Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19: Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

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Abstract: Research designs require flexibility, and adjustments made to the designs do not always have to lead exclusively to disadvantages. In this research note, we would like to share our reflections on the impact of COVID-19 on the conduct of qualitative interviews with irregular migrants. Since these considerations were developed in close connection with one of our own projects, in which fieldwork is currently in the planning phase, we believe they may be relevant to similar projects. We include a brief remark on the current situation of irregular migrants in different (European) countries, as well as an assessment of the methodological feasibility of qualitative face-to-face interviews with irregular migrants and possible alternatives to this method such as remote and online interview formats. We conclude with insights on our recommendation to rely on a mixed-mode approach, which allows us to use various remote interview modes, thus providing the necessary flexibility to adapt to profound health and social crises such as COVID-19.

Table of Contents

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

1. Introduction

Interviews are a method commonly used in the qualitative social sciences. The meetings between interviewees and interviewers are oftentimes arranged face-to-face. As a research group that was in the organizational phase of such interviews when the global spread of COVID-19 became apparent, we would like to share our reflections on the coordination of qualitative interviews in lieu of the current situation. Especially central to our considerations is an assessment of the feasibility of the originally planned methodological approach and of the ethical principles that now need to be reconsidered very carefully. [1]

To briefly describe our project, we had previously planned to conduct personal qualitative interviews (face-to-face) with irregular migrants in Austria, Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Jordan, and Libya. When speaking of irregular migrants, we refer to those who cross borders without proper authority[1]. According to this broad definition, irregular migrants are a diverse group ranging from refugees who may be granted asylum status or subsidiary protection at a later stage to people who are not in the process of forced migration and who may face a negative asylum decision. While the term illegal migration is often used synonymously with irregular migration, it should be noted that illegal migration primarily covers cases of human smuggling and human trafficking (LOPEZ-LUCIA, 2015). In our study, the term "irregular" refers to the act of migration, the act of irregular entry, but not necessarily to irregular stay. This means that our research participants are people whose stay in a country has either already been legally registered (e.g., by filing an asylum application) or who do not need to fear action by law enforcement agencies just because of their stay in a respective country. [2]

Using a multi-sited research approach recommended for research on transnational migration (see, e.g., AMELINA, 2010), interviewers, as native speakers of the interviewees' mother tongues, would have been trained in Austria and would have traveled to the reception centers. The field time was scheduled for the second half of 2020 until March 2021. Thus, the worldwide spread of COVID-19 since the beginning of 2020 and the current situation has had a direct impact on our work plan. The reflections made in regards to this case can also be useful for similar projects. [3]

As a general remark, all considerations, whether organizational or methodological, must be understood from an ethical premise. From the very beginning, it has been our utmost priority that our research does no harm to our research subjects (i.e., irregular migrants). Since ethical reflexivity must be understood as a key component of qualitative research practice, ethical questions, which are usually not easily or definitively answered, have to be interpreted and evaluated repeatedly throughout the research process (ROTH & VON UNGER, 2018, §4). Considering the current pandemic and the rate at which it is spreading, including the risk of pre-symptomatic transmission and the fact

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1   See https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms [Accessed: November 11, 2020].

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

that there is currently no vaccine or effective medication against the virus, we face a particular challenge in this regard. [4]

In an article published in mid-March, FAVAS, CHECCHI and WALDMAN (2020) examined possible strategies to contain COVID-19 in low-income settings and among displaced populations. The authors indicated that the impact of COVID-19 on low-income countries and people in humanitarian crises could be far more severe than in high-income countries. Besides the urgent recommendation to shield high-risk populations, e.g., people over 60 years of age, FAVAS et al. also pointed out that, realistically, distance measures would only have a sufficient effect if most of the non-essential workers were working from home or not at all. In a sense, this then poses the question of the extent to which our research work can be considered *essential* in the methodological *form* currently proposed. [5]

In the following section, we provide an overview of the situation of refugees in times of the COVID-19 pandemic and briefly address the development of COVID-19-related travel restrictions in Europe that directly impact the implementation of our planned approach. In Sections 3 and 4, we focus on a methodological comparison of different qualitative interview methods and discuss a case-specific conclusion for an adapted methodological design, which might be helpful for similar projects in Section 5. [6]

2. Reports on the Impact of COVID-19 on Asylum Systems, Reception Centers, and Travel Restrictions

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the European asylum systems and reception centers, as well as on the freedom to travel, have a major impact on qualitative research with irregular migrants in terms of both content and implementation. We will briefly discuss each predicament below. [7]

2.1 The asylum system

UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, referred to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the situation of refugees and asylum seekers on its homepage and in several reports[2]. Following these reports, measures to contain COVID-19 such as physical distancing and restrictions on movements and gatherings, have had an impact on how asylum systems in Europe function regarding registration of new asylum applications and documents, status determination, and judicial reviews. In general, reception capacities in some European countries have already been under pressure for some time, a situation that is now being worsened by the COVID-19 crisis[3]. In some countries, pandemic-related measures have led to an effective suspension of the right to seek asylum[4]. As the risk of virus transmission is particularly high in

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2   See, e.g., https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76447 [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

3   See https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/4/5ea68bde4/coronavirus-unhcr-offers-practical-recommendations-support-european-countries.html [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

4   See https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76447 [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

crowded reception centers or confined spaces, some countries have attempted to reduce these risks by creating additional accommodation capacities or implementing similar initiatives[5]. At the same time, however, it has also been reported that various national measures have far-reaching adverse effects on irregular migrants, including the widespread misuse of immigrant detention, an increase in the risk of sexual violence, discriminatory restrictions concerning health and social services, and a severe loss of livelihood, all of which exacerbate the precarious living conditions of many refugees[6]. [8]

As indicated by various sources, COVID-19-related restrictions on freedom of movement and their imposed isolation have a severe impact on the often already fragile mental health of refugees and migrants[7] (for Turkey, see MURDOCK, 2020). All of these developments coincide with the effects of COVID-19-related restrictions within the humanitarian sector, including those of access in regards to vulnerable populations, operational capacity, and travel restrictions[8] (MOKDAD, 2020). [9]

2.2 The situation in reception centers

Due to limited access to water, sanitation, and health facilities, refugees and irregular migrants must be considered particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. As reported by SUBBARAMAN (2020), shortly after the onset of the pandemic in mid-April, no major COVID-19 outbreaks had been reported in large refugee centers, but many aid groups warned that an outbreak was likely to occur in the coming months. According to Devon CONE, a representative of the organization Refugees International, measures such as self-isolation or quarantine, which limit the spread of the disease in other parts of the world, simply cannot be implemented in refugee shelters. Annick ANTIERENS, a strategic advisor of the NGO Médecins sans Frontières, similarly explained that epidemics always pose a significant danger to displaced people, but that COVID-19 is particularly dangerous as physical distance and isolation are extremely important (SUBBARAMAN, 2020). The consequences of the pandemic for refugees were fully realized in Greece in September 2020, when COVID-19 infections were reported in the overcrowded migrant camps on the islands of Lesbos and Chios, thus prompting the Greek authorities to impose a lockdown (BURKHARDT, 2020). [10]

With regard to the likelihood of transmission in such precarious settings, BOZORGMEHR et al. (2020) showed that the risk of viral infection in German refugee accommodation centers is considered quite high, similar to that on a

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5   See https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/4/5ea68bde4/coronavirus-unhcr-offers-practical-recommendations-support-european-countries.html [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

6   See https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/4/5ea035ba4/beware-long-term-damage-human-rights-refugee-rights-coronavirus-pandemic.html [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

7   For Italy, see https://www.caritas.eu/life-in-italy-under-covid-19/; for Bosnia and Herzegovina, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/76250 [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

8   See https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/05/21/coronavirus-humanitarian-aid-response [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

cruise ship. The study was based on data collected in 23 shelters with 1,368 confirmed COVID-19 cases in several German federal states. In Germany, COVID-19 outbreaks have repeatedly affected refugee accommodation centers, presenting a significant problem for German authorities to which they still do not have a solution (HENZLER & VON HARDENBERG, 2020). In fact, the German court of Münster criticized the double standards of COVID-19 measures with regard to refugee centers, ruling in favor of a pregnant refugee who claimed that sufficient distancing measures could not be met in the overcrowded refugee accommodation centers[9]. [11]

2.3 Travel legislation and field access

Border controls and closures related to COVID-19 have a direct impact on researchers' field access. In most European countries, these restrictions were numerous and rigorous between March and May 2020. By the beginning of June, they were gradually being lifted, but during the summer and the beginning of fall, travel warnings and travel restrictions increased again[10]. Because of the possibility of a second infection wave, any kind of field research will continue to be characterized by a high level of uncertainty, and will therefore be challenging to conduct in the coming months. Planning field research at a time when field access is restricted requires both a thorough examination of travel restrictions and entry conditions in one's home country as well as in the countries where research is intended to take place. Moreover, sufficient time flexibility to cope with sudden changes regarding these conditions is needed. [12]

3. Methodological and Ethical Considerations Regarding Remote Modes of Interviewing

Considering the current situation and the difficulty of estimating how the pandemic may develop in the coming months, it is useful to evaluate the viability of remote methodological alternatives to the planned face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews have long been ascribed as the gold standard for conducting interviews (OLTMANN, 2016, §2), generally generating a "wider range of data" than remote modes of interviewing via telephone or online; for example, face-to-face interviews allow the researchers to collect and assess non-verbal information and make comments on the surrounding environment, which help to further contextualize the interviews. [13]

While telephone interviews have proven to be of high quality (see, e.g., SCHULZ & RUDDAT, 2012, §40) and a comparable (OLTMANN, 2016, §4) methodological alternative to qualitative face-to-face interviews, there has also been an increase in online forms of qualitative interviewing in recent years (KING, HORROCKS & BROOKS, 2018). The main reasons for using forms of remote interviews in qualitative research are the physical distance between the participants and the

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9 See https://www.dw.com/en/german-court-covid-19-protection-inadequate-at-refugee-home/a-53395710 [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

10 See, e.g., https://www.bmeia.gv.at/reise-aufenthalt/reiseinformation/land/bosnien-und-herzegowina/ [Accessed: June 15, 2020].

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

research team and the problematic availability of the participants. The particular topic under investigation may also prompt researchers to consider alternative interview modes. OLTMANN (2016, §8) pointed out that the research context should be a determining factor regarding decisions on research design and its implementation. For example, in studies that deal with the use of the Internet, an online interview would generate a so-called "contextual naturalness" (MANN & STEWART, 2002, p.604). However, such methodological decisions do not come without potential drawbacks (see Section 3.1). [14]

KING et al. (2018) distinguished between four types of remote qualitative interviews—telephone, remote video, e-mail, and instant messaging—and characterized each by its synchronous or asynchronous nature. Another term used is "mobile methods," which refers to methods that use mobile communication technologies for data collection and can include forms of qualitative interviews as well (KAUFMANN, 2020, p.168). In general, the literature states that the decision to use remote forms of qualitative interviews should not only be based on mere practical reasons, but on the respective sample (OPDENAKKER, 2006, §12) and, ideally, also the research topic. [15]

3.1 The topic and the participants

In the current research project, the primary research interest lies in understanding the interplay between migration-related media use and resulting migration-related perceptions. We aim to find out the extent to which media use before and during migration affects perceptions of potential destination countries and possible migration routes, while also taking into account individual media and information literacy. Thematically, the *contextual naturalness* mentioned above could therefore be applied to media-supported remote interview forms. [16]

In her paper on the use of mobile methods in migration research, KAUFMANN (2020, p.167) mentioned a particularly strong connection between migrants and their smartphones, which needs to be investigated and made useful in a methodological sense. When conducting interviews based on mobile devices, however, it is essential to acknowledge how the method draws on a certain pre-selection of participants. For example, it can be assumed that if the interview is conducted via smartphones, the sample is primarily composed of digitally literate people and that non-cell phone users will likely not be reached. In this regard, STAUDACHER and KAISER-GROLIMUND (2016, p.34) stressed that the depth of data collection often depends on the respondent's media literacy as well as their age, since exchanges with older people via digital formats are often less intensive. In our case, we initially planned to select interviewees regardless of their smartphone ownership, media and information literacy, and age. Thus, the consequences of applying a mobile method to this objective would need to be carefully considered. [17]

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

3.2 Social cues, data depth, and self-disclosure

In contrast to face-to-face interviews, social cues are less prominent or significant in the context of remote forms of interviewing. Social cues are pieces of non-verbal information that can be added to the verbal response and include, for example, voice, intonation, and body language (OPDENAKKER, 2006, §7). CHIUMENTO, MACHIN, RAHMAN and FRITH (2018, p.10) reflected on the method of remote video interviews, emphasizing that adding depth to their collected data was a particular challenge. They also mentioned that interpreting pauses or silence and building relationships with the interviewees were more difficult, partially due to non-visual cues (p.1). Indeed, relationship building is considered to be an essential part of the qualitative interview process, both during the interview and in the later steps of data analysis and interpretation (see, e.g., TIETEL, 2000). [18]

In regards to remote interviewing, one may question the extent to which the interviewee is able to convey his or her authentic self via technical mediation. In this context, SULLIVAN (2012, p.59) argued that today's media-supported interactions are already more closely linked to one's personal situation than many would suspect. Arguing in favor of telephone interviews, OLTMANN (2016, §17) referred to the fact that face-to-face interviews in particular may lead to socially acceptable reactivity and to less authentic answers due to observable characteristics of the interviewer such as class and race. The risk of an interviewee presenting circumstances in a better light is inherent in all forms of the interview, not only in remote ones. Additionally, research results have indicated that the willingness to self-disclose is actually higher when the interviewer and the interviewee do not see each other or when the interview is conducted anonymously (OPDENAKKER, 2006, §20). Moreover, KING et al. (2018, p.136) argued that synchronous text-based interviews trigger spontaneous reactions more often. [19]

When considering adaptations regarding the interview mode, one must also keep in mind that the applied form of qualitative interviews plays an essential role in this decision. The depth of the data or social cues, for example, cannot be perceived as equally important when conducting biographical or ethnographical interviews as compared to qualitative semi-structured interviews. Given that irregular migrants (i.e., our respective sample) belong to a particularly vulnerable group, and that the topic of migration is a very sensitive one, we decided in favor of the use of semi-structured interviews and against biographical interviews, as the basic understanding of the latter may conflict with anonymization (ROTH & VON UNGER, 2018, §18). The guidance provided by such a dialogical form of interviewing focuses on the psychological safety of the respondents. In the course of our semi-structured interviews, irregular migrants will be asked to voice their own views on their media use, recount their media routines in their own words, and describe the impact of their media use on their perceptions of potential destination countries. Specific questions on previous migration experiences or their reasons for migration will be omitted. Therefore, the questions raised should not expose interviewees who potentially experienced

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

trauma or human rights violations in the course of or before their migration to new, unsettling situations. However, the interviews should certainly give the interviewees space to co-determine the conversation. To ensure that this is the case and that the interviewee takes a break or ends the interview if it becomes too stressful, the selection and any possible modifications made to the interview mode must ensure that a dialogical character in the interview is maintained. This excludes the option to switch to survey-like forms, but still offers many options regarding the mode of the qualitative semi-structured interviews. [20]

3.3 Cultural background

If the distance between the participants and the research team is not only physical but also cultural, researchers must also consider how such differences may affect the remote mode of the interview and the corresponding data. There are differing views on the cultural consequences of such an interview setting, however; for example, ELRON and VIGODA (2003, p.330) argued that the lack of face-to-face social cues leads to more significant cultural and language barriers, whereas SHACHAF (2005, p.52) pointed out that respondents felt that e-mail "lessens the negative effects of cultural diversity and reduces intercultural miscommunication." According to CHIUMENTO et al. (2018, p.6), insufficient visual cues in intercultural research contexts reinforce the distance between the white, Western, English-speaking researcher, and the local interpreter and participants. In light of the fact that conducting interviews as an "outsider" to the group under research is generally regarded as more problematic in qualitative research (see, e.g., GANGA & SCOTT, 2006, §7), the physical distance caused by remote methods may be perceived as a further reinforcement of this outsider status. In the research setting of the current case, we therefore conclude that the use of remote interview modes would require an even more intense examination of cultural diversity and its consequences on data collection and interpretation. [21]

3.4 Ethical considerations and data protection

From an ethical perspective, both migration and ethnographic scholars indicate that mobile methods, especially those that are text-based (like WhatsApp for qualitative interviews), democratize the research process (STAUDACHER & KAISER-GROLIMUND, 2016, p.36) and prompt more symmetrical power relations (KAUFMANN, 2020, p.176) because they allow interviewees to respond on their own time and on their own terms. Following this notion, the focus shifts to the participants to become self-reliant actors; the mode and implementation of the conversation are no longer determined solely by the setting defined by the researcher, as is the case in most forms of telephone or remote video interviews. The participants thus gain additional freedoms, regarding, for example, the time of response (KAUFMANN, 2020; STAUDACHER & KAISER-GROLIMUND, 2016; CISNEROS-PUEBLA, FAUX & MEY, 2004). As a result, however, a text-based remote interview may also demand a great deal of time flexibility on the part of the interviewer (KAUFMANN, 2020, p.172). In addition, it might also be difficult for an interviewer to communicate that an interview has ended (STAUDACHER & KAISER-GROLIMUND, 2016, p.176), although the possibility of communication

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

still exists, for example, when exchanging personal WhatsApp numbers or e-mail addresses for conducting the text-based interviews. [22]

CHIUMENTO et al. (2018, pp.8-9) also pointed out that the asymmetry created by remote interviews has ethical implications for the researcher's relative safety as compared to the participants' safety. The ethical principle of protecting participants from harm can thus not be guaranteed. But at the same time, the concept of the researcher protecting participants in an unstable environment is to be perceived as somewhat illusory and therefore must be questioned in any scenario. [23]

In the field of qualitative digital migration studies, LEURS and PRABHAKAR (2018, p.262) mentioned several key ethical questions that need to be considered, including the question of whether researched populations are aware of being studied. In this regard, researchers who have used instant messaging applications, which are typically used to communicate with friends and family, have stressed the importance of clarifying the research context of the conversation conducted with the participants (KAUFMANN, 2020; STAUDACHER & KAISER-GROLIMUND, 2016). Another ethical issue is the need to ensure privacy and data protection when interviews are conducted using technical devices. In this context, researchers are not only responsible for the data security (e.g., encryption and data protection laws), but also for taking into account the participants' necessary familiarity with the software. [24]

4. Overview of Alternative Data Collection Methods

In order to find the most appropriate methodology for our specific research project in the wake of COVID-19, both methodological and organizational/practical considerations need to be examined. Regarding the practical considerations of our research, the assessment by our contact persons in the reception centers is of central importance. Several of these contacts have already been approached and asked for their assessment of the consequences of COVID-19 with respect to the feasibility of the initially planned face-to-face interviews. Their evaluations, published reports on the current situation in reception centers, and the scientific literature review above helped us to create a systematic comparison of methodological options (Table 1). Table 1 contrasts face-to-face interviews with different modes of remote interviewing, including telephone interviews, remote video interviews, synchronous text-based interviews, and asynchronous text-based interviews. All interview types are displayed in a "standard variant." It is possible to compensate for possible shortcomings of an interview type by adding additional specifications or by combining different types.

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

	Method				
Characteristics	Face-to-face	Telephone	Remote video	Synchronous text-based	Asynchronous text-based
Effects on the sample composition (selectivity)	(no)	(no)	(yes)	yes	yes
Possibility of group interviews	yes	(yes)	yes	yes	(yes)
Technical equipment required	(no)	(yes)	yes	yes	yes
Impact of temporary technical problems	no	yes	yes	(yes)	no
Social cues observable	yes	(yes)	yes	(yes)	no
Spontaneous reactions	yes	yes	(yes)	yes	no
Willingness to self-disclose	no	(yes)	no	yes	yes
Informal style of communication	no	no	no	yes	(yes)
Symmetrical power relations	no	no	no	(yes)	yes
Perceived intrusiveness	yes	(yes)	yes	(yes)	no
Perceived comfort/privacy	no	(yes)	no	yes	yes
Easy solutions to show fair return for assistance	yes	(no)	(no)	(no)	(no)
Flexibility	no	(no)	(no)	(yes)	yes
High time expenditure per interview for researchers	no	no	no	(yes)	yes
Researchers' involvement in interview conduct[11]	(no)	(no)	(no)	yes	yes
Possibility of standardized interview situation	yes	no	(yes)	no	no

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11 In case researchers do not speak the language of the interview fluently and do not want to irritate the interviewees in their role as mere observers.

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

	Method				
Ensured participants' undivided attention	yes	(no)	(yes)	no	no
Difficulties ending the interview	no	no	no	yes	yes
Required transcription	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Travel and accommodation costs	yes	no	no	no	no

Table 1: Comparison of different interview modes (based on CHIUMENTO et al., 2018; KAUFMANN, 2020; OPDENAKKER, 2006; STAUDACHER & KAISER-GROLIMUND, 2016). [25]

As there are numerous variations of remote interviews, some of which are a hybrid or combination of different modes, it is not always easy to determine how a particular interview mode relates to a particular characteristic listed in our table. KAUFMANN and PEIL (2020), for example, presented the method of the mobile instant messaging interview (MIMI). This method uses an application (WhatsApp), which does not necessarily require synchronous text-based interaction, but the MIMI nevertheless needs to be classified as a synchronous text-based interview mode. When applying this method, respondents agreed in advance that they would be available on their smartphones on a particular day and that they would respond to text messages, thus leading to synchronous text-based interaction with the research team. Indeed, it must be considered that it is possible to compensate for the potential shortcomings of one interview format by adding additional specifications; for example, while the physical environment in which the respondents are located is typically inaccessible to researchers in text-based interview formats, this problem may be partially solved in the context of modern messaging applications since they easily allow the sending of photos and videos. Another point to consider is that many mobile applications allow sending voice messages. Therefore, participants' ability to write or type is not necessarily a default selection criterion with respect to the sample. To briefly elaborate on an advantage of text-based methods, which is especially relevant for projects where trained interviewers (and not the researchers) conduct the interviews, the research team's physical attendance at each interview is not always feasible in such projects, which is true in our case. Therefore, text-based methods may in fact offer more opportunities for researchers to participate in the implementation of the interviews. They allow researchers to support the interviewers, thus making the interview process a "side-by-side procedure" between interviewer and researcher, an approach that is strongly recommended when taking methodological considerations for multilingual qualitative interviews into account (see, e.g., VAN NES, ABMA, JONSSON & DEEG 2010, p.315). In sum, we were able to contrast the methodological alternatives to face-to-face interviews that are available for implementation, as seen in Table 1, and make a decision regarding

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

the adaption of our research design. This decision is summarized in the following and final section. [26]

5. Concluding Remarks: A Mixed-Mode Design

Given the current uncertainty regarding the development of COVID-19 and the ethical premise of not putting anyone at risk through our research, we decided, for our specific case, to change from our initial plan to conduct only face-to-face interviews to a mixed-mode design that includes remote types of interviews. By mixed-mode design, we understand a flexible implementation of one or several of the compared remote methods in addition to face-to-face interviews wherever safety is guaranteed. This approach not only enables us to meet the needs of all interview participants, but also allows us to take into account the respective local conditions under the given circumstances of COVID-19. When deciding on the specific remote interview mode, we aim to work closely with our contact persons in reception centers, who enable contact with our research participants. In concrete terms, this means that face-to-face interviews, remote video interviews, and very flexible forms of asynchronous text-based interviews will be applied, depending on the situation of the interviewees (i.e., whether they live in crowded reception centers or small private accommodations, whether they are literate, whether they are flexible regarding time or difficult to reach, etc.), the technical requirements, and the capacities of the people responsible in the centers. [27]

Interviewees are therefore provided with several ways to take part, representing a "flexible approach to participation," which is particularly recommended for research with hard-to-reach groups (HOFFMAN, 2009, §32). We aim to compensate for possible shortcomings of the particular interview mode in various ways; for example, to compensate for the lack of insights and context regarding the physical surrounding of our participants in a text-based interview mode (e.g., via instant messaging apps), participants may be asked if they would like to send us a photo of their current accommodation. [28]

Similarly, we would like to enable participants to respond to text-based interviews in the form of voice messages as well, if they so desire. In accordance with the interview type applied, ethical considerations as addressed above need to be reevaluated carefully, and the process of informed consent needs to be adapted to fit the new methodological designs. Similarly, some questions, as proposed in our interview guide, need to be slightly adapted or rephrased. [29]

In conclusion, we argue that the flexibility gained by using a mixed-mode interview design enables us to best deal with the uncertainty researchers face in times of a global pandemic and to further ensure the safety of the research participants who form part of an already vulnerable group. Moreover, the data obtained can provide further insights into the different interview modes and their respective advantages and disadvantages, which will also be reflected in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Drawing on qualitative research logic, there should be no problem analyzing data collected through potentially different interview modes. However, the respective mode will have to be reflected upon

FQS 22(1), Art. 7, Maria Gruber, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Fabienne Lind & Hajo G. Boomgaarden:
Qualitative Interviews with Irregular Migrants in Times of COVID-19:
Recourse to Remote Interview Techniques as a Possible Methodological Adjustment

and discussed during the process of data analysis and interpretation. While this note discusses possible methodological adjustments to qualitative research designs during COVID-19, it can also be seen as a starting point for researchers who consider gathering data remotely from physically inaccessible spaces like war zones, for researchers who are themselves physically unable to travel, or for qualitative research in the context of humanitarian crises more generally. We look forward to continuing the dialogue on the methodological adjustments currently being made in our own and probably many other research projects. [30]

Acknowledgment

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