

# Coronavirus pandemic could serve as a catalyst to build better digital identity systems

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The coronavirus pandemic could act as a catalyst for a qualitative leap forward in the field of digital identity, a study argues.

The COVID-19 health crisis has resulted in an acceleration in the design, development, and deployment of digital [identity](#) tools and contact-free solutions.

Professor Ana Beduschi, from the University of Exeter Law School, argues this technology could comply more with data privacy and human rights law.

Professor Beduschi said: "Worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the need for more trustworthy digital identity systems to cater to the increasing demand for online public and private services. While the shift to digital activities and services intensifies, policymakers should take the opportunity to review and improve digital identity frameworks.

"Privacy should be at the center of the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of digital identity systems. A better focus on human rights would have a significant impact on the protection of individuals' human rights throughout the identity lifecycle. Moreover, digital identity should not be transformed into surveillance tools by the private and public sectors alike."

The study says it is essential that public authorities evaluate the impact of digital identity technologies beyond data privacy to consider the broader impacts that digital identity can have on individuals' human rights.

Professor Beduschi said: "Data privacy must not be a mere afterthought. It must be placed at the center of the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of digital identity systems, independently of the type of architecture or technology chosen. A data privacy-centric approach should encompass data privacy by design and by default.

"A human rights-based approach to digital identity could help prevent the exacerbation of existing inequalities and discrimination. Human rights impact assessment tools could be used to help identify and address potential issues.

"Digital identity technologies adopted during the pandemic will have a lasting impact on our societies. They will shape how we respond to [data privacy](#) and [human rights](#) within digital identity frameworks. Considering this would help policymakers not only respond to the challenges brought about by the pandemic but also use them as a catalyst for a qualitative leap forward toward building better digital identity systems for post-COVID-19 societies."

Provided by University of Exeter

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