

# New Ukrainian Defense Minister reveals scale of desertions, draft dodgers

**Jason Melanovski****23 January 2026**

Mykhailo Fedorov, the newly-appointed Defense Minister of Ukraine, publicly revealed the widespread scale of troop desertions and draft dodgers in comments made to parliament last week during his own confirmation hearings.

According to Fedorov, around 2 million Ukrainians are evading the draft while some 200,000 Ukrainian soldiers have deserted their positions without permission.

Information on desertions, along with the number of Ukrainian soldiers killed as a result of the now four-year-long NATO proxy war, has been closely guarded by the right-wing government of President Volodymyr Zelensky. Government officials rarely comment on such figures. When they have done so in the past, they were obviously lying. For instance, Zelensky absurdly claimed in December 2024 that just 43,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed compared to 198,000 Russian soldiers killed.

Despite Fedorov's seemingly candid admission, these numbers too are likely an understatement of the huge number of Ukrainians who often risk imprisonment or worse to avoid being killed in the imperialist proxy war against Russia.

As the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported to *Ukrainska Pravda* last October, from January 2022 to September 2025 law enforcement officials opened 290,000 criminal cases against Ukrainian soldiers for unauthorized abandonment of a unit or outright desertion. Such numbers clearly exceed Fedorov's claim of 200,000 desertions and do not take into account many more who deserted but have yet to be prosecuted.

Nevertheless, Fedorov's admission underscores the fact that despite a massive pro-war propaganda operation being carried out both within Ukraine and the

West, working-class Ukrainians privately hold very different views.

As Ukrainian journalists reported for the WSWS last September, the mass desertion of personnel from the Ukrainian Armed Forces has already become one of the largest acts of civil disobedience in the country's history since 1991.

In comparison, just 50,000 US soldiers deserted during World War II, largely in the European theater of the war, while the United Kingdom reported 100,000 during its entire six-year history in the deadliest war of the 20th century.

Fedorov, like his three predecessors as defense minister during wartime, has vowed to reform the defense ministry and take on systemic issues "that have accumulated over the years."

Fedorov also reported that the defense ministry is facing a shortfall of \$6.9 billion in funding, despite receiving over \$100 billion in military aid from its Western backers since the start of the war in February 2022.

Zelensky's previous defense ministers have been directly or indirectly forced to resign following a series of corruption and kickback scandals involving military procurement, making it clear that for the ruling class in Ukraine, the war has served as a means to get rich quick.

Throughout the course of the war, desertion schemes have continued to hamper the Ukrainian military's ability to man its 600-mile front line against the steadily advancing Russian forces.

Earlier this month, law enforcement officials arrested two Lviv residents for running a trafficking operation in which they assisted Ukrainian men fleeing the war for the cost of \$13,000 to illegally cross the border into Hungary.

The average monthly salary in Ukraine is just \$600, making a sum of \$13,000 equivalent to nearly two years of wages.

Under current Ukrainian law, all men between the ages of 18 and 60 must register with the military, while only those aged 25 to 60 are subject to forced mobilization.

Ukraine's martial law also forbids all men aged 23 to 60 who are suitable for military service from exiting the war-torn country. Prior to August of last year, men 18-22 were generally prohibited from leaving the country.

Despite these rules, in December 2023 BBC Ukraine estimated that 768,000 Ukrainian men had fled the country to the EU.

Earlier in August of last year, the country underwent another mass exodus after it relaxed rules on men 18 to 22 from leaving the country after being previously banned.

Just two months later in October, the Telegraph reported that 100,000 men had rapidly left the country in the wake of the changes using data from the Polish border guard.

According to the Telegraph, "Polish data show that from January through August—just before the rule change—about 45,300 Ukrainian men aged 18–22 entered Poland. Over the next two months, the total more than doubled to 98,000, averaging roughly 1,600 per day."

In December, Al-Jazeera reported on the record number of Ukrainian soldiers abandoning their posts. Speaking to Al-Jazeera, Tymofey, a 36-year-old office worker from Kiev who had been forcibly conscripted in April of last year, explained his reasons for deserting after realizing he would soon be sent to the front as cannon fodder with no chance of survival.

"There's zero training. They don't care that I won't survive the very first attack," Tymofey said.

At the time of the report, Tymofey had not been officially charged with desertion yet and therefore would not count in the official desertion numbers cited by Fedorov in his remarks to parliament.

In explaining the reason for his non-prosecution to Al-Jazeera after deserting the army, Tymofey stated a well-known but unreported fact among men of military age in Ukraine. "Half the country is on the run," Tymofey said.



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