



Poland 2020 OSAC Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw. OSAC encourages travelers to [use this report](#) to gain baseline knowledge of security conditions in Poland. For more in-depth information, review OSAC's [Poland country page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Poland at Level 1, indicating travelers should exercise normal precautions. Review OSAC's report, [Understanding the Consular Travel Advisory System](#).

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Warsaw and Kraków as being a **LOW**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Polish National Police statistics underscore that Poland continues to be one of the safest countries in Europe. In 2019, police reported 796,557 criminal offenses, a 1.8% increase from 2017.

Pickpocketing is common, and is one of the most frequently reported crimes for U.S. nationals and other visitors. Most pickpocketing incidents occur on public transportation or in areas where there are large crowds (Kraków's Market Square or Warsaw's Old Town). At train stations, where many people are vulnerable by carrying cumbersome luggage and other articles, groups of thieves can jostle and distract their victim while stealing their wallet. Crowded public buses and trams also attract pickpockets. U.S. nationals most often report passports and other items stolen from luggage, backpacks, or purses. Review OSAC's reports, [All That You Should Leave Behind](#).

Assaults occur on very rare occasion. Most assaults occur among patrons of late-night establishments and often involve alcohol consumption. These crimes generally take place between midnight and 0600. The Embassy has received reports of wildly excessive credit card bills received from nightclubs near popular city center areas. Pay careful attention to drink prices and pay in cash. There have also been reports of nightclub security being overly aggressive, occasionally physically assaulting patrons. Travel in a group when going out after dark to nightclubs, discos, bars, or high-tourism areas, such as the Market Square in Kraków and Old Town in Warsaw. Avoid any confrontation at these locations. Review OSAC's Report, [Shaken: The Don'ts of Alcohol Abroad](#).

Burglars tend to rob homes by entering through an unlocked front door or by ruse. Police continue to report that most residential crimes occur because tenants and homeowners failed to use alarm systems or to lock doors, gates, and/or garages, allowing thieves to take advantage of the vulnerability. A common tactic is to pose as employees of municipal utility services and attempt to gain access to a residence under the guise of checking meters or repairing reported problems. In reported cases, residents failed to verify the employment status of the supposed employees. Review OSAC's reports, [Hotels: The Inns and Outs](#) and [Considerations for Hotel Security](#).

Poland is located along the eastern border of the Schengen Zone, and is the entry point into Schengen Europe for some illicit activities. Organized crime, which has declined in presence since its heyday in the late 1990s, remains active. Various elements operate across borders, particularly in trafficking of stolen vehicles, drugs, cigarettes, and persons. While casinos and gaming establishments are government-regulated, some are affiliated with, or have attracted the interest of, organized crime.

Soccer matches often involve confrontations between opposing fans. Such confrontations may become violent.

Only change money at banks or legitimate exchange kiosks (*kantor*). ATMs at commercial banks, large hotels, shopping malls, and airports are safest. Review OSAC's reports, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#) and [Taking Credit](#).

Cybersecurity Issues

Review OSAC's reports, [Cybersecurity Basics](#), [Best Practices for Maximizing Security on Public Wi-Fi, Traveling with Mobile Devices: Trends & Best Practices](#), and [Satellite Phones: Critical or Contraband?](#)

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

In 2019, Polish authorities registered approximately 30,288 traffic accidents, including 2,909 fatalities. The road fatality rate is high, placing Poland among one of the more dangerous places to drive in Europe. There has been a substantial increase in the number of cars on the road. Driving, especially after dark, is hazardous. Roads are sometimes narrow, poorly illuminated, frequently under repair (especially in the summer), and include pedestrian and cyclist use.

Unpredictable weather can cause problems on the roads. Flooding has closed bridges and significantly disrupted road travel. Driving in the mountainous regions in the winter can be extremely dangerous, as the roads tend to be narrow and twisty with narrow shoulders. Drivers should consider snow tires and/or tire chains.

Alcohol consumption is frequently a contributing factor in accidents. Polish law provides virtually zero tolerance for driving under the influence of alcohol; penalties include a fine and probation or imprisonment for up to two years. Penalties for drivers involved in accidents are severe and can include imprisonment from six months to eight years; in the case of drivers under the influence of alcohol/drugs, penalties can be up to 12 years.

You must have both an International Driving Permit (IDP) and a U.S. driver's license in order to drive in Poland. U.S. nationals cannot obtain IDPs in Poland. Drivers staying for more than six months must obtain a Polish driver's license.

Use of seat belts and headlights is compulsory. The law prohibits the use of cellular phones while driving, except for hands-free models. The law prohibits making a right turn on a red light. A green arrow allows you to turn, but does NOT give you the right of way.

For traffic offenses or accidents, police may make an immediate determination of guilt and levy a fine, which may be substantial. Individuals with a registered address in Poland will receive a fine payable within seven days. Non-residents must pay fines immediately to the issuing police officer. You must be prepared to pay in local currency, though in some cases credit cards are acceptable. If you are unable to pay, or if you refuse to pay, the police may hold your passport and request an “accelerated procedure” with the court. The court will not return the passport until the transaction is complete.

Polish roadside services are improving rapidly. The Polish Automobile Association (Polski Związek Motorowy Auto-Tour, +48 (22) 532-8427 or 8433) has multilingual operators and provides nationwide assistance 24/7.

Review OSAC’s reports, [Road Safety Abroad](#), [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#), and [Evasive Driving Techniques](#); and read the State Department’s webpage on [driving and road safety abroad](#).

Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation is safe, efficient, and reliable.

Within cities, taxis are available at major hotels and designated stands, or in advance by telephone. Some drivers speak English and accept credit cards. When hailing taxis on the street, avoid those that do not have a company name and/or telephone number displayed, since these may not have meters, and may charge significantly more. Use "radio taxis," whose company phone number and name appear on the light bar. Check to see that the taxi has a functioning meter and that the driver uses the meter when starting your trip. Do not accept assistance from self-professed “taxi drivers” who approach you in/near the airport arrivals terminal; use only taxis from designated taxi stands. Uber and other rideshare services are increasingly common. Review OSAC’s report, [Safety and Security in the Share Economy](#).

Poland has a highly developed rail system, and the number of rail accidents is quite low. Review OSAC’s report, [Security In Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Warsaw and Kraków as being a **LOW**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Poland has no indigenous terrorism. No known terrorist organizations are identified as operating in Poland.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Warsaw and Kraków as being a **LOW**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Civil Unrest

Demonstrations are a regular occurrence, but are generally orderly and peaceful. Demonstrations occur regularly in Warsaw, and can range from a few individuals to thousands. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful may turn violent. Avoid areas where you see heavy police presence or crowds assembling; exercise caution if within the vicinity of any large public gatherings; and stay away from demonstrations.

The U.S. Embassy is located near the prime minister's chancellery, Parliament, various government ministries, and other embassies. While demonstrations rarely target U.S. policies, the U.S. Embassy lies along a major north-south traffic artery often used by demonstrators, so the Embassy may experience disruptions from these demonstrations.

Demonstrations in Kraków are much less frequent and typically draw much smaller crowds. The U.S. Consulate General in Kraków is near the German and French Consulates. Occasionally, small demonstrations target the German Consulate; these normally have little impact on Consulate operations.

Review OSAC's report, [Surviving a Protest](#).

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Poland has some of the worst air pollution in Europe. It generates almost 90% of its electricity with coal, with almost 70% of single-family homes using a coal-fired boiler or stove. In 2015, the European Commission (EC) referred Poland to the European Union (EU) Court of Justice as noncompliant with EU regulations regarding the level of particulate (PM10) and fine particulate matter (PM2.5) in the air. Poland has not yet complied with EU regulations regarding particulate levels.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

In 2013, Poland adopted the National Critical Infrastructure Protection Program, designed to improve security and resilience of its financial, energy, and communications infrastructure. Polish authorities have not yet identified specific infrastructure concerns.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Theft

U.S. government interaction with private-sector representatives and Polish counterparts indicate economic espionage problems exist. Many organizations do not know they are targets; others have tried to address the problem internally without involving the authorities.

Personal Identity Concerns

There are no legal restrictions on consensual same-sex sexual relations between adults or on the organization of LGBTI+ events in Poland. Polish law prohibits discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Though the government generally enforces these provisions, there is growing discrimination, hatred, and verbal and physical aggression against LGBTI+ persons. Politicians from multiple political parties made statements attacking LGBTI+ “ideology.” During the year, more than 30 local governments around the country adopted anti-LGBTI+ declarations, nonbinding documents that mainly focused on preventing “LGBTI+ ideology” in schools. Several pride marches were met with violent protests. In April, approximately 400 participants attended the country’s first march of the year in Gniezno, where around 500 counterdemonstrators threw bottles, eggs, and other objects at police and shouted homophobic slogans. In July, there was violence at an equality march in Białystok, where counterdemonstrators attacked participants and tried to block the march. In September 28, police used water cannons and tear gas to control counterdemonstrations during Lublin’s second annual equality march. Police detained 38 persons who attempted to disrupt the march, including a married couple who brought explosive materials to the march. Review the State Department’s webpage on security for [LGBTI+ travelers](#).

Anti-Semitic incidents continue to occur, often involving desecration of significant property, including Jewish cemeteries and the wall of the former Jewish ghetto in Kraków, and sometimes involving anti-Semitic comments on radio and social media. Jewish organizations have expressed concern regarding their physical safety and security. Review OSAC’s report, [Freedom to Practice](#), and the State Department’s webpage on security for [faith-based travelers](#).

Polish law states that buildings should be accessible for persons with disabilities, but many buildings remain inaccessible. Public buildings and transportation generally are accessible, although older trains and vehicles are often less so, and many trains and subway stations are not fully accessible. In Warsaw and other major cities, some new public buildings are accessible. Wheelchair users will still find challenges, as Warsaw is very hilly, with lots of steps and few curb cuts. Outside of major metropolitan areas, accessible public transportation is less common. Review the State Department’s webpage on security for [travelers with disabilities](#).

Societal discrimination against Roma continues to be a problem. Romani leaders complain of widespread discrimination in employment, housing, banking, the justice system, media, and education. Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities also continue to experience harassment and discrimination.

Drug-related Crimes

There is a negligible threat of drug violence or narco-terrorism. Most violence involving drug trafficking takes place among those involved in the illegal activity; innocent bystanders rarely, if ever, become collateral victims. Poland is primarily a drug trans-shipment country for Europe. Amphetamines, marijuana, and synthetic drugs are reportedly the primary drugs of choice for domestic use.

Authorities in Poland and neighboring countries report increased illicit production of synthetic drugs, including methamphetamine. However, it is unclear whether the methamphetamine is for local consumption or distribution to neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic.

Kidnapping Threat

There are reports of wealthy Poles or their family members kidnapped for ransom, but those instances are rare. Review OSAC's report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Other Issues

Taking pictures of Polish military buildings or other national security/restricted objects is illegal. Review OSAC's report, [Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography](#).

Polish Customs enforce strict regulations concerning the export of items such as works of art. Read the State Department's webpage on [customs and import restrictions](#) for information on what you cannot take into or out of other countries.

Police Response

The police emergency lines in Poland are **112** and **997**. In an emergency with a Polish-speaking person available, call the police, fire department, or ambulance service, depending on your emergency and assistance needed. If no Polish-speaking person is available, call the Embassy or Consulate for assistance. Major cities will generally have English speakers available through the general emergency number. Police officers are universally professional and cooperative. For local first responders, refer to the Embassy's [Emergency Assistance page](#).

Victims of crime should file a report at the nearest police station. Few police officers will speak fluent English, but will usually offer to obtain an interpreter. This may take a few minutes to a few hours. It helps to have a bilingual companion along for translation. Download the State Department's Crime Victims Assistance [brochure](#).

Medical Emergencies

The medical emergency lines in Poland are **112** and **999**. The standard of care in major cities may lag behind healthcare in the United States; in small villages, it may be limited. Many healthcare workers do not speak English. Prescription medication is reliable, but sometimes unavailable. Find contact information for available medical services and available air ambulance services on the [U.S. Embassy website](#).

The U.S. Department of State strongly recommends purchasing international health insurance before traveling internationally. Review the State Department's webpage on [insurance overseas](#).

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Poland](#).

Review OSAC's reports, [The Healthy Way](#), [Traveling with Medication](#), [I'm Drinking What in My Water?](#), [Shaken: The Don'ts of Alcohol Abroad](#), [Health 101: How to Prepare for Travel](#), and [Fire Safety Abroad](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The OSAC Country Council in Warsaw is active, meeting quarterly. Contact OSAC's [Europe team](#) for more information or to join.

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

Aleje Ujazdowskie 29/31, 00-540 Warsaw

Regular hours: 0830 – 1700, Monday – Friday

Telephone: Embassy Operator: +48-22-504-2000.

Marine Post One: +48-22-504-2639.

Website: <https://pl.usembassy.gov>

Other U.S. Diplomatic Posts In Poland

- [U.S. Consulate General Kraków](#), ul. Stolarska 9, 31-043 Kraków. +48 12 424 5100, 5183, or 5122.
- [U.S. Consular Agent Poznań](#), ul. Paderewskiego 8, 61-770 Poznań. +(48) (61) 851-8516

Helpful Information

Before you travel, consider the following resources:

- [OSAC Risk Matrix](#)
- [OSAC Travelers Toolkit](#)
- [State Department Traveler's Checklist](#)
- [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#)