Guidance on the Core Indicators library

EEA and Norway Grants Financial Mechanisms 2021–2028

Background

Core indicators[1] have been a key component of results-based management (RBM) in the Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021 (FMs 14-21), providing a standardised framework for defining and measuring programme outcomes and outputs. During implementation and reporting, these indicators enabled Programme Operators (POs) and Fund Operators (FOs) to apply a consistent methodology for data collection and reporting. **When multiple programmes use the same indicators, results can be aggregated, helping to tell the Grants' overall results narrative**. Final Programme Reports use core indicators to enhance narrative reporting by substantiating key achievements.

The Financial Mechanism Office (FMO) has developed an updated and expanded core indicators library for the FMs 2021-2028, drawing from effective indicators in the previous period and aligning with the EU Results Framework (EURF), where relevant. As outlined in the *RBM Guidance for FMs 2021-2028*,[2] core indicators have been established for all programme areas/funds in the new *Blue Book*. These **indicators are mapped to their respective programme areas/funds and *should* be incorporated into a programme's Results Framework, where applicable**. Each Results Framework will thus include a mix of core and custom indicators, depending on the programme's selected outputs and outcomes. The core indicators library in GrACE provides a definition and simple methodology for each indicator, ensuring consistent data collection, aggregation and reporting across the Grants.

All major international donors and development agencies—such as the European Commission, the World Bank, various UN agencies, and national development actors like the Swiss Development Cooperation—use a similar approach by maintaining a library of standard indicators, particularly when working across multiple sectors, countries, or funding streams. This memo provides guidance on the use of the Core Indicators Library.

Introduction

The core indicators library provides a standardised framework for assessing outputs and outcomes across programmes and programme areas/funds. These expected results, measured using core

[1] **Indicators are a means to quantifiably measure progress.** Indicators should be chosen to measure the most important results a programme expects to achieve and are not intended to measure all possible results. **Indicators are used to help *indicate* the extent to which an outcome or output has been achieved.** A **core indicator** is a standardised metrics used consistently across multiple projects, programmes or programme areas to measure common outputs and outcomes.

[2] https://eeagrants.org/en/fmo/documents-library/archive/results-based-management-guidance-2021-2028

and programme-specific indicators, are drawn from the **areas of support outlined in the Blue Book.**[3]

The library is intended for stakeholders involved in the development and management of EEA and Norway Grants programmes, particularly National Focal Points (NFPs), Programme Operators (POs), Fund Operators (FOs), Donor Programme Partners (DPPs), Project Promoters (PPs), and the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO).

Key features of the core indicators library

The library is a **flexible menu of indicators**, except for bilateral indicators, which are primarily measured through an FMO-administered survey.

Core indicators are mapped to programme areas/funds based on thematic relevance. A deliberately inclusive (or "maximalist") approach has been used in the core indicators library, acknowledging that individual programmes often span multiple programme areas. Core indicators can be selected on an outcome-by-outcome basis, as each outcome is typically aligned with one area of support within a single programme area. This thematic alignment—i.e., the correspondence between indicators and programme areas/funds, as well as between indicators and the predefined outcome and output statements of the CSF results framework—is indicative only and intended purely as guidance.

The FMO supports POs and FOs in selecting suitable core indicators for their programme Results Frameworks. **An output-by-output and outcome-by-outcome approach is employed to identify appropriate core indicators from the library.** Where suitable core indicators do not exist, programme-specific ones will be developed with the FMO Results and Evaluation (R&E) Unit support. Each programme results framework will thus include a mix of core and programme-specific indicators. The *RBM Guidance*[4] recommends including 2 to 3 indicators per output and outcome statement.

Many core indicators can be customised to reflect specific groups or themes, while remaining compatible with aggregation needs.

The library is expandable—ongoing feedback during the programme development phase may lead to updates and additions.

Application of the library

The library is used at two main stages of the programme cycle:

- **Programme design**: The FMO supports the integration of appropriate core indicators into programme Results Frameworks. An output-by-output and outcome-by-outcome approach is employed to identify appropriate core indicators from the library. Where suitable core indicators do not exist, programme-specific ones are developed with R&E Unit support.

[3] https://eeagrants.org/en/fmo/documents-library/archive/blue-book-programme-areas-and-funds-eea-and-norway-grants-2021-2028
[4] https://eeagrants.org/en/fmo/documents-library/archive/results-based-management-guidance-2021-2028

Each programme results framework thus includes a mix of core and programme-specific indicators.

- **Monitoring and reporting**: Standard indicators enable aggregation of results across programmes and countries, helping to tell the narrative of the Grants' results.
- **Learning and adaptation**: The library will evolve based on implementation experiences and stakeholder feedback. It is a living tool, adaptable to future needs.

Access to the library

Stakeholders can access the core indicators library through:

- **GrACE**: A searchable database with dropdown menus and tooltips for definitions and methodologies.
- **SharePoint site for concept note development**: Excel format, used in programme concept note development.
- **Public access**: Available as a downloadable document on the EEA and Norway Grants website (https://eeagrants.org/en/fmo/documents-library).[5]

Structure of the library

- **Tab 1** lists **all core indicators** excluding bilateral indicators, mapped to programme areas/funds, with brief definition and methodological note, unit of measurement, disaggregation options, and example data sources. The column 'Customisable core indicator' indicates whether the indicator can be customised by target group and/or topic. Most core indicators are customisable.
- **Tab 2** includes **core bilateral indicators**, which are, for the majority, tracked by the FMO. POs/FOs must ensure that up-to-date contact details for Project Promoters (PPs) and donor project partners are maintained in GrACE for the post-project bilateral survey, and these stakeholders remain available for participating in the survey.
- **Tab 3** includes **core indicators relevant to the Civil Society Fund (CSF)**, with indicators mapped to the pre-defined outcomes and outputs of the CSF Results Framework. The CSF relevant indicators are also included under Tab 1.
- **Tab 4** outlines the indicator coding system for easier reference and navigation.

Tips for using the library

- Conduct a **step-by-step review of each outcome and output statement** to identify relevant core indicators for inclusion in the programme results framework. Each outcome typically corresponds to a single area of support within one programme area.
- Use keyword, indicator code, or programme area/fund (proceeding outcome by outcome) as **filters to search the list**. For the CSF relevant core indicators, use keyword, indicator code, or outcome and output statements as filters to search the list.

[5] https://eeagrants.org/en/fmo/documents-library/archive/core-indicators-library-eea-and-norway-grants-2021-2028

- Focus on the feasibility of reporting, not just the number of indicators. A **traffic light system** helps assess complexity:
    - Low (primarily for output-level indicators): Data collection and reporting are simple and straightforward.
    - Medium: Data collection and reporting require moderate effort.
    - High (mostly for outcome-level indicators): Data collection and reporting are complex. Few indicators in the core indicators library fall into this category.

Unit of measurement

Most core indicators are measured in cumulative numbers. For such indicators, a baseline is generally not required.

For indicators measured in *annual numbers*, a baseline value is required. The baseline value should reflect either the pre-project conditions or data from the first year of implementation of relevant projects. The baseline value should draw on evidence. Reliable secondary data from institutions such as statistical agencies or NGOs may be used to establish a baseline, but if such data is unavailable or unsuitable, a dedicated baseline study may need to be conducted or commissioned. The cost of collecting baseline data is eligible under the programme management costs, with baseline values to be collected by the deadline specified in the Programme (Implementation) Agreement.

Optional disaggregation

Disaggregating indicators (e.g. by age, gender, or other identity) can be valuable when programmes target the general population but seek to understand how different groups are affected and identify disparities in results. However, due to challenges experienced during FMs 14–21—including limited use of disaggregated data in analysis and reporting—**disaggregation remains optional in FMs 21–28 and should be applied selectively**. Further, under FMs 2021–2028, **only the following disaggregation categories may be selected**:

Disaggregation category	**Options**
Age	Youth (age ≤ 29) Adult (age ≥ 30) Not specified
Gender	Female Male Other / Not specified
Roma	Roma Non-Roma Not specified
State	Beneficiary State Donor State Not specified

Include a **“Prefer not to say”** option in all data-collection tools whenever you request personal information. The disaggregation suggested in the core indicators library are indicative only and intended purely as guidance.

To maintain clarity, it is strongly recommended to **use only one type of disaggregation per indicator**. If additional or multiple disaggregation types are needed, consider splitting the indicator into separate, group-specific indicators. For example, HEA-001 “Number of people directly benefiting from new or improved healthcare services” can be split as:

- Number of children (under 18)...
- Number of adult (above 18)…

Disaggregation vs. specific indicators

Programmes can capture group-specific results by:

- **Disaggregating indicators** (e.g. by agegender, or other identity) – useful when the programme targets the general population but it is important to monitor and analyse how different groups are affected (that is, to identify disparities in results).
- **Using group-specific indicators** – appropriate when a programme targets a specific group (e.g. older women, unaccompanied child refugee). In this case, the change specifically within that group needs to be measured to assess progress toward equity or inclusion goals. The expected results of the group are distinct enough that aggregated or disaggregated data would not adequately capture achievements. For example, this core indicator can be customised to focus on Ukraine: *‘Number of advocacy/awareness-raising campaigns focused on Ukraine-related information integrity carried out’.*

These methods may be used separately or in combination, depending on programme objectives. The FMO offers support in selecting the most suitable approach.

Self-reporting of gender identity

For any gender-specific indicators or disaggregation by gender, **voluntary self-identification is the golden standard to follow**. In line with the Grants’ values, human rights principles, and international best practices, individuals must not be pressured to disclose their gender identity. It is also essential that all **questions related to identity-based self-identification are framed respectfully and clearly**, with an explanation of the purpose of data collection.

Gender should be understood in non-binary terms. The recommended response options are:

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Where individual self-reporting is not possible (e.g. in group settings) or desirable, **a qualified estimate by a trusted and informed community representative may be used**. These individuals should be recognised by their communities and selected through a participatory process. Gender identity questions should not be asked if there is any risk of harm or discomfort.

Self-reporting of Roma identity

Roma identity should, where relevant, also be captured through **voluntary self-identification**, and, where appropriate, **supplemented by qualified estimates from Roma fieldworkers**. These estimates are useful for contextualising the composition of the project area—for example, by identifying the general demographic makeup of a neighbourhood, rather than pinpointing specific individuals.

It is essential that all **questions related to identity-based self-identification are framed respectfully and clearly**, with an explanation of the purpose of data collection. Attendance sheets and survey questionnaires should invite individuals to self-identify in an inclusive and sensitive manner—e.g., “In addition to being [Czech], do you also identify as [Roma]?”—and should **allow space for multiple or mixed identities**. Where relevant, respondents should also have the option to identify with **Romani subgroups** or **country-specific terms** (e.g., *Gitano*).

All data collected must be **anonymised**, **aggregated**, and used **solely for monitoring and reporting purposes**. A **clear data protection statement** must accompany any data collection, explicitly stating that no personal data is being collected and that the information is intended to help Donors and decision-makers better understand how to support Roma inclusion.

In addition to or in lieu off self-identification, programmes may use **proxy indicators**[6] focused on dimensions or activities where Roma participation is expected to be high (e.g., core indicators coded with “ROM”). **Geographical targeting** is another viable method, drawing on statistical data and mapping tools—such as the Roma Atlas (Slovakia), socially excluded localities (Czechia), or identified deprived/segregated neighbourhoods (Romania, and Hungary)—to assess results in areas with significant Roma populations. For larger-scale interventions, data on the **composition of the area** (e.g., census data showing 70% Roma residents) can serve as a basis for estimating the proportion of Roma beneficiaries.

These estimates may be further **validated and refined through triangulation**, using supplementary data from **schools, kindergartens, NGOs**, or **local authorities** to enhance the reliability and accuracy of assumptions about the beneficiary population. This triangulated approach enables robust tracking of Roma-related results while respecting data-protection constraints.

Data ethics, privacy and safety

All data must be managed in accordance with applicable laws, including the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, which requires:

[6] A proxy indicator is a measurable variable used to represent or approximate something that is difficult to measure directly. It provides indirect evidence of the underlying change you want to track.

- Lawful, fair, and transparent processing: Data must be collected and used in a way that is legal, ethical, and clear to individuals.
- Purpose limitation: Data must be collected for specific, explicit, and legitimate purposes and not used for anything beyond those stated reasons.
- Data minimisation: Only the data necessary for the stated purpose should be collected and processed.
- Accuracy and currency: Data must be accurate, kept up to date, and corrected or deleted if found to be incorrect.
- Limited retention: Personal data should be stored only for as long as needed to fulfil its intended purpose.
- Security against unauthorised access or loss: Appropriate technical and organisational measures must be taken to protect data from breaches, theft, or accidental loss.

In addition, all data must be managed in line with the Grants' values, with a strong emphasis on ethics, privacy, and safety. Special care must be taken when collecting personal or sensitive data, particularly when measuring indicators tailored to specific groups and when disaggregating by, age, gender, other identity, or other personal characteristics such as ability. This includes ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the minimisation of harm or risk to individuals and communities. Where appropriate, data should be anonymised—especially in case management systems, surveys, or monitoring tools—to protect identities and prevent misuse.