

WOMEN IN ISRAEL

The [State of Israel](#) was established on the principle of equality of social and political rights for all its citizens irrespective of religion, race or sex.

This image is, however, somewhat misleading. There are many areas in which traditions, social institutions, religious rules, and even laws have kept women at a disadvantage: in the workplace, in divorce proceedings, in national service and even as victims of violence. Changes in the political and economic climate, such as the Middle East conflict on the Middle East and the influx of thousands of guest workers, have created new problems.

There are still difficulties facing women in Israel today, but overall the women's movement has fought for, and won, many advancements for their place in society. Today, women are represented in every level of government, a woman judge presides over the Supreme Court, a woman sits in the highest command of the IDF and women take positions in all of the top high-tech industries.

Legal Status

Israel's [Declaration of Independence](#) was one of the first of its kind to include sex as a group classification for the purpose of equal rights. It stated, "The State of Israel will maintain equal social and political rights for all citizens, irrespective of religion, race or sex."

Since then, there have been a number of pieces of legislation aimed at implementing the principle of gender equality.

The 1951 Women's Equal Rights Law equated the legal status of women to that of men and prohibited discrimination on grounds of sex. The 1988 Equal Employment Opportunities Law similarly prohibited all forms of discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender, marital status and parenthood. This law recognizes sexual harassment as a form of discrimination in the workplace, which is subject to civil and criminal sanctions.

In 1998, the [Israeli Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law](#) was enacted, prohibiting sexual harassment and prejudicial treatment in a broad range of situations involving relationships of power and dependence. That same year the Knesset established the [Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women](#) which is authorized to encourage, coordinate, promote and monitor the government's and the local authorities' activities regarding women's status, to promote legislation and to advise the government on the enforcement of laws promoting the status of women. It is also expected to initiate research and to enhance public awareness through the media and education.

Further, the Israeli judiciary has contributed greatly to the advancement of women's rights. The [Supreme Court](#) has declared the principle of gender equality to be a fundamental tenet of the Israeli legal system.

In 2010, [women](#) represented just over 50% of Israel's population and their average [life expectancy](#) was 82.4 years, compared to 78.6 years for men.

Education & Employment

In 2010, 23.7% of Israeli women above the age of fifteen had between 13 and 15 years of formal [education](#), compared with only 21.3% of males in the same bracket. Conversely, though, 3.4% of all Israeli women had no schooling compared to just 1.2% of men.

In 2010, women accounted for 57.9% of all [university and college](#) students graduating with their first degree, amounting to 24,810 in absolute numbers. Women also represented 54.7% of all first-degree students in Israel. During the 2000's, Israel ranked seventh in the Western world with regard to the percentage of women studying in higher education facilities.

Since the establishment of the state, the ratio of [unemployment](#) among females has been slightly higher than that of males, though it dipped lower than the male ratio for the first time in 2009. That year, 7.5% of the women civilian labor force (109,000) was unemployed in comparison with 7.6% of men (122,000).

In 2010, there were 1.34 million women working either full or part time in the civilian labor force compared with 1.55 million men. In terms of equal economic participation in the workforce for women, Israel was ranked 15th out of the 31 nations in Europe, Asia, North America and Oceania by the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Within the women workforce, the majority of women have jobs as clerical workers, sales agents, social service workers, or associate professionals and technicians. 93,000 women worked in the high-tech sector, of which more than half had knowledge-intensive positions.

Average gross work income per month for Israeli women in 2009 was 6,280 NIS, compared to 9,500 NIS for men.

In the 2008/09 academic year, women made up just under 30% of all academic staff at Israeli universities and colleges, with the majority of those being lecturers in the humanities and social sciences.

Government & Public Life

Since the establishment of the [State of Israel](#), only ten women have served as cabinet ministers, including Prime Minister [Golda Meir](#) and Vice Prime Minister [Tzipi Livni](#). Of the twenty-four (24) ministers in the eighteenth [Knesset](#) (2009-Presnet), only two - [Limor Livnat](#) (Culture & Sport Minister) and Sofa Landver (Immigration Absorbption Minister) are women. Another three women - Lea Nass, Gila Gamliel and Orit Noked - hold deputy minister positions and a final woman, [Tzipi Livni](#), is leader of the opposition.

In the eighteenth [Knesset](#), elected in 2009, there are 24 women out of the 120 members, representing 20%, as compared to an average of 17.6% among the member states of the [European Union](#). This 20%, though, does represent the highest number of women who have served in a government, up from a record low of 8 in 1981 and 9 in 1996.

In the [eighteenth Knesset](#), six women sit on the Finance Committee and two belong to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. In addition, the Committee on the Status of Women, the Science & Technology Committee and the Subcommittee on Trafficking in Women are all headed by women.

Israel is one of the only countries to have been led by a female Prime Minister. Known as the “Iron Lady” of Israeli politics, Prime Minister [Golda Meir](#) served from 1969 to 1974, and was only the third woman to serve as Prime Minister in the world.

Beyond politics, women have become a central part of the Israeli judicial system.

For many years at least one of Israel's [Supreme Court](#) justices has been a woman. At present, five women sit as judges on the 15-person Supreme Court and one of them, [Dorit Beinisch](#), is the current President of the Court. Beinisch served for ten years as a justice on the Supreme Court, from 1995 to 2005, and in September of 2006 she was sworn in as the first woman to ever hold the position of Supreme Court President, succeeding [Aharon Barak](#).

Women also comprise nearly 51% of all magistrate and district court judges, making it very likely that more women will be appointed to the Supreme Court in the future. Additionally, more than 44% of all lawyers registered in Israel are women.

Sixty percent of public servants are women, but most are concentrated in the lower ranks of the civil service. Affirmative Action legislation was enacted to improve women's representation in higher ranks. Since the founding of the State, only four women have served as mayors of municipalities. One of the four was a Christian Arab. In 2012, there was only one woman municipality mayor - Miriam Fireberg of [Netanya](#). Additionally, in 2012, there were many women local representatives though only one woman, Yael German, was serving as a mayor of a local authority.

Many political parties now necessitate a minimum number of women on all party lists, but these requirements are not yet implemented on all levels of party activity. In addition to legislative change, the work of government bodies, non-government women's organizations and grassroots activist groups are instrumental in directing and channeling the intellectual power and leadership potential of Israeli women. In recent years, legislation has been proposed to obligate parties to open their ranks to women, by curtailing government support to parties with less than 25% women candidates.

Military & National Service

As opposed to every other nation around the world, in Israel women are conscripted into military service alongside the men.

Except for their service in the [War of Independence](#) (when all able bodied individuals were needed to fight), however, were not allowed to serve in combat units in the IDF until 1994. That year, under appeal by a female immigrant from South Africa, the High Court ruled that some combat roles be open to female soldiers. In 2000, the Equality amendment to the Military Service law stated that the right of women to serve in any role in the IDF is equal to the right of men.

Since then the number of women serving in all sorts of combat roles, from the artillery and infantry corps to naval and air forces, has skyrocketed.



Today 90% of all military positions in the IDF are available to women . Some specialized units, such as Karakal, a unisex combat unit, and the elite canine unit, Oketz, are open to women. Various positions in the artillery and armored divisions are also tasked by women. Women also serve in the Sachlav unit of the Military Police, the Samag unit of the Border Police, and the Yasam special patrol unit of the Israeli police.

In 2001, the [Air Force](#) graduated its [first ever female combat fighter pilot](#), Lt. Roni Zuckerman. Four years later, in 2005, a [second female passed the intensive fighter pilot course](#) and two other female soldiers graduated to serve as transport pilots. During the [Second Lebanon War](#) in 2006, female helicopter pilots took part in field missions alongside their male counterparts.

In October 2011, 27 female combat soldiers completed the IDF Ground Forces Officers Training Course along with 369 male soldiers and were promoted to the rank of second lieutenant. The new female officers serve in a wide range of combat units from artillery to Caracal and tanks.

In December 2011, the 163rd graduation ceremony of the [Israeli Air Force](#) Flight Academy saw five female pilots complete the arduous and elite program.

Women's Organizations

The exact number of women's NGOs operating in Israel is estimated at 100. They vary tremendously in size, ideology, socio-economic characteristics of their members, activities and goals. Some of the major organizations are the Israel Women's Network (IWN), [Na'amat](#), Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO), and Emunah.