

# Russian Websites Begin Blocking VPN Users as Internet Controls Tighten

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April 15, 2026



**Evgenij Razumnyj / Vedomosti / TASS**

A growing number of Russian websites and online services have begun blocking users who try to access them with virtual private networks, or VPNs, as the government ramps up its efforts to restrict the censorship-circumvention tools.

The e-commerce platform Ozon and the popular streaming service Kinopoisk are among several platforms now displaying “access denied” or similar messages to website visitors using a VPN, The Moscow Times was able to confirm.

Similar disruptions have been [reported](#) on various banking and ride-sharing applications. Some major platforms, including the social network VKontakte and the retailer Wildberries, remained accessible with VPN on Wednesday.

The companies have not provided an official explanation for the restrictions, but they

coincide with an April 15 [deadline](#) reportedly set by Russia's Digital Development Ministry for more than 20 major platforms to curb VPN usage.

Russia's Digital Development Minister Maksut Shadayev [said](#) last month that his agency had been tasked with "reducing the use of VPNs." He linked the push to what he described as "long, difficult and ultimately unsuccessful" talks with foreign tech companies over compliance with Russian laws.

**Related article:** [As Kremlin Cuts Off the Internet, VPNs Become a Way of Life](#)

The VPN restrictions follow months of mobile internet disruptions across Russia and government-imposed slowdowns of the messaging apps WhatsApp and Telegram.

Six people in Russia told The Moscow Times on Wednesday that they were still unable to access Telegram without a VPN. However, two Russians in the southern Krasnodar region said Telegram continued to work without issue for them.

The Kremlin [said](#) Wednesday that VPN use is not punishable by law in Russia and denied knowledge of plans to penalize it.

Downloads of VPNs surged in Russia after authorities started blocking Western social media platforms and scores of Russian independent news outlets following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

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