

Russian Prisons, Corporations Recruit Ukraine ‘Volunteers’ – Reports

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Workers of the Baltic shipyard in St Petersburg. **Ruslan Shamukov / TASS**

Prisons and corporations across Russia are recruiting volunteers to fight in Ukraine, independent media reported this week.

The effort appears to be an attempt by the Russian military to [replace its depleted forces](#) following a grinding four-month effort to capture territories in southern and eastern Ukraine.

Wagner, a Kremlin-linked private military company, has allegedly [offered](#) prisoners in St. Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod high salaries and potential amnesty for six months of service, investigative news outlet iStories report.

“My relative was told: ‘It’s very difficult to detect Nazis there [in Ukraine], they’re very well trained,’” the family member of an unnamed detainee told iStories, recounting their relative’s retelling of a meeting with recruiters.

“They said: ‘You’ll be in the vanguard helping detect the Nazis, so not everyone will come

back.’”

Russia sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24 with the stated aim of “denazifying and demilitarizing” its pro-Western neighbor. After struggling to take the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, Moscow shifted its focus toward eastern Ukraine for the campaign's second phase in late March.

Instead of written contracts, prison volunteers are reportedly offered verbal promises of 5 million rubles (\$90,500) paid to their families in case of their death.

At one St Petersburg prison, 200 inmates initially showed interest in the offer, with 40 eventually enlisting, iStories said.

When the relatives of detainees contacted the warden at the same prison about the event, he said that he was hearing about the recruitment drive for the “first time,” iStories reported.

Similar recruitment drives have been [reported](#) at two shipyards managed by the state-owned United Shipbuilding Corporation and billionaire Alisher Usmanov’s Metalloinvest mining works, according to The Moscow Times’ Russian service.

Usmanov and the United Shipbuilding Corporation are both currently under U.S., British and EU sanctions for their involvement in the Ukraine conflict.

Superintendents at the Admiralty and the Baltic shipyards in St. Petersburg reportedly offered workers contracts with Russia’s Defense Ministry with monthly salaries of 300,000 rubles (\$5,300).

“It looks like they picked only those with St. Petersburg residency [to attend the recruitment event],” one unnamed Admiralty Shipyard worker said. He reportedly received a summons to attend a military enlistment office in early June.

The shipyard employees were later questioned at the enlistment office, with recruiters finally asking, “do you agree to serve under [military] contract?” None of his colleagues agreed to the terms, the worker told The Moscow Times.

At Metalloinvest’s Lebedinsky mining and processing works in the border city of Belgorod, one worker told The Moscow Times that a recruitment drive had been ongoing for several months.

Metalloinvest denied that its mining works had offered miners to sign up for military service. The United Shipbuilding Corporation did not respond to requests for comment.

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