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Relocation preferences in the Era of Work From Home: Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

Motivation: The COVID-19 pandemic catalysed an unprecedented global expansion of work-from-home (WFH) arrangements. While the prevalence of remote work has receded from its peak, it has stabilized since 2022 at levels well above those observed before the crisis. This shift indicates that WFH has evolved into a lasting feature of contemporary labour markets rather than a temporary disruption. Beyond transforming how work is organized, remote work influences daily routines, professional interactions, and social engagement. One domain where these effects are particularly salient is residential choice. By altering preferences regarding both housing attributes and location, WFH has the potential to reshape urban spatial patterns, reinforce suburbanization, and stimulate development in peripheral or rural areas.

Aim: This paper aims to develop a multidisciplinary theoretical framework to examine how WFH shapes relocation processes. Building on neoclassical economics, relocation theories such as life-cycle and life-course approaches, and Stress-Threshold Model, it conceptualizes WFH as a distinct trigger of migration. The paper adopts a conceptual framework-building approach, synthesizing interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives through a systematic review of the literature.

Results: The proposed framework emphasizes that WFH may significantly reshape stated residential preferences regarding both dwelling attributes and location, yet these shifts do not automatically translate into actual relocation. Whether preferences result in moves depends not only on individual dissatisfaction, as outlined in the Stress-Threshold Model, but also on market conditions and structural constraints. Relocation decisions therefore often reflect compromises rather than straightforward adjustments. The framework also suggests that short-distance mobility will remain central in hybrid work contexts, though broader spatial effects may emerge over time. These findings highlight avenues for future research, particularly qualitative studies on how preferences are negotiated across life-course stages and housing markets, and under what conditions WFH operates as a meaningful relocation trigger.

Keywords: Work-From-Home; Remote work; Relocation, Residential mobility; Housing preferences

JEL: R30; R23; R21; J61

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented surge in work-from-home (WFH)[1] arrangements worldwide. Although the prevalence of remote work has declined since the peak of the pandemic, it has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Instead, since 2022 it appears to have stabilized at a new equilibrium: lower than during the crisis but substantially higher than before. Despite notable cross-country variation in its intensity (Aksoy et al., 2025), it seems that remote work has become an enduring feature of modern labour markets rather than a temporary disruption.

This structural transformation extends beyond the reorganization of work. It affects employment and daily routines, reshapes professional relations, and alters how individuals engage with their social and physical environments. Among the many domains influenced, residential preferences stand out. WFH may shape housing choices at multiple scales, encompassing both the attributes of the dwelling itself and the selection of residential location. These shifting preferences can have direct implications for urban spatial structures, potentially accelerating suburbanization while also creating new opportunities for peripheral or rural development. This policy context is further shaped by the EU Work–Life Balance directive (Directive 2019/1158), which provides a formal regulatory framework for flexible

1 This paper uses "telecommuting" exclusively in the context of pre-pandemic literature, where this term was dominant. "Working from home (WFH)" and "remote work" are used interchangeably throughout the paper, although it is acknowledged that these terms may carry distinct meanings in other contexts — the former referring specifically to home-based work, the latter encompassing broader location-flexible arrangements.

work arrangements, including working from home, thereby reinforcing the institutional conditions under which WFH has expanded across European labour markets.

In light of the above, this paper seeks to develop a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that identifies and explains how the spread of WFH may influence relocation processes. To this end, the paper adopts a conceptual framework-building approach (Jaakkola, 2020; Whetten, 1989), synthesizing three theoretical traditions: neoclassical economics, life-cycle and life-course perspectives on residential mobility, and the Stress-Threshold Model developed by Brown and Moore (1970). Drawing on these foundations, the paper conceptualizes WFH as a potential trigger of migration, initiating a two-step process that helps to explain the dynamics of relocation.

The theoretical contribution of this paper is threefold. First, it explicitly positions WFH as a distinct life-course trigger of residential relocation — a role that existing frameworks acknowledge in general terms but have not systematically elaborated in the context of flexible work arrangements. Second, by integrating the Stress-Threshold Model, the paper specifies the psychological mechanism through which WFH translates into relocation intentions, explaining why exposure to WFH does not automatically produce residential moves. Third, the framework incorporates structural constraints — resources and restrictions, including housing market conditions, affordability, and access to financing — as a necessary mediating layer between intention and actual relocation behavior. Taken together, these elements extend the classical life-course model of residential mobility (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999) by introducing a novel trigger and deepening the explanatory architecture of the relocation process.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on relocation and remote work, beginning with definitional clarifications of relocation. Section 3 discusses residential preferences and housing choices. Section 4 develops the theoretical conceptualization of remote work and residential mobility, first by modelling the residential decision-making process and then by proposing a conceptual framework that treats WFH as a potential relocation trigger. The final section concludes with a summary and broader implications.

2. Relocation and remote work – literature review

A worthwhile attempt to construct a theoretical model of the impact of remote work on relocation preferences should first be preceded by a definitional clarification and an elaboration of the concept of relocation, as well as an attempt to answer the question of which types of relocation may be affected by the possibility of remote work and to what extent.

In the academic literature, relocation is typically defined as a form of spatial mobility or the physical movement of individuals involving a change in one's usual place of residence, either over short or long distances (Yarina & Wescoat, 2023). This broad notion can be categorized into two primary forms: international (or foreign) and internal (domestic) relocation. In much of the academic and policy literature, both of these forms are frequently referred to under the umbrella term migration (King et al., 2008; Weisheit, 2018), however, the term "migration" itself is fraught with ambiguousness, and the economic literature abounds with multiple and inconsistent uses of this term (Zax, 1994).

The fact that one can draw a meaningful line between short – and long-distance internal relocations is widely acknowledged in the economic literature (Coulombel, 2010). However, there is still no consistent or universally accepted threshold for this boundary, and definitions often vary depending on contextual criteria such as political or administrative jurisdictions, the co-occurrence of job changes, commuting thresholds, or metropolitan zones (Morrison et al., 2004). Short-distance mobility is often referred simply to residential mobility, typically occurring within metropolitan zones, where housing and labor markets are spatially integrated. These moves primarily involve adjustments in housing consumption (such as size, house type, tenure, or location preferences) (Coulombel, 2010). As such, residential mobility is often confined to intra-metropolitan dynamics, including phenomena like suburbanization or gentrification, where commuting remains feasible within daily travel practices (Kryczka et al., 2025; Zukin, 1987). In contrast, long-distance internal mobility typically involves a shift across distinct housing and labor markets and is frequently associated with broader life-course transitions (Spring et al., 2024).

Despite the conceptual and practical significance of these different forms of relocations, scholarly attention has been highly uneven. As shown in Chart 1 (Appendix), researchers have devoted far more attention to international migration than to internal mobility or residential relocation, which is reflected in the substantially higher number of publications — a disproportion that underscores the importance of the research problem addressed in this article.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought an unprecedented surge of interest in remote work, the concept itself is not new: early discussions of "telecommuting" date back to Nilles (Nilles, 1975), and since the 1990s scholars have explored its potential consequences for commuting and residential location. In the first phase of research, studies concentrated mainly on short-distance effects, as telecommuting opportunities were tied to large metropolitan areas and remained relatively limited often tested through pilot initiatives such as the California Telecommuting Pilot Project (Kitamura et al., 1990; Nilles, 1991). This project represents what appears to be the first

systematic empirical verification of the impacts of telecommuting on both residential and commuting decisions. Its results showed a substantial reduction in vehicle trips and commute distances among participants, confirming the immediate transportation benefits of remote work. However, the project also concluded that telecommuting did not induce significant relocation or long-distance residential moves: most participants retained their existing homes, suggesting that early telecommuting mainly altered daily travel patterns rather than reshaping broader residential location choices. At the same time, authors did not rule out the possibility that, over a longer time horizon, greater adoption of telecommuting could eventually influence residential relocation decisions. This notion has been theoretically substantiated in subsequent studies for instance, Lund and Mokhtarian (1994), modified the classic Alonso "Monocentric City Model" (Alonso, 1960) to explicitly account for telecommuting. Their analysis demonstrated that a reduction in commuting frequency may lower the effective marginal cost of distance, thereby shifting the residential equilibrium outward and suggesting that telecommuting may foster longer-distance relocation. Similar conclusions have been derived from other theoretical elaborations (Kim, 1997; Rhee, 2009; Shen, 2000).

Although these theoretical considerations suggested that telecommuting could reshape residential choice, empirical evidence has been mixed. For example Ellen and Hempstead (2002) using data from the 1997 Current Population Survey, examined both the prevalence of telecommuting and its relationship to the residential location patterns of white-collar workers. Their results showed little support for the decentralisation hypothesis: telecommuters were not disproportionately located in suburban or rural areas but were often concentrated in large metropolitan regions, suggesting that telecommuting has not systematically undermined the demand for urban living. Ory and Mokhtarian (2006) found that the relationship between telecommuting and residential relocation is bidirectional. Their analysis showed surprisingly that workers who were already telecommuting and then moved tended to relocate closer to their workplace, while those who moved farther away were more likely to adopt telecommuting afterward as a way to cope with longer commutes. Overall, they concluded that telecommuting is more often a response to relocation decisions than a cause of sprawl, thus helping to mitigate rather than exacerbate the negative transportation impacts of residential moves. Similarly (Muhammad et al., 2007), analysing Dutch data, found no strong evidence that telecommuting systematically affects residential relocation decisions, suggesting that its role in shaping urban spatial structure is weaker than often assumed. In line with this, Ettema (2010) also detected no overall relocation effect, but his latent-class analysis revealed distinct subgroups: some telecommuters were highly sensitive to commuting distance and more likely to consider moving, while others used telecommuting precisely to tolerate longer commutes, thereby reducing their relocation

propensity. However, Zhu (2013), analyzing U.S. household travel surveys, found that telecommuting households consistently had longer commutes than non-telecommuters, with the gap widening between 2001 and 2009. In two-worker households, the added distance was driven by the telecommuter, suggesting that telecommuting enables moves to more distant or amenity-rich locations rather than prompting relocation closer to workplaces. By contrast, Kim (2016) using path analysis with cross-sectional travel survey data from the Seoul Metropolitan Area found that job location, rather than the option to telecommute, was the decisive factor shaping residential choices. Telecommuting was typically adopted afterward as a strategy to cope with long commutes, rather than serving as a driver of relocation. However, because the analysis was based on cross-sectional data, the causal interpretation remains tentative.

After the pandemic shock, interest in remote work grew rapidly, extending into many areas, including its potential impact on residential location. Beyond studies indicating suburbanization processes, often described as the "donut effect" (Ramani & Bloom, 2022) or "urban exodus" (Fukuda, 2024; Rowe et al., 2023) again, with inconclusive results (Ilham et al., 2024; Woźniak-Jęchorek et al., 2024) researchers suggested additionally that the spatial impacts of increasingly blurred labour market boundaries were likely extending well beyond urban areas and its surroundings (Braesemann et al., 2022). Several studies investigated the possibility of the WFH to encourage long-distance internal migrations especially to rural areas. As remote work reduces the importance of proximity to the workplace, households increasingly prioritize residential preferences such as housing affordability, quality of life, and access to amenities (Bolter et al., 2024; Chekmarev et al., 2021; Gonzalez-Leonardo et al., 2022; Vij et al., 2024). Recent evidence from Germany confirms this trend: during the pandemic, rural areas attracted more young and highly skilled migrants, supported by the rise of remote work. However, overall migration volumes declined, suggesting only a relative, not absolute, shift toward rural living (Knuepling et al., 2025). Moreover, an emerging body of research has begun to explore the potential impact of remote work on international migration, particularly through the lens of so-called "digital nomads," individuals who work remotely while moving across borders (Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024). However, empirical investigations of this trend in EU countries (Albinowski, 2024) conclude that, although digital nomads became visible in labor market statistics after the pandemic, their numbers remain relatively small, not exceeding 0.2% of the domestic workforce in host countries – indicating rather limited impact on potential international mobility.

In an attempt to review the potential evidence on remote work and relocation, it should also be noted that some empirical studies suggest remote work may foster residential immobility rather than relocation, as reduced

commuting requirements can encourage individuals to remain in their current homes while accepting longer home–work distances (Macias et al., 2025). Moreover, as telework reduces the frequency of commuting, it may also encourage "two-home living", a phenomenon where individuals maintain a primary residence while acquiring a secondary dwelling closer to their workplace to use occasionally—highlighting the complex spatial arrangements enabled by flexible work (Hostettler Macias et al., 2022).

Summing up, pre-pandemic empirical studies on telecommuting and relocation were limited in scope, focused mainly on its effects on commuting and short-distance residential mobility, and provided little evidence that telecommuting played a decisive role in shaping relocation decisions. After the pandemic, there has been a huge increase in studies examining the impact of remote work on relocation, mainly with regard to short-distance moves, but also considering potential impacts on long-distance internal and even international migration. However, given that remote work is now predominantly implemented in hybrid formats (Aksoy et al., 2025) and that most empirical studies suggest that its strongest potential effects are likely to be found in short-distance relocation the following discussion will focus on residential preferences and choices analyzed through relevant theoretical frameworks on mobility and relocation behavior.

3. Residential preferences and choices

As indicated above, the spread of remote work may most strongly affect short-distance relocations, or, as it is more commonly defined, residential mobility. Before attempting to answer how remote work may impact this type of relocation, short explanation related to residential or housing preferences and choices related to them is needed, especially that in related literature the terms "choice" and "preference" are often used interchangeably (Wildish, 2015). However, there are important differences between them which affect the theoretical and practical applications of the research in this field.

In general, residential preferences can be regarded as factors and attributes that individuals consider important when choosing a place of residence, often referred to as desires for particular characteristics of the "housing bundle" (Clark, 1992). Most commonly, this "bundle" includes not only the physical characteristics of the dwelling, such as type, size, condition, tenure – but also the locational and neighborhood attributes. Locational attributes typically refer to proximity to central business districts (CBDs), access to infrastructure (public transport, roads and highways) and environmental quality (access to green spaces, air and noise pollution, landscape), while neighborhood attributes encompass factors such as safety, social cohesion, demographic composition, and availability of local amenities (Coulombel,

2010; Kain & Quigley, 1970; Shlay, 2012). In discussions of residential location, a further distinction is sometimes made between the site and the situation of a place: site refers to the internal qualities of the location and dwelling itself, whereas situation concerns its spatial relation to other important destinations such as workplaces, schools, and services places that must fall within individuals' daily activity spaces (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999).

It is important to emphasize that residential preferences are primarily shaped by underlying needs, which evolve in response to changing household and life-course circumstances. Consequently, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics constitute the principal determinants of these preferences (Rossi, 1980).

Choices, on the other hand, represent the observable actions through which these preferences are expressed, and are assumed to reflect them (Molin et al., 1996). Yet, this correspondence does not necessarily hold in the context of residential decision-making. The choice of a particular dwelling with its bundle of characteristics depends not only on the needs and preferences of households but also on what is practically possible. Namely, the choice set shaped by household resources, restrictions, and the opportunities and constraints of the housing market (van Ham, 2012). Very often the actual dwelling a household live is not always the one that fully meets all of its needs and preferences. Because most households face limited options and because housing adjustments are costly, many remain in dwellings that are suboptimal given their situation. In this context, the term "real housing choice" has been coined. Real choice is defined as being able to choose a preferred option from a set of distinctive alternatives (Brown & King, 2006).

Some complication in this definitional puzzle lies in the distinction between stated and revealed housing preferences, which has become a fundamental conceptual framework in the study of residential behavior (Timmermans et al., 1994). The differentiation between these two was first systematically articulated in economics by Samuelson (Samuelson, 1938), where he introduced the concept of revealed preferences as an empirical approach to understand consumer choice based on observed behavior, rather than introspective utility. In the context of residential decision-making, stated preferences can be understood as previously defined as residential preferences, which are hypothetical in nature, whereas revealed preferences as actual residential "decisions" or "choices" made under real-world constraints and conditions (Li et al., 2020; Tanaś et al., 2019). Stated preferences are thus aspirational and are unlikely to consider competing priorities or constraints, whereas decisions to move to another or stay in the current neighborhood are revealed preferences that have been matched to realized opportunities.

The revealed choice approach has been successfully applied in many different housing preference and housing choice studies. Yet this approach has a fundamental methodological problem: the assumption that revealed choice

reflects underlying preferences. In reality, choices are influenced by the prevailing market conditions. Hence, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle preference from disequilibrium conditions in the marketplace.

4. Remote work and residential mobility – theoretical conceptualization

This section develops the theoretical framework in two steps. Section 4.1 establishes the analytical baseline by modelling the residential decision-making process through a neoclassical lens. Section 4.2 builds on this foundation to propose a conceptual framework that treats WFH as a potential relocation trigger, integrating life-course theory and the Stress-Threshold Model.

4.1. Modelling residential mobility

Residential location decisions rank among the most consequential choices in the life course of individuals and families. Beyond shaping personal well-being, these decisions hold significant implications for local governments, urban planners, policymakers, and other stakeholders. For this reason, residential choice has long constituted a central field of inquiry across the social sciences, particularly in economics, human geography, sociology, and psychology.

Although this paper focuses specifically on WFH as a potential relocation trigger, the neoclassical framework presented below serves as a necessary analytical baseline: it formalizes the logic of housing utility maximization and moving costs that underlies all subsequent theoretical steps, including the Stress-Threshold Model and the life-course perspective. The choice of this starting point is deliberate — while alternative perspectives, such as behavioural economics or institutional approaches, offer valuable insights, the neoclassical model provides the most parsimonious formal representation of the core trade-off between housing utility and mobility costs. Behavioural and life-course dimensions are incorporated in Section 4.2, where the Stress-Threshold Model and the life-course framework extend and enrich this baseline by accounting for psychological mechanisms, household trajectories, and structural constraints that the neoclassical approach does not capture.

The roots of this tradition reach back to the discipline's beginnings. Adam Smith made several perceptive observations that remain relevant to contemporary debates, noting that proximity to employment is a fundamental determinant of residential location — "every individual endeavours to employ his capital as near home as he can" (Smith, 1776, p. 110) — while also acknowledging the inherent difficulty of human mobility: "a man is, of all sorts of luggage, the most difficult to be transported" (Smith, 1776, p. 590–592). With the growing dominance of the neoclassical approach, housing came to

be treated as a composite good and residential decisions were subsequently modelled through utility-maximization theory (Coulombel, 2010; Jansen et al., 2011; McFadden, 1977; Tiebout, 1956). Although such frameworks are not without limitations — including questions about whether utility can be meaningfully measured (Sen, 1977) — they offer a simplified yet insightful way to model residential location behavior. A simplified example, based on Coulombel (2010), is presented below.

Consider Agent M., a recent university graduate who, upon arriving in a city of his choice, obtains employment in the central business district. Seeking proximity to his workplace, he chooses to reside in Residentialia a diverse and expansive housing complex offering options ranging from luxurious villas with landscaped gardens to modest single-room accommodations. Agent M., however, has relatively modest preferences, which can be represented by a Cobb-Douglas utility function U:

$$U\,(h,\,c) = h^{\varepsilon}\,c^{1-\varepsilon} \tag{1}$$

where h denotes housing services (broad measure of the quality and quantity of a housing conditions), c is composite good reflecting for all other goods consumed by Agent M. and ε [0;1] reflects the relative preference for housing compared to other goods and may change at any moment, according the preferences toward housing services. Assuming that Agent M. can freely change rooms, and its goal is to maximise the U, this simple model indicate, that M. would do so every time ε varies: this might be a single bedroom when he works late or a deluxe villa for a weekend with friends. Transposed to the real world, residential mobility is primarily a response to a change in residential preferences being a response to a change in housing needs. Assuming mobility were costless in all regards, one would expect people to constantly adjust their housing consumption, as happens in this tale. However, mobility is not costless, and staying in one place often yields increasing advantages over time. These increasing returns to staying and disutility from moving can be formally captured by introducing a mobility cost term, lets denote it as δ. In contrast to frictionless models of continuous adjustment, the introduction of moving costs (represented by a disutility parameter δ) fundamentally changes the behavior of economic agents like Agent M. Formally, a move is only made if the gain in utility from switching housing bundles exceeds the cost of moving:

$$U\,(h_1,\,c_1) = U\,(h_0,\,c_0) > \delta \tag{2}$$

where is the optimal consumption bundle of housing and other goods given the current value of ε, and () his current consumption. Considering that M. has a budget constraint giving c as a function of h and income, his decision

to move or not depends on whether the gain in utility from switching bundles exceeds the moving cost δ. In this simplified framework, a move occurs whenever the utility gain from relocating is greater than δ. However, in the real world, this is often too simplistic. A more realistic and behaviorally accurate approach is to assume that moving decisions follow an (S, s) rule (Caplin & Leahy, 2010). Under this rule, individuals tolerate small mismatches between current and optimal housing in both directions, and only decide to move when the discrepancy becomes sufficiently large:

$$h_1 \notin [h_0 - \mathrm{m}, h_0 + \mathrm{M}] \tag{3}$$

where m and M define the lower and upper thresholds of tolerance for deviation from the current housing. Both m and *M* depend on several factors such as the degree of preference for housing ε the moving cost or disutility of relocation income constraints δ, and psychological or social inertia. The introduction of moving costs causes housing adjustments to occur only when the mismatch between the current and optimal residence exceeds a stress threshold, making changes discrete rather than continuous. This may explain why housing decisions are typically infrequent, clustered, and sometimes delayed, even when preferences or circumstances change.

Despite its simplicity, the proposed model highlights a fundamental aspect underlying the residential mobility process: its inherently two-step nature. This sequential structure also represents the most widely shared assumption among conceptualizations of residential mobility, as numerous scholars argue that individuals first decide whether to move and only then determine where to relocate (Brown & Moore, 1970; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999; Wong, 2002). Brown and Moore (1970) underline that, relocation process may be induced by stress, which arises when a mismatch develops between a household's needs and the characteristics of its current residential environment. This stress may stem from changes in the household itself (e.g., size, income, employment), or from external environmental conditions (e.g., neighborhood decline, accessibility issues, economic situation) sometimes referred to as micro – and macro-level factors. When such stressors surpass the household's tolerance threshold, the decision process enters Phase I, where the household considers relocating. If a suitable alternative dwelling is not found during the search (Phase II), the household may decide to stay and either adjust its needs or modify the current dwelling or its use to restore satisfaction. In this context some studies have refined the model by conceptualizing residential mobility as a three-stage process: the decision to consider moving, the search for a place to move to, and the final choice between moving or not moving to that particular place (Mulder, 1996).

From the above considerations, it follows that the key drivers of the residential mobility process are the factors that alter housing preferences and

create a divergence between the current and the desired dwelling. In the literature, these factors are most commonly referred to as triggers, sometimes also as push factors; however the latter term being more frequently used in the context of international migration studies.

4.2. Work from home as relocation trigger – conceptual framework

Building on the presented understanding of residential mobility as a sequential process, the next question concerns what actually sets this process in motion. Triggers can be understood as the specific events or conditions that create dissatisfaction with the current dwelling and generate a gap between existing housing circumstances and desired living arrangements (Mulder, 1996).

Since the seminal work of Rossi from 1955, triggers of residential relocation have been a central theme in mobility research. In Why Families Move, Rossi linked these triggers primarily to stages of the family life cycle, with changes such as marriage, childbirth, or children leaving home prompting a demand for more or less space (Rossi, 1980). Although this perspective revealed strong regularities in mobility patterns, it has been criticized for its deterministic and normative assumptions (Pickles & Davies, 1985; Wildish, 2015) and was gradually replaced in the course of the 1990s by a more flexible life-course framework. This approach situates relocation decisions within the broader trajectories of individual and household development. From the life course perspective, mobility can be instigated by events across several domains or "careers" in domains such as family, education, labor, and housing each of which may alter housing needs and preferences (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999). While later work has noted that the life-course approach can be too event-focused and less attentive to issues of inequality and immobility (Coulter et al., 2016), it remains the dominant framework in mobility studies.

Building on this theoretical foundation and treating changes in work arrangements as a potential trigger that reshapes relocation preferences, Scheme 1 (in appendix) proposes a conceptualization of the residential mobility process. The scheme integrates insights from the life-course framework, the Stress-Threshold Model, and behavioral decision-making theories to illustrate how remote work may influence residential relocation. At the core of the model lies the recognition that remote work, by altering spatial constraints tied to employment, can act as a triggering factor initiating a re-evaluation of housing needs and preferences. These preferences may be particularly affected in the domain of dwelling and location, as remote work alters both the way people use their homes and how they perceive residential location. With reduced commuting requirements, proximity to the workplace becomes a less dominant factor, potentially shifting attention toward

housing quality, available space, and local amenities.

It is important to underline that this trigger does not directly cause relocation but rather may generate a stress or dissatisfaction with the current living situation. In line with the Stress-Threshold Model, this perceived mismatch between current conditions and emerging needs may prompt the formation of relocation intentions. If the stress threshold is surpassed, the process enters this stage, where the household develops a predisposition to move that remains contingent on structural and economic conditions, including housing market availability, affordability, and access to financing. Here, psychological, economic, and structural constraints come into play. These include mobility costs, market conditions, and available housing alternatives, all of which can either enable or hinder the translation of intention into action.

The conceptual scheme, therefore, presents residential mobility as a contingent and dynamic process, initiated by changes in work patterns but mediated through evolving preferences, contextual constraints, and individual decision-making. It highlights the non-linear and probabilistic nature of relocation, providing a comprehensive lens through which to study the spatial consequences of remote work in the post-pandemic era.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to propose a multidisciplinary theoretical framework for understanding how the spread of WFH may influence relocation dynamics. While earlier research has produced valuable insights, its findings remain inconclusive and often focus narrowly on short-term residential mobility. This emphasis is understandable, as hybrid work arrangements suggest that short-distance moves will likely continue to be the most relevant domain.

The framework developed here, summarized in Scheme 1, makes three interrelated contributions. First, it explicitly conceptualizes WFH as a distinct life-course trigger of residential relocation, extending the classical framework of Mulder and Hooimeijer (1999) to account for the structural transformation of work arrangements. Second, by drawing on the Stress-Threshold Model, it specifies the psychological mechanism linking WFH to relocation intentions — underscoring that dissatisfaction must accumulate and exceed a tolerance threshold before intentions to move are formed. Third, the framework integrates structural constraints in the form of resources and restrictions, capturing the conditions under which relocation intentions may or may not translate into actual moves. This highlights that residential choices frequently involve compromises and trade-offs rather than straightforward adjustments, and that market conditions mediate the relationship between WFH-induced preferences and revealed relocation behavior.

These observations carry implications beyond academic research. For urban planners and housing policymakers, the framework suggests that the spatial consequences of WFH are unlikely to unfold uniformly: they will be conditioned by local housing market structures, affordability constraints, and the life-course stage of households. In contexts where structural constraints are binding, WFH may reshape stated preferences without producing observable relocation flows, a distinction that should inform both research design and policy intervention.

These observations also point to important avenues for future research. In particular, qualitative investigations could shed light on how preferences are negotiated in different life-course contexts and within diverse housing markets. Such studies would deepen our understanding of how WFH operates as a relocation trigger and under what conditions it meaningfully alters residential dynamics.

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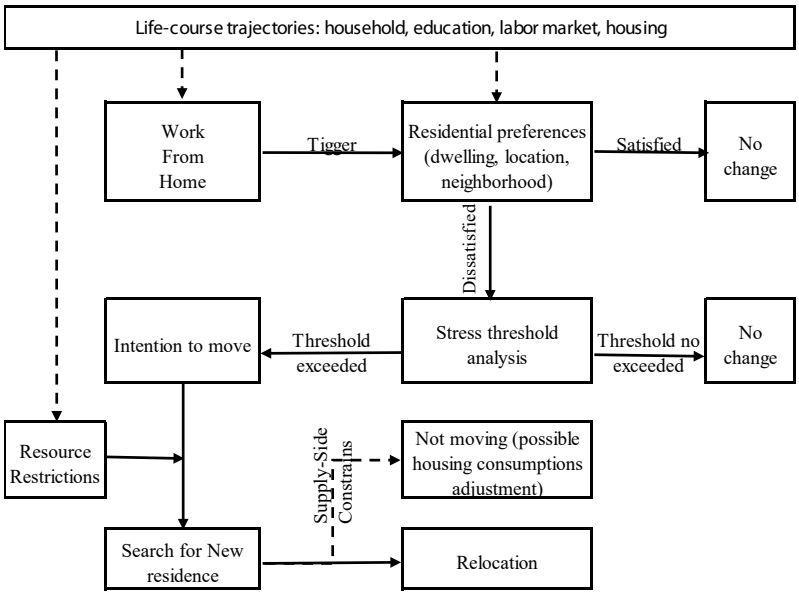
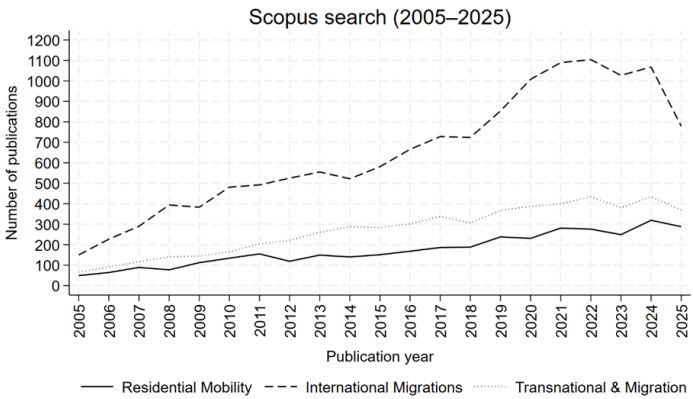
Appendix

Scheme 1. Remote work and residential preferences



Source: Own preparation.

Chart 1. Residential mobility vs. international migrations in Scopus database



Searches were conducted on 18/08/2025. The search was limited to articles indexed in Scopus Social Sciences. Searches were carried out on the title, abstract, and keywords fields, and the results were restricted to articles within Social Science disciplines.
Source: Own preparation based on Scopus database.