

# Designing for women empowerment

For women in workplace migration

Design Equality 2025

Setting the context

# Mobility as the Foundation of Empowerment

For many women, **migration reshapes subjectivity**. It enables income generation, financial control, skill acquisition, exposure to new social systems, and, in some cases, exit from coercive family structures. Even when women remain behind while male relatives migrate, **mobility shifts household power dynamics by increasing women's control over spending and care-giving decisions**.

Globally, **women now constitute nearly half of all migrants**, yet their economic contribution remains statistically undercounted because many are recorded as family or marriage migrants rather than workers. **This invisibility shapes policy design: when women are not recognized as economic actors, systems fail to account for their needs**. Women are also structurally concentrated in informal or semi- informal sectors where contracts, wage enforcement, social security, etc are weak or absent, amplifying exposure to exploitation and violence.

At the same time, women experience what researchers describe as de-citizenization. **Rights tied to geography or documentation collapse during migration**. A large majority of migrant women lose access to food rations at destination, lack employment cards and housing access, and are excluded from destination voting. **Women continue to contribute economically while no longer being recognized as full rights holders**. Legal dependency deepens this vulnerability. In many countries, residency or work authorization is tied to a spouse or a single employer, generating fear of retaliation or deportation that discourages reporting abuse, seeking healthcare, or changing jobs.

While these failures affect migrant men as well, their impact is more severe for women because migration intersects with gendered labor markets. **Women's concentration in isolated informal work increases dependence on employers for housing, food, and documents, heightening exposure to control and abuse**. Because women typically hold fewer assets and bear primary responsibility for food provisioning, childcare, and health, loss of welfare access translates into immediate bodily and intergenerational risk rather than only income loss.

Where do the faults lie?

Rights and systems in place right now don't often translate into real actions that keep women safe and supported during their moves.

When women migrate, their rights get scattered across different systems and legal jurisdictions. Important information becomes hard to find, overly complicated, and often out of reach due to literacy, language barriers, digital access issues, or fear of authority. Moreover, the support they have at home often doesn't travel with them.

Consequently, women often find themselves moving from place to place without any continuity. Each relocation resets their access to essential resources, protection, and social networks, making them rely on informal systems that can expose them to exploitation and abuse.

For real empowerment to happen, **women need a consistent and supportive framework that recognizes and upholds their rights, no matter where they go.**

## Statistics:

Women represent about **48%** of the estimated 281 million international migrants worldwide.

In many developed regions (e.g., Europe and North America), women comprise just over **half** of working-age migrants.

Services dominate employment for migrant women: nearly **80 %** of women migrant workers are in services, often in low-paid, unregulated roles such as care or domestic work.

According to ILO estimates, migrant women had an employment-to-population ratio of about 48 %, compared to nearly **73 %** for migrant men.

Migrant women also experienced higher unemployment (about **8.7 %**) than migrant men (about 6.2 %), further demonstrating unequal labor opportunities.

Only about **43 %** of countries provide social protection to domestic workers, and just 14 % extend this protection to migrant domestic workers

Over **58 %** of the global workforce works informally, often without legal protections.

In developing regions, over **90 %** of women workers in least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa are informally employed, highlighting deep structural exclusion

# Design Focus and Scope Discipline

We looked at 4 major tangents to address this gap:

1

## Portability of Rights:

Ensuring that entitlements, identity continuity, and service linkages travel with the woman across geographies and employers.

2

## Rights Awareness That Converts Into Action

Moving beyond information provision toward situational guidance that supports real decision-making under pressure.

3

## Safety-Preserving Access

Enabling escalation and support without exposing women to retaliation, surveillance, or institutional risk.

4

## Offline-First Reliability

Designing for low connectivity, low digital literacy, and environments where smartphones, data access, and power stability cannot be assumed.



# Stakeholders

## Primary Users: Migrant Women in Low-Wage Informal Labor

Our system targets working women, migrating from low-income rural regions in lower and lower-middle income countries, particularly South Asia and Southeast Asia, with comparable patterns in parts of East Africa and Latin America.

### Typical characteristics:

- **Employment type:** Informal or semi-informal domestic work, garment factories, agricultural labor, brick kilns, construction-adjacent care and cleaning work.

### Migration type:

- Independent young women seeking first income autonomy.
- Married women migrating with or following household relocation.
- Circular and seasonal migrants with repeated job churn.



***Problem statement:***

Migrant women are often unable to access their rights despite the existence of labour protections, welfare schemes and gender equality policies because **rights are fragmented** across geographies, institutions, and moments of mobility.

Entitlements tied to place, employer, or documentation often collapse when women migrate, forcing them to rely on **informal networks, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.**



***Insight:***

Empowerment does not fail at policy creation, but at the **point of conversion** where those policies and rights need to be translated into usable, safe and timely actions during moments of transition.

Migrant women in these cases need **continuity and not just awareness.**



## The Intervention

Our solution is a two-part system that operates across the physical, digital, and social layers of a migrant woman's life. UniPass and UniSafe is a system we designed to try and ensure that rights, benefits, and trusted support do not collapse when a woman moves across borders, cities, or jobs. Instead of relying on institutional continuity, the system places continuity with the individual herself.

### UniPass

**UniPass** is a hybrid platform that integrates **physical and social infrastructure**, enabling migrant women to retain their rights, benefits, and trusted support networks as they move across borders, cities, and jobs. Rather than relying on place-based institutions or employer-controlled systems, UniPass is person-held, ensuring that **ownership and control remain with the woman herself**.

The system is intentionally designed to do three things:

#### 1. Translate rights into situational action

Rights become usable guidance rather than abstract legal language. Women receive context-specific prompts and guidance for situations such as what to do if wages are delayed, documents are withheld, or housing becomes unsafe.

#### 2. Preserve entitlement continuity during mobility

Welfare access, work history, skills validation, and service touchpoints remain legible across movement, reducing the systemic loss that typically accompanies migration.

#### 3. Embed trust through human anchors, not platforms

Verified NGOs, clinics, legal aid desks, and worker centers serve as escalation points, maintaining safety without constant connectivity or institutional surveillance.

### UniSafe

**UniSafe** is the secure digital counterpart to UniPass, designed to **protect and preserve critical documents**, records, and proofs that are essential for exercising rights but are frequently lost, confiscated, or invalidated during migration. It functions as a **personal vault**, where access is controlled by the woman, not by employers or institutions.

UniSafe is designed to do three things:

#### 1. Secure identity and entitlement continuity

Verified copies of IDs, contracts, certificates, and service records are preserved across movement, preventing loss of recognition when physical documents are withheld or destroyed.

#### 2. Reduce dependency on physical possession

By ensuring that documents remain accessible even when originals are unavailable, UniSafe lowers vulnerability to employer control, theft, or coercion.

#### 3. Enable safe verification without exposure

Documents can be shared selectively and temporarily, allowing women to prove eligibility or employment history without surrendering control or entering surveillance-heavy systems.



# How does the UniPass work?

## Distribution and Onboarding

The UniPass is issued through multiple touchpoints where migrant women already interact with systems: pre-departure centers, recruitment agencies, NGO clinics, health camps and worker hostels.

Onboarding is supported by trained field staff and peer migrant contacts to reduce dependence on formal institutions and reach informal workers who may never register with official systems.

Each UniPass carries a visible validity marker that prompts periodic refresh and content updates when women encounter partner organizations, preventing long-term information decay.

## Situational Rights Guide

Instead of legal language, the UniPass uses **voice, image and icon-driven** flow guidance organized around real scenarios.

Each pathway provides:

- Stepwise escalation ladders
- Localized contacts mapped to certified Trust Anchors
- Guidance that prioritizes safety over confrontation.

Visual navigation minimizes literacy barriers. In situations where connectivity is compromised, **QR-linked audio instructions** are available in local languages.

## Trust Anchors

Rather than relying on centralized apps or hotlines, the UniPass embeds a network of **verified local organizations** on both origin and destination sides.

Each anchor undergoes **periodic validation**. Multiple anchors are listed per geography to prevent **single-point failure**.

Anchors provide safe pathways, mediation support and referrals. The UniPass does not replace these institutions, but rather aims to connect women safely across them.

## Entitlement Continuity Log

The UniPass contains a record of:

- Welfare access (ration, health, insurance).
- Employment history and skills gained.
- Training certificates and service interactions.
- Verification stamps from authorized partners.

This log **reduces loss of entitlements** when women change locations, employers, or documentation status.

Updates are **verified physically through partner stamps**.



# UNIPASS

Work & Rights Companion

NAME

Sunita Kumari Sharma

ID NUMBER

NP-2026-987654

ISSUED

January 15, 2026

UNI-2026-0001234

## Emergency Contacts

MEMORIZE THESE NUMBERS

### HOME ANCHOR

Organization: Migrant Women Support Network  
Phone: +977-1-4567890  
Contact: Sunita Sharma  
Hours: 24/7 Emergency Line

### DESTINATION ANCHOR

Organization: Workers Rights Collective  
Phone: +91-11-2345-6789  
Contact: Priya Mehta  
Hours: 24/7 Crisis Support

### SILENT SIGNAL SYSTEM

- Text "SAFE" to +977-1-4567890 = I'm okay
- Text "HELP" to +977-1-4567890 = Need discreet help
- Miss 2 check-ins = Anchor initiates welfare check

## Basic Information

FULL NAME

DATE OF BIRTH

BLOOD TYPE

HOME ADDRESS

EMERGENCY CONTACT (FAMILY)

PHONE NUMBER

MEDICAL INFORMATION

### Photo Attachment

Attach identification photo here

### UniSafe Backup

All documents securely stored in your digital vault. Access code on back cover.

## Employment History

EMPLOYER

LOCATION

START

END

ROLE

WAGES

### Why This Matters

This record helps prove work experience for new jobs or claiming unpaid wages. Keep updated after each employment.

### Digital Backup

Employment history automatically synced to UniSafe vault. Records preserved even if booklet is lost.

### Verification Stamps

Authorized organizations verify employment here

## Skills & Training Record

### Skills Acquired

 Childcare Elderly Care Cooking Cleaning First Aid Basic Nursing

### LANGUAGES SPOKEN

### OTHER SKILLS

### Training Completed

DATE	TRAINING NAME	ISSUING ORGANIZATION

#### UniSafe Storage

Upload certificate photos to your vault. Never lose proof of qualifications.

## Entitlements Tracker

### PRE-DEPARTURE

 Orientation completed (Date: \_\_\_\_\_) Contract explained in my language Health screening received Insurance policy explained

### DESTINATION-SIDE REGISTRATION

 Registered with local labor office Embassy registration completed Bank account opened Health card obtained Worker collective contacted

#### Why Track This

These entitlements are yours by right. Checking them ensures you receive what you're entitled to.

## Wages & Benefits Log

MONTH	DUE	RECEIVED	DATE PAID	NOTES
Jan 2026				
Feb 2026				
Mar 2026				
Apr 2026				
May 2026				
Jun 2026				
Jul 2026				
Aug 2026				
Sep 2026				
Oct 2026				
Nov 2026				
Dec 2026				

### Important

- Keep all payment slips and receipts
- If wages delayed more than 30 days, see Page 6 (Crisis Map)
- This log serves as evidence for complaints

USE THIS IF:

## Wages Delayed or Withheld

### YOUR RIGHTS

- Wages must be paid every 30 days maximum
- Deductions require written agreement
- You can request payment records
- Wage withholding is illegal

#### 1 Document Everything

- Record dates, amounts owed, promises made
- Keep payment slips, messages, agreements
- Complete Wages Log (Page 5)

#### 2 Request Payment (if safe)

- Ask calmly: "When will wages be paid?"
- Stay factual, avoid confrontation
- Request specific date

#### 3 Wait 7-10 Days

Allow time for response. Continue documenting.

#### 4 Contact Your Anchor

- Call Destination Anchor (inside cover)
- State: "Wages unpaid for [X] days. I have records."
- They advise on mediation, complaint, or safe exit

### DO NOT

- Threaten employer
- Stop working suddenly (unless unsafe)
- Confront alone if at risk

### WHO CAN HELP

**Primary:** Destination Anchor +91-11-2345-6789

**Backup:** Labor Office 1800-XXX-XXXX

**Legal Aid:** Workers Clinic +91-11-XXXX-XXXX

## Passport or ID Withheld

## YOUR RIGHTS

- Your passport belongs to you, not employer
- Document withholding is illegal
- You can request return at any time
- Visa status does not change this right

## 1 Do Not Panic

This is common but illegal. You have options. Read all steps first.

## 2 Request Return (if safe)

- Say: "I need passport for [bank/embassy/registration]"
- Frame as practical need, not accusation
- Suggest temporary return

## 3 If Refused: Document

- Note: date requested, refusal reason
- Photo/copy other documents you have
- Note passport storage location (if known)

## 4 Contact Anchor Immediately

- Call Destination Anchor: +91-11-2345-6789
- They can intervene, contact embassy, arrange safe exit
- Do not delay — this is urgent

## DO NOT

- Attempt forcible retrieval
- Threaten police without support
- Leave without documents unless in immediate danger

## WHO CAN HELP

**Primary:** Destination Anchor +91-11-2345-6789

**Embassy:** +91-11-XXXX-XXXX

**Police:** 100 (with Anchor guidance)

## Physical or Sexual Abuse

## YOUR RIGHTS

- You have the right to safety
- Abuse is a crime regardless of work status
- You can leave an abusive situation
- Your safety matters more than any job

## 1 Assess Immediate Danger

- Are you safe right now?
- Can you reach phone privately?
- Is there a safe room?

## 2 Use Silent Signal

- If unable to talk: Text "HELP" to +91-11-2345-6789
- Or miss 2 check-ins — Anchor will contact you
- Use pre-arranged code phrase

## 3 Evidence (only if safe)

- Photos of injuries (if possible)
- Save threatening messages
- Note: dates, times, details
- **Safety first — skip if unsafe**

## 4 Emergency Extraction

- Crisis Line: +91-11-2345-6789 (24 hours)
- Arranges: shelter, medical care, legal support, safe exit
- You do not have to stay

## IF IMMEDIATE DANGER

- Emergency: 100 (Police) or 102 (Ambulance)
- Nearest shelter: [Address provided separately]
- Your safety outweighs job, documents, consequences.

## WHO CAN HELP

**24-hr Crisis:** +91-11-2345-6789

**Shelter:** [Name] [Address]

**Medical:** [Hospital] [Address]

## Know Your Rights

### Right to Wages

Payment on time, in full, with written records. Deductions require written agreement.

### Right to Rest

Minimum 8 hours sleep daily, 1 day off weekly. Overtime paid at higher rate.

### Right to Safety

Protection from violence, harassment, abuse. Employer cannot harm you.

### Right to Your Documents

Passport and ID belong to you. Cannot be withheld by anyone.

### Right to Leave

You can resign with proper notice (typically 30 days). Not enslaved to employer.

### Right to Communicate

Calls and messages to family should not be blocked or monitored without consent.

### Right to Healthcare

Access to medical care when sick or injured. Emergency care cannot be denied.

### These rights exist even if:

- Visa tied to employer
- Contract states otherwise
- Employer threatens deportation
- You owe recruitment fees

## Your Support Network

### HOME ANCHOR

**Organization:** Migrant Women Support Network

**Contact:** Sunita Sharma

**Phone:** +977-1-4567890

**Email:** [\[email protected\]](#)

#### SERVICES PROVIDED

- Issue and explain UniPass
- Regular check-ins
- Document backup storage
- Family communication support
- Return and reintegration assistance
- UniSafe vault setup

### DESTINATION ANCHOR

**Organization:** Workers Rights Collective

**Contact:** Priya Mehta

**Phone:** +91-11-2345-6789

**Email:** [\[email protected\]](#)

#### SERVICES PROVIDED

- Crisis intervention
- Employer mediation
- Legal support and referrals
- Emergency shelter coordination
- Wage, contract, document assistance

### Check-In Schedule

Weekly text: Every Sunday at 6 PM

Monthly call: First Saturday at 10 AM

Missing 2 check-ins triggers welfare confirmation from Home Anchor.

## Additional Resources

### EMBASSY / CONSULATE

**Name:** Nepal Embassy, New Delhi  
**Address:** Barakhamba Road, New Delhi  
**Phone:** +91-11-2332-XXXX  
**Hours:** Mon-Fri, 9 AM - 5 PM  
**Services:** Passport issues, repatriation, legal support

### LEGAL AID

**Name:** Migrant Workers Legal Clinic  
**Phone:** +91-11-XXXX-XXXX  
**Hours:** Mon-Sat, 10 AM - 6 PM  
**Services:** Free legal advice, contract disputes, wage claims

### MEDICAL CARE

**Clinic:** Community Health Center  
**Phone:** +91-11-XXXX-XXXX  
**Hours:** 24/7 Emergency  
**Services:** Free/low-cost care for migrant workers

### EMERGENCY SHELTER

**Name:** Women's Safe House  
**24-hr Line:** +91-11-XXXX-XXXX  
**Services:** Temporary shelter, meals, safety planning

### EMERGENCY NUMBERS

**Police:** 100  
**Ambulance:** 102  
**Women's Helpline:** 1091  
**Trafficking:** 1098

## UniSafe Digital Vault

### WHAT IS UNISAFE?

UniSafe is your secure digital vault where important documents are safely stored. Even if physical UniPass is lost, stolen, or taken, your documents remain protected and accessible to you alone.

### WHAT'S STORED

- Passport and ID copies
- Employment contracts
- Training certificates
- Wage payment records
- Medical records
- Employment history from UniPass

### HOW TO ACCESS

Web: [app.unisafe.org](http://app.unisafe.org)

SMS: Text "ACCESS" to +977-1-4567890

Your Code: [Written during setup]

### SECURITY ASSURANCES

- Only you can access (not employers, not agencies)
- Documents encrypted and protected
- You control who sees what and when
- Nothing shared without permission

### KEY FEATURES

- Temporary Sharing: Show documents for 24 hours only
- Automatic Backup: UniPass updates saved automatically
- Emergency Access: Home Anchor helps recover access
- Offline Mode: Download documents for offline viewing

### If You Lose Access

Contact Home Anchor immediately. They help recover your account securely. Documents never truly lost.

# How does the UniSafe works?

## Purpose and Scope

UniSafe functions as a secure digital vault that preserves only the most essential records a migrant woman may need to assert her rights. This includes:

- Identity proofs
- Work history
- Training certificates
- References to welfare or service entitlements.

UniSafe is not a comprehensive data repository but a continuity mechanism that protects proof when physical documents are lost, withheld, or invalidated during movement.

## Verification and Trust

All records in UniSafe are added and validated exclusively through **cross verification and biometrics**.

This security ensures credibility without placing control in centralized state systems.

Trust is **distributed across institutions** the woman already interacts with, rather than embedded in a single platform or authority.

## Privacy, Control, and Continuity

Access to records is **contextual and time or purpose-bound**, reducing the risk of misuse while still enabling claims to be asserted.

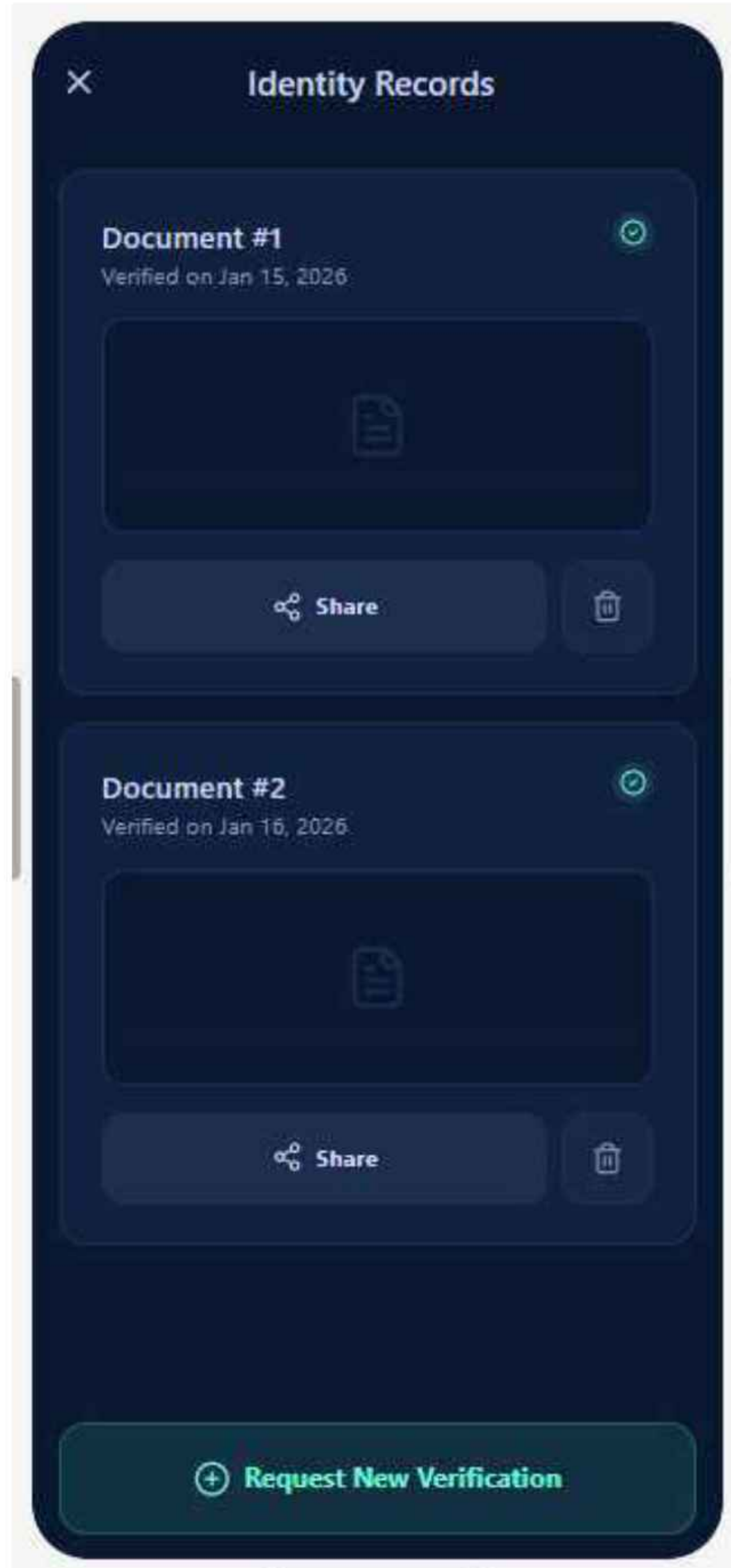
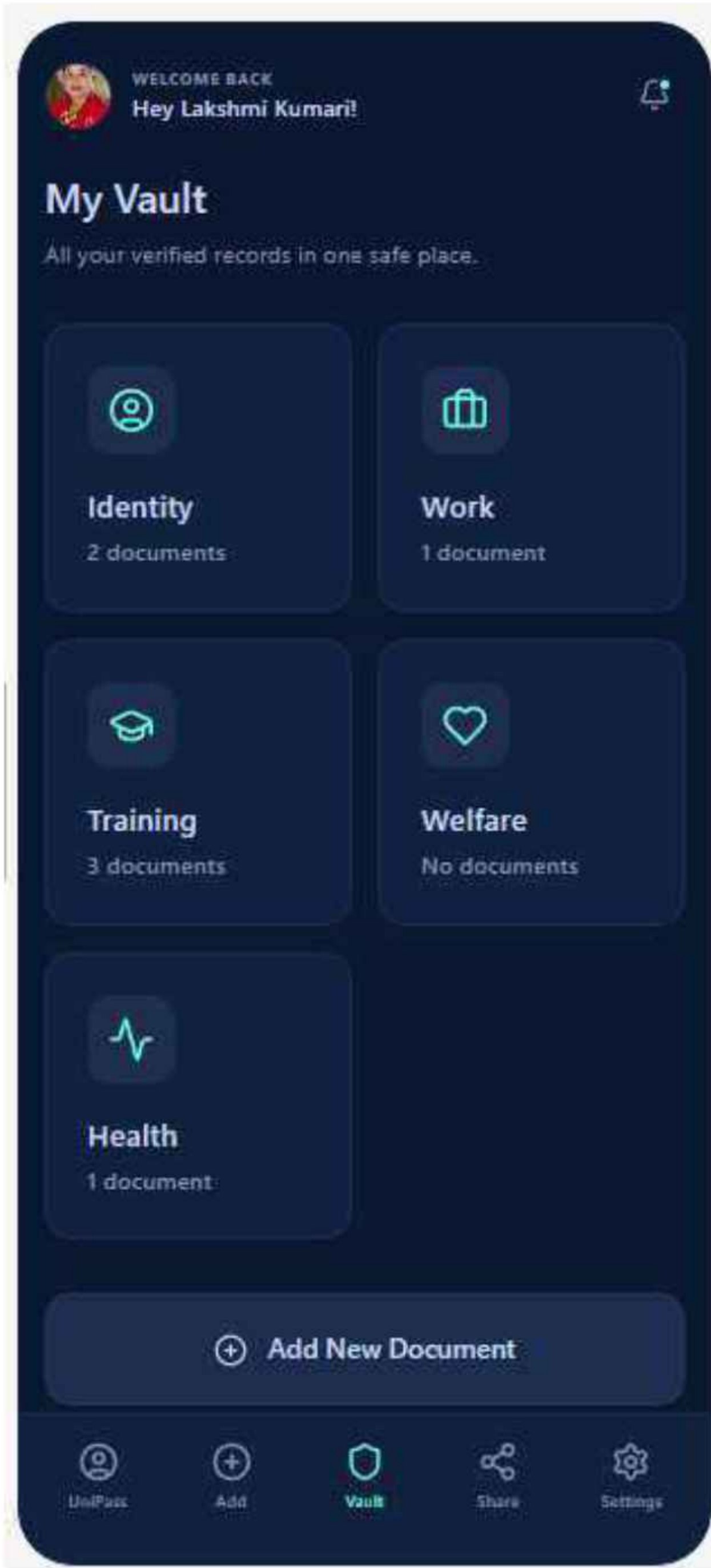
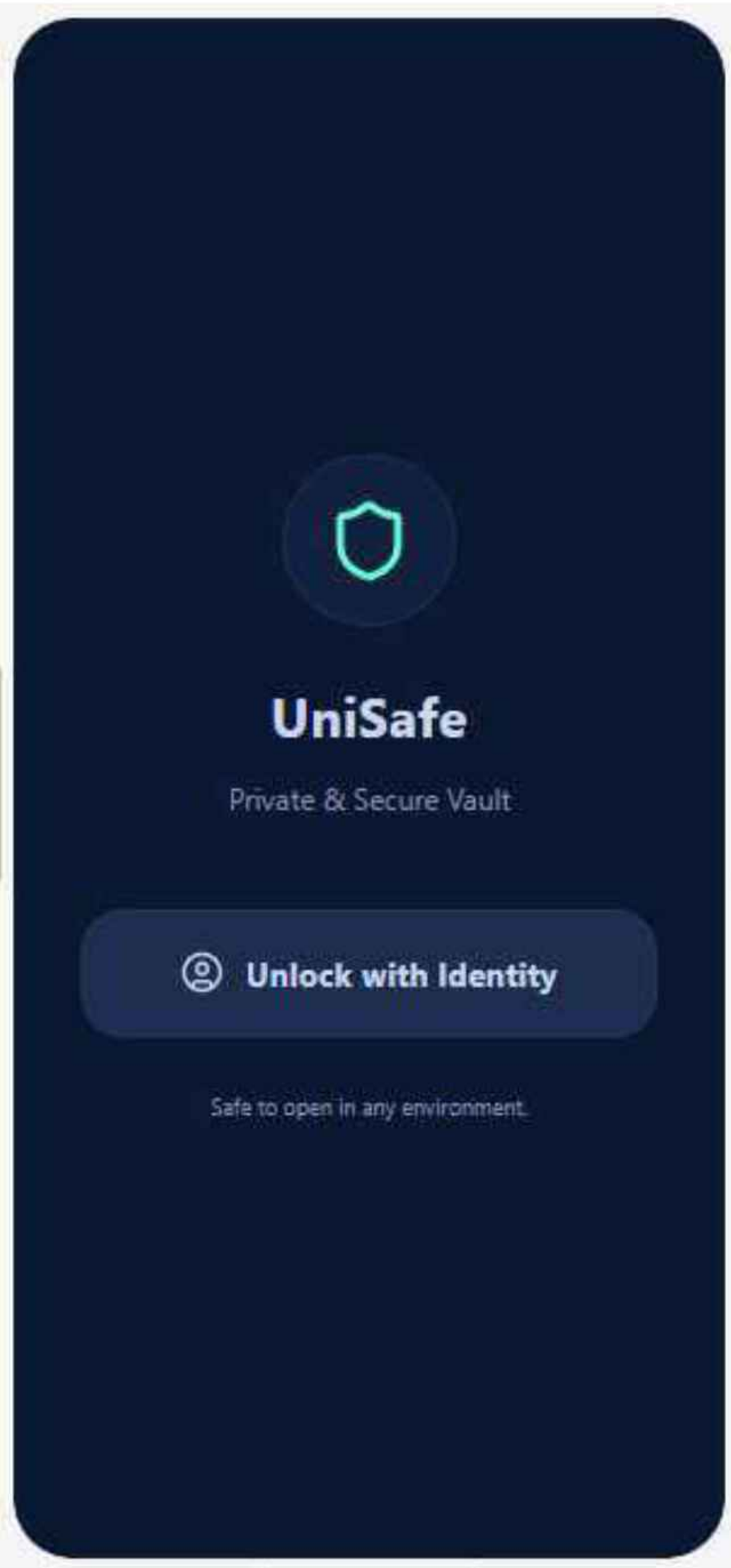
UniSafe does not rely on continuous connectivity, avoids tracking, and stores only what is necessary for continuity. Its core function is to ensure that **mobility does not erase proof**, and that the loss of documents does not result in the loss of rights.

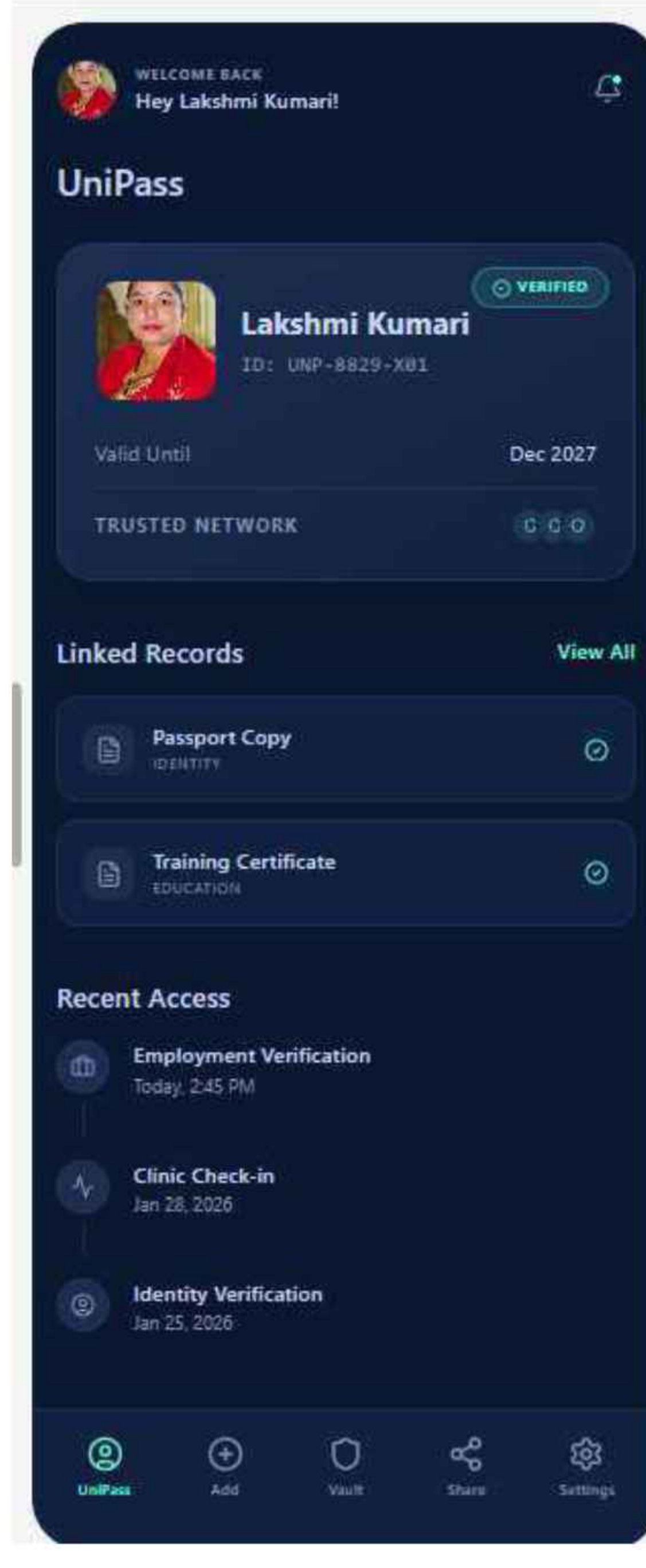
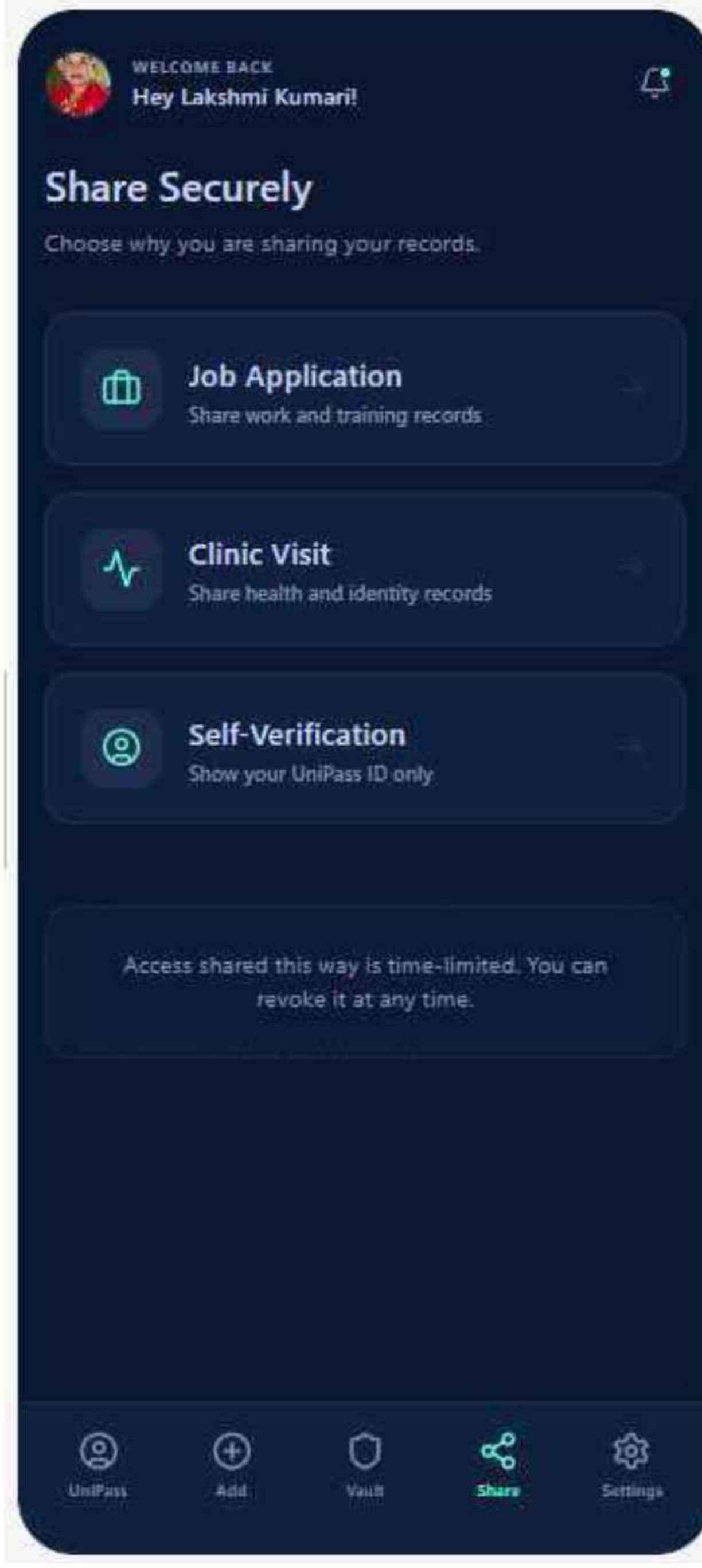
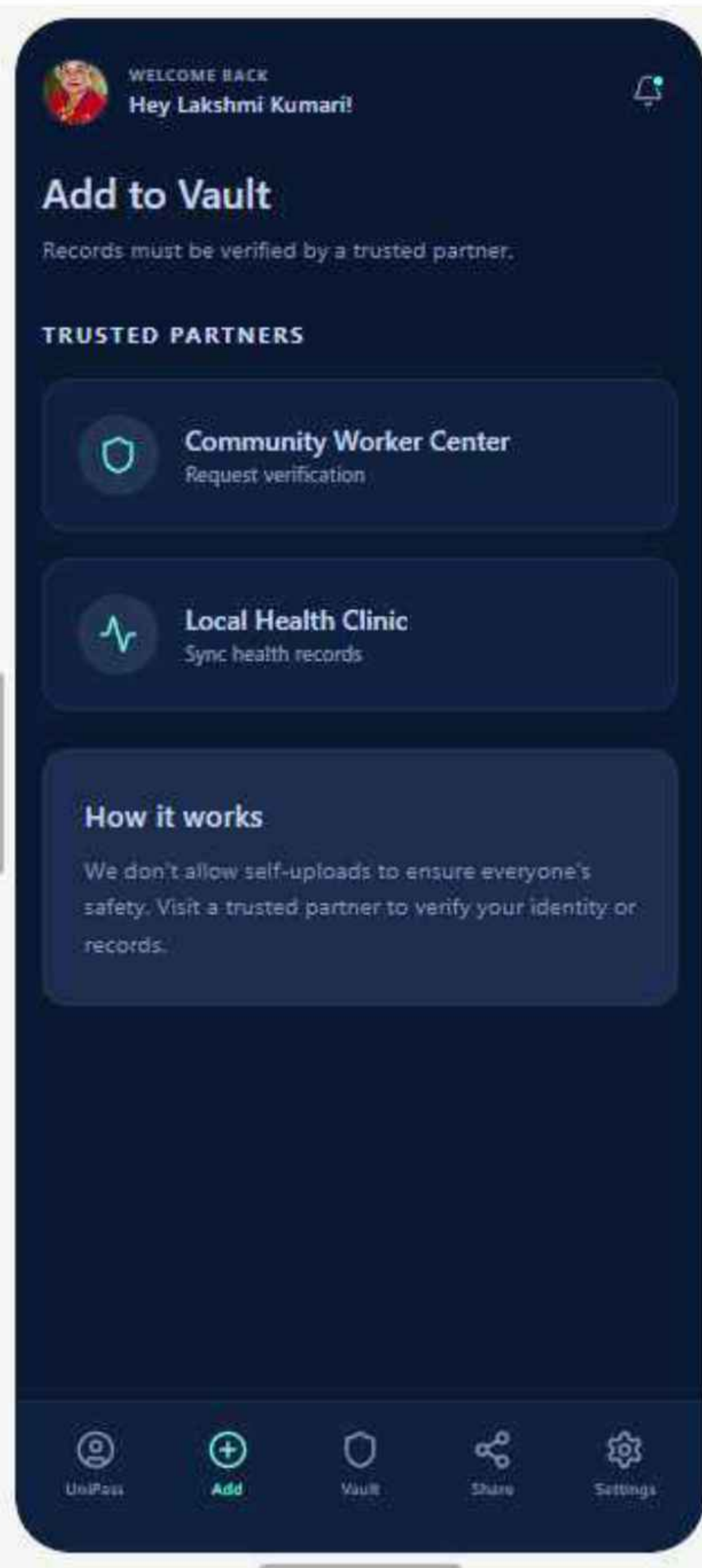
## Situational Use and Access

UniSafe is designed for **one-off cases**, not constant use. It is accessed only at critical moments, for example when:

- An employer disputes employment history
- A service provider denies access due to missing documents
- Papers are confiscated.

In these situations, a woman can surface only the **specific record required**, often with the support of a trusted intermediary, rather than exposing her entire data profile.





[Tap or Scan QR to view complete prototype video](#)



## Journey Without the Rights Passport

### 1. Pre-departure

Laxmi signs a contract she cannot fully interpret. She is told that “support exists” but receives **no concrete contacts**, escalation steps, or verification of recruitment claims. Her **rights remain abstract and detached** from real action pathways.

### 2. Early Employment

After two months, **wages are delayed**. She does not know whether this violates labor norms or how to raise the issue safely. Asking directly risks retaliation or job loss.

### 3. Crisis Moment

Her **passport is withheld** by the employer “for safekeeping.” She does not know whom to contact locally, fears involving authorities, and **lacks trusted intermediaries**. The information gap converts into inaction.

### 4. Outcome

Laxmi adapts rather than acts. She absorbs the loss of agency. Although protections technically exist, fragmentation, fear, and lack of continuity prevent her from exercising them

## Journey With the Rights Passport

### 1. Pre-departure

Before leaving, Laxmi is issued a UniPass through a local NGO partner. She receives **clear guidance and verified contacts** that travel with her.

Her key documents are **validated and securely stored in UniSafe**, and she leaves knowing what rights exist, and how she can use them without putting herself at risk.

### 2. Early Employment

When wages are delayed, Laxmi checks her UniPass. It helps her recognize that the delay is not normal and shows **safe, low-risk steps to take**. With support from a nearby Trust Anchor listed in the system, she raises the issue.

Her employment record and contract details can be surfaced from UniSafe if needed, **without handing over physical papers**.

### 3. Crisis Moment

When the employer withholds her passport, Laxmi uses the UniPass which directs her to trusted local support points that handle document retention cases.

Through UniSafe, she can prove identity and employment history without physical access to her documents.

### 4. Outcome

Laxmi acts instead of adapting. Mobility no longer resets her position. Rights, proof, and support remain intact across movement and disruption. What was once fear and silence becomes measured, informed action, allowing her to retain agency in situations that previously forced compliance.



## Intended Impact and how do we measure it.

The intended impact of the UniPass and UniSafe system is to convert migrant women's **latent agency into reliable, safe action** during moments of mobility, disruption, and vulnerability.

To assess this impact rigorously, we adapted the **Women's Empowerment in Migration Index (WEMI)** to better reflect the mechanisms through which the system operates.

While WEMI offers a strong baseline for measuring empowerment in migration contexts, it does not fully capture several outcomes that are central to our intervention. We therefore extended the framework to measure these dimensions more precisely, ensuring alignment between what this system is designed to change and what is being evaluated.



# Tailored WEMI for the UniPass and UniSafe

## 01. Intrinsic Agency

### Original WEMI measures:

- General attitudes toward gender roles and violence
- Sense of personal entitlement and respect

### Addition:

- **Confidence in using rights guidance:** Self-reported belief that one knows what to do in key scenarios because of the UniPass.
- **Perceived safety in escalation:** Self-reported sense of safety when contacting Trust Anchors.
- **Reduction in fear of retaliation:** Self-report on fear of reporting abuse before and after receiving the UniPass.

## 02. Instrumental Agency

### Original WEMI measures:

- Participation in migration decisions
- Asset ownership
- Financial services access

### Addition:

- **Rights usability in practice:** Whether the woman has used the UniPass or UniSafe in real situations.
- **Continuity of entitlements accessed:** Tracking sustained access to welfare benefits across moves.
- **Number of safe escalation actions taken:** Count of times Trust Anchors were contacted and resolved issues.

## 03. Collective Agency

### Original WEMI measures:

- Group membership
- Social support structures

### Addition:

- **Trust Anchor engagement frequency:** Number and strength of interactions with anchors.
- **Peer network learning and spread:** Whether women have shared Passport guidance with peers.
- **Anchored conflict resolution:** Situations where external actors actively supported the woman via the Passport system.

**Thank  
you.**