assistance, job training, and income support. While most are eligible for free health care in Turkey, they often noted that it was difficult to obtain this benefit and that health care was cheaper and better quality in Europe.<sup>31</sup> Given complaints about rent in Istanbul, many respondents also praised European housing assistance programs.

Some participants also thought that European countries help with job training and finding a job. For example, one participant said that in Europe governments “make workshops to teach people professions so that no one stays unemployed”<sup>32</sup> and another said, “they teach every person to do a job, they want the refugees to be productive people. They educate, train, and then offer you a job opportunity, even the elders.”<sup>33</sup> Others thought that European governments are more supportive of refugees starting businesses: “If you have a business idea with clear plan, you can show it to a committee from the government and they’d give you a 50,000 Euro loan.”<sup>34</sup>

Participants also defined welfare benefits as income support to refugees, but they often belittled such policies. Many participants stressed that they stayed in Turkey because they believed that they would have the chance to work, rather than depend on cash support. For instance, one emphasized, “I do not like it when people/governments give me apartment or money, I want to work and earn [my income].”<sup>35</sup> Likewise, another leader said he did not want to be one of “those lazy people who want to take the boat to Europe and live on the social financial support of the European governments there.”<sup>36</sup> Still others even objected to welfare payments while attending language training: “I can’t bear the idea of having to go to school and receive a salary from the government to sit at home.”<sup>37</sup>

Those who spoke positively of income support programs focused on friends and relatives who can no longer work. As one participant noted “my husband’s health condition doesn’t

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<sup>31</sup>See for example Men 26-45, Focus Group, 16 August 2017 and Women 26-45, Focus Group, 2 August 2017.

<sup>32</sup>Men 18-25, Focus Group, 9 August 2017.

<sup>33</sup>Women 26-45, Focus Group, 2 August 2017.

<sup>34</sup>Men 26-45, Focus Group, 16 August 2017.

<sup>35</sup>Community Leader Nr. 4.

<sup>36</sup>Community Leader Nr. 2.

<sup>37</sup>Focus group, male 26-45.

allow him to work a lot, so it's better for us to be in Europe and have government assistance."<sup>38</sup> Others thought that income support should be for "the family that has kids and the provider is sick or can't work."<sup>39</sup> They did not think that income support should be for able-bodied migrants, as they preferred the dignity of working. One community leader reported the story of a man who returned to Turkey from Germany for this reason: "I liked my job [in Turkey] though it was not a high salary . . . But here in Germany I used to stay for 3 months without doing anything, we were just staying at home all the time, getting more depressed."<sup>40</sup> Thus, among our participants, some types of government assistance, such as job training, language classes, housing subsidies, and disability, are seen as positive ways to get back on the path to a stable and dignified life. Yet respondents were quick to distinguish and reject policies that they saw as fostering dependence on the government.

The concern for a dignified life can also be seen in how our participants define a refugee. Most of the responses defined refugees in a negative manner. Refugee was seen as someone who receives help from the government (26 different mentions). In contrast, most of our participants saw themselves as temporary workers, or some other status, because they were working. A common sentiment came from one participant who distinguished: "A refugee is someone who is forced to leave a country and who is living on the assistance of the government. Why should I consider myself as a refugee if I am earning my own money?"<sup>41</sup> Many avoided the label refugee because they believed that it lowered their social status (14 mentions): "The word refugee means weakness. One would feel weak, foreign, afraid."<sup>42</sup>

Far fewer respondents (13 mentions) defined refugees in terms of violence. Occasionally, participants were conflicted about their identity, saying that they were not refugees because they were self-sufficient in Turkey, but then qualified their response because they fled conflict and lost their homes. For example, one community leader explained, "I can consider myself as

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<sup>38</sup>Women 18-25, Focus Group, 26 July 2017.

<sup>39</sup>Men 46-65, Focus Group, 16 August 2017.

<sup>40</sup>Community Leader 8, In-person Interview, 21 August 2017.

<sup>41</sup>Men 18-25, Focus Group, 9 August 2017.

<sup>42</sup>Men 26-45, Focus Group, 16 August 2017.

an asylum seeker because I went out of my country because of my political opinion...That's why I left Syria, but not as a refugee ...because when you are saying refugee it means that someone got displaced and *then he needs some support.*"<sup>43</sup> While the international community would consider this person a refugee, our participants rejected the term refugee because they were economically self-sufficient.

Participants also discussed concerns about their legal status (almost 10% of comments). Most of the discussions revolved around temporary protected status in Turkey (TPS, or the Kimlik card). Only a handful of respondents mentioned a desire for a more permanent status, due to concerns that Turkey might revoke TPS.<sup>44</sup> As in the survey, respondents seemed sanguine that they would gain permanent status if they traveled to Europe. One participant noted that Syrians received more stable treatment there: "In the EU, at least they know that they'll definitely get a permanent residency and apply for citizenship, and then they'll have the same rights the Germans have."<sup>45</sup> One community leader concurred that Syrians that he worked with prefer to go to Western countries "because of the stable life, organized systems, rich, strong passports, laws for citizenships."<sup>46</sup> Thus, at least among Syrians in Turkey, concerns about legal status revolved on the immediate situation of residency cards. As on the survey, respondents did not anticipate legal problems in Europe.

As in the conjoint test, some respondents expressed concern about living in a country without a vibrant Muslim culture. About 3% of comments voiced concerns about the lack of respect for Muslim culture in Europe. These concerns included discrimination against more religious Muslims — e.g. "regulation[s] in Europe that allows the employer to fire female employees with head scarf"<sup>47</sup> — and different norms about appropriate behavior — e.g. that "in European schools there are swimming classes and that's not suitable for our daughters."<sup>48</sup> Conversely, many respondents saw the cultural and religious life in Turkey as a reason to

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<sup>43</sup>Emphasis added, Community Leader 8, In-person Interview, 21 August 2017.

<sup>44</sup>Men 46-65, Focus Group, 16 August 2017; Community Leader 8, In-Person Interview, 21 August 2017.

<sup>45</sup>Men 26-45, Focus Group, 16 August 2017.

<sup>46</sup>Community Leader 2, In-Person Interview, 20 July 2017.

<sup>47</sup>Men 18-26, Focus Group, 9 August 2017.

<sup>48</sup>Men 18-26, Focus Group, 9 August 2017.

stay (5% of mentions). Respondents talked about a culture of helping neighbors, socializing in public spaces, and shopping at markets late in the evening. Common comments were in the spirit of one man who said, “The traditions of the Turkish and Syrian people are really close.”<sup>49</sup>

More generally, the focus groups and interviews largely support the findings of the survey. Participants with relatively good jobs in Turkey generally were happier with their lives in Turkey and had no plans to move elsewhere. Participants who lacked jobs, or whose jobs could not support the costs of living in Turkey, were more interested in moving to Europe. They tended to mention that life would be easier with the type of assistance that European governments provided. Some of those with family abroad also hoped to reunify with their family members: sometimes this meant trying to get to Europe and sometimes trying to get family members in Europe or Syria to move to Turkey.

Taken together, the focus groups and interviews bolster the idea that migrants care about preserving their dignity and therefore prioritize work over welfare benefits. Most of the refugees want a job that can support their families. Government assistance is praised when it helps migrants integrate, such as job training and language classes. Nonetheless, many saw cash benefits as a way to distinguish themselves from “refugees.” Although migrants were concerned about their legal status, these concerns were very immediate to their surroundings. Perhaps rightly, they did not expect European countries to remove them if they made the trip. But many preferred their lives in Turkey because they could work, practice their religion, and take part in a community with similar values, preserving their dignity.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we examined how humanitarian migrants think about their preferred destinations. First we focused on expanding the category of refugees to a broader set of migrants that we call humanitarian migrants. In order to understand their preferences, we conducted

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<sup>49</sup>Men 46-65, Focus Group, 16 August 2017.

a unique survey of those in conflict zones and neighboring countries to understand their preferences and expectations prior to arriving at a final destination. We drew on conceptions of dignity from work on the welfare state and political theory to argue that humanitarian migrants prioritize restoring their social status and economic sufficiency. They therefore prioritize work over welfare benefits.

What we found is more complicated than simple economic or network models, but perhaps more hopeful. First, the majority of humanitarian migrants do not want to move to Europe or any wealthy country. Instead, they want to return home as soon as it is safe to do so. Across different question formats, we find that, when migrants do contemplate moving to developed countries, their first concern is the labor market. The priority placed on working also is strongest among those who have suffered the most violence. After the labor market, they cared about the ease of the asylum process and access to the social welfare system about equally. These migrants cared little about support for anti-immigration parties or about the size of the existing Muslim population; although, unsurprisingly, those that had a relative or friend abroad hoped to live in the same country.

This paper, then, has important policy implications. As the world has failed to respond to the largest refugee crisis since World War II, there have been calls to reform the refugee regime. Our research suggests that instead of focusing on permanently resettling refugees, which usually involves a lengthy legal process, the regime should focus on giving more migrants temporary work permits, through something like temporary protected status. This would also allow for a more expansive definition of a refugee — instead of proving that s/he had a well-founded fear of persecution based on being a member of a class, migrants could be provided refuge when fleeing a conflict or high levels of civil violence. These work permits would allow migrants to begin to rebuild the life they have lost. Further, the temporary nature might make the program more palatable to natives worried about the cultural and political changes that might come with thousands of new citizens. Finally, the new regime should focus on how to repatriate migrants when conflicts end. Many migrants plan

to be temporary migrants but end up staying permanently (Waldinger 2007). In part this is due to the ties they make while in the host country, but it is also often the case that migrants are asked to return to states that lack functioning economies and governments. Greater economic development prior to repatriation would help, as might programs that help returnees regain their former lives or find dignity in a new life. Such programs would be able to quickly help more people, in a way that they prefer, and likely in a way that would engender less anti-immigrant sentiment than the current regime.

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