

# SOS HUMANITY

Communication  
challenges in Search &  
Rescue operations in the  
Central Mediterranean



# Hello!

## My name is Barbara

- Academic background: human rights, international law + corporate comms
- 12+ years of experience in humanitarian organizations
- Search and Rescue volunteer since 2023
- Currently: Communications Coordinator at SOS Humanity (German NGO)



# SOS HUMANITY

**As SOS Humanity, we strive for a world in which the human rights of all are respected.**

**No person drowns while fleeing at sea and everyone is treated with dignity.**



# MV “Humanity 1”



**Rescue ship covering the  
Central Mediterranean**

**29 crew members  
(permanent employees +  
volunteers)**

**Focus on search and  
rescue and protection**

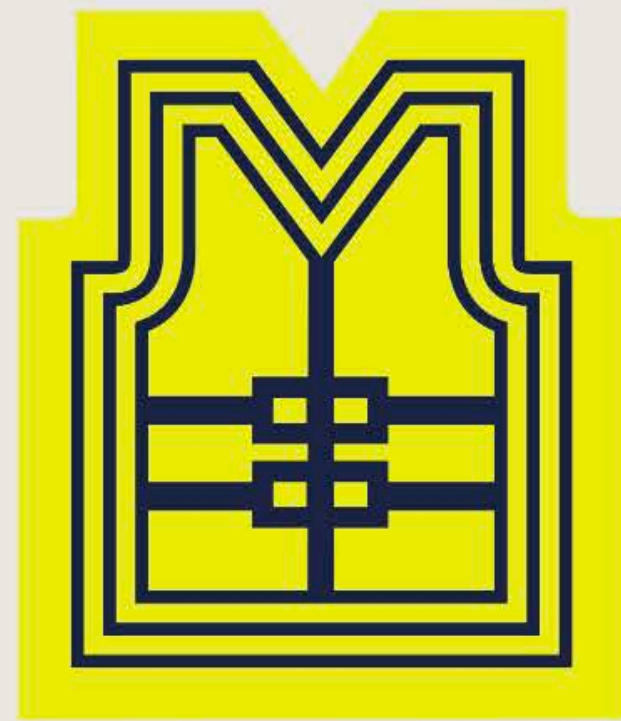


# Very short history of Search & Rescue (SAR)

A route as old as  
humanity...



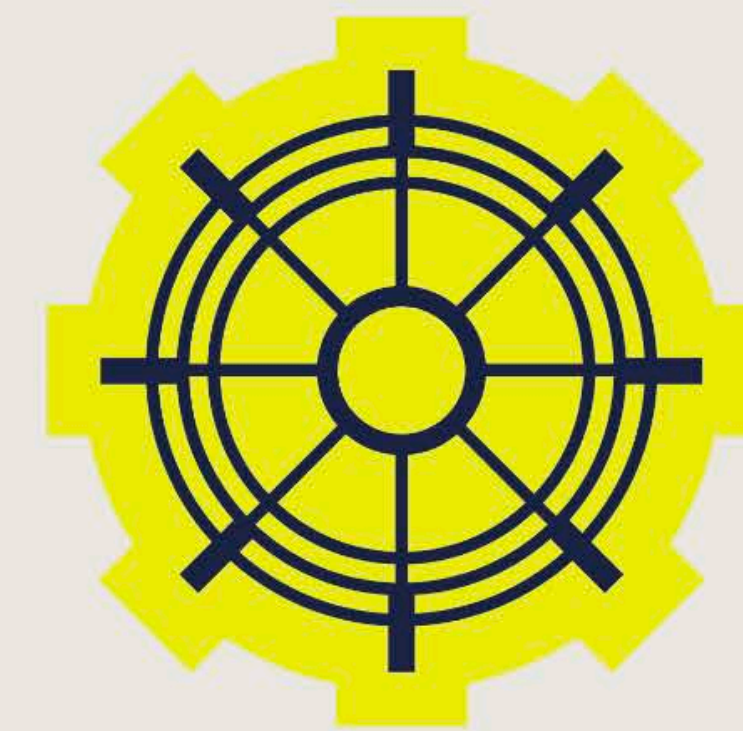
# Search and Rescue is a Legal Duty



The duty to rescue at sea applies **everywhere at sea** and to all ships universally.



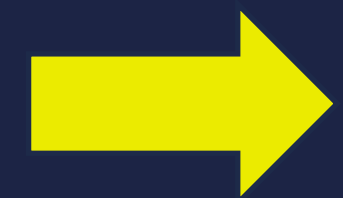
States must ensure that **every person** in distress at sea is helped.



People rescued from distress at sea must be brought to **a place of safety.**

# What constitutes a Place of Safety?

- A place where the survivors' safety or life is no longer threatened
- Place where their basic human needs (such as food, shelter, medical needs, protection) can be met



Libya and Tunisia are not places of safety

SOS  
HUMANITY

# Communications and SAR



# Our goals

## We save lives

With our rescue ship we rescue people fleeing from distress in the Central Mediterranean Sea since August 2022.

## We protect and assist

We provide the rescued people on board with clothing and food, as well as medical and psychological care. Furthermore, we identify special protection needs and communicate them to the respective agencies on land.

## We testify

We document the stories of survivors and release information on abuses such as human rights violations at Europe's external borders.

## We create change

We inform the public about the inhumane consequences of European migration policies. On a political level we advocate for the rights of people fleeing across the sea.

# The Communications Coordinator onboard

- Three “CommsCo”, on a rotating basis
- Part of the Head of Mission team
- **Responsible for audiovisual content production**
- Responsible for internal communications onboard and with the back office on land
- Responsible for evidence collection during rescues (emails, recordings...)
- Spokesperson and media contact



# Audiovisual and ethical guidelines



SOS Humanity / Marcel Beloqui Evardone

## Do no harm

- The people's safety and wellbeing always come first
- Awareness that a person or their family may be harmed in various ways by audiovisual media

# Audiovisual and ethical guidelines



## Informed consent

- Both an ethical and legal requirement
- Concerns portraits, testimonies and audio/video content that make a person identifiable
- What does “informed” mean?
- Especially critical for some people, i.e. minors

# Audiovisual and ethical guidelines



Sos Humanity / Elisabeth Sellmeier

## Content that creates protection risks

- Evidence to reject applications for international protection
- Criminalization of boat drivers
- Risks for survivors' families back home
- Anonymity and right to privacy



SOS Humanity / Judith Buete



SOS Humanity / Alessio Cassaro



SOS Humanity / Wanda Proft



SOS Humanity / Marcel Beledjir Ewardone



SOS Humanity / Lizzie Gilson

# Audiovisual and ethical guidelines



Sos Humanity / Judith Buete

## Content that raises ethical concerns

- Awareness of power imbalances
- “White saviourism” and harmful stereotypes
- Situations of extreme distress and suffering

...What would you do in this scenario...?

## Collecting testimonies



I myself was detained for three months by the Libyan Coast Guard.

- Why do we do it?
- When and how? Who is present?
- A constant collaboration with the Care team (medics, psy, protection)
- Importance of informed consent and anonymity

# People, not just numbers

“I was aware of how dangerous it is to cross the sea, but you know, it's better to die in the Mediterranean than to die on land in Libya.”

- Buba from Gambia, 18 y/o



# No Single Story

“You describe people from one side, exclusively from one side, over and over again, and ultimately that side becomes their identity.”

- Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie (Nigerian writer)





**Thank you!**

**Any questions?**

