

Policy Note:

Perspectives from Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) on the Peace Building Architecture Review (PBAR)

Introduction:

1. In a world shaped by constant flux between peace and conflict, efforts to build, keep, and sustain peace often rest on breaking the cycles of violence and insecurity. This entails ensuring former combatants, including women and children, a sustainable return to civilian life, restoring fractured communities, reducing the circulation of weapons, and preventing violence from reigniting. Noting the deterioration of security conditions worldwide, the international community has made significant strides at the political, policy, and operational level in addressing the threat posed by armed groups. In recent decades, system-wide efforts such as the [SG's Common Agenda](#), the [New Agenda for Peace](#), the Sustainable Development Goals (specifically SDG 16), as well as several Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, have placed the management of armed groups at the heart of the peacebuilding and peacekeeping issues.

2. Recently, at the political level, member states have committed to further enhancing collective efforts to tackle the root causes of insecurity driven by armed groups. [The Pact for the Future](#) [1] advocates for the strengthening of national capacities to promote and implement prevention efforts and address conflict drivers, including through sharing of best practices and lessons learned. The Pact also commits to reduce all forms of violence against women and children. It also emphasizes the need to address the illicit trade and circulation of small arms and light weapons as a critical driver of violence and conflict. It highlights the importance of combatting disinformation and misinformation, often exploited – and propagated - by armed groups to inflame tensions and hinder peace efforts. Additionally, the Pact calls for stronger partnerships with regional organizations and international financial institutions to align peacebuilding initiatives with national and regional development strategies.

3. However, more can be done. Today, the number of armed conflicts across the globe is historically high and conflict-related deaths as well as internal displacement continue to increase. The review of the Peacebuilding Architecture therefore offers a unique opportunity to further highlight and acknowledge **that Sustaining Peace in fragile and conflict-affected settings cannot be meaningfully promoted without effective and lasting interventions that are designed to prevent, address, mitigate, and respond to the (negative) impact of armed groups.** The review is also a crucial moment to reinvigorate the momentum behind the twin resolutions on Sustaining Peace (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282), building on previous commitments from member states who emphasized the importance of "inclusive and effective demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration programs" as fundamental to the consolidation of peace and long-term stability.

4. To this end, this policy note provides an overview of the conflict trends, including the impact of armed groups on peacebuilding and prevention efforts, and direct and actionable recommendations.

Shifting conflict dynamics and the proliferation of armed groups

5. The evolving nature of armed conflicts – now involving a plethora of non-state armed groups, cross-border activities and complex regional dynamics compounded by the effects of climate change, the spread of violent extremism, mercenaryism, and the proliferation of weapons – have made conflicts significantly more difficult to manage and resolve. Conflicts today are increasingly fragmented and multifaceted, far removed from the traditional patterns of inter-state and intra-state warfare that dominated much of the 20th century. Challenges are exacerbated by the urbanization of violence and misuse of communication technologies. Combined, these features have strongly shaped the design and implementation of interventions aimed at disarming and reintegrating non-state armed groups. The motivations to join armed groups as well as their modus operandi have changed over time. [Armed groups are now more fluid, less centralized, and often driven by complex webs of regional, economic, ideological, ethnic, local and personal grievances](#) [2]. Issues are exacerbated by the growing presence of armed actors across contexts and their oftentimes opportunistic affiliations – gangs, militias, self-defense, extremist groups, terrorist organizations and insurgencies – at the national and regional levels. In the absence of predictable economic opportunities, access to basic social and security services, increased marginalization and discrimination, massive internal displacement and shrinking civil space, community members might become vulnerable for the recruiting into armed groups and foment local, national, regional violence. In these insecure and increasingly violent spaces, civilians mobilize and form in more and more settings self-defense groups to ensure their own protection where other actors, such as the state security forces as well as international actors fail to do so. A situation leading to young men and women, boys and girls being particularly exposed to violence and armed (re)-recruitment.

6. These armed groups, [aided by the unabated flows of weapons and ammunition](#) [3] and the [consolidation of illicit economics](#), are central drivers of insecurity and violence in conflict-affected regions, posing severe threats to civilian populations. Their actions lead to war crimes, widespread human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), forced displacement, and the destruction of livelihoods. Civilians, [particularly women and children, bear the brunt of these violations](#)[4], facing direct attacks, abductions, and coercion into armed conflict. In some cases, political and economic elites manipulate these groups to deepen divisions for their own benefit. The territorial control of armed groups and forces perpetuate fear and insecurity, limiting access to essential services, humanitarian aid, and development efforts. Moreover, they actively disrupt or replace local governance and fuel cycles of violence and impunity. Efforts to prevent, reduce, manage, control, and dismantle the actions of these groups are therefore critical to- break

the cycles of violence and insecurity and a precondition for ensuring peace, stability, and the protection of human rights, with a focus on accountability, transitional justice, and strengthened mechanisms for civilian protection.

The need for non-military measures to address armed groups

7. Military operations alone do not constitute sustainable solution to conflict. To this end, significant progress has been made in addressing the impact of armed groups at the regional, national, and sub-national levels. Drawing on lessons learned and best practices from peacekeeping operations, special political missions, and non-mission settings, the United Nations has developed a set of [new tools](#) [5], [standards](#) [6], approaches, and programmatic interventions in recognition that traditional approaches to disarmament and demobilization, while still necessary, are not sufficient in new conflict settings as described above. Practitioners now find themselves equipped with [deploying a new generation](#) [7] of tools in peacebuilding settings, operating throughout the [conflict lifecycle](#) [8], while seeking to ensure [that interventions look beyond](#) [9] the immediate cessation of violence and create conditions that offer former combatants meaningful and sustainable alternatives to fighting. Simultaneously, efforts have been made by national and international actors to develop localized approaches to foster justice and reconciliation, rebuild trust, and facilitate the acceptance of ex-combatants into communities where social ties have been severed or broken by violence. **UN efforts to manage armed groups have expanded beyond post-conflict settings to encompass the entire peace continuum, from prevention and conflict resolution to peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.** Mediation support is also critical during the drafting of peace agreements to ensure that including of clear and realistic provisions on DDR tailored to the conflict context. In addition to supporting collective processes as part of a peace agreement, programmes are now designed to encourage the voluntary disengagement of members of armed groups during ongoing armed conflicts.

Contributions by DDR practitioners to Sustaining Peace efforts.

8. Under this premise, DDR practitioners have developed new approaches, such as [community violence reduction \(CVR\)](#) [10] and [transitional weapons and ammunition management](#) [11], deploying them in countries experiencing ongoing conflict. Individuals leaving armed groups, including those designated as terrorist organizations, receive reintegration support, regardless of the presence or absence of a peace agreement. These DDR efforts in active conflict zones are as critical as those in post-conflict settings, enabling national authorities to mitigate violence and support the transition into civilian life even without the traditional preconditions for program implementation. Additionally, DDR practitioners have also developed preventive approaches to contain the formation of armed groups before conflicts erupt or resurfaces, while opening up space for a negotiated political solution to unfold. They have found that preventing recruitment requires addressing fundamental issues such as basic security, marginalization, economic deprivation, and

discrimination through a whole-of-government approach that includes interventions in health, food security, education, [climate resilience](#) [12] in line with the [humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding nexus \(HDPN\)](#) [13]. By adapting to the conditions on the ground, DDR processes have helped mitigate grievances, climate-induced resource scarcity, [natural resource exploitation](#) [14], and recruitment tactics, aimed particularly at youth.

9. Despite these advances, significant challenges remain. Effectively dismantling armed groups through non-military measures such as DDR, often faces significant funding challenges, particularly during the reintegration phase. Issues are exacerbated by limited institutional capacity, lack of legal and strategic frameworks, rigid administrative procedures, lack of accountability and political will, and unclear division of roles and responsibilities. The focus of international donors is frequently on the more immediate tasks of disarmament and demobilization which is important; however, the operation spans beyond this preliminary objective. And despite catalytic funding through the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)¹ or medium-term funding through [International Financial Institutions \(IFIs\)](#) [15], reintegration is where funding dwindles, and the goal of sustainable impact is no longer plausible. Efforts to [disengage and reintegration members of violent extremist groups face significant challenges](#) [16], including legal uncertainty and stigmatization of communities.

Recommendations:

- I. **Analysis and Planning:** There is a need to systematically integrate knowledge about these complex armed group dynamics, including recruitment patterns, motivations, as well as typologies and internal structures, to enhance the conflict-sensitivity of humanitarian, peacebuilding – and in the long run -- development interventions. This requires not only understanding the nature and modus operandi of armed groups but also leveraging local expertise to map out the rules, norms, informal networks and power structures that influence these groups' actions. By integrating such an (conflict-sensitive – context specific) analysis, including an age-sensitive and gender-responsive perspective, into key UN analytical and strategic products, such as the UN Common Country Analyses (CCAs), World Bank Systematic Country Diagnostics (SCDs), and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), [mission political strategies and mandates](#) [17], the international system can contribute to more nuanced and tailored interventions. Such efforts enable the design and implementation of evidence-based interventions.
- II. **Programming:** [Several lessons from transition settings](#) [18] have demonstrated that regional, national, and local authorities, as well as civil society organizations, need to be

¹ In the field, since 2016, PBSO has been a critical supporter of DDR and Community Violence Reduction (CVR) and enabled programmes inter alia in Haiti, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic (CAR) through the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) amounting to a total of USD 22.22 million (see Annex: DDR/CVR related PBF-funded projects).

empowered to define priorities and lead efforts, based on comprehensive political strategies and through localized inclusive coordination mechanism. The sustainability of conflict prevention or mitigation/peacebuilding efforts relies on advancing local ownership through capacity-building initiatives, promoting knowledge exchange through South-South cooperation and providing strategic support, that enable authorities on the ground to lead and own localized processes to dealing with armed groups, including with recent [Aswan Forum conclusions](#). This local ownership is critical to ensuring that reintegration processes are perceived not as externally imposed but as an integral part of broader national justice, reconciliation and development agendas. International actors should provide technical support and resource mobilization, ensuring that local stakeholders have the tools, funds and technical capacity to effectively manage through community-based approaches to address the proliferation of armed groups and localized violence.

- III. **Coordination and Financing: A global multi-donor trust fund with flexible funding windows dedicated to reintegration needs to be established**, ensuring sustained financial resources for interventions that promote the economic and social reintegration ex-combatants in order to avoid that they become spoilers to peace efforts. The fund should promote coordination mechanisms and include accountability procedures through periodic reviews and conditional disbursement linked to reintegration outcomes. At the same time, interventions must be pragmatical and risk tolerant, thus calibrating expected results according to changing local dynamics as well as broader social, economic, and political trends. Furthermore, a regional approach to consolidating common strategies and financing could address specific cross-border challenges posed by armed groups, particularly in areas where conflict dynamics are influenced by transnational armed groups and criminal – organized crime networks.

About this Policy Note: This Note is based on several research and policy documents developed or commissioned by the DDR Section within the UN Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) as well as the United Nations Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS). This Note also benefited from valuable written inputs from a number of strategic partners in the UN system, through the [Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR](#), and research institutions within the [International DDR Training Group \(IDDRTG\)](#), notably the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), the Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies (BICC) and the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCCPA). It also integrated suggestions from various think-tanks with expertise on the subject such as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED).