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COUNCIL**

**An EU strategic approach in support of Disarmament, Demobilisation, and
Reintegration of former combatants**

1. Introduction

The changing nature of conflict, the proliferation of armed groups and growing violence cause enormous pain and suffering, and deeply affect the lives of men, women, boys and girls across the globe. Whenever peace recedes and armed conflicts destabilise states and entire regions, the European Union (EU) often faces direct or indirect consequences and new security challenges. Therefore, more than ever, the EU needs to hone its response as a global peace actor addressing instability and conflict beyond its borders.

The EU has a longstanding tradition of providing support to enhance the security and human development of communities and individuals searching for a way out of conflict. In transitions from conflict to peace, facilitating accountable exit opportunities, political processes and alternative livelihoods for those involved is essential. Support to the peace processes in Colombia or in the Indonesian province of Aceh, seeking exit opportunities from conflict zones in north-eastern Nigeria or strengthening the reintegration of veterans of the conflict in eastern Ukraine show some of the ways the EU can adapt and support these undertakings.

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants (DDR) plays an essential role in stabilisation and building lasting peace. It can prevent further exploitation of grievances and instability stirred by armed groups, some of which may be designated as terrorist organisations. DDR is thus an integral part of the EU's contribution to the non-reoccurrence of violence and to broader stabilisation, as it addresses the risks posed by armed groups and supports the transition from armed confrontation to political engagement and inclusive governance.

DDR initiatives sometimes hit specific obstacles, facing *inter alia*: weak local and national ownership; a fragmented approach to peacebuilding; unrealistic or unsupported provisions or expectations from ceasefires or peace agreements; short-term approaches to reintegration; ineffective security and justice sector governance. The EU's experience has demonstrated the need for early engagement with a long-term perspective, flexibility and a capacity to react swiftly, connecting diplomacy, development, peace, security and defence efforts in high-risk contexts.

To meet the challenges posed by armed groups and to maximise the impact of its actions, the EU decided to update its DDR policy¹, drawing on its Global Strategy and its EU Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises² (hereinafter: 'Integrated Approach'). The updated EU DDR policy will match the ambition of a stronger Europe in the world, building on its commitment to the United Nations (UN) sustaining peace agenda³ which focuses on conflict prevention and pro-active pathways to peace and development. By doing so, the EU contributes to the prevention of spill-over effects from neighbouring and surrounding regions that could affect the EU's internal security⁴.

¹ The European Commission and the Council of the European Union approved the EU Concept for Support to DDR (doc. 13727/4/06 REV 4) in December 2006.

² Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy and the Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises (5413/18).

³ See United Nations General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions 70/262 and 2282 respectively.

⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, The Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Security Union Strategy (COM(2020) 605).

Definition and aim

DDR refers to the voluntary engagement of male and female members and associates of armed forces and groups in laying down their weapons, breaking away from command and control structures, and transitioning to civilian life. Sustainable (re)integration is the main aim of DDR. This entails multiple considerations related to security, social and psychological needs and to future socio-economic, educational, health, legal and political prospects, not only for the former combatants and their associates, but also for the families and the communities in which they (re)integrate. As such, **DDR is at the crossroads of humanitarian, development and peace efforts**⁵.

This Joint Communication **sets out an EU-wide comprehensive policy to assess and engage** in DDR processes, and proposes means **to frame and deliver support** to DDR in affected countries and regions, in a **coordinated, conflict-sensitive manner**⁶ and **in line with international law**, directly and in tandem with partners, including the UN⁷, the World Bank, regional organisations and third countries.

This Communication therefore:

- presents the **EU approach to DDR** and highlights the **types of contributions** that the EU and its Member States may bring;
- strengthens **links** with other **key policies and instruments** across the whole conflict cycle;
- outlines **guiding principles** for EU actors;
- proposes dedicated **tools and actions**.

2. Adapting the EU's DDR approach to changing contexts

Contemporary conflicts see increasingly fragmented armed groups with fluid command structures, transnational dimensions and links to organised criminal and terrorist organisations. The dynamics that lead to radicalisation exploit social, ethnic, cultural, economic, political, religious and security grievances, magnified by weak rule of law, state structures and public administrations, inequitable access to land and natural resources, climate change and environmental fragility.

Within this context, DDR processes are often left without their traditionally required frameworks – lasting ceasefires and viable peace agreements. Furthermore, other key conditions for DDR – the conflicting parties' mutual trust in the peace process, their willingness to engage, and minimum levels of security – may be eroded. Thus, individuals and groups exiting armed conflict may require assistance and support when there is a peace agreement as well as when conflict is still ongoing.

Participation in DDR processes

To manage expectations and enhance trust in a peace process, participation of men, women, boys and girls in a DDR process should be based on context-specific, clear and steady

⁵ The concept and practice of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, at times referred to as the Triple Nexus, allows different actors to work and engage in a sequenced and integrated manner while respecting each other's mandates, tools and principles.

⁶ For the definition of Conflict Sensitivity, see the 2020 Guidance Note on the Use of Conflict Analysis in Support of External Action.

⁷ The EU can also benefit from the revised Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS).

eligibility criteria, responsive to age, gender and diversity. Although roles may overlap, relevant categories for DDR include:

- combatant members of armed forces and/or armed groups, and individuals filling support roles, often referred to as associates;
- civilian returnees and self-demobilised individuals;
- families and other dependants associated with members of armed groups;
- abductees, children, survivors and other victims;
- communities in which former combatants and their associates (re-)integrate.

International human rights law (IHRL), international humanitarian law (IHL) and international criminal law set restrictions on the eligibility to DDR processes of perpetrators of war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights. For this reason, an individual initially deemed eligible for a given DDR process may be excluded and prosecuted following the outcome of a criminal investigation. Furthermore, groups designated by the UN Security Council or the EU as terrorist organisations⁸ or returning foreign terrorist fighters and their families remain outside the realm of DDR.

The unconditional and immediate protection, release and (re)integration of children associated with armed forces and groups⁹ (CAAFAG) with their family and community should be planned for and prioritised at all times, irrespective of the armed group's potential designation, in line with IHRL and IHL. Children at the age of criminal responsibility, and who are suspected of having committed a serious crime, shall be handed over to civilian actors, and justice should be provided within juvenile justice frameworks.

Key components of DDR

The EU regards DDR as a political, non-military and transformative process that relies strongly on national and local ownership, peace and development efforts, and on resilience building. EU engagement in support of DDR, its emphasis on specific components, their sequencing and articulation need to be tailored to each specific context.

The EU may support initiatives that are not explicitly referred to as DDR¹⁰ but that still aim to reduce violence or increase resilience at community level and enhance individuals' capacity to resist (re-)recruitment by armed groups. Creating prospects for accountable exits – be they spontaneous or structured – from armed groups and returns to civilian life may contribute to environments more conducive for DDR.

Disarmament is the safe assessment, collection, documentation, control and disposal of arms, ammunition and explosives used by combatants and their associates, and sometimes also by the civilian population, to reduce the illicit circulation of primarily small arms and light weapons (SALW) and related items. Disarmament may take place at all stages of DDR, be transitional¹¹ or conditioned on broader political developments or a progressing peace process.

⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond (COM(2020) 795).

⁹ The EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict. CAAFAG have at times been referred to as child soldiers.

¹⁰ DDR may include components or references to Decommissioning, Disengagement, Disaffiliation, Reincorporation, or Reconciliation, depending on specific contexts.

¹¹ Transitional management of weapons and ammunition may include safe storage controlled jointly by the parties concerned.

*The EU can support **disarmament** and/or weapon and ammunition management through policy and political dialogue or by providing assistance measures and expert advice to national or local authorities. Joint disarmament operations within the framework of a CSDP mission and/or operation could be envisaged, if the Council so decides, in line with Article 43 TEU, in addition to contributing to UN-mandated or regionally and nationally-led initiatives. Operational cooperation between EU and non-EU law enforcement authorities should also continue to take place within the Firearms priority of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT)¹².*

Demobilisation refers to the separation and/or disaffiliation of adult members¹³ of armed forces and armed groups from command structures and their transition to civilian status. It entails changes of legal status, and may require psychosocial counselling and health care support. It can happen spontaneously or be organised through legislation or political agreements¹⁴. The processing and discharge of eligible combatants and their associates includes transitional, short-term and targeted assistance, referred to as reinsertion support, for those undergoing a demobilisation process. This process should take into account victims of trafficking in human beings exploited for armed conflicts and war purposes.

*The EU can support **demobilisation** through rapidly deployable assistance and specific provisions under EU external action funding programmes, actions under Article 28 TEU, contributions from CSDP and other engagements reinforcing authorities' capacities in areas such as verification, logistics and digitalisation. Reinsertion support measures could include training to prepare for future social and professional life challenges, in parallel to specific provisions to link reinsertion and reintegration by, for example, participation in economic and development projects related to infrastructure, health services, green energy, etc.*

Reintegration is the process through which former combatants and their associates make the transition to living as civilian community members. This open-ended process has security-related, psychological, social, health, cultural, religious, economic, political and legal dimensions, and takes place at individual, family and community levels as part of wider recovery, peace and development processes.

Under specific circumstances, eligible and vetted former combatants may integrate into the national security sector. This process should be nationally owned, promote greater inclusion and fair representation, and respond to the security needs of the population, in addition to taking account of accountability issues, rightsizing and the absorption capacity of the security sector.

*EU **reintegration** actions will be combined with broader development and peacebuilding efforts to support former combatants and their associates in their transition to civilian life and increase the absorption capacity of the recipient communities and authorities, including by strengthening local governance structures, capacities and processes.*

As broader dysfunctions of political systems, state institutions, education and health systems and public administration further reduce prospects for successful reintegration, the EU will envisage structural approaches. Supporting other populations affected by conflict and

¹² Council Conclusions on the permanent continuation of the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime: EMPACT 2022+ (6481/21) and the EU action plan on firearms trafficking 2020-2025 (COM/2020/608).

¹³ Children under the age of 15 are seen as being *released* from armed groups rather than undergoing demobilisation.

¹⁴ A formal demobilisation process is often framed by a political agreement and marks a change in the legal status of the individual from combatant/associate to civilian, whereas self-demobilised individuals directly achieve civilian status.

an equitable sharing of peace dividends (e.g. through reparations to victims and survivors, including victims of trafficking in human beings) enhances local communities' and national actors' buy-in to the process and contributes to reconciliation.

To support socio-economic reintegration, the EU is committed to addressing the multi-sectoral nature of these processes, covering aspects as diverse as overcoming insecure land tenure and ensuring access to health care, to supporting access to financial and banking services. Therefore, certain key factors of socio-economic vulnerability, such as structural macroeconomic deficits and obstacles to sustainable development, well-being and decent job creation, educational gaps, and ineffective or inaccessible social and health protection systems, will need to be considered and addressed, together with other relevant dimensions such as the role of organised crime, illicit economies, risks of re-recruitment, etc.

Through its development, humanitarian aid and trade cooperation, the EU supports the promotion of decent work, sustainable livelihoods and economies, to help countries recover from emergencies and build back better. This approach should be more systematically applied to processes of reintegration, including of internally displaced people, refugees and returnees.

In its efforts to promote a culture of peace that is conducive to political reintegration, the EU assists individuals and communities in acquiring the skills they need to engage in political activities through a political party, a social movement, or as independent activists, allowing pluralistic debate as well as prospects for wider reconciliation and peacebuilding without fear of violent reprisals.

3. A holistic EU engagement matching the challenges of DDR

A wide reach

To match the challenges of DDR, the EU will leverage its multi-dimensional contributions to peace, security and development:

- As a global actor with an enhanced mediation profile, the EU plays a strong convening role in peace processes and conflict prevention, with human security at the centre of its action. Therefore, the EU is well-placed to provide effective and flexible support to DDR processes through country or regional strategies. A realistic approach based on policy and political dialogue, which also addresses state security actors, can lower the likelihood of the resurgence of tensions and improve the stability and resilience of the EU's partners in the neighbourhood and beyond.
- Upholding the multilateral, rules-based international order, the EU remains strongly engaged with bilateral, regional and international partners to ensure and promote respect for international law, notably full respect for IHRL and IHL. Promoting the rule of law (RoL), including through concrete initiatives on protection of civilians and support to civil society organisations and human rights defenders, will foster inclusivity and enable more effective implementation of the EU's Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security¹⁵ and the Youth, Peace and Security agenda¹⁶.

¹⁵ Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security (15086/18).

¹⁶ See e.g. Council Conclusions on Youth in External Action (8629/20) and UNSC 2250 (2015).

- As a major humanitarian¹⁷, development and peace actor, the EU supports national institutions and organisations working to alleviate human suffering and promote sustainable development, enhance human security and facilitate long-term reintegration of various conflict-affected groups beyond DDR.
- The EU and its Member States make a pivotal contribution to peace and security. They also create better prospects for the overall management of risks related to armed groups through the unique role of civilian and military CSDP missions and operations and the networks of defence, security and counter-terrorism (CT) advisers in EU Delegations.
- Making use of research and innovation for evidence-informed policymaking improves support to DDR processes and requires the management of knowledge, lessons and experiences.

A coherent use of the EU's toolbox

DDR initiatives are more effective if supported by the policies, tools and instruments of the Integrated Approach, provided that they follow adequate sequencing, realistic objectives, budgeting and timelines for each specific context.

All relevant EU actors, engaging in accordance with their competences, need to coordinate, consult and cooperate on the political, strategic and operational levels to link long-term policy-driven development support with short-term actions and other assistance measures. The EU is now better placed to deliver in this field, thanks to the adoption of the Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)¹⁸ and the European Peace Facility (EPF)¹⁹.

Peacebuilding and development cooperation

The EU invests in conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives globally, and aims at mainstreaming conflict sensitivity and resilience in its external action, including through specific requirement²⁰ applying to development cooperation and international partnerships in fragile and conflict affected countries. This includes systematically addressing the root causes of conflicts and crises through long-term approaches to conflict transformation and peacebuilding. In fragile environments, efforts to create space for political dialogue and respect for the RoL, and to prevent or reduce violence and extremism at community level, are key. In these contexts, investment focused on former combatants, their associates and recipient communities has a preventive effect on relapsing conflicts and violence by building resilience and resistance to re-recruitment by armed groups.

The EU plays a fundamental role in the Colombian peace process, both by stimulating trust and dialogue among former FARC-EP representatives and the Government of Colombia, and as a main donor to the social and economic reincorporation (reintegration) of former combatants, through projects as well as budget support. Reinforced by the prominent role of the EU Special Envoy for the peace process, the EU's support was designed with a human

¹⁷ EU humanitarian aid adheres to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. See the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles (COM(2021) 110).

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, O.J. L 209/1 (2021).

¹⁹ Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/509 of 22 March 2021 establishing a European Peace Facility.

²⁰ According to Art. 12 (2)b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 establishing the NDICI, when drawing up the programming documents for countries and regions in crisis, and for fragile and vulnerable situations, a conflict analysis shall be conducted to ensure conflict sensitivity, and due account shall be taken of the special needs and circumstances of the countries or regions concerned and their population.

rights-based approach and was in line with the principles of leaving no one behind. It pursues the economic reintegration of ex-combatants through support to productive projects and vocational training, housing and access to public basic services, rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, child care and women's economic empowerment.

The main challenges of the Colombian peace process relate to security issues affecting ex-combatants, redistribution and access to land for projects and housing, sustainability of income generating initiatives, budgeting at local and regional levels for reincorporation needs in local development plans, stigmatisation and access to EU funding via the banking system.

Preventive diplomacy and mediation

As noted in the concept for EU Peace Mediation²¹, arrangements related to armed actors are key in mediation and peace negotiations. When possible, negotiating delegations should include representatives of armed groups and of communities affected by DDR processes. Implementable and realistic DDR-specific provisions, including cessation of hostilities, ceasefire and power-sharing mechanisms, and security arrangements, increase the chances for successful reconciliation and stabilisation. It is therefore important to involve DDR expertise at an early stage of negotiations.

Security sector reform and rule of law support

In line with the EU-wide SSR framework²², SSR and DDR can be closely intertwined. Actors may condition their engagement in one process on the adversary's credible commitments to the other process, as SSR might be perceived as weakening states' uniformed forces and DDR as undermining armed groups.

The reform of the security sector should lead to improvements in the accountability of the security sector and its human rights record, as well as better support for the RoL and democratic governance, thereby addressing the core underlying grievances exploited by armed actors.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the EU played a key role in the DDR process starting in 2013, particularly on reintegration. The government focused on disarmament and demobilisation, while the EU focused on reinsertion and reintegration through different projects. It also provided complementary support to the State Building Contract, with a focus on justice sector reform, national reconciliation and conflict prevention projects supporting civil society organisations and local authorities.

CSDP missions and operations and networks of security and defence advisers

DDR efforts need to be in synergy with EU activity in the security and defence sector. In accordance with their mandates, civilian and military CSDP missions and operations should contribute to an environment favourable to a DDR process by supporting national and local actors. In addition to their direct contribution to specific DDR components, CSDP missions may contribute to long-term reintegration of former combatants that have gone through a DDR process by training and mentoring activities.

Relevant Commission services, EU Delegations, EEAS military advisers and counter terrorism/security experts' networks, as well as defence attachés and security advisers from EU

²¹ Concept on EU Peace Mediation (13951/20).

²² Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Elements for an EU-wide strategic framework to support security sector reform (JOIN(2016) 31).

Member States, should be key players in reaching out to national armed forces and law enforcement agencies from partner countries engaged in DDR processes.

The EU-led Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) was launched in 2005 to monitor and support the peace process in the Indonesian province of Aceh. The AMM was a civilian mission tasked with the decommissioning of Free Aceh Movement (GAM) armaments and the relocation of non-organic military and police forces. After completing its decommissioning mandate in early 2006, the AMM continued to monitor the human rights situation, the process of legislative change and the reintegration of GAM members until the completion of the mission in 2006.

Prevention and countering of violent extremism

Many DDR-related processes take place in contexts where violent extremism has gained a stronghold in the dynamics of a conflict. In such contexts, in complementarity with the external dimension of the EU's Counter-Terrorism Agenda²³, initiatives on prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE) contribute to the general prevention of terrorism and violent extremism -including (re-)recruitment by armed groups- for which elements aiming at de-radicalisation might be considered. When in full compliance with IHRL standards, such initiatives aim to equip governments, civil society, communities and local authorities with the necessary knowledge and skills to better deal with such dynamics and enhance communities' resilience and local capacities for the prevention of conflict and violent extremism. Practitioners working in these contexts should be well aware of DDR and P/CVE initiatives relevant to the countries or regions in which they work, understand the aims and specific working methods, and seek synergies between different engagements.

P/CVE initiatives may contain coercive elements, for instance when authorities pursue rehabilitation and reintegration strategies following prosecution. This makes P/CVE initiatives different from DDR, which under all circumstances has a voluntary character that must be safeguarded.

Transitional justice

Transitional justice (TJ) refers to the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation and peace²⁴. To help prevent the re-occurrence of violence, DDR frameworks often operate simultaneously and may rely on TJ-related processes and commitments. As such, TJ and DDR are mutually reinforcing processes that share the long-term goal of contributing to sustainable peace and respect for the RoL.

The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro was signed between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2014 and includes a normalisation annex, pertaining to the DDR-related aspects of the conflict. The normalisation track entails four key components, including security (with the formal decommissioning (demobilisation) of 40 000 combatants), socio-economic development, confidence-building measures, and transitional justice and reconciliation. The EU's holistic approach linked early recovery efforts to the longer-term accompaniment of the local authorities, to lay the foundations for sustainable development through the strengthening of governance, the RoL, and of the local economic capacities. These programmes were aligned with other EU initiatives which also support communities, institution building and rural development in Bangsamoro

²³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond (COM(2020) 795).

²⁴ The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies – Report of the UNSG (S/2004/616). See also Council Conclusions on EU's Support to Transitional Justice (13576/15).

and Mindanao. The EU is also supporting reconstruction in Marawi city, a programme to support the Bangsamoro Transitional Authority, which also covers civil society and TJ issues, rural development programmes and agri-enterprise programmes.

Small arms and light weapons, weapon and ammunition management, and mine action

The proliferation and diversion of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in a conflict context facilitate re-armament and the mobilisation of armed groups, and hamper any effect a DDR process may have on preventing reoccurrence of conflict. It also bears a long-term risk for the internal security of the EU, with the possibility of stockpiles being diverted to criminal groups in the EU or in the region. Consequently, disarmament within a DDR process should build on wider political weapon and ammunition management (WAM) processes. This will help to reinforce post-conflict recovery strategies, arms embargoes and gender-responsive regulatory, operational and technical SALW control efforts, in line with the EU SALW Strategy²⁵. To achieve this, the involvement of EU Member States and cooperation with non-EU countries is key.

DDR relates closely to mine action initiatives that could help to enhance overall trust in a peace process. It may form part of reinsertion and reintegration activities, *i.e.* through mine risk education initiatives. Humanitarian demining also allows access to land and livelihoods, and improves the security situation of the affected communities.

Tackling organised crime and combating illegal exploitation of natural resources

The active presence of organised criminal groups dealing with illicit and war economies often fuels conflicts and can play a decisive role in the re-mobilisation of armed groups or as a general conflict driver. Criminal structures thrive in the absence of functioning state institutions and might find symbiotic relationships or convergent objectives with armed forces and groups. As such, tackling organised crime and corruption²⁶ can contribute to more effective DDR processes and the overall objective of sustainable peace. The EU can leverage its impact in these settings by reinforcing cooperation in this field with third countries and international organisations.

Moreover, the illicit control or unregulated exploitation and management of natural resources may exacerbate vulnerabilities to climate change and natural disasters, as well as causing environmental degradation. However, when managed in a sustainable, conflict sensitive and inclusive way, including through due diligence regulatory frameworks, natural resources may contribute to processes of socio-economic reintegration and wider development by attracting investment and sustainable employment opportunities. Therefore, a crucial aspect is to assess vulnerabilities and risks in relation to environmental degradation and climate change when planning socio-economic reintegration, for example in relation to agricultural development, fisheries, forestry, land use, water management, etc.

Combating trafficking in human beings

Conflict zones create fertile ground for the flourishing of trafficking in human beings, further affecting vulnerable groups. The increasingly desperate economic circumstances, the weakening or even breakdown of the RoL, and fewer available social services increase the

²⁵ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Elements towards an EU Strategy against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons and their Ammunition ‘Securing Arms, Protecting Citizens’ (JOIN(2018) 17). See also the 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking (COM(2020) 608).

²⁶ See the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025 (COM(2021) 170) and the Council Conclusions on the Permanent Continuation of the EU Policy Cycle for Organised and Serious International Crime: EMPACT 2022+ (6481/21).

isolation of populations based on factors such as gender inequality, poverty, social exclusion and ethnicity. This in turn increases the vulnerability of local populations to trafficking, especially women and children. Children are often exploited as soldiers, or to perform associated servitude roles, e.g. as porters, cooks, lookouts and intelligence gatherers, and as sexual slaves. The cross-border nature of trafficking is of particular importance, as criminal organisations often operate through well-structured and professional networks, both offline and online. The EU will continue to focus on breaking the criminal business models of traffickers and protecting and empowering victims, especially women and children²⁷.

4. Guiding principles for the EU's support to DDR

The approach to supporting DDR varies widely depending on the phase of the conflict, its dynamics, the type of cessation of hostilities and the level of involvement of the international community. The support provided by the EU in line with international law should be **realistic, flexible, conflict-sensitive** and guided by **the following dedicated principles**:

➤ Policy-driven and well-coordinated with partners

A strengthened policy-driven approach will allow the EU to effectively integrate and coordinate efforts and mitigate related risks²⁸, while engaging with key actors from the peacebuilding, diplomacy, development and humanitarian fields. EU Delegations, EU Special Representatives, CSDP missions and operations and Member States' representations in the partner countries play a key role in laying the foundations for a stronger, more joined-up contribution by the EU.

As a supporter of effective multilateralism, the EU will capitalise on valuable partnerships with the United Nations, the World Bank, regional organisations such as the African Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, third countries and national actors, in addition to local actors, communities, private sector entities and civil society actors. The EU will further support DDR efforts by promoting accession to and use of multilateral instruments.

➤ Nationally and locally owned

Whilst external contributions, including at regional level, may facilitate an environment conducive to DDR, the ownership, commitment and work of national, local and community actors remain fundamental. To achieve sustainable results, the EU's coordination of efforts through national and regional strategies will aim to reinforce ownership, including in areas with porous borders. This should help build the RoL and strengthen accountable institutions and capacities, such as DDR-related agencies and bodies, and relevant community and civil society initiatives.

➤ People-centred and voluntary

The EU will apply the '*do no harm*' and '*leave no one behind*' principles, and exercise due diligence on human rights, as well as conflict sensitivity.

²⁷ See the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy on the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025 (COM(2021) 171).

²⁸ DDR may have unintended negative impacts or exacerbate conflict and tensions. The risks associated with DDR could be of a political, reputational and/or security nature. They could, for instance, inflate expectations, create the perception of rewarding participation in armed groups, fuel the trade in weapons and ammunition, expose former combatants, their associates and their communities to retaliation, or be seen as promoting impunity, lack of transparency and injustice.

The decision to leave an armed group is contextual and, although it may be facilitated or incentivised, neither individuals nor groups can be forced to partake in a DDR process; preserving the voluntary nature of their engagement is fundamental. The EU will promote respect for IHRL and IHL in all settings, including in situations like detentions and battlefield captures where individuals may lack alternatives.

People entering and engaging in DDR processes often face social exclusion and stigmatisation. They may have broken family ties, educational gaps, health problems, including mental health issues that may involve substance abuse, violent behaviour and/or individual or collective trauma, including from sexual and gender-based violence and human trafficking. They may lack skills and networks to sustain themselves through (self-)employment and/or to participate constructively in the political arena, while facing stigmatisation, legal and practical obstacles to reintegration. Simultaneously, recipient communities may suffer from collective trauma, fear and mistrust, and may experience a deteriorated security situation, which could enhance suspicion towards former combatants and their associates.

For these reasons, the EU will apply a multi-sectoral approach to DDR, considering the different, specific and non-homogenous needs, capacities and expectations of men, women, boys and girls of different ages, including those belonging to national or ethnic, religious, linguistic and political minorities and indigenous peoples. In these endeavours, the EU will also factor in disability-related issues as well as healthcare challenges in fragile settings.

i. Protective of children and their rights

A child perspective, founded in the best interest of the child and focusing on the protection of boys and girls against the six grave violations during conflict²⁹ is central to DDR processes and remains a priority at all stages of the conflict cycle.

Children associated with armed forces or groups must always be considered primarily as victims of these six grave violations, irrespective of their role and the designation of the group. Children's release from armed groups and separation from adults in DDR processes, their protection, rehabilitation, (re)integration and reunification with relatives and/or communities require a swift response and a long-term engagement. Where reunification of the child with his/her family is not immediately possible, interim care should be made available until a long-term solution is found. Specific attention should be paid to challenges faced by children born within armed groups as well as to those recruited as children and demobilised as adults.

Specialised child protection agencies should be involved early in DDR processes and the EU's support framed within a broader child protection intervention. Families and communities, as well as state institutions and local authorities, need to be prepared for the reintegration of the children, including through social, educational and healthcare institutions providing age- and gender-specific services, in an individualised way when so required. The specific psychosocial and healthcare needs, the security considerations and the risk of stigmatisation need to be addressed, both for the children and for communities where they (re)integrate, especially in cases where children have been subjected to radicalisation processes or military training.

²⁹ See UNSCR 1261 (1999) and 1612 (2005). The six grave violations are: killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups; attacks on schools or hospitals; rape or other grave sexual violence; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access for children. The forced or compulsory recruitment of children under the age of 18 and their use in hostilities by both armed forces and armed groups is illegal and one of the worst forms of child labour. Furthermore, the recruitment of children under 15 constitutes a war crime.

Moreover, children should not be kept in detention. The EU should support the negotiation, adoption and implementation of handover protocols³⁰ by partner national authorities, to swiftly transfer children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection agencies for reintegration.

ii. Gender-responsive

DDR processes must consider men's, women's, boys' and girls' different needs, capacities and opportunities, and the contextual expectations placed on them, to ensure their equally meaningful participation in all stages of DDR processes. The mainstreaming of a gender perspective should rely on a thorough and gender-responsive analysis across development cooperation programmes. Responses should take into account the diversity of roles that different gender and age groups may have had during their association with armed groups³¹ and tackle stereotypical gender roles, inequalities and gender-based stigmatisation.

iii. Youth-engaging

The roles of young people should be duly considered, be they survivors and victims of conflict, agents of positive change, and/or targets of radicalisation or (re-)recruitment. The specific needs, opportunities and expectations of male and female youths in DDR settings should be addressed across DDR processes through active consultation, engagement and participation³².

➤ **Well planned**

Planning for supporting a DDR process should be initiated at the earliest possible stage. Based on the coordinated DDR assessment, the EU's engagements in terms of humanitarian aid, stabilisation, peacebuilding, development, CSDP and CSFP should be articulated in line with the Integrated Approach. Contributions can combine actions by the EU, its financial institutions and its Member States.

Whenever required, EU Delegations should benefit from specialised expertise and support in DDR, as well as related fields such as peacebuilding, mediation, child protection or security. When appropriate, they should also draw on the participation of security or military advisers/attachés and EEAS CT/security experts, and on the CSDP's presence in the same country or region, or benefit from temporary reinforcements through dedicated assignments.

The environmental and climate contexts in which DDR processes unfold need to be properly accounted for. This requires, in particular, vulnerability or fragility assessments to make sure that economic and social opportunities designed throughout DDR processes are resilient and long-lasting, and that environmental or climate change risks are mitigated where possible and do not further exacerbate existing vulnerabilities or conflict risks.

The EU should communicate clearly its support to national and local authorities, participants, stakeholders and to potential spoilers. Communication should be responsive to age and gender, and adapted to recipients and local cultures and contexts. For this purpose, political, military,

³⁰ Handover protocols are practical tools to prevent or reduce the detention of children in armed conflict. They are agreements to swiftly transfer children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection agencies for reintegration. Handover protocols are not guarantees of immunity. See e.g. Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2020. *A Path to Reintegration: The Role of Handover Protocols in Protecting the Rights of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*.

³¹ Council Conclusions on Women, Peace, and Security (15086/18) and the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action (JOIN(2020) 17).

³² UNSCR 2250 (2015) and the Council Conclusions on Youth in External Action (8629/20).

traditional and religious leaders, as well as civil society, are important partners, albeit taking into account conflict sensitivity issues and human rights standards.

➤ **Adaptable**

Engagements in support of DDR should be informed by evidence and flexible, using monitoring, evaluation and learning, and should harness opportunities for digitalisation, as well as capitalising on best practices and lessons.

Translating this policy into action requires raising general awareness and capacity building with respect to DDR, including through training that connects practice, policy and research. This will enable the EU to put knowledge, talent and expertise at the service of peacebuilding and development.

5. Actions to assess and engage, frame and deliver effective EU DDR engagement

The EU will coherently combine rapid responses with geographic, regional and thematic long-term commitments in support of DDR. It will seek to maximise its impact through partnerships with third countries and international organisations, based on shared values, common interests and mutual benefits.

- The High Representative and the Commission will strengthen their coordination on DDR support by promoting exchanges among relevant EU stakeholders. All related policies, instruments and facilities³³ will be considered when engagement in support of DDR is planned. As part of the Integrated Approach, EU Member States' contributions will also be sought.
 - A dedicated permanent informal inter-service Task Force, with representatives from relevant thematic EEAS and Commission services, will be created to oversee EU DDR activities, advise and support EU Delegations, EEAS and Commission services and CSDP missions. The creation and functioning of the DDR Task Force will follow similar procedures as those for the permanent informal inter-service SSR Task Force³⁴.
 - DDR expertise will be included in the teams of EU mediators to ensure peace and cease-fire agreements include realistic DDR-related clauses.
 - The EU will enhance its internal capacity to support DDR processes, e.g. through DDR training and strengthened collaboration with relevant training institutions, and with research and expert networks.
- Whenever DDR support is envisaged, a specific EU DDR coordinated assessment should be conducted at the earliest possible stage to enable a policy-driven, conflict-sensitive and flexible engagement.
 - To support this, the EEAS and Commission services will develop an analysis module focused on DDR, building on the methodology for conflict analysis for programming in fragile states and regions. The module will help develop, when needed, specific DDR options, including by assessing the risks and the available EU tools.
 - The design and implementation modalities to support DDR processes will rely on a thorough age and gender analysis. Within the broad support to partner authorities and

³³ For example, the EU Security Sector Governance (SSG) facility, EU Facility on Justice in Conflict and Transition, and European Resources for Mediation Support (ERMES).

³⁴ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Elements for an EU-wide strategic framework to support security sector reform (JOIN(2016) 31), pp 12-13.

to communities, the EU will seek to protect children and their rights and to adopt a gender-responsive approach, and a youth perspective.

- The regional dimensions will be further explored together with the linkages between DDR and P/CVE in regional contexts, such as the Sahel or the Horn of Africa.
- Cooperation will be pursued in specific frameworks with key partners:
 - DDR will feature in cooperation with multilateral partners, the UN and the World Bank, as well as with regional organisations and structures. The EU-UN Steering Committee will be a privileged forum for early consultations on DDR approaches and actions, and to develop joint assessments whenever possible. Interaction with the UN Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR and other similar fora will also be intensified.
 - With partner countries, the EU and its Member States will make best use of policy, political and technical dialogues, advice and capacity building, including at local and regional level. To provide this, EU Delegations, EUSRs and CSDP missions and operations, and EMPACT Firearms, as appropriate, will play a key role.
 - The EU will enhance its dialogue and cooperation with civil society, DDR experts and researchers and communities of practice.
- The EEAS and relevant Commission services will develop monitoring and evaluation criteria and systematically conduct lessons processes based on the aforementioned principles and work strands. They will regularly map and review the EU's overall engagement in support of DDR, in synergy with related engagements whenever possible.

6. Final remarks

The European Commission and the High Representative will pursue all the above-mentioned actions to better meet challenges posed by armed groups and complex conflict drivers in specific context cases. Whenever political and peacebuilding opportunities arise and a conflict sensitive involvement can be ensured, the EU stands ready to fully engage in support of DDR.

As the success of DDR is often closely linked and dependent on broader processes, the EU will maximise its impact on DDR processes and deliver sustainable results by making full use of available policies, tools and instruments, in an integrated approach

To achieve the objectives outlined in this Joint Communication, the EU can leverage its multi-dimensional contributions to peace, security and development, and the full engagement of EU Member States is indispensable. Relevant national experiences provide useful insights into these complex processes, and the diplomatic networks of peacebuilding and development cooperation expertise can bring valuable contributions.

The European Commission and the High Representative jointly invite the European Parliament and the Council to endorse and support the approach set out in this Joint Communication and to engage fully in the move towards more coherent and effective support to DDR processes.