

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | MARCH 2019

# THE MISSING PEACE:

## GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN COLOMBIA'S REINTEGRATION EFFORT

by Alexandra Amling

**OVERVIEW:** Gender perspectives are understood as the differences in needs and challenges of men, women, boys, and girls which are based on the social construction of gender roles and norms. In DDR processes as well as in relation to other aspects of the implementation of peace agreements, these differences are often missing or not properly identified, resulting in women and girls not being able to access services and benefits. In other words, if the distinct roles men, women, boys, and girls play in conflict are not being assessed and analyzed, peace processes run the risk of continuing or exacerbating gender-based inequalities by both violent and non-violent means.

### I. KEY FINDINGS

- In the absence of a clear understanding of the gendered nature of conflict and gender dynamics within armed groups, DDR programs tend to neglect the role of gender identities, whereby both men and women may struggle to live up to the expectations that their culture may place on them.
- There is the persistent association of men with being perpetrators of violence and women as victims. When their experiences do not match the cultural expectation, men/boys and women/girls face difficulties with acceptance of their experiences. This can perpetuate existing gender stereotypes that could aggravate tensions in the transitional phase from combatant to civilian.
- Though male perpetration of different forms of violence (including sexual and gender-based violence) has been established in the literature over time, “masculinity cannot be interpreted as a fixed propensity to violence” per se. In fact, the overemphasis on alleged male proclivities toward violence inhibits further examination of the degree to which gender stereotypes may also render men and boys vulnerable.
- A better understanding of gender can drive initiatives that aim at transforming gender identities that do not disadvantage one gender over another.

### CHALLENGES OF REINTEGRATION



## II. GENDER MATTERS

### women

1

The percentage of women and girls in many of Colombia's armed groups stands in sharp contrast to their absence in peace processes, though women's inclusion increases probability of sustainable peace.

2

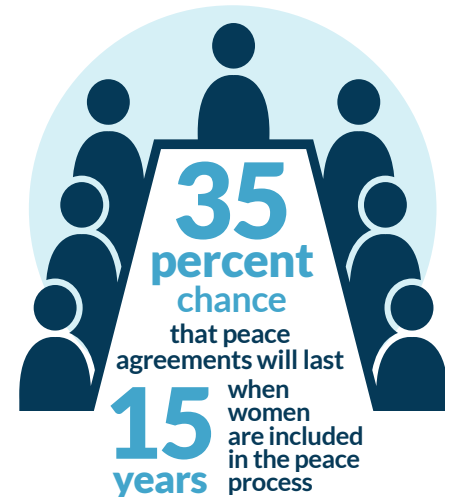
Patriarchal structures that dictate women's place in conflict cause their invisibility to transfer over to the post-conflict period, setting the stage for continued inequality and absence from decision-making and policy discourses.

3

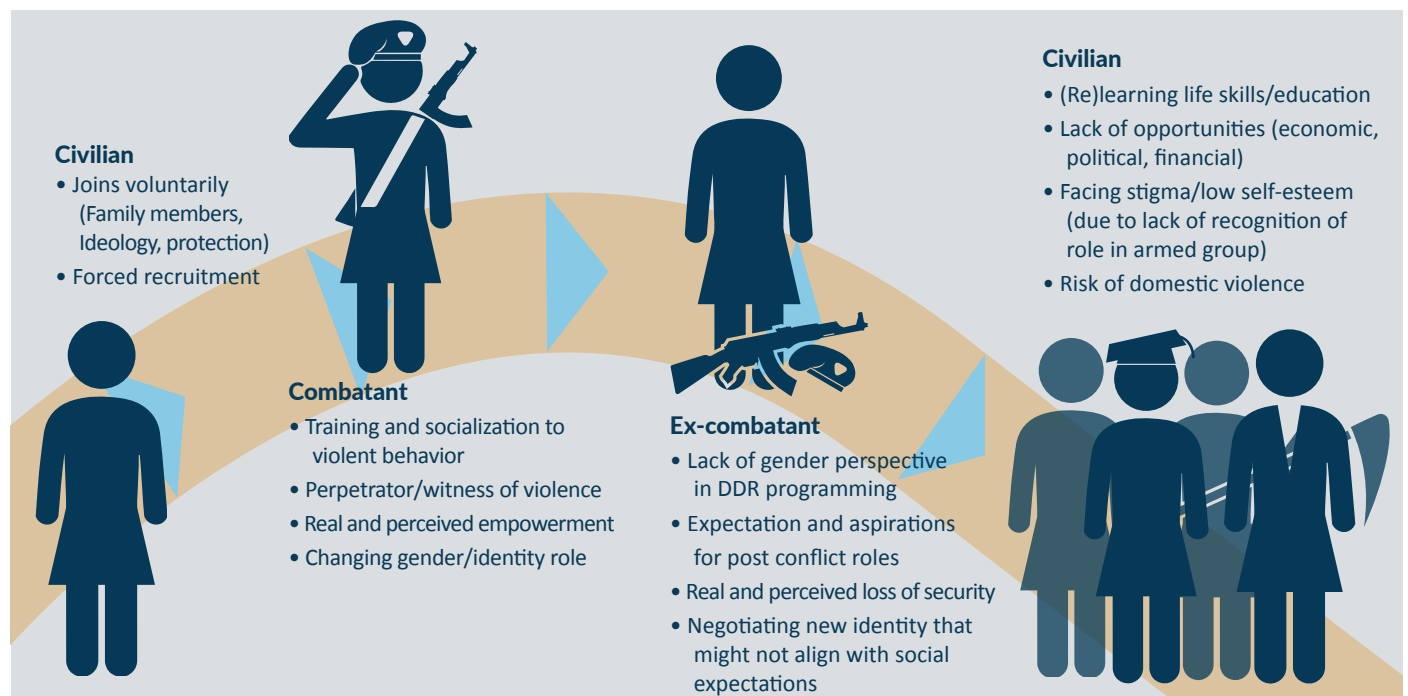
By specifically targeting male ex-combatants at the expense of female ex-combatants and former girl soldiers, post-conflict reconstruction efforts perpetuate the binary view of male perpetrators and female victims.

*“ Work directly from the needs of ex-combatants. The programs must be developed in a participatory manner; you cannot continue thinking that they do not have the capacity to make proposals. The approach and solutions should not remain individual but collective. The exercise of citizenship, participation, are key to building life projects, not self-blaming, or blaming society. That is why we should work with the communities. The approach is different for those who have a rural origin and have acted in rural areas, and for those who are of urban origin and have worked in the cities. The differential and gender approach must be present. I believe that welfare models do not strengthen people's citizenship, and that therefore initial aid must be accompanied by individual capacity-building projects, so that gender roles are not reproduced but also so that people are prepared for the failure of their productive or life projects and can establish support networks to face the difficulties that will always be present in everyday life. ”*

—Female ex-combatant (M-19), Valle del Cauca, April 2017



### PATHWAY- CIVILIAN TO COMBATANT TO EX-COMBATANT: WOMEN/GIRLS (ADOPTED FROM IAWG, 2012)



## II. GENDER MATTERS

### men

1

While joining an armed group was liberating for most women and did impact their gender identities, men have been clinging to an essential component of their identity: manhood. As such, they have been unable to see that their role as the sole provider is part of gendered expectations that render them easily vulnerable to frustration and open avenues for gangs to prey on ex-combatants' dissatisfaction. In particular, where notions of masculinity, such as power, status, and authority link directly to the identity of a guerilla or fighter, male ex-combatants are at high risk of recidivism

*“And those of us who got the chance, we’re here trying to survive with dignity. That’s why sometimes there’s so much recidivism. Many colleagues fall back into it. They go back. They commit suicide. They get lost to drugs. Many fall back into other things. The agency and the government have done many things with these programs. It has been improving, but it is not enough.”*

—Former boy soldier (FARC), Valle del Cauca, April 2017

2

Focus on female ex-combatants has increased, though there is an inherent risk to neglect notions of masculinities beyond violent masculinities. For example, men and boys are equally at risk to be placed in gender stereotypical jobs like women and girls

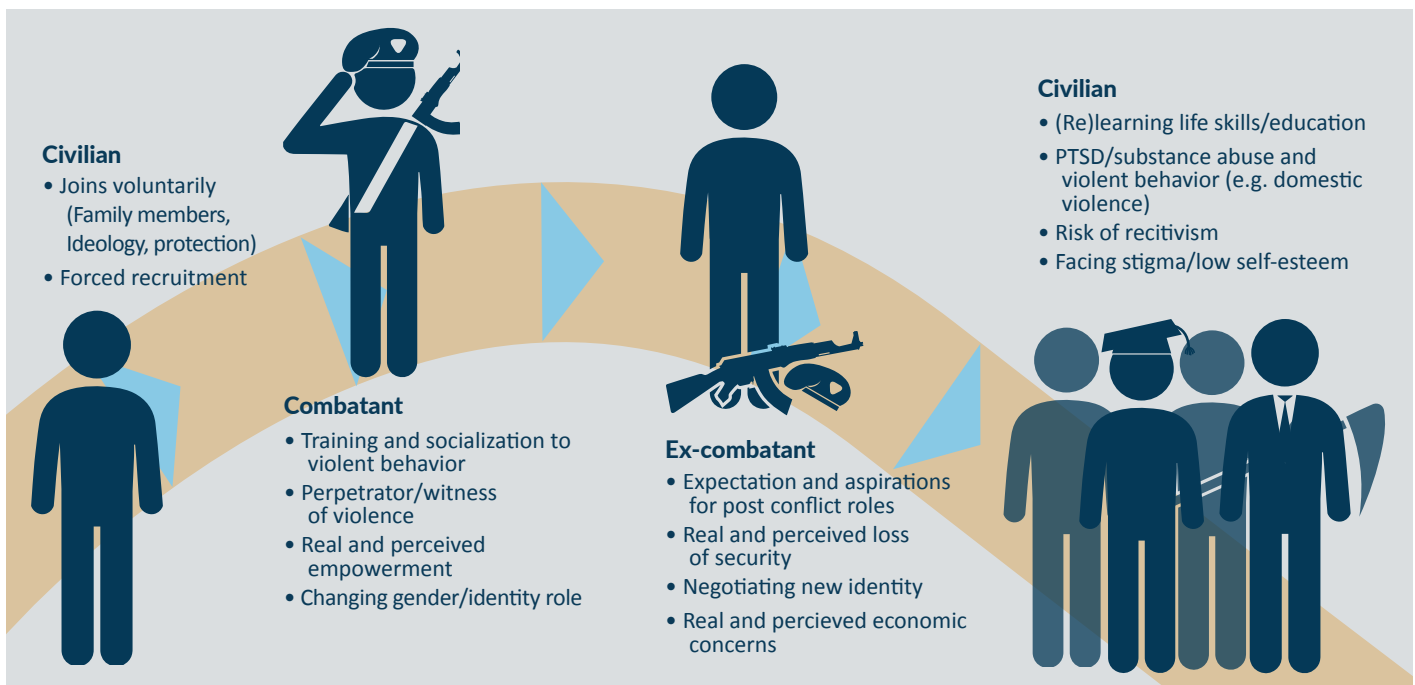
*“You would get an equivalency diploma, get to high school, but from there you wouldn’t take the next step, not because you didn’t have aspirations, but because you had responsibilities to support yourself, work, and the productive project wasn’t the most profitable in order to be able to go to college. . . . That didn’t allow me to be the head of household, support my family and go study. . . . Economic conditions were not very favorable.”*

—Male ex-combatant (CRS), Sucre, March 2017

3

Proclivities toward recidivism and illicit activities among male ex-combatants (without families and education), while significantly higher than among female ex-combatants, have to be understood in the context of the “situational specificity of masculinities, violence and violence prevention, and the capacity to move from the individual level to the level of institutions and nations.”

### PATHWAY–CIVILIAN TO COMBATANT TO EX-COMBATANT: MEN/BOYS (ADOPTED FROM IAWG, 2012)



### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A gender-sensitive approach toward DDR needs to take into account the complexity surrounding masculinities and femininities in any given society. Ensuring women do not revert to traditional roles and get placed in jobs typically associated with women, such as hairdressing and tailoring, needs to also be seen in the context of men often being placed in jobs that are considered male, such as mechanic or farmer.

DDR processes therefore require consideration for the experiences of both male and female ex-combatants in order to design interventions and strategies that mitigate post-conflict interpersonal and communal conflicts,<sup>88</sup> but also reduce the risk of providing opportunities that are based on gender stereotypes and might not match with the economic realities as well as aspirations and expectations of ex-combatants.

#### Design Gender-Aware Programs

- Validate and enforce gender capacity and knowledge among implementation teams
- Evaluate prevalent gender norms in civil society to mitigate tension between ex-combatants and resettlement communities
- Evaluate gender-specific vulnerabilities as they pertain to masculinity and femininity in order to manage expectations of ex-combatants vis-à-vis civil society and the labor market
- Create space and forums for active political participation, especially for female ex-combatants, to ensure women are not forced to revert to reproductive roles only
- Provide workshops and trainings to prepare long-term ex-combatants for living in a modernized society

#### Design Gender-Specific Programs

- Assess and document the contributions of women and girls to armed groups to ensure programs do not reinforce gender stereotypes or jeopardize the physical and economic integrity of women and girls in post-conflict settings
- Engage female ex-combatants at all levels of camp management and community outreach

- Implement programs that address and mitigate causes of intimate partner violence and domestic abuse in demobilization camps, including training on violence against children for male and female ex-combatants
- Support male ex-combatants through workshops on positive masculinities

#### Address Structural Inequalities and Grievances upon which armed groups have historically thrived

- Address structural inequalities and grievances upon which armed groups have historically thrived
- Invest in educational programs, especially higher education (where applicable)
- Ensure physical security for ex-combatants and their communities
- Ensure employment opportunities, vocational training, skills, and expectations match economic realities
- Provide infrastructure projects that link remote areas of demobilization with urban centers to ensure equal access to markets
- Expand and enforce community outreach to eradicate stigma against ex-combatants

