

# BORDERNETwork

## Guidelines

- **For the use of Qualitative Methods as part of the Rapid Assessment and Response**

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In the frame of a

- Fact Finding Mission (FFM) in NON-EU countries and EU border Areas

### Qualitative Methods

- Focus Groups;
- Interviews
  - Un/semi-structured;
  - Structured

# I. Focus Groups

## Definition:

A number of individuals who:

- *come from similar background;*
- *have common experience;*
- *hold a particular expertise;*
- *do not necessarily know each other*

gathered together to discuss a specific topic of research interest facilitated by a trained researcher.

# I. Focus Groups

## Nature:

Relies explicitly on the *group interaction* to elicit data, knowledge and insights about a studied phenomenon;

Focus group is more than just a group interview, the group dynamic (content and process) becomes an intrinsic part of the study's focus;

Expertise on groups' nature, functioning, roles and dynamics is required by the facilitator;

# I. Focus Groups

Appropriate by:

- **Exploration** – little known topics, insufficient information, early research phase, form hypotheses;
- **In-depth survey** – one or two specific topics in great detail, check validity of gathered information in- depth;
- **Group perspective** – study group norms and rules, subjective meaning, evaluate representativeness;
- **Evaluation** - needs assessment and project evaluation

# I. Focus Groups

## Advantages:

- **Quick and economic** – lot of information in a short time;
- **„Unpacking“** – explore hidden attitudes, beliefs and norms;
- **Explorative** – identify topic studied later by other methods;
- **Usually accepted** – offers natural social context of group communication

# I. Focus Groups

## Disadvantages:

- No generalisations about a wider community, only trends, range of views and experiences;
- Difficult to reach personal themes in- depth;
- Group „social acceptability“ norms influence the authenticity of responses;
- Group dynamic and dominant leadership may hamper equal participation;
- Facilitation requires significant group work experience.

# I. Focus Groups

## Preparation:

- **Participants** – sufficiently homogeneous;
- **Group size** – 8 to 10 persons optimal;
- **Time** – 1.5 to 2 hours
- **Location** – allowing confidential discussion;
- **Preliminary information** – aim of research, main focus of discussion, number of participants, expected duration, incentives;
- **Topic guide** – guide with areas of interest „open“ to discussion;

# I. Focus Groups

## Moderation:

- Welcome participants, introduce team, present research project briefly;
- Introduce the main focus of discussion;
- Explain why those participants are the important ones for that focus group;
- Ensure confidentiality, introduce note taking, tape recording and observation;
- Introduce ground rules of discussion;
- Invite group members to introduce themselves;
- Start with an open inviting question warming participants up for a free talk;
- Take care for the group process and communication **flow**;

# I. Focus Groups

## Pitfalls:

- Too many Yes/No and WHY????;
- Too many questions;
- Too much talking, explaining and expertise;
- Too little tolerance towards silence;
- Too long discussion of slightly related topics;
- Too talkative and dominant individual participants;
- Too less awareness/attention to the group atmosphere and non-verbal expression;

## II. Un /semi-structured interviews

- **Interactive**- based on interrelation in which meaning is not taken for granted but is subject of research;
- **Responsive** – to interviewee's concepts and language;
- **Explorative** – make hypotheses, confronts contradictions, look behind facts;
- **Flexible** – based on a process of interrelation between two persons;
- **In-depth** – few topics but deepening understanding and insights;

## II. Un /semi-structured interviews

### Preparing:

- Start with research aims and focus;
- Determine through brainstorming:
  - *key issues of interest*
  - *which issues to which group*
  - *existing hypotheses and explanations*
  - *new hypotheses*
- Formulate questions, grouped in topics and sub-topics;
- Arrange topics (logically, chronologically) and choose initial topic;
- Consider language;

## II. Un /semi-structured interviews

### Conducting:

- Ask.....
  - Clear,
  - Open-ended;
  - Not leading;
  - Not judging;

### ...Questions

- Give the respondent time;
- Do not try to fill silence gaps;
- Take mental notes of answers and turn hypotheses into further questions;
- Probe for as much detail as necessary;
- Do not make assumptions in advance;
- Do not complete answers;
- Be emphatic but not necessarily sympathetic, be unbiased

## II. Un /semi-structured interviews

### Ending:

- End on a positive note;
- Thank the respondent;
- Reaffirm confidentiality and the use of the information;
- Shift smoothly to a social conversation;
- Offer additional information regarding services, counselling etc.

# III. Questions, Questions

Types:

1. **Facts and opinion** – usually closed:

*Q. “Have you ever made an HIV test?” (fact)*

*A: “I considered once, but actually did not do it.”*

*Q: “What influenced your decision for not doing it?” (opinion)*

2. **Clarification (specification) and representativeness** – check proper understanding and probe for further information:

*Q: “Early on you said that unprotected sex is better paid. What makes clients pay more for it?”  
(clarification)*

*A: “The pure pleasure of course. But not all of them want it.”*

*Q: “How often do clients ask you for it? (representativeness)*

# III. Questions, Questions

Types:

1. **Hypothetical** – studying possible but not yet experienced situations or too “sensitive” issues:

*Q. What would be the best way for you to receive information about HIV? (hypothesis)*

*Q: Suppose that the bar owners in the border area suspect you deliver the information to the migrant office. How would you act?*

2. **Qualification and comparison** – outline order of importance, arrange priorities, clarify contradictions:

*Q: In order of importance, which specialists in the city do you think we should contact for further information? (prioritisation)*

## IV. Structured interviews

- Provide higher control over the topics and flow of conversation;
- Standardized questions same to all respondents;
- Strictly followed order of questions;
- Mainly close questions;
- Coding and data analysis easily quantifiable;
- Prepared in a written „questionnaire“ form;
- Low flexibility and interaction possible;
- Meaning of context can be missed

# V. Interviews and Focus Groups

## Ten steps:

1. Get to the place earlier - ensure **free of interruptions** space,
2. Check your tape recorder (**batteries, tapes**),
3. Open **friendly and invite** people to introduce themselves,
4. Use clear and simple language, but **no SLANG**,
5. Introduce **sensitive topics carefully**, through hypothetical questions;

# V. Interviews and Focus Groups

## Ten steps:

6. Reflect back answers by **the own words of the participants** and check proper understanding;
7. Be a good **patient listener**, do not rush to over talk, probe for further answers using *how come?, what makes you think so?*
8. Always collect **demographic information** such as age, ethnic origin, educational background, status etc.,
9. Generalize key questions and **opinions after the end** of the discussion;
10. At the end always **ask for questions, do not give advices**, provide with information and materials.

***Good Luck!***



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