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## UK Advances eVisa Rollout Amid Push for Digital IDs

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From 15 July 2025, the United Kingdom will fully transition to electronic visas (eVisas), phasing out physical visa documents in favour of secure, online immigration records tied to individual passports. This shift, already adopted by millions, replaces biometric residence cards, passport endorsements, and vignette stickers, streamlining immigration processes with a digital-first approach.

The move coincides with growing calls from prominent figures, including Sir Alex Younger, former MI6 chief, for a national digital identity system to address irregular migration and employment checks. In a BBC interview on 10 July 2025, Younger argued that a digital ID system is essential to curb undocumented migration, describing the absence of such a system as a “major pull factor” for small boat crossings. He criticised the reluctance among British politicians to embrace ID cards, calling it a “weird anathema” and urging the UK to take responsibility rather than pointing fingers at France.

The push for digital IDs aligns with a recent UK-France agreement, signed by Prime Minister Keir Starmer and President Emmanuel Macron, aimed at tackling the small boat crisis. The deal establishes a reciprocal exchange system, allowing the UK to return undocumented migrants arriving by small boats to France while accepting an equivalent number of genuine asylum seekers with family ties in Britain. This agreement has sparked debate, with critics arguing it fails to address root causes and risks overburdening border systems.

Former minister Harriet Harman, now Baroness Harman, supports digital IDs, suggesting they could deter illegal migration and streamline processes like voter eligibility checks. Speaking to Sky News on 11 July 2025, she acknowledged the controversy within political circles, noting, “Some fear the state might overreach, but digital ID enables the government to deliver what people expect.” Harman pointed to the ubiquity of digital identities in modern life, arguing that public scepticism could be overcome with robust safeguards.

The government is exploring a smartphone-based digital identity credential, dubbed the BritCard, proposed by the think tank Labour Together. This mandatory credential would facilitate right-to-rent and right-to-work checks, aiming to curb illegal migration. However, Hannah Rutter, deputy director of digital identity at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, highlighted challenges in public trust. Speaking at the Identiverse conference in Las Vegas in June 2025, Rutter noted, “The technology isn’t the issue—trust is. I’ve had digital ID apps for years, but a bar would still demand my driver’s licence.”

To address these concerns, the UK has introduced the Digital Verification Services (DVS) framework, formerly the Digital Identity and Attributes Trust Framework (DIATF). This government-backed system certifies identity service providers, ensuring compliance with ISO standards, cybersecurity protocols, and data protection laws, including the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. Rutter emphasised flexibility, stating, “We’re not mandating one solution but enabling a range of trustworthy, certified options.”

The government also plans to digitise credentials like driver's licences, positioning the state as a trusted data issuer. These credentials, stored in digital wallets, will grant access to public and private services. "Not everyone has a passport or driver's licence," Rutter told SC Media in June 2025. "We're expanding to other government-issued credentials to make this inclusive."

The legal foundation for digital verification was solidified with the Data (Use and Access) Bill, passed recently, alongside existing laws like the Identity Document Act 2010 and the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006. While these developments signal progress, critics warn that public trust and political consensus remain hurdles. The government's cautious approach, balancing innovation with privacy concerns, will determine whether digital IDs become a cornerstone of Britain's immigration and identity landscape.