



National Audit Office



REPORT

Investigation into the costs of the UK–Rwanda Partnership

Home Office

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Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the
National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of
Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act

Gareth Davies
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

28 February 2024

What this investigation is about

1 In April 2022, the government announced that it had agreed a Migration and Economic Development Partnership (the partnership) with the Government of Rwanda. The partnership falls under the government's third country asylum processing policy, which is a process whereby individuals identified as being in the UK illegally, or seeking asylum after arriving illegally, are relocated to a safe third country. Under the partnership, the UK government provides development funding to Rwanda and will meet processing and integration costs for each relocated person. The Home Office is responsible for administering the partnership.

2 On 8 December 2023, the Chairs of the Public Accounts and Home Affairs Committees wrote to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) to express their concern at the lack of information available to Parliament in relation to spending on the Rwanda partnership. They asked whether the National Audit Office would consider the costs of the partnership, and its value for money. The C&AG decided to produce a factual report covering the costs incurred to date and the Home Office's estimate of potential costs when the partnership is operational. This report does not conclude on value for money, given that this would rest on whether the partnership deters individuals from making illegal journeys to claim asylum in the UK.

Scope of the work

3 This report sets out the direct financial consequences of the Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda. It covers:

- the costs incurred to date and the basis on which future costs would be incurred when the partnership is operational; and
- the Home Office's oversight and approach to monitoring the partnership.

4 For the purposes of this report, we use the phrase 'the partnership' to refer to the agreement reached through the Migration and Economic Development Partnership and the provisional treaty agreed with Rwanda in December 2023 to establish an asylum partnership. Our report does not cover the possible financial implications for other departments, such as the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. We have not considered the wider costs of implementing the Illegal Migration Act 2023 in this report, such as the cost of expanding detention facilities necessary to hold people before they are relocated.

5 As at February 2024, the UK government had not finalised revised arrangements with the Government of Rwanda to reflect the provisional treaty, so the payment schedule may be revised. The Home Office considers the operation of the partnership as part of its wider modelling of the Illegal Migration Act. At the time of our work, the Home Office was assessing a wide range of options on the timing and number of people who could be relocated. The Home Office intends to review and update its plans as it progresses arrangements to relocate people to Rwanda. These plans are based on a series of assumptions about what could happen when the partnership is operational and, as a result, are inherently uncertain at this point. Given the level of uncertainty, we have set out the payments and costs that the UK government is committed to make and the basis on which future costs would be incurred. Our report is based on information provided by the Home Office in February 2024.

Summary

Key findings

6 In implementing the partnership, the Home Office would make two types of direct payments to the Government of Rwanda. These are:

- payments to the Economic Transformation and Integration Fund (ETIF), which is designed to support economic growth in Rwanda; and
- payments to cover asylum processing and operational costs for individuals relocated to Rwanda. The Home Office has agreed to pay a five-year integration package for each relocated person, which covers accommodation, essential items such as food, medical services, education and other integration programmes. The partnership runs until 13 April 2027, and the Home Office is planning to relocate people up to March 2028. On this basis, it would potentially continue to make payments under the partnership until March 2033 (five years after the final person was relocated).

7 Under the partnership, the Home Office would pay £370 million into the ETIF and then further amounts depending on the number of people relocated to Rwanda. As at February 2024, the Home Office had paid £220 million to the Government of Rwanda under this mechanism, and has agreed to make further payments of £50 million each in April 2024, 2025 and 2026. The UK government has also agreed to make ETIF payments that are dependent on the number of individuals relocated:

- £120 million once 300 people have been relocated; and
- payments of £20,000 per individual relocated (paragraphs 2.1 to 2.3).

8 The Home Office would also pay a total of £151,000 per individual relocated to cover the asylum processing and operational costs. The payments include an integration package and are made in stages over five years if an individual remains in Rwanda. If a relocated individual decides to leave Rwanda, the UK would stop payments for that individual but would pay the Government of Rwanda a one-off £10,000 per individual to help facilitate their voluntary departure. As at February 2024, the Home Office had paid £20 million to the Government of Rwanda as an advance payment against which future processing and operational costs will be offset (paragraphs 2.4 to 2.7).

9 The Home Office is also incurring direct costs in setting up and operating the partnership. These include staff costs in managing and overseeing the partnership, costs of responding to legal challenges, and travel and escort costs for individuals relocated to Rwanda. As at February 2024, the Home Office had incurred costs of £20 million, which it expects to rise to £28 million by the end of 2023-24. The Home Office estimates that it will also incur further costs of approximately £1 million per year in staff costs and £11,000 per individual for flight costs. It will also incur costs to escort individuals to Rwanda. These include training costs of £12.6 million in 2024-25 and £1 million per year thereafter in fixed costs, plus further escorting costs which are dependent on the number of flights required. These Home Office costs do not include the wider costs from implementing the Illegal Migration Act, such as the cost of providing sufficient detention facilities to hold people before they are relocated (paragraphs 2.9 to 2.13).

10 The Home Office has established monitoring arrangements to test that the partnership is working and to oversee payments. It recognises that the partnership is a high-risk and novel policy. It has set up committees to review the implementation of the partnership and advise whether the terms of the agreement are being adhered to, including the relocation process and treatment of relocated individuals. It is also establishing controls to provide assurance on the completeness and accuracy of payments (paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2).