

## Incidents Involving Migrants – Revised SOP 20210930

As per every Standard Operating Procedure, **All** activity coordinated by HM Coastguard will be *proportionate, legal, accountable and necessary* for the requirements applicable to the SAR response.

This SOP is marked as OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE and is for use by HMCG personnel only

Use this SOP when a report of potential or confirmed migrant activity is received  
Report may come in from:

- Migrant vessel directly
- A passing vessel
- NMIC or JCR
- French Coastguard
- Police

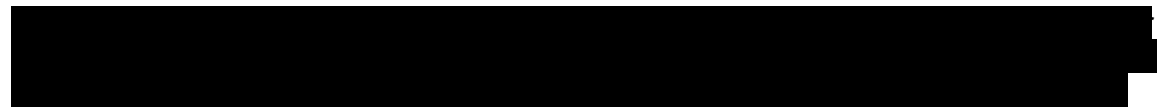
### Related Links

[SAR Incidents Involving Migrants Vessel - Reported in Difficulties](#)  
[Vessel - Sinking or Taking Water](#)  
[Vessel – Lost or Abandoned](#)  
[Maritime Terrorist Incident](#)  
[Maritime Piracy Incident](#)  
[Maritime Cyber Incident](#)  
[Maritime Criminal Incident](#)  
[Stowaways](#)

### Initial Actions

Create ViSION Incident

- If no identifiable 'situation', create as Vessel - VOID
- If confirmed as a migrant vessel, use revised type MIGRANT



Log each report as a separate incident if multiple occur simultaneously and then look to merge once details across multiple incidents are known to match.

**Information Gathering**

Obtain as much of the following information as possible in order to evidence decisions and actions (including those that lead to a revision of the incident phase).

Information Regarding the Vessel

- The location of the vessel?
- The description of the vessel?
- Is the vessel underway and making way, if so course and speed?
- If not making way, why? Is it broken down, taking on water etc?

Information from the Migrant Vessel and/or Persons on Board

- Obtain the caller's phone number
- Try to obtain a location and record any EISEC information, specifically mobile operator
- Are the persons on board wearing lifejackets, or do they have access to other LSE?
- Does anyone require medical assistance?
- How many persons are on the boat?
- Is there anyone in the water or missing?
- Where did you leave from and when?
- Did any other boats leave with you?
- What nationalities are onboard?

**When Persons are rescued further questions are to be asked to determine if further assistance is required or if there is any urgent need to evacuate person(s) to the shore for medical assistance.**

Information from Police

- Obtain original caller's phone number – attempt to make a call to the number to get the information listed above
- Ask whether the police will make a [communications data](#) enquiry?  
If not, request one via Duty Controller

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Mission Conduct**

*Immediately Inform*

See ViSION and [On Call Duty Personnel](#)

- SMC
- Duty JRCC Commander
- NMIC Coastguard Liaison Officer & Joint Control Room (JCR) Coastguard Liaison Officer

[REDACTED]

[Redacted]

**Broadcast Action**

[Redacted]

Example Broadcast
<i>"All stations this is UK Coastguard Following recent safety concerns, mariners are requested to report any unusual activity or sightings of small vessels transiting UK waters primarily in but not limited to the hours of darkness in the Dover Straits Anyone with information on such activity please report to UK Coastguard via the usual methods"</i>

**Strategic Actions**

Is this a [Major Incident](#)? Discuss with JRCC Commander

HMCG will assume overall coordination of all declared and additional resources.

[Redacted]

The SMC should therefore task all relevant declared and/or additional resources to the incident as required. HMCG will:

- Retain coordination of the incident until migrants reach a place of safety, are under the control of an appropriate authority, or until information is received that the vessel and persons are not in need of SAR assistance and SAR operations are terminated. \*
- Deploy sufficient assets to allow for the recovery of casualties.

[REDACTED]

\* Examples of a change to SAR phase or implementation of SAR termination are below:

Change of SAR Phase: from Distress to Alert
<p><i>“Alert phase”:</i> a situation where apprehension exists as to the safety of a person, a vessel or other craft.</p> <p>Information gathered via credible sources which provides sufficient detail to indicate that a vessel is taking on water, but not hampered in its ability to manoeuvre or make way would justify a change of SAR phase from distress to alert phase, but will remain as a SAR incident.</p>
[REDACTED]

**Termination of SAR**

**\*The sections below provide full details of the criteria and circumstances which HMCG take into account when assessing whether migrant vessels are in distress \***

Unlike non-migrant vessels, migrant vessels are presumed to be in distress based on several common features which make them unsuited to the cross-Channel journey, including:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A SAR can be terminated where reliable information is received that the emergency no longer exists; i.e. that the factors which gave rise to the SAR no longer exist.

As such the question is whether the observable characteristics are sufficient to rebut the general presumption of distress [REDACTED]

Where there are unknowns, (for example fuel supply, hypothermia, navigation equipment), whilst the position is likely to be that the presumption remains that the vessel is in distress and you cannot terminate the SAR, there might be exceptions where, taking into account the relevant circumstances prevailing at the time, including the particular nature and extent of the unknowns and the knowns, the SAR could nonetheless be properly terminated.

***Abandoned Vessels***

Refer to [Vessel – Lost or Abandoned](#)

Once persons have been rescued and removed from their vessel, Migrant vessels should only be abandoned at sea, as a last resort due to a higher priority tasking.

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<sup>1</sup> Note, the assessment to be made is whether a vessel is ‘overloaded’ and not whether a vessel is ‘excessively overloaded’.

**OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE**

SMC is to be advised prior to the conscious abandonment of a vessel (to avoid a further SAR incident at another time).

The following information will need to be provided to prevent unnecessary SAR activity at a later stage:

- Time and position of abandoning
- Full description of craft
- Method vessel was marked (see below)
- Photograph of vessel, this should be sent to the zone email address as soon as practicable.
- Any immediate or potential risk

*Marking of a Migrant Vessel*

Marking the migrant vessel will indicate that an incident has been dealt with and persons onboard account for. The methods of marking the vessels are:

- Spray Coastguard reference letter to both sides of vessel using bright fluorescent spray paint
- If the reference letter is not available at the time, a large 'X' should be sprayed onto both sides of the vessel and any outboard motor.
- Fix a strobe light to vessel if currently, or likely to be abandoned when dark.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Media**

Media Strategy is to be agreed by all responding agencies

- Media statement only to be released.
- All press enquires must be directed to the MCA media team or the duty command team.