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Staying or Moving? Aspirations, Constraints and Residential Intentions in Italy's Major Urban Regions of Rome and Milan: Convergent Mechanisms and Divergent Motivations

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ABSTRACT

Residential mobility is a key mechanism of urban socio-spatial change, yet less attention has been paid to the formation of mobility intention preceding actual moves, particularly in Southern European contexts. This paper investigates the socio-economic, demographic, housing and neighbourhood factors associated with residential mobility intentions in Italy's two main urban regions, Rome and Milan, together with respondents' stated motivations for prospective mobility and immobility. Drawing on data from the 2025 MetroMosaic Survey, we use logistic regression models to assess whether established correlates of mobility intentions operate differently across two metropolitan contexts that share the same national housing system but have followed divergent socioeconomic and housing-market trajectories. Results show substantial convergence between Rome and Milan: education, employment instability, housing tenure and adequacy, household composition and neighbourhood dissatisfaction are associated with mobility intentions in broadly similar ways. Greater differentiation emerges in stated motivations, with significant differences between the two urban regions concentrated in involuntary/forced and neighbourhood-related reasons. Overall, the findings suggest that shared institutional conditions structure the opportunities and constraints underlying residential intentions, while contrasting metropolitan contexts emerge in some of the reasons associated with moving or staying. The study highlights the value of residential intentions for understanding how aspirations, resources and constraints interact before residential mobility is realised.

1 | Introduction

Residential mobility is shaped by a combination of individual socioeconomic characteristics—such as income, education, employment status and household composition—and contextual urban and economic factors, including housing costs, neighbourhood amenities, access to services and public transport. Together, these factors influence both the propensity to relocate and the selection of destination areas (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999).

Research on residential mobility distinguishes between *revealed preference* approaches, which infer preferences from observed residential behaviour under structural constraints, and *stated preference* approaches, which analyse self-reported intentions

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and aspirations. While revealed preference approaches capture realised mobility, stated preference approaches reveal latent mobility potential. Integrating both helps explain gaps between intended and actual mobility (De Groot et al. 2011; Lu 1998).

Residential mobility is commonly understood as a multistage process in which desires, intentions, and realised moves represent analytically distinct phases (Coulter 2013). Desires capture general aspirations to relocate, whereas intentions reflect a more concrete commitment or plan to move, even if the move does not eventually occur. Focusing on residential mobility intentions is therefore essential for understanding the planning stage that precedes actual relocation. Intentions are typically more tightly linked to individuals' evaluations of their housing and neighbourhood conditions than realised behaviour, which may be constrained by financial, institutional or other barriers. Moreover, intentions are strong predictors of subsequent moves (Clark and Lisowski 2018; De Groot et al. 2011), and research has also identified several factors associated with the formation of residential mobility intentions, including young age, changes in family structure, tenure status and dissatisfaction with housing or neighbourhood conditions (Feijten and Van Ham 2009).

An increasing number of studies have examined residential mobility and its socio-spatial consequences in Southern European cities (Crisci et al. 2025a; López-Gay et al. 2020; Arbaci 2019; Consolazio et al. 2023; Coppola and Lucciarini 2023; Gil-Alonso et al. 2016). However, the pre-move processes through which residential aspirations develop into intentions remain less explored, partly because data sources in Southern Europe rarely provide detailed information on mobility intentions and their motivations (Duque-Calvache et al. 2018; Bergamante and Lucciarini 2025).

This perspective is especially relevant in the context of Southern European housing systems. High rates of homeownership, the limited availability of affordable and social rental housing and the strong dependence on family resources for access to housing (Allen et al. 2004) create a distinctive institutional opportunity structure in which greater residential stability coexists with constraints on mobility. These conditions can influence not only individuals' ability to carry out a residential move but also the forms of residential change they perceive as both feasible and desirable.

The key question, therefore, is not whether Southern Europe displays entirely different individual-level determinants of mobility intentions, but rather how established drivers of residential mobility operate within a distinctive housing regime and social reproduction system that shape the opportunities and constraints associated with residential adjustment.

This paper investigates these processes through an analysis of the urban regions (URs) of Rome and Milan, two of the largest metropolitan areas in Southern Europe, which have followed diverging socioeconomic trajectories in recent years, drawing on original data from the 2025 MetroMosaic Survey (MMS). The survey provides detailed information on individual and household characteristics, housing and neighbourhood conditions, residential mobility intentions and, importantly, respondents' self-reported reasons for intending to move or to stay. To our knowledge, MMS represents one of the first Southern European surveys specifically designed to study the intentions and aspirations for future residential mobility within urban settings. This allows us to integrate two analytical perspectives that are often examined separately: the socioeconomic and housing factors associated with mobility intentions and the motivations explicitly reported by respondents for prospective mobility or immobility. Rather than inferring motivations solely from individual characteristics or observed residential moves, we can directly examine the relationship between mobility intentions and stated reasons across different residential and metropolitan contexts.

The comparison between Rome and Milan adds a further comparative dimension to the analysis. The two URs are embedded within the same national housing regime and social reproduction system and therefore share key structural conditions affecting residential mobility, such as high levels of homeownership and a relatively limited rental sector (Allen et al. 2004; Crisci et al. 2026). At the same time, they have experienced markedly different economic, demographic and housing-market trajectories in the 2000s (Crisci et al. 2024). In the 2010s, Rome experienced economic stagnation, while Milan's growth, driven partly by real estate expansion, accelerated. After the 2008 crisis, suburbanisation slowed in both areas, yet Milan soon renewed core-to-hinterland displacement, whereas Rome maintained signs of reurbanisation (Crisci et al. 2025a). Therefore, comparing these two contexts provides the basis for assessing whether their different metropolitan socio-economic trajectories are associated with distinct patterns of mobility intentions or whether similar relationships emerge within a shared framework of institutional constraints/opportunities despite different local performances.

Against this background, the contribution of the paper is threefold. First, it examines how established individual-, household-, housing- and neighbourhood-level factors associated with residential mobility intentions operate within the institutional setting of the Southern European housing system. Second, by considering the reasons respondents report for both intending to move or stay, the analyses integrate the factors associated with mobility intentions with individual subjective motivations, providing a more comprehensive understanding of residential decision-making. Third, the comparative design allows us to assess whether residential mobility intentions and stated motivations for moving or staying differ between Rome and Milan, two URs that share the same national housing system but have experienced markedly different economic and real estate performances.

The article addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: *Which individual, family, housing and neighbourhood characteristics are associated with residential mobility intentions in the URs of Rome and Milan, and to what extent do these associations vary between the two contexts?*

RQ2: *How do stated motivations for prospective mobility and immobility differ between Rome and Milan? And what do these differences reveal about the interplay between shared institutional conditions and contrasting metropolitan opportunity structures?*

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a review of the literature on residential mobility and intentions to move.

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Section 3 presents the two urban contexts and their recent trajectories. Section 4 describes the data and methods used in the analysis. Section 5 presents the results, which are discussed in Section 6. Section 7 contains the concluding remarks.

2 | Literature Review

Research on residential mobility is commonly framed in terms of revealed and stated preferences. Revealed preference approaches infer preferences from observed residential behaviour, modelling mobility outcomes as the result of life-course events and structural constraints (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999). While empirically robust, they offer limited insight into latent demand and involuntary immobility. Stated preference approaches focus instead on self-reported intentions and preferences, conceptualising mobility as an intentional and anticipatory process shaped by residential satisfaction and aspirations (Lu 1998; Speare 1974). Although prone to reporting biases, stated preference approaches capture unrealised mobility. Recent contributions emphasise the analytical value of integrating both perspectives to examine the gap between intended and realised mobility (Coulter et al. 2016; De Groot et al. 2011).

Studies on mobility intentions fall within a broader literature investigating the decision-making processes leading up to residential relocation. While an actual move occurs at a specific moment in time, it is the result of a longitudinal process involving individual and family desires, intentions, resources and constraints (Coulter et al. 2016). A desire for mobility refers to a wish to change dwelling or residential context without necessarily any concrete planning to do so. By contrast, an intention to move denotes a more concrete readiness to relocate that already involves, at least to some extent, an assessment of constraints and opportunities and is therefore more likely to result in actual mobility (De Groot et al. 2011). This distinction is especially relevant to the present study. Once individuals begin to assess the feasibility of their residential aspirations, their intentions are likely to incorporate not only personal preferences but also their perceptions of the housing opportunities and constraints realistically available to them.

Most studies have examined indirectly why people desire, intent or make residential moves, inferring motives from the correlates of moves, without direct knowledge of individuals' self-reported motivations (Coulter and Scott 2015). In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, nationally representative longitudinal surveys exist that allow researchers to analyse people's stated reasons for moving (Clark and Lisowski 2017). Longitudinal studies have identified a series of life course events that may trigger both the intention to move and the eventual relocation, including the formation or dissolution of a partnership, the birth of a child or changes in employment status (De Groot et al. 2011). More generally, individual and household characteristics, housing conditions and satisfaction with the dwelling or neighbourhood have emerged as key factors associated with mobility intentions (Feijten and Van Ham 2009).

Among individual characteristics, age appears to be negatively associated with the intention to move: young adults are more likely to consider relocation than older individuals. Income also shows a negative association, as higher-income individuals tend to express lower intentions to move, possibly reflecting greater access to satisfactory housing and residential environments (Clark and Lisowski 2018). Individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to consider relocation, partly because greater human capital expands employment opportunities and spatial flexibility (De Groot et al. 2011). Employment conditions may similarly shape both individuals' capacity to mobilise resources for relocation and their level of residential stability.

Household and family circumstances are equally important. Being single is positively associated with mobility intentions; partnership and household changes may prompt residential adjustment, whereas having children can constrain mobility by increasing the costs of moving (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999).

Housing conditions represent another major dimension. Homeownership is generally associated with lower mobility than renting, due to the strong financial and emotional attachment it creates to the dwelling (Helderman et al. 2004). Moreover, it is likely that an owner-occupied dwelling has been chosen with greater care than a rental unit, particularly with regard to the characteristics of the neighbourhood in which it is located. By contrast, renters tend to be more mobile, because of the lower transaction costs associated with moving and often a weaker attachment to the dwelling and neighbourhood (Lu 1998). Housing adequacy also matters: dissatisfaction with the dwelling or the neighbourhood and insufficient residential space increase the likelihood of considering relocation (Feijten and Van Ham 2009). However, individual and household factors operate within broader institutional and housing-market contexts. Housing availability and affordability, tenure arrangements and access to housing support all shape the opportunities and constraints that households face when considering relocation (De Groot et al. 2011).

This contextual dimension is especially important in Southern Europe, where housing systems are generally characterised by high homeownership rates, limited social and affordable rental provision, relatively weak public support for housing transitions and a strong role of family resources in facilitating access to housing (Allen et al. 2004; Allen 2006). These features differentiate Southern European housing systems from many Northern and Western European countries, where rental housing, including social and regulated rental sectors, plays a larger role and represents a more accessible alternative to homeownership (Kemeny 2001).

These institutional differences also shape housing careers. Comparative research shows that access to independent housing and homeownership varies substantially across European welfare and housing systems (Aassve et al. 2002; Mandic 2008; Mulder and Billari 2010). In Southern Europe, housing careers are more strongly intertwined with family resources and intergenerational transfers, and access to independent housing tends to occur later. Renting, moreover, often represents a transitional stage rather than a long-term alternative to homeownership (Duque-Calvache et al. 2018).

These features may shape how mobility intentions are formulated, as well as the extent to which and ways in which they can eventually be turned into actual mobility. Rather than suggesting that the individual determinants of such intentions are

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specific to Southern Europe, we argue that the region's housing systems help shape both mobility intentions and actual moves. Homeownership may be highly valued and widely sought after, but it may be associated with costly trade-offs—for instance, in terms of location—that generate dissatisfaction without necessarily leading to an intention to move, given the difficulties involved in selling a property or the risk of obtaining a lower price than expected. Renting may be the only possible tenure for certain social groups or in a given stage of their housing pathways, but limited supply, unaffordability and the lack of allowances may make a further move within the same tenure difficult to envisage as a realistic option, let alone undertake.

Family resources may likewise have a dual effect on residential mobility. In Southern Europe, family support can facilitate housing transitions, particularly access to homeownership, while family ties and dependence on intergenerational resources may also encourage residential stability or constrain relocation options (Allen et al. 2004; Gentili and Hoekstra 2021).

Residential mobility intentions thus provide a useful lens for examining the interplay between aspirations and structural constraints. Intentions to move may reflect both perceived opportunities and unmet housing needs, while intentions to stay may indicate either residential satisfaction or limited alternatives. This distinction is particularly relevant in housing systems where tenure options are restricted, and family and housing resources strongly shape residential trajectories. The few studies specifically addressing residential mobility intentions in Southern European countries provide some evidence for this interpretation. In Granada, Spain, the tenure status emerges as the most significant predictor of mobility intentions, with renting often representing a temporary and transitional phase within an individual's housing career oriented towards ownership (Duque-Calvache et al. 2018). Moreover, in contrast to findings from Northern Europe, residential stability in the parental home is often viewed positively by many young adults in Southern Europe, resulting in lower mobility intentions compared to their Northern European peers (Coulter et al. 2016; Duque-Calvache et al. 2018). However, such a preference may be the result of the perceived inadequacy, unavailability or unaffordability of alternative options (Sironi and Rosina 2018). Labour market changes, particularly remote working, also shape mobility intentions. In Italy, however, its uneven diffusion and weak institutionalisation continue to limit relocation opportunities, privileging cognitive workers and reinforcing residential concentration in metropolitan areas (Bergamante and Lucciarini 2025).

3 | The URs of Rome and Milan: Shared Structural Features But Diverging Trajectories

Italy is considered part of the 'southern European housing systems', characterised by a high incidence of homeownership, the significant role of family transfers in access to housing, and a residualised rental supply (Allen et al. 2004). In recent decades, housing policy has pushed towards the liberalisation of the rental market, the privatisation of public housing and the promotion of new forms of financialised social housing supply (Belotti et al. 2024).

In Italy, regional economic disparity deeply influences patterns of internal and international migration with the wealthier Centre-North attracting migrants from both the South and abroad, including through temporary mobility arrangements (Bonifazi et al. 2021; Crisci and Di Tanna 2016). In the most dynamic URs in particular, access to housing has become increasingly challenging due to a limited rental supply—both in the highly fragmented, private as well as in the residualised social and public sectors—the growing competition of touristic uses and the divergence between incomes and real estate prices, especially in central and semi-central areas (Celata and Coppola 2026; Crisci et al. 2022). The two URs present similar population—4.23 million in the Rome UR and 4.68 million in the Milan UR in 2021—but fundamental differences in population density and urbanisation levels, and very uneven surfaces—Rome UR being almost twice the size of Milan UR (5363 vs. 2763 km^2).[1] Moreover, while nearly two-thirds of the population of Rome's UR reside in the municipality of Rome (65.9%), Milan UR hosts less than a third of the total (28.8%), but Rome's municipal area is approximately seven times larger (1287 vs. 181 km^2), encompassing an extensive portion of farmland. This is important to consider as suburbanisation in Rome has involved mostly areas within municipal boundaries, while the opposite has happened in Milan. Furthermore, Milan's UR—despite its very significant and growing weight—has a more balanced distribution of employment poles across the entire urban region, while it is much less so in the case of Rome. For these reasons, criss-cross mobility flows connecting localities different from the core city are significantly more common in Milan (Coppola and Guevara 2025a) than in Rome.

In recent years, Milan's UR population has grown largely due to positive migration rates. Especially since the 2010s, both demographic and employment growth have polarised on the core while some peripheral areas experienced decline (Coppola and Guevara 2025a; Coppola and Aramburu Guevara 2025b). Part of the increased attractiveness of the core depended on consistent public investments in great events, new infrastructures and on the flexibilization of planning to attract real estate investments in the repurposing of extensive brownfields (Belotti et al. 2025). With booming real estate international investments, housing supply has expanded but prices and rents skyrocketed, making housing affordability the most pressing local issue in the city by the late 2010s (Bricocoli and Peverini 2024). Declines in housing affordability in the core and in those neighbourhoods have led to strong suburbanisation flows, which gained new momentum—due to larger outflows and smaller inflows—for both nationals and foreigners (Crisci et al. 2025b). These trends are contributing to a changing social geography across the entire urban region (Carlucci et al. 2018). Historically, rental supply, both in the private and public/social sectors, is concentrated in the core and, more in particular, in certain working-class neighbourhoods that, since the 2000s,

[1] In this paper, the urban region of Rome coincides with the province of Rome. The urban region of Milan includes the two provinces of Milan and Monza-Brianza and 73 communes in the territories of neighbouring provinces of Varese, Como, Bergamo, Cremona, Lodi and Pavia. For the methodology employed to identify such perimeter (see Coppola and Guevara 2025a).

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have also been characterised by a high incidence of foreigners (Consolazio et al. 2023). In recent years, in these neighbourhoods, mobility rates with the rest of the Milan UR became largely negative, pointing to likely entrenching processes of housing displacement (Coppola and Guevara 2025a; Crisci et al. 2024). Still, the large majority of outer municipalities—overwhelmingly characterised by high homeownership levels—present positive migration balances with the core and the rest of the urban region for both foreigners and natives, pointing to a relatively low risk of spatial segregation, at least at that scale. Overall, the Milan UR is experiencing a clear pattern of polarisation, with housing values and incomes increasing more intensively in the core, the rental supply becoming more unaffordable and moderately increasing foreigners' dissimilarity indexes at the scale of the entire urban region (Crisci et al. 2025b). Arguably, this is reducing the accessibility of the core and of some first ring municipalities for incoming residents and the increasing displacement of the existing ones (Coppola and Guevara 2025a).

The municipality of Rome is one of the largest in Europe, encompassing the dense historic core and also extensive low-density and even rural areas. Rome experienced significant demographic and economic growth between the late 1990s and 2008, during the phase dominated by a service- and real-estate-led growth model, combining suburban expansion with the concentration of symbolic and cultural activities in central areas, within a selective urban-branding strategy. (Lucciarini and Violante 2007). This expansion was fuelled by construction, tourism and major international events such as the Jubilee of 2000, which attracted both domestic migrants and international newcomers (Benassi et al. 2022; Rimoldi et al. 2024). In this period, growing property values, particularly in central areas, translated into uneven settlement opportunities and intensified suburbanisation of migrants and low-income households (Crisci 2010). The 2008 financial crisis hit Rome harder than Milan: economic growth slowed, property values stagnated and then declined, eroding household wealth and reducing incentives for development. International inflows weakened and natural balances remained negative, producing an overall pattern of demographic stagnation (Crisci 2016). Residential mobility trends underline these shifts. The decline in property values brought suburbanisation to a halt, slowing the displacement of the population from the urban core and marking the emergence of signs of reurbanisation in the urban core (Crisci 2022). Outward flows in Rome remained subdued, constrained by a weaker economic recovery and a depressed housing market. At the same time, the Rome UR remains fragmented, with the urban core itself encompassing both vibrant central neighbourhoods and marginalised peripheries, shaping a socio-spatial landscape marked by persistent inequality and limited demographic and economic growth.

Overall, during the past decade, the two URs have followed divergent trajectories in economic growth, in their attractiveness to migration flows from both the rest of Italy and abroad, in housing production and market values, and in the patterns of suburbanisation (Crisci et al. 2025b). First, patterns of real-estate values have steeply diverged. During the expansionary period leading up to 2008, the Rome UR registered a much sharper increase in property values than the Milan UR (+ 44% vs. +14% between 2004 and 2008) (Crisci et al. 2025b). In the following years, however, Milan overtook Rome in terms of average property prices and number of transactions. At the same time, new housing production has been stronger in Milan than in Rome, while Milan's rental supply has been comparatively larger and more dynamic, both in the urban core and in outer municipalities and across private and social/public housing sectors (Osservatorio del Mercato Immobiliare 2025). Despite the growth of medium- and short-term rentals, Milan's rental market has also been relatively less affected by the expansion of tourist-oriented uses in the urban core. Second, the greater economic dynamism of the Milan UR has attracted highly skilled professionals, boosting housing demand and intensifying competition in the housing market, especially in the core. Low-skilled workers, often from migrant backgrounds, have found it increasingly difficult to find housing in traditionally affordable urban neighbourhoods and have been pushed towards outer municipalities, partially refashioning inherited patterns of spatial segregation (Consolazio et al. 2023). The Rome UR, by contrast, has been marked by economic stagnation and more limited inflows from both the rest of Italy and abroad, which have constrained housing demand and limited the intensity of suburbanisation and spatial segregation. As a result, the inner peripheries of Rome's urban core have experienced less dramatic change and often display a more heterogeneous socio-economic composition compared to Milan (Lucciarini 2011; Lucciarini 2018; Salvati et al. 2019). Third, besides shared traits depending on being part of the same national system—such as the marginal role of metropolitan authorities in regulating land uses and housing supply—public policy has had a different impact in the two contexts. Milan's development and regulatory model has largely prioritised market-oriented housing strategies, with urban regeneration projects targeting high-income groups and international investors, while support for affordable housing has remained limited and focused on the middle-class (Belotti et al. 2025). Rome, by contrast, has seen fewer neoliberal urban projects and—even if in the context of no support to social/public housing expansion—a broad tolerance toward the occupation of buildings for housing purposes by vulnerable social groups, also including informal practices within the traditional regulatory framework (Giovanelli and Lucciarini 2025). This stagnant economic trajectory and different policy environment have mitigated, at least partially, the scale of segregation processes observable in the capital.

4 | Data and Methods

4.1 | Data

In this study, we utilised data from the MMS Survey, conducted within the framework of the Metromosaic Project, examining patterns, drivers and outcomes of residential (im)mobility in the URs of Rome and Milan during the 2000s. The MMS is a cross-sectional study carried out between April and July 2025 and was specifically designed to explore the motivations, constraints and preferences that shape residential mobility. The survey is representative of the population aged 25 to 64 years, who have been residents of Rome's and Milan's URs s for at least 5 years and made at least one autonomous residential relocation (i.e., not following their parents) within them between 1 January 2000 and the date of the interview. The aim was to capture the

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residential mobility trajectories and motivations of working-age adults who were autonomous at the time of their move and had developed a relatively stable connection to the local contexts during a period of major socioeconomic change, such as the 2000s. Thus, this survey has not involved residents that moved to the two URs after 2020, whose mobility intentions may somehow differ from the ones of longer-standing residents, also because of the intensification—particularly in relation to Milan UR—of some of the structural traits and trends that we have outlined above.

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using a standardised questionnaire. In addition to socio-demographic information, the questionnaire covered information on residential mobility trajectories, current and previous dwellings, motivations for moves, relocation intentions and housing aspirations. The geographical units of reference are the neighbourhoods within the two central cities (155 Urban Zones for Rome and 88 Local Identity Nuclei for Milan), and the municipalities for the remainder of the URs (120 municipalities for Rome and 261 for Milan).

Respondents were selected through stratified random sampling of individuals meeting quotas by gender, 5-year age groups, citizenship (Italian or foreign), household type, duration of presence, housing tenure and macroarea of residence, corresponding to the proportion of the population in each urban region. According to the fieldwork design, a total of 2200 interviews were conducted. Of these, 3.2% did not meet the survey's inclusion criteria. The final analytical sample therefore consists of 2129 interviews, which were almost evenly distributed between the two URs.

4.2 | Methods

We addressed our research questions by employing logistic regression models.

For the first research question (RQ1), which examines the socioeconomic characteristics associated with residential mobility intentions among residents, we estimated a logistic regression model using the full sample of respondents from both URs.

The dependent variable—intention of residential mobility—is a binary indicator equal to 1 if the respondent expressed an intention to relocate to another dwelling. It was constructed as follows: (a) respondents who answered 'yes, as soon as possible' and 'yes, but not in the near future (e.g., at least in a couple of years)' were classified as intending to change residence; (b) respondents who answered 'no (I do not intend to, this is not the right time)' and 'I don't know' were classified as not intending to change residence. Respondents currently in the process of relocating (37 cases) were excluded, since their intention had already been implemented. After accounting for missing values in the independent variables, the final sample consisted of 2064 cases.

The independent variables were grouped into four dimensions, with categories defined as reported in Table 1:

1. Demographic characteristics: Gender,[2] Marital status, Household type by youngest child's age. This variable was constructed by combining household type and children by age class to avoid collinearity.
2. Human and economic capital: Education, Occupational status, Perceived economic condition, Housing tenure, Housing crowding. The latter variable was constructed using floor area per person (m^2) (≥ 53 = Very spacious – reference, 38–53 = Spacious, 26–38 = Neutral, < 26 = Crowded). Floor area per person was classified using the Jenks natural breaks algorithm.
3. Spatial location: Urban region, Urban belt,[3] Living in the urban region at age 14.
4. Satisfaction with local area: Neighbourhood/municipality satisfaction.

Descriptive statistics for these variables are presented in Table A1 in the Appendix.

To facilitate interpretation of the logistic estimates, we then report adjusted predicted probabilities for selected covariates, and we formally assess whether these probabilities differ between Milan and Rome by computing contrasts of predictive margins.

Model fit was assessed using the Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test and the area under the ROC curve (AUC). Collinearity among predictors was evaluated using variance inflation factors (VIF). The robustness of the general model's estimates was assessed in three ways: by re-estimating the model with an alternative operationalisation of the outcome variable, by re-estimating standard errors via bootstrap and by re-estimating the same specification separately for Milan and Rome. Full diagnostic results are reported in Appendix Tables A4a–A4c.

For the second research question (RQ2), which examines how motivations of residential mobility intentions vary between the two URs, we proceeded in two steps.

As a first step, we estimated two logistic regression models predicting the probability of belonging to the Milan UR rather than the Rome UR, separately for the group of those who intend to move and the group of those who do not (full models are provided in Appendix Tables A5a,b). The dependent variable—urban region—is a binary indicator equal to 0 if the respondent is resident in the Rome UR, and 1 if the respondent is resident in the Milan UR. As independent variables, we included all the covariates included in the previous model predicting the intention to move, and the variable 'Motivation', which expresses the main stated motivations for moving or not moving intention (Adequate housing – reference, Involuntary/forced choice, Work, Family/network, Neighbourhood, Other). This variable

[2]Among the 2129 final sample of respondents, only one individual selected 'Other' for the gender question. Their responses were excluded from the analysis to ensure the consistency of the statistical results.

[3]For Rome, the category *Urban core* refers to neighbourhoods located within the Great Ring Road (*Grande Raccordo Anulare)*, while *Hinterland* refers to the remaining areas of the urban region. For Milan, *Urban core* corresponds to the municipality of Milan, and *Hinterland* to the rest of the urban region.

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TABLE 1 | Odds ratio from logistic regression predicting residential mobility intentions.

	OR	Significance
Demographic characteristics		
Gender (ref. Men)		
Women	0.925	0.520
Age	0.990	0.153
Citizenship at birth (ref. Italian)		
Foreign	1.074	0.698
Marital status (ref. Married or in a civil union)		
Never married	1.227	0.265
Separated or divorced	1.401	0.068*
Widowed	1.280	0.462
Household type by youngest child's age		
(ref. Household without children)		
Single-person	0.976	0.914
Households with children 0–5 y.o.	0.518	0.043**
Households with children 6–14 y.o.	0.707	0.142
Households with children 15–18 y.o.	0.627	0.091*
Households with children > 18 y.o.	0.509	0.011**
Human and economic capital		
Education (ref. Primary and lower secondary)		
Upper secondary	2.121	0.003***
Tertiary or above	3.810	0.000***
Occupational status (ref. Permanently employed)		
Temporarily employed	1.754	0.009***
Self-employed or entrepreneur	1.326	0.068*
Not in employment (unemployed, homemaker, other)	1.199	0.708
Perceived economic condition (ref. Affluent)		
Very good, good	0.585	0.073*
Just adequate	0.991	0.977
Poor/Insufficient	1.681	0.153
Housing tenure (ref. Owner-occupied, with a mortgage)		
Owner-occupied, without a mortgage	0.657	0.009***
Rented	1.696	0.000***
Other	1.019	0.982
Housing crowding (ref. Very spacious)		
Crowded	2.240	0.007***
Neutral	1.484	0.094**
Spacious	0.988	0.947
Spatial location		
Urban region (ref. Milan)		
Rome	0.901	0.407
Urban belt (Ref. Urban core)		
Hinterland	1.313	0.034**
Living in UR at age 14 (Ref. Yes)		
No	0.796	0.108
Satisfaction with the local area		
Neighbourhood/municipality satisfaction (ref. Satisfied)		
Dissatisfied	2.208	0.000***
Total of observations	2064	

Note: Robust standard errors were used to account for heteroskedasticity (full model available in Table A2 in the Appendix; full models for each UR are also available in Tables A3a and A3b).
*$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

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was constructed separately for the two questions on intentions to move or not to move. Although the labels assigned are the same, motivation categories do not represent the same latent construct across intention groups.

For those intending to move, motivation 'Adequate housing' includes respondents who intend to change residence to obtain a larger dwelling, one with more suitable features or to switch from renting to ownership; 'Involuntary/forced choice' includes respondents who have to move because of end of lease, eviction, rent increase or overcrowding; 'Work' reasons include respondents wishing to move closer to their workplace; 'Family/network' includes respondents who want to move for reasons linked to the relational realms, such as living alone, family reunification, birth of a child, marriage, living with a partner or the desire to live near relatives and/or friends; 'Neighbourhood' includes answers of those who are unsatisfied by the local context of their residence; finally, the 'Other' category includes people who don't have the time or interest to consider moving. Conversely, for those intending not to move, motivation 'Adequate housing' includes respondents who are satisfied with their dwelling; 'Involuntary/forced choice' includes respondents who cannot move for economic reasons beyond their control; 'Work' reasons include respondents who do not want to move because they already live close to their workplace or are waiting for job stabilisation; 'Family/network' includes respondents who do not want to move because of family constraints (e.g., presence of school-age children, incompatible requirements between partners); 'Neighbourhood' includes answers of those who are satisfied by their local residential context; finally, the 'Other' category includes residual responses for not moving. Then we computed the predicted probability of residing in Milan's UR for each motivation category, separately for respondents who intend to move and those who do not. Since the variable 'Motivations' is a post-treatment variable (i.e., motivations differ structurally between the two groups), these results are descriptive and should not be interpreted causally. As for the previous models, fit was assessed using the Hosmer–Lemeshow test and the area under the ROC curve (AUC), and collinearity among predictors was evaluated using VIF. Full diagnostic results for the movers and non-movers models are reported in Appendix Table A6.

As a second step, we run a logistic model on the full sample, including an interaction between intention to move and stated motivation and computed contrasts between intention groups within each motivation category. The interaction model is appropriate for identifying whether the relationship between motivation and residential context differs systematically between movers and non-movers. The interaction model was assessed using the same diagnostics as the previous models (Hosmer–Lemeshow test, AUC, VIF), with two adaptations warranted by its specification. First, collinearity is assessed on main-effect terms only, as VIFs for individual interaction terms are inflated by construction and are not informative of a substantive collinearity problem. Second, the substantive relevance of the interaction term is tested via a Wald test rather than a likelihood-ratio test, as the latter is not valid under robust variance estimation. Full diagnostic results are reported in Appendix Table A8. Again, given the post-treatment nature of the variable 'motivation', this is a purely associative rather than causal analysis. Nevertheless, it allows us to assess, for each category of motivation, how the association between intention to move (yes/no) and the probability of being in one of the two URs varies, holding other covariates constant. This approach can provide useful exploratory insights into the differences between Rome and Milan regarding the role of various motivations.

5 | Results

As outlined in Section 4, the analytical strategy starts from the logistic regression model on the full sample (Table 1), in order to answer the first research question (RQ1), which examines the socio-economic characteristics associated with residential mobility intentions among residents in the URs of Rome and Milan.

Indicators of human and economic capital are among the strongest predictors of mobility intentions. Education shows a clear gradient: individuals with tertiary education or higher (OR = 3.810, $p < 0.01$) and those with upper secondary education (OR = 2.121, $p < 0.01$) are substantially more likely to report intentions to move compared to those with lower education. Employment status also matters: temporary employment is strongly associated with higher mobility intentions (OR = 1.754, $p < 0.01$), while self-employment is weakly associated with increased intentions (OR = 1.326, $p < 0.10$). Perceived economic condition plays a more limited role, with only respondents reporting a 'very good or good' economic situation showing lower mobility intentions relative to the affluent reference group.

Housing characteristics are consistently associated with residential mobility intentions. Compared to owner-occupiers with a mortgage, individuals owning their dwelling outright are less likely to intend to move (OR = 0.657, $p < 0.01$), whereas renters display significantly higher mobility intentions (OR = 1.696, $p < 0.01$). Housing crowding also emerges as a strong predictor: living in crowded dwellings substantially increases mobility intentions (OR = 2.240, $p < 0.01$), and even neutral levels of crowding are associated with higher intentions relative to very spacious housing (OR = 1.484, $p < 0.10$).

Spatial variables show more limited associations. After controlling for individual, household and housing characteristics, residing in the Rome UR rather than in that of Milan is not significantly associated with mobility intentions. By contrast, living in the urban hinterland (as opposed to the urban core) is associated with higher mobility intentions (OR = 1.313, $p < 0.05$). Having grown up outside the current urban region shows no statistically significant effect.

Finally, subjective evaluations of the local context are strongly related to mobility intentions. Respondents who are dissatisfied with their neighbourhood or municipality are more than twice as likely to report intentions to move compared to satisfied residents (OR = 2.208, $p < 0.01$).

Taken together, these results indicate that residential mobility intentions are primarily shaped by education, employment instability, housing tenure and crowding, household composition and dissatisfaction with the local residential context,

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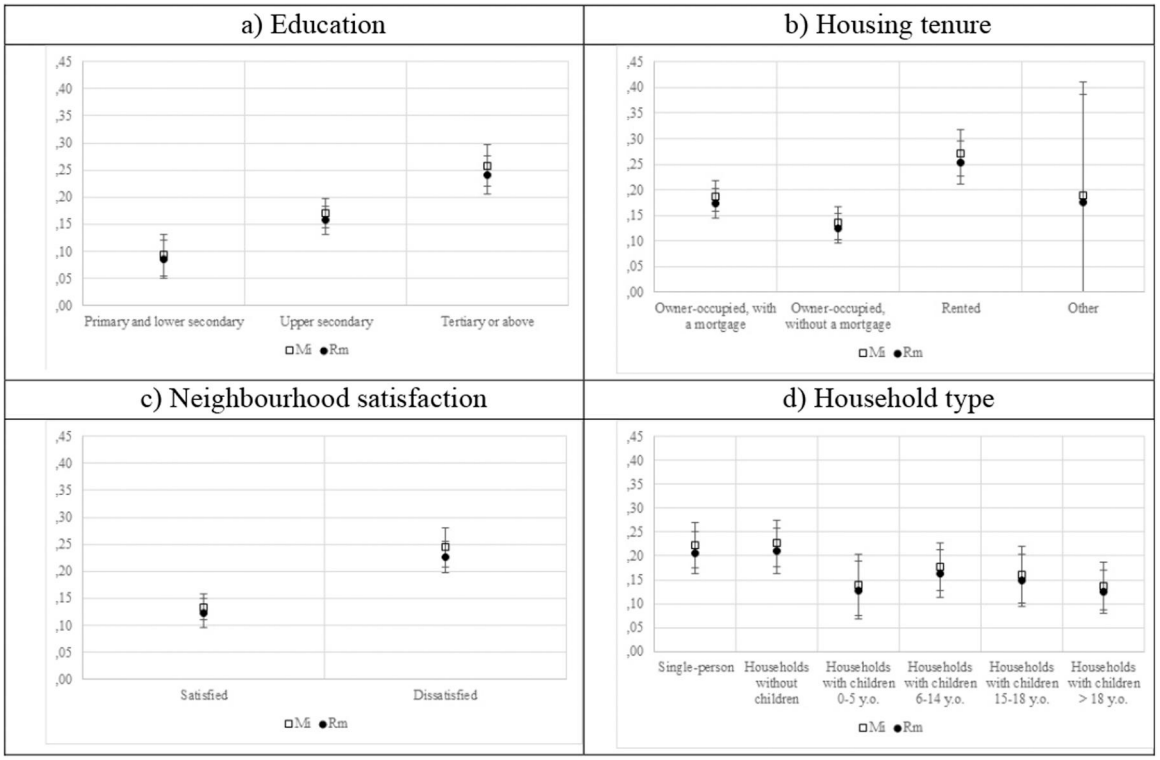

FIGURE 1 | Adjusted predicted probabilities of residential mobility intentions across selected covariates: education, housing tenure, neighbourhood satisfaction, and household type. *Note:* Predicted probabilities are estimated from the logistic regression model reported in Table 1, controlling for the covariates included in the model. 95% CIs. The full model is available in Table A2 in Appendix).

whereas broad demographic characteristics and urban-region residence play a comparatively minor role once other factors are considered.

To facilitate interpretation of the logistic estimates, we first report adjusted predicted probabilities for selected covariates (Figure 1) based on evidence from the literature and on their strength in predicting mobility intention: (1) Education is substantively linked to increasing agency within opportunity structures; (2) Housing tenure has a clear relevance because it is linked to both wider social expectations and the structure of opportunity embedded in the housing system; (3) Neighbourhood satisfaction is closely related to the social division of urban space and the way in which different social groups are placed or would like to be placed; and finally, (4) Household type is substantively meaningful for life-course interpretations.

Adjusted predicted probabilities show a clear educational gradient in residential mobility intentions, operating similarly in both Milan and Rome URs. Individuals with primary or lower secondary education display the lowest probability of intending to move, at around 8%–9%, whereas those with upper secondary education exhibit intermediate levels (approximately 16%–17%). The highest probabilities are observed among individuals with tertiary education or above (26% in Milan, 24% in Rome). Although residents of the Milan urban region show slightly higher (although not statistically meaningful) predicted probabilities at each educational level, the differences between the two URs are modest.

Predicted probabilities vary substantially by housing tenure. Renters exhibit the highest likelihood of intending to move, with predicted probabilities close to 27% in the Milan UR and 25% in the Rome UR. In contrast, owner-occupiers without a mortgage show markedly lower probabilities, at around 12%–14%, while owners with a mortgage occupy an intermediate position (approximately 17%–19%). Differences between Milan and Rome URs are small within each tenure category, and once again, Milan records the highest values. These results highlight the constraining role of homeownership—particularly outright ownership—in shaping residential mobility intentions in both URs. This association may reflect high satisfaction and place attachment, but it may also indicate a form of residential entrapment.

Neighbourhood satisfaction emerges as one of the strongest correlates of residential mobility intentions, and on this occasion as well, Milan records the highest values. Among respondents who report being satisfied with their neighbourhood or municipality, predicted probabilities of intending to move are relatively low, at about 12% in the Rome UR and 13% in the Milan UR. By contrast, dissatisfaction is associated with a sharp increase in mobility intentions: predicted probabilities rise to approximately 23% in Rome and 24% in Milan.

Regarding household type, households with children aged 0–5 years display predicted probabilities of intending to move of about 14% in the Milan UR and 13% in the Rome UR (similar values are also observed for households with older children), compared with approximately 21%–23% among households without children.

To assess whether the association between urban region and residential mobility intentions varies across key sociodemographic and

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housing characteristics, we estimated contrasts of predicted probabilities between the URs of Rome and Milan at the values of education, housing tenure, neighbourhood satisfaction, and household type. Across all covariates considered, the Rome–Milan URs differences are small in magnitude (generally below two percentage points) and statistically insignificant, with confidence intervals consistently including zero. Joint tests confirm the absence of significant regional differences across categories of each covariate. Overall, these results suggest that residential mobility intentions do not differ systematically between the two URs once individual and housing characteristics are considered.

To address the second research question (RQ2), we estimated predicted probabilities of residing in the Milan UR (vs. Rome UR) by stated motivation category, separately for individuals with and without mobility intentions. Both models show good discriminatory power (AUC = 0.773 for those intending to move, 0.722 for those not intending to move) and satisfactory classification accuracy (72.4% and 67.8% correctly classified, respectively). The Hosmer–Lemeshow test based on the conventional 10-group partition indicates a significant deviation from perfect fit in both sub-models, for opposite reasons related to sample size: test instability due to small per-group N among movers ($N = 366$), and heightened sensitivity to substantively negligible deviations due to large N among non-movers ($N = 1427$). In both cases, a coarser partition confirms adequate fit (Appendix Table A6). Collinearity diagnostics indicate no problematic multicollinearity in either sub-model, including for the Motivation variable.

Figure 2 shows the predicted probabilities by stated motivations, conditional on the set of covariates used in the previous logistic model on intention to move. Because stated motivations for (potential) relocation are observed conditional on individuals' mobility intentions, the results should be interpreted as associational patterns rather than causal effects.

Among respondents who do not intend to move, predicted probabilities of residing in the Milan UR vary moderately across motivational categories. The highest probability is observed for individuals reporting involuntary or forced motivations (0.681), followed by those reporting family/network reasons (0.525) and other motivations (0.513). By contrast, work-related motivations are associated with a lower probability of residing in the Milan UR (0.424). Stated motivations related to adequate housing and neighbourhood characteristics correspond to probabilities close to 0.50, indicating no strong spatial differentiation between Milan and Rome URs for these categories within this group.

Among respondents who intend to move, the association between stated motivations and residential location appears more heterogeneous. In particular, respondents reporting neighbourhood-related motivations have a markedly higher predicted probability of residing in the Milan UR (0.741), representing the highest predicted value across all motivation categories in this group. Family/network motivations are also associated with a relatively high probability of residing in the Milan UR (0.597). In contrast, respondents reporting involuntary or forced motivations show a substantially lower predicted probability of residing in the Milan UR (0.354), suggesting a stronger association with the Rome UR among movers in this category. Work-related and adequate housing motivations are associated with intermediate probabilities, with relatively wide confidence intervals, reflecting greater uncertainty.

Overall, the results indicate that the relationship between stated motivations and UR residence differs descriptively between individuals who intend to move and those who do not. However, given that motivations are measured conditional on mobility intentions, these differences should be interpreted as patterns of co-occurrence between stated motivations and residential context rather than as evidence of differential causal effects of motivations on urban location.

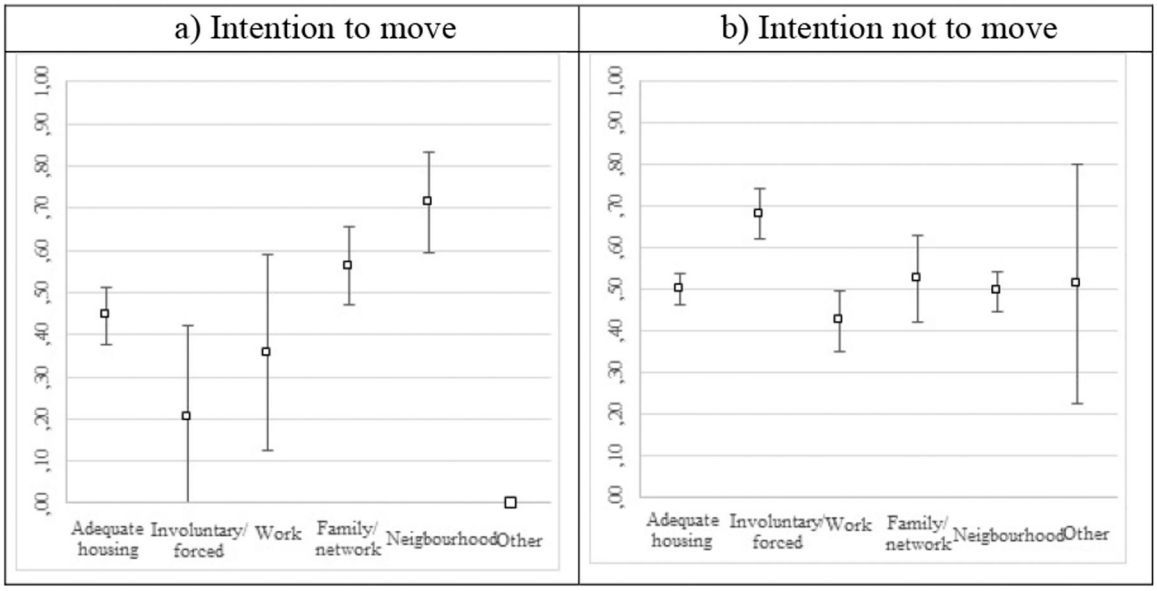

FIGURE 2 | Adjusted predicted probability of residing in the Milan UR (vs. Rome UR), by stated motivation and intention to move or not to move. *Note:* Predicted probabilities are estimated from logistic regression models controlling for the covariates included in the model reported in Table 1. 95% CIs. Full models are available in Table A5a and Table A5b in the Appendix.

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TABLE 2 | Contrasts in predicted probability of residing in Milan UR by stated motivation and intention to move.

Motivation	Marginal effect (Δ)	SE	95% CI	*p*
Adequate housing	0.026	0.041	[−0.054, 0.105]	0.529
Involuntary/forced	−0.308	0.145	[−0.592, −0.023]	0.034
Work	−0.016	0.128	[−0.267, 0.234]	0.899
Family/network	0.076	0.070	[−0.062, 0.214]	0.279
Neighbourhood	0.258	0.061	[0.138, 0.378]	0.000
Other	Not estimable	—	—	—

Note: Entries report contrasts of predicted probabilities (Intend to move minus intend not to move) derived from a logistic regression model predicting the probability of living in the Milan UR (full model is available in Table A7 in the Appendix). Predicted probabilities were computed using post-estimation margins, holding all other covariates at their observed values. Corresponding differences for Rome are equal in magnitude and opposite in sign.

Consistent with the margins shown in Figure 2, the reported marginal effects (Δ) in Table 2 represent, for each motivation category, the difference in the predicted probability of residing in Milan UR between individuals who intend to move and those who do not, holding other covariates constant. Because the dependent variable contrasts the Milan UR with that of Rome, all reported marginal effects refer to the probability of residing in the Milan UR. The interaction model used for marginal effects (Appendix Table A7) shows acceptable but comparatively more modest discriminatory power than the simpler sub-models (AUC = 0.707; 65.9% correctly classified), a trade-off expected given the added complexity of the interaction specification (Appendix Table A8). The Hosmer–Lemeshow test indicates a modest, non-negligible deviation from perfect calibration ($\chi^2[4] = 12.47$, $p = 0.014$ at a 6-group partition). However, the inclusion of the interaction term is strongly supported on substantive grounds: a Wald test on the motivation × intention interaction terms is highly significant (χ^2 [4] = 15.24, $p = 0.004$), confirming that the relationship between stated motivation and residential context differs systematically between movers and non-movers (Appendix Table A8). Collinearity diagnostics on the main-effect terms indicate no problematic multicollinearity (Mean VIF = 1.27).

Involuntary or forced motivations are associated with a substantially lower probability of residing in the Milan UR among individuals who intend to move compared to those who do not ($\Delta = -0.308$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that, within this category, movers are considerably more likely to be located in the Rome UR than non-movers. A large and statistically significant difference is observed for neighbourhood motivations ($\Delta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that among individuals citing neighbourhood, those who intend to move are substantially more likely to reside in the Milan UR than those who do not intend to move. No statistically meaningful differences emerge for housing, work-related and family/network-related motivations, indicating that the association between these motivations and URs does not differ systematically by intention to move. The contrast for the 'Other' category is not estimable, likely due to sparse data or perfect prediction in one of the interaction cells and is therefore excluded from substantive interpretation.

6 | Discussion

The results reveal a striking convergence between Rome and Milan URs' in the individual, household and housing characteristics associated with residential mobility intentions, despite the increasingly divergent economic, demographic and housing-market trajectories followed by the two URs. This suggests that differences in metropolitan dynamism do not substantially reshape the associations between established correlates and residential mobility intentions. Rather, these factors appear to operate in largely similar ways within the shared institutional framework of the Italian housing system, characterised by widespread home ownership and limited private and social rental alternatives (Allen et al. 2004; Arbaci 2008).

Human and economic capital show a significant influence across both contexts. Education emerges as one of the most powerful predictors of mobility intentions, with individuals holding secondary or tertiary qualifications exhibiting a much higher likelihood of intending to move than those with lower education levels. This pattern, well established in the literature (Coulter et al. 2016), suggests that higher education is associated with spatial mobility and flexibility, as well as a greater capacity to develop residential aspirations and to perceive and potentially act upon housing opportunities, both acting as important sources of 'distinction'. Occupational status similarly influences residential intentions in both cities. Individuals with temporary employment display a higher propensity to move than those with permanent contracts, in line with previous research linking labour market instability and residential mobility (Kley and Mulder 2010). Conversely, stable employment may contribute to anchor households, providing greater economic security and potentially reinforcing residential stability.

Housing tenure represents another key determinant, displaying consistent effects in the two contexts. In both URs renters have markedly higher mobility intentions than homeowners, while those who own their dwelling outright show the lowest propensity to move. This pattern reflects the stabilising influence of ownership documented in prior research (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999). As is typical in Southern European settings, homeownership embodies a hegemonic social expectation and functions as a core element of residential stability and intergenerational transmission of resources (Ronald 2008), embedded in a welfare system that historically prioritise property acquisition over rental support (Allen et al. 2004; Gentili and Hoekstra 2021). Housing choices are also conditioned by family networks, which constitute key welfare resources, for both younger and older generations and may influence preferences for residential proximity (Lucciarini and Violante 2006). In such a context, renting may itself contribute to stronger mobility

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intentions, as it enjoys limited social legitimacy and is extensively associated with less secure or sub-optimal housing conditions (Filandri et al. 2024). Housing quality also plays a significant role in shaping intentions to move. Overcrowded or barely sufficient dwellings substantially increase the likelihood of intending to relocate, confirming that inadequate housing conditions represent a relevant push factor (Coulter and Scott 2015). Taken together, these findings highlight the distinction between residential stability and constrained immobility: low mobility intentions may reflect housing security, while stronger intentions among renters and households in inadequate housing may signal unmet needs that cannot necessarily be translated into actual mobility. Neighbourhood satisfaction exerts a similar influence across both contexts. Individuals expressing dissatisfaction with their neighbourhood or municipality are considerably more likely to intend to move, reflecting the well-established connection between local satisfaction and residential adjustment (Duque-Calvache et al. 2018).

Social and demographic characteristics highlight the importance of life-course circumstances in shaping residential intentions. Separated or divorced individuals show slightly higher propensities to move than married individuals, consistently with the residential adjustments frequently associated with partnership dissolution and household reorganisation (Mulder 2007).

Household composition also significantly influences mobility intentions, with markedly lower propensities observed among households with the youngest (0–5 y.o.) and the oldest (> = 18 y.o.) children, compared with households without children. Although families with children are likely to have high expectations regarding housing, many may have already fulfilled most of these preferences (Feijten and Van Ham 2009). The similarity of these associations across Rome and Milan, suggests that life-course and household constraints structure residential intentions even within different metropolitan environments (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999).

Spatial location within the UR also shapes intentions in comparable ways, with residents in peripheral zones displaying higher mobility intentions in both contexts. This finding underlines the relevance of spatial positioning within the urban hierarchy, consistent with research linking peripheral residence to residential mobility and metropolitan change (Boterman 2013). In both URs, peripheral residence may also reflect trade-offs between housing and locational preferences. The access to homeownership for lower- and middle-income households may require residential relocation towards more affordable peripheral or hinterland areas, potentially at the cost of preferences for more central locations and better access to urban services. Higher mobility intentions among peripheral residents may therefore reflect not only dissatisfaction with current residential conditions, but also previous constrained residential choices and a continuing aspiration for spatial readjustment (Crisci et al. 2025b). Especially in a context characterised by renewed polarisation of jobs and recreational opportunities within the cores, suburban homeownership may be becoming increasingly subjected while homeownership in the urban core, especially in Milan, may become increasingly restricted to middle-upper and upper-class households (Bricocoli and Peverini 2024).

Considering stated motivations for intention to move or stay, the results point to some greater differentiation between the two URs than that observed for the individual, household and housing characteristics associated with mobility intentions. Although the analysis captures associations rather than causal relationships, due to the post-treatment nature of the motivations variable, a clear pattern emerges. Differences in predicted probabilities between individuals intending to move and those intending to stay are statistically significant only for involuntary/forced and neighbourhood motivations. Involuntary/forced reasons show a stronger association with Rome UR among those intending to stay, whereas neighbourhood-related motivations show the opposite geographical pattern, being more strongly associated with Milan UR among prospective movers. This contrast between the broadly similar factors associated with mobility intentions and the greater variation in stated motivations is theoretically significant. It suggests that shared institutional conditions may shape the general opportunities and constraints underlying residential intentions, while differences in metropolitan socioeconomic and housing-market contexts may emerge more clearly in individuals' reasons for moving or staying (Coulter and Scott 2015; Coulter et al. 2016).

7 | Conclusions

Drawing on data collected through an original 2025 survey in the Rome and Milan URs, this paper examined the socioeconomic, demographic and contextual factors associated with residential mobility intentions, together with respondents' stated motivations for intending to move or stay. By comparing two major Italian URs, the paper explored how individual aspirations operate within broader institutional conditions and locally specific socioeconomic and housing-market contexts in shaping residential intentions. The similarities observed between the two URs underscore the importance of understanding residential change as a set of household decisions formed within a broader socioeconomic system, in which structural inequalities and institutional legacies operating at the national scale shape the structure of opportunity and constraints for residential adjustment.

Taken together, the results indicate that the differences between the Milan and Rome URs mostly concern variations in intensity rather than in the factors associated with mobility intentions. The Milan UR displays slightly higher predicted probabilities of mobility intentions across several covariates included in the models, consistent with its more dynamic housing market, higher economic growth and mobility rates. The pattern observed in the Rome UR, by contrast, appears consistent with a more stable context, characterised by economic stagnation, weaker labour-market performance and a less dynamic housing market, and relatively strong family and neighbourhood embeddedness. Yet the structural foundations underlying these tendencies are common: both URs are shaped by housing systems dominated by ownership, residualised private and social rental sectors and limited welfare support for housing transitions. These shared features create similar opportunity structures and constraints, as well as hegemonic aspiration models, producing largely convergent patterns of residential mobility intentions despite a decade-long divergence between the two

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URs in terms of socio-economic trajectories, migratory dynamism and housing-market dynamics. These findings are consistent with some of the institutional characteristics identified in the literature on Southern-European housing systems, rather than indicating a specifically Southern European regime of residential intentions (Allen et al. 2004).

At the same time, some differences in stated motivations for intending to move or stay may reflect the contrasting socio-economic and housing-market trajectories of the two URs. These findings suggest that metropolitan differences may emerge more clearly in the reasons associated with moving or staying than in the individual and household factors underlying mobility intentions.

Involuntary/forced motivations, particularly among those intending to stay, also point to the distinction between residential stability and constraint: for some households, immobility may reflect limited feasible alternatives rather than a preference for remaining in place. In the Milan UR, the greater relevance of involuntary/forced motivations among those intending to stay may indicate that some of the conditions generating residential aspirations may simultaneously constrain their translation into mobility intentions. This pattern may be consistent with growing housing unaffordability and limited housing support. The greater relevance of neighbourhood-related motivations among those intending to move in Milan may similarly be related to its more rapidly changing urban context. Perceptions of an evolving residential environment, in which relative positions within the socio-spatial structure are being reshaped by housing-market pressures and processes of neighbourhood change, may contribute to making neighbourhood conditions more salient in the formation of mobility intentions.

These findings also have implications for housing and territorial policies. The convergent patterns of mobility intentions observed in the Rome and Milan URs suggest the need to *bring the state back in* to rebalance housing opportunities across different population groups. Strong market dynamics—such as those characterising Milan in the last decade—or, differently, weaker ones such as the ones characterising Rome, may leave a significant portion of the resident population dissatisfied with their housing conditions. Although we cannot know how much of the pool of intentions to move detected in our study will translate into actual and satisfactory moves, their existence and quantitative relevance provide a reason to reflect on the role of public policy in accommodating the aspirations and needs underlying them (Bergamante and Lucciarini 2025).

Expanding social and affordable rental options would help ensure that the growing economic attractiveness of URs does not translate into increasingly high entry barriers to urban housing markets, leaving the mobility intentions of lower-income groups largely unrealised or resulting in less favourable residential adjustments. Ensuring a spatially balanced supply of affordable rental and homeownership opportunities across both urban cores and hinterlands could help to prevent forms of intensively class-selective, forced suburbanisation (Coppola and Lucciarini 2023). At the same time, policies aimed at improving the quality of life and access to services in peripheral areas may lower residential dissatisfaction and address some of the disadvantages associated with peripheral residence.

If housing access remains largely market-based and increasingly dependent not only on labour market and educational achievements but also on intergenerational wealth transfers, it may increasingly determine who can—and who cannot—afford to live in particular urban areas, potentially reinforcing dynamics of spatial separation.

Strengthening public intervention is therefore essential to protect vulnerable groups and prevent existing divides from deepening. Given the shared structural dynamics emerging across the two URs, a multilevel governance architecture—capable of activating context-sensitive local responses while ensuring coordination and complementarity with regional and national policies—could contribute to more equitable and resilient residential mobility pathways. And to support changes in hegemonic social expectations and models—such as the pursuit of homeownership as early as possible and at all costs—that constrain residential aspirations and shape mobility intentions. Overall, the comparison between Rome and Milan highlights how shared institutional conditions and contrasting metropolitan contexts jointly shape residential intentions. Further research is needed to assess whether and under what conditions these intentions translate into actual moves.

Acknowledgements

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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Note: Reference marked with "*" cited in Table A4b of the online Appendix.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.

Table A1: Descriptive statistics (%, mean for *age*) for the sample used in the full logistic regression model (Table A2), predicting residential mobility intentions in the Milan and Rome urban regions.

Table A2: Logistic regression predicting residential mobility intentions in the Milan and Rome urban regions.

Table A3a: Logistic regression predicting residential mobility intentions in the Milan urban region.

Table A3b: Logistic regression predicting residential mobility intentions in the Rome urban region.

Table A4a: Model fit and robustness checks of logistic regression predicting residential mobility intentions in the Milan and Rome urban regions (Table A2).

Table A4b: Collinearity diagnostics for model predictors (Table A2).

Table A4c: Model fit and collinearity diagnostics — city-specific robustness models (Milan and Rome).

Table A5a: Logistic regression predicting residential location (Milan vs. Rome urban regions) among individuals intending to move.

Table A5b: Logistic regression predicting residential location (Milan vs. Rome urban regions) among individuals intending not to move.

Table A6: Model fit and collinearity diagnostics for models in Tables A5a and A5b.

Table A7: Logistic regression predicting residential location (Milan vs. Rome urban regions), with interaction between motivation and intention to move.

Table A8: Model fit, collinearity, and interaction test for the motivation × intention interaction model (Table A7).

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