# UK plans to roll out mandatory digital ID with biometrics by 2029 amid privacy concerns



The UK government has revealed plans to introduce a mandatory digital ID scheme by 2029, requiring anyone who wishes to work in the country to carry digital identification on their mobile phones. Announced by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer at the Global Progressive Action Conference in London, this scheme aims primarily to clamp down on illegal immigration and secure the UK’s borders by making it more difficult for individuals without legal status to gain employment. The digital ID is expected to include personal details such as a photograph, name, date of birth, and residency status, with consultations planned to explore if additional data like addresses should be included. The government is also considering ways to include those without smartphones in the scheme, emphasising its broad accessibility.

This digital ID initiative revives earlier Labour Party ambitions from the 2000s under Tony Blair, but it represents a significant step forward in centralising identity verification for millions of UK residents. Industry data shows that digital ID app usage is projected to rise sharply from 6.9 million users in 2025 to 25.5 million by 2029, supported by government efforts to bolster trust and integrate services across both public and private sectors. Beyond employment, the digital ID system is expected to eventually facilitate access to other government services, including welfare, childcare, and tax records.

However, the announcement has sparked debate amongst technology and privacy experts over the implications for security and personal privacy. Critics warn that consolidating a wide array of personal data, including potentially immutable biometric identifiers, into a centralised system could create an attractive target for hackers, with severe consequences if breached. Rob Jardin, chief digital officer at privacy-first VPN provider NymVPN, cautioned that digital IDs incorporating biometrics could lead to irreversible security risks, and warned of "mission creep," where the scope of the system might gradually expand into surveillance or control of citizens' movements and access to services.

Conversely, some experts argue that a properly designed digital ID system could offer superior security compared to current fragmented methods which involve sharing sensitive documents like passport scans via unsecured channels. Cindy van Niekerk, CEO of UK-based verification firm Umazi, noted that UK citizen data is currently scattered across hundreds of insecure databases. She claimed that consolidating and distributing these verification functions under a decentralised architecture—akin to Estonia's digital ID system—could lower risks of large-scale breaches while empowering users to control what information they share and when. Estonia’s system, operational since 2002 with around 1.4 million users, has experienced only one minor security incident over 23 years, highlighting the potential robustness of decentralised approaches.

Decentralisation is widely viewed as a crucial safeguard against surveillance and data misuse. Both Jardin and Van Niekerk emphasised the importance of ensuring no single authority has unfettered control over personal data, allowing citizens to hold the cryptographic keys to their own information. Moreover, the UK scheme may benefit from integrating quantum-resistant cryptography from the outset, potentially avoiding costly future upgrades needed in other countries. Distributed, quantum-safe protocols would provide multiple layers of protection, ensuring system resilience even if one security method is compromised.

Nevertheless, concerns about bias and inclusivity in biometric technologies remain unresolved. Government research has shown that facial recognition systems can exhibit demographic biases, failing to equally identify people across different ethnicities and genders unless rigorously tested and refined. The UK government has pledged to launch consultations to address these issues and explore best practices for implementation of the digital ID scheme.

Opposition politicians have criticised the scheme for risks of increased bureaucracy and questionable efficacy in reducing illegal immigration. Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey suggested that the initiative could add to taxpayers’ burdens without significantly impacting migrant crossings.

As the UK prepares to implement this nationwide digital ID system, the balance between enhancing border security, safeguarding citizen privacy, and ensuring equitable, secure access to services remains a complex challenge. The ultimate success of the scheme will largely depend on how well these technological, ethical, and legal considerations are managed in the coming years.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://decrypt.co/341631/uks-new-digital-id-scheme-target-for-hackers), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-introduce-mandatory-digital-id-cards-2025-09-26/), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-leader-starmer-announce-digital-id-card-plans-media-reports-say-2025-09-25/), [[6]](https://identityweek.net/25-5-million-uk-citizens-to-use-digital-id-apps-by-2029-accelerated-by-gov-uk-app/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-introduce-mandatory-digital-id-cards-2025-09-26/), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-leader-starmer-announce-digital-id-card-plans-media-reports-say-2025-09-25/), [[6]](https://identityweek.net/25-5-million-uk-citizens-to-use-digital-id-apps-by-2029-accelerated-by-gov-uk-app/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://decrypt.co/341631/uks-new-digital-id-scheme-target-for-hackers), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-identity-services-inclusion-monitoring-report-findings-2025/inclusion-monitoring-report-findings-2025)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://decrypt.co/341631/uks-new-digital-id-scheme-target-for-hackers), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/digital-identity)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://decrypt.co/341631/uks-new-digital-id-scheme-target-for-hackers), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/digital-identity)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://decrypt.co/341631/uks-new-digital-id-scheme-target-for-hackers), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/digital-identity)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://decrypt.co/341631/uks-new-digital-id-scheme-target-for-hackers), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-identity-services-inclusion-monitoring-report-findings-2025/inclusion-monitoring-report-findings-2025)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://decrypt.co/341631/uks-new-digital-id-scheme-target-for-hackers)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://decrypt.co/341631/uks-new-digital-id-scheme-target-for-hackers> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-introduce-mandatory-digital-id-cards-2025-09-26/> - The UK government has announced plans to introduce mandatory digital ID cards for all citizens and residents beginning new employment, aiming to combat illegal immigration. Prime Minister Keir Starmer emphasized that the initiative will strengthen border security and hinder illegal work. The digital ID, to be stored on mobile phones, will be integrated into employers' hiring checks by 2029 and eventually used for accessing other government services like childcare, welfare, and tax records. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-introduce-mandatory-digital-id-cards-2025-09-26/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-leader-starmer-announce-digital-id-card-plans-media-reports-say-2025-09-25/> - British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is expected to announce a plan to introduce mandatory digital ID cards for all adult citizens, according to media reports. The initiative is aimed at addressing illegal immigration by making it more difficult for individuals without legal status to gain employment. This proposed policy will be presented at a policy conference on Friday. While Starmer's office has not officially commented on the reports, the move is a revival of a previous Labour Party initiative from the 2000s under then-Prime Minister Tony Blair. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-leader-starmer-announce-digital-id-card-plans-media-reports-say-2025-09-25/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/digital-identity> - The UK government is enabling the use of trusted digital identity services, allowing individuals to securely prove their identity without presenting physical documents. This initiative is led by the Office for Digital Identities and Attributes (OfDIA), part of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). The government is also rolling out GOV.UK One Login, a more straightforward and secure way for people to prove their identity and access government services online. ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/digital-identity?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-use-and-access-bill-factsheets/data-use-and-access-bill-factsheet-making-lives-easier?trk=public_post_comment-text> - The Data (Use and Access) Bill includes measures to establish a statutory footing for digital verification services without creating a mandatory digital ID system or introducing ID cards. The government is making it clear which digital identity products and services are secure and reliable, so individuals can make more informed decisions about which ones to trust with their personal data. ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-use-and-access-bill-factsheets/data-use-and-access-bill-factsheet-making-lives-easier?trk=public_post_comment-text&utm_source=openai))
6. <https://identityweek.net/25-5-million-uk-citizens-to-use-digital-id-apps-by-2029-accelerated-by-gov-uk-app/> - A Jupiter Study confirms the upturn of digital identity usership as the UK government next prioritises issuing ID cards and digital wallets for citizens. UK residents currently using digital identity apps to verify themselves and log into services are predicted to rise from 6.9 million in 2025 to 25.5 million in 2029. The state-issued wallet is planned to boost identity verification technology harnessed by the public sector, gaining user trust. ([identityweek.net](https://identityweek.net/25-5-million-uk-citizens-to-use-digital-id-apps-by-2029-accelerated-by-gov-uk-app/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-identity-services-inclusion-monitoring-report-findings-2025/inclusion-monitoring-report-findings-2025> - Biometric technologies are commonly used as part of identity verification or authentication to conduct liveness checks and likeness checks. While biometric technologies can be very accurate, there is a risk that they can be biased towards certain demographic groups if not robustly tested. For example, some types of facial recognition technology may not identify people of certain ethnicities or genders as well as others. ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-identity-services-inclusion-monitoring-report-findings-2025/inclusion-monitoring-report-findings-2025?utm_source=openai))