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Determinants of intended return migration among refugees: A comparison of Syrian refugees in Germany and Turkey

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Abstract

This study assesses whether Syrian refugees intend to return to Syria, taking account of the economic, cultural and institutional differences between their country of origin and the host country.* We develop a simple theoretical model on return migration and optimal duration of stay in the host country to identify the potential trade-offs faced by refugees. We then assess the theoretical predictions empirically with a sample of 577 Syrian refugees living in Germany and Turkey. Three return scenarios are considered: (i) ever returning, (ii) returning when it is as safe in Syria as before the war, and (iii) returning within two years. Refugees in the immediately neighbouring country of Turkey are more likely to regard their stay as temporary (76%) compared to those who fled to geographically more distant Germany (55%, *p*-value of difference=0.000). Concerning the correlates of intended return, we observe that socio-demographic and economic characteristics tend to have limited predictive power for re-migration intentions, independent of the host country. Similarly, while refugees value freedom of speech and belief, the existence of these liberties does not feed into the return migration decision in either of the host countries. Thus, attempts to impose these values on the Assad Government are unlikely to trigger mass return movement. From a policy perspective, we analyse whether random exposure to positive or negative information regarding return migration impacts on the refugees' intentions. We find no systematic impact on the decision to migrate back. This demonstrates that host governments cannot expect (rapid) information disseminated by refugee agencies – even if it provides support – to impact the refugees' decision making about return. Overall, the analysis suggests that neither proximate nor distant host countries should bank on the speedy return of the Syrian refugees but should focus on refugee integration, independently of how long they intend to stay.

Keywords

Refugee, Syria, return migration, information.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the Syrian civil war entered into its 10th year. It has resulted in approximately half a million civilian deaths, more than 6 million internally displaced people and more than 5.6 million refugees (OCHA, 2019; UNHCR, 2019a). The majority of Syrian refugees are concentrated in the countries that border Syria, particularly Turkey, but a significant number are also hosted in EU countries, mainly Germany (UNHCR, 2019b). The unprecedented influx of Syrian refugees over recent years has resulted in political, social and economic challenges for host countries, with social tension rising especially in the wake of mass migrations that occurred in 2015. EU citizens are concerned that the increase in refugees is concomitantly increasing the risk of terrorism as well as reducing the chances for nationals to secure jobs or social benefits (Amaral et al., 2018). The alleged threat that refugees pose to host communities is increasingly used by right-wing populist parties in Europe to win votes, playing on insecurity and fear and distracting the electorate from national issues and failures (Holmes and Castaneda, 2016).

The UN and some European host countries, as well as the Syrian government, consider the return of refugees to their country of origin as the desired solution to the crisis. The reconstruction of Syria is intrinsically linked to the country's political future. Yet, the EU is hesitant to commit funds to the reconstruction in light of ethical issues related to being party to consolidating Bashar Al-Assad's victory. For its part, the Syrian government has been discussing its plans for rebuilding Syria for some years: in 2016, reconstruction deals were agreed between Russia, China, Iran and Syria (Batrawi, 2018). However, concerns about the reconstruction plans seem well founded. A report on urban reconstruction in Syria asserts that the Syrian government's urban reconstruction policy is 'enabling demographic engineering, rewarding political loyalty, and privileging higher socioeconomic classes' using price manipulation, forced eviction and the seizure of refugee properties to bar certain strata of the population from accessing newly available housing (Batrawi, 2018).

Given the political challenges in the host countries and the unclear future outlook in Syria, the research on which this paper is based explores whether Syrian refugees who are located in Germany and Turkey consider return migration to be an option. The voices of Syrian refugees have seldom entered the debate on refugee policy. Rather, current policies are influenced by the vested interests of host countries and other parties to the conflict such as the Syrian government and Russia. Another key barrier in making the voices of Syrian refugees heard is the difficulty of accessing authentic perspectives from the refugee communities due to cultural and language barriers as well as the sensitivity of the topic and the high level of fear and insecurity among refugees in host countries. We have overcome these challenges and collected systematic information from 577 Syrian refugees by employing Syrian nationals directly in the research activities. With this research we aim to highlight the needs, aspirations and agency of Syrian refugees in deciding upon their future.

The factors affecting the decision to return depend partly on the specific context and environment of Syrian refugees in the host country, but also on the perceived potential for re-establishing their lives in Syria. This implies that the end of the war is no guarantee that people will return. To date, of the more than 5.5 million Syrian refugees worldwide, a very small number have returned to Syria. The official stance of UNHCR is that it is not supporting voluntary repatriation because the conditions are not yet conducive for refugee returns (UNHCR, 2018). In 2017, an estimated 840,000 people returned to their areas of origin in Syria, 77,000[1] of which were refugees and 764,000 internally displaced people (UNHCR, 2018). However, there are doubts if the returns were purely voluntary (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

[1] 19,366 returned from Turkey in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018).

We empirically assess the willingness of Syrian refugees to return to their country of origin by identifying push and pull factors and investigating whether the end of the war would be justification enough for returning. We provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis complemented by detailed qualitative information. For the case of Syrian refugees, we are not aware of any quantitative study assessing the determinants of refugees' decision to return to their country of origin. We show that refugees in neighbouring countries like Turkey are more likely to regard their stay as temporary compared to those in Germany. Overall, more than two thirds of the interviewed respondents expressed a desire to go back to Syria one day. However, if we present more proximate return scenarios, the intention to return is less strong: fewer than 40 per cent indicate that they want to go back if Syria is just as safe as before the war, and only about one third intend to go back after two years in the host country. This is not surprising given that the interviews were carried out in summer 2018 when the war was still ongoing and showing no sign of coming to an end.

Next we identified the correlates of return migration. Six patterns could be observed. First, socio-demographic and economic characteristics tend to have limited predictive power for re-migration intentions, suggesting that intended return migration is not so much driven by background as by other factors such as experiences. Second, with regard to Germany, refugees who no longer have assets in Syria are less likely to consider returning. Third, while Syrian refugees clearly value freedom of speech and belief, the existence of these liberties does not feed into the return migration decision; this is true regardless of where they are hosted. This suggests that imposing these values on the Syrian regime is unlikely to trigger mass return migration. Fourth, Syrian refugees who place a high value on education seem to have opted for seeking refuge in Germany; the more importance they place on education the less likely they are to indicate that they want to migrate back. Fifth, theory suggests that over time return migration becomes more likely. However, our research identifies a relationship between re-migration intentions and duration of stay only if we present a re-migration scenario that suggests return to Syria when the country is as safe as it was before the war. Sixth – and most challenging from a policy perspective – we isolate the influence of the role of new information through a survey experiment; we assess whether random exposure to positive or negative information impacts on the refugees' intended re-migration. The results show that information does not systematically influence the decision to return. The lack of a reaction to the presented information demonstrates how challenging it is for host governments to reach out to the refugees even with supportive messages. Our research shows that information shared on the spot or simply handed over in a refugee agency is unlikely to impact the refugees' decision making.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly outlines the context of the Syrian refugee crisis. Section 3 summarizes the existing literature on return migration. Section 4 presents a basic theoretical model about return migration of refugees. The survey and data are introduced in section 5. The empirical model is presented in section 6 and the results in section 7. Section 8 concludes and provides some policy recommendations.

2 CONTEXT

The war in Syria is considered a highly complex conflict due to the multitude of parties involved. These include the Syrian government and its allies, the international coalition led by the United States, and the many opposition groups including the Kurds, the People's Protection Unit, as well as the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), to name but a few (BBC News, 2019). As a result of the conflict, Syria's GDP dropped by an estimated 63 per cent between 2010 and 2016; 68 per cent of the country's health centres have been damaged, 53 per cent of the educational facilities have been damaged (with 10 per cent destroyed), 32 per cent of housing is partially or completely destroyed, and in 2015 the youth unemployment rate was as high as 78 per cent (World Bank, 2017).

Due to the fighting and its consequences, many Syrians have left the country. In the early years of the crisis civilians fled mainly across the borders. According to the United Nations (OCHA, 2019; UNHCR, 2019a), the neighbouring countries are currently hosting the vast majority of the more than 5.5 million Syrian refugees, with Turkey being the recipient of almost two thirds of these. In 2015, when the conflict intensified, people began to cross the Mediterranean seeking asylum in Europe. Within Europe, Germany has received the highest number of Syrian refugees with 568,785 officially registered Syrian asylum applicants between January 2015 and December 2019 (Eurostat, 2020).

For the purpose of this research we rely on the commonly accepted definition of the term 'refugee' from the 1951 UNHCR Refugee Convention which states that a refugee 'is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion' (UNHCR, 2010 pp. 3). Thus, we consider a refugee to be any individual who seeks refuge in Germany or Turkey independent of their legal status according to the respective host-country rules, as long as they left Syria as a result of war and/or persecution.[2]

The context of asylum is intricate in the host countries. We do not engage in any detailed definitions of who qualifies as an asylum seeker and what the specific national terms are since this would take us beyond the scope of this paper. Along broad lines, the situation for asylum seekers in Germany and Turkey is as follows:

In Germany, the right to asylum is laid down in the constitution (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2019a) and the country is a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Germany has a long history of receiving immigrants and refugees (Constant and Massey, 2003). The total foreign population in Germany by the end of December 2018 was about 11 million people (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018a). Germany is one of the most popular asylum destinations in Europe due to its strong economy and favourable policies towards refugees.[3] The number of asylum seekers in Germany increased radically between 2014 and 2017, largely as a result of the war in Syria, with around 1.5 million asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea over that period (Grote, 2018). In 2017, 94 per cent of the cases of Syrian nationals seeking asylum in Germany were approved (Asylum Information Database, 2018a) making Syrians the largest group among all nationalities applying for asylum in Germany and the third biggest community with a migrant background (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018a).

Turkey is also a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention but in 2013 established a stand-alone legal framework implemented by the General Directorate of Migration Management (Asylum Information Database, 2018b). Covered under this legal framework are more than 3.5 million registered Syrian refugees residing in Turkey (UNHCR, 2020). Syrians who are hosted in Turkey as a result of the war in Syria are considered guests under 'temporary protection' which entitles them to services and assistance in Turkey and specifically the right to stay in Turkey until a more permanent solution can be found. However, the temporary protection status does not apply to all Syrian refugees that are in Turkey: some have a work permit, others remain unregistered.

Given that there are more than 6 million internally displaced people in Syria (OCHA, 2019; UNHCR, 2019a), return migration has to be narrowly understood: return to a place other than the own house, street or village cannot be considered as return unless the refugees themselves have chosen this option. Considering the high level of destruction, looting and appropriation of private homes across Syria (including reports of private homes taken by the Syrian government and by rebel opposition groups for military purposes), as well as the already high population density of the

[2] This includes those who have been granted Turkish nationality but fled the country due to the war and still have the desire to return to their country of origin. Across host countries, individuals who go to Syria to visit family during the Eid festival will also be considered as refugees, as visiting is a different decision compared to returning. Similarly, individuals who left Syria before the war for economic and/or persecution related reasons will be considered as refugees if they are not able to return to Syria due to the risk of being persecuted and/or killed.

[3] The German system distinguishes between four groups of refugees. We abstain from a detailed discussion. Further information can be found from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Germany (2019c).

few areas considered 'safe' in Syria, the idea that people can return to their own homes is currently not realistic for the majority. Keeping this in mind, our analysis focuses on intended return to a place that the refugees would consider their home.

3 LITERATURE ON RETURN MIGRATION

3.1 Return migration of regular migrants

The literature on migration is large, covering aspects from the decision to migrate (Levy and Wadycki, 1974; Schlottmann and Herzog, 1981) and internal versus international migration (Adams and Page, 2005; de Brauw et al., 2014; Lucas, 1997) to wage differentials between host and source countries (Dustmann, 2003a), remittances (Akobeng, 2016; Stark and Lucas, 1988) and return migration (Collier et al., 2018; Reinhold and Thom, 2013), to name just a few prominent topics.

Most of the literature focuses on economic migration and migration decisions have mainly been modelled as a response to income disparities. Static models of temporary migration suggest that migration increases if the wage differential between the country of origin and the host country grows (Harris and Todaro, 1970). However, this is not necessarily compatible with empirical data; return migration is a common feature across host and source countries (Bartolucci et al., 2018; de Coulon and Piracha, 2005; Deléchat, 2001; Dustmann and Kirchkamp, 2002; McCormick and Wahba, 2001, 2003; Mesnard, 2004; Piracha and Vadean, 2010; Rendon and Cuecuecha, 2010; Wahba and Zenou, 2012). It has been documented that migrants tend to work harder than the native population and also save more because of their return migration motive (Galor and Stark, 1990). In a similar vein, early empirical studies established that migrants send remittances as part of their return migration plans (Merkle and Zimmermann, 1992). These findings are further reinforced by more recent studies: Kirdar (2009) assesses motives for return migration among immigrants in Germany and shows that accumulated savings and retirement are important predictors. Constant and Massey (2003) further study the most likely points in time for return migration. They highlight that immigrants to Germany are most likely to migrate back to their country of origin at two distinct moments: (i) either at the beginning of their stay, i.e. in the first five years after arrival, or (ii) toward retirement. Dustmann (2003a) shows in a dynamic model of migration that migrants may return earlier if wage differentials are larger; empirical evidence is provided from immigrants in Germany.

However, the decision to return is not taken exclusively on economic grounds. Complementary empirical evidence indicates that the ambition to return tends to be already present when leaving the home country because there is a strong sense of belonging often reinforced by perceived discrimination in the host country (Kunuroglu et al., 2018). Similarly, Tezcan (2019) shows that Turkish immigrants in Germany are more likely to intend to return when they identify as Turkish rather than German. Another motive for return migration is found in concerns about children (Dustmann, 2003b).

The recent literature further nuances the analysis about return migration decisions by distinguishing between different types of migrants. Gibson and McKenzie (2011) analyse a sample of highly skilled emigrants of Tonga, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea and show that it is not forgone income that influences the decision to return but family and lifestyle reasons. Bijwaard and Wahba (2014) present evidence for immigrants to The Netherlands, identifying a U-shaped return migration pattern with respect to income.

As can be seen, overall this literature focuses to a large extent on the economic aspects of migration and return. It only vaguely discusses cultural and institutional factors as well as the sense of belonging.

3.2 Return migration of refugees

Compared to the large literature on economic migration and return, the literature on refugees is considerably smaller. Yet, these two groups of migrants are inherently different. The main differences between refugees and economic migrants are (i) their reasons for leaving the country of origin, (ii) their legal status in the host country, and (iii) the length of time that they remain out of the country of origin (Dadush, 2018). Other differences include their experiences of hardship and trauma prior to leaving and their ability to return to a safe environment. We are aware of only a few quantitative studies about refugees/illegal migrants and return migration.

For the case of post-conflict Burundi, Fransen et al. (2017) compare returnees with non-migrant households and show that in terms of the main source of capital, livestock holding, as well as perceived economic well-being, the returnees fare worse. The study that is most closely related to our work assesses the intended return migration of illegal migrants from Mexico in the United States (Ravuri, 2014). While length of stay is not a significant determinant of intended return, ownership of land in Mexico is. In turn, those who invested in property in the United States want to stay.

While the economic literature on return migration of refugees is limited, the political debate in the host countries is buoyant and there are numerous migration studies and policy papers assessing (assisted) voluntary return and host-country programmes to fund such return (Black et al., 2004), as well as the appropriate timing and source country security requirements (Black, 2002). For the case of Liberian refugees living in Ghana, Omata (2013) shows that the presence of secure shelter, education and job opportunities in their country of origin all feed into refugees' decision to return. In a similar vein, Al-Ali et al. (2001) identify the following factors that prevent Eritrean refugees in the United Kingdom from returning home: low wages, no decent health system, lack of quality education, and lack of housing. The role of socio-demographic factors in the decision to return, such as gender and marital status, remains contested (Black et al., 2004; Bloch and Atfield, 2000; Harild et al., 2015; Koser and Kuschminder, 2015). Kibreab (2003) distinguishes between refuge in developed versus developing countries and argues that refugees in developing countries often experience lack of respect and indignity. Moreover, they tend to have no prospect of obtaining the rights of citizenship and thus aim for refuge in developed countries if possible or return as quickly as possible. Al-Rasheed (1994) studies Iraqi refugees in London, highlighting that refugees, even from the same country of origin, are a diverse group and differ substantially in their desire to return home. But, according to Koser and Kuschminder (2015), the biggest bottleneck in studying refugees' decision to return is the lack of reliable data to assess the structural and individual conditions that affect return migration. This is where our study sets out to make a difference.

4 BASIC THEORETICAL MODEL ABOUT RETURN MIGRATION OF REFUGEES

Existing theoretical models on return migration tend to focus on skill accumulation, brain drain versus brain gain, and work effort (Dustmann et al., 2011; Galor and Stark, 1991). Dustmann and Görlach (2016) consolidate the theoretical literature on temporary migration with a general dynamic model that can incorporate different assumptions about reasons for going back to the country of origin. Similar models have been formulated by Bellemare (2007), Deléchat (2001), Kirdar (2012) and Rendon and Cuecuecha (2010), to name just a few. Extensions include border enforcement, homesickness and brain drain versus brain gain effects (Angelucci, 2012; Dustmann et al., 2011; Lessem, 2018; Nakajima, 2019).

Yet, in the context under study, migration is not primarily related to personal skills or effort, or labour-market prospects in general but to (perceived) country of origin risks. Djajić (2013) explicitly incorporates country of origin institutions in his model, in which migration dynamics are linked to the process of capital accumulation in the country of origin, i.e. the capital left behind

and the repatriated savings in relation to the depletion of the capital stock due to the costs of migration. Yet, with respect to capital accumulation in the country of origin, refugees are different from labour migrants.

We have to account for these differences when conceptually thinking about the decision to migrate along with the decision to go back to the country of origin. Concerning the first decision, i.e. the decision to flee the country, Djajić (2014) theoretically assesses the optimal way of seeking asylum in an advanced country. There are two options for refugees, either to rely on human smugglers to get to the safe country of their choice or to apply for resettlement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The model presented by Djajić (2014) shows that young, skilled, non-credit constrained individuals tend to opt for smuggling.

Since we want to model the decision to flee the country jointly with the return migration decision, we use a model that incorporates both decisions. We employ the most basic migration model revolving around wage differentials without considering skill formation or capital accumulation. There is no uncertainty in the model and no discounting. The model is akin to those of Dustmann (2003a) and Dustmann and Weiss (2007).

In what follows, we use superindex h for the host and o for the country of origin. The refugee has the possibility to flee the country of origin at $t=0$ and dies at $t=T$. We assume that the refugee works until s/he dies and simultaneously decides between staying in the country at war, and moving to a safe country, along with decisions concerning the optimal duration of stay and the optimal consumption levels in the host country as well as at home. The refugee chooses the optimal duration of stay based on a positive wage differential between the country of origin and the host country ($w^o<w^h$). For simplicity, we assume that wages are constant and we abstract from modelling any heterogeneity across migrants.

The refugee's lifetime utility function is given by

$$U= s\, u(c^h, I^h) + (T-s)\, B(\tau^{Info})\, u(c^o, I^o), \tag{1}$$

where s is the time spent in the host country, and consumption levels in the host and origin country are given by c^i, with $i=h, o$. The utility function $u(.)$ has the standard properties of increasing in all elements but at a decreasing rate. We assume that refugees have a desire for consumption in both the host and the origin country. The refugee also derives utility from the institutional environment through aspects such as security, access to health, education and legal services. This is denoted as I^i, with $i=h, o$. While host countries tend to have better institutional environments in general, they can explicitly apply disincentives for refugees to come and stay by imposing lengthy interrogations and procedures designed to deter. Thus, I^i, captures not only the institutional differences between a country at war and a peaceful country, but also the institutional difficulties that are imposed upon the individuals in both environments. Finally, the function $B(.)$ indicates the refugee's sense of belonging and preference for the location of consumption. In the baseline scenario we treat $B(.)$ as a fixed parameter. But we can also allow $B(.)$ to depend on information shocks. A positive information shock $\tau^{Info}>1$ about the situation in the country of origin results in an increase in $B(.)$ and thus in a relative utility gain of country of origin utility versus host-country utility, whereas a negative information shock $\tau^{Info}<1$ represents a relative utility loss. We assume that consumption in the country of origin is preferred to consumption in the host country and thus $B>1$. This implies that at identical levels of consumption in the host and origin country the level of utility is higher if the consumption takes place in the country of origin.

The refugee maximizes lifetime utility with respect to c^h, c^o, and s, subject to the lifetime budget constraint or total income

$$s\, c^h + (T-s)\, p\, c^o + k = s w^h + (T-s) w^o \equiv Y, \tag{2}$$

where the parameter p denotes the relative price of consuming in the host relative to the origin country. If $p>1$, consumption in the country of origin is more expensive compared to consumption in the host country – a scenario that is possible given the conflict situation at home. The costs of finding refuge abroad are denoted by k. Since it is not unusual that families pool their resources to send a family member to a safe country, we factor these costs in the lifetime budget constraint. Put differently, instead of savings the migrant pays for the costs of her/his escape.

The model allows for two corner solutions concerning the optimal length of stay in the host country, namely $s \rightarrow 0$ and $s \rightarrow T$ referring to the situation that an individual never leaves the country of origin and the situation of permanent migration, respectively. For interior solutions concerning the optimal length of stay in the host country we take the first derivative of the Lagrangian with respect to the optimal time of return s^* and combine terms such that:

$$Y' \left((w^h - w^o) + (pc^o - c^h)\right) - \left(B(\tau^{Info})\, u'_{c^o}(c^o, I^o) - u'_{c^h}(c^h, I^h)\right) = 0 \qquad (3)$$

This is the equilibrium condition which determines the optimal duration of stay in the host country. Y' is the marginal utility of lifetime income. The benefit of remaining for an additional unit of time in the host country is represented by $((w^h - w^o) + (pc^o - c^h))$. This term is positive given our assumptions but decreasing in s. In turn, the term $(B(\tau^{Info})\, u'_{c^o}(c^o, I^o) - u'_{c^h}(c^h, I^h))$ is the cost of staying for an additional unit of time in the host country. This second term is also positive but increasing in s. Taking the derivative with respect to the duration of stay from equation (3), it can be shown that the difference in benefit and costs decreases over the duration of stay.

We can now identify four basic scenarios that lead to return migration. In the baseline scenario with better economic conditions in the host country $w^h > w^o$, negligible differences in (the perceived) institutional environment $I^h = I^o$, and identical costs of consumption $p=1$ but preferences for consumption at home $B(.)>1$, lifetime income rises in s. This implies that the value of staying in the host country for an additional period decreases as lifetime income increases due to the decreasing utility of lifetime income, leading to a reduction in the migration duration to reduce forgone consumption at home. The bigger the preference for being at home, the shorter the duration of stay. In turn, the better the economic condition in the host country relative to the home country, the more likely the refugee will stay.

In a second scenario we change the costs of consumption to $p<1$ implying higher purchasing power of the host-country currency in the country of origin. We set the preference parameter to indifference between the country of origin and the host country, $B(.)=1$, keep the perceived lack of difference between the institutional environments $I^h = I^o$, and stick to the wage differential $w^h > w^o$. This leads eventually to return migration because of the higher costs of living in the host country and the resulting lower consumption there. At home a higher consumption can be achieved with the host-country currency.

The third scenario focuses on institutional differences with the host country offering better protection, $I^h > I^o$. We assume identical economic conditions faced by the refugees in both countries $w^h = w^o$, and identical costs of consumption $p=1$ but preferences for consumption at home $B(.)>1$. In this scenario we observe a trade-off between the utility derived from a better institutional environment in the host country and the desire to consume at home. If institutional gains can be accumulated, such as host-country passports, we eventually observe return migration. The easier it is to accumulate these institutional benefits, the shorter the duration of stay in the host country.

In the three scenarios presented above, we kept the preference parameter $B(.)$ fixed. In the fourth scenario we assume a positive information shock $\tau^{Info}>1$ about the situation in the country of origin implying that the utility derived at home appreciates in value $B(\tau^{Info})>B(.)$ where $B(.)$ is the baseline country of origin preference. Assuming better economic conditions in the host country $w^h > w^o$, negligible differences in (the perceived) institutional environment $I^h = I^o$, and identical costs of consumption $p=1$, we arrive at an interior solution akin to scenario 1 if the resulting preference function $B(.)$ is greater than 1. This last scenario hinges on the relative effect of the information

shock on the country of origin utility. In turn, negative information shocks are likely to expand the duration of stay in the host country.

So far, we have neglected the costs of migration. These negatively affect total lifetime income. If we assume that host-country income is higher compared to country of origin income $w^h > w^o$ while keeping all other parameters identical in the two countries, we observe an increasing propensity for return migration over the lifetime of a refugee. As a consequence of the decreasing utility of lifetime income, the value of staying in the host country for an additional period decreases as lifetime income increases. Consequently, if the initial investment was larger, the refugee is likely to stay longer in the host country.

While all the cases seem extreme in the context of war, displacement and refuge, it is possible for a refugee, who initially opts for a host country that is culturally very different, to move back to their unstable home because of a sense of belonging. As Black et al. (2004) highlight in their conceptual considerations about return migration of refugees, social relations such as family back home are an important ingredient in the decision to return. Similarly, policies might create economic and institutional incentives or disincentives for refugees to stay on in the safe country by, for example, allowing refugees to seek work (Black et al., 2004). Lastly, the procedure of registration in the host country can be made so burdensome that trust in the host-country institutions vanishes and fear may even develop. Thus, while the above model is simplistic, it incorporates some key elements of seeking refuge and of potentially leaving the safe haven again. Most importantly, the model suggests return migration dynamics vary depending on the perceived differences between the country of origin and the host country. We are interested in assessing exactly these heterogeneous reactions to the host-country environment by contrasting refugees from the same country of origin who are located in two different host countries.

5 SURVEY AND DATA

5.1 Survey Set-up, Study Population and Sampling

The host countries of Germany and Turkey were selected for this study for three reasons. First, they represent the host countries with the highest number of Syrian refugees in their respective areas. Second, they play key roles in policy discussions and actions about refugee management as manifested in the EU Turkey Refugee deal and the EU Migrant Relocation and Resettlement scheme. Third, the two host countries represent completely different contexts in terms of proximity to Syria and economic, political and cultural conditions, allowing for a comparative analysis about the possible push and pull factors outlined in the theoretical model.

The study population are Syrian refugees who moved to Germany and Turkey as a result of the war in Syria, i.e. after 2011. The selection criteria were as follows: respondents had to be at least 18 years old and have the autonomy to take the decision to return for themselves and, if applicable, for their families. As a result of these criteria, the majority of respondents are male heads of household, in line with dominant Syrian culture in which the husband (or eldest male) is the decision maker for the family. There was no restriction on the date of arrival (as long as it was after 2011) or the current legal status in the host country.

The questionnaire was developed based on the existing literature, qualitative assessments carried out prior to the survey and the experience of working with Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) for five years. The questionnaire was initially formulated in English and then translated into Arabic to ensure proper comprehension. Questions about return migration, the sense of belonging and institutional preferences are very sensitive for refugees. Refugees tend to be afraid that voicing their opinion freely might affect their situation in the host country as well as in relation to the Syrian regime. We therefore took great care in setting up the survey and in creating a safe environment during the interviews. Data collection ethics were implemented with

an explicit focus on the privacy and anonymity of the respondents and the need for sensitivity when asking about difficult experiences such as loss of family members. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the ISS Research Ethics Committee. Participation in the survey was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The digital data collection platform KoBoToolbox was used for the data collection.

While we had aimed for proportional random sampling, we could not get the necessary sampling frames and did not want to risk biased answers as a consequence of institutional involvement. We therefore opted for exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling.[4] While we cannot claim representativeness given our sampling approach, we could at least minimize response bias by implementing this referral approach. To counteract the limitations of the snowball sampling, we aimed for representativeness in the initial selection of the survey locations. To cover as broad a respondent base as possible, we employed Syrian enumerators who do not all know each other, come from different backgrounds, and are living in different host cities. Given the sensitivity of the data collected, we had to rely on the trust between the enumerator and the respondent in order for respondents to honestly share their point of view and to provide referrals to other respondents.

A total of 577 interviews were conducted in Germany and Turkey over a period of three weeks in August 2018. In Germany, 241 interviews took place, in Turkey 336. We opted for a short survey period to reduce response bias from a changing political environment. Moreover, we explicitly chose the summer holiday period for the surveys to further reduce the possibility of changing political dynamics influencing the responses.

In Germany the surveys took place in North-Rhine Westphalia which is the most populated state in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017) hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018b). Interviews took place in two cities and the adjacent rural area.[5] These locations can be considered representative of the life of Syrian refugees in Germany as the refugees themselves do not decide where to live but the German authorities use the so-called EASY quota system (in German: '**E**rstverteilung der **Asy**lsuchenden' – 'first distribution of asylum seekers') to allocate asylum seekers across the country (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2019b). This implies that refugees are allocated in proportion to the local population. Thus, despite the limitations in the sampling approach we expect to have a fairly representative sample of Syrian refugees in Germany as a result of the EASY quota system. Data collection in Germany was conducted by eight Syrian nationals and took 20 days (8–27 August 2018).

In Turkey, the selection of representative locations was approached differently as there is relative freedom for refugees to choose the governorate in which they wish to reside. Syrian refugees tend to live in Istanbul and in cities that are close to the Syrian border. According to the Turkish Directorate of Immigration, the main cities hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey in 2018 were Istanbul (563,963 refugees), Şanlıurfa (469,215 refugees), Hatay (442,091 refugees) and Gaziantep (392,998 refugees) (Mülteciler Derneği, 2018). Since the refugees prefer to stay in the Turkish governorate which is closest to their Syrian province of origin, we observe the following situation: the governorate Hatay mainly hosts Syrians from Idleb, Hamah and Latakia, the governorate Gaziantep mainly hosts refugees from Aleppo, and the governorate Şanlıurfa hosts refugees from Alraqa and Deir Alzor. Istanbul is the most diverse, although the majority of refugees staying there come from Damascus. Based on this locational sorting, surveys were conducted in four Turkish cities which account for more than half of the Syrian refugees in Turkey. The data collection in Turkey took place between 15 and 27 August 2018 and was conducted by 17 Syrian nationals.[5]

[4] The first recruited individual in the sample provides at least one referral which is explored and included in the sample. Every newly recruited participant similarly provides referrals until primary data from sufficient individuals are collected.
[5] Due to the sensitivity of the information shared by the refugees we abstain from identifying the names of the cities and precise locations where the surveys took place.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for our sample are presented in Table 1. With respect to the intention to return to Syria we observe that more than two thirds of the interviewed respondents desire to go back to Syria one day. However, if we look at more proximate return scenarios, the intention to return dips: fewer than 40 per cent indicate that they want to go back if Syria is as safe as before the war and only about one third intends to go back after two years of stay in the host country. Note that we deliberately present a scenario that describes Syria as being as safe as before the war, i.e. such a situation builds on the assumption that the regime Al-Assad is still in place, a scenario that seems not unlikely.[6]

There are marked differences in intended return migration between those refugees who stay in Germany and those who stay in Turkey (Table 1). Of those respondents in our sample who made it to Germany, roughly half indicate that they want to go back to Syria eventually, whereas more than 75 per cent of the respondents who stay in Turkey want to go back. Similarly, only 14 per cent of the refugees who live in Germany want to return if Syria is as safe as before the war, compared to half the refugees in Turkey. Only 13 per cent of the Syrian refugees in Germany can see themselves going back after two years, but 50 per cent of those in Turkey anticipate returning. These differences between Syrian refugees in Germany and Turkey in the intention to migrate back to their home country are not only large in size but also statistically significant suggesting that the pool of refugees in the two countries is different.

Turning to the background characteristics, the German sub-sample consists of far fewer women, namely only 8 per cent versus 27 per cent in the sub-sample collected in Turkey (Table 1). It is therefore not surprising that the German sub-sample includes more household heads – 95 per cent versus 50 per cent. Moreover, the German sub-sample also consists of more married individuals – 71 per cent versus 58 per cent. The average age of the refugees is roughly three years higher in Germany, but in terms of secondary education and vocational training the two sub-samples are identical, i.e. 36 per cent of the sample have secondary education or vocational training. However, there is a difference of almost 10 percentage points in the share of individuals with university education between the refugees in Germany and Turkey; Syrian refugees in our Turkish sub-sample have a higher education level on average because we purposefully sampled highly educated individuals in Turkey expecting that they are most comparable to those who made it to Germany. Yet, this resulted in some over-representation of those with university degrees. Next we inquired about the duration of stay. The duration of stay is almost six months shorter on average for refugees living in Germany. This does not come as a surprise since most refugees do not directly arrive in Germany but stop in other countries and then decide to move on. The travel tends to be tedious and time-consuming.

Turning to the economic variables, we observe a similar share of individuals in both host countries who classify themselves as being poor prior to the start of the war (Table 1). Yet, refugees in Germany report a higher contemporaneous income category on average. The average refugee in Germany reports an income between 1,000 and 1,500 EUR a month (category 4) whereas refugees in Turkey report an income between 300 and 500 EUR per month (category 2) on average. These income differences between refugees in Germany and Turkey are to be expected given the different economic situation of the two countries. The costs of escape were more than 8 times higher for Syrian refugees who are in Germany compared to those who live in Turkey. From an analysis of the qualitative data we deduce that the refugees consider these higher costs for reaching Germany as an investment in 'the future' and especially the future of their children. In addition, the refuges repeatedly pointed out that the physical distance to their home country and the perceived order of life in Germany give them an extra sense of security.

[6] The return scenarios presented were as follows: 1) Do you and your family consider returning to Syria? 2) If Syria became safe like it was before the war, would you return? 3) How likely is it that you will return to Syria after two years?

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Full sample		Germany		Turkey		Differences in means
	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.	p-value
Return intentions							
Wants to return	0.674		0.552		0.762		0.000
Wants to return if Syria is as safe as before the war	0.388		0.141		0.565		0.000
Wants to return after two years	0.347		0.129		0.503		0.000
Socio-demographic variables							
Gender: Female	0.187		0.079		0.265		0.000
Respondent is household head	0.688		0.954		0.497		0.000
Respondent is married	0.631		0.705		0.577		0.002
Age	32.367	9.909	34.170	8.157	31.074	10.824	0.000
Has secondary education or vocational training	0.362		0.382		0.348		0.409
Has university education	0.390		0.336		0.429		0.025
Duration of stay in months in the host country	38.773	14.128	35.436	8.049	41.167	16.823	0.000
Economic variables							
Self-rated economic status before the war: Poor	0.083		0.075		0.089		0.532
Income category in host country	2.853	1.612	4.286	1.270	1.824	0.879	0.000
Costs of escape from Syria	2157.619	2650.637	4401.129	2622.299	548.435	967.313	0.000
Feeling of belonging							
Does not have assets in Syria	0.331		0.324		0.336		0.751
Has family members in host country	0.759		0.743		0.771		0.437
Does not feel welcome in host country	0.180		0.195		0.170		0.435
Institutional preferences							
Bashar Al-Assad not being president	0.851		0.867		0.839		0.354
Importance of freedom of speech	3.251	1.248	3.232	1.324	3.265	1.191	0.758
Importance of freedom of belief	3.253	1.271	3.307	1.340	3.214	1.220	0.388
Importance of health services	2.997	1.311	3.041	1.417	2.964	1.231	0.486
Importance of education services	2.939	1.352	2.992	1.472	2.902	1.260	0.431
Importance of reconstruction	3.009	1.386	2.826	1.523	3.140	1.265	0.007
Information shock							
Negative news items (video)	0.326		0.344		0.312		0.421
Positive information about support for return (leaflet)	0.293		0.290		0.295		0.913

Note: The total number of observations is 577, of which 241 individuals were interviewed in Germany and 336 in Turkey. The income categories in the host country are as follows: Category 1 – Less than 300 EUR; Category 2 – 300–500 EUR; Category 3 – 500–1,000 EUR; Category 4 – 1,000–1,500 EUR; Category 5 – 1,500–2,000 EUR; Category 6 – more than 2,000 EUR. Institutional preferences are coded on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 to 4: Category 0 – not very important; Category 1 – not important; Category 2 – not sure; Category 3 – important; Category 4 – very important.

Interestingly, despite the considerable differences, in practical terms and statistically speaking, in the socio-demographic characteristics, cost of escape and contemporaneous economic variables between Syrian refugees in Germany and Turkey, there are very few differences in their sense of belonging, measured along three dimensions (Table 1). First, one third of all respondents across both sub-samples have no assets left in Syria. While this variable can also be considered an economic variable, we argue that it similarly proxies for a sense of belonging. Individuals with no assets in Syria are more likely to have cut all ties. Second, 76 per cent of the interviewees indicate

that they have family in the respective host country; and third, 18 per cent report that they do not feel welcome in the host country. Since preferences and ratings are 'soft' variables that are considered context specific and easily manipulated, it is important to emphasize that despite the cultural and economic differences between the two host countries, there are no statistically significant differences in the perception of being unwelcome or any other subjective perception rating. Similar to the sense of belonging, institutional preferences are practically and statistically identical across refugees in both host countries. The vast majority of the refugees – 85 per cent – are afraid of the Syrian regime and desire the end of the Al-Assad era. There is a clear preference for the democratic value of freedom of speech, on average the refugees indicate to find it important (average response of 3.25 on a 0-4 Likert scale). Freedom of belief is valued equally highly (3.25 on a 0-4 scale). Notably, more tangible institutions such as health and education services rate slightly lower in importance compared to freedom of speech and belief. On average health services have an importance rating of 3.00 out of 4 and education services of 2.94 out of 4. There is only one difference in the institutional importance ratings between Syrian refugees in Turkey and Germany. Refugees in Turkey give more importance to reconstruction of their country. In practical terms this latter difference amounts to less than one third of a point on a five-point Likert scale. Notably, the other five institutional ratings are identical across host countries.

Lastly, we implemented a survey experiment on the influence of information on re-migration decisions. We randomly divided the refugees into three groups and presented them with a positive, a negative or no information about Syria and relocation support. The experiment was carried out after the background information about the socio-demographic and economic characteristics were collected, and prior to survey questions asking about the intention to migrate back. We randomly exposed one out of three respondents to a negative news item about Syria in the form of a video clip. The video lasted 2.7 minutes and was issued by Aljazeera news channel in Arabic. The negative news item presented latest facts about the numerous challenges that Syrian refugees who returned home from Lebanon are facing. The second group of respondents received a positive information shock about possible support for returnees. We put together a one-page leaflet with positive and encouraging information on support for returnees, including relevant links and addresses in case of interest.[7] The remaining one third of the respondents served as a control group. We deliberately presented powerful images and messages that are directly related to return migration to assess whether the new information affected the refugees' return migration intentions. We aimed at resembling the type of rapid information that comes in through social media. Yet, contrary to most social media we only shared the content once and not repeatedly. The experiment was designed such that the first interviewee of every enumerator entered the control group (receiving no information), the second interviewee was exposed to the negative treatment, and the third one received the positive treatment. As the descriptive statistics indicate, the information experiment was equally implemented across countries. Moreover, we assessed balancing of the treatment across socio-demographic and economic characteristics for the sample as a whole and the country sub-samples. Detailed balancing statistics can be found in the Appendix (Table A1). By and large the information treatment is well-balanced across socio-demographic and economic characteristics and sub-samples, but we find an imbalance for gender and age. Details are discussed in the Appendix. Overall the experiment can be considered as truly randomly implemented along the predetermined variables since of the 30 possible comparisons in the overall sample only three are statistically significant, for the German sub-sample only one out of 30 is statistically significant and for the Turkish sub-sample five out of 30 are statistically significant (three at the 10 per cent level). We do not present balancing statistics for the sense of belonging and the institutional preferences as we expect that, in addition to the outcome variables (return migration intentions), they are also affected

[7] Full details and the material used in the information experiment are available from the authors upon request.

by the information treatment. Importantly, we collected all these data after the information treatment.

6 EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

Our empirical strategy aims at identifying the correlates of intended return migration. In addition, we want to determine the extent to which these correlates are host country specific. We proxy the theoretically identified optimal duration of stay with the intent to return. We have three different variables depicting (i) the intent to ever return, (ii) the intent to return when it is as safe in Syria as before the war, and (iii) the intent to return within two years, i.e. in the near future. In addition to socio-demographic control variables we include the presented economic variables, preference parameters and measures of institutional quality as motivated by the theoretical model. Finally, we assess the role of the information experiment since host-country governments compete with dubious news channels, social media and country of origin sources in communicating with refugees and it is of interest to host-country institutions to understand how sensitive refugees are to new information. The resulting empirical model can be presented as follows:

$$R = X_S' \beta_S + X_E' \beta_E + X_P' \beta_P + X_I' \beta_I + X_N' \beta_N + \lambda_G + \lambda_A + \lambda_{Enum} + \varepsilon \,^{8}$$

The outcome R is binary, with 1 indicating that an individual intends to return and 0 otherwise. The matrix of socio-demographic control variables X_S includes age along with dummy variables for female respondents, household heads, married individuals, individuals with secondary education or vocational training, and individuals with university education. The duration of stay in the host country is included in logarithmic form. The matrix of economic variables X_E includes a dummy variable for those who self-classify as having been poor prior to the war, dummy variables for the income category the refugees belong to in the host country and the costs of escape, the latter in logarithmic form. The matrix of preference parameters X_P includes the following dummy variables: an indicator for (i) respondents who have family members in the host country, (ii) the perception of not feeling welcome in the host country, and (iii) assets in Syria. Note that we include a dummy variable coding *1* for those who do *not* have assets in Syria. Next we include a series of institutional variables collected in the matrix X_I. First, we include a dummy variable that is equal to 1 if the respondent prefers that Bashar Al-Assad is *not* president anymore. Next, we include a series of institutional preference variables. For all these variables we give a preference scale from 0 to 4 with 0 indicating no importance being given and 4 indicating very high importance or support. Indifference is denoted by 2. These variables include the importance of freedom of speech for the respondent, the importance of freedom of religion, the importance of free and functioning health services as well as of free and functioning education services, and finally the importance of reconstruction having started in Syria. Finally, we assess the respondents' sensitivity to new information with the information experiment that randomly provides negative, positive or no information. The variables are collected in the matrix X_N. The experiment allows us to empirically assess to what extent news feeds affect return intentions.

To account for structural aspects associated with coming from the same background and living together in the same refugee accommodation, we employ governorate of origin specific effects λ_G as well as accommodation specific effects λ_A. In addition, we account for enumerator specific effects λ_{Enum}. Although we have carefully trained the enumerators, we want to eliminate any remaining systematic bias stemming from the way an enumerator might have asked the questions

[8] Since all variables are individual specific except for the fixed effects, we abstain from including individual specific identifiers in the regression model.

or the interview atmosphere an enumerator might have generated. We cluster the remaining error term ε at the enumerator level. Since this results in only 25 clusters, we also apply cluster wild bootstrapping with 1,000 replications.

Most importantly, the above model includes an interaction term for every control variable. We interact every control variable with being a refugee in Turkey. Since the descriptive statistics have already indicated that refugees in Germany and Turkey are different along the socio-demographic and economic dimension, we want to contrast the determinants and motives for return migration for the refugees in both host countries. We opt for a joint model for efficiency.

Although our outcome variables are binary, we decided to employ the linear probability model as main specification. Since the respondents come from 10 different governorates, were sampled from seven different locations (two cities and one adjacent rural area in Germany and four cities in Turkey) and interviewed by 25 different enumerators, we include a considerable number of linear fixed effects given the relatively small sample of 577 observations. We do not want to run the risk of an incidental parameters problem and abstain from implementing non-linear models (Lancaster, 2000; Neyman and Scott, 1948). Nevertheless, for completeness, we use the logit model as a robustness check.

7 RESULTS

Before starting with the discussion of the multivariate results, we will highlight some observations about the nature of our outcome variables. First and foremost, the descriptive statistics already indicate that the three presented return scenarios are not only different in nature but also perceived differently. There is no doubt that the majority of the refugees plans to return eventually (67%, compare Table 1). But when it comes to concrete time horizons or a situation that is presented as safe but with the caveat that it is only 'as safe as before the war' the refugees are less inclined to consider return migration. The differences in the three scenarios are also reflected in the correlation across the intended return migration scenarios. The strength of the correlation is only moderate, between 0.33 and 0.36. Yet, all the correlations are highly statistically significant (p-value<0.001). Thus, there is no doubt that the concept of return migration is understood across scenarios but put in perspective given the presented conditions.

The host country dynamics differ across return scenarios. The correlation between the intention to eventually go back and the other two re-migration indicators is relatively small among Syrian refugees in Germany. In turn, for refugees in Turkey the correlation in return scenarios is highest for eventual return and re-migration if Syria is safe as before the war. This suggests that returning home is more closely linked to an end of the fighting for refugees staying in Turkey. Hence, the descriptive statistic in combination with these basic correlation dynamics indicate a sorting of refugees into host countries depending on intended duration of stay. Detailed correlation results are presented in the Appendix (Table A2).

7.1 Main Results: Multivariate Analysis

The results of the multivariate analysis are presented in Table 2. Six findings stand out that hold independent of the presented return migration scenario. First, despite considerable differences in the socio-demographic and economic characteristics between the refugees in Germany and Turkey, these characteristics tend to have limited predictive power for re-migration intentions, suggesting that return migration intentions are not very much influenced by background characteristics. Second, refugees in Germany who do not have any assets in Syria are less likely to indicate that they want to return to their country of origin, suggesting that they have cut all their ties. This finding holds across all models that we estimate and even when we apply cluster wild

bootstrapping. Third, democratic rights that are very much emphasized by Western governments and NGOs in the process of reconstruction and repatriation do not seem to feed into the return migration decision. Although the refugees attribute a high value to freedom of speech and freedom of belief (Table 1), these preferences are not coherently or strongly associated with the return migration decision independent of where the refugees are hosted. Fourth, Syrian refugees who place a high value on education seem to have opted for seeking refuge in Germany; the more importance they attach to education, the less likely they are to want to migrate back. Fifth, theory suggests that over time return migration becomes more likely. However, we do not identify a relationship between re-migration intentions and duration of stay in two of the three scenarios. This might be linked to the relative short time of staying in the host countries and the fact that at the time of the interviews the war in Syria was still ongoing with unclear outcome. Duration of stay is only linked to the intention of going back if Syria is as safe as before the war. Sixth, the information treatment does not systematically influence the decision to migrate back. The lack of a reaction to the shared information demonstrates how intricate it is for host-country governments to reach out to the refugees even with useful support messages such as the presented leaflet. The new information does not seem to affect the refugees' return migration intentions although we deliberately opted for strong messages directly related to return migration.

Next we turn to a detailed discussion of the findings. Column 1 of Table 2 presents the correlates of intended return migration at some point in time ('return ever'). First, we observe that there are differences in the socio-demographic correlates between those refugees staying in Germany and those in Turkey. Female respondents interviewed in Turkey are 33 per cent less likely to have intentions for return migration compared to men. However, this effect disappears once we apply the wild bootstrapping. While we do not identify any gender dynamics for the sub-sample of refugees in Germany, we observe that married refugees who stay in Germany are 19 per cent more likely to have re-migration intentions compared to married individuals in Turkey. Again, however, the effect disappears with bootstrapping. In turn, we find a statistically stable age effect suggesting that older refugees who stay in Germany are more likely to have the wish to go back to Syria compared to younger refugees in Germany. This is in line with the existing literature about return migration (Kirdar, 2009; Constant and Massey, 2003). We further learned from the qualitative interviews that this finding is linked to cultural differences between Germany and Syria. The differences are perceived as being considerable and there is a desire to be closer to home when old. We observe contrasting age dynamics for refugees in Turkey. The younger respondents are more likely to express the desire to go back. While older refugees perceive Turkey as a safe haven that is close to home, the younger ones indicated that they see more opportunities back in Syria. In turn, we find that refugees with university education who stay in Turkey are considerably less likely (27 per cent) to intend going back home. However, this finding also disappears when we bootstrap. In short, the socio-demographic factors could not be identified as strong predictors for return migration decisions.

Turning to the economic variables, those refugees staying in Germany who have a higher income have a lower probability of re-migration.[9] Meanwhile, the costs of escape are positively and statistically significantly associated with return to Syria for those refugees staying in Germany but negatively for those staying in Turkey.

Next we assess the variables that code for the sense of belonging, which proxy for the parameter *B(.)* from our theoretical model. The first variable that we analyse is also an economic variable, namely whether an individual has assets in Syria. Not having assets in Syria decreases the probability of return migration among refugees in Germany by 20 per cent, suggesting that those individuals derive a comparably low benefit from consumption back home. Lack of asset ownership has no effect for refugees in Turkey. Another variable feeding into a sense of belonging is the presence of family members in the host country. Having family members in Germany (Turkey) reduces (increases) the probability of return migration by 24 per cent (37 per cent). We

[9] Note that we pool all sources of income including remittances and social assistance.

can only speculate about the increased likelihood of return migration in the case of Turkey: we have some indicative evidence from the qualitative interviews that due to the proximity between Turkey and Syria, refugees with family members in Turkey consider the country a safe haven to which they can always turn if needed. Lastly, whether the refugees feel welcome or not does not affect their considerations of return migration in either host country.

TABLE 2
Main Results: Return Migration Intentions and their Correlates

	Return ever	Return after two years	Return if Syria is as safe as before the war
Socio-demographic variables			
Respondent is female	0.277	0.021	-0.101
	(0.189)	(0.058)	(0.069)
Tx(Respondent is female)	-0.333*	-0.015	0.077
	(0.195)	(0.111)	(0.095)
Household head	-0.245	0.053	-0.387**
	(0.159)	(0.093)	(0.177)
Tx(Household head)	0.280	-0.009	0.397**
	(0.181)	(0.108)	(0.189)
Age	0.011**	-0.002	0.000
	(0.005) [0.074]	(0.004)	(0.002)
Tx(Age)	-0.014**	0.005	-0.000
	(0.005) [0.024]	(0.007)	(0.004)
Married	0.187*	-0.067	-0.010
	(0.095)	(0.042)	(0.048)
Tx(Married)	-0.142	0.006	0.098
	(0.118)	(0.085)	(0.092)
Secondary/vocational education	-0.015	-0.017	-0.085
	(0.057)	(0.066)	(0.054)
Tx(Secondary/vocational education)	-0.066	-0.191	0.130
	(0.093)	(0.118)	(0.098)
University education	0.118	0.007	-0.050
	(0.107)	(0.064)	(0.121)
Tx(University education)	-0.272**	-0.294**	-0.014
	(0.130)	(0.132) [0.084]	(0.145)
Duration of stay (log)	-0.011	-0.129	-0.170***
	(0.094)	(0.086)	(0.059) [0.002]
Tx(Duration of stay)	0.011	0.092	0.184**
	(0.123)	(0.110)	(0.086) [0.052]
Economic variables			
Self-rated poor	0.079	-0.114*	-0.128
	(0.051)	(0.061)	(0.111)
Tx(Self-rated poor)	0.050	0.135	0.154
	(0.089)	(0.136)	(0.127)
Income category host country	-0.051**	0.016	0.007
	(0.020) [0.010]	(0.022)	(0.022)
Tx(Income category host country)	0.018	-0.031	-0.073*
	(0.032)	(0.047)	(0.036) [0.088]
Costs of escape (log)	0.036***	0.012	-0.004
	(0.008) [0.000]	(0.007)	(0.005)
Tx(Costs of escape)	-0.048**	-0.041*	0.020
	(0.023) [0.056]	(0.024)	(0.022)
Feeling of belonging			
No assets in Syria	-0.204***	-0.075*	-0.147***
	(0.058) [0.036]	(0.037) [0.098]	(0.044) [0.002]
Tx(No assets in Syria)	0.057	-0.009	0.064
	(0.081)	(0.083)	(0.083)

Family members in host country	-0.239**	0.002	-0.105
	(0.104) [0.054]	(0.081)	(0.068)
Tx(Family members in host country)	0.366***	-0.092	0.037
	(0.115) [0.002]	(0.108)	(0.108)
Does not feel welcome in host country	-0.025	0.112***	0.104*
	(0.055)	(0.037)	(0.059)
Tx(Does not feel welcome in host country)	-0.067	-0.050	-0.178**
	(0.070)	(0.077)	(0.079) [0.044]
Institutional preferences			
Important: Freedom of speech	-0.035	0.027	0.022
	(0.087)	(0.017) [0.054]	(0.021)
Tx(Important: Freedom of speech)	0.042	-0.038	-0.056
	(0.100)	(0.044)	(0.041)
Important: Freedom of belief	-0.003	-0.037	-0.014
	(0.072)	(0.041)	(0.018)
Tx(Important: Freedom of belief)	0.045	0.076	0.051*
	(0.089)	(0.052)	(0.029) [0.068]
Important: Health services	0.098	0.087*	0.049
	(0.069)	(0.046)	(0.060)
Tx(Important: Health services)	-0.097	-0.095	0.002
	(0.077)	(0.062)	(0.070)
Important: Education services	-0.126**	-0.082*	-0.073*
	(0.059) [0.004]	(0.042) [0.060]	(0.035) [0.086]
Tx(Important: Education services)	0.102	0.109**	0.091*
	(0.064)	(0.052)	(0.052) [0.100]
Important: Reconstruction	0.048***	0.031	0.043
	(0.012) [0.000]	(0.034)	(0.036)
Tx(Important: Reconstruction)	0.013	-0.056	-0.030
	(0.026)	(0.056)	(0.049)
Bashar Al-Assad not being president	0.212**	0.044	0.078*
	(0.087)	(0.051)	(0.045)
Tx(Bashar Al-Assad not being president)	-0.111	0.090	0.082
	(0.110)	(0.121)	(0.086)
Information shock			
Negative information	0.027	0.046	0.044
	(0.036)	(0.063)	(0.031)
Tx(Negative information)	-0.096	-0.135	-0.146***
	(0.071)	(0.084)	(0.040) [0.002]
Positive information	0.001	0.028	-0.024
	(0.053)	(0.064)	(0.040)
Tx(Positive information)	-0.054	-0.131	-0.074
	(0.074)	(0.079)	(0.068)

Note: Results derived from a linear probability model with governorate of origin, host-country accommodation and enumerator specific effects. The total number of observations is 577. Standard errors clustered at the enumerator level are presented in parentheses; *p*-values resulting from the cluster wild bootstrap procedure with 1,000 replications are presented in brackets next to the clustered standard errors whenever the wild bootstrapped *p*-value is ≤ 10%. ***/**/* indicates significance at the 1/5/10% level. The interaction term for respondents from Turkey is indicted by 'Tx(.)'.

Institutional preferences as theoretically modelled by I^i (with $i=h, o$) are fairly weak predictors of eventual intended return. Neither freedom of speech nor freedom of belief nor access to free and functioning health services are linked to re-migration considerations. Put differently, the refugees derive limited utility from democratic liberties. However, those refugees who stay in Germany and value education are 13 per cent less likely to have return migration intentions. The role of education was stressed throughout the interviews. In Table 3, Panel A we present a small collection of direct quotes showing that from the point of view of the refugees staying in Germany is associated with better education and a better future for their children. While reconstruction within Syria has a positive impact on the re-migration intentions of refugees in Germany, it only increases the

probability of re-migration by 5 per cent, suggesting that there is limited trust that reconstruction will happen. This lack of trust in change is further related to the current Syrian regime. Since in the interviews the refugees referred frequently to the regime and the role of President Al-Assad (Table 3, Panel B) we also assessed whether his presidency has an impact on intended return migration. Many interviewees explicitly talked about 'the regime', fear of it and return in case the regime falls. This also shows quantitatively. For the German sub-sample we find that if the Al-Assad regime were to come to an end, intended return migration would increase by 21 per cent. Taken together, the empirical findings about institutional preferences support their inclusion in the theoretical model. Yet, the findings highlight that it is only the most tangible institutions that feed into return migration intention.

Finally, as already discussed, the information treatment does not affect intended return migration. We consider the information treatment as shifter of the preference *B(.)* for consumption at home and expect that a positive (negative) information shock $\tau^{Info}>1$ ($\tau^{Info}<1$) increases (decreases) that preference. In the case of eventual return migration, it is not surprising to find no impact since the information we presented contains facts that are immediately relevant and mainly aimed at those who are considering return in the near future.

TABLE 3
Qualitative Statements

Panel A: Statements about education and a better future for the children
'The problem is the absence of security in Syria because of the regime and militia affiliated with it. I took my children to Jordan and then brought them to Germany to protect them and *to get them a better future*. It is not for me' (45-year-old man in Germany).
'If I wanted to return, I would not have sold my house, which was all that I had in Syria. … The problem is not only about the war ending. There are other matters negatively influencing whether I want to return: crime*, the future of my children* …' (32-year-old man in Germany).
'Whether Syria is safe or not, I do not want to return. I lost years of my life and do not have a *future*. … But if it is up to me, I will stay here to continue what I already started. I will *finish my studies* and get a university degree in Germany' (27-year-old man in Germany).
'[In Germany] there is someone to help me *build their [the children's] future*. This forces me to stay and not think about return whatever I will be offered' (42-year-old man in Germany).
Panel B: Statements about the Syrian regime
'We want a free Syria in which we live a safe and dignified life and have the full freedoms that the people deserve, *without the regime of Bashar Al Assad* and his intelligence gangs' (35-year-old man in Turkey).
'It is most important to *live without the feeling that you are owned by a government* or by anybody' (32-year-old man in Germany).
'I do not want to return *because of the Assad Regime*. I was arrested, my brother died under torture. How can I go back as long as the regime still exists there?' (28-year-old man in Germany).
'I will not return unless the *regime of Assad falls* and all armed groups are dismantled …' (23-year-old man in Turkey).
'Because I want to return only in the event of the *fall of the regime,* which means if the war ends. But if the regime does not fall, I do not want to return' (32-year-old woman in Turkey).

Note: italics added by the authors.

Next we assess the scenario of return after a stay of two years in the host country. This scenario is least predictable with the characteristics that we analyse. Except for university education, none of the socio-demographic variables has predictive power. Syrian refugees with university education who stay in Turkey are about 29 per cent less likely to indicate that they want to return after two years. Again, the duration of stay in the host country does not affect intended return after two

years. We find some moderate indication reinforcing the negative effect of the costs of escape for refugees in Turkey. The effect is similar as for the outcome 'return ever' but less precisely estimated.

In addition, we observe that for the short-term scenario of return after a stay of two years, the sense of not feeling welcome reinforces the desire to go back to Syria for refugees in Germany by 11 per cent. But even this effect is not stable, and disappears with wild bootstrapping. One effect that is coherently statistically significant across models is that refugees in Germany who did not keep any assets in Syria are less likely to express the intention to go back home after two years (7.5 per cent). The role of education services is similarly coherently significant. Refugees in Germany who value education are 8 per cent less likely to report that they want to return to Syria after two years of stay. Lastly, although refugees who consider return to Syria in the short term should in theory be susceptible to new information, we do not find any reaction to our information treatment.

The third scenario under study is that of return to Syria if the country is as safe as before the war. As outlined above, we deliberately present this scenario that includes the continuation of the regime Al-Assad. Again, we observe hardly any relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics and the intention to migrate back. Syrian household heads in Germany appear to be less likely to want to go back compared to household heads in Turkey. However, this result does not hold when we employ wild bootstrapping for standard errors. What we do find is that the duration of stay in the host country is related to the intention of going back to Syria if it is as safe as before the war. The longer the refugees are in Germany, the lower the probability becomes that returning to a Syria that is as safe as before the war is an option. In contrast, the longer the refugees stay in Turkey, the bigger the probability that they consider going back if Syria is as safe as before the war, indicating that assimilation patterns are different in Germany and Turkey. Similar to return intentions after two years, those refugees who live in Germany and do not feel welcome are 10 per cent more likely to consider returning if Syria is as safe as before the war. However, this result disappears with wild bootstrapping. In turn, refugees in Turkey who do not feel welcome are 18 per cent less likely to want to go back. In short, the results about feeling welcome are neither systematic nor stable across outcomes. Therefore, we treat them with caution. What is stable across return scenarios is the observation that refugees in Germany who lost all their belongings or sold everything back home in Syria are 15 per cent less likely to have the intention of re-migration if Syria is as safe as before the war. This is in line with the findings associated with the other two return migration outcomes. Also similar to the other two migration outcomes is the finding that refugees in Germany who value education are 7 per cent less likely to intend going back to a Syria that is as safe as before the war. This result shows up coherently across specifications, even when we employ wild bootstrapping. Finally, the negative information treatment is significant for refugees in Turkey when it comes to the concept of returning to a Syria that is as safe as before the war (15 per cent). This finding suggests that for those who stay close to home and consider going back even if the regime is still in place, new information about the cruelties of the regime is likely to make them rethink. The finding also highlights that for the information treatments under study to be successful requires very specific setup and conditions. Only very well-tailored negative information appears to have an impact on those most affected. Consequently, if similar impacts are to be achieved with positive and supportive information, that information needs to be extremely pertinent for the target group.

To sum up, in relation to our theoretical considerations we find support for three factors. First, the sense of belonging ($B(.)$) matters for return migration intentions. Second, tangible institutions (I^i, with $i=h, o$) also affect intended return whereas more abstract institutional concepts do not. Third, on the spot information (τ^{Info}) has limited impact on the desire for consumption at home. Yet, we find some indication that relevant and timely information might make a difference.

7.2 Robustness Checks

To gauge the robustness of our findings we also estimate the three models step-wise. We first include only the socio-demographic controls, then we add the economic variables, and so on. We observe parameter stability across models. Detailed results are presented in the Appendix in Tables A3 to A5. In addition, we estimate a logit model although our specification includes many fixed effects and many dummy variables relative to the sample size. The results from the logistic regressions are presented in the Appendix in Table A6. Results are qualitatively similar, reinforcing our main findings, but the coefficient estimates tend to be bigger in absolute size and inference is less conservative even when applying multi-way clustering. Therefore, we prefer the conservative estimates from the linear probability model.

Finally, we estimate a model that contains only the predetermined control variables and the fixed effects along with the information experiment. This model is estimated to assess whether the lack of impact from the survey experiment on the outcome variables is driven by the impact the information treatment has on the sense of belonging and the institutional preferences. Results are presented in the Appendix in Table A7. Again, we find no support for the information treatment systematically affecting return migration intentions. At first sight it seems that the negative information treatment has an effect on refugees in Turkey and their short-term return migration intentions but when we apply wild bootstrapping the effect disappears for the return migration intention after two years. Similar to the full model, the only effect that persists is the negative information effect for refugees in Turkey who intend to go back if Syria is as safe as before the war. Thus, at most we can conclude that the refugees who consider going back home in the near future are susceptible to unknown negative news. Such negative news makes the refugees rethink their re-migration intentions as the likelihood of going back to Syria decreases by 15 per cent as a consequence of the video. Beyond this limited impact of the negative information treatment we do not see that information provided on the spot, in particular support information, has an influence on decision making about return.

8 CONCLUSION

Understanding decision making about return migration, particularly in the case of refugees, is not an easy task but for that very reason it is important to provide informed, data-driven information from the refugees themselves to host-country policy makers. We focus on Syrian refugees since the Syrian civil war is considered the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time. While we are aware that Syria is still at war, host-country governments face a lot of domestic pressure to provide long-term solutions for the Syrian refugees. The discourse of the alleged threat that refugees pose to host communities is used by right-wing populist parties to win votes by playing on insecurity and fear (Holmes and Castaneda, 2016). Moreover, since mid-2019 the most violent war activities in Syria have ceased and, according to the UNHCR, by the end of August 2019 almost 200,000 Syrian refugees had self-organized their return (UNHCR, 2019b). Consequently, foreign governments as well as international institutions are starting to think ahead and assess whether in the not-so-distant future Syrian refugees will be able to safely and voluntarily return home.

This research presents a first quantitative attempt to disentangle the individual-level factors associated with the possible return migration of Syrian refugees. We contrast Syrian refugees staying in a highly developed, distant country, i.e. Germany, with those in the neighbouring country that accepted most refugees, i.e. Turkey. Next to individual-level correlates of intended return migration we examined the impact of new information on the return decision by randomly exposing respondents to a video containing negative information or a leaflet with positive information about returning. Our results are as follows: refugees in neighbouring countries like

Turkey are more likely to indicate their willingness to return compared to those in Germany, suggesting that the greater distance of Germany and the perceived order of life not only gives an immediate sense of security and structure but more importantly stability for the future. Even when asked about eventual return at some point in the future, 45 per cent of the respondents in Germany and 24 per cent of the respondents in Turkey state that they never want to go back. In addition, host governments should not underestimate the role of Assad's Government for return migration intentions. For the majority of the refugees, eventual return is linked to an end of the regime. Thus, neither proximate nor distant host countries should bank on the speedy return of the Syrian refugees but should focus on integrating them, independently of how long they intend to stay.

In terms of predictors of re-migration intentions, we conclude the following: despite considerable differences in the socio-demographic and economic characteristics between the refugees in Germany and Turkey, these characteristics tend to have limited predictive power for re-migration intentions, suggesting that return migration intentions are not substantially influenced by background characteristics. Next, we observe that refugees in Germany who do not have any assets left in Syria are less likely to have re-migration intentions. Although refugees value democratic rights, liberties such as freedom of speech do not feed into the return migration decision, independent of where the refugees are hosted. Syrian refugees who place a high value on education seem to have opted for seeking refuge in Germany, and the degree of importance they attach to education has an inverse relation to the likelihood that they will want to migrate back. The randomly introduced information treatment does not systematically influence the decision to migrate back. The lack of a reaction to the presented information demonstrates how challenging it is for host governments to reach out to the refugees even with support messages.

We do not want to conclude without acknowledging that this research suffers from several limitations that have to be taken into consideration when assessing the findings. First, we could not employ random sampling. We addressed this challenge as follows: we aimed to obtain as representative a sample as possible by relying on a fairly large number of enumerators with different circles of influence and by ensuring that we interviewed refugees from different governorates of origin and at different host locations. Second, we deliberately reached out mainly to household heads and, given the structure of Syrian families, household heads tend to be men. They make far-reaching decisions such as return migration. As a consequence, in particular our German sub-sample has very few female respondents. Therefore, we do not want to draw any conclusions about gender dynamics. Third, ideally we would have observed returned refugees, allowing us to assess the average duration of stay instead of stated intentions under different scenarios. However, in mid-2018 Syria was still in a state of war and for host countries that allowed many refugees to enter, such as Germany and Turkey, a key question is what makes refugees want to stay or want to go home and not realized decisions. Thus, by presenting different return scenarios we can get fairly close to obtaining an answer to one of the most pressing questions of host-country governments which are in need of informed advice now and not retrospectively. Fourth, we would have liked to analyse more complex return migration scenarios. In our survey, we presented the respondents with scenarios that offer financial support for repatriation, but found that the refugees were not responsive to different levels of financial support. Those who indicated from the start that they were not interested in repatriation could not be convinced by increasing financial incentives to change their stated intention and those who wanted to relocate wanted to do so independent of the financial support provided for starting a new life back home. Given this inelastic response to the presented return scenarios, we had to carry out our analysis employing binary indicators. Fifth, from an econometric point of view we would have liked to include more objective measures of institutional quality. However, such measures are not available at a disaggregated level and it is not very likely that a slight change in a good governance index between any two years of war would make refugees revise their view on local institutions. It is rather the refugees' own perceptions and the subjective experiences they have lived through and shared with others that influence their decision making about return.

What, then, have we learned? If large-scale return migration is desired, we should try to better understand the preferences and concerns of the refugees. Consequently, we would do well to listen to the voices of the refugees themselves since they have very clear ideas about what would make returning worth the effort. By understanding the decision-making process of refugees, host-country governments will be able to reach out to them and communicate with them more effectively. Host-country governments should take the time to engage with the refugees and base policy decisions on micro-level evidence instead of viewing refugees as one big, homogeneous group (Al-Rasheed, 1994). The situation in Syria continues to be unstable and it remains to be seen whether the country can find a way back to peace in the near future. As our data show, the end of the war and even political change will not be enough for all refugees to consider returning. Consequently, host countries might as well invest in the integration of those refugees who are willing to assimilate. Taking the stance that the presence of the Syrian refugees is entirely temporary is not what the data suggest.

Finally, to better understand the refugees' perspective, future research should assess their preferences and aspirations in more detail and examine how these might change with the duration of stay and the experiences accumulated in the host country. Such research could feed into decisions about the type and scope of effective integration as well as repatriation programmes.

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APPENDICES

TABLE A1
Balancing Statistics for the Survey Experiment

	Control	Negative news	Positive news	Comparison Control vs Negative	Comparison Negative vs Positive	Comparison Control vs Positive
Full sample						
Gender: Female	0.232	0.149	0.172	0.035**	0.146	0.561
Age	33.323	32.766	30.680	0.576	0.009***	0.042**
Respondent is household head	0.682	0.723	0.657	0.362	0.604	0.175
Respondent is married	0.650	0.638	0.598	0.806	0.291	0.431
Duration of stay in the host country in months	3.647	3.582	3.592	0.116	0.179	0.840
Has secondary education or vocational training	0.382	0.335	0.367	0.328	0.763	0.531
Has university education	0.400	0.362	0.408	0.429	0.869	0.368
Self-rated economic status: Poor	0.068	0.112	0.071	0.123	0.914	0.186
Income category in host country	2.859	2.899	2.793	0.805	0.682	0.543
Costs of escape from Syria	6.282	6.585	6.370	0.149	0.692	0.346
Germany						
Gender: Female	0.114	0.036	0.086	0.057*	0.566	0.197
Age	33.182	35.072	34.343	0.107	0.381	0.602
Respondent is household head	0.955	0.940	0.971	0.667	0.584	0.354
Respondent is married	0.682	0.711	0.729	0.682	0.526	0.810
Duration of stay in the host country in months	3.581	3.575	3.550	0.867	0.406	0.493
Has secondary education or vocational training	0.409	0.361	0.371	0.525	0.633	0.899
Has university education	0.398	0.301	0.300	0.188	0.205	0.987
Self-rated economic status: Poor	0.057	0.096	0.071	0.332	0.710	0.584
Income category in host country	4.284	4.313	4.257	0.885	0.890	0.788
Costs of escape from Syria	8.130	7.875	7.779	0.257	0.182	0.761
Turkey						
Gender: Female	0.311	0.238	0.232	0.218	0.190	0.923
Age	33.417	30.943	28.091	0.096*	0.000***	0.039**
Respondent is household head	0.500	0.552	0.434	0.425	0.325	0.093*
Respondent is married	0.629	0.581	0.505	0.456	0.060*	0.279
Duration of stay in the host country in months	3.691	3.588	3.621	0.118	0.277	0.658
Has secondary education or vocational training	0.364	0.314	0.364	0.428	1.000	0.459
Has university education	0.402	0.410	0.485	0.901	0.208	0.282
Self-rated economic status: Poor	0.076	0.124	0.071	0.216	0.885	0.204
Income category in host country	1.909	1.781	1.758	0.268	0.196	0.849
Costs of escape from Syria	5.050	5.565	5.373	0.023	0.150	0.423

Note: The total number of observations is 577. The German sub-sample consists of 241 and the Turkish sub-sample of 336 observations.

***/**/* indicates statistical significance at the 1/5/10% level.

Discussion of imbalances: There are more women in the control group compared to the treatment group receiving negative information: the difference amounts to 8.3 percentage points and is statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. In turn, despite being statistically significant, the actual age difference across treatment groups is small. Across groups all refugees are in their early 30s on

average; the positive treatment group is youngest, i.e. the average respondent is 30.68 years old, which makes them 2.64 years younger than the oldest group which received no information, i.e. the control group. In the German sub-sample, only the imbalance with respect to gender persists. The age imbalance is found in the Turkish sub-sample with the already discussed gap. In addition, the Turkish sub-sample exhibits an imbalance for household heads and marital status, both significant at the 10 per cent level for one of the three treatment groups.

TABLE A2
Correlation Across Return Migration Outcomes

	All		Germany		Turkey	
	Wants to return	Wants to return after 2 years	Wants to return	Wants to return after 2 years	Wants to return	Wants to return after 2 years
Wants to return after 2 years	0.328		0.247		0.297	
	(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)	
Wants to return if Syria is safe	0.334	0.369	0.197	0.485	0.328	0.161
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.003)

Note: The total number of observations is 577. We have 241 observations for Germany and 336 for Turkey; *p*-values are indicated in parentheses.

There are some interesting host-country dynamics. The correlation is strongest for return migration after two years and return migration if Syria is safe for Syrian refugees in Germany, suggesting that these scenarios evoke similar connotations. At the same time, among the refugees staying in Germany, the share of those who want to return eventually is considerably higher (55%) compared to those who want to go back if Syria is safe and/or in the short run (14 and 13%, respectively, compare Table 1). Thus, it is unsurprising that the correlation between the intention to eventually go back and the other two re-migration indicators is relatively small among Syrian refugees in Germany. The picture is considerably different for refugees staying in Turkey. The correlation is lowest between those who want to go back if Syria is safe and those who want to go back after two years. In turn, the correlation is highest between those who want to re-migrate if Syria is safe and those who want to return eventually, suggesting that returning home is more closely linked to an end of the fighting for refugees staying in Turkey. Hence, the descriptive statistic in combination with these basic correlation dynamics already suggest a sorting of refugees into host countries depending on intended duration of stay.

TABLE A3
Step-wise Setup of the Regression Model for the Outcome 'Return Ever'

	Return ever			
Socio-demographic variables				
Respondent is female	0.220	0.191	0.216	0.268
	(0.204)	(0.205)	(0.239)	(0.200)
Tx(Respondent is female)	-0.249	-0.217	-0.275	-0.320
	(0.209)	(0.209)	(0.242)	(0.206)
Household head	-0.198	-0.254*	-0.261*	-0.248
	(0.128)	(0.145)	(0.147)	(0.158)
Tx(Household head)	0.234	0.287*	0.262	0.274
	(0.153)	(0.166)	(0.168)	(0.180)
Age	0.010*	0.013**	0.010**	0.011**
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Tx(Age)	-0.012*	-0.015**	-0.014***	-0.014**
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Married	0.076	0.119	0.181*	0.185*
	(0.126)	(0.115)	(0.105)	(0.094)
Tx(Married)	-0.002	-0.036	-0.125	-0.137
	(0.150)	(0.142)	(0.127)	(0.117)
Duration of stay (log)	0.091	0.054	0.047	-0.007
	(0.098)	(0.092)	(0.085)	(0.100)
Tx(Duration of stay)	-0.045	-0.043	-0.042	0.008
	(0.120)	(0.120)	(0.115)	(0.127)
Secondary/vocational education	-0.037	-0.050	-0.048	-0.018
	(0.089)	(0.095)	(0.082)	(0.056)
Tx(Secondary/vocational education)	-0.040	-0.014	-0.003	-0.059
	(0.124)	(0.124)	(0.116)	(0.095)
University education	0.114	0.113	0.128	0.116
	(0.127)	(0.135)	(0.122)	(0.110)
Tx(University education)	-0.271*	-0.248	-0.249	-0.265*
	(0.149)	(0.156)	(0.148)	(0.133)
Economic variables				
Self-rated poor		0.138	0.154*	0.083
		(0.106)	(0.085)	(0.052)
Tx(Self-rated poor)		-0.018	-0.004	0.042
		(0.119)	(0.101)	(0.090)
Income category host country		-0.070***	-0.056***	-0.050**
		(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.020)
Tx(Income category host country)		0.070***	0.044	0.022
		(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.030)
Costs of escape (log)		0.038***	0.037***	0.036***
		(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Tx(Costs of escape)		-0.059**	-0.050*	-0.048**
		(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.023)
Feeling of belonging				
Family members in host country			-0.218**	-0.240**
			(0.081)	(0.102)
Tx(Family members in host country)			0.356***	0.369***
			(0.097)	(0.113)
Does not feel welcome in host country			-0.022	-0.024
			(0.042)	(0.054)
Tx(Does not feel welcome in host country)			-0.111	-0.076
			(0.065)	(0.069)
No assets in Syria			-0.203**	-0.204***
			(0.080)	(0.059)
Tx(No assets in Syria)			0.072	0.063
			(0.094)	(0.080)

Institutional preferences	
Important: Freedom of speech	-0.036
	(0.088)
Tx(Important: Freedom of speech)	0.041
	(0.101)
Important: Freedom of belief	-0.003
	(0.072)
Tx(Important: Freedom of belief)	0.044
	(0.089)
Important: Health services	0.100
	(0.066)
Tx(Important: Health services)	-0.099
	(0.074)
Important: Education services	-0.128**
	(0.057)
Tx(Important: Education services)	0.103
	(0.063)
Important: Reconstruction	0.047***
	(0.013)
Tx(Important: Reconstruction)	0.014
	(0.027)
Bashar Al-Assad not being president	0.213**
	(0.085)
Tx(Bashar Al-Assad not being president)	-0.110
	(0.110)

Note: Results derived from a linear probability model with governorate of origin, host-country accommodation and enumerator specific effects. The total number of observations is 577. Standard errors clustered at the enumerator level are presented in parentheses.
***/**/* indicates statistical significance at the 1/5/10% level.

TABLE A4
Step-wise Setup of the Regression Model for the Outcome 'Return after Two Years'

	Return after two years			
Socio-demographic variables				
Respondent is female	-0.016	-0.011	-0.024	0.009
	(0.056)	(0.067)	(0.064)	(0.066)
Tx(Respondent is female)	0.002	-0.002	0.025	0.006
	(0.111)	(0.115)	(0.120)	(0.116)
Household head	0.042	0.036	0.025	0.049
	(0.104)	(0.105)	(0.110)	(0.099)
Tx(Household head)	-0.053	-0.047	-0.017	-0.016
	(0.119)	(0.118)	(0.125)	(0.111)
Age	0.001	-0.000	-0.001	-0.002
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Tx(Age)	0.005	0.005	0.006	0.006
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Married	-0.024	-0.048	-0.063	-0.066
	(0.058)	(0.069)	(0.063)	(0.042)
Tx(Married)	-0.041	-0.004	0.027	0.007
	(0.100)	(0.104)	(0.101)	(0.085)
Duration of stay (log)	-0.078	-0.098	-0.093	-0.130
	(0.095)	(0.092)	(0.079)	(0.079)
Tx(Duration of stay)	0.100	0.067	0.077	0.094
	(0.116)	(0.117)	(0.107)	(0.104)
Secondary/vocational education	-0.055	-0.055	-0.044	-0.023
	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.057)
Tx(Secondary/vocational education)	-0.121	-0.118	-0.148	-0.181
	(0.113)	(0.113)	(0.112)	(0.118)
University education	-0.020	-0.026	-0.010	0.001
	(0.094)	(0.084)	(0.080)	(0.069)
Tx(University education)	-0.236	-0.224	-0.260*	-0.285**
	(0.139)	(0.135)	(0.133)	(0.136)
Economic variables				
Self-rated poor		-0.099**	-0.095**	-0.109
		(0.041)	(0.037)	(0.065)
Tx(Self-rated poor)		0.138	0.124	0.125
		(0.129)	(0.125)	(0.138)
Income category host country		0.019	0.018	0.017
		(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.021)
Tx(Income category host country)		-0.016	-0.019	-0.023
		(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.046)
Costs of escape (log)		0.011	0.012*	0.011
		(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Tx(Costs of escape)		-0.043*	-0.044*	-0.041*
		(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Feeling of belonging				
Family members in host country			0.017	0.001
			(0.069)	(0.079)
Tx(Family members in host country)			-0.102	-0.090
			(0.097)	(0.105)
Does not feel welcome in host country			0.112***	0.114***
			(0.028)	(0.037)
Tx(Does not feel welcome in host country)			-0.055	-0.057
			(0.071)	(0.077)
No assets in Syria			-0.046*	-0.071**
			(0.024)	(0.034)
Tx(No assets in Syria)			-0.007	-0.001
			(0.080)	(0.084)

Institutional preferences	
Important: Freedom of speech	0.028
	(0.020)
Tx(Important: Freedom of speech)	-0.040
	(0.043)
Important: Freedom of belief	-0.037
	(0.042)
Tx(Important: Freedom of belief)	0.074
	(0.052)
Important: Health services	0.090**
	(0.043)
Tx(Important: Health services)	-0.096
	(0.059)
Important: Education services	-0.084**
	(0.039)
Tx(Important: Education services)	0.107**
	(0.048)
Important: Reconstruction	0.030
	(0.033)
Tx(Important: Reconstruction)	-0.053
	(0.057)
Bashar Al-Assad not being president	0.041
	(0.057)
Tx(Bashar Al-Assad not being president)	0.095
	(0.121)

Note: Results derived from a linear probability model with governorate of origin, host-country accommodation and enumerator specific effects. The total number of observations is 577. Standard errors clustered at the enumerator level are presented in parentheses. ***/**/* indicates statistical significance at the 1/5/10% level.

TABLE A5
Step-wise Setup of the Regression Model for the Outcome
'Return if Syria is as Safe as Before the War'

	Return if Syria is as safe as before the war			
Socio-demographic variables				
Respondent is female	-0.178**	-0.163*	-0.167*	-0.120
	(0.081)	(0.086)	(0.087)	(0.071)
Tx(Respondent is female)	0.139	0.126	0.136	0.104
	(0.102)	(0.105)	(0.110)	(0.096)
Household head	-0.398**	-0.386**	-0.399**	-0.394**
	(0.159)	(0.168)	(0.181)	(0.181)
Tx(Household head)	0.374**	0.348*	0.365*	0.390*
	(0.173)	(0.181)	(0.193)	(0.193)
Age	0.003**	0.003*	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Tx(Age)	-0.002	-0.002	0.001	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Married	-0.041	-0.037	-0.023	-0.017
	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.021)	(0.045)
Tx(Married)	0.165*	0.180**	0.168**	0.108
	(0.086)	(0.085)	(0.077)	(0.087)
Duration of stay (log)	-0.125**	-0.132**	-0.133*	-0.160***
	(0.059)	(0.056)	(0.076)	(0.056)
Tx(Duration of stay)	0.144	0.176*	0.185*	0.175*
	(0.090)	(0.093)	(0.105)	(0.086)
Secondary/vocational education	-0.112	-0.125	-0.113	-0.089
	(0.076)	(0.084)	(0.079)	(0.060)
Tx(Secondary/vocational education)	0.183	0.209*	0.196	0.140
	(0.111)	(0.113)	(0.116)	(0.103)
University education	-0.069	-0.084	-0.061	-0.051
	(0.152)	(0.163)	(0.156)	(0.128)
Tx(University education)	0.005	0.049	0.034	-0.008
	(0.171)	(0.183)	(0.179)	(0.150)
Economic variables				
Self-rated poor		-0.114	-0.103	-0.122
		(0.120)	(0.118)	(0.111)
Tx(Self-rated poor)		0.168	0.150	0.143
		(0.135)	(0.133)	(0.127)
Income category host country		0.001	0.006	0.009
		(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.021)
Tx(Income category host country)		-0.045	-0.052*	-0.066*
		(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.034)
Costs of escape (log)		-0.004	-0.004	-0.004
		(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Tx(Costs of escape)		0.018	0.016	0.019
		(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.024)
Feeling of belonging				
Family members in host country			-0.083*	-0.106
			(0.044)	(0.065)
Tx(Family members in host country)			0.006	0.040
			(0.090)	(0.104)
Does not feel welcome in host country			0.110*	0.108*
			(0.055)	(0.055)
Tx(Does not feel welcome in host country)			-0.223***	-0.191**
			(0.076)	(0.074)
No assets in Syria			-0.131***	-0.148***
			(0.044)	(0.042)
Tx(No assets in Syria)			0.089	0.078
			(0.081)	(0.081)

Institutional preferences	
Important: Freedom of speech	0.020
	(0.020)
Tx(Important: Freedom of speech)	-0.055
	(0.040)
Important: Freedom of belief	-0.013
	(0.018)
Tx(Important: Freedom of belief)	0.048
	(0.028)
Important: Health services	0.053
	(0.058)
Tx(Important: Health services)	-0.001
	(0.068)
Important: Education services	-0.076*
	(0.038)
Tx(Important: Education services)	0.092
	(0.054)
Important: Reconstruction	0.042
	(0.036)
Tx(Important: Reconstruction)	-0.028
	(0.049)
Bashar Al-Assad not being president	0.085*
	(0.047)
Tx(Bashar Al-Assad not being president)	0.078
	(0.088)

Note: Results derived from a linear probability model with governorate of origin, host-country accommodation and enumerator specific effects. The total number of observations is 577. Standard errors clustered at the enumerator level are presented in parentheses. ***/**/* indicates statistical significance at the 1/5/10% level.

TABLE A6
Marginal Effects from a Logistic Regression

	Return ever	Return after two years	Return if Syria is as safe as before the war
Socio-demographic variables			
Respondent is female	0.281	0.093	-0.008
	(0.207)	(0.100)	(0.119)
Tx(Respondent is female)	-0.359*	-0.095	-0.030
	(0.215) [0.095]	(0.138)	(0.136)
Household head	-0.311**	0.113	-0.639***
	(0.157) [0.048]	(0.170)	(0.180) [0.000]
Tx(Household head)	0.384**	-0.075	0.646***
	(0.185) [0.038]	(0.179)	(0.193) [0.001]
Age	0.013***	-0.003	0.001
	(0.005) [0.009]	(0.008)	(0.005)
Tx(Age)	-0.017***	0.006	0.000
	(0.006) [0.002]	(0.010)	(0.006)
Married	0.258***	-0.104	-0.014
	(0.095) [0.007]	(0.088)	(0.108)
Tx(Married)	-0.207*	0.041	0.108
	(0.123) [0.092]	(0.103)	(0.130)
Duration of stay (log)	-0.080	-0.147	-0.304***
	(0.113)	(0.154)	(0.119) [0.010]
Tx(Duration of stay)	0.100	0.100	0.311**
	(0.138)	(0.166)	(0.131) [0.017]
Secondary/vocational education	-0.012	-0.020	-0.178
	(0.041)	(0.155)	(0.114)
Tx(Secondary/vocational education)	-0.091	-0.172	0.227
	(0.115)	(0.183)	(0.145)
University education	0.124	0.004	-0.110
	(0.085)	(0.158)	(0.188)
Tx(University education)	-0.313***	-0.282	0.048
	(0.111) [0.005]	(0.201)	(0.197)
Economic variables			
Self-rated poor	0.028	-0.219	-0.291
	(0.062)	(0.190)	(0.370)
Tx(Self-rated poor)	0.163	0.219	0.313
	(0.168)	(0.221)	(0.370)
Income category host country	-0.076***	0.054	0.052
	(0.025) [0.002]	(0.040)	(0.054)
Tx(Income category host country)	0.036	-0.078	-0.113*
	(0.036)	(0.056)	(0.062) [0.071]
Costs of escape (log)	0.036***	0.038	-0.008**
	(0.006) [0.000]	(0.035)	(0.004) [0.031]
Tx(Costs of escape)	-0.057**	-0.071	0.019
	(0.026) [0.027]	(0.043)	(0.021)
Feeling of belonging			
Family members in host country	-0.331**	-0.031	-0.231
	(0.145) [0.023]	(0.182)	(0.165)
Tx(Family members in host country)	0.490***	-0.064	0.163
	(0.153) [0.001]	(0.194)	(0.184)
Does not feel welcome in host country	-0.011	0.141**	0.232***
	(0.056)	(0.067) [0.034]	(0.072) [0.001]
Tx(Does not feel welcome in host country)	-0.091	-0.095	-0.316***
	(0.071)	(0.089)	(0.095) [0.001]
No assets in Syria	-0.248***	-0.136***	-0.310***
	(0.068) [0.000]	(0.045) [0.003]	(0.056) [0.000]
Tx(No assets in Syria)	0.067	0.041	0.214**
	(0.094)	(0.092)	(0.087) [0.014]

Institutional preferences			
Important: Freedom of speech	-0.040	0.041	0.126*
	(0.068)	(0.052)	(0.065) [0.052]
Tx(Important: Freedom of speech)	0.055	-0.059	-0.166**
	(0.082)	(0.065)	(0.078) [0.033]
Important: Freedom of belief	0.004	-0.066*	-0.070**
	(0.057)	(0.035) [0.059]	(0.033) [0.036]
Tx(Important: Freedom of belief)	0.053	0.111**	0.111**
	(0.072)	(0.052) [0.034]	(0.044) [0.013]
Important: Health services	0.150**	0.136	0.040
	(0.062) [0.016]	(0.121)	(0.112)
Tx(Important: Health services)	-0.155**	-0.148	0.003
	(0.076) [0.042]	(0.127)	(0.117)
Important: Education services	-0.195***	-0.105	-0.121**
	(0.047) [0.000]	(0.088)	(0.053) [0.022]
Tx(Important: Education services)	0.173***	0.136	0.147**
	(0.060) [0.004]	(0.091)	(0.063) [0.020]
Important: Reconstruction	0.066***	0.056	0.104
	(0.012) [0.000]	(0.060)	(0.077)
Tx(Important: Reconstruction)	0.000	-0.080	-0.086
	(0.036)	(0.073)	(0.089)
Bashar Al-Assad not being president	0.258***	0.059	0.076
	(0.058) [0.000]	(0.074)	(0.080)
Tx(Bashar Al-Assad not being president)	-0.109	0.069	0.093
	(0.103)	(0.132)	(0.105)
Information shock			
Negative information	0.005	0.078	0.065
	(0.029)	(0.150)	(0.076)
Tx(Negative information)	-0.083	-0.171	-0.161*
	(0.089)	(0.159)	(0.084) [0.055]
Positive information	0.004	0.007	-0.107
	(0.046)	(0.127)	(0.136)
Tx(Positive information)	-0.072	-0.115	-0.003
	(0.083)	(0.132)	(0.149)

Note: Results derived from a logistic regression model with governorate of origin, host-country accommodation and enumerator specific effects included as dummy variables. The total number of observations is 577. Standard errors clustered at the enumerator level are presented in parentheses; *p*-values resulting from the multi-way clustering are presented in brackets next to the clustered standard errors whenever the multi-way clustered *p*-value is ≤ 10%. ***/**/* indicates statistical significance at the 1/5/10% level.

TABLE A7
Regression Model including Predetermined Covariates and Information Treatment

	Return ever	Return after two years	Return if Syria is as safe as before the war
Socio-demographic variables			
Respondent is female	0.204	0.005	-0.141*
	(0.192)	(0.054)	(0.081)
Tx(Respondent is female)	-0.233	-0.027	0.097
	(0.196)	(0.107)	(0.103)
Household head	-0.250	0.043	-0.378**
	(0.149)	(0.098)	(0.162)
Tx(Household head)	0.292*	-0.046	0.353*
	(0.170)	(0.111)	(0.175)
Age	0.012***	-0.000	0.003*
	(0.004) [0.072]	(0.004)	(0.001)
Tx(Age)	-0.015***	0.004	-0.002
	(0.005) [0.018]	(0.006)	(0.004)
Married	0.125	-0.045	-0.029
	(0.115)	(0.071)	(0.048)
Tx(Married)	-0.047	-0.008	0.166*
	(0.142)	(0.104)	(0.089)
Duration of stay (log)	0.040	-0.100	-0.150**
	(0.089)	(0.099)	(0.057) [0.020]
Tx(Duration of stay)	-0.032	0.068	0.191**
	(0.118)	(0.124)	(0.092) [0.064]
Secondary/vocational education	-0.050	-0.047	-0.122
	(0.094)	(0.056)	(0.076)
Tx(Secondary/vocational education)	-0.019	-0.127	0.200*
	(0.123)	(0.110)	(0.106)
University education	0.110	-0.017	-0.085
	(0.132)	(0.072)	(0.158)
Tx(University education)	-0.250	-0.232*	0.044
	(0.154)	(0.125)	(0.179)
Economic variables			
Self-rated poor	0.132	-0.107**	-0.123
	(0.105)	(0.040) [0.020]	(0.119)
Tx(Self-rated poor)	-0.007	0.148	0.183
	(0.116)	(0.127)	(0.134)
Income category host country	-0.071***	0.019	-0.001
	(0.015) [0.002]	(0.020)	(0.011)
Tx(Income category host country)	0.069***	-0.020	-0.049
	(0.024) [0.006]	(0.039)	(0.030)
Costs of escape (log)	0.038***	0.012	-0.004
	(0.007) [0.000]	(0.008)	(0.005)
Tx(Costs of escape)	-0.058*	-0.043*	0.019
	(0.028) [0.064]	(0.024) [0.092]	(0.021)
Information shock			
Negative information	0.017	0.057	0.044
	(0.032)	(0.055)	(0.031)
Tx(Negative information)	-0.090	-0.133*	-0.153***
	(0.066)	(0.077)	(0.047) [0.002]
Positive information	-0.042	0.024	-0.042
	(0.042)	(0.067)	(0.033)
Tx(Positive information)	0.009	-0.115	-0.038
	(0.067)	(0.078)	(0.067)

Note: Results derived from a linear probability model with governorate, accommodation and enumerator specific effects. The total number of observations is 577. Standard errors clustered at the enumerator level are presented in parentheses; *p*-values resulting from the cluster wild bootstrap procedure with 1,000 replications are presented in brackets next to the clustered standard errors whenever the wild bootstrapped *p*-value is ≤ 10%. ***/**/* indicates statistical significance at the 1/5/10% level.