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Finland Moves to Bar Russian Athletes From Entry Over Ukraine War

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Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen. **REUTERS / Umit Bektas**

Finland announced Thursday that it will block Russian athletes from entering the country ahead of this month's cross-country skiing World Cup opener.

The restrictions take effect Monday and apply even to those Russian athletes cleared to compete under a neutral flag, as well as other sports professionals.

Russian citizens with Schengen visas will only be allowed into Finland to work in tasks that are deemed essential to the country's national interests, which excludes sports.

"As long as Russia's war of aggression continues, Russian athletes have no business in Finland. Their entry would endanger Finland's international relations," said Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen.

The International Skating Union (ISU) said it was "studying implications" of Finland's entry ban for upcoming events hosted by the country, including the 2027 Figure Skating World

Championships in March.

“ISU believes that athletes should not be punished for the actions of their governments in a world where, sadly, many conflicts are ongoing,” ISU said.

The far northern Finnish resort of Ruka will host the men's and women's 10-kilometer classic races, classic sprints and 20-kilometer freestyle mass starts from Nov. 27 to 29. The World Cup returns to Finland for races in the city of Lahti from Feb. 12 to 14. Ruka will also host the men's World Cup ski jumping on Nov. 28 and 29.

The ISU this year allowed Russian and Belarusian figure skaters to return to international competitions for the 2026-27 season under a strict neutral status, saying it was acting on recommendations from the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The IOC provisionally lifted its ban on the Russian and Belarusian Olympic Committees this July, leading to the gradual reinstatement of their sports federations.

Finland has already put restrictions on the entry of Russian citizens by, for instance, banning non-essential travel for Russian citizens in 2022.

AFP and Reuters contributed reporting.

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