

## Early marriage – same background

*Eight out of ten Norwegian-born to immigrant parents who married for the first time in the period 1990-2012 chose a partner who also had an immigrant background. Among those who did not have an immigrant background, nine out of ten married someone without an immigrant background. Couples with the same immigrant background tend to get married at a younger age than couples who have different immigrant backgrounds. This applies to the entire population, but is particularly prevalent among women with an immigrant background.*

The proverb “birds of a feather flock together” still applies today. Several recent Norwegian studies show that we like to find a partner who is similar to ourselves, for example, with roughly the same social background, education or occupation (Hansen 1995; Birkelund and Heldal 2003). This also applies to immigrants. Earlier studies have shown that the vast majority of immigrants who marry, find a spouse from the same immigrant group or the same country of origin (Daugstad 2008; Mohn 2010).

We know far less about the choice of partner among persons born in Norway to foreign-born parents. One reason is that only now is there a relatively large group who are at an age when it is common to start a family. At the start of 2013, this population group totalled around 117 000 persons. Although this is still a very young group in the Norwegian population, around one out of five are now 18 years or older (Statistics Norway 2013).

### Same age at first marriage

A survey from 2012 showed that less than 6 000 Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, or about 30 per cent of the over 18s, were either in a first marriage or cohabiting relationship (Wiik 2012). Of these, 64 per cent were married and 36 per cent were cohabiting. A higher share of Norwegian-born to immigrant parents from the EU/EEA etc. cohabited in their first live-in relationship (79 per cent) than those with parents born in Asia, Africa etc. (27 per cent). Among those with no immigrant background of the same age, 16 per cent got married in their first live-in relationship, while 84 per cent cohabited (Wiik 2012).

This survey also compared age disparities on entering a live-in relationship for the first time. The results showed that Norwegian-born to immigrant parents were generally somewhat younger than those without an immigrant background when they married for the first time. However, the age disparities on entering a live-in relationship (i.e. marriage cohabitation as a whole) for the first time were small between Norwegian-born to immigrant parents and those without an immigrant background. This was because persons without an immigrant background mainly chose to cohabit in their first live-in relationship.

Are women and men who are born in Norway to immigrant parents, and who marry at a young age, more likely to have a partner who also belongs to the immigrant population (either immigrant or Norwegian-born to immigrant

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#### Definitions

*Immigrants* are persons who are resident in Norway, but who are born abroad to foreign-born parents and have four foreign-born grandparents. This article covers immigrants who moved to Norway before the age of 18.

*Norwegian-born to immigrant parents* are persons born in Norway, with two immigrant parents, and four grandparents born abroad.

Together these two groups constitute *persons with an immigrant background*.



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### Data and methodology

The article uses register data on the entire population born in the period 1972-1994, and focuses on first marriages contracted in the period 1990-2012 when the subjects were aged 18 to 40 years. Persons who immigrated as adults are excluded because we do not have complete information on any first marriages contracted abroad. Persons who emigrated from Norway or died before they were 18 years old are also excluded. The dataset contains data on about 1 341 158 persons and 312 098 (first) marriages.

In order to analyse the correlation between the timing of the first marriage and choice of partner, the data is subject to an events history analysis. This follows each person from the year they turned 18 until their first marriage. In this dataset, each person contributes with one observation for each year they are not married. Persons who have not yet married by the end of 2012 are removed from the dataset, and are thus no longer included in the risk population (denominator). This also applies to those who die or emigrate from Norway before a marriage takes place or the end of the observation period.

The dependent variable measures whether a person marries someone with an immigrant background (i.e. Norwegian-born or immigrant) or a person without an immigrant background in a given year. The reference category is to remain unmarried. In order to study the unique correlation between key independent variables or explanatory variables (here immigration type) and the dependent variable, controlled for other independent variables, a so-called regression analysis is done.

All of the analyses are controlled for the parents' region of origin and the annual updated information on education, student status, place of residence and children. Since women are generally younger than men when they first marry, and different factors influence women and men's decisions to live together, separate analyses are presented for women and men. This article presents the results of these analyses as annual probabilities.

parents) than those who get married later? Register data on the population born from 1972-1994 is used to examine partner choice among all Norwegian-born to immigrant parents who were married in the period 1990-2012. The Norwegian-born to immigrant parents are compared with the early immigrants (immigrated before age 18) and persons without an immigrant background. Immigrants who were 18 or older when they came to Norway are excluded because many already were married, and some came to Norway for the purpose of finding a spouse.

Studies of our partner choices are important. In addition to telling us how close contact there is between those with and those without an immigrant background, marriage across immigrant backgrounds can promote integration with society in the long term (Kalmijn 1998).

### Offers, expectations and greater independence

When a person marries for the first time, and with whom, is naturally affected by a wide range of factors. Appearance, personality and intelligence are some characteristics which most would agree are important for the individual's wishes and success in the "marriage market". Research from several countries, including the USA (Qian and Lichter 2007) and the Netherlands (Kalmijn 1998; VanTubergen and Maas 2007), has shown that the access to potential partners may be another key factor that affects the propensity to marry a partner from the same country. And not least, what is normal and expected in different environments has a major influence.

Another factor that comes into play is the socio-economic disparities between immigrants and those without an immigrant background; if the disparities are relatively small, the likelihood of cross-cultural marriages increases. A further explanation of why people with similar country and immigrant backgrounds marry one another is settlement patterns. Geographical segregation means that people from different backgrounds are less likely to meet (Kalmijn 1998).

We know little about the possible correlations between age at first marriage and partner choice. One of the few studies that have looked at this correlation found that persons who married later in life more often found a partner with a different ethnic background than those who married younger. This was the case in both the USA and Germany, and among persons without an immigrant background and children of immigrants born in these countries (Soehl and Yahirun 2011).

### Fewer opportunities to meet?

Differences in age at first marriage may in itself be a barrier to people with different backgrounds finding each other in the marriage market, and as with geographic segregation, an "age segregation" can also exist. If most persons in a group get married at a younger age, while the majority in another group waits, those in the latter group will have little opportunity to find a spouse among the first group. Since women and men with an immigrant background generally marry at a younger age than those without an immigrant background (Wiik 2012), it may be difficult for persons without an immigrant background to find a spouse with an immigrant background because most of them married when they reached marriageable age.

It may also be that the individual's requirements for what is a good partner change as they get older. For example, it could be envisaged that socio-econo-

mic characteristics of potential partners, such as education and income, are more important than country background after a person has completed their education and embarking on a career. In general terms, people often become more independent as they age. Choices, including who to marry, are therefore perhaps made without so much influence from close family and relatives when a person is older?

**Most are still not married...**

Most of the sample were not married. This particularly applies to Norwegian-born with an immigrant background, and reflects their young age. Nine out of ten men and more than three out of four women (77 per cent) born in the period 1972-1994 had not married by the end of 2012 (see Figure 1). More women than men in all three population groups shown in Figure 1 had married for the first time, and this is because women are generally younger than men at the time of their first marriage.

**...but most of those who are have chosen an "equal" partner**

Among those who had married, most Norwegian-born to immigrant parents had chosen a spouse with an immigrant background (81 per cent), either Norwegian-born to immigrant parents or an early immigrant (immigrated before turning 18), as shown in Figure 2. The remaining 19 per cent had married a spouse who did not have an immigrant background.

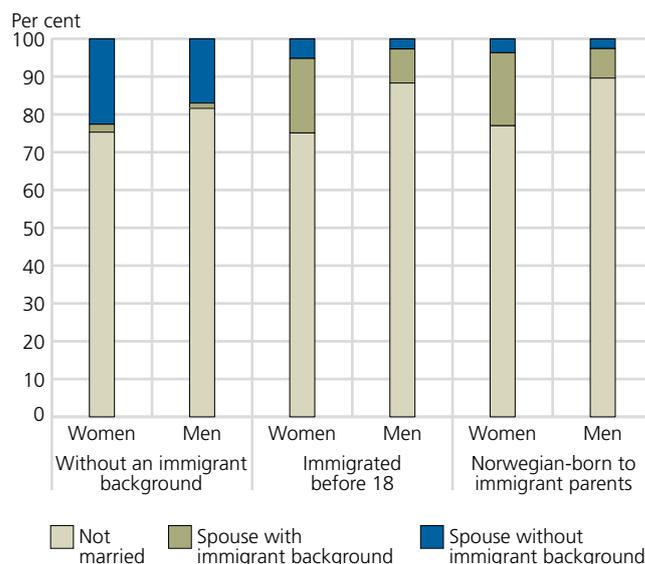
A somewhat higher share of Norwegian-born men with immigrant parents (25 per cent) had married a Norwegian than was the case for women in the same population group (16 per cent). The gender disparities were somewhat smaller among the early immigrants, where 21 per cent of women and 23 per cent of men married someone without an immigrant background.

Among those without an immigrant background, only eight out of 100 had a spouse with an immigrant background, while the remaining 92 per cent had married a man or woman born in Norway with at least one Norwegian-born parent (see Figure 2). In other words, it is far more common among those with an immigrant background than without to marry across the population groups we analysed. However, a slightly larger share of women (9 per cent) than men (7 per cent) in the latter group had a spouse with an immigrant background. This is the opposite of the pattern among persons with an immigrant background, where somewhat more men than women had married across their own immigrant background.

**Partner choice varies with regional background**

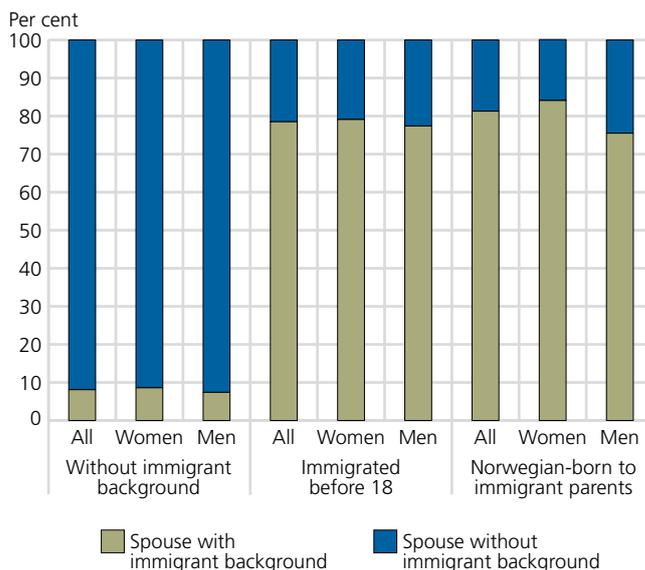
The shares that have married a partner without an immigrant background vary considerably by regional background. This applies to around eight out

Figure 1. Share married and not married, by own and spouse's immigrant background. Women and men born 1972-1994



Source: Population statistics, Statistics Norway.

Figure 2. Share with and without spouse with immigrant background. Married women and men born 1972-1994



Source: Population statistics, Statistics Norway.

of ten Norwegian-born to parents born in the Nordic countries (86 per cent), West Europe, North America and Oceania (83 per cent) and the EU countries in East Europe (73 per cent); as shown in Table 1. The corresponding share among Norwegian-born women and men with immigrant parents from Asia was one out of five (9 per cent). About one in four Norwegian-born women and men with parents from East Europe outside the EU had married someone with no immigrant background, compared to around one out of six (17 per cent) with a background from Africa and six out of ten with parents born in South and Central America.

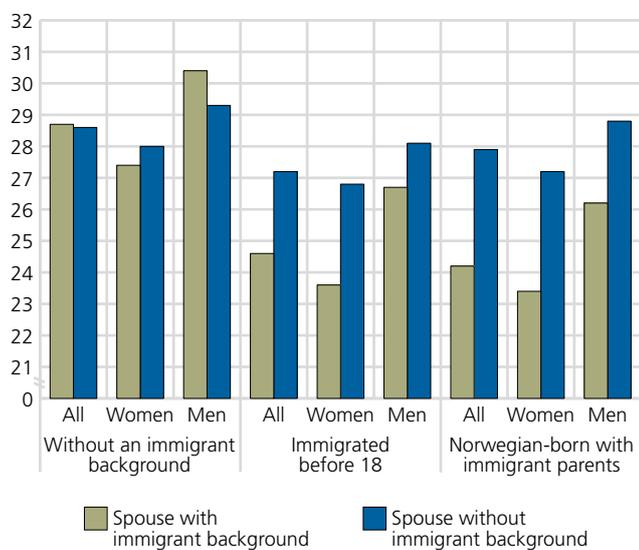
Analysis of the group who immigrated to Norway at a young age (before age 18) shows much the same picture: the highest share who had married a person without an immigrant background is among those who immigrated from the Nordic countries, West Europe, North America, Oceania, EU countries in East Europe, and South and Central America. Fifteen per cent of early immigrants from East Europe outside the EU and 13 per cent of early immigrants from countries in Asia and Africa chose a partner without an immigrant background when marrying for the first time (see Table 1).

Table 1. Share with spouse without immigrant background, by regional background. Married women and men born 1972-1994. Per cent

	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents	Immigrated before 18	No immigrant background
Norway/Nordic countries	86	78	92
Rest of West Europe + North America, Oceania	82	72	-
East Europe, EU	73	55	-
East Europe, non-EU	27	15	-
Asia	9	13	-
Africa	17	13	-
South and Central America	60	54	-
No. married	4 390	12 382	295 326

Source: Population statistics, Statistics Norway.

Figure 3. Average age at first marriage, by own and spouse's background



Source: Population statistics, Statistics Norway.

### Correlation between "when" and "with whom"...

The studies done in this area indicate that those who choose to delay getting married for the first time also have a greater propensity to choose a partner with a different background. As shown in Figure 3, this also seems to apply in Norway.

Taking all Norwegian-born to immigrant parents as a whole, the average age at first marriage, where the partner also had an immigrant background, is 24.2 years. For those who had married a partner without an immigrant background, however, the average age was nearly 28 years. We also see from Figure 3 that men on average were older than women the first time they married, regardless of the partner's background.

The lowest average age at first marriage among Norwegian-born to immigrant parents is among women who had married an immigrant man or a man born in Norway to immigrant parents (23.4 years). Men born in Norway with two immigrant parents who had married a Norwegian woman without an immigrant background were on average 28.8 years old at the time of their first marriage. A similar pattern was found for those who immigrated before the age of 18.

Women and men without an immigrant background were, on average, the oldest at first marriage. However, those who had married an «equal partner», i.e. one without an immigrant background, were younger, on average, than those who had married a person with an immigrant background - although the disparities were small. As shown in Figure 3, this particularly applies to

men who married a woman with an immigrant background, and these were an average of 30.4 years when they married for the first time.

Among women without an immigrant background, those who had chosen a husband with an immigrant background were slightly younger (27.5 years), on average, than those who married a man without an immigrant background (28 years). Since only first marriages of persons aged 18 to 40 years are covered here, the average age is relatively low.

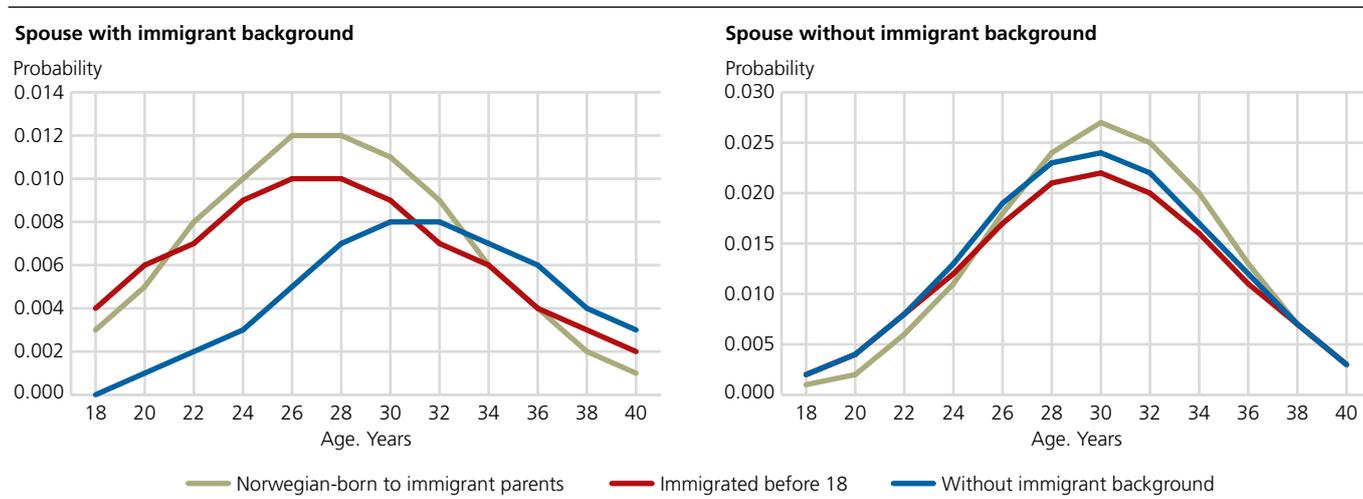
**...even when other indicators are considered**

Results from multivariate events models are presented in Figures 4 (women) and 5 (men). Here, each person is followed from the time they were 18 years old up to their first marriage. These regression models are controlled for a number of other factors that might affect the correlation between immigrant background on the one hand and marriage and choice of partner on the other, such as regional background, level of education and schooling (see textbox for methodology). Both figures show the probability of getting married in a given year with a partner with or without an immigrant background respectively, by age and immigrant background. The reference category is to remain unmarried.

Norwegian-born women with an immigrant background who married a man with an immigrant background had the highest probability of marrying (relative to remaining unmarried) early in life, as shown in the left area of Figure 4. A similar pattern is also found in women who immigrated before the age of 18. Among women without an immigrant background, the probability of marrying a man with an immigrant background was, however, greatest among those who married for the first time somewhat later in life.

The correlation between immigrant background and the probability of marrying in a given year is weaker for women who married a man without an immigrant background (right area of Figure 4). However, both women born in Norway with immigrant parents and early immigrated women who married

Figure 4. **Probability<sup>1</sup> of marrying someone with or without an immigrant background (reference = remain unmarried) in a given year, by own background and age. Women<sup>2</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> On a scale of 0-1.

<sup>2</sup> Controlled for education, student status, regional background, children and place of residence.

Source: Population statistics, Statistics Norway.

someone without an immigrant background had the highest probability of marrying later in life than those who chose an “equal” spouse (with an immigrant background). Correspondingly, we see that women without an immigrant background had the highest probability of marrying somewhat earlier in life when they chose an equal partner (i.e. a man without an immigrant background), than those who married a man with an immigrant background.

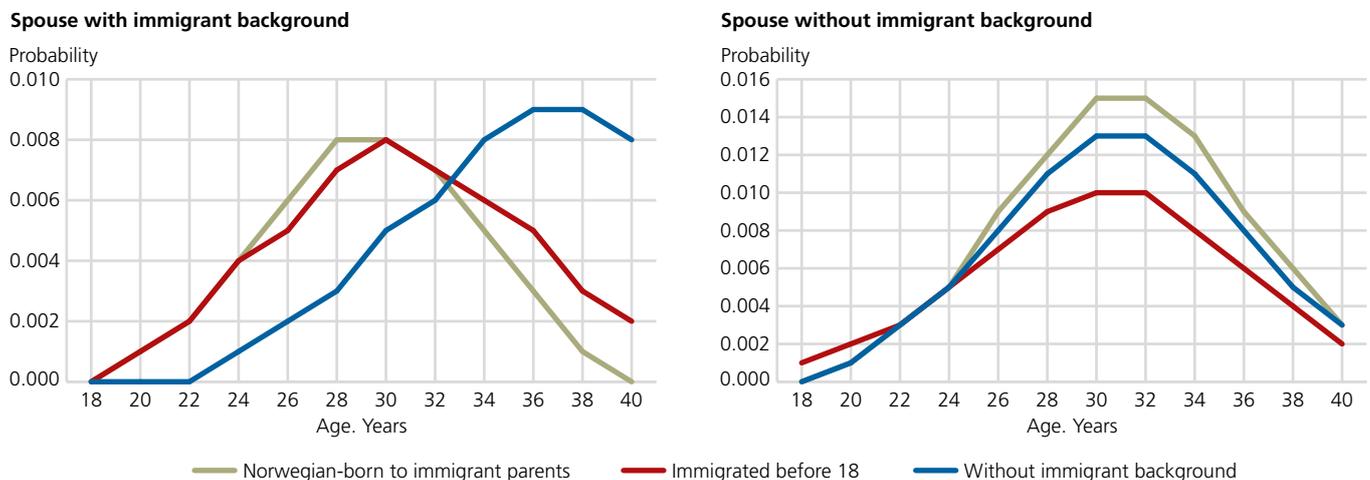
A similar pattern is found among men (see Figure 5), although the disparities are generally smaller than for women. Men born in Norway to immigrant parents who chose a partner with an immigrant background had the highest probability of marrying at a younger age than was the case for men who chose a partner without an immigrant background. Among men without an immigrant background, the probability of marrying was also highest somewhat earlier in life among those who chose a partner with the same immigrant background as themselves. Men without an immigrant background who married “across” their own immigrant background were most likely to marry when they were in their mid-30s.

### Background important for most

Eighty-one per cent of Norwegian-born with an immigrant background who get married do so with someone who also has an immigrant background (either Norwegian-born with immigrant parents or who has immigrated). This is somewhat higher than the corresponding share among those who immigrated to Norway before the age of 18 (79 per cent). Only 8 per cent of women and men without an immigrant background had married someone with an immigrant background, while the remaining 92 per cent had married someone without an immigrant background.

The findings in this article show that there is a correlation between when a person decides to get married for the first time and their choice of spouse. Persons who choose an “equal” partner generally get married earlier than those who marry across their own background. This applies to the whole population, but the correlation is most evident among women with an im-

Figure 5. **Probability<sup>1</sup> of marrying someone with or without an immigrant background (reference = remain unmarried) in a given year, by own background and age. Men<sup>2</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> On a scale of 0-1.

<sup>2</sup> Controlled for education, student status, regional background, children and place of residence.

Source: Population statistics, Statistics Norway.

migrant background. Among those without an immigrant background, it is particularly men whose wives have an immigrant background that get married later in life for the first time.

### Only data on behaviour

What lies behind these findings is difficult to determine with the data used here. Register data includes the entire population and makes it possible to examine small population groups, such as Norwegian-born to immigrant parents over 18 years. However, the data only contains information about the actual behaviour and not attitudes, values, and other factors that could influence the choice of spouse, such as expectations and pressure from surroundings.

The fact that most people who choose a partner with a different immigrant background also wait longer to marry, may, however, indicate that the opportunity for “non-traditional” choices increases with age. The requirements for a spouse can also change through education and work, which can also increase a person’s chances of coming into contact with people from different backgrounds.

Since women and men with an immigrant background generally get married earlier than persons without an immigrant background (Wiik 2012), it can also be difficult for those without an immigrant background to find a spouse with an immigrant background since most are already married when they are of a “marriageable age”. The fact that it is more common to marry across a person’s own background among Norwegian-born to immigrant parents than among those without an immigrant background may also be because there are far more potential partners without an immigrant background to choose from in Norway.

### A young population group

The population group Norwegian-born to immigrant parents is still very young. More knowledge is needed about the relationship pattern of Norwegian-born women and men with immigrant parents as more reach the age that it is common to start a family. Are those who have married a select group that is not necessarily representative of the group as a whole? Furthermore, we know little about the marriage patterns of Norwegian-born women and men with immigrant parents from the country groups that are currently still too young to get married or cohabit, such as Somalia, Poland and Iraq.

This article has not discussed cohabitation and examined whether those who cohabit the first time they are in a live-in relationship differ to those who get married. Persons without an immigrant background often cohabit for a long period before getting married, while the majority of Norwegian-born to immigrant parents get married without living together first.

Although the age at first cohabitation/marriage is thus somewhat similar (Wiik 2012), persons without an immigrant background are older at the time of their first marriage than Norwegian-born women and men who have immigrant parents. Whether more of those who choose cohabitation also choose a partner with a different immigrant background, and whether the correlation between age at first cohabitation and partner choice is as clear as for first marriage are still unanswered questions.

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