

Let's Talk About:

Rwanda: the Safety of Rwanda

(Asylum & Immigration Bill)

Date/Time:
Tuesday 7th May 2024 12:00 – 14:00

Location:
Sunny Room (Community Space),
Sahir HQ, Liverpool, L2 2AH.

Facilitator(s):
Shereen Cowley (LGBTQ+ Asylum & Refugee Support Lead)
& Kat Taylor (LGBTQ+ Engagement Worker)

1. Introduction

Purpose

A facilitated discussion at Sahir for all members of our community to come together to talk about the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill.

Background

On 22nd April 2024, the UK Government enacted the Safety of Rwanda Act, designed to deter illegal migration by relocating some asylum seekers to Rwanda. This legislation coincided with a tragic event where five individuals, including a child, perished while attempting to cross the English Channel in an overcrowded boat. At Sahir, we have spoken with many LGBTQ+ individuals seeking refuge in the UK who have understandably expressed profound concern and anxiety about their future and safety. The increasing hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers is deeply troubling for our entire community.

2. Attendance

Participants

The discussion saw a diverse turnout with attendance from a wide range of community members, allies, and representatives from allied charities.

Attendance Statistics

14 attendees from across the Liverpool City Region. The vast majority of attendees were LGBTQ+ identifying. A third of attendees are currently seeking sanctuary in the UK.

3. Agenda

- Introduction
- Overview of the Rwanda Bill
- Impact on people seeking asylum
- Community Response & Concerns
- Q&A & Open Discussion

4. Discussion

Identified Issues

The worries and concerns we discussed were informed by materials from Refugee Action and other reliable sources.

- The Council of Europe, which looks out for human rights, has criticised the UK govern-ment's plan to send people to Rwanda. They say it is a big problem for the rights of asylum seekers and for fairness in the law.

- The person in charge of human rights at the Council, Michael O'Flaherty, is worried about this new law. He says it could be really bad for people asking for asylum and for judges be-ing fair.

- The new Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill which the UK Government has pushed through is causing a lot of worry about asylum seekers' rights and the law in general.

- Laws like this one, along with others targeting 'illegal' immigration, are making our society more divided and that is exactly what extremist groups want.

- People affected by these laws are feeling really anxious about what might happen to them, even though they still hope to find safety in the UK.
- When people are sent to Rwanda, their pleas for asylum are ignored. This means refugees never get to explain why they need help from the UK.
- We do not have proof that this plan will actually stop people from trying to reach safety in the UK. Instead, we should focus on helping them get here safely.
- By closing off official ways to seek asylum and threatening those who try other ways with deportation to Rwanda, the UK is no longer a safe place for refugees.
- Everyone should have the right to ask for safety.
- More people will be sent to Rwanda than the scheme can handle. Some will be forced on-to planes, but many others will be left in limbo not knowing what will happen to them.
- Sending people to Rwanda will not make them stop trying to cross the Channel. This is not about stopping migration; it is about stopping people from finding safety.

Insights

The insights below were provided by Leah, a Legal Education Officer at Right to Remain. Leah kindly attended our discussion to offer help, advice and guidance to our community members.

- People eligible for removal to Rwanda are already getting notices from the Home Office. Note that more people might end up in detention before removal.
- You might be at risk of being detained or removed to Rwanda if:
  - You got a decision under the inadmissibility rules (after receiving a notice of intent letter).
  - You received a removal decision.
  - You received removal directions that mention Rwanda specifically.
- Generally, an asylum claim in the UK may be found to be inadmissible if the person who claims asylum has or had a connection to another safe third country. For example, if they stayed in another European country on their way to the UK or received refugee status in another country.
- The Rwanda plan is concerning, but here are some key points to remember:
  - While the Illegal Migration Act has been passed, certain sections like section 2 have not been put into action yet.
  - Before someone can be sent to Rwanda under this Act, they must first be detained. However, the UK's detention centres are almost full, making it impractical to detain everyone at risk of being sent to Rwanda.
  - Rwanda has only agreed to take about 2,000 asylum seekers from the UK this year. This shows the plan's small scale and its aim to intimidate asylum seekers.
  - Since Jan 2021, over 77,000 people have been notified that they may fall under the Inadmissibility Rules, but only a few have been removed from the UK under these rules.
  - Flights to Rwanda are planned within the next few months, but it is unclear how this will be arranged.
  - While the Prime Minister says there will be hearings for appeals, the judiciary de-cides how judges are deployed, not the government.
- Challenging a notice for removal to Rwanda
  - There is only one situation where you can dispute or appeal a removal to Rwanda under the Act. According to the Act, a court can temporarily stop the removal if it is convinced you would face serious and irreversible harm in Rwanda.
  - This is a tough standard to meet and it has to be about you specifically. You or your lawyer need to explain why you personally would be in immediate danger if sent to Rwanda. Just saying that Rwanda is generally unsafe is not enough.
  - Duncan Lewis Solicitors' Public Team is getting ready to help people who are de-tained and need to challenge Rwanda removal orders.

- Getting ready for possible detention
  - Check out Right to Remain's Immigration Reporting and Detention Toolkit page: https://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/detention/
- What can those seeking asylum and refugees do for themselves?
  - Know Your Rights: educate yourself about your legal rights and the asylum process to navigate the system more effectively.
  - Stay Informed: keep up-to-date with news and information relevant to your status.
  - Network: build a support network with other asylum seekers, refugees, local community members and support organisations for social and practical support. Keep in touch with Sahir and make sure you attend our Many Hands group meetings.
  - Maintain your Wellbeing: try to engage in activities that promote mental and physical well-being, such as sports, hobbies and social events.
  - Learn the Language: invest time in learning English to improve communication, access to services and employment opportunities. Attend Sahir's free English lessons.
  - Seek Education: if you can, pursue educational opportunities, such as vocational training or higher education to enhance skills and qualifications.
  - Access Health Services: ensure you understand how to access healthcare services for phys-ical and mental health needs. Ask Sahir staff if you are not sure.

5. Next Steps

- Follow-up discussion to be organised in collaboration with our 'Many Hands' peer support group.
- Attendees mentioned that they might consider peaceful protests and other methods to express community concerns. Sahir recommended caution.
- Service users are encouraged to book in sessions with Shereen Cowley (LGBTQ+ Asylum & Refugee Support Lead) should they wish to discuss individual concerns.

6. Conclusion

Our 'Let's Talk About' discussion shed light on the signifi-cant concerns surrounding the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum & Immigration) Bill. We are grateful for the insights shared from various sources, including Right to Remain, which have helped us better understand the complexities of this issue.

As we navigate these challenges, it is crucial to remember that Sahir remains committed to standing alongside all LGBTQ+ individuals seeking sanctuary in the UK. Togeth-er, we will con-tinue to advocate for their rights and provide support in any way we can.

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