

IDF begins drafting women to elite combat units in historic first
Anna Ahronheim - Jerusalem Post

For the first time, women will be drafted into the elite Israel Air Force's 669 Search and Rescue unit beginning this month, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit announced.



Women will soon be able to serve in the Israeli Air Force© (photo credit: IDF SPOKESPERSON

*Female recruits will undergo various physical and mental screenings to draft into combat positions in the elite unit. The brigade had been closed to women **until earlier this year** when IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kohavi approved the integration of women.*

The screenings for Unit 669, which happen once a year, will be made in accordance with the current operational requirements that have been determined by the chief medical officer, the chief infantry and paratroopers' officer and the IAF's 7th Wing for Special Forces.

*All cadets will be required to meet the operational conditions, including during training, in order to ensure that the unit continues to meet its operational tasks and the required quality of troops serving in the unit. Recruits who do not pass the screenings will be able to apply to other combat roles in which **women are already permitted to serve.***



Women will soon be able to serve in the Israeli Air Force's elite 669 Search and Rescue Unit as well as the Yahalom combat engineering unit. (credit: IDF SPOKESPERSON'S UNIT)© Provided by The Jerusalem Post

In 2016, women were allowed to join Unit 669, but in positions such as paramedics or other non-combat roles.

The IDF's elite Airborne Combat, Search and Rescue Unit 669 is one of [the four special forces of the IDF](#). Though more than 1,200 cadets on average try out for the unit, only a small fraction graduate the 18-month course.

The course, which lasts about 20 months, is considered to be particularly intense, with cadets training in the air, on land and at sea.

Women will also be able to draft into the Yahalom Combat Engineering Unit beginning in March 2023. Those who pass the initial screening but not the final process will be able to draft into other roles.

The drafting of women into these positions comes after an IDF committee announced in July that [more combat roles should be open to female recruits](#). The committee was formed in July 2020 to evaluate the integration of women into combat roles after four female recruits petitioned the High Court of Justice to open all combat positions.

What requirements must women meet to serve in elite units?

In order to not compromise the operational requirements of combat units and due to the need to carry heavy loads of more than 40 kg. (88 lbs.) for long distances during war, the Medical Corps formulated basic threshold physical requirements for [women who want to join combat units](#) such as Unit 669 or infantry units.

For example, women who want to serve in elite units, such as Unit 669, need to weigh at least 78 kg. (172 lbs.) and be at least 1.66 meters (5'5") tall. Those who want to join combat infantry units must weigh at least 67 kg. (148 lbs.) and be at least 1.64 meters tall. Those who want to join the Armored Corps must weigh at least 60 kg. (132 lbs.) and be at least 1.65 meters tall.



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Following the recommendations of the committee, Kohavi ordered that as long as a woman fits the requirements set out by the team, along with the operational requirements of the role, the position would be open to them.

But elite units such as Sayeret Matkal, an army commando unit that goes behind enemy lines; naval commandos Shayetet 13 and the IAF's Shaldag Special Forces unit, will remain closed to women, the IDF said. The IDF's commando brigade and the Israel Navy's Submarine Unit will also remain closed to women.

The IDF has stressed that the recommendations to allow women to serve in these positions were based solely on professional and physiological requirements. However, critics of gender integration in the military [say it is a dangerous social experiment](#) with potential ramifications for national security as requirements for female combat troops have been lowered because women suffer from stress injuries at a higher rate than men.

The military said it would begin pilot programs to study women serving as sappers and in other positions in the Yahalom unit of the Combat Engineering Corps and as drivers in combat-related transportation roles in the Infantry Corps.