



# Implementing the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) in surveys

## Choosing a survey vehicle

The best option for using the FIES to measure the prevalence of food insecurity is by implementing it within a **well-established, ongoing, government-administered survey**. Embedding FIES measurement into an existing survey structure is preferable to creating an ad hoc new survey, as adding a module is less costly and less time consuming.

An ad hoc survey carried out only to measure food security is **not advised**, with the exception of pilot-testing the FIES for the first time in a population. If a new national survey is designed for the purposes of SDG monitoring, it should be carefully planned to include collection of **additional information relevant to food security and should be conducted on a periodic basis**, not as a one-time event.

Many types of surveys can serve as appropriate vehicles for the FIES survey module (FIES-SM):

- Censuses
- National Household Income and Expenditure surveys
- Labour surveys
- Agriculture surveys
- Health and nutrition surveys

Several features of existing surveys should be considered in order to identify the most appropriate one for the FIES-SM.

Target population	Representativeness	Sample size and unit	Periodicity of data collection	Survey Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prevalence rates can only be computed for the population represented by the survey</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The sample must be selected to accurately reflect the distribution and characteristics of individuals or households in the target population. Appropriate sample design and implementation are necessary to ensure representativeness. Sampling weights should always be provided to allow proper calculation of prevalence rates.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National surveys often have sample sizes large enough and design appropriate to produce results that are representative at subnational units (state, province, etc.) and by some population groups (by income level, language, education, etc.)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Under the SDG monitoring framework, countries are encouraged to report annually on indicators, so annual or continuous population surveys are the preferable vehicle for the FIES-SM.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is important to look at food insecurity in relation to other variables of interest. Thus, when considering a survey for inclusion of the FIES, the type of information it collects should be considered with respect to how it can deepen understanding of food insecurity's drivers and consequences.</li></ul>

## Versatility of the FIES survey module

### Administration time

The FIES survey module can be administered in a very short time, usually not exceeding **5 minutes**, and requires no specialized equipment (such as picture catalogues, scales or rulers).

### Responding unit

There are two versions of the FIES survey module: household-referenced and individual-referenced.

- When using the **household-referenced** version, the FIES questions should be administered to a capable respondent (older adolescent or adult) who answers on behalf of his or her whole **household**, or
- When using the **individual-referenced** version, the FIES questions should be administered to a capable respondent who answers on behalf of him or herself as an **individual**. This is preferable, as the results can be disaggregated by gender, although it is not always possible.

### Reference period

The FIES survey module can be applied using different **reference periods** (30 days or 12 months). **For SDG monitoring, a 12 month reference period is recommended** because it controls for possible seasonal changes in food security; for this reason, it improves comparability of results across countries or across national regions with different environmental and climatic zones.

If the survey is conducted continuously throughout and is time stratified, as is the case with some national Living Standards Monitoring Surveys, a 30-day reference can be used. Average prevalence rates of food insecurity during the year can be still be calculated for SDG monitoring purposes. When the FIES is being applied **to identify risk factors and consequences** of food insecurity rather than for population monitoring, **a 30-day reference period is preferred**. In this case, ideally surveys are time stratified and data collection is spread over the year in order to capture seasonality. The shorter reference period might be more appropriate when food insecurity is being studied in relation to data collected in the same survey on food consumption during the previous day, week or month.

## Placement of the FIES-SM within a survey questionnaire

To collect good quality data, it is essential to carefully consider appropriate placement of the FIES questions in relation to others in the survey. Specifically, the FIES-SM should be placed after the demographic section but **separate from modules on food consumption or coping strategies**. In the case that the FIES module must be placed adjacent to questions on food consumption, interviewers should be instructed to clarify the relevant reference period and carefully distinguish the FIES survey module from preceding questions.

The order in which the eight FIES questions are asked should not affect how they are answered by respondents, however it is recommended to use the standard order module, in which questions refer to conditions that moves roughly from less severe to more severe food insecurity.

## Translation and linguistic adaptation

Before applying the FIES in a new setting, it is essential to carefully prepare linguistically and culturally adapted translations of the FIES-SM in all the languages in which it will be administered.

The validity and accuracy of results from the FIES are highly dependent on the proper understanding of the questions by the respondents, which in turn may depend on words and terminology used in the questions. The FIES questions were designed to capture distinct behaviours or experiences, but the way to describe these experiences varies considerably across languages. Literal translations often do not work well.

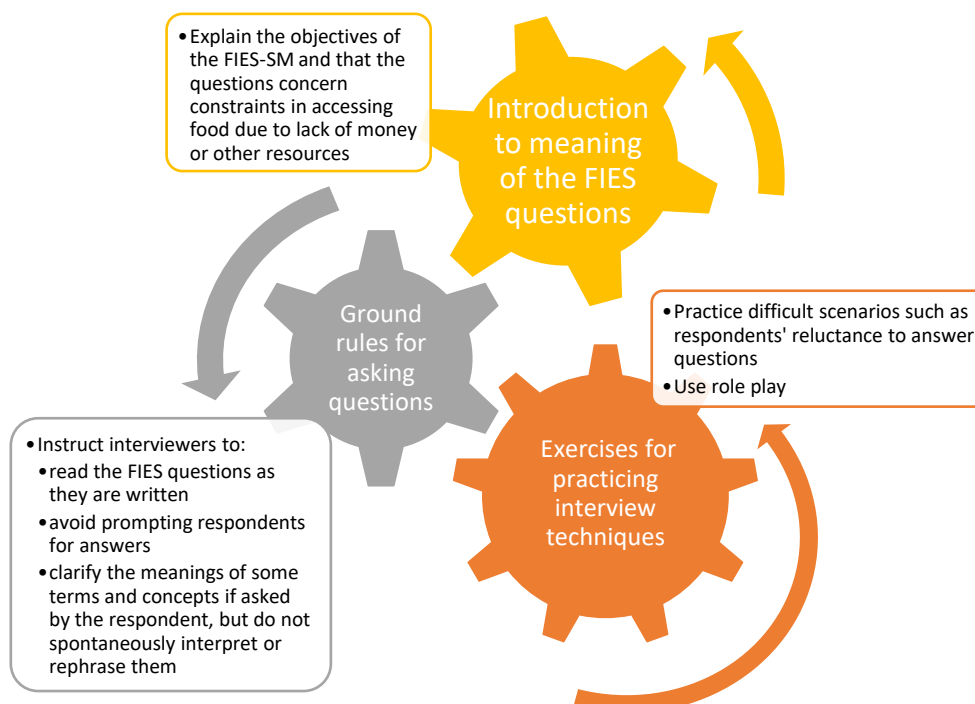
The FIES-SM is already available in around **200 languages** on the Voices of the Hungry webpage, where detailed information on the intended meanings of each question as well as [guidance for translation](#) can be found as well.

## Interviewer training

To obtain valid and accurate data from the FIES survey module, it is not only important to provide clearly-written instructions for interviewers and survey supervisors, but also to deliver **in-person training** on how to properly collect data using the FIES survey module. This training should include practice in administering the FIES questions in the different survey languages in order to familiarize the interviewers with the formulation of the questions as they will be asked to respondents.

Thorough training of interviewers is key to ensuring that interviews are conducted in a way that is both technically correct and **fully respectful of respondents**. Interviewers must strive to be considerate and non-judgmental in their approach in order to elicit honest responses to all FIES questions. In some cultures and contexts, gender matching of respondents and interviewers may be necessary. Food insecurity is a socially and emotionally sensitive subject. The quality of data resulting from the inclusion of the FIES in a survey is highly dependent on how well the survey is carried out in the field. When possible, field supervisors should attend the training session on administering the FIES. As they are responsible for ensuring the quality of the data collected, it is essential that they thoroughly understand the module and its purpose.

There are three key components to a comprehensive **FIES interviewer training**:



## Pilot surveys

When the FIES is being administered in the context of existing surveys that include multiple topics and modules, a pilot study is usually carried out to practice all the survey steps, from start to finish, including all survey modules and procedures. FIES questions that are not clearly understood are modified, problems administering the questionnaire are addressed and the final revisions of the FIES survey module can be made at this time. The pilot should be carried out **for each of the languages** in which the FIES will be administered.

## Supervision of interviewers

Good survey practice includes **constant supervision and monitoring** of interviewer performance, including checking questionnaires at the end of the day for incomplete responses to the FIES survey module, obviously erratic response patterns, e.g. a pattern of all no answers except for the last one or two items, **particular patterns**, e.g. same response pattern in all questionnaires produced by specific interviewers. These types of patterns, if systematic, may point to problems with specific interviewers or systematic misunderstanding of one or more questions in the FIES survey module.

## Avoiding non-response errors

Non-response errors occur when a household or individual selected for the survey does not participate in the survey at all or participates but does not provide complete information. This may occur because a household or person **is reluctant or refuses to answer** the questions, because of a language barrier, a health limitation, or the fact that no one is at home during the survey period.

Reducing non-response can be achieved by paying careful attention to:

- correct translation of the questions;
- respectful question administration by interviewers to avoid refusal or reluctance by respondents;
- management of unreachable interviewees by:
  - repeating visits several times,
  - replacing sample units if visits are unsuccessful, and
  - adjusting the original sample size for non-responses and computing compensatory weights