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Passports for Sale: How (Un)Meritocratic Are Citizenship by Investment Programmes?

In recent years, citizenship by investment (CBI) and residency by investment (RBI) programmes have been burgeoning throughout the world, including in a range of European States. At first sight, such programmes are blatantly anti-meritocratic: they hinge on a person's wealth, and not on her skills, potential, and intrinsic qualities. Yet upon a closer look, the public discourse that surrounds CBI and RBI is influenced by the same meritocratic conceptions as those that have been driving domestic citizenship and immigration law in the past decades. In this article, I take a step back from existing debates about CBI to argue that the concept of meritocracy is key to understanding, supporting, but also challenging contemporary immigration and citizenship law, including CBI. First, I analyse the merits—if I may say so—of the concept of meritocracy. I then show the limitations of using meritocratic arguments to justify the existence of CBI schemes.

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