Focus groups – specification

In each country, five to six focus groups will be conducted. Each group will include eight to ten participants from a different specific social group identified as having particular interests and potential solidarities in relation to state welfare:

- 1 middle-class and 1 working-class group, to reflect class divisions;
- 1 group of retired people and 1 of younger people (under 35), to examine the influence of age cleavages.
- 1 group of women with care responsibilities and managing family and working life, to explore issues of gender and new social risks.
- 1 group of established citizens who are not immigrants (i.e. people who are not first or second-generation immigrants) to explore attitudes to immigration.

Each session should last **two hours**, if possible without a break. It may be more suitable to hold most focus groups in the evening, but one or two could take place during the day (e.g. retired people). There will be no before/after survey. For each focus group, a researcher should be present in order to identify who says what but the researcher should not intervene. If a researcher cannot be present, then the focus group should be video recorded. Recruitment criteria are included at the end of this document.

The main theme of these focus groups is: **Solidarity, responsibility and deservingness: Who should get what from what source and why?** The focus groups are intended to explore people's views on this. They are not directly linked to our democratic forums conducted in late 2015.

Warm-up exercise (15 minutes):

Introduction to the idea of the welfare state, using the definitions from the DFs:

"Welfare policies are benefits and services provided by the government in order to meet people's needs. The main areas are the health service, pensions, benefits for unemployed and low-wage people, benefits for people in work, social housing, childcare provisions, rights to paid leave, social care for older people and, in some countries, schooling. The welfare state is by far the largest area of government spending, and there are many issues to be considered for the future."

Free association with the words 'welfare state' to familiarise the groups with the idea and make sure that benefits (pensions, unemployment benefits, tax credits, housing benefit, universal credit) and services (the NHS, hospitals and GPs, social care for older people, care for children, day-nurseries, education schools and colleges, and social housing), all financed by taxation and provided by government, are included.

The main part of the discussion will be based on six cards or 'vignettes', showing people in the typical circumstances of different socio-demographic groups. These vignettes are:

- An unemployed person of working age in good health [Moderator to probe what difference it makes if they are too disabled to work];

- A person aged 70 in good health [Probe on the difference age makes, if they are 75? if they are 80?]

- A family on average median wages with children under 3 in good health [Probe what difference it makes if the family consists of a single parent];

- A low-income worker [on minimum wage or on a level equivalent to 50% of national median wage for a full-time worker over 25];

- A comfortably-off worker [with income equivalent to 150% of national median wage for a full-time worker over 25];

- An immigrant [Moderator to probe on what difference it makes if they are from the EU, from the rest of the world, or are refugees].

For each group the moderator is to probe in three main areas:

- **What benefits and services they should get?**

- **Who should provide it (individual, family, state, market, present/previous employer)?**

- **What would make a difference as to whether they should get it?**

Further details of specific probes for each card are given below.

The last part of the focus groups will be a card-sorting exercise. The groups will be asked to put the different cards in order of who deserves benefits and services from the welfare state.

The Moderator will ask people to explain and justify their choice of ordering.

Each card should be discussed for between 10 and 20 minutes, with abut the discussion should be open and flexible to enable participants to discuss issues they feel should be considered as important in order to answer the moderator's questions.

A "box for thoughts" will be placed on the table so that after the discussion. Participants will be encouraged to write down some ideas, thoughts or issues they think are important that were not addressed in the discussion.

The research agency is asked to transcribe the Focus Group proceedings, linking each statement with a participant, and translate them into English for purposes of comparison, and to provide the translations and also the audio file.

Schedule:

Time	Content	Notes
Minute 0-5 (5 minutes)	Welcome	Lead facilitator to welcome participants and introduce the format of the focus group • Introduce self and independent research agency + research team • "The topic we will be talking about is **access to the country's welfare state: Who should get what and why?"** • "The main objective of this meeting is **to discuss about the categories of people who should (or shouldn't) get access to the country's welfare state**". • "It is not a test! We want to give you the opportunity to speak up. We genuinely want to know where you don't understand things and we want to hear your questions too". • "There are no right answers to the questions. We want to hear your views." • "The discussion will last for two hours". • "We are also recording the table discussion for our records" • "At the end of the discussion, you will have the opportunity to put notes, reflections or comments on the topic in this "box for thoughts". All comments will remain confidential". • Briefly explain ground rules (e.g. listen to each other, respect comments, etc.).
Minute 5-20 (15 minutes)	Warm-up exercise "What is the welfare state?"	• As above • If participants have any questions, these should be dealt with before the first vignette is given.
Minute 20-35	First vignette: unemployed	• Imagine an unemployed person of working age in good health: what benefits and services should they get access to, and why? • Probe: what difference does it makes if this person is too disabled to work? • Issues relevant to different vignettes can be combined (for example, a participant may say that only unemployed nationals should have access to specific benefits and services). • For all vignettes: the moderator could ask whether age and gender makes a difference, i.e.: should an unemployed woman have better access to benefits and services than an unemployed man?
Minute 35-50	Second vignette: old-age	• Imagine a 70-year old person in good health: what benefits and services should they get access to, and why? • What about a 75-year old, an 80-year old? Does such old age make a difference? • The moderator could ask questions related to old-age pensions, e.g. when should people be allowed to retire? Should government provide pensions adequate to live off for everyone? How should they be paid for? What about access to social care?

Minute 50-65	Third vignette: family with children	- Imagine a family on median wages with children under 3 in good health. What benefits and services should they get access to, and why? - What about a single parent with children, does it make a difference? - Does the age and number of children make a difference? - Probe on childcare if not already mentioned: should childcare be publicly or privately funded? Who should pay for it?
Minute 65-80	Fourth vignette: low-income worker	- Imagine a low-income worker [on minimum wage or on a level equivalent to 50% of national median wage for a full-time worker over 25 - Probe on benefits and services, including wage top-up benefits, and access to training.
Minute 80-95	Fifth vignette: comfortably-off worker	- Imagine a comfortably-off worker [with income equivalent to 150% of national median wage for a full-time worker over 25]. - Probe on what benefits and services should they get access to, and why? - Also probe on taxation: should comfortably-off workers pay more taxes than low-income workers, or should they all pay the same share, and why?
Minute 95-110	Sixth vignette: immigrant	- Imagine an immigrant. What benefits and services should they get access to, and why? - The moderator is asked to probe on differences in terms of country of origin (EU, non-EU) and status ('economic' migrant, refugees). Probe on whether immigrants should have access to the same benefits and services as nationals and on whether length of stay in the host country matters.
Minute 110-120	Concluding session: card-sorting exercise	The groups will be asked to rank the cards by who deserves more in benefits and services from the welfare state, and to explain why some categories deserve more than others. Participants will then be asked to write down some thoughts in put them in the box.

Recruitment specification (based on the UK):

Group 1: middle class

- gender balance
- completed higher education, i.e., 3 years or more
- Income level: equivalent to 150% of national median wage for a full-time worker over 25
- A majority should be homeowners
- Max. 2 students / unemployed

- Some variation with respect to family status: Married/partner, single parent, parent with primary school children, parent with teenage children, empty nest parents, persons without children etc.

Group 2: Working class

- Gender balance
- Less than 3 years higher education
- At least 4 persons in the group without higher education
- Income level: household income decile should be J, R or C (i.e. under £348 weekly)
- Max. 2 students /unemployed
- Some variation with respect to family status: Married/partner, single parent, parent with primary school children, parent with teenage children, empty nest parents, persons without children etc.

Group 3: Old age pensioners

- Gender balance
- Age 62 to 75 years, with majority age 67+
- Variation in pension benefit level
    o At least two persons on lowest pension level/minimum pension
- Sufficient hearing as a condition for participation
- Some participants from single person households (widow, divorced etc.)
- Some childless participants or with children who live far away

Group 4: Young adults

- Gender balance
- Age 18 to 35, will try to achieve an as even age distribution as possible
- 3 students
- At least three parents
- Some variation in family status

Group 5: Women with care responsibilities

- Only women
- All should participate in the labour market
- Some (around 2 out of 10) should have care responsibilities in relation to own parents/parents in-law/grandparents
- A majority of the participants will have a family of their own (partner/spouse and/or children)
- At least three participants should have primary school children in their household

Group 6: "British"

- Only composed of people who are not first or second-generation immigrants in the United Kingdom
- Gender balance
- No age restriction
- Different levels of income

Common criteria for all groups

- Exclude professional politicians and persons working as market analysts
- All participants must have expressed a willingness to share their opinions and listen to others
- Variation in political orientation to avoid bias, i.e. there should be a balance between left and right-wing participants (no need to look at party preferences here)
- Ethnic minorities should be represented, except in the sixth group on "British people".