

Pathways of Intention–Realization in Leaving the Parental Home in Italy: An Integrated Analysis of Survey and Register Data

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Abstract

The postponement of independence has significant implications for young people's aspirations and well-being. We aim to investigate the socio-economic determinants of the pathways from intentions to realizations to leave the parental home. We use an integrated approach based on survey and registers. Indeed, we link intentions to leave the parental home of 18-34-year-olds respondents from the Family and social subjects survey (Istat, 2016) and their living arrangements after 3 years (i.e., measured in 2019 from the Population register). Moreover, we use the information regarding the economic resources available to the young adults from the Income Register (fiscal income from administrative data sources). We distinguish four pathways linking intentions to leave and their realization and apply a multinomial logistic regression on the pathways of independence by sex. We include as main covariates the socio-economic conditions of the individual, such as education, occupational status, individual disposable income, and individual income pattern from 2016 to 2019. Moreover, we include the socio-economic conditions of the parents, such as the highest level of education of each parent, the Socio-economic class of the parents (Esec). It emerges that individual economic resources (income and income pattern) are very important for the probability of succeeding in leaving the parental home. Moreover, as for the parental socio-economic determinants we observe that: the social class plays a relevant role, especially when there is asymmetry among parents and a higher level of education of the parents discourages leaving the parental home.

Background:

In Italy, young adults aged 18 to 34 show one of the highest proportions of those staying in the parental home. The postponement of independence has significant implications for young people's aspirations and well-being. Literature indicates that decisions to leave the parental home are influenced by social, economic, and personal factors, and that intentions are shaped by attitudes, social norms, and perceived control.

Latest studies focussing on Italy and regarding socio-economic factors report the following findings:

First of all, the work and its quality play a role on leaving the parental home: unemployment and inactivity hinders home leaving, particularly for men, while job insecurity (i.e. temporary contract) do not systematically discourage leaving home [Meggiolaro & Ongaro 2024].

Secondly, the social class and the family capital are relevant: and the role differs by gender and over time [Brini et al. 2025].

Among women, daughters from higher social classes used to delay leaving more than daughters from lower social classes, but in the youngest cohorts that gap is much smaller. Among men, the gap by parental social class has widened, thus the postponement of home-leaving is especially strong for men from higher social-class backgrounds

Aim:

This study aims to verify the extent to which the intentions to leave and the economic resources affect the transition from the parental home. An innovative approach combining survey and register data is used to investigate the role of economic variables and track transitions in living arrangements.

In the absence of a follow-up survey on the same individuals, to monitor the realization of their intentions to leave or to stay home, we make use of the information coming from the Italian Population Register to measure the permanence in the family of origin in the subsequent years. Particularly, we follow those individuals aged 18-34 in 2016 that expressed their intention to (or not to) leave the parental home and verify to what extent they carried out their intentions 3 years later. We do this including many covariates collected from the survey (individual, family and geographical characteristics), enriched by external information coming from registers - linked at the individual level - addressing the economic resources (personal income) and the living arrangement condition after 3 years (shift in usual residence).

Data: This paper is based on an innovative dataset, produced by integrating a sample survey, “Family and Social Subjects” (Famiglie e Soggetti Sociali Fss 2016), with data coming from 2 registers, the Income Statistical register and the Italian Population register. The integration is based on an individual record-linkage, through a unique pseudonymous individual identification code (SIM), centrally assigned by Istat (Ambroselli, 2015).

Firstly, the Fss survey is the main statistical source on family dynamics as it covers a wide variety of information on current and retrospective demographic characteristics for individuals aged 18 and more residing in private households in Italy. Only one individual per household is interviewed.

Secondly, the Income Statistical register (BDR-I Banca Dati Reddittuale Integrata) includes a specific module, the so called Income Integrated Database, providing information on taxable and non-taxable incomes, gathered by several administrative data sources (i.e. tax statements and social security data). The module provides yearly income variables for about 45 millions of individuals per year, the entire resident population of income recipients in Italy. In this study, 2015 data are used for providing information about the household economic condition just before the interviews for the survey FSS are carried out.

Finally, the 2015 Italian Population Register (RBI=Registro Base degli Individui) is also used. The SIM code used of the data integration is available for all the individuals in the registers. It is worth noting that only income data provided by administrative data are taken into account, so that underground economy is completely disregarded.

The linkage with the Population Register is at the core of this study. Indeed, as a further step forward of data integration, we perform an individual level record linkage to the 2019 Population register, to verify whether those young adults, previously interviewed in occasion of the 2016 FSS survey, actually realized their intentions of (not) leaving the parental home in the three years following the interview. Indeed, the Population Register allows for the tracking of changes in individuals' usual residence.

This is consistent with the strategy implemented in EU-SILC (i.e. the income reference period is the calendar year before the interview) and the household composition in the year of sample selection.

Method:

A longitudinal study follows a sample of 2,728 individuals aged 18-34 who were living with their parents in 2016. The study examines their stated intentions in 2016 and verifies whether they left the parental home by 2019, i.e. changing their usual residence according to the Population Register. We consider several covariates provided by the survey, including individual, family, and geographic characteristics, as well as household composition. Furthermore, individual income is considered for the first time in this kind of analysis, through the integration with the Income register. We link intentions (measured from the 2016 survey) and the living arrangements (measured in 2019 from the register). The intention of leaving the parental home differs between men and women. Women are slightly more positively intended to leave: 65% women intend to leave (57% men), but only a minority with certainty (19% women, 14% men). Women have

more often left the parental home (23% vs 18% men). We distinguish four potential pathways: Positive Success (15%), Failure, perhaps postponement (45%), Negative success (35%), Unintended exit (5%).

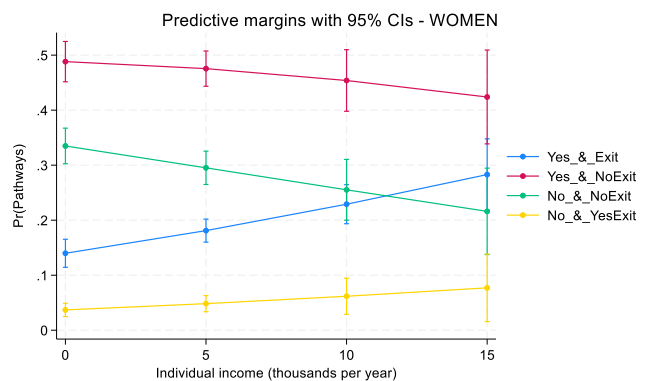
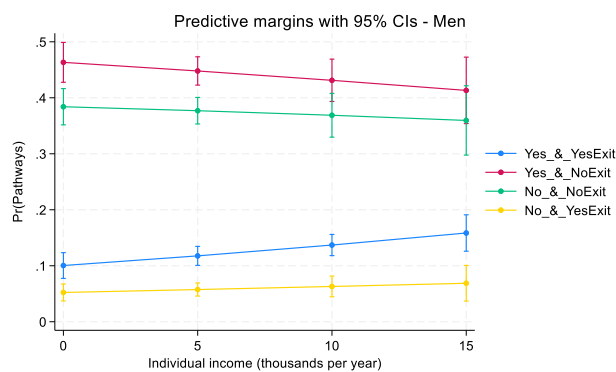
We run multinomial logistic regression models by sex where socio-economic conditions of the individual and of their parents are the main covariates.

Results:

Preliminary findings indicate that women are more likely than men to leave home, with the probability increasing with age. Higher education levels and employment status are associated with a greater likelihood of leaving as well as higher chances of leaving among those in central and southern areas compared to the North.

The parental social class plays a relevant role, especially when there is asymmetry among parents. When Only the mother with high social status there is a discouraging effect on both children, but stronger among daughters. When Only the father with high social status gendered effect there is a discouraging on sons and encouraging on daughters. Parents with both-medium/high status or Only the father with high status then Unintended exit are discouraged among daughters and encouraged among sons

The probability of ‘Positive success’ or of an ‘Unintended exit’ rise with increasing income, especially for women. Consistently, the probability of ‘Negative success’ and of ‘Failure’ declines with increasing income.



Discussion and conclusions:

The integration of survey and register data allows to investigate through a longitudinal approach the dynamics of young adults’ emancipation, providing novel and valuable insights and enabling the monitoring of young adults’ transitions. The strengths of this work are the integrated survey-registers approach, the match between intentions and realizations, the inclusion of the register-based income.

However, some limitations are in place: we do not distinguish between reasons for leaving (due to low numbers), we do not study of the timing of leaving home and we do not distinguish job characteristics (i.e. permanent or not).