

# Migrant Worker Accommodation

IHRB Briefing

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## International Legal Standards

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** recognise that everyone has a right to adequate housing.

UN experts have identified **seven key elements** to “adequate” housing:

- legal security of tenure
- affordability
- habitability
- availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure
- accessibility
- location
- cultural adequacy

**ILO Convention No. 97** concerning Migration for Employment requires that migrant workers are not discriminated against in the provision of housing.

## Housing for Migrant Workers

Because they are employed outside their home countries or regions, businesses may need to make specific provisions for the accommodation of migrant workers. Companies should help migrant workers find accommodation in the local housing market if they wish to rent independently, and in some cases they will need to offer dedicated worker housing. Living in employer accommodation should not be compulsory, unless this is a requirement of the worker’s visa.

## What Should Businesses Do?

- Offer workers **assistance in finding** housing in the local market, or where this is not feasible, offer employer accommodation.
- Commit to the provision of accommodation that **adheres to the UN’s seven principles** of adequate housing as a requirement for all employees and subcontractor employees.
- Limit the **number of workers to a room**, ensure sufficient, proper and well-maintained **water, sanitation** and **cooking** facilities.
- Ensure **sleeping quarters** are air-conditioned and well-ventilated.
- Ensure that workers have access to **leisure activities**.
- Ensure that workers are **not charged** for their accommodation or have rent deducted from their salaries.

## Health and Housing

The quality of workers’ living environment has a major effect on their physical and psychological well-being. The provision of decent housing is an important sign that businesses respect and value their employees, and is shown to enhance productivity. Many businesses report that new workers settle into their roles much faster when they live in decent and dignified accommodation. Conversely, poor housing conditions can lead to workers becoming demotivated and unwell, with obvious implications for their ability to perform their work effectively.

## Defining Decent and Adequate Housing

Countries where migrant workers are a large proportion of the workforce may have specific laws governing worker housing. However in some cases these laws may fall short of best practice and international standards.

**ILO Recommendation No. 115** concerning Workers' Housing gives guidance for employers directly providing accommodation for their employees. It covers a range of key principles:

- Accommodation should be **sited appropriately** so that workers are not affected by air pollution, surface run-off or sewage.
- The construction of the housing should provide "**structural safety** and reasonable levels of **decency, hygiene** and **comfort**". The recommendation provides detailed standards, including minimum room sizes. 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, so-called "hot-bedding". There should be adequate supply of safe water for all personal and household uses.
- **Sanitation facilities** should be located conveniently, meeting minimum standards of health and hygiene and providing reasonable standards of comfort.
- **Health and safety.** Measures should be taken to prevent the spread of diseases and fire safety measures should be in place. While security measures should be taken to protect workers and their belongings, measures should be reasonable and not unduly restrict workers' freedom of movement.
- **Inspection** of premises should be frequent, with results available to view.
- Upon termination of employment, the worker should be entitled to a reasonable period of time to vacate the premises.
- Workers should be **consulted** as much as possible on the design of their housing.



Credit: Flickr/Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights

*"Poor housing conditions and uses may provide weak defences against death, disease, and injury or even increase vulnerability to them. Adequate and appropriate housing conditions, on the other hand, not only protect people against health hazards but also help to promote robust physical health, economic productivity, psychological well-being and social vigour."*

**World Health Organisation**

## Dhaka Principles for Migration with Dignity

### Principle 8: Living conditions are safe and decent



Migrant workers should enjoy safe and hygienic living conditions, and safe transport between the workplace and their accommodation. Migrant workers should not be denied freedom of movement, or confined to their living quarters.

Visit the Responsible Recruitment Gateway to view the full Dhaka Principles **Implementation Guide**.

### EBRD / IFC Guidelines

In 2009 the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) published detailed guidelines for worker accommodation on projects they had funded. The guidance is viewed as a key source of best practice for employers around the world.