



Workers' housing

Housing provided to workers as part of the employment contract should meet certain minimum specifications in respect of the nature and standard of the accommodation and facilities to be made available.

The following guidance is based on international labour standards. National or state regulation will often set baseline specifications as part of housing, labour, health or even fire safety regulations; they should be checked and followed. National employers and workers organizations may also be a good source of information on national law, collective bargaining agreements and customs pertaining to housing for workers; or may be able to refer you to the appropriate statutory authority.

Guiding principles

➔ In providing worker¹ housing, the objective should be to ensure “adequate and decent housing accommodation and a suitable living environment”² for workers. This includes upkeep, improvement and modernisation of housing and related community facilities.³

It is “generally not desirable that employers should provide housing for their workers directly”.⁴ Employers are encouraged to help their workers to obtain housing through autonomous private agencies, public housing

schemes, or cooperatives.⁵ This is because workers living at the work site on property owned or controlled by the employer tend to be less integrated into the local community, and more dependent on the employer. However, certain circumstances, such as when an undertaking is located far from normal centres of population, or where the nature of the employment requires that the worker should be available at short notice may require the employer to provide housing for his or her workers.⁶

If housing is provided by the employer “the fundamental human rights of the workers, in particular freedom of association, should be recognised.”⁷ Arrangements where accommodation and communal services are provided as payment for work should take care to ensure that the interests of the workers are protected. If rent is charged, it should not cost the worker more than a reasonable proportion of his or her income.⁸

Siting and construction

➔ The housing and related community facilities should be of durable construction, taking into account local conditions, such as liability to earthquakes.⁹

The location of workers' housing should ensure that workers are not affected by air pollution, surface run-off or sewage or other wastes.¹⁰

Housing Standards

➔ Housing should ensure “structural safety and reasonable levels of decency, hygiene and comfort”.¹¹ The undertaking should ensure the following:

- a) a separate bed for each worker;
- b) adequate headroom, providing full and free movement, of not less than 203 centimetres;
- c) the minimum inside dimensions of a sleeping space should be at least 198 centimetres by 80 centimetres;
- d) beds should not be arranged in tiers of more than two;
- e) bedding materials should be reasonably comfortable;
- f) bedding and bedframe materials should be designed to deter vermin;
- g) separate accommodation of the sexes;
- h) adequate natural light during the day-time and adequate artificial light;
- i) a reading lamp for each bed;
- j) adequate ventilation to ensure sufficient movement of air in all conditions of weather and climate;
- k) heating where appropriate;
- l) adequate supply of safe potable water;
- m) adequate sanitary facilities (see below);
- n) adequate drainage;
- o) adequate furniture for each worker to secure his or her belongings, such as a ventilated clothes locker which can be locked by the occupant to ensure privacy;
- p) common dining rooms, canteens or mess rooms, located away from the sleeping areas;
- q) appropriately situated and furnished laundry facilities;
- r) reasonable access to telephone or other modes of communications, with any charges for the use of these services being reasonable in amount; and

¹ Workers' Housing Recommendation, 1961 (No. 115). The section entitled “Suggestions concerning methods of application,” Part I, paragraph 5, encourages “equality of treatment between migrant workers and national workers”. Therefore, this guidance applies equally to migrant workers and national workers.

² R. 115, General Principles, Part II, paragraph 2.

³ R. 115, paragraph 3.

⁴ R. 115, Part IV, paragraph 12(2).

⁵ R. 115, Part IV, paragraph 12(1).

⁶ R. 115, Part IV, paragraph 12(2).

⁷ R. 115, Part IV, paragraph 12(3a).

⁸ R. 115, Part II, paragraph 4, Part IV, paragraph 12(3c) and (4).

⁹ R. 115, Suggestions Concerning Methods of Application, Part I, paragraphs 10-11.

¹⁰ R. 115, Suggestions Concerning Methods of Application, Part IX, paragraph 43.

¹¹ R. 115, paragraph 19.

- s) rest and recreation rooms and health facilities, where not otherwise available in the community.

In workers' sleeping rooms the floor area should not be less than 7.5 square metres in rooms accommodating two persons; 11.5 square metres in rooms accommodating three persons; or 14.5 square metres in rooms accommodating four persons. If a room accommodates more than four persons, the floor area should be at least 3.6 square metres per person. Rooms should indicate the permitted number of occupants.

As far as practicable, sleeping rooms should be arranged so that shifts are separated and that no workers working during the day share a room with workers on night shifts.

Sanitation facilities

➔ Adequate sanitary facilities should include a minimum of one toilet, one wash basin and one tub or shower for every six persons. They should be provided at a convenient location which prevents nuisances. Sanitary facilities provided should meet minimum standards of health and hygiene. They should also provide reasonable standards of comfort, including hot and cold fresh running water. There should be separate sanitary facilities provided for men and for women. Sanitary facilities should have ventilation to the open air, independently of any other part of the accommodation. Soap and hygienic paper should be adequately stocked.

Health and safety

➔ As far as possible, floors walls, ceilings and equipment should be constructed to minimize health risks.

The accommodations should be kept free of rats, mice, insects and vermin. In areas where mosquitoes are prevalent, workers should be provided netting.

Measures should be taken to prevent the spread of diseases. Separate facilities should be provided for sick workers to prevent the spread of transmissible diseases among the occupants. Fire safety measures should be taken, including installing and maintaining fire equipment (alarms, extinguishers, etc.). Workers should be trained in fire procedures. Bedding should not contain flammable materials. Radiators and other heating apparatus should be placed so as to avoid risk of fire, and shielded where necessary to prevent discomfort to occupants.

Safety exits should be clearly marked. Adequate means of escape should be provided and properly maintained.

Provisions should be made for workers' physical safety and well-being, and protection of their belongings. Measures should be reasonable and not unduly restrict workers' freedom of movement. Workers should be allowed visits for social relations or business, including trade union business.¹²

Inspection of premises

➔ Premises should be inspected frequently to ensure that the accommodation is clean, decently habitable and maintained in a good state of repair. The results of each such inspection should be recorded and be available for review.

Vacating the premises upon termination of employment

➔ When a worker's contract of employment is terminated, the worker should be entitled to a reasonable period of time to vacate the premises, in accordance with national law and custom.¹³

Consultation

➔ In the design of housing for workers, "every effort should be made to consult those bodies representative of future occupants best able to advise on the most suitable means of meeting their housing and environmental needs."¹⁴

References

➔ Workers' Housing Recommendation, 1961 (No. 115); full text available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/recdisp1.htm>.

➔ For comparison, you may also wish to consult the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 2006, Title 3, which gives detailed guidance for workers' accommodation for seafarers; full text available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C186>.

¹² R. 115, Suggestions Concerning Methods of Application, Part IV, paragraph 17.

¹³ R. 115, General Principles, Part IV, paragraphs 12(3b) and Suggestions Concerning Methods of Application, Part IV, paragraph 15.

¹⁴ R. 115, Suggestions Concerning Methods of Application, Part IX, paragraph 42.