



GUIDELINES ON AUDIT INTERVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines give advice on how to conduct interviews.

Section 1 gives a brief introduction to the method and discusses its main features and different types of interviews.

Section 2 gives advice regarding situations in which interviews are useful, and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the method.

Section 3 is a detailed guide for auditors on how to conduct interviews, step by step, including planning, formulating questions, drafting the interview guide, handling the interview situation and documenting and analysing the results.

Annex: checklist for interview preparation

Who to contact

If you feel that the information provided in this document could be improved, please do not hesitate to communicate your suggestions: ECA-AMS.CONTACT@eca.europa.eu.

SECTION 1: INTERVIEW

The interview is a data gathering technique frequently used by auditors. It is a question and answer session, to a large extent steered by the interviewer, aimed at obtaining quantitative as well as qualitative information. An interview can be used to elicit facts and/or the opinions of those persons involved in, or affected by, a particular programme or project regarding its context, implementation, results or impact. In addition, it can also serve to gather information on practices in different organisations/entities.

An interview can either be face to face or remote, usually by telephone. Likewise, it can either be directed to an individual or a group. This guideline mainly focuses on a face to face interview situation.

1.1. THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

Three main purposes:

There are three main purposes for an interview in an audit context: *orientation*, *examination* and *confirmation*. An interview can have one or two of these purposes, but normally not all three at the same time.

- orientation part of the learning process

Orientation is normally part of the audit team's learning process during the planning phase. It aims at exploring and giving an overview of a specific area or function, e.g., by asking for presentations of activities, explanations of formal or informal networks or interpretation of documents (reports, instructions or, budgets). The objective could be to identify possible audit subjects or to find out about other available sources of information, such as key persons or documentation.

- examination aims at finding audit evidence

Examination aims at more specific issues with a view to establishing new information, often to be used as audit evidence. In some cases, such information has not been previously recorded at all but is embodied in the interviewee through personal experiences, particular references, opinions, etc. In other cases, the knowledge can be retrieved for example by (joint) interpretation of internal documents, reports or records.

- evidence from interviews needs to be corroborated

It should be noted that evidence obtained from interviews often needs to be corroborated, i.e. supported by evidence from other data collection methods.

to confirm that facts are correctly understood.

Confirmation, finally, often goes together with either orientation or examination, but deserves to be mentioned as a separate purpose because of its fundamental importance. Confirmation, by definition, is typically based on information that has already been gathered. However, in this context the information can also be gathered and confirmed simultaneously. Not least in the planning phase, it is important to have basic conditions and facts explicitly confirmed by stakeholders. However, in the execution phase there might also be a need to confirm facts and findings. If data is incorrectly understood, the quality of the whole audit may suffer and a lot of work may be in vain.

1.2. TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

The interview technique can be divided into two main interview types, structured and unstructured interviews, which elicit information of a different nature. Although they are quite distinct from each other, they can be seen as existing on opposite sides of a continuum, as outlined below.

Unstructured interview

An unstructured interview usually highlights a small number of themes and examples of questions for the interviewer to follow when needed. The interviewer is allowed maximum flexibility to explore themes that have not previously been considered and to follow up the responses that are given. Such an approach is well suited to obtaining rich data, often related to complex or sensitive subjects, and as a means to building theory.

Structured interview

The structured interview can be defined as an interview in which a standard set of pre-set questions is established, which can be asked in the same order from one interview to another. The wording of questions and the order in which they are asked are consistent throughout, and there is very limited flexibility in the approach for exploring issues that have not been included in advance. This approach is highly suited to capturing simple, factual data, covering a range of issues, pinpointing or confirming certain points and for hypothesis testing. The results are good for purposes of comparability and are receptive to coding and subsequent analysis.

A mixture of the two interview types

In practice, most interviews contain a mixture of the two interview types. For example, the interviewer can allow for the interviewee to steer the dialogue, following the flow of the conversation, and use the questions/themes as a checklist to make sure all topics are covered. This is generally called a semi-structured interview.

SECTION 2: WHEN TO USE INTERVIEWS

Interviews can be used at any stage of the audit, depending on the purpose of the interviews.

2.1. IN THE PLANNING PHASE

Identify significant issues

The aim in the planning phase is to develop a comprehensive and correct understanding of the audited activity or the auditee's business in order to facilitate the identification of significant audit issues, there is therefore a need to get orientation as well as confirmation. An interview can very well be justified by a combination of these purposes.

Orientation requires a more unstructured approach, with the auditor having maximum flexibility where necessary to explore themes that have not previously been considered and to deeply probe the responses that are given.

In this phase, the auditor generally does not have a priori hypotheses or deep knowledge of the project or activity. Confirmation, on the other hand, needs a fairly structured approach in order to have important facts and conditions verified.

2.2. IN THE EXECUTION PHASE

Pursue the audit objectives

In the execution phase of the audit, when the objective is often a more focused examination of an area, in order to capture simple, factual data, to document or clarify certain points or to test hypotheses, interviews will typically have a more structured form.

The aim is often to obtain evidence (documents, opinions and ideas) that relate to the audit's objectives, to confirm facts and to corroborate data from other sources. The auditor has a firm grasp of the issues he wants to cover and should know in advance what type of data he/she wants.

2.3. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The interview as a data collection method has the following strengths and weaknesses:

Table 1:

| | STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Interviews in general | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather data on various complex issues in an efficient way - Take into account situational and individual factors - Provides information that is not available from other sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constitute the lowest form of evidence, which needs to be supplemented by evidence from other sources. - Can be difficult to draw general conclusions |
| <i>Unstructured interview</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Useful for theory building - Offers rich data - Well suited to complex subjects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can be time intensive - Additional effort involved in data analysis - Difficult to quantify data |
| <i>Structured interview</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Useful for hypothesis testing - Generates breadth of data - More easily quantified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited options can bias responses - Need very good advance knowledge - Difficult to reach deep understanding |

SECTION 3: HOW TO CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

For interviews to be successful, it requires some initial work and sufficient consideration of the different stages, which entail initial preparations, formulating questions, developing an interview guide, organising the interview, managing the interview situation, and documenting and analysing the information obtained from the interviews.

3.1. INITIAL PREPARATIONS

3.1.1. Define the objective of the interview

Generally, the first step of the preparations is to define the objectives of the interview. What is the purpose of the interview, and what are the priority areas of information needed?

In the planning phase:

- gather facts

In the planning phase, initial preparations would normally focus on two things.

Firstly, gather all basic facts. These facts are normally of the type which cannot be contested, e.g., which regulations are applicable, organigrammes, changes which are foreseen. The interviewer needs to strive to develop a rather exhaustive list. These listed facts will need to be confirmed, or rejected, by the interviewee.

- search for different opinions.

Secondly, gather all relevant information on opinions about the subject. This kind of information is normally subjective. Here it is not really possible to establish an exhaustive list. It is more important that the interviewer tries to find opinions from different sources and preferably with different views - e.g. pros and cons. This should form the basis for getting an orientation on the subject. The objective is often quite open and the interview used to inform the development of an audit programme.

In the execution phase,

- consult the audit questions

In the execution phase, the interview will normally be narrower and the information needed is often indicated by the detailed audit questions. It is therefore necessary to consult these in order to acquire a thorough understanding of what information will be needed.

3.1.2. Information needs

- be updated on already available information

So, no matter at what stage the interview takes place, the auditor should examine what information is available on the area. Advice could, e.g., be sought from colleagues or outside experts. Being updated will make the interview more efficient and effective.

- consider how the data will be used later

It is often useful to consider how the information is to be used. The structure of the interview will determine what type of analysis can be done afterwards. It is considered good practice to prepare for most of the data analysis at this early stage. This includes considering e.g. how to group and codify the data and which methods to use for analysis, what questions the analysis should answer.

Thorough preparation will help later in drafting the interview guide, particularly in deciding which questions are necessary and which are superfluous for the later analysis and presentation of the data.

3.1.3. The interviewee

Selection of interviewees

Normally, before drafting the detailed questions, it should be decided who to interview. In some cases it will be evident, for example Commission officials responsible for specific programmes. In other cases, it might be relevant to talk to several people, and a selection must be done. The selection should be made on the basis of the knowledge acquired of the area, and involve some criteria to make sure relevant areas/programmes, hierarchical levels, are sufficiently covered. The number of interviews depends on the subject of the audit, and the resources available.

Find out information about the interviewee

Having selected the interviewee, it is important to find out information, if possible, about the person, but certainly about the organisation or programme he/she works with. This will facilitate the communication in the interview.

Consider what role the interviewee actually has

It is important to consider what might be the particular interests, or roles, of the interviewees in the interview situation. In different situations, the same interviewee can be regarded as an expert, stakeholder (with certain interests), or just an auditee. In fact, an interviewee can play different roles even within the same interview. For example, when interviewing an official in the Commission in the planning phase, he/she should be regarded as an expert when it comes to confirmation. In the case of orientation he/she can be regarded as either an expert or a stakeholder depending on whether answers are factual or opinions. In all other cases, he/she would normally be regarded as an auditee. This is important to have in mind when planning, conducting, and analysing the results of an interview.

Also the interviewer can take on different roles

It is equally important for the interviewer to reflect on the different roles he/she would take on, while working for these different purposes. In pursuing the orientation purpose, and perhaps also for confirmation, the interviewer would need more to approach the task with the mind of a pure researcher, whereas in carrying out the examination task the role is that of the traditional auditor.

3.2. CONSIDER HOW TO FORMULATE QUESTIONS

Open or closed questions Before starting working with the detailed questions it is recommended to consider different styles of asking questions. Two main approaches can be chosen: open questions or closed questions.

The objective of the open questions is to let the interviewee speak freely to develop their point of view. These questions allow the interviewees to express themselves in their own words, and are suitable for obtaining qualitative information. Key words/phrases are: why?, how?, what do you think of...?

For example: *“how does the system of internal control function?”*

Open questions Open questions are suitable for exploring topics and collecting information in unstructured interviews, but require more work when it comes to coding and analysing the responses.

Closed questions The objective of closed questions is to obtain precise, limited or quantifiable answers that can easily be categorised. The answers to these questions will often be more restricted, like a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or they can take the form of short facts or a choice of defined alternatives. Key words/phrases are e.g.: when, where, how many and what.

For example: *“does the system of internal control of the project function well?”*

Suitable for more structured interviews Closed questions limit the expression of the interviewee, and sometimes induce the answer. But they are often suitable for more structured interviews where one seeks to confirm and corroborate facts. The answers will also usually be easier to categorise for subsequent analysis.

Different styles of questions Different styles of questions provoke different types of answers, and it is important to be aware of the character of answer required before starting to develop the questions. Some audits are concerned with establishing the facts and chronology of events, and consequently knowledge based questions and time-frame questions are very useful.

In contrast, quality of service examinations focus on the opinions of interviewees in relation to the area studied. In this case, opinion, feeling or sensory based questions should be posed. The following is a brief guide to different question styles:

Table 2:

| Style of question | Example |
|---------------------------|--|
| Knowledge-based question | - <i>When was the grant awarded?</i> |
| Time-frame-based question | - <i>How were these grants awarded last year?</i> |
| Opinion-based question | - <i>Do you think the grant scheme is fair?</i> |
| Feeling-based question | - <i>Do you feel comfortable about the administrative arrangements for the grant scheme?</i> |
| Sensory-based question | - <i>What do you see when you visit the sites where grant money is used?</i> |
| Experience-based question | - <i>How long have you been awarding grants?</i> - <i>What is your background?</i> |
| Behaviour-based questions | - <i>Do the grant recipients treat the attached conditions seriously?</i> |

3.3. DEVELOPING AN INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preparation of the interview guide

Questions should be organised into an interview guide, which is a sort of questionnaire, where all the questions and all other important information for the interviews should be listed. It should usually be sorted into sections, whose order is set out so as to focus the interviewees' attention. The format of the guide depends on the type of the interviews - a more structured interview demands the drawing up of a detailed interview guide, while a more unstructured interview entails a sort of checklist of essential topics/questions to cover in conversations with key informants.

Ordering of questions

As a piece of general advice, it is useful to divide the interview guide into different topics or areas. It can be useful to start out with some general and more open questions and then move on to specific topics addressed by more specific questions. Any sensitive issues, such as potentially difficult personnel issues, should be placed towards the end of the interview, when the interviewee is a bit 'warmed up' on the subject, and feels more comfortable in the interview situation.

3.3.1. In the planning phase of the audit

For an interview in the planning phase, the guide should normally contain elements for both confirmation and orientation. The decision as to whether it should be divided into two such sections, or divided in another way, based on different subjects, is up to the interviewer.

Confirmation part should be structured

The confirmation part should be very structured. Table X gives examples of information that normally needs to be confirmed. In many cases, several or all of these examples are vital to include.

Table 3:

| Area | Facts to be confirmed |
|-------------------|--|
| policies | - <i>applicable regulations</i> - <i>stable situation, i.e. no recent changes or changes expected</i> |
| organisation | - <i>responsibilities</i> - <i>reporting hierarchy</i> - <i>stable situation, i.e. no recent changes or changes expected</i> |
| procedures | - <i>internal/external requirements</i> - <i>stable situation, i.e. no recent changes or changes expected</i> |
| other information | - <i>no recent or upcoming evaluations or audits</i> |

Flexibility in orientation part

For the orientation part, questions should allow for flexibility but not be too unfocused. Therefore, it is recommended to identify a number of themes to explore. Preferably, certain preliminary hypotheses could be developed and included in the list of questions.

This technique requires the auditor to have a wide general knowledge of the area in order to be able to quickly assimilate information received during the interview, and thereby open up new lines of thinking which can be directly pursued during the session.

Include supporting information in annex

It is recommended to include in the guide, perhaps as an annex, any material that might be helpful, such as organigrammes, details about different sources from which information has been gathered. The development of the discussion is hard to foresee and it is easier to have a fruitful discussion if one can be very precise in references to, e.g., regulations, documents, reports.

Audit questions should be starting point

3.3.2. In the execution phase

For an interview in the execution phase, the starting point for developing interview questions is most often the audit questions. The Court of Auditor's Performance Audit Manual points out that it is appropriate to set out the audit objectives in the form of questions that the audit is to answer and then develop a hierarchy of sub-questions that allow each overall question to be answered (See also the guideline on Developing the audit objectives).

It is advisable to start from the lowest possible level of audit sub-questions. The next step is to consider what kind of information is needed to answer these. The questions must be translated into measurable elements, and the different data and information needed to answer these should be listed.

Potential interview questions to elicit this information should then be developed. Below is an example of identifying, developing and selecting questions, based on the ECA's Audit Planning Memorandum (APM) on devolution¹:

Example 1:

Audit sub-question:

"Was there a clear and reliable analysis of existing resources in delegations prior to devolution?"

Example of information needed to answer this:

1. The assessments made by External Relations Directorate General and Europe Aid of resources in delegations prior to devolution
2. The sufficiency of the resources in delegations
3. Comparison of the present situation with that prior to devolution

Examples of interview questions developed to obtain this information:

1. In your opinion, was the analysis of the existing resources in delegations prior to devolution sufficient?
2. What difficulties or deficiencies were there in analysing the resources?
3. In comparison to the previous situation, do you think the resources situation is satisfactory?
- If NO, why not?

Pre-test the interview guide

In the process of developing the interview guide, the questions should be tested on colleagues, experts or other advisors and it is advisable to run a pre-test of the completed interview guide on a limited number of people.

These could be potential interviewees that are not included in the sample to be interviewed. A pre-test like this will provide a critical view of the form and content of the interview guide, and makes it possible to assess its relevance.

In addition, it gives useful practice in running the interviews, and can also give a preliminary indication of the likely answers and reactions to the questions. Furthermore, it gives an opportunity to test methods of analysis.

When the pre-test is completed and relevant conclusions are drawn, the final version of the interview guide can be drawn up and the methods of analysis can, if necessary, be adjusted.

¹ Devolution is a form of [decentralization](#). In the EU context devolution is granting of powers from the Commission HQ in Brussels to the EC Delegations in non-Member States in order to improve the aid effectiveness.

3.4. ORGANISING THE INTERVIEW

It is also important to organise the interview properly both in terms of the teamwork between the interviewers and in terms of practical arrangements.

| | |
|---|--|
| Organisation of the interview team | The size of the team can vary, but teams of two persons are frequently used. Single interviewing should be avoided as well as a team of too many people, which can be intimidating for the interviewee. |
| Ensure common approach for different teams | If there is more than one team of interviewers covering a series of interviews in the audit, it is essential for the different teams to work together in the initial phase. It can be useful for the teams to go through the interview guide together, rehearsing the question session and the different tasks to perform, in order to secure a mutual platform and a common approach. |
| Division of tasks | It is also necessary to discuss the interaction between the interviewers and the division of tasks. As a rule, it can be useful that one of the team gives attention to the interviewee, asking the questions, while another person focus on taking notes, keeping an eye on the interview guide to make sure all major topics are covered, and where necessary contribute with follow-up questions. |
| Make a time plan | The entire interview situation needs to be planned and practical arrangements need to be taken care of. How much time to plan for the interviews will vary depending on the type of interviews and the particular situation. The steps in the interview preparations are not necessarily sequential; many of them can be overlapping. Although the activities are not additive, all of the steps are time-consuming and it is important to consider all the individual stages when making an estimation of the time needed. The planning must, e.g. allow time for potential re-scheduling of appointments, and for writing out the minutes from each of the interviews. This aspect is particularly important when several interviews are planned for the same day. If possible, it should be ensured that there is sufficient time between interviews for the audit team to sit down undisturbed and reflect on the outcome of each interview. If the interviews are carried out in the same building it is advisable to explain to the organisation visited that a separate meeting room is needed for the audit team. |
| communication with the auditee | It is important to notify the interviewees in good time, and give a brief overview of the topics that will be covered in the interview and give an estimation of time needed for the interview. It can often be constructive to send the questions in advance, so they have time to prepare for the interview. This can be particularly useful if there is a need to gather information from documents or other sources so as to be able to answer the questions, and also if the questions concern events in the past that could be difficult to recall instantly. It can be useful to keep in mind that, in certain instances, especially when facing a challenging interview, sending the complete interview guide to the interviewee in advance can pose the risk that the interviewee may use this to take the lead at the interview session. |

3.5. THE INTERVIEW SITUATION

For the interview to be successful, it is important to make an effort to establish and maintain a good climate for communication. Cooperation and a positive attitude from the auditee significantly increase the prospect of getting the required information in the interview.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Opening the interview session | Always open the interview session by thanking the interviewee for the reception and introduce each team member and their responsibilities. Take the opportunity at this stage to exchange business cards with the interviewee. Knowing and using names correctly will facilitate communication. |
| Set the background | Make sure that the auditee has a clear understanding of what ECA is and the role it plays within the European Union. Take the time to present the audit, including the objectives, scope and tasks. Also explain the purpose of the interview and how it is planned to be conducted. This is also important since it will clarify the course of the meeting, who is leading the meeting and what information is expected from the interview. Having an understanding of the purpose of the interview and its context might help the interviewee to give better and more relevant answers. Also guarantee confidential treatment of the answers where necessary or possible, or else explain how the data will be used. |
| Steering the interview | There will often be considerable variation between interviewees when it comes to how much they talk, whether they keep to the topic, or easily get distracted or diverted. It is the interviewer's task to maintain control and steer the conversation to get the required information. Normally one of the team members should be the interview leader. During the interview there can be a change of leader with one of the other team members present taking on the role. Preferably such changes should be foreseen in the initial presentation and clearly announced when it takes place. |
| Summarise and confirm | Refer back to the interview guide throughout the session and lead the interviewee back on track if necessary. A good way to keep control is to summarise the answers from the auditee at the end of each section of the interview and get confirmation that the information has been properly understood before moving on to the next step. This may also be a way to build up "the case" and detect inconsistencies later on in the session. |

Team work is important

Good team work and communication within the interview team are also fundamental for keeping control and ensuring the best possible result. Before as well as during the interview, all team members should know their task and responsibilities.

The interview team leader shall make sure that any comments or additional questions from the team members are heard, e.g. at the point when wrapping up the sub-sections. The one who is responsible for taking notes must give notice to the team member if he/she needs extra time to note down the minutes. The interview leader may also need support to ensure that all questions are covered.

Clarify answers

Often answers need to be clarified by follow-up questions. If the answers are vague, the interviewer must ask questions to make the answer more specific; if the answers are too complex, or involve terminology or jargon that are difficult to comprehend, the interviewer must ask the interviewee to clarify. If the answers are off the subject, the interviewer should ask again. Below are some examples of useful approaches to follow-up questions:

| Approaches to follow-up questions | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Clarify important/vague points: | - <i>Is this different from that...?</i> |
| Pursue inconsistencies: | - <i>Didn't you say that...?</i> |
| Agree understanding: | - <i>So, what you mean is...</i> |
| Contrast with different perspectives: | - <i>The Delegation thinks this...</i> |
| "What ifs": | - <i>Would it be the same if...?</i> |
| Deconstruct opinions: | - <i>Why do you say that? Could you clarify?</i> |
| Get examples: | - <i>On what occasion did this happen? Can you give an example of...?</i> |
| Don't ignore the signals: | - <i>Details, non-verbal, repetition</i> |
| Exploit complaints: | - <i>How does the new system cause you problems?</i> |
| Make assumptions visible: | - <i>What is the basis for that...?</i> |
| "Unpack" organisational rhetoric: | - <i>What do you mean by "cascade"?</i> |

Facts or opinion?

In cases where it is unclear, it will also be necessary to clarify if given information is factual or the expression of an opinion. If it is an opinion, it should further be clarified as to whether it is a personal opinion or if it represents an official view of the organisation.

Attention to non-verbal language

It is also important that the interviewer is aware of characteristic non-verbal cues such as change in voice, facial expressions, or gestures, since as much as half of the communication that takes place during the interview is conveyed by these modes of expression. Failure to understand these cues may result in miscommunication.

Handling difficult situations

Some interviews can have a particularly challenging context, e.g. when the aim is to confirm or document negative findings. This may require extra careful consideration from the interviewer's side. A few important points can be especially useful to keep in mind in those cases:

- Always show a respectful attitude towards the auditee.
- It can be constructive to recognise the auditee's difficulties, and mention their strong points or previous success.
- Recognise disagreement, but do not get caught in unconstructive discussions, trying to convince the auditee.
- Refrain from using sarcasm or irony.
- Do not impose opinions on the auditees.
- As far as possible, avoid interrupting the auditee.
- Be aware of linguistic difficulties or ambiguities.
- Always make an effort to end the interview on a positive note.

Also, when dealing with audit interviews, suspicion of fraud or other illegal matters may emerge. It is important that all auditors are well aware of the Court of Auditor's decisions on what actions to take in this regard.

Closing the interview session

It is good practice to be clear about the scope and limits of the interview. Therefore, before closing the interview, it is recommended to check that all questions have been answered. The interviewer may sometimes find it useful to return to the main questions to get confirmation of the answers given. It is good practice to round off the interview with a short summary of the main conclusions from the interview.

It is also recommended, if applicable, to agree with the interviewee how and when further contacts should be made for supplying additional information, etc. Then the interviewee should be offered the opportunity to add any comments. After that it is polite to inform the interviewee of future plans for the audit. Finally, it is time to thank them once again for their time and declare the formal interview session closed.

3.6. DOCUMENTING AND ANALYSING THE RESULTS

| | |
|--|--|
| Documentation is important | <p>In order to be able to make use of the data arising from interviews, it is essential that the answers are properly recorded and documented. The final phase consists of interpreting, and analysing the information given by the interviewee and comparing with information obtained from other interviews.</p> |
| Record of participants | <p>Initially, the interviewer should note down who participated in the interview (interviewers, interviewees), location, date and time of the interview. The interviewees contact details could also be useful to note, in case there is a need to get back to the interviewee to clarify specific points from the interview.</p> |
| Minutes | <p>The minutes are the tangible evidence obtained from the interview. It is important that sufficient notes are taken. Take time to carefully note down key words and important facts, and avoid being stressed. A lone interviewer should not be afraid of taking pauses in the questioning to be able to note down the answers. Make sure the interviewee understands the importance of this. Do not try to record everything being said in the interview, but make a synthesis of opinions and conclusions. It is also wise to note down, on a separate list, documents or other evidence that the interviewee, during the session, agrees to supply at a later stage. Notes should be typed out soon after the interview, putting the answers into relevant categories.</p> |
| Audio or video | <p>Using audio or video recording of the interviews is an option, but this should be approached with great caution and only done with permission from the interviewee. This might make interviewees feel uncomfortable, and will in any case involve a lot of work after the interviews, as notes and a summary of the interviews will still have to be made for data analysis purposes.</p> |
| Confirm minutes | <p>To avoid controversies at a later stage, it is advisable to have the interviewee confirm the minutes from the meeting. Having the possibility to correct and approve the minutes afterwards may also make the interviewee feel less restrained during the interview.</p> |
| Qualitative data analysis | <p>Interview minutes should be typed out in comparable format, adapted to the later data analysis. The main challenge in analysing data from interviews is to interpret what has been said, and sort this out into different categories or topics. Usually, the approach will be some form of qualitative data analysis. One should look for common aspects of information, things that fit together or examples of the same underlying problem, issue or concept in the interviews.</p> <p>As mentioned earlier, it is important to consider that the interviewee may play different roles in different situations and this must be taken into account when analysing the results.</p> |
| Identify topics of interest | <p>The process starts with reading and re-reading a substantial number of the written down responses in order to interpret the text and identify particular topics of interest. The data should be sorted into themes, developing some scheme to categorise the answers. This process involves a transformation of the data from the particular to the more general, and similarly a movement from the descriptive, summarising what the interviewee says, to the interpretative, involving making an attempt to identify what the information actually means.</p> |
| Interpret information | <p>In essence, the elaborated data can be embodied in very broad categories, like positive-negative-neutral, or they can resemble a set of alternative responses to the question. An example is potential answers to the following question:</p> <div data-bbox="529 1303 1501 1487" style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #e0f7fa; padding: 5px;"><p><i>What difficulties or deficiencies are there in analysing the resources?</i></p><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Relevant data did not exist;</i>- <i>Difficulties in accessing relevant data;</i>- <i>Lack of cooperation from officials;</i>- <i>etc...</i></div> |
| Assign responses to different categories | <p>Rules must then be developed for assigning responses to the different categories. Even with a set of rules, people may categorise answers differently. Therefore, ideally several people should go through each completed interview and categorise the answers, ensuring comparability.</p> <p>It is important that the interpretations being made are transparent, so the reader can see very clearly how the interviewer's interpretations of the data relate to the data. It is also important that the interpretations are plausible. There is no totally 'right' interpretation of any qualitative data set, but some interpretations may be more persuasive than others.</p> |
| Important considerations in interpreting data | <p>When interpreting interview data, it is important to be aware that all responses to interview questions are influenced by preconception and contextual factors that need to be unravelled. What the interviewee expresses will be influenced e.g. by their background, their expectations, their experience of things discussed. A lot of things frequently distort communication between people, and a few facts are important to keep in mind when analysing/using the data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not everything said by the respondent is heard by the interviewer;• Not everything heard by the interviewer is understood;• Not everything said by the respondent will be remembered or recorded;• Not everything the respondent says can be corroborated by an independent source. |

ANNEX : CHECKLIST FOR INTERVIEW PREPARATION

| Checklist for interview preparation | Comment |
|---|---------|
| 1. Has initial research been done? | |
| 2. Has the purpose of the interview been defined? | |
| 3. Has the type of interview been decided? | |
| 4. Has it been discussed how information obtained will be used? | |
| 5. Have there been preparations for data analysis? | |
| 6. Have interviewees been selected? | |
| 7. Have the interview teams been selected? | |
| 8. Has the interview team discussed how to conduct the interview (e.g. division of responsibilities)? | |
| 9. If there are different teams, has there been co-ordination between the teams? | |
| 10. Has an interview guide been prepared? | |
| 11. Have interviewees been notified and informed about the purpose and time required for the meeting? | |
| 12. Have practical arrangements or services needed been requested from the interviewee organisation? | |
| 13. Has the interview guide been pre-tested? | |