

2018 Henley Passport Index: Africa lagging behind in travel freedom

With its citizens enjoying visa-free access to 100 countries in total, South Africa has ranked 52nd on the [2018 Henley Passport Index](#), the third highest African country on the index. Supplemented with extensive in-house research, the Henley Passport Index is based on exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which maintains the world's largest and most definitive database of travel information.



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However, it is far surpassed by the Seychelles, which, with visa-free access to 141 countries, is the highest-ranking country in Africa and sits in 27th place on the index. Ranking second in the region and 32nd globally, Mauritius, meanwhile, grants its citizens visa-free access to 134 countries.

Globally, Germany holds on to first place for the fifth year running in the 2018 edition of the index. Compared to their African counterparts, citizens of the European country enjoy visa-free access to 177 countries in total.

A dramatic decline in travel freedom

In 2008 and 2009, South Africa reached its highest ranking over the last 10 years when it ranked 35th on the index. Nigel Barnes, managing partner of Henley & Partners South Africa, explains that, when it comes to both travel and settlement freedom, South Africa is lagging behind in its rankings.

“In fact, of all the continents, Africa as a whole has suffered the most dramatic decline in travel freedom on the 2018 Henley Passport Index, with African countries accounting for 19 of the 27 biggest fallers over the past decade,” he says.

Sierra Leone, which gained visa-free access to seven countries, and rose eight places to secure 73rd position, is the biggest climber of all African countries on this year’s index. The Sierra Leonean passport now offers visa-free access to 62 countries globally. Meanwhile, Somalia, Libya and Eritrea, with a visa-free scoring of 32, 36 and 37 respectively, sit at the very bottom of the region in the Henley Passport Index.

Global trends

“Global mobility is on the brink of massive change and some of the emerging trends we are seeing, as a result, include travel bans, visa restrictions, Brexit and growing support for nationalisation,” says Barnes. “Closer to home, credit rating downgrades, the volatile political and social climate, and concerns about the sustainability of sectors such as education are further evidence of increasing uncertainty and the major shifts shaping our world.”

The biggest movers in this year’s index were Georgia and Ukraine, which completed the visa-liberalisation process with the EU in 2017 and gained access to 30 and 32 new countries respectively. Georgia was the highest individual mover, climbing 15 places, while Ukraine ascended 14 ranks, clinching first place from the Russian Federation in the Commonwealth of Independent States. China, Sierra Leone, Guinea, the Dominican Republic, and Indonesia also performed strongly this year, each gaining seven or more places compared to 2017.

At the other end of the spectrum, 14 countries - Cyprus, Trinidad and Tobago, Sweden, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Iran, North Korea, Nepal, Yemen, Antigua and Barbuda, North Korea and Syria - fared equally poorly in terms of downward movement on the index, each losing four places year-on-year. New Zealand descended the most but fell by only two places.

Of the 199 countries featured on the index, 143 (including the US) improved their rank over the past year and 41 countries (the Russian Federation among them) maintained their position.

In terms of visa-free access, only seven countries saw their level of access reduced over the past year: Azerbaijan, New Zealand, Antigua and Barbuda, Laos, Algeria, North Korea, and Syria all lost visa-free access to a single country. By contrast, 18 countries maintained their level of visa-free access year-on-year, and the remainder of countries (174 in total) saw an improvement in their level of access compared to 2017.

Investment migration fast becoming the quickest route to improved mobility

More governments than ever are embracing **citizenship-by-investment programmes** as a means of stimulating economic development and growth, and an increasing number of wealthy and talented individuals are looking to diversify their citizenship portfolios to afford themselves and their families greater international opportunity, travel freedom, stability, and security.

Barnes points out that the countries that offer the most credible citizenship-by-investment programmes in the world consistently perform strongly on the Henley Passport Index. “Malta offers the top-ranked investment-migration programme globally, and the country also scores very highly on the index, holding the world’s ninth most powerful passport and offering visa-free access to 169 countries. In fourth place, Austria provides access to a total of 174 countries. Cyprus, in 17th place, is another highly sought-after destination and offers visa-free access to 159 countries,” he says. Likewise, Caribbean countries offering citizenship-by-investment programmes performed well on this year’s index.

“Alternative citizenship represents the most direct route to global mobility, connectivity, and access. Individuals who have multiple passports benefit from each country’s best practices and are less vulnerable to its risks and shortcomings. The Henley Passport Index is relevant to anyone seeking to strengthen their level of international access, as well as to governments trying to understand their passport offering in a global context,” Barnes concludes.

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