Investigating the role of perceived discrimination on humanitarian migrants' economic settlement in Australia: A longitudinal study

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Short abstract:

This study uses multiple rounds of the Building a New Life in Australia panel and the Ecosystems Model of Refugee Resettlement to investigate how discrimination impacts the economic integration of humanitarian migrants in Australia. The outcomes measured were labour force participation and employment status, with perceived discrimination serving as the main exposure variable. Discrimination was assessed using the question: "In the last 12 months, have you been discriminated against, stopped from doing something, or been made to feel inferior because of your ethnicity, religion, or skin colour?" and was categorized as 'yes' or 'no'.

The findings indicate that perceived discrimination significantly affects economic outcomes. Those who reported discrimination were 1.7 times more likely to be out of the labour force (95% CI 1.21, 2.4) and 1.6 times more likely to be unemployed (95% CI 1.08, 2.44) compared to those who did not experience discrimination, after adjusting for confounders. Additionally, gender and age were significant predictors of both labour force participation and employment status. This study underscores the critical role perceived discrimination plays in hindering the economic integration of humanitarian migrants, highlighting the need for policies that address discrimination to improve resettlement outcomes.

Long abstract

Introduction:

Over the last 20 years, there has been an unprecedented increase in humanitarian migrants all over the globe. Currently, one in every 113 people globally is now either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee/humanitarian migrant. Nevertheless, the limited available evidence suggests humanitarian migrants settle less successfully, both economically and socially than other migrants. Understanding the factors that determine the economic performance of humanitarian migrants is crucial to support their process of integration into the destination country. The role of discrimination is extremely important for the economic and

social settlement of humanitarian migrants. Past evidence is limited to qualitative studies of selected groups, and to cross-sectional studies that are susceptible to unmeasured confounding bias. Using multiple rounds of the most comprehensive longitudinal survey of humanitarian migrants ever undertaken in the world and the Ecosystems Model of Refugee Resettlement, this study examines the role of discrimination in the economic settlement of humanitarian migrants in Australia. We hypothesize that humanitarian migrants who report experience of discrimination would have a higher probability of being out of labour force and employment after controlling for various confounders.

Methods:

Data from 2,277 participants who had at least one valid response to the two outcome variable at waves 1, 3, and 5 of the Building a New Life in Australia panel study were analysed using multilevel, multinomial mixed effects logit models. Labour force participation and employment status were the outcome measures. The main exposure variable for this analysis was the perceived discrimination based on the question 'In the last 12 months, do you think you have been discriminated against, stopped from doing something, or been hassled or made to feel inferior, because of your ethnicity, religion or skin colour?' and was categorized as 'yes' and 'no'. The other independent variables included in the models were grouped as individual socio-demographic characteristics, pre-migration factors, and post-migration factors.

Results:

Overall, at wave 1, 22.9% of respondents were in the labour force. Of these, 29.2% were employed. By wave 5, 47.8% were in the labour force, of which 72.1% were employed. The proportion of those who reported discrimination increased from 4.8% in wave 1 to 8.0 in wave 5. Perceived discrimination was strongly associated with both being not in the labour force

and being unemployed. After adjusting for all the time-varying confounders, those reported perceived discrimination were 1.7 times (95% CI 1.21, 2.4) and 1.6 times (95% CI 1.08, 2.44) were more likely to be in the not in the labour force compared and unemployed respectively compared to those who did not report perceived discrimination. For both labour force status and employment status, gender and age were significant predictors of labour force and employment status.

Conclusion:

This study demonstrates that perceived discrimination is extremely important for the economic integration of humanitarian migrants. Female and older humanitarian migrants' experience of discrimination has significant negative effects on their labour force and employment status.