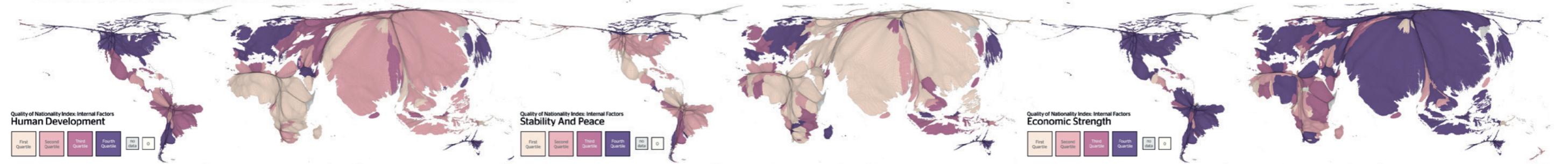


Basemap: Equal-population projection (gridded population cartogram), Data Source: Quality of Nationality Index 2018



The power of passports

By Benjamin Hennig

The value of citizenship and nationality plays an important part in every person's life. While some people live within peaceful, highly developed countries and are free to travel, others are hampered and restricted by their nationality. The Quality of Nationality Index (QNI) developed by Dimitry Kochenov and Justin Lindeboom from the University

of Groningen, represents an attempt to measure the quality of different nationalities in an objective, data-driven way. The index reveals that nationalities are by no means equal but contain a substantial element of inequality that can dictate what an individual is able to achieve in life and the rights they hold. Kochenov and Lindeboom also note that the quality of nationalities are not necessarily correlated with the prestige of the issuing states.

The QNI uses a wide variety of quantifiable data to rank nationalities on a scale from 0 to 100 per cent. Internal values measured include economic strength; human development; and peace and stability, as shown in the smaller series of cartograms in this feature.

External factors include how easily a person of a particular nationality (and a holder of its respective passport) is able to travel through administrative processes, or to settle in other countries.

The achievements of European integration, combined with the continent's economic strength and its long period of political stability set the continent apart. Europe (apart from parts of the Balkan peninsula) stands out for 'extreme high quality'. Freedom to travel within EFTA and EU-member states plays an important part in this. This freedom also contributes to the high external value of nationality for those countries that have entered into visa-free travel agreements with this part of Europe, which partly explains the high quality of citizenship in much of the Americas, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. In turn, limited access to Europe and very restricted travel (and settlement) rules, create a divided world in which the African and Asian continents are excluded from these freedoms, despite their geographical proximity.

Viewing this from a population-centric perspective reveals how unequal the external quality of nationality is. The equal-population projection used in this series of cartograms shows that almost half the world's

population has overall quality of nationality scores of medium to low quality, while economic strength is clearly correlated to a high quality of nationality.

Nevertheless, even in the highest ranking group, the quality of nationality still varies between countries. This is evident when comparing France (currently at the top of the global ranking with an 83.5 per cent score) and Bulgaria (75 per cent), though the latter still ranks above the USA (70 per cent). Bottom of the list of ranked countries is Angola with a score of 24.2 per cent.

From a European perspective, the relevance of national and European identities and their impact on the quality of nationality need more consideration in the ongoing debates about a new wave of nationalism. These debates need to be balanced between emotional and subjective arguments of nationality, and the measurable objective benefits which become visible in indicators such as the Quality of Nationality index. ●

Benjamin Hennig (@geoviews) is professor of geography at the University of Iceland and honorary research associate in the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford. He is also involved in the Worldmapper project (Worldmapper.org).