# Keir Starmer's return hubs plan rejected by Albania amid rising Channel migrant crossings



During a recent visit to Albania, Prime Minister Keir Starmer unveiled a plan that quickly spiraled into controversy, highlighting his administration's failure to grapple with the UK's pressing immigration crises. His proposal to establish 'return hubs' in the Balkans for failed asylum seekers met with outright rejection from Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, who stated unequivocally that Albania would not participate in such an initiative. This debacle serves as a glaring example of Starmer's struggle to forge a credible approach to immigration amid a surge in numbers crossing the English Channel.

Starmer's plans represent a drastic shift from earlier policies, specifically from the previous Conservative government's Rwanda deportation scheme, which he dismissed as mere theatrics. The newly minted return hubs would not involve sharing asylum responsibilities but instead focus on holding individuals with rejected claims until they can be sent back. Yet, Rama’s stark rejection underscores the immense diplomatic challenges Starmer faces and raises serious doubts about his credibility as the steward of immigration policy at a time when small boat crossings have soared.

Indeed, with a staggering 40% increase in arrivals by small boat this year alone—over 12,000 recorded in 2025—it’s clear that Starmer's policies are out of touch with the crisis at hand. Critics, including Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp, have lambasted the entire plan as disorderly and ill-conceived, questioning Starmer's decision to engage in a diplomatic endeavor that clearly yielded no immediate ally.

In a desperate attempt at damage control, Starmer suggested ongoing discussions with other Balkan countries like Serbia and Bosnia, aiming to lure them into hosting these return hubs. However, this raises the question: is this a genuine strategy or simply another round of political posturing in the face of increasing scrutiny? The implicit endorsement of offshore processing contradicts his previous denouncements, with the opposition labeling his approach as hypocritical and reflective of political inconsistency.

As the government signals plans to strengthen its joint task force with several Balkan nations to combat immigration crime, one has to wonder whether this is a sign of true commitment or merely a reactive measure to fend off growing criticism. The fact remains that Starmer's plans may not resonate with the public already fatigued by ineffective governance on immigration matters.

The stakes are indeed high for Starmer as he faces mounting competition from rising anti-immigration forces. His ability to deliver concrete results in this embattled arena is crucial; the success or failure of his return hubs initiative could significantly influence his standing in future elections. As the current trend of unchecked migrant crossings continues, Starmer risks further alienation from a public yearning for decisiveness and integrity in managing immigration.

As British politics continues to evolve, the contentious debate surrounding these return hubs is likely to persist. Starmer's struggle to secure credible partnerships for immigration management will remain a pivotal issue—not just for his administration, but in the broader political landscape where calls for substantive reform echo louder by the day.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14717891/Keir-Starmer-humiliated-live-TV-plans-send-asylum-seekers-Balkans.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb168f-4869-4a15-99a8-23048488705b> - UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer confirmed ongoing discussions with several countries to establish 'returns hubs' for asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected. During a visit to Albania, Starmer emphasized that these hubs in safe third countries could effectively support the removal of failed asylum seekers. However, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama clarified that Albania would not participate as a host for UK returns hubs. Despite criticism from Conservative figures and political opponents, Starmer asserted that returns hubs are a legal and cost-effective part of a broader immigration control strategy, distinct from the previous Conservative government's Rwanda plan. The hubs would process individuals who have exhausted all legal avenues in the UK before arranging their return to origin countries. The initiative aligns with European Commission proposals and has conditional support from the UN refugee agency. The UK government has reportedly been exploring potentials in Balkan countries for several months. While the Home Office recorded high removal numbers recently, small boat crossings have increased to record levels in 2025, prompting further political pressure on Starmer to address migration challenges. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb168f-4869-4a15-99a8-23048488705b?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://apnews.com/article/a2a86b3ab6e0b834176fa699942b6885> - British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced during his visit to Albania that the UK is in talks with several countries about establishing 'return hubs' to house rejected asylum seekers awaiting deportation. Starmer described the initiative as an important innovation aimed at curbing irregular migration. Although specific countries were not named, the plan contrasts with previous strategies, such as the former UK government's controversial Rwanda deportation scheme, which Starmer scrapped upon taking office. These return hubs differ from transferring asylum responsibilities; they instead house individuals whose claims have already been denied. The concept has support from the European Commission and is being considered by countries like the Netherlands and Sweden. Albania has an existing five-year agreement with Italy for a similar migrant arrangement, though Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama clarified that their cooperation with Italy was a one-time exception and rejected similar proposals from other nations, including the UK. Starmer also highlighted the success of a joint task force with Albania, which led to a sharp decline in Albanian migrants crossing to Britain. Despite this, overall migrant arrivals via small boats have risen over 30% this year. Starmer and Rama also signed a defense industry cooperation deal, and Starmer will participate in the European Political Community summit in Tirana. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/a2a86b3ab6e0b834176fa699942b6885?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-steps-up-efforts-tackle-organised-immigration-crime-west-balkans-2025-05-14/> - British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced increased efforts to combat organized immigration crime in the Western Balkans, aiming to strengthen his position amid political pressure over immigration policies. During his first official visit to Albania, Starmer revealed measures to prevent deported Albanian nationals from re-entering the UK and to combat money laundering between the two countries. The UK will donate forgery detection machines to help identify fake passports. Additionally, the UK will expand its joint migration task force to include North Macedonia and Montenegro, building on existing partnerships with Albania and Kosovo. This initiative follows a sharp decline in Albanian migrants arriving in the UK via small boats, largely due to a previous deportation agreement. The increased attention to illegal migration complements Starmer's broader pledge to reduce legal migration significantly, warning that without stricter immigration rules, Britain faces the risk of becoming 'an island of strangers.' ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-steps-up-efforts-tackle-organised-immigration-crime-west-balkans-2025-05-14/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-seeking-third-countries-host-deported-migrants-2025-05-15/> - The British government, under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, is in negotiations with several unspecified third countries to establish 'return hubs' for migrants who have been denied asylum and have exhausted all legal means to stay in the UK. This move aims to bolster the government’s credibility on immigration control, a politically sensitive issue. Starmer is seeking effective alternatives to the previous Conservative administration’s controversial plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, which he had previously criticized and scrapped upon taking office. During a visit to Albania, Starmer emphasized efforts to combat human trafficking and was met with a refusal from Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama to establish a similar returns model for the UK. The proposed policy targets individuals who are using legal delays to avoid deportation and would involve relocating these individuals to safe third countries while awaiting necessary documentation. Further specifics of the plan are expected to be revealed in due course. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-seeking-third-countries-host-deported-migrants-2025-05-15/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/sep/16/giorgia-meloni-starmer-showed-great-interest-in-our-albania-migration-deal> - Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni stated that UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer showed 'great interest' in Italy's migration deal with Albania. During a press conference in Rome, Meloni and Starmer signed a joint declaration addressing migration issues. Meloni highlighted that the UK government had shown significant interest in the agreement. The deal involves Italy opening two migrant processing centers in Albania, where the claims of 36,000 migrants will be processed annually. The UK government has insisted that this approach is different from the Rwanda deportation plan it abandoned in July, a scheme that Starmer had criticized. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/sep/16/giorgia-meloni-starmer-showed-great-interest-in-our-albania-migration-deal?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czrmme1d6gvo> - UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has suggested he will study Italy's asylum processing deal with Albania as part of a 'pragmatic' approach to tackling migrant boats crossing the English Channel. During talks in Rome with Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni, Starmer discussed the 'concept' of Italy's deal, under which some migrants rescued in Italian waters will be sent to Albania to have their asylum claims processed. Meloni stated that Starmer had shown 'great interest' in the planned scheme. Starmer also expressed interest in Italy's model of paying North African countries to do more to stop boat crossings. The Labour government has scrapped the previous Conservative plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, where they would only be able to apply for refugee status in the East African nation. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czrmme1d6gvo?utm_source=openai))