

Rwanda has launched legal action against the United Kingdom, seeking compensation of more than £50 million (\$63 million) after Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government scrapped a controversial migrant relocation agreement shortly after taking office.

The deal, introduced by the previous Conservative government in 2022, aimed to deter irregular migration by transferring asylum seekers who arrived in the UK without authorization to Rwanda, where their claims would be processed. The policy faced strong criticism from human rights groups and repeated legal challenges, preventing it from being fully implemented.

Starmer, who led the Labour Party to victory in July 2024, canceled the agreement as one of his first actions in office, arguing it was costly, ineffective and failed to stop migrants from crossing the English Channel in small boats. Labour had pledged during the election campaign to abandon the policy, calling it a waste of public funds that would address less than 1% of asylum cases.

Before the deal was terminated, the UK had already paid Rwanda about £290 million, money Kigali said was used to prepare infrastructure and services to host migrants, including accommodation facilities such as Hope Hostel, which announced in April 2024 that it was ready to receive arrivals.

In November 2025, Rwanda issued a formal notice of arbitration, triggering legal proceedings at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands. The Rwandan government is represented by Justice Minister and government agent Emmanuel Ugirashebuja. The UK is being represented by senior Home Office official Dan Hobbs, with legal support led by barrister Ben Juratowitch of Essex Court Chambers. Rwanda's legal team includes barrister Verdiram KC of Twenty Essex.

Rwanda argues that the UK's unilateral decision to cancel the agreement violated international legal obligations and was taken without mutual consent. Kigali says hosting migrants aligned with its commitment to human rights and international cooperation.

The UK government has defended its decision, saying the policy was expensive, unworkable and diverted resources from more effective border and asylum reforms. A government spokesperson said substantial funding had already been provided to Rwanda and that ending the deal was in taxpayers' best interests.

The Conservative Party has sharply criticized the cancellation. Chris Philp, the party's shadow home affairs spokesman, said Rwanda's claim was a direct consequence of abandoning a policy he argued would have helped reduce irregular migration.

Conservatives also say the number of asylum seekers housed in hotels has risen since the deal was scrapped, with more than 36,000 people in temporary accommodation by September 2025.