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Russians Lose Access to Apple ID Mobile Payments

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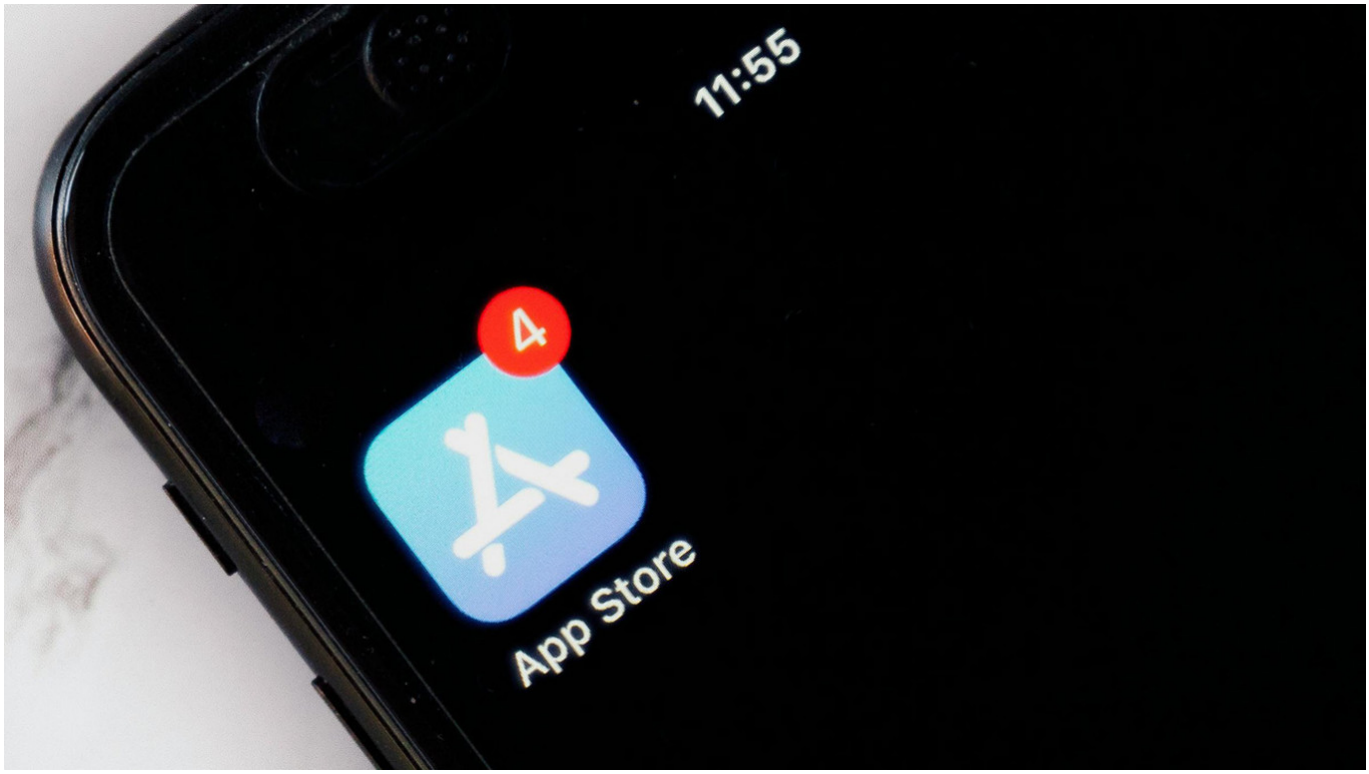


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Russians on Wednesday lost the ability to top up their Apple ID accounts using mobile phone billing following reports that authorities in Moscow are trying to pressure the U.S. tech company to return Russian apps to its online store.

Apple ID allows users to purchase apps, music, movies and subscriptions. Russians have been able to make Apple ID purchases directly from their mobile accounts after international payment services like Visa and MasterCard suspended operations in Russia in early 2022.

As of Wednesday, Russians who try to top up their Apple ID accounts now encounter the message: "Payment by mobile phone is temporarily unavailable, please try again later."

Major mobile network carriers in Russia urged their customers earlier this week to top up their Apple ID accounts so that they would have enough funds for at least a year.

That guidance was issued after anonymous government sources told media outlets that

Russia's Digital Development Ministry instructed the carriers to "temporarily" block Apple ID payments as a way to pressure Apple to return Russian apps to its online store that were removed due to Western sanctions.

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"The Digital Development Ministry believes that temporary restrictions by carriers may encourage [Apple] to comply with Russian law, since the lost profits would otherwise be too great," a government source was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

Russian officials have not publicly commented on the reports.

State Duma Deputy Speaker Vladislav Davankov, a member of the center-right New People party, called on the Digital Development Ministry to provide "detailed official explanations" behind the Apple ID restrictions.

Anton Tkachev, another New People lawmaker in the State Duma, said he believes that disabling Apple ID only hurts ordinary Russians and likely will fail to convince Apple to return Russian apps to its online store.

The Moscow Times contacted Apple for comment.

Analysts estimate there are approximately 16 million iPhone users in Russia, around half of whom periodically make purchases or pay for subscriptions.

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