

Merve Demirel

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Citizenship: Turkey
Residence: Sweden (permanent)

Education

2020–2027 **Stockholm University (IIES)**, PhD in Economics (expected June 2027)
2024–2025 **Columbia University**, Visiting Scholar, hosted by Laura Boudreau
2017–2019 **Stockholm School of Economics**, MSc in Economics
2012–2017 **Koç University**, BA in Economics, BA in Business

References

Johannes Haushofer	Anna Tompsett	Tessa Bold	Laia Navarro-Sola
Cornell University	Stockholm University	Stockholm University	Stockholm University
haushofer@cornell.edu	anna.tompsett@iies.su.se	tessa.bold@iies.su.se	laia.navarrosola@iies.su.se

Research Fields

Development Economics, Labor Economics, Gender

Job Market Paper

Migration Costs and Higher Education: Experimental Evidence from India

Large gaps in economic opportunity across places in developing countries persist alongside low rates of migration, which a large literature attributes to the non-pecuniary costs of leaving home. This paper asks whether these costs hold prospective college students back from migrating for college, and whether access to a migrant peer can reduce perceived costs and facilitate migration. I follow 1,682 final-year secondary students across 52 schools in Maharashtra, India, over a full year as they make one of the most consequential decisions of their lives, whether and where to continue their education. I measure their perceived migration costs, and run a randomized controlled trial offering half of them a phone-based mentorship program that pairs each student with a university student who migrated for college. At baseline, the average student would forgo a 129% increase in expected post-graduation earnings rather than study away from home, an amount that rises steeply with distance. Beliefs about the difficulty of moving, safety, parental approval, and happiness away from home account for much of it. Mentorship shapes choices, but only on the margin: a pre-specified educational migration index rises by 0.16 standard deviations, driven by applications and moves to closer destinations, rather than more distant major cities, and driven almost exclusively by male students. Non-pecuniary beliefs about the distant cities do not improve, suggesting that high migration costs are unlikely to be driven by misperceptions.

Pre-registered: AEARCTR-0016735.

Working Papers

Distance, Gender, and Access to Elite Higher Education: Evidence from India's Centralized Engineering Admissions (with Xuanzhe Hou and Yash Kanoria)

Earlier version circulated as "How Far Would You Go? Higher Education and Migration Decisions in India."

Identity and Human Capital Investment: Evidence from the Veiling Ban Removal in Turkey (with Avenia Ghazarian)

HoSS Working Paper 2026-1, Stockholm School of Economics.

Moving to Opportunity Abroad: The Effects of International Educational Migration (with Toman Barsbai, Philipp Moskopp, Marcello Perez-Alvarez and Matthias Sutter)

World Bank Social Policy and Labor Discussion Paper No. 2702. Pre-registered: AEARCTR-0012924.

Educational Migration Prospects and Human Capital Investments: Evidence from a Uganda-Germany College Access Program (with Toman Barsbai, Philipp Moskopp, Marcello Perez-Alvarez and Matthias Sutter)

World Bank Social Policy and Labor Discussion Paper No. 2702. Pre-registered: AEARCTR-0009992.

Work in Progress

International Migration and Identity Formation: The Perception of the Self and Others (with Toman Barsbai, Philipp Moskopp, Marcello Perez-Alvarez and Matthias Sutter)

Pre-registered: AEARCTR-0016846.

Harassment in Colleges: A Bottom-Up Approach (with Eugenia Frezza, Emmanuel Keith Kisaame and Arne Nasgowitz)

Pilot stage.

Research Grants

2026	Max Planck Society (EUR 147,480); ECONtribute (EUR 19,850); Leading House Africa , Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (CHF 13,625)
2025	J-PAL , Jobs and Opportunity Initiative / Social Protection Initiative (USD 250,000); ECONtribute (EUR 60,000); J-PAL , Crime and Violence Initiative, Exploratory Research and Travel Grant (USD 9,995)
2024	Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (SEK 298,500); The Weiss Fund , Travel and Piloting Grant (USD 14,938); Mannerfelt Foundation (SEK 38,700); Stockholm Center for Global Asia (SEK 15,000); SurveyCTO , Primary Data Collection Research Grant
2023	World Bank , Innovation Challenge on Jobs and Migration (USD 279,900); ECONtribute (EUR 50,000); PEDL , Exploratory Research Grant (GBP 5,000); Mannerfelt Foundation (SEK 30,000); IIES (SEK 20,000)
2022	ECONtribute (EUR 99,712)

Fellowships and Honors

2021	Jan Wallander and Tom Hedelius Foundation (SEK 500,000)
2018	Stockholms Grosshandlarssocietet , Scholarship for Studies Abroad (SEK 15,000)
2017	Af Jochnik Foundation , MSc Scholarship (SEK 300,000)
2016	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development , Starting Grant
2012	Koç University , Full Merit Scholarship

Teaching Experience

- 2021 **Stockholm University**, Introductory Microeconomics, TA to Lars Vahtrik
 2019 **Stockholm School of Economics**, Introductory Microeconomics, TA to Richard Friberg
 2018 **Stockholm School of Economics**, International Economics, TA to Paul Segerström

Research Experience

- 2018–2020 **Stockholm School of Economics**, Research Assistant for Martina Björkman-Nyqvist, Abhijeet Singh and Pamela Campa
 2018 **Stockholm University**, Research Assistant for Anna Tompsett

Talks and Conferences (†scheduled; *co-author)

- 2026 Oxford Development Economics Workshop; RFBerlin Migration Forum; Women in Economics Network Conference; Talent Economics Conference; ASWEDE Conference†; The Economics of Migration Junior Webinar†
 2025 Tilburg University; University of Groningen; Development Colloquium, Columbia University; Interdisciplinary PhD Workshop in Sustainable Development, Columbia University; SEEDEC, Max Planck Institute Bonn; Workshop on Gender and Economics, Luxembourg*; Development Economics Meeting, Erlangen*
 2024 ASWEDE Conference
 2023 European Network Development Conference; ASWEDE Conference
 2022 ASWEDE Conference

Refereeing

Journals: *Science*, *Journal of Population Economics*

Service

- 2020–2023 **Women in Economics Initiative**, Board Member

Other Experience

- 2016–2017 **Jana Impact**, Co-founder of a social enterprise for refugee employment
 2016–2017 **Carma Consultancy**, Business Development Intern

Languages

Turkish (native), English (fluent), Swedish (intermediate), French (beginner)