

# **Ethnic differences in couples' employment and the transition to parenthood in Belgium**

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## **1 Introduction**

In light of the increased female educational and labour force participation and the declining fertility rates observed in many developed countries during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studying family formation and its relation to (female) employment has become an established research tradition. The dual breadwinner model was initially thought to hamper the transition to parenthood (Becker, 1981; Lesthaeghe, 2010). Later studies found that the link between employment and first births is highly dependent on the normative and political context considered (Brewster & Rindfuss, 2000; Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015). However, despite the increasing diversity of most societies, we lack insight in household labour division and its relation to family formation among population subgroups with a migrant background. A large body of research indicates differences in socio-economic opportunities (Heath, Rethon, & Kilpi, 2008; Münz, 2007) and attitudes toward female labour force participation (de Valk, 2008; Huschek, de Valk, & Liefbroer, 2011) between majority and minority populations. These differing opportunities and preferences can be expected to reflect on the relation between household employment and family formation.

Using a prospective linkage between the Belgian census data and birth registers we study childless couples with a native Belgian, Southern European, Moroccan and Turkish migration background in 2001 and 2011 to see how their household breadwinner models relate to first births in the subsequent five years (2002-2005 and 2012-2015). Our study contributes to the current literature in several ways. First, we provide insight into the household division of paid work and family formation among migrant families. Previous studies have increased our understanding of socio-economic opportunities and attitudes among men and women with a migrant background. In addition, recent research has shown population heterogeneity in the link between female employment and fertility by education and migrant background (Wood & Neels, 2017). We build upon these findings and study whether there is population heterogeneity by origin group in the association labour force participation on the household level and fertility. Second, this study employs a couple perspective to test hypotheses on the household division of paid labour in relation to the transition to parenthood. This is a growing, yet limited, field of research and in contrast to the number of studies focusing on the general population, our understanding of these dynamics among groups with a migration background is particularly limited. Including couple information is particularly important among couples with a migrant background given strongly varying profiles depending on partner choices of men and women with a migrant background. Third, by studying

how household breadwinner models and their relation to family formation have evolved between 2001 and 2011, we are able to assess whether the labour force position of couples with a migrant background have further converged to those of native Belgian couples and whether fertility patterns of different breadwinner models have evolved accordingly.

## **2 Background**

### *2.1 Labour force participation of couples with a migrant background*

Due to the increasing educational and labour force participation of women, the dual breadwinner model has become the dominant form of division of paid labour among couples in Belgium and is supported through a range of policies that aim to reconcile work and family life which facilitates employment of both partners before and after family formation (Population Council, 2006; Raz-Yurovich, 2014). However, previous studies in Belgium and Europe indicate that subgroups within a population, such as groups characterised by a history of migration, tend to differ from the majority population in terms of attitudes toward female labour force participation and opportunities to participate in the labour market which may manifest itself in a deviation from the dual breadwinner norm observed among the native Belgian population. This study focusses in particular on Southern European, Moroccan and Turkish migrant groups, who originated from labour migration in from the 1950s until the early 1970s.

With regards to gender role attitudes, particularly first and second generation migrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin are found to have more traditional gender role expectations compared to natives in Belgium (Huschek et al., 2011; Pessin & Arpino, 2018) and other European countries (Bernhardt, Goldscheider, & Goldscheider, 2007; de Valk, 2008; Pessin & Arpino, 2018; Röder & Mühlau, 2014; Spierings, 2015). Regarding socio-economic opportunities, previous research has shown that first generation immigrants and their children still encounter substantial disadvantages in the educational system and on the labour market (Baert, Heiland, & Korenman, 2016; Crul, 2013; Heath et al., 2008; Münz, 2007; Neels, 2000; Phalet, 2007; Timmerman, Vanderwaeren, & Crul, 2003).

Given the socio-economic disadvantages often encountered by couples with a migrant background and the differing attitudes toward female labour force participations among first and second-generation migrants, we would expect couples with a migrant background to differ from the dual breadwinner predominance of couples with two native Belgian partners. However, even within the group of couples with a migration background, we would expect to find differences by the composition of the couple depending on whether couples are mixed or homogamous and whether the couple resulted from marriage migration (Lievens, 1999).

### *2.2 Transition to parenthood*

Early theories on household labour force participation and fertility linked the declining fertility rates to the increase in female educational attainment and employment through increased opportunity costs (Becker, 1981) or a shift in values (Lesthaeghe & Van de Kaa, 1986). As a result, these theories assumed

that female employment and dual earner models decreased fertility. However, the decline in real wages observed since the 1980s put pressure on this view as single-earner couples became more vulnerable to job loss or unstable employment of the main earner (Oppenheimer, 1988). In a context where labour market uncertainty has increased and real men's wages have declined (Oppenheimer, Kalmijn, & Lim, 1997), where attitudes have shifted toward gender equality (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015) and where a wide range of work-family reconciliation policies are available (Raz-Yurovich, 2014), we expect that dual breadwinner models will yield the highest risks of entering into parenthood.

However, given the different societal position and normative context of couples with a migrant background, we expect the link between household employment and fertility to differ between population subgroups. More specifically, we theorize that the vulnerable socio-economic position of non-European migrants and their descendants may increase the opportunity costs of outsourcing childcare so that it exceeds the advantages of an additional source of income. Unstable and uncertain employment may also lead migrant couples to look for alternative ways to reduce the uncertainty about their future by emphasizing other roles (Friedman, Hechter, & Kanazawa, 1994). This may be a particularly attractive strategy within a normative context that has more traditional attitudes toward female employment compared to the majority population (Huschek et al., 2011). Hence, we expect that the male breadwinner model will yield the highest first birth risks among couples with a partner of Turkish or Moroccan origin. We expect more limited differences among couples with a Southern European partner given the limited differences with respect to opportunities and preferences compared to native Belgians.

### **3 Data and methods**

#### *3.1 Data*

We draw on the 2001 and 2011 census data and combine these with birth registrations for the following five years. The Belgian census data provide detailed information of all residents legally residing in the country, including on fertility histories, employment status, educational attainment, marital status and first nationality. This study has a prospective research design and studies the relation between a household's division of paid labour in a given year (2001 and 2011) and the risk of entry into parenthood during the subsequent five years (2002-2005 and 2012-2015). We focus on couples consisting of a man and woman both aged 15-49 and not enrolled in education at the time of the census. We select couples that consist of two partners of native Belgian origin (first nationality of both parents is Belgian) and couples that consist of at least one partner of Southern European, Moroccan or Turkish origin (they or at least one parent have a Southern European, Moroccan or Turkish first nationality).

#### *3.2 Method*

We estimate discrete-time event-history models for the transition to a first birth. The independent variable of interest in this study is the couple's division of paid labour in 2001 and 2011. We divide

couples into four categories: 1) both partners are employed (dual breadwinner model), 2) only the male partner is employed (male breadwinner model), 3) only the female partner is employed (female breadwinner model), 4) both partners are unemployed (no breadwinner model). We control for educational attainment, marital status and the age difference between the female and the male partner and the ethnic composition of the couple. The baseline hazard function is allowed to vary by education and ethnic composition. The ethnic composition of the couple exists of 11 combinations of the woman's and the man's origin and accounts for the origin (based on the first nationality of the partner and his/her parents) and generation. For both censuses, we estimate two discrete-time event history models. Model 1 assessed the association between breadwinner models in 2001/2011 and first birth hazards in the following five years. Model 2 studies to what extent this association between the couple's division of paid labour and first birth risks varies by ethnic composition of the couple.

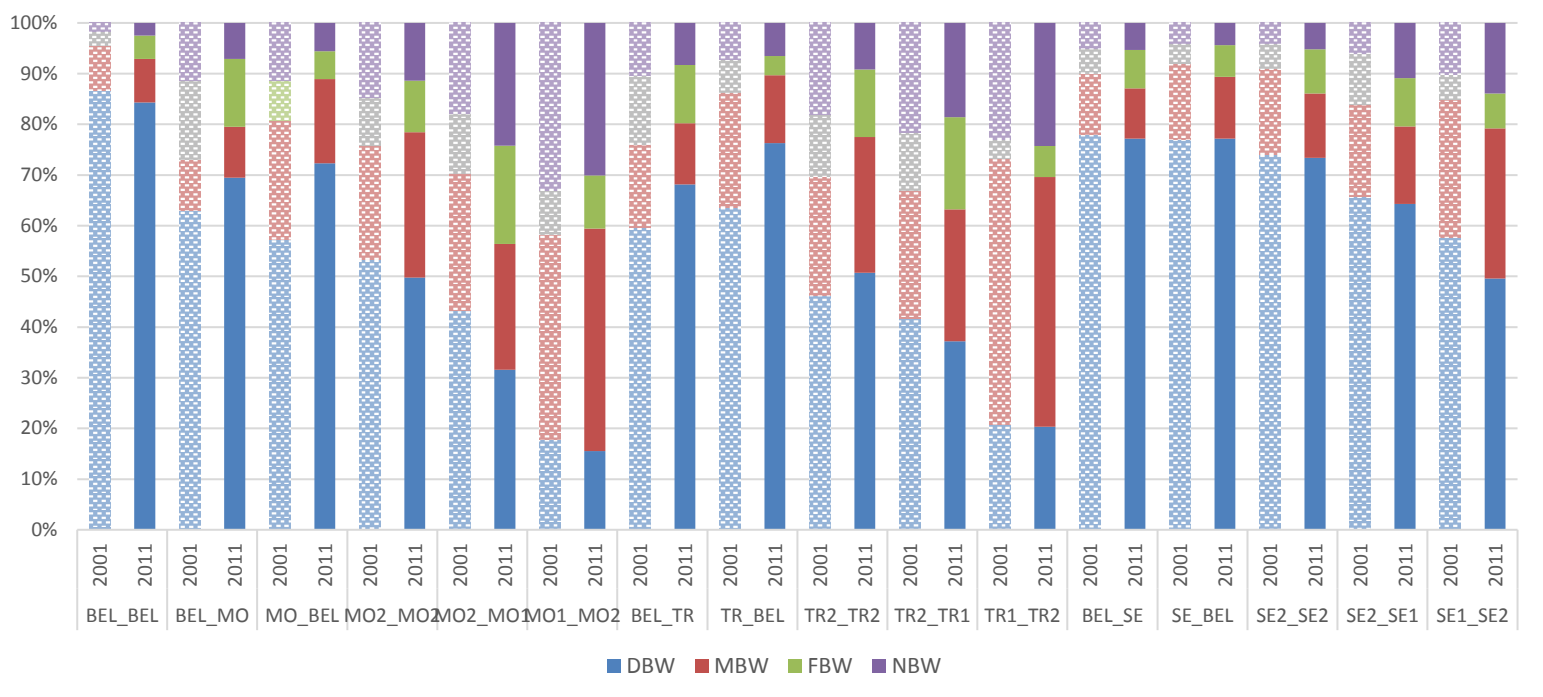
#### **4 Discussion**

In a first step, we studied the division of paid labour on a household level among native Belgian couples and couples with at least one partner of Southern European, Turkish or Moroccan origin in 2001. Descriptive results (figure 1 in appendix) showed that the majority (86,76%) of native Belgian couples adhere to the dual breadwinner model and that the remainder can be found in the male breadwinner model. We find similar results among couples with at least one Southern European partner, but a much greater percentage of male breadwinner and no breadwinner models among couples with at least one partner of Turkish or Moroccan origin. The results (table 1 in appendix) showed that the dual breadwinner model is associated with the highest first birth risks among native Belgian couples and couples with at least one Southern European partner. However, this pattern does not recur among couples with at least one partner of Turkish or Moroccan origin where the transition to parenthood is often most likely for couples adhering to the male breadwinner model.

In a second step, we repeat the same analyses for 2011 and compare the results to those of 2001 in order to see how the household division of paid labour has changed. The comparison (figure 1 in appendix) shows that the percentage of dual breadwinner couples has strongly increased among mixed Belgian-Moroccan and Belgian-Turkish couples. Among ethnically homogamous couples, we do not observe the same increase. In some cases, such as couples consisting of a second generation woman and a first generation men, we even see a decrease in dual breadwinner couples in favour of the female breadwinner model. As the last segment of this paper, we study whether the association between breadwinner models and the transition to parenthood among majority and minority population couples have become more similar or more divergent over time in line with the evolution in the household division of paid work.

### 5 Appendix

**Figure 1** Distribution of couple-years by origin group and breadwinner model, Belgium 2001; 2011  
 (Source: Belgian 2001 census & Belgian 2011 census).



**Table 1** Exponentiated coefficients (odds-ratios) from logit models of first birth, Belgium 2002-2005 (Source: Belgian 2001 census & register data).

	<b>Model 1</b>					
	MBW		FBW		NBW	
	e(b)	sig	e(b)	sig	e(b)	sig
<b>Main effect</b>						
. Main effect	.926	**	.844	***	.809	***
	<i>Model parameters</i>					
<b>-2LL</b>	319956.8					
<b>df</b>	125					
<b>BIC</b>	321621.8					
	<b>Model 2</b>					
	MBW		FBW		NBW	
	e(b)	sig	e(b)	sig	e(b)	sig
<b>Main effect</b>						
. Main effect	.881	***	.841	**	.781	***
<b>Differential</b>						
. BEL MO	1.464	*	1.202		1.197	
. MO BEL	1.443	*	1.345		1.309	
. MO2 MO2	2.093	**	1.289		1.394	
. MO2 MO1	1.512	**	1.017		1.043	
. MO1 MO2	1.068		.892		.735	
. BEL TR	1.824	**	1.276		1.975	**
. TR BEL	1.117		.657		1.958	
. TR2 TR2	1.331		.880		1.023	
. TR2 TR1	1.196		.885		1.221	
. TR1 TR2	2.263	*	1.963		3.027	**
. BEL SE	1.219		1.209		1.173	
. SE BEL	.966		.989		.992	
. SE2 SE2	1.078		.985		.911	
. SE2 SE1	1.209		.602		.789	
. SE1 SE2	.709		.595		1.197	
	<i>Model parameters</i>					
<b>-2LL</b>	319888					
<b>df</b>	170					
<b>BIC</b>	322152.5					

Controlling for: baseline (linear, quadratic, cubic), origin (16 household ethnic compositions), baseline\*origin, education (9 educational attainments), baseline\*education, education\*breadwinner model, age difference between partners, marital status.

Source: Belgian 2001 census & register data, calculations by authors

Significance levels: NS (-),  $p < .10$  (\*),  $p < .05$  (\*\*),  $p < .01$  (\*\*\*)

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