

# EU EASTERN BORDERS: Polish president signs asylum suspension law — Finland plans to extend its asylum suspension law — 18 reception centres to close in Finland — Tighter controls at checkpoints on Latvia's borders — Pushback accusation in Lithuania

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- A controversial new asylum law has entered into force in Poland.
- The Finnish government is planning to extend the duration of its controversial asylum law.
- The Finnish Immigration Service has announced that it will close 18 reception centres in 2025.
- The Latvian government has tightened controls at three checkpoints on the country's borders with Russia and Belarus.
- Lithuanian border guards have been accused of a pushback on the country's border with Belarus.

A controversial new asylum law has entered into force in Poland. It was signed by Polish President Andrzej Duda on 26 March, two weeks after it was **approved** by the Senate. Despite having previously criticising the draft law, which will allow Poland to temporarily suspend the rights of people who enter the country via the border with Belarus irregularly to apply for asylum, Duda **said** that he had decided to approve it as it was “necessary for strengthening the security of our borders”. He also encouraged Prime Minister Donald Tusk to “take active measures in the matter of Poland’s security”. Several ECRE member organisations responded by repeating their longstanding criticism of the law. “This is not only a violation of the Constitution, but above all a threat to the lives of people fleeing war and persecution,” **said** the Ocalenie Foundation, adding: “The entry into force of the law is a victory of populism over a migration policy that is safe for all”. Elsewhere, the Association for Legal Intervention (SIP) **said**: “A law aimed at the victims – not the perpetrators of the crisis – will not bring any results, just as a 5-meter fence, a zone or an ‘export law’ did not”, while the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR) **said**: “Taking away the right of migrants to seek international protection in Poland will not only not increase security on the Polish-Belarusian border, but will deepen the chaos prevailing there”. “Illegal pushbacks and the creation of a grey zone for the activities of Belarusian services and smuggling groups will certainly not improve the safety of Polish citizens and expose migrants to serious risks of losing their health and lives,” it added.

The European Commission (EC) appeared to be much more relaxed about the new law. Speaking to reporters in Brussels on 27 March, an EC spokesperson **said**: “It is crucial to recall the current context. There are hybrid threats arising from the weaponisation of migration by Russia”. Asked about the compatibility of the new law with existing EU law, the spokesperson noted that all measures needed to be “temporary, necessary, proportionate and well-defined” as part of a response which one journalist described as an “indirect endorsement”.

The Finnish government is planning to extend the duration of its controversial asylum law. The ‘Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalised Migration’ (commonly referred to as the ‘Border Security Act’) enables Finnish authorities to prevent people who enter Finland irregularly from Russia from applying for asylum. It was **adopted** in July 2024 and was initially due to remain in force for 12 months. According to a **press release** which was issued by the Ministry of the Interior on 27 March, although “instrumentalised migration has ceased for now”, the risk that the situation may change had necessitated an extension of the law until the end of 2026. “The threat of instrumentalised migration at Finland’s eastern border remains high and difficult to predict,” said Minister of the Interior Mari Rantanen, adding: “The situation at the border is tense but stable. However, we must prepare for the possibility that the situation may change rapidly and seriously”. According to the Finnish state broadcaster (YLE), the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Centre Party are expected to support the extension while the Greens and Left Alliance remain opposed. “The Green Party is committed to strengthening border security, but it must be done in a manner consistent

with human rights obligations,” said the chair of the Greens’ parliamentary group, Oras Tynkkynen MP. The law has received criticism from various quarters, including from the [Council of Europe](#), while Chancellor of Justice Tuomas Pöysti has called on the government to provide “stronger justifications” to justify its continuation.

The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) has announced that it will close 18 reception centres in 2025. According to a [press release](#) issued on 27 March, the planned closures are in response to a significant fall in demand following a 45% decrease in the number of asylum applications in 2024 compared to the previous year and an increase in the number of people who have become residents of municipalities. Migri has also noted that approximately 2,200 of the people living in the 18 centres that are due to close are eligible to apply for a “municipality of residence” and that approximately 47% of residents could move to a municipality “immediately” if they wanted.

The Latvian government has tightened controls at three checkpoints on the country’s borders with Russia and Belarus. Since 19 March, entry into Latvia via the three checkpoints (one on the border with Belarus and two on the border with Russia) have been limited to motor vehicles only, while pedestrians and cyclists have been prevented from crossing “until further notice”. According to the Latvian government, the decision to restrict the operations of the three checkpoints was taken based on “several important security and public order aspects. “One of the main reasons is the risk of hybrid threats and migration crisis,” it [said](#). Two days earlier, the Paternieki checkpoint (Belarus border) was closed temporarily because border guards had seen a group of people close to the border and feared that they may have been planning to try to enter Latvia irregularly. Commenting on the overall situation at Latvia’s borders, the head of the State Border Guard, General Guntis Pujāts, [said](#): “Currently, a very large number of violators are heading towards Poland. We cannot rule out that at some point these flows may be redirected to Latvia”.

Lithuanian border guards have been accused of a pushback on the country’s border with Belarus. According to the NGO Sienos Grupė, which provides support to people on the move on the Lithuania-Belarus border, officials from the State Border Guard Service (VSAT) ordered a group of five people from Kenya and Sudan who arrived at the Medininkai checkpoint to return to Belarus despite them trying to apply for asylum. “Although the Lithuania authorities regularly state that border guards have the competence to make sure that people are not seeking asylum, we are faced with the exact opposition situation,” [said](#) the head of Sienos Grupė, Mantautas Šulskus, adding: “This time, the asylum seekers arrived exactly as they are told to do when they are turned back in the forest, and they arrived at the border checkpoint”. An audio recording of the incident which was shared with Sienos Grupė appears to confirm the pushback claim. In it, a woman repeats the word “asylum” but the man to whom she is speaking says that he does not understand what she is saying. VSAT spokesperson Giedrius Mišutis said that he had not heard the recording and rejected accusations of a

pushback. “There was no explicit request [for asylum],” he told the Baltic News Service. “We treat their non-entry into Lithuania as legitimate”.

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