

Open Call for Consulting Services

Reference Number 024-017

Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications

Title: Team of Experts for Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications

Contracting Authority: RCC Secretariat

Starting Date: 10 September 2017

Reporting to: RCC Senior Expert on Skills and Mobility

Duration: 11 September – 20 December 2017 (40 working days)

Application Deadline: 3 September 2017

Eligible: Respective legal entities or individual consultants within bidding consortia

Reference Number: 024-017

Terms of Reference:

I BACKGROUND

Purpose

The purpose of the assignment is to support the implementation of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy (hereinafter: SEE 2020) by supporting the work on Recognition of Academic Qualifications.

The purpose of the assignment is to provide the basis for talks on starting the discussions on automatic/fast-track recognition of academic qualifications in SEE.

The main objective of the assignment is to conduct a Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications in SEE and provide case study examples on Recognition of Academic Qualifications between the Benelux and the Nordic countries:

- 1) Outline and compare the legislation regulating the recognition procedures and the bodies responsible for recognition in the SEE economies, namely Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*¹, Montenegro, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- 2) Outline and compare the progress towards development and implementation of National Qualification Frameworks, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Systems, ECTS, Diploma Supplement and other relevant instruments as key building blocks of the recognition of academic qualifications;
- 3) Outline the legislation and practice of fast-track recognition between Benelux and Nordic countries in a form of case study.

Background information

The work of RCC on **automatic recognition** is based on the commitments made by the Ministers responsible for higher education at the Yerevan Ministerial Summit under the Bologna process framework: “to develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of prior learning” and to ensure “that qualifications frameworks work in practice”.

To meet the outlined objectives the RCC supported consultation meetings of the Ministries of Education and ENIC/NARIC offices in the region. In January 2016 the Ministries of Education in the region have agreed to start working on establishing a procedure for automatic recognition of qualifications by developing a quality assured automatic recognition procedure for foreign higher education qualifications which builds on the efforts to develop Quality Assurance systems and National Qualification Frameworks in the region and in close cooperation with EU member states. These commitments were reinforced at the EU-WB Leaders’ Summit in July 2017 where

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

an Action Plan on Recognition of Academic Qualifications was adopted. The commissioned Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications should support the work towards the implementation of the Action Plan.

II DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Objectives and scope of the assignment

The main objective of the assignment is to conduct a Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications in SEE and provide case study examples on Recognition of Academic Qualifications between the Benelux and the Nordic countries:

- 1) Outline and compare the legislation regulating the recognition procedures and the bodies responsible for recognition in the SEE economies, namely Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*², Montenegro, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- 2) Outline and compare the progress towards development and implementation of National Qualification Frameworks, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Systems, ECTS, Diploma Supplement and other relevant instruments as key building blocks of the recognition of academic qualifications;
- 3) Outline the legislation and practice of fast-track recognition between Benelux and Nordic countries in a form of case study.

The Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications will outline and compare the legislation regulating the recognition procedures and the bodies responsible for recognition in the SEE economies, namely Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It will assess the effectiveness of the current recognition systems and identify its strengths and weaknesses in comparison with the ideal recognition framework set out in the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

In view of developing the system of automatic/fast-track recognition of qualifications in the SEE, the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications will include an introduction to the current and ongoing discussions on automatic recognition of qualifications in the framework of the European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Process and an explanation of how different building blocks of the Bologna Process – the National Qualification Frameworks, the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Systems, ECTS, etc. form a systemic basis for development and implementation of fast-track/automatic recognition of academic qualifications. Case studies of legislation framework and practice of fast/track and automatic recognition between Benelux and Nordic countries should outline how these countries have developed fast-track/automatic recognition systems between themselves both in terms of legislation and procedures, as well as operationally (e.g. joint IT systems, sharing of information between ENIC/NARIC centres, etc.)

Building on the framework outlined above the key part of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications should outline the current state of play in terms of development of the key elements of automatic system of recognition of academic qualifications in Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*³, Montenegro, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, namely National Qualification Frameworks, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Systems, ECTS, Diploma Supplement. This should be done with an aim of identifying gaps and potential pathways for building a system of recognition of academic qualifications in SEE.

The Study will in all its stages be developed in close consultation with the RCC and ERI SEE Secretariats. The Study will be developed in several stages.

The first stage will be the preparation of a detailed outline and methodology of the Study in cooperation with the RCC and ERI SEE Secretariats. The methodology will be discussed in a

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preparatory meeting in the week of 11th September between the contracted Expert/s and the RCC and ERI SEE Secretariats and finalised by **20 September 2017**.

A one-day preparatory meeting between 11 September and 15 September 2017 at RCC premises in Sarajevo is obligatory.

Based on the agreed methodology the required analysis will be conducted. The initial results of the analysis in a draft study format with a clear structure of the study will be shared with the RCC and ERI SEE Secretariats by **10 November 2017**.

Based on the comments received the second draft of the study will be finalised by **25 November 2017** to which a second round of comments will be prepared by the ERI SEE and RCC Secretariats.

Based on the comments received a final version of the study will be delivered by **20 December 2017**.

The engaged Expert/s 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 Expert/s.

Tasks

- Meeting with RCC Secretariat between 11th and 15th September 2017 in Sarajevo;
- Detailed Methodology and Outline of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications by 20 September 2017;
- First Draft of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications by 10 November 2017;
- Second Draft of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications by 25 November 2017;
- Final Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications by 20 December 2017;

- 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 Expert/s.

The envisioned level of effort is set at a maximum of 40 days of expert/s input with trips to the region.

The Consultant will report to the Senior Expert on Smart Growth at the Regional Cooperation Council.

Deliverables

- Detailed Methodology and Outline of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications by 20 September 2017;
- First Draft of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications by 10 November 2017;
- Second Draft of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications by 25 November 2017;
- Final Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications by 20 December 2017;
- 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 Expert/s.

Timeframe

The total duration of the engagement will be four months, starting on 15 September 2017 and finishing by 15 December 2017.

DELIVERABLE	DEADLINE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed Methodology and Outline of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications 	20 September 2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Draft of the Comparative Study on 	10 November 2017

Recognition of Academic Qualifications	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second Draft of the Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications 	25 November 2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Comparative Study on Recognition of Academic Qualifications 	20 December 2017

III COMPETENCIES

RCC is looking for Team Leader and 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 Expert/s need to demonstrate knowledge and experience in working within the Bologna process framework and the specific knowledge and understanding of the SEE.

Qualifications

Team Leader

Education:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University degree of at least four years of higher education in the area of social and humanistic sciences.
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

	<p>and specifically in relation to the SEE;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experience of working in more than one economy in SEE; ▪ Proven experience of working with the European Higher Education Area; ▪ <u>Proven analytical skills and ability to conceptualize 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.

Experts

Education:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University degree of at least four years of higher education in the area of social and humanistic sciences.
Experience:	<p>Qualifications required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimum of 5 years of experience in similar tasks; ▪ Experience in working on issues related to recognition of academic qualifications, in particular within the Bologna process framework; ▪ In-depth knowledge of at least one of the economies covered by the Study;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experience of working in more than one economy in SEE will be considered an asset; ▪ <u>Proven analytical skills and ability to conceptualize 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 of the Team

- 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 of the Team

- 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

The expert should ensure an internal quality control during the implementing and reporting phase of the assignment. The quality control should ensure that the draft reports comply with the above requirements and meet adequate quality standards before sending them to stakeholders for comments. The quality control should ensure consistency and coherence between findings, conclusions and recommendations. It should also ensure that findings reported are duly substantiated and that conclusions are supported by relevant judgment criteria.

The views expressed in the report will be those of the contractor and will not necessarily reflect those of the Regional Cooperation Council. Therefore, a standard disclaimer reflecting this will be included in the report. In this regard, the expert may or may not accept comments and/or proposals for changes received during the above consultation process. However, when comments/proposals for changes are not agreed by the expert, he/she should clearly explain the reasons for his/her final decision in a comments table.

Quality control by the Regional Cooperation Council

The consultant outputs shall undergo two external reviews. The first draft shall be reviewed in parallel by all relevant stakeholders, including the representatives of the dimension coordinators and the Regional Cooperation Council.

The final (second) draft shall be reviewed by the Regional Cooperation Council taking account of the comments made by the different stakeholders and how the experts have handled these

comments. The approved final report will be subject to a quality assessment by SEE 2020 Strategy Coordination Unit of the Regional Cooperation Council, upon whose endorsement the report would be distributed and made public.

APPLICATION RULES

The Technical Offer must include the following documents:

- 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 legal entities). In case of a bidding consortium a corresponding written authorisation, power of attorney is accordingly treated;
- Financial records - company's balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement for the past year (only in case of a bidding of legal entities);
- CV(s) of a team leader and experts of the project team, outlining relevant knowledge and experience as described in Annex I Terms of References, along with contact details of referees;
- An outline work programme of a maximum of 5 pages that the applicant is applying for that will describe the main issues, sources of information to be used, timeline and research tools to be employed by the consultant. The Work Programme should include the initial outline of the content of the study;
- List of references for relevant activities implemented over the past 7 years demonstrating relevant experience in the subject matter;
- Service Tender Submission Form (Annex I);
- Signed Statements of Exclusivity and Availability (Annex II).

Financial offer

The financial offer should reflect the following (Annex III):

- 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:

- The proposed budget should include daily fee rate for consulting services; the fee rates should be broadly consistent with the EU framework rates for these types of professional services.

Submission of applications:

- Qualified applicants are invited to send an application via e-mail to ProcurementforRCC@rcc.int no later than **3 September** by 24:00 Central European Time;
- Please make sure that the application is submitted in two separate folders one containing Technical Proposal and the other Financial Proposal. The documents should be submitted in a form of copies of the originals.

Evaluation rules:

- The consultancy will be awarded to the highest qualified applicant 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. Track record, references and general experience of the bidder: General work experience; evidence of other contracts of the size comparable with that of the tender; experience with clients comparable to the Contracting Authority.	20
A.2. Quality and professional capacity of the team leader and experts: CV(s) satisfy the criteria set forth in the Terms of Reference and demonstrate professional capacity and experience required; quality	40

of the team inspires confidence.	
A.3 Quality of an outline work programme: Bidder provided a clear outline of the work to be executed with a sound methodology; main challenges identified; the process is clear and the proposed use of resources adequate.	40
B. Financial Proposal/ cheapest price has maximum score	100

Score for offer X =

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

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

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

Annex I

APPLICATION SUBMISSION FORM

Open Call for Consultancy Services

Reference Number: 024-017

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

1 SUBMITTED by:

	Name(s) and address(es) of the Entity submitting this Application
Full Name of the Entity	

2 CONTACT PERSON

Name	
Address	
Telephone	
Fax	
e-mail	

3 STATEMENT

[Name of the Entity] _____ hereby declares that we have examined and accepted without reserve or restriction the entire contents of the Open Call for Consulting Services, Grounds for Exclusions and Conflict of Interest as such:

Grounds for Exclusion

Candidates or bidders will be excluded from participation in a procurement procedure if it is known that:

- (a) They are 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) They have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment which has the force of res judicata;
- (c) They have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the Contracting Officer can justify;
- (d) They 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 Officer or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
- (e) They 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.

Contracts may not be awarded to candidates or bidders who, during the procurement procedure, are:

- (a) Subject to a conflict of interest;
- (b) Guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the Contracting Officer as a condition of participation in the contract procedure or fail to supply this information.

Conflict of Interest

- a) The candidate or bidder shall take all necessary measures to prevent or end any situation that could compromise the impartial and objective performance of the contract. Such conflict of interests could arise in particular as a result of economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties, or any other relevant connection or shared interest. Any conflict of interests which could arise during performance of the contract must be notified in writing to the Contracting Authority without delay.
- b) The Contracting Authority reserves the right to verify that such measures are adequate and may require additional measures to be taken if necessary. The candidate or bidder shall ensure that is not placed in a situation which could give rise to conflict of interests. The candidate or bidder shall replace, immediately and without compensation from the Contracting Authority, any member of its staff exposed to such a situation.

- c) The candidate or bidder shall refrain from any contact which would compromise its independence. If the Consultant fails to maintain such independence, the Contracting Authority may, without prejudice to compensation for any damage which it may have suffered on this account, terminate the contract forthwith.
- d) The candidate or bidder shall, after the conclusion or termination of the contract, limit its role in connection with the project to the provision of the services. Except with the written permission of the Contracting Authority, the candidate or bidder or supplier with whom the candidate or bidder is associated or affiliated shall be disqualified from the execution of works, supplies or other services for the project in any capacity, including tendering for any part of the project.
- e) Civil servants and other agents of the public administration of the RCC Participants, regardless of their administrative situation, shall not be recruited as experts in contracts financed by the RCC Secretariat.
- f) The candidate or bidder and anyone working under its authority or control in the performance of the contract or on any other activity shall be excluded from access to RCC Secretariat financing available under the same project unless they can prove to the Contracting Authority that the involvement in previous stages of the project does not constitute unfair competition.

STATEMENT

We offer to provide the services requested in the Terms of Reference on the basis of supplied documentation subject to this Open Call for Consultancy Services, which comprise our technical offer, and our financial offer.

This Call for Consultancy Services is subject to acceptance within the validity period stipulated in the Terms of Reference.

Name of Authorized Person:	
Signature:	
Date:	

ANNEX II: STATEMENT OF EXCLUSIVITY AND AVAILABILITY

REF: 024-017

By representing the Entity _____ we agree to participate exclusively 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

ANNEX III: BUDGET BREAKDOWN

REF: 024-017

No	Cost categories	Daily fee rate	Total Cost
	.		
	.		
	.		
	.		
	.		
	.		
	.		
	.		
2	TOTAL COSTS		
3	VAT (if applicable):		
	GRAND TOTAL (2+3):		

NOTE:

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

- Include the number of proposed working days and daily fee rate for consulting services, the fee rates should be broadly consistent with the EU framework rates for these types of professional services.
- Travel costs are not subject of the financial offer and shall be treated separately.