

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

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## Introduction and context

Immigrant-native intermarriage have become increasingly common in European countries. In Switzerland, these union represented about 34% of the new marriages in 2020 (FSO-BEVNAT 2020). As for other exogamous partnerships (e.g., dissimilarity in education, religion, language) ethnically mixed couples encounter 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 along the lines 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). Who stays and who moves out of the family home is one of the first object of negotiation between ex-partners upon separation (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). Within couples’ inequalities and resources asymmetries between ex-partner plays 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 imbalances within households generally plays in favour of men who end-up having more say into the decisions of where to live and where to move (Wright et al. 2013). In fact, post-separation housing outcomes are gender specific (Mikolai et al. 2020) and seem to reflect the normative beliefs about the role of the men and women inside and outside the household. On the one hand, men are more likely to contribute to a higher share of the household income, on the other, women are disproportionately more likely to have children custody upon separation; two factors that strongly predict the likelihood of moving of and staying in the family home.

Another factor weighing heavily on the cost of moving and staying for both partners are the ties to the local community (Mulder 2018). Partners often have varying attachment to the current location. This may be even more obvious for tied or recent immigrants for whom the ex-partner may be the main anchor to the current location. As suggested by Cooke and colleagues (2016) a separation may be the opportunity to move to a more ideal location (perhaps to the origin country) and resolve any locational conflict one has during the relationship.

Drawing on population registers and a nationally representative survey, this study analyses post-divorce migration and residential outcomes among immigrant-native mixed couples. It addresses the question, is the gender balance and bargaining power between ex-partners the same in male-immigrant/female-native partnerships than it is among male-native/female-immigrant couples? Are these dynamics contingent to the presence of children and the time since immigration to Switzerland? By analysing two

outcomes of a separation, that is, who moves out of the family home (the man, the woman or both) and where this person goes to (in the same municipality, to another municipality in Switzerland or to another country) this paper questions whether the gender dynamics at the time of a separation depends 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. The Structural Survey complements the population register with additional information on the socioeconomic and sociocultural structure of the resident population over 15 years old. The date of reference for all registers and the Structural survey is December 31<sup>st</sup>. Thanks to a personal identification number, these data can be linked together, and individuals tracked across different data sources.

I first combine four years of cross-sectional information from the Structural Survey (2010-2013). The household component of this survey documents all household members (including their personal ID that can later be linked to the registers), their basic demographic characteristics, and their relation to the person of reference. From this sample, I select two-gender couples, either married or cohabiting, registered at the same address at the time of the survey. Second, I retrieve the residential and migration histories of these couples from the population register. The population register documents the place of residence for the entire population by means of a Federal Building ID. This variable allows for an identification of any changes of residence by comparing the Federal Building ID on December 31<sup>st</sup> of year  $t$  and December 31<sup>st</sup> of year  $t+1$ . I consider three types of residential change: 1) both partners move to the same address, 2) both partners move but to different addresses, and 3) only one partner moves out of the joint home. The last two 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, death, or the end of observation (2014). The sample is then restricted to 24'136 couples who experienced a separation between 2011 and 2014.

I use multinomial logistic models to predict the probability of moving out of the joint home following a separation, accounting for three possible outcomes: the man moves out; the woman moves out; or both partners move out. The same modelling strategy is used for the destination of the move (also with three possible outcomes: in the same municipality, to another municipality in Switzerland or to another country). The structure of the household – the main explanatory variable – distinguishes 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). The model also 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.

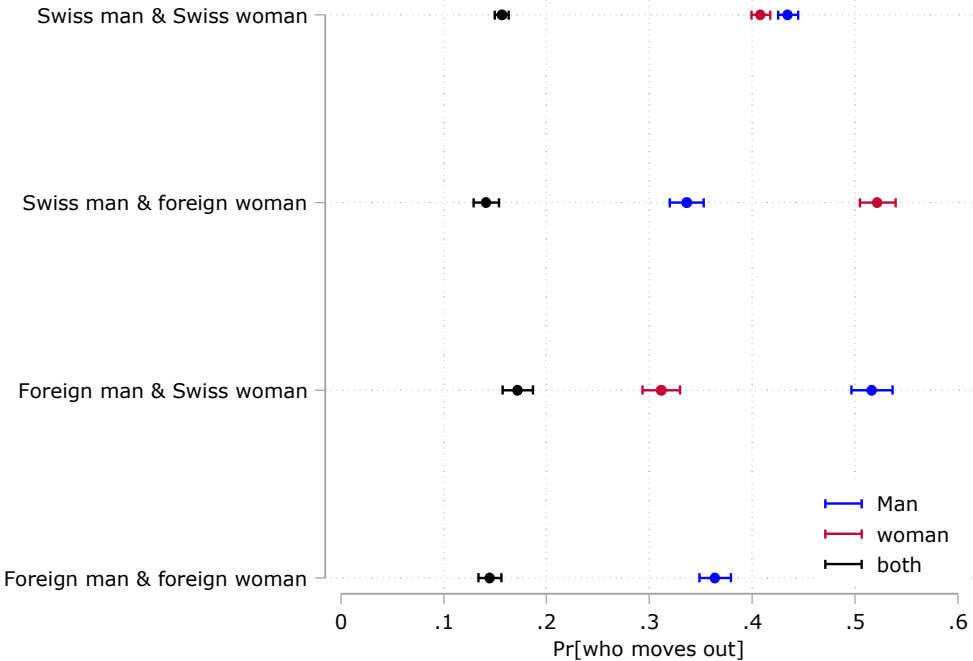
## **Preliminary results**

I first estimate the probability of moving out of the joint home for each partner among native, immigrant, and immigrant/native mixed couples (Figure 1). Among native households, men (0.435) are marginally more likely to leave the family home than women (0.408) upon separation. The results for

mixed couples are unambiguous: the person with the foreign origin is disproportionately more likely to leave the family home. This effect is almost identical for male immigrants (0.517) and for female immigrants (0.522). The migrant partner is about 20% more likely to leave the family home compared to their Swiss ex-partner, regardless of gender ( $0.517 - 0.311 = 0.20$ ;  $0.522 - 0.336 = 0.19$  respectively). In immigrant households, the woman is about 13% more likely to leave the family home upon separation (predicted probabilities of 0.491 for women and 0.364 for men).

The probability of both partners moving out does not prove to differ substantially (confidence intervals overlap) between household compositions: it varies between 0.142 (Swiss man and foreign woman) and 0.172 (foreign man and Swiss woman).

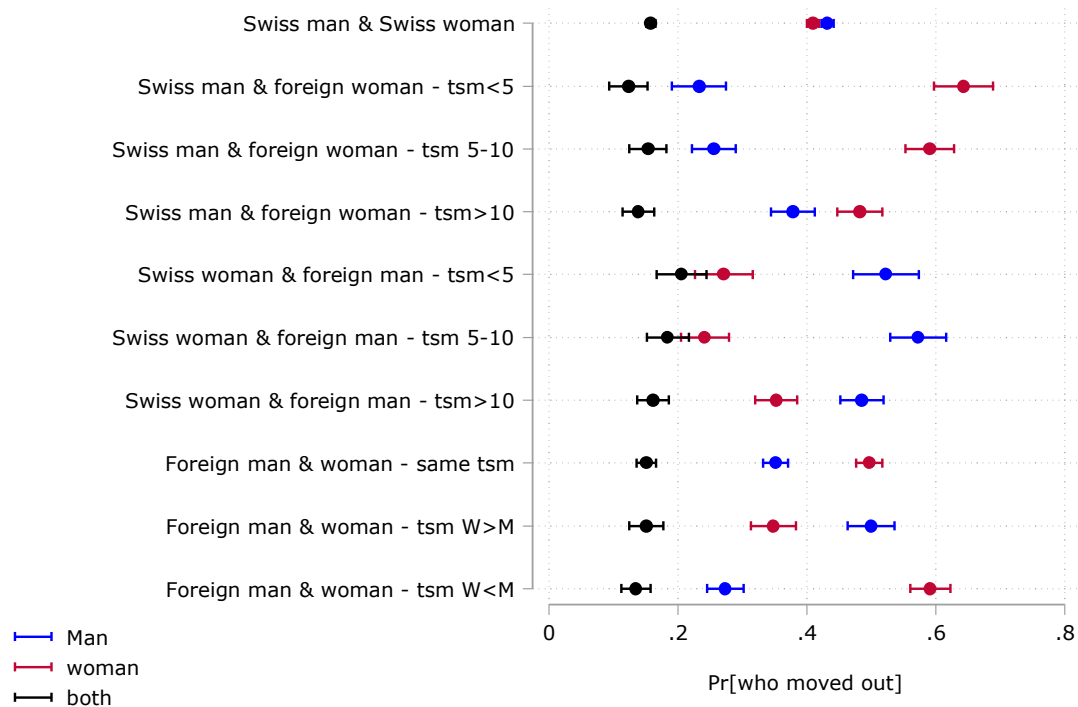
**Figure 1: Probability of moving out of the family home by household compositions**



The time spent in the country – a proxy for the accumulation of location-specific capital and attachment to the local community – plays an important role in this process (Figure 2). The results show a clear gradient among mixed couples with a foreign-born female partner: the longer the woman lived in the country, the less likely she was to move. This pattern holds for mixed couples whose male partner was born abroad but with less intensity (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 ( $0.499 - 0.348 = 0.15$ ); if the man has spent more time in the country, his chances of staying increase by 32% ( $0.591 - 0.274 = 0.32$ ).

Figure 2: Probability of moving out of the family home by household compositions and time since immigration (tsm) to Switzerland



The results for the destination of the move will be subject to further analyses.

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