

Russian Region, Rushing to Finish World Cup Stadium, Offers Food for Work

By [Reuters](#)

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Aleksander Ryumin / TASS

When authorities in Russia's Nizhny Novgorod region realized their 2018 World Cup stadium wasn't quite ready, they tried to entice local municipal workers to help them finish it - in exchange for free food and lodging.

The stadium, one of 12 venues in Russia for the June 14-July 15 World Cup, will host six matches during the competition, including a quarter-final and England's group stage match against Panama.

Moscow hopes hosting the world's most prestigious football tournament will allow it to present a positive image of Russia at a time of soured relations with the West over everything from the war in Syria to the poisoning of a former spy in Britain.

The appeal by Nizhny Novgorod's sports ministry - asking for unpaid help in the final run-up

to the competition - evokes memories of the Soviet era, when the authorities would sometimes draft in students to help gather bumper harvests.

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It also shows how World Cup preparations in some places are running close to the wire.

In a letter seen by Reuters, the regional sports ministry asked the heads of local districts to nudge municipal sports facilities into sending their employees to help finish building Nizhny Novgorod's 45,000-seat World Cup stadium.

Offering them three meals a day, housing and work tools, the ministry said the extra muscle was essential to ensure the stadium was ready for its April 15 inauguration.

"Unfortunately the level of the stadium's readiness for the inauguration requires the enlistment of additional labor," says the letter, signed by regional sports minister Sergei Panov.

"I ask you to send employees from physical activity facilities and other institutions in the field of physical culture and sport (10 people) to Nizhny Novgorod for the completion of construction and general service works at the stadium from April 6 to 14 (inclusively)."

It was unclear how many towns and cities had answered the ministry's call and sent workers, but the appeal appears to have been successful, as the stadium hosted its first football match on April 15 and has held two others since.

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Both the regional authorities and Stroytransgaz, the stadium's general contractor, said they were aware of the letter's existence, but that it had been "improperly worded."

The regional sports ministry told Reuters the letter was in fact meant to call on sports centers to assemble a team of engineering specialists to maintain the stadium.

"There are some 40 physical activity facilities and other major sporting venues in the region whose employees have accumulated good experience in operating sporting facilities," the ministry said.

"In the future, it will be necessary to form a proper team to operate the stadium."

The head of a sports complex in one small town outside Nizhny Novgorod told Reuters he had received the ministry's letter, but had decided not to oblige.

"I'm responsible for the people who work here," he said, declining to be identified for fear of repercussions at work.

"Who will be responsible for them there (at the stadium) if something happens? Of course it

would the person who sent them."

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