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Ukraine Struggling to Find Fresh Conscripts

Ukraine is facing a declining pool of new conscripts as its military is “running out” of career soldiers, the *Washington Post* reported December 8. The newspaper pointed out that Kyiv has significantly stepped up controls on its Western borders as dozens of military-age men try to escape the country illegally on a daily basis.

Earlier this week, Mykhailo Podolyak, a top aide to President Volodymyr Zelensky, admitted that more mobilization in Ukraine would be a complex matter, voicing hopes that by ramping up Ukraine’s “propaganda element,” the government would be able to tackle the lack of new conscripts.



AP Images

Speaking on Ukrainian TV recently, Podolyak responded to a question regarding a recent raid by Ukrainian officials and armed service members on a gym in western Ukraine, where all males present were handed draft notices. Incidents of potential conscripts being ambushed by draft officials in shopping malls, restaurants, and other public places have become more commonplace in recent months.

The senior aide justified his government’s conscription drive, accusing reluctant Ukrainians of wanting “to live in a free state where you can behave as you please, but not wanting to protect the rights that you love,” adding that the situation will dramatically change if Russia wins the conflict.

Podolyak also revealed Kyiv’s plans to amend “the propaganda element of the mobilization procedures.” He proceeded to say that a lot depended on whether the Kyiv government could win over those who “don’t really understand what the war is and what consequences it may lead to if it’s not finished in the right way.”

The *Post* noted that, at this stage in time, “even more than bullets, Ukraine needs fighters, leading to a search for new ways to mobilize the population and stronger measures against draft dodgers.” It quoted a 68th Brigade assault team leader, who uses the callsign Dolphin, as saying, “Honestly, we need more soldiers. The professional military personnel are running out.”

Although “tens of thousands” of volunteers are still joining the military, many draft-eligible Ukrainians “are less than eager to fight for a military and national government that is viewed as rife with corruption and incompetence,” *WaPo* reported.

The article continued on how draft dodgers were trying to flee Ukraine despite a ban imposed by the government at the beginning of the conflict on men aged 18-60. Some bribe officials to obtain a certificate of medical disability, while others try to forge documents on their own.

Other men trying to dodge the mobilization are attempting to cross the border via official checkpoints, concealing themselves in secret compartments in vehicles, or even feigning to be clergy members and women.

Andrey Demchenko, a spokesperson for Ukraine’s State Border Guard Service, told *WaPo* that there



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have been at least 825 cases where draft-age men have tried to bribe border guards since February 2022. One anonymous draft dodger told reporters that the going rate on the Moldovan border was \$300.

Still, others are hiring professional guides hoping to steer them through mountainous areas to Romanian soil. Some men are undertaking the dangerous trek in freezing temperatures on their own, the newspaper reported, adding that some have drowned or frozen to death while doing so.

Kyiv's drive to recruit more manpower follows its mediocre summer counteroffensive, which, based on the Russian Defense Ministry's estimates, has cost the Kyiv regime more than 125,000 troops.

Ukraine announced a general mobilization shortly after the Russian invasion in February 2022, forbidding most men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country. The conscription drive, nonetheless, has been plagued with widespread corruption and draft avoidance. The BBC previously reported that around 20,000 potential conscripts have escaped the country to avoid being mobilized to the front lines, with approximately the same number caught in the process.

In late November, Zelensky introduced a new "complex plan" of mobilization, without elaborating on the plan. Aleksey Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, indicated that Kyiv had signed contracts with recruitment companies to lure those reluctant to enlist. Earlier, Danilov said that during his country's conflict with Russia, every Ukrainian citizen "has to fight a war or perform a service."

Last month, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) said that Kyiv's Western backers had advised Ukraine to lower the minimum conscription age to 17 and raise the maximum to 70, as well as drafting more women into the army.

Meanwhile, website iDNES.cz reported that over 150 Czechs had obtained official approval from their country's head of state to fight for Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, quoting the president's office.

Approval from the republic's president was the only legal channel for Czech citizens to avoid problems with the law at home after joining the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the outlet reported.

More than 550 people have applied for such approval since February 2022, the president's office declared, when ongoing tensions between Russia and Ukraine intensified into military conflict. Nevertheless, most of these requests were declined, the website elaborated.

As of December 1, 151 men and one woman from the Czech Republic have been officially permitted to become members of the Ukrainian military.

Then-Czech President Milos Zeman had authorized 132 such requests, with 20 more being approved by Petr Pavel, who replaced Zeman in March, iDNES.cz added.

In July, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that foreign mercenaries fighting on the side of Kyiv have also been suffering "significant losses" amid Ukraine's attempts to mount a counteroffensive.

Moscow will ensure that "the public in the countries whose governments send people to the war zone" are aware of what is actually taking place on the battlefield in Ukraine so that they can properly "evaluate the actions of their governments," Putin said.

During the conflict, the Russian Ministry of Defense has reported various major strikes on deployment sites with foreign mercenaries in Ukraine, in which it said there were hundreds of casualties.



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