

Principle 6: Living Conditions Are Safe, Clean, and Habitable

Workers, when provided with accommodation, have living conditions that are safe, clean, hygienic, and habitable, where consideration is given to their physical and mental health and well-being.

Introduction

Applying the Building Responsibly principles in practice will be unique in every instance. This guidance note offers discussion around the potential issues and challenges faced and offers suggested good practice options for the implementation of each principle in the Key Components for Consideration section.

Providing or facilitating the provision of accommodation for workers—particularly where migrant workforces are employed—is often an element of construction projects. Facilities to accommodate these workers may be either temporary, such as during the construction phase of a project, or more permanent, such as at an operational facility. Moreover, this accommodation may be either in camps or in existing housing in the local community, and it may be paid for either directly or through allowances paid to the workers to compensate them for accommodation costs.

Depending on the type of accommodation required, there are a range of factors relating to living conditions that should be considered. Delivering acceptable standards of living facilities for workers is key to maintaining a productive, safe, and healthy workforce and to improving the well-being of workers. In practice this means that several key elements relating to the design and operation of worker accommodation should be actively considered, including safety and fire safety, security, cleanliness and sanitation, the quality of food and sleep, access to healthcare, as well as (where relevant) cultural and religious needs.

The specific provisions included in this guidance note deal primarily with camp facilities for longer-term, large-scale, single-site construction projects and ongoing, long-term facility operations.

Key Terms and Definitions

- » **Habitable:** Accommodation that is safe and that can be occupied in reasonable comfort, providing the opportunity for personal care as well as rest and relaxation after the workday. Although standards may vary by region and according to how accommodation is provided, the premises should as a minimum adhere to the local building codes; provide protection against the elements with appropriate heating and ventilation; meet fire code standards; provide access to hygienic toilets and bathing facilities; provide for waste disposal; offer kitchen or canteen facilities; and provide required utilities such as water, power, and sewers.
- » **Well-being:** Relates to all aspects of workers' lives, from the quality and safety of their physical working environment to the conditions of their accommodations and well-being.

Key Challenges

Varying Conditions

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to worker accommodation. Construction projects vary in size, duration, and location. These factors determine the type of accommodation provided, from small, remote mobile camps to large worker accommodation that is set up to last many years.

Management Control and Responsibility

The company employing the workers does not necessarily have control over the living conditions offered, in particular when it is leasing existing housing. It is even more challenging to ensure adequate accommodation when workers are provided with an allowance to secure their own accommodation.

Workers' Rights and Freedom of Movement

In some contexts, access to worker accommodation may be restricted to ensure the health, safety, and security of the workers and of the communities living around the accommodations.

Cultural and Religious Sensitivities

There are cultural and religious sensitivities that may pose management challenges as they require consideration of issues such as dedicated catering, facilities for religious observance, and segregation of genders in sleeping, eating, and sanitary facilities. In some cases, social tensions may arise from workers sharing limited facilities in remote locations or where there is a mix of nationalities or ethnicities.

Key Components for Consideration

(The detail of this baseline checklist is primarily applicable to large fixed camps for long-term, large construction projects or for camps for ongoing facility operations. However, at the highest level, each item is broadly applicable to all types of accommodation.)

Management and Oversight

- ☑ **General Management:** Companies should develop a written worker welfare plan for worker accommodation, covering topics including maintenance, security, health and safety, living conditions, and relationships with the communities. In developing the plan, an environmental health risk assessment should be performed. Rules and regulations should be reasonable and non-discriminatory, and a mechanism to provide feedback on problems with facilities should be established.
- ☑ **Indirect Management:** When accommodation services are procured from a third party, companies should have standard processes in place to manage the initial procurement and to periodically assess living conditions in the facilities.

General Conditions

- ☑ **Building Construction:** Companies should ensure that worker accommodation meet local building codes and are of sound construction and resistant to extreme weather events. Worker accommodation should meet all passive and active fire safety requirements, including fire and gas detection systems, and should be located away from site-specific hazards such as blast zones or toxic fumes.
- ☑ **Medical Facilities:** Companies should ensure that adequate medical facilities, equipment, and personnel are available, depending on availability and quality of local facilities.
- ☑ **Heating/Air Conditioning/Ventilation:** Companies should ensure that heating, air conditioning, ventilation, and noise control in sleeping accommodation and recreational facilities are appropriate to the climate and local standards and provide a comfortable and healthy environment to rest.

Accommodation and Sanitation Facilities

- ☑ *Sleeping Facilities:* Companies should ensure that sleeping facilities provide workers with an adequate level of privacy, and that a separate bed and mattress for each worker is provided. The sleeping facilities should be kept clean and in good condition to allow proper rest.
- ☑ *Bathing Facilities:* Companies should ensure that showers and wash basins are appropriate to the number of workers; segregated by gender; in proximity to the sleeping facilities; kept clean, adequately ventilated and lighted; in good working condition, and allow privacy.
- ☑ *Toilet Facilities:* Companies should ensure that toilet facilities—including toilets, urinals, and sinks—are appropriate to the number of workers, adequately ventilated and lighted, segregated by gender, kept in a clean and fully working condition, and allow privacy.
- ☑ *Waste Treatment:* Companies should ensure that wastewater and solid waste treatment complies with local standards or with the IFC's Environmental, Health, and Safety Guidelines for Water and Sanitation where local standards are unavailable. It must be designed to prevent contamination and avoid the spread of infection and disease and the proliferation of mosquitoes, flies, rodents, and other pest vectors.
- ☑ *Access to Water:* Companies should ensure that clean water, both potable and for washing, is always readily available to prevent dehydration and diseases resulting from lack of hygiene.

Communal Facilities

- ☑ *Leisure, Social, and Telecommunication Facilities:* Companies should ensure that basic leisure and social facilities for rest and recreation during free time are provided, as well as means to communicate with family, such as access to internet to alleviate homesickness and feelings of isolation. Where possible, companies should provide space for religious observance.
- ☑ *Canteen, Cooking, and Laundry Facilities:* Companies should ensure that canteen, cooking, and laundry facilities are adequate to the number of workers and that equipment is clean, sanitary, and operational. Services are provided for free or reasonably priced, never above the local market price. When caterers are contracted to provide food service, specific dietary needs of workers should be incorporated into the specifications. A healthy mix of food options should be offered, and food should be of sufficient quality and quantity. Hygiene standards should be met. Third party kitchen inspections should be held regularly, and inspection reports should be filed.

Transportation

- ☑ *Transportation:* Companies should ensure that transportation that is safe, comfortable, and easily accessible is provided to the worksite from the housing facility and back. Transport should also be available for access to leisure facilities, banking, or shopping if the housing is remotely located.

Tools and Resources

- » [ILO Workers' Housing Recommendation 115](#)
- » [IFC / EBRD, Workers' accommodation: processes and standards](#)
- » [IFC Environmental, Health, and Safety Guidelines for Water and Sanitation](#)
- » [IOGP, Temporary onshore accommodation – Design, layout, accommodation, facilities and services](#)

About Building Responsibly

Building Responsibly is a group of leading engineering and construction companies working together to raise the bar in promoting the rights and welfare of workers across the industry. We have come together to foster and ensure a better working environment for workers in the engineering and construction sector. Doing so will allow us to more effectively respond to client, stakeholder, and regulatory expectations and manage a healthier, more productive workforce.

For more information and resources to support implementation of these Principles, visit www.building-responsibly.org.