

4.2.5. Alternative civilian service

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The right to alternative civilian service is stipulated by Article 59.3 of the Russian Constitution.[792] It is applicable to individuals whose convictions or religious beliefs contradict military service or individuals who represent small indigenous ethnic minorities who lead a traditional way of life.[793] The duration of alternative civilian service is 18 months within organisations of the armed forces and other military formation in the role of civilian personnel and 21 months in civilian organisations.[794]

As of March 2025, the list of professions available for alternative civilian service consisted of 266 professions.[795] The placements can be in the spheres of social service, healthcare, education, culture, and art,[796] with the positions ranging from skilled professions (such as doctor, veterinarian, engineer, programmer, or economist) to general working specialities (janitor, driver, courier, handyman).[797] The placement is determined by the draft commission and, therefore, can take place in the location different from the individual's place of residence. Quitting alternative civilian service is not possible, as it leads to a criminal prosecution for draft evasion.[798]

While there was an increase towards alternative civilian service after the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022,[799] compared to the total number of conscripts, the number of persons enrolled in the alternative civilian service is comparatively small.[800] According to the statistics by the Russian Federal Service of Labour and Employment (Rostrud), as of 1 August 2025, 2 722 young men were enrolled in alternative civil service,[801] compared to 2 022 as of 1 August 2024.[802]

Applicants must submit their request to the military enlistment office no later than six months before the start of the conscription period: by 1 April to enroll during the autumn draft and by 1 October to be included in next year's spring draft. The application must clearly indicate the reasons for the inability to perform the military service and include supporting documents, such as a reference letter from the place of work or study and witness statements.[803] Late applications can be submitted with a valid explanation for the delay.[804]

Military enlistment offices often refuse the requests for alternative civilian service, including for missing application deadline (which constitutes the majority of refusals[805]), insufficient or false information, prior evasion of military service, and lack of suitable or available vacancies.[806] As noted by Artem Klyga, in some cases – for example, in Chuvashia, Krasnodar krai, and Tomsk oblast – military enlistment offices reportedly claimed that the possibility to replace military

service with alternative civilian service was no longer valid, which has been appealed in court. Moreover, there were also instances where military enlistment offices refused to forward applications to the draft board.807

Access to alternative civilian service in Moscow has become increasingly difficult,808 with only one in 33 applications approved during the 2025 spring draft.809 As noted by Artem Klyga, even if the person is granted alternative civilian service, problems often occur with finding an organisation where it can be performed, with the procedure handled by the Ministry of Labour, a civil service agency.810 Huseyn Aliyev further noted an increase in corruption, with some applicants being requested to pay bribes to receive approval.811

As of May 2024, there were at least two cases where persons who have applied for alternative civilian service were charged with an administrative offence of ‘discrediting’ the Russian armed forces as the applicant noted that ‘he does not want to serve in the military because Russia is waging a war of aggression’ in Ukraine.812

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