

When Displacement Ends: A Framework for Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons

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Internal displacement “shall last no longer than required by the circumstances,” the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement stipulate. It is now well recognized that to be internally displaced is to be exposed to a range of particular risks and vulnerabilities, even if it does not create a legal status. Bringing an end to this precarious plight is critically important. However, if decided prematurely, it can have serious ramifications. There consequently has to be an understanding of how to define and realize this end in a manner that respects the safety and security of the displaced.

Providing solutions to IDPs and ensuring their protection and assistance primarily lie with national authorities and, where applicable, with non state actors who control a given territory. This Framework should enable humanitarian organizations to assist the relevant authorities and non state actors to take on this responsibility. Its purpose is also to assist them and the displaced themselves to determine whether durable solutions to internal displacements have been found and, if not, to identify what is still required towards reaching that goal. The Framework addresses those displaced by conflict, human rights abuses and natural or human-made disasters. It may also provide guidance to those displaced by development projects although in such situations return most often is not possible and, in addition, special guidelines on resettlement exist.¹ The Framework does not aim to address the question of disengagement of humanitarian organizations specifically, which is a operational and mandate driven decision, although the achievement of durable solutions can be a criterion for it.

Currently, there is no consensus as to when to stop considering someone as an internally displaced person (IDP). Because identification as an IDP does not confer a special status under international law there is no cessation clause as for refugees. For some, internal displacement ends only upon the reversal of displacement, that is, upon IDPs’ return to their place of origin. In many cases, such return can occur only when the causes of the displacement have been resolved. However because return is not always possible or even desired by IDPs, this can lead to a situation where internal displacement holds little prospect of ever ending, and instead is an “identity” passed down from one generation to the next, which can impede their integration and even undermine their rights. At the other extreme, internal displacement may abruptly be deemed to have ended. It may, for instance, be in the interest of a government to claim there are no longer any IDPs in the country, in an effort to give the appearance of a return to normalcy and to direct international scrutiny elsewhere. Or, resources may dictate who is considered an IDP, with displacement “ending” when funding ends. To end specific actions for IDPs prematurely may lead to some IDPs’ particular protection needs being neglected, without having found a durable solution.

As prevention, which should be the first priority, is not always successful, there is a need to find durable solutions for the displaced, once their forced displacement has occurred. Three types of durable solutions to internal displacement exist: return to the place of origin, local integration in the areas in which IDPs initially take refuge or settlement in another part of the country, the

¹ See World Bank, Operational Policy on Involuntary Resettlement OP 4.12 Involuntary Resettlement, December 2001 for more information about the processes to be followed in cases of development-induced displacement.

latter two being termed “resettlement” by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.⁴ In order to be considered durable, they must be based on three elements, long-term safety and security, restitution of or compensation for lost property and an environment that sustains the life of the former IDPs under normal economic and social conditions.²

Displacement ends when one of these durable solutions occurs and IDPs no longer have needs specifically related to their displacement. This does not mean that they may not continue to have a need for protection and assistance, but their needs would be no different from other similarly situated citizens. Having found a durable solution, formerly displaced persons continue to be protected by human rights law and, if applicable, by international humanitarian law (IHL). Consequently, they continue to have all of the rights of citizens, and the international community should support these rights on the same basis as others in the country. The fact that a person is no longer being considered an IDP shall have no repercussions for the enjoyment of her or his citizen’s and human rights, and, when applicable, the protection offered by IHL, including the right to seek redress/compensation, or the right not to be discriminated against because of having been displaced. The end of displacement is achieved when the persons concerned no longer have specific protection and assistance needs related to their having been displaced, and thus can enjoy their human rights in a non-discriminatory manner vis-à-vis citizens who were never displaced. In order to assess whether this situation has been achieved, an analysis of the individual’s access to rights needs to take place for each situation.

Internal displacement does not generally end abruptly. Rather, ending displacement is a process through which the need for specialized assistance and protection diminishes. Sometimes, for long periods after return, those who have been displaced may find themselves in markedly different circumstances and with different needs than those who never left their home communities. For example, claims to their property may not be adjudicated immediately, leaving them without shelter or a means of livelihood in places of return. Similarly, those who are settled elsewhere may require humanitarian and financial aid until they are able to obtain shelter and employment in their new location. Even in the context of a durable peace agreement, insecurity may continue to pose problems for uprooted populations, particularly if there are resentments and conflicts between returning, locally integrated or settled IDP populations and the already resident population. Under these circumstances, even if the people have returned, they still have residual displacement related problems and are therefore of concern.

The right of IDPs to make informed and voluntary decisions as to whether they want to return, or settle and integrate at the place where they found refuge or elsewhere, is one of the cornerstones of the Guiding Principles, and must be ensured. Though freedom of movement is a fundamental human right, it can be restricted and the right to determine where one lives is not absolute. There may be situations in which national authorities may determine that conditions are too unsafe to permit return or settlement in a specific location (for example, imperative military reasons or a natural or human-made disaster has made an area uninhabitable). However, every effort should be made to ensure that the decision to choose a durable solution is voluntary and that the decisions of individual IDPs whether to return home or settle elsewhere must be respected and facilitated.

Deciding that displacement has ended contains both subjective and objective aspects. IDPs may continue to see themselves as displaced long after national authorities and international observers may determine that their situation has been resolved using a set of objective criteria. Conversely, IDPs may see their displacement at an end upon returning home, even though a more objective analysis would indicate that they remain vulnerable as persons who have been

² Guiding Principles 28-30 spell out the rights of IDPs and responsibilities of competent authorities relating to return, resettlement and reintegration. Since former IDPs should not be disadvantaged relative to those who are still displaced, the Guiding Principles relating to protection from displacement, protection during displacement, and humanitarian assistance apply, where appropriate, after return or resettlement.

previously uprooted and who would continue to need protection and assistance as returnees, locally integrated or persons who have settled elsewhere in their country.

To determine whether and to what extent a durable solution has been achieved it is necessary to examine both the *processes* through which solutions are found and the actual *conditions* of the returnees and those persons who have integrated locally or settled elsewhere in the country. In general, it is important to consider whether 1) the national authorities have established the conditions conducive to safe and dignified return or settlement elsewhere; 2) formerly displaced persons are able to assert their rights on the same basis as other nationals; 3) international observers are able to provide assistance and monitor the situation of the formerly displaced; and ultimately, 4) the durable solution is sustainable. It is important to note that there is no clear or magic formula for deciding that displacement or the need for assistance or protection has ended. Rather, the totality of the situation must be assessed and consultation with all relevant stakeholders be a part of the process.

The Framework is presented in two sections. First are the processes through which durable solutions to displacement are determined to have been achieved, and second are the conditions that mark a durable solution to displacement.

Process

IDPs are able to make an informed decision as to whether to return to their home communities, remain where they are, or settle elsewhere in the country³. The information needed to make an informed decision has to be in a language understood by the IDPs and, at a minimum, includes:

- General situation in the community of origin or settlement, including the political situation, safety and security, freedom of movement, amnesties or legal guarantees, human rights situation, legal and other mechanisms to protect the rights of women, children, youth, minorities, older people, type and duration of assistance available to them, etc. This includes objective information as to whether the causes of displacement have been resolved, and if they have not been resolved, a realistic assessment as to the prospects for resolution and the efficacy of risk reduction mechanisms in place. Information should also be provided on what mechanisms have been put in place in order to ensure a smooth (re-)integration of the IDPs with the local population.
- The procedures for returning, integrating locally or settling elsewhere, including information on what items the IDPs can take with them, what documents they will need, what type of transport will be available, what arrangements if any have been made for those with special needs, what if any reintegration package will be provided, any necessary administrative requirements to stay where they are, etc.
- The conditions on return, local integration or settlement in another part of the country, including access to housing, land, livelihoods, information on mine risks, employment and other economic opportunities; availability of public services (public transport, healthcare, education, etc.); conditions of buildings and infrastructure for schools, health clinics, roads, bridges and sanitation systems; and assistance available from national, international and private agencies.

IDPs, including women, minorities and others who may not have representation, participate fully in the planning and management of return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country.⁴ To ensure full and appropriate participation of the internally displaced in decision-making, planning and management, such participation in

³ Principle 28.2 requires that “Special efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of internally displaced persons in the planning and management of their return or resettlement and reintegration.”

⁴ In line with international human rights law, durable solutions for displaced children must be in the best interest of the child.

decisions may take place in the context of community meetings, social and other service delivery, feeding centers, skills training and income generating programs, and other environments in which the displaced gather. Involvement of staff of NGOs in outreach may help ensure broader participation. In urban areas where internally displaced persons have spontaneously relocated, special efforts will be needed to ensure that they receive notice of consultations and gain access to information. Those who have spontaneously returned, locally integrated or settled elsewhere should also be consulted about continuing assistance or protection needs. The use of mass media may be the most effective way to reach spontaneously settled individuals.

To the extent possible, arrangements have been made for IDP representatives to visit and assess conditions for return or settlement elsewhere. These visits should include women and men as well as a broad representation of ethnic, racial, religious and political groups. The visits should include opportunities for consultations with populations already residing in the potential return or settlement communities in order to identify issues that may lead to conflict.

No coercion—including physical force, harassment, intimidation, denial of basic services, or closure of IDP camps or facilities without an acceptable alternative—has been used to induce or to prevent return, local integration or settlement elsewhere. As stated above, there may be situations in which national authorities are justified in determining that return is impossible, at least for the time being or in the near future. For the most part, however, the use of coercive measures to prevent or induce return, settlement, or local integration undermines the principle of voluntariness, which is essential to ensure the protection of the rights of IDPs.⁵ As stated in the *Handbook for Applying the Guiding Principles*, “Internally displaced persons have the rights to be protected against forcible return to or resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty, and/or health would be at risk. Just as the principle of non-refoulement (the prohibition against forced return to their home countries) is the most important right for refugees, protection from forced returns is also essential for protecting internally displaced persons. This principle has particular importance for internally displaced persons because it is the loss of their ability to remain in their original homes that characterizes their plight. Further depriving them of their right to seek safety adds even greater injury to them.”

National authorities, where appropriate with the support of the international community, have taken appropriate measures to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, to enable IDPs to return voluntarily, in safety and dignity, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country and to facilitate the (re)integration of returned or resettled IDPs.⁶ The primary responsibility for ensuring that IDPs do not face dangers to their physical safety and security rests with national authorities. Countries in transition from conflict or natural disasters may need assistance from the international community (see below) in establishing such conditions.

In practical terms, the responsibility of national authorities includes: taking measures to ensure respect for human rights and humanitarian law; providing safe transit for internally displaced persons; and offering adequate assistance and protection of physical safety upon relocation. In conflict situations, practical measures include seeking peaceful resolution of conflicts; where appropriate, national authorities may need to pay special attention to landmines and unexploded ordinance that may pose a danger to IDPs and/or disarm militias or civilians

⁵ Guiding Principle 28 emphasizes that IDPs should be able “to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country.”

⁶ Guiding Principle 28.1 states that “Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country.”

carrying arms. In the case of natural disasters, national authorities will need to take measures to reduce vulnerability of returnees and the general population from future disasters.

National authorities grant and facilitate safe, unimpeded and timely access of humanitarian organizations and other relevant actors to assist IDPs to return, locally integrate or settle elsewhere in the country.⁷ International and national humanitarian organizations and other relevant actors can play an important role in assisting return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country. In some cases, memoranda of understanding signed by national and local authorities, humanitarian organizations and representatives of the internally displaced may be a useful way to spell out the understandings and obligations of all parties involved in finding solutions to the displacement. Humanitarian organizations and other appropriate actors can also play an important role in assessing the safety and security of internally displaced persons who have returned, integrated locally or settled elsewhere in the country. Assessments should take into account gender-specific violence and exploitation connected to displacement as well as threats specific to children and to other groups with particular protection concerns.

Conditions

Formerly displaced persons do not suffer attacks, harassment, intimidation, persecution or any other form of punitive action upon return to their home communities or settlement in other locations. Attacks or other acts of violence against internally displaced persons are prohibited in all circumstances. Evidence that former IDPs are not subject to such attacks or other punitive actions is an essential condition that a durable solution has been achieved. In the case of conflict situations, it is particularly important to determine that former IDPs are not physically endangered by landmines, unexploded ordinances, small arms or other violence perpetrated by combatants.

Formerly displaced persons are not subject to discrimination for reasons related to their displacement.⁸ This provision has two components. First, displacement ends when returnees and settled or locally integrated persons do not face discrimination because they had been displaced in the past. Second, for the solution to be sustainable, displacement can be said to have ended only if the reasons that induced past and may induce future displacement have ended. These include discrimination based on race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, membership in a particular social group, political opinion or gender.

Formerly displaced persons have full and non-discriminatory access to national and sub-national protection mechanisms, including police and courts. Although law enforcement and judicial systems in rural areas, or in countries in transition from conflict or severely affected by disasters, may not be sufficiently developed, it is important that IDPs have access on a par with other residents to national protection mechanisms and progress be made towards establishing effective courts and police in areas of return, settlement, or local integration. In cases where durable solutions are being sought for IDPs due to conflict, formerly displaced persons have full and non-discriminatory access to local reconciliation mechanisms, as well as reparation for having been the victims of gross violations of their human rights, in particular of having being forcibly displaced.⁹

⁷ Guiding Principle 30 specifies that, “All authorities concerned shall grant and facilitate for international humanitarian organizations and other appropriate actors, in the exercise of their respective mandates, rapid and unimpeded access to internally displaced persons to assist in their return or resettlement and reintegration.”

⁸ Guiding Principle 29.1 states that internally displaced persons who have returned to their homes or places of habitual residence or who have resettled in another part of the country shall not be discriminated against as a result of their having been displaced. They shall have the right to participate fully and equally in public affairs at all levels and have equal access to public services.

⁹ See Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, GA Resolution 60/147 of 16 December 2005

Formerly displaced persons have access to personal documentation, which typically is needed to access public services, to vote and for administrative purposes. To give effect to the right for internally displaced persons to recognition before the law, it is important that the formerly displaced have access to documents necessary for the enjoyment and exercise of their legal rights, such as passports, personal identification documents, birth certificates and marriage certificates. Women and men have equal rights to obtain such necessary documents and have the right to have such documentation issued in their own names. Such documentation in fact should be issued earlier, as soon as an IDP needs them.¹⁰

Formerly displaced persons have access to mechanisms for property restitution or compensation regardless of whether they return or settle in the area where they found refuge or a new location.¹¹ These standards apply to all residential, agricultural and commercial property. The right to restitution or compensation extends to all displaced persons—including men, women and children—who have lost ownership of or access to their property, whether they have formal or informal titles. It also includes those who stand to inherit property from deceased family members who were displaced. The process through which property restitution and compensation is made can be complex and may take time. It is not necessary for it to be fully achieved before IDPs are determined to have found a durable solution if they have access to procedures for property restitution and compensation, including traditional property dispute mechanisms, and are able to reside safely and securely during the interim. It should be emphasized that those determined to have found durable solutions do not lose their claim to restitution or compensation because their displacement has ended – property rights, like all human rights, remain in effect an entitlement of former IDPs. Alternative solutions should be found for temporary occupants of IDP property who are being evicted in the course of property restitution, in particular if they are displaced persons themselves. Appropriate solutions should be found for persons who lost their tenancy rights in the course of displacement. The problems that women may face in obtaining recognition of their ownership or access to the property need special attention, particularly where there are legal barriers to female inheritance of property.

Formerly displaced persons enjoy without discrimination an adequate standard of living, including shelter, health care, food, water and other means of survival.¹² National authorities have the principal responsibility to ensure that those who return, integrate locally or settle elsewhere in the country have access, on a sustainable basis, to essential food and potable water, basic shelter and housing, and essential medical services and sanitation. Humanitarian organizations may be called upon to help ensure that these basic needs are met. Initially, IDPs may have needs for assistance to obtain the means of survival that differ significantly from that of the resident population. However, if adequate attention is being paid to their specific situation, the needs of IDPs are likely to resemble that of other residents over time. To the extent that the needs merge, the continuation of IDP-specific programs could become discriminatory towards the other residents. It should be emphasized, however, that since the formerly displaced retain their rights, along with other citizens, to an adequate standard of living, development programs to help them achieve such a standard will be warranted.

More specifically, formerly displaced persons will have access without discrimination to:

- **Employment opportunities and income generation.** Return, settlement and local integration often occur in circumstances of high unemployment and fragile economies. This benchmark does not mean that all formerly displaced persons must be employed

¹⁰ Guiding Principle 20 spells out the rights of IDPs to documentation.

¹¹ Guiding Principle 29.2 spells out the responsibilities of competent authorities regarding property restitution and compensation.

¹² Guiding Principle 28 states “[Competent] authorities shall endeavor to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.” Guiding Principle 29.1 specifies that returnees and resettled persons “shall have the right to have equal access to public services.”

before considering displacement to have ended. Nor does it require that IDPs regain their previous livelihood. Rather, displacement ends when IDPs have no barriers to employment and income generation opportunities that relate specifically to their displacement.

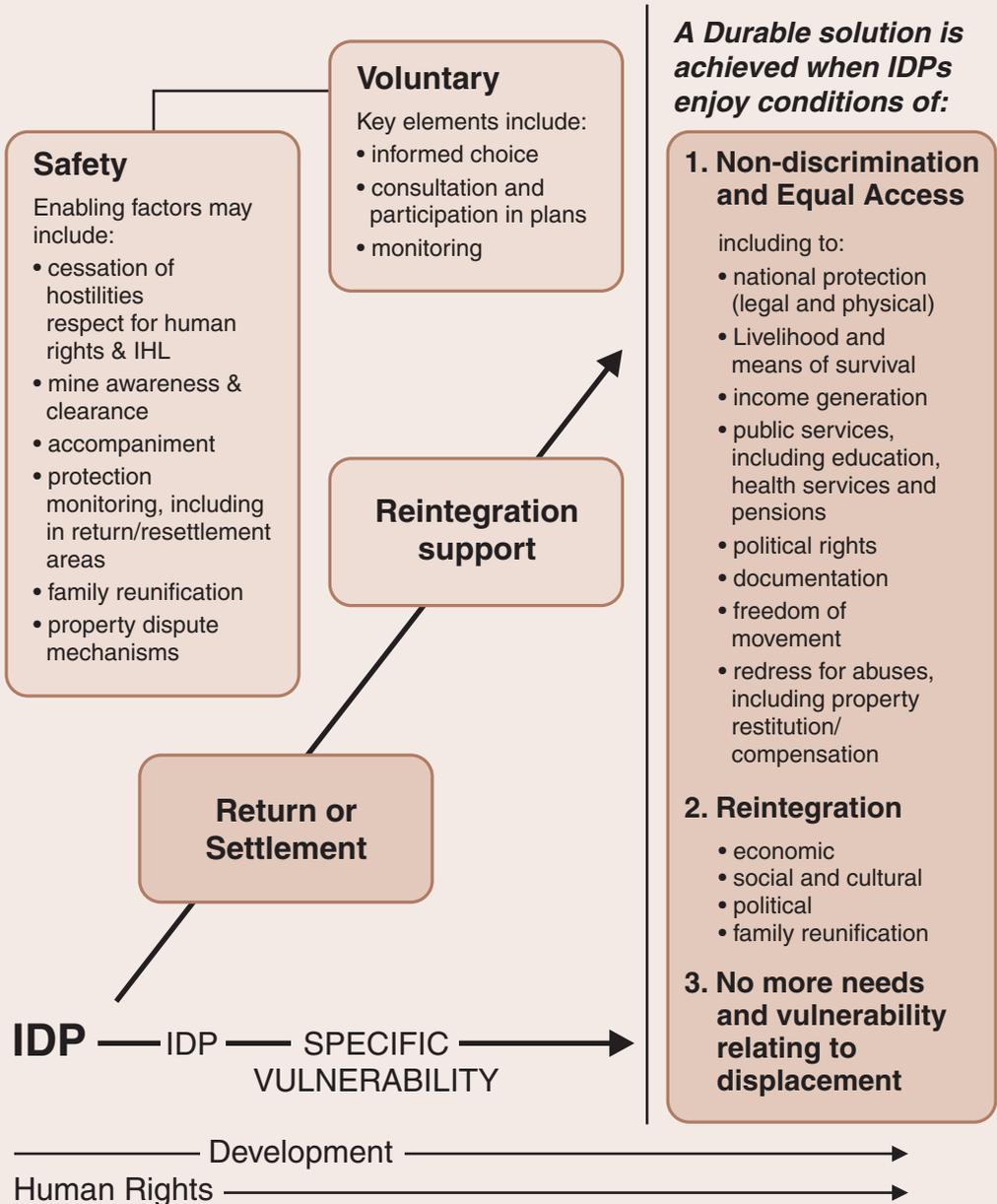
- **Basic public services**, including education, health services and pensions. Similarly, the key to determining whether IDPs have such access is whether there are barriers related to their displacement that bar them from using services that are available to other residents of the community. Replacement of personal documentation, as noted earlier, is often essential in order for IDPs to regain access to public services.

Formerly displaced persons have been able to reunite with family members if they choose to do so. Families separated by displacement should be reunited as quickly as possible, particularly when children are involved.

Formerly displaced persons are able to exercise the right to participate fully and equally in public affairs.¹³ This includes the right to associate freely and participate equally in community affairs, to vote and to stand for election, as well as the right to participate in public affairs, and have access to public institutions, in a language they understand.

¹³ Guiding Principle 29.1 specifies that internally displaced persons “shall have the right to participate fully and equally in public affairs at all levels” upon their return or resettlement. IDPs also have this right while displaced (see Guiding Principle 22 (d)).

Annex: Benchmarks for Durable Solutions for IDPs - Flowcharts



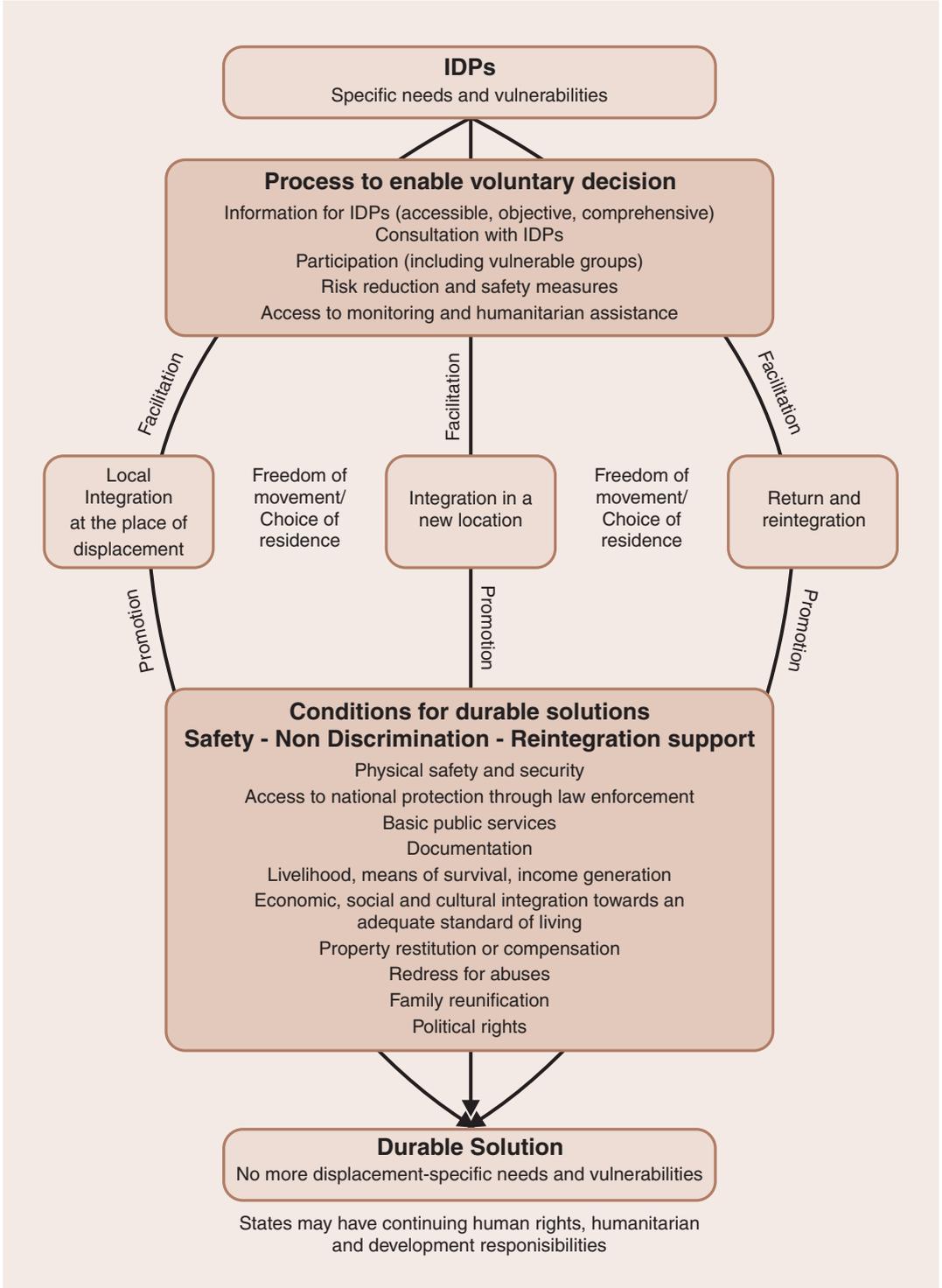




Photo front cover: UNHCR / H.Caux 2007, Displaced Chadian women collect small fish in a pool in the waddi near Dogdore.
Photo back cover: Roald Høvring/NRC, Women bringing wood back to an IDP camp in Darfur.