

Over 150 Journalists Flee Russia Amid Wartime Crackdown On Free Press – Reports

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Sophia Sandurskaya / Moskva News Agency

At least 150 journalists are believed to have fled Russia in recent days as authorities moved to stifle what remains of the country's independent media amid Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, the Agentsvo news website [reported](#) Monday.

A new law signed by President Vladimir Putin on Friday punishes the dissemination of "knowingly fake information" about the Russian Armed Forces with up to 15 years in prison. Russian authorities have also blocked several independent news websites or forced them to delete articles that refer to the war as a "war" or "invasion" rather than a "special military operation."

Related article: [Putin Signs Law Introducing Jail Terms for 'Fake News' on Army](#)

According to Agentsvo, nearly all of Meduza's Moscow newsroom — about 20 people — are believed to have left, as well as journalists from the Dozhd broadcaster, Ekho Moskvy radio station and Novaya Gazeta newspaper.

A number of Western media outlets have suspended their reporting within Russia, including the BBC, CNN and Bloomberg, in order to evaluate the new law's implications.

“Most of the employees of the BBC’s Russian service (at least 15 people), Bloomberg and [U.S.-funded RFE/RL] left Russia,” Agentsvo wrote.

Agentsvo said it interviewed 17 newsrooms to make its calculation.

Russia has carried out an unprecedented crackdown on independent and critical voices since the start of the invasion.

Dozhd, Ekho Moskvy and Znak have closed down after being blocked by the authorities, while Meduza and Mediazona continue to operate despite being blocked. Novaya Gazeta has deleted all its old coverage of the invasion and said it will no longer cover it in order to avoid being blocked.

State-controlled outlets have meanwhile reinforced official narratives about the “special military operation” to “demilitarize and denazify” Ukraine.

Many Russians have been downloading VPNs in an attempt to circumvent these blocks. Estimates from the Sensor Tower digital metrics company indicate that the top five VPN apps on the App Store in Russia have seen their total downloads increase by a staggering 2691% since Feb. 25.

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