

Fewer Bodies or Cheaper Bodies?

*What a New Wave of Russian
Mobilization Would Do to the
Wages of Those Who Stay Behind*

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Executive Summary

A new Russian mobilization is usually discussed in terms of manpower, but it would also reach deep into the labor market. Since 2022, the war has drawn men out of civilian work, and the state has become the biggest bidder for low-skill male labor in Russia, paying contract soldiers several times what civilian employers offer the same men. A call-up would change both at once. It would take more men out of work, and it would let the Kremlin fill its ranks by order instead of paying the going contract rate. We used sixteen months of Russian vacancy data, regional decrees, and casualty records to work out what that would mean for the workers who stay behind.

This paper's key findings are as follows:

- **The military industry has cut hiring sharply.** Weapons and aviation manufacturers cut advertised positions by 37% over the past year, other military industries by 14%, and drone makers by 13%, while the civilian market grew by 7%. Military-industry wages rose by 6% vs. 15% for civilian pay. Most of the civilian growth comes from a few state-financed megaprojects tied to Kremlin-connected and foreign contractors; without them, the rest of the civilian labor market shrank by 3%.
- **The military recruits from the bottom of the labor market.** 94% of advertised military positions ask for neither experience nor qualification, compared with 46% of civilian vacancies. About a third of military-industry vacancies target the same workers. The exception is Alabuga, Tatarstan's drone campus, which hires the same men as the recruiting offices at about a sixth of the contract pay.
- **Sign-on bonuses work like a marketing tool.** The median payment rose from 1.5 million rubles to 2.5 million over two years. Many payments carry an expiration date, are extended a month at a time, or are cut and then restored. Increases in regional payments appear to have little to do with local economic conditions. Regions raise the payment after losing more men, which points to a shrinking pool of willing recruits. Political timing and the capacity to coerce help explain the rest.
- **The offer is enormous next to what these men could earn elsewhere.** The contract wage alone is about five times civilian pay. With the sign-on bonus added, one year of service is worth a median of about nine years of local income, ranging from about seven years in Kirov to nearly fourteen in Kabardino-Balkaria. Veteran benefits such as loan forgiveness, land, and grants come on top.
- **Removing men raises wages, but only slightly.** Regions that have sent more soldiers have seen faster real wage growth: about 0.1 to 0.2 p.p. for every 100,000 men. A draft mostly replaces the roughly 400,000 men a year the contract system takes; only the excess adds to scarcity. This implies about 0.1 to 0.2 points for a call-up of 500,000, and 0.6 to 1.2 points for a million.
- **The money that mobilization withdraws is far larger than the gain.** The military's offer accounts for more than a quarter of all money offered to this pool of workers, while taking about 4% of them. Sign-on payments alone come to about 1 trillion rubles a year. The scarcity gain would be worth 20 to 200 billion rubles to the pool's wages; the withdrawn money is five to more than fifty times larger. For scarcity to come out ahead, almost none of that money could have propped up civilian pay.
- **A mobilization would most likely leave the low-skill workforce poorer, not richer.** The small wage gain would be spread thinly across everyone who stays. The loss would fall on the men and regions that now receive the contract money, most heavily where local pay is lowest. Scarcity would only catch up with a call-up of three and a half million men or more.

1. How Mobilization Reaches the Labor Market

A new mobilization is usually discussed in terms of manpower, but it would also reach deep into the Russian labor market. Since 2022, the war has drawn men out of civilian work, and the state has become the highest bidder for low-skill male labor, paying contract soldiers several times what civilian employers offer the same men. A call-up would change both at once: it would take more men out of civilian employment, and it would let the state fill its ranks by order rather than by paying the going rate. This paper looks at what that combination would mean for the workers who stay behind: who the military competes with for labor, what it pays, how much the departure of men has already raised civilian wages, and what a mobilization would change.

This plays out against an already tight, inflationary labor market. Consumer prices were rising at 6.3% a year in August 2026—close to the real-terms erosion of the frozen contract wage this paper discusses in later sections—and the unemployment rate has sat at 2.1 to 2.3% since mid-2025 according to Rosstat, among the lowest readings on record and well below the roughly 4.5 to 5% typical in the years just before the full-scale invasion.¹ A labor market already this close to full employment has little slack to absorb a large withdrawal of workers without wages moving.

Recruitment has itself been falling through 2026: independent estimates put daily contract enlistment at 800 to 1,000 in the first quarter, down from 1,000 to 1,200 a year earlier, for a first-quarter total of roughly 70,500 recruits, even as the average regional sign-on bonus reached an all-time high in March.² Moscow's own intake also declined between spring 2025 and spring 2026, while the national total for the fourth quarter of 2025 came in at half the level recorded a year earlier.³ At an estimated 30,000 recruits a month nationally, the current flow roughly offsets battlefield losses rather than expanding the force, which makes mobilization more likely.⁴

The labor-market consequences would depend on how such a mobilization interacts with the existing contract system. If compulsory recruitment largely replaced voluntary recruitment, it would reduce the need for the exceptionally high compensation currently used to attract recruits while adding relatively little to the number of workers leaving civilian employment. A mobilization substantially larger than the existing recruitment flow would create a larger additional scarcity effect.

How mobilization plays out in the labor market also matters beyond the wage figure. If wages rose for those who remain, the Kremlin could present a call-up as costly at the front but tolerable, even beneficial, at home, much as it has presented the war economy since 2022. If instead the contract money disappeared, the households and regions that have supplied the most recruits would lose the income that has made the war years bearable at the same time as they **join the military ranks**.

Section 2 identifies the civilian workers that military recruitment competes for and how far the military industry overlaps with them; Section 3 measures what the state pays for a recruit; Section 4 measures how much the departure of men has already raised civilian wages; and Section 5 brings these together into an assessment of what a mobilization would do to wages.

2. Who the Military is Bidding Against

The military industry might be expected to compete with the army for the same low-skill workers, softening any scarcity effect a draft would create. For the most part it does not. Military-industrial hiring is contracting even as the civilian market grows, the premium it pays is mostly a function of job mix rather than a price war for workers, and the profile it recruits overlaps only partly with the one the army wants.

¹ [Rosstat](#): annual CPI inflation of 6.3% in August 2026, up from 6.0% in July; [CBR](#): unemployment at 2.3% in July 2026, up slightly from a series record low of 2.1% in August 2025; Russian unemployment averaged 4.5 to 4.8% in 2019 and 2021.

² [Janis Kluge](#), "Russian recruitment fell by 20% in Q1/2026," 12 Apr 2026.

³ [Verstka](#), "Контрактники закончились: будет ли новая мобилизация," 24 Jun 2026 (updated 15 Sep 2026).

⁴ [UNITED24 Media](#), "Russia Is Paying More Than Ever for Soldiers—But Fewer Are Signing Up," 13 Apr 2026.

Only Alabuga, the drone-manufacturing campus in Tatarstan, competes directly for the same men as the recruiting offices, and it offers them far less.

Between August 2025 and August 2026, the civilian market advertised 7% more positions while heavy-industry weapons and aviation manufacturers advertised 37% fewer; other military industries fell 14% and drone makers 13%. Military occupations themselves held roughly flat over the same window. Quantity and price moving together identify the cause in the military industry: manufacturing is posting fewer jobs and also paying relatively less, its like-for-like premium slipping from 1.25 to 1.23 times civilian while its wage growth ran at 6% against 15% for civilian pay. A sector short of workers would be raising pay; falling quantity together with a falling relative price indicates weaker demand for labor, consistent with fewer orders rather than fewer applicants.⁵ Independent reporting corroborates the contraction from outside this panel: defense-enterprise wages fell roughly 10% year on year in August 2025, and job postings across the sector dropped to their lowest level since the invasion began, below even January 2022.⁶

It is sometimes argued that equipping half a million mobilized men would create offsetting factory work. That requires military industry to be hiring, and the data show it is not: labor demand from war production, which could otherwise support wages, is already weakening.

The drone industry illustrates the pattern most sharply. Alabuga in Tatarstan alone carries 86% of all drone-maker positions and hires in a summer wave; compared August to August, Alabuga is down 12% and the rest of the drone industry—57 employers—is down 25%, while weapons and aviation manufacturing are down 37%.

Civilian vacancy growth in Figure 1 is concentrated almost entirely in a handful of state-backed energy and infrastructure megaprojects. NOVATEK's Arctic LNG 2 terminal near Murmansk, Gazprom's Ust-Luga gas-processing complex in Leningrad Oblast, and the Amur gas complexes account for most of the regional growth. The projects are also disproportionately state-financed and politically connected. Velesstroy, general contractor at Arctic LNG 2, was 85%-owned until October 2023 by Krešimir Filipović, the reported common-law husband of Moscow deputy mayor Anastasia Rakova; Velesstroy was also general contractor for Putin's Gelendzhik residence; Filipović is now under UK sanctions.⁷ Ust-Luga's developer, RusKhimAlyans, drew 900 billion rubles from the National Wealth Fund⁸, and its parent RusGazDobycha is reported to be controlled by Arkady Rotenberg through a manager holding stakes on his behalf.⁹

Chinese involvement extends beyond labor supply. China National Chemical Engineering & Construction Corporation Seven (CN) is the leading construction employer in Leningrad Oblast; in Amur, Sinopec (CN) holds 40% of the Gas Chemical Complex outright and China Eximbank backed it with a \$5 billion loan.^{10 11}

Tatarstan's leading construction employer, Yamata (TR), was building Sibur's 182 billion rubles "Styrene Chain" plant in Nizhnekamsk—until Sibur terminated the contract on 2 September 2026 over "insufficient personnel mobilization," after roughly 1,000 mostly Uzbek and Tajik workers left the site the month before citing unpaid wages and Ukrainian drone strikes on the industrial zone. The project was 65% complete; Yamata had already been retreating from Amur, where its position is now net negative.¹²

Excluding these megaproject contractors, the rest of the civilian labor market fell by 3%. The demand growth in Figure 1 disaggregates these foreign-contracted, state-financed, and politically connected megaprojects, and the rest of the civilian economy.

⁵ MIC workers typically hold mobilization deferrals, so a draft would not withdraw their labor at the same rate as elsewhere. Advertised positions measure hiring intentions, not employment: a sector can shed advertised demand while holding its workforce.

⁶ [UNIAN](#), citing Novaya Gazeta Europe, 23 Sep 2025.

⁷ [agents.media](#).

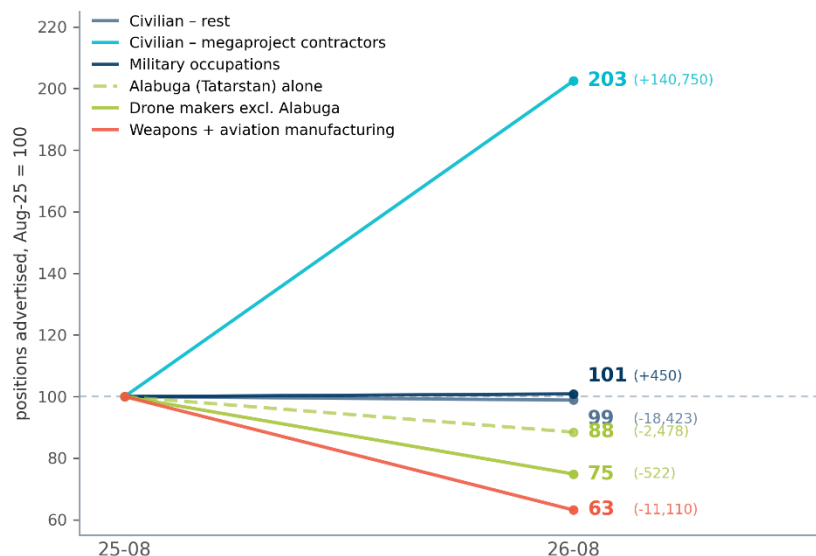
⁸ [Kommersant](#).

⁹ [RBC](#).

¹⁰ [AidData](#).

¹¹ [Interfax](#).

¹² [EADaily](#).

Figure 1: Positions advertised by segment, August 2025 = 100

Source: Headhunting portal vacancy postings, KSE Institute

Military employers pay more than the civilian market, and the raw gap is large, but most of it reflects the mix of jobs rather than higher pay for the same job. Within the same profession, military industry pays 13 to 19% above civilian and drone makers 35%; army administrative entities, such as the state recruitment offices, advertise slightly below market for the same occupation. Military industry hires a different bundle—more skilled trades and engineers, concentrated in higher-wage regions—so it competes for specific skills in specific places rather than across the labor market as a whole.

For a draft, what matters more is whether military industry wants the same worker as the army. Section 3 prices the army's bid, and Section 3.1 returns to how much of military industry's hiring overlaps with the army's recruit pool.

3. What the State Pays for a Soldier

The state's bid for recruits is unusually large; it is competing for workers whose civilian alternatives pay far less. The military recruits overwhelmingly from the low-skill end of the labor market, where workers typically have neither formal qualifications nor substantial prior experience. Against those alternatives, even the standing military wage represents a large premium, while regional sign-on bonuses raise first-year compensation much further. The chapter first identifies the workers targeted by military recruitment, then compares military and civilian pay, examines how sign-on bonuses vary across regions and over time, and finally measures the value of the total offer relative to local civilian incomes.

3.1. Who the Military Recruits

The military recruits overwhelmingly from the low-skill end of the labor market. 94% of advertised military positions require neither prior experience nor formal qualifications, compared with 46% of civilian vacancies—13 million of 28 million advertised positions. The recruitment pool is nearly half the advertised labor market, and it is concentrated in the lower-paid part of it.

The military industry overlaps with that pool, but only partly. Weapons manufacturing asks for neither experience nor a credential in 36% of its positions, aviation manufacturing in 37%, and the drone industry outside Alabuga in 38%—roughly a third of their vacancies are for the same kind of worker the military wants, which is below the civilian average of 46% and far under half the military figure of 94%. Most of their hiring is

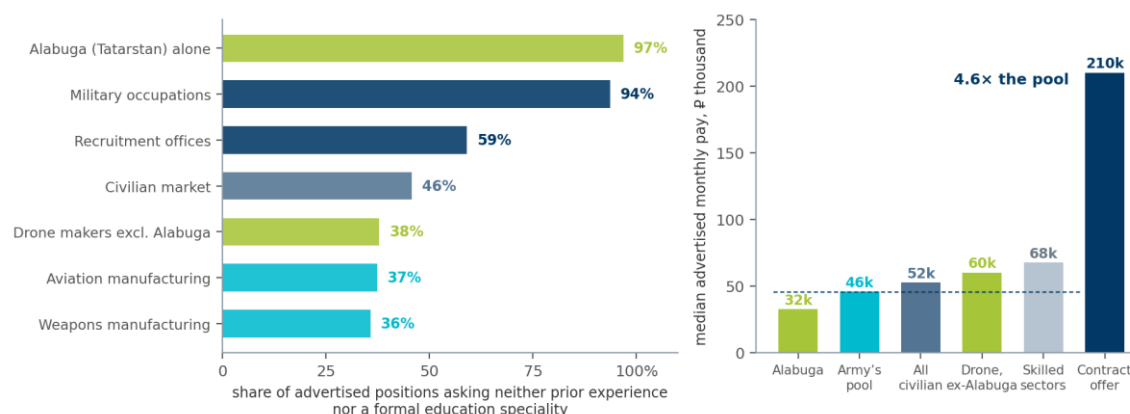
for credentialed workers outside the army's current recruitment profile, but a third is still a substantial share, and it is the part that a draft limited to today's no-experience, no-credential profile would actually compete for.

The scope assumed throughout this section—and in Section 5—is a conservative assumption about how a mobilization would work. If a draft instead pulled on the whole working-age male population rather than only on men with no experience and no credential, the picture would change in two ways. The pool the military draws from would grow by an order of magnitude, from the roughly 30 million people in low-skill jobs used in Section 5 to something closer to the full male civilian workforce, which on its own makes the scarcity effect per man removed smaller, simply because the same number of men is a smaller share of a much larger pool. But the bid-withdrawal effect would widen to match it: an indiscriminate draft competes directly with military industry's own skilled hiring—the engineers and tradespeople who make up most of what these plants advertise—and with the wider civilian market for credentialed labor that this paper has otherwise treated as untouched by military recruitment.

Alabuga is the exception. The single Tatarstan campus carries 197,000 of the 228,000 drone-industry positions in the data, and 97% of them ask for neither experience nor a credential; its advertised mix runs 142,000 positions in unqualified work, 30,000 in basic trades, 11,000 in services, and 7,000 in transport. The median advertised wage is 32,500 rubles—a sixth of the contract offer—which makes Alabuga the only military-industrial employer competing directly for the same men as the recruiting offices, at a far lower wage. The rest of the drone industry looks like the rest of manufacturing: its 31,000 positions across 57 employers sit in production and mechanical engineering, require a degree an order of magnitude more often than Alabuga does, and pay a median of 60,000 rubles, above the civilian market rather than below it. Compared like for like, in the same region, industry, and month, drone makers outside Alabuga pay 1.17 times civilian, against 1.14 for weapons manufacturing and 1.19 for aviation.

Measured against what the recruit pool earns, the state's offer is larger still. In mid-2026 the median advertised wage in the predominantly unskilled industries was 45,500 rubles, against 67,500 in the credentialed industries and 52,500 across the civilian market as a whole; the contract offer at the same date was 210,000. Relative to the pay of the men it targets, the contract offer is about 5 times as high (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Recruit profile and pay by segment



Source: Headhunting portal vacancy postings, KSE Institute

Note: Left: share of advertised positions requiring neither prior experience nor formal education, by segment. Right: median advertised monthly pay in mid-2026 by segment of the civilian market, against the advertised contract-soldier rate.

3.2. What the Military Pays

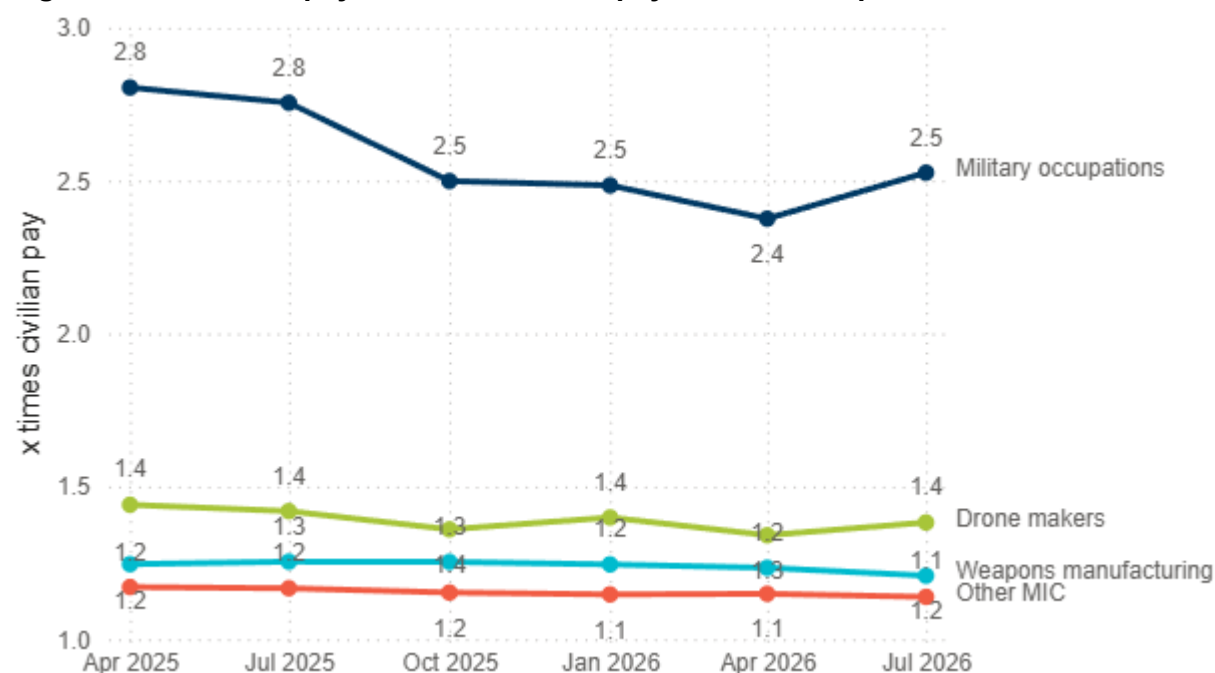
Even before sign-on bonuses, military recruitment offers a large premium over civilian work. Compared in the same month—military vacancies advertise about 4 times civilian pay. In mid-2026 the median military occupation offered 210,000 rubles against a civilian median of 49,000. For a man choosing between a job and a contract, that is the largest pay rise available to him anywhere in the

economy, and taking it off the table as a result of compulsory mobilization is a serious loss to anyone already holding a contract or counting on signing one.

The military rate itself, however, has not moved, which implies a real cut. The median advertised military wage sits at exactly 210,000 rubles in fourteen of the sixteen months in the data and never rises above it—a posted federal rate rather than a market price. Consumer prices rose 6% over the same window, so the offer is 6% lower in real terms. The civilian median, by contrast, rose from 40,000 to 49,015 rubles—15% in real terms—and the civilian 25th percentile rose 12%. The ratio of the **military** rate to civilian median pay has fallen from 5 to 4 in sixteen months without the state cutting anything on paper.

The posted rate is the relevant figure here, because a drafted man receives a decreed amount rather than a competitive wage, and the posted rate approximates that amount. Holding it fixed through a year of double-digit civilian wage growth amounts to an unannounced cut. The compression shows up across the board: averaged over the first and last six months of the series, the like-for-like (same profession, same month) military premium fell from 2.8 to 2.5 times civilian pay, and every military-adjacent employer lost ground to the civilian market over the year—drone makers from 1.43 to 1.36 times, weapons manufacturing from 1.2 to 1.1 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Advertised pay relative to civilian pay for the same profession



Source: Headhunting portal vacancy postings, KSE Institute

3.3. The Sign-On Bonus and Regional Variation

Two separate records exist of what a Russian region pays a man for signing a military contract: the orders signed by governors that set the payment, and the figures quoted in military recruitment advertisements. A third instrument exists alongside these two but is not captured in this paper: a growing number of regions now also pay a referral “per-head” fee to whoever brings in the recruit, separate from and additional to what the recruit himself receives.¹³

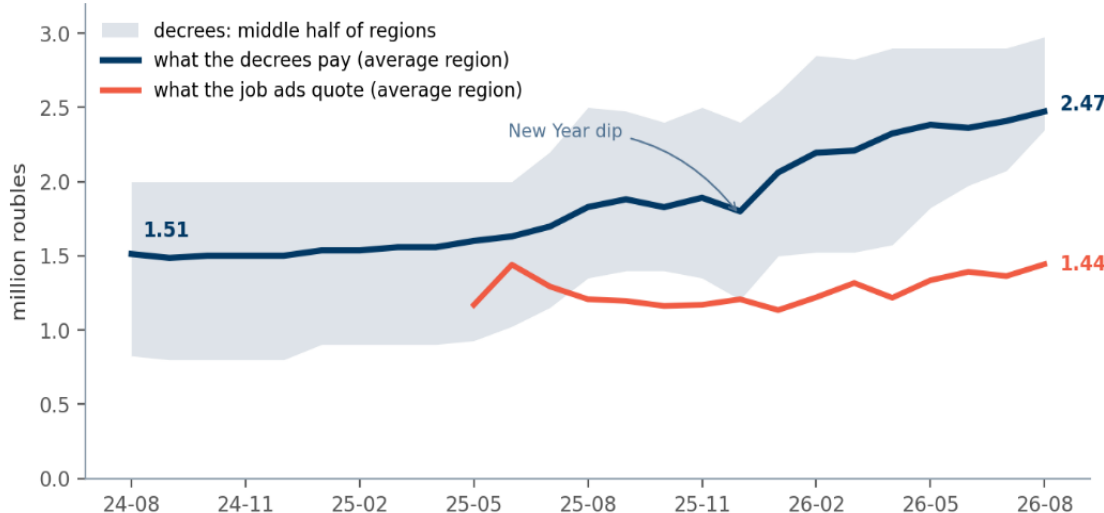
The median payment on signing rose from 1.5 million rubles in August 2024 to 1.8 million a year later and 2.5 million by August 2026—a fifth in the first year and a third in the second. All three figures include the federal component of 400,000 rubles, unchanged since July 2024, so the movement is regional

¹³ [Moscow Times \(Russian service\)](#), “Если вербовка не работает—будет мобилизация,” 7 Aug 2026; [Kyiv Post](#), “Russian Regions Ramp Up Cash Bonuses for War Recruiters as Volunteer Numbers Fall,” 7 Aug 2026.

money. Through 2025 the increase was gradual. It stalled and briefly reversed at the New Year, when several regions let a payment lapse or cut it before the new budget opened—Stavropol Krai cut its regional component from 1.6 million to 400,000 on 24 December and restored it three weeks later. The same reversal-then-restoration pattern showed up elsewhere: Chuvashia, Tatarstan, Mari El, Samara, and Orenburg all cut their regional payment to the federal floor in October 2025 and then restored it above its pre-cut level by January 2026—Chuvashia's regional component alone moving from 400,000 back up to 2.1 million rubles.¹⁴ From January 2026 the increase accelerated sharply, adding almost 700,000 rubles in eight months.

The figures quoted in recruitment advertising rose far more slowly, from 1.2 million in May 2025 to 1.4 million in August 2026, and the gap between the two records widened through the period. By August 2026 the advertised figure was roughly 1.1 million rubles below the decreed one. Commercial aggregators of regional payments put the national average at 2.3 to 2.4 million in late August 2026, close to the decree record and well above the advertising (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: The price of a contract soldier, August 2024–August 2026, federal plus regional payment on signing, in million rubles



Source: regional decrees and regional press; headhunting portal vacancy postings; KSE Institute analysis

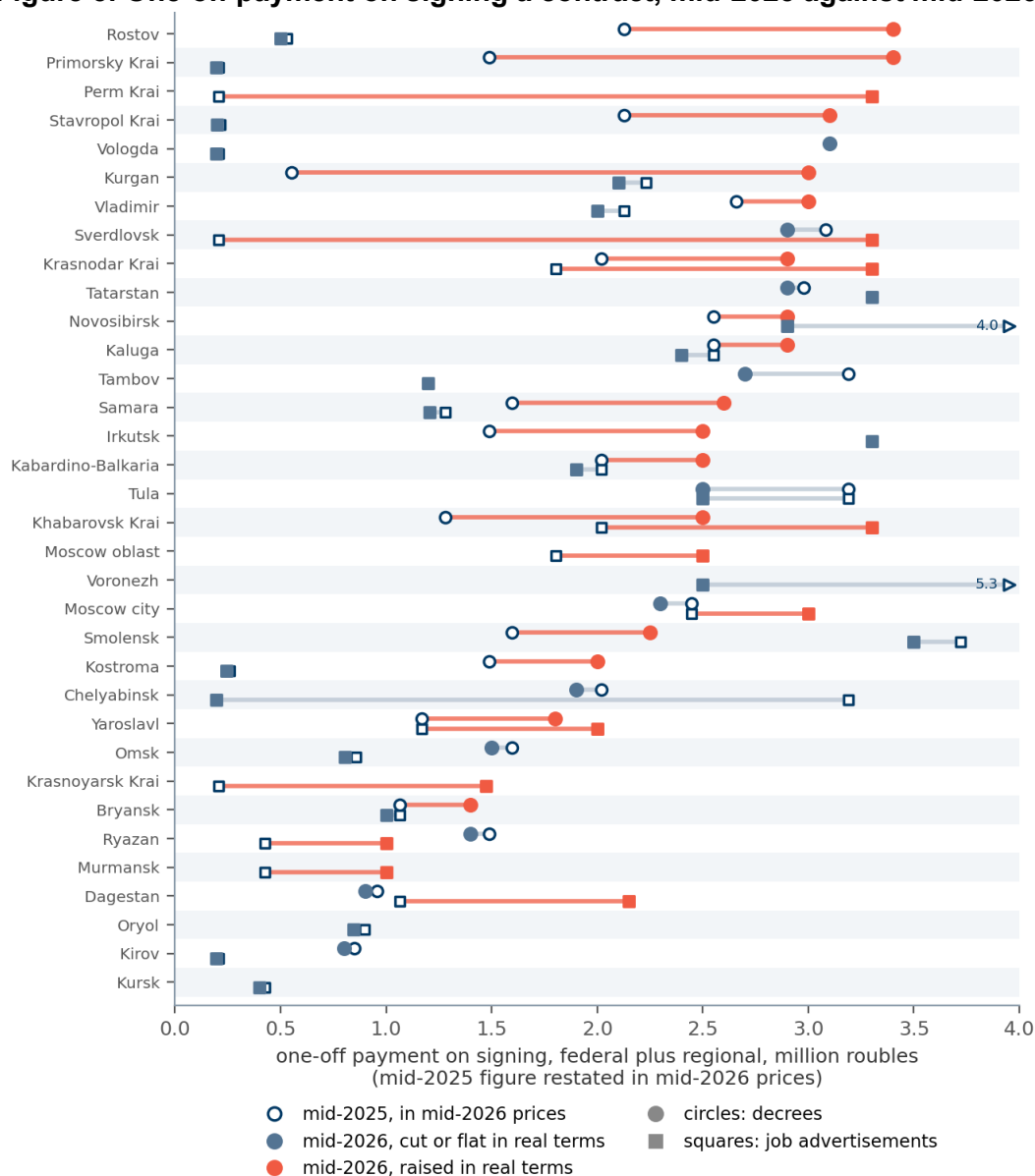
Of the 26 regions whose decreed payment can be measured at both ends of the year, 17 raised it, seven left it unchanged in rubles, and two cut it (see Figure 5). The median region added 500,000 rubles. Five regions—Kurgan, Primorsky Krai, Rostov, Khabarovsk Krai, and Irkutsk—account for about half of the total increase, adding between 1.1 and 2.5 million rubles each. The nine regions that did not raise include some of the wealthiest and most industrialized—Moscow city, Sverdlovsk, and Chelyabinsk—alongside Dagestan, among the poorest. Tula cut by 500,000 rubles and Tambov by 300,000. Neither prosperity nor how heavily a region has already been drawn on separates the two groups.

The instrument behaves like a marketing tool. A quarter of all recorded payments carry an expiry date, with a median window of 67 days and eleven shorter than two months. Dagestan's two-million-ruble offer in October 2025 applied to contracts signed within a three-week window. Where a payment is time-limited it is often extended rather than raised: Tomsk Oblast set two million rubles on 1 September 2025 and extended it four separate times, to 31 October, 31 December, 31 March, and 30 April, without changing the amount. Reversals are common—Tatarstan went from 3.1 million in August 2025 to 800,000 in October and back to 2.9 million in January. And some headline figures are not the general rate at all: Kabardino-Balkaria's 2.4 million and Dagestan's 3.0 million apply only to reserve-regiment contracts. Deadlines, monthly extensions,

¹⁴ [Moscow Times](#), "Regions Reintroduce Huge Sign-On Bonuses for Contract Soldiers After Lowering Payments in 2025," 14 Jan 2026.

and headline rates that apply only to a narrow category resemble a recruitment campaign more than a pay scale, and there are widespread reports of regional authorities disputing or delaying payments after the fact.

Figure 5: One-off payment on signing a contract, mid-2025 against mid-2026



Source: regional decrees and regional press; headhunting portal vacancy postings; KSE Institute analysis

The timing of bonus increases points to exhaustion. Using confirmed volunteer deaths as a proxy for how many men a region has already sent, regions that had lost more men in the preceding six months went on to raise their sign-on payment more: each additional million rubles of payment is associated with about 8% more volunteer deaths in the half-year before it took effect. The raises did not bring a measurable return: deaths three to eight months later, the window in which new recruits would reach the front, show no detectable increase. Taken together, the payment behaves like a defense of a shrinking pool—raised after a region has drawn down its willing recruits, and buying little beyond keeping the flow from falling further. This matches the national picture: enlistment fell through early 2026 even as the average regional payment reached an all-time high.

Neither the breadth of the local labor market, nor local civilian wages, nor population is related to how much it raised the sign-on bonus. The one pattern that survives is convergence: regions that were furthest behind raised by the most, and the middle half of the panel increased from 1.4 to 2.4 million rubles

in August 2025 to 1.9 to 2.9 million a year later. Regions appear to be moving toward a common national rate of roughly 2.5 million rather than responding to local conditions.

Two non-economic explanations remain. The first is political timing: payments are set by governors, and the decision to announce an increase or extend one for another month sits alongside budget cycles and the need to demonstrate loyalty to the center—the clustering of increases in early 2026 and of cuts at the turn of the fiscal year fits that calendar at least as well as any recruitment arithmetic. The second is the capacity to coerce—where authorities and security structures can apply pressure through employers, debt, migration status, or the courts, recruitment can be sustained without raising the price. Dagestan most obviously invites this reading: among the poorest regions in the panel, where the payment buys more years of local earnings than almost anywhere else, it held its general regional component at 500,000 rubles all year while regions several times richer bid past three million.

The sign-on bonus is a competition for bodies whose expected time in service—and survival—is often short, which is why a large payment today outweighs a wage a recruit may never live to keep collecting. Geographic discrimination—paying more where recruitment is hardest rather than raising the standing wage everywhere—remains central to it, and the one-off payment is the part of the offer that a mobilization removes entirely. The pressure did not ease once the panel here closed: regions kept raising bonuses through the following July as enlistment continued to fall, consistent with a payment being used to defend a shrinking pool of volunteers rather than held at a settled rate.¹⁵

3.4. What the Total Offer is Worth Locally

The scale of the military offer becomes clearer when it is compared with the earnings available to the workers the military principally recruits. Of the 23 regions with a decreed payment measurable at both ends of the year and a matched local civilian wage, the frozen federal contract wage of 210,000 rubles a month runs to a median of 4.8 times local civilian pay; with the decreed sign-on bonus added, one year of contract service is worth a median of about 9 years of local civilian income—ranging from 6.8 years in Kirov to nearly 14 in Kabardino-Balkaria (see Figure 6). This still understates the total transfer: contract veterans also become eligible for loan forgiveness of up to 10 million rubles, one-off land certificates, and business start-up grants, plus university admission quotas—benefits not sized here because they are irregular and conditional, but which add to the transfer already measured.¹⁶

A drafted man gets only the lower-bound wage and no bonus, so what is withdrawn from the local labor market is worth several years of local income to the household that currently holds it—and most in the regions where local pay is lowest. Section 5 weighs this loss against the scarcity gain the rest of the workforce receives.

4. Wages Rise Where Men Leave

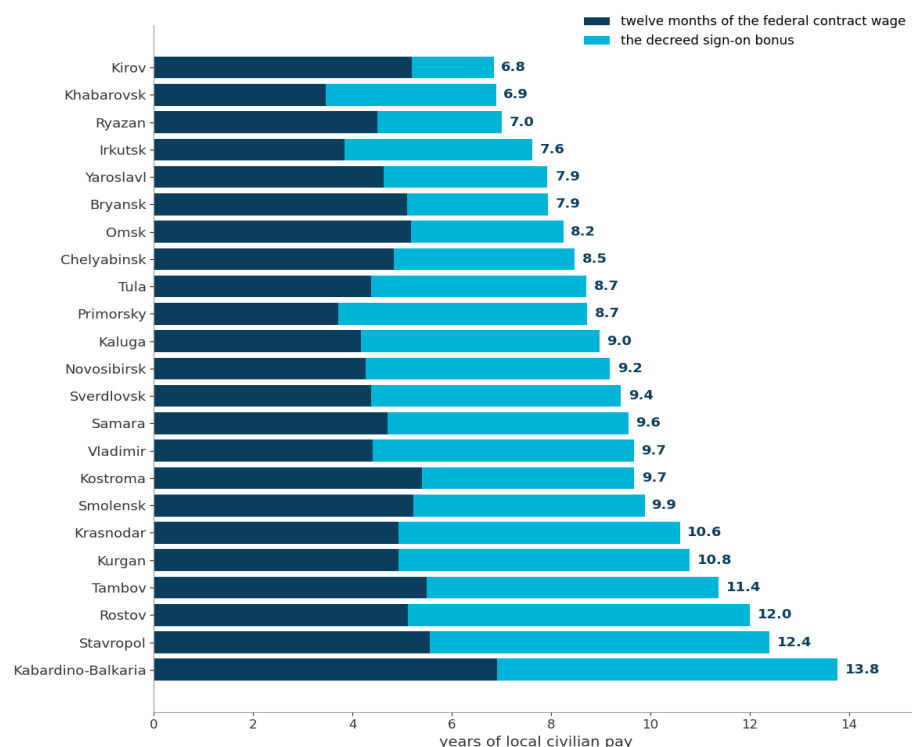
The loss of men to military service is associated with faster civilian wage growth in the regions that have supplied more recruits. Across 78 regions, real civilian wage growth over the past year tracks how many contract soldiers a region has sent, and is unrelated to how much of a region's local labor demand comes from military and military-industrial employers. The result survives controls for each region's pre-war wage trend and for the fact that poorer regions send more men to war, and it gives a direct measure of how much removing men from civilian work raises the pay of those who remain. This is consistent with the national backdrop in Section 1: a labor market that is exceptionally tight has little spare capacity to fill vacated jobs without paying more for them. Independent reporting describes the same tightness from the demand side: Russian industry was estimated to be short of some 2 million workers in 2025, with unemployment holding at 2.1%, and wages in regions with concentrated military-industrial

¹⁵ [Novaya Gazeta Europe](#), "Russian regions raise military recruitment bonuses as enlistment falls," 30 Jul 2026.

¹⁶ [Novaya Gazeta Europe](#), "From Trench to Grave," 20 Mar 2026.

production up 30 to 60% since 2022. The same reporting points to a partial offset this section does not capture: falling Central Asian migration after the 2024 deportation drives has been met in part by recruiting foreign fighters directly into the army—over 27,000 by March 2026, up from 18,000 in late 2025—rather than into the civilian labor pool, which would blunt rather than reverse the scarcity effect estimated above.¹⁷

Figure 6: Years of local civilian pay equal to one year of contract service, by region, mid-2026



Source: regional decrees and regional press; headhunting portal vacancy postings; KSE Institute analysis

This section measures the relationship using confirmed casualty data as a proxy for how many men each region has sent, matched against regional wage and price panels.¹⁸ Controlling for the initial wage level, each additional contract-soldier death per 100,000 residents is associated with 0.040 p.p. of extra real annual wage growth, and 0.028 excluding the outlier Chukotka. Confirmed deaths are a small and undercounted fraction of everyone who has actually left for war—they leave out the wounded, the still-serving, and the discharged—so the true outflow, and the wage effect that accumulates with it, are larger than the death count alone suggests.

A natural objection is that poorer regions were converging upward before the war, so the relationship could be pre-existing catch-up rather than anything to do with the war. Controlling explicitly for each region's own 2017–21 wage trend, measured from the municipal panel, leaves the coefficient essentially unchanged, and the pre-war trend itself carries no explanatory power in this regression.

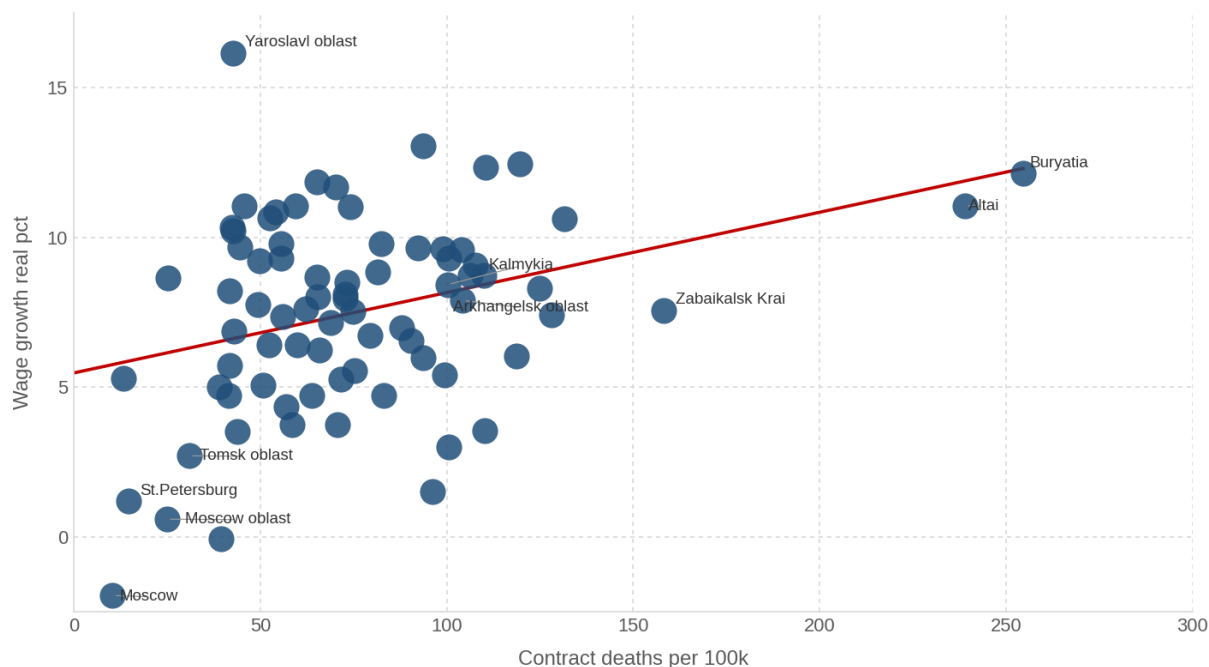
Because a draft withdraws men whether or not it pays them, this estimate can be applied to the additional worker outflow caused by mobilization. Mediazona has confirmed 88,851 contract deaths, 61 per 100,000 residents; against a cumulative contract intake of somewhere between 1.2 and 1.8 million, that implies 13 to 20 men withdrawn for each unit of the measure. On that conversion, a draft of 300,000 implies roughly a third to two thirds of a percentage point of extra real wage growth in the year it happens, 500,000 implies half a point to a point, and a million implies one to two points—for scale, the wage-growth

¹⁷ [UNIAN](#), 28 Apr 2026.

¹⁸ Contract-soldier deaths per 100,000 residents, from Mediazona's confirmed-death list by region and troop type, used as a proxy for cumulative contract outflow. Civilian wage growth is fixed-composition within industry and deflated by each region's own monthly consumer price index, so a region with faster local inflation is not credited with faster real wage growth.

gap already sitting between an average and a high-outflow region is about two points. The results are the same using all confirmed deaths rather than contract deaths alone (see Figure 7). These figures treat every man called up as an additional departure; Section 5 adjusts them for the men the contract system would have drawn away in any case.

Figure 7: Civilian wage growth vs contract deaths, by region



Source: Mediazona confirmed-casualty data; Headhunting portal vacancy postings; KSE Institute analysis

Note: Chukotka excluded. Wage growth is real, deflated by each region's own consumer price index.

The regional comparison captures what happens to wages when men leave. It does not capture what happens when the state stops paying for them. Section 5 takes that up.

5. What Mobilization Would Do to Wages

Taken together, the earlier sections point to what a call-up would do to the civilian labor market. It would remove men from civilian work, and, because the state would no longer need to buy them, it would take a large amount of money out of the same market. Put on the same monetary scale, the second is far larger than the first.

The military and civilian employers hire from the same pool of men with no experience or qualification. In mid-2026 civilian employers offered that man a median of 49,675 rubles a month; the army offered 418,000 counting the sign-on payment across his first year, 9 times as much.

The military's share of the money offered for this pool far exceeds its share of the workers, whichever way it is counted. Counting postings, the army is 2% of the hiring in this pool and 17% of the money offered for it; counting the number of advertised positions, 6% and 38%; anchoring instead on the outside estimate of 400,000 contracts a year against the pool's own annual hiring, about 4% and 28%. The levels differ because military recruitment postings advertise 10 positions each against 3 for a civilian posting, and those counts are advertising rather than hiring plans—but on all three measures the army's share of the money is six to seven and a half times its share of the workers.

Converting that asymmetry into a wage effect needs an estimate of how large this low-skill pool is and how fast it turns over. The data appendix sets out the assumptions—built from vacancy data,

Rosstat's employment total, and an external turnover estimate—and their range; the working figure used through the rest of this section is a pool of 30 million people turning over into about 10 million hires a year.

A call-up does not add to scarcity one for one. The men already serving on contract have left the civilian pool, and a call-up does not send them back. What a call-up removes beyond the status quo is only the men who would not otherwise have signed a contract: the size of the call-up minus the roughly 400,000 a year the contract system already draws away.¹⁹

Applying the Section 4 estimate of about 0.1 to 0.2 p.p. of real wage growth per 100,000 men to that excess gives the following. A call-up of 300,000 that replaced contract recruitment would add no scarcity at all; 500,000 would add about 0.1 to 0.2 p.p.; a million would add about 0.6 to 1.2 points. These figures assume the draft replaces contract recruitment entirely. If contracts continued alongside it, the extra scarcity would be larger, up to the Section 4 figures, but the state would then still be paying the contract bid. The two effects trade off against each other: the more a draft replaces contracts, the less scarcity it adds and the more of the bid it withdraws.

The contract money is on a different scale. At 400,000 contracts a year and 418,000 rubles a month each, including the amortized sign-on payment, the state's bid comes to about 2 trillion rubles a year directed at this pool. A drafted man receives the standing wage but no sign-on payment (Section 3.4). Even if he is paid the same monthly rate as a contract soldier, the sign-on payments alone, about 1 trillion rubles a year, leave the market.

The scarcity gain can be measured in the same units. The pool's 30 million workers, at around 46,675 rubles a month, earn about 17 trillion rubles a year, so each percentage point of extra wage growth is worth about 170 billion rubles. A call-up of 500,000 would raise the pool's pay by some 20 to 35 billion rubles a year, and a call-up of a million by some 100 to 200 billion. Against that, at least a trillion rubles of sign-on payments would be withdrawn: more than fifty times the scarcity gain in the 500,000 scenario and about five to ten times the gain in the one-million scenario.

Not all of that money would feed through to civilian wages. Part of it is income to recruits' households rather than a price civilian employers have to match. But the army is not simply filling a fixed quota. The sign-on bonuses show it bidding for these men region by region, and an employer who has to compete with a 418,000-ruble offer to keep or hire staff pays more than one facing no such rival, whether or not any particular worker was close to signing a contract. For the scarcity gain to outweigh the withdrawn bid in civilian pay alone, less than about 2 to 3% of the sign-on money would have to have been supporting civilian wages in a call-up of 500,000, and less than 10 to 20% in a call-up of a million. The regional data cannot pin down that share (see Data Appendix). Even so, scarcity would only come out ahead if the military's large bid for workers had almost no effect on the wages around it.

So, mobilization would most likely lower rather than raise the income of the low-skill workforce it draws on. The small wage gain from scarcity would be spread thinly across all the workers who remain. The loss from the withdrawn bid would fall on the men and regions that currently receive it, most heavily where local pay is lowest and one contract year is worth the most years of local income (Section 3.4). Two earlier findings reinforce this. The military industry is shedding jobs rather than hiring (Section 2), so it offers no offsetting demand. And regions have been raising the bonus to defend a shrinking pool of volunteers (Section 3.3), so the money a draft would make unnecessary is growing, not shrinking. Scarcity would only catch up with the sign-on money in a call-up of roughly three and a half to six and a half million men, well beyond the scenarios considered here.

¹⁹Annual contract intake. [IStories](#), 30 May 2025, estimates 374,200–407,200 signed in 2024 from federal spending on sign-on payments; [Janis Kluge](#) estimates roughly 191,000 in H1 2025 from 37 regions' budgets covering 43% of the population, implying 380,000–420,000 a year. Official claims run higher (Belousov 427,000, Medvedev 450,000 for 2024). This paper uses 400,000.

Data Appendix

Advertised wages are not paid wages. They measure the marginal price of labor, which is appropriate for this analysis, but their levels will not match Rosstat wage data. The headhunting portal also over-represents blue-collar, regional, and state-adjacent employers—a skew that suits the comparison with military recruitment but biases the national wage level.

The dataset consists of 16 snapshots from the headhunting portal between May 2025 and August 2026, covering roughly 10 million vacancy-months. Military vacancies are identified using an occupation list applied to vacancy text, while employers are classified by INN. Comparisons are vacancy-weighted and made within profession codes. Ratios compare the same month with the same month, so no inflation adjustment is required. The military series is relatively thin—roughly 2,400 vacancies with an advertised salary per month—and consequently noisy, with August 2026 an outlier relative to June and July.

The skilled/unskilled split is based on a manual review of the 300 largest industry-profession pairs, covering 19 million advertised positions and aggregated into 16 industries. Industry-level shares are necessarily coarse, and several industries are internally mixed, which attenuates the interaction test. The pool measure captures requirements stated by employers, not the characteristics of workers who actually apply. Alabuga is identified as drone-industry postings in Tatarstan, a close but not exact match to the campus itself.

All ratios in Sections 2 and 3 compare observations within the same month and therefore require no price adjustment. Growth rates in Sections 3 and 4 are deflated using the national consumer price index for national series and each region's own index for regional series. The latter matters because regional inflation ranges from 5 to 15% over the year.

The bid-withdrawal effect is not estimated econometrically. The four regional tests return statistically insignificant results because the samples are small and lack statistical power, not because the effect is zero. Section 5 therefore does not rely on a regression coefficient for it. Instead, it compares the size of the withdrawn money with the size of the estimated scarcity gain, and reports what share of that money would have to reach civilian wages for the two to balance.

Sizing assumptions used in Section 5

The low-skill labor pool used in Section 5 is sized using the vacancy data, Rosstat's aggregate employment count, and an external estimate of labor turnover. In the vacancy data, 46% of advertised civilian positions require neither prior experience nor formal education. Because vacancy advertising over-represents high-turnover, low-skill work, this is treated as an upper bound rather than an estimate of the employment share. The true share is not published, so the analysis bounds it between 25 and 50% of employment and uses 40% as its central assumption. Applied to Russian employment of 75 million in June 2026, this gives a pool of around 30 million workers. Applying annual labor turnover of roughly 33% produces around 10 million hires a year. Varying the assumed pool share across the full range gives approximately 6 to 12 million hires annually; Section 5 uses 10 million as its central estimate.

The four regional tests of the bid-withdrawal channel use the local military wage as a multiple of local civilian pay (38 regions), the number of years of local income represented by one year of military compensation (15 regions), and the advertised sign-on bonus, tested both as a matched before-and-after panel (15 regions) and as a cross-section (27 regions). All four return coefficients statistically indistinguishable from zero.

The lack of statistical significance reflects an important power limitation. To distinguish an effect from noise in these samples, a region would need a sign-on bonus one million rubles larger than another region's to

generate 1.8 p.p. more annual wage growth. The observed difference between the highest- and lowest-bonus regions is only 2.7 million rubles, leaving too little variation to identify an effect of the expected size reliably.

The comparison in Section 5 uses the following arithmetic. The Section 4 conversion gives about 0.1 to 0.2 p.p. of real wage growth per 100,000 men removed ($300,000 \rightarrow 0.33\text{--}0.67$; $1\text{ million} \rightarrow 1\text{--}2$). This is applied only to the men removed beyond the 400,000-a-year contract flow. The pool's annual wage bill is $30\text{ million workers} \times 46,675\text{ rubles} \times 12 \approx 16.8\text{ trillion rubles}$, so one percentage point $\approx 168\text{ billion rubles}$. The withdrawn bid is $400,000\text{ contracts} \times 418,000\text{ rubles} \times 12 \approx 2.0\text{ trillion rubles}$ in total, of which the sign-on component is $400,000 \times 2.5\text{ million} \approx 1.0\text{ trillion}$. The break-even shares divide the scarcity gain by the 1-trillion sign-on figure: 17–34 billion rubles at 500,000 (about 2–3%) and 100–200 billion at a million (10–20%). The wage bill is valued at advertised pay, which over-represents low-skill work; valuing it at paid wages would change the scale of the scarcity gain but not the order-of-magnitude gap.

Finally, worker scarcity may be absorbed partly through migration, shift work, and overtime rather than higher wages, which would limit the upward wage effect.