

GAPS Statement on the UK Government's Rwanda Plan and Deportation Flight

Around 7 people seeking asylum in the UK are due to be deported to Rwanda under the Government's new plans today. Under this agreement, if their asylum claims are successful, they will stay in Rwanda, rather than be allowed entry to the UK. The Government's plans are cruel and dehumanising. They represent a culmination of years of hostile environment measures, where migrants and asylum seekers have been subject to disgracefully racist treatment at the border and at detention centres across the country. The current offshoring plans and the recently passed Nationality and Borders Act are a shameful abandonment of the UK's commitments under the Refugee Convention. Women are not exempt from the offshoring policy. Indeed, the Home Secretary's formal assessment is that women would not face serious harm on account of their gender in Rwanda. While the first cohort of proposed removals to East Africa is all men, if the policy is allowed to continue, women will find themselves next in line. Regardless, genuine refugees - including an Iraqi man who the UK acknowledges is a credible victim of torture - will be on today's flight. The effect of these men's removal to Rwanda will also be that their family members, including women and girls, will be robbed of their right to family reunion in the UK with their loved ones.

The deportations will re-traumatise women, girls and other vulnerable people who have fled from torture, persecution and specific forms of gender-based violence. By deporting asylum seekers to Rwanda for processing, the UK is avoiding its responsibilities to people fleeing persecution and violence from countries where it has had a direct hand in exacerbating conflicts, such as Afghanistan and Yemen. While there has been much attention placed on the Rwanda policy, the new Borders Act will also, from this month, commence implementation of changes to the asylum system and appeal process which are explicitly designed to make it harder for all asylum-seekers, men and women, to prove their claims. In parallel, the Government is further criminalising irregular entry to the UK and narrowing support to destitute asylum-seekers.

People's lives are not pawns in the Government's political game. The Government must halt this flight, consult with migrant rights organisations, women's rights organisations and civil society, and pass immigration policies that prioritise the lives and needs of asylum seekers. We stand in solidarity with activists, campaigners and legal experts fighting this racist policy, and with all asylum seekers in the UK.