

Russian Students Say State Has Stopped Paying Their Stipends

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More than 40 Russian universities have delayed stipend payments to their students since the beginning of the year, student rights ombudsman Artyom Khromov confirmed to The Moscow Times on Thursday.

Some universities have admitted to the delay, putting it down to "technical difficulties," while others insist all payments have been made on time.

Khromov said he received the first complaints from students in January. By the end of February, Khromov's agency had checked several universities, revealing that a considerable number of students had not received their stipends for two months.

Khromov listed 40 different universities where delays have been recorded, including the prestigious Moscow State University, Higher School of Economics, and Southern Federal University.

Under Russian law, a certain number of places at state institutions are available free of charge to the best students. If they get good marks, those students are also paid a stipend of between 1,420 rubles (\$23) and 2,130 rubles (\$35) by the state every month, depending on their grades.

Orphans and disabled students are also entitled to a stipend of 2,130 rubles per month.

The Education Ministry issued a statement in response to the reports, in which it said that if the delays are confirmed, "the rectors of the universities that have violated students' rights and that are subordinate to the ministry will be held accountable."

The ministry said that the funds allocated for student stipends in the first quarter of this year had been transferred to universities.

At Moscow's Higher School of Economics (HSE), nearly 30 percent of the students have not received their stipends, according to the official page of the school's student council on social networking site VKontakte.

An HSE representative explained the delay as being down to technical difficulties that had occurred due to a new procedure for calculating and allocating the stipends.

"All discrepancies have now been eliminated, and all stipends will be paid out by the weekend," school spokesman Vadim Vorobyov told Interfax on Thursday.

Moscow State University's press service told Interfax that all payments had been made on time.

According to Khromov, universities began to pay stipends after he sent a letter to the Education Ministry.

"Ministry officials began to call universities and demand that they pay out the money," he said.

On Wednesday, the TASS news agency reported that some universities could hike their tuition fees by up to 30 percent in May.

The increase will affect regional universities and was initiated by the Education Ministry, TASS cited the first deputy head of the State Duma's education committee, Vladimir Burmatov, as saying.

Russian universities also increased their tuition fees in January in an attempt to reduce their losses amid a currency crisis and spiraling inflation.

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