

Russian Army Found to Have Recruited Prisoners to Fight in Ukraine

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An inmate in a Russian penal colony. **Stanislav Krasilnikov / TASS**

The Russian Defense Ministry has been recruiting inmates from prisons in at least 25 different regions of the country to serve in the Russian military in Ukraine, according to an investigation by the BBC Russian service [published](#) Wednesday.

The investigation found that the recruitment drive began in September in the separate network of prisons for former members of Russia's security services, law enforcement agencies, and the military, before being expanded to include civilian jails across the country in January.

Inmates were reportedly given petitions for clemency to sign and had documents prepared for their transfer to a penal colony in Russia's southern Rostov region near the border with Ukraine, after which they were released to the Russian military.

Prisoners who signed up to fight were initially promised a monthly salary of \$1,800 to \$2,500. However, relatives of some of the prisoners complained to the BBC that they had in fact been

paid just \$500 a month.

Businessman and controversial Wagner group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin is believed to have been the first person to recruit serving prisoners to fight in Ukraine in September.

Those who signed up to serve with Wagner were promised that their criminal records would be expunged after six months of military service. However, Prigozhin [announced](#) in January that Wagner had ended its recruitment of prisoners.

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