

Putin Signs Decree Allowing Foreigners Into Russia's Army

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree authorizing foreign citizens to serve in the Russian army and Interior Ministry troops, according to a document published on the Kremlin website.

Foreigners aged 18 to 30 can enlist in the military under five-year contracts on condition they speak Russian and have no criminal record, according to the decree, which was signed on Jan. 2 and published on the Kremlin website this past weekend.

The decree will enable scores of young men from former Soviet republics in Central Asia and other regions who have been flocking to Russia as migrant laborers to instead sign up as soldiers — likely earning higher salaries and receiving military benefits.

Russia has military bases in Tajikistan and Armenia, and units in the breakaway regions of Transdnestr in Moldova as well as Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia.

The decree also allows foreigners to serve in the national firefighting service or as Interior Ministry troops — a force that is deployed within the country to ensure order and combat insurgencies or riots.

Russia has lately been striving to increase the number of professional soldiers in the military as part of Putin's wide-ranging military modernization and rearmament program.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said in 2013 that half of the Russian military — or 500,000 soldiers — would be serving on professional contracts by 2022, RIA Novosti reported. The army is still primarily made up of conscript soldiers in a holdover from the Soviet era.

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