# Labour's digital ID plans face fierce opposition amid privacy concerns



Labour under Prime Minister Keir Starmer has unveiled plans for a mandatory digital ID system intended to become “the bedrock of the modern state,” positioning it as a crucial tool to combat illegal immigration and reform public services. The policy, spearheaded by Darren Jones, Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, mandates that anyone working in the UK must hold this digital ID, which will contain personal details such as name, date of birth, a photo, nationality, and residency status. This ID would be stored on smartphones or alternative devices and required to legally secure employment, marking a significant step in tightening immigration control.

Starmer’s government presents the digital ID not merely as an immigration enforcement mechanism but as a foundation for reforming public services, promising easier access to healthcare, welfare, and other state facilities. The ID will be issued free of charge, with provisions for those without smartphones to ensure inclusivity. At the Global Progress Action Summit in London, Starmer emphasised the need for a fair immigration system, arguing that the policy reflects a pragmatic response to the public’s concerns about illegal work and unfair labour market practices. He stated unequivocally: “You will not be able to work in the United Kingdom if you do not have digital ID.”

Yet, the rollout of this plan has ignited significant backlash from civil liberties advocates, opposition parties, and segments of the Labour Party itself. Critics warn that the digital ID could expand state surveillance and encroach on privacy. Campaign groups like Big Brother Watch have labelled the scheme "wholly unBritish," warning it could create a domestic “mass surveillance infrastructure." A petition opposing the introduction of these digital IDs quickly gained traction, amassing over 1.4 million signatures on the UK Parliament petitions website within days, reflecting widespread public unease. The petitions platform mandates government responses to proposals exceeding 10,000 signatures, and petitions surpassing 100,000 may be considered for parliamentary debate. While this does not guarantee parliamentary discussion, the scale of opposition is notable.

Comparisons have been drawn to the Labour government under Tony Blair, which attempted a similar ID card scheme that was ultimately scrapped after fierce parliamentary and public resistance. Reform UK and the Liberal Democrats have dismissed the current plans as ineffective gimmicks unlikely to stop illegal immigration, while Tory leader Kemi Badenoch described the policy as “a gimmick that will do nothing to stop the boats,” referring to migrant Channel crossings. Even within Labour ranks, figures like Shadow Pensions Secretary Helen Whately expressed scepticism, arguing that the digital ID would not tackle cash-in-hand jobs in the grey economy where employment is often unregulated and wages below legal minimum standards.

Supporters of the policy, including the Tony Blair Institute think tank, urge ministers to capitalise on this moment to go further, advocating for digital IDs to become a gateway for citizens to access state services securely and to demonstrate that the government is acting in their interest. The institute’s Alexander Iosad described the initiative as an opportunity “that must not be missed,” emphasising the dual goals of combating illegal migration and fostering a modernised, citizen-friendly state.

Starmer’s announcement comes amid a broader political context marked by public discontent and controversies facing his leadership. His premiership has seen contentious debates over immigration and broader governance, including clashes over his stance on the Israel-Hamas conflict that contributed to Labour losing seats and sparked petitions calling for early elections. These pressures underscore the challenges his government faces in pursuing ambitious reforms while maintaining public support.

The introduction of mandatory digital IDs reflects a significant policy shift in the UK’s long-standing debate over identity verification. Since the Second World War, compulsory identity cards have been largely absent due to privacy concerns and political opposition. Whether this new attempt by Starmer’s administration will succeed in balancing public security, civil liberties, and technological innovation remains to be seen as the policy faces intense scrutiny and sustained public pushback.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15138527/Labours-digital-ID-Keir-Starmers-aides-petition-against-policy-1-4MILLION-signatures.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/03264e6728c88892b280afcd1323395b), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BritCard)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15138527/Labours-digital-ID-Keir-Starmers-aides-petition-against-policy-1-4MILLION-signatures.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/03264e6728c88892b280afcd1323395b)
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* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/03264e6728c88892b280afcd1323395b), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BritCard)

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## Bibliography

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2. <https://apnews.com/article/03264e6728c88892b280afcd1323395b> - The UK government, under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, announced plans to introduce mandatory digital ID cards for British citizens and permanent residents by 2029. Aiming to curb unauthorized immigration and limit illegal employment in the underground economy, the digital ID will be required to secure legal employment in the country. Starmer emphasized that individuals need not carry the ID physically, but one must possess it to work. The ID system also promises simplified access to public services like healthcare and welfare. This initiative rekindles a long-standing and controversial issue in the UK. Identity cards have not been compulsory since World War II, and previous efforts—such as those by former PM Tony Blair—faced strong resistance from civil rights advocates and Parliament, mainly over privacy concerns. However, political analyst Tim Bale pointed out that a digital ID might be practical, given the existing need to verify identity in multiple contexts. Unveiled at the Global Progress Action Summit in London, the plan is part of Starmer’s broader strategy to assure the public of the government’s control over immigration, especially amid rising concerns over Channel crossings by migrants. The ID will be free of charge and accessible for those without smartphones, with a public consultation to determine its implementation details.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BritCard> - The BritCard is a proposed mandatory digital identity card for adult residents of the United Kingdom that was announced by Prime Minister Keir Starmer on 25 September 2025. It will be introduced as part of the Starmer ministry's attempts to tackle the rise in illegal migrant crossings in small boats across the English Channel. The proposals for mandatory digital ID have received opposition from Labour MPs and other political leaders due to concerns around the possible infringement of civil liberties, with Big Brother Watch describing the plans as "wholly unBritish" and creating a "domestic mass surveillance infrastructure". It has been compared to the abandoned mandatory ID card scheme of former prime minister Tony Blair. A petition against mandatory digital ID cards has reached over 1 million signatures as of 26 September 2025.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_Parliament_petitions_website> - The UK Parliament petitions website is an official online petition platform that enables members of the British public to create and support proposals for consideration by the Parliament of the United Kingdom. While the UK Parliament's Petitions Committee reviews all petitions that receive 100,000 signatures or more, reaching this threshold does not guarantee a parliamentary debate. However, the Government is required to respond to all petitions that receive over 10,000 signatures. Once a petition has been published on the website, it will be open to signatures for six months. At 10,000 signatures, the government will formally respond. At 100,000 signatures, the request will be considered by the Petitions Committee for debate in Parliament.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Keir_Starmer_speech_on_migration> - Controversy over Starmer's support for Israel in the Israel-Hamas war, which began during his tenure as Leader of the Opposition and led to Labour losing several seats in the election, continued into his premiership despite Starmer calling for a ceasefire. This culminated in a petition calling for an early general election on the UK Parliament website being started in November 2024 by the publican and Conservative voter Michael Westwood, who said he launched it because he believed the Labour government had "gone back on the promises" the party had made. Within days, the petition reached over 2 million signatures. Starmer responded to the petition by stating, "I’m not surprised, quite frankly, that as we’re doing the tough stuff there are plenty of people who say 'well I’m impacted, I don’t like it'. But we’ve got to make the big calls on the NHS and on schools that are really important for the here and now and for the future."
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plan_for_Change> - Controversy over his support for Israel in the Israel-Hamas war, which began during his tenure as opposition leader and led to Labour losing several seats in the election, continued into his premiership despite Starmer calling for a ceasefire. This culminated in a petition calling for an early general election on the UK Parliament website being started in November 2024 by publican and Conservative voter Michael Westwood, who said he launched it because he believed the Labour government had "gone back on the promises" the party made. Within days, the petition reached over 2 million signatures. Starmer responded to the petition by saying "I'm not surprised, quite frankly, that as we're doing the tough stuff there are plenty of people who say 'well I'm impacted, I don't like it'. But we've got to make the big calls on the NHS and on schools that are really important for the here and now and for the future."
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13645055/Sir-Keir-Starmer-warned-Labours-workers-rights-revolution-cost-jobs-choke-growth.html> - The article discusses concerns raised about Sir Keir Starmer's proposed 'workers' rights revolution' and its potential impact on the UK's economy. Critics warn that the plan could lead to job losses and hinder economic growth. The article highlights the debate surrounding the balance between workers' rights and economic development, with some arguing that the proposed measures may impose burdens on businesses, making it more challenging for them to thrive and expand. The discussion reflects broader tensions between labour protections and economic policies aimed at fostering growth.