

Motion

Expressing solidarity with young refugees in the united kingdom and across wider europe

signed by: British Youth Council (BYC)

co-signed by: European Liberal Youth (LYMEC),
International Federation of Liberal Youth
(IFLRY), International Movement of Catholic
Agricultural and Rural Youth (MIJARC Europe),
European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS),
Polish Council of Youth Organizations (PROM),
Young European Federalists (JEF Europe),
International Falcon Movement - Socialist
Educational International (IFM-SEI)

The European Youth Forum is deeply concerned by the British Government's recent rhetoric on refugees. As a network of over 100 youth organisations, all committed to the fundamental humanitarian values underpinned by the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), we are unwavering in our belief that the rights of refugees should be respected and upheld.

We recall the United Kingdom's **existing national obligations under the 1998 Human Rights Act (Article 1 on jurisdictions and Article 13 on access to effective remedy)**. We also recall the **United Kingdom's** international obligations as a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention (Article 1 on the definition of a refugee **and Article 33 on prohibition of expulsion or return ('refoulement')**), the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 14 on asylum), the 1950 European Convention for Human Rights (ECHR) (Article 3 on the prohibition of torture); the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 22 on child refugee protections) among others. We express alarm at the British Government's so-called 'Rwanda deportation policy' and its efforts to undermine the right to asylum.¹

First unveiled in April 2022, the Rwanda deportation policy constitutes an effort by the British Government to deal with the exponential increase in migration levels it has experienced in recent years. Rather than upholding the fundamental right to claim asylum, this policy means any undocumented migrant who enters the United Kingdom will be deported regardless if they are fleeing conflict or persecution.

This policy's most controversial feature concerns its intended aim to forcibly deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, with whom the United Kingdom struck a £120m "migration deal". This deal is alarming given that internal Foreign Office memos have revealed that civil servants repeatedly warned senior UK

Government officials about Rwanda's abysmal human rights record.² Notably, this is evidenced by the UK's High Commissioner to Rwanda, who stressed that the country "has been accused of recruiting refugees to conduct armed operations in neighbouring countries".³

When the policy was first launched, hundreds of charities and NGOs decried the policy as an alarming development which threatened to further endanger the lives of asylum seekers, a group who by their very circumstances are already highly vulnerable.

Adding to the national outcry, the international community rallied in condemning the policy. Filippo Grandi, the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, decried the policy as "all wrong"⁴, while Dunja Mijatović, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, branded the policy as sending "a worrying signal" which risks "seriously undermining the global system of international [refugee] protection[s]".⁵

In June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights granted a legal injunction, blocking on the basis that this policy violated the ECHR, specifically in relation to Article 3's prohibition on torture. Had it not been for this legal intervention, it is highly likely that these asylum seekers would have been illegally deported to Rwanda.

Since the summer of 2022, the situation has continued to worsen, with many senior Members of Parliament now turning to more extreme language, and also increasing their attacks on the ECHR. This has carried on into 2023, as British Ministers have ramped up their efforts to deport asylum seekers - most recently by proposing a new hardline bill (the 'Illegal Migration Bill') to press ahead with their original Rwanda policy.

1 Sky News (2023): *UK officials working on starting deportation flights to Rwanda 'by summer'*. Online: <https://news.sky.com/story/migration-policy-to-seal-off-all-loopholes-as-officials-work-towards-deportation-flights-by-summer-1-2837413> [Accessed 2 Apr. 2023].

2 The Guardian (2022): *UK ministers ignored evidence Rwanda violated human rights, court told*. Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/05/deported-uk-asylum-seekers-human-rights-at-risk-in-rwanda-court-told> [Accessed 2 Apr. 2023].

3 Ibid.

4 United Nations (2022): *UK's bid to export some refugees to Rwanda, 'all wrong', says UN refugee chief*. Online: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120262> [Accessed 2 Apr. 2023].

5 Council of Europe (2022): *United Kingdom government's intention to offshore asylum processing to Rwanda sends a worrying signal - Commissioner for Human Rights - www.coe.int*. Online: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/united-kingdom-government-s-intention-to-offshore-asylum-processing-to-rwanda-s-ends-a-worrying-signal> [Accessed 3 Apr. 2023].

With an intensifying situation, multiple reports have concluded that the level of anti-refugee activity in the United Kingdom has risen dramatically. For example, the number of far-right 'migrant hunts' taking place has doubled in the past year⁶ and on February 10th 2023, hundreds of far-right demonstrators engaged in violent protests outside a hotel used to house asylum seekers. According to local media reports and several police accounts, demonstrators attempted to surround the hotel, with many shouting abuse to intimidate asylum seekers housed in the hotel.⁷

This captures the severe effect that unconfirmed and extremist-amplified online rumours can have in a national environment in which migrants and asylum seekers are routinely demonised by senior government officials and legislators.

Amid a tense and politically-charged situation within the United Kingdom, we demonstrate our collective solidarity with the thousands of asylum seekers who are currently in detention and face deportation to Rwanda.

We condemn all efforts to demonise refugees and question their status as refugees. Demonisation neglects the pain and suffering many refugees encounter when fleeing their home countries, and the incredible bravery they demonstrate. Such a stance erodes their sacrifice and the horrible conditions they have had to endure fleeing war, torture or other forms of political and/or identity-based persecution.

We strongly urge the British Government, a founding member of the Council of Europe, to scrap its deportation plans; stop using hateful and divisive rhetoric and agree to treat refugees with the dignity and compassion they deserve. Beyond living up to its international commitments, we call on the United Kingdom to once again commit itself to the humanitarian and pro-refugee values it has historically prided itself on.

We firmly believe that refugee rights are human rights and that all governments worldwide should

make it unequivocally clear that they will not attempt to undermine the civic and international legal protections afforded to refugees.

Although this motion heavily focuses on recent developments taking place in the United Kingdom, we also recall that similar trends are also being seen in other corners of Europe. We are resolute in our belief that all governments should never waiver in their commitment to ensuring access to asylum.

Therefore, in line with the Council of Europe, the United Nations and various other humanitarian bodies, we call on the British Government to:

1. Immediately cease their current efforts to demonise and dehumanise young asylum seekers;
2. Rescind its egregious 'Rwanda deportation policy' scheme and offer an unreserved apology to all the refugees who have been threatened with deportation;
3. Recognise the hardships that all refugees, particularly those who are young and those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, face upon seeking refuge in another country;
4. Abide by its international legal obligations as stated under the 1951 Refugee Convention and commit itself to the full implementation of the right to asylum;
5. Provide verbal, financial and political support to youth organisations, **civil society and humanitarian associations** working to bridge divides and meaningfully integrate young refugees into society;
6. Cease all efforts to undermine, question and politicise the jurisdictional authority of the European Court of Human Rights and the United Kingdom's membership of the Council of Europe.

6 Care4Calais (2023): *Surge in anti-refugee activity: new analysis*. Online: <https://care4calais.org/news/surge-anti-refugee-activity-new-analysis/> [Accessed 2 Apr. 2023].

7 The Independent (2023): *Asylum seekers in hotel targeted by rioters put under curfew as security increased*. Online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/migrant-hotel-riot-knowsley-curfew-security-b2282633.html?amp> [Accessed 2 Apr. 2023].

7. Work with the Council of Europe's Special Representative on Migration and Refugees to safeguard the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and unaccompanied children and young people in line with the existing obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Council of Europe's fundamental values.

8. Implement existing European convention frameworks and recommendation papers relating to these groups.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



The European Youth Forum is funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the Council of Europe or the European Youth Foundation. Neither the European Union nor any other granting authority can be held responsible for them.

