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Russian Tech Giant VK Orders Employees to Return From Abroad

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Alexander Koryakov / Kommersant

Russian tech giant VK has effectively banned employees from working abroad permanently, state news agencies reported Wednesday, citing a company letter to workers.

VK, which employs more than 10,000 people, owns the popular Mail.ru email and news services as well as the VKontakte and Odnoklassniki social networks, among others.

Its letter to employees comes as Russian officials weigh tactics for luring back the tens of thousands of skilled IT workers who fled the country last year over the invasion of Ukraine.

VK workers must work from Russia in order to "be in the same context with users and understand their needs," the company's letter states, according to a copy obtained by the TASS news agency.

The company's press service told TASS that while both remote work and hybrid work are still permitted, full-scale remote work "with all accesses, including working with user data, is

possible only from the territory of Russia."

Investigative media reported in January that VK, one of Russia's largest tech conglomerates, had ordered workers based abroad to return to Russia or face dismissal.

A VK source later said that the company didn't intend to fire workers who wanted to stay abroad, but would be offering them transfers to projects with no access to sensitive information instead.

The Russian government estimates that 100,000 IT workers — or 10% of the nation's tech workforce — have left Russia since the invasion of Ukraine, with some 80,000 of them continuing to work for Russian companies from abroad.

Russian lawmakers proposed legislation earlier this year that would ban workers in some sectors from working remotely from abroad.

In December 2021, Russian state-owned bank Gazprombank and insurance company Sogaz bought 57.3% of VK's shares, thus becoming its majority stakeholders.

VK's CEO, Vladimir Kiriyenko, is the son of Sergei Kiriyenko, the deputy head of President Vladimir Putin's administration.

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