



Open Call for Consultancy Services in the Field of Education

TERMS OF REFERENCE:	Comparative Study of National Qualifications Framework, Recognition of Academic Qualifications Procedures and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications in the Western Balkans
Contracting Authority:	RCC Secretariat
Eligible:	Respective consulting companies/ /individual consultants within bidding consortia
Duration:	20 May 2020 – 15th December 2020 (max 100 working days)
Reference Number:	019-020
Application Deadline:	30 April 2020

I BACKGROUND

The Leaders of the Western Balkans endorsed the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA) at the Trieste Summit in July 2017. MAP REA aims to enable unobstructed flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labour, making the region more attractive for investment and trade, while accelerating convergence with the European Union (EU), to bring about prosperity to citizens of Western Balkans. One of the key actions of the Mobility pillar of MAP REA is to facilitate and support the process of Recognition of Academic Qualifications and alignment with the EC Recommendation on Automatic Recognition of Academic Qualifications.

II DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Objectives and scope of the assignment

The Western Balkans economies are undertaking steps for better integration of high-skilled professionals and academics into their professional and research networks, including the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and working towards mobility of researchers and professionals. In this light, the Chair's Conclusions of the Western Balkans Poznan Summit in 2019 reflect the endorsement of the Declaration on Recognition of Academic Qualifications in the Western Balkans.

This exercise aims to provide continued cooperation on facilitating automatic recognition of academic qualifications in the Western Balkans, and support full alignment with the EU Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning abroad.

The main objective of the assignment is to conduct a Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications in the Western Balkans:

- 1) Outline and compare the National Qualifications Framework of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*¹, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia;
- 2) Analyse the implications of NQFs for the recognition practices across the Western Balkans (i.e. would the same qualification be recognised at different NQF level depending on where in the Western Balkans would the recognition be sought);
- 3) Outline and compare the recognition procedures and practices of the third cycle degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna academic qualifications of each of the Western Balkans economies;
- 4) Analyse the implications of the current recognition procedures and practices of the third cycle degrees/PhDs and pre-Bologna qualifications (i.e. would the same qualification be recognised differently across the Western Balkans);

¹ *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

- 5) Update on the current practice and procedures of recognition of academic qualifications (Bachelor and Master levels);
- 6) Outline a list of specific expert guidelines and recommendations to achieve a regionally coherent NQF and potential concrete steps to be taken to have a harmonised approach to recognition of pre-Bologna qualifications and PhDs, including a list of possible legislative/administrative adjustments.

The Study will have three sections:

- (1) On National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), outlining and comparing the existing NQFs in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The study will provide a description of all levels and sub-levels within the NQFs. The main aim of the comparison is to identify the similarities and differences between the existing NQFs and the implications of identified differences for recognition of qualifications.
- (2) On Phd, i.e. if the same degree is recognised differently (or is harmonised) in the WB6,
- (3) On pre-Bologna recognition procedures and outcomes in the Western Balkans, including a possible harmonised approach.

Conclusions and recommendations will provide tentative common guidelines and approach that the Western Balkans economies may consider implementing in their procedures if they decide to adopt a regionally coherent approach to recognising the same academic qualifications in the same manner. This section will also include the following:

1. Guidelines on recognition of academic qualifications levels based on the NQF comparison
2. Guidelines on recognition of third cycle qualifications
3. Guidelines on recognition of pre-Bologna qualifications

The Study will also include an Executive summary.

The Study will not exceed 50 pages.

In addition to desk research and analysis of legal framework, the experts engaged will be required to carry out interviews with key stakeholders in each of the Western Balkans

economies. Travel costs for the implementation of this assignment will be covered by RCC Secretariat. Specifically the interviews will be carried out with the Ministry of Education, ENIC/NARIC staff, selected higher education institutions and students who went through the recognition process.

The engaged Experts should be available for maximum of two presentations of the study results at a workshop or a seminar in the duration of the contract as agreed between the RCC Secretariat and the Experts.

Tasks

- Meeting with RCC Secretariat (or online call) between 25th and 29th May 2020 in Sarajevo (if circumstances permit);
- Detailed Methodology and Outline of the Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications by 5^h June 2020;
- First draft of the Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications by 15st August 2020;
- Second draft of the Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications by 1st October 2020;
- Final Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications by 1st November 2020;
- Maximum of two presentations of the study results at a workshop or a seminar in the duration of the contract as agreed between the RCC Secretariat and the Experts.

The envisioned level of effort is set at a maximum of 120 days of experts input with trips to the region.

The bidder will report to the Expert on Human Capital Development at the Regional Cooperation Council.

Deliverables

- Detailed Methodology and Outline of the Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD’s and pre-Bologna qualifications by 5th June 2020;
- First draft of the Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD’s and pre-Bologna qualifications by 15th August 2020;
- Second draft of the Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD’s and pre-Bologna qualifications for 1st October 2020;
- Final Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD’s and pre-Bologna qualifications by 1st November 2020;
- Maximum of two presentations of the study results at a workshop or a seminar in the duration of the contract as agreed between the RCC Secretariat and the Experts.

Timeframe

The total duration of the engagement will be 120 expert days, starting on 20 May 2020 and finishing by 1 October 2020.

DELIVERABLE	DEADLINE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed Methodology and Outline of the Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD’s and pre-Bologna qualifications 	5 th June 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First draft of the Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of 	15 th August 2020

Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second draft of Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications 	1st October 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Comparative Study of the existing National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Practices of Third Cycle Degrees/PhD's and pre-Bologna qualifications 	1 st December 2020

III COMPETENCIES

RCC is looking for a team of experts with strong background in recognition of academic qualifications with knowledge, experience and understanding of the Bologna process, European Higher Education Area, Lisbon Recognition Qualifications and national regulation and practice of recognition of academic qualifications. The Experts need to demonstrate knowledge and experience in working within the Bologna process framework and the specific knowledge and understanding of the SEE.

Qualifications

Education:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advanced university degree in the area of social and humanistic sciences.
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Experience:	<p>Qualifications required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimum of 7 years of experience in similar tasks; ▪ Experience in working on issues related to recognition of academic qualifications, in particular within the Bologna process framework and specifically in relation to the SEE; ▪ Experience of working in more than one country in SEE will be considered an asset; ▪ <u>Proven analytical skills and ability to conceptualise and write concisely and clearly;</u> ▪ Proven communication and presentation skills and ability to work in an environment requiring liaison and collaboration with multiple actors including government representatives, businesses, international organisations, civil society institutions and other stakeholders.
Language requirements:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fluency in English, as the official language of the RCC; ▪ Knowledge of other RCC languages is an advantage.
Other:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Familiar with MS Office applications.

Core competencies

- Demonstrates professional competence to meet responsibilities and post requirements and is conscientious and efficient in meeting commitments, observing deadlines and achieving results;
- Results-orientation: Plans and produces quality results to meet established goals, generates innovative and practical solutions to challenging situations;
- Communication: Excellent communication skills, including the ability to convey complex concepts and recommendations in a clear and persuasive style tailored to match different audiences;

- Team work: Ability to interact, establish and maintain effective working relations with a culturally diverse team; and
- Client orientation: Ability to establish and maintain productive partnerships with regional and national partners and stakeholders and pro-activeness in identifying the needs of beneficiaries and partners, as well as matching them to appropriate solutions.

Core values

- Demonstrates integrity and fairness by modelling RCC values and ethical standards;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability.

IV QUALITY CONTROL

Quality control by the Regional Cooperation Council

The consultants' outputs in the form of a report shall be reviewed by the Regional Cooperation council. The approved final report will be subject to a quality assessment by the Programme Department of the Regional Cooperation Council, upon whose endorsement the reports and deliverables will be distributed and made public.

V. APPLICATION RULES

The application needs to contain the following:

- Technical Offer;
- Financial Offer.

Technical Offer

For companies and consortia of individual consultants:

- Company profile including a brief description (up to 2 pages) of the company. In case of a bidding consortium, the team leader should submit the profile of the consortium;
- Copy of Company's Registration Certificate (in case of consulting companies);
- In case of bidding consortia of individual consultants participating in this Call, they must indicate the members and show how the work is divided between them. Specifically, all members must name the team leader and authorise this member to represent the consortium and receive payments on behalf of the other members. A corresponding written authorisation, power of attorney must be attached to the bid;

- Financial records - company's balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement for the past 2 years (only in case of a bidding of consulting companies);
- CVs of experts, outlining relevant knowledge and experience as described in the Terms of References, along with contact details of referees;
- An outline work programme of a maximum of 5 pages, describing the main issues, sources of information to be used, timeline and methodology. The work programme should include the initial outline of the content of the study;
- List of references for relevant activities implemented over the past years demonstrating relevant experience in the subject matter;
- Application Submission Form (Annex I);
- Signed Statements of Availability (Annex II).

Financial Offer (Free format)

The financial offer should reflect the following:

- All figures should be expressed in EUR;
- VAT amount, if applicable, should be presented.

When preparing the financial offer, the applicant should take into account the following:

- Use a free format for the budget providing the global price for the work to be provided.

NOTE:

When preparing the financial offer, the applicant should take into account that the fee rates should be broadly consistent with those applicable in the region.

Submission of applications:

Applications need to be submitted by 30 April 2020, by 17:00 Central European Time to the following address ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int

- Please make sure that the application is submitted in two separate folders one containing Technical Offer and the other Financial Offer. The documents should be submitted in a form of copies of the originals.

VI. EVALUATION RULES:

- The consultancy will be awarded to the highest qualified bidder based on the relevance of skills and expertise to this assignment;
- The applications are evaluated following these criteria:

EVALUATION GRID	Maximum score
A. Technical Offer (A.1+A.2+A.3)	100
A.1. Work experience, references list: Relevant work experience; evidence of other contracts of the size comparable to that of the Call; experience with clients comparable to the Contracting Authority.	35
A.2. Quality and professional capacity of the consultant(s): CV(s) satisfy the criteria set forth in the Terms of Reference, education and experience, demonstrate professional capacity and experience required.	35
A.3 Quality of the concept note: An outline of work programme describing the main issues, information, data sources, research and analytical tools to be employed by the author, as well as the timeline.	30
B. Financial Offer/ lowest price has maximum score	100

Score for offer X =

A: [Total quality score (out of 100) of offer X / 100] * 80

B: [Lowest price / price of offer X] * 20

In addition to the results of the technical and financial evaluation, competency-based interview will be held with the selected bidder.

Information on selection of the most favourable bidder

The RCC Secretariat shall inform candidates and bidders of decisions reached concerning the award of the contract as soon as possible, including the grounds for any decision not to award a contract for which there has been competitive tendering or to recommence the procedure.

Standard letter of thanks for participation to unsuccessful bidders shall be sent within 15 days after the contract is signed with the awarded bidder.

The candidates and bidders wishing to receive a feedback may send a request within 15 days after receipt of the standard letter of thanks.

The request may be sent to the e-mail address ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat
Attention to: Administration Department
Building of the Friendship between Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V
71000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Appeals procedure

Bidders believing that they have been harmed by an error or irregularity during the award process may petition the RCC Secretariat directly. The RCC Secretariat must reply within 15 days of receipt of the complaint.

The appeal request may be sent to the e-mail address ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat
Attention to: Administration Department
Building of the Friendship between Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V
71000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

ANNEX I:

APPLICATION SUBMISSION FORM

REF: 019-020 Open Call for Consultancy Services

Subject:

One signed copy of this Application Submission Form must be supplied.

1 SUBMITTED by:

	Name(s) and address(es) of the bidder submitting this tender
Full Company Name or Name of the legal entity/consortia of individual consultants	

2 CONTACT PERSON (for this Call)

Name	
Surname	
Address	
Telephone	
Fax	
e-mail	

3 **DECLARATION**

[Company Name or Name of the Consortia of Individual Consultants] _____ hereby declares that we have examined and accepted without reserve or restriction the entire contents of the Open Call for Consultancy 019-020.

And we are not in one of the following situations:

- (a) Bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;

- (b) Have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment which has the force of res judicata;
- (c) Have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the Contracting Authority can justify;
- (d) Have not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the Contracting Authority or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
- (e) Have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation or any other illegal activity.
- (f) Are civil servants or other agents of the public administration of the RCC Participants, regardless of the administrative situation, excluding us from being recruited as experts in contracts financed by the RCC Secretariat.

We offer to provide the services requested in the open call for consultancy on the basis of supplied documentation subject of this call, which comprise our technical offer and our financial offer.

Name and Surname	
Signature	
Date	

ANNEX III: STATEMENT OF AVAILABILITY

REF: 019-020

By representing the Entity_____ we agree to participate in the above-mentioned tender procedure. We further declare that we are able and willing to work for the period(s) foreseen for the position for which our CVs have been included in the event that this tender is successful, namely:

Full Name	Available from (Date)	Available until (Date)	Acceptance by signature	Number of man-days associated to each task from the ToR