

EHEA Long-term Secretariat: Call for expression of interest for hosting countries and organisations

The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) invites EHEA members and consultative members to express their interest in hosting the Secretariat of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (hereafter referred to as 'the Secretariat').

EHEA members and consultative members can apply individually or jointly, in a consortium. For the purposes of this call, 'host' is defined as the applicant, be it individual or a consortium.

Expressions of interest are non-binding and may be withdrawn at any stage until a formal agreement has been concluded with the designated host.

Nevertheless, the expression of interest represents a concrete commitment and should be submitted by the legal representative of the applicant, which has the authority required to commit the applicant in hosting the Secretariat, if selected. In case of a consortium, the legal representative of the coordinator of the consortium submits the application.

The hosting arrangement is an important aspect for the establishment of the Secretariat, as it would determine its venue, but potentially also impact some of its legal, financial and organisational aspects.

Applications should be submitted by Thursday, 12th of June 2025, and its results presented and discussed at the 2nd BFUG 2025. The BFUG is expected to take its decision whether to establish a long-term Secretariat in Spring 2026 and, agreement provided, would then also be in the position to take a definite decision on the hosting arrangement.

The following sections provide further information on the expectations of a hosting arrangement, and the process for submitting expressions of interest.

This comprises the background of this call (I), a short description of the role of the Secretariat (II), which is necessary for understanding how potential hosts, whether countries or organisations, can host and support the Secretariat (III), the application and review process (IV) and finally the application form that should be filled by interested parties to signal their expressions of interest (Annex 1 & 2).

I. Overall Context

The BFUG has been exploring during the 2021-2024 period the replacement of the present arrangement of a rotating Secretariat (usually staffed and hosted by one BFUG member for one working period) by a long-term Secretariat (with professional international permanent staff and situated in a fixed location).

The Task Force on the Review of Rules and Regulations for the Governance of EHEA concluded that such an arrangement is principally feasible, and provided some concrete suggestions on how it could be established. The Ministers, in the [Tirana Communiqué](#) (2024), tasked the BFUG to

further explore the issue, in order to prepare a decision in Spring 2026 and, if positive, ensuring the launch of the Secretariat in June 2027.

To this purpose, a new [Task Force \(TF\) on establishing a long-term Secretariat](#) has been set up. One of the questions to be clarified is whether the Secretariat could be hosted by one of BFUG members/consultative members. The BFUG agreed that while such a hosting arrangement would not be mandatory¹, it might be useful for the Secretariat and its work, in terms of material and immaterial benefits and advantages, as laid down below.

II. The role and tasks of the Secretariat

The role of the Secretariat is defined in the [Rules of Procedures of the EHEA and the BFUG](#), which are based on the present model of the rotating Secretariat, and in consideration of the long-term Secretariat in “[Long-term EHEA Secretariat. Principles and Roadmap](#).” For further information about the activity of the EHEA Secretariat, please refer to the [Terms of Reference](#).

The following elements of the work of the Secretariat are relevant in relation to the hosting party:

1. Operational role of the Secretariat

- The Secretariat supports the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and its working structures by:
 - Providing neutral administrative, technical, operational and logistical assistance for the meetings and events of the BFUG and its working structures.
 - Preparing and maintaining official documents, such as reports and meeting minutes.
 - Coordinating communication with and between BFUG members, the BFUG’s working structures and other relevant parties.

2. Accountability and Independence

- The Secretariat operates under the authority and guidance of the BFUG.
- The BFUG oversees the Secretariat’s work and ensures its alignment with EHEA goals.

3. Requirements for its work

- To fulfil its role, the Secretariat has to enjoy full freedom of operation, without any external pressure. This regards its entire work, including publishing, media use and public speaking.

¹ The EHEA-SEC can be principally established without any specific hosting arrangement.

- The Secretariat's international staff members, whether employed or seconded and their families may require work and resident permits.

III. Role and Responsibilities of the Host

III.1 Principles of the establishment of the Secretariat

The hosting arrangement should respect the following principles:

1. Independence and Accountability

The Secretariat should operate independently from the country and/or organisation (with)in which it is hosted. Its legal, financial and organisational arrangements should ensure its independence, minimise the risk of undue influence. It should operate under the authority of and be fully accountable to the BFUG including its governing structure arrangements, reporting and appointment of its staff. Its main source of funding should be contributions by the EHEA members.

2. Sustainability

The chosen arrangements for the Secretariat must be sustainable, with a clear perspective on how it can function for a longer term.

3. Staff

The Secretariat must be able to recruit and contract a sufficient number of staff, with suitable profiles and competences, from different EHEA countries. The employment rules of the country in which the Secretariat is based should allow for this, under flexible and fair contracts.

In addition to its own staff, the Secretariat should be able to accept secondments from EHEA members and consultative members, according to the rules approved by the BFUG.

4. Location

Regulations of the country where the Secretariat will be located must ensure the rule of law, allow its operation without undue influence of the national and local authorities. There should be no obstacle for receiving funding from different other EHEA countries.

5. Non-Profit Principle

The Secretariat would operate on a non-profit basis, with any surpluses reinvested into its budget. It may accumulate a reserve, which however should not exceed one annual budget. Otherwise, the fees for EHEA members should be reduced.

III.2 Specific responsibilities of the host

Deducting from the description of the role and mode of operation of the Secretariat, the hosting party would not have any immediate legal, financial or organisational responsibilities or competences, beyond those shared by all BFUG members collectively. But, unlike other BFUG members, the host is in a special position as it is familiar with the national legal and regulatory framework in which the Secretariat operates and can lend its knowledge and competences to

support the Secretariat, e.g. by providing advice, and sharing resources, in order to find the most appropriate arrangements and solve or avoid problems.

The relationship between the host and the Secretariat must ensure the Secretariat's operational independence under the BFUG while enabling the host to support its functions through infrastructure, in-kind contributions, and collaboration. By fostering this partnership, the host plays a valuable role in advancing the mission of the EHEA and in contributing to its success. The BFUG is recognisant and grateful for this contribution.

This engagement would be a voluntary one, that has its limits in the host's resources and competences, but also as it must not compromise the independence of the Secretariat. Therefore, the call distinguishes between compulsory and optional elements that applicants should consider in their expression of interest.

In designing the application, the applicants should consider that the expected size of the EHEA Secretariat is around 8 (eight) full-time equivalent personnel.

Based on these principles, applications should address the elements below. In case of a consortium, they should be respected by all consortium members.

Legal and Operational Recognition (compulsory)

- Support the Secretariat to function effectively within its national jurisdiction, including its recognition as an operational entity with legal personality, ability to enter legal arrangements and flexibly employ staff, ability to easily receive funding from other EHEA countries without substantial financial costs
- Support the Secretariat in the process of receiving visas, residence and work permits for its employed staff and seconded staff members.

Facilitation of Collaboration and Local Support (compulsory)

- Assist in navigating national and local administrative processes to ease the Secretariat's operations, especially assisting the Secretariat with legal registration in the country, including judicial procedures if appropriate, and offering guidance in adequately complying with legal frameworks, for example on fiscal, social security and employment related matters.

Coordination and Communication (compulsory)

- Designate within the host's organisation a liaison person or contact point to facilitate smooth communication between the Secretariat, the BFUG and its working structures and the host.

Financial and in-kind contribution (optional)

- The main source of income for the Secretariat must not come from the host, but from the regular contributions of the BFUG members. But as any other BFUG member, the host can allocate to the Secretariat a financial contribution beyond the required one. This should take place via the usual process through which BFUG members would contribute to the Secretariat's operating costs. As such, the application should only refer to the host's own additional contribution to the hosting the Secretariat.

- The host is welcome to contribute to the Secretariat's operation in-kind support, such as: provision of an office, at no cost or at an advantageous rate, or the bailment agreement for it, furniture, office equipment, and other resources; access to meeting venues and logistical support for events; interpretation or translation services for logistical purposes, if required; advantageous fiscal treatment, for example in relation to taxes and fees. The host can propose secondments to the EHEA Secretariat through the same procedure as any other BFUG member.
- Any potential financial or in-kind contribution of the host should not imply any influence on the Secretariat's operations and agenda.

III.3 Engagement in the establishment of the Secretariat

Transparent and reliable engagement and commitment

- Whatever the engagement or contribution of the host is, it should be reliable, predictable and transparent. Expressions of interest should spell out what the host may offer, but also the limitations, in terms of the nature, volume and duration of any support or contribution, and distinguish between guaranteed and potential provisions.

Initial support for the establishment of the Secretariat

- While hosting is an enduring task, it can be assumed that the Secretariat will need the host's support in particular during the first 1-2 years of its establishment, and even more so in the first months before and after its establishment, with regards to
 - Establishment of the legal status in the country
 - Identification of premises
 - Visa, resident and working permits for staff members

IV. Submission and review of applications

- Applications should be submitted by emailing the filled application form (Annex 1) and the budget template (Annex 2) to EHEA Secretariat - secretariat@ehea.info - by 12th of June 2025 at 12 CEST in zip format. Late submissions will not be considered.
- The EHEA Secretariat will register all applications received in good time and perform an administrative compliance check.
- If an application has been submitted on time, but does not pass the administrative compliance check, e.g. because of an incomplete application form, or a missing document, the applicant will be invited to supplement it within 48h.
- The EHEA Secretariat will submit the applications to the Task Force.
- The Task Force will review the applications. At the start of the process, Task Force members should clearly indicate any actual or potential conflict of interest; as a result, they may not participate in the review process, or the analysis of individual applications. A Task Force member must not analyse the application submitted by its own country or organisation.

- The Tasks Force, at any stage, may request additional information and clarifications from the applicants. These communications will be facilitated by the EHEA Secretariat.
- Each proposal will be reviewed by at least 3 TF members. The Task Force members will conduct this task independently and submit their analysis to the EHEA Secretariat. In case of major disagreements between the 3 reviews, additional analysis can be organised.
- The EHEA Secretariat will record the reviews and share them with the Task Force, for a meeting in September 2025. The Task Force will analyse the proposals, discuss the reviews, and form an opinion.
- The EHEA Secretariat will submit all applications, the reviews by TF members and the opinion of the Task Force to the BFUG
- At the autumn 2025 BFUG meeting, the applicants will be invited to present their applications. The BFUG may decide to shortlist 1-2 candidates after the BFUG meeting
- The final selection will be taken in the context of Go/No-Go decision on the Secretariat, to be taken in spring 2026. The process is concluded by an agreement between the BFUG, represented by its Co-chairs, and the host.

Applications will be analysed based on the following aspects:

- ability to meet the principles described in section III;
- suitability and flexibility of the country's legal framework and the proposed legal form;
- openness and flexibility of employment regulations in terms of hiring nationals from other EHEA countries as well as receiving secondments.
- accessibility of the proposed location from across the EHEA;
- cost (budget required for usual salaries, premises, other costs and taxes).
- potential commitments of the country (if any, with a clear indication that this should not impact the neutrality and independence of the Secretariat, the approach should be generally open for in-kind contributions, e.g. provision of an office space).

Annex 1 – Application Form

Application Form for the expression of interest for hosting the EHEA Secretariat

- Please fill in the template attached (Annex 1) containing the application form.
- Please try to respond to the questions of the form as complete and accurate as possible. The maximum number of words are estimative (not an eligibility criterion).
- If you have any questions, please address them to the TF Co-chairs and the Secretariat. Questions and responses will be shared with all potential applicants.
- Feel free to include additional information and documentation that you think might be helpful, in the application or referenced as annexes.
- Based on the expression of interest, you may be invited to answer further questions, in writing and/or during online meetings with the TF. A presentation of the application to the BFUG is expected in autumn 2025.

A. Administrative information

Applicant (or consortium leader)	<i>Insert text</i>
Legal representative	<i>Insert text</i>
Contact person and information	<i>Insert text</i>
Consortium members (if applicable)	<i>Insert text</i>

B. Proposal

Summary (max. 500 words)
<i>Insert text</i>
Motivation (max. 800 words)
What is your motivation, your main ideas and intentions in offering to host the Secretariat?
<i>Insert text</i>
Relevance (max. 400 words)
Why do you think your proposal is suitable?
<i>Insert text</i>
Location (max. 400 words)
Do you propose a particular venue and location?
If so, under what conditions and why do you think they are suitable?

Insert text

Complying with the hosting principles (max. 6000 words)

Elaborate separately how your application complies with each principle in section III (Independence and Accountability, Sustainability, Staff, Location, Non-Profit principle) for hosting the Secretariat.

Insert text

Legal form (max. 2000 words)

Please advise on what would be best legal form for the Secretariat in the national context and describe the regulatory framework. Please describe the national legislation to the extent in which it allows flexibility for the governance and operations of the Secretariat.

Insert text

Financial and in-kind contributions (max. 600 words) – optional

Expressions of interest should spell out what the host may offer, but also the limitations, in terms of the nature, volume and duration of any support or contribution, and distinguish between guaranteed and potential provisions

Insert text

Ability to fulfil the roadmap (max. 1200 words)

Please detail the necessary steps and the approximate time needed to establish the Secretariat once a decision would be taken by the BFUG.

Insert text

Other models (max 400 words) – optional

Can you suggest any other entity comparable to the EHEA Secretariat, located in your country, that could serve as a model?

Insert text

Budget

Please include an approximate budget estimate, based on national costs and the resources required for the operation of the Secretariat, that would be realistic for a Secretariat established in this location. Please note that if established, the main source of income for the Secretariat is not expected to come from the host, but from the regular contributions of the BFUG members.

Send the budget separately as an annex, based on the template provided in annex 2.

Annexes – optional

Please list below the annexes that you attach to this application, apart from the budget

Insert text

Name of the legal representative, position
Signature of the legal representative