



# Multilevel Support for the Process for the Reincorporation of FARC-EP: The Experience of the EU Trust Fund

*Carlos Madridejos Ornila*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Peace Agreement signed between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army (FARC-EP) in 2016 was a turning point in the conflict suffered by the country over the last five decades.<sup>1</sup> Despite the multiple difficulties arising in its implementation, Colombia’s experience sets an example to the world on account of its innovative nature and range of approaches and instruments, which differentiate it from other negotiations and peacebuilding processes. A key aspect has been the reincorporation of ex-combatants

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C. Madridejos Ornila (✉)

Hegoa, Institute for International Cooperation and Development Studies,  
University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Bilbao, Spain  
e-mail: [carlos.madrdej@ gmail.com](mailto:carlos.madrdej@ gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> An English translation of the full text of the agreement is available from the University of Edinburgh PA-X Peace Agreements Database: [www.peaccagreements.org/wview/1845/](http://www.peaccagreements.org/wview/1845/).

who formed part of the guerrilla forces and who are now in the process of rejoining civilian life. This aspect is covered by Point 3 of the Peace Agreement (“End of Conflict”), which sets out the procedures and commitments that have allowed 13,000 members of FARC-EP to lay down their arms. The EU, which had a strong presence and was widely recognised in the areas most affected by the violence, is formally considered one of the international backers of this component of the Peace Agreement and has become one of the main partners and funders. The EU’s support has been channelled through the post-conflict EU Trust Fund, with a total budget of €130 million and participation from 21 Member States, alongside the United Kingdom and Chile.

The EU’s support has played a fundamental role in the first five years since the signing of the agreement and the signatories have publicly acknowledged it on various occasions. Beyond political and diplomatic support, the EU Trust Fund has pursued a multilevel model of support, with investment structured around three levels: (i) promoting local and associative initiatives by ex-combatants; (ii) strengthening national organisations derived from the Peace Agreement, with an emphasis on two key areas of the reincorporation process (the solidarity economy and humanitarian demining); and (iii) supporting national public policy through budget support, with a mechanism to build the technical and operational capacity of the corresponding institutions. Despite the weaknesses and limitations of the logic behind the intervention, it represents a major effort by the EU to ensure compliance with some of the commitments in the Peace Agreement and provide pragmatic guarantees of certain aspects of progress and results in a national context characterised by high levels of polarisation, discord and scepticism. The multilevel approach encompasses different scales, dimensions and actors, which are interrelated and even interdependent, forming an ecosystem that connects the local reality to the national dynamic. The experience provides a range of lessons and conclusions that may be of considerable use for other institutions and organisations involved in post-agreement, peacebuilding and conflict management processes in other countries.

This chapter begins by providing a brief overview of the goals and dynamics of the reincorporation process. It highlights what makes it different from other cases and analysis the growing involvement of the EU in this aspect of the Peace Agreement, as well as the strategic framework that has defined its role and its technical and financial support. It then looks at each of the three levels of investment, analysing the results to

date and the key reflections shared by the parties involved. It ends with a discussion of the main conclusions from a political, institutional and technical perspective, paying particular attention to innovative and value-added aspects, as well as limitations and risks when it comes to ownership, scalability and sustainability.

This work is the fruit of over four years of research, including visits to the country, discussions with project technical teams and debates with the parties involved. During this period, I have made 15 trips to regions where EU Trust Fund projects are active and have held interviews and dialogues with over 50 people from public institutions, international organisations, development agencies and civil society organisations, as well as ex-combatants and members of communities neighbouring reincorporation areas. This information has been complemented by extensive documentary analysis and participation in various inter-institutional spaces for reflection, both academic and technical–institutional.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS FOR THE REINCORPORATION OF FARC-EP

The Peace Agreement is structured around six points, the third of which sets out a specific roadmap to transition from the end of offensive activities between the public forces and FARC-EP to the reincorporation of ex-combatants into civilian life. This process has taken place in three phases. The first involved the concentration of guerrilla troops in Village Zones of Transition and Normalisation (*Zonas Veredales de Transición y Normalización*, ZVTN). These temporary areas were defined by the signatories to allow the surrender of arms and initial activities to take place, such as civil registration, medical check-ups and education. The phase saw the certification of 13,202 former members of FARC-EP by the High Commissioner for Peace (Government of Colombia, 2020), 24% of which were women. The second phase focused on creating an inventory and collecting weapons and explosives. Over 7,000 individual weapons and 7,400 explosives of varying types were surrendered. This is the highest level per ex-combatant for disarmament processes in Colombia and is one of the highest in the world (Centro de Pensamiento y Diálogo Político, 2019; Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2019). The third and final phase is currently ongoing and involves the long-term reincorporation of the ZVTNs, starting with their conversion to Territorial Education and

Reincorporation Spaces (*Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación*, ETCRs). These spaces are at the heart of the implementation of the economic initiatives and political project of the FARC party (now Comunes).<sup>2</sup> So far, over 130 associative enterprises have been created by ex-combatants, primarily cooperatives and associations (García & Álvarez, 2020).

As previously mentioned, the Peace Agreement's approach to intervention is characterised by a number of innovative aspects compared to other peace processes. Three of these are particularly relevant to the analysis in this chapter:

- a. *Providing recognition and legitimacy for the collective dimension of reincorporation.* This has been done in various ways. The first was the creation of the ZVTNs as community spaces where arms could be surrendered and the ground prepared for the reincorporation process (activities such as civil registration, legal advice and determining levels of education) and the subsequent transition of the ZVTNs to permanent settlements. The second was the provision of 8 million pesos (approximately €1,850) for each ex-combatant to allow them to undertake a productive project, either individually or collectively. The third is the explicit acknowledgement that the path to reincorporation goes beyond personal support and must take account of the interests of the community of FARC-EP members and their families, with activities to strengthen the social fabric, promote coexistence and reconciliation, and deepen local democracy. Despite Colombia's reintegration policy already incorporating a "community-based approach" (National Planning Department, 2008), this was limited in scope, with less opportunity for participation, reaching agreement and territorialisation.
- b. *Giving a central and leading role to the social and solidarity economy.* There is a focus on collective association, supported by the creation of a group of cooperatives at the territorial and national levels. Not only is this model unprecedented in programmes in Colombia, it

<sup>2</sup> The FARC political party (*Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común* or Alternative Revolutionary Force of the Common) has the same acronym as FARC-EP and was founded in 2017 after the signing of the agreement. It became the Comunes party in 2021. This article uses FARC-EP to refer to the guerrilla forces and FARC to refer to the political movement created subsequent to the signing of the Peace Agreement.

is also innovative at the international level (Valencia & Chaverra, 2019). It is structured around a national organisation Ecomun, whose full name is Social Economies of the Common (*Economías Sociales del Común*), established by Decree 899 of May 2017 in line with the powers and functions defined in item 3.2.2.1 of the Peace Agreement. Ex-combatants can also choose alternative routes based on individual reincorporation on the creation of other types of organisations and businesses, although this model was initially favoured by the majority of FARC-EP.

- c. *Highlighting the importance of the cross-cutting incorporation of the territorial and differentiated approach, which are specific to the Colombian peace process.* The territorial dimension means the ex-combatants and receiving communities define their own projects based on their own interests, needs, identity and potential. The differentiated dimension ensures all initiatives pay specific attention to the situation of women and to gender inequalities, promoting the participation of victims, respecting the diversity and culture of ethnic peoples and taking into account barriers facing people with disabilities. While the inclusion of these aspects is an achievement, analysis shows their intangible nature and limitations when it comes to putting good intentions into practice (Figueroa et al., 2020; Sánchez & Sánchez, 2019).

The approval of legislation and policies has been needed to implement the commitments reached in Point 3 of the Peace Agreement. The first is Document 3931 of 2018 of the National Council of Economic and Social Policy (CONPES 3931), setting out a general framework for socio-economic intervention. This was complemented by Resolution 4309 of December 2019, which contains provisions for accessing the rights to health, education, work and housing for ex-combatants and their families, incorporating a community dimension. This involves the implementation of the National Reincorporation System, which brings together 29 government entities (Government of Colombia, 2021), led by the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation, which is responsible for coordination and monitoring. The Peace Agreement also established the creation of a key new entity: the National Reincorporation Council. Together with the Commission for the Monitoring, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Agreement, it provides a vital space for strategic planning and monitoring among the signatories. The reincorporation

pathway was approved by the National Reincorporation Council, albeit without the approval of Ecomun, which has criticised the lack of territorial agreement and the prioritisation of individual reincorporation over collective reincorporation. This framework has been gradually complemented by further legislation.<sup>3</sup>

Colombia has built up significant experience in this area, having demobilised more than 60,000 people in the 15 years prior to the Peace Agreement (Government of Colombia, 2019). The approach of the Peace Agreement is a major shift from previous reincorporation processes and their political instruments, which were more aligned with traditional disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) approaches and focused on access to public services and obtaining certain financial and legal benefits. The evaluation of these policies had already pointed to a more integrated approach, through the incorporation of comprehensive strategies for reconciliation, repatriation, community integration and public participation (Ramírez & Sanabria, 2020; Villarraga, 2012).

The mechanisms and protocols for the disarmament and reincorporation of former members of FARC-EP were one of the most critical and controversial aspects of the negotiations. Tensions were clear right up to the signing of the Peace Agreement, since the victory of the No campaign in the referendum and the subsequent renegotiations took place after some of the guerrilla detachments were stationed to begin the concentration process (Grasa, 2020). These tensions have continued throughout the implementation process, which has been plagued by disagreement. Criticism from the FARC has ranged from semantics (challenging the use of concepts like “demobilised” and “reintegrated” on account of connotations of giving up on the political struggle and returning to a society that they never abandoned),<sup>4</sup> all the way through to more strategic aspects, accusing the government of torpedoing collective reincorporation processes in favour of individual support in a strategy more focused on counterinsurgency and weakening their political and social foundations.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> There are at least six pieces of legislation: Decree 660 of 2018; Decree 1629 of 2019; Resolution 1279 of 2020; Decree 965 of 2020; Decree 1341 of 2020; and Decree 1543 of 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with a person in the process of reincorporation, from the Héctor Ramírez ETCR, in the Department of Caquetá. 9 May 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with a person in the process of reincorporation, from the Tierra Grata ETCR, in the Department of Cesar. 11 October 2019.

This context of polarisation and continuous disagreements between the signatories has been compounded by other institutional and territorial dynamics. Four of these have had a particularly strong influence during this period. The first is the growing atomisation of ex-combatants, who have left the ETCRs and dispersed throughout cities and regions. This is shown by the creation of over 90 New Areas of Reincorporation (based on calculations from the National Reincorporation Council in 2020), which are now home to over 3,500 people (United Nations, 2021c). The second relates to the government's refusal to recognise these new spaces, the difficulties in facilitating ownership of the land on which people settle and the complexity of approving and implementing collective projects.<sup>6</sup> The third is the failure to make the rural communities in which they are located competitive (e.g. tertiary roads, productive infrastructure and access to technology) and the obstacles this creates for the sustainability of businesses and economic reincorporation. Fourth and most importantly, is security, both in terms of the threats and lack of guarantees in many of these areas. Five years from signing the Peace Agreement, more than 1,270 social leaders and 299 ex-combatants had been murdered (INDEPAZ, 2021).

### 3 EU TECHNICAL–FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE REINCORPORATION PROCESS

From the start of the 2000s through to the New Peace Territories programme (the predecessor to the EU Trust Fund, running from 2011 to 2017), the EU's approach has primarily focused on promoting new models of rural development and territorial governance. Its objective has been to strengthen local and regional peacebuilding initiatives and to create the conditions for social dialogue and addressing inequalities, even in contexts of violence. This model, which is representative of the "local turn" in peacebuilding, has a number of features that make it different and potentially innovative compared to work in other countries. Working with ex-combatants (regardless of the armed group from which they originated) was not a strategic priority for the EU in terms of project design and intervention logic. Instead, its involvement was limited to the reintegration and demobilisation processes.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with a member of the United Nations verification mission. 4 February 2020.

Its approach has expanded since the signing of the Peace Agreement, which defined the EU as an international partner in the implementation of Point 1 (“Comprehensive Rural Reform”) and Point 3 (“End of the Conflict”), specifically for reincorporation. This has allowed the EU to play a considerably more active role than in previous processes, such as the Law for Justice and Peace of 2005, where its support was highly limited, without direct involvement in the disarmament and demobilisation process for the paramilitary organisation the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC) (International Crisis Group, 2006). This recognition formalised the EU’s role and its financial support was increased following a high-level meeting with the national government in Brussels, with the announcement of a donation of €15 million to promote the socioeconomic inclusion of ex-combatants (Mogherini, 2018).

The EU Trust Fund for Colombia was created eight months before the signing of the Peace Agreement (European Commission, 2016) through an administrative act establishing the instrument and defining general objectives and priorities for specific issues and groups. These aspects remained general but are fleshed out in a subsequent strategic document, which identifies ex-combatants as the target group for the first time. The strategy emphasises three aspects: the role of the National Reincorporation Council as the competent authority, the cross-cutting nature of the territorial approach and the importance of respecting the principles of inclusion and a differentiated approach (Delegation of the European Union to Colombia, 2017).

The scope of the EU Trust Fund is broad, leaving certain aspects vague and lacking precision. This openness has given it versatility and flexibility in practice, allowing it to adapt to the demands of the signatories and the continuously changing political, institutional and territorial contexts. The remainder of this section will examine the three levels—territorial, national and institutional—that have characterised the EU’s support for the reincorporation process.

### *3.1 The Territorial Level: Community-Based Organisations and Community Reincorporation*

Although the first EU Trust Fund projects were signed in 2017, their implementation on the ground did not gather momentum until the start of 2018. This was already a year after the signing of the Peace Agreement and complications to the local ecosystem for the reincorporation



process had already begun to emerge. These included (i) the high level of scepticism among ex-combatants and recipient communities regarding the investments made and the capacity of public institutions (Ombudsman's Office of Colombia, 2017); (ii) the lack of involvement of territorial entities in planning and decision-making<sup>7</sup>; and (iii) technical, legal and administrative difficulties in formally establishing the entities of the solidarity economy for ex-combatants (United Nations, 2018). Other more structural issues included the lack of legal security for ETCRs and uncertainty over their sustainability. This had a significant impact on investment dynamics, population exodus and the future plans of ex-combatants. All this has affected the collective reincorporation model put forward and publicly defended by FARC. In this context of growing tensions, the EU's resources have taken on a strategic role in stabilising the situation and building trust.

The EU Trust Fund has deepened its participation since the second half of 2018. From a territorial perspective, this has been done in two ways. The first has involved offering to increase the budget by up to 20% for projects in the design and implementation phase, including specific measures to better address the needs of the ex-combatant population and neighbouring communities. A number of the implementing partners have taken advantage of this opportunity, particularly those with ETCRs in their areas of influence and whose institutional approach allows them to work directly with these population groups. The second was a call for civil society organisations to finance initiatives for socioeconomic reincorporation, launched in January 2018. This led to the approval of four new projects, with investment of around €3 million. Some of these projects have been implemented by organisations created by and made up of ex-combatants.

According to the EU Trust Fund monitoring and reporting system, 29 projects had been funded as of March 2022 (excluding the two budget support packages for the government), 19 of which directly supported socioeconomic reincorporation.<sup>8</sup> These initiatives involved at least 18 ETCRs and New Areas of Reincorporation in 12 departments

<sup>7</sup> Interview with a representative of the Departmental Government of Guaviare. 1 August 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Data obtained from the information published by the EU at [www.fondoeuropeoparalapaz.eu](http://www.fondoeuropeoparalapaz.eu) for each of the initiatives financed and the activities, outcomes and indicators described in the official reports (11 quarterly and four annual).

across the country. There are also three more projects, which, despite not having direct investment in economic and community development terms, are nonetheless promoting reincorporation and reconciliation activities related to social dialogue, political advocacy and education in receiving communities. Approximately 75% of the initiatives funded through this instrument include specific measures to support the ex-combatant population. In thematic terms, the measures are focused on five areas:

- a. *Funding economic initiatives to generate jobs and income.* This first area covers community-based cooperatives created in and around reincorporation areas. The EU Trust Fund has supported the creation of businesses in around 40 of these areas (generating day labour and employment opportunities for over 900 ex-combatants). These include agricultural projects, as well as others related to agri-industrial transformation, micro-businesses and services (primarily community and nature tourism).
- b. *Construction of infrastructure to provide basic services or community integration.* This area primarily covers investment to improve access to water, electricity and the Internet. However, it also includes measures on education, with an emphasis on improving physical spaces, creating rooms with IT facilities and expanding the range of training and education. Lastly, it covers measures to create spaces for contact with receiving communities, including childcare and sports facilities and the adaptation of spaces for leisure and social life. These activities cover over 650 ex-combatants.
- c. *Initiatives for reconciliation and contact between local communities and the ex-combatant population.* Over 4,000 people have participated in these activities, including former members of FARC-EP, local populations and institutional representatives. Activities have been broad in scope, including reconciliation laboratories, intercultural contact, and arts and sports events. Despite the wide range of methods employed, the focus is on the shared objectives of creating opportunities to allow these actors to gradually build new types of relationships at the local level. This means overcoming the

logic of conflict through community integration as a prerequisite for reincorporation and reconciliation in the medium and long term.<sup>9</sup>

- d. *Technical capacity-building on entrepreneurship, business skills and finding work.* This educational component is common to many of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes. It is primarily focused on providing basic education and skills for work. However, the reality of FARC-EP members was markedly different from other international contexts: 90% were able to read and write and almost 60% had completed primary education (National University of Colombia, 2017). Given these figures, over 1,600 ex-combatants participated in training activities. The main focus was on knowledge and good practices for implementing productive projects, working in trades (e.g. construction, carpentry, metal-working) and agriculture. There was also a secondary focus on tools and skills needed to manage the cooperatives created for their reincorporation.
- e. *Creation of spaces for institutional dialogue and public participation.* Some projects have promoted the involvement of ex-combatants in official committees and bodies for territorial planning and decision-making. At least 44 leaders (including men and women) and 11 organisations have received support in this area. While the EU Trust Fund does not have a role under Point 2 of the Peace Agreement (“Political Participation”) and distances itself from activities with a political and ideological component, it does have a role to play in democratic governance. In this context, measures have focused on capacity-building for citizens and dialogue between the public and social sectors.

All the interventions and components share an associative approach. Investment has been aligned with the desire for collective processes expressed by FARC-EP in the Peace Agreement and which has characterised its reincorporation project, with local economic models based on cooperativism and the solidarity economy, which characterises its reincorporation project. The EU has respected this vision in its support for local

<sup>9</sup> Interview with a person in the process of reincorporation who is a member of the COOMPAZCOL cooperative in the Amaury Rodríguez ETCR (Pondores, Department of La Guajira). 9 October 2019.

initiatives led by ex-combatants and neighbouring communities, which have made up a large percentage of resources.

There are four aspects that help us to understand the EU's strategic support at the local and territorial levels. First, the EU's reaction to the request by the national government and the rapid deployment of allocated resources (primarily through budget increases to projects) represents an exceptional measure in terms of the EU's traditional logic of cooperation, showing both its ability to adapt and its institutional willpower. This flexibility has benefited the post-agreement process, allowing a versatile response to a continuously changing territorial, institutional and political context. The EU Trust Fund, which has more autonomy and room for manoeuvre than traditional sources of EU funding, has proven itself to be a useful instrument. Additionally, the use of an open and competitive call to social organisations has boosted civil-society participation in a context in which development agencies and international organisations have shouldered much of the responsibility for implementation (perhaps excessively so).

Second, the projects have been subject to a wide-ranging and inclusive negotiation process with ex-combatant communities and cooperatives. Investment has been the result of a participative and cross-cutting dialogue process, showing the willingness of the EU and implementing partners to adapt to local circumstances and requirements. The partners also highlight good practices, such as the Financial Support to Third Parties mechanism, which allows the direct implementation of funds by community-based organisations (Delegation of the European Union to Colombia, 2020). At least 14 projects have been implemented with the ex-combatant population. This has increased levels of inclusion and ownership, at the same time as strengthening community-based organisations.<sup>10</sup> This mechanism is not without its challenges, including (i) administrative requirements that remain complex for generally weak associations; (ii) the complexity of overcoming traditional leadership structures and the hierarchical structure that prevailed during the years of

<sup>10</sup> Interview with the person responsible for the technical coordination of a project funded by the EU Trust Fund. 15 September 2021.

armed struggle; and (iii) the difficulty of incorporating a vision sustainability, focused on measuring results and the pursuit of profitability and growth.<sup>11</sup>

Third, the Peace Agreement stands out for its cross-cutting incorporation of the territorial approach, a perspective also expressed in the projects funded by the EU. Participative design processes have avoided standard intervention models and allowed the identification of specific lines of work for individual territories. This is evidenced by the range of production chains that have been prioritised (in line with the potential of local areas), the involvement of ethnic communities, adaptation to environmental circumstances (e.g. productive systems, conservation strategies) and the different ways of working with territorial entities, depending on the political and institutional dynamics (including traditional indigenous and Afro-descendent authorities). The territorial approach helps identify structural weaknesses with the potential to threaten the continuity of certain initiatives, such as the lack of institutional presence and capacity, the lack of a business community and regional markets, and deterioration in public order.<sup>12</sup> At all times, the EU has respected the idea of “territorial peace”, which formed the backbone of the negotiation process.

Fourth, support for the dialogue and reconciliation process at the local level has been common across all components. The productive initiatives, business units and infrastructure work directly contribute to this aspect by creating spaces for contact and exchange between ex-combatant communities and neighbouring communities (the majority of which are victims of the armed conflict). Such initiatives favour more gradual and organic integration than explicit “truth and reconciliation” events and activities, allowing communities to move at their own pace and reach certain agreements naturally.<sup>13</sup> This joined-up approach, which connects economic development, community coordination and the promotion of new forms of governance, linked to public institutions, is reflected in the logic of a significant proportion of projects, in line with the Peace Agreement. In a certain sense, it involves creating “ecosystems” that provide foundations

<sup>11</sup> Interview with the management team of a project funded by the EU Trust Fund. 12 August 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with a member of the technical assistance team of the post-conflict EU Trust Fund. 28 April 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with the person responsible for the reincorporation component of a project financed by the EU Trust Fund. 11 August 2021.

for reincorporation, without losing sight of the objective of transitioning from ex-combatants to fully fledged active citizens.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2 *The National Level: Strengthening the Platforms for Coordinating Key Aspects of Reincorporation*

In addition to the associative structures created by the ex-combatant population in the country's regions, two national-level organisations were created under the Peace Agreement: Ecomun and Humanicemos DH. Although they have different missions and remits, both permit the materialisation of strategic aspects of the reincorporation process and display an innovative approach (including internationally) to reconciliation and peacebuilding. At the start of 2018, following a dialogue process between the national government (the High Council for Post-Conflict<sup>15</sup> and the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace) and FARC leaders, the EU decided to provide technical and financial support to both initiatives. This has meant working at a new level, since it seeks to promote these two “umbrella” organisations that go beyond the local logic of the previous two initiatives. The remainder of this section provides a description of the context and intervention model for each.

#### 3.2.1 *Ecomun*

The backbone of the reincorporation strategy put forward by FARC-EP since the negotiating phase has two methodological and strategic components: (i) collective work and (ii) the social and solidarity economy. Not only does this reflect its ideology and vision of development, it is also aligned with its political project (Zambrano, 2019), seeking to draw on existing support among its social base in certain territories to progressively build its status as a political force. With ex-combatants concentrated in different parts of the country, FARC identified the need to create a second-level platform, bringing together different cooperatives to support, strengthen and coordinate both the cooperatives themselves

<sup>14</sup> Interview with a person in the process of reincorporation, from the Miravalle ETCR, who is a member of the MMAVECOOP cooperative. 23 September 2019.

<sup>15</sup> This entity was renamed the Presidential Council for Stabilisation and Consolidation under the presidency of Iván Duque, a change that is indicative of the shift in approach under the new administration.

and their core business areas. This is explicitly set out in and given legitimacy by the Peace Agreement, which states that this organisation shall have national coverage and may adopt a territorial structure (Government of Colombia, 2016). The process to create Ecomun officially began seven months after the Peace Agreement with Decree 899 of 2017. In consensus with the signatories, the EU then pledged almost €8 million of budget support, based on two strategic priorities.

The first was that the group would be cooperative in nature. Here, the EU suggested that experience of the Mondragón Corporation of Cooperatives in the Basque Country could be adapted to the situation in Colombia. This involved discussions within Ecomun and the FARC component of the National Reincorporation Council, which noted some differences in the approach and favoured other models, such as Cuban cooperativism (more representative of the rural and peasant reality of peripheral territories). In the end, it was decided that the conditions existed for participation in the project and that this could contribute to the organisation's success at a stage of high expectations and institutional disengagement.<sup>16</sup> Over the three years of implementation, there have been a number of achievements, primarily in three areas<sup>17</sup>:

- a. *Creating a business structure that brings together and coordinates the associative enterprises created by the communities in the process of reincorporation.* The by-laws, rules and governance mechanisms that establish the cooperative group and govern its operation were drawn up in line with the legislation in force. There have also been broad efforts to engage with society and discussion with the community base through meetings and visits to build consensus and ensure the legitimacy of the organisation's model. Lastly, the organisation aims to encourage new ex-combatant cooperatives to join, with the goal of expanding territorial coverage and the range of products and services. As of the most recent report at the time of writing (June 2021), Ecomun has attracted 153 associative structures.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a person in the process of reincorporation who is a member of the Ecomun technical team. 13 December 2019.

<sup>17</sup> The data is taken from the EU Trust Fund monitoring system and is based on the progress indicators at [www.fondoeuropeoparalapaz.eu](http://www.fondoeuropeoparalapaz.eu), alongside quarterly and annual reports to Brussels.

- b. *Specialised technical assistance and building knowledge and capacity on the social and solidarity economy.* While some State bodies have provided training to some leaders, at the territorial level, there remains a dearth of business experience and this is a major barrier to growth and stability. During their guerrilla period, some figures from FARC-EP were involved in commerce, building up some knowledge of production and sales. However, this does not transfer across to a business environment, since the concepts, approaches and logics of management are quite different to life in clandestinity.<sup>18</sup> The project has built an online platform and curriculum to develop the business skills of over 250 associates of Ecomun.
- c. *Design and promotion of the productive chains prioritised by Ecomun and the corresponding community-based cooperatives.* Ecomun is focused on and specialises in a number of value chains to connect local potential (products and services provided by ex-combatants) and national business units. This requires sectoral strategic plans, technical specialisation, public–private partnerships and leveraging resources to develop the different lines of business. These components are still in the development phase.

The second strategic priority addresses the need for quick results for at least some business units and has seen specific support provided to develop a fish farming production chain. This support represents a significant proportion (around 60%) of the budget and aims to (i) ensure the direct participation of community-based cooperatives (through territorial nodes) in the chain, creating jobs and generating income for the ex-combatant population and (ii) promote innovation and the addition of value, ensuring an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable business model. Although the project has suffered significant delays, primarily from institutional and administrative issues, it remains Ecomun's biggest source of direct support for developing its business model and ensuring its sustainability.

While the first of these projects (implemented by the Mondragón Group) is focused on creating the infrastructure and technical capacity for business development, the second is focused on putting in place a viable

<sup>18</sup> Interview with a person in the process of reincorporation, from the Jaime Pardo Leal ETCR (Colinas, Department of Guaviare), who is a member of the COOJAPAL cooperative. 1 August 2018.



business model with economic benefits but above all showing Ecomun's potential as a national platform, alongside the support it can provide for local organisations in terms of knowledge transfer, specialist advice, leveraging resources and access to markets.

In general, the EU's support for Ecomun makes a fundamental contribution to the spirit of the Peace Agreement and the architecture agreed for its implementation. The EU has become a key partner of the organisation and has made a decisive contribution to collective reincorporation (promoting cohesion among the ex-combatant population), cooperativism (as a business model and form of social inclusion) and the territorial approach (tapping local potential and the know-how of communities).<sup>19</sup> The EU Trust Fund's technical and financial investment has been the international community's main contribution to this organisation (alongside the participation of Norway and various social and development organisations). Moreover, it has also weathered the institutional changes and strategic reorientation pursued by the administration of President Iván Duque. This has shown that, despite seeking consensus with the national government, the Delegation of the European Union to Colombia has kept a certain amount of autonomy in its criteria and actions and has been able to uphold agreements with the signatories during the EU Trust Fund's initial design and formulation phase.

Despite the positive results in technical training, specialisation and the creation of the cooperative group, the EU's support has faced three main challenges.<sup>20</sup> The first is the lack of institutional support and the reduction in the role initially defined for Ecomun. Despite the Peace Agreement stipulating that Ecomun should play a fundamental role in the approval and implementation of resources for collective projects, this has not occurred. In terms of dialogue, negotiating has fallen to the FARC component of the National Reincorporation Council, not Ecomun. Similarly, at the operational level, the national government has not given it the envisaged administrative role. The second challenge has been an internal dispute in Ecomun over two models of organisational management, generating fierce debate and conflicts. One of the models argues

<sup>19</sup> Interview with a representative of the Delegation of the European Union to Colombia (Bogota). 18 March 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with a member of one of the Ecomun support projects (Bogota). 14 March 2022.

for a more vertical approach and for the integration of political and business strategies, with a bigger role for the Comunes political party created out of FARC. The other backs a federal structure with more room for the participation and decision-making of the community-based cooperatives and territorial leaders that emerge from the organisational ecosystem. The third challenge involves growth and consolidation, touching on issues such as how to increase the value of productive chains and connect them to specialist markets; how to build the portfolio of services for local initiatives that form part of Ecomun; and how to access new financing and guarantee mechanisms.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Humanicemos DH*

Humanicemos DH, whose full name is the Corporation of Colombian Ex-combatant Brigades for Peace and Development (*Corporación Brigadas Colombianas de Excombatientes para la Paz y el Desminado Humanitario*), is the world's first humanitarian demining organisation exclusively made up of people in the process of reincorporation (United Nations, 2021b). The organisation stems from item 3.2.2.6 of the Peace Agreement, which states that the removal of anti-personnel mines, unexploded munitions and improvised explosive devices from affected territories must be considered a priority programme for the recruitment of ex-combatants following the agreement. This strategy has the potential to have a multidimensional impact, since it combines economic reincorporation (creating jobs and generating income), reconciliation (through reparations to victims) and peacebuilding (through awareness-raising and preventive campaigns in the most-affected communities).<sup>22</sup>

The demining strategy was launched in 2018 and has been supported by the EU from the outset. However, certain structural factors have hampered the process. In Colombia, demining has traditionally been certified by the Organization of American States. However, this has not been possible in this instance, since a large proportion of the organisation's funding comes from the United States, which has kept the FARC on its list of terrorist organisations (a decision reversed by the Biden

<sup>21</sup> Interview with a member of one of the Ecomun support projects (Bogota). 11 March 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with a person in the process of reincorporation, from the Héctor Ramírez ETCR (La Montañita, Department of Caquetá), home to one of the territorial offices of Humanicemos DH. 11 August 2021.

administration in November 2021). This has hindered working with ex-combatants (Humanicemos, 2020). A second factor has been the new national government, bringing new ideas and approaches to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. In the end, the United Nations Mine Action Service has been recognised as the verification authority by the competent institutions. This allowed the first 24 individual certifications enabling people to carry out these activities to be approved in the second half of 2020.

The EU's financial support began that same year and, as of March 2022, 116 ex-combatants were directly employed in demining activities, over 1,200 community members had been educated on the risks and on preventive strategies, and a team of 12 people had received full training for the long-term strategic, administrative and financial leadership of the organisation. Patricia Llombart, the EU Ambassador to Colombia, has described the process as a shining example of reconciliation and reincorporation (El Espectador, 2020). Activities to remove explosive artefacts are currently ongoing in municipalities in the Department of Caquetá.

In general terms, support for Humanicemos DH provides a valuable opportunity for innovation and for piloting a reincorporation model that combines occupational inclusion, peacebuilding and reparations to victim populations (Kroc Institute, 2021). This experience has the potential for international replication and it will be essential to transfer the lessons learned by the EU Trust Fund to other relevant EU delegations and bodies. Both the EU and the United Nations Mine Action Service can play a key role in this respect. In addition to crucial progress in deactivating explosives and educating the most vulnerable communities, this work is also helping rebuild social capital and relationships between ex-combatants, victim populations and the relevant public institutions (United Nations, 2021a).

The challenges for the next phases will be centred on coordination with other international organisations and public institutions, and on generating financing and support mechanisms to allow the scaling-up of demining to other regions of the country, to meet a key commitment on reparations. Lastly, the Humanicemos DH project has shown a number of good practices in terms of complementarity. The first phase, which was focused on its structure and establishment (2017–2019), was supported by the United Nations, while the second (2019–2022) has focused on the implementation and development on the ground and has been supported by the EU Trust Fund. This bridge between the financial instruments

of the two organisations is an interesting precedent and provides a long-term support model, particularly for unstable contexts that require solid and persistent foundations for cooperation and trust.

### *3.3 The Institutional Level: Promoting the Implementation of Sectoral Public Policy*

Since 2019, the EU Trust Fund has focused on larger projects, identifying priority issues for the national government and the EU to promote strategic aspects of the Peace Agreement. Support has been provided in three areas of intervention: development programmes with a territorial approach to implementing the Comprehensive Rural Reform; the National Reincorporation Policy (Point 3); and the Land Fund and process for formalising ownership (Point 1). The last two of these areas have been supported via budget support. This form of cooperation, which is widely used by the European Commission in different places, allows the direct transfer of resources to the treasury of the partner country. This guarantees greater autonomy in handling funds and facilitates management by results, since funds are disbursed in variable tranches, subject to compliance with previously agreed indicators. The main objectives of the instrument are to facilitate political dialogue on key issues, promote ownership and transparency, and create a favourable environment for the reform of policies and the regulatory framework (European Commission, 2017). However, this type of cooperation requires a high level of trust between parties. This is true of Colombia, now in its second cycle of budget support. This is the first cycle where the EU has specifically targeted issues related to peace, since previous support has focused on policies in areas such as rural development, competitiveness and sustainable development. In this instance, as the body charged with coordinating the incorporation process, the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation is the counterpart of the budget support, with responsibility for its implementation and compliance.

The main objective of the EU financing (€10.5 million for the period 2020–2024) has been to ensure the materialisation of the commitments made in CONPES 3931 of 2018 and increase financing for the peace chapter of the National Development Plan. Budget support has been designed based on a negotiation process between the EU and the national government, which ran for various months and defined the performance

indicators that will determine and enable financial flows. Nine indicators and five strategic areas were defined, structured around two dimensions<sup>23</sup>:

- a. *Economic reincorporation.* Two of the five strategic areas can be grouped under economic reincorporation, which is focused on the percentage of people in the process of reincorporation implementing productive projects or enterprises with the 8-million-peso payment under the Peace Agreement. These projects can be collective or individual. Rather than merely measuring the disbursement of funds, the focus is on whether initiatives have technical assistance to strengthen their operation and sustainability. For collective projects, the number of women leaders is analysed to ensure gender balance in the design and management of businesses in order to promote the inclusion and financial autonomy of women. The second strategic area that falls under this dimension covers professional training programmes and the development of skills for work. Since the phase for the surrender of arms, people in the process of reincorporation have received training and workshops on various occasions. However, only a small number have had access to long-term education opportunities. Aside from the creation of enterprises, inclusion in the workplace will be one of the main sources of employment among people in the process of reincorporation. Accordingly, budget support facilitates measurement of the current level of coverage from institutions and the percentage of students gaining qualifications (broken down by gender).
- b. *Increased focus on fundamental rights.* The other three strategic areas can be grouped under improving fundamental rights. The first aims to address a key issue for ex-combatants, namely the lack of land ownership and the difficulties in accessing quality housing. There are two indicators that help to raise the profile of these issues. These measure the percentage of people in the process of reincorporation who have benefited from access to land and housing but from the standpoint of a broader, rights-based approach, including the availability of sustainable public services (water, sanitation and energy).

<sup>23</sup> The strategic priorities, measurement variables and disbursement criteria are set out in the Technical and Administrative Provisions of the Financing Agreement signed between the European Commission and the Colombian Ministry of International Relations. 7 May 2020.

The second strategic area related to fundamental rights addresses the exponential growth in births among the ex-combatant population that has accompanied the peace process. In the absence of official figures, it is estimated that 3,500 children have been born both inside and outside the reincorporation spaces since the Peace Agreement was signed. The budget support recognises this situation and includes an indicator to monitor compliance with their rights, measuring the percentage of children under five years of age who access the care services of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare. The third strategic area of this dimension covers ex-combatants with disabilities due to causes related to the armed conflict. The Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation estimates that 1,197 ex-combatants are in this situation, with either physical or mental issues that require special care. This is reflected in two indicators that measure the percentage of people whose disability has been evaluated and who have obtained the corresponding certification. This status recognises their condition and allows access to multidisciplinary health care services, as well as a range of other institutional services.

Around 20% of budget support is assigned to “complementary support” via a technical assistance contract to (i) strengthen the corresponding national institutions through the transfer of good practices, successful experiences and specialised knowledge; (ii) guarantee the effective inclusion of the gender-based approach and other cross-cutting priorities (including the territorial approach and sensitivity to the conflict); and (iii) promote the distribution and sale of products derived from the reincorporation process and increase the range of occupational training. Since 2021, this last point has been addressed via a special school in the city of Cali, which aims to train over 200 people (ex-combatants and neighbouring populations of ETCRs) and facilitate the inclusion of at least 60% of them in the workplace. This is the most recent initiative financed by the EU Trust Fund.

In terms of evaluating budget support, it should be noted that its logic of intervention goes beyond the scope of a single project. While territorial initiatives have played a stabilising role and provided direct support

to the most vulnerable populations, the instrument is focused on transforming public policy, which gives it a number of advantages.<sup>24</sup> To a certain extent, it allows the prioritisation and promotion of key issues that may not be high on the political agenda. Examples include commitments related to access to land, quality housing and women's leadership. At the same time, budget support also promotes normative and institutional changes (in many cases binding), with the potential for greater sustainability over time. Key examples of how budget support has played a major role in the reincorporation process include the prioritisation of children of ex-combatants in the programmes of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare; the evaluation and certification of people with disabilities; the inclusion of the population in the process of reincorporation in the national employability roadmap; and recognition of urban housing for people living outside rural areas.

Although the budget support mechanism cannot address structural factors like the persistent issues surrounding land and ownership, it has shown its potential as a catalyst in key areas through negotiation and financing by results. While, more generally, some authors have questioned its efficacy and even connected it to forms of meddling by donors (Wolff, 2015), in Colombia it has positively shaped the institutional agenda, in line with the Peace Agreement and in a context in which the national government's willpower and commitment to implementation can be questioned. However, the sustainability of these decisions and their materialisation on the ground will ultimately depend on the political vision and budget allocation of the government over the medium and long term.

There are other technical and strategic aspects that also reflect potential changes derived from budget support. First, while the National Council of Economic and Social Policy had clear objectives, it did not have a specific measurement framework to monitor progress. The negotiation process with the EU has allowed the creation of a series of indicators and new procedures for gathering and analysing data. This constitutes real progress towards management by results. Second, budget support is ensuring the implementation of differentiated approaches by ensuring words are turned into actions. The indicators include aspects such as guaranteeing and measuring the inclusion of key groups like women, people

<sup>24</sup> Interview with a representative of the Delegation of the European Union to Colombia (Bogota). 23 March 2022.

with disabilities and minors, as well as the urban–rural dynamic. This aspect is particularly relevant given the geographic and social diversity and wide range of contexts inherent to the reincorporation process. Third, the intervention logic and the corresponding indicators look beyond the individual vision of ex-combatants to encompass the family unit. Progress in this direction is a major step towards stabilisation and the return to civilian life.<sup>25</sup> Budget support promotes care for minors and the involvement of families in productive projects, from a rights-based approach.

All this represents a new direction for public policy. However, the challenge lies in transferring this national strategy to the territorial and local level, where technical, human and financial capacity is generally low. Nonetheless, budget support has helped deepen this approach. It has also proven itself as a versatile instrument that can take into account some of the structural changes in the reincorporation dynamic, such as the exodus of many ex-combatants from ETCRs, the growing relevance of reincorporation in cities and the reality of New Areas of Reincorporation.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

There can be no doubting the significance of the EU's support for the reincorporation process. In the highly volatile and politically sensitive context of the post-agreement phase, the EU has played a decisive role in stabilisation and building trust, an aspect widely recognised by both parties to the agreement.<sup>26</sup> While this process is not without its weaknesses, challenges and difficulties, it has shown the important role international cooperation can play in a context of high polarisation and clashing territorial, political and institutional dynamics. This chapter will now conclude with some of the key lessons that can be learned from the EU's support.

At the political level, the EU has consistently expressed its support for the Peace Agreement and the reincorporation process. This has been

<sup>25</sup> Interview with a person in the process of reincorporation, from the Miravalle ETCR. 22 September 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Representatives of both parties have publicly acknowledged this fact on numerous occasions. It was recently affirmed in November 2021 by Emilio Archila (High Presidential Councillor for Stabilisation) at the sixth Strategy Committee meeting of the EU Trust Fund and by Rodrigo Londoño (FARC/Comunes) at some of the celebrations and conversations to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Peace Agreement.



particularly valuable when tensions have been running high and when political and social debates have significantly affected the morale and outlook of ex-combatants. The EU's relationship with the signatories has been characterised by pragmatism and diplomacy, keeping communication channels open and listening to both sides. This has allowed it to support certain demands of FARC-EP, particularly on community-based cooperatives, the promotion of Ecomun and in denouncing the lack of security guarantees in some regions. It has also allowed a growing connection with the national government, increasing funding through budget support and upholding priorities like supporting Territorially Focused Development Plans and investment in productive infrastructure and roads. This willingness to deal with both parties has required significant coordination within the EU Trust Fund itself to bridge the visions and positions of the 23 contributing countries and has generated criticism from the various political fringes. Ex-combatants have called for greater criticism of the State's failures to comply with the agreement and for increased attention to violations of their rights. In contrast, some political forces have criticised support for certain aspects of the Peace Agreement, arguing that it promotes impunity and favours people who were involved in armed conflict. Despite these criticisms, the institutions and FARC/Comunes have acknowledged the EU's capacity to build consensus and to finance strategic initiatives that establish and support reincorporation.

At the institutional level, the EU has shown a willingness and effort to respect the approach and commitments made between the national government and FARC-EP. This is clearly shown by two major decisions. The first is the decisive support for collective reincorporation processes, in line with the desires of the ex-combatant population, as set out in Point 3 of the Peace Agreement. This perspective has continued under the new government, which has shown reticence and erected barriers to the collective model (e.g. in the allocation of land, weakening the planning bodies derived from the Peace Agreement and the channelling of funds through Ecomun). The second is the decisive backing of Ecomun and the local initiatives of the social and solidarity economy, supporting the vision of development and the community approach of the population in the process of reincorporation.

The EU Trust Fund has also shown its versatility and ability to adopt different measures in response to changes in context, despite the technical challenges this has presented for the EU. Coordinated work inside the Delegation of the European Union to Colombia has allowed the

adoption of exceptional legislative and administrative decisions, showing a high level of assertiveness and flexibility. Examples include increasing the budget of projects in the short term, the search for ways to provide financial support to Ecomun, Humanicemos DH and ex-combatant cooperatives, and the cross-cutting inclusion of Financial Support to Third Parties to give community-based organisations direct access to funds. Nonetheless, the EU faces a number of persistent challenges. These include slow decision-making in a context that demands quick and effective responses and the volume and complexity of bureaucracy associated with its projects for some of the local implementing organisations, some of which possess limited experience and capacity to comply with these fixed rules (especially those stemming from the Peace Agreement).

At the technical level, the EU's experience contains added value that is worth highlighting and even adapting or replicating in other contexts. The intervention model promoted by the EU and implemented by its partners has adopted an integrated approach, combining economic reincorporation, inclusion and social dialogue. In addition to improving material conditions and increasing opportunities to obtain employment and an income, an important feature has been its ability to ensure the cross-cutting presence of two key aspects:

- i. *Reconciliation*: It has progressively opened commonplace, organic spaces for the coexistence of ex-combatants and receiving communities. This has resulted in new types of relationships and has helped overcome stigma created by the period of conflict, allowing ex-combatants to become accepted as individuals. In contrast, truth and reparation (covered by Point 5 of the Peace Agreement) have played a lesser role in EU projects.
- ii. *The inclusion of local institutions and the promotion of democratic forms of governance*: Projects have worked closely with municipal and departmental government, connecting them to the initiatives of ex-combatants and channelling the demands of local populations. Political tensions and budget limitations notwithstanding, these bodies will absorb the reincorporation process in the medium to long term.

In terms of the challenges and weaknesses of the EU's activities, there are two main points. The first is the perceived lack of participation and coordination with the bodies derived from the Peace Agreement. Despite being an international supporter, the EU has played a bit part in the Commission for the Monitoring, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Peace Agreement and its relevance in the National Reincorporation Council has diminished. Although the national government's lack of willpower and political disputes between the parties have caused these spaces to gradually decline, the EU could have had direct contact with them and supported them more explicitly, given their status as legitimate bodies derived from the Peace Agreement. Similarly, there is limited coordination by the EU among the various levels of support for the reincorporation process (territorial, national and institutional), with no solid strategy to promote relationships between them. While coordination boards have been organised across projects at the territorial level, this does not appear to be the case at the sectoral level. Projects have achieved some synergies and collaboration at the local level when they are in the same area but this does not appear to be the case at other levels of intervention (departmental and national), especially for connecting local initiatives and public policy.

Lastly, the sustainability of initiatives remains a major challenge, most notably when it comes to productive units or cooperatives. Nonetheless, the EU Trust Fund has made significant progress in this area beyond financing and material support. Specialised technical assistance for projects has allowed communities in the process of reincorporation and their organisational structures to develop their capacity for business and, above all, to take a more realistic view of the market and how business works. The experience of clandestinity and contact with the informal or illicit economy have created a distorted perception of productive and commercial dynamics. The concepts of cost efficiency, profitability and competitiveness are not yet fully accepted, remaining controversial and at times a source of criticism. Implementing partners have considerable experience in the social sector but not when it comes to business, limiting the implementation of market-oriented business models. Projects have successfully positioned so-called "peace products" (products and services produced by people in the process of reincorporation). However, while this represents added value that customers are willing to recognise, certain quality requirements need to be met and ensured. This process of optimisation and standardisation is still ongoing in many cooperatives.

There are also structural weaknesses that must be taken into account. A clear example is the lack of land ownership. While the EU has gone ahead with its investment despite this uncertainty (prioritising areas with greatest support and stability) and has used budget support to promote the National Land Policy, legal uncertainty hinders the local assimilation and mobilisation of resources. This also connects with other factors that have increased the complexity of the reincorporation process, such as the national government's lack of support for New Areas of Reincorporation, the growing dispersal of ex-combatants and—it goes without saying—the shadow of threats and murders that hangs over social leaders and signatories to peace.

Like with many other programmes, sustainability will ultimately depend on the capacity to permeate national public policy and influence the intervention logics of the bodies who will take on the implementation of the Peace Agreement over a much longer time frame than is possible with international cooperation. While the EU has managed to put in place a range of successful strategies, methods and initiatives that are already delivering significant results on reincorporation, reconciliation and peacebuilding, there remains no clear inter-institutional consensus on how to ensure support and ownership by the Colombian public institutions going forward. This may prove one of the biggest challenges for the implementing partners and the Delegation of the European Union to Colombia in the final phase of the EU Trust Fund.

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