

Reintegration or Recidivism?

Why ex-combatants in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) return to arms

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The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development.

FBA supports international peace operations and international development cooperation. The agency conducts training, research and method development in order to strengthen peacebuilding and statebuilding in conflict and postconflict countries. We also recruit civilian personnel and expertise for peace operations and election observation missions led by the EU, UN and OSCE. The agency is named after Count Folke Bernadotte, the first UN mediator. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the FBA.

Editorial Note

This report builds on statistical analyses carried out by Luís Martínez Lorenzo, Research Officer at the FBA, who is also the primary author. A first assessment of the data and a draft of the report was made by Sergio Triana-E, Cambridge Security Centre, in 2020. Significant editorial input was provided by Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, Head of Research at FBA, Sophia Wrede, Research Officer at FBA and Johanna Malm, Project Leader DRC at FBA. All authors except for the main author are listed in alphabetical order.

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This report builds on data collected in a comprehensive mapping carried out by Transnational International (TI) in 2017 on commission by FBA. Whilst their contribution remains confidential, we express our greatest gratitude to all respondents in the mapping and to the TI team who collected the original data.

Cover photo: Africa24. The Ituri rebels disarmament and reintegration in DRC.

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About this report

In 2015, FBA was mandated to implement a part of the Swedish Development Cooperation Strategy in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Within this framework, FBA was expected to contribute to increasing the capacity of local communities for the sustainable reintegration of female and male former combatants. In order to meet this objective, FBA commissioned Transition International (TI) to undertake an extensive mapping study in 2017. The aim of the study was to identify the main factors that could either facilitate or hinder the reintegration of male and female ex-combatants and children associated with armed groups. The present report was subsequently commissioned for the purpose of producing a scientifically robust analysis of the data collected by TI and for the purpose of providing evidence-based input on Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) processes in the DRC. The overall objective of this report is to identify local capacity-building needs when it comes to sustainable reintegration efforts, as well as ways to prevent future (re)recruitment.

List of abbreviations

CAAFAG	Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups
CVR	Community Violence Reduction Programme
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FBA	Folke Bernadotte Academy
MONUSCO	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
TI	Transition International
UEPN-DDR	Unité d'Exécution du Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion

Executive Summary

In conflict-to-peace transitions, it is vital to support ex-combatants in order to achieve sustainable peace, as they otherwise risk becoming spoilers in the peace process. For this reason, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes have become an important peacebuilding tool designed to support ex-combatants in their transition to civilian life and to contribute to the prevention of renewed conflict. In the context of the prolonged armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), three DDR programmes have been implemented in the past two decades. Yet little is known about why ex-combatants who participated in these programmes sometimes return to armed violence, contributing to repeated cycles of violence and insecurity.

The objective of this report is to identify the most prominent factors behind recidivism¹, or return to armed violence, among female and male ex-combatants in North Kivu in the DRC. In doing so, the report aims to provide evidence-based knowledge to inform policy and practice on issues of relevance for DDR processes, both in the DRC and internationally.

The report builds on data collected by Transition International (TI) in the DRC during 2017 and 2018. TI's data comprises ex-combatants' self-reported behaviour and a range of individual-level factors that are expected to influence the reintegration of ex-combatants. Data were collected from a total of 279 ex-combatants (26 women and 253 men) who had been members of non-state armed groups in eastern DRC. The selected method of analysis was a logistic regression analysis.

The findings show that DDR programmes, despite their important shortcomings, are associated with a reduced likelihood of recidivism, at least among those who perceived them to be useful. Community Violence Reduction (CVR) programmes were generally viewed as useful, but they do not appear to be critical in the prevention of (re)recruitment. Acceptance by the receiving community and maintaining family contact were, however, found to be robust preventive factors. Ex-combatants' perceptions of security did not seem to influence the likelihood of recidivism, despite being often mentioned as a reason for joining an armed group in the first place. Unemployment and poverty were cited as the main reason why ex-combatants re-joined armed groups, highlighting the importance of these factors, despite the non-robust effect of employment when this was explored in the statistical analyses. In terms of risk factors, being in contact with members of their former armed group increased the likelihood of recidivism, but the effect differed depending on the type of contact established. Among the respondents who kept in touch with individuals still active as members of their former armed group

1. In this report we use the terms recidivism, (re)recruitment, return to arms and re-joining an armed group interchangeably.

as a way to convince those individuals to give up arms, only a small proportion reported having considered re-joining an armed group. However, among the respondents who re-established contact with the former armed group because the armed group sought to convince the respondent to return to arms, a larger proportion reported having considered going back to arms.

Finally, while female ex-combatants and younger respondents appear to be at a higher risk of recidivism, it is necessary to interpret this finding with caution because of the unbalanced distribution of female and male ex-combatants in the sample. It is, however, likely that female ex-combatants often are excluded from DDR programmes and therefore self-demobilize to a greater extent than male ex-combatants do. Thus, the findings of this study point to the need to design future DDR programmes following a multidisciplinary approach that addresses the factors most closely associated with a higher risk of recidivism.

In sum, this report suggests that future DDR programmes need to fulfil the promises made to ex-combatants and adapt the support provided to the specific needs of each participant. Facilitating employment should be at the centre of DDR programmes, because this is the most-cited reason for considering returning to arms. It is also crucial to ensure the enrolment of female ex-combatants. In order to cater for female participants, DDR programmes should be adapted to their specific needs. To this end, a gender-sensitive approach needs to be deployed: for instance, by promoting the specific acceptance of female ex-combatants in local communities and undertaking actions to prevent their identification as ex-combatants.

Moreover, because ex-combatants' families and the surrounding communities play a critical role in preventing recidivism, DDR programmes need to extend their focus beyond ex-combatants and also include families and communities. Contacts with former armed groups could be encouraged when these contacts serve as a channel to share positive experiences of reintegration or aim to convince combatants to give up arms but should be avoided when contact has been established by the former armed group for the purpose of (re)recruiting the ex-combatant. Lastly, further research and evaluation of DDR programmes is needed in order to generate more detailed knowledge regarding how to design and implement effective DDR programmes.

1. Introduction

One of the most pressing concerns in post-war states is the (re)recruitment of ex-combatants by non-state armed groups still active in the territory. This process perpetuates the renewal of violence and hinders peacebuilding and reintegration. In order to better understand the conditions under which ex-combatants who have participated in DDR programmes sometimes return to arms, this report examines the potential explanatory power of a range of individual-level factors among female and male ex-combatants in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Since DRC's independence from Belgium in 1960, the country has experienced recurrent armed conflicts in many different shapes and forms: between rebel groups and the state, between and within non-state armed groups and one-sided attacks by armed actors against civilians. The most-affected regions are situated in the eastern part of the DRC, such as the provinces of Kivu, Kasai and Ituri. These regions are also affected by several development challenges, including extreme poverty, low governance capacity and recurrent droughts and floods, which also influence the constant cycles of violence renewal.

It is estimated that more than 130 armed groups are still active in the region. Many of these groups frequently attack civilians, which contributes to the forced displacement of the population. For example, violence in the Ituri province peaked in May 2020, with an unprecedented number of children killed and large numbers of attacks on schools and hospitals (Human Rights Watch 2020). In addition, the justice system is weak, with limited ability to prosecute warlords and end impunity.

Over the years, there have been several DDR-programmes designed to support ex-combatants in their transition from participation in armed groups to civilian life. The DRC national government, through the Unité d'Exécution du Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion (UEPN-DDR) and the United Nations Organisation Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), have been responsible for implementing the most recent DDR programmes in the region.

The first DDR-programme (DDR1) was initiated in 2002 in the Ituri region as a community, disarmament and resettlement initiative. Between 2004 and 2007, it continued under the mandate of the National Programme for Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (PNDDR). The second DDR-programme (DDR2) was implemented between 2008 and 2011 by the UEPN-DDR. The third and most recent DDR-programme (DDR3) started in 2015 but ended in 2018 due to lack of funding. The total number of participants in the three DDR processes is estimated to be more than 100,000, but because of the phenomenon of 'circular return' it is not clear how many of them subsequently

re-joined an armed group (MONUSCO 2021, Vlassenroot et al 2020) All three DDR-programmes have been characterized by multiple shortcomings. For example, the organization responsible for coordinating the first DDR programme only had limited capacity, while resurgence of the conflict in 2009 undermined the reintegration efforts of the second DDR programme (Transition International 2019, 11). At the time of the third DDR programme, continued military operations against the armed groups discouraged some combatants from demobilizing, and national and local authorities and other interested parties were insufficiently involved (Vogel and Musamba 2016). These limitations have resulted in operational challenges and instability in the regions where the programmes have been implemented.

There is no consensus regarding the effects that these DDR programmes have had in preventing violence renewal, recruitment and recidivism of ex-combatants. By studying the conditions under which ex-combatants return to violence in DRC, this report aims to inform relevant policymakers and practitioners about what is needed in order to improve the reintegration of former combatants of armed groups.

2. Theoretical point of departure

Global research and policy literature on this topic is still relatively limited. The concept itself stems primarily from the field of criminology, where it has been employed for some time (e.g., Leal Buitrago 2006, Latimer 2001, Zara and Farrington 2015). It is only recently that the scholarly literature in the field of peace and conflict research has started to explore recidivism of ex-combatants and violence renewal in the context of armed conflicts more systematically (e.g., Gilligan et al. 2013, Kaplan and Nussio 2018, Themnér 2013).

But there is no consensus yet regarding the factors that could explain the recidivism of ex-combatants. Some studies suggest that the content of the DDR programme and perceptions of the usefulness of the reintegration support provided to ex-combatants make a difference in this respect (e.g., Gilligan et al. 2013, Jennings 2007). Kaplan and Nussio (2018), however, identify weak family ties, the lack of educational attainment, the presence of criminal groups in the near environment and antisocial personality traits as the key drivers of recidivism. In addition, they found that those who had strong personal motives for initially joining the armed group, those who spent more time in the organizations and those without children were also more likely to engage in criminal activities (Kaplan and Nussio 2018, 66). Measuring recidivism as the self-reported likelihood of fighting again, Hill et al. (2008) identify poverty, unemployment and acceptance by family and community as the most relevant factors for returning to armed warfare among ex-combatants. Meanwhile, Bøås and Hatløy (2008) highlight security reasons as the most important factors for returning to armed violence. Themnér (2013), however, concludes that ex-combatant violence is rarely triggered by the lack of economic opportunities, experiences of insecurity or the mere presence of small arms. Instead, he finds that remobilization is more likely to occur when mid-level commanders re-establish contact with former combatants previously under their command. In their work on terrorist reengagement, Altier et al. (2019) likewise found that connections to associates involved in terrorism increased the probability of recidivism. Altier et al. also stress the importance of the group connection by showing that the risk of recidivism was lower when an entire terrorist group chose to give up arms. Lastly, Altier et al. also show that the likeliness of terrorist reengagement decreased with higher socioeconomic class and higher age. Zyck (2009, 112–113) found that the attempts made to break the bonds between ex-combatants and their former commanders through a DDR programme had the undesired effect of increasing the ex-combatants vulnerability, thus facilitating their (re)recruitment into different armed groups.

In summary, the previous literature on this topic suggests that several factors influence the likelihood of a return to arms among ex-combatants, including but not limited to participation in DDR programmes, acceptance by family and the community, perceived security, unemployment and economic opportunities and the type of contact maintained with active combatants in their former armed group. However, the findings are not consistent across studies, which highlights the importance of exploring the relative effect of each when controlling for different factors. The present report aims to fill this gap by systematically analysing the explanations identified in the previous literature in the case of ex-combatants in eastern DRC.

3. Methodology

In order to understand the conditions under which ex-combatants return to arms, the present report explores the influence of several factors on the self-reported likelihood of re-joining an armed group. We conducted a logistic regression to explore the effect of eight potential explanatory factors:

- 1) participating in a DDR programme;
- 2) the perceived usefulness of DDR programmes;
- 3) the effect of participating in a CVR programme;
- 4) the reception by the community;
- 5) the perception of security;
- 6) employment status;
- 7) contact with family; and
- 8) contact with armed groups.

We controlled for the influence of gender, age, education level and being a native of the municipality in which they currently lived. This was tested based on interviews with 279 ex-combatants (26 women and 253 men) in the province of North Kivu, DRC.

This report is based on extensive interview data collected by Transition International (TI) on behalf of FBA in five areas in North Kivu in North East DRC in 2017. The aim of the data collection by TI was to identify the main factors that could either facilitate or hinder the reintegration of male and female ex-combatants and children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG). The respondents included a variety of stakeholders in the areas, some of whom were ex-combatants. The overall mapping collected information about a large number of individual-level, programme-level and societal-level variables. In the present report, we limit the sample to comprise only the adult ex-combatants who had either self-demobilized or participated in at least one of the official DDR programmes between 2002 and 2017 and responded to the question of whether they would consider re-joining an armed group. The responses to this question allowed us to measure our outcome of interest: the self-perceived likelihood of going back to an armed group. Thus, the sample in this report is restricted to those 279 ex-combatants in the original TI data. An assessment of the data was conducted in order to identify the main factors of recidivism among ex-combatants. The method employed was a logistic regression analysis.

We acknowledge that our measurement of recidivism as the self-reported likelihood of returning to an armed group differs from measures used in previous studies, such as the criminal history of the ex-combatants (e.g., arrest) or actual re-recruitment. However, as these measurements were not available in the data, we measured recidivism by considering the self-reported likelihood of going back to an armed group. In this regard,

we acknowledge that not all the ex-combatants who reported that they would consider re-joining an armed group actually planned to do so. Notably, many also stated that they only considered re-joining an armed group under certain circumstances, such as persistent inability to find a job. Nevertheless, the distinction between those who considered re-joining an armed group and those who disregarded this option altogether in the interviews allows us to compare individuals at a higher risk of re-recruitment with those who reported that they were less likely to return to arms.

While the interview data offers a rich and comprehensive account of many relevant variables, it also has several limitations (Triana-E 2020). The first limitation is that the sample cannot, from a statistical perspective, be considered fully representative of the population of ex-combatants in the DRC. This is primarily due to challenges in gaining access to ex-combatants, in particular female ex-combatants. The low proportion of females in the sample poses a challenge in terms of accurately capturing gender differences. Moreover, only a limited number of ex-combatants reported that they had self-demobilized. It is also important to note that almost all the ex-combatants who self-demobilized were women. We therefore know that both these groups are underrepresented in the data.

The second limitation of the interview data is that certain responses were coded by the interviewers based on answers to open-ended questions. This could introduce a bias in the material if individual interviewers coded the variables differently. This also contributed to a few unclarified responses in the data, such as 'suffering'. Finally, some of the relevant factors included in this report had a considerable number of missing responses. In particular, female ex-combatants who reported that they had self-demobilized had many missing responses in regards to some of the main variables examined in this report. This circumstance motivated us to adapt the analysis and only explore the influence of certain variables for the subset of the sample who had participated in DDR programmes, as we describe more in detail below.

We went about the analysis as follows. First, using the complete sample of 279 ex-combatants, we explored the influence of four of the eight explanatory factors (participating in a DDR programme, reception by the community, perception of security and employment status) on the self-reported likelihood of recidivism. We controlled for the potential influence of gender, age, education and being a native of the municipality in which they currently lived. In a second step, we restricted the sample to only those who stated that they had participated in a DDR programme, thus excluding those who self-demobilized, resulting in a sample of 265 ex-combatants, of which 15 were women and 250 were men. This time, in addition to the four variables included in the first step, we also examined the influence of the four additional factors: perceived usefulness of the DDR programme, participating in a CVR programme, being in contact with the family and being in contact with members of their former armed group. Similarly to the first step, we controlled for the influence of gender, age, education and being a native of the municipality in which they currently lived. A more detailed description of how each variable is measured can be found in Table 1 of the Appendix.

4. Findings

This report aims to identify the most prominent factors behind recidivism, or return to armed violence, among female and male ex-combatants in North Kivu in the DRC. This section presents the results of the statistical analysis which examined the influence of the eight main explanatory factors presented above on the self-reported likelihood of recidivism. However, before turning to the presentation of the findings from the statistical analysis, we provide a general descriptive overview of the distribution of the sample.

4.1. Descriptive overview of the distribution of the sample

Table 1 shows the distribution of the explanatory factors, separated by sex². It is important to note that out of the 279 ex-combatants in the dataset, only 26 were women, while the remaining 253 were men.

Table 1. Distribution of the variables disaggregated by sex

TYPE OF VARIABLE	VARIABLE	RESPONSE CATEGORIES	TOTAL (%)	MEN (%)	WOMEN (%)
Outcome	Self-reported likelihood of re-joining an armed group	Yes	24	21	50
		No	76	79	50
Explanatory variables	DDR Any	Yes	95	99	58
		No	5	1	42
	DDR Useful	Yes	56	55	73
		No	44	45	27
	CVR	Yes	25	24	38
		No	75	76	62
	Well received by community	Yes	77	76	80
		No	23	24	20
	Feels safe	Yes	72	71	85
		No	28	29	15
	Employed (scale)	Unemployed	17	14	38
		Underemployed	44	47	12
		Employed or self-employed	39	38	50
	Contact w/family	Yes	89	88	93
No		11	12	7	
Contact w/armed group	Yes	21	22	0	
	No	79	78	100	
Control variables	Age	Numeric:			
		18-24	4	3	15
		25-40	77	78	69
		40+	19	19	15
	Education level	None	18	17	28
		Primary	42	41	56
		Secondary Upper	33	34	16
	Native of municipality		7	8	0
Yes		39	42	12	
	No	61	58	88	

2. The percentages are reported considering only the participants for whom we had information on the explanatory variables. For instance, there were 21 ex-combatants who did not report how they were received by their community, and so the percentages in the table show the distribution considering only the remaining 258 ex-combatants who answered that particular question.

As follows from Table 1, 24 per cent of the ex-combatants in the sample reported being likely to re-join an armed group. This proportion was higher for female ex-combatants. Table 1 also illustrates how the sample is unbalanced in terms of the ex-combatants who self-demobilized, who constitute a small minority in the sample and are almost exclusively women. Among the DDR participants, over half of them found the DDR programme useful. Only one-fourth of the sample took part in CVR programmes. Overall, 77 per cent of the respondents reported being well received by the communities in which they settled, the majority felt secure in their current location and the majority maintained contact with their families. Only 21 per cent of the ex-combatants were still in contact with members of their former armed groups. Overall, there is an important variation in their employment situations. The majority of the respondents were between 25 and 40 years of age, over half of them moved to a location other than their original municipality and they vary in terms of their level of formal education.

Compared to the male combatants, female ex-combatants more often moved to a location other than their original municipality, and none of the female ex-combatants reported being in regular contact with members of their former armed group, although there were some missing responses to this particular question.

4.2 Findings regarding recidivism in the full sample

This section presents the results for all the respondents, both ex-combatants who stated that they had participated in a DDR programme and ex-combatants who stated that they had self-demobilized. Two types of analyses were employed. We first explored four of the explanatory factors – DDR participation, community reception, perception of security and employment situation – on the likelihood of recidivism among ex-combatants. In order to control for the potential influence of other factors, the second analysis included the control variables – gender, age, education and being a native of the municipality. Table 2 shows the results of both analyses considering the full sample of ex-combatants.

Table 2. Results of the logistic regression for the full sample (both DDR participants and self-demobilized ex-combatants)

	Dependent variable: Self-reported likelihood of re-joining an armed group	
	(1)	(2)
DDR Any	-1.741*** (0.597)	-0.656 (0.750)
Well received by community	-1.251*** (0.341)	-1.268*** (0.361)
Feels safe	0.353 (0.372)	0.253 (0.388)
Employed (scale)	-0.449** (0.217)	-0.308 (0.228)
Sex (Male)		-0.996* (0.596)
Age		-0.056** (0.024)
Education level		0.184 (0.198)
Native of municipality		-0.547 (0.376)
Constant	1.564** (0.756)	3.156*** (1.106)
Observations	257	253

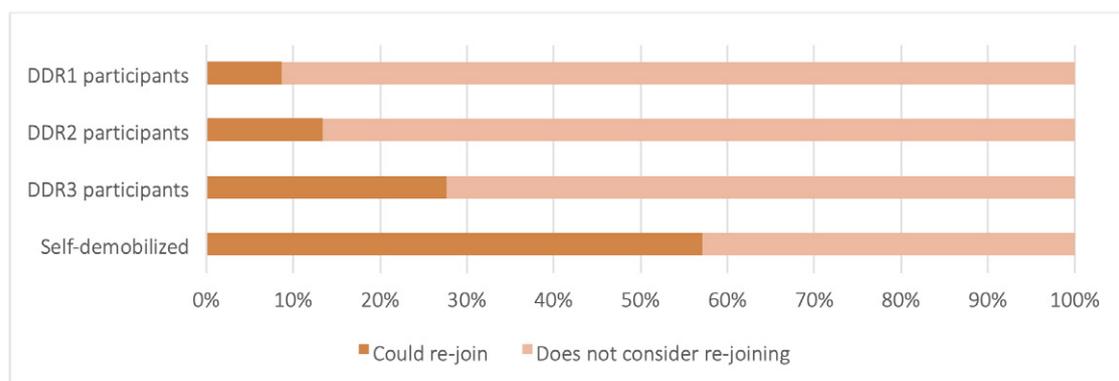
Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

4.2.1 DDR participation

The first analysis indicates that participation in a DDR programme is associated with a reduced likelihood of re-joining an armed group. However, this effect is not robust when we introduce the control variables. When doing so, the result is no longer statistically significant. Thus, participation in a DDR programme does not appear to have an independent effect on the likelihood of recidivism. However, as noted previously, several shortcomings of the data, such as the small proportion of ex-combatants who self-demobilized and the fact that most of these were female, also complicate the ability to find an independent effect of DDR participation on the likelihood of recidivism.

In order to explore the potential influence of DDR participation on the likelihood of re-joining an armed group in more detail, further analyses were made. First, we looked closer at potential differences between participation in the three different DDR programmes and whether ex-combatants who participated in a particular programme were more or less prone to re-joining an armed group. As is evident from Figure 1, all three DDR programmes appear to be associated with a reduced self-perceived risk of recidivism compared to self-demobilization. The reported likelihood of re-joining an armed group is somewhat higher for DDR3 participants. However, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this deviance. This is because of both the time perspective and possible biases in the sample. For example, the DDR3 programme was still ongoing for many respondents at the time of their interviews, and they may not yet have had a realistic chance to experience the benefits of their participation. An alternative explanation suggested by Transition International (2019, 94) is that there were particularly high dissatisfaction levels among the DDR3 participants. However, this is difficult to determine, as it is possible that some of the most dissatisfied participants from the previous DDR programmes had already returned to violence at the time of the interviews, meaning that they were not eligible for participation in the TI interviews. The sample is also skewed, in the sense that it only includes 14 ex-combatants who self-demobilized and 15 ex-combatants who participated in DDR2, while the majority of the respondents took part in DDR3.

Figure 1. Distribution of ex-combatants according to participation in the DDR programmes and their self-reported likelihood of re-joining an armed group



4.2.2 Community reception

The results demonstrate that attitudes of the receiving community play a key role in the prevention of (re)recruitment. As shown in Table 2, the coefficient for being well received by the community to which the ex-combatant moves is negative and statistically significant. This means that those ex-combatants who reported being well received by their community are less likely to consider re-joining an armed group, all else being equal. Importantly, this effect is robust when controlling for sex, age, education and being a native of the municipality. Thus, when the receiving communities accept ex-combatants or even help them to find a job, this can have an important effect on the prevention of recidivism. Only one-fourth of ex-combatants reported not being well received. However, among both groups – those who reported being overall well received and those who reported overall not being well received – there were some common experiences of negative behaviour and attitudes in the community. For instance, three common experiences of the ex-combatants were being excluded by the community because of their lack of financial means, being perceived as thieves or bandits and being feared by the population. In addition, two ex-combatants who reported being well received also acknowledged that no-one in their community knew that they were ex-combatants.

4.2.3 Perceptions of security

The results also show, somewhat surprisingly, that perceptions of security do not seem to play a key role in explaining recidivism. As illustrated in Table 2, the coefficient for feeling safe is not statistically significant. This suggests that ex-combatants' individual security does not have an independent effect on the likelihood of re-joining an armed group. This is also confirmed when controlling for other factors. Interestingly, the ex-combatants frequently mentioned security aspects among the reasons for why they joined an armed group in the first place. For example, many ex-combatants stated that they joined the armed group in order to defend themselves, their community or their family. Also, about half of the ex-combatants reported that the armed groups provided protection to their community or tribe (Transition International 2019, 89, 131).

Less than one-third of the ex-combatants reported not being safe at the time of the interviews, and this percentage was even lower for female ex-combatants. On the one hand, this should be interpreted as a sign of considerable improvement in light of the respondents' self-reported experiences of extreme insecurity while being active members of armed groups. On the other hand, it also suggests that many ex-combatants still feel insecure. Although the individual perceptions of security of ex-combatants do not appear to have an independent effect on the likelihood of returning to arms, it is possible that the broader perception of insecurity in their communities can still play a contributing role in motivating them to re-join these groups, as it was an important motivation for joining the armed groups to begin with.

4.2.4 Employment situation

Finally, we explored whether the employment situation of ex-combatants at the time of the interviews influenced their likelihood of considering re-joining an armed group. The results in Table 2 show that the coefficient for employment is negative and statistically

significant. This indicates that, all else being equal, employment is indeed associated with a lower risk of re-joining an armed group. However, this effect is not robust, and the coefficient is no longer significant when introducing the control variables. Thus, the results suggest that being employed can be a preventive factor in avoiding the (re) recruitment of ex-combatants, but this effect can be mediated by other factors, such as the age of the respondents.

4.2.5 A note on gender and age differences

In regards to gender, the results suggests that, all else being equal, female ex-combatants are at a higher risk of recidivism. These differences are also observed in Table 1. However, the unbalanced distribution of the sample, with only a small proportion of female ex-combatants and female ex-combatants being overrepresented among those who self-demobilized, limits our ability to draw any strong conclusions in regards to gender differences in the data. Previous studies of reintegration of ex-combatants have, however, identified female ex-combatants as being more at risk of being stigmatized, marginalized and excluded in their resettlement communities (Transition International 2019, 107). The higher likelihood of recidivism for female ex-combatants that we observe in this report can perhaps be explained by such discrimination patterns. However, it may also be due to their higher likelihood of self-demobilizing and missing out on the benefits of participating in DDR programmes, a factor that has been highlighted in other studies (Henshaw 2020).

In regards to the age of the ex-combatants, the results indicate that, all else being equal, older ex-combatants seem to be at less risk of re-joining an armed group. This is in line with what has been found in previous studies of recidivism (Altier et al. 2019). However, the analysis does not show that the ex-combatants' education level or location of resettlement (whether they are originally from the municipality in which they live or not) influence their likelihood of considering re-joining an armed group, when controlling for the other variables.

4.3 Findings regarding recidivism among DDR programme participants

This section presents the results for the ex-combatants who stated that they had participated in a DDR programme, excluding the 14 ex-combatants who self-demobilized. As in the previous section, two types of analysis were employed. First, we explored the influence of the main explanatory factors – perceived usefulness of DDR, participation in CVR programmes, reception by the community, perceived security and employment status, contact with family and contact with armed group – on the likelihood of recidivism among the DDR programme participants. As such, this section includes some of the factors explored in the previous section with the full sample and also adds several new factors. It also excludes the one factor that they all had in common: namely, participating in a DDR programme. In order to control for the potential influence of other factors, the second analysis included the control variables – gender, age, education and being a native of the municipality. Table 3 shows the results of both analyses.

Table 3. Results of the logistic regression for DDR participants

	Dependent variable: Self-reported likelihood of re-joining an armed group	
	(1)	(2)
DDR Useful	-0.712* (0.365)	-0.719* (0.398)
CVR	-0.091 (0.394)	-0.167 (0.426)
Well received by community	-0.858** (0.391)	-0.980** (0.405)
Feels safe	0.493 (0.416)	0.380 (0.427)
Employed (scale)	-0.337 (0.250)	-0.147 (0.263)
Contact w/family	-0.966** (0.474)	-0.926* (0.506)
Contact w/armed group	1.190*** (0.399)	1.325*** (0.419)
Sex (Male)		-1.541** (0.758)
Age		-0.052* (0.027)
Education level		0.179 (0.229)
Native of municipality		-0.203 (0.422)
Constant	0.212 (0.657)	3.126** (1.301)
Observations	228	225

Note:

$p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

4.3.1 Perceived usefulness of the DDR programmes

We first explored whether the perceived usefulness of DDR programmes had an effect on the likelihood of considering re-joining an armed group. The results show that the coefficient for whether the participant considered the DDR programme useful is negative and statistically significant (although only at the 90 per cent level). This indicates that, all else being equal, those ex-combatants who perceived the DDR programme as useful were less likely to re-join an armed group. In addition, this finding is robust when controlling for gender, age, education and being a native of the municipality, as shown in Table 3. The results thus suggest that DDR programmes do have the potential of reducing the risk of (re)recruitment – when they are perceived as useful by their participants. However, only 56 per cent of the participants perceived the DDR programmes as useful. The most common reasons mentioned for not seeing them as useful were that the promises were not fulfilled, the reintegration support (such as tools and cattle) was unsuitable or incomplete or they provided insufficient aid.

4.3.2 Participation in CVR programmes

We then examined whether participating in a CVR programme has an independent effect on the risk of recidivism. This does not seem to be the case, as illustrated by the non-significant coefficient for this variable. However, it is important to note that only one-fourth of the DDR participants were involved in a CVR programme, as shown in Table 1 above. Importantly, 92 per cent of those who did participate perceived the programme as useful. Thus, while participation in a CVR programme does not appear to have an independent effect of reducing the risk of recidivism, this programme was generally assessed positively by its participants.

4.3.3 Family contact

One of the factors that stands out as important for explaining recidivism is family contact. As shown in Table 3, the coefficient for being in contact with the family is negative and statistically significant, meaning that ex-combatants who maintained contact with their family members were less likely to return to arms, all else being equal. Thus, families seem to constitute a preventive factor for ex-combatants when they keep in contact. This effect is also robust when controlling for other factors.

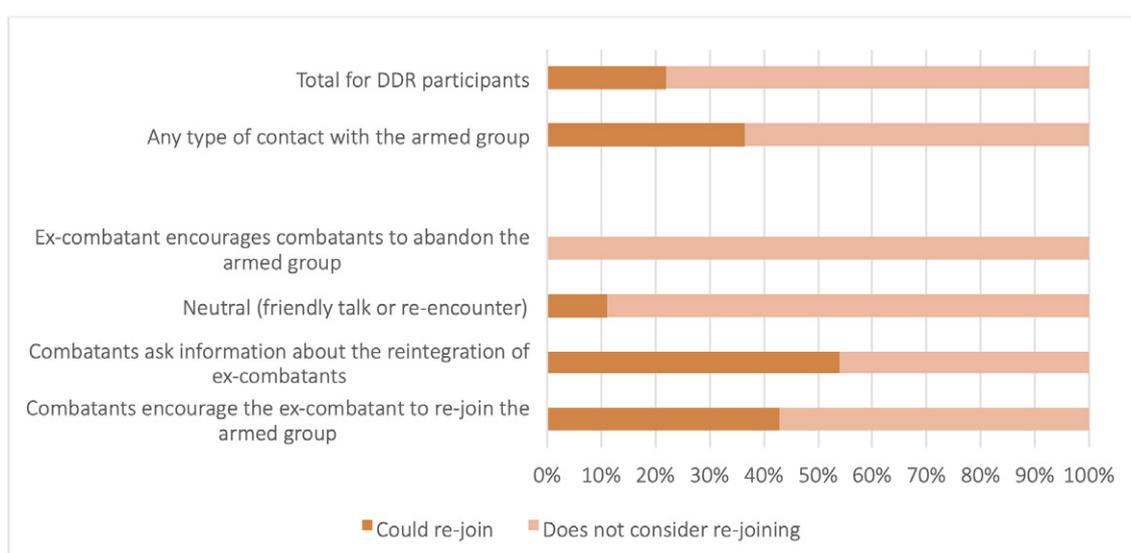
4.3.4 Contact with armed groups

Maintaining contact with members of their former armed group appears to have the opposite effect. The results in Table 3 show that the coefficient for this factor is positive and statistically significant, indicating that ex-combatants who kept in regular contact with their combatant friends or commanders were more likely to consider re-joining an armed group, all else being equal. This effect is robust when including the control variables.

In order to investigate this finding in more detail, Figure 2 presents the distribution of the type of contact that the ex-combatants maintained with the armed group and its influence on the likelihood of recidivism, excluding those ex-combatants who did not respond to this particular question from the analysis. Figure 2 shows that the risk of recidivism was higher among those ex-combatants who maintained contact with their former armed groups, with over one-third of them self-reporting that they were likely

to consider re-joining an armed group. However, the type of contact that they maintained matters for the risk of returning to arms. Among those who kept in contact with members of their former armed group in order to convince other still-active members to leave the armed group or for the purpose of establishing friendly talks, only a small proportion considered re-joining an armed group. But when the stated reason was that members of the armed group were trying to convince the ex-combatant to return to arms or wanted to know more about their reintegration process, the proportion of those at risk of (re)recruitment was reported as substantially higher. Thus, while being in contact with members of their former armed group can increase the risk of recidivism, the purpose of this contact should be taken into account.

Figure 2. Distribution of the sample according to self-reported likelihood of re-joining an armed group and contact with their former armed group



4.3.5 Community reception, perception of security and employment situation

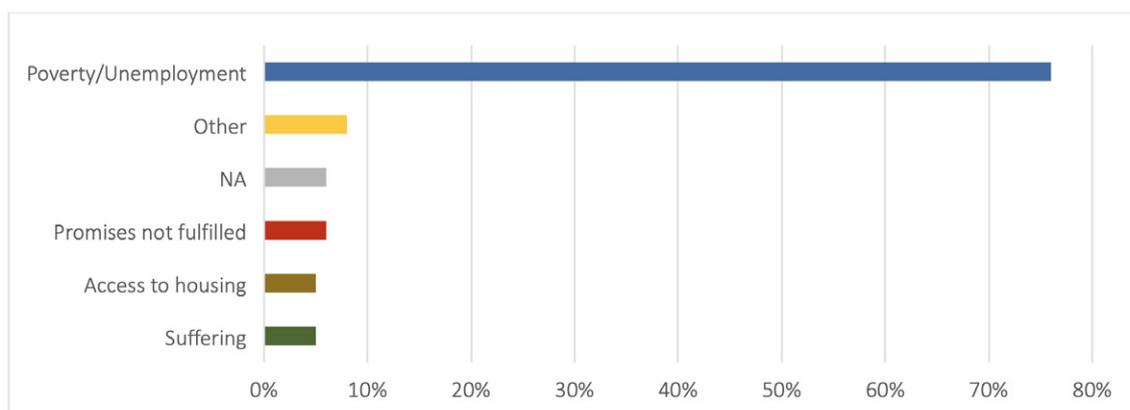
When it comes to the three explanatory factors already explored in the previous section – being well received by the community, feeling secure and being employed – the results for DDR participants are largely consistent with the findings for the full sample. The main difference is that the coefficient for the level of employment is not significant, indicating that being employed does not appear to have an independent effect on the likelihood of recidivism.

4.4. What do ex-combatants self-report regarding risk for recidivism?

This report aims to identify the most prominent factors behind recidivism, or return to armed violence, among female and male ex-combatants in North Kivu in the DRC. Previous sections have shown the factors that are associated with a higher likelihood of re-joining an armed group, statistically speaking. However, it is also important to consider the responses of the ex-combatants who reported that they would consider re-joining an armed group. Figure 3 presents the distribution of their stated reasons in this regard.³

3. The total percentage exceeds 100 per cent because some participants stated more than one reason.

Figure 3. Distribution of the ex-combatants who self-reported being likely to re-join an armed group according to the main reasons for re-joining an armed group



Overall, it is clear from Figure 3 that the overwhelming majority referred to poverty and unemployment as the main causes for returning to arms. But unfulfilled promises of reintegration, suffering and the inability to access housing were also mentioned as important. A few ex-combatants also mentioned being accustomed to the military life or the inability to adapt to civilian life. These last motivations are included in the category other. Interestingly, while poverty, unemployment and insecurity were identified as important for joining an armed group in the first place (Transition International 2019, 90), security was not listed as a critical reason considering re-joining an armed group. This could be due to an overall improvement of their own security situation after leaving the armed group, as suggested by evidence from the interviews, and because the majority of the ex-combatants felt safe at the time of the interview.

The data suggest some important gender differences in this respect. While a larger proportion of the male ex-combatants mentioned poverty and unemployment as reasons for going back to an armed group, female ex-combatants were more likely to mention suffering as a reason for recidivism. However, it is not entirely clear from the interview material if this suffering was connected to the community's stigmatization of female ex-combatants, difficulties in finding a job or something else. These results are presented in Figures 4 and 5, below.

Figure 4. Distribution of the female ex-combatants who self-reported being likely to re-join an armed group according to the main reasons for re-joining an armed group

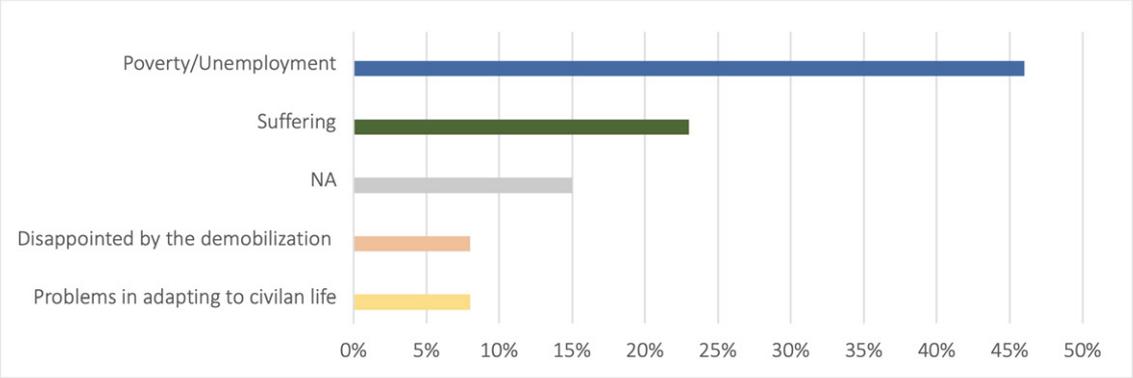
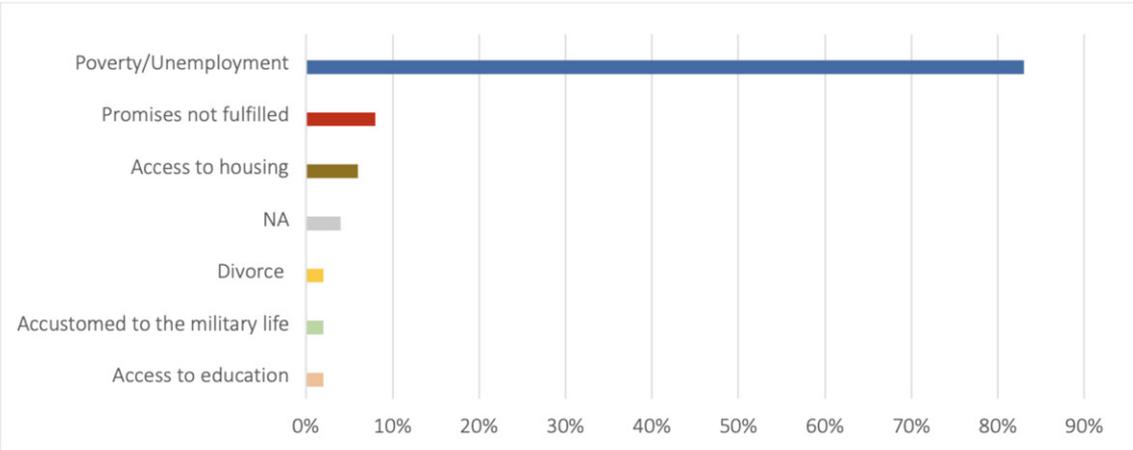


Figure 5. Distribution of the male ex-combatants who self-reported being likely to re-join an armed group according to the main reasons for re-joining an armed group



5. Conclusions and recommendations

The present report aims to identify the most prominent factors behind recidivism, or return to armed violence, among female and male ex-combatants in North Kivu in the DRC. The following policy recommendations emanate from the analysis.

5.1 DDR programmes remain important but need to cater for participants' needs

The results suggest that participation in a DDR programme is not a robust, independent preventive factor against recidivism. However, the participants who perceived the DDR programme as useful were significantly less likely to consider re-joining an armed group. Thus, despite the many known shortcomings of the DDR programmes implemented in the DRC, they do appear to have contributed to reducing the likelihood of recidivism among the participants who found them useful (a little more than half the respondents). However, many former combatants raised complaints about the DDR programmes during the interviews. Notably, they mentioned un-kept promises and reintegration support (such as tools and cattle) not being suitable to the needs of ex-combatants. Thus, future DDR programmes need to be designed to cater to the needs of the participants.

Participation in CVR programmes was generally assessed in a more positive light, but participation in the programmes does not appear to have had an independent effect on reducing the likelihood of recidivism. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions based on this finding because of the low proportion of respondents who had participated in CVR programmes.

5.2 Good relations with the receiving community and the family prevents recidivism

The findings also highlight the important role played by the receiving communities and the families of the ex-combatants in preventing (re)recruitment. A welcoming reception contributes to reducing the likelihood of recidivism. A majority of the respondents stated that they had been well received by the receiving communities, but some stated that they had been neglected because they lacked financial means or because they were perceived as 'bandits' or instilled fear in the community.

Being in contact with one's family was also identified as a preventive factor against recidivism, an effect which also proved robust when controlling for other variables. Thus, future DDR programmes could target receiving communities, as well as the families of ex-combatants, in order to promote the acceptance of ex-combatants, a factor that reduces the likelihood of their return to arms.

5.3 Ex-combatants' perceptions of (in)security do not increase the risk of recidivism

The analysis conducted does not support the hypothesis that ex-combatants' perceptions of security influence the likelihood of recidivism. The majority of the ex-combatants felt safe, likely in contrast to their perceived insecurity when they were still part of the armed group. Interestingly, while security and the protection of one's community or tribe were often cited as reasons for joining the armed group in the first place, these were not mentioned as reasons for re-joining an armed group. Based on this finding, ex-combatants' perceptions of security do not need to be a key aspect in DDR programmes.

5.4 Poverty alleviation and employment is crucial in order to prevent recidivism

Regarding economic opportunities and their effect on recidivism, the results suggest that, all else being equal, employment can act as a preventive factor. This effect is not robust when controlling for other factors, but when asked about the conditions under which they could consider returning to an armed group, the vast majority of the respondents – those who were employed at the time as well as those who were not – cited unemployment and poverty as the main reasons for considering taking up arms again. One interpretation for this seemingly contradictory finding is that most of the ex-combatant respondents still participated in the DDR3 programme at the time of the interviews. As such, some of them might have harboured expectations of finding a job once they left the programme. In sum, this means that poverty alleviation and employment should be key components of future DDR efforts.

5.5 Contact with the former armed group can increase the risk for recidivism

The report shows that ex-combatants who keep in contact with members of their former armed groups are at higher risk of going back to arms, all else being equal. However, contact only appears to increase recidivism when the reason for contact was either an active attempt at recruitment or an inquiry into the status of the reintegration. When engaged in casual conversations or when the ex-combatant tried to convince an active member to abandon the armed group, there was no increased risk of recidivism. This observation suggests that ex-combatants who have positive experiences of reintegration can attract combatants into civilian life. Such contacts should therefore be encouraged. On the other hand, it is advisable to – if possible – prevent contact between armed groups and ex-combatants that are explicitly aimed at (re)recruiting ex-combatants.

5.6 A gender-sensitive approach to DDR is paramount

Finally, while the results suggest that female ex-combatants and younger ex-combatants are at a higher risk for recidivism, the unbalanced distribution of the sample weakens the robustness of this conclusion. However, in light of findings on DDR participation and female ex-combatants from previous studies, female ex-combatants are underrepresented as participants in DDR programmes and face particular challenges of reintegration due to stigmatization, marginalization and exclusion. Thus, future DDR programmes should adopt a gender-sensitive approach that takes into account the specific needs of female

ex-combatants. The participation of female ex-combatants in DDR programmes should be encouraged, and the programmes should be adapted in consultation with the participants. In addition, the security of female ex-combatants and their children needs to be guaranteed, including efforts to prevent receiving communities from identifying them as former combatants. In line with the recommendation above regarding the importance of good relations, female ex-combatants' acceptance by families and receiving communities also needs to be encouraged.

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Appendix

Table 1. Measurement of the variables of interest

TYPE OF VARIABLE	VARIABLE	ORIGINAL QUESTION/ DESCRIPTION	RESPONSE CATEGORIES
Outcome	Self-reported likelihood of re-joining an armed group	Est-ce que vous pourriez rejoindre un groupe armé de nouveau? <i>[In English: Could you re-join an armed group again?]</i>	Yes, No
Explanatory variables	DDR Any	Whether the respondent participated in any DDR programme (DDR1, DDR2 or DDR3) as opposed to self-demobilizing.	Yes, No
	DDR Useful	Est-ce que le DDR vous a été utile? <i>[In English: Has the DDR been useful for you?]</i>	Yes, No
	CVR	Est-ce que vous êtes passé par le CVR auparavant? <i>[In English: Have you gone through the CVR before?]</i>	Yes, No
	Well received by community	Those who responded “Bien reçu” to the question “Comment pensez-vous que votre communauté vous reçoit?” <i>[In English: Those who responded “Well received” to the question “How do you think that your community has received you?”]</i>	Yes, No
	Feel safe	Est-ce que vous vous sentez en sécurité dans votre groupement/quartier? <i>[In English: Do you feel secure in your groupement/ neighbourhood?]</i>	Yes, No
	Employed (scale)	Quelle est votre occupation économique? <i>[In English: What is your economic occupation?]</i>	0 (Unemployed), 1 (Under-employed), 2 (Employed or self-employed)
	Contact w/family	Etes vous en contact avec votre famille? <i>[In English: Are you in contact with your family?]</i>	Yes, No
	Contact armed group	Est-ce que vous êtes toujours en contact avec vos amis du groupe et votre ancien commandant? <i>[In English: Are you still in contact with your friends in the group and your former commander?]</i>	Yes, No
Control variables	Sex (Male)	Sex of the respondents	1 (Male), 0 (Female)
	Age	Age of the respondents	Numeric
	Education level	Quel est votre niveau d'éducation? <i>[In English: What is your level of education?]</i>	0 (None), 1 (Primary), 2 (Secondary), 3 (Upper)
	Native of municipality	Etes vous natif du groupement? <i>[In English: Are you a native of the group?]</i>	Yes, No

