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**Asia Dominates When it Comes to Passport Power in 2020**

**For immediate release: London, 7 January 2020**

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As we enter the new decade, Asian countries have firmly established their lead on the [Henley Passport Index](#), the original ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa. For the third consecutive year, Japan has secured the top spot on the index — which is based on exclusive data from the [International Air Transport Association](#) (IATA) — with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 191. Singapore holds onto its 2nd-place position with a score of 190, while South Korea drops down a rank to 3rd place alongside Germany, giving their passport holders visa-free/visa-on-arrival access to 189 destinations worldwide.

The US and the UK continue their downward trajectory on the index's rankings. While both countries remain in the top 10, their shared 8<sup>th</sup>-place position is a significant decline from the number one spot they jointly held in 2015. Elsewhere in the top 10, Finland and Italy share 4<sup>th</sup> place, with a score of 188, while Denmark, Luxembourg, and Spain together hold 5<sup>th</sup> place, with a score of 187. The index's historic success story remains the steady ascent of the UAE, which has climbed a remarkable 47 places over the past 10 years and now sits in 18<sup>th</sup> place, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 171. On the other end of the travel freedom spectrum, Afghanistan remains at the bottom of the index, with its nationals only able to visit a mere 26 destinations visa-free.

[Dr. Christian H. Kaelin](#), Chairman of [Henley & Partners](#) and the inventor of the passport index concept, says the latest ranking provides a fascinating insight into a rapidly changing world. “Asian countries’ dominance of the top spots is a clear argument for the benefits of open-door policies and the introduction of mutually beneficial trade agreements. Over the past few years, we have seen the world adapt to mobility as a permanent condition of global life. The latest rankings show that the countries that embrace this reality are thriving, with their citizens enjoying ever-increasing passport power and the array of benefits that come with it.”

As ongoing research shows, these benefits are extensive. Using exclusive historical data from the Henley Passport Index, political science researchers Uğur Altundal and Ömer Zarpli, of Syracuse University and the University of Pittsburgh respectively, have found that there is a strongly positive correlation between travel freedom and other kinds of liberties – from the economic to the political, and even individual or human freedoms. Altundal and Zarpli observe that “there’s a distinct correlation between visa freedom and investment freedom, for instance. Similar to trade freedom, countries that rank highly in investment freedom generally have stronger passports. European states such as Austria, Malta, and Switzerland clearly show that countries with a business-friendly environment tend to score highly when it comes to passport power. Likewise, by using the Human Freedom Index, we found a strong correlation between personal freedom and travel freedom.”

## **Looking ahead: an increasingly pragmatic approach to migration**

While the latest results from the [Henley Passport Index](#) show that globally, people are more mobile than ever before, they also indicate a growing divide when it comes to travel freedom, with Japanese passport holders able to access 165 more destinations around the world than Afghan nationals, for example. Analysis of historical data from the index reveals that this extraordinary global mobility gap is the starkest it has been since the index's inception in 2006.

The impact of these and other key developments is analysed in depth in the 2020 edition of the [Henley Passport Index and Global Mobility Report](#) — a unique publication that offers cutting-edge analysis and commentary from leading scholars and professional experts on the latest trends shaping international and regional mobility patterns today.

Commenting in the report, [Dr. Parag Khanna](#), bestselling author and the Founder and Managing Partner of FutureMap in Singapore, notes: “Migration, as with almost everything else, is a function of supply and demand — and, increasingly, it is accepted that more migration creates more demand, stimulating much needed economic growth. As the world economy heads into a synchronized slowdown, we must view migration as part of the solution, not the problem.”

Khanna points out that with the US–China trade war showing no signs of decelerating, Western investment has shifted out of China towards Southeast Asia, bringing a new wave of foreign talent into ASEAN countries that have encouraged greater migration through streamlined visa policies. Thailand's strong upward movement in the [Henley Passport Index](#)'s rankings over the past year is a clear illustration of this emerging trend; benefitting from mutually reciprocal visa waivers, the country has climbed three spots in the past year and now sits in 65<sup>th</sup> place, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 78.

Middle Eastern countries have also made strong gains as part of overall efforts to boost trade and tourism. The UAE and Saudi Arabia each climbed four places, while Oman climbed three. Saudi Arabia is now in 66<sup>th</sup> place, with citizens able to access 77 destinations around the world without a prior visa, while Oman sits in 64<sup>th</sup> place, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 79.

Despite these positive regional developments, Dr. Lorraine Charles, Research Associate at the University of Cambridge's Centre for Business Research, warns that migration and mobility trends in the Middle East are largely driven by conflict, which looks set to continue in 2020. Citing deepening conflicts in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and with renewed anti-government protests in Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon, Charles notes that “forced displacement will most likely continue to dominate migration and mobility patterns within the Middle East.”

## **Brexit, talent migration, and the gap between policy and rhetoric**

Following the Conservative government's landslide victory in the UK late last year, the future of mobility and travel freedom between Britain and the EU remains uncertain. Madeleine Sumption, Director of the

Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, says, “The Conservative government has promised an ‘Australian-style’ points-based system that would be more liberal than current policies towards non-EU citizens, though still much more restrictive than free movement. As with all big migration policy changes, what this will mean for actual levels of mobility, however, remains extremely difficult to predict.” Noting that the looming threat of Brexit has potentially made Britain a less attractive destination for EU citizens, Sumption points out that net EU migration to the UK fell by 59% between 2015 and 2018.

Prof. Simone Bertoli, Professor of Economics at Université Clermont Auvergne (CERDI) in France, says that while countries around the world insist that they are taking steps to attract “the best and the brightest”, a rather different picture is currently emerging: “When it comes to talent migration, a worrying gap between policy and rhetoric has been opening up over the past year. The sluggish improvement of labor market conditions after the 2008 crisis, and the concomitant rise of nativist political parties, is reinforcing the perception of immigration as a threat rather than as an opportunity.”

### **Citizenship-by-Investment countries retain strong positions**

Going into the new year, countries with [citizenship-by-investment programs](#) continue to consolidate their positions on the index. [Malta](#) sits in 9<sup>th</sup> place, with access to 183 destinations around the world, while [Montenegro](#) holds on to 46<sup>th</sup> place, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 124. In the Caribbean, [St. Kitts and Nevis](#) and [Antigua and Barbuda](#) secure 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> spot, respectively.

Discussing the increasing popularity of [investment migration programs](#) for both wealthy investors and the countries that offer them, [Dr. Juerg Steffen](#), CEO of [Henley & Partners](#), says: “Demand for these programs is accelerating, just as the supply has grown globally. The past year has shown that, increasingly, nations and wealthy individuals see investment migration as more than a competitive advantage. Today, it is viewed as an absolute requirement in a volatile world where competition for capital is fierce, and it’s very clear that we will see more of this in 2020.”

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### **Notes to editors**

#### **About the 2020 Henley Passport Index**

With cutting-edge expert commentary and historical data spanning 15 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.

Along with the [Kälin – Kochenov Quality of Nationality Index](#), it is considered a major reference tool in this field for global citizens and governments.

## About the 2020 Henley Passport Index and Global Mobility Report

The [2020 Henley Passport Index and Global Mobility Report](#) is a unique publication that brings together commentary from leading scholars and professional experts on the major and emerging trends in global and regional mobility today.

Grounded in geopolitical analysis and with a focus on the realities shaping our world – from climate change to economic downturn to ongoing conflict – the report offers exclusive insight into mobility and migration patterns, and looks at what we can expect in the year to come as migration becomes a permanent condition of global life.

### Headlines 2020 versus 2019

- Japan holds top spot on the [Henley Passport Index](#) for the third year running, with citizens able to access 191 destinations without having to obtain a visa in advance.
- Singapore continues to hold 2<sup>nd</sup> place, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 190.
- Germany remains in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, with access to 189 destinations. It shares this position with South Korea, which dropped from the 2<sup>nd</sup> place position it held a year ago.
- Italy and Finland share joint 4<sup>th</sup> place, with access to 188 destinations around the globe.
- Continuing their steady decline down the rankings since 2015, the UK and the US have both dropped two spots, from 6<sup>th</sup> place to 8<sup>th</sup> place.
- Middle Eastern countries have made strong gains over the past year, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia both moving up four places. The UAE now sits in 18<sup>th</sup> place, with a score of 171, while Saudi Arabia is in 66<sup>th</sup> place, with a score of 77.
- Afghanistan continues to sit at the bottom of the index, with a score of just 26.

### Headlines over the past decade

- A Japanese passport holder can now access 165 more destinations than an Afghan passport holder can – the highest score difference seen in the index's 15-year history.
- The UAE is the strongest individual climber over the past decade, from 65<sup>th</sup> place in 2010 to 18<sup>th</sup> place currently.
- Taiwan has also made some very strong gains over the past ten years, moving 37 spots up the ranking from 69<sup>th</sup> place in 2010 to 32<sup>nd</sup> place currently.
- Countries in the former Soviet space have fared well over the past ten years, particularly Georgia and Ukraine, climbing 19 and 22 places up the rankings respectively.
- Globally, states affected by ongoing conflict or unrest have experienced heavy losses in score over the past decade. In the Middle East, Syria has dropped 18 places since 2010, while Yemen has dropped 15 spots in that period. In Africa, Libya has dropped 15 places, while Mali has dropped 13.

**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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