15.11.2026

Background paper Return Hub

Rwanda and the governments of Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece and the Netherlands are jointly exploring the possibility of establishing a **return hub model** in Rwanda. The model would be based on an **equal and mutually beneficial partnership** between Rwanda and the five EU Member States, **aligned with a broader partnership**, covering not only migration but also other areas of common interest.

This **new and innovative way of cooperation** would complement the existing framework for international migration governance and add new options for effective and efficient **migration management across continents**. It forms part of a broader effort to enhance the credibility, effectiveness, fairness and sustainability of the current global asylum and migration system. The goal is to establish an enduring and long-term solution for effective returns in close cooperation with international organisations and fully in accordance with obligations under national, EU and international law, including international human rights law, to provide a **new chance for those who do not have the right to stay in the EU**.

The new **EU Return Regulation** provides the legal framework for an agreement or arrangement with a country outside the EU on the return of third-country nationals without a right to stay in the EU. The aim is to establish a return hub model that effectively concludes the return process and provides an additional possibility for Member States to return persons in full compliance with national, EU and international law, as well as full adherence to human rights standards.

The target group is migrants without a right to stay in the EU who are subject to an **enforceable return or removal decision** in one of the five EU Member States and for whom return to their countries of origin is not feasible in a timely manner, for example due to a lack of return cooperation of the country of origin or a lack of cooperation by the person concerned. Whether to return **vulnerable persons** to such a hub needs to be reviewed with extra care. **Unaccompanied minors** will be **excluded in accordance with the EU Return Regulation.**

In contrast to the model of conducting the asylum procedure in a country outside the EU, the return hub model under the EU Return Regulation would not be a place where asylum claims are assessed, but a location to which persons with no right to stay in the EU and an enforceable return decision could be returned. Thus, relevant asylum or immigration procedures would first have to be carried out in the EU Member States and have to be determined in accordance with relevant national and EU laws, so that the migrants concerned neither have a right to asylum, international protection nor are entitled to reside in the five EU Member States on any other grounds.

Upon arrival in Rwanda, migrants would be offered a **residence permit**. Migrants would be received in a welcome centre where their basic needs would be provided for. This would be an **open and temporary facility**, where they would stay for a short period of time before moving to **appropriate community accommodation.** They would also be provided with **local integration support and vocational training.** The migrants would be given the **opportunity to stay and fully integrate** in Rwanda, including access to the labour market. At any time, they would have the right to leave Rwanda voluntarily, either for voluntary return to their country of origin or to go to any other country where they can enter and stay legally. For both durable solutions, local

integration and reintegration in the country of origin, assistance from international organisations would be provided.

As with all cases of forced return, the five EU Member States will respect under all circumstances the principles of non-refoulement as well as other rights and obligations for migrants under applicable international law, including human rights law. No one will be transferred to a return hub if there is a real risk of inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.

To oversee the practical implementation, an **independent mechanism** will be established.

The model would take a **step-by-step approach with necessary care but with clear ambitions:** The project would commence with an inception phase, followed by a scale-up to full implementation once there is a successful proof of concept.

The aim is to create a **cost efficient and sustainable model** with EU Member States covering the direct costs of the return hub and financing integration and migrant welfare projects, implementing measures that also benefit citizens of Rwanda and contribute to development objectives of Rwanda. Cost synergies would be achieved through joint action and reduction of costs in EU Member States.

Rwanda's efforts to provide protection and a safe environment for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers have been commended by international organisations. The UNHCR has recognised the country's generosity in hosting refugees and its commitments to providing dignified living conditions and opportunities for self-reliance. Since 2019, in partnership with the African Union and UNHCR, and through the Emergency Transit Mechanism, Rwanda has provided protection, healthcare, psychosocial support and skills development to 3,274 refugees and asylum seekers evacuated from dangerous conditions in Libya, of these 2,685 have since been resettled to third countries. This initiative demonstrates Rwanda's commitment to protecting human dignity as a shared international responsibility, and how African countries can play a meaningful role in providing solutions. The total refugee population in Rwanda stands at approximately 140.000 persons.

The **European Commission**, as observer, contributed to discussions on how the relevant provisions could be implemented in line with EU law. At the request of the receiving government, **IOM** is prepared to provide care and assistance to migrants with necessary safeguards in place. With the intention of preserving the integrity of asylum systems and international protection for those in need in the five EU countries, **UNHCR** is engaged in constructive discussions with these countries and Rwanda to provide advice, in a good offices capacity, on the compliance of the return hub process with international human rights law standards.