The UK announces mandatory digital ID plans

The United Kingdom is introducing a national digital ID scheme in an effort to crack down on illegal migrant workers. A government press release on Friday announced that the digital ID will be stored on mobile devices through the GOV.UK wallet app currently in development, and will be a mandatory requirement for adults to work in Britain by July 2029.

“Digital ID is an enormous opportunity for the UK. It will make it tougher to work illegally in this country, making our borders more secure,” UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in the press release. “And it will also offer ordinary citizens countless benefits, like being able to prove your identity to access key services swiftly – rather than hunting around for an old utility bill.”

The digital ID scheme isn’t finalized, and will need to go through parliamentary approval before it can be enforced. A public consultation will be launched by the UK government later this year to receive feedback regarding how the digital ID service will be delivered, according to the press release.

The announcement has sparked privacy concerns from civil rights groups, with Big Brother Watch saying the scheme would “fundamentally change the nature of our relationship with the state and turn the UK into a ‘papers, please’ society.” A petition against the introduction of digital ID cards has also attracted more than 830,000 signatures at the time of writing, citing concerns around mass surveillance and digital control.

Plans to introduce digital ID were announced in January, with the GOV.UK wallet app initially pitched to give UK citizens

the option to digitize their driver’s licenses and make government-issued documents easier to access. The GOV.UK wallet app is still in development, and described as “entirely optional” on the government website.

The new mandatory ID requirements and focus on illegal immigration come amid growing public concerns around migrant boat crossings and mounting pressure from the anti-immigration right-wing populist party Reform UK. The UK currently has no citizen ID card and does not legally require people to carry photo ID, such as passports or driver’s licenses.

The EU is planning to introduce a similar Digital Identity Wallet next year for “European citizens, residents and businesses to prove who they are when accessing digital services” and a place to “safely store, share and sign important digital documents.”

https://www.theverge.com/news/786323/uk-digital-id-plans-mandatory-immigration-crackdown