



Open Call for Consulting Services

Subject:	Support Western Balkans Six in preparation of the Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2026 Report
Title:	Technical assistance to prepare the Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2026 Report
RCC Department:	Programme Department
Eligible:	Consulting companies/consortia of experts
Reporting to:	RCC Secretariat
Duration:	June – November 2026
Deadline for Application:	21 June 2026
Reference Number:	045-026
Price ceiling:	Up to EUR 32,000

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

I. PURPOSE

The overall objective of the consultancy is to support the Western Balkans in monitoring and assessing digital transformation across the region through a robust, evidence-based framework aligned with the European Union's Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030. The consultancy will apply EU best practices and methodologies to measure progress in four key dimensions of the Digital Decade framework.

This consultancy aims to deliver the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) for the Western Balkans Six (WB6), including the calculation and analysis of all individual indicators from each dimension. In addition, an analytical report will be produced highlighting the main findings to support evidence-based policymaking and regional digital development.

II. BACKGROUND

The regional digital area is one of the four key areas of the Common Regional Market (CRM) 2024-2028 Action Plan (AP). To measure the progress in digitalisation of economy and society within the EU, the Commission has established the Digital Economy and Society Index¹ summarising indicators on digital performance and digital competitiveness. However, as of

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

2023, and in line with the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, DESI has been integrated into the State of the Digital Decade report and used to monitor progress towards the digital targets.

Building on the preparation of the Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) Reports under the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) umbrella, the RCC continues to monitor the digital transformation in the Western Balkans Six (WB6). Following the European Union (EU) approach, all reports² were prepared in line with the EU norms and practices.

III. DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Objectives and scope of the assignment

The overall objective of the consultancy is to provide a comprehensive analytical report on the main findings from the calculation of the DESI index for the Western Balkans³, in alignment with the EU methodology and under the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030. The consultancy will provide a quantitative assessment of the region's progress across all relevant targets, using comparable and evidence-based data where available.

Through a data-driven and comparative approach, the report will support policymakers and stakeholders in understanding the region's digital readiness, measuring convergence with the EU digital agenda, and informing strategic actions for accelerated digital development.

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

This assignment targets all the WB6.

Specific Tasks

The tasks specified herewith are:

1. Collect and calculate the DESI index for the WB6, and in doing so, the consultant should include, but not be limited to, the following⁴:
 - 1.1. Provide the definition of the indicator framework, adjusting to the new indicators from the EU Digital Decade 2026 Report;

² [DESI Dashboard | Welcome](#)

³ All published WB DESI Reports should be taken into consideration and used as a basis for the preparation of a new DESI Report.

⁴ The task should be completed following the new EU Methodological Note. For all indicators for which non-compliance with the EU DESI Methodology is found, adjustments should be made, and an explanation of the adjustment should be included in the report.

- 1.2. Collect publicly available data from online sources (such as the Eurostat, OECD, ITU, etc.) as well as those gathered from WB6⁵; due to new DESI indicators, mark indicators that are not publicly available but can be collected from the respective institutions in the WB6⁶; calculate the data that can be collected but cannot be calculated by the WB6;
- 1.3. Data cleaning, cross-check with WB6 where applicable, calculation of collected and missing data, as well as data aggregation;
- 1.4. Include EU and WB6 progress for each DESI indicator.
2. Prepare a Western Balkans report⁷ with main findings and detailed report for each WB6 on digital development and progress, including but not be limited to:
 - 2.1.1. Reflecting calculation, progress for each WB6, and comparisons with EU progress;
 - 2.1.2. Elaborating on the key findings;
 - 2.1.3. 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 Policy Programme 2030, and which can be reflected in the WB6;
 - 2.1.4. Specifying the methodology, resources, and objectives provided in these ToR and inputs received by RCC at the beginning of the work.
3. Provide the 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 WB6, 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 WB6 for each indicator;
5. Provide expert advice and support during the regional meeting(s) of the Western Balkans Working Group on DESI for the presentation of findings of the Report, and validate the findings and recommendations as a follow-up to the regional meeting(s).

Methodology

The consulting companies/consortia of experts are expected to develop the best approaches to undertake this task. However, the following guiding principles should be taken into consideration:

⁵ All data available online will be retrieved by consultants, while the consultations with the WB6 will focus on the remaining/missing data.

⁶ The data collected should contain: available sources, classification, periodicity of data collection, and any additional methodological requirement needed.

⁷ The structure of the reports should be based on the EU, and aligned with the dimensions of the Digital Decade Policy Programme. Any adjustment to the structure of the reports should be agreed in advance with RCC.

1. Desk review of the existing WB DESI report(s) and/or assessment relevant to the key tasks covered by these Terms of Reference;
2. The latest 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 administrations in the respective areas, if needed;
4. Any other method is applicable.

Lines of Communication

- The company/consortium of experts 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 the RCC expert will be organised to elaborate further on expectations and deliverables.

Timeframe

The engagement is expected to start in June 2026 and end on 30 November 2026.

	Deliverables	Due date
1.	Work plan	6 July 2026
2.	The first draft report developed, which will specify the methodology, resources, and objectives defined in these ToR, and with possible additional indications provided by the RCC.	20 September 2026
3.	Final report prepared in line with the EU Digital Decade 2026 Report and EU Methodology, which will contain a detailed report for each WB6 as part of the main WB DESI Report (covering, among other things, executive summary, data sources, key findings, progress, roadmap analysis, recommendations, and conclusions). All reports have to have a dataset with all tasks included and with reflected comments provided by the RCC Secretariat and WB6, covering all aspects defined in these Terms of Reference.	20 November 2026

	The final dataset should include a spreadsheet with all data points for all indicators for each WB6, as well as the aggregated scores for each DESI dimension. ⁸	
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Note: The date of the respective deliverable may be subject to change.

IV. COMPETENCIES

Expert Qualifications:

Criteria related to the experts delivering the service⁹

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 10 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; ▪ 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; ▪ 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-economy 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.

⁸ The spreadsheet will be used for online publishing.

⁹ These criteria apply to the main expert(s) and not for administrative or logistical team members

Other:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preference will be given to consulting companies/consortia of experts proposing team members from different areas.
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Data protection

Personal data (such as names, addresses, and CVs) shall be processed in accordance with the GDPR and other applicable data protection laws. The RCC implements appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect such personal data and ensure confidentiality.

V. APPLICATION RULES

The application needs to contain the following:

- Technical Offer;
- Financial Offer.

Technical Offer:

For the consulting 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 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, outlining relevant knowledge and experience as described in the Terms of Reference, along with contact details of referees;
- Financial records - company's balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement for the past 2 years (only in case of bidding of consulting companies);
- A concept note of up to 3 pages, concisely and clearly elaborating the proposed methodology for addressing and undertaking each task, relevant documents to be taken into account and the concept for the successful finalisation of the assignment;
- List of references for relevant activities implemented demonstrating relevant experience in the subject matter;
- Signed Statements of Availability (Annex I).

Financial Offer

The financial offer should reflect the following:

- All figures should be expressed in EUR;

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

- Maximum budget should not exceed EUR 32,000. The offers above the threshold will not be considered.
- Use a free format for the budget providing 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.

Note:

For the companies registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina please present:

- The price excluding VAT
- The VAT amount
- The total price including VAT

According to the Indirect Taxation Authority Instruction and its status of an international organisation, the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat is entitled to VAT refund.

Submission of applications:

Applications need to be submitted by 21 June 2026 through the website link [Apply now](#).

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 tender; experience with clients comparable to the Contracting Authority.	35

A.2. Quality and professional capacity of the consultant(s): CV(s) satisfies 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 concept note 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, a competency-based interview may 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 appreciation 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 or to the address of the RCC Secretariat:

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:

ANNEX I: STATEMENT OF AVAILABILITY

REF: 045-026

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