In a blow to UK’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s controversial immigration policy, the House of Lords has voted to delay the approval of the UK-Rwanda asylum treaty.

The non-binding motion, passed by 214 votes to 171, urges the government to hold off on ratifying the treaty until concerns about Rwanda’s asylum procedures are addressed.

The treaty, signed in December 2023, is a central plank of Sunak’s plan to send asylum seekers arriving in the UK to Rwanda for processing. This scheme has been met with fierce criticism from human rights groups and legal experts, who argue that Rwanda’s asylum system is inadequate and that sending vulnerable people there would violate international law.

The House of Lords vote reflects these concerns. The International Agreements Committee, a cross-party committee of the Lords, listed 10 outstanding issues with Rwanda’s asylum system in a report published last week.

These issues include concerns about the fairness of asylum hearings, the quality of legal representation, and the conditions in Rwandan refugee camps.

Lord Goldsmith, a Labour peer and former Attorney General, who proposed the motion to delay the treaty, said: “The government has already presented a Bill to Parliament asking it to make a judgment that Rwanda is safe now. And yet on the home secretary’s own evidence it cannot be so because the measures are not in place and have not been shown to be effective.”

The UK-government, however, remains committed to the Rwanda scheme. Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron urged the Lords to back the treaty, arguing that it is essential to deter people from making dangerous Channel crossings in small boats.

He also insisted that the treaty includes safeguards to ensure that no one is sent to Rwanda where their life or freedom would be at risk.

The UK government says that it will ratify the treaty regardless of the Lords vote. However, the vote is likely to fuel legal challenges to the policy and complicate its passage through Parliament.

The Rwanda Safety Bill, which would allow the government to override legal challenges to deportations to Rwanda, is due to be debated in the House of Lords next week.

The UK-Rwanda asylum treaty is a highly controversial policy that has divided opinion in the UK and abroad.

The Lords vote highlights the significant concerns that exist about the scheme, and it remains to be seen whether the government will be able to push it through despite the opposition.