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Russia Warns of a 'Crisis' at Arctic Border With Finland

By AFP

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Migrants at the international border crossing at Salla, Finnish Lapland. **Jussi Nukari / IMAGO / TASS**

Russia said Wednesday a humanitarian emergency was unfolding at one of its checkpoints on the Arctic border with Finland, where it said hundreds of migrants were stranded in freezing temperatures.

More than 500 asylum seekers have crossed from Russia to Finland since November, Finnish public broadcaster YLE says, mostly from Somalia, Syria, Yemen and Iraq.

Helsinki has accused Moscow of pushing them there deliberately, which Russia denies.

"There is a situation at the border with Finland, at the Salla checkpoint, which can be described as a humanitarian crisis," the head of Russia's Murmansk region bordering Finland, Andrei Chibis, said.

"About 300 people from more than 10 foreign countries have been waiting not for hours, but for days to cross the border," he said.

He blamed Finland for not letting them in.

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He also shared a video on social media showing dozens of cars and vans idling on the side of a snow-covered road at night, and a group of people in thick winter clothes huddling in what appeared to be a tent.

AFP was not able to immediately verify the situation at the border.

While the Salla checkpoint is still open, Finland shut down four of its border crossings with Russia last week in response to the influx of migrants.

It accused Moscow of trying to destabilize the country in retaliation for it joining NATO.

Helsinki's ties with Moscow have deteriorated massively since Russia launched its assault on Ukraine last February.

In April, Finland abandoned decades of military non-alignment and joined the Western-led NATO military alliance, prompting Moscow to warn of "countermeasures."

Western countries accused Russia's close ally Belarus of pushing tens of thousands of undocumented migrants across its border toward Poland and Lithuania in 2021, in retaliation for EU sanctions.

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