Dear Professors Breza, Chandrasekhar, and Viviano,

My name is Miray Omurtak and I am in my fourth year of the Economics Ph.D. program at Yale University. I am writing to apply to the Workshop on Development Economics and Networks for Early-Career Researchers. My research interests are in development economics and political economy, particularly how business relationships and networks shape access to markets and economic integration.

I would like to present *Interethnic Business Networks: Experimental Evidence from Turkish and Syrian Firms*, joint work with Onur Altındağ, Ceren Baysan, and Carlos Molina. Through a randomized business matchmaking program in Gaziantep, Türkiye, we examine whether reducing networking frictions can promote interethnic business partnerships and strengthen social cohesion. As explained in more detail in the motivation statement on the next page, we are at the paper-writing stage and are considering a short additional round of data collection on durable demand for future business connections with Syrian firms. Discussing our work with researchers in development and networks would be especially valuable as we interpret these findings and refine the design of this follow-up.

My advisor, Professor Rohini Pande, may be contacted for a recommendation if I am shortlisted. Her email address is rohini.pande@yale.edu.

Thank you for considering my application. I would welcome the opportunity to present our work and contribute to the workshop's discussions.

Sincerely,

Miray Omurtak
miray.omurtak@yale.edu

Statement of Motivation and Research Interests

I am a development economist in training interested in how relationships among firms, farmers, and trading partners shape access to information, markets, and economic opportunities. Some of my current research examines the formation of business connections across ethnic groups in Türkiye and the role of purchasing relationships in agricultural markets in sub-Saharan Africa. I would welcome the opportunity to attend the workshop to discuss these projects with researchers studying networks in developing economies and to strengthen the conceptual and empirical foundations of my research agenda.

The paper I am submitting in my application, *Interethnic Business Networks: Experimental Evidence from Turkish and Syrian Firms*, studies a randomized business matchmaking program in Gaziantep, Türkiye. We ask whether segregated business networks reflect limited familiarity, differences in match quality, or reluctance to engage across ethnic lines, and whether facilitated introductions generate lasting relationships. Our preliminary findings reveal a substantial gap in familiarity with Turkish and Syrian firms and greater attendance at interethnic meetings, even though participants report more challenging interactions in those meetings. These patterns raise questions about how initial interest translates into durable connections and how the benefits of meeting new partners interact with the costs of establishing trust and communicating across groups.

We are now at the paper-writing stage and are considering one more short round of data collection to measure durable demand for future business connections with Syrian firms. Feedback at the workshop would be especially useful for designing measures that distinguish sustained willingness to pursue new partnerships from satisfaction with a particular meeting or general expressions of interest. I would value discussion of whether behavioral measures, such as taking concrete steps to receive further introductions, could sharpen our interpretation of the results. More broadly, the workshop would help us connect the evidence on familiarity, match quality, and meeting experiences to theories of network formation and interethnic exchange.

These questions about how economic relationships form also motivate my work in Côte d'Ivoire's cashew sector. There, I am interested in how farmers and domestic processors build reliable purchasing relationships when contract enforcement is weak, and how these relationships affect farmers' access to markets and welfare. Networks of farmers and intermediaries may shape whom farmers trade with, how information about buyers circulates, and whether new trading opportunities extend beyond those directly reached by an intervention. Across the two settings, I want to understand how existing networks influence the formation of new relationships and the distribution of their benefits.

The workshop would help me bring this perspective more carefully into the design of future experiments. In particular, I would value learning how to measure relevant farmer and intermediary networks before an intervention, choose units of randomization that account for those connections, and distinguish direct effects from spillovers through information sharing or changes in trading relationships. The lectures and discussions with senior researchers and peers would help me connect practical field-design decisions to theories of network formation and credible empirical approaches. At this stage of my training, these interactions would strengthen both my current projects and my ability to design research that treats networks as part of how an intervention works. I would also bring experience from implementing business matchmaking and eliciting firms' preferences over potential partners to the workshop's discussions.

Miray Zeynep Omurtak

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Education

Yale University 2023–Present
Ph.D. Candidate in Economics
Ph.D. coursework: *Microeconomics I and II; Macroeconomics I and II; Econometrics I and II; Economic Development I and II; Applied Empirical Methods; Urban Economics; Environmental Economics; Political Economy of Development; International Trade I; Empirical Trade and Development.*

Wellesley College 2017–2021
B.A. in Economics; Minor in Mathematics *(Summa cum laude)*

Publications

Syrian Refugee Inflows, Health Care Access, and Childhood Vaccination in Turkey
with Bilge Erten, Pinar Keskin, and Ilhan Can Ozen
The World Bank Economic Review, 2023

Working Papers

Interethnic Business Networks: Experimental Evidence from Turkish and Syrian Firms
with Onur Altındağ, Lydia Assouad, Ceren Baysan, and Carlos Molina

Empirical Flood-Damage Functions for Agriculture: Duration, Experience, and Recovery
with Vineet Gupta, Maulik Jagnani, Rohini Pande, and George Taylor

Contested Waste: Measurement, Risk, and Environmental Governance in Ghana's Second-Hand Clothing Trade
with Meital Peleg Mizrachi and Naasey Kanko Arthur

Work in Progress

Building Purchasing Relationships: Buyer Entry and Farmer Welfare in Côte d'Ivoire
with Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak and Marie-Rose Tonguino

Coastal Land Use in the Mediterranean

Research and Professional Experience

Yale University Sep. 2025–May 2026
Research Assistant to Rohini Pande

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Research Assistant to Amy Finkelstein, Department of Economics Jan. 2021–Jul. 2023
Research Assistant to Robert S. Pindyck, Sloan School of Management Jan. 2019–Feb. 2021
Research Assistant to Clare Balboni, Department of Economics Sep. 2019–Dec. 2020

Analysis Group Jul. 2020–Aug. 2020
Summer Analyst

Teaching Experience

Yale University
Introduction to Microeconomics (undergraduate) Summer 2026; Fall 2026

Wellesley College
Introduction to Macroeconomics Fall 2018; Spring 2020; Fall 2020

Grants and Fellowships

Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship (Sylff), Yale University	2025–2026
Faculty Research Incubation Grant, Economic Growth Center, Yale University	2026
Robert E. Evenson Travel Fund, Yale University	2025
Seed Grant, Yale Women Faculty Forum	2025
Peggy Howard Fellowship, Wellesley College	2023
Jerome A. Schiff Fellowship, Wellesley College	2021

Honors and Awards

Natalie Bolton Thesis Prize, Wellesley College	2021
Camellia Student Leadership Award, Wellesley College	2021
United World College Davis Scholarship, Wellesley College	2017–2021

Skills and Languages

Technical: Stata, R, ArcGIS

Languages: Turkish (native), English (full professional proficiency)

Interethnic Business Networks: Experimental Evidence from Turkish and Syrian Firms

Onur Altındağ, Ceren Baysan, Carlos Molina, and Miray Omurtak

Extended abstract — September 2026

Displaced populations face significant barriers to economic and social integration in host communities. We study these barriers through a randomized controlled trial of a business matchmaking program in Gaziantep, Türkiye, an export-oriented industrial hub where, at the time of the study, Syrian refugees made up approximately 20% of the population and owned more than 10% of registered businesses. We examine whether reducing networking frictions can promote interethnic business partnerships and strengthen social cohesion. Specifically, we ask whether business networks are segregated, whether this segregation reflects reluctance to engage with Syrian firms or limited familiarity and match quality, and whether facilitated introductions generate durable ties and complementary economic opportunities.

Our intervention targets nearly 4,700 Turkish and Syrian firms and conducts a baseline survey with a representative sample of small and medium-sized enterprises in the manufacturing and wholesale sectors in Gaziantep. The matchmaking experiment includes 3,011 firms. Among firms agreeing to participate in the experiment, Turkish firms are randomly assigned to an intraethnic match (Turkish-owned), an interethnic match (Syrian-owned), or no facilitated match. Matches are generated using an LLM-assisted algorithm that integrates firms' stated preferences with detailed market and production data to identify complementary partnerships. The intervention distinguishes between *chooser* firms, which express preferences over potential partners, and *chosen* firms, which form the pool of potential partners. Critically, we elicit interest in two stages—first with business attributes only, then after revealing firm identity—allowing us to distinguish interest in economic complementarities from responses to ethnic identity. When mutual interest exists, the team facilitates meetings, including in-person meetings at the Gaziantep Chamber of Industry. Randomization is stratified by baseline firm characteristics and trust in Syrian business owners.

Baseline data show differences in firms' production and market orientation. Among Turkish firms, 18.0% operate in manufacturing only, 43.0% in wholesale only, and 33.9% in both; the corresponding shares among Syrian firms are 7.8%, 32.4%, and 57.4%. Syrian firms are also more likely to export: 71.9%, compared with 39.4% of Turkish firms. These differences suggest potential complementarities that business connections could help firms explore.

Despite operating in the same city in very close physical proximity, firms report markedly different business networks. Syrian firms account for 10.2% of Turkish firms' business partners. One potential explanation for this separation is differences in trust: 88.8% of Turkish respondents reported that they trust Turkish business owners, while 61.4% reported that they trust Syrian owners. Moreover, 34.5% of Turkish firms describe interethnic business as difficult, compared with 14.8% of Syrian firms. These barriers coexist with considerable interest in expanding networks: 77.5% of Turkish firms and 82.5% of Syrian firms express interest in new connections. The experiment tests whether this stated demand translates into meetings and lasting relationships when firms receive concrete introductions.

To directly examine demand for new connections, we compare Turkish chooser firms offered a shortlist of Syrian-owned chosen firms with those offered a shortlist of Turkish-owned chosen firms. We estimate interethnic–intraethnic differences using

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta\,\mathrm{Inter}_i + \gamma\,\mathrm{Emp}_{i0} + \lambda_{s(i)} + \varepsilon_i, \tag{1}$$

where Inter_i indicates an offer of Syrian rather than Turkish candidates, Emp_{i0} is the baseline number of employees, and $\lambda_{s(i)}$ denotes randomization-strata fixed effects. Outcomes include prior familiarity, willingness to meet, the algorithmic match score, and meeting attendance. Standard errors are clustered by chooser firm.

The preliminary results show that Turkish firms' familiarity with the offered candidates differs sharply between the intraethnic and interethnic groups (Table 1). Turkish firms already know, on average, 37.78% of the Turkish firms offered to them, compared with 8.93% of the Syrian firms offered. The adjusted interethnic–intraethnic difference is −29.06 percentage points. This provides direct evidence that cross-ethnic introductions reach firms outside choosers' existing contacts and that there is network separation in this context.

When evaluating candidates based solely on business attributes, Turkish firms are 5.61 percentage points less likely to express interest in meeting Syrian firms. This lower interest may reflect lower match quality: algorithmic match scores are 6.68 points lower for Syrian candidates on a 0–100 scale. After identity revelation, however, Turkish firms are 14.76 percentage points more likely to express definite interest in meeting Syrian firms than Turkish firms. This pattern is consistent with greater value attached to new connections than to already familiar intraethnic contacts. Conditional on not previously knowing a candidate, the estimated difference falls to −1.23 percentage points and is not statistically significant. Thus, the results point to unfamiliarity as an important source of network segregation and do not show a detectable ethnic gap in willingness to meet unfamiliar firms. Turkish firms in the interethnic group are also approximately 11 percentage points more likely to attend a meeting within the observed sample.

After every meeting, facilitators complete a survey recording their observations of the interaction. These assessments suggest that interethnic meetings are more challenging (Table 2). The comparisons are conditional on firms showing up to a meeting. Facilitators rate communication quality 0.32 points lower and language ease 1.04 points lower in interethnic meetings on five-point scales, while ratings of business complementarity are similar. Two weeks after the meeting, we call firms to conduct a follow-up phone survey. Firms rate interethnic meetings lower on communication quality, perceived trustworthiness, and business-culture alignment by 0.42, 0.62, and 0.37 points, respectively. Differences in having contacted the firm again, demand for additional meetings, and reported business relationships are not statistically significant, suggesting that firms are still interested in new outgroup partnerships despite more challenging meetings.

A key open question is whether these more challenging interactions nevertheless generate economic and social value. We are conducting an in-person endline survey with both chooser and control firms to estimate intention-to-treat (ITT) effects of assignment to facilitated meetings relative to the randomized control groups. We are collecting information on new Turkish and Syrian buyers, suppliers, intermediaries, and collaborators; continued contact, referrals, learning, and the perceived value of matchmaking; employment, sales, exporting, and export markets; and beliefs about firm quality, trust, and intergroup relations. These data will establish whether introductions lead to lasting network formation, improve economic outcomes, and change perceptions of Syrian firms. Endline collection is ongoing over the next two weeks and is scheduled to conclude in October 2026.

Table 1: Familiarity, willingness to meet, and meeting participation

Outcome	Intraethnic mean	Interethnic difference	SE	N
Panel A. Candidate evaluation (percent; differences in percentage points)				
Already knows offered candidates	37.78	-29.06^{***}	1.90	887
Would potentially meet before identity disclosure	64.83	-5.61^{**}	2.69	887
Would definitely meet after identity disclosure	37.53	14.76^{***}	2.57	887
Would definitely meet, among previously unknown candidates	57.98	-1.23	2.95	821
Panel B. Algorithmic match score (0–100)				
Mean score of offered candidates	83.88	-6.68^{***}	1.25	886
Panel C. Meeting participation (0/1)				
Completed preference survey and attended a meeting	0.17	0.11^{***}	0.03	828

Notes: Each row reports the interethnic–intraethnic coefficient from OLS controlling for baseline number of employees and randomization-strata fixed effects; SEs are clustered by chooser firm. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2: Meeting quality and early relationship formation

Outcome	Intraethnic mean	Interethnic difference	SE	N
Panel A. Facilitator assessment (1–5)				
Communication quality	4.17	-0.32^{**}	0.13	201
Language ease	4.96	-1.04^{***}	0.12	201
Business complementarity	3.94	-0.01	0.15	201
Panel B. Chooser's two-week assessment (1–5)				
Overall match quality	3.85	-0.28^{*}	0.15	195
Communication quality	4.25	-0.42^{***}	0.13	196
Other firm's operations and product quality	3.93	-0.50^{***}	0.16	126
Business-culture alignment	3.67	-0.37^{**}	0.17	166
Other owner's trustworthiness	4.17	-0.62^{***}	0.23	93
Likelihood of recommending the service	4.33	-0.14^{*}	0.08	194
Usefulness of matching with Syrian firms	3.94	-0.26^{*}	0.14	178
Panel C. Two-week behavior and demand (0/1)				
Contacted again	0.31	-0.03	0.07	197
Wants more meetings	0.88	-0.02	0.05	197
Initiated business relationship, conditional on having contacted the firm again	0.12	-0.05	0.07	58

Notes: OLS interethnic–intraethnic coefficients control for baseline number of employees and randomization-strata fixed effects; SEs are clustered by chooser firm. Higher ratings are more positive; Panel C uses probability units. Business relationships are measured only conditional on having contacted the firm again. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.