

State of Emergency Declared Over Refugee Influx in Southern Russia

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A state of emergency has been declared in six southern Russian territories as refugees continue to arrive en masse from Ukraine's conflict-ridden east, an Emergency Situations Ministry official said Thursday.

The regions of Rostov, Volgograd, Astrakhan, and Stavropol, as well as the Kalmykia Republic and the Crimean city of Sevastopol have all declared a state of emergency, said Deputy Minister of Emergency Situations Vladimir Artamonov, speaking before the Federation Council, as quoted by ITAR-Tass.

Speaking at a meeting of the Civic Chamber on Monday, deputy head of the Federal Migration Service Anatoly Kuznetsov said that more than 480,000 Ukrainians had fled to Russia since the outbreak of conflict in April. Only 20,451 have formally filed for temporary asylum so far, he said.

Refugee statistics caused a spat last week when Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev lashed out at a U.S. State Department spokeswoman for suggesting that the refugee situation may not be so dire.

Marie Heif said that those who crossed the border may have done so "to go visit their grandmother and come back," rather than with the intent of seeking refugee status.

"There are a huge number of refugees. Tens of thousands. People are fleeing from war. American propaganda claims they were going 'on holiday to their grandmothers.' [Such] cynicism knows no bounds," Medvedev wrote on his Facebook page last Wednesday.

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