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QNI Quality of
Nationality
Index

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EXPERT COMMENTARY

The Commonwealth of Independent States Region

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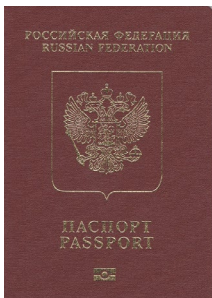
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The Commonwealth of Independent States Region



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The developments in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region generally followed the trends of previous years. Most nationalities of the CIS region, which is comprised of the 12 former Soviet Republics, remained unchanged in their positions in the QNI 2016. These positions were primarily determined by the integration dynamics in the region and bilateral relations with core regional actors. In terms of the QNI, the Russian and Moldovan

nationalities are the best performers among the nationalities of the other countries of the CIS region, being of High Quality. All other CIS nationalities are of Medium Quality.

Citizens of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation, which belong to the Russia-led EAEU, continued to benefit from free movement of goods, capital, services and people, and, in the case of former satellite Soviet Republics, particularly from access to Russia's labor market. EAEU nationalities mostly maintained their scores at the same level. The same can be said of the nationalities of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia – the block of states which pursue closer economic and political links with the EU and signed bilateral association agreements with the EU. Their nationalities also saw little progress in the QNI, mainly due to the EU's inability (in 2016) to fulfil its promise to grant a





visa-free regime to Georgia and Ukraine.¹ The nationalities of Central Asia continued to suffer from their isolation from core integration projects and lower levels of development.

Among the CIS countries, the Russian nationality remains of the highest quality in the region, with the top results on both internal and external values. Its general value reached 39.7% in 2016, which placed it in 63rd position. The Russian nationality was followed by the Moldovan nationality, ranked 80th, the only CIS nationality to continue to benefit from a visa-free regime with the EU. The Moldovan nationality has a QNI value of 35.2%. Both the Russian and Moldovan nationalities have the highest result on a travel value in the region with 58.3% and 58.1% respectively.

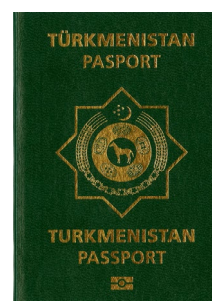
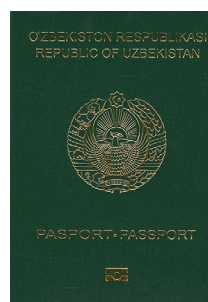
The nationalities of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan remain at the bottom of the QNI, occupying 116th, 121st and 124th places respectively. The weak socio-economic conditions in these countries is further aggravated by these nationalities' restricted external settlement rights.

There is a functioning visa-free regime in the CIS region with minor exceptions; however, since the overhaul of national settlement policies across the countries of the region in the 2010s, countries continue to push the idea of protecting their labor markets. In 2016, the Russian Federation, which is the biggest work and settlement destination in the CIS region, continued to use Travel and Settlement Freedom as its 'carrot and stick' in the region, restricting the nationalities of the countries which do not belong to its pet integration projects.

Only members of the EAEU allow their citizens to freely settle in their territories. The Armenian nationality is 31st in the Settlement Freedom ranking (value: 11.2%), the nationalities of Belarus and Kazakhstan share 32nd place (value: 11.1%), the Russian nationality occupies 33rd place (10.9%) and the nationality of Kyrgyzstan holds 34th (9.0%). The other CIS nationalities fall far behind in their settlement scores.

Russian nationals continued to enjoy the freest travel regime among the nationalities of CIS countries. Allowing visa-free travel or visa-on-arrival to 106 countries and territories in 2016 (which is an increase from 100 in 2015), the Russian nationality was ranked 70th in the Travel Freedom Ranking. The improved number of visa-free destinations had a positive impact on the External Value of Russian nationality in 2016, which increased to 34.6% (from 31.1% in 2015). Russian nationality also provided one of the best regimes to settle among the CIS states, allowing full access to five states (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan).

Belarusian nationality improved slightly in its value (to 32.6% from 31.6% in 2015), yet it dropped from 82nd to 88th position in the QNI General Ranking. While its external value remains stable, its internal value was slightly affected by a continuous economic crisis and worsening socio-economic conditions. Partially as a response to this, in 2016 Belarus endeavored to encourage some positive dynamics by speeding up migration cooperation with the EU, including negotiations on visa facilitation and re-admission agreements and the signing of a Mobility Partnership. Minsk also announced its preparation of a unilateral lifting of short-term visa requirements for the nationals



¹ The EU finally granted both Georgia and Ukraine visa free travels in March and May 2017 respectively

of a number of developed countries, including EU nationals, which arrive in the country through the national airport 'Minsk-2'.

The Kazakhstan nationality also largely remained stable, ranking 85th in 2016 (and 83rd in the 2015 QNI General Ranking) remaining three places ahead of the Belarusian nationality. Its travel value was 38.1% (ranked 91st) and a settlement value of 11.1% (sharing 32nd place with Belarusian nationality). Kazakhstan also continued its visa-free policy towards the nationals of 45 developed countries until the end of 2017, remaining one of the most open countries in the region for the holders of the world's most elite nationalities (the Russian Federation mostly welcomes tourists and nationalities from the developing world).

The nationalities of other members of the EAEU, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, showed close results on Travel and Settlement Freedom, benefitting from their membership of the Union. Armenian nationality was 107th for Travel Freedom with 31.8%, and 31st place for Settlement Freedom with 11.2%; and Kyrgyzstan ended up 108th in Travel Freedom with 31.4%, and 34th with 9.0% in Settlement Freedom respectively. The latter's settlement score was affected by Kazakhstan's policies. Their lower positions in the general ranking are explained by their lower internal value scores compared to Belarus, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.

At this point, it is important to note a recent trend for unilaterally opening up borders for short-term visits in the CIS region. While Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova initiated such unilateral liberalizations in late 2000s, Kazakhstan followed suit in 2014–2015, and Belarus took this step for nationals of 82 countries in February 2017, to be reflected in next year's QNI. Both Belarus and Kazakhstan are seeking additional revenue sources by attracting foreign investment and tourists.

In the other EU-leaning group of countries, the Moldovan nationality has the second highest score in the CIS region. It is in 80th place on the QNI General Ranking with 35.2%. Its main asset is its high external value, which is built on its visa-free access to the Schengen Area. Moldovan nationality is ranked 72nd in Travel Freedom with a value of 58.1%, which comes just after Russian nationality and is very high compared to other CIS nationalities. However, like Ukrainian nationality, Moldovan nationality suffers from a low settlement score, allowing only full access to Georgia and ranked 45th alongside 38 other nationalities.

Ukrainian nationality continued to lag behind Belarusian and Kazakhstani nationalities, ending up in 99th position in the QNI General Ranking. It was 87th in the same ranking in 2015 and is affected by a low settlement score (sharing the 45th position with 38 other nationalities) and no access to the labor markets of the Russian Federation, except for special exemptions for the asylum-seekers from Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions. At the same time, the Ukrainian nationality benefits from a relatively high travel score for a CIS region, benefitting from a number of bilateral visa-free agreements. Ukraine also fulfilled its Visa Liberalization Action Plan with the EU in 2016, which opens the way for visa-free travel to Ukrainian nationals in the near future and a significant improvement in ranking.

Georgia for its part is well-known for its very liberal migration policies, which allow nationals of a significant number of countries to freely travel and work in Georgia. At the same time, the possibilities for Georgia's nationals to work and travel abroad are very restricted. Georgia is 104th in the QNI ranking, with 29.1%. Its citizens benefit from visa-free travel to CIS countries, but lack any settlement rights. Furthermore, Georgian citizens still suffer from a visa-free travel ban from the Russian Federation. On a positive note, like Ukraine, Georgia fulfilled the requirements of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan, and is likely to be granted a visa-free travel for 90 days in a 180-day period in the Schengen Area in 2017. Despite the fact that neither Georgia nor Ukraine achieved a visa-free regime with the EU for its citizens in 2016, the prospect of visa-free travel is regarded as partial compensation for the restrictions to settle or even travel to the Russian Federation (as in case of Georgia) for their nationals, a recent major setback for the QNI scores of their nationalities.

Finally, the nationalities of the Central Asian republics remain at the bottom of the QNI rankings. The nationals of the Central Asian republics can travel to CIS countries, but the labor markets of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan are closed to their migrant workers, and their lower internal indices affect their general scores. There are also some self-imposed bans on the travel rights of their own nationals, as in the case of Turkmenistan, which makes possessing the nationality of Turkmenistan in fact much worse than the QNI is actually able to reflect.

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