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**Germany secures top spot in 2017 Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index  
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Germany retains its position at the top of the *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index* in the 2017 edition of the annual travel freedom ranking published by the global residence and citizenship advisory firm, Henley & Partners. The index is produced in partnership with the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which maintains the world's largest and most authoritative database of travel information.

Even after losing visa-free admission to one country, Germany holds on to its top spot on the index for the second year running with access to 176 countries in total. Sweden also remains static in second place with 175 countries, and Denmark, Finland, Italy, Spain and the US jointly rank third, with their nationals enjoying access to 174 countries without a visa. The UK, however, has slipped down yet another position this year to fourth, having shared first place with Germany for three consecutive years from 2013–2015.

Syria, Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan sit at the very bottom of the *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index*, each with visa-free access to less than 30 countries worldwide. This shows a slight change from last year's ranking, with Somalia rising out of the bottom four with access now to 30 countries, and Syria dropping into it with only 29. In total, 48 countries lost ground over the past year, dropping between one and three ranks, and only 42 countries showed no movement at all.

Dr. Christian H. Kälin, Chairman of Henley & Partners, says that although the size and make-up of the 'Top 10' remains the same as last year, the changing geopolitical climate could well affect the rankings over the next 12 months. "We have witnessed several major events recently that are likely to have an impact on global mobility – including Brexit and the election of US President Donald Trump. Both can be interpreted as steps toward restricting movement and creating barriers to entry. This trend towards curbing travel freedom is already apparent in the shift in rankings on this year's *Visa Restrictions Index*," explains Dr. Kälin, a leading authority on international immigration and citizenship law and policy.

The biggest movers in this year's index were Peru and Ghana. Peru was the highest individual mover, gaining 15 places. Island nations also made a strong showing, with the Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, Micronesia, Kiribati and Tuvalu all gaining over nine places. In contrast, Ghana showed the most negative movement, losing four places in one year.

The fortunes of the emerging economies of the BRICS nations were varied this year. Brazil and China both increased their standing on the index, moving up three and two ranks respectively. However, the other three all lost ground: Russia dropping three places, India two, and South Africa one.

"There is still huge disparity in the levels of travel freedom between countries, despite the world becoming seemingly more mobile and interdependent. Generally, visa requirements are a

reflection of a country's relationship with others, and take into account diplomatic relationships between countries, reciprocal visa arrangements, security risks, and the dangers of visa and immigration regulation violations," explains Dr. Kälin.

### **Citizenship-by-Investment Programs**

In contrast to 12 years ago when the *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index* was first published, there are now many more residence- and citizenship-by-investment programs available for those who wish to enhance their travel freedom. More and more governments are embracing these programs as a means of stimulating economic development and growth, and there is an increasing number of wealthy and talented individuals looking to diversify their citizenship portfolios to give themselves and their families greater international opportunity, stability, freedom and security.

Dr. Kälin points out that the countries that offer the most important citizenship-by-investment programs in the world continue to perform strongly on the index. "Malta offers the top-ranked investment migration program globally and scores very highly with the world's 10<sup>th</sup> most powerful passport and visa-free access to 167 countries. Austria is also in the top ten with a total of 173 countries and Cyprus is not far behind at 16, with 158 countries accessible without a visa."

Likewise, countries that offer citizenship-by-investment programs in the Caribbean have performed well. Grenada is ranked at 37<sup>th</sup> place and offers successful applicants visa-free access to 124 countries including China, Europe's Schengen area, Singapore, Brazil, and other key markets. Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Kitts and Nevis share 30<sup>th</sup> place on the index this year, with visa-free access to 136 countries, and St. Lucia offers its citizens access to 127 countries worldwide and is ranked 36.

"For individuals who hold passports of countries with fewer visa waiver agreements, a second or even third citizenship can open up travel opportunities to countries previously restricted by time-consuming visa application requirements and processes. The *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index* is relevant to both individuals interested in improving their mobility and the quality of their nationality, as well as governments focused on improving the local, regional and global opportunities inherent in their passports," concludes Dr. Kälin.

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### **Notes to Editors**

#### **About the *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index 2017***

Since 2006, the index has been produced in collaboration with the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which maintains the world's largest database of travel information.

Regional and country insights and infographics are available on the *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index* website: <http://visaindex.com/>

- [Click here to download the global infographic](#)

## Headlines 2017 versus 2016

- Germany loses one country but still retains the top spot on the index for the third year with visa-free access to 176 countries
- Sweden remains static in second place with 175 countries but also drops one country from 2016
- The UK drops another position to fourth place with visa-free access to 173 countries
- The size and make-up of the ‘Top 10’ remains exactly the same as in 2016, with the same 28 countries appearing, albeit in a different order
- Island nations make a strong appearance in the 2017 index. Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, Micronesia, Kiribati and Tuvalu all gained over nine places, with Peru the highest individual climber, rising by 15 ranks
- 48 countries lost ground, with Ghana dropping the most on the index by four places
- 42 countries showed no movement at all
- Syria, Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan occupy the bottom four ranks on the 2017 index, each having visa-free access to less than 30 countries around the world

## Headlines across the regions

### 1. Africa

Of all the continents, Africa has suffered the most dramatic decline in travel freedom on the 2017 *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index*, with African countries accounting for 16 of the 20 biggest fallers over the last decade. The Seychelles is the highest-ranking African country, ranking 29<sup>th</sup> on the Index with visa-free access to 137 countries, moving down two places from 2016. Mauritius, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> in the region in 33<sup>rd</sup> position, has visa-free access to 131 countries. South Africa is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> overall in the region in 55<sup>th</sup> position with visa-free access to 98 countries. In 2008 and 2009, South Africa reached its highest ranking over the last 10 years when it ranked 35<sup>th</sup> on the Index.

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### 2. MENA

Over the last 10 years, the UAE moved up an impressive 23 positions on the *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index*. Ranked 38<sup>th</sup> in the latest 2017 edition, a UAE passport offers visa-free travel to 121 countries. Meanwhile, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan remain in the bottom three places of the Index. With access to 30 countries, Somalia moved up one place from 2016 and out of bottom four, while Syria moved down one place into the bottom four, offering visa-free travel to just 29 countries. Iran managed to improve its ranking over the last decade and has escaped the bottom five positions.

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### 3. Southeast Asia

Countries in Southeast Asia remain stable on the 2017 *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index*. Offering visa-free travel to 173 countries and ranked 4<sup>th</sup> overall, Singapore remains the best-performing country in the region, also achieving its highest ranking on the Index in

10 years. Malaysia ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the region in 13<sup>th</sup> position, with visa-free access to 164 countries. Other Southeast Asian countries that improved their rankings from 2016 include Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

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#### **4. North Asia**

North Asian countries consistently perform well on the 2017 *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index*, with both Japan and South Korea retaining their position in the top 10. Japan remained stable in 5<sup>th</sup> position, offering visa-free access to 172 countries. Moving down by one position from 2016, South Korea ranks 7<sup>th</sup>, with visa-free access to 170 countries. Taiwan moved up by 23 positions over the last decade, showing the most growth in the North Asian region.

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#### **5. Russia/CIS region**

The Russian Federation dropped three places on the 2017 *Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index* to 51<sup>st</sup> overall, but remains the highest-ranked country in the Russia/CIS region with visa-free access to 106 countries. Moldova, which ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the region in 54<sup>th</sup> position, improved its ranking by more than 10 positions over the last decade. Georgia is the highest climber in the region, increasing its ranking by three places to 68<sup>th</sup>, while Turkmenistan is 87<sup>th</sup> with the lowest travel freedom ranking in Russia/CIS.

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#### **Headlines over the last decade**

- Africa suffered the most dramatic decline in travel freedom, with African countries accounting for 16 of the 20 biggest fallers since 2007
- Sierra Leone suffered the largest individual decline, losing 29 ranks on the index
- Europe dominates the list of countries who have gained the most travel freedom. Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Estonia all improved by 10 or more positions over the past decade
- Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Somalia have all remained in the bottom five when it comes to visa-free access over the past decade
- Iran has managed to improve its ranking over the past ten years and make its way out of the bottom five countries on the index
- In 2007, there were 25 countries in the top 10, with 18 of those located in Europe. A decade later, there are 28 countries in the top 10 but still with 18 from Europe

#### **About Henley & Partners**

Henley & Partners is the global leader in residence and citizenship planning. Each year, hundreds of wealthy individuals, families and their advisors rely on its expertise and experience in this area. The firm's highly qualified professionals work together as one team in 27 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 which has raised more than USD 6 billion in foreign direct investment. The firm has been involved in strategic consulting and the design, set-up and operation of the world's most successful residence and citizenship programs.

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