CDS 2026 Eligibility Criteria: Age, Education & Nationality

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The **Combined Defence Services (CDS) Examination 2026**, conducted by the **Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)**, is a prestigious national-level exam for candidates aspiring to join the **Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force** as commissioned officers.

Before applying, every aspirant must carefully understand the **CDS 2026 eligibility criteria**, as failure to meet even a single condition can lead to disqualification at any stage of the selection process.

This article provides a **complete and detailed explanation of CDS 2026 eligibility criteria**, covering **age limit, educational qualifications, nationality requirements**, and other important eligibility conditions.

CDS 2026 Eligibility Criteria – Overview

To be eligible for CDS 2026, a candidate must fulfill the following three major conditions:

- **Nationality**
- **Age Limit**
- **Educational Qualification**

Eligibility criteria vary slightly depending on the **academy applied for**, so candidates must check the requirements carefully.

CDS 2026 Nationality Criteria

A candidate applying for CDS 2026 must be:

1. A **citizen of India**, or
2. A **subject of Nepal**, or
3. A **subject of Bhutan**, or
4. A **Tibetan refugee** who came to India before **1st January 1962** with the intention of permanently settling in India, or
5. A person of **Indian origin** who has migrated from **Pakistan, Burma, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Zaire, Ethiopia, or Vietnam** with the intention of permanently settling in India.

Important Note:

- Candidates belonging to categories (2) to (5) must possess a **certificate of eligibility issued by the Government of India**.
- **Indian citizens do not require any eligibility certificate**.

CDS 2026 Age Limit (Academy-Wise)

The **age limit for CDS 2026** depends on the academy for which the candidate is applying. The age is calculated as per the **date of birth mentioned in the matriculation certificate**.

1. Indian Military Academy (IMA)

- **Age Limit:** 19 to 24 years
- **Candidate must be unmarried**

2. Indian Naval Academy (INA)

- **Age Limit:** 19 to 24 years
- **Candidate must be unmarried**

3. Air Force Academy (AFA)

- **Age Limit:** 20 to 24 years
- **Upper age limit of 26 years is applicable for candidates holding a valid and current Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL)**
- **Candidate must be unmarried**

4. Officers' Training Academy (OTA – Men)

- **Age Limit:** 19 to 25 years
- **Both married and unmarried male candidates are eligible**

5. Officers' Training Academy (OTA – Women)

- **Age Limit:** 19 to 25 years

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- **Both married and unmarried female candidates are eligible**

Key Age-Related Points:

- Date of birth once entered in the application **cannot be changed later**.
- Candidates must fall **strictly within the prescribed age range** on the specified date.
- Age relaxation is **not applicable** except for CPL holders in AFA.

CDS 2026 Educational Qualification

Educational qualifications vary depending on the **academy applied for**. Candidates must possess the required qualification **on or before the date specified in the notification**.

1. Indian Military Academy (IMA)

- A **Bachelor's degree** from a recognized university or equivalent.

2. Officers' Training Academy (OTA – Men & Women)

- A **Bachelor's degree** from a recognized university or equivalent.

3. Indian Naval Academy (INA)

- A **Bachelor's degree in Engineering** from a recognized university or institution.

4. Air Force Academy (AFA)

Candidates must have:

- A **Bachelor's degree** from a recognized university **with Physics and Mathematics at 10+2 level**,
  OR
- A **Bachelor's degree in Engineering**.

Important Educational Notes:

- **Final-year students** are eligible to apply, provided they can submit proof of

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passing before the specified date.

- Candidates with **backlogs at the time of SSB** are generally not considered eligible.
- Degrees obtained through **distance education** must be recognized by the appropriate authority.

CDS 2026 Marital Status Criteria

- **IMA, INA, and AFA:** Only **unmarried candidates** are eligible.
- **OTA (Men & Women):** Both **married and unmarried candidates** are eligible.
- Marriage during training at IMA, INA, or AFA is **not permitted**.

CDS 2026 Physical & Medical Standards (Brief Overview)

Although medical standards are evaluated later during the **SSB stage**, candidates must be:

- Physically fit according to **UPSC and Armed Forces medical standards**
- Free from any permanent medical condition that may hinder military service

A detailed medical examination is conducted at designated military hospitals.

Common Reasons for CDS Eligibility Rejection

- Incorrect **date of birth**
- Not meeting **educational qualification** criteria
- Applying for the wrong academy
- Lack of required **eligibility certificate**
- Medical unfitness during SSB

Why Understanding CDS 2026 Eligibility is Important

Understanding the CDS eligibility criteria ensures:

- Correct academy selection

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- Avoidance of application rejection
- Better preparation strategy aligned with eligibility
- Smooth progression through written exam and SSB stages

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – CDS 2026 Eligibility Criteria

Q1. Can final-year graduation students apply for CDS 2026?

Yes, final-year students can apply, provided they submit proof of passing before the date specified by UPSC.

Q2. Is there any age relaxation for reserved categories in CDS?

No, there is **no age relaxation** for SC, ST, OBC, or other categories in CDS examination.

Q3. Can married candidates apply for CDS 2026?

Married candidates can apply **only for OTA (Men & Women)**. IMA, INA, and AFA accept **unmarried candidates only**.

Q4. Is Mathematics compulsory for CDS?

Mathematics is compulsory **only for INA and AFA**. It is **not required for IMA and OTA**.

Q5. Can women apply for CDS 2026?

Yes, women candidates can apply for **OTA (Officers' Training Academy)** through CDS.

Q6. Is a diploma holder eligible for CDS 2026?

No, a **Bachelor's degree** is mandatory. Diploma holders without a degree are not eligible.

Q7. Does CDS have nationality restrictions?

Yes, candidates must meet the nationality conditions as specified by UPSC.

Conclusion

The **CDS 2026 eligibility criteria** play a crucial role in determining a candidate's suitability for the examination. Aspirants should carefully verify **age limits, educational qualifications, and nationality requirements** before applying. Meeting

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the eligibility criteria is the first and most important step towards achieving the dream of becoming an officer in the **Indian Armed Forces**.

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