

Russian Border Traffic Surges After 'Partial' Draft Announcement

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Irina Bujor / Kommersant

Long lines of Russians seeking to escape President Vladimir Putin's draft have formed at the land borders of nearly every country neighboring Russia, according to videos and reports published overnight.

Finnish border guards [said](#) they have noticed an "exceptional number" of Russian nationals seeking to cross the border overnight, according to Reuters.

The news agency reported that more than 4,800 Russians arrived in Finland on Wednesday compared with 3,100 a week earlier.

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Neighboring Norway, which shares a smaller border with Russia further north, said it had

observed no changes in crossings.

In the South Caucasus, eyewitnesses claimed that the Russian-Georgian border “collapsed” with overwhelming traffic, according to videos [shared](#) by Ekho Kavkaza, the regional service of U.S.-funded RFE/RL news organization.

Similar traffic jams were [filmed](#) near Russia’s borders with Mongolia, though the country’s customs service [denied](#) that there was any congestion at the border crossing.

In the Central Asian republic of Kazakhstan — whose shared border with Russia is the longest in the world — social media users [shared](#) footage of a seemingly endless line of cars and trucks waiting to cross.

Meanwhile, the three Baltic nations of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia said they would [refuse](#) [refuge](#) to Russians fleeing Putin’s mobilization after imposing restrictions on Russian tourists earlier this week.

Border agents at Russian airports have started interrogating departing male passengers about their military service status and checking return tickets, [according](#) to journalist and socialite Ksenia Sobchak.

Reports of a surge in border traffic emerged after Putin announced Wednesday an immediate “partial” mobilization of Russia’s 25 million reserves for training and deployment in Ukraine.

The Kremlin called the reports of increased border traffic “highly exaggerated,” saying some footage shared online was “fake.”

The announcement was met with anti-draft protests [across](#) dozens of Russian cities, with independent monitors recording nearly 1,400 arrests nationwide.

In Wednesday's announcement, Russia’s Defense Minister said that 300,000 reservists would be called up for service.

But human rights lawyers contend that the vague language in the Kremlin’s mobilization decree gives the military the option to recruit more servicemen and call up men without military experience.

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