



# Russia

*Conscription*



This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It has to be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service or of the Swedish Migration Agency.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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## Executive summary

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The most significant legislative changes regarding conscription since December 2022 include extending the age range from 18-27 to 18–30 years, amending the criminal code to allow earlier contract signing, and introducing electronic summonses. However, the electronic system launch has been postponed to 1 January 2025 due to technical challenges.

At 18, Russian men become eligible for conscription. If drafted, they undergo medical exams, and the Voenkomat decides whether to conscript, defer, or exempt them. Military representatives select conscripts based on needs or technical expertise. Every arm of service receives a number of conscripts. Whether or not a conscript's preferences, as to in which arm of service he will serve, are taken into consideration depends on the personnel at the Voenkomat.

Summonses can only legally be delivered in person or via registered post. Furthermore, the authorities are in the process of implementing a system of electronic summoning of conscripts. Formally once summoned, citizens cannot travel abroad and must surrender passports within five days. However, even after having received a physical summons, it is still possible for a person to leave Russia.

Academic studies are a common reason for deferral. Furthermore, corruption plays a significant part in the number of men, who have been exempted from military service for medical reasons.

Draft evasion is common but has not risen significantly since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Annually, several hundred cases are opened, most resulting in fines. However, draft evasion does not exclude individuals from future drafts. In general, there is no punishment for family members to draft evaders.

Conditions for conscripts vary; the army offers poorer conditions than the air force or navy. New conscripts receive six to eight weeks of training, with 65 percent performing manual labour, such as construction or cleaning. Conscripts also support the war effort in Ukraine through logistics or border defence.

Hazing of junior conscripts, once widespread, has declined due to the shortening of service from two years to one. Conscripts are encouraged to sign contracts with financial rewards, though authorities also apply pressure, driven by a "blame and shame" culture.

Prior to the invasion, conscripts from the North Caucasus queued to enlist, seeing military service as a path to social mobility. They served under the same conditions as others, although they often faced prejudice within the ranks.

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## Introduction

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This report at hand is a product of a joint mission to Latvia and Lithuania undertaken by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) from 4-7 November 2024. The purpose of the mission was to collect updated information on conscription in Russia.

The report includes a description of new legislation after December 2022, the conditions for Russian conscripts in practice, including where conscripts are posted and the extent to which they are under pressure to sign contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defence. Furthermore, the report covers exemptions and the extent to which conscripted are punished for evading conscription.

DIS and SMA drew up the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the report after consultation with the target users of the report, in particular the Secretariat of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board and the Asylum Division of DIS as well as a Danish advisory group (*Referencegruppen*) on COI. The results of the consultations with the Danish target users corresponded with the findings of a needs analysis carried out by the SMA. The ToR is included in Annex 1 of this report. In the process of compiling information for this report, the delegation interviewed 12 sources comprising nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, analysts and researchers. The delegation selected the sources interviewed based on their expertise, merit and experience relevant for the ToR.

Multiple sources with a variety of expertise have been interviewed to ensure that the collected information is precise and balanced. The objective is to present a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to the ToR at the time of publication. The minutes of the meetings with the consulted sources are listed in Annex 2. In addition to the information gathered from the interviews, the report is also based on available reports as well as articles in English and Russian of relevance for the ToR. The interviews were conducted in either English or in Russian with an interpreter present. Some interviews were conducted during meetings in Latvia and Lithuania, while others were conducted via Skype.

Prior to the interviews, all interlocutors were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the mission and the fact that their statements would be included in a report made publicly available. The interlocutors were asked how they wished to be introduced and quoted, and all sources are introduced and quoted according to their own wishes. 2 out of 12 sources preferred anonymity. All meeting minutes were forwarded to the interlocutors for their approval and amendment, allowing them the opportunity to offer corrections or make comments on their statements. All sources responded and approved their statements.

Care has been taken to present the views of the interlocutors as accurately and transparently as possible. For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the minutes of the interviews in Annex 2 have been numbered in a consecutive order, used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The quotation marks

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(“) are not used in the report whenever the text is a copy of the meeting minutes, however, a reference is made in the footnotes to the paragraphs where the text is cited from.

During the interview, the source may have highlighted issues that are not addressed in the ToR. As these issues could be relevant to refugee status determination, they are included in the meeting minutes in Annex 2, but not in the report.

The report has been externally peer reviewed in accordance with the EUAA COI Report Methodology.<sup>1</sup> The research and editing of this report was finalised on 27 January 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> EUAA, *Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2023, [url](#)



## Abbreviations

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ACS	Alternative Civil Service
AWOL	Absence without official leave
COI	Country of Origin Information
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
FSB	Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
HRW	Human Rights Watch
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (persons)
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MVD	Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SMA	Swedish Migration Agency
SCP	Single Conscription Point
ToR	Terms of Reference
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VDV	Vozdushno-desantnye voyska (paratroopers)

## Glossary

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### **Dedovshchina**

Dedovshchina, meaning "reign of the grandfathers/old-timers", refers to the informal practice of hazing and abusing junior conscripts, a practice that originated in the Soviet Armed Forces and continued in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

### **Gosuslugi**

Gosuslugi is a digital platform operated by the Russian government. The platform provides individuals and legal entities with online access to information about state and municipal services in Russia.

### **Krysha**

Krysha, which translates to "roof", is used in Russia to describe individuals or organisations that offer a variety of services, often informal and illicit, such as protection and patronage.

### **Refusenik/otkaznik**

Refusenik/otkaznik refers to Russian servicemen and National Guard fighters who refused to participate in the invasion of Ukraine.

### **Ryadavoy**

Ryadavoy is the lowest initial military rank in the Armed Forces of Russia, belonging to the category of soldiers (sailors) – equivalent to a private (soldier).

### **Spetsnaz**

Spetsnaz – Special purpose (forces) – is the name of Russia's military special forces.

### **Uchastkovy**

Uchastkovyi – often translated into district police officer – is a police officer that carries out official activities aimed at protecting the rights of citizens living in the relevant administrative-territorial area.

### **Voенkomat**

Voенkomat (in English: military Commissariat) – often translated into English by military enlistment office or draft board – is a government institution under the Ministry of Defence, which is given the role to recruit conscripts and mobilised personnel to the Russian military. Furthermore, the Voенkomat chooses who is eligible and ineligible for military service.

# 1. Legal framework

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Pursuant to article 59 of the Russian Constitution of 1993, Russian citizens have a duty and an obligation to defend the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the article specifies that any Russian citizen is obliged to carry out military service, according to the federal law.<sup>2</sup>

The main piece of Russian legislation that regulates conscription is the federal law “On Military Duty and Military Service” (N53-FZ), which has been effective since 1998 and amended several times since. This law contains the details for both conscription, contract soldiers and mobilisation.<sup>3</sup>

The right for Russian citizens to serve alternative civil service is also stated in article 59 of the constitution, if the citizen’s convictions or religion contradict military service. For more information on Alternative Civil Service, please see [chapter 3.2](#).<sup>4</sup>

The Russian constitutional law on Martial Law defines a number of measures that can be activated in times of war. These measures may limit the civil rights of the Russian population, as the authorities may implement curfews or establish visitation zones. These measures have been fully effective in the Russian regions bordering Ukraine. The further away from Ukraine a Russian region is located, the fewer measures have been put into force.<sup>5</sup>

According to Freedom House, the legal framework related to conscription and the implementation are different. The implementation and application of the existing legal framework related to conscription is carried out in a selective manner. The selective application of the laws implies that the same rules do not necessarily apply to all regions, all social groups or people with different ethnic backgrounds. Conscription can also be used against political opponents, and people and businesses that the authorities feel negatively about.<sup>6</sup>

The source at Freedom House stated that Russia cannot be described as a country of ‘rule of law’, but rather as a country of ‘rule by law’. Comprehensive legislative frameworks are in place, but laws, legislations and regulations are made up and applied in a weaponised way to harm certain groups of society. This selective implementation of laws leads to difficulties in judgement when representatives from foreign countries that are more inclined to follow their ‘rule of law’ apply their view on Russia, as if Russia technically should operate in the same manner.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gosudarstvennaya Duma, *Конституция РФ, Статья 59*, 1 July 2020, [url](#); Claus Mathiesen: 2

<sup>3</sup> Consultant, *Федеральный закон "О воинской обязанности и военной службе" от 28.03.1998 N 53-ФЗ*, 28 March 1998, [url](#); Claus Mathiesen: 1

<sup>4</sup> Gosudarstvennaya Duma, *Конституция РФ, Статья 59*, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> Consultant, *Федеральный конституционный закон от 30.01.2002 N 1-ФКЗ "О военном положении"*, 2 November 2023, [url](#); Claus Mathiesen: 8

<sup>6</sup> Freedom House: 2

<sup>7</sup> Freedom House: 4

## 1.1. New legislation after December 2022

The most important legislative changes regarding conscription since December 2022 are the following:

- Extension in draft age to 18 - 30 years
- Amendments of the criminal code
- Amendments allowing contracts to be signed sooner
- Electronic summons (in process)

The largest change in legislation has been the amendment of article 22 in The Federal law “On Military Duty and Military Service”, where the age of conscription has been extended from 18-27 years to 18-30 years.<sup>8</sup> The new amendment came into effect 1 January 2024, meaning that the spring draft of 2024 was the first draft, in which the change in legislation was implemented.<sup>9</sup>

Once a man turns 30, he can no longer be drafted for conscription service, but if a man is summoned for instance two weeks before he turns 30, he is obligated to serve.<sup>10</sup> The change in the age of conscription does not affect those, who have already served as conscripts. However, it does affect a person who has previously had his military service deferred for instance due to being enrolled at university.<sup>11</sup>

According to associate professor Claus Mathiesen at the Royal Danish Defence College, the reasons for extending the age of conscription are not fully transparent, but most likely there is an ongoing attempt to broaden the pool of potential conscripts. The duration of the spring draft has also been extended in order for the [Voenkomat](#)<sup>12</sup> to draft men, who have completed their studies in the preceding summer.<sup>13</sup>

The Russian authorities did not change the duration of the conscription period,<sup>14</sup> but there has reportedly been talks about prolonging the duration of conscription service from one to two years, according to two of the interviewed sources.<sup>15</sup> However, according to the observations of Mark Galeotti, this change in age range of conscripts has only been welcomed by the military whereas the Kremlin see this as politically unpopular, although the military would welcome such a step. The reason for this divided popularity is that at the time, when conscripts have

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<sup>8</sup> Consultant, *Федеральный закон "О воинской обязанности и военной службе" от 28.03.1998 N 53-ФЗ, Статья 22. Граждане, подлежащие призыву на военную службу*, 2 October 2024,[url](#); Huseyn Aliyev: 1; Claus Mathiesen: 20; A human rights lawyer: 1; Freedom House: 1; Sergey Krivenko: 3

<sup>9</sup> A human rights lawyer: 1

<sup>10</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 22

<sup>11</sup> A human rights lawyer: 2

<sup>12</sup> Russian military enlistment office. For further, please see glossary

<sup>13</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 21

<sup>14</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 3; Claus Mathiesen: 26

<sup>15</sup> Mark Galeotti: 1; Huseyn Aliyev: 23

completed their basic training and their unit training, they are only fully usable in the last three or four months of their conscription cycle. If there were to be added an additional six months, this could be useful time, according to the Russian military.<sup>16</sup>

Further to the change in age of conscripts, there has also been approved new amendments of the criminal code, harshening the punishment for rejecting military service (for further information see [chapter 4](#)).<sup>17</sup> The amendments consist of an increase in fines and the introduction of restrictions on those subjected to conscription.<sup>18</sup> These restrictions include a ban on leaving the country, driving, buying or selling real estate, taking out loans, and registering a small business. Additionally, regional governments can expand the list by introducing measures like suspending social benefits.<sup>19</sup>

The legal amendments in 2023 allow the police to search for draftees (e.g. to search phone bills and films from CCTV cameras) and demand that employers inform the authorities about changes related to potential conscripts. Consequently, the possibilities to leave the country and to hide in order to avoid conscription have become substantially limited.<sup>20</sup>

In the spring of 2023, the State Duma passed amendments allowing contracts to be signed with the MoD immediately after completing 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Recent school graduates, along with other contract soldiers, can now be sent to the front just four weeks after beginning their military service.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2. Electronic summons

One important change in legislation regarding conscription is the introduction of the electronic mobilisation and electronic conscription, which should have been operational from 1 November 2024.<sup>22</sup> However, the launch of the electronic system has faced technical and logistical issues, which has meant that it has not been implemented as of December 2024. The date has been postponed until 1 January 2025.<sup>23</sup>

The electronic system is designed to prevent summoned individuals from receiving travel documents as well as from leaving the country, thereby preventing them from evading conscription (see [chapter 2.4](#) for further information).<sup>24</sup> One source opined that the electronic

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Galeotti: 1

<sup>17</sup> Mediazona: 2

<sup>18</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 2; Инструкции «Призыва к совести», *Что поменялось для призывников к 1 октября 2023 года и как это влияет на защиту права не воевать*, 17 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> Carnegie Politika, *Russia's New Conscription Law Brings the Digital Gulag Much, Much Closer*, 17 April 2023, [url](#); Sergey Krivenko: 19

<sup>20</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 19

<sup>21</sup> BBC News, *Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> Consultant, *Федеральный закон от 14.04.2023 N 127-ФЗ "О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации"*, Статья 3, [url](#); BBC News, *Повестка на «Госуслуги», мгновенный запрет выезда для уклонистов: что в России изменится в системе призыва с 1 ноября*, 30 April 2024, [url](#); Huseyn Aliyev: 1, 9; Journalist Irina Novik: 1; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 2; Mark Galeotti: 17; OVD-Info: 2

<sup>23</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 8; A human rights lawyer: 7; Mediazona: 7; Claus Mathiesen: 35

<sup>24</sup> Freedom House: 7; OVD-Info: 2; Sergey Krivenko: 6

system would also offer possibilities of summoning people living in the diaspora.<sup>25</sup> However, the source had not encountered any Russian citizens abroad who have been summoned through the digital system yet.<sup>26</sup>

Pursuant to Russian Federal law № 127-FZ article 3, electronic summons uploaded to individual accounts on the Russian public service platform [Gosuslugi](#) are deemed delivered after seven days, regardless of whether the conscript in question accesses the Gosuslugi website or receives a copy by mail.<sup>27</sup> A person can find out whether they are summoned via the Russian webpage: <https://пеестрповесток.рф>.<sup>28</sup>

The Voenkomat is the only legal authority that is allowed to summon a person. Therefore, the use of Gosuslugi is simply the most efficient way of actually accessing all potential conscripts. According to Mark Galeotti, the electronic summons is first of all intended to be used for mobilisation. Therefore, this source opined that any new system will most likely only be effective when a new wave of mobilisation occurs.<sup>29</sup>

The electronic system has been tested in 2024 in the regions of Sakhalin, Ryazan and Mari El.<sup>30</sup> According to the chair of the State Duma's Defence Committee, Andrei Kartapolov, there will be a mixed approach in these three regions, where both physical paper and electronic summons will be sent.<sup>31</sup> In the other regions of Russia, summonses are still delivered physically to conscripts either by registered post or by a home visit from the Voenkomat personnel.<sup>32</sup>

Mark Galeotti stressed that the new electronic summons are primarily intended for mobilisation and not for conscription. Galeotti explained that people do not flee Russia in the same manner to avoid conscription, as they do to avoid mobilisation. The last wave of mobilisation of 300 000 men in the autumn of 2022 resulted in approximately 900 000 men fleeing the country.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Freedom House: 7

<sup>26</sup> Freedom House: 9

<sup>27</sup> Consultant, Федеральный закон от 14.04.2023 N 127-ФЗ "О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации", Статья 3, [url](#); Huseyn Aliyev: 3-4; A human rights lawyer: 6; Sergey Krivenko: 8; Journalist Irina Novik: 1; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 4-6; Claus Mathiesen: 29-30

<sup>28</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe: 4

<sup>29</sup> Mark Galeotti: 20

<sup>30</sup> RTVI, *Осенний призыв-2024: сроки, цифровые повестки, отсрочки и меры против уклонистов*, 25 September 2024, [url](#); Novaya Gazeta Europe: 3; Claus Mathiesen: 35; Huseyn Aliyev: 9; A human rights lawyer: 6; Sergey Krivenko: 8

<sup>31</sup> Interfaks, *Картаполов заявил, что основанием для призыва в армию этой осенью будут бумажные повестки*, 23 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe: 8; Claus Mathiesen: 35-36; Huseyn Aliyev: 9; Sergey Krivenko: 8; Freedom House: 8; A human rights lawyer: 8

<sup>33</sup> Mark Galeotti: 18

Given that there is not yet any signs of a mobilisation wave happening despite the fact that the military continues to push for it (as of December 2024), the implementation of the electronic summons for conscripts seems to be unrolling slightly more relaxed.<sup>34</sup>

### 1.3. Centralised database

The Russian authorities have also established a centralised database containing information on potential conscripts.<sup>35</sup> The central database consists of two registers:

1. A digital register of individuals accounted for conscription or military service in general (men from category A and B between 18-55 years). For further information, see [chapter 2](#).
2. A register of summons.<sup>36</sup>

According to the law, all state agencies and departments, such as healthcare institutions, tax agencies, employers (both public and private), educational institutions and the police should provide updated information about every person, who is subject to be in this register. The idea behind it is that all information should be available in one joint digital register, for the Voenkoms to be able to see a complete picture of every person subject to conscription or military service. As of December 2024, different agencies have kept their own registers of information in different forms, and it has proven problematic to unify these registers.<sup>37</sup>

The digital military register is a uniform system, to which every Voenkoms is entitled to have access. The registry contains all the information available to the Russian authorities on each individual eligible for conscription or mobilisation. The database will contain the following:

- a person's home address
- phone numbers
- email addresses
- places of residence
- employment status and
- educational history.<sup>38</sup>

In regard to the register of summons, the intention is that a summons should be included in a special digital register, after the Voenkoms sends a summons to an individual. State bodies have a formal right to restrict the rights of summoned individuals, such as banning them from

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Galeotti: 19

<sup>35</sup> Consultant, Федеральный закон от 14.04.2023 N 127-ФЗ "О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации", Статья 1, [url](#); Freedom House: 13; Sergey Krivenko: 5; Claus Mathiesen: 32; Huseyn Aliyev: 5; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 7

<sup>36</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 5; Claus Mathiesen: 32

<sup>37</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 5; Huseyn Aliyev: 6

<sup>38</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 5

leaving the country. With this digital register, the border police can automatically stop a person included in the register from leaving the country.<sup>39</sup>

Both electronic registers are nationwide, and the information from them become immediately available to the FSB border service, once a summons has been sent.<sup>40</sup> For further information on leaving Russia, please see [chapter 2.4](#).

Previously, much of the personal information on conscripts functioned in a rather old-fashioned way, so, this new single database is perceived to be an advantage for the Voenkoms and for the Ministry of Defence by one of the interviewed academic experts.<sup>41</sup>

Huseyn Aliyev, Senior Lecturer at the University of Glasgow, also opined that the introduction of a new database is likely to simplify the retrieval of data on individuals when conducting conscription campaigns and when possibly conducting mobilisation campaigns for reservists.<sup>42</sup>

There are mixed information about the functionality of this centralised database as of November 2024. A number of sources opined that the database is neither complete, nor functional.<sup>43</sup> However, two sources opined that the personnel at the Voenkomat is not interested in this register, as it would make it more difficult to use means of corruption, which are largely prevalent today.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, one source opined that the centralised database where conscripts and persons eligible for mobilisation is active. Such a database has been in place for a long time. However, historically it has been much more effective on conscripts than on reservists. The database is quite good at knowing where the 17-year-old boys are and where they live. Nevertheless, its capacity to track reservists was always much worse.<sup>45</sup>

Until 2022, the reserve system had fallen into disarray and the Russian authorities have attempted to strengthen the reserve system. This attempt has been carried out primarily by leveraging the national tax and residence registration database, rather than by creating an entirely new system from scratch. However, it is hard to tell, how effective this database on reservists is.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 5

<sup>40</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 33

<sup>41</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 7

<sup>42</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 7

<sup>43</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 5; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 7

<sup>44</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 7; Freedom House: 13

<sup>45</sup> Mark Galeotti: 21

<sup>46</sup> Mark Galeotti: 22



## 2. Recruitment of conscripts

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There have been no changes regarding the number of people conscripted over the past years.<sup>47</sup> This number is still approximately 300 000 annually, which constitutes roughly one third of the total population of men turning 18 per year.<sup>48</sup>

Pursuant to article 25 in the Federal law On Military Duty and Military Service, summons for conscription are sent out twice a year; during spring (from 1 April to 15 July) and during autumn (from 1 October to 31 December).<sup>49</sup>

The plan for the autumn draft of 2024 was to draft 133 000 conscripts, which is a slight increase of about 3 000 compared to the draft in 2023. The spring draft of 2024 consisted of 150 000 conscripts.<sup>50</sup>

Although the conscripts are an integrated part of the military, the military does not independently decide how many shall be drafted. The army will forward their request to the Kremlin, but it remains a political decision by the Kremlin as to how many shall be drafted.<sup>51</sup>

Previously, observers speculated about an increase in the number of conscripts for the autumn draft of 2024, which, however, did not occur. The Russian military has suffered huge losses, and recruitment of contract soldiers is not going well.<sup>52</sup> However, the Russian military authorities' main task is to ensure an increase in the number of contract soldiers rather than in the number of conscripts. Since issues concerning conscripts are sensitive to the Russian public, the Russian authorities are unwilling to increase the number of conscripts.<sup>53</sup>

If the authorities are unable to recruit sufficient numbers of contract soldiers, they only have two other means left to increase the number of military personnel; either via increasing the draft of conscripts or via mobilisation. Both of these options are politically unpopular decisions. However, the risk of a second wave of mobilisation is prevalent, according to Sergey Krivenko.<sup>54</sup>

Although President Putin announced an expansion of the military on 16 September 2024, this has not affected the conscript force. Now it may be that in the next autumn and spring drafts, the numbers change to try to reflect this new expansion.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 4; Mark Galeotti: 5; Huseyn Aliyev: 23

<sup>48</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 4

<sup>49</sup> Consultant, *Федеральный закон "О воинской обязанности и военной службе" от 28.03.1998 N 53-ФЗ, Статья 25*, 28 March 1998, [url](#); Novaya Gazeta Europe: 9; Mediazona: 7; A human rights lawyer: 3; Claus Mathiesen: 19

<sup>50</sup> A human rights lawyer: 3

<sup>51</sup> Mark Galeotti: 4

<sup>52</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 4

<sup>53</sup> A human rights lawyer: 4

<sup>54</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 4

<sup>55</sup> Mark Galeotti: 3; The Moscow Times, *Putin Orders Russian Army to Increase Troop Size by 180K*, 16 September 2024, [url](#)

## 2.1. Screening at the Voenkomat

The regional Voenkomat manages the screening process of conscripts. The process of conscription is twofold. The year a Russian man turns 17, he is summoned at the Voenkomat where his documents will be checked and for a preliminary conscription evaluation, during which he will be assessed by medical doctors, specialists and psychologists before being evaluated for service by the Voenkomat. This preliminary evaluation is mandatory for every man once he turns 17.<sup>56</sup>

The person would then have a brief interview with the Voenkomat personnel for them to get the information they need to assign conscripts, according to their skills. This is done because some arms of service are prioritised over others. The Voenkomat personnel will double check if the person has some kind of sporting achievement or if the person has IT skills, etc. that can be useful for the particular arm of service. Furthermore, during this interview, the potential conscript will get a chance to state if he qualifies for exemption or deferral (see [chapter 3.1](#) for further).<sup>57</sup>

After this evaluation, the young men are placed in to one of five categories.

1. Category A (А) is for those deemed fit for military service.
2. Category B (Б) is for those who are fit to serve with minor limitations.
3. Category V (В) is for those who are deemed fit to serve with limitations.
4. Category G (Г) Men who are temporarily unfit to serve are put in to the fourth category. Usually, these are men with treatable health conditions, and they are then given 6-12 months to undergo treatment after which they will be re-evaluated by the Voenkomat.
5. Category D (Д) is reserved for men deemed unfit for military service.<sup>58</sup>

Those assessed in category V (3) are not called up during peacetime but may be called up during wartime. As they have no prior military training, they must undergo a shorter or longer training programme to perform service during wartime, likely in roles that are not particularly demanding.<sup>59</sup>

Those assessed in category G (4), are referred for treatment lasting between 6 to 12 months. Following this, a new health assessment is conducted, which could potentially lead to placement in any of the other categories, i.e., A, B, V, or D. In the first two cases, individuals are called up for compulsory military service. In the latter two cases, they are not called up, but if placed in category V, they are transferred to the mobilisable reserve and may be called up during wartime. For those initially placed in category G (4), their subsequent category could be any of the four mentioned. However, the most likely outcome—if no specific treatment is

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<sup>56</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 10; Mark Galeotti: 9; A human rights lawyer: 15

<sup>57</sup> Mark Galeotti: 8; Sergey Krivenko: 32

<sup>58</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 11

<sup>59</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 12

undertaken during the 6-12 months but recovery from fractures or similar occurs naturally—is placement in category B (2).<sup>60</sup>

These five categories have remained unchanged for a long time, and may in fact date back to the time of the Russian Tsars.<sup>61</sup>

In peacetime, only men in category A and B are drafted for military service, but in wartime, men who have been deemed fit to serve with limitations are transferred to the reserve.<sup>62</sup> In the early 2000's, approximately 30 percent of the young men were deemed unfit to serve. During recent years, that number has decreased, according to official sources.<sup>63</sup>

After turning 18, Russian men are eligible for conscription and if they are drafted, they will once again be examined medically for changes in their health condition.<sup>64</sup> It is then up to the Voenkomat to decide whether to conscript the person or grant him a deferral or an exemption.<sup>65</sup>

Assuming that the person will pass, he will be handed a new summons, in which it is stated when the person should reappear at the Voenkomat to commence the conscription, usually within the scope of three to five days.<sup>66</sup> However, Huseyn Aliyev opined that the conventional deadline from when a person has received a summons to when he has to appear at the Voenkomat is approximately 20 days.<sup>67</sup>

Upon reappearing at the Voenkomat, the conscript is transferred to a so-called regional collection point. Each region in Russia has one regional collection point.<sup>68</sup> Here the person would be subjected to the so-called BIOS criteria, which means that the representatives of the various arms of service will be going through the personal files of the conscripts.<sup>69</sup>

Representatives from different military units meet at the regional collection point and choose conscripts. The selection can be based on qualifications such as special technical competence.<sup>70</sup>

Every arm of service will receive a number of conscripts. Broadly speaking there are the following arms of service:

- The strategic rocket forces
- The air forces
- The navy

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<sup>60</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 12

<sup>61</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 13

<sup>62</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 14

<sup>63</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 15

<sup>64</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 17; Sergey Krivenko: 31

<sup>65</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 31

<sup>66</sup> Mark Galeotti: 9; Mark Galeotti: 9

<sup>67</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 18

<sup>68</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 31

<sup>69</sup> Mark Galeotti: 9

<sup>70</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 32

## RUSSIA – CONSCRIPTION

- The army
- Some conscripts are serving in the National Guard.
- Some conscripts are serving in the border service
- The paratroopers (VDV), which are separate from the air force in terms of picking conscripts. These conscripts could also serve in the Spetsnaz (Special Forces) under the VDV.<sup>71</sup>

According to Claus Mathiesen, conscripts can also be drafted to serve in Ministry of Civil Defence, Emergencies and Disaster Relief.<sup>72</sup>

In the screening process, the strategic rocket forces will be given the right to pick conscripts first. They would typically choose persons who are technically adept, and then the paratroopers (VDV) will have their select and typically go for persons who are tougher, which for instance could be a cross-country runner at school. A person could try to influence this screening, if he believes he has an advantage somewhere. However, the screening process has been described as a pretty clumsy and rough process' by Mark Galeotti. There are cases precisely where a person has certain skills, but was overlooked by the Voenkomat or where the person in question did not bother mentioning his skills to the Voenkomat.<sup>73</sup>

As Russia is experiencing more military training at schools again similar to what happened in the USSR, it is becoming easier for persons who wish to join the [Spetsnaz](#) to distinguish themselves there. A young man who already has experience with parachute jumping may be more likely to be selected by the Spetsnaz.<sup>74</sup>

Whether or not a conscript's preferences as to in which arm of service he will serve are taken into consideration depends on the personnel at the Voenkomat. In this regard, Mark Galeotti assesses that there are no regions where conscripts would be worse off compared to others as it all depends on the competence and the care of the individual Voenkomat personnel.<sup>75</sup>

However, corruption could play a role in whether a conscript would be assigned to the region he wishes. Firstly, corruption plays a role in terms of bribing a doctor enough to obtain a medical certification stating that the person in question cannot serve. Secondly, corruption could play a role at a Voenkomat where a person might pay to be registered as exempted from conscription. Thirdly, a person may pay the Voenkomat in order to get into a particular arm of service or to get a particular assignment.<sup>76</sup>

With regard to the geographical deployment of conscripts, it is important to note that at the Voenkomat level, a conscript would not be assigned to a specific unit, but he will be assigned to

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<sup>71</sup> Mark Galeotti: 14

<sup>72</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 48

<sup>73</sup> Mark Galeotti: 10; Sergey Krivenko: 32

<sup>74</sup> Mark Galeotti: 15

<sup>75</sup> Mark Galeotti: 11

<sup>76</sup> Mark Galeotti: 12

an arm of service. For example, at the Voenkomat level a person could influence whether he will serve as part of the army or rather would join the navy.<sup>77</sup>

Before 2022, when the Spetsnaz was decimated, the Russian military sought to professionalise the Spetsnaz, which meant that the proportion of conscripts in the Spetsnaz decreased and the Spetsnaz stopped having units in all of the Russian regions.<sup>78</sup>

So-called “one-day drafts” are illegal ways of drafting conscripts. “One-day drafts” is a process where individuals show up at the Voenkomat for a specific purpose (e.g. to collect documents) and once there, are conscripted and sent to military service the very same day. This practice constitutes a violation of Russian law and was previously uncommon. However, an increase in this practice has been noted since 2022. The practice is more common in bigger cities, since people in rural regions usually adhere to their summons to a greater extent than in larger and more densely populated places.<sup>79</sup> In October 2023, at the beginning of the autumn conscription campaign, there were also examples of forced one-day conscription through raids conducted in Moscow where young people were conscripted from dormitories, apartments, grabbed on the streets, in the subway, in mosques and in educational institutions.<sup>80</sup>

The authorities have also intensified conscription through the establishment of a Single Conscription Point<sup>81</sup> (SCP) in Moscow in March 2024. In the SCP, conscripts’ personal files are stored centrally and their smartphones are confiscated at the entrance. Freedom of movement and means of communication is restricted and attorneys are not permitted.<sup>82</sup> The practice of SCP is planned to be introduced in other regions.<sup>83</sup>

## 2.2. Quota for conscripts

Each Voenkomat is assigned a quota of the number of conscripts they each have to deliver during every draft.<sup>84</sup> The main goal for the Voenkomat is to fill this quota, and not to conscript specific individuals.<sup>85</sup>

There is an element of arbitrariness in the way the Voenkomats seek to fulfil their quota with new conscripts. The quota is basically driven by demographics. In other words, it is a roughly analogous portion of how many 18 year olds, the military will have at their disposal, once the persons with exemptions and deferrals are taken out of the equation.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Mark Galeotti: 13

<sup>78</sup> Mark Galeotti: 16

<sup>79</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 11

<sup>80</sup> The “Call to Conscience” coalition et. al, The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War, 31 May 2024, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>81</sup> In Russian called: Единый призывной пункт

<sup>82</sup> The “Call to Conscience” coalition et. al, The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War, 31 May 2024, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>83</sup> The “Call to Conscience” coalition et. al, Обзор нарушений прав и сопротивления в весенний призыв 2024 года, [undated], [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> Mediazona: 8; A human rights lawyer: 9; Sergey Krivenko: 17; Mark Galeotti: 6; Freedom House: 5

<sup>85</sup> A human rights lawyer: 13; Sergey Krivenko: 17

<sup>86</sup> Mark Galeotti: 6

However, if a Voenkomat does not meet its draft quota, the Voenkomat’s personnel may resort to patrolling the streets alongside local police in search of young men, who are on the list of drafted conscripts. If a person is wanted, he may be detained and brought to the Voenkomat. In this case, the conscript has no choice but to join the military, as he cannot avoid going by refusing to sign his summons at this point.<sup>87</sup> The authorities become more aggressive in patrolling for evaders towards the end of the drafting period, if the quota has not been met.<sup>88</sup>

In rural regions such, as the North Caucasus, there does not seem to be issues with filling quotas, due to the high level of unemployment and an apparent willingness to join the military.<sup>89</sup> However, patrolling is reported to be more aggressive in the larger cities, where people are better educated and enjoy higher living standards, and therefore are less motivated to join the military. Furthermore, quotas are higher in bigger cities. The police do not have the authority to hand over a person to the Voenkomat without a representative of the Voenkomat also being present.<sup>90</sup>

If draft quotas are not met in the cities or in densely populated urban areas, the authorities can increase quotas in rural provincial regions. Consequently, the draft percentage of people from e.g. Buryatia is relatively higher than that from e.g. Moscow.<sup>91</sup> Even private companies are given quotas to fill with conscripts, according to one source. The source opined that although these quotas constituted the basic premises of how the conscripts system worked, these assigning predetermined quotas to private companies have not been an efficient way of identifying more conscripts.<sup>92</sup>

### 2.3 Receiving a summons

If not handed out electronically via Gosuslugi, the summons for conscription or for mobilisation could only legally be distributed in two ways:

1. Handing the summons in person to a potential conscript.
2. Sending the summons by registered post, in an envelope.<sup>93</sup>

The typical way to draft Russian citizens for conscription is for Voenkomat staff to show up at the person’s place of residence or to approach the person at their place of education (high school or other) handing him the summons, which the recipient then has to sign.<sup>94</sup>

The Federal law “On Military Duty and Military Service” does not mention that delivering summons to family members/other individuals living at the registered address is illegal or invalidates the summons. In fact, the Federal Law “On Enforcement Proceedings” Art.27 (point

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<sup>87</sup> A human rights lawyer: 9

<sup>88</sup> A human rights lawyer: 10

<sup>89</sup> A human rights lawyer: 11

<sup>90</sup> A human rights lawyer: 12

<sup>91</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 18

<sup>92</sup> Freedom House: 5

<sup>93</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 2; Sergey Krivenko: 8

<sup>94</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 10; EUSA, *The Russian Federation – Military service*, December 2022, [url](#), p. 16; Sergey Krivenko: 8

2), states that in case of the absence of a recipient, a summons can be handed over to any adult family member.<sup>95</sup>

Huseyn Aliyev noted that some Russian lawyers argue that delivering summons to family members is illegal and the same lawyers have encouraged conscripts to initiate court cases. However, these cases have often resulted in court verdicts against the complainants.<sup>96</sup>

If the Voenkomat personnel for some reason are unable to deliver the summons in person, they can send the summons by registered post, depending on the particular region and on the particular Voenkomat.<sup>97</sup> In certain cases, some of the Voenkومات are in favour of sending out summons by registered post. If a particular Voenkomat lacks staff, it would be time-consuming to go door by door.<sup>98</sup>

The delivery of summons is usually different in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vladivostok and Novosibirsk compared to other areas as these are larger cities, which have quite large populations and insufficient staff for the Voenkomat to hand-deliver summons. Some Voenkومات delegate the summons delivery duty to the district police sheriff (in Russian called [uchastkovyi](#)). In the cities, the new electronic system will be a huge relief for the Voenkomat, so they no longer have to rely on sending summons by registered post.<sup>99</sup>

Sending summons by registered post is also a widespread practice in the far northern regions, where there are large distances to cover for one Voenkomat. In these regions, the Voenkomat will rely more on the postal service rather than sending their own people out.<sup>100</sup>

One source stated, however, that there were no regional differences when it comes to which of the two mentioned methods is applied when summoning conscripts.<sup>101</sup>

According to the law, the conscripted person has to recognise reception of the summons by signing the letter in order for it to be valid.<sup>102</sup> However, in reality, if somebody else signed the registered letter for him or if the courier simply throws the letter into a post box the Voenkomat will consider it as a delivered summons.<sup>103</sup>

In practice, a postal worker has to deliver that letter, with a summons inside to the potential conscript in person and that person has to sign for it. However, delivering summons by registered post has not worked in reality. Therefore, in most cases, postal workers do not chase

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<sup>95</sup> Consultant, *Федеральный закон от 02.10.2007 N 229-ФЗ "Об исполнительном производстве, Статья 27. Вручение повестки, иного извещения*, 23 November 2024, [url](#); Huseyn Aliyev: 13

<sup>96</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 14

<sup>97</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 11

<sup>98</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 20

<sup>99</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 21

<sup>100</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 22

<sup>101</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 9

<sup>102</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 11-12

<sup>103</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 12

down the potential conscript. Instead, they are more likely to hand over this letter to somebody at this address in order for them to give it to the person in question.<sup>104</sup>

According to one of the interviewed experts, propaganda plays a part in convincing people who are generally unaware of their rights and the conscription procedure that they must serve. Many believe that the state has unlimited rights to send a person to conscription and that once a person is informed about a summons, they must adhere to it, no matter how it is delivered.

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The current situation of summoning conscripts is described as a “huge mess”, where personnel from the Voenkamat use several mixed methods; by sending formal summons, SMS-messages<sup>106</sup>, and messages through the official service Gosuslugi, all while the media informs people that all of these methods are valid even though they are not. Hence, even an SMS from the Voenkamat risks being perceived as a legally valid summons, although it is in fact not. Legally, only the traditional means of summoning in person or by registered post are compulsory. However, people are generally unaware of their rights and the procedure, and hence are not able to defend their rights.<sup>107</sup>

## 2.4. Leaving Russia after being summoned

Pursuant to the amendments of the Russian Federal law № 127-FZ article 2 and 3, citizens who are subject to military conscription and who have received a summons from the Voenkamat are prohibited from leaving the Russian Federation from the day a summons is deemed delivered, in accordance with federal law. This restriction remains in effect until the obligation to report to the Voenkamat as per the summons has been fulfilled,<sup>108</sup> or when the drafting period in which they received the summons has ended. The person will thereafter be able to legally leave the country unless the authorities have opened a criminal case due to draft evasion.<sup>109</sup>

Prior to the abovementioned amendments in May 2023, a summons from a Voenkamat did not restrict the rights or freedoms to travel abroad. The summons merely informed the recipient of their obligation to be at a specific place at a specific time. Until that moment, the conscript was free to travel abroad. However, travelling abroad did not exempt the person in question from their obligations stated in the summons.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 11

<sup>105</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 12

<sup>106</sup> Mediazona, *Московские призывники, которые не явились в военкомат по повестке, получили СМС с информацией о запрете покидать Россию*, 12 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 10; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 10

<sup>108</sup> Consultant, Федеральный закон от 14.04.2023 N 127-ФЗ "О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации", Статья 2, [url](#); Consultant, Федеральный закон от 14.04.2023 N 127-ФЗ "О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации", Статья 3, [url](#); Journalist Irina Novik: 2

<sup>109</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 6

<sup>110</sup> Tinkoff journal, *Можно ли уехать из России, если получил повестку в военкомат?*, 7 July 2022, [url](#)



In practice, however, it is still possible for a person to leave Russia after having received a physical summons.<sup>111</sup> When summoned, the conscript is given a deadline to appear at the Voenkomat. It is unlikely that the conscript will be stopped by the authorities if he flees the country prior to his deadline.<sup>112</sup> Although the system is electronic, it still requires Voenkomat staff to manually enter a code to register that this person has not turned up.<sup>113</sup> If a person refuses to sign a summons, he is able to leave the country, as a person is only obliged to appear at a Voenkomat, after they have signed the summons.<sup>114</sup>

According to Journalist Irina Novik, conscripts are required to hand over their passport to the Ministry of Internal Affairs within five days. In reality, however, conscripts will first be barred from leaving the country legally only after a decision has been made about conscription for military service or about sending him to alternative civil service (ACS).<sup>115</sup>

In November 2024, news emerged that Moscow conscripts who failed to report to the Voenkomat after receiving a summons received SMS messages informing them of a travel ban from leaving Russia. However, this might be merely an act of intimidation.<sup>116</sup>

When a person is enrolled into the military, they are already barred from leaving the country legally. Basically, the point at which a person actually turns up at the Voenkomat, assuming they are not exempted or deferred, he would be barred from leaving the country legally and if the person shows up at a border checkpoint, he will appear in their system.<sup>117</sup>

### *2.4.1. Leaving Russia after receiving an electronic summons*

The summoning by electronic register of summons is not yet operational and as a consequence a person who has been summoned to conscription can still leave the country.<sup>118</sup>

Once the electronic system of summoning is effective, the idea is that a person will no longer be able to leave the country after being summoned.<sup>119</sup> The electronic system is designed to prevent summoned individuals from receiving travel documents as well as leaving the country, thereby preventing them from evading conscription.<sup>120</sup> Although, it is currently unclear what happens after the implementation of the electronic system.<sup>121</sup>

Therefore, a draftee cannot legally leave Russia the moment the electronic summons has been sent to him, as the FSB will receive a notification if his passport is scanned at the border. Claus

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<sup>111</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe: 10; Mark Galeotti: 23; OVD-Info: 5; Sergey Krivenko: 6; Freedom House: 10

<sup>112</sup> Mark Galeotti: 23; OVD-Info: 5; Freedom House: 10

<sup>113</sup> Mark Galeotti: 23;

<sup>114</sup> A human rights lawyer: 8

<sup>115</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 2

<sup>116</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe: 10; Mediazona, *Московские призывники, которые не явились в военкомат по повестке, получили СМС с информацией о запрете покидать Россию*, 12 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> Mark Galeotti: 24; Claus Mathiesen: 27

<sup>118</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 6

<sup>119</sup> Freedom House: 10; A human rights lawyer: 7; Sergey Krivenko: 6

<sup>120</sup> Freedom House: 7

<sup>121</sup> A human rights lawyer: 14

Mathiesen assessed that this applies to all types of passports including non-biometric passports.<sup>122</sup> Both electronic registers are nationwide, and the information from them become immediately available to the FSB border service, once a summons has been sent.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 34

<sup>123</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 33

## 3. Exemptions, deferrals and Alternative Civil Service (ACS)

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### 3.1. Exemptions and deferrals

Traditionally, there have been five main ways in which to avoid military service in Russia:

- by hiding
- by leaving the country
- by being granted exemption due to health conditions
- by being granted deferral due to studies, or
- by applying for alternative civil service.<sup>124</sup>

The grounds for exemption and deferral from conscription in Russia are regulated in articles 23 and 24 of the Federal Law “On Military Duty and Military Service” from 1998.<sup>125</sup>

Exemption from military service means the cancellation of a citizen’s obligation for compulsory military service based on legitimate reasons.<sup>126</sup> Exemption can be granted for persons recognised as unfit for military service due to health reasons, persons who have previously completed military or ACS, persons who have completed military service in a foreign state,<sup>127</sup> or if a person’s father or brother has died in the course of their military service. Furthermore, convicts serving a sentence, persons with an outstanding criminal record, and persons under criminal investigation can also be exempted from conscription.<sup>128</sup>

Deferral from conscription means delaying a person’s call to conscription based on legitimate reasons.<sup>129</sup> Deferral can be granted to persons recognised as temporarily unfit for military service due to health reasons, elected deputies in e.g. legislative or representative bodies, persons employed in public agencies, or persons with specific family situations as regulated in the law. Deferral can also be granted to full-time students.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, certain groups can be granted deferral by a presidential decree. This has typically been applied to particularly

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<sup>124</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 19

<sup>125</sup> Consultant, Федеральный закон "О воинской обязанности и военной службе" от 28.03.1998 N 53-ФЗ (последняя редакция), Article 23 and 24, [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> Russian Federation, Ministry of Defence, Draft exemptions and deterrents, [undated] [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> In specific cases provided for by international treaties of the Russian Federation

<sup>128</sup> The reasons stated are not an exhaustive account of the reasons for exemption from conscription. For a comprehensive overview, see: Consultant, Федеральный закон "О воинской обязанности и военной службе" от 28.03.1998 N 53-ФЗ (последняя редакция), Article 23, [url](#); Russian Federation, Ministry of Defence, Draft exemptions and deterrents, [url](#)

<sup>129</sup> Russian Federation, Ministry of Defence, Draft exemptions and deterrents, [undated] [url](#)

<sup>130</sup> The reasons stated are not an exhaustive account of the reasons for deferral from conscription. For a comprehensive overview, please see: Consultant, Федеральный закон "О воинской обязанности и военной службе" от 28.03.1998 N 53-ФЗ (последняя редакция), Article 24, [url](#); Russian Federation, Ministry of Defence, Draft exemptions and deterrents, [url](#)

talented people, such as talented ballet dancers.<sup>131</sup> In recent times, the president has signed a decree granting deferral for young IT-specialists.<sup>132</sup>

Claus Mathiesen explains that many of the grounds for deferral of military service have carried over from the Soviet era, although the number of grounds for exemption has been reduced.<sup>133</sup>

In order to apply for exemption or deferral from conscription, a person has to contact Voenkomat and provide their grounds for exemption or deferral.<sup>134</sup> The procedure of providing grounds for deferral or exemption to the Voenkomat is nowadays possible to do over e-mail or through Gosuslugi.<sup>135</sup>

### *3.1.1. Deferral due to academic studies*

One of the primary, if not the foremost, reasons for deferral of military service is the pursuit of academic studies. According to Claus Mathiesen, being enrolled in an educational institution would more or less automatically lead to a deferral from military service until the completion or termination of the studies.<sup>136</sup> Due to the widespread prevalence of corruption in Russia, it would also be possible for a person to pay a lower quality university for enrolment despite not intending to fulfil the studies.<sup>137</sup>

However, the rules have become stricter and any documents supporting grounds for deferral due to e.g. studying will likely be checked thoroughly at the Voenkomat. A person who was granted deferral from conscription due to studying one subject, would not be granted deferral should he change the subject of his studies.<sup>138</sup>

### *3.1.2. Deferral due to medical reasons*

Legally, conscription is limited to individuals whose health status is recognised as fit. The military authorities have a list of medical illnesses, which disqualify a person from military service.<sup>139</sup> Upon conducting a medical assessment, a person is marked in a category depending on the level of fitness for military service (see [chapter 2.1.](#) for further).<sup>140</sup>

Traditionally, corruption has played a significant part in how many men have been exempted from military service for medical reasons.<sup>141</sup> Bribing doctors to falsify medical certificates stating that one is unfit to serve is prevalent amongst young people. However, the doctors at

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<sup>131</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 24-25

<sup>132</sup> The Economic Times, Russia 'postpones' military service for IT-specialists, 29 March 2022, [url](#); Oreanda News, The President of the Russian Federation signed a decree on autumn conscription, 30 September 2024, [url](#); Acsour accounting outsourcing, Deferment of IT-specialists under the age of 30, 21 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 50

<sup>134</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 15

<sup>135</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 15

<sup>136</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 51

<sup>137</sup> A human rights lawyer: 32

<sup>138</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 52

<sup>139</sup> Al Jazeera, *Explainer: How does conscription work in Russia?*, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>140</sup> Fontanka.ru, Болезнь по расписанию. Рассказываем, что дает отсрочку от мобилизации и кто признается годным к службе, 23 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>141</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 16

the Voenkomat will conduct their own medical examination of each conscript. These doctors have extended experience with people falsely claiming to suffer from health issues, and therefore it is rather difficult to get out of military service due to feigned medical problems.<sup>142</sup>

### *3.1.3. Temporary deregistering from the military registry due to living outside of Russia*

According to the law, a person leaving to stay outside of Russia for more than six months may be temporarily removed from the military register for the time of the stay abroad. During this period, the person cannot be summoned for conscription.<sup>143</sup>

A person travelling abroad for work or for studies would have to provide legal grounds for the stay, such as e.g. the pursuit of academic studies or having been granted a work permit.<sup>144</sup> The Voenkomat would then remove the person's name from the military register.<sup>145</sup>

While abroad, the person cannot be summoned and is thus not obligated to serve as a conscript. Upon immediate return to Russia, the person must re-appear at the Voenkomat and re-register. Failure to register for travelling abroad or to re-register upon return could lead to an administrative fine.<sup>146</sup>

The procedure of registering for an abroad stay must be carried out in person or by an authorised family member with a legal notarised document to act on behalf of the person in question. With the implementation of the new electronic system, it will also be possible to do it electronically.<sup>147</sup>

### *3.1.4. Tightened possibilities for exemption and deferrals*

According to Sergey Krivenko, the Russian state has become more cautious about bribes, and therefore the possibility of bribing one's way out of conscription has become more difficult.<sup>148</sup> The authorities have also become less lenient when granting deferral to persons already employed by the Russian state.<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, Russian authorities have tightened their efforts to draft conscripts, partly by breaching several of their rights, making it more difficult for people to use their legal rights to avoid performing military duty.<sup>150</sup> The Russian authorities have reportedly isolated and detained conscripts in Voenkomats, ignored deferrals due to studies and ignored applications

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<sup>142</sup> A human rights lawyer: 33

<sup>143</sup> Consultant, Постановление Правительства РФ от 27.11.2006 N 719 (ред. от 16.05.2024) "Об утверждении Положения о воинском учете", IX, [url](#); ПризываНет, Как сняться с воинского учета за границей?, 15 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> A human rights lawyer: 31

<sup>145</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 16-17

<sup>146</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 16-17; A human rights lawyer: 31

<sup>147</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 16-17

<sup>148</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 20

<sup>149</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 24

<sup>150</sup> The "Call to Conscience" coalition et. al, Обзор нарушений прав и сопротивления в весенний призыв 2024 года, [undated] [url](#)

for alternative civil service.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, according to human rights defenders, the conscription through the SCP structure creates a potential for violating the rights of citizens to legally refuse military service.<sup>152</sup>

There is reporting of medical personnel at the Voenkوماتs disregarding medical conditions of persons who are unfit for service, leading to them being drafted despite having legal reasons for deferral.<sup>153</sup> There have also been cases of men who have been previously confirmed unfit for military service being drafted through the practice of so called forced ‘one-day’ conscription.<sup>154</sup>

### 3.2. Alternative Civil Service (ACS)

The right to conscientious objection to military service and participation in military activities is guaranteed by the Russian Constitution, which establishes that citizens have the right to replace military service with ACS if military service contradicts their convictions or religion.<sup>155</sup>

ACS can be performed at e.g. hospitals, boarding schools, kindergartens, retirement homes, factories, cultural institutions or state owned enterprises.<sup>156</sup> The term for serving ACS exceeds the term of compulsory military service by 1.75 and is either 18 or 21 months, depending on the placement.<sup>157</sup>

Before the full-scale war, approximately a thousand young people underwent ACS, which constitutes less than one percent of the total number of persons conscripted yearly.<sup>158</sup> Based on federal statistics, in 2023 the number of people under ACS in Russia increased by almost 40 percent, from 1 199 in the first half of the year to 1 645 in the second half of the year.<sup>159</sup>

Interest in ACS has however increased tenfold compared to before the full-scale war, which leads to obstacles in the procedure for ACS, even though the procedure itself is still available.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>151</sup> The “Call to Conscience” coalition et. al, Обзор нарушений прав и сопротивления в весенний призыв 2024 года, [undated] [url](#), Novaya Gazeta: 12

<sup>152</sup> The “Call to Conscience” coalition et. al, The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War, 31 May 2024, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>153</sup> Al Jazeera, Explainer: How does conscription work in Russia?, 5 May 2022, [url](#); Ostorozhno Novosti, В Москве призывников стали задерживать и увозить на сборный пункт в 2,5 раза чаще по сравнению с прошлым годом, 30 November 2024, [url](#); Journalist Irina Novik: 26

<sup>154</sup> The “Call to Conscience” coalition et. al, The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War, 31 May 2024, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>155</sup> Russian Federation, Constitution of the Russian Federation of 1993.12.25 (КОНСТИТУЦИЯ РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ от 1993.12.15), chapter 59, Article 3, [url](#)

<sup>156</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 54-57; Russian Federation, Ministry of Defence, Alternative Service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, [url](#); Настоящее Время, "Для военнослужащих по призыву это работает". Кто выбирает и как добывается альтернативной службы в России во время войны, 15 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>157</sup> Russian Federation, Ministry of Defence, Alternative Service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, [url](#)

<sup>158</sup> Настоящее Время, "Для военнослужащих по призыву это работает". Кто выбирает и как добывается альтернативной службы в России во время войны, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>159</sup> Настоящее Время, "Для военнослужащих по призыву это работает". Кто выбирает и как добывается альтернативной службы в России во время войны, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>160</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 24-25

Human rights defenders have also noted an increase in questions on how to apply for ACS, and what to do if this right is denied. In addition, human rights defenders note an increase in refusals from the Voenkomat and a decrease in the number of successful cases brought by conscientious objectors in the courts.<sup>161</sup>

For a person to apply for ACS based on religious beliefs, their religious organisation must be legally registered in the Russian Federation, and the person must prove that they are a registered member of that community.<sup>162</sup>

ACS is further regulated in the Federal Law "On Alternative Civilian Service", which stipulates that a citizen also has the right to replace military service by ACS if he belongs to the indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation, leads a traditional way of life, carries out traditional economic activities and is engaged in traditional crafts of the indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation.<sup>163</sup>

There are multiple cases of men living a traditionalist way of life in hunter, gathering and reindeer herding communities in the far north and Siberia, applying for alternative military service on these grounds.<sup>164</sup>

Being disabled does not constitute eligible criteria to apply for ACS. Disabled individuals (depending on their degree of disability) have to apply for regular exemption from military service.<sup>165</sup>

The system of ACS has existed in Russia for more than 20 years. It comes with a special procedure, which requires the potential draftee to apply for ACS actively.<sup>166</sup> The application is to be submitted to the Voenkomat and the decision is made by the draft commission.<sup>167</sup> The law does not state which specific conditions will qualify a person for ACS and there is no predetermined criteria. However, there is an application form that needs to be filled out and the most important thing is doing this correctly and on time.<sup>168</sup> An application for ACS must be submitted to a Voenkomat six months before the start of the draft period, however there is a possibility to be granted extension to this time limit.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> The "Call to Conscience" coalition et. al, The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War, 31 May 2024, [url](#), p. 4; Настоящее Время, "Для военнослужащих по призыву это работает". Кто выбирает и как добивается альтернативной службы в России во время войны, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>162</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 27

<sup>163</sup> Russian Federation, Federal Law of July 25, 2002 No 113-FZ "On Alternative Civilian Service" (Федеральный закон от 25 июля 2002 г. № 113-ФЗ «Об альтернативной гражданской службе»), Article 2, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 28

<sup>165</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 28

<sup>166</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 24-25

<sup>167</sup> Russian Federation, Ministry of Defence, Альтернативная служба в Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации, [undated], [url](#)

<sup>168</sup> Novaya Gazeta: 21-22; Claus Mathiesen: 54-57

<sup>169</sup> The "Call to Conscience" coalition et. al, The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War, 31 May 2024, [url](#), p. 4-5

In practice, the right to ACS often has to be sought through court, as employees of the Voenkomat and the commission often refuse to accept applications, or make unjustified refusals to ACS.<sup>170</sup>

There is a problem with acceptance of ACS in the Russian society, which predates the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>171</sup> Performing ACS is not popular due to the ‘masculinity’ of the Russian culture. Russian propaganda has proven effective in convincing people to serve in the military, both as conscripts and as contract soldiers.<sup>172</sup>

To be considered for ACS in Russia, a person needs to know the rules and their rights. It is difficult to prove that you fulfil the requirements for ACS and the process requires weighty arguments, a lot of work and preparing documents in order. Usually it also requires the assistance of lawyers and specialists.<sup>173</sup>

General negative trends in the legal field and the weakening of control over Voenkomats affect the enforcement of the constitutional right to ACS for conscripts. ACS applicants must be persistent, but also constantly monitor developments, be aware of any legal changes and new practices and to take timely action.<sup>174</sup>

Acceptance will also depend on the goodwill of the Voenkomat personnel that review the application. Furthermore, the applicant will most likely be under attempts of persuasion from the commissariat to enrol into the military instead of performing ACS.<sup>175</sup>

One interviewed source conveys that courts in Russia do not respect the principle of a fair trial and are siding with the military. However, with legal assistance it is possible to win an ACS case in court. A human right’s organisation claims to have a high percentage of court victories in ACS cases.<sup>176</sup>

Additionally, two interviewed sources convey that most people are not aware of the right to refuse regular conscription due to one’s personal beliefs, and therefore do not claim it.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, many people are not aware of the legal possibility to appeal a decision of denial and take it to court.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Настоящее Время, "Для военнослужащих по призыву это работает". Кто выбирает и как добивается альтернативной службы в России во время войны, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> OVD-Info: 13-14

<sup>172</sup> Novaya Gazeta: 21-22

<sup>173</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 6; OVD-Info: 13-14; Claus Mathiesen: 54-57

<sup>174</sup> The "Call to Conscience" coalition et. al, The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War, 31 May 2024, [url, p. 4](#)

<sup>175</sup> OVD-Info: 13-14

<sup>176</sup> Novaya Gazeta: 17-19

<sup>177</sup> Mediazona: 34; Novaya Gazeta: 17-19

<sup>178</sup> Novaya Gazeta: 17-19



The introduction of articles regarding ‘discrediting the armed forces of the Russian Federation’, into the Criminal Code<sup>179</sup> and the Code on Administrative Offences<sup>180</sup> since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine, has led to risks for legal repercussion when applying for ACS. Even though anti-war beliefs is one of the legitimate reasons for being granted ACS, if a conscript declares that he does not want to serve in the military because Russia is waging an war of aggression, an administrative protocol might be drawn up for this person. As of May 2024, human rights defenders knew of two such cases.<sup>181</sup>

According to senior lecturer Huseyn Aliyev, indigenous ethnic communities with a traditionalist way of life are the only groups that can reasonably apply for alternative military services.<sup>182</sup>

For someone already conscripted, there is no mechanism for transferring to ACS or early dismissal from military service due to the formation of beliefs contrary to military service. Early dismissal is possible only for health reasons and under certain social circumstances.<sup>183</sup>

### 3.3. Exemptions for vulnerable Groups

#### 3.3.1. *Jehovah’s Witnesses*

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses do generally not wish to serve in the military, due to their religious beliefs as pacifists.<sup>184</sup>

Previously, it was sufficient for a summoned person to state that he belongs to Jehovah’s Witnesses and almost automatically, he would be granted ACS instead of ordinary military service.<sup>185</sup> Since 2017, Jehovah’s Witnesses is labelled an extremist movement in Russia and being a member is illegal. Therefore, a member of Jehovah’s Witnesses would likely face criminal charges rather than conscription if his affiliation to this denomination becomes known. However, the person would still be eligible for conscription as soon as cleared of criminal charges or in case no charges are raised.<sup>186</sup>

According to Sergey Krivenko, there is no longer an easy way for religious minorities such as Jehovah’s Witnesses to avoid conscription. It is however still possible to claim that a person has ideas and beliefs that are contrary to the purpose of the military (e.g. being a pacifist), and apply for ACS on these grounds.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Consultant, "Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации" от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 30.11.2024), article 280.3, [url](#)

<sup>180</sup> Consultant, "Кодекс Российской Федерации об административных правонарушениях" от 30.12.2001 N 195-ФЗ (ред. от 13.12.2024), article 2.3.3, [url](#)

<sup>181</sup> Настоящее Время, "Для военнослужащих по призыву это работает". Кто выбирает и как добывается альтернативной службы в России во время войны, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>182</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 28

<sup>183</sup> Memorial, rapport ACS.

<sup>184</sup> OVD-Info: 12

<sup>185</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 24-25

<sup>186</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 26; Sergey Krivenko: 24-25

<sup>187</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 24-25

### 3.3.2. LGBT persons

Formally, there are no exemptions from military service or conscription for persons belonging to the LGBT community.<sup>188</sup>

According to two sources, before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, belonging to the LGBT community was often considered a mental illness, and thus members of this group could be exempted on the grounds of mental health issues.<sup>189</sup> The list of illnesses does not categorise non-conventional sexual orientation itself as a health disorder, and hence being e.g. homosexual will not in itself be a formal reason for exemption from conscription.<sup>190</sup> It would, however, be possible to get an exemption on medical grounds if diagnosed with a personality disorder related to one's sexual orientation. The diagnosis would have to be concluded by a psychiatrist.<sup>191</sup>

As of 30 November 2023, the Russian authorities have labelled the so-called 'international LGBT movement' an 'extremist organisation' in Russia.<sup>192</sup> Consequently, LGBT members are generally reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation, including to military officials.<sup>193</sup>

Many members of the LGBT community try to leave Russia or hide somewhere within the country to avoid being conscripted into the armed forces.<sup>194</sup> According to a Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights, they could also try to be exempted through medical examination and depending on their illness, be considered unfit to serve in the military.<sup>195</sup>

It is possible for members of the LGBT community in Russia to be granted ACS, although they would have to convince the Voenkomat that they fulfil the legal requirements and that performing military service contradicts their religion or convictions. According to a Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights, they knew of about 100 cases of LGBT members accepted for ACS.<sup>196</sup>

Mark Galeotti opines that the Voenkomat personnel do generally not care about someone being a member of the LGBT community, as long as they can make a good soldier out of that person and the enlisted conscript meets the necessary health requirements. He elaborates that they may very well think that "he might get that kicked out of him".<sup>197</sup>

<sup>188</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 22, OVD-Info, 10; Journalist Irina Novik: 4-5

<sup>189</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 22; Novaya Gazeta: 13-14

<sup>190</sup> ПризываНет, [Гомосексуализм](#) и армия, November 15 2024, url; Consultant, Постановление Правительства РФ от 04.07.2013 N 565 (ред. от 17.04.2024) "Об утверждении Положения о военно-врачебной экспертизе", article 18, [url](#)

<sup>191</sup> ПризываНет, [Гомосексуализм](#) и армия, November 15 2024; url

<sup>192</sup> Meduza, Верховный суд России объявил «экстремистским» и запретил «движение ЛГБТ», 30 November 2023, [url](#), A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 17

<sup>193</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 22; Novaya Gazeta, 13-14; OVD-Info: 10

<sup>194</sup> OVD-Info: 10

<sup>195</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 1-3

<sup>196</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 21

<sup>197</sup> Mark Galeotti: 25

There is no statistics regarding members of the LGBT community in the military, as people do not openly talk about their sexual orientation.<sup>198</sup>

As for trans persons, a new law came into force in 2023, which outlawed gender affirming procedures and changing one's legal gender in official documents.<sup>199</sup> Trans women who have transitioned to women prior to this law, but did not change their legal gender status in their documents, were obliged to be conscripted into the military, as they were legally perceived as male and thus obliged to adhere to summons and go through medical examinations at the Voenkoms.<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, if a trans woman managed to change their legal gender prior to the new law of 2023, they would be legally perceived as female, and hence removed from the military register and not be obliged to serve in the military.<sup>201</sup> After the introduction of the law in 2023, it is no longer possible to be exempted due to being a trans woman.<sup>202</sup>

For a person changing their legal gender from female to male in their documents before the new law of 2023, they would be subject to military registration. However, the medical commission could "reject" him on the grounds of not being "a full-fledged man". The case would depend on the medical commission, who could issue a military card with the person in category D (unfit), as being transgender is considered a mental illness within the Russian military.<sup>203</sup>

Russia has not accepted the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11), which removed gender incongruence from the chapter of "mental and behavioural disorders".<sup>204</sup> According to article 18 of the list of illnesses, personality disorders related to gender identity would categorise a person as unfit for military service.<sup>205</sup> Consequently, the Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights conveys that trans men and trans women are considered mentally ill in Russia and are therefore not allowed to serve in the military. A trans woman who is still legally perceived as male would hence be claimed unfit for military service due to her transition.<sup>206</sup> According to a medical source interviewed by Meduza, the diagnosis and declaration of fitness depends locally on the Voenkoms.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Mediazona: 35

<sup>199</sup> Amnesty International, Russia: Adoption of transphobic legislation a horrendous blow to human rights, 14 July 2023, [url](#); Open Democracy, Russia's draconian new law is forcing trans people to flee the country, 26 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>200</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 5-6

<sup>201</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 8; Daily Storm, Трансгендеры смогут избежать мобилизации. Юрист рассказал о «военных» особенностях смены пола, 7 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>202</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 6

<sup>203</sup> Daily Storm, Трансгендеры смогут избежать мобилизации. Юрист рассказал о «военных» особенностях смены пола, 7 October 2022, [url](#)

<sup>204</sup> WHO, WHO/Europe brief – transgender health in the context of ICD-11, [undated], [url](#); A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 10

<sup>205</sup> Consultant, Постановление Правительства РФ от 04.07.2013 N 565 (ред. от 17.04.2024) "Об утверждении Положения о военно-врачебной экспертизе", article 18, [url](#)

<sup>206</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 6, 12

<sup>207</sup> Meduza, «Пусть лучше она там где-нибудь умрет» «Медуза» рассказывает о первой открытой трансгендерной женщине в российской армии. Ее собираются отправить на войну с Украиной (и это еще не вся история), 9 November 2022, [url](#)

## RUSSIA – CONSCRIPTION

In the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic, it is still legal to change one’s gender. Therefore, lawyers are trying to help trans persons to change their documents in this region. However, these cases are very few and the majority of Russian transwomen are leaving the country to avoid conscription.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 10

## 4. Draft evasion, absent without leave (AWOL) and desertion

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### 4.1. Draft evasion

#### 4.1.1. Legal framework

The definition of draft evasion is the failure, without a valid reason<sup>209</sup> to attend a medical examination, a psychological assessment, and a meeting at the Voenkomat; or by failing to appear at the time and place specified in the summons of the Voenkomat.<sup>210</sup>

Pursuant to article 21.5 of the Code of Administrative Offences, the failure of a citizen to appear without a valid reason at the time and place specified in the summons of the Voenkomat is an offence punishable with a fine in the range of 10 000 to 30 000 rubles [92 to 277 euros]. The same law stipulates that men who are subject to conscription must notify their local recruitment office about their place of residence. Failure to do so is also punishable with a fine.<sup>211</sup>

Draft evasion is further regulated under article 328 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates that illegal evasion of conscription is punishable by a fine of up to 200 000 rubles [1 769 euro], the amount of the salary or other income of the convicted person for a period of up to 18 months, forced labour for up to two years, arrest for up to six months or imprisonment for up to two years.<sup>212</sup>

Equally, evasion of ACS is punishable by a fine to up to 80 000 rubles (739 euro), the amount of the wages or other income of the convicted person for a period of up to six months, compulsory labour for a term of up to 480 hours, or by arrest for a term of up to six months.<sup>213</sup>

For criminal liability to arise in an evasion case, the attempt to evade military service has to be intentional.<sup>214</sup> The prevalence of intention must be proved in court, which can be done for example by showcasing repeated failures to appear at the Voenkomat without valid reasons.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> A valid reason could be e.g. illness or injury, severe health condition or funeral of a close relative, or unforeseen circumstances beyond a person's control. For further information, see: Consultant, *Какие причины неявки в военкомат являются уважительными?*, 22 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>210</sup> 2 Interfax, *ВС разъяснил, кто не подлежит призыву на военную службу и что понимать под уклонением*, 18 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>211</sup> Consultant, *"Кодекс Российской Федерации об административных правонарушениях"* от 30.12.2001 N 195-ФЗ (ред. от 13.12.2024)), Article 21.5, [url](#); The Moscow Times, *Russia Ramps Up Fines for Draft Dodging*, 31 July 2023, [url](#); A human rights lawyer: 21

<sup>212</sup> Consultant, *"Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации"* от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 30.11.2024)), Article 328, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>213</sup> Consultant, *"Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации"* от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 30.11.2024)), Article 328, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>214</sup> 2 Interfax, *ВС разъяснил, кто не подлежит призыву на военную службу и что понимать под уклонением*, 2023-05-18, [url](#)

<sup>215</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 48

In cases of criminal proceedings on draft evasion, the court must also prove that the person has received proper notification regarding the duty to report to a military recruitment office.<sup>216</sup>

The standard time from when a person has received a summons to when he has to appear at the Voenkomat is around 20 days. Without a legitimate reason for not adhering to the summons, he could potentially be considered a draft evader.<sup>217</sup>

The possibilities of leaving the country or hiding in order to avoid conscription have become more limited due to legal amendments, which impose restrictions on draftees and provide the authorities with more efficient methods of searching for draft evaders (see [chapter 1.1.](#)).<sup>218</sup>

### *4.1.2. Development in number of draft evaders*

Several of the interviewed sources conveyed that draft evasion is moderately widespread in Russia and that there has been no major increase in the numbers of draft evaders since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>219</sup> Mark Galeotti stated that although there has been a slight increase in persons avoiding conscription, the majority of draft evaders tend to evade through the means of corruption or by enrolling themselves into higher education to get a deferral without the intention of fulfilling the studies.<sup>220</sup>

According to Freedom House, there was an initial increase of young men leaving Russia in the early stages of the full-scale invasion and later on during the first wave of mobilisation. As of December 2024, the outflow of men leaving Russia is rather steady and in general, individuals potentially vulnerable for conscription are taking preparatory measures rather than dodging military service.<sup>221</sup>

The reasons behind the limited number of draft evaders can partly be explained by the fact that conscription has traditionally not been considered dangerous in Russia, rather something every young man should perform in order to become a 'real man'.<sup>222</sup> Mediazona corroborates this picture by explaining that conscripts are not generally active in combat operations.<sup>223</sup> Another source states that yet one reason is the fact that the conditions for conscripts are more or less the same as in the beginning of the war.<sup>224</sup>

However, the dynamics in Kursk where conscripts have been serving on the frontline since the Ukrainian incursion in August 2024 have changed the view on conscription, and it is increasingly perceived as dangerous.<sup>225</sup> According to Huseyn Aliyev, potential conscripts are now aware that

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<sup>216</sup> 2 Interfax, ВС разъяснил, кто не подлежит призыву на военную службу и что понимать под уклонением, 2023-05-18, [url](#)

<sup>217</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 18-19

<sup>218</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 19

<sup>219</sup> Mediazona: 28; Mark Galeotti, 52; Freedom House: 33; A human rights lawyer: 27

<sup>220</sup> Mark Galeotti: 52

<sup>221</sup> Freedom House: 33

<sup>222</sup> Novaya Gazeta; 31

<sup>223</sup> Mediazona: 28

<sup>224</sup> A human rights lawyer: 27

<sup>225</sup> Novaya Gazeta: 31-33

they can end up in border regions such as Kursk and actually risk participating in combat operations, which he estimates will lead to a higher number of draft evaders.<sup>226</sup>

During the last ten years, several hundred criminal cases of draft evasion were opened under article 328 per year, which constitutes less than 0.2 percent of the total. Almost all cases concluded with a fine.<sup>227</sup> In 2023, there were 901 such cases, out of which 894 resulted in fines. Three cases ended with a suspended sentence, and three persons were acquitted. The rest of the cases were dropped for undisclosed reasons.<sup>228</sup>

Additionally, there were several thousand administrative fines for not adhering to the summons. In these cases, the offence did not amount to draft evasion, but was rather classified as failure to fulfil obligations connected to the drafting procedure.<sup>229</sup>

In the first six months of 2024, Russian courts issued 427 sentences in draft evasion cases, out of which 423 resulted in fines. Three persons received suspended sentences, one person was acquitted and 15 cases were dropped.<sup>230</sup>

### *4.1.3. Legal repercussions*

If a person refuses to adhere to the military procedure and appear at the Voenkomat, it is very unlikely that it will end up as a criminal case, as this will happen only after repeated refusals to show up.<sup>231</sup> Mostly, fines are handed out to draft evaders following the second or third summons that they have received.<sup>232</sup>

Huseyn Aliyev explains that if an evasion case passes on to criminal investigation, the case will be handed over to a police investigator and it will be up to the police investigator to decide on the severity of the punishment. In the very few cases of draft evasion that actually go to court, it is very likely that the person in question would be fined, although it will most likely be a higher fine than in administratively settled cases – probably the double of the administrative fine.<sup>233</sup>

Huseyn Aliyev has not seen any evidence of anyone actually being imprisoned for the evasion of conscription.<sup>234</sup> Similar statements are conveyed by two other sources.<sup>235</sup> According to

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<sup>226</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 35

<sup>227</sup> The "Call to Conscience" coalition et. al, *The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War*, 31 May 2024, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>228</sup> A human rights lawyer: 23; Huseyn Aliyev: 39

<sup>229</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 47-48

<sup>230</sup> OVD-Info: 17

<sup>231</sup> OVD-Info: 17; Sergey Krivenko: 47-48

<sup>232</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 40

<sup>233</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 32, 33

<sup>234</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 32, 33

<sup>235</sup> OVD-Info: 17; A human rights lawyer: 18-19, 22

Sergey Krivenko, one or two cases have led to prison sentences in 2023, but this is a rare punishment for evaders.<sup>236</sup>

Traditionally, men who do not wish to be drafted have tried to avoid receiving their summons, for example by pretending not to be at home if visited by representatives of the Voenkomat.<sup>237</sup> If a person evades summoning and the Voenkomat drafts another person to fill the quota, the consequence for the originally summoned individual would depend on whether the Voenkomat has filled out all the proper paper work and sent the case to an investigative committee or not. Sergey Krivenko opines that this is rarely done.<sup>238</sup>

According to two sources, the Russian authorities have no interest in searching for or prosecuting every man who has evaded military service, as they would rather put their efforts into filling their quota.<sup>239</sup>

Paying a fine for draft evasion does not mean that a person would be excluded from future drafts. A person evading one draft risks being summoned again in future drafts, provided he is still within the age of conscription.<sup>240</sup> Yet, every draft is decided upon by a presidential decree. Consequently, a conscript evading the draft in the autumn and subsequently caught after the quota of that draft is filled would not necessarily be given a summons in the next draft.<sup>241</sup>

Huseyn Aliyev explains that there are cases of persons who have been fined and were given a new summons basically the next day. Furthermore, a summons can also be handed out at the point of entry to Russia, such as international airports.<sup>242</sup>

The Voenkomat searches for evaders in collaboration with local police.<sup>243</sup> Once a person has signed the summons, the Voenkomat has the right to detain the person in question.<sup>244</sup> At the same time, according to Freedom House, Russia is a large country, so if a person wants to evade conscription and hide this is possible inside the country. Life would be rather difficult and limited (e.g. trying to avoid leaving digital footprints), but it would be possible. Equally, it is possible to leave the country to evade conscription and the source dismisses the narrative of the 'iron curtain.'<sup>245</sup>

The authorities would not use extrajudicial punishments outside the ranks against draft evaders. If they catch a draft evader, they will prosecute him.<sup>246</sup> As for political opponents to the regime, Mark Galeotti states that if a person evades conscription, he will be prosecuted

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<sup>236</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 47-48

<sup>237</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 28

<sup>238</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 47-48

<sup>239</sup> A human rights lawyer: 18-19; Mediazona: 32

<sup>240</sup> A human rights lawyer: 18-19, 24; Mark Galeotti, 55

<sup>241</sup> A human rights lawyer: 24-25

<sup>242</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 42

<sup>243</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 61; OVD-Info: 18

<sup>244</sup> OVD-Info: 18

<sup>245</sup> Freedom House: 34

<sup>246</sup> Mark Galeotti: 58



accordingly. Although, a judge may be more likely to rule against a person, if they come to court wearing for example a Navalny t-shirt.<sup>247</sup>

### *4.1.4. Regional differences*

For the past decade or more, draft evasion has typically been more prevalent in cities like Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the central regions of Russia. The trend is more pronounced in these areas compared to regions like North Caucasus, though it does not necessarily extend to areas bordering Ukraine. In North Caucasus, jobs in the state service and in security services are popular, and since these require a person to have completed military service, cases of draft evasion are limited in these regions. The same goes for regions in the far north and the Siberian regions.<sup>248</sup>

### *4.1.5. Socio-economic differences*

Draft evasion is more prevalent among the Russian middle class, which means one would see proportionately more draft evaders in richer regions than in poorer regions. However, draft evasion through corruption tends to be more of a social phenomenon than a geographical one. A family in Moscow is more likely to have the money to bribe a doctor, or is more likely to attend university.<sup>249</sup>

### *4.1.6. Sentenced in absentia*

Several of the sources consulted claimed they had not heard of draft evaders being sentenced in absentia.<sup>250</sup> Instead, a draft evader would be put on a wanted list and the criminal proceeding suspended until he reappears.<sup>251</sup> Huseyn Aliyev claims that there is a tendency in Russia to charge an individual when they actually have the person in question arrested or the authorities have access to this individual. If a person has left the country in order to avoid conscription, he will likely only be charged once he returns to Russia. The border officials will have all the necessary information and data to detain the person.<sup>252</sup>

The source from Freedom House elaborates that applying sentences in absentia for draft evaders would lead to a delicate situation as many from the Russian elite have their young family members abroad. Sentencing draft evaders in absentia would create a precedence, which would have to be applied to everyone. The source therefore doubts that sentencing draft evaders in absentia will be implemented. Also, the source was not aware of draft evaders residing abroad who were deported back to Russia solely on the basis of draft evasion.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Mark Galeotti: 59

<sup>248</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 38

<sup>249</sup> Mark Galeotti: 53-54

<sup>250</sup> A human rights lawyer: 23; Claus Mathiesen: 62-63; Mediazona: 30

<sup>251</sup> A human rights lawyer: 23

<sup>252</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 41-42

<sup>253</sup> Freedom House: 35-36

Claus Mathiesen claimed not to have encountered any cases of draft evaders being sentenced in absentia, although he estimated that it is likely to have happened.<sup>254</sup> According to Mark Galeotti, there have been cases of conscripts being sentenced in absentia although it is very difficult to truly tell the numbers.<sup>255</sup>

Sergey Krivenko conveys that there are no public systems allowing persons outside of Russia to know if their case has been sent to criminal investigation.<sup>256</sup>

### 4.2 Absence without official leave (AWOL) and desertion

Absence without official leave (AWOL), or unauthorised abandonment of a military unit or place of service is regulated under article 337 of the Criminal Code, and is punishable with arrest, detention in a disciplinary military unit or imprisonment. The term of detention, arrest or imprisonment depends (however not exclusively) on the time a person has been absent.<sup>257</sup> The most severe article in this regard is applied when a person has been absent for more than a month, which can be punished with five to ten years of imprisonment.<sup>258</sup>

Desertion, unauthorised abandonment of a unit or place of service in order to evade military service, is regulated under Article 338 of the Criminal Code and is punishable with imprisonment for up to fifteen years.<sup>259</sup> Legally, desertion can only occur within a designated combat unit. Therefore, only contract soldiers can be punished as deserters.<sup>260</sup>

According to Claus Mathiesen, the penalty for AWOL, even from a non-combat military unit, is more severe than for draft evaders, and would usually consist of detention at the military barracks. This penalty will be decided administratively and not by a court of law. Mathiesen noted that more and more people within the Russian military are given the mandate to reach administrative decisions.<sup>261</sup>

If a conscript were to leave their unit in the Kursk region, Sergey Krivenko is not aware if this would legally be considered desertion or AWOL, as conscripts are involved in active fighting there. Leaving one's military unit is a crime, but the severity of the crime is worse when it takes place during fighting or in a territory where there is declared a state of war. Therefore, leaving one's military unit as a conscript in the Kursk region would be more severe than leaving ones military unit in e.g. Siberia or elsewhere in Russia. Potential punishments will also be higher. A person leaving his military unit in e.g. Novosibirsk, and returning after a month, could be

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<sup>254</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 62-63

<sup>255</sup> Mark Galeotti: 57

<sup>256</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 49

<sup>257</sup> Consultant, "Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации" от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 30.11.2024), Article 337, [url](#)

<sup>258</sup> Pskovskaya Gubernia: 8

<sup>259</sup> Consultant, "Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации" от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 30.11.2024), Article 338, [url](#)

<sup>260</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 59

<sup>261</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 60

sentenced to two years in prison. If a person does the same in the Kursk region, he could be sentenced to up to ten years in prison.<sup>262</sup>

According to OVD-Info, courts have mainly applied suspended sentences for cases related to AWOL, which enables the soldier to be sent to the front after the punishment.<sup>263</sup>

#### 4.2.1. *Development in number of criminal cases*

Before the announcement of mobilisation and tougher punishment in the fall of 2022, Russian soldiers were practically not prosecuted for refusing to serve. In May 2024, records were set in such cases. In one month, 829 criminal cases of AWOL, 43 cases of failure to comply with an order and 42 desertion cases came to the courts.<sup>264</sup>

Statistics from June 2024 showed that there have been more than 10 000 cases of persons who have been charged for refusing military service. The number might be even higher as of November 2024.<sup>265</sup> According to Mediazona, by late summer there were about 12 000 criminal cases against conscripts and contract soldiers.<sup>266</sup> It is worth noting however, that both Mediazona and Irina Novik mention that it is not possible to tell from the statistics whether cases on AWOL and desertion refer to contract soldiers or conscripts.<sup>267</sup>

### 4.3. Consequences for family members

The sources interviewed for this report hold different perspectives on the prevalence and severity of the consequences family members of draft evaders in Russia may face.

Claus Mathiesen stated that it is possible for family members to be prosecuted as accomplices to evasion if they have actively participated in the avoidance of conscription. This would likely be punished with a fine. He further stated that in other cases, evading the draft would most likely have no consequences for a person's family members.<sup>268</sup>

According to Aliyev, evading a draft will most likely have no legal consequences for the person's family members, as there is no law delegating assistance to draft evaders.<sup>269</sup> However, there were proposals by members of parliament to introduce such a law by supplementing the Criminal Code with provisions on liability for those who help Russians illegally evade military

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<sup>262</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 46

<sup>263</sup> OVD-Info: 18

<sup>264</sup> Mediazona, Более 10 тысяч российских военных обвинили в отказе от службы с начала войны в Украине, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>265</sup> Mediazona, Более 10 тысяч российских военных обвинили в отказе от службы с начала войны в Украине, 18 June, [url](#); Important Stories, A Runaway Regiment, 19 November 2024, [url](#); Journalist Irina Novik: 24

<sup>266</sup> Mediazona: 1, 3

<sup>267</sup> Mediazona: 1, 3; Journalist Irina Novik: 24

<sup>268</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 62-63

<sup>269</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 43

service.<sup>270</sup> In reality, there have been no reports of family members being charged with assisting somebody to evade conscription or for leaving false testimonies.<sup>271</sup>

Several of the interviewed sources opined that family members risk being subjected to questioning, harassment or different forms of pressure by the authorities in their search for draft evaders.<sup>272</sup>

Huseyn Aliyev mentioned that there is large-scale prevalence of cases of harassment by the Voenkوماتs, with officials asking family members for bribes or pressuring them to deliver information about their sons.<sup>273</sup> There have also been cases of local police officers (in charge of delivering the summons) threatening and harassing families to draft evaders.<sup>274</sup>

Another source conveyed that there have been cases of officials from the Voenkomat, the police or FSB calling family members of ‘[refusniki](#)’ and asking for the whereabouts of their son. The same source mentioned how military officials threatened one family with withholding their son’s college diploma if they did not comply and make their son adhere to his summons.<sup>275</sup>

One source explained that the policy may confront family members of a draft evader in their search for the person at the very beginning if the conscript refuses to receive his summons, but it is rare. It would not happen after the person has evaded.<sup>276</sup>

If a drafted person is not at home when visited by representatives of the Voenkomat, other family members eligible for conscription would not be taken in his stead.<sup>277</sup>

According to Mediazona, evading a draft is unlikely to have any consequences for the conscript’s family members.<sup>278</sup> However, the authorities might talk to the conscript’s family and try to make them convince him to perform his duty.<sup>279</sup>

There is anecdotal evidence of parents or other family members trying to pressure their own draft evading family member to appear at the Voenkomat, as they do not want him to break the law.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Парламентская газета, Сухарев предложил ввести ответственность за помощь в уклонении от призыва, 2023-08-31, [url](#)

<sup>271</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 43; Journalist Irina Novik: 27, -29

<sup>272</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 44, 55; Journalist Irina Novik: 27- 29; A human rights lawyer: 28; Freedom House: 38; Mediazona: 33

<sup>273</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 44

<sup>274</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 55

<sup>275</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 27- 29

<sup>276</sup> A human rights lawyer: 28

<sup>277</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 62-63

<sup>278</sup> Mediazona: 33

<sup>279</sup> Freedom House: 38; Mediazona: 33

<sup>280</sup> OVD-Info: 16

Relatives of draft evaders might be visited by the police in the authorities' search for the evaded person<sup>281</sup>, but in general, according to two sources, there is no pressure or punishment upon family members to draft evaders.<sup>282</sup>

As explained by Huseyn Aliyev, pressure on family members of draft evaders is more widespread in regions where Voenkamat officials actually go door-to-door. In larger cities where the summons often are sent by post, there is not much contact between the military officials and the family members. In these cases, there are fewer opportunities for the Voenkamat to put pressure on family members.<sup>283</sup>

However, Mark Galeotti mentioned that in rural communities, where there is still more of a sense of a collective unit, the local mayor or village 'leader' could tell the family that their son is letting the country down by speaking to their patriotic feelings. This sort of social pressure could happen, although the family would not be ostracised or prosecuted for the son's evasion.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 50

<sup>282</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 50; Psovskaya Gubernia: 13

<sup>283</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 45

<sup>284</sup> Mark Galeotti: 56

## 5. Material conditions for conscripts during service

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Conscripts are used in every arms of service within the Russian military – in the army, the air force and the navy,<sup>285</sup> and the general conditions under which conscripts serve do to some degree vary depending on the arms of service.<sup>286</sup> Generally, the conditions for a conscript serving in the army is worse than for a conscript serving in the air force or in the navy.<sup>287</sup> Most conscripts are drafted to serve in the army.<sup>288</sup>

Certain common standards are in place in every region.<sup>289</sup> Furthermore, one of the main priorities of the Russian military is to make it more appealing to serve as a conscript and subsequently signing a contract with the military. To accomplish this, efforts have been made to improve the quality of military barracks and the quality of food.<sup>290</sup>

The general conditions for conscripts have not changed since the beginning of the war.<sup>291</sup> Mark Galeotti agrees, that the Russian military are making efforts to retain conscripts, but mentions that the general situation for conscripts was fairly miserable prior to 2022.<sup>292</sup>

There are regional differences in the general conditions for conscripts, and the conditions tend to be better in the more wealthy regions like for example Moscow.<sup>293</sup> The practice of paying a bribe to serve under better general conditions, in better barracks with better food, is also more prevalent in the larger cities.<sup>294</sup> Conscripts serving in the larger cities can use a complicated system of bribery to pay for e.g. more comfortable living conditions.<sup>295</sup>

The general conditions for conscripts are the harshest in the regions of Kursk, Bryansk and Belgorod, which border Ukraine. In these regions, conscripts are more likely to be stationed outside in the fields, where they among other jobs are tasked with erecting defensive fortifications.<sup>296</sup> In the regions of Kursk and Belgorod there have been cases of conscripts complaining about being served expired food and complaints about the lack of proper weapons.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> A human rights lawyer: 35; Sergey Krivenko: 26; Huseyn Aliyev: 48; Mark Galeotti: 14

<sup>286</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 65

<sup>287</sup> Mark Galeotti: 30

<sup>288</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 48; Mark Galeotti

<sup>289</sup> Sergey Krivenko:30

<sup>290</sup> Mark Galeotti: 27; Claus Mathiesen 66

<sup>291</sup> Pskovskaya Gubernia: 1; A human rights lawyer: 37; Sergey Krivenko: 29

<sup>292</sup> Mark Galeotti: 26

<sup>293</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 7; Claus Mathiesen 67; A human rights lawyer: 41

<sup>294</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 59; Journalist Irina Novik: 7

<sup>295</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 59

<sup>296</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 54

<sup>297</sup> Pskovskaya Gubernia: 1

According to a human rights lawyer, there have not been any widespread complaints over health conditions, maintenance or related issues from conscripts. The source would most likely have heard of these problems, if they were indeed widespread.<sup>298</sup>

## 5.1. Access to health care services

In theory, conscripts do have access to health care services. However, medical resources are becoming scarce, as military hospitals are increasingly receiving wounded soldiers,<sup>299</sup> and the general quality of the health care system within the Russian military is not high.<sup>300</sup>

Conscripts are under the jurisdiction of The Ministry of Defence during their time of service. In case of injury or illness, they will therefore be treated at designated military hospitals and not at public hospitals. In the regions near Ukraine, temporary military hospitals have been constructed to offer further support to the war effort. Conscripts serving in these regions will be treated at these temporary hospitals, if need be.<sup>301</sup>

The quality of medical services varies from region to region and the lack of medical personnel is more prevalent in the far east and in the more remote areas of Russia.<sup>302</sup> Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the need for medical personnel to support the forces operating in Ukraine has increased, leading to an overall lack of medical personnel everywhere in Russia proper.<sup>303</sup> However, there are means of transportation available to conscripts serving in regions with a poorer quality of medical services.<sup>304</sup>

Huseyn Aliyev agrees that the quality of medical services depends on the individual unit and that generally the quality is higher in the bigger cities, where conscripts can also be allowed to use public medical facilities.<sup>305</sup>

The scarcity of medical resources has led to cases where soldiers, despite being diagnosed and recommended for treatment by a doctor, have been denied referral to a hospital by the commanding officer. In other cases, doctors failed to diagnose a soldier correctly.<sup>306</sup>

## 5.2. Hazing and “dedovshchina”

Historically, the practice of hazing junior conscripts – subjecting to violence – has played a major role in the Russian military. During the Soviet era, the concept of ‘[dedovshchina](#)’, was conceived. The classic notion of dedovshchina was a hierarchical system within the military, where order within military units was kept by senior conscripts who subjected junior conscripts

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<sup>298</sup> A human rights lawyer: 40

<sup>299</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 27

<sup>300</sup> OVD-Info: 27

<sup>301</sup> A human rights lawyer: 39

<sup>302</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 28

<sup>303</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 63

<sup>304</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 28

<sup>305</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 61

<sup>306</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 12

to hazing and violence.<sup>307</sup> Dedovshchina consists of both physical and verbal abuse as well as the practice of extracting money from junior conscripts by threatening to assign them to very undesirable tasks.<sup>308</sup>

The practice of dedovshchina, in this traditional sense, has since become much less prevalent. This is partly due to the shortening of conscription service from two years to one year, which has significantly reduced the seniority gap between conscripts compared to the Soviet era.<sup>309</sup>

The Russian military has taken steps to reduce the prevalence of dedovshchina.<sup>310</sup> Dedovshchina does however, still exist in Russian military units, where the general level of violence is still relatively high,<sup>311</sup> but is now more a concept of just violence and the prevalence of dedovshchina depends on the culture within the individual military unit and its commanding officers. It also depends on the geographical location of the military unit. For instance, conscripts serving in more remote regions like Kamchatka could be more likely to be subjected to dedovshchina, as there are fewer opportunities for conscripts to “blow off steam” and as the posting is further away from the view of higher authorities.<sup>312</sup> As stated by one source, a bored soldier is more likely to participate in dedovshchina than a soldier with a meaningful existence.<sup>313</sup>

Dedovshchina exists in every arm of service, although it is less prevalent in the more specialised units like the Spetznaz.<sup>314</sup>

Due to dedovshchina being somewhat arbitrary in nature, it is difficult to identify certain profiles who would be more at risk of being subjected to this practice than others.<sup>315</sup>

Certain ethnic groups such as those from Buryatia, members of the LGBT community and conscripts who do not align with traditional notions of masculinity may, however, face an increased risk of experiencing dedovshchina.<sup>316</sup>

Specifically, conscripts belonging to ethnic minorities not native to the territory of the Russian Federation are more likely to be subjected to harassment, hazing and discrimination. This could be the case for conscripts from Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) many of whom hold Russian citizenship.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 38

<sup>308</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 56

<sup>309</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 68; A human rights lawyer: 42; Irina Novik: 8, Pskovskaya Gubernia: 3; Sergey Krivenko: 38

<sup>310</sup> Mark Galeotti: 28

<sup>311</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 38; Freedom House: 27

<sup>312</sup> Mark Galeotti: 31; A human rights lawyer: 41 -42

<sup>313</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 71

<sup>314</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 57

<sup>315</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 41

<sup>316</sup> Irina Novik: 9; A human rights lawyer: 43; Huseyn Aliyev: 69

<sup>317</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 68



Despite the prevalence of *dedovshchina*, there are no recent reports of serious injuries or death caused by this practice. However, traditionally death by suicide has been used within the Russian military to explain death caused by hazing.<sup>318</sup>

A conscript who has been subjected to *dedovshchina* does have the formal right to file a complaint to [the military prosecutor's office](#) or to [the military investigation department](#). Doing so does, however, inherently come with a risk, especially if the complaint is directed at the commander of the military unit, as the conscript risks returning to that same military unit if his complaint is unsuccessful.<sup>319</sup>

A conscript facing abuse may also seek a transfer to a different military unit, but this typically requires legal assistance, as securing a transfer independently is highly challenging.<sup>320</sup>

The best way for a conscript facing abuse is to flee his military unit. Although fleeing is a criminal offence. However, if the conscript promptly files a complaint citing abuse as the reason for his actions, he will not be prosecuted should his complaint be successful.<sup>321</sup>

### *5.2.1. Conscripts belonging to the LGBT community*

Members of the LGBT community are especially at risk of being subjected to *dedovshchina* or abuse in general,<sup>322</sup> and a conscript belonging to the LGBT community would normally try to hide his sexual orientation. There are cases of LGBT members being sexually assaulted by other soldiers in the Russian military.<sup>323</sup>

LGBT persons who are subjected to abuse would likely be unable to obtain assistance within their military units, and asking fellow soldiers for help would more likely than not make the situation even worse.<sup>324</sup>

Being a member of the LGBT community is not illegal in itself in Russia as long as the person does not propagate the LGBT community. Therefore, a conscript who has been sexually assaulted by other soldiers could in theory file a complaint. However, no statistics exist on such cases.<sup>325</sup>

There are cases of members of the LGBT community serving in the military without any incidents, as they successfully managed to hide their sexual orientation.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> A human rights lawyer: 44

<sup>319</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 42

<sup>320</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 43

<sup>321</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 44; Huseyn Aliyev: 58

<sup>322</sup> Freedom House: 28; A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 13

<sup>323</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 13

<sup>324</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 15

<sup>325</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 17

<sup>326</sup> A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights: 14

### *5.2.2. Conscripts from North Caucasus*

Russian military units are comprised of conscripts from different regions, and there are no units comprised of conscripts from one single region. This mixture of regions and ethnicities could lead to clashes and problems with discipline.<sup>327</sup>

Conscripts from the regions of North Caucasus, including Chechnya, overall serve under the same conditions as conscripts from any other region.<sup>328</sup> However, Mark Galeotti opines, that conscripts from the regions of North Caucasus do risk facing prejudice within the military.<sup>329</sup>

Prejudice against conscripts from North Caucasus is more prevalent the further away from their home region a conscript is posted. This is, however, also the case for conscripts from other regions as well.<sup>330</sup>

Claus Mathiesen notes that it is in fact the practice of the Russian military to post conscripts far away from their home region.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 56

<sup>328</sup> Mark Galeotti: 50

<sup>329</sup> Mark Galeotti: 51

<sup>330</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 64, 65

<sup>331</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 45

## 6. Tasks performed by conscripts

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All new conscripts are given six to eight weeks of basic military training upon joining the military only after which they will be given the actual rank of ‘*ryadavoy*’ (equivalent to private).<sup>332</sup> A conscript that performs well, may eventually be promoted to the rank of “*efreytor*” (equivalent to the rank of private first class), but a conscript can no longer advance to the rank of a non-commissioned officer.<sup>333</sup>

Being promoted to the rank of *efreytor* is desirable, as *efreytors* are exempted from performing the more mundane tasks in the military.<sup>334</sup>

Huseyn Aliyev approximates, that 65 percent of the tasks performed by conscripts involve manual labour. A conscript could for instance be tasked with constructing both military and civilian facilities or with cleaning the base.<sup>335</sup> Other tasks could be related to logistics, communication and supply lines.<sup>336</sup>

The overall quality of the basic training given to conscripts is relatively low, but conscripts drafted into more elite units in the military are given better training.<sup>337</sup>

### 6.1. Refusal to perform a task

Since September 2022, refusing to obey a military command formally constitutes a punishable crime. However, a conscript is only obliged to carry out lawful orders. A conscript is therefore for example not obliged to obey an order to wash his commanding officer’s car, and he cannot formally be prosecuted for not doing so.<sup>338</sup>

Disobeying an unlawful order, however, could result in the conscript being subjected to physical violence.<sup>339</sup> In reality, refusing such an illegal order is difficult.<sup>340</sup>

According to Huseyn Aliyev, the reality of the Russian military is, that conscripts have been perceived as a free labour source for the past 30 years, and that conscripts must perform whatever tasks given to them by their commanding officers.<sup>341</sup> Huseyn Aliyev further elaborates, that some conscripts are even threatened or beaten pre-emptively if they show a lack of disposition towards these extracurricular activities.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 40

<sup>333</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 41, 43

<sup>334</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 42

<sup>335</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 50

<sup>336</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 49

<sup>337</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 50,51; Freedom House: 24

<sup>338</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 45; Mark Galeotti: 44

<sup>339</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 72; Mark Galeotti: 45; Huseyn Aliyev: 66

<sup>340</sup> A human rights lawyer: 48

<sup>341</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 52

<sup>342</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 53

A conscript, who has been given an unlawful order, can in theory file a complaint. However, doing so firstly requires the conscript to actually know what his rights are, and in Russia, many people are unaware of their rights. Secondly, the process of filing such a complaint is difficult and doing so could lead to even more problems for the conscript.<sup>343</sup>

## 6.2. Tasks related to the war effort in Ukraine

Conscripts support the war effort in Ukraine through logistical tasks, i.e. as drivers, mechanics, or as delivery staff, etc. Additionally, conscripts have operated checkpoints, have forwarded observation posts and have assisted FPV drone teams. Rear artillery positions are also staffed by conscripts.<sup>344</sup>

Conscripts have been actively used to guard the Russian-Ukrainian border since the autumn of 2022.<sup>345</sup> By Russian law, conscripts can only be posted inside Russian territory,<sup>346</sup> and most sources agree that conscripts do not serve in Ukraine proper.<sup>347</sup>

Russia considers the annexed Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia part of the Russian territory. The question of whether conscripts serve in these regions is debated among the interviewed sources. Some sources believe that conscripts are not posted in the annexed regions.<sup>348</sup> Other sources believe that conscripts are in fact posted in the annexed regions.<sup>349</sup>

Russian law prohibits using conscripts in combat units,<sup>350</sup> and the majority of sources believe, that conscripts are therefore not used for combat duties including in the annexed regions.<sup>351</sup> In the initial stages of the full-scale invasion, there were reports about conscripts having taken part in combat duties in Ukraine, as well as being taken as prisoners of war (POWs) by the Ukrainian military. This was also acknowledged by the Russian MoD.<sup>352</sup> According to more recent reporting from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Russian officials have assured the Russian public that conscripts will not be deployed to most of occupied Ukraine or participate in combat operations in Ukraine, although they will likely attempt to coerce and deceive conscripts into signing contracts with the Russian military in order to fight in Ukraine.<sup>353</sup> According to sources who believed that conscripts are posted in Ukraine, these

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<sup>343</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 16; A human rights lawyer: 48

<sup>344</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 91; Huseyn Aliyev: 72

<sup>345</sup> BBC News, *Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>346</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 86

<sup>347</sup> Mediazona: 10; Huseyn Aliyev: 82; Mark Galeotti: 39

<sup>348</sup> Pskovskaya Gubernia: 7; A human rights lawyer: 54; Novaya Gazeta 37; Mediazona: 10; Mark Galeotti: 39

<sup>349</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 86; Huseyn Aliyev: 82; Journalist Irina Novik: 19; Sergey Krivenko: 37

<sup>350</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 86

<sup>351</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 82; Journalist Irina Novik: 18

<sup>352</sup> Reuters, *Russia Acknowledges conscripts were part of Ukraine operation, some are POWs*, 9 March 2022, [url](#); Politico, *What the use of Russian conscripts tells us about the war in Ukraine*, 17 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>353</sup> Institute for the Study of War (ISW), *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 16, 2024*, 16 June 2024, [url](#); Institute for the Study of War (ISW), *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 28, 2024*, 28 December 2024, [url](#)

conscripts are performing duties supporting the Russian war effort such as constructing defensive fortifications or digging trenches.<sup>354</sup> Despite not being deployed for active combat, conscripts serving near the front lines do however still risk being subjected to Ukrainian drone attacks or missile attacks.<sup>355</sup>

According to Huseyn Aliyev, ending up in one of the annexed regions would put a conscript in a desperate situation, as he would be at much higher risk of sustaining life threatening injuries there than in any other part of Russia. Huseyn Aliyev further elaborates, that there have been cases where military barracks housing conscripts have been hit by long-range Ukrainian missiles in Luhansk and Donetsk, but conscripts serving in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia would be less likely to be hit.<sup>356</sup>

### 6.3. Conscripts in the Kursk region

The situation for conscripts in the Kursk region is unique compared to Russian conscripts deployed to other regions. Prior to the Kursk incursion, the majority of Russian forces on the border with Ukraine was made up of conscripts. When the offensive commenced, conscripts therefore took the heaviest blows.<sup>357</sup>

There are no official numbers of casualties of conscripts in the Kursk region<sup>358</sup>, nor is there a consensus on this matter among the consulted sources. According to Huseyn Aliyev, more than a thousand conscripts have lost their lives and many have been taken prisoner since the beginning of the Kursk incursion.<sup>359</sup> Irina Novik is aware of at least 13 conscripts being killed in the region of Kursk.<sup>360</sup> According to an article from the BBC, at least 159 Russian conscripts have been confirmed dead since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>361</sup>

According to Russian law, conscripts may only be deployed for combat in peacekeeping operations or in anti-terrorist operations. The Ukrainian presence in Kursk has, however, been classified as a terrorist incursion by Russian officials, meaning that conscripts may in fact be deployed for combat in Kursk. Refusing to fight in Kursk, therefore also constitutes a criminal offense.<sup>362</sup>

Since most conscripts have only had very basic military training, they generally make for poor combat soldiers,<sup>363</sup> and they are most likely used only defensively in Kursk and not used to attack Ukrainian positions. Conscripts in the Kursk region could, however, be posted in the

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<sup>354</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 72

<sup>355</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 82

<sup>356</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 82-84

<sup>357</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 74; A human rights lawyer: 55

<sup>358</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 74

<sup>359</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 74

<sup>360</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 17

<sup>361</sup> BBC News, *Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>362</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 80

<sup>363</sup> Novaya Gazeta: 36; Freedom House: 24

second line of defence holding, improving and expanding these positions and thereby supporting the regular troops and their assault operations.<sup>364</sup>

Once source, however, opines that conscripts are used offensively as well as defensively in the region of Kursk.<sup>365</sup>

The Russian casualties in the Kursk region are high, and a conscript initially serving somewhere else in Russia, does risk being transferred to a military unit in the Kursk region to replenish the ranks.<sup>366</sup>

Freedom House<sup>367</sup> opines that although Russian law prohibits the deployment of conscripts on the front line, there are cases of junior conscripts being sent to the front line without any proper training to be used as “cannon fodder”.<sup>368</sup> This source as the only one among the interviewed sources opined that conscripts are not only used on the front line in the region of Kursk but also inside Ukraine proper,<sup>369</sup> and that military commanders try to avoid casualties amongst their more qualified soldiers by using conscripts in areas under heavy Ukrainian fire.<sup>370</sup> However, there is a level of uncertainty and it is not possible to know in advance, who is going to be sent to the frontline.<sup>371</sup>

None of the consulted sourced had heard of incidents, where conscripts were used to guard or transport Ukrainian prisoners of war.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 78; Claus Mathiesen: 89

<sup>365</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 35

<sup>366</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 36

<sup>367</sup> It should be noted that Freedom House is the only of the interviewed sources who conveys that conscripts are used actively in combat activities on the front line in Ukraine.

<sup>368</sup> Freedom House: 17

<sup>369</sup> Freedom House: 20

<sup>370</sup> Freedom House: 23

<sup>371</sup> Freedom House: 22

<sup>372</sup> A human rights lawyer: 56

## 7. Signing contracts with the MoD

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Until April 2023, it was not possible to sign a contract with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in Russia immediately after finishing school – first, a person had to serve at least three months as a conscript or graduate from a technical college or university.<sup>373</sup>

Any conscript who has served for at least one month can legally sign a contract with the MoD.<sup>374</sup> In some cases, conscripts can become contract soldiers after even less than a month's military service.<sup>375</sup>

Conscripts can sign contracts within the first days or months of their mandatory service.<sup>376</sup> This practice emerged after the start of the offensive in the Kursk region.<sup>377</sup> Thus, one year of conscription service becomes two years of contracted service, meaning that the soldier is paid a one-time sum for signing up and a monthly salary.<sup>378</sup>

Prior to the Kursk Incursion, human rights organisations had only recorded isolated cases of such early contract signing.<sup>379</sup> By law, conscripts are required to undergo training for several months before entering into a contract.<sup>380</sup> There are no statistics yet, but there are similar cases where relatives already have taken legal action.<sup>381</sup>

It is still technically possible to sign a fixed term contract with the understanding that the authorities can choose not to let the person go.<sup>382</sup> Actually, some contract soldiers are being discharged at the end of their contract period. Although, most contract soldiers would not be released after the end of their contract, in accordance to the presidential decree on partial mobilisation.<sup>383</sup> Whether or not the Russian military will in fact respect that a contract has been signed for a fixed period is not clear.<sup>384</sup>

Contract soldiers who have been released from their contracts are more likely to be perceived by the authorities as either not being very good soldiers or having paid off their commanding officer.<sup>385</sup> If a soldier is released from their contract, they can trade every two days of

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<sup>373</sup> BBC News, Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>374</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 86; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 24; Telegram, МОБИЛИЗАЦИЯ I Новости I Срочники - Очередных срочников заставили подписать контракт, 21 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>375</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 86

<sup>376</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 82; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 26

<sup>377</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe: 26

<sup>378</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 82

<sup>379</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe: 26; Sever Realii, "Мы в ужасе, воевать не хотим". Срочникам платят по фальшивым контрактам, 20 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>380</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 82; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 26

<sup>381</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe: 26; Sever Realii, "Мы в ужасе, воевать не хотим". Срочникам платят по фальшивым контрактам, 20 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>382</sup> Mark Galeotti: 47; Claus Mathiesen: 84

<sup>383</sup> Consultant, Указ Президента РФ от 21.09.2022 N 647 "Об объявлении частичной мобилизации в Российской Федерации", 21 September 2022, [url](#); Mark Galeotti: 47

<sup>384</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 84

<sup>385</sup> Mark Galeotti: 48; Claus Mathiesen: 83

contracted service with one day of served conscription service. The reason for this being that a contract soldier is obliged to serve.<sup>386</sup>

It is estimated that approximately 40 to 50 percent of any group of conscripts will sign contracts with the MoD.<sup>387</sup> Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the military authorities reported that almost 50 percent of conscripts signed a contract.<sup>388</sup> In 2022, and even in 2023, there were apparently still quite a significant number of conscripts who willingly signed military contracts.<sup>389</sup> Although, the numbers have been fewer after the incursion in the Kursk Region started.<sup>390</sup>

There are no available statistics revealing how many persons have signed contracts with the MoD according to Russian law, contract soldiers can only become so by voluntarily signing their contracts.<sup>391</sup> In a number of cases, the MoD has assured relatives of deceased contract soldiers that they had signed their contract voluntarily, coincidentally, just weeks or even days before their deaths.<sup>392</sup>

The proportion of conscripts who have signed contracts with the MoD after or during their conscription period has decreased since 2022. Although, it is difficult to know with certainty due to the fact that conscripts are now given the choice of being a professional soldier and thus receive bonuses and other benefits.<sup>393</sup> The proportion of conscripts, who initially refuse to sign contracts, but eventually do, is high, but not as high as it has been.<sup>394</sup>

Conscripts serving in units with lenient enforcement mechanisms are less likely to avoid signing contracts with the MoD.<sup>395</sup> However, in 2024, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the number of those who willingly sign contracts is exceptionally small.<sup>396</sup>

## 7.1. Persuasion to sign contracts

There is no standard procedure for how conscripts sign contracts. The procedure varies from region to region and in each military unit.<sup>397</sup> It depends on the military commander and in some cases, conscripts are persuaded to sign contracts.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 83

<sup>387</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 96; Journalist Irina Novik: 23

<sup>388</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 53

<sup>389</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 94

<sup>390</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 20

<sup>391</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 53; Journalist Irina Novik: 23; Nastoyashee Vremya, *Убеждение и соблазнение деньгами. Правозащитник – о том, как призывников заставляют подписывать контракт с Минобороны РФ*, 11 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>392</sup> BBC News, *Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>393</sup> Mark Galeotti: 46

<sup>394</sup> Mark Galeotti: 46

<sup>395</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 96

<sup>396</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 94

<sup>397</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 87; Mediazona: 21;

<sup>398</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 87; Freedom House: 29; Mark Galeotti: 49



The average salary for a conscript is approximately 2 000 rubles a month (the equivalent of 19 euro), which include free accommodation and food rations. The low salary is one of the reasons why conscripts may want to sign contracts with the MoD.<sup>399</sup>

Conscripts are often incentivised to sign contracts through financial rewards.<sup>400</sup> Among these incentives are high salaries and large one-off payments.<sup>401</sup> A person can for instance get a onetime sum of 3 million rubles (app. 28 130 euro) for signing up to the military and after that he will be paid 2 500 to 3 000 euro every month. This is a considerable amount of money compared to a Russian with an average income, and the authorities therefore have no need for violence or pressure to persuade people to sign contracts with the military.<sup>402</sup>

The authorities' main objective is to sign up as many soldiers as possible. Therefore, pay-outs are continuously rising to incentivise contract signing.<sup>403</sup>

The amount of money one can get for signing a contract varies from region to region. Some of the wealthier regions are even able to attract men from other regions to sign contracts. One source had heard of people being paid up to 50 000 euro to sign a contract.<sup>404</sup>

The regions compete with each other to sign up soldiers as each region has a quota of contract soldiers to fill.<sup>405</sup> The military officials can also be rewarded for their recruitment effort through various ways including financial rewards. This leads commanders to being innovative when it comes to signing up contract soldiers.<sup>406</sup>

The border regions of Kursk, Belgorod and Bryansk and the regions in the North Caucasus are the regions who offer the highest financial incentives for signing a contract. Regions such as Rostov region are perceived to be a near border region, and thus slightly safer. However, it is expected that there will be more efforts to recruit military persons from Rostov region rather than somewhere further into Siberia or the far north.<sup>407</sup>

Financial rewards are more effective for recruiting reservists or individuals of older age, due to their poorer financial situation. Many of them have taken loans or have mortgages, lack employment, etc.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 19; Verstka, *Правозащитники сообщили о росте числа жалоб от срочников на принуждение к контракту с Минобороны*, 13 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>400</sup> A human rights lawyer: 49; Huseyn Aliyev: 88; Claus Mathiesen: 80

<sup>401</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 88

<sup>402</sup> A human rights lawyer: 49; Huseyn Aliyev: 88

<sup>403</sup> A human rights lawyer: 5; Claus Mathiesen: 49; Huseyn Aliyev: 92

<sup>404</sup> A human rights lawyer: 50

<sup>405</sup> A human rights lawyer: 50; Mark Galeotti: 49

<sup>406</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 92

<sup>407</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 99

<sup>408</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 95

Soldiers are also promised various social benefits and a stable career in the military. Many conscripts are also convinced by various patriotic slogans such as “serve your country”, “be a real man”, etc.<sup>409</sup> State propaganda plays an important part in this narrative.<sup>410</sup>

Conscripts from poor or remote regions of Russia are more likely to sign contracts due to patriotic fervour than those from wealthier regions of Russia.<sup>411</sup> Contract soldiers come in great numbers from the regions of Buryatia, Tuva and Chukotka. However, the reasons for this are mainly financial and less patriotic.<sup>412</sup>

## 7.2. Pressure to sign contracts

The Russian authorities exercise pressure over conscripts to convince them to sign contracts with the MoD.<sup>413</sup> Much of such pressure is driven by cultures within the military. The military has been told that they have to persuade a certain amount of people each month to sign contracts and then they find ways of doing that.<sup>414</sup>

Pressure exercised by the authorities takes place in nearly every military unit and the forms of the pressure can differ. Sometimes the command seeks to convince the conscript by using moral pressure. Physical violence in order to pressure a conscript to sign a contract is rare, but according to Sergey Krivenko, such cases do occur.<sup>415</sup>

The units posted in the border regions with Ukraine are under the most pressure to sign contracts, as the governors of the regions and the local military officials are under considerable pressure from the Kremlin to recruit more people into the Armed Forces. They are quite heavily reliant on these forcible methods of attracting conscripts and they are the ones that are increasing the amounts of financial rewards.<sup>416</sup>

Some conscripts can be forced to sign a contract.<sup>417</sup> There is a so-called blame and shame culture meaning that not signing a contract in front of the other soldiers could be considered shameful.<sup>418</sup> In some military bases, some conscripts are labelled as cowards by having their photographs pinned on boards for all to see (for an example of this method please see the interview in [Annex 2 Aliyev](#)).<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 88; Claus Mathiesen: 80

<sup>410</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 80

<sup>411</sup> Freedom House: 29

<sup>412</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 81

<sup>413</sup> Mark Galeotti: 49; Mediazona: 20; Claus Mathiesen: 77; Sergey Krivenko: 52-53; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 23; Huseyn Aliyev: 86; Pskovskaya Gubernia: 14; Journalist Irina Novik: 19+21; *Verstka, Правозащитники сообщили о росте числа жалоб от срочников на принуждение к контракту с Минобороны*, 13 November 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>414</sup> Mark Galeotti: 49

<sup>415</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 52

<sup>416</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 97

<sup>417</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 86; Pskovskaya Gubernia: 14

<sup>418</sup> Pskovskaya Gubernia: 14; Huseyn Aliyev: 90

<sup>419</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 90

It is possible to refuse to sign a contract.<sup>420</sup> Doing so could, however, cause problems with the officers, who can make life very difficult for the conscript in question.<sup>421</sup> Furthermore, his fellow soldiers would not see him as a real man.<sup>422</sup> This type of peer pressure can be psychologically tough for many conscripts.<sup>423</sup>

A more widespread approach for the authorities to make conscripts sign contracts with the MoD seems to be a forcible approach, where conscripts are threatened with physical punishment. They could for instance risk being locked in the basement until they sign a contract. According to Huseyn Aliyev, there are various reports that hundreds of conscripts have been locked in facilities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions for months.<sup>424</sup>

There have been cases where a conscript's signature has been falsified, and as a result, the conscripts are being sent as contract soldiers to Ukraine.<sup>425</sup> If this happens, it is possible for the conscript to file a complaint through his family or relatives, although it is rather difficult.<sup>426</sup>

In other cases, conscripts have received the one-time pay-off that a soldier receives upon signing a contract with the military before actually having signed the contract.<sup>427</sup> In these cases, the pressure on the conscript to sign up is immense, and in fact not actively returning the money could be considered as acceptance of contract duty by default.<sup>428</sup>

There have been cases of contracts being written and presented to conscripts without any prior indication that they wanted to sign up.<sup>429</sup> In one particular case, the authorities persuaded a conscript to sign an initial report about whether one would sign a contract or not. However, the report that he was forced to sign, was in fact not an initial report, but an actual contract with the MoD.<sup>430</sup> In other cases, contracts have been signed by a conscript's commander without the consent or knowledge of the conscript.<sup>431</sup>

One source stressed that signing up as a contract soldier is not a one-step procedure; rather it requires at least two steps. Firstly, one should sign an application on one's desire to join the contract service. Sometime later, the person will sign the contract itself, and there is still a possibility to refuse in the second step of this procedure. The source is aware of situations

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<sup>420</sup> Mediazona: 20; Novaya Gazeta Europe: 25; Pskovskaya Gubernia: 15

<sup>421</sup> Mediazona: 20

<sup>422</sup> In Russian called: Muzhik (Мужик)

<sup>423</sup> Pskovskaya Gubernia: 15; Journalist Irina Novik: 21

<sup>424</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 89-90

<sup>425</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 54; Huseyn Aliyev: 91; Freedom House: 6; Kholod, «Я вроде терпелой никогда не был, но меня как будто зомбировали», 27 July 2023, [url](#); Meduza, *На войне в Украине погиб 20-летний срочник с Сахалина. Он утверждал, что его подпись под контрактом с Минобороны подделали — теперь это подтвердила экспертиза*, 11 December 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>426</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 54; Huseyn Aliyev: 91

<sup>427</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 79; Telegram, *Новая газета Европа - Россияне продолжают получать деньги за контракты с Минобороны, которые не заключали*, October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>428</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 79

<sup>429</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 78

<sup>430</sup> Journalist Irina Novik: 22; Novaya Gazeta Europe, «Мне бы хотелось остаться в России», 14 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>431</sup> Telegram, *Сахалин против войны*, 22 October 2024, [url](#); Novaya Gazeta Europe: 23

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where people have changed their minds, and with the help from human rights defenders, they managed to halt the procedure so that these persons managed to avoid contract service.<sup>432</sup>

If a person has already signed a contract, the only way to avoid fulfilling the contract is by taking the case to court. The chance of getting out of the contract is about 50/50, and human rights organisations try to help conscripts in these cases.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Sergey Krivenko: 55

<sup>433</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe: 25

## 8. Conscripts from the Russian Caucasus regions

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In general, the North Caucasian regions are poorer than the other regions of Russia with low wages compared to the rest of the country. Employment in the military is thus considered an attractive job opportunity by many in these regions.<sup>434</sup> Prior to the full-scale invasion, conscripts from the North Caucasus regions queued to be enrolled into military, as they saw serving in the military as a social lift with good salaries.<sup>435</sup>

In terms of the institutional structures, conscripts from the North Caucasus regions would serve under the same conditions as any other conscript.<sup>436</sup> However, persons from North Caucasus may face a certain amount of prejudice in the ranks.<sup>437</sup> This means that if a conscript from an ethnic minority in the North Caucasus were to end up in a military unit consisting solely of ethnic Russians, they might face a certain degree of discrimination due to their ethnic and religious background.<sup>438</sup> There is always a chance that this person will actually be posted in his own home republic. This happens frequently with individuals from North Caucasus, for example, from Dagestan, Ingushetia or Chechnya, where they can rely on a certain degree of protection ([krysha](#)).<sup>439</sup>

Traditionally, the narrative within the Russian military has been that the practice of [dedovshchina](#) to some extent has been due to ethnic differences. Consequently, the military now aims to keep different ethnic groups apart from one another.<sup>440</sup> This means that conscripts from the North Caucasus will usually serve with other conscripts from the same region.<sup>441</sup>

If a person is posted close to their hometown, they are more likely to be safe and they would serve under better conditions. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, their conditions depend to some extent on their ability to pay bribes and to use their connections in order to serve in their home regions and possibly closer to their hometowns.<sup>442</sup>

### 8.1. The situation for Chechen conscripts

Chechens are being conscripted for military service, and they might be sent to any part of Russia to serve. Chechen conscripts serve in many different units including in the National Guard.<sup>443</sup> According to Mark Galeotti, there still seems to be evidence that Chechen conscripts

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<sup>434</sup> OVD-Info: 25

<sup>435</sup> OVD-Info: 26

<sup>436</sup> Mark Galeotti: 52

<sup>437</sup> Mark Galeotti: 52

<sup>438</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 65+69

<sup>439</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 69

<sup>440</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 75

<sup>441</sup> Claus Mathiesen: 76

<sup>442</sup> Huseyn Aliyev: 64

<sup>443</sup> A human rights lawyer: 51; Claus Mathiesen: 75; Mediazona: 13

tend to be deployed to Chechen units.<sup>444</sup> However, it is difficult to tell in practice, as the data is not fully transparent.<sup>445</sup>

When the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, wants to express his loyalty to Kremlin, local municipalities are directed to fill specific quotas with men to the military. According to Freedom House, many people from Chechnya become elite contract soldiers to ensure the safety of their families. Pressure on families is used as a weapon to exercise control over unwilling family members in Chechnya. Although this source was not certain that these practices applied to conscripts, however, it is probable.<sup>446</sup>

The situation for Chechens is different compared to the situation of other Russians, because most officers in the Russian military dislike Chechens and Kadyrov. Chechens do not fight in Ukraine with the regular Russian military. They only fight in local Chechen groups.<sup>447</sup>

The vast majority of Chechens have not been required to undertake conscription since 1991, even though Chechnya officially resumed conscription on a limited scale in 2014. In 2024, only 500 Chechens were drafted in each conscription cycle, representing a mere 0.33 percent of the total number of conscripts in the military's latest intake, which is a proportion that has remained unchanged even after the full-scale invasion began in Ukraine.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Mark Galeotti: 51

<sup>445</sup> A human rights lawyer: 51

<sup>446</sup> Freedom House: 32

<sup>447</sup> Mediazona: 12; see [Russia - Recruitment of Chechens to the war in Ukraine](#) for further on this topic.

<sup>448</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe, *An army of one*, 4 September 2024, [url](#)

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## Annex 1: Terms of Reference

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### **Legislation**

- New legislation since December 2022

### **Recruitment of conscripts**

- Situation for conscripts (nutrition, physical conditions, tasks)
- Places of posting (frontline, border area, Ukraine)
- Prevalence of pressure on conscripts to sign contracts with the MoD
- Situation of conscripts from the Caucasus regions of Russia
- Prevalence of work tasks related to the Russian war effort in Ukraine

### **Draft evasion and desertion**

- Enforcement of legislation
- Possibility to exit Russia after receiving call-up/summons
- Consequences for family members to draft evaders/deserters
- Sentenced in absentia
- Extrajudicial punishments

## Annex 2: Meeting minutes

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### Meeting with Claus Mathiesen

Associate professor in Russian, Royal Danish Defence College

#### Legislation

1. The main piece of legislation when it comes to understanding Russian military service is the [law on conscription and military service](#), which was implemented in 1998 and amended several times since. This law contains the details for both conscription, contract soldiers and mobilisation.
2. Conscription is part of [the Russian constitution's article 59](#).
3. After 4-6 weeks of basic training, new conscripts are required to take an oath swearing their allegiance to Russia. Basic training teaches conscripts to behave as soldiers, for instance: How to correctly wear their uniform.
4. Conscription is a broad term, as former conscription soldiers are subject to mustering. This means, that conscripts who during their conscription service have been trained for a specific function, may be summoned for mustering, if the Russian authorities deem it necessary. During mustering exercises, the military checks, if the summoned soldiers still have the expertise to carry out the duties for which they were trained.
5. There are two kinds of reservists in the Russian military. The first kind, in Russian called *Zapas*, consist of former conscripts trained for specific functions within the military. These former conscripts are listed as reservists eligible for being summoned for a number of years.
6. The other kind of reservist, in Russian called *Reserv*, which is a broader term as it includes all people who would be obliged to serve in the military if summoned. This could for instance be a nurse or a doctor, who never previously had served in the military.
7. Russia has activated a state of war, in Russian called *voennoe polozenie*, which means that reservists can legally be called in for duty. The state of war is activated to a different degree in different regions.
8. [The Russian constitutional law on Martial Law](#) contains a number of different measures that can be activated in times of war, limiting the rights of the Russian population, as the authorities can for instance implement curfews or visitation zones. These measures have been activated in full in the regions bordering Ukraine. The further away from Ukraine a region is located, the fewer measures have been put into force.
9. The obligation for the abovementioned reservists to appear for service if summoned also apply during times of mobilisation. The only official mobilisation of 300 000 men was announced by President Putin in the autumn of 2022.

#### Draft procedures

10. The process of conscription is twofold. The year a Russian man turns 17, he is summoned for a preliminary conscription evaluation during which he will be assessed by a number of doctors, specialists and psychologists before being evaluated for service by the Voenkomat in Russian called Voenkomat. This preliminary evaluation is mandatory for every man once he turns 17.
11. After this evaluation, the young men are put in to one of five categories.
  - The first category (category A) is for those deemed fit for military service.
  - Category B is for those who are fit to serve with minor limitations.
  - The third category (category V) is for those who are deemed fit to serve with limitations.
  - Men who are temporarily unfit to serve are put in to the fourth category. Usually, these are men with treatable health conditions, and they are then given 6 months to undergo treatment after which they will be re-evaluated by the Voenkomat.
  - The fifth category is reserved for men deemed unfit for military service.
12. Those assessed in category V (3) are not called up during peacetime but may be called up during wartime. As they have no prior military training, they must undergo a shorter or longer training programme to perform service during wartime, likely in roles that are not particularly demanding. Those assessed in category G (4), are referred for treatment lasting between 6 to 12 months. Following this, a new health assessment is conducted, which could potentially lead to placement in any of the other categories, i.e., A (fit), B (fit with minor limitations), V (limited suitability), or D (unfit). In the first two cases, individuals are called up for compulsory military service. In the latter two cases, they are not called up, but if placed in category V (limited suitability), they are transferred to the mobilisable reserve and may be called up during wartime. For those initially placed in category G (4), their subsequent category could be any of the four mentioned. However, the most likely outcome—if no specific treatment is undertaken during the 6-12 months but recovery from fractures or similar occurs naturally—is placement in category B (2).
13. These five categories have remained unchanged for as long as the source remembers, and may in fact date all the way back to the time of the Russian Tsars.
14. In peacetime, only men in category A and B are drafted for military service, but in wartime, men who have been deemed fit to serve with limitations are transferred to the reserve.
15. In the early 2000's approximately 30% of the young men were deemed unfit to serve. During recent years, that number has become lower and lower, according to official sources.
16. Traditionally, corruption has played a significant part in how many men were exempted from military service for medical reasons. Conscripts have also used bribery to influence where they would be eventually posted as it may be more appealing to serve close to their home region than very far away from it.

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17. After turning 18, Russian men are eligible for conscription and if they are drafted, they will once again be examined medically for changes in their health condition.
18. The draft is handled by the regional Voenkomat, the Voenkomat.
19. During the first three months of the year, the Voenkomat conducts the preliminary screenings of young men, and from April to the end of July the first draft for conscription service of the year is conducted. From October until the end of the year, the Voenkomat conduct the second draft of the year.
20. The age of conscription has recently been raised from 18 -27 to 18-30.
21. The reasons for extending the age of conscription are not very transparent, but most likely it is an attempt to broaden the pool of potential conscripts. The duration of the spring draft has also been extended in order for the Voenkomat to draft men, who complete their studies in the summer.
22. Once a man turns 30 he can no longer be drafted for conscription service, but if a man is summoned for instance two weeks before he turns 30, he is obligated to serve.
23. A man who manages to evade the draft will not be subject to the next draft round, if he has turned 30 in the meantime. He would most likely be fined.
24. Other particular circumstances could also merit a deferral of military service. This could for instance be the case for men already employed by the Russian state. In the past, even working with maintenance at the local police station would be sufficient grounds for deferral. However, according to the source, the Russian authorities are now less lenient when applying this potential reason for deferral.
25. Certain groups could also be exempted from military service by presidential decree. Mainly this has applied to particularly talented people like for instance a very talented ballet dancer.
26. There have been considerations as to if the length of military service should be raised from one year to two years. However, for the time being it remains at one year.
27. Once drafted, a conscript may not leave the country.
28. Traditionally, men who do not wish to be drafted have tried to avoid receiving their summons in Russian called povestka – for example by pretending not to be at home if visited by representatives of the Voenkomat.
29. A summons was previously only considered legally delivered to the conscript once delivered physically to and signed by the conscript. This has, however, been changed with the introduction of an electronic draft system that can forward summons to conscripts via a digital service platform called [gosuslugi](#).
30. With the implementation of the gosuslugi a summons is considered legally delivered to the conscript one week after having been sent regardless of whether the conscript has actually read it or not.
31. According to the source, a person would be barred from leaving the country from the moment the summons has been digitally delivered to him.
32. In order for these limitations to actually work, two additional databases have also been created. The first database contains the names of every young man who after his

preliminary evaluation was deemed fit to serve (category A and B). The second database is a database for the digital summons.

33. Both databases are nationwide, and the information from the databases become immediately available to the FSB border service, once a summons has been sent.
34. In practice this means, that a drafted conscript cannot legally exit Russia the moment the summons has been sent to him, as the FSB will receive a notification if his passport is scanned at the border. The source assessed that this applies to all types of passports including non-biometric passports.
35. The electronic system is being tested in 2024 in the regions of Sakhalin, in Ryazan and Mari El. However, most conscripts will still receive their summons physically in 2024, and a full implementation of the electronic system is expected to happen in 2025 if not further delayed.
36. Therefore, exempt in the three-abovementioned regions, a summons would be handed over to a person in question either personally by a Voenkomat personnel or by registered letter. The summons would be considered received by the Russian authorities from the moment it is sent by registered letter, regardless of the actual reception by the conscript in question.
37. Members of the opposition could be targeted for military service, although this could most likely only happen on legal grounds.
38. Convicts may be offered amnesty if they agree to sign a contract with the military, and people charged with a crime could have their charges dropped if they agree to sign.

### Tasks

39. Generally, the conscripts perform relatively simple functions.
40. Only after a conscript has completed the basic 6 – 8 week military training course and has taken his oath to serve Russia, the conscript is given an actual rank. Until then, the conscript is only considered a recruit.
41. After taking the oath, conscripts obtain the rank of private in Russian called ryadavoy or the rank of "efreytor"<sup>449</sup>, which they can only become later, when they have shown good results in their education.
42. The rank of efreytor is reserved for conscripts who are deemed more suitable for combat and who are therefore exempt from performing the more mundane tasks like guard duty or peeling potatoes.
43. It is no longer possible for a conscript to advance to the rank of non-commissioned officer.
44. After completing the basic training course and taking the oath, conscripts are then trained for their specific function such as rifleman or mortar crew member. About half way through their period of conscription, the conscripts can be transferred to the actual unit, in which they are to serve, and where they will be further trained.

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<sup>449</sup> Efreytor can be translated to a senior private.

45. Traditionally, Russian conscripts are posted far from their home region. There has however been a number of unfortunate incidents related to this practice. The source recalls one such incident, where two or three conscripts died of pneumonia due to them waiting for their transport outside an airport not properly dressed to handle temperatures of 30 degrees Celsius below freezing. This led to the process being changed, so that new conscripts are equipped for the further travels to their place of posting at a military barracks or another suitable building in their city. During their stay at this facility, which usually lasts two or three days, the conscripts undergo another health evaluation to ensure, that they are still fit to serve.
46. Conscripts are also issued a credit card, because conscripts are paid approximately 3 000 rubles a month for their service.
47. The source noted, that conscripts are no longer allowed to bring their mobile phone while serving in the military. This is due to the risk of the location of their place of service being revealed.
48. Conscripts do not only serve in the military. Some may also serve in the Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters or in the Border Guard Service under the FSB. The current draft consists of 130,000 conscripts twice a year, and the source estimates that only about 100,000 – 110,000 of these new conscripts will serve in the military.
49. The National Guard also still takes a certain amount of conscripts. They have, however, undergone a professionalization, as the Russian authorities aim to sign up as many soldiers as possible as contract soldiers.

### **Deferral and exemption**

50. The rules regarding exemption and deferral of military service are also covered in the law on conscription and military service. Many grounds for deferral of military service have carried over from the Soviet era, although the number of grounds for exemption has been reduced. For instance, being the caregiver for ones parents in need of care could lead to that person having his military service deferred.
51. One of the primary, if not the foremost, reasons for deferral of military service has been the pursuit of academic studies. Being enrolled at an institution of education would more or less automatically lead to a deferral of that person's military service until the completion or termination of his studies. Therefore, a man would have to be able to continuously document that he is an active student until he turned 27, which was the age at which the age of conscription used to end. However, the age of conscription has recently been extended to the age of 30.
52. Any documents supporting that a person should have his military service deferred due to, for example, studying will likely be checked thoroughly at the Voenkomat. The rules have been made more strict. For instance, a person who has had his military service deferred due to studying one subject, cannot get another deferral should he change the subject of his studies.

53. Members of the LGBTQ community or members of Jehovah's witnesses would most likely keep their sexual orientation and their religious beliefs private at the Voenkomat, rather than trying to use these as a way to be exempted for military service.
54. It is, however, possible to be approved for alternative military service for certain people whose religious beliefs prevent them from serving as soldiers in Russian called *alternativnaya grazhdanskaya sluzhba*. Only few such cases are known to the source.
55. Alternative military service could be performed at a kindergarten or at a theatre, etc.
56. The law does not directly state which specific conditions that will qualify a person for alternative military service. However, it is the estimation of the interviewed source, that a person would need very weighty arguments to be approved.
57. Only a relatively low number of people have been approved for this alternative military service. The source has not seen the numbers of overall applications, only the numbers of approvals.

### **Draft evaders**

58. The definition of a draft evader is someone who avoids being summoned for service. Initially, the penalty for evading being drafted is a fine.
59. Desertion in wartime is punishable by death, and will most likely be carried out extrajudicially. Legally, desertion can only occur within a designated combat unit. Therefore, only contract soldiers will be punished as deserters.
60. Absent without official leave (AWOL) from a non-combat military unit is also punishable. The penalty is more severe than for draft evaders, and would usually consist of detention at the military barracks. This penalty will be decided administratively and not by a court of law. The source noted, that more and more people within the Russian military are given the mandate to reach administrative decisions.
61. The Voenkomat does search for people who have ignored their summons. This is done in collaboration with a local police officer.

### **Family members of draft evaders**

62. Evading the draft will most likely have no consequences for the person's family members, unless they actively participate in avoiding his conscription. A family member could in this case be punished as an accomplice to evasion, which would most likely lead to a fine.
63. If a drafted person is not at home when visited by representatives of the Voenkomat, any other family member eligible for conscription would not be taken in his stead.
64. The source has not heard of draft evaders being sentenced in absentia, although it is likely to have happened.

### **Conditions for conscripts**



65. The general conditions for conscripts vary depending on in which arm of service they serve.
66. The general conditions for conscripts have improved in recent years. The quality of the military barracks has improved significantly, which has also been a priority for the Russian authorities. Certainly there are however still barracks of very low quality in Russia.
67. The general conditions vary from region to region and are also linked with cultural differences. The army probably has the harshest culture within the different branches of the Russian military.
68. The practice of dedovshchina is still used in the army but less prevalent than when the duration of conscription service was two years. This is due to the fact that dedovshchina is the concept of older soldiers hazing newer soldiers. Due to the duration of conscription service being shortened from two to one year, the experience gap within units of conscripts is smaller which in turn makes dedovshchina less prevalent.
69. The life of a conscript has to some extent become more meaningful.
70. The general physical conditions have improved, and the tasks conscripts are ordered to perform are also less mundane than in the past. Having meaningful tasks also plays a role in dedovshchina being less prevalent.
71. The source estimated, that dedovshchina is more prevalent the further away from Moscow a unit is located. Basically, a bored soldier is more likely to participate in dedovshchina than a soldier with a meaningful existence.
72. A conscript who refuses to carry out an order could risk being subjected to physical violence. Orders must be lawful, although the definition of what constitutes a lawful order within the Russian military is defined broad. A conscript could still be ordered to wash his commander's car, but tasks of this nature are used less than in the past. A conscript can try to file a complaint afterwards, if he has been forced to carry out an unlawful order.
73. In the beginning of the Russian war effort in Ukraine, many experts believed, that the Russian military had become more professional than it used to be. However, the level of corruption within the military was not properly taken into account. Many warehouses intended to store explosives are now empty or filled with wooden blocks, because the explosives has been sold or traded.
74. The Russian military equipment has proven to be much less effective than estimated by the Russian military itself.
75. Traditionally, the narrative within the Russian military has been that the practice of dedovshchina to some extent has been due to ethnic differences. As a consequence, the military now aims to keep different ethnic groups apart from one another. On the other hand, Chechen conscripts serve in many different units including in the National Guard.
76. Conscripts from the North Caucasus will therefore usually serve with other conscripts from the same region.

77. The focus within the Russian military has increasingly shifted towards the recruitment of conscripts as contract soldiers. To achieve this goal, a considerable amount of pressure is applied to conscripts.
78. The source had also heard of cases of the contract being written and presented to the conscript without any prior indication that he wanted to sign up.
79. In other cases, the conscript had received the one-time sum of money that a soldier receives upon signing a contract with the military before actually having signed the contract. In these cases, the pressure on the conscript to sign up is immense, and in fact not actively returning the money could be considered an accept of contract duty by default. The source has no knowledge of the scope of this practice.
80. The source, however, did suspect, the financial rewards associated with signing a contract are appealing to many Russians. In addition to the financial appeal, the patriotic idea of serving ones country is also still a factor when signing up as a contract soldier. State propaganda plays a big part in creating this narrative.
81. The contract soldiers come in great numbers from the regions of Buryatia, Tuva and Chukotka. The reasons for this are mainly financial and less so patriotic.
82. Previously, a conscript needed to serve for six months before being allowed to sign a contract, which was subsequently reduced to three months. This has now been changed, and a conscript soldier is now able to trade his service as a conscript soldier with that of a contract soldier from day one. Thus, one year of conscription service becomes two years of contracted service, meaning that the soldier is paid a one-time sum for signing up and a monthly salary.
83. Contract soldiers will however highly likely be posted in Ukraine. In the event that the contract is terminated, which would most likely be due to the contract soldier being incompetent, the soldier can trade every two days of contracted service with one day of served conscription service. The reason for this being that a contract soldier is obliged to serve.
84. Whether or not the Russian military will in fact respect that a contract has been signed for a fixed period of two years is not clear to the interviewed source.
85. The Russian military is in dire need of personnel as casualties are high.

### **The war effort in Ukraine**

86. In principle, conscripts cannot be used for combat and cannot be posted outside Russian territory. However, in practise Russia has annexed the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia meaning that Russia consider these regions part of the Russian territory.
87. By Russian definition, it is therefore legal to post conscripts in these regions. These regions are listed in the Russian constitution as part of Russian territory.
88. Conscripts have also been used in the border regions of Kursk, Belgorod and Bryansk. Conscripts are sent to these regions, which the Russian authorities consider part of the Russian territory. However, the source is not sure, if conscripts are posted inside Ukraine proper.

## RUSSIA – CONSCRIPTION

89. As conscripts have had very little military training, they are most likely only being used defensively in the annexed regions.
90. Conscripts are now also being drafted in the annexed regions. As for Crimea, this is not a new practice.
91. Conscripts do also contribute to the war effort in Ukraine without actually being in Ukraine. Conscripts could for instance perform logistical tasks supporting the war effort in Ukraine.
92. The conscripts in the contested regions considered Russian territory by the Russian state would most likely perform duties supporting the war effort rather than being directly involved in combat. However, some conscripts in these regions do in fact end up at the front line, although the front line is mainly staffed with contract soldiers.
93. The situation is different in Kursk and Belgorod, where advancing Ukrainian units have met units of Russian Conscripts. According to Ukrainian reports, these Russian units have been inclined to surrender, as they have been ill equipped to fight or had not been under the leadership of commanders capable of making the right decisions.
94. It is difficult to estimate how big a percentage of conscripts end up supporting the war effort in Ukraine in some way or another. However, the Russian military is large and has many different branches, so the source's estimation is that only a smaller percentage of conscripts end up supporting the war effort in the army. The navy, for instance, mainly consist of contract soldiers, but conscripts do also serve in the navy. Many conscripts also perform guard duties all across the Russian territory.
95. If the source was to venture an estimate, 20-30% of the conscripts perform duties that support the war effort in the Ukraine.

## Meeting with Mark Galeotti

*Executive Director, Mayak Intelligence, Honorary Professor, UCL School of Slavonic & East European Studies and Senior Associate Fellow, Royal United Services Institute.*

### **Legislation**

1. In terms of the overall structure, there has been no changes in the legislation regarding conscription in 2024. However, there has been talks about prolonging the duration of conscripts from one to two years, but this change is politically unpopular, although the military would welcome such a step. This is because at the time when conscripts have completed their basic training and after that the unit training, the conscripts are only fully usable in the last three or four months of their conscription cycle. If there were to be added an additional six months, this could be useful time, according to the Russian military.
2. There has been no changes in the numbers drafted at the biannually conscription cycle. There are always some minor variation. However, what is actually striking is that there has not been any dramatic change given the current situation.
3. Although President Putin just announced an expansion of the military, this has affected the overall armed forces rather than the conscript force. Now it may be that in the next autumn and spring drafts, the numbers change to try to reflect this new expansion, we have to see.
4. Although the conscripts are an integrated part of the army, the army does not decide how many it is going to draft. The army will put in their request, but it is a political decision by the Kremlin as to what size a conscript draft will have.
5. According to Mark Galeotti, there has been no changes in the formal tasks that a conscript will perform during his military service.

### **Recruitment of conscripts**

6. There is an element of arbitrariness in the way the Russian Voenkomats<sup>450</sup> are picking new conscripts. As every Voenkomat is given a quota of how many young men, they are to draft. The quota is basically driven by demographics. In other words, it is a roughly analogous portion of how many 18 year olds the military will have at their disposal, once the people who have exemptions and deferments are taken out of the equation.
7. There are exit national databases where people are registered as being enrolled into higher education, which is a reason for getting conscription deferred. If a 17-year-old person in Russia has viable grounds for exemption or deferral, he will have quite an incentive to go and pre-emptively get registered as exempted or deferred at a Voenkomat.
8. A person summoned will first have to receive a summons, which requires him to attend at the Voenkomat. Here he will have a medical check, and a document check. Then the

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<sup>450</sup> Voenkomat (Voennyj Kommisariat/Военный комиссариат): military enlistment office

person would have a brief interview, where the Voenkomat personnel can get a sense of who the person is. This is done, because there are some arms of service that have priority over others. The Voenkomat personnel will double check if the person has some kind of sporting achievement or if the person has IT skills etc. that can be useful for the particular arm of service. Furthermore, during this conversation, the conscripted will get a chance to say if he thinks that he qualifies for exemption or deferral.

9. A person has to attend the Voenkomat twice before he is posted. The first stage is a very quick and cursory attendance, where the medical condition and documents are checked. Then assuming that the person will pass, he will then be told to report in usually a few days later. Here the person would be subjected to the so-called BIOS criteria, which means that the representatives of the various arms of service will be going through the files.
10. In the screening, the strategic rocket forces will be getting the first pick of conscripts. They would typically pick persons who are technically adept, and then the paratroopers (VDV) will have their pick and typically go for persons who are tougher, which for instance could be a cross-country runner at school. A person could try to influence this screening, if he believes he has an advantage somewhere. However, it is a pretty clumsy and rough process. There are cases precisely where a person has certain skills, but was overlooked by the Voenkomat or where the person in question did not bother mentioning his skills to the Voenkomat.
11. Whether or not a conscript's preferences as to which arm of service he will serve is dependent on the personnel at the Voenkomat and this could differ from Voenkomat to voenkomet. In this regard, there were no regions where conscripts would be worse off than others would. It all depends on the competence and the care of the individual Voenkomat personnel.
12. However, corruption could play a role in this regard. First, corruption plays a role in terms of paying off a doctor, who can give a person a certification stating that the person in question cannot serve. Second, corruption could play a role at a Voenkomat where either a person might pay to register the person as exempted for conscription. Third, a person may pay the Voenkomat in order to get into a particular arm of service or to get a particular assignment.
13. It is important to note in this regard that at the Voenkomat level, a conscript would not be assigned to a specific unit, but he will be assigned to an arm of service. So a person can at the Voenkomat level influence whether he for instance will serve as part of the infantry or rather would join the navy.
14. Every arm of service will receive a number of conscripts. Broadly speaking there are the following arms of service:
  - The strategic rocket forces
  - The air forces
  - The navy
  - The ground forces
  - Some conscripts are serving in the National Guard.

- Some conscripts are serving in the border service
  - The paratroopers (VDV), which are separate from the air force in terms of picking conscripts. These conscripts could also serve in the Spetsnaz (Special Forces) under the VDV.
15. As Russia is experiencing more military training at schools again similar to what happened in the USSR, it is getting easier for persons who want to join the Spetsnaz to distinguish themselves there. Perhaps they have already done a parachute jump or similar tasks of interest.
  16. As the Russian military was trying to professionalise the Spetsnaz, before they were decimated in 2022, the proportion of conscripts was going down. Therefore, it did not make sense to actually have Spetsnaz units in all of the Russian regions.
  17. In terms of the new law on electronic summons, it is ready to go. However, it does not seem to have been implemented quite yet. It seems like the authorities are trying to work out the interconnection between the different databases and such like. However, the entire legal basis is in place and the time line for whereby things are meant to work.
  18. It is important to stress that the new electronic summons are primarily made for mobilisation and not conscription. This is because people are not fleeing the country in the same manner to avoid conscription, as they do to avoid mobilisation. The last wave of mobilisation of 300 000 men in the autumn of 2022 resulted in approximately 900 000 men fleeing the country.
  19. Given that there is at present not yet the signs of a mobilisation wave happening despite the fact that the military continues to push for it. The implementation of the electronic summons for conscripts is unrolling slightly more relaxed.
  20. It is only the Voenkomat that has the legal authority to summon a person. Therefore, the use of Gosuslugi<sup>451</sup> is simply because it is the most efficient way of actually accessing all these potential people. Again, it is not really a problem with conscription. The electronic summons is really meant for mobilisation. Therefore, Mark Galeotti opined that we would probably first see the new system in use when there is a new wave of mobilisation.
  21. Regarding the centralised database where conscripts and persons eligible for mobilisation is active, Mark Galeotti noted that such a database has been in place for a long time. However, historically it has been much more effective on conscripts than on reservists. The database is quite good at knowing where the 17-year-old boys are and where they live. Nevertheless, its capacity to track reservists was always much worse.
  22. The reason for this is that the reserve system until 2022 had fallen into disarray. Therefore, Russian authorities are attempting to strengthen the reserve system primarily by leveraging the national tax and residence registration database, rather than creating an entirely new system from scratch. However, it is hard to tell at this point in time, how effective this database on reservists is.

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<sup>451</sup> Gosuslugi is a Russian electronic platform providing Russians with access to government information and services.

23. According to the interlocutor, there is a window of opportunity to leave the country after having been summoned. When summoned, the conscript is given a deadline to appear at the Voenkomat. It is unlikely that the conscript will be stopped by the authorities if he flees the country prior to his deadline, as conscripts are only banned from leaving the country after having failed to appear at the Voenkomat. Although, the system is electronic, it still requires a person to enter a code to register that this person has not turned up.
24. When a person is enrolled into the army, they are already barred from leaving the country. Basically, the point at which a person actually turns up at the Voenkomat, assuming they do not exempt or defer that person, then he would be barred from leaving the country legally. This means that if a person show up at a border checkpoint, it should come up on their system.
25. The source was not aware of any informal exemptions to members for the LGBT+ community. Personnel at a Voenkomat do generally not care about whether they can make a good soldier out of a person, as long as the enlisted conscripts meet the necessary health requirements. The personnel could very well just think well, he will get that kicked out of him soon enough, once he is in the ranks.

### ***The general situation for conscripts***

26. The general situation for Russian conscripts before 2022 is pretty miserable, but miserable within the terms of an austere environment. However, because the military was looking much more carefully about retention. Therefore, they wanted conscripts to then sign up as *kontraktniki*<sup>452</sup> after the end of their conscription term.
27. There has been some awareness of the fact that the life of a conscript was miserable, which also contributed to people trying to dodge the draft. Therefore, a lot of effort actually had been put in to try to improve barracks, certainly improve food service, and basically to try and make conditions a little bit less dire.
28. The notion *Dedovshchina*<sup>453</sup> still exists within the Russian military. Although, efforts have been made by the authorities to try to combat it. However, the success of those efforts was very patchy. It depended a lot on the unique culture. Nonetheless, what had for a long time been essentially illegal but tolerated was increasingly actually being not tolerated. The recent creation of a specific military police force actually had a real impact, as up to that point investigations of misconduct were done in the units themselves, and the outcome was typically that nothing happened.
29. Most of what we hear these days is about what is happening to the people in the actual Ukraine war. It is a lot harder for the military police to report about what is actually happening in the conscript body now, because of the press being under

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<sup>452</sup> *Kontraktniki*: Contract soldiers

<sup>453</sup> *Dedovshchina* is an informal practice of hazing and abuse of junior conscripts

increasing constraints. However, that said Mark Galeotti still believed that nowadays the Dedovshchina was at a much lower level than it used to be.

30. The general situation for conscripts would differ to a degree, depending on under which arm of service a person was serving. Generally speaking, the ground forces tend to be worse off, as they have larger concentrations of people. Within the Air Force and in the Navy, there is a slightly higher technical expectation.
31. However, the prevalence of Dedovshchina is much more about individual unit cultures and it often comes down to, what the Colonel and the Lieutenant Colonels tolerate. But also a matter of location, for example if a conscript is posted in some distant base somewhere in Kamchatka, where there is no opportunities for letting the conscripts blow off steam in some local town or whatever else, it could be more prevalent. Furthermore, at such remote postings weather conditions tend to be worse, which also tend to encourage Dedovshchina. This is also because these postings are further away from the view of the higher authorities.
32. As mentioned before, the ground forces are typically worse off. However, there is no demarcation in barracks between the tank crew and the infantry platoon. These are all combined armed forces. Even tank units also have infantry with them.
33. There also exists a “macho paratrooper culture” that can be more vicious, but that is just general macho building sort of culture. This specific Dedovshchina – this kind of seniority based harassment is more likely to be found in the ground forces.

### ***Physical conditions for conscripts***

34. Each arm of the service has a different level of priority when they pick conscripts. The least prioritised service is the construction and railway troops. This job is a lot of hard labour.
35. Therefore, the strategic rocket forces pick conscripts with technical skills, but above all, they value stability and maturity. In terms of conditions, given that conscripts are less likely, for example, to be fighter plane pilots, they are more likely to be technical ground crews and such like. Conscript serving in the more technical arms of service usually serve under better conditions. However, Mark Galeotti did not believe that one could actually say that a particular arm of service has better conditions than other arms.

### ***Tasks of the conscripts***

36. The largest single deployment of conscripts is to the ground force. Here the conscripts do a lot of drills and training. Furthermore, in a very Soviet/Russian style, the conscripts probably also do work perceived as pointless, like washing things so they look pretty when the general visits etc.
37. The Russian military also firmly believes that an exhausted soldier is a controllable happy soldier. However, there is not really a difference between the current conditions for a conscript soldier compared to their condition in non-wartime.



38. The source did not have information on the particular number of conscripts posted at the borders of Russia. It is rather difficult to get the numbers of conscripts in each regiment or brigade and different units have different proportions of contract vs. conscript soldiers.

### ***Tasks of conscripts related to the Russian war effort in Ukraine***

39. First of all, by law conscripts cannot be sent abroad except if they volunteer or in a time of actually formally declared war. At this point in time, there is no evidence to suggest that conscripts are being used in the annexed territories. If anything, the Russian authorities are actually showing rather more restraint there for political reasons.
40. So actually in terms of the ongoing Kursk conflict, the responsibilities that the conscripts had have been precisely backfilling along the Ukrainian border areas. So that kontraktniki had been taken out to form a battalion tactical group to be sent into the war which led predominantly conscript units to just sit at the border more or less just performing statically guard assignments.
41. The more logistically oriented forces clearly had been involved in moving military equipment etc. to the vicinity of the war zone, but even then, the conscripts will stay within Russia. In some situations, an ammunition train would be handled by forces that comprised conscripts, but they would never actually be taking it into Ukraine.
42. On the other hand, the logistics require specialists as well, and conscripts are not necessarily going to be driving trains for example. Nevertheless, what we see now in wartime is a disproportionate role for conscripts outside of Ukraine to allow for the use of professionals inside Ukraine.
43. The only other area where conscripts are used in connection to the war effort in Ukraine would be air defence in terms of shooting down drones and missiles coming from Ukraine. The air defence units that are based in Russia have conscripts. There are conscripts in every single arm of service including even the presidential regiment.
44. It is possible to reject to perform a task if it is an illegal order. However, a conscript cannot say that he is not fit for a certain task and be released from that. If a person is conscripted, he is basically for the next year a serf of the state. However, Mark Galeotti did not think that it is generally different from other countries.
45. If a person disobeys an illegal order, then he might in some cases receive an extrajudicial punishment, which basically means that the rest of his squad is told to give him a beating. Otherwise, depending on the nature of the breach, the conscript would get a punishment permissible under the military regulations.

### ***Conscripts signing contracts with the MoD***

46. The proportion of conscripts signing contracts with the MoD after or during their conscription period has gone down since 2022. Although, it is difficult to answer due to the conscripts now being given a choice of being a professional soldier and get bonuses and other benefits. The proportion of conscripts, who refuse at the beginning but at end up accepting the end of the conscript cycle, is still high, but it has gone down.

47. It is still technically possible to sign a fixed term contract with the understanding that the state can choose not to let the person go. Actually, some contract soldiers are being discharged at the end of their contract period. However, most contract soldiers would not be released after the end of their contract.
48. Mark Galeotti opined that contract soldiers who are released from their contract would probably be soldiers who are perceived by the authorities of either not being very good soldiers or they paid off their commanding officer.
49. It is clear that there is a pressure from the Russian authorities for conscripts to sign contracts with the MoD. At the very least, the authorities try to emphasise the great advantages of signing a contract and try to encourage conscripts to sign contracts. Much of such pressure is driven by cultures. The military has been told that they have to persuade a certain amount of people each month that want to sign a contract and then they will find ways of doing that.

### ***Conscription in the Caucasus region***

50. There still seems to be evidence that Chechen conscripts tend to go into Chechen units. But, aside from that, essentially conscripts from the Caucasus region in Russia will have to serve under the same terms as any other conscript in Russia.
51. In terms of the institutional structures, Conscripts from the Caucasus region would serve under the same conditions as any other conscript. However, persons from north Caucasus may face a certain amount of prejudice in the ranks.

### ***Draft evasion and desertion***

52. Draft evasion is still moderately widespread and has increased since 2022. However, the majority of draft evaders tend to evade through the means of corruption or enrolling themselves into higher education to get a deferment, although the person may well not have any real intention of actually studying.
53. Draft evasion is more prevalent among the Russian middle class, which means one would see proportionately more draft evaders in rich regions as Moscow than in poor regions of Russia. However, draft evasion through corruption tends to be more of a social phenomenon more than a geographically one.
54. A family in Moscow is more likely to have the money to bribe a doctor and a Moscow family is more likely to go to a university. One can maintain ones university exemption, if the person in question goes on to a protected profession after university.
55. If a person at some point was sentenced for draft evasion, they would still be obliged to serve after their sentence. Furthermore, there has been cases of doctors being sentenced for taking bribes in connection to evasion from military service. However, those cases have not been recent.
56. Mark Galeotti has never come across cases in Russia, where family members to draft evaders faced problems with the authorities. However, in rural communities, where there is still more of a sense of a collective unit, the local mayor or the sort of leader of

- village could tell the family that their boy is letting the country down speaking to their patriotic feelings. This sort of social pressure could happen. Although, the family would not be ostracised or prosecuted for the son's evasion.
57. There have been cases of conscripts being sentenced in absentia. Although, it is very hard to truly tell the numbers. A person could evade conscription by not turning up at the Voenkomat and instead move to a different city. At some point, the person would come to the attention of the authorities, whether it is through his residence registration or Gosuslugi etc. So actually, sentences in absentia are only for people who have left the country to avoid conscription or mobilisation.
  58. When asked if the authorities would use extrajudicial punishments against conscripts, the interlocutor replied that there was still a kind of bullying taking place within the ranks. However, in terms of outside the ranks, draft evaders etc. the authorities would not use extrajudicial punishments against them. If they catch a draft evader, they will prosecute him.
  59. When asked whether persons in opposition to the government were more at risk of being targeted, Mark Galeotti replied that on the whole, the state follows its own rules. No one can question those rules. But if a person evades conscription, he will be prosecuted accordingly. Although, a judge may be more likely to rule against a person, if they come to court wearing for example a Navalny T-shirt.
  60. There are no signs of what we perceive as a state level and institutionalised targeting of conscripts, just because they are from a particular ethnic group. If a person is conscripted, he will be targeted because the authorities want to fill their quota, but there is no suggestion that the authorities will target a person because he has a particular affiliation. Not least because many of the ethnic groups that tend to feel persecuted, tend to also be more impoverished and actually have experienced much higher levels of volunteering into the ranks.

## Meeting with Huseyn Aliyev

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### **New Legislation and recruitment of conscripts**

1. There has been a number of legislative changes over the past one year when it comes to the conscription. The age of conscription has been extended from 18-27 years to 18-30 years. However, the most important change in legislation is the introduction of the electronic mobilisation or electronic conscription, which should come into force from the 1 November 2024.
2. Previously the summons for conscription or for mobilisation could only be distributed in two acceptable ways:
  1. handing the summons in person to a potential conscript,
  2. sending the summons by registered post, in an envelope
3. With the implementation of the new system, summons can be distributed through electronic means, which could be through an email sent through Gosuslugi, which is a Russian public service platform. Even in the case, where a person does not have an account at Gosuslugi, the summons can still be sent via Gosuslugi and will be considered as a received summons.
4. On this regard, it does not really matter if an individual actually opens his account on Gosuslugi, reads the summons and takes it into consideration. As long as the summons has been issued through this electronic portal, it is considered delivered to the individual by the Russian authorities.
5. Another change related to conscription concerns the introduction of a new online military register or electronic military register. This is a uniform system, to which every Voenkomat (Voenkomat) will get access. It contains all the information available to the Russian authorities on each individual eligible for conscription or mobilisation. The database will contain the following:
  - a person's home address,
  - phone numbers,
  - Email addresses,
  - places of residence,
  - employment status and
  - education history.
6. Thus, all information that is available to the Russian authorities will be accumulated within this joint military register to which the MoD and consequently all Voenkomats will have access.
7. Previously, much of this information functions in a very old-fashioned way, so, this new single database should be an advantage for the Voenkomats and for a Ministry of

- Defence, making it easier to retrieve data on individuals when conducting conscription campaigns and when possibly conducting mobilisation campaigns for reservists.
8. There is also a new piece of legislation, which was signed last month by President Putin. This new law will suspend criminal investigations and criminal sentences to individuals who voluntarily will be mobilised to participate in the so-called special military operation in Ukraine. Although, this has been done since 2022 on the large scale, it is only as of now that there is a legal basis to mobilise convicted individuals.
  9. Legally the Russian authorities should only start using the new electronic summons from 1 November 2024. However, there are already some reports that the authorities are testing the system. Basically, it is just less than a month before it comes into Force, officially. So officially, if you are summoned now, as of the 8 October, you will receive a registered post, which you will have to sign, or receive a visit from the Voenkomat personnel.
  10. The most common way to draft Russians for conscription is for a person from the Voenkomat to show up at the person's place of residence or personnel from the Voenkomat approaching a person at a high school or another educational facility handing him the summons, which he then has to sign.
  11. If the personnel for some reason are unable to deliver the summons in person, they could send the summons by registered post, which the person in question then has to sign in order for it to be valid. In practice, this means that a mail carrier has to deliver that letter, with a summons inside to the potential conscript in person and that person has to sign for it. However, delivering summons by registered post has not worked in reality. Therefore, in most cases, the people at the post offices do not feel that they actually have to chase down the potential conscript. Instead, they would just hand over this letter to somebody at this address in order for them to give it to the person in question.
  12. Legally, the conscripted person has to sign that he has received the registered letter. However, in reality, if somebody did sign that registered letter for him, as a family member, the Voenkomat will consider it as a delivered summons. A summons sent by post is also considered as delivered as long as the courier signs that he/she delivered it to the addressee even if it was handed over to another person at this address, or simply thrown into a post box. In this regard, there has been this big gap in the legal implementation of this regulation and unfortunately, it has never worked in favour of the conscripts.
  13. The Federal law [“On Military Duty and Military Service” \(N53-FZ\)](#) does not mention that delivering summons to family members/other individuals living at the registered address is illegal or invalidates the summons. As a matter of fact, the Federal Law [“On Enforcement Proceedings” Art.27 \(point 2\)](#), states that in case of the absence of a recipient, a summons can be handed over to any adult family member. In which case “a receipt is considered as informed.”

## RUSSIA – CONSCRIPTION

14. The assumptions that delivering summons to family is illegal are made by some Russian lawyers, encouraging conscripts to start court cases, which usually result in court verdicts against them.
15. If a person for some reason is not able to serve as a conscript due to work, due to studying or due to other reasons, that individual can call up the commissariat and ask for deferral or exemption for conscription. Actually, nowadays it is also possible to do this over email through Gosuslugi.
16. If a Russian man of conscription age is traveling abroad for study or for work, they need to go to their local Voenkomat and register as living abroad. This could be done with the implementation of the new electronic system. However, until now it has to be done in person. However, a family member who is authorised by this potential conscript could with a legal notarised document act on their behalf. In such a case, the Voenkomat will remove the name from the military register. As soon as they return back to Russia, completed their study or they just do not live abroad anymore, they have to show up at the Voenkomat again and re-register.
17. If a person does not register that they travelled abroad, they could be fined. However, the fine is not particularly high approximately 100 euros.
18. The standard deadline from when a person has received a summons to he has to appear at the Voenkomat is around 20 days. If the person has no legal reason not to show up, he could potentially be considered as a draft evader. However, it depends on the individual circumstances.
19. For instance, the commissariat might be aware, that they are in fact sending summons to a wrong address or maybe they need to check up with the family members and relatives. Hence, it does depend on the particular situation.
20. Furthermore, it depends on the particular region and on the particular Voenkomat. In some cases, some of the Voenkomats are in favour of sending out summons by registered post. If a particular Voenkomat lacks staff members, it would be more difficult to go door by door.
21. It is usually different in larger cities such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vladivostok and Novosibirsk as these have quite big populations and not enough staff for the Voenkomat to go door by door. Some Voenkomats delegate summons delivery duty to the district police sheriff (in Russian called uchastkovyi). In the bigger cities the new electronic system will be a huge help for the Voenkomat, because previously, they would rely heavily on sending summons by registered post.
22. Sending summons by registered post is also a widespread method in the far northern regions, where there are large distances to cover for a Voenkomat. In these places, the Voenkomat will rely more on the postal service rather than sending their own people out.
23. There has been no changes in the duration of the conscription service, although there had been talks about prolonging it from 1 year to 2 years, it is still at one year. There has also been no change in the numbers of summoned men, which has more or less stayed the same throughout the course of the war.

24. In the beginning of the full-scale war, some conscripts were sent to the area of the so-called Special Military Operations. However, that did not happen systematically and did not happen on scale. After what happened in the Kursk region in August 2024, it is happening on a grander scale and there are possibly thousands and thousands of conscripts involved in the battles in the Kursk region as of now.

### **Vulnerable groups and groups eligible for alternative military service**

25. In terms of vulnerable groups in Russia, members of the LGBT community come with a stigma that could lead to negative consequences for them if their affiliation was revealed. Therefore, members of the LGBT community would not explicitly indicate that they belong to this community.
26. Jehovah's Witnesses is perceived as an extremist movement in Russia and being a member is illegal. Therefore, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses would be more likely to face criminal charges than conscription if his affiliation became known. However, they would still be eligible for conscription as soon as cleared of criminal charges or in case if no charges raised.
27. However, members of other religious communities and sects can apply for alternative military service, based on their religious beliefs as long as their religious organisations are legally registered in the Russian Federation, and as long as they can prove that they are registered members of these communities.
28. There are multiple cases of men living in the far north, where a number of reindeer herding communities live, applying for alternative military service because they belong to these indigenous ethnic communities with a traditionalist way of live, including hunter and gatherer communities of the Far North and Siberia. However, these are the only groups that can reasonably apply for alternative military services. Furthermore, the federal law [on alternative military service](#) does not list disable individuals as one of the categories eligible to apply for alternative service. These individuals (depending on degree of disability) can apply for exemption from mandatory military service.
29. According to the source, it is not very likely that members of opposition groups or somebody who has a reputation or any prominent supporter of Navalny for instance will be conscripted into military services, as most of these individuals have tried to leave the country or tried to use other routes to avoid military service.

### **Draft evasion**

30. Legally a person is not allowed to leave the country from the moment they receive the summons. However, it takes about a week for the information that a person has been summoned to arrive at the border officials.
31. If a drafted person wishes to leave the country, he could use this seven-day gap to do so. It would however still be considered an illegal exit.
32. Normally evasion of conscription is punished by a relatively small fine. A fine will be between 10,000-30,000 rubles. There have been very few cases, which have gone to

- court, even since the start of Russian invasion of Ukraine. In most cases, the individuals who avoid conscription will be charged with a fine.
33. If an evasion case goes to criminal investigation, the case will be passed over to a police investigator and it will be up to the police investigator to decide on the severity of the punishment. In the very few cases of draft evasion that actually go to court, it is very likely the person in question would be fined, although it will most likely be a higher fine than in administratively settled cases – probably the double of the administrative fine. This would probably be the harshest sentence for draft evasion. The source had not seen any evidence of anyone being actually imprisoned for the evasion of conscription.
  34. The situation is, of course, very different with the evasion of mobilisation for reservists. In these cases, people have received relatively long prison sentences. There were cases of individuals being sentenced up to 10 years imprisonment, although, 3-5 year sentences are more common. There many criminal cases were launched against those who tried to avoid being mobilised back in 2022.
  35. Prior to the Kursk offensive, the number of draft evaders since 2022 has not differed particularly from previous years, but the source expects that the recent conscription period, would likely lead to a higher number of draft evaders. This is because potential conscripts are now aware that they can end up in the border regions such as Kursk and actually risk participating in combat operations.
  36. There is a lack of information available to a large number of Russian citizens. Therefore, all the reports about conscripts being forced to sign contracts in Russian language would appear in media outlets of the opposition such as Meduza or mediazona etc. There are certainly a number of Russians who read such news reports. If a person were aware about the actual situation then they would obviously try to avoid being conscripted in the first place.
  37. On the other hand, large numbers of young men in Russia do not read these news reports and they are not aware of the situation. They are not aware about the forced contracts. However, they might have heard some rumours about it, but the perception among the majority of Russians still is that conscription service is necessary. Conscription is something every man has to do in order to have a good career further on and potentially get a job in government bodies.
  38. For the past decade or more, draft evasion has typically been more prevalent in larger urban centres, particularly in cities like Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the central European regions of Russia. This trend is more pronounced in these areas compared to regions like the North Caucasus, though it does not necessarily extend to areas bordering Ukraine. In north Caucasus, jobs in the state service and in security services are popular, and since these require a person to have completed military service, there is very limited draft evasion. The same goes for the far north regions and the Siberian regions.
  39. Fines are the most widespread punishment for draft evasion. As registered by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, there were 901 court cases on the draft



evasion article (Art.328) in 2023. 894 of these resulted in fines. 3 offenders were either acquitted or received probation terms. The rest of the cases were closed.<sup>454</sup> However, the source has not seen a single court case of draft evasion since 2016. There might have been one or two cases that have not emerged anywhere in open source, although this was doubtful because normally this sort of information would leak onto the regional news websites

40. There were significant numbers of individuals who were charged with fines and who have paid those fines without the case being transformed into a criminal case as draft evasion cases are charged with administrative fines. Mostly fines are handed out to draft evaders following the second or third summons that they have received.
41. There were not many draft evaders who had been sentenced in absentia. However, there are many cases of evasion of mobilisation. There is a tendency in Russia to charge an individual when they actually have the person in question arrested or the authorities have access to this individual. So, if that individual, for example, has left the country in order to avoid conscription, he will likely only be charged once he returns to Russia. This is because the border officials will have all this information and all this data to detain a person.
42. Depending on the circumstances, the person in question who have evaded conscription and subsequently left the country would likely be fined upon his return to Russia. There are cases of persons who has been fined and were given a new summons basically the next day. Furthermore, a summons can also be handed at the point of entry to Russia, such as international airports.

### **Consequences for family members of draft evaders**

43. There is no law delegating assistance to draft evaders yet. However, there were proposals by members of parliament to introduce such law.<sup>455</sup> It is the same article as its article on military service. The punishment will be a fine. In reality, there has been no reports of any family members being charged with assisting somebody to evade conscription.
44. Nonetheless, there have been cases of harassment by the Voenkومات on a large scale. The Voenkomat are actually harassing family members by threatening them, asking them for bribes, pressing them to either deliver information about their sons, or to solve the situation informally, which is offering them, some sort of a bribes.
45. Pressure on family members to draft evaders is more or less universally widespread particularly in those regions where Voenkomat officials actually go door-to-door. In addition, there were also cases of local police staff (in charge of delivering summons) threatening and harassing families of draft evaders. In larger cities where the summons

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<sup>454</sup> For further useful statistics for previous years, including graphs, please see: <https://paperpaper.io/v-rossii-stali-chashe-sudit-uklonistov/>

<sup>455</sup> For further reading on this subject please see: <https://www.pnp.ru/social/sukharev-predlozhil-vesti-otvetstvennost-za-pomoshh-v-uklonenii-ot-prizyva.html>

often are being sent by post, there is not much of a contact between the military officials and the family members. In these cases, there are fewer opportunities for the Voenkomat to press family members.

46. The source was aware of one case from Khabarovsk, where family members to a draft evader actually tried to sue a member of the Voenkomat, for asking a bribe, but the case was dropped due to lack of evidence. Launching corruption cases against government officials are rarely successful.
47. There are plenty of cases, where family members of individuals who are eligible for partial mobilisation, have been targeted and charged.

### General tasks for conscripts

48. The majority of conscripts are drafted into the ground forces, but a high number also goes to the Navy and the Air Force units, as well as elite formations such as Airborne troops (VDV). The tasks in the ground forces are usually of a manual nature, and the conscripts there only receive minimal and basic military training. Some conscripts in infantry units do not receive the basic training in using the weapons, they are supposed to use.
49. Conscripts also participate a lot in other tasks such as logistics, communication, supply lines and construction work among other things. In this regard, conscripts are now actively involved, particularly in around the Kursk region, but also in the regions that border Ukraine.
50. Approximately 60% of the tasks involve manual labour, which could be the construction of military or civilian facilities. Their tasks could also be various cleaning jobs conducted on their bases or outside of it. Their tasks depend on the particular region and the unit's particular economic situation. The military element is relatively limited. Although, it is likely to be higher in the more elite units. Conscripts who have been involved in sports and the likes are more likely to be drafted into these more elite units and they are more likely to receive better military training with the expectation that they will eventually sign contracts with the ministry of defence and that they will serve as reservists.
51. However, the overall standards of the tasks and the training that they receive are quite low and an average infantry soldier in the ground forces is likely to have very limited military training, and thus would spend most of the time performing tasks that have very little to do with the actual military service.
52. If a conscript is given an illegal order, he can refuse to obey. However, in reality conscripts have been doing whatever their commander tells them to do for the past 30 years, including building dacha<sup>456</sup>s for the officers, private villas for the Russian officials and for members of political parties. Conscripts have been used as a free labour force in all sorts of informal jobs, as well as in formal jobs, such as construction of roads and other infrastructure programmes.

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<sup>456</sup> Dacha is a Russian summer/holiday cottage

53. There are legal consequences under [Art.332 \(Criminal Code of RF\)](#), punishable by up to 2 years in prison. However, the consequences of refusing an order could be all sorts of physical and verbal abuse. Most likely, the person in question would be threatened with being taken to the basement by the officers and severely beaten. This is a normal occurrence in the Russian army, all conscripts are well aware of the scope of such punishments, and some of them might even be subjected to them pre-emptively, if they show a lack of disposition towards these extracurricular activities.

### **General conditions for conscripts**

54. In general, conditions of service for conscripts including treatment, nutrition etc. are not necessarily particularly different across the country. However, the conditions for conscripts are worse in Kursk, Bryansk and Belgorod regions, which are the regions that border Ukraine. In these regions, conscripts could face shortages of many things. This is because in many cases, conscripts posted in these regions have to be stationed somewhere outside in the fields, where they have to work on building defensive fortifications and other tasks, that would be rather abnormal for conscripts in other parts of the country. Other than that, the general situation for conscripts is similar to what it used to be.
55. In the past couple of decades, hazing has been widespread and the living conditions are very basic and to some extent harsh compared to European standards. The food is limited and of low quality, and the barracks are usually semi-heated or in some cases not really heated.
56. The so-called dedovshchina is widespread among conscripts in Russia. Dedovshchina is a historical practice of hazing that goes back to the Soviet Army, and became widespread in the Russian army, over the past 30 years. Dedovshchina is a part of the Russian military tradition where the older conscript soldiers, contract personnel and the officers would make every effort to either verbally or physically abuse or make use of conscripts such as extracting pocket money from them or force them to do all sorts of dirty jobs.
57. Dedovshchina is present in every military arm of service, from the ground forces to the fleet, in the Air Force and National Guard. However, Dedovshchina is less prevalent in special forces (spetsnaz) and elite units, as these groups have fewer conscripts. Although Dedovshchina is mostly applied to conscripts it can also be applied to reservists and to individuals who have just started as contract soldiers
58. Dedovshchina could be more prevalent in certain regions compared to others. However, it also depends on the status, financial ability and the connections of the conscript or reservist to provide protection from Dedovshchina.
59. In larger cities, there is an extremely complicated system of bribery, where individual soldiers can more or less bribe their way into more comfortable living conditions or bribe their way into a better military unit or into more comfortable barracks where they have access to better food etc.

60. Conscripts can also bribe their way into serving in the Moscow region or in the larger cities such as Moscow or St. Petersburg city, rather than being dispatched somewhere in Siberia or in the far north. There is a very complicated system of bribery, which could enable a certain soldier better living conditions. A conscript can also buy themselves better serving conditions by simply paying the officer and offer him protection money (known as krysha) in which case nobody would ever touch them.
61. The access to proper healthcare depends heavily on the military unit as some units have relatively decent medical facilities. Especially in those units based in and around larger cities. In these cities, conscripts can also use civilian Medical Services. Although, in most cases, they do have their own relatively, well-developed medical healthcare services.
62. The situation is more dire in the more remote regions of the Russian Federation. In the far north and in the north Caucasus federal district, the health services have deteriorated. However, the healthcare situation for normal civilians in these areas are also worse than in the cities.
63. There is a lack of medical personnel in the remote areas of Russia, where there are also fewer medical facilities. Since 2022, there has been a rising demand for military medical services for Russian military forces that are based in Ukraine. Therefore, there is an overall lack of military medical staff available everywhere in Russia because many of the medical personnel has now been posted in Ukraine. Due to this high demand, the already scarce medical resources in the provinces have been further drained. Although, the situation is still reasonable in the larger cities of Russia.
64. In Chechnya, conscription was re-introduced in 2022, but being a conscript in the other regions in the north Caucasus, is more challenging if they have been posted far away from their home region. If a person is posted close to their hometown, they are likely to be more or less safe. They would serve under better conditions. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, their conditions depend to some extent on their ability to pay bribes and to use their connections in order to serve in their home regions and possibly closer to the hometowns.
65. However, conscripts from these regions are likely to face a higher degree of discrimination if they serve elsewhere in Russia because of the ethnic and religious background. However, the case with mobilisation of reservists is very different.
66. Extrajudicial punishments can be used in cases where conscripts refused to perform the orders that they receive – especially orders that they should not be doing such as extra or dirty jobs. In this case, they can face extrajudicial punishments. There is a whole system of punishments that exists in the military structure of Russia.
67. More privileged soldiers can participate in hazing others who are less privileged, regardless of their time in the military, or their military rank. So there are several layers in this hierarchy and layers of discrimination and therefore it's impossible to say that all Russian conscripts are subjected to the same level of harassment, discrimination or extrajudicial punishments.

68. Particularly the members of ethnic minorities who are non-native to the territory of the Russian Federation are more likely to be subjected to harassment, hazing and discrimination. For example, individuals, from the Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan). Many of them have acquired Russian citizenships.
69. However, there is potentially always the chance that someone from an ethnic minority for example from Buryatia could end up in the military unit where there are only ethnic Russians. Here he could face a degree of discrimination. There is always the chance that this person will actually be posted in his own home republic. This happens frequently with individuals from North Caucasus, for example, from Dagestan, Ingushetia or Chechnya, where they can rely on a certain degree of protection (krysha).
70. In some cases, even senior officials from these republics would come over and sort of the talk to military officials that you cannot touch people and so on. So they can they can be subjected to discrimination and their chances are higher to be subjected to discrimination as compared to it. But they still can rely on this informal mechanisms of protection.
71. This krysha is more difficult to obtain for a person who originates from the Central Asian republics or South Caucasus as they do not enjoy support from official administrative structures within the Russian Federation. They can potentially face discrimination based on their ethnicity or religious identity.

### **Tasks for conscripts relating to the war in the Ukraine**

72. Conscripts have been deployed in logistics tasks (i.e. as drivers, mechanics, delivery staff, etc.), also actively used in construction of defence fortifications (digging trenches, preparing sand bags, etc.). There are a lot of conscript soldiers at the second and third lines of defence, manning check points, forward observation posts and assisting FPV drone teams (such as retrieving drones). Rear artillery positions are also heavily staffed by conscripts, assisting with maintenance and operation of artillery guns.
73. There is a lot of information and evidence indicating that the Russian authorities use extrajudicial punishments, when it comes to mobilising reservists for the participation in the so-called Special Military Operation. However, the situation is different when it comes to conscripts.
74. After the Kursk incursion, the Russian conscripts have played both an active and a supporting role. Prior to the Kursk offensive, conscripts made up the majority of the Russian forces on the border with Ukraine. Therefore, they have taken the heaviest blows, when the Kursk offensive commenced. Many conscripts have been taken as prisoners and probably over a thousand conscripts lost their lives since the start of the Kursk incursion. However, there are no official numbers available, which can corroborate this.
75. The conscripts were used as the major military force in the initial phase of the incursion. However, eventually, they were to some extent replaced by regular troops. Some of replacements came from the Donbas region and some came from other

regions of the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to estimate the exact involvement of conscripts in the combat roles in the Kursk region currently, because there is no official or verifiable information on this matter. The source estimated that it was likely 50/50, which means half of the combat tasks are to this day still performed by conscripts in the Kursk region.

76. This was actually the official message of Russian military authorities, both from the Ministry of Defence and at the local level. A number of Russian military commanders have claimed that conscripts actually have to be involved in the Kursk operation. Furthermore, conscripts were involved actively in supporting roles such as in the construction of defensive fortifications around Kursk and Belgorod regions.
77. Initially when the Kursk incursion started in the early August 2024, most of the Russian military positions in the Kursk region i.e. trenches, block posts and strongholds were predominantly staffed by conscripts. The conscripts were obviously led by professional officers and their job was to hold these positions.
78. Conscripts are not involved in offensive operations in the Kursk region. Therefore, one will not find conscripts in the first line of assault troops to retake those positions from the Ukrainians. However, they would be supporting regular troops and their assault operations, probably in the second line of defence or holding the positions, improving and expanding them. In this regard, conscripts in the Kursk region will be in the line of fire, as they will be within the range of Ukrainian artillery and drones.
79. It is very much doubtful that conscripts would take part in assault operations, because many of them have absolutely no military experience and have had only very basic military training. Therefore, they will not be very efficient as combat soldiers, although there has been reports of conscripts being used in the start of the Kursk incursion. They were sent into assault missions in August 2024. However, there have not been reports of such missions recently.
80. According to Russian law, conscripts can only be deployed for combat in peacekeeping operations, or in anti-terrorist operations. However, the official Russian discourse has described the current situation in Kursk region as a counterterrorist operation. Russian officials have classified the Ukrainian presence in these areas as a terrorist incursion into Russian territory, which meant that Russian MoD needed to conduct an anti-terrorist operation. In this way, the conscripts would legally be put into the category of military personnel that actually have to participate in military actions. Thus, conscripts serving in Kursk cannot legally refuse any orders from the commanders as part of this operation.
81. The situation is obviously very different in the Russian occupied territories of Ukraine, where there is no legal ongoing anti-terrorist operation meaning conscripts should not be involved in any military operations there. In these regions, conscripts can legally refuse to be deployed in dangerous operations. This could for instance be the case in Crimea.
82. Russian conscripts are engaged in Ukraine proper. They serve in Crimea and they also serve in the four annexed regions: Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk.

Officially, conscripts should not be involved in combat operations. They also should not be anywhere close to the area of military activities. In Crimea there is obviously no risk of being close to the front lines, as there are no front lines in Crimea. However, they are still subjected to the Ukrainian drone attacks and Ukrainian missile attacks. There were a number of cases where barracks with conscripts were hit by the Ukrainian long-range weapons in Crimea, as well as in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

83. It is more doubtful that conscripts have been hit in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, but there are conscripts stationed in these regions nevertheless. These annexed regions are not very preferential regions for conscripts, unless a conscript is a local person and he wants to serve in his own home region, for example, around Donetsk. However, if a conscript is from somewhere else in Russia, from Novosibirsk for example, he certainly would not want to serve in the occupied areas of Ukraine.
84. The source assessed that it would be a desperate situation for a conscript to end up in the occupied territories because the life-threatening risks are much higher in these regions in comparison to postings elsewhere in the Russian Federation.
85. Occasionally there has been reports of conscripts who ended up somewhere on the front lines and were captured. However, many conscripts do eventually end up on the front lines due to signing contracts with the MoD to become contract soldiers.

### **Pressure to sign a contract with the Russian military**

86. The above-mentioned practice started in 2022 and in 2024, it has acquired a massive scale. Any conscript who has served for just one month can legally sign a contract with the MoD. In some cases, conscripts can become contract soldiers after even less than a month's military service. Some conscripts can be pressured or even forced to sign a contract.
87. There are no standards for how conscripts sign contracts. It differs from region to region. It is done differently in each military unit. It depends on the military commander and in some cases, conscripts are more or less persuaded to sign contracts.
88. Conscripts have often been persuaded to sign a contract through financial rewards. They are offered high salaries and large one-off payments. In some cases, for example in Belgorod region, the Russian authorities offer three million Rubles as a one-off payment to anyone signing a contract, which is over 20,000 US dollars. Furthermore, soldiers are offered all sorts of social benefits and a stable career in the military. Many conscripts are also convinced by various patriotic slogans such as “serve your country”, “be a real man” etc.
89. A more widespread approach for the authorities to make conscripts sign contracts with the MoD seems to be a forcible approach, where conscripts are threatened with physical punishment. They could for instance risk being locked in the basement until they sign a contract. There are various reports that hundreds of conscripts have been locked in facilities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions for many months for this purpose.

90. There are other types of punishments that the authorities can utilise. It could be beatings or naming and shaming. In some military bases, there have been examples of posters and photographs of individuals on boards for everyone to see and label these conscripts as cowards.<sup>457</sup>
91. Additionally, there have been a few reports that contracts have been signed on behalf of conscripts by their commander without the consent or even knowledge of the conscript.
92. There is a whole set of different practices, that the Russian military officials use, which would depend on the individual military commander. The military officials want to recruit as many soldiers as possible for the Russian war effort in Ukraine. The military officials can then be rewarded for their recruitment effort through various ways including financial rewards. This leads commanders to being innovative when it comes to signing up contract soldiers.
93. In this regard, there is no need for the Russian military to send the actual conscripts to the front lines, as they have plenty of previous conscripts, who have signed contracts with the MoD.
94. In 2022 and even in 2023, there were apparently quite a significant number of conscripts who willingly signed military contracts. They were attracted by the financial rewards and by the opportunities of a stable job within the military etc. As of today in 2024, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the number of those who willingly sign contracts is exceptionally small. Therefore, most of the contracts have to be enforced and that is why there seems to be substantial evidence of how these contracts are being forced upon conscripts. Previously – especially in 2022 – the practice of enforcing contracts was rather bizarre and the cases were unusual.
95. Financial rewards, are more effective for recruiting reservists or individuals of older age, due to their financial situation. Many of them have taken loans or have mortgages, lack employment etc. However, conscripts probably hope to get employment somewhere else in civilian jobs.
96. The source estimated that approximately 40-50% of a conscript cycle would end up signing contracts with the MoD. It depends on their personal circumstances. If the conscripts serve in a unit where they are offered a choice and where the enforcement mechanisms are not so harsh, they are more likely to avoid signing contracts.
97. The units posted in the border regions with Ukraine are under the most pressure to sign contracts, as the governors of the regions and the local military officials are under a lot of strain and pressure from the Kremlin to recruit more people to attract more individuals into the Armed Forces. They are quite heavily reliant on these forcible methods of attracting conscripts and they are the ones that are increasing the amounts of financial rewards.
98. Furthermore, the local Governors of the north Caucasus are also under pressure to sign up soldiers. For example, the head of Chechnya always promises the Kremlin that he

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<sup>457</sup> Please see photos from Telegram channels at the end of the minutes.



will bring the highest number of military volunteers for the so-called Special military Operation.

99. The border regions (Kursk, Belgorod and Bryansk regions) and the regions in north Caucasus are the regions who offer the highest financial incentives for signing a contract. Regions such as Rostov region are perceived to be a near border region, and thus slightly safer. However, it is expected that there will be more efforts to recruit military persons from Rostov region rather than somewhere further into Siberia or the far north.

100. Below are two photos of naming & shaming posters. Both of these photos are taken from various Telegram channels. The first is of a board with names and photos of personnel disobeying orders during the so-called special military operation, and the second is a poster for shaming individual soldiers and designed to be send by post (supposedly to families, work places, etc.).

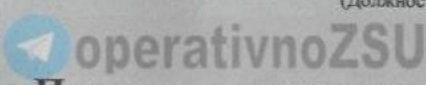
The DIS and SMA have decided not to include one of the photos due to reasons related to the privacy of the individuals portrayed on the photo.

# ДОСТОИН ПРЕЗРЕНИЯ

В то время, как весь российский народ защищает интересы своего Отечества, Ваш сын

капитан

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Должность, воинское звание, ФИО)

 Проявил лицемерие к законам государства, малодушие и трусость по отношению к своим товарищам, чем опорочил и унизил достоинство гражданина Российской Федерации. Он лично сам, без принуждения, принял решение о подписании контракта на службу в Вооружённых Силах РФ и согласился с условиями прохождения службы по контракту

Командование и весь личный состав воинской части выражают свое признание \_\_\_\_\_

(ФИО)

За нарушение воинской присяги Российской Федерации и неисполнение гражданского долга, согласно Конституции РФ.

## Meeting with Novaya Gazeta Europe

*Novaya Gazeta Europe was founded in April 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine six weeks earlier and the subsequent introduction of wartime censorship that forced most of Novaya Gazeta's editors and journalists to leave the country.*

### New legislation

1. The Russian authorities are trying to control channels on Telegram and are marking everyone with more than 10,000 subscribers on a special bloggers list.
2. There are not a lot of cases in the media concerning electronic summons. The use of electronic summons was supposed to be implemented by 1 November. However, the electronic summons system is not fully used as of the date of this interview, 7 November 2024.
3. As far as the source knows, the use of electronic summons is being tested in three regions, Ryazan Oblast, Sakhalin and in the Republic of Mari El. Unfortunately, There are no accurate information about whether the system is functioning properly in these regions. As reported on 1 November 2024, by Andrey Kartapolov, Chairman of the State Duma Defence Committee, electronic summonses will only be tested in these three regions for now.
4. There is little available data on this subject, but the Russian authorities have stated on their official website, that the registry would be operational by November 1, 2024. However, it has not yet started functioning. The website is connected to the electronic platform Gosulugi. The link: <https://реестрпозвосток.рф>
5. When drafted electronically, the conscript will receive his summons through Gosulugi.
6. When summoned electronically, the summons is considered delivered. A summons will be considered delivered 7 days after it is posted in the electronic registry. (whether the drafted person opens the summons or not).
7. The Russian authorities are collecting data for a centralised database with potential conscripts, but this database has not been created yet.
8. In the other regions of Russia, summons are still delivered physically to conscripts by the Voenkomat (draft office).
9. Summons for conscription service are sent out twice a year. During spring and during autumn.

### Possibility to leave Russia after being summoned

10. It is still possible to leave Russia after haven been summoned for military service by a physical summons. As far as the source knows, the Russian military authorities do not share information about drafted conscripts with the border authorities the border authorities of the other countries. So, this works if a person exits through Belarus, Kazakhstan, etc. When crossing the Russian border without involving third countries, problems may arise. After our conversation, [news](#) emerged that Moscow conscripts who failed to report to the military enlistment office after receiving a summons

received SMS messages informing them of a travel ban from leaving Russia. However, this might be merely an act of intimidation.

11. One option is to travel to Belarus, as being barred from leaving Russia does not prevent you from traveling to Minsk and cross the border here.

### **Exemption, deferral and alternative military service**

12. The source knows of a number of cases related to 10 – 20 students who should not be drafted due to being active students or being disabled. Despite this, they were detained at the Voenkomat and most of them now serve in the army as conscripts despite their families hiring lawyers to help them with their rights.
13. Previously people belonging to the LGBT community could be exempted from military service on the grounds of mental health issues, as their sexuality was perceived as a mental illness.
14. As of November 2024, members of the LGBT community risk being prosecuted and sent to jail if their sexuality becomes known. This change in the treatment of LGBT persons happened in the spring of 2024 and came about both through new legislation and in practice.<sup>458</sup>
15. Several videos of LGBT persons being subjected to abuse have come to light since. There are cases of persecution described in human rights communities.<sup>459</sup>
16. Jehovah's witnesses are categorised as an extremist organisation and their members might be sent to prison. Such cases could be found, but detailed information about Jehovah's Witnesses and the war can be read [here](#).
17. In theory, a member of a religious minority could refuse military service due to their religious beliefs, for instance pacifism, and instead serve alternative civil service. However, many people do not know of this right and therefore do not claim it.
18. When the Voenkomat refuses to grant alternative civil service, many people do not know of the option to take this decision to court.
19. The courts in Russia do not respect the principle of a fair trial. The courts are on the side of the military. However, with the help of human rights lawyers, it is possible to win such a case in court, and in fact one human rights organisation claims to have a high percentage of court victories. There is no unified statistics, but human rights activists from various organizations mention the number of successful court cases. See footnote.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Meduza, Верховный суд России объявил «экстремистским» и запретил «движение ЛГБТ», 30 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>459</sup> Telegram, Кризисная группа СК SOS, 4 September 2024, [url](#); Telegram, ДСО — Движение сознательных отказчиков, 6 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>460</sup> Telegram, Призыв к совести, 31 July 2024, [url](#); Current time, Для военнослужащих по призыву это работает". Кто выбирает и как добивается альтернативной службы в России во время войны, 17 May 2024, [url](#), Current Time, Призывникам в России отказывают в альтернативной службе. Советы

20. There are a number of human rights organisations who can help persons who have deserted, had gone AWOL or do not want to serve. These organisations are: Идите Лесом, Движение Сознательных Отказчиков and Призыв к Совести.
21. There are no set and predetermined criteria for being granted alternative civil service. There is an application form that needs to be filled out, and the most important thing is doing this correctly and on time.
22. Russian culture is a masculine one, and doing alternative civil service is not a popular choice in Russia. Russian propaganda has proven effective in convincing people to serve both as conscripts and as contract soldiers.

### Pressure to sign a contract with the military

23. A lot of pressure is put on conscripts to sign contracts with the military, and there are cases where the one time sum for signing a contract has been paid out without a contract actually having been signed.<sup>461</sup> In other cases, contracts have been signed by a conscript's commander without the consent or knowledge of the conscript.<sup>462</sup>
24. Contracts can now be signed early into conscription service. The source believed, that a contract could be signed within the first month of service.<sup>463</sup>
25. It is possible to refuse serving as a contract soldier in these cases. Although, only by taking the case to court. The chance of getting out of the contract is about 50/50, and human rights organisations try to help conscripts in these cases.
26. The trend of forcing conscripts to sign contracts within the first days or months of their mandatory service only emerged after the start of the offensive in the Kursk region. Prior to this, human rights organizations recorded only isolated cases of such early contract signing (by law, conscripts are required to undergo training for several months before entering into a contract). There are no statistics yet, but it is known that relatives are already taking legal action in similar cases.<sup>464</sup>
27. Both physical and psychological pressure is applied to conscripts to try to make them sign a contract. The military use both the carrot and the stick to make people sign contracts.
28. The source opined that LGBT persons have been forced to sign up as contract soldiers and have been sent to the front line.<sup>465</sup>

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юриста, как отстаивать свои права, 22 September 2024, [url](#); Telegram, Призыв к совести, 13 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>461</sup> Telegram, Новая газета Европа - Россияне продолжают получать деньги за контракты с Минобороны, которые не заключали, October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>462</sup> Telegram, Сахалин против войны, 22 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>463</sup> Telegram, МОБИЛИЗАЦИЯ | Новости | Срочники - Очередных срочников заставили подписать контракт, 21 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>464</sup> Sever Realii, "Мы в ужасе, воевать не хотим". Срочникам платят по фальшивым контрактам, 20 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>465</sup> OVD-Info, «Будешь у меня родную землю в окопах целовать!» Как за окрашенные волосы получить протокол о «дискредитации» и повестку в военкомат, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

**Draft evasion, etc.**

29. There are three levels of punishments for soldiers who do not wish to serve in the military:
  1. The first level is for people who refuse service. The punishment in these cases is a fine of 300 euros, which is ten times more than the former fine for the same offense.
  2. People who leave their military unit without permission (going AWOL) risk up to five years in prison. However, in practice, these people will instead be sent to the front line even though they would prefer to go to prison. These soldiers were mobilised, and not conscripts.<sup>466</sup>
  3. Deserters are soldiers who leave a front line unit without permission.
  4. The sentences for AWOL and desertion range from 5 to 15 years, depending on the time spent away from the military unit and the circumstances.<sup>467</sup>
30. A Russian citizen residing outside Russia can hire a lawyer to check, if they have any criminal cases against them. It is also possible to check online. In fact, information about whether a person is on the wanted list can be found on the official website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Information about whether a criminal or administrative case has been initiated against a person can be obtained by searching on the regional courts' websites

**Tasks of conscripts**

31. Traditionally, conscription service has not been considered something dangerous in Russia. Rather, conscription service is seen as something every young man should do to become a real man.
32. However, the cases of conscripts serving at the front have increased. This is primarily due to the situation in the region of Kursk, where conscripts do serve and where some have been taken prisoners of war.
33. The situation in the region of Kursk has changed the view on conscription service, as it is now considered dangerous.
34. The source's most popular video on their Youtube-channel is about a young conscript who served near the border to Ukraine and who were killed in a drone strike.
35. Conscripts serve as combat soldiers in the region of Kursk where they defend their country. However, they do not, as far as the source knew, serve in the occupied regions of Ukraine.
36. The source was not aware of whether conscripts were used both defensively and offensively in the region of Kursk. Conscripts have only had very basic military training

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<sup>466</sup> Verстка, Служба по контракту без альтернатив: принуждения, угрозы и штурмы, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>467</sup> Consultant, УК РФ Статья 338. Дезертирство, 23 November 2024, [url](#); Madiazona, К августу 2024 года в российские суды уже поступило больше дел о бегстве из армии, чем за весь 2023-й, 12 August 2024, [url](#)

and are not trained to fight and to kill. Statistics about conscript casualties are not publicly available.

37. The reason why conscripts do not serve in the occupied regions of Ukraine is that conscripts are not allowed to take part in the special military operation. They do, however, serve in the region of Kursk, due to the activities in the region being labelled as an anti-terror operation. They also serve in Crimea, as this is considered a part of Russia. Despite the fact that, from the perspective of Russian law, the "newly" occupied territories of Ukraine are considered part of the Russian Federation, conscripts are not sent there.
38. Conscripts defend the borders to Ukraine and they could be tasked with assembling drones. They also perform supportive duties such as digging trenches.

## Meeting with Sergey Krivenko, director of the Human Rights Group "Citizen. Army. Law"

*Sergey Krivenko, director of the Human Rights Group "Citizen. Army. Law", which is a Russian non-profit and non-governmental organization created in 2010 in Moscow based on many years of work to protect the rights of conscripts and military personnel, as well as to promote alternative civilian service (ACS) in Russia. In December 2021, the Russian Ministry of Justice added the Human Rights Group to the so-called register of "foreign agent NGOs". After the start of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the main focus of the organization's work became supporting those Russian citizens who consciously refuse military service and participation in the war (see <https://t.me/peaceplea>). In August 2023, the Russian Ministry of Justice added the director of the human rights group "Citizen. Army. Law" Sergei Krivenko to the register of foreign agents in an individual capacity.*

### New legislation

1. There have been two waves of legal amendments relating to conscription rules, which according to the source have become generally toughened. We explain how the law on military service was changed in April 2023 and how to now fight for the right not to fight.<sup>468</sup>
2. The amendments consist of the introduction of an electronic register of those who are subject to conscription, and increase in fines and the introduction of restrictions on those subjected to conscription (please see an overview of what has changed in the end for the autumn 2023 draft in the footnote).<sup>469</sup>
3. With regards to duration of the conscription period, no changes have been made. However, the age of conscription has been increased from 18 to 30 years, compared to the previous 18 to 27 years. For persons in the reserve, mobilisation age was increased to 55 years.
4. There have been no changes regarding the annual number of people to be conscripted. This number is still about 300,000, which constitutes approximately one third of the total population of men turning 18 per year. There were previous speculations that the number of conscripts would be increased for the present autumn draft period, which however did not occur. The Russian army has suffered huge losses to be compensated, and volunteer involvement in contract service is not going well. The authorities therefore has two means to increase the number of military personnel; either via increasing the draft or via mobilisation. Both of these options are difficult and come

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<sup>468</sup> Инструкции «Призыва к совести», Сбор данных о военнообязанных, ограничение прав и облегчение вербовки — объясняем, как изменили закон о воинской службе и как теперь бороться за право не воевать, 7 April 2024, [url](#); Инструкции «Призыва к совести», Штрафы, запрет на выезд, повышение призывного возраста и предельного возраста запаса — что изменили в правилах призыва и мобилизации за лето и как теперь бороться за право не воевать, 7 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>469</sup> Инструкции «Призыва к совести», Что поменялось для призывников к 1 октября 2023 года и как это влияет на защиту права не воевать, 17 January 2024, [url](#)



with a set of problems; however, the source opines that the risk of a second wave of mobilisation is prevalent. The number of citizens called up for military service per year:

2015	297,245
2016	307,000
2017	276,000
2018	260,500
2019	267,000
2020	263,000
2021	262,150
2022	254,500
2023	277,000
2024	283,000

### Central database

5. As for the planned central database, the source clarifies that it consists of two registers:
  1. A digital register of those individuals accounted for conscription or military service in general (men between 18-55 years). This database also includes women who are registered for military service. These are women who previously served in the army and have already left, these are women who have no connection with the army, but who have specialties that can be used in the army, for example, doctors, and signalmen.

According to the law, all state agencies and departments, such as e.g. healthcare institutions, tax agencies, employers (both public and private), education institutions and the police should provide updated information about every person who is subject to be in this register. The idea behind it is that all information should be available in one joint digital register, for the Voenkomat (the 'Voenkomat') to be able to see a complete picture of every person subject to conscription or military service.

Up until today, different agencies have kept their own registers of information in different forms, and it has proven problematic to unify these registers. At the moment, the joint digital register is not complete nor functional.

- a. A register of summons.

After the Voenkomat sends a summons to an individual, the summons should be included in a special digital register. State bodies have a formal right to restrict the rights of summoned individuals, such as e.g. banning them to leave the country. With this digital register, the border police can automatically stop a person included in the register from leaving the country. There are also examples of other restrictions on

summoned individuals such as the prohibition to drive a car and to take financial loans. Formally, the ban on leaving the country comes into effect immediately from the moment the summons is placed in the register and remains in effect until the citizen appears at the Voenkomat. Other restrictions on rights may be imposed on the citizen if he fails to appear at the Voenkomat within 20 days after the summons is placed in the register.

6. The digital register of summons does not work yet, meaning that a person who has been summoned to conscription can still leave the country. Once the register comes into force, this possibility should no longer exist. The prohibition to leave the country applies to those subjected to conscription during the drafting period in which they received the summons. After the drafting period has ended, that person will again be legally able to leave the country unless the authorities has opened a criminal case due to draft evasion.
7. The source is unaware of when the digital register of summons is expected to start working. Theoretically, the authorities could announce within the next year that it is working. The source opines, however, that employers at the Voenkomat are not interested in this register, as it would make it more difficult to use means of corruption, which are largely prevalent today.

### Summoning

8. Russian authorities are working on introducing electronic summons for conscription through the official service *Gosuslugi* and the system has been tested in some regions. The website of electronic summonses is being checked in the Ryazan region, Mari El and Sakhalin.<sup>470</sup> However, the launch of the electronic system failed and therefore the changes have not yet come into full effect. The source opines that creating a “good quality data base” is a common problem in Russia. The president initially ordered departments and ministries to prepare for both the electronic register and the electronic summons system by 1 October 2024. Since the launch failed, the date has been postponed until 1 January 2025. Therefore, the old rules and measures for summoning conscripts are still applied. These consist of the three following practices:
  - Summoning by handing a summons in person to the recipient, who then has to sign the summons for it to legally count as having been delivered, or the summons may be handed to the citizen personally by military registration and enlistment office employees.
  - Sending the summons by registered post. If the summons is sent by registered post it does not have to be signed by the recipient.
  - The summons may be served to a citizen at work or at an educational institution through the management of these organisations.

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<sup>470</sup> RTVI, В трех регионах России началась проверка реестра электронных повесток, 18 September 2024, [url](#)

9. There are no regional differences when it comes to which of the two-abovementioned methods is applied when summoning conscripts.
10. Propaganda plays a problematic part, convincing people who are generally unaware of their rights and the conscription procedure that they must serve. The source states that many believe that the state has unlimited rights to send a person to conscription and that once you are informed about a summons, you must adhere to it, no matter how it is delivered. The source describes the current situation as a “huge mess”, where servicemen from the Voenkamat use several mixed methods for summoning conscripts; by sending formal summons, SMS-messages, and messages through the official service *Gosuslugi*, all while the media informs people that all of these methods are obligatory even though they are not. Hence, even a SMS from the Voenkamat risks being perceived as a legally valid summons, although it is in fact not. Legally, only the traditional means of summoning in person or by registered post are obligatory. The source opines that only a minority of young people understand their rights and the procedure, and are able to defend their rights.
11. Illegal so-called “one day drafts” also occur, are described as the process when an individual turns to the Voenkamat for a different purpose (e.g. to collect paperwork) and once there, he is conscripted and sent to military service the very same day. This practice constitutes a gross violation of Russian law and was previously a rare situation, however an increase has been noted since 2022. The practice is mainly a problem in bigger cities, since people in rural regions usually adhere to their summons to a greater extent than in larger and more densely populated places.
12. According to the source, once a person is formally conscripted, it is impossible to revoke the process and be returned, even if the conscription was done through violations of draft procedures.
13. A citizen is considered officially called up if the draft board makes a decision to call him up. At this stage, it is still possible not to go to the army if you appeal the decision of the draft board to a higher draft board of the region or to the court.
14. The formal procedure of conscription, which is fixed in the law, consists of the fact that after the decision of the conscription commission, the citizen is given a summons to appear at the assembly point to be sent to the army. The time between these moments is usually several days. This time is necessary to resolve personal issues if the citizen intends to go to the army. Or to file a complaint if the citizen does not want to go to the army.
15. A gross violation of the law would be if a citizen is forcibly taken to a collection point immediately after the draft board and from there forcibly sent to the army. This is the so-called violation of “one-day conscription”. A citizen receives the legal status of “military serviceman” at the collection point. It is impossible to resign from the army because the conscription was in violation of the law. There is no such ground for dismissal in Russian law.

16. The source has seen many cases where someone struggles for their rights, they will be taken aside by the Voenkomat. There are cases of forced conscription and cases where a citizen wanted to leave the military registration and enlistment office, but he was forcibly sent to the army.<sup>471</sup> See also "Overview of Rights Violations and Resistance During the 2024 Spring Conscription."<sup>472</sup>
17. Every Voenkomat has a predetermined quota to fill with conscripts and the main goal for the Voenkomat is to fill this quota, not to conscript specific individuals.
18. If draft quotas are not met in the big cities or in densely populated urban areas, the authorities can increase quotas in rural provincial regions where it is easier to draft conscripts. Consequently, the draft percent of people from e.g. Buryatia is higher than that from e.g. Moscow.
19. Traditionally there have been five main ways to avoid military service; to hide, to leave the country, to be granted exemption due to health conditions, to be granted deferral due to studies or applying for alternative civil service (ACS). With legal amendments in 2023, a ban for summoned individuals to leave the country was introduced. Furthermore, the amendments allow the police to search for draftees (ex. by using the possibility of searching through phone bills and films from CCTV cameras) and demand that employers inform the authorities about changes related to potential conscripts. Consequently, the possibilities to leave the country and to hide in order to avoid conscription have become more limited.
20. There is also a theoretical possibility to bribe your way out of conscription, but also this has become more difficult today as the state is more cautious about bribes.
21. As for the possibility to forge a summons document, the source opines that this would not be too difficult. According to the source there is a market of fake stamps. Additionally, it is possible to forge a summons via e.g. IT methods as there are many copies of summons circulating online. This means that forging summonses can work for migration services of foreign countries.

### LGBT

22. Formally, there are no exemptions for LGBT persons when it comes to conscription. Before the full-scale war in Ukraine, LGBT persons were often considered mentally ill and therefore they would easier meet the grounds for exemption. Today however, the so-called international LGBT movement has been declared an extremist organisation in Russia, meaning that openly declaring e.g. homosexuality could lead a person to face criminal prosecution. Even though there is no real existence of an international LGBT movement as portrayed by the Russian state, any person claiming to belong to the

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<sup>471</sup> Telegram, Призыв к совести - В Москве запасника попытались призвать на срочную службу, но отпустили, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>472</sup> Инструкции «Призыва к совести», Обзор нарушений прав и сопротивления в весенний призыв 2024 года, 30 October 2024, [url](#)

LGBT group could be prosecuted for being a member of this so-called organization. Therefore, people are generally not revealing their sexual orientation.

23. If e.g. a homosexual person serves as a conscript and their sexual orientation is revealed, the source opines that consequences may differ broadly. In some cases, there might be no consequences, and in other cases, the individual might be subjected to e.g. bullying and pressure. The source is aware of such cases from the period before the full-scale war, but there are no statistics on the matter as this is not an officially existing problem in Russia.

### Religious minorities and ACS

24. Earlier, it was sufficient for a person to state being a Jehovahs Witness and almost automatically he would be permitted to perform ACS instead of ordinary military service (as a conscript). In 2017, Jehovahs Witnesses were outlawed in Russia, so a person can no longer publicly admit that they belong to this denomination out of risk of being prosecuted. According to the source, there is therefore no longer an easy way for religious minorities to avoid conscription.
25. It is still possible to claim that one has ideas and beliefs that are contrary to the purpose of the military (e.g. being a pacifist), and apply for ACS on these grounds. The system with ACS has been prevalent in Russia for more than 20 years, and comes with a special procedure, which involves applying actively to a special commission. The procedure is still available but comes with many obstacles, even more so since 2022 as the interest in ACS has increased at least ten times compared to before the full-scale war. For further information on ACS there is a special report "THE RIGHT TO CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO MILITARY SERVICE IN RUSSIA DURING FULL-SCALE WAR<sup>473</sup>" (May 2024); it is posted on the website <https://peaceplea.org>.

### Postings

26. In general, every arm of service of the Russian military has conscripts serving in it. Most military units are combined, consisting of both conscripts and contract soldiers. Larger military units may sometimes consist of smaller units, with some of them being comprised only of contract soldiers. The conscription period is only one year and some specialities within the military require longer time for preparation. Conscripts can, therefore be offered to sign a contract before deployment into these special military units. It is, according to the source, the units consisting of only contract soldiers that are being deployed to the war.

### Healthcare

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<sup>473</sup> The report in Russian:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jt0\\_YiXqwPTS60DyKL6VOg8XVTYNCi7Y/view?pli=1](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jt0_YiXqwPTS60DyKL6VOg8XVTYNCi7Y/view?pli=1)

The report in English: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X3Zq2l66jUnnQTnotL8Q8eDGoZJ90gNC/view>

27. Medical service is available in the army and conscripts formally have access to healthcare. In practice however, there is a lack of medical personnel and it happens that paramedics replace doctors. In order for a conscript to be sent to the hospital he should have a referral from a local paramedic. As military hospitals are increasingly full of wounded soldiers, a conscript or a soldier with a minor illness or health condition will have reduced access to the hospitals. The lack of medical capacity within the military has led the MoD to sign contracts with civic hospitals in order to send military personnel there for treatment, however this has not worked well so this possibility is usually not available to conscripts.
28. As far as potential differences in conscripts' access to healthcare between different regions, on one hand there are less medical institutions e.g. in the far east and in more remote parts of Russia. However, there are many means of communication and transport. No comparative studies or analysis has been done on this topic and there is no available statistics.

### **General physical conditions**

29. The source is not aware of any special complaints with regards to the general conditions for conscripts and the source states that the physical conditions for conscripts have improved. During the mobilisation campaign in 2022, temporary logistical problems arose however.
30. The source estimates that there are regional differences regarding the general conditions for conscripts, but at the same time highlights that there are standards in place which are the same for all the army and all regions in Russia.

### **Process**

31. When a person appears at the Voenkomat after being summoned, he goes through a medical check. This process starts after receiving an initial summons – in person or via registered post. It is then up to the conscription commission to decide whether to conscript the person or grant him a deferral or an exemption. According to standard procedure, the person is released after this commission, however with a new summons in which it is stated when the person should reappear at the Voenkomat to commence the conscription, usually within the scope of e.g. three or five days. Upon reappearing at the Voenkomat, the conscript is transferred to a so-called regional collection point. Each region in Russia has one regional collection point.
32. Representatives from different military units come to the regional collection point and chose conscripts. The selection can be based on e.g. qualifications such as special technical competence. As for special competences, this could already have been screened at the Voenkomat level. Aside from this, the source states that the selection procedure is quite random and it is not possible to predict where in the military the individual conscript will end up.

### **Tasks and postings in Ukraine**

33. Conscripts' tasks consist of fulfilling routine obligations of the military, to be trained militarily and to participate in military preparations. The tasks are similar in the different arms of service.
34. Prior to 2024, conscripts had not been participating in active military actions, but rather served in border regions near the Ukrainian territory such as Belgorod, Crimea, Bryansk and Kursk. In these regions, due to the proximity of Ukraine, there have been many recorded casualties amongst conscripts because of e.g. shellings etc. Many conscripts serving in the navy were also killed when the flag-ship Moscow was sunk..
35. However, since August 2024 the tasks for conscripts have changed. Conscripts are now participating in the fighting in Kursk in full scope. The source conveys that conscripts are used for both offensive and defensive activities there. In Kursk, a conscript could be ordered to engage in the main military activity, which usually takes place during the fighting.
36. If a conscript is posted somewhere else in Russia, and the casualties in Kursk are high, there is a possibility that the conscript can be sent to Kursk according to the law. After four months of military service he could legally be sent to engage in fighting.
37. The source does not have much information about conscripts in the annexed territories (Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia) but there are reports about conscripts being sent there in order to participate in construction work or perform logistical tasks, however not in fighting.

### **Hazing and 'dedovshchina'**

38. According to the source, the level of violence in the Russian military is relatively high, although the classic notion of 'dedovshchina' does not exist anymore. The source points at two notions of 'dedovshchina'. The first was a system of administration in the military unit where more senior conscripts who were drafted earlier were responsible for the order and for commanding junior conscripts. This system of administration was maintained by violence and took place under the era of the Soviet Union and in Russia until 2010. In 2010, a reform led to the reduction of the term for conscription leading to a situation where there were no longer "senior" or "junior" conscripts. There were also steps taken towards so-called humanization of the military service. As a result, 'dedovshchina' as a system of administration has disappeared.
39. The second notion of 'dedovshchina' is just violence. According to the source, violent offences are still committed inside the army, but today the violence is not a part of the formal system of administration. Hence, the prevalence and use of violence within the military today has different reasons and sources. Officers can e.g. apply violence to soldiers. Violence could also be related to conflicts between different groups, e.g. between contract soldiers and conscripts or between ethnic groups.
40. Corruption is another source of violence, where e.g. personnel in the military demand money from those who have financial resources. There is a prevalence of internal bribes where you can buy your way out of specific duties. If a person pays for not having to serve specific duties, this means that somebody else should serve them, and

this person could be forced. Therefore, it becomes a source of violence. Violence is also often used to force conscripts to sign contracts with the MoD, and the source states that this is a widespread problem.

41. The source states that it is difficult to for see and distinguish special groups who would be more vulnerable or at a higher risk to be subjected to violence. There are random processes inside the units and barracks where the source of violence could be either an officer, a contract soldier, conscripts united in a group or e.g. a national or ethnic group. Classical 'dedovshchina' was a hierarchical system, but as this does not exist anymore it has become more unpredictable how violence is applied and who is subjected to it.
42. A person subjected to violence can file a complaint to the military prosecutor's office (<https://gvp.gov.ru/>) or to the military investigation department (<http://gvsu.gov.ru/>). It is also possible to convey information about the violations to relatives or friends, so that they in turn can file a complaint to the MoD or make the situation public. Even though there is a system for filing complaints, it comes with difficulties, especially if the commanding officer is the source of violence. In this case, it would be better to deliver information to family members or relatives for them to file a complaint to the authorities. If the source of violence is someone else, it is easier for the conscript to use formal procedures and file the complaint himself.
43. Formally there is also a possibility to apply to serve in another military unit, but in practice not many people use this possibility. It is unrealistic for a serviceman to be transferred to another unit on his own initiative. Lawyers try to apply this procedure in another case. When a serviceman in one unit is subjected to violence and his complaints do not work. Then he can run away from this military unit. Then contact the military prosecutor's office and ask there to be sent to another military unit, reporting the violence that was used against him. Sometimes this procedure works.
44. Another instrument to defend your rights is to flee your military unit. Fleeing your military unit is a criminal offence, but a person would not be subject to criminal responsibility if he flees and within a few days appeals to the authorities through a complaint and explains that the reason for fleeing was violations of your rights. If the violations are confirmed, this person will not be prosecuted. However, the source underlines that this relates to drafted conscripts and military personnel stationed on Russian territory, not to soldiers who participate in the war in Ukraine.

### **Draft avoidance, draft evasion and refusals**

45. After September 2022, refusal to obey to a military command is a formal crime according to the criminal code.

Military personnel may be subject to criminal punishment:

- for refusing to participate in combat operations (Article 332 of the Criminal Code of Russia);<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Consultant, УК РФ Статья 332. Неисполнение приказа, 23 November 2024, [url](#)



- for unauthorized abandonment of a military unit (Article 337 of the Criminal Code of Russia);<sup>475</sup>
- for desertion from the army (Article 338 of the Criminal Code of Russia).<sup>476</sup>

As such, this offence could lead to prosecution. However, refusal to obey to an unlawful command, e.g. washing a command's car, is not an offence and would not lead to formal repression.

46. If a conscript were to leave their unit in Kursk, the source is not aware if this would legally be considered desertion or absence without leave (as conscripts are involved in active fighting there). Leaving ones military unit is a crime but the responsibility is higher when it takes place during fighting or in a territory where there is declared a stage of war. Therefore, leaving ones military unit as a conscript in Kursk would be more severe than leaving ones military unit in e.g. Siberia or elsewhere in Russia. Potential punishments will also be higher. A person leaving his military unit in e.g. Novosibirsk, and returning after a month, could be sentenced to two years in prison. If a person does the same in Kursk, he could be sentenced to up to ten years in prison.
47. Prison is very rare punishment for draft evaders. Out of a few hundred criminal cases related to draft evasion in 2023, only one or two cases led to prison. The rest ended with fines. Additionally, there were a few dozens of thousands of administrative fines for not adhering to the summons. In these cases, the offence did not amount to refusal to serve, but was rather classified as failure to fulfil obligations connected to the drafting procedure. The source wished to underline that one has to take into consideration that out of 1 million men summoned to military facilities each year, and 300 000 summoned to conscription, only a few hundred were subjected to criminal prosecution.
48. If a person leaves the country after being summoned, and instead they draft another person to fill the quota, the consequence for the originally summoned individual would depend on whether the Voenkomat has sent the case to an investigative committee or not. The crime of draft evasion does not take place if you fail to adhere to your summons once, but at least two draft campaigns. If a person fails to adhere to his summons, the Voenkomats rarely decide to fill out all the proper paper work and send it to an investigative committee.

Article 328 of the Criminal Code of Russia defines criminal liability for conscription into military service.<sup>477</sup>

Evasion of conscription for military service means failure to appear for a medical examination and a meeting of the draft board without a valid reason. But, as the

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<sup>475</sup> Consultant, УК РФ Статья 337. Самовольное оставление части или места службы, 23 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>476</sup> Consultant, УК РФ Статья 338. Дезертирство, 23 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>477</sup> Consultant, УК РФ Статья 328. Уклонение от прохождения военной и альтернативной гражданской службы, 23 November 2024, [url](#)

Supreme Court of Russia recently (in the spring of 2023) clarified, criminal liability occurs if the conscript intends to avoid the obligation to perform military service by conscription and the presence of his intention must be proven in court. For example, repeated failures to appear at the Voenkamat without valid reasons may indicate the presence of intention.

49. If a person is outside of Russia, there are no public systems allowing you to know if your case has been sent to criminal investigation.
50. Relatives to draft evaders are at risk for being visited by the police in the authorities' search for the evaded person, but in general, there is no pressure or punishment upon family members to draft evaders.
51. The situation for soldiers who are in in Ukraine is tough, as they are forbidden to leave the army since 2022. Since they cannot leave the military legally, the number of cases of people fleeing from military service has been increasing since 2022. Before the full scale war, there were a few hundred cases of persons illegally leaving their military unit annually, and now there are about 10,000 criminal cases.<sup>478</sup> This includes both desertion and refusal to obey an order. Those who refuse to serve on the frontline and leave their units are subject to prosecution according to criminal law. However, these persons are only contract soldiers.

### **Pressure to sign contracts**

52. Pressure on conscripts to sign contracts with the MoD is widespread and takes place nearly in every military unit. The forms of the pressure can differ. Sometimes the command convinces the conscript by using moral pressure. Physical violence in order to pressure a conscript to sign a contract is rare, but the source is aware of such cases and claims that they do occur.
53. Nearly all relatives of draftees who contact the source's organization inform them about pressure to sign contracts, but the forms of the pressure are sufficiently different. The source does not have any relevant statistics on the matter, neither is there available statistics regarding how many of the 300 000 drafted conscripts per year that sign a contract. Before the full-scale war, conscription service was the main source for contract service. Some years before the war, the military authorities reported that almost 50 % of conscripts signed a contract, but today such statistics is lacking. It is still the status in Russian law that contract soldiers volunteer to sign contracts.
54. There are also cases where somebody else signs the contract instead of the conscript, and as a result, the conscripts are being sent as contract soldiers to Ukraine. If someone else signs a contract in a forged matter, it is possible for the conscript to file a complaint through his family or relatives, although it is rather difficult.

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<sup>478</sup> Mediazona, Более 10 тысяч российских военных обвинили в отказе от службы с начала войны в Украине, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

55. Signing up as a contract soldier is not a one-step procedure; rather it has at least two steps. Firstly, one should sign an application about the desire to join the contract service. Sometime later, the person will sign the contract itself, and there is still a possibility to refuse in the second step of this procedure. The source is aware of situations where people changed their minds, and with the help from human rights defenders, they managed to halt the procedure so that these persons managed to avoid contract service.

### **On conscription from the North Caucasus**

There are no ethnic military units in Russia, meaning that conscripts from e.g. Dagestan and Chechnya would not be subject to specific postings or tasks. The source conveys that there could be problems with discipline due to the mixture and clashes of different cultures inside the barracks, but that there are no national ethnic military units when relating to conscripts. Further, There was no conscription in Chechnya for a long time, but in recent years it has been resumed, with several hundred people conscripted, serving mainly in the southern regions of the country.

56.

## Meeting with OVD-Info

*OVD-Info is an independent human rights defence and media group established in 2011, focusing on the rights to freedom of assembly and expression. OVD-Info works on the ground in Russia and globally aiming at putting an end to political persecution in Russia. For this purpose, they collect data and produce content about political repressions in Russia, coordinate legal aid to unjustly persecuted people and work towards a systemic change in the human rights field.*

*OVD-Info is also people helping in courts and prisons, who are persecuted due to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and anti-war speeches.*

### New legislation

1. Many laws in Russia are so broadly written or in so low quality that judges can interpret the laws in completely different ways. Therefore, the many laws make room for a very broad interpretation of that law, which one can observe in the way judges are ruling. In a way, the laws are written so that everybody feels guilty. In this way the laws is an instrument of self-censorship.
2. The source stated that electronic summons started to work this autumn. The source opined, however, that the electronic summons and the centralised database of persons eligible for military service will likely not be as effective as the Russian authorities claim. It would be interesting to monitor in the near future. The electronic system is partly introduced to make it easier for the Voenkomat to find draft evaders.
3. In spring 2023 the notorious law imposing administrative and criminal charges for «discrediting the military» or spreading «fake news» about the Russian army has been [updated to include](#) volunteer battalions, organisations or individuals assisting in completion of the objectives set for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, meaning that spreading «fakes» about mercenary groups, such as Wagner PMC, could constitute a punishable offence. In April 2023, a law [was passed](#) to allow military summonses to be sent out electronically through the public services website Gosuslugi, a unified registry of citizens eligible for military service was established, and restrictive measures have been put in place concerning people evading conscription, such as a prohibition on operating vehicles and conducting real estate transactions after twice failing to report to a military recruiting office once a summons has been received.
4. New, harsher punishments have been added to the law for desertion, going absent without leave and opposing a superior. A new crime of “voluntary surrender” has also been added. Reports suggest that torture and illtreatment are used by Russian army commanders as punishment against servicemen who refuse to obey orders, including locking soldiers in pits in the ground, called “zindan”, without food or water.

### Recruitment of conscripts

5. When a person receive a summons for conscription, he will still have some time to leave the country. The source assessed that this window would be approximately one week. It is much easier for those who want to leave the country after receiving a

summons to Kazakhstan, Armenia or Belarus, as one can travel to these countries on a Russian internal passport. From these countries, it would be easier to travel to other countries.

6. It is, however, quite dangerous for Russians to stay in Belarus, if a person had broken the law in Russia because the Russian and the Belarusian authorities are working close together and have interconnected systems for wanted persons. On the other hand, the problem for Russia is that Belarusian officers are not very interested in taking Russians. The source mentioned that there has been some cases where people were stopped by Belarusian authorities.
7. In 2023 and 2024, mobilisation [focused](#) on recruiting specific groups, including socioeconomically vulnerable people, prisoners, Indigenous Peoples, Russian citizens who had recently acquired citizenship, men with military-related specializations and, in some cases, migrants with temporary residence. Physical violence and underhanded tactics have been used to force men into signing contracts to join the war. Individuals who avoid mobilisation can be prosecuted.
8. Military recruitment offices have been opened in migration processing offices; in the Kaluga region, officials demanded signed military contracts as a precondition for applying for naturalisation, contrary to Russian law. Migrants, in particular from Central Asia, have been targeted by police raids, forcing them into signing contracts to join the war.
9. This year, the autumn draft for the first time [included](#) conscripts from the occupied Zaporizhzhia region. Ukrainian men aged 18 to 30 who obtained Russian passports are required to report for conscription.

### Vulnerable groups

10. There are no exemptions for members of the LGBT community in Russia for conscription. The LGBT members are therefore afraid to go to Army officials and say openly that they are gay. They have to hide their sexual identity for the Voenkomat. Many members of the LGBT community are trying to leave Russia or to hide somewhere inside Russia in order to avoid being conscripted into the army.
11. Members of the LGBT community are more afraid to serve as conscripts than heterosexual Russian citizens, because the Russian army culture is very masculine and patriarchal in its structure. People working in the army from conscripts to army officers in general do not believe in rights of LGBT people. Many of them actually believe that LGBT is something one has to cure with medicine. It is psychological illness in the eyes of many Russia army employees.
12. Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses do not want to serve in the army, because they are pacifists. So they are approaching conscription in the same way as members of the LGBT community. Therefore, they will not go and tell members of the Voenkomat that they are members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, as Jehovah's Witnesses like the LGBT community is deemed as an extremist organisation in Russia.

### Access to Alternative Civil Service

13. There are problems with acceptance of alternative civil service in Russia, which predates the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Some people are allowed to serve Alternative Civil Service in Russia. However, these cases are few in numbers.
14. To be approved for Alternative Civil Service in Russia, a person needs to know the rules and their rights on this matter to be even considered. A person need to do a lot of work, prepare documents in order to be considered for alternative civil service and the acceptance will also depend on the goodwill of the Voenkomat personnel that has to review the application for alternative civil service. Furthermore, the personnel of the Voenkomat will most likely try to persuade the person in question to be enrolled into the army instead of alternative civil service.
15. The source opined that the best thing a person who do not want to be conscripted can do is not to appear at the Voenkomat. Therefore, when a person receive a summons, the best thing to do is to do nothing. In this case, there probably will be opened an administrative case against that person. However, such a case will take a long time before it is completed. Most likely to will take several months for the case to be closed and then the person will have to pay around 300 euros in fine.

### Draft evasion and avoidance of conscription

16. There are many stories about society trying to pressure draft dodgers to appear at the Voenkomat. Typically, this would be their parents or other family members. The parents do not want their kid to break the law, and because it is against the law to evade conscription, they will try to persuade their son to go to the Voenkomat.
17. If a person refuses to go to the Voenkomat and he subsequently pays the fine, he will eventually at a future point in time face a criminal case. However, this will happen after he has refused to show up at a Voenkomat many times. It is very seldom that a draft evasion case will end up as a criminal case.
18. If a person has not acted in the summons he received, the Voenkomat personnel would in some cases try to find the person. However, it is hard for the Voenkomat to find a particular person. However, if a person has signed the summons, the Voenkomat personnel have more rights to detain the person in question.
19. All NGOs that work with Russians who do not want to go to the army advise the following steps to avoid the army:
  1. Do not sign the summons
  2. If the summons is signed, do not go to the Voenkomat. Send a representative in your place instead.
15. The Voenkomat personnel is doing a lot to apply pressure on a person to make them sign a summons. They use psychological tricks such as blackmail and bullying, saying: *if you don't sign we will address your work or your university*. It is not possible for the person in question to know whether these threats are empty threats or if they actually will go and tell the person's employee.

16. Then again, the main effort for the Voenkomats will be to make people sign contracts with the Ministry of Defence, as it is much preferable for the authorities to get contract soldiers into the army than conscripts. In particular, the authorities is encouraging immigrants or to sign contracts with the MoD, especially migrants from Central Asian countries. These migrants are not citizens of Russia, but the moment they receive Russian documents they try to get them to sign contracts with the MoD, although many of these migrants do not speak Russian and hence do not know what type of documents they are signing.

### - Enforcement of legislation

17. In both 2023 and 2024, no prison sentences that include deprivation of liberty as punishment [were issued](#) for draft evasion (Article 328, Part 1 of the Russian Criminal Code). In the first six months of 2024, Russian courts issued 427 sentences, of which: 423 conscripts received fines; 3 conscripts were given suspended sentences; 1 case resulted in an acquittal. In addition, 15 cases filed under this article were dismissed.
18. For cases related to unauthorized absence (Article 337 of the Criminal Code), courts also mainly issued suspended sentences. However, the rate of cases under this article is unprecedented. According to [Mediazona](#), the number of cases against refusers increased significantly after mobilization was announced in September 2022, but the pace in 2024 is like never before. Only in March 2024, Russian military courts carried out 684 sentences in such cases.
19. There are no detailed statistics on desertion cases. However, OVD-Info [is aware](#) of at least 10 people prosecuted under Articles 337 and 338 of the Russian Criminal Code who are in custody. We only count those who openly expressed anti-war motives in their actions, so the actual number of those imprisoned under these articles is likely higher.

### - Extrajudicial pressure

20. In Moscow, conscripts are being widely [required](#) to fill out forms that include a clause on non-disclosure of state secrets. “Getting clearance for state secrets means that military enlistment offices will have one more reason to threaten conscripts. They’ll say, ‘If you publicly report any violations during conscription, we’ll charge you with disclosing state secrets,’” lawyers explain. Additionally, clearance for state secrets means a travel ban from Russia for up to five years after the clearance is revoked. Attempting to leave Russia with such clearance is also a crime.

### - Possibility to exit Russia

21. On October 13, the first known case since the beginning of the war occurred in which an EU country responded positively and agreed to [issue](#) travel documents to several Russian servicemen and mobilized soldiers who [decided](#) to escape from the war.

22. This is an important precedent. In visa-free and bordering countries for Russians, such as [Armenia](#) and Kazakhstan, former military personnel and conscripts have been detained and [extradited](#). For instance, former FSO Major Mikhail Zhilin, who opposed the war and fled from mobilization to Kazakhstan, was extradited to Russia, where he was [sentenced](#) to six years in prison.
23. The first fine for not showing up was 3,000 roubles (ca 30 euro). This was the fine before October 2023. After October 2023, it became 10,000-30,000 rubles.
24. There are a couple of dozen cases of draft evasion in a day in Russian. In March 2024, Russian military courts carried out 684 sentences in cases of absence without official leave (AWOL). In the first six months of 2024, Russian courts carried out 427 sentences of which 423 conscripts received fines. Three conscripts were given suspended sentences.

### **The situation for conscripts in North Caucasus**

25. The North Caucasus regions are quite poor and thus people living in these regions see it as a big opportunity to serve in the army. This is because that job opportunities in these regions has been quite limited.
26. Before the full-scale invasion many people in big cities, did not want to serve in army. They had a variety of means to avoid being conscripted. For example to study or to make the Voenkomat believe that the person had medicine issues. However, in the Northern Caucasus regions there was a queue to be enrolled into army, as they saw serving in the army as a social lift with good payment.
27. In general, the health care system in the Russian army is not very good. If a soldier suffers with some kind of mobility issues or have difficult cases if health, then the soldier can rely on the medical system. However, in a standard situation, like if a soldier gets a fever, infections or problems with his teeth, there is not much help to get in the military health system. On the other hand, there are examples where soldiers from the Wagner Group had access to special clinics in Saint Petersburg and these clinics were actually quite good.



## Meeting with Pskovskaya Gubernia

*Pskovskaya Gubernia is an independent Russian regional media from the Pskov region, where there is a large military base and recruitment to the army is very active in this region.*

*Pskovskaya Gubernia was established in 2000.*

*After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine started in February 2022, Pskovskaya gubernia left Russia. Since the partial mobilisation in the autumn of 2022, the organisation have received requests from the relatives from mobilised personnel and from conscripts.*

### The general conditions

1. The general conditions for Conscripts have not changed since February 2022. However, the source was aware of cases from Kursk and Belgorod regions, where conscripts had complaint about the quality of the food given to them in these regions, as the food was expired. Furthermore, there has been complaints from conscripts about the lack of proper weapons.
2. The source had not heard of any problem concerning health care among conscripts in Russia.
3. The notion of dedovshshina is not prevalent anymore in the Russian army. However, the most pressing problem within the Russian army would be harassment and hazing from the officers, not from elder conscripts hazing younger conscripts. The source has not heard of such cases for a long time.
4. There is not so many information about conscripts, as the Russian authorities try to make them sign contracts with the Ministry of Defence very early during their conscription period. There was a big scandal in Russia at the beginning of 2022, when conscripts were sent into Ukraine. The Minister of Defence, Sergey Shoigu, declared that conscripts were mistakenly sent to Ukraine, and it would not happen again. However, many relatives to conscripts complained about this, which is why the authorities want all conscripts to sign contracts before sending them to Ukraine.

### Conscripts involved with the war effort

5. It is already known that several conscripts from Pskov region have died in the war. These conscripts died in Kursk region. The source did not know how many conscripts from Pskov that were posted in Kursk region only that some conscripts were just given the task to work in this particular region.
6. According to the source, it is now more mobilised personnel that are sent to Kursk oblast to replenish the losses the Russian army have suffered after the Ukrainian incursion. In September and October 2024, those mobilised personnel who refused to go to war the so-called refuseniki/otkazniki were forced to go to the Kursk region.
7. The source did not assess that conscripts were sent into Ukraine proper. They can be sent to border areas to Ukraine such as Kursk and Belgorod, but not into the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson or Zaporizhzhia.

### **Soldiers refusing to take part of the war against Ukraine**

8. The Russian criminal code contains a number of articles in regards to absent without official leave (AWOL) in the military, depending on the term a person has been absent. The harshest article in this regard is applied when a person has been absent for more than a month, which can give 5-10 years of imprisonment. However, many people are now willing to go to prison than fighting in Ukraine.
9. As of November 2023, there are 67 criminal cases for refuseniki in Pskov region. New information about criminal cases for refuseniki is 102 cases. This applies to contract soldiers and mobilised. These cases are, however, not only refusenikis from Pskov region, but also from other Russian regions. This is because the 76 airborne division is based in Pskov Oblast.
10. The 76 airborne division used to be an elite unit within the Russian armed forces. However, there has been a lot of influx from the Caucasian regions, mainly from the Dagestan region, to this unit, which has somewhat changed the dynamics in the unit. These soldiers from Caucasus are contract soldiers.
11. Nevertheless, the 76 airborne division also comprise conscripts and as previous mentioned some of these conscripts have died in Kursk. A 19 years old conscript from the city of Nizhny Tagil, Sverdlovsk region, was serving as a conscript in Pskov, but was sent to Kursk and subsequently died there.
12. The source opined that most soldiers who are refusing to fight do it on the front line, not at the Voenkomat or when they receive their summons.

### **Draft evasion and consequences for family members**

13. According to the source, there has been no consequences for family members of conscripts, who refuse to serve in the Russian army. There has been no pressure observed from the authorities, not even on the family members of the mobilised soldiers, who refuse to serve. According to the source, there were no criminal cases against conscripts in Pskov region.

### **Pressure to sign contracts with the MoD**

14. There is a lot of propaganda in Russia aiming to make Russians join the army. However, if a person refuses to be conscripted, he will receive a fine. Furthermore, if a person is serving as a conscript in the army, there would be pressure for him to sign a contract with the Ministry of Defence. Usually there are forcing conscripts and mobilised persons to stand in one line, and then the officers are trying to convince them to sign a contract with the ministry of Defence. They were forced to sign contracts with the ministry of Defence. If they did not sign the contract, it became shameful not to sign in front of all the others – the so-called blame and shame method.
15. The source advised that it is possible to refuse to sign, although, the other fellow soldiers would not see you as a real man (muzhik). This type of peer pressure can be tough psychologically for many conscripts.

16. When asked if the Russian authorities would use other masseurs to pressure conscripts into signing contracts, the source opined that the psychological pressure would be enough. There were no need to use any other methods in this regard.

**LGBT persons in the army**

17. The source had never heard of any cases where a person who is openly gay has been drafted into the army at any point. The source had heard from mobilised persons that they did not want to be in a unit with members of the LGBT community. In the other hand, the source had never heard of a case where a person was exempted from serving in the army, due to being a member of the LGBT community.
18. In Pskov, there has been some issues with conscripts from the Caucasian regions of Russia. These conscripts had very limited education and some of them saw electricity for the first time. However, Chechens do not serve in Pskov. They have their own units where they serve.

## Meeting with Irina Novik, Russian Journalist

### New legislation

1. This autumn (from November 1, 2024), the Russian authorities started using electronic summons to draft conscripts in Russia. However, the authorities are also using paper summons as they did prior to the introduction of electronic summons. Furthermore, according to the source, there was a centralised database on conscripts in place through the online portal Gosuslugi.
2. Formally, from the moment of receiving the summons, the Russian citizen is prohibited from traveling abroad. In addition, within 5 days he is required to hand over his passport to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In practice, everything is different. Even if a person can be served with a summons: in person, by registered mail or electronically, this will not affect your departure from the country. Conscript will not be able to leave the country legally only after a decision has been made about your conscription for military service or about sending him to alternative civilian service.
3. The source knows of cases where a person had tried to leave Russia after receiving a summons. In this regard, there has not been a record of people trying to leave, but was unable to do so. There is simply no statistics in this subject at this point in time.

### Vulnerable groups

4. There are no exemptions from conscription for members of the LGBT community. In some cases, the members of the LGBT community try to convince the Voenkomat personnel not to be conscripted, but it does not matter. They will be drafted anyway, as there are no laws of exemption for conscription on grounds of one's sexual orientation.
5. There has been an example, where a transwoman has been drafted for conscription, as the person had not changed the legal gender marker in their documents. In the documents, the person was marked as a male, and hence was conscripted.<sup>479</sup>
6. Members of the Jehovah Witnesses or other religious groups can in theory be exempted from conscription. However, it is difficult to prove that you fulfil the requirements for exemption as a pacifist. Usually it requires lawyers and specialists. Furthermore, it does not completely cancel the necessity of serving, although, it is a different service than military service — alternative civilian service.

### General conditions

7. The physical conditions for conscripts, much depends on how rich the region of posting is. This means that the condition would in general be better in barracks in Moscow than in Sakhalin.

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<sup>479</sup> Radio Svoboda, Трансженщина пытается уволиться из российской армии, 9 November 2022, [url](#)

8. The notion of dedovshchina has been less prevalent among conscripts in the Russian army compared to previous years. This is because the service period for conscripts were reduced to one year instead of two years. The officers were ridiculing the new conscripts, but now it is not as much ridiculing from the management but among the conscripts.
9. The source noted that conscripts more in risk of being subjected to dedovshchina would be ethnic groups from Buryatia, Tuva and members of the LGBT community as well as men who do not conform to generally accepted concepts and masculinity.

### Access to proper health care

10. There are access to health care for conscripts in the Russian army. Medical support is accessible at every usual military base with conscripts. However, The Ministry of Defence seems to pay less attention to serious medical issues at this point in time and just brushing it off and explaining that maybe the conscripts are just trying to get out of their conscription. Therefore, in cases where conscripts are in need to go to a hospital outside of the barracks, the military leadership would hesitate to allow this not always but in many cases.
11. The source mentioned a case where a person at the Voenkomat deemed fit for fight at the medical examination even though there are criteria for when a person should be deemed fit for fight. But, the medical commission would pass people that should not have been deemed fit for fight. There was a case from the end of October, where a person had been in a car crash and got his head cut off. However, he was still declared fit for fight although he was dead.<sup>480</sup>
12. There are cases where the doctors had diagnosed soldiers to hospitals, but subsequently the commander of the soldiers denied them proper medical treatment anyway. But, there are also cases<sup>481</sup> where doctors not even diagnosing soldiers properly even though they had symptoms that needed to be treated properly. But because there has been a ruling from upper management the doctors did not diagnose those soldiers properly. Many of these cases has been cases of soldiers with PTSD.
13. At least 159 Russian conscripts have died during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>482</sup> There was a case from Crimea, where a soldier was beaten and he did not get access to a hospital in due time, and subsequently died in the hospital of his wounds.<sup>483</sup> Furthermore, a conscript was killed during shelling in Crimea.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> Lenta.ru, *Россиянина без головы признали ограниченно годным к военной службе*, 5 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>481</sup> More about such cases can also be found here: <https://stoparmy.org/> and @netprizyvu

<sup>482</sup> BBC News, *Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>483</sup> Nastoyashee Vremya, *Срочник из Карелии умер в Крыму от тяжелой травмы головы. Его могли жестоко избить за отказ подписывать контракт и ехать на войну*, 25 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>484</sup> Sibir.Realii, *Срочник из Новосибирска погиб после обстрела Крыма*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

### Tasks performed by conscripts

14. Starting from February 2022, the tasks done by conscript has to some extent been less obvious. There has been cases where persons were supposed to be snipers, but all they did was office work or the other way around. Due to the fact that many soldiers had left for Ukraine, the man power to do all other tasks including administrative work has lessened. Therefore, people have been given a variety of different tasks, which they were not supposed to do initially.
15. If a soldier refuses to an order given by the senior Commander, there could be consequences for this. The soldier could have his salary taken from him or there could be other punishments, which are also classified as extrajudicial punishments.
16. In theory, a soldier could file a case against an illegal order given to him. However, first of all, many Russians do not know their rights and the procedure to file a case against a senior officer is long and difficult. It could end up giving the person more problems within his unit, than if he had filed a lawsuit.

### Conscripts involved with the war effort

17. The Russian authorities have promised that conscripts will not take part in the special military operation in Ukraine. However, conscripts are being used in Kursk region. In this region, conscripts has been killed and taken as prisoners of war by the Ukrainian armed forces. At least 13 Russian conscripts killed in Kursk region.<sup>485</sup>
18. According to the source, conscripts could also be posted into Ukraine proper, which means in the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea. However, they are not engaged at the front line. The source had not heard of conscripts being posted in Zaporizhzhia or Kherson regions. In Ukraine, conscripts would have practical tasks such as digging trenches, doing repairs of buildings and military vehicles. The source had not heard of conscripts handling Ukrainian Prisoners of war.

### Conscripts signing contracts with the Ministry of Defence

19. The average salary for a conscript is approximately 2,000 rubles a month (19 euros), but then you get free accommodation and food rations. However, the low salary as one of the reasons why conscripts want to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defence. Furthermore, conscripts also sign contracts under psychological and sometimes physical pressure.<sup>486</sup>
20. The source did not have any concrete numbers of how many conscripts would sign a contract with the ministry of defence. Although, the source noted that the numbers have been fewer after the incursion in the Kursk Region started.

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<sup>485</sup> Verstka, *Как минимум 13 российских срочников погибли в Курской области после прорыва ВСУ*, 14 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>486</sup> Verstka, *Правозащитники сообщили о росте числа жалоб от срочников на принуждение к контракту с Минобороны*, 13 November 2024, [url](#)

21. Given the circumstances that conscripts are working under and especially with their salary in mind, many conscripts feel pressure to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defence. The authorities are using all available methods to attract as many conscripts as possible. Which includes propaganda, promising that they are becoming, but also peer pressure and stigmatising that they are not patriotic if they do not sign contracts.
22. The source mentioned a case where a conscript refused to sign a contract. The authorities then persuaded him to sign an initial report about whether one would sign a contract or not. However, the report that he was forced to sign was not this initial report, but an actual contract with the Ministry of defence.<sup>487</sup>
23. Before the start of the current autumn draft in Russia, almost half of the conscripts (i.e. approximately 65,000 people) signed a contract with the Ministry of Defence. There is no exact data on this now, but the flow of requests from conscripts on this matter is not weakening.<sup>488</sup>

### Draft evasion and absent without official leave

24. Statistics from June 2024 state that more than 10,000 cases of people in the Army who have been charged for refusing military service. However, there might be even a few more thousands as of November 2024. It is not stated whether these 10,000 are contract soldiers, mobilised or conscripts.<sup>489</sup>
25. In Moscow, conscripts have started being detained and taken to collection points 2.5 times more frequently in 2024 compared to 2023. Last year, 87 men of conscription age faced detention and subsequent transfer to collection points, from where they were sent to mandatory military service. Out of these, 23 managed to leave the facility and remain free. In 2024, 225 people have been detained—2.5 times more than last year. Of these, 66 were able to leave the collection points.<sup>490</sup>
26. A person who suffered from bronchial asthma (a non-conscription condition), was declared fit for service. The young man appealed this decision in court and later returned to the Voenkamat to receive a summons for a follow-up medical examination—where he was detained and taken to a collection point. Another person, who had long been declared unfit for service, was taken this year directly from his workplace to the Voenkamat and then to a collection point.<sup>491</sup>

### Consequences for family members

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<sup>487</sup> Novaya Gazeta, «Мне бы хотелось остаться в России», 14 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>488</sup> Nastoyashee Vremya, Убеждение и соблазнение деньгами. Правозащитник – о том, как призывников заставляют подписывать контракт с Минобороны РФ, 11 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>489</sup> Mediazona, Более 10 тысяч российских военных обвинили в отказе от службы с начала войны в Украине, 18 June, [url](#); Important Stories, A Runaway Regiment, 19 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>490</sup> Ostorozhno Novosti, В Москве призывников стали задерживать и увозить на сборный пункт в 2,5 раза чаще по сравнению с прошлым годом, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>491</sup> Ostorozhno Novosti, В Москве призывников стали задерживать и увозить на сборный пункт в 2,5 раза чаще по сравнению с прошлым годом, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

## RUSSIA – CONSCRIPTION

27. There has been cases of personnel from the Voenkomat, the police or the FSB who has called family members of the refusnikis and asked where their son is? Most family members normally answer that they have no clue of the whereabouts of the person in question.
28. The source knew of a case where a conscript's parents have been told by the Voenkomat personnel that the person needs to come to the Voenkomat. If they did not comply, the Voenkomat personnel will seek to withhold the son's college degree/diploma, although he had finished his education.
29. Although, in the beginning of November, there was a case with a woman who had been called as a mother for questions with the police. The police threatened her that they might start a criminal case against her because she has been given false testimony. However, when the mother consulted with her lawyer there that it is impossible to prove that she has been given this false testimony. Nothing happened afterwards. The source has not heard of any cases where family member had been put in jail due to false testimonies in such cases.



## Meeting with Freedom House

*Freedom House is a non-profit organisation. It is best known for its political advocacy on matters of democracy, political freedom, and human rights.*

### Legislation

1. The source is not aware of any fundamental changes in legislation regarding conscription, other than the decision to raise the upper age for conscription from 27 to 30 years.
2. The legal framework related to conscription and its implementation are two different things. The implementation and application of the existing legal framework related to conscription is done in a selective manner. The selective application of the laws means that not necessarily the same rules apply to e.g. different regions, different social statuses and people with different ethnic backgrounds. Conscription can also be used as a weapon against political opponents, and people and businesses that the authorities do not like.
3. The source opines that the selective application of legislation is carried out on many different levels, not only on the state level. A former business ombudsman claimed in a recently conducted interview that business people of e.g. big factories and companies were trying to find an algorithm as how to manage to save valuable high qualified engineers from being conscripted, while at the same time "send" 10-15 other workers who are less qualified.
4. Russia is not a country of 'rule of law', but rather a country of 'rule by law'. Comprehensive legislative frameworks are in place, but laws, legislations and regulations are invented and written to be weaponized against certain groups of society. This leads to difficulties in judgement when representatives from countries of 'rule of law' apply their view on Russia, as if Russia technically should operate in the same manner. In this sense, it is important with contacts on the ground who have knowledge about how specific laws and regulations are being implemented in reality.

### Summoning of conscripts

5. Local authorities and even companies are given quotas to fill with conscripts. Although this constitutes the basic premises of how the system works, the source opines that these quotas are not very effective.
6. Bias and selective application of laws and regulations has led to a pattern of characteristics of those who are recruited to the war, such as e.g. certain ethnicities, which some having a higher percentage of enrolment into the military. At the same time there are certain regions which have higher number of military draftable men (for instance, Dagestan), thus the quota is going to be higher there. The more socially vulnerable you are, the bigger the risk that you will be enrolled into the military, which goes for both conscripts and contract soldiers. Persons living in remote regions are in a more vulnerable position than in e.g. people living in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The

line between conscripts and contracts might also be thing, given the recent reports on conscripts who were forced/whose contracts were falsified<sup>492</sup> or about recently killed conscript whose contract was allegedly falsified.<sup>493</sup>

7. The source is aware of there being plans on introducing digital methods of summoning conscripts. The digital system is designed to prevent summoned individuals from receiving travel documents as well as leaving the country, thereby preventing them from evading conscription. The digital system would also offer possibilities of summoning people living in the diaspora.
8. The digital system is not fully functional yet, as it is being tested. The source explained. Hence, conscripts are still summoned in the traditional ways.
9. The source has not encountered any Russian citizens abroad (in Lithuania) who have been summoned through the digital system yet. Discussions are taking place on a theoretical level within the Russian community abroad on how to prepare for this potential scenario.
10. According to the source's knowledge, there is still a time lap after a person has been summoned to conscription when he can leave the country. For someone who received a summons for conscription, the time lap is at least two to three days under which it is possible to leave Russia. Once the digital system of summoning is in place, the idea is that, you will no longer be able to leave the country after being summoned. However, it is not entirely clear if the system is going to work that way, but on politically motivated persecution cases, this is the pattern.
11. As for the possibilities to evade conscription, the advice given to young Russian men from human rights defenders is to get their documents in place before being summoned to conscription. The second advice is to not adhere to the summons nor go to the conscription point. For young Russian citizens living abroad, the advice is to obtain a passport and keep it abroad, and try to look for options of studying.
12. The best option for a summoned person is to leave as fast as possible via e.g. Belarus, as there are no border controls between Russia and Belarus. From there, the person can travel to a third country. This route works in both ways; Belarusians are fleeing via Russia, and Russians are fleeing via Belarus. There is also a certain time span before the relevant authorities' travel bans are being applied to the entire region. Even persons with criminal cases and persons under house arrest who are mandated to go to the police station regularly have an option to leave via Belarus.
13. The source is also aware of plans of establishing a centralized database containing information on potential conscripts, however he doubts that it has been established and activated, mostly due to practical reasons. Once a database like that is established, it will become more difficult for the authorities to be selective in applying laws and

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<sup>492</sup> Kholod, «Я вроде терпелой никогда не был, но меня как будто зомбировали», 27 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>493</sup> Meduza, *На войне в Украине погиб 20-летний срочник с Сахалина. Он утверждал, что его подпись под контрактом с Минобороны подделали — теперь это подтвердила экспертиза*, 11 December 2024, [url](#)

regulations. Further, the Kremlin and the Russian authorities are in the epicentre of a disinformation war affecting all layers of society, so the authorities' talk about this database could be seen as a tool of intimidation.

14. As for extrajudicial methods to summon conscripts, the source again raises the issue with selective application of legislation. Legally, the only measure of category for conscription is a person's age. Still, there is a widespread picture that e.g. family members of MP or oligarchs in the right age category not being conscripted. There are also certain regions with a higher density of people being conscripted than e.g. Moscow, which can be explained by the fact that the population in Moscow is to a larger extent Caucasian and privileged. There is no specific data on conscripts, but this map is providing you with a general view which is very telling.<sup>494</sup>
15. According to the source, it would be possible to validate the authenticity of a military summons. There are verification processes in place with networks of investigative journalists and human rights defenders who know have local knowledge.

### Postings and tasks

16. The source's perception of postings and tasks for conscripts is based on bits and pieces shared in the independent media and from the human rights defenders community.
17. Conscripts cannot legally be deployed to the frontline and president Putin claims that this is not done. Yet, according to the source, there are instances where young conscripts without proper training and equipment were sent immediately to the frontline to be used as "meat on the fire" (*Russian saying, our interpretation would be 'cannon fodder'*). The source conveys that there is a pattern with conscripts being used as live shields to push the front and to push back Ukrainians, and consequently the survival rate amongst these conscripts is not high. This is the usual pattern, but as the reporting goes, given that conscripts are not very well trained/experienced, their survival rate would be smaller.<sup>495</sup>
18. The placement of conscripts on the battlefields might be legally excused by e.g. claiming that there was a lack of manpower for logistical tasks, which the source opines constitutes a cover-up in order for prosecutors not to start investigations, plus forcing them to sign contracts. Even though some conscripts are in fact performing logistical tasks, they are under permanent risk of being sent to the battlefield.
19. Laws are applied selectively also in relation to the tasks and postings of conscripts. The situation on the front is intense and the military needs to fill the "holes". The source lifts an example of an 18-year old conscript that died within the very first month of his conscription period.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Mediazona, *Russian losses in the war with Ukraine*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>495</sup> Youtube, *Потери России в войне с Украиной. Сколько срочников погибло за время войны*, 30 August 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Их там есть. Как российские срочники умирают на войне России с Украиной*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>496</sup> Sever.Realii, *На войне в Украине погиб 18-летний российский контрактник*, 1 January 2024, [url](#)

20. In the Kursk region, conscripts were responsible for protecting certain facilities, and upon Ukraine's incursion, they were captured as POWs. As for the situation in Kursk, it could partly be explained by Putin not having an initial intention to send them to the battlefield, but the battlefield instead came to them. However, the case with conscripts on the battlefield has not been seen only in Kursk, but also in Ukraine.
21. The source speculates that the dynamics of the war can explain the occurrence of conscripts on the battlefields. Russia's initial goal was to take Kyiv in three days, and hence mobilisation and the use of conscripts in the war was not the initial plan. However, as Russia did not achieve their initial military goal, they started the mobilisation and also conscripts suddenly started to appear on the battlefield. This was not the pattern during the first days of the full-scale war, but certainly as of late 2022 conscripts have been seen in the media appearing on the battlefields. However, the cruiser Moskva included a significant number of conscripts as reported by media when the cruiser was taken down during the early phase of the full-scale invasion.<sup>497</sup>
22. However, not all conscripts are sent to the battlefield. As for conscripts not participating in combat, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that they are involved in logistical work. There is a level of uncertainty and it is not possible to know in advance, who is going to be sent to the frontline.
23. The source refers to a cynical approach in the Russian army, where high ranking officers would avoid risking their most qualified soldiers to be heavily under fire on the frontline in e.g. Donbass, and rather send the inexperienced persons first to ensure that the Ukrainians become out of their ammunition. There is also reporting in independent media about the use of alcohol and drugs to encourage folks to go to the frontline. It is hardly specific to conscripts, but especially social networks (and media) were reporting on alcohol & drug abuse among the Russian soldiers.
24. Conscripts are generally poorly trained, so they would firstly be part of the infantry, as opposed to something more sophisticated in the Russian military. The source doubts that conscripts would be placed in the air force, but clarifies that this statement is based on common sense, not on any particular information. The source is not aware about any specifics related to potential differences in the situation for conscripts within the different arms of service (e.g. the army, the fleet or the air force).
25. Levels of experience, education, and literacy would affect whether the Russian public is aware of the rules for conscripts being ignored. There is a prevalence of propaganda, and if Putin says that Russia is not sending conscripts to the battlefield, this is widely believed by the public. Elements of e.g. the Bucha massacre was shown to the public, but due to propaganda many refuse to acknowledge the events that took place there. When conflicting messages are circulating, it is often claimed to be propaganda from the West, which includes staged information and discreditation. As there are now

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<sup>497</sup> Cherta, «Все, пацаны, едем умирать». *История солдата-срочника, воевавшего в Украине*, 29 June 2022, [url](#)

specific laws against discreditation of the Russian army, it is easy for the Russian army to e.g. label a media outlet a foreign agent outlet and thereby counteracting the truth.

26. The source does not have any statistics on the number of casualties amongst conscripts.

### **‘Dedovshchina’/hazing and vulnerable groups**

27. There is a prevalence of misconduct and mistreatment amongst conscripts. As for the notion of ‘dedovshchina’, this is not an uncommon practice. ‘Dedovshchina’ was common in the soviet army and the source opines that the same traditions apply today. There are such stories presented in independent media, and even though they most commonly portray individual cases, it shows that the general pattern of ‘dedovshchina’ is there.
28. LGBT individuals would be specifically vulnerable in terms of being subjected to ‘dedovshchina’, and also constitutes one of the most evident examples. Anyone who stands out of the male standard in the Russian army is already vulnerable. As for abuse of LGBT individuals within the military, the problem is that there is no functional system of checks and balances or a functioning system of reporting. If a conscript reports harassment and abuse, he would risk being subjected to even more mistreatment. Hence, for a person belonging to the LGBT community it would be safer to avoid conscription.

### **Pressure to sign contracts**

29. The source does not know how widespread it is for conscripts to sign contracts with the MoD during or after their conscription and has no statistics on the matter. Based on status, money and making ones family proud and the fact that you would risk being deployed to the battlefield either way, the assumption is that signing contracts is rather common. The source assumes that conscripts are persuaded to sign contracts by arguments and motivation, which would be especially applicable on conscripts from poor or remote districts of Russia.
30. At the same time the source lifts a cynical approach among the authorities, explained as “why would we give them the money if we can use them for free”. Although, money has not been an issue for Kremlin and Russia has two strategic advantages; unaccounted money and brutal force.

### **On conscripts from northern Caucasus**

31. The regions in northern Caucasus are different in the sense that if a person evades conscription, then he would be putting the entire family at risk. In general, families are large in northern Caucasus and the issue of persuasion differs from in the rest of Russia.
32. Kadyrov’s army does not need additional convincing, however. When Kadyrov wants to express his loyalty to Kremlin, local municipalities are directed to fill specific quotas

with men to the military. The source conveys that in Chechnya, there is a prevalence of lawlessness, where one man points his finger and there is no space for resistance. Many people from this region would become elite contract soldiers for the safety of their family, and going into hiding would put the family at risk. Families are weaponised in Chechnya. Although the source is not certain that these practices apply to conscripts, it is probable. Chechnya is highly militarized.

### **Draft evasion and draft avoidance**

33. There has been no visible increase in the numbers of draft evaders in Russia. There was an initial first chock of young men leaving Russia in the early stages of the full-scale invasion, as there was another increase in people leaving during the first wave of mobilisation. Today, the outflow of men is rather steady and in general, individuals potentially vulnerable for conscription are instead taking preparatory measures.
34. Russia is a large country, so if a person wants to evade conscription and hide this is possible even inside the country. Life would be rather difficult and limited (e.g. trying to avoid leaving digital footprints), but it would be possible. Equally, it is possible to leave the country to evade conscription and the source dismisses the narrative of the 'iron curtain.'
35. The source is not aware about draft evaders sentenced in absentia for evading conscription. Applying sentences in absentia for draft evaders would lead to a delicate situation as many from the elite have their sons etc. in Europe. Doing so in on case would create a precedence, which then has to be applied to everyone. The source doubts that sentencing draft evaders in absentia will be implemented.
36. There are not many examples of conscripts being deported back to Russia, with a few exceptions in Central Asia. These cases were related to absence of proper documents. Other than that, the source is not aware of any such cases.
37. There are cases of criminal prosecution of persons not adhering to their summons for conscription. The number of these criminal cases have not been very high, which the source claims is due to Russia applying their laws selectively.

### **Family members of draft evaders**

38. Families can be used to convince the draft evaders to return and fulfil their conscription. The source has not heard of other ways families to draft evaders are affected. If the family members were educated, they would more likely encourage their sons to avoid conscription and flee to save their own lives. The massive number of men in conscription age that left early after the full-scale invasion and who are now residing abroad shows that there is a portion of the society well aware of the risks.

## Meeting with Mediazona

*Mediazona was founded about 10 years ago and mainly deals with justice in Russia, criminal cases in Russia and statistics. Russian court statistics are open for Mediazona and they follow them closely. This includes military courts.*

### New legislation

1. Mediazona sees many criminal cases against Russian soldiers and Russian conscripts. More and more soldiers are rejecting to fight in Ukraine. These cases started in September or October 2022 during the partial mobilisation.
2. To battle the many who rejected to fight in Ukraine, the Russian government decided to amend the criminal code, so that rejecting military service became punishable from 3-10 years in prison.
3. There has been many cases against conscripts. In July-August, there were about 12,000 cases against conscripts and contract soldiers for 2024. It is impossible to separate these two groups within the statistics.
4. Some of the sentences have been very strict – for instance six or seven years in prison for rejecting to fight in the war. Furthermore, there are about 1,000 political prisoners in total.
5. The majority of these cases have been against contract soldier, but based on personal stories, the source knew, that the 12,000 people persecuted as deserters alone. The source estimated that 5- 10% of these cases have been against political opponents of the Russian authorities.
6. The numbers of cases are most likely higher now in November 2024. People with criminal cases are often given the choice to fight in the war as an alternative to being sentenced.
7. The source only follows court statistics and statistics on administrative fines are not available to the source.
8. The use of electronic summons through the Gosuslugi-system has not been implemented yet. Summons for conscription are sent out twice a year. During spring, and during autumn. The summons are delivered to the conscript who has to sign the summons.
9. Each individual Voenkomat has a quota for how many conscripts they each have to deliver each draft.

### Tasks

10. Conscripts do not serve in Ukraine proper or fight in combat units. They do, however, serve in the border regions such as Bryansk, Belgorod and Kursk. They do not serve in the regions of Kherson or Zaporizhzhia. The source did not believe that conscripts would be posted in Crimea. However, men in Crimea will be drafted.
11. In Kursk, conscripts do risk participating in combat with Ukrainian forces.

### Conditions for conscripts

12. The source did not know of any big conflicts in the army due to ethnic clashes. The situation for Chechens is different, because most officers in the Russian army dislike Chechens and Kadyrov. Chechens do not fight in Ukraine with the regular Russian army. They only fight in local groups.
13. Chechen conscripts serve in regular Russian groups in all parts of Russia.
14. Conscripts do not have big problems in regard to health care, food and housing. The conditions do vary from region to region and are usually better in bigger urban centres such as Moscow.
15. There are no specific statistics about conscript casualties. The source suspected that casualties of conscripts are higher in the Kursk region than in any other region.
16. Each Voenkomat has its own quota for how many contract soldiers they should sign up for contract duty.
17. The salary for a conscript is about 500 euros pr. month, whereas a contract soldier earns about 2,000 euros pr. month. This makes it appealing to sign a contract.
18. The monthly salary is the same in every region. However, there is also a one-time sign-up fee for a contract soldier, which varies from region to region. In Moscow, this fee is about 25,000 euros. The fee can be much lower in other regions, meaning people are eager to sign up in Moscow. A man is qualified to sign a contract in Moscow, if he has been employed by a company in Moscow for even just one day. The sign-up fee is paid to the soldier upon the signing of the contract.
19. Many people who are addicted to narcotics or alcohol sign contracts due to the financial benefits.
20. Conscripts are pressured to sign contracts. It is possible to reject signing a contract, but doing so will potentially create a problem with the officers, who can make life very difficult for the conscript.
21. The number of soldiers who sign up for contract duty varies from region to region. It is easier to avoid conscription and to refuse contract duty in the bigger cities.
22. Many people sign up for contracts in Chechnya.
23. Contracts formally last for one year, but in practice, they are open ended.

### **Draft evasion**

24. At the moment, it is possible to leave the country after having been summoned. This will most likely change when the electronic summons are implemented.
25. The borders to Armenia, Kazakhstan and Belarus are open, and Russian citizens can use their internal passports to cross the borders. This is significant, as most conscripts do not have an international passport.
26. Russian citizens do not need visas to travel to for example Georgia or Türkiye making these destinations a possible way out of Russia.
27. The source was not aware of whether the information that a conscript had failed to show up at the Voenkomat was shared with the FSB who controls the border.



28. The fines for evading the draft as a conscript have been raised to 500 euros. However, the source had not seen such cases as of November 2024. The source also did not see a lot of people fleeing Russia to avoid serving as a conscript. This is due to conscripts not fighting in the war, and they therefore mainly see front line soldiers fleeing the country.
29. Corruption and paying a bribe to avoid serving as a conscript soldier is more prevalent in the bigger cities.
30. The source had seen no cases of conscripts being sentenced in absentia.
31. The source did not recall any cases regarding the use of extrajudicial punishments of conscripts, although, he opined that such punishments did occur. There are no statistics about this.
32. The priority of the Voenkomat is to fill their quota rather than searching for the draft evaders.

### **Consequences for family members**

33. Evading the draft will have no consequences for the conscript's family members. However, the Russian authorities might talk to the conscript's wife and try to make her convince him to do his duty.

### **Alternative service and vulnerable groups**

34. It is technically possible to refuse to serve due to a person's personal beliefs. However, most people do not know about this option.
35. There are no statistics regarding members of the LGBT community in the army, as people do not openly talk about their sexual orientation.

## Meeting with A Russian lawyer specialising in LGBT rights

The source did not have specific numbers of how many LGBT persons that are being drafted as conscripts in into the Russian army, as there no existing statistics on this field. However, there exists a service where people could apply for legal support, which include cases of LGBT in the army.

### Recruitment of LGBT persons to conscription

1. LGBT persons in Russia try to avoid being conscripted into the army. This is because it is dangerous for them to go to the army. Therefore, LGBT persons often try to be exempted for military service through medical examination and depending on the illness the person has he can be considered unfit to serve in the army. However, it is harder to prove that you are unfit in rural areas compared to in bigger urban centres.
2. It is not possible to be exempted for military service at a Voenkomat by stating that you are a member of the LGBT community. There exist NGOs who are helping LGBT members by suggesting how a LGBT person can avoid being conscripted.
3. There are four ways to avoid military conscription for LGBT persons:
  1. Exemption by medical examination
  2. Deferment by studying
  3. Being accepted to serve alternative civil service
  4. Leave the country after receiving the summons
4. Many LGBT persons who chose to leave Russia would eventually not return to Russia. Most of them will leave for Armenia or Georgia, and to a less extend to Kazakhstan.

### Transgender persons as conscripts

5. According to this source, it is even more difficult for transgender persons. In 2023, a new Russian law was introduced. This law made it illegal to transition to another gender, than the one a person had from birth. This means that transwomen who transitioned prior to this law, but did not change their legal gender status in their documents, where obliged to be conscripted into the army, as they were perceived to be males.
6. Before the 2023 law, a transwoman was legally perceived by the Russian authorities to be a male and should therefor appear in front of the Voenkomat and subsequently undergo a medical examination. The doctors would then claim the transwoman unfit for military service, due to their transition. However, after the introduction of the law in 2023, it is not possible anymore to be exempted due to being a transwoman. The exemptions made prior to the 2023 law is, however, still enforced.
7. Did this apply to transwomen who had not changed their legal sex, or also to those who had their legal sex changed in their documents? Our initial perception was that if

- you had changed your legal sex to woman, you would not even be summoned to the Voenkomat.
8. Nevertheless, if a transwoman managed to change their legal gender marker prior to the new law of 2023, they would not be obliged to serve in the army, as they are legally perceived to be a woman.
  9. There exist two large organisations in Russia, which mainly are focusing on helping transgender persons. These organisations also help transgender persons to leave Russia. The main focus of these organisations is not assessing whether the transwomen are applicable for military service or not, but it is helping them leave the country, as this is believed to be the safest method to avoid military service.
  10. In the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic, which is a Russian annexed region of Ukraine, it is still legal to change gender. Therefore, lawyers are trying to help transpersons change their documents in this region. However, it is very few cases of this in Russia, the majority of transwomen are leaving the country to avoid conscription.
  11. The source was aware of one case, where a transwoman ended up serving in the army. This person was not a conscript but signed a contract with the Ministry of Defence. The person was immediately sent to the front and was killed. The source was not aware of any cases of transwomen serving as conscripts in the Russian army.
  12. Transmen, who changed their legal gender marker in their documents prior to 2023, are legally exempted from serving in the army in Russia. These persons do not serve in the army, as trans persons are subjected to the so-called MKB-10<sup>498</sup> (ICD-10). Trans persons are, according to MKB-10, not allowed to serve in the army. Transgender is perceived as an illness in Russia, as Russia did not accept the MKB-11, which removed transgender as an illness.

### **General conditions for LGBT persons in the Russian army**

13. LGBT persons who end up serving in the Russian army would try to hide their sexual identity. However, if it is found out that the person is a member of the LGBT community, he could face sexual abuse by other soldiers. In some cases, this could end up in rape. Unfortunately, there is no existing statistics of rape within the armed forces of the Russian Federation.
14. The source was only aware of those cases, where soldiers approached these support organisations and told them their stories. The source was aware of cases where LGBT persons had served in the army without anything happening to them, while serving. However, these are all cases where the persons managed to hide their sexual identity during their service.
15. According to the source, the military society is to a large extent based in discrimination of fellow soldiers. This means that if a soldier is asking for help, his fellow soldiers

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<sup>498</sup> International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems

would likely make the situation even worse for the person needing help. This is how the military environment works in general.

16. According to Russian law, it is illegal to rape another person in the army. Therefore, in theory a LGBT person who has been raped can file a complaint to the military investigative comity. However, there has been no cases of rape within the Russian army, as the system is so closed, which make it near impossible to reach out for help if a LGBT person has been raped in the army.
17. The source noted that it is not in itself a criminal offence to be a member of the LGBT community in Russia. It is, however, illegal to propagare the LGBT community. The international LGBT community has also been deemed an extremist organisation in Russia be the Supreme Court.
18. It is more difficult to understand what propaganda of LGBT really means, according to Russian law. The source mentioned the famous Russian television presenter, Anton Krasovsky, who was suspended for saying that Ukrainian children who hate Russia should be drowned and burned, is openly gay. He has no problem living in Russia as an openly member of the LGBT community in Russia.
19. There are now five cases of extremism on grounds of LGBT in Russia. However, these cases has nothing to do with the army.
20. If it becomes known during to the Voenkomat that a particular conscript is a member of the LGBT community, this knowledge would not effect where he would be posted. However, in the army there is a working caste system like in Russian prisons, so after arriving at a posting, a new conscript is likely to end up at the very lowest level, and consequently could face being targeted by soldiers higher op in the military hierarchy. Therefore, a low-level conscript can end up doing all the dirty work such as washing toilets all the time. This is based in the notion of dedovschina and applies to all low-level conscripts whether LGBT member or not. Low-level conscripts will typical include physical fragile persons.

### **LGBT persons accepted into alternative civil service**

21. It is possible to be accepted into serving alternative civil service for members of the LGBT community in Russia. Although, a LGBT member has to convince the Voenkomat that they are fulfilling the requirements for alternative civil service, which is based in the person's religious or other views. According to the source, there was a few 100 cases of LGBT members who was accepted for alternative civil service.

## Meeting with a human rights lawyer

### **Legislation**

1. The only major change in legislation regarding Russian conscripts since 2023 is that the age of conscription has been raised from 18-27 to 18-30. As far as the source remembers, this came into effect 1 January 2024, meaning that the draft in the spring of 2024 was the first draft, in which the change in legislation was implemented. During this draft, people aged 28 and 29 were drafted.
2. The change in the age of conscription does not affect those, who have already served as conscripts. It does, however, affect somebody who has previously had his military service deferred for instance due to being enrolled at university.
3. 133,000 conscripts will be drafted in the autumn draft of 2024, which is a slight increase of about 3,000 compared to the draft one year ago. This draft will cover the period from October 2024 to the end of the year. The spring draft of 2024 consisted of 150,000 conscripts, but it also covered a longer period, from April to 15 July 2024.
4. The interviewed source doubts that there will be a change in the amount of time conscripts are required to serve. The Russian military authorities' main task is to increase the number of contract soldiers and not the number of conscripts. Furthermore, issues concerning conscripts are sensitive to the Russian public, and the Russian authorities are unwilling to go into these issues.
5. The source therefore doubts that conscription soldiers will have to serve for 2 years. The task is very clear now, the Russian authorities are paying more and more to the people, who sign contracts, which is the main objective.

### **Recruitment of conscripts**

6. The electronic register for summons to conscription is being tested during the current draft in the fall of 2024. New conscripts will get their summons through the Russian public service platform called Gosuslugi.
7. A separate website with the register of summons will be launched, where everyone can go to check, if they have been drafted. If they are on the list of conscripts, they cannot cross the Russian border as they are barred from exiting the country. The launch of the electronic system has faced some technical and logistical issues, although, the Russian authorities are paying a lot of attention and using many resources to make the new system work.
8. Until the electronic system is implemented, summons are still delivered physically to the conscript who is required to sign the summons. If he refuses to do so, he is able to leave the country, as a person is only obliged to appear at a voenkomat, after they have signed the summons.
9. In practice, every military commander has their own quota to fill by any means, and may enlist persons with the help of the police to round up drafted conscripts. They may patrol the streets in the area together and look for young men, who are on the list of drafted conscripts. If a person is wanted, he may be detained and brought to the

- military commissariat. In this case, the conscript has no choice but to join the military, as he cannot avoid going by refusing to sign his summons at this point.
10. The authorities become more aggressive in patrolling for evaders towards the end of the drafting period, if the quota has not been met yet.
  11. This could happen in any region. It all depends on the quota. In regions such as north Caucasus, where there is a willingness to come and fight, and in Dagestan, where the unemployment rate amongst young people is high. Overall numbers are 15% officially unemployed, 55% of the unemployed are people from 15 to 30 years old. Therefore, about 100,000 young people out of 300,000 are unemployed, it's about 33-35%.
  12. The patrolling is more aggressive in the bigger cities, where people are better educated and have higher living standards, and therefore are less willing to join the military. Furthermore, the quota is higher in the bigger cities. The police, however, does not have the authority to hand over a person to the voenkomat without a representative of the voenkomat also being present.
  13. The military commissariats generally do not care who they draft, as long as the person is on the list so that they can fill their quota.
  14. If a conscript manages to avoid attention, he does not have to leave the country to avoid serving as long as the quota is met – usually less than 3 months until an ongoing draft is over. What happens after the implementation of the electronic system is currently unclear.
  15. As of October 2024, a young man being summoned for conscription needs to sign the summons and then report to the voenkomat where he will undergo a medical examination. If he is fit to serve, he will then be given his posting. The conscript has no say as to where he is to be posted and can be sent to any part of the country. The Russian military uses an extraterritorial principle when assigning postings, meaning that few conscripts serve in their own home region. However, it might happen, as there is no ban to serve in a person's home region, although, there is no rule or a right for a conscript to serve in their home region.
  16. Some conscripts are even sent to south Ossetia and Abkhazia despite it not being formally recognised as part of Russia. According to the source, there are two Russian military units present there.
  17. The legal grounds for this might be due to military agreements between Russia and these two regions. It has been the practice for many years and was renewed in 2008. The same applied in Tajikistan due to an agreement between Russia and Tajikistan that Russia should control the border to Afghanistan. This is a normal practice based on bilateral agreements.

### ***Draft evasion***

18. According to the source, the justice system in Russia has no interest in prosecuting every man who has evaded military service despite being drafted for conscription, as the ministry of defence will be busy filling their quota.
19. A person evading one draft will, however, risk being summoned again in future drafts, provided he is still within the age of conscription.

20. There will also be a centralised database that will store the pool of potential conscripts. The database could also be used in case of a new wave of mobilisation, although, the source did not see any indication of this happening in the near future.
21. The punishment for evading military service as a conscript is usually a fine of 150 euros/15,000 rubles, which is an increase, as the fine used to be around 30 euros/3,000 rubles. This is the fine given to a person that has been served the summons, but who fails to show up at the voenkomat (the recruitment office).
22. The interviewed source had not heard of any cases of conscripts being sentenced to incarceration for evading military service. There has been criminal cases and the law does allow for sentencing the conscript to imprisonment. However, in practice every case has ended with a suspended sentence or a fine.
23. No statistics regarding the criminal cases concerning draft evasion for 2024 has been published yet. In 2023, there were 901 such criminal cases, 894 of which were closed with a fine. Three cases ended with a suspended sentence and three persons were acquitted. The rest of the cases were dropped for other undisclosed reasons.
24. Paying a fine for draft evasion does not mean that a person would not be part of future drafts. However, paying a fine still does allow a person to leave the country.
25. A conscript evading the draft in the autumn and subsequently caught after the quota of that draft is filled would only risk to be fined and would not necessarily be given a summons in the next draft. This is due to every draft being decided by presidential decree.
26. As far as the source is aware, conscripts who fail to answer their summons are not convicted in absentia. This is due to the penalty being very minor, and is the authorities are not trying to make the penalty more severe. Instead, an evader would be put on the wanted list and the criminal proceeding suspended until he reappears.
27. There has been little change in the numbers of cases against draft evaders since the beginning of the war. The conditions for conscripts are more or less the same as in the beginning of the war.

### **Consequences for family members of draft evaders**

28. Family members of a draft evader can be visited by the police searching for the person at the very beginning if the conscript refuses to receive his summons, but it is rare. It would not happen after the person has evaded.
29. It happened to a person known to the source a year ago in Moscow. The person did not go to the voenkomat despite being drafted. He was visited at his apartment by a police officer and two representatives from the military commissariat at 6 am who served him the documents and took him to the commissariat. Only two days later, the person was sent to a unit 1,000 km from Moscow. This puts a certain amount of pressure on the family members, because in this situation there is nothing left to do to avoid serving except trying to influence where to be posted. Once the police is involved, it does not matter whether the person signs the summons or not. The Police has the authority to detain the person.

### **Exemption and deferral of military service**

30. There are three main ways to avoid military service as a conscript.
31. The first way is to get out of the country, in which case a person is not obliged to serve. A person, living abroad, is not obliged to serve. Formally, he should notify the military authorities (the voenkomat) that he lives abroad by providing legal grounds for this. A student at a university or a worker may provide residence permit or a statement from a university. While he is outside of the Russia, he cannot be handed over the summons. Therefore, he does not have an obligation to appear at the voenkomat and serve. When he comes back to Russia, however, he has to notify the voenkomat again and put himself back to the long list of conscripts. Lack of doing this may lead to the administrative punishment (a fine).
32. A conscript can have his military service deferred if he is a student. Many people enrol at for example university to have their military service deferred. Corruption in Russia is widespread, and it is possible to pay for example a lower quality university to enrol a person despite the person having no intention of attending classes.
33. It is also possible to be exempted for medical reasons, and people do bribe doctors for fake medical notes stating that they are unfit to serve. However, the doctors at the voenkomat will check themselves. The doctors have a lot of experience with people claiming to suffer from fake health issues, and therefore it is very difficult to get out of military service due to fake medical problems.
34. There are no special conditions for the LGBT+ community, but the source stated, that members of the LGBT+ community were better off not revealing their affiliation, as the LGBT+ community is now considered an extremist organisation by decision of the Russian Supreme Court in 2023.

### ***The general situation for conscripts***

35. Conscripts are used in every arms of service within the Russian military – both in the army, the air force and the navy. In fact, almost 50 conscripts died during the sinking of the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, Moskva, in the spring of 2022. Conscripts also serve in the national guard. The borders are controlled by the FSB who do not use conscription soldiers.
36. The source had not heard of the Russian authorities using extrajudicial punishments for conscripts. Targeted opposition groups would generally be more at risk of extrajudicial measures, for instance if the conscript is a supporter of Navalny. A known supporter of Navalny was in fact specifically targeted, arrested and sent to a very remote military unit in Novaya Zemlya.

### ***Physical conditions for conscripts***

37. The conditions for conscripts are more or less the same as in the beginning of the war.
38. Conscripts are given four months of military training before being deployed.
39. During service, conscripts are under the ministry of defence's jurisdiction and have access to hospitals in case of injury or illness. They will be treated at designated military hospitals not used by the civilian population. For those deployed closer to



Ukraine, temporary military hospitals have been erected to which the conscripts have access instead.

40. The source has not heard of any widespread complaints over the health conditions, maintenance or related issues from conscripts. If there were widespread problems in this area, the source would have heard about it.
41. There are regional differences in the treatment of conscripts. For instance, a conscript serving in Moscow may have better physical conditions than one serving in Kamchatka or Kursk. Ultimately, it all depends on the specific unit and the commander in charge. The two main problems in the Russian conscription army are corruption and hazing.
42. Hazing, including *dedovshchina*<sup>499</sup>, has been a problem in the army for decades, and is particularly used in units, in which the commander has no control over the situation or the unit. However, *dedovshchina* originates from the era when military service lasted for two years, where the more senior conscripts would haze the newer conscripts. Since military service for conscripts is now 12 months, *dedovshchina* is less prevalent although it still occurs.
43. Hazing is particularly widespread due to ethnic factors. For instance, it is a part of the culture in Dagestan, and hazing often occurs in Dagestani units. It happens if the commander is not strong enough to control the situation. Hazing could, however, happen anywhere including in Moscow.
44. There are no recent reports of serious injuries due to hazing. However, such incidents may not become public knowledge. In the past, death by suicide in the army has been used as an explanation for deaths caused by hazing., The numbers regarding suicides in the army are now kept secret, and in fact looking into these numbers could lead a person to be charged with treason.
45. Generally, ethnic groups are not especially vulnerable. However, Russian nationals considered migrants do have to serve and they are pushed to sign contracts.

### ***Tasks of the conscripts***

46. The tasks of a conscript consist of whatever their commander orders them to do.
47. Conscripts are usually used for logistical tasks. Conscripts serving near the Ukrainian border supply the contract soldiers fighting in Ukraine and perform maintenance tasks.
48. A conscript soldier can only refuse an order if he is threatened or assaulted. In these cases, he can go to the prosecutor's office and file a complaint. For instance, an officer may order a conscript to paint his fence, which is technically against the law. However, in practice, the conscript cannot refuse such an order, but he may file a complaint.
49. The Russian authorities are trying to make signing a contract appealing to conscripts. Historically, the Russian authorities have used violence and fear to solve a given task. However, they are now trying to make signing a contract financially appealing. A person can for instance get a onetime sum of 30,000 euros/3 million rubles for signing up to the military and after that he will be paid 2,500-3,000 euros every month. This is a lot of money, and the authorities, therefore, have no need to use violence or

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<sup>499</sup> *Dedovshchina* is an informal practice of hazing and abuse of junior conscripts.

- pressure to persuade people to sign contracts with the military. Nobody is complaining.
50. The amount of money one can get for signing a contract varies from region to region. Some of the wealthier regions are even able to attract men from other regions to sign contracts. The source had heard of people being paid up to 50,000 euros to sign such a contract. The regions compete with each other to sign up soldiers as each region has a quota of contract soldiers to fill.
  51. Chechens are also being conscripted for military service, and they might be sent to any part of Russia to serve. However, it is hard to tell in practice, as the data is not transparent. According to the source, no one in the military cares about ethnic balance within the different units.
  52. Desertion amongst conscription soldiers is rare unlike desertion amongst soldiers fighting at the front line, which happens every day. Desertion and evasion rates amongst conscripts does not vary much from region to region, as the numbers are very low.
  53. Conscripts see very little action. They have four months of basic training at the very beginning. Then they are transferred to their military unit to serve for another nine months where the conditions are generally acceptable.

### ***Tasks of conscripts related to the Russian war effort in Ukraine***

54. Conscripts are not being used for active combat duties. Conscripts are regularly posted in the border regions close to the front line, but they are never posted on the actual front line or inside Ukraine proper. The conscripts do not serve in the newly occupied territories, including Donetsk, Luhansk Kherson and Zaporizhzhya. The source was not sure about Crimea, although, there are conscripts from Crimea serving in the Russian army. Being close to the front line, they do however still risk being injured or indeed killed during service. There are cases of conscripts being injured or killed during service.
55. The Kursk region is a little different, because parts of the region is occupied by the Ukrainian army. Conscripts are being sent to Kursk to serve, and they risk being captured there and then being taken to Ukraine as POWs. The source knew of at least one exchange of prisoners of war involving Russian conscripts.
56. The source had not heard of any conscripts being in charge of Ukrainian prisoners of war and doubts that this could be the case. This is due to prisoners of war being considered a valuable asset and therefore would be guarded securely by more experienced soldiers. The source doubted Russian conscripts were being used in Syria.

### **False summons**

57. There are stories of people falsifying their entire files, but the source doubted, that it would be worthwhile to falsify a military summons. It is much easier to falsify a political motive.