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UK Moves to eVisas as Digital ID Push Gains Momentum

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The United Kingdom is set to roll out electronic visas known as eVisas beginning July 15, replacing physical immigration documents in a significant shift toward digital border control. As this transition begins, calls are growing for the adoption of national digital identity cards to address illegal migration and enhance security enforcement.

The eVisa is a secure, digital record of an individual's immigration status, directly linked to their passport and accessible online. It will replace physical documentation such as biometric residence cards (BRC), visa stickers, and other passport endorsements. Millions of foreign nationals in the UK already hold eVisas, and the full transition marks the next step in modernising the country's immigration control system.

Amid this rollout, some voices within the Labour Party and former intelligence officials are renewing calls for a broader digital identification framework. Sir Alex Younger, former Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service, more widely known as MI6, argued that the absence of a digital identity system has become a magnet for undocumented migration. "It's absolutely obvious to me that people should have a digital identity," he told the BBC, adding that politicians must stop shifting blame to foreign partners. "Let's stop shouting at the French; a lot of this is on us," he said.

Former Labour minister Harriet Harman also supported the idea, claiming digital IDs would act as a deterrent for those attempting to enter the UK illegally. Their comments followed a new agreement between the United Kingdom and France that aims to return migrants crossing the Channel illegally, in exchange for accepting asylum seekers with legitimate ties to Britain.

Beyond immigration, advocates say a digital identity system would assist with voter verification and access to public services. While concerns remain about government overreach, supporters argue that a well-regulated framework could strike a balance between security and civil liberties.

The government is reportedly considering a smartphone-based identity credential dubbed the "BritCard." This digital form of ID would be used in right-to-work and right-to-rent checks, helping to curb illegal employment and housing. The proposal was authored by the Labour-affiliated think tank Labour Together.

Speaking at the Identiverse technology conference in Las Vegas, Hannah Rutter Deputy Director of Digital Identity at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) acknowledged public scepticism but insisted trust could be restored through robust safeguards. "These technologies aren't new," Rutter said. "The issue is not the tech, it's the lack of trust."

The government is developing a certified system through the Digital Identity and Attributes Trust Framework (DIATF), recently rebranded as Digital Verification Services (DVS). This legal structure ensures providers meet strict standards aligned with international cybersecurity protocols and data protection rules.

Importantly, the UK passed the Data (Use and Access) Bill earlier this year, establishing a legal foundation for digital verification. The law works alongside existing legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the Identity Document Act 2010.

Government officials have confirmed that digital versions of key credentials such as driver's licenses will soon be available, allowing them to be stored in secure digital wallets. For those without a passport or driving license, efforts are underway to expand access through alternative government-issued credentials.

While debate continues around the implications of national digital IDs, the UK's transition to eVisas marks a firm move toward a future of digitised border and identity management, one aimed at restoring order to migration enforcement and enhancing national security through innovation.