

## **LP 26/2025 West Africa Stowaway Cases Surge in 2025**

Throughout the 2025 policy year, the Club has continued to note Members' reports where stowaways were found on board, frequently in West African ports.

Although the Club has issued Circular 2010/02 to remind Members of the stowaway risks and to adopt appropriate precautions, and a Loss Prevention Bulletin – Focus on Stowaways was issued in 2020 to set out high-risk areas, typical profiles, boarding methods, preventive measures and disembarkation procedures, the number and geographical spread of cases in which the Club has been called upon to assist show that Africa – especially West Africa – remains a chronic hotspot.

### **I. Cases in point**

#### **Case #1**

In February 2025, member vessel A departed from Lagos, Nigeria, bound for Kribi, Cameroon. Before leaving Lagos, the captain reported conducting two stowaway prevention inspections and confirmed safety.

However, several days later, after anchoring at Kribi, a stowaway was discovered at the deck ladder by a duty sailor.

The stowaway stated that he had gone to the vessel's crane control room after boarding and hid in a corner there.

After discovery, the crew properly accommodated him in a cabin, and with the assistance of the local shipping agent, he was repatriated from Kribi.

#### **Case #2**

In May 2025, member vessel B berthed at Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, for nearly a week to load cargo.

According to the captain, before departure, the crew and the onshore Dog Search Team conducted a stowaway inspection covering cargo holds, cranes, forepeak, lifeboats, rescue boats, accommodation areas, air conditioning rooms, and steering gear rooms, with no stowaways found.

However, a few days into the voyage, a stowaway was discovered hiding in a life-boat. The stowaway was ultimately repatriated at a mid-voyage bunkering port.

#### Case #3

In August 2025, member vessel C carried out unloading operations at Lagos, Nigeria. After unloading and after all stevedores had left, the local dog search team boarded to assist in stowaway inspections.

According to the captain, no stowaways were found after joint checks and secondary inspections. However, upon arrival at Owendo, Gabon, the chief engineer reported hearing knocking sounds at the aft of the steering gear room.

The captain immediately notified the shipowner, and crew opened the steering gear manhole for inspection. Nine stowaways were found hiding in the rudder trunk.

All stowaways were safely brought into the steering gear room using the ship's rope ladder and were eventually repatriated at Owendo.

#### Case #4

In October 2025, after departing Lagos, Nigeria, member vessel D called at Lome, Togo. A passing tugboat discovered stowaways on the ship's rudder and reported it to the captain.

The captain organized an inspection and found 13 stowaways.

It was reported that all had secretly boarded during the early hours while the vessel was berthed in Lagos. All stowaways were repatriated from Lome.

## **II. Case handling**

When a stowaway incident occurs, the captain must report according to the SMS requirements, immediately notifying the shipowner or management company and as instructed, the agent and port authorities. Upon receiving the report, the shipowner should promptly notify the P&I Club to arrange repatriation.

After receiving a stowaway report, the P&I Club verifies the situation with the shipowner and, if needed, contacts local agents to assist with repatriation at the port of disembarkation. In most countries, port authorities require shipowners to bear repatriation costs, which may include fines.

Some authorities also require prepayment of all related fees before the stowaway can disembark, or they may detain the vessel. In short, repatriating stowaways is both time-consuming and costly for shipowners.

Costs may include visa and ticket fees, escort personnel expenses, and medical costs if the stowaways are ill or injured. Additionally, fines may apply. For example, the BUDD Group recently issued a circular on fees and fines at West African ports, noting that non-Ghanaian stowaways in Ghanaian ports could result in a \$5,000 fine per stowaway from the port authority and an additional \$5,000 from the Ghana Immigration Service, potentially totalling \$10,000 per stowaway.

When multiple stowaways are involved, costs escalate, and arranging accommodation, guarding, and repatriation becomes more complex and riskier. In Case 3, repatriating 9 stowaways required medical treatment for 4, adding significant costs.

Multiple authorities, including OPRAG and immigration in Gabon, fined the shipowner \$80,000. Only after prepayment of all repatriation costs was the vessel allowed to sail.

### **III. Stowaway prevention**

These cases demonstrate that, despite multiple stowaway inspections before departure, stowaways can still evade detection. Reasons include:

1. **Hidden locations:** Stowaways often hide in areas rarely covered by inspections, such as crane control rooms, lifeboats, and rudder trunks.
2. **Inspection gaps:** Sometimes inspections are carried out superficially or inspectors may be negligent.

In conclusion, stowaway incidents remain rampant at West African ports. Vessels calling at these ports should pay extra attention and focus on preventive measures, strictly following relevant rules and guidance.

Prevention is therefore better than post-discovery handling. If stowaways are found, shipowners should promptly notify the Club for guidance and assistance.

*For more information, please refer to the attached Loss Prevention Bulletin – Focus on Stowaways or contact Managers of the Association.*