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As Russia has tried to substitute some imports from the West, it has expanded manufacturing of textiles, footwear, food products and basic electronics, noted Ekaterina Kurbangaleeva, a visiting scholar at George Washington University, specializing in political and social research, including Russian taxpayer data. Some types of workers saw their wages triple and in some cases quintuple between 2021, the year before Russia launched its war, and 2024, her research has found.

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“It was like a shot of adrenaline,” Kurbangaleeva said of the wartime boost to the economy, though she noted the slowdown in economic growth since then.

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Some of Russia’s more deprived, rural areas have also experienced an economic uplift since the start of the war, in part because of huge pay checks going to Russian soldiers and their families – a strategy the Kremlin has used to recruit volunteer soldiers and avoid wider conscription as it seeks to replace those lost on the frontlines in Ukraine.

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“Russian soldiers today are paid more than any Russian soldier in the history of Russian soldiers,” RUSI’s Connolly said. “They have been earning more money than they ever would have hoped to have earned if they’d have stayed in those relatively depressed parts of the country and got another job in the civilian economy.”

The Russian government has also disbursed large compensation payments to the families of soldiers killed or injured in the war, Kurbangaleeva noted.

In part by throwing money at the military workforce and their families, the Kremlin has managed to temper discontent despite Russian casualties in Ukraine nearing 1 million people, with 250,000 of those dead, according to a CSIS estimate published in June.

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