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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Ref. GP/DVQ/ReferNet_FPA/001/23

Cedefop's European Network of Expertise on Vocational
Education and Training (VET)

ReferNet

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DEFINITIONS

‘Affiliated entity’

Article 187 FR of the Financial Regulation distinguishes two types of affiliated entities which, in spite of being third parties to the grant agreement, may take part in the action alongside beneficiaries and declare eligible cost under certain conditions:

(a) several legal entities forming together one legal entity or ‘sole beneficiary’ which may, or may not, have been specifically established for carrying out the action (e.g. groupings, joint ventures, consortia).

(b) legal entities having a legal or capital link with a beneficiary or co-beneficiary, which is neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation (e.g. networks, federations, trade unions).

In both cases, the said affiliated entities:

- shall be identified in the application;
- shall provide the supporting documents allowing the verification of their compliance with the eligibility, non-exclusion and selection criteria;
- shall be entitled to declare eligible costs.

‘Annual ReferNet work plan’: set of activities that are defined annually within the scope of the Framework partnership agreement. It describes the activities to be accomplished and outlines how they will be carried out. The work plan is prepared by Cedefop and agreed after consultation of the network.

‘Applicant’: eligible legal entity or grouping of legal entities having submitted a proposal within the framework of this open call.

‘Beneficiary (Single entity or as per a) above)/**multi-beneficiary’** (as per b) above): any legal person(s) with whom a grant agreement has been signed. Such an entity is called **‘National ReferNet partner’**. On an annual basis, each national ReferNet partner may be the beneficiary of a grant by Cedefop to carry out activities indicated in a Specific grant agreement. National ReferNet partners are key institutions working in the field of vocational education and training (VET) and VET-related issues. They must demonstrate expertise in VET or labour market issues and the capacity to network with national and international organisations involved in VET or VET-related policy, research and practice. They must ensure broad and active cooperation with the various national VET institutions and stakeholders and be able to mobilise their expertise to carry out the activities. They are responsible for providing deliverables and final implementation reports within the deadlines and to the standards agreed.

‘National ReferNet partner’: see **‘Beneficiary’**

‘National ReferNet team coordinator’: individual designated by the national ReferNet partner to coordinate the team implementing the annual work plans. He/She supervises the performance of the agreements and represents the partner at the annual plenary meeting of ReferNet and in Partnership forums. A strong cooperation with the national representative for ReferNet is recommended.

‘National representative for ReferNet’ (see also Section 2.4.2 below): individual nominated by the national government and approved by Cedefop to support ReferNet work at national level by:

- (a) cooperating with the national ReferNet partner;
- (b) validating, on behalf of the national government, information prepared by the national ReferNet partner;
- (c) attending ReferNet meetings.

National representatives should be selected on the basis of their high level of expertise in national VET, lifelong learning and employment issues. They should also possess good knowledge and understanding of European VET and labour market policies, processes, strategies and objectives and their impact on national systems and policies. Experience in comparative VET research is an additional asset. Furthermore, it is recommended that national representatives for ReferNet are nominated in collaboration with social partners. The national representative cannot be a member of the ReferNet national team.

‘Partnerships’ are implemented through two legal instruments: Framework partnership agreements and Specific grant agreements:

- firstly, the **‘Framework partnership agreement’ (FPA)** sets out the conditions governing grants to partners for carrying out jointly agreed work plans. This does not constitute an obligation for Cedefop to award annual grants; and
- secondly, the **‘Specific grant agreement’ (SGA)**, based upon the Framework partnership agreement, governs the implementation of the annual work plan. The conclusion of a Specific grant agreement is subject to another grant procedure (‘consultation procedure’).

‘Subcontracting’

Where the implementation of subsidised actions requires subcontracting or the launching of a call for tenders, the partner or co-beneficiary should award this contract to the tender offering the best value for money, respecting the principles of transparency and equal treatment of potential contractors and ensuring that there is no conflict of interests.

Any subcontracting/subcontractor must be approved by Cedefop, either by accepting the applicant’s proposal or, if proposed by the partner after the Agreements’ signature, in writing by an exchange of letters. In the latter case subcontracting/subcontractor will be accepted only if it is judged necessary and does not lead to distortion of competition (if applicable) or to weakening the partner’s or Cedefop’s control over the quality of implementation of the work plan.

The applicant must clearly indicate the foreseen proportion of subcontracting by filling in the related information in Annex II (*Section 2, point 1.1.1 of the application form*) of the application form.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. About Cedefop

Cedefop is one of the EU's decentralised agencies established in 1975 and governed by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽¹⁾.

Based in Greece since 1995, Cedefop supports the promotion, development and implementation of the Union policy in the field of vocational education and training (VET) as well as skills and qualifications policies by working together with the Commission, Member States and social partners. To this end, it enhances and disseminates knowledge, provides evidence and services for policy-making, including research-based conclusions, and facilitates knowledge sharing among and between EU and national actors.

Successful European cooperation in VET depends on information and insights on developments in VET, qualifications, skills and labour market trends and understanding their interrelationships. Cedefop's work on EQF/NQF, skills intelligence and governance, VET policy monitoring, apprenticeships and upskilling pathways for adults, has helped shape a comprehensive perspective on VET which has become the Agency's unique value proposition. Building on past achievements, Cedefop's multi-annual objectives aim to help partners to construct an informed evidence-based policy agenda that continuously develops VET in response to the changing needs of people, economies and societies.

Cedefop's objectives include policy learning between countries, social partners, VET providers and other stakeholders and supporting the implementation of EU policies and measures. The expertise Cedefop has generated through its wide spectrum of past and current analyses and research will inform EU-led VET initiatives such as the Centres for Vocational Excellence and the [EPALE](#) community of European VET practitioners.

Further information about Cedefop is available on its [web portal](#).

1.2. ReferNet: Cedefop's European network of expertise on VET

Refernet is Cedefop's European network of expertise on VET. It was set up in 2002 to meet the growing demand for comparative information about VET systems, developments and policies at the time. The network currently covers EU member states, Iceland and Norway. Each country is represented by a key organisation involved in VET and/or VET-related research and analysis referred to as the national ReferNet partner.

ReferNet is part of Cedefop's work programme and is therefore subject to decisions of Cedefop's Governing Board and the budgetary authorities. It is regularly evaluated to ensure that the resources allocated are used efficiently and economically, in keeping with the objectives set for the network and with the policy agenda and strategy of Cedefop.

ReferNet's mission is to support cooperation in VET-related issues between the EU (Cedefop) and the member states and associated countries, but also among member states, to facilitate the flow of information between the EU and the individual countries and so ensure mutual awareness of EU and national VET developments.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/what-we-do/cedefop-regulation>

Currently ReferNet supports Cedefop in monitoring, assessing and reporting on countries' progress, in implementing joint priorities for VET as defined in the Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration, respecting the priorities selected by countries in their national implementation plans (NIPs).

ReferNet supports Cedefop by

- (a) reporting on national VET systems and policy developments on VET, skills and qualifications; and
- (b) raising the visibility of VET and disseminating information on VET, skills and qualifications.

ReferNet informs on the role, purpose, governance and structure of VET, Skills and qualifications. It provides insights in developments and trends, and analyses of how each country is progressing in its implementation of common European policy objectives.

ReferNet is a platform to exchange information, share practices and ideas and promote understanding of different challenges in the partner countries. Working together provides a stronger evidence base on VET, skills and qualifications and related issues in Europe. Closer cooperation across the EU will also contribute to raising awareness on the value of VET. ReferNet partners benefit from thematic discussions, peer learning and information exchange as well as dissemination of national policy developments through Cedefop's channels (e.g. Cedefop newsletter⁽²⁾).

National ReferNet partners are supported by 'national representatives for ReferNet' nominated by their governments (see Definitions above). On behalf of the national government the national representative for ReferNet validates information by the partner, whenever such validation is deemed necessary. In particular, information on national VET systems and policy developments needs to be validated, to ensure that it is accurate and in accordance with national policies and strategies.

ReferNet activities require cooperation with a broad range of national stakeholders. Cedefop recommends national ReferNet partners to set up a national consortium of key institutions, social partners and researchers on VET, skills and qualifications and mobilise expertise of consortium members to carry out activities. The consortium may also contribute to disseminating widely information on Cedefop's products.

Further information on ReferNet can be found at

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/refernet/index.aspx>

1.3. Objectives and nature of the call

With the objective of supporting the operation of the European network for VET – ReferNet –, this call aims at selecting one applicant from each eligible country (EU member states, Iceland and Norway) with which Cedefop will conclude a four-year Framework partnership agreement ⁽³⁾.

⁽²⁾ Available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/newsletters>

⁽³⁾ The successful applicant could be a single organisation or a grouping of co-beneficiaries.

Framework partnership agreements are implemented through four Specific grant agreements (one per financial year). The Framework partnership agreement defines the legal and financial framework and the scope of activities (see Section 2). Specific grant agreements define the partner's annual work plans.

Applicants are therefore required to submit under this grant procedure:

- a) a proposal for a four-year Framework partnership agreement for the years 2024-2027 and
- b) a proposal for the Specific agreement for ReferNet action 2024.

The conclusion of the Specific grant agreements for ReferNet action 2025, 2026 and 2027 shall be subject to future consultation procedures.

2. SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES

2.1. EU Policy background

In 2020, a new cycle of European cooperation in VET began with the first ever Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (hereinafter, the VET Recommendation) and the Osnabrück declaration on VET as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies (hereinafter, the Osnabrück declaration). In combination with other strategic documents and policies, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU Skills agenda, the Pact for Skills, the two documents gave a new impetus to the Copenhagen process and set the stage for further cooperation of EU-27, Iceland and Norway.

The VET Recommendation invites Member States in accordance with national and Union legislation, available resources, national priorities and circumstances, including the socio-economic situation and the characteristics of national VET systems, to implement reform in the following six areas:

- (a) VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges;
- (b) Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET;
- (c) VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand;
- (d) VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills;
- (e) VET promotes equality of opportunities;
- (f) VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.

As well as achieving by 2025 the following quantitative objectives:

- (a) the share of employed graduates from VET should be at least 82%;
- (b) 60% of recent graduates from VET benefit from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training;
- (c) 8% of learners in VET benefit from a learning mobility abroad.

The implementation of the measures should rely on:

- (a) supporting sustainable partnerships for the VET governance and involving the social partners and other relevant stakeholders, including at regional and sectoral level ;
- (b) making best use of the European transparency tools;
- (c) making best use of European Union funds and instruments supporting reforms and/or investment in VET, including on digitalisation and environmental sustainability , and stimulating further investments from both public and private sectors.

In the Osnabrück Declaration, the Ministers responsible for VET from EU Member States, candidate countries, EEA/EFTA countries agreed with the European Social Partners and the European Commission, to focus on four main areas for the years 2021-25:

- (a) resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET;
- (b) establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of C-VET and digitalisation;
- (c) sustainability – a green link in VET;
- (d) European education and training area and international VET.

VET is at the point of convergence of other programmes and initiatives of the EU, such as the European Education Area and the Digital Education Action Plan, and will contribute to their successful implementation. VET policy has become much better linked to and integrated with broader economic and social agendas and skills policies and strategies, in particular those linked to the twin transition.

VET needs to be agile and adaptive to the dynamic labour markets, work-based learning and apprenticeship continuing to be effective approaches for employability, reskilling and upskilling. VET programmes need to be more personalised and learner-centred, ensuring more engagement and ownership over learning by learners, teachers and trainers and employers. They will also adapt to prepare for the digital and green transitions: greening of VET programmes, curricula and content will go hand in hand with multi-dimensional digital strategies. Green and digital skills should become an integral part of upskilling pathways. Flexible, modern and excellent VET needs highly qualified and experienced teachers and trainers, including hybrid professionals who work both in VET institutions and in companies and have most up-to-date knowledge and skills.

At systems level, VET systems across the EU observe fewer clear-cut borderlines between VET for youth and adults, initial and continuing training and this calls for effective interaction between all education and training sectors in a lifelong learning perspective. For lifelong learning to become an operational reality, IVET and CVET provision must interact in more efficient and flexible ways to support individuals in their needs to progress in education, training and learning throughout their lives. VET should become ‘age-open’ instead of ‘age-neutral’ and should address the gender imbalances. Increasing CVET offer for all types of learners could be a step towards the establishment of a lifelong learning culture.

The role of the common European tools for transparency, comparability, documentation and recognition of qualifications within and across borders remains important. The EQF and related comprehensive National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) act as enablers of changes and facilitators of reforms in other education and training areas. Further work on transparency will support flexible and attractive learning pathways, help linking VET with other education paths and facilitate expanding VET to higher levels. Flexibility will be ensured through more modularisation and use of units of learning outcomes, through more systematic recognition and validation of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings.

Cedefop has monitored, analysed, and reported on EU countries progress towards common objectives and priorities in VET since 2004, following the Copenhagen process

on modernising VET systems in Europe (2002). In 2020, Cedefop organised a conference closing the reporting cycle on the Riga medium-term deliverables, which confirmed the potential of VET as enabler for individuals, companies, economy and society at large debating the role and future of VET at a time of unprecedented challenges.

The VET Recommendation invites the European Commission (EC) to ‘ensure qualitative and quantitative monitoring in line with the common objectives’ and ‘report to the Council on the implementation of the Recommendation every five years, building on data available at national and European level and annual monitoring by Cedefop’ while the Osnabrück Declaration reaffirms it and asks Cedefop (and ETF) to monitor the implementation of the agreed actions and report annually to the Advisory Committee for Vocational Education and Training (ACVT) and Directors General for Vocational Education and Training (DGVTS).

Following the European Commission’s proposal and discussions at the meetings of the ACVT in 2020 and 2021, an integrated approach was adopted for monitoring the implementation of both, the VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration.

As stipulated in the Recommendation on VET, EU Member States, Iceland and Norway have worked to develop their national implementation plans (NIPs) describing how they plan to address the common EU priorities on VET for the coming years (long-term perspective of 2030). 27 NIPs from 26 of the EU 27+ countries have been submitted by mid-2023 (24 Member States, NO and IS; BE submitted two NIPs, for BEfr and BEfl, while CZ, IE and SE are in the process of submitting their NIPs).

2.2. Purpose of the action

The above policy processes not only require regular monitoring and thematic stock-taking but increasingly also systematic country-specific information and analysis. Such analysis informs the European Commission’s work and discussions of Directors General (DGVTS) and the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT), as well as other Cedefop work.

VET varies considerably among Member States. Analysis and understanding of policy developments and achievements within and across countries requires thorough information on how VET and labour market work. This requires timely and accurate information on VET’s role, purpose, outcomes, governance and structure. Considered in its specific socio-economic and labour market context and tradition, this information helps understand countries’ starting points and the progress they have made as regards VET.

ReferNet is Cedefop’s European network for information on VET. Since 2008, Cedefop’s cooperation with ReferNet has been taking place through four-year FPAs (Framework Partnership Agreement). Under the new FPA (2024-2027) ReferNet will be the main source of information on national VET systems and developments contributing annually to Cedefop monitoring of policy developments in line with the EU priorities in VET. Its role has been strengthened in the integrated approach to policy monitoring and reporting of the Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration as agreed by the ACVT Committee in its meeting of 8-9 June 2021, calling for a close cooperation of ReferNet with the Directors General for Vocational Training in the Member States.

Through their national networks of different stakeholders, ReferNet partners are well-placed to collect first-hand information on VET systems and policy developments on VET, skills and qualifications, to pool knowledge and experience from policy-making, implementation, evaluation and research at the national, regional, local and sectoral levels and report on the implementation of their NIPs. They will submit a set of deliverables (collection of quantitative and qualitative data on policy developments on VET, skills and qualifications, descriptions of VET systems, thematic articles and surveys, news items) which feed into several Cedefop projects and online databases.

ReferNet is also expected to help raising the visibility of Cedefop, its products and more generally VET issues at national level. The national ReferNet partners act as multipliers and dissemination channels in the countries, targeting various audiences.

National ReferNet partners' online presence, through national ReferNet websites and a professional presence on social media, can help improving visibility and dissemination of Cedefop's work. ReferNet websites also support exchanges of information with Cedefop and other national ReferNet websites.

Therefore, for the period 2024-27, Cedefop will require national ReferNet partners to:

- (a) report on VET, skills and qualifications policies and the way VET-related objectives are being addressed in their countries in line with the priorities defined in the Council Recommendation on VET and the Osnabrück Declaration;
- (b) provide up-to-date information on VET and skills systems;
- (c) deliver thematic and other support to complement the information on VET, skills and qualifications and/or address topical information needs; and
- (d) carry out communication / visibility activities, including maintenance and update of a national ReferNet site.

2.3. Expected deliverables

The partners shall be requested to perform the activities below and deliver four types of deliverables:

Deliverable type 1: Reporting on VET and VET-related policy
Deliverable type 2: Reporting on VET systems
Deliverable type 3: Ad-hoc thematic and other support
Deliverable type 4: Communication / Visibility activities

All deliverables shall be provided in English. They shall be checked by a native speaker or a professional language editing service familiar with the relevant terminology used at EU level before submission.

The national partners will ensure that the format used for the deliverables follows Cedefop's Style manual and Referencing guide (see Annex IV).

Peer review among ReferNet partners is strongly encouraged and, when indicated in the work plan, shall be mandatory for certain deliverables.

All deliverables type 1-3 shall be checked and validated by the national ReferNet representative before delivery to Cedefop.

The 'scenario' presented (Annex V) to evaluate the applicants against the award criteria represents a realistic but non-binding one-year workload.

Deliverable type 1: Reporting on VET and VET-related policy

Deliverable 1a Policy reporting

Background/Aim

ReferNet annual reporting on the progress of policy developments will remain Cedefop's principal source of information for the integrated monitoring of the implementation of the objectives and actions of the VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration as described in the countries' NIPs.

National ReferNet partners report the information in a structured, comparable way in an online tool, VET REF, a database of policy developments (hereinafter, PDs) ⁽⁴⁾. It presents policies in their progress from design to completion, whenever possible; the information has been collected since 2015. Each PD is described and attributed to a number of criteria, such as its background, objectives and main activities, progress in a given year as separate sections; bodies responsible for implementation; type (strategy/action plan; legislation/regulation or practical measure/initiative); subsystem (initial or continuing VET); target groups. The template also indicates thematic categories that a PD covers; other PDs from a country that relate to it and a list of sources where additional information can be found (including in national languages). The VET REF allows exporting PDs in Word and Excel formats.

In 2023-27, ReferNet will be asked to report on the progress of the ongoing VET policies and initiatives that are already included in the VET REF and provide information on the new policies and initiatives that are part of the measures set out in the NIP.

⁽⁴⁾ In the VET REF, a policy development (PD) is an action or a set of actions that policy- and decision-makers in a country take to (re)define rules, (re)organise structures, (re)shape or implement practices in VET and lifelong learning (LLL), including those supported by EU funding.

This input will inform country policy briefs and the *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* – an online visualisation tool that will be launched in 2023. Findings will be used to inform the European Commission Education and Training Monitor, and discussions of the Directors General for VET (DGVET) and the Advisory Committee for VET (ACVT) at their biannual meetings. Where relevant, they will also be used for other Cedefop work.

Methods

ReferNet partners will continue to review and provide information through the policy reporting tool (VET REF) annually; Cedefop will provide guidelines to ReferNet partners.

Reporting should draw on a wide range of sources, including NIPs, policy papers, legislation, evaluation reports, research and policy analysis as well as case studies. This also requires broad cooperation with various national stakeholders, mobilising their expertise, and preparing and validating the responses; ReferNet are advised to establish cooperation with/seek feedback from DGVETs of their countries. Cedefop will organise webinars and customised online meetings, including bilateral meetings with the country managers, to get a better understanding of latest national developments in VET and align policy reporting to the countries' national implementation plans.

Information shall be checked and validated by the national representative for ReferNet before delivery to Cedefop.

Information shall be provided in English. It shall be checked by a native speaker or a professional language editing service familiar with the relevant terminology used at the EU level before submission.

Cedefop may also seek feedback to its own analysis of progress at country level and ask ReferNet as well as DGVETs/ACVTs to validate the information.

Deliverable 1b National news on VET

ReferNet partners provide short news items to inform non-national readers on recent VET and VET-related developments in their countries. These include issues that are clearly linked to VET, e.g. labour market developments influencing VET provision, employment policies linked to training, guidance and counselling, validation.

News items should focus on topics that relate to the European VET policy agenda, countries' NIPs, particularly the priorities of the Council Recommendation on VET, the Osnabrück Declaration, the European skills agenda, EU Presidency priorities as well as country-specific recommendations in relevant areas. Cedefop will provide ReferNet with guiding themes.

National news on VET will be disseminated via Cedefop's newsletter and website and/or magazine. They will also inform other Cedefop work where relevant, e.g. country fiches/chapters, thematic studies, discussions at DGVET and ACVT meetings or other events; they may also inspire proposals for country examples to be presented at EU-level events.

Methods

ReferNet partners submit news items electronically, as Word documents. These should not exceed 500 words and consider the characteristics of effective online content and

style. Visual material (graphs, logos, photos, etc.) is welcome, provided it is in editable format and does not violate copyright. Cedefop will provide relevant guidelines on content and style.

News items shall be provided in English. They shall be checked by a native English speaker or a professional language editing service familiar with the relevant terminology used at the EU level before submission.

It is ReferNet's responsibility to ensure that the information presented is **original, recent, relevant, reliable and complete**. Information shall be checked and validated by the national representative for ReferNet before delivery to Cedefop.

Cedefop reserves the right to publish the news items on Cedefop website. News items that do not comply with the basic criteria described in the relevant Guidelines/Circular, will not be accepted by Cedefop and can be corrected and resubmitted once.

Cedefop will review the submitted news items and may request clarification and/or further information or revision. If clarification requests are not addressed within a reasonable time frame, the submitted news item will be rejected.

ReferNet partners should submit news items as soon as national/regional developments in VET take place and not less than three news items per year.

Deliverable type 2: Reporting on VET systems

Understanding national VET systems, their characteristics, developments and priorities is a key element at different levels of the VET coordination and development process; it is a prerequisite for comparative work and analysis. In December 2019, Cedefop in cooperation with ReferNet launched the [VET in Europe database](#) – an online tool that showcases 35 VET systems, generates more than 2500 pages of data structured by theme, including VET system charts and detailed information about each VET programme type, and allows comparing VET systems and downloading national reports. Short descriptions of national VET systems based on ReferNet input are a comprehensive information source also used for or referred to in policy documents and reports by EU and international institutions, as Cedefop's performance measurement system demonstrates. In addition, Spotlights on VET in the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway, summarise key features of the national systems.

Reporting on VET systems takes different formats. The exact format is set in the ReferNet annual work plans.

The ReferNet partner delivers:

- (2a) Updates to the [VET in Europe database](#) every two years
- (2b) Publications on descriptions of national VET systems for the EU Presidency countries based on the most recent information in the VET in Europe database: i) [Short descriptions of VET systems](#) and ii) [Spotlights on VET](#)

Methods

Cedefop will provide guidelines and cooperate closely with ReferNet partners for the production and update of each deliverable. Customised online meetings will be organised on request from either party, to discuss and clarify issues for the finalisation of the deliverables. Cedefop will provide assistance and feedback throughout the process and ask for clarification/complementary information when analysing ReferNet input.

Deliverable type 3: Ad-hoc thematic and other support

To respond to topical information needs and complement the VET systems information, this activity aims to address issues related to VET, skills and qualifications in line with the European policy agenda. It may be linked to EU Presidency themes, new initiatives at EU-level or information requests to Cedefop.

The activity may require qualitative and/or quantitative information. It can take the form of articles, surveys or providing direct ad-hoc support to Cedefop activities. It could also include validation of national information on VET, skills and qualifications and related issues, feedback to survey design, involvement in and/or support to stakeholder forums or expert meetings. The themes and the working methods may remain open in the annual work plan and be defined at a later stage to be able to better meet ad-hoc information requests.

When applicable, the information should be checked and validated by the national representative before its delivery to Cedefop.

For previous articles, please refer to <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/networks/refernet/thematic-perspectives>.

Deliverable type 4: Communication / visibility activities, including maintenance and update of a national ReferNet website

A minimum requirement and expected deliverable are the regular maintenance and update of a national ReferNet website in the national language and also, if national ReferNet partners so wish, in English. The ReferNet website aims to disseminate information and raise visibility of VET and Cedefop's work nationally. It is considered an essential tool allowing for a broad national audience to become aware of and use Cedefop publications through the creation of links to Cedefop webportal. Other types of online presence are also recommended, for example professional use of social media, tagging Cedefop events, blogging online, discussing in forums, etc.

Websites can be autonomously hosted on their own domain or on a dedicated section in the national ReferNet partners' websites. Cedefop provides guidelines to prepare national ReferNet websites as well as technical advice and support for their setup and maintenance. Advice and support can take the form of style guidelines, website libraries, online inventories, databases, web programming code samples, discussions for optimum solutions, etc. Cedefop looks for solutions that have minimum maintenance effort and cost, for example exchange of content (news, events, publications) via automated RSS feeds.

National ReferNet partners will be ready to adapt visibility and dissemination activities to Cedefop's strategy and annual objectives, and include in their annual work plans other deliverables, such as translations of Cedefop products into national language,

organisation of meetings with national stakeholders on Cedefop activities, cooperation with other European or global networks, etc to raise the visibility of Cedefop, its products and more generally VET issues at national level. Translations into national languages are strongly encouraged as an efficient dissemination and visibility tool.

Partners are requested to report on their visibility actions through an online questionnaire at the end of the action.

National ReferNet websites can be accessed from
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/networks/refernet/national-partners>

2.4. Working arrangements

2.4.1. Teams

The national coordinator and team members are selected following specific criteria (see Section 3 below). These criteria must be met during the four-year period, in particular when the coordinator has to be replaced or the composition of the team be changed, to ensure continuity and the same level of competence throughout the FPA. Therefore, Cedefop has to be informed as soon as a change occurs, so that the coordinator and/or the team can be evaluated again on the basis of the relevant questionnaire (see also Annex 6 to Annex II).

2.4.2. Language

The working language for ReferNet activities is English. In particular, all deliverables **must be submitted to Cedefop in English**. They may additionally be provided in the country's official language(s). The national partner will ensure that the deliverables submitted are of high linguistic quality and have been checked either by a native-speaker or a professional language editing service familiar with the relevant terminology used at the EU level.

Except when specified differently, the national partner will also ensure that the format used for the deliverables follows **Cedefop's Style manual and Referencing guide** (see **Annex IV**). Related costs will be considered eligible.

2.4.3. Validation

Deliverables reporting on national VET systems and policy developments must be validated by the national representative for ReferNet (see Definitions above) on behalf of the national government to ensure that the information provided is in accordance with national policies and strategies.

National ReferNet partners can also use other validation processes depending on the deliverable type. They should always provide comprehensive information on the procedures adopted.

2.4.4. Peer review

Peer review among ReferNet partners, introduced by Cedefop in 2013, aims at improving the quality and consistency of the reports. Annual work plans indicate for which deliverable peer review is mandatory and provide guidelines for its organisation.

2.4.5. Meetings

Meetings are held in English, either in a physical or virtual format.

Each year the ReferNet team coordinator and the national representative attend the **annual ReferNet plenary meeting** organised by Cedefop. If one of them cannot attend, she/he may propose a second person from the ReferNet national team or her/his team. Cedefop will reimburse the attendance of two (2) participants per country.

A number of **Partnership forums** (usually two or three) are co-organised each year by Cedefop and a national partner hosting the meeting. These Forums include various partnership activities, such as knowledge-sharing on a topic from the current ReferNet work plan, assistance and clarifications on deliverables to be submitted in the same year, workshop sessions, etc. Like all other meetings, they are focused on increasing the quality and the efficiency of our cooperation. Each year ReferNet members shall attend one of the Partnership forums.

To improve, revise and develop specific activities or products, partners may also volunteer to participate in joint **working groups** composed of national ReferNet partners and Cedefop project managers.

Workshops/webinars may also be organised to respond to specific needs linked to ReferNet activities (e.g. Terminology).

Induction meetings will be organised for new ReferNet members.

Online meetings and site visits with Cedefop representatives and national VET stakeholders will be organised in a systematic way for Cedefop to get an in-depth understanding of latest national developments in a variety of VET policy areas.

Customised **meetings** may also be organised with specific partners on request from either sides, to support the implementation of the annual work plan.

ReferNet partners may organise **meetings** in addition to those above with other national partners. For these meetings, Cedefop will provide information, documentation or other material at the organiser's request. Where appropriate, Cedefop will attend at the organiser's request.

(For further information on the financing of the meetings, see 5.6.1).

2.4.6. Periodic assessment

National ReferNet partners will be assessed periodically on the basis of:

- (a) content analysis: concerning relevance and quality of the deliverables, and
- (b) compliance: concerning respect of deadlines.

Both national ReferNet coordinator and representative will receive in July a mid-term report on the state of implementation of the current work plan.

National ReferNet partners will be requested to report on their visibility actions through an online questionnaire at the end of the action.

2.4.7. Final implementation report

Within four (4) months of the end of the operational year, the national ReferNet partners will submit to Cedefop a Final implementation report comprising an Activity report and a Financial report supporting the Grant balance payment request for the action. Cedefop will provide a template for these reports.

3. FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Using the eligibility, exclusion, selection and award criteria below, Cedefop will conclude a four-year Framework partnership agreement with one successful applicant from each eligible country.

3.1. Eligibility criteria

To be considered eligible, applicants (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable) should meet the following requirements:

(a) be a public or a private organisation, with a legal status and legal personality (natural persons, i.e. individuals, are not eligible), as demonstrated by the following documents:

Private company, association, etc.:

- financial identification and legal entity form, duly completed and signed (see *Annex II, Application form*);
- extract from the official gazette/trade register and, if applicable, certificate of liability to VAT ⁽⁵⁾ (if the trade register number and VAT number are identical, only one of these documents is required);

Public-law entity:

- financial identification and legal entity form, duly completed and signed (see *Annex II, Application form*);
- legal resolution or decision established in respect of the public company or body, or other official document established for the public-law entity;
- certificate of liability to VAT, if any;

(b) have their seat registered in a country where the grant is applied, i.e. in one of the following:

- EU-27 (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden);
- associated countries (Iceland and Norway).

⁽⁵⁾ Entities are liable to VAT when they charge VAT for their services to third parties and claim it back from their national taxation authority.

3.2. Exclusion criteria

3.2.1. Exclusion

The authorising officer shall exclude an applicant from participating in call for proposals procedures where:

- (a) the applicant is bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, it is in an arrangement with creditors, its business activities are suspended, or it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under EU or national laws or regulations;
- (b) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the applicant is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;
- (c) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the applicant is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the applicant belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful intent or gross negligence, including, in particular, any of the following:
 - (i) fraudulently or negligently misrepresenting information required for the verification of the absence of grounds for exclusion or the fulfilment of eligibility or selection criteria or in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision;
 - (ii) entering into agreement with other applicants with the aim of distorting competition;
 - (iii) violating intellectual property rights;
 - (iv) attempting to influence the decision-making process of the Agency during the award procedure;
 - (v) attempting to obtain confidential information that may confer upon it undue advantages in the award procedure;
- (d) it has been established by a final judgment that the applicant is guilty of any of the following:
 - (i) fraud, within the meaning of Article 3 of Directive (EU) 2017/1371 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Article 1 of the Convention on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 July 1995;
 - (ii) corruption, as defined in Article 4(2) of Directive (EU) 2017/1371 or Article 3 of the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of member states of the European Union, drawn up by the Council Act of 26 May 1997, or conduct referred to in Article 2(1) of Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA, or corruption as defined in the applicable law;

- (iii) conduct related to a criminal organisation, as referred to in Article 2 of Council Framework Decision 2008/841/JHA;
 - (iv) money laundering or terrorist financing within the meaning of Article 1(3), (4) and (5) of Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council;
 - (v) terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities, as defined in Articles 1 and 3 of Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA, respectively, or inciting, aiding, abetting or attempting to commit such offences, as referred to in Article 4 of that Decision;
 - (vi) child labour or other offences concerning trafficking in human beings as referred to in Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council;
- (e) the applicant has shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations in the performance of a contract, a grant agreement or a grant decision financed by the Union's budget, which has led to its early termination or to the application of liquidated damages or other contractual penalties, or which has been discovered following checks, audits or investigations by an authorising officer, OLAF or the Court of Auditors;
 - (f) it has been established by a final judgment or final administrative decision that the applicant has committed an irregularity within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2988/95;
 - (g) It has been established by a final judgement or final administrative decision that the applicant has created an entity in a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or any other legal obligations of mandatory application in the jurisdiction of its registered office, central administration or principal place of business;
 - (h) it has been established by a final judgement or final administrative decision that an entity has been created with the intent referred to in point (g);
 - (i) for the situations referred to in points (c) to (h) above, the applicant is subject to:
 - (i) facts established in the context of audits or investigations carried out by European Public Prosecutor's Office after its establishment, the Court of Auditors, the European Anti-Fraud Office or the internal auditor, or any other check, audit or control performed under the responsibility of an authorising officer of an EU institution, of a European office or of an EU agency or body;
 - (ii) non-final judgments or non-final administrative decisions which may include disciplinary measures taken by the competent supervisory body responsible for the verification of the application of standards of professional ethics;
 - (iii) facts referred to in decisions of persons or entities being entrusted with EU budget implementation tasks;
 - (iv) information transmitted by member states implementing Union funds;

- (v) decisions of the Commission relating to the infringement of Union competition law or of a national competent authority relating to the infringement of Union or national competition law; or
- (vi) decisions of exclusion by an authorising officer of an EU institution, of a European office or of an EU agency or body.

3.2.2. Remedial measures

If an applicant declares one of the situations of exclusion listed above, it must indicate the measures it has taken to remedy the exclusion situation, thus demonstrating its reliability. This may include e.g. technical, organisational and personnel measures to correct the conduct and prevent further occurrence, compensation of damage or payment of fines or of any taxes or social security contributions. The relevant documentary evidence which illustrates the remedial measures taken must be provided in annex to the declaration. This does not apply for situations referred in point (d) of section 3.2.1.

3.2.3. Rejection from the call for proposals

The authorising officer shall not award a grant to an applicant who:

- (a) is in an exclusion situation established in accordance with section 3.2.1; or
- (b) has misrepresented the information required as a condition for participating in the procedure or has failed to supply that information; or
- (c) was previously involved in the preparation of documents used in the award procedure where this entails a breach of the principle of equal treatment, including distortion of competition, that cannot be remedied otherwise.

The same exclusion criteria apply to affiliated entities.

Administrative sanctions (exclusion) may be imposed on applicants, or affiliated entities, if any of the declarations or information provided as a condition for participating in this procedure prove to be false.

3.2.4. Supporting documents

Applicants and affiliated entities must provide a 'Declaration on honour' certifying that they are not in one of the situations referred to in Articles 136(1) and 141 FR, by filling in the relevant form attached to the application form accompanying the call for proposals and available in Annex II.

This obligation may be fulfilled in one of the following ways:

- (i) the applicant signs a declaration in its name and on behalf of its affiliated entities;
OR
- (ii) the applicant and its affiliated entities each sign a separate declaration in their own name.

3.3. Selection criteria

The applicant (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable) must have the professional competence as well as appropriate qualifications necessary to

complete the proposed action described in Section 2 (Scope of activities) for the duration of the Framework partnership agreement. In this respect, they must provide the information listed below in order to satisfy the following criteria (See *also section II of Annex II – Application form*).

In the case of legal entities forming one applicant (the ‘sole’ applicant), as specified in section 3.1, the above requirements apply to each one of those entities.

3.3.1. Operational capacity

A. Criteria

The applicant must demonstrate expertise in VET or labour market issues, including in carrying out activities similar in scope and nature to those specified in the scope of activities (Section II.1.1 of Annex II), and capacity to network with national and international organisations.

The applicant’s team of experts proposed to carry out the activities outlined in Section 2 must have relevant professional competence and qualifications to guarantee their successful implementation. In particular, they must meet the following requirements:

The ReferNet **team coordinator** must have a **minimum of 5 years** of professional experience in each of the below:

- managing similar projects at national or international level;
- conducting policy analysis or relevant research on VET, Skills, Qualifications, life long learning (LLL), employment/labour market issues or related fields or evaluation of programmes and policies in one or more of these areas;

as well as

the capacity to understand, speak and write in English to a standard at least equivalent to level C1 (as determined in ‘Language levels of the Common European Framework of Reference’ – CERF ⁽⁶⁾)

The **members of the ReferNet team** must have altogether a **minimum of 3 years** of relevant professional experience.

They must demonstrate, **as a whole**, 3 years of professional experience in each of the below:

- collecting and analysing national information and data;
- monitoring, analysing and reporting on developments in national VET systems, arrangements and policies, and/or on skills, qualifications, LLL, employment/labour market issues or related fields;

(6) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

- drafting reports, articles and other material on national VET systems, arrangements and policies, and/or on skills, qualifications, LLL, employment/labour market issues or related fields for national or European/international audiences, for publication online or in hard copy;
- managing website content.

In addition, each member of the team proposed to be involved in drafting deliverables type 1, 2 or 3 must demonstrate:

- knowledge of (initial and continuing) VET arrangements, systems and policies or skills and qualifications or lifelong learning, employment and social policies;
- the capacity to understand, speak and write in English to a standard at least equivalent to level C1 (as determined in ‘Language levels of the Common European Framework of Reference’ – CERF⁽⁷⁾).

B. Documents

The following documents or information must be presented as evidence of the technical and professional capacity:

For the applicant (affiliated entities being included, if applicable):

- a **comprehensive presentation of the applicant institution**, including its mission and organisational structure and showing the positioning of the service or team intended to deal with ReferNet activities within the whole structure; the average total manpower and the current number of staff working in the area of VET or labour market issues; in case of network/consortium, its general structure must also be presented;
- a **description of regular contacts within the last five (5) years** between the applicant and other national and international institutions/organisations involved in VET or VET-related policy, research and practice; if possible, evidence of joint work, for example, projects, reports or events;
- a **short description of projects** similar in scope and/or nature to those specified in the scope of activities (Section 2), either completed or being carried out;
- a **list of reports (maximum five)** including titles and abstracts in English and related accessible links, publications, online databases (and the like) describing or providing information on national VET systems / labour market issues, arrangements and policies;
- an **estimate of the proportion of the action** which the beneficiary may intend to subcontract;
- a **presentation of the applicant’s dissemination potential**, including examples of communication / visibility activities carried out within the last five years.

(7) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

For the ReferNet team:

- A duly filled in questionnaire (*see annex 6 to Annex II*) for all members of the proposed team, including the proposed coordinator, underlining relevant professional experience and qualifications as well as English language competence ⁽⁸⁾.

3.3.2. Financial capacity

The applicant (affiliated entities and multi-beneficiaries being included, if applicable) must have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the duration of the grant and to participate in its funding.

The average annual turnover of the applicant for the last **two (2) financial years** should represent at least **twice** Cedefop annual contribution (see maximum grant amount in point 6.2).

<u>Country groups</u>	Minimum average annual turnover required
<u>Country group 1: Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Iceland</u>	EUR 47 230
<u>Country group 2: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden and Norway</u>	EUR 67 250
<u>Country group 3: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain</u>	EUR 87 240

(8) The levels of English are available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

To permit an assessment of their financial capacity, the applicant (affiliated entities being included, if applicable) **must** submit together with their application, **the profit and loss accounts and the balance sheet** for the **last two (2) financial years** for which the accounts have been closed. (See also *Section II.2.1 of Annex II – Application form*).

The verification of financial capacity **shall not apply** to public bodies or international organisations; such status will be verified against the documentation provided by the applicant in relation to point 3.1 above (Eligibility criteria).

3.4. Award criteria

Applications meeting the selection criteria will be assessed against the following award criteria.

Award criteria	Weight/ points
1- Adequacy of the proposed approach to ensure broad and active cooperation with the various national VET institutions and stakeholders: a) variety and relevance of institutions and stakeholders considered (10 pts) b) arrangements proposed to mobilise their expertise to carry out the activities (10 pts) c) cooperation with – and support from – national authorities as demonstrated by a dedicated letter of recommendation issued by relevant government authorities (10 pts)	30
2- Adequacy and efficiency of work organisation including proposed division of roles and responsibilities between the ReferNet team members	10
3- Quality and relevance of: a) working methods, including project management, linguistic editing and terminology (15 pts) b) data sources (10 pts)	25
4- Relevance of risk analysis and adequacy of contingency measures, back-up provisions, etc.	15
5- Quality of the country policy brief submitted, in terms of: a) relevant selection and use of national sources and policy initiatives in education and lifelong learning and specifically VET, linked to the main national strategic documents including the country's national implementation plan ⁹) (8 pts)	20

⁹ 27 NIPs from 26 of the EU 27+ countries have been prepared by Director's Generals for VET by mid-2023 (24 Member States, NO and IS; BE submitted two NIPs, for BEfr and BEfl, while CZ, IE and SE are in the process of submitting their NIPs. For the three countries that have not yet prepared their NIP

b) coherence and conciseness of the text, clarity and readability for foreign readers (12 pts)	
TOTAL	100

The applicants are requested to provide the information as requested and to fill in the relevant boxes in *Section III.1) of Annex II – Application form* and **based on a scenario in Annex V**.

For this purpose, a ‘scenario’ including deliverables to be submitted and deadlines for submission is presented to the applicant.

This scenario represents a realistic annual workload, which is however non-binding since it will be used for evaluation purposes only.

1. The applicant is requested to describe a detailed methodology (approach to ensure broad and active cooperation with the various national VET institutions and stakeholders, work organisation, working methods, data sources and quality assurance, risk analysis and contingency measures) to carry out the whole range of activities foreseen in the scenario for the year. All deliverables shall be covered. The methodology will be assessed against Criteria 1-4.
2. The applicant shall draft a country policy brief in English (item 1a) in the scenario), which will be evaluated against Criterion 5 below.
3. Remark: Criterion 1c) will be used only to assess the existence and nature of the letter attached to the application form as indicated under this Section.

A committee shall be appointed by Cedefop to evaluate the proposals. Outside experts might assist the committee.

Only the proposals scoring in total a minimum of **60 points** (out of max. 100) against the above award criteria will be considered for a Framework partnership agreement.

The Framework partnership agreement (standard model can be found in Annex II) per country will be awarded to the applicant scoring the highest number of points (out of 100).

3.5. Legal commitments

The applicants understand that the submission of a grant application implies acceptance of the general conditions attached to this call for proposals. These general conditions bind the beneficiary to whom the grant is awarded and shall constitute an annex to the grant decision.

tenderers are invited to refer to the national strategic documents to identify the national priorities in VET up to 2025 or beyond.

In the event the application for framework partnership is selected, a framework partnership agreement detailing the conditions of cooperation will be sent to the applicant, as well as information on the procedure to formalise the agreement of the parties.

3.6. EU restrictive measures

By submitting a proposal, applicants (including affiliated entities) confirm that they are not subject to EU restrictive measures adopted under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) or Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). Cedefop reserves the right to refer to publicly available information to check whether an organization is subject to EU restrictive measure. The prohibition of being subject to EU restrictive measures applies throughout the whole performance of the Framework Partnership agreement.

4. SPECIFIC GRANT AGREEMENT FOR REFERNET WORK PLAN 2024

This work plan will be co-financed by a Specific grant agreement which shall start in January 2024 and have duration of 12 months.

Applicants are required to indicate in their proposal the estimated eligible costs for each activity/output of the 2024 work plan in order to fulfil the specifications outlined in Annex I (official application form to be used is available in Section III.2 of Annex II).

While the eligibility of the estimated costs will not be checked by Cedefop at the stage of evaluating the proposal, applicants must note that, if awarded a grant for the ReferNet 2024 work plan, they will be required, within two months of the end of the operational period, to submit to Cedefop various documents as required under below point 5.8.1, which follow models provided by Cedefop.

The proposals for the 2024 ReferNet action will be assessed in accordance with the following evaluation criteria:

- consistency of the proposal with Cedefop specifications and expected deliverables, including timeliness and compliance with Cedefop timetable;
- amount of the grant requested not exceeding ceiling amount and percentage set by Cedefop.

If the proposals do not fulfil the requirements, Cedefop may request clarifications as appropriate or reject the proposal and can continue with a second phase of consultation with the applicant. This second phase of consultation shall follow the same procedure as the first phase.

The period of eligibility for expenditure resulting from the implementation of the work plan will begin on entry into force of the Specific Agreement, i.e. upon its signature by both parties and expire on 31/12/2024.

In accordance with Article 193(2) of the Financial Regulation (hereinafter referred to as the 'Financial Regulation'), if the applicant can demonstrate the need to start the action before signature of the Specific Agreement, the starting date shall not be earlier than that of the submission of the proposal in response to this call. In such cases, costs incurred prior to the date of submission of grant applications shall not be eligible, save in duly justified, exceptional cases. The ending date shall remain unchanged.

5. FINANCIAL CONDITIONS

5.1. General terms and conditions

The estimated total budget available for the four-year duration of the Framework partnership agreements for all countries (2024-2027) amounts to **EUR 3.760.000** (+/- EUR 940.000 per annum) depending on the annual decisions of the Budget Authority.

Acceptance of an application by Cedefop does not constitute an undertaking to award a financial contribution equal to the amount requested by the applicant. Award of a Framework partnership agreement does not establish an entitlement for subsequent years.

Cedefop grants aim to facilitate the implementation of a project which could not otherwise proceed without the EU's support. Cedefop's financial grant is based on the principle of co-financing. It is only an additional financial contribution to the National ReferNet partner's own financial contribution and/or local, regional, national and/or private contributions obtained elsewhere for the project (including sponsoring).

In all cases, Cedefop's total contribution may not exceed 70 % of the eligible costs. Therefore, a minimum of **30 %** of the total estimated eligible expenditure of the project must come from sources other than the budget of the European Union. Proposals must include evidence that co-financing amounting to the remainder of the total cost of the project is available (secured).

5.2. Specific terms and conditions for the 2024 work plan

The total available budget for ReferNet work plan 2024 in all eligible countries ⁽¹⁰⁾ is approximately EUR 940.000.

The total available budget for ReferNet work plan 2024 is distributed as follows ⁽¹¹⁾:

<u>Country groups</u>	Maximum grant amount
<u>Country group 1: Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Iceland</u>	EUR 23 615
<u>Country group 2: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden and Norway</u>	EUR 33 625
<u>Country group 3: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain</u>	EUR 43 620

Under no circumstances may the grant have the purpose or effect of producing a profit for the partner or co-beneficiaries. Profit is defined as a surplus of receipts over the costs of the work plan. The amount of the grant will be reduced by the amount of any surplus. The Bank account (and/or the sub bank account) indicated by the partner must allow for the identification of the amounts paid by Cedefop and **be denominated in euro**.

5.3. Payment procedures

After approval by Cedefop, a financial agreement (the annual Specific grant agreement), drawn up in euro and detailing the conditions and level of funding, will be concluded between Cedefop and the partner.

The financial agreement will lay down the payment arrangements.

⁽¹⁰⁾ EU-27, Iceland and Norway

⁽¹¹⁾ The allocated amount may not under any circumstances exceed the amounts indicated in the table.

- (a) A pre-financing payment equivalent to **60 %** of the total EU contribution will be transferred to the partner within 30 days of the signing of the agreement by the last of the two parties. The pre-financing is aimed at providing cash flow to the partner and co-beneficiaries.
- (b) Cedefop will determine the level of the final payment to be made to the partner within 60 days of Cedefop approving the final report. Requests for final payments have to be accompanied by financial statements and underlying accounts certified by an auditor or, in case of public bodies, a competent and independent public institution/officer.
- (c) Should the actual eligible cost of the project be different from the total estimated cost, Cedefop will maintain or reduce its contribution proportionally, taking into account the maximum contribution amount and the maximum rate of co-funding, both indicated in Art. 3, par. 2 of the SGA. The partner will be obliged to reimburse amounts already paid in excess of the amount thus due.
- (d) The final accounts must be drawn up in euro, balanced, dated, signed and certified by the authorised person as provided for in the partner's articles of association. These must be presented using a specific structure which will be provided by Cedefop in due time.
- (e) Partners undertake to carry out the activities as they are presented in the grant application. Any change to the project must be authorised by Cedefop in advance.
- (f) Should the partner not perform all planned activities, Cedefop will reduce the grant amount proportionally in due consideration of the costs estimations breakdown provided by the partner in the grant application.

5.4. Ex-post control, audit and evaluation

Projects may be subject to ex-post controls, audits, ex-ante and ex-post evaluations. The responsible person representing the partner will confirm, with his or her signature, that the grant has been used correctly and will provide proof if requested. Cedefop, the European Commission, the Court of Auditors of the European Union or any other bodies authorised by them to do so on their behalf may check the use made of the grant at any time during the term of the agreement and during a period of five years following expiry of the agreement.

Furthermore, there are audit requirements for the requests for final payments.

5.5. Double financing

An organisation is not entitled to receive more than one grant from the European Union for the activities covered by the selected project.

5.6. Eligible costs

The only costs eligible in the context of this call are those which are:

- (a) directly linked to the project concerned, i.e. generated directly by the project and indispensable for its implementation. These costs have to be

necessary and reasonable for the implementation of the project. The project must comply with the principles of sound financial management, in particular in terms of value for money and cost-effectiveness;

- (b) generated during the lifetime of the project as defined in the agreement;
- (c) actually incurred by the partner and co-beneficiaries and recorded in their accounts in conformity with the applicable accounting principles, and which are declared in accordance with the requirements of the applicable tax and social legislation; and
- (d) identifiable and verifiable with original supporting documents, including pay slips.

The period of eligibility for expenditure resulting from the implementation of the work plan will begin in January 2024 and will have duration of 12 months provided the agreement has been signed by both parties.

If the applicant can demonstrate the need to start the action before January 2024, the starting date shall not be earlier than that of the notification by Cedefop of award of the grant while the ending date remains unchanged.

The internal auditing and accountancy procedures of the partner shall make it possible to verify that the stated project costs and receipts correspond to the accounting statements and the supporting documents.

5.6.1. Eligible direct costs

‘Direct costs’ of the action are those specific costs which are directly linked to the implementation of the action and can therefore be attributed directly to it. They may not include any indirect costs.

To be eligible, direct costs shall comply with the conditions of eligibility set out in Article II.19.1 of the model Framework partnership agreement (See also Annex III).

In particular, the following categories of costs are eligible direct costs, provided that they satisfy the conditions of eligibility set out in Article II.19.1 of the Framework partnership agreement as well as the following conditions:

- (a) the costs of personnel working under an employment contract with the partner or an equivalent appointing act and assigned to the action, comprising actual salaries plus social security contributions and other statutory costs included in the remuneration, provided that these costs are in line with the partner's usual policy on remuneration; those costs may also include additional remunerations, including payments on the basis of supplementary contracts regardless of the nature of those contracts, provided that they are paid in a consistent manner whenever the same kind of work or expertise is required, independently from the source of funding used;

The costs of natural persons working under a contract with the partner other than an employment contract may be assimilated to such costs of personnel, provided that the following conditions are fulfilled:

- (i) the natural person works under the instructions of the partner and, unless otherwise agreed with the partner, in the premises of the partner;
 - (ii) the result of the work belongs to the partner; and
 - (iii) the costs are not significantly different from the costs of staff performing similar tasks under an employment contract with the partner;
- (b) costs of travel and related subsistence allowances, provided that these costs are in line with the partner's usual practices on travel;
- (c) the depreciation costs of equipment or other assets (new or second-hand) as recorded in the accounting statements of the partner, provided that the asset has been purchased in accordance with Article II.9 of the Framework partnership agreement and that it is written off in accordance with the international accounting standards and the usual accounting practices of the partner; the costs of rental or lease of equipment or other assets are also eligible, provided that these costs do not exceed the depreciation costs of similar equipment or assets and are exclusive of any finance fee;

Only the portion of the equipment's depreciation, rental or lease costs corresponding to the period set out in Article 2.2 of the Specific grant agreement concerned and the rate of actual use for the purposes of the action may be taken into account. By way of exception, the Special Conditions or the Specific grant agreement may provide for the eligibility of the full cost of purchase of equipment, where justified by the nature of the action and the context of the use of the equipment or assets;

- (d) costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they are purchased in accordance with Article II.9 of the Framework partnership agreement and are directly assigned to the action;
- (e) costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the Framework agreement or the Specific agreement (dissemination of information, meetings, specific evaluation of the action, audits, translations, reproduction), including the costs of requested financial guarantees, provided that the corresponding services are purchased in accordance with Article II.9 of the Framework partnership agreement;
- (f) costs entailed by subcontracts within the meaning of Article II.10 of the Framework Partnership Agreement, provided that the conditions laid down in that Article are met;
- (g) duties, taxes and charges paid by the partner, notably value added tax (VAT), provided that they are included in eligible direct costs, and unless specified otherwise in the Special Conditions or in the Specific grant agreement.

5.6.2. *Eligible indirect costs*

‘**Indirect costs**’ of the action are those costs which are not specific costs directly linked to the implementation of the action and can therefore not be attributed directly to it. They may not include any costs identifiable or declared as eligible direct costs.

To be eligible, indirect costs shall represent a fair apportionment of the overall overheads of the partner and shall comply with the conditions of eligibility set out in Article II.19.1 of the Framework Partnership Agreement.

Unless otherwise specified in the Article 3 of the Specific agreement, eligible indirect costs shall be declared on the basis of a flat rate of 7 % of the total eligible direct costs.

5.6.3. *Ineligible costs*

In addition to any other costs which do not fulfil the conditions set out in Article II.19.1 of the Framework partnership agreement, the following costs shall not be considered eligible:

- (a) return on capital;
- (b) debt and debt service charges;
- (c) provisions for losses or debts;
- (d) interest owed;
- (e) doubtful debts;
- (f) exchange losses;
- (g) costs of transfers from Cedefop charged by the bank of the partner;
- (h) costs declared by the partner in the framework of another action receiving a grant financed from the Union budget (including grants awarded by a member state and financed from the Union budget and grants awarded by other bodies than Cedefop for the purpose of implementing the Union budget); in particular, indirect costs shall not be eligible under a Specific grant for an action awarded to the partner when it already receives an operating grant financed from the Union budget during the period in question;
- (i) contributions in kind from third parties;
- (j) excessive or reckless expenditure;
- (k) deductible VAT.

5.7. **Balanced budget**

The estimated budget of the action must be attached to the application form. It must have revenue and expenditure in balance.

The budget must be drawn up in euros.

Applicants for whom costs will not be incurred in euros should use the exchange rate published in the Official Journal of the European Union on the Infor-euro website available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/inforeuro/inforeuro_en.cfm

The applicant must ensure that the resources which are necessary to carry out the action are not entirely provided by the EU grant.

Co-financing of the action may take the form of:

- the partner's own resources,
- income generated by the action or work plan,
- financial contributions from third parties.

5.8. Calculation of the final grant amount

The final amount of the grant is calculated by Cedefop at the time of the payment of the balance. The calculation involves the following steps:

Step 1 — Application of the reimbursement rate to the eligible costs

The amount under step 1 is obtained by applying the reimbursement rate specified in section 5.1 to the eligible costs actually incurred and accepted by Cedefop, to which the co-financing rate applies in accordance with sections 5.1 and 5.6.

Step 2 — Limit to the maximum amount of the grant

The total amount paid to the partners by Cedefop may in no circumstances exceed the maximum amount of the grant as indicated in the grant agreement. If the amount obtained following Step 1 is higher than this maximum amount, the final amount of the grant is limited to the latter.

If volunteers' work is declared as part of direct eligible costs, the final amount of the grant is limited to the amount of total eligible costs approved by Cedefop minus the amount of volunteers' work approved by Cedefop.

Step 3 — Reduction due to the no-profit rule

‘Profit’ means the surplus of receipts over the total eligible costs of the action, where receipts are the amount obtained following Steps 1 and 2 plus the revenue generated by the action for partners [and affiliated entities] other than non-profit organisations.

In-kind and financial contributions by third parties are not considered receipts.

The total eligible costs of the action are the consolidated total eligible costs approved by Cedefop. The revenue generated by the action is the consolidated revenue established, generated or confirmed for partners [and affiliated entities] other than non-profit organisations on the date on which the request for payment of the balance is drawn up.

If there is a profit, it will be deducted in proportion to the final rate of reimbursement of the actual eligible costs of the action approved by Cedefop.

Step 4 — Reduction due to improper implementation or breach of other obligations

Cedefop may reduce the maximum amount of the grant if the action has not been implemented properly (i.e. if it has not been implemented or has been implemented poorly, partially or late), or if another obligation under the Agreement has been breached.

The amount of the reduction will be proportionate to the degree to which the action has been implemented improperly or to the seriousness of the breach.

5.8.1. *Payment arrangements*

The partner may request the following payments provided that the conditions of the grant agreement are fulfilled (e.g. payment deadlines, ceilings, etc.). The payment requests shall be accompanied by the documents provided below and detailed in the grant agreement:

Payment request	Accompanying documents
A pre-financing payment corresponding to 60 % of the maximum grant amount	
Payment of the balance Cedefop will establish the amount of this payment on the basis of the calculation of the final grant amount (see section 5.7 above). If the total of earlier payments is higher than the final grant amount, the beneficiary will be required to reimburse the amount paid in excess by Cedefop through a recovery order.	(a) Final activity report by the partner organization, (b) Final financial report by the partner organization (including BPR, Summary statement of expenditures, Summary statement of receipts, Overview), (c) Certificate delivered by an auditor on the financial statements and underlying accounts, (d) Check-list delivered by an auditor.

5.9. **Other financial conditions**

5.9.1. *Non-cumulative award*

An action may only receive one grant from the EU budget.

Under no circumstances shall the same costs be financed twice by the Union budget. To ensure this, applicants shall indicate in the grant application the sources and amounts of Union funding received or applied for the same action or part of the action or for its (the applicant's) functioning during the same financial year as well as any other funding received or applied for the same action.

5.9.2. *Non-retroactivity*

No grant may be awarded retrospectively for actions already completed.

A grant may be awarded for an action which has already begun only where the applicant can demonstrate in the grant application the need to start the action before the grant agreement is signed.

In such cases, costs eligible for financing may not have been incurred prior to the date of submission of the grant application.

5.9.3. *Implementation contracts/subcontracting*

Where the implementation of the action requires the award of procurement contracts (implementation contracts), the partner may award the contract in accordance with its usual purchasing practices provided that the contract is awarded to the tender offering best value for money or the lowest price (as appropriate), avoiding conflicts of interest.

The partner is expected to clearly document the tendering procedure and retain the documentation in the event of an audit.

Entities acting in their capacity as contracting authorities within the meaning of Directive 2014/24/EU or contracting entities within the meaning of Directive 2014/25/EU must comply with the applicable national public procurement rules.

Partners may subcontract tasks forming part of the action. If they do so, they must ensure that, in addition to the above-mentioned conditions of best value for money and absence of conflicts of interests, the following conditions are also complied with:

- (a) subcontracting does not cover core tasks of the action;
- (b) recourse to subcontracting is justified because of the nature of the action and what is necessary for its implementation;
- (c) the estimated costs of the subcontracting are clearly identifiable in the estimated budget;
- (d) any recourse to subcontracting, if not provided for in description of the action, is communicated by the partner and approved by Cedefop. Cedefop may grant approval:
 - (i) before any recourse to subcontracting, if the partner requests an amendment
 - (ii) after recourse to subcontracting if the subcontracting:
 - is specifically justified in the interim or final technical report and
 - does not entail changes to the grant agreement which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or be contrary to the equal treatment of applicants;
- (e) the partners ensure that certain conditions applicable to partners, enumerated in the grant agreement (e.g. visibility, confidentiality, etc.), are also applicable to the subcontractors.

6. **PUBLICITY**

6.1. **By the partners**

Partners must clearly acknowledge the European Union's contribution in all publications or in conjunction with activities for which the grant is used.

In this respect, partners are required to give prominence to the name and emblem of Cedefop on all their publications, posters, programmes and other products realised under the co-financed project.

To do this they must use the text, the emblem and the disclaimer specifically provided by Cedefop.

6.2. By Cedefop

With the exception of scholarships paid to natural persons and other direct support paid to natural persons in most need, all information relating to grants awarded in the course of a financial year shall be published on an internet site of the European Union institutions no later than the 30 June of the year following the financial year in which the grants were awarded.

Cedefop will publish the following information:

- name of the partner;
- address of the partner when the latter is a legal person, region when the partner is a natural person, as defined on NUTS 2 level if he/she is domiciled within the EU or equivalent if domiciled outside the EU;
- subject of the grant;
- amount awarded.

Upon a reasoned and duly substantiated request by the partner, the publication shall be waived if such disclosure risks threatening the rights and freedoms of individuals concerned as protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union or harm the commercial interests of the beneficiaries.

7. PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA

Your reply to the grant application will involve the recording and processing of personal data (such as your name, address and CV), which will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1725⁽¹²⁾ on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data. Unless indicated otherwise, your replies to the questions in this form and any personal data requested are required to assess your grant application in accordance with the specifications of the call for proposals and will be processed solely for that purpose by Cedefop's Finance and Procurement Service.

Details concerning the processing of your personal data are available on the privacy statement at the page:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/public-procurement>

⁽¹²⁾ Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC - Text with EEA relevance.

Personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) should the beneficiary be in one of the situations mentioned in Article 136 of the Financial Regulation⁽¹³⁾. For more information, see the privacy statement: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm

8. PROCEDURE AND REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

8.1. Publication

The text of the call for proposals, annexes, and for information purposes a copy of the standard agreement, can be obtained from Cedefop website at the following address: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/public-procurement>.

8.2. Application form

Applications must be drawn up in one of the official EU languages, preferably in English.

Please note that only typed applications, using the official application form annexed to the present call (Annex II), duly filled in, signed by the legal representative of the organisation and sent to Cedefop according to the defined schedule, will be examined.

Applications can be signed by hand or with Qualified Electronic Signature (QES) within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 (eIDAS Regulation).

The application must be sent in **one original copy**.

8.3. Submission of the application

Deadline for submission of applications: **see the below table. Applications submitted after this date will be rejected.**

Applications can be submitted in **one** of the following ways:

- by **registered post** to the following address with the indication Ref. **GP/DVQ/ReferNet_FPA/001/23** on the envelope, for which purposes the relevant date is to be the date of dispatch by post, as evidenced by the postmark or the registered delivery receipt issued by the Postal Services.

CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

(Procurement Service)
'SERVICE POST'

⁽¹³⁾ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 (OJ L 193 of 30.07.2018, p.1).

Europe 123
57001 Thermi (Thessaloniki)
Greece
Tel: 2310 490111 (*indicate only in case of courier delivery*)
[Insert title and reference]

- by **courier service**. For security reasons applications by a courier service can only be delivered to the central post service of Cedefop with the indication Ref. **GP/DVQ/ReferNet-FPA/001/23** on the envelope. In case of delivery by a courier service, the submission date is the date of receipt by the courier service.

CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Procurement Service

Europe 123, GR- 57001 Thessaloniki (Pylea)

Applications submitted by fax or e-mail will **not** be examined.

Contacts between the contracting authority (Cedefop) and applicants are prohibited throughout the procedure save in exceptional circumstances and under the following conditions only:

Before the final date for submission of applications:

- At the request of the applicant, the Cedefop Procurement Service may provide additional information solely for the purpose of clarifying the call for proposals documents. Any request for additional information must be made **in writing by e-mail** (C4T-services@cedefop.europa.eu).

Requests for additional information/clarification should be received by the date in the below table. No such requests will be processed after that date.

- The contracting authority may, on its own initiative, inform interested parties of any error, inaccuracy, omission or any other clerical error in the text of the call for proposals.

Any additional information, including that referred to above, will be published on Cedefop's website. Please ensure that you visit regularly the site for updates up to the closing date for receipt of tenders.

After the opening of proposals:

- The contracting authority may contact the applicant, in case clarifications are required or if obvious clerical errors in the proposal need to be corrected. These clarifications should not lead to any amendment of the terms of the call for proposals, nor alter the terms of the proposal itself.

- Applicants should not contact the contracting authority (i.e. Cedefop) on their own initiative after the applications have been opened.
- The applicants cannot change the content of their proposal nor the information submitted in the application form on their own initiative.

Timetable:

	Steps	Date and time or indicative period
(a)	Publication of the call	10/07/2023
(b)	Deadline for requests for additional information/clarification	13/09/2023
(c)	Deadline for submitting applications	22/09/2023
(d)	Evaluation period	October/November 2023
(e)	Information to applicants	November 2023
(f)	Signature of grant agreement(s) FPA: SGA:	December 2023

9. NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

9.1. Reception of application

Applicants will be informed of the receipt of their proposal upon request by e-mail at the following address: c4t-services@cedefop.europa.eu.

9.2. Admissibility of application

Only applications complying with all criteria stated in this open call will be taken into account for the award of a possible grant. If an application is deemed inadmissible, a letter indicating the reasons for the rejection will be sent to the applicant.

9.3. Selection of application

Applicants will be informed of Cedefop's decision concerning their grant application as soon as possible **in writing**. No information will be released until Cedefop's decision on partner selection has been taken. It is foreseen that successful applicants shall receive this written information based on the results of the procedure in November 2023.

9.4. Grant agreement

It is foreseen that successful applicants shall receive a Framework partnership agreement for signature as from December 2023.

10. APPLICABLE REGULATION

The award of EU grants is governed by the legal basis to the Programme and the Financial Regulations, and must respect the procedures laid down therein:

- Regulation (EU) 2019/128⁽¹⁴⁾ of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 January 2019 establishing a European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75
- Cedefop's Annual Work Programmes contained in the (Single) Programming Document ⁽¹⁵⁾
- Cedefop's Financial Regulation ⁽¹⁶⁾ (DIR/RB(2019) 01034 of 16 July 2019)
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012

11. CONTACT

Cedefop entity responsible for implementing and managing this call for proposals is 'Procurement Service'. Additional information can be obtained by e-mail at the following address: c4t-services@cedefop.europa.eu

Annexes:

I. Specifications ReferNet work plan 2024

II. Official application form and annexes:

- 1a. Legal entity form private companies
- 1b. Legal entity form public entities
2. Financial identification form
3. Involvement of third parties in the action/work plan
4. Check-list for applicants
5. Declaration on honour
6. Questionnaire on team (selection criteria)

⁽¹⁴⁾ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/what-we-do/cedefop-regulation>

⁽¹⁵⁾ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/what-we-do/work-programme>

⁽¹⁶⁾ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/finance-and-budget/financial-rules>

III. Model of standard Framework partnership agreement (including model of standard Specific Agreement)

IV. Cedefop's Style manual and Referencing guide

V. Scenario for a one-year action (Award criteria)