

An aerial photograph of a large fleet of cargo ships at sea, viewed from a high angle. The ships are scattered across the dark blue water, with some appearing as long, dark lines and others as more detailed structures. The overall scene is dimly lit, suggesting a dusk or dawn setting.

FHAS Foundation
for Humanitarian
Action at Sea

**SEARCH AND RESCUE REGIONS
(SRRs)**

DEFINITION

Search and Rescue Regions (SRRs)

divide the world's oceans to clarify responsibility for coordinating search and rescue operations.

All of the world's oceans are covered by a SRR.

LEGAL BASIS

SRRs are established under

**the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue
(SAR Convention)**

to ensure that someone is responsible when distress occurs at sea.

SRRs are agreed by states in cooperation with one another and notified to the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

(SAR Convention, arts. 2.1.4–2.1.6)

WHAT SRRS ARE (AND ARE NOT)

SRRs create coordination responsibilities, not powers of control.

They are not territorial or sovereign claims.

They designate areas where a state has agreed to coordinate SAR services — not zones of law enforcement or border authority.

BOUNDARIES

Some SRRs remain provisional.

In some parts of the world, SRR boundaries overlap, which can lead to confusion in rescue response.

SRR boundaries are filed with the IMO in its Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS).

The last official global map of SAR regions dates from 2012.

(IMO SAR.8/Circ.4, Annex 4)

COORDINATION

Each SRR is overseen by a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC).

MRCCs are responsible for coordinating rescue services and must:

- receive, acknowledge, and assess distress alerts
- assume overall coordination when a vessel is in distress
- coordinate with neighbouring states where necessary

MRCCs must respond to all distress calls without prejudice.

ASSETS AND DUTY TO RESCUE

Coordination responsibility exists even if a state has no rescue assets of its own.

Many distress cases occur far from coastal rescue ships. MRCCs may therefore call upon commercial vessels.

All shipmasters have a duty to render assistance to persons in distress, unless this poses a serious danger to their ship, crew, or passengers.

This duty applies everywhere, regardless of the SRR.

DISEMBARKATION

SRRs do not determine where rescued persons may disembark.

International law requires disembarkation to a place of safety — and SRR boundaries do not define what is safe.

A country is not a place of safety if rescued persons face threats to life, persecution, or torture, even if rescued within its SRR.

The MRCC in the SRR of the rescue has primary responsibility to coordinate and cooperate to identify an appropriate place of safety.

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**Everyone at sea can play a role in
preventing shipwrecks**

Find more information and resources at

www.fhas.ch