


## 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').

Expressions of interest are non-binding and may be withdrawn at any stage until a formal agreement has been concluded with the designated host.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

A decision on the selection may not be taken before Spring 2026, when the BFUG would take the definite decision on whether to establish a long-term Secretariat..

Applications should be submitted by xx 2025, through the procedure outline in Section .

The following sections provide further information on the conditions of a hosting arrangement, and the process by which expressions of interest can be submitted.

### I. Overall Context

Over the past two years, the BFUG has been exploring 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 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 inform 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 mandatory<sup>1</sup>, it might be useful for the Secretariat and its work, in terms material and immaterial benefits and advantages, as laid down below.

The following provides first a short description of the role of the Secretariat (II), which is necessary for understanding on how potential hosts, whether countries or organisations, can host and support the Secretariat (III), and finally an application form that should be filled by

---

<sup>1</sup> The EHEA-SEC can be principally established without any specific hosting arrangement.

interested parties to signal their expressions of interest (IV). The final section describes the approach for the review of the expressions of interest.

## II. The role and tasks of the Secretariat

### 1. Operational role of the Secretariat

- The Secretariat supports the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and its working structures by:
  - Providing administrative, 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 among BFUG members, between other EHEA structures and externally.

### 2. Accountability and Independence

- The Secretariat operates solely under the authority and guidance of the BFUG.
- The BFUG oversees the Secretariat's work and ensures 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, which includes publishing, media use and public speaking.
- The Secretariat employs international staff and receives seconded staff. These staff member and their families may require work and resident permits.

The role of the Secretariat is defined in the [Rules of Procedures of the EHEA and the BFUG](#), which however 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](#)."

## III. Role and Responsibilities of the Host

### III.1 Specific responsibility of the host

Deducting from the description of the role and mode of operation of the Secretariat, it is clear that 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 its 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 hosting country to support its functions

through infrastructure, in-kind contributions, and collaboration. By fostering this partnership, the hosting country plays a valuable role in advancing the mission of the EHEA and contributing to its success. The BFUG is recognisant and grateful for this extraordinary contribution.

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

**1. Legal and Operational Recognition (compulsory)**

- enable the Secretariat to function effectively within its jurisdiction, including recognizing it as an operational entity with legal personality, able to enter legal arrangements and employ staff, and ensure for its international staff visas and residence permits.

**2. Facilitation of Collaboration and Local Support (compulsory)**

- Assist in navigating 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 and employment related matters.

**3. Coordination and Communication (compulsory)**

- Designate a liaison or contact point to facilitate smooth communication between the Secretariat and the hosting country's authorities.

**4. Encouragement of contribution (voluntary)**

- 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.
- The host is also welcome to contribute to its operation in-kind support, such as:
  - i. Bailment agreement for the headquarters, furniture, office equipment, and other resources.
  - ii. Access to meeting venues and logistical support for events.
  - iii. Interpretation or translation services, if required.
  - iv. Advantageous fiscal treatment, for example in relation to taxes

**5. Secondment of a staff (voluntary)**

The Secretariat will have its own staff, selected by the head of the Secretariat. But the host will enjoy the same opportunity as any other Bologna Process party, to second a staff member to the Secretariat, in line the RoP. A secondment could be helpful to keep a good and fruitful relationship between the Secretariat and the host, but it could also become a source of problems. For example, it should be avoided that the seconded staff gets into a conflict of interests between

its employer, the host, and its role and tasks at the Secretariat. Therefore, the general rules for secondment also apply to secondments by the host. It is a bilateral agreement between the seconding and the receiving party, which can be discontinued with an appropriate period of notice.

### **III.2 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.

### **III.3 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
- Resident and working permits for staff members

## **IV. Application form for expressions of interest**

- Please try to respond to the form as complete and accurate as possible.
- 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.
- On the basis of the expression of interest, you may be invited to answer further questions, in writing and/or during online meetings

Expressions of interest should answer the following questions:

- 1. What is your motivation, your main ideas and intentions in offering to host the Secretariat?**
- 2. Why do you think your proposal is suitable?**
- 3. Do you propose a particular venue and location?**
  - a. If so, under what conditions
  - b. Why do you think they are suitable?
- 4. Briefly elaborate for each principle (in section 4) how it can be assured for a Secretariat in that location;**
- 5. Please advice on what would be best legal form for the Secretariat in the national context**

Principally, the Secretariat could be organised either as an NGO or as a foundation.

- a. Are both forms possible in the national context? Is any of them preferable, as it easier to organise, better recognised etc.?
- b. Please try to list the advantages and potential drawbacks of an NGO

- c. Please try to list advantages and potential drawbacks of a foundation
  - d. **Include an approximate budget estimate, based on the required resources described in Annex 1 that would be realistic for a Secretariat established in this location.**
6. **What do you think your country/ organisation might gain from the hosting arrangement?**
  7. **Can you recommend any other international organisations, comparable to the EHEA secretariat, located in your country, that could be contacted to share their experiences?**

## V. Assessment of submissions

A Review Committee will assess the submissions, and provide a recommendation to the BFUG, which may decide on whether to consider one, several or none of the parties as a potential host.

All submissions will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- 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;
- ability to meet the principles described in section 4;
- cost (budget required for usual salaries, premises, other costs and taxes).
- potential commitment 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).

Once an offer has been accepted, the legal form and its governing structure could be developed in full detail.

The final decision on this matter is yet to be taken (spring 2026), but therefore, a potential hosting arrangement has to be explored and determined before, as this will impact the location, its costs and possibly also the legal form the Secretariat would take, its costing model etc.

## VI. Submitting the application

The application should be submitted by sending the filled application form and the budget template to [secretariat@ehea.info](mailto:secretariat@ehea.info) by ..., at 12 CET.

The documents should be sent in pdf format in an encrypted zip file, protected by a password, ensuring thus the confidentiality of the content of the application.

Between 12-14 CET on the day of the submission deadline, the applicants should send the encryption password to the EHEA Secretariat and the TF co-chairs.

BFUG\_BE\_VA\_90\_7\_5\_TF\_RR\_Draft\_Annex\_Communique

Annex 1 – Budget Template