DPI | Democratic Progress Institute

A PRIMER TO

DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION

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FOREWORD

The process known publicly as the "resolution process", and in official language as "Terror-Free Türkiye", was renewed in October 2024. It has opened a new and important phase in Türkiye's effort to resolve the Kurdish issue through peaceful and democratic means. This phase calls for attention not only to the security dimension of the conflict, but also to the political, legal and institutional questions that will decide whether the process can move forward and be sustained.

One of these questions is the legal framework for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). When DPI convened its series of meetings on DDR, no legislation had yet been introduced. Some uncertainty remained about the scope and direction of the legislation expected from Parliament. The framework was expected to cover disarmament and reintegration and it was likely to require amendments to a wide range of laws, including the Criminal Code, the Provincial Administration Law and the Law on Political Parties.

This made the discussions timely. Before the law came into force, our meetings in Istanbul on 12-13 June and in Van on 10-11 July 2026 brought together legal practitioners, academics, Presidents of Bar Associations and representatives of political parties. They gave us an opportunity to discuss inclusive and applicable legal principles, to examine comparative international experience and to bring participants' legal proposals to the attention of policymakers. Law No. 7595 on Strengthening National Solidarity and Social Integration was subsequently adopted on 10 August 2026 and entered into force on 18 August 2026.

The discussions at the meetings showed that DDR is not only a matter of security. Its success depends on how well the legal system deals with the transition of those who lay down their arms into civilian and political life. That is why legal and conceptual clarity was emphasised as a precondition for a healthy public debate. We hope this primer gives legislators, legal practitioners, academics and civil society a common ground for the questions Türkiye faces as it considers its own approach.

No example in the text is offered as a direct prescription for Türkiye. There is no universal model for peacebuilding. Each country has its own history, political conditions, legal traditions and social realities. Comparative experience is most useful when it helps decision-makers see possibilities, anticipate risks and develop solutions suited to their own circumstances. Peace cannot be secured by legislation alone, but it needs laws and institutions that can sustain the trust on which the process depends.

We also thank the Presidents of Bar Associations, legal practitioners, academics and politicians who took part in our meetings for their valuable contributions. We hope that the path to a lasting and sustainable peace in Türkiye will be built through informed and inclusive legal dialogue.

Kerim Yıldız
Chief Executive Officer
Democratic Progress Institute

KEY POINTS AT A GLANCE

- **A political, not just technical, process.** DDR works best when it has political backing, is adapted to the context and is part of the wider peace process, rather than being treated as a standalone technical programme.
- **Flexible sequencing.** DDR stages often overlap in practice. Reintegration support may need to start before disarmament is complete, and rigid sequencing can be counterproductive.
- **A powerful but sensitive confidence-building measure.** Visible and verified progress and joint oversight can build trust. But DDR can also undermine confidence if it is seen as unfair, unclear or politicised.
- **Disarmament is about more than collecting weapons.** Combatants also need confidence that they can pursue their goals through political means.
- **Reintegration is the longest and hardest part.** It depends on national institutions, communities and labour markets, not DDR programmes alone. It therefore needs longer-term funding and realistic timelines.
- **Gender and inclusion must be built in from the start.** They should be considered throughout the process, from cantonment and eligibility criteria to avoiding stigma and gender-stereotyped livelihood programmes.
- **Links to SSR, justice and legal reform are essential.** DDR works better when coordinated with security sector reform, transitional justice and legal or constitutional reform. The limits of any amnesty should also be clear from the start of negotiations.
- **DDR is not the only tool.** Where full DDR is not feasible or appropriate, Community Violence Reduction and other approaches can complement or replace DDR.

I. Introduction: DDR in Contemporary Peace Processes

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) is a core instrument for supporting transitions from armed conflict to peace. It addresses one of the most immediate post-conflict challenges: the continued presence of organised armed actors, weapons and individuals whose livelihoods, identities and social networks have been shaped by war. Unless these are managed through a credible political and operational process, and the grievances that contributed to mobilisation are addressed, the risks of renewed violence and instability can increase.

DDR is designed to create a secure environment in which political dialogue, governance reform, recovery and development can take hold. At its core, it involves removing weapons from combatants, dismantling armed formations, providing short-term reinsertion assistance to meet immediate needs after demobilisation, and supporting the longer-term social, economic and political reintegration of former combatants into civilian life. By reducing weapons in circulation, dismantling command structures and providing former combatants with civilian, political and economic pathways, DDR reduces immediate security risks and the risk of remobilisation, helping create the conditions for longer-term peacebuilding. It is not, however, a substitute for state-building or development policy and cannot by itself address the structural drivers of conflict.

Once viewed mainly as a technical exercise focused on weapons collection and troop discharge, DDR is now recognised as an inherently political process that must be embedded in peace negotiations, linked to security guarantees and adapted to the incentives and power dynamics shaping a transition. This is reflected in the United Nations (UN) Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)[1], which remain the principal international framework for DDR planning and implementation.

The IDDRS emphasise the political dimensions of DDR and its contribution to the broader sustaining peace agenda. Five principles are particularly important. First, DDR should be politically anchored and context-specific, reflecting the peace process, the nature of armed actors and local security dynamics. Second, it should have strong national and local ownership, with international support complementing rather than substituting for domestic leadership. Third, DDR should be voluntary, people-centred and inclusive, recognising the different experiences and needs of men, women, children and other conflict-affected groups. Fourth, it should be linked to wider peacebuilding, security sector reform

[1] *See https://www.unddr.org/the-iddrs/*

(SSR), transitional justice and development planning. Finally, DDR must be flexible enough to respond to changing political and security conditions while maintaining transparency, accountability and public confidence.

II. DDR within the Broader Peace Process

DDR is not simply a technical programme. It is a political process that works best when it is part of a broader peace process.

1. DDR as Part of a Political Settlement

Peace agreements, ceasefire arrangements or other negotiated settlements commonly set the broad parameters for DDR, including eligibility criteria, implementation timelines, institutional responsibilities, and monitoring and verification mechanisms. This political ownership is essential to the credibility and sustainability of DDR as national authorities and signatory parties must provide visible leadership and align DDR with national priorities and legal frameworks. The institutional arrangements and leadership required for this are discussed in more detail in Section IV on enabling conditions.

2. Sequencing with other Process Tracks

DDR is closely interconnected with other elements of the peace process, including ceasefire implementation, security guarantees, power-sharing arrangements, elections and constitutional reforms. Progress in these areas often shapes the willingness of conflict parties and affected communities to engage in DDR. For instance, former combatants may be reluctant to disarm if security guarantees are weak, while political actors may hesitate to support reintegration efforts if broader political agreements remain contested.

Power-sharing or transitional governance arrangements can also provide incentives for armed actors to commit to DDR, particularly when linked to opportunities for political participation. Where former armed groups transition into political actors, DDR may become closely tied to electoral processes and reforms governing political participation. For instance, in Nepal (2006) and Colombia (2016), power-sharing and security arrangements linked disarmament and demobilisation and the gradual transformation of the Nepali Maoists and Colombian FARC into political actors, with DDR tied to electoral participation. Constitutional reforms can further influence the long-term environment for reintegration by shaping issues such as decentralization, security sector governance and rights protections as was done in Aceh (Indonesia).

Given these interdependencies, DDR should be planned and implemented in coordination with other peace process tracks. While rigid sequencing can be counterproductive, certain enabling conditions, such as minimum security guarantees or political assurances, are often necessary before large-scale disarmament can proceed. At the same time, visible progress in DDR can reduce tensions, demonstrate commitment to peace agreements and create a more conducive environment for political dialogue and reform. DDR is therefore both dependent on, and supportive of, broader political progress.

Establishing benchmarks that link DDR progress to achievements in related process tracks can help build trust and maintain political support. Joint monitoring mechanisms, agreed milestones and transparent reporting can provide evidence of compliance, reduce perceptions of imbalance and strengthen confidence in the peace process.

3. DDR within a Wider Peace, Recovery and Development Framework

The long-term success of DDR also depends on its integration into broader peacebuilding, recovery and development strategies. While DDR programmes often begin with immediate objectives such as reducing security risks and supporting the transition of former combatants to civilian life, their impact is more likely to be sustained when linked to national recovery priorities and long-term development goals.

DDR should therefore be incorporated into wider policy frameworks – including peacebuilding strategies, recovery compacts and national development plans – connected to broader efforts to restore livelihoods and promote social cohesion. It also facilitates coordination among government institutions, international partners and civil society actors. A key example of this was the World Bank led Multi-country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (MDRP) in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Between 2002 and 2009, this regional programme mobilized and coordinated funding to support the reintegration of over 230,000 ex-combatants across seven Great Lakes countries by financing reintegration packages that were embedded in broader recovery and community-development efforts.

This link is particularly important as reintegration outcomes depend not only on assistance provided to former combatants but also on the broader social, economic and institutional environment into which they return. Sustainable reintegration requires state institutions and communities that can deliver services, create economic opportunities and address grievances that may have contributed to conflict. By situating DDR within a wider framework of recovery, justice and development (see Sections V.2. and V.4.), stakeholders can consolidate gains achieved during the transition from conflict and contribute to durable peace.

4. DDR as a Confidence-Building Measure

Beyond its security and recovery objectives, DDR can also function as a confidence-building measure. Seeing weapons collected and destroyed, forces assembled and combatants formally discharged concretises parties' commitment to a peace agreement and reduces fears of covert remobilisation – an effect reinforced by symbolic actions such as public weapon-destruction "peace flame" ceremonies (used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone) and by joint oversight structures such as mixed DDR commissions. This reassurance is strongest where DDR is underpinned by credible security guarantees (see Section V) and by clear, direct communication with fighting forces and communities about eligibility, benefits and monitoring.

At the same time, DDR can undermine rather than build trust if it is perceived as unfair, poorly sequenced or politicised, for instance through uneven benefit distribution, opaque eligibility decisions, or asymmetric compliance between parties. A measure of reciprocity is therefore important but it need not mean that both sides make equivalent security concessions. In some peace processes, the central bargain is that armed groups give up their weapons and the option of armed coercion in return for a credible opportunity to pursue their objectives through political means. Nepal is a particularly clear example: Maoist weapons and combatants were placed under monitored arrangements while the peace process opened a route to democratic elections, political participation and fundamental political change.

III. Stages of DDR

DDR can be divided into three distinct but closely linked stages. They are presented in sequence below for clarity, but in practice they often overlap. Different armed groups may also enter the process at different times and follow different pathways, particularly where insecurity, access constraints and multiple armed groups make a single, linear process impractical. As seen in the Central African Republic, "pre-DDR" provided support for disengaging combatants in advance of a national DDR programme and, when the latter was established, some groups went through reintegration while negotiations with other armed groups were still underway.

1. Disarmament

Disarmament constitutes the first operational pillar of DDR and serves as a visible and symbolic marker of the transition from armed conflict to peace. It involves the collection, documentation, control and disposal of weapons, ammunition and explosives from combatants and associated personnel. Beyond its technical dimensions, disarmament signals the cessation of organised violence, reduces the capacity for renewed conflict and helps create the conditions necessary for demobilisation and reintegration to proceed.

The modalities through which disarmament is implemented vary significantly across contexts and are often politically negotiated. Disarmament may be structured as a voluntary process, though in practice it is typically linked to broader incentives and guarantees embedded in peace agreements that and open pathways for former combatants to pursue their political goals without arms. Approaches may be organized around individual combatants or conducted on a unit-based basis, with the latter often better aligned with existing command structures and chains of control. The use of financial or material incentives, such as weapons buy-back schemes, remains controversial. While such measures can accelerate weapons collection in the short term, they risk distorting incentives, encouraging the circulation or acquisition of additional weapons for profit, and undermining the political framing of disarmament as part of a collective transition.

Operationally, disarmament requires robust systems for weapons management and accountability. This includes the registration and cataloguing of weapons, safe handling and storage procedures, and the secure transportation and storage or destruction of collected materiel. Effective information management systems are essential to track weapons that are handed in, link them to individuals or units and support verification processes. These technical dimensions are not politically neutral: decisions about what is registered, what is

destroyed, and what may be retained for future integration into national security forces can carry significant implications for trust between parties.

Disarmament is frequently one of the most politically sensitive elements of a peace process. Armed actors are often reluctant to relinquish their weapons absent credible guarantees regarding their security, status, and future role. This reluctance is not purely strategic. For many combatants the weapon is bound up with identity, status, protection and survival, and surrendering it is a deeply personal and emotional act rather than a purely technical one; disarmament design should account for these psychological and symbolic dimensions of weapon relinquishment, not only its logistics. As a result, the framing and sequencing of disarmament, whether presented as simultaneous, phased, or reciprocal, can be decisive. Language in agreements often reflects these sensitivities, emphasizing parity, proportionality, or mutual commitments rather than unilateral surrender[2]. Where disarmament is perceived as imbalanced or coercive, it can generate resistance, non-compliance, or fragmentation within armed groups.

A range of structural challenges further complicates disarmament efforts. The widespread availability and economic value of weapons in many conflict-affected settings mean that they are not only tools of violence but also assets that can be traded, stored, or concealed. The true number of weapons in circulation is usually unknown, which complicates both planning and verification, and ammunition (often harder to track than the weapons themselves) deserves at least as much attention in disarmament design. Hidden caches, cross-border trafficking networks, and the presence of weapons among civilians or criminal actors limit the extent to which disarmament as a part of a DDR process can fully eliminate armed capacity and reduce armed violence.[3] In addition, asymmetries in compliance, where some groups disarm while others delay or defect, can create incentives for hedging behaviour and increase the risk of spoilers.

Without adequate security arrangements, rapid disarmament can create local security gaps, leaving ex-combatants and communities vulnerable to rival groups or criminal networks. This risk can be reduced by linking DDR to interim security measures. Weapons can be registered and securely stored rather than immediately destroyed, as in Nepal. Limited protection arrangements can be established, such as the Joint Peace and Security Teams in the Philippines, while state or international monitoring can verify that all sides are meeting their commitments, as in Colombia. As reintegration progresses, former combatants and receiving communities can also receive individual, collective or community-

[2] *This notion is also found in the language surrounding disarmament which in some contexts has been referred to as "laying aside of weapons" (Colombia, Turkey), "decommissioning" (Northern Ireland, Israel/Gaza) or "management of arms and armies" (Nepal).*

[3] *As DDR focuses on weapons held by signatory armed groups, this can result in a transformation of violence from political violence to criminal violence or inter-communal conflict as weapons remain in the hands of criminal groups and communities, or continued political violence involving non-signatory groups and breakaway factions who refuse to disarm.*

based protection, as illustrated by Colombia's security guarantees, El Salvador's civilian-police reforms, Sierra Leone's support for community policing and the Philippines' normalisation arrangements.

Verification mechanisms are central to the credibility and effectiveness of disarmament. They provide assurance to parties that commitments are being implemented as agreed and help build confidence in the broader peace process. Verification is commonly undertaken by a combination of actors, including UN peace operations, regional organizations, and joint monitoring bodies composed of representatives from the signatory parties. These structures are typically mandated to oversee weapons collection and report on compliance. This model has been used in settings such as Côte d'Ivoire and the DRC, where joint commissions and UN peace operations documented weapons, monitored cantonment sites and publicly reported on compliance to reassure signatories and communities. However, the most prominent example is the UN Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) which was established with a mandate to monitor FARC disarmament and "the process of political, economic and social reincorporation of the FARC-EP."[4]

At the technical level, verification relies on a range of tools and procedures. These may include the recording of serial numbers, photographic documentation, and biometric registration of combatants to link individuals to disarmed weapons where feasible. While no verification system can guarantee complete accuracy, credible and transparent processes are essential for maintaining trust, deterring non-compliance, and demonstrating tangible progress to both national stakeholders and the international community.

Disarmament is therefore best understood not as a discrete event but as a negotiated and iterative activity shaped by political dynamics, security conditions and institutional capacity. Its success depends on balancing technical rigor with political sensitivity, ensuring that the collection of weapons is matched by credible guarantees and broader progress in the peace process.

2. Demobilisation

Demobilisation is the formal and controlled discharge of active members of armed forces or armed groups from military structures. It marks the transition from combatant to civilian and is a critical bridge between disarmament and reintegration. Beyond the physical separation of individuals from military organisations, demobilisation also involves the dismantling or transformation of command structures, administrative systems and support networks that sustained armed mobilisation during conflict. Breaking command structures does not dissolve the former-combatant social networks, formed through conflict.

[4] *Security Council Resolution 2366 (2017) of 10 July 2017, Op. Para 2*

Former combatants may remain connected through shared experience, friendship, mutual assistance and continuing ties to former commanders. These networks can facilitate reintegration by providing peer support, information, collective livelihoods and channels for dialogue, or they can sustain exclusion, patronage and remobilization risks. Reintegration should therefore seek to transform such networks from exclusive, armed-group-based bonds into inclusive civilian associations connected to families, communities, institutions and markets.

The change in status from combatant to civilian has important legal, political and social implications. Former combatants cease to be members of armed forces or groups and become subject to civilian laws, institutions and responsibilities. Demobilisation therefore serves as a visible signal that the conflict is moving from a military to a political phase. It also provides an opportunity to prepare individuals for civilian life, manage expectations regarding reintegration assistance and establish links to longer-term support programmes.

Demobilisation is often used as an umbrella term for several distinct but related stages. These typically include assembly or cantonment, verification of eligibility and registration of beneficiaries, formal discharge and immediate post-discharge (reinsertion) support. During assembly or cantonment, combatants gather at designated sites where they can be identified, verified, receive key demobilisation services and prepared for transition. Services provided may include temporary accommodation, food, medical care, psychosocial support and information about the demobilisation process. Cantonment sites should provide sex-segregated sanitary and sleeping facilities alongside childcare and family accommodation; without these, women associated with armed forces and groups may face barriers to accessing DDR programmes. In many contexts, the assembly of forces in cantonment sites can also serve as a visible and tangible demonstration that commitments made in peace agreements are being implemented. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, for instance, the establishment of cantonment sites and the visible concentration of forces provided early signals that political agreements were being honoured, even as negotiations over border demarcation and security guarantees continued.

A core function of demobilisation programmes is the registration and profiling of participants. Accurate registration helps establish eligibility and provide a foundation for planning assistance. Information is commonly collected on age, gender, rank, family composition, educational background, skills and any specific vulnerabilities or support needs. This profiling enables programmes to tailor assistance to different groups and helps ensure that resources are allocated effectively, yet it is not merely technical: inaccurate registration can fuel disputes over numbers, distort resource allocation, and deepen political tensions among parties that already distrust one another. To reduce incentives for armed groups to inflate membership numbers in order to capture benefits, DDR eligibility and incentives are best made strictly contingent on sustained compliance across the wider peace process.

In the Central African Republic, DDR was paired with Community Violence Reduction (CVR) programmes that benefit youth-at-risk and other groups to lessen the relative advantage of fraudulent recruitment and reduce the incentive for civilians to falsely claim combatant status,

Formal discharge – usually through the issuance of a demobilisation card or certificate - constitutes the official termination of military status. This is often followed by a short period of reinsertion support. As former combatants rarely leave armed life with the means to immediately meet their basic needs, reinsertion packages are designed to temporarily assist them in their return to civilian communities while longer-term reintegration measures are being established. This may be done through cash payments, in-kind assistance, housing support, clothing, household items or access to basic services and is distinct from longer-term reintegration support, which is addressed in Section III.3.

Demobilisation programmes must also address the needs of women combatants and women associated with armed forces and armed groups who often perform a wide range of combat and support functions but may face barriers to recognition and programme eligibility, especially if they are unable to present an arm if their role in the movement (for example in intelligence, logistics or medical support) did not require them to carry one. Children associated with armed forces or armed groups also require specialised approaches centred on family reunification, education, protection and psychosocial support. Persons with disabilities, those suffering from conflict-related trauma and dependants of former combatants may similarly require tailored assistance. Ensuring that eligibility criteria and programme design reflect the diversity of conflict-affected populations is essential for both effectiveness and equity.

Demobilisation does not always result in a return to civilian life. In some peace processes, a proportion of former combatants may be integrated into national security institutions, including the military, police or other uniformed services. This option is often referred to as integration and may form part of a broader SSR process (see Section V.1.).

3. Socio-Economic and Political Reintegration

Reintegration is the longest and most complex pillar of DDR because it is a multidimensional process through which former combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups transition sustainably into civilian life at the individual, family, and community levels. Unlike disarmament or demobilisation, which can often be organized through clearly bounded operational phases, the primary drivers of reintegration are not DDR programmes themselves but the local institutions, labour markets, social networks, and the broader political and security environment into which former combatants return. For this reason, reintegration should be understood as a catalytic and time-bound

contribution to a much longer transition, and as part of a broader recovery and development process rather than as a self-contained project.[5] This distinction became clear in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where initial cash transfers and training packages had to be complemented by broader employment programmes, community projects and governance reforms to avoid DDR being reduced to short-term payments with little effect on long-term trajectories.

In this context, it is useful to distinguish short-term reinsertion support from longer-term reintegration. Reinsertion refers to temporary assistance provided immediately after demobilisation to cover basic needs and stabilise the transition, whereas reintegration concerns the sustained social, economic and political inclusion of former combatants and their dependants. It is not a general social safety net but a targeted intervention for a conflict-affected caseload whose trajectories have direct implications for peace and security.

Reintegration has social, economic and political dimensions. Economically, former combatants need opportunities to earn a living and support themselves and their families. Socially, they need to rebuild relationships with families, communities and institutions, often after years of conflict and displacement. Politically, they may need opportunities to take part peacefully in civic and political life. These dimensions are closely linked, and focusing on only one can leave important drivers of re-recruitment and social exclusion unaddressed. Reintegration also takes time. Programme timelines are often much shorter than the time former combatants need to adjust from a combatant to a civilian way of life. This process requires sustained support across psychological, social and educational areas and cannot easily be achieved through short-term projects.

Social reintegration

Social reintegration is essential because many former combatants return to communities marked by fear, trauma, resentment and competing narratives of victimhood and legitimacy. Former combatants must therefore rebuild relationships with these communities and social reintegration focuses on restoring trust, strengthening social ties and facilitating acceptance within communities.

Rebuilding trust often requires measures such as community dialogue, traditional or religious ceremonies, psychosocial and peer support, family mediation and initiatives that recognise victims' rights and experiences. The latter are particularly important in ensuring that reconciliation efforts do not focus exclusively on former combatants at the expense of

[5] *This distinction is particularly important when differentiating between reinsertion and reintegration. While reinsertion is typically delivered through DDR programmes, reintegration depends on a much broader range of actors and conditions. Conflating the two can distort programme design by encouraging short-term payment schemes to stand in for the deeper social and institutional investments needed for durable peace.*

victims and other community members who also bore the consequences of the conflict. This may include formal reconciliation processes as outlined in Section V2., or less formal processes such as those led by local chiefs, religious leaders and community organisations DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In these contexts, they mediated returns, organised cleansing or welcoming rituals and supported acceptance of former child soldiers and other returnees.

Reintegration must also address psychosocial challenges such as trauma, loss of identity, normalised violence and substance abuse. These can make it harder to return to civilian life and can contribute to stigma and social isolation. Women and girls formerly associated with armed groups may face particular stigma and exclusion, including because of perceived involvement in violence, conflict-related sexual violence or children born during their time with the group. Reintegration programmes should therefore address stigma from the outset, rather than treating it as a secondary issue. Addressing these challenges can improve well-being, build resilience and support lasting reintegration.

Economic reintegration

Former combatants frequently return to civilian life with limited assets, disrupted education, weak employment prospects and skills that may not be readily transferable to civilian occupations. Without viable livelihood opportunities, economic insecurity can increase the risk of criminal activity, remobilisation or involvement in other forms of violence.

Economic reintegration therefore remains one of the most visible components of reintegration programming, but experience shows that livelihoods support only works when linked to real market opportunities and broader local recovery.

Typical interventions include skills training, apprenticeships, formal and non-formal education, public works, agricultural starter packages, micro-enterprise support and referrals to existing employment or social services. These programmes should also respond to different needs and barriers. For example, offering women only traditionally female occupations such as sewing or hairdressing can limit rather than expand their economic opportunities and reintegration opportunities should be based on beneficiaries' interests and market demand, rather than assumed gender roles. People with disabilities may face similar barriers that standard programmes do not address. Such support can provide income, structure and a path away from armed networks. However, it is less effective when programmes train people for jobs that are already saturated, ignore local market demand or assume that self-employment is viable where purchasing power and infrastructure are weak

Labour-market absorption is therefore a central challenge. In many post-conflict settings, economies have been damaged by violence, public institutions are weak, and the number of people seeking work far exceeds available opportunities, making it unrealistic to expect short training cycles on their own to produce sustainable incomes. Reintegration support should therefore be based on economic opportunity mapping and adapted to context, including differences between rural and urban settings. In rural areas, agricultural packages, land access arrangements, and producer support may be more relevant, while in urban settings the emphasis may need to shift toward services, trades, transport, construction, or wage employment pathways. Across both settings, programmes should avoid creating long-term dependency by linking assistance to realistic transition plans, counselling, and referral into existing institutions rather than indefinite project support. In the DRC and Côte d'Ivoire, for example, agriculture and small-scale trade dominated many DDR livelihood components, whereas in Liberia, Colombia and the Philippines, reintegration programmes also had to consider urban labour markets and link ex-combatants to services, training and social protection systems in towns and cities.

Political reintegration

Political and civic reintegration is an essential but often underdeveloped dimension. Reintegration is more durable when former combatants have lawful channels to express interests, organize collectively, and engage in public life without recourse to coercion. At the individual level, this may involve civic education, voter education, awareness of civil and political rights, and support for participation in local decision-making. At the collective level, some peace processes, involve the transformation of former armed movements into political parties or other recognized political actors[6], linking reintegration to wider transitions in representation, competition, and state legitimacy.

The successful political transformation of former armed groups depends on several conditions. These include credible political processes, legal frameworks that permit participation, respect for democratic rules and the willingness of former armed actors to renounce violence. Political participation is most likely to support peace when it occurs within inclusive institutions that provide legitimate channels for competition and representation. By contrast, political participation can undermine peace if armed organizations retain parallel command structures, preserve coercive control over communities, or use formal politics mainly as a cover for continued militarized influence.

At the same time, political reintegration can be contentious. Victims, rival political groups or parts of the public may oppose the participation of former armed groups. Peace agree-

[6] *Key examples of this include Colombia (2016 Final Agreement), El Salvador (1992 Chapultepec Accords) Nepal (2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement), Aceh (Indonesia – 2005 Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding)*

ments may therefore include specific provisions governing political participation, transitional arrangements or confidence-building measures. If well managed, political participation can provide incentives for compliance with peace agreements and contribute to the long-term consolidation of peace. If poorly designed or implemented, it can reinforce divisions or create new sources of tension.

Political reintegration is therefore not an automatic good. It is a conditional process that depends on security guarantees, institutional safeguards, and sustained political will across the broader peace process.

Community-based and Area-based approaches to reintegration

Community-based and area-based approaches have become increasingly important in reintegration. Rather than providing support only to former combatants, they combine targeted assistance with investments that benefit the wider community. This can reduce resentment and strengthen local capacity to absorb returnees. The two approaches are related but distinct: community-based approaches work with the specific communities receiving ex-combatants, while area-based approaches cover a wider geographic area, often including several communities, based on shared needs or exposure to conflict.

These approaches recognise that many of the factors influencing reintegration are rooted in community-level conditions. Community infrastructure, shared livelihood projects, local mediation platforms, youth programming, and improved access to services can make reintegration more politically and socially acceptable. Area-based approaches are especially useful where conflict has affected large populations, where ex-combatants are difficult to distinguish from other conflict-affected groups, or where local grievances or insecurity are themselves drivers of renewed violence. This was done in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire where community-driven reconstruction projects and area-based livelihood schemes were used to reduce resentment over targeted ex-combatant benefits and to address shared grievances over land, youth unemployment and basic services.

This broader framing also points to an important institutional lesson: the main drivers of reintegration lie beyond the formal DDR programme and linking reintegration to broader local development initiatives can help address structural drivers of instability while contributing to recovery and peacebuilding objectives. National ministries, local authorities, schools, employers, customary leaders, civil society, women's organisations, faith groups and families often play a greater role in long-term reintegration than temporary DDR structures. Reintegration programmes should therefore strengthen local and national ownership and build links with wider peacebuilding, recovery and development efforts. This is also important for exit planning: external DDR support is temporary, but reintegration continues long after programme funding ends.

IV. Enabling Factors and Conditions for Success

Successful DDR rarely depends on technical programming alone; it depends first on whether minimum political and security conditions exist, and second on whether programme design is realistic, inclusive, and adapted to the conflict context. This is why DDR has taken very different forms across contexts, from the nationwide programmes in Liberia and Sierra Leone after civil war to more localised schemes in Aceh (Indonesia) or approaches based around CVR in Haiti, each shaped by distinct conflict dynamics and political settlements. It is also worth noting that comprehensive peace agreements and negotiated political settlements, the traditional enabling context for DDR, have become less common in recent years, as more conflicts end without a signed accord or they are not inclusive as some actors remain outside of the process. Where this is the case, DDR needs to adapt, drawing more heavily on flexible, community- or area-based approaches, CVR, and other alternative or complementary approaches (see Section IX).

A basic precondition for DDR is usually a sufficiently robust and credible ceasefire or comparable political-security arrangement. Parties are far more likely to disarm and demobilise when command structures remain coherent, leaders are willing and able to enforce compliance, and ex-combatants believe they will not be exposed to retaliation, arrest, or abandonment once they enter the process. Credible security guarantees, whether through third-party monitoring, secure assembly arrangements, or other transitional measures, are therefore often indispensable to participation and compliance. Without such guarantees, armed actors may see handing over their weapons as exposing themselves to risk, rather than as a safe step towards civilian life.

Political leadership and national ownership are equally important. DDR is more likely to gain legitimacy and strategic coherence when there is a shared national vision for DDR, alongside clear institutional responsibilities, and when implementation is anchored in national DDR commissions[7], focal ministries, or other recognized coordinating bodies. Where leadership is fragmented or institutions are weak, programmes can quickly become politicised, duplicative, or disconnected from wider peacebuilding and recovery strategies.

Successful DDR programmes are also grounded in context-specific planning based on a conflict analysis rather than template-driven programming. This includes understanding the incentives of armed actors, the composition of affected groups, local political econom-

[7] *These are established in most DDR processes and are often joint Commissions involving members of the Government and armed opposition movements.*

ies, community attitudes, and the ways in which DDR interacts with other tracks such as security arrangements, reintegration, and local governance. Stakeholder consultation is central to that effort, especially where women, youth, civil society, local authorities, and receiving communities hold information and influence that formal negotiators may overlook.

Finally, implementation depends on adequate and predictable financing, realistic timelines, and the integration of gender and age perspectives from the outset. The transition from armed mobilisation to civilian life is rarely achieved quickly, particularly in fragile post-conflict environments and DDR processes often fail when short funding cycles collide with long-term reintegration needs. This tension is structural: donor funding is typically organised around annual or multi-year cycles and shifting priorities, whereas reintegration outcomes often only materialise over five to ten years or more; financing gaps and premature donor exit are among the most common reasons reintegration efforts stall once the more visible disarmament and demobilisation phases have passed. Programmes should therefore be designed with a long-term perspective. Likewise, when programmes are designed around an undifferentiated "average combatant" (usually a young able-bodied male) they miss the specific situations of women, children, youth, and persons with disabilities, excluding a large caseload and weakening credibility, inclusion, and sustainable outcomes.

Success in DDR is not only about weapons collected and programme milestones met, but also about whether people feel safer. A human-security perspective, for example through representative surveys measuring perceived safety before and after disarmament, can capture improvements that administrative indicators miss; removing weapons from public view or reducing open carrying, in particular, is often associated with improved perceptions of security among communities, even where technical weapons-collection targets are only partially met.

V. Linkages to SSR, Transitional Justice, and Other Post-Conflict Processes

DDR rarely operates in isolation. Its effectiveness depends on how well it is coordinated with other activities that address the causes and legacies of conflict, strengthen state institutions and support recovery. Its contribution is greatest when implemented as part of a broader transition linking SSR, transitional justice, legal and constitutional reform, governance and economic recovery. While these processes pursue distinct objectives, they are mutually reinforcing and often rely on common political agreements, institutions and stakeholders.

1. DDR and SSR

DDR and SSR are conceptually distinct but operationally intertwined. This includes the future roles of female combatants who integrate into reformed security institutions (particularly where they served within standing forces, as in Nepal) which require explicit attention in vetting, rank harmonisation and retraining rather than being left to informal practice. DDR is primarily concerned with disarming, demobilising, and supporting the transition of ex-combatants and members of non-statutory armed groups, whereas SSR focuses on the governance, structure, effectiveness, and accountability of the wider security apparatus, including military, police, justice, oversight, and related institutions. In practice, however, DDR directly shapes SSR because decisions about who is disarmed, demobilised, retained, screened, or integrated affect the size, composition, and legitimacy of post-conflict security forces.

This linkage is especially visible where DDR contributes to "right-sizing" or "rebalancing" forces by demobilising members of the security and defence forces or integrating ex-combatants into reformed military or police institutions. The latter can support stabilization where it is governed by clear criteria, vetting, rank harmonisation, retraining, and affordability studies, but it can undermine reform if it becomes a vehicle for absorbing armed factions without changing command culture, accountability, or force structure. This was the case in Eastern DRC where the negotiated integration into the national army of the M23 rebel movement without deep changes to command culture, accountability or force structure contributed to fragmented, factionalised forces and ultimately to renewed insurgency.

DDR and SSR should not be treated as separate processes. They need to be closely coordinated. Integrating former combatants into security institutions is not simply a matter of retraining them. If the institution's culture, doctrine and accountability do not also change, the same behaviours that caused harm during the conflict may continue under a new uniform. Meaningful security sector reform therefore requires changes not only in individuals' skills and attitudes, but also in the values, oversight and command culture of the institutions they join.

At the same time, reducing security forces too quickly can create security gaps, while integrating large numbers of former combatants without proper standards can weaken professionalism and accountability. Shared strategic frameworks and political guidance are essential to ensure that DDR decisions support, rather than undermine, wider SSR objectives.

2. DDR and Transitional Justice

The relationship between DDR and transitional justice is often one of managed tension rather than simple complementarity. Peace processes may use amnesties, sentence reductions, or other forms of leniency to encourage armed actors to disarm, yet international law and basic legitimacy considerations place clear limits on impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes and blanket amnesties are not allowed under IHL. DDR design must therefore balance incentives for participation with accountability requirements, especially where impunity would alienate victims, delegitimise the settlement, or reproduce abusive power structures. Setting these boundaries clearly at the negotiating table helps align DDR guarantees with international standards, avoids raising false expectations among combatants, and safeguards victims' rights to truth, justice and non-repetition.

In practice, DDR and transitional justice can be linked through several mechanisms that take place in parallel. These include vetting people before they enter public office or security forces, and involving former combatants in truth-telling, reparations and other reconciliation efforts. DDR can also support guarantees of non-recurrence by reducing the capacity and incentives for renewed organised violence. These links can help ensure that DDR does not simply turn armed status into political or economic advantage but instead forms part of a transition that recognises past violations and provides appropriate reparations or judicial redress.

A victim-centred approach is especially important as DDR benefits can generate resentment when they appear to reward perpetrators while victims remain excluded, or invisible in the post-conflict settlement. One response is to design reintegration in ways that visibly benefit communities as well as ex-combatants (see Section III.3.) and to connect reinteg-

ration support to participation in restorative processes and community reconciliation efforts. This does not mean making access to all assistance conditional on judicial outcomes, but it does mean ensuring that DDR messaging, eligibility rules, and programme interfaces are sensitive to victims' perspectives and broader social justice concerns.

3. Legal Reforms

DDR also depends on a supportive constitutional and legal framework. Five areas are particularly important: a peace or political agreement establishing the commitment to DDR; rules defining the status, eligibility and discharge of former combatants; provisions on accountability and any amnesty; rules governing political participation and association; and laws establishing the national institutions responsible for DDR. Without this framework, DDR can face legal disputes, political reversal or unclear responsibilities.

In practice, countries have used different legal approaches Mozambique and Angola, for example, combined constitutional and legislative reforms with DDR and wider political transformation, while Colombia and the Philippines included detailed provisions on amnesty and the transition from armed groups to civilian and political life. More fundamentally, transforming the security sector cannot be separated from the country's constitutional and governance system. The constitutional mandate given to the security apparatus, and the broader governance model it serves, shapes both how former combatants are integrated and the kind of security sector and democratic oversight that ultimately emerges.

Several legal reform areas are especially important. Constitutional amendments may be needed to reflect new power-sharing arrangements, redefine the role of the security sector, or establish transitional institutions; amnesty legislation may be used to regularise the status of former fighters while respecting limits under international law; political parties legislation may be necessary where armed movements transform into lawful political actors; and truth commission, reparations, or DDR framework laws can provide institutional clarity and due process. These reforms matter for compliance, but also for legitimacy, as they help move DDR from ad hoc political bargaining into a rules-based transition.

4. Governance and Recovery

DDR also intersects with wider governance and development agendas. Public administration capacity, decentralisation arrangements, land access and dispute resolution all shape whether former combatants and receiving communities can access services, livelihoods, and lawful channels of participation. Integrating DDR with these wider reforms can help ensure that ex-combatants are absorbed into inclusive state-society relations rather than recycled into wartime patronage networks or localized coercive structures.

The same applies to economic recovery. DDR can serve as a bridge to reconstruction by reducing immediate security risks, releasing human and fiscal resources from war-making, and enabling conflict-affected populations to re-enter civilian production and local markets. But these effects are most durable when DDR is embedded within national recovery and development plans, including poverty-reduction strategies, recovery compacts, employment frameworks, and local development programming. Development actors and international financial institutions have often played a major role here by financing reintegration, managing multi-donor trust funds, providing technical assistance, and linking DDR to broader recovery and development efforts. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank have supported national DDR programmes through direct financing, trust fund management, and integration with community recovery and livelihood support initiatives.

5. Community Violence Reduction

DDR is not the only and is not always the best way to address armed actors in a peace process. CVR is sometimes treated as a form of DDR but is increasingly used as a separate or complementary approach. CVR is a short-term, community-based approach to reducing armed violence. It can complement or replace DDR when a full disarmament and demobilisation process is not possible or appropriate. Unlike DDR, which targets identified and verified members of armed forces or groups linked to a peace agreement, CVR works through community projects, cash-for-work, vocational training and dialogue. It can target at-risk youth, informal armed actors and violence-affected communities without requiring formal group membership, weapons surrender or a comprehensive peace agreement.

CVR can support DDR in three main ways. First, it can build confidence, deliver visible peace benefits and reduce violence while formal DDR is being negotiated or is not yet politically viable. Second, it can complement DDR by supporting communities receiving ex-combatants and groups outside formal DDR eligibility, reducing incentives for civilians to falsely claim combatant status to access benefits (see Section III.2.). Third, it can replace DDR where combatants cannot be clearly identified, there is no comprehensive peace agreement, or violence is driven by actors only loosely linked to the main conflict parties, such as urban gangs or self-defence militias. This has been the case in the Central African Republic, where the UN peace operation used CVR alongside DDR to reach self-defence groups, peripheral armed actors, at-risk youth and affected communities outside the national DDR programme.

CVR typically combines quick-impact infrastructure and livelihood projects with community dialogue, local dispute resolution and links to local governance. It is measured by

its contribution to reducing violence rather than disarmament. However, its effects can be fragile without longer-term reintegration, livelihoods and governance reforms and sustained political and financial support. Without these links, CVR risks becoming a parallel, poorly coordinated track rather than a complement to national DDR and peacebuilding efforts.

VI. Conclusion and Key Takeaways

DDR is most effective when understood as a politically anchored, context-specific process rather than a technical template. It can reduce immediate security risks and create space for political dialogue, but its success depends on how well it is integrated into the broader peace settlement, security arrangements and recovery strategies shaping the transition from war to peace. It is not a substitute for state-building or structural reform; it is a time-bound contribution to the longer process of transforming institutions, relationships and incentives.

Several cross-cutting lessons emerge across the stages of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. First, credible political and security conditions are essential for parties to take the risks associated with laying down arms. Second, DDR must be tailored to the realities of armed actors, communities and local economies, drawing on conflict analysis and inclusive consultation. Third, while DDR programmes can provide targeted support, sustainable reintegration depends on the capacity of local institutions, markets and social networks, as well as progress in broader peacebuilding and recovery efforts.

The importance of linkages with adjacent processes is equally clear. DDR both shapes and is shaped by SSR, transitional justice, legal and constitutional reform, governance processes and economic recovery. Strategic coherence across these areas helps avoid security vacuums, perceptions of impunity and the reinforcement of wartime patronage networks. Without such linkages, DDR risks becoming an isolated benefits programme with limited impact on either security or institutional transformation.

Finally, DDR should be viewed as a confidence-building measure as well as a security instrument. Visible and verified progress, transparent eligibility and benefit arrangements, effective joint mechanisms and clear public communication can help demonstrate that peace commitments are genuine and subject to oversight. When embedded within a credible political process and coordinated with wider post-conflict reforms, DDR can make an important contribution to stabilisation and recovery.

Annex: Further resources

United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS). Official UN DDR standards (revised set).
https://www.unddr.org/the-iddrs/

Disarmament and DDR Provisions in Peace Agreements (PRIO). Interactive dataset for exploring how disarmament and DDR are addressed across peace agreements.
https://prio-data.github.io/disarm_ddr_in_peace_agreements/

Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations. Key "second generation DDR" reference on community-based and flexible approaches.
https://police.un.org/en/document-library/second-generation-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-ddr

The Evolving Nature of DDR: Study on Engaging Armed Groups Across the Peace Continuum. Follow-on mapping of DDR and related approaches in contemporary peace operations.
https://bicc.de/Publications/Other/The-Evolving-Nature-of-DDR–Study-on-Engaging-Armed-Groups-Across-the-Peace-Continuum/pu/13579

"Rethinking Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs" (Munive, J. and Stepputat, F., 2015). Academic article on second-generation DDR concepts and practice.
https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2157/6ebe4cf047832144fc0a78e6e78d1f0dc00f.pdf

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (World Bank Social Development Note). World Bank overview of DDR, financing and economic dimensions.
https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/776831468324547527/pdf/514150NWP0DDR0no01190Box342027B01PUBLIC1.pdf

"Regional Approaches to Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration" (UN). Comparative look at regional DDR experiences and mechanisms.
https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/regional_approaches_to_disarmament_demobilization_reintegration_report.pdf

UNITAR Online Course on DDR and IDDRS. Free self-paced e-learning course on the UN approach to DDR.
https://unitar.org/sustainable-development-goals/peace/our-portfolio/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration

"Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)" (DCAF). SSR-focused analysis of DDR–SSR linkages and coordination challenges.
https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/DDR-SSR_edited_14.03.2012.pdf

UNDP Practice Note on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-combatants (2012). A reference on UNDP's approach, with a strong reintegration lens and lessons from programming.
https://www.undp.org/publications/practice-note-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-ex-combatants