GUIDELINES

How to conduct qualitative interviews online

Learning outcomes

You will learn here:

- How to prepare a Design Thinking Process

- How to conduct qualitative interviews and focus groups with reference to refugees

- How to process the data

Basic information

In these Guidelines, how to organise a Design Thinking Process.

The Guidelines contain six main chapters.

You will need 3h to finish the Guidelines.

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Content

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Introduction

These guidelines are about how to conduct online interviews and focus groups with refugees. We used the Design Thinking approach to create this guide.

So at the beginning we clarify the question of what exactly Design Thinking is.

The further chapters then deal with the planning and implementation of interviews and focus groups. In doing so, we paid special attention to the group of refugees. What should you as an interviewer pay attention to so that all participants feel comfortable and you get the information you need for your further work?

We address the attitude of the interviewer and also provide some tools to make focus groups and interviews work well.

In general, in this guide we describe the whole process from preparation to implementation and how to evaluate the collected data.

What is Design Thinking?

Design thinking is an iterative process in which we…

- seek to understand the user,
- challenge assumptions and
- redefine problems to find alternative strategies and solutions that may not be immediately apparent with our initial understanding.

At the same time, design thinking offers a solution-oriented approach to problem solving. It is a way of thinking and working and a collection of practical methods.

Design thinking is about a deep interest in developing an understanding of the people for whom we are designing our services. It helps us to observe and develop empathy with the target user.

Design thinking helps us to ask questions:

- to question the problem

- to question the assumptions

- to question the implications

Design thinking is extremely useful in tackling poorly defined or unknown problems:

brainstorming sessions

• in a human-centred way

reframing the problem

• to generate lots of ideas

• practical approach

prototyping and testing
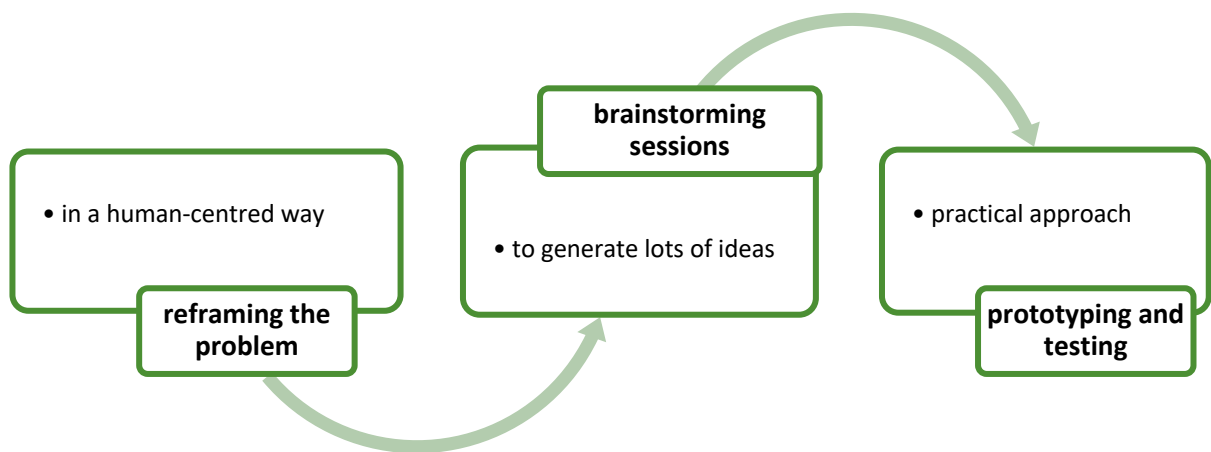
Design thinking also involves constant experimentation:

| sketching | prototyping | prototyping | testing | trying out |
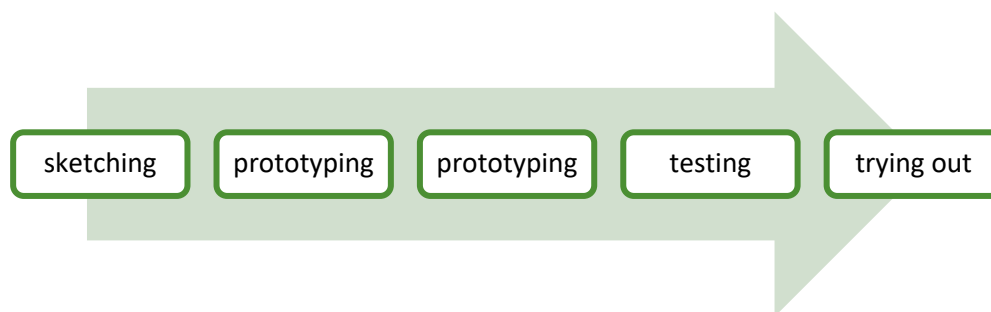
Design thinking provides tools to apply, in a systematic way, a process of observing and understanding the user (empathy) that helps to define the problem. From there, the generation of ideas, as many as possible, is fostered with the aim of building prototypes based on the most appropriate ideas generated. Finally, prototypes are tested with actual users to observe how they interact, whether they use the solution as the designer intended or there are other unforeseen uses. This

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stage is instrumental to generating a solution that can be effectively offered to final users.

Phases of Design Thinking

There are many variants of the Design Thinking process today. There are three-stage to seven-stage models. However, all of these models are based on the same principles, which were first described in 1996 by Nobel Prize winner Herbert Simon in The Sciences of the Artificial. We have chosen the five-stage model of the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (also known as "d.school"). We chose the d.school's approach because it is a pioneer in the application and teaching of design thinking. According to this model, there are the following five phases or stages.

A first quick overview

Empathize with your users

- conduct interviews
- uncover emotions
- seek stories

Define your users' needs, their problem, and your insights

- reframe and create human-centric problem statements

- identify meaningful surprises and tensions

- infer insights

Ideate by challenging assumptions and creating ideas for innovative solutions

- brainstorm radical ideas

- build on others' ideas

- suspend judgement

Prototype to start creating solutions

- create lo-res objects and experiences

- role play to understand context and key feature

- quickly build to think & learn

Test solutions

- Test with customers to refine solution and gather data

- Gain deeper empathy

- Embrace failure

Let us now go into detail and define these phases more precisely.

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Empathize

Empathizing is the phase in which we observe the behaviour of people and their interactions in the environment in which they are placed. Design thinkers observe and talk with users; they ask questions about anything that has some relation with the topic addressed (why?, when?). Collecting this knowledge helps to empathize with the user and wear their shoes. In addition, experts are consulted and research is carried out using any means at our disposal (observation, bibliographic references, information on the Internet, surveys, etc.).

Figure 2: a student talking with her teacher

Our final goal in this phase is to obtain a large amount of information about the problem we are going to solve, and about the real people for whom we are going to provide innovative solutions.

Now, given the nature of our project, all steps are to be done online, which can create a lot of challenges especially when it comes to this particular step. As mentioned above, it is extremely important to interact and observe our end users so we stand in their shoes. In this project, it would be crucial to use tools that allow us to interact and observe our end users in a flexible way so we can have a better understanding of their needs.

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Define

The definition phase is very important as the team members try to find and define the actual needs of the end user from the knowledge acquired across the empathy phase.

This phase consists of structuring and organizing the discoveries. from the empathy phase, that is, what is important, significant, irrelevant, and so on. Through the PoV, we try to answer questions such as What would happen if? or How could we?
This phase is completed once we have a clear definition of the problem that we will be solving.

Ideate

Once we found out what the actual problem to be solved is, and once the needs and motivations of our end-users have been identified and structured, design thinkers try to generate a lot of ideas and concepts to serve the identified needs and solve the problem, using tools such as brainstorming. In our case at @Go4DiGreen@ such ideas would come as suggestions in the form of educational material that refugees might need to become green entrepreneurs.

Figure 4: Finger inserts jigsaw puzzle

The more ideas we obtain to address possible solutions, the better we can perform the following phases so this process should be a real brainstorming session where ideas are produced, combined, expanded and refined at a rapid pace

Prototype

Building a prototype is a dynamic and very fast stage in the Design thinking process. A prototype in this context is mostly a learning instrument. Prototypes are intended to be imperfect, facilitating the assessment of ideas and allowing immediate and drastic changes if needed. A prototype can be a sketch, for example, or a cardboard box that we decorate to represent a device. It can even be a video or a storyboard. The goal of prototyping is to quickly visualize the solution and create a model with which users can interact and provide feedback.

Figure 5: Prototyping

In our case, the prototypes would generally fall into one of the predesigned educational tools we have in this project, such as the platform, the online videos, or the main written education material.

Test

Testing a prototype consists of presenting the prototype to the end users to listen to their opinions and reactions about it. Testing aims to find out whether the prototype meets the expectations of real people, and what aspects should be improved. Tests allow us to understand what end users' perceptions about the solution proposed actually are.

Figure 6: performing tests on metal parts

This step could be straightforward in our case since it would only require presenting the ideas.

Design Thinking is an Iterative and Non-linear Process

Attention! These five phases, stages or modes are not always sequential! They do not have to proceed in any particular order.

In fact, it is often the case that these phases run in parallel and repeat iteratively. In other words, the phases are not arranged hierarchically and are not necessarily sequential steps.

Instead, consider them as an overview of the modes or phases that contribute to an innovative project.

Learn about users through testing.

Empathise to help define the problem.

Tests create new ideas for the project.

| Empathize | Define | Ideate | Prototype | Test |

Learn from prototypes to spark new ideas

Tests reveal insights that redefine the problem.
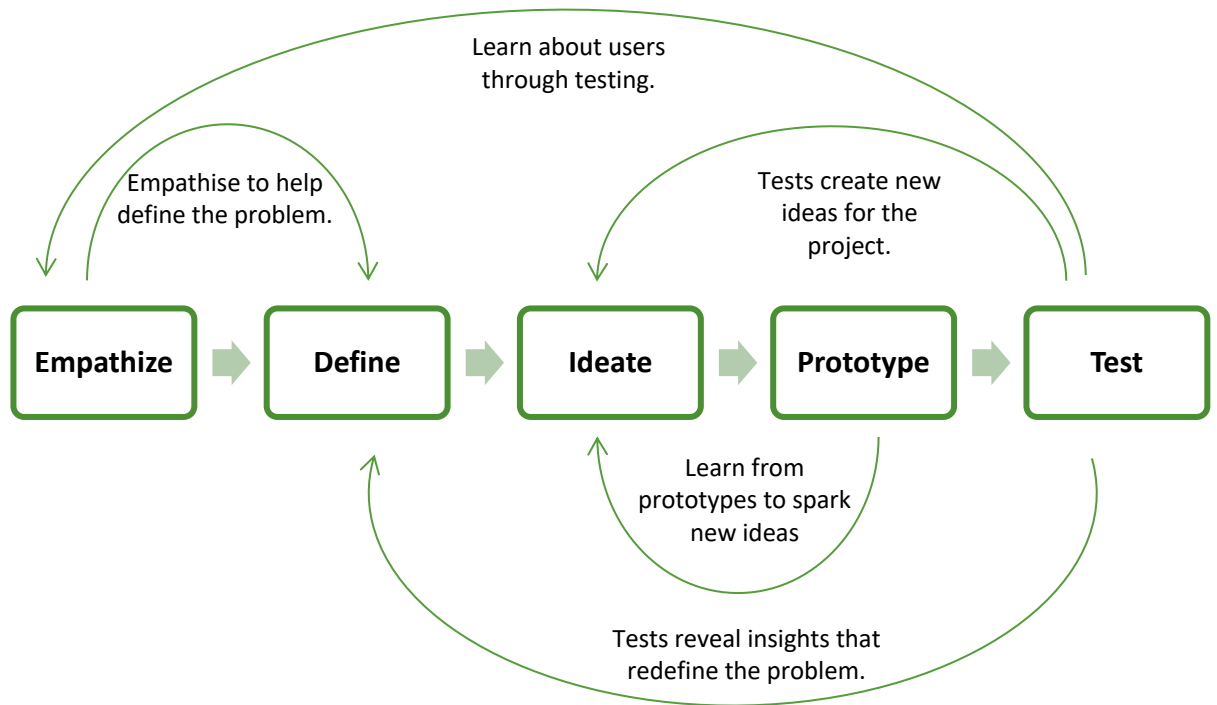
Figure 7: Design Thinking

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Guidelines for Conducting Online Interviews and Focus Groups with Refugees Backgrounds

The following chapters are very much about focus groups and interviews. We discuss the planning, implementation and evaluation of these instruments and give advice on what to consider in the individual phases.

Preparation

The goal of the interview is to be set clear from the beginning of the research. While setting up the interview objectives, it is important that the questions are concise and designed in an objective form.

Figure 8: filling out form

We aim to avoid narrow, outcome-oriented questions that merely seek to validate our hypothesis. A semi-structured approach proves advantageous in this scenario as it allows participants to respond to questions in diverse ways and from various viewpoints.

Sampling & Outreach

In qualitative interviews and research methods, collecting a representative and non-biased (to the largest extent possible) sample is a must, otherwise the findings we come up with can be considered biased and not representative, which could jeopardize the whole study findings. For that, a sample based on demographic data on the target population is to be considered in the early stages of the research.

Figure 9: Recruitment and Sampling

Based on the sample, invitations can be sent to participants who fit the initial selection criteria and who also represent the groups found in the sample. Outreach usually is planned ahead of time within an outreach strategy and plan, where selection criteria are predefined alongside some basic guidelines. One of the main guidelines is to always remind the potential participants of the voluntary nature of their participation.

Another important success element in qualitative interviews which falls within the recruitment plan is motivation. In our context, motivation for the participants to take part in our interviews had to be communicated very clearly.

For instance, this can be done by clearly informing the participants of why they are

selected and what exactly they would get in return for their participation. While most participants showed interest to take part in focus groups with the intention of providing beneficial insights into the project, we still decided on rewarding participants with online shopping vouchers.

Overall, in qualitative research, only a sample (that is, a subset) of a population is selected for any given study. The study's research objectives and the characteristics of the study population (such as size and diversity) determine which and how many people to select.

The most common sampling methods used in qualitative research are purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling.

What is Purposive Sampling?

Purposive sampling, one of the most common sampling strategies, groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question.

Population v.s. Purposive Sampling:

Figure 10: Purposive Sampling

Sample sizes, which may or may not be fixed before data collection, depend on the resources and time available, as well as the study's objectives.

Purposive sample sizes are:

- often determined based on theoretical saturation (the point in data collection when new data no longer bring additional insights to the research questions).
- Purposive sampling is therefore most successful when data review and analysis are done in conjunction with data collection.

What is Quota Sampling?

Quota sampling, sometimes considered a type of purposive sampling, is also common. In quota sampling, we decide while designing the study how many people with which characteristics to include as participants.
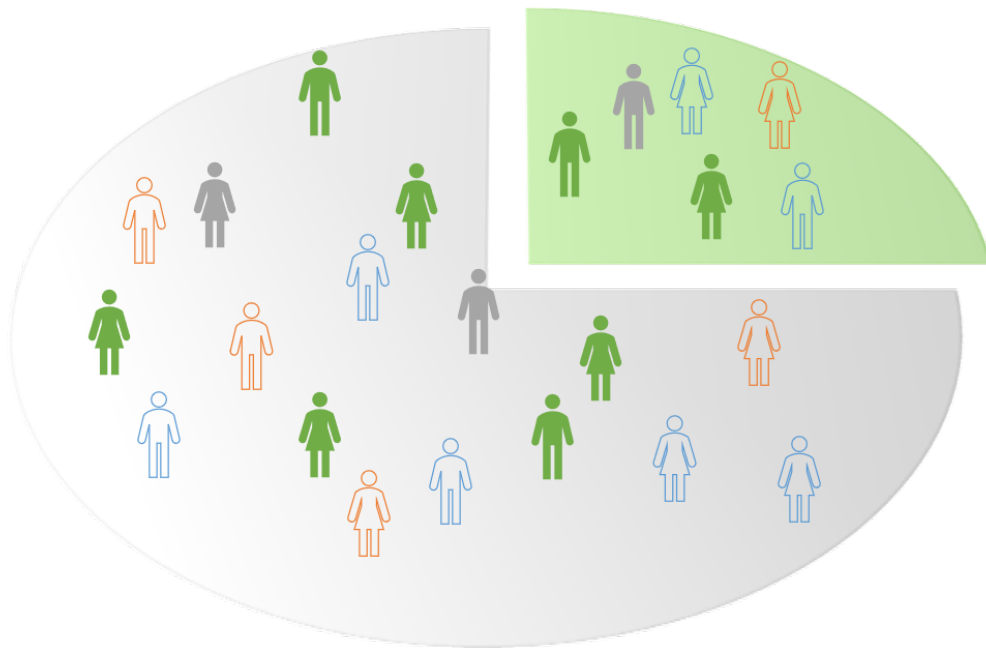
Figure 11: Quota Sampling

Characteristics might include age, place of residence, gender, class, profession, marital status, use of a particular contraceptive method,

The criteria we choose allow us to focus on people we think would be most likely to experience, know about, or have insights into the research topic. Then we go into the community and – using recruitment strategies appropriate to the location, culture, and study population – find people who fit these criteria, until we meet the prescribed quotas.

What is Snowball Sampling?

The third type of sampling, snowballing – also known as chain referral sampling – is considered a type of purposive sampling. In this method, participants, or informants with whom contact has already been made use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study.

Figure 12: Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling is often used to find and recruit "hidden populations," that is, groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies. Although the results of such a selection process cannot be generalized, it provides first access to such a group.

General requirements of an online interview
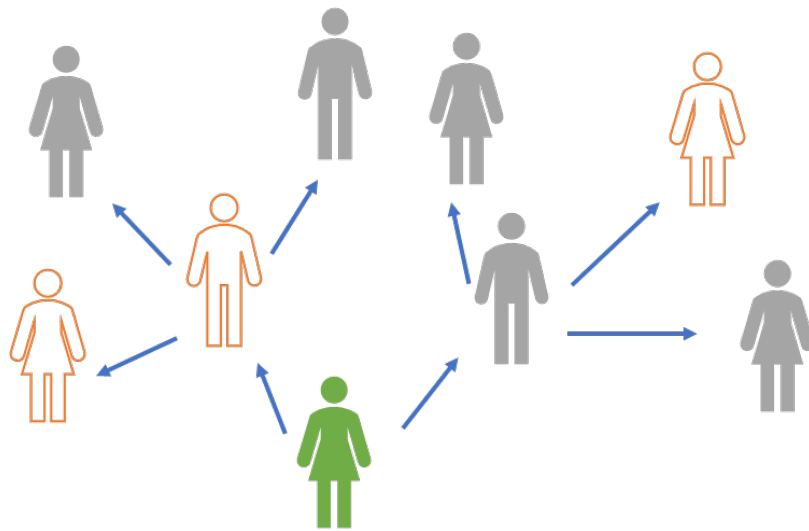
In general, we always feel more comfortable with online interviews and sessions. However, we must always strive to create an atmosphere of trust in an online environment. The environment in an online interview is often focused on the aim of the interview (you cannot provide space for non formal communication/activities) which creates a limited exchange. We usually run quickly toward the goal of the interview without bearing in mind the personal connection we need to maintain. Creating a good environment as much as you can be very beneficial. (Personal interaction).

Preparation and Challenges to consider in online interviews

Online interviews come with a set of challenges which the interviewer has to be aware of and prepared to deal with once and if they occur. These challenges fall under a few categories.

Technical issues

this include hardware and software, internet connection, and digital literacy. These elements can become a challenge before and during an online interview. On the one hand, before the interview, such shortcomings can affect the sampling of the group, simply because we usually tend to exclude those who don't have a fit hardware and internet connection, and also those who lack some digital skills. On the other hand, during the interview, a bad connection and malfunctioning hardware can create a stressful situation for all participants involved.

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Tools for Online Interviews

Generally, it is recommended to select a tool that most participants are familiar with and feel safe and secure using it. Moreover, it is preferred that the tool doesn't require signing up and creating accounts, that can be a shortcoming.

Some examples are:

- Zoom
- Google Hangouts

Behavioural and Emotional

Given the fact that interaction with the participants is limited to the dimensions and frame of the cameras, a huge shortcoming of the online setting can be attributed to the lack of observation on the physical level. Meaning that it is impossible for the interviewer to observe the body language of the participants. One way to mitigate this, is to listen very carefully to the participant and focus on their reactions. For that, ideally the moderator should be solely focused on the participants and the questions, and another person should be taking notes. This particular category can also be related to the environmental element we referred to earlier. The mitigation of such shortcoming is directly related to creating a comfortable environment.

Managing the Interview

First and foremost, establishing a common ground and very clear guidelines on privacy and data protection is to be handled at the very beginning. This includes gathering informed consent for recording if needed, informing all participants on how, what, and why if any, data is to be processed during and after the interview. These obligations fall under the ethical guidelines mentioned earlier and should be handled strictly according to GDPR regulation and the national legislation.

Figure 13: Data Protection of attendees

Attitude of the interviewer

The following attitudes can help you to master:

Be mindful of people

Anything that a design thinker does is based on an attempt to better understand the human being. In fact the term human-centred design can be used almost synonymously with design thinking.

Focus on your Audience

Working with design thinking, we should ensure to always keep the human being at the core of whatever we are doing: we take care to understand the situation and the context of that human being—the challenges and opportunities, the wishes and needs. We try to understand the target audience of the final concept or solution (e.g. girls who should be empowered to go to school). We also try to understand other stakeholders who are important in that situation (eg. end users families and other figures in their lives).

Be mindful of the (work) place

In order to support the team, it is helpful to work in a space that is flexible. In our case, we need to try to be creative with our online setting as much as we can! This step also would require us to be very interactive and ensure a flow of conversation and exchange to keep our audience engaged.

Main success elements to manage the interview

In our case and based on the data collected, three main success elements of managing an interview are identified. Needless to say, more elements and factors can be found in the academic literature. The following findings are restricted to and based on this project and the findings we gathered from the interviews.
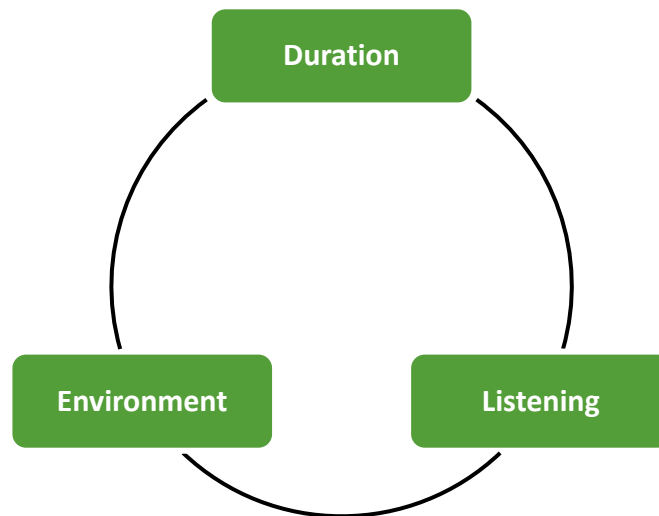
Figure 14: managing the interview

Duration

Time is a crucial factor in conducting interviews, hence managing it well is a must. In our case, managing the duration of the interview is important to keep the participants engaged and focused.

Figure 15: duration

While the duration of the interview usually depends on the topic and the number of participants, a general consideration of keeping the duration short is beneficial, especially in an online context.

Environment

Managing the environment is another important aspect. This means that the moderator/s and the hosts provide a comfortable environment for the participants and try to initiate a personal connection among the participants.

Figure 16: environment

This is even more needed when the participants meet for the first time. Another aspect of managing the environment is to ensure that the moderator is in charge of directing the interviews and keeping the participants within the questions framework. In other words, answers have to be kept direct and related to the topic. Within this element, other important shortcomings or challenges to be considered. For instance, in group interviews it is likely to face group biases and group thinking patterns, the moderator's job in this case is to avoid such falls as much as possible.

Listening

this element doesnt require much explanation. Good listening is the only way where we could get meaningful and cmplex findings.

It is also important to show the participants that you truly understand what they are saying which can encourage them to open up more and contribute more deeply. Furthermore, active listening is crucial for establishing an emotional connection with participants. The emotional dimension is usually one of the main ways to empathise and create true connections with participants. On another note, good listening can help the interviewer to not only better understand the participants, rather it also helps in understanding what the participant is trying to achieve with their answer. (self-interest gains).

Ethical Guidelines

From what has been said so far about the attitude of the interviewer, we now have the ethical requirements that must be observed strongly in a qualitative interview or focus group.

Generally speaking, following an ethical approach in conducting a qualitative interview is more of a tradition in the research field. Nonetheless, some important remarks to be emphasized such as being aware of inequalities that we might have in our biases when planning the interviews, such biases can be gender, racial, ethnic and so on.

Figure 18: Ethical

Appropriateness
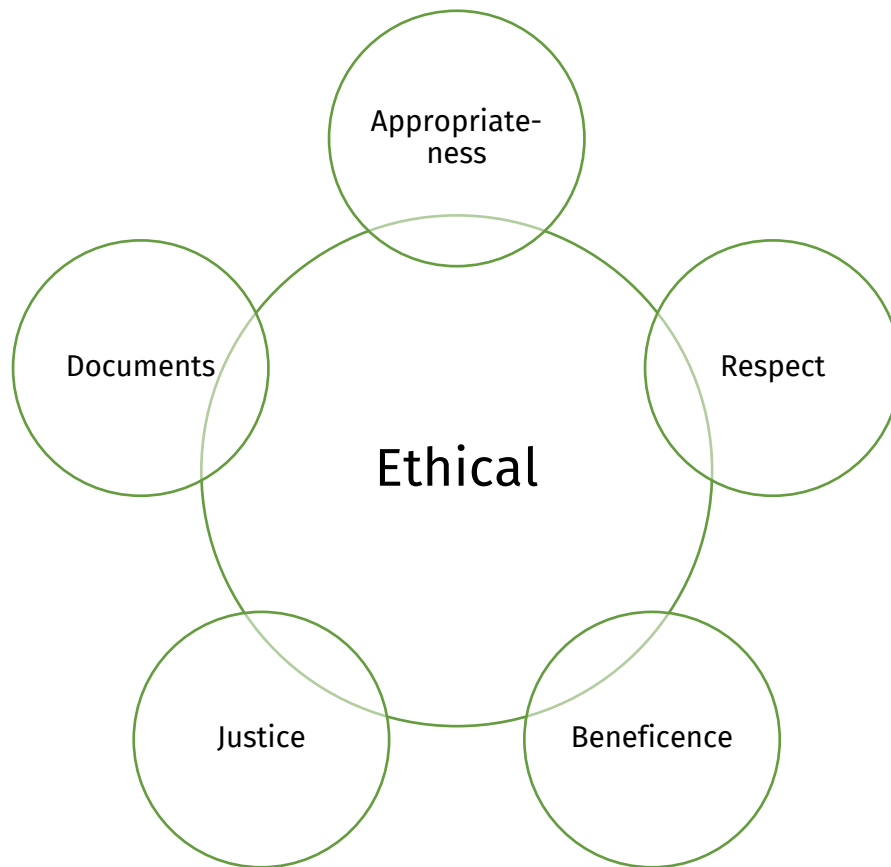
Another important ethical aspect to be considered in the preparation phase is appropriateness. In our context, this means that questions designed for the interview have to respect the privacy, security, and dignity of the participants. As a general rule, only questions that have direct relation to the interview objectives (which already must be clarified beforehand and communicated with the

participants) are to be asked. Moreover, participants should be always reminded and given the opportunity to pass questions they don't feel comfortable answering. On top of that, a few main ethical principle our findings indicate are the followings:

Respect

Respect for persons requires a commitment to ensuring the autonomy of research participants, and, where autonomy may be diminished, to protect people from the exploitation of their vulnerability.

Figure 19: Respect

The dignity of all research participants must be respected. Adherence to this principle ensures that people will not be used simply to achieve research objectives.

Beneficence

Beneficence requires a commitment to minimizing the risks associated with research, including psychological and social risks, and maximizing the benefits that accrue to research participants. Researchers must articulate specific ways this will be achieved.

Justice

Justice requires a commitment to ensuring a fair distribution of the risks and benefits resulting from research. Those who take on the burdens of research participation should share in the benefits of the knowledge gained. Or, to put it another way, the people who are expected to benefit from the knowledge should be the ones who are asked to participate.

Figure 20: Justice

The interview is voluntary and can be cancelled at any time, even without a reason and there are no consequences. Questions might be not provided with answers without giving reasons. Respect and appreciation are quite important.

Documents

One of the main documents that a researcher needs to have prepared beforehand and shared with the participants is a very clear agenda.

Figure 21: Documents

Participants need to be informed about the major points in the interviews and the project. Having a well-informed participant is a must in order to ensure an ethical and also productive interview.

Important techniques to manage the interview

Important techniques and guidelines to manage the online interview include the followings:

Explain the Purpose	Let everyone have their say	Follow up on participants' answers
Obtain Consent	Moderator plus additional note takers	Pay attention to language of participants
Present a Clear Agenda	Care for Comfortable Environment	

Figure 22: interview techniques:

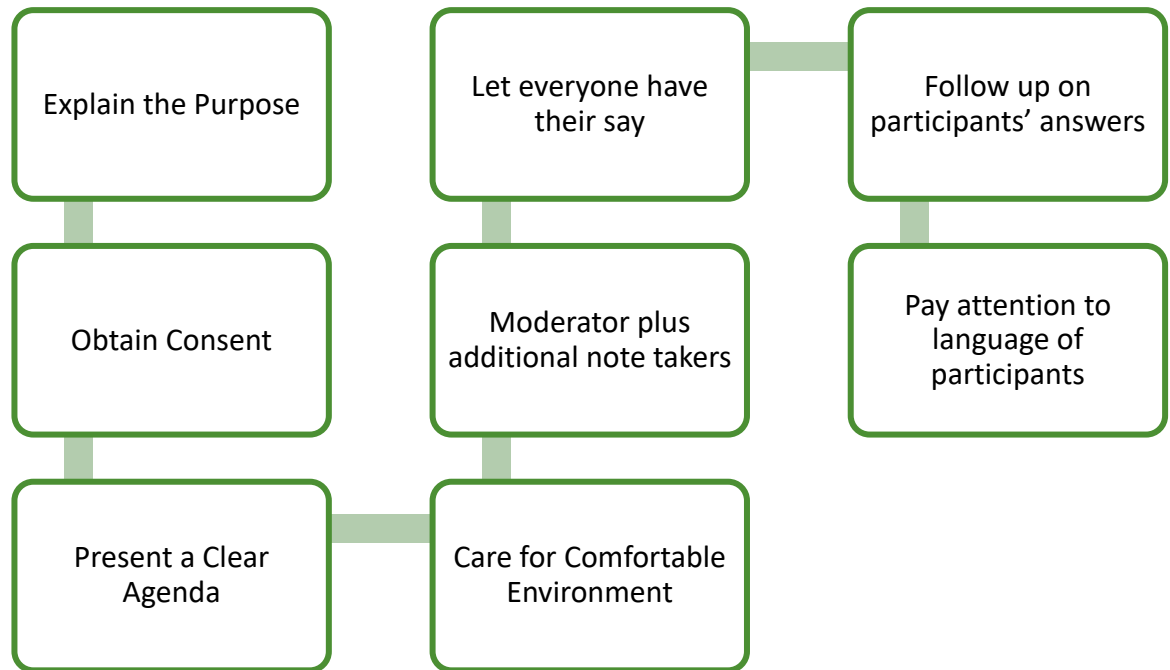**Explain the Purpose**

The moderator should begin by explaining the purpose of the group and what is expected of the group.

Obtain Consent

If the session is to be recorded as a video or audio, participants consent should be taken before doing so. And once recorded, access to this recording must be used only for the purpose announced at the beginning of the session.

Present a Clear Agenda

Sharing a very clear agenda that paints a clear picture for the participants about the whole interview process and the purpose of it. The interviewees must have a good feeling and understanding of the interview process beforehand.

Care for Comfortable Environment

Every measurement is a treatment. To ensure that the overall environment is comfortable and to establish a basic measuring tool for the overall interview, it is recommended to start with check-in question for all interviewees to measure how they feel at the beginning of the meeting, and to end the session with a check-out question, to capture how the interview went and how the participants feel about it.

Moderator plus additional note takers

The moderator is not supposed to take notes, rather that should be assigned to someone else. The moderator's role is to facilitate and progress the discussion while not taking part in it. The note takers must also be introduced at the beginning of the session.

Let everyone have their say

Another task of the moderator is to ensure that participants are feeling comfortable during the session and to prevent anyone from dominating the discussion.

Follow up on participants' answers

Pay attention to the participants' reactions and make sure to follow up on their answers. In the process of doing so, you might want to make sure that all participants get to share their opinions. A good observation for the whole scene will help in activating all participants and in avoiding groupthink and manipulative attempts by participants who always push for their opinions.

Pay attention to language of participants

Conduct the interview in either the mother tongue of the participants or in their second language. One key aspect is to ensure that participants are able to truly express themselves. If needed, split participants in different groups based on their language preferences and hire a translator.

Special requirements for the target group of refugees

The special requirements to handle when interviewing refugees are not many in comparison to non-refugees. However, the few differences we noticed are still major and need to be addressed in a sensitive way.

These differences go mainly under two folds:

Avoid negative associations

First, the word interview has negative associations for people with a refugee background. Most refugees at some point have been subject to interviews conducted by the police or the asylum authority, this can create a stressful situation.

The word interview can perhaps be replaced by conversation. Another observation is that people with refugee experience often also come from systems with strong hierarchies and they are often in a vulnerable role. For example, if the refugee is

interviewed by a university professor, you cannot assume that they will speak openly and give honest answers.

Figure 23: Stressed person

Pay attention to cultural differences

Second, cultural aspects. Interviewing cultures are different across nations and geographical locations. Despite the fact that the target group is located in the host country at the moment, some cultural differences will remain in place and are to be addressed properly.

Figure 24: cultural differences

Mostly, such differences are handled by preparing a cultural sensitivity questionnaire which considers the different cultural backgrounds of the participants. Another aspect is related to how trained and experienced the moderator is. Sometimes it is more appropriate to have a moderator who happens to belong to the target group, in other cases, participants might prefer having a moderator who belongs to another country or culture. Hence, ideally you might have 2 moderators, one that is trained and belongs to the target group, and the other is also trained but belongs to another culture (host country for example).

Pay attention to personal experiences

Third, personal experience related requirements. At this level, it is essential to pay attention and keep in mind the experiences the participants might have gone through.

Since our target group is refugees, some questions can be very sensitive, such as questions that are related to the participant's history in relation to their country, journey to the host country, and questions about family members and friends they might have lost in the crisis back in their country. Hence, being appropriate in the questionnaire is very recommended. For once, asking the wrong/sensitive question which is not related to the objective of the study, that would jeopardize the process and make it very difficult for the participant to contribute.

After the interviews

It is important to know for whom the date is. Is it for internal use of your organisation or do you want to publish your outcomes?

This defines how to analyse your data.

Qualitative content analysis (according to Mayring, 2021)

The basis of qualitative content analysis is to assign text passages to so-called categories. Categories have an abstract, classifying character and should reflect the content of the respective text passages.

The formation of categories can be carried out either inductively or deductively:

- **Inductive**

  The category is developed "on the material", i.e. on the respective text passage. It is considered which category can best represent this passage.

- **Deductive**

  The category is created in advance based on a theory or prior knowledge. The passage is then assigned to the category.

- **Deductive-inductive**

  Before coding, some categories are deductively derived. These are supplemented by categories that are created inductively on the material.

What does it mean to code?

Coding means assigning text passages to respective categories.

Figure 26: coding

As already mentioned, this can be done either inductively or deductively. However, there are also mixed forms of the two procedures. It is common, for example, that certain main categories (i.e. superordinate, more general categories) are already determined deductively in advance and that these main categories are supplemented and differentiated inductively by subcategories in the course of coding. The length of the respective text passage (the so-called coding unit) that is assigned to a category varies. Single words, sections as well as whole texts can be assigned to a category.

Programs

NVIVO helps qualitative researchers to organize, analyse and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, journal articles, social media, and web content, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required.

NVIVO is great at conducting data analysis for qualitative research. It allows users to code the qualitative data, making it easier for users to perform content analysis with the data. NVIVO's interface is very user-friendly and requires a minimal time investment to learn the application.

Body language and interaction during interviews are the important points. In an online setting, this can be difficult. Analysing the program NVIVO can also consider the body language.

The purpose of ATLAS.ti is to help researchers uncover and systematically analyse complex phenomena hidden in unstructured data (text, multimedia, geospatial). The program provides tools that let the user locate, code, and annotate findings in primary data material.

Figure 27: NVIVO

Figure 28: ATLAS.ti

Examples of a Design Thinking Process – The Go4DiGREEN Approach

In our project we organised a total of three focus groups.

Below is a brief overview of the structure of our process:

Home Work

Do initial research on your end users and the topic

Focus Group 1

Apply steps on to find out a fit way to do online focus groups across the project.

Focus Group 2

Repeat design thinking steps to uncover refugees' need to be green entre-preneurs.

Home Work

Work on the findings of first two groups and prepare for final focus group.

Focus Group 3

Apply the findings from groups 1-2 and evaluate the findings.

Here are examples of how qualitative interviews and focus groups were utilized in the project partnership. They highlight the findings from a focus group that aimed to explore effective approaches for conducting online qualitative interviews with refugees. The focus group gathered insights from experts and practitioners to identify best practices, challenges, and opportunities in this area.

Austria

Methodology

Participants

A total of 10 participants were recruited for the focus group, including researchers, academics, practitioners, and individuals with firsthand experience working with refugee communities. All participants possessed substantial knowledge and experience in conducting qualitative interviews with refugees.

Data Collection

The focus group was conducted virtually using video conferencing software. The session was audio and video recorded with participants' consent. The discussion was guided by a set of predetermined questions and prompts that focused on key aspects of conducting qualitative interviews with refugees online.

Data Analysis

 The audio and video recordings were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes and patterns within the data.

Findings

Accessibility and Connectivity

One of the primary challenges highlighted by the participants was the issue of accessibility and connectivity. It was noted that some refugee populations may face barriers in accessing stable internet connections or suitable devices for online interviews. Strategies such as providing technical support, offering alternatives (e.g., phone interviews), or leveraging community resources were suggested to mitigate these challenges.

Language and Cultural Sensitivity

Language and cultural sensitivity emerged as critical factors when conducting qualitative interviews with refugees online. Participants emphasized the importance of hiring interpreters or bilingual interviewers, utilizing translated consent forms and interview guides, and being aware of cultural nuances to ensure effective communication and understanding.

Establishing Rapport and Trust

Building rapport and trust with refugees during online interviews was identified as crucial. Participants recommended investing time in establishing a welcoming and supportive environment, being empathetic, and demonstrating cultural humility. Utilizing icebreaker activities, establishing ongoing relationships, and conducting interviews in safe spaces were suggested as effective strategies.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Participants highlighted the need for flexibility and adaptability during online interviews with refugees. Given potential disruptions, such as unstable living conditions or traumatic experiences, it was recommended to allow for breaks, adjust interview lengths, and adapt interview techniques to accommodate the specific needs and contexts of individual refugees.

Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

Ethical considerations and confidentiality were emphasized by the participants. Safeguarding participants' identities and sensitive information, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality through secure data storage and transmission were regarded as essential principles to uphold throughout the qualitative interviewing process.

Conclusion

The focus group provided valuable insights into conducting qualitative interviews with refugees online. The findings underscored the importance of addressing challenges related to accessibility, language, cultural sensitivity, rapport building, flexibility, and ethical considerations.

By implementing the recommended strategies and best practices, researchers and practitioners can enhance the quality and inclusiveness of their qualitative interviews with refugees in an online environment.

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Recommendations

Based on the focus group findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Prioritize addressing issues of accessibility and connectivity to ensure equal participation.
- Invest in language support and cultural sensitivity training for interviewers.
- Establish rapport and trust through empathetic communication and cultural humility.
- Remain flexible and adapt interview techniques to accommodate individual needs and contexts.
- Uphold ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, throughout the research process.

Bulgaria

Methodology

Team and Respondents

The focus groups were implemented by multifunctional teams (interviewer and note taker). A total number of 21 respondents participated in the focus group – refugees and humanitarian practitioners. The participants demonstrated knowledge and experience in implementation of interviews with refugees.

Data Collection

The focus group was conducted virtually using video MS Teams. The discussion was guided by a set of predetermined questions and prompts that focused on key aspects of conducting qualitative interviews with refugees online. The questions were sent in advance to the participants, before the online session. During the focus group the data was collected into a matrix.

Data Analysis

The collected information in the data collection matrix is refined and analyzed, according to the research objective.

Findings

Findings

Connectivity

Connectivity and accessibility emerged as major concerns raised by attendees. Certain refugee groups face challenges accessing reliable internet connections and suitable devices for online interviews. To tackle these issues, suggestions included providing technical assistance, considering alternative options such as phone interviews, and leveraging community resources.

Language

When conducting qualitative interviews with refugees online, considerations of language and cultural sensitivity came to light as essential elements. To guarantee clear communication and comprehension, participants underlined the value of hiring interpreters or multilingual interviewers, using translated permission papers and interview guidelines, and being aware of cultural habits.

Positive environment

The participants suggested spending time creating a friendly and encouraging environment, being sympathetic, and exhibiting cultural humility. Effective tactics included using icebreaker activities, building long-term connections is also essential.

Adaptability

During online refugee interviews, participants stressed the importance of adapting and being flexible. Suggestions included allowing pauses, adjusting interview times, and modifying approaches to accommodate individual refugees' unique circumstances, such as insecure living conditions or traumatic experiences.

Ethical aspects: The participants underlined the importance of privacy and ethical issues. Informed permission, maintaining confidentiality through safe data storage and transfer, and protecting participant names and sensitive information were seen to be crucial aspects to keep throughout the qualitative interviewing process.

Conclusion

The focus group gave valuable guidance on how to conduct qualitative interviews online with refugees. The results emphasized how crucial it is to deal with issues including accessibility, language barriers, cultural sensitivity, rapport-building, adaptability, and ethical considerations.

Researchers and practitioners can improve the caliber and inclusivity of their qualitative interviews with refugees in an online setting by putting the suggested tactics and best practices into practice.

Recommendations

Based on the focus group findings, the following recommendations are provided:

- Resolving connection and accessibility concerns to guarantee fair participation is required

- Providing interviewers with language assistance and cultural sensitivity training is required.

- Flexibility of the interviewing methods to fit the demands and circumstances of each candidate is required

- Maintaining ethical standards throughout the focus group implementation is required.

Belgium and Cyprus

Methodology

Participants

A total of 12 participants were invited to participate in this focus group, including stakeholders, practitioners from local NGOs and individuals with experience working in the field of migration and refugee issues. All participants had first-hand experience working with refugees and migrants in Cyprus and knowledge of the themes and items discussed in this focus group.

Data Collection

The focus group was conducted virtually using Zoom. The session was audio and video recorded with participants' consent. The discussion was guided by a set of predetermined questions and prompts that focused on key aspects of conducting qualitative interviews with refugees online. There was a dedicated note-taker who summarized the key items of the conversation.

Data Analysis

A summary of the focus group was written by the moderator and discussed internally to produce lessons-learned and produce findings.

Findings

Accessibility and Connectivity

Covid restrictions have given most of us the opportunity to practice Zoom/online interviews but we must remember that interviewees may not have had this experience so they may not be able to connect as easily and/or feel awkward doing online conversations. Beneficiaries who don't have much experience with online interactions might not read body language well online and feel intimidated by the lack of face-to-face. Other issues mentioned were network issues, problems with moderating conversations with multiple participants ("open microphones") and keeping people engaged when they are not talking or directly addressed.

Language and Cultural Sensitivity

Language barriers and different interpretations of body language were identified as serious issues when conducting group interviews, or with new people. A single awkward silence can ruin the entire conversation. Do research about the people you interview ahead of time. Know who you are talking to.

Establishing Rapport and Trust

Gender equality was an important aspect of conducting these interviews. Some interviewees might feel more comfortable if a woman conducts the interview.

Be aware of the space the people whom you interview are in. Are they at home? Is this a safe space for them? Can they speak freely? Are they alone in the room?

Also consider what you wear as the interviewer, who is walking around in your background, what are they wearing?
What can be seen in your background, Consider what you say, be aware of cultural and religious values.

Utilizing icebreaker activities, establishing ongoing relationships, and conducting interviews in safe spaces were suggested as effective strategies.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Participants highlighted the need for flexibility and adaptability during online interviews with refugees. Given potential disruptions, such as unstable living conditions or traumatic experiences, it was recommended to allow for breaks, adjust interview lengths, and adapt interview techniques to accommodate the specific needs and contexts of individual refugees.

Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

Ethical considerations and confidentiality were emphasized by the participants. Safeguarding participants' identities and sensitive information, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality through secure data storage and transmission were regarded as essential principles to uphold throughout the qualitative interviewing process.

Conclusion

Important to bear Cyprus specific restrictions in mind. Multiple participants of the focus groups stressed the importance of not getting participants' hopes up if they are allowed to participate in the program but are legally not able to become entrepreneurs in Cyprus.

Making green business ideas lucrative for participants:

- Need for financial incentives, and tangible results
- Drawing upon local knowledge
- Drawing upon previous knowledge of the participants
- Fostering the creativity and motivation of the participants

Recommendations

Based on the focus group findings, the following recommendations are provided:

- Best to aim for a smaller group of participants. Maybe 6-8
- Reducing the number of slides in the presentation if possible
- Shortening the time of the focus group meeting
- Discussing the most relevant questions first and leaving yes/no and other simpler questions towards the end of the meeting

Congratulations!

You finished the Guidelines!

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List of Figures

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