



## Open Call for Consulting Services

<b>Subject:</b>	Support Western Balkan economies to monitor key digital developments in Western Balkans and prepare Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2024 Report
<b>Title:</b>	Technical assistance to monitor key digital developments in Western Balkans and prepare Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2024 Report
<b>RCC Department:</b>	Programme Department
<b>Eligible:</b>	Consulting companies/consortia of individual consultants
<b>Reporting to:</b>	RCC Secretariat
<b>Duration:</b>	September – January 2025
<b>Deadline for Application:</b>	2 September 2024
<b>Reference Number:</b>	043-024

### I. PURPOSE

The overall objective of the consultancy is to support the Western Balkans (WB) in monitoring digital progress in each economy and the region towards digital targets, by using indicators related to the digital economy and society (DESI), in line with the four dimensions of the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, European Union (EU) best practices, and the respective EU DESI methodology.

This consultancy aims to calculate the index for Western Balkans, including all individual indicators from four dimensions, and produce a report on the main findings that can be extracted from analysing the results.

### II. BACKGROUND

The Common Regional Market (CRM) 2021-2024 Action Plan is built on the successful initiative and achievements of the Regional Economic Area (REA). CRM puts forward a structured and ambitious agenda focusing on the four freedoms approach in the regional trade area, increasing the attractiveness of the region for foreign investors, creating a new digital environment, and upgrading the industrial base and innovation.

The regional digital area is one of the four key areas of CRM and measures therein aim to integrate the Western Balkan region into the pan-European digital market. To measure the

progress in digitalisation of economy and society within the EU, the Commission has established the Digital Economy and Society Index<sup>1</sup> summarising indicators on digital performance and digital competitiveness.

In relation to the Western Balkans, and in order to set a baseline, the European Commission carried out a three-year research study<sup>2</sup> with the aim to monitor progress made by the Western Balkan economies towards compliance with the EU rules for electronic communications and information society services, and convergence with the internal market.

To continue the process and improve current research in WB economies, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has prepared the study on the State of Application of Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) in Western Balkans<sup>3</sup>, including identification of gaps and needs in each WB economy.

The Study set the grounds for new activities, and as a follow-up, the first regional Western Balkan Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022 Report<sup>4</sup> was developed under the RCC umbrella (covering data for 2020 and 2021). The Report was prepared in line with the European Union norms and practices, and monitored digital developments in each WB economy and the region in order to better track the progress of digital transformation.

### **III. DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **Objectives and scope of the assignment**

The overall objective of the consultancy is to provide a report on the main findings of the calculation of DESI index for Western Balkans<sup>5</sup>, following the approach of four dimensions of the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, and a quantitative analysis showing/comparing the progress of the region regarding all targets, where relevant and comparable data exist. A comprehensive analysis should be carried out that allows fact-based comparisons with the EU.

A consulting company/consortium of individual consultants will be engaged for this consultancy.

This assignment targets all Western Balkan economies.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>

<sup>2</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a54e990d-1fb3-11ea-95ab-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/125/report-on-the-state-of-application-of-digital-economy-society-index-desi-in-western-balkan-economies>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/WB%20Desi%20Report%202022%2025%2005%202023%20final%20HR.pdf/43a521a624cf08523a2268a67a7be2ff.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The WB DESI 2022 Report, published in 2023, should be taken into consideration and used as a basis for the preparation of a new DESI Report

## Specific Tasks

The tasks specified herewith are:

1. Calculate the DESI index for the Western Balkan region and in doing so the consultant should include but not be limited to the following:
  - 1.1. Provide the definition of the indicator framework, adjusting it to the new indicators from EU DESI 2024 Report which are related to the four dimensions of the Digital Decade Programme 2030;
  - 1.2. Collect publically available data from online sources (including data gathered from international sources such as the Eurostat, OECD, ITU, etc.) as well as those gathered from WB economies<sup>6</sup>; given the new DESI indicators, mark indicators that are not publicly available but can be collected from the respective institutions in the WB economies<sup>7</sup>; calculate the data that can be collected but cannot be calculated by the economies;
  - 1.3. Data cleaning, cross-check with WB economies where applicable, calculation of collected and missing data, as well as data aggregation;
  - 1.4. Include EU and WB progress for each DESI indicator<sup>8</sup>.

The first task should be completed following the new EU DESI 2024 Methodological Note<sup>9</sup>. For all indicators for which non-compliance with EU DESI Methodology is found, adjustments should be made and an explanation of the adjustment included in the report.

2. Prepare a Western Balkan report with main findings and detailed economy report(s) on digital development and progress, including but not limited to:
  - 2.1.1. Reflecting calculation for WB economies;
  - 2.1.2. Reflecting WB economy progress and comparisons with EU progress;
  - 2.1.3. Elaborating on the key findings;
  - 2.1.4. Providing recommendations based on the findings and EU targets, which will include recommendations on the policies, measures, and actions as indicated in the Digital Decade Programme 2030 and which can be reflected in the WB region;
  - 2.1.5. Specifying the methodology, resources, and objectives provided in these ToR and inputs received by RCC at the beginning of the work.

The structure of the reports should be based on the EU structure for the calculation of DESI indicators and as much as possible in alignment with the four cardinal points of the Digital Decade Policy Programme. Any adjustment to the structure of the reports should be agreed in advance with RCC.

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<sup>6</sup> All data available online will be retrieved by consultants, while the consultations with the WB economies will focus on the remaining/missing data

<sup>7</sup> The data collected should contain: available sources, classification, periodicity of data collection, and any additional methodological requirement needed

<sup>8</sup> Progress made since WB DESI 2023 Report

<sup>9</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/106717>

3. Provide a complete set of data calculated for each indicator as structured data; the dataset should include a spreadsheet with all data points for all indicators for each WB economy, as well as the aggregated scores for each of the four dimensions;
4. Provide steps and methods of work during the data aggregation, including the process of calculation of the average for WB region for each indicator;
5. Provide expert advice and support at the regional meeting of the Western Balkans Working Group on DESI for the presentation of Report findings, and validate the findings and recommendations as a follow-up of the regional meeting(s).

### **Deliverables**

- First draft report, which will specify the methodology, resources and objectives defined in these Terms of Reference.
- The final dataset should include a spreadsheet with all data points for all indicators for each WB economy with the method of calculation, as well as the aggregated scores for each dimension.
- Final report (covering the sections such as Executive summary, Methodology, WB DESI progress, Key findings, Recommendations and Conclusions) and detailed economy report (covering, among other things, executive summary, data sources, key findings, economy progress, national roadmap analysis, conclusions). All reports have to have dataset with all tasks included and with reflected comments provided by the RCC Secretariat and WB economies, covering all aspects defined in these Terms of Reference.

### **Methodology**

The consultant is expected to come up with the best approaches for undertaking this task. However, the following guiding principles should be taken into consideration:

1. Desk review of the existing WB DESI report and/or assessment relevant to the key tasks covered by these Terms of Reference;
2. The last EU DESI Methodology should be used for the preparation of the report (when it comes to at least data imputation, normalisation, weighting and aggregation);
3. Communication/interviews/consultations/focus groups with the representatives of national administrations in the respective areas, if needed;
4. Any other method applicable.

To achieve the objectives of these Terms of Reference, the consultant should also establish direct communication with the members of the WB DESI Working Group of each WB economy in order to collect missing data from each economy. The RCC will provide all contacts mentioned in these ToR as needed.

## Lines of Communication

- The consultant will report to the RCC Secretariat. Upon completion of activities, as defined in the timeframe and in accordance with the Terms of Reference, a detailed report will be prepared and sent to the RCC Secretariat for review and approval.
- Meeting with RCC experts will be organised to elaborate further on expectations and deliverables.

## Timeframe

The engagement is expected to start in early September 2024 and end on 30 January 2025.

	<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Due date</b>
1.	First draft report, which will specify the methodology, resources and objectives defined in these ToR, and with possible additional indications provided by the RCC.	20 October 2024
2.	The final dataset that should include a spreadsheet with all data points for all indicators for each WB economy as well as the aggregated scores for each DESI dimension. <sup>10</sup>	20 November 2024
3.	Final report (covering the sections such as Executive summary, Methodology, WB DESI progress, Key findings, Recommendations and Conclusions) and detailed economy report (covering executive summary, data sources, key findings, economy progress <sup>11</sup> , national roadmap analysis, conclusions). All reports have to have dataset with all tasks included, and with reflected comments provided by the RCC Secretariat and WB economies, covering all aspects defined in these Terms of Reference.  <u>Note:</u> The final report will be shared with the Western Balkan economies for their comments. All inputs received shall be reflected before the meeting of WB WG on DESI. The meeting will serve the consultants to present the findings and validate the report.	2 December 2024
4.	Comments/inputs received during the WB WG on DESI meeting from the WB economies and the RCC Secretariat	15 January 2025

<sup>10</sup> The spreadsheet will be used for online publishing.

<sup>11</sup> Progress made since WB DESI 2023 Report

	reflected, covering all aspects defined in these Terms of Reference.	
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#### IV. COMPETENCIES

##### Qualifications:

##### Criteria related to the consultants delivering the service<sup>12</sup>

<b>Education:</b>	Degree in engineering, law, economics, statistics, business or other areas directly related to the subject of work. Master's Degree or PhD is an advantage.
<b>Experience:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Minimum of 7 years of relevant experience in similar consultancies;</li> <li>▪ Experience in working with governments, statistical offices and/or EU institutions on developing strategic documents and programmes related to digital economy and society is considered an advantage;</li> <li>▪ At least two similar (in scope and complexity) projects completed in the last three years. The list should include details of their start and end date, scope, role and amount invoiced;</li> <li>▪ Proven analytical skills and ability to conceptualise and write concisely and clearly;</li> <li>▪ In-depth knowledge of the economies covered by the assignment;</li> <li>▪ Demonstrable experience in writing and reporting on complex multi-sector or multi-economy strategy development and implementation (samples of work to be provided);</li> <li>▪ Proven communication and presentation skills and ability to work in an environment requiring liaison and collaboration with multiple actors including government representatives, businesses, civil society institutions, donors and other stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Language requirements:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fluency in written and spoken English, as the official language of the RCC;</li> <li>▪ Knowledge of other RCC languages is desirable.</li> </ul>
<b>Other:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Preference will be given to consulting companies/consortia of individual consultants proposing team members from different areas.</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> These criteria apply to the main consultant(s) and not for administrative or logistical team members

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|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Having at least one EU consultant in the team is an advantage.</li></ul> |
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### **Core Values**

- Demonstrates integrity and fairness by modelling RCC values and ethical standards;
- Independent and free from conflicts of interest in the responsibilities defined by the Terms of Reference;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability.

### **Core Competencies**

- Demonstrates professional competence to meet responsibilities and post requirements and is conscientious and efficient in meeting commitments, observing deadlines and achieving results;
- Result-oriented; plans and produces quality results to meet the set goals, generates innovative and practical solutions to challenging situations;
- Communication: Excellent communication skills, including the ability to convey complex concepts and recommendations clearly;
- Team work: Ability to interact, establish and maintain effective working relations in a culturally diverse team;
- Ability to establish and maintain productive partnerships with regional and national partners and stakeholders.

## **V. QUALITY CONTROL**

The consultant should ensure an internal quality control during the implementing and reporting phase of the assignment. The quality control should ensure that the draft reports and deliverables 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 reports. In this regard, the consultant 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 consultant, they should clearly explain the reasons for their final decision in a comments table.

## **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;
- An outline work programme of a maximum of 5 pages, describing the main issues, sources of information to be used, timeline and methodology.
- 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);
- CV of an expert(s), outlining relevant knowledge and experience as described in the Terms of References, along with contact details of referees;
- List of references for relevant activities implemented over the past years demonstrating relevant experience in the subject matter;
- 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:**

- Maximum budget should not exceed EUR 40,000.
- The fee rates should be broadly consistent with those applicable in the region.



## Submission of applications:

Applications need to be submitted by 2 September 2024, by 17:00 Central European Time.

## 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
<b>A. Technical Offer (A.1+A.2+A.3)</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>A.1. Work experience, references list:</b> Relevant work experience; evidence of other contracts of the size comparable with that of the call; experience with clients comparable to the Contracting Authority.	35
<b>A.2. Quality and professional capacity of the consultant(s):</b> CV(s) satisfy the criteria set forth in the Terms of Reference, education and experience demonstrate professional capacity and experience required.	35
<b>A.3 Quality of the concept note:</b> 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>B. Financial Offer/ lowest price has maximum score</b>	<b>100</b>

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, a 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](mailto: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](mailto: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 II: STATEMENT OF AVAILABILITY**

REF: 043-024

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