

REINTEGRATION OF FORMER MEMBERS OF ARMED FORCES AND ARMED GROUPS

Purpose

This guidance supports private security companies (PSCs) in the responsible reintegration of former members of armed forces and armed groups into their workforce. It aligns with international standards, including the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA) and the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), and aims to promote professionalism, human rights and peacebuilding.

When does reintegration occur?

Reintegration into private security may occur through:

- Spontaneous applications by individuals
- One of the reintegration options in a government Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes in post-conflict settings
- Recruitment of veterans retired from regular armed forces
- Hiring of former members of non-state armed groups (often requiring additional support)
- Engagement with individuals experiencing physical or mental health challenges related to service or conflict
- Reinstatement of staff after service breaks

What is reintegration?

Reintegration refers to the process by which ex-combatants and individuals formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups sustainably transition to civilian life within communities of their choice. This process unfolds at individual, family and community levels, encompassing social, psychosocial, economic, political and security dimensions. (IDDRS)



Opportunities, challenges and risks

Hiring former members of armed forces and groups can bring significant benefits: many possess advanced skills in first aid, demining, teamwork, discipline and resilience. Their experience can strengthen operational capability if leveraged responsibly.

Responsible reintegration benefits companies, clients, individuals formerly associated, communities and former combatants and their families, thereby supporting peace and raising professional standards.

Challenges include physical injuries limiting operational roles and social or psychological adaptation difficulties. Effective

reintegration requires comprehensive support systems combining psychosocial care and professional development.

Ex-combatants are often vulnerable due to unemployment and social stigma. In some cases, they are exploited as cheap labour, underpaid compared to peers or hired without contracts. While most ex-combatants are male, reintegration efforts must recognise and address the specific needs of female former members of armed forces and groups, including protection from discrimination and tailored support. Programmes should also consider the families of ex-combatants, providing resources to promote their well-being and successful community reintegration.

Crucially, private security work fundamentally differs from military roles. It demands new competencies – legal awareness, restraint, communication and conflict de-escalation – plus a mindset grounded in respect for human rights and responsible conduct. Successful reintegration requires tailored support and robust training.

Without strong ethical safeguards, reintegration through PSCs risks reinforcing militarised identities, eroding public trust and undermining broader DDR and security sector reform goals.

What can private security companies do to favour reintegration?

1 Recruitment and vetting

- Ensure recruitment is transparent, voluntary and free from coercion.
- Conduct comprehensive screening (service records, criminal records, medical and psychological assessments).
- Exclude candidates implicated in war crimes, mercenary activity or other serious violations of the law.
- Collaborate with authorities and credible organisations to verify backgrounds.
- Use interviews to identify stress triggers and resilience factors.

2 Training and professional development

- Recognise combat-acquired competencies (e.g., credits or shortened courses).
- Deliver induction on human rights, company policies and applicable law.
- Provide paradigm-shift training: de-escalation, negotiation, defensive tactics and legal/ethical distinctions from military roles.
- Offer specialised modules on lawful weapons use and handling.
- Ensure strict compliance with national/international regulations on use of force.
- Certify trainings and establish ongoing professional development, mentoring and peer support.



Key principles for successful reintegration

- Voluntariness and informed consent
- Non-discrimination: proactively addressing gender, disability inclusion and family impacts
- Do no harm: strict vetting, re-training and avoiding reinforcement of militarised identities
- Legal and human rights compliance



3 Adaptation and decompression period

- Match roles to individual risk profiles; avoid placing high-risk individuals in sensitive positions without thorough evaluation.
- Employ phased integration (e.g., start with static posts, progress to mobile response).
- Restrict firearm access during adaptation.
- Implement former member-to-former-member/veteran-to-veteran mentorship programmes.
- Require refresher training on de-escalation/use of force.
- Provide clear career progression routes beyond high-risk roles (e.g., management, logistics, training).

4 Mental health

- Offer structured decompression and adjustment periods.
- Conduct trauma screening and regular confidential assessments.
- Ensure access to professional mental health care (including PTSD expertise).
- Encourage peer support networks.

5 Physical health

- Adapt roles/facilities for wounded or disabled veterans.
- Adjust workloads to individual capacity.
- Ensure access to medical care and rehabilitation.

6 Gender and inclusion

- Identify and address the unique experiences and needs of female former members of armed forces and groups.
- Ensure access to psychosocial support, protection from harassment or discrimination, tailored health care and mentoring.
- Guarantee equal access to leadership and supervisory roles.
- Provide gender-sensitive training for all staff.

7 Workplace policies, staff and family support

- Enforce anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies.
- Provide psychosocial and health support for all staff, recognising that conflict impacts society broadly, not only ex-combatants.
- Support families of ex-combatants through counselling, economic assistance and community outreach to reduce stigma and isolation.
- Maintain accessible, confidential grievance mechanisms.
- Appoint reintegration champions or mentors to support new recruits.

8 Fair employment practices

- Guarantee equal pay for equal work, regardless of background.
- Ensure all staff, including ex-combatants, receive formal contracts with clear terms and protections.
- Prohibit exploitative labour practices and establish transparent wage policies.
- Provide accessible grievance mechanisms to report unfair treatment or discrimination.
- Partner with labour rights organisations or unions to strengthen oversight and accountability.

9 Monitoring and accountability

- Regularly review reintegration outcomes and training effectiveness.
- Maintain secure records of vetting, training and support.
- Implement responsive feedback and compliance reporting systems.
- Establish measurable indicators (e.g., retention rates, misconduct incidents, community feedback).
- Community and stakeholder engagement
- Communicate openly about reintegration efforts and demonstrate compliance with international standards (ISO 18788, ICoCA).
- Engage proactively with local communities to build trust and address risks of stigmatisation, especially regarding former armed group members.
- Partner with clients, civil society, DDR agencies and public institutions to strengthen reintegration.
- Ensure transparency and responsiveness to community concerns.



Conclusion

Reintegration of former combatants is more than a hiring decision: it is a commitment to peace, professionalism and human dignity. PSCs have a unique opportunity to contribute to stability and human rights by managing this process with care, integrity and accountability.

This document is designed to be a very short summary of how to manage the reintegration of former members of armed forces and armed groups in private security operations. For further guidance, contact secretariat@icoca.ch or refer to additional resources provided.