

Anti-racism & Localisation Community of Practice

Theme 2: Passport Privilege in Nutrition in Emergencies

December 2024

Passport privilege is the unearned advantages that citizens of certain countries enjoy when it comes to international travel. It remains a critical issue to equity in the Nutrition in Emergencies (NiE) space. One way passport privilege practically plays out is through the number of countries a person can enter visa-free or with a visa on arrival because of the passport they hold.

Passport privilege is measurable. According to the [2025 Global Passport Power Rank](#), the strongest passports are largely held by European, former colonial countries and white settler societies—such as Australia and the United States. This power imbalance has large and real implications on the inclusion of global health professionals from the Global South.

Global health specialist and contributor, Madhukar Pai, warns that, “Global health was neither diverse nor global even before the pandemic, but now, there is a real risk that all global health events will start resembling Davos elite, white people getting together in North American or European cities, to discuss issues that mostly impact Black and brown people in low- and middle-income countries. There is a big risk that people in the Global South will be left behind, or left trying to join hybrid events via unreliable internet connections.”

To adequately and genuinely address visa and passport discrimination, global health policy advocate, Shashika Bandara (et al.), says we need, “...a paradigm shift within ourselves that resists the othering of people in the Global South.” In his article, he and his colleagues propose short-, medium-, and long-term solutions to visa and passport inequities.

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(As framed by the GNC's A&L COP)

In December, the **GNC's Anti-racism and Localisation Community of Practice (CoP)** discussed the practical ways in which passport privilege poses a challenge to equity within the NiE sector and how these challenges can be addressed. The views and opinions expressed in this resource do not necessarily represent the views of any specific organisation or the GNC at large. We also recognise that the CoP's discussions and resources around this topic have been shared in English only, which we acknowledge as a limitation.

Key takeaways from the discussion:

- 1 Challenges around acquiring visas create additional time and administration burdens for applicants, but are also an issue of human dignity. The visa process can be dehumanising for applicants because of systemic biases and negative perceptions tied to nationality.
- 2 Passport privilege can be a barrier to colleagues applying for NiE positions in other countries, hindering their career advancement and opportunities.
- 3 Passport privilege limits organisations' ability to send their most skilled staff where in-person NiE support is needed if their passport is discriminated against.
- 4 There is an overrepresentation of people with powerful passports at global events, which means local expertise is not adequately represented nor recognised.
- 5 People with less powerful passports are more likely to be excluded from global events or limited to remote attendance. This limits their ability to network, collaborate, build relationships, showcase their research, and access opportunities compared to those attending in-person.
- 6 During hybrid (both remote and in-person) events, remote attendees generally have less opportunities to speak, are not heard as clearly due to technical issues, and may not be given as much attention from facilitators. In other words, remote attendees struggle to fully engage compared to those attending events in-person, which results in them having less of a voice.
- 7 We need to ask ourselves, "What are we missing in the NiE space because of passport inequality and how can we address this in our work?"
- 8 Invest in training, mentoring, and development initiatives for local experts to broaden their opportunities and networks.
- 9 Consider structuring numerous smaller events leading up to larger events to increase opportunities to participate more widely.

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To reduce people with more powerful passports being overrepresented—particularly at global events—we must amplify local voices more. This can be achieved by prioritising participation and leadership of local NiE professionals at global conferences, panels, and in decision-making processes.

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If remote participation is not made available at a global event, we must seek to understand why and encourage event planners and decision-makers to provide it for future events.

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We must provide relevant training on cultural safety, anti-racism, unconscious bias, and passport and visa inequality to global event planning decision-makers and their teams.



Source: *Springer Nature Research Communities*

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Create and promote a checklist for event planners with what to consider when planning in-person events—specifically in terms of visa and travel challenges for event participants with less powerful passports.

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Organize events in visa-friendly countries that do not have harsh or cumbersome visa requirements or high currency values, and geographically rotate the location of global events so more NiE professionals have the opportunity to attend.

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Increase travel sponsorship opportunities for colleagues from the Global South and representatives from local and national actors.

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Use the least powerful passports as a starting point when selecting the location of the event:

- Assess passport strength using the [Passport Index](#) by Arton Capital.
- Systematically assess barriers to travel for participants using tools such as the [Visa Openness Index](#) before selecting the location of a global event.
- Get prepared and consider developing meetings using a matrix of different criteria to assess location, such as the [Organising More Equitably Accessible](#) Global Health meetings.

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Consider the level of effort and lead time needed for participants to obtain a visa—including travel time, wait time, and interview time—as well as whether a passport is held and released later, a second round of travel and wait time is needed, and the burden of being without a passport. Provide dedicated administrative support to colleagues with weaker passports.

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Consider time zones more when planning global events and offer multiple sessions to accommodate NiE professionals in different regions when possible.

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When balancing decision-making between visa considerations and climate/carbon footprint considerations, always determine who is favoured. Holding meetings in ‘easier’ countries where fewer people in total are traveling can sometimes cut out participation for those from countries that have least contributed to climate change.

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Where in-person global events are held and some colleagues cannot attend because of visa restrictions or insufficient notice to acquire a visa, explicitly state this during the event and the reasons why.

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Just because someone has passport privilege doesn’t mean they need to use it. When providing in-country NiE support, prioritise national or regional practitioners who may require no international flights or shorter duration flights to lead the support.

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National non-governmental organisations, community based organisations, and civil society associations could consider developing a joint advocacy agenda to address visa and passport inequalities in their country. This could include making an investment case stating the cost benefits a country would gain once global health employees are allowed to access visas at an affordable fee, compared to income from high visa fees.



The A&L Community of Practice is hosted by the GNC Anti-racism and Localisation Working Group. Scan the QR Code to learn more.