



## Open Call for Consulting Services

<b>Title:</b>	Strengthening Regional Smart Specialisation Ecosystems Initiative
<b>RCC Department:</b>	Programme Department
<b>Duration:</b>	October 2025 – July 2026
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	8 October 2025 by 12:00CET
<b>Reference Number</b>	<b>072-025</b>
<b>Eligible:</b>	Consulting companies or consortia of individual experts

### TERMS OF REFERENCE:

#### I. BACKGROUND

The Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025-2028 (CRM 2.0) is a regionally-owned framework based on the EU rules and standards to consolidate and enhance competitiveness and dismantle barriers. It is a catalyst for deeper regional economic integration and a stepping stone towards the EU Single Market of the Western Balkans Six (WB6). CRM 2.0 seeks to further boost the socio-economic convergence between the WB6 and the EU and paves the way for closer integration with the Single Market.

The CRM 2.0's Human Capital Development pillar aims to enhance job opportunities and combat brain drain. It emphasizes, inter alia, equipping the workforce with the skills necessary for the digital transition and improving the region's innovation performance and competitiveness to create added value for various players including businesses and academia.

The European Commission (EC) has embraced the Smart Specialisation (S3) framework as a cornerstone of its strategy to foster research, development, and innovation (R&D&I), while simultaneously enhancing regional competitiveness. This place-based approach encourages national and regional authorities to identify and prioritise areas of economic and scientific strength that align with their unique capabilities and industrial ecosystems. By doing so, S3 aims to unlock comparative advantages and chart sustainable growth trajectories over the medium and long term.

The S3 process has gained traction in the WB6 as a transformative policy tool. The WB6 economies, each with distinct socio-economic profiles and development challenges, have been working to align their innovation strategies with EU standards and practices since 2018. As of today, four out of the six WB economies have formally adopted their S3s (Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania), demonstrating strong political commitment and institutional readiness. These strategies reflect a rigorous process of stakeholder engagement, evidence-based analysis, and entrepreneurial discovery, tailored to the specific needs and opportunities of each territory. The remaining two economies are actively progressing through the preparatory phases, working to finalise their strategies through inclusive dialogue and data-driven assessments.

By leveraging S3, these economies are not only strengthening their innovation ecosystems but also fostering cross-border collaboration and improving governance. However, to ensure full and proper implementation of S3s, the WB6 require external support to increase their capacities and boost economic impact.

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Objectives of the assignment**

The purpose of this assignment is to (1) enhance institutional capacity of the region's S3 teams for EU project design and proposal development and (2) facilitate knowledge transfer and cross-regional collaboration for innovation ecosystem development.

## **III. SCOPE OF WORK**

### **Specific Tasks**

More specific tasks include:

- (1) Enhancing institutional capacity for EU project design and proposal development**
  - Tailored coaching and co-writing support for high-quality EU project proposals to strengthen internal capacities of S3 institutions in the WB6 (proposal writing, partnership building, budgeting, and compliance with EU standards) for future independent proposal writing
  - Provide one-on-one mentoring and proposal review support for selected institutions preparing applications for Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Interreg, or other relevant EU programs
- (2) Facilitating knowledge transfer and cross-regional collaboration for innovation ecosystem development**
  - Deliver a minimum of 4 capacity-building online workshops on results-based management for S3 stakeholders, EU funding mechanisms and strategic alignment between common WB6 and EU priorities (e.g. Green Deal, Digital Transition, New Growth Plan for the WB)

- Compile a short compendium of good practices and case studies on S3 implementation, innovation policy, and project success stories (while ensuring relateability) for regional dissemination
- Assist the RCC to organise two study visits/peer exchanges with EU regions that have advanced S3 implementation practices, focusing on innovation governance and stakeholder engagement

## **Methodology**

The consultants are expected to propose a comprehensive work plan which, at a minimum, outlines a clear and coherent methodology addressing all specified tasks, and presents a detailed timeline for delivery.

## **IV. LOGISTICS AND TIMING**

### **Timeline**

The engagement is expected to start in October 2025 and end in July 2026.

### **Lines of Communication**

- The task will be implemented in close consultation with the RCC Secretariat.
- The contracted bidder will report to and closely liaise with the RCC's Senior Expert on Human Capital Development and Expert on Competitiveness.

## **V. REQUIRED OUTPUTS/REPORTING**

	<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Due date</b>
<b>1.</b>	Work Plan agreed with the RCC	October 2025
<b>2.</b>	A short compendium of good practices and case studies on S3	December 2025
<b>3.</b>	A minimum of 2 capacity-building online workshops	December 2025
<b>4.</b>	A minimum of 2 capacity-building online workshops	End of June 2026
<b>5.</b>	Built consortia of partners from the WB6 region and minimum 5 (preferably more) high-quality project proposals submitted to relevant EU funding calls	End of July 2026

## VI. REQUIREMENTS

### Expert Qualifications:

<b>Education:</b>	Degree in sciences, engineering, economics, finance, business, public policy or other fields directly related to the assignment. Master's or PhD degree is an advantage.
<b>Experience:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Minimum 5 years of demonstrated capacity to lead end-to-end project development, from idea structuring to writing full application packages (narratives, budgets, logical frameworks, KPIs, annexes, etc.)</li><li>- Deep familiarity with EU funding mechanisms, eligibility criteria, evaluation frameworks, and application portals (e.g. Funding &amp; Tenders Portal)</li><li>- Proven track record in EU-funded project participation or coordination (Digital Europe, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, Interreg, Creative Europe, or similar programs) within similar sectors will be considered an advantage</li><li>- Ability to deliver structured capacity-building and feedback mechanisms, and to translate stakeholder input into compelling funding narratives</li><li>- Prior work in the WB6 economies, knowledge of regional dynamics and a strong understanding of S3 will be considered an advantage</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>• N.A.</li></ul>

### 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.

### **Quality Control:**

The experts 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, they should clearly explain the reasons for their final decision in a comments table.

RCC employees and partners participating in any programme or activity conducted or funded by RCC are prohibited from discriminating based on race, religion, political beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, disability, marital status and national origin.

## **VII. APPLICATION RULES**

### **Technical Offer:**

#### **The technical offer needs to contain the following:**

*For the 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/Institution's Registration Certificate;
- In case of bidding consortia of individual consultants or individual professionals 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 authorised power of attorney must be attached to the bid;
- CVs of key members of the project team (maximum 2 pages per expert), outlining the most relevant knowledge and experience as described in the Terms of Reference;
- Financial records - company's balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement for the past 2 years (only in case of bidding of consulting companies);
- An outline work program of a maximum of 5 pages
- List of references demonstrating relevant experience in the subject matter;
- Signed Statements of Availability (Annex I).

### **Financial offer (Free format)**

The financial offer should reflect the following:

- All figures should be expressed in EUR;

When preparing the financial offer, the applicant should consider the following:

- Use a free format for the budget offering the global price for the work to be provided.
  - Fee rates should be broadly consistent with the regional framework rates for these types of professional services.
- For companies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, VAT should be presented.

Note: According to the Indirect Taxation Authority Instruction and its status of an international organisation, the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat is entitled to VAT refund and is exempted from customs duties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Submission of applications:**

**Applications need to be submitted by 8 October 2025 through the website link [Apply now](#).**

## **VIII. EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

The assignments will be awarded to the highest qualified applicant based on the skills, expertise, and the quality of the work plan 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:

<b>EVALUATION GRID</b>	<b>Maximum Score</b>	<b>Actual scoring</b>
<b>A. Technical Offer (A.1+A.2+A.3)</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>A.1. Competencies: Work experience, references list:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep familiarity with EU funding mechanisms, eligibility criteria, evaluation frameworks, and application portals (e.g. Funding &amp; Tenders Portal)</li> <li>• Ability to deliver structured capacity-building training sessions</li> <li>• Prior work in the WB6 economies, knowledge of regional dynamics and a strong understanding of S3 will be considered an advantage</li> <li>• Experience in working with WB governments and/or WB institutions, science and innovation hubs and innovation-enabling organisations is considered an advantage.</li> </ul>	<p><b>20</b></p> <p><b>15</b></p> <p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>5</b></p>	

<b>A.2. C.V Quality and professional capacity of the consultants:</b> Degree in sciences, engineering, economics, business, or other fields directly related to the assignment. Master's or PhD degree is an advantage; Minimum 5 years of demonstrated capacity to lead end-to-end project development, from idea structuring to writing full application packages (narratives, budgets, logical frameworks, KPIs, annexes, etc.)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>10</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>20</b></p>	
<b>A.3 Quality of the Work Plan</b> A work plan, up to a maximum of 5 pages, indicating the individual tasks to be undertaken against a timeframe.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>25</b></p>	
<b>B. Financial Proposal/ lowest price has maximum score</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>100</b></p>	

**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 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 appeal.

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 I: STATEMENT OF AVAILABILITY**

REF: 072-025

Strengthening Regional Smart Specialisation Ecosystems Initiative

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 signature	by