

Shelter Programs

Tips for Protection Mainstreaming

Edition 1 (May 2014)


The content for this note is taken mainly from the following sources:

- [Minimum Inter-Agency Standards for Protection Mainstreaming \(WVI\)](#)
- [Disabilities among Refugees and Conflict-Affected Populations - Resource Kit for Fieldworkers \(WRC\)](#)
- [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(CPWG\)](#)
- [GBV Guidelines \(IASC\)](#)
- [Humanitarian Charter & Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response \(SPHERE\)](#)

This note is divided into three sections, representing the four key elements of Protection Mainstreaming. The content is not meant to be exhaustive, but presents examples of key actions that should be taken to ensure the integration of protection principles *in the delivery of humanitarian assistance*.

Although each action described should be considered throughout implementation, there are some key actions which are especially important to consider during emergencies and during the assessment/project design stage of the project cycle. These are highlighted with the following symbol-codes:

- Emergencies 
- Assessment & Project Design Stage 

Some actions can be sensitive by their nature. In these cases, it is suggested to reach out to a Protection specialist. These are highlighted with the following symbol: 

Prioritize safety & dignity, and avoid doing harm

- Ensure that the proposed locations for shelter are considered in terms of the threat of physical attacks, threats to safety such as mined areas, or environmentally unsuitable areas such as steep hills, subsiding land areas and areas prone to flooding, volcanic activities and other potential natural disasters;
- It is essential to understand land tenure arrangements, including statutory/legislative and customary access rights to land, water and other natural resources as well as inheritance rights. This precaution will reduce the risk of eviction or conflict erupting due lack of clarity of these issues. When unsure consult Protection Cluster (Housing, Land and Property Group where possible);
- Ensure that shelter has been designed and built with adequate escape routes in the case of emergency evacuation, and disaster affected populations have received information and training on fire safety and evacuation procedures;
- Take specific precautions in shelter in terms of surveillance and implement community surveillance if possible;
- Provide efficient lighting throughout site/settlement, with special attention to public and communal areas such as sanitation facilities;
- Respect minimum space standard in shelters to minimize risks of exploitation and abuse;
- Establish communal areas and collection points at a safe distance from shelter sites and temporary settlements. Ensure that they are accessible to persons with disabilities and older persons;
- Plan separate bathrooms and toilets for men and women, avoid dark and isolated areas;
- Include partitions and door locks (when culturally relevant) to better protect women and girls, particularly single women and female-headed households;
- Provide shelter materials and distance between dwellings that offer greater privacy and dignity, especially in cultures where men's and women's are markedly separate or the privacy of the family is very important;

- Establish safe location and time for Core Relief Items distribution to ensure the safe return of individuals to their shelters;
- Assess whether access to shelter is causing tension or conflict;
- Ensure settlements have good visibility and lighting and adequate security at night;
- Ensure that essential services (e.g. health facilities, food distribution and water points, schools, etc.) and materials can be easily and safely accessed from the shelter and settlement locations;
- If required for safety, ensure that there are separate living areas available to groups such as single women, people with disabilities and unaccompanied children, and these areas are protected from targeting of abuse or violence;
- Avoid any shelter or settlement activities that involve forced relocation or return;
- Monitor safety of affected populations on an ongoing basis and make changes to the design of the shelter programme or advocate with local authorities for improved safety;
- Take into account local material, existing capacities and the environment. Whenever possible, locally acceptable and available materials and labor should be used to benefit the local economy, while not depleting local resources

Meaningful Access

- Treat displaced persons equitably, whether they are living in host-family arrangements, collective centers, are self-settled in urban or rural locations, are self-settled in camps, or are living in planned camps;
- Ensure that agencies consider the needs of different ethnic, racial, national or social groups in shelter allocation, ensuring that the quality of shelter is equitable across all groups;
- Prioritize people and groups on the basis of need – do not prioritize certain groups because their solutions are easier to achieve;
- Ensure that shelters are accessible and appropriate to all groups and individuals, note in particular concerns of persons with physical or mental disabilities and older persons– where necessary, make individual changes to household shelters, or build all shelters to be universally accessible;
- People with disabilities and older persons may not be able to come to distribution/facility sites (e.g. food, water). Plan additional measures to reach persons with disabilities and older persons;
- Ensure that bathrooms are accessible to persons with disabilities and older persons, and safe for small children;
- Ensure particularly vulnerable groups such as female headed households, older persons and persons with disability have equal access to Core Relief Items and ability to transport them;
- Treat owners, tenants, the landless, informal dwellers and secondary occupants equitably even if return, resettlement and reintegration options are different for different groups;
- Recognise the joint ownership rights of both male and female heads of household and prevent discrimination;
- Provide both women and men with the same benefits for their input and their work in construction: e.g. if work is paid, ensure that both women’s and men’s work is paid and is equal;
- Ensure adequate safe recreational spaces for children to play and for community groups to meet where family members can watch them from shelter to avoid children playing in remote areas;
- Support and assist displaced persons until such time as they are no longer disadvantaged as a result of their displacement;
- All efforts should be undertaken to secure safe housing for unaccompanied children and establish monitoring procedures by specialized agencies and the community itself;
- Ensure that unaccompanied older persons are assisted in constructing their own shelters;
- Develop appropriate response to help vulnerable groups to access aid, transport shelter material and construct shelters. Pay particular attention to assistance needed by persons with disabilities and older persons to ensure construction of accessible shelters;

Accountability, Participation & Empowerment

- Observe and ask about local construction practices and use appropriate method when possible;

- Identify local authorities responsible for shelter provision and strengthen and support their role where possible;
- Ensure that local authorities are involved in site planning and selection so as to avoid problems and ensuring consent and participation from local leaders. Provide technical and construction assistance;
- Involve women and men in the planning and in the implementation of Core Relief Items distribution;
- Provided support to diverse groups that are not traditionally involved in construction activities but may be interested in participating in shelter programmes;
- Ask disaster-affected populations, including diverse groups, to help identify safe locations for shelters and settlements as well as shelter design;
- Train and practice fire procedures and emergency evacuations with affected populations;
- Ensure that disaster-affected populations are fully involved in the planning and management of their return, resettlement and reintegration;
- Promote modalities of shelter that enable IDPs to upgrade their own shelters from transitional to more permanent structures, as their situation evolves;
- Reinforce the community's self-help capacity: encourage traditional construction methods, particularly in areas where transportation of shelter material is restricted for logistical or security reasons; give women the opportunity to equally participate in the process; equip beneficiaries with knowledge of safe construction practices;
- Cash-for-work and food-for-work schemes as well as childcare arrangements can be useful to support households with specific needs in building their own shelters. Monitor the implementation of such schemes to avoid exploitative and fraudulent practices;
- Work with the community to identify skilled women and men and adolescent girls and boys who can support shelter construction, from both the IDP and the other affected communities;
- Ensure that protection or community services staff work alongside shelter specialists and site planners in all multi-sectorial assessments and specialized shelter assessments to ensure that the protection implications of shelter interventions are taken into account at the onset.
- Ensure consultation with host communities, government authorities, as well as beneficiaries, men, women, boys and girls. Involve persons with disabilities and older persons in your needs assessments in order to have accurate information about their specific needs;
- Obtain permission (temporary or permanent) before using or building on any land or property, in writing where possible;
- Consider assistance to host families and host communities, such as support in expanding or adapting the host family shelter;
- Set up mechanism for complaints and appeals, and ensuring that men and women are both comfortable to access these complaints mechanism;
- Provide information about people's entitlements and where and how they can access remedies, resolve disputes or apply for compensation – by referring to relevant authorities, legal services, or another agencies specialising in housing, land and property rights;
- Avoid and monitor any exploitative labor especially child labor on construction sites;
- Disseminate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and implement programmes that support displaced people's rights;
- Promote respect for social customs for dealing with the remains of the dead while ensuring that existing facilities such as graveyards or crematoria are adequate;
- Conduct regular structured dialogues and discussions with individuals and groups of different ages, gender and backgrounds, particularly those with specific needs on shelter issues, to ensure that any protection concerns highlighted are discussed and resolved;
- Work with the community to set up monitoring or similar mechanisms to assess the living conditions of persons with specific needs in the community, such as older persons living without adult family members or child-headed households.