

## Unravelling binational partnerships in the UK: the characteristics of EU-born nationals

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### Abstract 258 words

Existing literature has investigated the characteristics of binational partnerships in a small number of European countries, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, but such research has not been replicated in the UK context. Understanding the prevalence and characteristics of binational partnerships is a critical policy issue in the UK context, as the country edges closer to a public referendum on its membership in the European Union. In the event of a so-called 'Brexit' the rights and responsibilities of non-UK, European nationals and their families could be significantly affected. Against this context, this paper draws on the 2011 Census for England and Wales in order to investigate the characteristics of non-UK European nationals resident in England and Wales. The preliminary findings show that just over four per cent of individuals living in England and Wales in 2011 are Europe-born nationals; almost two-thirds are employed; just over half are single never-married; and approximately half of them have at least one dependent child. About one-third of men and one-fifth of women in this group were partnered with a British-born individual. Such findings contribute to our understanding of the current situation of binational partnerships in the UK, which can in turn inform our understanding of their potential situation in the future if a 'Brexit' occurs. The next part of the analysis draws on the latest wave of the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (Understanding Society) in order to explore in greater detail the demographic, socio-economic and health characteristics of such individuals who are in partnerships with British individuals or with non-British individuals from other European countries.

### Extended Abstract

#### Introduction and Background

Existing research has noted that 'love is often a key factor in migration decisions' (Van Mol et al, 2015, abstract), and the outcome of such decisions can often result in bi-national partnerships among individuals. Partnerships between individuals of different ethnicity or nationality have frequently been used as an indicator of social integration (Qian and Lichter, 2007) and have been identified as forming an intrinsic part of intra-European migration (Van Mol et al, 2015). Most of the existing literature focuses on marriages between partners from the native population with those from a minority ethnic group, usually from outside Europe. For example, there has been some recent research focussing on European bi-national marriages (see for example, Koelet and de Valk, 2014; de Valk and Medrano, 2014) but amongst this sparse literature, the UK is largely absent.

Understanding the characteristics of binational partnerships is particularly critical in the British context, as the country is edging closer to a public referendum on its membership in the European Union. Should the country decide to leave the EU (an event described as Brexit in the public discourse), the impact of social policies on the rights and responsibilities of non-UK, European nationals in the UK could be significant. More specifically, those families with European bi-national couples, might be especially affected in at least three ways. Firstly, non-UK partners in bi-national couples might be affected in terms of their eligibility to stay in the UK, directly impacting on the ability of the partners to stay together in the UK. Secondly, non-UK partners might also be affected in terms of their ability to maintain economic activity in the UK, thereby impacting on the socio-economic position of the family. Finally, the nationality and citizenship status of the children of bi-national couples might become uncertain, affecting

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such children both in terms of their identity and from the perspective of their socio-economic status in the UK.

The proposed research aims to fill the evidence gap by shedding light on the prevalence of European intermarriage / partnership in the UK (i.e. unions between two partners of different European nationality). The research examines the number and composition of these partnerships, exploring the demographic (e.g. age, sex) and socio-economic characteristics (e.g. economic activity, type of employment) of both partners, as well as differentiating between those with and without children. The research also distinguishes between partners from the ‘old’ EU, defined as the EU-15, and the new ‘EU’, defined as more recent additions of countries to the European community such as Eastern European, Baltic and Balkan countries.

## Data and Methodology

This research involves secondary data analysis of the microdata files from the *2011 Census of England and Wales* along with data from the latest wave of the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (*Understanding Society*). The 2011 Census household file consists of records of all individuals within a 5% sample of all households at local authority geographical level, providing person and household level data on 245 variables for over 2 million individuals<sup>1</sup>. The empirical analysis using the Census will be supplemented at the next stage of the research with analysis of Understanding Society, a nationally-representative survey of over 100,000 individuals living in over 40,000 households in the UK.

## Results

Table 1 below shows the percentage of individuals in England and Wales by sex and country of birth. The majority of the population (more than 86 per cent) were both in the UK, with a small minority (just over 4 per cent of men and about 4.4 per cent of women) born in other European countries (with the largest sub-proportion coming from Ireland, followed by Germany and Poland).

**Table 1: Percentage of individuals in England and Wales by sex and country of birth (2011)**

	Male	Female	All
Born in the UK	86.54	86.13	86.33
Born in Ireland	0.67	0.79	0.73
Born in EU	4.12	4.44	4.29
Born outside the EU	8.67	8.64	8.65
Total	100 (1,383,511)	100 (1,430,287)	100 (2,813,798)

Source: 2011 Census of England and Wales Microdata

Turning to explore the economic activity status among the EU-born population in England and Wales, Table 2 shows that almost two-thirds (65 per cent) were employed, with less than 10 per cent being retired and almost 19 per cent not working while being in education or being unemployed (just over 3 per cent of the total 19 per cent). Some interesting gender differences permeate these economic activity patterns: men were more likely than women to be employed (72 compared to 59 per cent), while women were more likely than men to be retired (12 compared to 7 per cent). Similar proportions were not working or long-term sick. A stark gender difference can be seen in terms of the category of ‘looking after the home’, where more than 8 per cent of women but less than 1 per cent of men are located.

**Table 2: Among EU-born in England and Wales, percentage by sex and economic activity status (2011)**

	Male	Female	All
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<sup>1</sup> This extended abstract uses data from the 5% sample of the 2011 Census available from the Data Archive. Further analysis will be conducted during the next three months using the restricted access 10% sample which is only accessible in a secure setting via the Office of National Statistics.

Employed	71.69	59.01	64.95
Retired	7.08	11.69	9.53
Not working	18.51	19.26	18.91
Looking after home	0.71	8.10	4.65
Long term sick	1.98	1.94	1.96
Total	100 (50,563)	100 (57,332)	100 (107,895)

Source: 2011 Census of England and Wales Microdata

In terms of their marital status, approximately half of all EU-born individuals in England and Wales are single never married, with 37 per cent being married, 9 per cent divorced or separated and almost 4 per cent being widowed. Men are more likely than women to be single, while women are slightly more likely than men to be divorced (11 compared to 8 per cent), and almost 6 times more likely to be widowed (6 compared to 1 per cent). Such patterns in marital status reflect a relatively young structure of this sub-population overall, which is directly related to economic migration, with a larger proportion of EU-born women compared to men (not shown here) staying in England and Wales into their later life. In addition, preliminary analysis shows that among male EU-born nationals who were partnered, approximately half of their partners came from an EU country (not UK), while one-third of their partners came from the UK. By contrast, among women EU-born nationals, about two-thirds came from an EU country compared to about one-fifth born in the UK. These preliminary findings are in line with the limited research in this field using migration data (see Gaspar 2012).

**Table 3: Among EU-born in England and Wales, percentage by sex and marital status (2011)**

	Male	Female	All
Single never married	54.52	46.40	50.24
Married/ civil partn.	36.52	36.47	36.49
Divorced/ separated	7.56	11.12	9.44
Widowed	1.39	6.01	3.83
Total	100 (57,050)	100 (63,567)	100 (120,617)

Source: 2011 Census of England and Wales Microdata

Table 4 shows that almost half (48 per cent) of all EU-born nationals in England and Wales had no dependent children (aged under 16), compared to just under one-quarter (24 per cent) having one child, about 21 per cent having 2 children and 7 per cent having 3 children or more. There were few gender differences between men and women in this respect.

**Table 4: Among EU-born in England and Wales, percentage by sex and number of dependent children (2011)**

	Male	Female	All
No dependent children	47.48	48.15	47.84
1 dependent child	24.27	24.01	24.13
2 dependent children	21.04	20.47	20.73
3+ dependent children	7.21	7.37	7.30
Total	100 (18,420)	100 (22,034)	100 (40,454)

Source: 2011 Census of England and Wales Microdata

The next step of the analysis, which will be presented as part of this paper, draws on the secondary analysis of data from Understanding Society. It investigates the characteristics of partnerships between EU-born nationals and British nationals, including the composition of such families (eg. with or without dependent children); their demographic characteristics (eg. living arrangements, age); their health status (eg. self-reported general health); and their socio-economic circumstances (eg. none, one or both partners being economically active; receipt of income-related or universal state benefits).

## Discussion and conclusion

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This research provides important new evidence on the characteristics of non-UK, EU nationals in England and Wales, and contributes to our better understanding of the prevalence and characteristics of families, couples and children might be affected by the so-called 'Brexit'. The findings show that about 4 per cent of the England and Wales population comes from other European countries, with the largest groups coming from Ireland, followed by Germany and Poland. Such small overall level of non-native nationals from the EU is in line with findings in other countries (see for example de Valk and Medrano 2014). Reflecting patterns of economic migration, half of this sub-population in England and Wales is single never married; about two-thirds are employed (either part-time or full-time); and about half have at least one dependent child. Preliminary analysis also shows that about one-third of Europe-born men, and about one-fifth of Europe-born women in England and Wales are partnered with an individual is British-born. These findings indicate that, although relative to the British-born population the percentage of EU nationals is low, nevertheless in absolute terms, there are significant numbers both of Europe-born individuals and of binational partnerships or families with or without dependent children, whose rights and responsibilities could be affected by the UK's possible decision to exit the European Union.

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