

ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS

The Socio-demographic Factors with the Greatest Influence on the Transition to Coupledness in Spain

Los factores sociodemográficos que más influencia tienen en la transición a la vida en pareja en España

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of socio-demographic and economic variables on the decision to live as a couple among young Spaniards aged 25 to 34. Using data from the 2022 Living Conditions Survey, a descriptive analysis and a binary logistic regression model were conducted. The results indicate that women are more likely to cohabit than men. In addition, factors such as economic activity, income and nationality are key determinants in this decision. The profile least likely to live as a couple is that of a 25-year-old man with university education, of Spanish nationality, not economically active and with low to medium income. By contrast, the profile with the highest likelihood corresponds to a 34-year-old woman with only primary education, not of Spanish nationality, economically active and with high to medium income. These findings highlight the importance of economic stability and labour market integration in the transition to adulthood.

KEYWORDS: transition; youth; coupledness; socio-demographic factors; economic activity; educational level.

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ABSTRACT

Este estudio investiga la influencia de variables sociodemográficas y económicas en la decisión de vivir en pareja entre jóvenes españoles de 25 a 34 años. Utilizando datos de la Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida de 2022, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis descriptivo y un modelo de regresión logística binaria. Los resultados indican que las mujeres tienen una mayor probabilidad de cohabitar que los hombres. Además, factores como la actividad laboral, los ingresos y la nacionalidad son determinantes en esta decisión. El perfil con menor probabilidad de vivir en pareja es un hombre de 25 años, con estudios superiores, español, no activo laboralmente y con renta media baja. En contraste, el perfil con mayor probabilidad es una mujer de 34 años, con estudios primarios, no española, activa laboralmente y con renta media alta. Estos hallazgos subrayan la importancia de la estabilidad económica y la inserción laboral en la transición hacia la vida adulta.

KEYWORDS: transición; juventud; vida en pareja; factores sociodemográficos; actividad laboral; nivel educativo.

1. Introduction

The decision to form a couple is a phenomenon inherent to human beings, shared with other animal species, and involves both a biological component, related to reproduction, and a social one (Gámez and Díaz-Loving, 2012). In contemporary societies, monogamy predominates as the norm (Hernández, 2022; Rodríguez, 2024), although it cannot be regarded as a cultural universal. There is historical evidence from various cultures that practise polygamy, whether polyandry (one woman with several men) or polygyny (one man with several women) (Alshboul, 2007; Bituga-Nchama, 2023). Beyond biological and social factors, the decision to form a couple is also influenced by personal, emotional and sexual factors (Moreno and Gutiérrez, 2021), as well as by opportunity. Requena and Ayuso (2022) reflect this diversity in the factors that have historically influenced couple formation and continue to do so today, ranging from economic factors to the influence of new information and communication technologies. However, beyond the diversity highlighted in the literature, there may be common elements that lend themselves to study. This research focuses on assessing how socio-demographic and socio-economic variables may facilitate or hinder coupledness and, by extension, the formation of new family units.

In Spain, most children are born within couples, though not necessarily within marriage. Data from the National Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística – INE) show that the proportion of children born to unmarried couples increases each year; in 2023, it stood at 49.96%.¹ In any case, it is clear that parenthood is most commonly undertaken within some form of couple, as also noted in various sources cited in Ayuso's study (2022). Given that fertility rates in Western

societies – and particularly in Spain – are significantly below replacement level, having declined from 3.3 children per woman in the 1960s to 1.12 in 2023,² it seems reasonable to suggest that fostering coupledness could contribute to increasing these figures.

The decision to live as a couple is a transitional event that has received relatively little scholarly attention and is closely linked to leaving the parental home and entering parenthood (Donat and Martín-Lagos, 2020). The literature reveals a relationship between nuptiality and fertility (Fuentes, 2010; Quintana, 2018). Nevertheless, coupledness does not necessarily begin with marriage, as there are other forms of union, with or without legal recognition, that may likewise be considered transitions into coupledness. The decision to enter into a legally recognised partnership is often preceded by cohabitation. Having a partner is a necessary step towards living as a couple and is one of the variables most strongly associated with residential emancipation (South and Lei, 2015; Donat and Martín-Lagos, 2020). It is important to clarify at this point that, although having a partner may precede moving out and living as a couple, this is not the focus of the present study.

The study of youth transitions – particularly couple formation and cohabitation – is crucial not only because of its intrinsic significance but also due to its far-reaching demographic implications. These events are closely linked to fertility, which in Spain and across Europe is generating major challenges, such as imbalances between the working-age and dependent populations and increasing pressure on the sustainability of pension systems and healthcare provision. Demographic indicators – particularly fertility rates and life expectancy – are reshaping the population pyramids in Western societies, with fertility remaining below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman and high life expectancy accelerating population ageing (Esping-Andersen *et al.*, 2013).

This situation gives rise to important economic and social concerns. Moreno (2013) highlights the growing anxiety in Europe over the fact that increasingly smaller cohorts of working-age individuals will make it more difficult to sustain the current social security system. Macunovich (2012) provides empirical evidence of the importance of young cohorts for the economy, with potentially positive effects on gross domestic product. Spain presents a particularly alarming scenario, with one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe and globally (Castro *et al.*, 2021; Llorente-Marrón *et al.*, 2022). In this context, it may be hypothesised that facilitating youth transitions – particularly the formation of new family units – could contribute positively to increasing fertility.

From this perspective, it is relevant to examine the factors that are potentially most influential in the decision to take one of the defining steps in the transition to adulthood: the decision to live as a couple. The main objective of this study is to determine the extent to which certain socio-demographic and socio-economic factors (educational attainment, income, employment status or econom-

ic activity, nationality, age and gender) influence the decision to live as a couple among young people aged 25 to 34. The analysis is based on data from the 2022 Living Conditions Survey (Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida – ECV), which serves as the primary dataset for this study. The chosen age range is supported by the literature (Arnett, 2000; Rivera and Muñoz, 2011; INJUVE, 2020) as well as by the authors' own exploratory studies, which confirm that this is the age group in which cohabitation most commonly begins. Once the most influential factors have been identified, it will be easier to inform public policies aimed at supporting the transition to adulthood, particularly with regard to the decision to live as a couple.

2. Theoretical framework. Young people, transitions to adulthood and coupledness

From a sociological perspective, it is difficult to define the concept or social category of *youth*. If we take leaving the parental home and the formation of new family units as reference points, then an 18-year-old who has moved out and has a partner would not be considered young, whereas someone who remains in education beyond the age of 30 and has yet to move out may still be regarded as such. This highlights how the age range used in youth studies is becoming increasingly broad, often extending well beyond the age of 30, despite the evident differences between an 18-year-old and a 30-year-old. A purely age-based perspective presents significant limitations. From a sociological standpoint, youth can be understood more as a process than a state (Zárraga, 1989; Furlong, 2006; Galland, 2007; Casal *et al.*, 2011).

The transition to adulthood is marked by a series of events or *rites of passage*, which unfold in highly diverse ways. This diversity makes it possible to define different types of transition depending on the variables or elements taken into account. The increasing variety of these transitions and the lack of linearity in the associated events contribute to their growing de-standardisation (Moreno *et al.*, 2010; Sánchez-Galán, 2017). In just a few decades, we have moved from structured and linear processes – such as completing education, entering the labour market and forming new family units – to much more complex transitions. These include simultaneous events, such as studying while working, or reversed processes, such as leaving the parental home and later returning to it (Moreno and Sánchez-Galán, 2020).

In this sense, it is more appropriate to speak of youth as a process in which different transitional events occur throughout the life course. This process culminates in the greater stability that characterises adult life (Leccardi, 2010; Toulemon, 2010).

Youth may be defined from a social perspective in terms of the completion of key transitional events such as finishing education, entering the labour market, leaving the parental home, forming a couple and becoming a parent (Vieira and Miret,

2010; Vieira, 2013). Other studies adopt the *life course* approach, whose overall aim is to analyse how historical events and demographic, economic, social and cultural changes shape people's lives, both individually and by cohort or generation (Elder, 1994; Blanco, 2011). Nevertheless, it must always be borne in mind that individual trajectories are closely linked to social structure and context – including family, environment, peer groups and educational pathways (Urcola, 2003; Casal *et al.*, 2006; Ulrich, 2008; Vieira and Miret, 2010; Moreno *et al.*, 2012). As a result, the transition to adulthood is understood as a process influenced by socio-historical realities, social institutions and young people's own decision-making. Failure to take all of these factors into account hinders a comprehensive analysis of transitional processes (Bird and Kruger, 2005; Furstenberg, 2005; Sánchez-Galán, 2017). In short, the transition or pathway to adult life must be approached from a perspective that integrates structure, agency and history. This constitutes a holistic analytical model, though it presents certain limitations in that it does not consider the reversibility of events or even their potential non-occurrence (Robette, 2010; Iacovoy, 2011).

As already noted, the decision to live as a couple is a relatively under-researched transitional event, yet it is closely associated with residential emancipation and parenthood (Donat and Martín-Lagos, 2020). Several studies explore the factors that may account for the timing of the decision to live as a couple or become a parent (Davía and Legazpe, 2013; Sánchez-Galán, 2017; Mitchell *et al.*, 2017), offering findings such as higher education reduces the likelihood of living as a couple among young people and delays parenthood; being in education decreases the probability of having a partner; and during times of crisis and post-crisis, the likelihood of living as a couple declined in comparison with previous periods. However, an important observation by Moreno *et al.* (2017) underscores the diversity of couple, family and union models as another key factor to take into account. It is therefore relevant to study all forms of emancipated couplehood, irrespective of whether or not the union has legal status. Within this diversity, attention must also be paid to mixed partnerships, which involve their own relational dynamics and occupy a space between national cultural identities and the new influences brought by the migrant partner – a feature particularly evident in reconstituted families (De Miguel Luken, 2022).

Life as a couple is typically preceded by residential emancipation from the parental home. The length of time young people remain dependent on their families of origin is partly driven by the increasing demand for education, which significantly extends this stage of life. Compared with the rest of Europe, Spain is the second-latest country in terms of the average age of emancipation (Donat and Martín-Lagos, 2020). In 2022, the average age of residential emancipation in the EU-27 was 26.4 years, while in Spain it was 30.3 years (Eurostat, 2024). Additional contributing factors include uncertainty and unpredictability regarding the immediate future, particularly in a context of economic change and global crises. This is compounded in Spain by a highly rigid labour market and a housing market characterised by high prices and a limited rental supply (Ballesteros

et al., 2012; Colom and Molés, 2016; Moreno, 2012). Moreover, Spain's welfare state model provides limited support for youth emancipation, thereby reinforcing dependence on the family of origin (Albertini and Radl, 2012; Becker *et al.*, 2010; Vitali, 2010). Behavioural and psychological explanations must also be considered, as they may shape the attitudes of native-born youth. In recent decades, family relationships have become more open, flexible and negotiable (Viqueira, 2024). Young people often find within the family an ideal environment in which to enjoy extensive privileges, services and comforts, all of which contribute to postponing emancipation and life as a couple – particularly in the face of clearly uncertain prospects (Donat and Martín-Lagos, 2020; Meil, 2010). Nonetheless, it is important to take into account the changing profile of youth, which increasingly includes young people from migrant backgrounds. Recent studies such as that by Fuster *et al.* (2024) show that young people of migrant origin tend to begin the emancipation process at earlier ages, influenced by distinct life trajectories and cultural factors.

Analysing the socio-demographic and socio-economic variables that most strongly influence the transition to coupledom is essential for understanding social dynamics and informing the design of policies and programmes that respond to the specific needs of young couples. Such measures may help foster full social integration and, as supported by both the literature and empirical data, positively influence demographic indicators such as fertility.

3. Methodology

Based on the literature review and the research question concerning the influence of socio-demographic and socio-economic factors on the decision to live as a couple among young people, the following research hypothesis is proposed: socio-demographic and socio-economic factors exert a significant influence on transitional events in the move to adulthood, particularly the decision to live as a couple. Variables such as educational attainment, income, employment status, age and gender are key elements in analysing the transition to coupledom among young people. The overall aim of this study is to examine and quantify the influence of these socio-demographic and socio-economic factors on the decision to live as a couple.

A quantitative methodology has been employed, based on data from the 2022 Living Conditions Survey (ECV), conducted by the National Statistics Institute (INE).³ Both descriptive analysis and binary logistic regression analysis will be undertaken. The dependent variable selected is “*living as a couple*”, while the explanatory independent variables are *age*, *nationality*, *gender*, *education*, *economic activity status* and *income*. The data in Table 1 clearly show that the age at which young people decide to live as a couple is concentrated in the upper range of the frequency distribution. For this reason, it was decided that from this point in the study onwards, the age range selected for the subsequent data analysis would be

between 25 and 34 years. From the age of 25, it can generally be assumed that formal education has been completed, thereby avoiding distortions when analysing the influence of educational attainment, since this variable may be closely correlated with age. The ECV provides four microdata files, of which only the P file, containing personal variables, was selected. Variables were transformed and recoded using the microdata and the methodological information provided by the INE. The binary variable "*living as a couple*" corresponds to the variable "*spouse or de facto partner*". This variable has three possible values (*yes with legal status*, *yes without legal status* and *no*), which were recoded by merging the two affirmative categories to construct the binary dependent variable under study, "*living as a couple*", with the values *yes* or *no*. The first stage involves a descriptive analysis, offering an initial approximation of the potential influence of the selected socio-demographic variables on the decision to live as a couple. Subsequently, a logistic regression model will be constructed to explain and quantify the factors that influence this decision.

The defining feature of binary logistic regression is that the dependent variable is dichotomous. In this study, the variable is defined by whether or not the respondent has a spouse or de facto partner. It was coded as follows: 1 = in a couple, 0 = not in a couple. The category with the greater absolute value is the category of interest. A series of independent variables or explanatory factors were selected which, in binary logistic regression, may be either quantitative or qualitative. In the model used, the only quantitative variable is age; the others are categorical. All statistical analyses and variable recoding were carried out using SPSS software.

Independent variables:

Age: the only numerical variable, calculated by subtracting the *year of birth* from the *survey year*.

Gender: a categorical variable coded as 0 for men and 1 for women.

Nationality: provided in the ECV with the categories *Spain*, *Other EU countries* and *Non-EU countries*. It was recoded into two categories: *Spanish* and *foreign*. The reference category is Spanish nationality.

Educational attainment: originally offered in nine categories in the ECV, this variable was recoded into two: *university-level* and *non-university-level education*. Reference category: non-university-level education.

Economic activity status: the ECV provides a broad range of categories for this variable. For the purposes of this study, these were recoded into two: one comprising all economically active categories and another comprising all non-active categories.⁴ Reference category: economically active.

Net annual monetary income per person: although a numerical variable, it was grouped into two categories: up to €14,000 annually and over €14,000 annually. This threshold was selected based on the average per capita net annual income in 2022,⁵ which was approximately this amount; for simplicity, the figure was rounded. Reference category: €14,000 or less.

At a significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis posits that there are no statistically significant differences between the reference categories and the others in explaining the decision to live as a couple.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Descriptive analysis

This section presents a descriptive analysis of the variables under study. It provides an initial overview of the potential influence these variables may have on the dependent variable, namely having a *spouse or de facto partner*.

The first interpretation suggested by the data in Table 1 is the clear relationship between age and the likelihood of living as a couple. While this is generally intuitive, some notable nuances emerge when the variable is crossed with *gender*. Table 2 shows that the average age among men is 31.46 years, compared to 31.11 years among women. It is well known that women tend to leave the parental home earlier than men, form partnerships earlier and become mothers at a younger age. However, what is striking here is not so much that women are, on average, 0.4 years younger than men, but rather how small that difference actually is.

Table 1
Percentage of individuals living as a couple by age

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
25	25	1.7	1.7
26	51	3.4	5.1
27	69	4.6	9.8
28	82	5.5	15.3
29	110	7.4	22.7
30	148	10.0	32.7
31	205	13.8	46.5
32	220	14.8	61.3
33	275	18.5	79.9
34	299	20.1	100.0
Total	1,484	100.0	

Source: self-produced based on ECV (Living Conditions Survey) 2022 data.

Table 2

Average age at which individuals live as a couple, by gender

Gender		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Male	Age	592	25	34	31.46
	N valid (listwise)	592			
Female	Age	892	25	34	31.11
	N valid (listwise)	892			

Source: self-produced based on ECV (Living Conditions Survey) 2022 data.

Table 3 presents the distribution of highest level of education completed, following recoding into two categories: individuals with university education and those without. This is a sample in which more than half of respondents report having completed university-level studies.

Table 3

Level of education completed

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid %	Cumulative %
Non-university-level education	2,042	46.3	46.3	46.3
University-level education	2,367	53.7	53.7	100.0
Total	4,409	100.0	100.0	

Source: self-produced based on ECV (Living Conditions Survey) 2022 data.

Table 4 again presents the level of education completed, cross-tabulated by the variables *spouse or de facto partner* and *gender*. Among partnered men, those without university-level education exceed those with university-level studies by 10 percentage points. Among women, however, this difference is negligible – young partnered women are almost equally split between those with and without university education.

Table 4
Level of education completed

Spouse or de facto partner	Gender		Frequency	Percentage
No	Male	Non-university-level education	801	50.4
		University-level education	788	49.6
		Total	1,589	100.0
	Female	Non-university-level education	469	35.1
		University-level education	867	64.9
		Total	1,336	100.0
Yes	Male	Non-university-level education	329	55.6
		University-level education	263	44.4
		Total	592	100.0
	Female	Non-university-level education	443	49.7
		University-level education	449	50.3
		Total	892	100.0

Source: self-produced based on ECV (Living Conditions Survey) 2022 data.

Given the demographic weight, it is unsurprising that there are more young Spaniards living as a couple than foreign nationals. However, Table 5 provides comparative data between the two groups. Among Spanish nationals aged 25 to 34 included in the study, 29.5% live as a couple, compared with 50.6% of foreign nationals in the same age group.

Table 5
Spouse or de facto partner, by nationality

Nationality		Frequency	Percentage
Spanish	No	2,497	70.5
	Yes	1,046	29.5
	Total	3,543	100.0
Foreign	No	428	49.4
	Yes	438	50.6
	Total	866	100.0

Source: self-produced based on ECV (Living Conditions Survey) 2022 data.

Table 6 presents the frequency distribution of the variable *economic activity status* as defined by the respondent, segmented by gender and partnership status. Among those not living as a couple, there is virtually no difference by gender: around 65% are economically active and 35% inactive. However, among those living as a couple, the gender gap is more pronounced: 84.8% of partnered men are active, compared with 70.6% of partnered women. Beyond gender differences, these data suggest that employment is a factor that increases the likelihood of living as a couple.

Table 6

Economic activity status as defined by the respondent

Spouse or de facto partner	Gender		Frequency	Percentage
No	Male	Active	1,039	65.4
		Not active	550	34.6
		Total	1,589	100.0
	Female	Active	859	64.3
		Not active	477	35.7
		Total	1,336	100.0
Yes	Male	Active	502	84.8
		Not active	90	15.2
		Total	592	100.0
	Female	Active	630	70.6
		Not active	262	29.4
		Total	892	100.0

Source: self-produced based on ECV (Living Conditions Survey) 2022 data.

Table 7 presents the variable *net monetary income* among young people aged 25 to 34, comparing those who live as a couple with those who do not. The data show that the percentage of individuals with an annual income below €14,000 is significantly higher than the percentage earning more than €14,000, both among those who live as a couple and those who do not. However, among those living as a couple, the proportion of individuals earning above €14,000 is 10 percentage points higher than among those not in a couple. Pending the results of the logistic regression analysis, it can be hypothesised that higher income increases the likelihood of living as a couple.

Table 7

Net annual monetary income in previous year (grouped)

Spouse or de facto partner		Frequency	Percentage
No	Up to €14,000	2,052	70.2
	Over €14,000	873	29.8
	Total	2,925	100.0
Yes	Up to €14,000	911	61.4
	Over €14,000	573	38.6
	Total	1,484	100.0

Source: self-produced based on ECV (Living Conditions Survey) 2022 data.

4.2. Inferential analysis

This section presents the results of the binary logistic regression analysis. It provides technical details regarding the model's construction, statistical robustness and findings. It is important to note that causal relationships in the social sciences are complex and that many factors potentially influencing young people's decisions to live as a couple are not included in this model. Nonetheless, there is scope to expand research on couple formation among young people by developing new research models that incorporate additional variables. The findings presented here serve as a valid and reliable starting point for future studies.

In terms of the relative importance of the covariates, the variable *age* obtains the highest Rao's score test value (661.605), while *educational attainment* has the lowest (29.304). All variables are statistically significant and may therefore be included in the model.

The null model is defined as the one with the highest deviance and, consequently, represents the least effective model. Deviance reflects the discrepancy between observed and predicted values. The null model is obtained by excluding all factors that may affect the outcome or raw classification and including only a constant, which reflects the odds of being in a couple.

With the null model, 66.3% of the sample is correctly classified. According to this model, those in a couple represent 50.7% of those not in a couple. The model yields a deviance of 5,632.443. When the covariates *gender*, *age (centred at 29 years)*, *educational attainment*, *nationality*, *economic activity status* and *income* are introduced, the deviance is reduced to 4,597.702. This implies that the inclusion of these covariates reduces deviance by 1,034.741 points (5,632.443 – 4,597.702), explaining 29% of the variability in the dependent variable (*living as a couple*).

The Hosmer–Lemeshow statistic is used to test the null hypothesis that the model's predicted frequencies closely match the observed ones. Since the null hypothesis is rejected, we conclude that the predicted and observed frequencies differ significantly (sig. < 0.05). The proposed model correctly classifies 72.6% of the sample, compared to 66.3% under the null model.

The logistic regression model is expressed as follows:

$$\text{logit}(\text{couple} = 1) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Gender}) + \beta_2 (\text{Age}) + \beta_3 (\text{Educational attainment}) + \beta_4 (\text{Nationality}) + \beta_5 (\text{Economic activity}) + \beta_6 (\text{Income})$$

Table 8
Binary logistic regression

	B	Standard error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender (recoded)	0.686	0.074	85.463	1	0.000	1.986
Age (centred at 29 years)	0.305	0.014	488.882	1	0.000	1.357
Educational attainment (recoded)	-0.447	0.078	33.128	1	0.000	0.639
Nationality (recoded)	0.959	0.090	113.768	1	0.000	2.608
Economic activity (recoded)	-0.816	0.095	73.340	1	0.000	0.442
Income (recoded)	0.222	0.083	7.194	1	0.007	1.249
Constant	-1.234	0.083	221.334	1	0.000	0.291

Source: self-produced based on ECV (Living Conditions Survey) 2022 data.

All coefficients are statistically significant (sig. < 0.05). The sign of each coefficient indicates the direction of the relationship between the dependent and independent variable. A positive sign suggests that as the value of the independent variable increases, the probability of the dependent variable also increases; a negative sign suggests the opposite.

$\beta_0 = -1.234$: This is the model's prediction on the logit scale when all covariates are set to 0. In this case, it refers to a 29-year-old man with lower secondary education or less, of Spanish nationality, economically active and with an income of €14,000 or less. For this profile, the odds of living as a couple are 29.1% of the odds of not living as a couple. The negative sign indicates that it is more likely not to live as a couple (0) than to live as a couple (1).

$\beta_1 = 0.686$: This indicates that women are more likely than men to live as a couple. Its exponential value shows that the odds of living as a couple are 1.986 times higher for women than for men.

$\beta_2 = 0.305$: This suggests that the probability of living as a couple increases with age. Its exponential value shows that the odds of living as a couple increase by a factor of 1.357 for each additional year of age.

$\beta_3 = -0.447$: This suggests that higher levels of education are associated with a lower probability of living as a couple. Its exponential value shows that the odds of living as a couple decrease by 63.9% as education level increases.

$\beta_4 = 0.959$: This indicates that the probability of living as a couple is higher among foreigners than among Spanish nationals. Its exponential value shows that the odds of living as a couple are 2.608 times higher for foreigners than for Spaniards.

$\beta_5 = -0.816$: This indicates that not being economically active decreases the probability of living as a couple. Its exponential value shows that the odds decrease by 44.2%.

$\beta_6 = 0.222$: This suggests that the probability of living as a couple increases with income. Specifically, having an income over €14,000 increases the odds of living as a couple by a factor of 1.249 compared to those earning €14,000 or less.

Linear predictions are obtained by assigning values to the various covariates. By computing all possible value combinations, we can calculate the *logit* of living as a couple in each case. The combination with the lowest probability is defined as:

$$\text{logit}(\text{couple} = 1) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(0) + \beta_2(-4) + \beta_3(1) + \beta_4(0) + \beta_5(1) + \beta_6(0) = -3.72$$

The associated probability is very low, with a value of 0.024. This corresponds to a 25-year-old man with university education, Spanish nationality, not economically active and an income of €14,000 or less.

The combination with the highest probability is defined as:

$$\text{logit}(\text{couple} = 1) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(1) + \beta_2(5) + \beta_3(0) + \beta_4(1) + \beta_5(0) + \beta_6(1) = 2.158$$

The associated probability is very high, with a value of 0.896 (89.6%). This corresponds to a 34-year-old woman with only primary education, who is not Spanish, is economically active and has an income above €14,000.

This predictive model for living as a couple includes the following dichotomous or dichotomised covariates: *gender*, *educational attainment*, *nationality*, *economic activity* and *income*, along with *age* centred at 29 years. All covariates have a statistically significant effect on the prediction, allowing 72.6% of cases to be correctly classified.

According to this model, the profile least likely to live as a couple is that of a 25-year-old man with university education, of Spanish nationality, not economically active and with an income of €14,000 or less, while the profile most likely to live as a couple is that of a 34-year-old woman with primary education, not of Spanish nationality, economically active and earning more than €14,000.

This study did not take into account potential interactions between the different covariates.

5. Conclusions and discussion

This study examined how certain socio-demographic variables influence the decision of young people aged 25 to 34 to live as a couple. This age range was selected because cohabitation is relatively uncommon below the age of 25, and most young people have completed their formal education by the age of 25. One of the findings confirms that women tend to leave the parental home and form

partnerships earlier than men, as noted in previous studies (Mitchell *et al.*, 2017). However, the average age gap between men and women living as a couple is surprisingly small – just 0.4 years. Although this was not a central focus of the study, it may point to a convergence in traditional gender roles, potentially affecting decisions regarding when to move out and start a family. Furthermore, more than half of the young people in the sample had completed university education. Here, notable gender differences emerge: while men without university qualifications are more likely to live as a couple, no significant difference is found among women based on educational attainment. In other words, among young women, the proportion living as a couple is similar regardless of whether or not they have a university degree. Another relevant factor is nationality. A significantly greater proportion of young foreigners live as a couple compared to their Spanish counterparts. This phenomenon may be explained by cultural and economic factors that encourage earlier partnership formation among young migrants – a finding consistent with that reported by Fuster *et al.* (2024). The analysis also reveals that being economically active increases the likelihood of living as a couple, particularly among men. In addition, those with annual incomes above €14,000 are more likely to cohabit. These findings are consistent with those reported by Ballesteros *et al.* (2012), Colom and Molés (2016) and Moreno (2012).

To further investigate these results, a binary logistic regression model was applied, confirming and quantifying the observed relationships. The model shows that all variables considered – *gender, educational attainment, nationality, economic activity and income* – significantly influence the decision to live as a couple. Notably, the model indicates that women are nearly twice as likely as men to live as a couple. It also confirms that the probability of cohabiting increases with age and that having a university education considerably reduces that probability. Finally, the regression model identifies the profile least likely to live as a couple as a 25-year-old man with university education, of Spanish nationality, not economically active and with low income. By contrast, the profile most likely to live as a couple is that of a 34-year-old woman with primary education, not of Spanish nationality, who is economically active and has higher income.

In summary, the decision to live as a couple is clearly linked to a range of socio-demographic and economic factors. The findings suggest that labour market integration and financial stability are key enablers of this transition to adult life. Given that having children generally occurs within the framework of a stable partnership, it is essential to continue investigating the motivations behind such decisions in order to support pathways to adulthood and potentially increase birth rates in a context where these remain below replacement level.

Some important limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, it is a cross-sectional analysis based solely on 2022 data. Future research is needed to track how these findings evolve over time from a longitudinal perspective. In addition, the use of secondary data restricts the analysis to available variables and those support-

ed by the existing literature. To enrich the study, it would be useful to explore other datasets offering additional variables of interest and to consider conducting qualitative studies that provide a more holistic understanding of processes such as couple formation, cohabitation and parenthood.

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Notes

1 <https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=1410>

2 https://ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736177003&menu=ultiDatos&idp=1254735573002

3 https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176807&menu=resultados&secc=1254736195153&idp=1254735976608#_tabs-1254736195153

4 It should be noted that the concept of “economically active” used in this study does not include the unemployed. In official employment registers and the Labour Force Survey (Encuesta de Población Activa – EPA), individuals who are unemployed but seeking work are classified as active. However, in this study, “active” refers only to those engaged in economic activity. The unemployed are included under “not active”.

5 [https://www.ine.es/ss/Satellite?L=es_ES&c=INESeccion_C&cid=1259925432454&p=%5C&pagename=ProductosYServicios%2FPYSLayout¶m1=PYSDetalle¶m3=1259924822888#:~:text=Renta%20media%20por%20unidad%20de%20consumo%20seg%C3%BAn%20edad&text=en%20los%20hombres,El%20valor%20m%C3%A1s%20alto%20corresponde%20al%20intervalo%20de%20edad%20de,44%20a%C3%B1os%20\(18.992%20euros\).](https://www.ine.es/ss/Satellite?L=es_ES&c=INESeccion_C&cid=1259925432454&p=%5C&pagename=ProductosYServicios%2FPYSLayout¶m1=PYSDetalle¶m3=1259924822888#:~:text=Renta%20media%20por%20unidad%20de%20consumo%20seg%C3%BAn%20edad&text=en%20los%20hombres,El%20valor%20m%C3%A1s%20alto%20corresponde%20al%20intervalo%20de%20edad%20de,44%20a%C3%B1os%20(18.992%20euros).)

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