THE STATE OF MARITIME PIRACY 2019

ASSESSING THE HUMAN COST

REPORT

one earth FUTURE

STABLE SEAS

a program of **One Earth Future**

Supported by the Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP) of UNODC.

THE STATE OF MARITIME PIRACY 2019

ASSESSING THE HUMAN COST

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Boarding team from Spanish Navy Patrol Boat SERVIOLA (P71) boarding hijacked vessel Blue Marlin off the coast of Equatorial Guinea in May 2019.

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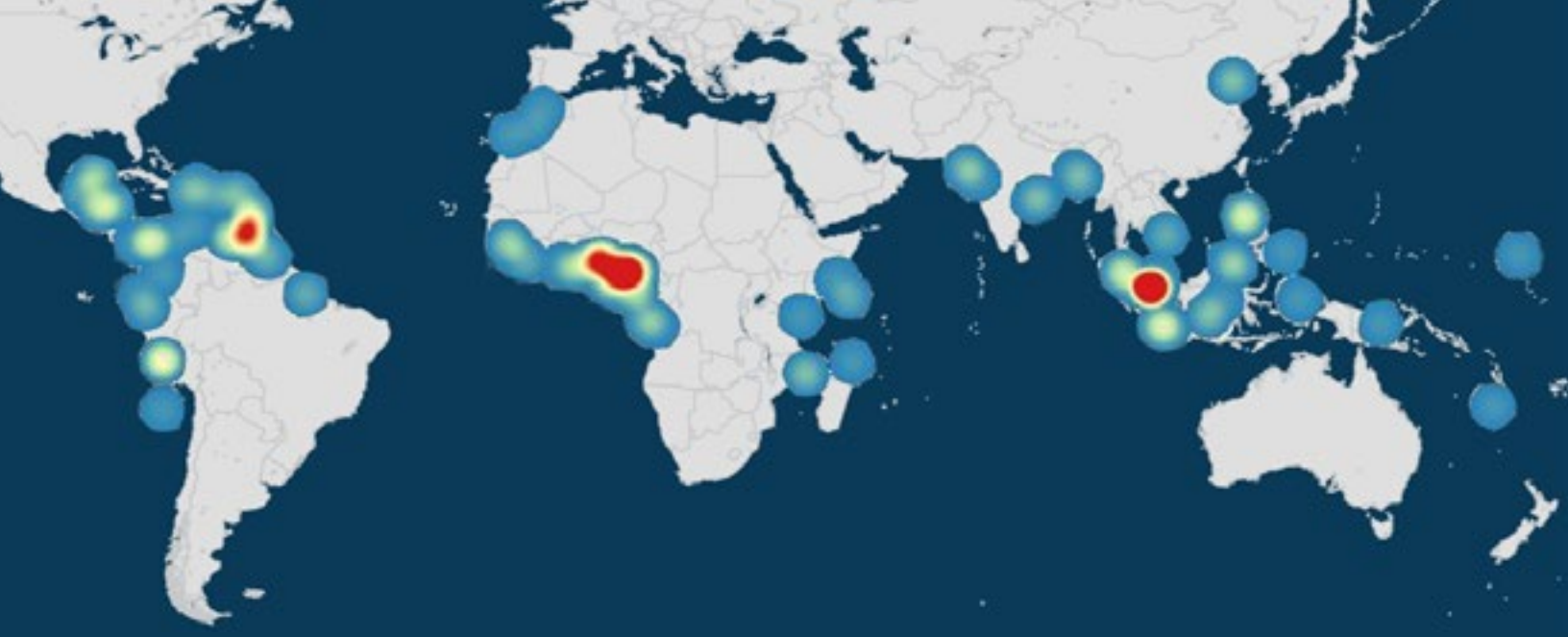
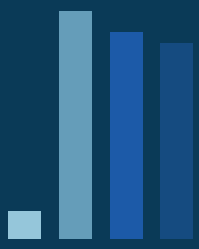


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **IN 2019, THE GULF OF GUINEA REMAINED THE AREA WORST AFFECTED BY PIRACY AND MARITIME ROBBERY OF VESSELS WORLDWIDE.** Although the number of incidents decreased from 2018, a 60 percent increase in the number of crew members kidnapped was reported in 2019, with a total of 164.
- The Yemeni-flagged fishing dhow *Al Azham* was hijacked to be used as a mothership in an attack on fishing vessels off the coast of Somalia in April 2019. EUNAVFOR intercepted the hijacked dhow, arrested the pirates, and released the 23 hostages onboard. The hijacking underlined that **THE THREAT OF PIRACY OFF SOMALIA IS NOT ERADICATED, ONLY SUPPRESSED.**
- **THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN REMAINED THE SAME IN 2019 AS IN 2018.** Violent kidnapping and armed robbery incidents against fishing vessels, yachts, and a cargo vessel were reported in Guyana, Trinidad, and Panama, and included the murders of four fishermen and one captain of a motor yacht. Several crew members were also seriously injured, and female crew were sexually assaulted.
- **KIDNAPPINGS OF CREW ON FISHING VESSELS BY ABU SAYYAF AND ASSOCIATED GROUPS CONTINUED IN THE SULU SEA,** as did kidnappings off the Bangladeshi portion of the Sundarbans by criminal gangs. Robbery and attempted robbery of commercial vessels, but especially of tugs towing barges, increased in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore in 2019, with 34 reported incidents.

TOTAL INCIDENTS OF PIRACY/ROBBERY BY REGION (2019)



- [12] East Africa
- [98] West Africa
- [89] Asia
- [84] Latin America & the Caribbean

TOTAL SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY (2019)

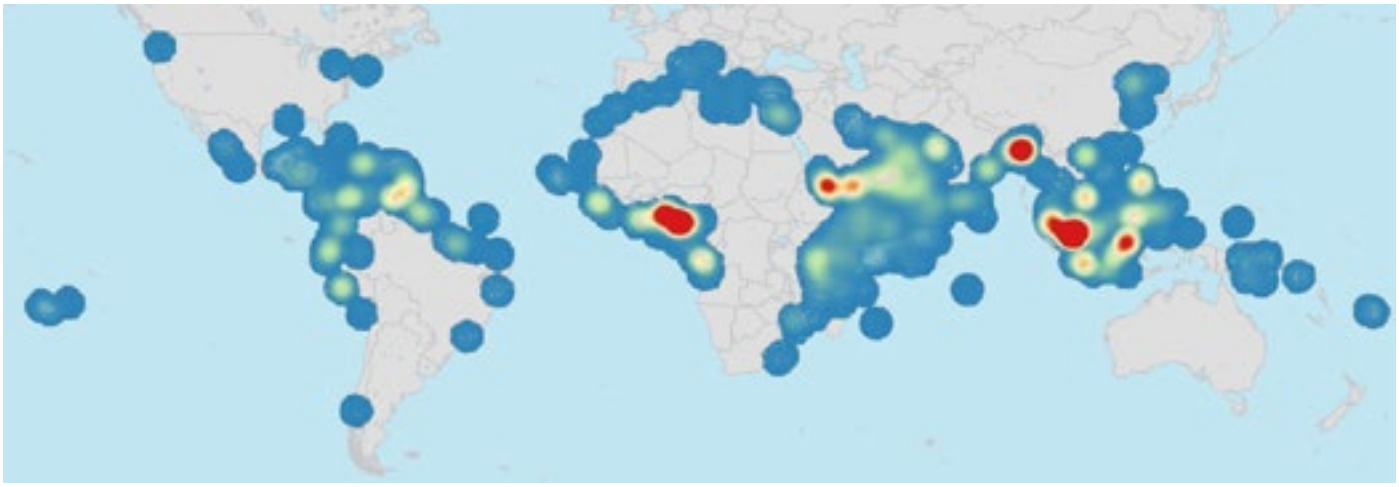
- [270] East Africa
- [1,689] West Africa
- [1,503] Asia
- [783] Latin America & the Caribbean

INTRODUCTION

At the time of writing, the world is in turmoil due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The shipping industry has been impacted in a myriad of ways. Thousands of seafarers, unable to disembark for crew changes, are languishing at sea. Seafarers are only paid while on contract, and when their contracts inevitably end and they are forced into lockdowns, they and their families lose income. Hundreds of elderly passengers on cruise ships have been infected, leading to several deaths during quarantines outside ports, while port authorities around the world refuse to allow vessels to dock. With less demand for goods, all vessels have been impacted, from oil tankers to container ships. The only thing that does not seem to be affected is the threat of maritime piracy and armed robbery of ships. Kidnapping of crew members continues in the Gulf of Guinea and the Sulu Sea, as does robbery on ships in the Straits of Singapore and Malacca and at anchorages around the world.

The *State of Maritime Piracy 2019* marks the tenth year that One Earth Future Foundation has assessed the human cost of maritime piracy. Over the last ten years the report has evolved from being first a project of Oceans Beyond Piracy to now belonging to the Stable Seas program. Our focus has expanded from piracy off the coast of Somalia to piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, Southeast Asia, and finally Latin America and the Caribbean. What has remained constant is our goal to explain and quantify the magnitude of these crimes and the profound impact piracy and armed robbery of ships have had on stakeholders and, most importantly, its victims, and our belief that ending violence at sea is possible.

HISTORICAL VIEW OF PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY 2010 TO 2018



Stable Seas wishes to acknowledge and thank our funding partner, the Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP) at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, for their contribution to *The State of Maritime Piracy 2019*. The Stable Seas program is grateful to have the excellent support and cooperation of the GMCP.

Data Sources

Incident data were collected from several sources which included maritime authorities and other maritime role-players as well as media reports. We'd like to give special thanks to the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau (ICC's IMB), the International Maritime Organization, and the information center of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, from whom most of the information was derived. Den Norske Krigsforsikring for Skib and independent sources also contributed incident data to the Stable Seas dataset.

State Of Maritime Piracy 2019: Incident Types

Hijacking

Ships are hijacked to ransom crew; to steal the oil cargo, ship stores, or crew possessions; or to use the vessel as a mothership in the hijackings of other vessels. Hijacking for cargo theft often requires complicity of a variety of actors. Ships carrying petroleum products are targeted and attacked. Once the vessel is hijacked, the crew is often forced to navigate to a remote location where parts of the cargo are transferred to a smaller tanker or a storage facility on land. The stolen cargo is then sold on the black market or blended with legitimate refined products.

DEFINITION OF PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982: 61) defines piracy as:

(a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed:

(i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft;

(ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State;

(b) any act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or of an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft;

(c) any act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described in subparagraph (a) or (b).

Resolution A.1025(26) (Annex, paragraph 2.2) on IMO's Code of Practice for the investigation of the Crimes of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships defines armed robbery against ships as:

(a) any illegal act of violence or detention or any act of depredation, or threat thereof, other than an act of piracy, committed for private ends and directed against a ship or against persons or property on board such a ship, within a State's internal waters, archipelagic waters and territorial sea;

(b) any act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described above.

Kidnapping

In West Africa and Asia, perpetrators board ships with intent to kidnap crew members. Hostages are taken to land, where they are held during ransom negotiations. Off the coast of Somalia, pirates steer hijacked vessels toward a coastline where they will hold both the vessel and its crew captive for an extended period of time until a ransom is paid. Somali pirates have also been known to use motherships to launch attacks farther out at sea. Private armed security teams (PASTs) on vessels, patrols by local and international actors, and efforts on land have had positive effects in combating the crime.

Armed Robbery

Armed robbery occurs when perpetrators are reportedly armed and attempt to steal ship stores and/or crew belongings. These incidents can occur on ships that are underway or anchored, both at anchorages or ports and at sea. In West Africa, failed hijackings or kidnap-for-ransom attacks may also lead to armed robberies.

Robbery

Robbery describes incidents where the perpetrators were reportedly unarmed and attempted to steal ship stores and/or crew belongings. This type of incident frequently occurs aboard ships that are at anchor or drifting close to a port or anchorage. These instances in general pose a minor threat to the crew.

Failed Attack/Boarding

Failed attacks and boardings refer to incidents in which pirates or armed robbers were thwarted by self-protective actions taken by crew, embarked security teams, or naval intervention.

Suspicious Approaches

Suspicious approaches include cases where a ship reports a close encounter or a direct approach from another vessel which is threatening in nature. The perceived threat is determined by the ship's master or PAST based on the actions of the approaching vessel, or from observation of weapons or ladders.

PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AGAINST SHIPS IN EAST AFRICA 2019

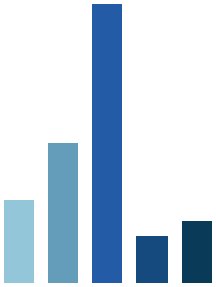
MAIN MESSAGES

- Twelve incidents of piracy and robbery of ships were recorded in East Africa in 2019. One incident of hijacking was reported, during which the Yemeni fishing dhow *Al Azham* was hijacked to be used as a mothership in attacks on two other fishing vessels, both of which were unsuccessful.
- Seven incidents of robbery and attempted robbery at ports and anchorages were reported: three at Nacala Anchorages, Mozambique; two at Kandla Port and Anchorage, India; one at Port of Diego Suarez in Antsiranana, Madagascar; and one at Mbaraki Wharf in Mombasa, Kenya.
- Suspicious approaches reported in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden are often not linked to piracy; rather, they are more closely associated with the conflict in Yemen, fishing vessels and trolling skiffs operating in the area, and smuggling activity.
- Several other maritime security incidents unrelated to piracy were reported in this region in 2019. An attack on a fishing whaler southwest of Mogadishu was claimed by al-Shabab. Vessels were intercepted and detained by Eritrean forces and the Houthis in the southern Red Sea, and by Iranian forces in the Strait of Hormuz. The Houthis also used remotely controlled water-borne improvised explosive devices against Saudi vessels, and sea mines in their port approaches. Tankers sustained damage from explosions in the Gulf of Oman and allegedly in the Red Sea, which were related to the conflict between Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia coalition.

OVERVIEW: EAST AFRICA INCIDENTS

EAST AFRICA

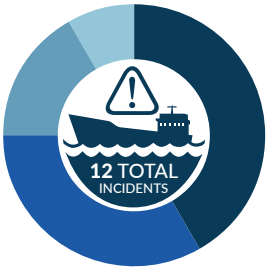
TOTAL INCIDENTS OF PIRACY/ROBBERY (2015 - 2019)



- [16] 2015
- [27] 2016
- [54] 2017
- [9] 2018
- [12] 2019

EAST AFRICA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY TYPE (2019)



- [5] Robbery
- [4] Failed Attack
- [2] Armed Robbery
- [1] Hijacking

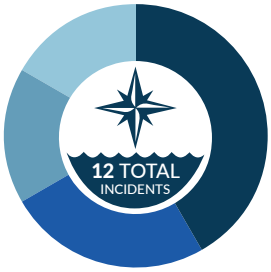
EAST AFRICA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY LOCATION (2019)

- [10] Territorial
- [2] International

EAST AFRICA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY VESSEL MOVEMENT (2019)



- [5] Anchored
- [3] Steaming
- [2] Berthed
- [2] Drifting

EAST AFRICA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY VESSEL TYPE (2019)

- [6] Tanker
- [2] Fishing Vessel
- [1] Bulk Carrier
- [1] Cargo Vessel
- [1] OSV
- [1] Dhow

EAST AFRICA

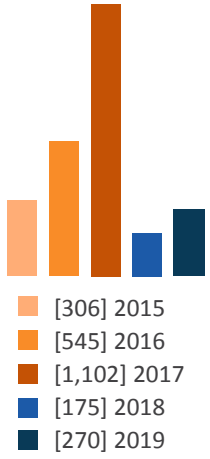
ROBBERY & ATTEMPTED ROBBERIES AT PORTS/ ANCHORAGES (2019)

- [3] Nacala Anchorages, Mozambique
- [2] Kandla Port & Anchorage, India
- [1] Port of Diego, Antsiranana, Madagascar
- [1] Mbaraki Wharf, Mombasa, Kenya

OVERVIEW: EAST AFRICA HUMAN COST

EAST AFRICA

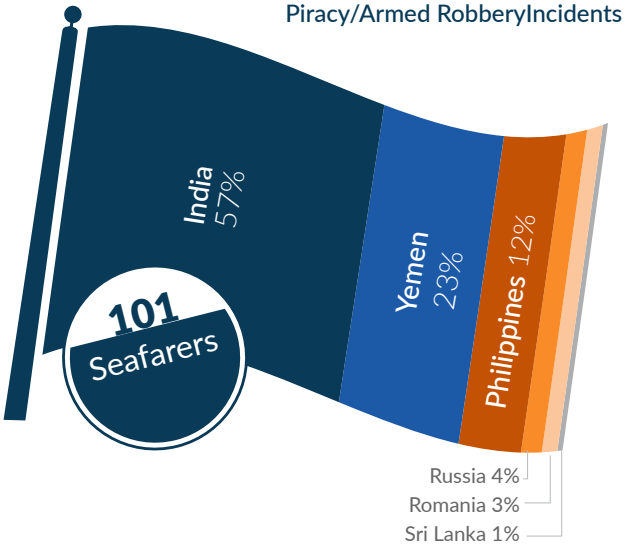
TOTAL SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY (2015 - 2019)



[306] 2015
[545] 2016
[1,102] 2017
[175] 2018
[270] 2019

EAST AFRICA

KNOWN NATIONALITIES of Seafarers Exposed to Piracy/Armed RobberyIncidents (2019)



Russia 4%
Romania 3%
Sri Lanka 1%

EAST AFRICA

SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY BY INCIDENT TYPE (2019)

[112] Robbery
[100] Failed Attack
[35] Armed Robbery
[23] Hijacking

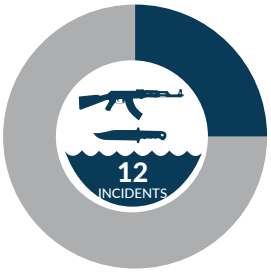
EAST AFRICA

SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY VIOLENCE (2019)

[60] Threatened
[23] Hostages (Long Term)

EAST AFRICA

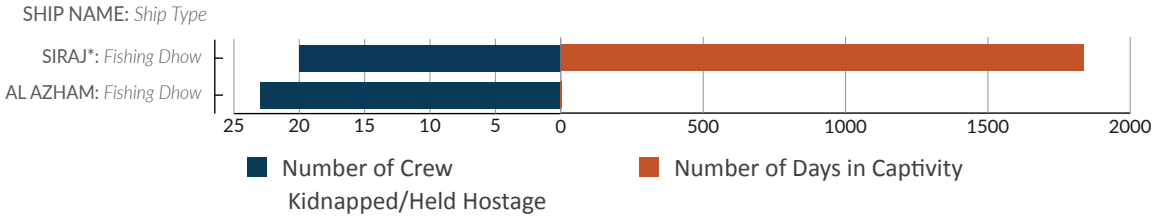
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS INVOLVING WEAPONS (2019)



[3] Guns
[9] Unknown

EAST AFRICA

CREW HELD HOSTAGE BY SHIP, NUMBER, AND LENGTH OF TIME (2019)



**Siraj* hijacking took place 03/23/2015

Piracy in the Western Indian Ocean

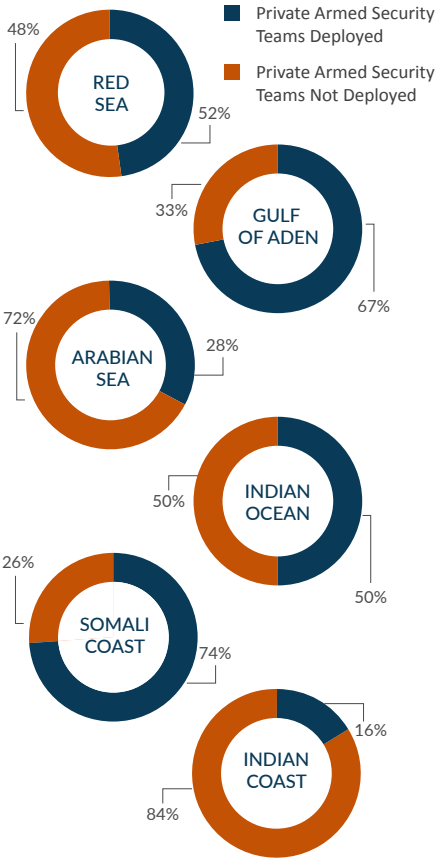
On 1 May 2019, the geographical boundaries of the high-risk area had been amended by the Round Table of international shipping associations and the Oil Companies International Marine Forum to reflect the current threat level off the coast of Somalia.[1] Masters of ships are encouraged to continue to implement best management practices (BMP5) for mitigating security threats in the region.[2]

The hijacking of the Yemeni fishing dhow *Al Azham*[3] on 19 April was the only hijacking reported off the coast of Somalia in 2019. Five armed men hijacked *Al Azham* near the village of Cadale, northeast of Mogadishu, Somalia. Two days later the *Al Azham* was used as a mothership in an attack on the Korean fishing vessel *Adria* 242 nm southeast of Mogadishu. *Adria* was approached by two skiffs, each of which had eight to ten men on board who were armed with automatic weapons and RPGs. The fishing vessel *Txori Argi* came to *Adria*'s defense, after which the pirates fired on them. The PAST on board *Txori Argi* returned fire, which led to the pirates' retreat.

EUNAVFOR dispatched a maritime patrol aircraft and conducted a search in the area, identifying *Al Azham* as the mothership. On 23 April, EUNAVFOR's flagship *ESPS Navarra* intercepted *Al Azham* and apprehended five suspected pirates. The 23 hostages aboard *Al Azham* were subsequently released.[4] The suspects were transferred to Seychellois authorities on 25 April 2019,[5] in accordance with a transfer agreement between Seychelles and the European Union with support from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), to stand trial in a court in Victoria, Seychelles. They appeared in court on 29 April 2019 and reappeared on 7 June 2019.[6] Two of the suspects had previously been arrested. One suspect was acquitted by the sitting supreme court judge in the Seychelles and repatriated by the UNODC to Mogadishu in December 2018. The second was convicted in the Seychelles, appealed the conviction, and was acquitted and repatriated to Somalia.[7]

Seychelles condemned the early release of 19 convicted pirates who had been sentenced in Seychelles to serve sentences of 30, 36, and 42 years for piracy. The pirates were transferred to 'Somaliland' in 2012 to serve the remainders of their

PERCENTAGE OF PRIVATE ARMED SECURITY TEAMS DEPLOYED ON SHIPS IN 2019, BY REGION



Source: EU NAVFOR

On 23 April, EU NAVFOR's flagship ESPS NAVARRA intercepted and boarded the hijacked dhow Al Azham. Photo: EU NAVFOR.

sentences,[8] but were released in August 2019 in breach of articles 5 and 7 of the memorandum of understanding between Somaliland and Seychelles. The Chair of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia expressed concern with regard to the decision and emphasized the importance of upholding agreements between parties in the region to prevent piracy from once again escalating in the Western Indian Ocean.[9]

Several suspicious approaches were reported in 2019 in the Gulf of Aden and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, where skiffs are often reported to break off some attacks at great distances. Ladders are also sighted at times at unlikely distances. In the absence of aggressive attacks or approaches, it is unlikely that these incidents are linked to piracy; rather, they are more closely associated with the conflict in Yemen, fishing vessels operating in the area, and smuggling activity.

Several maritime security incidents linked to conflict in the region impacted vessels in the western Indian Ocean, southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Oman in 2019.

Al-Shabab

An attack on 3 April 2019 on a fishing vessel southwest of Mogadishu, during which a fisherman was killed, was claimed by al-Shabab.[10] The Lower Shabelle area was seized by al-Shabab shortly before the attacks.[11] In 2018, attacks on ships by al-Shabab were also reported in this region. In a similar attack in July 2018 off Lower Shabelle, the landing craft *Alpha Kirawira* came under mortar attack near the Port of Baraawe in Somalia.[12], [13]

Conflict in Yemen

In recent months, several attacks off Yemen have been linked to the conflict in Yemen. In 2019, the Houthis targeted ships in the southern Red Sea with remotely controlled water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIEDs) and sea mines. Seizures of vessels by the Houthis were also reported.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)-led coalition forces reported that they intercepted and disarmed four WBIEDs launched from Yemen by Houthi rebels on the coast north of Hodeidah. The rebels turned local speed boats into WBIEDS.[14] Unconfirmed reports also stated that Houthis launched an attack on the port of Midi, Yemen, on 12 October 2019 and that eight soldiers from the KSA-led coalition and a reporter were killed in the attacks.[15] On 17 September 2019, a marine mine was disarmed near a port in Haimah, Hodeidah.[16]

The Houthis seized three vessels during two incidents. On 15 November 2019 the South Korean-flagged tug *Woongjin T-1100,* towing the oil platform *Woongjin G-16* with 16 crew members on board, strayed into Yemeni water due to bad weather. They were underway from Jeddah, KSA, to Berbera, Somalia, at the time. They were seized west of Kamaran Island, northwest of Hodeidah, by Houthi militants and taken to the port of Saleef in Yemen. On 17 November 2019, the Saudi Arabian tug *Rabigh 3* was seized west of Kamaran Island. The vessels were released on 20 November 2019.[17]

Eritrea

Two incidents initially reported as piracy in the southern Red Sea were connected to Eritrean forces. During the first, on 19 September 2019, the yacht *Silver Moon* was seized by six men in a speedboat, presumably Eritrean forces, near uninhabited Harmil Island, Eritrea. The yacht was released shortly after.[18]

Piracy and robbery of ships have traditionally been very rare on the Eritrean coast as the Eritrean defense force has the highest number of active military personnel in Africa, and although they are not substantial, does have naval patrol capabilities limited to coastal patrol and interception operations. The UAE also has a military presence in the country.[19] In the last decade, no hijackings were reported off the coast of Eritrea, but in 2011 more than a dozen suspicious approaches and attacks where armed men fired on vessels were reported off Assab.[20] It is not clear if they were connected to Somali piracy or Yemeni forces.

In the second incident, on 30 October 2019, two fishing vessels were boarded in the southern Red Sea near Yemen.[21] Some Yemeni fishermen have licenses to fish in Eritrean waters, and Yemeni fishermen without licenses are often intercepted by Eritrea's Coast Guard. It is estimated that 202 Yemeni fishermen were detained in Eritrea in 2018.[22]

Iran–KSA Coalition Conflict

The year 2019 was earmarked by tension between Iran and KSA in the Strait of Hormuz which caught several tankers in the middle experiencing damage by sea mines, explosions, and seizures.

On 12 May 2019, two tankers and two smaller vessels sustained damage from sea mines at the Port of Fujairah. The US blamed Iran for the attack, while Iran denied responsibility.[23]

Three tankers, *Front Altair*, *Kokuka Courageous*[24], and *Sabiti,*[25] experienced explosions between June and October 2019 off Iran and Saudi Arabia, most likely from limpet mines attached to the ships' hulls.

Three British-owned tankers were seized off Iran by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) in 2019. The Panamanian-flagged product tanker *Riah,* seized on 13 July 2019 in the Strait of Hormuz, was released on 25 July 2019. The British-flagged tanker *Stena Impero* was seized on 19 July 2019[26] and released on 23 September 2019.[27] The Liberian-flagged crude oil tanker *Mesdar* was seized on 19 July 2019 and released a couple of hours later.

Robbery and Attempted Robbery at Ports and Anchorages

Seven robberies and attempted robberies at ports and anchorages were reported in the region in 2019, all resulting in minor theft. In 2019, two robberies and an attempted robbery were reported at Nacala's outer and inner anchorages in Mozambique, where robbers stole ships' stores. In 2018 and 2019, incidents at these anchorages took place between 20:30 and 23:55 LT. Two or three robbers usually approach in a small boat, boarding via the anchor chain and hawse pipe (the pipe through which an anchor cable passes).

Siraj Hostages

One of the remaining Iranian hostages from the fishing vessel Siraj was released on 21 September 2019, after years in captivity. The Hostage Support Partnership (HSP), conducted the negotiations for his release with the local community and delivered him safely to the Iranian Embassy in Ethiopia. The Siraj Captain had become very ill and was released on humanitarian grounds.[28] The Iranian fishing vessel *Siraj*, along with another fishing vessel, *Jaber*, had been hijacked by a criminal gang at Ceel Huur in the Mudug region of Somalia on 23 March 2015. In August 2015, *Jaber* slipped its moorings and escaped. Since then, eight crew members of the *Siraj* have died in captivity and eight have been released.[29]

Three hostages from the *Siraj* remain in captivity. In November 2019, the pirate group holding them, led by Karani, was attacked by a rival group in Hobyo. According to the Hostage Support Partnership (HSP), two of the three hostages were seriously injured during the attack. At the time of last contact with the HSP, their situation was dire. The pirates are contacting the families of the hostages directly with ransom demands, but the families are in no financial position to pay. The International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network are supporting the families of the hostages and supported the release of the hostage with funding for travel from the Piracy Survivor Family Fund. [30]

Prosecutions

The INTERPOL database[31] of piracy suspects produced some results identifying piracy suspects arriving as refugees in Europe and the US. One such suspect is Abdi Yusuf Hassan, who entered the US in New York on 15 September 2015.[32] He was charged on 21 February 2019 in the US District Court Eastern District of New York[33] with kidnapping and other counts for his alleged role in the abduction of the journalist Michael Scott Moore, who was kidnapped in January 2012 in Somalia. Mohamed Tahlil Mohamed is listed as a co-defendant in the case. Moore was released on 23 September 2014 on payment of a ransom. Moore was held hostage by the pirate group on the fishing vessel *Naham 3* for some time. The *Naham 3* was hijacked off Hobyo, Somalia, on 26 March 2012.[34]

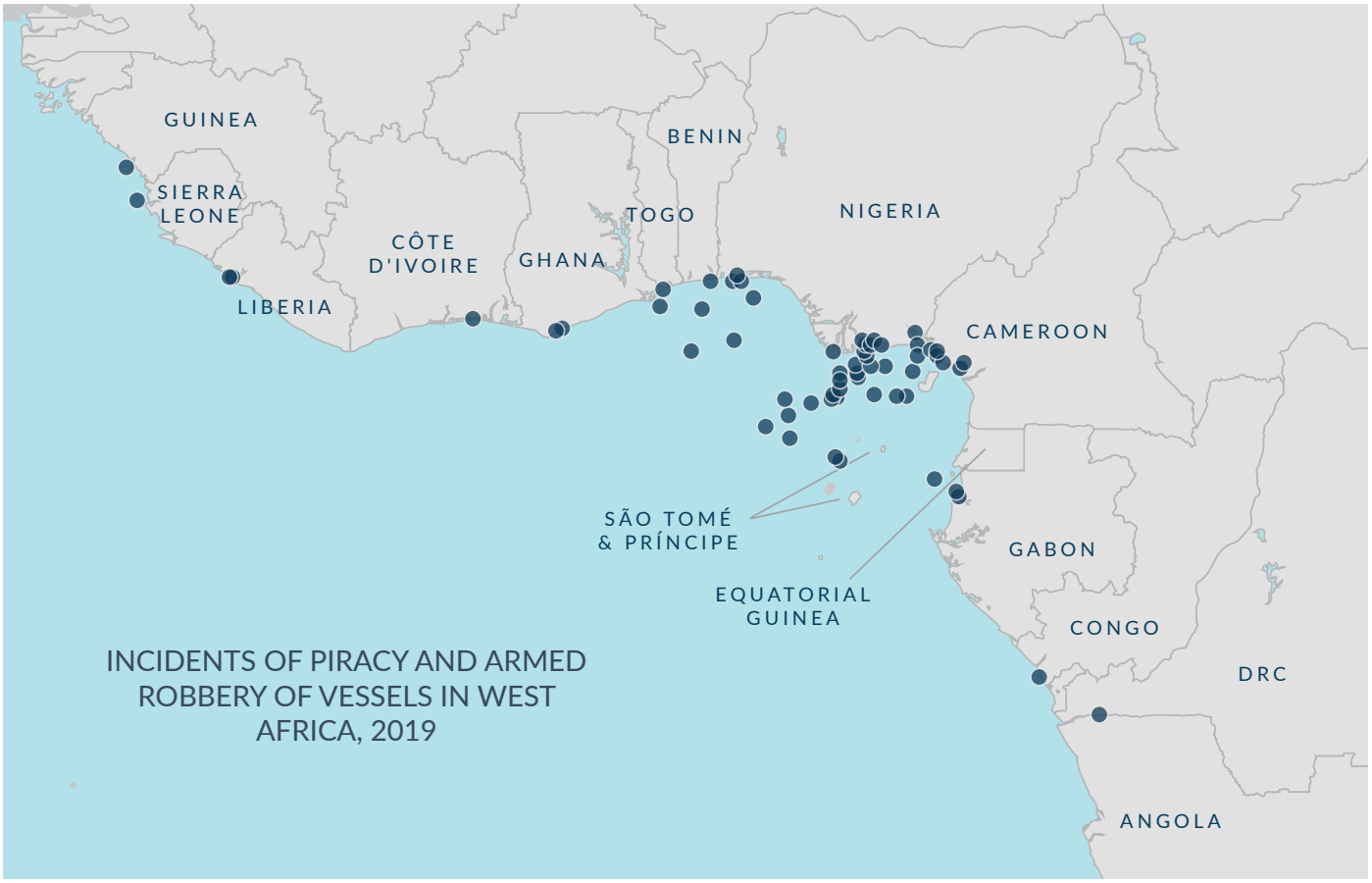
The UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme in East Africa

The UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme has had several initiatives in the region to counter the resurgence of piracy and to build Somalia's maritime law enforcement capabilities, such as training for prison officers as well as vocational training for inmates. Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) training for Somali boarding teams in Berbera, Bosasso, and Mogadishu were also delivered.[35]

PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AGAINST SHIPS IN WEST AFRICA 2019

MAIN MESSAGES

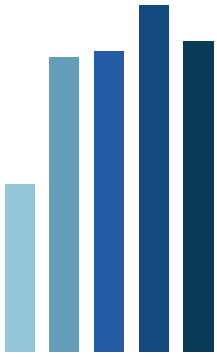
- The Gulf of Guinea was the area most affected by piracy and maritime robbery worldwide in 2019. Although fewer incidents were reported compared to 2018, a 60 percent increase in the number of crew members kidnapped was reported in 2019. Nigeria is at the epicenter of this problem in the Gulf of Guinea, and as in recent years, kidnapped crew members were held hostage in the Niger Delta in 2019.
- In 2019, the range of attacks with the intent to hijack vessels or kidnap crew extended from Côte d'Ivoire in the west to Gabon in the south and as far as 170 nautical miles off the coast. Attacks were often violent: five deaths of crew members and navy personnel were recorded.
- Four vessels were hijacked, and 164 crew members were kidnapped during 30 incidents. Crew were kidnapped from vessels off Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Nigeria, Togo, and Cameroon. A high concentration of violent incidents was recorded off Brass and Bonny, Nigeria, and off Idenau and Douala Anchorage, Cameroon.
- In total, 43 incidents were reported at ports and at anchorages. High numbers of incidents of robbery and attempted robbery were also reported at Lagos Anchorages, Nigeria. Two hijackings were reported at Lomé Anchorage, Togo, and crew members were kidnapped from anchorages at Bonny, Nigeria; Cotonou, Benin; and Douala and Limboh, Cameroon.
- In total, 26 suspects were arrested for piracy and armed robbery in the region in 2019; 8 suspects were arrested for robbery of vessels in Nigeria and Ghana, and 18 for attempted hijacking off Equatorial Guinea and Togo.



OVERVIEW: WEST AFRICA INCIDENTS

WEST AFRICA

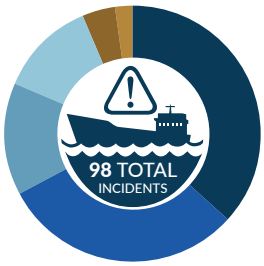
TOTAL INCIDENTS OF PIRACY/ROBBERY (2015 - 2019)



- [54] 2015
- [95] 2016
- [97] 2017
- [112] 2018
- [98] 2019

WEST AFRICA

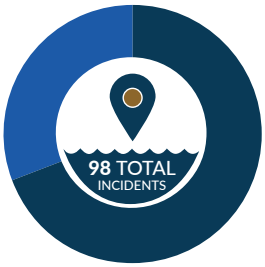
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY TYPE (2019)



- [36] Failed Attack
- [30] Kidnapping
- [14] Armed Robbery
- [12] Robbery
- [4] Hijacking
- [2] Suspicious Approach

WEST AFRICA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY LOCATION (2019)

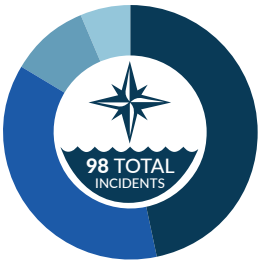


- [68] Territorial
- [30] International

The Gulf of Guinea was the area most affected by piracy and maritime robbery worldwide in 2019. Although fewer incidents were reported compared to 2018, there was a 60 percent increase in the number of crew members reported kidnapped.

WEST AFRICA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY VESSEL MOVEMENT (2019)



- [46] Steaming
- [36] Anchored
- [10] Berthed
- [6] Drifting

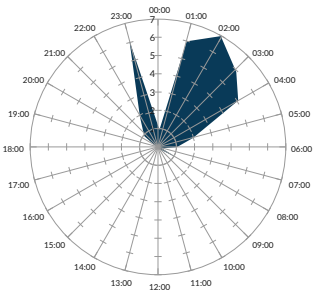
WEST AFRICA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY VESSEL TYPE (2019)

- [40] Tanker
- [11] Fishing Vessel
- [10] Bulk Carrier
- [10] OSV
- [7] Cargo Ship
- [7] Container Ship
- [6] Passenger Boat
- [4] Ro-Ro/Landing Craft
- [3] Other

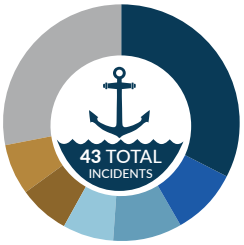
WEST AFRICA

TIME OF ROBBERIES & ATTEMPTED ROBBERIES AT PORTS/ANCHORAGES



WEST AFRICA

ROBBERY & ATTEMPTED ROBBERIES AT PORTS/ANCHORAGES (2019)

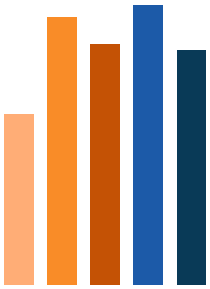


- [14] Lagos Port Terminal & Anchorages,Nigeria
- [4] Port of Douala and Anchorage, Cameroon
- [4] Onne Port Terminal, Nigeria
- [3] Conakry Anchorage, Guinea
- [3] Pointe Noire Anchorages, Republic of the Congo
- [3] Sekondi Port & Takoradi Anchorage, Ghana
- [12] Other

OVERVIEW: WEST AFRICA HUMAN COST

WEST AFRICA

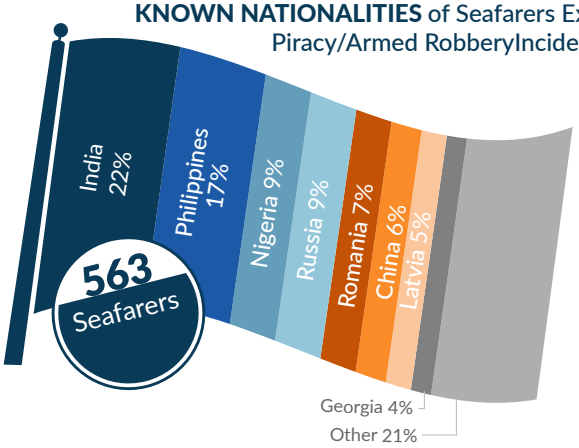
TOTAL SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY (2015 - 2019)



- [1,225] 2015
- [1,921] 2016
- [1,726] 2017
- [2,012] 2018
- [1,689] 2019

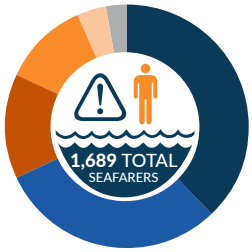
WEST AFRICA

KNOWN NATIONALITIES of Seafarers Exposed to Piracy/Armed RobberyIncidents (2019)



WEST AFRICA

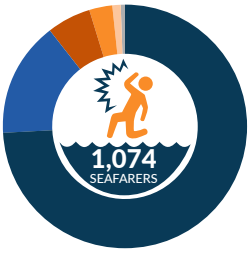
SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY BY INCIDENT TYPE (2019)



- [642] Failed Attack
- [510] Kidnapping
- [235] Armed Robbery
- [194] Robbery
- [64] Hijacking
- [44] Suspicious Approach

WEST AFRICA

SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY VIOLENCE (2019)

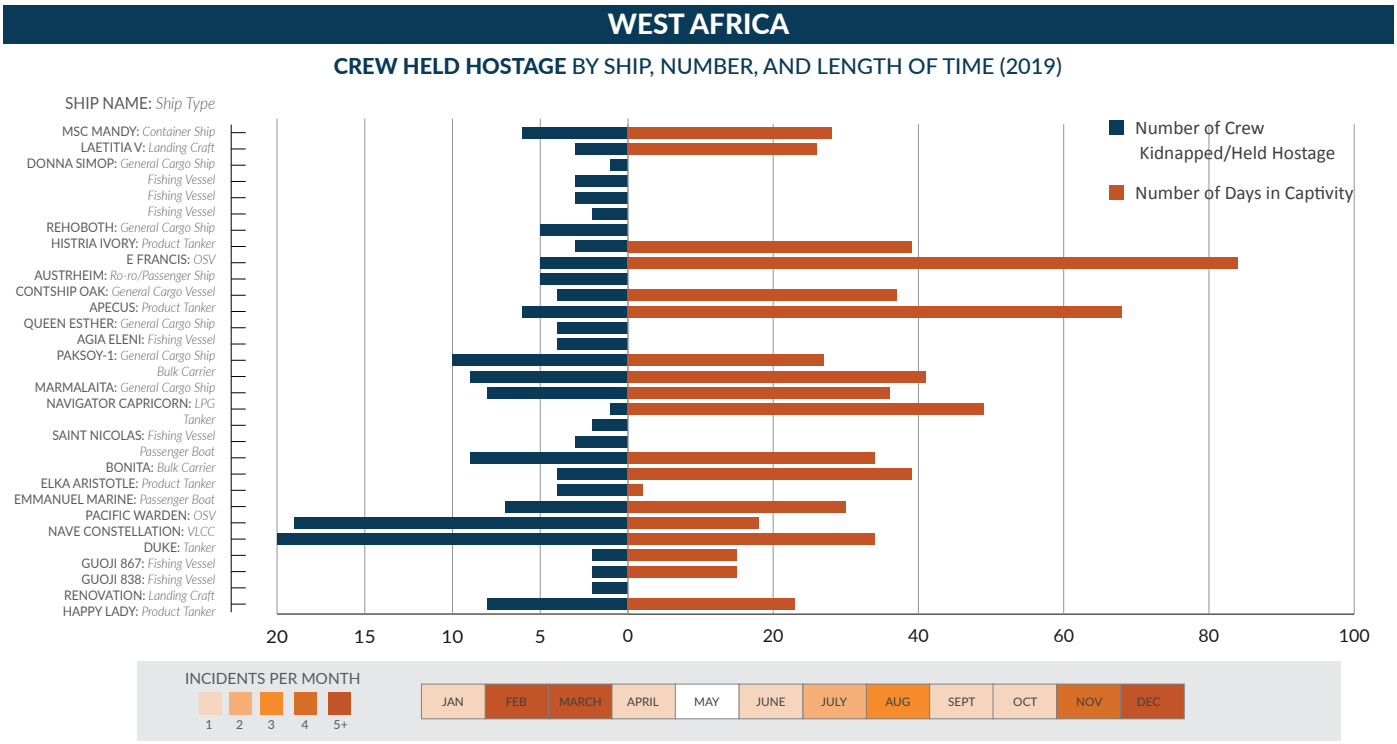


- [798] Threatened
- [164] Kidnapped
- [62] Hostage (Short Term)
- [33] Hostage (Long Term)
- [12] Injured
- [5] Killed

WEST AFRICA

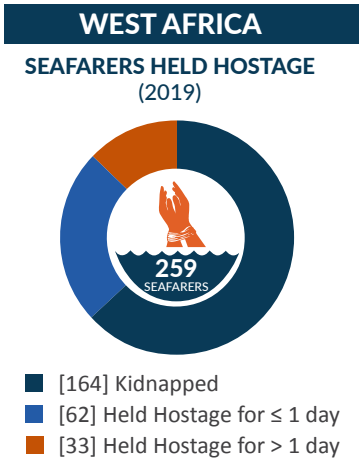
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS INVOLVING WEAPONS (2019)

- [62] Guns
- [2] Knives/Machetes
- [1] Metal Pipe
- [1] Rocket Propelled Grenade
- [32] Unknown



West Africa: Crew Held Hostage

- **Hostages kept for one day or less on a hijacked vessel: 62**
- **Hostages held for more than one day on a hijacked vessel: 33** (Captivity, where release could be confirmed, ranged from one to four days.)
- **Crew members kidnapped: 164** (A considerable increase. Durations of captivity ranged from 2 days to more than 84 days for cases where release could be confirmed.) The average time of captivity was 34 days.



Trends: West Africa

In 2019, 98 incidents of piracy and robbery of vessels were recorded in the Gulf of Guinea, compared to 112 incidents in 2018. Although fewer total incidents were reported, slightly more hijacking and kidnapping incidents were reported in 2019, and a 60 percent increase in kidnapping of crew were reported in 2019.[36] A lower number of unsuccessful attacks were reported in 2019, as pirates and armed robbers became more effective in their operations.

Hijacking

In contrast to kidnapping incidents, the highest concentration of successful hijacking incidents in the last ten years in the Gulf of Guinea occurred off Togo and Benin.

Four vessels were hijacked in 2019 in the Gulf of Guinea—three tankers and a tug. The tanker *Maria Soltin* was hijacked off Lagos, Nigeria;[37] the tug *Charis* off Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea;[38] and the tanker *G Dona I* at Lomé Anchorage, Togo.[39] There is some discrepancy around the location of the hijacking of the tanker *Danman,* which was somewhere between Lomé, Togo, and the Côte d'Ivoire border with Ghana.[40] The commonality between the hijacked vessels is that they are all flagged in Gulf of Guinea countries—Nigeria (3) and Togo (1)—and where it could be determined, managed by Gulf of Guinea companies. This is likely because local vessels' routines and operations are known to criminals in the area.

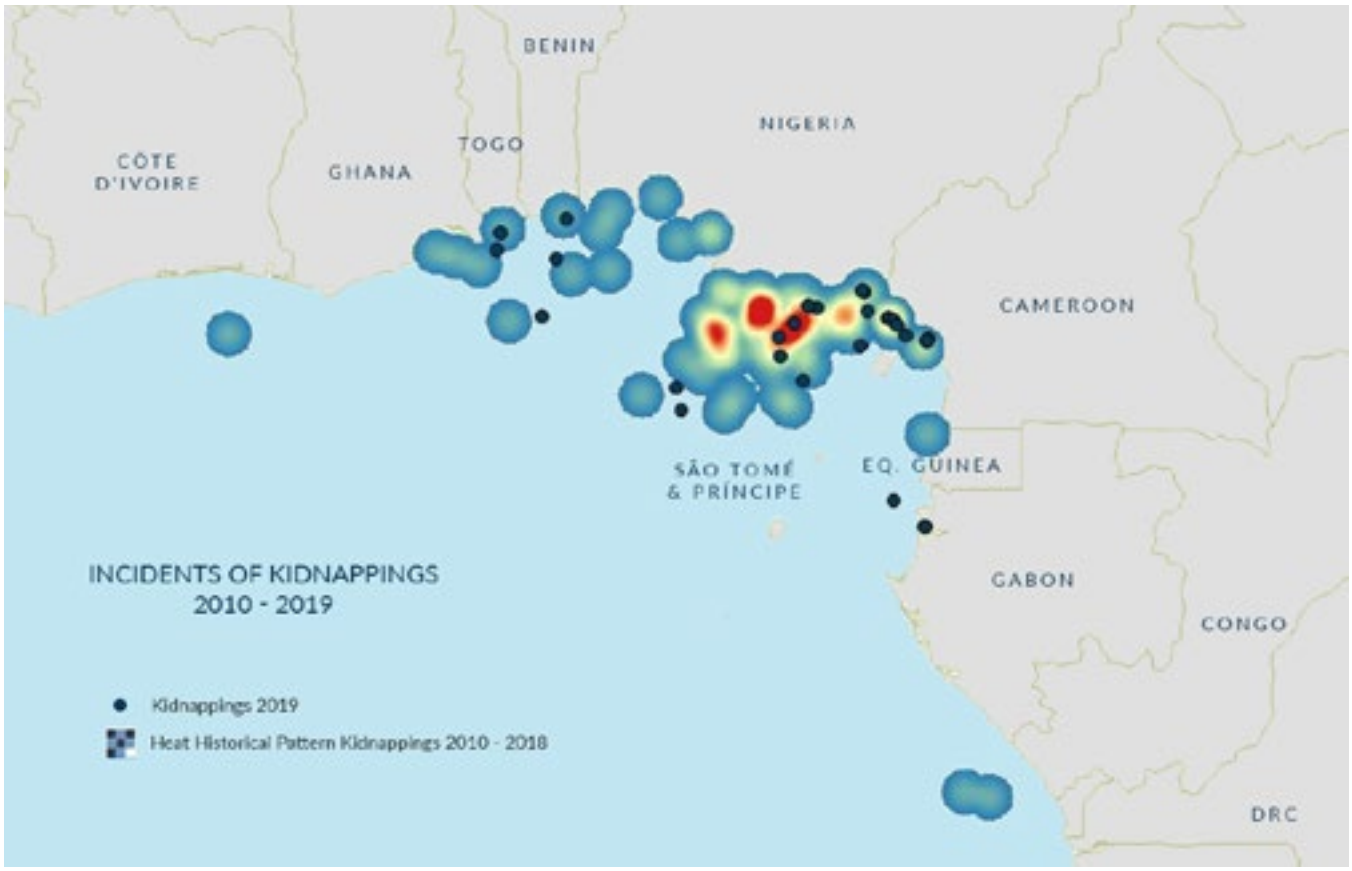
In recent years vessels have been hijacked to steal oil cargo, to serve as motherships to attack other vessels, to ransom the vessel and crew, or to rob the crew. Cargo is often transferred to smaller tankers. Vessels are hijacked while at anchor at anchorages, while drifting, or while underway. Hijackers attack vessels from speedboats in groups of up to 18 pirates. They often shoot at the bridge with automatic weapons. Communication and navigation equipment are destroyed, vessels ransacked, and crew possessions stolen during the attacks.

None of the three tanker hijackings in 2019 resulted in oil theft or ransom. Pirates abandoned *Maria Soltin* on 5 April 2019, four days after hijacking it, upon sighting an approaching Spanish navy vessel. Crew property was, however, stolen. The Togolese navy intercepted the tanker *G Dona 1,* hijacked on 12 May 2019, and arrested six Nigerian and two Togolese pirates. The tug, *Charis,* was hijacked in May 2019 to be used as a mothership to attack the heavy load carrier *Blue Marlin*. The tanker *Danman,* hijacked on 12 August 2019, was abandoned after it ran out of fuel.

Spanish patrol boats from the Serviola in a joint operation with the Guinean frigate Wele Nzas, approaching the semi-submersible heavy lift ship, Blue Marlin boarded by pirates on 5 May 2019. Ten pirates were arrested. Photo: Ministry of Defence Spain.

Kidnapping

In the last decade kidnapping incidents have been concentrated off Brass and Bonny, Nigeria. In 2019, 30 kidnapping incidents were recorded in the Gulf of Guinea from as far as Togo to Gabon in the south. At least half of the successful kidnapping incidents were on vessels that have a permanent presence in the Gulf of Guinea, such as cargo ships, coastal tankers, OSVs, fishing vessels, and ro-ro passenger vessels. The other half were on visiting commercial vessels—tankers, container ships, bulk carriers, and cargo vessels. Indigenous companies also do not often employ PAST due to the huge associated cost, which averages between $30,000 and $50,000 per trip.[41] Two-thirds of incidents in the Gulf of Guinea were recorded in territorial waters, of which almost a third (9)



were recorded in the territorial waters of Cameroon, most likely as it borders Nigeria and is in close proximity to the Niger Delta. Incidents in Cameroon are concentrated off Idenau and at Douala Anchorage. Five of the kidnapping incidents off Cameroon were from fishing vessels.

Nigerian pirate groups operate and find safe haven in the Niger Delta, with several kidnapped crew members held in captivity in the Delta in 2019. Crew from the bulk carrier *Bonita*, the very large crude carrier (VLCC) *Nave Constellation,* and the tanker *Duke*, among others, were held captive in the Delta during 2019.

A hostage's account of the attack and kidnapping of 18 Indians and one Turkish national from VLCC Nave Constellation on 3 December 2019, 66 nm south of Bonny Offshore Terminal, held some interesting detail, though the accuracy is hard to verify. The vessel, with a freeboard of 8.4 meters and a crew of 26, was fully laden at the time of the attack and was outbound to India at 13.3 knots.[42] [43] According to this crew member, armed security was hired to escort the vessel from Bonny Offshore Terminal but they never arrived and the vessel departed without them on 3 December. The slow speed, low freeboard, and absence of armed security all left the Nave Constellation vulnerable to a pirate attack.

Just after 7:00 p.m. six armed pirates approached and boarded the vessel with a ladder. They stole the contents of the safe in the captain's cabin and kidnapped the 18 crew members and the wife of one of the crew. The pirate boat took several hours to reach a river, where they waited until dark. Due to the high number of hostages taken in this event and the kidnapping incident involving the tanker *Duke* later in December 2019, it was speculated that a mothership was used in the kidnappings by the pirates. In this account, it was indicated that the pirates covered the hostages with a tarpaulin as they came closer to shore, making it likely that a large speedboat was used as a pirate vessel. They arrived at a camp where 40 pirates were present and were housed in makeshift sheds. On the second day of captivity, a rival gang tried to steal the hostages and a firefight ensued. The hostages were instructed to run. For some time they changed locations every night. On the eleventh day they reached a place where they stayed until the end of their captivity. At the time of their release on 21 December 2019, the hostages were dropped near Port Harcourt; from there the military escorted them to a hotel. They were held captive for 18 days by the pirate group. Three of the crew contracted malaria during captivity.[44]

Locally operated general cargo vessels are targeted in the Calabar River in Nigeria. Crew members of three vessels were kidnapped in 2019. Some vessels are also targeted more than once. On 9 February 2019 one crew member was kidnapped from the Cameroonian-flagged general cargo ship *Donna Simop/Dona Samoa* close to Parrot Island on the Calabar River in Onne, Nigeria.[45] Four crew members and a passenger had been kidnapped from the same vessel in September 2017 close to the same location.[46] The general cargo ship *Queen Esther*, also a Cameroonian-flagged vessel, was attacked on the river on 10 June 2019. Four Cameroonian crew members were kidnapped.[47] The São Tomé and Príncipe–flagged general cargo ship *Rehoboth* was targeted on 2 March 2019 in the Calabar River, 8 nm south of Calabar. In another kidnapping incident off the coast of Calabar, four Cameroonian nationals and a Nigerian were kidnapped from the ro-ro passenger vessel *Austrheim*.[48] The *Austrheim* regularly ferries passengers between Tiko, Cameroon, and Calabar, Nigeria. At the time of the incident there were 44 passengers and 9 crew on board. It is likely that the same group is involved in these kidnappings.

Fishing vessels are targeted off Idenau, Cameroon. Seven fishing vessels were attacked in this area in 2019. Fourteen fishermen were kidnapped from five vessels. Five of the seven vessels are operated by Asian fishing companies flagged to and operating from Gulf of Guinea countries. This is a pattern repeated from 2018. Eighteen Cameroonian and Chinese fishermen were kidnapped from five Cameroonian fishing vessels off Idenau, Cameroon, on 23 November 2018, as well. These incidents are likely to have been executed by the same group. Crew members were also kidnapped from cargo ships and bulk carriers at Douala Port and Anchorage in 2019. Four crew members were kidnapped from the general cargo vessel *Contship Oak* at Douala Anchorage, Cameroon in March 2019.[49]

Nigerian authorities argue that kidnapping incidents are exaggerated and are often related to other crimes, such as oil smuggling. They claimed that the kidnapping of six of the crew from the tanker *Apecus* on 19 April 2019 was staged.[50] The crew members were held in the Niger Delta and released on 26 June 2019 after a payment of ransom. The Nigerian Navy claims that the incident was connected to conflict between parties in an illegal oil transaction involving Osimili Adah, the managing director of Petrogress, Inc., in Nigeria. Allegedly the plan was to move stolen crude oil with the Petrogress tankers *MT Apecus* and *MT Invictus* from Nigeria to Ghana. Adah and 17 accomplices were arrested for smuggling.[51]

Several aspects of this case support the Nigerian Navy's version of events. On 17 January 2015 the product tanker *MT Mariam* was hijacked off Bayelsa, Nigeria, after which its cargo was transferred to the pirate vessel *MT Invictus*.[52] *MT Takoradi* (name changed to *Optimus* in 2014), another vessel of the same company, was held in connection with illegal bunkering in 2012.

According to several independent sources, one of the other crimes that leads to piracy and armed robbery on locally operated vessels in Nigeria is extortion schemes resulting in the kidnapping of crew when owners fail to pay protection money, or "blessings," as it is locally known.

The Nigerian Federal Executive Council's Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure, or Deep Blue Project, aims to reduce piracy and armed robbery of ships and other crimes in Nigeria's territorial waters and the Gulf of Guinea. New assets, including six interceptor boats, were procured for the project.[53]

The "Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security off the Coast of West Africa including the Gulf of Guinea (BMP West Africa)," published in March 2020, aims to help ships plan voyages and detect, avoid, deter, delay, and report attacks.[54]

Robberies at Ports and Anchorages

Although most incidents at ports and anchorages in the region can be classified as small-scale theft, violent robberies, hijackings, and kidnappings were also reported in 2019. Vessels were hijacked at Lomé Anchorage, Togo, and crew members were kidnapped from anchorages at Bonny, Nigeria; Cotonou, Benin; and Douala and Limboh, Cameroon.

Lagos Anchorages and Port Complex

The Lagos Port Complex saw an increase in traffic early in 2019, which further increased congestion in port; a total of 213 ships with a total tonnage of 6,778,397 berthed in Apapa and Lagos ports.[55] Longer times spent at anchor while waiting to enter congested ports lead to increased rates of robbery at ports and at anchorages.

In 2019, the number of incidents at Lagos Anchorages (11) and the Lagos Port Complex (3) was lower than in the previous year, with incidents at the port complex totaling less than a third of the number of 2018 incidents. While only one of the robberies at the anchorages was successful, the three robberies at the port complex were all successful. Crew members were assaulted during two of the armed robberies at the port complex, while robbers fired at the crew during an attack at Apapa Bulk Oil Plant. At Lagos

Port, robbers gained access to vessels through the open waterfront using small boats and canoes, and boarded vessels with a rope attached to a hook.

The Lagos Secure Anchorage Area (SAA), located 10 nautical miles southwest of the entrance to the Lagos port channel, was an initiative to counter armed robbery of vessels waiting off Lagos to enter port. The SAA was operated by a private company, OMS Limited, on behalf of the navy. Security at the anchorage was effective, but came at a cost to shipowners[56] ($2,500 for the first day and $1,500 thereafter).[57] In October 2019, the Nigerian Ports Authority decided to dismantle the SAA.[58] What will become of OMS Limited's personnel after the dismantling of the SAA is a concern.

At Lagos Anchorages, vessels are usually boarded by between three and ten robbers armed with knives who approach in small wooden boats at night or when vessels are engaged in ship-to-ship operations. Robbers board via the anchor chain and hawse pipe or by a hook attached to a rope. Fuel and ship property are stolen. Crew may be threatened in such incidents.

Onne Port, Nigeria

The Federal Ocean Terminal and the Federal Lighter Terminal located at Onne Port in Rivers State recorded one robbery and three attempted robbery incidents in 2019. Robbers gain access to vessels berthed at the terminals by using speedboats or canoes fitted with outboard engines, then steal ship property. The actual number of incidents is likely higher than reported. According to vessel masters, port access control and watchkeeping at night need improving. Four suspects were arrested while robbing two vessels at Onne in 2019.

Douala Port and Anchorage, Cameroon

In August 2019, the government of Cameroon announced that placement of free armed security guards on board vessels at the Douala anchorage would be available after 21 crew members were kidnapped there during three attacks in 2019.[59] Two general cargo vessels and a bulk carrier were targeted at night.

Conakry Anchorage, Guinea

Three night-time robberies took place at Conakry Anchorage in 2019. A bulk carrier, product tanker, and container ship were targeted. During two of the incidents, four robbers armed with guns boarded and took the crew hostage, ransacked crew cabins, and stole ship stores, cash, and crew possessions. The master was injured during one of these incidents, and in another, crew members were locked in a cabin before the robbers escaped.

Pointe-Noire Anchorage, Congo

During three robberies at night at Pointe-Noire Anchorage, Congo, ship stores were stolen. None of these incidents were violent.

Sekondi Port and Takoradi Anchorage, Ghana

An increase in robberies was seen at Takoradi Anchorage beginning in early 2019, half of which were successful. On 23 March 2019, laptops valued at $4,200 were stolen from the UK-flagged pipe-layer *Seven Pacific*. A blue speedboat with the inscription *PM Princess Marine* was involved in the theft, as it was seen in proximity to the vessel at the time of the robbery. According to the owner of *PM Princess Marine*, she rented the boat out early in March 2019 to be used to supply food and drinks to vessels at the Takoradi Anchorage. Two suspects have since been arrested, but three suspects remain at large. It is suspected that the group was also responsible for other robberies at the anchorage.[60] No robberies have been reported since the arrests.

Cotonou Anchorage, Benin

On 2 November 2019, nine of the crew were kidnapped from the bulk carrier *Bonita* while it was at anchor waiting to enter port to discharge cargo. Five incidents were also recorded in 2018 at the same anchorage during which two tankers were hijacked. As the method of attack was so similar, the same group was likely responsible for all attacks. In November 2019 Benin's government decided to provide armed security onboard vessels at Cotonou.[61] In April 2019, the government announced the establishment of a National Center for Maritime Control to house a surveillance system incorporating coastal radar, once acquired, to safeguard the nation's land and sea borders and fight against piracy and other maritime crime in its EEZ.[62]

Arrests And Prosecutions

Over the past several years, few criminals have been arrested for piracy and robbery of vessels in Nigeria; even less evidence of successful prosecutions is available. In June 2019 President Buhari signed the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act 2019 into law.[63] The hope is that the bill will encourage arrests and facilitate the prosecution of pirates in Nigeria. The UNODC, in cooperation with INTERPOL, aided criminal justice practitioners in the areas of technical support and capacity building during simulated piracy trials in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo.[64]

On 12 May 2019 the Togolese navy intercepted the hijacked chemical tanker *G Dona 1* and arrested six suspects from Nigeria, and two from Togo. The suspects will be prosecuted in a special court in Togo.[65]

Piracy suspect Itoruboemi Benson Lobia, allegedly the kingpin behind the kidnapping of crew from the *FWN Rapide* in April 2018, was extradited from South Africa to the Netherlands in early December 2019. He was arrested at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg in November 2018.[66]

Robbery of Boats in Rivers State

According to a community leader at a stakeholder meeting, criminals are operating from Oluama community in the Asari-Toru Local Government Area.[67] From there they attack deep-water and artisanal fishing and passenger boats in the riverine areas of Bonny, Abonnema, Bille, Bakana,[68] Okrika, Port Harcourt, Andoni, Opopo, Degema, and Soku in Rivers State. Robbers attack passenger boats in this state, stealing property, cash, fish, and at times even the boat engines. People have been shot at, injured, and killed, and women fishers were sexually assaulted. During two incidents, two police officers, a boat driver, and four immigration officers were kidnapped. The Nigerian Navy rescued the immigration officers on 13 November 2019.[69] Some of these attacks may be politically motivated as many victims are politicians and members of security forces. The community has called for daily patrols of the waterways.

PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AGAINST SHIPS IN ASIA 2019

MAIN MESSAGES

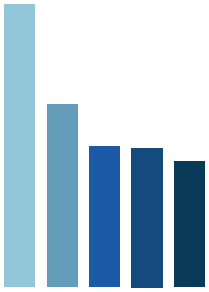
- In 2019, Stable Seas recorded 89 incidents in Asia, which is nine fewer than the number reported in 2018.
- Kidnapping incidents remained at six in 2019. All of these kidnappings were from fishing vessels; three off Sabah, Malaysia, and three off the Bangladeshi portion of the Sundarbans.
- The kidnappings of 12 fishermen from two fishing vessels off Sabah, Malaysia, in 2019 emphasize that the threat of kidnapping in the Sulu and Celebes seas remains. Crews of vessels are urged to remain vigilant when transiting the area, and when possible, to re-route ships away from this area. Best management practices to deter piracy and kidnapping should also be implemented.
- The number of robberies and attempted robberies dropped significantly in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS) between 2016 and 2018, mainly due to an increase in patrols by littoral states. Seven incidents were recorded in 2018. Of concern is the high number of robberies and attempted robberies reported in the SOMS in 2019. Seventeen incidents of robbery and attempted robbery of tugs towing barges were recorded, and one of a dredger towed by a barge, with more incidents recorded close to Tanjung Piai, Johor. Attacks on 16 bulk carriers and tankers while underway in the SOMS were also recorded.
- Almost half of robbery and attempted robbery incidents reported in Asia in 2019 occurred when vessels were at anchor. While high numbers of incidents in previous years were reported at Muara Berau Anchorage, Samarinda, Indonesia, and Chittagong/Kutubdia Anchorages, Bangladesh, no incidents were reported at either of these locations in 2019. In total, 37 incidents were reported at ports and anchorages. Six incidents were reported at Belawan Port and Anchorage, Indonesia.
- At least 11 suspects were arrested by law enforcement officers of Indonesia and Malaysia in 2019 for crimes related to piracy and robbery of vessels.

OVERVIEW: INCIDENTS IN ASIA 2019

In 2019, 89 incidents of piracy and armed robbery were recorded in Asia. For the purposes of this report, Stable Seas defines the Asia region as the area from the eastern coast of India to the Banda Sea in Indonesia. Incidents occurring on the west coast of India have been included in the East Africa region of this report.

ASIA

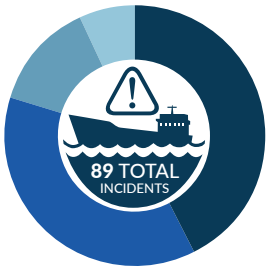
TOTAL INCIDENTS OF PIRACY/ROBBERY
(2015 - 2019)



- [199] 2015
- [129] 2016
- [99] 2017
- [98] 2018
- [89] 2019

ASIA

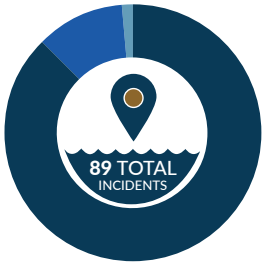
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS
BY TYPE (2019)



- [38] Failed Attack
- [33] Robbery
- [12] Armed Robbery
- [6] Kidnapping

ASIA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS
BY LOCATION (2019)

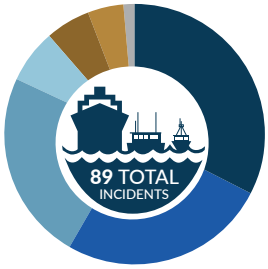


- [78] Territorial
- [10] International
- [1] Internal Waters

While incidents of piracy and armed robbery in Asia dropped slightly from 2018, kidnapping remains a threat in the Sulu and Celebes seas, and nearly half of robbery and attempted robberies occured when vessels were at anchor.

ASIA

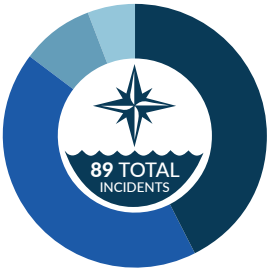
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS
BY VESSEL TYPE (2019)



- [29] Tanker
- [23] Bulk Carrier
- [21] Tugboat
- [6] Fishing Vessel
- [5] Container Ship
- [4] Cargo Vessel
- [1] Yacht

ASIA

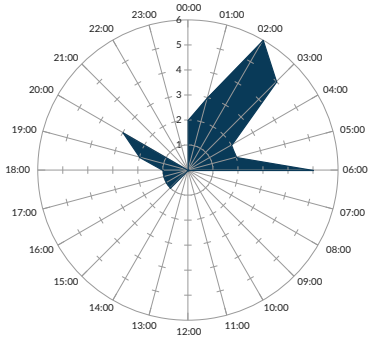
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS
BY VESSEL MOVEMENT (2019)



- [38] Steaming
- [38] Anchored
- [8] Berthed
- [5] Drifting

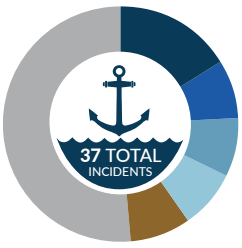
ASIA

TIME OF ROBBERIES & ATTEMPTED ROBBERIES AT PORTS/ANCHORAGES



ASIA

ROBBERY & ATTEMPTED ROBBERIES
AT PORTS/ANCHORAGES (2019)



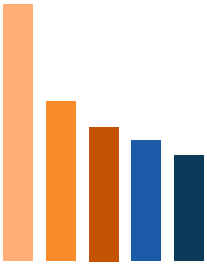
- [6] Belawan Port and Anchorage, Indonesia
- [3] Taboneo Anchorage, Indonesia
- [3] Cigading Port and Anchorages, Indonesia
- [3] Batangas Alpha Anchorage, Philippines
- [3] Manila Port and Anchorages, Philippines
- [19] Other

OVERVIEW: ASIA HUMAN COST

A total of 1,503 seafarers were exposed to piracy and armed robbery in Asia in 2019, which is a 13 percent decrease from 2018.

ASIA

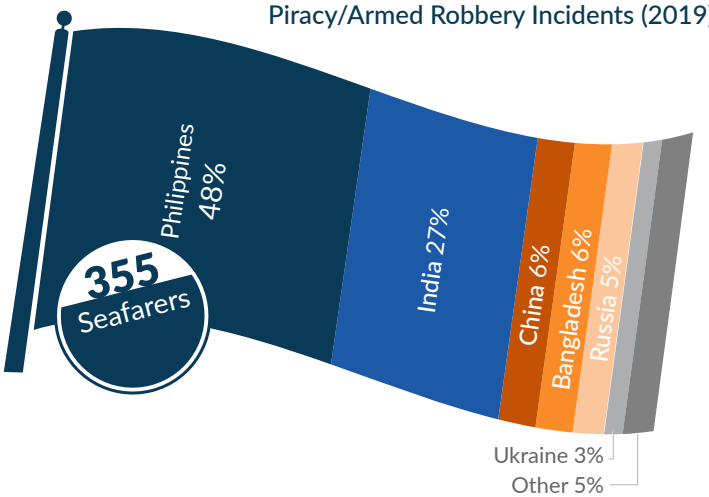
TOTAL SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY (2015 - 2019)



- [3,674] 2015
- [2,283] 2016
- [1,908] 2017
- [1,730] 2018
- [1,503] 2019

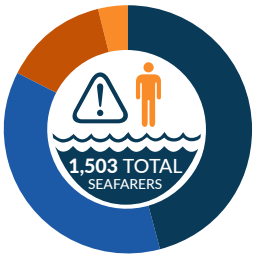
ASIA

KNOWN NATIONALITIES of Seafarers Exposed to Piracy/Armed Robbery Incidents (2019)



ASIA

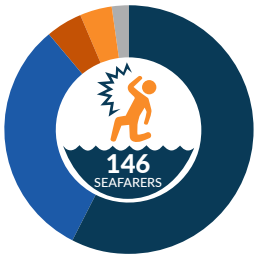
SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY BY INCIDENT TYPE (2019)



- [693] Failed Attack
- [547] Robbery
- [205] Armed Robbery
- [58] Kidnapping

ASIA

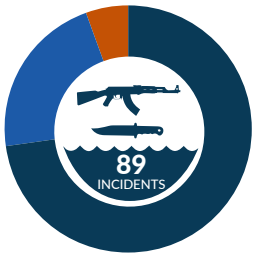
SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY VIOLENCE (2019)



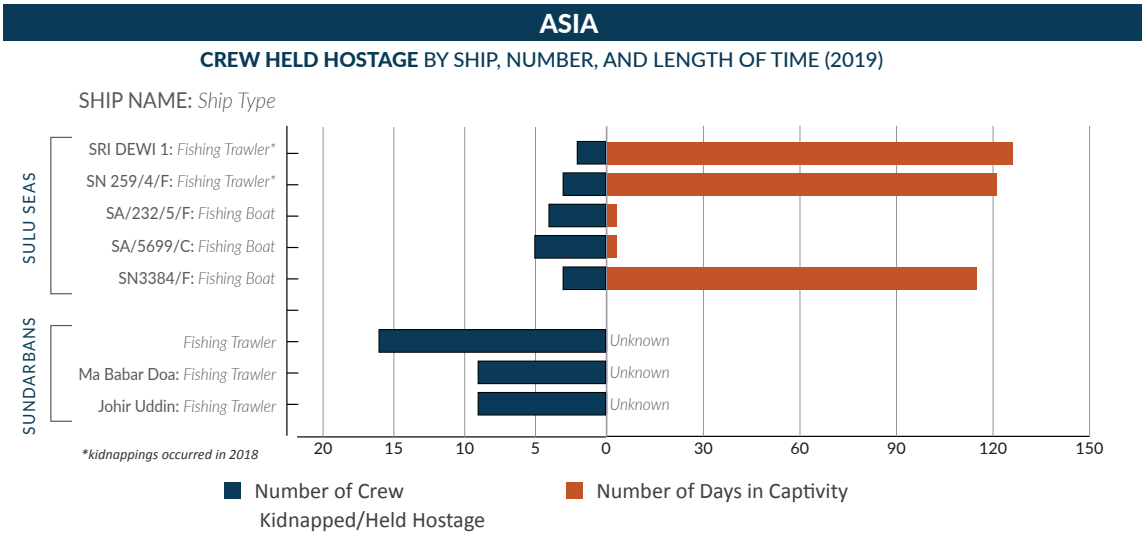
- [84] Threatened
- [46] Kidnapped
- [7] Hostage (short term)
- [6] Assaulted
- [3] Injured

ASIA

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS INVOLVING WEAPONS (2019)



- [67] Unknown
- [17] Knives/Long Knives
- [5] Guns



- In 2019, 46 crew members from six separate kidnapping incidents were held hostage in Asia. All of the victims were fishermen. Three incidents took place off Sabah, Malaysia, and three in and off the coast of the Bangladeshi Sundarbans.
- In 2019, crew members kidnapped in the Sulu Sea were held hostage for between 3 and 115 days (under four months) in the Philippines.
- In 22 of the 89 incidents it was reported that assailants were armed. Weapons included iron rods, knives, machetes or long knives, and firearms, some with grenade launchers.
- Hostages kept for one day or less: 7
- Hostages held for more than one day and confirmed as released: 12
- Hostages still in captivity from 2019: 0
- Hostages kidnapped in 2018 and released in 2019: 2
- Two hostages kidnapped in 2018 also died as a result of injuries sustained during rescue operations in 2019.

Kidnapping in the Sulu Sea

Although the threat of kidnapping by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) remains high in the Sulu Sea, 2019 saw levels of kidnapping activity well below the peak of such activity in 2016. Slow vessels with a low freeboard, such as fishing vessels, tugboats, small passenger boats, and yachts, are at higher risk, although crew were also kidnapped from two bulk carriers and a heavy load carrier in recent years. Fishing vessels attacked in the last five years in the Sulu Sea had Indonesian, Filipino, and Malay crew. All fishing boats involved were artisanal fishing vessels working from small harbors in the Sulu Sea. In 2018 and 2019 kidnapping incidents on boats were confined to fishing vessels. All incidents over this time period were reported in the area between Tambisan Island and Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia.

Two of the three victims kidnapped off Pegasus Reef from the Malaysian-flagged fishing vessel *SN 259/4/F* on 5 December 2018 by the ASG under sub-leader Majan Sahidjuan, alias Apo Mike, appeared in a video on Facebook on 14 February 2019. In the video the kidnappers threaten to behead the hostages unless ransom is paid.[70] On 5 April 2019, the Philippines Joint Task Force Sulu launched an attack on the ASG fighters holding the hostages on Simisa Island, 8 nm to the east of Jolo Island, Sulu. In an effort to escape, one hostage drowned and the other was saved by Philippines marines as the two attempted to swim across the channel to Bangalao Island. The third hostage died in hospital due to injuries sustained from a bullet wound during the rescue.[71]

Twelve crew members were kidnapped in 2019, all from Malaysian-flagged fishing vessels. Nine crew from the fishing vessels *SA/232/5/F* and *SA/5699/C* who had been kidnapped en route from Tambisan to Semporna, Sabah, on 18 June 2019 were released three days later.[72] According to authorities, they were most likely kidnapped by Mameh, a Malaysian criminal group[73] which likely intended to hand them over to ASG for part of the ransom money. Facts surrounding the incident are not clear.

On 23 September 2019, just before noon, two fishing vessels were fishing about 50 meters from each other approximately 6.3 nm north of Tambisan Island in Sabah, Malaysia, when seven masked men armed with automatic weapons approached in two pump boats painted green and blue with red stripes. The fishing vessels were boarded and crew possessions,[74] cell phones, and documentation were stolen. Three Indonesian fishermen were kidnapped from one of the fishing vessels, the Malaysian-flagged fishing boat *SN3384/F*. The kidnappers fled in the direction of Tawi-Tawi, Philippines.[75]

The fishermen were initially held by ASG sub-leader Salip Mura, and on 4 November 2019 were transferred to an ASG veteran in maritime kidnapping, Majan Sahidjuan,[76] who has also been linked to kidnappings of crew from several other vessels in recent years. With him was a group of 50 to 60 ASG members. Three of the kidnapper-leaders, Majan Sahidjuan, Salip Mura, and Sibih Pisih, were on the Eastern Sabah Security Command's most wanted list. Sibih was killed in a military operation in November 2019 and replaced by one "Mokong," who is reportedly the son of ASG leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan.[77]

Two hostages from the fishing boat *SN3384/F* were rescued by the military on 22 December 2019 and the last hostage was rescued on 15 January 2020.[78]

Kidnapping in the Bangladeshi Sundarbans

Bahinis, or gangs, are kidnapping fishermen in and off the coast of the Bangladeshi Sundarbans. Although the Bangladeshi government's initiative to rehabilitate bahinis has led to a decline in the number of fishermen kidnapped in the Sundarbans since 2015, sporadic incidents of kidnapping for ransom persist.[79]

On 15 March 2019, 16 fishermen were kidnapped from their boat near Jahajkhari in the Sundarbans. The kidnappers also took their fish, fuel, and fishing nets. A ransom was demanded for their release.[80] Eighteen fishermen were also kidnapped from the trawlers *Ma Badar Doa* and *Johir Uddin* on 26 August 2019 off Nijhum Dwip, Bangladesh. They were taken along with the two trawlers.[81]

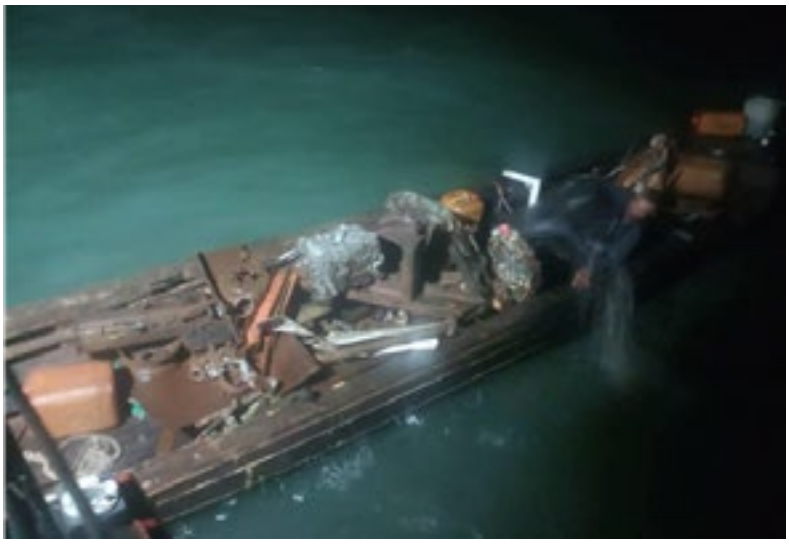
Robbery and Attempted Robbery in the Singapore and Malacca Straits

High numbers of incidents of robbery and attempted robbery occurred in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS) in 2019, with a sharp increase from 2018. Sixteen incidents where bulk carriers and tankers were boarded while underway have been reported since September 2019. Robbers were armed with knives, and during one attack, guns. In a few incidents, crew members were bound. Most of the robberies were unsuccessful, but usually ship stores and equipment are targeted.

Robbery of tugs towing barges continued in the SOMS in 2019, with a higher number of incidents close to Tanjung Piai, Johor. Groups of 3 to 11 men, often armed with knives, board the barges from sampans while underway. In 17 cases, barges were targeted, and in one case, a dredger towed by a tug. Mostly scrap metal is stolen from the barges, but at times, also tools and equipment, and in one case, cargo from a container on the barge. Typically no crew are present on the barges and as a result, no confrontation between perpetrators and crew takes place. Often the masters of the tugs were aware of having perpetrators on the barge but decided to continue the journey regardless. In several cases, the masters reported the incidents to the Singapore Vessel Traffic Information System (VTIS). Upon arrival of the Singapore Police Coast Guard, the Singapore Navy, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), perpetrators flee in their sampans.

On 3 August 2019, three Indonesian suspects were arrested 3.2 nm southeast of Kukup Island by the MMEA for allegedly stealing scrap iron from vessels.[82] The location is very close to Tanjung Piai, Johor, where most robberies of tugs towing barges are taking place.

Two incidents where crew were assaulted were reported in the approaches to the Singapore Strait. The bulk carrier *CK Bluebell* was boarded on 22 July 2019 at 04:25 LT approximately 16 nm northwest of Pulau Damar, Indonesia, in international waters, by pirates armed with guns and other weapons.[83] They approached at above 20 knots in a speedboat. Some sailors sustained minor injuries. Crew possessions and $13,000 in cash were stolen.[84]



On 3 August 2019, three Indonesian suspects were arrested 3.2nm southeast of Kukup Island by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (APMM) for allegedly stealing scrap iron from vessels . The location is very close to Tanjung Piai, Johor were most robberies of tugs towing barges are taking place. Photos: Agensi Penguatkuasaan Maritim Malaysia

Robbery and Attempted Robbery at Anchorages

Almost half of robbery incidents in Asia during 2019 occurred when vessels were at anchor. Thirty-seven robberies and attempted robberies were reported at ports and anchorages. During these incidents, ship stores and equipment are stolen.

In 2018 the highest number of robberies and attempted robberies were at two locations: Muara Berau Anchorage, Samarinda, Indonesia (17), and Chittagong/Kutubdia Anchorages, Bangladesh (13). No incidents were reported at either anchorage in 2019. The highest number of incidents at an anchorage in 2019 was reported at Belawan Port and Anchorage, Indonesia, with six reported incidents.

Ten robberies were reported at Manila Anchorages in the Philippines during 2017. After the arrest of five robbers in their motor banca *Shyrill* at Manila in January 2018,[85] incidents remained low there in 2019, with three reported incidents. Container ships were targeted in all previous incidents, a pattern that remained in 2019. Survival and safety equipment such as life rafts, immersion suits, breathing apparatuses and cylinders, and firefighting outfits, as well as ship property, were stolen.

Five robberies and attempted robberies on tankers and bulk carriers at anchor were reported off Bandar Penawar, Johor, Malaysia, outside the designated anchorage areas in international waters.

Arrests

Eleven robbers were arrested by coastal authorities in 2019. Seven robbers responsible for the incident on the bulk carrier *Odysseas L* on 29 May 2019 at Taboneo Anchorage, Indonesia, were arrested.[86]

On 16 June 2019, at 03:00 LT and approximately 2.9 nm south of Teluk Ramunia, Pengerang, Malaysia, an MMEA patrol noticed two wooden boats, both named *Lima Sore,* next to the tanker *Ponier*. The patrol found four robbers attempting to steal items from the ship. They arrested them, but two managed to escape by jumping overboard when the MMEA patrol boat broke down. The two were later arrested in Pulau Batam, Indonesia, by Indonesian authorities.[87]

PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AGAINST SHIPS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN 2019

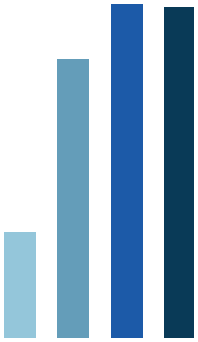
MAIN MESSAGES

- In 2019, Stable Seas recorded 84 incidents of piracy and robbery in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is one fewer than the number reported in 2018. Only three of these incidents could be classified as piracy.
- Anchorages off Barcelona, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad represented incident hotspots in Latin America and the Caribbean during 2019.
- In 2019, 14 fishermen were kidnapped during four incidents; three were off the southern coast of Trinidad and one was in the Manosa River in Venezuela.
- Anchorages off Barcelona reported a high number of incidents in the early part of the year, and Callao Anchorage, Peru, reported a high number of incidents.
- Anchorage crime against yachts made up roughly 42 percent of all cases, which is roughly the same as in 2018. In 2019, violent incidents against yacht crews were reported off Panama.
- In 2018, a total of 14 suspects were arrested for robberies on a fishing vessel, a cargo vessel in Guyana, and yacht cruisers in Panama. All robberies were very violent, resulting in the murders of four fishermen and one captain of a motor yacht. Several crew members were seriously hurt and some female crew were sexually assaulted.

OVERVIEW: INCIDENTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN 2019

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

TOTAL INCIDENTS OF PIRACY/ROBBERY
(2016 - 2019)



- [27] 2016
- [71] 2017
- [85] 2018
- [84] 2019

Stable Seas recorded 84 incidents of piracy and armed robbery in Latin America in 2019, only one fewer than 2018. However, only 3 of these incidents could be classified as piracy.

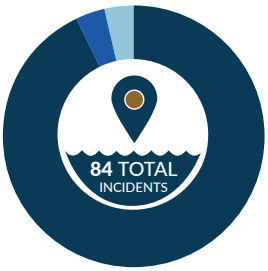
LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY TYPE (2019)

- [32] Armed Robbery
- [31] Robbery
- [17] Failed Attack
- [4] Kidnapping

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

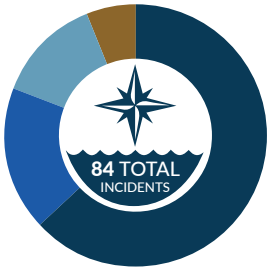
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY LOCATION (2019)



- [78] Territorial
- [3] Internal
- [3] International

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

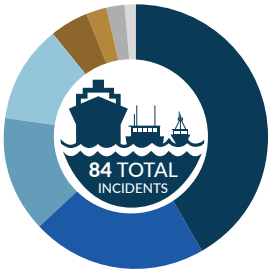
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY VESSEL MOVEMENT (2019)



- [53] Anchored
- [15] Drifting
- [11] Steaming
- [5] Berthed

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

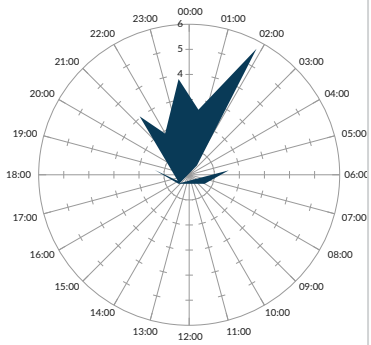
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS BY VESSEL TYPE (2019)



- [35] Yacht
- [18] Fishing Boat
- [12] Bulk Carrier
- [10] Tanker
- [4] Container Ship
- [2] Vehicle Carrier
- [2] Other
- [1] OSV

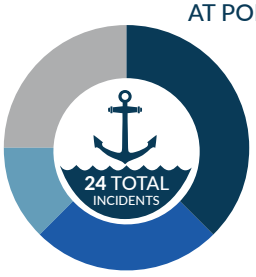
LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

TIME OF ROBBERIES & ATTEMPTED ROBBERIES AT ANCHORAGES/PORTS



LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

ROBBERY & ATTEMPTED ROBBERIES AT PORTS/ANCHORAGES (2019)



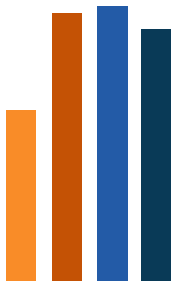
- [9] Callao Anchorage, Peru
- [6] Barcelona Anchorages, Venezuela
- [3] Port Au Prince and Anchorage. Haiti
- [6] Other

OVERVIEW: LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN HUMAN COST

In 2019, 783 seafarers were affected by piracy and armed robbery in Latin America and the Caribbean—75 fewer than in 2018. This indicates a slight increase in incidents on vessels with smaller crews, such as fishing boats.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

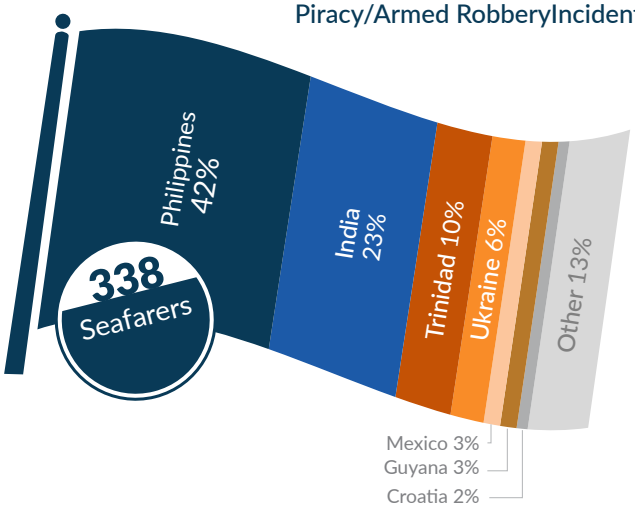
TOTAL SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY (2015 - 2019)



- [527] 2016
- [854] 2017
- [858] 2018
- [783] 2019

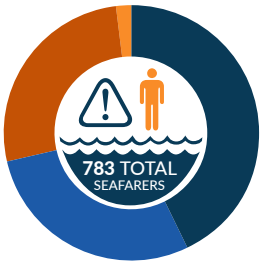
LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

KNOWN NATIONALITIES of Seafarers Exposed to Piracy/Armed RobberyIncidents (2019)



LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

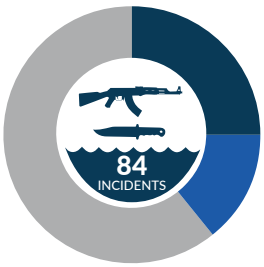
SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY BY INCIDENT TYPE (2019)



- [337] Armed Robbery
- [222] Robbery
- [210] Failed Attack
- [14] Kidnapping

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

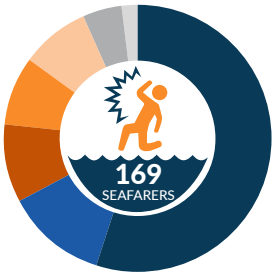
PIRACY/ROBBERY INCIDENTS INVOLVING WEAPONS (2019)



- [21] Guns
- [12] Knives/Machetes
- [51] Unknown

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

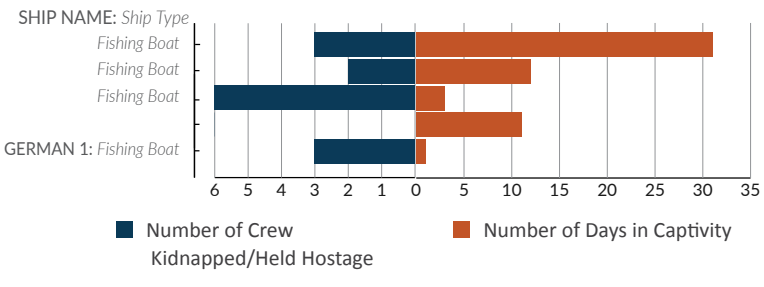
SEAFARERS EXPOSED TO PIRACY/ROBBERY VIOLENCE (2019)



- [93] Threatened
- [21] Hostage (short term)
- [16] Assaulted
- [14] Kidnapped
- [14] Injured
- [8] Killed
- [3] Missing

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

CREW HELD HOSTAGE BY SHIP, NUMBER, AND LENGTH OF TIME (2019)



Trends

Only three incidents in the Caribbean Sea and northern Atlantic Ocean can be classified as piracy.

Kidnapping of Fishermen in Trinidad

A mere 8.5 nautical miles separates Trinidad and Venezuela across the Columbus Channel. In 2019, two kidnapping incidents involving fishermen were reported off Moruga, and one off Icacos, on the southern coast of Trinidad, and one was reported in the Manosa River, within the internal waters of Venezuela.

Voice notes and WhatsApp messages are used by kidnappers to make contact in kidnapping cases. Ransom demands are between $12,000 and $90,000 for each group and often include additional items such as gold jewelry, cell phones, and boat engines. Victims are held in captivity for between three days and a month. Some officials are of the opinion that at least some of the kidnappings are related to smuggling activity due to the short time frames in which large ransom amounts are gathered.[88]

During an incident on 27 January 2019, six fishermen were kidnapped by Venezuelans armed with AK-47s and AR-15s while the fishers were catching shrimp in the Manosa River in Venezuela.[89] One hostage was released on 30 January 2019, and the other five on 7 February 2019 after ransom was paid through an intermediary.[90]

Engine Theft in Trinidad

Engines of at least five boats were stolen in 2019 in Trinidad, a trend that continued from 2018. After robbers steal engines, fishermen are often left drifting at sea. When robbers are unable to remove engines, the boats are taken. Boats are sometimes found adrift without their engines. Some of these attacks are violent. Fishermen are often violently assaulted and thrown overboard. Several fishermen died and were injured in attacks in 2019. Not all of these attacks can be attributed to Venezuelans, as eight Trinidadians were arrested for engine theft in 2018 and 2019.

Attacks on Fishermen off Guyana and Suriname

On 23 September 2019, suspect Nakool Manohar was charged with the murder at sea of two of the crew of 25 from a group of fishing boats attacked off Suriname in April 2018. During the proceedings, witness tampering was a constant concern.[91] In November 2019, nine fishermen were sentenced to between 5 and 35 years of imprisonment for their part in the attacks.[92] The murders have been linked to an ongoing feud between fishermen that is connected to fishing rights. Manohar, the alleged mastermind, has also been connected to three prior incidents of robbery of fishing vessels between 2015 and 2018.[93]

On 5 October 2019, two fishermen—allegedly working for Manohar—and three others were involved in yet another attack off Guyana on four fishermen on the fishing boat *Sara-1* in an attempt to steal their catch. When the crew of *Sara-1* recognized the attackers, they were brutally beaten and hacked with machetes, had their hands and feet bound, and were thrown overboard. The bodies of two of the four men were discovered on the Abary and Mahaicony foreshores. Three men have since confessed to the murders and two are still wanted.[94]

Attacks off Mexico

According to the International Federation of Maritime Transport Workers, 16 attacks per month were registered on commercial vessels off Campeche, Tabasco and Veracruz from January to September 2019, very few of which could be confirmed.[95] Six incidents of armed robbery—on a pipe-layer, an OSV, and four fishing vessels—were reported on the east coast of Mexico in 2019.

In Mexico, reports of thefts on fishing vessels of outboard motors, fish, communication equipment, diesel, and cash were noted in 2019. Masked robbers armed with guns attack fishing boats from speedboats. Fishermen are often assaulted and left at sea when their engines are taken. Some incidents were reported off the coast of Chuburná Puerto, and three were reported off Progreso.

On 11 November 2019 the Italian-flagged OSV *Remas* was attacked by seven to eight perpetrators while underway off Ciudad del Carmen. The robbers approached in two speedboats and started firing once on board. They robbed the crew and left. One crew member was shot in the knee and another was hit over the head with a blunt instrument.[96]

In another attack in the same vicinity on 4 August 2019, the Malta-flagged pipe-layer *Tog Mor* was robbed of ship stores and property while underway.[97]

It was reported by Enrique Lozano Díaz, an inspector with the International Federation of Maritime Transport Workers, that 164 robberies against oil platforms were reported in the Campeche Sound, 80 nm offshore, between the start of January and the end of September 2019. The inspector noted that the federation insisted on having an offshore naval detachment close to the oil platform to respond to attacks in this extensive area.[98] Armed robbers approach the oil platforms in groups of boats at night, climb the platforms, and indiscriminately steal anything they can find, from communication equipment to metal manhole covers. There have been reports of complicity of some oil platform crew in at least some of the thefts and in creating false reports.[99] Robbery from oil platforms cannot be classified as piracy, but robbery did extend to OSVs servicing the platforms.

Robbery and Attempted Robbery at Anchorages

Venezuela Anchorages

In total, seven incidents were reported in Venezuela in 2019, which is less than half the number in 2018. All but one of these incidents were at anchorages off Barcelona—Puerto José Anchorage and Puerto la Cruz Anchorage. In 2019, four robberies and two attempted robberies were reported, all against tankers at anchor. Robbers were armed with knives, and a crew member was threatened with a knife during one incident. Ship stores were stolen. All incidents were recorded from January to April 2019, after which activity stopped abruptly.

Several factors could have contributed to this, including increased security in ports intended to prevent humanitarian aid sent from the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao) from reaching Venezuela, or US Treasury sanctions imposed on tankers and shipping companies transporting Venezuelan oil to Cuba (which incentivized tankers to turn off transponders in Venezuelan territorial waters), but the most likely was the placement of members of the Venezuelan Armed Forces on 15 Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)-operated tankers amidst growing dissatisfaction amongst PDVSA officials and the fear that they might refuse to deliver product to Cuba. This added armed security on tankers was in all likelihood the determining factor explaining why armed robberies off Anzoátegui stopped at the end of April 2019.[100]

Callao Anchorage, Peru

Callao Anchorage, Peru recorded the highest number of robberies and attempted robberies in the region, with nine reported incidents. Vehicle carriers, bulk carriers, and tankers were boarded between 00:55 and 05:20 LT by three to five men in a small boat via the anchor chain or a rope with a hook. In one case, the men were masked. They were armed with long knives and assaulted a crew member during one robbery and bound duty crew on two other occasions. Crew possessions and ship stores were stolen during the seven successful attacks.

Port-au-Prince Martissant Terminal and Anchorage, Haiti

Two robberies were reported at Martissant Terminal in Port-au-Prince in 2019, which was the same number as in 2018. Robbers boarded berthed tankers using a hook attached to a rope. Ship property was stolen in both cases. Robberies and attempted robberies at the Port-au-Prince Anchorage went down from 11 in 2018 to one in 2019. During the incident in 2019, a crew member was held hostage by robbers with guns and long knives. They escaped with ship property.

Yacht Incidents

The highest number of incidents in Latin America and the Caribbean by vessel type in 2019 were against yachts. In total, 35 incidents were reported. One crew member was killed, four injured, and three assaulted, and five were threatened and twelve held at gunpoint.

The majority of incidents recorded were at night while vessels were anchored, and in a high number of the incidents, dinghies and outboard motors were stolen. Robbers approach the yachts with small boats or by swimming from shore to yachts at anchor. Robbers often rob vessels without being detected, while owners are asleep or on land.

While yachts were mostly anchored or berthed during the execution of each robbery, cases were reported where yachts were boarded while underway. In April 2019, the yacht *Sylph* was fired at while underway 15 nm northeast of the Hibiscus oil platform off Trinidad and Tobago.[101]

In 2019, attacks off the Panama coast turned violent. During five of the eight reported incidents, crew members were assaulted, raped, or held at gunpoint, and a crew member was killed. During some incidents, robbers seemed to be under the influence of drugs, and in another they demanded drugs. Groups of up to eight men armed with guns and knives approached vessels at anchor during the night. They held crew at gunpoint and ransacked yachts, stealing cash, phones, computers, electronics, licenses, and dinghies. Attackers were arrested following two of the incidents. One of these arrests was after the murder of Alan Culverwell on his motor yacht, *Aqua Lobo*, near Morodub island in May 2019.[102]

The following anchorages recorded more than three incidents each:

- Anchorages off the south coast of Panama—Portobelo, Linton Bay, and Nombre de Dios (6)
- Río Dulce, Guatemala (4)
- Canouan, Charlestown Bay, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (5)
- Roatán, Honduras (3)

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