

Russian Prisoners Increasingly Denied Parole Amid War Recruitment Efforts

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Sergei Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency

Russian prisoners are increasingly denied parole amid efforts by the Wagner mercenary group and later the Defense Ministry to recruit convicts for the war in Ukraine, the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* newspaper [reported](#) Thursday.

Only 23,000 requests for conditional early release (CER) were granted in 2022 out of nearly 59,000 requests reviewed by courts, according to judicial statistics from the Russian Supreme Court cited by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.

"Over 12,000 requests were withdrawn, transferred to another jurisdiction or discontinued," the report from the Supreme Court said.

Only 39% of prisoners who applied for CER were granted it in 2022, one of the lowest rates in two decades of record-keeping.

This compares to 80-90% of such requests granted in 2004-2005 and 57% of requests

granted in 2010.

The courts' decisions to deny CER were motivated by convicts' failure to demonstrate good behavior or lack of sufficient encouragement from prison staff, according to Nezavisimaya Gazeta.

"The absence of criteria for determining the degree of a convict's reform allows the courts and correctional institutions to abuse individuals' right to CER," Yekaterina Tyutyunnikova, a lawyer at the CentryurService firm, told the newspaper.

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Meanwhile, Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe and rejection of the European Court of Human Rights following the invasion have led to a tightening of legal proceedings, said Alexander Brod, a member of Russia's presidential human rights council.

This in turn means that requests from the accused and their defense are "practically disregarded," Brod told Nezavisimaya Gazeta, and that minor infractions can lead to a parole request being rejected.

Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin became the first to recruit prisoners for the war in Ukraine in August 2022.

According to prominent prisoner's rights activist Olga Romanova, Wagner recruited some 48,000–49,000 prisoners to fight, promising them clemency in exchange for serving a six-month contract.

Russia's Defense Ministry took over prison recruitment efforts at the beginning of the year. According to Romanova, the military recruited about 10,000 people from prisons between February and April 2023.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Wagner has [lost](#) over 30,000 mercenaries, including 9,000 killed, White House spokesman John Kirby said in February.

Kirby said half of Wagner's losses took place in December during the storming of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine, with about 90% of those killed recruited from Russian prisons.

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