



European Commission – DG Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) – Migration Management Response

Background note for an exchange of views on

the type of information that shipmasters may exchange with rescued people following SAR incidents

This draft background note follows the meeting of the Search and Rescue (SAR) Contact Group on 16 June 2023 where volunteering Group members agreed to engage in technical-level discussions on the type of information that shipmasters and crew may be asked to collect from rescued people following SAR incidents.

Based on available information, there appears to be no common definition of information that shipmasters of private vessels, irrespective of the way in which they come to be engaged in a rescue activity, can collect on board nor uniform practice in this respect. Collecting information on board and sharing it with relevant authorities can contribute to addressing the needs of those onboard as well as facilitating a smooth disembarkation and first reception in the coastal State where the port of safety is determined by the responsible authorities.

The volumes II and III of the IAMSAR Manual offer general guidelines on the types of information that is useful to gather during SAR incidents, notable in relation to certain aspects of the distress incident and to the medical history of the rescued persons, on which shipmasters could collect information.

While each SAR event is different in nature and circumstances might prompt different needs and practices, this note aims to facilitate a discussion among Member States in order to achieve a better overview of what type of information and with what timing might be usefully collected, which is of indicative nature and does not prevent the responsible coastal authorities from asking for further or less elements. This overview should build on established good practice developed over the years and be proportionate to the objective and nature of the rescue activity, as well as to the capabilities of the ship crew, in view to ensuring a safe and swift conclusion of the rescue operation in line with applicable law. This type of information would not be related nor can in any way substitute procedures, such as screening at border crossing points or asylum procedures, which can only be conducted by the competent authorities. Moreover, data gathered onboard should not be shared with authorities outside those in charge of disembarkation and/or other competent authorities, in line with applicable law including on fundamental rights and EU data protection rules. Lastly, the information collected should comply with the principles of proportionality and necessity.

The list could be shared and discussed with other stakeholders active in rescues at sea, as well as other relevant actors, such as for example UNCHR.

Finally, there seems to be also no uniform agreement on the type of information shipmasters may be able to share with the rescued people themselves. With regard to this aspect of the discussion, Group members could consider discussing elements in [UNHCR's dedicated leaflet on information provision to disembarked migrants](#), circulated separately alongside this background note.



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Information that could be asked related to the SAR event for the purposes of sharing it with the responsible authorities:

- Details of the distress event, including on the developments that led up to it (e.g. weather conditions, problems with the vessel) and the timeframes involved;
- The total number of people on the vessel and whether there are any person missing or dead (and if so, where their location could be);
- Place and time of departure of their vessel, and the approximate length of their journey;
- Information about the crew of the vessel and their actions prior to the distress event;
- If applicable, accounts on the involvement of smugglers/traffickers and their actions prior to and during the journey;
- If applicable, any potential encounters with other entities during the journey, and whether they contributed to the distress situation;
- If applicable, any incidents of violence and exploitation on board of the vessel during the journey.

Information that could be asked related to the rescued people on board for the purposes of sharing it with the responsible authorities:

- The presence of any individuals on board requiring urgent medical support, as well as any other type of special care, including mental health and psychosocial support upon disembarkation;
- Information about the presence of vulnerable categories on board, including minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders, and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical, or sexual violence;
- The person's nationality and country of origin, and information on whether the person faced persecution or fear of persecution there;
- Information about families on board;
- Whether the persons on board possess relevant identification and travel documents that may be relevant upon disembarkation;
- Whether the person plans to apply for asylum in the country where he/she will be disembarked.



Annex I – IAMSAR Manual Volume II, 6.17

6.17 Debriefing of survivors

- 6.17.1** A survivor who has been rescued may be able to give information which will assist the SAR operation. SAR personnel should question survivors and communicate any information received to the RCC.
- 6.17.2** Information which may be available from survivors includes:
- total number of persons on board the distressed craft, the possibility of other survivors being unaccounted for, and any indication of their position; and
 - the survivor's own medical history, in particular, about recurring disease, heart trouble, diabetes, infectious diseases, epilepsy, or similar condition from which they may suffer. This information should be noted, together with any medical attention given, for future attending medical personnel.
- 6.17.3** The debriefing helps to ensure that all survivors are rescued, to attend to the physical welfare of each survivor, and to obtain information which may assist and improve SAR services. Proper debriefing techniques include:
- due care to avoid worsening a survivor's condition by excessive debriefing;
 - careful assessment of the survivor's statements if the survivor is frightened or excited;
 - use of a calm voice in questioning;
 - avoidance of suggesting the answers when obtaining facts; and
 - explaining that the information requested is important for the success of the SAR operation, and possibly for future SAR operations.



Annex II – IAMSAR Manual Volume III, 2-39

Recording information on survivors

- Survivor information should include:
 - type of injury suffered by the patient
 - describe serious injury
 - describe secondary injuries
 - how the injury occurred
 - the history of the most serious injury may give valuable insight into the nature and extent of injuries which may not be noticed otherwise
 - past medical history
 - includes previous surgery
 - congenital defects
 - illnesses, allergies
 - medication taken
 - results of a full secondary assessment, including
 - vital signs
 - other signs
 - symptoms



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- treatment given
 - particularly morphine and similar narcotic drugs
 - amounts and times administered
- times when tourniquets, splints, or compress bandages were applied
- for stretcher cases, this information should be noted and placed in a waterproof pouch, and securely attached to the survivor
- medical records pertaining to the survivor should be delivered to the hospital as soon as possible.

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Debriefing of survivors

- Survivors should be questioned about the distressed craft as soon as possible. Their input may be able to further assist in the SAR operation, future SAR operations, or the prevention of incidents in the future. The information should be relayed to the SMC.
- Questions to ask include the following:
 - What was the time and date of the incident?
 - What was the last known position?
 - What was the total number of persons on board prior to the accident?
 - What caused the emergency?
 - Were any of the persons able to leave by lifeboat or raft?
 - How many survivors did you see in the water?
 - What flotation gear did they have?
 - If you were in the water, how long for?
 - Were search craft seen before the survivors were located and, if so, what were the dates and times of the sightings?
 - Were any signals or devices used to try to attract the attention of search craft? If so, what were they and when were they used?
- In addition, for aircraft incidents:
 - Did you bail out or was the aircraft ditched?
 - If you bailed out, at what altitude?
 - How many others did you see leave the aircraft by parachute?
 - How many ditched with the aircraft?
 - How many did you see leave the aircraft after ditching?



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- Survivors should also be questioned about their medical history:
 - recurring disease
 - heart trouble
 - diabetes
 - epilepsy
 - conditions from which they may suffer.
- This information should be noted, together with any medical attention given, for future attending physicians.
- Questioning survivors has many purposes.
 - to ensure that all survivors are rescued
 - to attend to the physical welfare of each survivor
 - to obtain information which may assist and improve SAR services.
- Care must be taken to avoid worsening a survivor's condition by excessive interrogation.
- If the survivor is frightened or excited, the questioner should assess these statements carefully.

Note: Questions should be asked in a calm voice and the questioner should avoid suggesting answers to the survivor. Explain that the information required is for the success of the SAR operation and may be of great value for future SAR operations.

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