DIGITAL IDENTITY AND BIOMETRICS: RESHAPING AIR TRAVEL IN EUROPE



Digital identity initiatives are growing rapidly in global markets, as governments create and launch solutions for citizens to store and share verified digital credentials. The European Union requires all EU member states to provide their citizens with a European Digital Identity (EUDI) wallet by the end of 2026.

In aviation, such digital initiatives are considered to contribute to the efficiency of travel through the implementation of digital travel credentials (DTCs) and biometric verification in airport processes. However, the initiatives bring up a number of concerns in accordance with the control over personal information, trust, and the competitive environment in the European aviation market.

How Digital Travel Credentials Work

Digital travel credentials (DTCs) represent a digital version of information from a government-issued travel document. **They can be stored in a digital wallet and combined with biometric verification solutions.** In this regard, one of the main advantages of DTCs is that travelers can retain control over their personal information, only sharing the necessary data with authorized parties. The technology can store a traveler's facial image, which was previously extracted from their passport, on their device. As such, airlines do not need to retain this information.

This design element enhances the security of the system and minimizes the risk of privacy breaches. However, some temporary retention of biometric data is required to ensure the efficiency of the processes at the airport. In the future, it will be possible to utilize one digital identity across multiple trust domains and vendors. In this regard, the travelers will be able to use the same digital credentials across multiple segments of their journey. Furthermore, extracting information from a government-issued document eliminates the possibility of errors and additional security checks.

Travelers' Preferences and Concerns

The main supporters of the initiative indicate that the majority of passengers would be willing to use their biometrics to replace passports and boarding passes at check-in, security, and border control. The coalition cites the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) 2025 Global Passenger Survey, which found that 74% of travelers would prefer to use biometrics over other forms of identification, given the appropriate security assurances. The excessive protection of personal information risks undermining the overall concept of digital identity.

According to Phocuswright's research, while some travelers are hesitant to use biometrics, a significant portion of consumers favor the solution. The study found that 36%, 32%, and 25% of U.K., German, and French travelers, respectively, expressed a high degree of trust in biometric entry at airports. In this regard, the coalition notes that, among EU travelers familiar with the EUDI, 59% and 48% of French and German travelers, respectively, said they would use the EUDI for travel-related purposes. The research highlights that the majority of travelers value the benefits of digital identity, including its convenience and enhanced security, such as reduced risk of theft or misuse.

As such, the use of digital identity solutions in aviation can create a positive environment in which

passengers feel safe and comfortable with the technology. The most critical aspect of this framework is the ability of individuals to retain control over their personal information.

The European Aviation Outlook

Various stakeholders emphasize the need for the European Union to take a science-based approach to biometric air travel in order to ensure the competitiveness of the region's airports. In this respect, travelers should retain control over the use of their data with appropriate levels of security, transparency, and accountability.

Biometric technology has already been implemented in a number of public and private enterprise applications. The use of biometrics in aviation can support the industry's ability to accommodate a growing number of passengers while enhancing security and providing a seamless travel experience. The technology is vital for the future of the European aviation market, as it enables a secure and convenient experience for passengers, which is paramount for the industry. It is noteworthy that the competitive environment in which European airports exist is also at risk. The European Airports Association (EuroAirport) and SITA found that **some non-European airports have already implemented the technology to offer a better customer experience and facilitate travel.** As such, if European airports do not embrace the change, they risk losing their competitive advantage. Connecting flights can become simply inconvenient at European airports, where lines are likely to form. This, according to SITA, is a growing concern, as travelers increasingly favor airlines that operate out of non-European airports.

DTCs and EUDI wallets will enable a more efficient and traveler-friendly experience without compromising the safety and security of aviation processes. The use of EUDI, combined with appropriately regulated biometrics, will create a win-win situation for all stakeholders in the European aviation market. Those who will be able to provide a better and more transparent experience for travelers will benefit from the growing market. It is of paramount importance that policymakers, airports, and technology providers remain committed to creating an environment that is enhanced for both sides of the equation.

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