

# **Are Foreign Women Competitive in the Marriage Market? Evidence from a New Immigration Country**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Whereas empirical studies concentrating on individual-level determinants of marital disruption have a long tradition, the impact of contextual-level determinants is much less studied. In this paper we advance the hypothesis that the size (and the composition) of the presence of foreign women in a certain area affect the dissolution risk of established marriages. Using data from the 2009 survey Family and Social Subjects, we estimate a set of multilevel discrete-time event history models to study the de facto separation of Italian marriages. Aggregate-level indicators, referring to the level and composition of migration, are our main explanatory variables. We find that while foreign women are complementary to Italian women within the labor market, the increasing presence of first mover's foreign women (especially coming from Latin America and some countries of Eastern Europe) is associated with elevated separation risks. These results proved to be robust to migration data stemming from different sources.

## 1. Motivation

Europe has witnessed a substantial increase in the incidence of marital disruption in recent decades. This process is most advanced in Nordic countries, where more than half of marriages ends in divorce, followed by Western, and Central and Eastern European countries (Sobotka and Toulemon 2008; Prskawetz et al. 2010). The divorce rates are the lowest in Mediterranean Europe, as this part of the continent has traditionally been characterized by strong family ties and a strong attachment to Christian values (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004; Hantrais 2005). Nonetheless, even in these countries the process of marital disruption has accelerated over the last decade (Vignoli and Ferro 2009; Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011b).

A plethora of empirical research has been conducted in response to these developments, with the goal of learning more about the correlates, if not the determinants, of marital disruption. Whereas empirical studies concentrating on individual-level factors affecting marital dissolution risks – such as age at marriage formation, marriage duration, parental divorce, premarital childbearing, or women's education – have a long tradition (e.g., Goode 1962; Levinger 1965; White 1990; Amato and Rogers 1997; Härkönen and Dronkers 2006; Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010; Matysiak, Styrac, and Vignoli 2013), the impact of contextual-level determinants of divorce is much less studied and understood. In this paper we focus on a potentially new, and never investigated, contextual correlate of marital disruption. We advance the hypothesis that the size (and the characteristics) of the presence of foreign women in a certain area affect the dissolution risk of established marriages.

Our reflection focuses on a new immigration country, Italy. Internationally, there is huge interest in the Italian context. First, this interest stems mainly from the dramatic family changes that Italy has witnessed over the last couple of decades. At the end of the Seventies, with some delay in comparison with other countries, traces of family changes began to emerge; these changes intensified in the Nineties, and accelerated in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna 2008). The period total divorce rate<sup>1</sup> increased from around 115 (divorces per 1,000 marriages) in 2000 to 182 in 2011 (Istat 2012). Second, starting from the Seventies, Italy was a privileged destination for women migrating alone (either for family reunification reasons or as first

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<sup>1</sup> Period total divorce rate is computed as a sum of age-specific divorce rates, with respect to a hypothetical (synthetic) cohort of 1,000 marriages.

movers). The increase of women first movers and their entrance for work reasons is explained by the expansion of the demand for family services, in particular for care of old age and sick relatives. Such sector faced a meaningful expansion over the last decades essentially because in Italy the institutional organization of welfare is largely based on (if not delegated to) the family, which serves as the primary social safety net (Ferrera and Rhodes 2000). In this scenario, the crisis of traditional family models, the rapid population ageing, and other life-style transformations have pushed increasing numbers of households to search for external help for tasks which were in the past mainly relegated within the family itself. Thus, the case of women's migration toward Italy offers a crucial example of the double meaning of the "feminization of migration": on the one side the feminization refers to the increase in the *quantity* of women who migrate; while on the other it points to the *transformations* of women in transnational mobility from movers for family reunification to first movers (Di Bartolomeo and Marchetti 2013).

Beside, in this paper we ask: Are foreign migrant women really a panacea for the Italian families? Or are there other dimensions of the family dynamics which are affected by the increase in the size of foreign women? In particular, we inquire if the marriage market is affected by the increase of supply of one of the two partners, namely if the increase of available women favor the disruption of already established couples. We continue by presenting some figures and interpretation on the feminization of migration in Italy. We then present the rational of the interplay between migration and the marriage market. Data, methods, and results follow. We conclude with final remarks and prospects for future research.

## **2. The Feminization of Migration in Italy**

In Italy, immigration started at the end of the Seventies with male coming from the very close Mediterranean countries. In mid-Nineties women were still only 42% of total stock of migrants, while in 2012 they represent the 53% of total migrants (Table 1). Such feminization of migration has mainly two drivers: the family reunification which dominated the Nineties (80% of women entered by this channel) and the presence of women first movers (which reached 40% of total entrance around 2010). The reasons beyond the move are different according to the ethnic group. We note that Albanian and Moroccan women are today mainly characterized by migrations because of family

reunifications (Reyanud and Conti 2011). Differently, Pilipino, Latin American and migrants from Central and Eastern European countries are prevalent among first movers because of working reasons (see also Marchetti and Venturini, in press).

*Table 1 – Feminization of migration in Italy: Foreign population residing in Italy by gender and area of nationality, 2011*

Region of nationality	Men	Women	Total	% Females
<b>EU-27</b>	<b>567,725</b>	<b>767,095</b>	<b>1,334,820</b>	<b>57.5</b>
<i>of which Romania</i>	439,311	529,265	968,576	54.6
<i>Poland</i>	31,415	77,603	109,018	71.2
<b>Central Eastern Europe</b>	<b>484,232</b>	<b>609,891</b>	<b>1,094,123</b>	<b>55.7</b>
<i>of which Albania</i>	259,352	223,275	482,627	46.3
<i>Ukraine</i>	40,617	160,113	200,730	79.8
<i>Moldova</i>	42,997	87,951	130,948	67.2
<b>Other European countries</b>	<b>5,565</b>	<b>6,959</b>	<b>12,524</b>	<b>55.6</b>
<b>Africa</b>	<b>585,628</b>	<b>400,843</b>	<b>986,471</b>	<b>40.6</b>
<i>of which Morocco</i>	254,906	197,518	452,424	43.7
<i>Tunisia</i>	67,435	38,856	106,291	36.6
<i>Egypt</i>	62,840	27,525	90,365	30.5
<b>Asia</b>	<b>416,230</b>	<b>350,282</b>	<b>766,512</b>	<b>45.7</b>
<i>of which China</i>	108,418	101,516	209,934	48.4
<i>Philippines</i>	56,559	77,595	134,154	57.8
<i>India</i>	73,446	47,590	121,036	39.3
<b>Central Southern America</b>	<b>132,182</b>	<b>222,004</b>	<b>354,186</b>	<b>62.7</b>
<i>of which Peru</i>	39,310	59,293	98,603	60.1
<i>Ecuador</i>	37,985	53,640	91,625	58.5
<i>Brazil</i>	13,989	32,701	46,690	70.0
<b>Others</b>	<b>9,188</b>	<b>11,653</b>	<b>20,841</b>	<b>55.9</b>
<b>Stateless</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>45.1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,201,211</b>	<b>2,369,106</b>	<b>4,570,317</b>	<b>51.8</b>

Source: Istat (2012)

The increase of women first movers is essentially attributable to the expansion of the demand for family services, in particular for care of old age and sick relatives which do not find in Italy adequate support by the public institutions. The inadequate support by the national welfare system of old age and sickness care obliges the family to take in charge these services. This goes hand in hand with the familistic culture of the country which relays on the women labor for the production of labor intensive family services. Altogether, this state of affairs finds a compromise by the hiring of additional women labor. Such demand becomes even more pressing in light of a context of rapidly aging society and the increasing need of a second income in the household to face the daily family expenditures. The hiring

of “Family Helpers” is not limited to high income families; the need of a second income has pushed also medium and low income families to look for external help for housework and care reasons while the female spouse are working in the labor market. In 2013, about 2.6 million Italian families are using legally a private domestic or care worker, not only foreigners.

Female migrants provide a solution to the social model of the family as main producer of care services and contribute to perpetuate its nature. In fact, looking at the labor market role of foreign women in Italy, Barone and Mocetti (2010) showed that they are complementary to highly skilled native women, who can increase their labor supply thanks to this external family services production. Romiti and Rossi (2011) as well argued that foreign women workers reduce the probability of native women to quit the labor (early retire) market to take care of old aged parents.

In this paper we wonder whether foreign women, who are complementary to Italian women in the labor market, do however compete with them in the marriage market, possibly leading to increasing levels of marital dissolution.

### **3. The Rational: A Model for the Interplay between Marriage Market and Migration**

We can mimic the marriage market functioning by the functioning of a labor market system. The representation sounds a little male chauvinist and misses many dimensions, but it helps in understanding the possible marriage dynamics. The presentation of such model, even if in a very simplified version, provides us with the rationale of the subsequent empirical analysis and will guide the interpretation of the findings.

Let us imagine that there is a bundle of goods and services provided by the marriage, e.g., shirt ironing, food preparation, company, protection, sex. Individuals demand and supply these goods; in this male chauvinist model, men demand and women supply. In the marriage market the match between the demand by the men ( $D$ ) and the supply by the women ( $S$ ) takes place when the reservation remuneration – i.e. the minimum remuneration that women are ready to accept to enter into the match – is below the equilibrium remuneration. Within this system, we expect that the reservation remuneration of native women ( $S_n$ ) is increasing, due to women’s participation in paid employment and their growing careers and independence aspirations. These dynamics interplay with female migration entrance, which induces a decrease in the equilibrium remuneration. In this new

situation, some native women will lose the match, and some men, which before were without match since they offered a remuneration lower than the women's one, now find a match.

In this paper we focus on the first part of the whole fashion. Namely, we aim to understand if the increase of migrant women working in the household and care tasks reinforces the familistic model on the one hand, but weakens the model itself producing match disruption on the other. In the following, we compare different regions in Italy with the underlying hypothesis that the larger the share of foreign women, the higher the probability of disruption.

#### **4. Data and method**

We use individual data coming from the Italian survey "Family and Social Subjects" (FSS), carried out by the Italian National Statistical Office (Istat) in 2009, a nationally representative sample of 43,850 men and women, that provides detailed information on union formation processes. We include in the analysis men and women born after 1945, who had their first marriage after 1980.

Overall, our sample includes 12,668 individuals. We focus on the dissolution of the first marriage, considering *de facto* separations as a marker of the breakdown. *De facto* separation represents a marriage dissolution not yet accompanied by a legal provision that means, in practice, moving apart due to marital discord. We concentrated on *de facto* separation because this act corresponds to the same life-step for all three possible categories of separated people, i.e., *de facto* separated, legally separated, and divorced. 11.5% of the individuals sampled have been through a *de facto* separation in this period.

Data about foreign people come from two different sources. First, we consider the registry of residency permits, which contains the number of immigrants, by country of origin and region of presence, since 2001. Starting from 2006, data are furnished with the possibility to distinguish the migration presence also by gender. Second, we rely on the registry of foreign resident population, available from 2002 to 2009. Using these two data sets, we built a set of indicators representing the percentage of foreign people on the total resident population, by year and region. When possible, we distinguished these indicators by gender, by area of origin, or by both.

We estimated a series of discrete-time event history models to study *de facto* separation. We follow the marriage until *de facto* separation; alternatively we right censor the observation in case of

widowhood or date of the interview. Since data about foreign people are available only for more recent years, the analysis is left-censored, i.e. limited to separations happened within years 2001-2009. Our data are naturally hierarchically structured (individuals living in different regions of the Italian territory), which are themselves characterized by different migration levels and composition. The presence of an explicit hierarchical structure of the data entails a violation of the independence assumption among observations within the same order-level units (Rabe-Heskett and Skrondal 2008), and represents a nuisance in the estimation of relationships at the individual level. By adding higher level-specific random intercepts to the predictor, multilevel models explicitly introduce the hierarchical structure in the analysis and producing valid standard errors (Snijders and Bosker 1999). In order to account for the hierarchical structure of our data, we propose a two-level hierarchical extension of the discrete-time event history models that considers individuals (first level units) as nested in regions (second level units).

The migration indicators represent our main explanatory contextual variable in the assessment of the hazard of *de facto* separation. In preliminary analysis we tested alternatively a large set of indicators distinct by area of origin – e.g., Europe, Asia, North America, and Africa – and gender. In several cases, they came out to be not significant, thus we limit here to those reporting a significant association with the response variable. The list of these contextual indicators is presented in Table 2. They have been included in the model with the lag of 1 year. As control variables at the individual level, the models account also for the birth cohort (grouped into: 1945-54; 1955-64;  $\geq 1965$ ), gender, level of education (grouped into basic education, secondary and upper secondary education, and post-secondary and tertiary), and the duration of the marriage (continuous in years).

*Table 2 – Contextual indicators on the presence in foreign people in Italy, by source and reference period*

<b>Indicator acronym</b>	<b>Indicator description</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Reference period</b>
rp_total	Total residency permits	Residency permits registry	2001-2009
rp_lat_am_tot	Residency permits of people coming from Latin America	Residency permits registry	2001-2009
rp_rpr_tot *	Residency permits of people coming from Russia, Poland and Romania	Residency permits registry	2001-2009
rp_female	Female residency permits	Residency permits registry	2001-2009
rp_lat_am_f	Residency permits of women coming from Latin America	Residency permits registry	2006-2009
rp_rpr_f *	Residency permits of women coming from Russia, Poland and Romania	Residency permits registry	2006-2009
res_total	Total resident foreign population	Registry of foreign resident population	2002-2009
res_lat_am_tot	Total resident foreign population coming from Latin America	Registry of foreign resident population	2002-2009
res_rpr_tot	Total resident foreign population coming from Russia, Poland and Romania	Registry of foreign resident population	2002-2009
res_female	Female resident foreign population	Registry of foreign resident population	2002-2009
res_lat_am_f	Female resident foreign population coming from Latin America	Registry of foreign resident population	2002-2009
res_rpr_f	Female resident foreign population coming from Russia, Poland and Romania	Registry of foreign resident population	2002-2009

Note: \* starting from 2008, the immigrants from Poland and Romania are not included in the number of residency permits given the entry of these countries in the European Union.

## **5. Results**

The ORs of the contextual indicators referring to foreign population on the risk of de facto separation estimated through event history models are presented in Table 3. As previously described, we tested a series of contextual indicators referred to the presence of foreigners in Italy, total, and distinct by gender and/or area of origin. Here we present and comment results for the resulting significant indicators. We start first with the incidence of total foreign people (measured both by the residency permits and by resident foreign population, Models 1 and 7); we then concentrate on the presence of foreign people coming from Latin America and the area composed by Russia, Poland and Romania, the two territorial aggregates found to be relevant in de facto separation process (Models 2,3,8 and 9); finally, we concentrate on female migration, by presenting models estimated



alternatively for the total foreign women, and the foreign women coming from Latin America and the selected Eastern European countries (Models 4 to 6 and 10 to 12).

*Table 3 – ORs for the contextual indicators on foreign population*

<b>Model</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Model</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>P-value</b>
1.	rp_total	1.05	0.015	7.	res_total	1.03	0.066
2.	rp_lat_am_tot	1.65	0.001	8.	res_lat_am_tot	1.50	0.008
3.	rp_rpr_tot	1.37	0.006	9.	res_rpr_tot	1.12	0.086
4.	rp_female	1.13	0.007	10.	res_female	1.07	0.039
5.	rp_lat_am_f	1.72	0.160	11.	res_lat_am_f	1.99	0.005
6.	rp_rpr_f	1.05	0.882	12.	res_rpr_f	1.25	0.070

Note: All the models are controlled for cohort of birth, gender, education, duration of the marriage.

Model 1 shows that an increase in the percentage of residency permits on the total resident population is associated to a significant increase in *de facto* separation. This result is virtually confirmed (even if with a decreased significance) using as contextual indicator the percentage of foreign resident population on the Italian one (Model 7).

When considering the residency permits differentiated by area, we find that a one-point increase in the percentage of people coming from countries of Latin America implies a 60% higher odd of experiencing a *de facto* separation (Model 2). This association is slightly lower (OR=1.37), but significant, when considering the residency permits of people coming from Russia, Poland and Romania (Model 3). These results are substantially confirmed by the models that consider foreign resident population coming from both Latin America (model 8) and, even if with a lower significance, Eastern European countries (Model 9).

In order to test the hypothesis that it is the female level of immigration which matters most in marital dissolution in Italy, we then considered indicators referring to foreign women. Model 4 shows that a higher percentage of women’s residency permits on Italian residence population implies a higher risk of separation (OR=1.13); the OR equals to 1.07 in the model that consider female resident population (Model 10). Importantly, models including the male component of foreign presence as regional-level covariate of the dissolution risk do not illustrate any significant effect (results not shown, but available upon request).

Indicators about residency permits by area of origin and gender continue to show an OR higher than 1, however they are not statistically significant. It has to be remembered that, due to data

limitations, models 5 and 6 are estimated considering only separations happened during the period 2006-2009. It is thus possible that the reduced statistical significance arises from the limited time span considered and the consequent scarce numerous of the event of interest. Moreover, people coming from Poland and Romania are excluded from the determination of the residency permits in most recent years. When using as contextual indicators the foreign resident population by area of origin, it results that an increasing presence in the Italian regions of foreign population coming from countries of Latin America (Model 11) doubles the risk of de facto separation. The immigration from Russia, Poland and Romania, is significant and in the same direction, even if with a lower magnitude. Incidentally, these are the ethnicities prevalent among women who tend to migrate as first movers, and not for family reunification reasons.

## **6. Abridged Conclusions**

Most of the demographic literature on migrants is focused on fertility and mortality. Literature on divorce risks and union dissolution is still lacking. In this paper we focus on the interplay between the feminization of migration and the marriage market of Italians, addressing whether aggregate migration shocks alter the traditional marriage market.

We found that while foreign women are complementary to Italian women within the labor market, they play a critical role for the stability of the marriage. Our findings suggest that the increasing presence of first mover's foreign women (especially coming from Latin America and some countries of Eastern Europe) is associated with elevated divorce risks. It is important to note that these results proved to be robust to migration data stemming from different sources, providing support for our hypothesis.

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