

## **Asian Countries Dominate as UK and US Passport Power Declines**

**For immediate release: London, 2 July 2019**

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Moving into the third quarter of 2019, Japan and Singapore hold onto top spot on the [Henley Passport Index](#), with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 189. This latest ranking of passport power and global mobility – which is based on exclusive data from the [International Air Transport Association \(IATA\)](#) – marks the culmination of an 18-month long winning streak for both countries, after they unseated Germany from its long-held 1<sup>st</sup> position at the beginning of 2018.

Falling from the 1<sup>st</sup> place spot it shared with Japan and Singapore last quarter, South Korea now sits in 2<sup>nd</sup> place on the index along with Finland and Germany, with citizens of all three countries able to access 187 destinations around the world without a prior visa. Finland's ascent from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> place is due to recent changes to Pakistan's formerly highly restrictive visa policy. In the hope of attracting tourists and boosting its struggling economy, Pakistan now offers an ETA (Electronic Travel Authority) to citizens of 50 countries, including Finland, Japan, Malta, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Arab Emirates. This concession, strikingly, does not extend to either the UK or the US. With a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 183, the UK and the US now share 6<sup>th</sup> place – the lowest position either country has held since 2010, and a significant drop from their 1<sup>st</sup> place spot in 2014.

Denmark, Italy, and Luxembourg sit jointly in 3<sup>rd</sup> place on the index, each with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 186, while France, Spain, and Sweden are in joint 4<sup>th</sup> place, each with a score of 185. In significant shifts elsewhere in the rankings, the United Arab Emirates has entered the index's top 20 for the first time in the index's 14-year history, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 165. Over the past five years, the UAE has more than doubled the number of destinations its citizens are able to travel to without a prior visa. Afghanistan remains at the bottom of the global mobility spectrum, with its citizens able to access only 25 destinations worldwide without a prior visa.

### **Brexit, the EU, and the Link between Visa-Openness and Progressive Reform**

Throughout most of the index's long history, the UK has held one of the top five places in the ranking. However, with its exit from the EU now imminent, and coupled with ongoing confusion about the terms of its departure, the UK's once-strong position looks increasingly uncertain. The Brexit process has not yet had a direct impact on the UK's ranking, but new research using exclusive historical data from the [Henley Passport Index](#) indicates that this could change, with consequences that extend beyond a decline in passport power.

Political science researchers Uğur Altundal and Ömer Zarpli, of Syracuse University and the University of Pittsburgh respectively, have found that there is a link between visa-openness and progressive reform, and that a county's ranking on the index reveals far more than simply the number of destinations its holders are able to access. Altundal and Zarpli's unique research shows that even short-term travel mobility, which represents 85% of all cross-border movements, can positively influence political liberalization and democratization. Conversely, countries moving towards nationalist isolationism and away from policies that encourage visa-openness are likely to drop in the [Henley Passport Index rankings](#) and incur geopolitical consequences for themselves and their neighbors.

Altundal and Zarpli observe that “the prospect of visa-waiver agreements with the EU has encouraged neighboring countries to adopt important reforms in areas such as civil and political rights, rule of law, and security,” and note that freedom of movement appears to be a vital precondition not only for economic growth, but also for social integration and progressive political change. With nationalism on the rise, and global powerhouses like the UK and the US embracing policies that limit freedom of movement, this new research indicates that associated impacts on political rights, rule of law, security and democracy could be profound.

Commenting on these developments, [Dr. Christian H. Kaelin](#), Chairman of [Henley & Partners](#) and the creator of the passport index concept, says: “With a few notable exceptions, the latest rankings from the Henley Passport Index show that countries around the world increasingly view visa-openness as crucial to economic and social progress. Discussions of passport power and global mobility tend to focus on the benefits for the countries with the strongest passports. However, this latest unique research appears to confirm something that many of us already knew intuitively: that increased visa-openness benefits the entire global community, and not just the strongest countries.”

### **Integration and Economic Progress: Africa, the Middle East, and Brazil**

The connection between visa-openness, economic control, and social progress is exemplified by changing attitudes in African countries regarding strengthened diplomatic relationships on the continent and beyond. Discussing the shift towards visa liberalization within the African continent, Ryan Cummings, Director of [Signal Risk](#), says: “The nexus between border openness and economic performance on the African continent has been exemplified by Rwanda. Last year, it was one of the countries to receive the highest degree of foreign direct investment. In explaining the country's performance in this regard, Rwandan Minister of Trade and Industry, Soraya Hakuziyaremye, linked it to their robust visa openness policy, noting that Rwanda – which initiated a visa-on-arrival policy for citizens of all African countries in the beginning of 2018 – views freedom of movement as a vital component for economic integration.”

Commenting on this approach in light of the growing connections between African countries and Middle Eastern states, particularly in the Gulf, [Froilan Malit](#), an Associate at the Gulf Labour

Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) program and a Fellow at Centre International de Formation des Autorités et Leaders (CIFAL), says: “By establishing deeper relationships with these states, African countries are not only able to secure trade and investment benefits and employment opportunities for their nationals locally and in the Gulf countries, but also to develop stronger diplomatic relations. These particular strategies can have transformative effects on Africa’s economic growth and development, and may play an essential role to rapidly modernize their economy, trade, and investments in the long term.”

Experts predict that recent changes to Brazil’s visa policy are likely to have similar effects – the country has implemented a visa waiver for citizens of Australia, Canada, Japan, and the US. [Dr. Parag Khanna](#), Founder and Managing Partner of FutureMap and author of *The Future Is Asian: Global Order in the Twenty-first Century*, says, “Brazil’s new government has come in at a time of economic crisis and seeks to accelerate an economic rebound. It needs to send a signal that it is open for business and cleaning up. Despite years of opposition to visa waivers for countries such as the US on a non-reciprocal basis, it seems Brazil has now caved in. To attract the capital and investor interest the country needs as part of its turnaround, it has taken this step to open up to important capital exporters such as Canada, Japan, and the US.”

### **Investment Migration Countries Secure Strong Positions**

Countries with [citizenship-by-investment \(CBI\) programs](#) continue to perform strongly on the [Henley Passport Index](#), and demonstrate a similar connection between passport power and economic and social progress. Moving up from the 8<sup>th</sup> place spot it held last quarter, [Malta](#) now sits alone in 7<sup>th</sup> place with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 182, just one spot behind the UK and the US. [Cyprus](#) retains its 16<sup>th</sup> place on the index, with a score of 172, while the Caribbean nation of [Antigua and Barbuda](#) is now in 29<sup>th</sup> place, with a score of 147, rising 11 places over the past decade.

[Dr. Juerg Steffen](#), the CEO of [Henley & Partners](#), says: “Citizenship- and residence-by-investment programs are becoming more sought after, and these latest results make it easy to see why. Look at Malta’s position on the index, for example. For wealthy investors, the acquisition of a passport that gives its holders visa-free access to 182 destinations around the world is genuinely life-changing. And we know now that the benefits of these programs go both ways. Since the introduction of its [citizenship-by-investment program](#), Malta has attracted significant foreign direct investment, dramatically reduced its overall debt levels, become one of the most financially dynamic countries in the EU, and created employment opportunities that have improved the lives of all its citizens.”

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## Notes to editors

### About the 2019 Henley Passport Index

Including cutting-edge expert commentary and historical data spanning 14 years, the [Henley Passport Index](#) is the original ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa. The ranking is based on exclusive data from the [International Air Transport Association \(IATA\)](#), which maintains the world's largest and most accurate database of travel information, and it is enhanced by extensive, ongoing research by the Henley & Partners Research Department.

The [Henley Passport Index](#) is updated in real-time, as and when visa-policy changes come into effect. Along with the [Kälin – Kochenov Quality of Nationality Index](#), it is considered a major reference tool for global citizens and the standard reference for governments in this field.

### About the Henley Passport Index website

The [Henley Passport Index website](#) provides up-to-date, printable lists of the countries you can access visa-free, with an e-visa, with a visa on arrival, or with a normal visa. It also allows you to compare the strength of passports and understand how you might improve your travel freedom with alternative citizenship. [Visit the website](#) to view and download the global ranking and find out more about the power of your passport.

### Global headlines for Q3 2019

- Japan and Singapore hold joint top spot on the [Henley Passport Index](#).
- Finland, Germany, and South Korea hold 2<sup>nd</sup> place.
- Denmark, Italy, and Luxembourg hold 3<sup>rd</sup> place, while France has dropped to 4<sup>th</sup> place, sharing this position with Spain and Sweden.
- The UK and the US now share 6<sup>th</sup> place, along with Belgium, Canada, Greece, Ireland, and Norway.
- The UAE enters the top 20 for the first time. The country has climbed a record-breaking 41 places over the past decade.
- Other strong climbers include Taiwan, which has climbed 24 places over the past ten years and now sits in 30<sup>th</sup> place, and Serbia, which has also climbed 24 places in the past decade and is now 41<sup>st</sup> place.
- Afghanistan sits alone in 109<sup>th</sup> and last place, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of just 25.

### Regional headlines for Q3 2019

- In Africa: The Seychelles, Mauritius, and South Africa, respectively, continue to hold the top 3 spots. The Seychelles and Mauritius are the only African countries to have made gains in their scores over the past decade. South Africa has dropped 19 places in that period, as has Kenya.

- In the Middle East: The UAE remains in 1<sup>st</sup> place, with Israel in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and Turkey in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. The UAE and Israel are the only two countries in the region to have made gains in their scores over the past decade. Iraq, Syria, and Yemen have all dropped 20 or more places during that period.
- In the Caribbean: The top 3 spots are held by Barbados, the Bahamas, and St. Kitts and Nevis, respectively. A number of Caribbean countries have made strong gains over the past decade. The Bahamas and St. Kitts and Nevis have both climbed 12 places, while Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago have both climbed 11 places.
- In Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Ukraine holds 1<sup>st</sup> place, Moldova holds 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and Russia holds 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Turkmenistan remains the poorest performer in the region, now in 93<sup>rd</sup> place globally, having dropped 19 places over the past decade.
- In Southeast Asia: Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, respectively, hold the top 3 spots.
- In North Asia: Japan is the global and regional leader, with South Korea and Hong Kong holding 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the region.

### **About Henley & Partners**

Henley & Partners is the global leader in residence and citizenship planning. Each year, hundreds of wealthy individuals and their advisors rely on our expertise and experience in this area. The firm's highly qualified professionals work together as one team in over 30 offices worldwide.

The concept of residence and citizenship planning was created by Henley & Partners in the 1990s. As globalization has expanded, residence and citizenship have become topics of significant interest among the increasing number of internationally mobile entrepreneurs and investors whom we proudly serve every day.

The firm also runs a leading government advisory practice that has raised more than USD 8 billion in foreign direct investment. Trusted by governments, the firm has been involved in strategic consulting and in the design, set-up, and operation of the world's most successful residence and citizenship programs.

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