

Open Call for Consulting Services

Subject:	Technical assistance to assess the state of application of Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) in Western Balkans (WB), and identification of gaps and needs in each WB economy
RCC Department:	Programme Department
Number of Consultants:	1 (one) International Expert
Starting Date:	16 November 2020
Reporting to:	RCC Secretariat
Duration:	16 November – 30 December 2020
Deadline for Application:	13 November 2020
Reference Number:	095-020

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

I. PURPOSE

The overall objective of the consultancy is to support the Western Balkans to contribute to more evidence-based regulatory framework/policy-making regarding the digital economy and society in the region on the basis of better-quality statistics in line with the European Union (EU) norms and best practices in order to allow fast-track and sound monitoring of progress in digital transformation of the Western Balkans.

This consultancy aims to elaborate and define the extent to which DESI is implemented in WB region and identify gaps in data collection and availability and needs to ensure regular collecting in each economy as per the strategic vision defined under the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans (DAWB). The consultancy will ultimately assess the overall applicability of DESI in each economy, including technical and/or administrative challenges of data collection, availability and quality to allow as well as provide advice for the next steps towards improving the collection of all DESI indicators.

BACKGROUND

At the Trieste Summit of the Berlin Process (12th July 2017) Western Balkan leaders endorsed the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA), prepared and coordinated by RCC. The MAP REA puts forward a structured agenda for regional economic integration promoting further trade integration, introducing a dynamic regional investment space, facilitating regional mobility, and creating a digital integration agenda. It stems from the commitments undertaken within the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement and South East Europe (SEE) 2020 Strategy and is based on EU rules and principles as reflected in the Stabilisation and Association Agreements.

Digital Integration is one of the components of MAP REA and measures therein aim to integrate the region into the pan-European digital market on the basis of a future-proof digitisation strategy, an updated regulatory environment, improved broadband infrastructure and access as well as accelerate digitisation in the region. Embracing digital transformation, ensuring greater availability of digital infrastructure, and enabling better regulatory framework and level playing field can help our region grow, increase the convergence rates with the EU, improve the business environment and encourage cross-border services, thus offering better life for the citizens.

Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans launched on 25-26 June 2018 aims to support the digital transformation, improve service delivery for the citizens and businesses and help Western Balkans in the preparations to integrate better into the EU Digital Single Market.

To measure the progress in the digitalisation of economy and society within the EU, the Commission has established the Digital Economy and Society Index * summarising indicators on digital performance and digital competitiveness. DESI was first calculated in 2014, using 2013 statistics.

In relation to the Western Balkans, and in order to set a baseline, the European Commission (EC) is carrying out a three-year research study 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.

The study presents a collection of Digital Economy and Society Index and accompanying indicators for monitoring regulations and policies in the Western Balkan region.

Moreover, the study developed six thematic dimensions, comprised of 37 indicators, to monitor market development for electronic communications and digital services in the Western Balkan economies. Data shows a mixed trend along the six dimensions of the study, which are:

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

1. Connectivity (The Connectivity dimension measures the deployment of broadband infrastructure and its quality. Access to fast and ultrafast broadband-enabled services is a necessary condition for competitiveness);
2. Human Capital / Digital skills (the Human Capital dimension measures the skills needed to take advantage of the opportunities offered by digital);
3. Use of Internet Services by citizens (the Use of Internet Services dimension accounts for a variety of online activities, such as the consumption of online content (videos, music, games, etc.) video calls, as well as online shopping and banking);
4. Integration of Digital Technology by Business (The Integration of Digital Technology dimension measures the digitisation of businesses and e-commerce. By adopting digital technologies, businesses can improve efficiency, reduce costs and better engage customers and business partners. Furthermore, the Internet as a sales outlet offers access to broader markets and potential for growth);
5. Digital Public Services (The Digital Public Services dimension measures the digitisation of public services, focusing on eGovernment and eHealth. Modernisation and digitisation of public services can lead to efficiency gains for public administration, citizens and businesses alike);
6. Research and Development ICT (the Research and Development ICT presents an analysis of trends in the ICT sector and R&D provided by the European Commission, as well as external studies conducted at the request of the European Commission).

The Study prepared by EC showed that significant gap between EU-28 countries and the Western Balkan region exists in the connectivity and digital skills, as well as that Western Balkans are catching up or already outperforming EU28 average in the citizen Internet use dimension. In almost half of business technology integration indicators WB met EU28 performance levels. However, significant differences exist among individual Western Balkan economies' performances.

To improve current research in WB economies, it is necessary to accurately determine the DESI calculation methodology in the region. The experience of WB economies has shown that it is necessary to clarify logical questions and needs. It is necessary to harmonise the methodology of the DESI indicator account in order to obtain quality data.

At the Digital Summit in Belgrade, held on 4 April 2019, WB economies agreed to work towards setting a commonly agreed baseline and monitoring progress in the main areas of digital transformation, through the collection of data to benchmark Western Balkan economies using DESI. In addition, the upcoming Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans

2021-2024 will undertake activities to establish a monitoring tool in order to measure and track digital transformation progress in WB region.

III DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Objectives and scope of the assignment

The overall objective of the consultancy is to provide an in-depth analysis of the application of DESI indicators in WB economies. The consultancy will assess the state of application of DESI indicators in WB economies, including technical and/or administrative challenges of data collection, their availability and quality as well as identify gaps and needs in each WB economy.

An international expert will be engaged for the purpose of this consultancy. This assignment targets all Western Balkan economies.

The overall scope of services under this assignment includes the following:

1. Identify DESI indicators used in WB region, defining the classification, frequency and other methodological aspects of data collection, gaps and needs, as well as data exchange among the existing databases in each WB economy.
2. Provide expert advice and prepare guidance on the next steps of data collection process in each economy as well as steps needed to harmonise application of EU DESI methodology and regulatory advancements, surveys, reporting, etc.

Specific Tasks

The specific tasks specified herewith are:

1. Conduct desk research of data available for each DESI indicator in each WB economy, including stakeholders responsible for collecting data to calculate DESI indicators, any overlapping in data collection and processing, responsible institutions, etc.;
2. Map data collected in each economy per respective indicator, including frequency, respective institution, available open data source for each indicator, etc. In addition, identify any deviation from EU DESI methodology used in data collection and reporting and provide expert advice on steps needed to ensure full alignment;
3. Identify data collection shortcomings/gaps and needs in each WB economy (list of responsible institutions per respective indicator, applicable modes of data collection (i.e. surveys, etc.), methodology for calculating DESI indicators, methods of work, capacity building needs, financial needs, etc.);
4. Provide expert advice on how to best utilise data collection for reporting purposes under each DESI indicators, in line with best practices in EU;

5. Provide expert advice and guidance, including but not limited to data collection model and processes, steps to be taken to update their methodology/handbook in order to achieve full compliance with EU DESI methodology, strategic vision, needs for revision of existing and creation of new surveys on data collection, reporting practices in each WB economy, etc.

Deliverables

- Methodology and work plan;
- Detailed analysis elaborated with concrete steps and process needed to improve the basis of more and better-quality statistics regarding the digital economy and society in the Western Balkan region, including gaps and needs in each economy, as well as other specific tasks of this ToR.
- Report incorporating all relevant comments provided by Western Balkan economies and the RCC Secretariat, covering all aspects defined in these Terms of Reference.

Methodology

The expert 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 related documents prepared by EU, WB or any other relevant institution/organisation to assess the current status of data collection and to reveal which indicators are available from open sources;
2. Desk review of all existing reports and/or assessments relevant to the key tasks covered by these Terms of Reference;
3. Communication/interviews/consultations/focus groups with the representatives of national administrations in the respective areas;
4. Any other method applicable.

To achieve the objectives of these Terms of Reference, the expert should also establish direct communication with MAP REA Digital CCPs and Statistical Offices[†] of each WB economy to discuss and exchange views on the scope of investigation and analysis in the given economy. The RCC will provide all contacts mentioned in these ToR as needed.

Lines of Communication

- The expert 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.

[†] Members of the Monitoring Committee of SEE2020 may be of relevance in communicating with each Statistical Office in WB6

Timeframe

The engagement is expected to start on 16 November 2020 and end on 30 December 2020. The expert is expected to use up to 15 days for this assignment.

Deliverables	Due date
Methodology and work plan	18 November
First draft report for each WB economy with all data defined in these Terms of Reference. The draft should also reflect information gathered from respective institutions in each WB economy, through online and/or physical meetings, as feasible.	07 December
Final report incorporating all relevant comments provided by Western Balkan economies and the RCC Secretariat covering all aspects defined in these Terms of Reference Note: The final report will be shared with the Western Balkan economies and their comments and those of RCC shall be duly reflected.	By 30 December

III COMPETENCIES

Expert Qualifications:

Criteria related to the experts delivering the service

Education:	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.
Experience:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Minimum of 7 years of relevant experience in similar consultancies;▪ 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;▪ Proven analytical skills and ability to conceptualise and write concisely and clearly;▪ In-depth knowledge of the economies covered by the assignment;▪ Demonstrable experience in writing and reporting on complex multi-sector or multi-country strategy development and implementation (samples of work to be provided);▪ 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.
Language requirements:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fluency in written and spoken English, as the official language of the RCC; ▪ Knowledge of other RCC languages is desirable.
Other:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N.A.

Core Values

- Demonstrates integrity and fairness by modelling RCC values and ethical standards;
- He/she is 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.

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 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 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.

APPLICATION RULES

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.

Technical Offer:

The technical offer needs to contain the following:

- Letter of interest;
- CV, outlining relevant knowledge and experience as described in Section III Competencies of the Terms of References;
- List of reports, papers, and other documents the expert has drafted;
- Brief concept note describing the main issues, information, data sources to be employed by the expert as well as the approach to the work to be undertaken;
- List of references for relevant activities implemented over the past 5 years demonstrating relevant experience in the subject matter;
- Submission Form (Annex I).

Financial offer:

Use a free format providing the lump sum for the services to be provided.
The fee rates should be broadly consistent with average consulting fees in this field of work.

Applications including technical and financial offer need to be submitted via e-mail to ProcurementforRcc@rcc.int by 13 November 2020 by 17:00 (CET Central European Times).

IV. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

The assignments will be awarded to the highest qualified applicant based on the skills, expertise, and the quality of the concept note(s) and the cost-effectiveness of the financial offer.

Applications will be evaluated on the basis of the profile and competencies of the candidate and the responsiveness to the Terms of Reference for Consulting Services.

The best value for money is established by weighing technical quality against price on an 80/20 basis.

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 nature comparable to that of the Call; experience with clients comparable to the Contracting Authority.	35
A.2. Quality and professional capacity of the consultants: CVs satisfy the criteria set forth in the ToR, education and experience demonstrates professional capacity and experience required.	35
A.3 Quality of the concept note: Quality of main issues, information, data sources to be employed by the expert as well as the approach to the work to be undertaken	30
B. Financial Proposal/ 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

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

Open Call for Consultancy Services:

REF: 095-020

One signed copy of this Call for Consultancy Submission Form must be supplied.

1 SUBMITTED by:

Name	
Address	
Telephone	
Fax	
e-mail	

2. STATEMENT

[Name of the Consultant] _____ hereby declares that we have examined and accepted without reserve or restriction the entire contents of the Open Call for Experts, 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 Contractor 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 Consultant shall ensure that their staffs, including its management, are not placed in a situation which could give rise to conflict of interests. The Consultant shall replace, immediately and without compensation from the Contracting Authority, any member of its staff exposed to such a situation.
- c) The Contractor shall refrain from any contact which would compromise its independence or that of its personnel. If the Contractor 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 Contractor 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 Contractor and any other contractor or supplier with whom the Contractor 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 Contractor 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.

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

Name	
Signature	
Date	