

THE EC SAFA PROGRAMME

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

1. Origins of the EC SAFA programme

The SAFA (safety assessment of foreign aircraft) programme was originally launched in 1996 by the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) with the support of the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA). The programme centered on the voluntary inspection (against ICAO standards) by ECAC states of foreign aircraft landing in their airports and the pooling of all data obtained from such inspections into a common database accessible to all participating states. The scope of the inspections relating to 'foreign' aircraft implied those aircraft which are not used or operated under the control of the competent authority of the state where the inspection takes place.

The ECAC-JAA SAFA programme therefore, was not based upon a European legal binding basis but upon a commitment of the Directors General of the participating ECAC states.

On 30 April 2004 **Directive 2004/36/EC** of the European Parliament and of the Council on the safety of third-country aircraft using Community airports (the so-called 'SAFA Directive') was published, creating a legal obligation upon EU Member States to perform ramp inspections upon third country aircraft landing at their airports. In this case, 'third country aircraft' implied an aircraft which is not used or operated under control of a competent authority of an EU Member State; although the Directive does in no way prohibit EU Member States from inspecting aircraft from other EU Member States.

Following a decision by the Directors General of ECAC member states, the SAFA Programme was transferred under European Community (EC) competence where as of 1 January 2007, responsibility for the management and further development of the **EC SAFA Programme** falls upon the European Commission assisted by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

The continued participation in the programme of the fifteen non-EU ECAC states - and thus the pan-European dimension of the programme - has been assured through the signature of a working arrangement between each of these individual states and EASA. Including the EU-27 therefore, the EC-SAFA programme currently boasts a total of **42 participating states** (*see table overleaf*):

States participating in the EC SAFA programme

EU Member States
Austria
Belgium
Bulgaria
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Netherlands
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Slovak Republic
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
United Kingdom
Total
Non-EU States
Albania
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bosnia Herzegovina
Croatia
Georgia
Iceland
Moldova
Monaco
Norway
Serbia
Switzerland
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Turkey
Ukraine

2. Functioning of the EC SAFA programme

In each SAFA participating state, aircraft (third-country for EU states or foreign for non-EU ECAC states) can be subject to a ramp inspection, chiefly concerned with the aircraft documents and manuals, flight crew licenses, the apparent condition of the aircraft and the presence and condition of mandatory cabin safety equipment. **The references for these inspections are contained in the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) which are commonly applicable internationally to all inspected aircraft; namely Annexes 1 (Personnel Licensing), 6 (Operations of Aircraft) and 8 (Airworthiness of Aircraft).**

These checks are carried out in accordance with a procedure which is common to all participating states. Their outcome is then the subject of reports which also follow a common format. In the case of significant irregularities, the operator and the appropriate aviation authority (state of operator or registry) are contacted in order to arrive at corrective measures to be taken not only with regard to the aircraft inspected but also with regard to other aircraft which could be concerned in the case of an irregularity which is of a generic nature. All data from the reports as well as supplementary information are shared and centralised in a computerised database set up and managed by EASA in Cologne, Germany.

3. Integration of the EC SAFA programme in the overall European aviation safety chain

Based upon the SAFA inspections performed over the last few years, experience shows that these give a general indication of the safety of foreign operators. However, this indication is limited in the sense that no full picture is obtained about the safety of any particular aircraft or operator. This is due to the fact that certain aspects are difficult to assess during an inspection (e.g. crew resource management, full airworthiness status ... etc.) owing to the limited time available to perform an inspection and consequently the limited level of detail possible during such an inspection.

In this manner, the information gained through the EC SAFA programme is useful:

- Primarily as a pre-emptive tool helping to identify potential negative safety trends whereby a numerous and/or recurring number of findings concerning a particular operator, is a very good indicator of potential structural weaknesses both with regard to the quality control management of that operator as well as the level of safety oversight exercised by the responsible national civil aviation authorities of the state where that operator is certified; similar negative trends may also be identified concerning specific aircraft types.
- More directly, SAFA inspections may contribute in real-time to the safe operation of the particular aircraft which has just been inspected, prompting the inspecting authorities to ensure that corrective actions are taken immediately prior to any further operations being conducted by that aircraft.

Additionally, since the coming into force of Regulation (EC) No 2111/2005 establishing a list of carriers which are banned from flying into EC territory, SAFA inspections have acquired an increased importance as one of the criteria considered by the Commission in taking its

decisions on the inclusion of carriers in the Community list. Indeed, this has been the case since the establishment of the first Community list in March 2006 and its subsequent regular updates.

4. Development of the programme since 01 January 2007

Upon assuming full responsibility for the management and further development of the programme, the Commission embarked upon a number of measures intended to reinforce the programme by maximising the level of harmonisation of procedures for the conduct and reporting of ramp inspections across Europe as well as related follow-up actions.

On 16 April 2008, the Commission adopted two important legislative measures aimed at further strengthening the EC SAFA programme:

- **Commission Directive 2008/49/EC** (amending Directive 2004/36/EC) contains the core elements of the SAFA Procedures Manual and providing for harmonised rules for the conduct of SAFA inspections including: follow-up actions, mandatory reporting timeframe (15 working days) and the mandatory communication of the results of the inspection to the inspected operators through the delivery of a Proof of Inspection according to a common format. In addition, the abovementioned Directive introduces a common set of criteria for the training and qualification of SAFA inspectors. EASA was mandated to support the participating states by developing detailed guidance material in line with the core elements enshrined in the Directive.

As tasked under Commission Directive 2008/49/EC, EASA has developed and issued **detailed guidance material** for the **qualification SAFA ramp inspectors** as well as for **ramp inspection procedures**, setting standards which are common across all participating States. The qualification criteria focus on eligibility, training (including recurrent training) and the experience of inspectors. The training of inspectors must follow the syllabi developed by EASA whilst independent training providers must be qualified according to a dedicated set of common criteria.

- **Commission Regulation (EC) No 351/2008** (implementing Directive 2004/36/EC) introduced a structured, pan-European **risk-based approach** whereby participating states are required to prioritise a portion of their ramp inspections on certain potentially unsafe subjects (either individual operators or all the operators certified in a certain state). The prioritisation list is compiled by the European Commission and updated whenever the need arises according to the set of criteria established under the said Regulation, namely:
 - information transmitted by EASA following its regular analyses of the SAFA database;
 - information stemming from the meetings of the EC's Air Safety Committee;
 - information received by the Commission from the Member States.

Operators which are listed in Annex B of the Community list of banned air carriers (established under Regulation (EC) No 2111/2005) as well as the other operators certified in the same state as any operator featuring concurrently on the Community list are also subject to prioritised inspections.

The first prioritisation list was issued on 20 April 2008 and has subsequently been reviewed on a regular basis. During 2008, out of a total 10,337 SAFA inspections 1,481 were conducted on subjects indicated in the prioritisation list.

In addition to these legal measures, a number of initiatives started in 2007 have now become regular standard activities under the EC SAFA Programme; such as the **quality review of reports** entered by participating states in the SAFA database and the **regular database analysis**. Conducted on a four-monthly basis this analysis attempts to identify as early as possible potentially negative safety concerns and trends in order that they may be addressed in a timely manner before indeed becoming a threat to international aviation safety. The methodology for conducting this analysis was further refined and enhanced to maximise the use of the available SAFA data.

In October 2008 a major upgrade of the SAFA database was deployed, allowing for improved reporting, support for monitoring of the prioritisation process (established under Commission Regulation (EC) No 351/2008) and improved workflows. Whilst also implementing the changes introduced by Commission Directive 2008/49/EC, the upgrade introduced a major new feature aimed at improving the consistency of findings by using a set of **pre-described findings**, developed and maintained by EASA.

The SAFA database was also replicated as a fully operational training environment allowing for hands-on training of its users.

Data contained in the database is considered confidential in the sense that it is only shared with other participating States and is not available to the general public. The database can be accessed by all National Aviation Authorities of participating states via the (secured) internet.

In 2008 the SAFA participating states performed a **record 10,337 inspections** which revealed some 11,298 findings (*see table below*).

Inspections	10,337 inspections.....
Operatoron 1,067 different operators.....
State of Operatorfrom 131 states.....
Aircraft typeoperating 220 different (sub)types of aircraft

5. A contribution to the establishment of sound, global safety indicators

Whilst the EC SAFA programme is already an established and consolidated safety-monitoring tool at a pan-European level, through this initiative, the European Commission aims to enhance its value added at an international level thereby contributing towards the establishment of sounder global safety indicators.

Since January 2008, the Commission has granted ICAO privileged access to all data available in the SAFA database on an equal footing with SAFA participating states.