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Report: Russian Soldiers in Ukraine Face Increasing Payment Delays

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A serviceman operates a portable anti-tank grenade launcher during combat training. **Andrei Rubtsov / TASS**

Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine and their families have increasingly been complaining of delayed salary payments, independent news outlet Verstka reported on Wednesday.

Residents of 52 Russian regions as well as the annexed Crimean peninsula have said their family members currently fighting in Ukraine have been receiving delayed or partial salary payments, while some haven't been paid at all, according to the report.

Verstka identified the trend by examining an array of thematic pages and chats on the VKontakte social media website, where complaints about salary payments began to appear earlier this month.

"Are we going to start fighting for free?" one VKontakte user asked.

Those affected include professional soldiers and those who have recently enlisted in the army,

as well as conscripts called up during Russia's "partial" military mobilization drive, the news outlet reported.

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Valentina Melnikova, who heads the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, said she thought the delays in paying salaries to soldiers were likely due to the near collapse of the Russian military's bureaucracy, which has left it unable to keep track of the huge number of additional soldiers now in its ranks.

"We've never had so many people involved in conflicts before. Neither volunteers nor the mobilized have ever been [in the army before]. There is no experience of working with such personnel," Verstka cited Melnikova as saying.

According to official statements, the starting salary for a Russian soldier fighting in Ukraine is 195,000 rubles ($2,535) per month, which is nearly 14 times higher than the median salary in some regions of Russia.

In addition to their salary, Russian servicemen are also entitled to receive various bonuses depending on their rank, level of qualification and total number of years served in the army.

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