# Russia Finishes Issuing Passports in Occupied Ukrainian Regions, Putin Says

By [AFP](AFP)

March 05, 2025



**Sergei Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency**

Russian authorities have finished issuing passports to Ukrainian nationals living in territories seized by the Russian military, President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday, a process that Ukraine has condemned as an illegal attempt to erase the region's Ukrainian identity.

Since launching its full-scale invasion in February 2022, Russian authorities have pressured Ukrainians in the south and east of the country to adopt Russian citizenship.

Those who refuse face restrictions on their movement and difficulties accessing public services, such as healthcare and education, provided by Russian-installed authorities. Ukrainians who do not obtain a Russian passport are classified as foreign nationals.

"Last year, the passportization of residents in the liberated areas of the Luhansk and Donetsk republics, as well as the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, was virtually completed," Putin

said during a meeting with Interior Ministry officials in Moscow.

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Russia claims to have annexed those four Ukrainian regions in September 2022, despite not having full control over them.

Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev reported that 3.5 million passports had been issued in total.

Even before its full-scale invasion, Russia offered simplified citizenship to residents of parts of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions under the control of Moscow-backed separatists.

Kyiv has called the process "illegal" and a "gross violation of Ukraine's sovereignty."

The move has also been condemned by Western governments and human rights groups, while the European Union does not recognize the passports as legitimate travel documents.

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