Till Wicker

Tilburg University

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Placement Officer
Prof. David Schindler
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Education

2022 to present	Ph.D. in Economics, Tilburg University
	Expected Completion: May 2026
2020–2022	Research Master in Economics, Tilburg University
	CentER Scholar (*with Distinction*)
2015–2018	Bachelor's degree in Economics and Management, University of Oxford

Research Interests

Development Economics, Behavioral Economics & Labor Economics

Research Visits

2025	Department of Economics, University of California, Berkeley
	Host: Prof. Edward Miguel

Job Market Paper

Discrimination as Retaliation

Discrimination remains pervasive, but little is known about how past personal experiences of discrimination shape our future discriminatory behavior. This paper introduces and empirically documents retaliatory discrimination, whereby individuals are more likely to discriminate against a group after perceiving that they were personally discriminated against by members of that group. Guided by a theoretical framework that models retaliatory discrimination alongside taste-based and statistical discrimination, I conduct experiments in Uganda and the United States. In a two-stage experiment, I first randomly expose participants to (un)fair task allocations from managers of varying identities: coethnic, non-coethnic, or computer. In the second stage I then observe whether they discriminate against non-coethnic workers when placed in a managerial role. Negative past experiences with a non-coethnic manager increase subsequent discrimination by 60%, driven by an increase in the intensity of discrimination rather than the number of discriminators. I distinguish between four pre-registered micro-foundations of retaliatory discrimination and find empirical support for motivated beliefs: participants selectively interpret unfair task allocations as discriminatory to justify retaliation. Retaliatory discrimination provides a behavioral foundation for anticipated discrimination and the evolution of discriminatory tastes. Its policy relevance is underscored by an experiment showing that the removal of affirmative action policies triggers a backlash that amplifies discrimination, consistent with the model's predictions.

Working Papers

Mental Accounting and Cash Transfers: Experimental Evidence from a Humanitarian Setting *(w/ P. Dalton & D. van Soest)*
Stage 1 Acceptance at the *Journal of Development Economics*

> We conducted a field experiment to test whether a light-touch intervention offering refugee households in Uganda the option to earmark cash transfers for specific purposes can help them accumulate capital and increase their income. Households received monthly unconditional transfers over seven months. Treatment households could allocate their transfers across four labeled envelopes — *Education*, *Health*, *Investments*, and *Other* — while control households received the same monthly amount in a single, unlabeled envelope. Take-up was high: 93% of treatment households opted in, and 37% were still using the envelopes a year after the program ended. One year after the end of the cash transfer program, treatment households had invested 26% more in income-generating activities, particularly in lumpy assets, leading to a 18% increase in income and a 22% increase in savings. Households who actively chose how to allocate the transfer, rather than receiving a suggested allocation, engaged more with the commitment device and experienced greater benefits.

Winsorizing and Trimming with Subgroups
Revise and Resubmit at the *Journal of Development Economics*

> Winsorizing and trimming are used to minimize the effects of outliers on estimated treatment effects. The typical approach winsorizes/trims the tails of the whole sample, even if there are heterogeneous subgroups within the sample — like a treatment and control group in Randomized Controlled Trials. An alternative approach — *Stratified Winsorizing/Trimming* — winsorizes subgroups separately, ensuring that an equal proportion of observations are winsorized/trimmed per subgroup. Monte Carlo simulations of an RCT illustrate that *Stratified Winsorizing/Trimming* reduces the treatment effect bias and risk of Type II errors compared to the traditional approach, although at the cost of a greater likelihood of Type I errors. Applications to Angelucci et al. (2023) and Jack et al. (2023) illustrate that the chosen winsorizing/trimming technique can affect the magnitude and statistical significance of treatment effects. I discuss practical guidelines for researchers wanting to winsorize/trim a sample that consists of heterogeneous subgroups.

Labor Market Signals: The Role of Large Language Models *(w/ K. Abbas Nejad, G. Musillo & N. Zaccaria)*
Revise and Resubmit at the *Journal of Labor Economics*

> Large Language Models (LLMs) are transforming the labor market, including hiring decisions. This paper examines their impact on the signals job-seekers send to potential employers through two field experiments focusing on cover letters. We find that LLMs enhance signal quality, especially benefiting lower-quality applicants, yet these gains do not boost interview invitations because they are concentrated in standardized, less influential sections of the cover letter. LLMs furthermore reduce the frequency of grammatical errors, but reduce the text's readability by using longer words. When recruiters learn of LLM usage, they place greater value on high-quality, human-crafted letters. Hence, LLMs reduce the informativeness of signals, potentially increasing inefficiencies in labor market matching. A calibrated structural model estimates the losses compared to a setting without LLMs.

Threshold Public Goods Games with Temporal Contribution Dynamics

> Climate scientists agree that early greenhouse-gas reductions are more effective than identical cuts made later. We embed this insight in a multi-round "Climate Protection Game," comparing a standard linear weighting of emissions cuts over time (*Linear*) with a design where early reductions yield greater climate benefits (*Step*). In a laboratory experiment with 300 participants, the *Step* treatment encouraged larger early contributions and higher individual payoffs, though both treatments reached the mitigation threshold similarly often. Evolutionary Game Theory simulations support these findings, in line with theoretical predictions. The results suggest that environmental policies incentivizing early emissions reductions can achieve better environmental and welfare outcomes.

Work in Progress

Graduation Approach versus Cash Transfers Among Refugees *(w/ A. Ruža)*
Funding Secured, RCT ongoing, endline scheduled for Fall 2026

> Humanitarian organizations are faced with the dual challenge of decreasing funds, and increasing needs. Therefore, cost-effective policies are more important than ever. This paper evaluates two cost-effective policies through a RCT among refugees in Kyangwali refugee settlement, Uganda. 377 refugee households are randomized into a 5-month-long unconditional cash transfer program, or a two-year Graduation-like program, benchmarked against

a group of refugees that do not receive either program. This project provides insights into the differential effectiveness of short-term vs. longer-term humanitarian assistance. Surveys are conducted every 6 months, for 3 years.

Vocational Training for Refugee Youths *(w/ D. Tommasi)*
Funding Secured, RCT ongoing, endline scheduled for Fall 2026

This RCT evaluates a non-formal vocational training program in Uganda, targeting young South Sudanese refugees residing in Uganda's Rhino Camp refugee settlement who intend to return to their country. The intervention comprises of non-formal vocational training, apprenticeships, and a start-up kit, with the overarching goal of fostering socio-economic integration and enabling sustainable livelihood opportunities, either in Uganda, or upon return to South Sudan. Participants are followed for 18 months after the vocational training program, in 3-month intervals, generating a novel panel dataset.

Internalizing Edutainment: First the Messenger, Then the Message
Pre-Analysis Plan written

To what extent do plot comprehension and character identification shape the effectiveness of edutainment interventions? Motivated by replicating and extending Berg and Zia (2017), where I find that positive impacts of edutainment were concentrated among viewers already familiar with the show, this study isolates the causal roles of processing fluency and character identification. I propose a lab-in-the-field Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) in Uganda using MTV Shuga. Participants will be randomized into three groups: (T1) view only Season 2, (T2) receive a Season 1 synopsis before Season 2, or (T3) receive both a synopsis and character information before Season 2. This design exogenously varies familiarity with the plot and characters, allowing me to estimate their impact on HIV-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as the underlying cognitive and emotional mechanisms.

The Value of Volunteering Among Refugees *(w/ P. Dalton, D. van Soest & N. Seimel)*
Funding secured, baseline scheduled for May 2026

With humanitarian aid decreasing, refugees increasingly need to rely on their community for assistance. This is particularly pronounced for highly vulnerable refugees, such as new arrivals, new mothers, and those with ailing mental and physical health. Volunteering is a promising opportunity to foster social cohesion, while supporting the community's most vulnerable, and improving the volunteer's psychological well-being and self-satisfaction. This theory of change is evaluated through an RCT among 720 refugees in Kyangwali refugee settlement.

Grants, Scholarships, and Awards

2024	Wellspring Philanthropic Fund (Co-PI), $100,000
2024	Fondazione San Zeno (Co-PI), €10,000
2024	OpenAI Researcher Access Program (Co-PI), $2,000
2024	IPA Displaced Livelihoods Initiative (Sole PI), $10,000
2023	Excellent Teacher Award, Tilburg University (*only Economics Ph.D. candidate recipient*)
2022	NWO Open Competition (Co-PI), €762,594

Seminar & Conference Presentations

2025	UC Berkeley Development Lunch, PACDEV, MWIEDC, Economics Job Market Bootcamp (Bologna), G^2LM—LIC/path2dev/BREAD Conference on Development Economics, UCL Enter Seminar *(scheduled)*, Dutch Development Economics Ph.D. Workshop *(scheduled)*, Tilburg University *(scheduled)*, Applied Young Economists Webinar series *(scheduled)*
2024	Maastricht University Interdisciplinary Brownbag Seminar of Behavioral Sciences, Lund University Ph.D. Workshop on Development Research, Tilburg University Department of Economics Internal Seminar,
2023	Development Economics & Economic History Research Group
	RGS Doctoral Conference, Dutch Development Economics Workshop, KVS New Paper Sessions, Summer School in Development Economics, TIBER Symposium

Refereeing

Food Policy, Journal of Policy Analysis & Management, Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, Journal of Economic Psychology

Teaching Experience

Fall 2025	Tutorial *Development Economics*, graduate level, Tilburg University (ongoing)
Spring 2025	Lecture *Econometrics for Development Economics*, undergraduate level, Tilburg University (no evaluation)
Fall 2024	Tutorial *Development Economics*, graduate level, Tilburg University (4.8/5.0)
Spring 2024	Tutorial *Development Economics*, undergraduate level, Tilburg University (4.9/5.0)
Spring 2023	Tutorial *Development Economics*, undergraduate level, Tilburg University (4.9/5.0)
2022 –	Thesis Supervision, undergraduate level, Tilburg University

Voluntary Positions

2024-2025	Chair, Tilburg Ph.D. Platform
2023-2025	Economics and Management Representative, Tilburg Ph.D. Platform
2023-2024	Co-organizer, Dutch Development Economics Ph.D. Workshop/Conference
2020 –	Economics Research Master and Ph.D. Representative, Graduate Student Society

Employment

2021	Research Assistant for Prof. David Schindler, Tilburg University (The Netherlands)
2019-2020	Economic Recovery Officer, Danish Refugee Council (Uganda)
2019	Intern and Consultant, German Development Corporation (Tunisia & Libya)
2018	Visiting Associate, Boston Consulting Group (Germany)
2017	Summer Consulting Intern, Oliver Wyman (The Netherlands)

Computer Skills

LaTeX, Stata, R, Qualtrics, Kobo, SurveyCTO, oTree

Languages

German (native), English (fluent), Dutch (fluent), Portuguese (beginner)

References

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