

Key Considerations: How to Achieve Sustainable and Durable Rental Assistance

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What is Rental Assistance?

Rental Assistance programs aim to support refugee and migrant households with access to safe and decent individual shelter for a defined period. There are several approaches to providing Rental Assistance that varies depending on the purpose (for example: providing emergency, temporary, or long-term and durable solutions) and focus (for example: working directly with the affected population or with landlords and the host community, or both; rent through third parties, in hotels or directly to the owners, etc.). Rental Assistance programs include activities such as technical support and awareness of what comprises adequate; work improvements for rental; cash and voucher assistance; assistance with housing, land, and property (HLP) issues; conflict resolution and eviction prevention; advocacy before authorities for access to housing and on the rights of the people supported, and evaluations on the rental market, among others.

Assistance through cash and/or coupons is not the only modality, although it has been identified as the most used in the region in such programs. Generally, it is linked to certain conditions and is granted directly to the beneficiary (tenant/lessee). This type of work is an increasingly common option for access to individual shelter in urban contexts.

To achieve efficient Rental Assistance programs that are sustainable over a long period, it is necessary to do comprehensive analyses throughout the distinctive phases of the project cycle/the project cycle's distinctive phases; otherwise, the impact of the interventions might likely be minor and will only last for the duration of the program.

Below you will find a non-exhaustive list of recommendations and examples. It is important to note that not all examples of best practices related to Rental Assistance are listed in this document.

During the Design Phase:

- Before proceeding with a Rental Assistance program, carry out a risk analysis on the impact of said program in the long term, with a perspective of do no harm.
 - This includes not only the population of interest, supported by the assistance, but also the host community (xenophobia, PEAS) and the rental market (potential inflation, construction of low-quality rental housing, blocking other people's access to available housing in the area, etc.)

- Programs must be developed from the planning phase with realistic exit strategies that allow refugee and migrant households to manage their income and continue paying the rent after the support ends. You are invited to consider:
 - Frame the action within comprehensive programs that include Area-based approaches → Incorporating actions that include the host community, mapping of present actors, as well as their type interventions, existing basic services, coordination with authorities, etc. Link shelter intervention with the public spaces and existing infrastructures (i.e., repairing, retrofitting...). Check if area assessments (ABA) have been carried out in the area.
 - Links with national social protection programs → consult with the Protection Sector and/or with the Social Affairs Ministry or other relevant entities dealing with social issues
 - Analyze opportunities to work in parallel with social protection programs, distribution of Multipurpose Cash Transfers (MCP) → Consult with the Cash Transfers Working Group
 - Work in parallel with livelihood and income generation programs of the same organization or others → Consult within the organization and/or with the National Integration Sector.
 - Consider the challenges or facilities for access to basic services and job opportunities → Evaluate not only the location within the given geographical area but also its mobility/transport network (transport networks, distances both on foot and by transport, length of journeys, times of maximum influx - traffic jams, etc.), the safety or lack thereof of the neighborhoods.
 - Analyze options for access to durable housing solutions → Consult with the Shelter Sector and with ministries and/or other relevant entities that deal with housing/shelter programs and social issues
- Design programs based on markets to incorporate a systemic analysis of the rental market that allows greater access and availability of adequate housing, supporting the existing market while reducing barriers in existing policies, promoting the sustainability of the intervention, and reducing actions with damage to the current market and speeding up the response.
- Design programs with flexible budgets that allow them to be adapted throughout the implementation phase to events that may impact the context and modify expected/planned results.

During the Implementation Phase:

- The Rental Assistance must consider the socioeconomic profile of the people supported to define the duration and value of the transfer. It should determine whether it is the prioritized action and whether it is variable according to the person's profile and the house/room rented). Further, precautions should be taken to avoid creating dependencies.
- Generally, programs with a duration of more than three months are recommended, ideally between 6 and 12 months, as these would allow refugee and migrants households some stability and facilitate their integration.
- Rental Assistance, and by extension, the development of a rental program:
 - Must be developed based on an evaluation of the rental market and must include, among others:

- the socioeconomic profile of the households that will participate in the program,
- habitability conditions (adequate housing) and basic services,
- security of tenure (more details below),
- location,
- sociocultural adaptation.
- Rental Assistance requires continuous monitoring of:
 - the relationship between landlords¹ and tenants² (continuity of the contract, stay, payments; the existence of conflicts or abuse by one of the parties, among others),
 - the financial situation (monitoring of monthly payments, price stability and monitoring of the contract conditions, and feasibility to continue paying in the future once the assistance ends)
- It is highly recommended, whether required by national regulations or not, to ensure tenure by signing a contract or other model agreement.
 - Verbal agreements, even when legal, can put the supported households at risk of eviction or different types of abuse, preventing the achievement of durable solutions.
 - Likewise, once evicted, households are exposed to homelessness and/or new displacements and are at risk of turning to negative coping mechanisms.
- To avoid unforeseen consequences due to the volatility of the contexts, in particular, the strong impact of movement restriction measures enforced due to the Covid-19 pandemic on local economies, it is necessary throughout the implementation stages to review the risk matrices and, along with it, the designed exit strategies.

At the end of the project/program:

- Ensure referrals to actors within the thematic areas of integration and/or development.

Positive aspects of carrying out comprehensive Rental Assistance programs that include elements of integration and scope for durable solutions:

- The stability of having secured shelter for a specific period contributes to the economic recovery of households, the reconstruction of their lives and livelihoods, and strengthening the resilience, dignity, independence, and self-sufficiency of households and individuals.

¹Landlord: owner of the house or rented room.

²Tenant: person who rents a house or room. Tenant.

Critical actions for the integration of livelihood programs in Rental Assistance:

- It is recommended from the onset that Rental Assistance activities be complemented with livelihood programs so that the person receiving the support can generate income and continue paying rent when the assistance ends.
- Livelihood programs must be adapted to the socio-economic profile of households and to the professional aspirations of the household members, including the local demands of the labor market and/or products/services and the particular needs of people to access the labor market and/or to entrepreneurship.
- To guarantee the link between persons supported with assistance and access to livelihoods, coordination among the following actors is recommended: International Organizations (Integration Sector, organizations that are implementing livelihood programs; information, orientation, and referencing); Government (migrant centers; public employment services); and Civil Society Organizations.
- Depending on the context, the profile of the person and the specific needs, support in financial education, legal support, and psychosocial support could also be considered; as well as complementarities with social protection programs (including MPC)

Bibliography:

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. “Step-by-Step Guide to Providing Rental Assistance for People Affected by Crisis” [Access the guide here](#)

Global Shelter Cluster. “Humanitarian Rental Market Interventions. A review of best practices” April 2020. [More information here](#)

Global Shelter Cluster “Guidance note on the focus on settlements. Where limits and action merge” [Access to the document here](#)

Global Shelter Cluster. “Rental Market Interventions: Exit Strategies & Transition to Durable Housing – TIP SHEET 5”. [More information here](#)