The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Defense Minister Says 4K Students 'Volunteered' to Fight in Ukraine

December 19, 2023



Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. **Artem Geodakyan, TASS / kremlin.ru**

Over 4,000 Russian university students have taken academic leave to fight in Ukraine as volunteers, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said at an end-of-year military meeting on Tuesday.

"More than 4,000 Russian students have voluntarily taken a gap year and are performing combat missions," Shoigu told the gathering, which was chaired by President Vladimir Putin.

He added that the number of Russian combat personnel grew to 1.15 million in 2023 and was expected to further increase to 1.32 million.

Under Russian law, university students are entitled to defer their year-long compulsory military service until graduation.

Related article: Putin Says Over 600K Russian Servicemen in Ukraine

The ruling, pro-Kremlin political party United Russia last year proposed granting students academic leave for taking part in what Moscow calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

After Russia invaded Ukraine last year, authorities introduced basic military training for high school students as part of changes to the school curriculum.

Shoigu, speaking at the end-of-year meeting, praised students for making camouflage nets and donating blood for soldiers on the front line.

"We can say the entire country supports the Armed Forces and has united around the state's leadership," he said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/12/19/russian-defense-minister-says-4k-students-volunteered-to-fight-in-ukraine-a83484