

VOLUNTEERS FOCUS GROUPS GUIDELINES

About this document: *In this document there are some basic information, the “script” and the structure of the focus groups with volunteers, both beginners and experienced. This is just for this target group, identified at the kick-off meeting. Another document is available with guidelines for collecting inputs from key actors from organizations (through interviews).*

At the bottom of the document you can also find the guidelines for interviews to volunteers in case you want to complement the information collected through the focus groups.

These guidelines can be of course modified and improved once we start the focus groups/interviews and have possible “lessons learnt”.

INTRODUCTION

The focus groups aim at **collecting information from volunteers** working¹ with refugees and asylum seekers. In particular, at least **2 focus groups with 6-8 participants** (or more) need to be held by each partner **from 20th January to 4th February** at the latest, so the selection and the contact phase should start even before, although it will be made easier through the key actors interviews activity (see the relevant document).

Ideally, the focus groups should be held in **different geographical/cultural areas of the country**. They should include **both beginner volunteers and experienced volunteers** (there is no need to have separated focus groups for these two “categories” – mixing them could be even better).

FOCUS GROUP KICK OFF “SCRIPT”

Welcome

The facilitator introduces the caseWORK project and thanks the participants.

Theme

We are conducting a research around organizations and volunteers working in the sector of refugees and asylum seekers in 5 European countries (Italy, Greece, Germany, Austria, Slovenia). One of the main aim of the research is to take over the training needs of volunteers working in this sector, collecting opinions and thoughts both from beginners volunteers and experienced volunteers. We would like therefore to collect your inputs on several critical issues in this field, for instance on your relationship with your organizations, on perceived limits of your trainings for the activities you are involved on a voluntary basis, on the level of information and skills you have, on your relationship with particular forms of human fragility present in the environment you work in, on possible situations of burn-out, etc.

The information we are going to collect will help us to identify what and how to address in the on-line training to support volunteers working with refugees and asylum seekers we will design and set up after this research phase. The information we are going to collect will be used anonymously.

¹ “Working” here (and in the rest of the document and in other documents produced for the IO1) is of course intended as “engaging in activities with refugees and asylum seekers”, and not as paid/formal work (job).

What is a focus group?

A focus group is a group discussion moderated by one or more facilitator(s). I, the facilitator, will propose some general issues I would like to know your opinions on. I will not ask questions to you singularly, but only as a group. What I would like therefore is that your answers came from a discussion among you. There is no sequence for participating: everyone of you is free to speak when you prefer and how many times you want to add something new to the discussion or to exchange opinions on what others have said. I will jump into the conversation only to ask for clarifications and insights on what comes out from the discussion and to provide you with new inputs.

5 rules for a better discussion

- 1) Speak aloud and one by one to make the recording clearer
- 2) Listen to and respect what others say and their opinions, as there are not right or wrong answers
- 3) It is possible to change your mind, without any concern to seem inconsistent
- 4) Do not worry to express your opinions, even when they contrast with what others have said – Our aim is not to get an agreement between you all, so different points of view on the same issue as well as both positive and negative comments are welcome
- 5) It is important to stay pertinent to the issues we are discussing

General information

Our conversation will be recorded² as we cannot count only on facilitator's memory and especially as our aim is to carefully consider every opinion expressed. (Ask participants to sign the release for recording).³

The discussion will be about one hour and half long.

Let's start!

Now I invite all of you to introduce yourself to the others saying your name.

FOCUS GROUP STRUCTURE, ACTIVITIES AND KEY QUESTIONS

Who is the volunteer working with refugees/asylum seekers? (15 mins)

- How would you define your role of volunteer in a general sense? (Everyone writes down their definition)
- The facilitator reads aloud the definitions (and writes them on the board)
- Try – with the help of the participants – to cluster the definitions (without discussion)
- Would you change anything in the definition you have written now that you have listened to others definitions?
- Are there then different kinds of volunteers?

² If recording is not possible, please make sure you wrote down as much as you can/the most relevant parts, as the transcriptions will be part of the national reports as annexes. This is valid also in case of interviews to volunteers (see below).

³ It is good practice to ask people taking part to focus groups/interviewed to sign a brief release for recording. You can find a template for it as attachment at the bottom of this document.

In what areas are they involved? (15 mins)

- Thinking about your own experience, what are the areas where volunteers working with refugees and asylum seekers are involved?
- What do you do? (Ask for examples of activities)
- How much time do you spend for these volunteering activities?

Identikit of the “good” volunteer (15 mins)

- What do you think are the characteristics someone volunteering with refugees/asylum seekers must have? Describe the “ideal” volunteer thinking about:
 - age
 - nationality
 - gender
 - skills (technical, professional, relational and human)
 - qualifications
 - life experiences
 - work experience
 - motivations and vocations
- What do you think is the identity that volunteers working in the sector “build” for themselves? In particular:
 - how they perceive themselves
 - how they are perceived by beneficiaries of their activities and their relatives
 - how they are perceived by the organization they work in
 - how they are perceived by others external to the organization

What are the main critical issues? (15 mins)

- Make participants think about concrete critical issues they have faced and what their causes can be. If they don't emerge on their own, use the following suggestions:
 - in relation to training: Inadequate preparation? Inconsistency between activities carried out and training received that create specific expectations? Lack of training? On what aspects? What skills do you need? Etc.
 - in relation to work organization: Excessive workloads? Are you asked for things you should not do? There is not continuity in what they do. Etc.
 - in relation to beneficiaries: Conflicts with them? Lack of intercultural skills? Specific situations of vulnerability needs a specialized worker and cannot be delegated to a volunteer. Etc.
 - in relation to relationship with different professional roles: Conflicts with other organization's staff? Are they supportive enough? Lack of understanding of different roles? Etc.
 - in relation to emotionality: Being in contact with suffering, disadvantages that cannot be solved? Sense of powerlessness? Sense of loneliness? Etc.
 - in relation to motivations: What are the motivation for choosing this form of volunteering? Is it a vocation? What is more important, competence or vocation? Can they be conflicting? How? Etc.

Possible solutions to identified critical issues and how they can be solved (20 mins)

- Make participants think about possible solutions to the critical issues they have identified. If they don't emerge on their own, use the following suggestions:
 - in relation to training: If and how the training has been organized so far. Strengths and weaknesses? In case of training, what has been the “level of satisfaction” for it? How the results of the training has been evaluated so far? What is missing? What do you want to be trained on and how? What kind of information do you need? Are they specific to the refugees/asylum seekers sector? Provide examples of trainings you think you need or would like to take. How to teach and train on aspects related to empathy and relational skills? Do you think continues updates/trainings are needed? Etc.
 - in relation to work organization: Sharing of the work's organization and the tasks/activities to deliver? Etc.
 - in relation to beneficiaries: How to improve intercultural skills? Etc.
 - in relation to relationship with different professional roles: Working more closely with staff members? Clearer division of tasks and responsibilities? More support and ongoing training from them? Improving understanding of different roles? Etc.
 - in relation to emotionality: Support from staff members? Promote team work? Supervision activities? Etc.
 - in relation to motivations: How motivation and vocation can be increased? Etc.

Closing (10 mins)

Conclusion asking if there is something to add, that have been forgotten, etc.

INTERVIEWS GUIDELINES

In addition to the focus groups (and not in replacement), you may want to reach volunteers that work far away from where your organization is/can held the focus groups via interviews⁴, in order to make your research more various and representative. In that case you can use the questions below, that summarize what is discussed in the focus groups. Please note that these are quite basic and straight questions, that needs to be better articulated by the interviewer.

- 1) Please introduce yourself (name, organization and context, experiences in the sector of volunteering and/or with asylum seekers and refugees, etc.).
- 2) How would you define your role of volunteer in a general sense?
- 3) Thinking about your own experience, what are the areas where volunteers working with refugees and asylum seekers are involved?
- 4) What do you do? (Ask for examples of activities)
- 5) How much time do you spend for these volunteering activities?

⁴ The same recommendation as for the key actors interviews is valid here: interviews can be conducted both face to face or via Skype (or similar system). In every case they need to be recorded (if this is not possible, it is anyway important to note down as much as you can/the most relevant parts, as the transcriptions will be part of the national reports as annexes).

- 6) What do you think are the characteristics someone volunteering with refugees/asylum seekers must have? Please go through these categories: age, nationality, gender, skills (technical, professional, relational and human), qualifications, life experiences, work experiences, motivations and vocations.
- 7) What do you think is the identity that volunteers working in the sector “build” for themselves? (Thinking about how they perceive themselves and are perceived by others, like beneficiaries, relatives, organization, others external)
- 8) What concrete critical issues you have faced in your work and what can their causes be? (You can use the suggestions in the corresponding part⁵ of the focus group above to facilitate the reply)
- 9) What are the possible solutions to the critical issues you have identified? (You can use the suggestions in the corresponding part⁶ of the focus group above to facilitate the reply)
- 10) Anything else to add before concluding the interview?

[ATTACHMENT – Release for recording](#)



Release for
recording.docx

⁵ See “What are the main critical issues?” at page 3.

⁶ See “Possible solutions to identified critical issues and how they can be solved” at page 4.