

4.3. Contractual military service

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Following the conclusion of the ‘partial mobilisation’ in late 2022,877 the Russian authorities shifted to recruitment of contract soldiers for the regular armed forces, military personnel by private military contractors, and volunteer fighters for diverse irregular forces.878 Contract service is widely advertised both in cities and remote villages, as well as online,879 appealing to patriotism and sense of duty.880

The recruitment process has largely been based on various financial incentives,881 making the war effort costly for the state to sustain.882 In June 2025, BBC News Russian service reported that 37 Russian federal subjects were offering one-off enlistment bonuses exceeding 2 million rubles [20 500 euros], with the highest – 2.6 million rubles [26 650 euros] paid in Moscow and Tula oblasts.883 Newly recruited contract soldiers have been also offered high salaries and other financial benefits, such as ‘preferential tax status’ and writing off loans up to 10 million rubles [102 500 euros].884

In June 2025, Verstka reported that the authorities were offering payments to police officers and ordinary citizens for recruiting volunteers.885 Alongside financial incentives, the authorities have also used ‘deception and indirect coercion’, with reports that some individuals were ‘lured into signing contracts’ with promises that they would ‘serve as cooks or drivers.’886 Moreover, military contracts are offered to job seekers, with employment centres offering vacancies in the military.887 Furthermore, authorities grant Russian citizenship to foreigners – as well as to their families – through a fast-track process if they sign a one-year military contract.888 Since April 2024, police has reportedly conducted frequent mass detentions of migrants and individuals with acquired Russian citizenship, to force them to conscript into obligatory military service or to sign a contract with the army, threatening them with revocation of Russian citizenship.889

According to IStories, based on Russia’s federal budget expenditures, up to 407 200 individuals signed contracts with the MoD.890 Without indicating a source, researcher Dmitry Gorenburg mentioned 450 000 contracts soldiers recruited the same year.891 As reported by IStories, 89 600 individuals signed contracts in the first quarter of 2025892 and 37 900 in the second quarter of 2025.893 In an interview with EUAA, a human rights lawyer noted that contract recruitment campaigns have been winding down, which is also reflected in the reduction of regional bonus payments for signing contracts. The MoD appears to be less intent on recruiting contract soldiers compared to 2023 and 2024, with individuals with criminal records being

increasingly denied deployment to Ukraine, even when they volunteer. Previously there have been no such rejections.894

The largest number of contract military personnel serve directly under the MoD.895 According to the presidential decree on 'partial mobilisation,' the contracts of all contract soldiers (*kontraktniki*) and those who were mobilised under the decree remain in force until the end of the 'special military operation'.896 For both groups, since autumn 2022, leaving the military service has been possible only because of serious health issues,897 such as injuries rendering a person temporarily or permanently unfit for the service,898 if a person has been sentenced to a real prison term.899 As noted by Huseyn Aliyev, there are individuals who were mobilised or joined the army as volunteers in 2022 who still continue to serve.900

In contrast, former members of the Wagner group or other PMCs, which are now under control of the MoD, and especially those recruited from the prison system, signed one-year contracts guaranteeing that they would be released from the military service – as well as from the prison sentences – after they complete their contracts. These commitments have largely been fulfilled, both by the Wagner group and the PMCs that replaced it.901

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