

Country experience: Italy: border sample survey (Chapter 7)

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7.71. Since international tourist flows are very important in Italy, Bank of Italy uses an extensive border sample survey. The size of the survey and its sample design enable the production of high-quality analytical statistics on many aspects of international tourism in the country. The intended objectives of the data collection system are essentially: (a) ensuring the high quality of the statistics of the "travel" item of the BOP and better adherence to statistical standards established at the international level and (b) providing disaggregated data on a large number of characteristics of the tourism market for use by central and local government bodies, the tourism industry and researchers. The technique used for the collection of data consists in interviewing a representative sample of persons, both residents and non-residents, in transit at the Italian borders, while at the same time estimating their number and nationality. The sampling is carried out independently at each type of border (roads, railways, international airports and ports), which are selected as representative. The methodology of the survey is to provide estimates of expenditure on international tourism in Italy through the application of two distinct operations at the chosen border crossing points: the counting operation and the interview.

7.72. The counting operation is based mainly on the technique of systematic sampling, with each observation of one unit being "n", with "n" predetermined. The counts provide the number of persons travelling at each border point, disaggregated by country of residence. The counting operation is necessitated by the lack of administrative information with the required level of coverage, detail and timeliness on the physical flows of persons. The face-to-face interviews provide an estimate of expenditures and a set of attributes that allow its disaggregation and qualification. The interviews are conducted with a structured questionnaire submitted to a random sample of persons travelling at the end of the stay abroad (i.e., when residents are re-entering Italy and non-residents are leaving). That technique lowers the number of errors in the respondents' report of expenses incurred compared to, for example, a telephone survey conducted sometime after travel has been completed.

7.73. The questionnaire is the same for all border points. The main information requested, with varying levels of detail, includes: sex, age and occupation; location; means of transport used (with possible detail of the airline or ship used); reason for the trip (if "vacation", the type of holiday); place visited (foreign country for residents of Italy, Italian province for residents abroad); number of nights spent on the trip; type of accommodation used; travel arrangements (inclusive or not inclusive); total expenditure, broken down by type of product (transportation, lodging, restaurants, shopping and other services); method of payment; and level of satisfaction about various aspects of the place visited and of the stay.

7.74. In 2011, 145,000 interviews, or about 1.1 per thousand of total Italians and foreigners crossing the borders of the country, and about 1,550,000 counts of persons travelling, were carried out. The sample is stratified by different variables for each type of border. The stratification variable "direction", with the two modalities "to Italy" and "to abroad" and the variable "type of carrier", with four modalities (road, rail, air and sea), are recorded exhaustively, i.e., respondents are Italian and foreigners crossing all types of borders. The survey covers 82 border points (42 for roads, 5 for rail, 24 for airports and 11 for ports), i.e., the most important in terms of annual flows, although a limited number of small border points were selected to capture origin-destination routes that were otherwise poorly represented in the survey. The selection was based on data from the Italian statistics office (ISTAT) when the survey was begun, and was thereafter updated through the evidence of the border survey itself, which monitors some border points on a rotating basis. The border points were chosen on the basis of data from ISTAT and the National Civil Aviation Authority (ENAC). The choice of number of border points sampled was reduced over time to optimize costs. Specific procedures for conducting the counting operation and the interviews were established for each type of border.

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