

## **Social stratification of migrants in Italy: class reproduction and social mobility from origin to destination**

### **Stratificazione sociale degli immigrati in Italia: riproduzione di classe e mobilità sociale dall'origine alla destinazione**

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**Abstract** In this work we aim at studying the social stratification of foreign workers in Italy adopting a class-based approach: this perspective allows us to shed light on the transmission of inequality and social mobility (both *inter-* and *intra-*generational) from country of origin to destination. We formulate the hypotheses that a low social origin and class position in home country is associated both with poor occupational achievement (*Hyp 1*) and with scarce chances of upward social mobility (*Hyp 2*) in the host country. Our results underline a clear class reproduction in the lowest strata of the occupational structure. Furthermore, occupational mobility to upper class (but not to petty bourgeoisie) is easier for who already has a high social position, while who lies at the bottom of the social structure is prevented from improving his/her position also in the host country.

**Abstract** *Questo lavoro studia la stratificazione sociale dei lavoratori stranieri in Italia con una prospettiva centrata sulla classe sociale: è così possibile analizzare la trasmissione delle disuguaglianze e la mobilità sociale (sia inter- che intra-generazionale) dal paese di origine a quello di destinazione. Si ipotizza che bassa origine sociale e posizione di classe nel paese d'origine siano associate a scarsi esiti occupazionali (Hyp 1) e a ridotte possibilità di mobilità ascendente (Hyp 2) nel paese di destinazione. I risultati sottolineano una chiara riproduzione di classe negli strati più bassi della struttura occupazionale. Inoltre, la mobilità occupazionale verso l'upper class (ma non verso la piccola borghesia) è più realizzabile per chi ha già un'elevata posizione sociale, mentre chi ha un basso status socio-economico incontra difficoltà a migliorare la propria posizione anche nel paese ospitante.*

**Key words:** international migration, labour market, social class reproduction, social mobility, social stratification

## 1 Introduction

In this work we study the social reproduction of migrants in Italy, combining the social stratification and mobility literature with the *migration studies*. In particular, we explicitly account for migrants' heterogeneity in terms of social class of origin, an issue which has been under-considered in the study of first generation migrants' integration (Panichella, Avola, Piccitto, *in press*). Hence, we adopt a class-based approach to analyse to what extent social inequalities are transferred across space and time from both an *inter*-generational and an *intra*-generational point of view.

The focus on social class allows to add some important contributions to this field of study. Social class of origin is likely to affect occupational outcomes in a host country since it provides migrants with different endowments of capitals, that could be distinguished in economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1986). Other social background-related factors that affect the occupational achievement – over and above education – are motivations and aspirations, inheritance of parental business or material resources, different productivity, potential favouritism (Bernardi, Ballarino, 2016).

Social class in the country of origin has per se a direct effect on occupational achievement after migration: new-comers are indeed more at risk of entering in the secondary labour market (job positions characterized by lower chances of social improvement) (Portes, 1995). This is particularly true in a country like Italy, where migrants are over-represented among unskilled, not-standard and poorly rewarded jobs (Avola, 2015; 2018; Avola, Piccitto, 2020; Ballarino, Panichella, 2015; 2018; Fullin, Reyneri, 2011; Panichella, 2018; Panichella, Avola, Piccitto, *in press*), especially due to the large share of underground economy (Reyneri, 2003), a high turnover between (unskilled) employment and unemployment (Avola, 2015) and the stark processes of flexibilization at the margins (Barbieri, Cutuli, 2016). These characteristics of the Italian labour market make migrants more likely to be trapped in the so-called *3D* (dirty, dangerous and degrading) occupations (Piore, 1979) and to have very limited opportunities of upward social mobility (Fellini, Guetto, 2019; Avola, Piccitto, 2020; Panichella, Avola, Piccitto, *in press*).

On this ground, we hypothesize that migrants with the lowest occupational chances in Italy are those who already had weak social origin and class position in the country of origin: these subjects are the ones who get lower occupational achievements at the first job in Italy (*Hyp 1*) and are less likely to 'escape' the low-status jobs trap during the career (*Hyp 2*). Thanks to high-quality data, focused on migrant individuals living in Italy, we are able to highlight patterns of social class reproduction after migration.

## 2 Data and method

We base our analysis on the Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens (SCIF) survey, which has been collected by the Italian National Institute of Statistics

Social stratification of migrants in Italy: class reproduction and social mobility from origin to destination (Istat) in 2011–2012. We define social class on the basis of the EGP class scheme (Erikson, Goldthorpe, 1992), identifying: 1) upper class (EGP I-II-IIIab); 2) petty bourgeoisie (EGP IVabc); 3) working class (EGP V-VI-VIIab). Within the working class, we further distinguish between: 3a) stable working class (permanent and full-time); 3b) unstable working class (fixed-term and/or part-time); this choice allows us to account for the growing within-classes heterogeneity of modern societies (Oesch, 2006; Panichella, Avola, Piccitto, *in press*). Individuals are classified as migrants if they have been born abroad, except for people born in North America, Oceania and other high-income countries, since their occupational condition is in general similar to that of the native population (Avola, Piccitto, Vegetti, 2019). Our sample consists of males aged between 25 and 64. Since migration is a gendered process, we excluded women from the analysis: their inclusion should have required a more refined empirical strategy (Ballarino, Panichella, 2018). Analysis also excludes those migrants who migrated before being less than 15 years old, since they may migrate in order to join their parents (generation 1.5). After a list-wise deletion of missing observations, we end up with an analytical sample of 5,752 individuals.

Our empirical strategy consists of two sets of logit models, aiming at testing our two hypotheses. Three dependent variables are defined to test *Hyp 1*: a) entering the working class at first job; b) entering the stable working class at first job; c) entering the unstable working class at first job. In order to test *Hyp 2*, we define the following dependent variables: a) transiting from working class to upper class; b) transiting from working class to petty bourgeoisie; c) avoiding unstable working class or unemployment. We control for a number of covariates, namely: level and place of education (lower or less; upper/tertiary in country of origin; upper/tertiary in Italy); father's social class (upper class; petty bourgeoisie; working class); marital status (single, married, divorced); number of children (0; 1; 2; +3); age dummies (from 25 up to 64); macro-area of residence (North-west; North-east; Centre; South and Islands); years of residence dummies; direct migration (yes; no).

### 3 Preliminary findings

Table 1 shows the results for models testing *Hyp 1*, while in Table 2 are presented results for *Hyp 2*. Considering model (1), it emerges that being raised in a working class family increases the chances of getting a job within the working class after migration, net of the socio-economic position in the country of origin. Interestingly, social class before migration is a stronger predictor of social class at first job in Italy: indeed, individuals that were employed in the working class are more likely to maintain this very class in their first occupational episode in the host country; this is true for people with a previous job in their country of origin both in the stable working class and in the unstable one. Remarkably, also individuals not working in their home country have higher chances to have a working class job, with respect to former members of upper class or petty bourgeoisie. When 'unpacking' the working class in stable and unstable (models (2) and (3)), the reproduction of class position

from country of origin to destination becomes even more visible: indeed, people who belonged to the stable working class transit, after migration, to a permanent position within that class. Vice versa, who before migration was employed in a less secure and rewarding blue collar job, has more chances to find a similar job in the new country; these people is not even able to experience a pattern of horizontal mobility *within-working class*.

**Table 1** – Probability of entering in the working class at first job in Italy. Average partial effects: logit models

	WC		Stable WC		Unstable WC	
	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	$\beta$	$\sigma$	$\beta$	$\sigma$	$\beta$	$\sigma$
Class of origin [Ref.: Upp]						
PB	0.01	(0.03)	-0.01	(0.04)	0.01	(0.04)
WC	0.03*	(0.02)	0.03	(0.02)	0.00	(0.02)
Class in country of origin [Ref.: Upp]						
PB	0.01	(0.03)	-0.00	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)
WC (Stable)	0.17***	(0.02)	0.17***	(0.03)	-0.01	(0.03)
WC (Unstable)	0.12***	(0.02)	0.02	(0.02)	0.10***	(0.03)
Not working	0.07***	(0.02)	0.04*	(0.02)	0.03	(0.02)
(N)	5,752		5,752		5,752	

Table 2 analyses to what extent foreign workers succeed in: 4) transiting from working class to upper class; 5) transiting from working class to petty bourgeoisie; 6) avoiding unstable WC and unemployment. Looking at the two ‘real’ upward mobility processes, it emerges that social class does not have any effect on the transition from working class to petty bourgeoisie (5). It is likely that the non-financial resources related to the social status, like motivation and entrepreneurial attitude (but not the financial ones, geographically enrooted and not transferable), ease the access in this class in a new country only immediately after the process of migration: once ‘trapped’ in working class at first job, these resources cease being relevant for the transition to self-employment. Differently, coming from a job in upper class (4) confers higher chances on foreign workers of transiting from working class to upper class; indeed, coming from whatsoever other class is associated with less chances of experiencing this pattern of upward mobility. This finding may be lead from highly-educated people that accept a low-status first job in a new country, waiting for the recognition of their educational degree (Fellini, Guetto, 2019). Finally, when looking at the probability of downgrading from stable working class at first job in Italy to unstable working class or unemployment (6), it emerges that coming from a working class household is associated with fewer chances of dodging this pattern of mobility. Similarly, also the position in own home country is associated with the avoidance of this downward transition: people who were in the

Social stratification of migrants in Italy: class reproduction and social mobility from origin to destination unstable working class or not working are remarkably more at risk of incurring in this trajectory than people previously employed in other classes.

**Table 2** – Probability of upward social mobility among migrants. Average partial effects: logit models

	From WC to UPP		From WC to PB		Avoiding unstable WC and unemployment	
	(4)		(5)		(6)	
	$\beta$	$\sigma$	B	$\sigma$	$\beta$	$\sigma$
Class of origin [Ref.: Upp]						
PB	0.00	(0.02)	-0.01	(0.02)	0.01	(0.06)
WC	-0.02*	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.10***	(0.03)
Class in country of origin [Ref.: Upp]						
PB	-0.07***	(0.02)	0.02	(0.03)	-0.05	(0.05)
WC (Stable)	-0.09***	(0.02)	-0.00	(0.03)	-0.03	(0.04)
WC (Unstable)	-0.07***	(0.02)	0.01	(0.02)	-0.12***	(0.04)
Not working	-0.08***	(0.02)	-0.01	(0.02)	-0.15***	(0.04)
(N)	4,887		4,887		2,703	

These first findings corroborate our hypotheses. With respect to *Hyp 1*, our analysis shows that people with weak social position in their country of origin is more likely to reproduce their low position in the new country. This process emerges also within working class, with the distribution of workers in core/peripheral occupations within this class mirrored in the country of destination. Also *Hyp 2* is confirmed by our results: having had a job in the upper class in the home country eases the transition from working class to upper class, while who was placed in the periphery of the labour market in the own country finds severe difficulties in improving his/her social status also in the host country. Only the transition from working class to petty bourgeoisie is not affected by individuals' social background or by individual social position in his/her country of origin. Remarkably, despite the process of occupational upgrading which should trigger more and better jobs for everyone (Piccitto, 2019; Oesch, Piccitto, 2019), worker's social status continues to be an important factor of inequality within the labour market: the most fragile segments of the workforce bring their fragilities with them also after migration.

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