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# 170K in East Ukraine Get Russian Passports Under Putin's Fast-Track Program

November 14, 2019




**Igor Ivanko / Moskva News Agency**

More than 170,000 residents of separatist-controlled territories in eastern Ukraine have become Russian citizens under President Vladimir Putin's fast-track program since it launched six months ago, authorities said.

Putin simplified the path to Russian citizenship for an estimated 3.7 million residents of the pro-Russian Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics" in April, angering Ukraine and the United States. He later expanded the fast-track Russian passport offer to residents of neighboring areas in eastern Ukraine that are under Kiev's control.

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“As for the number of people who received citizenship, it’s over 170,000,” Rostov region governor Vasily Golubev told local television Wednesday. “Some have of course gone back [to eastern Ukraine].”

Golubev did not specify what share of the newly minted Russian citizens came from government- or separatist-controlled areas.

He said the cross-border influx has not affected his region’s social services, school systems or labor market.

Russia opened its first passport-issuing center for eastern Ukrainians in the Rostov region’s mining city of Novoshakhtinsk near the border with Ukraine. The state-run TASS news agency reported that four more were opened in the region over the summer and four others were set to open this fall.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy responded to Putin’s expanded passportization drive in July with an overhaul of Ukrainian citizenship procedures. Zelenskiy opened eligibility to those suffering from human rights violations and constraints on freedom in their home countries and to ethnic Ukrainians "from friendly powers" willing to help Ukraine's development.

Five years of war between Ukrainian troops and Russian-backed forces in Ukraine’s eastern Donbass region have killed 13,000 people despite a ceasefire signed in 2015.

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