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Moscow Says 1.5Mln Russian Passports Issued in Occupied Ukraine

By AFP

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Residents of eastern Ukraine's Donetsk receiving Russian passports. **Yegor Aleyev / TASS**

Russia has issued 1.5 million passports in occupied Ukrainian territories, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said Tuesday.

Residents of the occupied regions told AFP this month that they had been pressured into taking up a Russian passport, necessary for using basic public services.

Kyiv has described the passport handouts as an effort to suppress Ukrainian identity.

"From October last year, almost 1.5 million people received a Russian passport in the new regions," Mishustin said during a government meeting, referring to the parts of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions that are under Russian control.

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Moscow claims to have annexed the four regions, despite not controlling them fully.

"It is important that all their residents feel real changes taking place in cities and towns, see that streets and houses are gradually being restored," Mishustin said.

Russia has for years issued passports to people living in the eastern Donbas area held by pro-Moscow separatists since 2014, as well as in annexed Crimea.

But since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, Moscow has doubled these efforts.

The EU has said it will not recognize Russian passports issued by Moscow in illegally occupied regions of Ukraine.

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