Coast Guard Repatriates 13 Dominican Migrants, Ends Search for 3 Others Who Are Missing



A Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier crew member inspects a migrant vessel just off Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico, that was adrift and without engines with 13 migrants aboard on Nov. 18. U.S. Coast Guard

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The U.S. Coast Guard repatriated 13 migrants to the Dominican Republic and ended a two-day search on Nov. 20 for three others who remain missing as part of an illegal migrant voyage on Nov. 18 off Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a release.

The operator of a good Samaritan fishing vessel Yamilette reported finding the migrant vessel adrift Nov. 19 and taking it in tow. The Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier sighted and responded to a red flare that had been shot off by the operator of the Yamilette to alert nearby vessel traffic of the distress.

Once on scene, the Joseph Napier's crew embarked four women and nine men from the 25-foot makeshift vessel that was taking on water. The interdicted migrants reported that three men who were traveling with the group had jumped into the water when they sighted land five days earlier and attempted to swim to shore.

"Thanks to the decisive actions of the good Samaritan and the Joseph Napier crew for quickly and safely removing these persons from a life-threatening situation," said Lt. Matt Miller, commanding officer of the Joseph Napier.

“Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family of those who remain missing,” said Cmdr. Beau Powers, Sector San Juan chief of response. “This case highlights the inherent danger of operating in the maritime domain, where migrants too often risk losing their lives far when they embark grossly overloaded and unseaworthy vessels to cross the Mona Passage.”

The crew of the Joseph Napier transferred the 13 migrants to the cutter Donald Horsley for their repatriation.

Following the report of the three missing migrants, Coast Guard watchstanders directed the launch of a Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin rescue helicopter to search for them. Coast Guard rescue crews completed eight air and three surface searches covering 1,334 square nautical miles with no signs of the missing men.

Coast Guard rescue assets involved in the search were:

- MH-65 Dolphin helicopters from Coast Guard Air Station Borinquen
- HC-144 Ocean Sentry fixed-wing aircraft from Guard Air Station Miami
- Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier
- Coast Guard Cutter Donald Horsley