

Russia's Army Plans to Enlist 20K Criminal Defendants for Ukraine War – IStories

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Sergei Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency

Russia's Defense Ministry plans to enlist around 20,000 people currently held in pre-trial detention to fight in Ukraine, the investigative news outlet IStories [reported](#) Tuesday, citing anonymous military and legal sources.

According to a military official who spoke to IStories, efforts are already underway to identify who among the thousands of defendants awaiting trial might be fit for military service, with "40% expected to be taken."

The enlistment plan reportedly involves selecting 100 defendants from each of Russia's 210 pre-trial detention centers.

IStories, citing federal prison statistics, noted that 106,000 people were held in pre-trial detention as of early 2024, though that figure includes individuals under investigation and

convicted criminals.

The reported plan comes a week after federal lawmakers [passed legislation](#) allowing criminal defendants to serve in the military, closing a loophole that previously limited enlistment to convicted criminals and suspects under police investigation. Those changes now face a single vote in the Federation Council, after which President Vladimir Putin is expected to sign it into law.

Sources told IStories that authorities are targeting criminal defendants to avoid sparking public unrest with a new wave of mobilization.

A source close to the military's General Staff said the Defense Ministry turned to criminal defendants after running out of convicted prisoners willing to volunteer for the war in Ukraine.

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