This guide was produced by members of InterAction’s Protection Working Group, whose aim is to enhance the capacity of humanitarian actors in the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons and civilians affected by conflict.

InterAction is the largest alliance of U.S.-based international development and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations. With 160 members operating in every developing country, InterAction works to overcome poverty, exclusion, and suffering by advancing social justice and basic dignity for all.

I. INTRODUCTION

Prior to delving into the substance of this guide, it is useful to highlight a few statements that explain what the document is intended to convey and its limitations.

What it is:
The document is designed to complement and supplement existing publications that detail how to do data collection. It is a “how to” tool for incorporating protection considerations into data collection. The document should not mislead readers into thinking that incorporating the following guidance means that one is “doing protection.” Rather, this is a snapshot that illustrates how to incorporate protection into one element of one area of humanitarian work. Protection work is multi-faceted and must be given particular attention at all levels of humanitarian operations including project design, monitoring and evaluation as well as effective coordination among and between organizations. Protection is not an isolated activity, but rather requires complementary efforts among all stakeholders.

What it is not:
This document is not intended to explain how to design and conduct assessments, surveys, evaluations or any other type of data collection. There is a litany of professional and quality guidebooks and publications that detail the appropriate methodologies and techniques for the various types of data collection (a few of which have been cited in the reference section). This document is not to be used in lieu of those publications but rather in conjunction with them.

A word on language:
The document employs the phrase “data collection” as an umbrella term for all activities associated with soliciting information from individuals and groups. This encompasses, but is not limited to, activities such as evaluations, assessments, surveys, and others.

Participation:
It is important to note that meaningful participation is a fundamental aspect of all protection-related matters, not just within this document, but across the spectrum of protection considerations from the design of a data collection process and program design to implementation and monitoring. Participation implies inclusion of not only the beneficiary community leaders but also community members including a broad range of women, men, children of different ages, and minority groups.
II. **Ethical Principles in Data Collection**

Ethical considerations are essential to any form of data collection in a humanitarian operation or in a post-conflict setting. Collecting information for any purpose, including monitoring, assessments or surveys, can put people at risk not only because of the sensitive nature of the information collected, but also because simply participating in the process may cause people to be targeted. The risks can range from physical violence to social marginalization and are often unknown to the individual soliciting the information.

This section offers guidelines that ensure at a minimum that the collection of data performed in a humanitarian setting is socially valuable, participants are treated fairly and with dignity, and the participants’ interests are protected. These guidelines are essential when dealing with vulnerable populations such as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, who often lack effective protection from their state. As such, if their rights are violated as participants in information collection, they have little legal recourse. Moreover, owing to their particular circumstances and high level of insecurity, these participants are at greater physical risk from retribution for participating in this type of activity, which can be viewed with suspicion. Particular attention must be given to working with children in these circumstances, as the principle of informed consent applies equally to children and their parents, even if it may take more time to explain in terms that young people fully understand. Humanitarian workers involved in information collection are obligated to protect the rights of individuals and groups involved in this process as participants.

Three basic principles of particular relevance to the ethics of data collection involving human participants are: respect, do no harm, and non-discrimination.

**Respect:** Respect for the individual implies that each person is regarded as autonomous (i.e., independent and free to make his or her own choices) and should be given the necessary information to decide whether or not to participate voluntarily in data collection. Respect also includes developing an understanding of the cultural norms of the participating group and treating people as equal participants in the data collection process rather than as victims. Finally, respect for the individual means that the person collecting information is cognizant of the concept of power and the power differentials between the collector and the participant. The “collector” holds the power in this setting and should be sensitive to this imbalance. The collector should work to develop a more balanced power differential by involving the participant and community in the process of design as well as evaluation and response.

**Do No Harm:** Based on the Hippocratic maxim to first do no harm, efforts must be made to minimize possible negative effects and maximize possible benefits. It is your responsibility to protect participants from harm, as well as ensure that they experience the greatest possible benefits of involvement. While gathering information with displaced groups, the question asked must not only add value to the exercise but must also be greater than any harm that might be done. For example, in certain circumstances, a question such as “are you HIV positive?” might add informational value, but that value may be sufficiently outweighed by the negative consequences associated with others learning about his or her HIV status; the end analysis may be that it is best not to ask the question. Another example is the important need to give adequate consideration and be sensitive to the potential of forcing a participant to relive traumatic events during the data collection. If significant risk of re-trauma exists, the data collector should ensure that appropriate psychological or psychosocial supports are provided both during and following the data collection.

Often, participants may believe that by responding to questions, circumstances will change or aid will be delivered in exchange for information. The information collected should become a resource that empowers the participants, enabling them to take greater control of their lives rather than enhancing vulnerabilities and risks.

**Non-Discrimination:** The concept of non-discrimination may be questioned when we attempt to decide who will be given an opportunity to participate and who (and for what reason) will be excluded. Often there are criteria that justify differential treatment for certain purposes, such as selection according to age, gender or particular group. However, once the general selection parameters are determined, the selection thereafter must be equitable and fair. For example, are some groups or persons being selected simply because of their accessibility, their language ability, education level or their position in society, while others are not? The collector
of data must be aware of these and other relevant factors so as not to unintentionally or otherwise discriminate in the selection of participants.

Keep the principles of respect, do no harm and non-discrimination in mind when you are selecting participants, obtaining consent, and conducting your study. The responsibility to protect and inform participants of their rights is ultimately yours and cannot be ignored or delegated.

III. APPLICATIONS OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES: A CHECKLIST

The following offers a basic list of conditions that should be met in order to determine whether the method of data collection is ethical when dealing with displaced and other vulnerable groups:

**Dignity**

The data collection must be designed such that all interactions with participants and their community are conducted according to existing human rights principles, including those recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The data collected must yield added value to the population involved; the resulting information must be used to support the dignity and autonomy of the participants and, where applicable, the community at large. In addition, the design of the data collection must include:

- Clear objectives and reasoning why data collection is necessary
- Methodologically rigorous procedures and processes
- Sufficient sample size
- Plausible data analysis plan
- Determination whether an internal review is sufficient or the need exists for an independent review mechanism to ensure quality, integrity and ethical considerations for formal research projects

**Risk-Benefit Analysis**

Risk-benefit analysis entails weighing the probability of harm versus a desired outcome or anticipated benefit. Balancing risks and benefits is an important consideration. Risk-benefit analysis should be applied not only to the substance of the data collection, but also how it is conducted and subsequently stored and used. The following conditions should be met and detailed prior to any survey or data collection:

- Anticipated risks are identified
- Unintended risks are identified
- Risks to the participant are minimized
- Mechanisms are designed to monitor for and address adverse outcomes
- The risks to the participants are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits

**Informed Consent**

Respect for persons requires that, to the degree possible, participants must be given the opportunity to make an informed decision about their potential participation, which entails three elements: information, comprehension, and voluntary participation. Informed consent should always be obtained verbally and in ways that are culturally appropriate and relevant. To ensure informed consent has been obtained according to the standard and conditions outlined below, the data collection team should include at least one staff person (as applicable, from within the participating community) who speaks all relevant languages and will monitor the informed consent process. The following points should be taken into consideration in designing an appropriate consent form:

- Wording of the document should be simple, concise and clear
- Document is written in the language of the participant
- Document must be explained orally to each participant
- If for illiterate groups, the document should include appropriate diagrams, pictures, etc.
- If for children, document should be adjusted to their level of understanding. It must be sensitive to the adult/child dynamics when
explaining participation and ensure that the child understands the nature of participation; a separate form will be necessary for parental and/or guardian consent depending on the nature of the topic

- Ensure as part of the voluntary nature of the process that the document does not mislead or raise false expectations. If the surveyor is an outsider, participants are more inclined to believe that there is something for them to gain by participating; particular care must be taken when dealing with child participants
- Discuss and explain the use of physical media, if relevant (i.e. camera, tape recorder); the interviewer may have to make a judgment call about whether the use of this media is appropriate
- Consent may need to also be obtained by a community leader or elder or from the head of household; this should be in addition to individual consent
- Ensure the appropriate option: signature, thumbprint, or oral consent with non-affiliated witness
- Copy of document given to participants

The following explanations should be included in an informed consent document:

- Explain the purpose of and method used in the survey or data collection
- Detail the procedures and processes of the survey or data collection
- Provide necessary information and details to help clarify the nature of the data collection
- Explain the purpose and expected duration of the participant’s role
- Detail the potential risks and benefits
- Explain the confidentiality of participation
- Offer contact information so that the participant can reach the surveyor/information gatherer
- Statement that participation is voluntary and there is no penalty for declining
- Statement that the participant can cease participation at any time and request that their data be destroyed
- Statement that if the participant is determined to be in imminent harm to self or others, relevant information will be relayed on to appropriate authorities or third party

**Confidentiality**

Respect for the participant through protecting the individual and family’s privacy is essential to the process. Privacy should be ensured in that there is a defined timeframe for the participation and that it is conducted under circumstances and in a location determined to be appropriate for the participant. Confidentiality pertains to the treatment of information that the individual has disclosed in the interview process with the expectation that it will not be divulged or disclosed in a manner inconsistent with the way in which the participant was originally informed. The following points are essential to consider and plan for, especially if the information collected is of a highly sensitive and personal nature:

- To what extent does the survey involve an observation or intrusion on the participant’s privacy
- Where possible interviews should be conducted in privacy particularly if content is of a sensitive nature to ensure the participant feels free and safe to speak
- Explain in simple terms the distinction between raw data, which is confidential and private, and the synthesized conclusive information, which does not include identifying factors, to be used for programming and advocacy (perhaps through media)
- The data collection or survey objective justifies the invasion of privacy
- Adequate confidentiality measures are provided
- Participants are clearly aware that they can withdraw at any time without prejudice and they do not have to answer personal questions
- Every effort is made to ensure accountability and that the person collecting data serves the interest of the participant
- Every effort is made to safeguard the participant against any harm as a result of participating in the data collection
- Data collectors/surveyors are prepared to provide information where the participants’ well-being and/or safety is at risk (i.e. referrals to organizations or agencies for a particular assistance)

**Security**

The following relates to securing data and persons involved in the collection process:

- Design a method to separate identity from content material (i.e. use of codes or separating face sheets that contain biographic information)
- Information relating to the site or sections of the temporary settlement or refugee camp should also be kept confidential
- Limit access to collected data
Impress on staff the importance of maintaining confidentiality

- Store records in secure area
- Ensure the Code of Conduct is discussed and understood among all staff especially with regard to improper conduct, abuse and exploitation of participants
- Devise a procedural plan for handling breaches of confidentiality
- Devise a procedural plan for physical security of participants and interviewers during interviews
- Be aware of the local political culture and whether warlords or governing authorities are imposing a “culture of silence” on people
- Be cautious of the rapport developed with warlords or rebel leaders from whom you are seeking participation, so that you don’t risk losing legitimacy in the eyes of the community while granting them a source of power and influence
- Review the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s code and standards regarding abuse and exploitation and the protection of participants

**Fairness**

Defining the appropriate group of participants for an assessment or evaluation involves a variety of factors: requirements of scientific design, susceptibility to risk, likelihood of benefit, practicability and considerations of fairness. Participant selection must be fair, unbiased, and conducted on the basis of scientific principles according to the objectives of the data collection. The following conditions should be considered in selecting participants:

- Clear plan determined with respect to numbers needed, exclusions criteria, age limitations, mentality or other capacity
- Determine whether the participants should be selected by event, gender or random selection
- Ensure that the selection process does not stigmatize a particular group either by ignoring a select group or by being perceived as preferential treatment for a select group at the expense of another
- Document when inaccessibility is an issue and information as a result will be less accurate
- Determine whether participants will require follow up
- Determine the appropriateness and imperative need to feed the findings back to the community

**IV. DATA COLLECTION: PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS IN DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

As mentioned in the introduction, this document is not intended to provide guidance on how to conduct scientifically sound data collection as such, but serves to outline key protection considerations as integral parts of the data collection process.

Data collection in humanitarian operations is often undertaken with a technical focus, particularly in assessments and surveys that lead to the design of projects that are assumed to be the solution to technical problems. However, this process can often de-politicize the underlying problem at hand and convert it into a technical problem that masks the power relations and patterns of inequality and exploitation.

Adding the protection lens to the overall process allows for clearer identification of the underlying causes through effective data collection. This protection approach will create greater opportunity for sustainable resolution to problems by empowering participants to create holistic rather than simply technical solutions.

The following highlights examples of protection considerations in the design and implementation of data collection:

**Designing a Method for Data Collection**

- What are the driving questions?
  - Example: Are members of the returning community accessing the civil administration?
- What will the surveys measure?
  - Example: Number of returnees who access the civil administration and frequency of three types of obstacles.
- To whom do you want to ask these questions?
  - Example: Returnee elderly men and women, families, single female heads of household in X community.
- Why do you want a survey?

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1 Although there are numerous documents detailing how to design and conduct scientifically sound data collection, the primary one used for reference here is the “Rapid Assessment Procedures: Addressing the Perceived Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons through Participatory Learning and Action,” done in partnership with USAID, Tulane University and John Hopkins University School of Public Health under the aegis of the Complex Emergency Response and Transition Initiative (CERTI).
Example: Will the survey be used for:

1. **Descriptive research**: describe phenomena and summarize; to get a precise measurement of certain things, such as preferences
2. **Causal explanation**: measure association between things (i.e. why does X do Y or what is the link between X and Y)
3. **Evaluation**: the degree to which a desired objective is attained as a result of a planned program
4. **Prediction**: survey data that can be used to forecast future events

**Choosing Question Format**

- Questions should be designed to enhance participation
- Objectively stated; without bias
- Include neutral or not applicable responses as a midpoint on forced choice questions
- Concise with regard to length of questionnaire, particularly for young participants
- Questions should be simply worded, as most will require translation and possibly multiple translations
- Place sensitive questions at the end of the survey in case the person is prompted to drop out by being asked such questions
- Work with local community members to ensure that questions are culturally appropriate

**Examples for Wording Questions:**

Poor: Were you raped
Better: Are there bad things that happened to women or girls in this camp; can you tell me about them

Poor: How often do you stand in line for food aid
Better: How many days last week did you stand in line for food aid such as flour or rice

Poor: Did you cross the border last year
Better: When did you cross the border

Poor: Should the government install better lighting or hire more guards
Better: Should the government hire more guards to monitor the safety in the camp

Poor: How much do you agree with the following statement: Since coming here, IDPs experience political oppression
Better: How much do you agree with the following statement: Last month, IDPs were not allowed to vote in the regional elections

Poor: How long have you been a refugee in Tanzania
Better: Are you registered as a refugee in Tanzania. How long have you been a refugee in Tanzania

Poor: Back in village X, had you ever been threatened for your political beliefs and considered fleeing the country with your family
Better: When you lived in village X, were you ever threatened for your political beliefs
When you were threatened, did you consider fleeing the country because of these threats
If you were forced to flee the country, would you take your family with you

Poor: Did you collect firewood today
Better: Which of the following activities did you do this morning

Poor: Have women been raped in this camp
Better: Which of the following problems do women face in this camp
Translation Issues

- Use local language version of the survey with subtitles
- If using translators, ensure they are trained in ethics and the importance of sound methods to avoid bias
- Be aware that translators from the same area as the respondent may represent or be associated with a group that the respondent fears or despises
- Ensure that all survey staff, including translators, understand and sign a confidentiality agreement

Interviewing tips

- Determine the number to be interviewed beforehand
- Create a fair and balanced selection process that is easy to administer (e.g. every third household in the village)
- Explain in broad general terms the concept of data collection and what it is
- Explain from the beginning why you are asking the questions, what it is that you want to know about, and what you will do with the information
- Explain for whom you are working and that you are only seeking information to help improve his/her condition
- Be respectful of the participant as a competent adult person
- Be aware and critical of one’s assumptions about the participants
- Attempt to have females interview females, particularly if questions are of a sensitive nature
- If determined appropriate, conduct interviews in private where possible, particularly when working with women or children
- Show genuine interest in what people are saying (i.e. focus your attention on the person speaking) and be careful to not re-traumatize the interviewee (i.e. be sensitive about intrusive questions)
- Approach “taboo” subjects with caution and cultural sensitivity, but do not avoid the issue if it is relevant to the data collection. It is crucial to start by asking trusted local people how one could safely collect particular kinds of information
- Inconsistent statements are not necessarily intentionally false statements; rephrase questions (without leading the respondent) to see if a different question produces a clearer response. Do not immediately assume inconsistency is a credibility issue.
- If there is a credibility issue, the interviewer should duly note it with an explanation as to why that conclusion was reached
- Use translators or interpreters only when necessary
- If tape recording or using other medium, ensure that proper authorization is obtained from the participants and that there are safeguards in place for ensuring safety of material recorded
- Establish and adhere to a maximum time limit, particularly with young children, and consider participatory rapid appraisal tools
- Offer frequent reassurances about confidentiality
- Maintain objectivity; do not become emotionally involved
- With regard to children, it may be easier to allow them to narrate episodes for greater clarity of events or employ use of maps, drawings, etc. in interview process
- Since repeated interviewing can be stressful, it is useful to rotate team members and provide group debriefings after interviews are completed so that team members have an appropriate forum to vent and release any stresses and frustrations
- Ensure that your statements or comments do not raise a sense of expectation or hope by the participant

Post Collection

- Strategy to transport and store data (confidentiality issues)
- Date entry procedures and quality control established to monitor data entry
LESSONS LEARNED IN HUMANITARIAN DATA COLLECTION

Local meaning versus outside assumptions: For example, if an interviewer is asking about issues of safety when walking around camp, an outsider (i.e. the interviewer) may mean the question in reference to interpersonal safety whereas a member in the camp community may be thinking about snakes. This may prove true with questions about sexual violence, which may not be seen as violence or rape. Another example is that an outsider typically assumes that an IDP wants to return home. This is often not the case, but the assumption can skew how questions are asked and interpreted.

Dealing with abstract concepts: Issues such as time or age may be better dealt with using local relevant markers than the traditional western calendar (e.g. displacement occurred just prior to the last rainy season).

Timing of data collection: Current trends in the location may impact the findings (i.e. if there are rumors spreading about a certain issue, there are new populations entering, peace process underway); these other issues/limitations must be noted as present during data collection.

Scientific validity can be improved: There is a tendency to conduct too many interviews and to collect too few data sets. Control groups are essential and there is a need to employ a variety of measures rather than relying on one type of information source. Often humanitarian workers use what’s referred to as “advocacy research,” whereby the people collecting information already know what they want to say and they come away from the research having “proved” it, usually via anecdotes, embellishment of facts, and distortion of numbers.

Participatory methods: The participation of community members in the process of research design, implementation and analysis can be critical in ensuring that the data is relevant, accurate, and will be used for the benefit of the community members it is designed to assist. The processes of participatory assessment methods have been shown to be as beneficial, or more beneficial, than the actual results of the data themselves. When participants actually “own” the research through active participation, they may become empowered to make changes that result in improvements in the conditions that were being researched.

Involvement and management of staff: It is important that at least one staff member is committed from the beginning to end to ensure coherence, consistency and appropriate supervision in the data collection processes. It is also useful to provide emotional/psychological support for staff including debriefing after the data collection process to ensure staff wellbeing and understanding.

Clarity of concepts and definitions: Organizations and individuals define and interpret concepts and words differently and it is useful to clarify what exactly is meant by typical phrases such as ‘human or social capital,’ ‘gender,’ ‘participation,’ or ‘empowerment.’

Access problems skew results: Often research on displaced people is limited to camps or settlements and conclusions are drawn for the whole population, which raises a problem for all the people who do not live in a camp setting. Accessing remote populations is difficult due to logistics, security and trust. The absence of these “hidden” groups means that any conclusions drawn are limited to the group within the confines of the camp and represent only this select group rather than the population at large. If access is a problem, it needs to be described and factored into the data analysis.
ANNEX A

PROTECTION ISSUES

In all sectors of humanitarian service delivery, important protection issues arise. As outlined in the paper “Making protection a priority: Integrating protection and humanitarian assistance,” protection is a collective responsibility and can be strengthened through the integration of protection elements into humanitarian activities such as food, water, shelter, and education, as well as the development of stand-alone protection initiatives for at-risk groups. Within this framework, it is useful to illustrate the kinds of protection issues that arise in the contexts of different sectors and operating environments.

The following is a general list of protection issues that require consideration in data collection and program design as well as in any systematic process of monitoring, documenting and reporting. While by no means exhaustive, the list endeavors to highlight the range of issues that relate to protection and should inform data collection activities.

There are two protection-related questions put forth under each issue for illustrative purposes. These issues will be elaborated upon below but are summarily presented here for consideration of how an integrated approach in data collection may be developed through monitoring, reporting, assessments and surveys. While some of these areas are included in the Sphere Project, the list here is intended to be more concise, reach beyond the Sphere sector designation, and remain focused on protection.

The list is not presented in any particular order but is meant to extend to all war-affected populations whether they are refugees, IDPs or returnees. The accompanying questions are meant to reflect the need to not only identify problems but also focus on the prevention, mitigation and response to protection-related problems.

Access to food and non-food item distribution
- Have women been fully involved in the design and distribution process
- Is the distribution logistically accessible to all groups

Access to water and sanitation
- Are cultural practices incorporated into the design of facilities
- Is the facility accessible to all groups

Access to health facilities and medical care
- Is health care accessible to all members of the community at convenient times and locations
- Are reproductive health services designed with participation of adolescents and youth

Access to educational and vocational training
- Can girls get to and from school safely
- Are grading methods controlled to reduce opportunity for exploitation

Registration (birth, marriage, citizenship)
- Is data disaggregated by gender and age
- Are births and deaths reported and properly documented

Security within camp or settlement
- Is some form of light provided for evenings
- Are patrol groups coordinated to support prevention of recruitment, looting, rape, or other threats

Access to documentation and legal stay (identification papers)
- Are displaced groups provided necessary documents to live, work, and meet basic needs
- Are government-issued documents tacitly supporting a discriminatory process
Access to administrative and legal due process
• Is there a mechanism in place to process criminal or other illegal activity
• Is there a mechanism to protect witnesses or victims

Freedom of movement and association
• Are people allowed to cross borders freely
• Are people being separated from the group according to ethnicity, religion, or other distinction

Arbitrary arrest and detention (including incident of torture)
• Are people being detained owing to ethnicity, religion, political position, etc.
• Are there any judicial mechanisms in place for people arrested

Freedom to practice religion
• Are people allowed to gather freely to practice religion
• Are groups singled out for their religious beliefs

Access to gainful employment and ability to participate in income-generating activity
• Do women have access to employment opportunities
• Are people resorting to illegal activity to earn income

Prevalence of child labor
• Are there engaging and constructive activities available to children
• Do families (including child-headed households) have access to alternative means of acquiring income

Prevalence of trafficking of women and children
• Are there systems in place to reduce this occurrence
• Are there information campaigns advising people how to prevent trafficking

Prevalence of child soldier recruitment
• Are children placed in housing situations that reduce the possibility of abduction
• Is the recruitment of children as soldiers publicly denounced

Separated and unaccompanied children
• Are separated children clearly documented in the registration process
• Are children placed in appropriate interim care that allows them to meet their basic needs without exploitation or abuse

Prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV)²
• Are girls denied access to school because they have to tend to the house
• Are girls forced into marriage at a young age

Prevalence of sexual abuse and exploitation
• Are complaint mechanisms in place that allow people to report abuses
• Is the Code of Conduct known and understood among all staff

Prevalence of harmful traditional practices
• Are forms of retribution being employed in refugee camps or IDP settlements
• Is female genital cutting being forced upon young women

Access to reintegration/resettlement or other assistance
• Are there mechanisms in place for an individual who may be in need of third country resettlement
• Are refugees allowed to return home voluntarily

Access to land and to property, its restitution, succession and compensation
• Is housing or property available for returnees or alternate housing if property occupied
• What are the processes of restitution or compensation

Integration of IDP or refugee groups in local community
- Are IDPs separated from the general public
- Are groups allowed equal access of services

Mistreatment by government or other authority of displaced groups
- Are government programs discriminatory for certain groups
- Is there hostility between displaced and host communities

Prevalence of mines and UXOs
- Have children been trained and rehearsed in what to do in a mine field
- Are there media campaigns designed to warn about mines and UXOs

Select groups forcibly transferred from one locale to another
- Are government programs forcing groups to relocate
- Are government programs intentionally feeding misinformation to groups

Threat of forced repatriation
- Is repatriation voluntary
- Are cross border networks established to ensure conditions and exchange of information from both sides
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