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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

FSB Recruits Ukrainian Teenagers for Espionage and Sabotage – FT

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Russian intelligence agencies are recruiting Ukrainian teenagers to carry out espionage and sabotage operations inside the country, the Financial Times reported Monday, citing senior officials in Kyiv.

Russia is systematically targeting teenagers and young adults, including orphans, individuals displaced by conflict and those facing financial hardship or seeking additional income, Ukrainian officials told the FT.

In one recent case, a 16-year-old boy was arrested in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro after being recruited by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) on Telegram, Ukrainian security officials told the FT.

Ukraine's SBU security service had been monitoring the individual and detained him as he attempted to take photos near a military facility in Dnipro. According to counterintelligence officials, the information was likely intended to assist in guiding Russian missiles or drones.

SBU chief Vasyl Maliuk told the FT that Russia was being "aggressive, committing various crimes against national security, including recruiting agents from among our own citizens."

The SBU has made more than 700 arrests related to espionage, arson and the placement of explosive devices organized by Russian intelligence since spring 2024, SBU spokesperson Artem Dekhtiarenko told the FT.

Of those arrested, 175 individuals, approximately 25%, were under the age of 18, Dekhtiarenko said.

Dekhtiarenko told the FT that the recruitment campaign "started last spring with tasks of burning cars [and] electricity hubs along the railway."

The FSB then "upgraded their strategy and started burning military recruitment centers," he said, adding that "they switched to using Ukrainians as suicide bombers" earlier this year.

The FSB reportedly started offering money for acts of espionage and sabotage as the number of Ukrainians sympathetic to Russia and willing to work as spies dwindled following the full-scale invasion.

Moscow's reliance on untrained agents is also said to have intensified following the expulsion of about 600 Russian diplomats from Western countries in 2022, many of whom were believed to have operated undercover as intelligence officers.

Reports indicate that minors in other parts of Europe have also been targeted by Russian intelligence.

Reuters reported in early June that at least 12 teenagers in Europe have been arrested for involvement in sabotage and espionage cases linked to Russia, including in Britain, Germany, Poland and Lithuania.

Reuters also referred to dozens of teenagers in Ukraine facing similar allegations.

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