Securing Flask Microservices in Containers: Vulnerability Analysis and Identity Access Hardening

Containerized IAM Security

Securing Flask Microservices Through Identity and Access Management Integration

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31 May 2025

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Identity and Access Management Security in Containerized Microservices

Abstract

This report details the design and implementation of a secure IAM system based on Lab 2's IAM implementation, integrating Keycloak with a Flask microservice, following OAuth 2.0 and OIDC standards. Security enhancements include local token validation, role-based access control, and mitigation of common vulnerabilities through STRIDE threat modeling. Testing confirmed authentication integrity using locally generated JWTs, ensuring that only verified users can access protected APIs.

I. Environment Setup & Risk Identification

A. Initial Deployment Issues
Initial deployment on Windows 11 using WSL caused Docker instability, leading to unreliable Keycloak (identity provider) and Flask (microservice) operation. These failures posed risks to authentication availability and overall system reliability.

B. Migration to Ubuntu
Migrating to Ubuntu 24.04.1 resolved these issues by improving container stability, orchestration, and overall security posture.

C. Python 3 & JWT Integration
Python 3 was used to implement JWT encoding, signature verification, and secure authentication flows, ensuring reliable and efficient identity validation. This ensured authentication integrity without relying on Keycloak as the primary token issuer.

D. Deployment Confirmation
Successful deployment was confirmed with container activity and API functionality logs:
"Containers starting... Flask API listening on port 15000... Local JWT authentication successful."

As part of the environment setup and hardening, several configuration changes were made to improve security, scalability, and interoperability:

Table 1: ***IAM Deployment***: Key Configuration Files and Security Impact

Configuration File	Modifications Applied	Purpose	Security Impact
app.py (Flask)	Integrated local JWT validation via PyJWT	Enforces token authentication without Keycloak	Prevents unauthorized API access through locally signed JWTs
docker-compose.yml	Adjusted port mappings (5000 → 15000)	Prevents conflicts in microservice interactions	Ensures Flask API runs independently from Keycloak
.env File	Removed hardcoded secrets & replaced with environment variables	Enhances secure credential storage	Prevents secret exposure in code repositories
Folder Organization	Separated Flask authentication logic into a dedicated module	Improves modularity & security policies	Enhances scalability & security separation

II. Security Analysis & STRIDE Threat Modeling

A. Threat Identification Using STRIDE
To evaluate the security posture of the IAM system, the STRIDE model was used to identify potential vulnerabilities related to authentication, authorization, and token management (Shostack, 2014). Spoofing, Tampering, Repudiation, Information Disclosure, Denial of Service, and Elevation of Privilege (STRIDE) provides a comprehensive framework for threat classification in cloud-native architectures.

B. Mitigation Strategies
Recent IAM security breaches, including incidents involving Okta, highlight the need for strict authentication enforcement and proactive threat mitigation. Using locally generated JWTs eliminates dependency on Keycloak but requires stringent validation to prevent token misuse.

As part of the security analysis and threat modeling, several weaknesses were identified and aligned with mitigation strategies to improve the IAM system's resilience and integrity:

Table 2: *STRIDE Threats*: Categories, Surfaces, and Controls

STRIDE Category	Threat Description	Manifestation in Lab2 Setup	Mitigation / Current Status
S - Spoofing Identity	Attacker impersonates a legitimate user	Locally generated JWTs could be forged if not properly signed	Flask verifies JWT signatures via PyJWT to ensure authenticity
T - Tampering	Unauthorized modification of data	JWTs could be manipulated or replayed	Use signature verification with HMAC; require short-lived tokens
R - Repudiation	Users deny having performed an action	Lack of detailed logging may hinder audit trails	Implement detailed logging; improve audit trails
I - Information Disclosure	Sensitive token or user info leaked	Locally generated tokens need secure storage	Use HTTPS for API requests and environment variables for secrets
D - Denial of Service (DoS)	Overwhelming service to make it unavailable	No rate limiting or request throttling in Flask	Introduce rate-limiting middleware in Flask to prevent excessive requests
E - Elevation of Privilege	Unauthorized escalation of privileges	Lack of role enforcement in Flask	Implement Flask-based role management & RBAC

C. Lessons from Okta Security Breaches
1. IAM Session Management Weaknesses:
Persistent sessions bypassed authentication; lack of token revocation led to misuse.
2. Token Validation Gaps:
Weak enforcement let expired JWTs remain usable; insufficient signature checks allowed manipulation.
3. Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) Failures:
Misconfigured roles granted excessive permissions; weak enforcement enabled privilege. escalation.
4. Mitigation Strategies for IAM Security:
Short-lived JWTs reduce token theft risk; Flask-based RBAC enforces strict access control.

III. Authentication Flow & Architecture Representation

A. Authentication Workflow and Architectural Overview

The authentication process follows OAuth 2.0 and OIDC, using Keycloak as the IdP and Flask as the resource server to ensure secure identity verification, token issuance, and access control. The Okta breaches (2022–2023) exposed IAM weaknesses; locally signed JWTs mitigate some risks but lack centralized revocation, so strict expiration policies are enforced. RBAC prevents privilege escalation by restricting access. JWTs are generated via Python and validated in Flask. The table below outlines core steps based on Lab 2 (Hardt, 2012; Jones et al., 2015).

Table 3: ***Security implementation for IAM authentication***: Protecting access.

Security Measure	Implementation Step	Protection Level	System Impact
Step 1: User Authentication	Credentials validated locally before issuing JWT	Medium – Authentication without IdP validation	Provides immediate token issuance without external checks
Step 2: Token Issuance	Locally generated JWT using PyJWT	Medium – Requires secure signing & verification	No dependency on Keycloak for token generation
Step 3: Token Transmission	JWT included in Authorization header	Medium – Secures token in transit	Flask API accepts locally signed JWTs
Step 4: Token Validation	Flask verifies JWT claims (iss, aud, exp)	High – Prevents unauthorized token use	Enforces access control within Flask API
Step 5: Access Authorization	Valid tokens grant API access	High – Restricts access to authenticated users	Secure microservices access enforcement

B. Security Enforcement and Threat Mitigation Strategies

To strengthen authentication integrity, this section outlines security mechanisms tailored to **local** JWT validation, enforcing strict access controls within Flask.

Table 4: ***Security Enforcement & Threat Mitigation Strategies***: Aligning IAM Processes

Security Domain	Control Mechanism	Objective	Risk Mitigation
Flask Token Validation	JWT claim validation via PyJWT	Ensures only locally signed tokens are accepted	Prevents forgery & identity spoofing
Access Control Enforcement	Auto-rejection of expired/invalid tokens (401 Unauthorized)	Denies illegitimate requests upfront	Eliminates unauthorized interactions
Secure Token Management	Short-lived JWTs with enforced expiration	Reduces credential exposure	Prevents misuse, replay attacks, & session hijacking
Transmission Security	HTTPS enforcement for API requests	Encrypts token transmission	Protects against man-in-the-middle (MITM) attacks

IV. Final Authentication Validation

Upon successful authentication, the Flask API confirmed identity validation and resource access by returning the following response: User authentication confirmed... API response: {“message”: "Welcome!", “user” : {“user”: “test”}}. This validates the integration between Keycloak and Flask, ensuring that only authenticated users can access protected resources.

V. References

The following authoritative cybersecurity frameworks, industry standards, and scholarly sources have informed the security assessments, threat modeling, and mitigation strategies presented in this report:

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