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Moscow Using Facial Recognition to Detain Men Challenging Military Conscription, Rights Group Says

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Police officers guard an area outside a military commissariat in Moscow. **Mikhail Tereshchenko / TASS**

Moscow police are using facial-recognition technology to detain men who have appealed their military conscription orders, the Civil Alliance of Russia rights group said.

According to Civil Alliance of Russia head Oleg Filatchev, a 19-year-old client who is contesting his draft was detained in the Moscow metro on Saturday and taken to a conscription center on Ugreshskaya Ulitsa, where around 20 other young men were reportedly being held under similar circumstances.

When a conscript challenges a draft decision in court, local enlistment offices flag his personal data in government databases as if he were a draft dodger, Filatchev said.

As a result, he can be automatically detained when caught on a surveillance cameras equipped with facial-recognition software.

Lawyers representing detainees have reportedly been denied access to their clients at the Ugreshskaya center, even when holding a notarized power of attorney.

Filatchev advised those appealing their conscription orders to avoid using the metro and, if detained, to refuse medical examinations unless served with a legally valid draft notice.

He also urged them to file complaints with the military prosecutor's office.

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The Defense Ministry plans to call up 135,000 men aged 18 to 30 for its autumn draft campaign this year — the largest conscription drive since 2016, when President Vladimir Putin ordered 152,000 to be called up for compulsory service.

Combined with the record 160,000 called up in the spring, a total of 295,000 men are expected to enter military service this year.

This fall, draft notices in Moscow, the republic of Mari El and the Ryazan and Sakhalin regions are being issued only in electronic form.

These notices are considered delivered once they are posted online, at which point recipients are automatically barred from leaving Russia.

Men who fail to report for service face a wide range of penalties, including bans on registering as self-employed or as individual entrepreneurs, driving vehicles, obtaining passports, taking out loans or conducting property transactions.

They can also be fined between 10,000 and 30,000 rubles ($123-$370).

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