Emma C. Smith

https://sites.harvard.edu/emmasmith

esmith@g.harvard.edu
617-515-8485

Placement Director
Marcella Alsan
marcella_alsan@hks.harvard.edu
617-384-0016

Director
Nicole Tateosian
nicole_tateosian@hks.harvard.edu
617-495-1190

Education

Harvard University   Cambridge, MA
Ph.D. in Public Policy (Economics Track)   2018 - 2024 (expected)
Wellesley College   Wellesley, MA
B.A. in Economics, Middle Eastern Studies, magna cum laude   May 2014

Fields Development economics, behavioral economics

References   Rema Hanna (chair)   Gautam Rao
                        rema_hanna@hks.harvard.edu   grao@fas.harvard.edu

                        Emily Breza   Edward Miguel
                        ebreza@fas.harvard.edu   emiguel@berkeley.edu

Job Market Paper

Stigma and Social Cover: A Mental Health Care Experiment in Refugee Networks

Winner of Weiss/NEUDC Distinguished Paper Award, 2023

People may not seek mental health care due to stigma. But if stigma also prevents people from even learning about services, then its consequences may be far greater. I design a field experiment with 847 Syrian refugee friend groups in Jordan to measure willingness to share information about mental health services. First, I document significant local knowledge about who may be depressed, implying individuals may be able to efficiently target information. Despite being compensated to share, people hold back information: only 22% of friends receive information. The study's main finding is that giving individuals social cover, by encouraging them to disclose that they are compensated to share information, raises sharing rates by 37%. Consistent with a social cover mechanism, these effects are strongest for senders who are prior mental health care users. In a follow-up experiment I show that senders can use the excuse of being paid without decreasing recipients' interest in the services. In a reversal of the common prediction that financial incentives may crowd out prosocial behavior, I instead find that in this setting with stigma, increasing the visibility of financial incentives increases prosocial participation.

Research in Progress

Alleviating Behavioral Constraints to Digital Employment for Refugees and Potential Migrants, with Layane Alhorr and Alice Danon. *(Recruitment stage, full funding secured)*

The majority of refugees globally have limited access to local labor market opportunities due to legal restrictions and high unemployment in predominantly low and middle-income host countries. In this project we conduct a field experiment with 2000 refugees in the Middle East and Africa to generate evidence on the potential of online work to integrate geographically and economically marginalized groups into the global workforce. The study aims to lift informational, logistical, and behavioral barriers to technology adoption through a combination of training and professional mentorship. The study will contribute to understanding the effect of access to online labor markets on human capital investments, migration intentions, integration, and employment outcomes.

Gendered health and economic impacts of household water scarcity, with Lydia Assouad and Giulia Buccione. *(Pilot funding and partial data secured)*

With 1.8 billion people globally expected to be living in absolute water scarcity by 2025 (United Nations 2022), understanding how water scarcity affects households' socioeconomic outcomes is essential. This project utilizes rich spatial data on the water delivery infrastructure in Jordan, one of the world's most water-scarce countries, with longitudinal survey data to identify the impacts of varying water access on households' socioeconomic outcomes including education, mental health, willingness to pay for water, and labor market engagement. Qualitative research suggests that women's traditional role in the household in Jordan may lead to an unequal burden of the costs of water scarcity, and thus the project will investigate gender differences in the key outcomes.

Affordable Housing for Forced Migrants: Impacts of Rental Subsidies for Refugees, with Samuel Leone, Edward Miguel, Sandra Rozo, Sarah Stillman, Bailey Palmer and Abdulrazzak Tamim. *(Analysis stage)*

Housing subsidies have been shown to be an effective means of poverty reduction in US and other developed contexts. However, there is less evidence on the efficacy of housing subsidies and improvements in low-income countries. To address this gap, we conducted a randomized controlled trial evaluating a housing subsidy program that offers both rent subsidies and housing improvements to existing homes of Syrian refugees in Jordan. In the short run we find evidence that housing subsidies decrease new debt but that households also welcomed more individuals into their households (specifically teenage boys), which paradoxically increased food insecurity in the treatment group.

Refugee labor response to conflict fluctuations, *(Analysis stage)*

Do fluctuations in ongoing conflicts indirectly impact the labor market behavior of refugees residing in hosting countries? To measure this I combine high-frequency news text data, geolocated conflict data, and panel survey data on refugees' labor market behavior. Machine learning is used to predict monthly conflict and identify quasi-exogenous unexpected conflict events, the impact of which is measured on refugees' labor market behavior.

Published and Forthcoming Research

[The Syrian Refugee Life Study: First Glance](), with Edward Miguel, Bailey Palmer, Sandra Rozo, Sarah Stillman and Abdulrazzak Tamim (2022). *Oxford Review of Economic Policy.* 38(3): 625â653.

This paper presents descriptive statistics from the first wave of the Syrian Refugee Life Study (S-RLS), which began in 2020. S-RLS is a longitudinal study that collects comprehensive data on a representative sample of approximately 2,500 registered Syrian refugee households in Jordan. We document lags in basic service access, housing quality, and educational attainment for Syrian refugees relative to non-refugees, by comparing to the 2016 Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey (JLMPS). The impacts of the pandemic may partially explain these disparities. The data also show that most Syrian refugees have not recovered economically after Covid-19 and have larger gender disparities in income, employment, prevalence of child marriage, and gender attitudes than their non-refugee counterparts.

Comparing the Economic Well-being of Host Communities and Refugees in Jordan During the COVID-19 Pandemic, with Laura Rodriguez-Takeuchi. *Forthcoming World Bank Policy Research Working Paper.*

The World Bank estimated that three million additional people fell into extreme poverty in the MENA region in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis (World Bank, 2020). This paper tracks and compares the socio-economic wellbeing of a representative sample of Jordanian and Syrian refugee households in Jordan in three rounds of surveying between March 2021 and June 2022. In contrast to earlier literature, the study follows households one and two years into the crisis. By collecting contemporaneous data on Jordanians and Syrian refugees the study allows for a close comparison of the wellbeing of both populations during the pandemic.

Employment

The World Bank, Consultant, 2020-2022

University of California, Berkeley (Edward Miguel), Research Assistant, 2017-2018

Innovations for Poverty Action, Research Associate, 2015-2017

New York University, Abu Dhabi, Academic Fellow in Economics, 2014-2015

Presentations

2023 Pacific Conference for Economic Development, Harvard Economics, Harvard Social Policy, NEUDC.
2022 Oxford Blavatnik School, MIT ReACT Migration Summit, World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center, Harvard Economics.
2021 Harvard Economics.
2020 The World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center, Harvard Economics, The Carnegie Endowment.
2019 The World Bank and Center for Effective Global Action, Harvard Economics.

Research Grants and Honors

Best Paper Prize

Distinguished Paper Award, *North East Universities Development Consortium*   2023

Grants

The World Bank Innovation Challenge on Jobs and Migration – $279,090   2023
     with Layane Alhorr and Lorraine Charles

STIERD Hub, London School of Economics – $6,000   2023
     with Lydia Assouad and Giulia Buccione

Institute for Quantitative Social Sciences Research Grant – $5,200   2022,2023

Institute for Humane Studies Research Grant – $5,000   2023

Weatherhead Institute for International Affairs Research Grant – $3,500   2022

SurveyCTO Data Collection Research Grant – $1,000   2021

Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics Research Grant – $47,824   2021

Innovations for Poverty Action Peace and Recovery Fund – $185,674   2020
     with Edward Miguel and Sandra Rozo.

Innovations for Poverty Action Peace & Recovery Exploratory Grant – $10,000   2020

Innovations for Poverty Action Peace and Recovery Fund – $353,553   2018
     with Edward Miguel and Samuel Leone.

Teaching Experience

Economic Development: Theory and Evidence, Harvard Kennedy School   2021
Professors Dani Rodrik and Eliana Carranza
Received 4.8/5 rating from 64 evaluations (school semester average 4.47).

EPoD Executive Education Program on Policy Design, Harvard Kennedy School 2021

Introduction to Econometrics, Undergraduate, New York University, Abu Dhabi   2015

Languages

English (native), Arabic (intermediate) and Spanish (basic)

Service

- Harvard Kennedy School PhD Student Association Peer Mentor   2019-Present
- Co-Chair, Peer Mentoring Program of Harvard Kennedy School PhD Student Association 2022-2023

Affiliations

- Evidence for Policy Design
- Center for International Development
- Institute for Quantitative Social Sciences
- Harvard Graduate Women in Economics
- Harvard Economics Diversity and Inclusion Group
- The Madeleine Korbel Albright Institute of Global Affairs at Wellesley College
- National Security Education Program Boren Scholar
- Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship