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# **Headway and Hurdles: The Reincorporation Progress and Challenges Faced by FARC-EP Ex-combatants**

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This report, and the research that supported it, were undertaken as part of UNIDIR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. MEAC is a multi-donor, multi-partner initiative to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transitions. While the report benefited from feedback from MEAC's donors and institutional partners, it does not necessarily represent their official policies or positions.

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# Key Findings

- While several reincorporation participant needs align with available forms of support, important gaps persist in other key areas. Although economic forms of support are the most accessed by participants in the process, economic needs remain the most pressing. Gaps between participants' needs and the support they receive also remain in other areas, including security and housing.
- Economic hardship remains a central challenge in participants' reincorporation trajectories. Limited access to land was highlighted as a key barrier—particularly in rural areas—hindering participants' ability to, among others, establish and sustain productive projects.
- Security also emerged as a major and persistent issue. One-third of participants reported having received threats since the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement. Insecurity negatively affects economic stability, interpersonal relationships, and mental health, limiting participants' ability to fully benefit from the support provided in the reincorporation process.
- Nearly half of respondents reported experiencing stigmatization, a challenge with tangible impacts on their daily lives and reincorporation trajectories. For example, several participants who possess productive projects noted that stigmatization has directly impacted the implementation and success of their business initiatives.
- Some of the challenges reported by participants have a gendered element. For instance, women are significantly more affected by challenges in caregiving responsibilities, which frequently constrain their participation in reincorporation activities. Potential gender gaps are also present in stigmatization and economic challenges faced by reincorporation participants.
- Addressing participants' diverse needs is crucial to ensure the success of their social, community, economic, and political reincorporation and to prevent participants' return to armed activity. A notable minority of respondents stated they could be motivated to return to an armed group in the future.

# Background

## About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably without falling back into conflict cycles? These questions are at the core of UNIDIR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based programme design and implementation in real time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. The MEAC project benefits from generous support by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO); the Government of Norway; Global Affairs Canada (GAC); and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs; and is run in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM); UNICEF; the UN Development Programme (UNDP); the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO); the World Bank; the Secretariat of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience in the Lake Chad Basin; and United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR).

## About this Series

The MEAC findings report series seeks to put evidence about conflict transitions and related programming into the hands of policymakers and practitioners in real time. The reports present overviews of findings (or emerging findings) across a wide range of thematic areas and include analyses of their political or practical implications for the United Nations and its partners.

## About this Report

This report examines the experiences, progress, and key challenges faced by former FARC-EP members in their ongoing reintegration process (referred to as reincorporation). It assesses the extent to which the current Reincorporation process addresses these challenges and offers concrete recommendations to enhance the support provided to this population. The analysis draws on survey data collected between July and October 2025 from 319 participants in four programming locations: the Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space (ETCR) of Tierra Grata (Cesar Department), the ETCR of Mariana Páez (Meta Department), Bogotá, and Medellín. The findings indicate that, although the Reincorporation process meets many participant needs, gaps persist – particularly regarding security threats and economic

challenges – which hinder participants’ reincorporation trajectories. Addressing these gaps is essential, as they not only affect participants’ quality of life but also pose risks to the long-term sustainability of peacebuilding efforts in Colombia. The report offers recommendations for strengthening the support provided by the Reincorporation process, as well as for informing future DDR-like initiatives and broader peacebuilding strategies in Colombia and beyond.

# Context

## The Evolution of DDR

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) is “a process of removing weapons from the hands of members of armed groups, taking the combatants out of their armed forces and groups and helping them to reintegrate as civilians into society.”<sup>1</sup> DDR processes and standards have evolved significantly over recent decades to better address the changing dynamics of conflict.<sup>2</sup> Early DDR efforts mainly focused on military and security aspects,<sup>3</sup> but with time, DDR became more holistic,<sup>4</sup> seeking to promote social, political, and economic reintegration<sup>5</sup> in order to sustainably build peace in complex contexts.<sup>6</sup>

Of the DDR components, reintegration is regarded as the most challenging – yet most crucial phase – for achieving sustainable peace, security, and development after conflict.<sup>7</sup> The ultimate goal of reintegration support is to enable ex-combatants to regain civilian status and become socially, economically, and politically integrated into their communities.<sup>8</sup> To this end, reintegration support can include access to education and/or vocational training, community outreach and mentoring, medical and psychosocial support, and legal assistance. Meeting the diverse needs of ex-combatants during their transition to civilian life is critical to ensure the success of DDR initiatives and to minimizing the risk of recidivism or return to illicit activities.<sup>9</sup> Today, sustained investment in DDR – particularly the reintegration component – is viewed as

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “[Symposium in Geneva to scale up on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration as key to peace](#)”, 30 May 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Cristal Downing, Javier Cardenas, Kyle Johnson, Angela Olaya, Sofia Rivas and Juanita Velez, “[The Evolution of Inclusion: Three Decades of Policies and Programmes to Manage Exits from Armed Groups in Colombia](#)”(New York, United Nations University, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Jose Miguel Rodriguez Castellon, “[Evolution and Challenges of DDR: A Policy Review Through the Prism of Colombia’s Three-Generational Experience](#)”, *Heliyon*, Vol 10, No. 1 (June 2024).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, “[Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration](#)”, n.d.

<sup>5</sup> Rodriguez Castellon, “[Evolution and Challenges of DDR](#)”.

<sup>6</sup> Mario Nascimento, “[Adapting Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Processes to New Conflict Realities](#)”, n.d.

<sup>7</sup> UN Peacekeeping, “[DDR](#)”, n.d.; Rodriguez Castellon, “[Evolution and Challenges of DDR](#)”.

<sup>8</sup> Cristina Pectu, “[Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programming With Colombia’s Youth](#)”, Working Paper (Colombia, July 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

vital to breaking cycles of violence and bolstering security and respect for human rights for countries transitioning out of conflict.

## How has DDR Been Adapted in Colombia?

In 2016, after 50 years of internal conflict, the Colombian government and the former guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP), signed a Peace Agreement. From the perspective of DDR,<sup>10</sup> this agreement is considered as one of the most comprehensive ones in history.<sup>11</sup> It adapted disarmament and demobilization components, establishing a rapid process of laying down of weapons, followed by a collective transition of former FARC-EP combatants into civilian and political life.<sup>12</sup> The former FARC-EP combatants gathered in collective spaces, commonly referred to as Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCR, in Spanish), cantonments where they could hand in their weapons under UN verification and where they could initiate their social, economic and political reincorporation into society.<sup>13</sup> Today, only a small minority (approximately 11 per cent) of participants still reside in these spaces, while the rest have moved on to live amongst urban or rural communities.<sup>14</sup>

The agreement deliberately avoided the classic DDR model centred on individual demobilization and reintegration. Instead, it used the concept of "reincorporation" designed to reflect the collective, political, and rural character of the FARC-EP's transition. To demonstrate their commitment with legal and democratic participation, FARC-EP ex-combatants even created a political party, currently known as Comunes.<sup>15</sup> Today, although many participants remain in the party, it is no longer the only space through which they exercise their political rights. In recent years, participants have also created other spaces—such as associations and organizations—where they engage politically.

The Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) is the government body responsible for implementing this collective DDR model. It is important to keep in mind that although the ARN coordinates the overall process, service delivery is not always carried out directly by the

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<sup>10</sup> Colombia currently has also two other "DDR-like" processes: the reintegration and the differential assistance process. The individual reintegration process has existed since 2006 and was open to members of the AUC paramilitary organisation who collectively demobilized between 2003 and 2006, as well as FARC-EP guerrilla and ELN fighters who defected before the Peace Agreement in 2016. Currently, only ELN combatants can join this process, which has meant that very few people join it each year. According to the ARN, since 2001, around 52,500 people have demobilized and joined the individual reintegration process. The more recent differential assistance process is open to those who defect from FARC dissident and criminal groups that are part of the non-international armed conflicts within the country (e.g., Gaitanista Army of Colombia (EGC, in Spanish) among others). According to the Ministry of Defence, around 2,200 people have demobilized to join this process.

<sup>11</sup> Pect, "[DDR Programming With Colombia's Youth](#)".

<sup>12</sup> Downing et al., "[The Evolution of Inclusion](#)".

<sup>13</sup> Colombia, Presidencia de la República, [Decreto 2026 de 2017](#) (Colombia, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización (ARN), "[ARN en Cifras](#)", Infographic, 31 July 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Partido Comunes, "[Quienes somos](#)", n.d.

agency itself. In certain areas, such as healthcare or security, the ARN refers participants to other institutions, such as the General System of Social Health Security (SGSS) and/or the National Protection Unit (UNP), who provide specialized support in those areas.

Specifically, the Reincorporation process:

- Offers collective economic support, through cooperatives and productive projects,<sup>16</sup> as well as complimentary individual monthly stipends.<sup>17</sup>
- Facilitates access to education, healthcare, and psychosocial assistance.<sup>18</sup>
- Seeks to strengthen participant' civic and political participation.<sup>19</sup> In addition, as part of the commitments of the 2016 Peace Agreement, 10 automatic seats were assigned in Congress, which will remain in place until 2026.<sup>20</sup>

The Colombian Reincorporation process is considered as one of the most comprehensive and best-managed processes ever created.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the process is lauded for its adaptation to the conflict context, by incorporating collective approaches, prioritizing rural inclusion and development, and emphasizing political transformation. In 2025, the process was further reinforced through the Comprehensive Reincorporation Programme (PRI, in Spanish), created to strengthen capacities and guarantee access to rights for individuals in reincorporation.<sup>22</sup> While the Reincorporation model is recognized globally for being well funded, contextually relevant, and comprehensive, whether it has fully achieved its objectives remains uncertain.

## Methodology

This report examines the trajectories of former members of the FARC-EP transitioning to civilian life, how the Reincorporation process supports their progress, and the challenges they continue to face as they seek to leave conflict behind them. The findings are based on survey

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<sup>16</sup> Economic reincorporation involves supporting business initiatives (or productive projects) that include ventures in clothing manufacturing, agriculture, and agribusiness, among other fields. The Reincorporation process offers 2,000 USD to support participants' productive projects. Today, productive projects can be either individual or collective. Collective projects are approved by the National Reincorporation Council, while individual ones are directly approved by the ARN.

<sup>17</sup> As part of the Peace Agreement, former fighters receive a monthly stipend equivalent to 90% of Colombia's minimum wage, or roughly 325 USD.

<sup>18</sup> The social reincorporation strategic line includes coordination, support, psychosocial assistance, advisory activities, and processes to ensure access to healthcare services for the participants and their families. Likewise, security is one of the cross-cutting components of reincorporation, through which measures are implemented under the Strategic Security and Protection Plan and the Comprehensive Protection Programme.

<sup>19</sup> Political reincorporation promotes citizen engagement by supporting and strengthening organizational processes and public oversight mechanisms

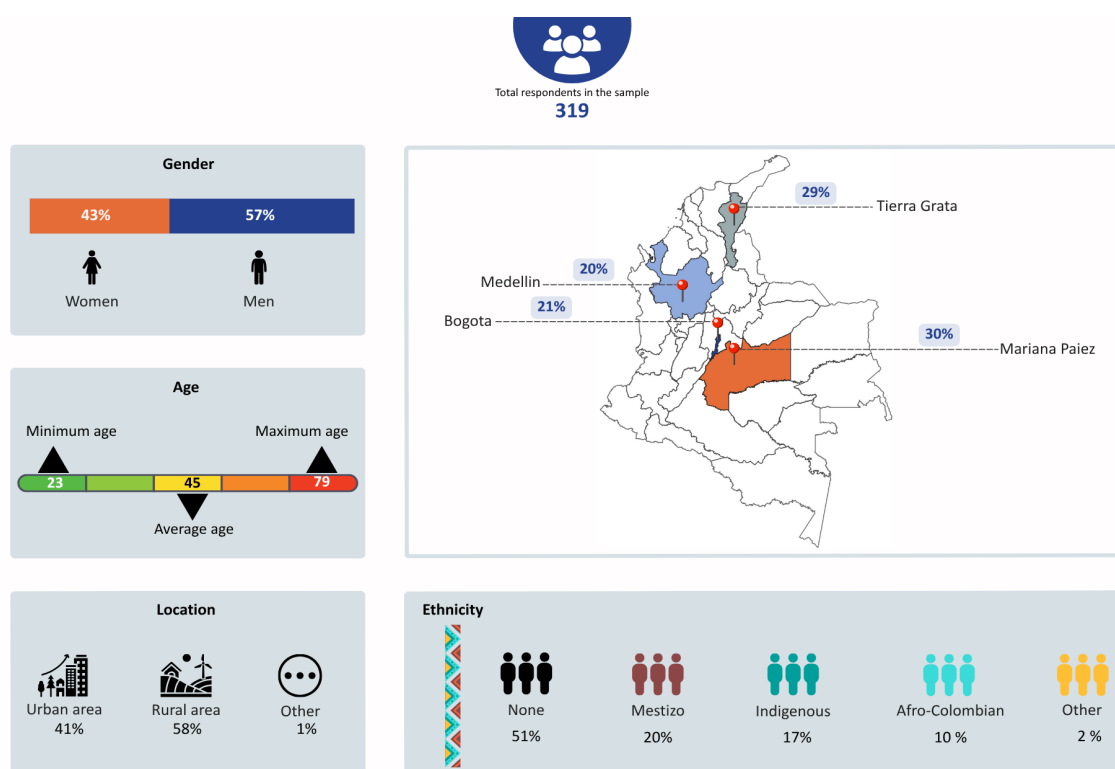
<sup>20</sup> Colombia, ARN, [Resolución 2319 de 2024, Modificada por la Resolución 950 de 2025](#) (Colombia, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Unidad para la Implementación del Acuerdo de Paz, "[Comunidad Internacional reconoce a Colombia como ejemplo en proceso de reincorporación y reintegración](#)" (2022); Michael Jonsson, Jan Pettersson and Michael Tatone, "[Determinants of Successful Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Colombia: Some Initial Findings](#)" (November 2020).

<sup>22</sup> The PRI advances four strategic reincorporation pathways: political, economic, community-based, and social.

data collected between July and October 2025. In partnership with the Conflict Responses Foundation (CORE), MEAC conducted 60-minute surveys<sup>23</sup> with 319 participants in the Reincorporation process across four locations. <sup>24</sup> Two of these locations were Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCRs):<sup>25</sup> Tierra Grata in the department of Cesar<sup>26</sup> and Mariana Páez in Meta, where 91 and 97 respondents were surveyed respectively – representing nearly the entire reincorporation population in these areas. The remaining participants were based in Bogotá and Medellín, the two biggest cities in Colombia.<sup>27</sup> The full survey sample is described in Figure 1 below.

**FIGURE 1 – SAMPLE OVERVIEW<sup>28</sup>**



<sup>23</sup> The survey firm Cifras and Conceptos (C&C) conducted the surveys. See: Cifras and Conceptos, “[Sobre Nosotros](#)”, n.d.

<sup>24</sup> To ensure participants’ anonymity and safety, all surveys were conducted in secure, private spaces provided or approved by the ARN.

<sup>25</sup> Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCRs) are temporary rural sites established as part of the 2016 Peace Agreement to support former FARC-EP guerrillas. These spaces allow former combatants to live, receive training, and develop economic projects as they transition into civilian life.

<sup>26</sup> While most participants were surveyed within the Tierra Grata ETCR, a small number were surveyed in a nearby area - the city of Valledupar - since some former residents no longer lived in the ETCR. This approach allowed the research team to reach a larger sample.

<sup>27</sup> Bogotá and Medellín are the two main cities where urban reincorporation members currently reside. Even if these participants reside in cities, they can still access benefits provided or referred through the programme.

<sup>28</sup> MEAC strives to conduct gender-sensitive and gender-responsive research and assessments in line with evolving best practice. MEAC collects data that can be disaggregated by gender (amongst other demographic features) to compare the experiences of men, boys, women, and girls. MEAC also uses targeted and responsive questions to examine the particular experiences of certain groups. Local variation requires that MEAC adapt its approach to gender to each of the local contexts where it works. In Colombia, respondents are asked to self-identify their gender as “man”, “woman”, or “other gender identity” to ensure inclusivity and better reflect the lived realities of non-binary or gender-fluid identities.

Whereas the map in Figure 1 reflects the locations in which surveys were conducted, the rural/urban disaggregation under ‘location’ reflects participants’ places of residence rather than the survey location or locations where support is provided. This disaggregation is used throughout the analysis, as the environment in which participants live may influence their experiences in the Reincorporation process and may differ from the locations where they commute to receive support.<sup>29</sup>

The survey includes a broad range of questions exploring participants’ experiences before, during, and after their time in the FARC-EP, including their experience in the Reincorporation process.<sup>30</sup> The survey was jointly constructed with key local actors – including CORE, the ARN and Comunes – to ensure accuracy and cultural sensitivity. Topics covered included political participation, economic stability, mental health, security, and stigmatization, among others. This report focuses specifically on those questions related to current progress, needs and challenges identified by participants, and how these shape their transition into civilian life. All summary statistics presented in this report are derived from this survey unless otherwise stated. The report draws on these findings to provide practical recommendations for the ARN, Comunes, and other stakeholders in an effort to strengthen reincorporation support and to consolidate peace dividends from the 2016 Peace Agreement.

The research faced several key challenges worth noting. First, although MEAC initially aimed to survey 500 participants across the four selected locations, only 319 individuals ultimately took part in the study. The lower participation rate was primarily due to security concerns, participant fatigue from repeated research engagements, and the difficulty of balancing their participation in the study with their daily responsibilities.<sup>31</sup> These challenges may have impacted the sample and the information collected, for example since individuals experiencing the most difficult circumstances may have been less likely to participate. These challenges and the limited sample size have been taken into account in the data analysis and interpretation, and its implications are noted throughout the findings.

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<sup>29</sup> The surveys in Tierra Grata and Mariana Páez were conducted in ARN facilities located within the ETCRs. In Bogotá, the surveys took place both in ARN facilities and in public libraries authorized by the ARN. In Medellín, the surveys were conducted exclusively in ARN facilities.

<sup>30</sup> Respondents always have the option to refuse to answer (i.e. skip) a survey question, which could happen for various reasons (e.g. lack of knowledge or not wanting to answer). In this report, unless explicitly mentioned, ‘refused to answer’ rates below 5% are excluded from the calculation and analysis of summary statistics. All statistics reported are rounded to the nearest whole number. Disaggregation by percentage thus does not always add up to 100%.

<sup>31</sup> Despite MEAC’s efforts to mitigate these challenges – by offering flexible data collection dates and schedules, and by conducting the survey in safe, private settings – challenges persisted in recruiting participants.

# Findings

This section presents key findings on the progress former FARC-EP combatants are making in their transition to civilian life and how the Reincorporation process is supporting them. The analysis explores participant needs, their experiences in the Reincorporation process, and the perceived impact of this process on their lives. The results reveal both areas of alignment between participants' priorities and the support they receive, as well as persistent gaps that may hinder the overall effectiveness of reincorporation. They also reveal that reincorporation participants face substantial challenges – including economic difficulties and insecurity – that impact their transition to civilian life in various ways and that could motivate some to return to war, ultimately jeopardising peacebuilding efforts.

## Participant Experiences Within the Reincorporation Process

Approximately 12,000 former combatants take part in the Reincorporation process today, of the original 14,000 FARC-EP combatants who gave up their weapons in 2017.<sup>32</sup> The Reincorporation process offers a wide range of support mechanisms designed to address the diverse needs of participants. It is important to note that although the ARN coordinates the process, support mechanisms are not always directly offered by the agency. As is the case with medical assistance or protection against insecurity, other institutions are in charge of supporting participants. This section examines the broad range of support mechanisms provided within the Reincorporation process - either by the ARN or by other partner agencies - and assesses whether they align with participants' needs and expectations. Such insights are essential for institutions seeking to strengthen support and promote lasting, sustainable peace.

### **Provision and Access to Reincorporation Support**

Since the launch of the Reincorporation process in 2017, ex-FARC-EP fighters have benefited from a broad range of support.<sup>33</sup> Amongst active Reincorporation participants, the most frequently accessed forms of support included education, medical care, cash transfers, psychosocial support, and income-generating activities. Figure 2 depicts the full range of services accessed by surveyed reincorporation participants.<sup>34</sup>

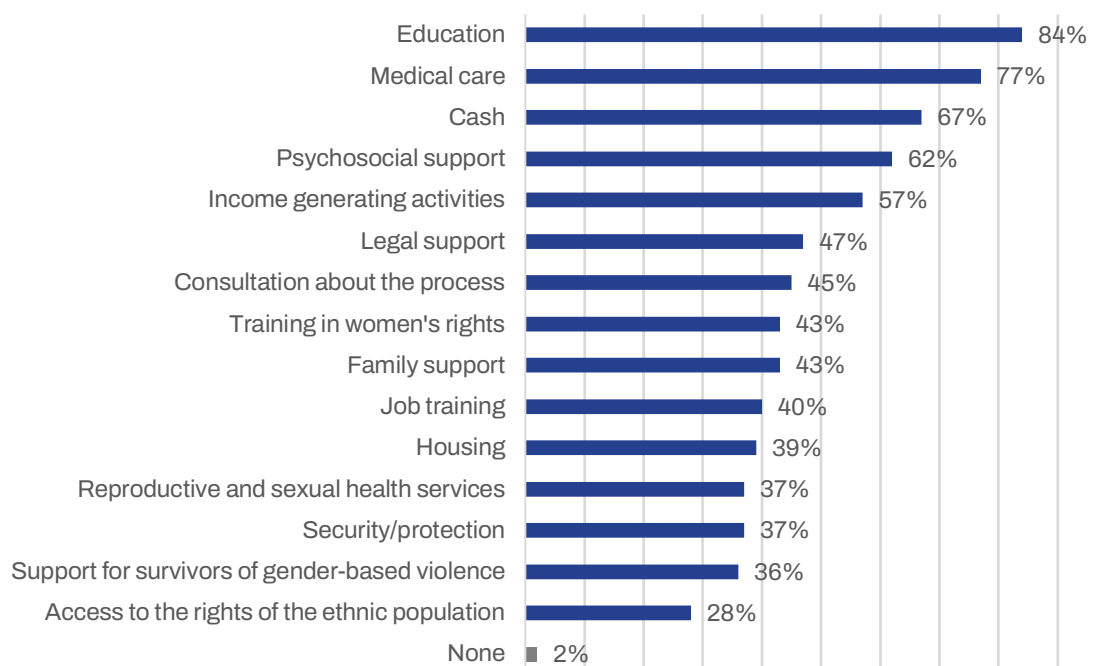
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<sup>32</sup> ARN, "[La Reincorporación en Cifras](#)", Excel document, October 2025.

<sup>33</sup> ARN, "[ARN en Cifras](#)", Infographic, 31 July 2025.

<sup>34</sup> "Since the signing of the Peace Agreement, did you receive any of the following services in the Reincorporation process?" (multiple select question).

**FIGURE 2 – PARTICIPANTS ACCESSING EACH SERVICE IN THE REINCORPORATION PROCESS**



In addition to the services and support listed above, the ARN, in coordination with the National Reincorporation Council (CNR),<sup>35</sup> offers participants assistance in developing their own business initiatives (commonly referred to as productive projects).<sup>36</sup> Beyond a simple cash transfer, productive projects were envisioned as largely collective ventures that would allow ex-combatants to develop viable livelihoods in agriculture, livestock, petty trading or handcrafting. Specifically, the Reincorporation process offers a one-time payment of approximately 2,000 USD to support participants’ productive project implementation. More than 6,000 productive projects have been approved since the start of the process, providing thousands of former FARC-EP fighters with the chance to access legal, alternative, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.<sup>37</sup> In this study, 66 per cent of respondents<sup>38</sup> reported having a productive project, most of which were in farming or trade.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The National Reincorporation Council (CNR) is an entity created by the Peace Agreement composed of Government representatives and former FARC-EP fighters who demobilized in 2016. In collaboration with other institutions, such as the ARN, the council evaluates and monitors the implementation of the economic, social, and political reincorporation of FARC-EP ex-combatants. Specifically, the council determines the viability of productive projects and provides guidance for their effective implementation.

<sup>36</sup> Some of the benefits participants receive through their productive project could be reflected in the data presented in Figure 2, for example those stating they accessed “income-generating activities” or “cash”.

<sup>37</sup> ARN, “[ARN en Cifras](#)”, Infographic, 30 September 2025.

<sup>38</sup> No significant difference was found between women and men – both groups engage in productive projects to a similar extent – 66% of women and 65% of men in the sample reported possessing a productive project.

<sup>39</sup> “What type of activity is your productive project focused on?” Answer options (multiple select question): Farming (42%), Other (21%), Trade (20%), services (10%), Livestock/fish farming (8%), Tourism (7%), Industry or construction work (4%), Manufacturing/crafts (3%), Culture (0.5%).

As expected, participants in rural areas reported having a productive project more often than those in urban areas (76 and 52 per cent respectively).<sup>40</sup> Many participants in the Reincorporation process come from rural backgrounds and possess skills suited to agricultural or livestock activities, making rural projects both more feasible and more familiar. Rural areas also offer greater access to land – whether through individual ownership, collective arrangements, or the support available in ETCRs – which facilitates the implementation of productive projects that require land. Moreover, early reincorporation policies concentrated technical assistance and investment in rural settlements, creating more favourable conditions for project development outside urban centres. In contrast, urban environments present constraints that can limit the implementation of productive projects. Higher living costs often compel participants to prioritize immediate income through salaried or informal employment, reducing the time and resources they can dedicate to their own business initiatives. Urban productive projects also tend to require different skill sets, higher levels of formalization, and greater start-up costs, posing additional challenges for many participants.

## Participant Needs and Support Received

This section looks at participant needs and the support they receive. Examining whether the support provided within the Reincorporation process align with participants' needs (and expectations) is essential for strengthening support, and ultimately the impact of the Reincorporation process.

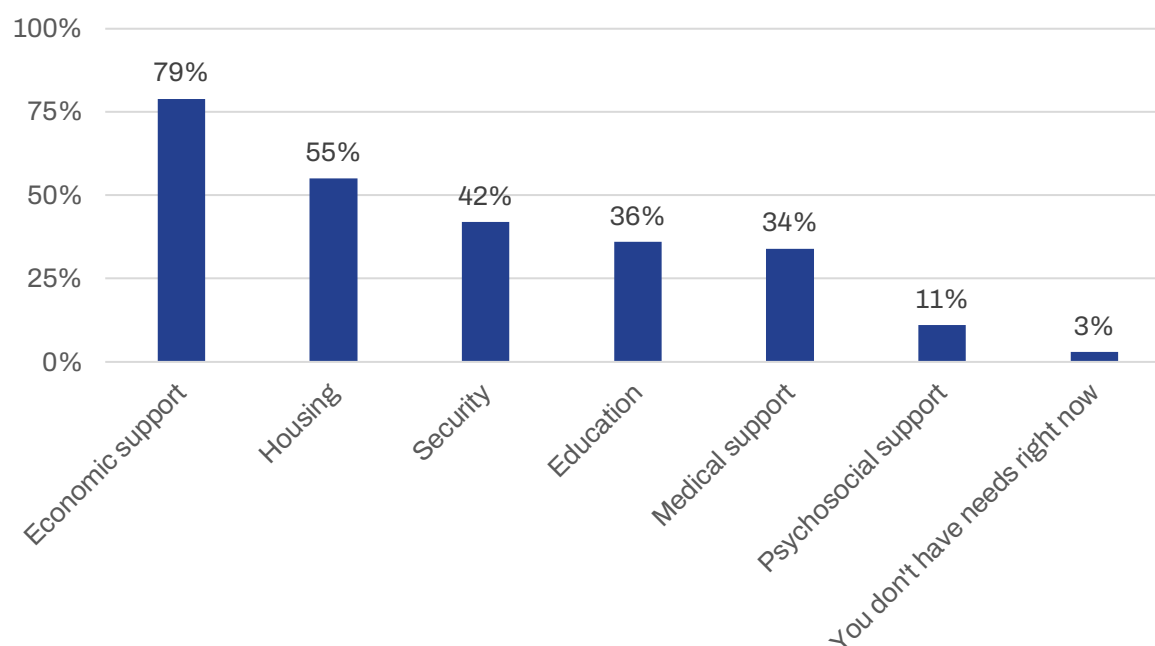
MEAC data shows that the 2016 Peace Agreement and the resulting Reincorporation process have effectively prioritized the economic reincorporation of former FARC-EP combatants by offering alternative and sustainable livelihood opportunities. These opportunities are essential for breaking cycles of conflict and violence, positioning the economic dimension as a central factor enabling participants to reincorporate successfully. As seen in Figure 3 below, which depicts the most pressing needs in life mentioned by respondents, economic support was identified most often by respondents (79 per cent). At the same time, the Reincorporation process is viewed as delivering on this need. The majority of participants who identified the need for economic support, reported that it is being addressed within the Reincorporation process (72 per cent).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> A t-test was run on the difference between urban and rural areas and found it to be statistically significant with a p-value < 0.05.

<sup>41</sup> "Which of these needs are being addressed by the Reincorporation process?". Answer options (multiple select question): Economic support (72%), Psychosocial support (62%), Education (55%), Medical support (45%), Housing (42%), Security (38%), None (10%). Posed only to those who said they had more than one pressing need. Note that respondents were only able to answer out of the list of needs they said were among the most pressing in their life. Percentages are calculated out of those respondents who listed the respective need as pressing in their life.

**FIGURE 3 – MOST PRESSING NEEDS IN LIFE AS REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS<sup>42</sup>**



While on economic support, the Reincorporation process appears to be addressing participants' needs, there are other – and sometimes related - areas where there are gaps between the support provided and their perceived impact on participants' lives. For instance, although more than half of participants viewed housing as a key need (55 per cent), only 42 per cent of this group said their housing needs were being met within the process. The need for increased housing support is also reflected in the relatively low number of participants who stated that they received housing support through the Reincorporation process since the signing of the Agreement (see Figure 2). Furthermore, this is a particular challenge for participants in urban areas.<sup>43</sup> In coordination with the Housing Ministry, the ARN mainly provides housing in rural reincorporation spaces (ETCRs),<sup>44</sup> explaining the gap between urban and rural participants. In urban areas, former fighters are responsible for securing their own housing and paying rent – something they are unaccustomed to after having spent years in the armed group.<sup>45</sup> This added financial burden can place additional pressure on their overall Reincorporation process, as their economic needs can be higher than those of participants in rural areas who often receive housing in the ETCRs. Yet this is only one of several challenges

<sup>42</sup> Participants were asked: “What are the three most pressing needs in your life right now?”. Participants were allowed to select any number of answer options, ensuring that they could indicate more (or less) than three if they considered it necessary.

<sup>43</sup> A higher proportion of participants in rural areas indicated their housing needs were met by the programme (59%) in comparison to participants in urban areas (16%). A t-test was run on the difference between urban and rural areas and found it to be statistically significant with a p-value < 0.05.

<sup>44</sup> Unidad de Implementación del Acuerdo de Paz, “[La vivienda para reincorporación es irreversible Gobierno anuncia la construcción de las primeras 521 viviendas para excombatientes en antiguos ETCR](#)”, 2 March 2022.

<sup>45</sup> These insights stem from CORE’s fieldwork experience engaging directly with reincorporation participants.

faced in urban settings. Indirect obstacles may include the difficulty of finding housing near their workplaces, which can result in long commutes through public transportation systems they are still learning to navigate, among other daily challenges. In contrast, despite the provision of direct housing support through the Reincorporation process for rural participants, they may also face numerous barriers in this respect. In ETCRs, reincorporation participants often struggle to meet all the requirements – financial, technical, and infrastructural – to build their own houses, especially in areas that are not included in the municipality’s formal housing development plans. Housing is essential for the progress of reincorporation as it provides the safety and stability needed by participants and their families to allow for social, cultural, economic, and political transformation.

Another important gap detected has to do with participant insecurity and the perceived impact of protection efforts. Protection against security threats was noted by 42 per cent of respondents as one of the most pressing needs in their life right now, likely reflecting the hundreds of killings, attempted homicides, and disappearances of former FARC-EP members in recent years.<sup>46</sup>

There are indications that current protection efforts are not sufficient. 37 per cent of all participants reported receiving protection against security threats through the Reincorporation process (see Figure 2). Protection for former FARC-EP fighters is mainly provided by the National Protection Unit (UNP), the government entity that seeks to guarantee protection across Colombian territory.<sup>47</sup> CORE’s fieldwork experience indicates that ex-combatants often express dissatisfaction with these services as they are deemed inadequate in improving their overall safety.<sup>48</sup> Only 38 per cent of respondents who identified security as one of the most pressing needs in their life reported that their security concerns were being addressed within the Reincorporation process. The impact of security threats on continued participation in the Reincorporation process, as well as on overall progress, is examined in greater detail in the following section.

In addition, while not as widespread as economic or housing needs, a third of participants also indicated medical assistance (34 per cent) as a pressing need in their life. However, medical support was reported as one of the most accessed services as part of their reincorporation trajectory. Although this service is not directly provided by the ARN, but rather is accessed

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<sup>46</sup> Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, “[La reincorporación desarraigada. Homicidios, victimizaciones colectivas y vaciamiento de territorios en medio de la comparecencia ante la JEP. 2016-2025](#)”, 25 April 2025.

<sup>47</sup> This model generally consists mainly of bodyguards (who are also former FARC fighters who have gone through special training), armoured cars, and, in some cases, bulletproof vests and cell phones.

<sup>48</sup> Occasionally armed groups steal these cars and the guns from the bodyguards in roadblocks and have even killed former fighters who had bodyguards and an armoured vehicle.

upon ARN referral,<sup>49</sup> it seems to already be a substantial focus of the Reincorporation process.<sup>50</sup> But concerns about the accessibility, relevance and quality of existing services remain. Out of those who indicated medical support as a continuing need, less than half (45 per cent) said that it is being met by the Reincorporation process. Additionally, former guerrilla fighters have stated that during the war, the healthcare within the group was quick and effective, which can affect their expectations and perceptions of healthcare in their transition to civilian life.<sup>51</sup> Reincorporation participants living in urban areas reported accessing medical care services referred through the Reincorporation process at lower rates than their peers in rural areas (66 per cent and 86 per cent respectively).<sup>52</sup> While the reasons for this disparity were not explored further in this study, it is possible this may indicate differences in provision and/or quality of health services by location.

Finally, educational, and psychosocial support also appear to be among the more effective services in meeting the needs of those who seek them out. 84 and 62 per cent of participants respectively reported receiving these types of support through the Reincorporation process (see Figure 2). In addition, both types of support were identified less frequently as pressing needs compared to for example economic and housing needs.

Altogether, MEAC's data suggests a mixed record. In some areas, particularly on economic support, participants largely believe their acute needs are being met. In others, there appear to be gaps between some needs and respondent perceptions of whether the Reincorporation process is sufficiently meeting them, which raise questions about the scope and quality of support in areas crucial for participants' safety and well-being. Although the findings above reflect participants' perceptions of support services and not the actual rate of support provided, they underscore the need for continued reflection on support delivery across several programming areas — for example in the security sector — to ensure continued engagement in the Reincorporation process and to promote reincorporation progress. To better understand what may cause these gaps, the next section explores the various factors that may prevent participant needs from being fully met and, consequently, hinder their full and effective reincorporation despite programming efforts.

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<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that the ARN does not directly provide medical assistance. Instead, individuals in the reincorporation process access the Colombian health system just like any other member of society. The ARN coordinates with the public system to ensure the enrollment of individuals and their families in the "General System of Social Health Security" (SGSSS in Spanish). During the initial phase, the State covers their healthcare costs; however, once participants begin working, they are expected to assume these costs themselves.

<sup>50</sup> 77% of participants reported receiving medical assistance as part of their reincorporation trajectories since the signing of the Agreement, which makes it the second most accessed by participants, after education.

<sup>51</sup> El Colombiano, "[Pastor Alape confesó su primer desencuentro con el sistema de salud colombiano](#)", 3 January 2017.

<sup>52</sup> A t-test confirmed this difference to be statistically significant with  $p < 0.05$ .

# Challenges Faced by Participants in their Reincorporation Journeys

Since its establishment in 2017, the Reincorporation process has benefited thousands of former FARC-EP members, as evidenced by the high satisfaction rate of participants.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, several enduring challenges – beyond the gaps detected in support delivery – continue to prevent participant needs from being fully met, and ultimately hinder reincorporation progress. A thorough analysis of the factors that impede the provision of support and undermine the desired impact of reincorporation support is crucial for the design and implementation of effective support and peacebuilding more broadly.

## Economic Challenges

Participants reported several challenges throughout their reincorporation trajectories that hinder their ability to secure sustainable income, which complicate their participation in various programming initiatives and undermine their reincorporation progress. It is important to note that economic precarity affects a significant portion of the Colombian population, and therefore, it is not a challenge that exclusively affects ex-combatants. However, this population faces specific difficulties associated to their experiences in the armed conflict and to their reincorporation, which deserve to be analysed in more depth.

In line with the hierarchy of needs noted in the previous section, economic difficulties were identified as the most common obstacle to respondent progress. 59 per cent of participants reported “economic hardship” and 57 per cent reported “lack of employment” as major challenges.<sup>54</sup> A small, although not statistically significant, gap is present with women reporting slightly higher rates of economic challenges compared to men.<sup>55</sup> In line with existing qualitative research<sup>56</sup> and as discussed later in this section, a gender gap could stem from higher levels of stigmatization experienced by women ex-combatants in Colombian society and/or the greater care responsibilities they tend to assume compared to men, which can impact their overall ability to engage in the workforce. This is particularly concerning for women’s economic

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<sup>53</sup> “How satisfied are you with the Reincorporation process?”. Answer options: Very satisfied (40%), Somewhat satisfied (52%), Not satisfied at all (8%).

<sup>54</sup> “What are the biggest challenges you have faced since you entered the Reincorporation process?”. Answer options (select multiple): Economic hardship (59%), Lack of employment (57%), Stigmatization for being an ex-combatant (43%), Lack of access to land (38%), Care responsibilities (23%), Lack of leadership opportunities (11%), Family problems (9%), Mental health (8%), Living without a weapon (6%), Physical violence (3%), Traditional gender roles (2%), Doesn’t know (1%), None (4%).

<sup>55</sup> Women reported ‘lack of employment’ as a challenge at a higher rate than men (62% and 54% respectively). This is also the case for ‘economic hardship’ (63% of women and 56% respectively).

<sup>56</sup> Samuel Rojas Quintero, Jenny Marcela Acevedo Valencia and Sindy Yuliana Gallego Tavera, “[Aciertos y desafíos de la reincorporación económica de mujeres firmantes de paz en Colombia](#)”, *Ratio Juris (UNAULA)*, Vol. 18, No. 36 (2023).

reincorporation and raises questions about the efficacy of the support offered within the Reincorporation process to women.<sup>57</sup> The ARN recently launched the project “Mujeres Soberanas por la Paz”<sup>58</sup> (“Sovereign Women for Peace”), designed to support women participants in their economic reincorporation and address other needs related to gender-based inequalities. This initiative represents a valuable opportunity to confront structural gender inequalities within the Reincorporation process. However, despite its promises, its impact on women’s economic reincorporation remains uncertain given its recent implementation.

Specifically, when it comes to productive projects that participants are trying to get off the ground, several challenges in their implementation were identified, including insufficient economic support (49 per cent) and a lack of technical training (31 per cent).<sup>59</sup> While concerns about insufficient financing of productive projects and the sustainability of these start-up ventures remain, there are additional challenges beyond the control of the Reincorporation process. For example, the lack of proper infrastructure in rural areas around ETCRs and the difficult access to markets represent important challenges for reincorporation in Guaviare, Norte de Santander, Antioquia, Cauca, and Caquetá.<sup>60</sup>

In line with the various economic difficulties reported by respondents, 33 per cent of the total sample reported that their economic situation was better when they were in the FARC-EP.<sup>61</sup> This can in part be due to the collective dynamics that existed inside the armed group, which are often difficult to find in civilian life (especially in urban areas). This raises concerns that some ex-combatants will become disillusioned with civilian life and think about a possible return to armed groups in search for better economic opportunities.<sup>62</sup> Evidence indicates that many active armed groups in Colombia (including FARC dissident groups and the Clan del Golfo)<sup>63</sup> recruit individuals by promising financial stability (e.g., through a stable income and

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<sup>57</sup> Today, the gender focus of economic reincorporation includes the integration of women excombatants in the work force, support in developing leadership skills, and participation in community organizations, among other forms of support.

<sup>58</sup> Ayuda en Acción, “[Mujeres Teras: proyecto de Ayuda en Acción y La Tienda de la Empatía desarrollado con el apoyo de la Embajada de Suecia y ONU Mujeres, que busca generar oportunidades de desarrollo para las mujeres en Colombia](#)”, May 2025.

<sup>59</sup> “What are the main difficulties that you have had in the implementation of your productive project?”. Answer options (multiple select question): Economic support (49%), Lack of technical training (31%), Lack of access to land (29%), Lack of technological tools/machinery (27%), Lack of marketing channels (26%), Lack of proper administration (22%), Stigmatization (15%), Security problems in the area (15%), Other (9%), You haven’t faced difficulties (9%), Physical/mental health problems (7%), Lack of support for the care of other people at home (5%).

<sup>60</sup> These insights stem from CORE’s fieldwork experience engaging directly with reincorporation participants.

<sup>61</sup> “When you were with the FARC-EP, was your economic situation - that is, your ability to meet your basic needs and live in economic stability - better, the same, or worse than it is today?”. 27% of respondents said their situation was the same. 40% said it was with the FARC-EP worse than it is today.

<sup>62</sup> Although the economic factor is one of the main factors that could motivate excombatants to return to war, this is not the only factor. Other factors, such as persistent insecurity and stigmatization can also motivate them to return.

<sup>63</sup> The Clan del Golfo, also known as the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC), is one of the most powerful criminal organizations in the country. It is regarded as a right-wing paramilitary group and is heavily involved in drug trafficking.

the provision of basic needs).<sup>64</sup> Former FARC-EP members facing economic hardship may perceive such offers as appealing, raising the prospects for re-recruitment. It is therefore key to explore the challenges associated to economic reincorporation in more detail (see recommendations at the end of the report).

For those participants who indicated that their economic situation has improved since leaving the FARC-EP, most credit the ARN's assistance. Of the 40 per cent of participants for whom economic conditions had improved, most indicate that that this is mainly due to the monthly economic support provided by the ARN, and/or a new job. Other, less mentioned, drivers include productive projects and family support.<sup>65</sup> These results reinforce the centrality of support provided by the Reincorporation process to the economic reincorporation of ex-combatants – particularly the monthly stipend and the economic and technical assistance for productive projects provided by the ARN – especially amidst difficult economic conditions.

### **Security Challenges**

Security emerged as another large and ongoing concern for participants, and one that appears to undermine their continued involvement in the process. The Reincorporation process is carried out in an increasingly complex security context. Illegal armed groups in Colombia have, in general, strengthened in recent years. The armed groups involved in today's non-international armed conflicts in Colombia,<sup>66</sup> such as the Gaitanista Colombian Army (EGC in Spanish), the National Liberation Army (ELN in Spanish) and FARC Dissidents, have grown in ranks and in the amount of territory they control since the Peace Agreement was signed in 2016, according to statistics from Colombia's intelligence services.<sup>67</sup> The war economies they control, such as the cocaine trade and illegal mining (e.g., gold), are larger and more profitable than ever.<sup>68</sup>

Since the signing of the Agreement, at least 481 ex-combatants have been killed, while another 57 have been disappeared; 157 suffered attacks but survived.<sup>69</sup> While the number of ex-

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<sup>64</sup> Through multiple fieldwork missions in areas influenced by these groups and drawing on semi-structured interviews with current and former members, CORE has confirmed that economic incentives have been a central element in these groups' recruitment strategies.

<sup>65</sup> "What is the main reason why your economic situation is better now?". Answer options (multiple select question): Monthly economic support for reincorporation (53%), A new job (53%), Productive project (23%), Family support (17%), Neighbors' and/or friends' support (6%), Support from the CNR (6%), Other (17%). Posed only to those who said their economic situation was worse when they were with the FARC-EP.

<sup>66</sup> Currently, there are eight local-level armed conflicts. In addition to proliferation, the type of conflict has shifted: Today, the various illegal armed groups that are active fight more amongst themselves than against the State. Attacks against state armed forces have decreased due to peace negotiations and ceasefires with the government since 2022. However, in the last two years, attacks against armed forces have increased again, because the government has suspended ceasefires, and armed groups have started attacking again.

<sup>67</sup> Kyle Johnson and Angela Gómez, "[Grupos armados se fortalecieron bajo el gobierno Petro, pero no todos del mismo modo](#)", La Silla Vacía, August 2025.

<sup>68</sup> It is common that armed groups today delegate interpersonal conflict resolution to local organizations which they back; if a conflict is severe or cannot be resolved by these local organizations, armed groups will then often step in.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, "[Report of the Secretary-General](#)", Infographic, October 2025.

combatant killings decreased between 2020 and 2024, the first nine months of 2025 have shown an increase compared to the whole of 2024.<sup>70</sup> Many of these attacks are presumed to have been committed by illegal armed groups, but in over 80 per cent of cases, the culprits are still unknown.<sup>71</sup> Ex-combatants also suffer other types of violence at the hands of armed groups, including forced displacement, which has impacted ETCRs in the Guaviare, Meta, Norte de Santander and Caquetá departments.<sup>72</sup> The potential implications of violence targeting ex-combatants that have laid aside their weapons has been highlighted in the latest UN Security Council meeting on Colombia.<sup>73</sup>

In total, one-third of participants said they had been threatened by an armed actor since the signing of the Agreement in 2016.<sup>74</sup> While a substantial number of those threatened did not know the source of the threat(s), many came from FARC dissident groups and the Clan del Golfo, some of the main criminal organizations currently operating in Colombia.<sup>75</sup> These findings are in line with past data that evidence the various threats – including forced displacement, disappearances and killings – that ex-combatants face today.<sup>76</sup>

Insecurity poses a substantial obstacle to reincorporation progress. As indicated in Figure 4, in addition to participation, security threats undermine participant mental health, personal relationships, economic wellbeing, and mobility. Participants also emphasized that insecurity is a major factor preventing many from returning to their communities of origin: One commented that “Because it’s so insecure, I will not go there anymore, because it brings me very bad memories” and another lamented, “I can’t go anymore because there are constant threats”.

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<sup>70</sup> UN Verification Mission in Colombia, “[Report of the Secretary-General](#)”, Infographic, October 2025.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> El Tiempo, “[Cinco ETCR más serían trasladados por riesgos de seguridad por violencia en las regiones, según la directora de la ARN](#)”, 4 September 2024.

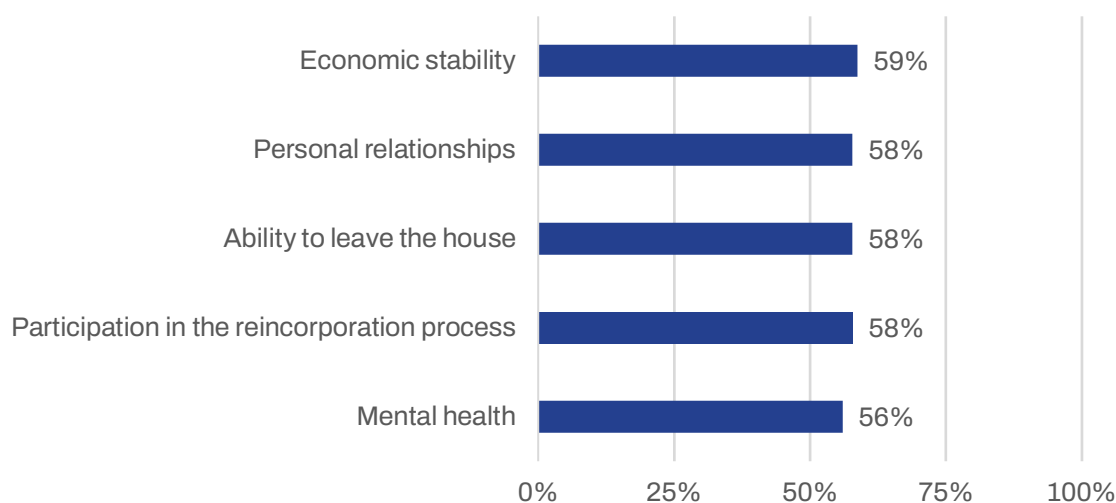
<sup>73</sup> United Nations, “[Security, Rural Reform Key to Colombia’s Peace, Special Representative Tells Security Council](#)”, 3 October 2025.

<sup>74</sup> 34% of respondents said ‘Yes’ to “After the signing of the agreement, have you been threatened by an armed actor?”.

<sup>75</sup> “Who do you believe was responsible?”. Answer options (multiple select question): Clan del Golfo/AGC/Urabeños (19%), Unknown FARC dissident group (19%), ELN (9%), EMC of Mordisco (7%), EMC of Calarcá (5%), State Armed Forces (2%), The Second Marquetalia (1%), Other (17%), Doesn’t know (30%). Posed only to those who said they have been threatened by an armed actor.

<sup>76</sup> Diana Losada, “[La violencia contra excombatientes en Colombia sigue siendo la mayor amenaza para su transición a la vida civil](#)”, United Nations Colombia, 13 January 2022.

**FIGURE 4 – PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS REPORTING EACH CATEGORY AS NEGATIVELY IMPACTED BY SECURITY THREATS<sup>77</sup>**



There is some reluctance to report these threats, and/or concerns about the steps being taken to mitigate them. Most of the participants who said they received threats reported these “sometimes” or “most times” to relevant authorities (85 per cent), such as the ARN, the CNR, or the police.<sup>78</sup> Some reported that they had entered a security scheme managed by the National Protection Unit, but, as highlighted above, this programme has been widely criticized for being incomplete and inefficient, raising concerns about the degree of protection it provides.<sup>79</sup> A notable minority (16 per cent) chose not to report the incident(s) at all. Some participants mentioned that they avoided reporting in an effort to keep themselves safe and/or because they do not trust the authorities.<sup>80</sup> Many have chosen to deal with these security threats themselves. Nearly half of the total sample reported that they had to change their place of residence due to security concerns.<sup>81</sup> Another common strategy adopted by participants is avoiding certain places and communications with certain people.<sup>82</sup> As highlighted by one

<sup>77</sup> Respondents who reported experiencing security threats were asked several follow-up questions on the impact of these threats:

“Have these threats affected your participation in the Reincorporation process?”

“Have these threats affected your ability to leave the house?”

“Have these threats affected your economic stability?”

“Have these threats affected your personal relationships with your social network?”

“Have these threats had an impact on your mental health?”

Answer options: Most times, Sometimes, Never. Most times and Sometimes answers were combined for the purpose of this graph.

<sup>78</sup> “Have you reported these acts to the authorities (ARN, CNR, police, etc.)?”. Answer options: Most times (68%), Sometimes (17%), Never (16%).

<sup>79</sup> Programa Somos Defensores, “[Telegrama](#)”, Informe semestral enero- junio 2024, No. 2024 (Colombia, 2024).

<sup>80</sup> “Why haven’t you reported these acts?”. Open-ended follow-up question to “Have you reported these acts to the authorities (ARN, CNR, police, etc.)?”. Posed only to those who said they never reported threats.

<sup>81</sup> “After the signing of the agreement, have you had to change your place of residence due to security issues, for example threats?”. Yes (47%), No (53%).

<sup>82</sup> “What protection measures have you taken to deal with these threats?”. Open ended follow-up question to “After the signing of the agreement, have you been threatened by an armed actor?”. Posed only to those who said they have been threatened.

participant: “It is important not to tell anyone when you leave or come back. Don’t gather with big groups. Don’t go out to cafeterias and only let your partner know what you do”. As security challenges continue to undermine the reincorporation of former FARC-EP members and the overall effectiveness of the Reincorporation process, it is essential to strengthen reporting mechanisms and enhance the protection provided to participants.

### **Other Challenges**

Participants also reported other kinds of challenges that directly or indirectly affect their economic, social, community, and political reincorporation. 43 per cent of participants said that stigmatization for being an ex-combatant has been one of the challenges in their transition to civilian life.<sup>83</sup> While this finding raises concerns about progress against one of the central pillars of reincorporation—social cohesion and reconciliation—it has very real implications for the day to day lives of ex-combatants.<sup>84</sup> For example, some participants who have launched a productive project reported that stigmatization has hindered the implementation of their initiatives, limiting their economic development opportunities.<sup>85</sup> Stigmatization also appears gendered. A small, although not statistically significant, gender gap is again present with women reporting higher rates of stigmatization than men.<sup>86</sup> Qualitative research findings underscore this disparity, identifying that women ex-combatants for example often experience a “double stigmatization,” particularly in machista societies like Colombia. They are stigmatized not only for their past involvement in an armed group but also for having transgressed traditional gender norms that associate femininity with nurturance, passivity, and peacefulness.<sup>87</sup>

Lack of access to land was also an enduring challenge for participants’ reincorporation process.<sup>88</sup> This challenge has a notable effect on those who have a productive project. Nearly a third of this group of respondents indicated that limited access to land poses a major obstacle to the implementation of their business initiatives.<sup>89</sup> These findings are consistent with the fact that most former FARC-EP combatants come from rural backgrounds, and that many of their

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<sup>83</sup> “What are the biggest challenges you have faced since you entered the Reincorporation process?”

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Alejandro Socha Castelblanco, Adriana Gaviria Dugand and Miguel García Sánchez, “[Estigmas, creencias, miedos y experiencias. Un análisis de las narrativas de los colombianos sobre la convivencia con los excombatientes de las FARC](#)”, Observatorio de la Democracia, February 2021.

<sup>85</sup> “What are the main difficulties that you have had in the implementation of your productive project?” 15% of participants reported stigmatization as one of their difficulties.

<sup>86</sup> “What are the biggest challenges you have faced since you entered the Reincorporation process?” A t-test was run on gender differences in reporting stigmatization as a challenge. It found the difference between women and men (49% and 39% respectively) to be non-significant with a p-value of 0.063.

<sup>87</sup> Laura Camila Barrios Sabogal and Solveig Richter, “[Las Farianas: Reintegration of former female FARC fighters as a driver for peace in Colombia](#)”, *Cuadernos de Economía*, Vol. 38, No. 78 (2019), pp. 753-784.

<sup>88</sup> “What are the biggest challenges you have faced since you entered the Reincorporation process?” 38% of respondents reported lack of access to land as one of their challenges.

<sup>89</sup> “What are the main difficulties that you have had in the implementation of your productive project?” 29% of participants reported lack of access to land as one of their difficulties.

productive projects are focused on agriculture.<sup>90</sup> This raises concerns given that land inequality was one of the main drivers of the armed conflict since its start in the 1960s. Despite the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement and its provisions on land reform,<sup>91</sup> efforts to facilitate access to land for reincorporation participants (and others) and reduce inequalities between rural and urban areas (through the Comprehensive Rural Reform implemented with the Peace Agreement) have lagged behind aspirations. According to the Kroc institute, who monitors the implementation of the Peace Agreement, after eight years of implementation, 70 per cent of stipulations agreed upon for comprehensive rural reform are at a “minimal” level of progress.<sup>92</sup> While outside the mandate of the ARN, which is not involved in carrying out rural reform parts of the 2016 Agreement, the lack of progress on land reform, and challenges accessing viable land for agricultural purposes, has implications for the implementation of the ARN-run Reincorporation process and peacebuilding in Colombia more broadly.

Finally, caregiving responsibilities continue to impact economic reincorporation progress, particularly for women. Caring for children or elderly family members were identified as an important challenge by 23 per cent of participants. A significantly higher proportion of women compared to men (33 per cent and 15 per cent respectively) reported this as a major difficulty.<sup>93</sup> This gender gap reflects the traditional caregiving roles socially assigned to women in Colombian society.<sup>94</sup> Such responsibilities can limit women’s capacity to fully engage in and benefit from reincorporation support, thus hindering their transition to civilian – and particularly economic – life. This finding highlights the importance of ensuring support is gender-sensitive and accommodating to all caregivers so that they can meaningfully engage in the support provided.

## The Urgency of Addressing Gaps and Challenges

Without addressing implementation gaps and pervasive outside challenges – particularly insecurity – it will be hard for the Reincorporation process to deliver on its ambitious objectives. Specifically, failure to address threats to ex-combatants can undermine peace dividends and

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<sup>90</sup> “What type of activity is your productive project focused on?” 42% of respondents who have a productive project said it was focused on farming.

<sup>91</sup> The 2016 Peace Agreement includes provisions on land access through the Comprehensive Rural Reform (RRI, in Spanish), which seeks to democratize access to and use of land by formalizing property rights, creating land funds, restoring land to victims, establishing reserve zones, and promoting credit and subsidies for rural development.

<sup>92</sup> Kroc Institute, “[Navegando las aguas de la paz: avances, retos y oportunidades en el octavo año de implementación diciembre 2023 a noviembre 2024](#)” (Colombia, June 2025).

<sup>93</sup> “What are the biggest challenges you have faced since you entered the Reincorporation process?” A t-test was run on gender differences in reporting care responsibilities as a challenge. It confirmed the difference to be statistically significant with a p-value < 0.05.

<sup>94</sup> Octavio Giraldo, “[El machismo como fenómeno psicocultural](#)” *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1972).

perpetuate insecurity.<sup>95</sup> Past research,<sup>96</sup> including MEAC research in Colombia and in other contexts,<sup>97</sup> has shown that when the challenges faced by ex-combatants go unaddressed, these may lead them to return to armed groups or illicit activities.<sup>98</sup> This highlights the urgency to pay attention to these various challenges and find ways to effectively support participants throughout their reincorporation journeys in Colombia. The peace forged by the 2016 Agreement is still fragile and needs to be reinforced through sustained efforts to assist ex-combatants across the multiple dimensions of their reincorporation.

Despite the comprehensiveness of the Peace Agreement, the wide variety of reincorporation support provided, and the more than 12.000 FARC-EP ex-combatants committed to building peace, recidivism remains a real concern. While no actual statistics exist on how many former combatants have returned to conflict after giving up their weapons, many high-profile cases are documented in media reports: In 2019, around 20 former high- and mid-level commanders from the FARC-EP announced their return to conflict, creating a dissident group known as the “Second Marquetalia.”<sup>99</sup> Other high-profile cases include “Araña”, the alias of the leader of the Border Commandos, and “Andrey”, the alias of the commander of the 33rd Front dissident group.<sup>100</sup>

While most of the reincorporation participants interviewed articulate that they are committed to their transition to civilian society, there are factors that could undermine their progress. The majority of participants in the study (76 per cent) reported that “nothing” would motivate them to return to an armed group in the future. A small minority of respondents highlighted drivers that could motivate them to return to illegal activity. “Self-protection” was most often mentioned as a potential motivation, but still by a minority of respondents (12 per cent).<sup>101</sup> Although small, this finding is concerning given that security remains one of the most important challenges in participants’ reincorporation trajectories, and that protection is frequently insufficient.

Insecurity may push some into returning to an armed group, while others are being pulled by recruitment campaigns. A substantial portion of respondents reported having been invited to

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<sup>95</sup> The MEAC project recognizes the multiple ways in which FARC-EP ex-combatants have expressed their commitment with peacebuilding and conflict prevention in Colombia. This is one of the reasons why this report seeks to address the factors that may put these processes at risk.

<sup>96</sup> The United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), “[Module 4.30: Reintegration](#)”, *The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*, United Nations, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Cristal Downing, Kyle Johnson, Ángela Olaya, and Sofia Rivas, “[Recidivism Risks in the “Differential Assistance” Process for People Exiting Criminal Groups in Colombia](#),” MEAC Findings Report 25 (New York, United Nations University, 2022).

<sup>98</sup> IAWG on DDR, “[Module 4.30: Reintegration](#)”.

<sup>99</sup> Kyle Johnson, Ángela Gómez, Ángela Aguirre and Daniel Albarracín, “[Disidencias de las FARC-EP: Dos caminos de una guerra en construcción - Parte 2](#)” (Bogotá, Conflict Responses, 2024).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> “What would motivate you to return to an armed group in the future?” Answer options (multiple select question): Self-protection (12%), Protect your community (3%), Defend my political ideology (2%), Better pay (2%), Stigma or discrimination (2%), Join a loved one (1%), Intra-family abuse (1%), Revenge (1%), Other (8%), Nothing (76%).

(re)join an armed group since the signing of the Agreement (29 per cent).<sup>102</sup> This percentage was higher in cities than in urban areas (42 and 20 per cent of respondents respectively).<sup>103</sup> This difference may reflect the distinct dynamics of recruitment in urban areas. Armed groups maintain extensive recruitment networks in cities – particularly in Medellín and Bogotá – which they attempt to persuade or deceive individuals into joining armed organizations that operate in rural zones. In contrast, recruitment in rural areas is concentrated in areas where groups exert territorial control.<sup>104</sup> The combination of security threats with solicitations by active armed groups to (re)join poses a large risk to the implementation of the Peace Agreement and the overall success of reincorporation, and therefore must be addressed with urgency.

It is worth noting the context against which these offers to return to an armed group (or coercive demands) are being made. While Colombia's Reincorporation process was uniquely designed to be a collective process (as exemplified by the ETCRs and focus on collective productive projects) tied to the political transformation of the FARC-EP as a political party, the communal nature of reincorporation and its relationship with FARC's political successor has eroded. Today, only 1,550 ex-combatants still live in the ETCRs created for their collective demobilization.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, the Peace Agreement envisaged and allowed for FARC-EP's transformation into a political force, but today, thousands of ex-combatants are no longer affiliated with the resulting Comunes Party and some are now part of other organisations or are reincorporating individually. Important former FARC-EP commanders have publicly detached themselves from the party, which has also undermined the collective aspect of reincorporation (at least how it was initially intended) and further undermined confidence in the process and in the Comunes party's leadership. These changes reflect the evolution of the collective dimension of reincorporation since its creation in 2017. Armed groups, including FARC dissident groups, have tried to take advantage of the frustration with Comunes in their recruitment efforts.

Overall, the findings presented in this report reveal a nuanced picture of Colombia's Reincorporation process. While the process is addressing many of participants' needs in difficult conditions, there remain some programming gaps and outside challenges to participation - particularly security threats - that undermine its goals. This has implications for both participants' quality of life, but more broadly, could undermine the long-term sustainability of peacebuilding efforts in Colombia. Strengthening targeted support in these areas - and effectively addressing threats to participants - appears essential to ensuring a more stable and durable Reincorporation process.

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<sup>102</sup> "Since the signing of the agreement, have you been invited to return to an armed group?"

<sup>103</sup> A t-test was run on the difference between urban and rural areas and found it to be statistically significant with a p-value < 0.05

<sup>104</sup> These insights stem from CORE's fieldwork experience engaging directly with reincorporation participants.

<sup>105</sup> ARN, "[ARN en Cifras](#)", Infographic, 30 September 2025.

# Policy Recommendations

The findings presented in this report highlight reincorporation participant needs, the extent to which participants perceive that these are being addressed, and additional challenges – particularly insecurity - that impact their participation in the Reincorporation process and ultimately, their progress in transitioning to civilian life. The results reveal both areas of alignment between participants' priorities and needs and the support they receive through the Reincorporation process, and persistent gaps that if left unaddressed could hinder the overall effectiveness of reincorporation and broader peacebuilding outcomes in Colombia.

Based on these findings, MEAC developed a series of recommendations to strengthen support to reincorporation participants in light of current and evolving challenges. To ensure the effective implementation of these recommendations, it will be essential that the ARN and related reincorporation support are sufficiently funded and there is consistent cross-government commitment to addressing these gaps. The latter is particularly important because of the way the Reincorporation process is run, with the ARN providing direct support in certain areas and referring or deferring to other entities to lead on particular issues (e.g. medical care or protection). Thus effective coordination and referrals between service providers is essential to adapting reincorporation to address gaps and outside challenges. For example, the ARN, the CNR and Comunes must work together to ensure that productive projects are responsive to the obstacles endured by those developing them. Any adjustments to programming must be done in a way that is inclusive, gender-responsive, and tailored to the diverse needs and expectations of participants across regions.

While the section that follows identifies specific adjustments that could help close gaps and strengthen the Reincorporation process, it is essential to recognize that there are broader societal factors that will continue to influence reincorporation outcomes but over which the ARN and some of its partners have little direct control. This includes not only insecurity, but also dominant gender norms that foster inequality and the slow down the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement, particularly with regard to land reform, the coca crops substitution programme, and efforts to dismantle armed and criminal groups.

## **Addressing threats to safety is a top priority**

Since safety concerns continue to undermine the progress and sustainability of the Reincorporation process, they must be placed at the center of programmatic reform efforts. Beyond the direct physical risks posed by armed actors, insecurity crucially disrupts participants' economic initiatives by limiting mobility and discouraging participation in

productive projects and other livelihood activities. A more comprehensive and coordinated protection framework – led by the ARN, the National Protection Unit and other relevant authorities - is needed to prevent reprisals against reincorporation participants:

- It is essential to develop and widely socialize a clear, accessible, and unified response pathway that allows participants to report threats or risk situations in a timely and secure manner. Protection should be guaranteed throughout the entire reporting process to prevent individuals from abandoning it due to fear or additional risks. This pathway should be promoted by an awareness campaign to inform participants about existing channels and processes for handling security threats.
- Whenever possible, digital reporting pathways should be prioritized to protect participant anonymity and reduce the need for in-person reporting, which can increase the risk of being detected and targeted.
- To address the distrust in relevant authorities, which was mentioned by respondents, it is key that reports are taken seriously by recipient entities and handled in a timely manner. There should be regular feedback mechanisms so that individuals know how their cases are being handled.
- Protection mechanisms must be sensitive to diverse identities, recognizing that women, ethnic minorities, and rural participants often face distinct risks.
- In addition to creating a clear trusted reporting mechanism, existing practical guidance on managing personal safety should be revised, strengthened and disseminated more effectively with reincorporation participants and relevant institutions. This would allow better strategies for responding to threats and reducing vulnerability in daily life to be adopted.
- Given that forced displacement is a major consequence of security threats identified in this study, secure housing should be made available in time of emergency so participants can seek refuge while receiving support. Beyond emergency contexts, guaranteeing access to safe and stable housing is essential for successful reincorporation, with additional efforts particularly needed in urban areas.

### **It is necessary to do more to address stigma and enhance social cohesion**

The stigmatization of ex-combatants prevents their effective political, economic, and social, and cultural reincorporation. While this has long been recognized as a challenge to effective reincorporation into civilian life, more needs to be done to tackle this issue:

- Strengthen existing initiatives that address stigma in communities and in all the institutions in charge of providing support to participants. As this study shows, reducing stigma is especially crucial for successful economic reincorporation, including the effective implementation of productive projects.
- Insecurity not only threatens the physical safety of ex-combatants but also reinforces their social isolation by limiting community participation and interaction. Improving

security conditions is therefore fundamental to participants' empowerment, inclusion, and ability to engage in community life.

- While it is beyond the work of just the ARN, all institutions involved in reincorporation and peacebuilding should aim to dismantle traditional gender norms that contribute to heightened stigmatization against women ex-combatants. This could take the form of a communications campaign that addresses the reality of women's participation in war and the negative impacts of gender inequality, and promotes gender solidarity and behaviours. It is important to recognize that broader gender inequality in Colombia contributes to the particular challenges faced by women ex-combatants and societal change is needed to reinforce programmatic efforts.
- While the ARN has made notable progress in responding to the needs of women peace signatories through the "Mujeres Soberanas por la Paz"<sup>106</sup> ("Sovereign Women for Peace") programme, this initiative still faces numerous challenges. To ensure its effectiveness, the programme requires a robust pedagogical component aimed at building a shared understanding of its objectives, strengthening institutional ownership, and reducing the reproduction of harmful gender norms. A sustained educational effort across agencies would support a more consistent implementation and help consolidate the programme's transformative potential.

### **Economic challenges require more attention**

The possibility of securing a dignified and stable livelihood post-Agreement is one of the most important - yet most challenging - dimensions of the Reincorporation process. More needs to be done to address related programmatic gaps so as to strengthen economic reincorporation outcomes for ex-combatants:

- Women ex-combatants often face distinct barriers to economic reincorporation. It is therefore essential to continue integrating gender-sensitive approaches that address gendered challenges and ensure equitable economic participation of both women and men (e.g., caring responsibilities that limit full participation in the process).
- This study identified the lack of land access as a major obstacle to the implementation and long-term viability of productive projects. While beyond the ARN's control, ensuring the effective implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Reform established under the 2016 Peace Agreement is crucial to reincorporation success and addressing broader structural economic inequalities between rural and urban areas.
- Participants seem to have entered the process with uneven levels of understanding of what economic reincorporation entails, often expecting immediate financial returns. The gap between these expectations and reality often produces frustration and uncertainty amongst participants. Closer coordination between the ARN, the CNR,

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<sup>106</sup> Ayuda en Acción, "[Mujeres Tesis](#)".

Comunes, and other relevant institutions and better communication is therefore essential to properly manage the expectations of participants.

- Although the ARN has made crucial efforts to strengthen the collective component of reincorporation (e.g., through the promotion and consolidation of cooperatives), these initiatives continue to face challenges. Generally speaking, strengthening the organizational, associative and governance capacities of the ARN and other relevant entities is key. This includes adapting programming to improve the market positioning, commercial viability, and the ability of collective business initiatives to adapt effectively to territorial economies, as well as ensuring the necessary infrastructure and technical support for their long-term sustainability.
- Urban and rural settings present distinct challenges that often hinder the success of productive projects. Support strategies must therefore be tailored to the specific territorial characteristics of each location, providing participants with the technical, administrative, and skills-based support relevant to the areas in which they operate.

# MANAGING EXITS FROM ARMED CONFLICT



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