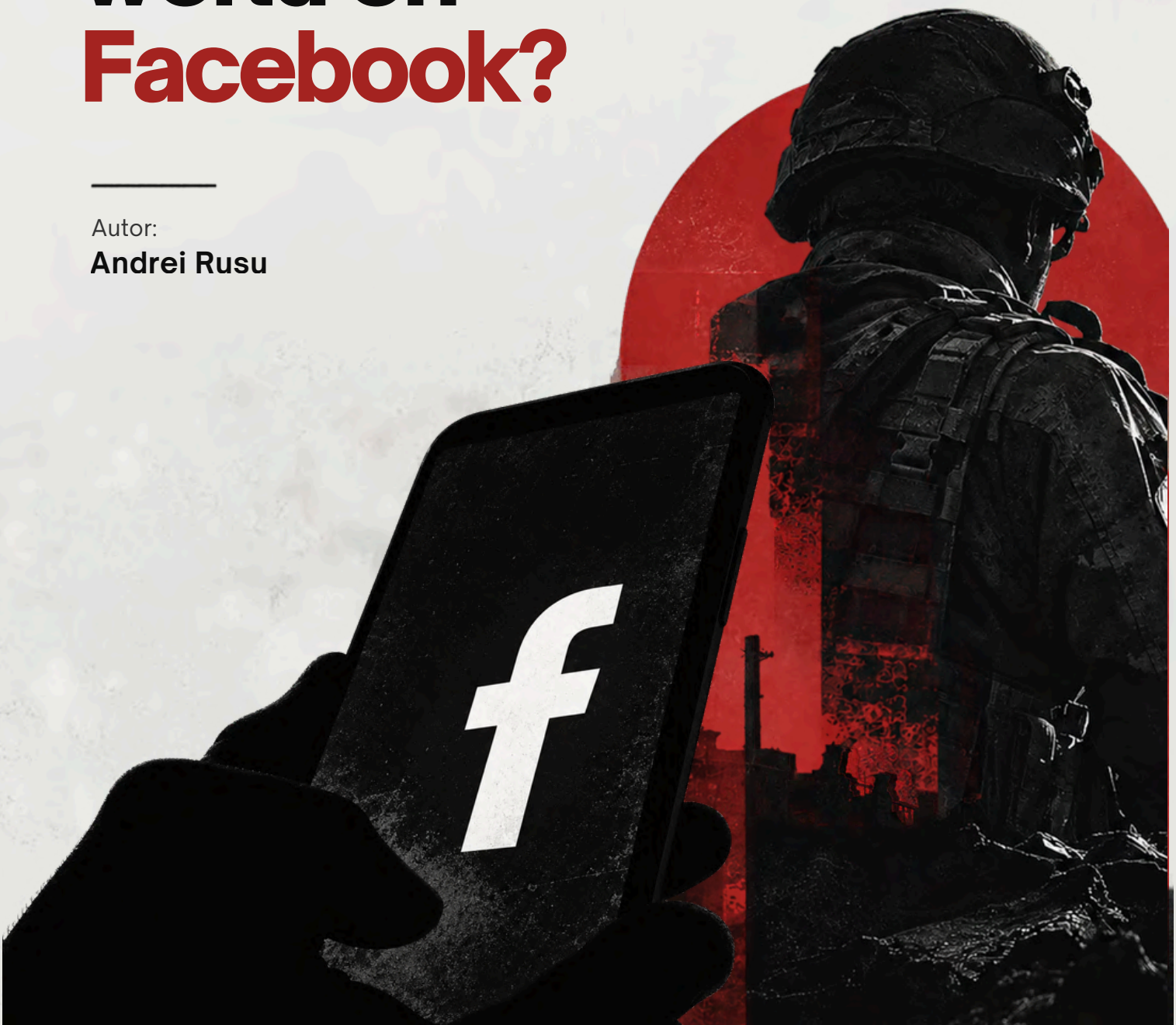
How does the Kremlin recruit mercenaries from around the world on Facebook?

Autor:
Andrei Rusu



Disclaimer

The report was produced with the financial support from the National Endowment for Democracy. The opinions expressed in the report belong exclusively to the authors; they cannot in any way be interpreted as reflecting the opinion and position of the National Endowment for Democracy.

Summary

In Russia, META has been designated an extremist organisation, and the networks it owns have been blocked since 2022. These sanctions, however, have not stopped the Kremlin from flooding META's platforms with manipulation and disinformation, including content promoted through ads paid to the American company. Most recently, the Russian army has been using paid ads on Facebook and Instagram to recruit mercenaries from around the world for its aggression against Ukraine. We have documented the details of these operations, which reveal both Russian tactics and the gaps in META's prevention system, in the investigation below.

According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Russia's losses exceed its recruitment by thousands of people a month, while the Kremlin avoids a new open mobilisation because of its political cost. One of the solutions is recruitment abroad. The Main Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence (HUR) stated that since 2022, almost 29,000 foreigners have signed contracts with the Russian army, and that for 2026 Moscow aims to recruit at least 18,500 more mercenaries. The agency says that after 39 countries secured the suspension of the recruitment of their citizens, Russian structures shifted their focus to South America, Central Asia and Africa.

In September 2026, three Facebook pages with no apparent connection to the military distributed a Romanian-language poster in the Republic of Moldova: "*Contract service: service for real men*". The poster promised 482,000 lei, a monthly salary of up to 47,489 lei and Russian citizenship. Behind it was an offer to enlist in the Russian army. Starting from this case, the "*WatchDog.MD*" Community analysed how Russia uses Facebook and Instagram ads to recruit foreigners, including Moldovans, for the war against Ukraine.

The monitoring covered the period 29 June – 29 September 2026 and was based on the public META Ad Library archive. Four ads targeting Moldova, published by three pages, and 86 ads aimed at other countries were identified. To see what happens after the click, the websites the ads link to, the sign-up forms and the recruiters' Telegram accounts were analysed, including the domain registration data and the location of the servers.

The study shows that the ad is only the first step of the recruitment. The route has four stages: the ad promises money, citizenship or a job (or all of them together); the candidate lands on a website, on a Facebook form or directly on Telegram or WhatsApp; the recruiter discusses the terms and the departure; the contract is signed only once the person is in Russia.

We would like to point out that these ads run without a disclaimer, which makes it harder to collect public information about who paid for the ads and how much money was spent on them. We find that META should review its advertising policies, regardless of whether an ad is political or commercial, so that civil society and state authorities can counter such recruitment activities.

The Uzbek pages "*Kasb o'rganing*" show how the mechanism works. The ad offers work assembling drones and about $50,000, without mentioning the army. The websites promise "*official recruitment into Russia's drone forces*", but claim that "*participation in combat is excluded*". The data collected by these websites ends up on a server located in Düsseldorf,

Germany. The fact that the infrastructure of an EU member state, which is increasingly targeted by the Russian Federation's hybrid attacks, is used for such activities points to a serious security breach. In this case, Germany, as well as other EU states together with digital companies, should launch a series of investigations into how Russia uses Western servers for mercenary recruitment and for other hybrid activities.

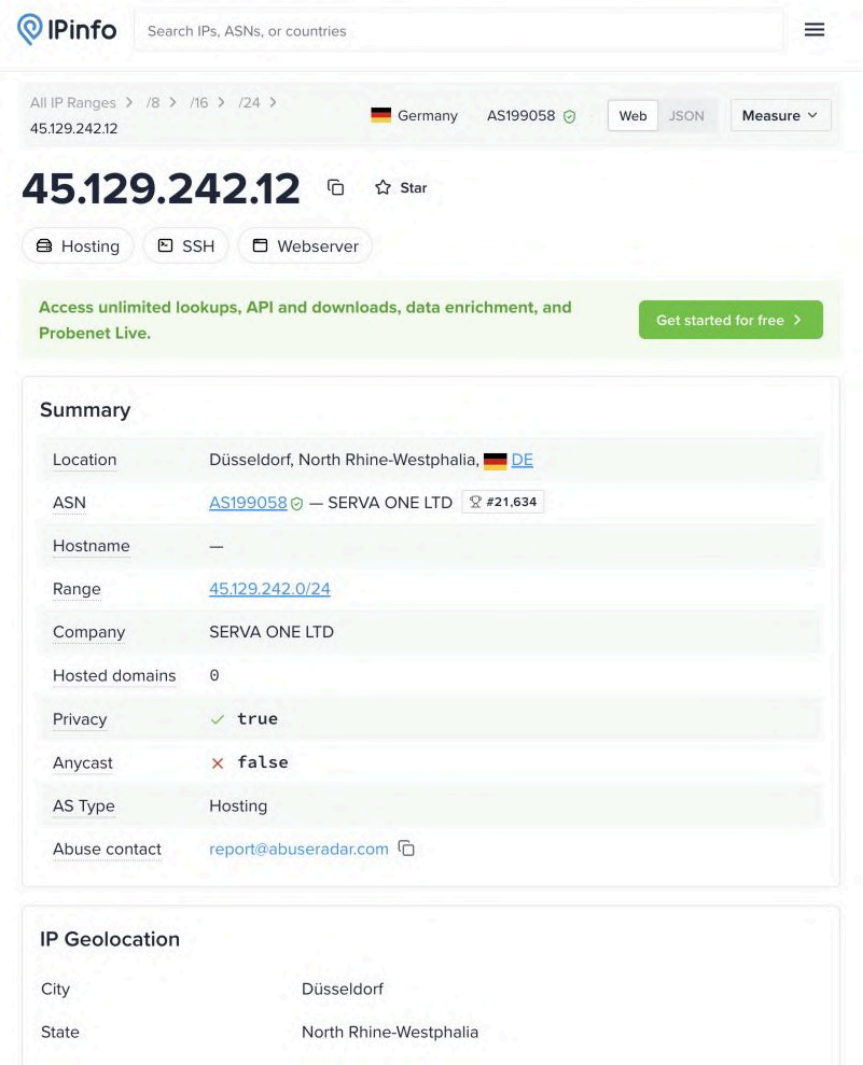


Figure 1. Public data from the ipinfo.io service on the IP address 45.129.242.12, to which the forms on the "UAV Forces" websites send candidates' data. The address is located in Düsseldorf, Germany, and belongs to the hosting company SERVA ONE LTD.

Previously, the outlet Verstka, cited by Diez.md, reported that in 2024, recruitment ads coordinated by the Russian Ministry of Digital Development gained over 1 billion impressions on the Yandex platform alone. Some of these campaigns were also directed at countries such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Azerbaijan.

The Republic of Moldova was targeted in two recruitment waves. In January 2026, Diez.md exposed two Russian-language pages seeking fighters for assault troops. The recruiter

promised almost 500,000 lei ($ 27,600) upon signing and described two to three weeks of training, followed by deployment to the front in Ukraine to "*replace losses*" and a monthly pay of 65,000 lei ($ 3,600). The amount on the posters was different: one of them promised $64,000.

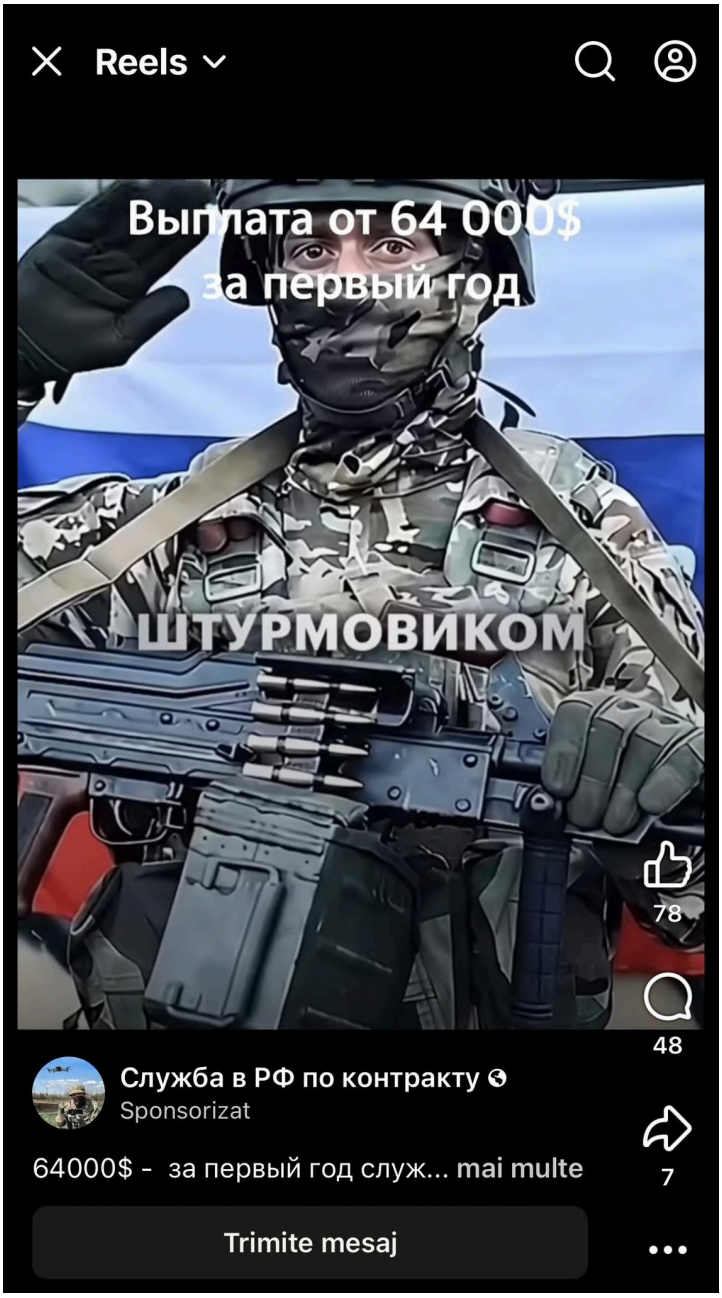


Figure 2. The page "Служба в РФ по контракту" promotes a reel promising $64,000 for enlisting in Russian assault troops. Source: Maxim Pistrui.

In September, the offer returned in Romanian, on pages with neutral names. The sum of 482,000 lei, presented on the poster as an "*annual payment*", became on the website a payment "*for signing the contract*" and was equivalent to the average salary in Moldova for

almost two and a half years. At the time the study was published, the three September pages had disappeared, and their ads no longer appear in the Ad Library.



Figure 3. The anonymous account Elena Vargas promotes a Romanian-language poster for contract service in the Russian army.

The main finding of the study is that recruitment through META ads is not a collection of isolated cases, but an organised operation, and the Republic of Moldova is one of its explicit targets. The network uses the same techniques in all countries: pages with neutral names, sometimes created on the same day as the ad, pages from series used for casino ads, and front domains. This shows that it is the running of the ads itself that is subcontracted to companies or informal groups in the industry, which make money from commercial orders, including scams. The geography of the campaigns matches the regions to which, according to Ukraine's HUR, Russian recruitment has shifted. META reacts slowly: the January ads had been running for more than three days when they were discovered, and a page targeting Latin America published recruitment ads for more than two months without being blocked.

For Moldova, the risk also lies in the collection of data through forms, from passport details to HIV status, which reaches anonymous operators and may later be used for pressure or for other forms of recruitment, identity theft, etc., including for sabotage operations in the interest of the Russian Federation beyond the borders of the Republic of Moldova.

In 2025, the authorities in Chișinău identified several Moldovans involved in mercenary activities in Ukraine and other countries, some of them affiliated with the "*Wagner*" group.

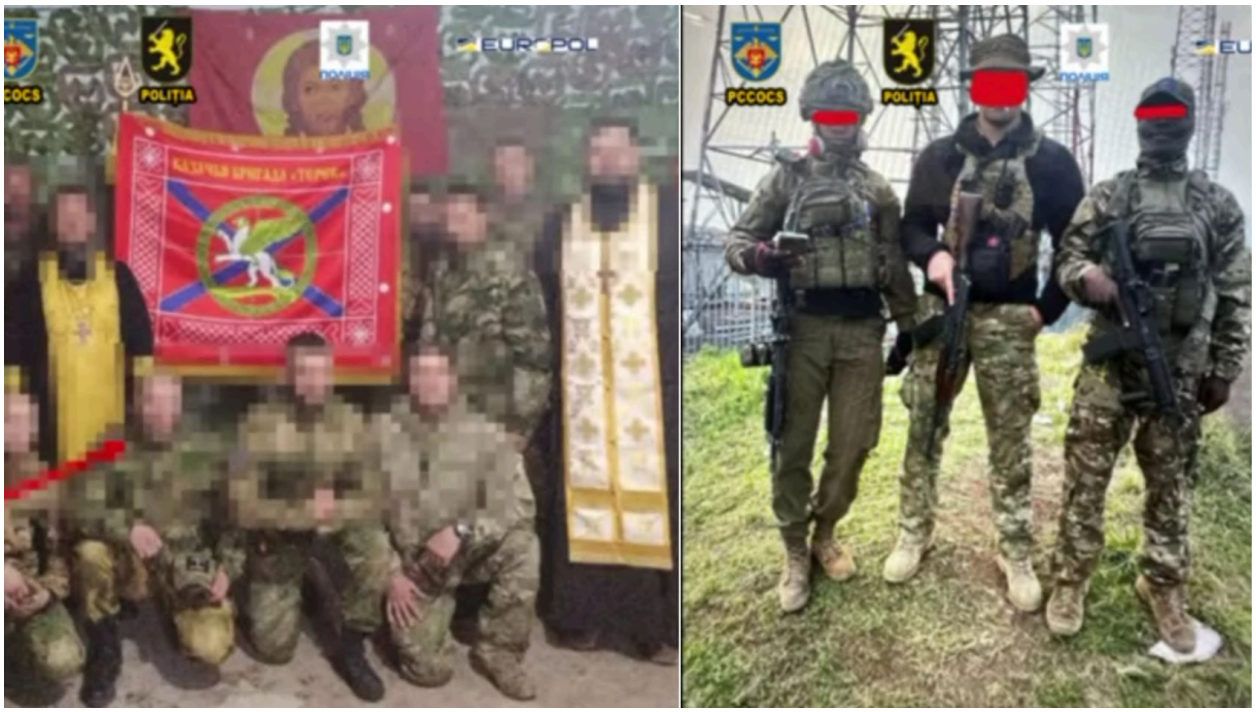


Figure 4. Photos of Moldovan mercenaries enlisted in Russian military structures, identified following searches carried out by the authorities in Chișinău in partnership with the Ukrainian authorities and Europol. Source: PCCOCS

Under Article 141 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova, participating as a mercenary in an armed conflict or in military actions is punishable by 5 to 10 years in prison, and recruiting, training, financing or using mercenaries by 10 to 15 years in prison.

Introduction

Russia is going through a military personnel crisis. For months, losses at the front have exceeded the number of people signing contracts with the army, while the Kremlin avoids a new open mobilisation, which would carry a high political cost. An increasingly common solution is recruiting foreigners. According to HUR, almost 29,000 citizens of other countries have signed contracts with the Russian army since 2022, and for 2026 the Russian Ministry of Defence aims to recruit at least 18,500 foreigners.

Part of this recruitment is moving online, on Facebook and Instagram, through ads run by anonymous accounts. These ads violate META's Community Standards, and the company has committed to countering such serious violations.

In this study, we set out to document how recruitment through META ads works and to explain why current moderation mechanisms fail to stop it. To this end, the study answers the following questions:

- **Who are the ads aimed at, and how is the message adapted for each country?**
- **What do the ads promise people, and what do they not tell them?**
- **What happens after someone clicks on an ad?**
- **What techniques do recruiters use to get past META's checks?**

The analysis covers the period 29 June – 29 September 2026 and is based on the META Ad Library archive, on the websites and Telegram accounts the ads link to, and on public sources.

Context

For months, the Russian army's losses have exceeded the number of people signing contracts, and Moscow increasingly fills the gap with citizens of other countries. The outlet Mediazona, in partnership with the BBC Russian Service and a group of volunteers, had identified 266,032 dead Russian soldiers as of 2 October 2026. In August 2026 alone, the Russian army lost 42,020 soldiers, killed and wounded, according to the Institute for the Study of War, which cites data from the Ukrainian General Staff. ISW estimates that "*Russia's loss rate exceeds its recruitment rate by thousands of people per month*".

To cover this deficit, the Kremlin must choose between a new mobilisation, whose political cost it has avoided since the autumn of 2022, and recruiting mercenaries from abroad. On 28 September, President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that the Russians "*have already begun an additional mobilisation*", while Ukrainian intelligence services, cited by Kyiv Independent, estimate that the Russian General Staff is preparing to mobilise about 300,000 people in each of 2026 and 2027. In parallel, North Korea is preparing to send another 10,000 troops, in addition to the more than 8,000 already in Russia.

Recruiting foreigners allows the Kremlin to replenish its troops without the political cost of a mobilisation. According to the Main Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence (HUR), almost 29,000 citizens of other countries have signed contracts with the Russian army since 2022, and for 2026 the Russian Ministry of Defence aims to recruit at least 18,500 more.

Data and methodology

Purpose of the monitoring:

The study aimed to identify, on the META platform, ads promoting the enlistment in the Russian army of citizens of the Republic of Moldova and of other countries of the world. At the same time, the study exposes the loopholes used by Russia to promote such ads on the META platform.

Objectives of the monitoring:

Given the stated purpose, the monitoring exercise had the following objectives:

- Identifying the Facebook accounts promoting ads for enlistment in the Russian army aimed at citizens of the Republic of Moldova;
- Creating a list of keywords to identify similar cases in other countries of the world through the META Ads Library;
- Analysing similar cases in other countries of the world exposed by international organisations;
- Studying the methods by which the Kremlin tries to collect data on the people it wants to recruit;
- Analysing the websites promoted for recruiting mercenaries into the Russian army;

Research stages

To develop the working methodology, 9 working stages were set out:

- Developing the working methodology;
- Identifying the recruitment network targeting the Republic of Moldova;
- Compiling the list of keywords to identify similar ads in other countries;
- Consulting reports by other international organisations to identify similar cases in other countries targeted by Moscow for recruitment;
- Extracting the content of the identified ads;
- Studying the methods by which the Kremlin tries to collect data on the people it wants to recruit;
- Analysing the websites promoted for recruiting mercenaries into the Russian army;
- Explaining how this online recruitment can affect the security of the Republic of Moldova and how it fits into the Kremlin's hybrid warfare tactics;
- Reporting

Monitoring period and data source:

The monitoring period was set as 29 June – 29 September 2026. This interval coincided with the period in which Ukraine and Western security services made public information about a possible mass mobilisation in the Russian Federation.

To collect the data, we used the META Ad Library, the public archive of ads on Facebook, Instagram and Messenger. The data for each ad include: the page paying for it, the date, the platforms on which it runs, and the content of the ad. Although this archive should remain public, META periodically deletes the records of pages that ran ads without a disclaimer in violation of the Community Standards.

Identifying the ads:

We started from the Romanian-language ad placed on the page "*Property abu2*", which linked to the website increase-expert-endive.tilda.ws. In total, in Moldova we identified 4 ads placed on three different pages, which were later deleted. Then, based on keywords, we identified in the META Ad Library archive a number of ads from pages and websites recruiting outside the Republic of Moldova. We searched for phrases typical of these ads, translated into more than

30 languages, and ran country searches for the Balkans, North Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia. After manual verification, we identified 86 ads from 18 pages, distributed between 29 June and 27 September 2026 and aimed at countries other than Moldova. We also identified 4 pages with the generic Russian name “Служба по контракту” (“Contract service”) that had been created recently but had not been set to run ads at the time of monitoring.

Analysis of the recruitment forms:

To see what happens after someone clicks on an ad, we analysed 9 addresses the ads link to, one form filled in directly on Facebook, and the Telegram accounts listed on the websites. We checked the domain registration data in the public registries (RDAP), and the location of the servers through dnsdumpster.com.

How recruitment works: from ad to contract

Through anonymous accounts on Facebook and Instagram, Russia has launched a series of online campaigns to recruit mercenaries from various countries of the world, including Moldova, for its war against Ukraine. The method: advertising on Meta-owned platforms.

The ads are only the first step of the recruitment process. Their role is to identify potential candidates, draw attention to this “opportunity” and take the user as quickly as possible to a space that, in some cases, META does not control. The route generally consists of four stages:

- The ad appears in the Facebook or Instagram feed and promises money, citizenship or a job;
- The destination can be an external website, a form filled in directly on Facebook, or a conversation on WhatsApp or Telegram;
- The recruiter takes over the contact, usually on Telegram, and discusses the terms, documents and departure;
- The contract is signed after the recruited person arrives in Russia.

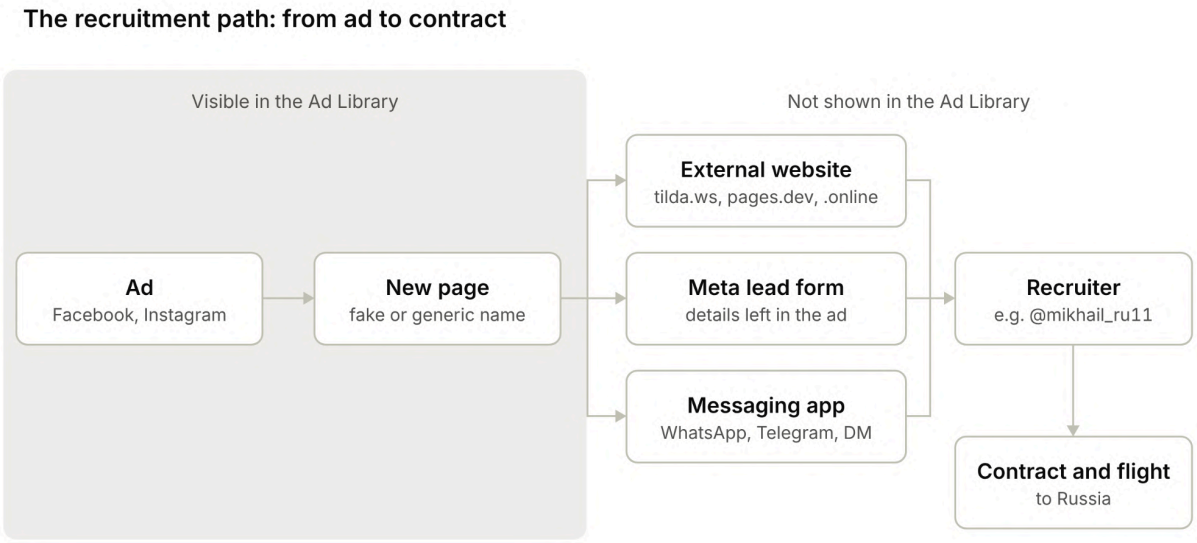


Figure 4. The recruitment route. The Meta Ad Library shows only the first two stages. Everything that follows takes place outside the platform.

Uzbekistan. An example traced step by step

We traced the route step by step using the ads of the Uzbek page “Kasb o’rganing”, meaning “Learn a trade”. The page offers a job assembling drones, with a signing bonus of 588 million so’m, or about $50,000. For a reader in Uzbekistan, and indeed across the entire post-Soviet space, the sum is very large, and the ad never says “army”.



Figure 5. Ad by the page "Kasb o'rganing", in Uzbek. The offer looks like a factory job: assembling drones, with a bonus of 588 million so'm (≈ $50,000).

Those who click land on the website recruiter-cis.click/uz, titled "*Ministry of Defence jobs: UAV Forces*". The website promises a bonus of $50,000 (the same amount as in the ad, this time in dollars) and "*official recruitment into Russia's drone forces*", while at the same time claiming that this is "*factory work, behind the front lines*" and that "*participation in combat is excluded*".

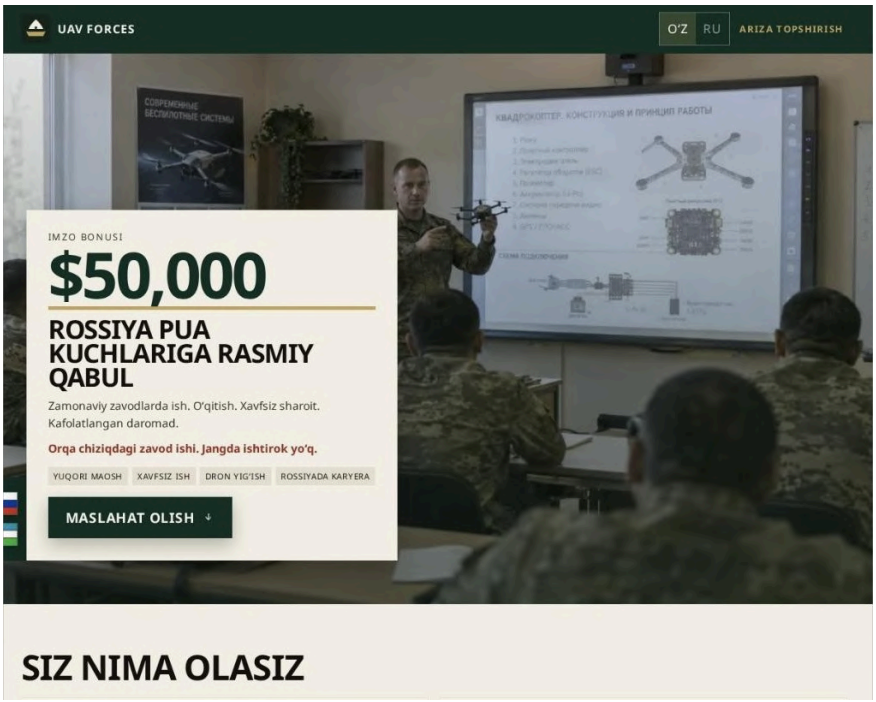


Figure 6. The website the "Kasb o'rganing" page ad links to. It promises work "behind the front lines", without taking part in combat, but the background photo shows a training session led by a soldier.

The form on the website asks only for a name and phone number, after which the candidate chooses to be contacted by the recruiter on Telegram or WhatsApp. The collected data ends up on a server with the address **45.129.242.12**, hosted in Düsseldorf, Germany, by SERVA ONE Ltd. The same server receives data from three other identical websites, published on free Cloudflare ***pages.dev*** subdomains (*logistics-35b595096579.pages.dev, logistics-35467b9df1f3.pages.dev, logistics-12b9a01fd10f.pages.dev*) and used by other "*Kasb o'rganing*" profiles.



Figure 7. The form provided by the website recruiter-cis.click for being contacted later by the recruiter.

We identified 4 pages named “*Kasb o’rganing*” that target citizens of Uzbekistan with jobs in drone production on the territory of the Russian Federation. The pages were created on 22, 24 and 25 September. The first ad run from these pages was launched on 22 September.

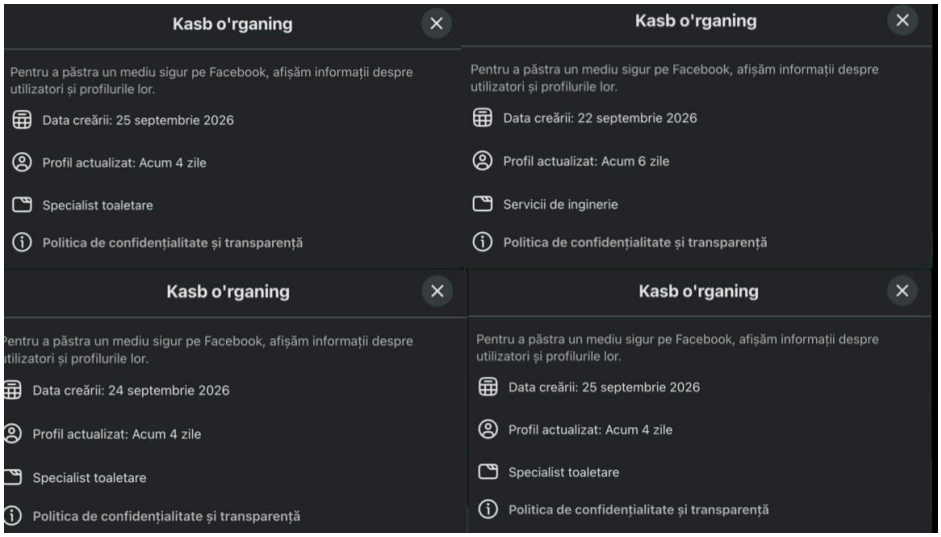


Figure 8. The form provided by the website recruiter-cis.click for being contacted later by the recruiter.

Diez.md reports that since 2022, at least 338 criminal cases for mercenarism have been opened in Uzbekistan, concerning participation in armed conflicts abroad. According to the Ukrainian project "*Хочу жить*", as of 29 October 2025, the names of at least 2,715 citizens of Uzbekistan who are fighting or have fought against Ukraine were known.

Types of destinations

Not all of the identified ads lead to a website like the one above. The 14 destinations we analysed fall into five types, in addition to the forms filled in directly on Facebook.

Type of destination	**How it works**	**Examples from the study**
Recruitment website with a form	Presents the offer and asks for the candidate's data to be entered directly on the website	increase-expert-endive.tilda.ws (Moldova), rus-contract-service.net, the "UAV Forces" websites
Screening questionnaire	Asks questions step by step (age, health) and keeps only suitable candidates.	serviciovol.online
Relay page	An intermediate page that sends the user further on, usually to Telegram.	zyntraf.shop
Front domain	Shows automated systems something different from what it shows candidates. It is used to trick META, when the ad is set up, into treating it as a commercial ad associated with a restaurant.	go.mo-rf.online
META instant form	Name and phone number are collected directly by Facebook	the "Carlo Pvs" page

The case of the Republic of Moldova

In 2026, the Republic of Moldova was targeted by Russian recruiters in two waves through ads on Facebook and Instagram. In January, the outlet Diez.md exposed two pages named "*Служба в РФ по контракту*" and "*Служба по контракту РФ*" (Contract service in the Russian Federation), which promoted enlistment in the Russian army to Moldovan citizens. The ads promoted the recruitment of fighters for assault troops, and contact was made through a bot, on Telegram and WhatsApp.

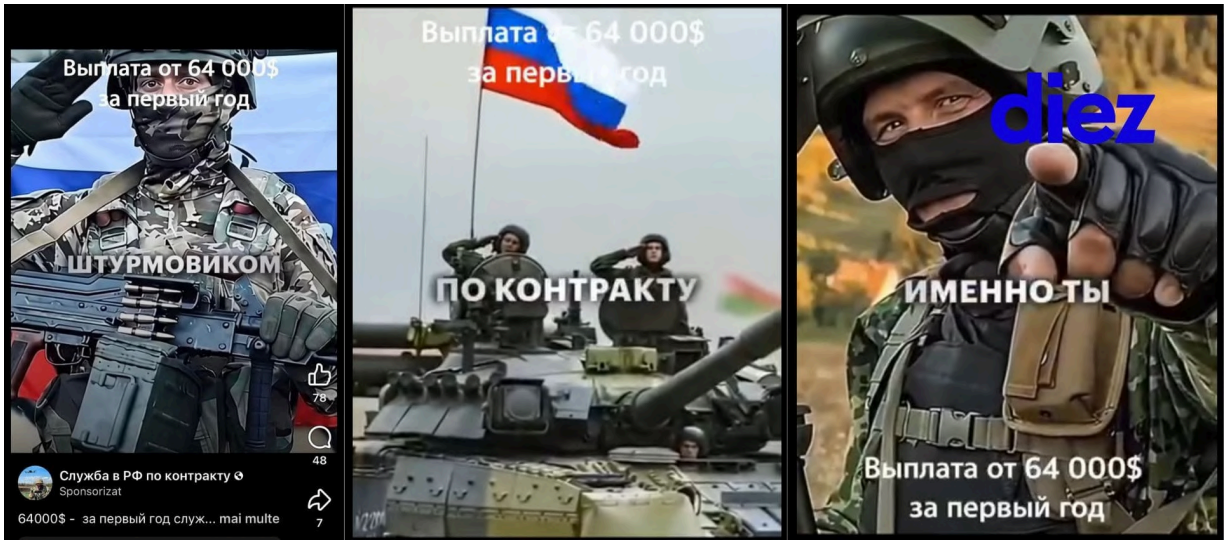


Figure 9. Ads promoted in January 2026 by the page "Служба в РФ по контракту" seeking mercenaries for the Russian army. Source: Diez.md

The journalists spoke with the recruiter, who introduced himself as "*Roman*". He promised about 65,000 lei a month (300,000 roubles, or approximately $3,600) and almost 500,000 lei (about $28,000) upon signing the contract with the Russian army, and described the application steps to them. Candidates had to make their own way to Moscow, where they would "*be met*", and the money for the tickets "*will be reimbursed later*". According to the recruiter, the future mercenary would have "*2–3 weeks of training and instruction*", after which he would be sent to "*replace the losses*" of the Russian army's North and Centre groups of forces in Ukraine, which were "*being replenished*". To be registered, the recruiter also asked the future mercenary to send a photo of his passport.



Figure 10. The conversation between the recruiter named Roman and the Diez journalists, in which he explains the steps the future mercenary should follow. Source: Diez.md

When Diez identified the ads on 25 January 2026, they had been running on Facebook for more than three days. Therefore, the META platform is not sufficiently engaged in combating this

phenomenon, as also shown by the posts identified by the “WatchDog.MD” Community in other countries and presented in this study.

In September, Moldova was targeted by a new wave of ads for recruiting mercenaries into the Russian army. Three pages, “*Property abu2*”, “*Surprise Hot*” and “*Elena Vargas*”, distributed the same Romanian-language poster: “*Contract service: service for real men*”. At the time this study was published, all 3 pages had disappeared, and their ads do not appear in the META Ad Library archive.

The poster promised an annual payment of 482,000 lei (about $27,000), a monthly payment of 37,349–47,489 lei (about $2,100–2,700) and Russian citizenship. To understand how attractive the offer is, the amounts must be compared with incomes in Moldova. The average gross salary was 16,896 lei (about $950) per month in the second quarter of 2026, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. The promised monthly payment is therefore more than twice the average salary, and the sum of 482,000 lei corresponds to the average salary for almost two and a half years.



Figure 11. The pages “Property abu2”, “Surprise Hot” and “Elena Vargas” promote enlistment in the Russian army to Moldovan citizens, promising them huge sums and the citizenship of the Russian Federation.

The ad links to the website increase-expert-endive.tilda.ws, built on the free Tilda platform. The website repeats the message of the poster in the ads but changes an important detail: the sum of 482,000 lei is no longer an “*annual payment*”, but a payment “*for signing the contract*”. The website promises “*a job for real men*”, claims that the recruiters “*have been operating for more than two years*” and offers transport, help with obtaining a visa and “*high-quality training*”.



Figure 12. The website to which the recruitment ads targeting the Republic of Moldova link.

The form on the website asks for the full name, email address, WhatsApp phone number, confirmation that the person has a valid passport for travel abroad, and a declaration of HIV/AIDS status. The second button on the page leads to a Telegram channel bluntly named "*Contract with the Russian Army*".

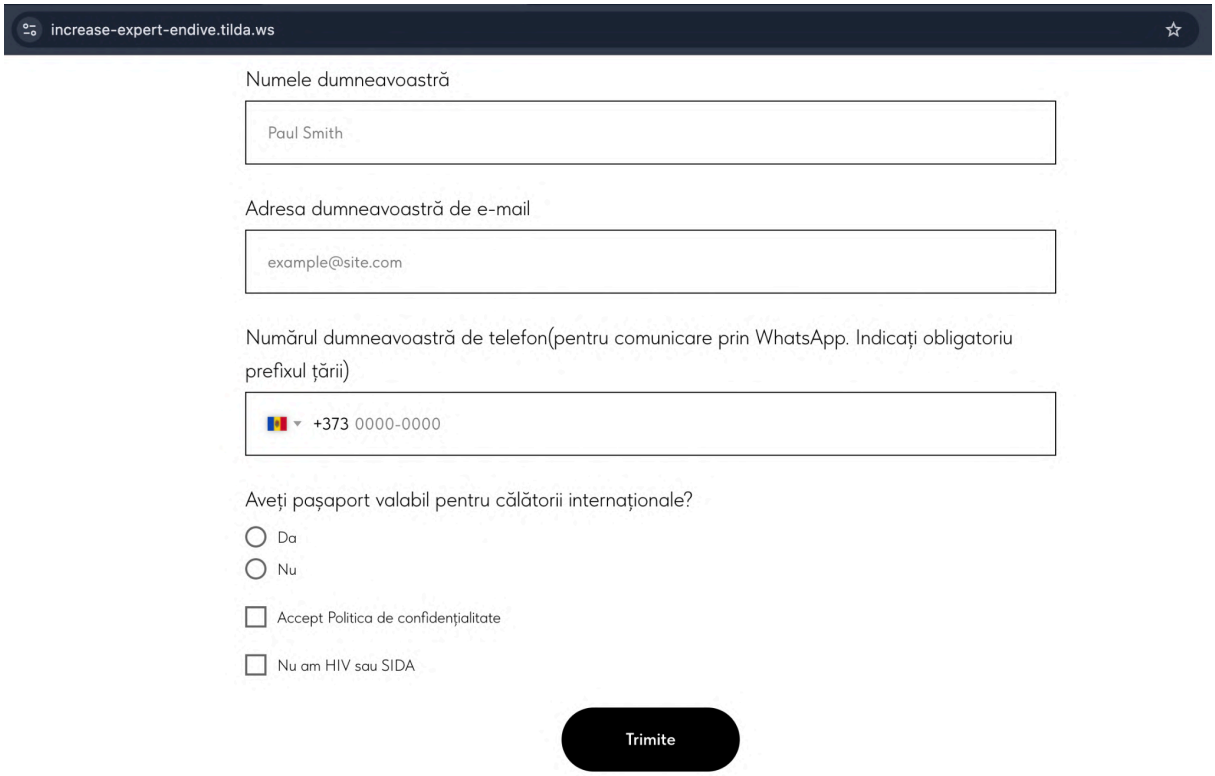


Figure 13. The form the recruiter asks the future mercenary to fill in.

To protect their ads, the Russians made several changes. Unlike in January 2026, the page names do not suggest a direct affiliation with mercenary services. The second change is the ad text: all information about the army was moved from the text into the image, so that META's AI algorithms would not detect the ad and remove it. This makes these ads harder to find in the Ad Library. The only option is to search for the phrase "employment information".

Who else is targeted: mercenary recruitment in other countries

The ads targeting Moldova are a small part of a larger operation. The "*WatchDog.MD*" Community identified 86 ads targeting Belarus, Central Asia, Latin American countries and Francophone Africa. The ads are highly concentrated: just two pages, "*militares voluntarios*" and "*Claudia Beawgagck*", published 40 of them, almost half.

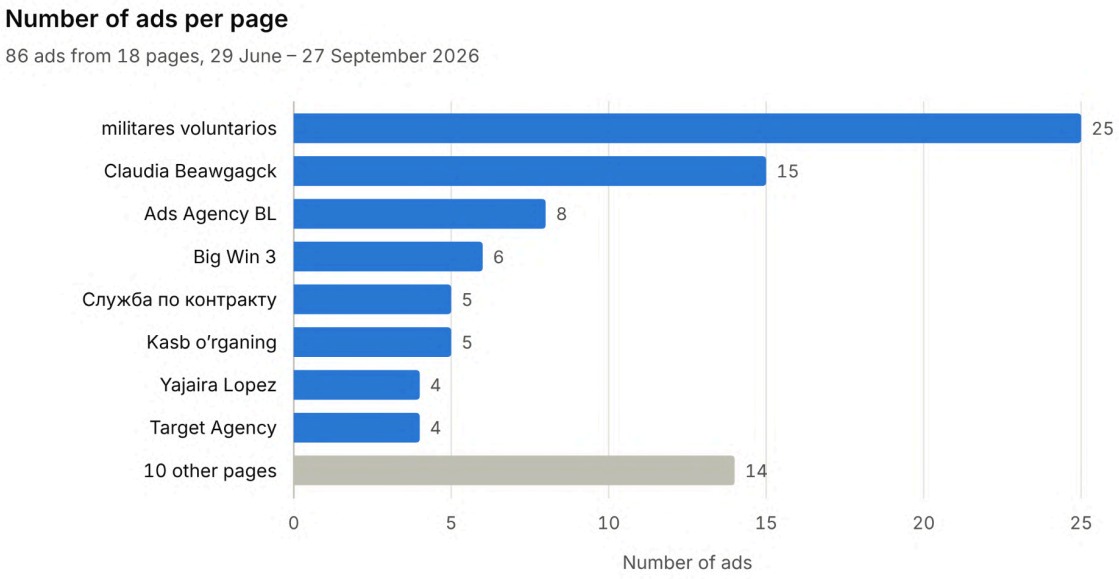


Figure 14. Number of identified ads promoting recruitment into the Russian army. Two pages published almost half of the ads. The rest are spread across 16 smaller pages, some created one day before the campaign.

The ads do not appear constantly, but in waves. In the summer, only the Spanish-language campaign for Latin America was visible. Then, in a single week, 21–27 September, 56 of the 86 ads were launched, most of them targeting Belarus and Central Asia.

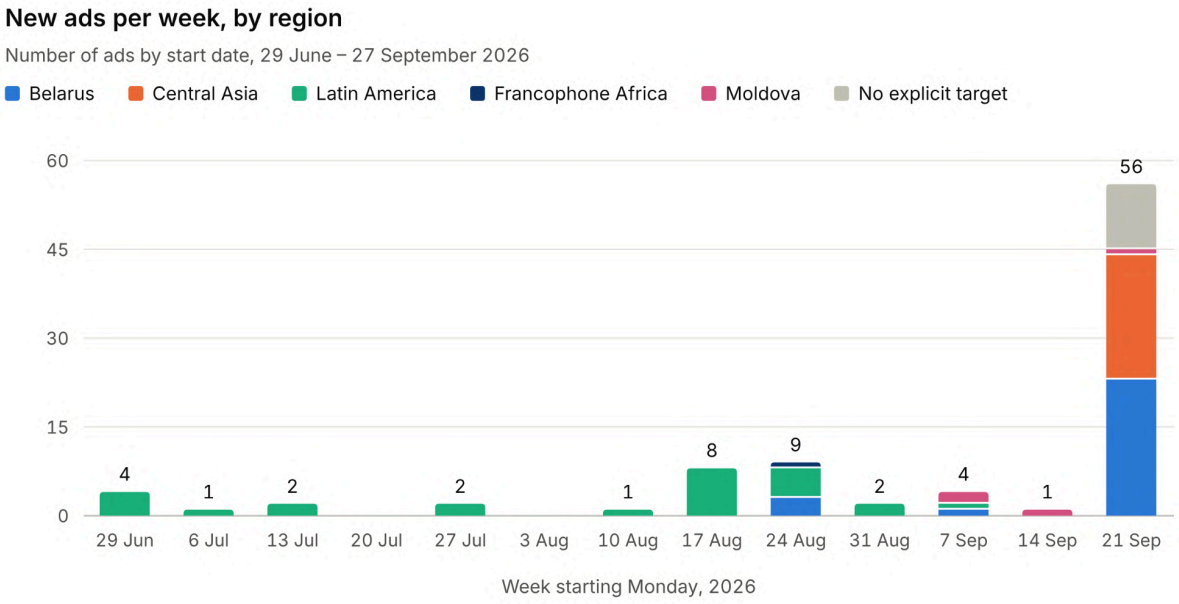


Figure 15. New ads per week. The peak in the last week shows a campaign launched simultaneously across several pages. Earlier weeks are probably under-represented, because stopped ads may disappear from the archive.

Belarus

Belarus is the target with the most pages. Here the ads do not hide. The page “Защитник” (“Defender”) directly invites Belarusian citizens to join the Russian Armed Forces and assures them that “*everything is official*” and that “*it is not mercenarism*”. The page and the ad were created on the same day, 25 September, and three days after launch the ad was still active.

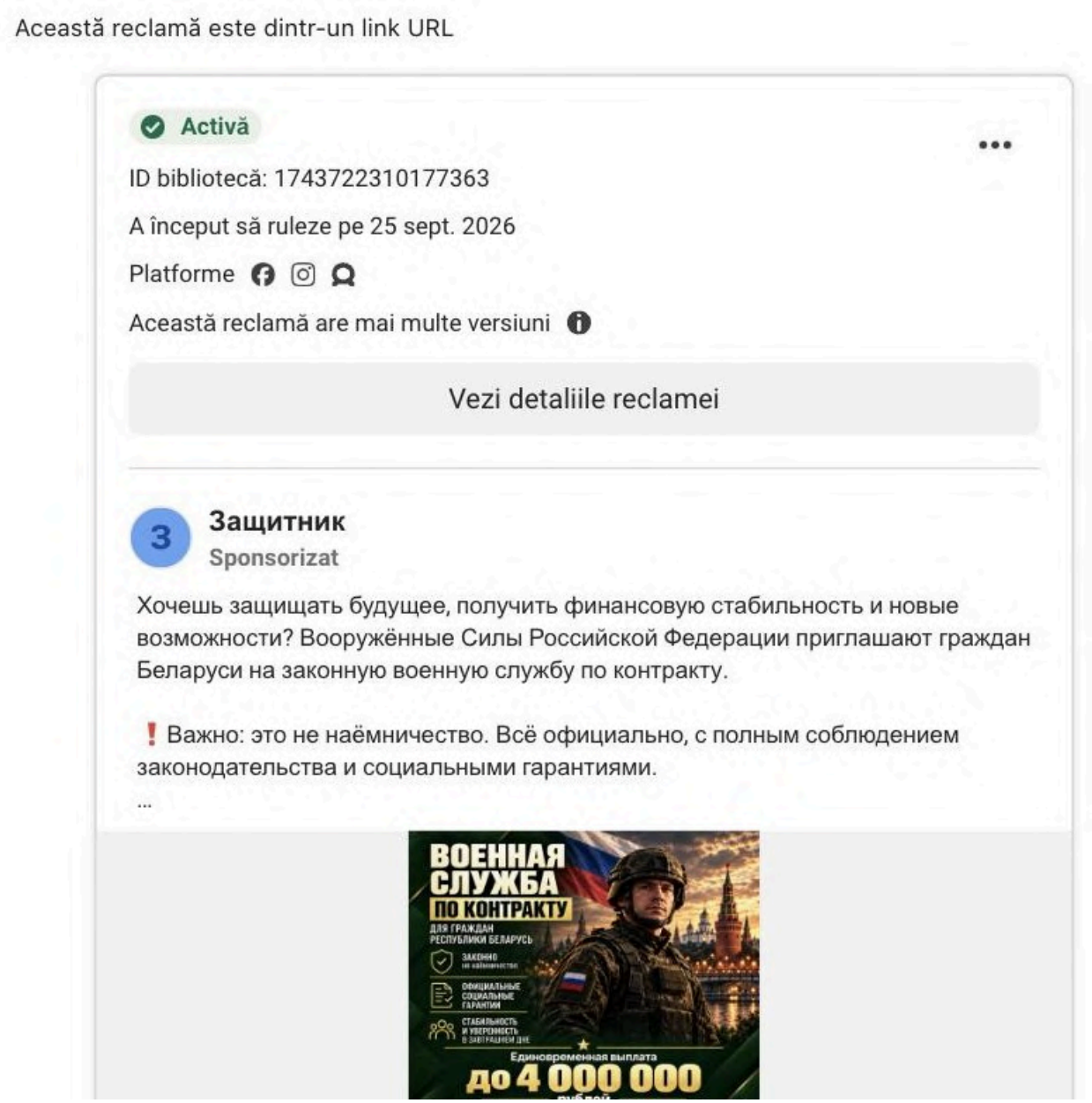


Figure 16. Ad by the page “Защитник” promising financial stability to Belarusian citizens who enlist in the Russian army.

Unlike in the Republic of Moldova, in Belarus recruiters use not only anonymous Facebook accounts but also anonymous Instagram accounts to later contact future recruits.

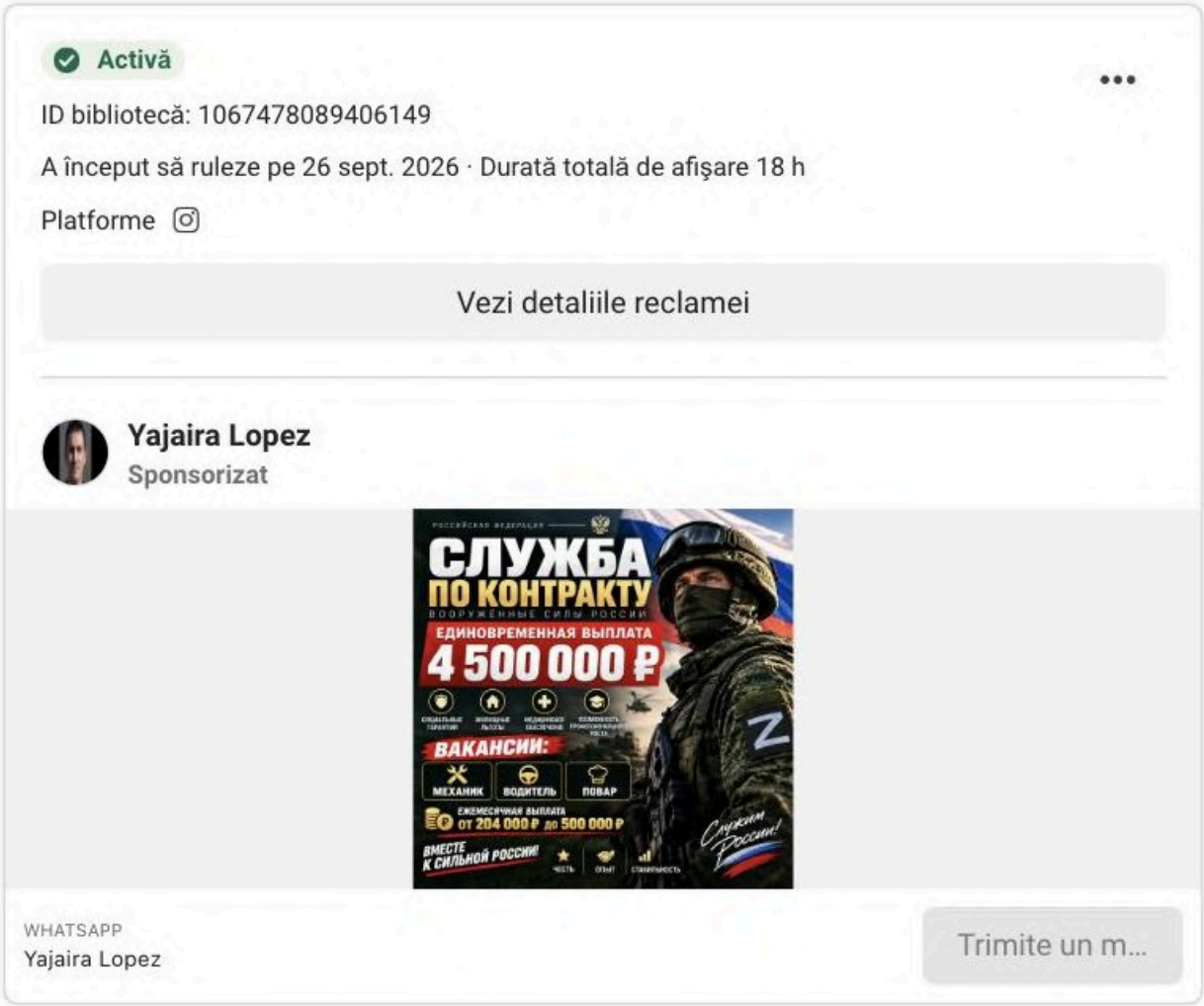


Figure 17. Ad by the Instagram account "Yajaira Lopez". The page name is Hispanic, but the ad is in Russian and targets Belarus and Central Asia.

Central Asia

For Central Asia, the same templates are translated into Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz, and the amounts are converted into each country's currency. The page "Claudia Beawgagck" published 15 ads in a single day, 26 September, on Instagram only. The Tajik version offers service in Russian military units, 378,000 som (about $41,000) upon signing and Russian citizenship. The Kyrgyz version offers enlistment in Russia's drone forces, with 3,060,740 som, or about $35,000.

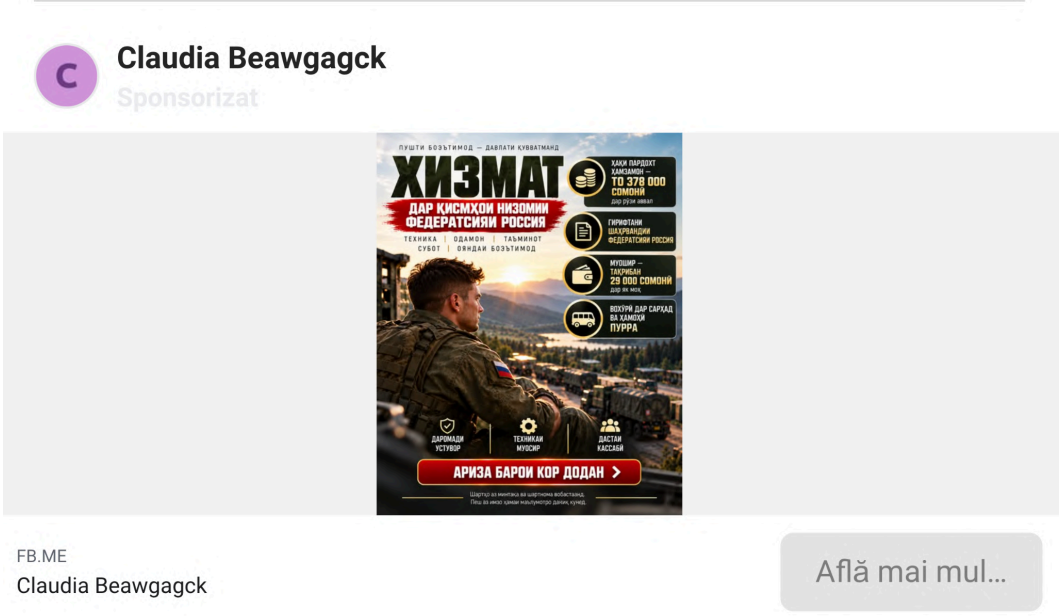


Figure 15. Ad by the profile "Claudia Beawgagck" in Tajik, promoting enlistment in the Russian army for 378,000 somoni (≈ $41,000) upon signing the contract and Russian citizenship.



Figure 18. Ad by the profile "Claudia Beawgagck" in Kyrgyz, promoting enlistment in the drone troops of the Russian army for 3,060,740 som (≈ $35,000).

Latin America

For Latin America, we identified the page “militares voluntarios”, one of the most active, with 25 Spanish-language ads published between 29 June and 7 September. Its ads carried messages such as “*Incorporación al ejército de Rusia*” (Enlistment in the Russian army) and “*Vuelos pagos*” (Paid flights), the same pattern seen on the pages targeting Moldova, Central Asia and Belarus.

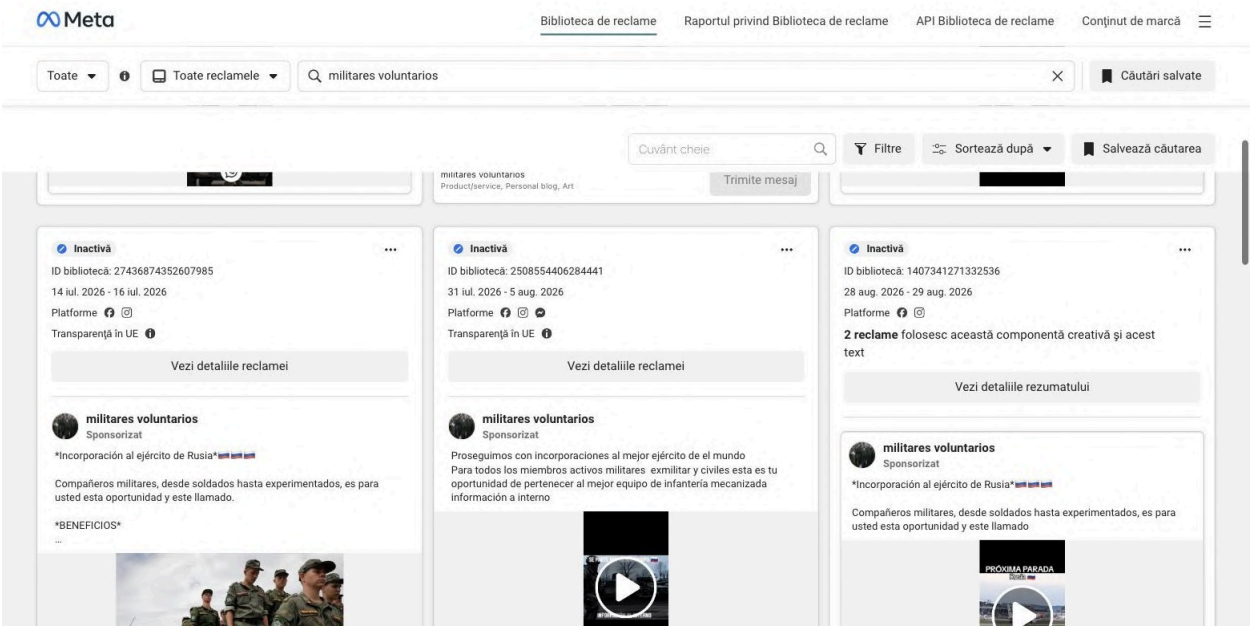


Figure 19. The archive of the page “militares voluntarios” in the META Ad Library. The ads are inactive but still visible in the archive.

Africa and South-East Asia

For Francophone Africa, we identified the page “Recrutement”, which calls on readers: “*Rejoignez l’armée russe*” (Join the Russian army), with $12,000 upon signing the contract, $2,700 a month and an age limit of 18–49 years.

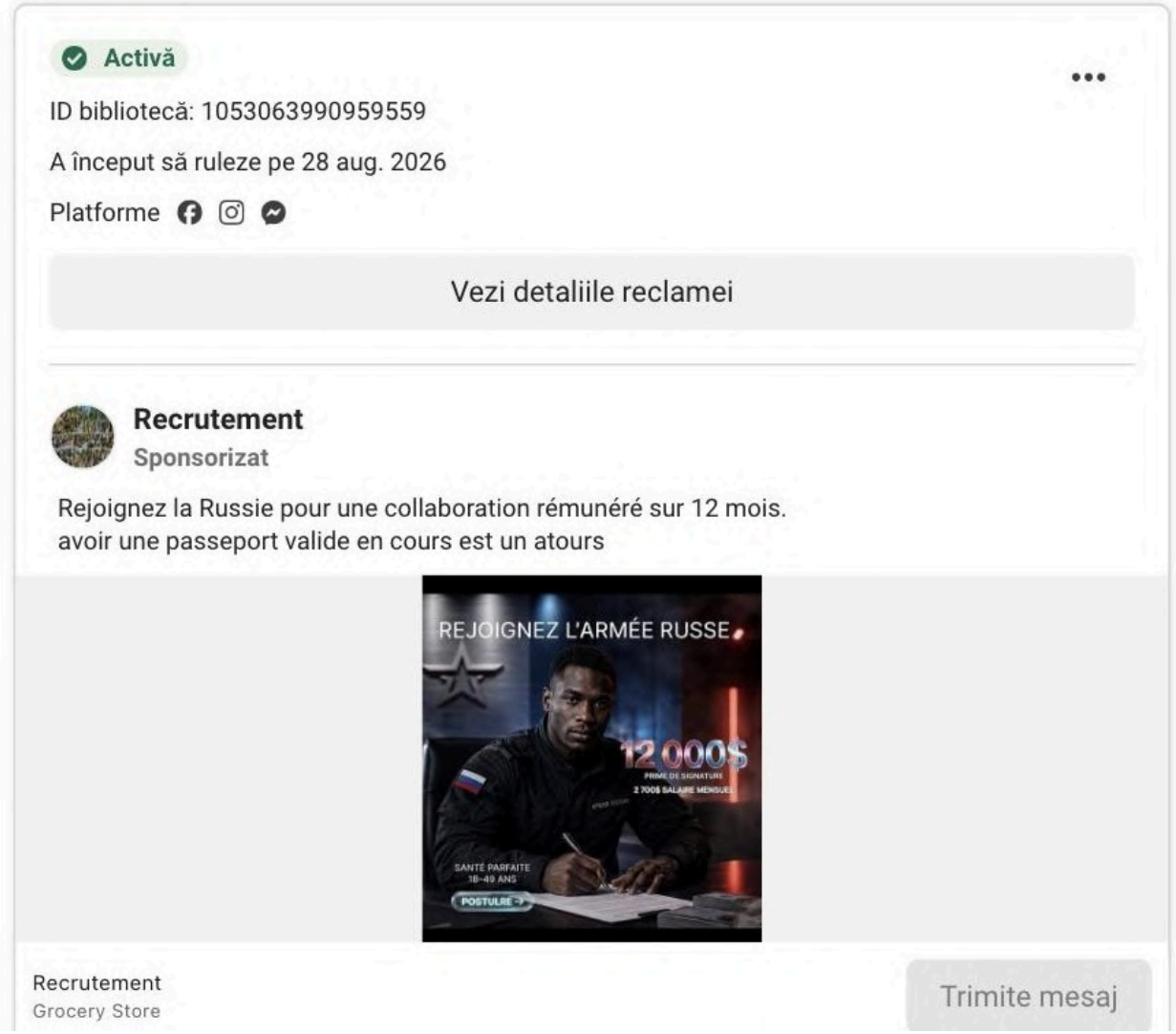


Figure 20. Ad by the page "Recrutement", in French, promising pay for working with the Russian army for 12 months.

The Code for Africa investigation, published by Politico in September 2026, documented, among other things, ads for Côte d'Ivoire titled "*Contrat militaire en Russie*" and a fake film casting call for "*African actors*", used as bait.

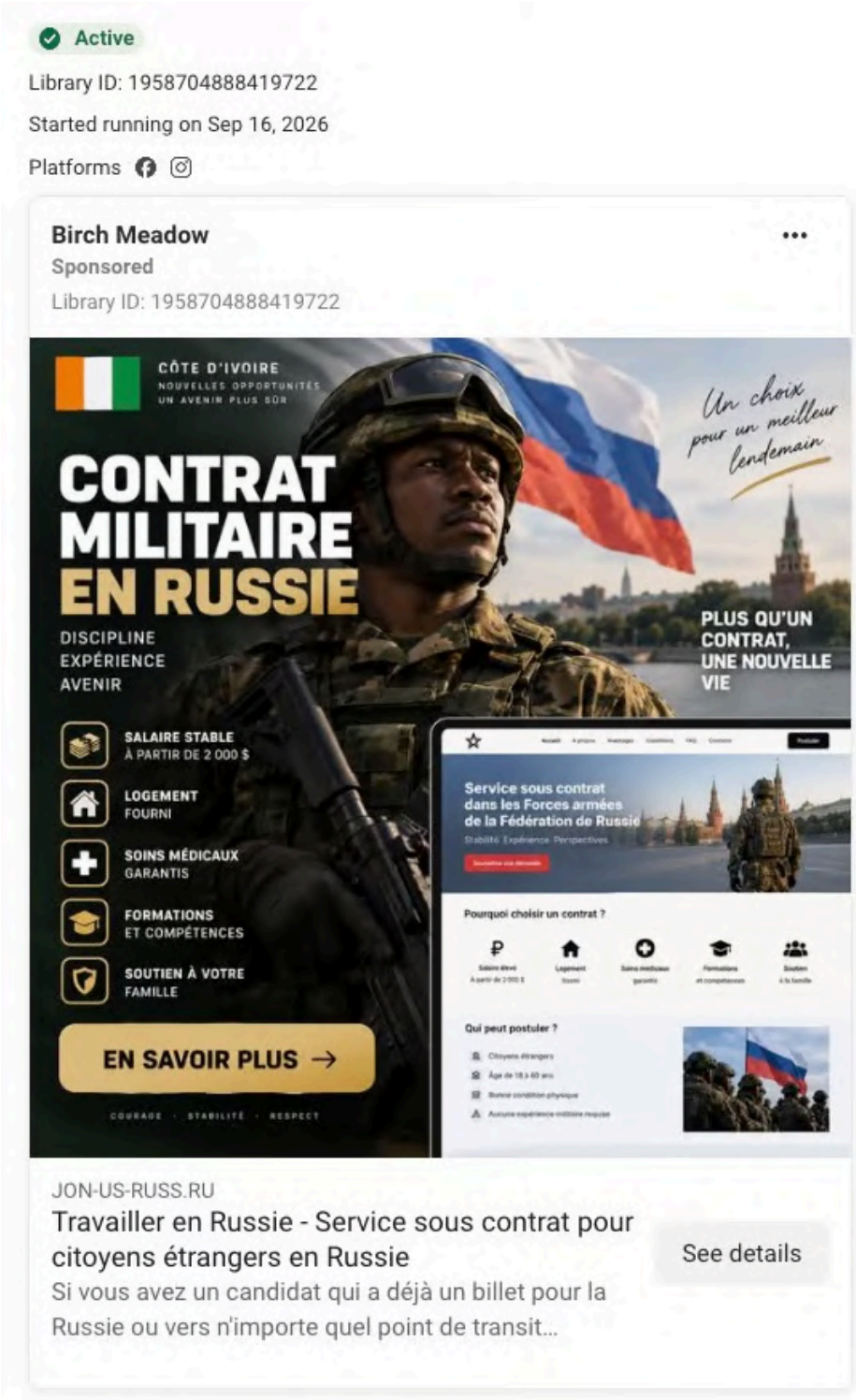


Figure 21. Ads documented by Code for Africa for Côte d'Ivoire, and a fake casting call for "African actors". Source: Politico

Russian military recruitment is also reaching South-East Asia. On 28 September 2026, Ukraine's Centre for Countering Disinformation reported that ads for service in the Russian army

are actively spreading in the Thai information space. According to the Ukrainian institution, Thais are lured with the promise of about $70,000 per contract, assurances that they will serve far from the front line, and the prospect of Russian citizenship.

Ads for “any foreigner”

Some ads do not target a specific country, but all foreigners. The page “Big Win 3” offers, in English, “Military contract service in Russia for foreign citizens”, with $2,700–3,200 a month and up to $27,000 upon signing.

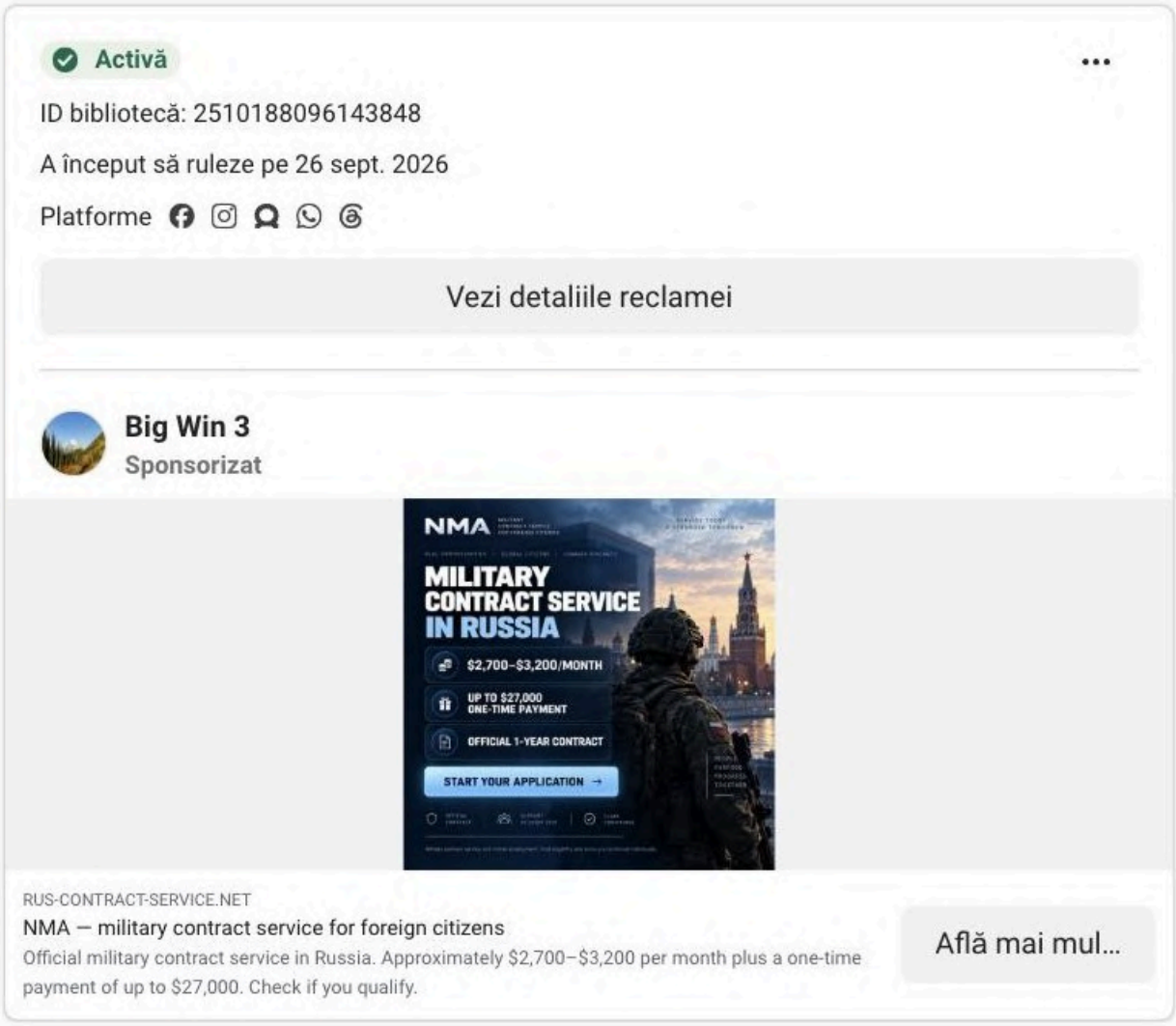


Figure 22. Ad by the page “Big Win 3”, addressed to all foreigners. The page name comes from a series of more than 450 “Big Win” pages, used mainly for online casino ads.

The ad leads to rus-contract-service.net, the website of a so-called “*National Military Agency*”. The website claims to have an “*official contract with the Ministry of Defence of Russia*”, without offering any proof, and promises Russian citizenship. Its Telegram account describes itself as

follows: “*We help foreigners join Russian Army. Official government service*”. Although the page is in English, the cookie banner is in Russian, and the contact phone number is Russian.



Figure 23. rus-contract-service.net (“National Military Agency”). Note the Russian-language cookie banner at the bottom of a page written in English. The domain was registered on 10 September 2026, 16 days before the ads.

What the ads promise and what they do not say

The ads in the study use a narrow set of arguments, repeated in all languages. The main argument is financial. The promised amounts are very large for the targeted countries, but they appear in different currencies. To make them comparable, they were converted into dollars at the official exchange rate of the National Bank of Moldova of 29 September 2026.

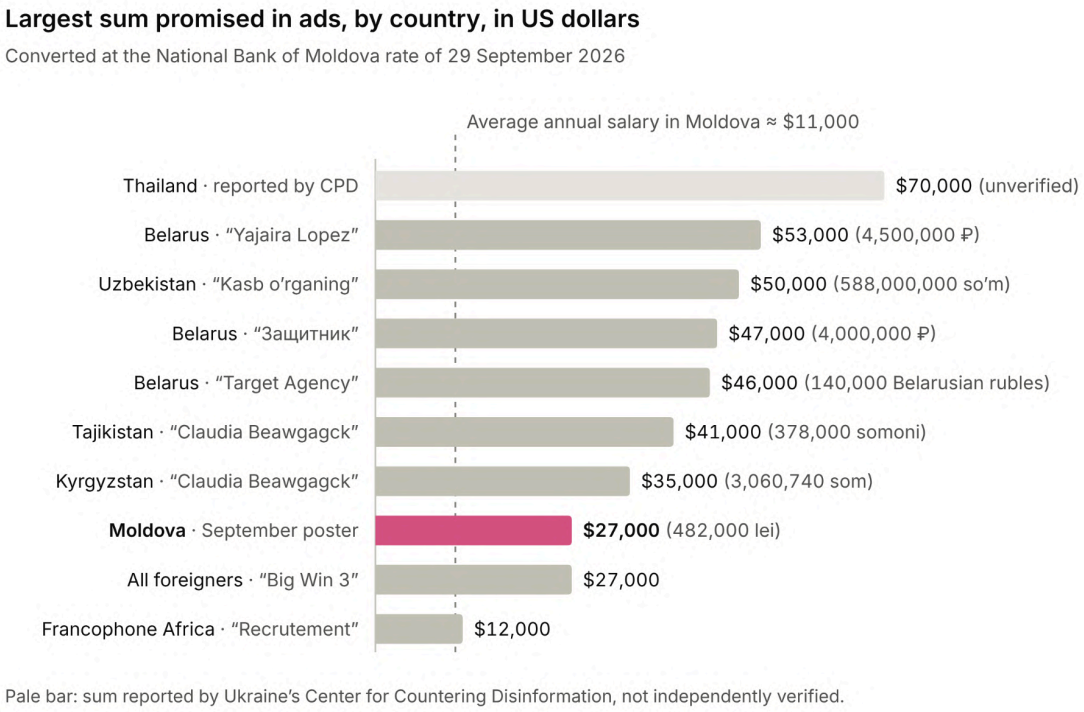


Figure 24. The large sum promised in the ads, by country, converted into dollars. Moldova (pink) is offered the smallest sum among the former Soviet republics in the study. NBM exchange rate of 29 September 2026: $1 = 17.76 lei = 84.4 Russian roubles = 3.03 Belarusian roubles = 9.23 somoni = 87.7 som = 11,829 so'm.

The chart also shows a difference. Among the former Soviet republics in the study, Moldova is promised the smallest sum: almost a quarter less than Kyrgyzstan and about half as much as in the "*Yajaira Lopez*" ad for Belarus. Even so, the sum is more than twice the average annual salary in Moldova, of about $11,000.

The second argument is Russian citizenship, promised almost everywhere, sometimes even "in one day". For people from poor countries, a Russian passport may seem valuable in itself.

The third argument is legality. Phrases such as "everything is official" and "it is not mercenarism", or the claim of an "official contract with the Ministry of Defence", pre-empt candidates' fear that they could face criminal prosecution at home.

The fourth promise is that the person will not end up fighting at the front. The ads offer "work behind the front lines", jobs as a driver, mechanic or welder, logistics or drone assembly. The page "Target Agency" offers, for Belarus, "*Работа в тылу*" (Work behind the front lines), with 140,000 Belarusian roubles, or about $46,000.

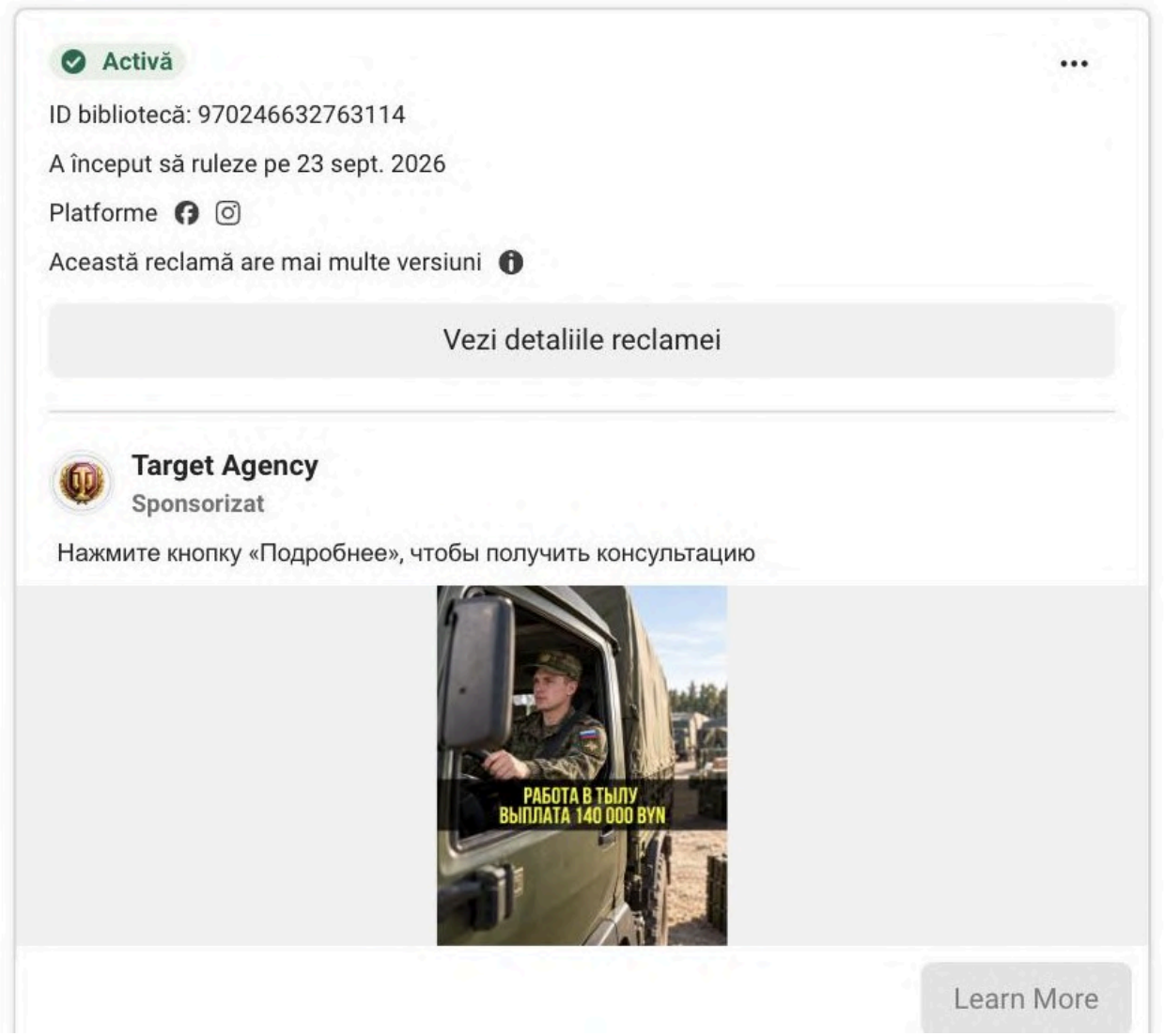


Figure 25. Ad by the page "Target Agency": "Work behind the front lines". The phrase suggests that the person will not fight, without any document guaranteeing this.

What actually happens to those recruited is not visible in the ads. According to Ukraine's Centre for Countering Disinformation, in most cases, foreigners from the Global South lured by such promises end up in the most dangerous sectors of the front.

Findings

The study shows that recruitment for the Russian army through META ads is not a series of isolated cases, but an organised operation, with the Republic of Moldova as one of its explicit targets. The same promotion techniques also appear in the other countries: pages with neutral names, created a few days before or even on the same day as the ad, pages that are part of series used for casino ads, and front domains that show verification systems a restaurant and show candidates the recruitment offer.

The message changes from one country to another, but the arguments remain the same. The ads appear in at least eight languages, and the amounts are converted into local currency. Belarusians are told openly that it is about the army and that "*it is not mercenarism*", Uzbeks are offered "*work assembling drones*" without the word "*army*", and Moldovans are offered a "*service for real men*". Everywhere, the main bait is money and the citizenship of the Russian Federation.

Faced with this network, META reacts slowly. The January ads had been running for more than three days when journalists discovered them, and the page "militares voluntarios" published recruitment ads for more than two months. The network, by contrast, can launch new campaigns very quickly: between 21 and 27 September alone, 56 ads were launched, in the same period in which Kyiv warned that Russia had begun an additional mobilisation. When the ads are eventually removed, they can also disappear from the archive, as happened with the pages that targeted Moldova in September. Delayed moderation thus not only lets the ads reach people, but also erases the traces investigators would need. In effect, META is helping Russia erase the evidence of its crimes.

Nor is the geography of the campaigns accidental: Latin America, Central Asia and Africa are exactly the regions to which, according to HUR, Russian recruitment structures shifted after 39 countries secured the suspension of the recruitment of their citizens.

For the Republic of Moldova, the risk goes beyond the loss of lives at the front. Before any conversation takes place, the forms collect the names, phone numbers, passport information and HIV status of men willing to go to war for money. This data reaches anonymous operators, and nothing prevents its later use for pressure or for other forms of recruitment, including sabotage operations in the interest of the Russian Federation.

For now, the Moldovan state's response remains limited to warnings. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has advised Moldovans in Russia not to sign documents related to military service without legal advice, and the Minister of Internal Affairs says the advertisements are being monitored. However, the Republic of Moldova does not publish its own figures on citizens recruited, killed or captured at the front on Russia's side. The only available data, 857 Moldovans recruited and 81 killed, come from HUR and have been neither confirmed nor denied by the Moldovan authorities. Without official data and without public monitoring of the ads, the real scale of the phenomenon remains unknown, and recruiters can return with each new wave.

Recommendations

In light of the information collected and analysed, the "WatchDog.MD" Community makes the following recommendations:

For META:

- Detecting text in images for military recruitment terms;
- Mandatory disclaimers for running ads on META platforms, including commercial ads, for pages created less than 6 months ago and for pages that have run ads fewer than 10 times since registration or have spent less than USD 1,200;
- Mandatory retention in the META Ad Library archive, including for a longer period, of commercial ads that ran without a disclaimer, so that civil society can identify such cases and alert the host platform about them;

For the authorities of the Republic of Moldova:

- A public information campaign, in Romanian and Russian, on the legal risks of mercenarism and on the danger of sending one's passport or medical data to unknown recruiters;
- Active monitoring of such recruitment campaigns and blocking of the websites that collect data for the Russian army;
- Consular and legal assistance for Moldovans in Russia who are in administrative detention or threatened with expulsion, the group most exposed to forced recruitment;
- Cooperation with Ukraine and European partners to identify the recruiters and those who administer the pages and websites, not only the recruited persons.

For the external partners of the Republic of Moldova:

- The European Commission should require META, as well as other digital platforms, to provide the same ad transparency in Moldova, an EU candidate country. Recruitment ads should be treated as a security risk;
- Platforms hosting the recruitment websites should block them on their servers based on information provided by civil society and the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, with the support of external partners;
- Support for civil society in the Republic of Moldova so that it can expose as many cases as possible of the hybrid war waged by the Russian Federation.
- EU member states should initiate investigations into the digital companies on whose servers Russia stores data on future recruits.