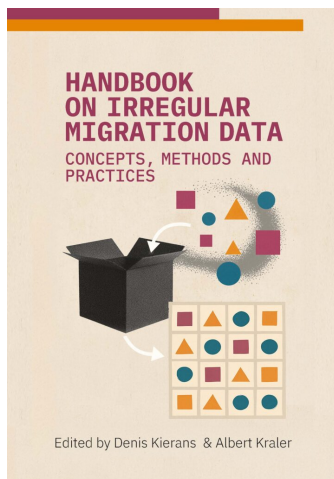




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Box 10.1: The Centre Sampling Technique

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Surveys that explicitly include undocumented migrants in their sampling design

Some surveys designed to collect information on undocumented migrants avoid the use of a conventional sampling frame altogether. A leading example in Europe is the Regional Observatory for Integration and Multiethnicity (ORIM) in Lombardy, Italy. Active from 2001 to 2021, the program collected data on the living conditions of people with a migration background. Explicit efforts were made to include irregular migrants, who – particularly in ORIM's early years – made up a substantial portion of the foreign-origin population in the area.

Every year, ORIM conducted retrospective, face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of foreign residents in the region using the Centre Sampling Technique (CST; see Box 10.1; Baio et al., 2011). A cornerstone of the ORIM model was its

participatory and inclusive approach to fieldwork: interviews were conducted by trained cultural-linguistic mediators of migrant background, enhancing trust and communication, which was particularly important when engaging with undocumented individuals.

Over the course of two decades, ORIM generated a unique cross-sectional data series that supported academic research and informed evidence-based policies in integration, social inclusion, and rights protection. Although the program was discontinued in 2021, it has remained a methodological benchmark for research on hard-to-reach populations and a model for how undocumented migrants can be ethically and effectively surveyed. CST has also been used at the national level in Italy and outside the Italian context (e.g. the Immigrant Citizenship Survey ICS).

Box 10.1: The Centre Sampling Technique

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The **Centre Sampling Technique (CST)** is a probabilistic sampling method developed to reach hard-to-survey populations, particularly undocumented migrants who are typically excluded from standard household surveys due to the lack of a sampling frame. The method was first implemented systematically in Italy. CST is based on the idea that migrants—regardless of their legal status—tend to frequent specific **centres** or **aggregation points** in their everyday lives, such as religious institutions, cultural and community associations, consulates, NGOs, migrant help desks, public spaces, and informal meeting places. The method proceeds in three stages.

First, a **mapping phase** is conducted to identify and classify existing centres that are expected to be regularly visited by the target population within the geographic area of interest. Centres are categorised by type (e.g., religious, cultural, associative, consular), estimated relevance (e.g., estimated average attendance) and population specificity (e.g., open to all migrants or nationality-specific), and then stratified accordingly. Then, a **sample of centres** is drawn, and some individuals are selected in each centre either randomly (e.g., systematic sampling upon entry) or via controlled quota sampling if the flow is not randomizable. The unit of analysis is the individual migrant.

After the end of the interview phase, weights are calculated based on the number of centres attended and their importance, which allows for correcting potential overrepresentation of more socially active individuals.

Some surveys have successfully reached undocumented migrants by exploiting administrative sources that, by their nature, include them. One prominent example in Europe is the **Spanish National Immigrant Survey (ENI)**; Reher and Requena, 2009), carried out by Spain's National

Statistics Institute (INE) in 2006–07. The ENI drew its sample from the municipal population register (*Padrón Municipal*), which grants all registered residents—including irregular migrants—access to public health care and other services and is considered representative of immigrants living in