

THE DECODER RING: A GLOSSARY FOR THE DIGITAL ID PLAYBOOK

This glossary is your decoder ring. It takes the polished policy language and industry jargon used to sell global identity systems and strips it down to what those words actually do in practice: build standards, lock in vendors, normalise surveillance and make a single credential the obvious gate for everyday life. Read it to spot the rhetorical cover stories — “inclusion”, “interoperability”, “privacy preserving” — and to expose the policy levers they hide: certification, trust frameworks, delegated regulation, revocation lists and vendorised civic infrastructure. Use these definitions to challenge claims, quote the receipts, and explain to others in plain language why a supposedly technical debate about APIs and wallets is actually about who gets to control access to jobs, money, healthcare and movement.

Index — numbered list of words and terms (alphabetical order)

1. Algorithmic accountability / auditability
2. API / Interface standards
3. Attribute issuer / Attribute
4. Audit observers / legal observers
5. Automated gating / smart-contract enforcement
6. Best practice / lessons learned
7. Biometrics
8. Canonical (canonical record)
9. Capacity-building
10. Centralised
11. Certification lifecycle / re-certification
12. Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) / Certification
13. Consent-based data sharing
14. Cross-border interoperability / harmonisation
15. Data (Use and Access) Act / delegated regulation
16. Data disaggregation
17. Data-driven / evidence-based
18. Data fiduciary / data steward
19. Data minimisation (real-world caveat)
20. Decentralised / Federated
21. Digital public good (DPG)
22. Digital public infrastructure (DPI)

23. Digital Verification Service (DVS) / DVS trust framework
24. DVS conformity / flow-down contractual terms
25. DVS register / public register
26. Enrolment
27. Event log / Event logging / Audit trail
28. Equity
29. Evidence based policymaking / data revolution
30. Finance / Addis Ababa Action Agenda
31. Fiscal space / policy space
32. Follow up and review / monitoring and accountability
33. Geospatial data / Earth observations
34. Global indicator framework / measurement & indicators
35. Green recovery / green growth
36. Holder recovery / account restoration
37. Holder service / Holder service provider
38. High Level Political Forum (HLPF)
39. Humanitarian–development–peace nexus
40. Identity wallet
41. Inclusion / “Leave no one behind”
42. Innovative finance / blended finance
43. Interoperable
44. Interoperability as a political lever
45. Interface body / Interface standards
46. Just transition
47. Legal identity / “Provide legal identity for all” (SDG 16.9)
48. Loss and damage
49. Mainstream donor terminology — “results” / “outcomes”
50. Mainstreaming
51. Mission creep / Function creep
52. Multi-stakeholder partnerships / Public-private partnerships
53. Multi-stakeholder / “all stakeholders”

54. National ownership
55. NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions)
56. No one left behind (duty)
57. Office for Digital Identities and Attributes (OfDIA)
58. Once-only principle
59. Operationalisation
60. Orchestration layer / Broker
61. Pilot / demonstrator / lighthouse project
62. Policy coherence
63. Policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD)
64. Policy laundering / Semantic laundering
65. Policy uptake
66. Performance indicators / targets
67. Public-private delivery / Vendor lock
68. Public registry transparency
69. Reactive script / Problem, reaction, solution (implied)
70. Resource mobilisation
71. Results based management (RBM)
72. Revocation / Revocation list
73. Rights to information / transparency commitments
74. Root of trust
75. Scaling / scale up
76. Scaling accelerators / accelerator programmes
77. Schema / Relevant technical terms — Schema
78. Self-sovereign identity (SSI)
79. Social protection floor
80. South–South cooperation / triangular cooperation
81. Stakeholder (covered under multi-stakeholder)
82. Sunset clause / review mechanisms
83. Sustainable consumption and production
84. Sustainable development / Sustainability

- 85. SDG alignment / mainstreaming of SDGs
- 86. SDG 16.9 / “legal identity for all”
- 87. Technology facilitation mechanism
- 88. Technocracy / Technology Facilitation Mechanism / online platform
- 89. Technical assistance
- 90. Transformative / transformation
- 91. Trust framework
- 92. Tokenisation / Soulbound tokens
- 93. Trusted registry / attestation authority
- 94. Verifier app
- 95. Verifiable credentials (VCs)
- 96. Voluntary / Voluntarism
- 97. Voluntary National Review (VNR)
- 98. Voluntary National Review follow up
- 99. Zero-knowledge proof (ZKP)

Alphabetical entries (numbers correspond to index above)

1. Algorithmic accountability / auditability

Officially: mechanisms to review, explain and audit automated decision systems. Example: independent audits of a verification algorithm or logging of automated rejections. In practice: promises of audits that are slow, limited in scope and often non-binding. What it really means: compliance theatre — checks that create the appearance of oversight while systems expand unchecked.

2. API / Interface standards

Officially: the technical rules and programmatic interfaces systems use to talk to each other. Example: an API that allows a verifier app to request and receive a credential assertion. In practice: mandated formats and endpoints that vendors and public bodies must implement to interoperate. What it really means: the technical law; once an API is specified everyone must build to it, which locks in whoever set the spec and whoever supplies the reference implementations.

3. Attribute issuer / Attribute

Officially: an issuer is an organisation that vouches for a fact about you; an attribute is the fact itself. Example: a university issues a “degree” attribute; the passport office issues citizenship. In practice: official bodies and private firms can both be issuers; attributes are the currency of verification. What it really means: the stamps that decide your rights — who issues the stamp determines both truth and access.

4. Audit observers / legal observers

Officially: independent monitors who document compliance and legality of operations or protests. Example: NGO legal observers at a public assembly. In practice: volunteers and lawyers who

document interactions and refusals. What it really means: the accountability lifeline for resistance — document everything so denial and coercion cannot be hidden.

5. Automated gating / smart-contract enforcement

Officially: systems that enforce rules automatically based on token or credential checks. Example: a rental agreement that releases keys only when a valid attribute is presented. In practice: reduced human discretion and faster enforcement. What it really means: machines that refuse you in seconds; human appeal becomes slower and less effective.

6. Best practice / lessons learned

Officially: share what works so others can adopt it. Example: publishing a how-to guide for a pilot. In practice: rapid adoption of standardised solutions across countries. What it really means: a distribution channel for pre-tested surveillance and ID tech — “best practice” becomes the default standard to copy.

7. Biometrics

Officially: unique physical or behavioural identifiers such as fingerprints or facial templates. Example: fingerprint used to unlock a wallet or facial recognition used at a gate. In practice: biometric templates and matching services hosted by providers or state services. What it really means: the permanent password you cannot change; biometrics make identity sticky, surveillant and deeply invasive when tied to a universal credential.

8. Canonical (canonical record)

Definition: the single authoritative version of a record. Example: a “canonical record” of right-to-work = the official master list everyone treats as the source of truth. Plain meaning: the one official version that everyone treats as the source of truth. In practice: when they say a “canonical record,” they mean a definitive master list or view (for example, of who has the right to work or rent). What it really means: once a canonical list exists, whoever controls it can decide who’s on or off, and every other system falls in line with that decision.

9. Capacity-building

Officially: support to strengthen institutions, skills and systems. Example: training civil servants to use new software. In practice: consultants, foreign tech and standard tools embedded in state systems. What it really means: the funding route to implant foreign tech and consultants — dependency and standardisation under the cover of “help”.

10. Centralised

Definition: one place (or a small handful of places) is the gatekeeper and keeps the switches. Example: a single national database controlled by a ministry. In practice: central authority sets rules, revokes access and controls the master ledger. What it really means: single choke points that let a central authority switch people on or off and decide who counts.

11. Certification lifecycle / re-certification

Officially: the periodic audits and updates required to keep a certificate valid under a trust framework. Example: three year certificate terms with annual audits. In practice: ongoing costs and forced upgrades that favour well funded incumbents. What it really means: the treadmill that locks providers in and makes exit expensive; it ensures commercial advantage for those who can afford constant compliance.

12. Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) / Certification

Officially: independent organisations that audit services and certify compliance with a trust

framework. Example: a CAB issuing a certificate to a wallet provider that proves compliance. In practice: third parties that vendors hire to pass audits and then appear on public registers. What it really means: the credential for the credential makers; certification is the commercial shortcut to dominance and an instrument for locking competitors out.

13. Consent-based data sharing

Officially: systems that only share personal data when users explicitly agree. Example: a wallet prompt allowing a user to share a credential with an employer. In practice: consent screens plus legal terms that can be designed to nudge or lock users into sharing; institutional and commercial pressure to accept. What it really means: a façade of voluntariness; real pressure, job or tenancy requirements make “consent” coercive in practice.

14. Cross-border interoperability / harmonisation

Officially: aligning standards so systems work across countries. Example: sharing travel credentials between states for border checks. In practice: common schemas and agreed APIs that vendors implement globally. What it really means: the international template that makes national rollouts plug-and-play — one global standard, one set of commercial winners, one consolidated control model.

15. Data (Use and Access) Act / delegated regulation

Officially: legislation that enables ministers to make regulations on data sharing, including powers to compel provision of customer and business data and to establish statutory DVS frameworks.

Example: regulations setting mandatory APIs or data sharing duties for data holders. In practice: secondary law that can rapidly extend obligations without full parliamentary scrutiny. What it really means: the legal fast lane that lets ministers write the rules later; it hands huge delegated power to define who must share what and with whom, baking in surveillance and commercial transfer.

16. Data disaggregation

Officially: breaking statistics down by income, gender, age, ethnicity, migration status and other characteristics to reveal inequalities. Example: SDG reporting that requires disaggregated data. In practice: large scale personal and group level datasets collected and shared for monitoring. What it really means: the data that enables precise targeting and profiling; useful for fairness on paper, useful for granular control in practice.

17. Data-driven / evidence-based

Officially: policies informed by data and research. Example: using statistics to design interventions. In practice: mass collection of behavioural data and automated decision systems. What it really means: the excuse to harvest huge datasets then claim technocratic inevitability — “the data says so” masks value choices and control.

18. Data fiduciary / data steward

Officially: entities legally responsible for managing others’ data in their interest. Example: an organisation that must act in users’ best interests when processing identity attributes. In practice: new role definitions that can be ambiguous and often left to regulators to define. What it really means: a veneer of trustworthiness used to justify handing critical infrastructure to “trusted” commercial stewards who then profit and gain influence.

19. Data minimisation (real-world caveat)

Officially: principle to collect the least data necessary. Example: only requesting age verification rather than full birthdates. In practice: schemas and APIs still produce metadata and logs and often

request more fields than strictly necessary. What it really means: a stated limit that is easy to ignore once the infrastructure requires richer data for commercial or regulatory reasons.

20. Decentralised / Federated

Definition: data stays in many places (for example, Passport Office, Home Office visas) and is only pulled together when needed. Example: passport office keeps citizenship data; employers query a verification endpoint. In practice: multiple data sources but a shared verification process. What it really means: marketing for “not central” while control points (login, verification, revocation, audit trail) remain central — it is central power with a fresher UI.

21. Digital public good (DPG)

Officially: open source technologies and standards intended for public benefit. Example: open code libraries for identity verification or open registries. In practice: reusable building blocks adopted across countries and vendors. What it really means: an attractive branding for globally standardised control tools that are easy to export and mandate.

22. Digital public infrastructure (DPI)

Officially: shared digital systems and standards governments build to deliver public services. Example: national identity platforms, payment rails or health information exchanges. In practice: core platforms and APIs that many services plug into. What it really means: the civic plumbing that, once built, routes everyone through the same channels — perfect for standardising surveillance and control.

23. Digital Verification Service (DVS) / DVS trust framework

Officially: a statutory or recognised scheme describing how digital verification services must be run and certified. Example: a DVS register listing approved wallet providers and attribute issuers. In practice: compliance checks, conformity assessment bodies and certification stamps that create commercial advantage for listed providers. What it really means: the government endorsed “approved” list — become certified and win the market, fail to certify and be excluded from everyday life.

24. DVS conformity / flow-down contractual terms

Officially: contract clauses that require relying parties to follow provider rules when accepting certified credentials. Example: a wallet provider forcing a bank to accept certain audit logs and retention standards. In practice: relying parties bound by contract even if not formally certified. What it really means: law by contract — voluntary certification becomes compulsory by contract clauses and commercial pressure.

25. DVS register / public register

Officially: a published list of certified providers and registered services. Example: a government website listing wallets, issuers and verifiers that passed the trust framework. In practice: the go-to list relying parties consult to choose suppliers; being on the register equals market trust. What it really means: the black and white list that decides who is legitimate; exclusion from it becomes practical exclusion from services.

26. Enrolment

Officially: the process of registering individuals into a programme or system so they receive an official record or credential. Example: birth registration, biometric capture at a registration centre, or downloading and activating an identity wallet. In practice: mass campaigns, outreach drives and onboarding flows that gather verified attributes and link people to services. What it really means: the doorway into permanent systems — once enrolled you are added to canonical records, audit

trails and revocation lists; enrolment normalises universal coverage and turns voluntary uptake into de facto obligation.

27. Event log / Event logging / Audit trail

Officially: the record of verification events and metadata for security and accountability. Example: timestamped logs of each time a credential was checked. In practice: large datasets of who checked whom, when and where. What it really means: the permanent behavioural ledger that enables profiling, enforcement and retrospective audits; all the little nudges and penalties feed a dossier on citizens.

28. Equity

Officially: fair access and outcomes for all groups. Example: targeted funding so disadvantaged areas get the same outcomes as wealthier ones. In practice: metrics and interventions aimed at changing outcomes across populations. What it really means: a Trojan word for engineered redistribution and social engineering — used to justify intrusive, centrally designed programmes that steer behaviours to hit targets.

29. Evidence based policymaking / data revolution

Officially: using reliable data and analysis to inform decisions. Example: statistical baselines, surveys and impact studies. In practice: large scale data systems, dashboards and monitoring tools rolled out to measure outcomes. What it really means: “evidence” becomes the rhetorical justification for technological systems that gather the data needed to prove policy success, and those systems themselves shape what is measured and therefore what counts.

30. Finance / Addis Ababa Action Agenda

Officially: international and domestic finance commitments and instruments to support implementation. Example: references to official development assistance targets and blended finance. In practice: complex financing packages that tie programme funding to particular vendors, technologies and policy approaches. What it really means: money that comes with strings and procurement templates; finance is the accelerator that turns pilot projects into permanent infrastructure.

31. Fiscal space / policy space

Officially: the capacity of a government to provide public spending without destabilising the economy. Example: room in the budget for social programmes. In practice: donor conditions and financial packages constrain how projects are designed and who benefits. What it really means: a bargaining lever — finance shifts decision power to funders and preferred vendors.

32. Follow up and review / monitoring and accountability

Officially: repeated reporting, country reviews and data collection to check progress. Example: requests for timely, reliable and disaggregated data to measure outcomes. In practice: a surveillance friendly architecture of reporting cycles and external reviews. What it really means: ongoing monitoring legitimises external pressure and conditionality, and makes it normal for international actors to demand specific reforms and systems from national governments.

33. Geospatial data / Earth observations

Officially: satellite and location based data used for planning and monitoring. Example: mapping land use, populations and resources. In practice: cross referenced datasets that identify communities, resource flows and vulnerabilities. What it really means: precise surveillance capability under the guise of planning and disaster response.

34. Global indicator framework / measurement & indicators

Officially: a set of metrics to track progress on the Goals. Example: GDP, unemployment rates, SDG indicators. In practice: dashboards and scorecards that guide policy decisions. What it really means: turn soft politics into hard levers — agree the metric, then redesign behaviour to hit it. Metrics become mechanisms of control.

35. Green recovery / green growth

Officially: economic stimulus and development that prioritise low carbon and climate resilient investments. Example: post crisis finance packages for renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure. In practice: large public procurement programmes and preferential finance that benefit particular industries. What it really means: a policy doorway to mass infrastructure projects and vendorised green tech with long term control implications.

36. Holder recovery / account restoration

Officially: processes to recover wallets or accounts when users lose access. Example: government-backed recovery options or provider-managed recovery flows. In practice: recovery often requires identity proofs and reliance on issuers. What it really means: the conditional lifeline — recovery procedures tie you back to the system and give providers power over re-entry.

37. Holder service / Holder service provider

Officially: the service or app that stores an individual's credentials (the wallet). Example: a phone app that holds your right-to-work credential and can present it to employers. In practice: managed accounts with recovery, support and account rules controlled by the provider. What it really means: the personal leash — the wallet is sold as empowerment but is controlled, recoverable and governed by provider policies that can be used to restrict access.

38. High Level Political Forum (HLPF)

Officially: the UN forum that oversees follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Example: member states and stakeholders meet to present VNRs and discuss progress. In practice: the global stage where consensus language is finalised and where donor priorities are showcased. What it really means: a legitimising theatre where international agendas are normalised and political pressure to conform is amplified.

39. Humanitarian–development–peace nexus

Officially: integrated approach linking humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding. Example: programming that addresses immediate needs and long term resilience. In practice: blended projects that attract blended finance and multi stakeholder consortia. What it really means: a policy umbrella that justifies cross sector interventions and the use of interoperable systems spanning aid, services and security.

40. Identity wallet

Officially: an app or secure store for digital credentials (on phone or hardware). Example: Gov.uk or Apple/Google wallet storing a right-to-work credential. In practice: the visible UI people carry; access to it is gated by account creation, onboarding and issuer rules. What it really means: the user interface of compliance — a portable leash that makes state control convenient and everyday.

41. Inclusion / “Leave no one behind”

Officially: ensure everyone benefits from progress. Example: making public services accessible to people with disabilities. In practice: universal programmes and enrolment drives framed as protective. What it really means: the cover story for universal enrolment into identity and tracking systems — sell it as protection for the vulnerable while normalising total enrolment.

42. Innovative finance / blended finance

Officially: new funding approaches including private capital for development. Example: private investors funding infrastructure projects with public guarantees. In practice: private operators run public systems under contract. What it really means: sell public assets and policy levers to private investors — policy becomes revenue generating for corporate partners.

43. Interoperable

Definition: able to exchange information with another system and use that information without extra translation because both follow agreed rules and standards. Example: a digital ID pass that any compliant checker app can read and validate. In practice: if two apps follow the same rules and format for a digital pass, one can issue it and the other can read it. What it really means: “choice” that actually locks everyone into the same root of trust controlled by whoever issues the keys.

44. Interoperability as a political lever

Definition: technical compatibility enabling cross-system use. Example: passport office, NHS and DWP issuing attributes the same way. In practice: a small set of standards and endpoints that everyone uses. What it really means: the technical glue that ensures global templates become national mandates — standards are the path to standardised control.

45. Interface body / Interface standards

Officially: organisations or standards bodies that manage APIs and interoperability rules. Example: a standards body publishing a reference API for credential exchange. In practice: groups that influence which technical designs become mandatory. What it really means: the invisible technocrats who set the rules everyone must follow; control the interface and you control the flow of lives.

46. Just transition

Officially: ensuring workers and communities are protected during moves to greener economies. Example: retraining programmes and social protections for industries in decline. In practice: conditional funding and projects that reconfigure local economies to fit national transition plans. What it really means: a moral frame used to push structural economic change while locking in the technical systems and standards that must be adopted.

47. Legal identity / “Provide legal identity for all” (SDG 16.9)

Officially: birth registration and identity documentation for everyone. Example: registering births and issuing ID documents. In practice: policies and projects to ensure everyone has an official record. What it really means: the explicit textual hook for national digital ID rollouts — the UN language becomes political cover for mandatory, system-wide credentials.

48. Loss and damage

Officially: the harms from climate impacts that cannot be avoided by mitigation or adaptation. Example: compensation mechanisms and support funds for affected countries. In practice: new international funding flows and instruments. What it really means: another channel to attach conditionality and chosen technical fixes to crisis responses.

49. Mainstream donor terminology — “results” / “outcomes”

Officially: focus on measurable impacts rather than inputs. Example: funding tied to demonstrable outcomes. In practice: short term project metrics and dashboards dictate programme design. What it really means: donors favour interventions that produce tidy metrics, which encourages projects that are measurable rather than necessarily the most just or democratic.

50. Mainstreaming

Officially: integrating a priority across policies, sectors and institutions. Example: mainstreaming climate action into all national planning. In practice: central directives and standard templates used across departments. What it really means: a bureaucratic process that embeds chosen priorities into every department and justifies aligned technical systems across government.

51. Mission creep / Function creep

Definition: gradual expansion of a system beyond its original purpose. Example: a travel credential later used for welfare checks. In practice: new use cases layered onto existing infrastructure by regulation or procurement. What it really means: the deliberate pathway from a narrow pilot to a ubiquitous governance tool — once the plumbing exists, scope widens without public re-consent.

52. Multi-stakeholder partnerships / Public-private partnerships

Officially: collaboration between states, private sector and civil society. Example: government working with tech firms and NGOs to roll out a service. In practice: corporates, foundations and governments co-design and fund projects. What it really means: a legalised bypass where corporations design policy and public institutions enforce it — policy capture dressed as cooperation.

53. Multi-stakeholder / “all stakeholders”

Officially: inclusion of governments, civil society, business, academia and others in implementation. Example: inviting private sector actors to UN consultations. In practice: selected NGOs and corporate actors structure the conversation and set agendas. What it really means: pluralistic language used to legitimate private sector influence and to blur lines of accountability; “stakeholder” processes often institutionalise the role of vendors in public decision making.

54. National ownership

Officially: countries lead implementation in line with national priorities. Example: a government adapts UN guidance to local law. In practice: local implementation using global standards. What it really means: a rhetorical sop — “national” in name while using the same interoperable tech and templates that guarantee uniform outcomes.

55. NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions)

Officially: climate commitments countries submit under the Paris Agreement. Example: emission reduction targets and adaptation plans. In practice: policy pledges that shape national investment and regulatory priorities. What it really means: another policy lever that funnels public and private finance into specific technologies and infrastructures labelled as climate solutions.

56. No one left behind (duty)

Officially: moral imperative to prioritise the poorest and most vulnerable. Example: targeted social protection for marginalised groups. In practice: universal schemes pitched as protective. What it really means: heart-string rhetoric used to justify universal systems that then gate access to services through compliance.

57. Office for Digital Identities and Attributes (OfDIA)

Officially: a government body responsible for maintaining identity standards, registers and supplementary codes. Example: OfDIA running the public register and approving conformity bodies. In practice: the office that coordinates certification, publishes supplementary rules and shapes which private vendors get privileged access. What it really means: the state office that brokers public legitimacy for certain vendors and writes the rules others must follow; power dressed as administration.

58. Once-only principle

Officially: users submit data once and public services reuse it so citizens do not repeatedly prove the same facts. Example: submit a birth record once; multiple agencies read the same verified attribute. In practice: central sharing of authenticated attributes across services. What it really means: the technical convenience that becomes a universal master record — hand over one document and the state builds a permanent profile.

59. Operationalisation

Officially: converting policy into concrete institutional arrangements, rules and procedures. Example: turning an SDG target into a national programme with budgets and timelines. In practice: drafting regulations, creating registries and awarding contracts. What it really means: the moment ideas become enforceable systems and commercial opportunities.

60. Orchestration layer / Broker

Officially: services that route requests between wallets, issuers and verifiers and translate between protocols. Example: a broker that converts a wallet credential into a format a bank's system accepts. In practice: middlemen that make interoperability "easy" while collecting fees and data. What it really means: the traffic controllers that centralise flows and create choke points; brokers become powerful intermediaries that can monetise and control access.

61. Pilot / demonstrator / lighthouse project

Officially: small scale tests designed to show feasibility before scaling. Example: a pilot digital payments or ID project in one region. In practice: pilots become the evidence base used to justify larger rollouts and normalise chosen technologies. What it really means: the standard pathway to normalisation — test, show success under controlled conditions, then scale with finance and regulatory changes.

62. Policy coherence

Officially: aligning policies across sectors to avoid contradictions. Example: coordinated housing and employment policy. In practice: one unified policy architecture across departments. What it really means: central plans stitched into everything so local dissent is squeezed out and national programmes go unchecked.

63. Policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD)

Officially: aligning national policies to support sustainable development across sectors. Example: ensuring trade, tax and environment policy do not contradict SDG goals. In practice: centralised coordination that streamlines projects and procurement around a chosen model. What it really means: harmonisation used to reduce friction for standard solutions and to limit alternative local approaches.

64. Policy laundering / Semantic laundering

Definition: dressing policy actions in neutral or positive language to make them acceptable. Example: calling mandatory ID "privacy preserving." In practice: soothing language in reports and marketing to neutralise critique. What it really means: the PR magic that turns surveillance into "innovation" and sells control as care.

65. Policy uptake

Officially: the adoption of recommended policies and practices by governments. Example: a country adopting UN guidance into national law. In practice: replication of models and vendor solutions with limited critical scrutiny. What it really means: the spread of standardised templates that favour the actors who designed them.

66. Performance indicators / targets

Officially: specific, measurable markers used to judge progress. Example: reduce child mortality by X percent. In practice: targets drive programmes and funding priorities. What it really means: metrics become the stick to enforce conformity; systems and data flows are designed primarily to hit indicators, shaping what policy looks like in practice.

67. Public-private delivery / Vendor lock

Officially: private sector runs public infrastructure under contract. Example: cloud providers hosting identity backends. In practice: long contracts, recurring fees and dependency. What it really mean: outsource the guts and private interests capture recurring public revenue and influence over policy.

68. Public registry transparency

Officially: publishing who is certified and what they are certified for. Example: a public list of wallet providers and supplementary code approvals. In practice: a page governments can point to as proof of regulation. What it really means: transparency that legitimises exclusion; a public list makes the blacklist visible and normalises the winners.

69. Reactive script / Problem, reaction, solution (implied)

Not an official term but a policymaking pattern often observed. Example: amplify an issue, propose a universal tech fix, then normalise infrastructure. In practice: media cycles, policy proposals and procurement align to push rollouts. What it really means: manufacture the crisis, sell the solution, lock in control.

70. Resource mobilisation

Officially: efforts to raise funds for development priorities from public and private sources. Example: donor conferences and blended finance deals. In practice: financing packages that shape which projects are viable and who supplies them. What it really means: money with strings attached — donors and investors influence policy choices by making funding conditional.

71. Results based management (RBM)

Officially: a management strategy focused on achieving outcomes and measuring performance. Example: projects with defined logical frameworks and indicators. In practice: rigid programme structures and reporting burdens. What it really means: managerial control through indicators that privilege implementers who can report success, often favouring standardised technical solutions.

72. Revocation / Revocation list

Officially: mechanism to invalidate credentials that are lost, revoked or expired. Example: an employer revoking a fraudulent right-to-work credential. In practice: live checks that can deny access instantly. What it really means: the on-off switch for people's rights in real time; revocation lists make exclusion immediate and remote.

73. Rights to information / transparency commitments

Officially: policies that require public access to government data and decisions. Example: open data portals. In practice: curated transparency that highlights successes and hides failures. What it really means: selective openness that legitimises chosen actors and systems while making dissent appear marginal.

74. Root of trust

Definition: the authority whose keys and assertions everyone trusts. Example: government key used to sign official credentials. In practice: the chosen issuer whose signature makes a credential

“official.” What it really means: whoever holds the root of trust controls the system — changing policy at the root changes everyone’s status.

75. Scaling / scale up

Officially: expanding successful pilots or programmes to national or regional levels. Example: taking a pilot health ID system countrywide. In practice: procurement, standards and legal changes accompany scale up. What it really means: the formal plan to convert temporary projects into permanent infrastructure with market capture for vendors.

76. Scaling accelerators / accelerator programmes

Officially: mechanisms to speed up adoption of innovative solutions. Example: seed funding and mentorship to scale pilots. In practice: funneling winners into investment ready models and procurement pipelines. What it really means: a funnel that propels certain technologies and vendors from pilot to national programme with investor and donor backing.

77. Schema / Relevant technical terms — Schema

Definition: the agreed template of what data a credential contains. Example: name, date of birth, photo, right-to-work flag. In practice: all issuers and verifiers must conform to the schema to interoperate. What it really means: standardised content that makes mass automated checking and automated exclusion trivial.

78. Self-sovereign identity (SSI)

Officially: identity architectures that give individuals control over credentials stored locally. Example: a personal wallet storing verifiable credentials you present selectively. In practice: wallets and standards claiming user control while still depending on issuing authorities and verification endpoints. What it really means: marketed as empowerment, SSI can still funnel identity through central trust anchors and technical chokepoints.

79. Social protection floor

Officially: basic social security guarantees to protect vulnerable populations. Example: minimum income, healthcare access and unemployment support. In practice: programs that often require identification and enrolment infrastructure to administer benefits. What it really means: funding and delivery mechanisms that normalise enrolment into identity and data systems as a prerequisite for receiving help.

80. South–South cooperation / triangular cooperation

Officially: collaboration between developing countries, sometimes with donor support from a third party. Example: technical exchange and joint projects between nations in the global south. In practice: sharing platforms, standards and vendor solutions across similar contexts. What it really means: an avenue for scaling standardised solutions across borders under the same templates, accelerating harmonisation without transparent debate.

81. Stakeholder

See multi-stakeholder / “all stakeholders”.

82. Sunset clause / review mechanisms

Officially: built in expiry or review points for policies and programmes. Example: pilot expires after two years unless renewed. In practice: reviews often rubber stamp continuation; sunset clauses rarely lead to dismantling once infrastructure exists. What it really means: cosmetic safeguards that make expansion look reversible while practical lock in continues.

83. Sustainable consumption and production

Officially: promoting resource efficient, low impact production and consumption patterns. Example: policies to reduce waste and promote circularity. In practice: standards, certifications and regulatory nudges that restructure markets and supply chains. What it really means: a policy umbrella used to justify tracking, labeling and data collection across commerce and to steer industry behaviour toward sanctioned solutions.

84. Sustainable development / Sustainability

Officially: a catchall for development that balances economic, social and environmental aims so that the needs of the present are met without compromising the future. Example: policies to promote “sustainable consumption and production” or “sustainable energy for all.” In practice: a long term policy brand that justifies wide ranging programmes, targets and interventions across virtually every sector. What it really means: feel-good language that dresses a decades long governance project. Say “sustainable” and you create moral pressure to accept new rules, data collection and infrastructure that would be hard to oppose on humanitarian or ecological grounds.

85. SDG alignment / mainstreaming of SDGs

Officially: ensuring that national policies and budgets take SDG targets into account. Example: integrating SDG indicators into national plans. In practice: central planning and reporting changes that steer procurement and priorities. What it really means: the bureaucratic mechanism that translates global goals into national obligations and market opportunities for implementers.

86. SDG 16.9 / “legal identity for all”

Officially: a target to provide legal identity, including birth registration, by 2030. Example: pledges to register births and issue identity documents. In practice: used as the textual hook for national digital ID programmes and for pushing identity systems into development agendas. What it really means: a short, humanitarian phrase that functions as legal cover for mandatory identity architectures, standards and interoperable databases.

87. Technology facilitation mechanism

Officially: UN level coordination to share technology and innovation for development. Example: a global platform for science and technology cooperation. In practice: a catalogue and conduit for specific technological solutions and vendors recommended to governments. What it really means: an institutional route to standardise and distribute technical toolkits that then shape national procurement and policy choices.

88. Technocracy / Technology Facilitation Mechanism / online platform

Officially: a UN mechanism and online platform to share tech, coordinate support and map innovations. Example: a UN portal listing digital government toolkits. In practice: central catalogues of approved tools, standards and vendors. What it really means: a global “app store” and playbook that standardises and distributes the same tech solutions to governments.

89. Technical assistance

Officially: expert support to implement programmes, build capacity or transfer technology. Example: donor funded advisors helping write procurement rules. In practice: consultancy contracts and embedded advisory networks shape system design. What it really means: the channel by which external actors install preferred technical models and vendors into national systems.

90. Transformative / transformation

Officially: deep systemic change necessary to meet the Goals. Example: calls for “transformative action” on climate, inequality and governance. In practice: justification for sweeping institutional

redesign and long lived infrastructure projects. What it really means: language used to legitimize irreversible change; “transformative” becomes the argument for building infrastructure and systems that are difficult to unwind.

91. Trust framework

Officially: a set of rules, principles and standards that define how digital identity services operate and interwork. Example: a government published trust framework that certifies wallets, issuers and verifiers. In practice: certification routes, public registers, supplementary codes and auditing mechanisms that decide who can be trusted to issue or check credentials. What it really means: the legalised playbook that turns certified providers into default gatekeepers; the framework is the gate, and whoever writes it gets to choose who walks through.

92. Tokenisation / Soulbound tokens

Officially: tokenisation is converting an attribute into a digital token; soulbound tokens are non-transferable tokens tied to a person or identity. Example: a non-transferable work-authorisation token bound to one holder. In practice: tokens used for smart contracts, automated checks and machine readable gating. What it really means: machine keys that can be read by contracts to auto-approve or auto-deny; soulbound tokens make exclusion programmable and irreversible by design.

93. Trusted registry / attestation authority

Officially: a list or authority that vouches for issuers, keys and credential validity. Example: a government register of accredited identity issuers. In practice: the authoritative index that tells verifiers which signatures to trust. What it really means: the switchboard — whoever controls the registry decides whose credentials count and whose do not.

94. Verifier app

Definition: the tool employers or landlords use to check a credential. Example: an app that scans a QR and returns yes or no. In practice: the front line where checks become routine and logged. What it really means: the everyday gatekeeper that normalises “papers please” in digital form and produces the event logs that feed central control.

95. Verifiable credentials (VCs)

Officially: cryptographically signed attestations about a person or entity (for example, “right to work”). Example: a signed digital certificate an employer can verify. In practice: signed tokens issued by authorities that verifiers check against issuer keys and revocation lists. What it really means: digital badges that look private but are traceable and revocable by whoever controls the keys.

96. Voluntary / Voluntarism

Officially: measures or programmes adopted without compulsion. Example: voluntary guidelines for private sector reporting. In practice: soft rules that become de facto standards through procurement, funding and reputational pressure. What it really means: “voluntary” is often a marketing term; non-binding norms become coercive when tied to money, market access or certification.

97. Voluntary National Review (VNR)

Officially: a country’s self assessment of progress on the SDGs presented to the UN High Level Political Forum. Example: an annual or periodic report showing policies and indicators used to meet Goals. In practice: PR documents that highlight successes, secure funding and signal policy alignment to donors. What it really means: a polished performance report used to legitimise programmes and attract conditional finance; dissent or messy local realities are downplayed.

98. Voluntary National Review follow up

Officially: actions and reforms a country undertakes after presenting a VNR to address identified gaps. Example: new programmes or reporting commitments. In practice: technical assistance, donor engagement and procurement that follow the VNR agenda. What it really means: VNRs create a roadmap donors and vendors can use to lobby for specific interventions and contracts.

99. Zero-knowledge proof (ZKP)

Officially: a cryptographic technique that allows one party to prove possession of information without revealing the information itself. Example: proving age over 18 without revealing date of birth. In practice: complex protocols that are often opaque to ordinary users and require supporting infrastructure. What it really means: comforting technical talk that lets designers claim “privacy-preserving” while back-end logs and metadata still enable control.