

THE PASSPORT EXPERIENCE





AFRICA FORUM ON
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PRIVATE SECTOR SOLUTIONS | THEME: ALL IN

The Passport Experience



The African Union adopted a Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in 2018. By January 2024, only four nations had ratified it, far short of the 15 needed for it to take legal effect. In practice, this means visas are still required for 47% of intra-African travel today.

For an African entrepreneur who needs dozens of separate visas to move around the continent for business, or for a displaced person seeking opportunity across a border, this becomes the daily arithmetic of whether an opportunity is reachable.

What Is the Passport Experience?

The Passport Experience is an immersive simulation originally designed by the Amahoro Coalition and first implemented at the third edition of the Africa Private Sector Forum on Displacement (**AFD 2025**). Instead of receiving a standard conference badge, participants were issued a mock passport containing their personal details and the forum's programme.

Passports were issued in different colours, and each colour determined a different experience within the same physical event:

- * Which queue a participant was placed in, and for how long
- * What kind of questions they were asked at each checkpoint
- * What evidence or documentation they were asked to produce
- * Which parts of the venue and programme they could access

The experience is a simulation of what it means to try to move, across a border, into a visa appointment, through an airport, toward an opportunity abroad, while holding a travel document that the world treats as suspect by default. The colour of the passport a participant carried determined how long they waited, how they were questioned, what proof of legitimacy they were asked to produce, and ultimately whether they could move forward at all, regardless of who they were or what they had achieved.

Serious Fact:

According to Amahoro Coalition's Intra-Africa Labor Mobility report, a first instance decision to grant or not to grant asylum takes 2,738 days for it to be processed.

What does the Passport Experience achieve?

Conversations about displacement and mobility are usually conducted in the abstract, through statistics, policy papers, and panel discussions. The Passport Experience helps individuals generate their own experiences with mobility. Research has shown that people remember information much better when they actively experience something rather than passively reading or listening to something.

As participants move through the Passport Experience, they are able to experience firsthand that:

1

Mobility is gated by the passport hold, not by who they are, what they have achieved, or where they intend to go

2

Even within the continent, movement within and beyond of the remains slow, discretionary, and unevenly enforced depending on nationality.

3

The experience surfaces how much capability and ambition is lost not to lack of talent but to lack of a document, or the right category of document, that others take for granted.

4

Real border and visa processes for displaced and stateless individuals are often characterised by unpredictability and inconsistency.

Forums like this bring together people with very different lived relationships to displacement in the same room including policymakers, corporate executives, philanthropists, and displaced people themselves. The Passport Experience gives all of them the same starting material to talk about, which is difficult to achieve through a keynote or a report alone.

How Can You Implement It?

At a minimum, an implementation needs:

1

Something every participant carries (a mock passport, ID, or badge) that visibly signals which tier or category they belong to, and that staff can check at multiple points.

2

At least two, ideally three or more, distinct experiences mapped onto the different tiers, different queue lengths, different levels of scrutiny, different questions, different levels of access. The differentiation should feel like bureaucracy.

3

A second-stage activity that simulates the process of trying to move such as a visa desk, a border crossing, or an airport transit point where participants are asked to produce proof of purpose, funds, sponsorship, or return intent, mirroring what is actually demanded of travelers affected by displacement or those holding weak passports.

4

Some tiers are set up to be delayed, turned back, or denied regardless of what they present at the checkpoint. This must be planned in advance and executed consistently, the point is that the outcome is disconnected from the individual's conduct or preparation, not that it is random.

5

The experience only becomes useful for advocacy if participants can name what just happened to them. This debrief could be through a plenary discussion, small group conversation, or moderated panel, that lets people articulate what they noticed (frustration, confusion, a sense of unfairness) and then connects that feeling back to the real-world systems it is modelling.

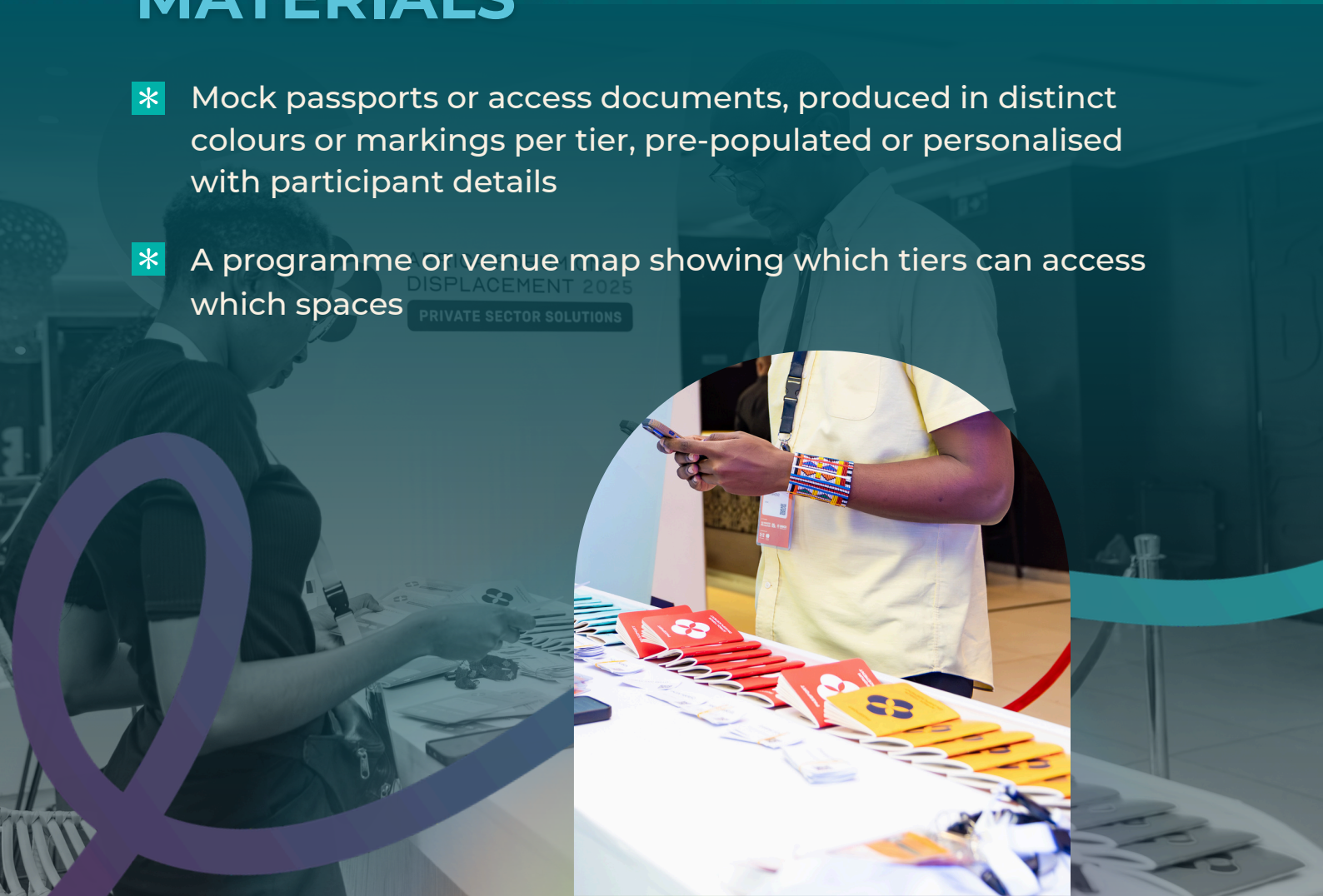
What Do You Need to Implement It?

PEOPLE

- * A small design/production team to script the tiers, checkpoints, and outcome logic in advance
- * "Border/checkpoint" actors or staff briefed to stay in character and apply differentiated treatment consistently
- * A facilitator or moderator to run the debrief
- * Note-takers or observers to capture participant reactions for later reporting or advocacy use

MATERIALS

- * Mock passports or access documents, produced in distinct colours or markings per tier, pre-populated or personalised with participant details
- * A programme or venue map showing which tiers can access which spaces



- * Signage for queues and checkpoints that reinforces the simulation (visa windows, application counters, etc.)
- * A mock visa or transit application form for the checkpoint stage, requesting the same categories of documentation that real border and consular processes require (proof of funds, sponsorship letters, return tickets, invitation letters, proof of accommodation, etc.)
- * A pre-built decision key mapping each tier to its outcome, shared only with staff running that stage

SPACE AND LOGISTICS

- * Enough physical space to run multiple queues or checkpoints simultaneously without one bottlenecking the others
- * A clearly time-boxed schedule, since the experience depends on participants feeling the weight of waiting without derailing the rest of the event
- * A debrief space (plenary hall, breakout rooms, or informal circle) immediately following the activity, while the experience is still fresh



CONTENT AND EVIDENCE BASE

- * Real or realistic data on the systems being simulated to ensure the simulation is credible and defensible if challenged.
- * A consent and framing note for participants, since the experience can surface real frustration or discomfort and should be introduced honestly as a simulation with a clear purpose

SAFEGUARDING CONSIDERATIONS

- * Awareness that some participants, particularly displaced or formerly displaced individuals in the room, may find the simulation re-traumatising rather than illuminating. Organisations should decide in advance whether participation is opt-in, whether alternative framing is offered to those with lived experience, and ensure facilitators are equipped to support anyone who becomes distressed.



This guidebook draws on the design and delivery of the Passport Experience as implemented by the Amahoro Coalition. Organisations adapting this model for their own context should adjust the specific system being simulated, the data underpinning it, and the safeguarding measures to fit their own audience and objectives while attributing the original idea to Amahoro Coalition.