

Public-private partnerships showcased in airport biometrics adoption

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Digital identity projects for national ID and border control are being initiated or advanced by governments around the world, creating opportunity for biometrics providers, with Idemia's technologies for airports an example making headlines this week. Accenture has also won a pair of contracts, and Clearview is giving its facial recognition service away for free to the Ukrainian government, while in non-government news Shufti Pro picks up a dramatic early funding boost.

Top Biometrics new of the week

America's TSA has launched an Identity Management Roadmap, which sets out the agency's strategy for a cohesive digital identity ecosystem, including new technologies like mDLs and the new CAT II biometric document scanners. An FTE webinar featuring representatives from TSA, Delta, airport operator LAWA and Idemia similarly explored the need for collaboration and traveler choice, from an aviation perspective.

Aviation deployments also continue apace, with Idemia I&S NA running a trial of mobile carts for biometric enrollment to TSA PreCheck at a Mississippi airport, and a Texas airport is implementing both face biometrics for both arrivals and departures. Accenture has won a credential-merging contract with TSA, while Vision-Box has selected Unisys to support its installation of 93 biometric gates in Australia and New Zealand.

Accenture is also among the technology providers and universities awarded contracts to research 'whole-body' biometric identification by the U.S.'s IARPA. The awards, under the 'Biometric Recognition & Identification at Altitude and Range' (BRIAR) program, are for work on identification in challenging conditions, such as over large distances or through atmospheric turbulence with drones.

As a way of establishing ownership of digital content, NFTs have a potential role in decentralized digital ID systems, according to proponents. Sceptics point to authentication challenges NFTs leave unaddressed, but if the legions of enthusiastic developers and investors turn their attention to solving them, they could become a popular tool even with imperfect functionality.

The UK government has set up a new organization to oversee the implementation of a trust-mark scheme for security and privacy-preserving digital ID services from the private sector. The new Office for Digital Identities and Attributes (ODIA) is part of DCMS, at least for now, but the government is also working on legislation for how the digital identities will work, and what for.

China's government is planning to make public services broadly accessible online through the digital version of its national ID card in 2022 to encourage its wider adoption. Outside of 15 major cities, reception of the digital ID has been inconsistent. A Canadian province is selecting a vendor to help it set up an optional government digital ID, meanwhile.

UK Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner Fraser Sampson is pressing vendors to consider public acceptance and even ethics, not just data protection regulations and legal requirements. In a keynote at the NPCC CCTV Conference, Sampson made his case in terms of both moral responsibility and self-preservation, with specific examples.

Facial recognition from Clearview AI has been deployed in the war in the Ukraine, after the company says the Ukrainian government took up its offer for free service. The specific application or applications it is being used for remains unconfirmed, but the company says it holds 2 billion images from Russian social media in its database.

The use of Clearview in Ukraine demonstrates both the potential for positive uses of facial recognition that are overlooked in attempts at broad bans, and jurisdictional challenges associated with the technology, according to a Cato Institute blog post.

The war also prompted a wave of renewed interest in Biometric Update's coverage from last year of Ukraine passing a law to recognize its digital passports as legally equivalent to the physical travel ID document in many situations.

Zambia has begun enrolling citizen's biometrics for its new national ID system, with the first 15,000 out of the country's total population of over 18 million. The Integrated National Registration Information System (INRIS) replaces a paper-based system that assigned an ID number from 16 years of age, and is expected to include biometric ID documents, birth and death certificates.

Shufti Pro is the latest biometrics provider to announce a major leap in funding, with a \$20 million Series A to reach new markets and built out its IDV and compliance portfolio.

Elsewhere in industry funding, Aware is investing \$2.5 million in Omlis Limited and partnering with its subsidiary Miracl to extend Aware's cloud authentication capabilities, and Patriot One is seeking \$10 million in a public offering to continue growing its threat detection business.