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Russia's Prison Service Faces Staffing Crisis as Shortages Top 30%, Officials Say

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Andrei Lyubimov / Moskva News Agency

Russia's prison service is grappling with a deepening staffing shortage, with tens of thousands of positions unfilled last year, highlighting mounting personnel problems across the country's law enforcement agencies as the war in Ukraine stretches into its fifth year.

The Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN)'s staffing deficit exceeded 30.5% in 2025, Interfax cited Director Arkady Gostev as saying. Based on FSIN's authorized workforce of about 234,100 employees, the shortfall amounts to roughly 71,400 staff.

The deficit has widened sharply from 23% a year earlier, when the prison service was short about 54,000 employees.

The shortages are particularly acute in leadership roles. Between 34.5% and 51% of senior management posts are vacant across 13 regional FSIN bodies, Gostev said. Between 40% and

50% of junior supervisory positions remain unfilled in 29 units, while the share exceeds 50% in 16 units.

The situation has increased workloads and psychological strain on remaining staff that in turn contribute to further departures, Gostev said. More than 40% of employees leave the service before reaching retirement eligibility.

Related article: Russia's Prison Population Falls to Historic Low, Deputy Chief Justice Says

The staffing crisis comes even as Russia's prison population has fallen to a historic low.

Deputy Supreme Court Chairman Vladimir Davydov said earlier this month that about 308,000 people are currently held in prisons and pre-trial detention centers, down from roughly 466,000 before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Russia's broader law enforcement system has also been struggling to recruit and retain personnel.

Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev said previously that the country faces a shortage of 212,000 police officers. Around 80,000 officers left the force last year, 7% more than in 2024, while new recruits failed to keep pace with departures.

Kolokoltsev cited low salaries and heavy workloads as key drivers of the staffing gap.

In response, President Vladimir Putin has ordered officials to address the police shortage in part by recruiting veterans of the war in Ukraine.

The shortages underscore growing strain on Russia's security and law enforcement institutions as the war drains manpower and public-sector wages struggle to keep pace with inflation, complicating efforts to maintain policing, prison operations and internal security.

Separately, the Justice Ministry announced in February plans to cut 546 positions at FSIN as several pre-trial detention facilities are transferred back to the Federal Security Service (FSB) following Russia's withdrawal from the Council of Europe in 2022.

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