

“WHO HOSTS? THE CORRELATES OF HOSTING THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED”

AUTHORS

Leonid Peisakhin, Nik Stoop, Peter van der Windt

AFFILIATIONS/RESEARCH CENTRE

New York University Abu Dhabi, Political Science Department
 University of Antwerp, Institute of Development Policy; Research Foundation Flanders FWO

ABSTRACT

Tens of millions of individuals are displaced due to violence, and most are hosted by other households in their home countries. We ask what motivates people to host the forcibly displaced. We are interested in whether empathy increases the willingness to host but also consider alternative explanations. To explore the correlates of hosting we collected survey data from 1,504 households in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, fielded in-depth interviews, and implemented an experiment. We employ a novel strategy to measure hosting behavior, where household characteristics are measured prior to the arrival of displaced persons.

We find that households with higher empathy are more likely to host in the ten-month period following the survey. There is no evidence that ethnicity, religiosity or wealth affect hosting behavior. Results from the experiment suggest that it is difficult to increase hosting propensity in the longer term (4+ months) through simple interventions.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS/AIMS

At the end of 2022, 108 million people were living in forced displacement, having abandoned their homes due to violence or natural calamities. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) – those who seek shelter within their countries’ borders – made up 71 million of this total; the highest number ever recorded. Most IDPs are not accommodated in refugee camps, but find refuge in regular towns and villages, often with host families.

Our aim in this study is to advance the understanding of why people volunteer to host the internally displaced. Following the recent psychological turn in this literature, we are especially interested in whether higher empathy might be correlated with a greater willingness to host. We also consider alternative explanations, given that hosting can be conceptualized not only as altruistic behavior but also as a type of cooperation if there is an expectation of reciprocity through, for example, labor or future offer of shelter. Thus, we also consider the role of co-ethnicity, links to local authority figures, the wealth of the hosting family, security concerns, and religiosity of the potential hosts in informing hosting decisions. The emphasis on empathy and consideration of the alternative factors were pre-registered as hypotheses.

METHODOLOGY

The study took place in the DRC, home to the third largest population of IDPs globally.

In a methodological advance on the existing literature, we measured the characteristics of potential hosting households before the arrival of IDPs. To do this, in 2019, we identified a research site in Eastern DRC that was likely to receive an influx of displaced people in subsequent months and surveyed all dwellings in 15 villages in that region. This allowed us to avoid the common trap of ex post rationalization of hosting decisions. Also, unlike most other studies in this literature, we measured empathy directly, modifying an empathy scale from psychology. Hosting behavior was measured through verifiable village chief’s reports over a ten-month period after the initial survey.

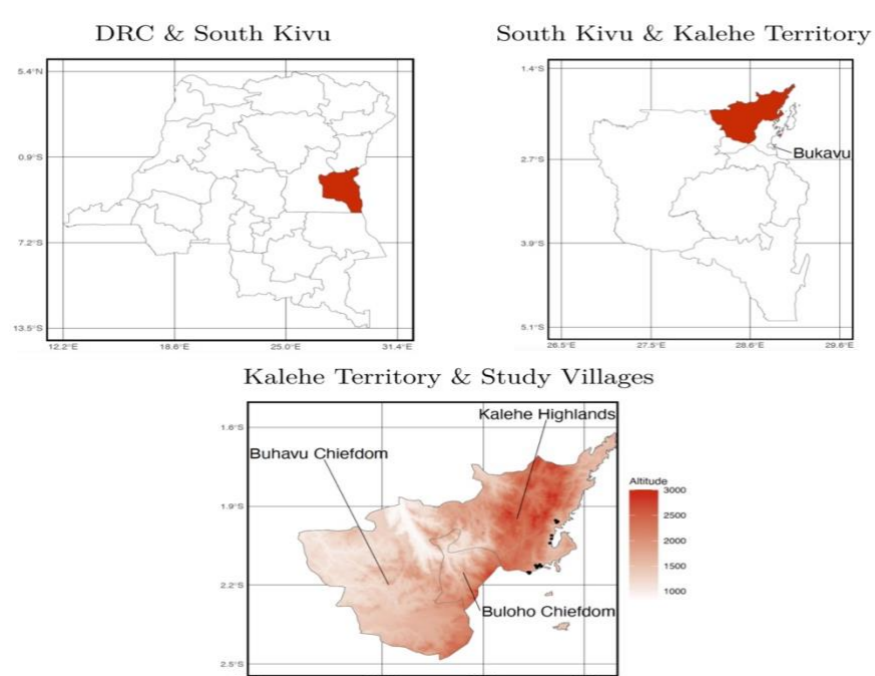
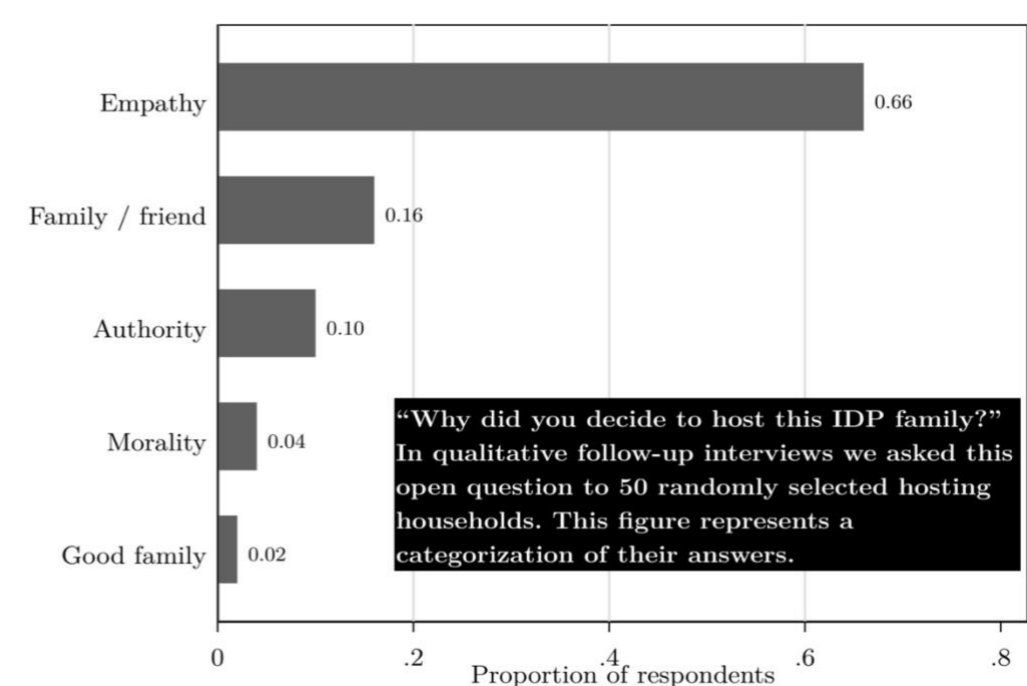
To learn whether hosting can be encouraged, the survey featured an experiment wherein we appealed to participants’ empathy, respect for authority and religiosity. To contextualize our findings, we further collected qualitative information through semi-structured interviews with five village chiefs and 150 randomly selected households.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Almost a quarter (24%) of households started hosting IDPs. Our results show that empathy is the most important correlate of opening one’s doors to the forcibly displaced. We found that the most empathetic person in our sample was 20 percentage points more likely to host than the least empathetic. Semi-structured interviews confirmed this result. Most hosts said they were motivated by compassion, noting that they themselves had experienced displacement or could easily imagine their household being displaced.

Among other factors that influenced the decision to host were the household’s sense of security, and strength of connections to local authorities. Being of the same ethnicity as the IDP, or being wealthy or highly religious, did not appear to influence the hosting decision at all. Follow-up interviews also confirmed that shared ethnicity was not relevant when initiating a hosting relationship.

The experiment largely produced null results, suggesting that it is difficult to increase hosting propensity in the longer term (4+ months) through simple interventions.



OUTPUTS/PUBLICATIONS

[“Here’s what motivates people to host refugees”](#) – Good Authority

[“Who Hosts? The Correlates of Hosting the Internally Displaced”](#) – Households in Conflict Network Working Paper & forthcoming in the American Political Science Review

LEARN MORE

nik.stoop@uantwerp.be