

June 2025 Taxcast: millionaire exodus myth

Naomi Fowler: Hello and welcome to the Taxcast from the Tax Justice Network. I'm Naomi Fowler. Coming up later on the Taxcast, the myth of the millionaire exodus:

Mark Bou Mansour: Millionaires did not, and are not fleeing countries to escape taxes. The widely reported millionaire exodus was a complete fiction. But what the media reported and what governments listened to was based on questionable data published by a firm that helps the super-rich buy their way out of rules that apply to everybody else.

Naomi Fowler: We've analyzed the claims from those in the business of helping to sell passports to wealthy people. It turns out that millionaires are extraordinarily immobile. For governments, it means don't worry - trying to 'keep' them by lowering their taxes even more is completely unnecessary. And things are changing for people in the business of helping to sell citizenship. Some doors are closing.

Before that in Malta, two men who supplied the car bomb that killed journalist and anti-corruption activist Daphne Caruana Galizia in 2017 have just been sentenced to life imprisonment. Corinne Vella of the Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation was in the courtroom.

Corinne Vella: It was a huge relief. But until it happened, we weren't sure it would. It was important to us first that they were found guilty, but then also that they were sentenced to life in jail. These are men with a long history of criminal activity, but no criminal record. Now they have one and it's for the worst possible crime. So it's tremendous relief, but we're not done yet because there's at least one pending trial coming up, and the person there who allegedly commissioned the murder is actually out on bail, thanks to the length of time it takes to get proceedings completed.

Naomi Fowler: We'll follow that trial when it happens.

Also this month, the Tax Justice Network released its latest findings on the Financial Secrecy Index, which assesses countries around the world to name and shame the biggest financial secrecy offenders. We rank countries based on secrecy levels combined with their size as global players. I spoke to Mark Bou Mansour at the Tax Justice Network about the key results.

Okay, we're seeing the top 10 biggest offenders on the Financial Secrecy Index. The United States still at the top, er Switzerland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Luxembourg, Germany, Netherlands, South Korea, Guernsey, Japan. The biggest risers in the top 10, I think are the Netherlands and South Korea, which is interesting but what unites all of them is that they are all scoring worse with democracy watchdogs. So, I mean, the Tax Justice Network doesn't monitor democracy, but lots of very, very good people do, and they are all scoring worse, all of those top 10 biggest offenders.

Mark Bou Mansour: That's exactly it. Simply put, countries are enabling the most dark and dirty money to circumvent the rule of law, to circulate in economies, they're scoring worse with these democracy watchdogs. And the US, which sits again at the top of the ranking, was downgraded this year by the Polity Project from a democracy to an anocracy. I had to Google what an anocracy is, and it's a semi democracy, semi-autocracy and the way the Polity Project put it is the US is now basically sitting on the borderline between a democracy and an autocracy.

Naomi Fowler: Yeah, interesting. And obviously the United States, anything it does has a very strong influence on the world, it's been an oligarchy for a long time, but this anocracy which I also had to look up, is really important. They're making lots of moves to shut down some of their most important anti-corruption tools in the country, so it's likely that the United States can only get worse.

Mark Bou Mansour: Yes. I should also point out that there is an exception to the rule which is Singapore, which marginally improved its democracy score, but it continues to have a democracy score below country averages and it's still classified by the Freedom Project as an electoral autocracy. But you're absolutely right about the US, I mean, we've seen the US for years shield billionaires and tax evaders from the rule of law on things when it comes to finance and taxes. And now we're seeing the US being captured by these billionaires.

Naomi Fowler: Absolutely. And so then if we look at the top five, they've stayed in the same place as before, so that's the United States, of course, at the top, Switzerland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Luxembourg. But in terms of change there, four out of five of those countries at the top of the worst offenders of our index are seeing *less and murkier* finance is how we're putting it, except for Singapore. So what that means is they're pulling in a slightly smaller share of global financial services than previously, but what they are attracting is murkier.

Mark Bou Mansour: Yes, they've worsened their secrecy scores, which is a measure of how much room a country's laws and regulations allow for financial secrecy. There are a number of reasons behind their secrecy scores getting worse. Some are regulatory changes and other are changes to our methodologies. Singapore is the exception, bringing in more financial services and worsening its secrecy score at the same time.

Naomi Fowler: Right. Let's talk about the EU countries. Quite an interesting finding?

Mark Bou Mansour: Yeah. What the index finds when it comes to EU countries can be best described as a Jekyll and Hyde-like enabling of financial secrecy. EU countries have some of the best transparency practices on paper, but what the index shows in practice is many EU countries negating these commitments, and even worse, they're specifically negating these commitments when it comes to lower income countries.

Naomi Fowler: Right, so when it comes to lower income countries, there are two types of cooperation the EU is offering, depending on the country. This is what you mean by the EU's Jekyll and Hyde-like secrecy?

Mark Bou Mansour: Exactly. The index looked across three core areas of tax cooperation and tax transparency, and what it found is EU countries are simultaneously operating two tiers of cooperation and transparency. A higher, more robust level when it comes to other EU countries and to richer countries, and a lower, less transparent, less cooperative level when it comes to lower income countries.

So one example of this, we found that more than half of EU countries are using a backdoor, an international law that we had overlooked to shield non-EU countries' tax evaders from accountability. This has to do with the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance, which among the many things it does, it allows countries to agree that if you've got tax hiding their finances in my country and you wanna collect the taxes owed off of those finances I will help you to do so, but the convention has a reservation that allows countries to deny help, and we found that more than half of EU countries are using that reservation. So, what we thought was an exception to the rule is actually the default. Now, EU countries are not allowed to deny each other that assistance under EU law. So what you have in practice is EU countries cracking down on tax evaders at home, but shielding them abroad.

Naomi Fowler: Wow, interesting. And this Jekyll and Hyde-like behavior from the EU has implications for negotiations at the United Nations with countries led by the Africa group trying to reform global tax rules?

Mark Bou Mansour: That's right, yeah. Calling out the EU's Jekyll and Hyde secrecy is so important right now is because the majority of countries are working on reforming tax cooperation and tax transparency at the UN. But EU countries keep pushing back against this work saying, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. But what our findings show is that it's indeed broken, it's EU countries who played a big part in it. There is a clear pattern of EU countries choosing to crack down on financial secrecy at home, but not doing so abroad. And any EU talk about not fixing tax rules at the UN should be seen through this context.

Naomi Fowler: Right, because EU countries still haven't got on board with the UN Tax Convention, their position for a long time now has been that they wanna stop it, but the world is changing, power relations are changing, and there are very good reasons why they should change their tune now and support it, aren't they?

Mark Bou Mansour: Exactly. Looking at the position EU countries find themselves in at the moment, to one side they've got countries at the UN extending an open hand to cooperate and build a better global tax system. On the other side, you've got Trump threatening EU countries with economic repercussions for agreeing to a proposal that the Biden administration had proposed and Trump challenging the tax sovereignty of EU countries saying you can't tax profit in your own borders when it's made by a US company. So really, EU countries face a very clear choice right now. It's either tax sovereignty at the UN or tax subjugation under Trump. The UN tax convention that is currently being developed isn't just about fair tax, it's about protecting the foundations that democracies stand on. No taxation without representation, and that's what countries at the UN are calling for right now.

Naomi Fowler: Thanks, Mark. That's Mark Bou Mansour of the Tax Justice Network, and he's staying with me for a few more minutes because we're gonna talk about the false claims in the media recently which come up time and time again about the millionaire migration myth. It's a tall story, it only serves the interests of those who service high net worth people, who are in the business of helping to sell passports and golden visas to the very wealthy.

Mark, we've talked before on the Taxcast about how quite modest wealth tax proposals could really tackle poverty and the climate crisis. And every time any talk about taxing wealth comes up in public debate in the media, that old

chestnut 'oh, but the wealthy will leave' always comes up and you get story after story in the media, especially in the UK anyway, it's a billionaire owned press, about so-called tax flight by the very wealthy, an exodus. Well, the Tax Justice Network has just looked at the data and the evidence just isn't there.

Mark Bou Mansur: That's right, yeah. Millionaires did not, and are not fleeing countries to escape taxes. About 11,000 news pieces were published around the world in 2024 by some of the most read and most watched news outlets claiming that droves of millionaires were fleeing countries in record numbers. This was a huge exodus, we were told, with economic consequences, and the root of it all was supposedly taxes on the super-rich. But here's what all this media reporting left out, these record numbers of millionaires leaving represented just 0.2% of all millionaires. In other words, almost 100% of millionaires did not move to another country, yet somehow this was spun a full 180 into an exodus. So where does this story come from? Well, it's based on a report published by a firm called Henley and Partners, which helps sell golden passports to the super rich. Golden passports were just ruled to be unlawful by the European Court of Justice, thanks to a challenge by the European Commission, which said golden passports impose a serious risk of corruption, money laundering, tax evasion. Our review of the Henley and Partners report shows that there were several issues with the report's methodology, its sample and its reporting. But what the media reported and what governments listened to was a fiction, based on questionable data published by a firm that helps the super-rich buy their way out of rules that apply to everybody else. Scare stories like these are used to block the positive change people want.

Naomi Fowler: Thanks, Mark. And that's right because all the polling I've seen consistently shows that taxing the very wealthy a bit more is overwhelmingly popular with people. The campaigning organization, Patriotic Millionaires did a poll of UK millionaires and even 80% of them in their poll support a 2% tax on wealth over assets of 10 million pounds. Here's Steven Kinsella of Patriotic Millionaires explaining recently on GB News how that works.

Stephen Kinsella: Let's say you had a wealth tax of 2% on wealth over 10 million, that would mean you'd pay 2% on your 11th million. So if you had 11 million net wealth, you'd pay a one-off tax of 20,000 pounds. In that year, if you'd invested at all sensibly, you should have made another five hundred thousand. So you would net, still be nearly five hundred thousand pounds better off at the end of the year.

Naomi Fowler: Puts it in perspective, doesn't it? In fact, if the UK had had that wealth tax on UK millionaires over the past 30 years, they could have raised

160 billion pounds. That's according to a recent Patriotic Millionaires report. That money could have built 80 new hospitals in that period, they reckon. Other countries can do the same kind of sums and see the missed opportunities there for them too.

For those *minute* numbers of wealthy people globally who want a different passport, for whatever reason, firms like Henley and Partners help them get citizenship by investment and so-called golden visas, a route to residency. You can buy them by doing things like buying real estate over a certain cost that's way out of reach for most of us. But the business model of companies like Henley and Partners just took a hit, several hits, in fact. Something's shifting in Europe. Let's start with Spain, where a non-EU citizen could, until recently, get residency in exchange for a minimum investment in real estate of 500,000 euros. This Spanish lawyer from company Emergent Investors doesn't sound too happy about it.

Spanish property lawyer: The end of the golden visa in Spain has arrived. The government has now officially announced to terminate the Golden Visa program. They claim that this investment visa is having a very negative impact on the property market due to real estate speculation among non-resident foreign investors. To me, at least, the termination of Spain's golden visa reflects a broader European trend as countries like Portugal have also moved to abolish these types of programs, and Greece will eventually do the same thing.

Clips of protest

Naomi Fowler: Like so many countries, Spain has big problems with affordable housing. In Spain's case, it's also linked to Airbnb-type rentals to tourists. The Golden Visa program that encouraged very wealthy people to buy up property and drive up prices even more was the last straw for many people living in Spain, where 85% of people under 30 still live with their parents because housing's so unaffordable. Many who *can* find a place to rent are spending 40% of their income on housing.

[Clip of Spanish protests]

Naomi Fowler: Spain isn't the only country to abolish or reform its golden visa program. The Netherlands, the UK and Ireland ended their visa programs offering residency to what they call 'investors.' In Europe, also changing is citizenship by investment, a nice way of saying passports for sale, often linked to buying property or real estate. Portugal's removed its option to get citizenship through buying real estate. Cyprus stopped accepting new applications at the

end of 2020, and it's now investigating citizenships it's already granted. Bulgaria has abolished its scheme. Montenegro wants to become an EU member, and it abolished its scheme under pressure from the EU. And now Malta's citizenship by investment scheme has just been ruled illegal by the European Court of Justice. More on that in a minute.

When it comes to *outside* the EU, there are famous ones around the world, or probably I should say *infamous*. Among the cheapest is Vanuatu. For as little as \$130,000, they don't require your physical presence, you don't even need to visit. You can get approval in one month and a passport in three months that gives you visa free travel to more than a hundred countries. Vanuatu is highly secretive according to our Financial Secrecy Index. It's not a big global player, but if you look at the people its scheme has attracted, you can see why the EU recently moved to take away visa free access for Vanuatu citizens, and I'm sorry for the many citizens there who now have to jump through visa hoops.

ABC news anchor: Vanuatu says it is looking to revoke citizenship granted to high profile, alleged rapist and human trafficker Andrew Tate. The misogynist influencer received a Vanuatu passport via a fast track program around the time of his arrest in Romania.

Naomi Fowler: This is ABC News, speaking with Dan McGarry of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, who first got the story.

Dan McGarry, OCCRP: Well, it seems that the agent who provided the support just wasn't aware of who this guy was. I spoke with her for a, a fair amount of time, and she said, well, you know, I, I, I knew he was a bit of a celebrity, but I didn't really know anything about him. And I asked, you know, did you Google him? And she said, look, I just don't use social media. She's somebody who, you know, is very much a sort of a, a, a creature of the previous century and as a result, nobody seems to have flagged the fact that this was a very controversial person whose application was being processed. Now the Citizenship Commission, I spoke with them about it and the Commissioner told me that once an application has been submitted, the only thing that's really going to disqualify the person is if they show up on an Interpol red notice, for example, or if they have a criminal conviction somewhere in the world. And at the time that Tate was applying for his citizenship he didn't have a conviction. He had been raided at his home. He was under suspicion and under investigation by Romanian authorities, and as it turned out, 15 days after he got citizenship he was arrested by the Romanians, and by the time his passport was issued in January 2023, he was actually in jail, in detention, in Romania due to the charges that had been laid against him. There's a lot of money to be made in

this program. You know, each agent makes about \$50,000 US on each successful application. And so, you know, there is an apparent tendency to, you know, do volume basically just do, you know, a lot and not really ask a lot of questions about it.

Naomi Fowler: Dan McGarry speaking to ABC News. Back in Europe, as citizenship by investment schemes were being reformed and abolished by European countries, Malta was an outlier. It was the last EU member state to offer passports for sale. Now, the European Courts of Justice has just ruled that its scheme is illegal under EU law. Corinne Vella of the Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation received a leak from a whistleblower back in 2021 that showed the world how Malta's scheme was.

Corinne Vella: The passport papers investigation, yes was the first time that inside information was made public. This was actually cited in the judgment issued by the European Court of Justice. The fact that it was cited demonstrates how important it is to have good journalism all along the way to hold power to account.

What we had found during the Passport Papers, and of course the data that there was available to us was obviously not complete. There have been other passport applicants since, and we don't know what's in that in the data, which we don't have access to. But what we had found is that on the face of it, it's about individual investment but then there were all these dodgy ways of getting around the requirements, you know, making a donation, claiming to have a genuine link with Malta when you don't actually have one, and of course, the ease with which you could apply for a passport, you could actually apply for one very easily, it attracted all sorts. We found among the profiles we looked at, we found that were people who were fugitives from justice. There were people who we found at the time of publication we tried to contact them and we found they were in prison because the justice systems in their own countries had caught up with them. We found in our search that most of the applicants came from Russia, which became an even bigger problem when Russia invaded Ukraine. There have been cases of Russians who, for example have fallen foul of the law.

Some of the things which were presented as indicators of a genuine link, you know, some people were in Malta for six hours. They came here, they picked up their passport, they took their oaths and they left. They ticked all the boxes, they did all the things which are expected of them, you know, having an address in Malta and so on, but they didn't actually spend time here other than coming here to pick up their passport. We saw things like tickets to a reptile exhibition,

newspaper subscriptions, you know, it was ridiculous at some point. It got so bad that it became an open secret you that you could just tick all those boxes, accumulate the points you needed towards your application and then you get your passport and you don't actually have to live here. You know, you'd open up a bank account, you could join a gym, you could present a plane ticket, you'd rent a car, which is all supposedly indicators that you actually have a physical presence here. But we found in our research a point scoring system awarding points for a genuine link during the application process, and the cumulative number of points you needed was 220 points. The target score was 250 points, and you could get there by spending a day in Malta, you got 15 points, you rent a flat, you got 60 points. If you opened a bank account, you got 10 points. If you subscribed to a society in Malta you got another 10 points. But you didn't actually have to do anything, you didn't have to live in the property, you didn't have to operate that bank account, there was no follow up. So there's a points matrix that led you to present a picture of being in Malta when actually you weren't, as long as you scored points, and of course one of the point scorers was making a donation to a charitable institution. That led to another area of business. Some passport sales agents opened up foundations which were financed by money from passport sales. They picked up on that opportunity themselves.

Another thing we saw in our research is that property owners or property brokers were openly advertising property. There is one advert I'm looking at right now, there was a flat in Sliema, which is a very expensive area now, it was advertised with passport clients already renting. It's never been lived in, and it's being sold with the passport clients as ghost tenants. It was an open advert and it became more and more common, I mean, the mask has fallen completely and nobody any longer pretends that it was anything other than passport sales. It was never about investment.

Naomi Fowler: Malta's been offering this passport scheme since 2013 and Corinne says the benefits to the people that the government claimed just don't add up.

Corinne Vella: Malta said the scheme brought in \$1.4 billion euros, which was invested in people helping them in their moments of need. But interestingly we took that 1.4 billion and a group of fact checkers at Amphora media at the foundation found that more than 90% of that 1.4 billion is not accounted for in social projects. It's either placed in financial instruments or it's not allocated at all. That's more than 90%. So the talk of this being of benefit to social need is actually not the case at all. We don't know where a lot of the money is ending up.

The fundamental is that citizenship should not be sold, that was a position we always took. That was the basis of Daphne's reporting, and obviously if you want to buy a passport, you are doing that because the one you already have presents problems. It doesn't mean you personally are a problem, but your passport does present problems to you. And what a Maltese passport did, it gave people a key to the door. You could get past barriers which would otherwise exist for you. So by having a Maltese passport you had an EU passport. So any risks that came with selling a Maltese passport were risks for the entire European Union. If anybody who's suspect bought that EU passport because it's Maltese, it's an EU passport but they didn't want to live here, they bought it to get around obstacles.

I mean, in terms of endangering democracy and accountability in the EU generally, you know, this was reducing passports to a commodity to be bought and sold. The basis of the EU judgment is that it is a violation of the treaties. It is not compatible with membership of the union because it flies in the face of what citizenship is meant to mean. The EU free market does not extend to citizenship.

Naomi Fowler: It's all the worse when you contrast the selling of passports to those who can afford to buy them with the reception Malta has given to people desperate enough to risk their lives to get there.

Reporter: This is the third time now in one single day that there's been a call to rescue so far, there's 195 people on board, and we know that there's another boat in distress nearby. The crew haven't said how many people they think are there, what condition it is, what type of boat it is, um, but everybody rushed out to do this again.

That was a very difficult rescue for the crew. When we arrived the boat was sinking very quickly with enormously overcrowded and really unsafe, so people would just hold onto these, onto these boats, including a baby and, and three children.

TV Reporter: 58 migrants onboard the rescue ship Aquarius have been allowed to disembark in Malta after initially being barred entry. After negotiations Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat agreed to accept the migrants on condition they'll be transferred to other countries. The Aquarius, which is operated by humanitarian organization Medicine Sans Frontiers has been at the center of an ongoing political row about migrants attempting to reach Europe from Libya. Medicine Sans Frontiers said in a tweet, people fleeing Libya will continue to die.

Naomi Fowler: Back to Corinne Vella in Malta.

Corinne Vella: I am uneasy about the commodification of citizenship because if we're looking to increase Malta's human capital, there are other ways of doing it. There are people trying to enter Malta on boats. They're refused permission to land, some drown, some do land here and spend years here, and then are deported. Some become part of society and continue to remain here and are productive. They might not be millionaires, but they're doing useful work. Not everybody's a good person but that should not depend on, the criteria to distinguish should not be whether or not you can pay for a passport or not. There need to be other criteria in place. And I feel very uncomfortable around the idea that with one hand we're offering a passport to people that can pay for it, but on the other hand, we're locking the door to people who are desperate and trying to escape oppression elsewhere.

Naomi Fowler: Yeah, absolutely. What do you think Malta is going to do now that this scheme has been found not to be legal and what Henley and Partners might do, um, in this changing environment? I mean, the EU seems to be, I would like to believe that it is shifting away from these schemes and, you know, discouraging them on the part of EU members. What do you think will be their next steps?

Corinne Vella: Well, Henley and Partners fundamentally are a business, so they will adapt to the circumstances, as businesses normally do, but ultimately only Henley and Partners can say where and how far they will go. Malta, well, our government has said it'll adapt the scheme. Uh, it's still not clear to me *how* they will adapt the scheme because if you can't sell passports then you can't have a passport sales scheme.

Naomi Fowler: And so while Europe is shifting away from golden visas and certainly passport for sale schemes, and recognizing the risks from money laundering and tax cheating, what's the United States doing in this area? Well, they're bucking the trend. President Trump has just launched a \$5 million gold card.

Donald Trump: 5 million. For \$5 million this could be yours. You know what that card is? Gold Card. Gold card. It's the Gold card, the Trump card gold card. It'll be out in about less than two weeks. Pretty exciting, right?

Gary Kalman: Information, just to be clear, from this administration, comes out sometimes in tweets and sometimes in different ways and so it's a little bit difficult but my understanding is that they started it, that there are cards, in fact

there was one suggestion from our treasury secretary that a thousand visas were approved. So as far as we understand, this program is moving forward.

Naomi Fowler: This is Gary Kalman, director of Transparency International US.

Gary Kalman: For the US to say, well, we're gonna unilaterally expand our Golden Visa program and give more opportunities for bad guys to hide their money here, you're making the US a safe haven, obviously has some pretty serious repercussions in terms of what we're allowing into our own finance system, but also the global financial system.

Naomi Fowler: The Gold Card appears to fast track pretty much anyone who can pay \$5 million towards residency and citizenship. Apparently 15,000 people are on the waiting list for this card, although even Henley and Partners have expressed skepticism over those numbers. Trump claims applicants will be thoroughly vetted, but his other recent moves rolling back anti-corruption protections don't inspire confidence.

Gary Kalman: He has suspended enforcement of the beneficial ownership law, he has mentioned not enforcing the real estate rules, he has dismantled, or the Justice Department has dismantled the Klepto Capture Task Force and the Kleptocracy Asset Recovery Initiative. They have suspended, or redefined enforcement. It's a little unclear what they mean with our foreign bribery law. , They announced that they were reinterpreting the Foreign Agent Registration Act involving foreign influence in our politics. I'm probably missing three or four other things, but the sort of, universal attack on US's anti-corruption, transnational corruption and crime framework, the anti-money laundering laws is quite alarming. It empowers bad actors to step up.

Naomi Fowler: The Trump administration has been very clearly signaling the end of rules-based economies, and it looks like this gold card, also known as a Trump card, is no exception. It's full of contradictions. Trump's committing to enacting the largest deportation operation in US history, yet he's opening the doors wide to those who can afford \$5 million.

Gary Kalman: People wanna say, oh my God, we've never done this before, this is, you know, totally new, it's not entirely new. There are some features to it, uh, upping the amount means you're targeting an even wealthier part of the world population, right? Because the old one, the EB5 program, the idea was originally to provide a visa for people who made investments in the US in - in theory - economically struggling communities. And so it'd be a way of

attracting foreign investment to help some of the hardest hit communities in the United States. It's been raised over various times, I think it's still around a million dollars, it's a little over a million dollars. But just as an economic engine, these have not been terribly useful, right? So they've defined economically distressed areas as certain metropolitan areas, no one's actually investing in some of the toughest communities or neighborhoods, so even as an economic engine it hasn't been the best economic development program. In the old program there was a process and a system, right, that could still take time. Whereas my understanding of this program is they've made it easier to move from visa to citizenship and speeded up the process.

Naomi Fowler: There used to be a cap of 10,000 applications a year for that, but they've lifted the cap. Now they've got this \$5 million fast track process.

So anyway, on the one hand, the EU's cracking down on passports for sale, many countries are rethinking their investor golden visas. On the other hand, the United States is going in the opposite direction. And there are limits on how many people might want to pay \$5 million for this gold card, no matter what the claims. None of this is good news for firms like Henley and Partners. Back to the myth of the millionaire exodus.

We heard Mark earlier talking about our analysis of the Henley and Partners Report last year. They've just put out another one, which we've also analyzed at the Tax Justice Network. They're claiming that there's a record scale of migration by millionaires, but our analysis shows even using their own estimates that nearly a hundred percent of millionaires *haven't* relocated to a new country since 2013, and it's in fact diminishing. It's proportionally smaller than migration rates in 2016, 2017, and 2018.

And I understand Mark why a company like this might feel the need to attract big media headlines and use a bit of drama, but they have at least backtracked on the word they used 'exodus', and they have acknowledged that it was a questionable choice of words since our analysis of their claims, so tell us a bit about that.

Mark Bou Mansour: Yes, they have backtracked on the use of the word exodus. It doesn't appear in their press release. And they've published an article alongside, or as part of their report, sort of raising questions about what an exodus means and, you know, word choices and so on. They're not saying we were wrong to use it, they're just sort of questioning its use, which is sort of the best we could have really hoped for, I think. Um, it is a bit comical. You know, their, their response is, 'well, after we were criticized we had to refer to a

dictionary to check what exodus actually means.' And you know, they're saying it means a mass departure. And to quote, they're saying, you know, 'philosophically, is around 1% of a population really a mass departure? It depends on what the newspaper wants to make a story out of.' So, obviously, no. This is not a mass departure. Um, but hey, you know, it's the best we could have hoped for from Henley and Partners. We could have hoped for a lot more from the press, which is to drop the exodus framing, which they haven't. So even though Henley and Partners have backtracked on it, the report came out yesterday and, you know, it's headlines across all reputable newspapers around the world, reiterating the exodus framing and that choice of words.

Naomi Fowler: Let's talk about the media coverage because, okay, let's be as fair as we can to Henley and Partners, they might have used words like exodus, which they haven't used this time around, they're still saying 'it's bigger than ever!' still sort of saying that but when it comes to the media, the mainstream media anyway, it is to blame, isn't it, for running with this myth? And if you look at media ownership, there is a strong likelihood already that coverage is going to report Henley and Partners claims sympathetically each year they put this report out. Most owners of the media, mainstream media anyway, own multiple media titles, they're billionaires, certainly in the UK they are if you take the UK as an example. I know it's partly the nature of journalism to simplify and exaggerate. I also know that fewer and fewer journalists are doing more and more work, and they haven't got time necessarily to scrutinize this kind of stuff properly, but it is staring them in the face now that this is misleading, at best this is misleading. They're still saying exodus in the media. Our analysis pretty much does their job for them, really in the media by taking apart and really analyzing properly Henley and Partners claims. You put these press releases out, you deal with the media all the time. What was your experience to the way the media reacted to our analysis?

Mark Bou Mansour: So full disclosure, it's been a terrible experience. So we published our report at the start of the month. And the report criticized the 2024 Henley report. Henley and Partners published the 2025 addition of their report this week. So in response to that we also published our own review of the latest report and we managed to get our review out ahead of time, ahead of when they published so we were able to reach out to the press, you know, just shortly before the report came out.

Since Henley published its report yesterday there's been over 700 new pieces around the world covering it and across all this coverage there's very little pushback and very little space given to opposing views as far as we can see in it. And you know, when we were first looking at the Henley report, its claims

were so weak and the spin was so apparent we were really shocked at how such a report was put out and how it was picked up.

This to me is clearly a report that didn't expect to get much pushback from the press, you know, when we publish reports, we are prepared with tons of sourcing, we make all our data public, you know, Excel format, any format you want, we invite people to dig in and really examine it. You know, the Henley report doesn't publish any of its data, it's all opaque. We don't know how many people they claim they actually observed migrating, we just know what they've extrapolated based off of those observations. And what we've seen yesterday with the press having access to our information with us, as well as Tax Justice UK, Patriotic Millionaires UK knocking on doors, ringing phones, trying to reach out to as many journalists as possible and be like, 'hey, there are serious issues with this report!' And the fact that it still got covered with very little pushback just shows how this, this confidence and this lack of accountability is sort of supported and fostered, right? You know, the Henley report didn't expect to get pushback and even when we equipped the press to push back they chose not to, and this is how the press helps perpetuate these myths.

I've spent the past month communicating with journalists trying to get this information out there and door after door was kind of closed in my face and it's been quite a disappointing experience. We've managed to get a handful of outlets to cover it, but you know, only one national paper and even then the mention there was just a half a sentence at the bottom of an article. But all the major news outlets that covered the exodus continued to cover the exodus. All the journalists who covered it who we spoke to, they didn't cover what we had published and they've continued to publish the latest claims from Henley and Partners. Pretty much everybody I spoke to said 'right, next time around I'll be more critical' or you know, 'we'll be wary of these claims in the future.' But then just a few days later, the new report comes out and it's the same outlets, sometimes the same journalists, reiterating these claims so it's been, it's been really difficult to watch, and yeah, quite a disappointment.

Naomi Fowler: It, it is really frustrating, isn't it, when you've got evidence and then you keep seeing the same media headlines and misreporting. And I know when it comes to changing minds, if you look back at when I first started doing the Taxcast in January 2012, which is a long time ago, we did have to spend back then a lot of time explaining tax justice and what that is, and could be. But I do feel like now that has entered the public consciousness to such an extent, and tax is such a big issue now where politicians really can be held to account and they're nervous on it. So, what are your thoughts on the nature of educating around this millionaire migration myth and changing minds?

Mark Bou Mansour: How I would describe it is you've kind of got this Jenga tower, only it's more like a pyramid, like an inverted pyramid with one block at the very bottom and it kind of expands and widens out as you go upwards. And the very first block at the very bottom is the Henley and Partner report. And on this block, this whole sort of myth and narrative of a millionaire exodus has been built. And then on top of that, layers have been added about sort of, you know, give tax breaks to non-doms, and then let's shun wealth taxes and all these kind of things. Our hope was you take down that report on which everything is built on, you remove that from the picture, and then the whole tower comes tumbling down. And that's what we've done, we've showed that you cannot reasonably rely on this report. It's got so many issues, and we're not the only ones who kind of call out issues with this report. So we've removed that block, but the Jenga tower has somehow stayed intact and it's now just kind of hovering in the air, it's just taken a life of its own now.

So we have to take it step by step, like the Tax Justice Network has done with previous myths and eventually over time, through more research, through reaching out to more people, raising more awareness among the press and so on, we will see change. And you know, one positive sign has been the response from the public, and especially on social media, we put the information out there and we try to push it as far as we can, but we've seen so many people on social media take this, take our analysis and push it really far and they're challenging policy makers, they're challenging these voices out there perpetuating the myth. And it may have not been the sort of quick response we may have hoped for, but this myth's days are numbered, that's for sure.

Naomi Fowler: You can read our analysis of these bogus millionaire exodus claims and lots more all in the show notes. Thank you for listening to the Taxcast. We'll be back with you next month. Bye for now.