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Russia Bans Extradition of Foreign Nationals Who Fought in Its Army

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a law prohibiting the extradition of foreign nationals and stateless persons who serve or have served under contract in the Russian army if they took part in combat operations.

The law bars their extradition abroad for criminal prosecution or to serve a sentence, according to the published text of the legislation.

The measure effectively shields foreign fighters who joined Russia's war against Ukraine from being handed over to other countries, even though participating in the armed forces of a foreign state is a criminal offense in many jurisdictions — including some considered friendly to Moscow.

Foreign citizens were first allowed to sign contracts with the Defense Ministry in November 2022, while stateless persons became eligible in July 2024.

Since January 2024, both foreign recruits and their family members have been able to obtain Russian citizenship through a simplified procedure that waives language exams and the usual requirement of five years' permanent residence.

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Under additional changes introduced in November 2025, foreigners who fought against Ukraine can apply for Russian citizenship even after leaving military service, including on the basis of discharge documents or a medical commission's decision declaring them unfit for duty.

There are no official figures on the total number of foreign nationals fighting for Russia. Authorities have acknowledged the presence of North Korean troops.

According to the United States, as many as 5,000 Cuban citizens were fighting alongside Russian forces as of autumn 2025.

Exiled investigative outlet IStories reported that more than 1,500 foreigners from 49 countries, including Nepal, China, India and Uzbekistan, signed contracts between April 2023 and late May 2024.

The Telegraph reported that by the end of 2025 Russia had recruited around 18,000 people from 128 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America, of whom at least 3,300 had been killed.

Several countries including Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Jordan and Kenya have demanded that Moscow stop recruiting their citizens.

Russia has said it is willing to comply with those requests, although the military law project Voenny Advokaty has reported that the Defense Ministry has recently faced difficulties attracting new contract soldiers.

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