



# DIGNIFIED IDENTITIES IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION:

**JOURNEY AND REFLECTION**

**FEBRUARY 2023**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Cover photo: November 2022, during a simulation exercise in Nairobi, QR codes were scanned by participants to see the process of verification using digital credentials generated by the DIGID platform.  
Photo credit: Kenya Red Cross Society*

# CONTENTS

<b>Timeline of the DIGID project</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction: From Theory to Practice</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Reflection on Achievements</b>	<b>9</b>
Benefits for humanitarian organisations	9
Humanitarian Sector-Wide Digital Identity	9
Optimise Aid Provision	10
Reduce Spillage	10
Benefits for individuals	11
Restore Dignity	11
Accessing Services	12
Overcoming Portability Challenges of Physical Documentation	13
<b>Gaps between Expectations and Experience</b>	<b>14</b>
Limits of Technology	14
Do people want to own and manage their data?	15
Enabling transition from pilot to operational use	16
<b>What now for Digital Identity in humanitarian action?</b>	<b>17</b>
Improving existing internal solutions	17
Investment in Interoperability	18
Linking with long-term legal or official IDs	19
<b>Concluding remarks</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Annexes</b>	<b>22</b>
ANNEX 1: List of resources:	22
ANNEX 2: List of engagements where DIGID was represented	24

# TIMELINE OF THE DIGID PROJECT

2019

**January**

DIGID consortium formed with a Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Group represented by the Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian Refugee Council, Norwegian Church Aid, Save the Children Norway with the IFRC as the technical lead.

**March**

Public information sessions were conducted to kick off the DIGID project, present the problem statement and solicit support from humanitarian and private sectors and other institutions.

**May**

Digital ID workshop in Kenya brought representatives of the DIGID consortium based in Kenya including representatives from the private sector to discuss the issues with identification and provision of cash assistance and explore the concepts behind “decentralized identity” and technologies being developed.

**July**

Request for proposal published

**December**

Contract granted to a technology provider. The first research report commissioned by the DIGID project was published by Engineering for Change focusing on Digital IDs for cash assistance in East Africa.

2020

**January**

Project kickoff with the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) and representatives of the DIGID consortium based in Kenya.

**March**

COVID-19 restrictions prevented the distributed teams from conducting field-level activities and progressing on the project.

**May**

Technology provider (based outside of Kenya) sent notice to terminate contract due to the inability to meet commitments restricted by the pandemic.

**September**

Gravity was contracted as the new technology provider for DIGID. They had a presence in Kenya and were able to work closely with KRCS to mitigate risks due to COVID-19 restrictions.

**December**

Consultation with communities to verify the needs and functionality of the solution being sought.



Photo page 2 and page 3: Bukedea women are waiting for the verification process to receive cash assistance. Photo credit: Uganda Red Cross



2021

**January**

Technical design developed.

**March**

Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) was finalised, and controlled testing started.

**April**

Second research report was conducted by Oxford Centre for Development & Technology, “Digital Identity: An analysis for the humanitarian sector<sup>1</sup>”, which looked at the efforts of different humanitarian organisations and companies in looking into the needs for digital ID and how they might be implemented. Three case studies were presented.

**May**

Field pilots were conducted in Nairobi (urban) and Turkana (rural) where 300 households – mostly without official IDs and made vulnerable by the COVID-19 pandemic – were issued humanitarian digital credentials to establish eligibility to receive cash assistance. Post-distribution monitoring was conducted to assess and get feedback on the experience and perceptions of communities in using the DIGID digital credentials.

**June**

Technology interoperability proof of concept conducted between Gravity and Tykn to see how different decentralized identity providers are able to recognise digital credentials issued.

**July**

Third research report was published by the IFRC looking specifically at Digital Identities in migration context<sup>2</sup>, the needs of vulnerable migrants related to identification and how to receive services in a dignified manner.

**September**

KRCS conducted consultations with migrants and other stakeholders in Garissa, Migori, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei to understand the needs for identification within different migrant communities.

**October**

Webinars organised by KRCS and IFRC to share lessons learnt from the field pilot.

**October**

The Response Innovation Lab Uganda, Uganda Red Cross Society and IFRC hosted an online workshop to discuss the opportunities and actions around digital identification in the migration context in Uganda. Attendees included representatives from humanitarian organisations and tech providers.



1 <https://www.ifrc.org/document/digital-identity-analysis-humanitarian-sector>

2 <https://www.ifrc.org/document/digital-identity-analysis-humanitarian-sector>

2022

### January

KRCS and IFRC published the lesson learnt report from the pilot in May<sup>3</sup> including a supplementary report on follow-up activities after the pilot such as internal and external advocacy efforts, additional community consultations, and a look into sustainability models for DIGID. IFRC and KRCS also published a new report on “Voices of Migrants in Kenya<sup>4</sup>” exploring the opportunities and risks of Digital IDs for migrants in Kenya.

### January

An inception workshop was conducted with Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) providing an overview of the DIGID project, review lessons learnt from Kenya, and discuss how the project could be applied in Uganda. The workshop also discussed the scenarios where identification is done with vulnerable migrant communities and attempted to prioritise the use cases for the project.

### January

Kenya Red Cross Society and IFRC conducted an Inception meeting for the second phase of the DIGID project in Kenya focused on migration and healthcare.

### March

Consultation with the KRCS staff in Kalobeyei health facility to understand the challenges related to identification and access to healthcare for migrants.

### May

KRCS provided a DIGID project briefing to partner organisations and key stakeholders in Kakuma and Kalobeyei including the government, Ministry of Health, and UNHCR.

### June

KRCS conducted a pilot with 48 migrant patients in Kalobeyei (creation of digital wallets and digital credentials, issuance of QR codes, and monitoring of use of QR codes in subsequent visits). A survey was conducted after the initial pilot to better understand the experience of the patients and get their feedback including any concerns related to their data. A lesson learned debriefing session was conducted also with partner organisations in Kakuma and Kalobeyei.

### June

Simulation in Isingiro district with URCS staff and volunteers. Invited local government representatives and other humanitarian organisations providing assistance in the Nakivale refugee settlement to discuss how DIGID might be used to establish eligibility and verify migrants receiving cash assistance.

### June

Cross-border workshop and simulation in Busia, the border between Uganda and Kenya. Representatives from the Uganda Red Cross Society branch in Busia (Uganda side) and Kenya Red Cross Society branch in Busia (Kenya side) attended and discussed the potential for digital credentials issued by one National Society could be used to identify and provide assistance when they cross the border.



3 <https://cash-hub.org/resource/dignified-identities-in-cash-assistance-lessons-learnt-from-kenya/>

4 <https://cash-hub.org/resource/cva-in-migration-context-voices-of-migrants-in-kenya/>



2022

### September

KRCS piloted an additional 32 migrant patients in Kalobeyei and monitored the use of the QR codes from the previous 48 patients. Total of 80 migrant patients have received the QR codes. Additionally, a simulation was done with the Kakuma Mission Hospital with host community members to see the potential of interoperable digital credentials used and recognized by healthcare providers in the Kakuma and Kalobeyei areas.

### August

Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for both the contexts looked at in Kenya and Uganda highlighted areas to improve on in terms of risks to data protection and developed mitigation measures.

### November

Uganda Red Cross Society conducted a field pilot of DIGID supporting 60 vulnerable women displaced due to floods in Bukadea with cash assistance.

### November

A cross-border workshop and simulation with the KRCS and South Sudan Red Cross was conducted. Discussed the opportunities of collaborating when migrants move between their borders using digital credentials to provide humanitarian assistance such as cash, in-kind, or healthcare. Additionally, an interoperability workshop was also conducted in Nairobi with Kenya-based partners discussing the lessons learnt so far from the DIGID pilots in cash assistance, migration, and healthcare.

### November

Save the Children Kenya conducted a pilot of DIGID in Dagahaley refugee camp in Dadaab targeting 250 refugee households with cash assistance, who were made vulnerable by severe droughts and with child protection risks. 50 staff members took part in the training of the DIGID solution.



Photo page 4 and page 5: Floods-affected Bukadea women hold up their printed QR codes which carry their digital credentials for the cash assistance verification process.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- The Dignified Identity in Cash Assistance (DIGID) consortium, consisting of Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children Norway, Norwegian Church Aid and IFRC as technical lead, explored and validated the concept of humanitarian digital identity that it launched in 2019 to identify opportunities and risks of such an identity to help vulnerable people, particularly in cash assistance and continuity of health care, and in the migration context.
- The DIGID consortium worked with its global network, particularly the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) and Save the Children in Kenya and the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) in Uganda, to test the concept of identification in humanitarian action and document lessons learnt.
- The DIGID consortium conducted a series of consultations with migrants in Niger<sup>5</sup>, Kenya<sup>6</sup>, and Colombia<sup>7</sup> that included perceptions on digital ID and published research on analysing digital identity in the humanitarian sector<sup>8</sup> and migration<sup>9</sup>, highlighting the user journey. The consortium and its global network also engaged in digital ID discussions to share knowledge, experience and lessons learned at the Data and Digital Week (2021)<sup>10</sup>, the Turing Trustworthy Digital Identity Conference<sup>11</sup>, the NetHope 20th Anniversary Summit<sup>12</sup>, and the ID4D podcast<sup>13</sup>
- The development of the DIGID solution took time to develop, test and validate. The solution involved consulting with key stakeholders, particularly users, government officials, and representatives from the humanitarian and private sectors, to validate the solution from pilot to scale and ensure an enabling environment for its sustainability.
- Documented key takeaways from pilot implementations<sup>14</sup>, including observations, recommendations and feedback are ready to leverage lessons learned to improve our existing systems, policies and governance related to identification to promote the rights of people providing data to organisations. Best practices could be implemented now while scaling and sustainability are planned.
- Organisations can integrate the solution into existing systems as a layer of data attributes to establish people's eligibility, optimise aid delivery and reduce spillage for accountable humanitarian action to people and donors.
- There is a remarkable need for more solutions that help promote benefits for those affected rather than specific, siloed solutions that only benefit organisations.

5 <https://cash-hub.org/resource/cva-in-migration-context-voices-of-migrants-in-niger/>

6 <https://cash-hub.org/resource/cva-in-migration-context-voices-of-migrants-in-kenya/>

7 <https://cash-hub.org/resource/cva-in-migration-context-voices-of-migrants-in-colombia/>

8 <https://cash-hub.org/resource/digital-identity-an-analysis-for-the-humanitarian-sector/>

9 <https://preparecenter.org/resource/digital-identity-enabling-dignified-access-to-humanitarian-services-in-migration/>

10 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjL1MOv7\\_Rc&t=7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjL1MOv7_Rc&t=7s)

11 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuCFdvJePVw&list=PLuD\\_SqLtxSdVy8meO\\_ezV9l89Q9Gg8q6p&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuCFdvJePVw&list=PLuD_SqLtxSdVy8meO_ezV9l89Q9Gg8q6p&index=5)

12 <https://nethope.org/articles/digital-id-in-humanitarian-contexts-lessons-learned-and-whats-next/>

13 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3H-seajJE9Y>

14 <https://cash-hub.org/resource/dignified-credentials-to-access-humanitarian-cash-assistance-in-migration-lessons-learnt-from-uganda/>





## Introduction: From Theory to Practice

*November 2022, a community member made vulnerable and displaced by floods in Bukedea receives cash assistance from Uganda Red Cross Society after being verified with their digital credentials. Photo credit: Uganda Red Cross Society*

When the Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance (DIGID) project was conceptualised in late 2018, four Norway-based organisations – Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian Refugee Council, Norwegian Church Aid, Save the Children Norway – came together to address a common challenge that was systemic throughout the humanitarian sector: how to ensure that the most vulnerable, many with no official forms of identification, are not left out of assistance, particularly cash? At the time, the IFRC and Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) had just completed a pilot on “Blockchain open-loop cash transfer”<sup>15</sup> where it was seen that 25% of the caseload of KRCS did not have official IDs, making it difficult for people to receive cash assistance where KRCS employs financial service providers such as M-PESA to distribute money. Financial service providers are bound by regulatory requirements such as Know Your Customer (KYC), where official IDs are necessary to present. The IFRC’s World Disasters Report released in 2018 titled “Leaving No One Behind”<sup>16</sup> also highlighted that people without official identity documents are made invisible not just in terms of receiving services such as education, employment, and land ownership, but also humanitarian assistance in times of crises and disasters.

As the DIGID project kicked off in early 2019, governed by the four Norway-based organisations with the IFRC as its technical lead and supported by Innovation Norway, the buzz around the concepts of decentralised identity and self-sovereign identity (SSI) increased within the humanitarian sector. The promise of such technology (some of which was blockchain-based) was to bring agency back to end users – meaning, to give people ownership of their data to manage and use as they choose, instead of being collected by companies and organisations for their own purposes where in many cases the end users do not even have access to data they provided. Organisations such as the Netherlands Red Cross and Australian Red Cross have initiated their own pilot projects looking to implement SSI

15 <https://preparecenter.org/resource/blockchain-open-loop-cash-transfer-pilot-project/>

16 <https://www.ifrc.org/document/world-disasters-report-2018>

concepts. The UNHCR and UNICC also opened up tenders for blockchain based digital ID platforms with “self-managed” or “self-sovereign” properties<sup>17,18</sup>. It is important to note that DIGID has a limited scope: to offer functional identity only, as related to humanitarian assistance. DIGID is not intended to replace (or be a parallel system for) legal or official ID, which is the mandate of the government.

Fast forward to early 2023, four years after the inception of the DIGID project, four pilots in total have been conducted by the Kenya Red Cross Society, Uganda Red Cross Society, and Save the Children Kenya. A digital platform has been developed and tested for use cases related to cash assistance, continuity of healthcare, and migration context. Several lessons related to governance, technology, and user behaviour were identified. One is that the pure self-sovereign identity model was not appropriate for the most vulnerable who do not have access to smartphones, have limited digital literacy, and live in areas where there’s low connectivity.

This report summarises the key achievements and perceived gaps in implementing and piloting the DIGID project and shares a reflection on a way forward for the humanitarian sector seeking to solve the problem of identification for humanitarian action.

### Box 1: Defining Digital Identity

The lack of an appropriate definition of the term “digital identity” in humanitarian action makes it difficult to have constructive discussions among stakeholders that have different notions of what the term entails. GSMA, the World Bank, and the Secure

Identity Alliance define Digital identity as, “a collection of electronically captured and stored identity attributes that uniquely describe a person within a given context and are used for electronic transactions”<sup>19</sup>. A generic definition that could also mean different things to different people, particularly on how to “describe a person.”

As DIGID looks into a more appropriate definition, it is more important to note what it is not:

- The humanitarian issued digital IDs are not legal or official IDs (not foundational IDs); they are functional IDs with **limited scope and use to provide humanitarian assistance** such as cash or healthcare.
- The humanitarian-issued digital IDs are not the traditional IDs that establish the person, rather it is more a collection of data attributes linked to that person that describes their **eligibility**.

In Uganda, the word “identity” particularly related to migrants (refugees and asylum seekers) is considered sensitive. The DIGID project opted to use the term “digital wallets” and “digital credentials” instead.

### Box 2: Efforts to explore Digital Identity by different humanitarian organisations

Besides DIGID, here’s a list of resources where different organisations have attempted to pilot or explore digital ID solutions:

- Netherlands Red Cross /510 – [Digital Identity: An Analysis for the Humanitarian Sector - PrepareCenter](#) (case study – Nov. 2020) Also includes two other case studies from World Vision and Gravity.
- Australian Red Cross’ Traverse initiative – [Traverse: Insights from Australian Red Cross creating, designing and ending a digital identity platform - Solferino Academy](#) (Nov. 2022)
- Digital Humanitarian Network – [The Humanitarian Sector & Digital Identity: Are We Affecting Refugee’s Self-Identities?](#) (Sep. 2022)

17 <https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/unhcr-accepting-proposals-digital-identity/>

18 <https://www.ungm.org/Public/Notice/130043>

19 <https://www.gsma.com/identity/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Mobile-Identity-enabling-the-digital-world-report-Final-1.pdf>





# Reflection on Achievements

*June 2022, Debriefing session with different organisations in Kakuma providing services to refugees and asylum seekers. Kenya Red Cross Society shared experiences following their first pilot of DIGID in using digital health credentials for patients in Kalobeyei. Photo credit: Kenya Red Cross Society*

## Benefits for humanitarian organisations

### Humanitarian Sector-Wide Digital Identity

The DIGID project has proven how beneficial partnerships between humanitarian organisations and private companies can be in responding to complex humanitarian crises. The collaboration between the DIGID consortium and Gravity involved a considerable exchange of knowledge and experience between the two actors to create new opportunities in the humanitarian sector to improve operations' efficiency in delivering assistance, improve data protection and privacy of people, and enhance the inclusion of unmapped communities. The collaboration included affected communities in the solution design, to understand their needs and concerns and to develop DIGID as a tool that meets the needs of the people. By taking user needs into account, the DIGID solution considered the underlying challenges faced by vulnerable people in humanitarian settings to address issues that may increase the vulnerability of excluded communities in humanitarian actions and to improve inclusive access to assistance and accountability to people and donors. DIGID provided humanitarian organisations with the ability to operate efficiently in fields with varied levels of access to connectivity, digital literacy, and identification documents. The solution availed new opportunities for collaboration among organisations through multiple system integrations and coordination, data sharing and rapid response, enhanced data protection and privacy, and efficient use of resources and referrals.

The DIGID solution was used for other use cases besides cash assistance, allowing organisations to explore other humanitarian use cases and needs. The Kenya Red Cross Society used DIGID



to deliver continued health care to migrants and refugee-host communities in Kenya's Kakuma-Kalobeyei integrated refugee settlement. The solution explored the opportunity for interoperability for collaboration among several organisations, including humanitarian organisations, private companies and government and UN agencies, for sharing data and achieving good coordination while assisting vulnerable people in urban, rural, and migration contexts. DIGID can be integrated with existing beneficiary management systems by populating credentials and minimising the amount of data necessary to establish the eligibility of people in need of assistance. The solution provides organisations with the capability to use digital systems in remote areas with poor access to connectivity and limited digital literacy.

DIGID, as a functional humanitarian digital credential, allowed the Kenya and Uganda Red Cross National Societies to establish the eligibility of vulnerable people without any form of ID – in rural and urban areas, and in the context of migration – to receive cash assistance. DIGID was also used for continued health care for patients with non-communicable diseases. The solution allowed the Kenya Red Cross to digitise health records carried by migrant NCD patients who need quality and continued health care. The solution provided patients with digital health credentials of their diagnosis saved on QR codes issued to them and that could be shared with other health facilities that have integrated the DIGID platform. The solution allowed humanitarian organisations to save time verifying people needing cash assistance and continued health care while improving the security and privacy of their data and providing them with ownership over their own data – increasing transparency and trust between the organisations and the people they serve.

## **Optimise Aid Provision**

Personal records, particularly when compiled by multiple agency staff members by hand amongst diffuse groups of people, are often incorrectly amalgamated and stored. Medical records are a particularly acute example, with relevant information often being collected by different medical practitioners, often in different geographic areas and occasionally in different countries.

The KRCS in Kenya noted that situations where medical records were incomplete posed a barrier to people receiving correct medication, treatment plans, or diagnoses. The KRCS's pilot program sought to use digital identity to overcome this challenge by streamlining individuals' identities and medical history in their digital wallets hosted on the blockchain, thus safeguarding sensitive information and giving the individual ownership over their data. Overall, the pilot program provided a positive indication of how digital identity can be used to minimise the risk of incomplete data collection and retention.

Leveraging digital identity to improve aid disbursement is not limited to situations where people lack identity documentation. While the most acute benefits of digital identity accrue to individuals who have no way to verify their identity and often face the greatest challenges in proving eligibility for aid programs, streamlining enrollment and verification across the board could optimize aid delivery and improve affected peoples' experiences in all circumstances.

## **Reduce Spillage**

Often working in difficult budgetary conditions, humanitarian organisations look to reduce “double-dipping” – instances where one individual may access identical services multiple times. Using paper-based eligibility and enrollment documentation in circumstances prone to manual error means organisations are prone to missing instances where people access benefits inconsistently with their eligibility, either intentionally or accidentally. Using digital identity, by digitizing records and relying on automatically verifiable eligibility profiles, reduces or eliminates this risk. However, given the relatively low frequency of double-dipping and its low impact on the financial bottom line, it is important that organisations do not sacrifice affected person security in pursuit of absolutely optimal financial control. By leveraging a digital identity system and individual-owned data, humanitarian organisations can accomplish both goals.

## Benefits for individuals

### Restore Dignity

The DIGID project has proven how beneficial partnerships between humanitarian organisations and private companies can be in responding to complex humanitarian crises. The collaboration between the DIGID consortium and Gravity involved a considerable exchange of knowledge and experience between the two actors to create new opportunities in the humanitarian sector to improve operations' efficiency in delivering assistance, improve data protection and privacy of people, and enhance the inclusion of unmapped communities. The collaboration included affected communities in the solution design, to understand their needs and concerns and to develop DIGID as a tool that meets the needs of the people. By taking user needs into account, the DIGID solution considered the underlying challenges faced by vulnerable people in humanitarian settings to address issues that may increase the vulnerability of excluded communities in humanitarian actions and to improve inclusive access to assistance and accountability to people and donors. DIGID provided humanitarian organisations with the ability to operate efficiently in fields with varied levels of access to connectivity, digital literacy, and identification documents. The solution availed new opportunities for collaboration among organisations through multiple system integrations and coordination, data sharing and rapid response, enhanced data protection and privacy, and efficient use of resources and referrals.

The DIGID solution was used for other use cases besides cash assistance, allowing organisations to explore other humanitarian use cases and needs. The Kenya Red Cross Society used DIGID.

The typical dynamics in an emergency situation involve multiple agencies trying to register affected people for their programmes – even if these are the same people in the same areas that different agencies provide assistance to. Unfortunately, not everyone will receive assistance, and some people may receive more than others due to a lack of coordination or deduplication mechanisms. At the heart of the programming cycle is the data that is collected from affected people who have to repeat potentially traumatising stories.



November 2022, women in Bukedea displaced and made vulnerable by floods receive cash assistance from Uganda Red Cross Society. Photo credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

In the DIGID pilots, restoring dignity back to people in need was a key objective. Some examples where dignity was observed include seeing people who did not have official IDs receive cash directly instead of resorting to finding someone else with an official ID to claim on their behalf; people were able to present themselves and their data to ask for services that they need and be verified for eligibility or referred more quickly to other agencies who could offer specialised services; and people could consent to share their data with other organisations and even revoke or delete their data if they did not see a need for their digital IDs anymore. Empowering people with the data they provide and doing this in a dignified manner is important.

## **Accessing Services**

Undocumented persons typically find it far more difficult to access basic support and services. Without the ability to verify the end user's eligibility, states and humanitarian organisations often deny services that the individual should otherwise be able to enjoy. Know-Your-Customer ("KYC") regulations typically require financial service providers to verify an end user's identity to avoid the risk of money laundering and criminal financing. Without being able to prove one's identity, undocumented persons are often unable to open a bank account. Lack of documentation also often forms a barrier to obtaining a SIM card, which makes regular communication prohibitively challenging. Because, in many jurisdictions, a valid identity is required to use financial service platforms, the inability to secure a valid SIM is also a substantial barrier to accessing the formal economy.

The creation of a digital identity profile that is directly accessible by the end user can help to overcome many of these challenges. In Kenya, for instance, the KRCS's DIGID pilot program in Kakuma-Kalobeyi demonstrated how digital identity could be used as a viable mechanism for providing services to individuals by creating an internally recognised identity platform that facilitated ease of access for people seeking aid. DIGID solution allows one organisation to create digital credentials that help establish vulnerability criteria for people needing humanitarian assistance. The credentials empower individuals to be recognised by other humanitarian organisations as eligible to access humanitarian assistance.

A 2020 study published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ("UNHCR") underscored the tactical applicability of digital identity for people, particularly undocumented forced migrants, seeking avenues back into the formal economy and banking services. The study estimated that 80 per cent of the global population lives in a jurisdiction needing a valid SIM to apply for a banking or mobile money account. However, in 2020, the Financial Action Task Force ("FATF"), an intergovernmental anti-money laundering organisation, updated their non-binding guidelines around KYC regulations, noting that state bodies or humanitarian organisations can issue identity documents for access to humanitarian services, that cash accounts are crucial to secure life-saving humanitarian cash assistance, and that measures should be taken to prevent financial exclusion for those without formal state-backed documentation.

Undocumented individuals are often unable to access humanitarian aid, gain formal employment, or apply for government assistance. While humanitarian-use digital identity cannot approximate the legal backing of state-issued identity documents, these non-official identity profiles are a stepping stone to obtaining some of these services. In other instances, it is possible for non-state-backed documentation to substitute for required identity documentation to secure banking and financial services. Based on the result of DIGID implementations in Kenya and Uganda, the DIGID consortium and the KRCS and URCS have engaged key stakeholders to define the humanitarian digital identity and identify opportunities for the humanitarian sector, particularly the undocumented people, to be able to access assistance. A key benefit was the ability to complement government efforts to digitally identify their citizens by creating awareness, particularly in hard-to-reach areas where government services are underserved.





November 2022, QR code of a cash recipient was scanned, and a PIN code was asked before details regarding their eligibility were accessed by Uganda Red Cross Society staff. Photo credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

## Overcoming Portability Challenges of Physical Documentation

For humanitarian agencies, it is all too common to have instances where aid recipients previously owned a state-backed identity document only to have it lost, destroyed, confiscated, or stolen in a disaster, conflict, or forced migration event. A person's identity documents are usually the basis on which they can secure assistance from their government either at home or abroad, receive humanitarian aid, open a bank account, or apply for a work permit. For vulnerable populations, especially forced migrants, the simple event of losing one's passport can be a debilitating personal disaster. Digital identity in humanitarian assistance has the potential to help overcome this challenge. A digital repository of identity information cannot be lost in the same way a physical passport can. It is portable and could be mutually recognised and interoperable with other humanitarian aid organisations and third-country governments in ideal circumstances.

While this study limits its focus to digital identity in the context of humanitarian aid, it is important to acknowledge the potential for government-backed digital identity initiatives to unlock barriers to receiving aid or accessing humanitarian services. If more countries begin creating digital identity profiles for their citizens and assuming those profiles are directly accessible by the citizens themselves, the problem of undocumented individuals will correspondingly diminish. After all, when one's core identity documents are accessible through authentication on any internet-connected device, the problem of an externally displaced migrant losing their passport and becoming undocumented is eliminated.



## Gaps between Expectations and Experience

*March 2022, A clinical officer from KRCs conducts a user consultation of the DIGID solution at Kalobeyi Settlement. Photo credit: Kenya Red Cross Society*

### Limits of Technology

The DIGID solution has evolved throughout the years learning from field experience, observation, consultations and meetings with key stakeholders, feedback, and recommendations from different lessons learnt from pilot implementations and simulation exercises in cash assistance and in health care in the context of migration in Kenya and Uganda. The learnings have contributed greatly to developing the DIGID solution by introducing and testing new functionalities. The solution was also adapted to changing needs according to use cases and contexts that were explored and policies to adapt to serving global needs.

DIGID uses blockchain, providing high trust and transparency for sharing data between multiple organisations across sectors and leveraging the high-security encryption of keys to unlock digital wallets. However, this advantage comes with limitations that could be experienced differently based on the use case for DIGID and on programming needs, such as the possibility to modify data stored in the wallet of people, which requires the revocation of the QR code and the issuance of a new one with updated data. Depending on the program's needs, modifying data stored in a wallet could be about changing the vulnerability criteria, adding new criteria or indicating the referring organisation. This limitation is also extended to the ability to verify duplications when multiple actors use the platform without a coordinated mechanism to provide assistance based on their respective mandates in a defined area of operations. The functionality for de-duplication of data is yet to be operational on the platform until multiple organisations join, which will enable the function to be practically possible, for example, to determine if an individual has received assistance from one organisation that could be known by another organisation.



From the early version of DIGID, PIN numbers and passphrases were used to encrypt the data stored in QR codes issued to people. However, there was a limitation for users to change their PINs that serve as encryption for sharing their data with another organisation which limited the possibility for a user to retrieve their data unless they go back to the organisation that registered them, which implied the notion of guardianship. Furthermore, PIN codes are generally not the best security option given that people tend to forget them, and communities with low literacy levels find it difficult to manage. More user-centric ways of securing digital credentials need to be investigated.

As mentioned in the introductions, self Sovereign Identity (SSI) was seen by the Netherlands Red Cross/510 as not adding value in their pilot in 2020 for various reasons, such as lack of smartphones, connectivity, and digital literacy in the places where the most vulnerable are located. There are few efforts from private companies to want to invest in making the concepts of pure SSI work in low-connectivity environments. DIGID, therefore, decided to stick with the guardianship model with decentralised identities, which at least increases the security and data privacy aspects of the data but still relies on the issuing humanitarian organisation to guard the data on behalf of the people they serve, which is typically what they do now when they collect data.

The W3C standards for verifiable credentials and decentralised identifiers were very promising as they allow for a common way to construct digital IDs and store them in digital wallets. However, it is yet to be seen how one digital ID issued using a digital ID provider like Gravity is easily readable by another digital ID provider like Tykn, where the two companies have separate and different technology stacks. The DIGID project was able to do an interoperability test between these providers, but the end-user experience and administration of data indicate that the promise of the W3C standards is not enough to accommodate the use cases of the humanitarian sector.

## Do people want to own and manage their data?

Most individuals who participated in the DIGID project had varying levels of digital literacy. Some individuals never owned an internet-enabled phone or home computer, and the digital learning curve was steep for those with little or no experience. To have the DIGID solution respond to these underlying needs, a nuanced understanding of digital literacy amongst staff and volunteers was also necessary. The humanitarian digital identity was customised to reality in respective contexts and to address underlying challenges for accessing humanitarian assistance in terms of connectivity



March 2022, A consultation session with different stakeholders in Kalobeyei refugee integrated settlement was conducted before the pilot implementation. Photo Credit: Kenya Red Cross Society



and interaction with digital tools such as mobile phones. During pilot projects, KRCS, URCS, and Save the Children Kenya noted the importance of educating communities on online services, digital identity fundamentals, and data protection. To succeed, this education was universally delivered and specifically tailored for both affected people and staff.

Since most people lacked digital literacy and access to digital tools, data guardianship was arranged wherein KRCS, URCS, and Save the Children Kenya maintained people's digital identity data. At the same time, individuals ultimately retained ownership over their information. This means that the organisations maintained access to people's digital wallets while people still maintained the right to revoke access or amend/add information. Building individual and community-based trust was essential to exercising a data guardianship model. Organisations needed to provide a genuine opt-out to digital identity solutions to help mitigate the ways power asymmetry between the aid provider and person manifested. The power imbalance was manifested in the people seeing undesirable data guardianship arrangements as the only avenue towards receiving vital assistance.

## Enabling transition from pilot to operational use

Many, if not all, of the efforts done so far by humanitarian organisations on implementing digital IDs for assistance, have all (so far) remained as pilot exploration. DIGID is currently investigating strategies for scale-up and further rollout. In contrast, government efforts have been able to scale up faster given more resources (and some support from the World Bank equally keen to address SDG 16.9 or legal identity for all by 2030). Although the transition from pilot to operational use was faster, certain governments have been criticised for implementing digital IDs irresponsibly. Such examples were efforts in India, Kenya, and Uganda, where the governments have been criticised and in some cases sued<sup>20</sup>.

DIGID helped highlight a critical component in dealing with “identification” and to engage with the communities who will be using such IDs, whether it's for official purposes or for limited use, such as to receive humanitarian assistance. Getting feedback from communities helps ensure the implementation truly addresses their needs, and that harm is not brought to them unexpectedly. Humanitarian organisations investing in responsible digital ID solutions could provide a good example for governments.

Another important factor to consider is sustainability. For digital credentials to work in a distributed environment by many actors, an infrastructure must be available where humanitarian organisations and tech providers could participate and contribute. The financial model for issuing wallets and credentials and utilising them should be affordable for humanitarian organisations that are strapped for resources and typically unable to invest a lot of money in running costs. Charging for every single transactional use must be analysed according to single fees per wallet. The financial model should be cognisant of the funding structure of many humanitarian organisations where funds are raised when there are emergencies. So pay-per-use models are more attractive, as is working in consortiums or groups where members can contribute to the running costs of the consultations and maintenance.

20 <https://cash-hub.org/resource/dignified-credentials-to-access-humanitarian-cash-assistance-in-migration-lessons-learnt-from-uganda/>



# What now for Digital Identity in humanitarian action?

December 2022, QR code generated using the DIGID platform by the Kenya Red Cross Society was scanned at the Kakuma Mission hospital to test how they could be verified by other partner organisations. Photo credit: Kenya Red Cross Society

## Improving existing internal solutions

There are specific lessons from the DIGID project that could be used to improve existing internal systems as the environment to create a successful scale-up and consistent usage of humanitarian-issued digital IDs are addressed. The key ones are:

1. **Allow individuals to access the data they shared and stored in the organisation's database, especially if used to decide who is eligible.** This function is typically unavailable in many internal solutions because such databases have been built primarily to help programme personnel. Implementing this function helps ensure the rights of the individual towards their data can be exercised.
2. **Strengthen data protection and data security.** If not done already, a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) should be conducted for the internal system or databases used by the organisation. This includes asking what legal bases are appropriate for data collection and should not always default to consent. For data security, ask if there are vulnerabilities due to the centralised nature of hosting and storing data, and whether implementing some distributed storage of highly sensitive data might reduce the risk of data protection issues.
3. **Review data governance and policies for sharing data.** More and more, implementing cash at scale requires not just a single actor. And as multiple actors generate more data, coordination mechanisms should include an analysis of how different actors (big and small) can contribute to the data they collect or use data from others to improve decision-

making and reduce overlap and duplication of assistance and data. Taking a look at internal governance and policies related to collecting, maintaining, sharing, and even deleting data should be reviewed.

These key points do not require immediate implementation of DIGID but already take some of the project's aims and apply them to improve internal systems and databases.

## Investment in Interoperability

Interoperability, as the term used in the DIGID project, looked at two aspects: (1) the system-to-system interaction when digital credentials issued using one provider are presented to another technology provider, and (2) the ability of organisations to recognise a digital identity or digital credential that another humanitarian organisation has issued to communities they serve. The DIGID project looked at the technological aspect of interoperability by testing with two different providers of digital IDs with two separate technology stacks, and indeed, such ways of recognising credentials are possible, but more research and work are necessary to make the user experience and administration more streamlined<sup>21</sup>. For the tech part, it is important to engage with the private sector who is also setting the standards for the interoperability of digital ID solutions.

Successful implementation of DIGID relies on multiple stakeholders to recognise and leverage such digital credentials issued by humanitarian organisations. Here are ways to engage multiple stakeholders:

1. **Analyse how trust is established.** As mentioned in the learning review report for Uganda, different mechanisms may allow different humanitarian actors to collaborate and coordinate. For instance, working as a consortium or implementation partnership or participating in coordination mechanisms such as Cash Working Groups. Furthermore, there are defined referral services where one organisation already refers to another organisation providing those specific services that otherwise they are not able to provide. Using these mechanisms to build trust and explore together on opportunities and risks might be helpful. As seen in Kakuma-Kalobeyei in Kenya, many aid organisations work on similar, parallel, and sometimes overlapping initiatives to serve the same communities. Interviewees noted the lack of coordination and inability to recognise shared goals. These divergences will ultimately harm the communities. When different actors were asked, they agreed that interoperability among them is crucial, but so is better coordination.
2. **Start small, check the opportunities and risks, and see if scaling up is feasible.** The approach employed by the Uganda Red Cross Society of starting with simulations rather than piloting is a very effective way in not only ensuring responsible innovation is done (i.e., do not test on vulnerable people with something new), but it was helpful as a way to advocate and enable productive discussions among stakeholders such as local and national government officials and other humanitarian actors operating in the same areas. A similar approach was taken by the Kenya Red Cross Society in the Kakuma-Kalobeyei areas, where they actively brought other organisations in as part of the inception of the project, therefore making them a key player in the future of the solution, then bringing them on again to debrief on lessons learned and how the stakeholders' inputs were used.
3. **Do not forget the affected individuals.** Decisions are often made to address an organisation's challenges rather than those of the communities. Investing in interoperability should not be a technical exercise of how systems might talk to each other but the eventual benefit for an individual to be recognised and receive humanitarian services regardless of which systems are used by the humanitarian actors. The cross-border simulations, conducted by the Kenya Red Cross Society, Uganda Red Cross Society, and South Sudan Red Cross, were an effort to put affected people first and see how National Societies can help them in their journey, potentially through Humanitarian Service Points where migrants receive essential services and provide a safe space for them.



The topic of interoperability is also high on the agenda of donors, where the Donor Cash Forum published their “Guiding Principles on Interoperability of Data Systems for Cash Programming” in September 2022<sup>22</sup>. ECHO has funded the DIGID consortium to further explore the systems-level interoperability<sup>23</sup>. ECHO also funded the Collaborative Cash Delivery (CCD) network on their interoperability project but looking more into “data portability”, data literacy, and governance<sup>24</sup>

## Linking with long-term legal or official IDs

It has often been quoted that over one billion people lack official or legal IDs<sup>25</sup>, and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 16.9 indicated the need for “legal identity for all” by 2030<sup>26</sup>. The World Bank’s ID4D initiative has been helping states to implement digital identity solutions in line with the “Principle of Identification” they developed in line with the SDG. The focus of DIGID, however, is on humanitarian assistance and, therefore, the provision of a *functional identity* with limited scope to help establish eligibility rather than establishing a legal identity which is more foundational and the mandate of states and governments. When presenting DIGID to stakeholders, there’s confusion that the project will deal with legal IDs, but this is not the case; therefore, defining what “digital identity” means for humanitarian action is critical. This point has been raised in IFRC’s research “Digital Identity: An Analysis for the Humanitarian Sector”<sup>27</sup>. Although the functional humanitarian-issued IDs have different properties than foundational legal IDs, there is an opportunity to link digital IDs with limited purpose for humanitarian efforts to more longer-term legal IDs, so people’s vulnerability could be addressed not just in times of disasters or crises but also in their day-to-day life in accessing services they need.

22 <https://www.calpnetwork.org/publication/donor-cash-forum-statement-and-guiding-principles-on-interoperability-of-data-systems-in-humanitarian-cash-programming/>

23 <https://interoperability.ifrc.org/>

24 <https://www.collaborativecash.org/dataportability>

25 <https://id4d.worldbank.org/guide/why-id-matters-development#:~:text=As%20of%202018%2C%20the%20ID4D,not%20have%20basic%20identity%20documents.>

26 <https://getinthepicture.org/news/sdg-target-169-legal-identity>

27 <https://preparecenter.org/resource/digital-identity-an-analysis-for-the-humanitarian-sector/>

4:13 PM

Habari, umepokea maelezo  
kutoka Kenya Red Cross.:

lastName : [REDACTED]

firstName : [REDACTED]

middleName : [REDACTED]

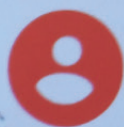
gender : FEMALE

idNumber : [REDACTED]

nationality : N/A

dateOfBirth : [REDACTED]

homeAddress : [REDACTED]



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## Concluding remarks

*May 2021, User receives SMS notification containing a copy of their bio information after successfully creating their digital wallet. Photo Credit: Kenya Red Cross Society*

The work of the DIGID consortium in demystifying the concepts related to “digital identity”/“digital credentials”, and exploring practical applications in cash and voucher assistance, migration, and healthcare, contributed to some very important learnings on identification in humanitarian action. This includes: how the wider humanitarian network should prioritise the benefits for the communities they serve, how to think critically about emerging technologies and their promises to see if they would work in real-life situations of vulnerable people affected by emergencies and crises, and how we can apply some of these learnings now while different strategies of scale up and rollout are investigated.

The case study on the Australian Red Cross’ exploration of Digital IDs for volunteers using SSI technology – and having to shut down their initiative due to the lack of enabling environment for it to be managed solely by a humanitarian organisation – is important to reflect on in terms of sustainability. Comparing this experience with the Kenya Red Cross Society and building small networks of organisations in the Kakuma and Kalobeyi areas recognises a shared vision of providing more efficient, effective, and even complementary assistance to the same communities. And the solution could start small, so they can monitor together and adjust as needed.

Recommendations from user consultations and research reports have greatly informed the design and development of the DIGID solution to meet the needs of the people and organisations that serve them, given the literacy level of users and their access to digital tools and services. The solution adopted the principle of data minimisation, used PIN as an alternative to biometrics, prioritised data protection and user consent to collect, process, store and share their data, and provided translation in the common languages of the users. Information sessions were held to raise awareness of digital identity and support end-user digital literacy. Advocacy and engagement with

governments was conducted, and training workshops were held to provide technical support to key stakeholders, including participating and observing humanitarian organisations, to create an enabling environment for the long-term benefits of the DIGID solution for the humanitarian sector and provide a solid foundation for interoperability between many organisations.

It is indeed about having an enabling environment where trust can be established, where different parties can contribute towards the sustainability of the solution rather than relying on one party to figure this out. This is the spirit of DIGID. And as the world encounters more climate changes, crises causing people to migrate, and uncertainties, it is key to continue looking for solutions that promote the affected communities first, and to always maintain their dignity.



## ANNEX 1: LIST OF RESOURCES

**DIGID web page:** <https://hiplatform.org/digid>

### Research reports

January 2022	CVA in Migration Context – Voices of Migrants in Kenya	<a href="#">Link</a>
January 2022	CVA in Migration Context – Voices of Migrants in Niger	<a href="#">Link</a>
January 2022	CVA in Migration Context – Voices of Migrants in Colombia	<a href="#">Link</a>
October 2021	Digital identity, biometrics and inclusion in humanitarian responses to refugee crises   ODI: Think change	<a href="#">Link</a>
June 2021	Digital identity: enabling dignified access to humanitarian services in migration	<a href="#">Link</a>
May 2021	Digital Identity: An Analysis for the Humanitarian Sector	<a href="#">Link</a>

### Lessons learnt reports

February 2023	Dignified credentials to access humanitarian cash assistance in migration: Lessons learnt from Uganda	<a href="#">Link</a>
February 2023	Dignified identities in healthcare and migration: Lessons from Kenya	<a href="#">Link</a>
November 2021	Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance: More Lessons Learnt from Kenya	<a href="#">Link</a>
July 2021	Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance: Lessons Learnt from Kenya	<a href="#">Link</a>

### Webinars

February 2023	DIGID Webinar- Experiences from Dignified Identities (DIGID) in Migration Context, in Humanitarian Cash Assistance and Continuity of Healthcare	<a href="#">Link</a>
November 2021	DIGID webinar 3 – Kenya Lessons Learned Webinar – Interoperability of tech & NGOs	<a href="#">Link</a>
November 2021	DIGID webinar 2 – Kenya Lessons Learned Webinar – Data protection	<a href="#">Link</a>
November 2021	DIGID webinar 1 – Humanitarian Digital Identities and DIGID Project in Kenya	<a href="#">Link</a>

Videos		
February 2023	Uganda: Dignified Identity in Cash Assistance to Flood Affected Women in Bukedea District	<a href="#">Link</a>
February 2023	Kenya: Kenya: Dignified Identity in Migration Context for Continuity of Health Care [Trailer]	<a href="#">Link</a>
February 2023	Kenya: Dignified Identity in Migration Context for Continuity of Health Care [Full Video]	<a href="#">Link</a>
October 2022	Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance – Kenya pilot (full video)	<a href="#">Link</a>
October 2022	Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance – Kenya pilot (trailer)	<a href="#">Link</a>

## ANNEX 2: LIST OF ENGAGEMENTS WHERE DIGID WAS REPRESENTED

Date	Topic	Links
15 September 2022	Innovation Norway's Innovation Breakfast: How can blockchain technology and digital ID help people on the run?	
13 April 2022	MOBILE for identity Management and inclusive ID4D (Humanitarian Action)	<a href="#">Link</a>
16 November 2021	Digital ID in the Humanitarian Sector: Lessons learned and what's next NetHope 20th Anniversary Virtual Summit	<a href="#">Link</a>
September 2021	Humanitarian Digital Identities and DIGID Project in Kenya	<a href="#">Link</a>
September 2021	Alan Turing Institute: Defining digital identities for humanitarian action in migration	<a href="#">Link</a>
1 June 2022	IdentiBeer Talks, Oslo	<a href="#">Link</a>
2 May 2022	Humanitarian Network and Partnership Week	<a href="#">Link</a>
April 2022	Humanitarian Network and Partnership Week Exhibit	<a href="#">Link</a>
30 November 2021	ICRC Analysis & Evidence Week	<a href="#">Link</a>
19 April 2021	Data and Digital Week: Digital Identity in Humanitarian Action	<a href="#">Link</a>
28 October 2020	Lessons in Engaging the Private Sector in Designing Digital ID for Humanitarian Cash Assistance	
17 March 2020	NetHope webinar: Digital ID - Closing the Identity Gap	<a href="#">Link</a>
27 February 2020	NetHope Euro Chapter: Digital Identity and Agency for Rights Holders	
6 February 2020	Humanitarian Network and Partnership Week: Opening the innovation space through innovative procurement	<a href="#">Link</a>
5 December 2019	NetHope : Achieving Good Digital ID at Scale with Technical Requirements	<a href="#">Link</a>
24 October 2019	NetHope Global Summit: Digital Identity workshop	
27 September 2019	Humanitarian Innovation Day 2019	



# THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

## **Humanity**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

## **Impartiality**

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

## **Neutrality**

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## **Independence**

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

## **Voluntary service**

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

## **Unity**

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

## **Universality**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



**The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**

is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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