

SAFE PASSAGE

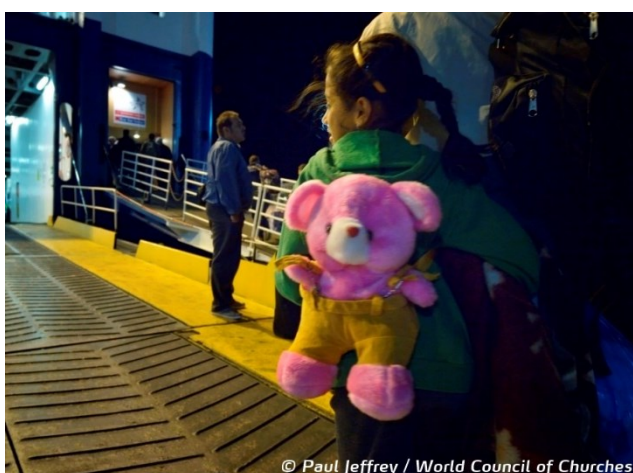
Establishing and Maintaining, preferably civilian, Search and Rescue Operations at Sea with a rather wide scope

What is Search and Rescue (SAR)?

Search and rescue at sea is a longstanding obligation under international law: all captains of vessels are required to rescue people in distress at sea and to deliver them to a place of safety, regardless of their country of origin or their immigration status.

Why is it important?

Search and rescue is paramount to prevent loss of life in the Mediterranean. It becomes particularly important for refugees and migrants who, in the near absence of legal routes, are forced to undertake extremely dangerous journeys, often crowded in unseaworthy boats, to reach Europe.



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What is the current status?

In October 2013, in response to two tragic shipwrecks in the Mediterranean in which over 600 people died, the Italian government started a proactive search and rescue operation called *Mare Nostrum*. The operation was well funded and staffed, and highly successful in preventing deaths at sea: it is believed to have rescued more than 130,000 people. The operation lasted one year and ended in October 2014. Despite the many calls for solidarity from other Member States, Italy was left largely alone in financing and conducting *Mare Nostrum*.

A joint EU operation named *Triton* was established afterwards under the coordination of Frontex, the European Border Agency. *Triton's* monthly budget amounted to less than a third of *Mare Nostrum's*, and the operation reached only a smaller area much closer to the Italian coast, with a focus on border control rather than search and rescue. Shortly after its establishment, in the course of a week in April 2015, over 1,300 people lost their lives in two of the biggest shipwrecks ever recorded in the Mediterranean.

In response to these tragedies, the European Commission adopted in May 2015 a European Agenda on Migration, which among other points ensured stronger search and rescue efforts tripling *Triton's* budget and enlarging its responsibility area to the high seas, in line with the previous *Mare Nostrum* capacity.

Currently, other than EU Member States vessels operating under *Triton*, there are a number of private civilian search and rescue operations managed by NGOs, such as SOS Méditerranée, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS).