

# Socio-Economic Determinants of Student Mobility and Inequality of Access to Higher Education in Italy

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## **Abstract**

This research aims at providing a measure of accessibility for Italian students to the higher education (HE) institutions in the country. Accessibility is often formalized by indexes based on gravity models. Within this particular sphere the elements are necessarily geographical locations rather than people, consequently the socio-economic factors are often left unexplored. The idea behind this research is that the capability of facing costs must be distinctive to one's socio-economic background. Therefore in order to account for these factors and to derive peculiar separation functions, a spatial interaction model were applied. Again based on gravity logic, spatial interaction model conceptualizes flows of students by a separation function between given locations and the relevant factors for origin and destination. In this application the total students were decomposed into subgroups according to a set of proxies. Following the Equality of Opportunity literature, these proxies were defined as circumstances , and assumed to be out of one's responsibility. This procedure allowed for a simultaneous consideration of spatial and socio-economic factors that influence the migration pattern of students. While examining the determinants of student mobility , then the purpose of this study was to discover to what extent the accessibility to higher education differs among different social groups. The findings indicate a degree of inequality of access to HE between provinces as well as between students belonging to different socio-economic groups.

**Keywords** Spatial Interaction, Higher Education Accessibility, Gravity Model, Equality of Opportunity