

R115 Workers' Housing Recommendation, 1961

Recommendation concerning Workers' Housing

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Place:Geneva

Session of the Conference:45

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Status: Up-to-date instrument

The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation,

Having been convened at Geneva by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and having met in its Forty-fifth Session on 7 June 1961, and

Having decided upon the adoption of certain proposals regarding workers' housing, which is the fifth item on the agenda of the session, and

Having determined that these proposals shall take the form of a Recommendation,

adopts this twenty-eighth day of June of the year one thousand nine hundred and sixty-one, the following Recommendation, which may be cited as the 'Workers Housing Recommendation, 1961:

Whereas the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation provides that the Organisation shall promote the objects set forth in the Declaration of Philadelphia, which recognises the solemn obligation of the International Labour Organisation to further among the nations of the world programmes which will achieve the provision of adequate housing; and

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations recognises that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including housing; and

Whereas the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation have agreed, as set forth in the Integrated Work Programme of the United Nations and the Specialised Agencies in the Field of Housing and Town and Country Planning, noted by the Economic and Social Council and by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office in 1949, that the United Nations has an over-all responsibility within the general field of housing and town and country planning and the International Labour Organisation a special concern for matters relating to workers' housing;

The Conference recommends that each Member should, within the framework of its general social and economic policy, give effect to the following General Principles in such manner as may be appropriate under national conditions:

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

I. Scope

1. This Recommendation applies to the housing of manual and non-manual workers, including those who are self-employed and aged, retired or physically handicapped persons.

II. Objectives of National Housing Policy

2. It should be an objective of national policy to promote, within the framework of general housing policy, the construction of housing and related community facilities with a view to ensuring that adequate and decent housing accommodation and a suitable living environment are made available to all workers and their families. A degree of priority should be accorded to those whose needs are most urgent.

3. Attention should also be given to the upkeep, improvement and modernisation of existing housing and related community facilities.

4. The aim should be that adequate and decent housing accommodation should not cost the worker more than a reasonable proportion of income, whether by way of rent for, or by way of payments towards the purchase of, such accommodation.

5. Workers' housing programmes should provide adequate scope for private, co-operative and public enterprise in house building.

6. In view of the fact that programmes of large-scale permanent housing construction may compete directly with programmes for economic growth and development--since scarce skilled and semi-skilled labour or scarce material resources may be needed for housing as well as for other types of production required for the expansion of production capacity--housing policy should be co-ordinated with general social and economic policy, so that workers' housing may be given a degree of priority which takes into account both the need therefor and the requirements of balanced economic development.

7. Each family should have a separate, self-contained dwelling, if it so desires.

III. The Responsibility of Public Authorities

8.

(1) The competent national authorities, having due regard to the constitutional structure of the country concerned, should set up a central body with which should be associated all public authorities having some responsibility relating to housing.

(2) The responsibilities of the central body should include--

(a) studying and assessing the needs for workers' housing and related community facilities; and

(b) formulating workers' housing programmes, such programmes to include measures for slum clearance and the rehousing of occupiers of slum dwellings.

(3) Representative employers' and workers' organisations, as well as other organisations concerned, should be associated in the work of the central body.

9. National housing programmes should aim at ensuring, consistently with other national goals and within limits set by housing and related needs, that all private and public resources which can be made available for the purpose are co-ordinated and utilised for the construction of workers' housing and related community facilities.

10. Where a substantial permanent increase of house-building capacity is required in order to meet national needs for workers' housing on a continuing basis, economic development programmes should include, consistently with other national goals, measures to provide in the long run the skilled manpower, materials, equipment and finance required for house building.

11. Public authorities should, to the extent required and as far as practicable, assume responsibility either for providing directly or for stimulating the provision of workers' housing on a rental or home-ownership basis.

IV. Housing Provided by Employers

12.

(1) Employers should recognise the importance to them of the provision of housing for their workers on an equitable basis by public agencies or by autonomous private agencies, such as co-operative and other housing associations, separate from the employers' enterprises.

(2) It should be recognised that it is generally not desirable that employers should provide housing for their workers directly, with the exception of cases in which circumstances necessitate that employers provide housing for their workers, as, for instance, when an undertaking is located at a long distance from normal centres of population, or where the nature of the employment requires that the worker should be available at short notice.

(3) In cases where housing is provided by the employer--

(a) the fundamental human rights of the workers, in particular freedom of association, should be recognised;

(b) national law and custom should be fully respected in terminating the lease or occupancy of such housing on termination of the workers' contracts of employment; and

(c) rents charged should be in conformity with the principle set out in Paragraph 4 above, and in any case should not include a speculative profit.

(4) The provision by employers of accommodation and communal services in payment for work should be prohibited or regulated to the extent necessary to protect the interests of the workers.

V. Financing

13.

(1) The competent authorities should take such measures as are appropriate to ensure the execution of the accepted programmes of workers' housing by securing a regular and continuous provision of the necessary financial means.

(2) For this purpose--

(a) public and private facilities should be made available for loans at moderate rates of interest; and

(b) such facilities should be supplemented by other suitable methods of direct and indirect financial assistance such as subsidies, tax concessions, and reduction of assessments, to appropriate private, co-operative and public owners of housing.

14. Governments and employers' and workers' organisations should encourage co-operative and similar non-profit housing societies.

15. Public authorities should endeavour to ensure that public and private facilities for loans on reasonable terms are available to workers who wish to own or to build their dwellings, and should take such other steps as would facilitate home ownership.

16. National mortgage insurance systems or public guarantees of private mortgages should be established as a means of promoting the building of workers' housing in countries where a sound credit market exists and where such systems are considered appropriate.

17. Appropriate measures should be taken in accordance with national practice--

(a) to stimulate saving by individuals, co-operative societies and private institutions which can be used to finance workers' housing; and

(b) to encourage investment by individuals, co-operative societies and private institutions in the construction of workers' housing.

18. Workers' housing built with assistance from public funds should not become the object of speculation.

VI. Housing Standards

19. As a general principle, the competent authority should, in order to ensure structural safety and reasonable levels of decency, hygiene and comfort, establish minimum housing standards in the light of local conditions and take appropriate measures to enforce these standards.

VII. Measures to Promote Efficiency in the Building Industry

20. Governments, in association with employers' and workers' organisations, should promote measures to achieve the most efficient use of available resources in the building and associated industries and, where necessary, should encourage the development of new resources.

VIII. House Building and Employment Stabilisation

21. National housing programmes should be planned so as to permit a speeding up of the construction of workers' housing and related community facilities during slack periods.

22. Appropriate measures should be taken by governments and employers' and workers' organisations to increase the annual output of workers' housing and related facilities by reducing seasonal unemployment in the building industry, subject to the principles referred to in Paragraph 6 above.

IX. Town, Country and Regional Planning

23. The development and execution of workers' housing programmes should conform to sound town, country and regional planning practice.

24.

(1) Public authorities should take all appropriate steps to prevent land speculation.

(2) Public authorities should--

(a) have the power to acquire land at a fair price for workers' housing and related community facilities; and

(b) create land reserves in appropriate situations in order to facilitate advance planning of such housing and facilities.

(3) Such land should be made available for workers' housing and related community facilities at a fair price.

X. Application of General Principles

25. In applying the General Principles set forth in this Recommendation, each Member of the International Labour Organisation and the employers' and workers' organisations concerned should be guided, to the extent possible and desirable, by the accompanying Suggestions concerning Methods of Application of the Recommendation.

SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING METHODS OF APPLICATION

I. General Considerations

1. Workers' housing programmes adopted and pursued in accordance with Paragraph 8 of the General Principles should be such as to lead to maximum improvement in workers' housing conditions as quickly as relevant considerations--such as available national resources, state of economic development, technology and priorities competing with housing--permit.

2. Special consideration should be given in national housing programmes, particularly in developing countries, to the housing needs of workers employed in, or required by, industries or regions which are of great national importance.

3. In establishing and carrying out workers' housing programmes, special attention should be given at the local level to--

(a) the size and age and sex composition of the worker's family;

(b) the relationship of the persons within the family; and

(c) the particular circumstances of physically handicapped persons, persons living on their own and aged persons.

4. Measures should be taken, where appropriate, to achieve a more effective utilisation of the existing supply of rental housing by encouraging an exchange of occupancies in accordance with housing needs, arising for example from size of family or place of work.

5. The competent authorities should give special attention to the particular problem of housing migrant workers and, where appropriate, their families, with a view to achieving as rapidly as possible equality of treatment between migrant workers and national workers in this respect.

6. The collection and analysis of comprehensive building and population statistics as well as the undertaking of sociological studies should be encouraged as essential elements in the formulation and execution of long-term housing programmes.

II. Housing Standards

7. The housing standards referred to in Paragraph 19 of the General Principles should relate in particular to--

(a) the minimum space per person or per family as expressed in terms of one or more of the following, due regard being had to the need for rooms of reasonable dimensions and proportions:

(i) floor area;

(ii) cubic volume; or

(iii) size and number of rooms;

(b) the supply of safe water in the workers' dwelling in such ample quantities as to provide for all personal and household uses;

(c) adequate sewage and garbage disposal systems;

(d) appropriate protection against heat, cold, damp, noise, fire, and disease-carrying animals, and, in particular, insects;

(e) adequate sanitary and washing facilities, ventilation, cooking and storage facilities and natural and artificial lighting;

(f) a minimum degree of privacy both--

(i) as between individual persons within the household; and

(ii) for the members of the household against undue disturbance by external factors; and

(g) suitable separation of rooms devoted to living purposes from quarters for animals.

8. Where housing accommodation for single workers or workers separated from their families is collective, the competent authority should establish housing standards providing, as a minimum, for--

(a) a separate bed for each worker;

(b) separate accommodation of the sexes;

(c) adequate supply of safe water;

(d) adequate drainage and sanitary conveniences;

(e) adequate ventilation and, where appropriate, heating; and

(f) common dining rooms, canteens, rest and recreation rooms and health facilities, where not otherwise available in the community.

9. Workers' housing standards should be revised from time to time to take account of social, economic and technical development and increases of real income per head.

10. In general, and in localities where employment opportunities are not of a temporary character, workers' housing and related community facilities should be of durable construction.

11. The aim should be to construct workers' housing and related community facilities in the most suitable materials available, having regard to local conditions, such as liability to earthquakes.

III. Special Schemes

12. In the developing countries special consideration should be given, as an interim measure pending development of a skilled labour force and of a building industry, to schemes such as large-scale aided self-help schemes for short-life housing, which offer one means for improvement in housing conditions, particularly in rural areas. Simultaneously, steps should be taken in these countries for the training of unemployed and unskilled workers for the building industry, thereby increasing the capacity for building permanent dwellings.

13. All appropriate measures should be taken by governments, employers and employers' and workers' organisations to assist home ownership by workers and, where desirable, self-help housing schemes. Such measures might include, for example--

(a) the provision of technical services, such as architectural assistance and, where necessary, competent supervision of the work;

(b) research into housing and building matters and publication and dissemination of manuals and simple, illustrated pamphlets containing information on such matters as housing design, housing standards, and building techniques and materials;

(c) training in simple building techniques of self-help housing;

(d) the sale or hire of equipment, materials or tools at less than cost;

(e) reduced interest rates and similar concessions, such as direct financial subsidies towards the initial capital outlay, the sale of land at less than developed cost and long leases of land at nominal rents.

14. All appropriate measures should be taken, where necessary, to give families information concerning the maintenance and rational use of facilities in the home.

IV. Housing Provided by Employers

15. In cases where housing is provided by the employer the following provisions should apply unless equivalent protection of the worker is ensured, whether by law or by collective or other binding agreements:

(a) the employer should be entitled to reposses the accommodation within a reasonable time in the event of termination of the worker's contract of employment;

(b) the worker or his family should be entitled to a reasonable period of continued occupancy to enable a satisfactory alternative dwelling to be obtained when he ceases to exercise his employment by reason of sickness, incapacity, the consequences of employment injury, retirement or death;

(c) the worker who, in the event of termination of his employment, is obliged to vacate his accommodation, should be entitled to receive fair compensation-- (i) for crops which he is growing, with permission, on land belonging to the employer; and

(ii) as a general rule, for improvements enhancing permanently the amenities of the accommodation, which are made with the agreement of the employer, and the value of which has not yet been written off through use.

16. A worker occupying housing provided by his employer should maintain the premises in the condition in which he found them, fair wear and tear excepted.

17. Persons having social relations or business, including trade union business, with a worker occupying accommodation provided by the employer, should be entitled to free access to the house occupied by such worker.

18. The possibility should be examined, where appropriate, of a public authority or other institution or worker-occupants acquiring, for a fair price, ownership of housing provided by the employer, except in cases where such housing is within the operational area of the undertaking.

V. Financing

19. Public authorities should either finance directly or give financial assistance to rental housing schemes, especially for certain groups of workers, such as heads of newly formed families, single persons and those whose mobility is desirable for a balanced development of the economy.

20. Loans granted to workers in accordance with Paragraph 15 of the General Principles should cover all, or a substantial part of, the initial cost of the dwelling unit and should be repayable over a long period of time and at a moderate rate of interest.

21. Provident funds and social security institutions should be encouraged to use their reserves available for long-term investment to provide facilities for loans for workers' housing.

22. In the case of loans granted to workers to promote home ownership, adequate provision should be made to protect the worker against the loss of his financial equity in his house on account of unemployment, accident or other factors beyond his control, and in particular to protect his family against the loss of his financial equity in the event of his death.

23. Public authorities should render special financial assistance to workers who, by reason of inadequate income or excessively heavy outlay in respect of family responsibilities, are unable to obtain adequate accommodation.

24. In cases where public authorities provide direct financial assistance toward home ownership, the recipient should assume financial and other responsibilities with respect to such housing in so far as his capacity permits.

25. Public authorities giving financial assistance to housing programmes should ensure that tenancy or ownership of such workers' houses should not be refused on grounds of race, religion, political opinion or trade union membership.

VI. Measures to Promote Efficiency in the Building Industry

26. Workers' housing programmes should be carried out on a long-term basis, and should be spread over the whole year, in order to obtain the economies of continuous operation.

27. Appropriate measures should be taken for improving and, where necessary, expanding facilities for the training of skilled and semi-skilled workers, supervisory personnel, contractors and professional personnel, such as architects and engineers.

28. Where there is a shortage of building materials, tools or equipment, consideration should be given to such measures as giving priority to the construction of factories producing these goods, importing equipment for such factories and increasing trade in these goods.

29. Having full regard to considerations of health and safety, building codes and other regulations pertaining to design, materials and construction techniques should be so formulated as to permit the use of new building materials and methods, including locally available materials and self-help methods.

30. Special attention should be given, among other measures, to improved planning and organisation of work on the site, to greater standardisation of materials and simplification of working methods and to the application of the results of building research.

31. Every effort should be made to eliminate restrictive practices on the part of contractors, building-material suppliers and workers in the building industry.

32. National institutions should be developed for the purpose of undertaking research into social, economic and technical problems of workers' housing. Where appropriate, use might be made of such services as can be made available by the Regional Housing Centres sponsored or assisted by the United Nations and other appropriate international organisations.

33. Every effort should be made to promote the efficiency of small-scale building contractors, for example by placing at their disposal information on low-cost materials and methods of building, by the provision of centralised facilities for hiring tools and equipment, by specialised training courses and by establishing suitable financial facilities where they do not already exist.

34. Measures for reducing building costs should not result in a lowering of the standards of workers' housing and related facilities.

VII. House Building and Employment Stabilisation

35. Where unemployment in the construction industry is markedly in excess of the transitional unemployment which occurs during the period between the cessation of a construction workers' employment on one site

and the commencement of his employment on another site, or where there is substantial unemployment outside the construction industry, programmes for workers' housing and related facilities should be expanded, where appropriate, to offer employment to as many unemployed persons as possible.

36. In periods of declining private construction or declining economic activity in general and in cases where there is a need for an increased volume of construction, the government should take special action to stimulate the construction of workers' housing and related facilities by local authorities, or private enterprise or both, by such means as financial assistance or extension of their borrowing powers.

37. Measures for increasing, if necessary, the volume of private housing might include a reduction in the rate of interest and in the size of down-payment required, and the lengthening of the amortisation period.

38. Where appropriate, measures to be taken to reduce seasonal unemployment in the construction industry may include--

(a) the use of all appropriate plant, machinery, materials and techniques to enable construction work to be carried out in a safe and satisfactory manner and to protect the worker during periods traditionally regarded as unfavourable for the carrying out of construction operations;

(b) education of those concerned regarding the technical feasibility and social desirability of not interrupting construction in unfavourable climatic conditions;

(c) the payment of subsidies to offset in whole or in part additional costs which might be involved in construction under such conditions; and

(d) the timing of various operations in programmes of workers' housing and related facilities in such manner as will help to reduce seasonal unemployment.

39. Appropriate steps should be taken, where necessary, to ensure administrative and financial co-ordination between the various central and local public authorities, and between them and private bodies, in carrying out an employment stabilisation programme affecting the construction of workers' housing and related facilities.

VIII. Rent Policy

40.

(1) Although in the highly industrialised countries with a high and rising standard of living one of the long-term objectives should be that rents should tend to cover the normal costs of housing accommodation, taking into account the principles laid down in Paragraph 4 of the General Principles, it should be a general aim that as the result of higher real wages and increased productivity in the building industry the percentage of the workers' income devoted to rent covering the normal cost of the dwelling should progressively diminish.

(2) No increase in rent should permit more than a reasonable rate of return for the investment.

(3) During periods of acute housing shortage, measures should be taken to prevent an undue rise in rents of existing workers' housing. As the housing shortage eases and a sufficient number of workers' dwellings of decent quality become available to meet the need, these measures may be, where appropriate, progressively relaxed, subject to the provisions of this Paragraph.

IX. Town, Country and Regional Planning

41. Workers' housing should, in so far as practicable and taking into account available public and private transport facilities, be within easy reach of places of employment, and in close proximity to community facilities, such as schools, shopping centres, recreation areas and facilities for all age groups, religious facilities and medical services, and should be so sited as to form attractive and well-laid-out neighbourhoods, including open spaces.

42. In the design of houses and the planning of new communities for workers, every effort should be made to consult those bodies representative of future occupants best able to advise on the most suitable means of meeting their housing and environmental needs.

43. The siting of workers' housing should take into consideration the possibility of air pollution from factories, and topographical conditions which may have an important bearing on the disposal of surface run-off and of sewage and other wastes.

44. In the construction of short-life housing it is particularly important to ensure community planning and control over density of occupancy.

45. It is desirable to adopt the principle of providing in towns and cities for inter-related zones, such as residential, commercial and industrial zones, with a view to ensuring as agreeable an environment as possible for the worker and his family and to minimising the time spent and risks incurred by workers in going to and from work.

46. With a view to combating slums, the competent authorities, in collaboration, as appropriate, with civic and other organisations concerned, as well as with landlords, home owners and tenants, should take all practicable measures for the rehabilitation of slum areas by means such as renovation and modernisation of structures which are suitable for such action and the conservation of buildings of architectural or historical interest. The competent authorities should also take appropriate action to ensure adequate housing accommodation for families which may be temporarily displaced during the period when such rehabilitation is being carried out.

47. In order to lessen overcrowding in large urban centres, plans for future development should be formulated on a regional basis, with a view to preventing over-concentration of industry and population and to achieving a better balance between urban and rural development.

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