

Incidents Involving Migrants

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

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

- A migrant vessel directly
- A passing vessel
- Joint Control Room (Dover) Liaison Officer
- JMSC (NMIC) Liaison Officer
- French Coastguard
- Police

Related Links

[SAR Incidents Involving Migrants](#)

[Vessel - Reported in Difficulties](#)

[Vessel - Sinking or Taking Water](#)

[Maritime Terrorist Incident](#)

[Maritime Piracy Incident](#)

[Maritime Cyber Incident](#)

[Maritime Criminal Incident](#)

[Stowaways](#)

[Preventing Small Boats Progressing Through UK Territorial Waters](#)

[Flowchart for Migrant Incident - Termination of SAR](#)

Initial Actions

Create ViSION incident using:

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

■ All migrant vessels in the UK SRR are in grave or imminent danger until credible evidence suggests a distress response is not needed

■ **Distress Phase**

- Enter incidents into the Distress Phase, can reassess throughout the incident
- Reclassify if necessary
- Information gathering to continue throughout
- Log multiple reports as separate incidents. Merge once details across multiple incidents match

Information Gathering

 The information may lead to a revision of the incident phase.

Vessel

- Location of vessel?
- Description of vessel?
- Is the vessel underway or making way? If so, course and speed?
- If not underway, why? broken down, taking on water

Persons on Board

- Number of persons on the vessel?
- Are the persons on board wearing lifejackets?
- Do POBs have access to other life saving equipment?
- Does anyone require medical assistance?
- Is there anyone in the water or missing?
- What nationalities are onboard?

Report from Migrant Vessel

- Obtain caller's phone number
- Record any EISEC information, specifically mobile operator and location
- Where did the vessel leave from and when?
- Did any other vessels leave with you?

Report from Police

- Obtain original caller's phone number
- Will police make a [communications data](#) enquiry? If no, request one via Tactical Commander

Declare Phase

Mission Conduct

Task appropriate resources, considering the priority if you are currently multi incident working based on information received.

Immediately Inform

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

- SMC
- Duty JRCC Commander
- Joint Control Room (Dover) Liaison Officer
- UK Border Force MCC – For all small boat channel crossings
- UK Border Force MIB – For all other migrant activity
- Duty MCA Press Officer
- Local Police

▣ If Coastal assets need tasking, given any formal and agreed request from other agencies, the following should also be notified:

- Duty SCOO
- Duty Coastal Commander

Broadcast Action

▣ If SAR action is required within the TSS, take broadcast action via Dover CNIS.

Dover CNIS to broadcast action via VHF Channel 11 to warn commercial traffic on vessel by vessel basis

Safety broadcasts can also be used to solicit information from commercial and privately owned craft.

This should be included in the MSI and in the Channel Navigation Broadcast if within the Dover CNIS controlled area

Frequency of broadcasts to be agreed with the Duty JRCC Commander

Example Broadcast

"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"

Actions

 Is this a [Major Incident](#)?

HMCG will assume overall coordination of all declared and additional resources

Tasking

 All incidents should be treated as a SAR incident, with an SMC coordinating the response

 Vessels containing migrants are generally unsafe and likely require immediate assistance.

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

If migrants are seen to be in grave and imminent danger on arrival, unit(s) should take appropriate action as per IAMSAR

When persons are rescued, SMC to determine if there is a need to urgently evacuate persons to shore for urgent medical assistance.

 An aircraft should be deployed, contact the ARCC

Coordination

HMCG will retain coordination until:

- Suspected migrants reach a place of safety and are handed to appropriate authorities
- or
- Vessel and Persons on Board are not in need of SAR assistance/SAR is terminated

HMCG will also:

- Deploy sufficient assets to allow for the recovery of casualties
- Use Airwave Talkgroups for comms between MRCCs and Border Force assets. Use Satcomms or VHF CH 0 if Airwave is unavailable.

Examples of changes to SAR phase or implementation of SAR termination are below:

Changes to SAR Phase: From Distress to Alert
<i>“Alert phase”: a situation where apprehension exists as to the safety of a person, a vessel or other craft.</i> Information must be credible, with sufficient detail. A vessel taking on water, but able to manoeuvre, would justify a change in phase.
Termination of SAR Response
Reliable and credible sources suggest emergency no longer exists. This must be agreed by JRCC Commander. Once agreed, search is terminated and tasked resources promptly informed. The JRCC Commander is to inform the on call Strategic Commander of any request to terminate ASAP.

Termination of SAR

In order to determine if the distress incident should be downgraded, the following information should be received:

■ [Please refer to this flowchart to aid decision making.](#)

Vessel

- Is vessel overloaded?
- Any maritime experience onboard?
- Is vessel seaworthy and suitable for a Channel crossing?
- Is the vessel sinking?
- If transiting at night, does the vessel have navigation lights?
- Is the vessel able to continue and complete journey unaided?

POB

- Vulnerable persons on board (pregnant women, children, disabled, adults who appear vulnerable to hypothermia)?
- Are the persons on board exposed to weather/sea elements
- Are they hypothermic?
- Are persons on board wearing appropriate clothes/are they wet?
- Is there anyone in need of medical assistance?

LSE

- Is there sufficient Life Saving Equipment onboard (lifejackets)?
- Does the vessel have adequate communications onboard?
- Is the vessel able to determine its position?
- Does the vessel have sufficient fuel to make land?
- Are persons onboard indicating that they are in danger and requesting assistance?

Conditions

- General Channel sea and weather conditions, is there a need for SAR assistance
- Consider the time of year (e.g. winter temperatures)

SAR Termination

SAR can be terminated where reliable information is received that the emergency no longer exists

Non SAR Termination

Assume vessel is in distress for all unknowns and maintain SAR (e.g. fuel supply, hypothermia, navigation equipment)

The incident should remain open and reclassified as Non-SAR.

If incident moves back to SAR:

- Reclassify the original incident
- Assume coordination
- Task appropriate resources

Abandoned Vessels

▣ Migrant vessels should only be abandoned at sea as a last resort due to a higher priority tasking.

Inform SMC prior to the conscious abandonment of the vessel

Provide the following information to prevent SAR activity for the abandoned vessel at another time:

- 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 Migrant Vessel

Mark the vessel to confirm that an incident has been dealt with and persons onboard accounted 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

Post-Incident

All calls are to be tagged to the main ViSION incident for use in criminal investigation

Media

Media Strategy to be agreed by all responding agencies

- Media statement only to be released
- All press enquires must be directed to MCA media team or the Duty Tactical Commander/Strategic Commander

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