



Explanatory note for the structured survey on end recipients of ESF+ support for addressing material deprivation (specific objective 4(1)(m) ESF+ Regulation)

March/2024

DISCLAIMER: This is a document prepared by the Commission services. Based on the applicable EU Law, it provides technical advice to the attention of public authorities, practitioners, beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries, and other bodies involved in the monitoring, control or implementation of the ESF+ support for addressing material deprivation. The aim of this document is to provide Commission's services explanations and interpretations of the related rules in order to facilitate the implementation of operational programmes and to encourage good practice(s). However, this explanatory note is without prejudice to the interpretation of the Court of Justice and the General Court or evolving Commission decision-making practice.

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1. Introduction

According to Article 23(4) of the ESF+ Regulation (EU) No 2021/1057 the ‘*Commission shall adopt an implementing act establishing the model to be used for the structured survey of end recipients in accordance with the advisory procedure referred to in Article 38(2) in order to ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of this Article*’.

Under Article 23(3) of the ESF+ Regulation (EU) No 2021/1057 Managing Authorities shall report twice to the Commission the results of a structured survey of the end recipients regarding i) the support received from the ESF+ under specific objective 4.1 point (m), ii) their living conditions and iii) the nature of their material deprivation.

The present note aims at providing guidance on the implementation of the structured survey on end recipients as defined by the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/2071 of 27 September 2023 establishing a template for the structured survey on end recipients of food and/or basic material assistance under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council ¹.

The ESF+ should contribute to the eradication of poverty by supporting national schemes aiming to alleviate food and material deprivation and promote social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion². Food and/or basic material assistance may be provided directly to the most deprived persons or indirectly, for example, through vouchers or cards, in electronic or other form, provided that they can be redeemed only against food and/or basic material assistance³.

This survey will allow Managing Authorities (hereafter also referred to as MAs) to draw lessons on the implementation of this assistance. It will also allow aggregating results at EU level, for use by Member States or the Commission in the context of evaluations.

¹ Link: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023R2071>

² C.f. Recital 19 of [ESF+ Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1057](#)

³ C.f. Art. 19(2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1057



2. Definitions

This note builds on following definitions provided in the ESF+ Regulation 2021/1057, CPR Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, Directive 2011/95/EU, Eurostat and the Common Indicators Toolbox:

Article 2 of the ESF+ Regulation (EU) 2021/1057⁴

(2) ‘third-country national’ means a person who is not a citizen of the Union, including stateless persons and persons with an undetermined nationality;

(3) ‘basic material assistance’ means goods which fulfil the basic needs of a person for a life with dignity, such as clothing, hygiene goods, including feminine hygiene products, and school material;

(4) ‘disadvantaged group’ means a group of people in vulnerable situations, including people experiencing or at risk of poverty, social exclusion or discrimination in its multiple dimensions;

(6) ‘most deprived persons’ means natural persons, whether individuals, families, households or groups of persons, including children in vulnerable situations and homeless people, whose need for assistance has been established according to the objective criteria which are set by the national competent authorities in consultation with relevant stakeholders while avoiding conflicts of interest, and which may include elements that allow for the targeting of the most deprived persons in certain geographical areas; (7) ‘end recipients’ means the most deprived persons receiving the support as laid down in Article 4(1), point (m);

(7) ‘end recipients’ means the most deprived persons receiving the support as laid down in Article 4(1), point (m);

(9) ‘accompanying measure’ means an activity provided in addition to the distribution of food and/or basic material assistance with the aim of addressing social exclusion and contributing to the eradication of poverty, such as referrals to or providing social and health services, including psychological support, or providing relevant information on public services or advice on managing a household budget;

(15) ‘cost of purchasing food and/or basic material assistance’ means the actual costs which are linked to the purchase of food and/or basic material assistance by the beneficiary and are not limited to the price of the food and/or basic material assistance.

⁴ Link: [ESF+ Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1057](#)

Article 2 of the CPR Regulation (EU) 2021/1060⁵

(9.a) ‘beneficiary’ means a public or private body, an entity with or without legal personality, or a natural person, responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing operations;

(13) ‘output indicator’ means an indicator to measure the specific deliverables of the intervention;

(14) ‘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.

Definitions provided by Directive 2011/95/EU⁶

‘Refugee’ means a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.

Definitions provided by EUROSTAT

- ‘Household’⁷ is defined, in the context of surveys on social conditions or income such as EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) or the Household budget survey (HBS), as a housekeeping unit or, operationally, as a social unit:



- having common arrangements;
- sharing household expenses or daily needs;
- in a shared common residence.

A household includes either one person living alone or a group of people, not necessarily related, living at the same address with common housekeeping, i.e. sharing at least one meal per day or sharing a living or sitting room.

- An ‘asylum seeker’⁸ is an asylum applicant awaiting a decision on an application for international protection, granting or refusing a refugee status or another form of international protection.

⁵ Link: [CPR Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#)

⁶ Link: [Directive 2011/95/EU](#)

⁷ Link: [Glossary:Household - social statistics - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸ Link: [Glossary:Asylum seeker](#)

Definitions provided by the Common Indicators Toolbox⁹ and further documents under SFC Support Portal¹⁰

- ‘Reference value’ for SO(m) means a value which is used to compare the indicator’s achieved value with past experience. It is usually based on historical achievements deemed relevant as comparison. The reference value for SO (m) should be an average annual value and not a cumulative value over the whole period. Only a limited set of result indicators should be underpinned with reference values.

Definitions of certain vulnerable groups provided in the common indicators toolbox:

- ‘End recipients with disabilities’ are persons who are registered disabled according to national definitions and have received support (Source: §315 Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Labour market policy statistics – Methodology 2018).
- ‘Third-country nationals’ are persons who are not citizens of the Union, including stateless persons and persons with undetermined nationality and have received support.
- ‘End recipients with a foreign background and minorities’ are persons who have a foreign background or who are from a minority (including marginalised communities such as Roma people) according to national definitions and have received support.
- ‘Homeless end recipients or end recipients affected by housing exclusion’ are persons defined as homeless or affected by housing exclusion according to national definitions and have received support.

⁹ Link: https://ec.europa.eu/sfc/en/2021/support-ms/2021MNTESE?qt_esf_faq=2#/

¹⁰ Link: [SFC support portal](#) and [SFC F.A.Q.](#)



3. Selection of end-recipient for the structured survey and timing

The survey should be as representative as possible of the population of end recipients supported by ESF+ [Specific Objective (m)] for the various types of assistance provided. In order to be able to report survey sound results, the questions in the survey should cover a period of time that is sufficient to provide a reliable picture of the type of support received from the ESF+ by end-recipients, their satisfaction with such support as well as their socio-economic characteristics and living conditions that explain their needs.

Should food and/or basic material assistance be provided indirectly to the most deprived persons, for example, through vouchers or cards, MAs shall also be able to gather relevant information through the dedicated survey (c.f. Annex II of the structured survey template for indirect support set out in Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/2071 of 27 September 2023¹¹).

In the case that food and/or basic material assistance is provided to the most deprived persons both directly (on the premises where food/goods are delivered) and indirectly, MAs should carry out separate surveys following the two different structured survey templates set out in the Implementing Regulation mentioned in previous paragraph. The combination of both surveys should aim at being as representative as possible of the population of end recipients within Specific Objective (m).

A statistical sample is the selection of a subset of individuals from within a population to estimate characteristics of the whole population. To achieve this objective, collecting samples that are representative of the population is of paramount importance. To calculate the sample size the Commission proposes to apply the following parameters: a confidence level¹² of 95% and a confidence interval of 3%. Figures reported with an estimated maximum margin of error between 3% and 5 % are deemed less reliable than those with an estimated maximum margin of error below 3%. Estimations with a margin of error exceeding 5 % are considered not sufficiently reliable. An example of sample size calculation is provided in Annex 1 of the present document. This example is based on a methodology for the statistical sampling for unknown populations. Alternative methods such as statistical sampling for known populations with similar parameters also may be used.

In the case of very small populations, non-statistical sampling may be used provided it is justified. In all cases, the sampling method chosen should be described when reporting the results of the survey (Annex 3 of the present explanatory note).

The effect of non-response or partial response should be offset by increasing the respective number of respondents receiving similar support as there is a risk of selection bias if this results in specific groups under- or over-represented in the survey. Therefore, it is recommended that additional samples would have same or similar characteristic to those of non- or partially responding. In case the effect of non-response or partial response cannot be offset by increasing the respective number of respondents receiving similar support due to the unsubstitutability or

¹¹ Title of Annex II should read 'Structured survey template on ESF+ indirect support for addressing material deprivation' (link to corrigenda: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202490016)

¹² The confidence level is a measure of certainty regarding how accurately a sample reflects the population being studied within a chosen confidence interval

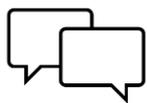
unreachability of those groups, MAs should apply a reasonable and recognised weighting method that accounts for both the probability of selection into the planned sample and for the imbalanced non-response regarding the relevant characteristics of the population of end-recipients and the population of beneficiaries/partner organisation. MAs should enumerate and explain in Annex 3 the characteristics of the populations used in designing the sampling and, where applicable, the weighting method applied and the justification why an additional sample with the same or similar characteristic to those of non- or partially responding could not be drawn up or is not available.

It is important that MAs plan the survey(s) well in advance to obtain the required number of comprehensive responses, taking account of the planned distribution of assistance throughout the year. Finally, MAs will provide a summary of the methodology applied together with the results of the survey to the EC using the template outlined in the Annex 3 of the present explanatory note. SFC2021 is the electronic data exchange system to be used to transmit these documents to the Commission¹³.

Food donated by external parties and distributed with the logistical support financed by ESF+ is considered ESF+ support. For instance, if the partner organisation (PO) is reimbursed for every kg of donated food handled with ESF+ funds, then the end recipients of the donated food would also be considered to have benefited from ESF+ and as such would also form part of the population of end recipients of ESF+ support, from which a sample is drawn to participate in the structured survey.

To improve the comparability of structured survey data and the appropriate use of survey data for ESF+ evaluation, the structured survey template(s) should be used. The meaning of questions should not be changed to allow for aggregation of survey results at EU level.

¹³ c.f. Article 69(9) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council



4. The survey process

Following Article 23(3) of the ESF+ Regulation (EU) No 2021/1057 Managing Authorities (MA) shall report twice to the Commission the results of a structured survey of the end recipients regarding the support received from the ESF+. The first such report shall be submitted by 30 June 2025 and the second by 30 June 2028. The survey should be carried out in the year previous to the reporting year (in effect 2024 and in 2027). However, if MAs already implemented all interventions before 2027, the structured survey would not need to be performed in 2027. The survey could be conducted more frequently if deemed appropriate.

Although the MA has always the final responsibility for the completion of the survey it may be carried out by staff of the MA, by external contractors or in cooperation with beneficiaries/partner organisations/implementing organisations of the voucher/card schemes (and, in this case, through their staff). The latter option might generate a better response rate, as end recipients are familiar with the staff, however it also carries a risk of influence on the end recipients' responses. Hence, guidelines should be provided by the MA on the conduct of the survey. If the survey is performed by the beneficiaries, it should be proportionate having regard to the level of support allocated and the limited administrative capacity of organisations that often rely on volunteers.

It should be borne in mind that deprivation is a complex multi-dimensional concept and all evaluations and surveys should respect the privacy and dignity of end recipients and be carried out in such a way so as not to stigmatise the most deprived persons (see article 19(3) of the ESF+ regulation). In case the end recipient is a child, the responses should be obtained from parent(s) or from an authorised representative. In case an authorised third party collects food/goods on behalf of an end recipient, this third party may complete the survey on behalf of the end recipient.

Participants to the survey are to be selected among those end recipients who have received directly or indirectly food and goods/accompanying measures supported by ESF+. Beneficiaries, who initiated and/or implemented ESF+ supported operations related with food and/or basic material assistance, will also participate in the survey (Part A).

It is essential that interviewers are properly trained, and familiar with the functioning of ESF+ in the Member State (MS). Similarly, it is important to avoid any bias in the selection of interviewees or while carrying out the survey. Furthermore, the wording of the questionnaire should be well understood by interviewers and end recipients. The survey may be completed on paper or electronically, and procedures should be in place that allow for checking the quality of the survey results and of the aggregation. The records of the individual interviews, which are anonymised, may also be used for evaluation purposes by MS or the Commission.

For most cases it is recommended that the survey is carried out by the interviewer through a face-to-face interview with the ESF+ end recipient as it produces more reliable results. Although face-to-face interviews can be partially replaced by interviews over the phone or on-line, specific target groups typically without phones (e.g. the homeless) should be interviewed in person (e.g. at the premises of distribution points).

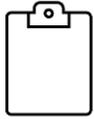
To overcome the challenge of getting responses from sensitive or hard-to-reach target groups, it is recommended to develop effective strategies, e.g. phone interviews, native language

interviewers (in the case of migrants and minorities), or on-site visits to the distribution points. This recommendation needs to be understood within the frame of what is reasonable and feasible.

Unforeseen challenges such as those imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have made necessary changing the initial approach to the structured survey and the strategies used to reach out to the most vulnerable target groups.

In addition, it should be considered that the point in time selected by the MA to conduct a structured survey may influence the results of the survey as types of assistance requested by end recipients may differ depending on the time of year (e.g. during the winter season, the help requested by end recipients may relate to access to clothes, which may affect satisfaction with assistance, and the overall assessment of the relevance of ESF+ assistance).

To have a meaningful aggregated data, any selected recipient who decides not to respond should be replaced by another one with the same characteristics – type of assistance received, type of target group, period of collection of assistance, etc.



5. Detailed explanations on the templates

This section provides detailed explanations on the templates for the ESF+ structured survey as approved by the implementing act of Commission (EU) 2023/2071 (c.f. Annex 2 of the present explanatory note).

The heading of both templates requests in the field description of ‘place’ a ‘post code from where the survey is carried out’. Should the survey not be carried out face-to-face, the post code should be understood as the one in which the end recipient lives when he is interviewed.

The survey combines closed questions (with pre-defined answers from which the respondent must choose) and open-ended questions (leaving the possibility to the respondent to formulate his/her own answer).

Closed questions are easier to answer and analyse and are mainly used to gather quantitative data which can be aggregated at EU level. Open questions are used to gather qualitative data from stakeholders (beneficiaries and end-recipients), who have the possibility to explain their views, to add individual information/concerns, and to refer to issues not yet addressed in the questionnaire. Open questions thus help to get a broader and potentially deeper picture, to refine the substantiation of responses. They will improve the qualitative assessment of the contributions. For open questions, the answers should where possible be recorded in a way that allows subsequent aggregation of the most reoccurring categories. Managing Authorities may at their discretion also add additional questions to the survey in order to gain further insights into the socio-economic characteristics of end recipients or their satisfaction with their support received. However, Managing Authorities may not adapt the predefined answers in closed questions as this would impede the correct aggregation of data at EU level.

In case a closed question in the survey is clearly not applicable, the questions should not be deleted. Managing Authorities or beneficiaries have the possibility to pre-fill the replies by adding ‘not applicable’. This way the interviewer will know that the question does not have to be asked.

Unless otherwise explicitly stated in the question (e.g. A4 in both templates), the questions in both survey templates refer to ESF+ support and are addressing end recipients of support received from the ESF+ and beneficiaries initiating/implementing ESF+ support to the most deprived. By answering the questions end recipients provide insights on the type of support received from ESF+, their satisfaction with such support, their socio-economic characteristics and their living conditions or level of deprivation. The additional information submitted by beneficiaries provides further details on the ESF+ assistance provided.

Moreover, the survey templates make direct reference to ESF+ in different headings. There is no further need to refer to ESF+ support explicitly in each and every question as this would unnecessarily make the questions longer. When the interviewer explains the purpose of the survey to the end recipient before proceeding with the questions, this aspect should be made clear.

Part A of the survey - Questions for Beneficiaries initiating or implementing ESF+ support directly or indirectly through e.g. vouchers/cards

The first part of the survey (part A) consists of questions to be answered by beneficiaries. Depending on the national setting, a beneficiary can be a public or private body, an entity with or without legal personality, or a natural person, responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing operations (related with direct support or indirect support through voucher/card schemes). MAs will define the type(s) of beneficiaries that should be entrusted with the task to fill in Part A of the survey.

In some MS, beneficiaries have several distribution points. Therefore, for the purpose of the survey, the distribution point is a place where the assistance is distributed to the end recipients directly. If a distribution point is the same for several end-recipients selected for the survey, Part A of the questionnaire can be prefilled by the beneficiary and/or interviewer as they would be the same.

If the target group addressed by the organization belongs to a category different to the explicitly mentioned in the question, ‘others’ should be marked and the target group specified (e.g. Question A1).

Gathering information from beneficiaries on the frequency of the distribution of ESF+ assistance is relevant as this may be a factor explaining the degree of satisfaction with the support expressed by end recipients (c.f. Question A2 in the questionnaire for direct support). As there might be differences in the frequency of the distribution within the same country depending on the beneficiary, a number of beneficiaries are interviewed.

Concerning Question A3 and A7 in the questionnaire for direct support and A3, A6 and A8 for indirect support, the estimations requested should be made using a reasonable method and for the whole present calendar year. Should implementation not have started at the beginning of 2024 yet, the estimation should cover the period from the start of the implementation until the end of the year.

Furthermore, concerning Question A3 in both questionnaires, the estimated number of persons should be reported irrespective of the number of times the support is given to them in the year¹⁴.

As regards open question A10 in the questionnaire for direct support if the beneficiary has not gathered any experience with indirect support, instead of stating “not applicable” it is more useful to provide such explanation in the text field.

Concerning Question A7 of the questionnaire for indirect support, the Managing Authority/beneficiary can prefill the answer about eligibility criteria. Similarly, as regards Question A8 of the same questionnaire, the value is often known by Managing Authorities as it is determined at their level and so, the answer can also be prefilled by them. In case this value has not been predetermined, a proxy (estimated average amount per end recipient of voucher/year) can be provided. The question can be left unanswered if a reasonable proxy is impossible to determine and a clarification added in the text box available in the same question.

¹⁴ Hence, the estimated number of times people received food/goods co-financed by the ESF+ (participants) from the organisation in the calendar year should not be reported. Participants should be reported only once irrespective of the number of times they receive food/goods under ESF+ support in the calendar year. In case the support is given to households, all the members of the households are considered participants.

Hence, it is not requested any individual monitoring of voucher values provided to individual end recipients to answer this question.

Part B of the survey - Questions for ESF+ end recipients

The second part of the survey (part B) consists of questions addressed to end recipients of food and/or basic material assistance provided with ESF+ support under SO(m). End recipients are expected to provide information concerning the support received from the ESF+ and their satisfaction with such support. To better understand the needs of the end recipients, they are also asked to provide some information on their socio-economic characteristics and their living conditions or level of deprivation.

Firstly, end recipients should be informed of the purpose of the survey before answering the questions: e.g., *"This assistance has been funded by funds of the European Union. We would like to know from those that receive support, if this assistance is useful in order to improve it"*, and then asked to participate. Interviewees have always the option not to take part in the survey as a whole or not to answer any specific question. In such a case, as already indicated in section 3 above, it is recommended that additional samples are drawn with the same or similar characteristic to those of non- or partially responding.

It should also be explained to selected end recipients that i) participation is voluntary, and in no way a condition of assistance, ii) the survey is anonymous and confidential and iii) data collected will be used solely for purposes of monitoring and evaluation of ESF+. The survey should respect the privacy of end recipients. As was the case for FEAD, the specific difficulties to the attainment of reliable survey results deriving from the particularities of the assistance under Specific Objective (m) that certain Managing Authorities may encounter based on the delivery and implementation model chosen should be addressed by designing a strategy that lowers the risk of getting responses from persons not having received ESF+ support. It needs to be recalled that survey results will be subject of analysis when conducting evaluations¹⁵.

Hence, before conducting the interview, it would be advisable to confirm that the interviewee has received ESF+ support directly (food or goods) or indirectly (with vouchers/cards) as well as accompanying measures co-funded by ESF+. This confirmation may come directly from end recipients, from beneficiaries or from Managing Authorities (e.g. the latter might be knowledgeable of it in the case of indirect support).

Also, beneficiaries shall keep records of products purchased with ESF+ funds and distributed to the most deprived, for management and control purposes. In line with article 24 of the ESF+ Regulation, audits may cover all stages of implementation and all levels of the distribution chain, with the sole exception of the end recipients unless there is a risk assessment indicating a possible risk of irregularity or fraud. Moreover, as MAs have to report on indicators established by the Regulation related to material support, beneficiaries shall be able to identify food/basic material assistance that is co-financed by the ESF+ and distributed to the most deprived, in accordance with the criteria set in the ESF+ Programme.

¹⁵ Evaluations on all SOs including ESF+ support for addressing material deprivation (SO m) need to be performed by MAs.

In principle, the survey will be carried out through a face-to-face interview with the ESF+ end recipient. The interviewer will mark the appropriate answer based on the response of the end recipient. In justified cases, the survey may be filled directly by the end recipient if the MA considers it as a reliable method for data gathering.

One survey form should be used for each individual end-recipient. Interviewers should in principle follow the order of the questions proposed and read out each question. They should wait for the reply from the end recipient and be ready to provide more detailed explanations if these are requested or of benefit to the survey.

To reduce the burden of data collection, if data and responses requested by the survey are already available from up-to-date, reliable and robust sources, or if the responses are clear (e.g. answer to B2 might be obvious in certain cases¹⁶), it is possible to reply to these questions without asking the end recipients. The list of pre-filled questions and sources used should be provided together with the aggregated results of the survey.

Some answers can be recorded by the interviewer by ticking the appropriate box (only one possible reply from a multiple choice). Multiple answers are allowed in some cases (e.g. A5, A6, B4-B5, B7-B9). Other questions require one answer per row as each row is a sub-question (e.g. A1, A4 and B17). Finally, for open-ended questions a free text is available for respondents to formulate his/her own answer (e.g. A10, A11, B19).

In some instances, an end-recipient may still not understand the question or does not want to provide an answer. In such cases, the answer to record should be "Doesn't know/does not understand the question/ Does not wish to answer".

The categories "Does not wish to answer" and "Doesn't know or does not understand the question" should not be read to the end recipient. The interviewer will select them only if the respondent spontaneously says so. This is done to encourage respondents to answer most questions fully.

In some cases, the interviewer should not spell out categories of answers, and rather wait for a response to receive an unbiased reply (e.g. B7, B15).

Although the structured survey focuses on the ESF+ support received from end-recipients, in some cases the questions seek to gather information on their socio-economic background, current and past situation and their views or satisfaction with the ESF+ assistance. For instance, questions B16 may contribute to assess their level of deprivation whereas questions B1, B2, B3 help to characterise the target groups.

For questions marked "other (to be specified)", the answers should where possible be recorded in a way that allows subsequent aggregation of the most reoccurring categories.

¹⁶ Number of the question given as example in this section refer always to the survey template for direct support



6. Data protection

The protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and shall apply to the processing of survey data. Recital 33 of the ESF+ Regulation states *‘With regard to the processing of personal data within the framework of this Regulation, national data controllers should carry out their tasks for the purposes of this Regulation in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council¹⁷. The dignity of and respect for the privacy of end recipients of operations under the specific objective ‘addressing material deprivation through food and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived persons, including children, and providing accompanying measures supporting their social inclusion’ should be guaranteed. In order to avoid any stigmatisation, the persons receiving food and/or basic material assistance should not be required to identify themselves when receiving the support and when taking part in surveys on the most deprived persons who have benefitted from the ESF+’.*

The data collected, entered and stored shall be processed solely for management, evaluation and audit purposes. The Commission does not require the micro data but only aggregated data sets of the individual surveys. It may however ask to have access to this anonymised microdata, when carrying out evaluations, as it contains useful information.

The Member State/managing authority shall ensure the physical protection of confidential data by regulatory, administrative, technical and organisational measures (statistical disclosure control). These measures should however not limit the use of the data for the purposes set out in the Regulations and this explanatory note. Member States should take appropriate measures to prevent and sanction any violation of statistical confidentiality.

¹⁷ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) (OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1).



7. Data aggregation and transmission to the EC

The structured survey contains a number of questions for beneficiaries and end recipients, the aim of which is to gather relevant information such as type and frequency of the support provided by the beneficiaries, number and type of end recipients supported, their socio-economic backgrounds, current and past situation or their views on the ESF+ assistance.

Survey results shall be aggregated at EU level which will feed into ESF+ mid-term and ex-post evaluations to be conducted by the EC. In addition, the results of this survey can also be used by the Managing Authorities to conduct evaluations and draw lessons at national level.

Aggregated data provides valuable information to assess the effects of the support and explore the potential impact of interventions, including potential correlations between the type and intensity of support offered and end recipients' satisfaction with the support received, which may allow drawing conclusions (e.g. whether key characteristics of the end recipients make them more receptive to a specific type of support than another¹⁸). If the MAs decides to carry out an aggregation at sub-national - regional or more local - level the assessment of survey results might allow for further effect/impact identification, comparison and benchmarking, which would be useful for evaluation purposes¹⁹.

Managing Authorities are responsible for data collection, validation, aggregation and reporting to the Commission. The data from the survey(s) should be aggregated and input directly in SFC2021²⁰ to ensure the comparability of data at EU level. SFC2021 will clearly indicate which questions are single or multiple choice. Identified gaps and inconsistencies in structured survey data should be addressed by Managing Authorities e.g. by using additional research methods, e.g. analysis of the raw data from structured surveys, focus groups and consultations with stakeholders at national level.

For this purpose, aggregated data of the survey results shall be reported to the EC by filling a preformatted template directly in SFC2021 under the tab "evaluation" by 30 June 2025 and 30 June 2028 respectively. Managing Authorities should develop an internal methodology for such aggregation and analysis of responses at national level.

Following three parts are differentiated in the aggregated template for each survey type (direct and indirect support):

- i) introductory questions,
- ii) questions addressed to beneficiaries (section A) and
- iii) questions addressed to end recipients (section B).

¹⁸ For instance, by cross-tabulating the type of support received, key end recipient characteristics (e.g. age group, gender, etc.) and their satisfaction it may be assessed whether certain forms of support led to higher satisfaction or were considered more useful than others for end recipients of certain characteristics. Reported level of difficulty in getting the assistance could be examined in combination with other replies such as the type of support or characteristics of end recipients.

¹⁹ MAs may analyse the impact of the assistance and accompanying measures at the level of end-recipients by examining the rich set of information gathered in the surveys e.g. perception or usefulness of the support by target groups (gender, age, vulnerable group, household composition, ...) or by implementation features at national or regional level. Such analysis will contribute to better understand who benefits more from the ESF+ support and under what conditions or which delivery model increased perceived impacts or alleviated perceived difficulties in getting the assistance. If more surveys are carried along the years of implementation, changes across time in terms of impacts as well as in the composition of end recipients may be examined. This analysis may provide the foundation on which to further explore in an evaluation the potential impact of ESF+ interventions within SO(m), including potential correlations between the type and intensity of support offered and end recipients' satisfaction with the support received.

²⁰ A quick technical guide on how to report in SFC2021 i) the summary of the methodology applied to carry out the survey(s), ii) aggregated data for each question and iii) results and conclusions of the survey will be issued in a separate document.

Firstly, as part of the submission a cover sheet shall also be completed and input in SFC2021, which includes name, type and activity of the beneficiaries selected for the survey and number of surveys carried out by beneficiary selected and in total, organisation(s) involved in interviewing, summary of the methodology applied to carry out the survey and the main results and conclusions drawn by Managing Authorities (see Annex 3 of the present document).

Secondly, the number of responses received by each option for each of the questions contained in the survey addressed to beneficiaries (section A) and to end recipients (section B) should be input in SFC2021. The values to be introduced should be absolute numbers. Therefore, no values reflecting percentages are to be introduced in SFC2021.

Thirdly, Managing Authorities may upload further documents in SFC2021 related with the survey to provide more background information that could be useful to understand the results e.g. background detailed information on the sample methodology, detailed explanations to survey results, descriptive statistics (e.g. frequencies, cross tabulations) providing distribution of responses by different types of support (food support, material assistance, accompanying measures) and target groups., raw data with anonymized individual results in excel format, etc. For this purpose Managing Authorities may upload these documents in SFC choosing the type “Additional information” or “Other Commission Document”.

8. Annex 1 - Example of sample size calculation for unknown populations

Where the population is unknown, the sample size can be derived by computing the minimum sample size required for accuracy in estimating proportions by considering the standard normal deviation set at specific confidence level, percentage picking a choice or response and the confidence interval (margin of error).

The following formula can be used for the sample size calculation:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times P \times (1 - P)}{s^2}$$

where :

n = sample size;

Z values represent standard normal deviation set at specific confidence level (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence level);

P is percentage picking a choice. If **P** is unknown (for example, before research is done) the maximal possible value of (**P** × (1-**P**)) should be used in the formula = 0.5 × 0.5 = 0.25;

s = margin of error (it is the positive and negative deviation you allow on your survey results for the sample).

For the ESF+ structured survey, we are proposing to apply the following parameters: a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 3% and percentage picking a choice 0.25.

When using these parameters, the sample size is 1.068 units.

9. Annex 2 - Survey templates

- ✓ Link to the **Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/2071** of 27 September 2023 establishing a template for the structured survey on end recipients of food and/or basic material assistance under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council - C/2023/6387

OJ L 239, 28.9.2023, p. 5–22 (BG, ES, CS, DA, DE, ET, EL, EN, FR, GA, HR, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SL, FI, SV)

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023R2071>

- ✓ Link to the Corrigendum to Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/2071 of 27 September 2023 establishing a template for the structured survey on end recipients of food and/or basic material assistance under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and the Council (OJ L 239, 28.9.2023) - C/2024/195

OJ L, 2024/90016, 18.01.2024 (BG, ES, CS, DA, DE, ET, EL, EN, FR, GA, HR, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SL, FI, SV)

The title of Annex II should read: ‘STRUCTURED SURVEY TEMPLATE ON ESF+ INDIRECT SUPPORT FOR ADDRESSING MATERIAL DEPRIVATION’.

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202490016

- ✓ The English version of the survey template for direct support and indirect support via vouchers/cards in word format²¹ is attached below.



Annex I_SURVEY
DIRECT SUPPORT_EN



Annex II_SURVEY
INDIRECT SUPPORT_E

²¹ These templates are provided for your convenience. Please note that the templates are only available in English in this format and they do not replace those formally adopted <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023R2071>.

10. Annex 3 - Reporting of aggregated results

Aggregated data of the survey results shall be reported to the EC by filling a preformatted template directly in SFC2021 under the tab "evaluation". It should be accompanied by the completed cover sheet presented below, which shall also be entered directly in SFC2021.

COVER SHEET TO THE AGGREGATED DATA

<p>Country: [country]</p>
<p>Name, type and activity of the beneficiary and number of surveys carried out: 1. [name of beneficiary] – [type*] – [activity**] - [number of surveys] 2. [name of beneficiary] – [type] - [activity] - [number of surveys] 3. [name of beneficiary] – [type] - [activity] - [number of surveys] . . x. [name of beneficiary] – [type] - [activity] - [number of surveys]</p> <p>(*) As regards type of beneficiary: [provide a brief explanation of the type of beneficiaries that carried out the surveys following your own categories e.g. public agency, private, NGO, charity, church-based organisation, food-bank, other]</p> <p>(**) As regards activity of the beneficiary: [provide a brief explanation of the type of activity performed by the beneficiaries participating in the survey e.g. health sector, education, social protection, food, advisory psychological support, housing support, other]</p>
<p>Type of vouchers/cards distributed with ESF+ support (in case indirect support is provided): [only applicable to indirect support - indicate the type of vouchers or cards distributed with ESF+ support i.e. electronic voucher/card, electronic via phone app or paper In case there are only survey results from direct support, this field should be empty]</p>
<p>Total number of end recipients survey forms filled in: [provide the grand total number of end recipients survey forms aggregated that were filled in. This number should be equal to the sum of surveys indicated in section 'Name, type and activity of the beneficiary and number of surveys carried out' above]</p>
<p>Total number of organisations involved in interviewing: [provide the total number of organisations that carried out interviews]</p>
<p>Period when the structured survey was carried out: [MM/YYYY-MM/YYYY]</p>
<p>Sample size and method used for a calculation of the sample: [please, provide the number of end recipients sampled, describe the methodology used for calculating the sample size and explain how non responses and incomplete answers were dealt with]</p>
<p>Description of the structured survey process and selection of end recipients: [who carried out the survey – external/internal, how the end recipients have been selected; in case some questions were prefilled, please identify them ; in cases when some questions were not asked, please identify them and provide a justification; the MA should also describe difficulties encountered and lessons learned during the survey process]</p>

Main results and conclusions:

[The results and conclusion can be structured in following subsections:

- Results and conclusions of the survey at the level of beneficiary;
- Profile and characteristics of end recipients;
- Assessment of the interventions by category of assistance (food/material/accompanying measures) and by target group
- Improvement areas identified and how they are intended to be addressed
- Overall conclusion....]

AGGREGATED DATA WITH SURVEY RESULTS

- ✓ The sum of responses received by each option for each question (contained in the survey addressed to beneficiaries and end recipients) shall be entered in SFC2021.
- ✓ No values reflecting percentages are to be introduced in SFC2021 but absolute numbers. For instance, if 2000 end recipients have completed the survey, question B2 should show a total of 2000 for the five options available. The worked example below shows how absolute figure responses could be broken down.

B2. What age are you?				
0 -17	18-29	30-64	65 or above	<i>I do not wish to answer/know/understand the question</i>
300	500	700	450	50

- ✓ Some questions allow multiple answers (e.g. B4-B5 or B7-B9 of Annex I), Only under those questions, may the sum of responses be higher than the total number of completed end recipients survey forms.
- ✓ Concerning question A3 and A7 in the questionnaire for direct support and question A3, A6 and A8 for indirect support, the number entered should be the cumulative figure of the reported data provided by each beneficiary participating in the survey.