

# Terminating Asylum Partnerships, “Resettling Refugees”: The UK Ends the “Rwanda Solution”

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*The dishonour board is long. Advisors from Australia, account chasing electoral strategists, former Australian cabinet ministers happy to draw earnings in British pounds. British Conservative politicians keen to mimic their cruel advice, notably on such acid topics as immigration and the fear of porous borders.*

Ghastly terminology used in Australian elections rhetorically repurposed for the British voter: “Turning the Back Boats”, the “Rwanda Solution”. Grisly figures such as Boris Johnson, Priti Patel, Suella Braverman, Rishi Sunak, showing an atavistic indifference to human rights. The cruelty and the cockups, the failures and the foul-ups. Mock the judges, mock the courts. Soil human dignity.

All this, to culminate in the end of the Rwanda Solution, declared by the new Labour Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, as “dead and buried before it even started”. Yet it was a sadistic policy of beastly proportion, offering no prospect of genuine discouragement or deterrence to new arrivals, stillborn in execution and engineered to indulge a nasty streak in the electorate.

In April 2022, the then prime minister, Boris Johnson, announced the [Asylum Partnership Arrangement](#) with Rwanda, ostensibly designed “to contribute to the prevention and combating of illegally facilitated and unlawful cross border migration by establishing a bilateral asylum partnership”.

Mysteriously, British officials suddenly found Rwanda an appropriate destination for processing asylum claims and resettling refugees, despite Kigali doing its bit to swell the ranks of potential refugees. In June 2023, the UK Court of Appeal [noted](#) the risks presented to asylum seekers, notably from ill-treatment and torture, arguing that the British government would be in breach of the European Convention on Human rights in sending

them into Kigali's clutches. In November that year, the Supreme Court [reached the same conclusion](#).

These legal rulings did not deter the government of Rishi Sunak. With lexical sophistry bordering on the criminal, the Safety of Rwanda bill was drafted to repudiate what the UK courts had found by denying officials and the judiciary any reference to the European Convention of Human Rights and the UK's own Human Rights Act 1998 when considering asylum claims.

The bookkeeping aspect of the endeavour was also astonishing. It envisaged the payment of some half a billion pounds to Kigali in exchange for asylum seekers. The breakdown of costs, not to mention the very plan itself, beggared belief. The Home Office [would initially pay](#) £370 million under the Economic Transformation and Integration Fund, followed by a further £20,000 for every relocated individual. Once the risibly magic number of 300 people had been reached, a further £120 million would follow.

Operational costs for each individual kept in Rwanda [would amount](#) to £150,874 over the course of five years, ceasing in the event a person wished to leave Rwanda, in which case the Home Office would pay £10,000 to assist in the move.

With biting irony, the UK government had demonstrated to Rwanda that it could replace the supposedly vile market of people smuggling in Europe with a lucrative market effectively monetising asylum seekers and refugees in exchange of pledges of development.

By February 2024, according to the National Audit Office, the UK had paid £220 million to Rwanda, with a promise of another £50 million each year over three years. It was a superb return for Kigali, given that no asylum seekers from the UK had set foot in the country. When [asked at the time](#) why he was hungrily gobbling up the finance, Paul Kagame feigned serenity.

"It's only going to be used if those people will come. If they don't come, we can return the money."

With an airy contemptuousness, the Kagame government has refused to return any of the monies received in anticipation of the policy's full execution. Doris Uwicyeza Picard, the central figure coordinating the migration partnership with the UK, [was blunt](#):

"We are under no obligation to provide any refund. We will remain in constant discussions. However, it is understood that there is no obligation on either side to request or receive a refund."

In [another statement](#), this time from deputy spokesman for the Rwandan government, Alain Mukuralinda, the sentiment bordered on the philosophical:

"The British decided to request cooperation for a long time, resulting in an agreement between the two countries that became a treaty. Now, if you come and ask for cooperation and then withdraw, that's your decision."

In an [official note](#) from Kigali, the government haughtily declared that the partnership had been initiated by the UK to address irregular migration, "a problem of the UK, not Rwanda." Rwanda, for its part, had "fully upheld its side of the agreement, including with regard to

finances”. Redundantly, and incredulously, the note goes on to claim that Kigali remained “committed to finding solutions to the global migration crisis, including providing safety, dignity and opportunity to refugees and migrants who come to our country.”

The less than subtle message in all of this: Rwanda is ready to keep cashing in on Europe’s unwanted asylum seekers, whatever its own record and however successful the agreement is. Kagame has no doubt not lost interest in Denmark, that other affluent country keen on outsourcing its humanitarian obligations. While Copenhagen abandoned its partnership with Rwanda in January 2023 regarding a similar arrangement to that reached with the UK, it is now showing renewed interest, notably after hosting a high-level conference on immigration.

In opening the conference on May 6, the Social Democratic Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, [speaking in language](#) that could just as easily have been associated with any far right nationalist front, decried the “de facto” collapse of the “current immigration and asylum system”. Those in the Rwandan treasury will be rubbing their hands in anticipation.

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*Featured image: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak holds a press conference on the Rwanda asylum plan, 22 April 2024 (Licensed under OGL 3)*

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