

FIEC examines the challenges and potential of social ID cards in the EU construction industry

The SIDE-CIC project, co-funded by the European Commission and coordinated by FIEC and the EFBWW, has progressed from mapping national social ID card schemes to assessing their legal and technical feasibility for interoperability.

The project has produced a set of recommendations to guide Member States and social partners to achieve greater transparency, compliance and mobility in the construction sector.

A social ID card can be defined as an individualised worker certification tool which contains visible and safely stored electronic data that aims to attest that specific social and/or other requirements have been met by the worker's employer and/or the worker him/herself.



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WHY INTEROPERABILITY MATTERS

The feasibility study confirms that social ID cards have value for workers' protection, compliance, and transparency.

Yet the mechanisms for social ID cards in Europe's construction sector remain fragmented – 18 different systems exist in 16 countries, each with its own legal basis, data model and enforcement rules.

This makes it difficult to recognise and control workers' credentials and company information across borders, leaving gaps in enforcement.

In a sector characterised by high mobility and complex subcontracting chains, interoperability between national systems and access to data in other countries is crucial.

A connected system would allow site managers and inspectors to verify workers' identity, social security coverage, training and qualifications, as well as information about companies from other countries, across Member States.

This would not only promote fair labour mobility and help prevent undeclared work and social dumping but also reduce administrative burdens for employers, particularly SMEs.

LEGAL AND TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY

The legal analysis demonstrates that interoperability between the existing national systems is possible under EU and national law, though political will and careful implementation are crucial.

In order to achieve this, several models could be envisaged:

- Bilateral or multilateral agreements between card issuers. This solution can be easily achieved but is the less comprehensive as it doesn't create an EU-wide interoperable solution.

- A shared data space enabling secure and standardised data exchange, which is the most promising option. It offers high flexibility and takes into account the differences between national schemes.

- A new common scheme involving multiple Member States.

- Integration with EU-level tools such as ESSPASS (European Social Security Pass), the EU Digital Identity Wallet, or the Interoperable Europe Act.

Each option has its own advantages and drawbacks in terms of how fast it can be implemented and managed.

The most pragmatic approach could be to combine them, starting with bilateral connections and gradually expanding towards an EU-wide data ecosystem.

The technical study shows that the main barriers are not technological but organisational.

Proof-of-concept demonstrations proved that secure data exchange between schemes is technically viable using data spaces and digital wallets.

However, success requires strong governance, common standards and trust between national systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Based on the mapping report and on the feasibility studies,

FIEC and EFBWW draw a set of recommendations, that are non-binding and fully respect national autonomy, serving as a reference framework to guide Member States and social partners towards interoperable social ID cards across Europe.

First, FIEC and EFBWW recognise the strong added value of social ID cards and recommend that all Member States introduce mandatory social ID cards for workers in the construction sector, with a minimum set of information.

The reports highlighted that the main challenges for interoperability are linked to the fact that the existing national schemes are different.

A better alignment of the existing schemes could help to develop interoperability. Additionally, to maximise their effectiveness, national schemes should be designed to ensure compatibility with EU-level tools such as ESSPASS and the EU Digital Identity Wallet.

At the same time, systems must remain flexible, allowing both public authorities and social partners to operate schemes, provided they can interconnect to guarantee accuracy and reliability.

The SIDE-CIC project may be coming to an end but the European social partners in the construction industry will continue to work on this topic.

One way could be to do a follow-up pilot project to test and put into practice the solutions identified in the feasibility study.

An assessment and considerations to consider before launching a pilot are included in the report.