

# Intermarriage and housing upon separation. A matter of resources and bargaining power?

Julie Lacroix<sup>1,2</sup>  | Júlia Mikolai<sup>1</sup>  | Hill Kulu<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>School of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St Andrews, St. Andrews, UK

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Demography and Socioeconomics, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland

## Correspondence

Julie Lacroix, School of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St Andrews, St. Andrews, UK.

Email: [jl347@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:jl347@st-andrews.ac.uk)

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This paper examines post-separation residential outcomes in immigrant, native, and immigrant–native mixed (married and cohabiting) couples.

**Background:** Previous research showed that women were more likely to leave the family home upon separation than men, indicating a weaker bargaining position.

**Method:** Using linked survey and register data from Switzerland, we estimate two post-separation mobility outcomes: who leaves the family home and to what distance this person relocates. By distinguishing male and female partners by migrant origin, we consider how gendered power imbalances interact with migration status to create specific bargaining dynamics within households.

**Results:** Among immigrant–native mixed couples, the immigrant ex-partner (regardless of gender) was significantly more likely to move out of the joint home following separation. The likelihood of moving (abroad) after separation was highest for recently arrived immigrant women.

**Conclusion:** The results suggest that migration status brings in a new dimension of bargaining within separating couples, which affects the gender-specific residential mobility outcomes reported in previous studies. Although family migration decisions are generally biased toward the human capital of men, this study shows the advantage of the native partner in immigrant–native couples.

## KEYWORDS

decision-making, divorce, gender, housing, immigrants, separation

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## INTRODUCTION

Immigrant–native intermarriage is increasingly common in European countries. In Switzerland, they represent 35% of new marriages (FSO, 2022b). As with other exogamous partnerships, mixed nativity couples have a higher risk of divorce than endogamous couples, especially among partners who are considered “culturally distant” from one another (Milewski & Kulu, 2014). Yet, the disruptive impacts of separation on immigrants’ residential mobility and their gendered expression in the context of immigrant–native relationships have not been explored.

Studies on majority populations across industrialized countries have shown that separation and divorce have a long-lasting negative impact on people’s housing conditions characterized by residential instability and downward moves on the housing ladder (Mikolai et al., 2020; Mikolai & Kulu, 2018). The question of who stays and who moves out of the family home is one of the first subjects of negotiation between ex-partners upon separation (Fiori, 2019). It is expected that any separating person for whom the costs of moving are higher than the costs of staying will prefer to stay in the family home (Mulder & Wagner, 2010). Resource asymmetries and power dynamics within separating couples play an important role in this outcome (Feijten & Mulder, 2010). A partner who has more resources is better positioned to afford the costs of housing alone; they may also derive more bargaining power from the resource asymmetries when negotiating who should stay in the family home (Mulder et al., 2012).

For the ex-partner who moves out, the distance (or the destination) moved following separation also reflects bargaining dynamics within couples. Family members are likely to have different and conflicting locational ambitions, and therefore, a family’s place of residence most likely results from a compromise by one of the partners (Cooke et al., 2016). Separation may be an opportunity to move to an ideal location (perhaps even to the origin country) and resolve possible locational conflicts faced by one of the partners during the relationship.

This paper examines post-separation residential outcomes in immigrant, native, and immigrant–native mixed couples (married and cohabiting) and focuses on the role of the relative distribution of resources and bargaining power within households. We rely on proxies in the absence of a direct measure of bargaining power (Bertocchi et al., 2014), capturing different dimensions of heterogamy (income, education, age) and, in particular, migration status. A person with more resources is thought to have more influence over household decisions (McDonald, 1980), including the decision of who should move or stay in the family home following a separation. Moreover, the person who had less influence over previous migration decisions should experience greater locational conflict at the time of separation and thus move over longer distances (Cooke et al., 2016). Distinguishing male and female partners by migrant origin, we examine whether the gender balance and bargaining power between ex-partners are the same for male-immigrant/female-native and male-native/female-immigrant couples.

Previous research showed that women were more likely than men to leave the family home upon separation and to move a longer distance, indicating their weaker bargaining position (Cooke et al., 2016; Feijten, 2005). In immigrant–native mixed couples, the bargaining power of spouses is expected to be differently distributed, presumably in favor of the native partner (Basu, 2017; Nottmeyer, 2014). The native partner likely has more economic resources and location-specific capital strengthening their bargaining position during the relationship. Upon separation, the native partner may use their dominant position to claim the house (Mulder et al., 2012; Theunis et al., 2018). The shift in bargaining power toward the native partner may be even more obvious for recently arrived immigrants or tied movers for whom the ex-partner may be the main anchor to the current location.

Drawing on linked administrative registers from Switzerland and a large sample from the Structural Survey ( $N = 21,424$  separated couples), we analyze two outcomes of separation: who moves out of the family home and to what distance this person relocates. Following previous

research, we account for variation by gender and parenthood status in post-separation housing outcomes. In addition, we examine two novel dimensions of intra-couple bargaining power: the migration background of each ex-partner and the time spent in the country. Including immigrant–native mixed couples in the study of post-separation residential mobility outcomes allows us to consider how gendered power imbalances interact with migration status to create specific bargaining dynamics within households.

## RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY UPON SEPARATION: WHO MOVES AND TO WHAT DISTANCE?

Along with the division of assets and child custody, housing outcomes are among the major stressors associated with the divorce process (Leopold, 2018). Studies showed that the person leaving the family home was likely to experience a downward move on the housing ladder (Lersch & Vidal, 2014; Mikolai & Kulu, 2018). The disruptive impact of separation on an individual's residential mobility and housing conditions has brought attention to the mechanisms behind the decision of who moves out of the joint home following this event (Mulder & Wagner, 2010). Since Becker's (1991) unitary family model, the economic literature has emphasized the bargaining process that characterizes household decision-making, introducing notions of cooperation and conflict in household interactions (e.g., Lundberg & Pollak, 1996). In a bargaining model, when one partner benefits from an outcome at the expense of the other, the outcome that emerges depends on the relative bargaining position of the household members. Bargaining power is generally defined in terms of "outside options," that is, the expected utility one would receive if cooperation failed (i.e., how well-off each partner would be in case of a separation) (Agarwal, 1997). In theory, the person with more resources has better outside options (e.g., labor market prospects and potential income) and, therefore, has a higher relative bargaining power during the relationship. How separation affects negotiations when outside options no longer matter is, however, not trivial.

Mulder and Wagner (2010) were the first to develop a theoretical framework to predict which ex-partner(s) will leave the joint home upon separation. The theory builds on established principles of family power relations (e.g., Blood & Wolfe, 1960 resource theory) and a rational choice model in which ex-partners engage in a bargaining process over the relative costs of staying or moving for each ex-partner. It assumes that any ex-partner for whom the costs of moving are higher than the costs of staying will prefer to stay in the joint home. If the costs of staying are larger than the costs of moving (e.g., unaffordable housing) for one of the two ex-partners the situation may be promptly resolved by the move out of at least one partner. On the contrary, if the costs of moving are higher than the costs of staying for both partners, the situation remains unresolved. In such cases, a negotiation between the former partners must take place, weighing the relative costs of the move for each partner (Thomas et al., 2017).

Resource asymmetries and power dynamics within the couple play an important role in this outcome. The ex-partner with greater relative resources is better positioned to independently bear the costs of housing and is, therefore, more likely to stay in the family home upon separation (Mulder & Malmberg, 2011). In a negotiation process, the person with more resources is also expected to have greater levels of self-determination and derive more bargaining power from the resource asymmetries (McDonald, 1980; Mulder et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2017), making him/her more successful in claiming the house and avoiding an undesirable outcome such as moving out (Theunis et al., 2018). Bargaining power also derives from gendered marital household-task division and traditional assortative mating which tend to place women in a weaker bargaining position compared to men (Zilincikova & Schnor, 2021).

Income, education, and age have been shown to strengthen a person's bargaining position; in heterogamous couples, the older ex-partner and the partner with higher income or education

are more likely to stay in the family home at separation (Mulder et al., 2012; Theunis et al., 2018). This is in line with the idea that people generally use their resources to stay rather than move (Mulder et al., 2012). However, other principles may also be at play when both ex-partners want to remain in the joint home. Rules of fairness or justice may favor the residential continuity of the person for whom the costs of moving would be greatest (Mulder & Wagner, 2010; Zilincikova & Schnor, 2021). In some cases, moving following separation may be a positive outcome. At separation, people may prefer to leave behind the negative memories attached to the house and make a fresh start by moving to a new place or even moving in with a new partner (Mulder et al., 2012). This means that the theoretical prediction of the relationship between resources, bargaining power, and residential outcomes is ambiguous as it depends both on the relative affordability as well as non-monetary costs of moving and staying for both partners.

For the ex-partner who moves following separation, the distance moved also reflects power relations and bargaining dynamics within couples. Relocation after separation mostly occurs over short distances (Feijten & van Ham, 2007). However, long-distance moves are also common and often consist of return migration (Spring et al., 2021). This brings us to the notion of locational conflict (Cooke et al., 2016), suggesting that the place of residence of a family most likely results from a compromise by one of the partners, and when this compromise is no longer necessary, separation may be an opportunity for one of the partners to move to an ideal location. This means that locational continuity may not be the desired outcome for all, especially for the partner who had less influence over previous family migration decisions. Locational disadvantage during the relationship should lead to an increased likelihood of moving over a longer distance at separation, often back to a familiar location. Again, the tied mover (the person who made a compromise on the place of residence) is most likely the one with lower relative resources and bargaining power.

Building on the bargaining power model, the following section presents how resource asymmetries between men and women, immigrants and natives, and mothers and fathers lead to different opportunities and costs of moving for these groups. Gender and parenthood status are two well-documented dimensions of intra-couple bargaining power. We emphasize how these key dimensions interact with the migration background of each ex-partner and what it means for post-separation residential outcomes.

## Gender and post-separation residential outcomes

Studies showed that gendered power dynamics within households generally play into decisions about where to live or where to move to (Wright et al., 2013). Family migration decisions are gendered and biased toward the human capital of men (Compton & Pollak, 2007; Cooke, 2008). In the context of separation, a number of studies have reported that overall, women were more likely than men to leave the family home upon separation (Cooke et al., 2016; Ferrari et al., 2019; Fiori, 2019; Mulder & Malmberg, 2011; Mulder & Wagner, 2010, 2012; Schnor & Mikolai, 2020; Theunis et al., 2018). Differences in resources lead to uneven opportunities and costs of moving or staying for men and women. Having sufficient financial resources is the most obvious requirement for staying in the family home at separation. Despite significant progress in recent decades, the large and persistent gender gap in market and non-market work continues to place women at a disadvantage in terms of disposable income. Switzerland is no exception, with a “one-and-a-half earner” model, where women (and especially mothers) often work part-time while men generally work full-time, regardless of their parental status (Lacroix & Vidal-Coso, 2018). As a result, women are, on average, more dependent on their partner’s resources and, therefore, more exposed to the risk of housing insecurity after divorce (Leopold, 2018). Not only is the distribution of resources often unbalanced

in favor of men, but relative resources are not gender-neutral. Studies show that women need a comparatively higher income than men to negotiate staying in the joint home upon separation (Mulder et al., 2012).

Ties to the home are other important resources in terms of post-separation housing outcomes (Mulder & Wagner, 2012). Studies documented the higher propensity of women to move out when the couple's home was owner-occupied (Mulder et al., 2012)—a finding explained by the lower economic independence of women (Feijten, 2005). In addition, women were more likely than men to move into their partners' homes at the start of co-residence (Brandén & Haandrikman, 2019; Mulder & Wagner, 1993). Traditional assortative mating partly explains this dynamic. In many cases, the man was older than the woman and had further progressed in their professional career, leading to a strengthening of their negotiating position. The factors that were decisive in determining the couple's place of residence upon partnership formation (e.g., the woman moving into the home of their partner) may be just as decisive at the time of separation (e.g., higher chances that the woman moves out) (Mulder & Wagner, 2012). In line with the gendered model of family migration, women, and especially those with low levels of human capital, are more likely to end up living in a less than optimal location, to experience greater locational conflict, and to move over a longer distance at separation (Cooke et al., 2016). Considering that (1) people generally use their resources to stay rather than move, (2) that locational conflicts can be resolved by long-distance moves, and (3) that men are expected to have more resources and derive more bargaining power from the resource asymmetries, we expect that *women will be more likely to leave the joint home upon separation than men, and to relocate over a longer distance if they move* (gender hypothesis).

## Migration status and post-separation residential outcomes

Despite abundant research on post-separation residential mobility, differences in resources and housing outcomes by migration status have been overlooked. This is problematic for several reasons. First, studies consistently showed that immigrants have lower human (and location-specific) capital compared to the native population, that they are less likely to be employed (especially immigrant women), and overrepresented in lower-paid jobs (Aguilera & Massey, 2003; Ebner & Helbling, 2016). Although an important share of recent migration flows to Switzerland is highly qualified (especially migrants from neighboring countries), the median income of foreigners is still significantly lower than that of the Swiss population (FSO, 2022a). In a mixed partnership (i.e., where one partner is native-born and the other partner is an immigrant), this may lead to lower relative resources and a weaker bargaining position for the immigrant partner. Second, minorities experience greater difficulties in translating their human capital into residential advantages (Wright et al., 2013). This implies that immigrants need considerably higher levels of human capital to influence family migration decisions. Third, immigrants are expected to have lower ties to their homes and locations. As with women's mobility at the time of partnership formation with a man, immigrants are presumably more likely to move into their native partner's home (or to their partner's ideal location). Although no studies have documented this dynamic among immigrant-native couples, studies showed that a higher share of relative resources, better housing conditions, and stronger local ties increase the likelihood of the partner moving in (Brandén & Haandrikman, 2019; Krapf et al., 2022)—these are resources that are likely to favor the native partner. This is all the more evident when the immigrant partner moves to Switzerland to join his/her partner, as having a decent dwelling is a condition for family reunification. Fourth, selection into a mixed partnership could potentially affect the dynamics of intra-couple bargaining. Studies generally showed that social and economic integration is positively associated with the likelihood of marrying a native partner (Chiswick & Houseworth, 2011). Positive selection was also observed in Switzerland (Potarca &

Bernardi, 2018), which could partially counterbalance the adverse resource asymmetry for the immigrant partner.

The reason for migration is another factor that influences immigrants' resources and their rights and opportunities to remain in the country after separation. Studies showed that family migration is associated with lower income and worse employment outcomes for married women (Cooke, 2008). Since 2002 and the ratification of the Agreement of the Free Movement of Persons with the EU by Switzerland, the reasons for migration and the skills composition of the migrant population vary by nationality. EU nationals (led by Germany, France, Italy, and Portugal) represent about two thirds of the migration flow and generally move to Switzerland for employment reasons. By contrast, entry regulations for non-EU nationals (led by China, Turkey, the United States, and India) are restricted to family reunification, study, and asylum, while employment-related migration is limited by strict quotas for highly skilled workers (Piguet, 2017). The reasons for migration not only differ by nationality but also by gender. According to a recent Swiss survey, 55% of women migrated to Switzerland for family-related reasons compared to only 22% of men (NCCR—On the Move, 2023).

While a few studies have reported a difference in the likelihood of moving by migration status, none has specifically accounted for the origin of both the man and the woman and whether they are in an exogamous or endogamous union. Rooyackers et al. (2015) reported a higher mobility rate at the time of separation for Dutch women compared to immigrant women. In Sweden, Mulder and Malmberg (2011) found that natives were less likely to move following separation compared to those born abroad. Mobility rates also proved to be smaller when the partner was foreign-born. As pointed out by the authors, the results are not easily interpreted without information on the ethnic composition of the couples.

Taken together, we expect the immigrant ex-partner (both female and male) in a mixed partnership to leave the family home more often than the native partner. We also expect immigrants to have more locational conflict at the time of separation and, therefore, to move over a longer distance and even back to their origin country (migration status hypothesis). In addition, one might expect the role of gender to depend on the migration status of each ex-partner. The cumulative disadvantage for immigrant women may be expected because of a more traditional division of labor (Blau et al., 2020), lower representation in the labor market, and a higher propensity to be tied movers. *In a mixed partnership, we expect immigrant women partnered with native men to be more likely to move out and relocate over a longer distance compared to immigrant men partnered with native women. In couples with the same nativity composition, we expect the gender gap to be greater in immigrant households than in native households* (intersection of gender and migration status hypothesis).

The time spent in the country also influences many aspects of immigrant settlement and integration. Whether locational continuity is feasible and desirable not only depends on the socioeconomic resources of the ex-partners but also on their location-specific capital (Schnor & Mikolai, 2020). Location-specific capital is the ties that bind people to a specific place (DaVanzo, 1981). These ties influence both the likelihood of a move and the distance moved, as they can be attached to either the home or the location. Living in the country of birth and a long history in the place of residence matter in the propensity to move upon separation (Mulder & Malmberg, 2011; Mulder & Wagner, 2012). The longer one lives in a location, the more likely it is that they have developed local ties, whether in the form of social networks, emotional ties, or familiarity with the location. Long-term residents are also expected to be more familiar with the legal system, norms, and peculiarities of the country, which may prove helpful during a negotiation process. The better-connected partner may argue that they should stay in the family home as the costs of severing their local ties would be too high (Mulder & Wagner, 2012). By contrast, people with fewer local connections may prefer to relocate and move closer to their own professional and social networks. At the same time, an erosion of ethnic-specific human capital over time for immigrants (Chiswick & Houseworth, 2011) may

lead to a lower incentive to move back to the origin country. Considering that long-term stayers are expected to have accumulated more resources and to be more embedded in their environment and their home, *a longer time spent in the country is expected to increase the chances of staying in the family home and to move over a shorter distance among movers* (local ties hypothesis).

## Parenthood status and post-separation residential outcomes

Residential dynamics of parents differ considerably from those of non-parents, starting with the gender dimension. Parenthood status mitigates the gender gap in the likelihood of moving: mothers keep the home more often than childless women, while fathers move out more often than childless men (Ferrari et al., 2019). In some contexts, fathers have been found to leave their shared residence more frequently than mothers (Fiori, 2019; Thomas et al., 2017). Part of this dynamic is explained by the fact that women more often have custody of the children, and the parent who has custody is less likely to leave (Mulder & Wagner, 2010). Switzerland is no exception. In case of a separation, custody is predominantly granted to mothers, resulting in almost six times as many single-parent households headed by mothers than fathers (FSO, 2017).

Because of the norms that favor the mother's co-residence with the child in the family home, it was argued that the bargaining model and the relative distribution of resources between ex-partners are less relevant when children are present (Thomas et al., 2017). Nevertheless, Schnor and Mikolai et al. (2020) showed that mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds who lack local ties were more likely to move and less likely to maintain location continuity after separation, suggesting that parenthood affects mobility differently depending on the mother's profile. The division of market and non-market work within the household will also influence each parent's prospects of obtaining custody and their capacity to independently pay for the joint home. Research indicated that immigrant women allocate more of their time to non-market work compared to native women or immigrant men (Blau et al., 2020), potentially leading to greater responsibility for childcare during the relationship. On the one hand, it could be that the main caregiver holds greater negotiating power when it comes to making decisions about children's day-to-day life and can advocate for the child's "best interests," which often implies continued residence in the joint home (Ferrari et al., 2019). On the other hand, this leverage in negotiating power may be completely offset by a lower representation in the labor market and, therefore, insufficient income to solely pay for the joint home.

The presence of children influences not only the likelihood of the mother and father staying in the joint home, but also the distance moved by the partner(s) who leave. Having joint children strongly binds people to a specific place. For example, former partners need to coordinate their post-separation residential locations to facilitate child visitation and the sharing of parental responsibilities (Stjernström & Strömngren, 2012; Thomas et al., 2018). Studies showed that compared to ex-partners without children, separated parents tended to move over significantly shorter distances and to live in closer geographical proximity (Cooke et al., 2016; Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen, 2008; Mulder & Malmberg, 2011; Thomas et al., 2017). In Switzerland, a parent who wishes to leave the country with their children needs the permission of the other parent. If there is a disagreement, the best interests of the child and the ability to assume primary custody (e.g., flexible work hours) are decisive, although other factors are also considered (e.g., school enrolment, languages spoken). As these grounds typically favor mothers in obtaining custody, one might expect immigrant women to be in a better position than their male counterparts to move abroad at separation, even if they have children. Taken together, *we expect mothers to remain in the family home more often than non-mothers, regardless of the couples' migration background. We also expect ex-partners of all migration backgrounds to move*

over shorter distances when they have children (parenthood hypothesis). However, because of lower local ties and greater economic constraints for immigrant mothers, we expect a weaker effect of parenthood for immigrant mothers than native mothers. We also expect the probability of parents to move abroad to be small, yet comparatively greater for immigrant mothers than for immigrant fathers (intersection of parenthood and migration status hypothesis).

## DATA AND METHODS

### Data

We combine data from the Swiss population register (Statpop 2010–2014), the income register (CCO 2010–2014), and the Structural Survey (2010–2013), a nationally representative survey conducted every year on a new sample of at least 200,000 individuals. Since 2010, the population register has provided information on the permanent resident population, including the exact date of any childbirth, marriage, divorce, death, immigration, emigration, changes of citizenship, and changes of dwelling (available once a year). Unfortunately, the data do not allow for residential follow-up beyond 2014. The Structural Survey complements the population registers with cross-sectional information on the socioeconomic and sociocultural structure of the resident population aged 15 or older. Most importantly, the survey contains information on the link between household members (including unmarried cohabiting partners), which is needed to follow the residential trajectories of couples at the time of separation. The income register provides information on salary from (self-)employment. The date of reference for all datasets is December 31 each year. These data sources can be linked using the personal identification number, allowing us to track individuals across different data sources.

The dataset was built as follows. First, we pooled 4 years of cross-sectional data from the Structural Survey as a base sample. The survey gathers information on all household members, demographic attributes, socioeconomic characteristics, and household position. We restricted the sample to two-gender couples, either married or cohabiting, registered at the same address at the time of the survey. Second, we retrieved the migration and residential trajectories of these couples from the population register. 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 move 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 31 of year  $t$  and on December 31 of year  $t + 1$ , considering four possible options: (1) both partners remained at the same address, (2) both partners moved to the same address, (3) both partners moved but to different addresses, and (4) only one partner moved to a different address. The last two outcomes are defined as a separation. Unlike most previous studies, we were able to consider a move abroad as a possible outcome of separation. However, if both partners moved abroad, it is not possible to tell whether they moved abroad as a couple or as separated individuals. Therefore, these moves are not considered as separation. Couples' residential trajectories are observed from the year they participated in the Structural Survey (any time between 2010 and 2013) until a separation, emigration of both partners, death, or the end of the observation period (2014). The analytical sample consists of 21,424 couples who experienced a separation between 2011 and 2014.

Using administrative data to analyze post-separation mobility behaviors comes with some limitations. First, couples can stop living together for reasons other than a separation (e.g., living apart together). Although these partnerships are increasingly common, they still represent a negligible share of couples in Switzerland. To minimize the risk of misclassification, we checked that the partner did not move back a year later. Second, some individuals may not



register their new address immediately, especially those moving to temporary accommodation, in the first step of the relocation process (Mulder & Malmberg, 2011). Therefore, in some cases, the separation may only be identified with some delay. Third, moves are only registered on a yearly basis. This means that if both partners leave the home a few months apart, we will only consider the person who moved out first if these moves occur over two calendar years. We conducted a sensitivity analysis where we considered both partners to have moved out (not shown) if one of the partners moved during the following year. Although this specification shows more situations where both partners moved out, the results remained unchanged. Nevertheless, the data structure and identification strategy are similar to other European population register-based studies (e.g., Mulder & Malmberg, 2011; Theunis et al., 2018).

## Analytical strategy

We analyze two post-separation residential outcomes. First, we study the probability of moving out of the joint home upon separation. For this set of analyses, the unit of observations is couples ( $N = 21,424$ ). We account for three possible outcomes: the man moved out, the woman moved out, or both ex-partners moved out. We estimate three multinomial logistic models stepwise. Model 1 reports the probability of moving out for each ex-partner, distinguishing male and female partners by migrant origin. We distinguish native households (both partners are born in Switzerland) from immigrant households (both partners are born abroad) and immigrant–native mixed couples (immigrant woman and a native man or immigrant man and a native woman). Model 2 considers the role of time since immigration to Switzerland in this process, a proxy for the accumulation of location-specific capital and attachment to the current location. This variable has three categories allowing for a distinction between recent immigrants (arrived less than 5 years ago), immigrants who arrived 5–10 years ago, and long-term stayers who spent more than 10 years in the country. When both ex-partners are born abroad, the model accounts for the partner who spent more time in the country. In doing so, we take into account the location-specific capital of each partner, but also who is more likely to be the primary migrant or the tied mover. Model 3 includes an interaction term between the composition of a couple (i.e., the migration status of the man and the woman) and the presence of children to test whether the propensity to move out varies by the presence of children.

Second, we study the distance of moves for the ex-partner who leaves the joint home upon separation ( $N = 24,958$ ). In this set of analyses, the unit of observations is individuals. Because some separations involve the mobility of both ex-partners, the number of observations (couples vs. individuals) differs slightly from the first set of analyses. Because the dataset does not contain information on the distance of moves, we distinguished moves within labor-market areas (a proxy for short-distance moves), moves across labor-market areas, and moves abroad; the latter two are considered as long-distance moves. There are 101 labor-market areas in Switzerland defined as a region in which the majority of the working population lives and works (FSO, 2018). We follow the same analytical steps as for the first set of analyses.

## Variables

For the analysis of who moves out, we consider the characteristics of both ex-partners in the models. This includes the presence of children, union type (cohabiting or married), the age, education, and salary differences between the man and the woman, as well as homeownership status and place of residence (see details on data sources and measurement for each variable in Table SA6). Homeownership status is a household-level variable, which means that we cannot identify which ex-partner(s) owns the home. All covariates are measured at the time of

separation except for the level of education, which is only available at the time of the survey. The second part of the analysis (on the distance moved) only controls for the characteristics of the movers. As pointed out by Mulder and Malmberg (2011), there seems to be no reason to expect the partners' characteristics to influence the distance of the move.

## DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

The unconditional outcomes in Table 1 report the two post-separation housing outcomes: the probability of moving out of the joint home for each ex-partner and the probability to move to different distances among movers. Women were slightly more likely than men to leave the family home upon separation. It was also frequent (about one in six) for both ex-partners to leave the family home. In addition, the person leaving the family home was likely to relocate over a short distance. Most moves (72%) took place within the same labor-market area and longer-distance moves were less common (21%). The likelihood of moving abroad, although the lowest, was non-negligible, with a 7% chance of migrating to another country following separation.

The characteristics of separating couples are shown in Table 2 (Table SA7 documents these characteristics separately by couple type). The majority of couples who separated were formed by two native partners (59%). Nevertheless, more than 40% of separated couples were formed of at least one immigrant partner (19% were mixed couples and 22% were formed by two immigrant partners). Even after distinguishing between households by time since migration, all categories were large enough to warrant detailed statistical analyses by time since migration.

## MULTIVARIATE RESULTS

### Who moves out?

Figure 1 reports the probability of moving out of the joint home, distinguishing male and female partners by migration status. The full models are reported in Tables SA1 and SA2. In all family compositions, the most frequent outcome was that only one of the ex-partners moved out of the joint home; the probability that both ex-partners moved out was between 14%

**TABLE 1** Unconditional probability of moving out of the joint home for each ex-partner upon separation and the distance of the moves.

	Probability
Who moved out	
Man	0.41***
Woman	0.43***
Both	0.16***
<i>N</i>	21,424
Distance of moves	
Within labor-market area	0.72***
Between labor-market areas	0.21***
Abroad	0.07***
<i>N</i>	24,958

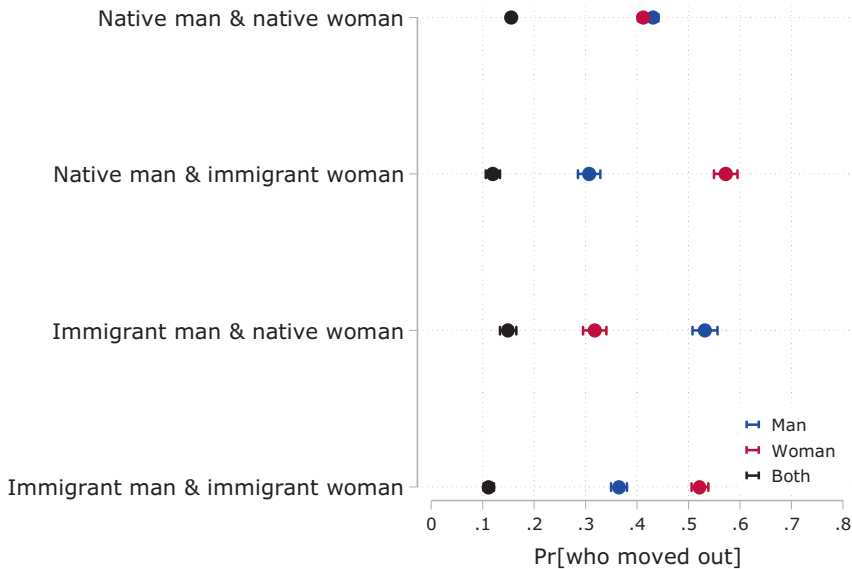
\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Source: Authors' calculations using the Swiss population register and Structural Survey (2010–2014).

**TABLE 2** Characteristics of separated couples ( $N = 21,424$ ).

	<i>N</i>	%
Household composition by gender and migration status		
Native man and native woman	12,647	59.0
Native man and immigrant woman	2008	9.4
Native woman and immigrant man	1976	9.2
Immigrant man and immigrant woman	4793	22.4
Household composition by gender, migration status, and Tsm		
Native man and Native woman	12,647	59.0
Native man and immigrant woman—Tsm <5	474	2.2
Native man and immigrant woman—Tsm 5–10	681	3.2
Native man and immigrant woman—Tsm >10	853	4.0
Native woman and immigrant man—Tsm <5	427	2.0
Native woman and immigrant man—Tsm 5–10	589	2.8
Native woman and immigrant man—Tsm >10	960	4.5
Immigrant man and immigrant woman—Same Tsm	2869	13.4
Immigrant man and immigrant woman—Tsm W > M	846	4.0
Immigrant man and immigrant woman—Tsm W < M	1078	5.0
Type of union		
Married	13,212	64.7
Cohabiting	8212	38.3
Children in household		
No	11,320	52.8
Yes	10,104	47.2
Age		
Same age	2030	9.5
Man older than woman	14,571	68.0
Woman older than man	4823	22.5
Education		
Both up to lower secondary	1546	7.2
Both upper secondary	6894	32.2
Both post-secondary	3512	16.4
Man higher educational level than woman	5894	27.5
Woman higher educational level than man	3578	16.7
Salary		
Man and woman have the same salary	4482	20.9
Man has a better salary	13,344	62.3
Woman has a better salary	3598	16.8
Homeownership status		
Rent	14,812	69.1
Own	6612	30.9
Place of residence		
Municipalities <30,000 inhabitants	15,820	73.8
Municipalities ≥30,000 inhabitants	5604	26.2

Abbreviation: Tsm, time since migration.

Source: Authors' own calculations using the Swiss population register, Structural Survey, and income register (2011–2014).



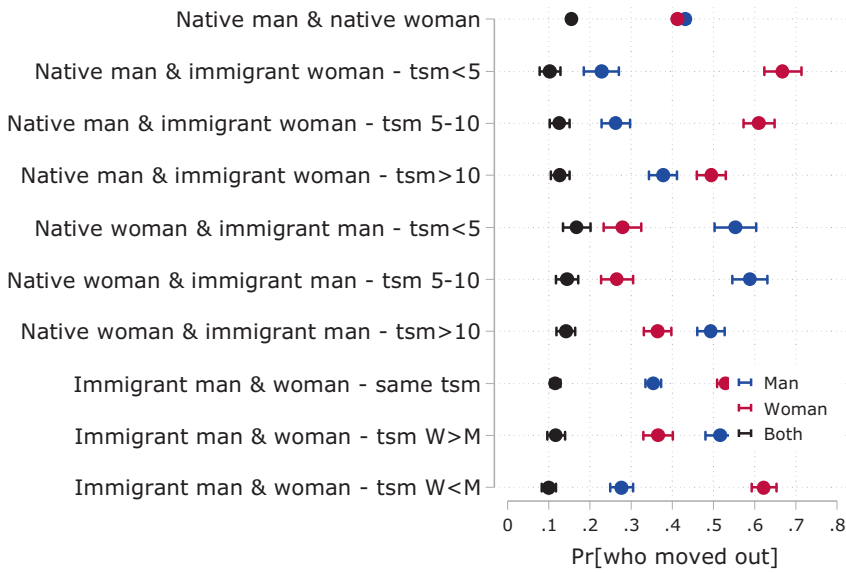
**FIGURE 1** Probability (with 95% confidence intervals) of moving out of the joint home upon separation by household composition: gender and migration status. The model controls for the presence of children, partnership status, age, education, and salary differences between ex-partners, homeownership, and place of residence. *Source:* Authors' own calculations using the Swiss population register, Structural survey, and Income register (2011–2014). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

(among native men and immigrant women households) and 18% (among native women and immigrant men households).

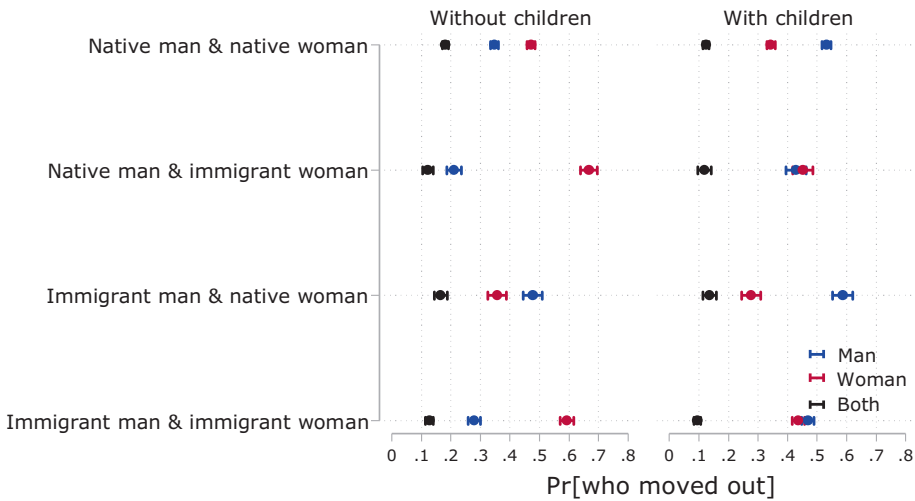
Among households composed of two native partners, men and women were equally likely to leave the family home upon separation. This dynamic contrasts with that of mixed couples, where the immigrant ex-partner was disproportionately more likely to leave the family home. The likelihood of moving out was almost identical for male- and female-immigrants partnered with Swiss natives. In fact, the immigrant partner was about 20 percentage points more likely to leave the family home compared to their native ex-partner, regardless of gender. In households with two immigrant partners, women's likelihood of moving out was 15% greater than that of men.

Figure 2 shows whether the time spent in the country alters individuals' chances of staying in the joint home at separation. The results for immigrant women partnered with native men are unambiguous: the longer the woman lived in the country, the more likely she was to stay in the joint home following separation. This picture resembles that of immigrant men partnered with native women, although we did not find a clear gradient over time. Nevertheless, even after more than 10 years in the country, the immigrant partner was still more likely than the native partner to move out of the joint home (12% more for women and 14% for men) after separation.

When both ex-partners were born abroad, the model accounted for which one, the male or the female, spent more time in the country. We found that the person who migrated first to Switzerland was more likely to remain in the family home upon separation. However, this association was not symmetrical for men and women. A woman who had lived in the country longer than a man was 16 percentage points more likely to stay in the family home, while a man who



**FIGURE 2** Probability (with 95% confidence intervals) of moving out of the joint home upon separation by household composition: gender, migration status, and time since migration. The model controls for the presence of children, partnership status, age, education, and salary differences between ex-partners, homeownership, and place of residence. Tsm, time since migration. *Source:* Authors' own calculations using the Swiss population register, Structural survey, and Income register (2011–2014). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**FIGURE 3** Probability of moving of the joint home upon separation, the interaction between household composition, and the presence of children. The model controls for partnership status, age, education, and salary differences between ex-partners, homeownership, and place of residence. *Source:* Authors' own calculations using the Swiss population register, Structural survey, and Income register (2011–2014). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

had spent more time in the country increased his chances of staying by 34 percentage points. Additional gender asymmetry was observed among foreign-born couples who migrated to Switzerland at the same time. In these couples, women were more likely to move out of the joint home upon separation than men. Moreover, the effect of covariates was consistent with what

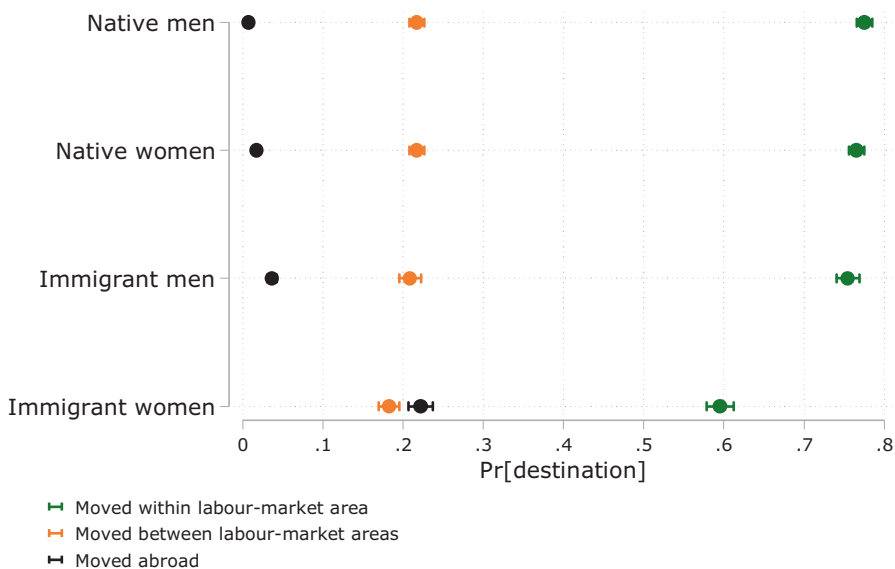
we know from previous studies: the older, better-educated, and better-paid ex-partner was more likely to remain in the joint home after separation.

Figure 3 shows the probability of moving out by parenthood status. Men were more likely to stay, and women were more likely to move if the former couple was formed of two native partners and did not have children. In similar households with resident children, the woman was more likely to stay and the man to move. This dynamic contrasts with that of immigrant and immigrant–native mixed couples. Immigrant women (either partnered with a native or an immigrant man) were significantly more likely to move upon separation when there were no children. When children were present, these differences disappeared; both men's (native or immigrant) and women's likelihood of moving was around 45%. Among male-immigrant/female-native couples, the male-immigrant ex-partner was more likely to leave, regardless of the presence of children, although the gap in the probability of moving between men and women was larger when children were present in the household.

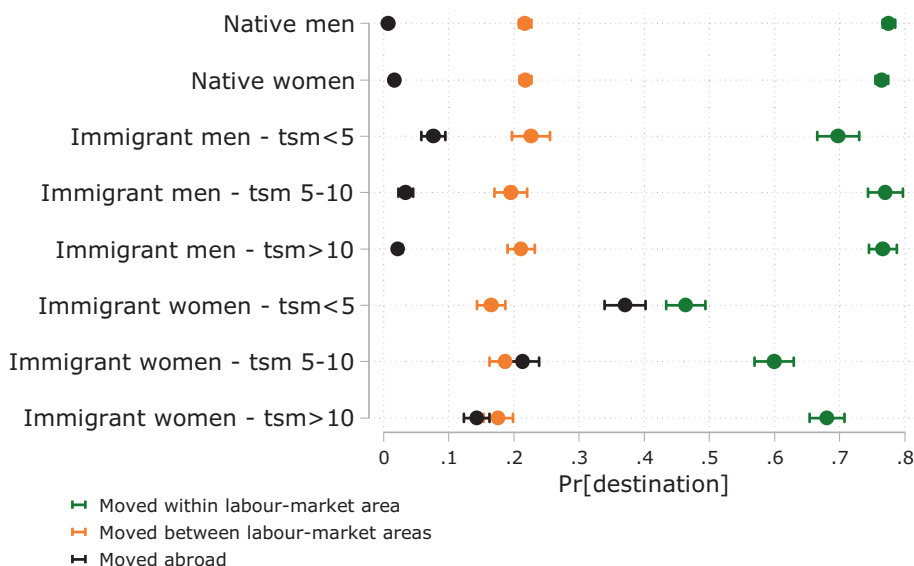
## Destination of moves

For the distance moved, we estimated the probability of moving to three destinations among movers: within labor-market areas, between labor-market areas, and moving abroad. The person who moved out was most likely to relocate over a short distance, that is, within the same labor-market area (Figure 4). This pattern held for natives and immigrants of both genders. The second most common outcome was a move between labor-market areas. There were hardly any differences in the distance moved across nativity groups. One exception, however, was the highest propensity of female immigrants to move abroad (22% vs. 4% among men).

Although short-distance relocation was the most frequent outcome for all, we found a clear gradient by time since migration on the likelihood of moving over different distances (Figure 5). Again, immigrant women were the most affected by this; the longer they had lived in



**FIGURE 4** Probability (with 95% confidence intervals) of moving over different distances by gender and migration status. The model controls for age, presence of children, partnership status, educational level, salary, and place of residence. *Source:* Authors' own calculations using the Swiss population register, Structural survey, and Income register (2011–2014). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



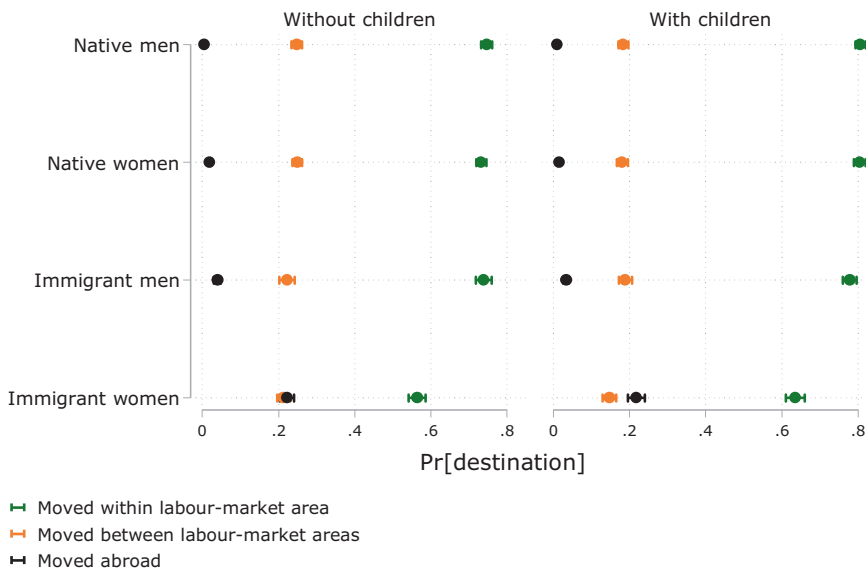
**FIGURE 5** Probability (with 95% confidence intervals) of moving over different distances by gender and migration status, and time since immigration. The model controls for age, presence of children, partnership status, educational level, income, and place of residence. Tsm, time since migration. *Source:* Authors' own calculations using the Swiss population register, Structural survey, and Income register (2011–2014). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Switzerland, the more likely they were to move a shorter distance. Immigrant women who lived in the country for less than 5 years moved within the same labor-market area about half the time; the probability increased to two-thirds for those who arrived more than 10 years ago. The probability of moving between labor-market areas remained stable over time. In contrast, the likelihood of moving abroad for immigrant women decreased sharply with time spent in the country, ranging from 37% among those who arrived less than 5 years ago to 14% among those who stayed for more than 10 years. Although much smaller than for immigrant women, immigrant men also showed some differences in the propensity to move over different distances by time since migration. They were slightly more likely to move abroad in the first 5 years, and more likely to move a shorter distance when they had lived in Switzerland for more than 5 years.

The person who moved out upon separation tended to relocate a shorter distance when the former couple had children compared to childless ex-couples (Figure 6). Parents' likelihood of moving within the same labor-market area was about 7 percentage points higher than that of non-parents. By contrast, parents were less likely to relocate between labor-market areas; the propensity to move abroad remained unchanged. This pattern was similar for all groups, although having children only increased the likelihood of moving a short distance by 4 percentage points for immigrant men. Furthermore, the higher propensity of immigrant women to move abroad applied equally to mothers and non-mothers.

### Additional analyses

We further examined whether housing outcomes vary by homeownership status, migrant's country of birth, and couples' income composition (Figures SA3–SA5). First, we examined who moved out among renters and homeowners separately (i.e., Model 1 with an interaction term between couple types and homeownership status) to make sure that sole ownership of the home



**FIGURE 6** Probability (with 95% confidence intervals) of moving over different distances by gender, migration status, and presence of children. The model controls for age, presence of children, partnership status, educational level, salary, and place of residence. *Source:* Authors' own calculations using the Swiss population register, Structural survey, and Income register (2011–2014). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.com)]

(presumably most often by the native partner) did not drive the results. Although there are practically no restrictions on access to homeownership by foreigners with a residence permit, this statistic differs considerably depending on the nationality of the household members: 44% of Swiss households owned their home compared to 27% of mixed Swiss-foreign national households, and only 13% of foreign national households (FSO, 2023). We tested whether immigrants were still more likely to move out when the home was rented. We found that the residential outcomes of renters were almost identical to those of homeowners (Figure SA3). Second, we distinguished couples by country of birth (EU vs. non-EU countries) of the ex-partners. Non-EU immigrants, especially women, are underrepresented in (the more prestigious sectors of) the labor market and are more likely to have migrated for family reasons, which likely translates into lower resources. Figure SA4 shows that among immigrant–native couples, immigrants from EU and non-EU countries of both genders were more likely to move out, which further supports the migration status hypothesis. However, the probability of moving out of the family home at separation was higher among non-EU immigrants (men and women). In immigrant households, the results indicated an advantage for EU men: they were more likely to stay whether they were in a couple with an EU or non-EU women. By contrast, non-EU men moved out just as much as their female immigrant partner, regardless of origin. Third, although all models control for the economic resources of both partners, research showed that relative income has different effects for men and women (Mulder et al., 2012); this effect may also vary by migration status. We focused on economically homogamous couples (Figure SA5) and found that even when matching on salary, immigrants in a mixed partnership were still more likely to move out, although the association was no longer symmetrical. The extent of the gap was reduced for immigrant women partnered with native men. The pattern held for both low-salary households, and medium- to high-salary households (not shown).



## DISCUSSION

This paper is the first to consider migration status as an important dimension of intra-household bargaining and housing outcomes following separation. We estimated the probability of moving out of the joint home and the distance of a move among movers in immigrant, native, and immigrant–native ex-couples. The person leaving the joint home after separation was expected to have fewer resources and lower bargaining power than his or her former partner. In addition, a person who has moved over a longer distance is thought to have had less influence on the family's place of residence, again reflecting lower resources and a weaker bargaining position within the household. We examined these hypotheses by combining rich administrative data with a nationally representative survey in Switzerland, a country where the prevalence of mixed marriages is higher than in other European countries. The results suggest that the distribution of resources and arguably bargaining power within immigrant–native mixed couples is unfavorable to the immigrant ex-partner at the time of separation.

In line with the gender hypothesis and previous research on majority populations, we found that women were more likely to move out of the joint home upon separation than men among immigrant households. We did not find such differences in households composed of two native ex-partners; men and women were equally likely to move out. However, this result is not in contradiction with the international literature: when women from different migration backgrounds were pooled together women were slightly more likely to move than men in Switzerland, too. Instead, this new finding suggests that the gendered pattern found in previous studies differs across population subgroups.

By bringing in the specific case of immigrant–native mixed couples, we considered an additional marker of intra-couple distribution of resources and bargaining power: migration status. The results confirmed the migration status hypothesis. Among immigrant–native mixed couples, the immigrant ex-partner was significantly more likely to move out of the joint home upon separation. This pattern was the same for female and male immigrants, meaning that the role of migration status prevails over gender. This may be due to a larger gap in (non-)economic resources between immigrants and natives than between men and women. Although we found no evidence for the intersection of gender and migration status hypothesis in mixed couples, uneven gaps in the propensity to move between men and women in immigrant and native households provided partial support for this hypothesis. In addition, the results showed a gradient in the propensity to stay in the joint home by country of birth of the ex-partners: natives were the most likely to remain in the family home, followed by EU migrants and non-EU migrants. Residential outcomes of immigrant households from different origins (e.g., ex-couples formed of an EU and non-EU partner) brought in even more complexities, suggesting an advantage for EU men (Figure SA4). However, whether this is a reflection of the lower resources of certain disadvantaged groups or a more complex manifestation of the power dynamics induced by the way gender intersects with migration status would require further investigations.

Analyzing the distance moved revealed some gender differences, with immigrant women being five times as likely as immigrant men to move abroad following separation, regardless of parental status. Different migration processes for men and women can explain this pattern. Women are more likely than men to migrate through the family reunification program, and therefore, their conditions of residence are more likely to be linked to their partner (NCCR—On the Move, 2023). Upon separation, some immigrant women may have no choice but to leave the country. Similarly, if the ex-partner was the main reason for moving to and staying in Switzerland, separation could affect the desire to stay. Tied movers are expected to have lower bargaining power, and as we know from research on family migration, women are much more likely than men to be in this situation (Cooke, 2008). Given how often immigrant women move abroad upon separation stresses the importance of considering this outcome to better

understand the disruptive effect of a separation on immigrants' lives. This is another novelty of this paper.

The results also showed a clear time component in post-separation residential mobility, again, especially for immigrant women. The longer they lived in the country, the higher the chances that they stayed in the family home upon separation. When they moved, recently arrived female immigrants were more likely to move abroad following separation compared to long-term stayers. The role of time was less obvious for immigrant men, who showed only a slight increase in the probability to move abroad during the first 5 years in the country. We found similar trends by time since migration for EU and non-EU migrants in a mixed union (results available upon request). This suggests that the higher probability of moving (abroad) for women in the early years was not strictly due to constraints that may restrict the right of residence to non-EU migrants at the time of separation. Instead, the result is in line with the local ties hypothesis, suggesting that immigrant women accumulate more resources and develop more locational ties and bargaining power over time compared to immigrant men.

The intersection of parenthood and migration status also revealed specific bargaining dynamics. Social norms that favor mother's residential continuity with the child(ren) weigh heavily on this outcome: mothers were significantly more likely to stay in the joint home than childless women in all family configurations. The difference was, however, not symmetrical: the gap in moving propensity was larger between immigrant mothers and non-mothers than between native mothers and non-mothers. Although native mothers stay in the joint home more often than their ex-partners after a separation, immigrant mothers did not.

Notwithstanding several new insights, this study has a number of limitations. First, the assumption was made that moving out upon separation resulted from a loss in the negotiation process, which might not always be the case. In fact, the principle of fairness points to a reverse relationship favoring residential continuity for the ex-partner with the least resources in order not to further disadvantage them. Moreover, although studies showed that the person leaving the family home is likely to suffer a loss of housing quality (Mikolai & Kulu, 2018), housing conditions following the move were unknown, and we cannot exclude that some individuals moved for better housing. Nevertheless, the results clearly indicated that the person with more resources was more likely to remain in the home following separation, which is in line with the bargaining power model.

Second, like prior research, this study did not have a direct measure of bargaining power. Instead, we relied on different dimensions of heterogamy, identified in the literature as significant determinants of decision-making by couples from a negotiation perspective (Bertocchi et al., 2014). However, even after controlling for the couple's relative resources, migration status and gender still mattered in household decision-making processes. This either means that there are resources that correlate with migration status and gender that we did not control for and predict housing outcomes (e.g., who moved in first to the joint home is an important resource that we cannot measure with these data) or that resources have uneven impacts on power dynamics for men and women and for natives and immigrants. As such, the way gender and migration status affect the household decision-making process should be understood as the interaction of both uneven resources and bargaining power; the two are indistinguishable in this study.

Third, we cannot rule out the possibility that unobserved characteristics determine both bargaining power/resources and one's likelihood of entering into a mixed partnership. Studies generally showed that social and economic integration is positively associated with the likelihood of marrying a native partner (Potarca & Bernardi, 2018). Immigrants who arrived at a younger age, who spent more time in the country, had good language skills, and were highly educated were more likely to intermarry (Chiswick & Houseworth, 2011; Kulu & Hannemann, 2019). This suggests that, if anything, immigrants entered a marriage or

cohabiting relationship in an advantageous bargaining position (compared to those entering an endogamous union). This would not challenge the results.

Divorce is an undesirable life event with major consequences on individuals' well-being. These consequences are gendered, with women generally faring worse than men in terms of housing and economic outcomes, while men seem to be worse off in other domains, such as health (Leopold, 2018). How this event affects immigrants in different life domains is much less documented. A higher propensity to move out at separation for immigrants may only exacerbate their already poor housing conditions. Long-term settlement plans in the host country may be completely disrupted for those whose separation results in the loss of their residence permit. Future research is needed to disentangle the effects of the migration process and legal status from those of origin or ethnicity in bargaining processes. More importantly, the complex intersection of gender, migration status, and origin calls for closer investigations of how they affect household decision-making and generate specific experiences for immigrant subgroups across the life course.

This paper contributes to the family migration literature by offering new insights into the interaction of gender, migration status, as well as household resources, and bargaining power in family migration decisions. Results suggest that migration status brings in a new dimension of bargaining within separating couples, which affects the gender-specific residential mobility outcomes reported in previous studies. Although family migration decisions are generally biased toward the human capital of men, evidence shows the advantage of the native partner in immigrant–native couples.

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## ORCID

Julie Lacroix  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4482-1850>

Júlia Mikolai  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7733-6659>

Hill Kulu  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7936-8259>

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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