ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP PROGRAMS: 2019 EDITION
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This link will take you to the latest report available.

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In the 1930s, dark clouds were gathering over Europe, especially for Jewish people. Workers and businessmen were losing their jobs, homes, and entire businesses, simply because their last names ended with “berg” or “stein”. But they weren’t losing their lives just yet - at least not en masse - and many thought that soon, everything would return to normal.

Others, however, saw the writing on the wall and chose to take action. Among the latter group were around 100 Eastern European Jewish families that in 1937 sailed to the American continent.

They didn’t head to the United States, Brazil or Argentina - the common immigration destinations at the time. Instead, they took advantage of the first modern example of an economic citizenship program, offered by... Haiti.

The price of a Haitian passport was steep - $5,000 in 1937, which is close to $100,000 in today’s money - but paying that price trumped the grim alternative of staying back home. The lives of these 100 families were saved. In contrast, most of those who stayed did not fare as well.

That’s just one example of how having an “escape hatch” can make a difference to your future. It pays, if possible, to plan ahead: Recently, millions of Venezuelans learned the hard way that getting out of the country when the economy has already collapsed is very hard… and very expensive. Once citizens of the richest country of Latin America, now very few Venezuelans can afford to buy even a bus ticket across the border to Colombia.

If they had previously procured backup citizenship, or residency abroad, their fates could have been different.

And while these are rather extreme examples of why second passports can be critically important, today having second citizenship (or at least a second residency) remains as important as ever, regardless of your ethnicity and origin.

It’s even helpful in good times, not just difficult ones.
A second passport means more options and more freedom. Period. You can live, do business, invest in, and study, with no restrictions, in more than just the country of your birth. Often, it can also mean that you can travel to a wider range of countries without a visa.

If you want to open a bank account abroad, or a crypto account overseas, or a foreign brokerage account, having a second citizenship can often make it easier. (Some banks/companies/brokerages prefer not to deal with US citizens, for example.)

And if things turn very nasty at home, you can easily get out of Dodge. You’ll always have a way out… and a place to go.

There are many ways to obtain a second passport (we will cover them below), but purchasing one outright is also viable and is completely legal.

And the great news is that the choice of available options today is so much greater than back in 1937. Since WWII, Haiti has done nothing on the economic citizenship scene, but many other nations have grabbed the baton.

There are a dozen economic citizenship programs in the world (a.k.a citizenship-by-investment, or CBI, programs), where you receive a passport outright. And there are about the same number of Residency by Investments (a.k.a Golden Visa Programs), where you receive the right to live in the country indefinitely. With residency only, you don’t have the right to vote, or a passport, but you can still go to your second residency without issues.

Choosing among various programs can be daunting. They come in various shapes, with unique conditions, and are offered by countries from different continents.

And just over the past couple of years, several new programs have either come into existence, or are about to do so - from Moldova and Montenegro to Turkey and Jordan, often with little reliable information available.

Which one to choose?

To answer all these questions, we consulted Christian Hesheim - an industry insider. Researching and analyzing various CBI programs is what he does all day, every day. Christian wields that knowledge to run imidaily.com - an independent website dedicated to the topic. We found him highly knowledgeable about the latest developments and were interested in hearing his opinions on various programs around the world.
But before we get into the details of those programs, let’s review the basics of economic citizenship:

**ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP PROGRAMS: WHAT ARE THEY?**

Traditionally, the main grounds for acquiring citizenship in a country have been:

- **Birth in a country that follows the “jus soli” principle**

  If you give birth to a child in one of the *jus soli* (the right of soil) countries, such as the US, Canada, Chile, Argentina, etc., then he or she will automatically become a citizen there. This practice is almost exclusively practiced by countries of the New World, located in North and South America.

  This is one of the easiest ways to give a coveted second citizenship to your child.

- **Descent from a citizen parent**

  Most citizenships are passed down from a parent to a child through *jus sanguinis* (right of blood). For example, if your mother is American and your father is German, you will hold both citizenships.

- **By ancestry**

  This method is a derivation of the one above. Some European countries allow you to claim citizenship if one of your ancestors (usually a grandparent, sometimes a great-grandparent) hails from that country. And sometimes, such as in the case of displaced ancestors from World War II or even the Spanish Inquisition, these ancestors might have left the area decades or even centuries ago, but if you can prove the link to him/her, you could qualify for citizenship.

- **Naturalization**

  Naturalization -- legally living in a country as a resident for a set period of time -- is by far the most common way to obtain a second citizenship. Hundreds of thousands of people become naturalized each year around the world.

  It is also the longest way and usually requires several years of residing in a country.

  (We cover the various citizenship options in [our extensive library here](#).)
You can become a citizen faster if...

- **You marry a citizen of a country**

Very rarely you can apply for a passport right after getting married. You usually still need to reside for several years in your spouse’s country before you can apply for naturalization. However, most countries will allow for faster naturalization if you marry a citizen.

Important - we do not recommend you to get married with just a passport in mind. False marriages are illegal in most countries.

But if you are in an international relationship, know that many countries make it easier for foreign spouses to naturalize.

- **You have a child in a country**

Most countries located on the American continent grant citizenship to a child born within its borders. Several countries, including Argentina and Brazil, will also let parents apply for an expedited naturalization.

Perhaps you lack recent ancestors from a *jus sanguinis* country, have no plans to marry a foreigner anytime soon, and don’t want to move to a new country and live there full time. If you have some money to spare, then **citizenship-by-investment** may be your best route.

Citizenship-by-investment (CBI) programs offer you the opportunity to legally acquire a new citizenship quickly and simply, without any disruptions to your every-day life.

You don’t have to go through any kind of local history or language test when becoming a citizen. You do not have to live in your new country for years at a time.

All you need to do is pony up the investment (or donation) amount.
Why would countries sell the right to be called a citizen?

Typically, these programs are offered by small nations that don’t have immense natural resource wealth like Saudi Arabia, or flourishing industries like the US... so they leverage what they have – the right to be a citizen in their nation – to bring in revenue.

In return, they typically require you to make a non-recoverable donation to the government. (That’s why most programs around the world really offer citizenship-by-donation rather than by-investment.)

Alternatively, many nations allow citizenship to be acquired via a hefty investment into the country, or by a combination of a donation and an investment.

There are 12 citizenship-by-investment programs in the world that are either already functioning or should come online soon. Nearly half of the programs hail from the Caribbean, and these are the world’s busiest, processing more than 60% of all CBI applications.

(After releasing the latest number of approved applicants in late September of 2019, the Turkish CBI program has suddenly emerged as the most popular program in the world...)

Keep in mind, in this report we intentionally skipped programs that are too obscure (i.e. Cambodia), or too expensive and do not guarantee a passport even if you fulfill the requirements (i.e. Austria).
All passports are not created equal

To grasp why some programs are much more expensive than others, it is important to understand that different passports have different intrinsic values, based on the countries you can access through them.

Passports (and thus the programs offering them) fall under three major tiers:

**Tier A** - passports of the member-countries of the European Union; these also allow extensive visa-free access to the rest of the world, including the UK, Canada, and sometimes the US.

Programs covered in the report: Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria

**Tier B** - passports that allow visa-free access to the Schengen area of Europe (26 European states that have officially abolished all border controls at their mutual borders), the UK, and most of Latin America and Southeast Asia (but never to the US, Canada, or Australia).

Programs covered in the report: all five Caribbean programs, Montenegro, Moldova

**Tier C** - passports of countries that do not have visa-free access to any part of the “developed world” including the Schengen area, the UK, Canada, the US, etc.

Programs covered in the report: Egypt, Jordan

(Click here to access the Sovereign Man Passport Ranking and learn more about each CBI country’s passport.)

Now let’s delve into various programs around the world, starting with the Caribbean - the region with the highest concentration of them.
PROGRAMS OF THE CARIBBEAN

The Caribbean, again, is home to five economic citizenship programs, hence the region is responsible for making the business of exchanging citizenship for investment (or donation) mainstream.

The CBI countries here are St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, and Grenada.

All offer Tier B passports, all cost about the same, and all offer good value for your money. St Kitts and Nevis’s program started in 1984, making it the longest-running uninterrupted program in the world. Over 35 years, St Kitts has issued more than 16,000 passports.

The entire population of St Kitts is around 56,000, meaning that the program has increased citizenship there by nearly half.
And in the 2017 aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, several Caribbean programs made their programs even more attractive by literally halving their prices, trying to attract buyers to their shores.

We traveled the region extensively at that time, writing an alert about the programs. (Keep in mind that some prices are outdated in that piece.)

Since then, the prices have stayed low, and in some cases have decreased even further.

St Kitts, for example, introduced a reduced $200,000 real estate investment option to attract investors to the country’s luxury resort developments. That’s a huge improvement from the $400,000 investment threshold they had before (and which is still a requirement for other types of developments).

And Antigua introduced a limited-time “50% off” offer on both the donation and real estate options that is set to expire on Oct 31, 2019. However, chances are they will keep renewing the offer to be able to compete with other programs.

And just in May of 2019, Grenada dropped the price for a single applicant to $150,000 for the donation option (down from $200,000). Also, now Grenada allows applicants to invest a reduced real estate amount of $220,000 (down from $350,000) if you invest in “priority projects.” At least two individuals need to combine their funds if you go with this option, with the total minimum property value of $440,000.

Additionally, the fact that there are five competing programs in the Caribbean plays in favor for you - the consumer. Programs (for the most part) are similar to each other, and the passports they offer are similar in quality, so going with the lowest-priced option generally is not a bad strategy.

(Program similarity is the reason we don’t cover them separately in the report.)
Here is how the Caribbean programs compare today:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>St Kitts &amp; Nevis</th>
<th>St Lucia</th>
<th>Dominica</th>
<th>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</th>
<th>Grenada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Donation option</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government donation amount</td>
<td>$150k - single</td>
<td>$100k - single</td>
<td>$100k - single</td>
<td>$100k * - single, couple &amp; family of 4</td>
<td>$150k - single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$195k - couple &amp; family of 4</td>
<td>$165k - couple &amp; family of 4</td>
<td>$175k - couple &amp; family of 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>$200k - couple &amp; family of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL COST (with all govt fees)</td>
<td>$157,850</td>
<td>$109,600</td>
<td>$109,950</td>
<td>$132,800*</td>
<td>$158,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple</td>
<td>$207,200</td>
<td>$180,700</td>
<td>$190,400</td>
<td>$140,600*</td>
<td>$216,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family of 4</td>
<td>$207,700</td>
<td>$207,900</td>
<td>$218,300</td>
<td>$141,200*</td>
<td>$221,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lowest-priced programs are in green.

*Antigua's discounted prices (as in the table) are set to expire in November 2019, but will likely be renewed further.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Grenada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Real estate option (can invest in government-approved projects only)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum property purchase price</td>
<td>$200k - if luxury resorts</td>
<td>$300k</td>
<td>$200k</td>
<td>$200k*</td>
<td>$220k-if “priority project”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$400k - other RE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$350k - other RE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL COST (with all govt fees)</td>
<td>$242,800</td>
<td>$359,500</td>
<td>$233,500</td>
<td>$257,800*</td>
<td>$278,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family of 4</td>
<td>$287,900</td>
<td>$452,500</td>
<td>$247,500</td>
<td>$266,200*</td>
<td>$286,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't sell the property (years)</td>
<td>7 years (5 years if choosing the $400k option)</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>3 years (5 years if selling to another CBI applicant)</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Grenada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other investment options</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in local enterprise</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$3.5M plus government fees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$1.5M plus fees ($400k if investing as a group)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in government bonds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Starts at $500k plus fees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Grenada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other information</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency requirements</td>
<td>no residency requirements</td>
<td>no residency requirements</td>
<td>no residency requirements</td>
<td>Must visit once to renew passport after 5 years.</td>
<td>no residency requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval time</td>
<td>3-5 months</td>
<td>3-5 months</td>
<td>3-5 months</td>
<td>3-5 months</td>
<td>3-5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passport quality (according to the <a href="https://soverignman.com/passport-rank">Sovereign Man's Passport Ranking</a>)</td>
<td>“B”, with access to Schengen, the UK, Russia...</td>
<td>“B”, with access to Schengen, the UK, Russia...</td>
<td>“B”, with access to Schengen, the UK, Russia...</td>
<td>“B”, with access to Schengen, the UK, China, Russia...</td>
<td>“B”, with access to Schengen, the UK, China, Russia...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And clicking these links will take you to each program’s official page: St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada.

Explanation notes:

- The table above includes all applicable government fees (which can be rather high), but does not include another potentially significant expense – the commission for the local agent who will actually file your paperwork with the government. That fee usually starts at $10,000, and it’s not rare for the industry leaders to charge $30,000 or more for the service. (Don’t fall into that expensive trap.)

We have great contacts on the ground in most of the countries we’re covering who charge fair prices - in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Write to us at clients@sovereignman.com if you want a reference.

- When calculating the total outlay for a family, we included two kids young enough to not trigger criminal background checks (which means there would be no due diligence fees for them).

In St Kitts, Dominica, and Grenada the trigger age is 16; in Antigua - 12; in St Lucia - 18.

**Total Access members, you can obtain a St Lucian passport cheaper than anyone else in the world**

As an official promoter of St Lucian program, we offer St Lucian passports less expensively than anyone else in the world, at a price lower than what you see in the table above. We can do that because we do not pocket the government’s commission, but rather hand it back to our subscribers.

This unique opportunity is available only to our Total Access members - the highest-tier membership we offer. If you are a TA member and interested in obtaining a St Lucian passport, write to us at access@sovereignman.com and we will provide you with more details.
Benefits of a second passport from the Caribbean

The first and the most obvious benefit of any (not just Caribbean) second passport - is that it works as the ultimate insurance policy.

If things take a turn for the worse in your home country, you can simply jump on the plane to your second homeland.

And as a citizen of one Caribbean state, you can reside in six other islands as well.

That's because the Caribbean region is home to international organizations that facilitate the free movement of goods and people.

First, all five countries offering economic citizenship programs also are full members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), with Montserrat and St Vincent and the Grenadines being the other two members (for a total of seven full members).

As a citizen of any of these states, you can freely move to, and reside in, any other member state in the community.

Additionally, all five countries are also part of the larger block - Caribbean Community (CARICOM) consisting of 15 nations sharing tariff-free trade. This comes with greater limitations than OECS when it comes to the movement of people, however.

As a St Lucian citizen, for example, you can't just move to Trinidad and Tobago (both are CARICOM members) just because you want to. At the moment, only people with certain skills can move freely among CARICOM states, so you would need to obtain a corresponding skills certificate.

But in the (distant) future, the bloc expects to achieve full freedom of movement of people.

Still, the Caribbean is a small region to live in full-time, and the countries comprising it are even smaller. So, the main value of the Caribbean passport comes from the visa-free travel it provides around the world.

Caribbean passports are not the world’s best in this regard, but they are solid: All CBI countries offer visa-free travel to the Schengen Area and the UK, for example...

One downside is that none of them give access to the US, Canada, or Australia.

The only country with a notable advantage is Grenada. Their citizens can travel visa-free to
China. And back in 1989, the country signed an agreement with the United States allowing Grenadians to work and live in the US under an E-2 visa. No other Caribbean nation with a CBI program can boast that.

(The E-2 visa is an investor visa where you can invest around $100,000 in the American economy - usually in your own business. E-2 is a non-immigrant visa and does not lead to a green card or citizenship in the US, but as long as your investment stays intact, you can live in the country indefinitely.)

If you are not a US citizen, then note that Grenadian citizenship can serve as a gateway for people with an end goal of living in the United States.

For more specific information about the visa-free possibilities of each Caribbean passport, access our passport ranking report.

**You can become a citizen in as little as three months**

Participating in a CBI program is usually, by far, the quickest way to obtain a passport, but it’s still not instant.

The government performs due diligence on each applicant, and that takes time.

To fight the perception that they take in anyone with a padded wallet, even criminals, most Caribbean CBI governments make a genuine effort to take in only squeaky clean people onboard. And it is not uncommon for the countries to revoke the citizenship of people who commit wrongdoing after they obtain citizenship.

Reputation is omnipotent.

So, proper due diligence takes time, and in the Caribbean, that process usually takes 4-6 months.

However, it can be quicker. The fastest approval we have seen with our own subscriber in St Lucia was three months.

**There is more than one way to obtain a passport in the Caribbean**

In the table above we covered two most popular ways to obtain a passport in these programs
- a) donation to a government fund, and b) investment in local real estate:

**Donation to a government fund** is the most straightforward option.

It entails contributing around $100,000 (plus fees) to a government-run development fund. The government later spends the money on schools and roads, and to rebuild the country after the next hurricane.

And you get your passport.

**Investment in local real estate** works a bit differently, and at first sight, it may seem like a better choice.

Sure, the price is higher, but instead of donating money, you buy a property that you can use for your own personal needs (Caribbean vacations!) or even rent out.

Also, after the mandatory (usually five-year) moratorium on the sale of a property ends, you can sell your property, recoup the investment in full, and still get to keep your passport.

What’s not to like?

A lot, actually. In our experience, there are several expensive complications:

First, real estate anywhere in the Caribbean is not cheap.

Secondly, you must purchase a property from a government-approved project. You can’t just
buy any property you like. And the properties that qualify under the CBI programs tend to be even more expensive than the norm.

That’s “expensive squared”.

(You can review all approved projects here: St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada.)

So, selling your property five years down the road without a loss will likely be a challenge.

And finally, when going the real estate route, expect to pay much higher government fees. For example, in Grenada, various government fees for a family of four amounts to $20,000 for the donation option, but for the real estate option, it’s $70,000. This way, the government makes sure the country’s coffers still get a serious direct cash infusion from passport seekers.

That’s why we think that the donation option is a better choice for most people thinking about economic citizenship in the Caribbean (unless you really must own that Caribbean villa at any cost).

In addition to the donation and real estate options, some nations get even more creative. Antigua, for example, offers another way to obtain a passport - by investing $1,500,000 in a local enterprise. It, too, must be approved by the government.

In St Lucia, the threshold to invest in an approved local enterprise in return for a passport is even higher - $3,500,000.

We do not recommend you go this route unless you really know what you are doing - meaning that you have a very deep understanding of the local business environment and know the business you are investing in really well.
Should you obtain a passport in St Lucia by investing in government bonds?

St Lucia also offers an option to purchase a passport that no other regional competitor does - by investing $500,000 in a government bond (plus applicable government fees).

The investment is interest-free, so you will get no income from it, and you will need to hold your investment for at least five years.

However, unlike the real estate option, you will actually get your entire investment amount back in five years... assuming St Lucia does not default.

St Lucia is a small country and is very susceptible to external factors. The great financial crisis of 2008/2009 slammed the country’s economy to its knees after the tourism dollars dried up.

And in any year, an unfortunate hurricane can hit the nation, requiring billions of dollars to rebuild, and altering the nation’s ability to pay you back.

The current government’s debt-to-GDP ratio is around 70%. That may seem like a decent number when compared to the US’s 106% or Japan’s incredible 238%.

But don’t be misled: 70% is a lot for a tiny nation that is not considered a prime borrower. We have seen countries with lower debt levels default on their promises.

Additionally, there is an opportunity cost in locking half a million dollars for five years.

If you have $509,500 (the exact price for a single applicant) readily available today to invest in a passport, you may still choose to donate $109,500 to buy it outright, and invest the remaining $400,000 in a 28-day T-bill.

We consider investing with Uncle Sam for 28 days at a time (and to keep rolling it over) to be a much safer proposition than locking down your investment for five years with a tiny nation.

T-bills are currently paying around 2% a year, so after five years of being invested, you should earn around $40,000 in interest. This way, the real cost of your passport will come down to just about $69,500 ($109,500 - $40,000).
And to generate the entire $109,500 investment in interest, the same $400,000 will need to earn you 5.5% a year for five years - harder to do but still possible. In this case, your passport will end up being completely “free”.

Things get a bit different if you apply as a family. The donation option for a family of four costs $207,500 including the government fees, and $567,000 in case of the bonds.

If you buy your passports outright, you will have $359,000 left to invest ($567,000 - $207,000). So to recoup your donation amount in five years, you will need to find an investment returning you the entire 11.5% a year - pretty hard in the current low-interest environment.

Final thoughts on the Caribbean CBI programs

Programs in the Caribbean are very similar in their nature and pricing. They also provide good value for your dollars (stick to the donation option).

It is unlikely that you will end up spending the rest of your life in your beautiful - but tiny - new Caribbean home country. But if things go south back where you came from, you’ll find comfort in being able to move to any of the seven members of the OECS.

And in the meantime, you can take advantage of the visa-free travel that Caribbean passports offer.

Grenada’s passport inches a bit higher in quality in this regard, offering travel to China visa-free, plus desirable access to the E2 visa program in the US. And that is reflected in their pricing.

St Kitts’s passport comes with a premium too - their program has been around for 35 years and usually sets the standard for other programs in the region.

However, if you do not care about visa-free access to China, or about a program’s long history, then you should do just fine with St Lucia or another program of your liking.
Risks of participating in a CBI program

Obtaining a second passport is completely legal in any of the Anglosphere countries, including the US, Canada, the UK... even if you purchase it outright. However, there is still a risk that your new passport could become a little less valuable in the future.

You see, the world’s most desirable travel destinations - the European Union, the US, Canada... don’t really like CBI programs (in the Caribbean or elsewhere), and from time to time, they threaten to revoke visa-free access to the countries that have them.

A few years ago, for example, Canada cancelled visa-free access for citizens of both St Kitts and Antigua, citing “security concerns” and claiming that the countries’ background check systems were not efficient enough to filter all potential criminals wanting to obtain passports.

Currently, all five Caribbean programs enjoy visa-free access to the Schengen Area and the UK, but every now and then, European parliament members call to scrap visa-free access from countries that have “nefarious” citizenship-by-investment programs in place.

So far, none of the grousings has lead to any travel restrictions from the EU, but there is no guarantee that these countries will be able to stay on Europe’s visa-waiver program forever.
PROGRAMS IN EUROPE

While the Caribbean programs can provide great bang for your buck, the “holy grails” of economic citizenship are located elsewhere - in Europe.

Sure, Europe is increasingly embracing socialism (with some exceptions) and has acute immigration problems. But a passport from a European Union member country is still a great asset to have. With it, you can work, live and study in any of the 28 countries of the block (27, if you discount the UK).

And Europe offers an amazing quality of life. French wine regions, the music scene in Vienna, and Spanish beach resorts will likely keep attracting crowds from all over the world for years to come.

Many countries in the European Union will grant you citizenship through ancestry, and for those of you with European heritage, that’s usually the easiest way to obtain a coveted EU passport.

But if you do not belong to a lucky gene club, Malta and Cyprus have economic citizenship programs. Upon obtaining a passport from one of these two counties, you gain access to the entire European Union.

Additionally, Bulgaria - also an EU member - has a program in place that leads to faster citizenship after just about two years of residency there. (The standard timeline is five years of residency.) However, it still takes at least two years, thus we call this program a fast-track, and not an instant, citizenship program.

But since it’s very easy to get confused by the various terms when talking about Europe, let’s quickly review the differences between the EU and Schengen.
The European Union vs Schengen area vs the Eurozone

The European Union (EU), the Schengen Area, and the Eurozone are three different concepts within the same continent (though most European countries are in all three).

The European Union is a political and economic union of 27 European states (after discounting the UK) with a single market allowing for the free movement of people, goods, services, and money. Citizens of one EU country are free to study, work, live, and retire in any other EU country.

The Schengen area comprises 26 European states (not all of them are in the EU) that have officially abolished passport and all other types of border control at their borders, so traveling among them is akin to traveling from California to Texas, or from Quebec to Alberta.

Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Cyprus are set to join the area in the future (see the yellow countries on the Schengen map).

And finally, the Eurozone is another union you need to know about. It consists of 19 countries (all of them are in the EU) that have adopted the euro as their sole currencies. Additionally, while not officially members of the Eurozone (or the EU), Montenegro and Kosovo also chose to use the euro as legal tender (yellow on the Eurozone map).
And finally, Europe is bigger than the European Union. Montenegro and Moldova - countries that are not part of the EU, now also have their CBI programs (though they are not currently operational just yet).

These programs could be interesting for people who can’t afford the EU passport but still would like to put down roots in Europe.

All countries in this part of the world (except Moldova) require you to do two things in order to receive citizenship:

a) donate to a government fund - you will not see this money back; AND,

b) invest in local assets (usually real estate) - this amount is potentially recoverable.

Here’s how all the European programs compare:

(Click on the country name to jump to the respective section of the report.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-returnable donation to the government</th>
<th>Cyprus</th>
<th>Malta</th>
<th>Montenegro (soon to launch)</th>
<th>Moldova (on hold)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>€150k</td>
<td>Donation: €650k - single, and additional €25k for a spouse and each minor child</td>
<td>€100k</td>
<td>€100k - single €115k - couple €145k - family of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate: €80k goes to the landlord if you choose to rent</td>
<td>Real Estate: €150k if you chose to rent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returnable Investment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate: €2M - residential; €2.5M - other types of RE</td>
<td>Real estate: €150k worth of gov. bonds, stocks, etc.</td>
<td>Real Estate (gov-approved only): €250k-outside of Podgorica and the coast (less developed areas); €450k-Podgorica and the coast (developed areas)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial instruments: €150k</td>
<td>€150k</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL COST (with all govt fees)**

| Single | €2.15M (+VAT*) | €888k (if rent) €1.15M (if buy) | €365k (less developed) €565k (developed)** | €147k |
| Couple | €2.16M (+VAT) | €915k (if rent) €1.21M (if buy) | €375k (less developed) €575k (developed) | €170k |
| Family of 4 | €2.16M (+VAT) | €999k (if rent) €1.27M (if buy) | €395k (less developed) €595k (developed) | €201k |

**Can’t sell the investment (years)**

| Single | Must keep the property for 5 years (after that must keep a €500k personal home) | Financial instruments: 5 years. | Real estate: 5 years. If renting, need a 5-year contract (worth €80k). | No set regulation yet, but likely 5 years. |
| Couple | | | | |
| Family of 4 | | | | |

The TOTAL COST of a passport does not include agents’ fees that can be high - €50k or more in Malta and Cyprus.  
* The standard Cyprus VAT rate is 19%, but can be reduced to 5% for certain properties.  
** For Montenegro, total costs are approximate.  

**Other information**

| Approval time | -8 months (includes 6 months of mandatory residency) | -13-15 months (includes 12 months of mandatory residency) | 6 months (expected timeline) | As little as 3 months (expected timeline) |
| Residency requirement | No residency requirements, but need to maintain a €500k personal home forever. | Need to visit once to become a citizen. After that, no residency requirements | Need to visit for 5 days in the first 5 years. After that, no residency requirements | No residency requirements |
| Passport quality (according to the Sovereign Man’s Passport Ranking) | “B+”, with access to Schengen, the UK, Canada... but not the US | “A”, with access to Schengen, the UK, Schengen | “B-”, with access to Schengen, Russia... but not the UK, the US, Canada... | “B-”, with access to Schengen, Russia... but not the UK, the US, Canada... |
| Membership in European blocks | EU - yes Schengen - no | EU - yes Schengen - yes | Prospects of joining the EU (and Schengen). | Very distant prospects of joining the EU (and Schengen) |
(Just like in the Caribbean, we have great contacts on the ground in most of the European countries that we cover today. Write to us at clients@sovereignman.com if you want a reference.)

European CBI programs are quite different from the Caribbean ones, and from each other. We will review each one separately below.

**Cyprus**

(Click here to access the program’s official page)

Cyprus is an interesting option because you invest - and not donate - the majority of your money. However, the investment amount is very hefty. Here is how the structure looks:

First, you still must donate €150,000 to the government. You will not see that money again.

Then there’s the actual investment:

On top of the €150k donation, you also need to invest between €2 and €2.5 million in the local economy, depending on the nature of your investment.

Various investments are permitted, but most people prefer putting their money into local real estate. (And in this case, on top of the purchase price, they also need to pay the VAT,
which can be as high as 19%. We cover it in detail further.)

So your total donation + investment outlay can be as little as €2.15M (plus VAT) and as much as €2.65M (plus VAT).

**That’s a lot of money to invest, so you should only consider Cyprus if money is not an issue.**

On the bright side, you can purchase any real estate of your liking; you’re not limited to a shortlist of government-approved projects, as it is the case in the Caribbean.

After five years, you can liquidate your real estate investment but will have to keep a certain tie to the country **forever** if you want to maintain your citizenship. That tie is a personal property worth at least €500,000 (plus VAT).

And since there are various investment options available (which you can liquidate after five years), here is how they work together with your 500k personal residence (which you need to keep forever):

- You can invest in residential properties only
In this case, your total investment outlay will be €2 million, plus the VAT. (Again, this is in addition to the €150,000 government donation.)

And one of these properties should be your personal residence (worth at least €500,000 plus VAT).

After five years, you can sell all of your properties except the personal residence.

Also, the government specifies that if any of the properties has been used before to acquire citizenship in Cyprus through the CBI program, the minimum investment goes up to €2.5 million (plus VAT).

Your total minimum donation + investment amount is going to be €2.15M (plus VAT).

- You invest in commercial property

In addition to the €150,000 donation, you can invest in commercial real estate. If you do so, you will need to invest €2 million, plus the VAT, in one or more commercial properties and €500,000 in your personal residence, for a total of €2.5 million, plus the VAT. After five years, you can sell your commercial property(ies), but will need to keep the personal residence.

Your total minimum donation + investment amount is going to be €2.65M (plus VAT).

- You choose other types of investments

In this case, your total investment outlay will be €2.5 million (plus the donation of €150,000).

You can also invest €2 million in certain other investment vehicles in Cyprus - private or publicly traded companies with at least five employees, or investment funds, and can even combine various permitted options.

Your personal residence of €500,000 (plus VAT) is not included in the €2 million investment.

Your total minimum donation + investment amount is going to be €2.65M (plus VAT).
You will be paying more for your Cypriot property due to VAT

When purchasing a property in Europe, you typically need to pay VAT (Value Added Tax). Cyprus is no exception.

When buying a property, for which a “planning permit” was obtained before May 1, 2004, then you will not need to pay VAT. (You may want to find an older property if you want to save on VAT.)

In all other cases, there will be VAT involved, which means you will have to spend more money. The standard rate in Cyprus is a hefty 19%, but a reduced 5% VAT will apply when:

- You buy a property as an individual (not a company).
- You use a property as your main place of residence in Cyprus (during your stay in Cyprus) - you can't rent it out.
- You have never bought any other property at the reduced VAT rate before.
- The reduced rate of 5% applies to the first 200 sq.m. of residential property; after that it is back to 19%.

You will not recoup the VAT amount, so treat it as another “donation” to the government in addition to the first one (€150,000).

So, keep that in mind if you plan to invest in Cyprus. Your final bill will likely be significantly higher than the minimum requirement of €2 million.

One thing to keep in mind, if you are looking for fast second citizenship, is that Cyprus may not be your best choice.

That’s because Cyprus requires you to hold a residency in the country for at least six months before you can become a citizen there, so the total time from investment-to-passport is seven months or more.

However, after you become a citizen, you will not have to spend any time on the ground to retain citizenship. (You will still need to maintain your €500,000 (plus VAT) personal residence.)
A word of caution if you want to recoup your investment in full

Just as with any other real estate investment, be aware that you might not be able to recoup your investment amount in full if you decide to sell your property.

So far, the program has been a great success. In 2018, Cyprus CBI attracted more investment euros to its shores than all other programs in the world - more than $1 billion.

(Turkey’s revenue is likely to be much higher. The officials did not reveal the latest revenue numbers.)

That made prime properties on the island appreciate significantly in the last few years. As long as the bonanza continues, you should be able to sell your property at a profit, or at least break even.

(What you will not get back for sure is the VAT. It’s just another form of a donation to the government.)

However, don’t forget that Cyprus is part of the EU, and the EU bureaucrats hate all these citizenship programs, especially those happening on their own ground.
So far, Cyprus (and Malta) have been able to resist and adapt, but they could still succumb to the pressure from Brussels. If the Cypriot program gets canceled, the flow of CBI investment dollars into the real estate market will dry up, and that will negatively affect property prices.

**Cyprus is not part of the Schengen Area, but it doesn’t matter**

Cyprus and Bulgaria (which we will cover further) are members of the European Union but not of the Schengen area.

This means that whenever you decide to travel from Cyprus to Greece (or to any other Schengen country), you will have to go through border controls. But that’s where the inconvenience ends.

Cypriots are EU citizens, and have the right to live, work, and study in any country in the European Union, so the fact that Cyprus is not part of the Schengen Area should not affect your decision to become a citizen there.

In any case, all current members of the EU that are not yet part of the Schengen (except Ireland and the UK) are legally obliged to join the area in the future, so the membership is just a matter of time.

The government currently has a self-imposed limit of 700 applicants per year, with a good chance of reaching the limit in 2019.
Malta

(Click here to access the program’s official page)

Malta is a tiny island nation of 460,000 people located just south of Sicily and is probably the only southern European country that weathered the Global Financial Crisis of 2008/2009 fairly well.

The Maltese are very entrepreneurial, so it is no surprise that they have a thriving CBI program in place.

Here is how it works.

- **Donation**

You start by contributing a minimum of €650,000 to the National Development and Social Fund. This is the donation portion, to the government, so you will not see the money again. For your, and for each minor child, add another €25,000. All other dependents, such as unmarried children between the ages of 18 and 26, dependent parents, or even grandparents can join as well, with a €50,000 additional contribution for each.

- **Investment in financial instruments**

Then, you should also invest at least €150,000 in government-approved financial
instruments - usually government bonds, but you can also choose stocks or other instruments approved by the government at the time of your application.

You will have to keep your investment for at least **five years**.

- **Real estate purchase or rental**

On top of that, you will need to commit to either buying or renting a property in Malta.

You can buy a property in Malta worth at least €350,000 and keep it for at least five years, or you can lease property for five years or more with a minimum annual rent of €16,000. If you chose to rent, you will need to pay at least €80,000 over five years (80=16*5).

**More about Malta’s 12-month residency requirement**

Malta is a member of the European Union and the Schengen Area, and it enjoys visa-free access to the United States, among many other countries. (Malta has **the best** travel document among all CBI programs).

That means they need to keep a lot of bureaucrats - who dislike CBI programs - happy.

So, besides performing a rigorous due diligence process, Malta requires you to hold residency in the country for at least twelve months before you can become a citizen. This way, they can show that they naturalize people who are genuinely interested in the country.

Still, it doesn’t mean you will need to live there the entire year in Malta if you want to get a passport, though it may actually be a great idea - Malta is a lovely country with a rich history and mild Mediterranean climate.

All you will need is to visit the country once to complete all the required paperwork.

![Valletta, Malta](image)
In any case, Malta requires you to invest both time and money if you want to become Maltese.

After you become a citizen, there is no requirement to live in Malta... or anywhere in Europe for that matter, if you don’t want to.

The government sets a limit of 1,800 applicants per year, but so far, the limit has never been reached.

Is spending €1 million or more on an EU passport really worth it?

Europe - especially Southern Europe - offers an amazing lifestyle, but EU passports from the region come with a sky-high price tag.

If money is not an issue, then spending a €1 million or more could make sense. However, if investing in an EU passport will empty your war chest, then you should consider more cost-effective solutions.

If you want to live in Europe, then consider obtaining one of cheaper residency options in the European country of your liking.

We have covered how to get a “person with means” visa in Portugal and Spain, for example. To obtain that residency in these two countries, you just need to prove you have means to sustain yourself and your family while living in the country. No need to invest millions. However, under these options, you will actually need to spend about six months each year on the ground, or you will lose your residency.

If you plan to spend much less time than that in Europe each year, then consider one of the European Golden Visas: These provide you with residency in a country, allowing you to live there indefinitely... or not at all.

These programs start at €250,000 (+ fees). See the section below dedicated to European Golden visas. **What you get, again, is a residency, not a passport, but you can naturalize in the country after a few years** of living there. (The exact timing depends on the country’s laws.)

And if you **must have** a second passport now - for example, if you plan to renounce your US citizenship soon - then you could just participate in one of the streamlined and cost-effective programs in the Caribbean.
Montenegro

(Click here to access the program’s official page)

Montenegro is a stunningly beautiful country on the Mediterranean coast. And along with Moldova, it is home to a brand-new CBI program.

Montenegro’s CBI program is not yet active as of September 2019.

We reached out to Christian - the expert we consulted with for this piece - for further clarification. His Montenegrin insider tells him that the country should be ready to start taking its first applicants by the end of 2019, but that there are still a few final hurdles to clear. For example, there is currently only one (overpriced) approved real estate project.

And since under the program’s conditions you must purchase real estate, the government understands there should be more choices available.

It’s different from St Lucia’s program, for example, that also has only one real estate project approved. In St Lucia, you can always opt for a pure donation option (which is a good idea anyway), and not worry about purchasing real estate. But that doesn’t exist with this program.
Here is how the Montenegro CBI program is intended to work when it comes online:

**Donation**

You start with a €100,000 donation to the government fund intended for under-developed areas of the country.

**Real estate investment**

After that, you need to choose between two options and invest:

- €250,000 or more if investing in the northern or central region of Montenegro (which is less developed), excluding the country’s capital of Podgorica; OR,
- €400,000 or more if investing in Podgorica or in the country’s coastal area.

Similar to the Caribbean, Montenegro wants you to invest in government-approved real estate projects. **This is a big drawback**, since such projects are typically overpriced to start with, and also severely limit your choice of property.

Currently, there is only one approved project - a hotel in a ski resort (a €250,000 investment). The government reportedly plans to approve more projects before the program is launched.
As you can see, the way Montenegro structures the program (donation + investment) is similar to how Malta and Cyprus do it.

And while Montenegro’s program is cheaper than Malta’s, it is significantly more expensive than the cheapest Caribbean programs (which start at a little over $100,000), which offer passports of similar - or even better - quality when it comes to visa-free travel.

Why the premium?

First, Montenegro by itself is a livable country, with pleasant summers and mild winters. It is also located in Europe and is very well-connected with the rest of the continent.

But more importantly, Montenegro is a candidate for membership in the European Union, and expected to join the block in 2025.

While we are skeptical about the year (2025), Montenegro actually has a real chance of joining the block in the future, unlike many other candidates.

Turkey, for example, has been unsuccessfully trying to become “part of Europe” since 1987. And Serbia, which submitted its application along with Montenegro, first will have to resolve the acute problem they have with Kosovo - a breakaway region they still consider part of Serbia but have no control over.

Even for Montenegro, it will likely take a decade to join - assuming the EU will even exist in its present form then. But there is no doubt that among the candidates, Montenegro is the likeliest one to join.

Thus, the premium.

Currently, the government’s plan is to take only 2000 applicants for CBI, and to close the program at the end of 2021. But if proven successful, we expect the program to continue.
Moldova

(Click here to access the program’s official page)

Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe, launched its own CBI program in 2018, hoping to attract significant foreign investments.

After launching the CBI program in the second half of 2018, and after accepting 34 applications, in July of 2019, Moldova suspended the program, quoting the need to review the standard operating procedures and service providers that are involved in the program.

The moratorium will last until at least November of 2019.

Christian thinks that Moldova’s brand new program is just experiencing teething problems, and expects the program to resume after all procedures are duly reviewed. But there is also a chance that the program will get completely overhauled, and thus delayed even more, or even entirely canceled... depending on the stance of the political opposition.

When (and if) Moldova resumes its program, it promises to be refreshingly simple.

Currently, the government just requires a donation to the government fund. There is no other requirement to invest in the country.
Currently, the donation amount is €100,000 for a single applicant, €115,000 for a couple, €145,000 for a family of four, and €155,000 for a family of five or more.

And after accounting for all applicable government fees, your passport will cost €147,000 for a single applicant or €201,000 for a family of four.

Since all prices are in euros, the program will cost a little more when converted to dollars, but still, the total cost of the passport is comparable to many Caribbean programs (and much cheaper than any other European programs).

What you get in return for your donation is a passport that is similar - or worse - in quality to its Caribbean peers. (You can learn more about Moldova's passport as a travel document here.)

Moldova’s plan is also to join the EU in the future, but unlike Montenegro, the country is very far from joining the block. Moldova has an unresolved problem with the break-away region of Transnistria, and with multiple internal problems such as rampant corruption.

Also, landlocked Moldova is just a less exciting place to live or to visit than Montenegro, Malta or Cyprus. No one goes to Moldova for a fun vacation.
But still, as a Moldovan citizen, you get easy access to the rest of Europe. And the country’s population of over 3 million means you would be living in an “actual” country, and not a tiny island nation.

And considering that Moldova is one of the cheapest places in Europe, it could be an interesting place to spend your summer.

**Final thoughts on the European CBI programs**

The European Union is home to the world’s most expensive programs, starting at around €1 million. That’s a lot of money to part with, even for a very high-quality passport.

Such programs may make sense for investors with very deep pockets longing to diversify politically, and whose passports are subpar travel documents. (The largest consumers of the programs are Chinese, Middle Easterners, and Russians.)

But spending so much money at once makes much less sense for well-informed Sovereign Man readers who know there are other options out there, even if you have the means. You can spend ten times less money and obtain an almost-as-good passport from a Caribbean nation.

And if you really want to live in Europe (which can offer an amazing lifestyle), you can consider much less expensive Golden Visas in Europe, or even obtain a residency completely “free” by applying for a visa designed for “persons with means” in Spain, Portugal, etc.

The European CBI programs outside of the EU are much more reasonably priced. Still, Montenegro is much more expensive than Moldova due to a lifestyle that it can offer, plus the prospects of joining the EU.

If Montenegro or Moldova ever do join the EU (which is much less likely in the case of Moldova), the value of their passports will go up many times, so you will be happy that you “got in early”.

More programs in the CBI pipeline

The last five years have been prolific in the CBI world, with many new programs coming online.

And likely, over the next five years, we will see more countries offering similar programs.

Currently, Armenia is actively looking to establish its own CBI program and has been working closely with the law firms that specialize in helping governments set up their own programs.

If the program does ever commence (there is usually strong political opposition in each country), it will likely become the cheapest program in the world, starting at just $50,000 plus fees.

We will keep you updated.

Golden visas - a cheaper alternative in Europe

If all you want is just to live in Europe, and you don’t need an immediate passport from a European country, we have good news for you - every European country has an array of visas for you to consider - student, employment, start-up, etc.

However, pretty much all of them require a commitment from your side - be it physical presence on the ground for at least part of the year, for you to run an active business, etc.

But if you want that European residency with very few strings attached, then you should consider European golden visas - they are much cheaper than CBI programs.

As the name suggests, a golden visa does NOT imply obtaining citizenship. Instead, it comes with legal residency that allows you to live in the country indefinitely.

The reason why some countries engage in residency-by-investment programs rather than citizenship-by-investment is largely political.

For governments of small Caribbean nations, it’s easier to convince the opposition and fellow citizens that a CBI program is in the country’s best interest. These programs make a
dent in the country’s budget - as much as 50% of the government’s total revenue in the case of Dominica and St Kitts in 2018.

However, selling citizenship outright would be a highly unpopular move for most governments... especially those with large welfare states.

For most cash-starved governments, selling residencies - not citizenships - is a much more agreeable solution.

**Residency vs Citizenship in EU countries**

As a citizen of an EU country, you can live and work in any other EU country with no restrictions.

But it’s different when you just have residency in an EU country. You can live and work... only in the country where you invested.

Also, you can travel freely in the rest of Europe as a tourist, but for no longer than 90 days within a six-month period. (But, let’s face it - all countries with golden visa programs are part of the Schengen Area. And the borderless nature of that area makes any tracking hard. Authorities are not likely to notice that you drove from Spain to France, for example.)

And after a certain number of years, you can naturalize in the country of your residence, and enjoy all the privileges of EU citizenship. And you do it on common grounds, meaning that, depending on each country’s laws, you will need to live there for several years, prove knowledge of the local language and history, pay taxes, etc.

These are all the requirements that you would not have if you choose the economic citizenship route.

There are four explicit golden visa programs in Europe worth paying attention to: Portugal, Spain, Greece, Malta, and Latvia.

Usually, they allow for various ways to qualify for a program, but by far the most popular way is to invest in local real estate. The investment amount ranges between €250,000 and €500,000, depending on the program.
Important - expect to pay more (as much as by 20%) than the required minimum due to the government fees, taxes, and depending on the program and how many family members you bring.

You will need to keep your investment as long as you want to keep your residence in these countries. But in practice, you may sell your property after you become a permanent resident there (which usually takes five years), or after you become a citizen (five to ten years).

### Portugal (official page)

Over the years, the Portuguese golden visa program has been the investors’ favorite, with the majority of applicants coming from China (which is also the case with almost any other golden visa and CBI program.)

There are several ways to qualify. By far the most popular is to make a €500,000 purchase in local real estate of any kind. You can buy any property available on the market, or piece together several purchases, as long as the properties have a total value of €500,000. The investment amount can be lowered to €350,000 if you buy an old property that you plan to restore.

After you become a resident, you will need to come to Portugal for at least seven days in the first year, and then 14 or more days in each subsequent two years.

**Naturalization timeline:** five years (down from the previous six years).

Back in 2016, we covered the experience of Steve - a friend of Sovereign Man - [applying for a Portuguese Golden Visa](https://www.sovereignman.com/apply-portuguese-golden-visa).
Spain (official page in Spanish)

Spain has its own very popular program.

The most common way to qualify for a Spanish golden visa is to invest €500,000 in local real estate of any kind. You can buy any property, or several properties, with a total value of €500,000. You can rent out your property.

There is no requirement to reside in Spain.

If your goal is to eventually become a Spanish citizen, think twice about this one: The naturalization timeline in Spain is ten years, and they want you to renounce all your previous citizenships upon naturalization.

But, the timeline goes down to just two years -- and the renouncement requirement goes away -- if you hail from one of Spain’s former colonies, including any Spanish or Portuguese speaking country in Latin America (such as Puerto Rico), the Philippines, or Macao.

Greece (official page)

The Greek program is similar to Spain’s and Portugal’s with one important distinction - the investment amount is substantially lower: €250,000 in one or several properties of any kind.

You can rent your property out, and you can switch between qualifying properties during your residency time...for example, if you decide you don't really like the original property you bought there.

Unlike other programs, the Greek golden visa does not allow visa holders to seek formal employment in Greece. (But chances are you didn't plan to work in a country with high unemployment and low salaries, anyway.)

You become eligible to apply for a Greek passport after ten years of being a resident there.

Malta (official page)

Besides the CBI program, Malta also has its own residency by investment program.
Under the rules of the program, to obtain residency in Malta, the following combination of investments and a donation is required. (Yes, you’ll need to do all three):

1) Invest €250,000 in government bonds, or any company listed on the Malta Stock Exchange.

2) Rent a property for a minimum of €10,000 per year in the South of Malta or €12,000 in the North of Malta. Alternatively, you can purchase a property for a minimum value of €270,000 in the South of Malta or €320,000 in the North of Malta.

3) Pay a government administration fee of €30,000, and an additional €5,000 for each applicant.

You should keep your lease or hold your purchased property and other investments for at least five years.

So, the total minimum investment amount comes to around €550,000 if you buy a property, or €280,000 if you decide to rent a property instead.

**Latvia**

Latvia was the earliest among golden visa schemes, introducing its program back in 2010. It was a big hit, with thousands of applicants (mostly Russians) applying every year.

The program’s conditions have changed over the years, and today you would need to purchase €250,000 worth of real estate in Latvia to qualify. For that price, you will need to buy one property if you invest in Riga or Jurmala (Latvia’s two major cities located next to each other), or two properties if buying elsewhere. You can rent them out.

But the boom years seem to be over for Latvia. Last year, “only” 439 visas were issued via the program, as most people prefer Greece -- since it offers a better climate for the same price.

**OTHER CBI PROGRAMS**

In this section, we’ll get into programs that probably are not right for most people, but that might be suitable for others.
These programs aren’t for everybody for various reasons - because they are less transparent (the case with Vanuatu), offer very poor travel documents (Turkey, Jordan), are not actively supported by their governments (Bulgaria), or are just not worth the money (Jordan).

Still, some of them, namely Bulgaria’s and Turkey’s, can still work for the right person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vanuatu</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program overview</td>
<td>Donation to the government fund. $130,000 for a single applicant and $180,000 for a family of four</td>
<td>Bulgarian fast-track citizenship (takes at least 2 years) requires a ~ €1M investment in government bonds or a local enterprise.</td>
<td>Investment in local real estate starting at $250k. Other, more expensive options are available.</td>
<td>Investment in the local enterprise starts at $1M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passport quality (according to the Sovereign Man’s Passport Ranking)</td>
<td>“B-”, with access to Schengen, the UK, Canada... but not the US</td>
<td>“B+”, with access to Schengen, the UK, Canada... but not the US</td>
<td>“C”, with NO access to Schengen, the US, the UK, Canada...</td>
<td>“D”, with NO access to Schengen, the US, the UK, Canada...</td>
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Bulgaria, part of the former Soviet bloc, is a member of the EU and could join the Schengen area later this year.

But since early 2019, Bulgaria has been thinking of scrapping its citizenship by investment program, due to lack of interest.

The government has done a poor job promoting the program, and the program’s conditions are arguably less appealing than Malta’s. Reportedly over the years, Bulgaria received only around 200 applications… over ten years of the program’s existence.

It is by far the slowest program in the world, as you should expect to receive your passport no sooner than two years after you make your first investment.

It also requires a very hefty investment.

The programs work in two stages:

1) **Invest €511,292 to obtain residency in Bulgaria**

First, you deposit BGN 1 million in government bonds for five years. The investment equals to €511,292, as the Bulgarian lev is pegged to the euro at the rate of €1= 1.96 BGN.
At the end of the five-year period, the full amount is returned to the investor without any accrued interest.

You can do nothing at this point and will be able to naturalize in Bulgaria five years later, just like any other legal resident in the country.

Or, you can speed things up.

2) **One year later, invest €511,292 more to qualify for fast-track citizenship**

After you have held your permanent residency status for at least one year, you can speed things up by doubling your investment to BGN 2 million (€1,022,000).

An additional €512,000 can go towards purchasing government bonds or investing in a Bulgarian company that is carrying out a Priority Investment Project (as defined in the Investment Promotion Act).

You will need to hold a second additional investment for a period of two years.

All in all, expect to receive your Bulgarian passport in no less than **two full** years.

**Bulgaria allows you to finance the investment amount**

Interestingly, the Bulgarian government allows applicants to finance their investment amount - usually a big “no-no” in the case of all other CBI programs.

Applicants can ask for a financing from a European bank. We inquired about the costs; you can expect to pay approximately €300,000 **upfront** to receive €1 million from a bank.

If you go that route, your investment will turn into a pure donation of €300,000, which you will not receive back. But in this case, you’re donating the money not directly to the government, but to one of Europe’s financial institutions (doesn’t have to be Bulgarian).
Vanuatu

(Click here to access the program’s official page)

Vanuatu is an example of a less-than-transparent program. Finding reliable information about their program is a hard task, even for industry insiders.

But fortunately, we have contacts on the ground among Sovereign Man subscribers who helped get it all straight.

The Vanuatu Development Support Program (DSP) is an international version of the program that you would be using. Apparently, there is also a program aimed specifically at Chinese citizens.

Speaking of prices, the program works the following way:

The government sets the minimum selling price, below which agents are not supposed to market and sell. That said, some agents still sell at a cheaper price if they don’t mind reducing their own profit.

The “selling price” in the table below is what you will be paying as an applicant - all applicable government fees are already included in it.

Agents, in their turn, pay a specified amount to the government - see the “government’s take” column.
The difference between the selling price and the government’s take is the agent’s profit after accounting for all expenses, due diligence fees, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Selling price (what you will be paying)</th>
<th>Government’s take</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single applicant</td>
<td>$130,000</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with one child (younger than 18)</td>
<td>$165,000</td>
<td>$115,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with two children (younger than 18)</td>
<td>$180,000</td>
<td>$130,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vanuatu is likely the fastest CBI program in the world today. You can count on receiving a passport in record time -- **just 45 days**. That’s fast… and **could** mean they are cutting some corners when it comes to due diligence. (And if they do, it will inevitably affect the programs’ reputation in the future.)

The only additional costs you might incur is the cost of travel to Vanuatu to receive the passport, since Vanuatu requires you to visit to finish the process. Or the cost of a government agent to travel to meet you outside of Vanuatu.

Important to note - currently Vanuatu is granting “honorary” citizenship to investors. This allows you to live and work in Vanuatu, and to travel around the world with a Vanuatu passport, but not to vote there.

By doing this, Vanuatu - a country with less than 300,000 people - tries to address the issue of “dilution of voter base” with new citizens.

Caribbean countries solve the issue in a more elegant way, in our opinion: They give you regular citizenship, but allow you to vote only if you reside on the island for at least five years… which doesn’t happen too often.

Vanuatu could be going the same route. Christian’s understanding is that the country is currently changing the rule and will be granting ordinary citizenship in the future (but this is yet to be confirmed).

The bottom line here is that Vanuatu’s program is fast and competitively priced but lacks transparency. In our opinion, the Caribbean programs are a better choice today and often are even cheaper.
Turkey

(Click here to access the program’s official page)

Turkey’s program started in January of 2017. Back then, the Turkish government promised citizenship in return for an investment in any real estate in Turkey worth $1,000,000.

Predictably, interest from potential passport seekers was almost non-existent.

Sure, Turkey is a big and interesting country and could be an interesting place to live. But the quality of its passport is subpar - it’s a Tier C passport that doesn’t allow visa-free access to the Schengen area, nor to the US, Canada, or the UK. And when the program started, there was the start of, to put it mildly, the rough political situation, including an attempted coup d’état in 2016. Given all of that, a $1 million investment was just too much to ask.

So, in September 2018, the government dropped the investment threshold to $250,000.

The measure worked surprisingly well.

In late September of 2019, Turkish officials announced the latest stats. They reported a total of 2,611 main applicants and almost 10,000 overall applicants since the price drop in September of 2018. That makes the program the most popular in the world…
(There is also an opinion in the CBI community that Turkey probably cut quite a few corners with their due diligence process, allowing people other programs wouldn’t touch.)

The majority of applicants come from the Middle East.

Turkey is much “closer to home” for them, so a lot of Egyptians, Saudis, and Syrians with money were already visiting Turkey as a vacation destination. Now they just bought vacation homes there and received passports to boot.

And Turkey is predominantly a Muslim country, so for Egyptians and Syrians, Turkey is a more familiar environment than St Lucia or Moldova.

**Turkish real estate is cheap now, but it can get cheaper.**

As you can see from the graph of the exchange rate of the Turkish lira versus the USD, the last few years have not been the best for the Turkish currency. Just in the last five years, the exchange rate went up from 2 TRY to almost 6 TRY for each dollar.

The primary reason for this is the intense political turmoil the country has found itself in. After the failed coup, strongman President Recep Tayyip Erdogan violently repressed the opposition.

Real estate in Turkey took a downturn, becoming much cheaper, and the equivalent of US $250,000 today can buy you much more than it did a few years ago. And in Turkey, to qualify for the CBI program, you can purchase any real estate, not just in some overpriced government-approved project. You only need to keep it for three years - a shorter time frame than in the Caribbean (which usually requires a holding period of five years).

So, at least theoretically, you could sell your property in three years, and keep your Turkish citizenship forever. (You will still lose various government fees, broker commissions, and taxes along the way.)

So if you always wanted to own a condo in Istanbul - one of the world’s most beautiful and historic cities, or a villa on the Mediterranean coast, now could be the time to do it. Besides
the property, you will also get a passport to boot.

However, keep in mind that the uneasy political situation can get worse, and your cheap real estate could become even cheaper.

So, consider this program only if you have a very long-term view.

Investing in real estate is the most appealing way to participate in the Turkish CBI, but there are also other ways to qualify:

- Deposit $500,000 Turkish banks for at least three years
- Invest $500,000 in a local enterprise (can be your own)
- Invest $500,000 in government bonds for at least three years
- Invest $500,000 in a real estate fund or venture capital investment fund share for at least three years
- Create 50 jobs

And finally, if you just want to live in Turkey, you can always use another program that the country has had in place for decades: If you buy any livable property in the country for any price, you can apply for a residency permit renewable annually. No need to put $250k of your money at risk, even in return for a passport.
Jordan

In 2018, Jordan launched its own CBI program, offering several ways of obtaining a passport there. None of them are cheap:

- Invest $1 million in local enterprises for five years
- Deposit $1.5 million with Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) for five years at zero interest
- Invest $1.5 million in treasury bonds at an interest rate to be decided by the CBJ for at least ten years
- Buy $1.5 million worth of securities for five years
- Make a $2 million investment in any investment project in the country, $1.5 million if the project is located outside of Amman. A project must create at least 20 jobs and stay operational for at least three years.

Frankly, it’s hard to consider Jordan’s program appealing. Its passport is one of the world’s worst travel documents, and the country itself is landlocked and lacks the lifestyle appeal that for example, Turkey has.

Still, Jordan received around 200 applications between the program’s launch and April of 2019, with 21 people becoming citizens so far.
WHAT ABOUT TAXATION IN YOUR NEW HOMELAND?

Most likely, you will never have to worry about taxation in your new homeland at all.

St Lucia, Dominica, Grenada; Cyprus, Malta, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Moldova, Turkey and Jordan practice residency-based taxation.

So if you become a tax resident in these countries - which usually means that you need to spend six months in a calendar year there - they will tax your worldwide income.

But for this to happen, you will pretty much need to live there full-time. And if your plan is to show up in your new homeland occasionally, you won’t have to worry about taxation there at all.

Additionally, the countries of Antigua & Barbuda, St Kitts & Nevis, and Vanuatu have no personal income tax at all. So even if you move and start living there full-time, they will not care about your income inside or outside the country.

(To learn more about the world’s major taxation systems, please refer to this short report that we prepared.)

YOU WILL NOT NEED TO RENOUNCE YOUR ORIGINAL CITIZENSHIP

Not every country in the world allows dual citizenship. Sometimes the country of your original citizenship wants to have a monopoly on you, and sometimes the country where you plan to become a citizen wants you to renounce all of your former nationalities.

- First, you need to find out what your new country’s requirements are.

Some countries require you to renounce all of your previous citizenships upon naturalization in their country, no exceptions. China and Singapore are just two notable examples here.

Other countries make exceptions for certain situations. Spain, for example, usually requires renouncing your previous citizenship upon naturalization in the kingdom, but they drop the requirement if you hail from their former colonies (and there are a lot of them).

But none of the countries with CBI programs (Spain’s golden visa is a residency program, not a CBI) require you to renounce your previous citizenship. You can keep what you have.
• And second, the country of your **original citizenship** may have a problem with you obtaining a second citizenship.

China and India are notorious examples here. They won’t tolerate their citizens obtaining another passport.

(In practice, Chinese and Indians still obtain second passports without renouncing their original ones, and then go through troubles of hiding this fact from their authorities.)

However, if you hail from any of the Anglosphere countries, know that the governments of the US, Canada, the UK, Australia or New Zealand, do not require you to renounce your citizenship if you obtain another. You are free to hold two (or more) citizenships.

**CONCLUSION**

Just like with everything we do at Sovereign Man, we created this report with you and only you in mind.

That’s important because the CBI world can be opaque, with little objective information available.

We have nothing to sell you. Even as an official St Lucian agent, we intentionally lose money to maximize your benefit. An impartial point of view is all we care about.

Economic citizenship programs are definitely not for everyone. Most people will be served better using more traditional ways - through the naturalization process after living a few years in a new country, or taking advantage of your Italian, Irish or Polish, etc. heritage.

However, clearly not everyone can drop everything at home and move to a new country (though this experience can be very rewarding), and not every person is lucky to have the right bloodline.

In this case, economic citizenship could be the only way to obtain that ultimate insurance policy - a second passport... in as little as three months.

If that’s your case, we recommend you pay close attention to the Caribbean programs, as they provide excellent value and start at around $100,000 plus government fees. (Remember to stick to the donation - not real estate - option.)
And if you prefer one of the European programs, there are several of them for you to choose from. On average, they are much more expensive than the Caribbean ones but promise that great European lifestyle.

And finally, remember that if your end-goal is to live in Europe (as opposed to obtaining a fast passport there) you should instead consider obtaining residency (not citizenship) by applying for a visa in the country where you want to live. We covered options in Spain and Portugal in this report.

Or, you can participate in one of the European golden visa programs, which allow you to come and go from Europe freely but are much cheaper than the CBI programs.

Whatever you choose, once you make your decision, be willing to go through the hurdles. In the end, you’ll be maximizing your freedom and opportunities, which makes sense no matter what is happening in the world.