

UK scales back digital ID plans

BY JILL LAWLESS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — The British government has watered down plans for mandatory digital identification cards, a contentious idea it had touted as a way to help control immigration.

It's the latest policy U-turn by Prime Minister Keir Starmer's embattled center-left government, which is under fire from both opposition politicians and governing Labour Party lawmakers.

Officials confirmed Wednesday that it won't be

compulsory for citizens and residents to show a digital ID card in order to get a job, ditching a key plank of the policy announced in September.

"The digital ID could be one way you prove your eligibility to work," Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander told the BBC, alongside other documents such as biometric passports.

The government said detailed plans for digital ID cards will be "set out following a full public consultation which will launch shortly."

Starmer announced in September that "you will not

be able to work in the United Kingdom if you do not have digital ID. It's as simple as that."

He said the plan would help reduce unauthorized immigration by making it harder for people to work in the underground economy. He said it would also make it simpler for people to access health care, welfare, child care and other public services.

He faced an immediate backlash, with polls suggesting support for digital ID plummeted after Starmer

backed the idea.

Britain has not had compulsory identity cards for ordinary citizens since shortly after World War II, and the idea has long been contentious. Civil rights campaigners argue it infringes personal liberty and puts people's information at risk.

Former Prime Minister Tony Blair tried to introduce biometric ID cards two decades ago as a way of fighting terrorism and fraud, but the plan was abandoned after strong opposition from

the public and Parliament.

After the latest policy shift, opposition Conservative Party chairman Kevin Hollinrake said that "Labour's only consistent policy is retreat." Liberal Democrat spokeswoman Lisa Smart said Starmer's office "must be bulk-ordering motion sickness tablets at this rate to cope with all their U-turns."

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