SUMMARY REPORT OF
THE ECGFA NET PROJECT

This project is co-financed by the European Union
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# CoaST GuaRD FUNCTIONs

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The goal of the European Coast Guard Functions Academy Network project was to enhance educational cooperation between European authorities involved in training and education in the field of coast guard functions (CGF). The project set out to achieve this objective through four inter-connected work strands:

1. Improving accessibility to training by developing a working space for the network members
2. Establishing a network of training institutions in the field of CGF
3. Developing a sectoral qualifications framework for CGF to facilitate mutual understanding and comparativeness of qualifications awarded in Europe
4. Increasing student and expert exchange to facilitate sharing of knowledge and best practices

Work was divided into three project phases taking place from 2015 to 2019. The project was co-funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund with a total of 1.5 M, and was led by the Finnish Border Guard with the support of work package leaders, the Italian Coast Guard and the Spanish Maritime Safety and Rescue Agency.

European Coast Guard Functions Forum (ECGFF) was an important background for cooperation throughout the project.
ACHIEVEMENTS

A need for enhanced training cooperation was identified by member states within the ECGFF. An important driving force for the project was the Study on the feasibility of improved cooperation between bodies carrying out CGFs. It concluded that training and education are important factors in improving collaboration which, in turn, contributes to effectiveness. However, the study found that training institutions in Europe were not well networked.

This need, among many others, was taken into account in the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) and its Action Plan. The strategy laid out several goals for capacity building in CGF. The ECGFA NET project has helped to execute several lines of action, such as

- promoting pooling and sharing initiatives and projects, as well as training and education;
- promoting greater sharing of best practices, risk analysis and threat information, as well as training and education, amongst all relevant civilian and military fora;
- establishing networks for knowledge and competence development for civilian and military educational institutes, centres and academies;
- conducting education and training activities with third countries and regional organisations;
- organising cross-sectoral maritime security training and exercises and training on priority areas such as coast guard functions;
- fostering cooperation in the area of maritime training and education, including on-the-job training, by promoting synergies and through the establishment of links between EU agencies and research, training and education centres in EU Member States; and
- promoting a European maritime academy network).
1. ECGF TRAINING NETWORK

The European Coast Guard Functions Training Network was established by 18 CGF training institutions to improve practical collaboration. The Network assembles cross-sectoral training expertise and represents all CGFs. Over the years, the members have built close professional connections to each other on several levels, ranging from directors to operational staff.

Today the Network comprises of 30 members from 12 European countries. Membership remains open to all recognised institutions working in the field of CGF, in a country that has representation in the European Coast Guard Functions Forum.

The Network has created a functional platform for training cooperation in CGF. Two main features in this cooperation have been its own platform for sharing information (ECGF Training Portal) and a training exchange programme (ECGF Training Exchange Programme).
2. ECGF TRAINING PORTAL

ECGF Training Portal is a platform that facilitates the sharing of information through several features. It hosts a selection of courses that are open for all members of the Network. Members of the Network may browse the selection to fulfil their training needs, and advertise courses of their own. This improves access to training.

The Portal contains information on all institutions that are part of the Network. These institutions pages, along with the course selection, are maintained by the members themselves. Each institution and course has a point of contact to which interested members can reach out.

The Training Portal has originally been developed under the coordination of the Spanish Maritime Safety and Rescue Agency. Essentially, the Portal is a platform of the members, by the members and for the members.
3. ECGF Training Exchange Programme

In order to increase student and expert exchange and to enable an efficient sharing of best practices, skills and knowledge, the ECGF Training Exchange Programme was developed. The programme is targeted to members of the Network but has also reached experts from the EU’s neighbouring countries.

On the job training is in the core of the programme. It is an efficient way to ensure learning by doing and to observe different practices, methods and even use of technology. Knowledge gained from the exchange is cascaded to others, which brings benefits on a broader scale. The programme has prompted ambitious cascading activities, comprising of presentations focusing on lessons learned and even comprehensive reports, full of recommendations for the home organisation to develop practices and capabilities based on what the expert has observed and tested during their exchange period. Furthermore, dialogic connections between organisations have continued even after the exchange period.

The ECGF Training Exchange ran in two editions, first in 2017 and then in 2019. The 1st edition was executed by the Finnish Border Guard whereas SASEMAR coordinated the 2nd edition. In total 57 experts from 15 organisations underwent training in the two editions of the programme, which offered 33 on-the-job trainings and courses.

The ECGF Training Exchange Programme has developed rapidly and demand for it has grown significantly. In its second running, 86 candidates were nominated to take part in the programme, over a double compared to the 42 places available in the programme. Candidates could apply up to 3 hosting offers, which resulted in 207 applications in the 2nd edition. That is over 10 times more than in the 1st edition of the programme.

In 2019, the first training course developed purely within the framework of the ECGF Training Network and its exchange programme saw light of day. This CGF course focused on traffic management with the aim of improving efficiency though VHF communications. The course was co-planned and co-instructed by SASEMAR and the Italian Coast Guard. It served as a cross-sectoral training opportunity that also involved participating experts from Lebanon and Morocco. The CGF course was planned using a draft of Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Coast Guard Functions.
4. SECTORAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR COAST GUARD FUNCTIONS

The Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Coast Guard Functions (SQFCGF) is a result of multi-year collaboration in the project. It is a voluntary framework that describes learning outcomes for 10 coast guard functions, excluding maritime border control that is covered by the SQF for Border Guarding developed by Frontex.

Learning outcomes are descriptions of essential knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy that learner has achieved at the end of a training. They are abstract statements that don’t refer to any specific qualifications, making them universally applicable. The SQFCGF describes the contents of qualifications in a common language, facilitating comprehension and comparability of different qualifications both internationally and nationally.

The SQFCGF is an outstanding achievement that ties back to the ECGF Training Exchange Programme and training cooperation in general. The framework builds the foundation for Erasmus-like training programmes that enable sharing of training resources and exchange of knowledge on a whole new level.

The SQFCGF encompasses 4 levels of qualifications that are in line with the European Qualifications Framework. In addition to the benefits for training and operational activities, the SQFCGF is an achievement that implements principles of Bologna and Copenhagen processes.

The SQFCGF has been developed under the leadership of the Italian Coast Guard. A dedicated group of experts from several project partners was compiled to draft the tables for 10 CGFs, while the three relevant Agencies EFCA, EMSA and Frontex provided their support as active observers. CIMEA (Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence) was procured as an external expert to support the work and three independent assessors evaluated the entire process.

The SQFCGF is available as publication and visual tool. The visual tool is available at the Training Portal.
FROM PROJECT TO PROCESS

The project results – ECGF Training Network, Training Portal, Exchange Programme, and the SQFCGF – are needed initiatives in CGF cooperation, especially in capacity building. It’s important to not only maintain these results but also to further develop them. In a quest for finding the best home for the results, the project turned to the three EU Agencies: EFCA, EMSA and Frontex.

The results of the project will be incorporated into the inter-Agency cooperation framework. EFCA, EMSA and Frontex have agreed in their 2020 Annual Strategic Plan of the Tripartite Working Arrangement (TWA) that ensuring an appropriate follow-up of these results is a priority. The specifics are still being discussed but at this point it has been agreed that EFCA, as chair of capacity building cooperation under the TWA, will coordinate the future cooperation framework. EFCA will also host and manage the Training Portal.

At the same time, collaboration with the ECGFF continues to play an important part. ECGFF is invited to formally adopt the SQFCGF. Furthermore, ECGF Training Network and its activities are proposed to become a permanent bullet point in the meetings the ECGFF.

The ECGFA NET project achieved and even exceeded the objectives laid out for it. There is a functioning framework of CGF training cooperation in Europe, aimed at sharing knowledge, practices and resources. Due to the SQFCGF, Exchange Programme and the Training Portal, it is an effective and lively cooperation framework that contributes to a safer, cleaner and more secure European maritime domain.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

European Commission

Project leader: Finnish Border Guard

Work package leaders: Italian Coast Guard and Spanish Maritime Safety and Rescue Agency

Project contributors over the phases: Armed Forces of Malta, Cyprus Police, French Customs, Guarda Nacional Republicana, Guardia Civil, German Federal Police, Hellenic Coast Guard, Portuguese National Maritime Authority, Portuguese Navy, Romanian Naval Academy, Spanish Customs, Spanish Navy, Swedish Coast Guard and UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Members of the ECGF Training Network

SQF working group: Italian Coast Guard, SASEMAR, Spanish Customs, Guarda Nacional Republicana, Finnish Border Guard, Hellenic Coast Guard, Maritime and Coastguard Agency (UK)

External expert in SQFCGF: CIMEA

External assessors and validation of the SQFCGF: Ms. Julie Norris, Ms. Bairbre Redmond, Ms. Manila Marcuccio

European Coast Guard Functions Forum

European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Photo credit: Finnish Border Guard.

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