

RMS data collection modality guidance

prepared by Tango International

Remember to abide by data protection principles and refer to your Data Sharing Agreement

Survey data can be collected through face-to-face (F2F) interviews, phone interviews (including Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews, or CATI¹), web-based surveys, or a combination of methods. While F2F interviews are considered more effective and usually result in less interviewer error, it may not always be possible to conduct F2F interviews in every sampling area due to insecurity, budget and time constraints, or other factors. The MFT should restrict interview modality choice based on the country context, as well as the sample size, sample frame, number of indicators to be measured, survey partner capacity, and available RMS resources.

All RMS are conducted using Computer-Assisted Personal or Telephone Interviewing (CAPI or CATI) methods as opposed to paper-based interviewing. This minimizes the environmental burden and logistical hassle of printing paper questionnaires, significantly reduces data entry errors and increases efficiency in data collection and analysis. For this, each enumerator will need access to:

- a portable device, such as a tablet or smartphone, for F2F interviews, or
- a telephone and a device for registering responses (i.e., a computer, tablet, or smartphone) for phone interviews.

While it is possible to use a smartphone to register survey responses, tablets are recommended² (usually, an Android tablet with 7–8-inch screen³).

Minimum recommended tablet specifications

- Android OS 8.0
- 7 or 8-inch screen
- 1.5 GB of RAM
- 8 GB of storage
- Wi-Fi module with 3G/4G connectivity

Data is collected through the mobile application, KoBoCollect⁴, or the web application, [KoBo Toolbox](#). Before enumerators can collect data using the KoBo application, the final questionnaire (in KoBo XLS form) must be uploaded to the UNHCR KoBo server. If enumerators are using portable devices, a quick read (QR) code can be generated from the server and scanned using the KoBoCollect application to download the questionnaire to the portable device.

¹ With CATI, enumerators make calls from a call center. Sometimes, software is used to facilitate calls, wherein the sample respondents' contact information is already uploaded to the special dial-in survey package installed on the computer, and the software will randomly select a respondent to dial in for survey interview.

² Traditionally, the KoBoCollect application runs better on tablets than on smartphones.

³ Consult your IT team for additional guidance and recommendations.

⁴ On an Android device, KoBoCollect can be downloaded through the Google Play Store.

Face-to-face (F2F) interviews

Face-to-face (F2F) or in-person interviews are generally considered to provide more accurate data, with less interviewer error compared to phone interviews. F2F interviews allow for enumerator observation (e.g., observation of sanitary facilities or verification of vaccination records) and are the most appropriate option if people to be interviewed are unlikely to have telephones, or telecommunication services in survey areas are inadequate for phone surveys.

However, F2F interviews are relatively more expensive compared to phone interviews. More enumerators may be required to complete the survey in all areas within the survey timeframe, and transportation costs contribute to the need for a larger budget. In addition, a listing exercise may be required to locate all households in the area.

It is recommended that field teams either travel with one or two additional tablets as well as with paper copies of the questionnaire as a fail-safe should technical difficulties prevent the use of portable devices. Responses collected using a paper questionnaire are entered into KoBoCollect or the web application and uploaded to the server as soon as it is feasible to do so. Special arrangements need to be made to ensure safety and protection of personal data stored on paper copies.

In deciding on whether to do F2F interviews, you can consider the sample frame, country context, number of indicators to be measured, survey partner capacity, and available RMS resources:

- *Sample frame* – F2F interviews are feasible when a majority of the sample is relatively immobile and does not frequently change dwellings. Population groups that are highly mobile may be difficult to locate for F2F interviews. Phone interviews may be more appropriate for highly mobile population groups, as enumerators may still be able to reach households by phone even if they have moved out of the survey area.
- *Country context* – F2F interviews are feasible when the sample population is accessible without any significant political, health, or security risks to enumerators and sample respondents.
- *Number of indicators to be measured* – F2F interviews are recommended when the number of indicators to be measured results in a survey that is greater than 30 minutes in length.⁵

If the sampling frame is not available or only partially available, it indicates that survey populations may be scattered, unknown, or hidden, and not systematically tracked by relevant authorities. If they are hidden or do not want to be registered/recorded, F2F interviews may not be possible unless special sampling techniques such as RDS or TLS are used. Similarly, if populations dwell in regions or areas that are unsafe for enumerators and listing agents to travel, F2F interviews are not possible.

⁵ Best practice suggests that phone interviews be less than 30 minutes in length.

- *Survey partner capacity* – The survey partner has experience organizing F2F interviews in the field and employs qualified supervisors to oversee enumerators.
- *Available resources* – F2F interviews are feasible when the RMS have an adequate budget for field work. F2F interviews are relatively more expensive than phone interviews due to enumerator travel cost and the possible need for a listing exercise. A listing or validation exercise is often needed to verify and validate the sample selected out of the frame.
- *Additional considerations* – F2F interviews are feasible when RMS deadlines allow for some flexibility in the amount of time that can be allocated for data collection. Unlike phone interviews, additional time is needed to organize listing and data collection logistics and for field teams to travel to survey areas. Planning, travel to the initial survey area, and travel to subsequent towns or areas could take two to four weeks depending on the distribution of the sample. F2F interviews require early planning and additional time for travel.

For F2F interviews, ensure the following steps are completed prior to data collection:

- The listing and/or validation exercise is completed, and sample households are identified and validated
- Enumerators are properly trained on the questionnaire and CAPI system
- Each enumerator has a tablet or smartphone with the questionnaire loaded to the KoboCollect application
- Each enumerator is assigned to a supervisor, and supervisors have received a field work plan including the dates of travel and clusters assigned to the team.

Phone interviews (CATI)

Due to the relatively lower costs associated with phone interviews, they might often be the preferred data collection modality IF certain conditions are met. Consider the sample frame, country context, number of indicators to be measured, survey partner capacity, and available RMS resources when considering phone interviews:

- *Sample frame* – Phone interviews are feasible when at least 80% of households within the sample frame own or have access to a phone and contact information is available. Even if 80% or more of the sample frame has phone access, determine if those without phones possess different individual or household characteristics than those with phones (e.g., differences in age, gender, socioeconomic status, urban/rural, etc.). If population groups in certain regions or areas are less likely to have phones (due to lack of telecommunication service, for example), determine if these areas may be considered “different” and conducting phone interviews would bias or skew results. Finally, a validation exercise may still be necessary to confirm household contact information.
- *Country context* – Phone interviews are feasible when there is strong and reliable telecommunication coverage in survey areas. Phone interviews are preferred if survey areas have good telecommunication coverage and are also unsafe for enumerator travel or are otherwise difficult to access.
- *Number of indicators to be measured* – Phone interviews are feasible when the number of indicators to be measured results in a questionnaire that is relatively short. Best practice recommends that phone surveys take less than 30 minutes to complete. In addition, if indicator measurements require that enumerators make observations (e.g., verifying vaccination records, observing handwashing stations) then in-person interviews are preferred.
- *Survey partner capacity* – The survey partner has experience organizing phone interviews and an established quality assurance protocol to ensure data quality. It will reduce RMS costs if survey partners already possess telephones and tablets or computers for interviewer use.
- *Available resources* – Phone interviews might be preferable when resources are inadequate for F2F interviews.

If the sampling frame does not include phone numbers for sample households the survey will need to be done using F2F interviews. While enumerators or listing agents can visit clusters and try to collect phone numbers, the process of collecting phone numbers can be expensive and is not feasible if there are security concerns or poor telecommunication coverage in the area.

For phone interviews, ensure the following steps are completed in preparation for data collection:

- Enumerators have a list of contact information for the selected sample respondents
- Enumerators have access to the questionnaire either on a tablet with the KoBoCollect application installed or on a computer
- The survey partner has access to a venue to be used as a call centre, where supervisors can oversee phone calls and respond to enumerators' questions or concerns
- Each enumerator has a quiet place with good phone service and internet connection to conduct the interview
- The tablets and mobile phones are fully charged, and the enumerator is in a location where he/she can charge the phone when needed.

Web-based surveys

To date, no known experiences of web-based RMS exist. Here are some considerations:

Web-based surveys may be more cost-effective than phone or in-person interviews, as respondents respond in their own time, and enumerators are not required to facilitate the survey. The online survey can be made available for a specific period and respondents encouraged to apply before the deadline, which may make online surveys more time efficient as well. However, web-based forms may require additional technical support and thorough testing beforehand to ensure that the webform is user friendly and easy to navigate.

While web-based surveys may be more time and cost effective, there are important limitations. Most notably, response rates tend to be lower for online surveys than for phone or in-person interviews. Respondents must have internet access and must be digitally literate to navigate the online survey. In addition, long and detailed surveys will likely have very low response rates with web-based surveys. A sound strategy to define the proper route or routes to share the survey and promote completion are required. Consider whether registration lists include email contact information, or the survey link should be shared through partners, via text message, or by mail. In addition, there are often significant and systematic differences between those who respond to internet surveys and those who do not. Differences in respondents versus non-respondents would bias results.

Mixture of modalities

Sometimes, a combination of both F2F and phone interviews may be necessary. A mixed modality survey may be required to reach more households and reduce coverage bias, while keeping costs lower than a unimodal, F2F survey. However, mixed-mode surveys must be carefully designed to ensure that data can be combined and compared across modes and time. The considerations discussed for F2F and phone surveys still apply and will need to be carefully considered to determine if a mixture of modalities is necessary, appropriate, and efficient.

Examples of when a mixed-modality approach may be required include:

- The recruitment, listing, or validation of households is conducted using one modality, but interviews are completed using a different mode.
- Even if sampled households do not have a phone number to contact, there is a local focal point who can arrange and/or provide phone access to the respondents for the interview.
- F2F interviews are planned but some clusters become inaccessible due to insecurity, political unrest, or other obstacles. In this case, F2F interviews can be conducted in accessible clusters and phone surveys reserved for clusters where field teams are no longer able to travel.⁶
- The sample cluster is accessible, but households are highly mobile, and many have moved at the time of data collection. F2F interviews can be conducted with households who are still present in the cluster, but phone interviews could be used to reach households who have moved (if contact information is available). This will help increase the response rate.

Using a combination of modalities requires careful survey design to ensure data can be compared between the two modalities. Usually, this implies using the same survey tool for both modalities, even if the survey tool is not optimized for both. For example, if F2F is the main survey mode, with complementary phone interviews in areas that are inaccessible, then the same questionnaire is used for F2F interviews and phone interviews, even if the survey length exceeds 30 minutes, which is the maximum recommended length for phone surveys. This ensures that results from both the F2F and phone surveys cover the same indicators and questions.

If different modalities are used, analyse the characteristics of the respondents and determine if there are systematic differences between the modalities. If there are no systematic differences between respondents, the MFT may aggregate the data. If, however, there are significant differences found, the results should be reported separately for each modality.

⁶ If F2F interviews are planned and it is known prior to field implementation which clusters are inaccessible due to insecurity or other reasons, the inaccessible clusters can be replaced. However, if it is impossible to replace the clusters and to still reach the required sample size, phone interviews may be adopted as an alternative strategy.