

March 2024 -- Briefing note for local councillors -- Rwanda 'voluntary departures'

On Wednesday 13 March 2024 it was reported that the Home Office is telephoning people to offer them £3000, over the phone, if they move to Rwanda. Very little has been publicly announced about this scheme.

The Home Office is claiming that this policy is merely an extension of their existing voluntary returns scheme, whereby people were encouraged to return to their countries of origin. The Home Office changed the name of their [guidance](#) from 'Voluntary and assisted returns' to 'Voluntary and assisted departures' on Monday 11 March, a few days before calls reportedly began. However, there is clearly a big difference between assisting someone to return to their country of origin, where they have contacts and an understanding of the system, and sending them to a country they may never have visited.

It has been reported that these calls are targeting people who have been refused asylum in the UK. However, it is not clear whether this includes, for example, people who have been refused asylum but have not yet appealed, or people whose asylum claim is being treated as withdrawn by the Home Office. The majority of asylum refusals are overturned on appeal, and we are aware of reports that people's asylum claims are being wrongly treated as withdrawn if, for example, the Home Office has sent a letter to the wrong address.

We have grave concerns about the ethics of this new scheme, which comes at a time when the Government is making a concerted effort to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda ahead of the General Election. Please note that this scheme is entirely separate from efforts to send people who have not yet claimed asylum to Rwanda. Under that scheme, people who arrive to the UK and claim asylum, but whose asylum claims are deemed to be inadmissible, will be forcibly removed to Rwanda to have their asylum claims processed there by the Rwandan government. Under this scheme, people who have already claimed asylum in the UK and been refused are being offered £3000 to leave the UK and relocate to Rwanda.

There are serious ethical questions about offering people who are not allowed to work or claim benefits, and who may be at risk of or experiencing destitution, a cash incentive to leave the country. There has also been no clarity as to what immigration status people who are relocated under this scheme will have access to upon arrival, and how long this status will last for.

If you have residents who may be at risk of receiving these phone calls, please:

- Share [this graphic](#) in local WhatsApp groups
- Advise residents that they **DO NOT** have to say yes
- People who receive a phone call purporting to be from the Home Office should ask for the request in writing, and seek legal advice
- Residents can find a legal advisor by searching 'OISC advisor finder' or 'directory of legal aid providers'