



Global Shelter Cluster Key Messages on Security of Tenure and COVID-19

These messages from the Global Shelter Cluster are shared with cluster partners to raise awareness of issues that can affect the shelter and housing of vulnerable people.

As governments respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by restricting the circulation of people, goods and services and millions of people are losing their income, the risk of evictions looms as a grave consequence, for which governments and humanitarian actors must prepare.

The pandemic threatens to put an additional and unprecedented strain on already vulnerable populations, including the displaced, many of whom lack security of tenure, are tenants, live in informal settlements or in homelessness. Millions rely on informal or seasonal employment to make ends meet. Daily wage earners such as traders, agricultural support or casual laborers have precarious work agreements, limited opportunity to advocate for their safety or job security, and insecure access to land and market opportunities.

Tenants at risk of defaulting on rent payments are not the only ones under the potential threat of evictions in the times of pandemic. To enforce social distancing, governments have been considering and - in some cases – undertaking evictions in informal settlements with the purported goal of ‘decongesting’ these areas. Moreover, migrant workers that are housed in their place of work or in accommodation provided by their employers are also at risk of evictions during COVID-19-related lockdowns.

Another factor contributing to the increased risk of evictions is stigma. Landlords have been evicting health workers as well as foreigners, whom they perceive as likely carriers of the virus. Women are in higher risk of dispossession and eviction during epidemics. Even in non-pandemic times, women-headed households often have more difficulty accessing adequate housing and claiming and exercising their rights once they are housed. If their access to housing and land is secured by a male relative, women are also at risk of dispossession and eviction if those male relatives die.

Forced evictions are not only a violation of international human rights law, but in the current context, all evictions, lawful or forced are also inconsistent with the ‘stay at home’ policies being enforced to fight against the pandemic.

In this context, Shelter Cluster partners must ensure that these increased risks of evictions are taken into account and mitigated in their programming and operations. This will require a better understanding of the extent of these risks in each particular context, as well as raising awareness among host Governments and donors on the impact of COVID-19 on security of tenure.

KEY MESSAGES ON SECURITY OF TENURE AND COVID-19

Considering the above, and in line with the guidance notes on COVID-19 issued by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, and with current discussions with the HLP Area of Responsibility, the Global Shelter Cluster recommends that partners:

- 1. Keep track of evictions cases:** Monitoring cases of evictions among the displaced and in host communities and spotting spikes and trends is critical to understanding the extent of the issue in each context as a basis to develop targeted mitigation measures. Adding targeted questions on the perceived risk of evictions to household surveys that are already systematically undertaken is the quickest way of capturing a potential trend. In the absence of a reliable baseline on the number of eviction cases, actual or expected loss of income can be used as proxy for assessing impending increase in risk of evictions.
- 2. Temporary assistance to tenants and landlords:** Consider developing temporary rental support programmes or expanding existing ones. Rental support in its different modalities can provide a buffer of security for tenants whose income has been affected and allow them to “shelter in place” during the height of the pandemic. These may include cash assistance to tenants, and direct support to landlords. Programmes that contribute to towards expanding the housing stock, such as initiatives that incentivise landlords to extend buildings or that advocate for the repurposing of buildings should be prioritized.
- 3. Monitor stigma:** Whenever possible, shelter actors should include the monitoring of attitudes towards health workers and people from outside communities in their assessments. Having this information can allow partners to pre-empt and help mitigate potential stigma-related forced evictions and growing tensions within host communities. Key informant-based surveys can capture changes in perceptions and attitudes towards targeted groups.
- 4. Advocate for a moratorium on evictions, delaying mortgage payments, and freezing rent:** In coordination with protection colleagues, shelter partners should advocate for the enactment of a temporary moratorium on evictions and on the shutoff of essential utilities, the delaying of mortgage payments, and the freezing of rent payments during the pandemic and in the months following the end of the health emergency, at least until ‘normal economic activity’ resumes. The moratorium should include protections for informal tenants. Multiple issues shared by urban informal settlers are similar to those faced by displaced persons. Development actors, civil society and government must be part of a system-wide call for improved security of tenure and prevention of evictions from a “whole of society” approach.

The Global Shelter Cluster would like to highlight that the HLP (Housing, Land and Property) Area of Responsibility of the Global Protection Cluster has provided a template decree to support [advocacy efforts](#).

