

And they all lived happily ever after: evidence for status-exchange among mixed-nativity couples in Italy

Raffaele Guetto & Davide Azzolini

The aim of our paper is to provide empirical evidence supportive of the hypothesis of status exchange as a key mechanism underlying the formation of mixed-nativity marriages in Italy.

We use cross-sectional data from the Italian Labour Force Survey (2005-2012) and apply multinomial logistic regression models to analyse Italian men and foreign-born women probabilities of crossing national-origin boundaries (Fig. 1). We find that mixed-nativity couples strongly deviate from the standard pattern of assortative mating based on educational homogamy and a limited age difference between the spouses.

We interpret these findings as an evidence of status exchange. High-educated immigrant women might conceive marrying a low-educated native man as a potential means to overcome their high risks of socio-economic marginalization, e.g. through the acquisition of EU citizenship. Low-educated Italian men might be inclined to enter unions with Non-Western immigrant women as a consequence of their growing difficulty in finding a partner in the native marriage market.

To assess the potential role of citizenship on mixed-nativity marriages in Italy we adopted a Difference-in-Differences approach and provide evidence that Romania experienced a marked decrease in the number of women who married an Italian man after the access to the European Union (1st January 2007), compared to other Eastern European countries.

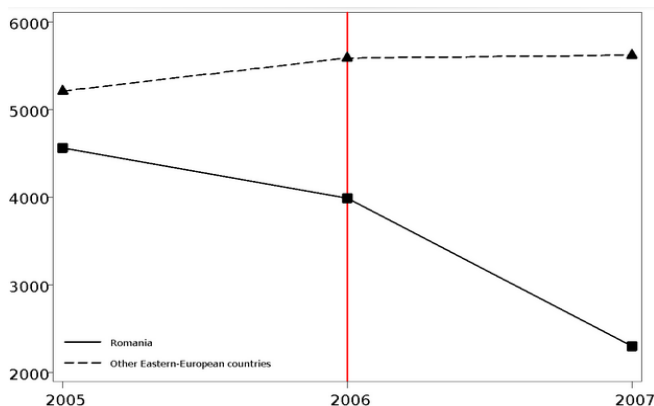


Fig. 2 Trends in mixed-nativity marriages (foreign-born women and Italian men)

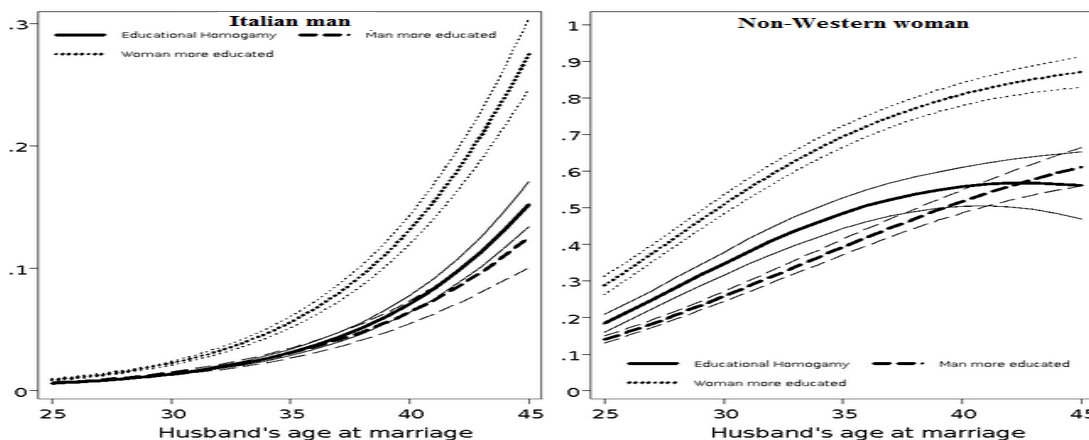


Fig. 1 Probability of marrying a Non-Western woman for Italian men (first panel) and probability of marrying an Italian man for Non-Western women (second panel), rather than a partner of the same group, by age at marriage of the husband and by educational sorting of the couple. Models include both partners' age at marriage, region of residence of the couple and year fixed effects



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