

Anti-racism & Localisation Community of Practice

Theme 5 - The Humanitarian Wage Gap

June 2025

*We can think of the **Humanitarian Wage Gap** as the pay disparity between international and national humanitarian workers or between the staff of different kinds of humanitarian actors. This gap often results in local workers, who may face higher risks and perform critical work, being paid significantly less than their international counterparts, even with comparable qualifications and experience.*

Resources

The [**Mind the gap in local and international aid workers' salaries**](#) article summarises a survey of nearly 1,300 local and expatriate workers from around 200 organisations in six countries. On average, local staff were paid four times less than their international counterparts, despite having similar education and experience. The authors concluded that "The dual salary system is a difficult structural inequity that makes it hard for many workers in aid and development--both local and international staff alike--to work together, support each other and achieve project goals." The article includes a link to an optional podcast.

[**The State of the Humanitarian System 2022 full report**](#) stated that aid worker salaries vary significantly based on the type of organisation in which they work. For example, UN staff are paid more than double their INGO peers and staff of international organisations are paid, on average, six times the salary of local or national NGO (L/NGO) staff. The report also provides country examples (section on "Pay" pages 64-65).

The article [**The Shocking Inequality in Foreign Aid Nobody Talks About**](#) explores how national staff endure both the increased exposure to risk and poorer pay, resulting in serious mental health challenges for many local aid workers. [A 2012 joint survey](#) conducted by the Center for Disease Control and the Antares Foundation found that up to 65 percent of national staff in Jordan, Uganda, and Sri Lanka suffered from clinically significant levels of depression, compared to 20 percent of American and European aid workers post-deployment. In addition, 86 percent of national aid workers in Uganda experiencing chronic stress as a result of financial or economic matters.

Key takeaways:

Below is a collection of key takeaways from CoP members discussing how the Humanitarian Wage Gap hinders equity in the NiE sector, along with practical strategies to address these challenges. Please note, they do not necessarily represent the views of any specific organisation or the Global Nutrition Cluster. Further, we acknowledge that the resources shared and CoP discussions are currently exclusively in English.

1

The Humanitarian Wage Gap is a well known and frequent problem in our sector:

- A survey of 1300 local and expatriate workers from around 200 organisations showed that on average, local staff were paid four times less than their international counterparts, despite having similar education and experience. And, alarmingly, 80% of local workers said that their pay was not sufficient to meet their everyday needs.
- The SOHS 2022 reported that UN staff were paid more than double their INGO peers, and staff of international organisations as a whole were paid on average more than six times the salary of L/NGO staffers.
- One organisation reported the salary of a UK staff member was ten times that of their national counterpart.

2

The pay gap can also be influenced along racial lines:

- In 2020, Save the Children UK published an Ethnicity Data and Pay Gap Report, which demonstrated that Black women earn a mean average of more than 23% less than white men and 13% less than white women.

3

We can also see variations in salaries between NGOs in-country, even when paid by the same donor.

4

Different pay based on nationality does not seem to be a common practice outside of the aid sector.

5

Salaries should be equitably based on education, experience, and skills, but the Humanitarian Wage Gap cannot be explained by differences in experience or skills.

6

The wage gap goes beyond just the salary and includes per diem, lodging, meals, accommodation, and due diligence around security.

7

There is a heightened security risk for national staff, with the Aid Worker Security Report 2024 estimating that 96% of major attacks were against national aid workers in 2023. The year 2024 has been called the "deadliest year ever for aid workers" with 95% of fatalities being of national staff. Female national staff face additional risks of harassment and sexual violence.

8

Despite national staff enduring a much higher security risk—and being afforded fewer resources, protections, and rights than their international colleagues, they are often responsible for ensuring the security of the international staff.

9

Stress and depression affect national humanitarian workers, even more severely than international humanitarian workers:

- A 2012 joint survey found that up to 65% of national staff in Jordan, Uganda, and Sri Lanka suffered from clinically significant levels of depression, compared to 20% of American and European aid workers post-deployment.
- Meanwhile, A 2018 UNOCHA report concluded that international staff receive greater psychosocial support, training, and security provisions than their national counterparts.

10

The realisation that national and expatriate staff are paid and protected very differently can be jarring.

11

This disparity can hinder one's ability to transfer skillsets, undermine team building and engagement, and strain professional relationships.

12

When this topic is raised, organisations often lean on arguments around cost of living, but practitioners from the Global North who move to the Global South do not have their salaries decreased proportionally.

13

The Humanitarian Wage Gap and its implications should be discussed amid the Humanitarian Reset conversations.

14

Humanitarian salaries should not be based on nationality. Differences in pay based on nationality or being national or expatriate create inequity and undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

15

If we achieved pay equity, the humanitarian sector could attract more talent from the countries and regions we support, and therefore more contextual expertise.

16

Explore pay transparency within your organisation, including disclosing salary ranges for specific roles, explaining the factors influencing pay, and, in some cases, even making individual salaries public, while being considerate of confidentiality policies.

17

Ensure equitable compensation practices in your organisations, to ensure individuals are fairly and adequately compensated for their contributions, reflecting the value of their work, their like job responsibilities, experience, and the specific context of the work.

18

Support career advancement for national staff in your organisation by providing access to training, mentorship, and clear career pathways.



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