

**STUDYING OR WORKING? WHICH CHILD SHOULD THEY SUPPORT & WHY?**  
**FAMILY NORMS ON INTERGENERATIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT TOWARDS YOUNG ADULT**  
**CHILDREN AMONG IMMIGRANTS**

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8. Istruzione, mercato del lavoro, istituzioni e disuguaglianza sociale (Gabriele Ballarino, Emmanuele Pavolini).

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3. Genere, lavoro e famiglia, tra mutamenti dei contesti ed esiti delle politiche (Manuela Naldini, Mauro Migliavacca).

**Storia del paper:** il paper è stato presentato in occasione di un workshop internazionale su Relazioni Intergenerazionali tra la Popolazione Immigrata in Europa tenutosi nel 2015. Assieme ad altri articoli presentati durante il workshop fa parte della proposta di un numero monografico (a cura degli stessi autori) della rivista *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

**Introduction, relevance, aim.** The financial support that children receive from their parents along their life course is an important factor affecting their life chances and well-being. Previous research has consistently documented that, in Western-European societies parental support significantly affects children's educational attainment, occupation, home ownership, and income and wealth level. This is even more so for children of immigrant origins: intergenerational support is crucial for their socio-economic integration in the host society and to reduce inequalities in life chances between them and native children. Together with lower economic resources and skills, the weakness of the informal support networks available to immigrant children, their stronger economic support obligations towards their parents, the lack of encouragement and support in investing in their educational career, and specific cultural traits and beliefs are often mentioned as relevant factors to explain their lower propensity to enter tertiary education.

In most part of previous studies on the topic, however, these different cultural norms that presumably leads to lower parental support to children's educational investment are not directly observed. It is often the case that, in the context of multivariate analyses, differences between natives and immigrants in educational investment are first explained by differences in household's economic and cultural resources, children's cognitive skills, and previous academic performance. Then, if after controlling for these factors there are still significant between groups differences these are often attributed to cultural norms, beliefs and parental support.

In the present paper we aim at directly observing which are the norms that regulate parental support to adult children among first and second-generation immigrants living in Italy. In particular, adopting a mixed method approach we aim at shedding light on norms regulating family solidarity in three groups of immigrants from quite different origins: Maghreb, the Philippines and China.

**Data, methods and variables.** This paper is based on data collected via so-called "vignettes": "short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond". The vignette at the centre of our analysis aims to understand intergenerational financial support mechanisms of migrant families and, more precisely, between parents and their young adult children. The vignette describes a situation in which a couple of

immigrant parents are confronted with the competing demand for financial help from their two children. Both children are unmarried and still live with their parents: the older one (age 22) has lost his/her job and wants to start a small business (a shop); the younger (age 18, talented at school) would like to pursue an academic career in an Italian university far from the place of residence. Finally, the vignette specifies that the parents do not have sufficient resources to support both children's needs. Respondents were then asked an open-ended question: "What should the parents do?". The intention is to identify criteria used by respondents (child's gender or age, education versus entrepreneurship, or other something else) and the underlying values and norms that orient parents in helping their offspring (without obliging respondents to feel that they personally must behave in any specific way).

The vignette was formulated in four different versions, following a factorial design, differentiating children's gender according to the type of need. Which of the four versions was administered to a respondent was determined randomly.

Our sample comprises 347 individuals hailing (or born to parents) from three distinct areas, featuring relatively heterogeneous cultural traits: the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria), China, and the Philippines. Respondents were recruited, from November 2014 to April 2015, via a snowball technique among adults residing in the province of Bologna (in Northeastern Italy). Thus, it is worth noting that our sampling strategy has no probability basis nor any claim to representativeness.

## **Results**

### *Which child should they support?*

Descriptive analyses. The absolute majority- 57% - of the respondents suggest that the parents should support the one of the two children who want to invest in a tertiary education, while a third prioritize the financial support of the oldest child who want to open a small business slightly less than 10% of interviewed individuals did not express any preference opting for supporting both children or none of the two.

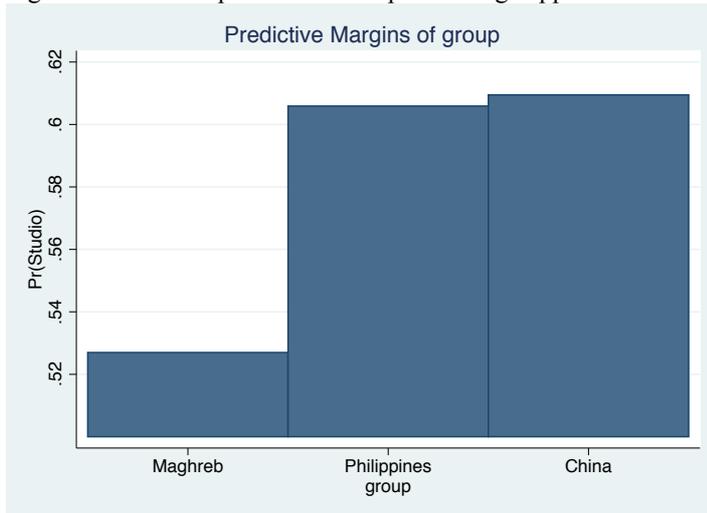
If we examine the variation across the different groups of immigrants, according to their country of origin, we do find that Chinese are those who are more likely to opt for supporting the studies of a child, whereas Maghrebis are the least likely to select this option. Interestingly in this latter group we also find a higher prevalence of respondents who think that the parents should support both or none of the two children. This latter group – as we will see – reveals that a strong influence among these immigrants of the traditional upward direction of the flow of economic resources along the generational lineage.

At the aggregate level the distribution of the responses seems to be largely unaffected by the specific version of the vignette utilized – and thus on different combinations of the gender of the two children.

Multivariate analyses. In the second step of the analyses we have explored which are the main factors correlated with the likelihood that the respondent thinks that the parents should prioritize the support to the child who want to enrol at the university vs. the one willing to work. The model include as explanatory factors: respondent's country of origin, sex, age at arrival in Italy, educational level, employment status, generational position in the family lineage; a dummy that take the value of 1 if the respondent is married to an Italian; the vignette version.

The results of the logit regression show that the probability of prioritizing support to a child who want to study is the lowest among those who arrived in Italy during school age (6-17) and the highest among those who migrated when they were 29 years old or older. Surprisingly, those respondents who are students are also less likely than those who are in paid employment to indicate that the parents should support the academic career vs. the working career of a child. Finally, net of compositional effects the group of immigrant from the Maghreb area are the least likely to support the enrolment of a child at the University (figure 1).

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of prioritizing support to a child who want to enrol at the university, by ethnic group.



### *Why?*

Qualitative analyses of the respondents' answers have been conducted in order to shed light on the motivations put forward by respondents to justify their preferences for supporting the academic or working career of a child. The main classes of reasons provided to support priority being given to a child who want to study are related with: i. the idea of education as an investment strategy from the economic and occupational point of view; ii. the prestige deriving from a child succeeding in reaching a university degree; iii. the idea that only at young ages children can pursue an academic career and thus the chance of investing in such career should not be lost. Differently reasons provided to support the view that the working career of a child should be given priority are related with i. the idea that a working child can immediately contribute to enhance the economic situation of the family; ii. the preference for a two step strategy in which the oldest child after opening a small business will be able to support the sibling who want to enrol at the university; iii. the belief that a child who want to study could and should get access to grants and economic support from public institutions.