

## Review of European Maritime Certification of Competence Practices

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper specifically highlights the various elements of the national practices that are routinely carried out at project partner national administration level with respect to Standards of Training Certification and Watchkeeping of Seafarers (STCW) training and endorsement of seafarers in the Certification and Competency (COC), particularly within the European Union.

The methodology used in this paper contains the research mainly conducted with 6 partner countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Spain, Turkey, Ireland, Slovenia) with a series of questions designed to capture information as much as possible in the early stages for the project, information around maritime training of seafarers and their certification in various roles and competencies.

The chapters represent the current practices at national level for partners of the project and the target audience responded provided to compare specific requirements and training practices with reference to international standards. This information is used to investigate any barriers that are currently present for seafarers certificate of competency in endorsement or recognition of their professional qualifications.

### 1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted within 6 partner countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Spain, Turkey, Ireland, Slovenia) with four separate questions. Complementary desktop research was conducted to validate the findings at national, European and International Level with reference to international standards. Each partner collated information through their countries administration which was cross-referenced with international practices [1].

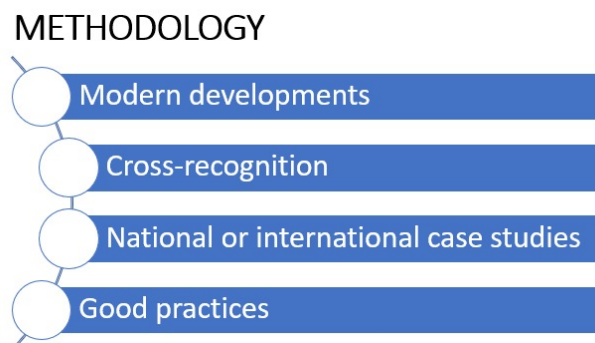


Figure 1. National Research Methodology

## 2 STCW ROLE IN CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCY

The national administrations use the STCW standards for recognition of foreign certificates, however, there are some specific rules regarding recognition of certificates issued by countries.

The Administrations maintain a 'Whitelist' of Training Centers in other countries for specific Certificates of Proficiency (CoP) recognition and these criteria are specifically guided by IMO standards in terms of competent training institutes and centers. These criteria are specified based on the international requirements for CoP certification in a focused or specialist role [2].

It has been noted that there has been a shift in the global supply of trained seafarers from Europe and the United States of America to Asian nations and the far East. Consequently, there are some differences in training practices when a comparison is made between such regions. From the perspective of international STCW standards on mariner training, all nations committed to the provision of seagoing personnel must adhere to these specific Certifications of Competency (CoC) and Certification of Proficiency (CoP) standards.

However, although the requirements of the STCW are the global standard, it has been noted also that certain training practices are experiencing a lag period with respect to state-of-the-art technologies. An example can be given when considering energy transition and the International Code of Safety IGF code requirements which have been implemented in STCW since 2017. The training of personnel has been slow to meet these new requirements for seafarers, however this type of training and certification for instance in Bulgaria is now being observed to be catching up.

From a European member state perspective, all training aligned with STCW standards are taught across training providers and certified by national administrations. There does not appear to be any significant barriers to seafarers having been trained up on the newest shipping technology, as crewing management, and shipping companies themselves provide the specific demand for training and certification of future mariners working towards profession in such fields [3].

## 3 CROSS RECOGNITION

According to all ENDORSEME project "Enabling Seafarers to Mutual Endorsement" partner countries responses, STCW training is provided to all individuals across the European Union, including a 'whitelist' of so called third countries like the USA, Australia, and others. However, it has been found that training practices in third countries in many cases differ from the STCW standards and these are what gives rise to challenges in cross recognition. Even within EU member states, specifically, Italian legislation imposes stricter standards, and thus does not adhere closely to Directive 2008/106/EC, as amended by Directive 2012/35/EU, and fails to follow

to the letter the specific provisions on the revalidation of certificates set out in section A-I/11 of the STCW Code. As a result, updating and renewing certificates has become particularly complicated, as what are essentially bureaucratic problems are preventing workers from continuing in their profession as normal, despite abundance of experience and qualification in many cases.

This also limits those trained seafarers from other EU nations and third countries from applying and working on board an Italian flagged vessel. There are several examples within the EU of these limitations and barriers to recognition. In Ireland for example, the United Kingdom which is now a third country since leaving the European Union, has various agreements with the UK due to geographic and geopolitical considerations. It remains to be seen how these barriers could be strengthened in the near future as STCW regulation is updated and reassessed. From a Bulgarian perspective, agreements on cross-recognition or endorsement with third countries has not been approved, but as a member of the EU, is obliged to recognize the CoCs (Certification of Competencies) and CoPs (Certification of Proficiencies) issued by another member state after confirming their authenticity. For the third countries, this is valid only for those which are included in the EMSA list. But this recognition does not lead to endorsement. This is more complicated for Turkey as being EU member candidate. Endorsement of COCs and COPs are much more challenging for Turkish seafarers within EU.

There is a process in Romania regarding third country validation of CoC and CoP certification. If the third state in question is not on the list published in the Official Journal of the European Union, the Romanian maritime administration can issue a request to the commission, stating the reason for a specific case for recognition. There is a clause that states if the commission does not return a decision within 18 months of application, the Romanian administration may then decide unilaterally on the recognition of the certificates issued by the competent authority of the respective state. This is clearly a barrier that could be reformed with reference to the timeframe that the commission must decide. Reducing the time that a prospective seafarer must wait in this particular case would speed up the process to endorsement of training certification. It has been noted also that Slovenian mariners holding CoC's are working solely on EU flagged vessels. The reason for this appears to be the result of numbers of qualified individuals, which is approximately 40 who obtain their CoC each year. Because of this fact, they do not face any recognition problems.

If the seafarers have a CoC from an approved country but has CoPs from non-approved Training Centers, they would not be recognized in so far as the relevant CoP has not been validated. Certification from approved training centers is only recognized in order to endorse an individual's certifications.

#### 4 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CASES

There are numerous case study examples that have been looked at by organisations like EMSA (European Maritime Safety Agency) and the IMO (International Maritime Organisation) in relation to shipping and maritime safety challenges. Many of these studies tend to focus on aspects of safety at sea from the perspective of the working environment. Many more Asian nations like Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines are now considered to be in the top five largest supply countries of seafarers (officers and ratings) according to the International Chamber of Shipping. [4]

This shift is said to be the consequence of seafarers seeking higher standards of employment in European flagged and American vessels. This has shown to be a major challenge for the shipping industry to respond to, as demand for officers has increased year on year since 2000. Consequently, so called third country qualified seafarers from the perspective of the EU are shown to hold certifications that are not fully aligned with standard STCW qualification. This creates an issue globally in the cross-recognition of certifications from Asian nations as mentioned above. In a specific case study focused on Vietnam, potential reasons may be attributed to the combined effects of changing international regulations such as working time legislation, the higher back up ratio which increases the demand for seafarers, and the lower manning scales on modern vessels that reduces demand. The challenge this creates is demand for seafarers cannot readily be met due to the long lead time involved in training seafarers compared to the shorter time frame required for building and launching a new vessel [5].

As mentioned previously, IGF code training requirements have become a barrier to certification. There was a case a few years ago in Bulgaria to which some seafarers were unable to operate on certain EU flagged vessels because of the absence of such training. Once Bulgarian national legislation adopting the IGF code training requirements was established, it remained a limiting factor in the provision of this training for the Bulgarian seafarers for some years due to lack of training providers covering the requirements. Currently, there is an option to Bulgarian seafarers to complete their training with IGF code requirements, and this is becoming less of a barrier [6].

Certain EU member states using Slovenia as an example, having quite a small shipping sector and consequently a sufficient maritime training infrastructure, the supply of trained seafarers from active training colleges and facilities have been capable of servicing the current demand for maritime personnel.

CoC Acceptance Flow Chart

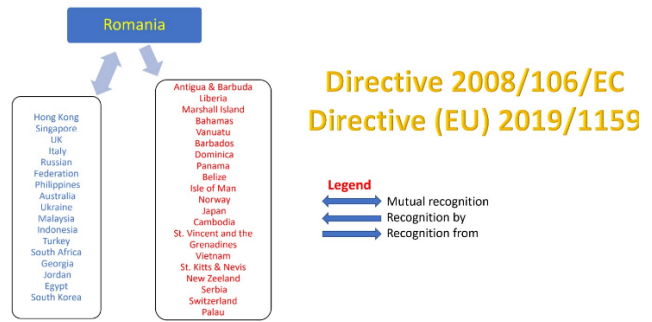


Figure 2. Example on Romania Practices in COCs

#### 5 BETTER CERTIFICATION PRACTICES

There is no support or guidance for the administrations which they can apply in the cases of seafarers holding a non-recognized certification, for them to be able to work on ships under the state's flag.

All the information about recognition of certificates is public on Administrations' websites.

In Ireland, Romania, and Bulgaria in the context of this question, there have been online IT platforms identified that are being adopted within other sectors but also in training institutes that have the capability to provide information on qualifications, courses and STCW standards to certification requirements out to sea. In the case of Ireland, there is a platform or online tool that is currently under development by the Irish Maritime Administration. This online tool is like that in existence within the oil and gas sector, OPITO approved courses and certification. NMCI (National Maritime College of Ireland) in Ireland have for several years since 2010 been delivering fully accredited OPITO approved offshore courses. It is through collaborations like this that programmes to develop such tools for the maritime sector has emerged in Ireland. In Romania, there are several IT platforms in existence for online training. Constanta Maritime University is implementing such products, one being a platform for training and examination for all curricula developed by the University, based on STCW Convention requirements.

The Bulgarian Naval Academy is in the process of adopting similar online tools as above. In a similar tool to what is being developed in Romania, there is an IT platform for training and examination of COLREG (Collision Regulations) traineeships which are in use regularly. [7].

ENDORSEME project develops a tool for COC endorsement and it is encouraging that there are working examples of an online platform available that is carrying out the tasks and gathering such relevant endorsement information for employers and employees of the oil and gas sector and now also maritime training facilities. In designing and developing a tool that will store seafarer certifications, provide details of the most up to date information on requirements by country, and potentially act as a platform in which national administrations and training institutes can promote refresher courses, each

nation that has global STCW agreements could link up with one another providing an international database of relevant information on endorsements to all prospective seafarers. [8].

recognition will be included as recommendations to relevant authorities and administrations responsible for updating and implementing maritime training standards for European seafarers.

All this information is included also in the development of an online tool/platform whereby seafarers, training providers and national maritime administrations will have access to such data. This could help to streamline and improve knowledge sharing in the maritime and shipping sector, and possibly lead to more collaborative endorsement or recognition of such training in Europe.

	Bulgaria	Ireland	Slovenia	Romania	Spain	Turkey
<b>National Requirements</b>	- Bulgarian language is NOT required for international flags but for national flags - Working Language is required but not limited to English	- Minimum English Language required (Marlins) - IRISH Maritime Administration assess COCs	- If in Slovenian Waters, Slovenian language competence to be displayed - Working Language is required but not limited to English	- Romanian Language is NOT required for international waters but for national waters - Working Language is required but not limited to English	- Spanish Language is NOT Required for International Flagged but for national flagged - Working Language is required but not limited to English	- A minimum maritime English language is required for COCs - Working Language is required but not limited to English
<b>Work Permit</b>	- If from EU, Not required	- If from EU, Not required	- If from EU, Not required	- If from EU, Not required	- If from EU, Not required	- Required for all nations working in Turkish Flagged vessels
<b>Assessments to recognised</b>	National Authority conducts COCs exams	National Authority conducts COCs exams EN01 Medical Certificate required	National Authority conducts COCs exams And COCs are accepted from STCW recognized countries	Romanian Naval Authority Issues Recognition is possible with bilateral agreements	The General Directorate of the Merchant Marine issues and decides recognition	National Administration checks Holder must be from White List Bilateral Agreements

Figure 3. National Practices partner countries

## 6 CONCLUSION

The information provided above, although only the beginning of data gathering in this project, provides the most up to date information from project partners in the context of the national practices currently undertaken by maritime training providers in partner countries. This is clearly limited to the questions designed and included in this document. Also, as part of this phase of research, supplementary information will be provided by a series of survey questionnaires that have been circulated to maritime stakeholders and national administrations in partner countries. In addition to training provision at each institute participating on the project, we are seeking relevant experiences from seafarers regarding their personal challenges or barriers to endorsement overseas from where they achieved their qualifications. Once it is discovered, the practices and processes that show pathways to solutions for various obstacles to cross

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