

# UK Labour government speeds up deportations to Nigeria in expanding anti-migrant crackdown

Harvey Thompson, Robert Stevens  
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Britain's Labour government used a state visit last week by Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to announce an expansion of its anti-migrant crackdown.

The Home Office statement, "New UK–Nigeria partnership to speed up removals," said the agreement ensures that "Visa overstayers, foreign criminals and failed asylum seekers will be removed from British soil far more easily..." The agreement was signed by Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood and Nigerian Interior Minister Dr. Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo.

Central to the deal is that "UK letters, an alternative identification document issued to individuals without a valid passport and used to support the return of people with no right to remain in the UK, will be recognised by the Nigerian government for the first time."

This was condemned by human rights organisations in Britain and Nigeria. Renowned Nigerian human rights lawyer Femi Falana, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, stated, "The use of the 'UK letters' to return Nigerians is not and cannot be a substitute for proper travel documents. This was "fundamentally at odds with international human rights standards," as it "lowers the threshold for deportation—potentially allowing individuals to be removed without proper verification of their identity or nationality." He warned that this could lead to "wrongful or arbitrary deportations."

Currently, there are 961 Nigerian asylum seekers in the UK who have exhausted their rights of appeal and have no claim to refugee status. There are 1,110 foreign nationals from Nigeria convicted of crimes in UK jails whom the Home Office is seeking to deport. Regardless of the severity of their crimes, they will be removed more rapidly under the new system.

The Home Office framed the deal as central to its agenda of mass round-ups of migrants. Tens of thousands have been deported since the government came to office in July 2024.

Home Office minister Alex Norris said of the deal, "It is another step in our mission to restore order to the border by ensuring those who have no right to be here are swiftly removed. Nigeria is a key partner in our work to tackle illegal migration, as the UK's largest African visa market".

"The agreement marks a shared commitment to safe, fair and well managed migration," the Home Office said. "Annual returns to Nigeria have nearly doubled to 1,150. Returns and deportations of illegal migrants and foreign criminals from the UK have reached nearly 60,000 since the 2024 election."

Britain's right-wing tabloid media, constantly demanding more draconian anti-immigration policies, hailed the policy. The *Daily Mail* said Mahmood had addressed the problem that, "Currently, one of the main barriers faced by the Home Office in its bid to deport a foreign national is waiting for their home country to issue a passport or other travel papers".

The *Daily Telegraph* enthused, "[Home Secretary] Shabana Mahmood will deport thousands of foreign criminals and failed asylum seekers before they can use human rights laws to appeal and block their removals."

As part of the deal, Nigeria will review its laws to tackle immigration crime, including potentially tougher sentences. A wider agreement is expected to include measures on cybercrime and fraud.

British imperialism is bolstering links with Nigeria, a country rich in oil and mineral resources. During the visit, the government announced that UK Export

Finance (Britain's export credit agency and a government department) would guarantee £746 million (\$902m) in loans to Nigeria. This will fund the redevelopment of two major Nigerian trading ports: Lagos Port Complex (Apapa Quays) and the Tin Can Island Port Complex.

The state visit—the first by a Nigerian leader to the UK in 37 years—included a lavish banquet at Windsor Castle. King Charles III described Nigeria as an “economic powerhouse, a cultural force and an influential diplomatic voice.”

Streamlined deportations to Nigeria are part of a sweeping attack on the rights of migrants in the UK, including arguably the most severe curtailment of asylum protections in the post-war period.

Previously, asylum seekers whose claims were accepted were granted five years of protection under the Labour government of Tony Blair. From this month, adults and accompanied children claiming asylum will receive only 30 months of protection. After that, their cases will be reviewed, and deportation will be enforced if the country of origin is deemed “safe.”

These measures are designed to put the most vulnerable people into permanent insecurity and to provide repeated opportunities for their removal.

Mahmood has also doubled the normal waiting period for settled status in Britain from five to ten years, with the expectation that it will be extended further for many. The changes apply retrospectively to thousands of migrants currently in the system.

Financial and accommodation support for asylum seekers is now discretionary.

In the final days of Rishi Sunak's Tory administration, Starmer and his opposition front bench attacked its flagship anti-migrant Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill. Under it, asylum seekers would have been deported to Rwanda and forced to live in hovels while their claims were processed. Britain's Supreme Court ruled the policy unlawful because Rwanda is not a safe third country for migrants.

But Labour's opposition was always from the standpoint that there were more legally and cost-effective measures to achieve the same result.

Yvette Cooper, the then Shadow Home Secretary, and now Starmer's Foreign Secretary, argued that the problem was that it was “extortionately expensive” and

“only covers 1 percent of those arriving in the UK.” She complained, “There is no plan for the other 99 percent who will now join a permanent costly backlog, with the taxpayer footing the bill.”

Labour would “put the Rwanda money into strengthening our border security instead. That means new counter-terror-style powers, new international intelligence-sharing agreements, and new cross-border police working with European partners...We have to restore order to the border.”

The Nigeria deal, following attacks on the rights of asylum seekers, is one of an endless stream of measures making good on its promises.

On Thursday, measures announced on March 5 became law, imposing an emergency brake on study visas from Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan, and work visas from Afghanistan. According to the Home Office, 39 percent of the 100,000 people who applied legally to come to Britain last year were from these four countries. Labour's solution: cut off completely any chance of anyone else arriving via this route.

The Labour government—supporting genocide and war overseas and imposing xenophobic anti-migrant and pro-social austerity at home—is a deeply right-wing party, social democratic only in name. It joins social democratic parties across Europe complicit, and even playing a leading role, in the stripping back of asylum protections, demonisation of migrants, construction of detention camps and strengthening of “Fortress Europe”—as thousands continue to die on its walls.



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