The Moscow Times
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Russia Expands Free Public Wi-Fi as Mobile Internet Blackouts Spread

July 16, 2025



Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency

Russian regional authorities are rolling out new public Wi-Fi networks in response to increasingly frequent mobile internet shutdowns nationwide.

Interactive maps of newly available Wi-Fi access points have been published in many major cities and regions.

On the Digital Development Ministry's website for the Samara region, an interactive map now displays several hundred Wi-Fi access locations.

"The area may face temporary restrictions on mobile internet to ensure citizen safety and protect infrastructure," regional government head Mikhail Smirnov said.

Related article: Russia Moves to Centralize Mobile Internet Shutdowns Amid Rise in Ukrainian Drone Attacks

Mobile network disruptions, often linked to drone attacks blamed on Ukraine, have become increasingly common in recent weeks.

July marked a peak in internet shutdowns, with the independent communications watchdog Na Svyazi documenting disruptions in 77 regions, including areas far from the front line such as the Primorye region, the Sakhalin region and the Kamchatka region.

Wired internet has also been affected. In June alone, 655 incidents of internet blocking were recorded across Russia, a tenfold jump from the previous month.

Michael Horowitz, an analyst with the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, told Bloomberg that disabling mobile networks has proven effective in disrupting Ukrainian drone operations, which have repeatedly penetrated deep into Russian territory.

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