Italian Sociological Review
ISSN 2239-8589
DOI: 10.13136/isr.v16i2.987 2026, 16(2), pp. 853 – 888

Inequalities in Action: Examining the Interplay of Social Origins and Right-to-Study in Shaping Student Employment Patterns

Alessandro Bozzetti[a], Nicola De Luigi[a], Loris Vergolini[a]

Abstract

The paper explores the intersection of social origins, Right-to-Study measures, and student employment among university students in Italy, with a focus on the University of Bologna. In particular, it investigates how parental education (as a proxy for cultural capital) influences the likelihood of working while studying and evaluates the efficacy of Right-to-Study benefits – namely, scholarships and tuition waivers - in mitigating the need for student employment. Findings indicate that students with lower parental education are significantly more likely to work extensively, even when controlling for economic resources; this suggests that cultural resources exert an independent effect on student behavior. Furthermore, results show that comprehensive financial support (i.e., the combination of both scholarships and waivers) effectively reduces the probability of working extensively, especially for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds; in contrast, tuition waivers alone appear insufficient to alleviate financial pressures. Residential status further differentiates student experiences: off-site students are less likely to work extensively than residents or commuters, possibly reflecting higher motivation or selection effects, and Right-to-Study benefits seem particularly effective in supporting off-site students in reducing work hours. Drawing on survey data from the HousINgBO project (N = 9,337), these findings highlight the multifaceted nature of inequality in higher education and suggest that robust financial aid can partially offset inherited cultural disadvantages, with important implications for the design of Right-to-Study policies: effective support strategies should also consider cultural and symbolic barriers, particularly for first-generation and disadvantaged students.

Keywords: Social origins, Student employment, Right-to-Study, Habitus, Inequality, First-generation Students.

[a] Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna, Italy.

Corresponding author:
Alessandro Bozzetti, Nicola De Luigi, Loris Vergolini
E-mail: alessandro.bozzetti2@unibo.it

Received: 10 June 2025
Accepted: 14 January 2026
Published: 24 May 2026

1. Introduction

Even though the literature has long highlighted the increasing access to university over the last decades (Tight, 2019; Triventi, 2013), significant inequalities persist in the transition to higher education, partly due to less favorable prior educational pathways (Panichella & Triventi, 2014; Vergolini & Vlach, 2017). As a result, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are usually underrepresented and often embark on less conventional university trajectories, for example by not accessing higher education directly from secondary school or by not pursuing full-time, classroom-based studies (Ogren, 2003). These students, although overall dropout rates are decreasing, remain at greater risk of interrupting their studies (Contini & Salza, 2020).

If disadvantaged backgrounds continue to have an impact on students' educational careers, it seems relevant to look at the mechanisms that lead to the adoption of ways of coping with the difficulties they may experience. Among these, the most common is the combination of studying and working: a growing number of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, find themselves having to reconcile these two activities. At the European level, every second student works because they otherwise would not be able to afford studying: the average percentage of students working during the lecture period is 60%, with an additional 18% of students working only during the lecture-free period (Hauschildt et al., 2021). Moreover, work is particularly common among the most disadvantaged students: with reference to Eurostudent data, 32% of students whose parents are very well-off indicate that they work to fund their studies. By contrast, 73% of students whose parents are not at all well-off work to pay for their studies (Hauschildt et al., 2021).

Focusing on the effects of studying and working on educational attainment, as well as on the conceptualization and measurement of disadvantaged backgrounds, is crucial. Research seems to agree on the negative impact of studying and working on academic performance, with a longer time to graduation and an increased risk of dropout (Callender, 2008; Moulin et al., 2012), although no linear pattern has been identified (Hunt et al., 2004; Passaretta & Triventi, 2015). Concerning the conceptualization and measurement of disadvantaged backgrounds, early research has analyzed social origins in various ways, most commonly through the lens of parents' socio-economic status (Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993) or social class position (Breen et al., 2010). Parental education was also frequently considered as an additional variable: specifically, having at least one parent with a bachelor's degree greatly enhances the likelihood of aspiring to higher education and subsequently enrolling in university (Andres et al., 1999; Lehmann, 2009). However, there has been little theoretical discussion on it: instead, it has often been assumed

that the method of measurement has a minimal impact on the extent of educational inequalities.

Jaeger (2007) challenges this assumption, arguing that class serves as a broad "proxy variable" encompassing diverse factors. He emphasizes that studies on educational inequality should include more detailed variables beyond parental class, capturing not only economic resources but also familial cultural capital, as Bourdieu (1979) suggests. Particular attention should be paid to the role of cultural factors and *habitus*, especially for first-generation students, whose parents do not hold a university degree (Romito, 2021). Cultural capital, as theorized by Bourdieu (1979), plays a fundamental role in the intergenerational transmission of cognitive schemas, aspirations, and skills. Similarly, Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2013) assert that relying solely on class as an indicator of social origins risks conflating multiple influences on educational attainment. They advocate complementing class with an additional concept that accounts for the sociocultural dimensions of stratification, making the inclusion of parental education a logical and valuable addition.

Analyzing how economic and cultural resources differentially influence students' propensity to work (Bukodi et al., 2018; Marzadro & Schizzerotto, 2014) is also crucial to understanding the effectiveness of the Right-to-Study policies implemented, which are designed to support students from more disadvantaged backgrounds (Deming & Dynarski, 2010; Goldrick-Rab, 2016). However, few studies have assessed the impact of Right-to-Study measures: these financial interventions are intended to facilitate university attendance and degree completion. Recognizing the role played by these benefits within the student population is critical to understanding their ability to be truly successful in supporting the most disadvantaged students in relation to the need to work alongside their studies (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009; Richburg-Hayes et al., 2015).

While the cited studies have documented the general increase in student employment and the association between financial aid and reduced work intensity, they rarely examine the combined role of cultural background, economic resources, and specific policy instruments within a single analytical framework. In particular, previous research often treats financial aid as a homogeneous category or focuses on overall access to benefits rather than examining the distinct mechanisms through which tuition fee exemptions and direct financial support influence students' employment choices. This study aims to fill this gap. Firstly, it investigates whether the profile of the working student is more prevalent among those from disadvantaged cultural backgrounds and whether parental education exerts a distinct influence compared to that of students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Second, it examines whether, and to what extent, Right-to-Study measures shape the employment opportunities of students from disadvantaged cultural

and/or socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby contributing to the equalization of opportunities in higher education.

The paper aims to shed light on the mechanisms through which financial aid policies interact with students' social origins by explicitly comparing the cultural and socio-economic dimensions of disadvantage and distinguishing between different types of Right-to-Study measures. In particular, the findings suggest that, although parental cultural capital has a strong influence on students' propensity to combine study and work, this effect is not set in stone. When students receive comprehensive financial support, the explanatory power of inherited cultural dispositions appears to diminish.

Finally, the paper aims to provide valuable insights into policy design, identifying the most effective instruments for different student groups and the conditions under which they are most effective. In other words, distinguishing the effects of cultural background from those of socioeconomic background enables a more comprehensive evaluation of Right-to-Study policies. While these policies primarily address socioeconomic disadvantages through scholarships and tuition waivers, it is also important to consider whether additional interventions - such as peer tutoring or mentoring - might more effectively address *habitus* and cultural barriers.

1.1 The Italian context and the case study of the University of Bologna

This paper examines the Italian context, which is marked by several distinctive features. On the one hand, Italy offers considerable freedom of access to university: students can potentially enroll in any university course, regardless of their previous schooling. On the other hand, the system is characterized by significant disparities in transition rates from secondary to tertiary education. These disparities stem partly from the legacy of a strongly family-oriented welfare system - which implicitly expects parents to bear the costs of education (Facchini et al., 2021) - and partly from limited public investments in the education and training sector. As a result, students wishing to pursue higher education often face substantial economic barriers.

Moreover, compared to the European average, Italy has both a low percentage of students working during the lecture period (Hauschildt et al., 2021) and a low overall university enrollment, suggesting that a process of selection has already occurred. Furthermore, Italy is characterized by a low percentage of students receiving scholarships and by limited coverage of education and living costs for scholarship recipients (Eurydice, 2020).

More specifically, the paper focuses on the University of Bologna, which represents an important case study within the Italian context, as the second

largest Italian university, with 85,000 students enrolled in the 2020/21 academic year. A noteworthy feature, in an otherwise relatively underdeveloped Italian context compared to other European countries (Eurydice, 2022), is the extensive array of benefits available to students, made possible by the Emilia-Romagna Region through the Agenzia Regionale per il Diritto allo Studio (ER.GO.) and the University itself. These benefits include scholarships awarded based on economic need (for first-year students) and academic merit (for students in subsequent years). Additional benefits are provided in the form of meal vouchers and accommodation in student residences. Data for the 2020/21 academic year, analyzed in this paper, indicates that ER.GO. distributed 14,404 scholarships to students enrolled at the University of Bologna

Furthermore, the University of Bologna provides substantial financial assistance in the form of exemptions from student contributions. Its fee system uses a personalized approach based on the ISEE (Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator) and includes merit-based criteria. Students with an ISEE of up to €23,000 are eligible for a "no tax area" designation, while a progressive system of partial exemptions is available to support middle-income students. In the 2020/21 academic year, approximately half of the Unibo's student population (43,108) benefited from fee waivers, with 22,192 receiving full waivers. Additionally, 14,404 students were awarded scholarships.

For this reason, the case of the University of Bologna makes it possible to examine in depth, on the one hand, the influence of the various Right-to-Study measures on the employment patterns of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and, on the other hand, whether and to what extent students' residential status impacts the university experience and the likelihood of combining study and work during university studies. If Italy is the European country with the highest percentage of students residing with their parents during their studies (68%, which is twice the European average; cf. Hauschildt et al., 2021), the case of the University of Bologna is particularly interesting in that around half the student body comes from outside the Emilia-Romagna region, where its campuses are located, allowing for an examination of how moving away from home impacts employment status. University costs are particularly relevant for students who leave their homes to enroll at university (off-site students): beyond the expenses related to food and daily life in the city in which they live, it is mainly the costs of rent that have a significant impact, due to high housing prices in those cities characterized by significant rental demand. For this reason, residing with parents during university studies may be a necessity rather than a choice, particularly in the absence of adequate financial support measures to reduce costs (Bozick, 2007; Callender, 2008).

The following section presents an analysis of the existing research literature, with a particular focus on the cultural and economic background of

the university student population, specifically in relation to first-generation students, Right-to-Study measures, and students' residential status. The subsequent section presents the data, variables, and methods employed in the study. This is followed by an exposition of empirical results and concluding remarks.

2. Research Literature

2.1 Working while studying at university

As anticipated above, although still less widespread than in the US, earning while learning is becoming more common in many European countries (Lessky & Unger, 2022). Despite its significance, the relationship between higher education and simultaneous employment has been relatively underexplored in the academic literature: research has largely concentrated on the connection between work and academic progress, generally indicating that working while studying negatively affects university performance (Callender, 2008; Triventi, 2014).

In contrast, little is known about the different types of jobs in which university students are employed. Beyond the well-studied distinction between on-campus and off-campus work experiences (Woods & Frogge, 2017), some individuals may be full-time workers who decide to enroll in a university course; other students might enter the labor market after beginning their higher education, leveraging the skills they acquire during their studies, which can positively impact their future careers. Conversely, some students might choose to work - even in fields not consistent with their course of study - to cover educational expenses or fund other activities alongside their studies. Since the demands of these jobs are often restricted to specific times of the week or year, they tend to be less rigid, and in some cases even informal, making them more compatible with attending classes and studying overall.

In addition, over time, young people have been forced to deal with different forms of employment, becoming increasingly engaged in short-term, non-standard work, facing zero-hour contracts, low-wage jobs, and "flexible" employment (Canny, 2002). These shifts in the labor market have coincided with transformations in the university experience, in which the necessity for students to finance their education, along with increasing living and housing costs, has become commonplace. While the precariousness and insecurity associated with such jobs are clearly problematic, the availability of flexible, "on-demand" work that accommodates study schedules can also be a strength,

as students often take on temporary jobs that can be easily left behind after graduation (Gregory, 2022).

While some scholars argue that the reasons for working while studying are only partially driven by economic need (Baum, 2010), a significant portion of the literature emphasizes the dominant role of financial factors (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009; Perna, 2010). For many students, working while studying is primarily a necessity to earn money for basic needs and university expenses. Financial considerations are particularly influential in the work decisions of students from low-income families (Broton et al., 2016): students must cover educational expenses (such as books and tuition fees) in addition to their basic living costs (rent, transportation, utilities, food, etc.). However, from the lens of rational choice theory (Goldthorpe, 1996), working during studies can be seen as having additional significance. For a working-class family, the substantial investment in a university education could lead to significant returns, such as a well-paying job, but working while studying can also help mitigate the risks associated with this investment (Tavares & Cardoso, 2013).

Although research indicates that student employment is more common among those from disadvantaged social classes, the relationship between social origin and the likelihood of working during university is less clear, particularly because the type of work is often not distinguished, especially when discussing occasional work (Hunt et al., 2004). More recently, Hauschildt et al. (2021) have highlighted that students from lower-class families are more likely to engage in continuous full-time or part-time jobs, while temporary jobs are common across all social groups.

Though the number of studies that take into account the nature of the work performed by students is limited, some scholars (Adebayo, 2006; Macari et al., 2006) have highlighted that any student obliged to combine study with paid work, whether full-time or part-time, by choice or by necessity, falls into the category of so-called *non-traditional students*.

2.2 First-generation students

The non-traditional students label is employed to describe students whose socio-demographic characteristics and university experiences differ from those of traditional participants in higher education. It is a valuable term for capturing the broad heterogeneity within the student population, as it encompasses differences in prior educational trajectories, social and family backgrounds, gender, age, living conditions, study motivations, and employment profiles (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002).

The concept of non-traditional students is particularly useful for the analyses presented here, as it allows consideration of the experiences of so-called first-generation students, a label referring to students whose parents have not obtained a university degree. This term is widely used both in the US (Beattie, 2018) and Europe (Thomas & Quinn, 2007), yet it remains relatively underutilized in Italian academic literature, with the exception of Romito (2021, 2025).

For a long time, research on university pathways has primarily focused on social class or parental socio-economic background. Even when parental education has been taken into account, it has rarely been treated as an independent factor, instead being used as a proxy for student's socio-cultural background (Romito, 2021). This approach persists despite extensive literature on social inequalities - beginning with Bourdieu's work (1979) – that has emphasized the crucial role of cultural capital in the intergenerational transmission of cognitive frameworks, aspirations and skills.

If cultural capital is understood as the set of cultural resources that are passed down from one generation to the next and through which individuals can gain access to social and economic privileges (Bourdieu, 1986), then it is clear that, while not entirely excluded from advancing their intergenerational status, first-generation students are likely to face closed systems that present them with unique challenges.

First-generation students, who are often referred to *class transfuges* (Friedman, 2016), typically experience a process whereby they encounter a social world during their schooling whose symbolic codes may contrast with those that characterize their family background (Romito, 2021).

This process often generates barriers to accessing key resources that support decision-making and orientation, stemming from both prior schooling experiences and the characteristics of the social networks - family and peers - in which they are embedded (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Moreover, the transition to university frequently produces tensions and ambivalence within the families of first-generation students, giving rise to a *divided habitus* and a growing distance from familiar social and cultural worlds (Lehmann, 2014). As highlighted by Nairz-Wirth et al. (2017), students with a strong awareness of their social position and 'place' are particularly vulnerable to perceiving themselves as *cultural outsiders* in higher education, a perception that often intensifies fears of failure.

Numerous empirical studies show that parental educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of university access. Having at least one parent with a bachelor's degree significantly increases the probability of attending university (Lehmann, 2009), whereas the absence of parents with tertiary education lowers the likelihood of enrollment (Horn & Nuñez, 2000). Even

when financial conditions and academic performance are held constant, students from highly educated families are more likely to enter higher education and less likely to drop out (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In contrast, first-generation students tend to face a range of educational, cultural, and financial challenges throughout their university trajectories (Cardoza, 2016).

It is precisely for this reason that first-generation students may combine their education with employment, not only to cover financial costs but also to achieve social mobility that goes beyond economic aspects and includes cultural issues. Research shows that these students rely on both part-time and full-time work, experiencing the university path differently from their peers (Checkoway, 2018; Stich & Freie, 2016). However, it is not clear whether financial costs can be a barrier in and of themselves, or whether cultural and symbolic factors - reflected in family expectations and engagement with higher education - also play a role (Romito, 2021). In other words, if the availability of economic capital is a crucial mediator in university experience (Quinn et al., 2005), symbolic aspects may play an equally crucial role.

2.3 The Right-To-Study measures

Existing research suggests that students from the most disadvantaged social classes are more likely to work in order to meet the costs of university. Against this background, it is important to examine whether Right-to-Study benefits can alter this relationship. Students who are forced to work for economic reasons may change their employment behavior when they gain access to financial aid (Lobel, 1991). As Goldrick-Rab et al. (2009) argue, a common assumption in the literature is that scholarships help reduce students' need to work extensively by covering part of their educational expenses: this effect would be particularly strong especially among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Broton et al., 2016).

Right-to-Study measures, whether based on financial need or academic merit, are also embedded in broader debate on equal access to education and its consequences for social stratification and mobility (Agasisti & Murtinu, 2016; Facchini et al. 2021; Herbaut & Geven, 2020). Carruthers and Özek (2013) highlighted that the loss of financial aid negatively affects students' motivation and leads them to increase the working hours during university, not solely due to financial constraints. This issue raises important equity concerns: if students from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to work to finance their studies, and student employment negatively affects academic progression, this dynamic risks reinforcing social inequalities.

Right-to-Study policies vary across national contexts and according to students' characteristics (including income, merit, and residential status), but they generally aim to promote participation in higher education among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hauschildt et al., 2021). Conversely, when student aid systems are inefficient, paid work often becomes a necessity to cover living and study-related expenses (Choitz & Reimherr, 2013; Glocker, 2011). It is therefore important to distinguish between measures that directly increase students' financial resources, such as grants, and those that reduce study-related expenses, such as tuition waivers.

Although academic and policy debates have largely focused on financial aid, scholarships and tuition waivers, this emphasis risks overlooking other crucial dimensions, particularly those related to cultural and social capital. From a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu, 1986), economic resources alone are not sufficient to ensure full participation in higher education. Many students face less visible barriers associated with their background, norms, and familiarity with the academic environment (Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021; Lehmann, 2014), which can significantly affect both academic progress and their sense of belonging.

In this paper, Right-to-Study benefits are analyzed as a set of policies that can influence the relationship between studying and employment in different ways. Given that students' social backgrounds shape their likelihood of working while enrolled, it is essential to assess how these policies can reduce the need – or the perceived necessity - to work in order to support their education. Identifying which measure is most effective, and for which group of students, has therefore relevant policy implications.

2.4. The role of residential status

Finally, university students differ also in their residential status: research shows that students who move to the cities where they study tend to be those with higher qualifications, greater motivation, and higher economic and socio-cultural capital (Christie, 2007).

For off-site students the financial burden is considerably higher than that faced by commuters or students who live on campus: in addition to everyday expenses such as food and general living costs, accommodation expenses are a major concern, especially in cities with high rental demand and limited affordable housing options. Several studies suggest that the need to leave home to attend university is a significant deterrent for young people from families in which tertiary education is not the norm (i.e., first-generation students). These increased costs could imply that off-site students are more likely to work.

However, research shows that students from disadvantaged backgrounds often choose to study close to home to minimize housing costs, especially in countries with inadequate student housing (Bozzetti et al., 2024a; Gerdes & Kroher, 2024). In the US, scholars have found that low-income students are more likely to live at home during their early college years and work while studying to manage expenses (Bozick, 2007) and that students who live with their parents are more likely to work than those who lived independently (Callender, 2008). In other words, not experiencing university life as an off-site student may sometimes reflect a cost-reduction strategy: while off-site students may have to work to cover the higher costs associated with university life, students already living in the city where the program is based may have been influenced in their choice of university by the lower costs associated with living with their family of origin.

A different argument can be made for commuters: issues related to time constraints and socio-work integration may play a role in the decision of whether or not to work. For commuters, daily life may be disadvantaged by longer journeys – both in distance and time – from home to the place of study (Newbold et al., 2010; Spiess & Wrohlich, 2008). Commuting can therefore serve as a survival strategy for students who are determined to continue their studies despite the high costs of education and limited financial support from their families. However, the costs of commuting, both in terms of time and money, impose a significant burden on those who are least able to bear them.

2.4 Research questions

In order to explore the relationships between the dimensions presented above, the research questions this paper seeks to answer are as follows.

2.4.1 How does parental education influence the likelihood of working while studying in university?

In line with the arguments put forward by Jaeger (2007) and Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2013), the following analyses aim to consider the concept of class in all its dimensions. Particular attention is paid to family cultural capital, as this plays a significant role in the intergenerational transmission of cognitive patterns, aspirations and skills (Bourdieu, 1979). More specifically, considering parental education as a proxy for cultural capital allows its impact to be measured with equal economic resources in order to understand the role of socio-cultural background in the decision to work while studying. It is expected that the cultural component related to social origins may exert an independent

influence on the probability of working during university, meaning that it would not be solely linked to economic necessity. In other words, it is expected that working students will be more common among those whose parents have a lower level of education, given the same initial economic situation.

2.4.2 To what extent can Right-to-Study measures influence the way in which the university is experienced, and make a dent in the existing dimensions of disadvantage?

If the Right-to-Study policies are designed to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Deming & Dynarski, 2010; Goldrick-Rab, 2016), it is crucial to understand how effective they are in supporting such students and whether they can truly succeed in doing so, taking into account the need for them to work alongside their studies, thereby contributing to equal opportunities in higher education.

More specifically, it is important to consider whether the various Right-To-Study measures have a differentiated impact on a highly heterogeneous student population. Do scholarships, which affect students' finances directly, and tuition fee waivers, which aim to limit study-related expenses, have different effects on the likelihood of students working during their studies? Scholarships are particularly expected to make a difference. For students who only benefit from tuition fee exemptions, the effectiveness of such measures is expected to be lower, forcing them to combine study with work. This tendency is also expected to be more prevalent among students from lower socio-cultural backgrounds (Richburg-Hayes et al., 2015).

2.4.3 Is the propensity to work and the impact of different Right-to-Study measures the same for the entire student population, or does it vary according to the students' residential status (off-site or residents)?

On the one hand, research shows that students who move to the cities where they study tend to have better qualifications, be more motivated, and have greater economic and socio-cultural capital (Christie, 2007). On the other hand, off-site students face a considerably higher financial burden compared to residents or commuters, which is a significant deterrent for young people from families with less cultural capital. While these higher costs may imply that off-site students are more likely to work, they can also be considered a "selected" population in terms of socio-economic background and motivation. Studies conducted in the US seem to confirm this, emphasizing that low-income students were more likely to live at home and work during their studies to manage expenses (Bozick, 2007; Callender, 2008). Due to the lack of studies in the Italian context, this relationship must be investigated in depth, preventing

any specific research hypothesis. Consequently, the impact that Right-to-Study measures may have on the propensity to work, taking into account the students' residential status, remains to be discovered.

Taken together, these research questions aim to contribute to the existing literature on student employment by documenting patterns and clarifying the mechanisms through which cultural background, economic resources, and specific policy tools interact. The paper therefore aims to provide evidence that is directly relevant to the design and targeting of Right-to-Study policies.

3 Data, Variables and Methods

The analyses in this paper are based on data from the HousINgBO survey, which was distributed to students enrolled at the University of Bologna during the spring (May-June) of 2021. A total of 9,337 questionnaires were collected, and the characteristics of the resulting sample closely align with those of the overall student population.

The HousINgBO survey contains detailed information on students' socio-economic background and employment characteristics, all of which are relevant to our research questions. The main limitation of the data is its local scope, which prevents the generalization of the results to the entire Italian context.

As stated above, the outcome of interest is employment status, measured through a dummy variable that takes the value "0" for non-working students and students engaged in occasional jobs, and the value "1" for students working extensively. More precisely, occasional and extensive jobs are identified by jointly considering a question on the respondents' self-perception of their employment condition and the number of hours worked. In line with the interpretation provided by Broton et al. (2016), a student is classified as working extensively if he is employed for at least 20 hours per week[1]. This approach makes it possible to identify students who may encounter difficulties in attending lectures or having sufficient time to study.

The main independent variables used in the analysis are parental education, Right-to-Study and residential status. Parental education is measured following the dominance approach[2] through a 3-category variable that identifies parents

[1] As a robustness check we also estimated additional models in which we use an alternative threshold for extensive work. More precisely, we consider as extensive workers also those who declare to be employed in a part-time occupation for less than 20 hours. The results are substantially coherent with those presented in the main text.
[2] According to the dominance approach (Erikson, 1984), parental education is determined by the higher educational degree of the two parents.

with compulsory, upper secondary, and tertiary education. Right-to-Study is also measured using a 3-category variable that distinguishes between students with no benefits, students with only tuition waivers, and students who have access to both tuition waivers and scholarships. Finally, residential status divides students into three categories: residents, off-sites, and commuters. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for these variables.[3]

The analytical strategy of this paper is based on a two-step approach. The first step involves the comparison of a set of nested logistic regression models. More precisely, five models are estimated, and to facilitate comparison across models, average marginal effects are presented (Mood, 2010). The analysis starts with a bivariate model in which only parental education is included, and then progressively adds socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, geographic area of birth); school experience (high school track, type of degree, year of enrolment, course location, field of study, residential status); Right-to-Study and economic resources (parental social class, household economic condition). These models allow us to address the first research question concerning the influence of parental education while accounting for variables related to economic resources, with the aim of identifying the role played by cultural resources in students' employment decisions.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (N=6,609).

Outcome	
Work activity	%
Occasional/no job	87.2
Extensive work	12.8
Main independent variables	
Right-to-Study	%
No benefit	53.5
Only tuition waiver	27.0
Tuition waiver and scholarship	19.5
Residential status	
Resident and commuter	51.8
Off-site	48.2
Parental education	
Compulsory	18.0
Upper secondary education	43.0
Tertiary	39.0

The second step of our analytical strategy considers the interaction between parental education, Right-to-Study, and residential status, which allows us to address the second and third research questions.

[3] See Table A1 in the Appendix for the descriptive statistics of all the variables used in the analysis.

4 Empirical findings

Table 2 reports the set of nested models described in the previous section. The aim of these models is to answer the first research question, which concerns the role played by parental education in students' decision to work while studying. It is apparent that having highly educated parents play a significant role in the employment decisions of students enrolled at the University of Bologna. For example, in Model 1, which presents the simplest specification (i.e., a bivariate model), having parents with tertiary education reduces the likelihood of working extensively by 11.8 percentage points (pp) compared to students whose parents did not progress beyond compulsory education. The nested model strategy shows that, as additional variables are included, the influence of parental education tends to decrease, but remains consistently relevant[4] and statistically significant.

For our purposes, the most interesting model is the fifth, which also controls for parental social class and household economic conditions. As highlighted in previous sections, including these variables jointly allows us to disentangle the distinct contributions of the various resources associated with social origins (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2013). In this specification, the effect of parental education can be interpreted primarily as a proxy for cultural resources. The results from Model 5 indicate that the cultural component of social origins exerts an independent effect on the likelihood of working extensively while attending university. It seems that the decision to work is not solely driven by economic need. For instance, parents with a university degree may plausibly encourage their children to prioritise their studies and engage fully in university life. This could happen for several reasons, including the possibility that parents with university degrees place relatively greater value on academic engagement and may wish to emphasize the intrinsic value of education over early labour market participation. Alternatively, they might also view extensive employment as potentially distracting from academic achievement and personal development. Conversely, parents without a university degree may view working during studies as a sign of responsibility and independence, or as a potentially important step to gain work experience and improve future employment prospects.

[4] More precisely, having tertiary educated parents reduce the working probability of 8.5 pp in model 2 and the effect decreases to 4.5 pp once all the intervening variables are considered (model 5).

Table 2. Average marginal effects (selected variables) from a set of logistic regression models for the probability of working extensively.

	Model 1 Bivariate	Model 2 M1+SocDem	Model 3 M2+School	Model 4 M3+RTS	Model 5 M4+Eco
Parental education					
Compulsory	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Upper secondary	-0.083***	-0.058***	-0.042***	-0.042***	-0.037***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Tertiary	-0.118***	-0.085***	-0.056***	-0.056***	-0.045***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Right-to-Study					
No benefit				Ref.	Ref.
Only tuition waiver				0.016*	0.012
				(0.009)	(0.010)
Grant and waiver				-0.012	-0.018*
				(0.011)	(0.011)
Residential status					
Resident			Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Off-site			-0.058***	-0.057***	-0.057***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Pseudo-R^2	0.019	0.102	0.138	0.139	0.142
N	6,609	6,609	6,609	6,609	6,609

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Full models are reported in the Appendix (Table A2).
Legend. SocDem: socio-demographic characteristics; School experience; RTS: Right-to-Study; Eco: economic resources (i.e., economic condition and parental social class).

Table 2 provides some preliminary clues regarding the other two research questions. More precisely, with respect to Right-to-Study, the results in Models 4 and 5 are substantially similar, although with some (non-trivial) differences in statistical significance. The general message is that students with only tuition waivers tend to work slightly more in extensive employment than those without any kind of benefit (+1.6 pp in Model 4 and +1.2 pp in Model 5), while those receiving both benefits (tuition waivers and scholarships) are less likely to work extensively. In this case as well, the estimated effects are very small (-1.2 and -1.8 pp).[5] The results for residential status are clear: regardless of model specification, off-site students show a lower probability (about 6 pp) of working extensively than resident students.

To deepen our analysis, the next step is to consider the interaction between Right-to-Study and, respectively, parental education and residential status.

[5] The estimates about the Right-to-Study become slightly bigger if we consider it as a dummy variable ("No benefit or only tuition waiver" Vs "Scholarship and tuition waiver"). In this specification having a scholarship reduces the probability of working extensively of about 2.4 pp.

Figure 1[6] shows this interaction by considering Right-to-Study, first, as a dummy variable (having a scholarship vs. no benefit or only a tuition waiver) and, second, in its standard 3-category coding. This distinction is useful to better understand the role played by financial aid.

It is apparent that Right-to-Study makes a difference primarily for students from the lowest socio-economic background: the only significant difference is observed among those with low-educated parents (i.e., parents who did not progress beyond compulsory education). In the upper panel of the figure, the difference between students with a scholarship and other students is about 5 pp. In the lower panel, the relationship appears more complex. The statistically significant difference is the one between students with only a tuition waiver and those receiving both a scholarship and a tuition waiver. Students with only a tuition waiver show a probability of working extensively of about 0.19, whereas those receiving both benefits display a lower probability of about 0.12.[7] The additional empirical evidence derived from this analysis suggests that Right-to-Study measures have the potential to reduce the likelihood of working extensively during university, particularly for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. More precisely, such measures are more effective when they combine multiple forms of support, such as grants and tuition fee reductions or waivers. Tuition waivers alone appear insufficient to alter beneficiaries' propensity to work.

The final research question examines the role of residential status in shaping the probability of working extensively. As shown by the models in Table 2, off-site students are more likely to avoid employment in order to remain focused on their university studies. This result is not surprising, as off-site students may represent a selected population not only regarding observable characteristics such as social background - which we control for in our models - but also in terms of unobserved factors, including motivation and academic ability.

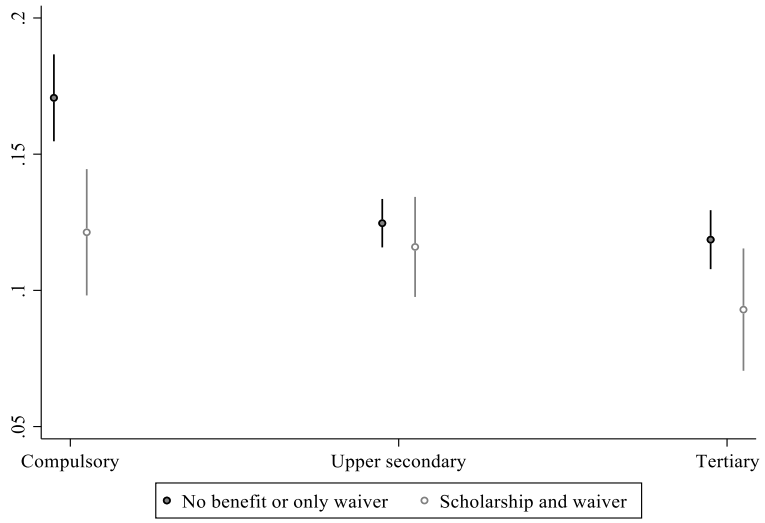
Indeed, it is plausible to assume that these students are especially motivated to graduate on time, at least partly to minimize their financial burden.

Figure 2[8] explores the relationship between residential status and eligibility for the Right-to-Study measures. The findings suggest that comprehensive financial aid can make a significant difference for off-site students by reducing the need to work extensively. However, it is important to emphasize that

[6] Tables A3 and A4 in the Appendix reports the values of the predicted probabilities as well as the test for the statistical significance.
[7] Students with no benefit stand in the middle with a probability of about 0.16.
[8] Tables A5 and A6 in the Appendix reports the values of the predicted probabilities as well as the test for the statistical significance.

receiving only a tuition waiver - without additional support - does not appear to help students reduce their working activities. Overall, the results confirm that tuition waivers alone are not an effective policy tool: for off-site students who receive only a tuition waiver, the likelihood of working extensively is not statistically different from that observed for resident students.

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities (and standard errors) of working extensively according to the interaction between Right-to-Study and parental education.



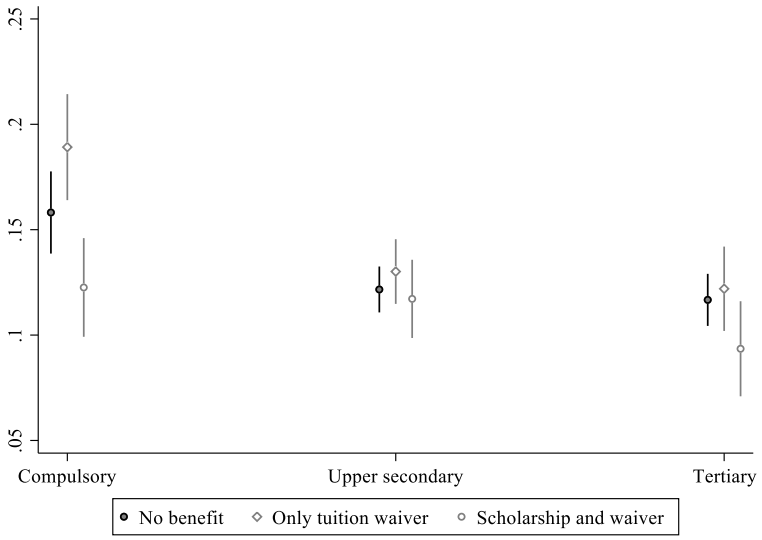
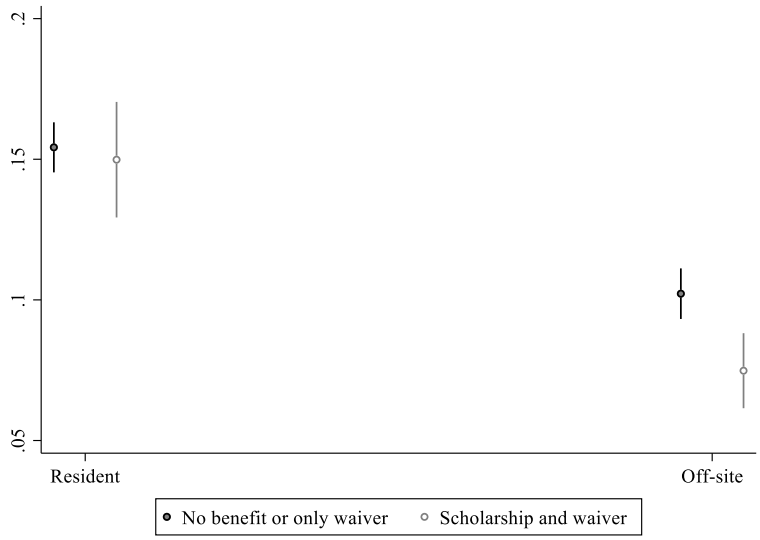
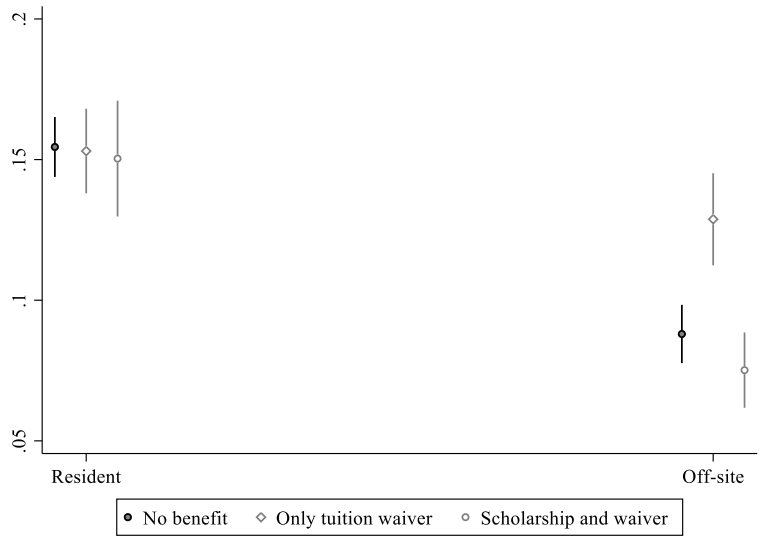


Figure 2. Predicted probabilities (and standard errors) of working extensively according to the interaction between Right-to-Study and residential status





To further investigate these dynamics, we conducted a separate analysis comparing resident and commuter students. However, as shown in Table A7 in the Appendix, the difference in extensive work probabilities between these groups is minimal (approximately one percentage point). Moreover, the interaction between residential status and eligibility for Right-to-Study financial aid introduces only small (and statistically insignificant) differences between residents and commuters (see Figure A1 in the Appendix). These findings underscore the limited impact of residential status on extensive work behaviour once financial aid is taken into account.

5. Conclusion

This paper delves into the determinants of university students' employment, focusing on the interplay between parental education, Right-to-Study and residential status. It is structured around three main research questions, beginning with the influence of parental education and continuing with the role played by Right-to-Study measures in mitigating the effects of social origin. The third research question explores the heterogeneity of these effects based on students' residential status. The study aims to go beyond existing research, which has typically examined student employment, financial aid or social origin in isolation, by jointly considering these dimensions. Instead,

it provides an integrated account of how these factors interact in shaping students' work decisions.

The findings highlight that combining studies with paid work is a common strategy, especially for students coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. More specifically, our results align with the framework proposed by Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2013), which suggests that even when controlling for parental class and household economic conditions, parental education continues to exert a significant influence on students' employment choices. Indeed, students whose parents have lower levels of education are more likely to engage in work activities alongside their studies. These results underscore the specific role of cultural factors, especially for first-generation students (Romito, 2021), which have an independent impact beyond that of parental social class. It is therefore plausible that cultural capital may play a relevant role in the intergenerational transmission of cognitive schemas, aspirations and skills (Bourdieu, 1979), and this suggests that it could be important to consider such factors when designing policy measures aimed at supporting students from more disadvantaged cultural backgrounds and addressing challenges related to student employment

Addressing our second research question, the paper sheds light on the role played by various Right-to-Study measures. Our findings indicate that a reduction in the probability of working extensively is observed only when students receive comprehensive support (i.e., both a scholarship and a tuition fee waiver), especially among those with low-educated parents. These results seem to suggest that, although cultural background continues to influence students' attitudes and behaviour, this influence can be offset by robust economic support and, consequently, that different forms of capital do not operate in a rigid, additive manner. Embodied cultural capital, or *habitus* in Bourdieu's terms, appears to remain sensitive to changes in objective conditions. From this perspective, economic resources are not simply added to cultural resources in a cumulative or mechanical way. Rather, substantial financial support can modify inherited patterns of behaviour and preferences, enabling students from contexts with low cultural capital to adjust their behaviour. Conversely, students benefiting exclusively from a tuition fee waiver experience no comparable decrease in their likelihood of extensive employment. This differentiation between types of financial support represents a key added value of the study, as much of the existing evidence treats financial aid as a homogeneous instrument, thereby obscuring important heterogeneity in its effects and implications for policy design.

The final research question focuses on residential status, which emerged as a relevant factor: off-site students tend to work significantly less than resident students, and receiving a scholarship proves particularly impactful for the

former. As mentioned, the University of Bologna is a notable case study in a context such as Italy, which is characterised by low student mobility. This focus constitutes a limitation of our study for what concerns the generalisability of the findings to the broader Italian context. In particular, mobility decisions among students from disadvantaged backgrounds could be influenced by the availability of Right-to-Study measures, which vary considerably across Italian regions (Laudisa et al., 2024). Our results should be interpreted as context-specific and most relevant for institutions with relatively well-developed Right-to-Study frameworks. Future research would benefit from extending the analysis in a comparative perspective, explicitly considering variation in Right-to-Study measures across universities as a pivotal factor in explaining the relationship between students' social origins and their engagement in working activities.

6. Policy implications

Some considerations regarding possible policy implications can be drawn from the results presented in this paper. The first, and more obvious, is to enhance financial aid provisions, particularly need-based grants. This can be an effective strategy to reduce liquidity constraints, thereby allowing students to be more focused on academic achievement. Our results highlight that not all Right-to-Study measures are equally effective. Tuition fee exemptions alone seem to be insufficient to counterbalance cultural and economic disadvantages, whereas comprehensive financial support has the potential to create more equal conditions for studying. Therefore, designing policies that ensure adequate and comprehensive support is crucial for addressing economic hardship and mitigating the reproduction of cultural inequalities within higher education.

However, as previously mentioned, our study also suggests that the decision to work is not solely driven by economic necessity, but it is also rooted in a cultural dimension. For this reason, it could be an effective strategy to rely on informative programmes (providing information about the availability of grants and scholarships, opportunities offered to working students by different study pathways, etc.) or on mentoring schemes in order to bridge possible gaps and to help students navigate the implicit rules of academia, In particular, the opportunity to be mentored by peers at a more advanced stage of the university course can be especially relevant for expanding the personal repertoire of cultural capital through new knowledge and suggestions (Lehmann, 2014). Furthermore, such initiatives may enhance self-confidence and academic identity, particularly among first-generation students or those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Factors such as alignment with family

expectations, distancing from one's social environment, and emancipation from family orientations influence how students experience university life. As already highlighted in the literature (Lessky, 2025), these subjective dimensions must be taken into account to improve targeted support and the quality of learning experience for all students in higher education.

Finally, while previous research has shown that working during university studies can negatively affect academic performance (Triventi, 2014), other studies suggest that employment aligned with the field of study may enhance future employability (Passaretta & Triventi, 2015). This duality highlights the need for nuanced policy responses. One promising direction is the development of more flexible curricula that allow students to combine study and work more effectively, particularly through structured opportunities such as paid internships. These should not only facilitate early engagement with the labor market but also preserve the educational mission as the core of the university experience.

This policy direction becomes even more pressing in light of the growing presence of non-traditional students - those who are older, employed, commuting, or first in their family to attend university (Bozzetti et al., 2024b). These students often face structural constraints that make full-time, on-campus attendance difficult, and they tend to express a clear preference for flexible learning formats. Moreover, dropout rates remain high among this group, especially in institutions that fail to accommodate their needs.

Expanding research in this direction is therefore essential. It would contribute to a more holistic understanding of what it means to uphold the Right-to-Study principle in student populations that include a growing number of non-traditional learners, diverse in terms of age, background, and life circumstances. More importantly, it would help ensure that working while studying becomes a matter of (conscious) choice rather than a necessity imposed by socio-economic disadvantage. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly evident that the challenge for higher education institutions is not merely to widen access make the attainment of a university degree possible for an ever-growing number of people, but also to adapt teaching and learning models and support systems to foster inclusion, retention, and success for all students.

References

Adebayo, D.O. (2006). Workload, social support, and work-school conflict among Nigerian nontraditional students. *J. Career Devel*, 33(2), 125-141.

Agasisti, T., & Murtinu, S. (2016). Grants in Italian university: a look at the heterogeneity of their impact on students' performances. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(6), 1106-1132.

Andres, L., Anisef, P., Krahn, H., Looker, D., & Thiessen, V. (1999). The persistence of social structure: Cohort, class and gender effects on the occupational aspirations and expectations of Canadian youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2, 261-282.

Baum, S. (2010). Student work and the financial aid system. In L. W. Perna (Ed.), *Understanding the working college student: New research and its implications for policy and practice* (pp. 3-20). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Beattie, I. (2018). Sociological Perspectives on First-Generation College Students. In B. Schneider (Ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Education in the 21st Century* (pp. 171-191). Berlin: Springer.

Bourdieu, P. (1979). *La distinction*. Paris: Édition de Minuit.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.C. (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: SagePublications.

Bozick, R. (2007). Making It through the First Year of College: The Role of Students' Economic Resources, Employment, and Living Arrangements. *Sociology of Education*, 80(3), 261-284.

Bozzetti, A., De Luigi, N., & Vergolini, L. (2024a). Differing patterns of employment for university students: the role of family background, educational choices and access to benefits. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1-20.

Bozzetti, A., De Luigi, N., & Vergolini, L. (2024b). Non-traditional Students Between Online and Offline: Which Way Forward for Higher Education? *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16(2), 131-156.

Breen, R., Luijkx, R., Müller, W., & Pollak, R. (2010). Long-term trends in educational inequality in Europe: Class inequalities and gender differences. *European sociological review*, 26(1), 31-48.

Broton, K.M., Goldrick-Rab, S., & Benson, J. (2016). Working for College: The Causal Impacts of Financial Grants on Undergraduate Employment. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 38(3), 477-494.

Bukodi, E., & Goldthorpe, J. H. (2013). Decomposing 'social origins': The effects of parents' class, status, and education on the educational attainment of their children. *European sociological review*, 29(5), 1024-1039.

Bukodi, E., Eibl, F., Buchholz, S., Marzadro, S., Minello, A., Wahler, S., Blossfeld, H.P., Erikson, R. & Schizzerotto, A. (2018). Linking the macro to the micro: a multidimensional approach to educational inequalities in four European countries. *European Societies*, *20*(1), 26-64.

Callender, C. (2008). The Impact of Term-Time Employment on Higher Education Students' Academic Attainment and Achievement. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23(4), 359-377.

Canny, A. (2002). Flexible Labour? The Growth of Student Employment in the UK. *Journal of Education and Work*, 15(3), 277-301.

Cardoza, K. (2016). First-generation college students are not succeeding in college, and money isn't the problem. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/01/20/first-generation-college-students-are-not-succeeding-in-college-and-money-isnt-the-problem/

Carruthers, C.K., & Özek, U. (2013). *Losing HOPE: financial aid and the line between college and work* (paper presentation). Annual Conference of the Association for Education Finance and Policy. New Orleans, LA.

Checkoway, B. (2018). Inside the Gates: First-Generation students Finding Their Way. *Higher Education Studies*, 8(3), 72-84.

Choitz, V., & Reimherr, P. (2013). *Mind the Gap: High Unmet Financial Need Persistence and Completion for Low-Income Community College Students*, Center for Law and Social Policy.

Christie, H. (2007). Higher education and spatial (im)mobility: nontraditional students and living at home. *Environment and Planning A*, 39, 2445-2463.

Contini, D., & Salza, G. (2020). Too Few University Graduates. Inclusiveness and Effectiveness of the Italian Higher Education System. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 71, 1-16.

Deming, D., & Dynarski, S. (2010). College aid. *Targeting investments in children: Fighting poverty when resources are limited*, 87, 283-302.

Erikson, R. (1984). Social class of men, women and families. *Sociology*, 18(4), 500–514.

Eurydice (2020). *National Student Fee and Support Systems in European Higher Education 2020/21. Facts and Figures*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurydice (2022). *National Student Fee and Support Systems in European Higher Education*. https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/data-and-visuals/national-student-fees

Facchini, M., Triventi, M., & Vergolini, L. (2021). Do grants improve the outcomes of university students in a challenging context? Evidence from a matching approach. *Higher Education*, 81(5), 917-934.

Friedman, S. (2016). Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility. *Sociological Review*, 64(1), 129-147.

Gerdes, F., & Kroher, M. (2024). Studying and Living on Your Own: Possible But not Affordable? The Current State of Student Housing in Germany. *Autonomie locali e servizi sociali*, 47(2), 371-404.

Glocker, D. (2011). The effect of student aid on the duration of the study. *Economics of Education Review*, 30(1), 177-190.

Goldrick-Rab, S. (2016). *Paying the price: College costs, financial aid, and the betrayal of the American dream*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Goldrick-Rab, S., Harris, D. N., & Trostel, P.A. (2009). Why financial aid matters (or does not) for college success: Toward a new interdisciplinary perspective. In J. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 4, pp. 1-45). New York, NY: Springer Science & Business.

Goldthorpe, J. (1996). Class analysis and the reorientation of class theory: The case of persisting differentials in educational attainment. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 47, 481-505.

Gregory, K. (2022). The students are already (gig) workers. In M. Currie, J. Knox & C. McGregor (Eds.), *Data Justice and The Right to the City* (pp. 211-226). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hauschildt, K., Gwosć, C., Schirmer, H., & Wartenbergh-Cras, F. (2021). *Eurostudent VII - Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe*. Bielefeld: wbv Publikation.

Herbaut, E., & Geven, K. (2020). What works to reduce inequalities in higher education? A systematic review of the (quasi-)experimental literature on outreach and financial aid. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 65, 1-14.

Horn, L., & Nuñez, A.M. (2000). *Mapping the Road to College First-Generation Students' Math Track, Planning Strategies and Context of Support*. Washington DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education.

Hunt, A., Lincoln, I., & Walker, A. (2004). Term-time employment and academic attainment: Evidence from a large-scale survey of undergraduates at Northumbria University. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28(1), 3-18.

Ivemark, B., & Ambrose, A. (2021). Habitus adaptation and first-generation university students' adjustment to higher education: A life course perspective. *Sociology of Education*, 94(3), 191-207.

Jaeger, M. M. (2007). Educational mobility across three generations: the changing impact of parental social class, economic, cultural and social capital. *European Societies*, 9, 527-550.

Laudisa, F., De Luigi, N., & Vergolini, L. (2024). Introduzione. *Autonomie locali e servizi sociali,* 2, 241-255.

Lehmann, W. (2009). University as vocational education: working-class students' expectations for university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30(2), 137-149.

Lehmann, W. (2014). Habitus Transformation and Hidden Injuries: Successful Working-class University Students. *Sociology of Education*, 87(1), 1-15.

Lessky, F., & Unger, M. (2022). Working long hours while studying: a higher risk for First-in-Family students and students of particular fields of study?. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 13(1), 1-20.

Lessky, F. (2025). First-in-Family students' roots and routes into higher education: Familial dynamics as drivers for breaking intergenerational cycles of educational attainment. *European Educational Research Journal*, 24(6), 797-819.

Lobel, S.A. (1991). Allocation of investment in work and family roles: Alternative theories and implications for research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 16, 507-521.

Macari, D.P., Maples, M.F., & D'Andrea, L. (2006). A comparative study of Psychosocial development in nontraditional and traditional college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory Practice*, 7(3), 283-302.

Marzadro, S., & Schizzerotto, A. (2014). More stability than change. The effects of social origins on inequalities of educational opportunities across three Italian birth cohorts. *Scuola democratica*, 2, 343-364.

Mood, C. (2010). Logistic regression: Why we cannot do what we think we can do, and what we can do about it. *European sociological review*, 26(1), 67-82.

Moulin, S., Doray, P., Laplante, B., & Street, M. C. (2012). Work intensity and non-completion of university: longitudinal approach and causal inference. *Journal of Education and Work*, 26(3), 333-356.

Nairz-Wirth, E., Feldmann, K., & Spiegl, J. (2017). Habitus conflicts and experiences of symbolic violence as obstacles for non-traditional students. *European Educational Research Journal*, 16(1), 12-29.

Newbold, J.J., Mehta, S.S., & Forbus, P.R. (2010). *Commuter Students vs. Non-Commuter Students: A Gap Analysis Examination of Differences in Satisfaction with Higher Education* (paper presentation). ACME Annual Conference, Dallas, TX.

Ogren, C.A. (2003). Rethinking the "nontraditional" student from a historical perspective: State normal schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *J. Higher Educ.*, 74(6), 640-664.

Panichella, N., & Triventi, M. (2014). Social Inequalities in the Choice of Secondary School. *European Societies*, 16(5), 666-693.

Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How college affects students (Vol. 2)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Passaretta, G., & Triventi, M. (2015). Work experience during higher education and post-graduation occupational outcomes: A comparative study on four European countries. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 56(3-4), 232-253.

Perna, L. (2010). *Understanding the working college student: New research and its implications for policy and practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Quinn, J., Thomas, L., & Slack, K. (2005). *From Life Crisis to Leifelong Learning: Rethinking Working-Class Dropout from Higher Education*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Richburg-Hayes, L., Patel, R., Brock, T., de la Campa, E., Rubb, T., & Valenzuela, I. (2015). *Providing More Cash for College: Interim Findings from the Performance-Based Scholarship Demonstration in California*. New York: MDRC.

Romito, M. (2021). *First-generation students. Essere i primi in famiglia a frequentare l'università*. Roma: Carocci editore.

Romito, M. (2025). 'A little one among giants': First-generation students transitioning to university in Italy, before and beyond the pandemic. *European Educational Research Journal*, 24(6), 738-756.

Schuetze, H.G., & Slowey, M. (2002). Participation and exclusion: A comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education. *Higher Education*, 44, 309-327.

Shavit, Y., & Blossfeld, H. P. (1993). *Persistent Inequality: Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Spiess, C. K., & Wrohlich, K. (2008). *Does distance determine who attends a university in Germany?* IZA Discussion Paper Series No. 3615.

Stich, A. E., & Freie, C. (2016). *The Working Classes and Higher Education: Inequality of Access, Opportunity and Outcome*. New York: Routledge.

Tavares, O., & Cardoso, S. (2013). Enrolment choices in Portuguese higher education: do students behave as rational consumers?. *Higher Education*, 66, 297-309.

Thomas, L., & Quinn, J. (2007). *First Generation Entry to Higher Education: An International Study*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Tight, M. (2019). Mass Higher Education and Massification. *Higher Education Policy*, 32, 93-108.

Triventi, M. (2013). Stratification in higher education and its relationship with social inequality. A comparative study on 11 European countries. *European Sociological Review*, 29(3), 489-502

Triventi, M. (2014). Does working during higher education affects students' academic progression?. *Economics of Education Review*, 41, 1-13.

Vergolini, L., & Vlach, E. (2017). Family background and educational path of Italian graduates. *Higher Education*, 73, 245-259.

Woods, K., & Frogge, G. (2017). Preferences and Experiences of Traditional and Nontraditional University Students. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 65(2), 94-105.

Appendix

Table A1. Descriptive statistics for the control variables model (N=6,609).

Outcome	
Geographical area of birth	%
North	60.1
Centre	13.8
South & Island	20.1
Abroad	6.0
Gender	
Male	33.6
Female	66.4
Age	
Younger than 21	33.8
From 22 to 24	39.3
Older than 25	26.9
High school track	
Academic	75.3
Technical	18.8
Vocational	2.7
Diploma earned abroad	3.2
Type of degree	
Bachelor's	54.2
Master's	31.0
Unique cycle	14.8
Year of enrolment	
Beyond the prescribed duration of study	9.2
Within the prescribed duration of study	90.8
Course location	
Bologna	78.0
Cesena	5.2
Forlì	8.0
Ravenna	4.8
Rimini	4.0
Field of study	
Humanities	33.6
Social sciences	26.0
STEM	32.6
Health	7.8

Table A2. Average marginal effects (full models) from a set of logistic regression models for the probability of working extensively.

	Model 1 Bivariate	Model 2 M1+SocDem	Model 3 M2+School	Model 4 M3+RTS	Model 5 M4+Eco
Parental education					
Compulsory	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	0.000
Upper secondary	-0.083***	-0.058***	-0.042***	-0.042***	-0.037***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Tertiary	-0.118***	-0.085***	-0.056***	-0.056***	-0.045***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Geographical area of birth					
North		Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Center		-0.057***	-0.027**	-0.027**	-0.027**
		(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
South & Islands		-0.065***	-0.031***	-0.029***	-0.029***
		(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Abroad		-0.060***	-0.028	-0.025	-0.029
		(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age					
Younger than 21		Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
From 22 to 24		0.036***	0.045***	0.045***	0.046***
		(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Older than 25		0.209***	0.228***	0.228***	0.226***
		(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Gender					
Male		Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Female		0.015*	0.008	0.007	0.007
		(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
High school track					
Vocational			Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Technical			0.011	0.011	0.012
			(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Academic			-0.031	-0.031	-0.031
			(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Diploma earned abroad			-0.060*	-0.059*	-0.064*
			(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.034)
Type of degree					
Bachelor's			Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Master's			-0.049***	-0.048***	-0.048***
			(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Unique cycle			-0.035***	-0.036***	-0.035***
			(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Year of enrolment					
Beyond time			Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Within time			0.001	0.001	0.003
			(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Course location					
Bologna			Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Cesena			-0.001	-0.001	-0.002
			(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Forlì			-0.039***	-0.040***	-0.039***
			(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Ravenna			0.018	0.018	0.018
			(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)

Rimini			-0.002	-0.003	-0.004
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Field of study					
Humanities			Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Social Sciences			0.025**	0.026**	0.025**
			(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
STEM			-0.050***	-0.050***	-0.051***
			(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Health			-0.058***	-0.059***	-0.059***
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Residential status					
Resident			Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Off-site			-0.058***	-0.057***	-0.057***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Right-to-Study					
No benefit				Ref.	Ref.
Only tuition waiver				0.016*	0.012
				(0.009)	(0.010)
Scholarship and waiver				-0.012	-0.018*
				(0.011)	(0.011)
Parental social class					
Upper & middle class					Ref.
Self-employed					0.028**
					(0.013)
Working class					-0.002
					(0.010)
Missing					0.001
					(0.016)
Household economic condition (Compared to most people in Italy)					
Worse					Ref.
Equal					-0.028**
					(0.013)
Better					-0.033**
					(0.014)
Pseudo-R^2	0.019	0.102	0.138	0.139	0.142
N	6,609	6,609	6,609	6,609	6,609

Table A3. Predicted probabilities for Figure 1 (upper panel).

	No benefit or only waiver		Scholarship and waiver		p-value
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	
Compulsory	0.171	0.012	0.121	0.017	0.0135
Upper secondary	0.125	0.006	0.116	0.013	0.5609
Tertiary	0.119	0.008	0.093	0.016	0.1545

Note: p-value refers to the significance of the Wald test for the equality of the predicted probability between "No benefit or only waiver" and "Scholarship and waiver" within each parental education level.

Table A4. Predicted probabilities for Figure 1 (lower panel).

	No benefit		Only tuition waiver		Scholarship and waiver		p-value		
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	p1	p2	p3
Compulsory	0.158	0.014	0.189	0.018	0.123	0.017	0.168	0.104	0.001
Upper secondary	0.122	0.008	0.130	0.011	0.117	0.014	0.537	0.779	0.455
Tertiary	0.117	0.009	0.122	0.015	0.093	0.016	0.753	0.214	0.191

Note: p-value refers to the significance of the Wald test for the equality of the predicted probability between: "No benefit" and "Only tuition waiver" (p1); "No benefit" and "Scholarship and waiver" (p2); "Only tuition waiver" and "Scholarship and waiver" (p3).

Table A5. Predicted probabilities for Figure 2 (upper panel).

	No benefit or only waiver		Scholarship and waiver		p-value
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	
Resident	0.154	0.006	0.150	0.015	0.788
Off-site	0.102	0.007	0.075	0.010	0.017

Note: p-value refers to the significance of the Wald test for the equality of the predicted probability between "No benefit or only waiver" and "Scholarship and waiver" within each parental education level.

Table A6. Predicted probabilities for Figure 1 (lower panel).

	No benefit		Only tuition waiver		Scholarship and waiver		p-value		
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	p1	p2	p3
Resident	0.154	0.008	0.153	0.011	0.150	0.015	0.912	0.808	0.884
Off-site	0.088	0.008	0.129	0.012	0.075	0.010	0.003	0.291	0.000

Note: p-value refers to the significance of the Wald test for the equality of the predicted probability between: "No benefit" and "Only tuition waiver" (p1); "No benefit" and "Scholarship and waiver" (p2); "Only tuition waiver" and "Scholarship and waiver" (p3).

Table A7. Average marginal effects (full models) from a logistic regression models for the probability of working extensively.

	Model 5
Parental education	
Compulsory	Ref.
Upper secondary	-0.043***
	(0.011)
Tertiary	-0.057***
	(0.012)
Right-to-Study	
No benefit or only waiver	Ref.
Scholarship and waiver	-0.018*
	(0.010)
Residential status	
Off-site	Ref.
Commuter	0.060***
	(0.009)
Resident	0.048***
	(0.012)
Geographical area of birth	
North	Ref.
Center	-0.027**
	(0.012)
South & Islands	-0.028**
	(0.011)
Abroad	-0.023
	(0.018)
Age	
Younger than 21	Ref.
From 22 to 24	0.045***
	(0.008)
Older than 25	0.228***
	(0.014)
Gender	
Male	Ref.
Female	0.008
	(0.009)
High school track	
Vocational	Ref.
Technical	0.010
	(0.023)
Academic	-0.032
	(0.021)
Diploma earned abroad	-0.060*
	(0.034)
Type of degree	
Bachelor's	Ref.
Master's	-0.049***
	(0.010)
Unique cycle	-0.037***
	(0.012)
Year of enrolment	
Beyond time	Ref.
Within time	0.003
	(0.012)

Course location	
Bologna	Ref.
Cesena	-0.002
	(0.019)
Forlì	-0.040***
	(0.013)
Ravenna	0.017
	(0.018)
Rimini	-0.002
	(0.018)
Field of study	
Humanities	Ref.
Social Sciences	0.026**
	(0.012)
STEM	-0.050***
	(0.010)
Health	-0.058***
	(0.014)
Observations	6,609
Pseudo R^2	0.139