

Over 4.5K Russian Soldiers Convicted of Desertion Since Invasion – Proekt

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Dmitry Yagodkin / TASS

Russian courts have convicted more than 4,600 soldiers for desertion and other offenses related to refusing to serve in the military since Moscow invaded Ukraine nearly two years ago, the independent investigative outlet Proekt [reported](#) Thursday.

Russia passed new legislation in the fall of 2022 that toughened punishment for voluntary surrender, conscientious objection and desertion.

Absence without official leave has been the most widespread criminal charge pressed against servicemen over the past two years, with 4,373 soldiers convicted during wartime compared to 527 in the pre-war year of 2021, according to Proekt.

That charge is followed by disobeying a superior's orders, with 289 defendants being convicted of this crime in 2023 compared to only nine in the preceding five years.

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Another 129 soldiers faced trial for desertion, as well as 31 for faking illness and evading service by other means.

Proekt noted that soldiers found guilty of desertion received harsher punishments than those who openly refused to fight in Ukraine, who were sentenced to an average of two years in prison.

Overall, Proekt said 5,260 criminal cases were opened between 2022 and 2023 for absence without official leave and 501 for desertion.

The independent news website Mediazona [reported](#) in December that a record-setting 5,593 Russian soldiers faced trials in 2023 for desertions and other related offenses, which roughly [amounted](#) to 100 convictions a week.

The “vast majority” of the soldiers received suspended sentences so they could be sent back to the battlefield, Medizona wrote at the time.

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