

AFRAS Funding Update – International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) – Mixed Migrant Safety Project- How we saved lives together

The International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) is the international charity committed to preventing the loss of life in the world's waters. One of the ways we save lives is through our Mixed Migrant Safety Project, which is providing immediate support to rescue services in the Aegean and now the Central Mediterranean (off the Coast of Libya).

In 2016 AFRAS donated over \$50,000 to support efforts in the Mediterranean. We are very pleased to report that our Mixed Migrant Safety Project working in the Aegean has saved 5,000 lives to date, including many children and babies. The majority of the migrants rescued are Syrian refugees who are fleeing civil war in Syria. Thank you for playing your part in allowing these lives to be saved.

This project has now extended its focus to supporting our member NGOs' efforts and the Italian Coast Guard in the Central Mediterranean (off the Libyan coast), another migrant hotspot. The current crisis off the coast of Libya shows no immediate signs of ending. Between January and November of 2016 more than 15,150 children crossed the Mediterranean – a 69% increase from the same period the year before.

The IMRF's Mixed Migrant Project – the story so far

The IMRF's involvement in the Aegean Sea started when our member organisation the Hellenic Rescue Team (HRT), a volunteer rescue organisation based in Greece, came to the IMRF's World Maritime Rescue Congress in June 2015 and asked for support due to the unprecedented demand of rescuing the tens of thousands of migrants making the short Aegean Sea crossing from Turkey to Greece, often in overcrowded, unseaworthy vessels. IMRF members answered the call and came to the HRT's support



However, by mid-November 2015, with the crisis in the Aegean continuing to intensify as the northern winter set in, it became clear that a coordinated response of IMRF members would be needed to prevent massive loss of life. By this point, more than 836,000 desperate people had arrived by sea, fleeing war, terror or abuse, the great majority taking the Aegean route to the islands of Greece.

To prevent further loss of life, the IMRF, through the support of the Swedish Sea Rescue Society (SSRS), appointed a full-time project manager to coordinate these efforts and develop a formal relationship with the responsible SAR authority, the Hellenic Coast Guard. The Hellenic Coast Guard engaged the IMRF to act as an expert interlocker to help manage the NGO response in the Aegean Sea. We established a registration process, developed a map of NGO resources and, most importantly, provided information and guidance to the NGOs who were unaware of the required protocols when undertaking sea rescues in foreign waters.

Alongside this, we carried out an assessment of the precise SAR needs in the Aegean and southern Mediterranean, and then started work with the Hellenic Coast Guard and the HRT, to bring the support of IMRF member organisations (DGzRS, KNRM, RNLI, RS, MOAS, Sea-Watch and Proactiva Open Arms) to where it was needed most. Through this collaboration we have been able to offer a coordinated response to the migrant crisis in the Aegean, as well as assisting in building the capacity of the HRT. For example, we assisted in establishing lifeboat stations on the islands of Lesbos, Samos,

Chios and Kos, and have provided much-needed equipment to non-Greek NGOs Proactiva Open Arms and Sea-Watch.

Next steps



Looking forwards, the IMRF is committed to completing the development work that we have started with the HRT, which we expect to continue until mid-2017. This will include continuing to co-ordinate maritime search and rescue efforts, developing a national training system, and taking the lead in the development work of the HRT HQ board.

Recently, our Mixed Migrant Safety Project has extended to the Central Mediterranean (off the coast of Libya). Here we are helping to continue saving the lives of migrants travelling between North Africa and Italy. We are working directly with the Italian Coast Guard to help coordinate efforts, as well as supporting the equipment needs of our member NGOs who are working in this area. For example, in late September we sent 300 donated lifejackets to Sea-Watch. 150 of these were children's lifejackets, which are in very short supply as recently record numbers of children and infants need rescuing.

Outcomes and legacy to date of our Mixed Migrant Safety Project

- The Mixed Migrant Safety Project has directly saved the lives of over 5,000 people.
- Replacement equipment has been provided to non-Greek NGOs Proactiva Open Arms and Sea-Watch.
- Through the IMRF's coordination, sustainable local maritime rescue services have been developed on Lesbos, Samos, Chios and Kos.
- A positive legacy will be left in Greece, in the form of an appropriately trained and resourced volunteer maritime rescue service, with 16 dedicated rescue boats and trained professional volunteers, suitably equipped and resourced to meet the challenges of future sea rescues.

The maritime search and rescue need in the Mediterranean is currently at its greatest ever level, as UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler said in late September:¹

“Despite the total number of Mediterranean crossings this year (300,000) being 42% lower than during the same period last year (520,000) — primarily as a result of fewer crossings to Greece — the number of people reported dead or missing so far this year (3,498) is only 8% lower than the total number of casualties for the whole of 2015 (3,771). At this rate, 2016 will be the deadliest year on record in the Mediterranean Sea.”

If you require a more detailed overview or have any questions regarding this project, please contact Bruce Reid at b.reid@imrf.org.uk or +44 (0)7450262202.

Thank you for your support

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/briefing/2016/9/57e4ee964/migrant-refugee-boat-tragedy-irregular-departures-egypt.html>