



Readiness for rescues at sea more important than ever

The number of migrants and refugees being rescued at sea in 2014 was record high and continues to rise into 2015. Any vessel operating in the Mediterranean may be requested to take part in a rescue at sea and should be prepared for the situation.

Published 17 April 2015

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According to a recent news story published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), some 219,000 refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean in 2014, and at least 3,500 lives were lost. So far this year, some 31,500 people are known to have made crossings to Italy and Greece, and numbers have recently been picking up as sea and weather conditions improve.

Members and clients with vessels operating in the Mediterranean should ensure that both shore and onboard personnel are familiar with their obligations should one of their vessels be requested to assist boats with people in distress.

In addition to our recommendations and advice provided in the following Gard Updates:

- Alert “[Rescuing refugees at sea](#)” of 24 October 2014; and
- Alert “[Recovery of persons from the water](#)” of 17 June 2014,
- Loss Prevention Circular No.13-09 “[No%2013-09%20Refugees%20and%20migrants%20rescued%20at%20sea.pdf](#)”;

we would like to draw Members’ and clients’ attention to the 2015 version of the guide, “[Rescue at Sea: A guide to principles and practice as applied to refugees and migrants](#)” prepared jointly by the IMO, the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the Office of the UNHCR.

The guide is aimed at all stakeholders involved in rescue at sea situations and particularly addresses the obligations of and actions required by Masters and Government Rescue Coordination Centres. It provides guidance on relevant legal provisions, practical procedures to ensure the prompt disembarkation of rescued persons and measures needed to meet their specific needs, particularly in the case of refugees and asylum-seekers.

The ICS’s Guidance “[Large scale rescue operations at sea](#)”, which is a supplement to the Rescue at Sea guide, emphasises the importance of advance preparations, “*In making advanced preparations, experience has shown that effective procedures, supported by regular drills, will prepare Masters and crews to respond safely and to manage successfully rescue operations at sea.*”