



IMMIGRATION

Hundreds of Migrants Face Sex Attacks in Darien Gap, Says MSF

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FILE - Migrants heading north arrive in Lajas Blancas, Darien province, Panama, on Oct. 6, 2023, after walking across the Darien Gap from Colombia. Doctors Without Borders reported on Nov. 17 that many women migrants have been sexually assaulted this year in the jungle stretch.

PANAMA CITY — Nearly 400 U.S.-bound migrants, most of them women, have endured sexual violence this year as they crossed a notorious jungle stretch between Panama and Colombia, according to Doctors Without Borders, or MSF.

The situation facing migrants in the Darien Gap is "increasingly cruel and dehumanizing," the international medical aid organization said in its report released Friday, adding that the rate of sex attacks had worsened in recent months.

Between January and October, 397 people who received care from MSF — 97% of them women — have been victims of sexual violence in the jungle.

MSF said, "The figures, which were already alarming in previous months, increased sharply in October," when there were 59 cases of sexual violence.

Despite its dangers, the 265-kilometer (165-mile) Darien Gap has become a key corridor for migrants heading from South America through Central America and Mexico in hopes of reaching the United States.

Panamanian authorities said in September more than 400,000 migrants had passed through the jungle in the previous nine months — 62% more than in all of 2022.

Most are Venezuelans, but there are also Ecuadorans, Haitians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Afghans and Africans from Cameroon and Burkina Faso.

One migrant woman, whose identity was not specified in the news release, said she "saw a lot of people being raped. I saw them coming out naked and beaten."

In the jungle, armed men have set up tents and kidnap women and girls to rape them, individually or in groups, said the organization, known by its French acronym.

According to MSF, the number of women victims of rape is much higher, but many do not dare to speak out for fear of stigmatization, reprisals or seeing their trip delayed.