

# A Tip Sheet for Rental Assistance Programming



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This Tip Sheet provides selected abstracts and summarises from the [IFRC \(2020\) Step-by-Step Guide for Rental Assistance to People Affected by Crisis](#) and it intended to introduce the reader to some of the key concepts related to Rental Assistance Programming, for those requiring further information please referral to the guide.

## Why consider rental assistance programming?

People forced to leave their homes by a crisis would often prefer to rent a room, an apartment, or a house rather than live in a make-shift shelter or camp. Rented accommodation can be used to rest, and provides safety and protection whilst households recover and decide what to do next: move on, return, settle, or reconstruct.

### Key advantages of rental assistance programming

- 1** Can quickly enable access to safe and adequate accommodation through the use of existing housing stock, which can be particularly useful in urban areas where other options can be limited.
- 2** Can empower households who directly receive rental payment by giving them the opportunity to decide where to rent, helping promote dignity and choice.
- 3** Often provides an opportunity for households to integrate into the wider host community, increasing their social capital and bolstering their social inclusion and resilience.
- 4** Rental payments can act as a cash injection to stimulate the local economy, reducing tension between households receiving rental support and the host community.

### What does rental assistance programming involve?

A rental assistance programme often involves the provision of rental payments, but rental assistance goes beyond the provision of cash and voucher assistance. The objective of rental assistance is to ensure people's protection and dignity, whilst enabling access to adequate accommodation for an agreed period of time, to make it possible for people to live in a dignified space without fearing eviction or abuse. An exit strategy must be planned from the outset, ensuring people can maintain their living conditions once support ends.

The type of rental assistance programme adopted is influenced by the intended objectives, the context, people's status (e.g. undocumented migrants), and the vulnerabilities, needs and capacities of the targeted households. As such there may be different components to be considered in a rental assistance programme:

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Components	Descriptions and some examples (not an exhaustive list)
 <b>1 Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supporting affected population in understanding the rental market, rental requirement and normal rental practices</li><li>• Supporting affected population to find adequate accommodation to rent</li><li>• Supporting owners and service providers to understand renting best practice</li><li>• Informing and involving hosting community about the rental assistance programme through community mobilisation</li></ul>
 <b>2 Minimum Housing standard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishing minimum housing standards</li><li>• Assessing and Monitoring the housing market quality, quantity and cost</li></ul>
 <b>3 Minimum security of tenure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensuring security of tenure through appropriate rental agreements</li><li>• Ensuring both parties understand their roles and responsibilities in contractual arrangements (verbal or written)</li></ul>
 <b>4 Exit Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Linking to complementary programmes to ensure exit strategy and do no harm</li></ul>
 <b>5 Technical advice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technical visits related to use, maintenance, and wear-and-tear of rental properties.</li><li>• Supporting households to make insurance claims to pay for temporary accommodation.</li><li>• Assisting with accessing support from Government support systems</li><li>• Referral to social workers for support on relationship management between tenant and owners, this can be part of eviction monitoring</li><li>• Legal advice on mediation and collaborative dispute resolutions</li></ul>

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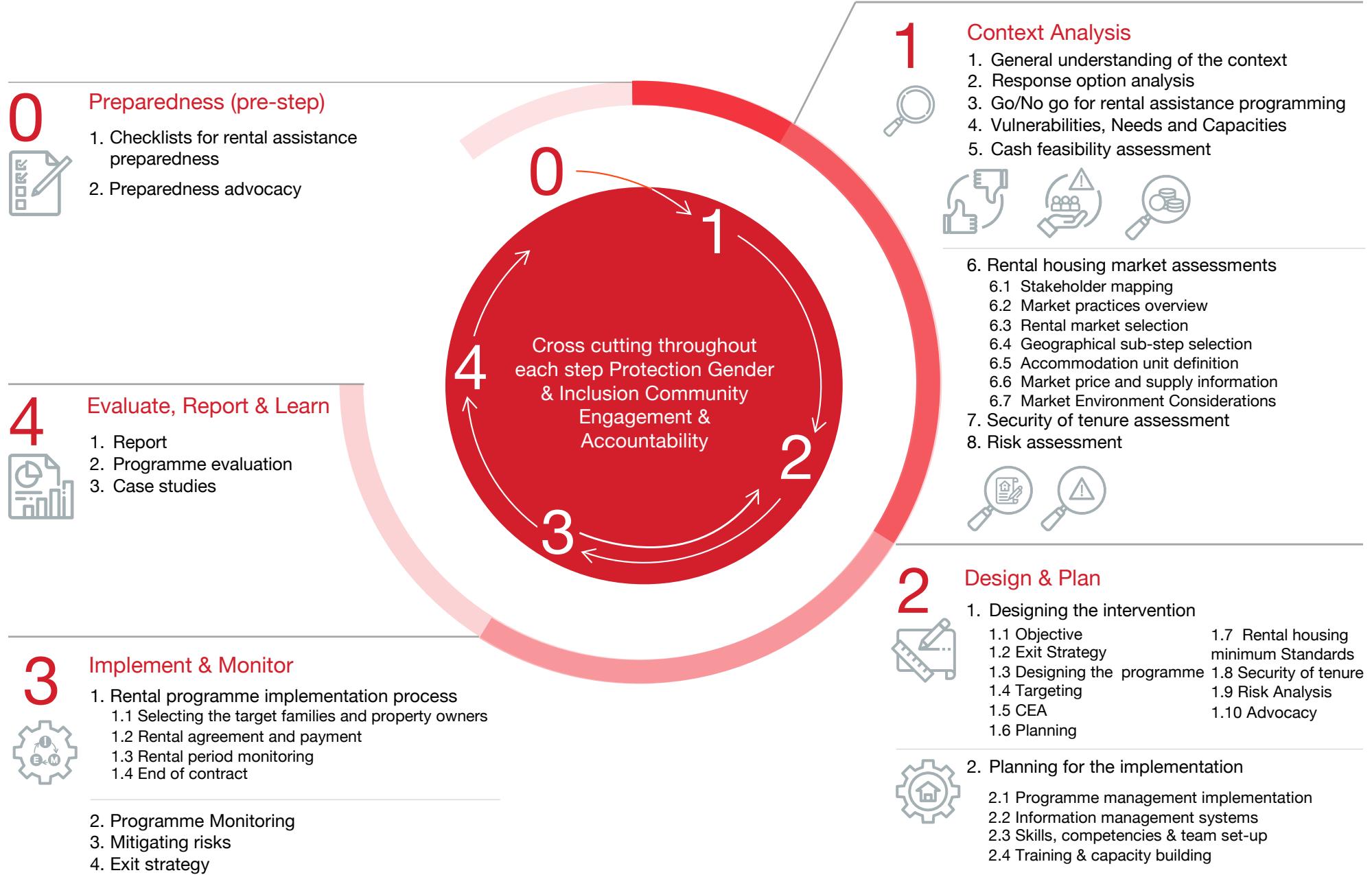
Components	Descriptions and some examples (not an exhaustive list)
 <b>6</b> Rental payments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Rental payment assistance to cover rent (totally or partially), cost of utilities, and/or cost of furnishing.</li><li>Payment can be direct to the affected population (preferred) or service provider or property owner depending of the context. It can be undertaken through labelled MPC grant or conditional CVA (preferred option to secure the desired outcome).</li></ul>
 <b>7</b> Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Advocacy to government, donors and other relevant institutions, on issues that could include, for example, allowing those affected to access rental accommodation, facilitating legal documentation to legalise affected people's status, and access to livelihoods</li></ul>
 <b>8</b> Complementary programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Livelihoods</li><li>Psycho-social support</li><li>Health</li><li>WASH</li><li>Shelter (e.g. Household Items, construction or repair assistance)</li><li>Support with civil documentation</li><li>Referrals to social assistance and other protection services</li></ul>

## What expertise are required to undertake a rental assistance programming?

Designing and implementing a rental assistance programme requires a holistic approach drawing on multiple areas of expertise, ideally in multi-disciplinary teams to ensure best practice and to do no harm. Areas of expertise required may include: shelter; market assessment and analysis; housing land and property (HLP); cash and voucher assistance (CVA); community engagement and accountability (CEA); protection gender and inclusion (PGI); migration; livelihoods; procurement; and finance amongst others. Coordination with external actors is also essential, including governmental social protection departments.

# Step-By-Step Guide For Rental Assistance to People Affected by Crisis<sup>1</sup>

## Cycle Overview

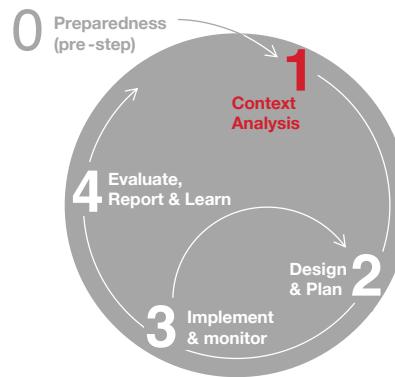


<sup>1</sup> Extracto de IFRC (2020) Guía Paso a Paso para la prestación de asistencia de alquiler para Personas Afectadas por Crisis. Estos consejos se basan en información extraída y resumida de esta guía.

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## Step 0 Preparedness

The key to successful programming, especially novel types of programming such as rental assistance is preparedness. This step considers a range of areas for preparedness activities from leadership commitment to processes, systems and tools (including Cash and Voucher assistance preparedness). It is strongly recommended that as part of this step a pilot rental assistance programme is undertaken to verify the preparedness.



## Step 1 Context Analysis

This step requires project managers to determine whether rental assistance programming is a feasible response option for the context, the crisis, and the target population that will be assisted. It suggests which information should be collected and analysed to enable selection of the most appropriate components that integrate the rental assistance. This is a broad step which includes Rental Housing Market Assessments, CVA Feasibility Assessment, Response Option Analysis, Security of Tenure Assessment, and within this tip-sheet we will focus on Rental (Housing) Market Assessments and Security of Tenure Assessment.

### Rental Market Assessments



Consider who (market actors and other stakeholders) have influence and interest in the rental assistance market, this could include property owners, housing institutions, real estate companies, service providers, hotels, private property owners' associations, tenants etc.

Understand the rental housing market practices of the formal and informal rental sectors. You may need to think pre-crisis and post-crisis situation. Consider questions such as: How do tenants find accommodation in this context? Is there some sort of agent or equivalent? How and when is the rent payment made? What is the deposit and how much? What taxes and utilities needs to be paid and who is responsible for what? Who has access to the rental market? Who is excluded?

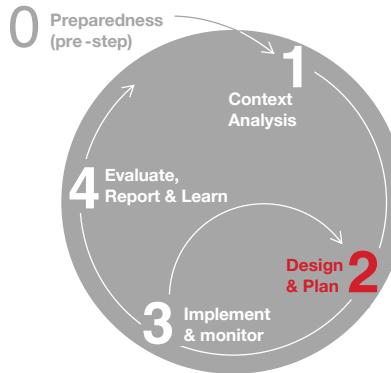
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 <b>3</b> Housing market type selection	<p>The critical rental housing market types to consider are those that are most likely to be relevant to the affected population. The economically vulnerable people that may be targeted for assistance will generally be interested in the more affordable part of the rental market. This may be a particular market type. Examples of accommodation markets types: Private housing through private property owners; Private rooms within private properties/ lodging; Service providers, hotels, hostels.</p>
 <b>4</b> Geographical selection	<p>The rental housing market will vary depending on the geographical area even within a city, depending on proximity to services and type of neighbourhoods, amongst other factors.</p>
 <b>5</b> Typical accommodation unit definition	<p>To be able to investigate rental prices, adequacy and quantities of units available, it is necessary to define the features of the typical rental units you will be considering and these will be the most likely to be rented by the target population. Typical features include: Size; No. of rooms (bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom); utilities; furniture, accessibility; and type of tenure.</p>
 <b>6</b> Price, supply, and demand information	<p>Through a range of methods try to understand the price and absorption capacity of the rental market, focusing on the typical accommodation units previously defined. In small responses of a few hundred households, qualitative information may be enough to assess the market absorption capacity. In larger responses, a more detailed and quantitative analysis will be required to ensure the absorption capacity of the market, and limit/ mitigate negative impacts on host communities.</p>
 <b>7</b> Market Environment Considerations	<p>These could include for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regulatory barriers and enablers to access accommodation (e.g. impact of migrant or refugee status)</li><li>• Socio-cultural considerations such as how rental practices impact gender inequality (e.g. often lease agreements only include the head of the household who may be male).</li><li>• Household income and livelihoods considerations such as what are people's situations in access financial services, credit?</li><li>• Infrastructure and services: What are people's trusted sources of information? What sort of processes and structures are used (formal and informal) to resolve disputes between property owners and tenants?</li></ul>

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## Security of Tenure Assessment

Security of tenure is the feeling of certainty that a person's right to a property is protected, and that there is a guarantee of legal protection against forced eviction, harassment, and other threats. Rental security of tenure provides the right to use a property for a specified period of time at a given price, without transfer of ownership, on the basis of a written or verbal contract with a private or public owner. Ensuring and understanding security of tenure is critical to a successful rental programme. Parts of the assessment should include considering the relationships and power dynamics between tenants and property owners and the community, and who has decision-making power and influence over tenure arrangements. Understanding the contract types, conditions, roles and responsibilities in the formal and informal sectors (written or verbal) will also be part of this. Understanding whether protection risks (such as the risk of exploitation or illegal eviction) arise due to tenure insecurity with your protection colleagues will be important.



## Step 2 Design and Plan the Response

This step focuses on designing the rental assistance intervention (objective, exit strategy, response, targeting, selection of providers, rental payments, housing minimum standards, security of tenure, risk, and humanitarian diplomacy) and planning for its implementation (programme management, Information management, team and capacity building). While it includes several sub-steps, for this tip sheet we will focus only on Defining the Exit Strategy, Planning the Rental Payments and Working with Multi-purpose cash grants (MPC).

### Defining the Exit Strategy

From the beginning of the response, the programme objective needs to anticipate, define, and plan what is intended to happen when the rental assistance ends. Defining and planning the exit can also enable decision making on whether rental assistance should be undertaken at all. In many contexts, it is difficult to anticipate how the crisis and response will evolve, however it is still important to plan a programme exit from the beginning even if this might change as the context and response change over time. Exit refers to the National Society (NS) ability to stop providing support to the target population but leaving the family able to maintain their living conditions. Considerations and actions will include:

- whether those supported with rental assistance can develop their household income to continue paying rent
- if displacement was caused by damage to their home, whether repair or reconstruction can take place
- advocacy with government and others to emphasise people's right to minimum living conditions, and to promote access to livelihoods, and/or access to social protection.

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Exit strategy monitoring should be carried out as contexts often change, meaning the exit strategy will also need to evolve. There will be different exit considerations depending on whether households intend to stay, move to another location, or return to their place of origin once the rental assistance has finished.

## Planning the Rental Payments

Rental payments can be provided directly to the targeted households as CVA, or can be provided as a payment to property owners or service providers depending of context or potentially on restrictions imposed by authorities on the transfer to assist the targeted population. The following must be considered:

### Rental Payment Value



The value of the rental payment should be based on the average monthly cost of renting the selected type of housing units, minus the capacities of the affected population to cover their basic needs. The total value will also be determined by the number of months the rental support is intended to cover. Some vulnerable households or large families may need larger or additional rental support payments to access appropriate accommodation. Other housing costs associated with the rental payments should also be considered (e.g. utilities or taxes).

### Duration of the assistance



The duration of support should be determined by the intended objective and with consideration to the exit strategy. In cases where the sustainability or the exit strategy is limited - for example in Lebanon where Syrian refugees do not have access to stable livelihoods and income, and safe return is not currently an option - the rental payment may only buy time for them. In this case, advocacy is used to improve the exit strategy outcome.

### Delivery modality and recipient of rental payment



Whether you decide to provide rental payments direct to the targeted households or the property owners will have an impact on programme results. The NS will have to consider the different potential approaches, and their pros and cons, when selecting the rental payment delivery modality. Approaches may include (amongst others): conditional CVA to tenant households; payments to property owners or service providers directly; pre-selecting several service providers and provide a voucher to the targeted population.

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## CVA Conditionality and Restrictions



Conditionality and restrictions on CVA are often used to help ensure rental assistance programming objectives are met.

Example conditionalities used in rental assistance programmes include:

- Minimum housing adequacy standards
- Security of tenure - a condition that households must find a property owner who is prepared to accept a rental agreement for example.
- Occupancy - Making subsequent tranches of CVA conditional on the household occupying the accommodation

Example restrictions used on a rental assistance programme:

- Using a voucher system to restrict the payment to specifically selected hotels or hostels for individuals or households seeking short term accommodation.

## Payment transfer in tranches and timing



The disbursement timing of the rental payment through tranches will depend on the needs and capacities of the target population, and any conditionality set to help ensure the objectives of the programme are being met. The number of tranches should be minimised wherever possible to reduce transaction fees but also to give the household as much certainty as possible that they will have the rent in time to pay the property owner promptly.

## Selecting the Cash and Voucher Assistance delivery mechanism



The Red Cross Movement Cash in Emergencies Toolkit provides relevant information on CVA modalities and mechanisms. Each have their minimum conditions, advantages, and disadvantages and these are clearly described in the toolkit and an assessment should be undertaken to compare different options for CVA delivery mechanism. Mechanisms can range from bank transfer to mobile money to paper vouchers.

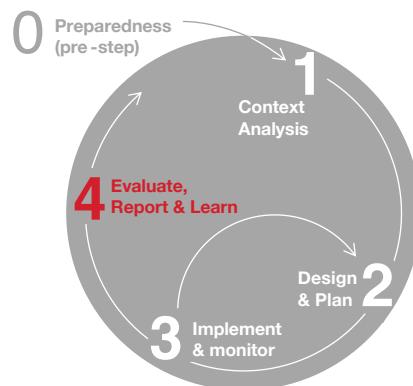
## Working with Multi-purpose cash grants (MPC)

In many situations, such as immediately after a crisis, MPC may be given for a short period. The Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) which is used to define the transfer value of the MPC may include a component for rent. With MPC it should not be expected that rental assistance programme objectives will be met by all households, this will particularly be the case when only a proportion of the cost of rent is included in the transfer value. Even if the full amount is included, rental payments alone do not guarantee security of tenure or that accommodation will meet minimum adequacy standards. It is therefore recommended that as soon as possible a dedicated rental assistance programme is setup with the relevant components of support (such as technical assistance and information) in addition to the rental payment support, to secure the impact of the intervention.

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## Step 3 Implement and Monitor

Step 3 concerns implementation and monitoring of a rental programme. It also considers the necessary processes for adapting and changing the programme design to the evolving and often changing crisis context. This step includes selecting the target households and property owners, the rental agreement and payment, activities associated with the end of the rental assistance and the monitoring of the programme, especially in relation to mitigating risks and the programme exit strategy. Monitoring should lead where necessary to corrective actions.



## Step 4 Evaluation and Reporting

The final step describes considerations related to evaluation, learning, and reporting. This is not specific for rental assistance but good practice for all programmes.

### Where can you get more information?

For those who require more detailed information for implementation it is strongly recommended that the [IFRC \(2020\) Step-by-Step Guide for Rental Assistance to People Affected by Crisis](#) is referred to directly. A webinar recording related to the October 2020 launch event of the guide can also be found [here](#).

For Red Cross Red Crescent Movement Staff and Volunteers who have queries related to undertaking rental assistance programming and require any assistance in the application of the guide you are welcome to contact either the Cash-Hub Helpdesk: [helpdesk@cash-hub.org](mailto:helpdesk@cash-hub.org) or IFRC Shelter and Settlements team on: [shelter.settlements@ifrc.org](mailto:shelter.settlements@ifrc.org)