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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Relative education of recent refugees in Germany and the Middle East: Is selectivity reflected in migration and destination decisions?

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Abstract

In this paper, relative education profiles of recent refugees arriving to Germany from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan are described and compared to the profiles of Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon and of internally displaced Iraqis. Relative education describes a migrant's position in the educational distribution of the origin population. For recent refugees, relative education could be reflected in the decision of where to migrate: those who are relatively better educated may be more able to reach a distant destination. The empirical analyses use data from the project 'ReGES – Refugees in the German Educational System', the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, the Arab Barometer and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). The findings suggest that on average, Syrians and Afghans in Germany and Syrians in Jordan are positively selected on education, while Syrians in Lebanon and internally displaced Iraqis appear slightly negatively selected. The findings for Iraqis in Germany show mixed evidence.

INTRODUCTION

The numbers of forced migrants increased globally over the past decade. Many of these migrants are likely to stay in their countries of arrival in the long term and constitute an important part of receiving societies. Among other factors, education is known to play an essential role in migrants' integration. To assess their integration prospects, we need to know what they brought with them: What kind of education did they acquire in their countries of origin?

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While education is usually referred to in absolute terms, that is, which educational qualifications an individual has attained, this type of assessment may not draw a complete picture of refugees'[1] educational background because the meaning of education is highly context-dependent. This points to a more relative character of education. For example, in a country where the average educational level is lower, an intermediate-level degree could stand for a relatively better education than in a country where most people obtain at least such type of degree (Spörlein & Kristen, 2019a). Relative education describes how a migrant's educational attainment compares to the educational distribution of the origin population.

Those who migrate are usually selected on education; they 'are not a random sample of the population at origin' (Lee, 1966, 56). Migrant groups are often better educated than the origin population (e.g. Feliciano, 2005), which is commonly described as positive educational selectivity, while negative selectivity characterizes migrant groups that are educated below the average level in their origin countries. Recent studies have moved away from treating selectivity as a group-level characteristic and have shown that migrant groups are usually composed of shares of relatively better educated as well as relatively less educated individuals (Ichou, 2014).

This paper aims to contribute to this literature by describing and comparing the profiles of relative education of recent refugees who migrated from Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan to Germany or destinations in the Middle East. Few researchers have explored educational selectivity among forced migrants in detail. Because forced migrants move for different reasons than other migrants, they may systematically differ in their relative education profiles. Some studies consider these differences in migration motivation rather implicitly by contrasting the categories of economic and political migrants (e.g. Feliciano, 2005; Lessard-Phillips et al., 2014). However, the specific conditions that make political migrants migrate can vary greatly and may reflect in specific selectivity patterns.

In one of the first contributions describing selectivity patterns within a specific refugee group, Lukic and Nikitovic (2004) found that refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who moved to Serbia are on average better educated than both the population at origin and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Contributions that explicitly focus on the selective migration of recent humanitarian migrants coming mostly from Middle Eastern countries have notably been made by Buber-Ennser et al. (2016) for Austria and Lange and Pfeiffer (2019) for Germany. Both studies found that on average, migrants are better educated than the population at origin. Spörlein and Kristen (2019b) confirm these findings but also show that positive educational selectivity is less pronounced among recent refugees than among most other migrant groups who mainly move for economic reasons. In this paper, the educational selectivity of recent refugees from the Middle East in Germany is described using two different data sets to contribute to robust knowledge about the educational background of these groups.

Furthermore, only a few studies have considered the relation between selective migration and the selection of a certain destination in the context of forced migration. If there is a relationship between relative education and the destination where forced migrants end up, then this could be highly relevant for these migrants' societal integration. Aksoy and Poutvaara (2019) show that recent refugees in various European countries are positively selected on education and that among these European destinations, countries with economic incentives such as a high GDP per capita are more likely to attract highly educated refugees. On a more global level, individuals who are relatively better educated could have more options in terms of where to migrate. Those who reached Europe may be relatively better educated than those who sought refuge closer to their place of origin. Spörlein et al. (2020) find support for this assumption by contrasting Syrian refugees in Germany, Lebanon and Jordan. This paper aims to contribute to these findings on educational selection among short-distance and long-distance refugees by including further data sources and an additional comparison group: IDPs in Iraq.

A further contribution of this paper relates to a methodological issue. Research on educational selectivity has rarely paid attention to the regional origin of migrants (see Spörlein & Kristen, 2019a, 2019b). In less developed countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, infrastructural conditions may be unequal across regions and lead to disparities in educational attainment. For instance, an intermediate-level degree could represent a relatively advanced education in a region where the average educational level is low because of limited opportunities. While an

individual with an intermediate degree would then be relatively better educated by regional standards, this insight could be masked by a measurement of relative education that refers to the national distribution if the national average educational level is substantially higher than the regional average. In the context of forced migration, this could be particularly relevant because refugee streams often originate from specific areas. Taking regional origins into account helps render the findings of this paper more precise.

This paper is guided by the following research questions. First, how can the relative education profiles of Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans in Germany be described? In a second step, the paper includes forced migrants who sought refuge in destinations that are closer to their places of origin. How can the educational selectivity profiles of Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan and of IDPs in Iraq be described? How do they compare to the profiles of their compatriots in Germany?

To clarify the specific conditions under which humanitarian migrants decide to move, this paper starts with an overview of the situations in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and how these affected refugee movements. Subsequently, theoretical elaborations evolving from Lee's (1966) description of migration push and pull factors lay the groundwork for the assumptions on refugee selectivity. While these help explain who migrates, principles from value expectancy theory (De Jong & Fawcett, 1981; Kalter, 2000) are applied to formulate assumptions on who migrates where. Relative education is measured at the individual level, defining a migrant's position in the educational distribution of the population at origin. The research design section describes this measurement in more detail and presents the data sources used. Eventually, the findings are presented, compared and discussed with regard to policy implications.

SITUATIONS IN THE ORIGIN COUNTRIES

Starting in 2011, the Syrian civil war led to an exodus of Syrians. The conflict involves several actors that are usually grouped into a coalition of the government and its allies, opposition groups and Kurdish forces. After the first years of war, the terror organization Islamic State (IS) emerged as a further party to the conflict and contributed to rising numbers of refugees by conquering vast parts of the Syrian territory (EASO, 2018). Enormous numbers of those who were forced to migrate sought refuge in neighbouring countries, most importantly Jordan, with approximately 680,000; Lebanon, with approximately one million; and Turkey, with over 3.5 million registered Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in 2018. At the same time, an important share of refugees from Syria has travelled longer distances to reach safe destinations and currently constitute the largest group within the recent refugee population in Europe; for instance, approximately 580,000 Syrians have been registered in Germany (UNHCR, 2019).

As in Syria, IS also forced the migration of numerous inhabitants of Iraq (EASO, 2019b). While tensions between religious groups have resulted in violent incidents for years, the expansion of IS in parts of Iraq between 2014 and 2017 led to a strong increase in the number of internally and internationally displaced Iraqis. Although the numbers decreased after the territorial defeat of IS, UNHCR estimates suggest that there were still more than 1.8 million IDPs in Iraq in 2018. Based on the bare figures, neighbouring countries do not seem to play the same role as in the Syrian case; for instance, fewer than 70,000 Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers were registered in Jordan in 2018 and nearly 143,000 in Turkey. Germany received approximately 180,000 humanitarian migrants from Iraq (UNHCR, 2019).

The situation in Afghanistan is characterized by a long-lasting armed conflict between, on the one hand, the Afghan state and its allies and, on the other, numerous anti-governmental forces – particularly the Taliban but also IS and others (EASO, 2019a). While violent acts constitute direct threats to the daily lives of Afghans, the conflict also affects their economic situation. Many intend to leave because of unemployment, showing that humanitarian migration is not necessarily driven by a single factor (Asia Foundation, 2018). Afghanistan has an important population of IDPs, with more than two million persons estimated to be affected, although even more Afghans have emigrated to neighbouring states. For instance, nearly one million refugees and asylum seekers have been

registered in Iran, and more than 1.4 million moved to Pakistan. The number of Afghans who have sought refuge in Germany amounts to approximately 190,000 (UNHCR, 2019).

Although conditions in the countries of origin under study vary, a common pattern can be deduced: violence or the threat thereof constituted the main cause of migration for many individuals in recent years. In this respect, Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans can be described as forced migrants, even if reasons other than violence may have further contributed to the decision to leave. In terms of places of arrival, beyond Germany, Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq received important shares of humanitarian migrants and can therefore be regarded as particularly well-suited cases to study the background of recent migrants.

EDUCATIONAL SELECTIVITY, FORCED MIGRATION AND DESTINATIONS

Selectivity in the context of forced migration

From a theoretical perspective, how might forced migration reflect in the selectivity profiles of those who migrate? Some authors distinguish types of migrants based on pull motivations. The ambition to maximize benefits in a destination that provides better opportunities makes people migrate (Chiswick, 1999; Lee, 1966). Migrants are then assumed to be positively selected on certain characteristics. In terms of education, they should on average be better educated than those parts of the population who do not migrate. While education is an attribute that can be directly observed by means of qualifications, it also constitutes a proxy for unobserved characteristics according to which those who are relatively better educated should also be more ambitious and more willing to take risks (Chiswick, 1999). Furthermore, a higher relative education is also posited to be a proxy for a higher social status in the country of origin (Ichou, 2014).

Individuals whose migration decision is based on such motivations are said to respond mainly to pull factors in the place of arrival and represent the typical image of an economic migrant. Their relative freedom of choice to stay or to move sets them apart from other migrant groups, particularly refugees, whose migration decision is usually triggered by different circumstances. Refugees react more strongly to push factors such as violent conflicts or threats; that is, they are pushed out of their contexts of origin rather than pulled to destinations. For this reason, scholars argue that refugees' migration decisions are less driven by personal motivation and that positive selectivity should be less pronounced among refugees (Chiswick, 1999; Lee, 1966).

Nevertheless, this argumentation has some shortcomings because refugees are not a homogeneous group of migrants. First, each refugee stream is a consequence of specific push factors. Push factors can particularly differ in their degree of threat and in their comprehensiveness. Some push factors, such as civil wars, can prove fatal to the population, while others are less threatening and without deadly consequences. Similarly, a civil war can serve as an example of a comprehensive push factor because it affects virtually the whole population. In contrast, some push factors target specific population groups – for example, political or ethnic minorities being persecuted.

Varying threat types and degrees of conflict comprehensiveness are likely to have implications for the composition of refugee groups. The less specific the groups hit by push factors are, the more closely refugees should resemble the origin population in certain characteristics. Following humanitarian crises such as civil wars, it is unlikely that migrants who are forced to leave their homes are positively selected to a great extent (Lee, 1966).

A similar reasoning may apply to the degree of threat. A push factor with a weak degree of threat may make only some persons leave – for example, those who can afford it. The more threatening a situation becomes, the greater the number of people who are forced to leave. Therefore, we can assume selectivity to be less pronounced in situations that are characterized by strong threats. In the cases of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, both the degree of threat and the comprehensiveness of the respective conflicts have been high. Refugees from these countries may therefore be selective to a rather weak extent – that is, their educational distributions may be quite similar to the origin populations' distributions.

A second shortcoming of Lee's (1966) and Chiswick's (1999) contributions is that they describe an ideal-typical type of migrant. In reality, the boundaries between categories of migrants are fluid on 'a continuum between the rational choice behaviour of proactive migrants seeking to maximize net advantage and the reactive behaviour of those whose degrees of freedom are severely constrained' (Richmond, 1993, 10). While the more proactive migrants have more options with regard to both whether and where to move, those whose migration decision is more strongly characterized by reactive behaviour should have a limited scope of action. Nevertheless, because of the importance of what is at stake, one can suppose that even under circumstances that force people to react, humans reflect on their decisions of whether and where to migrate.

The relationship between educational selectivity and destinations

According to value-expectancy approaches, individuals weigh certain options before making a decision (e.g. De Jong & Fawcett, 1981; Kalter, 2000). They have subjective perceptions about these options and attribute expected benefits, costs and realization probabilities to them. An individual's migration decision can be interpreted as a function of these determinants. In the context of migration, the options are potential destinations, including the place of origin if an individual decides not to migrate, and the realization probabilities become manifest as the probabilities of reaching these destinations.

Selectivity could then be reflected in the choice of the destination country. Positively selected migrants who mainly move for economic reasons are known to be more likely to choose destinations at a greater distance from their place of origin (Belot & Hatton, 2012) and to move to developed countries (Docquier & Marfouk, 2006). Similar patterns can be expected for forced migrants. With a greater distance, the 'difficulty of the intervening obstacles' (Lee, 1966, 56) is expected to rise. Intervening obstacles include the distance of migration itself and physical barriers that migrants encounter as they are on the move. Overcoming these obstacles entails costs. This could make Europe a realistic alternative only for a select group of refugees. Among other factors that influence their migration trajectories, the probabilities of reaching a distant destination could potentially be higher for those who have the resources to cover the high monetary costs of fleeing there – that is, who have a corresponding social status – than for those with a lower status (McAuliffe & Jayasuriya, 2016; Spörlein et al., 2020). Because social status can be approximated by relative education, those with a relatively better education are assumedly more able to migrate to distant places.

While monetary costs need to be paid for things like transportation or human trafficking, non-monetary costs are exemplified by the riskiness of the journey. Numerous forced migrants who have tried to reach Europe over the past years found themselves stuck in transit countries or died on their way. If positive educational selectivity proxies for unobserved personality traits such as ambition or the readiness to assume risk, those who are relatively better educated could be more likely to assume the risk of a long and difficult journey to Europe.

Further arguments relate to the expected benefits associated with potential destinations. More precisely, economic considerations could influence the decision of where to migrate (see Brücker et al., 2016). While economic benefits can generally be considered greater in Europe than in Middle Eastern countries, these benefits should be even greater for the better educated because monetary returns to education in Europe are expected to be higher for better educated individuals (Spörlein et al., 2020).

In a similar vein, non-monetary benefits should be greater in Europe. It is certainly true for all forced migrants that fleeing their home is primarily an attempt to meet their need for safety. This basic need may already be met in a location close to the place of origin. However, those with a higher social status in the country of origin may seek to maintain their status in the long term (Maslow, 1943). For example, relatively better educated parents could value education more than less educated persons and want their children to receive a good education. For this reason, it may not be enough for them to be in a safe destination close to home if they do not see their higher needs met there.

Overall, the greater costs of the journey and the greater expected benefits for those who had a higher social status in their country of origin should result in profiles with positive educational selectivity among refugee groups who came to Europe. Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans in Germany are therefore expected to be relatively better educated than the population in their origin countries. In contrast, fleeing to a neighbouring country or another region within the country of origin entails a shorter and less risky trajectory. With the shorter distance, the degree of positive educational selectivity should be smaller. Therefore, Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon as well as Iraqi IDPs should be positively selected on education to a lesser extent than their compatriots in Germany.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data sources

Building individual-level measures of relative education depends on the availability of both origin- and destination-specific data sources. Two sources deliver information on recent refugees in Germany: data from the project 'ReGES – Refugees in the German Educational System' and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees. The ReGES project was designed to describe and analyse the educational trajectories of underage refugees who arrived in Germany between 2014 and 2017 (Will et al., 2018a, 2018b). To obtain contextual information on the lives of these children and adolescents, their parents were also interviewed. The data from these parent interviews constitute one source on Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees in Germany.

Second, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees is a household survey based on a random sample of refugees who came to Germany between 2013 and 2016 (Brücker et al., 2016; Kroh et al., 2017). Refugees with good prospects of remaining in Germany as well as women and individuals older than 30 years were oversampled. To account for oversampling, weights were applied in the analyses of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP data.[2.]

While the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees claims to be representative of the recent refugee population in Germany, the ReGES parents are not a random sample, for obvious reasons. With the median respondent being 40 years old, they are significantly older than the IAB-BAMF-SOEP sample, which is characterized by a median age of 28 years. This gap may be reflected in the educational levels measured in the ReGES sample. Due to educational expansion, older persons should on average be less educated. Although relative education is measured in an age-specific way, findings related to the ReGES data should be interpreted with consideration of the fact that respondents are not randomly sampled.

While it would be sufficient to use only one data source to cover the refugee groups in Germany, there are good reasons to rely on both data sets. The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees is a general survey on a broad range of topics, whereas ReGES specifically focuses on educational aspects. Both surveys provide the same tools to describe educational selectivity. Nevertheless, descriptive analyses can be a first step only. Future research will have to address how educational selectivity influences various aspects of refugee integration. The ReGES data contain rich information for this purpose, particularly with regard to young refugees' integration. Second, the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees is certainly the most commonly used data source on recent refugees in Germany. However, sampling a highly mobile and vulnerable group is a challenging endeavour, and given the target population's recent immigration, many of their characteristics were initially unknown. Research on recent refugees should therefore be cautious in claiming representativeness, but relying on ReGES data as a further source can help confirm findings and contribute to their robustness.

To compare the relative education profiles among Syrian refugees in Germany to those of refugees who resettled in Syria's neighbouring states, analyses are complemented by using Arab Barometer data. Its fourth wave covers subsamples of Syrian refugees who moved to Jordan or Lebanon. These migrants have in common a migration trajectory to a country that is relatively proximate to their place of origin. This sets them apart from Syrians who migrated to Germany, a distant destination. The data were collected in 2016 and are based on a random sample

of Syrians living outside refugee camps (AlKhatib et al., 2016). Because refugees living in camps may systematically differ in characteristics such as education from those living outside camps, it should be kept in mind that the findings presented in the following chapter apply only to the latter, albeit numerically more important, group: in Lebanon, there are no official refugee camps; in Jordan, 79 per cent of registered Syrian refugees lived outside camps in 2016 (UNHCR, 2017).

Fourth, it is possible to identify IDPs with Iraqi Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data from 2018, thereby allowing for comparisons of IDPs in Iraq and Iraqi refugees in Germany. MICS is an international household survey programme developed by UNICEF to provide comparable data on a range of indicators. The Iraq 2018 MICS was carried out based on a random sample of households (CSO Iraq et al., 2019). For each household, the data contain socio-demographic information on all household members. In this paper, the sample of analysis is restricted to persons whose main reason for moving was conflict or violence and who had lived in another part of Iraq before moving.

Further restrictions are applied to improve comparability across all destination-specific samples. Analyses cover respondents aged 18 to 64 years with a duration of stay of less than five years in the place of arrival.

To obtain reference educational distributions of the origin populations, MICS data from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan are a suitable source (CBS et al., 2008; CSO Iraq et al., 2019; CSO Afghanistan & UNICEF, 2013).[3.] Because the data contain information on respondents' region of residence, it is possible to generate distributions of educational attainment on the regional level. Region-specific measurements are important because the MICS data clearly show differences in regional educational distributions. Furthermore, all destination-specific data sets reveal that refugees' origins are not proportional to the share of each regional group in the reference population. In each country, there are a few regions from which the majority of the respective refugee group originates.

While the Iraq MICS data have been collected very recently, thereby making them an ideal source to compare those who migrated to those who did not, the Syrian and Afghan data are deemed suitable as well. Collected in 2010/2011, the Afghan data reflect educational distributions that should not have undergone major changes since then (see UIS 2020). In the case of Syria, it is obvious that the educational system suffered from the civil war, which resulted in broken educational biographies of particularly younger Syrians. This phenomenon is not captured by data collected before the war. For this reason, robustness checks were run on the data that include only Syrian refugees aged 25 years or older in the destination-specific samples. The findings prove nearly identical to those including Syrians aged 18 years or older. Because the picture remains the same, all results presented on Syrians refer to samples of individuals aged 18 or older.

An overview of all data sources is given in Table 1. As far as possible, analyses are based on weighted data. No weights exist for ReGES and the Arab Barometer. Despite the use of weights in some of the samples, it should once more be noted that it is generally difficult to ascertain the representativeness of data on groups that are characterized by recent migration and high vulnerability, which should be kept in mind for interpretation of the results.

Operationalization

Relative education is measured at the individual level, determining a migrant's position in the educational distribution of the origin population (see Ichou, 2014). This measurement accounts for the idea that migrant groups are heterogeneous in composition and that selectivity varies within groups. To construct the measure, distributions of educational attainment are required for each origin country. Because there may be significant differences in the educational attainment of men and women, between older and younger generations, and across regions, each distribution is specific to gender, five-year age group and region of origin. Based on these distributions, an index of relative education is generated that adds up the shares of the less educated reference population plus half of the reference population with the same educational level as the focal individual. Values may range from 0 to 1. For instance, a value of 0.65 for a 31-year-old woman from Aleppo would indicate that this person is at least as

TABLE 1 Data sources

Country	Refugee group	Data source	Survey year	Sample size
Destination-specific data				
Germany	Syrians	ReGES	2018	2,290
		IAB-BAMF-SOEP	2016	2,048
	Afghans	ReGES	2018	259
		IAB-BAMF-SOEP	2016	474
	Iraqis	ReGES	2018	377
		IAB-BAMF-SOEP	2016	523
Iraq	Iraqis	MICS	2018	3,977
Jordan	Syrians	Arab Barometer	2016	232
Lebanon	Syrians	Arab Barometer	2016	191
Origin-specific data				
Syria	-	MICS	2006	62,948
Afghanistan	-	MICS	2010/2011	51,894
Iraq	-	MICS	2018	74,167

educated as 65 per cent of women aged between 30 and 34 years from this region. Individuals with an index value above 0.5 are better educated than more than half of the reference population and are commonly characterized as positively selected.

All sources except the Arab Barometer data contain information on respondents' region of origin. The measures of relative education of Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan are therefore not region specific. To compare their relative education profiles to those of Syrians in Germany, two selectivity indices are constructed for the latter: one that considers regional origins and one that is specific to gender and age groups only.

As a second exception, some cases in the other destination-specific data sets have missing values on the region-of-origin variable. In most groups, the share of these cases is negligible. However, among Iraqi IAB-BAMF-SOEP respondents, it amounts to roughly seven per cent. Because these respondents might systematically differ in terms of educational background, they are kept in the samples and assigned a value of relative education that is specific to gender and age groups only.

Note that the measurement of respondents' region of origin refers to region of birth in the case of IAB-BAMF-SOEP respondents, while ReGES respondents were asked for the region where they mainly grew up. For Iraqi IDPs, this variable refers to the region where they lived before moving to their current place of residence. This difference should be kept in mind in regards to the comparisons of the findings in the following chapter.

Finally, all data on educational attainment are harmonized. The following categories, which largely correspond to the 1997 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED97), are distinguished: no formal education completed (equivalent to ISCED 0), primary (ISCED 1), lower secondary (ISCED 2), upper secondary (ISCED 3), post-secondary (ISCED 4) and tertiary education (ISCED 5/6).[4] Minor exceptions need to be made for two data sets. First, because the Afghan origin data do not further specify post-secondary and tertiary education, the respective levels are combined for Afghan refugees. Second, the scale used in the Arab Barometer does not provide a category corresponding to post-secondary education, and it is not possible to determine whether interviewers grouped respondents with post-secondary education into the next higher or lower category. Nevertheless, post-secondary education is not common in the other data sources, so the bias introduced by using the less precise Arab Barometer data should be negligible.

Measuring educational selectivity is not meaningful for individuals who acquired their highest educational degree in the destination country. While the ReGES and IAB-BAMF-SOEP data contain information on the country in which

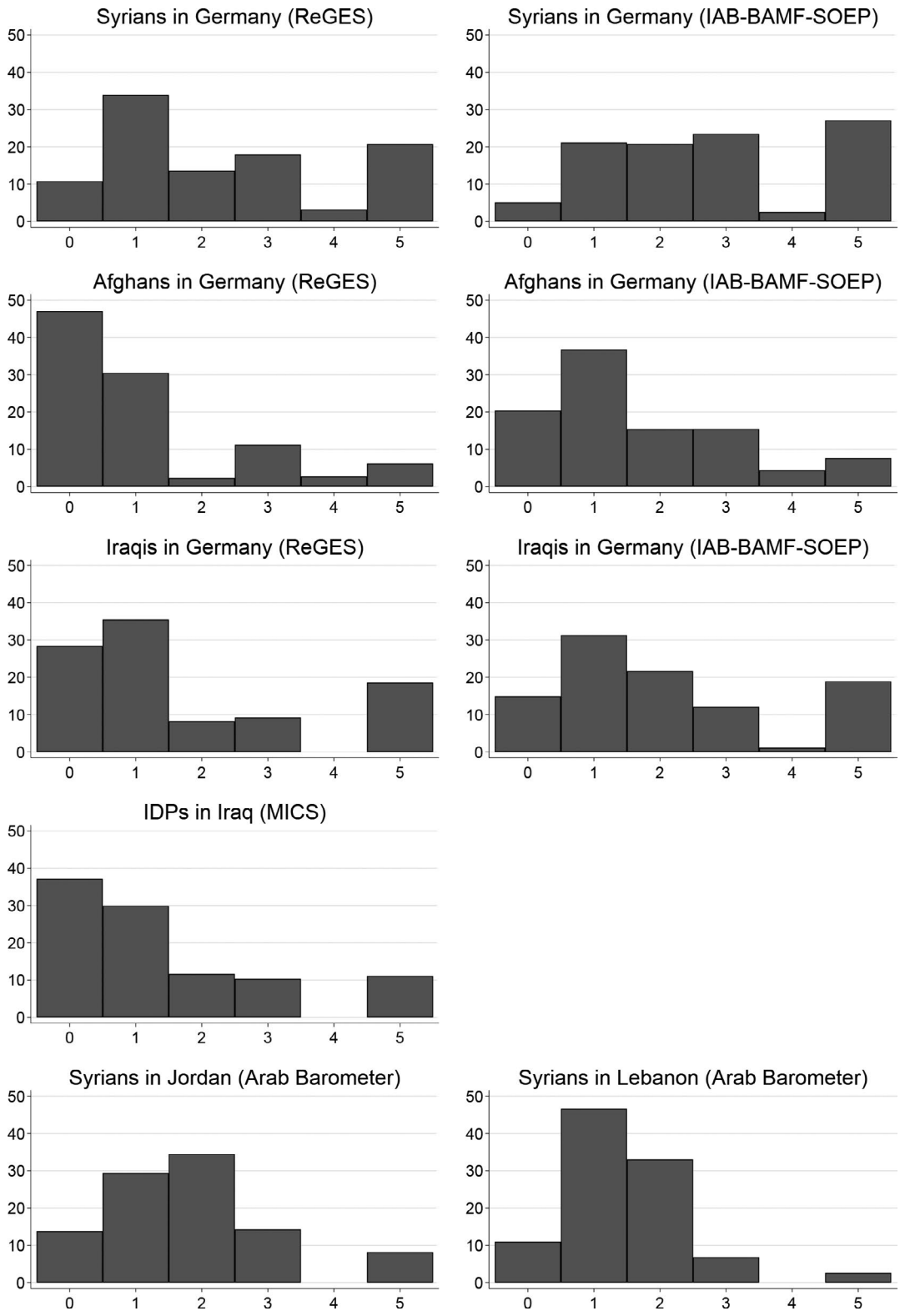

FIGURE 1 Absolute educational attainment in percent (0: no formal education completed; 1: primary; 2: lower secondary; 3: upper secondary; 4: post-secondary; 5: tertiary)

an individual acquired his or her highest education, this cannot be checked in the Arab Barometer and the Iraqi MICS data. However, because the samples are restricted to respondents with a duration of stay of less than five years in the place of arrival, it can be assumed that most of them acquired their highest educational degree prior to migration.

RESULTS

Before addressing the findings on relative education in more detail, this section starts with an overview of recent refugees' absolute educational levels (see Figure 1). As seen from the two leftmost bars of each histogram, all groups have important shares of individuals who attained at most primary education. In almost all groups, the two lowest levels of educational attainment comprise more than half of the distribution. Syrians in Jordan and Germany are an exception, but even these groups are composed of high shares of individuals who acquired no formal education or only primary education.

Relative education of refugees in Germany

How does the educational attainment of refugees compare to the education of the origin population? To address this question, the selectivity profiles of Syrian refugees in Germany are compared to those of their Iraqi and Afghan counterparts who also moved to Germany. Subsequently, the findings on refugees in Middle Eastern destinations are presented and compared to those for their respective compatriots in Germany. Table 2 gives an overview of the median values of relative education of all refugee groups under study. In addition, it displays the shares of migrants who are positively selected with regard to education; that is, those who score above 0.5.

Figure 2 presents region-specific density distributions of relative education. These distributions refer to all refugee groups under study with the exception of Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon. For Syrian refugees in Germany, the findings point towards substantive shares of individuals with a high relative education. Analyses based on both ReGES and IAB-BAMF-SOEP data reflect rather consistent profiles. Both density distributions are skewed to the left and show a peak on the upper end. Many of these strongly positively selected individuals have attained

TABLE 2 Metrics of educational selectivity

Refugee group	Data source	Median relative education	Positively selected individuals (%)
Region-specific measurement			
Syrians in Germany	ReGES	0.667	59.9
	IAB-BAMF-SOEP	0.766	74.8
Afghans in Germany	ReGES	0.543	52.5
	IAB-BAMF-SOEP	0.779	68.3
Iraqis in Germany	ReGES	0.478	48.3
	IAB-BAMF-SOEP	0.585	59.4
Iraqi IDPs	MICS	0.462	43.9
Non-region-specific measurement			
Syrians in Germany	ReGES	0.630	59.1
	IAB-BAMF-SOEP	0.789	75.9
Syrians in Jordan	Arab Barometer	0.635	62.9
Syrians in Lebanon	Arab Barometer	0.492	49.7

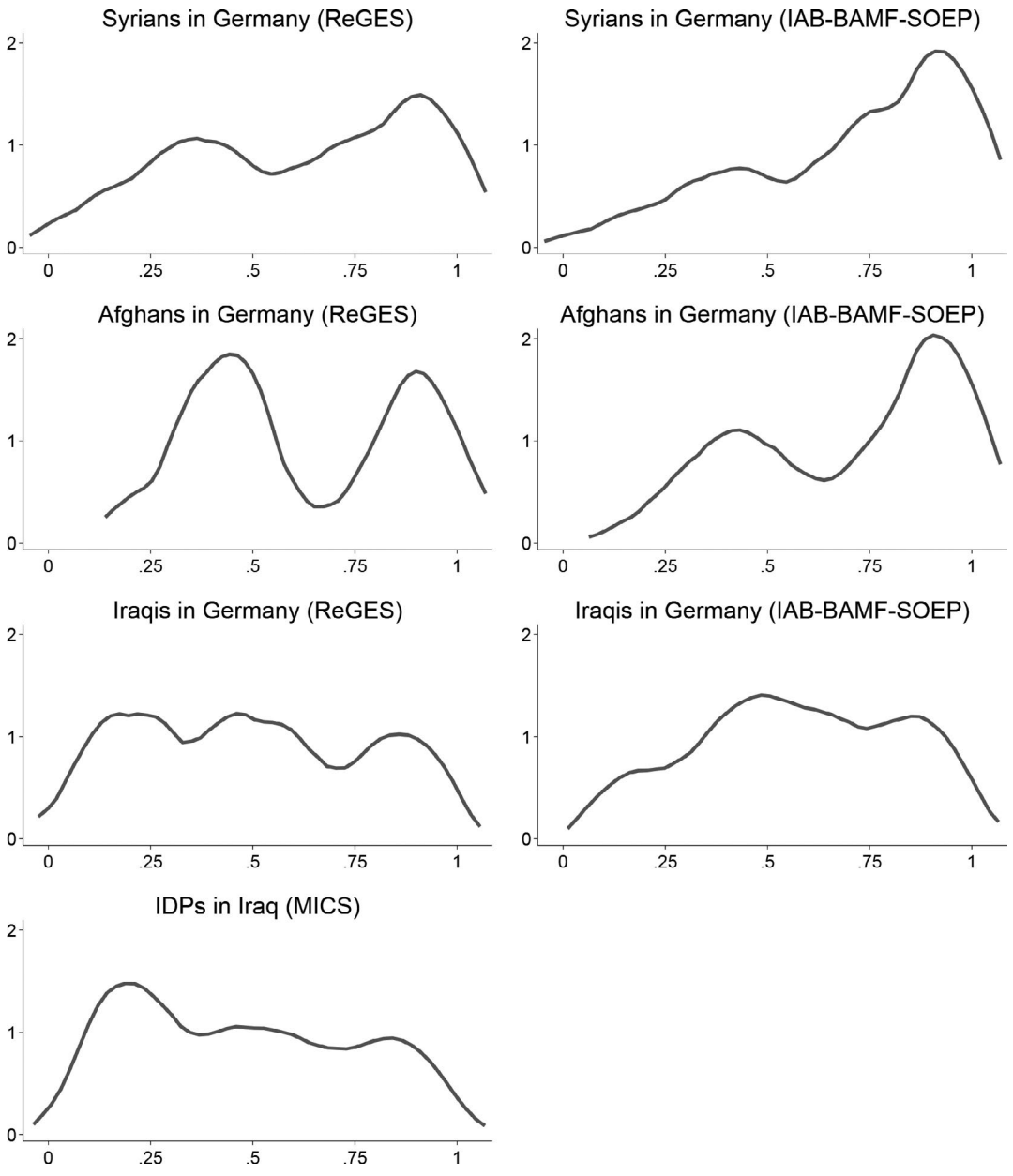

FIGURE 2 Density distributions of region-specific relative education

a tertiary degree. In the IAB-BAMF-SOEP distribution, the peak of strongly positively selected Syrians appears particularly high. The median Syrian refugee is at least as educated as 76.6 per cent of the population at origin. In comparison, the distribution of relative education among Syrians in the ReGES sample is slightly less skewed. Here, the median amounts to 66.7 per cent, pointing towards less selectivity than among Syrians in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP data. However, the overall findings from both sources suggest that most Syrians in Germany are positively selected on education and that they are the most positively selected group under study.

Afghans' relative education profiles can be characterized as bimodal, with one peak on the left-hand side and a smaller second peak on the right-hand side of each distribution. As illustrated by the gap between both peaks,

only few Afghan refugees display intermediate values of relative education. There are, however, some differences between the IAB-BAMF-SOEP-based and the ReGES-based distributions. While the former displays a peak of strongly positively selected individuals that is comparable to the shape of the distribution for Syrians, the latter shows a higher peak of individuals who are relatively less educated. This is also expressed by their median relative education. The median Afghan IAB-BAMF-SOEP respondent is at least as educated as 77.9 per cent of the reference population, whereas the corresponding value based on the ReGES data is 54.3 per cent.

The density distributions of Iraqi refugees in Germany show a somewhat different pattern and can be characterized as more balanced, without extreme peaks. In this respect, they appear more similar to a random sample of the population at origin than the distributions for Syrians and Afghans. Minor differences between the IAB-BAMF-SOEP distribution, where a slight peak appears in the centre, and the ReGES distribution, which contains higher shares of relatively less educated individuals, are also reflected in the respective median values. The median Iraqi refugee is at least as educated as 58.5 per cent (IAB-BAMF-SOEP) or 47.8 per cent (ReGES) of the population at origin.

These findings show that the profiles of relative education vary between the three refugee groups in Germany. Overall, all samples except Iraqi ReGES respondents are on average relatively better educated than their respective origin populations. This speaks in favour of the assumption that refugees who made it to Germany should on average be better educated than the origin population.

Comparing the relative education of refugees in Germany and the Middle East

How do the refugees discussed above compare to their compatriots who migrated to less distant destinations in the Middle East? In the case of Iraqi IDPs, the pattern bears some resemblance to the rather balanced distributions of Iraqi refugees in Germany, with one apparent difference. The distribution for internally displaced Iraqis includes a peak on the left-hand side, representing high shares of individuals with a relatively low education. The median IDP is as educated as 46.2 per cent of the Iraqi reference population, which is only slightly lower than the corresponding value in the Iraqi ReGES sample but more than twelve points lower than among Iraqi IAB-BAMF-SOEP respondents. Therefore, the assumption that refugees who make it to a distant destination such as Germany should on average be relatively better educated than those who move to less distant places can be supported on the basis of the available data on Iraqis.

In regards to the comparison of Syrians in Germany, Lebanon and Jordan, Figure 3 displays their density distributions. In contrast to the distributions discussed so far, these distributions are not region-specific. The findings for Syrians in Germany reveal slight differences from the corresponding region-specific distributions, but the general trend remains the same: Syrian refugees to Germany are on average positively selected. The median values of relative education differ marginally from the corresponding metrics of region-specific relative education. The median Syrian ReGES respondent is at least as educated as 63.0 per cent of the origin population. In the IAB-BAMF-SOEP data, the corresponding value is 78.9 per cent.

The patterns of relative education are somewhat different for Syrian refugees in Middle Eastern destinations. Upper-end peaks of strongly positively selected individuals can be found in neither the Jordan distribution nor the Lebanon distribution. Instead, peaks around the centre of each distribution represent high shares of slightly positively and slightly negatively selected individuals who appear to be mostly drawn from intermediate educational levels. These double peaks are particularly pronounced for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This group's metrics are rather balanced, with the median Syrian in Lebanon being at least as educated as 49.2 per cent of the Syrian reference population. Among their compatriots in Jordan, relatively better educated individuals make up a more important share of the distribution, while the peak of negatively selected individuals is smaller. The median Syrian in Jordan is at least as educated as 63.5 per cent of the population at origin.

These findings tend to support the assumption that those Syrians who are relatively less educated are more likely to end up in destinations that are less distant from their place of origin. However, this conclusion

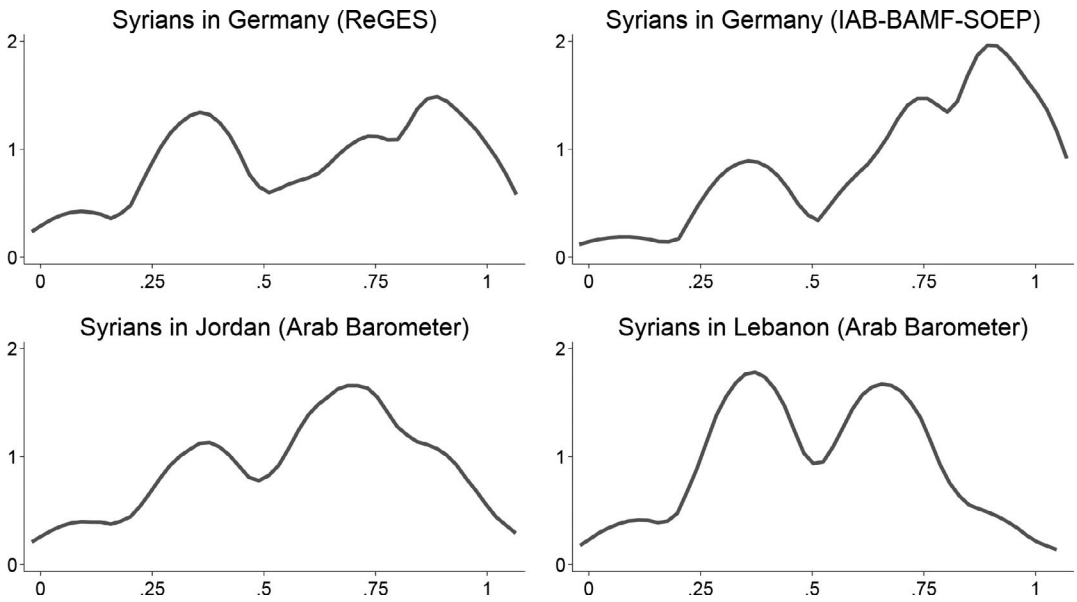

FIGURE 3 Density distributions of non-region-specific relative education

should be made cautiously, keeping in mind that the impossibility of disaggregating by region of origin in the Arab Barometer data could veil more precise findings. Moreover, the findings on Syrians in Jordan show that even refugees with a shorter trajectory can be positively selected. They are less positively selected than Syrians in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP sample, but their metrics are comparable to those of Syrians in the ReGES sample.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to explore whether forced migration reflects in specific patterns of educational selectivity and whether differences in selectivity profiles can be found between refugee groups in different destination countries: Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans in Germany, Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan, and Iraqi IDPs. Although it is not possible to draw general conclusions on refugees' educational background, several patterns can be observed. First, most refugees – particularly those who migrated to Germany – are relatively better educated than their non-migrating compatriots. Syrian refugees in Germany appear the most positively selected group, while there are also important shares of positively selected individuals among Afghans in Germany. For Iraqi refugees in Germany, the evidence is mixed.

With regard to refugees in Middle Eastern destinations, the evidence should be interpreted particularly cautiously because of the low case numbers in the Arab Barometer subsamples and because only three, quite specific, comparison groups have been explored in this paper. While Iraqi IDPs and Syrians in Lebanon are composed of higher shares of negatively selected individuals than their respective compatriots in Germany, this is not necessarily true for Syrians in Jordan. However, their distributions of relative education suggest different selectivity patterns than for Syrian refugees in Germany. Additional large-sample data sources that include a greater number of refugee groups could contribute to a more solid picture of the differences between long- and short-distance refugees.

Implications for both origin and receiving countries arise from the finding that refugees are often relatively better educated than the origin population. Origin countries appear to experience an exodus not only in

quantitative but also qualitative terms – usually referred to under the keyword 'brain drain' – which could be a burden for these societies' future. In receiving societies, most refugees experience status loss (Engzell & Ichou, 2020). Losing the social status that they had prior to migration could become a source of frustration for them, even more so as integration into the receiving society is a long and often slow process. Policymakers should be aware of this challenge and provide newcomers and their children with the necessary tools to compensate for status loss.

Second, the positive findings on refugees' relative education should not veil the fact that all refugee groups under study are characterized by high shares of low absolute education – that is, many refugees have acquired no formal education or completed only primary education in the place of origin. However, education is an important factor for successful integration, particularly in a country such as Germany, where success on the labour market depends heavily on certificates (Bol & van de Werfhorst, 2011). Policymakers in receiving countries should incentivize educational investments among newcomers – particularly those with low educational levels – to improve these persons' integration prospects.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that there is a great deal of variation within the refugee groups. Each group is composed of varying shares of positively as well as negatively selected individuals. Variation within groups may have consequences because education is an important baseline from which refugees start their integration. For instance, those individuals who are relatively better educated may have better preconditions to adapt to a life in a new context because they might be more motivated, more competent, or more likely to behave according to the subjective social status that they brought with them from their origin country (Ichou, 2014). Future research will have to analyse the consequences of relative education on refugees' integration prospects – particularly for those who came to their places of arrival only recently and still stand at the beginning of the integration process. Furthermore, the perspective of refugees themselves is highly relevant. What kind of value do they attribute to their educational background? This could likely affect their decisions on both migration and societal integration in the place of arrival.

PEER REVIEW

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ENDNOTES

1. This paper uses the term "refugee" as a collective term for all individuals seeking humanitarian protection. The notion is not limited to the strict definition of the Geneva Convention.
2. Although the IAB-BAMF-SOEP sample should be identical to the sample in Spörlein et al. (2020), minor deviations in terms of case numbers and educational distributions can be detected due to the use of an updated version of the data in this paper.
3. This paper relies on the same MICS datasets for Syria and Afghanistan as that in Spörlein et al. (2020). However, educational attainment is measured more conservatively, considering not only educational levels but also completed years of schooling. This should result in more positive relative educational distributions for Syrian and Afghan refugees.
4. In addition to an ISCED97 variable, two variables in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP data—an original and a generated variable—report the shares of respondents who have never attended school. The original variable reports higher shares of respondents who have never attended school (for Syrians, 8.7 percent in the original data vs. 6.1 percent in the generated data; for Iraqis, 23.3 vs. 19.9 percent; for Afghans, 32.5 vs. 28.7 percent), while many of these cases are coded as missing in the generated variable. In this paper, the analyses rely on the generated data, assuming that these are more reliable. However, this procedure likely underestimates the share of respondents without formal education in the IAB-BAMF-SOEP sample. This should be kept in mind for interpretation of the results.

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