Europe wants to deport refugees to Rwanda

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23 November 2026

Germany, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Greece want to set up a so-called “Return Hub” in the East African country of Rwanda. The five states announced this at a joint meeting in Vienna on November 16. As early as next year, refugees are to be deported to Rwanda if they are not granted asylum in Europe, are classed as “obliged to leave” and cannot in practice be deported to their countries of origin.

People who have fled to Europe from war, exploitation and social upheaval are in future to be taken to Rwanda, to remain there or to disappear. Postcolonial relations of exploitation are being taken to the extreme. Europe is planning to dispose of the victims of its own imperialist policies in a country it once plundered as a colonial power and whose elites are offering themselves as willing accomplices in human rights crimes.

With its recently adopted “Return Regulation,” the European Union (EU) has paved the legal ground for the creation and operation of so-called “Return Hubs” in third countries outside Europe. At the beginning of 2026, EU interior ministers had agreed on a concept of “safe third countries.” In future, rejected asylum seekers are to be deported to these countries even if they have no connection whatsoever to them—through family, friends or previous stays, for example—and even if the country did not lie on the route by which they fled.

The term “Return Hub” is therefore misleading, because if the announced deportations from Europe to Rwanda go ahead, those deported there will not have come from Rwanda, will never have lived in the country before and will have no contacts there.

The EU Return Regulation does not prescribe any concrete standards for the accommodation or care of those affected in the third countries. Formally, only third countries that comply with international human rights standards and the prohibition on further deportation under international law are supposed to be eligible—the so-called principle of non-refoulement, under which no onward deportation may take place to states where people face persecution. But this formal declaration is unlikely to be worth the paper it is written on. That can already be seen from the choice of Rwanda as the location of the first “Return Hub.”

Rwanda, a “safe third country”

Rwanda, a former German and Belgian colony, is an impoverished, dictatorially ruled country in East Africa. It ranks 159th out of 193 states in the current United Nations Human Development Index. According to official figures, around 60 percent of the population live in poverty. The average salary in public administration is €150 a month.

Paul Kagame has ruled Rwanda since 1994, the year of the Rwandan genocide, which claimed the lives of around 1 million people. During the Rwandan civil war, Kagame was commander of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), having previously been trained for this role at the US Army’s Command and General Staff College in the United States.

The RPF took power during the genocide and has formed the government ever since. Kagame was appointed president in 2000 and has repeatedly extended his term of office through constitutional amendments. In elections, he invariably wins more than 90 percent of the vote. Most recently, in 2024, he had himself confirmed in office with 99.18 percent.

Opposition candidates are regularly excluded from elections and newspapers, and gatherings are banned and journalists shot.

A central component of the Rwandan economy is the plundering of the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A United Nations group of experts has documented Rwanda’s links to the illegal trade in minerals (coltan and gold) and found that rebel groups backed by Rwanda, in particular the March 23 Movement (M23), have taken control of mining areas in the east of the DRC. These groups smuggle the minerals across the border into Rwanda, where they are fed into international supply chains.

Rwanda can therefore hardly be regarded as a country that is “safe” for refugees or that has a “positive approach” or “prospects” to offer deportees, as German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) put it with boundless hypocrisy. Rather, the country is in the frame as a partner precisely because Kagame and the Rwandan leadership possess the necessary lack of scruples and have amply proven their loyalty to Washington and its allies.

Rwanda as a partner for deportations

In recent years, Rwanda has already successfully offered itself to various states as a destination for deported migrants and for their further confinement or disappearance.

As early as 2013, Israel and Rwanda concluded an initially secret agreement on taking in asylum seekers. According to official figures, between 2013 and 2018 Israel coerced some 4,000 refugees from Sudan and Eritrea into “voluntary departure” to Rwanda and Uganda. The alternative was indefinite detention in the Holot refugee prison in the desert near the Egyptian border.

According to research by the Israeli refugee aid organisation Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (HRM) and the BBC, many of those deported to Rwanda had their Israeli papers taken from them as soon as they arrived at Kigali airport, so that from then on, they were effectively in Rwanda illegally. They were threatened with imprisonment and forced to flee further, or relieved of a large sum of money and deported straight across the border into the neighbouring country. Either way, it was impossible for the paperless “voluntary leavers” to settle and find work in Rwanda. Rwandan opposition politician Frank Habineza said of the 4,000 refugees deported from Israel, “Nothing is known about their whereabouts.”

As early as 2014, Israel’s Supreme Court had ruled that the Holot refugee prison violated human dignity and ordered its closure. It was finally closed in 2018 following various protests at home and by the UN. This brought an end to the practice of extorted “voluntary departure” to East Africa, which had threatened some 20,000 refugees in Israel.

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In 2019, Rwanda signed a memorandum with the UNHCR and the African Union under which a total of 2,760 refugees had been evacuated from Libya to Rwanda by April 2025. They came mainly from Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Mali and Chad. A transit centre was set up in Gashora in Bugesera district, some 60 kilometres from the capital Kigali, to receive the refugees. By April 2025, the great majority of the refugees had already left Rwanda again, the UNHCR reported.

In 2022, Britain, under Prime Minister Boris Johnson, pursued the "Rwanda Asylum Plan," through which refugees who had entered Britain from "safe third countries" were to be flown to Rwanda to go through asylum procedures there. If they were granted asylum, according to the British plan, they could settle in Rwanda; otherwise, they would have to leave the country. In neither case would they ever be allowed to enter Britain again.

In June 2022, an interim ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) halted the first British deportation flight to Rwanda. Britain's Supreme Court later declared the policy unlawful because in Rwanda there was a risk of "refoulement"—that is, of asylum seekers being sent back to states where they face persecution.

Although no deportations from Britain to Rwanda took place as a result, in 2023 British authorities did in fact deport a group of Tamil refugees there, whose boat had landed at the US-British military base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. A year after their arrival in Kigali, the BBC reported that the deported Tamils in Rwanda faced a ban on working, harassment, de facto house arrest, a lack of medical care and a complete lack of prospects. "I don't know how many more years we will have to live as stateless prisoners of the British government without freedom," read one of the many desperate appeals the group had addressed to official bodies in Britain, quoted by the BBC.

In April 2025, Rwanda took in an Iraqi refugee deported from the United States. Shortly afterwards, the US and Rwanda agreed on the deportation of up to 250 people from the United States to the East African country. At the end of August, a further seven people deported from the US arrived in Rwanda; nothing was made public about their nationality or backgrounds. Rwandan government spokeswoman Yolande Makolo told the press that three of the seven had decided to return to their countries of origin—a further indication that refoulement is the practice.

The EU states are now joining this illustrious group of states that use Rwanda as a deportation destination in order to rid themselves of responsibility for refugees. The prospect of deportation to Rwanda is also intended to act as a deterrent, so that refugees do not set out for Europe in the first place, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen stressed.

In a statement, Rwandan Interior Minister Vincent Biruta described Rwanda as "a welcoming country for refugees and migrants." An Associated Press report points to the benefits Rwanda expects from the partnership. "Rwanda has the political will and wants these deals for its own reasons including diplomatic and economic benefits from these partnerships," AP quotes Kigali political analyst Gonzaga Muganwa as saying. And Stephanie Wolters of the South African Institute of International Affairs points out that Rwanda makes itself attractive "by opening its doors to arrangements that suit European countries who are trying to offload a complicated and difficult issue."

The European Union adopts the policies of the far right

With the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) adopted in 2024 and the European "Return Regulation" built on top of it in 2026, the EU has gone over to an openly far-right migration policy. Democracy, freedom and human rights may be invoked in grand speeches, but they play no role in political practice. The reactionary nature of the European Union comes openly to the fore in its treatment of refugees and migrants—the most vulnerable section of the population.

In the European Parliament, a coalition has formed between the conservative parties of the European People's Party (EPP), led by German Christian Social Union (CSU) politician Manfred Weber, and the openly far-right parties to push through the relevant legislation. But the policy is supported just as much by the Social Democrats, the Greens and the pseudo-left.

Mette Frederiksen, Denmark's social democratic prime minister, has adopted the vocabulary and conspiracy narrative of fascist forces. In an interview with the Danish newspaper *B.T.*, she described the plans to deport refugees to Rwanda as a step against a "great population replacement" in Europe. The antidote, she said, was a "strong majority culture." She wanted "a Denmark that is Danish," and offered an ethno-nationalist definition to go with it: "After all, we are a Danish society and, by origin, an ethnically Danish tribe."

In Germany, the Social Democrats (SPD) are a mainstay of the government that is placing itself at the head of this essentially fascist policy in Europe—even if individual SPD deputies shed a few crocodile tears or even announce "resistance." The leader of the Austrian Greens, Leonore Gewessler, has called the plan to deport refugees to Rwanda "one of the most expensive symbolic-policy solutions of all." What the bourgeois press describes in this context as "criticism" of the interior ministers' plans is not dissent from their basic political direction, but simply a reminder that the Greens would like to act against refugees more cheaply and effectively.

The treatment of asylum seekers and migrants shows clearly how far the entire European establishment has shifted to the far right.

The same interior ministers who are today planning the deportation of refugees to Rwanda in order to deter migrants, and who are making Fortress Europe ever more brutal, will have just as few scruples tomorrow about crushing the social protests of young people and workers in Europe's cities. Indeed, European governments are already moving to forcibly suppress the growing opposition to their policies of war and redistribution in favour of the rich. Their recourse to authoritarian forms of rule—seen most sharply in asylum and migration policy—serves to arm them for the class struggles that are developing.

The working class must not allow itself to be divided along "ethnic" lines. European workers have more in common with migrants from other parts of the world than with the ruling elite in their own countries. Democratic rights, freedom and a good life can be achieved for all—and not on the bones of refugees and migrant workers. On this basis, workers must tear down Fortress Europe and replace it with the United Socialist States of Europe.

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