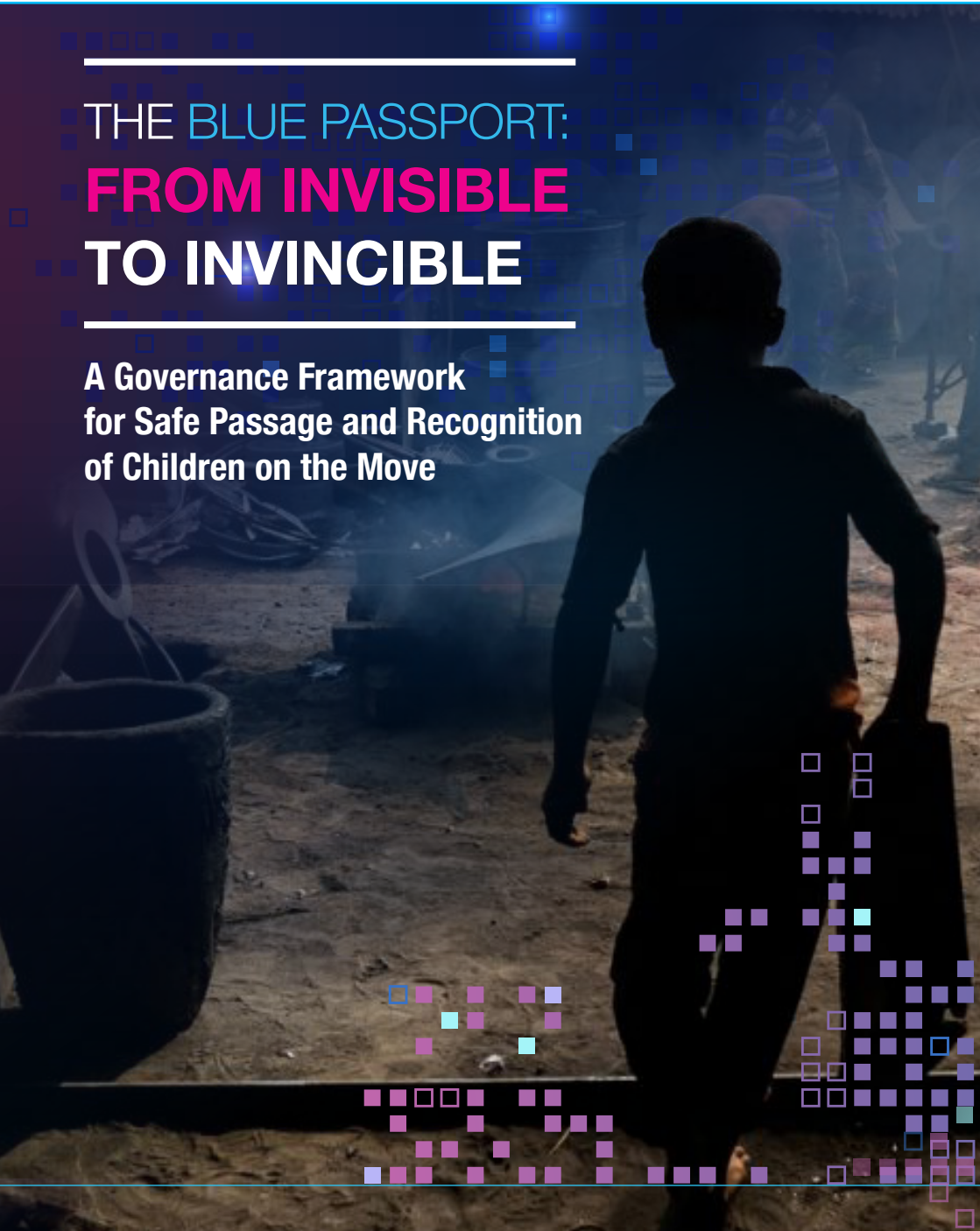

THE BLUE PASSPORT: **FROM INVISIBLE** **TO INVINCIBLE**

**A Governance Framework
for Safe Passage and Recognition
of Children on the Move**



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Case studies, including material on the United Kingdom's National Age Assessment Board, are drawn from published sources, public records, and parliamentary proceedings. All claims are attributed. Nothing in this report constitutes legal advice.

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The current report draws on seven years of implementation experience, pilot programs, and field research that have clarified both the nature of the problem and the magnitude of the solution required. To present these findings and a new approach for safe passage, recognition, and protection of children moving across borders, WIN Foundation has engaged with a number of organizations supporting this agenda. The views expressed in this report represent solely those of the WIN Foundation and do not imply co-authorship with any other entity.

The “Blue Passport” concept was first proposed by Dr. Mariana Dahan in Bloomberg Opinion in November 2019, building on WIN Foundation’s 2018 report and over a decade of prior research and operational work on the use of technology for human advancement. The specific ethical governance framework developed in this report is the product of that body of work. In any subsequent publication or citation that draws on the “Blue Passport” concept or its ethical governance framework, authors are requested to credit this original work by Dr. Mariana Dahan and the WIN Foundation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, millions of children cross borders fleeing conflict, violence, and poverty. Most of them are without recognized identity documents, portable records, or institutional visibility. At the end of 2024, 48.8 million children were displaced by conflict and violence: nearly triple the figure from 2010. An estimated 150 million children under five have never been registered. When a child is not recognized as a minor, the child is not protected: without proof of identity, many basic services are out of reach. Critically, this represents a real danger for the most vulnerable: children, women and migrants who have been uprooted and are fleeing poverty, violence, and war. They can easily fall prey to human traffickers who then coerce them into modern slavery and exploitation. Globally, children now account for 38% of all detected trafficking victims.

Over the past decade, digital identity has been promoted as a possible solution to the problem. Countries have expanded national ID systems, humanitarian agencies have improved registration, and new technologies such as distributed ledgers have enabled verifiable credentials. While this is progress, a fundamental gap persists: recognition does not always travel. Whether at the border, in temporary housing, or in an asylum process, a child identified in one system can remain invisible in another.



The core problem is no longer the absence of identity systems. Today it is the absence of governed, cross-border recognition. Protection depends not on whether a child has been registered, but on whether that registration is recognized consistently, securely, and across institutions.

For WIN Foundation, seven years of operational experience – from the 2018 “Blockchain for Humanity” Challenge, to the 2019 Bloomberg Op-Ed proposal for extending UN *laissez-passer* passports to refugees and the 2023 UNHCR Global Refugee Forum pledge – trace a clear arc: from technology-first experimentation to governance-first system design. Lessons learned from those pilots show that interoperability first fails at the institutional level, not the technical one. Successful governance depends on factors no technology could address.

A new framework is emerging and it hinges on three instruments: **safe passage as standing infrastructure** rather than humanitarian exception; the “**Blue Passport**” – a novel rights-anchored recognition credential that is informed by but separate from the existing UNHCR refugee travel document – and an **ethical governance framework** with defined roles, controls, and safeguards ensuring that a tool built for protection cannot be repurposed for surveillance or enforcement.

Recognition that does not travel is not protection. The tools exist. The knowledge exists. What remains is the governance architecture and the political will to connect them.



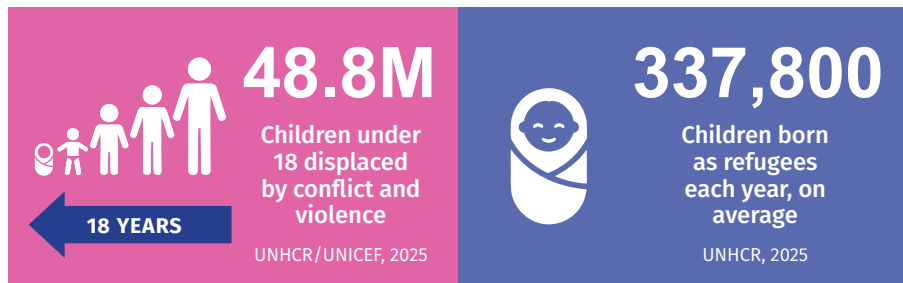


1. THE PROTECTION GAP

Protracted conflict, deepening inequality, and accelerating climate displacement have made children disproportionately vulnerable. When civilian infrastructure collapses, children are the most exposed. When families are forced to move, children are least likely to carry the documents or the credentials that make the recognition and the protection possible. Even when humanitarian registration processes function, these records rarely translate into recognized identity across borders or institutions.

Children on the Move

At the end of 2024, 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide: nearly double the figure a decade earlier. Children constitute 40% of all forcibly displaced people.



Nearly one in five children worldwide now lives in a conflict zone (UNICEF, 2024–2025). Between 2014 and mid-2024, at least 3,696 children died or went missing during migration journeys.

In 2024 alone, 127 children died or disappeared on migration routes toward Europe (IOM/UNICEF, 2025) — a geographic subset; worldwide child migration deaths in 2024 totaled approximately 480.

Lack of Recognition and Vulnerability of Children

Children who cannot prove who they are, their age, origin, or guardianship face sharply increased odds of exploitation and even death.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for approximately 90 million unregistered children today – more than half the global total – and the region could see this trend increase if nothing is done to address the issue (UNICEF, 2024).



← 5 YEARS

150M

Children under five with no birth registration 150 million children under five remain unregistered and are invisible to government systems; a further 50 million lack birth certificates.

UNICEF, 2024

The legal invisibility of unregistered children makes it more likely that their disappearance and exploitation will go unnoticed by authorities.

— Plan International, 2014





WHEN RECOGNITION FAILS: THE UK NATIONAL AGE ASSESSMENT BOARD

The United Kingdom's National Age Assessment Board (NAAB), established in March 2023 under the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, illustrates that the recognition gap is not confined to developing countries. When unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrive via English Channel crossings and their age is disputed, two Home Office officers may classify them as adults based on physical appearance and demeanor alone.

Consequences are severe. Children wrongly classified as adults are placed in unsafe adult accommodation—including children as young as fourteen sharing rooms with unrelated adults—without safeguarding. They face detention, removal to France, and criminal prosecution in adult facilities. Young refugees described NAAB assessments as more traumatic than those conducted by local authorities; the process has been linked to self-harm and suicidal ideation (Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium, 2024).




57%
of cases reviewed by local authorities were confirmed to be children—the Home Office wrongly classified children as adults in more than half of disputed cases.

Source: Refugee Council, 2022–2023

The failings are structural. Assessments are adversarial rather than child-centered, relying on culturally inappropriate indicators. Evidence from professionals familiar with the child is routinely dismissed. A child may face up to four separate age determinations – a fragmented process producing conflicting outcomes.

Structural lesson: No new approach can by itself override national age assessment processes. However, there's value in creating a verifiable baseline record before any state assessment take place. It creates a normative pressure for recognition that comes with multilateral endorsement. Structural reform of receiving-state processes remains necessary.



Issues with age determination of children also occur in host countries, as detailed in the Refugee and Migrant Children’s Consortium 2024 report. The dedicated case study on the United Kingdom’s National Age Assessment Board demonstrates what happens when governed recognition is absent in a wealthy democracy: children systematically misidentified, detained with adults, denied protection – all because the assessing institution had enforcement incentives that overrode protection obligations.

Whether their identity is unrecognized or misclassified, children find themselves in vulnerable situations, leading to devastating consequences.

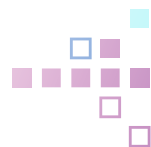
These “invisibles” are vulnerable to human traffickers, who often use fake ID documents to transport them across borders. Once trafficked, children are sold to brothels, exploited and abused, and even used for the illegal human organ trade.

— WIN Foundation, 2018

Trafficking of Children on the Move

Separation from proof of identity makes children acutely vulnerable to traffickers who exploit documentation gaps to move minors across borders

using forged papers. Once trafficked, children are forced into sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and even organ trade. Absence of recognized identity makes rescue harder, prosecution rarer, and family reunification slower. Women and girls account for 61% of all detected trafficking victims; children (girls and boys combined) represent 38%. Together, women and children comprise the large majority of all detected victims (UNODC, 2024). Three in four trafficked women and girls are sexually exploited.



The vast majority of victims of trafficking are not identified, and consequently do not have access to their rights to assistance, support and protection.

— European Commission, 2016

Even when children on the move arrive safely to a destination country, they may be miscategorized as adults and exposed to re-trafficking. A report by Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT) found that unaccompanied children placed in adult accommodation face increased risks of re-trafficking and exploitation. In 2024, immigration practitioners have documented cases where children wrongly treated as

adults were subsequently re-trafficked from adult Home Office accommodation in the UK.

Systemic Failure Points

The problem is not data absence. It is the absence of recognized, portable, trusted identity across systems. Children's identities are tied to guardians, documentation is frequently lost, and legal status changes rapidly during movement. Critical information fragments at each stage of displacement.

Failure points concentrate at border crossings (identity and guardianship unverifiable), custody validation (separation and dispute), asylum processing (identity inconsistencies delay protection), family reunification (no verifiable linkage), school enrolment (records missing or unrecognized), and host-country integration (identity required for services and employment).

UN analysis has already underscored the same structural weakness. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children urges governments to ensure that children on the move are promptly identified and legally registered upon arrival at borders, so that their rights can be claimed and enforced across the migration journey.

The system is not failing to identify children. It is failing to recognize them where protection depends on it.



2. From Tech Experiments to System Design

Between 2015 and 2020, technology's potential to solve the global identity crisis generated extraordinary optimism. The United Nations, through SDG 16.9, committed for the first time to providing legal identity to all by 2030. The World Bank's ID4D global agenda looked at biometrics as a way for governments to confer unique ID credentials to its citizens. Blockchain technology has also attracted intense interest across the development sector with the premise of decentralized, tamper-resistant digital identities. For children on the move, the promise was a portable, verifiable identity that could protect them everywhere.

THE 2018 “BLOCKCHAIN FOR HUMANITY” GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Launched to address child trafficking in Moldova, the Global Challenge launched by WIN Foundation – in partnership with UNOPS, UN-OICT, LSE, the Government of Moldova, NGOs and private sector companies – resulted in three concrete implementation proposals. Each of the three proposals – from ConsenSys, the Bitfury Group (Exonum), and Sovrin/ixo Foundation consortium – envisioned blockchain architectures for child identity and guardian-linked credentials at border crossings. The proposals were technically sophisticated and operationally grounded. They also exposed fundamental gaps in the institutional infrastructure required to make any of them work.

WIN Foundation / LSE / UNOPS / UN-OICT, 2018

Three major initiatives tested the premise. In 2018, two United Nations agencies (UNOPS and UNOICT) teamed up with the World Identity Network (WIN) Foundation, and – in collaboration with academia, civil society, private sector and government agencies – launched the “Blockchain for Humanity” Global Challenge. Following suit, the UNHCR launched a “Digital Identity” Challenge seeking solutions for refugee identification. And the World Bank ID4D program convened its “Missing Billions” Challenge in 2019. Each Global Challenge advanced technical understanding. The cross-border recognition layer remains the unsolved problem in the field. Across every major initiative, the limiting factor has not been technology, but governance: the absence of well-defined institutional roles, legal frameworks, and cross-border recognition protocols that no technical design can substitute for.



What We Learned

Registration alone does not ensure access or safety. The primary barriers to implementation are institutional, legal, and political. Without institutional recognition, even well-designed technology remains siloed. Poorly governed systems may expose children to surveillance, exclusion, or harm. The question of “what technology” has been answered. What remains is the question of “what governance architecture must exist for any technology to work?”

Interoperability fails at the institutional level, not the technical one. Each system could verify identity within its own architecture. Cross-border recognition required legal frameworks, diplomatic agreements, and institutional trust that no technical design could replace.

Local uptake depends on factors no technology could address. Pervasive corruption in law enforcement (e.g. Moldova’s anti-trafficking investigative body was restructured mid-initiative), low institutional trust, and the practical challenges of onboarding children in low-connectivity environments all blocked adoption regardless of technical quality.

Technology is not a silver bullet for this or any problem. Any proposed solution will need to go hand in hand with significant policy action and structural reforms.

— WIN Foundation, 2018

Informed by these early results, WIN Foundation launched an advocacy campaign to argue that the issue is not tech, but systems design and that a different approach needs to be taken.

In 2019, WIN Foundation's founder published an Op-Ed in Bloomberg that reframed the debate, arguing that the United Nations should extend its laissez-passer passports – usually reserved for UN officials – to refugee children, enabling recognized safe passage across borders. The proposal addressed a structural gap: safe passage for children remains a humanitarian exception, activated in crisis and dependent on ad hoc coordination. Displacement is neither exceptional nor temporary. Dahan's core argument was that technology had never been the obstacle – viable tools exist and had already been tested. What was missing were the governance structures and implementation mechanisms to make recognition portable across borders and institutions.

The focus must shift from building better technology to building better systems.

Children who lack recognized identity documents need governed protection mechanisms at borders documents meet a particular standard, but children. Safe passage for children on the move must function as standing infrastructure, not as an improvised response to each new crisis.



3. SAFE PASSAGE AS INFRASTRUCTURE

Safe passage requires five core components operating as standing infrastructure. First, a child recognition credential that enables consistent identification across systems. Second, cross-border recognition protocols accepted by multiple jurisdictions, ensuring that a credential issued in one country retains its validity in another. Third, rapid institutional verification mechanisms that allow humanitarian agencies and national authorities to confirm a child's status without delay. Fourth, wherever possible, guardian-linkage verification to ensure that custody relationships are trusted and documented. And fifth, tamper-resistant records that reduce the risk of fraud and manipulation throughout the process.

Safe passage as infrastructure

Safe passage requires **standing infrastructure**, not ad hoc responses. Five core components form the foundation of a governed recognition system for children on the move.



Child recognition credential



Cross-border protocols



Rapid institutional verification



Guardian-linkage verification



Tamper-resistant records

TWO PARALLEL TRACKS

1

POLITICAL TRACK

Diplomatic agreements, multilateral norm-setting, and legal recognition of cross-border credentials by receiving governments.

2

TECHNICAL TRACK

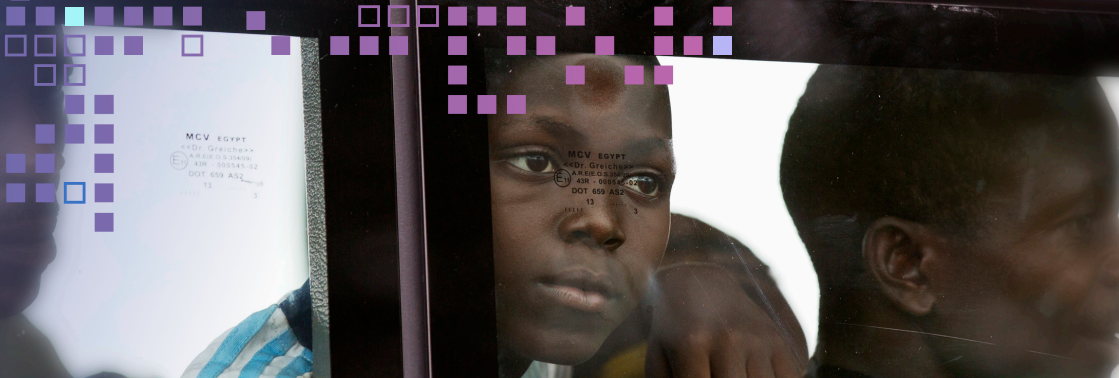
Credential architecture and interoperability standards enabling institutional verification in real time.

Delivering this infrastructure requires two parallel tracks. The first is political: diplomatic agreements, multilateral norm-setting, and legal recognition of cross-border credentials by receiving governments — none of which require new technology to begin. The second is technical: designing the credential architecture and interoperability standards that enable institutional verification in real time. Neither track is sufficient on its own; political agreements without technical infrastructure remain aspirational, and technical systems without legal recognition remain unenforceable.

Previous pilots demonstrated that investing in technical infrastructure before political foundations are in place produces systems that no government has agreed to recognize.

As we move forward, implementation will continue to face political, legal, and institutional constraints — particularly where cross-border recognition intersects with sovereignty, data protection regimes, and immigration control systems. These constraints are real and should not be understated. They are also not grounds for inaction.





4. THE “BLUE PASSPORT”

Building on a Century of Precedent

The **Nansen Passport (1922–1938)**: first travel document for stateless refugees, issued by the League of Nations. Approximately 450,000 issued, recognized by 52 countries. By 1926, more than 20 states allowed holders to depart and return – a right of re-entry most modern refugee documents still struggle to guarantee. The Nansen Office received the 1938 Nobel Peace Prize.

The **UN *laissez-passer* created in 1946** under the Convention on Privileges and Immunities: an internationally governed, ICAO-compliant, biometrically secured credential functioning across borders, accepted by most member states. Never extended beyond UN staff and World Bank Group employees.

THE ORIGINAL “UN PASSPORT” PROPOSAL BY WIN FOUNDATION IN 2019

In November 2019, WIN Foundation’s founder proposed in a Bloomberg Opinion that the United Nations extend its *laissez-passer* passports to all refugees. The Op-Ed suggested that UNHCR could issue passports at borders and hotspots while negotiating safe-passage corridors with neighboring countries.

The structural argument: unlike CTDs, which require prior state-level recognition, the UN *laissez-passer* is issued by an international body and accepted by member states. Extending it to displaced populations would bypass the existing bottlenecks that leave hundreds of millions in legal limbo.

Source: M. Dahan, Bloomberg Opinion, 20 November 2019.

The **1951 Refugee Convention: Article 28** requires signatory states to issue Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) to refugees in their territory. Several European countries issue these – sometimes labeling them as “blue passports” as well – but these are structurally a different type of credential. Their limitation is that holders must already be recognized as refugees by a specific state and its local authorities – a condition millions of displaced children cannot meet in the wake of a sudden displacement.

THE UN HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) PLEDGE IN 2023

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR launched a pledge titled “*Refugee Travel Documents – The 21st Century Nansen Passport,*” calling on states to provide and accept machine-readable CTDs meeting ICAO biometric standards.

Relationship to this framework: The pledge modernizes existing state-issued documents within the Article 28 paradigm. It does not address children not yet processed by any state, those in transit, those who are stateless, or those who are undocumented. The remaining gap – in the space between displacement and state processing – is where children are most vulnerable.

Source: UNHCR Global Compact on Refugees, Multi-stakeholder Pledge, 2023.

Nansen proved the principle. The 1951 Convention codified the right but reversed the mechanism to state-level issuance, creating a gap for those not yet recognized. The UN *laissez-passer* built the infrastructure. WIN Foundation identified the extension to the children on the move who fall prey to human traffickers. This framework provides the architecture: governance layer, technical specification, ethical safeguards, and adoption pathway.

Children on the move have a better chance at safe passage when issuance occurs at the moment of displacement or arrival – at borders, transit points, camps, hotspots – by the UN or other multilateral body with existing field presence and biometric registration capacity.

Protection begins at displacement, not at the conclusion of a bureaucratic process that may take months or years.



A New Approach for Safe Passage, Recognition, and Protection of Children on the Move

At the center of the proposed approach is a rights-anchored recognition credential. The “Blue Passport” is a hybrid instrument: a physical document supported by a digital record, enabling offline verification at border crossings with limited connectivity and real-time institutional verification by authorities and humanitarian agencies. It is informed by, but distinct from, UNHCR's existing Convention Travel Documents (CTDs), which are issued nationally but are not universally recognized.

The “Blue Passport” establishes four facts: that the child exists, is a minor, has protection needs, and has a verified age. Whenever possible, a fifth element is added: the guardian-linkage verification. It does not confer citizenship, residency, or asylum status. The minimal footprint is deliberate — designed for acceptance by the broadest possible range of receiving institutions without creating jurisdictional conflicts.

It would, however, allow all parties to agree on one critical determination: proof of age. Age determines whether a child is old enough to work or be married, whether they should be in school, and whether they should be processed through the juvenile or adult justice system.



The Blue Passport: a rights-anchored recognition credential

At the center of the proposed approach is a hybrid credential — a physical document supported by a digital record — designed to function across the full spectrum of infrastructure conditions.



PHYSICAL LAYER Tangible document

Enables offline verification at border crossings with limited or no connectivity.

Remains functional where digital infrastructure is unavailable or untrusted.



DIGITAL LAYER Verifiable record

Enables real-time institutional verification by authorities and humanitarian agencies.

Supports cross-border recognition and audit trails.



Rights-anchored: grounded in the child's legal entitlements, not immigration status



Cross-jurisdictional: designed for recognition across multiple national systems



Tamper-resistant: reduces fraud risk through linked physical-digital verification



Guardian-linked: documents trusted custody relationships where possible

HOW IT DIFFERS FROM EXISTING INSTRUMENTS

Blue Passport

- Issued independently of any single national authority
- Hybrid physical-digital architecture
- Child-specific, rights-anchored design
- Built for universal cross-border recognition

VS.

Convention Travel Documents

- Issued nationally by host governments
- Paper-based, no digital verification layer
- General refugee instrument, not child-specific
- Not universally recognized across jurisdictions



5. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

If governance determines whether recognition translates into protection, the governance framework must carry proportionate weight. It must be designed not as an aspirational layer but as a structural requirement – embedded in the “Blue Passport”’s architecture from inception.

Ethical Framework for the “Blue Passport”

Four pillars ensuring that a credential designed for protection remains structurally incapable of becoming a tool for control.

PILLAR 1 Principles

[Child-first protection] [Consent] [Age-appropriate agency] [Data minimization] [Non-discrimination] [Cross-border interoperability]

The credential collects only the minimum data required — the four attestations — and stores personal data off-chain while managing permissions on-chain, directly addressing the tension between immutable ledgers and erasure rights.

The NAAB’s adversarial, enforcement-oriented assessments demonstrate the consequences of operating without these principles.

PILLAR 2 Roles

Five distinct functions — separation prevents dangerous concentration of power.

Recognition issuers

UNHCR or authorized partners at point of displacement

Guardian verifiers

Trusted custody confirmation

Independent oversight bodies

Accountability and review across all functions

Protection authorities

Host country child protection services

Border & institutional verifiers

Schools, asylum offices, service providers

PILLAR 3 Controls

[Auditable logging] [Revocation & correction] [Appeals processes] [Access management] [Key management]

Every credential issuance, verification, and modification is logged and reviewable. Errors can be remedied. Recourse is guaranteed.

PILLAR 4 Safeguards

[Guardian dispute resolution] [Adulthood transition of control] [Protection-trigger mechanisms] [Prohibition of commercial exploitation] [Structural separation from enforcement]

The credential cannot be used for immigration enforcement, detention, or removal.

Design principle: A tool designed for protection must be structurally incapable of becoming a tool for control.

Any data system handling the identities of vulnerable children creates the possibility that information could be corrupted, stolen, weaponized, or used to target, control, or exclude. Legitimate critiques of digital identity for refugees have documented how biometric data can become surveillance infrastructure, registration systems can be repurposed for enforcement, and data breaches in humanitarian contexts can be life-threatening.

Recognition issuers, protection authorities, guardian verifiers, border verifiers, and independent oversight bodies must operate under defined roles, with auditability, revocation, correction, and cross-border validation mechanisms embedded from the outset. No single actor can deliver this alone – the framework depends on sustained cooperation across institutions, mandates, and jurisdictions.





6. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT AND ADOPTION PATHWAY

The framework does not require building multilateral support from scratch. UNOPS and UN-OICT were direct partners in the 2018 WIN Foundation initiative. UNHCR's protection mandate already encompasses digital identity for stateless and displaced persons. The World Bank's ID4D initiative has published guiding principles on inclusive identification that inform the analytical background of this report. Regional bodies including the EU, African Union, and ASEAN are already engaged in digital identity interoperability discussions that this framework can align with rather than duplicate.

UN's own Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children has reinforced this trajectory, calling for governments to move from a continuum of violence to a continuum of protection, including legal registration of children when they arrive in a new country. The governance framework proposed here is designed to give that call concrete operational form at borders, so that legal identity and recognition travel with the child as they move through different jurisdictions.

The approach described in this report builds on those guiding principles and invites their renewed engagement; it does not presuppose a formal endorsement of the "Blue Passport" proposal.



Differentiation and Strategic Impact

Existing identity initiatives have improved identity systems and civil registration but neither addresses portability of recognition across jurisdictions for children displaced from the systems these initiatives seek to strengthen. The “Blue Passport” creates the layer that does not currently exist. The instruments are complementary.

The “Blue Passport” approach enables safer, more predictable cross-border movement for children; reduced trafficking and exploitation risk through recognized identity credential; increased institutional trust between origin, transit, and host countries; and stronger integration outcomes. As traditional mechanisms contract, this safe passage infrastructure becomes essential in supporting millions of children on the move.

Proposed Phased Pathway

PHASE 1: Normative alignment

Convene an international coalition around shared principles and governance standards. Secure endorsements from key UN agencies and regional bodies. Establish the institutional home for credential issuance and oversight.

PHASE 2: Pilot corridors

Launch implementation in two to three high-priority displacement corridors. The first one could be Ukraine – Moldova (where WIN conducted its 2018 pilot with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs) providing a natural starting point to help address the influx of Ukrainian refugees, specifically children on the move: from affected areas of Ukraine to safe passage corridors and destination countries in Europe.

PHASE 3: Cross-border agreements

Bilateral and multilateral agreements for credential recognition, building on pilot results to demonstrate operational viability.



PHASE 4: Institutional integration

Credential verification embedded in education, healthcare, legal representation, and social services across participating jurisdictions.

PHASE 5: Scaling

Extension through multilateral endorsement, targeting inclusion in frameworks such as the Global Compact on Refugees.

Next Steps

Delivering the "Blue Passport" from concept to practice requires a coalition of partners willing to co-design and test it in a controlled setting. No single actor – government, humanitarian organization, or tech funder – can deliver this alone.

► Governments

Interested governments are invited to co-design a corridor pilot at selected borders for children on the move, without changing existing asylum or migration laws at this stage. Participation involves three commitments: acknowledging that current systems leave children in a dangerous pre-recognition space that justifies a structured pilot; designating one or more border or transit points where a "Blue Passport" issued by authorized actors will be treated as a high-quality evidence package triggering child-centered safeguards (for example, presumption of minority pending full assessment), while existing procedures remain in force; and supporting independent monitoring of key outcomes – wrongful age assessments, time to guardianship confirmation, use of adult facilities – with a joint review at the end of the pilot before any decision on scale-up.

► UN and multilateral agencies

UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM have the field presence, registration infrastructure, and protection mandate to operationalize issuance. Operational humanitarian organizations with comparable field capacity – particularly the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which delivers child protection services across more than 40 countries – could serve as authorized implementation partners for

credential issuance and verification at the point of displacement. The pilot requires a designated multilateral body to coordinate issuance at borders, transit points, or reception centers, using existing biometric registration capacity. Coordination with UNHCR's PRIMES system, UNICEF's child protection programming, and the operational reach of partners like IRC can determine whether the credential integrates into existing workflows or creates a parallel process. The pilot must answer that question empirically.

► Development finance and philanthropic partners

The pilot's critical funding need is not technology – it is the governance layer: legal analysis for each corridor jurisdiction, negotiation of bilateral recognition terms, design of the independent monitoring framework, and institutional coordination across partners. An indicative pilot – one corridor, 18–24 months, two to three border points – requires early-stage funding to move from framework to operational design. Development finance institutions and philanthropic organizations are invited to fund the pilot's governance and coordination costs, with technology costs expected to draw on existing infrastructure.

► Technology and implementation partners

The 2018 “*Blockchain for Humanity*” Challenge produced technically sophisticated proposals that remain relevant as starting architectures. The pilot requires a technical partner to build or adapt the credential infrastructure for credential issuance, verification protocols, and offline-capable validation for low-connectivity border environments. Technical partners must operate under the ethical governance framework described in this report, including data minimization, structural separation from enforcement, and independent auditability.

► Civil society and child protection organizations

Independent monitoring is a structural requirement, not an add-on. Child protection organizations – particularly those with documented expertise in age assessment and trafficking – are needed to design the monitoring framework, conduct independent case review, and ensure that the pilot's outcomes are measured against child welfare indicators, not institutional convenience.



7. Call for Action



The architecture described in this report draws on a century of precedent, seven years of field experience, and institutional capabilities that already exist. The gap is not knowledge. It is not technology. It is governance infrastructure and the political will to build it.

Every year that this gap remains open, children pay the price. They are separated from their families because no system recognizes the link between parent and child once a border has been crossed. They are detained as adults because they cannot prove they are minors. They disappear – from temporary housing, from protection systems, from the record of who exists. They are more easily trafficked because recognition does not travel with them.

This is not inevitable. The Nansen Passport proved a century ago that an international body could issue recognition to displaced people and that sovereign states would accept it. Fifty-two countries did. What was possible in 1922 for stateless adults should not be impossible in 2025 for displaced children

A century ago, Fridtjof Nansen proved that international recognition could protect the displaced. The question before us is whether we have the will to extend that principle to the children who need it most.

Somewhere today, a child is crossing a border without a document or credential that any receiving institution will recognize. That child's safety depends not on whether a technology exists to identify them, but on whether the systems on the other side are governed to recognize them.

Recognition that does not travel is not protection. The governance architecture to change that is now within reach.

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