# **Introduction**

Setting accommodation minimum standards is an important part of rental assistance programming. Without this, there is a risk that people supported on the programme will choose cheaper sub-standard housing which may not afford the safe, dignified and healthy living that the programme aims to support.

Tools and examples from the toolkit, that may be useful to assist here include:

* 2.1.7\_Example\_Housing\_Standards\_Check\_Slovakia\_RentalAssistance\_2023.docx & 2.1.7\_Example\_Housing\_Standards\_Check\_Slovakia\_KoboForm\_RentalAssistance\_2023.xlsx
* Kobo Collect form used in Ukraine 2022 response in Slovakia for Ukrainian prospective tenants in rental assistance programme to verify housing standards.
* 2.1.7\_Example\_Housing\_Standards\_Check\_Bahamas\_RentalAssistance\_2023.docx
* Checklist used in Bahamas Hurricane Dorian 2019 response
* 2.1.7\_ 2.1.7\_Example\_House verification for Slovak tenants (limited impairments only) RentalAssistance.docx
* Checklist used for host community Slovak prospective tenants with mobility impairments to determine if accommodation meets needs. Used in Ukraine 2022 response in Slovakia.
* 2.1.7\_Example\_ShelterMinimumHousingStandardsCheck\_Poland\_RentalAssistance.docx
  + Housing standards checklist Used in 2022-2023 Ukraine response in Poland
* 2.1.7\_IrishGov\_Minimum\_Standards\_and\_Fire\_Safety\_RentalAssistance.pdf
  + Irish government Information Education Communication (IEC) material on rental accommodation standards not connected to rental assistance, but still a useful resource to demonstrate an item that could be produced on a rental assistance programme.

# **Setting the Standards**

1. Investigate if country or city has minimum standards for rental accommodation as defined in regulations.
2. Check with shelter working groups/cluster if a standard has been established (since this is normally the first standard established by a coordination forum) for transitional or recovery housing. Note however, that it still may not be wholly applicable to rental assistance programming to adopt this standard if rental assistance is intended as an emergency shelter solution in the acute phase of the response and for less than 6 months. It may be acceptable to adopt something between emergency shelter standards and permanent housing standards.
3. Reflect on the Sphere Handbook (2018) qualitative standards in the Shelter and Settlements chapter, however, with rental assistance we should be able to provide a standard much better than emergency shelter and therefore standards such as 3.5m2/person are not as applicable to rental assistance.
4. Visit different types of typical rental accommodation, if possible, to understand what is going to be easily attainable on the rental market. Also reflect upon the rental practices part of the rental housing market assessment undertaken in Step 1.
5. Meet with representatives of target population to discuss acceptable living arrangements (use the criteria below as headings in discussions).
6. It is important to only Using [IFRC (2020) Step-by-step guide for rental assistance to people affected by crisis](https://cash-hub.org/resource/step-by-step-guide-for-rental-assistance-to-people-affected-by-crisis/) , step 2, sub-step 1.7 with some modifications to identify criteria related to the following:
   1. **Minimum area to be rented for different family compositions, see below example:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Family composition | | Property type | Minimum space |
| Single Adult |  | Room in shared house | 3m2 in room + access to shared other living space |
| Single Adult |  | Studio | 35m2 |
| Single Adult | 1no. child under 5 | Studio | 35m2 |
| Single Adult | 1no. child over 5 | 1 bedroom flat | 45m2 |
| Single Adult | 2 no. child | 1 bedroom flat | 45m2 |
| Adult couple | 1no. child under 1 | 1 bedroom flat | 45m2 |
| Adult couple | 1no. child, age 1- 11 | 1 bedroom flat | 45m2 |
| Adult couple | 2 no. child aged 11 and above difference sexes | 1 bedroom flat | 45m2 |
| Adult couple | 2 no. child aged 11 and above different sexes | 2 bedroom flat | 55m2 |
| Etc. | Etc. |  |  |

When establishing criteria for the composition of the household that gives entitlement to what size of accommodation (no. of bedrooms etc.) consider the recommendations given in L. Cultural practices.

It is recommended to go for the lower band of what is culturally acceptable on space and number of bedrooms, to give households significant flexibility when choosing accommodation that meets their needs, and also for affordability (the sustainability of renting after the supported rental payment period has ended).

* 1. **Layout (separation between sleeping, cooking, and WASH)**

There is a need to specify that cooking areas must be separate (have a closeable door) from bathrooms and toilets, however, depending on the context you may also need to specify living arrangements being separate from kitchens when a household needs to use this for an adult to sleep for example.

* 1. **Ventilation and natural lighting, illumination of the living spaces (Livingroom and bedrooms)**

Often it is specified that all bedrooms and living room must have openable windows. It can be acceptable to have bathrooms and kitchens without openable windows as long as they have some form of ventilation (e.g. extractor). Windows are often important for mental health, fire escape, and also ventilation.

* 1. **Access to services and facilities (water, electricity, shared bathrooms, health, and social facilities)**

Specify explicitly what utilities need to be available such as water, sewerage, electricity, gas, mobile phone connectivity, internet. Note that connectivity for the displaced can be very important for the displaced, for keeping in touch with networks, remote working, and remote schooling etc. Be guided by standard rental practices.

Specify distances or proximity to public transport to ensure access to educational facilities, health centres, markets and livelihood opportunities.

* 1. **Waste management**

Specify that there must be some way to safely dispose of solid waste. E.g. “Access to vermin-proof and pest-proof rubbish storage facilities. The landlord must also make efforts to prevent the infestation of pests and vermin at the property.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

* 1. **Access, and Accessibility (access to shelter with roads and paths, accessibility for people with mobility issues)**

For those with mobility impairments this should be explicitly specified and may include specifying working lift access or ground floor living. It should also specify accessibility from the main road to the home. Inside the accommodation there may need to be additional specifications with respect to rooms to store equipment for chronic illness or disability, and additional space in areas such as a bathrooms to allow a carer to help.

* 1. **Disease vector risks – mosquitoes, fleas, tics, bats, rats etc.**

For example, mosquito screens can be specified here. However, in certain contexts you may want to specify the types of material related to walls and flooring even, when it is known in some contexts these can provide habitat for vectors.

* 1. **Climate context**

This may relate to the apartment being able to be heated or cooled. For example, the criteria could specify that there must be heating and it must be of a certain type for affordability reasons. It could also specify that it must be possible to heat living and bedrooms to 20oc in winter. This requirement can tie into ventilation in hot countries.

* 1. **Lifespan/robustness of shelter**

This may relate to the types of more durable materials that the accommodation is constructed from. This can help to remove sub-standard accommodation such as sheds for-example, which may not be appropriate for dignity, even if they meet other standards.

* 1. **Structural safety**

In a post-disaster situation property owners may try to rent out accommodation which is not structurally safe. Criteria related to cracking or non-vertical walls etc. can be included. Note that in post-earthquake scenarios there can also be strong after-shocks

* 1. **Roof covers**

Criteria can be included highlighting that the roof must ensure the home is water tight.

* 1. **Cultural practices**

There may be other requirements included in the criteria related to what activities take place inside or outside of the home. This could relate to how people use their home, such as the need for a veranda where people normally cook or receive people. There may also be religious practices such as for some populations where a latrine cannot face towards Mecca. These are only examples.

There can also be protection, gender and inclusion related cultural practices that can be important to consider. For example, consider to what age boys and girls can share a room, or where women and girls may spend most of their time in the home. Is domestic violence prevalent in some contexts, such that it requires homes to have both a back and front door to allow women to escape?

* 1. **Safety and privacy**

Consider a broad range of hazards, but especially related to:

* Fire-safety. This can relate to within the apartment or house and also the building and escape routes immediately around the building. There are often specific regulations related to fire safety and rental accommodation or housing and these should be consulted, but they can relate to needs related to fire-alarms, smoke detectors, fire blankets, and fire doors. It can also be important to consider child safety, such as no windows that children can fall out of, or balcony with railing that could form a ladder, or communal stairwells which don’t have appropriate railing.
* Health. Such as signs of damp in cold or humid contexts. In particular there have been some examples on rental assistance programmes of the prospective tenants trying to rent basement rooms which are often suffering from significant damp which can cause respiratory problems.
* If the context is post-earthquake, it can also be necessary to look at if there is any furniture that may fall in an aftershock.
* Crime, all doors and windows should be lockable and secure.

In some cultures, and in relation to gender norms, privacy can be very important and the NS should consider how access to items that promote privacy such as blinds or net curtains or screening around the home to allow women to occupy the garden or veranda for example, can be provided.

* 1. **Household activities**

Specify what households items need to be provided by the property owner. Here it is important to consider what can be asked for and is normally provided in rental accommodation. For example, a washing machine, or access to a washing machine in a communal area.

Ideally allow tenants to find furnished or unfurnished property that meets their needs, and have a plan for supporting access to essential household items, through for example, partnering with organisations that collect donations of household items and use it for charitable means, or cash move-in grants.

* 1. **Other functions of shelter (e.g. livelihoods, childcare etc)**

Consider all uses of the home including livelihoods, this is particularly important where women may struggle to leave the home because of gender norms for example.

See the range of examples of checklists in toolkit.

Also see an example from Ireland of national legislation governing minimum conditions in rental accommodation here: <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/renting-a-home/minimum-standards-for-rented-homes/>

# **Strategy for promoting compliance with standards**

This can include:

1. Ideally co-designing housing minimum standard requirements with representatives of the target population (prospective tenants), so that there is a greater understanding of the rationale for requirements.
2. Orient those prospective tenants accepted onto the programme on the requirements, and ideally give them a leaflet/checklist to take with them when viewing properties.
3. Train staff and volunteers in how to assess compliance with the housing minimum standards and visit properties prior to prospective tenant agreeing tenancy and any rental payment transfer. Where appropriate, include an escalation function where borderline cases can be escalated to senior staff members.
4. Where remote assessment is appropriate, it may be possible to work with the households to undertake this using video calls potentially, with some in-person visits for those cases where it is difficult to tell over a video call. Note to help mitigate risks it may be possible to ask for live-location to be shared for the duration of the video call to help establish that the accommodation assessed is related to the tenancy address that the prospective tenant has declared interest in.
5. When working in a context with high standards of rental accommodation self-certification may be possible (with some spot-checks).

1. <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/renting-a-home/minimum-standards-for-rented-homes/> [Accessed 01 Aug 2023] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)