

Ukrainian government cancels consular services for military-age men

Jason Melanovski**24 April 2024**

The government of President Volodymyr Zelensky has canceled all consular services for military-age men in a desperate bid to force some of the reported 4.5 million Ukrainian men living abroad back home to fight in the over two-year-long NATO proxy war against Russia.

On Monday Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba wrote on Twitter/X that he had "ordered measures to restore fair attitudes toward men of conscription age in Ukraine and abroad". At the same time, Ukrainian consulates across Europe began canceling services for military age men, according to the Ukrainian news outlet *Suspilne*.

In announcing the move, Kuleba criticized Ukrainians who fled rather than be sent to the frontlines. "How it looks like now: a man of conscription age went abroad, showed his state that he does not care about its survival, and then comes and wants to receive services from this state," Kuleba said.

"It does not work this way. Our country is at war. Staying abroad does not relieve a citizen of his or her duties to the Homeland."

Fighting-age Ukrainian men abroad will now be forced to return to Ukraine in order to renew their passports where they will then be subject to forced conscription and mobilization. Those that do not return to the country will be penalized with the loss of their passports and driver's licenses, essentially becoming stateless citizens living abroad illegally.

The announcement follows the passage last week of a mobilization bill that was originally introduced in February and amended over 4,000 times.

The 2024 mobilization drive was first proposed in Zelensky's end-of-year address in December when he announced that the Ukrainian Armed Forces were hoping to mobilize 500,000 new soldiers at a cost of

\$13.3 billion. Following widespread opposition, an initial mobilization bill was withdrawn and then reintroduced in February, ultimately leading to the bill's passage.

With the bill's passage, all men aged 18 to 60 will be required to update their personal information within the next 60 days with the authorities responsible for conscription. This requirement will also apply to Ukrainian men living abroad. The new law will make it easier for Ukrainian authorities to issue draft notices, including through an electronic system. It also obliges local governments and the police to aid the military in the conscription drive.

The final version of the bill passed does not include a provision for the demobilization of men after three years of service, which was removed at the last minute by request of newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Oleksandr Syrsky. Since the fall, the wives and families of soldiers who in many cases have been fighting on the front for over two years have been protesting in major Ukrainian cities to demand that their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers be allowed to return home.

Facing a severe manpower and ammunition shortage and steadily losing ground at the front, the right-wing Zelensky government is tacitly admitting, through the bill's passage and the inclusion of punitive measures against draft dodgers, that despite constant nationalist propaganda, Ukrainian men are less eager than ever to volunteer for the NATO proxy war.

BBC Ukraine reported in November that 650,000 Ukrainian men aged 18-60 have left Ukraine for Europe since the start of the war, while Zelensky's former adviser Alexey Arstovich recently claimed that 4.5 million Ukrainian men, nearly half of the Ukrainian male population, had fled abroad to avoid military

service, and that 30 to 70 percent of military units consist of “refuseniks,” who have gone absent without official leave (AWOL).

Following the announcement of the proposal, Ukrainians across Europe were seen waiting in line at consular offices to renew their passports before the mobilization changes take effect. In Valencia, Spain, 550 people reportedly waited in line for hours to renew their passports and ensure their legal status in Spain for the upcoming year.

Earlier this week, Andriy Demchenko, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian State Border Service, reported that ten men of military age per day attempt to leave the country using fake documents. Demchenko also reported that bribe attempts of border guards are a regular occurrence and that guards are now stationed across Ukraine’s borders to stop draft dodgers.

Despite its own support of the slaughter in Ukraine, the *New York Times* recently reported in an article titled, “In Ukraine’s West, Draft Dodgers Run, and Swim, to Avoid the War,” on the desperate situation facing Ukrainian men. Providing a glimpse of the huge numbers fleeing Ukraine on a regular basis, the article reported that Romanian authorities alone had detained 6,000 men swimming across the Tysa River since the full-scale war began in February 2022.

This past December, Zelensky and his then commander-in-chief Valery Zaluzhny declared that another 500,000 new soldiers were needed to continue the war. That number was subsequently lowered by Syrsky, who claimed that thanks to an internal audit conducted by the Defense Ministry, the figure had been “significantly reduced.” Syrsky did not clarify the exact number but instead claimed “we expect we will have enough people capable of defending.”

The war has already resulted in a reported 500,000 casualties for the Ukrainian side, according to Russian numbers reported this week. Meanwhile, the Zelensky government continues to absurdly claim it has lost just 31,000 troops in over two years of war even as it cannot account for 700,000 soldiers apparently missing from its forces. Ukraine had a pre-war population of under 40 million.

Whatever the true numbers, it is clear that due to mass casualties and large numbers of Ukrainians fleeing the war that the US-backed Kiev government will continue to be at a disadvantage against the

numerically superior Russian army. According to a recent speech in parliament cited by the *New York Times*, “the commander of Ukrainian forces in the east, Gen. Yurii Sodol, said Russians in certain sections of the front outnumber Ukrainians by more than seven to one.”

Despite the expected passage of a \$61 billion aid bill currently making its way through Congress, weapons still need soldiers to use them, which no amount of aid can magically conjure up.

As Ukraine’s Ground Forces Commander Oleksandr Pavliuk recently admitted on Facebook in an attempt to recruit more Ukrainians to join the Armed Forces, “No matter how much help we get, how many weapons we have—we lack people.”



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