



Introduction



The Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) is committed to advancing trusted, learner-centered, and globally interoperable approaches to sharing digital learner data and credentials. Given its neutral and global reach and the expertise of its diverse community, it is uniquely positioned to help advance trusted global convergence in these areas.

These policy pillars are acknowledged as ever changing and are intended to provide a strategic foundation for collaboration, advocacy, and ecosystem development that is inclusive, practical, and globally relevant. They are grounded in the principles of interoperability, trust, inclusion, privacy, responsible innovation, and global cooperation.

Rather than promoting uniformity, GDN seeks to foster:

- shared principles,
- interoperable approaches,
- trusted governance models, and
- sustainable collaboration across diverse jurisdictions and sectors.

Through this work, GDN can continue to support trusted learner mobility, equitable access to opportunity, and responsible innovation in the AI era.

As digital transformation accelerates across education, employment, and mobility ecosystems, there is a growing need for globally coherent principles that enable trusted exchange while respecting regional diversity, legal frameworks, and sovereign implementation models.

The overarching approach undergirding these pillars is to ensure **globally coherent principles with local contextualisation and sovereign implementation that ensure trusted data mobility without requiring uniform systems.**

The Pillars

Policy Pillars

Shared Principles
for Global Trust,
Local Autonomy,
and Learner
Mobility

**Pillar 1: Learner Sovereignty, Privacy,
& Agency**

**Pillar 2: Trusted Recognition &
Credential Integrity**

**Pillar 3: Interoperability, Open
Standards, & Semantic Alignment**

**Pillar 4: Digital Public Infrastructure &
Capacity Building**

**Pillar 5: Sovereign Interoperability &
Network-of-Networks Governance**

The Pillars

Pillar 1: Learner Sovereignty, Privacy, & Agency



Policy Position

The GDN supports initiatives that ensure learners can securely control, access, manage, and share their personal data and credentials within trusted digital ecosystems.

This pillar establishes the learner as the central beneficiary of digital transformation efforts and reinforces the importance of privacy, consent, transparency, and equitable access.

Call to Action

The GDN calls for countries, organizations, and sectors to adopt user design principles when creating and evolving initiatives. They should further ensure that created solutions result in the learner holding their record and being able to share it when and with whom they wish. The GDN calls for core operating principles to be adopted including the following:

- Building solutions using privacy by design principles
- Maintaining responsible data stewardship
- Ensuring learner control, consent, and agency over personal data
- Emphasizing transparency, explainability, and accountability in data use
- Ensuring human-centered system design focused on real-world outcomes
- Ensuring the secure and ethical exchange of credential information
- Aligning with evolving privacy legislation and regulatory obligations

Rationale

Developing systems and governance models that empower individuals while safeguarding their rights and protecting against misuse of personal information reduce friction for learners while maintaining trust, security, and accessibility.

Strategic Benefits for GDN Signatories and Patrons

Organizations participating in the GDN ecosystem strengthen trust with learners, institutions, governments, and employers by demonstrating responsible stewardship of data and commitment to ethical, learner-centered practices.

The Pillars

Pillar 2: Trusted Recognition & Credential Integrity

Policy Position

The GDN supports initiatives that ensure authentic, verifiable, portable, and trusted credentials and credential exchange across borders and sectors, while advancing fair, transparent, and inclusive recognition practices aligned with the principles embedded in the UNESCO Global Convention and regional recognition conventions.

This pillar reinforces the importance of trust frameworks, quality assurance, recognition practices, and transparent governance structures that support learner mobility, lifelong learning, and confidence in digital credentials and qualifications.

Call to Action:

The GDN calls for countries, organizations, and sectors to pursue solutions that ensure the following:

- Credential authenticity, provenance, and integrity
- Transparent, fair, and non-discriminatory recognition practices
- Recognition of lifelong learning, diverse learning pathways, and evolving forms of achievement
- Fraud prevention and quality assurance mechanisms
- Shared trust frameworks and governance models
- Accountability, oversight, and continuous trust-building
- Alignment with UNESCO global and regional recognition conventions and their underlying principles
- Responsible use of digital innovation to strengthen recognition capacity and improve access

Rationale

Trusted recognition ecosystems sustain relevance and currency when they facilitate fair, transparent, and inclusive credential evaluation while improving access to education and employment opportunities globally.

The Pillars

Pillar 2: Trusted Recognition & Credential Integrity (cont.)

Consistent with UNESCO principles, GDN recognizes that trusted recognition systems should:

- support equitable access to learning and work opportunities,
- promote transparency and fairness in recognition decisions,
- enable recognition across formal, informal, and non-formal learning contexts, and
- leverage digital innovation to strengthen institutional and cross-border recognition capacity.

GDN further supports collaborative approaches that help institutions, governments, and ecosystem partners modernize recognition systems while maintaining trust, accountability, and quality assurance.

Strategic Benefits for Signatories and Patrons

Organizations benefit from increased trust, credibility, and international alignment while strengthening their ability to participate in globally connected recognition ecosystems.

By aligning with internationally recognized principles and trusted governance approaches, organizations can:

- improve the portability and recognition of credentials,
- strengthen confidence among learners, institutions, employers, and governments,
- reduce barriers to mobility and access, and
- support more inclusive recognition practices that acknowledge lifelong and diverse forms of learning.

The Pillars

Pillar 3: Interoperability, Open Standards, & Semantic Alignment

Policy position

The GDN supports innovations that enable scalable, meaningful, and secure exchange of credential data across systems, jurisdictions, and sectors that align with privacy regulations.

This pillar recognizes interoperability as foundational to trusted digital mobility and emphasizes the importance of open standards, semantic consistency, and layered interoperability approaches.

Call to Action

The GDN calls for countries and sectors to adopt approaches and solutions that achieve the following:

- Technical, semantic, legal, and organizational interoperability
- *Recognition that interoperability exists at multiple layers and requires alignment across governance, policy, process, technical, and semantic dimensions*
- *Adoption of open source and internationally aligned standards that use structured, open, linked, interoperable, and secure durable data formats that are human-readable and machine-actionable, and allow data to be reused*
- Vendor-neutral ecosystem design
- Cross-border compatibility and portability
- Shared vocabularies, taxonomies, metadata models, and persistent identifiers
- Semantic consistency to ensure shared understanding and meaningful interpretation of data across systems and jurisdictions



The Pillars

Pillar 3: Interoperability, Open Standards, & Semantic Alignment (cont.)

Rationale

Interoperable ecosystems reduce fragmentation, support innovation, and enable trusted exchange and can achieve this without requiring uniform technologies or centralized control.

Interoperability should not be viewed solely as a technical issue. Trusted exchange requires alignment across multiple layers, including:

- technical interoperability,
- semantic interoperability,
- legal interoperability, and
- organizational interoperability.

Semantic interoperability is particularly important to ensure that information exchanged across systems retains consistent meaning, context, and usability across jurisdictions and sectors.

Benefits for GDN Signatories and Patrons

Organizations can participate more effectively in global ecosystems, reduce integration complexity and costs, and enhance the portability and usability of credentials across borders.

Pillar 4: Digital Public Infrastructure & Capacity Building

The GDN supports equitable access to secure, resilient, and sustainable digital infrastructure and works to strengthen the knowledge and implementation capacity of its community that participate in creating and supporting trusted digital ecosystems.

Call to Action:

- Secure and scalable digital infrastructure
- Institutional and national capacity building
- Knowledge exchange and communities of practice
- Workforce development and digital literacy
- Sustainable implementation and operational resilience
- Reduction of global digital inequities

Collaborative approaches that help organizations and jurisdictions build the technical, operational, and governance capacity necessary for long-term participation in interoperable ecosystems helps to ensure good practice and partnership.

Organizations gain access to shared expertise, emerging practices, collaborative opportunities, and implementation knowledge that strengthen long-term readiness and sustainability.

The Pillars

Pillar 5: Sovereign Interoperability & Network-of-Networks Governance

Policy Position

The GDN supports initiatives that enable global interoperability and trusted exchange while respecting sovereignty, local governance, and regional implementation priorities.

This pillar reflects GDN's role as a convenor and connector that supports convergence rather than centralized control.

Call to Action:

That countries, communities, organizations, and sectors implement coherent initiatives that ensure global interoperability and trusted exchange while respecting local sovereign implementation through the following enabling operating principles:

- Flexible legislative and policy approaches that support interoperability
- Cross-border coordination and trusted exchange frameworks
- Network-of-networks collaboration models
- Shared governance principles and mutual accountability

Rationale

Governance models that enable jurisdictions and organizations to maintain sovereignty and grow local capabilities while participating in globally connected ecosystems built on trust, transparency, and cooperation will be beneficial to mobile learners and workers.

Benefits for GDN Signatories and Patrons

Organizations can engage in trusted global ecosystems while maintaining control over their own governance, policies, systems, and strategic priorities.



Enabling Trusted Global Convergence

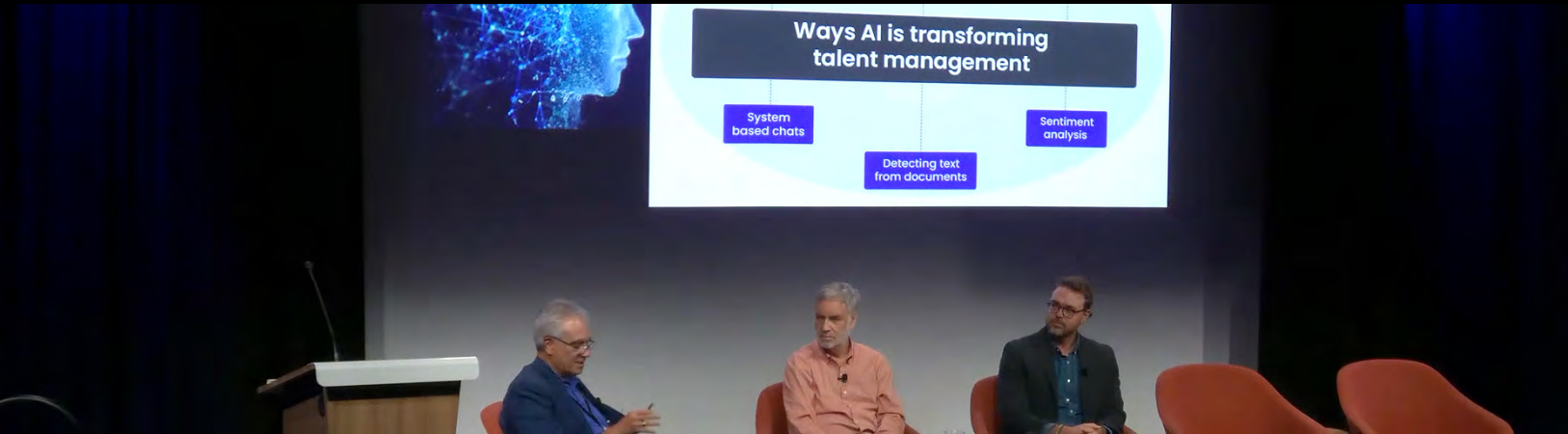
Sample Reference Framework Categories

The following types of reference frameworks exist around the world and are important to explore further as communities build local capacities informed by these policy pillars. These types of reference frameworks come in a variety of forms and should be viewed as enabling resources that support trusted global convergence while allowing for locally sovereign implementation and contextual adaptation.

In select instances, such frameworks may form part of legislative frameworks. For example, the UNESCO conventions are often formally adopted by Member States which changes their legislative nature; however, even where this does not occur, the principles are enduring and serve as quality assured guidance for regions as they consider building capacities for trusted credential recognition and exchange.

- UNESCO Global and Regional Recognition Conventions
- Competency and skills recognition frameworks
- Open data exchange and interoperability standards
- Semantic and metadata alignment frameworks
- Local, regional, and international privacy and fairness regulations
- Quality assurance and credential integrity frameworks
- Ethical and trustworthy AI governance frameworks
- Digital identity and trust ecosystem frameworks
- Cybersecurity and digital resilience frameworks
- Digital public infrastructure and digital governance models
- Cross-border governance and trusted exchange frameworks
- Human rights, accessibility, and inclusion frameworks
- Regulations: privacy regulations, fairness regulations, national policy
- Workforce mobility and lifelong learning policy frameworks

A Word on AI:



Responsible AI and Algorithmic Governance

The GDN promotes education and related capacity building regarding the use of AI to ensure ethical, transparent, and accountable use within and for credential and learner mobility ecosystems. It acknowledges that the AI field is evolving, volatile, and changing rapidly. Having noted this, the GDN recognizes the growing role of AI in recognition, verification, interpretation, and exchange processes and emphasizes the importance of governance, oversight, and trust.

Examples of topics or areas requiring further study that the GDN could potentially help with pending further discussion and consultation:

- Identifying frameworks to help organizations with responsibly adopting and scaling the use of AI; for example, in the areas of continuous monitoring, detection, content.
- Examples where the GDN might be able to help its community: (1) responsible use of AI, (2) Guidance to ensure personal information remains protected from AI, (3) Guidance on which AI to avoid or use, (4) Guidance on what parameters govern AI use, (5) Education on the misuse of AI (e.g. as it relates to decision making).

For any questions, contact

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