

# Migrants at sea. Large scale SAR operations.

Updated NSA advice, suggested procedures, debrief/checklists.



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## NSA guidelines for large scale SAR operations. (One-page summary)

In 2014, and so far in 2015, a record numbers of migrants attempted and are still attempting to reach Europe by sea, resulting in SAR operations involving merchant ships. The types of ships involved, the type of operation and the numbers of migrants involved (100-500) varies. Ships may either be asked to monitor and assist a small boat with migrants while waiting for assistance by a coastguard/navy vessel/other SAR capacities or a ship may be asked to embark the migrants, to then transfer migrants to a coastguard/navy vessel/other SAR capacities or take them to a nearby safe port for disembarkation. SOLAS regulates the obligation to assist people in distress and the right to disembark them at a safe port. UN refugee conventions bar you from returning migrants to shore in a country deemed unsafe. Seek advice if in doubt. NSA is ready to assist you if necessary.

#### Key suggested guidelines:

- Make sure your company and crew is prepared. Discuss scenarios, roles, risks, solutions.
- Approach the migrants with a mob boat. Provide life vests, water/nutrition if possible.
- Establish trust. Assure the migrants that they are safe and will not be returned to shore.
- Calm down the migrants. Protect their boat from winds, waves, using you own ship.
- Keep in touch with the MRCC. Maintain good internal communication among the crew.
- If embarking migrants: Secure, prepare your ship. Lock the interior. Seal off dangerous areas.
- The transfer/embarkation phase is critical. Ensure safety and order to avoid accidents.
- Note numbers, gender, children, and nationality (see annex page 13). Document events.
- Implement hygienic and infectious disease control measures for crew. Use protective gear.
- Keep migrants on deck in a 24/7 controlled environment. Wear uniforms, display authority.
- Control what the migrants bring on board. Body check/metal scan as far as possible.
  Confiscate knives and other dangerous items.
- Show cultural and gender sensitivity. Identify and assist the most vulnerable.
- Ensure safety and supervision of children. Some may be alone.
- Provide water and food/nutrition/shelter/medical aid as per your capabilities.
- Consider destroying the migrant boat but note that the traffickers may try to interfere.

#### After disembarking / transferring to a safe port:

- Search for stowaways. Hand over any remaining ID papers / belongings to the authorities.
- Disinfect decks / areas. Dispose of used personal protective equipment, properly.
- Debrief your crew after operation, also successful ones. Remember, some may need extra follow-up. A debrief guidance is included on page 10 and 11.



#### 1. Introduction

This NSA guidance continues to be, to a large degree, based on the experience of Norwegian shipowners and crew onboard their ships, particularly in parts of the Mediterranean in 2014 and 2015 as well as based on the know-how of crisis management experts.

These guidelines are also relevant in other parts of the world, where human trafficking and migratory flows are prevalent. In 2015 we saw a rise in the number of migrants setting out to sea in Southeast Asia.

Our aim is to assist shipowners and crews in the preparation before, during and after a potential, large scale SAR scenario. We focus on the operational aspects, but recommend that you stay updated on relevant insurance, legal and human rights issues, which we refer to briefly.

This advice is generic and should be adapted to each shipowner, ship and operation.

The Norwegian Shipowners' Association is responsible for the content of this document. However we would particularly like to thank several Norwegian shipowners and their crew for sharing their experiences. We also received valuable input from Norwegian seafarers unions (NSOF, DNMF, NSF), while overall advice on migrant issues was provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security in addition to the Norwegian Seamens' Church and insurance experts as well as Lars Weisæth who has contributed to the updated version.

Note that we, in accordance with common practice, use the term "migrants" throughout this document. We use this term due to its neutrality. It is not up to NSA, the shipowners or crew to determine the legal status of the people they rescue at sea.

In this document the term "ship" means the merchant or offshore ship and crew that takes part in SAR operations. The term "crew" means the ship's crew, under the command of the shipmaster.

This document was always meant to be living. A first version was published in October 2014. This second version has been slightly updated with the latest facts. Some of the recommendations have been revised but the operational recommendations from the first version remain relevant and have been unchanged. The pictures have been generously provided by shipowners and crew on board Norwegian owned vessels and were taken during SAR operations in the Mediterranean during 2014 and the beginning of 2015.

#### 2. Conflicts, response and human trafficking patterns at sea.

Search and rescue (SAR) operations are not new to shipping, and there is a longstanding tradition among Norwegian (and many other) shipowners to assist when needed. SOLAS and UN refugee conventions regulate the legal obligations to assist in SAR, the right of the ship to disembark those rescued in a safe port, and restrictions regarding the return of refugees to unsafe shores/ports.

It is the great number of migrants at sea and the frequent SAR operations that makes the situation in the Mediterranean extraordinary. With hundreds of migrants on board, the shipmaster and the 20 or



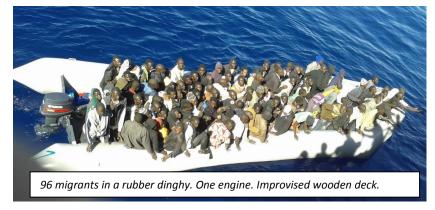
so crew will effectively be in charge of a medium sized refugee camp at sea. In order to handle such situations well, situational awareness, preparation, experience and flexibility is necessary.

In 2014, a record number of 230 000 migrants entered Europe by sea, 170 000 of those arriving in Italy. The figures for 2015 are predicted to be even higher. So far 81 500 have arrived in Italy via the central Mediterranean route and 107 000 have arrived in Greece via the eastern Mediterranean route. Approximately 3500 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean in 2014 and the figure so far in 2015 is over 2000. It is feared that 200 have died in a capsizing off Libya in the recent days.

In the fall of 2013, hundreds of refugees drowned off Lampedusa, Italy. This resulted in the Italian navy and coastguard strengthening their SAR efforts through operation "Mare Nostrum", in a 50 NM by 580 NM area between Italy and Libya-Tunisia (source: Frontex). Mare Nostrum was scaled down and was terminated at the end of 2014. The Italian coastguard and navy have continued their efforts and are still operating outside of the Italian SAR area. In November 2014, the EU border control agency "Frontex" implemented operation "Triton". This operation had initially a third of the resources of Mare Nostrum. Due to the continued increase in number of migrants and the unusually large number of fatalities by April 2015, the EU decided to strengthen the operation. The EU has also implemented the "Poseidon" operation in the waters between Greece and Turkey.

Migrant boats are often not seaworthy. Navigational skills and equipment are minimal if at all existent. Migrants sometimes embark larger vessels and may be forced to transfer to smaller ones,

and then being left to themselves a short distance from where they set out to sea, with only a handheld compass and a satellite phone as navigation and communication means. They may only have a rough idea of the direction to Italy (or another European country). Many set out from Libya, where the breakdown of the rule of law permits the illegal business of human traffickers. However, we have seen in 2015 a shift towards the eastern



Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece.

Reportedly people smugglers promise migrants transport to Italy, Malta, Greece / Europe, but instead "dump" the migrants in shipping lanes or near oil rigs. When a critical situation arises, merchant ships or coastguard/navy vessels/other SAR resources hopefully come to the rescue, and provide further transport to Europe. Traffickers abuse available SAR resources in their operations and "marketing". The business is profitable: a boat journey typically costs 1000 - 3000 USD per person.

It is reasonable to anticipate a continuation of very high numbers of migrants at sea in the central and eastern Mediterranean, peaking in the "migrant boat seasons" (spring to fall).



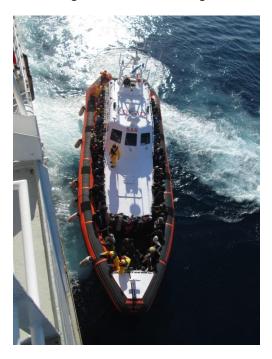
#### 3. SAR involving large numbers of refugees. Rights and obligations.

SAR operations occur frequently north of Libya and Tunisia and south/east of Greece and Cyprus. The types of SAR assistance by merchant ships in the Mediterranean vary greatly. Ships may initiate SAR themselves, or be requested by MRCCs to assist. Ships may monitor the refugee boat while waiting

for a navy, coastguard or Triton ship to arrive and pick up the refugees. Ships may take on board migrants from small boats, and then wait for transfer to a coastguard/navy vessel/other SAR resource. Finally, ships may pick up and transport migrants to a safe port for disembarkation.

As a rule of thumb, merchant ships in the busiest Mediterranean trafficking routes should be prepared to take part in SAR operations involving migrant boats carrying 100 – 300 people. Up to 500 migrants have been rescued from small boats, but then the MRCC / rescue authority may try to share the burden between several assisting ships.

SAR operations in this area typically last from a few hours up to two days. This depends on the nature of a ship's involvement, i.e. from monitoring to transferring to transporting the refugees, and the availability of other SAR resources, as well as the distance to a safe port.



#### SOLAS and UN refugee conventions: Rights and obligation to disembark refugees in a safe port

<u>SOLAS</u> provides the right to disembark those rescued in a safe nearby port. UN refugee conventions prohibit the return to unsafe ports/shores. SOLAS is normally respected by coastal states. Only rarely will a ship be denied its right to disembark people rescued at sea. The "MV Tampa case" in 2001 was extreme. Due to particular circumstances, it took ten days to find a solution which allowed "Tampa" to disembark its 430 refugees. There have been cases where migrants insist on being transported to Italy. Before the Lampedusa tragedy in 2013, some European coastal states restricted such disembarkation.

Should you encounter this type of obstacle after having rescued people at sea, do not hesitate to call the NSA for advice. The flag state, UNHCR and others can also assist.

## 4. Checklist: General preparation and advice

- ✓ <u>Information</u> is key. Prepare for what the crew <u>may</u> encounter in major maritime trafficking areas: Great numbers of refugees and distressed, injured or sick persons, possibly dead bodies.
- ✓ "Camp management", crowd control: Assign roles for relevant crew members. Prepare/exercise how to quickly organize the ship so as to care for the refugees while maintaining authority/control.
- ✓ <u>Be prepared</u> to shut down the interior of your ship if bringing refugees on board. Plan for taking care of refugees in deck areas, in a controlled environment.



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- Maintain good communication with the MRCC throughout. The MRCC will advise on your role. The MRCC will also request an overview of numbers including the number of children, gender composition and nationality. Prepare a system for registering such information. ID documents are often missing and name registration can be difficult.
- Document events, but consider who you share this information with. Follow your company's own safety guidelines and reporting systems.
- SAR operations at night require additional vigilance.
- Know your SOLAS obligations and rights as well as basic refugee rights. Note that the UN Refugee Convention prohibits return of refugees to where they risk persecution (for example Libya).
- Seek <u>advice</u> if necessary. NSA may assist. See also the resources and contact details listed below.
- Have post-incident debriefing routines in place. Take good care of any distressed crew members. See page 10 and 11 for more details.

## 5. Checklist: Monitoring, support while awaiting assistance

- ✓ Place the ship so as to <u>protect</u> the migrant boat from weather/waves and to lessen sea sickness.
- Use the mob boat to access the refugees. Bring safety vests, water and food. Explain that it is important to remain in their boat.
- Count the refugees. Identify vulnerable persons. Ensure that the sick, children etc. are cared for.
- Refugees fear being returned to shore. Underline that they are safe and will not be returned to where they came from. If you fly the Libyan flag (operating offshore Libya), consider lowering it to

avoid misunderstandings about the nationality/role of

your ship.

- There have been instances where children and women have been thrown into the water to speed up the SAR process. Try to calm the situation and help those in the water.
- Establish trust and good communication with the refugees. Identify "leaders" and helpers. Make use of their resources (language skills, knowledge, authority, roles in group).
- Prepare a safe transfer phase (to your ship or a navy/coastguard vessel). Avoid panic.





- ✓ Note that human traffickers could be on board / near the refugee boat. They may try to force a SAR process to speed up the transfer of refugees to your ship, to be able to get their boat back and quickly return to shore to pick up a new load. Their main interest is money, not helping migrants.
- ✓ <u>Organize and secure</u> your ship, and a safe transfer. If you decide to bring migrants on board: This is a critical phase. See above.

## 6. Checklist: Migrants on board your ship

- ✓ <u>Organization and oversight</u>: Count and map the migrants at the earliest opportunity, before or during embarkation. This information is important for safety reasons, for the MRCC and port authorities.
- ✓ Let "leaders" and resource persons (English speakers etc.) assist you in communicating with, organizing and aiding the migrants.
- ✓ Ensure supervision of children. Some travel without parents/guardians: Be extra vigilant. Either a crew member should be in charge of them or they should be placed with a family. Lone children should not be disembarked until they have been assigned a responsible adult/caretaker.
- ✓ <u>Be gender sensitive</u>. Note that physical contact with women can be perceived as intruding. If possible, assign any female crew members to assist female migrants.
- ✓ Keep single women/children, families and single men separate if possible.
- ✓ Some children may be embarked alone.
- ✓ The migrant boat should be sunk so as to avoid it being used again by traffickers. Consult with the MRCC. Note that traffickers have acted aggressively against crew to have their boat returned.
- <u>Security</u>: Stay in control of your ship. Lock the interior, and close of dangerous/sensitive areas.
- ✓ Limit the amount of personal items that migrants bring onboard. Consider light body/luggage searches (manual or with simple metal scanners). Confiscate knives / dangerous items.
- ✓ Keep the migrants on deck to better supervise and assist them. Separate decks into different zones (use tape or rope).



✓ Organize a 24/7 guard system to monitor and secure the ship. Use uniforms at all times to display authority. Avoid sharing information about security routines, the number of crew, etc.



- ✓ Fights between the migrants can arise. Calm the situation and be firm. By considering the ethnic/cultural/religious background of the migrants, you may be able to avoid conflicts.
- ✓ Unstable or ill intended persons may be among the migrants. Human smugglers could be among those rescued or loitering near your ship, noting your actions but trying to avoid exposure.



- ✓ <u>Health</u>: Sanitary facilities should preferably be on deck. One toilet per 20 to 50 persons is a minimum requirement. Toilets should be set up as far away from water/food area as possible.
- ✓ Disinfect boots with chlorine solution before going below deck or entering the interior. Keep decks clean.
- ✓ Infectious disease control measures such as face masks may be necessary if one is likely to come in close contact with the migrants (see health items list for details).
- ✓ If handling dead bodies, treat them properly and respectfully. Keep bodies in body bags, separate from migrants and crew but easy to reach. Consider personal protective equipment (checklist).
- ✓ <u>Disembarkation in a safe port</u>: Hand over the count / breakdown of migrants to authorities in the safe port, or to the coastguard (or similar) vessel that receives the migrants. (see template form on page 13)
- ✓ The MRCC rescue authorities (or others) may ask for pictures of the migrants and SAR operation. However be discrete when taking pictures and be conscious about who you share them with.
- ✓ Carry out a stowaway search immediately after the migrants have been disembarked.
- ✓ Hand over any ID papers and personal belongings to rescue/port authorities.
- ✓ Ensure lone children have been assigned a caretaker.
- ✓ Disinfect relevant decks and areas.



## 7. Checklist: Nutritional, safety and camp items

The items below have proven useful when embarking and assisting large numbers of people / migrants at sea. You may get far with existing resources on board, however for certain vessel types, operations, voyage routes etc. you may consider pre-storing some of these items:

- ✓ Simple <u>registration</u> forms (number/gender/nationality, see annex)
- ✓ <u>Nutrition bars</u>: easy to store (no cooling required), long life or other food.
- ✓ Adequate drinking <u>water</u> supply. Plastic bottles / disposable cups.
- ✓ Life vests (for children and adults)
- ✓ Large <u>tarps</u> to protect against sun, rain
- ✓ "Space blankets", useful, lightweight. Simple mats (not essential).
- ✓ Camping style toilets, with disposable bags.
- ✓ First aid/medical kits
- ✓ Disinfectant foam / cleaner for deck cleaning.
- ✓ A simple metal <u>detector</u>.
- ✓ Body bags.

#### 8. Checklist: Health / hygiene for crew. Protective equipment (PPE).

At NSA's request, the Norwegian Institute for Public Health (FHI) has recommended a basic kit of widely available personal protective equipment, for infectious diseases control (including Ebola).

- ✓ Anti-bacterial gel/sanitizer individual packages and dispensers on the ship.
- ✓ Area disinfectant for surface cleaning chlorine based ones are cheap and efficient.
- ✓ Fluid-resistant, impermeable coat with long sleeves and cuffs. Tychem coveralls for situations where one gets involved in handling/carrying persons who may be infected.
- ✓ Gloves (latex or nitrile) of an internationally accepted standard: CE marked EN 455-1, EN 455-2 and EN 455-3. Use underneath work gloves to avoid rifts.
- ✓ Respiratory protection: FFP3 mask (equivalent to the N95 US standard), if unavailable FFP2 or surgical face mask. Note that the mask should be properly fitted to the face. Masks may not fit persons with beards and large moustaches.
- ✓ Eye protection: Face shield or goggles.
- ✓ Hair and shoe protection: to be considered but not vital.





#### To do list:

Protect mucous membranes (eyes, mouth, nose) and open wounds.

Hand hygiene is essential and effective.

- ✓ Use coats, gloves, masks etc. correctly and only when necessary. Dispose of used equipment properly. Wearing some of the equipment for too long time or putting it on / removing it the wrong way may be dangerous.
- ✓ Dispose of used equipment properly. See more information by following this link provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <u>instruction manual</u>.

### 9. Guidelines for debrief conversations following SAR operations:

This section on debrief conversation has been developed in close collaboration with the Norwegian psychiatrist Lars Weisæth, who is an expert in crisis management and trauma.

Since issuing the initial version of the guidelines in October 2014, the NSA has advised crew on board vessels operating and passing through the Mediterranean to have read through those original suggested guidelines in order to be best prepared for a SAR operation. However, in that version, we had not included a detailed section on debrief conversations <u>after</u> an operation. The purpose of this checklist is to ensure that the Master or others on board are given tools on how to conduct a debrief conversation with the aim of learning from the event and the operation in order to minimize the risk that some members of the crew are left with in terms of stressful experiences that can be difficult to process.

A technical debrief should include the human aspects when they are considered relevant. When the crew members are a cohesive group, they know and trust each other, and also feel safe in sharing difficult experiences; in turn, they are able to solve difficult tasks together.

In general, we see that most of the rescue operations, although stressful, are successful in the sense that everyone is saved. We know that the act of rescuing other humans is gratifying and doing so can be a reward in itself. However, we also know that recognition from others is important, particularly in terms of providing a support system and to feel that what one has done has value. Such recognition can come from:

- Other crew members
- Shipowner management
- Government authorities
- Media

We advise the shipowner management to give just recognition to crew that have been involved in SAR operations and ensure that they receive proper follow up.



<u>Debrief:</u> As per its definition, a debrief follows after crew has been initially briefed. NSA therefore continues to advise crew to prepare and discuss how to solve a rescue operation and mentally prepare for the event of one taking place.

Research shows a debrief conversation can be vital after a traumatic or even just stressful situation. Following a large scale operation, the debrief is a useful mechanism for the seafarers to be able to discuss and share their experiences and reactions; it may also be useful after "successful" rescue operations.

It is recommended that the Master or a senior member of the crew leads the conversation/debrief. The debrief does not necessarily need to be long but it is important to ensure that everyone that took part in the SAR operation is included, as far as possible. Everyone is allowed to speak, but no one is forced to.

If this is the first operation the crew has partaken in, it is first of all important to underline that having a reaction to a stressful experience is normal and natural. An in depth conversation of every detail of an operation is often not necessary. The main goal of a debrief conversation after a stressful operation should be to:

- Clarify and discuss the operation.
- Discuss what went wrong, what went well, what could have been done differently.
- Recognize what in the situation was challenging and stressful.
- Discuss the reactions different members of the crew have to this stressful situation.
- Reactions vary from person to person, normalizing and understanding them is important.
- Encourage the members to take an interest in and support each other.
- Try to build an agreed perception of the operation, a shared history of the event which is positive.
- Summarize lessons learned and how to improve for future operations, possibly write this down.

It is advised that crew members should be understanding of each other and ensure that they are able to pick up on any signs among their colleagues that some may need additional support in order to cope.

There are times when a rescue operation does not go as according to plan and one can be faced with a situation involving dead bodies. It is important:

- To handle corpses with dignity and care as far as possible.
- To focus on the task at hand.
- To not focus on faces or other qualities.
- To perform a ritual.

It may be noted that these suggested guidelines are an attempt at structuring and facilitating difficult situations but are neither a standard nor are they meant to be.



## 10. Useful links and resources

- ICS Guidelines Updated 2015
- Rescue at Sea guidelines— UNHCR-IMO-ICS
- SOLAS convention 2004 amendment
- <u>UNHCR webpage</u> (including relevant contact details)
- IMO's webpage
- NSA Contingency Planning Secretariat:
  - www.rederi.no
  - Beredskap@rederi.no
  - NSA Emergency assistance telephone +47 90095001

## Comments or questions? Your input is welcome!

Norwegian Shipowners' Association, Contingency Planning Secretariat

Beredskap@rederi.no, duty phone (24/7) +47 90095001

Registration form.								
Vessel name:	Date and	l time:						
	Position / area:							
Comments:								
Number	Nationality/Origin	Gender		Age group				
				(State the child's age if possible)				
1.		☐Male	☐ Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
2.		□Male	☐ Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
3.		□Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
4.		□Male	☐ Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
5.		□Male	☐ Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
6.		□Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
7.		☐Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
8.		☐Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
9.		□Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
10.		□Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
11.		□Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
12.		□Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
13.		☐Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
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29.		□Male	Female	☐ Child, age:	□Adult			
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