

BEYOND THE CHECKLIST: ADVANCING DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS FOR A NEW GENERATION THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GENDERED REINTEGRATION EXPERIENCES OF FORMER PKK GUERRILLAS

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Abstract

This study examines the reintegration trajectories of former Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) fighters in the absence of a formal disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) system, exploring how gender and political discourse shape post-conflict reintegration. It critically examines the traditional United Nations DDR model in the context of PKK's non-mission setting and reframes reintegration as a socially and politically situated process rather than a primarily technical one. The mixed-methods design draws on 20 semi-structured interviews with 12 former PKK fighters (six women and six men) and eight community leaders, alongside a large dataset of Turkish-language content published on X (formerly Twitter) between 2010 and 2025, analyzed for topic and sentiment using OpenAI's GPT-4o mini-model. The results show that disarmament occurred voluntarily and gradually without institutional recognition, while demobilization never developed as a systematic or state-sponsored process; former combatants instead relied on family support, informal labor markets, diaspora networks, and political connections to facilitate socioeconomic reintegration, though many reported significant declines in physical and psychological well-being. Drawing on feminist security

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theory, the study demonstrates that reintegration is deeply gendered, with female former combatants facing particular challenges and forms of exclusion. By integrating the personal experiences of former PKK fighters with broader societal and elite discourse, the study advances a new-generation understanding of reintegration and disarmament, arguing that it should be seen as a socially and politically negotiated process shaped by local context, gender relations, and public perceptions rather than a standardized technical intervention.

Keywords: *feminist security theory-based, Türkiye, Kurdish Question, Turkish Community, gender analysis, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration.*

Introduction

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) has been employed for more than three decades as a central mandate verified and supported by United Nations, to manage post conflict transitions in different contexts with the hope of reducing the risk of renewed violence and extremism. There are many samples of the experience starting from Namibia 1989 when UN for the first time involved in the process through its observers. And this led to the voluntary demobilization of irregular armed forces in El Salvador (Reufer 2005). Nevertheless, most of the frameworks of DDR have been designed and implemented in mission settings, after peace agreements signed in post conflict areas, leaving a significant policy gap, applying it to armed groups or non-state actors in non-mission settings. Kurdistan Workers Party most commonly known as (PKK) or in Kurdish language (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) with 41 years of large scale and sustained armed struggle, and three thousand to seven thousand active guerrillas, thousands if not millions of supporters, drawn from multiple countries including; Iraq, Iran, Syria and Türkiye, represents a complex case to DDR in non-mission settings (Bruno 2007; Mumford 2021). PKK as Kurdish militant political organization with Marxist-Leninist ideology founded by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978, its structure, ideological evulsion, the context it is active in and it's regional ties can challenge the conventional assumptions of DDR (Bruno 2007). This study seeks to interrogate conventional Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration framework adopted by United Nations in non-mission context of PKK. Combining the quantitative social media analysis and qualitative interviews, the study examines unfold of reintegration in the absence of formal DDR framework, and the way both gender and political discourses shape the post-conflict outcomes in PKK setting. Moreover, United Nations Integrated DDR standards employed in the study as comparative benchmark, with the development and advancement of Next Generation of DDR, which re-conceptualized reintegration as politically and socially embedded process in society, rather than a technical process.

The study holds great position for both theoretical and empirical factors. The main reason is the eventual disengagement of guerrillas, which is already accruing. There are different forms of it including, group-based disengagement as it happened after 2000, which more than one hundred guerrillas disarmed, and individual defection which happens occasionally. What is more salient in this context is, former guerrillas, who decide to disarm and return to civil life. They return to an environment which lacks

DDR and it is highly polarized and securitized. They face sever challenges, including social stigmatization, legal invisibility and economic instability. These obstacles appear everywhere the guerrillas disarm, but they are acute in non-mission settings such as IKR. This happens because of the geographical location of the region which located in North of Iraq, sharing borders with Iran, Syria and Turkey and national tie, which is land of Kurdish nation, with majority of the people speaking Kurdish and a Kurdish system and legal framework. Moreover, majority of the guerrillas disarm and intend to stay there. At the societal level, sometimes unfavorable public discourse challenges them in IKR. Furthermore, lack of legal statue and documentation and poor access to sustainable live hoods are out there. In addition, adverse and hostile public narratives further challenge their retunes, especially in Türkiye. For instance, analysis of 5,225 Xs (formerly known as Tweets) published in X (former Twitter) social media platform between 2010 to 2025, reveals that Turkish public portrait PKK guerrillas as terrorists, threatening Türkiye's national security. The language used in the Xs is characterized by aggressive language patterns, social dissatisfaction, and calls for punishment of the guerrillas. Finally, such a discursive society, challenges the successful reintegration process and increase the chance of remobilization over time.

The core claim of this study and the argument advanced in the study is that, the absence of context specific DDR framework, tailored for PKK guerrillas in mission or non-mission settings constitutes a critical security gap in the settings the party exists in, in one side. In the other side, when guerrillas disarm individually or in group face severe challenges including, psychological distress, long-term economic vulnerabilities, long time social exclusion, mainly in the first four years of their disengagement of the party. It worth mentioning that, the pressures more pronounced among former female guerrillas, those prolonged exposure to the war and fighting in battlefield, creates lasting social and psychological affects, that challenge the reintegration models. This shows that, without DDR framework tailored for PKK, context specific DDR tools, and gender sensitive DDR programs with the use of the principles of Next generation of DDR, the risk of reactivation, local insecurity, and social marginalization increases. These conditions challenges security in local, national and regional level of Türkiye and IKR (Tziarras and Gul 2026).

Employing a mixed method research design; the study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, with the objective of designing a gender responsive PKK specific DDR framework in non-mission settings with the use of principles of Next generation of DDR. The empirical data includes 20 in depth interviews (IDIs) with formers senior guerrillas of PKK (six male and six females with minimum ten years of rolling as active combatants from Kurdistan region of Iraq (IKR) and Türkiye. And eight community leaders with extensive professional background and knowledge of PKK, including law and military experts, academicians, journalists, social leaders, political activists of both genders (male and female). And analyzing of 5,255 Xs published in variant occasions from 2010 to 2025 by different accounts including normal people, political and governmental leaders of Türkiye and 10 accounts of 10 most popular media outlets of the Türkiye in Turkish language on PKK in X social media. The findings of the study demonstrate a pressing need of PKK tailored gender sensitive DDR approach with ability of going beyond the traditional non mission

setting DDR frameworks. But with ability of creating an environment which makes legal reintegration, social preparedness, physical support, economic stabilization, psychological habitation, and political & system preparedness possible.

The study proceeds a literature review of the existing literature on DDR, implemented samples, PKK's background, ideology, and evolution, the local and regional context PKK acting in, it also highlights the key empirical and theoretical gaps. It will be followed by theoretical framework guiding the analysis of the study, and detail tailored discussion of the methodology and design. The following section uncovers the analysis and findings of both qualitative and quantitative data with particular attention to gender.

The Evolution of DDR from unsystematic practice to context tailored strategic framework

"Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are at the heart of successful peacebuilding" stated former secretary general of United Nations Kofi Annan, addressed UN Security Council on Mar 23, 2000 in open debate with 31 member states on maintenance of peace and security in the world and post-conflict peace building process. The remark Annan made was at a time when conflicts in the world were internal and the Council had been working on reviewing the lessons learned from the operations in Kosovo, Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor and Sierra Leone. (United Nations 2000a). 25 years later, following multiple conceptual revisions (2009/2014, 2017, and 2019) DDR continue to function in process of stabilizing post-conflict areas (United Nations 2000b). Yet, conflict landscapes all around the world, marked by existence of armed groups and non-state actors created unsolved conflicts in different regions. This challenged DDR as a mission-centric framework, and has generated time bound need of rethinking DDR, beyond the traditional settings. Kurdistan workers party presents a paradigmatic case study, to investigate the framework, limitations and possibilities of implementing DDR on. To be able to situate this inquiry within a rational framework, this section explains the conceptual foundation of DDR and its evolution, with particular attention to gender sensitive DDR in non-mission settings, and their emergence. Moreover, it examines how this type of DDR can intersect with regional context, organizational structure and ideological evolution of PKK.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) is one of the crucial frameworks in peace process initiatives, with ability to make impact on post-conflict stability. Although seemingly born yesterday, but it holds historical roots (Rodríguez-Castellón 2024; Mazurana, McKay, Carlson and Kasper 2002). The analysis of the historical roots shows that recognition of DDR started from ancient Room, when they used the crude forms of DDR for the veterans. For instance, they distributed farm-lands and recruited them to army to support them in reintegration process. There is evidence of implementation of DDR programs in the beginning of 20th century after the end of Boer war between Republic of Boer and British Empire in 1902 (Lamb 2008).

The World Wars made great change in the vision of the experts of reintegration process, because noticeable number of solders demobilized after both World Wars,

great numbers of the found reintegration process challenging and re-activated in to armed groups. Germany is one of the noticeable examples, when first World War resulted in deployment of large number of solders, the government failed in collecting the guns and support of them in reintegration. Short time after war, the guns used in partisan struggles and the solders joined armed groups and re-activated. Furthermore, those who did not join armed groups, they failed to integrate and emerge in the democratic structure the country planed. This experience of failure was an incentive to US and pushed to further improve the practices of demobilization and reintegration, especially after World War II. So, the country started demobilization in stages, the solders offered pre-exams to re-join school or high education. The main objective at that time was to avid influx solders into labor market and civil communities, with hope of reduction of violence. In contrast of what happened in Germany after World War I, the demobilization experience of US veterans witnessed less setbacks and challenges (Banholzer 2014).

Establishment of UN in October 24, 1945 after international instabilities of World War II, marked a new phase of conflict resolutions and peace building in the world. It took UN and states almost half century (45) years to emerge Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in late 1980s to Early 1990s. The size and the scope of the framework developed with the growth the international peace building efforts witnessed. For instance in UN observer group 1989 conducted voluntary disarmant and demobilization of Nicaragua Resistance, through the Toncontin Agreement. The same year 13, 000 combats from Peoples liberation Army of Namibia were disarmed and demobilized. And 30,000 combatants from the forces of South Africa disarmed and demobilized. Following what happened in Nicaragua and Namibia, UN Transitional Authority Program in Cambodia implemented in 1992. Lessons learned from the Disbarment and demobilization process revealed that, both DDs can not guarantee the permanent de-activation of combats, they have to be given new opportunities to start over again, with the purpose of lessen their interest to re-activate in long-term. In the early stages of realization of this fact, UNs was first international body to adapt the strategy, and start Reintegration to Disarmament and Demobilization framework. They did this while supported resettlement of combatant in Democratic Republic of Congo. 2000 onwards was new phase in the practice of DDR , because 2000 onwards because instead of single country, multi country operations of DDR started. For instance for the first time in 2002 Multi Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program embraced seven countries in the Interlacustrine Region of Africa (Great Lakes Region). The Program led by World Bank, Multi Doner Trust Fund and IDA funds with \$500 millions. (Banholzer 2014; World Bank 2010).

This type of peace intervention is now expanding its scope. According to DDR Compendium of the projects of IOM (2010-2017) in the past 25 years the organization has supported more than 120 projects in 30 different countries with particular focus to Sub-Saharan Africa and Colombia. The projects assisted the combatant and the communities the combatant returned to, recover from conflict primarily through the reintegration activities and long-term strategies that guarantee the de-activation of the combatants and social peace in society (IOM 2018; Dash and Haseen 2026). Equally important, DDR in non-mission settings within the countries were no official UN peace

keeping operations exist missioned, case of Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo Indonesia, Central African Republic, Uganda, Niger and Somalia are existing samples (Banholzer 2014).

The grammar of peace building: what is DDR?

DDR generally regarded as a tool managing post conflict transitions. With objective of supporting combatants disarm - demobilize and revert to civil life. And keep post conflict societies social and security peace safe, as stabilization mechanism. It also worth highlighting that, with all the measures and detailed definitions given of the framework by DDR experts mandated by UN agencies, there is still ambiguity in the implementation of DDR, for instance some DDR programs and tools launched and implemented while hostilities were sting in place. While other programs and tools of DDR launched after the sign of peace agreements . Some others launched and implemented after termination of war without resolution of a peace initiative or a peace agreement, as it happened in Central African Republic. There are also samples of DDR launched after the termination of a peace agreement. And It is not obvious that, noticeable number of peace agreements signed does not contain references to DDR. According to the Peace Agreement Database of Upsala Conflict Data Program (1989 - 2005) out of 148 programs only 63 (43%) peace agreements referenced DDR , and the rest which makes 85 peace agreements did not mention and contain DDR as program. This is not always the case, because out of 40 DDR implemented, 14 of them operated without any international peace measures and missions. (Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2006). In addition, all frameworks designed does not contain all three components. Some, countries only adapt exclusively the first two DDs, some others skip the DDs and focus on reintegration process of the combatants. For instance, Rwanda and Indonesia gave focus to reintegration (Banholzer 2014).

Given the diversity of the perspectives of DDR and complexities of the implementations and contexts the framework will be operated in, it is time to discuss what it fundamentally is? What are the forms it takes? The contexts it rule under? And under which condition it will succeed? And highlight the challenges that constrain its effectiveness. Different scholars define DRR from different perspectives, but most verified definitions come from United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. According to operational guide to the integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration standards (2010) Disarmament is process of collecting, documenting, control of the guns, ammunition, heavy weapons of the armed groups, take out the guns in the hands of the combatants, some times in the hands of civilians and small communities. It may include, initial programs of arms management programs and tools.

Demobilization is the formal process of discharging combatants—who served in armed groups or armed forces—from service. The initial stage of this process encompasses everything from the registration and preliminary processing of combatants at temporary centers to their large-scale assembly in designated areas or camps. The second—and final—stage of demobilization involves providing a package of support measures to the demobilized combatants.

This support package is known as ‘reinsertion’ (initial resettlement). It is a form of transitional assistance provided to demobilized combatants prior to the start of the reintegration process. It ensures that the basic needs of the combatants themselves and their family members (where applicable) are met—including the provision of clothing, food, shelter, and medical care—while also facilitating preparation for the transition to civilian life, short-term training, legal support, and assistance in accessing the labor market (e.g., regarding employment). Although the terms “reinsertion” and “reintegration” are sometimes confused, there is a distinction between them: while reinsertion consists of short-term financial and material aid, reintegration is a long-term process involving the economic, social, and political development of demobilized combatants, as well as the preparation of society and state institutions to accept them in order to ensure sustainable outcomes. This process has no fixed timeframe and unfolds within society and the state system; it forms part of the national action plan and the process of ensuring social and political stabilization, while also fostering further development (United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration 2010).

The traditional definitions of the components of DDR by UN and its history can give simple image of it, but to further understand it, it is important to discuss the evolve of DDR with the development of global ideas of peace and security. Early 2000s mark new phase of UN peace keeping missions, because they have been given border responsibilities. This further expanded DDR framework, but this expansion, did not went without critiques, because many experts were seeing this expansion as a factor of limiting DDR, especially regarding the time frame, many felt that the objectives of DDR are unreachable and the goals are unrealistic. With all the critiques made and continuation of DDRs all around the globe, in 2010 UN recognized a new style of DDR, called “Second Generation”. It was build on the old principles of DDR, yet influenced by security reform in the sates and peacebuilding in the societies. It simply shifted DDR from a frame work with objective of “ending war” to “peace building”. The argument behind this is in DDR the focus is mainly to breaking up the armed force or group and support them in the reintegration process, and the combatants were seeing as “spoilers who might re-activated in any time, while in Second Generation of DDR focus is given to rebuilding the community, creating sustainable economy and economic opportunities, improving the social relationships and social peace. This approach mainly supported by UN peacekeeping department and UNDP.

The Second generation of DDR become common after the conflicts happened in Balkans, Southeaste Asia and West & Central Africa. The conflicts in the regions were internal rather than between two or more states. It was difficult to make differentiate between civilians, combatants and rebels, even after the end of the war. In many cases the ceasefires and peace agreements were not able to stop the ongoing vionlance. The reason behind this was, the armed groups had international and regional ties, especially those who were involved in illegal trade such as weapons, minerals, human trafficking, and drugs. For instance, in 2004 rebel uprisings happened in Haiti, leading a political chaos in the country, economical and humanitarian crises. The necessity of the change and Second Generation of DDR appeared because the armed groups were urban gangs who have relation with political elites of country and organized crime groups. This

pushed UN missions in Haiti to create a new approach, titled, 'Community Violence Reduction' approach. It focus on crime prevention in communities rather than old school military demobilization. The results came out from the implementation of the approach pushed UNs re-think of the implementation of DDR in the modern conflicts all around the world (Muggah and O'Donnell 2015).

In the last 10 years, once more DDR witnessed changes, because peace and security experts realized the raise in activities and types of non-state actors in different regions, and difference between the conflicts newly emerged non-state actors create with the old ones, finally the need of practical guidelines align with the modern conflicts, as result DDR framework, DDR programs and DDR tools became more flexible. However, IDDRS remained the same. For instance between 2000 and 2010, 20,000 active combatants and members of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) returned to their own country. Meanwhile around 2,000 combatants refused to disarm and remain active and continue committing violence activities. In 2012, UN supported a forceful military approach to pressure them in the context of "Robust Peacekeeping". Then they remain with no choice only to join DDR. This revealed a fact that some non-state actors require "stick then carrot" strategy. Somalia is another sample of the necessity of change in DDR and sometimes use "stick then carrot" strategy. After long battle African Union Forces could retake Mogadishu from Al-Shabaab in 2011. After the failure of Al-Shabaab and lose of the territory, ordinary combatants of the group asked for help to leave the group. As a solution to the problem Somali government with support of UN agencies created "disengage" programs for the Al-Shabaab members and combatants. In the framework of the program they created transition centers with heavy involvement of the Somali intelligence, existing life threats on the demobilized ones and continuation of the war with Al-Shabaab. The nature of the conflict and the DDR/If DDR was different from former ones because the demobilized ones were in need of protection, secure location and time to start negotiation with their clans to accept the. It was less about economic opportunities and development, but rather it was about motivating them to abandon violence and make their communities accept them.

After the NATO's intervention in Libya, after the start of Arab Spring, the state collapsed. As result of lack of a central authority, there was no control over the weapons in the country, with all the mess on ground, successful DDR was impossible. Instead, UN started a Damage Control strategy. They supported militias store their weapons safely. The lesson learned from what happened in Libya was without basic political agreement and security agreements DDR cannot work. Other samples that show the implementation of DDR in different context and hopeful scenario is Mali in 2015. DDR included in the very beginning of peace negotiations, and the DDR experts were part of the peace mediations. Moreover they, supported the armed groups (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad & High Council for the Unity of Azawad) allowing them to remain armed under the UN monitored ceasefire. Meanwhile, the Community Violence Reduction approach implemented in the cantonment regions, to minimize the both personal and organized violence.

The samples mentioned support the fact that, the new generation of DDR is in need of development and flexibility, because of the dissimilarities of the contexts DDR is

implemented in and difference in the type of the non-state actor and the conflict they create. Here is the importance of Next Generation of DDR appears, because it initially starts earlier and sometimes before the peace agreement or it will be implemented alongside the continuation of military operations. It is not always voluntary, and operates in unstable contexts. Moreover, it shifts DDR from a technical checklist to a political negotiation peace process. And its teams are part of the peace negotiations. It will be part of the peace talks, security, social and political reform, justice, finally state building. In addition it tries not to label members of the armed groups as Ex-Combatants or fighters, rather encourages them to have new identity as local leader, worker, parents or community member. It also worth mentioning, that even the Next Generation of DDR could be challenged, because today's armed groups are criminalized, lacking clear political goals, some linked to terrorism and fragmented. This makes the implementation of DDR far more complex than former post-war settings (Muggah and O'Donnell 2015).

Post-Conflict illusions in the Middle East: practice of DDR in the absence of settlement

Historically, Middle East presents complex case of DDR experiences, its challenging political, ethnic and military landscape constrains the effectiveness of DDR framework. Unlike ordinary settings where DDR follows peace agreements and more quite landscape Middle East's conflicts and political tensions often have ability to highlight the limitation of DDRs because the conflicts of the region are characterized by ongoing violence, non-state armed groups, states ruling inside states, political legitimization of armed groups, religion and ethnic conflicts, and strong network of the armed groups with regional characters. (Sawani 2017). Most of the peace and security scholars argue that DDR frameworks are insufficient in the context of Middle East, because they must be adapted to lack of clear post conflict transitions strategy, state capacity and security agreements. It is also worth mentioning that DDR in the Middle East viewed as political intervention integrated to security reforms by the state, good governance and restructure of the government bodies, and long-terms strategies of social and political peacebuilding. (Wehrey 2018).

While Middle East has never experienced fully DDR framework succeeded, two attempts of the implementation of DDR stand out, Yemen and Iraq. Both samples never gained traction. The situation in Yemen consistently sparks controversy and lively debate; notably, Jachnik (2020) examined the failure of attempts to implement a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program in the country. He identifies two categories of armed actors in the country, which includes; Houthis (أنصار الله الحوثيون), local rebel military group who controls most of the areas of Northern Yemen. The internationally recognized government of the country's army and the militias allied with it with organized in forms of tribal defense, they are empowered by Saudi Arabia collation, and they most popular among Yemen's youth. Because of the armed conflicts and armed activities of this groups almost 24 million civilians are in need of humanitarian aid. Moreover, because of their activities Yemen globally ranked Third in prevalence of Armed Groups, because 54 guns are per 100 people in the country. The conflict context of the country never allowed classical DDR, however

UN's DDR section office worked in the country as part of the Special Envoy of UN Secretary General to Yemen. Their roles was always around mediation and advisory. Moreover, UN DDR Bulletin reveals that, in UN mission to support Hudaydah agreement in 2016 and 2017 included DDR components, within a political mission framework. But all the attempts made in the country never succeeded. (United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration [UN DDR] 2025). It is same for Iraq, because attempts of DDR could not succeed in the country. The DDR of Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) most commonly known as (الحشد الشعبي) or (al-Hashd al-Shaabi) and Kurdish Peshmarga forces is noticeable sample of this failure after defeat of ISIS in 2017, and DDR of Kurdish Peshmarga's after 1991 uprising in Kurdistan region of Iraq are noticeable samples.

July 9, 2017, Iraqi Primminister Haider al-Abadi has formally announced the victory of his country over so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). He waved Iraq flag among his troops saying; this is collapse of the state of terror" (BBC News 2017). After almost four year of fighting, thousands of combats including combatants of PMF and Kurdish Peshmargas started to return to their local communities. Starting from PMF, when ISIS launched its armed activities in the end of the spring of 2014, Iraq armed forces could not defeat this new enemy, they left many towns and communities living in the towns undefended. To address this security gap, on Jun 13, 2014 Grand-Ayatollah Al-Sistani, Iraq's most influential Shia clerk issued a fatwa. He called upon all able-bodied Iraqi males to take up arms against ISIS. After this fatwa, hundreds of thousands responded. The point was, they did not join Iraq's formal security forces, instead the gathered in group, they turned to non-state actors. Initially, many of the volunteers re-activated and joined militia groups existed, many of which associated with political figures, political parties or maybe regional actors. Only small group of them remain with no political ties, and their duty was to protect Shia sites. In Nov 26, 2016 the law to formalized PMF as part of Iraq's security forces passed in Iraq's council of representatives (Parliament), later on approved by Iraq's former president Fuad Masum. Between Grand-Ayatollah Al-Sistani in 2014 and defeat of ISIS in 2016, PMF forces grew from 1 to 707 different groups with Shia majority, and very small number of Sunni groups. In Mar 2018, Haidar al-Abadi issued a decree to incorporated PMF as Iraq's defense system and security forces. The decree granted the combatant salary and other financial benefits. Those who are in the age of 18 and 25, who must graduate from collage of staff of defense ministry or command collage to hold rank of lieutenant or above. The first step of DDR of PMF started from 2018, when National Reconciliation Committee claimed, after ISIS war 43,000 fighters of PMF would like to demobilize, but it does not seem right. On the number of PMF fighters, according to prime minister Abdi's office information released in 2018, the number of PMF fighters was 152,000 with 120,000 receiving salaries from Iraq government, and 32,000 receiving salaries from other sources. However, Iraq government same year started to allocated another 30,000 fighters of PMF. According to a budgetary expert by 2019, another 30 to 36,00 fighters added to PMF with their allocations. This created a strong network out of PMF, and steps toward DDR of the force again remain critical to the time of this research.

This is almost the same for Kurdish Peshmargas, they are part of the formal defense system of Kurdistan region of Iraq. Their number was estimated to 190 to 250,000 Peshmargas in 2015, while in 2019 their number estimated as 300,000 Peshmargas. In addition to this, there were people who were voluntarily joined Peshmarga force to fight against ISIS. However, Peshmarga is legally defense system of Kurdistan region of Iraq, and internationally verified, but they are divided into factions on the basis of their political agenda. One faction related to Patriotic union of Kurdistan and the other faction have ties with Kurdistan Democratic Party. Back to 1994, the two forces fought each other in civil war. In 2006 after four years of the 2003 invasion the efforts to unify Peshmarga forces started, the first effort ended up in unification agreement to demobilize them, in 2009 after three years of the agreement the two Peshmarga ministries one of KDP and the other one of PUK, were organized in one ministry under Kurdistan regional government, named Ministry of Peshmarga affairs. The ministry as first step created 14 integrated brigades of 40,000 combats. Yet, almost 100,000 Peshmargas were out of the authority of the ministry. They were known as (70 Force tied to PUK) and (80 force ties with KDP). Each one of these forces retain its salary and armed structure, with headquarter where the party most ruling. In addition, both parties have their own, security force, counter-terrorism forces and intelligence. The reform in these forces went critically, and the fall of ISIS further challenged the reforms in Ministry of Peshmarga. For instance, in the very beginning of 2017, Ministry of Peshmarga (KRG) adopted a 31 point package. The package includes commitments to unify 70s and 80s forces. The Oct 16, 2017 incidents after Kurdistan Region Referendum, which resulted in reduction of 40% of Kurdish controlled territory, loss of Kirkuk's oil fields which were under Peshmarga's and Bagdad's order to retake control of Iraq's disputed territories, further challenged the reforms, because the incidents not only generated further tension between Erbil and Bagdad, but cause ignited internal tension between PUK and KDP. Both parties accuse each other of betrayal and working with enemies of IKR Kurds. This tensions now and then push calls for re-division of IKR to PUK and KDP territories as it was before 2006. This made DDR of Peshmarga forces further challenging, and till now never succeeded (Parry and Burlinghaus 2019; Al-Khafaji 2019).

Despite the limitations of DDR frameworks and failure of the attempts mentioned in Middle East, the prospective DDR of PKK remains a complex and critical case. With more than four decades of armed struggle with Türkiye, being active in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Türkiye, having a dynamic character and structure, PKK remains a critical case for DDR, especially with the necessity of design of gender-sensitive DDR framework in non-state mission-setting. This research is an attempt to address this analytical gap, in Middle East, a region whose security and political trajectories have historical root and shaped, will continue to shape in the future (Mojtahedi, Bolhuis and van Wijk 2025).

Beyond mission based DDR: addressing reintegration in context of PKK

The DDR framework was international designed as a mechanism with ability to enable transition from war to peace or from post-conflict situation to sustainable peace when non-state armed actors exist, under the mandate of UN peace missions. However, the

experience of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) guerrillas and the guerrilla warfare demonstrates the fact that in Middle East and all around the world many non-state armed groups operate in different contexts, where mission based DDR programs and tools are absent. The nature of the armed groups like PKK and the context they operate in will challenge the traditional DDR standards, because capture of the reality of armed groups and complex contexts like one PKK is operating in, not easy task to do. In this study PKK is treated as non-state armed group, mobilized in November 26 – 27, 1978, announced its existing in July 1979 in Türkiye. (Jongerden 2023). The groups ideology is treated as, Marxists – Leninist national liberation movement with goals of building independent Kurdistan with a classless society till 2000s. Then change in ideology of the party to build ecological democratic confederalist society with the aim of securing Kurdish peoples constitutional and civil rights, creation of democratic autonomy in the country, Pushing Türkiye to non-centralized system. (Yarkin 2015). To analyze the context the study uses Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration with focus to Next Generation DDR framework outlined between years 2017 and 2023. Moreover, to understand the female guerrillas in PKK context, the study draws feminist security theory. Which explains how gender is capable of shaping security experiences, create threats and opportunities in both conflict and post conflict contexts.

The study adapts IDDRs with focus on Next generation of DDR, and it shifts the focus from DDR in post-conflict contexts to conflict contexts and fragmented conflict contexts like the context PKK is operating in, which surrounded by regional war, legal, political, religious and ethnical conflict and internal armed struggle in Iraq, Türkiye, Syria and Iran, with its headquarters in Kurdistan region of Iraq. It emphasizes on sustainability, inclusivity and political and social structures the framework processing in. While demobilization and reintegration programs has been absent in the context of PKK since the very beginning, the framework is able to provide standards of evaluation, how informal reintegration deviate or reflect IDDRs and Next Generation of DDR. Meanwhile it allows the study to examine how principles of the framework could support reintegration of combatants even in conflict setting/non-mission settings. Moreover, by using them as normative standards, the analysis of the study shows micro gaps between lived reality of the Ex- guerrillas of PKK and their reintegration process without a formal program and DDRs theoretical side, how IDDRS might be adapted in conflict context, where traditional involvement is absent.

To understand the experience of former female PKK guerrillas, and their reintegration process as female combatant, the study draws feminist security theory, it interrogates how gender roles in shaping the experiences of PKK female guerrillas in conflict contexts. Here the theory treated as an approach, which treats gender as lens to analyze, understand and address security challenges, rather than considering it as sub-topic in security studies. It argues, security topic and security challenges cannot be studied without consideration of gender lens, women's affect, and ways which gender shapes and reshapes experience in conflict and post conflict contexts. And the ways, how gender shapes and re-shapes relations, human rights, economy, militarization, political situations and political economy. (Sjoberg 2016). Through the lens of the theory, and treating gender as analytical variable, the study explores, how being a female ex-guerrilla shapes demobilization and reintegration experience and influences

access to economic and social opportunities. Meanwhile the study, compares experiences of six female Ex-guerrillas of PKK with six male Ex-guerrillas of the same group, it also examines gender differences in terms of the challenges and supports, social adaptation, societal acceptance outside formal reintegration program.

Practice of DDR in non-mission settings is essentially political, because most of the time it is state leading. The social and political embedding of reintegration of PKK guerrillas, which operates in ongoing conflict setting, social perceptions and contested legitimacy, especially labeling them as “terrorist” Turkish social media (X; former Twitter) and main stream media, shapes the challenges and opportunities while reintegration in civil society. Collecting 5,000 Xs on (X; former Twitter) published by main stream media, by ordinary people, political and governmental leaders of Türkiye, and 8 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with communities’ leaders with background of PKK provides insight to local social and political conditions going on in Türkiye on ground. On the basis of this perspective DDR can be reconceptualized as socially and politically embedded framework, not distinct intervention specialized for post conflict contexts. This also demonstrates that, reintegration of Ex-combatants is a process, shaped by community dynamics, social context, and informal initiatives of the states. Here the role of gender appears, because it allows the analysis show how gender dynamics can interact with social contexts, political situations, legal framework and ongoing conflict, then shape the opportunities and challenges of Ex-combatants while reintegration.

A mixed method analysis of reintegration of PKK ex-combatants

The study adapts mixed method research design (qualitative and quantitative) to examine the non-mission setting DDR of guerrillas of Kurdistan workers party (PKK). The reason behind adapting this method is, the method fits the analysis of DDR framework in conflict settings like PKK, where lack programmatic data, and unfolding of the reintegration process depends on collection of fragmented data, driven from legally, systematically and politically constrained. Combination of both qualitative and quantitative data is only way to cover both individual level integration of former PKK guerrillas and socio-political context the reintegration occur. Moreover, the research theoretically uses Next generation of DDR, which conceptualizes the framework as process extending beyond post-conflict context, rather it is context-sensitive and adaptive. It also employs IDDR standards as normative benchmark. It also adapts feminist security theory, which conceptualizes gender as a variable, with ability of shaping and reshaping reintegration experience.

The qualitative data is 20 semi-structured interviews/ in-depth interviews conducted with two types of participants. The first type includes 12 former PKK guerrillas (6 male and 6 female), to be able to do gender comparative analysis. The youngest age among the interviewed former guerrillas is 39 years (born in 1985) and the oldest age is 63 years old (born in 1962), with active year of been guerrillas ranged from less than a year and more than 23 years. And with earliest mobilizing year ranked 1995 and oldest mobilizing year as 1977. Second group includes 8 community leaders with strong knowledge of PKK, and social and political context the group is operating in and the individuals reintegrated in. They are four types of community leaders,

including; journalists, academicians, military and law experts, and social leaders. The participants of both groups selected by purposive sampling. For instance, targeting former guerrillas reintegrated in Kurdistan region of Iraq and EU countries. The main them of the interviews was; social and political background of the combat, their experience in the armed group, disarmament and demobilization process, reintegration experience, their identity change and gender constrains. Giving the sensitivity of the topic and the context the former-guerillas and community leaders are living in, the interviews conducted under strong ethical consideration, which includes protection of the identity of the participants, and their consent of the usage of the data.

The study also incorporates quantitative data, which includes analysis of Turkish language Xs (formerly known as Tweets) published in X (formerly known as Tweeter) social media, from 2010 to 2025. The research uses two sample research design, seeks to examine elite preference (political leaders and media) and public. The research also uses automatic harvesting from 5,50 tweets, published by general users and manually selected 206 tweets, published on verified accounts of political leaders, media outlets of the country and accounts of the political parties of the contra on X. The vore analytical engine was OpenAI'S GPT – 40 mini model, it performed nuanced sentiment and thematic classification. The component of analytical methodology was the application of bespoke Influence Score Algorithm. It is weighted metric designed to prioritize impactful voices within the dataset. The algorithm calculated a score (S) for each post using the formula $S = 0.6 * (F / F_{max}) + 0.4 * (L / L_{max})$. In the formula F presents the users follow the account, L presents the posts likes count, each normalized against the maximum values in the dataset (F_{max} , L_{max}). By assigning a 60% weight to the user's inherent reach (followers) and a 40% weight to the content's received engagement (likes), this formula ensured that the final analysis were not a mere tally of opinions but a representation of the conversation as amplified by its most authoritative and resonant voices.

Together, the theoretical framework and the data collected in mixed method, demonstrate DDR as politically and socially embedded framework processing in non-mission settings like Kurdistan workers party, not as post conflict intervention.

Normative Adequacy of IDDRS in Non-Mission Settings: Assessment of Next Generation of DDR in Kurdistan Workers Party Context

Imagine 12 years girls, living in a village of Kurdistan region of Iraq in the early 1990s, leaving her family in early snowy morning of a cold winter in 1997, deciding to be guerilla, arriving to a PKK headquarters in very late snowy night. Spending 7 years within the group, growing with them and becoming guerrilla, leaving the group at 19, and returning to her family. Challenged by family, system and social norms, forced into arranged marriage, and suffering from its consequences. Starting to rebuilt her life, and adapting to a life she ever wished to live in. Someone must be very talented and adaptable to be able to address all this challenges.

This section examines the normative adequacy of DDRs, based on the experiences of 12 PKK former guerrillas (6 male and 6 females) in non-mission settings (Kurdistan region of Iraq and Europe countries). The analysis of the research is conducted within the framework of the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration,

giving focus to the Next Generation of DDR (2017 - 2023) which is known with three main lines (flexibility, adaptability and inclusion) in non-mission settings most of the time in conflict areas, yet producing functional results. The research examines the experience of PKK guerrillas; because the party and its armed group are one of the groups reflect the core conditions of Next Generations of DDR. They are active in conflict environment, and their former guerrillas integrated in the absence of DDR framework. Moreover, the party adopts the concept of Democratic Confederalism, which was systematized and politically operationalized by its founding leader Abdullah Öcalan. In his book titled Democratic Confederalism, Öcalan defines the term as a non-state social paradigm highly based on participation of communities in the frame of decentralized state. In this model state or high-level power's main role is to coordinate communities will, because decision-making power is in the hand of local communities. The core connection between Öcalan's Democratic Confederalism and adaptation of Next generation of DDR is Democratic Confederalism intends to reframe DDR from a state centered and international mission demilitarization framework to society centered but political transformation project. (Öcalan 2011). However, PKK with the leadership of Öcalan adopts Democratic Confederalism, but in his, "call for peace and democracy" issued on Feb 27, 2025, Öcalan for the first time mentions concept of "Democratic Society" and calls for "Voluntary Disarmament of PKK", which is again it contains elements of DDR with focus of Next Generation of PKK.

The analysis draws 12 semi structured interviews with former combatants of PKK (6 male and 6 female) to be able to do gender comparative analysis. The youngest age among the interviewed former guerrillas is 39 years (born in 1985) and the oldest age is 63 years old (born in 1962), with active year of been guerrillas ranged from less than a year and more than 23 years. And with earliest mobilizing year ranked 1995 and oldest mobilizing year as 1977. After disarmament process, 10 of them reintegrated in Kurdistan region of Iraq and the rest demobilized in EU countries including Germany and Netherlands. The ex-combatants interviewed are from Kurdish residential areas of Türkiye (5), Syria (1) and Kurdistan region of Iraq (6). Their identity is Ethnic identity is Kurdish except for one of them, who is Kurdish Alevi from Kurdish residential areas of Türkiye. Their level of education before joining PKK varies, five of them finished primary level or they were in primary level, four of them either finished secondary school or they were in secondary school, two of them are holding associated degree and one of them holds Bachelor's Degree. In addition, three of them (two female and one male) finished Bachelor's Degree after their reintegration. Their marital status before joining PKK divided into married and single, one out of 12 married before joining PKK, which is a male combat, the rest all were single. But their marital status differs after reintegration, for instance eight of them married after reintegration (five male and three female) and three of them remain single (two male and one female). 10 of the ex-guerrillas interviewed have children (one of them have children before marriage and nine of them have children after reintegration).

The analysis of the data, apply a comparative logic, which is IDDDR principles, their normative expectation, their observed practice, the normative gap and interpretation of the Next generation of DDR including adaptation and functionality. The details explained in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparative assessment of IDDRS normative principles against observed practice in the reintegration of PKK ex-combatants

#	IDDR Principles	IDDRS	Observed Practice	Normative Gap	NG/DDR Interpretation / Concept
		Normative Expectation/s			
1	Disarmament & Demobilization voluntariness	Disarmament and Demobilization should be voluntary rooted, yet formally managed by related parties. Moreover, it should be institutionally recognized.	Disarmament happened gradually yet voluntary basis, driven by various factors. For instance, 11 out of 12 participants disarmed and disbanded as result of internal armed and political conflict inside the party. However, one female Ex-guerilla disbanded due to a social factor; her involvement in a romantic relationship with a fellow male guerilla, which contradicts the parties' internal regulations. Moreover, demobilization process never happened.	The demobilization mechanisms are absent	Consistent with the NG-DDRs and its recognition of informal exit pathways for Ex-combatants. For instance, in NG-DDR demonstrates that, disarmament can be achieved voluntarily in non-mission and conflict settings, without institutionalization and formal recognition. For instance, all PKK Ex-guerillas interviewed disarmed in the continuation of the armed conflict between the party Türkiye, in a region witnessed continues political and armed struggles like, fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Arab Spring, raise and fall of ISIS, Kurdistan region uprising in 1991, Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" (Woman, Life, Freedom) uprising in Iran in 2022, and many more.
2	Socio-economic Reintegration	Provision of necessary vocational training, supporting them and providing	As there was no formal DDR program in place when the PKK Ex-combatants disarmed, none of them received	Absence of DDR or organized economic support.	In NG of DDR state tailored and informal economic reintegration considered as adaptive substitutes. Moreover,

#	IDDR Principles	IDDRS Normative Expectation/s	Observed Practice	Normative Gap	NG/DDR Interpretation / Concept
		them with income, and assisting them to have access to employment.	formal economic assistance, neither in IKR, nor in Syria, Germany, and Netherlands. Consequently, economic reintegration received through informal channels. For instance, 6 out of 12 Ex-guerrillas depended on the free labor market, three out of 12 depended on their political network with PUK and KDP, two of 12 depended on their family support, and one out of 12 supported by PKK, because of the political engagement with the group. To achieve their economic independency they faced many challenges.		reintegration happens in existing economy. However, the DDR framework was absence and economical integration was hard to the PKK EX-guerrillas, but all of the participants have similar experience in the economic reintegration.
3	Psychosocial and physical Well-being	Access to psychological and social support	All 12 former combatants interviewed reported; they had no access to neither psychological nor physical services in formal basis. As there was no DDR framework in place, neither the host countries nor the state systems provided Ex-guerrillas well-being	Absence of psychosocial and physical DDR component	Psychosocial support considered as dimension requiring with intervention of the institutes in NG of DDR. This is similar to the experience of PKK Ex-Combatants interviewed, but still needs institutional intervention in case of the implementation of in conflict setting of

#	IDDR Principles	IDDRS Normative Expectation/s	Observed Practice	Normative Gap	NG/DDR Interpretation / Concept
			services following their disarmament. For instance, 11 out of 12 of the Ex-guerillas confirmed they had no access to well-being services, except for one who sought psychological support on personal basis. All of them reported, they experienced psychological severe challenges and trauma, particularly in the three years following the disarmament, they continue experiencing it.		PKK.
4	Community Rooted Reintegration	The community should be involved in support acceptance of the Ex-combatants and reduce the stigma.	In context the study has been done, no substantive reintegration happened, all Ex-guerillas interviewed described themselves as survivors who have been given right to live only because they are Kurdish, regardless of how they live. Eight out of 12 agreed they hide their background as combatants, only their immediate social network knows about their background, for different reasons,	Absence of formal community-based reintegration programs.	However, informal inclusion aligns with the framework and principles of NG of DDR, which gives focus to community-based reintegration, the reintegration process remains fragile, as exists in the case of Ex-combatants of PKK, they never experienced real reintegration. The combatants, the community and the system never been on the same page on reintegration.

#	IDDR Principles	IDDRS Normative Expectation/s	Observed Practice	Normative Gap	NG/DDR Interpretation / Concept
5	Institutional Coordination	Coordination involvement of state (Legal body & legislative executive institutions), international bodies and civil society actors	some because of the fear of retaliation, some because of the social view of society especially the female ones, others because of the security threats by both PKK and Türkiye. Five out of 12 have no legal statue and no access to legal rights, due to legal codes of Kurdistan region of Iraq, Since the context absence a formal legal framework, no coordination existed between state, legislative bodies, international bodies and civil society actors. States involvement particularly in Kurdistan region of Iraq is in a minimal level. For instance, Kurdistan regional governments involvement in support process is limited to giving the Ex-combats temporary presidentship, with no access to other legal papers as passport and national ID card.	Lack of DDR coordination.	It is state tailored DDR implemented under the NG of DDR framework and principles. It manages reintegration indirectly through the executive and legislative bodies of the country. However, it never happened in the context of the Ex-combatants of PKK, interviewed.
6	Inclusion & Nondiscrimination of the Ex-	There should be equal chance of access to the	All 12 Ex-guerrillas reported discrimination and inclusion of	Lack of DDR discrimination	NG of DDR considers No-discrimination and inclusion a context

#	IDDR Principles	IDDRS	Observed Practice	Normative Gap	NG/DDR
		Normative Expectation/s			Interpretation / Concept
	combatants.	reintegration support regardless of gender, ethnicity, political or religious background.	different levels and different types, sometimes faced different types in the same time. For example, 10 out of 12 faced direct discrimination of the basis of their race and their gender, 10 out of 12 faced indirect discrimination in the same time because of the policies and regulations of the places they disarmed in. Additionally, three out of 12 experienced harassment (all female). And 3 out of 12 reported experiencing victimization, because the reported in the discrimination, following their disarmament.	related program.	dependent and negotiated subject, rather than a programmatic subject. It aligns with the context of PKK and experience PKK Ex-combatants experienced.
7	Sustainability: Lowest risk of remobilization	The reintegration process should reduce risk of remobilization as much as possible	No evidence of remobilization witnessed among the interviewees, however no evidence of total demobilization witnessed.	Lack of Demobilization strategies, towards the sustainability.	However IDDRs indicates functional reintegration, and it is in consistent with NG of DDR expectations, but the experience of PKK Ex-combatants does not include this.

The analysis of the table reveals the structural difference between lived reality and experience of the PKK Ex-guerrillas interviewed and the IDDRs linear, frame and programmatic assumptions. This appears when we give focus to disarmament and demobilization, because disarmament happens, while demobilization never

experienced. For instance, IDDRs is a state recognized process working under international framework, with clear exit pathway, the PKK Ex-combatants describe the process as, “One foot out the door” and “its written all over my face”, uncovering the fact that following their disarmament, they did not experience demobilization, the process neither social nor politically real. “My disarmament process was gradual, I remember I joined PKK when I was 20, It was 1988, after five years of been active combat, I come to conclusion, this is not my way. I had different idea, different vision and different opinion. It took me 12 years to disarm. I disarmed in 2005. But I know this background remains with me forever! Not as something I ashamed off! No! I am proud of fighting for my nation! But the thing is, the live I lived psychologically, socially and politically will remain with me forever” SM12 describes his experience and background as guerrilla. This pattern illustrates of on the key insights of NG of DDR, which considers voluntariness of disarmament as non-institutionalized process to be effective. But it also demonstrates the sensitivity and criticalness of the context of PKK. The interviews demonstrated that, however no evidence of remobilization witnessed, but there is no prove of demobilization, because none of the Ex-guerillas interviewed experienced demobilization.

The socio-economic reintegration comparative analysis in the table shows how informal systems substituted in the absent of IDDR in the context of PKK. The Ex-guerillas achieved their economic survival through informal labor market, family support, political network in Kurdistan region of Iraq. In contrast in Germany and Netherlands they achieved it through migration linked labor programs. For instance, S2 is a female Ex-combatant, in her 50s living in Germany, she achieved her economic survival through migration linked labor programs, so as SM 11, male Ex-combatant who lives in Netherlands. In contrast, to SM 10, male Ex-guerrilla who is in his 60s and S2 female Ex-guerrilla who is in his 50s, who received their economic survival through informal labor market. Such accounts highlight NG of DDR's principles, where economic incorporation occurs in market structures already exist. However, it demonstrates that context in the context of PKK the Ex-guerillas face very challenging moments to achieve it. As SM 12 describes as, “We breath but do not live”. The analysis of the table also shows the critical limitation of psychological and social well-being of the Ex-combatants. Despite functional integration in economy, physical and psychological challenges the Ex-combatants live with reveals the failure of informal substitutions. As S5 reflects, “I steal have dreams of fighting as guerilla at night” and SM states, “I can not work because of my physical disabilities”. This suggests that, while Next generation of DDR can accommodate non-institutional rooted integration in economy, physical and psychological survival and recovery remains fragile domain. Eventually, the dimensions of Community Rooted Reintegration, Institutional Coordination, Inclusion & Nondiscrimination of the Ex-combatants and Sustainability: Lowest risk of remobilization illustrate that how reintegration under the Next generation of DDR is political invisibility dependent, negotiated and conditional, rather than coordinated state-international framework. This based on the fact that, Ex-guerillas interviewed demonstrated that they reintegrated, they did it through political networks, kinship, and state adopted residence programs and arrangements. As SM 12 explains, “I am accepted as long as I pretend to be someone else, not because I do not

accept my identity, but because it is hard to other to accept it.” Taking all together, the table illustrates that, DDR in non-mission settings, particularly in context of PKK can function without institutional visibility, but it is worth mentioning that there will be a cost, especially in psychological and physical neglect, inclusion and discrimination, legal precarity. These outcomes are key insights that advance the boundaries and limitations of Next Generation of DDR.

Gender as Variable in reintegration of PKK Ex-guerrillas: Analysis of Feminist security study

Imagine it is 2000, it is 7th congress of Kurdistan workers party, women inside the party are combatants and head of armed units, they have their own military unit and are independent, but decide to cut their hair as form of protest to show they are not agree to go under men's authority and continue their semi autonomy. This is a very well turning point in the history of Kurdistan workers party in terms of fighting for gender equality. It is also shows an equation of contrast in the reality of the party.

Portrait of women inside Kurdistan Workers Party always decided by what PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, defines, “Oldest colony” or “first nation colonized” and the image of women inside the party drawn by as guerrillas, commanders and military and political leader. But where does all this comes from? It mainly comes from the perspective of Öcalan to women, because he sees women not as biological or social category, rather as central historical and civilization concept. His core thesis is that the first and most fundamental form of class oppression in human history was the enslavement of women by men. He argues that before the emergence of economic classes like slaves and masters or workers and capitalists, a gender - based class system was established with the rise of patriarchy and the state (which he terms "the domination of the state civilization". Therefore, Öcalan defines women as; The first colonized nation or the oldest colony (Öcalan 2013). Moreover, if we take a look on chronology of raise of women's power we realize that women have history that embedded in all historical phases PKK went through in the past. For instance, in 1970s and 1980s women had presence inside PKK, but they had no executive power and they were not decision makers. In late 1980s and early 1990 because of the intensive armed conflict between PKK and Turkey great number of women became combatants inside the party, and they took their place, but the manhood mentality in the party was banning their power from being decision makers and the mentality of “war is man's business” was popular. In addition, the women in one side were essential to the party as combatants, yet excluded from decision making. 1995 witnessed a great change when for the first time under the supervision of Öcalan, first women's guerrillas unit established and this was a turning point, but again this was not continued, because when in 1999 Abdullah Öcalan been arrested, the opposition voices rose against women. This disagreement was aligned with other internal conflicts of PKK. There was discussion weather, after his capture, Öcalan remains as active political leader of PKK or as symbolic. After this, the same group were discussing, women should be subordinated under men's power. The protests against this opinion started inside PKK by female guerrillas, they started an uprising with objective of, “whatever happens no way, men will make decision for us”, in the 7th congress of the party a group of female

guerillas cut their hair, their uprising marked a new era in the history of gender equality concept inside PKK, because it broke the ice and created a new era where women have their own organizational structure. Years after women formed their own stable structures. Women's military forces formed and Kurdistan Women's Community (KJK) formed, which is the autonomous, female only umbrella organization within the broader Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) which is affiliated with the PKK. Now women have right to veto decisions will affect women, they have independent decision-making ability and embedded in the institutions ruling the party.

This section evaluates gender as a central analytical variable shaping post disarmament reintegration among PKK ex-guerillas. Drawing on feminist security theory, and building on the earlier comparison between IDDRS and the Next Generation of DDR (NG-DDR) framework, the analysis examines how reintegration outcomes differed between male and female ex-combatants. The empirical basis for this analysis consists of 12 in depth interviews, equally divided between 6 male and 6 female ex guerillas, allowing for a balanced and systematic gender comparison. Interview data were coded by gender to identify patterned similarities and differences across three dimensions: access to resources and support, social acceptance and stigma, and challenges in entering civilian life.

All the female guerillas who interviewed experienced the developments discussed inside PKK, some of them witnessed the hair cut protests and they were part of it, for instance the years of their mobilization is 1993, 1993, 1996 1997, 1997, 1997, and they demobilized in 2004, 2004, 2007, 2007, 2007, 2008.

Gendered Background Conditions and Reintegration Context

Background characteristics reveal important gendered conditions shaping reintegration trajectories. Male participants were generally older at the time of disarmament and tended to have longer or more continuous combat histories, in several cases spanning over two decades. Female participants, while slightly younger on average, also reported extended periods of involvement, ranging from seven to 15 years. Educational attainment across the sample was modest; however, women were more concentrated at primary and secondary levels, while men concentrated of high education and secondary school, were more potentially constraining post - conflict economic mobility. Moreover, a greater proportion of the female members originate from towns, whereas most of the male members come from cities. These background differences intersected with gendered social norms to shape distinct reintegration pathways, supporting feminist security theory's emphasis on how gender structures vulnerability and access in post - conflict settings.

Gendered Access to Resources and Support

The findings show that a clear gender differences emerged in relation to access to economic and social support. Among male ex-combatants, reintegration into the informal labor market was more common and relatively less contested. Family networks, political affiliations, and community ties, particularly in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, facilitated access to work and income. Masculinity functioned as a

social resource, aligning with expectations of men as economic providers. As SM12, male ex combatant reflected; “When I disarmed, I began working in journalism and my salary was only \$150. I told myself: if I can at least afford a sandwich each day, that will be enough. Yet the transition was far from easy. Without strong self-discipline, it is possible to lose direction, especially after dedicating most of one’s youth to armed struggle and then returning without having achieved the intended goal. Under such circumstances, the adjustment becomes profoundly difficult. Nevertheless, in order to continue living, one must find the strength to stand again, and that is what I did.”

Female ex-combatants, by contrast, encountered more restrictive forms of support. While family assistance was sometimes available, it was often conditional and embedded within expectations of dependency, domesticity, or withdrawal from public life. Feminist security theory helps explain this asymmetry: women’s participation in armed struggle disrupts dominant gender norms, yet reintegration processes often seek to restore those norms. S2 recounts her experience as follows: “When I was a combatant, my family tried several times to bring me home, but I did not obey them. After leaving the PKK, they struggled to accept me because of my background and personality, which was understandable, so they sent me to live with relatives. I remained there until I got married. This rejection extended to society at large; when applying for jobs, all I knew was journalism, yet I was repeatedly refused due to my background.” S2 further elaborates: “When I eventually returned, my family allowed me to live with them, but they did not fully accept my personality. I spent many days and nights alone, grieving the loss of friends and family who had been combatants and navigating the challenging social circumstances. I endured this isolation alone, and finding employment was extremely difficult. Although I had a job before joining the PKK, securing work after leaving the organization proved far more challenging because of my past I faced both security and social challenges.” Similarly, S3 reflects on her own reintegration, describing the situation as profoundly difficult: “Due to widespread unfounded social rumors about me, I was unable to work at all until after I married and divorced. This process took nearly twenty years, after which I was finally able to reintegrate and gain employment.”

In the absence of formal DDR mechanisms, informal systems substituted for institutional support. However, consistent with NG-DDR insights, these informal substitutions were unequally distributed, reinforcing gendered hierarchies rather than neutralizing them.

Social Acceptance and Gendered Stigma

Gender had a pronounced impact on social acceptance and stigma. Male ex-combatants generally experienced conditional acceptance, particularly when concealing their former combatant identities. Their past involvement was often interpreted through political or nationalist narratives, allowing for partial reintegration into community life. For instance, SM12, says: “most of the times we hide our identity as people from Bakur (North of Kurdistan located in Türkiye), and simply narrates at, we are her to work. This allowed as to reintegrate more easily”.

Female ex-combatants faced more intense and multifaceted stigma. Beyond political suspicion, women were subjected to moral judgment, harassment, and social

exclusion. Feminist security theory highlights how female combatants are frequently perceived as transgressors of norms related to femininity, honor, and sexuality. S3 describes her experiences, stating: “When I left the PKK, my family did not accept me, first, because of all the false rumors circulating about us as guerrillas, and second, because they had never known when I chose to become a combatant and left the family. Upon returning, they sent me to live in house of a local social leader who was more understanding of my situation. The only solution seemed to be marriage, how long could I remain there otherwise? They arranged for me a man who knew my background as an ex - guerrilla and accepted it. We married, and for more than a decade I lived in a hell with him and his family. They constantly reminded me, ‘you are a man, not a woman,’ referencing my time as a combatant. He was abusive toward me and my children, and it took over ten years before I could divorce.” S1 similarly reflects: “It was extremely difficult after all the years I spent as a combatant. It is not only society; you also struggle to adapt to the system and the people, having previously interpreted their ideologies or personalities differently. Even now, I find social life challenging.” S5 adds: “It is not easy. I generally have no connection with my neighbors like a normal person would in our community, and sometimes I feel out of place in social conversations. At times, even going to the market to buy clothes for my children is difficult. After all these years as a combatant, my focus remains on aspects of my former lifestyle, and living in society under these conditions is not simple.” S2 also says; ‘after 20 years I still have no friends’.

This gendered stigma limited women’s willingness to disclose their pasts and restricted access to social spaces. While NG-DDR conceptualizes invisibility as an adaptive strategy, this analysis demonstrates that invisibility carries higher social and psychological costs for women, often requiring the suppression of identity and political agency.

Gendered Challenges in Entering Civilian Life

The transition into civilian life revealed further gendered challenges. Male ex-combatants primarily emphasized legal insecurity, economic instability, and political marginalization, yet often framed these difficulties as manageable extensions of wartime hardship. As SM12 describes it as, “difficult but with the personality PKK gave him manageable”. Female ex-combatants, however, experienced what feminist security scholars describe as double reintegration: re-entering civilian society while renegotiating gender roles and expectations. Many faced pressure to marry, prioritize caregiving, and disengage from political life. Five out of six female participants were married with children, intensifying emotional and economic responsibilities. As S3 says; “The only solution seemed to be marriage”.

These challenges were compounded by the absence of psychosocial support identified in earlier chapters. While both men and women reported trauma, women faced greater barriers to seeking or articulating psychological distress due to stigma and social constraints. This reinforces a key NG-DDR finding: informal reintegration mechanisms may enable survival, but they fail to address gendered psychosocial harm, particularly among women.

Implications for DDR and NG-DDR Frameworks

This gender based analysis challenges the implicit gender neutrality of IDDRS and strengthens the conceptual contribution of NG-DDR. While IDDRS formally acknowledges gender, its programmatic assumptions limit applicability in non-mission settings where social norms, rather than institutions, govern reintegration. NG-DDR, when combined with feminist security theory, offers a more accurate understanding of reintegration as a gendered, socially embedded process.

The findings demonstrate that adaptability alone is insufficient. Without explicit attention to gendered power relations, informal reintegration reproduces inequality, stigma, and exclusion. Gender should therefore be treated not as a secondary variable, but as a core analytical category essential to understanding post-conflict reintegration and long-term stability.

Reconceptualization of DDR as socially and politically embedded framework; Advancing Next generation of DDR through PKK's Ex-guerrillas experience in non-mission settings

“For more than 100 years, the denial of Kurdish identity in Turkish state took social peace under question and limited it, as the border system and legal framework built around this logic, consistently defining PKK guerillas as terrorists” says 57 years old Kurdish CL6 military expert, who describes his background knowledge of Kurdistan workers party and the context they are active in as “35 years old background”.

This section discusses the advancement of Next generation of DDR on the basis of reconceptualization of DDR as socially and politically embedded process, not post-conflict or technocratic intervention. The analysis drew on lived experience of 12 PKK combatants (6 male and 6 female), eight community leaders with different professions (journalists, social leaders, law and military experts and academic people), elite (206 Xs) and public perspective (50,51 Xs) of Türkiye (2010 - 2025), the analysis of findings show that reintegration in the context former PKK guerrillas disarmed in which is the context of unsolved narrative securitization shaped by political discourse, public perception and community power relations, rather than formal DDR mechanism. With integration of qualitative interviews data and quantitative social media data the study operationalized Next Generation of DDR as context sensitive model, which is able to work in complex social, political and security contexts, where armed groups and organizations have not undergone formal DDR missions or formal peace agreements, as PKK is living in.

Conventional DDR models, including the ones articulated in IDDRS, assume transition of the armed group and the context from conflict to post conflict, where reintegration depends on legal normalization, institutional programs and social reconciliation process. However, neither the context the PKK guerillas disarmed in nor the context PKK is active in Türkiye conform this assumption, because of the negative discourse of public against PKK, continual of state security operations against it. Meanwhile, Next Generation of DDR is able to respond to such a context, because it shifts the focus from formal program to a social process and from post conflict framework to politically contested continuity and from institutional program to societal

legitimacy. This perspective tested in the study by examining how reintegration negotiated in context the PKK Ex-guerillas reintegrated in.

The analysis of elite social media (n=206) which includes, political figures (33), 10 noticeable media outlets (Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah , Ntv, TRT Haber, Gazete Duvar, Cumhuriyet, CNN Türk, A Haber, Anadolu Ajansı), and all political parties of the country, reveal state military resolve, condemnation and victimhood.

Table 2. Elite social media engagement with PKK-related content on X (formerly Twitter), 2010–2025 (N = 206)

#	Key Statistics	Value	Note
1	Number of total tweets/Xs analyzed	206	
2	Number of verified accounts/users	41	
3	Verified users	0	
4	Total likes of the contents	637116	
5	Total Retweets	108233	
6	Average engagement	0	
7	Likes for tweets with Pro-PKK content	110683	
8	Likes of Anti-PKK contents	462115	
9	Neutral Likes	64318	
10	Tweets with the usage of profanity	3	These tweets are embedded within the total of 206 identified tweets, their likes counted in the overall engagement figures or engagement count.
11	Likes of the Tweets with the usage of profanity	78337	

The dataset reveals the political figures, media outlets targeted and political parties of Türkiye produced securitized narratives of guerrillas of Kurdistan workers party, highlighting the victimhood, state military resolve and condemnation. For instance, the key themes used in the contents published include: (1) remembrance of “terrorist attack of Türkiye” and its victims; (2) seeing withdrawal of PKK as result of state counterterrorism efforts; (3) commitment to intelligence and military operations of Sate against PKK and its so called affiliates cross border; (4) clear rejection of any concessions to PKK, meanwhile highlighting the constitutional values, territorial integrity and threats to national security and keeping it safe; (5) calling the 2025 peace efforts “Terror Free process” and desire to push the country towards it; (6) Commitment of the state to continue combating PKK, which they call it “terrorist”; (7) Emotional affect of the attacked “they call it by PKK” on the families of the victims; (8) criticism on clemency pushed towards PKK. Moreover the analysis of the data

shows that out of 637116 different users did for the contents published, the anti-PKK contents attracted more audience with 462115 users liking them, while the Pro-PKK contents were not very much attractive by Turkish language users with 110683 likes by different users to the Pro-PKK contents. While, 64318 liked the neutral contents. Nevertheless, the analysis show the use of profane language against PKK in three contents, and what is more interesting is, the tweets been detected liked by 78337 users. The findings the of the analysis of the Tweets of elite in Türkiye, align with the analysis of the 5,050 Twwets gathered and analyzed randomly.

Table 3. Public social media engagement with PKK-related content on X (formerly Twitter), 2010–2025 (N = 5,051)

#	Key statistics	Value	Note
1	Total Tweets been analyzed	5051	
2	Verified users	17	
3	Unverified users	5034	
4	Average engagement	30.06	
5	Total likes of the contents published	35315	
6	Total number of Retweets of the contents published.	139768	
7	Likes for tweets with Pro-PKK content	6729	
8	Likes for Tweets with Anti-PKK content	24129	
9	Likes for the neutral contents	4457	
10	Tweets with the usage of profanity	1357	These tweets are embedded within the total of 5,050 identified tweets, their likes counted in the overall engagement figures or engagement count.
11	Likes of the Tweets with the usage of profanity	7068	

The analysis of the public dataset shows great alignment with narrative the elite of the public created. For instance, 35315 users liked for 5,051 tweets published, among them 6729 users liked the contents with Pro-PKK content which makes %19.5 of total content, while users who liked Anti-PKK content is 24129, which makes %68.3. Furthermore, same as the narrative elite of Türkiye produced, there is usage of profanity in the tweets of public, for instance 1357 Tweets out of total contain profanity language, and 7068 users liked the Tweets. This makes 20.1% of the Tweets published by public, meanwhile %12.3 of the Tweets published by elite contains same language. It is the same for Pro and Anti PKK language, for instance the analysis of the

elite show that %72.5 of the users liked Anti-PKK contents, and %68.3 of the public the same liked Anti-PKK contents. Moreover, %19.05 of the public users likes Pro-PKK contents, only %17.37 of the elite of the liked Pro-PKK contents.

The analysis of both datasets aligns with the qualitative data collected from interviews of the community leaders. Six out of 8 community leaders answered this question; How can communities be prepared to accept and support returning ex-combatants? They are all agree, that legal and constitutional preparations should be made for the Ex-guerrillas should be made, in term of amendments of Anti-Terrorism Law No. 3713 (1991) or cancelation of the law, and constitutional redrafting with purpose of defining all national minorities and Kurdish nation, to give them right of equal citizenship as given to Turkish identity in terms of legal statue and civil rights. Six out of eight community leaders agree, to keep social security of Türkiye and Ex-combatants safe, social planning is necessary, before, during and after the reintegration, making it sustained and long term. For instance, CL2, who has 13 years of experience of covering stories from armed groups in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Türkiye, sees the social reintegration as “real challenge” saying; “While related actors and NGOs see this stage of discussions between PKK and Turkihs state as tough, the real challenge is wining the trust of Turkish society to support and pursue sustained peace process with PKK Ex-guerrillas and Kurdish people. It has been more than 100 years that they system depicts Kurdish people as the countries antagonist, and PKK as terrorist who acts as threat to social and national security, this is triple the age of PKK, changing this mindset and the entrenched narrative they adopt, no easy step”. Inline with CL2’s view, 47 years old CL9 who holds PHD and one of the main units of this PHD thesis is on the history and development of the ideology of PKK, thinks, “the complexity of conflict PKK is in extends beyond its confrontation with Turkish state, it also involves complex tension between the party and certain local groups, particularly the tribes. So, the tribal leaders must be engaged in the process, their role should guarantee social peace for both the Ex-guerillas and community”. The findings of this section indicate that the space the reintegration must occur in (Türkiye) is antagonistic to PKK guerrillas, indeed it is insight central to the Next generation of DDR, as “there is no language of safe transition and reintegration in public debate nowadays in Türkiye, because of the 100 years background of denial of Kurdish identity, only victory, vigilance and punishment”, this creates clear mismatch between DDR norms and lived reality in Turkish society, while within Next generation of DDR such environment works as informal veto mechanism of reintegration of PKK guerillas. Even in the cases where combatants (PKK guerrillas) disengage their armed background, society labeling, particularly the use of the words like “terrorist” restricts access of the guerrillas to social trust, economic opportunities and community participation. As 58 years old CL3 social leader articulated this dynamic as, “imagine 41 years of defense against a state, now integrating to the same system is quite art of reconciliation. The findings of this section extend Next generation of DDR on the basis of the observation, demonstrating how public discourse is able to shape reintegration.

Gendered reintegration in Next generation of DDR

One of the main concepts that Next generation of DDR emphasizes on is the need of considering gendered social norms and power dynamics will design reintegration process beyond the DDR standards. The qualitative interviews reveal how both gendered experienced stigma, and their trajectories shaped by their gender. For instance, female Ex-guerrillas describe the experience as a process marked by social silencing, and moral scrutiny, rather than being Ex-guerrilla, as S2 explains the experience as, “I have always been alone, back in IKR, and now in EU. My father disowned me; I did not have chance to see him. I was politically, socially and economically labeled by my background”. The male Ex-guerrillas by contrast, emphasized on economic exclusion and legal statue, rather than physiological barriers, and social exclusion. This gender perspective of reintegration is confirmed by most of the community leaders interviewed. Most of them agree that gender does matter when it comes to reintegration, because the community the PKK guerillas will reintegrate in is strongly structured by social boundaries. It is also worth mentioning that, they are all agree that strong educational and cultural background of PKK guerillas, and the programs they attend before becoming active combatant make them different from a normal combatant, especially the female ones. The findings demonstrate that Next generation of DDR in the context of PKK must move beyond gender inclusion, as the analysis of the data confirmed that how gender shape reintegration.

Informal reintegration; a DDR beyond formal programs

In the absence of formal DDR framework and DDR programs, reintegration in the context of former PKK guerillas occurred through informal adaptive strategies, as the Ex-guerrillas describe them as economic dependency on relative networks around, deliberate social invisibility, internal displacement, and deliberate political invisibility. As SM 10 male Ex-combatant who spend 23 years of his life as combatant describes it as “had process, but adaptive one” because as he says; “the personality PKK ex-combatants have is very morally and culturally reach, they ideology they get within the party teaches them how be resilience and confidant in the same time, because most of them come from country keeper families (welatparêz) with strong national background, after joining PKK they get training courses of different topics such as; gender, Kurdish nations history and personal development, then they become combatants. However, this will not make them safe from all the challenges they face when they reintegrate, resilience yes, but safe, no”.

According to Next generation of DDR, the startigies used by Ex-PKK guerillas are coping mechanism rather than successful and sustained reintegration. This is what makes the reintegration process so different, because in such a contexts reintegration becomes survival mechanical negotiated in political and social context full of constraints. All these insights support Next generation of DDR's call for a socially grounded reintegration mechanisms and context sensitive DDR, rather than classical DDR framework. By integrating lived experience of Ex-guerillas of PKK and perspective of community leaders from different sectors with quantitative analysis of public and elite perspective, the research advances Next generation of DDR as a

framework capable of operating in non-mission complex settings. Moreover, it shows reintegration process of Ex-combatants (Ex-guerrillas of PKK) as a socially negotiated, politically mediated, and constrained process, rather than a post-conflict framework. The findings also confirm that, community norms, public perception, and social boundaries function as reintegration variables (critical ones), able to shape the outcomes of disarmament independent of formal policy frames. Meanwhile, gendered social and economic expectations further impact the outcomes of reintegration trajectories, while informal mechanisms dominate the context because of absence of formal DDR framework. In doing so, the study contributes to Next generation of DDR as politically and socially embedded reintegration framework.

Conclusion and discussion

"We are foreigner even to ourselves."

"Being a foreigner has become our defining condition. We are foreigner even to ourselves. You label me as former combatant or Ex-guerilla, but I no longer inhabit the role you mentioned! People define me as someone from Bakur (North or Great Kurdistan located in southeastern and eastern Anatolia, Türkiye), but it has been 18 years that I didn't see my town, everything changed, since I left, the place, the houses and the people. Even my father died! Am I from Kurdistan region of Iraq? No! because I hold no legal statue of the region! So, we are a group of foreigners! And I have come to accept the reality I live in!" Says 57 years old SM12, a male combat who spend almost 18 years of his life serving as senior guerilla with PKK, and disarmed in 2005.

Developing a Next Generation of DDR concept in the context of the PKK: "I am proud of having fought for rights of our nation and our national identity as a Kiurd. But my struggle and challenges did not end there. Together with our friends we continue discuss the political situation and exchange opinion on it, yet we face difficulties and challenges in our social life. When I become mother, I understood the pain I caused my own mother once. For many of us experiencing social life in such a context less likes freedom, but more like open prison" said 52 years S4 female Ex-guerrilla, who spend 10 years of her life as senior combatant, disarmed in 2008 and now mother of three. The study set out to examine the applicability and limitations of conventional DDR framework in non-mission setting, through the use of case of Ex-guerrillas of Kurdistan Worker's Party. It also engages critically with IDDR standards and advancing the Next generation of DDR. It also conceptualizes DDR as politically and socially embedded process rather than a post conflict intervention. The study provides empirically grounded and theoretically informed contribution towards achievement of peace and security goal, through adopting a mixed method research design, which contains 20 depth interviews with Ex-PKK guerrillas and community leaders alongside a large-scale quantitative data collected in X social media platform to uncover the elite and public discourse in Türkiye.

The study uncovers set of several findings, for instance it demonstrates that reintegration can occur in non-mission settings in the absence of formal DDR liked institutions. In such contexts, Ex-combatants depend on informal mechanism like political networking, family, community mediation, political affiliation and free market. Moreover, the adaptive concealment strategies used by former combatants used

as alternative to the institutional support given in DDR, this also provides the combatants with basic economic and social survival. However, the analysis of the findings unfolds the critical limitations of this kind of reintegration. In the case study of the research (Ex-PKK guerrillas) physical and psychological needs unaddressed, social exclusion reinforced, and legal precarity largely noticed. The gaps highlighted reveal the boundaries of Next Generation of DDR, when it emphasis on adaptability of former combatants. The findings suggest that, when reintegration happens in conflict settings, legal precarity, prolonged political conflict and contested legitimacy, flexibility is inadequate. In addition, the informal arrangements are able to reproduce vulnerabilities.

Key contribution of the study lies in placing gender as foundational analytical variable. Drawing on feminist security theory, the findings indicate that reintegration trajectories are gender dependent. While male Ex-guerrillas more often accessed to labor market (informal labor market) and achieved conditional social acceptance in society, the female Ex-guerrillas faced limited economic opportunities, intensified stigma, and withdrawal from political life noticeably. What female Ex-guerrillas undergo may be described as “double reintegration”; they are not only reintegrated from their armed background, but are also renegotiated gender norms in society. This means, in the informal reintegration process reimpose of patriarchal norms, rather than accommodate a social and political transformation for former female guerrillas.

Beyond personal narratives, the study advances reintegration process as socially and politically embedded process, politically mediated and socially negotiated. It integrates quantitative analysis of elite and public of Türkiye with perspective of community leaders. The findings of the analysis of the data integrated show that community norms, symbolic boundaries and public perception play important role in shaping reintegration outcomes of former combatants. For instance, disarmament alone cannot resolve the post-conflict and post-disarmament trajectories of former combatants, rather it is a process linked to portraying the former combatants through political discourse, everyday social interactions, public discourse, access to life linked resources, belonging and media narratives. For instance, the findings reveal that both public and elite of the country frame the PKK guerrillas through the security and terror lens, limit the space of social acceptance and push to suspicion of the guerrillas. This shows that reintegration not only shaped by absence of policy frameworks, but by normative barriers, with ability of operating outside of formal arrangements. Taking together, the findings of the study contribute to the advancement of next generation of DDR by providing empirical evidence of its relevance, while highlighting its limitations. The study supports the argument that implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in non-mission settings must be understood as socially and politically embedded process, rather than a post conflict intervention. However, it warns placing excessive optimism on emancipatory ability of informal reintegration. Without purposeful consideration of gendered hierarchies, power relations and dialog space reintegration process will be risky and unsustainable. In this sense, DDR should be reconceptualized as contested social long-term process not only technical tool.

Notably, certain limitations shape the scope of the study. Access to Ex-combatants of Kurdish Worker's party restricted by security concerns for both the researcher and

the Ex-guerrillas, the main factor behind participants anonymity, as the armed struggle between PKK and Türkiye remains active. Moreover, the legal statue of the Ex-guerrillas of PKK is not formally recognized. The qualitative fieldwork also shaped by time and budget limitations. While the mixed method adopted by the study further strengths the findings, future research could benefit from broader analysis of different armed groups now active in Middle East, give focus to long-term reintegration trajectories and psychological dimensions with aim of deeper understanding of implication of Next generation of DDR in non-state mission.

Ultimately, the research unfolds the need for reconceptualizing DDR beyond formal programs and mission-based framework. By highlighting the story and real live experience of Ex-guerillas of PKK, gendered dynamics and political and social dynamics shaping reintegration, the research contributes to refine and context sensitive reintegration in conflict settings. This reconceptualization is important to further advance Next Generation of DDR in non-mission settings. And it is essential to further advance peace and security in Middle East and empowering it in addressing complex realities of non-state armed groups.

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Ethics Statement

The authors affirm that this research was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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