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Penza Authorities Forcibly Mobilizing Men Into Military – Reports

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@iditelesom_help / Telegram

Russian security forces and military enlistment officers are carrying out coordinated street raids across the Penza region to force local men into signing military contracts to fight in the war against Ukraine, according to exiled Russian media and anti-war groups.

Idite Lesom, a non-profit organization that helps Russian men avoid military service, said it was contacted by several people in the city of Penza and nearby towns who described men being "rounded up indiscriminately." Witnesses reported that law enforcement authorities were stopping cars and public transportation, detaining men and taking them away.

The exiled news outlet Mediazona said it verified the location of a Penza enlistment office in a widely circulated video on social media, which showed women crying and accusing men in uniform of physically assaulting their relatives who were placed in a minibus.

A senior military official later told Mediazona that the video was "staged."

At least 20 people have reportedly been detained across Penza and the nearby towns of Kamenka and Kuznetsk. Some residents told exiled Russian media that the raids appeared to target "draft dodgers" who had previously ignored military summonses.

Police officials in Penza called the reports "inaccurate" and said the raids targeted men who recently received Russian citizenship but failed to register at the local military recruitment office.

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Idite Lesom said pro-government media outlets in Penza dismissed the reports of forced military mobilization as "fake," characterizing the heavy security presence in the region as routine law enforcement sweeps targeting undocumented migrants and standard draft evaders.

However, Idite Lesom said it has continued to receive messages from families whose male relatives were said to have been forcibly taken off the streets by security forces. One family has already filed a formal complaint alleging that a relative was tricked into signing a Defense Ministry contract under the guise of standard paperwork documenting his arrest.

President Vladimir Putin announced a "partial" mobilization of 300,000 reservists in September 2022, several months into the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since then, Russian media have regularly reported instances of men being forced to join the army.

Putin ordered the Russian military to boost active personnel to 1.5 million by 2026.

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