

Russia Plans \$3.6 Billion Food Stamp Program as Poverty Rises

By [The Moscow Times](#)

September 24, 2015



State statistics agency Rosstat said in July that 22.9 million people — about 16 percent of the population — were below the poverty line at the end of March.

The Russian government may spend 240 billion rubles (\$3.6 billion) on a national food stamp program to support an estimated 15–16 million Russian citizens whose poverty has deepened amid an economic slump, the RIA Novosti news agency reported Thursday.

To deal with an economic shock that has spurred inflation into double digits and pushed 3.1 million Russians below the poverty line in the first quarter of this year alone, the Industry and Trade Ministry this month submitted a proposal modeled on the U.S. food stamp program to help low-income and out-of-work people.

Deputy Minister Viktor Yevtukhov said on Thursday: "The number of potential program participants, according to our calculations, is in the order of 15 to 16 million people." RIA Novosti quoted him as saying that according to preliminary estimates the plan would require

240 billion rubles — or around 15,000 rubles (\$225) per person.

State statistics agency Rosstat said in July that 22.9 million people — about 16 percent of the population — were below the poverty line at the end of March, meaning they had incomes of less than 9,962 rubles (\$150) per month.

Yevtukhov said the funds would be drawn from both the federal and regional budgets. The program would provide special bank cards to citizens in need of higher-quality food, and recipients would be restricted from buying imported food and non-food items, RIA Novosti reported.

Yevtukhov said any commercial enterprise was free to participate in the scheme. "The only requirement for retailers is that they must process the transactions through a central processing system administered by one of our largest banks," he said, without specifying which bank.

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