Denmark and four EU Member States announce cooperation with Rwanda on return centre

Denmark, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, known as the Five-Country Group, reached an agreement with Rwanda to establish a return centre for persons without a legal right to remain in the EU.

According to information published by the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, this initiative aims to strengthen the effectiveness of the return procedure, reduce irregular migration and disrupt migrant-smuggling networks. The Danish government expects a concrete agreement with Rwanda in early 2027, with the aim of conducting the first transfers before the end of 2027.

Key features of the proposed model
Under the proposed model, individuals without a legal basis for residence in the EU could be transferred to a reception center in Rwanda. Following an initial reception period, they would be supported in integrating into Rwandan society and given the opportunity to establish a new life there. Alternatively, individuals wishing to return to their countries of origin would receive assistance with return and reintegration. The operational framework is still under development, including the precise transfer procedures and implementation arrangements.

Legal and institutional framework
The participating countries have committed to ensuring that the arrangement complies with EU law on human rights and international obligations. According to the Ministry:

- The IOM is prepared to provide practical assistance and support to migrants transferred to Rwanda, at Rwanda's request.
- UNHCR will provide advice on compliance with international obligations and protection of human rights.
- European Commission will participate as an observer to support compliance with EU law.

The initiative aims to address the growing political momentum among certain EU Member States to externalise aspects of migration management and strengthen the implementation of return decisions. It builds on the Five-Country Group's principles, presented in Copenhagen on 4 September 2026:

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- Reduce irregular migration and undermine migrant-smuggling networks.
- Ensure full compliance with EU law and international obligations.
- Establish equal and mutually beneficial partnerships with countries outside the EU.

The initiative is also part of a broader Denmark-Rwanda partnership. A bilateral agreement, is expected to be signed on 23 November 2026, will cover migration cooperation, green transition, good governance and bilateral trade.

Next steps

- 23 November 2026: Expected signing of the broader Denmark-Rwanda partnership agreement.
- Early 2027: Expected presentation of a concrete agreement on the return centre.
- End of 2027: Danish ambition to begin the first transfers to Rwanda.

Key issues requiring further consideration include the legal basis for transfers, access to asylum and protection procedures, compliance with the principle of *non-refoulement*, individual legal safeguards, reception conditions and the allocation of responsibilities between participating Member States and Rwanda.

Source(s)

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Policy

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