



# NIAS Area Studies

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## IN FOCUS

### UK-Rwanda asylum deal: Three issues

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## AFRICA IN BRIEF

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## COMMENTARY

### UK-Rwanda asylum deal: Three issues

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Apoorva Sudhakar



Image Source: Muhizi Olivier/AP/CNN

On 14 April, the UK announced it would relocate asylum seekers to Rwanda, citing that the UK's asylum system had been subjected to humanitarian crises and people smugglers for long. The UK Home Secretary Priti Patel said the [UK will provide assistance to Rwanda](#) to ensure that relocated asylum seekers would receive “five years of training, integration, accommodation, health care.” With these facilities, the asylum seekers can later choose to settle and continue living in Rwanda. The UK’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson said: “Our compassion may be infinite but our capacity to help people is not,” and added, “We can't ask the British taxpayer to write a blank cheque to cover the costs of anyone who might want to come and live here.” Johnson maintained that Rwanda is one of the safest countries with a welcoming approach to migrants.

#### What is the UK-Rwanda deal for asylum seekers?

Patel termed the plan a “joint new migration and economic development partnership.” The UK has already paid 120 million pounds to Rwanda to kickstart a five-year pilot project. The pilot project would relocate single men who have

arrived since 1 January 2022 or will arrive, in the UK from France by boats through the English Channel, and trucks. Following this, the UK will pay more money to process more asylum requests.

Rwanda cited that it had previously hosted refugees from Libya and Afghanistan. Therefore, Rwanda has maintained that it has the capacity to accept the asylum seekers that the UK proposes to relocate. However, Foreign Minister Vincent Biruta maintained that Rwanda would “prefer not to receive people from immediate neighbours like the DRC, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania” and those with criminal records.

#### Three issues in the UK-Rwanda asylum deal

Despite Patel’s claims that Rwanda is an ideal country for relocation, there have been criticisms to the plan.

First, the intentional opposition to the plan. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said the deal was a violation of international law and contradicts the “States’ responsibility to take care of those in need of protection.” Contrary to the UK government’s reasoning that the plan would deter asylum seekers, the [UN said the deal would increase risks](#) as refugees would opt for other routes. In Rwanda, the [opposition has raised several concerns](#) including asking the government to address issues which force Rwandans to flee before accepting refugees. The Green Democratic Party of Rwanda’s president said accepting asylum seekers would

increase the competition for land and resources. As of 2015, Rwanda had the second-highest population density in Africa and on 20 April, The Washington Post reported that with twice the population density of the UK, Rwanda hosts at least five times more refugees than the UK.

Second, the state of human rights in Rwanda. Despite the UK's current claims that Rwanda is a safe third country for asylum seekers, [many have questioned the state of human rights in Rwanda](#) previously. Rwanda ranking 160th out of 189 in the 2020 Human Development Index and 156th out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index are indicators of the poor state of human rights. In 2021, the Director-General for Europe at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office called on the UN to investigate reports of restrictions on civil and media freedom, alleged extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and so on. At the time, the UK had supported the above claims and expressed disappointment over Rwanda's alleged inaction. Therefore, it is unclear why the UK has changed its perception and opted for Rwanda as a safe third country.

Third, UK's larger anti-immigration scheme. The latest plan comes amid the current government's position on the subject. For example, on 25 April, The Guardian reported that Patel had previously introduced a "[refugee pushback](#)" policy wherein the refugees arriving on dinghies from France through the Channel would be pushed back. The pushback policy was, however, withdrawn, days before a judicial review. Similarly, another bill, the [nationality and borders bill](#), has come under scrutiny; Patel claimed the bill would ensure a safe and legal route for asylum seekers arriving in the UK; later, the Home Office reportedly admitted that the bill does not provide for any government-backed route.

### **UK not the first country to consider relocation**

The UK is not the first country to propose policies aimed to deter irregular asylum seekers. [Australia, Denmark and Israel](#) have also introduced similar plans in the past.

Australia began relocating asylum seekers to Nauru and Papua New Guinea in 2001. According to Australia's Border Force, 4000 people have been relocated between 2012 and 2019 alone. Australia maintains that this plan has prevented deaths at the sea.

In 2015, the EU signed a deal with Turkey wherein the latter agreed to receive asylum seekers who had arrived in EU countries. In return, the EU had promised to provide aid, ease visa rules for Turks and progress on Turkey's request to join the EU.

In the same year, Israel introduced a similar plan wherein asylum seekers, mostly from Sudan and Eritrea, were given two choices: to return to the country of origin or receive USD 3500 to avail of a one-way ticket to a third country, which included Uganda and Rwanda. If found remaining in Israel, they would be jailed.

In 2021, Denmark passed legislation providing for the relocation of asylum seekers outside the EU while their asylum request was under process. The European Commission criticised and the African Union condemned the plan at the time. The AU maintained that Denmark's move was xenophobic. However, the UK's latest announcement has [revived Denmark's efforts](#) to find a third country that would accept asylum seekers.

### **Passing the buck to smaller countries**

As the UK's plan continues to be debated and has brought the spotlight back to other countries with similar plans, several questions have been raised. However, as seen in the case of Israel and Australia, the policies are not foolproof. Further, what

would happen to asylum requests rejected by Rwanda? What prompted Rwanda to accept the deal? The UK's plan and Denmark's revived efforts come at a time when European countries are relaxing their rules to accept Ukrainian refugees. Therefore, are these plans indeed decided by the race? The questions may remain

unanswered, but rich countries are shifting responsibility to smaller countries and externalising the responsibility to accommodate refugees is an emerging trend.

## Recent publications from the NIAS Africa Studies

Apoorva Sudhakar, "Africa, Russia, and the War in Ukraine: Three reasons behind abstentions and silence," *Africa Weekly*, 19 April 2022

Anu Maria Joseph, "Looking Back: Darfur conflict and its key drivers," *Africa Weekly*, 12 April 2022

Sankalp Gurjar, "The rise of East African Community: From the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean," *Africa Weekly*, 12 April 2022

"60 years of Algerian independence," *Africa Weekly*, 29 March 2022

"Libya: Political Polarization and Parallel Governments," *Africa Weekly*, 22 March 2022

Nireekshan Bollimpalli, "Africa's slow COVID vaccination continues. Four reasons why," *Global Politics*, 13 March 2022

## AFRICA IN BRIEF

20 April-26 April

By Mohamad Aseel Ummer and Apoorva Sudhakar

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### TUNISIA

#### Migrant boat sinks off the coast off Tunisia killing nearly 17

On 23 April, four boats carrying migrants from Tunisia to Italy sank off the coast of Sfax city. According to local reports, the death toll rose to 17 on the second day of the incident. Sfax has emerged to become a major transit point for illegal migrants to Europe who attempt to cross the Mediterranean in makeshift boats. Various other ports and coastlines in the North African region such as Ceuta and Melilla have also seen a considerable number of similar incidents in recent years. The increased number of illegal migrants making such precarious voyages indicates worsening living conditions in the continent and a red flag for European emigration. (“[Death toll from migrant shipwrecks off Tunisia rises to 17](#),” *Reuters*, 24 April 2022)

#### President extends his powers by seizing the election commission

On 22 April, Kais Saeed issued a decree stating that he is seizing control of the election commission, and would replace its members. The opposition condemned the decision as an attempt to sabotage the integrity of elections in the country. He has also informed that out of the nine members commission, he would retain three officials and will place himself as the head of the commission. The opposition opined this was another attempt by Saeed to consolidate his position and embolden his sphere of influence. Amidst a dismissed parliament and judicial council, Saeed is planning to restructure the constitution. Tunisia has been under severe financial stress since the pandemic, and with the recent political upheavals the country is facing unrest and insecurity. (“[Tunisian President seizes control of electoral commission](#),” *Reuters*, 22 April 2022)

### KENYA

#### Former President Kibaki dies at 90

On 22 April, the third president of Kenya, who had remained in office from 2003 to 2013 Mwai Kibaki passed away. The death was announced by current president Uhuru Kenyatta; it was widely held that Kibaki was ailing and suffering severe health conditions. Kibaki was an expert economist educated in Britain. He had attempted to lift the Kenyan economy from plummeted levels, but his attempts were widely hindered by systematic corruption and economic graft. His presidency was also marred by the nationwide riots and violence after his controversial re-elections in 2007. Moses Wetangula, a former cabinet member recalled: "As his foreign minister, I ran many missions to stabilize Somalia and other pockets of instability including Congo." (“[Kenya's Former President Kibaki dies at 90](#),” *Reuters*, 22 April 2022)

### SOUTH SUDAN

#### UN condemns increase in violence in Leer county

On 25 April, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) condemned the surge of violence in Leer county. The UN has highlighted the role of armed youth from Koch and Mayendit counties for the rising violence in the Leer county. The UN's condemnation comes after 72 people were reportedly killed, 11 injured and 64 cases of sexual violence reported between 17 February and 7 April in the area; 40,000 people have fled the violence. Meanwhile, the UN has deployed additional peacekeepers to address the situation. (“[UN condemns ‘horrible’ surge of violence in South Sudan](#),” *UN News*, 25 April 2022)

## NIGERIA

### IS claims responsibility for Taraba bombing

On 21 April, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the explosion on 20 April killing nearly 30. The explosion occurred in a market in the Taraba state, where alcohol was sold. The outfit released its statement on a Telegram channel and claims to have targeted “a gathering of infidel Christians.” The IS openly expressed satisfaction and for destroying the liquor store. Armed robberies, and abduction have become increasingly rife in the country since the beginning of the pandemic. North-eastern Nigeria is the worst affected region with frequent occurrences of violence and militancy. The recent attack marks an expansion of the Islamic State’s territory into the middle-belt region of the country. The country is caught in a violent power struggle between rivalling militant outfits like Boko-Haram and ISWAP causing escalated insecurities (“[Islamic State claims Nigeria bombing, says about 30 killed or hurt](#),” *Reuters*, 21 April 2022)

## MALI

### UN criticises Mali for preventing investigation into Moura massacre

On 20 April, the UN condemned the Malian authorities for preventing UN investigation into the Moura massacre during a raid between 27 March and 31 March. The UN said it is “extremely concerned” by Mali’s reaction as the allegation has attracted international attention due to the alleged involvement of Russia’s Wagner Group. According to a Human Rights Watch report, at least 300 people were executed during the raid in Moura. The survivors claimed that white mercenaries suspected to be Russians had taken active participation during the massacre; Mali dismissed these claims. A UN spokesperson estimated that the death toll could go as high as 500, and added that “time is of the essence to ensure accountability, prompt and effective

justice for the victims.” The soldiers during the raid purportedly have raped and looted. Mali has been home to major Islamist militancy and faces major threats from outfits like Al Qaeda and Islamic State. The 2020 military coup has created instability and the straining of Mali-French relations has further exacerbated the situation. (“[UN says investigators prevented access to site of Mali killings](#),” *Reuters*, 20 April 2022)

## NIGER

### Niger approves redeployment of French troops from Mali

On 23 April, Niger’s legislative body approved the deployment of French troops into the region to fight Islamist insurgency. In February, President Mohammad Bazoum had agreed to welcome the deployment of the French troops from Mali. The bill to deploy French troops received approval of an overwhelming majority in the Parliament. Nearly 3000 French troops are currently stationed in the region as part of the Takuba task force to fight militancy in the region. The number of troops was halved by the French in early 2022. The French decision came amid strained relations between Mali’s military government and the allegations of a deal between the military government and the Wagner group was a major blow to the Macron administration. The new bill would give further opportunity for the French to embolden their presence and influence in the region. (“[Niger approves re-deployment of more European special forces from Mali](#),” *Reuters*, 23 April 2022)

## REGIONAL

### East African Community agrees to joint military action in DRC

On 22 April, seven countries of the East African Community (EAC) agreed to the deployment of a joint regional military force in the Democratic Republic of Congo to fight the increasing and decades-old threat of Islamist insurgency in the country. DRC became a member of the

EAC in March, and a meeting was held on 21 March. The meeting called on armed groups to engage in political dialogue for resolutions or to be prepared to be dealt with militarily. The UN runs one of the largest peacekeeping operations in the country, and despite of years of efforts with several setbacks and security failures, the troops have failed to establish peace. It is estimated that nearly 120 militia groups, some with ties to Islamic State and other outfits from neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda operate in the country. Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) is the most notorious among the insurgents, wreaking havoc and violence in the country. Military operations are often retaliated by killing civilians, it is estimated that in 2021 alone the group has killed nearly 1200 people. (“[East African Community agrees on regional forces to try to end Congo unrest](#),” *Reuters*, 22 April 2022)

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### **UNICEF warns of an avalanche of child deaths**

On 22 April, a press release from the UNICEF said the number of children in the Horn of Africa, at the risk of severe drought conditions, has risen by 40 per cent between February and April, from 7.25 million children to 10 million. The risks include acute hunger, malnutrition and thirst. The UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa said: “If we don’t act now, we will see an avalanche of child deaths in a matter of weeks,” and added, “Famine is just around the corner.” Between February and April, the total number of people classified as food insecure increased from nine million to 16 million. (“[At least 10 million children face severe drought in the Horn of Africa – UNICEF](#),” *UNICEF*, 22 April 2022)

#### **About the authors**

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## [About NIAS Africa Studies](#)

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

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## [About the team](#)

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Apoorva Sudhakar is a Project Associate at the School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Her areas of interest include peace and conflict in Africa and South Asia. She has previously worked on the conflict over the Nile Dam and the abductions in Nigeria.

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### *Anu Maria Joseph*

Anu Maria Joseph is a postgraduate scholar at Department of Political Science in Madras Christian College, Chennai. Her areas of interest include democracy in Africa, human rights issues, ethnic conflicts in Africa, Afro-European and Afro-China relations.

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Poulomi Mondal is a postgraduate scholar at the South Asian Studies Centre at the Pondicherry University. Her interests include governance in the Sahel, Eastern and Central Africa, and issues related to maritime governance and non-traditional security.

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