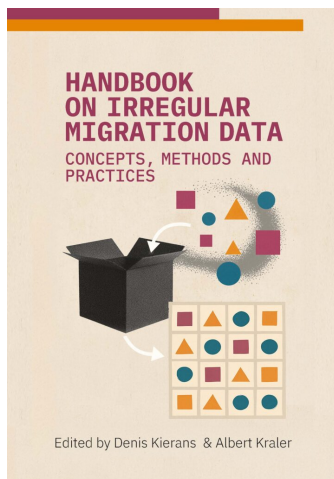




Textbox taken from D.Kierans & A.Kraler (eds),
Handbook on Irregular Migration Data. Concepts,
Methods and Practices. Krems: University of Krems Press

ISBN: 978-3-903470-24-8

Box 10.2: Surveying irregular migrants with an existing sampling frame – The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees

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To cite: Stache, R. (2025). Surveying irregular migrants with an existing sampling frame – The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees. In D. Kierans and A. Kraler (eds), *Handbook on Irregular Migration Data. Concepts, Methods and Practices*. Krems: University of Krems Press. <https://doi.org/10.48341/g31s-vq79-box10.2>

Keywords: IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, persons under an obligation to leave, toleration, Duldung, life-situation

Spain irrespective of their legal status. It collected information on the type of respondents' residence permit and immigration status (e.g., asylum applicant).

Similarly, Germany's **IAB-BAMF-SOEP**¹ (see Box 10.2) and the Feasibility Study on the Im-/Mobility of Rejected Asylum Seekers (**MIMAP**; Stache et

al., 2024) include groups such as rejected asylum seekers with temporary suspension of removal ('Duldung'), capturing segments of the population who experience forms of de facto irregularity. The MIMAP Survey, in particular, was explicitly designed to target irregular migrants through its sampling strategy and questionnaire items.

Box 10.2: Surveying irregular migrants with an existing sampling frame – The IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees

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As in any survey, a suitable sampling frame that includes the entire target population and enables sample selection as well as contact details is crucial for reliable survey data collection on irregular migrants and for generalizing empirical results. In Germany, the Central Register of Foreigners (see Chapter 7) offers such a sampling frame for subgroups of irregular migrants, enabling representative samples and the use of traditional survey methods. Since 2016, the **IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees** is annually surveying refugees who arrived in Germany since 2013 in a panel study, regardless of the outcome of their asylum procedures. As a result, the data include irregular migrants known to the authorities whose deportation has been temporarily suspended (tolerated/*Duldung*).

The dataset offers several advantages to analyse the living situation of irregular migrants: 1) **Accessibility** to external researchers via a data usage agreement. 2) **Broad thematic coverage**, including migration trajectories, housing, employment, language acquisition, health, attitudes, religion. 3) **Longitudinal design**, allowing for the observation of individual developments over time. 4) A **heterogeneous group** of irregular migrants in terms of age, gender country of origin, and other characteristics. 5) **Comparative potential**, enabling systematic analyses of differences between individuals with tolerated status and other groups (recognized refugees or migrants and natives - when using the compatible SOEP-CORE and IAB-SOEP MIG data), and the identification of influencing factors across domains.

However, when using the data for research on irregular migrants some limitations arise: 1) The dataset **includes only a specific subgroup** of irregular migrants – those with tolerated status following an asylum application. Additionally, this group tends to participate less often in follow-up surveys and had higher non-response. 2) Additionally, **not all topics are covered in every survey wave**. 3) As a result, **representativeness and reliable estimations may be limited** for certain research questions. However, statistical techniques such as weighting, pooling of waves, or propensity score matching can help mitigate these issues. 4) There is **inherent selectivity**: irregular migrants who have returned, moved to another country, or gone into hiding are not captured in the data. 5) Some **questions central to the lived experiences of irregular migrants** – such as work permits, life in irregularity, coping with the threat of deportation, or expectations regarding their country of origin – are either absent or not asked in a way that avoids possible bias, like social desirability.

1 This survey is undertaken by the Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF-FZ) in cooperation with the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) and the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin). Further information can be found at https://www.diw.de/en/diw_01.c.930532.en/iab-bamf-soep_survey_of_refugees.html

The **Brief Analysis 3/2024** published by the Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees illustrates how this data can be used to **study the living conditions of tolerated persons** in comparison to recognized refugees, using propensity score matching. The comparison shows that both groups are similarly integrated in terms of language skills and employment. However, the tolerated are more likely to live in shared accommodations and report much lower life satisfaction, which further declines over time (Stache, 2024).

References:

Stache, R. (2024). Auswirkungen einer Duldung auf Lebenssituation und Lebenszufriedenheit. (BAMF-Kurzanalyse, 3-2024). Nürnberg: BAMF.
<https://doi.org/10.48570/bamf.fz.ka.03/2024.d.2024.duldung.1.0>

In the US, nationally representative surveys have been used to identify 'likely undocumented' immigrants through imputation. For example, using the **Survey on Income and Program Participation (SIPP)**, a longitudinal study investigating occupational-related aspects in the US, some scholars exploited limited information on visa status (concerning citizenship and legal permanent

resident (LPR) status) and participation in welfare programs to infer immigrant respondents' current legal status (Hall et al., 2010). Other studies have developed imputation methods based on observable characteristics unrelated to legal status, which have been applied to the **Current Population Survey (CPS)**, the American labour force survey (Passel and Cohen, 2014).

Surveys targeted to applicants of regularisation programmes

Surveys targeting applicants of regularisation programmes are a key source of empirical evidence on migrants who have experienced irregularity. However, they only capture information on those who successfully applied, and therefore exclude non-applicants or rejected cases. These surveys are typically conducted in the process of major legalisation programmes and are designed to capture individuals' socioeconomic characteristics, labour market trajectories, and integration patterns.

One of the most prominent examples is the **Legalized Population Survey (LPS)**, a longitudinal survey launched in the US after the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which granted legal status to nearly 2.7 million undocumented migrants. Conducted in two waves, the LPS collected detailed data on pre- and post-

legalisation employment, mobility, income, and legal trajectories, and remains a foundational source for studying the economic impacts of legalisation. The first wave of the survey (LPS1) gathered data from 6,193 individuals who had applied for temporary residence status by January 31, 1989. Respondents were asked to report their employment status during the week preceding the submission of their amnesty application. In the second wave (LPS2), conducted in 1992, a follow-up was carried out with 4,012 participants from LPS1 who had since obtained lawful permanent residence. While the sample is not representative of all individuals who received amnesty under IRCA, the longitudinal design remains a major strength for analysing changes in employment outcomes over time, specifically around the critical transition from undocumented to legal status.