



# UN: AS MANY AS 400,000 MIGRANTS MAY CROSS DARIEN GAP IN 2023 - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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*Photo: Migrants, mostly Venezuelans, walk across the Darien Gap from Colombia into Panama hoping to reach the U.S. on Oct. 15, 2022*

Two U.N. groups said Thursday that the number of migrants crossing the dangerous Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama could soar to as many as 400,000 this year.

That would represent a huge increase from the 250,000 migrants estimated to have crossed the roadless, jungle-clad route in 2022.

The U.N. agencies for refugees and migration said in a report that nearly 100,000 people may have already made the crossing so far this year, six times more than in the similar period of last year.

If that trend keeps up, it could mean many more migrants seeking to reach the United States through Central America and Mexico.

The groups called it "an unprecedented movement (of people) through the Americas."

The United States pledged its forces will assist their Colombian and Panamanian counterparts with intelligence gathering to dismantle smuggling rings operating in the Darien Gap, which is a key route for migrants heading to the U.S. from South America, a senior Biden administration official said Wednesday.

The area is among the most dangerous portions of the long route to the U.S. borders. Migrants and international human rights groups have denounced sexual assaults, robberies and killings in the remote jungle. That's in addition to the natural dangers posed by venomous snakes and rushing rivers.

U.S. forces could assist in targeting smugglers for arrest and locating "stash houses" where smugglers hold migrants, the official said, without specifying whether the U.S. forces involved would be military or civilian law enforcement.

The United States, Panama and Colombia had announced Tuesday an ambitious 60-day campaign to shut down the Darien Gap route.

The official said the 60-day period had not started yet and was still under consideration, but the effort is part of a broader campaign to prepare for the end of pandemic-era restrictions on applying for asylum at the U.S. border set to expire May 11.

The same obstacles that make it a treacherous crossing for migrants will make it impossible for authorities to completely cut off. It is

about 60 miles of roadless dense jungle used by organized criminal groups for smuggling drugs and people.