

# Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding — the way towards harmonisation of border guard qualifications across EU?

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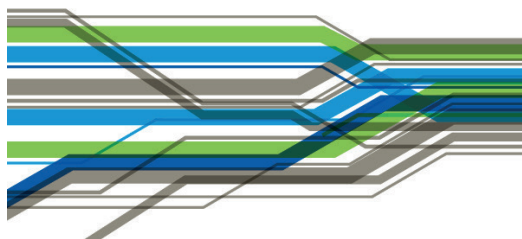
## Abstract

The core set of shared border guard functions performed across EU requires compatible job competences and a system of comparable learning outcomes that can ensure the national border guards are trained under a common framework, respecting the national education and training systems as well as the specific organizational needs, whilst achieving the desired qualifications described in a common language that makes them easily readable, comparable and compatible across EU. The development process of a Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding to achieve this requirement is detailed as a potential exemplar to similar professional fields of learning, highlighting challenges encountered and solutions developed.

**Key words:** Frontex, border guarding, Sectoral Qualifications Framework (SQF)

## Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding

SETTING STANDARDS FOR TRAINING EXCELLENCE



Rationale for development and added value of the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding (SQF for BG)

'If you want to go fast, go alone;  
if you want to go far, walk together'

The development of the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding (SQF for BG) was initiated by Frontex as a result of an increasing need for harmonization and comparability of border guard training and qualifications across the European Union, given the emerging global challenges to border security in the context of the common background of the Schengen regulatory framework that underpins the border control activities within the professional sector.

The border guard job by its nature is a 'European' job, requiring collaboration, cooperation and coordination between the Member States (MS), Schengen Associated Countries (SAC) authorities and EU/international agencies operating in the area of border control and migration. It is essential that the border guards from all MS/SAC can work together effectively in the joint operations organized at the 'hot spots' of increased migration pressure<sup>(1)</sup>, in the name of the European and international solidarity. As such it is necessary that the same standards are applied at all EU borders. One of the mechanisms to achieve this is to ensure that the European border guards receive training in accord-

ance with the same principles and values, based on the same procedures and learning requirements, described using a common, shared language.

In the light of implementing its mandate in the field of training<sup>(2)</sup>, Frontex, in collaboration with the MS/SAC has launched the development of a sectoral qualifications framework for border guarding. The SQF was intended to provide a tool to facilitate the national integration of the EU common standards in the field of border guards training (common core curricula and learning standards), and to promote best practice in the design of the training courses for border guards, ensuring that all the learning in the border guard field is operationally relevant and specifically tailored to the needs of the job.

The SQF was also intended to create the possibility to design exchange/mobility programmes similar to Erasmus that allow the border guards to study together and be exposed to various European practices and systems at all the different types of borders and in various geographical areas. As such, the SQF allows for the comparability of the qualifications in the border guard field, increasing the mobility of learning and the interoperability in joint operations and leading to harmonization and benchmarking of border guard learning across EU). The SQF also facilitates the description of border guard learning and competences applicable to all border guard organizations, regardless of their different systems and structures addressing the challenge of developing common training at European level with courses that complement the national training whilst bringing added value and avoiding overlaps with existing national training (Frontex, 2013).

Critically, the SQF facilitates the creation of a common border guard culture across EU, which is an important catalyst for the creation of the European Border Guard teams<sup>(3)</sup> that are expected to work together effectively at all the EU external borders. Furthermore, having a sectoral framework creates the basis of the development of a quality assurance and certification system

<sup>(1)</sup> Frontex joint operations <http://frontex.europa.eu/operations/roles-and-responsibilities/>

<sup>(2)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and Council Decision 2005/267/EC (OJ L 251, 16.09. 2016, p. 1).

<sup>(3)</sup> European Border Guard teams <http://frontex.europa.eu/operations/european-border-guard-teams/>.

for the European border guard qualifications and facilitates the validation of non-formal (learning from work experience), informal (in-service, non-accredited learning) and formal (accredited) learning for national and European level courses. The integration of the fundamental rights principles across all border guard learning is an important desideratum for the border guard education and training and this is also facilitated by the SQF.

The SQF contributes to streamlining the developments in the field of training across EU, supports the stakeholders in performing training needs assessments and facilitates synergies in the context of the interagency cooperation and coordination, in the framework of the European Law Enforcement Training Scheme (LETS) <sup>(4)</sup>. It brings together all the previous Frontex developments in the field of training under a common reference framework, an integrated platform for a long term training strategy and it reflects Frontex and MS/SAC shared values and strategic priorities.

#### Considerations that informed the development of the SQF structure and methodology

Bologna and Copenhagen processes are the European solutions to achieving transparency, convergence, comparability and compatibility of qualifications in higher, respectively vocational education, as well as mobility of learning and learners, quality assurance, employability and international competitiveness. Equally, Frontex aims to achieve interoperability of systems and border guard teams working together at the external borders, needs to ensure that the right people having the appropriate competences are deployed in joint operations and able to work together or make strategic decisions on how to tackle migration challenges in the framework of international and European cooperation. One of the main goals of Frontex is capacity building in the MS/SAC with regard to operational and training capacity, through organizing exchange-mobility programmes, setting standards of excellence, through harmonization of requirements and procedures. Inclusiveness, representativeness and cooperation are key principles that lead Frontex activities, promoting the integrated border management concept with high standards of fundamental rights, performance and

leadership <sup>(5)</sup>. Frontex Training commitment to Bologna and Copenhagen principles emerged from the very nature of the shared goals and values.

The EU Council initiative to develop the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) <sup>(6)</sup> represents a successful reference framework for all learning at all levels and in all areas applicable to all European states. A translation tool for all National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) which uses a common language to provide a set of descriptors of learning (learning outcomes) that identify different types of learning (knowledge, skills and competences) at all levels of complexity, covering both vocational and higher education (European Commission, 2011). The benefits of the EQF and its role as a common reference, a translation tool between the national systems and qualifications that does not impose on the national systems, but creates a link between all systems (European Commission, 2010) allowing the comparability and transferability of qualifications is exactly what is needed for the border guard professional sector: a translation tool, a common reference that, without dictating to the Member States, allows comparison and the recognition of border guard qualifications from across the EU (European Commission, 2008). A mechanism that offers a common language to describe learning and, through its reference to the EQF further onto the NQFs, facilitates the accreditation and validation processes at national and European level for the border guard qualifications, both vocational and academic (European Commission 2013a).

One of the main guiding principles of the project development was to create a framework that is inclusive to the entire sector, that can facilitate cooperation across borders and interoperability through the development of common training tools and courses, which is a challenge for the EU, given the different training practices, cultures and organizational systems in the MS/SAC. This means that the SQF does not dictate any learning requirements to the national training, but instead it reflects the entire scope of learning in the border guard field across EU at all levels and in all areas, in a comprehensive manner without encroaching on competences derived from non-border related organizational functions. The SQF is reflective and inclusive

<sup>(4)</sup> European Commission (2013b) *Establishing a European Law Enforcement Training Scheme*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels

<sup>(5)</sup> <http://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/mission-and-tasks/>.

<sup>(6)</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning, Official Journal of the European Union C 111, 6.5.2008.

to all border guard organizations, without being prescriptive, thus respecting the diversity of the specific national structures and systems.

Operational relevance was an important principle of the SQF development, as it was based on an extensive job mapping at all levels and in all areas of border guarding across EU. The SQF aimed to ensure the link between the learning and the job, and that was achieved by starting with the identifications of the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform all of the border guard jobs, transferable to the workplace. The concept of 'professional learning' (Eraut, M. 2004 and Eraut, M. 2007) is key to the SQF for BG.

Representativeness and the collaborative nature of the SQF design are two underlying principles equally reflected in the SQF development process and consequently, on the final product. Frontex ensured that all MS/SAC were involved in the SQF development and/or validation process, also including other key stakeholders (i.e. UNHCR, FRA, EASO). All decisions made by the project group and reflected in the final structure and content of the product were the result of a collaborative process of critical analysis aimed at the identification of the common, generic as well as specific competences required to perform the border guard job and the related learning requirements. Stakeholders involvement as one of the key principles of Bologna process is equally a characteristic of Frontex training development business process and it was crucial to the success of the SQF in the view of its usability and acceptance by the MS/SAC — the ultimate beneficiaries of the framework.

The development of the SQF took into consideration the opportunity to provide a set of standards that will facilitate the recognition of prior learning (as recommended by the Leuven Communiqué, 2009) <sup>(7)</sup>, in particular of the non-formal and informal learning. It is well known and accepted (Janssens, L., Smet, K., Onghena, P., Kyndt, E., 2017 and Filstad, C. and Gottschalk, P., 2013) that particularly in policing/border policing/law enforcement in general a great deal of learning happens on the job and in the context of various non-formal courses provided by the national or international agencies. This learning is relevant to the job in developing specific skills and competences and significant for the

officers career development, although not formally credited. Thus, the SQF aimed to capture and articulate the professional learning, the one that happens during the operational and organizational activities, enabling the validation of this learning, leading to internationally recognized certification.

The integration of the fundamental rights principles was a particular underpinning element of the SQF in terms of its structure. High level fundamental rights learning outcomes are part of the generic learning outcomes that are core to the border guard field, which means they become integrated across all the border guard learning outcomes. Specific fundamental rights considerations are identified for each border guard task and in order to facilitate the process of course design at national level that would reflect this principle, a special designated 'Guide to integrate fundamental rights learning outcomes' was also developed as part of the SQF, as an additional reference tool (Frontex, 2013).

All of these considerations informed the development of the SQF, becoming the rationale for decisions in terms of structure, process and methodological approach.

## Development process and methodology

The development of the SQF was contextualized by previous Frontex activities to develop common curricula for mid-level and high-level border guard training. These processes raised questions such as (Frontex, 2013):

'What exactly is mid-level and high level given the range of border guard organizational structures in Europe?'; 'What learning is required at the national and EU levels for mid-level and high level officers?'; 'What do these officers already know and how that is defined?'; 'How can it be ensured that the learning designed for mid-level and high-level officers achieves the principles of harmonization, interoperability and mobility?'

Given the principles highlighted above, the solution pointed towards a sectoral framework as an appropriate, solid tool to address these issues.

<sup>(7)</sup> Leuven Communiqué, April 2009, [https://www.eurashe.eu/library/modernising-phe/Bologna\\_2009\\_Leuven-Communique.pdf](https://www.eurashe.eu/library/modernising-phe/Bologna_2009_Leuven-Communique.pdf).

The clear reference for the development of the SQF was the methodology of the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project <sup>(9)</sup>, which envisioned similar aims of identifying points of reference, conversion and common understanding whilst respecting national diversity and avoiding prescriptive uniformity of subject-related study programmes in higher education institutions across Europe. Wagenaar (2014) points out that a significant contribution of the methodology is the alignment of learning outcomes as indicators of competence development to strengthen employability. These features of the Tuning method were most applicable to the SQF, however several important differences prevented the direct implementation of the methodology and distinguish the academic from the professional approach.

Within the Tuning project reference points (competences and learning outcomes) have been developed in forty-two subject areas, and two sectoral frameworks developed that each encompass the relevant range of subject reference points. For example the Tuning SQF for Social Sciences provides a thematic framework of learning across eight subject domains, mapped onto the EQF for levels 4 to 8.

The Tuning project is implemented by higher education for higher education and is effective for this purpose. The methodology specifically targets the three Bologna cycles, with a focus on first, second and third cycle degrees as a structural component. This approach aligns with delivery of higher educational courses and the principles of Bologna, with each level building on the former and also enabling an exit to the workforce with a rounded set of pre-determined generic and subject specific competences, and with each cycle considering the ECTS for a degree programme. The approach necessitates a process of ranking competences in terms of their importance to the subject and likely employment opportunities but also limiting them to the most important within each learning cycle and organizing them at the level of the cycle.

For the purposes of this SQF, the learning cycles were not considered as part of the framework as professional and organizational learning does not happen in terms of a bachelor's followed by a master's degree as delivered by universities. A further key difference is comprehensiveness; the framework needed to capture

all competences and all learning related to the professional domain rather than engage in a process of prioritization. It is fully understandable that higher education prioritize competences that best contribute to a range of occupational fields, however border-guarding organizations must ensure competence in all functional areas.

Regardless of these differences the Tuning project provided a rich source of information relating to the challenges of undertaking the process and organizing the outcome. It became apparent that the SQF for Border Guarding development process needed to adopt elements of the development of reference points of a single subject, both the competences and learning outcomes, and integrate them with themes from other existing subject areas such as management, with the final structure aligning to the EQF.

The development process led by Frontex started by setting up of an European working group representative to over 20 MS/SAC border guard agencies, comprising training and operational experts representing border guard key functions in as many areas and as many levels possible at the time. The development followed five phases:

1. 'Development of the Competence Profiles' consisted of an extensive job mapping of border guard tasks and jobs at all levels and in all areas, that reflected and captured all border guarding activities, defined in occupational terms, using knowledge, skills and competence as descriptors. They were later organized around the same border guard areas as the learning outcomes, to facilitate cross-referencing. A wide consultation throughout all MS/SAC followed this step, where the draft competence profiles developed by the working group were verified with all national organizations, including the ones not represented in the working group, with the aim to identify if any relevant border guard competence is missing, or is not defined at the appropriate level. The feedback was integrated and used to improve the Competency Profiles. The resulting Competency Framework (Frontex, 2013), serves as a comprehensive reference for all border guard occupational standards and job profiles across EU.

<sup>(9)</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/home.htm>.

2. Development of learning outcomes, a painful and very thorough exercise of writing learning outcomes at sectoral level which challenged even the most experienced training designers, more familiar with writing curriculum level learning outcomes. Considerable attention was paid to ensuring that the learning outcomes were specific to border guarding but still generic enough to meet the sectoral level, all-encompassing, whilst ensuring that the learning areas were relevant and facilitated integration and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and finally that the level of learning was correct. Debates such as 'attitudes versus competences' eventually resulted in an agreement to use the EQF descriptors that fit best the needs of our sectoral framework. At this point the structure of the SQF was agreed, organized by learning areas to enable clarity in progression of learning. An internal consistency exercise was performed to ensure that the learning outcomes are well defined and independent of the learning areas they belonged to. This resulted in the structure being re-organized as an 'Academic SQF' that mirrored the EQF. Both structures are published to different purposes. Finally, the learning outcomes were cross-referenced with the competence profiles to ensure that the learning outcomes were fully inclusive. This mapping exercise was also published, (Frontex, 2013), to enable course designers to identify the specific learning requirements that contribute to achieving certain job competences.
3. European Validation of the SQF consisted of another extended national consultation process that involved over 30 organizations with border guard competences and also international organizations that have interests in the area of border security and migration (i.e. UNHCR, OSCE, FRA, DCAF, EASO). Revised job competences and learning outcomes were presented to all stakeholders with the request to check the completion, accuracy, coherence, relevance, levels, or any potential gaps or inconsistencies. The SQF must reflect accurately the entire scope of learning in the border guard field and the aim of this validation step was to ensure this is achieved. Feedback collected contributed to an improved version of the draft competence profiles and learning outcomes and furthermore, the 'Guide to integrate Fundamental Rights into border guard training' (Frontex, 2013) was initiated, using the substantial feedback provided by the international agencies. The Guide is useful in writing fundamental rights learning outcomes suitable for all border guard courses and it was added to the SQF package.
4. An external independent assessment was conducted by a panel of Bologna experts who were invited to evaluate the SQF and consider the alignment of the SQF to the EQF levels and to assess if the construction of the framework facilitated RPL and mobility of learning, if the descriptors are correctly used, and if the framework is overall coherent and consistent to the Bologna principles. The two Bologna experts noted that the framework and the learning outcomes are clear and well referenced to the EQF, that the process of stakeholders consultation was 'impressive' and 'robust' and that overall the framework serves the interests of the large variety of border guard organizations by its inclusive nature. They concluded by recommending the SQF methodology and approach as an example of good practice for developing an international sectoral framework (ISQ) that may serve as a model for other organizations intending to develop an ISQ. The assessment report is included in the final documentation (Frontex 2013).
5. The Management Board of Frontex was invited to review and endorse the SQF for border guarding, given the strategic implications of the framework for all border guard training. It was adopted with enthusiasm by the board formed of all heads of border guard structures across EU, which gave a political statement and a positive signal for the follow up integration process at national level.

## Challenges of the SQF development

One of the very first challenges to acknowledge is that this SQF was the first to be developed from a non-academic perspective to capture a professional domain. As such there was no direct, published methodology to follow which inevitably lead to the development as a learning process driven by European and organisational requirements in combination with Bologna and Copenhagen principles. One of the key reasons for this publication is that other professions, and particularly law enforcement may be better informed as to the specific challenges and thinking behind the process.

Coming from a learning perspective and on consideration of thematic academic SQF's, a natural starting point was to define the learning required across border guarding organisations, with representative experts, and organise that learning, formed as learning outcomes around the major themes of the profession. Both of these assumptions caused a false start. The natural major themes of border guarding caused significant repetitiveness in learning outcomes, and given the major differences in organisations with responsibility for borders in terms of structures, types of borders, policy and legislation, starting with learning outcomes caused a huge amount of outcomes to be developed. It quickly emerged that this was not a useful way forward.

Using role profiles was considered, however again differences in organisational responsibilities across Europe would result in multiple, partial profiles, which would not be of practical utility. Further, each organisation has differing rank and role structures and this diversity is absolutely respected. Whilst it would be possible to identify shared learning requirements, a significant amount of necessary individual organisational learning would not be represented meaning that the core rationale for developing the SQF would not be achieved and ultimately public security would be affected.

It was determined that if the SQF would capture the learning requirements related to border guard activities then the work of border guarding should be clearly and comprehensively defined. As such the working group set about naming and differentiating every task related to border guarding. This process enabled natural clusters to emerge, which prevented repetition, with resultant learning outcomes truly grounded in the practical tasks of border guarding.

With the process determined the next challenge related to dealing with the learning requirements of hierarchical, predominantly ranked organisations. Determining the level of learning presented a persistent difficulty for working group participants. Academic learning within a single subject can be defined quite naturally as it develops in complexity, however professional learning is not necessarily the same. The working group tended to consider escalation of the EQF level of learning being synonymous with promotion, with the higher the rank the perceived higher the level of learning. In reality, the lowest ranks in an organisation may be required to develop highly complex competences, for example; decision-making in the use of lethal force within the context of the principles of fundamental rights, whilst higher ranking officials may be required to develop quite basic management or finance competences.

Further challenges were encountered in relation to language. In the construction of job competences and learning outcomes, finding the exact language was a long process. Capturing the exact essence of meaning, at sectoral level, which would translate into every European language, resulted in a necessary glossary and carefully monitored translation workshops beyond the original formulation. Most of the working group will forever recall days of debating each and every word of the SQF.

In terms of the working group, there were vast levels of expertise in relation to basic border guarding, but establishing broad expertise in the tasks and learning required of senior management was not easy. Evidently, given there are fewer of such people across the organisations, availability will always be a challenge. The validation process whereby the outcome of both the competences and learning outcomes were evaluated by each organisation addressed this particular issue.

Addressing these challenges was achieved by debate and discussion amongst the expert group, driven by commitment and an understanding of the benefits of the potential outcome, without a practical vision of what the outcome would look like. It took about six workshops within a period of 6 months in early 2012 to achieve all these agreements and overcome the challenges, including the national and international validation processes managed through written consultation. It is hoped that this SQF and the associated publica-



tions serve to assist anyone engaged in this process to better manage these challenges.

## Conclusions and further steps

The value of the SQF for Border Guarding resides in its actual usage, not in its completion, as its objectives are met when it is used, not when it was written or officially endorsed.

There are many ways in which the SQF becomes an useful tool for the MS/SAC.

The review of job competence profiles and occupational standards (Cedefop, 2009) in the border guard field is facilitated by the usage of the SQF Competence profiles. These profiles are written in an 'occupational' language, providing a comprehensive list of knowledge, skills and competences required to perform all border guarding activities and they are organized according to the level of learning required to achieve them. The definition of occupational standards creates the link between the human resources activities (e.g.: performance management and appraisal) and the training activities, ensuring that the training is relevant for the job.

Validation of qualifications and programmes accreditation is built around a number of key elements (ESG, 2015): learning outcomes (what type of learning has happened), credit points (how much learning has happened), level of learning according to the EQF/NQF and quality assurance mechanisms that ensure and demonstrate the learning has actually happened (including assessments). The SQF supports the national accreditation/validation processes in the field of border guarding by offering European validated reference points for 2 key elements: learning outcomes that are specific and relevant for the border guard field and levels of learning referenced to the EQF levels 4 — 7 that translate into all NQFs.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015) in the border guard field can greatly benefit from the existence of the SQF in that it offers standards that serve RPL processes. The competence profiles and learning outcomes in the SQF assist in the definition and assessment of informal and non-formal learning with the purpose of its recognition and certification or credits towards other formal programmes.

RPL requires learners to articulate the learning they have achieved, in such a way that it is recognized by both border guard and academic organisations. As such, the SQF supports the border guard learners in engaging and benefitting from RPL policies, and also saving tax dependent organizations scarce funds wasted on training officers in subjects in which they are already competent. It becomes increasingly valuable to give credit particularly to the informal and non-formal learning in the border guard profession, given the significance of the on-the-job learning and non-formal courses delivered within the organizations (Marsick, V. J., and Watkins, K., 1990).

Whilst it is expected that the SQF is used selectively and integrated by each border guard organization according to their specific needs and national mandate, the SQF for border guarding offers an useful model and a validated methodology for developing further national sectoral (organizational) frameworks. This can be achieved by further mapping the remaining organizational tasks according to the national mandate (e.g.: traffic police, military police etc.) and adding them onto the selectively integrated SQF for border guarding elements that are suitable for the respective organization, using SQF for border guarding for benchmarking. This way, the benefits of a sectoral framework may extend at national level, bringing organizational value in streamlining and eliminating overlaps, clarifying tasks and responsibilities, making well informed decisions regarding staff development, training management and needs assessment.

The development of comparable and compatible courses is particularly relevant in the border guard field. The description of all courses in border guarding using the SQF learning outcomes as a common currency ensures their comparability and also makes possible the establishment of exchange-mobility programmes in this field between the MS/SAC. It also facilitates the development of European courses ensuring that they add onto and not overlap the national training. Progression of learning becomes clear and the qualifications obtained in different countries through courses named differently, offered by different institutions, courses of various lengths and forms of learning — now become comparable, given the common language used to describe the learning achieved, thus facilitating mobility of learning and of learners. These courses developed based on the SQF are operationally relevant, as the link between the training and the job created by the



Competence Profiles and the cross-referencing tables ensure the operational and organizational relevance of the training. Furthermore, the courses developed based on SQF will have integrated specific fundamental rights considerations, ensuring that each border guard task is performed in compliance with the fundamental rights principles, organically integrated in the border guard training at all levels and in all areas.

All these are relevant not only for the MS/SAC, but also for Frontex, in the context of the deployment of the European border guard teams called to work together and perform at the highest standards during the joint operations at EU external borders, given the challenges to border security, the migration and humanitarian crisis that we are experiencing at the time of writing.

Frontex is offering support to the MS/SAC in building the capacity to design courses and curricula aligned to the SQF. Approximately 200 curriculum designers and teachers from the MS/SAC border guard training institutions have been trained in 'Course design in line with Bologna/Copenhagen principles using the SQF' so far and an increasing number of courses are reported to be designed or reviewed in the MS/SAC using the SQF. Furthermore, to facilitate the harmonization and integration processes, Frontex most recently offers grants to the MS/SAC to design SQF aligned curricula that may be delivered as national courses or as exchange-mobility programmes involving a number of European training institutions and academies. A quality assurance system is currently developed aiming to provide Frontex with institutional accreditation as a quality assured training provider, enabling the subsequent validation and international recognition of border guard qualifications offered by Frontex, based on the SQF for Border Guarding.

The SQF itself has its own quality assurance methodology and a monitoring Expert Board to review the framework in the coming years, to ensure the most recent and emerging developments at EU level in border security, such as the increased focus on coast guard functions as part of border security, are included. One of the most interesting challenges for the coming years is to demonstrate the correct referencing of the SQF to the EQF, through the validation of the national qualifications aligned to the SQF (developed or reviewed based on it) and recognized according to the NQFs at the respective level. In the absence of a specific methodology to reference the international sectoral

frameworks to the EQF (European Commission, 2016), this approach opens interesting perspectives on linking a transnational sectoral (meta-)framework like the SQF to the EQF through the national qualifications (NQFs), which is worth exploring. A first step has been achieved already, through the development and international accreditation of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management <sup>(9)</sup> run by Frontex as part of an international Consortium of Universities and Border Guard Academies, a joint curriculum developed based on the SQF level 7 and accredited through a joint accreditation in a single procedure, a pioneering pilot project coordinated by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) <sup>(10)</sup> and consequently recognized by the quality assurance agencies of all Consortium Partners.

As a conclusion, it can be said that the SQF is the main tool that facilitates the implementation of Bologna and Copenhagen principles in the border guard education and training sector and also supports the national integration of the European common core curricula and learning standards developed together by Frontex and the MS/SAC, supporting effective strategic management of training and resources and ensuring harmonization, mobility of learning and comparability of qualifications in the border guard field across EU (Frontex, 2013). The SQF not only promotes, but has proven to trigger interesting debates in both higher education and vocational educational fora, with potential further developments in both areas. Whilst much work still lays ahead in terms of quality assurance and validation of qualifications based on the SQF, an optimistic quote back in 2013 from one of the SQF expert group members is proving to be true: *'Outstanding work accomplished (...). Let me confirm to you that the SQF draft can fulfill our competence profiles/learning outcomes properly at our national level (...). The SQF will promote itself due to its quality and usefulness.'* (Frontex 2013)

<sup>(9)</sup> <http://frontex.europa.eu/training/educational-standards/>.

<sup>(10)</sup> <https://www.nvao.com/about-nvao> and <http://ecahe.eu/>.

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## Sample of SQF products

SECTORAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR BORDER GUARDING				
Learning Outcomes				
Learning Area (high level description of activities)	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7
GENERIC BORDER GUARDING				
<b>Fundamental rights</b>	Respect the fundamental rights of all persons in the context of all border guarding activities	Promote the fundamental rights of all persons in the context of all border guarding activities	Ensure protection and respect for the fundamental rights of all persons	Strategically integrate fundamental rights within all aspects of organisational activities
<b>Ethics, diversity and professional standards</b>	Act in accordance with defined ethical and professional standards and demonstrate respect for diversity	Promote defined ethical and professional standards, ensuring respect for diversity	Ensure professional and ethical standards across all border guarding activities	Review the strategic implementation of professional and ethical standards across all border guarding activities
<b>Law, policies, strategies, rules and procedures</b>	Outline a defined range of national, EU and international law, policies, rules and procedures relevant to border guarding activities  Apply a defined range of national, EU and international law, rules and procedures relevant to specific border guarding activities	Describe a defined range of national, EU and international law, policies, rules and procedures relevant to border guarding activities  Apply a broad range of national, EU and international law, rules and procedures relevant to a range of border guarding activities	Define and explain a broad range of national, EU and international legislation relevant to border guarding activities and appreciate the implications for implementation in the national context  Exercise the appropriate level of autonomy in the application of a broad range of legal and procedural frameworks	Critically evaluate national, EU and international border security policies and strategies in the wider context of how they interface with other agencies and partners  Critically evaluate the existing legal and procedural frameworks related to border security
<b>Cooperation with national, EU and international partners</b>	Apply specific procedures in relation to partnership and cooperation agreements	Apply the terms of defined agreements, partnerships and cooperation procedures to operational duties	Assess operational activities in the context of cooperation, ensuring the operational implementation of agreements, partnerships	Engage with the development, review and evaluation of national, EU and international agreements, partnerships

### SECTORAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR BORDER GUARDING (ACADEMIC)

#### LEVEL 6 – Learning Outcomes

Knowledge	Skills	Competence
GENERIC BORDER GUARDING		
Define and explain a broad range of national, EU and international legislation relevant to border guarding activities and appreciate the implications for implementation in the national context	Assess operational activities in the context of cooperation, ensuring the operational implementation of agreements, partnerships and cooperation procedures  Demonstrate advanced communication skills including negotiation, conflict resolution, and ensure implementation of effective communication strategies in a broad range of border guarding contexts	Ensure protection and respect for the fundamental rights of all persons  Critically evaluate information/data management systems and ensure data protection compliance  Take the initiative to identify, assess and address personal and professional development requirements for self and others utilising a range of learning contexts  Ensure professional and ethical standards across all border guarding activities  Exercise the appropriate level of autonomy in the application of a broad range of legal and procedural frameworks

#### BORDER CONTROL

Select, coordinate and critically evaluate border surveillance activities  Critically evaluate the tactics and implementation of operational procedures for border checking  Differentiate between systems and technologies available for border control, compare their suitability, supervise and evaluate the operational deployment and results	Facilitate cross-border movements by balancing the right to free movement with the responsibility to prevent and detect cross-border irregularity/infringements  Manage border crossing procedures and take decisions in complex situations related to border checks  Plan, organise and deploy border control resources and critically assess performance and evaluate results
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**BORDER GUARD COMPETENCE PROFILES: LEVEL 4****GENERIC BORDER GUARDING**

<b>Knowledge</b> knowledge and understanding of:	<b>Skills</b> ability to:	<b>Competence</b>
A limited range of national, EU and international legislation, policies and procedures	Uphold and enforce specific National, EU and International law, policies and procedures	Act autonomously within prescribed guidelines for the individual role
Specific ethical codes, values and professional standards	Communicate effectively with individuals and groups in predictable border guarding contexts	Act within organisational value statements, professional standards and code of conduct guidelines
A limited range of processes, rules and procedures for interacting with cooperative agencies and other organisations	Resolve specific problems	Facilitate the legitimate movement of people across borders
Specific cultures and customs of other countries	Assist and support people in their passage, providing advice and information as necessary, with a quality service orientation	Exercise the appropriate level of autonomy and discernment in the application of national, EU and International law, policies, rules and procedures
Specific information and data handling systems together with procedures, such as form filling and databases	Follow defined procedures to maintain accurate and timely records and reports.	
	Follow protocols for information sharing, respecting and maintaining standards of confidentiality	

COMPETENCE PROFILES		SECTORAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK LEARNING OUTCOMES – Level 5																
Level 5																		
BORDER CONTROL (cont.)																		
Skills (cont.)																		
Ability to:																		
Apply a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills to perform border checks in accordance with the SBC and/or applicable national legislation	Conduct border interviews in irregular circumstances	Apply a broad range of national, EU and international law, rules and procedures relevant to border guarding activities																
		Describe a defined range of national, EU and international law, policies, rules and procedures relevant to border guarding activities																
		Promote ethical and professional standards, ensuring respect for diversity																
		Promote the fundamental rights of all persons in the context of all border guarding activities																
		Operate a broad range of border checking technology and equipment and interpret results																
		Examine and establish the validity and usage of travel related documentation																
		Recognise the value of information as potential intelligence, gathered through overt or covert activities and share accordingly																
		Evaluate potential risks and threats through the application of established profiling methods																
		Implement tactical responses to risks and threats																
		Manage or resolve unpredictable but non-complex conflict situations in accordance with relevant law, policies, rules and procedures																
		Establish eligibility for admission, residence or travel within the EU in cases that are irregular but not complex																
		Conduct return, removal, repatriation and asylum procedures in compliance with fundamental rights																
		Develop relationships with local communities																
		Act in cooperation with all stakeholders involved in border security																
		Ensure the state obligations of international protection of asylum seekers and refugees are implemented																
		Act in the context of respect and relationship building with local communities																
Competence																		
Act in cooperation with all stakeholders involved in border security																		
Ensure the state obligations of international protection of asylum seekers and refugees are implemented																		
Act in the context of respect and relationship building with local communities																		



GUIDE TO INTEGRATING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS INTO BORDER GUARD TRAINING				
Example Learning Outcomes				
Learning Area (high level description of activities)	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7
<b>GENERIC BORDER GUARDING</b>				
<b>Fundamental rights</b>	<p>Respect the fundamental rights of all persons in the context of all border guarding activities (SQF)</p> <p>Recognise the important role and responsibility of the border guard to prevent human rights violations and protect victims</p>	<p>Promote the fundamental rights of all persons in the context of all border guarding activities (SQF)</p> <p>Explain the role and responsibility of border guards to prevent human rights violation(s)</p>	<p>Ensure protection and respect for the fundamental rights of all persons (SQF)</p> <p>Identify and address barriers to the integration of fundamental rights in border guarding activities</p>	<p>Strategically integrate fundamental rights within all aspects of organisational activities (SQF)</p> <p>Take responsibility and be accountable for non-compliance with Fundamental Rights and International Protection legislation and treaties</p>
<b>Ethics, diversity and professional Standards</b>	<p>Act in accordance with defined ethical and professional standards and demonstrate respect for diversity (SQF)</p> <p>Apply cultural, age and gender-sensitive approaches in day-to-day contacts with persons arriving at the border, in full compliance with international law and standards</p> <p>Recognise and address the needs of people with disabilities and people with behavioural indicators of vulnerability</p>	<p>Promote defined ethical and professional standards, ensuring respect for diversity (SQF)</p> <p>Promote diversity based approaches within the work setting</p> <p>Apply national and European ethical guidelines to border guard practice</p>	<p>Ensure professional and ethical standards across all border guarding activities (SQF)</p> <p>Ensure cultural, age and gender-sensitive approaches in day-to-day contacts with persons arriving at the border, in full compliance with international law and standards</p> <p>Reflect on the application of ethical practice in border guarding activities</p>	<p>Review the strategic implementation professional and ethical standards across all border guarding activities (SQF)</p> <p>Strategically integrate a diversity policy within the BG organisation</p> <p>Value and promote ethics and standards compliance in all professional activities</p>
<b>Law, policies, strategies, rules and procedures</b>	<p>Recognise key provisions of the international, regional and national legal instruments related to human rights, including</p>	<p>Describe the legal nature of fundamental rights and consequences of violations and in terms of international, EU and</p>	<p>Analyse border specific European and UN case law related to fundamental rights and international protection and make</p>	<p>Review policy and procedures to ensure compliance with fundamental rights and international protection</p>