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UK May Introduce ID Cards Only for Migrants: Ministers

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UK ministers are reportedly working on proposals to introduce digital ID cards exclusively for immigrants stored on smartphones to verify legal right to live and work in the country without requiring British or Irish citizens to hold one.

Ministers in the United Kingdom are reportedly working on proposals to introduce identity (ID) cards specifically for immigrants, marking a potential shift in how the government manages immigration and public service access. The measure is being considered as part of wider efforts to respond to the country's ongoing migrant crisis.

These digital IDs would document immigration status for non-citizens, enabling landlords, employers, and public services to verify legal entitlement and help curb underground employment and exploitation. Government sources confirm the proposal applies only to migrants; UK and Irish citizens would not be required to hold these digital IDs.

This move comes in response to growing pressure on public systems and an increasing demand for more effective tools to manage immigration flows. Officials believe that such a system could reduce illegal working, help prevent exploitation, and improve public confidence in the immigration system Supporters, including former Prime Minister Tony Blair and over 40 Labour MPs, argue that an immigration-only ID system avoids the backlash associated with universal national ID proposals while targeting illegal working and migration control.

A government insider noted that discussions are ongoing and that no final decisions have been made. "This is about control, clarity, and fairness," the source explained. "We want to ensure that those who are here legally can prove it easily, and those who are not can be identified swiftly."

Civil liberties advocates and MPs have voiced concerns that an ID scheme solely for migrants risks creating stigma and discrimination and could undermine trust in communities. Critics warn that targeting only immigrants with ID requirements could foster division and deepen mistrust in communities.

The UK introduced voluntary national ID cards for foreign nationals and a pilot for UK citizens in the late 2000s; the scheme was abolished in 2010 amid strong civil liberty objections and concerns about privacy and cost. Unlike past universal schemes, this digital ID proposal targets only migrants and is explicitly designed to address immigration enforcement rather than a national ID for all residents.

Officials say the migrant-only digital ID is still at the proposal stage, and any implementation would require legislation, regulatory drafting, and parliamentary approval before being rolled out nationally.

It remains uncertain whether the plan will gain sufficient support, but the migrant—only digital ID represents a strategy to strengthen immigration control without reviving universal identity card proposals.

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