

Protection Dilemmas Arising from the Reintegration of Former Combatants and the Impact of the Terrorist Designation

AGATHE SARFATI AND PHOEBE DONNELLY



Cover Photo: Former child soldiers enlisted by al-Shabaab are handed over to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) after their capture by forces of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Mogadishu, Somalia, January 11, 2012. UN Photo/Tobin Jones.

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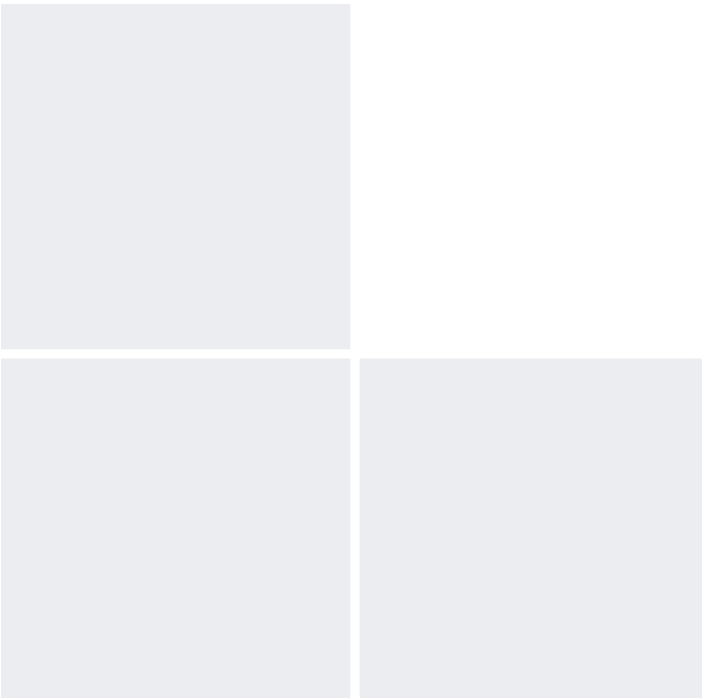
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ABBREVIATIONS

AGDTO	Armed group designated as a terrorist organization
CVR	Community violence reduction
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (now DPO)
DPO	UN Department of Peace Operations
FARC-EP	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army
IDDRS	UN Integrated DDR Standards
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IS	Islamic State
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
OROLSI	Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions
POC	Protection of civilians
PRR	Prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration
UNSOM	UN Assistance Mission in Somalia

Executive Summary

The concept and implementation of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) have evolved as DDR-related activities have increasingly occurred in environments where armed conflict is ongoing, no peace agreement has been signed, and armed groups designated as terrorist organizations (AGDTOs) are operating. In parallel, reintegration has increasingly been discussed in the UN counterterrorism architecture through the concept of prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (PRR). The changing context has raised challenges related to reintegration, especially reintegration of former members of AGDTOs.

One of the main challenges of reintegration is related to the protection of former members of armed groups, and in many cases protection risks are exacerbated for former members of AGDTOs, as well as their relatives and community members. We separate protection risks during reintegration into three main categories: (1) physical risks, including remobilization and recruitment into armed groups; (2) lack of community acceptance due to stigma and distrust; and (3) broader socio-economic exclusion, including health risks. All of these protection risks are faced not only by ex-combatants but also by the broader community they reintegrate into. The UN has a responsibility to help governments address these risks.

Beyond these general protection risks, members of AGDTOs can face additional risks. These include increased stigma against individuals regarded as terrorists, as well as their families and even their

victims. This stigma manifests itself differently for men and boys, who may inherently be seen as a security risk, than for women and girls, who may be treated as unimportant to security-related processes and thus excluded from reintegration programs. Another risk is the use of program beneficiaries, and sometimes of children, as assets in counterterrorism intelligence operations. Former members of AGDTOs also often face prolonged detention and lack due process.

Ultimately, reintegration efforts should serve broader protection outcomes by reducing the threat posed by armed groups, stopping cycles of violence, developing reconciliation schemes, supporting victims, and reestablishing the social, economic, and political rights of former combatants. While these goals are ambitious, there are steps the UN could take to help ensure that reintegration processes address protection risks, especially for former members of AGDTOs:

- Tailor reintegration programs to the context, not to whether a group is labeled as a terrorist organization;
- Design reintegration programs to be gender-sensitive and human rights-compliant;
- Ensure that PRR and DDR programs are complementary and adopt the Integrated DDR Standards module on AGDTOs; and
- Keep reintegration and counterterrorism goals distinct.

Introduction

The process and rationale for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) have been regularly reevaluated since DDR's inception in the 1990s. This process of reflecting on what DDR is and what it should look like has come about in response to changes in practice in the field as well as the evolution of the UN's broader role in armed conflicts and other situations of violence. In particular, the concept and implementation of DDR have evolved as DDR-related activities have increasingly occurred in environments where armed conflict is ongoing, no peace agreement has been signed, and armed groups designated as terrorist organizations (AGDTOs) by the UN Security Council or member states are operating.

These changes in operating environments have led the UN counterterrorism architecture to propose the concept of prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (PRR) based on Security Council resolutions addressing the phenomenon of "foreign terrorist fighters," though the links between PRR and DDR remain unclear.¹ The need for a UN system-wide approach to DDR for AGDTOs has prompted the UN Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR to set in motion the development of an Integrated DDR Standards module on DDR for AGDTOs, which has yet to be adopted.

Outside of UN peacekeeping, where DDR is considered an integral component of the third tier of the protection of civilians (POC), reintegration is seldom viewed through the lens of protection. This paper asserts that reintegration efforts should always be regarded as contributing to broader protection outcomes by reducing the threat posed by armed groups, promoting reconciliation, supporting victims, and upholding the socioeco-

conomic and political rights of former combatants.²

This policy paper analyzes the risks faced by individuals taking part in reintegration processes and by the communities they are reintegrating into. In particular, it analyzes how the designation of an armed group as a terrorist organization by the UN Security Council or by a state impacts these risks while acknowledging that these risks largely depend on the broader context. The paper examines three case studies of current reintegration processes: (1) the process for reincorporating former combatants from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo*, or FARC-EP); (2) the defector program for former members of al-Shabaab in Somalia; and (3) the reintegration process for individuals associated

with Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. In addition to the case-study analyses, the paper draws on interviews with experts on protection, DDR, PRR, and counterterrorism

from across the UN and beyond.

The paper concludes with specific recommendations for the UN to ensure that its approach to reintegration builds on lessons from past DDR practices and that it remains conflict-sensitive and oriented toward protection outcomes.

Evolution of DDR and the Challenge of Dealing with Armed Groups Designated as Terrorist Organizations

The UN's approach to DDR has evolved since its first DDR mandates during the 1990s in Central America and Africa.³ Traditionally, DDR programs

Reintegration efforts should always be regarded as contributing to broader protection outcomes.

1 UN Security Council Resolutions 2178 (September 24, 2014), UN Doc. S/RES/2178; and 2396 (December 21, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2396.

2 The Professional Standards for Protection Work define a protection outcome as "a reduction of the risk, including through improved fulfilment of rights and restitution, for victims. It includes reducing the threats people face, reducing people's vulnerabilities to these threats, and enhancing their capacities." The concept of protection also encompasses "all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law, i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law, and refugee law." International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), "Professional Standards for Protection Work Carried Out by Humanitarian and Human Rights Actors in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence (Third Edition)," 2018, pp. 9, 11. Note that the UN's Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) focus on how integrated DDR processes can contribute to the protection of civilians. Further, DDR is part of tier III of POC "establishment of a protective environment." See: UN DDR Resource Centre, "IDDRS Module 2.10: The UN Approach to DDR," 2019; and "The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook," 2020.

3 UN General Assembly, *Administrative and Budgetary Aspects of the Financing of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, UN Doc. A/C.5/59/31, May 24, 2005. See also: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI), "DDR in Peace Operations: A Retrospective," October 2010.

focused on the demobilization of military-like structures, took place after the conclusion of a peace agreement, and involved an armed group (in whole or in part). Examples include the UN-led DDR processes in Côte d'Ivoire in 2006, in Sudan after 2005, and in Colombia after 2016. The vast majority of these processes were or are supported by a Security Council–mandated peacekeeping operation or special political mission.

The phrase “second-generation” DDR was coined in the mid-2000s to reflect the increasing use of some elements of DDR during situations of armed conflict when the traditional preconditions for DDR had not been met.⁴ Second-generation DDR is exemplified by the community violence reduction (CVR) efforts of the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to tackle gang-related violence in Port-au-Prince.⁵ CVR efforts are now used in many major UN peace operations, including in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Mali (MINUSMA), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).⁶ In these cases, the beneficiaries of DDR encompass not only former fighters but also the larger community affected by armed violence, with the goal of reducing the risk of violence and enhancing community resilience.

The “third generation” of DDR can be traced back to the early 2010s as a response to the evolving nature of armed conflict and other situations of violence, including the multiplication and localization of non-state armed groups that are not included in peace negotiations and may be designated as “terrorists” by states or the Security Council.⁷ Third-generation DDR focuses on the community level and emphasizes a broader peacebuilding and conflict-management approach as well as a “more sustainable economic, social and

political alternative to conflict.”⁸ Third-generation DDR can include targeted DDR-related tools and reintegration support programs.

Both second- and third-generation DDR can be performed outside of situations conducive to first-generation DDR programs. They can include “pre-DDR, transitional weapons and ammunition management (WAM), community violence reduction (CVR), initiatives to prevent individuals from joining armed groups designated as terrorist organizations, DDR support to mediation, and DDR support to transitional security arrangements,” as well as programs for individuals leaving AGDTOs.⁹

In parallel to this shift in approach to DDR, reintegration has increasingly been discussed in the UN counterterrorism architecture through the concept of prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (PRR). Security Council Resolutions 2178 and 2396 call on member states to consider developing comprehensive PRR strategies for “suspected individuals whom they have reasonable grounds to believe are terrorists, including suspected foreign terrorist fighters.”¹⁰ While the concept of PRR has gained momentum in parts of the UN system, it has not been fully defined or institutionalized.

Indeed, the UN system has struggled to reach a common understanding of what policy frameworks—and what reintegration approaches in particular—are best suited to deal with armed groups designated as terrorists by the Security Council or third-party states.¹¹ This challenge stems in part from the lack of an internationally agreed-upon definition of terrorism. Without a clear definition, national authorities have come to differing interpretations of what constitutes a terrorist offense and who is a terrorist.¹² This has

4 According to the UN's IDDRS, preconditions for DDR include “the signing of a negotiated ceasefire and/or peace agreement that provides the framework for DDR”; “trust in the peace process”; “willingness of the parties to the armed conflict to engage in DDR”; and “a minimum guarantee of security.” UN DDR Resource Centre, “IDDRS Module 2.10,” p. 2.

5 Erin McCandless, “Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations,” UN DPKO OROLSI, January 18, 2010.

6 See: Namie Di Razza, “Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The Dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping in Mali,” International Peace Institute, October 2018.

7 UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) OROLSI and Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), “The Evolving Nature of DDR: Study on Engaging Armed Groups across the Peace Continuum,” July 9, 2021.

8 International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Compendium of Projects 2010–2017,” 2019, p. 5.

9 UN DDR Resource Centre, “IDDRS Module 2.10,” p. 3.

10 UN Doc. S/RES/2396, para. 29.

11 An IDDRS module on DDR for AGDTOs is being developed by the UN DDR Resource Centre's Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR. See: UN DPO OROLSI and BICC, “The Evolving Nature of DDR.”

12 See: Ben Saul, “The Legal Black Hole in United Nations Counterterrorism,” *IPI Global Observatory*, June 2, 2021.

not only led to different approaches to these groups at the national level but has also increased the risk of human rights violations and abuses under national counterterrorism frameworks.¹³ This, in turn, creates legal and operational challenges for the UN system, including in relation to respecting its Human Rights Due Diligence Policy and retaining its prerogative to engage with all parties.¹⁴

Because of this changing landscape of DDR, the UN system currently uses three programmatically independent routes for reintegration: first-generation DDR programs; DDR-related tools; and community-based reintegration programs (see Table 1).¹⁵ Each route has different eligibility criteria, actors, and beneficiaries, and they can be used in combination with each other.

Table 1. Terminology distinctions: Reintegration for whom and by whom?

	DDR	DDR-related tools	Community-based reintegration	PRR
Preconditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiated cease-fire or peace agreement providing for a DDR framework • Trust in peace process • Willingness of the parties to the conflict to engage in DDR 	None	None	Armed groups designated as terrorist organizations
Individuals eligible to participate	Members of armed groups or armed forces regardless of a third-party “terrorist” designation (except by the Security Council) ¹⁶	Members of armed groups or armed forces regardless of a third-party “terrorist” designation	Members of armed groups or armed forces regardless of a third-party “terrorist” designation	Members of suspected or designated terrorist organizations and their affiliates or associates ¹⁷
Individuals ineligible to participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perpetrators of international crimes • Groups and individuals designated as “terrorist” by the Security Council¹⁸ 	Perpetrators of international crimes ¹⁹	Perpetrators of international crimes ²⁰	Depends on screening and national policies

13 See: Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, “Human Rights and Counterterrorism: A Sisyphean Tale,” *IPI Global Observatory*, June 16, 2021.
 14 UN DPKO and Department of Political Affairs (DPA), “Aide Memoire—Engaging with Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) for Political Purposes: Considerations for UN Mediators and Missions,” April 2, 2020 (on file with author).
 15 While there are no formal reintegration programs in place under the PRR paradigm (as the reintegration component of PRR has not been conceptualized), PRR is included in Table 1 to understand its potential relationship to existing reintegration processes.
 16 UN DDR Resource Centre “IDDRS Module 2.11: The Legal Framework to UN DDR,” pp. 14, 16-17.
 17 Given the lack of a concrete definition for PRR, there are questions as to who would be regarded as being associated with terrorist groups. From a children’s rights perspective, however, it is important that children will be treated “in their best interests.” For more, see: UN Office of Counter-Terrorism Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT), “Handbook—Children Affected by the Foreign-Fighter Phenomenon: Ensuring a Child Rights-Based Approach,” September 2018; and United Nations, “Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children with Links to United Nations Listed Terrorist Groups,” April 2019.
 18 UN DDR Resource Centre, “IDDRS Module 2.11.”
 19 Ibid.
 20 Ibid.

	DDR	DDR-related tools	Community-based reintegration	PRR
Actors responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National governments and national DDR commissions • UN missions • UN country teams entities (especially IOM and the UN Development Programme) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National governments • UN missions • UN country teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National governments • UN missions • UN country teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National governments • UN counter-terrorism entities
Examples	Monitoring of FARC-EP reincorporation by the UN Verification Mission in Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al-Shabaab defector program • Programs for former Boko Haram combatants in Lake Chad Basin • CVR programs in MINUSMA, MONUSCO, and UNMISS 	Community-based reintegration programs in MONUSCO	Programs for former Boko Haram combatants in Lake Chad Basin

Reintegration in Practice

The UN system can support nationally led reintegration programs through a peace operation mandated by the Security Council, as in Colombia and (initially) Somalia, or at the request of a government outside of a mission setting, as in the Lake Chad Basin.²¹ UN support to reintegration can take various forms, including verification, technical advice to national authorities, and capacity building from the UN Secretariat and other UN entities.

This section presents three case studies of ongoing reintegration processes and the role of the UN in these: the reincorporation of ex-FARC-EP combatants in Colombia, the defector program for former al-Shabaab combatants in Somalia, and the reintegration process for former Boko Haram fighters in the Lake Chad Basin. The protection risks faced by combatants are discussed in the next section.

The Ongoing FARC-EP Reincorporation Process in Colombia

Since the 1980s, Colombia has undertaken multiple DDR processes. These have included several reintegration programs since the 2000s to encourage individual members of recognized organized armed groups to demobilize. More than 50,000 former combatants have participated in these reintegration programs since 2002.²² The programs offer standardized reintegration routes to individuals accredited as demobilized combatants who have voluntarily disengaged from violence absent an agreement between their armed group and the government. It is a six-and-a-half-year process broken down into eight steps to prepare participants to return to civilian life and is managed by Colombia's Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization.

²¹ UN DDR Resource Centre, "IDDRS Module 2.10," pp. 13–14.

²² The process has involved people who were FARC-EP dissidents as well as members of the National Liberation Army, the Popular Liberation Army, and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia. Colombian Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, "What Is Reintegration?" available at www.reincorporacion.gov.co/en/reintegracion/Pages/what.aspx.

Before the 2016 peace agreement, more than 22,000 FARC-EP members voluntarily disengaged through these reintegration programs on an *individual* basis. However, the final peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP provides for the *collective* disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of all former FARC-EP combatants.²³ The FARC-EP itself has taken an active role in designing the process. The idea is for ex-combatants to reincorporate within collectives, which “act as local centers of power—contributing to the FARC-EP’s idea of transforming territorial spaces that they once controlled through arms into clusters of political support.”²⁴ The peace agreement’s DDR provisions specifically call for the reincorporation process to emphasize women’s rights, though the implementation of this provision is lagging.²⁵

By March 2020, more than 13,000 ex-FARC-EP combatants had been accredited as demobilized and had disarmed within the context of the peace agreement; and the vast majority (almost 99 percent) remain committed to their reincorporation.²⁶ The reincorporation has taken place in twenty-three specially created territorial spaces for capacitation and reincorporation (*espacios territoriales de capacitación y reincorporación*), which

The UN system has struggled to reach a common understanding of what policy frameworks are best suited to deal with armed groups designated as terrorists.

provide physical protection as well as services “related to health, education, [and] economic livelihoods.”²⁷ While the former FARC-EP members are expected to settle in these zones, about two-thirds have left for urban centers or other rural communities due to family ties and socioeconomic opportunities in these areas, as well as the lack of socioeconomic services, infrastructure, and security in the zones. This dispersion has made it harder for the state to offer physical protection and provide housing, requiring adjustments to the program.²⁸

The UN Verification Mission in Colombia is responsible for verifying the implementation of the peace agreement, including the “process of political, economic and social reincorporation of the FARC-EP; the implementation of personal and collective security guarantees; and comprehensive programs on security and protection measures for communities and organizations in the territories.”²⁹ Through a “proactive approach” to verification, the mission has supported national protection schemes, including through protection by presence, risk assessment,³⁰ reintegration monitoring,³¹ advocacy,³² finance projects that aim to mitigate risks,³³ and partnerships with international, national, and local actors.³⁴

23 The agreement provides for the “reintegration of FARC-EP members into civilian life—in economic, social and political matters.” The term “reincorporation” (as opposed to “reintegration”) was negotiated by the FARC to demonstrate their ownership of the process and signal a difference from former and ongoing reintegration processes in Colombia. See: UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 29 March 2017 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2017/272, April 21, 2017, Annex II; and Renata Segura and Sabrina Stein, “The FARC’s Collective Reincorporation Project: Its Impact on Colombia’s DDR,” Social Science Research Council, July 2019, p. 3.

24 UN Doc. S/2017/272.

25 Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, “Towards Implementation of Women’s Rights in the Colombian Final Peace Accord: Progress, Opportunities and Challenges,” November 2020.

26 Washington Office on Latin America, “Protection of Ex-Combatants,” May 14, 2020, available at <https://colombiapace.org/protection-of-ex-combatants/>. See also: UN Security Council, *United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2021/603, June 25, 2021.

27 UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), “Lights and Shadows of the Peace Agreement Implementation in Colombia: Attitudes and Perceptions in the PDET Territories,” 2020, p. 49.

28 Interview with UN official in Colombia, June 2021.

29 See: UN Security Council Resolution 2366 (July 10, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2366, para. 2. On the protection role played by the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, see: Dirk Druet, “United Nations Special Political Missions and Protection: A Principled Approach to Research and Policymaking,” International Peace Institute, July 2021.

30 For example, at the local level, the UN mission in Colombia participates in “blue vest” (*carpa azul*) coordination mechanisms that bring together local authorities, security forces of the territorial areas, and FARC-EP representatives to review the security risks, grievances, requests, and their respective follow-up operations. Such mechanisms also exist at the national and regional levels, including the tripartite mechanism of former FARC-EP leaders, government representatives, and the UN mission. On the latter, see: “Colombia: UN Mission, Government and FARC-EP to Start Joint Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification,” UN News Centre, November 6, 2016.

31 The UN mission in Colombia is mandated to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement, including the reincorporation of former FARC-EP combatants and the security guarantees made by the national authorities. In other contexts, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights monitors the human rights compliance of reintegration programs.

32 Based on their monitoring and risk assessment, the UN mission and country team in Colombia are able to engage in discreet advocacy with the host-state government to convey messages and provide advice on how to reinforce protection measures and respect for human rights in reintegration processes.

33 The UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace in Colombia, for instance, finances capacity-building projects for the national government (to implement security guarantees) and civil society (to strengthen its self-protection capabilities).

34 Interview with UN official, August 2021.

Though the FARC-EP has transitioned from an armed group to a political party, the United States maintained its designation of the group as a terrorist organization until November 2021.³⁵ This designation had presented a barrier to direct financial and political support from the US.³⁶ Further, while the Colombian government does not regard the FARC-EP or its political arm as a criminal organization, the terrorist narrative remains pervasive in some political factions, including those led by former President Álvaro Uribe, who has referred to the peace process as a “capitulation to terrorism.” The FARC-EP has not been designated as a terrorist entity by the Security Council.

The “Defector Program” and Reintegration Efforts in Somalia

The DDR mechanism used in Somalia is frequently labeled a “defector program.” When the Security Council established the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) in 2013, it did not reference DDR. Yet when extending the mandate the following year, the council asked UNSOM to support the DDR activities of the government of Somalia and the African Union mission (AMISOM).³⁷ Since then, terminology around DDR has not reappeared in the resolutions renewing UNSOM’s mandate.

There is no one overarching defector program in Somalia; instead, there are several programs led by different entities. It has been challenging to track the number of participants, but one UN DDR expert estimated that around 3,000 people have gone through the programs, including 600

women.³⁸

The UN asserts that its DDR activities in Somalia are not related to counterterrorism efforts. However, the Somali government has demanded that a core component of the program in Baidoa focus on religious reeducation to counter violent extremism, and UNSOM links its DDR activities in Somalia to stabilization and preventing violent extremism.³⁹ Additionally, according to the UN and the Somali government, one metric for the success of the DDR program is its ability to encourage defections from and discourage youth from joining al-Shabaab.⁴⁰

Reintegration activities in Somalia are only for “low-risk” individuals defecting from al-Shabaab. Efforts by the UN to extend DDR activities to men and women from other armed groups have failed because of a lack of political will from the Somali government and the inability to guarantee security for defectors.⁴¹ Adult men who are classified as low-risk receive amnesty and are referred to one of three rehabilitation centers:

- Baidoa, which is administered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with Somali government officials, and funded by the government of Germany;⁴²
- Mogadishu, which is run by the British contractor Adam Smith International;⁴³ and
- Kismayo, which is also administered by IOM.⁴⁴

Low-risk adult male defectors receive access to rehabilitation services for up to one year, with the average length of stay ranging from six months to one year. An exit committee comprised of represen-

35 US Embassy in Colombia, “Statement on U.S.-Colombia Partnership to Combat Terrorism,” January 21, 2020, available at <https://co.usembassy.gov/statement-on-u-s-colombia-partnership-to-combat-terrorism/>; US Department of State, “Revocation of the Terrorist Designation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and Additional Terrorist Designations,” November 30, 2021, available at www.state.gov/revocation-of-the-terrorist-designations-of-the-revolutionary-armed-forces-of-colombia-farc-and-additional-terrorist-designations/.

36 Samantha Schmidt and Diana Durán, “How the US Terrorist List Is Getting in the Way of Peace in Colombia,” *Washington Post*, October 23, 2021.

37 Vanda Felbab-Brown, “DDR in the Context of Offensive Military Operations, Counterterrorism, CVE and Non-Permissive Environments: Key Questions, Challenges, and Considerations,” in “DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Its Purpose?” James Cockayne and Siobhan O’Neil, eds., United Nations University, 2015, p. 110.

38 Interview with UN DDR expert, July 2021. In 2019, the Serendi facility in Mogadishu worked with fewer than 100 defectors, while the Baidoa facility supported more than 200. See: Adam Day, Vanda Felbab-Brown, and Fanar Haddad, “Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How Militias and Paramilitary Groups Shape Post-Conflict Transitions,” UN University Centre for Policy Research, April 14, 2020, p. 144.

39 Felbab-Brown, “DDR in the Context of Offensive Military Operations,” p. 117; UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), “DDR—Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration,” available at <https://unsom.unmissions.org/ddr>.

40 Felbab-Brown, “DDR in the Context of Offensive Military Operations,” p. 113.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

43 *Ibid.*; interview with Somalia DDR expert, June 2021.

44 Interview with Somalia DDR expert, June 2021.

tatives from the rehabilitation center, implementing partner agencies, and the Somali government conducts regular meetings to decide when a beneficiary is ready to exit the program. Upon leaving, beneficiaries go through an exit interview to provide feedback. When possible, beneficiaries are referred to local civil society organizations for community-based reintegration support.⁴⁵

Day centers for the rehabilitation of adult women also classified as low-risk opened in Baidoa and Kismayo in 2020.⁴⁶ Like men, low-risk adult women receive amnesty, but they are only referred to a rehabilitation program if one is available.⁴⁷ If a rehabilitation center is not available, the National Intelligence and Security Agency may make alternative arrangements with a guarantor (typically a relative or clan elder). Traditional dispute mechanisms such as *xeer* are also seen as having a role in rehabilitating low-risk women, though these mechanisms have not been specifically discussed for male defectors.⁴⁸ Unlike programs for men, women's rehabilitation programs are nonresidential and tend to be shorter (around six months). The primary goal is for the women to remain in their communities and visit the center around three days a week. The rationale for this decision (at least within IOM's programs) is that communities have an easier time accepting women because they are viewed as victims.⁴⁹

The Reintegration of Former Boko Haram Combatants in the Lake Chad Basin

Since the death of Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau in May 2021, about 20,000 members of Boko Haram have surrendered to national authorities across the Lake Chad Basin. While the Islamic

State West Africa Province (ISWAP) has tried to fill the vacuum left by Shekau's death, most Boko Haram members have resisted joining the group.⁵⁰ Following the death of ISWAP's leader in September 2021, these dynamics present a pertinent opportunity to reinforce efforts to reintegrate ex-Boko Haram combatants.⁵¹

Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2349, countries in the Lake Chad Basin have been prompted to develop legal, policy, and institutional frameworks to implement "disarmament, demobilization, de-radicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration [DDRRR] initiatives, in line with strategies for prosecution, where appropriate for persons associated with Boko Haram and [the Islamic State]."⁵²

The UN has been assisting the Lake Chad Basin Commission and four of its member states—Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria—to develop these initiatives, along with regional standards. To enhance coherence in addressing the threat of Boko Haram, the commission adopted the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram Affected Areas of the Lake Basin Region in 2018, which includes a pillar on DDRRR. Boko Haram and ISWAP have both been designated terrorist organizations by the UN, which influences the approach and language used around reintegration in the region.⁵³ Indeed, a separate paper presenting a screening, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration sub-strategy was inspired by the language used for PRR.⁵⁴

Despite these policy documents, there is no common understanding within the UN system as to what specific approach—DDR or PRR—is being implemented in the Lake Chad Basin countries. For regional authorities, there is an interest in

45 IOM and Adam Smith International, "Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)," Annex C (on file with author).

46 In contrast, programs for male defectors have existed since 2014. See: Felbab-Brown, "DDR in the Context of Offensive Military Operations," p. 111.

47 IOM and Adam Smith International, "Standard Operating Procedures," Annex J. For more information on al-Shabaab women defectors, see: Orly Maya Stern, "The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab," Adam Smith International, September 2019.

48 IOM and Adam Smith International, "Standard Operating Procedures," Annexes C and J.

49 Interview with Somalia DDR expert, June 2021.

50 Chika Charles Aniekwe and Malik Samuel, "Lake Chad Basin and Stabilisation in the Post-Shekau Era," African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), October 13, 2021.

51 Interview with regional expert, October 2021.

52 UN Security Council Resolution 2349 (March 31, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2349, para. 29.

53 United Nations, "Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Two Entries to Its Sanctions List," press release, UN Doc. SC/14118, February 23, 2020; United Nations, "Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Boko Haram to Its Sanctions List," press release, UN Doc. SC/11410, May 22, 2014.

54 African Union, "Pillar Paper for Screening, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration: Lake Chad Basin Region," August 2018.

remaining distant from these UN institutional debates to ensure that the process is context-specific and implemented effectively.⁵⁵

The four countries of the Lake Chad Basin are at different stages of implementing reintegration activities. The most advanced demobilization route so far is Operation Safe Corridor in Nigeria. The operation was launched in 2015 to encourage the defection and reintegration of low-risk former Boko Haram combatants, primarily those who were recruited by force and did not participate in armed violence.⁵⁶ After being screened, individuals are categorized according to their level of risk. Individuals considered “low-risk” are sent to rehabilitation centers offering vocational training and psychosocial support before being transferred back into communities. Former combatants considered “high-risk” and suspected of participation in terrorist offenses are sent to pretrial detention before being prosecuted. Because Operation Safe Corridor is highly securitized and does not involve communities or have buy-in from local leaders, there are questions as to whether former combatants go back to their communities and reintegrate successfully.⁵⁷ Some local leaders have even argued against the reintegration of former Boko Haram combatants, which both influences and reflects some communities’ concerns about reintegration.⁵⁸

In Niger, former combatants are reintegrated through a combination of formal and informal processes that include traditional practices such as reintegration ceremonies. In Chad and Cameroon, however, no effective steps have been taken to implement these initiatives.⁵⁹ There has been

criticism of the way former combatants have been treated by national authorities in both countries, particularly after forty-five Boko Haram members died in a prison in Chad.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, with support from the international community, has taken steps to implement the DDRRR pillar of its regional strategy to standardize the treatment of former Boko Haram combatants across the region and address some of these challenges.

Types of Protection Risks in Reintegration Processes and the UN’s Approach to Them

While reintegration is not often articulated in terms of protection, reintegration efforts should be regarded as serving broader protection outcomes. Reintegration can reduce the threat posed by armed groups, promote reconciliation, support victims, and uphold the social, economic, and political rights of former combatants.⁶¹

The reintegration of former combatants is a sensitive exercise that presents physical safety risks for ex-combatants, their families, victims, communities, and others taking part in the process.⁶² Protection risks are particularly acute outside of the framework of peace agreements, in ongoing armed conflicts, and in reintegration programs that encourage combatants to leave armed groups.⁶³

If these safety risks are not reduced, the reintegration process could fail to enhance the protective environment in the long term.⁶⁴ Indeed, “individ-

55 Interview with regional expert, October 2021.

56 US Agency for International Development (USAID), “Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation (DDRR) in Northeast Nigeria,” February 2020.

57 Interview with regional expert, June 2021.

58 See, for instance, the statement from the chairman of the Nigerian Senate Committee on Army, Senator Mohammed Ali Ndume: “I Am Completely Against It!”—Ndume Reacts to Boko Haram Bill,” interview by Channels Television, February 21, 2020, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI9P3cq5YeU.

59 Note, however, that Cameroon established a DDR Committee in 2018, and some demobilization centers have been established. See: Republic of Cameroon, “Decree No. 2018/719 of 30 November 2018 to Establish the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee,” November 30, 2018.

60 “44 Suspected Boko Haram Members Found Dead in Chad Prison,” Agence France-Presse, April 18, 2020.

61 ICRC, “Professional Standards for Protection Work,” pp. 9, 11. See also: UN DDR Resource Centre, “IDDRS Module 2.10.”

62 According to the IDDRS, there are five categories of people that need to be taken into consideration during DDR processes: (1) members of armed forces and groups who served in combat or support roles; (2) abductees and victims; (3) dependents and families; (4) civilian returnees and “self-demobilized” individuals; and (5) community members. UN DDR Resource Centre, “IDDRS Module 2.10,” p. 19.

63 Arthur Boutellis, Delphine Mechoulan, and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, “Parallel Tracks or Connected Pieces? UN Peace Operations, Local Mediation, and Peace Processes,” International Peace Institute, December 2020, p. 17.

64 Cornelis Steenken, “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR): A Practice Overview,” Peace Operations Training Institute, July 13, 2017, p. 24; Sally Sharif, “A Critical Review of Evidence from Ex-Combatant Reintegration Programs,” Politics of Return Working Paper no. 2, Social Science Research Council, November 2018.

uals will not disengage if it puts them at risk,” so “successful disengagement and reintegration require a minimum threshold of security in society as well as mutual trust and political will.”⁶⁵ Similarly, absent efforts to address physical risks and socioeconomic exclusion, former combatants could see the benefit in rejoining armed groups. Ultimately, the failure of the reintegration process could impact the UN’s reputation and the credibility of its efforts. Reintegration practitioners thus need to anticipate, identify, and mitigate risks while using context-specific and gender- and age-sensitive approaches.⁶⁶

This section reviews the types of risks ex-combatants, their relatives, and community members can face during reintegration processes. At least three categories of protection risks have been identified: (1) physical risks, including remobilization and recruitment into armed groups; (2) lack of community acceptance due to stigma and distrust; and (3) broader socioeconomic exclusion, including health risks. These risks are not unique to armed groups designated as terrorist organizations (AGDTOs) and have been witnessed in traditional DDR processes over the past three decades in places such as Colombia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁶⁷ This paper focuses primarily on the risks to former combatants but also addresses the ways in which reintegration can create protection risks for their communities.

Physical Risks

The first category of risk comprises physical risks faced by former combatants, their families, and the communities they reintegrate into. Specific

physical risks include threats, assassination, reprisal attacks from communities or dissident factions of armed groups, and violence by government forces.

Physical risks to participants in DDR programs have been a recurring issue in Colombia, where, since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement, the UN mission has verified more than 290 murders, 67 attempted murders, and 22 disappearances of former combatants. The mission has also reported physical risks to relatives of former combatants.⁶⁸ It appears that active non-state armed groups have been behind these threats and attacks in an attempt to spoil the implementation of the peace agreement.

Reintegration practitioners need to anticipate, identify, and mitigate risks while using context-specific and gender- and age-sensitive approaches.

In Somalia, fears of retaliation against al-Shabaab defectors and their families are also widespread. Threats have been made against the rehabilitation center in Mogadishu, and

one interviewee explained that “al-Shabaab hates defectors and are open about their desire to kill them.”⁶⁹ Additionally, one of the goals of the defector programs in Somalia is to increase defections and reduce recruitment, which could increase the risk of violent retaliation by al-Shabaab against communities for providing fewer recruits.⁷⁰

Stigma

Another major challenge to the successful reintegration of former combatants is mistrust and stigma. In Nigeria, for instance, in the first year of Operation Safe Corridor, it is reported that former combatants were rejected by communities and ultimately left them, in part due to a lack of

65 Mary Beth Altier, “Violent Extremist Disengagement & Reintegration: Lessons from Over 30 Years of DDR,” RESOLVE Network, March 22, 2021, p. 7.

66 DDR was originally conceptualized for male ex-combatants, but gender experts have argued since its inception that DDR must also be adapted for women. Key challenges women associated with armed groups face in accessing DDR programs include: eligibility criteria and logistical issues, such as childcare; failure of programs to reflect women’s needs and wartime experiences; and lack of better formal reintegration processes for women leaving armed groups. Reintegration processes should consider not only the barriers to women’s participation but also the ways in which the conflict has altered the concepts of “masculinity” and “femininity.” Violent, militarized masculinities are valued during times of conflict, and reimagining new forms of masculinity in post-conflict processes is key to reducing violence. On this, see: Dyan Mazurana, Roxanne Krystalli, and Anton Baaré, “Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Reviewing and Advancing the Field,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, Fionnuala Ni Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Kimberly Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (February 2009).

67 Altier, “Violent Extremist Disengagement & Reintegration,” p. 24; Jeannie Annan, Moriah Brier, and Filder Aryemo, “From ‘Rebel’ to ‘Returnee’: Daily Life and Reintegration for Young Soldiers in Northern Uganda,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 24, no. 6 (November 2009).

68 UN Security Council, *United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2021/824, September 24, 2021, p. 3.

69 See: Vanda Felbab-Brown, “DDR—A Bridge Not Too Far: A Field Report from Somalia”; and interview with expert on the Somalia defector program, June 2021.

70 Interview with child protection specialist, June 2021.

preparation for communities to accept them.⁷¹ Women combatants and women associated with armed groups (such as combatants' family members or victims of gender-based violence like forced marriage) can face particular stigmatization during reintegration.⁷²

Yet even when mistrust of former combatants is high, communities are not necessarily opposed to reintegration. In both Colombia and Nigeria, for example, communities reportedly see the need for reincorporation programs, which they regard as "preconditions for accepting ex-combatants into their communities."⁷³ In the most conflict-affected communities in Colombia, 80 percent of residents expressed distrust of former FARC-EP combatants, yet the same percentage supported their reintegration.⁷⁴

Community acceptance depends on past connections with the armed groups: while some community members were their victims, others were their supporters. In Somalia, for instance, reintegration is influenced by the fact that al-Shabaab members have created links to certain communities by forcibly marrying women, providing employment opportunities, and recruiting.⁷⁵ As a result, many people know someone who is in some way linked to the group, which can reduce the stigma facing former combatants.⁷⁶

Socioeconomic Exclusion

There are strong links between the physical security of ex-combatants and successful socioeconomic reintegration. Overlooking the livelihoods and economic inclusion of ex-combatants can prevent them from enjoying a broader set of socioeconomic rights such as the right to work and the right to an adequate standard of living. Socioeconomic reintegration is a long-term endeavor that, if not

properly invested in, could create further distrust and new grievances among former combatants and thereby perpetuate the cycle of violence.⁷⁷

In Colombia, economic projects are at the core of the reincorporation of former FARC-EP combatants. After most of the former combatants left the designated territorial areas for training and reintegration, the government and UN adapted their approach to ensure combatants' continued participation in individual or collective projects.⁷⁸

Lessons from traditional reintegration programs have also shown the importance of equitably distributing resources and creating opportunities in a manner that benefits not only ex-combatants but also communities. This has been a challenge in Nigeria, where individual rehabilitation has not always been linked to community-based reintegration principles such as sequenced planning.⁷⁹ While socioeconomic reintegration depends on several external factors—including the ability of the labor market to absorb new individuals and create jobs—adhering to such principles can make these efforts more sustainable.⁸⁰

A final type of risk for ex-combatants is lack of access to healthcare, including psychosocial support to former combatants, communities, and victims participating in reintegration programs. Without equal access to formal healthcare, ex-combatants could lose trust in national authorities and feel "left behind." In Colombia, for instance, the UN mission and the government have had to ensure cantonment sites are equipped with healthcare capacity, particularly following a "baby boom" in communities in areas previously held by the FARC-EP.⁸¹ Conversely, psychosocial support is a tenet of the rehabilitation process in Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor.⁸²

71 Interview with regional expert, June 2021.

72 Altier, "Violent Extremist Disengagement & Reintegration," p. 48.

73 Interview with regional expert, June 2021.

74 UNDP and PRIO, "Lights and Shadows of the Peace Agreement in Colombia," p. 50.

75 Phoebe Donnelly, "Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups" (PhD dissertation, Tufts University, 2019).

76 Interview with expert on Somalia defector program, June 2021.

77 Altier, "Violent Extremist Disengagement & Reintegration," pp. 24, 41–42.

78 Interview with UN entity in Colombia, June 2021. The UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) for Sustaining Peace in Colombia has recently increased its investments to support the sustainable socioeconomic reincorporation of FARC.

79 Interview with independent expert, June 2021.

80 International Labour Office, "Socio-Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants—Guidelines," 2009.

81 Interview with UN officials, July 2021.

82 USAID, "DDRR in Northeast Nigeria."

Risks to Communities

Protection risks across these categories are not exclusive to defectors; they also apply to the whole community that defectors reintegrate into. Communities can be targeted with physical threats and attacks for accepting former combatants. For example, in the case of Somalia, not only individual defectors but also their family members face the risk of retaliation by al-Shabaab.⁸³ In Colombia, ex-combatants' families have been threatened and attacked, and social leaders in favor of the peace agreement have been killed.⁸⁴

Likewise, the stigma of being associated with an armed group applies not only to individual former combatants but also to their families. In some cases, this association with an armed group can even destroy social networks. This stigmatization is especially challenging for children born into armed groups.⁸⁵

Finally, communities that defectors reintegrate into often face social divisions and socioeconomic hardships that could be exacerbated by the reintegration process. In Somalia, for example, armed groups have intentionally severed social ties, destroyed livelihoods, and dismantled traditional community-support mechanisms. As one expert noted on the case of Somalia, "If you don't have [reintegration] programs focused on the fabric of community... you are done."⁸⁶ For this reason, it is particularly important to ensure that communities also benefit from the reintegration of former combatants. It is also critical to ensure that reintegration programs do not give the impression that they are rewarding criminality.

Protection risks are not exclusive to defectors; they also apply to the whole community that defectors reintegrate into.

The UN's Role in Addressing Protection Risks

UN entities involved in supporting reintegration have a responsibility to help governments address the protection risks facing former combatants, communities, victims, and other individuals involved in the reintegration process. This responsibility is laid out in several documents, some specific to DDR and others more general.

UN DDR efforts are guided by the do-no-harm principle, which is explicitly stated in the UN's Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS).⁸⁷ In addition, in peace operations with a protection of civilians (POC) mandate, the reintegration of former combatants is part of the third tier of POC ("establishing a protective environment"). Based on this, missions' DDR components have a responsibility to adhere to POC standards when supporting national reintegration program in the framework of peace operations.⁸⁸

While the protective requirements for PRR programs are less developed, member states are also called on and expected to comply fully with international law when designing and implementing PRR activities. This includes "[taking] into account gender and age sensitivities" and engaging with local communities, mental health and education practitioners, and other relevant civil society organizations and actors.⁸⁹

In line with these various sets of guidelines, the UN has undertaken several efforts to eliminate and reduce the protection risks facing former combatants and communities during the reintegration

83 See: Felbab-Brown, "DDR—A Bridge Not Too Far"; and interview with expert on the Somalia defector program, June 2021.

84 Interview with regional expert, June 2021.

85 Kimberly Theidon and Dyan Mazurana, eds., *Challenging Conceptions: Children Born of Wartime Rape and Sexual Exploitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2022).

86 Interview with UN official, June 2021.

87 UN DDR Resource Centre, "IDDRS Module 2.10," p. 22.

88 UN DPO, "The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook," 2020.

89 See: UN Security Council Resolution 2396 (December 21, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2396.

process. At the Secretariat level, some entities have championed specific protection outcomes, such as by supporting the development of the UN's Key Principles for Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of women and children linked to designated terrorist groups.⁹⁰ In the field, these include initiatives to assess risks, monitor reintegration, provide technical assistance and capacity building, finance projects that aim to mitigate risks, and lead advocacy efforts as discussed in these case studies. There is no standardized way to approach such efforts in the field, and no single entity leads them, leaving each UN mission or country team to develop its own approach depending on its mandate, resources, and access.⁹¹

Do Reintegration Risks Differ Because Groups Are Labeled Terrorists?

Beyond these general protection risks facing ex-combatants and communities involved in reintegration processes, members of armed groups designated as terrorist organizations (AGDTOs) can face additional risks. These include increased stigma against individuals regarded as terrorists, as well as their affiliates, their families, and even their victims. Some of these risks are increased by the approaches that national authorities take to deal with individuals regarded as terrorists. These risks should be taken into consideration by UN entities arguing that the designation of entities as “terrorist” or their association with terrorists should trigger a PRR process. Any efforts to address these risks should be contextualized within each country's political dynamics, including the ongoing situation of violence and transitional justice efforts. The below findings are mainly drawn from the case studies on Somalia and the Lake Chad Basin.

Being labeled a member or associate of a terrorist group immediately designates an individual as a criminal, which can stigmatize them.

Stigma and Misperceptions

Since there is no agreed-upon definition of what a terrorist group is, labeling an armed group as such is an inherently political act and does not necessarily reveal the characteristics of the group or how it compares to other groups with the same label.⁹² Being labeled a member or associate of a terrorist group immediately designates an individual as a criminal, which can stigmatize them. This stigmatization can fragment an individual's relationship with the state, exacerbating the protection risks they face, impeding the state's ability to mitigate these risks, and disincentivizing the state from negotiating with them. Labeling individuals or associated groups terrorists also delegitimizes their actions and existence.⁹³

Reintegration activities for AGDTOs create distinct stigmatization challenges for women, girls, men, and boys. These challenges particularly arise when an entire group of people, based on their collective identity, is seen as either a security risk or as not important to security-related processes. In certain contexts, women are classified as low-risk on the basis of their gender alone. This classification can lead to women being excluded from DDR-related activities and being immediately released back into communities. This is a particular challenge in Nigeria, where women are often released directly to communities or internally displaced person camps after leaving Boko Haram without the benefit of participating in DDR programs, despite the stigma they face.⁹⁴

In contrast, men and boys tend to be immediately viewed as security threats when they are associated with “terrorists,” especially if they are from certain national or religious communities. For example, the confining of boys and male adolescents in detention facilities in northeastern Syria illustrates

90 United Nations, “Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children.”

91 For the role of special political missions and UN country teams on protection, see: Druet, “UN Special Political Missions and Protection”; and Damian Lilly, “Considering the Protection of Civilians during UN Peacekeeping Transitions,” International Peace Institute, January 2021.

92 The terrorist label also poses political and legal challenges for external actors that risk violating counterterrorism policies and regulations.

93 Di Razza, “The Dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping in Mali.”

94 It should be noted that participation in formal reintegration programs can also lead to stigma. USAID, “DDRR in Northeast Nigeria,” p. 7.

that they are not seen as victims or children but as security threats.⁹⁵ Labeling children as terrorists can undermine their long-term reintegration. One DDR scholar spoke about a young Syrian man who left the Islamic State (IS) and sought to reintegrate in Jordan as a refugee. But when he tried to find work at a bakery, he was discriminated against because of his nationality and his previous ties to IS. He later told researchers that he was going to rejoin IS because of the discrimination he faced trying to reintegrate into civilian life.⁹⁶ A child protection specialist explained that the terrorist label “perpetuates the problem and creates a class of people that do not have opportunities, and [the discrimination] is almost seen as justified because they are terrorists. Nobody likes terrorists.”⁹⁷

Use as Intelligence Assets

Another risk that arises from the link between the terrorist designation and DDR activities is the use of DDR participants as assets in counterterrorism intelligence operations. Children who are associated with AGDTOs are at even greater risk of being viewed or used as intelligence assets by national authorities. Cases of adults and children being used for intelligence purposes have been identified in Somalia and Iraq.⁹⁸ For example, one child protection expert noted that they had heard of a boy in Iraq who, despite having no affiliation with IS, was told that he had to provide authorities details on the locations of IS members. Families fear that if they take their children back, they could also become targets of counterterrorism intelligence actors.⁹⁹ For individuals who already face extreme risks by leaving armed groups, being used as intelligence assets creates new physical safety risks, including retaliation from AGDTOs, governments, or international actors.

Prolonged Detention and Lack of Due Process

The lack of standards, transparency, and fairness of some national screening procedures calls into question the credibility of rehabilitation and reintegration processes. The integrity of these programs is further complicated by the fact that international observers—including the UN—often have limited access to these processes, which are typically conducted by national military, police, or intelligence services.¹⁰⁰

In Nigeria, for instance, some individuals have remained in prolonged detention due to the inability of authorities to determine their threat level through screening. In other cases, the lack of standards for screening has created uncertainties as to why certain individuals were sent for prosecution, rehabilitation, or reintegration.¹⁰¹ These issues are exacerbated in territories controlled or governed by AGDTOs, where affiliation with the group is a porous concept. In Mosul, Iraq, for example, it was difficult to identify the risk level of individuals who were street sweepers, tax collectors, social affairs officials, or one of the many other civilian officials who were part of IS’s governing infrastructure.¹⁰² This confusion around status and the lack of standards or indicators creates protection risks for such individuals who can be subjected to miscategorization and prolonged administrative detention.

While waiting in detention, individuals deemed high-risk may face human rights abuses, as has been documented in Somalia and Nigeria.¹⁰³ After men participating in Operation Safe Corridor in Nigeria left Boko Haram and turned themselves in, they were sent to detention centers, prisons, or military barracks for screening, where they were

95 Fionnuala Ni Aoláin, “Position of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism on the Human Rights of Adolescents/Juveniles Being Detained in North-East Syria,” UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), May 2021.

96 Interview with DDR researcher, June 2021.

97 Interview with child protection expert, June 2021.

98 Felbab-Brown, “DDR in the Context of Offensive Military Operations,” p. 113; interview with child protection expert, June 2021.

99 Interview with child protection expert, June 2021.

100 Joanne Richards, “High Risk or Low Risk: Screening for Violent Extremists in DDR Programmes,” *International Peacekeeping* 25, no. 3 (2018).

101 USAID, “DDRR in Northeast Nigeria,” p. 8.

102 Interview with DDR expert, June 2021.

103 See: Felbab-Brown, “DDR in the Context of Offensive Military Operations,” pp. 112-113 for description of the alleged human rights violations in the Serendi camp in Somalia.

often held for prolonged periods with no charges. While detained, participants were reportedly tortured, beaten, and interrogated by security officials and members of pro-government militias. Conditions in these centers were so bad that one participant recalled, “People died every day. In our cell, it was two or three people a week who died.”¹⁰⁴

In addition to posing a risk to individuals, human rights abuses perpetrated by government actors can drive individuals to join or rejoin AGDTOs.¹⁰⁵ By not complying with human rights standards when screening and detaining ex-combatants, governments can create new cycles of violence.

Lack of Victim-Centered Approaches

PRR is based on the idea that practitioners should distinguish between ex-combatants who can be reintegrated into civilian life and those who should be prosecuted for their crimes.¹⁰⁶ The premise is problematic, however, as victims of violence are put through the same PRR screening processes as ex-combatants (at least during the initial screening phase). One interviewee described an instance when an enforcer for the Islamic State and a Yazidi woman who had been subjected to sexual violence by IS were placed in the same room and provided the same support.¹⁰⁷ This example highlights how victim-centered approaches to reintegration can get lost under the prosecutorial framework of PRR programs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Policy, legal, and operational questions around the way the UN approaches armed groups designated as terrorist organizations are here to stay. As the UN Secretariat and the broader UN system continue to grapple with these questions, they

should ensure that reintegration efforts remain conflict-sensitive and oriented toward protection outcomes. Reintegration efforts under both PRR and DDR processes should serve broader protection outcomes by reducing the threat posed by armed groups, stopping cycles of violence, developing reconciliation schemes, supporting victims, and reestablishing the social, economic, and political rights of former combatants.¹⁰⁸ Other interlinked policy questions, such as transitional justice processes involving AGDTOs, also deserve further attention, in particular as the secretary-general’s guidance note on transitional justice is being revised.

The protection challenges related to reintegration are significant, and they must be addressed with thoughtfulness and urgency, especially given the changing nature of DDR and its associated tools. There are several steps the UN could take to help ensure that reintegration processes address protection risks, especially for former members of AGDTOs.

Tailor reintegration programs to the context, not to whether a group is labeled as a terrorist organization

The first step is to recognize the ways in which reintegration programs can exacerbate risks for individuals leaving armed groups and the communities they are reintegrating into. Importantly, focusing on labeling and designing programs based on whether an armed group is designated as a terrorist organization can add to protection risks and limit the application of best practices for reintegration. The appropriate reintegration program for an armed group should not be determined based on whether it is designated as a terrorist organization; instead, it should depend on a robust, context-specific risk analysis as well as on the political objectives of the host-state government and the UN.¹⁰⁹

104 International Crisis Group, “An Exit from Boko Haram? Assessing Nigeria’s Operation Safe Corridor,” March 19, 2021, pp. 7–8.

105 According to a 2017 UNDP report, 71 percent of individuals surveyed cited “government action” (such as the arrest of a family member or friend) as the specific incident that led to them joining a violent extremist organization. Ozonnia Ojelo et al., “Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment,” UNDP, 2017, p. 73.

106 Richards, “Screening for Violent Extremists in DDR Programmes.”

107 Interview with child protection specialist, June 2021.

108 ICRC, “Professional Standards for Protection Work,” pp. 9, 11. See also: UN DDR Resource Centre, “IDDRS Module 2.10.”

109 Tailoring DDR processes to local, national, and regional conflict dynamics was also a recommendation that the UN DPO put forth in its examination of DDR-related activities in Colombia, the Lake Chad Basin, Mali, and Somalia. See: UN DPO OROLSI and BICC, “The Evolving Nature of DDR,” pp. 26–27.

For instance, in comparing the three cases discussed in this report (two dealing with AGDTOs and one traditional DDR program), a common theme was the threat of retaliation by armed groups during the reintegration process. In Colombia, participants in the process face threats of retaliation by other armed groups, while in Nigeria and Somalia, they face retaliation by the groups they are defecting from. Whatever its source, this threat of retaliation should be addressed in all reintegration processes, whether or not the groups involved are designated as terrorist organizations. Similarly, protection challenges such as ongoing armed violence and the incapacity of the state to offer physical protection are present in all three cases, regardless of whether the groups involved are AGDTOs.

Focusing on labeling and designing programs based on whether an armed group is designated as a terrorist organization can add to protection risks and limit the application of best practices for reintegration.

Instead of the designation of armed groups as terrorist organizations, reintegration programs should be designed and implemented on the basis of context-specific factors such as the nature of ongoing armed violence, the political will and technical capacity of the state, political dynamics in the country, transitional justice processes, the nature of the armed group, and any mandates from the UN Security Council.

Design reintegration programs to be gender-sensitive and human-rights compliant

Protection challenges differ based on individuals' gender, nationality, ethnicity, and age (as well as combinations of these traits). Given the different populations that participate in reintegration processes and the ways in which their protection risks may vary, it is essential that reintegration programs consider the unique risks and challenges for different groups in the design phase, including by developing a victim-centered approach when relevant.

Ensure that PRR and DDR programs are complementary and adopt the IDDRS module on AGDTOs

Within the UN community, there is currently an interest in distinguishing the terminology of DDR from that of PRR. Not only are DDR and PRR linked to different budget streams and accountability mechanisms, but they are also guided by different goals. DDR, as an inherently political and peacebuilding effort, aims to mitigate the threat posed by armed groups and to end conflict. PRR, as a counterterrorism effort, can have various goals, including to advance judicial efforts to hold members of terrorist organizations accountable.

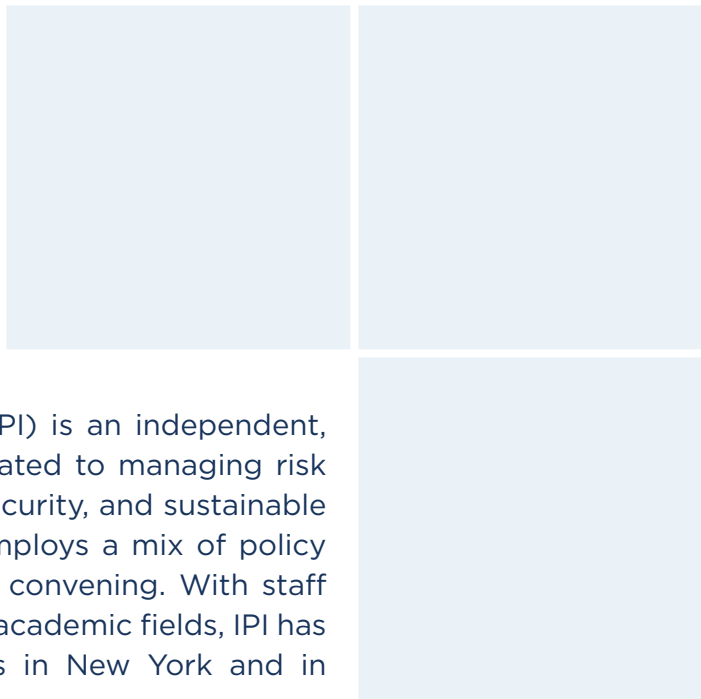
Despite these differences in approach, some overlap exists between reintegration within DDR and the conceptualization of the reintegration phase of PRR.

But PRR's emphasis on prosecution through the criminal justice system as a precursor to rehabilitation and

reintegration can increase protection risks and distract from other goals such as rebuilding social cohesion. It will therefore be important to ensure that all reintegration efforts are complementary, not only in their approaches but also in their application, and that lessons learned from DDR inform the conceptualization of reintegration under the PRR framework. To promote a harmonized UN approach to reintegration schemes involving AGDTOs, the UN Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR should promptly adopt the new IDDRS module on DDR and AGDTOs.

Keep reintegration and counterterrorism goals distinct

Reintegration programs are challenging to design and implement regardless of what type of armed group they focus on. These challenges only increase when these programs also try to engage in counterterrorism or intelligence gathering, which create serious protection risks. While counterterrorism and reintegration activities may occur in the same context (especially if PRR activities become more prevalent), they must be kept distinct.



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