

The income and employment consequences of migration for partner co-residence

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Introduction

Internal migration, involving long-distance moves within national borders, is traditionally assumed to be driven by prospects of higher income, improved employment opportunities or access to education. Consequently, migration is typically expected to lead to gains in income and employment. However, for many internal migrants, social and family considerations form an important, if not primary, role in their decision to relocate (Gillespie & Mulder, 2020). Migration for social and family reasons is associated with less favourable labour market outcomes compared to migration motivated by labour market opportunities (Gillespie, Mulder & Thomas, 2021).

A common instance of socially motivated migration is moving to live with a partner. This scenario is unique because it involves both partners making a joint decision regarding individual mobility. More specifically, couples must decide who moves towards or in with whom. This decision has especially large consequences for long-distance couples, as entering into co-residence requires one or both partners to sever ties to their current locations, including ties to work. No previous study has investigated the income and employment consequences of such moves.

This paper contributes to the family migration literature by investigating *the consequences of migration for co-residence with a partner on an individual's earnings and employment status*. We adopt a cross-national comparative approach, focusing on Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland, and use multinomial logistic regression models on aggregated microdata from population registers. The comparative approach allows us to examine the role of institutional differences between the three countries, including the prevalence of part-time employment, returning to higher education after employment, variations in employment flexibility and variations in employment rates of foreign-born individuals.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Migration with the purpose of co-residence represents a unique scenario, similar only to migration at union dissolution. The decision and outcome of such migration lie at the couple level and yet it is individuals who physically relocate, sometimes accompanied by children from prior relationships who live with them. This situates such mobility in an intermediate position between individual and couple or family migration. To gain insight into the joint location decision and its related income and employment consequences, it is crucial to consider not only whether an individual has migrated but also who within the couple has undertaken the migration (Van der Wiel, Gillespie & Tølbøll, 2021). The costs associated with migration can be substantial for both partners. Consequently, a couple's decision about where to live and who will migrate depends on an interplay between individual costs and relative costs. Because the couple's context significantly influences this process, a theoretical framing of migration for co-residence as family migration proves more advantageous than categorising it as individual migration.

Decades of research on family migration have revealed a pattern where women are often 'tied migrants' or 'trailing wives', moving primarily to support their male partner's career, while their own careers suffer due to the move (e.g. Boyle et al. 2001; McKinnish, 2008) – even though this negative effect tends to be short-lived (Clark & Davies Withers 2002). While some studies indicate a weakening of this pattern due to the rise of dual-career couples (e.g. Cooke, 2013; Smits et al., 2004), traditional gender structures continue to affect family migration dynamics in various countries (Vidal et al., 2017). Previous research on migration for co-residence similarly demonstrates a gendered mobility pattern (Brandén & Haandrikman, 2018; Schnor & Mulder, 2018; Van der Wiel, Gillespie & Tølbøll, 2021).

Migrating for the sake of establishing a joint household with a partner may yield similar negative labour market outcomes as migrating alongside a partner does. While co-residence may offer various emotional and practical benefits, migrating for this purpose might require economic sacrifices and costs, as it involves severing local ties to one's workplace and professional network. In fact, research indicates that family-related moves are associated with poorer labour market outcomes in comparison to moves driven by other reasons (Gillespie, Mulder & Thomas, 2021). Therefore, we hypothesise that *for*

individuals who are employed, the income and employment consequences of migrating for co-residence will be negative (H1).

Conversely, individuals who were previously unemployed may benefit from the migration. The new location may offer new job opportunities, or their partner may provide access to resources and networks, enhancing their job search and employment prospects. At the same time, a couple's decision where to live together can be influenced by one partner's unemployment status and the varying labour market opportunities offered by different locations. In a sense, an unemployed partner may have less to lose and more to gain from migrating than an employed partner. Previously, Gillespie, Mulder and Thomas (2021) showed, for Sweden, that unemployed individuals who moved for family-related reasons were much more likely to be employed following the move compared to those who moved for other reasons. Overall, we hypothesise that *for unemployed individuals, the income and employment consequences of migrating for co-residence will be positive (H2).*

Consistent with the 'trailing wife' effect observed for couples or families migrating together, we hypothesise that *women who migrate for co-residence are more likely to experience negative income and employment consequences than men who migrate for co-residence (H3).* There are two competing explanations for the often detrimental impact of family migration on women's labour market outcomes (see Cooke, 2008). The first is rooted in the human-capital model, which operates on the assumption that couples aim to maximise their pooled utility. In this framework, family migration decisions are based on the relative earning potential of both partners. Although the human-capital model is in essence gender neutral, it typically results in the prioritisation of the male partner's career due to the gender gap in earnings. The second explanation comes from the gender-role model, which attributes the 'trailing wife' effect to male dominance in migration decision-making, rooted in traditional gender roles and identities. To gain insight into these two alternative explanations, we include a variable that reflects the relative economic status and earning potential of both partners, similar to Cooke (2003).

Data and methods

We use data from population-based national registers for Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands, which provide longitudinal information on the entire populations of these countries, including information on employment and income, geographical locations and partner relationships. So far, we have preliminary findings using the Danish data. We plan to add the Dutch and Finnish data in the coming six months.

Our study population consists of matched individuals in opposite-sex couples aged 25-60 who entered co-residence between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2017 and who were in the labour force (N=373,311). We denote the calendar year in which the couple entered co-residence as year t and we use information from the year before ($t-1$) and the year after ($t+1$).

We use two different dependent variables. The first is *change in personal disposable income* between year $t-1$ and $t+1$, with three categories: any decrease in income, little to no change in income (between 0% and 5% change), or a substantial increase in income ($\geq 5\%$). The second dependent variable is an indicator of *employment status change* (employed/self-employed/unemployed/out of the labour force). This variable is based on a person's main source of income during the calendar year.

The main predicting variable indicates *who migrated* at the start of co-residence: the individual (denoted as "ego"), the partner, both partners, or neither partner. Migration is defined here as moving over a distance of 30 km or more. We further included the following independent variables: the individual's level of personal disposable income in year $t-1$; a dummy indicating whether the individual's share in the couple's pooled income in year $t-1$ is more than half, indicating relative economic status and earning potential; the partner's disposable income in quintiles in year $t+1$; a dummy indicating whether the individual has any biological or adopted children under age 18 living in their household on 1 January of year t ; a dummy indicating whether the person has had a new child during year t or $t+1$; and finally, age, completed education and international migrant status.

The findings presented below are obtained from individual-level multinomial logistic regression models. Once we have the data for the other two countries, we will aggregate the individual-level data and run analyses on the aggregated dataset, using country as explanatory variable.

Preliminary results

Tables 1-3 present our preliminary findings for Denmark. The reference categories for the dependent variables are set to ‘no change or small increase’ in income (Table 1), ‘still employed’ (Table 2) or ‘still unemployed’ (Table 3), thereby representing a situation of no or little change. Tables 1 and 2 show change for the sub-group of men and women who were employed in the year before co-residence, while Table 3 shows change for the sub-group of previously unemployed individuals.

For previously employed individuals, our findings clearly show that migration is associated with change in income and employment, mostly for the worse, but also for the better. Starting with income: if the ego migrated, whether they alone or their partner too, their relative risk of experiencing an income decrease is considerably higher compared to when their partner is the only one who migrated, or if neither they nor their partner migrated (see Table 1). To a lesser degree, the likelihood of experiencing an increase in income is also higher when migrating compared to not migrating. A similar pattern is visible when looking at change in employment status (see Table 2). Those who migrate at the start of co-residence, and especially those couples where both partners migrate, are much more likely to experience a change in employment status compared to those who do not migrate. The relative risk of becoming unemployed or of exiting the labour market is particularly high, but we also observe an increased likelihood of changing from employment to self-employment for those who migrate. Thus, our findings largely support *H1*, which predicted negative income and employment consequences of migrating for co-residence among employed individuals, although the chances of experiencing positive income change after migrating for co-residence are also heightened. In line with *H3*, the relative risk of an income decrease, becoming unemployed or exiting the labour market is higher for women who migrate for co-residence than for men.

For those who were previously unemployed, the relative risk of entering employment or self-employment compared to staying unemployed is considerably higher when a person migrated at the start of co-residence (see Table 3). This finding supports *H2*.

Table 1. Relative risk ratios of experiencing a decrease or increase in personal disposable income from the year before to the year after entering co-residence, among men and women who were employed the year before co-residence.

Relative risk ratios	Women		Men	
	Income decrease	Income increase	Income decrease	Income increase
ref. no change or small increase				
Who migrated at the start of co-residence (ref. partner only)				
Ego only	1.65***	1.10**	1.52***	1.13***
Both partners	1.62***	1.27**	1.50***	1.18**
Neither partner	1.10***	0.97	1.07**	0.98

Note: control variables included in the model but results not shown.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 2. Relative risk ratios of experiencing a change in employment status between the year before and the year after entering co-residence, among men and women who were employed in the year before co-residence.

Relative risk ratios	Women			Men		
	Newly self-employed	Newly unemployed	Exit labour market	Newly self-employed	Newly unemployed	Exit labour market
ref. still employed						
Who migrated at the start of co-residence (ref. partner only)						
Ego only	1.30*	2.09***	1.83***	1.01	1.67***	1.71***
Both partners	1.72**	2.37***	1.94***	1.15	1.76***	2.06***
Neither partner	1.14	1.12*	1.15***	0.93	1.11**	1.17***

Note: control variables included in the model but results not shown.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 3. Relative risk ratios of entering employment or self-employment or another employment status versus remaining unemployed between the year before and the year after entering co-residence, among men and women who were unemployed in the year before co-residence.

Relative risk ratios	Women		Men	
	Newly (self-) employed	New other status	Newly (self-) employed	New other status
ref. still unemployed				
Who migrated at the start of co-residence (ref. partner only)				
Ego only	1.65***	1.10**	1.52***	1.13***
Both partners	1.62***	1.27**	1.50***	1.18**
Neither partner	1.10***	0.97	1.07**	0.98

Note: control variables included in the model but results not shown.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

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