European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Ref. GP/DSI/ReferNet_FPA/001/20

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 <u>does not constitute an obligation</u> 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 the European Union's agency for vocational education and training (VET). With its research and analyses, it supports the European Commission, EU member states and social partners in designing and implementing VET policies, with a focus on how best to link education and employment.

European labour markets have been unsettled by globalisation, technological advances and demographic changes (ageing of the population and immigration). The economic downturn of the last decade has increased social inequality and geographical disparity. To address the economic, social, technological and environmental challenges, structural reforms both of labour markets and education and training systems are needed.

In this context, vocational education and training can help get people (back) into work and promote equality, inclusion and solidarity. VET is a pillar of lifelong learning, providing young people with an initial qualification and adults with upskilling options. VET caters both for the brightest, offering them interesting career prospects, and the most vulnerable, opening different pathways into the labour market.

Cedefop's work can be divided into three main strands:

Shaping VET

VET systems and institutions must be relevant to individual and labour market needs. Cedefop fosters their renewal and modernisation in response to emerging policy needs and priorities. It monitors labour market changes and policy implementation in the EU member states and reports on these.

VET systems need to take into account learning acquired in different ways and at different times and allow people to move between countries and sectors. Cedefop promotes the use of European tools such as qualifications frameworks which allow Europeans working or learning abroad to 'take their qualifications with them' by facilitating understanding and recognition of these.

Valuing VET

The ultimate goal of VET policy is to meet the needs of individuals: to strengthen their employability, help them find and keep jobs and allow them to make a good living. At individual countries' request, Cedefop reviews their VET policies and programmes to support effective implementation of European policies (e.g. work-based learning and apprenticeships) and policy learning between countries.

With its work on guidance and the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Cedefop promotes access to VET. It supports the inclusive role of VET by facilitating

the (re)integration into education and training of low-skilled and other vulnerable groups.

Informing VET

Cedefop looks into how socio-economic and demographic trends affect employment, the nature of jobs and the demand for skills in the labour market. It forecasts future skills needs and supply to help individuals, employers and policy-makers to make informed decisions about education, training and careers. It identifies policies and practices to help policy-makers and VET providers address skills mismatches.

Cedefop supports countries to develop their own intelligence and data on skills and employment needs.

Cedefop's information

Cedefop shares its expertise through its publications, networks, conferences, seminars and web portal www.cedefop.europa.eu. All Cedefop publications are available for download. Cedefop hosts and organises conferences and events throughout the year.

In addition to its web portal www.cedefop.europa.eu, Cedefop's work can be followed on Facebook at www.facebook.com/cedefop and Twitter at www.twitter.com/cedefop.

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 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.

Currently ReferNet supports Cedefop in monitoring, assessing and reporting on countries' progress, in implementing joint priorities for VET agreed under the so-called

'Copenhagen process' ([1]), which aims at strengthening European cooperation in VET and VET's contribution to reaching the goals of Europe's strategy for 2020 ([2]).

ReferNet supports Cedefop by

(a) reporting on national VET systems and VET-related policy developments; and

(b) raising the visibility of VET and disseminating information on VET and related issues.

ReferNet informs on VET's role, purpose, governance and structure. It provides insights in developments and trends in VET-related policies, 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 VET challenges in the partner countries. Working together provides a stronger evidence base on VET 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. The work also supports the visibility of VET at the national level ([3]).

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

Further information on ReferNet can be found at
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/refernet/index.aspx

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([1]) 'Copenhagen Process' related documents http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1433247701905&uri=URISERV:ef0018

([2]) European Commission (2010), *Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF
Europe 2020: a new European strategy for jobs and growth: European Council Presidency Conclusions 25-26 March 2010 http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/docs/en/era-partnership-council-of-the-eu-03-2010.pdf

([3]) Cedefop (2019), *Skillset and match: Cedefop's magazine promoting learning for work*, May 2019, p. 17, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9138 and Cedefop (2019), *Skillset and match*, January 2019, p. 17Framework, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9134

1.3. Objectives and nature of the call

With the objective of establishing a European network for VET – ReferNet –, this call aims at selecting one applicant from Belgium, Czechia, Greece, Ireland and the Netherlands with which Cedefop will conclude a 46-month Framework partnership agreement ([4]).

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 fourty-six-month Framework partnership agreement for the years 2020-2023 starting on 13 March 2020 and

b) a proposal for the Specific agreement for ReferNet action 2020 (10 months).

The conclusion of the Specific grant agreements for ReferNet action 2021, 2022 and 2023 shall be subject to future consultation procedures.

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

2. SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES

2.1. Policy background

In spite of uncertainties related to global factors, the latest economic indicators continue to point to an ongoing expansion of the European economy. Unemployment has declined to the levels before the 2008 economic crisis and employment has increased substantially suggesting that the 2020 target of 75 % ([5]) may be reachable. However, the employment rate of low-skilled workers is still below pre-crisis levels. Despite recent progress, tackling youth and long-term unemployment remains high on the policy agenda. Disparities persist, growth varies across countries and the refugee crisis continues to pose considerable challenges. The exceptionally extended period of crisis has left long-lasting consequences on many European economies, making it essential to strengthen Europe's resilience.

The European Commission's annual growth survey 2019 stresses that investments raising innovation and productivity are crucial to ensure future growth prospects and job creation and environmental sustainability. It stresses in particular, the need to invest in education and training to increase both productivity and employment. 'Education, training and lifelong learning' is the first of 20 key principles of the European pillar of social rights proclaimed by the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the European Commission in 2017: *Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market* ([6]).

Vocational education and training (VET) in particular, plays a crucial role for creating the necessary conditions for employment, innovation and growth and its response to the world of employment can help put more learners into jobs. VET's excellence and inclusion goals remain important building blocks in the EU policy agenda and the joint work to progress towards the Europe 2020 goals. VET will need to help ensure that innovative and skilled jobs of good quality can actually lead to higher productivity and growth.

The European Commission's *New Skills Agenda* launched in 2016 ([7]) works 'towards a common vision about the strategic importance of skills for sustaining jobs, growth and competitiveness'. It stresses that all members of the workforce, of all skills levels, need to be continuously updating their skills. It advocates adequate pathways for Europe's over 60 million adults with a low level of education to improve their employability and aims

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([5]) European Commission (2010) A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF

([6]) Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European pillar of social rights http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13129-2017-INIT/en/pdf

([7]) Council of the European Union (2016). Council resolution on a new skills agenda for an inclusive and competitive Europe. *Official Journal of the European Union* C 467, 15.12.16, pp. 1-2 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016G1215(01)&from=EN

to ensure all young people and adults have the strong key competence ([8]) base needed in the 21st century across all sectors and occupations. To embrace the digital transformation skills, the European Commission has invited Member States to develop national skills strategies and monitors progress ([9]).

VET plays a central role in the *Skills agenda*. While many European countries have strong initial VET systems that have a high standing among citizens and in the labour market, in still too many others initial vocational education and training (IVET) has a poor reputation and is considered a second choice for young people. The European Vocational Skills Weeks, organised by the European Commission since 2016, are considered a valuable contribution to raise VET's image. In addition, the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships ([10]) aims to improve their attractiveness and reputation with positive impact on the image of initial VET.

Moreover, the need for serious efforts from government and social partners to develop every workplace as a place of continuous learning is increasingly emphasised. Workers and those hit hard by the crisis need stronger support through a mix of learning and activation policies, which include customised VET provisions and work-based learning. This also implies (re-)organising work so as to promote opportunities for learning as well as using tools and methods to ensure valuing, recognition and transferability of their skills and competences. The European tools for transparency and recognition of qualifications provide a systematic infrastructure that supports permeability between VET and other forms of education and training enabling individualised and flexible learning pathways. Building on these tools, the Council recommended Member States to 'put in place, by 2025, the steps necessary to make substantial progress towards automatic mutual recognition for the purpose of further learning' of upper secondary education and training qualifications giving access to higher education and outcomes from up to one-year learning periods abroad and to achieve automatic mutual recognition of qualifications at the same level and mobility outcomes in higher education ([11]).

How to modernise and strengthen VET at all qualifications levels in different national contexts, remains a key challenge. The Bruges Communiqué has set the vision for EU VET policy agenda up to 2020 reinforcing European cooperation in VET on five streamlined priorities agreed in the 2015 Riga conclusions. Reaching at the end of this period the need to rethink and broaden the concept of VET beyond 2020 is increasingly important. To guide future policy in VET the Advisory Committee for Vocational

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([8]) The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning is part of the *New skills agenda* *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2018.189.01.0001.01.ENG*

([9]) This initiative is part of the *New skills agenda*, see *Digital skills and jobs coalition* https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-skills-jobs-coalition

([10]) Council of the EU (2018), Recommendation of the Council of 15 March 2018 on a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships. *Official Journal of the European Union* C153, 2.5.2018, pp. 1-6 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0502(01)&from=EN

([11]) Council of the European Union (2018). .Recommendation of the Council of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/eycs/2018/11/26-27/

Training (ACVT) has set a vision on excellent, inclusive and lifelong VET for 2030 and proposals for future cooperation ([12]). This vision promotes VET at all levels, including at higher levels, which integrates initial and continuing training and caters for young and adult learners. The goal is to: offer attractive, responsive, innovative, diversified and quality-assured VET accessible for all that is valued; help everyone develop their full potential in a lifelong learning continuum by acquiring the skills, competences and qualifications that ensure they are employable, can adapt to change, grow personally and become active citizens who adhere to European values.

Reliable evidence, thorough analysis and policy learning opportunities support European cooperation in VET. The governance of Europe's 2020 strategy and the Bruges Communiqué required regular monitoring of VET progress. Cedefop has been entrusted with this task. Cedefop's reports ([13]) – to which ReferNet contributed substantially – show how the objectives of European cooperation in VET have been implemented and discuss potential areas to focus on in the future. Cedefop's findings informed discussions on the post-2020 VET priorities and the opinion of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training on the future of VET. 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 Commission's work on the European semester ([14]), several policy documents (e.g. the Commission's Education and training monitor) and provides input to high-level policy relevant meetings of senior stakeholders such as Directors General (DGVT), the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT) and the European Commission working groups.

2.2. Purpose of the action

VET varies considerably between 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.

Wide ranging expertise is required to capture VET's role as an interface between education, employment, economic and social policies. To support evidence-based decision-making in VET, research findings, key documents and statistical data need to underpin analyses.

([12]) Opinion on the Future of Vocational Education and Training Post-2020 by the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (2018) https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1146&newsId=9263& furtherNews=yes

([13]) These reports are available at http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/reporting-european-training-policy

([14]) European Commission (2014), European semester: a new architecture for the new EU economic governance – Q&A http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/11/14

National ReferNet partners are well placed to inform on VET systems and VET-related issues in their specific context and on relevant policy developments. ReferNet partners have the capacity to collect first-hand information from different stakeholders. They can also pool knowledge and experience from policy-making, implementation, evaluation and research at national, regional, local and sectoral levels.

ReferNet is also expected to help raising the visibility of Cedefop, its products and more generally VET issues at national level. The national ReferNet partner acts as multiplier and dissemination channel in the country, targeting various audiences.

National ReferNet partners' online presence, through national ReferNet websites, can help improving visibility and dissemination. ReferNet websites also support exchanges of information with Cedefop and other national ReferNet websites.

Therefore, Cedefop will require national ReferNet partners to:

(a) report on VET policy and the way VET-related objectives of Europe's 2020 and post-2020 strategy and other European VET and related policy priorities are being addressed in their countries;

(b) provide up-to-date information on VET systems and the way VET is developing in their country;

(c) deliver thematic and other support to complement the information on VET systems and/or address topical information needs; and

(d) carry out 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:	**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 10-month workload.

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

Based on guidelines provided by Cedefop, national ReferNet partners report periodically on the implementation of national measures and actions that contribute to achieving the objectives of European cooperation in VET. ReferNet informs on policy initiatives, measures and actions in the requested format analysing them in relation to the main features of national VET systems and relevant socio-economic and labour market conditions.

To report on policies, ReferNet should:

(2a) draw on a wide range of sources, including policy papers, legislation, evaluation reports and statistics, research and policy analysis, expert and stakeholder interviews or focus groups, case studies;

(2b) cooperate with the relevant national stakeholders to mobilise their expertise to prepare and validate the information.

To assess progress in implementing the European VET agenda, national ReferNet partners may be asked to comment on or validate their countries' position against quantitative and/or qualitative information prepared by Cedefop.

This deliverable will feed into Cedefop's regular country-specific policy monitoring, its cross-country analysis on European cooperation in VET and its reports on VET policies.

The information can be collected in different ways. Examples include questionnaires, templates, reports, articles, news items. The information collection format will be set in the ReferNet annual work plans.

News items informing on the latest national developments in VET and related issues are screened by Cedefop and published on its website.

Further information on Cedefop's and ReferNet's previous policy reporting exercises can be found at http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/reporting-on-european-training-policy/index.aspx.

Previous news items can be found at http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/refernet/refernet-national-news-on-VET.aspx

Deliverable type 2: Reporting on VET systems

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

The ReferNet partner delivers:

(2a) information on VET systems or updates currently published online as *VET in [country X] reports* ([15]) and soon available in the online VET in Europe interactive tool.

Country reports present a brief but comprehensive and coherent picture of national VET systems to foreign readers.

They are based on a common structure provided by Cedefop. Peer review among ReferNet partners, introduced by Cedefop in 2013, aims at improving the quality and consistency of the reports. Applicants may request from Cedefop examples of previous guidelines prepared for ReferNet's *VET in [country X] reports*;

(2b) brief introductions to national VET or updates currently published online as *Spotlights on VET* ([16]),

Based on guidelines provided by Cedefop, *Spotlights* present key features, challenges and developments within the national VET system in a short format (leaflet);

which are updated periodically, and/or as necessary;

(2c) based on (2a) and (2b), the EU Presidency countries will also prepare the information for hard-copy publications to raise VET's visibility. Cedefop will be in charge of the publication progress.

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 VET-related issues relevant to the European policy agenda. It

([15]) Available at https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/vet-in-europe-country-reports

([16]) Available at https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4168

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 and related issues, feedback to survey design, involvement in and/or support to stakeholder forums or expert meetings. The themes and working methods may remain open in the annual work plan and be defined at a later stage to be able to meet ad-hoc information requests.

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

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

Deliverable type 4: Visibility activities, including maintenance and update of a national ReferNet website

A minimum requirement and expected deliverable is 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 VET 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, web programming code samples, discussions for optimum solutions. 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 VET 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 a SurveyMonkey questionnaire at the end of the action.

National ReferNet websites can be accessed from
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/refernet/3314.aspx

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 CVs.

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.

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.

Two to three **Partnership forums** 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 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.

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 **Skype and webconferences** 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 a SurveyMonkey 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 46-month Framework partnership agreement with one successful applicant from Belgium, Czechia, Greece, Ireland and the Netherlands.

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 ([17]) (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-28 (Belgium, Czechia, Greece, Ireland and the Netherlands);

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

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

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 7.1; 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 competencies 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 2 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/or nature to those specified in the scope of activities (Section 2), 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 and/or international level;

– conducting policy analysis and/or relevant research on VET, LLL, employment/labour market issues or related fields and/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 ([18])

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 national information and data;

– monitoring, analysing and reporting on developments in national VET systems, arrangements and policies;

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

– analysing, synthesising and summarising large amounts of information;

– drafting reports, articles and other material on national VET systems, arrangements and policies for national and/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 and related education, and/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) ([19]).

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;

– a **description of technical equipment**, tools and facilities at the disposal of the ReferNet team;

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

– 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 visibility activities carried out within the last five years.

For the ReferNet team:

– **detailed CVs** for all members of the proposed team ([20]), including the proposed coordinator, underlining relevant professional experience and qualifications as well as English language competence ([21]) and attaching a list of publications, where relevant, preferably in English.

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 for the 2020 SGA in point 5.2), i.e **EUR 67 250**.

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, point 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. The applicants are requested to provide the information as requested in *Section 3 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 10-month workload, which is however non-binding since it will be used for evaluation purposes only.

([20]) The applicants should preferably use the European CV format (see http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/).

([21]) 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

1. The applicant is requested to describe a detailed methodology 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 news item in English, 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.

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 (10 pts) b) data sources (10 pts) c) quality assurance measures, including linguistic editing and terminology, to ensure that the deliverables are of high quality and completed in time (15 pts)	35
4- Relevance of risk analysis and adequacy of contingency measures, back-up provisions, etc.	15
5- Quality of the document (news item or other) submitted, in terms of: 1. relevance of the topic addressed 2. clarity and readability for foreign readers	10

3. correct use of English	
TOTAL	100

A committee shall be appointed in order 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) 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.

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.

4. SPECIFIC GRANT AGREEMENT FOR REFERNET WORK PLAN 2020

This work plan will be co-financed by a Specific grant agreement which shall start on 13 March 2020 and have a duration of 10 months. The conclusion of this specific agreement is subject to another grant procedure ('consultation procedure')

For the purpose of this consultation procedure on the 2020 ReferNet work plan, Cedefop is dispatching the related documents together with the documents related to the FPA procedure. However, Cedefop will carry out the consultation procedure only with successful applicants following the FPA procedure.

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 (2020-2023) amounts to **EUR 4.000.000** (+/- EUR 980.000 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 2020 work plan

The total available budget for ReferNet work plan 2020 in all eligible countries ([22]) is approximately EUR 980.000.

The total available budget for ReferNet work plan 20120 is distributed as follows ([23]):

Country groups	Maximum grant amount
Country group 1: Croatia**,** Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Iceland	**EUR 23 615**
Country group 2: Austria, **Belgium***, Bulgaria, **Czechia***, Denmark, Finland, **Greece***, Hungary, **Ireland***, **Netherlands***, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden and Norway	**EUR 33 625** ***EUR 33 258**
Country group 3: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom	**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.

(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

([22]) EU-28, Iceland and Norway

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

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 on 13rd March 2020 and will have duration of 10 months provided the agreement has been signed by both parties.

If the applicant can demonstrate the need to start the action before March 2020, 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 II).

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 (b) final financial statement (c) summary financial statement aggregating the financial statements submitted together and indicating the receipts (d) certificate on the financial statements and underlying accounts (e) 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 ([24]) 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

You have the right of recourse at any time to the European Data Protection Supervisor for matters relating to the processing of your personal data.

More information can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dataprotectionofficer/privacystatement_publicprocurement_en.pdf.

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 ([25]). 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.

([24]) 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.

([25]) 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).

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.

The application must be sent in **four copies** (the original, being identified as such, plus three copies).

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 hand-delivery or courier service. For security reasons applications by hand-delivery or by a courier service can only be delivered to the central post service of Cedefop with the indication Ref. **GP/DSI/ReferNet-FPA/001/20** on the envelope.

- In case of hand delivery the submission date is the date of receipt by Cedefop ([26]).
- 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)
'SERVICE POST'
Europe 123
57001 Thermi (Thessaloniki)
Greece
Tel: 2310 490111 (indicate only in case of courier delivery)
[Insert title and reference]

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:

([26]) Cedefop is open from 09h00 to 17h00, Monday to Friday. It is closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Cedefop holidays.

- 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.

<u>After the opening of proposals:</u>

- 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	**Mid-January 2020**
(b)	Deadline for requests for additional information/clarification	**07/02/2020**
(c)	Deadline for submitting applications	**14/02/2020**
(d)	Evaluation period	**February/March 2020**
(d)	Information to applicants	**March 2020**
(e)	Signature of grant agreement(s) FPA: SGA:	**March 2020**

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 March 2020.

9.4. Grant agreement

It is foreseen that successful applicants shall receive a Framework partnership agreement for signature as from March 2020.

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 ([27]) 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

- Cedefop's Financial Regulation ([28]) (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 from:

CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

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

or by e-mail at the following address: c4t-services@cedefop.europa.eu

([27]) https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/what-we-do/cedefop-regulation

([28]) https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/finance-and-budget/financial-rules

Annexes:

I. Specifications ReferNet work plan 2020

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

IIIa. Model of standard Framework partnership agreement

IIIb. Model of standard Specific agreement

IV. Cedefop's Style manual and Referencing guide

V. Scenario for a 10-month action (Award criteria)