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4 in 5 Russians Support Taking in East Ukraine Refugees – State Poll

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Felix Light / MT

A majority of Russians supports taking in refugees from pro-Moscow separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, according to a state-run survey published Monday.

The leaders of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk republics on Friday ordered women, children and the elderly to cross the border into Russia, accusing the Ukrainian army of preparing to try and retake the regions by force. They said they planned to evacuate 700,000 civilians.

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More than half of Russia's 85 regions have expressed willingness to accommodate or support those relocating from the territories known as the Donbas. Six Russian regions declared states of emergencies due to the anticipated influx.

Russia's acting emergencies minister said more than 61,000 refugees have arrived from the Donbas as of early Monday.

According to Russia's state-funded pollster VTsIOM, 78% of Russian respondents said they support their government's decision to accept the refugees.

Only 13% opposed the policy, VTsIOM said.

Another 75% of the respondents voiced support for Russian President Vladimir Putin's order to hand out 10,000 rubles ($129) to the evacuees.

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Only 18% opposed Putin's payout, VTsIOM said.

VTsIOM carried out the phone survey among 1,600 Russians on Feb. 20.

Ukraine and its allies also accuse the separatist republics of purposely escalating the conflict with the evacuation and a dramatic increase in shelling.

The United States, which has warned that Russia could stage a false-flag operation to justify an incursion into Ukraine, called the evacuation a "cynical" move by Moscow.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine erupted in 2014 when Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula and the Donbas rebels broke away from Kyiv. Some 14,000 people have been killed in fighting since then.

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