

# The European Digital ID

08-07-2022 publication by society Vrijbit [www.vrijbit.nl](http://www.vrijbit.nl) - Johan van Someren

**The European Commission is working on a new European Digital Identity, This new app is a personal digital wallet that will contain a digital version of an identity card or passport of the holder and other personal information. The key to it is based on face recognition. This controversial idea brings together all the pro and con arguments from past and nowadays privacy debates. Because it is intended to be widely deployed, significant privacy risks might be involved in addition to the perceived benefits.**

*"Every time an App or website asks us to create a new digital identity or to easily log on via a big platform, we have no idea what happens to our data in reality. That is why the Commission will propose a secure European e-identity. One that we trust and that any citizen can use anywhere in Europe to do anything from paying your taxes to renting a bicycle. A technology where we can control ourselves what data is used and how." note 1*

This announcement of EU President von der Leyen is tending to sound well but is not strictly true. Addressing the problem of rampant data collection by commercial platforms like Google and Facebook does not require a new standard e-identity but legislation to set limits and to regulate the use of data for other purposes. On the other hand big tech platforms would like to add an unique identifier to their users' identities, guaranteed by the European member states. It would just enable them to improve the possibilities to follow all their users activities, even of line. But it is just the intention of von der Leyen to use the potential of collected data for valuable ideas and potential innovation. (note 2) This approach is just illustrating the problem, mixing public and private interests, with their own dynamics that each require different solutions.

## Digital wallet

In a world where many transactions take place on the Internet, it is necessary to establish legal frameworks for this purpose. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of individuals, organizations and companies in the digital world, standards have been established and are set out in the eIDAS regulation, eIDAS stands for 'Electronic Identities And Trust Services'. (note 3) The European Digital Identity is the next step. It is a digital wallet in which you can store all kinds of documents and personal data. And in addition, the European Commission wants to introduce a European Identification Number.

The precursor of the EU ID in the Netherlands, the vID (virtual ID card), has already been tested in several municipalities. Main purpose is still at this moment to approve the face recognition technology. When a citizen is applying for a vID, the procedure begins with reading the chip in the identity card or passport, and the facial scan is immediately compared with a real time image taken by camera. At the end of the procedure another photo is taken and added to the vID which you can activate with a "selfie". The system was rated as user-friendly by volunteers who participated in this project, however people who criticize the use of face recognition will never take part voluntary.

## Benefits

So what are the benefits according to the European Commission?

It will allow European citizens to safely save their documents and personal information in an app but it is much more than an identity document or driving licence. It will contain also medical records, bank cards or even university degree titles. You can use it as a passport, keep your tickets in it, rent a car, order a hotel room, prove your age at a nightclub or when buying alcohol, do financial transactions and store your diplomas in it so you have that handy as a package when you go abroad to study or to take a job in another EU country. But the aggregation of all data creates a perfect track record of all your doings.

## **Self-sovereign identity**

But according Mrs. von der Leyen, we will be in control and we will decide what data to show. The idea behind is the concept of "self-sovereign identity." (note 5) The users will manage their own data and only disclose the data they need but does it work that way in practice? Not necessarily! When we need to identify our self or need to prove that we are performing a legal act, it is not up to us to determine what data to show but to the requesting agency or officer.

## **ID 2020**

The European digital identity is not a stand-alone product. It is in fact a copy of ID 2020. (note 6) ID 2020 inc. is a non-profit organisation based in New York that aims to create easy access to digital forms of identification all over the world to improve the quality of life, especially in poor countries. The organisation is referring to article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "Everyone shall have the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law." The argument behind is that one in seven people globally lacks a means to prove their identity. Systems of identification are archaic, insecure, lack adequate privacy protection and even birth registries are not in order. Modern technologies such as block chain technology and biometrics are presented here as a solution. This is the origin of the digital wallet, the digital identity based on face recognition, iris scans and fingerprints. This idea has resonated particularly well at the World Economic Forum and found its way to the EU and to the Netherlands. Former secretary of state Raymond Knops presented his vision on this subject in a letter to the Parliament, a vision which was largely taken from reports by the WEF. (note 7)

## **Other applications**

The digital wallet is a concept that could be used for other purposes as well. A well-known example is the corona passport. One of the founders of ID 2020 is the vaccine alliance GAVI, a global vaccine alliance that brings together public and private sectors with the common goal of creating access to new and underutilised vaccines for children in the world's poorest countries, so it is not surprising that ID 2020 is working on a vaccine passport. Another application is the Known Traveller Digital Identity (KTDI) project. In January 2018, the Netherlands was approached by the Canadian government and the World Economic Forum (WEF) to take part in a pilot project to test this concept in practice.' In this case the digital wallet also here based on face recognition, contains someone's passport, flight ticket and other documents.

## **Block chain technology**

Until now, we are used to documents containing personal details for identification. Even with the biometric passport this is still the case, but with the EU ID this will change fundamentally. The required information is no longer stored in one device but somewhere in the cloud. The fact that sensitive biometric data is stored elsewhere makes it possible for others to access the data. That's why they will be encrypted and stored with block chain technology. It is supposed to bring security, but who knows the hacking techniques of tomorrow? And even function creep is not unthinkable because the global storage always causes new desires. This shift is already on its way in countries that store the biometric data of their citizens in a database when they have to renew their passport or identity card. This storage makes it possible to identify people without ID and even without informing them.

## **European identity number**

In addition to the EU ID the EU commission wants to introduce an European identity number. Most member states are in favour but the Netherlands as supporter of the EU ID suddenly slams on the brakes when it comes to the European Identification Number. The parliament adopted a motion calling on the government to oppose its introduction. "We fear for security", says secretary of State van Huffelen. According to her, there are alternatives like the Dutch DigiD, which can already be used to log in to institutions in Belgium.

## **Paving a Digital Road to Hell**

The American Human Rights Job Board of NYU School of Law - CHRGJ published in June 2022 a report with the title "Paving a Digital Road to Hell". It describes a dangerous tendency to reduce persons to traceable data such as biometrics, personal characteristics and related attributes. Individuals are primarily judged on their economic value. The fact that every person is unique and has a legal status with corresponding rights is pushed into the background. Big institutions like the World Bank however, consider such systems as a prerequisite for effective development aid, but these benefits are often poorly defined and poorly documented. In countries with non-democratic regimes, such systems are even a threat to social, civil and political rights. Studying this report may lead to the following conclusions:

- 1 Identification systems can be used to identify people with undesirable political opinions and so to the violation of human rights by non-democratic regimes.
- 2 Human beings are reduced to data sets judged almost exclusively on their economic value.
- 3 Establishing a person's identity and forms of an ID card or biometric registration are considered as a human right. Proponents even see it as privacy protection. This is a trap that even privacy advocates fall into.

Europe has a history showing that identity schemes were primarily used to control citizens, mostly for political reasons. On the other hand, registration is also used to perform health care and social benefit systems and other government tasks. Often it goes together and that is also happening now.

The new European digital identity, is paving the way to a world in which a lot of personal data is stored multiple times in a global structure. We cannot foresee exactly the consequences but what we must guard against is ending up in a dictatorship of data that is unstoppable.

1 Announcement of the European Digital Identity – Message by President von der Leyen  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFIs-oL1c4g>

2 Ursula von der Leyen: We want the digital transformation to power our Economy  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ng-2Pivpt30>

3 eIDAS regulation <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/eidas-regulation>

4 VID <https://magazines.rvig.nl/idee/2019/10/vid-het-id-van-de-toekomst>

5 Self-sovereign\_identity (SSI) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-sovereign\\_identity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-sovereign_identity)

6 ID 2020 Digital Identity Alliance <https://id2020.org/>

8 <https://www.openkamer.org/kamervraag/2022Z00327/>

9 <https://theworldnews.net/nl-news/nederland-vrijwel-alleen-in-verzet-tegen-eu-identificatienummer>

10 <https://chrgj.org/2022/06/17/press-release-the-world-bank-and-co-may-be-paving-a-digital-road-to-hell-with-support-for-dangerous-digital-id/>

[https://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Report\\_Paving-a-Digital-Road-to-Hell.pdf](https://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Report_Paving-a-Digital-Road-to-Hell.pdf)

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY "Paving a Digital Road to Hell"**

Governments around the world are designing or implementing digital identification systems, often with biometric components (digital ID). The spread of these systems is driven by a new development consensus which holds that digital ID can contribute to inclusive and sustainable development and is a prerequisite for the realization of human rights. But a specific model of digital ID is being promoted, which draws heavily on the Aadhaar system in India as a source of inspiration. Such digital ID systems aim to provide individuals with a 'transactional' or 'economic' identity, by establishing their uniqueness.

The promise is that with such an economic identity, an individual can transact with both government and private sector actors. This will then improve access to public and private services, fuel economic growth, and contribute to the emergence of truly digital economies.

Unlike traditional systems of civil registration, such as birth registration, this new model of economic identity commonly sidesteps difficult questions about the legal status of those it registers.

Many consider rapid and widescale deployment of such digital ID systems to be dangerous. Evidence is emerging from many countries around the world about actual and potential, often severe and large-scale, human rights violations linked to this model of digital ID. Such systems may exacerbate pre-existing forms of exclusion and discrimination in public and private services. The use of new technologies may lead to new forms of harm, including biometric exclusion, discrimination, and the many harms associated with surveillance capitalism.<sup>(13)</sup> Meanwhile, the promised benefits of such systems have not been convincingly proven. These dangerous digital ID systems may lead to "pain without gain."<sup>(14)</sup>

The World Bank, through its Identification for Development (ID4D) Initiative, has played a central part in the global promotion and support of this new model of digital ID systems. One important role it has played has been in manufacturing consensus in the newly framed field of 'identification for development.' By defining the problem as one of an 'invisible billion' who lack official identity, and presenting digital ID systems as inclusion and rights-enhancing solutions, it has provided legitimacy and a mandate for these systems. It has done this through extensive publications, technical assistance to governments, and knowledge exchanges—including through many opportunities to learn from the Aadhaar experience in India. Furthermore, over US\$1.5 billion in Bank financing across 35 countries is now devoted to identification systems.<sup>(15)</sup> According to the Bank, this includes roughly US\$390 million in supporting civil registration systems, approximately one quarter of investments. Governments in countries such as Nigeria, Mexico, the Philippines, and in West Africa, are receiving significant World Bank financing and support in the design and implementation of digital ID systems that represent this new economic paradigm.

But the World Bank is far from alone in supporting the 'identification for development' agenda. Though the Bank appears to play a critical and central role in the global promotion of these systems, a diverse network of actors, driven by different interests, has emerged to support this model of digital ID. This includes governments, foundations, vendors, and consulting firms. Despite surface references to human rights and development goals to legitimate these activities, serious engagement with human rights norms and values is currently almost completely lacking in this global network.

This document is not just a primer on dangerous digital ID systems and their promotion by the World Bank and the network. It is also a call to action to the global human rights ecosystem—including human rights organizations and other civil society organizations, experts, and activists. Given the severity of the actual and potential human rights violations arising from this model of digital ID, we are not merely sounding the alarm, but also reflecting on what can be done. This document therefore ends with practical suggestions for the human rights ecosystem, including how to ensure that future systems realize rather than violate rights.