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Russia Sees Wedding Boom as Draftees Rush to Tie the Knot

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Newlyweds share a kiss after their wedding ceremony at the House of Culture at a military base. **Roman Sokolov / TASS**

Anastasia and Oleg decided to get married the moment Oleg received his draft papers in Russia's "partial" mobilization announced last month by President Vladimir Putin.

"We had begun making wedding plans before," said Anastasia, who declined to provide her surname.

"But when we heard the news about mobilization we immediately decided to get married."

For some couples, the risk of death in Ukraine has crystallized their intentions toward each other. For others, formalizing their relationship is a way to get access to benefits — including free public transport and payouts for children — that are promised to serving men's families, as well as compensation of over 5 million rubles ($81,443) in the event of death in combat.

"I had mixed emotions — it was very joyful, but at the same time it was very strange to

celebrate the event without our family and parents," Anastasia, 20, said of the ceremony, which the couple held at a military base in central Russia.

Mobilized the day after Putin declared a "partial" mobilization for the war in Ukraine on Sept. 21, Oleg was already serving in the army at the time of their wedding.

While there is no available national data on marriages in Russia, evidence from social media and different regions suggests that the number of weddings has surged since the mobilization announcement.

Men in uniform hurrying to tie the knot — like Oleg — seem to be responsible for much of this boom.

The Ural mountains region of Sverdlovsk reported a 65% increase in the number of marriages in the first two weeks of mobilization. In the Far East region of Khabarovsk, there were 60% more marriages in the last week of September than in the whole of the preceding month, according to local media reports.

In the central Omsk region, local media reported groups of grooms being bussed to weddings straight from their military bases.

The hurried nature of these ceremonies means that oftentimes only a few friends and family members can attend, and there is little time for preparations.

Anastasia told The Moscow Times that she had only one day to buy a wedding dress and rings for the couple. A video of Oleg and Anastasia's wedding showed the couple in an empty hall with the groom wearing his military uniform.

"I hope that all this [the war] will end soon... and we will be able to live as a big happy family," Oleg, 27, said in the footage.

In a similar case, Marina Kompaniets and her boyfriend Konstantin Shilov decided to get married after Shilov was mobilized and told he would be leaving shortly.

"When it became known that Kostya [Shilov] would be leaving on the 5th, all the jokes and sentimentality were forgotten in an instant," Kompaniets said in a post on social network VKontakte about the decision to get married.

"Having finished crying, I wiped the tears away... and said that we should get married."

In particular, Kompaniets said she feared that if Shilov was wounded, she would not be allowed into a military hospital to see him without proof of their relationship.

Under Russian law, couples must notify a registry office one month in advance of a wedding. But earlier this month, the authorities added mobilization to a list of "exceptional" circumstances under which a wedding can take place immediately.

According to Kompaniets, the couple went to a registry office in St. Petersburg in casual clothes and the ceremony took about 15 minutes. Shilov was sent away for training the next day.

“I am happy the authorities gave us this opportunity,” Kompaniets told The Moscow Times in an exchange of messages on VKontakte.

In addition to simplifying the marriage procedure, Russian officials — perhaps seeking a PR opportunity — have actively assisted mobilized men seeking to arrange rapid marriages, providing free bureaucratic advice, transport and days off from work.

With the help of the local authorities, 43 couples registered their marriages in one fast-track group wedding in St. Petersburg last week.

“It’s important when someone is waiting for you at home,” St. Petersburg lawmaker Anastasia Melnikova from the ruling United Russia party, who attended the ceremony, told reporters.

With Putin’s decision to mobilize some 300,000 Russians is seen by many observers as a highly risky political gamble that risks denting his popularity, the Kremlin has gone out of its way to pledge financial support for soldiers fighting in Ukraine and their families.

While benefits for families vary by region, they include the right to free public transport, one-off payments of up to 300,000 rubles ($4,903) and medical assistance.

Most significantly, the families of soldiers killed in combat will receive 5 million rubles, according to a presidential decree published earlier this month. They may also be eligible for additional compensation from the Defense Ministry and local government.

The 5-million-ruble sum is a huge amount of money, especially for those living in rural areas of Russia.

In the central Russian region where Anastasia and Oleg live, it’s about 100 times higher than the average monthly salary.

Keen to increase their chances of receiving such a payout, some Russian women have even informed military recruitment offices of the whereabouts of estranged husbands.

“Immediately after Putin’s speech, I had a thought: if my ex-husband went to war, we would have our debts repaid,” one such woman, whose husband refuses to pay child support, was quoted as saying earlier this month by independent media outlet Verstka.

While the money may be the biggest motivator for some newlyweds, others are firm believers in the moral mission the Kremlin claims it is pursuing in Ukraine.

“We will show everyone what Russia looks like and together we will kick out NATO and restore peace,” Oleg said in a poem dedicated to his new wife written after the wedding.

“And only then can I say that it’s time for me to come home.”

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