

Migration and residential outcomes for immigrant-native mixed couples upon separation in Switzerland

Julie Lacroix, University of St Andrews

Context and objectives

Immigrant-native intermarriage are increasingly common in European countries. In Switzerland, these unions represented about 34% of new marriages in 2020 (FSO-BEVNAT 2020). As with other exogamous partnerships (e.g., dissimilarity in education, religion, language) ethnically mixed couples have a higher risk of divorce than endogamous couples, especially among partners who are considered more “culturally distant” from one another (Milewski and Kulu 2014). Yet, the disruptive impacts of a separation on immigrants’ lives and their gendered expression in the context of immigrant-native relations have not been explored.

Separation and divorce have a long-lasting negative impact on people’s housing conditions (Mikolai and Kulu 2018, Mikolai et al. 2020). The question of who stays and who moves out of the family home is one of the first object of negotiation between ex-partners upon separation – the outcome of which has important consequences on the lives and housing careers of the ex-partners (Fiori 2019). It is expected that any separating person for whom the cost of moving is lower than the cost of staying, or lower than the costs of moving for the other partner will leave the family home (Mulder and Wagner 2010). Inequalities and resources asymmetries within separating couples play an important role in this outcome (Feijten and Mulder 2010): a partner who has more economic resources will have a greater chance of being able to afford the dwelling alone; he/she may also derive more bargaining power from these resources when engaging in a negotiation over whom should stay in the family home (Mulder and Wagner 2010).

Gendered power dynamics within households generally play into decisions about where to live or where to move (Wright et al. 2013). Research indicates that family migration decisions are biased towards the human capital characteristics of men (Cooke et al. 2016). Post-divorce migration outcomes make no exception and seem to reflect normative beliefs regarding gender roles inside and outside the household. While men are more likely to contribute a higher share of the household’s income, women are disproportionately more likely to have the custody of the children upon separation; both factors strongly predict the likelihood of moving of or staying in the family home. Although these gendered asymmetries may be plain to see, the ways in which they are expressed among mixed-nativity couples remain puzzling.

Resources asymmetries within mixed-nativity couples can be thought in terms of location-specific capital. Ties to the local community and social networks weight heavily on the cost of moving or staying for both partners (Mulder 2018) who often have varying attachment to the current location. This may be more obvious for recently arrived immigrants or tied movers for whom the ex-partner may be the main anchor to the current location. Furthermore, as suggested by Cooke and colleagues (2016), a separation may be an opportunity to move to a more ideal location (perhaps even to the origin country) and resolve possible locational conflicts face by one of the partners during the relationship.

Drawing on administrative registers and a large sample from a nationally representative survey, this study analyses post-divorce migration and residential outcomes among immigrant-native mixed couples in Switzerland. It addresses the question, are the gender balance and bargaining power between ex-partners the same for male-immigrant/female-native partnerships and for male-native/female-immigrant couples? Are these dynamics contingent on the presence of children or the time since immigration to Switzerland? By analysing who moves out of the family home (the man, the woman or both) following a separation, this paper questions whether the gender dynamics at the time of a separation hinges on the partners' origin.

Data and Methods

This study combines data from the Swiss population register, the income register, and the Structural Survey – a nationally representative survey conducted every year on a new sample of at least 200'000 individuals. Since 2010, the population register provides exhaustive and continuous information on the permanent resident population, including the exact date for any childbirth, marriage, divorce, death, immigration, emigration, changes of citizenship, and changes of dwelling (the latter is only available once a year). The Structural Survey complements the population register with cross-sectional information on the socioeconomic and sociocultural structure of the resident population over 15 years old. The income register provides information on taxable income. The date of reference for all registers and the Structural survey is December 31st. Thanks to a personal identification number, these data can be linked together, and individuals tracked across different data sources.

I first pool four years of cross-sectional data from the Structural Survey (2010-2013) as a base sample for this study. The survey gathers information on all household members, basic demographic attributes, socioeconomic characteristics (educational level, employment status), and position in the household. I then restrict the sample to two-gender couples, either married or cohabiting, registered at the same address at the time of the survey. Second, I retrieve the migration and residential trajectories of these couples from the population register. Contrarily to other studies using survey data, the Swiss population register does not provide direct information on separation. This information is inferred from the residential trajectories of both partners. By tracking the place of residence of both partners each year one can identify couples who split-up and moved to different addresses. The population register documents the place of residence by means of a Federal Building ID. Separating partners are identified by comparing the Federal Building ID on December 31st of year t and on December 31st of year $t+1$ considering four possible options: 1) both partners remain at the same address, 2) both partners move to the same address, 3) both partners move but to different addresses, and 4) only one partner moves out of the joint home. The last two outcomes are defined as a separation. Emigration of one partner to another country is also considered as a separation (provided that the other partner remains in the country). Couples' residential trajectories are observed for up to four years: from the year they participated to the Structural Survey (either in 2010-2011-2012 or 2013) until a separation, emigration of both partners, death, or the end of observation (2014). The sample is then restricted to 21'747 couples who experienced a separation between 2011 and 2014.

I estimate three multinomial logistic models to predict the probability of moving out of the joint home upon separation, accounting for three possible outcomes: the man moves out, the woman moves out, or both partners move out. Model 1 reports the probability of moving out for each partner by household compositions distinguishing native households (both partners are born in Switzerland) from mixed

couples (only one partner is born in the country), and immigrant households (both partners are foreign-born). This model controls for the presence of children, the type of union (cohabiting or married), the age difference between the ex-partners, as well as the educational and income difference between the man and the woman. All covariates are measured at the time of the separation with the exception of the level of education which is only available at the time of the survey. Model 2 further considers the time since immigration to Switzerland - a proxy for the accumulation of location specific social capital and attachment to the current location. Model 3 (not shown) includes an interaction term between the household composition and the presence of children to test whether the decision of who moves out varies by presence of children.

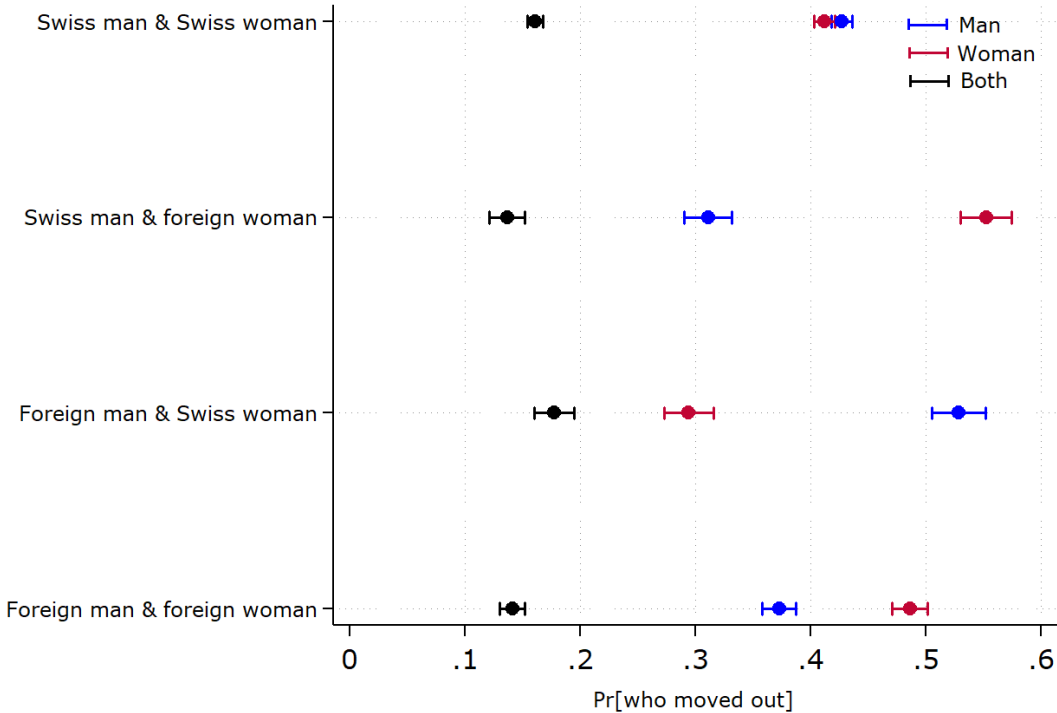
Preliminary results

Figure 1 first reports the probability of moving out of the joint home for each ex-partner among native, immigrant, and immigrant-native mixed couples. In all family compositions, the most frequent outcome is that only one of the ex-partners moves out of the joint home; only in 14% to 18% of the time are both partners moving out of the joint home upon separation.

Among households composed of two Swiss-born partners, men and women seem equally likely to leave the family home upon separation (confidence intervals overlap). This pattern hardly changes when no control variable is added in the model.

This dynamic contrasts with that of mixed nativity couples where the foreign ex-partner is disproportionately more likely to leave the family home. The likelihood of moving out is almost identical for men immigrant (53%) and women immigrant (55%) partnered with a Swiss native. In fact, the migrant partner is about 20% more likely to leave the family home compared to their Swiss ex-partner, regardless of gender.

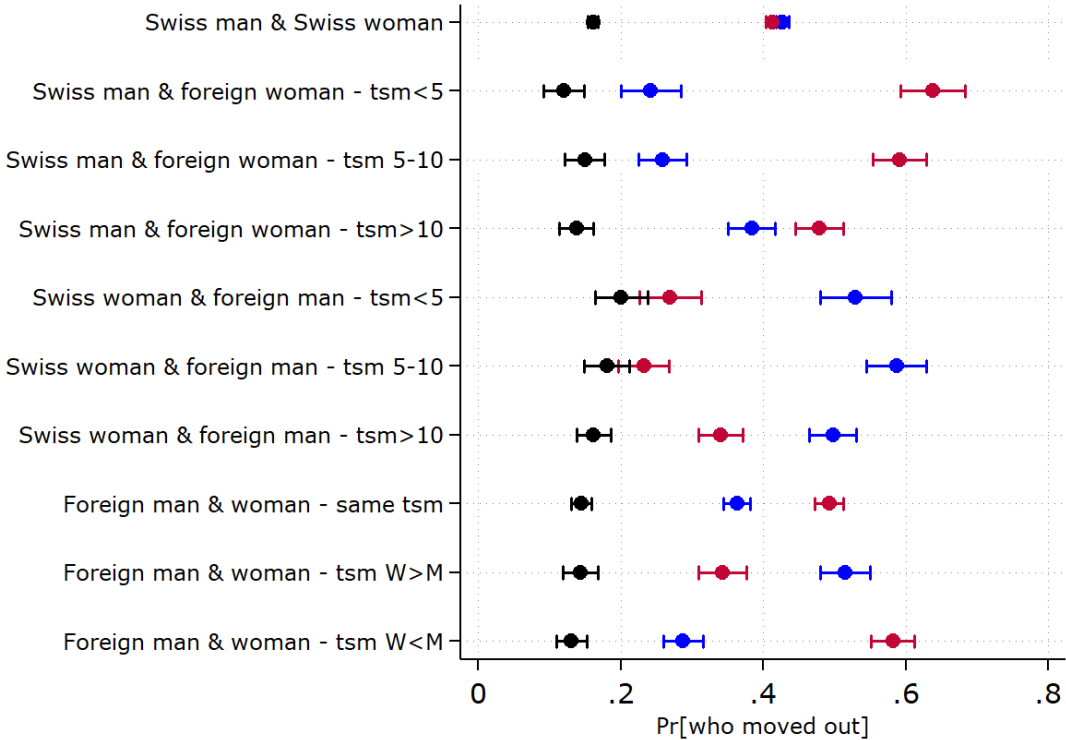
Figure 1: Probability of moving out of the joint home upon separation, by household compositions



In households with two foreign-born partners, the likelihood that the woman moves out is greater than the likelihood of the man moving out. The model reports a 12% difference in the probability of moving out of the the family home upon separation between women (0.49) and men (0.37).

Figure 2 aims to test whether the time spent in the country – a proxy for the accumulation of location-specific capital and attachment to the local community – alters the chance one has to stay in the joint home upon separation.

Figure 2: Probability of moving out of the joint home upon separation, by household compositions and time since immigration



The results for foreign-born women partnered with Swiss-born men are unambiguous: the longer the woman lives in the country and the more likely she is to stay in the joint home following a separation. This picture resembles that of foreign-born men partnered with Swiss-born women, although we do not find a clear gradient of this effect over time (overlap between confidence intervals). Nevertheless, even after more than ten years in the country, the foreign-born partner is still more likely than the native partner to move out of the joint home (10% more likely for the woman and 13% for the man) following a separation.

When both ex-partners are of foreign origins, the model accounts for which one, the male or the female, spent more time in the country. Unsurprisingly, the person who migrated first to Switzerland was more likely to remain in the family home upon separation. However, this effect is not symmetrical for men and women: if the woman has lived in the country longer than the man, she is 15% more likely to stay in the family home; if the man has spent more time in the country, his chances of staying increase by 32%.

References

- Cooke, Thomas J., Clara H. Mulder, et Michael Thomas. « Union dissolution and migration ». *Demographic research* 34 (2016): 741-60.
- Feijten, P., & Mulder, C. H. (2010). Gender, divorce and housing—A life course perspective. In D.Reuschke (Ed.), *Wohnen und gender. Theoretische, politische, soziale und räumliche aspekte* (pp. 175–193). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Fiori, Francesca. « Who leaves, who stays? Gendered routes out of the family home following union dissolution in Italy ». *Demographic Research* 40 (2019): 533-60.
- FSO-BEVNAT 2020, Marriages, nuptiality.
<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/population/marriages-partnerships-divorces/nuptialiy.html>
- Mikolaj, Júlia, et Hill Kulu. « Short-and long-term effects of divorce and separation on housing tenure in England and Wales ». *Population studies* 72, n° 1 (2018): 17-39.
- Mikolaj, Júlia, Hill Kulu, et Clara H. Mulder. « Introduction to the Special Collection on “Separation, Divorce, and Residential Mobility in a Comparative Perspective” ». *Demographic Research* 43 (2020): 35-58.
- Milewski, Nadja, et Hill Kulu. « Mixed marriages in Germany: A high risk of divorce for immigrant-native couples ». *European Journal of Population* 30, n° 1 (2014): 89-113.
- Mulder, Clara H. « Putting family centre stage: Ties to nonresident family, internal migration, and immobility ». *Demographic Research* 39 (2018): 1151-80.
- Mulder, Clara H., et Michael Wagner. « Union dissolution and mobility: Who moves from the family home after separation? » *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, n° 5 (2010): 1263-73.
- Wright, Richard, Steven Holloway, et Mark Ellis. « Gender and the neighborhood location of mixed-race couples ». *Demography* 50, n° 2 (2013): 393-420.