

A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: Moving markets; changing consumers

By  Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster

11 May 2018

Although South Africans are not separately listed, 30% of all recipients receiving European citizenship in 2016, hail from Africa according to the latest Eurostat figures released last month. Even though that percentage is slightly under the 33% of intra-EU citizenships granted, it does make Africa the largest beneficiary continent of new passports. Citizens of Morocco were the biggest group acquiring EU citizenship with 101,300 receiving mostly Spanish, Italian and French passports.

The next biggest movers were Albanians (67,500) with almost 90% of those granted Italian or Greek citizenship. Citizens of India (41,700), Pakistan (32,900), Turkey (32,800), Romania (29,700) and Ukraine (24,000) were also among the largest groups acquiring some of the nearly 1 million EU citizenships granted that year.

At the other end of the scale, the tiny Maltese Islands barely blip on the citizenship radar with only 1,495 people granted their Maltese colours by the government in 2016. Fully a third of all successful applicants were Russians. Expat Brits at 8.4% came in a distant second.



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The Russians are coming

Rumours of a Russian oligarch invasion of the archipelago would be overstated: most of the Russian traffic is merely wealthy businesspeople purchasing second passports – and Schengen visa-free access throughout the EU – for themselves and their families. The Russians may rent an apartment to tick a box on the list of citizenship requirements but they don't appear to live on the island. The second-placed UK contingent are much more likely to be settled in Malta since citizenship becomes an option after five years of residency status.

Although Malta's 1,495 figure for 2016 represented a 131% increase from the 646 citizenships granted in 2015, it was significantly lower than the 3,315 for fellow small EU member state Luxembourg.

Apart from the 29.6% coming from Africa, of the 995,000 people granted citizenship in European Union member states, 20.9% were Asian, 15.2% American and less than 1% from Oceania.

The EU's total of 995,000 citizenships in 2016 was higher than the 841,000 granted in 2015 and 889,000 in 2014.

Main recipients of citizenships granted by EU Member States, 2016

	Total number	2016/2015	Main recipients		Second main recipients		Third main recipients	
			Citizens of	%	Citizens of	%	Citizens of	%
EU	994 800	+18%	Morocco	10.2	Albania	6.8	India	4.2
Belgium	31 935	+18%	Morocco	12.5	Romania	4.8	Netherlands	4.4
Bulgaria	1 626	+28%	Russia	30.0	Ukraine	17.1	Turkey	8.9
Czech Republic	4 561	+74%	Ukraine	38.4	Russia	15.1	Slovakia	12.6
Denmark	15 028	+28%	Iraq	19.4	Afghanistan	10.8	Somalia	6.6
Germany	112 843	+2%	Turkey	14.4	Poland	5.9	Russia	4.3
Estonia	1 780	+98%	Recognised non-citizen*	81.9	Russia	13.7	Ukraine	1.6
Ireland	10 038	-26%	Poland	13.2	India	10.2	Nigeria	7.7
Greece	33 210	+138%	Albania	86.0	Ukraine	1.5	Russia	1.2
Spain	150 944	+32%	Morocco	24.5	Bolivia	10.5	Ecuador	10.1
France	119 152	+5%	Morocco	14.9	Algeria	14.8	Tunisia	6.4
Croatia	3 973	+232%	Bosnia & Herzegovina	38.2	Serbia	18.5	Chile	4.4
Italy	201 591	+13%	Albania	18.3	Morocco	17.5	Romania	6.4
Cyprus	4 660	+40%	Russia	24.8	Greece	15.6	United Kingdom	7.2
Latvia	1 957	+3%	Recognised non-citizen*	69.5	United Kingdom	6.6	Russia	6.5
Lithuania	176	-4%	Russia	32.4	Stateless**	21.0	Ukraine	16.5
Luxembourg	3 315	+4%	Portugal	32.7	France	11.6	Belgium	9.0
Hungary	4 315	+7%	Romania	66.6	Ukraine	8.5	Slovakia	6.5
Malta	1 495	+131%	Russia	33.0	United Kingdom	8.4	Saudi Arabia	5.2
Netherlands	28 543	+2%	Somalia	13.8	Morocco	11.8	Turkey	9.8
Austria	8 530	+5%	Bosnia & Herzegovina	14.8	Turkey	9.6	Serbia	8.8
Poland	3 684	-7%	Ukraine	51.2	Belarus	15.3	Russia	6.4
Portugal	25 104	+23%	Brazil	31.3	Cape Verde	14.4	Ukraine	12.9
Romania	4 527	+73%	Ukraine	89.1	Turkey	3.1	Syria	1.5
Slovenia	1 297	+3%	Bosnia & Herzegovina	55.8	Former Yug. Rep. of Macedonia	12.8	Serbia	12.3
Slovakia	484	+57%	Czech Republic	21.7	Serbia	19.4	Ukraine	15.9
Finland	9 375	+18%	Russia	21.6	Somalia	11.4	Iraq	5.7
Sweden	61 294	+25%	Somalia	14.8	Syria	7.3	Stateless**	7.2
United Kingdom	149 372	+27%	India	16.1	Pakistan	11.2	Nigeria	6.6

Russians topped the list of Maltese citizenship recipients | [Eurostat](#)

It might as well be spring

Looking ahead, the European Commission Spring Forecast (ECSF) has projected Malta's economic growth to remain vigorous over the coming months.

The report observes that labour supply continued to increase thanks to the inflows of foreign workers and the rising participation of women in the labour market. Strong economic momentum should further support employment creation, while the unemployment rate is forecast to remain at 4%.

The increase in the labour supply, it says, has helped to keep wage pressures contained, resulting in stable unit labour costs in 2017.



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In the near term, higher expected growth in compensation per employees is projected to result in increases of unit labour costs by respectively 1.5% and 1.6% in 2018 and 2019, above the euro area average.

Malta's economy, note the ECSF, is among the fastest growing economies in the EU, with record-low unemployment and moderate wage growth. The current account and the budget balances are set to remain in surplus.

Domestic demand is expected to become the main driver of growth in 2018, underpinned by the expansion in private consumption and the recovery in investment.

Strong services sector

Real GDP growth is forecast to average 5.8% for 2018 as a whole, in a context of favourable labour market conditions and high consumer confidence. The strong performance of the services sector, particularly in areas such as tourism, remote gaming and professional services, is expected to sustain the sizeable current account surplus.

In 2019, investment is expected to pick up further, supported by several projects in the health, technology and telecommunication sectors. With domestic demand projected to remain the main driver of growth, and a modest contribution from net exports, real GDP is set to increase by 5.1%.

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