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**LIVEWHAT**

**Living with Hard Times**

**How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political Consequences**

# Guidelines for interviews with national key informants (Deliverable 2.2.)

**WP 2: Policy responses to crises**

**Workpackage Leading Institution:UU**

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This document defines a general approach to conducting interviews with national informants. It defines which informants to approach and the themes around which interviews should revolve as well as pointing to some questions that should be used as a point of departure.

Finally the document includes instructions for making the country report, which will be later summarised in the integrated report by the UU team (Deliverable 2.4).

We have agreed to have 10-15 interviews per country and will focus on five policy fields. The interviews will focus on the post-2008 crisis period up until 2014.

Each country team will perform interviews in all five policy areas. However, as long as all areas are covered teams are free to distribute the number of interviews conducted freely across the fields studied so as to be able to capture the most relevant issues in their national context. If there are no particular reasons for focusing more (or less) on one of the policy areas teams should aim towards an even distribution of interviews across areas. The policy areas are

• Labour policies and rights

• Social policies (health, social aid)

• Tax policies and finance policies regarding housing

• Family policies and costs of education

• Citizens’ rights and rights depletion regarding protests

**Identifying key informants in national cases**

**Whom to interview?**

**It might be easier to take a concrete policy reform as a point of departure when locating informants.** Informants might be more comfortable discussing specific policies, rather than policies adopted or changed as a response to crisis in general. They will have more precise views on how the specific policies or reforms functioned, who was involved in the adoption process, what the reactions were, and what could have been done differently.

**Interviews will be carried out in government agencies as well as in government committees, which deal with these specific issues.** Informants should be selected so that 3-4 officials are interviewed for every policy field. Two-three respondents should be selected from the government agencies which implement the policies as they have the best knowledge about the functioning of the policies i.e. which groups were targeted and whether this actually worked as planned. They are also involved in suggesting the proposals for changing the policies.

The inclusion of interviewees from agencies is of primary importance, and can be considered mandatory. At least one respondent should be selected from the political level of government committees (e.g., ministry, department). It is likely that will get different answers to the same questions from these different sources and these would also give us better picture of the origin and effects of the specific reforms.

Even though the political and bureaucratic systems differ across our countries, every country has some form of government committee which prepare decisions that are then presented to parliament for voting. In the Swedish case such committees are put together proportionally to reflect the distribution of seats in the parliament but these are chaired by a non-politically appointed chairperson. The primary option should be to approach such a non-politically appointed official. If there is no such a committee in your country, opt for the non-political official at the ministry/department responsible for the policy issue.

In case the majority of officials are political ones i.e. change together with the change of the government, it might be reasonable to choose the political official. Recall, however, that It might be more difficult to get an even handed assessment of policy change from politically appointed officials. To the extent possible interviewees should be identified that worked during the reform process and that are more likely to have first-hand impressions of what prompted specific responses, who was involved etc.

**Agency informants: Mid-level officials rather than directors.** Mid-level officials generally have more in-depth understanding of specific programs and reforms, and know how they are implemented. Higher ranking officials tend to have less insights in the actual implementation process and are more likely to serve general ‘catch phrases’ which we can easily find from the media. Finding informants among mid-level officials might also be less time consuming.

Due to the country differences this guide does not define in detail where to locate informants. It is thus *up to national teams* to make an assessment of which specific agencies to approach and which informants might be most relevant to talk to, and be able to justify the approach chosen.

**Practical issues**

**Contact letters to interviewees** should be adapted to individual respondents to make clear what their insights and expertise might contribute to the aims of the project. Letters should always include a link to the LIVEWHAT webpage so that contact letters can be kept reasonably short but still offer the possibility to find out more about the project.

**Each team is expected to follow the ethical rules and guidelines** that apply in their national context and at their university, for conducting and recording interviews, as well as those for storing and processing interview material.

**Interview themes and questions**

**Our aim is to learn about large scale reforms that countries adopted and implemented in response to the economic crisis.** These questions listed below point out the general focus of interviews.

Obviously, answers from different officials will differ and will prompt follow-up questions that might lead to the exploration of aspects of these issues which was not previously thought of.

Our respondents are specialists of their policy issue, so they should be able to inform us about the most important policies/reforms as well as their general outcomes:

- What in your view were the most important reforms made in your specific policy area to deal with the effects of the economic crisis?

- What were the main problems with the rules that already existed?

- Which were the main options discussed in addressing these problems?

- What were the main arguments for the reforms actually chosen?

- In your view, to what extent were these reforms successful?

- In hindsight, what could have been done differently?

- Unexpected negative effects for specific social groups? Unexpected interaction effects with other reforms?

Respondents should also know to what extent other governmental agencies / international agencies or non-governmental stakeholders were involved in shaping the reforms under discussion:

- In devising these reforms did you collaborate with other government agencies?

- What was the role and influence of the EU in these policy reforms?

- In devising the reforms were other non-governmental stakeholders involved?

- If so, which (interest groups? Unions? Professional associations? Business sector associations?).`

- How, in your view, did these groups shape the reforms made?

- What where the main lines of disagreement between the different actors involved in the process?

- Which actors had the most discernible impact on the final policy?

- If the policy outcome was the result of a compromise, how was this compromise found?

Even though we will learn about the reactions to these reforms from other sources (WP3), it is important to get the officials’ perspective on that as well:

- What is your impression of how these reforms were received?

- By the general public?

- By those mainly affected by the policies?

- Did you receive direct targeted reactions from particular groups of stakeholders? From who? In what form? Were these reactions expected?

**Country reports or how to report interviews**

Start with a brief contextualization of the political system as part of the justification for how informants have been selected. This should include a brief note on the formal role of government committees and agencies in the selected policy areas. For each interview include names, position, as well as a short description of the governmental body where the informant works. This also includes how long the informant has worked in this position and possibly also where s/he has worked previously. The description of the agency should include its main tasks and to what extent it is made up of politically appointed officials/or not.

The report should include a separate list of all interviewees in the following format:

Name, title, government body, unit, place of interview, date.

EX: Larsson, Johanna, Policy analyst, Swedish Social Insurance Agency, Housing Policy Unit, Stockholm, 2014.04.27.

Each country team should retain a list of all the respondents contacted. In the report there is however only necessary to include the list of those with who interviews were actually carried out.

Interview summaries should be structured according to the four policy fields chosen for the study.

• Labour policies

• Social policies (health, social aid)

• Finance and tax policies regarding housing

• Family policies and costs of education

• Citizens’ rights and rights depletion regarding protests

Under the headings of these policy areas *each individual* interview should be summarized at a maximum of one page. It is actually less time-consuming than making some integrated overview, plus it will provide better opportunities for further comparative analysis of their statements. It is fine to include some especially good and illustrative quotations!

It is important to note that one informant may appear under several different headings as they could end up talking about both for instance labor policies and tax reforms. In such a case the part of an interview which concerns different policy areas should be summarized under the respective headings.