



Making public services work for you with your digital identity

(Cabinet Office)

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About MWN UK

MWN UK has been advancing equality, and social justice for Muslims women and girls since 2003 and is a registered charity (no.1155092) with a national membership. We provide direct support through our Muslim Women's Network Helpline (www.mwnhelpline.co.uk) which focuses on gender-based violence, (primarily domestic abuse and related issues) and Muslim Safety Net Helpline (www.muslimsafetynet.org.uk) which focuses on anti-Muslim abuse, hostility and discrimination. We also conduct research and use lived experiences to identify policy and practice gaps which informs our advocacy, campaign and resource production work to empower women. Further information about our work can be found on our main organisational website (www.mwnuk.co.uk) .

We have responded to the most relevant questions to us.

What do you think the main drawbacks will be, if any, for the government's new national digital ID system?

One of the main drawbacks of the government's new national digital ID system is the issue of digital literacy and digital exclusion. Not everyone has the skills, confidence, or resources to engage effectively with digital systems. Older people, individuals without regular access to Wi-Fi, smartphones, or digital devices, and vulnerable adults may struggle to use a fully digital identification system. These risks exclude certain groups from essential services and creating additional barriers for those who are already disadvantaged.

There are also concerns around affordability and access to technology. Many people are experiencing financial hardship and may not be able to afford reliable internet access, mobile data, or up-to-date devices required to use a digital ID system consistently. This could deepen existing inequalities and disproportionately affect low-income communities.

Another major concern is where personal data will be stored, who will have access to it, and how securely it will be managed. A centralised digital ID system raises important issues around data protection, privacy, and the potential misuse of sensitive information. There are serious questions

about whether data could be shared between departments, private companies, or third parties without individuals fully understanding or consenting to how their information is being used.

Cybersecurity risks must also be considered. Centralising large amounts of personal data could make the system vulnerable to hacking, data breaches, identity theft, or technical failures. If such a system were compromised, the consequences for individuals could be significant.

There are also wider concerns about increasing levels of surveillance and state monitoring. A national digital ID system could enable greater tracking of individuals' activities, interactions, and movements, raising fears about the expansion of a surveillance state. This may lead to a loss of anonymity in everyday life and could disproportionately impact marginalised communities who are already subject to higher levels of monitoring and scrutiny.

Muslim women may face challenges and anxieties in relation to a national digital ID system. There are concerns that increased surveillance and data sharing could contribute to discriminatory profiling, especially for visibly Muslim women who already experience disproportionate levels of scrutiny in public spaces and institutions. This may further damage trust between communities and public bodies.

There are also concerns around facial recognition technology and biometric identification systems, which have been criticised for inaccuracies and bias, particularly affecting women and ethnic minority groups. Muslim women who wear hijab or niqab may face additional barriers, intrusive checks, or repeated verification requirements when accessing services.

For some Muslim women experiencing domestic abuse, honour-based abuse, or coercive control, a highly centralised digital system could create additional fears around safety, confidentiality, and the potential misuse of personal data. If information is improperly accessed, shared, or linked across agencies, this could increase vulnerability rather than protection.

In addition, language barriers and lower levels of digital confidence within some communities may result in certain Muslim women being disproportionately excluded from services if non-digital alternatives are reduced or removed.

There are also specific risks for those affected by violence against women and girls (VAWG). Increased data sharing and surveillance could heighten fears around profiling, discrimination, or the misuse of personal information. For victims of abuse, particularly those trying to leave unsafe situations, a digital ID system may raise concerns around privacy, safety, and the possibility of their information being accessed or tracked in ways that could place them at further risk.

There is also the concern that over-reliance on digital identification could reduce flexibility for people with complex circumstances, including those with insecure immigration status, homelessness, disabilities, or individuals lacking formal documentation.

Overall, while a digital ID system may offer efficiency and convenience, it is important to consider how it could deepen existing inequalities, raise serious privacy concerns, and contribute to increased surveillance if not carefully implemented with strong safeguards and alternatives for those unable to access digital systems.

It is also important to recognise that forms of identification already exist in the UK, such as passports and driving licenses. These already provide physical proof of identity, raising questions

about whether a new digital system is necessary or whether it risks duplicating existing frameworks while introducing additional concerns.

What do you think the main benefits will be, if any, for the government's new national digital ID system?

The main benefits of the government's new national digital ID system appear to be linked to efficiency, speed, and convenience. A digital ID could make certain verification processes quicker, particularly when accessing government services, applying support, confirming identity online, or completing administrative procedures. This may reduce paperwork, administrative delays, and the need for physical documents or in-person verification.

A centralised system could also allow different government departments and public services to access consistent information, potentially improving coordination and reducing duplication across services. In theory, this could make some public services more streamlined, responsive, and easier to access for people who are digitally confident.

A digital ID system may also help reduce some forms of fraud or identity duplication where secure verification processes are in place. It could potentially simplify access to services for individuals who frequently use online systems and digital platforms.

However, these benefits appear relatively limited given that forms of identification already exist, such as passports and driving licenses, which are widely accepted and effective as physical proof of identity. Introducing a digital ID system may therefore duplicate existing structures rather than provide a fundamentally new public benefit.

There is also a risk that the emphasis on efficiency could come at the expense of accessibility, privacy, and individual freedoms if proper safeguards are not introduced alongside the system.

Overall, while a digital ID system may offer some improvements in speed, coordination, and accessibility for digital services, the advantages appear relatively modest when weighed against the fact that reliable forms of physical identification are already in place and widely used across the UK.

On behalf of Muslim Women's Network UK,

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(Advocacy Officer)

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