Estimating Poverty for Refugee Populations: Can Cross-survey Imputation Methods Substitute for Data Scarcity?

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Abstract

The increasing growth of forced displacement worldwide has led to a stronger interest by policy makers and humanitarian and development organizations in measuring poverty among refugee populations. We offer the first application of cross-survey imputation methods in a refugee context where household consumption data are not readily available. We exploit a rich database consisting of administrative and survey data for the Syrian refugees living in Jordan to offer various validation tests for the accuracy of imputation-based poverty estimates. These estimates are found to either perform better or have smaller standard errors than those based on asset indexes or proxy means testing and are robust to varying poverty lines. Furthermore, we find that accurate poverty estimation requires surprisingly small samples and relatively few variables that are already available in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' global registration system. If these encouraging results are replicated in other refugee contexts, this would open prospects for cost-effective and rapid measurement of poverty among refugees worldwide.