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Putin Says Girls Are Russia's Labor Force 'Reserve'

By AFP

December 18, 2023



President Vladimir Putin (L) attends a ceremony to award state decorations to outstanding Russian women at Moscow's Kremlin on International Women's Day. **Mikhail Metzel / POOL / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday urged traditionally male professions to employ more women, to reduce major labor shortages exacerbated by thousands of soldiers being called up to fight in Ukraine.

Russia has for years been suffering from a shrinking labor force because of persistently low birth rates, and this has been aggravated by the conflict in Ukraine.

The mobilization of hundreds of thousands of men took them out of the job market and prompted many of the most educated sections of the population to flee the country.

"Girls represent a huge reserve for Russia. In sectors where they are not yet working, they need to exploit their potential to the fullest," Putin said.

Putin praised women who were studying to join the Air Force.

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"In our flight schools, girls are already flying combat aircraft. The minister (of defense) reported that they do it brilliantly, while it always seemed that it was a purely male profession.

"Today, all boundaries are being erased."

But the Russian leader, a long-time defender of so-called traditional values, nuanced his comment.

"Of course, there are some limitations related to health, anatomy, maybe to family," Putin continued.

"(If) there is a long business trip... who do the kids stay with?" he wondered.

He nevertheless said these issues "can be solved" and restrictions to women's work should be lifted.

Putin's comments came a few days after he launched a presidential re-election campaign that is expected to enable him to stay in the Kremlin until at least 2030.

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