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Russia Doubles Budget for State-Sponsored 'Youth Army'

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Vasily Kuzmichenok / Moskva News Agency

The Kremlin has doubled its funding in 2025 for Yunarmiya ("Youth Army"), the state-sponsored youth organization that combines ideological indoctrination with military training for children and teenagers.

According to documents reviewed by the independent Mozhem Obyasnit news outlet, Yunarmia is receiving 1 billion rubles (approximately $11 million) in funding this year, the largest amount since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This year, Yunarmiya is set to receive 800 million rubles ($9.7 million) in state subsidies through the Youth and Children national project, which was launched in 2024 by presidential decree to create "advanced schools" across Russia's regions. The funds will be distributed by the Movement of the First, a government-backed organization based on the Soviet Young Pioneers movement.

The Defense Ministry will provide an additional 200 million rubles ($2.4 million) to support

programs that prepare young people for military service, Mozhem Obyasnit reported.

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In comparison, Yunarmiya received 480 million rubles ($5.8 million) in grants in 2024, 470 million ($5.7 million) in 2023 and 560 million ($6.8 million) in 2022.

The group has also started receiving money from private sponsors, including a 10-million-ruble ($121,000) donation from Promsvyazbank, the primary lender to Russia's military-industrial complex.

Yunarmiya was established in 2016 at the initiative of then-Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Its activities include basic military training, lessons in army discipline and patriotic education — including in the occupied territories of Ukraine. The program emphasizes instilling "the right attitude" toward military service.

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According to the organization's website, its membership currently stands at 1.75 million school-aged children and teens. In 2021, the Russian government set a target of more than doubling the organization's membership to 3.25 million by 2030.

Yunarmiya was sanctioned by Western countries following the invasion of Ukraine. The group has also been accused of forcibly deporting Ukrainian children during the invasion.

The organization is led by Vladislav Golovin, a military officer who took part in the siege of Mariupol and was named a Hero of Russia, the country's highest honorary title.

Russia has ramped up its efforts to promote "military-patriotic" education since sending troops into Ukraine in 2022.

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