

Ukrainian government proposes prison sentences for illegal border crossings

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Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers introduced a bill to Ukraine's parliament that would sharply increase the criminal liability of individuals caught illegally crossing the border, as thousands of Ukrainian men a month attempt to flee forced conscription.

The bill's introduction is a tacit admission that the war effort is far from popular among those who are forced—often through physical coercion—to fight and die in it.

As Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs said in a statement, "Today, unfortunately, we are seeing mass attempts to evade mobilization due to illegal travel abroad. As practice shows, administrative fines do not deter violators. Our responsibility is to ensure the security of the state and support its defense capability in the most difficult times."

Under the proposed measures, individuals who are subject to military service and caught illegally leaving the country could be sentenced to a term of three to five years in prison and fines. Under current law, illegal border crossers are subject only to administrative penalties and fines, a price many are willing to pay given that their alternative is dying at the front.

The authors of the proposed new measures admit in the bill's explanatory notes that illegal border crossings have surged since the beginning of the NATO-backed proxy war against Russia.

According to government data, from 2022 to 2025 Ukraine's border guards detained 43,000 mobilizable men aged 18–60 attempting to cross the border outside of official checkpoints. This is undoubtedly an undercount of the true number of Ukrainian men fleeing the war. Tens of thousands more successfully fled the country illegally and simply were not caught.

As demonstrated by numbers from neighboring Romania, border guards there detained over 5,000

Ukrainians in just the first seven months of 2025 and over 26,000 since the beginning of the war in 2022.

In addition to increasing criminal liability for the individuals themselves caught crossing the border, the proposed bill also cracks down on organizers of illegal crossings. This measure is clearly meant to target Ukraine's border guards and other government officials that are involved in widespread bribery schemes to get draft dodgers or "refuseniks" out of the country.

Earlier this year in May, Ukrainian authorities announced they had arrested a "gang," which included two border guards, for charging Ukrainian men fleeing the country bribes of up to \$15,000 and then classifying them as "disabled" to allow for their exit.

In a country where the average monthly salary is approximately \$500 per month, such schemes mean that the war has a vastly disproportionate effect on the country's working class and poor, particularly in rural areas. Reportedly, many rural villages throughout Ukraine have been totally cleared of military age men. Here, forced mobilization by press gangs is easier to carry out and less likely to be recorded and end up on social media. Videos of such forced street kidnappings are now regular part of Ukrainian social media.

The bill has already been criticized within Ukraine due to its obvious hypocrisy and double-standards. As Ukrainian parliamentary Oleksiy Homcharenko pointed out to news outlet *Strana*, the brother of newly appointed Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko fled to London to "study" and did not return to the country despite being subject to mobilization. There are countless other privileged Ukrainians who have fled illegally without any repercussions at all from the state and who have been able to make successful careers abroad during the war. Political scientist Yuriy Romanenko told *Strana* that the bill on criminal

liability for escaping from Ukraine indicates the formation in Ukraine of a “dictatorial regime”. In his opinion, with such decisions, the Zelensky government “is creating a revolutionary situation in wartime with its own hands.”

The proposed crackdown on draft dodgers is an indictment of the authoritarian Zelensky regime and the entire proxy war waged by Western imperialism under the fraudulent banner of defending “democracy” in Ukraine and over the bodies of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians.

Despite previous internal polling showing largely positive support for the war, the hundreds of thousands of military age men fleeing the country either legally or illegally testifies to a very different sentiment among the country’s working class. While mass protests have yet to erupt over the war, it is clear that huge numbers of Ukrainians want no part of it. A Gallup poll in early July found that 69 percent of Ukrainians favor a negotiated end to the war as soon as possible. Only 24 percent support continuing to fight until victory, by far the lowest figure since the beginning of the war.

The bill’s introduction takes place just as Russia has steadily advanced in the Donbass region, exposing Ukraine’s “porous” front lines which are short of soldiers as Ukrainian men continue to flee the country to avoid mobilization. These advances, which have come at a tremendous cost to both Ukrainian and Russian lives, are part of the efforts of the Russian oligarchy to bolster its negotiating position in the ongoing talks with Donald Trump about a settlement of the conflict.

According to the United Kingdom’s Defense Ministry, Russia has been advancing faster each month since March of this year and likely captured between 500 and 550 square kilometers in July alone.

In addition to advancing into the Dnipropetrovsk province in June for the first time since the war began, Russian forces have continued their encirclement of the logistics hub of Pokrovsk. The city was previously home to over 60,000 people but only 1,000 now remain as a result of the war.

While the Ukrainian government closely guards the true number of casualties in the war, experts such as Ukrainian-Canadian political science professor Ivan Katchanovski estimates that between 160,000—200,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed with about

640,000—800,000 injured. Whatever the exact number, it is clear that the number of dead soldiers in a country with a pre-war population of under 40 million represents a demographic proportion of death not seen in Europe since World War II.



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