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Russia Turns to Women's Prisons for Fresh Recruits – Reports

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Inmates at a Russian women's prison. **Yevgeny Yepanchintsev / TASS**

Russia has resorted to recruiting inmates from women's prisons to serve in the Russian military in a bid to make up for its growing losses in Ukraine, according to both Ukrainian officials and an independent Russian prisons watchdog.

“Last week, a train with sleeping cars for the transfer of prisoners was spotted moving towards the Donetsk region. One of the cars [had] female convicts [in it],” Ukraine’s Defense Ministry said in an update published on Monday.

Olga Romanova, the co-founder of prisoners’ rights organization Russia Behind Bars, confirmed the ministry's claims to independent news outlet iStories, noting that Russia had likely been using female prisoners to aid its invasion efforts since at least the end of last year.

“They were taken from penal colonies in southern Russia. I don’t know the exact ones, but they worked in Kushchevka [in the southern Krasnodar region],” Romanova told iStories.

As many as 100 female prisoners are believed to have been transferred to fight in Ukraine so far, according to the human rights defender, though it remains unclear if the recruitment was carried out on a voluntary basis or whether the inmates had been press-ganged into the Russian military.

In February, Ukrainian military officials said that Russia had recruited as many as 50 female prisoners from a penal colony in the Russia-occupied city of Snizhne in Ukraine's Donetsk region. The recruits were sent for "training" in Russia before being returned to Ukraine to fight, they said.

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