

Marriages and same-sex civil partnerships in Italy: focus on the age-gap

Maura Simone, Antonella Guarneri, Claudia Iaccarino
Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT)

1. The age-gap

Some research analysed the age gap between spouses in mixed couples. These studies represent a situation where mixed marriages are usually more heterogamous relative to age (Elwert, 2020) and often characterized by a larger age gap between partners (Stamper Balistreri *et al.*, 2017).

Different assortative mating patterns define a sort of “bargaining” between foreign and native partners: former’ relative youth in exchange presumably of latter’ social status and economic security (Gabrielli *et al.*, 2016).

2. Data sources and general framework

The analysis has been carried out using data collected from the Survey on Marriages and the Survey on Civil Partnerships. The two surveys, conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), provide the official data of all marriages (religious and civil) and all same-sex civil partnerships (by gender of the partners: both males and both females) in all Italian municipalities. The marriages’ survey is conducted since 1926, while, starting from 2018, there is also the availability of the data by the individual survey of same-sex civil partnerships in Italy.

The availability of these databases represents a great opportunity: the characteristics of the data, individual and exhaustive, allow analysing the phenomenon of ‘making family’ in relation to the main socio-demographic characteristics of the partners; the availability of a historical data series allows analysis in a longitudinal perspective; if compared to sample surveys a more disaggregated territorial classification can be considered.

In the last decades, in Italy the phenomenon of marriages with spouses with foreign background has grown. From 1996 to the beginning of the new millennium, the percentage of marriages with at least one foreign spouse on the total of marriages is almost constantly increasing, from 4.3% to the peak observed in 2008 (15.0%). In 2021, 24,380 marriages were celebrated in Italy with at least one foreign spouse (13.5%): of these, 24.9% are both foreigner, 56.2% with an Italian groom and a foreign bride, 18.8% with a foreign groom and an Italian bride.

In Italy, 2,148 civil unions (between same-sex couples) were established at the Civil Status Offices of the Italian municipalities during the year 2021; same-sex civil partnerships with at least a foreign partner were 372 (17.3%): 74.2% were male couples, 25.8% were female couples.

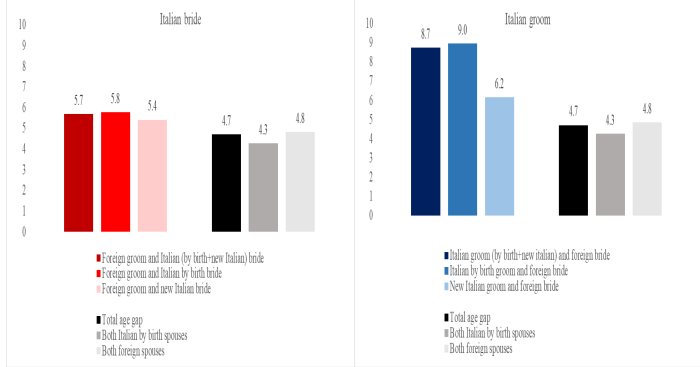
3. Background research

In previous research, we have studied the age gap of the spouses, in relation to the type of couple. In a focus on the marriages with a foreign spouse, it came to light that, in 2021, when the bride is Italian (by birth or new Italian), the age gap does not differ much neither from the value calculated on the total of the spouses nor from the value calculated on couples with both foreign or both Italian spouses. In this case, in fact, the age gap is 5.7 years, not so far from 4.7 years calculated on the total of marriages. Moreover, the difference when the bride is Italian by birth and the bride is a new Italian is negligible.

The situation, on the contrary, is very different if we focus on the couples in which it is the groom to be Italian. In this case the age gap is 8.7 years, about 4 years higher considering the age gap calculated both on the total of marriages and on the couples with both foreign spouses, 3.9 years if we consider the marriages with both Italian by birth spouses.

Focusing attention on Italian by birth grooms, the age gap reaches 9 years (over 4 years more compared to both the value calculated on the total of marriages and that of both foreign spouses). When the groom is a new Italian, on the contrary, the age gap drops to 6.2 years and the difference results reduced to just over a year (Figure 1).

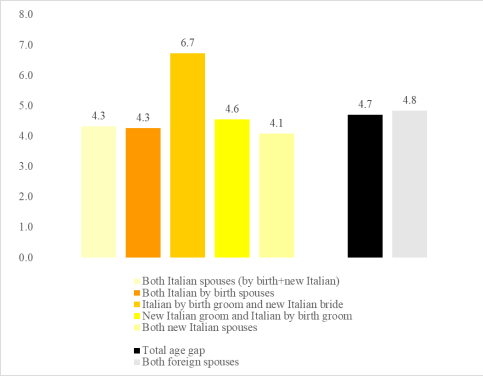
Figure 1- Marriages with a foreign spouse. Italy, year 2021 (age gap in years)



Source: Elaborations on ISTAT data

A similar situation concerns couples with both Italian spouses: the age gap is below the value calculated on both all marriages and marriages with both foreign spouses. If, however, we also consider the migratory background, it is immediately evident that when the groom is Italian by birth and the bride is a new Italian, the situation changes. In this case, the age gap is about 2 years higher than the one calculated in the other types of couples (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Marriages with both Italian spouses. Italy, year 2021 (age gap in years)



Source: Elaborations on ISTAT data

It is therefore clear from this analysis how reductive it is to study citizenship without considering the migratory history of individuals. It also seems to emerge that although the process of integration has reached an advanced step, as it is evident from having acquired Italian citizenship, behaviours, at least regarding the phenomenon of marriage and particularly in the case of Italian men, are not yet fully in line with those of the host country.

Age-assortative mating patterns here observed seem to confirm once more that a “variant” of the exchange theory can fit the Italian case (Maffioli *et al.*, 2014).

4. Aims, methods and work hypothesis.

The aim of the following work is to compare the age gap between partners in marriages and in same-sex civil partnerships, in relation to the main socio-demographic characteristics of the couples. We would like to verify if the same-sex civil partnerships confirm the age-assortative mating patterns observed in marriages with at least a spouse with migratory background.

Through descriptive and multivariate analyses, we will compare the profiles of foreign citizens, new Italians and Italians by birth distinguished by gender.

References

- De Rose A., Fraboni R. 2015. Educational assortative mating in Italy: what can Gini's homogamy index still say?, *Genus*, Vol. LXXI, No. 2-3, pp. 53-71.
- Elwert A. 2020. Opposites attract: Assortative mating and immigrant–native intermarriage in contemporary Sweden, *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 675-709.
- Gabrielli G., Paterno A. 2016. Selection criteria of partner: comparison between transnational and homogamous couples in Italy, *Genus*, Vol. LXXI, No. 2-3, pp. 137-155.
- Guarneri A., Strozza S., Tucci E. 2021. Acquisizione della cittadinanza e comportamenti demografici. Il caso dei matrimoni e delle emigrazioni. In Strozza S., Conti C. and Tucci E. (Eds.) *Nuovi cittadini. Diventare Italiani nell'era della globalizzazione*, Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 99-131.
- ISTAT 2023. Matrimoni, unioni civili, separazioni e divorzi. Anno 2021, Statistiche Report, <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/281565>.
- Maffioli D., Paterno A., Gabrielli G. 2014. International married and unmarried unions in Italy: Criteria of mate selection, *International Migration*, Vol 52, No. 3, pp. 160-176.
- Stamper Balistreri K., Joyner K., Kao G. 2017. Trading Youth for Citizenship? The Spousal Age Gap in Cross-Border Marriages, *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 43, Issue 3, pp. 399-591.