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Coast Guard Crews Continue Search After Boat Capsizes North of Puerto Rico: 38 Rescued, 11 Found Dead

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Coast Guard rescue craft arriving at the scene where a vessel capsized north of Desecheo Island in Puerto Rico on Thursday. By. COAST GUARD

In the hours since a boat carrying suspected migrants capsized in the waters northwest of Puerto Rico, searchers have rescued 38 survivors and recovered 11 bodies as efforts continue.

A US Customs and Border Protection helicopter spotted the group in the water on Thursday morning, and a co-ordinated multi-agency search and rescue operation immediately launched. Coast guard boats, planes and helicopters established a search pattern, concentrating efforts in an area miles north of an uninhabited island to Puerto Rico's west.

Two of those rescued alive were from the Dominican Republic, while the remaining 36 were Haitian Nationals. Eight of the Haitians were hospitalized following their rescue, while all 11 of the deceased were female, although identities and nationalities of the dead have not yet been confirmed. Also unknown at this time is the number of people originally on board the vessel, complicating the search efforts that continued into Friday.

Coast Guard spokesperson Ricardo Castrodad spoke to Associated Press journalists about the search efforts, and the crews that worked through the night. “We always look for the possibility of finding survivors.”

This kind of journey, authorities note, has risen sharply in recent months, as migrants from Haiti in particular, board vessels of dubious seaworthiness in increasing numbers. Some of those boats capsize, while others are driven towards the rocky shores of deserted islands, stranding passengers with no food or drinkable water. This dangerous route has become more attractive to some who have become desperate to escape spiking inflation, violence, and instability that the administration of Prime Minister Ariel Henry has thus far been unable to abate.