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Russia's Aircraft Output More Than Doubles as Drone Production Surges

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Sergei Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency

Russia's aircraft production more than doubled in April, driven largely by a surge in drone manufacturing, Bloomberg reported Tuesday, citing Russian state statistics, even as growth in the broader defense sector continued to slow.

Output in Russia's aviation industry, which includes both military aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles, rose 117% year-on-year in April, according to calculations based on Rosstat data reviewed by Bloomberg. That marked a sharp acceleration from the average annual growth rate of 68% recorded in 2025.

Production in the sector increased 78% in the first four months of 2026, the report said. Rosstat did not publish absolute production figures.

The data highlights how drone manufacturing has become one of the fastest-growing segments of Russia's wartime economy, helping sustain military production even as broader economic constraints, labor shortages and tighter state finances weigh on growth.

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Russia's overall defense industry expanded by 16% in January-April, according to estimates by Renaissance Capital analysts cited by Bloomberg. By contrast, civilian industrial output contracted by 3% over the same period amid weakening demand, high interest rates and mounting sanctions pressure.

Bloomberg said the aviation sector's rapid growth was being fueled in part by the mass production of inexpensive first-person-view (FPV) drones, which have become a central component of Russia's war in Ukraine.

"First-person view UAVs are now a dominant feature of fighting on the ground, making any kind of force build up hazardous for kilometers either side of the line of contact," Douglas Barrie, a senior fellow for military aerospace at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, told Bloomberg. "Longer-range UAVs have provided Moscow with the capacity to supplement its far smaller inventory of land-attack cruise missiles and to sustain a campaign against Ukrainian critical national infrastructure."

While Moscow does not disclose detailed figures for military production, President Vladimir Putin said in 2024 that Russia planned to produce 1.4 million drones that year.

Ukraine's top military commander Oleksandr Syrskyi said last month that Russia plans to manufacture 7.3 million FPV drones and an additional 7.8 million drone warheads and payloads in 2026, or roughly 20,000 units per day.

By comparison, Russia has delivered 64 Su-34 and Su-35 fighter aircraft and 12 Su-27 combat aircraft to its Armed Forces since the start of the war, Bloomberg cited Sam Cranny-Evans, a military analyst at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), as saying.

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