REVIEW OF SELECTED SURVEYS OF
REFUGEE POPULATIONS,
2000-2014

by

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INTRODUCTION

The mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) includes refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless persons, and certain groups of internally displaced persons. This paper will deal exclusively with the collection and analysis of statistics on refugees through the use of sample surveys.

There is no international or regional depository of sample surveys on refugees. The paucity of statistics on refugees and related categories derived from sample surveys, is striking. Even countries with a long tradition of accepting migrants and refugees and who have well-established public administrations and statistical systems show a remarkable lack of published statistics on refugees based on sample surveys. Statistics on refugees are typically published by government agencies that deal with migration and residency issues, not by national statistical offices.

This paper has considered only sample surveys that are in the public domain and are accessible on the internet without the need for registration. Generally, methodological guidelines for studies of displaced persons or refugees treat these as “rare” or “hard to reach” populations. During the last 15 years or so, there have been very few methodological studies on statistical data collection on forced displacement in general and on refugees in particular.

In recent years in the literature of “rare” or “hard to reach” populations a number of sampling methods have been discussed to deal mostly with medical behaviour issues such as HIV, drug abuse, or sexual violence in migrant or refugee settings. These issues are “rare events” in already “hard to reach” populations and are of a very specific nature which excludes them from the general discussion of sampling in general migrant or refugee populations. The methods proposed are, with one exception, variants of clustering the sampling. The exception is the Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) method. It is based on sampling respondents through existing social networks. For a general description see Michele R. Decke and Daesha Ramachandran, Respondent Driven Sampling, http://www.jhsph.edu/departments/population-family-and-reproductive-health/_docs/seminar-2012-10-31-rds.pdf.

For an application to the refugee setting see Keynnaert, I. at al, Sexual violence and sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco: a community-based participatory assessment using respondent driven sampling, in: Globalization and Health 2014, 10:32 http://www.globalizationandhealth.com/content/10/1/32

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A recent article, which is not new, but a variant on the “how to count nomads” approach may be of interest to the theme of the conference: Shifeng Wang, Emily So, Pete Smith, *Detecting tents to estimate the displaced populations for post-disaster relief using high resolution satellite imagery*, in: International Journal of Applied Earth Observation and Geoinformation, Vol. 36, April 2015, pp. 87-93. [http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0303243414002633](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0303243414002633)


**REVIEW OF SELECTED SURVEYS AMONG REFUGEE POPULATIONS**

1. **Country studies and survey elements to be reviewed**

A review of the period since 2000 covering over 60 refugee-hosting countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Pacific regions searching for sample surveys on refugees in camp and non-camp situations led to very modest results. The extensive search process eventually identified 13 articles, presentations, or reports dealing with general issues affecting the migrant, including refugee, populations based on findings from sample surveys.

These 13 studies are as follows:

1. 2001-2005 Canada: Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC);
2. 2002 Pakistan: Afghan Refugee Camp Surveys;
5. 2010 United Kingdom: Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom;

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3 Annex I includes a description of the study, the name of the institution that initiated or commissioned the survey, and the website where the relevant documents on the survey can be obtained. In the text of this paper, the studies will be identified by the name of the country; in the case of more than one study, the name of the country will be preceded by the year of the study; and in the case of more than one study in the same year, the name of the country will be followed by a key word of the title of the study.
6. 2011 Australia: Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants;
7. 2011 Australia: Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals;
8. 2011 USA: Refugee Integration Survey & Evaluation (RISE);
9. 2012 Lebanon: Survey of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon;
10. 2013 Lebanon: Shelter Poll Survey on Syrian Refugees in Lebanon;
11. 2013 Turkey: Syrian Refugees in Turkey 2013, Field Survey Results;
12. 2013 USA: Annual Surveys of Refugees; and

The following considerations will be used in the assessment of the validity and reliability of these studies:

- Institution that initiated or commissioned the study;
- Type of report;
- Objective or theme of the survey;
- Type of refugee population considered;
- Type of implementing agency;
- Sampling methods used; and
- Reporting on field operations (response rate, retention rates).

2. Assessment

a. Commissioning institutions

Of the 13 studies, seven were commissioned by government agencies:

- Agencies with the USA Government commissioned two studies in the country: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement commissioned one study, and an unnamed agency commissioned the second. In addition, the US Department of State’s Office of Research commissioned a study in Pakistan.
- The Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection commissioned two studies in Australia.
- The UK Border Agency commissioned one study in the UK.
- The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey commissioned one study in Turkey.

In addition, three of the 13 studies (Kenya, Lebanon, and Ecuador) were commissioned by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees offices in those countries. Two others (Canada and Norway) were commissioned by the national statistical offices in those countries, and one (Lebanon) was commissioned by a USA-based non-governmental organization.
b. **Type of report**

These 13 studies are not sample survey reports in the standard sense. Instead, they include an article (Pakistan), a set of two PowerPoint presentations (2011 USA), a website presentation with less than one page of description of the survey (2012 Lebanon), and part of the online description of an organization’s activities (Canada). For the remaining nine studies, publications presenting both the activities undertaken and the results were available.

c. **Survey objective or theme**

The 13 studies can also be classified by the objective of the study.

Seven of the studies dealt directly or indirectly with the integration of refugees in society. Of these, three prospective studies used the longitudinal approach (Canada, United Kingdom, and 2011 USA), and four used the retrospective approach (Norway, Australia Economic, Australia Settlement, and 2013 USA). The Australia Settlement study dealt indirectly with integration, as its main objective was the broader concept of settlement outcome, which includes integration. The Norwegian study also dealt indirectly with integration, as its main focus was the broader concept of living conditions.

In addition, two studies (Pakistan and 2012 Lebanon) dealt with the attitudes or opinions of refugees. Two more (Turkey and Ecuador) looked at the general socio-economic characteristics of refugees (Turkey) and of refugees and related categories (Ecuador). One study (Kenya) was concerned with the refugee population and neighbouring non-refugees as part of a wider project dealing with behaviour in relation to HIV. And the final study (2013 Lebanon) concentrated on the housing characteristics of non-camp refugees.

Out of all of the reports, refugee integration was the most-studied theme, though the surveys on this issue showed great variability in the definition of integration. The five studies that dealt explicitly with integration used the following definitions, with education, language skills, and employment appearing to be the common indicators:

- **Canada**: Finding suitable accommodation, learning or becoming more fluent in one or both of Canada’s official languages, participating in the labour market, accessing education and training opportunities.
- **United Kingdom**: English-language skills, employment, and housing of new refugees.
- **Australia Economic**: “Labour force involvement, ... developed their own businesses ... engaged in volunteer work ... participate in wider Australian society at local, regional and national levels ... connected to their local communities and to Australia, ... satisfaction with life in Australia and ... intentions to remain in Australia”.


• **2011 USA**: Employment, housing, education, health, social bridges, social bonds, social links, language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability, and rights and citizenship.\(^4\)

• **2013 USA**: Education, English-language training, job training, labour-force participation, work experience, use of medical and other services.

It is noteworthy that the UK study does not use the integration model developed by Ager and Strang in 2004 for the UK Border Agency, which commissioned the survey. This integration model was used by the 2011 USA study as a framework for the development of its study’s approach and questionnaire, and it has also been cited in the Australia Settlement study.

d. **Type of refugee population**

Of the 13 studies, only one (Pakistan) dealt exclusively with refugees in camps. In addition, one study (Turkey) focused on refugees in camp and non-camp situations, and another (Kenya) looked at refugees in camp situations as well as neighbouring non-refugee populations. In three studies (Canada, Norway, and Ecuador), refugees were studied as part of the larger migrant population. All other studies dealt with refugees in non-camp settings.

e. **Type of implementing agency**

The implementing agency could be clearly identified in all but three of the studies (Pakistan, 2012 Lebanon, and Kenya). There were two implementing agencies in the Pakistan study: the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago in the USA, one of the world’s leading survey specialists, and an unnamed in-country contractor in Pakistan.\(^5\)

The 2012 Lebanon study simply stated that the implementing agency was “a trusted public opinion research firm with extensive regional experience”. And the Kenya study appears to have been carried out by a “consortium” under the leadership of a UNHCR consultant, with assistance from UNHCR, the International Rescue Committee, the Kakuma District Public Health Officer, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

In two additional studies (Canada and Norway), the national statistical offices were involved. In another case (Turkey), the study was implemented by the staff of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of the Prime Minister’s Office. In Ecuador, the project was implemented by a national commercial outfit “Periles de Opinion”, but was part of a joint project on Profiling Urban Refugee Situations between UNHCR, the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) and the Feinstein International Centre (Tufts University). Finally, in Australia,

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\(^5\) This survey was carried out a year after the attacks of 11 September 2001, and there were serious doubts among survey specialists whether under those conditions a valid and reliable survey could be carried out among Afghan refugees in Pakistan.
one of the studies (Australia Economic) was carried out by a university department. In all other cases, however, the implementing agency was a commercial company.

f. Sampling method
Given that these were not standard survey reports, typical details on the sample design and its implementation were missing. With regard to the sampling method, some form of probability sampling was reported to have been used in all but two cases (Australia Economic and Ecuador). The Australian study used a purposely selected sample, while the Ecuador study used a mixed sampling procedure. In the latter, 24 per cent of respondents were selected through probability sampling, 42 per cent through snowball sampling, and 34 per cent through the purposive selection of interviewees or referrals. In both cases, the choice of non-probabilistic sample methods was justified because of the study’s objectives. In Australia, the aim was to study refugees who had been in the country for up to 25 years, and no sampling frame was available for this target group. Similarly, in Ecuador there was no reliable database of the target groups.

In seven of the 13 studies (Australia Economic, Canada, Norway, Turkey, UK, 2011 USA, and 2013 USA), the sample frame was formed or derived from the administrative records kept by the government agency responsible for migration or refugee issues. In three additional cases (Pakistan, 2011 Lebanon, and 2013 Lebanon), the sample frame was derived from UNHCR’s refugee-registration system. Three other cases (Australia Settlement, Ecuador, and Kenya) used a combination of sources.

The quality of reporting on the survey activities, especially on sample design, implementation, and outcome, was variable but generally of low standard, except for three studies (Canada, Pakistan, and Norway). Nonetheless, the various sample designs did show a good understanding of the complexities involved in locating respondents. At the same time, one primary defect in the execution of the surveys was incorrect variance calculations in cases of complex samples.

g. Reporting on field operations (response, retention rates)
For the Canada survey, StatCan prepared no final report. Nonetheless, its website and the scientific studies that used the data contain all of the elements required to infer the sample design and retention rates. For the Norwegian survey, a special methodological report (in Norwegian) was prepared, which provided the required information on sample design as well as outcome of the field operations. The Pakistan study concentrated largely on the methodological issues of using the sample design in a refugee camp setting and contained, in condensed form, all information required to assess the quality of the survey.

In the U.K. longitudinal survey, the response and retention rates were rather low. Of the 8,254 baseline questionnaires distributed, a baseline response rate of 70 per cent (5,742)
was obtained and 5,678 baseline questionnaires were analysed. After eight months, 1,840 (1,826)\textsuperscript{6} individuals responded, with a retention rate of 32.0 per cent (32.2%); after 15 months, 1,259 (1,173) individuals responded, with a retention rate of 21.9 per cent (20.7%); and after 21 months, 939 (867) persons responded, with a retention rate of 16.3 per cent (15.3%). The low response and retention rates were probably due to deficiencies in the sample frame and the nature of the data-collection method used – a postal survey. Because of the low retention rates in the subsequent waves, the validity of the results may be in doubt.

In the Australia Settlement survey, non-response was also high. The survey distinguished three categories of respondents: humanitarian migrants (i.e. refugees), skilled migrants, and family members of skilled migrants. The response rates for these three categories were just 44.1 per cent, 32.6 per cent, and 47.0 per cent, respectively. However, the survey organizers had information about the total population of the survey, as they had created the sample frame by cleaning the administrative records of the Government agency responsible for migration. Thus, they were able to establish that, for practically all variables and categories, there were no significant differences between the sample outcome and the population parameters. Hence, in this case the low response rate did not affect the validity of the survey results.

For the 2012 Lebanon study, during the field operations the mappers and interviewers detected about 20,000 extra “refugees” that were not in UNHCR records. No indications were given of who these individuals were – refugees with third-party certificates unknown to UNHCR? Non-refugees from Syria? This is the only case in which the target population was contaminated. Moreover, the response rate was about 50 per cent. The report states: “The total number of respondents was 1,188. Although 1,188 questionnaires were successfully completed, one out of every two initially selected respondents declined to be interviewed; many citing concerns over personnel safety.” The contaminated survey population and the high non-response rate cast doubts over the validity of these survey results.

The quality of the 2013 Lebanon survey seems to be acceptable, but several of its activities need improvement. The main problem is that the reported response rate was very low, at 25.8 per cent, and there is practically no information on the sample outcome. Hence, only a careful analysis of the sample implementation could provide the information needed to determine the survey’s quality. Its use of the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) approach can only be followed in countries and settings where refugees have general access to (mobile) telephones. The lack of an appropriate report on design and implementation makes it impossible to ascertain this study’s assertion of validity regarding the use of mobile telephones in refugee settings.

\textsuperscript{6} The numbers in brackets are the number of individuals of the original baseline sample.
3. **Best practices**

Given the limited number of sample surveys available on refugees and related categories, the wide variety of objectives, and lack of proper reporting of survey activities, it is not possible to formulate best practices in surveying refugee populations. Nevertheless some indications can be given as to what designs to use when certain types of objectives are being pursued.

In the case of integration surveys of refugees, there are two options: the retrospective approach and the prospective approach. Under the **retrospective approach**, the objective is to establish how refugees integrated in society in the past and to compare their current situation with that of (economic) migrants and the general population.

Given that the aim is a comparison of groups over time, a probability sample should be used under the retrospective approach, so that sampling variances for the subgroups can be calculated at the required moments. The size of the original sample or cohort should be large enough to ensure that, at the end of the period under consideration, the subgroups are large enough to draw valid conclusions about any differences between the groups. This implies that the most appropriate data-collection method is chosen – preferably face-to-face interviews – with the necessary follow-up mechanisms in place to ensure an adequate response rate. A traditional rule of thumb was that the final sample size should be at least 50 per cent of the original sample, in order to ensure validity and reliability.

The period over which the integration process is studied can be short term, up to five years, or longer term – at least five years, often 10 years, and, as shown by the Australian study, potentially as long as 25 years. In this kind of study, the availability of an appropriate sample frame is crucial; in its absence, information should be available to construct an appropriate sample frame from which respondents can be drawn. If this is not possible, probability sampling cannot be used, and unless other information is available to validate the results of non-probability sampling, the validity and reliability of the study may be in doubt.

In the **prospective approach**, the objective is to follow the respondents of a cohort or a sample of the cohort of refugees over time. The aim here is to establish how the refugees adapt to society, comparing them at specific moments with (economic) migrants and the general population. The same methodological and field organization consideration as used under the retrospective approach again apply under the prospective approach.

In the surveys reviewed, two variants were observed. The Canada study, for instance, dealt with a national sample, and the researchers did not interact with the respondents. The 2011 USA study, on the other hand, was a localized survey, in which community agents linked to service-providing institutions interacted with respondents on issues related to their integration. In both cases, the response rate and hence the retention rate was good. In the
Canada survey, after four years, 64.1 per cent of the original respondents were retained; in the USA study, 73.0 per cent were retained after the second year.

For the retrospective approach, the Australia Settlement survey could be used as a model despite its low response and retentions rates. For the prospective approach, the Canada, Norway, or 2011 USA studies could be used as a model, depending on the objective of the study. If the Norwegian approach were used, the analysis should systematically specify the rates for refugees for the different variables under consideration; however, this could be supported by tables that break down this information for migrants and refugees.

For other objectives of refugee surveys – for instance, basic characteristics, opinions, special requirements (such as housing) – the Pakistan study could be used as a model. That study is a classical survey, with face-to-face interviews, and its quality is excellent, though its sample design might need modification.

4. **Technical challenges associated with conducting refugee surveys**

In the reviewed studies, several challenges could be identified affecting capacity to carry out surveys among refugees and related categories. The following are worth considering.

**a. Lack of adequate sampling frames**

The sample frames used to identify the survey respondents in practically all cases appear to have been inadequate. For those countries for which information was available for the target population, in five cases this dealt with arrivals during a certain period (Canada, Australia (2 surveys), and USA (2 surveys)), in two cases these were UNHCR lists of camps and/or refugees (Pakistan and Kenya), in two cases these were UNHCR lists of non-camp refugees, and in one case this was data on visas approved during a specific period (UK). From the moment of entry into a host country, a refugee is subject to the following possible modifications in status: naturalization, return to home country, transfer to a third country, death, and loss of refugee status. If the sample frame is supposed to be of resident refugees, these categories should be removed from the frame.

**b. The numbers and characteristics of highly mobile populations, especially in ongoing crisis situations, may change rapidly**

Refugees and related categories are highly mobile, especially in cases of ongoing crisis. As such, their number may change frequently, making it difficult for the sample frame to remain stable. The numbers at the time of the selection of the sample and at the time of the interview may differ considerably.

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7 The documentation of the Canada, Norway, and Australia Settlement studies is of good quality. The documentation of the 2011 USA study is limited, as the report of the survey waves could not be located and information had to be distilled from PowerPoint presentations.
c. *Refugees typically have unknown educational levels, thus requiring very simple questionnaires*

As there is no consolidated database of refugee surveys, there is little information a priori on the level of education of refugees and related categories. This means that questionnaires must be very simple – thereby limiting the usefulness of the information in case differentiated opinion questions (Likert scale) are being used.

d. *Lack of the existence (or knowledge) of a set of standard questionnaires and standard definitions of specific issues affecting refugees*

The absence of a consolidated database of refugee surveys likewise makes it difficult for researchers to choose the appropriate model for a questionnaire meant to study specific issues around refugees and related categories. One good example is the term “integration”, for which there is no international agreement on either a definition or an approach to how it should be measured. The Council of Europe, the European Union, UNHCR, and academics have long studied this issue, but agreement has been hard to reach. At present, Eurostat⁸ is proposing to measure the integration of migrants (refugees) through employment, education, social inclusion (housing, risk of poverty and social exclusion), and active citizenship, but this approach is still “under construction”.

e. *Non-compliance with international standards of sample survey methodology*

Many of the agencies involved in these studies are apparently unaware of the existence of longstanding international standards of sampling and survey design as well as the development and reporting of sample implementation. As a science, statistics can only improve the quality of its operations if there is an accumulation of information about successful designs. Thus, information regarding sample and survey design, as well as operational outcomes, are required both for quality control and to enhance survey methodology.

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At the international level, national statistical offices could advocate for and support a number of initiatives that would set the organizational and technical framework for the enhancement of statistical data collection on refugees. These could include:

- The establishment of an international (or regional) depository of refugee surveys;
- The development of standard questionnaires based on internationally agreed definitions and operationalization of key concepts;
- The development of an international refugee survey programme; and
- The re-enforcement of adherence to international standards.

The World Bank, UNICEF, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention already adhere to standards of international surveys. So, too, do several national government agencies and commercial entities involved in international survey activities, such as the US Government-supported Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program.

At the national level, several options could be pursued, though at present few national statistical offices seem to be involved in refugee surveys. The administrative and legal mandates regarding the collection of statistical information varies for different countries, but there is no reason a coordination and collaborative arrangement cannot be achieved between the agency responsible for migrants and refugees, the national statistical office, and other stakeholders.

Establish a national coordination mechanism between the agencies and organizations involved in refugee issues, and make the national statistical office responsible for providing guidelines on issues related to refugee statistics (data collection, analysis, and dissemination) based on international standards. If these do not exist, establish national standards for the design, implementation, and reporting of survey methodology, including sampling. If possible, empower the national statistical office to approve the methodology for refugee surveys if these are carried out by third parties.

Ideally, countries should have a comprehensive integrated population register that contains information for all individuals residing in their territory, including migrants and refugees. However, few countries are in a position to develop such a register in the short term. Therefore, one of the main priorities for national governments should be the development of a refugee register, either focused solely on refugees or as part of a more extensive migrant register, on the basis of available administrative records at the agency that deals

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with refugee or migration issues. Such a register should take into account the possible modifications in status in the life of a refugee and should be regularly updated, so that it can serve as an up-to-date sampling frame and a source of tabulations on characteristics of the refugee population.

A module on refugee issues could be introduced in the national household survey programme that could be integrated into one of a country’s ongoing nationwide surveys, with the option of oversampling refugees.

These and other options would allow national statistical offices to contribute to overcoming technical challenges faced in refugee surveys. Agencies that deal with refugees and want to undertake surveys among this population are advised to contact the national statistical office in countries in which they operate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Year of Execution</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Brief Title or Description of Study</th>
<th>Institutional Initiator</th>
<th>Websites with Documentation of Reviewed Studies</th>
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| 1. | 2001-2005         | Canada  | Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) | Statistics Canada | 2001 (Wave 1) Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC)  
2003 (Wave 2) Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC)  
2005 (Wave 3) Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) |
7. 2011 Australia: Settlement Outcomes New Arrivals Australia
   Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Australian Government (recently
   renamed Department of Immigration and Border Protection)
   mic_Civic_and_Social_Contributions_of_1st_and_2nd_GenerationHumanitarian_en-
   trants.pdf

8. 2011 USA: Refugee Integration Survey & Evaluation (RISE)
   (Unknown initiator; probably USA federal agency)
   Implementing agency: Quality Evaluation Designs
   http://qualityevaluationdesigns.com/published-reports/

9. 2012 Lebanon: Survey of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
   International Republican Institute (IRI)
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   n%20Refugees%20in%20Lebanon,%20May%202010-June%202010,%202012.pdf

10. 2013 Lebanon: Shelter Poll Survey on Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
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        april-2013

11. 2013 Turkey: Syrian Refugees in Turkey 2013, Field Survey Results
    Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, Republic of Turkey, Prime Ministry

12. 2013 USA: Annual Surveys of Refugees
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    Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement
    http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/office-of-refugee-resettlement-
        annual-report-to-congress-2013

    United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
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