# UK plans mandatory digital ID cards for all workers amid privacy concerns and political debates



The United Kingdom is set to make digital identity cards mandatory for all workers under a new initiative announced by Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The plan, unveiled at the Global Progressive Action Conference in London, seeks to address illegal working while simplifying access to government services. Starmer emphasised that employment in the UK will require possession of the digital ID, which will be available to all UK citizens and legal residents and stored on smartphones. While citizens will not need to carry or present the digital ID in daily life, it will be compulsory for employment verification.

The Labour government frames the scheme as a response to growing voter concern over immigration, aiming to ensure that only people with the correct legal status can take up jobs in the country. According to Starmer, the digital ID represents an "enormous opportunity" to secure borders and manage migration in a way that is pragmatic and fair-minded. The system is designed to replace complex paper-based checks, promising smoother access not only to work but also to services such as driving licenses and welfare benefits.

However, the proposal has met with criticism, particularly from opposition parties like Reform UK, which leads in recent opinion polls. Critics argue that illegal work will persist regardless, highlighting a thriving cash-in-hand economy that digital IDs may not penetrate effectively. Some see the policy as unlikely to deter those already operating outside immigration laws.

This UK initiative unfolds against a backdrop of similar debates elsewhere, notably in Switzerland, where a referendum on electronic identity cards—or e-IDs—occurred around the same time. Switzerland's journey with e-IDs has been more irregular, with a previous 2021 referendum rejecting the concept amid privacy concerns and fears of centralisation and corporate control. The latest Swiss proposal differs by keeping the e-ID voluntary and under public control, with data residing on users' smartphones rather than a central database. Swiss authorities have actively campaigned for a "Yes" vote, emphasising the system’s security, ease of use, and voluntary nature. Supporters argue it will streamline interactions online, from age verification to government services, and strengthen Swiss digital sovereignty.

Swiss opponents remain wary, concerned that the e-ID system could weaken traditional privacy protections, enable tracking, or be repurposed for marketing despite reassurances. Nonetheless, public openness appears to have grown, partly due to familiarity with digital COVID certificates used during the pandemic.

The UK's move towards a mandatory digital ID for work marks a significant departure from Switzerland’s voluntary, privacy-conscious stance and reflects pressing domestic political priorities regarding immigration control. It also signals a broader global trend of governments turning to digital identity technologies to balance regulatory needs with service accessibility, although the practical challenges and civil liberties debates remain robust across different national contexts.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202509/29/WS68d9aa9ba310f735438b2c88.html), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-id-scheme-to-be-rolled-out-across-uk), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-26/starmer-digital-id-cards-are-enormous-opportunity), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/keir-starmer-parliament-prime-minister-nhs-b1249786.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202509/29/WS68d9aa9ba310f735438b2c88.html), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-id-scheme-to-be-rolled-out-across-uk), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/keir-starmer-parliament-prime-minister-nhs-b1249786.html), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-26/starmer-digital-id-cards-are-enormous-opportunity)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202509/29/WS68d9aa9ba310f735438b2c88.html), [[5]](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-politics/the-referendum-against-the-introduction-of-the-e-id-is-successful/89284041), [[7]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202504/swiss-e-id-to-face-another-referendum)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-democracy/swiss-government-makes-a-case-for-e-id-ahead-of-referendum/89821755), [[5]](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-politics/the-referendum-against-the-introduction-of-the-e-id-is-successful/89284041), [[7]](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202504/swiss-e-id-to-face-another-referendum)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202509/29/WS68d9aa9ba310f735438b2c88.html), [[5]](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-politics/the-referendum-against-the-introduction-of-the-e-id-is-successful/89284041), [[6]](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-democracy/swiss-government-makes-a-case-for-e-id-ahead-of-referendum/89821755)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202509/29/WS68d9aa9ba310f735438b2c88.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-id-scheme-to-be-rolled-out-across-uk> - The UK government has announced plans to introduce a mandatory digital ID scheme for all citizens and legal residents. This initiative aims to combat illegal working and streamline access to government services. The digital ID will be stored on smartphones and will be mandatory for employment verification, though there is no requirement to carry or present it in daily life. The scheme is expected to be implemented by the end of the current parliamentary term.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-26/starmer-digital-id-cards-are-enormous-opportunity> - Prime Minister Keir Starmer has described the proposed digital ID cards as an 'enormous opportunity' for the UK. The digital IDs will serve as official proof of identity and residency status, making it more difficult for individuals to work illegally. While carrying the ID will not be mandatory, it will be required for employment verification. The digital IDs will be available to UK citizens and legal residents by the end of the current parliamentary term.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/keir-starmer-parliament-prime-minister-nhs-b1249786.html> - Prime Minister Keir Starmer has unveiled plans for a new digital ID scheme, stating it will be an 'enormous opportunity' for the UK and will make working illegally tougher. The digital ID will be mandatory for proving the right to work but will not require individuals to carry or present it. It will be available to UK citizens and legal residents by the end of the current parliamentary term.
5. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-politics/the-referendum-against-the-introduction-of-the-e-id-is-successful/89284041> - In Switzerland, a referendum against the introduction of electronic identity (e-ID) has been successful. The Federal Chancellery confirmed that enough valid signatures were submitted by opponents of the federal law on electronic identity, leading to a nationwide vote on the issue. This marks the second nationwide referendum on the e-ID, following a previous rejection in 2021 amid privacy concerns and unease about a system largely run by private companies.
6. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-democracy/swiss-government-makes-a-case-for-e-id-ahead-of-referendum/89821755> - The Swiss government is campaigning for a 'Yes' vote on the e-ID Act, emphasizing that the electronic ID is secure, easy to use, voluntary, and free of charge. The government argues that the e-ID will strengthen digital sovereignty and promote Switzerland as a centre of innovation, making online interactions with authorities and companies more secure, simple, and efficient. The referendum is scheduled for September 28.
7. <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202504/swiss-e-id-to-face-another-referendum> - Switzerland will hold another referendum on the introduction of its national digital identity (e-ID). A committee opposing the federal government's introduction of the e-ID has submitted over 63,000 signatures, paving the way for a vote on the initiative. This is the second time the country is facing a referendum on introducing a digital identity, following a previous rejection in 2021.