

## **SERIES ON DIGITAL IDENTITY AND BIOMETRICS**

### ***Topic 2: Border, Travel, and Migration***



**Greater Internet Freedom**

**Centre for Intellectual Property and  
Information Technology Law (CIPIT)  
Strathmore University**

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## **Border, Travel and Migration**

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### **About CIPIT**

**The Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT) is an evidence-based research and training Centre based at Strathmore University, Nairobi, Kenya. CIPIT was established in 2012 and focuses on studying, creating, and sharing knowledge on the development of intellectual property and information technology utilizing diverse methodological approaches to inform debates on ICT applications and regulation.**

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### **About GIF**

**The Greater Internet Freedom Project (GIF) is a three-year, consortium-based, global program implemented by Internews and the GIF consortium across 39 countries. GIF places regional and local organizations at the forefront of the fight to preserve an open, reliable, secure, and interoperable Internet – and, by extension, protects the citizens, civic actors, journalists, and human rights defenders who rely on it to realize fundamental freedoms.**



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# Introduction

*The CIPIT and the GIF have developed exploratory material relevant to pertinent digital identity and biometrics topics. The 'Border, Travel and Migration' topic briefly explores how digital identity has been deployed for border management and travel purposes.*

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The increasing complexity of today's border management and travel systems has resulted in the need for digital identity (ID) solutions collecting vast amounts of personal and sensitive personal data on travellers, both in-country and those crossing border points. This was glaringly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused unprecedented restrictions on travel and movement across borders and countries giving rise to automated biometric border management and travel systems.

The entrenchment of e-border management systems has seen an increased uptake of automation at crossings, including e-visas and e-gates, and biometric corridors. Biometric corridors or eGates are border points that are contactless by nature. A biometric corridor refers to designated areas in border sites or airports where people are processed using biometric technology. It is a fully-automated system that works in a way that allows people to walk straight through a corridor without needing to show a document.<sup>1</sup>

Concerningly, these automated systems require increasingly large sets of data on individuals to enable the creation of watchlists, invoking concerns of mass and targeted surveillance of individuals across the globe.

### **Important Note**

- Biometric technology is increasingly being embraced in airports and border posts worldwide. The use of facial recognition, fingerprint scanning, and iris detection ensures accurate identity verification, enhancing security and streamlining processes.

As these technologies continue to evolve, they promise to further revolutionize border management and travel.

- Blockchain technology is another promising domain in the field of digital ID. It offers the potential for individuals to have a self-sovereign ID, providing them full control over their personal data. In the realm of air travel, the World Economic Forum is piloting a Known Traveller Digital Identity (KTDI) system, a project that utilizes blockchain tech to provide travelers a seamless journey.

**Sources:** [Thales](#); [KTDI](#).

Around the globe, countries continue to embrace various new and emerging practices and technologies related to digital identity in a bid to encourage travel and migration. For example, Estonia has implemented an e-Residency program, which is a government-issued digital ID allowing global citizens to start and manage businesses online. This program is geared at “creating a borderless digital society for global citizens.”<sup>2</sup>

In addition to providing a secure and efficient method of verifying identity, digital identity solutions are increasingly being used by governments and organizations to manage travel policies. This allows for greater control over movement across borders, helping to ensure the safety of travelers while also providing a more efficient system for managing immigration and visa applications.<sup>3</sup>

It is argued that digital ID solutions promote data privacy and security in border management and travel systems. It enables organizations to securely store personal information in a way that ensures only those who have permission can access it. These solutions also provide a secure platform for users to share their data with third parties.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the promising advancements in digital ID solutions, these technologies also raise challenges that need to be addressed. One of the most pressing concerns is privacy and data protection; as individuals' personal and biometric data are stored digitally, the risk of data breaches and misuse of information becomes more

prevalent. Therefore, robust data protection and cybersecurity measures must be in place to safeguard this sensitive data.<sup>5</sup>

Another issue pertains to the accuracy and reliability of biometric technology. Mistakes in biometric recognition can have severe consequences, including a denial of entry into countries through airports or other entry points. Where systems encounter technical glitches or individuals are falsely identified, this can lead to unnecessary delays, personal frustrations, and can even compromise security protocols.<sup>6</sup> As biometric digital ID systems continue to advance and find applications in this sector, addressing these concerns becomes pivotal in maintaining both the efficiency and integrity of identity verification processes.

Lastly, the cross-border acceptance of digital identities remains a challenge. Different countries have varying standards and regulations for digital identities, making it difficult to establish a globally accepted digital identity system. Overcoming these challenges requires international cooperation and harmonization of standards.<sup>7</sup>

# Resources and Reading List

## Journal Articles, Blog Posts and Book chapters

Jim Nash, Homeland Security cheers its emerging digital ID privacy technology – an online portal, 2021 <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202104/homeland-security-cheers-its-emerging-digital-id-privacy-technology-an-online-portal>

- **Summary:** The blog analyses the benefits provided by a mobile portal launched by the Department of Homeland Security. The portal will be useful for travellers, especially digital ID users as it offers additional protection. The technology will transform the customs and border protection by making it seamless for travellers at border points. However, it points out that although the database boasts of having protective policies and tactics, it fails to disclose the owner or manager of the database.

Iproov, UK Biometric Border Control Policy Unveiled – How Can Face Verification Streamline Border Control and Immigration? August 10, 2022 <https://www.iproov.com/blog/biometric-border-control-and-immigration-bio-corridor>

- **Summary:** Iproov, a technological company that provides border control services unpack the UK biometric border control policy. The policy paper speaks of the introduction of biometric e-gates as a new ingredient in border management. The objective is to attain contactless travel for British citizens and their trusted overseas partner. This will enable people to use biometric technology to avoid physical document check when travelling beyond UK borders. Iproov examines how biometrics will work and enable smoother border control.

Noori, S., Suspicious Infrastructures: Automating Border Control and the Multiplication of Mistrust through Biometric E-Gates, *Geopolitics*, 27:4, 1117-1139, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2021.1952183. 2022



- ***Summary:*** The author analyses the progressive change in EU border crossing points with the introduction of electronic gates also known as Automated Border Control (ABC). Noori unpacks the benefits brought about by ABC's infrastructure and the entry of e-gates. One, is that they promise to reduce instances of misuse of other people's ID documents and identity fraud. Thereby improving the trust levels towards border travellers. Two, ABC will replace manual work done by border guards, which has been touted as error-prone and unreliable. Three, e-gates have also raised suspicion due to the danger opaque nature and the risks to data protection. The author analyses how mistakes in the adoption of e-gates might result in exacerbation of the existing mistrust at EU borders.

The World Economic Forum, The Known Traveller Unlocking the potential of digital identity for secure and seamless travel, 2018  
[https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_The\\_Known\\_Traveller\\_Digital\\_Identity\\_Concept.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Known_Traveller_Digital_Identity_Concept.pdf)

- ***Summary:*** This report details the Known Traveller Digital Identity concept as a catalytic prototype capable of transforming the travel and tourism sector as well as medical services, education and beyond.

Wong, S., Beyond Preclearance, Future Borders, Digital IDs, and Privacy Management: A Technology and Policy Roadmap for Border Processing. Borders and Migration: The Canadian Experience in Comparative Perspective. 2023 Jan 10.

- ***Summary:*** The article examines pertinent considerations that should be taken into account when taking up future technology pertaining to governance of borders and migration. The author highlights the history of border clearances, specifically, in the US-Canada border. This includes the impact of introduction of preclearance programs and how it revolutionized the border governance. Consequently, the author looks at the future of borders and the promise of Digital IDs. One of the key

features that stand out with the introduction of this new technology is privacy management. Concepts such as “privacy by design” have to be the founding pillars of future border management.

## Policy Document

United Kingdom Government, New Plan for Immigration: Legal Migration and Border Control  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1092488/CCS204\\_CCS0722436296-001\\_Plan\\_for\\_Immigration\\_E-Laying.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1092488/CCS204_CCS0722436296-001_Plan_for_Immigration_E-Laying.pdf)

- ***Summary:*** The policy document sets out the vision for UK border and legal migration system. It promises a future that streamlined, with huge reliance on digital systems to improve UK security while responding to customer needs. It acknowledges the need to take up digitalization of the immigration system. This includes replacement of paper-based products with online and digital services that are accessible and easy to use. The policy paper captures the vision of the UK Border as one that is looking forward to adopting automated entry to the UK for passengers using all means of transport.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> iProov (2022). [UK Biometric Border Control Policy Unveiled – How Can Face Verification Streamline Border Control and Immigration?](#)

<sup>2</sup> Estonia. [e-Residency Program](#).

<sup>3</sup> ACI World Insights (2023). [Making Digital Airport Solutions the Norm for Travellers](#).

<sup>4</sup> WEF (2018). [System Initiative on Shaping the Future of Mobility: The Known Traveller Unlocking the potential of digital identity for secure and seamless travel](#).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nimra Khan & Marina Efthymiou (2021). [The use of biometric technology at airports: The case of customs and border protection \(CBP\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, n.4.