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RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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About the Board	<p>ISR103098.E</p> <p>Israel: Alternatives to military service and possibility of serving with modified duties (for example, without bearing arms or outside a particular area) Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa</p> <p>In 23 February 2009 correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a representative from New Profile, a pacifist non-governmental organization (NGO) opposed to the compulsory military service (New Profile n.d.), indicated that alternative service is generally not available in Israel (ibid. 23 Feb. 2009; States News Service 18 Dec. 2008); National Service (Sherut Leumi), a voluntary civilian service, is only available to persons who have already obtained a final exemption from military service, which is decided by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), not the individual recruit (New Profile 23 Feb. 2009). National Service can last between one and two years in length, and those who have completed this service are entitled to the same benefits as released soldiers (Ynet 31 Aug. 2007). Volunteers undertake various tasks; for example, they may "work in hospitals, aid in preventing traffic accidents, promote environmental awareness and act as health aides to the elderly" (<i>Haaretz</i> 20 Aug. 2007). According to the IDF, there is "no connection between volunteering for the National Service and receiving an exemption from the army" (Ynet 31 Aug. 2007). The first year of the National Service Program involved some 500 participants (<i>Haaretz</i> 20 Aug. 2007).</p> <p>In 2008, <i>Haaretz</i> reported that the number of Arab youths volunteering for National Service has been "constantly rising" (24 Feb. 2008). The National Service Administration reportedly registered 289 Israeli-Arab volunteers in 2006-2007 (US 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 5). While also eligible for civilian service, male yeshiva [Jewish religious seminary] students generally did not participate; of the 50,000 yeshiva students receiving draft deferrals, some 50 chose to join the civilian national service (<i>Haaretz</i> 10 Mar. 2008).</p> <p>In 2008, <i>Haaretz</i> reported that the number of yeshiva students seeking exemptions from military service had increased by over 10 percent over the previous year (31 July 2008). In 2007, the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee decided to extend the Tal Law which exempts full-time yeshiva students from military service until 2012 (<i>Haaretz</i> 11 July 2007). In 2008, some 28 percent of otherwise eligible 18-year-old Israeli males did not join the army, the vast majority of whom were Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Jews (NZPA 9 Oct. 2008). A minority of potential draftees were exempted based "on medical grounds, because they [had] low test scores, criminal records or [were] living abroad" (NZPA 9 Oct. 2008).</p>	12 March 2009	
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According to an article published on 14 August 2007 by *The Christian Science Monitor*, which cites military and government sources, approximately one in four eligible Israeli males is exempted from the compulsory three-year military service, whereas the figure was one in ten in the late 1990s. According to the same article, Internet sites offering advice on how to obtain a deferment have proliferated (*The Christian Science Monitor* 14 Aug. 2007).

A pamphlet published by the Israeli government on military service states that "[e]xemptions from the army for men are extremely rare [and] [e]ach case is investigated very carefully" (Israel 2006, 11). General exemptions from military service in Israel are available to Israeli Arabs, students in accredited Jewish religious institutions, pregnant or married women and mothers, and religiously observant women who opt to pursue community work in lieu of military service (*ibid.*; Global Security n.d.). Jewish women who seek an exemption based on religious observance must appear before an exemption committee to prove their religiosity (Israel 2006, 11). An article in *The Jerusalem Post* reports that 42 percent of Israeli women receive exemptions from military service for religious reasons (*The Jerusalem Post* 8 Mar. 2007; see also NZPA 9 Oct. 2008). However, another article by the same newspaper notes that the number of religious women joining the IDF has been increasing, with nearly 100 being drafted in March 2007 (*The Jerusalem Post* 16 May 2007).

According to *The Jerusalem Post*, women who wish to serve in combat units and serve for three years like their male counterparts (instead of their standard two years) must volunteer (8 Mar. 2007). While women represent 30 percent of the IDF, they are underrepresented in combat units (which have a total of 1,000 to 1,500 women) (*ibid.* 8 Mar. 2007)

Israelis may defer their compulsory military service while pursuing academic studies or technological training, although they must complete their military service in full upon completion (Israel 2006, 13-14) or interruption of their studies (*ibid.* n.d.e).

Possibility of serving a modified service

The Representative from New Profile stated that military recruits generally do not have the option of choosing a modified military service; rather, the IDF decides on a placement (New Profile 23 Feb. 2009). However, the Representative noted that "on very rare occasions" a recruit may negotiate terms with the military, but only when the military itself initiates such negotiations (*ibid.*).

According to the website of the IDF, soldiers whose presence near their home "is proven necessary" may be allowed to conduct their service near their family; this is determined on a case-by-case basis (Israel n.d.c). Similarly, recruits with "family, economic or social" problems that might have an impact on their service may be allowed a modified military service depending on their individual situations provided that they make a request six months prior to actual recruitment (*ibid.* n.d.d). According to the IDF, requests can be made under this provision in relation to the following:

- relief in service conditions;
- family payments;
- attending to and acknowledgement of a lone soldier;
- social exemption;
- volunteering (profile 21 or 24)
- shortening and lengthening the service;

- volunteering for reserve service;
- postponement or advancing the recruitment;
- volunteering document of a lone son/son of a bereaved family/son of casualties of animosity actions [who] wishes to serve in field units. (ibid.)

The Lone Son Security Service Act provides that "sons of bereaved families or sons of families who have lost a close family member as a result of an animosity" are exempt from serving as combat soldiers in the IDF (ibid. n.d.b).

Immigrants who have already served before coming to Israel are sometimes granted a deferment or shortening of service at the discretion of the IDF, provided that a request for such a deferment or shortening of service is approved by the recruitment bureau prior to enlistment (Israel 2006, 12; ibid. n.d.a). In some cases, immigrants whose resultant IDF service is less than six months will be asked to serve only in the reserves (ibid. n.d.g, 131). Women who are at least 20 years of age when they immigrate to Israel are "generally exempt from army service" (ibid. 2006, 11).

Israeli citizens who left Israel with their parents before the age of 16 years may also be eligible for a deferment for as long as they are outside the country and "are permitted to visit Israel every year under certain conditions" (ibid. n.d.f).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The Embassy of Israel in Ottawa, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), a lawyer specializing in Military Law and two Israeli professors specializing in military affairs did not respond to requests for information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Combatants for

Peace, Courage to Refuse, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Human Rights Watch (HRW), *The Jewish Chronicle* [London], *The New York Times*, Refuser Solidarity Network, War Resisters' International.

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