



FHAS Foundation
for Humanitarian
Action at Sea

HOW DO MARITIME RESCUE COORDINATION CENTRES ACTUALLY WORK?

WHY MRCCS MATTER

As global shipping grows and migration routes shift, maritime search and rescue is under constant pressure. States are required to maintain search and rescue services through a worldwide network of Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs), this shore-based backbone of the system was established under the 1979 SAR Convention and SOLAS.

But what does an MRCC actually do, and how can one centre coordinate rescues across such vast stretches of sea?



THE CORE MISSION OF AN MRCC

Every MRCC has three legally mandated responsibilities:

- **Monitoring distress alerts**
- **Coordinating rescue assets**
- **Ensuring communication between all parties**

It must operate 24/7 with trained staff and is responsible for a defined SAR Region. (SAR Convention)

These regions often extend far beyond territorial waters. Despite significant responsibilities on paper, many MRCCs remain under equipped. FHAS has programmed to strengthen MRCCs along underserved routes.



HOW ALERTS ARE RECEIVED

Alerts can reach an MRCC through the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), direct radio or telephone contact, and reports from ships, aircraft, or coastal stations.

The MRCC then assesses whether the case is uncertainty, alert, or distress and assigns the most suitable rescue units.

4.

COORDINATING THE RESCUE

MRCCs task rescue assets ashore and at sea, including merchant ships, which are often the closest responders far offshore or on migration routes.

They also coordinate with neighbouring centres and may appoint an on-scene coordinator.

5.

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RESCUES INVOLVING MIGRANTS

Under the SAR Convention, rescue includes retrieval, initial medical care, and delivery to a place of safety. SOLAS and the SAR Convention require States to coordinate disembarkation so that assisting ships are released with minimum further deviation and survivors are disembarked as soon as reasonably practicable.

(SOLAS ch. V)



RESOURCES / MRCC LOCATIONS

States must notify the IMO of their MRCC contacts and SAR Regions. This information is available through the IMO Global SAR Plan in GISIS, although no single official world map exists.

FHAS is in the process of verifying MRCC information along major maritime routes, available on www.fhas.ch.



Building bridges to save lives at sea

Find more information and resources at

www.fhas.ch