



**Asaf Malchi**

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**A Bridge to Employment:  
The Benefits of Military Service  
to the ultra-Orthodox Sector in Israel**

**Study Summary**

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Policy Paper 116



THE ISRAEL  
DEMOCRACY  
INSTITUTE

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# What do ultra-Orthodox men think of military service?

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I got to know Israeli society. I realized how foolish I had been to think that anyone who served in the army was a pushover, and that actually the opposite was true. I realized that the ones who serve in the army are the ones who are doing the right thing, but not out of Zionist motives.... You are committed to every person in the country, and that is why you serve.... I can walk with my head held high and say: I served in the army.... Even if I did not learn a profession, I got the best tools for the job: I got the ability to work.

(An ultra-Orthodox man who did vocational service in the army)

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While ultra-Orthodox men — married and single alike — who served in the Israel Defense Forces view army service as a path toward individual empowerment and the development of their abilities and skills, they see such service primarily as preparation for employment. Indeed, 88 percent of them successfully integrate into the job market after their discharge from the army. They also consider army service in general, and combat service in particular, as an entry ticket into Israeli society.

We find that even though army service is still a controversial topic in the ultra-Orthodox society, more than one-third (36 percent) of combat unit veterans say that their attitude toward secular society improved as a result of their service. Seventy-seven percent reported that since their army service, they have felt to a large extent that they are part of the State of Israel and its social challenges, and 44 percent of veterans of Netzah Yehuda, the ultra-Orthodox combat unit, said that their attitude toward the state improved a great deal after their army service

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# How much does army service increase the chance of integrating into the general job market?

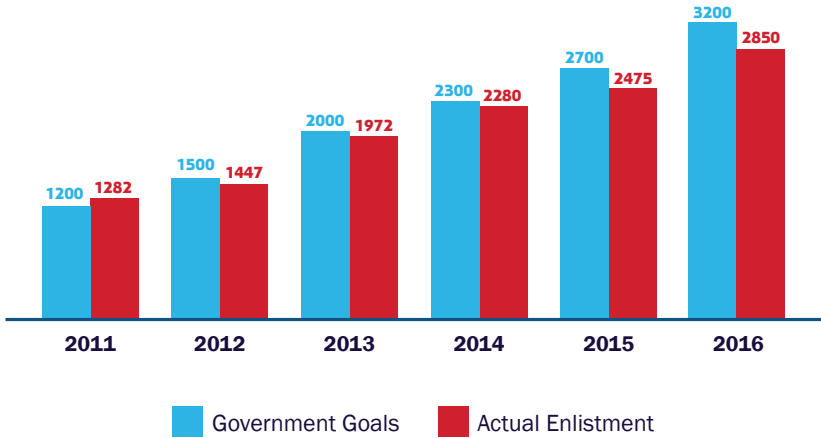
The study shows that serving in the IDF — particularly in the Shahar program for ultra-Orthodox men aged 22 to 28, which provides vocational training and employment experience during military service — is a powerful employment engine that enables these young men to find their place in the job market and support themselves in a dignified manner. In comparison, young men aged 18 to 21 who come from the margins of ultra-Orthodox society (those who could not persevere in their religious studies in the yeshiva world and ultra-Orthodox schools) serve in the Netzah Yehuda track as combat soldiers. For them, combat service provides a haven and a framework that strengthens their personalities, skills, and abilities.

The study found that 70 percent of ultra-Orthodox veterans had not worked at all before their army service, and more than half of them (51 percent) stated that their primary motive for joining the army was a feeling of civic responsibility toward the country. In addition, although approximately two-thirds (65 percent) of the Netzah Yehuda veterans believe that their task in the army did not help them find civilian jobs, most (84 percent) think that military service vastly improves the chances for ultra-Orthodox men to find work in the general work force. Still, approximately 40 percent report that they were much, or very much, in need of employment assistance and guidance after their army service.

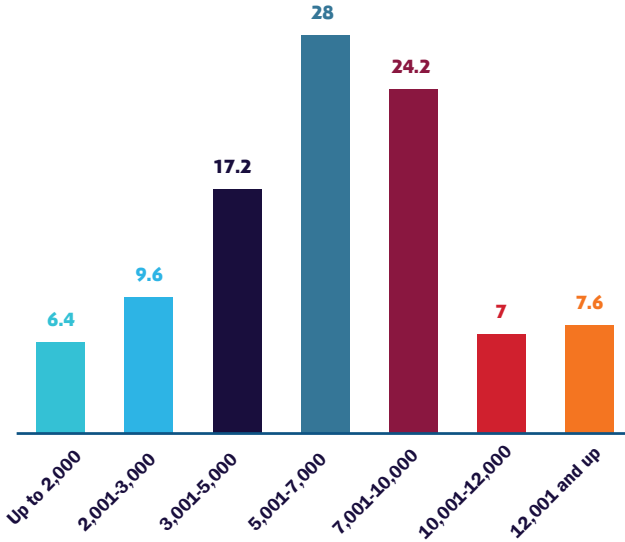
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## Success in Reaching Enlistment Targets



## Average Monthly Salary Level of Netzah Yehuda Veterans, 2016 (in shekels and percentages of the total number of workers)



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# What happens after discharge from the army?

Approximately two years, on average, after completing their army service, 88 percent of veterans enter the work force. Close to 80 percent of these discharged soldiers go on to work in mixed-gender (non-ultra-Orthodox) work environments, in a variety of professions and at higher salary levels than their ultra-Orthodox peers who did not serve in the army. By way of comparison, the employment rate among ultra-Orthodox men aged 18 to 24 as a whole is only 24 percent (in 2016).

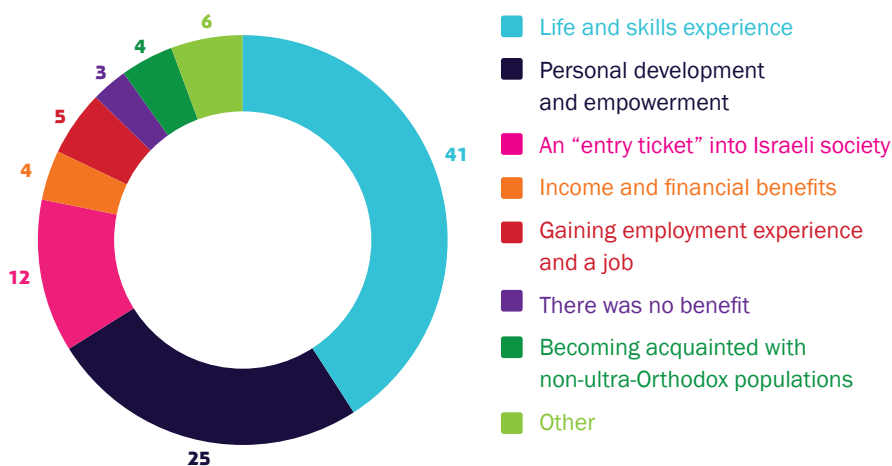
When it comes to employment, most veterans of the Shahar program have some advantage over veterans of the Netzah Yehuda combat unit because the former prepares its participants for employment. The study shows that young single men who are veterans of combat units (as opposed to the married veterans of the Shahar program) absorb and internalize “Israeli” norms and values, and so integrate more easily into the general society outside the boundaries of the ultra-Orthodox community.

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### The Primary Benefit of Army Service\*

(in percentages, out of the total number of Netzah Yehuda veterans)



Yet despite the many gains that have been made in the integration of ultra-Orthodox army veterans into the work force, there are still quite a few challenges when it comes to preparing them optimally for today's job market.

\* גברים חרדים בשירות צבאי טכנולוגי: השתלבות בוגרי מסלולי שח"ר בשוק העבודה  
דו"ח מחקר הערכה אסף מלח  
9-12, (<http://economy.gov.il/Research/Documents/X12244.pdf>)

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# Challenges and Recommendations

## (1) Preparation for Army Service

- a. In light of the rising dependence on civilian non-profit organizations for finding ultra-Orthodox men suitable for recruitment into the IDF, and due to the problems in marketing army service to members of the ultra-Orthodox community, we recommend establishing a community relations department at the national level. This department would help enhance interactions with young ultra-Orthodox men who are interested in serving in the army and with yeshiva heads who are willing to assist in the process.
  - b. Due to the IDF's multi-branched structure, including the department for ultra-Orthodox enlistment, we recommend establishing a main administrative body for ultra-Orthodox enlistment that would serve as a one-stop center. This administrative body would coordinate the procedures for finding, testing, and placing ultra-Orthodox recruits in the army, and would then prepare them for the job market and civilian life in general.
  - c. Even before enlistment, we recommend a diagnostic process, tailored to the unique characteristics of the ultra-Orthodox lifestyle. This process would include aspects connected to employment (identifying vocational aptitudes, personal capabilities, and so on), similar to those that are used in the vocational guidance centers for members of the ultra-Orthodox community. The use of vocational diagnostics will help each ultra-Orthodox soldier take full advantage of his skills and abilities.
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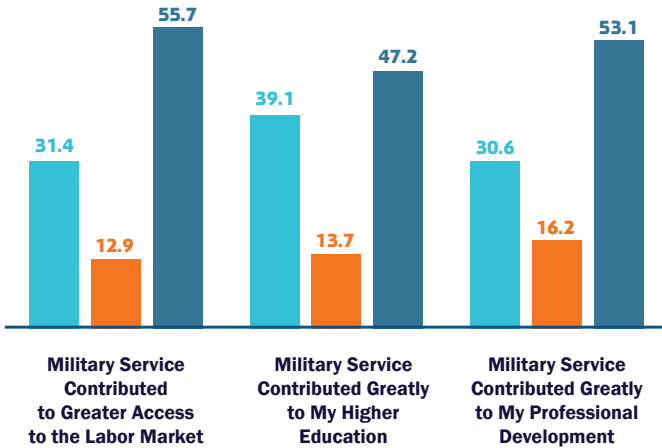
## **(2) During Army Service**

- a. As part of the year-long project developed for all soldiers in the Netzah Yehuda unit (aged 18 to 21; mostly combat service), we recommend varying the fields of study and incentivizing the engagement in general studies so as to expand these young men's post-army employment options.
  
  - b. The study's findings show that only about 47 percent of soldiers who serve in Netzah Yehuda complete their studies during the year-long project (a third year of service in order to complete their studies and prepare for the job market and civilian life). Three main measures are therefore required:
    - i. To define the command and administrative responsibility during the year-long project in one single, clear military framework;
  
    - ii. To increase the number of army personnel and positions who deal with soldiers during the year-long project;
  
    - iii. To increase the army's coordination with external parties.
  
  - c. Although there are many military roles tailored for ultra-Orthodox men, particularly in the Shahar program, it is vital that service options for ultra-Orthodox soldiers be expanded and varied and that these options be given professional recognition (credentials) in the government training programs.
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## Connection Between Military Service and Professional Development, Education and Access to Labor Market



 Somewhat Agree

 Moderately Agree

 Agree or Strongly Agree

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### **(3) Preparation for Discharge and Entry into the Work Force**

We recommend strengthening the connections between the civilian guidance and placement agencies dedicated to the ultra-Orthodox community and their counterparts in the army, particularly via the employment guidance centers operated by the Labor and Welfare Ministry. Doing so will help ultra-Orthodox veterans prepare in the best way possible for their entry into the civilian work force.

Due to the acute differences in the views held by the secular majority and ultra-Orthodox minority, most of whose leaders are still vehemently opposed to army service, it seems that the issue of equal civic responsibility will not be resolved within the next several years in a manner that any of the groups that comprise Israeli society will find satisfactory. At present, most men in the ultra-Orthodox community neither serve in the army nor perform civilian national service.

Yet, despite all that has been stated here, there is no dispute that a successful army service, leading to placement in high-quality employment and the development of greater social solidarity, simultaneously benefits individuals and has economic, civic, and social advantages for the population as a whole. A high-quality army service that leads to respectable employment in the years following discharge from the military can increase the percentage of ultra-Orthodox men who enlist. In addition, improving the service tracks within the army can increase the number of ultra-Orthodox men who will be willing to serve in the army and, by doing so, help mend the social rifts between the “tribes” that comprise the mosaic that is Israeli society.

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**Dr. Gilad Malach** is the director of the Ultra-Orthodox in Israel Program at the Israel Democracy Institute and a lecturer in political science at Bar-Ilan University. An expert in policy planning in the field of ultra-Orthodox employment, army service, and primary and higher education, he was director of implementation of the Gavison-Meidan Covenant Project at the Avi Chai Foundation and content manager of the Committee on Sharing the Security Burden in the Eighteenth Knesset.

This Policy paper is part of the work of the ultra-Orthodox in Israel program in the Center for Religion, Nation and State at the Israel Democracy Institute.

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