Letter of 16 November 2026 from the Minister of Asylum and Migration, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to the President of the House of Representatives, concerning innovative solutions with regard to migration

The government wants to ensure more grip on migration; not only in terms of who enters the EU and the Netherlands, but also who stays. The Netherlands is therefore working on a new, modern, strict and humane migration model. Changing the migration system requires innovation, as pointed out in the letter to parliament of 22 September 2026 on international migration.[1] We are writing to inform the parliament about the first concrete results that have already been achieved.

The results are part of a longer process. The Netherlands has been a driving force for the exploration and elaboration of innovative solutions within the EU for some time now.[2] And its efforts have borne fruit: the Netherlands played a leading role in the negotiations on the new Return Regulation, to establish a legal basis for the creation of return hubs.[3] The government also continues to work within the EU to establish the conditions for innovative solutions, including financing and support for implementing agencies. The guiding principle for the broad-based efforts to find innovative solutions is and will remain that any action taken must be in accordance with EU and international law.

Return hub Rwanda

Return is an essential part of an effective migration system, and necessary to ensure public support for migration. Those who are not entitled to stay must leave the Netherlands and the EU. The aim of the return hub is to contribute to this. To achieve this aim, the Netherlands played a leading role in the discussions regarding the return hub. The return hub is necessary because return is dependent on a number of factors, such as the willingness of the migrant to cooperate with their return. The hub provides an alternative in cases where return to the country of origin cannot be realised: it offers migrants who are not entitled to stay the chance of a better future, with the prospect of permanent residence in Rwanda. From there they are also free to travel on to any other country, such as their country of origin.

As part of a core group of like-minded EU member states – Denmark, Austria, Germany and Greece – the Netherlands is working to operationalise a return hub in Rwanda. Member States of the core group will work towards a broad partnership with Rwanda. Cooperation in that partnership must be accordance with EU and international law, including the principle of non-refoulement: migrants may not be sent to a country where they risk persecution. This is of great importance to the Netherlands, which is why, in addition to concluding an MoU, we are working on a bilateral treaty with Rwanda. A treaty basis will provide the possibility to enter into legally binding obligations, thus providing a stronger basis than an MoU to ensure safeguards for the human rights of the individuals in question.

There is also awareness for the fact that we are setting up a new model, which is why the core group is working with an inception phase of 1-2 years, in which proof of concept will be developed. This will be done in close cooperation with international organisations, including to ensure independent reporting. The reporting will focus on compliance with the arrangement concluded for the return hub; if Rwanda or one of the EU member states does not comply with the arrangement, this will emerge from the reports and be addressed. The aim is to proceed with care and to ensure the hub contributes to a humane migration model. The core group and Rwanda endorse these guiding principles.

[1] Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives 2026/27, 30 573, no. 245.
[2] In May 2024 and December 2025, letters were sent in conjunction with like-minded member states to the relevant European commissioners and Commission representatives.
[3] This concerns expansion of the definition of 'country of return'.

The return hub will be set up in accordance with the new EU Return Regulation.[4] We are working to establish a return hub from where migrants can integrate in Rwanda, with a view to permanent residence. Migrants will have the right of residence in Rwanda and have access to education, the labour market, healthcare and the legal system, among other things. The hub will provide an open facility from which migrants can move on to housing in Rwanda. Migrants will have complete freedom of movement in Rwanda and will be able to leave the country if they so wish. In other words, it is a new chance for those who are not allowed to stay in Europe. Of course migrants will also always have the option to voluntarily travel on to their country of origin; support will be available for this.

The Return Regulation governs who can be returned to the return hub. In principle this is any third-country national staying in the Netherlands illegally, with the exception of unaccompanied minors.[5] Although the Return Regulation does not impose any further limitations, the core group will focus on the transfer of single men for proof of concept. Individual vulnerabilities or circumstances will be taken into account to ensure the return hub will be legally sound and feasible in practice. In this phase the Netherlands will also focus on the transfer of migrants whose country of origin is in the same region as Rwanda, the other member states are free to choose a different approach in this respect. The transfer process will take place in full accordance with EU legislation, whereby the same safeguards apply as to a return process to a country of origin. For instance, no transfer will take place if travel would be inadvisable due to the foreign national's state of health. In addition, during the inception phase, foreign nationals will be allowed to stay in the Netherlands pending the outcome of any objection or application for judicial review they have lodged. EU legislation will cease to apply once the transfer has been completed and the foreign national has been admitted to Rwanda.

Rwanda is considered to be a suitable partner for cooperation on migration, in the form of a partnership of mutual interest. Rwanda has demonstrable experience in the reception of migrants and refugees, in close cooperation with international organisations such as the UN refugee agency UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), including through the Emergency Transit Mechanism.[6] Rwanda thus has the experience and expertise necessary to ensure migrants are treated in a humane manner, but also to work together effectively with international organisations and partners in the area of migration. The Netherlands and the EU have opted for constructive cooperation with Rwanda. This choice is the result of a broad consideration of interests and provides the opportunity to work together on areas of common interest, such as migration, while at the same time engaging in dialogue on subjects on which views diverge. The return hub will be established within a broad and balanced relationship, in which the interests of Rwanda are also taken into account.

The core group will finance the return hub. The Dutch part of the return hub will be financed through budget allocated for the migration partnerships, for which funds are reserved in the budget of the Ministry of Justice and Security. Financing through multilateral organisations such as UNHCR and IOM is under consideration with regard to the establishment of the return hub.

The Netherlands wants to be at the forefront of efforts to strengthen the global migration and asylum system and deal with the challenges of today. The operationalisation of return hubs is part of the necessary innovation, and is a step towards a better migration management system. We will work hard on this in the coming period, together with the core group, Rwanda and international organisations. The Parliament will be sent a progress report in the first quarter of 2027.

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[4] Regulation (EU) 2026/2280 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 October 2026 establishing a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union, and repealing Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Directive 2001/40/EC and Council Decision 2004/191/EC (Return regulation), Articles 14(1) and 14(2).

[5] Article 14(5) of the Return Regulation.

[6] Through the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM), Rwanda has since 2019 been temporarily housing vulnerable refugees stranded in Libya, in cooperation with UNHCR and the African Union, and with financial support from the European Union. Refugees (from countries including Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia) are evacuated from Libya to a designated centre in Rwanda. Within the ETM, refugees are given protection and medical and psychosocial support while a durable solution is sought, such as resettlement to a third country or voluntary return. The ETM thus provides a safe alternative to the dangerous sea crossing to Europe.

Global Round Table

The focus on operationalisation of return hubs and other innovative solutions are first steps towards strengthening the global migration and asylum system. The aim is to achieve the government's long-term vision, in which asylum applications can be submitted and processed outside the European Union, to help break the human smugglers' business model. Part of this is an exploration of how international refugee law can, and indeed must, be further modernised. The government is therefore looking at, among other things, the existing global agreements between countries on asylum and migration, such as the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the underlying agreements.

As the report by the Clingendael Institute concluded, international support is essential to the success of such solutions. That is why the government is working on an ambitious agenda in the multilateral arena in order to obtain that broad international support. It is a long-term process, and it is important for the participating countries to see their challenges and possible solutions reflected. This is crucial in order to ultimately work towards a future-proof, effective, strict and humane global system, based on international law.

In order to further shape out this process, the Netherlands, together with UNHCR and Kenya and in close cooperation with the Clingendael Institute, is hosting a Global Round Table from 24 to 26 November 2026. The event will mark the 75th anniversary of the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and is also part of a series of dialogues that UNHCR is holding in this context.

The Round Table event will be the first time that international experts, policy makers, refugees and representatives from all regions of the world will meet in a multilateral setting to discuss the challenges *and* solutions of today concerning the global asylum system. There will be several sessions during which scope for international solutions will be discussed, such as a more effective global division of responsibilities with regard to the reception of refugees, improvements in the area of return (including return hubs), 'transfer arrangements' such as cooperation on the basis of the 'safe third country' principle, and a first exploration of a possible expansion of the instruments to strengthen the implementation of the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

The government will take the outcomes of these round table consultations into account when creating a cooperation agenda at international level, with the ultimate aim of achieving its long-term aim of processing asylum applications outside the European Union. With this agenda, the government aims to bring together various international visions, interests and needs, including those of the Netherlands, in order to strengthen the global migration and asylum system and, where necessary, reform it. This agenda will also form the basis for the asylum summit. Work will continue on this in the coming period, and the summit will take place no later than 2027.