ROME (UN)CHANGING: PERSISTENCE AND PECULIARITIES OF ITS POPULATION

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Abstract. Rome — the largest municipality in Italy and one of the largest European capitals — offers a revealing case for understanding how national demographic decline translates into urban change. Combining long-run census evidence with annual resident-population stocks, demographic-balance components, and a municipality-level analysis, the study shows that Rome's recent trajectory broadly parallels the national pattern but with a delayed transition to decline. The decomposition of annual change indicates that natural decrease has become structurally negative, while migration plays a decisive role: international migration remains systematically positive, whereas internal mobility changes sign over time and is crucial in shaping shifts from growth to decline. As of 1 January 2025, Rome's population structure is close to the national profile in terms of ageing, yet it differs from other large cities in its level of ageing and internationalisation, with a particularly small child population. Within the city, Rome's 15 administrative subdivisions ("municipi") exhibit extreme heterogeneity in size, population, growth and structure: only a small number of peripheral municipi continue to grow, while others — most notably the historic centre — experience marked decline.

1. Introduction

Demographic trends in Italy have led to a profound and largely silent transformation, as the country has entered a phase of population decline and sustained ageing. The decline is due to a persistently negative natural balance, caused by very low fertility, a decrease in the number of women of childbearing age, and an increase in the number of deaths linked to the increasing size of older age groups. Specifically, the persistent decline in births and the continuous improvement in survival at older ages have shaped and intensified the ageing of the resident population. Similar trends have characterised much of Europe, where negative natural change has become increasingly widespread and structural, with deaths exceeding births in a growing number of countries (Eurostat, 2025). Across Europe, migration has increasingly become the main driver of demographic change, offsetting negative natural balances; in Italy, however, although foreign

immigration initially mitigated these effects, delaying demographic decline and moderating ageing, more recently it has proved insufficient to compensate for the structural deficit in births (Istat, 2025). At the same time, national-level demographic trends often mask substantial territorial disparities, with pronounced regional differences and persistent contrasts between urban and rural areas (Kashnitsky *et al.*, 2021; Cuadrado-Roura, 2023). In this uneven territorial landscape, large cities assume particular strategic relevance (Newsham and Rowe, 2023). Historically, large cities have experienced population growth and attracted both internal and international migration, often mitigating negative natural change. In European countries with a persistently negative natural balance, large metropolitan areas have often acted as demographic buffers, delaying population decline or showing slight growth due to positive net migration (Wolff and Wiechmann, 2018). However, aggregate metropolitan indicators can be misleading, as they often conceal significant intra-urban differences in demographic dynamics and population structure (Haase *et al.*, 2016).

Rome is the largest municipality (a Local Administrative Unit, LAU, under Eurostat classification) in Italy by population and among the largest in Europe in terms of territorial extent. Over the long term, Rome has undergone irregular residential expansion, characterised by marked spatial and temporal discontinuities. As a result, Rome represents a heterogeneous demographic space, where population change observed at the city level may conceal divergent trajectories across its administrative subdivisions. After a period of renewed growth in the 2000s, Rome has recently entered a phase of population decline, in line with the national trend but with different timing and intensity. This recent shift has occurred despite Rome's continued demographic attractiveness, largely linked to migration inflows, especially from abroad.

In-depth demographic analyses have been developed for several major European cities and capitals — such as Paris (Ogden and Schnoebelen, 2005) and Athens (Benassi and Salvati, 2020) — while comparative studies have documented the diversification of demographic trajectories across European urban agglomerations (Kabisch and Haase, 2011; Wolff and Wiechmann, 2018). Despite its demographic and territorial significance, Rome has received relatively limited and fragmented attention in demographic research, especially when compared with other large European cities and capitals, and in particular with regard to systematic evidence on intra-urban demographic heterogeneity. What has been the demographic evolution of Rome over the recent decades, and to what extent does it converge with or diverge from national trends and those observed in other large Italian cities? Which components of population change (natural change and migration) have driven Rome's recent shift from growth to decline, and how do these components vary across the city's administrative subdivisions? Is population

ageing in Rome less pronounced than at the national level — as suggested by the comparatively slower ageing often observed in large European cities — or does Rome display a distinctive ageing pattern driven by its internal heterogeneity? Our hypothesis is that Rome's recent demographic decline reflects not only a persistently negative natural balance, only partially offset by net migration, but also a reduced capacity to retain its residents. We also hypothesize that city-level trends mask highly divergent demographic trends among Rome's administrative subdivisions, particularly in terms of the intensity of ageing and population changes.

The aim of this work is to analyse Rome's demographic evolution over recent decades and its transition from growth to decline, comparing it with national trends and those observed in other large Italian cities. It also examines intra-urban heterogeneity across Rome's administrative subdivisions, focusing on the components of demographic change and key indicators of population structure.

2. Data and methods

In order to examine long-term demographic trends for Rome, comparing them with other Italian principal cities and with Italy, we use data from various sources. First, we use population census data from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) for the period 1951–2021 to reconstruct population change and intercensal growth rates for Rome, for the seven other most populous cities (Turin, Milan, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Naples, and Palermo), and for Italy. Second, we use Istat's annual demographic balance series (Population balance estimates for 2001-2018 years and Demographic balance for 2019-2024 period) for the same territorial levels, to compare natural change and net migration in Rome with the other cities and with Italy. Third, in order to study demographic change and its components across Rome's administrative subdivisions in the recent period, we use Population Register data at 1 January for the years 2015-2025.

Annual growth rates are computed as $r = 1{,}000 \times \ln(P\{t+n\}/P\{t\})/n$ where n is the number of years. Natural balance and net migration are expressed as annual rates per 1,000 residents.

To deepen the analysis, using the same sources mentioned above, we also construct key indicators of population structure for Rome, the other principal cities, Italy and the 15 administrative subdivisions of Rome. In particular, we calculate the ageing index (population aged 65+ per 100 population aged 0–14), the share of children aged 0–4, and the share of residents with foreign citizenship. All structure indicators are computed as of 1 January 2025.

Based on these sources, we conduct a long-term descriptive analysis of demographic changes and the components of this change. We therefore analyse population growth, changes in natural balance and net migration, and the structural characteristics of Rome's population, comparing them with other territorial contexts (other major Italian cities) and with the overall Italian context. Although descriptive, the analysis is particularly comprehensive. First, it covers a very long period, allowing for an understanding of long-term trends. The territorial level is also particularly detailed, as not only are trends at the municipal level examined, but for the city of Rome, the sub-municipal level is also considered. In this way we can analyse and understand similarities and differences across cities and within Rome, thereby providing a detailed framework of demographic changes over time and space.

3. Results

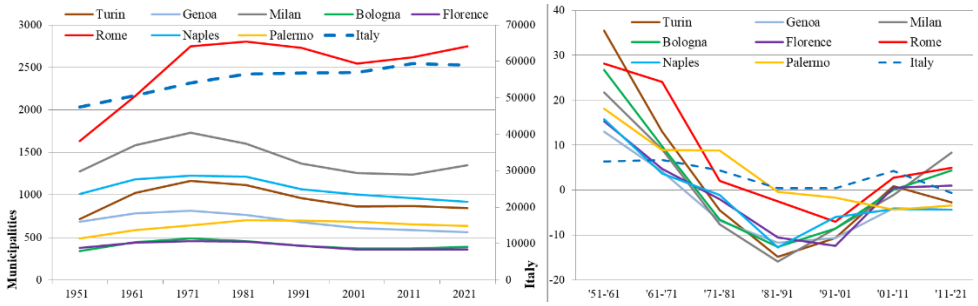
3.1. Long-term intercensal population change (1951–2021)

At the 1951 population census, Rome already exceeded 1.6 million residents (1,632,402) and was Italy's largest municipality; by the 2021 census it had reached 2,749,031 residents. During the same period, Rome's exceptionally large administrative area (1,287.4 km², the largest in Italy) provides an essential interpretative key to understanding intercensal change, as part of the suburban expansion may have taken place within the municipal boundaries rather than in neighbouring municipalities, as has often been the case in other urban areas. Rome is among the largest capital cities in Europe in terms of surface area, comparable in size to Greater London (1,572 km²) and smaller than Moscow (2,561.5 km²), bearing in mind that these figures refer to administrative boundaries rather than functional urban areas, which are larger in many other cases, such as Paris. Between the 1951 and 1971 censuses, Rome experienced very rapid average annual intercensal growth (28.2‰ in the period 1951–1961 and 24.0‰ in 1961–1971), well above the national average (6.3‰ and 6.7‰, respectively), as shown in Figure 1, and generally higher than that of most other large cities (second only to Turin in 1951–1961), consistent with the urbanisation phase in the urban-cycle framework (Van Den Berg *et al.*, 1982).

From 1971 to 1991, several northern cities experienced marked population losses (e.g., Milan, Turin, Genoa), consistent with a phase of population deconcentration and suburbanisation in the urban-cycle framework (Salvati and Carlucci, 2016), while Rome displayed a comparatively milder pattern (+2.0‰ in 1971–1981 and –2.6‰ in 1981–1991). The 1991–2001 decade marked a broader

phase of urban decline, with Rome also recording a negative intercensal rate (–7.1‰), bringing its trajectory closer to that of other large municipalities, while the national trend remains close to zero. Between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, Rome returned to growth (+2.7‰), in line with the renewed expansion observed in several major European capitals during the 2000s (Eurostat, 2016). Despite a negative national rate in 2011–2021 (–0.7‰), renewed growth was recorded in Rome (+4.9‰), together with Milan (+8.3‰) and Bologna (+4.3‰), while Naples and Palermo continued to decline.

Figure 1 – *Resident population (left panel, thousands) and intercensal population growth rate (right panel, per 1,000 inhabitants) in Italy and the eight most populous municipalities (Rome, Turin, Milan, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Naples, Palermo), 1951–2021 censuses.*



Source: our elaboration on ISTAT data.

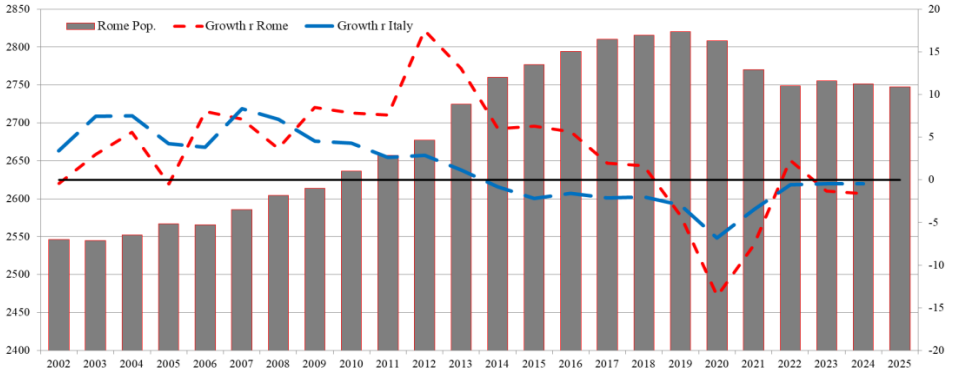
Overall, Rome's long-term trajectory combines intense post-war expansion with a relatively moderate phase of de-concentration and renewed growth in the last two decades, which warrants closer examination of the most recent period against a national backdrop of population decline recorded since the mid-2010s. At the national level, recent trends in Italy's resident population have increasingly relied on positive net international migration, largely driven by foreign immigration, which has only partially offset the persistently negative natural balance; in Rome, however, both international migration and within-country internal mobility need to be considered to interpret the recent demographic balance.

3.2. Recent annual population dynamics

Looking at recent trends in the resident population, Rome has also entered a phase of decline that was not apparent from intercensal evidence: from 1 January 2002 to 1 January 2025, the trend in Rome's resident population essentially follows

the national profile. It experienced growth in the 2000s followed by a subsequent slowdown, but it follows a clearly different timeline in the transition to decline compared with the national level. In Italy, the annual growth rate turned negative in 2014, whereas in Rome this occurred only in 2019, with a temporary recovery in 2022, indicating a delay in the onset of demographic decline at the capital level (Figure 2). At the local level, economic and social factors have a stronger influence in conditioning demographic dynamics, particularly internal mobility within Italy, within a shared national demographic framework (Buonomo *et al.*, 2024; Wolff and Wiechmann, 2018).

Figure 2 – *Resident population in Rome (thousands) at 1 January and annual growth rate (‰) in Rome and Italy, 2002–2025.*

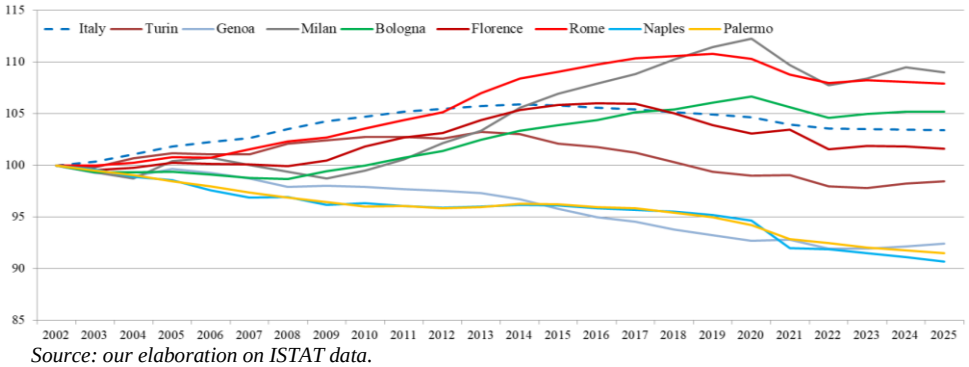


Source: our elaboration on ISTAT data.

In line with long-term evidence, Rome remains one of the major Italian municipalities with the strongest population growth, together with Milan, as the largest and most connected urban centres can preserve demographic resilience longer than the national average before eventually converging towards the broader demographic crisis. However, demographic trajectories of Rome and Milan—observed by indexing the resident population in 2002 (=100), regardless of initial size—diverge over time (Figure 3). Rome expanded more rapidly in the first decade, while Milan has been more resilient in recent years, in line with its role as the country's main economic centre and its greater capacity to attract resources and population (Buonomo *et al.*, 2024). Genoa, on the other hand, stands out as a city in long-term decline: its demographic contraction began earlier and was associated with natural decrease and population ageing, subsequently reinforced by out-migration linked to suburbanisation processes (Haase *et al.*, 2016). Southern cities, Naples and Palermo, are also experiencing persistent population decline, reflecting a combination of negative internal balances (strong net outflows), negative natural

change, and a more limited compensatory effect of international migration (Buonomo *et al.*, 2024).

Figure 3 – *Resident population at 1 January (indexed values; 2002=100) in eight major Italian municipalities, 2002–2025.*



Source: our elaboration on ISTAT data.

A central hypothesis is that in Rome migration has mitigated an increasingly negative natural balance, while internal migration may be consistent with the redistribution processes often associated with suburbanization and peri-urbanization (Buonomo *et al.*, 2024; Crisci and Casacchia, 2013).

3.3. Demographic components of population change (2002–2024)

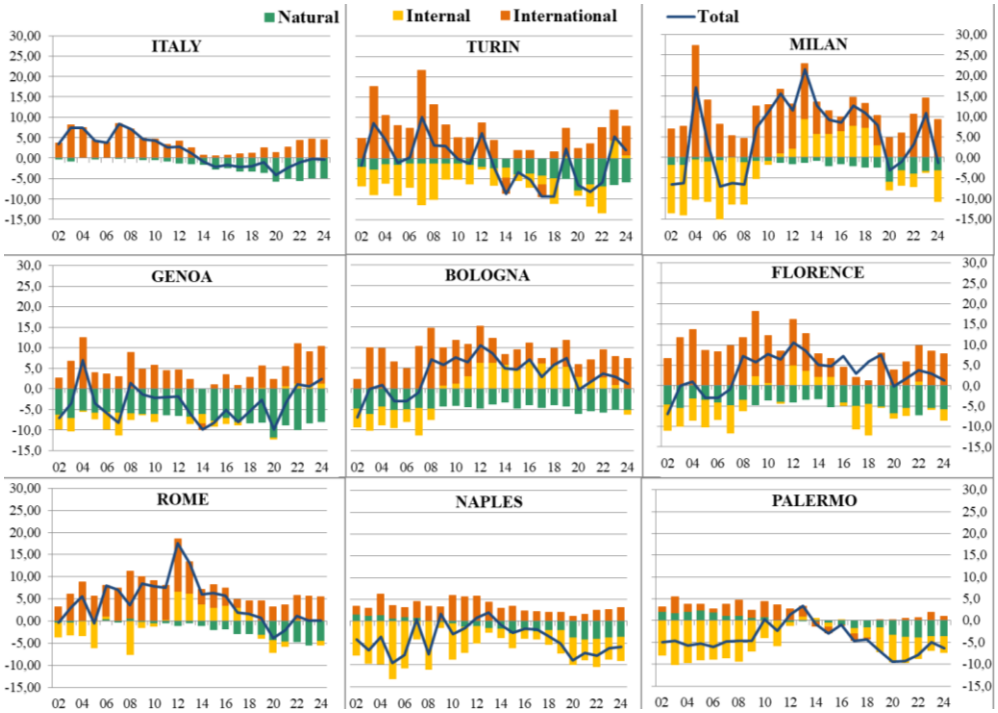
The different timing and trajectory of population growth in Rome compared to those of Italy reflect changes in the natural balance and net migration, distinguishing, at the municipal level, between internal and international migration (Figure 4), following an accounting framework widely used to interpret recent urban dynamics in Italy (Strozza *et al.*, 2016; Buonomo *et al.*, 2024).

Since the natural balance is negative for most of the period in both Rome and Italy, the sign and intensity of population growth increasingly depend on net migration. At the national level – where internal migration is structurally zero by definition – net international migration more than compensated for the natural deficit in the first part of the period. In subsequent years, its counterbalancing effect weakened, particularly in the aftermath of the economic crisis and during the Covid-19 pandemic, while the natural balance became increasingly negative, leading to a sustained population decline driven mainly by the continuing decrease in births (Reynaud and Miccoli, 2019; Buonomo *et al.*, 2024). A similar trend can be observed in Rome, but with the important difference that municipal growth also

depends on internal migration, which changed direction over time. The internal migration rate ranged between −5.9‰ and −2.7‰ in 2002–2005, then became clearly positive in the 2010s (from +0.3‰ up to +6.7‰ in 2011–2018), before weakening again after 2019, fluctuating between −2.7‰ and +0.5‰ in 2019–2024 (Figure 4). This sign reversal in internal migration may be consistent with redistribution processes often associated with suburbanization and peri-urbanization —also considering that Rome's large municipal territory can keep part of peri-urban redistribution within administrative boundaries—while net international migration is consistently positive and provides a stable counterbalance (Crisci and Casacchia, 2013; Salvati and Carlucci, 2016; Buonomo *et al.*, 2024). With natural decrease intensifying in recent years (between −3.3‰ and −5.5‰ in 2019–2024), positive international migration — still systematically positive (around +3.3‰ to +5.5‰ in 2019–2024) — is no longer sufficient to offset the combined effect of the natural deficit and renewed internal losses; this helps to explain the shift to decline observed at the end of the 2010s (Buonomo *et al.*, 2024; Crisci and Casacchia, 2013).

Compared with other large cities, Rome's natural balance turns negative later, in a timing closer to that observed in Naples and Palermo, whereas in most other large municipalities it is negative throughout the period (Strozza *et al.*, 2016). International migration provides Rome with a structurally positive contribution across the whole period, although in many years the international component is even stronger in Milan and, in some years, in Turin and Florence; in the other municipalities it is generally weaker and only sporadically negative, notably in Palermo (Figure 4). The key differentiating factor, however, is internal mobility: in Rome, its contribution is substantial only in specific sub-periods and with opposite signs, whereas other cities display more stable patterns, with internal gains concentrated in the middle of the period in Milan and Bologna and more persistent internal deficits in cities such as Turin, Naples and Palermo (Figure 4). These contrasts suggest that the delay in population decline in Rome reflects a specific combination of components: a late deterioration in natural change and a temporary phase of positive internal migration, which, together with consistently positive international migration, sustained growth for longer than in most other municipalities. Then, the same national demographic crisis translates into different urban trajectories depending on how these components interact locally (Buonomo *et al.*, 2024; Crisci and Casacchia, 2013).

Figure 4 – *Demographic components of population change (‰)—natural balance, net internal migration, and net international migration—in Italy and eight major municipalities, 2002–2024.*



Source: our elaboration on ISTAT data.

3.4. Population structure and ageing

The long- and short-term demographic dynamics described above translate into a population structure as of 1 January 2025 that varies across the considered areas (Table 1). Population ageing emerges as the dominant common feature in Italy — rooted in persistently low fertility and increasing longevity and reflected in a structurally negative natural balance — while the intensity and pace of ageing vary considerably from one municipality to another (Golini *et al.*, 2003; Kashnitsky *et al.*, 2021; Reynaud and Mingione, 2025). In this context, urban demographic profiles increasingly depend on the selective contribution of migration, which reshapes both the working-age and child populations and interacts with local demographic structures, thus differentiating large cities even within a shared national demographic framework (Buonomo *et al.*, 2024; Kashnitsky *et al.*, 2021).

As of 1 January 2025, Rome's age structure is aligned with the national profile, but it sits in an intermediate position between the oldest northern municipalities and the relatively younger southern cities (Table 1). In Rome, population ageing is slightly below the national level and lower than the most aged northern benchmarks, while still higher than Naples and Palermo: the share of population aged 65+ is 24.0% (Italy: 24.7%) and the ageing index is 202.8 (Italy: 207.7). Genoa stands out as the most aged municipality, in line with the fact that Liguria has long been Italy's oldest region. This highlights that ageing is widespread nationally but unfolds unevenly across local units: southern cities appear to be somewhat less aged overall, although ageing has progressed rapidly in recent years (Reynaud and Mingione, 2025). Despite being located in North-West Italy — the macro-area with the oldest demographic structure — Milan has a lower share of residents aged 65+ than Rome (22.4% versus 24.0%) and a lower ageing index (193.7 versus 202.8). This gap may reflect, on the one hand, Milan's stronger labour-market pull as Italy's main economic centre, which increases the weight of working-age residents. On the other hand, Milan's small municipal territory and physical continuity with neighbouring municipalities may facilitate short-distance residential relocation outside the city proper, whereas Rome's unusually large municipal area can retain part of this redistribution within its administrative boundaries (Buonomo *et al.*, 2024; Crisci and Casacchia, 2013; Salvati and Carlucci, 2016). Considering younger ages, the share of children aged 0–4 is very low in Rome (3.3%), slightly below the national level (3.4%) and below Milan (3.5%) and Bologna (3.4%); among the considered cities, only Genoa records a lower value (3.0%), while Florence and Turin are very similar (3.2%) (Table 1). The lower percentage in Rome, as well as in older cities, is largely due to the decline in the number of births and the resulting negative natural balance observed in recent years. This may be driven not only by lower fertility, but also by the comparatively lower presence of foreign residents, whose younger age profile and higher fertility may have partially mitigated the decline in the child population (Kashnitsky *et al.*, 2021; Crisci and Casacchia, 2013). More specifically, as of 1 January 2025, Rome recorded a share of foreign residents of 12.9%, significantly higher than the national level (9.1%) but well below Milan (19.6%) and other large municipalities in Centre-Northern Italy, such as Turin (15.7%), Bologna (15.1%), and Florence (15.6%) (Table 1). By contrast, the share of foreign residents remains much lower in the southern macro-areas (Naples, 6.6% and Palermo 4.1%). This highlight that Rome's 'internationalisation' is substantial in national terms, but not as intense as in the main economic centres of Centre-Northern Italy, nor as in many major European capital cities, where foreign-born shares often rank among the highest nationally (Eurostat, 2016).

Table 1 – *Population structure indicators at 1 January 2025 in Rome, Italy and selected major municipalities.*

Territorial unit	Aged 0-4 (%)	Aged 65+ (%)	Ageing index	% Foreigners
Turin	3.2	25.9	238.1	15.7
Milan	3.5	22.4	193.7	19.6
Genoa	3.0	28.8	275.0	12.0
Bologna	3.4	24.4	221.3	15.1
Florence	3.2	26.6	243.8	15.6
Rome	3.3	24.0	202.8	12.9
Naples	3.8	22.4	172.9	6.6
Palermo	3.9	23.5	176.2	4.1
Italy	3.4	24.7	207.7	9.1

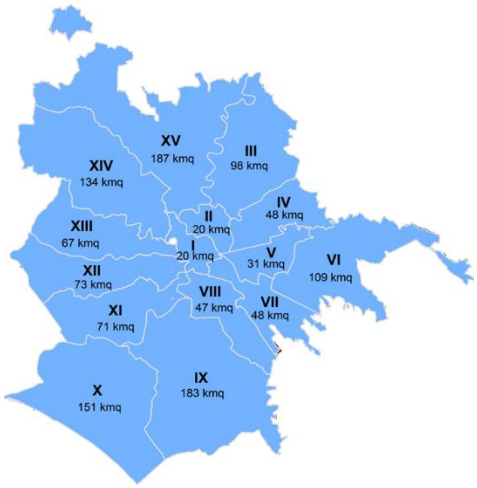
Source: our elaboration on ISTAT data.

Overall, the demographic structure as of 1 January 2025 confirms Rome as a distinctive and demographically important case: although it is broadly in line with the national profile, it does not fully coincide with it and differs from other large municipalities in the way ageing and internationalisation combine. Taken together, the demographic dynamics and structural characteristics make the Municipality of Rome a key context for further study, especially when considering its internal heterogeneity.

3.5. Intra-urban heterogeneity across Rome's administrative subdivisions

Rome is divided into 15 administrative subdivisions called "*municipi*" (hereafter *Municipi* I–XV), which also provide a useful territorial subdivision for scientific analysis; these *municipi* differ considerably in territorial size and population, resulting in substantial internal heterogeneity (Figure 5; Table 2). The two largest administrative subdivisions—*Municipio* XV (187.31 km²) and *Municipio* IX (183.31 km²) — are predominantly peripheral units extending to the municipal boundary and, despite their very large surface area, are not among the most populous (respectively 160,620 and 183,043 residents as of 1 January 2025). By contrast, the two smallest — *Municipio* I (20.09 km²) and *Municipio* II (19.66 km²) — are located in the central part of the municipality, with *Municipio* I corresponding to the historic centre. The most populous is *Municipio* VII, which, with 311,895 residents and a relatively limited area (47.60 km²), includes densely settled neighbourhoods in the inner urban belt close to (but outside) the historic core.

Figure 5 – *Rome's 15 administrative subdivisions ("municipi").*



Source: Roma Capitale, Statistical Yearbook 2025.

Over the last decade, recent trends in resident population growth vary considerably among Rome's 15 administrative subdivisions, confirming that city-level dynamics conceal substantial internal differences (Table 2). In the period between 1 January 2015 and 1 January 2025, most administrative subdivisions recorded population decline, in line with the overall slowdown and recent downturn observed at the city level; contractions are particularly marked in *Municipi* I, VI and IV (−18.53‰, −7.90‰ and −5.30‰, respectively) (Table 2). These losses tend to concentrate in the consolidated city. However, four administrative subdivisions still recorded positive annual growth rates — *Municipi* XV, IX, VII and XIV (+2.00‰, +1.81‰, +1.63‰ and +0.30‰, respectively) — indicating that growth is more likely in large peripheral subdivisions and in some densely settled sectors of the inner urban belt (Table 2) although these variations are also partly affected by recent administrative boundary adjustments for a subset of *Municipi*. The spatial pattern of these divergences fits the centre–periphery gradient widely discussed in the literature on Rome. It may reflect a combination of outward residential redistribution, linked to housing-market pressures and functional reorganisation within the consolidated city, and continued settlement expansion along selected peripheral corridors (Lelo *et al.*, 2019; Crisci and Casacchia, 2013; Salvati and Carlucci, 2016; Egidi *et al.*, 2020). The steep decline recorded in *Municipio* I over 2015–2025 (Table 2) appears to reflect a broader process of residential "emptying" of the historic centre, driven by the conversion of dwellings to short-term rentals and other tourism-oriented uses that reduce the stock available for long-term residents (Lelo *et al.*, 2019; Carminucci *et al.*, 2014).

Table 2 – *Population size, area and recent growth by municipio (1 January 2015–1 January 2025).*

Administrative subdivision	Resident Population at 1 January 2015	Resident Population at 1 January 2025	Area (Km^2)	Annual Growth rate (1.1.2015–1.1.2025) ‰
I	194,546	161,647	20.09	-18.53
II	167,986	163,097	19.66	-2.95
III	204,056	202,442	98.03	-0.79
IV	177,191	168,039	47.95	-5.30
V	244,662	239,925	30.57	-1.96
VI	261,969	242,069	109.47	-7.90
VII	306,837	311,895	47.60	1.63
VIII	131,054	127,086	47.15	-3.07
IX	179,763	183,043	183.31	1.81
X	229,642	226,842	150.74	-1.23
XI	153,861	151,057	71.48	-1.84
XII	140,976	138,694	73.07	-1.63
XIII	133,496	130,333	66.93	-2.40
XIV	189,337	189,909	133.55	0.30
XV	157,441	160,620	187.31	2.00

Administrative boundaries of Rome's municipi were partially revised during the period considered. In 2021, part of the boundary between Municipi VI and VII was modified, with the recorded population decreasing in Municipio VI and increasing in Municipio VII. In 2023, boundaries were partially revised again among Municipi IV, V and VI, with recorded population decreasing in Municipi IV and VI and increasing in Municipio V.

Residents not assigned to any Municipio ("not localised") are excluded from our Municipio-level analysis.
Source: our elaboration on Roma Capitale data.

These demographic trends are mirrored by marked differences in population structure across the administrative subdivisions (Table 3). As of 1 January 2025, there are significant differences in demographic structure across Rome's 15 administrative subdivisions, confirming that the city's overall profile conceals strong intra-urban contrasts. A particularly evident axis of differentiation is ageing. The historic-centre subdivision (*Municipio* I) stands out as the oldest area (share of aged 65 and over = 27.3%; ageing index = 304.8) and, at the same time, has the lowest share of children aged 0–4 (2.3%), whereas the youngest profile is observed in *Municipio* VI (share of aged 65 and over = 18.1%; ageing index = 129.6; 0–4 = 3.8%). This gap implies that the natural component and demographic "momentum" differ profoundly within the same municipality, reflecting a socio-spatial structure that is far from homogeneous. Even in a context of generally low fertility, the share of children varies considerably across subdivisions—from 2.3% in *Municipio* I to 3.8% in *Municipio* VI, with several intermediate areas around 2.8–3.3%—

suggesting that some parts of Rome are structurally more exposed to decline than others and may enter population decline at different times.

Table 3 – *Population structure indicators at 1 January 2025 in Rome's administrative subdivisions.*

Administrative subdivision	Aged 0–4 (%)	Aged 65+ (%)	Ageing index	% Foreigners
I	2.3	27.3	304.8	21.7
II	2.9	26.6	237.5	13.0
III	3.3	25.2	212.0	9.6
IV	3.0	25.6	232.1	10.8
V	3.2	23.1	202.2	18.4
VI	3.8	18.1	129.6	19.1
VII	3.0	25.2	228.1	11.1
VIII	2.9	26.9	250.6	11.7
IX	3.2	23.4	193.2	8.7
X	2.9	22.7	190.0	11.5
XI	3.1	23.7	203.4	14.2
XII	2.8	26.2	240.4	12.5
XIII	2.9	24.4	220.2	15.7
XIV	3.3	23.3	193.7	13.0
XV	3.0	22.7	196.4	20.3

Source: our elaboration on Roma Capitale data.

Internationalisation is very uneven within the city. The share of foreign residents varies from 8.7% (*Municipio* IX) and 9.6% (*Municipio* III) to 21.7% (*Municipio* I) and 20.3% (*Municipio* XV), with high values in *Municipi* VI (19.1%) and V (18.4%). This dispersion suggests that migration is not simply a "city-level buffer": it reshapes local demographic profiles in very different ways across Rome, interacting with age structures and contributing differently to the working-age and child populations in each subdivision.

Overall, these contrasts indicate that the demographic drivers identified at the city level operate through markedly different local configurations across Rome, making any aggregate reading inherently partial.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The evolution of Rome's resident population is best understood as a sequence of distinct phases rather than a single linear trajectory. Long-term intercensal data show intense post-war expansion, followed by a relatively moderate phase of de-concentration and subsequent renewed growth. This long-term profile places Rome

among the large Italian municipalities that have maintained demographic resilience for longer than most. In comparative terms, Rome's long-run path is closer to that of the growing cities—especially Milan and, to a lesser extent, Bologna—than to the persistent decline observed in Genoa and in the southern cities considered.

Annual data refine this picture and identify turning points that do not emerge from intercensal comparisons. Rome broadly follows the national pattern—growth in the 2000s and a gradual slowdown thereafter—but enters the decline phase later. While Italy's annual growth rate turns negative earlier, Rome's turns negative later and shows a brief rebound in the early 2020s. In this sense, Rome is also affected by the broader demographic crisis but experiences it with different timing and a more articulated trend. A similar divergence emerges from a comparison between the main municipalities: Rome remains one of the few large cities that have maintained growth for longer, together with Milan and, to a lesser extent, Bologna; while Genoa and the southern cities entered sustained decline earlier.

The decomposition of annual change clarifies the mechanisms underlying this delay. Natural change becomes structurally unfavourable and increasingly constrains population growth. Migration therefore becomes the decisive component, but its role is not uniform: international migration remains systematically positive throughout the period and provides stable support, while internal mobility changes sign over time and is fundamental in shaping the transition from growth to decline. The evidence is therefore consistent with the hypothesis that Rome's recent downturn reflects both a worsening natural balance and a reduced ability to retain residents when internal migration weakens or turns negative again. At the same time, the results show that a persistently positive international component, although essential, cannot alone prevent decline when the natural deficit intensifies and internal balances no longer support growth.

The population structure as of 1 January 2025 reinforces this interpretation. Rome's level of ageing is broadly similar to that of Italy as a whole, while the base of the demographic pyramid is particularly narrow. This combination points to weak demographic momentum. Rome is also markedly more internationalised than Italy overall, although less so than the most internationalised economic centres of Centre-Northern Italy. The key point is that Rome's structure does not fully coincide with the national profile and differs from other large municipalities in the way ageing, a small child population and internationalisation combine.

It is essential to look beyond the city level. The *Municipi* reveal extreme internal differentiation in size, population concentration, recent growth and structure. Over the last decade, only a small number of peripheral *Municipi* have continued to grow, while most are in decline. The historic centre stands out for the steepest contraction, in line with a broader process of residential depopulation in the core. At the same time, structural indicators vary considerably across *Municipi*:

older areas differ profoundly from younger ones in terms of both population ageing and the presence of children, and internationalisation is highly uneven within the city. Overall, the evidence supports the second hypothesis by showing highly differentiated local configurations, implying that "Rome" cannot be treated as a demographically homogeneous unit.

Rome's demographic resilience is not a static condition, but the result of changing combinations of natural change and migration over time. At the same time, the data show that these components do not operate uniformly across the city: they produce markedly differentiated local configurations within the same municipality. This intra-urban differentiation means that managing social and demographic change is inherently complex, because city-wide averages can mask opposing dynamics and needs in different parts of Rome. It is important to note that the size of Rome's administrative subdivisions is considerable in itself: some *Municipi* are territorially extensive and, in population size, comparable to medium-sized Italian cities. This suggests that further progress requires an even finer spatial resolution, moving beyond the *Municipio* level to capture heterogeneity at the neighbourhood scale. A key priority for future work is to better identify the spatial destinations of internal mobility: municipal net balances do not reveal whether redistribution occurs within the municipality or towards other municipalities, yet this distinction is essential for interpreting demographic change.

Overall, the analysis highlights Rome as a key demographic case in which trends can only be understood through their highly differentiated local configurations.

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