



Assessing the stowaway risk is key

Risk assessments must be used actively to prevent stowaways from embarking. This means that the measures outlined in the Ship Security Plan must be tailored to the local conditions where the ship operates. In ports with a significant risk of stowaway embarkation, proper access control and monitoring of cargo and ship areas are key.

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Gard's comprehensive [Guidance on Stowaways](#) outlines the problem, the applicable regulations, assessing the risk of stowaways, prevention at port and humane handling of stowaways found on board. In a recent update of the guide, we review the trends over the last several years and share our observations.

Incident trends and regional hot spots

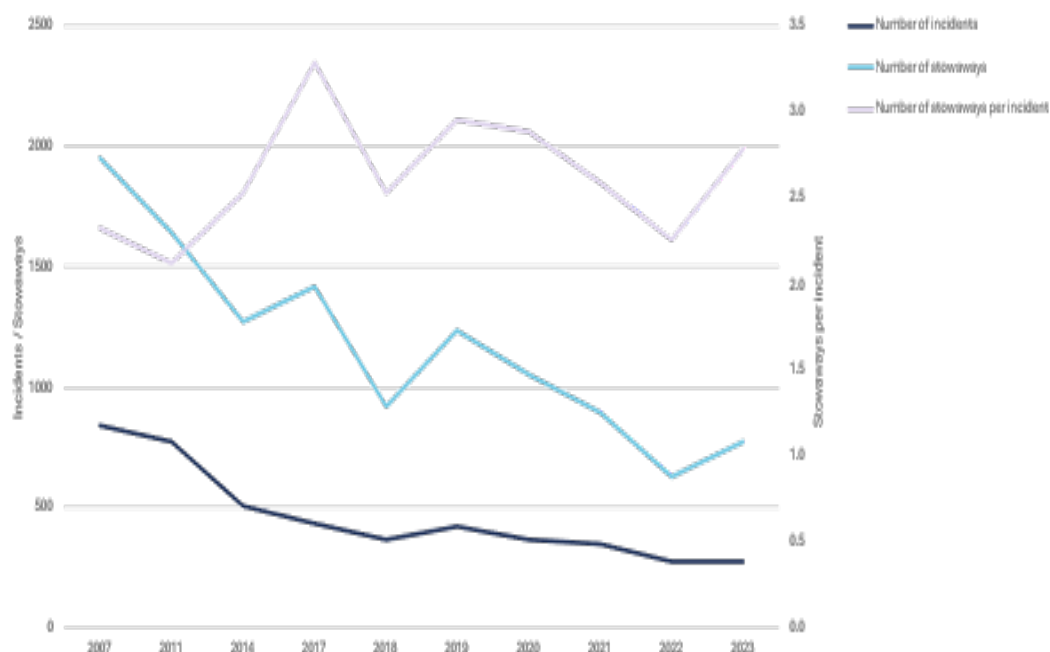
The International Group of P&I Clubs (IGP&I) regularly collects data on stowaways. Based on the claims experience of all the member Clubs, areas and ports where stowaways are a common problem are identified, along with the nationalities of persons stowing away and the average cost of stowaway incidents.

While the IGP&I data collection is primarily meant to compliment the stowaway cases reported to the IMO's Global Integrated Shipping System (GISIS), it is notable that the number of incidents recorded by the IGP&I is generally higher than those submitted via the IMO system. However, even if the IMO GISIS data are more moderate in terms of the total number of incidents and stowaways, some of the observed trends concerning regional stowaway 'hot spots', as well as stowaways' nationalities, are very similar to those identified by Gard and the other IGP&I Clubs.

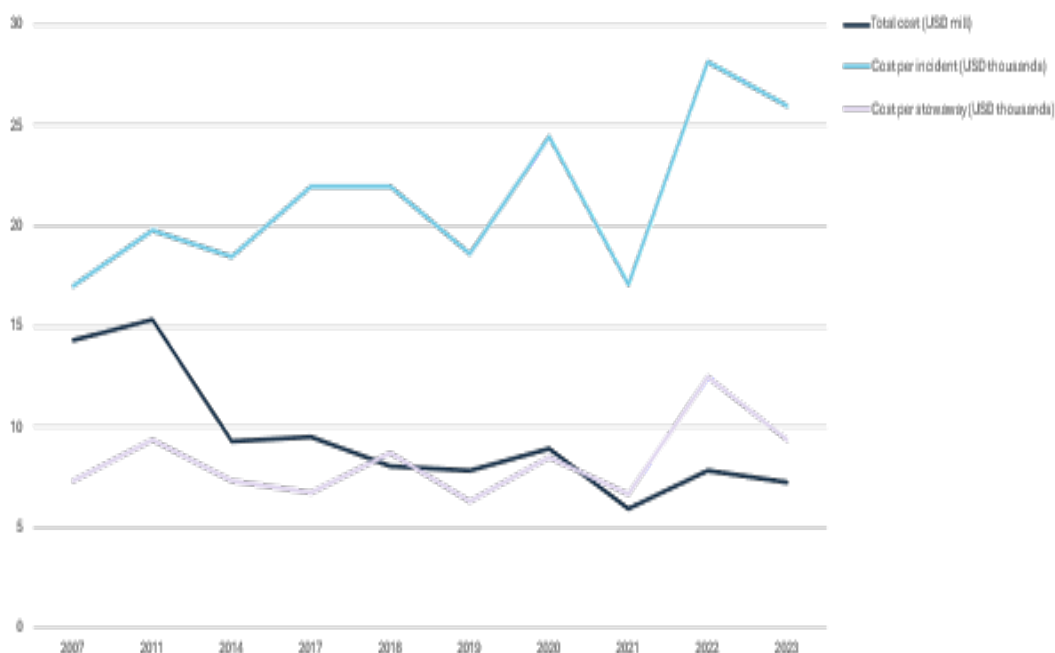
The IGP&I and IMO GISIS data for the period 2014 to 2023 show the following trends:

Overall incident trends (source IGP&I)

Number of incidents and stowaways



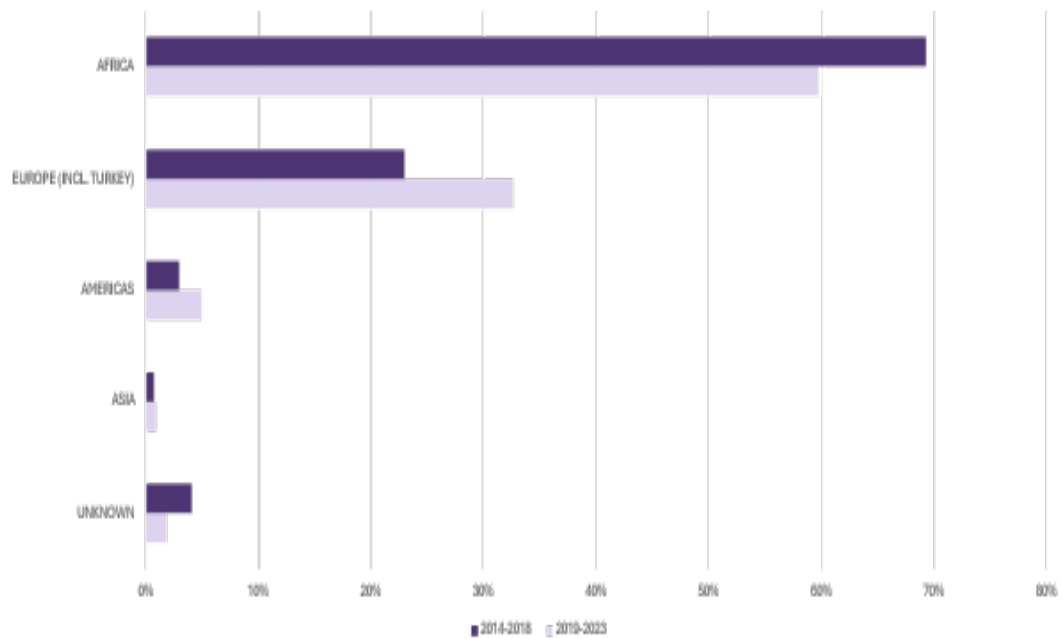
Cost of incidents and stowaways



- The number of stowaway incidents reported by the IGP&I Clubs has decreased by more than two-thirds since IGP&I carried out its first data collection exercise for the 2007/2008 policy year. It also shows a slight downward trend over the past five years.
- The total number of stowaways involved has also decreased, but not at the same rate as the incident figures. This means that the number of stowaways per incident has been growing, and the data would seem to suggest that the current average is close to three stowaways per incident.
- Whilst the total cost net of deductible to the IGP&I, including fines imposed on shipowners by states, has dropped since the highs in the 2000's and early 2010's, the cost per stowaway incident, as well as per stowaway, continues to show an upward trend. The cost now stands at nearly USD 30,000 per incident and USD 10,000 per stowaway.
- It is important to note that the cost to shipowners is higher than that incurred by the Clubs as, in addition to their deductible, shipowners are likely to incur other costs, which are not insured.

Stowaway incidents by region of embarkation (source IMO GISIS)

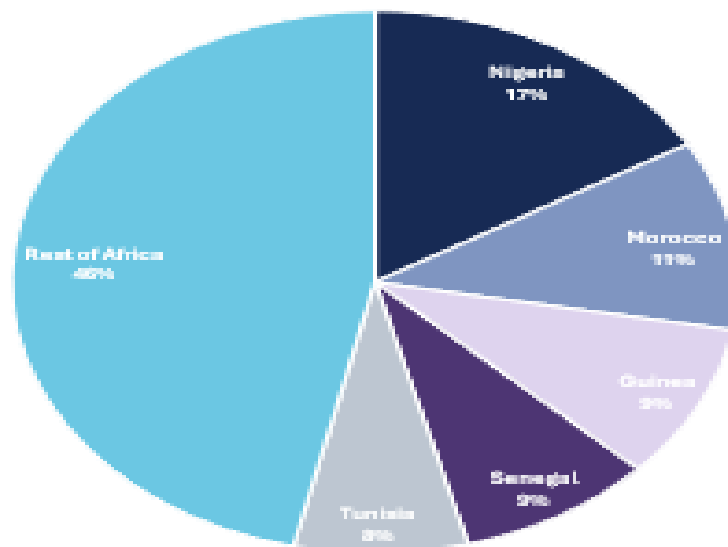
All figures are based on data extracted from IMO GISIS in April 2025.



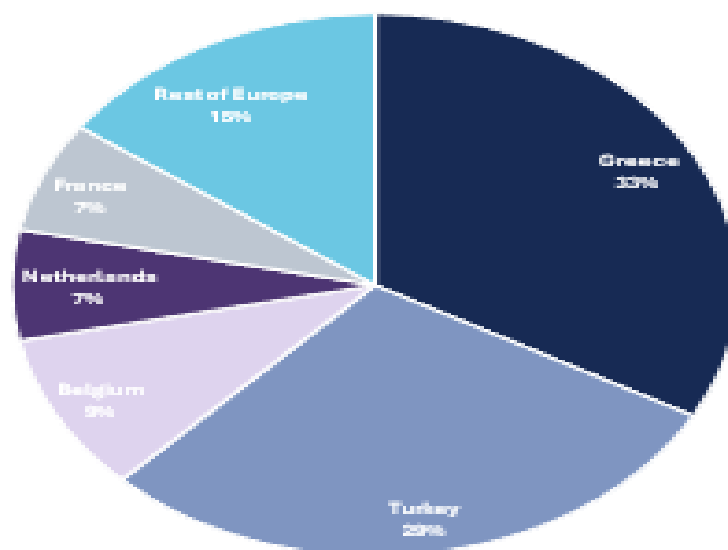
- Ports on the African continent continued to be the main hot spots for stowaway embarkations, even if the overall number of incidents reported from ports in Africa have decreased.
- European ports started to feature in the statistics in 2017 and the number of incidents reported from the European continent has remained high since.

Top five countries of embarkation 2019 - 2023 (source IMO GISIS)

African continent



European continent



- South African ports, which have traditionally been regarded as high-risk ports, have seen a decrease in the number of stowaway embarkations. This also applies to ports in some West African countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria. However, South and West African ports in general must continue to be viewed as having a high stowaway risk.
- Furthermore, since many North African countries have become major transit points for African and Arab migrants trying to reach Europe to escape war and poverty

there is a clear upward trend in the number of incidents reported from the Maghreb region of North Africa, particularly from the port of Casablanca in Morocco and Rades/Tunis and La Goulette Nord in Tunisia.

- The majority of stowaway embarkations in Europe were reported from ports in Greece and Turkey, but also ports in Belgium, Netherlands and France facing the English Channel were popular spots for persons attempting to stow away.

Prevention starts with risk awareness

As described in our [Guidance on Stowaways](#), the core strategy is to ensure that no unauthorized persons are able to gain access to the ship and all those who have been authorized to board, disembark before sailing. Proper access control relies on crew members who are sufficiently briefed about how the ship's trading patterns affect the stowaway risk and the relevant security measures to be implemented. Once aboard, stowaways adversely affect crew wellbeing. Crew may have to work longer hours because they also must take care of the stowaways, the Master will have to spend more time on communicating and planning the disembarkation, possible deviations and in port arrangements – and certainly, there is a significant safety element. Prevention is clearly better than cure.

The guide includes detailed advice on how to handle stowaways found onboard. With security in mind, stowaways should be treated humanely including adequate food and water and medical treatment if required. Stowaways have been a risk as long as ships have sailed the seas and will remain so. Some stowaways qualify for refugee status while others are economic migrants.