

One dead, dozens missing from capsized migrant boat off Florida coast

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The US Coast Guard reported at least one person is dead and 38 others are missing after a boat carrying a group of 40 migrants capsized over the weekend near the coast of Florida. Search and Rescue crews recovered a lone survivor and found one deceased person, but hopes are slim for finding any of the remaining missing passengers alive.

Rescue operations began about 8 a.m. on Tuesday when a commercial tugboat reported seeing a 25-foot boat capsized about 40 miles east of Fort Pierce, Florida with a “distressed” man clinging to the hull. The captain moved closer to rescue the man who was taken to a hospital to be treated for dehydration and sun exposure.

The mariners then called the Coast Guard, who launched a two-day recovery operation and said the incident is being investigated as a human smuggling operation. Through late Wednesday, cutter crews, helicopter teams, search planes and a US Navy air crew surveyed an area spanning more than 1,300 square miles between the Bahamas’ Bimini island chain and Fort Pierce Inlet, a Coast Guard statement said.

On Wednesday evening, Petty Officer Jose Hernandez, a Coast Guard spokesman, acknowledged that the chances of finding anyone else alive looked dim but said authorities would “reassess” the situation Thursday morning.

The lone survivor, whose family requested his name and nationality be kept anonymous, told authorities after his rescue that he was one of 40 migrants aboard the vessel when it left the Bahamas, about 50 miles east of Miami, on Saturday night. The boat capsized shortly after leaving in rough conditions that included a severe cold front, up to nine-foot waves and 23-mile-per-hour winds. No one was wearing a life jacket, the survivor said.

A woman—identified only as Marcia—told NBC6 News on Wednesday that the lone survivor is her son, who was traveling with her daughter as well.

“I tell him, ‘Tell me about your sister, please tell me about your sister, where is she? Where do I look for her? Tell me about my daughter,’” she said in Spanish.

“And he told me: ‘Mom my sister died, my sister drowned, I looked for her and I couldn’t find her. I called her and called her and my sister couldn’t stand [the waves].’

Incidents of overturned vessels crowded with migrants attempting to reach the United States are not uncommon off the coast of Florida, given its relatively close proximity to the Bahamas and Cuba, only 90 miles to the south. According to the Coast Guard, at least 557 Cuban migrants and more than 800 Haitians have been picked up at sea by the Coast Guard since October. In the last five years, the agency has intercepted nearly 7,400 Cubans and 3,900 Haitians in the Atlantic attempting to reach the US.

As Reuters notes, vessel crossings have grown more frequent as Caribbean island nations, such as Haiti, face worsening economic and political crises. Thousands of people each year board makeshift flimsy boats in a desperate attempt to cross turbulent seas and seek better opportunities in the United States. Thirty-two other people were rescued from a capsized vessel west of Bimini last Friday in another failed crossing attempt.

These marine disasters come amid a surge in seaborne migration on both coasts and expose the pretences of the Democratic Party and the Biden administration, which campaigned on promises for a softer approach to immigration than Trump and Obama. In fact, the Biden administration has upheld and argued in court for the continuation of the most inhumane Trump-era immigration policies: pandemic-

related border restrictions and the separation of migrant families at the border.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is currently fighting in federal court to retain Trump's use of Title 42, a section of the Public Health Service Act that allows the US government to ban noncitizens from entering the US in the interest of public health. On Wednesday, DOJ lawyer Sharon Swingle claimed the rule relied on "scientific expertise" and that lifting the policy would allow the unmitigated spread of COVID-19 among Border Patrol detention centers.

Public health experts have repeatedly argued against the policy and said there is no scientific rationale for it. Moreover, with proper safety precautions, it is entirely possible to process asylum seekers at the border without spreading COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

In reality, the Biden administration is utilizing Title 42, in conjunction with the pandemic, to justify the barbaric rounding-up and expulsion of immigrants.

In just one year, the Biden administration has used the policy to deport more than 1 million migrants arriving on the US-Mexico border, either sending them to overwhelmed border cities in Mexico or back to the home countries they had fled.

In a separate court case, the Biden administration is arguing family separations at the border are legal, a reversal of Biden's condemnation of Trump's immigration policies. The Justice Department argued in court that, despite the fact that the US has condemned the policy, the separations were lawful.

Biden initially created a task force to reunite families and considered financial compensation for affected families, but these initiatives were abandoned in December after only reuniting 61 children with their families as of November.

The Biden administration outlined its hostility to migrants in a January 7 brief related to the lawsuit. "At issue in this case is whether adults who entered the country without authorization can challenge the federal government's enforcement of federal immigration laws," the Justice Department said. "They cannot."

While the world's ruling elite move themselves and their capital around the globe with ease, stashing their wealth in Caribbean tax havens, artificial barriers are erected to restrict the free movement of working people, pit them against each other, and increase their

exploitation. The ruling elite's disdain for the lives of workers has disastrous consequences.

Just last week a migrant family of four from India, including two children, ages 11 and 3, was found frozen to death in a field just north of the US-Canada border. Investigators said the family arrived in Toronto on January 12 but perished while making their way towards the Manitoba community of Emerson around January 18, apparently seeking to cross into the United States outside an official port of entry.

The American ruling elite are incapable of solving today's social crises in a progressive manner. Migrants risking everything to remove themselves from the social hellscapes created by the intervention of US imperialism and the failure of the capitalist system require the full sympathy and support of workers everywhere. The working class must fight for a socialist transformation of society which will tear down national borders and uphold the right of workers to live and work where they please with full citizenship rights, free from harassment and the threat of death.



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