

Coast Guard Repatriates 36 Migrants to the Dominican Republic



A Puerto Rico Police marine unit tows a makeshift boat with 21 migrants aboard, following the interdiction of an illegal voyage moments earlier just off Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico Oct. 19, 2020. U.S. Coast Guard / Ricardo Castrodad

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The Coast Guard repatriated 36 of 38 migrants to the Dominican Republic on Oct. 21, following the interdiction of two illegal voyages just off Cabo Rojo and Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in an Oct. 22 release.

The interdicted migrants claimed to be Dominican Republic nationals, two of whom remain in Puerto Rico to face possible federal prosecution on charges of attempted illegal reentry into the United States.

The interdictions are the result of ongoing multiagency efforts in support of Operation Caribbean Guard and the Caribbean Border Interagency Group (CBIG).

“The close collaboration and efficient coordination between the Puerto Rico Police and fellow responding federal law enforcement partner agencies resulted in two successful interdictions and the safe removal of all 38 migrants,” said Cmdr. Beau Powers, Sector San Juan chief of response. “If a migrant vessel capsizes, the chance for survival is very low, since these grossly overloaded and unseaworthy makeshift boats are continuously taking on water and they have no lifesaving equipment onboard. We call upon anyone looking to take part in an illegal voyage that they not take the sea; it is just not worth risking your life or the life of a loved one.”

The first interdiction occurred on Oct. 19, when the crew of a Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine unit stopped a makeshift boat, approximately half a nautical mile southwest of Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. Coast Guard watchstanders diverted the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Doyle (WPC-1133), while a Customs and Border Protection marine interceptor also responded to assist.

Once on scene with the migrant vessel, the crew of the cutter Joseph Doyle safely embarked 21 migrants, 17 men and 4 women. After embarking all migrants, and following biometric processing, the crew learned of the criminal and immigration history of the two migrants who are now facing federal prosecution by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico. U.S. Border Patrol agents received custody of the two migrants in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico.

The second interdiction occurred on Oct. 21, after the crew of a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine aircraft detected a suspect illegal voyage, approximately six nautical miles off the coast of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. Shortly thereafter, the crew of a Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine unit stopped the 25-foot makeshift boat, while the cutter Joseph Doyle and a Customs and Border Protection Air and marine surface unit arrived on scene to assist. The crew of the cutter Joseph Doyle safely embarked 17 migrants, 15 men and two women from the migrant vessel.

In both cases, the migrants were provided with lifejackets before embarking the Coast Guard cutter, where all migrants received food, water, shelter and basic medical attention.

The cutter Joseph Doyle later rendezvoused with and completed the repatriation of the migrants to a Dominican Republic Navy vessel just off the Dominican Republic.