

ESF+ DATA SUPPORT CENTRE

18 MARCH 2021 – 3RD ESF+ DATA NETWORK MEETING

BACKGROUND NOTE

PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC INDICATORS

JULY 2021 UPDATE

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This document is a draft working document. It has been updated following discussions during the 3rd ESF Data Network Meeting on 18th March 2021 and may be further developed following subsequent discussions or input received from Member States.

MAIN CHANGES OF JULY 2021 UPDATE

- Restructuring of note (sections moved) and diagrams added.
- New section with conceptual framework for result indicators without an output indicator as basis (e.g. operations supporting entities/systems/structures and aiming to increase outreach/capacity or improve services).
- New sections on qualitative result indicators and indicators on user satisfaction.
- Expanded section on impact indicators.
- Questions for discussion have been removed, text boxes on issues to consider have been added.
- Updated references to specific objectives (there are now 13 specific objectives, which are no longer identified by roman numbers but letters from SO(a)-SO(m)).

JULY 2021 UPDATE

- Updated legal references to CPR and ESF+ Regulations.

1 Introduction

Programme-specific indicators are an important tool of results-based monitoring. They may be developed and added to individual programmes when common indicators do not sufficiently reflect the main results and outputs to be achieved under a specific objective. For this reason, they are strictly linked to the intervention logic of the programmes.

The aim of this background note is to support building a common understanding of programme-specific indicators for ESF+ programmes. It also seeks to encourage discussion and shared learning in the process of developing relevant indicators for the monitoring of programme implementation that adequately reflect the objectives and the intervention logic of the programme.

The note provides an overview of general concepts in relation to the scope of programme-specific indicators and some practical indications on when and how to select such indicators. It builds on the requirements set by the Common Provision Regulation (CPR)¹ and the ESF+ Regulation², further explained in the Common Indicator Toolbox, as well as on the experience gained through the Data Support Centre. It includes some examples and advice for managing authorities on how to ensure that programme-specific indicators are fit for purpose. Such indications are however not prescriptive and are rather intended to spur discussion and sharing of experiences.

2 Requirements of programme-specific indicators

The ESF+ Regulation states that programmes may, in addition to the common output and result indicators set out in the relevant annexes³, use programme-specific indicators to monitor progress implementation (Art. 17(1) and Art. 23(1)). The requirements for programme-specific indicators that derive from the ESF+ Regulation and the interpretation of both CPR and ESF+ Regulations, as presented in the ESF Common Indicators Toolbox can be summarised in the following points:

- Programme-specific indicators may be set, **in addition to common indicators**. Programme-specific indicators are not intended to replace common indicators. All programmes supported by the ESF+ are required to report on all common output and result indicators **and** any programme-specific indicators.
- Programme-specific indicators should help managing authorities **monitor progress in programme implementation and programme performance** (see section 4.3).
- The number of programme-specific indicators should be **limited**. They are to be used only when common indicators are not sufficient to **reflect the main outputs and results to be achieved under a specific objective**.
- Like the common indicators, programme-specific indicators (as well as any corresponding milestones or targets) are set at **the level of the specific objective**. The same programme-specific indicator may be used for several specific objectives under the same programme, but data (and

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1060/oj>

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1057/oj>

³ Annex I for specific objectives (a) to (l) when not targeting the most deprived, Annex II for operations under SO(l) targeting the most deprived, and Annex III for SO (m).

targets, when relevant) have to be set and reported for each specific objective separately. Generally, they should not refer to the types of actions or operations⁴.

- There is no obligation to set programme-specific indicators except for specific objective **SO(I)**, for which **at least one programme-specific result indicator should be set**⁵.

3 Scope of programme-specific indicators

Programme-specific indicators should **measure the major change(s) intended and main deliverables to be achieved in the specific objective as a whole**. Thus, the starting point for the development of programme-specific indicators should be the intervention logic. In this regard, the following elements should be considered (Figure 1).

- What will be the **expected results** that should contribute to the specific objective? (*E.g. is the operation trying to move people into employment or rather to improve their chances of entering the labour market (i.e. their employability)? Is the aim to reduce the drop-out rate in schools? Better equip education institutions to address specific needs of migrant population? Increase the capacity of labour market institutions to provide services to more individuals?*)
- What are the **target groups** (*e.g. young unemployed people, offenders or ex-offenders, women, low skilled workers, local municipalities, social partner organisations, public employment staff*)?
- What are the **outputs** contributing to the expected results, in other words, what is being supported (*e.g. individuals/entities supported, projects funded*)?
- What are the **types of operations** (*e.g. training, employment incentives, wrap-around care activities, outreach/community services, consultations/treatments, restructuring of services/entities*)?

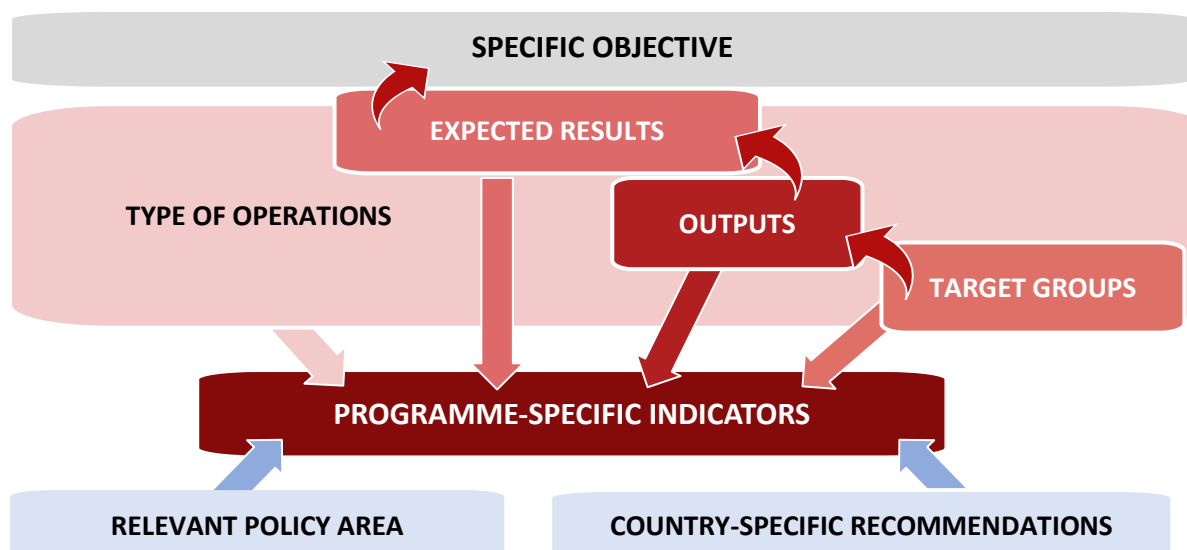
Programme-specific indicators may also be used to facilitate monitoring in **policy areas** relevant to the programme, either at regional, national or EU level⁶. They may also be set, in particular, to better monitor how **country-specific recommendations (CSRs)** issued as part of the European Semester are being addressed, as Member States should regularly present to the monitoring committee and to the Commission the progress made in implementing programmes in support of the CSRs (Recital 16 and Art. 40 of the CPR).

⁴ Indicators referring to specific type of operation may be however considered in order to closely monitor progress towards particularly relevant policy areas and implementation of country-specific recommendations. See text box “Indicators per type of operation” in section 5.1.

⁵ This requirement stems from the fact that for each specific objective, there should be at least one target for an output indicator and one target for a result indicator and for SO(I) there are no common result indicators.

⁶ The objectives of the programmes should be selected taking into account country-specific recommendations, the integrated national energy and climate plan, the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (“the Pillar”) and regional challenges (where relevant)(Art.11(1)(a) of the CPR). The ESF+ Regulation also emphasises the alignment with the European Semester by requiring Member States to prioritise interventions that address challenges identified in the European Semester, as in the country-specific recommendations, and that they allocate an appropriate amount of their resources to their implementation and to the implementation of the Child Guarantee, as well as to take into account the Pillar and the Social Scoreboard (Art.7 of the ESF+ Regulation).

Figure 1 – Elements to consider when developing programme-specific indicators



4 Types of indicators

Under the ESF+ programming logic, two types of performance indicators are foreseen: **output** indicators (section 4.1) and **result** indicators (section 4.2). Impact or context indicators are not designed to be part of performance monitoring (section 4.3).

In this section, we explore the general principles that apply to each type of indicator, based on the logic followed in the ESF+ indicators.

4.1 Output indicators

Art 2 (13) of the CPR: 'output indicator' means an indicator to measure the specific deliverables of the intervention.

- Output indicators measure the **volume of support offered** (i.e. what is directly supported/produced/supplied through the implementation of ESF+).
- **Measurement unit:** generally, output indicators refer to the **number of** participants/individuals, entities/organisations, treatments, systems, models, etc. that have been **supported/funded** (e.g. "recipients of social service benefits supported", "NGOs supported", "information campaigns funded to promote equality between women and men and to improve protection against domestic violence"). For operations providing food and material assistance - i.e. under specific objective (m) - output indicators may also refer to monetary value of food or basic material assistance distributed or to the quantity of distributed food.
- Output indicators are **always** expressed in **absolute numbers** (except two common output indicators in Annex III).

4.2 Result indicators

Art 2 (14) of the CPR: 'result indicator' means an indicator to measure the effects of the interventions supported, with particular reference to the direct addressees, population targeted or users of infrastructure.

- Result indicators focus on the **direct results** of the supported actions. There should be a **strong link** between the indicator and the **support provided by the programme**. Thus, and in order to

minimise external factors influencing the value reported under the result indicators, it is advisable to set indicators which are **as close as possible to the activities conducted under the respective specific objective**. For example, if the intervention aims to increase the participation of civil society organisations in social dialogue, an indicator measuring changes in the membership of NGOs (either as individuals or associated organisations) would not be linked to the support provided. Instead, a suitable result indicator would be *“supported NGOs participating in social dialogue process”*.

- Result indicators may be expressed in **absolute** (i.e. “number of”) or in **relative terms** (i.e. percentage/share). For example, either *“number of participants in individual support plans for whom employability has increased”* or *“share of participants in individual support plans for whom employability has increased”*. Relative terms are suitable when the success in proportion to the output is more relevant than the volume of successful outcomes. In these cases, result indicators are based on an output indicator (see 4.2.1 below).

- It is recommended that result indicators and their targets are expressed in the **same terms** (i.e. absolute or relative) whenever possible. This helps the interpretation of what the programme aims to achieve, contributes to a more direct calculation of target achievements, and offers immediate insights in the progress achieved.



PROGRAMMING:

measurement unit for result indicators

It is recommended to clearly specify both the **unit of measurement** as well as the **terms** in which indicators are expressed in the name of the indicator (e.g. “number of projects” or “share of individuals”).

The measurement unit should be specified in the dedicated fields in the programme indicators’ tables*, and it is recommended that the terms in which the indicator is expressed (absolute number or percentage) are also indicated in the programme. This will clarify the meaning of the result indicator’s achievement value and allow the automatic calculation of the target achievement ratio.

* Table 2 and Table 3 of Annex V of the CPR.

4.2.1 Result indicators with output indicators as basis

- In the logic of ESF+ monitoring, result indicators seek to capture the intended changes on supported “units” (e.g. participants, entities, models...) captured by output indicators. This means, for the **result indicator** there is an output indicator that captures the reference population (e.g. the supported participants, entities, etc.). That **output indicator is used as basis** for the result indicator (for example, “*participants under 30 who acquired a qualification*”, “*participants with a PhD diploma that find a job including self-employment 6 months after the intervention*”, “*supported SMEs that have implemented organisational changes*”).
- It is very important, particularly when result indicators are expressed in percentages or share, that the **output indicator used as basis** is clearly **outlined in the name of the indicator**. Otherwise, the meaning of the indicator value will be unclear. This link should also be made explicit when reporting data (see text box above)
- Result indicators should refer to a **specific point in time**. They may be used to capture changes immediately after the support has been received or after a certain time (e.g. “*people supported under the job creation that remain employed 12 months after the end of support*”, “*survival rate at 2 years of supported companies*”).

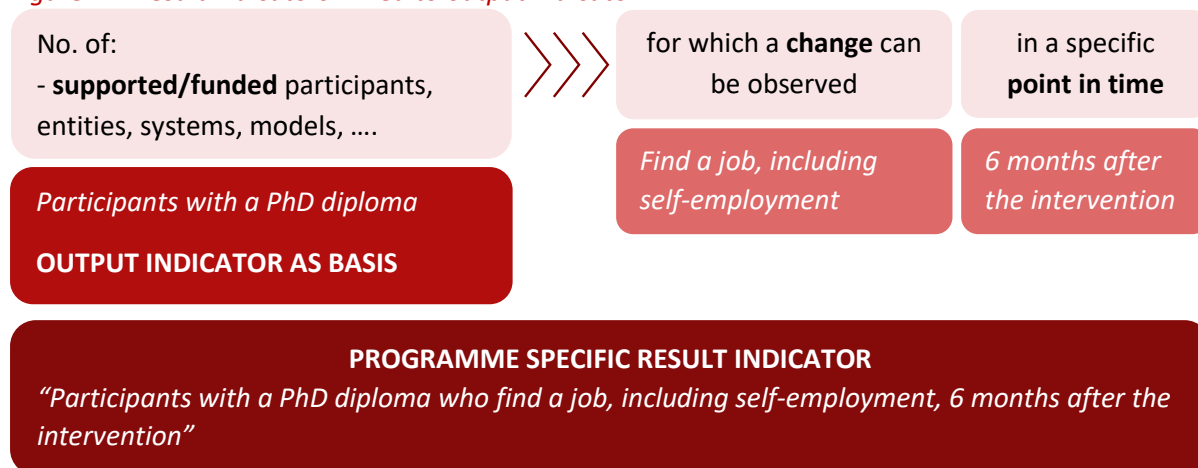


REPORTING: Output indicator as basis

When reporting data, it is recommended to **link the result indicator and the output indicator(s) used as a basis in SFC**. When results (and targets) are expressed in relative terms, this will allow understanding the reported value and facilitate automatic calculation of target achievement and the aggregation of results at the level of the programme, Member States, and ultimately at EU level.

The possibility to link result and output indicators (either common or programme-specific) will be in SFC regardless of whether either indicator has a target or not.

Figure 2 – Result indicators linked to output indicator



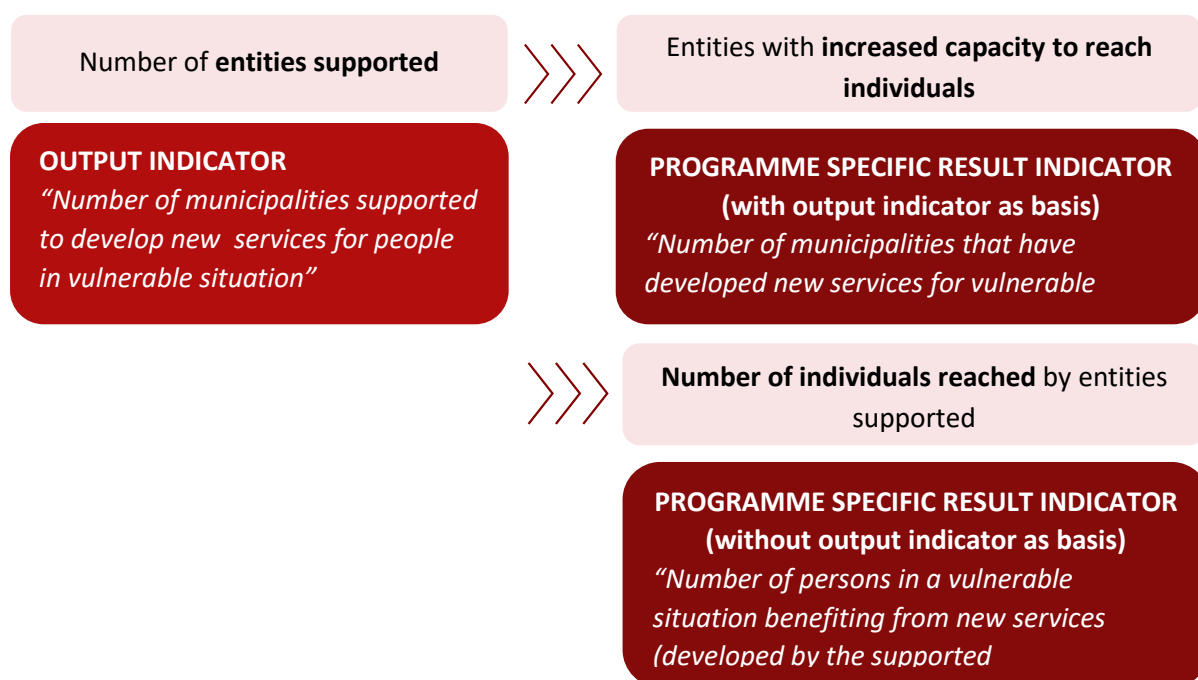
4.2.2 Result indicators without an output indicator as basis

In some type of operations, the direct result is achieved among (groups of) individuals who are not directly supported (are not ‘the output’). For example, in **operations aiming to improve the delivery of services or performance of public services and structures, or operations promoting access to**

services. In such cases, changes are typically not (only) expected at the individual level of entities or participants supported, but rather (or also) in the **number of individuals reached by the entities supported** (Figure 3) **or by what is directly being supplied/produced** (Figure 4). The support provided can be in the form of additional staff, or in the case of operations under SO (m), in the form of food and material assistance distributed. Thus, result indicators in such cases may refer to the number of people benefitting from services provided by supported entities or receiving support or assistance. Note that in such cases, these individuals are not considered to be participants as they are not benefitting directly from the operation (i.e. there is thus no need to collect personal data for them)⁷.

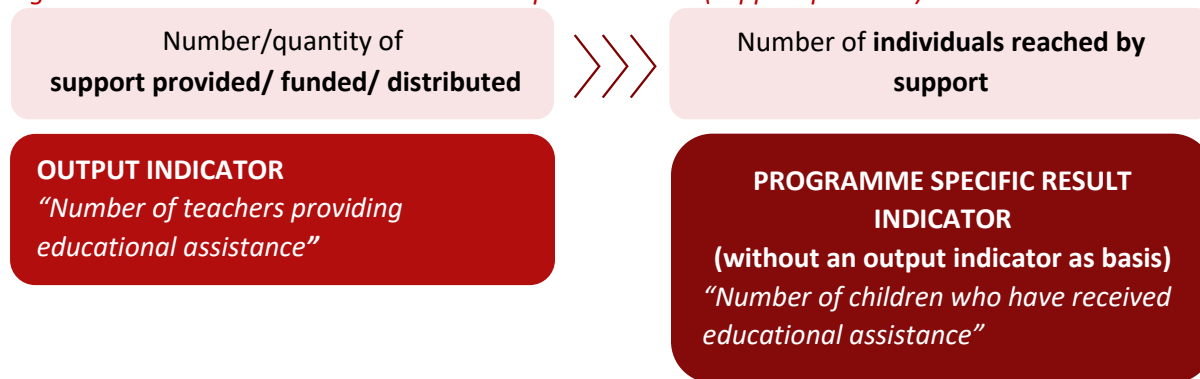
As mentioned above, result indicators should capture the main changes expected from the supported action, and there should be a **strong link between the indicators and the support provided**. For example, In cases where operations fund new services, result indicators should measure the **number of people benefitting from these new services only**. When operations aim to increase the capacity of outreach of entities or services, in order to capture the change brought about by the ESF+ support, the result indicators should measure the additional individuals reached thanks to the support. This, however, will only be feasible if data on the situation before ESF+ support are available.

Figure 3 – Result indicators not linked to output indicators (entities supported)



⁷ Participants are defined in the regulation as a natural person benefiting directly from an operation but without being responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing the operation (Art.2 (40) of the CPR).

Figure 4 – Result indicators not linked to output indicators (support provided)



Note that even when result indicators do not have an output indicator as basis (i.e. reference population), there should still be a corresponding output indicator capturing the main deliverables.

4.3 Impact/Context indicators

The ESF+ programme’s common and programme-specific indicators, together with their corresponding milestones, reference values and targets, compose the performance framework. **The performance framework indicators are meant to enable the monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the programmes’ performance during its implementation** (see recital (23) of the CPR+).

Although the impact of each programme should be evaluated at least once by 30 June 2029 (Art. 44 (2) of the CPR), **impact should not be evaluated only with the indicators of the performance framework, additional indicators/data should be used.**

“Impact” or “context” indicators, measuring either indirect effects on participants/supported entities, or changes/results on broader groups of society or entities, or describing the overall context within which the programme is implemented **should not be included among result indicators.** The use of such indicators for monitoring performance is not advised, though they may be useful in the descriptive part of the programme. Examples of indicators which should not be included in the performance framework, as they reflect broader or contextual changes or situation are: *“national drop-out school rate for young-people 15-19”, “unemployment rate”, or “percentage of children 0-3 years old in regional childcare system”.*



MONITORING & EVALUATION: PLAN AHEAD

The Better Regulation Guidelines state that *“Good monitoring generates factual data to improve the quality of future evaluation and impact assessment”.*

The data and indicators to be used to assess impact should be determined well in advance in order to plan for data needs for the evaluations (e.g. in the evaluation plan(s)).

5 When and how to identify programme-specific indicators?

As mentioned in previous sections, programme-specific indicators should be set when common indicators are not adequate to capture all the main deliverables and changes under a specific objective. Thus, programme-specific indicators may be set to **complement** common indicators to measure the different dimensions of the change sought under a specific objective. For example, for

innovative lifelong learning activities, it might be useful to measure the number of participants achieving a qualification (with the respective common result indicator) as well as the number of partnerships created among stakeholders as a consequence of ESF+ support or new services developed (with a programme-specific indicator).

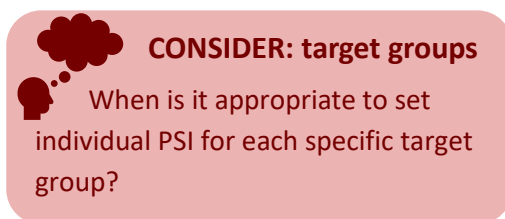
This section looks at certain circumstances under which it may be useful to set programme-specific indicators and provides some examples of relevant indicators. Note that the circumstances and indicators presented are only tentative and meant to be used as examples as it is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of either all the reasons why programme-specific indicators can be useful or all relevant indicators.

5.1 Output indicators

For SO(a) to SO(l), common output indicators measure the number of participants of ESF+ operations broken down by employment status⁸, age, educational attainment level⁸ and several categories of disadvantage, as well as the number of public entities and SMEs participating in the operations⁹. For SO(m), common output indicators measure monetary value and/or quantity of food and material assistance distributed.

Programme-specific output indicators could be set to:

- a) Measure the support provided for a **group of participants** that is **broader** than the ones captured by the common output indicators. In some cases, this can be done by simply aggregating two or more common output indicators, for example:
 - *participants not in employment (unemployed + inactive)*
 - *participants under 30 years old (<18 + 18-29)*
- b) Measure the support provided **for participants whose specificities are not captured** by the common output indicators. In some cases, this may be done by combining several common output indicators capturing different dimensions, such as age and employment status, as with micro data at hand, these indicators can be produced without extra data collection). For example:
 - *young migrants*
 - *long-term unemployed over 55*
 - *carers of disabled individuals*
 - *socially vulnerable/excluded or furthest from the labour market*
 - *offenders or ex-offenders*
- c) Measure support provided to a **type of entity** that is not captured by the common output indicators on entities (which cover public administration/public service in general and SMEs):
 - *healthcare institutions*
 - *labour market institutions/public employment services*
 - *Social enterprises*
 - *NGOs*



⁸ Only for SO(a) to SO(k).

⁹ Only for SO(a) to SO(l) operations not targeting the most deprived.

- *social partner organisations*
- d) Measure outputs in terms of **units** that are different than those used in the common output indicators (i.e. neither participants nor entities). For example, in the case that support is earmarked for:
 - *projects*
 - *models*
 - *treatments*
- e) Measure the food or material assistance distributed to target groups not covered by the common output indicators under SO(l), for example:
 - *total monetary value of goods for migrants*
- f) Measure the support provided through a **specific operation or type of operation**:
 - *teachers who receive training to tackle student drop-out*
 - *participants in health literacy improvement activities*
 - *participants receiving family services for complex needs*
 - *migrants taking part in language courses*
 - *young people (aged 29 or below) in traineeships in another EU country*

Indicators per type of operation

Is it a good practice to have a PSI for each **type of operation**, considering that indicators are meant to reflect main objectives and deliverables of the SO? Indicators by operation may be suitable to closely monitor progress towards particularly **relevant policy areas** and implementation of **country-specific recommendations**, as well as specific **types of intervention** detailed and coded in the regulation*, to which significant budget has been allocated as detailed in the programme** (e.g. “digitalisation in health care”).

* Annex I (Table 1) of the CPR

** Annex V (Table 4) of the CPR

5.2 Result indicators

For SO(a) to SO(k), common result indicators measure changes in employment and education/qualification/training status for participants. For SO(m), common result indicators measure the number of most deprived persons supported (i.e. “end recipients”) broken down in specific target groups.

The list of circumstances and examples of programme-specific result indicators presented below have been divided to differentiate between result indicators linked to an output indicator (see section 4.2.1 - and result indicators not linked to an output indicator (see section 4.2.2).

5.2.1 Result indicators linked to output indicators

Programme-specific result indicators **on participants** may be set when:

- a) The **common result indicators are not suitable to measure the changes expected**, either because focus is drawn to a different point in time, or because the expected changes do not relate to a change in the labour market status, participation in training or qualification (e.g. soft outcomes):
 - **Different point in time:**

- *Inactive participants engaged in job searching 3 months after leaving*
 - *Unemployed participants in employment 1 year after leaving*
 - *Participants under 30 gaining a qualification 3 months after leaving*
- **Different expected changes** (i.e. not related to labour market, education or qualification):
 - *soft outcomes (e.g. improved self-confidence, acquisition of basic skills)*
 - *improvement in health/well-being (e.g. healthier habits)*
 - *social inclusion (e.g. moved from institution to community-based care)*
- b) Expected **individual changes are captured by common result indicators**, but the **target group is not accurately reflected in the common output indicators** (e.g. either broader or more specific target group). For example:
 - *participants under 30 gaining a qualification upon leaving*
 - *long-term unemployed over 55 in employment upon leaving*
 - *young ex-offenders in education or training upon leaving*



Common or programme-specific?

When the individual expected changes are captured by common result indicators, but the target group is not reflected in the common output indicators, managing authorities may use a **programme-specific output indicator as basis**. The output indicator as basis should be clear from the intervention logic or in the accompanying methodological document. SFC will provide the possibility to link common result indicators with programme-specific output indicators as basis when reporting structured data.

- c) Since there are no common result indicators relating to entities, programme-specific result indicators on entities may be set up to measure expected **changes for organisations /entities**. For example:
 - *SMEs that remain operational 1 year after receiving support*
 - *Public administrations or public services providing new/developed services*
 - *Municipalities implementing innovative/flexible working arrangements*
 - *Social partner organisations putting forward opinions-proposals in the legislative process 1 year after the support*
- d) Finally, programme-specific result indicators may also be set when the expected changes relate to **units that are neither participants nor entities**, for example:
 - *Supported projects which have been fully implemented*
 - *Partnerships between businesses and education institutions which remain operational 1 year after the support*



Result indicators capturing unchanged situations

Result indicators may not always measure changes, in some cases, they may capture whether the situation has remained unchanged. For example, if an operation aims to promote job retention or avoid redundancies, a suitable result indicator may be “employed participants who remain employed 6 months after leaving”. Other examples of indicators not measuring changes may include “partnerships who remain operational 1 year after the project”, “SMEs which continue to trade 1 year after receiving support”.

Qualitative result indicators

As shown above, programme-specific indicators are particularly useful when the common result indicators, which are “standard” quantitative indicators relating to employment status or increased education levels and skills, do not appropriately reflect the results that are expected to be achieved through an ESF+ operation. This is the case for instance of “soft outcomes”, which, unlike easily measurable and standardised results, (such as qualifications or jobs) cannot be measured directly or tangibly. Soft outcomes are usually used to measure improved employability, but they can be equally applied to other policy fields, such health behaviours or other social inclusion indicators.

Result indicators for soft outcomes thus measure whether the (soft) outcomes have been achieved and may indicate a progress towards the achievement of other (hard) indicators. While a subjective judgement, ‘indicators or measures such as improved levels of attendance, improved time-keeping and improved communication skills can strongly suggest that motivation has increased’¹⁰.

An example of such indicators is those measuring the “distance travelled”, i.e. results and progression towards socio economic integration or the labour market by participants in ESF+ operations, particularly those targeting the long term unemployed or other individuals furthest from the labour market. This concept is a way to measure the progress beneficiaries of active labour market policies (ALMP) are making in terms of achieving ‘soft outcomes’ that may lead to sustained employment or other associated ‘hard outcomes’ in the future. Distance travelled could be measured, for example, in terms of: increased wellbeing; self-esteem; career self-efficacy; resilience; hopefulness; perceived progress towards the labour market; re-employment or labour market participation; re-employment quality; or access to education/vocational training.

The example of soft outcomes for employability-related measures above can be applied to other types of soft outcomes in the field of social inclusion and health (behaviour).

Most **measurement approaches** for qualitative indicators use some form of scoring system or scale, for example, to assess the nature and extent of participants’ needs, and the distance that they travel in developing their soft skills. Other methods can entail baseline assessments or follow-up reviews.

As with all programme-specific indicators, when designing an approach to measuring qualitative indicators it is important to identify **data collection methods**. These could refer to face-to-face or computer-based questionnaires; hand-held sliding scales with markers; web-based assessments; and games. Two main approaches to monitor progress could be identified: those based on opinions/perceptions of the participants and those that are more evidence-based (e.g. based on service provider assessment or other types of records). The type of operation itself would often indicate who should measure progress: assessment can be undertaken by the participant (self-assessment); it can be undertaken jointly by the participants and the caseworker; by a caseworker alone; or by a third party who is not directly associated with the programme, such as a teacher, trainer or workplace manager.

5.2.2 Result indicators without an output indicator as basis

Programme-specific result indicators without an output indicator as basis (i.e. as reference population) may be set to:

¹⁰ Sally-Anne Barnes and Sally Wright “The feasibility of developing a methodology for measuring the distance travelled and soft outcomes for long-term unemployed people participating in Active Labour Market Programmes”, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, June 2019

- a) Measure the number of individuals/entities having access to /benefitting from new services, provided by the supported entities. For example:
 - *individuals benefiting from new social services*
 - *at-risk youths attending after-school programmes in supported education institutions*
 - *people with access to innovative and efficient healthcare*
 - *SMEs using new business support services provided*
 - *candidate profiles/businesses registered in the developed) PES recruitment services*
- b) Measure the provision of improved/expanded services by supported entities:
 - *number of registered vacancies in new PES web portal*
 - *number of new childcare places available in supported kindergartens*
 - *number of unique website visitors*
 - *user satisfaction of improved service (see box below)*
- c) Other results/achievements from entities supported:
 - *number of new full-time positions created in SMEs supported*
 - *number of opinions/proposals in the legislative process and in the framework of the European Semester put forward by supported social partner organisations*

Indicators on user satisfaction

Indicators on user satisfaction may be a useful way to capture expected results in operations aiming to improve service delivery, as a measure of increased quality and performance of services. For example: “*number/share of users satisfied with the improved services*”. Indicators can also measure the “*average level of user satisfaction*”, in such cases, there should be a target associated and a reference in the programme and the methodology documentation on what is deemed as good result/achievement. To better link the indicator with the aims of the operation (i.e. improve quality of service), indicators that reflect a change in satisfaction level (increase) compared to previous situation may be more suitable, for example, “*number of service users with increased satisfaction*”. This is feasible provided there are data on previous user satisfaction.

For operations supporting the provision of new services or expansion of services, indicators on user satisfaction can be an indication of the quality of new/expanded services. However, since the aims are not related to improvement of quality of existing services, indicators on user satisfaction may be better suited for evaluation rather than for monitoring implementation in such cases¹¹.

There are several alternatives in which satisfaction levels can be measured in the ESF indicators in a meaningful way to enable monitoring of performance of operations. Here are some examples, based on how users can provide input on their satisfaction:

- Quantitative scale (e.g. 1-10, 1-5): indicators on average level of satisfaction.

¹¹ “While monitoring looks at “what” changes have occurred since the entry into force of a policy intervention, evaluation looks at “whether” the intervention has been effective in reaching its objectives, and whether the objectives have been met efficiently (i.e. at least cost), as well as the reasons for the success or otherwise of an intervention. In order to do this, an evaluation can and should collect additional data that is too expensive to monitor on a continuous basis or that measures longer-term effects.”

Better Regulation Toolbox, Tool #41. Monitoring arrangements and indicators
https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/better-regulation-toolbox-41_en

- Range of values, for example “dissatisfied, neither satisfied/dissatisfied, satisfied”: this can either be converted into a quantitative scale (as above), or the indicator could include the number of participants with a determined answer (e.g. those replying “satisfied” and “very satisfied”).
- Yes/No answer to a question, for example “Are you more satisfied with the service provided?” “Are you satisfied with the improvements in the services provided”? In such cases, indicators can count either the number or the share of users with affirmative answers.

The most common way to collect information on user satisfaction level will be by surveys or questionnaires, which can be carried out either at the time when users receive the service or ex-post, depending on what will be most suitable.

6 Criteria for good performance indicators

There are several sets of criteria or principles that can be used as a guide in the development of programme-specific indicators to ensure that performance is monitored adequately and to inform subsequent evaluations. Examples include RACER (Relevant – Acceptable – Credible – Easy – Robust), SMART (Specific – Measureable- Achievable – Realistic – Time), or CREAM (Clear – Relevant – Economic – Adequate – Monitorable), which are widely used in the public, private and civil society sectors to provide ‘rule of thumb’ guidance to programme managers. The principles/criteria under these set of principles are in essence smaller steps to be considered when developing indicators.

The RACER (Relevant – Acceptable – Credible – Easy – Robust) criteria are commonly used in EU guidelines for evaluation, such as the Better Evaluation Toolbox¹². Ensuring that each indicator developed fulfils all five criteria will help to establish a solid set of indicators to monitor implementation and performance of the programme. Table 1 below provides a brief description of the RACER criteria and includes some suggested good practices to ensure they are fulfilled, revisiting some of the main concepts introduced in previous sections.

Note that this is not a comprehensive list, but an indicative compilation.

¹² [TOOL #41 Monitoring arrangements and indicators \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euipo/euipo-portal/en/toolbox).

Table 1 – RACER criteria and good practices for ESF+ indicators

Criteria	Good practice
<p>Relevant: Is there a strong correlation with the objective that the programme/policy aims to achieve?</p>	<p>Use the intervention logic as starting point to develop and set indicators (see section 3), considering the main target groups and expected changes.</p> <p>The choice of the indicator should be made when the type of operation is determined (rather than subsequently). This can help clarify the expected achievement/change to be measured.</p>
<p>Acceptable: Can the indicator be easily understood and accepted by all stakeholders?</p>	<p>Develop definitions and provide them to all relevant stakeholders (from beneficiaries to EC) alongside the data collection methodology. It may be helpful to elaborate indicator fiches similar to those used in the toolbox.</p>
<p>Credible: Is the indicator accessible to non-experts, unambiguous and easy to interpret?</p>	<p>Ensure the wording of the indicators is clear and concise. Ensure that the output indicators that capture the reference population of result indicators are clearly specified in the name of the indicators and/or methodology document (see section 4.2.1)</p>
<p>Easy: Is it feasible to monitor and to collect data at reasonable cost?</p>	<p>One way of creating programme-specific indicators without posing significant additional burden is to combine common indicators, which already have to be collected and reported at the specific objective level.</p> <p>Avoid duplication with common indicators. If the programme-specific indicator is going to capture the same output and results under the specific objective as an existing common indicator, there is no need to set it, even if the wording may be different. This will facilitate the monitoring of the overall performance of the Fund.</p>
<p>Robust: Is the indicator sensitive enough to monitor changes but not subject to manipulation?</p>	<p>Ensure indicators are closely linked to the support provided.</p>



Continuity of indicators from previous programming periods

On the one hand, (re)using the same indicators as in previous programming period may have the benefit of definitions and data collection arrangements already being developed. On the other hand, previously used indicators may not be suitable for current operations, either because the objectives have changed, or because weaknesses were identified, in which case it would be a good practice to revise and improve existing indicators.

Annex: Linking result and output indicators as basis in SFC

As previously mentioned, it is a good practice for result indicators to have a clear reference to the target population by linking to an output indicator. The possibility to link result indicators to output indicators (either common or programme-specific) will be in SFC when transmitting structured data in line with the template in Annex VII of the CPR regardless of whether the output or result indicator have a target or not. Table 2 below illustrates the different possible combinations between common and programme-specific indicators and when it is suitable to use them.

Table 2 – Linking output and result indicators (common and programme-specific indicators) in SFC

Covered by common indicators?		Output indicator as basis	Result indicator	When?
Target group	Expected change			
Yes <i>Unemployed</i>	Yes <i>In employment upon leaving</i>	Common <i>Unemployed</i>	Common <i>Unemployed in employment upon leaving</i>	Suitable when both the expected changes and target group are captured by common indicators.
No <i>Under 30</i>	Yes <i>Gaining a qualification</i>	Programme-specific <i>Under 30</i>	Programme-specific/Common* <i>Under 30 gaining a qualification</i>	Suitable when the changes expected are captured by common indicators, but the target group is not accurately reflected in the indicator (e.g. not specific enough).
Yes <i>Inactive</i>	No <i>Gaining self-confidence</i>	Common <i>Inactive</i>	Programme-specific <i>Inactive gaining self-confidence</i>	Suitable when the target group is captured by common output indicators, but the changes expected cannot be measured by common result indicators.
No <i>Socially vulnerable participants</i>	No <i>Healthier habits</i>	Programme-specific <i>Socially vulnerable participants</i>	Programme-specific <i>Socially vulnerable participants with healthier habits</i>	Suitable when neither the target group nor the expected changes are reflected in common indicators.

* See text box “Common or programme-specific?” under section 5.2.1.