

GAO-26-107440

January 2026

A report to congressional requesters.

For more information, contact: Heather MacLeod at MacLeodH@gao.gov

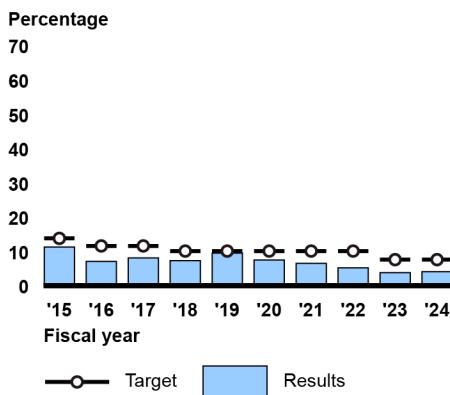
What GAO Found

The Coast Guard, a multi-mission military service within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), uses its resources—including assets such as vessels and aircraft—to conduct its drug and migrant interdiction missions. Given limited resources, the Coast Guard made tradeoffs to address a significant increase in maritime migration levels that began in 2021. Specifically, it redirected assets to migrant interdiction that it had originally allocated to other missions, such as drug interdiction. This impacted its ability to conduct those other missions.

The Coast Guard did not meet its primary drug interdiction performance target in fiscal years 2015 through 2024, and did not meet its primary migrant interdiction target for 6 years during the same period. See figures below. Coast Guard officials said neither primary measure effectively assesses its efforts. Thus, it began to implement new drug interdiction measures in fiscal years 2021 and 2022 to better assess its performance. As of July 2025, the Coast Guard had identified which would be its new primary drug interdiction measures. In addition, the Coast Guard is in the initial stages of developing new migrant interdiction performance measures, but as of July 2025 had not yet implemented them. Doing so would better position the Coast Guard to provide decision makers with relevant information to make future resource decisions.

Coast Guard Annual Drug and Migrant Interdiction Primary Performance Measures

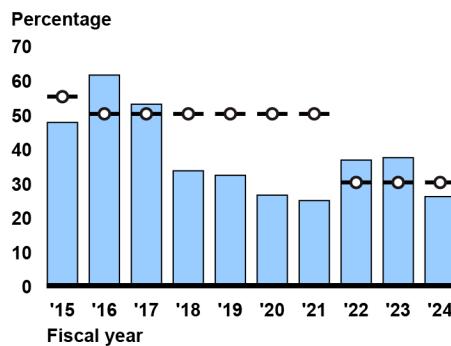
Coast Guard Cocaine Removal Rate from Noncommercial Vessels in the Maritime Transit Zone, Fiscal Years 2015-2024



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data. | GAO-26-107440

The DHS Operation Vigilant Sentry task force provides a key coordination mechanism for the Coast Guard and about 10 federal partners responsible for maritime migrant interdiction. The Coast Guard and its federal partners generally followed seven of GAO's eight leading collaboration practices identified in prior work. However, the task force did not fully share information on lessons learned. By implementing a process to identify and address lessons learned from events and sharing related reports with relevant federal partners, the task force would better address areas for improvement. This process could also help better manage fragmentation by ensuring all partners operate with similar information to support the migrant interdiction mission.

Percent of Migrants Attempting to Enter the U.S. by Maritime Routes that the Coast Guard Interdicted, Fiscal Years 2015-2024



Why GAO Did This Study

The Coast Guard is the lead federal maritime agency responsible for interdicting illicit drug traffic and enforcing U.S. immigration laws and policies at sea. In fiscal years 2022 and 2023, it responded to the highest maritime migration levels in over 30 years. It has been conducting a migrant interdiction surge operation since August 2022. As of November 2025, the surge operation was ongoing.

GAO was asked to review the Coast Guard's drug and migrant interdiction missions. This report examines, among other things: (1) the extent the Coast Guard met its drug and migrant interdiction mission performance targets in fiscal years 2015–2024, (2) how its maritime migration surge operation in fiscal years 2022–2024 affected its ability to perform its other statutory missions, and (3) the extent it coordinated with federal partners to conduct maritime migrant interdiction.

GAO analyzed Coast Guard drug and migrant interdiction performance data, and reviewed relevant policies and documentation. GAO also conducted in-person site visits to Miami, Florida and San Diego, California and interviewed Coast Guard officials and DHS partner agencies to discuss drug and migrant interdiction operations and related coordination efforts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to DHS to (1) implement new migrant interdiction performance measures for the Coast Guard and (2) implement a process for the Operation Vigilant Sentry task force to identify lessons learned from events and share related reports with all relevant federal partners. DHS concurred with both recommendations.