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The Residential Mobility of Mid-Term Temporary Populations: Personal Trajectories and Sociospatial Patterns in Rome

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how medium-term temporary dwellers—who have been living in a city for months or a few years without planning to settle in the long term—impact upon intra-urban residential mobility and sociospatial inequalities in Southern European contexts. Building on debates on residential mobility, (im)mobilities and temporary urban populations, the paper argues that these groups should be treated as a distinct and influential mobility actor. Empirically, the study draws on original mixed-methods evidence from Rome, combining a survey and follow-up interviews to link motivations for arrival, housing practices, and intra-urban relocations. Rome is discussed as a relevant Southern European case where post-crisis housing-market restructuring, uneven accessibility and the expansion of platform-mediated rental circuits intensify competition for centrally located housing. The findings show that temporary dwellers' residential movements and strategies contribute to neighbourhood change and can reinforce displacement pressures and unequal access to central and semi-central areas, thereby shaping broader patterns of residential mobility for the overall resident population.

1 | Introduction

This article analyses the residential choices and intra-urban mobility of mid-term temporary populations, understood as people who voluntarily move to a city for a relatively short period, without the intention or possibility of settling there permanently (Brollo 2024; Brollo and Celata 2023). This umbrella category includes, among others, students undertaking time-limited educational projects (Brooks 2018; King and Raghuram 2013), mobile workers who adopt multi-local employment arrangements (Khoo et al. 2008; Ralph 2014) and experience- or lifestyle-oriented movers—including digital nomads—whose stays are classified as projects and episodes rather than settlement pathways (Benson and O'Reilly 2016; Reichenberger 2018). Despite internal heterogeneity, these groups display coherence when considered in light of their

sociospatial relationship with the city, their urban practices and their capacity to influence neighbourhood trajectories and housing markets (Martinotti 1993; Nuvolati 2002; Stock 2006). Their settlement patterns are therefore relevant both in their own right and in terms of how they might shape longer-term residential mobility and urban transformation.

This focus connects with established debates on residential mobility as a mechanism that reshapes neighbourhoods and produces differentiated housing outcomes over the life course (Coulter et al. 2016; Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999). It also aligns with the “mobility paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006) and the literature, which emphasise how power relations and constraints structure mobility opportunities, including those mediated by housing and labour markets and digital

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intermediation platforms (López-Gay et al. 2021). Within urban sociology and geography, the spatial concentration of specific mobile subgroups has long been examined as a driver of place-based change, notably through studentification and forms of transnational gentrification (López-Gay et al. 2021; Sage et al. 2012; Sigler and Wachsmuth 2020; Smith and Holt 2007). Recent evidence further suggests that temporary presences are increasingly incorporated into local housing markets through platform-mediated short- and mid-term rental circuits, making it important to analyse their intra-urban residential mobility, not only their spatial distribution (Bei et al. 2026; Wachsmuth and Buglioni 2024).

To operationalise the concept in a way that is appropriate for analysing residential mobility within the city, the study focuses on medium-term temporary dwellers, who are present from a few months up to a few years. Examples include non-resident students, temporary workers, digital nomads, and similar profiles. Tourists, although often included under the broad umbrella of temporary populations, are excluded because their presence is primarily shaped by short and highly specific overnight dynamics and does not typically entail comparable intra-urban residential trajectories. At the same time, the conversion of residential properties for tourist purposes through short-term rental platforms is widely discussed as a driver of depopulation and displacement in historic centres, with extensive evidence from Southern European cities (Celata and Romano 2020; Cocola-Gant and Gago 2021; Yrigoy 2019). Against this background, the categories examined here have housing needs and timescales that are closer to those of long-term residents, and they therefore operate as a direct layer of competition in the rental market, with implications for access to housing and broader patterns of residential mobility.

The topic is particularly relevant in Southern Europe, where structural features such as high homeownership and fragmented housing policies may strengthen the link between mobility and socioeconomic inequalities. Rome is a highly specific yet paradigmatic case: recent demographic evidence documents strong intra-urban heterogeneity, with peripheral growth pockets observed alongside a marked historic-centre decline, on a trajectory increasingly driven by migration in the context of structurally negative natural change (Reynaud 2026). A service-centred, radiocentric structure thus guides residential choices and moves along a few main corridors, reinforcing accessibility gaps and making residential mobility central to the city's sociospatial inequalities (Crisci 2018; Lelo et al. 2019). Recent evidence also points to the reconfiguration of rental supply towards more flexible contract forms and a decrease in long-term rentals, with implications for housing precarity and residential mobility (Rossi et al. 2025).

A mixed-methods design is adopted to capture both structural trends and relational dynamic (Brollo *forthcoming*). Original data are gathered through an ad hoc survey on socioeconomic profiles, housing practices and residential trajectories, targeting people who have spent months or years in Rome without clear long-term plans to migrate. Follow-up interviews complement the questionnaire and help to interpret motivations, expectations and strategies associated with temporary stays. The analysis focuses on spatial behaviour in terms of residential location

and intra-urban moves. Survey evidence refers to late 2021 up to early 2022. Later housing-market indicators and other studies are used to place the situation in context and to indicate how the context has evolved.

The paper's objective and original contribution lie in analysing this macro-group through the combined lens of the motivations that bring temporary inhabitants to the city and the locational choices and subsequent residential moves they undertake once in Rome. Placing these findings in dialogue with the Southern European literature on residential mobility and settlement patterns provides new evidence on how temporary dwellers contribute to ongoing processes of urban change and inequality in contemporary cities.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 situates the study within the Southern European literature on residential mobility and settlement patterns. Section 3 reviews the debate on temporary urban populations, clarifying definitional and operational challenges. Section 4 introduces Rome as a paradigmatic Southern European case, outlining its socioeconomic trajectory, key sociospatial dynamics and asymmetries, and evidence on temporary presences. Section 5 presents the data, methods and analytical approach. Section 6 reports the empirical results, covering motivations for arrival, housing practices and spatial strategies. Section 7 highlights limitations of the empirical example proposed and then discusses implications for intra-urban residential mobility and neighbourhood change. A final conclusion section follows.

2 | Patterns of Residential Mobility in Southern Europe

Recent Southern European research converges on the idea that intra-urban and metropolitan residential mobility is structured primarily by core-ring gradients, accessibility and housing-market cycles (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2018; Crisci et al. 2024). These processes have defined spatial patterns, according to the context. In Rome, for instance, diffusion from the core has historically been channelled along radial corridors (consular roads) and based on quadrant logics, reflecting an oversized municipality a residence-jobs-services mismatch and infrastructural constraints—features that resonate with broader Mediterranean patterns of accessibility-driven settlement (Crisci 2012, 2022). In Athens long-run evidence similarly points to sustained decentralisation, with central Athens and Piraeus losing demographic weight while growth concentrates in outer belts consistent with a late suburbanisation trajectory underpinned by strong metropolitan primacy (Benassi and Salvati 2020; Rontos et al. 2024; Salvati 2020).

At the same time, the trends recorded for Southern Europe are markedly cyclical. The 2000s boom tended to sustain suburbanisation, while the 2008–2013 crisis weakened centrifugal flows, often producing an incipient “recentralisation” that operated mainly through reduced outflows from cores rather than increased inflows (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2018; Crisci 2022). This mechanism helps explain why cores lose less in the downturn, while outer rings—especially the more distant and recently expanded ones—tend to absorb less or even experience negative

change, as shown for Spain's largest metropolitan areas (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2018). A further commonality in Southern Europe is social differentiation of directions and destinations. In Spain, centralisation and suburbanisation coexist but apply to different household positions and class profiles, supporting “dual city” readings in which central areas become increasingly selective (Mazorra Rodríguez 2024; Torrado et al. 2021). Comparable mechanisms are suggested for Italian metropolitan dynamics where renewed price growth and urban renewal can reactivate displacement-linked deconcentration (Crisci et al. 2025) and where intra-urban mobility is shown to interact with segregation dynamics among foreign residents (Rimoldi et al. 2024) in a context where foreign populations played a key demographic role in the 2000s, often underpinning growth in both cores and rings (Strozza et al. 2016). Finally, alongside metropolitan redistribution, part of Southern European mobility is very short-distance and locally embedded. For example, the case of Lisbon shows that many socially differentiated newcomers move within the same parish and selective central-area (re)settlement, while longer-run analyses stress how population-housing mismatches constrain who can move and where (Garha and Azevedo 2021; Jorge et al. 2018).

A further driver of residential mobility in attractive Southern European cities is the growing weight of temporary demand in the housing system. Tourism and platform-mediated short-term rentals bring visitors directly into the residential stock and extend pressure beyond historic centres into adjacent residential neighbourhoods (Bei et al. 2026; Lopez-Gay et al. 2021). This is consequential for residential mobility because it tightens access to housing precisely where people tend to move in high concentrations, raising displacement risks and redirecting stable households towards alternative locations. These processes overlap with other temporary groups whose housing needs approximate long-term residence in terms of duration and everyday use, reinforcing central demand: highly qualified newcomers overlap with intensely touristic areas, and they relocate to central districts in disproportionately high numbers. A key mechanism is the expansion of mid-term rentals—a regulatory grey area between tourist accommodation and standard long-term contracts—through which temporary demand is redirected to dwellings that would otherwise serve residents (Bei et al. 2026; Orozco-Martinez and Gil-Alonso 2024). Overall, in Southern Europe, residential mobility is increasingly shaped not only by the fact that stable households move between core rings, but also by temporary populations' capacity to absorb housing in central and semi-central areas, which sustain rent increases and displacement pressures.

3 | Temporary Populations as Urban Agents

Temporary populations play an important role in the urban dynamics of contemporary cities. Nonetheless, they are intrinsically difficult to conceptualise and define because temporariness covers a wide spectrum of mobilities that vary by duration, repetition, purpose and other patterns. A classic entry point is Zelinsky's mobility transition framework, which distinguishes migration from circulation, namely short-term and repetitive movements without an explicit intention to settle (Zelinsky 1971). The operational challenge is made explicit by Smith (1989), who

argues that the objective of the study must first be defined before any measurements can be made. He therefore foregrounds a small set of key criteria to define temporary residents and select suitable data (Smith 1989). A basic boundary distinguishes day-trippers from overnight stayers, since only the latter generate accommodation demand; a further divide separates short from extended stays, associated with different housing needs and service use.

In European research, temporary mobility is often examined through specific subgroups—tourists, students, highly skilled workers—rather than as an integrated macro-category, and it is frequently linked to privileged forms of mobility enabled by free movement regimes and low-cost connectivity (Novy 2018; Ralph 2014). The last decade has seen experience-based mobility strengthen, including lifestyle migration and digital nomadism (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Reichenberger 2018). Across these strands, temporary populations tend to share partly common traits: comparatively young ages, consumption-based practices, distinctive locational and housing preferences, intensive use of public space and differentiated forms of local participation and economic impact (Bell and Ward 2000; Garmendia et al. 2012; López-Gay et al. 2021). Their urban significance is heightened by their need for “moorings” in the housing system (Hannam et al. 2006) and by competition between long-term residential use and temporary uses, which are often associated with rent increases, scarcity of affordable rentals and displacement processes (Cunha and Lobão 2021; Schäfer and Hirsch 2017; Wachsmuth and Weisler 2018). This is particularly salient in Southern European housing systems characterised by high homeownership and rental liberalisation (Siatitsa and Annunziata 2017).

Building on this literature, and focusing on housing and intra-urban mobility, the present study operationalises temporary populations as individuals who voluntarily stay overnight in the city for a limited period (from several months up to a few years) without the intention or possibility of settling permanently, and analyses key subgroups by primary motivation (study, work/research, experience-seeking).

3.1 | Sources and Methods for Quantification and Localisation

In other countries (such as the UK or Spain), the census provides specific categories for temporary or multi-local mobility. In Italy, some questions on short stays were asked in previous censuses, but they were later dropped, making this source unsuitable for these analyses. Other national designs may allow partial visibility of specific groups (e.g., students) but still struggle to capture time-bounded presences consistently (Bell 2005). Administrative registers—even if affected by undercoverage, especially for foreign populations (−11% in the 2011 census as reported by Istat 2015)—offer clearer operational entry points where they exist. Hence, in Italy, the *schedario della popolazione temporanea* (Presidential Decree 223/1989) defines temporary presence based on a minimum duration (3 months for EU citizens) but it is unevenly implemented, resulting in systematic undercounting. Survey-based strategies can link temporariness to life-course and housing trajectories

when panel designs are available (Impicciatore and Panichella 2019). Non-conventional data have been used: symptomatic indicators (e.g., utilities and waste) to infer seasonal populations (Sánchez Galiano et al. 2017), platform data on short- and mid-term rentals as geotagged digital traces (Gutiérrez et al. 2017) and anonymised mobile-phone records (Mariotti et al. 2022; Ratti et al. 2006). These sources improve spatial-temporal resolution but raise issues of access and comparability. For this reason, mixed-method designs that combine an operational threshold with original data collection (Elwood 2017) are particularly suited to linking locational outcomes with motivations and expectations and provide a coherent bridge between definitional and empirical choices.

4 | Rome as a Southern European Case Study

4.1 | Socioeconomic Development Model

From the early 2000s onwards, Rome's development trajectory has been increasingly shaped by structural tensions between a focus on innovation and a political economy anchored in land and property rent extraction, but also weak regulatory capacity. The Roman urban regime—a coalition of political and economic elites rooted in clientelism and rentierism—has subordinated public policy and limited the fiscal and regulatory tools needed to steer transformation in redistributive ways (D'Albergo and Moini 2015). As a result, strategies framed around the knowledge-based economy have remained largely discursive: policy cycles launched in the late 1990s lost momentum in the 2000s, leaving a fragmented system dependent on external trajectories. In this environment, rent-based dynamics attract volume and speculation and discourage a regulated, high-quality, investment-based market (Benini and

De Nardis 2013). Meanwhile, property valorisation has increasingly prevailed, as reinforced by Rome's positioning as a tourism and events capital. This reinforces sociospatial inequalities: the city centre concentrates services and higher-quality public space, while peripheral areas remain under-served, often as a result of fragmented or weak planning. Rome's location and internal population-density pattern are shown in Figure 1. After the Great Recession, this reorientation accelerated. Rome shifted its focus from innovation ambitions as the production structure shifted towards low-tech and low value-added activities and productivity stagnated (Bronzini et al. 2023). Between 2000 and 2018, cumulative growth reached 18.5% (vs 29% nationally and 44% in Milan), reflecting sectoral composition. This entailed the expansion of commerce, accommodation and food services, as well as personal services and property, alongside a declining share of manufacturing, finance and high-skill professions. Contributing factors include a collapse in public investment (Causi 2021) and the under-utilisation of human capital, with persistent over-education and a mismatch between qualifications and jobs (Bank of Italy 2023). Within this context, tourism has increasingly operated as a dominant lever of repositioning—a monoculture that has absorbed resources and marginalised alternative development strategies (Gemmiti 2019). More broadly, the talent-attraction agenda that has become central to contemporary urban economic policy (Florida 2002) operates here less as an innovation engine than as a catalyst for amenity-led consumption and property valorisation, reinforcing critiques of the “creative city” as a strategy for reinforcing entrepreneurial urbanism and rent dynamics (Peck 2005). This profile aligns Rome with broader Southern European trajectories, increasingly cast within the context of Europe's economic specialisation: amenity-rich consumption spaces that hold heritage, climate and tourist appeal and are relatively affordable to higher-income outsiders (Cocola-Gant et al. 2020).

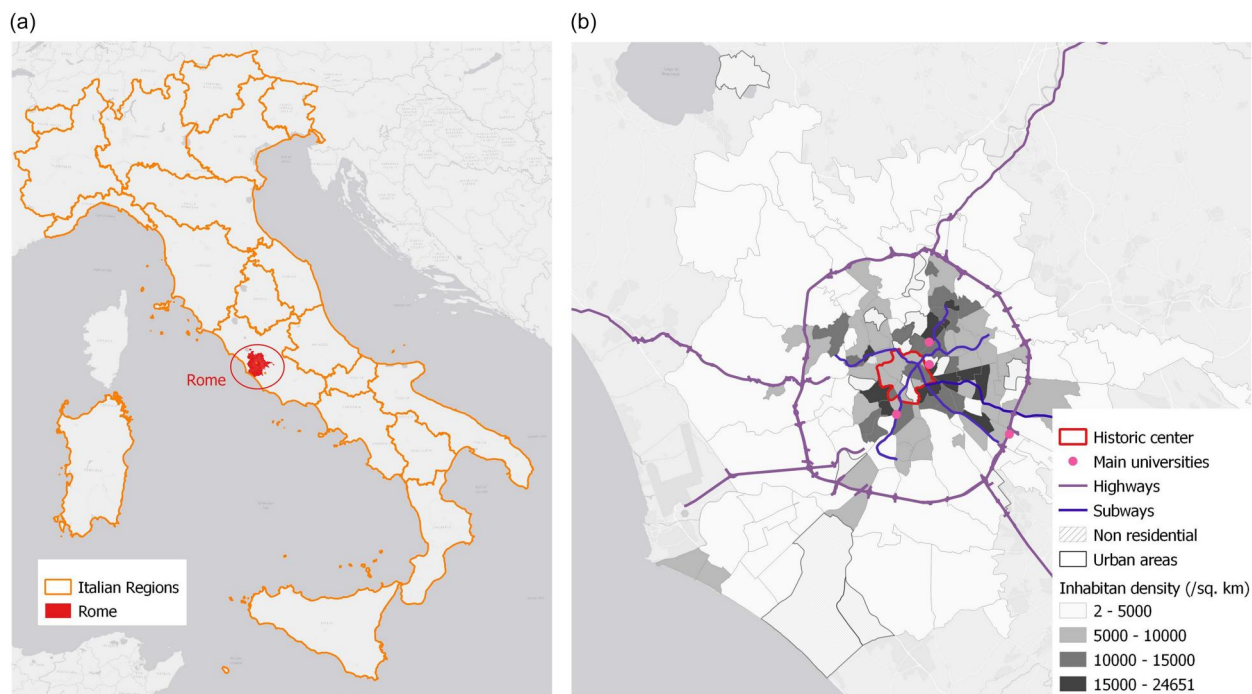


FIGURE 1 | (a) Rome's location within Italy; (b) close-up of the city and its population density in 2025. *Source:* author's elaboration based on Istat and Rome Municipality data.

4.2 | Sociospatial Dynamics: Urban Quality and Residential Mobility

For decades, Rome's urban core has concentrated advanced services, cultural amenities and the main public-transport and infrastructure networks, resulting in higher urban quality. By contrast, peripheral areas—especially beyond the GRA ring road remain systematically under-served, where issues include weak surface transit, sparse cultural facilities, the distance from institutions and jobs and a lack of public spaces for interaction (often replaced by shopping centres). This centre-periphery gap sustains car-dependent daily mobility and associated externalities (Crisci 2018; Lelo et al. 2019). These centre-periphery asymmetries provide the structural backdrop for reading Rome's recent trajectory within classic urban-cycle and (re)urbanisation debates (Haase et al. 2010) and Southern European discussions of sprawl and post-crisis reconfigurations (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2018; Salvati and Gargiulo Morelli 2014).

Despite central advantages, between the early 2000s and 2011, demographic growth shifted outwards: first-ring municipalities and peripheral areas within the city gained population, while central areas depopulated. Rising prices and rents and the functional conversion of the historic core fuelled residential diffusion and sprawl, pushing middle- and lower-income groups outwards. Crisci (2022) interprets this as Rome's long urban diffusion trajectory, consistent with Mediterranean low-density expansion (Salvati and Gargiulo Morelli 2014). After 2008, the bursting of the housing cycle altered these dynamics: the core's balance improved mainly because out-migration from central areas contracted, producing weak reurbanisation driven by fewer outflows rather than rising inflows (Crisci 2022). Register-based evidence (2003–2019) confirms a crisis-driven drop in suburbanisation due to reduced core outflows and persistently low post-crisis suburbanisation in Rome, versus Milan's rebound after 2014 (Crisci et al. 2025).

Meanwhile, part of the post-crisis value differential has been captured by platform-mediated short- and mid-term rentals. As demand for flexible stays grew, investment and lettings intensified in central and semi-central neighbourhoods, heightening housing pressure. Recent estimates report roughly 35,000 Airbnb listings citywide—about half in the centre and most of the rest in semi-central areas—while the mid-term segment, which covers students and other non-residents, has expanded alongside a growth in transitional leases that are more profitable and perceived as safer for repossession (Bei et al. 2026; OMI, 2024). This spatial pattern is consistent with evidence on Rome's short-term rental supply, which documents a sharp pre-Covid expansion (2014–2019) and a strong concentration in the historic centre and inner-city areas (Crisci et al. 2022). This makes it crucial to study the settlement patterns of temporary populations: given their strong central concentration and their ability to absorb housing through short- and mid-term circuits, they may offset the potential return-to-centre effects documented for the resident population (Crisci 2022), by occupying dwellings that could otherwise revert to long-term residents and by sustaining rent pressures in precisely those areas where reurbanisation would have the most social consequences.

4.3 | Quantifying and Localising Temporary Populations in Rome

In the case of Rome and many Southern European cities, tourists are a major source of pressure on central areas through (hyper-)temporary living. Rome is widely regarded as over-touristed: in 2024 it recorded more than 51 million tourist presences against a resident population of roughly 2.7 million. An early wave of touristification (up to the first decade of the 2000s) reshaped neighbourhoods still inhabited by working- and lower-middle-class residents. Initial impacts were concentrated inside or just beyond the ancient walls (e.g., San Lorenzo and Testaccio) and later spread to districts that are less tied to marquee attractions but have thriving social networks and cultural imaginaries (e.g., Pigneto and Centocelle). Today, the pressure of short-term rental platforms extends well beyond tourism. Over time, Airbnb has broadened its target to include other temporary populations, encompassing off-campus students, digital nomads and short-term workers. These groups typically seek centrally located housing and reduce costs via co-living, intensifying competition in high-amenity districts and affecting access, habitability and quality of life for long-term residents (Brollo et al. 2026).

Quantifying and mapping these temporary populations remains challenging. Using anonymised Facebook location data, estimates for Rome point to roughly 200,000 temporary presences daily (Brollo and Celata 2023). The resident population is more dispersed, with its highest concentrations outside the urban core, which continues to depopulate—albeit more slowly in the last decade than in earlier periods (Crisci 2022). This relative stabilisation may partly reflect inflows of temporary inhabitants: tourism in the historic centre (Celata and Romano 2020) and, increasingly, non-resident students, lifestyle migrants, temporary workers and other mid-term transient groups in residential neighbourhoods (Brollo 2024). In fact, central areas exert a powerful pull on temporary populations that extends well beyond the historic tourist core. A closer look at intra-urban patterns, as mapped in Brollo and Celata (2023), reveals distinct clusters. Eastwards, concentrations appear around Termini train station and the main university hub of Sapienza. Northwards, densities are evident between Prati and Salario, among the wealthiest, centrally located residential districts. The so-called “short-term city” (Brollo and Celata 2023) also comprises several peripheral hotspots where the draw is linked to business districts (e.g., EUR), hotel corridors (e.g., along the outer ring road) and universities.

Overall, the evidence depicts a city where temporary presence – tourist and non-tourist alike – has become a structural force in the housing market and urban public space, concentrating around centrality and connectivity and thereby reconfiguring neighbourhood demand and everyday urban life.

5 | Data and Methods

The strategy adopted to collect data on the residential mobility of temporary populations in Rome was to develop a survey, in line with influential research designs used to study temporary housing and mobility (Frändberg 2014; Garmendia et al. 2012;

López-Gay et al. 2026; Pine 2011). Given the difficulty of defining the relevant population universe, constructing a representative sampling frame and the limited availability of official data on the topic, the study relied on an exploratory, non-representative sample aimed at providing a grounded account of the phenomenon. The target group operationalised temporary populations in a way that is suitable for analysing residential mobility within the city: not tourists, but people staying for at least several months and up to a few years, without the intention or possibility of settling permanently. Participation was based on self-selection: respondents were those who recognised themselves as falling within this definition—reflecting Robertson's (2014) view of temporariness as lived and negotiated—typically having arrived for study, work, research or experience purposes. To reach this audience, the questionnaire was disseminated (between 2021 and 2022) primarily via social media—university and housing groups, nationality-based Facebook groups, and forums for expats and digital nomads—and complemented by printed QR codes posted in specific areas. To broaden participation, the survey was translated into English and Spanish and designed to be short and take less than 10 min. It concluded with an invitation to a follow-up interview, to better explore certain points with those willing to do so. The questionnaire comprised five sections: biographical profile; reasons for choosing Rome; temporality of the stay; housing practices; and future intentions. Most questions were multiple choice or Likert-scale to ensure comparability, with a few open prompts (including a final comment box) to capture opinions that closed formats would miss. The quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics, aimed at outlining the main characteristics and practices of the sampled temporary population. Results were examined based on the main reason for moving to Rome and the macro-category as a whole, to profile sociodemographic features, housing practices and intra-urban locational choices.

Fifteen semi-structured interviews, covering about 10% of respondents, were conducted with respondents who had agreed to be recontacted and were purposively selected to ensure varied profiles in terms of sex, age, origin and primary motivation for being in Rome. They were held both in person and via video call: the latter enabled those who were no longer in Rome to participate but came with the challenges of “Zoom fatigue” (Nadler 2020). To sustain engagement, sessions were concise and conversational, and I made my own positionality as a temporary resident explicit to foster confidence.

These findings are discussed in relation to existing evidence on residential mobility among the resident population, enabling a comparison between temporary dwellers' settlement patterns and the broader dynamics of intra-urban mobility in Rome.

5.1 | Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

The survey yielded 151 valid responses, which were considered in the analysis. Although small and not representative, the sample can be considered adequate for an exploratory study, given the lack of other available data on the topic and the diversity expressed by the data.

In the group of respondents, there were slightly more women than men. The modal ages are 26–35 (with roughly equal shares in the 26–30 and 31–35 brackets), followed by the 36–40 and then over-41 and under-25 brackets. A distinctive feature is the high education level: 86% hold at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 29% of Italians aged 25–34 in 2019—confirming the prevalence of young and highly educated movers as seen in other studies (Frändberg 2014; Impicciatore and Panichella 2019). Respondents come from 10 different countries, and more than 50 Italian provinces are represented. In one quarter of cases, the place of origin differs from the previous place of residence, meaning Rome is at least the third city lived in—a strong signal of high mobility at a relatively young age. Most reported having lived in a large city before Rome—especially foreigners seeking a life experience—whereas the majority of Italian students had arrived from small towns.

6 | Results

6.1 | Motivations for Moving to Rome

Asked about their main reason for moving to Rome, about a half of them cited studies and one third work, while others were split between seeking an experience and having family or emotional ties. Interviews show how these motives intertwine: studies can be a first step towards work; family ties can tip the choice of city; and “life experience,” while rarely the primary option, recurs during interviews as an important – if not omnipresent—secondary driver. As noted by 1 s-year university student who is a resident of Rome but comes from a town in the Lazio region, “I could have commuted... Living here was more a choice than a necessity—I wanted the direct experience of living in Rome.” Beyond personal motivation, a question on attraction factors highlights art and history, leisure and culture, and sociability as the strongest pulls. Career opportunities matter little on average (somewhat more for respondents from northern Italy). Quality of life is generally secondary; it appeals mostly to those seeking a life experience. Opportunities for sociability are generally recognised by all groups, especially students, life-experience movers and those coming from small towns, northern Italy and abroad. Interviews convey a nuanced picture: Rome's employment niches—in public/international institutions, media and culture, universities and research—coexist with its appeal as a “human metropolis.” A woman from a region bordering Lazio returned to live in Italy after years in Switzerland, choosing Rome because of its combination of warmer sociality and third-sector jobs, often absent in her provincial hometown. For others, the city itself was secondary to study or job opportunities. As a respondent from northern Italy put it, “liking Rome was secondary; the master's course I needed was offered there. At certain times in life, there isn't room for other kinds of choices.” This underlines the importance of job-related opportunities in shaping temporary migration, beyond lifestyle.

6.2 | Temporality and Future Prospects

The average time spent in the city is 5 years, with students tending to stay longer and “life-experience” movers staying for shorter periods of time. While this may appear relatively high, most respondents—including those who have been in Rome for more than 5 years—report frequent returns to their place of

origin and/or maintaining their official residence there. This suggests that temporariness is complex and multi-layered: it does not merely relate to duration, but also objectively unstable living arrangements and a clear subjective feeling of being unsettled (Robertson 2014). This idea is reinforced in light of the answers about the future. Uncertainty is widespread: nearly half answered “I don’t know” when asked if their future is in Rome, and about a third always saw their stay as temporary.

Interviews show why people decide to stay or leave, or struggle to decide. Rome’s pull—its art, its history and the freely accessible cityscape—often endures beyond the initial attraction; many spoke of long walks through the historic centre and valued the city’s open, street-based conviviality, especially those with experience abroad. Yet a persistent love-hate dynamic emerged. As one comment put it, “even though it is an incredible city, it is difficult for you to want to stay in Rome.” Recurrent frustrations include the drift towards peripheral neighbourhoods, inadequate public transport, car dependence and traffic, the hindrances faced in meeting friends or attending events, uneven housing quality and an unstable job market. Some people nonetheless remain, based on secure work, close ties, adequate housing or sheer passion for the place. After a few years, a woman in her late twenties reflected that “Rome is a beautiful and hostile place... like a person I sometimes want to meet and sometimes don’t.” She had arrived from a small village in the South to carry out university studies. Another woman who had arrived for a mix of work, experience and family reasons and was satisfied socially but not professionally, added “Rome is a shame, but it can be very difficult to leave... it’s more about charm than logic.”

6.3 | Housing Practices

Housing is among the least detectable aspects in official statistics and, at the same time, one of the most crucial for understanding the socio-geographical changes in the city as a whole. Housing is a key arena of potential conflict between temporary populations and residents, particularly due to competition in the rental market and the different values that can be extracted from different timeframes. The relationship between cost, quality and location is central to individual experience and is often decisive in the choice to remain in the city or leave it. Indeed, during interviews, several respondents reported that if they were no longer able to live in a semi-central area, they would prefer to leave the city rather than move to more peripheral areas.

Survey responses indicate that it is common for people to move house multiple times while living in Rome. On average, respondents reported three different places of residence over an average of 5 years in the city. Although comparable statistics for the resident population are not readily available, it is reasonable to assume that this level of residential turnover is substantially higher than among long-term residents. Only one-fifth of the respondents never changed home. As the length of stay increases, the frequency of moves declines; in the initial period, however, changes are frequent, often occurring more than once per year. The main motivation for moving is economic advantage. Among workers, reasons more closely related to housing type also emerge, for example, moving from shared

arrangements to more self-contained homes. As better explained during interviews, once in place, people learn how the market works and can secure average savings of around €100 between their first and second place of residence. The type of accommodation where respondents reported living the longest is a room in a shared flat (52% of the sample), as documented in other studies and contexts (Allinson 2006; Garmendia et al. 2012). This form of housing is predominant among out-of-town students but is also widespread among workers and those residing in the city for experiential purposes. Individuals who come to Rome intermittently—such as an entrepreneur from abroad or a student from a northern region who returns home almost every weekend—often find hotels and B&B more cost-effective, reporting favourable economic terms through repeat or negotiated arrangements.

Several people who have lived in other large Italian cities report that Rome’s prices are not excessive and that the market offers a broad and varied supply. Price, per se, was rarely cited as a major problem, although high rents are not uncommon, especially in relation to the quality offered. Reports of higher-quality dwellings typically refer to less central locations and to owners who either live in the property or have let it only recently, whereas the worst-maintained units are said to be in the historic centre or university districts and appear to have been in temporary use for longer. A recurring perception is that, particularly in neighbourhoods considered desirable by young people, there is constant demand for beds; as a result, owners have little incentive to invest in improvements, confident that they will quickly find new tenants even if turnover is high.

Informal arrangements with owners are common. For some interviewees, not having a contract was even welcomed as one less thing to worry about, in keeping with a phase of life that is consciously transitional and unstable, as well as being an expression of freedom. One respondent was a young man from Turin who had moved to Rome “for a while” in search of experience, having been captivated by previous trips. He recounted that he initially made a light-hearted decision to stay there but his landlord subsequently made a sudden request for him to vacate, because the property had to be sold.

6.4 | Dwelling Location

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate the areas where they first and most recently lived in Rome. These data are mapped to show the most attractive areas when first arriving (Figure 2) and areas that are more popular for any subsequent relocations (Figure 3), giving a clear representation of residential-mobility trajectories among this social group. In the figures, Rome is divided into its 155 urban areas (official municipal subareas used for planning and statistical purposes). They are shaded according to the number of respondents who reported moving to each area. Only areas reported by at least two respondents are mapped as meaningful destinations, to enhance cartographic legibility and reduce the visual weight of single, potentially idiosyncratic findings.

One of the first findings that stands out is the near absence of any area chosen for residential purposes beyond the Grande

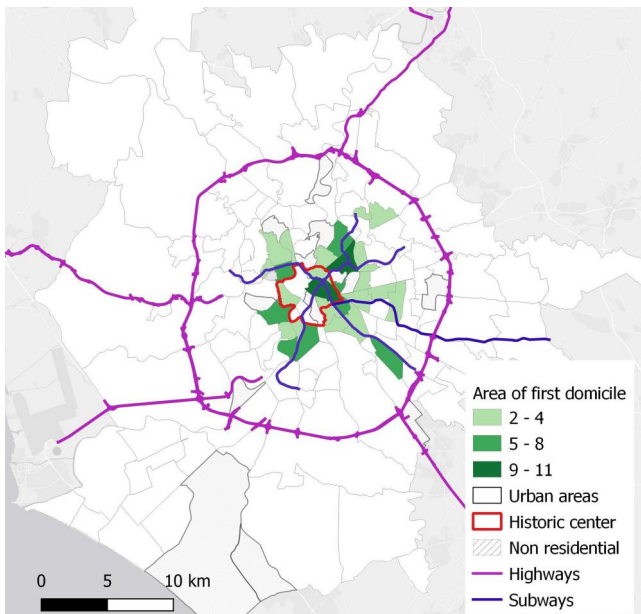


FIGURE 2 | Distribution of respondents by first domicile in Rome. *Source:* author's elaboration on survey data.

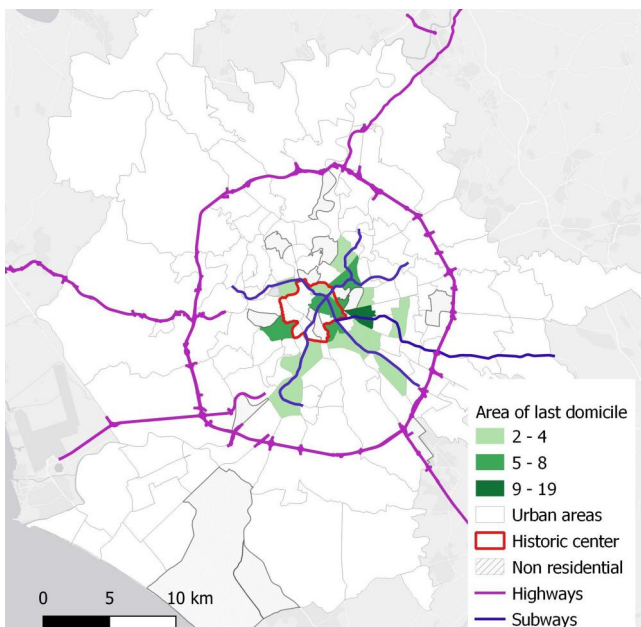


FIGURE 3 | Distribution of respondents by last or current place of domicile in Rome. *Source:* author's elaboration on survey data.

Raccordo Anulare (GRA), the circular highway road that roughly separates the compact city centre from the periphery. As hypothesised, people who move to a city on a temporary basis—whether for studies or work or to pursue a particular lifestyle—seek locations closer to the centre, unlike Rome-born residents who have historically moved toward the periphery, typically along the radial corridors where they grew up or where they still have family ties (Crisci 2018). Several interviewees, even when working in areas that are far more peripheral than where they live, stated that rather than relocating to the suburbs, they would prefer to leave Rome altogether. They stated a preference for nearby municipalities so they could be closer to

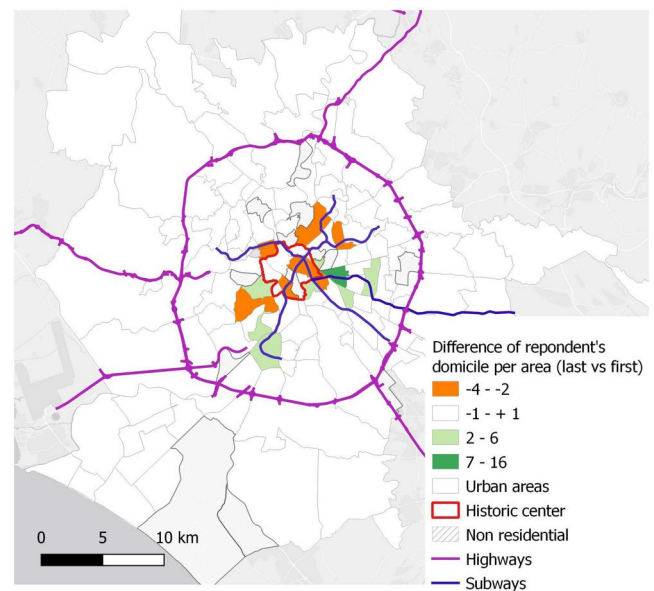


FIGURE 4 | Urban areas of Rome shaded by the net difference in respondents reporting having had them as their last or current domicile. *Source:* Author's elaboration on survey data.

nature, or for moving to a different city, as they considered living in the periphery to be pointless.

Comparing the areas where respondents had their last domicile (Figure 3) with those where they had their first (Figure 2) demonstrates their residential mobility trajectories (as in Figure 4), and that many areas lose their initial primacy. Two main shifts emerge: a reduction in the North-East (university and embassies area) and a concentration toward the South-East (more low-income), particularly around the Pigneto-Torignattara area, which has attracted a substantial share of movers. This displays a strong concentration of temporary residents with their current/last domicile there.

The neighbourhood has increasingly combined 'classic' gentrification with studentification and touristification, shifting over the last two decades from a working-class inner-eastern district to an 'alternative' urban part of the city that is shaped by the cultural scene and nightlife. This pattern reflects the visible revitalisation of the area, especially since 2014, when Rome Metro Line C opened stations nearby and pedestrianisation consolidated key streets as focal points for consumption and visibility, turning Pigneto into a new social laboratory on account of its artistic and music communities while reinforcing its symbolic centrality within Rome's leisure geography (De Michele 2021).

Another salient feature is that, although respondents tend to gravitate towards the centre, there is a limited presence in urban areas of the actual historic centre. People more often treat it as a first point of arrival, perhaps due to limited knowledge of the broader city or the pull of major attractions, but it is rare to find people choosing to remain there beyond the initial phase. In the net balance between first and last places of residence, we find no increase in any of the areas within the historic centre. One respondent who had lived in several historic central districts reported that some areas felt over-touristified, to the point of distorting the place itself and making everyday life

prohibitively expensive, in turn making living conditions harder not only for historic residents but also for temporary inhabitants. Similar competition over space among different temporary groups has been observed in other over-touristified cities, such as Venice (Paolo Russo and Sans 2009) and Florence (Kokoni and Loda 2024).

A general trend over time also appears when comparing the first address upon arrival with the last at the time of the survey. Hence, even temporary residents tend to shift from more central areas—both the literal historic core and locations central to their own interests (because of proximity to the university, e.g.)—towards more peripheral areas located around the South-East and South-West, while temporary inhabitants are still concentrated in residential neighbourhoods, which are well served by public transport and equipped with amenities. Interviews chiefly highlight the desire for lower rents and, to a lesser extent, more residential or ‘authentic’ neighbourhoods. In other words, temporary residents only partially embrace highly defined temporary enclaves and are particularly deterred by a heavy tourist presence. At the same time, they do not typically move along the consular radial main streets in a centrifugal direction, as is common among long-term residents (Crisci 2018); rather, they gravitate towards attractive areas that remain relatively close to the centre and to the metro, and almost never beyond the GRA, as residents tend to do. This is because this area is considered a threshold beyond which many would prefer to leave Rome altogether.

7 | Discussion

Medium-term temporary dwellers form part of a well-defined intra-urban system that is increasingly consequential for neighbourhood change in attractive Southern European cities. Temporary populations emerge as influential actors in the human geography of the city, not least because their housing needs require “moorings” (Hannam et al. 2006) that intersect with structurally constrained rental markets. In this research sample, this group is largely young and highly educated, often exhibits multi-local biographies, and is driven mainly by study- and work-related factors. Yet temporariness is not reducible to short duration: the average reported stay is 5 years, while frequent returns to places of origin and the fact that official residence is maintained elsewhere reveal layered circumstances, combining objective instability with a clear subjective period of being unsettled.

Against the Southern European benchmark—where resident mobility has long been structured by core-ring gradients, accessibility constraints and housing cycles (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2018; Crisci 2022; Torrado et al. 2021)—temporary inhabitants’ intra-urban mobility appears both centralised and volatile. Respondents reported three dwellings over 5 years on average, with especially frequent moves early on and a dominant economic rationale. Co-living is structurally embedded in these trajectories: the longest spell is most often a room in a shared flat, and informal, often digital arrangements (Ferreri and Sanyal 2022) are widespread. These practices match the literature on temporary groups’ tendency to adopt co-living arrangements for reasons of sociability and affordability in high-

demand areas (Garmendia et al. 2012; von Zumbusch and Lalicic 2020).

Spatially speaking, centrality—synonymous with accessibility—remains key for mobile populations seeking to optimise short-to-medium stays, which are less based on origin and family ties than resident trajectories. Newcomers cluster near study/work sites or trendy social districts featuring “landscapes of creativity” (Paolo Russo and Sans 2009, and empirical studies suggest a broader tendency to co-locate because of shared infrastructural needs and mutual attraction in the absence of established ties (Maitland and Newman 2008; Malet-Calvo 2018; Novy 2018). Consistently, Rome’s mapped trajectories show an almost complete avoidance of areas beyond the GRA and a preference for central and metro-connected semi-central neighbourhoods, while the historic centre operates mainly as a first point of arrival rather than a permanent destination. Even if the empirical study presented here has its limitations (as discussed in the next paragraph), it demonstrates a shift toward the South-East, suggesting that temporary mobility actively reproduces demand in neighbourhoods where gentrification, studentification and touristification overlap.

The empirical strategy adopted here does not permit strong generalisations. Instead, it provides an informative contribution on the intra-urban mobility of a specific segment that plausibly intersects with ongoing property valorisation processes, which are increasingly shaping housing accessibility and the liveability of expanding portions of the city. These trends reflect the reorganisation of Rome’s residential mobility from 2008 onwards. The literature documents weak reurbanisation driven mainly by reduced outflows from central areas (Crisci 2022). As more stock shifts to short- and mid-term uses, competition intensifies in central and semi-central segments, and displacement can affect not only low-income residents but also middle- and high-income households—including earlier gentrifiers—who are effectively excluded from the submarkets where temporary demand is concentrated. In this sense, the tourist city increasingly encroaches on the resident city through platform-mediated short-term rental markets (Celata and Romano 2020). In Rome, evidence points to a growing diffusion of platform-mediated rentals into semi-central and semi-peripheral residential neighbourhoods, extending exposure to short- and mid-term rentals dynamics (Bei et al. 2026). This phenomenon has been growing in the last few years, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is likely that this is actually further accentuating the trends observed in the survey analysed in this article. Scholars have consequently highlighted risks in terms of both affordability and the availability of long-term housing, with implications for intra-urban inequalities and displacement- and constraint-driven mobility (Brollo et al. 2026). The impact of temporary populations should therefore be understood not only as a phenomenon confined to tourism and central areas, but as a mechanism that gradually reshapes residential submarkets across wider portions of the city.

The expansion of medium-term temporary demand is thus central to contemporary intra-urban mobility. This demand can alter the functioning of neighbourhood housing markets in two complementary ways. First, it intensifies competition for dwellings in accessible semi-central areas, raising entry thresholds for long-term renters and increasing the likelihood that lower- and middle-income residents might be displaced or

forced to search further afield. Second, it reshapes owners' incentives: when temporary tenants are perceived as more solvent, willing to pay higher rents for short-to-medium stays and less risky in terms of contract flexibility and repossession, landlords may reasonably reallocate units away from long-term leases. In this process, households already living in these neighbourhoods may be pushed out if they rent, while some owner-occupiers may decide to monetise their place of residence by renting or selling into these higher-yield segments and relocating to cheaper peripheral areas. Taken together, these mechanisms suggest that platform-mediated short- and mid-term demand does not simply add "extra" population to the city; it can actively reconfigure intra-urban residential mobility by tightening access to housing in central and semi-central neighbourhoods and by redistributing resident trajectories along the centre-periphery gradient.

8 | Limitations

This study has some limitations related to the research design and data collection strategy: mixed-method approaches are not exempt from limitations, particularly with regard to representativeness and the robustness of inference. First, the survey is based on a relatively small number of respondents (151) and on a self-selected sample, which limits the scope for generalising the findings beyond the group observed. Recruitment through social media groups, online forums and QR codes posted in selected areas may also have generated coverage bias, likely favouring more digitally connected and socially visible segments of the target population. Second, the qualitative component relies on 15 follow-up interviews only; while these interviews are valuable for contextualising survey responses and reconstructing individual trajectories, they do not capture the full heterogeneity of temporary dwellers in Rome. More broadly, some of the patterns identified may reflect self-selection mechanisms rather than broader empirical regularities. Finally, the survey was conducted in 2021–2022, a period still affected by the short-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, including post-lockdown mobility rebounds and the expansion of remote working, which may have influenced both temporary mobility and housing practices.

In addition, while Rome is a highly relevant case for exploring these dynamics, its specific historical, sociospatial and housing-market characteristics limit the extent to which the findings can be extended to Southern Europe more broadly. Comparative research across other Southern European cities would therefore be needed to distinguish more general trends from context-specific features.

At the same time, these limitations do not undermine the exploratory value of the study, which provides rare empirical insight into a hard-to-measure population and into the links between temporary residency, housing practices and intra-urban mobility patterns.

9 | Conclusions

This paper argues for considering medium-term temporary dwellers as an influential component of residential mobility in Southern European cities. Conceptually, the Rome case confirms the validity of considering temporariness as a useful

category for understanding contemporary urban dynamics. This understanding is valuable for residential-mobility scholarship because it introduces a mobility system whose rationale is not primarily life-course driven in the classic sense but is strongly mediated by features of temporary residence and the relevant social group, as well as rental-market frictions and the marketing of rental intermediation platforms.

Substantively, the analysis highlights how temporary populations help to shape settlement patterns and inequality in attractive Southern European cities. Rome appears to be a significant example of a Southern European "Mediterranean" pathway to gentrification that is shaped by liveability, tourist appeal, food culture and relatively low costs for higher-income outsiders (Cocola-Gant et al. 2020; Salvati 2022). Within this trajectory, the housing system is increasingly shaped by overlapping temporary demands that affect the urban space. Spatial and accessibility conflicts among different subgroups—for example, between tourists and students and workers—emerge as a relevant mechanism structuring the social geography of the city, with implications for who can access central and semi-central neighbourhoods and for how displacement pressures are redistributed across the metropolitan gradient. Temporary populations also contribute through repeated intra-urban relocations that have the capacity to consolidate competition in specific submarkets and reinforce sociospatial inequalities.

Policy should address temporary demand where it competes with long-term residency in central and metro-accessible semi-central areas. It should regulate and monitor platform short-/mid-term rentals to protect availability, affordability and neighbourhood composition, since registries fail to account for many non-registered dwellers. Longer-term leases should also be incentivised over higher-yield temporary circuits (Festa et al. 2024).

The study's main limitation is that the dataset is based on an exploratory, self-selected survey and therefore does not provide representative estimates. At the same time, it provides unique data on an understudied (at least in Rome) topic, by providing rare evidence on a hard-to-measure population and by linking locational outcomes to motivations, expectations and strategies.

Future research would benefit from comparative designs across Southern European cities and from triangulation between ad hoc surveys, administrative registers and platform-derived data. Three avenues appear especially promising: (i) modelling how different temporary subgroups compete for housing across neighbourhood types and accessibility levels, and how this competition translates into displacement or immobility among residents, also considering the interaction with settled foreign-origin populations; (ii) tracing all the stages that make up sequences of moves; (iii) seeing how the growing platformisation of mid-term rentals affects the residential mobility and housing strategies of mid-term temporary populations.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study contain sensitive information collected through a survey and cannot be made publicly available. Anonymised data may be made available by the author upon reasonable request.

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