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Finland Shutters 4 Russian Border Crossings to Curb Asylum Seekers

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Temporary asylum seekers at the border between Russia and Finland at the Nuijamaa border check point in Lappeenranta, Finland on November 15, 2023. **IMAGO/Lehtikuva/TASS**

Finland's government announced Thursday it will shut down around half of its border crossings with Russia to address an increase in asylum seekers entering the country.

Four checkpoints on Finland's southeastern border with Russia will close at midnight Saturday local time, according to a cabinet statement cited by the Finnish broadcaster Yle.

They will remain shuttered until Feb. 18, 2024.

"This decision was reached based on the conclusions and information from border guards and other agencies," said Interior Minister Mari Rantanen said at a press conference.

"There are clear signs that the authorities of a foreign state played a role in the arrival of [people] who illegally crossed the border," Rantanen said.

Finland will accept asylum applications at crossing points on the northeastern border with

Russia, according to Yle.

Finnish border guards said they have recorded an uptick in the number of asylum seekers this week, including citizens of Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Somalia.

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Helsinki has suggested that Moscow was retaliating against Finland's defense cooperation with the United States by funneling asylum applicants to the border.

The Kremlin said Wednesday it "deeply regretted" Finland considering closing its border.

Finland's relations with Russia have deteriorated significantly after the Nordic country of 5.5 million, which shares a 1,300-kilometer border with its eastern neighbor, joined NATO in April — ending decades of non-alignment — following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia has warned that it would take unspecified "countermeasures" against Finland joining the U.S.-led military alliance.

Finland is in the process of erecting a 200-kilometer fence on a section of its border with Russia, and construction on the fence is expected to be completed by 2026.

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