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Finland Weighs Closing Russian Border Amid Uptick in Asylum Seekers

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The Russian-Finnish border. **Peter Kovalev/TASS**

Finland's government is considering closing its border crossings with Russia amid a rising number of asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa, the broadcaster YLE reported Tuesday, as Finnish officials suggest that Moscow is trying to destabilize the country.

Interior Minister Mari Rantanen told reporters that her agency was drafting proposals that would allow Finland to restrict border crossings, but she did not specify a timeline for Helsinki's anticipated decision.

"Russian authorities' actions have changed in such a way that it's become possible to get from Russia to Finland despite the lack of necessary documents," Rantanen said.

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Finland's border guard authority says around 60 asylum seekers have arrived from Russia

since early Monday — compared with 91 people over the past three months.

Citizens of Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Somalia have been among the latest group of asylum seekers, according to the Finnish border guard authority, which added that organized criminal groups were involved in some of the crossings.

Prime Minister Petteri Orpo accused Moscow of "repeating" the 2015-16 migrant crisis, in which he said Russian border agents had "accompanied" undocumented migrants to the border.

Orpo stopped short of classifying the latest influx as Russia's "hybrid operation," according to YLE, but he did say it "seemed like a deliberate decision."

Helsinki was "closely monitoring" and "taking seriously" the apparent increase in the number of undocumented crossings along the Russian-Finnish border, said Prime Minister Orpo.

Finland's relations with Russia deteriorated after the Nordic country, which shares a 1,300-kilometer border with its eastern neighbor, was accepted into NATO in April over security threats following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

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