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## **Stowaway - case share and loss prevention advice**

We have recently handled several typical stowaway cases involving vessels at West African ports. Despite owners having taken conventional security measures such as employing armed guards and enhancing vessel patrols, stowaway incidents remain difficult to prevent entirely, and the resulting repatriation costs and administrative fines can be substantial. Based on the key facts and lessons learned from two of these cases, we summarise the following for your reference.

### **1. Vessel “S” August 2025**

Seven Nigerian stowaways boarded the vessel at Lagos, hiding on the rudder. After the vessel arrived at Douala Anchorage in Cameroon, local coast guards discovered the stowaways and contacted the Club’s correspondent.

No small boats approached the vessel at the anchorage other than the armed patrol boat hired by the Member. Before departure from Lagos, the draft surveyor and Chief Officer inspected the bottom and rudder area and found nothing unusual. An escort vessel with a patrol boat had also been engaged and followed throughout the voyage, but no stowaways were detected.

Relevant cost:

Repatriation air tickets (higher cost due to the approaching holiday and the fact that split repatriations were not accepted), medical expenses (three persons hospitalised), travel documents, food, personal belongings, official service fees (landing, custody, escort, supervision).

Even with both vessel-based and port-based security, the stowaways apparently boarded in the previous port (Lagos) and remained hidden on the rudder until Douala. The case highlights the difficulty of inspecting blind spots such as rudders and sea chests, and the risk of stowaways boarding during gaps in escort cover or using blind angles.

### **2. Vessel “P” December 2025**

Five Nigerian stowaways were found hiding on top of the rudder, discovered by the pilot boat. The previous port was Lagos.

Relevant cost:

Port authority fine: USD 5,000 per person, under GPHA 2024 Fines List Item 10.12

Immigration fine: USD 5,000 per person

Repatriation costs: air tickets, custody, escort, travel documents, etc.

This case clearly shows the dual-fine mechanism (port authority + immigration) adopted by West

African port authorities, with fixed fines that are difficult to waive entirely. Repatriation costs were similar to those in Case 1, but the fines added a significant extra burden. Normally, such expenses must be prepaid to the local correspondent, and after final settlement any overpayment will be refunded and any shortfall collected.

### **Recommended Stowaway Prevention Measures**

#### **1. Control access to the vessel**

Strictly control access at the bottom of the accommodation ladder / gangway

Raise the accommodation ladder / gangway when not in use

Never leave rope ladders hanging over the side unattended

#### **2. Lock empty spaces**

Keep store rooms, chain lockers, mast houses and other enclosed spaces locked

#### **3. Conduct thorough stowaway searches**

Organise crew to search the whole vessel thoroughly

Consider using sniffer dogs (via professional contractors)

#### **4. Strengthen control of people on board in port**

Tighten controls on stevedores and surveyors, including headcounts and identity checks

### **Key Actions After Finding a Stowaway**

#### **1. Search for identity documents or dangerous items**

#### **2. Ask the stowaway when, where and how they boarded, and whether there are any others**

#### **3. Treat the stowaway humanely – do not assign any work**

#### **4. Notify the port authorities, the P&I Club and the correspondent as soon as possible, and arrange for the vessel to return to the port of disembarkation or for the stowaway to be landed at the next port**

We will continue to monitor stowaway risks at West African ports and issue further updates as appropriate. If you have any questions or need assistance with a specific case, please do not hesitate to contact ALCO claims team.