PALESTINE
SHELTER CLUSTER
Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements

Shelter Minimum Standards Guidance

West Bank and East Jerusalem

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1. Purpose of the Guidance on Shelter Minimum Standards

This guidance document aims to provide a clear and practical overview of the minimum technical standards for shelters to be applied in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It is intended to support cluster partners in designing and implementing shelter responses that meet agreed standards and ensure improved living conditions for affected households.

The Shelter Minimum Standards are designed to help partners focus on the core and essential elements that must be addressed to enhance the safety, adequacy, and dignity of shelters. The guidance also emphasizes the importance of aligning interventions with the broader humanitarian principles, ensuring that all responses are technically sound, context-appropriate, and protection-sensitive.

This document will be reviewed and updated annually, while also allowing for revisions in response to emerging needs, changes in context, scale of emergencies, geographic considerations, and other key factors influencing the shelter needs environment. It also outlines the necessary preparatory steps prior to implementation, including risk analysis and mitigation measures and comprehensive legal and Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) consultations, to ensure that interventions are both effective and sustainable.

2. Shelter Cluster Members Responsibilities

All actors involved in the delivery of shelter responses are responsible for the following:

- **Adhering to agreed minimum standards:** Respecting and applying the minimum standards outlined in this guidance to ensure a consistent and principled approach across all interventions.
- **Prioritizing essential elements**: Giving special attention to the core and critical components of shelter assistance, prioritizing these over non-essential or secondary needs to maximize impact and ensure dignified living conditions.
- **Transparent communication with the Cluster:** Informing the Shelter Cluster of any challenges or constraints that may prevent adherence to the required standards, and actively requesting amendments or updates when necessary to ensure relevance and feasibility.
- **Ensuring technical capacity:** Guaranteeing that organizational technical staff have the appropriate expertise to design, implement, and monitor shelter interventions in line with the guidance, while also engaging in continuous learning and capacity development.
- **Accountability to affected populations:** Establishing and maintaining a Feedback and Complaint Mechanism within the broader accountability framework to ensure that shelter assistance is responsive, transparent, and inclusive of beneficiary voices.
- **Contributing to collective learning and improvement**: Actively participating in the review and updating of this guidance based on evolving needs, lessons learned, and feedback from partners and targeted communities.
- **Empowering beneficiaries:** Ensuring that households and communities receiving shelter support are provided with adequate capacity-building, awareness, and training on safe use, routine maintenance, and sustainability of the interventions.

Additional Considerations:

- Protection mainstreaming: Ensuring that all shelter interventions are designed and implemented with due consideration for protection risks, gender sensitivity, inclusion of persons with disabilities, and the safety and dignity of all household members.
- Do No Harm principle: Taking into account potential unintended consequences of shelter assistance, such as creating tensions with host communities, and proactively addressing these risks.
- Legal and HLP compliance: Ensuring thorough consultation on Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) issues before implementation to reduce risks of eviction, disputes, or tenure insecurity.
- Environmental responsibility: Considering environmentally sustainable materials, energy-efficient designs, and minimizing the ecological footprint of shelter interventions wherever feasible.
- Coordination and information sharing: Actively coordinating with other partners and stakeholders to avoid duplication, optimize resources, and ensure that interventions contribute to a harmonized and complementary shelter response.

3. Target populations and Geographical Areas

The guidance is applicable to all shelter interventions across the West Bank. The minimum standards should be adopted as a baseline and then tailored to the specific shelter or housing type, geographical location, and exposure to risks.

For selection and targeting, Shelter Cluster partners should prioritize the most vulnerable households who:

- Reside in substandard or unsafe shelters that do not meet basic protection, safety, or habitability requirements.
- Lack the financial means to undertake upgrades, rehabilitation, or reconstruction on their own.
- Face compounded vulnerabilities due to a combination of socio-economic hardship (e.g., poverty, unemployment, large family size, chronic illness, disability, female-headed households) and technical vulnerabilities (e.g., inadequate structures, poor insulation, lack of weatherproofing, unsafe materials).

Special attention should be given to populations living in marginalized communities in Area C, where substandard shelters are widespread. Many of these shelters offer limited living space, insufficient protection from weather extremes, and lack basic services. These conditions significantly heighten the risks to health, safety, and dignity of affected families.

Therefore, Area C marginalized communities should be prioritized, where access conditions permit, to ensure shelters are upgraded to meet the agreed minimum standards. By applying a combination of socio-economic and technical vulnerability criteria, Cluster partners can ensure that assistance is needs-based, equitable, and impactful.

4. Shelter assistance / response options

Emergency Shelter Assistance

Emergency shelter assistance is provided as an immediate life-saving response to man-made or natural disasters (e.g., conflict-induced displacement, demolitions, storms, or other shocks). The primary objective is to ensure rapid access to safe, dignified, and weather-appropriate shelter.

Temporary Shelter Assistance

Temporary shelter assistance is tailored to the specific threats and vulnerabilities of individuals, households, and communities. It aims to address their limited capacity to improve housing conditions in the short to medium term. Depending on the type of structure, security of tenure, and land ownership status, the intervention can be classified as temporary or more durable.

Within the categories of temporary or durable shelter assistance, the response may include rehabilitation, upgrading, or replacement of shelters, based on technical, protection, and socio-economic assessments.

Types of Shelter Responses

The following interventions are considered under the Shelter Cluster response framework in the West Bank. This guidance note highlights the technical specifications and minimum standards to be met, as detailed in items 4–8 of the guideline.

Shelter Assistance Type	Description
Demolition Response (Emergency)	Rapid provision of shelter support to households affected by forced evictions, demolitions, or seizures. May include tents, prefabs, NFIs, or cash-based support, depending on assessed needs.
Winterization (Temporary / Durable)	Seasonal support to protect vulnerable households against cold weather, including distribution of insulation kits, blankets, heating solutions, sealing-off kits, or upgrades to existing shelters.
Substandard Shelter Upgrade, Rehabilitation or Replacement	Structural improvements or full replacement of unsafe or uninhabitable shelters, addressing essential elements such as flooring, roofing, insulation, ventilation, doors, windows, and wash facilities.
Unconditional Cash Assistance	While not a direct shelter intervention, unconditional cash transfers may support households to cover immediate shelter-related needs. In some cases, it has been used as one-off rental support (typically up to 3 months) for households facing forced displacement.
Cash for Rent	Applied for displaced families in line with agreed SoPs and response modalities. Provides time-bound rental assistance in situations where physical shelter construction or rehabilitation is not feasible.
Non-Food Items (NFIs)	Distribution of essential household items (mattresses, blankets, kitchen sets, etc.), often as a complementary component to shelter interventions, particularly for families lacking basic items after displacement or during upgrades.
Tents	Provision of complete tent kits, including steel frames and PVC covers, or replacement of specific parts (e.g., covers or frames). May be complemented by concrete flooring and internal wall improvements (e.g., brick partitions) to enhance durability and protection.

Prefab Units (Insulated Panels)	Used to replace dilapidated shelters when conditions allow. Prefabs are available in different sizes to meet minimum living space requirements, adapted to family size. This option is common in West Bank contexts where prefabricated resources and experience exist. Also applied in high-risk demolition areas. Prefabricated or composite panels can be installed internally while leaving the external structure unchanged, improving insulation, partitioning, and privacy without drawing external attention.
Implementation modalities: Self-Help Approach (Cash + Technical Assistance), Damage Repair	Supports households to construct makeshift shelters or rehabilitate substandard ones through guided self-help. Assistance may cover essential works such as concrete flooring, waterproofing, installation of windows and doors, or provision of sanitation facilities. Provision of essential repair materials and works that enable displaced people to return to, and safely use, their original homes and shelters after damage from conflict or disasters.
Caves	In specific rural contexts, some households reside in natural or man-made caves. Where appropriate and safe, light-touch improvements (e.g., flooring, insulation, or partitions) can be supported in line with minimum standards.

5. Shelter minimum standards

The minimum standards represent the essential requirements that all shelter interventions will aim to achieve, regardless of the type of assistance or implementation modality. These standards cover critical aspects of safety, dignity, adequacy, and protection to ensure that affected households have access to habitable living conditions.

It is important to note, however, that due to the operational risks and restrictions in Area C, some standards may not always be fully achievable. In such cases, Shelter Cluster partners are responsible for monitoring, documenting, and reporting when standards cannot be met, and providing clear justifications for the gaps. This ensures accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement of the shelter response.

To guide partners in applying these standards, the essential and recommended criteria have been consolidated in the attached Excel spreadsheet. The file includes:

- A detailed list of minimum and recommended standards for each type of shelter intervention.
- A scoring system that allows partners to assess the level of compliance for each standard.
- A color-coded highlighting system to indicate where standards have been achieved, partially met, or not met, making it easier to track progress and identify critical gaps.

This approach ensures that all interventions are systematically evaluated against agreed benchmarks, while also providing flexibility to adapt to the challenging operational context.

Link to the scoring form can be found at this link: Minimum Technical Standard scoring