

Billionaire Deripaska Walks Back Criticism of Russia's Poverty Figures

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Forbes estimates Oleg Deripaska's net worth at \$4.3 billion. **Yegor Alejev / TASS**

Russian billionaire Oleg Deripaska on Monday [softened](#) his criticism of federal poverty statistics to instead praise President Vladimir Putin's government for supporting workers and small businesses during the coronavirus pandemic.

In his initial Telegram post, Deripaska accused state statistics service Rosstat of under-reporting the number of Russians living in poverty.

"They are trying to convince us that the number of Russians whose incomes are below the living wage is 17.8 million people. In fact, there are about 80 million citizens with such incomes in our country," he wrote in the since-deleted post.

"In recent years Rosstat has learned to juggle numbers and manipulate statistics so masterfully that we now have to read such 'brave' reports on 'victories' over poverty. It's just a shame that these 'victories' are mainly happening on paper," he added.

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The billionaire also urged authorities to “at least give affordable mortgages for the regions” in the same post.

A few hours later, the critique disappeared and Deripaska — one of Putin’s closest allies who the U.S. accuses of [laundering](#) the Russian president’s money — replaced it with a less-confrontational message.

“It must be admitted that on behalf of the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin, the government implemented large-scale programs to support workers and small businesses during the pandemic,” his edited Telegram post read.

“But without a radical correction of monetary policy and creation of conditions for project financing, the country will not be able to take the next step in the fight against poverty,” he added.

Deripaska is one of the wealthiest businessmen in Russia, with Forbes [estimating](#) his fortune at \$4.3 billion.

The living wage in Russia for the working-age population at the end of 2020 was 12,273 rubles (\$160) per month.

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