



Greece 2020 OSAC Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Athens. OSAC encourages travelers to [use this report](#) to gain baseline knowledge of security conditions in Greece. For more in-depth information, review OSAC's [Greece 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 Greece at Level 1, indicating travelers should exercise normal precautions. Review OSAC's report, [Understanding the Consular Travel Advisory System](#).

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Athens as being a **LOW**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Crime Threats

Most crimes are non-violent, with street crimes (e.g. pickpocketing, purse snatchings, mobile phone theft) being the most common. The majority of these cases occur within the popular tourist areas and on the Metro system (rail and bus). Many of the incidents involve multiple perpetrators using various methods to distract their victims.

Be particularly careful on crowded streets and in other high-density areas (e.g. entertainment districts, department stores, restaurants, underground pedestrian street-crossings, and crowded public transportation). One day each week, individual neighborhoods host a farmer's market called the "Laiki." The market provides cover for criminal groups to descend on different neighborhoods, with police noting an uptick in pickpocketing and residential burglaries on these days. Report any suspicious behavior to the police. Review OSAC's reports, [All That You Should Leave Behind](#).

Residential burglaries and thefts of parked vehicles in 2019 showed a slight increase from prior year reports. Reported crimes involving narcotics, weapons, and explosives were stable compared to 2018.

Sexual assault crimes remain low relative to the size of the population; the number of reported rapes in 2018 was 157, and in 2019 was 167. Sexual assaults of U.S. nationals, while uncommon, do occur. In 2019, there were several cases of U.S. nationals assaulted while at nightclubs or bars in the early morning hours.

Drink alcohol in moderation and stay in control. Never leave your drink unattended in a bar or club. Some bars and clubs serve counterfeit or homemade spirits of unknown potency. Review OSAC's report, [Shaken: The Don'ts of Alcohol Abroad](#).

Cybersecurity Issues

Reports of cybercrimes, though on the rise, remain infrequent. The police maintain a dedicated [cybercrime division](#) to investigate cyber-related incidents. Review OSAC's reports, [Cybersecurity Basics](#), [Best Practices for Maximizing Security on Public Wi-Fi](#), [Traveling with Mobile Devices: Trends & Best Practices](#), [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#), and [Taking Credit](#).

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Greece has one of the highest rates of per-capita traffic fatalities in the European Union (EU); available data from 2019 suggests no change in comparison to years past. The rate of serious vehicular accidents involving motorcycles and scooters is substantially higher than elsewhere in Europe. Widespread failure to use safety belts and motorcycle helmets exacerbates the severity of traffic-related injuries. The majority of accidents occur between 1700-0700 hours, with accidents peaking during the summer and the holiday season.

In and around Athens and other larger cities, defensive driving is essential. Daily hazards include excessive speed, distracted drivers, non-compliance with right-of-way, general indifference to traffic laws, obscured traffic signs, and heavy traffic. In addition, motorcycles and scooters routinely weave in and out of traffic and drive between lanes. 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](#).

Outside of urban areas, narrow mountain roads and cold weather can contribute to treacherous driving conditions and closures.

Public Transportation Conditions

Although there are some concerns with respect to the consistency of timetables and speed of travel, the public transportation system provides several alternatives to driving. The Athens Metro is among the more modern rail systems in the world. Bus service serves Athens and the suburbs (along with 24-hour express shuttles to/from the airport). An additional tram system runs from the center of the city to the southern suburbs. Review OSAC's report, [Security In Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Strikes in the transportation sector can affect traffic and public transportation, to include taxis, ports, and airports. Most are of short duration, but travelers should confirm flight arrangements before going to the airport.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Greek Civil Aviation Authority as complying with International Civil Aviation Organization safety. Transportation sector strikes interrupt traffic, public transportation, taxis, seaports, and airports. Confirm domestic and international flights before heading to the airport.

Other Travel Conditions

Small motorbike and ATV rental firms frequently do not insure their vehicles. Customers are responsible for damages and should review their coverage before renting. Rental firms should require proof of both a driver's license and an International Driver's Permit (IDP) before renting any type of vehicle to a holder of a foreign driver's license. The Greek government imposes heavy fines on visitors caught driving without an IDP (up to €1,000). Insurance companies may not cover damages to renters without an IDP.

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Athens as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. International and domestic terrorist groups are an ongoing concern. Police continue to investigate and pursue members of domestic terrorist groups, as well as assess the possibility of collaboration between terrorists and elements of the criminal underworld. U.S. nationals are not specific targets, but attacks could happen in places foreigners visit. In 2019, there were intermittent domestic incidents involving the use of improvised explosives, incendiary devices, or small arms to attack political party offices and foreign institutions. Recent attacks include:

- December 27, 2018: An explosion occurred at 0710 in the Kolonaki area of Athens. A church employee found the explosive device in a metal box outside the church of Agios Dionysios on Skoufa Street, approximately 1.5 km west from the U.S. Embassy. No warning phone call preceded the explosion. A police officer and one civilian sustained minor injuries.
- December 17, 2018: At 0145 hours, an unknown individual contacted SKAI TV and Radio offices to inform security that an IED would go off in the building. The individual informed them that the device would explode in 45 minutes, and warned that it was not a hoax. The IED detonated at 0230 hours. According to police reports, no injuries resulted from the blast. The explosion damaged the office's main and first floors.
- March 22, 2019: Two unidentified perpetrators on a motorcycle threw a grenade that exploded in front of a police guard booth outside the consular section of the Russian Embassy, resulting in minor damage. A group called FAI/IRF Revenge Cell Mikhail Zhlobitski later claimed responsibility for the attack on an anti-establishment website.
- November 1, 2019: Approximately ten perpetrators broke into the offices of far-right political party Golden Dawn and set off an IED that caused a fire and material damages. No organization has claimed responsibility for this attack.

In 2019, Greece experienced small-scale disturbances conducted primarily by domestic anarchists, often acting in solidarity with incarcerated terrorists. Examples of these incidents included vandalizing government buildings, private residences of Greek politicians, and foreign missions with paint and leaflets.

Domestic terrorist groups remain a concern. For example, Revolutionary Struggle – a terrorist group that gained notoriety in 2007 when it attacked the U.S. Embassy with a rocket propelled grenade – advocates an anti-globalization and anarchist ideology. Its members are responsible for bombing police stations and other symbols of national authority. Police recaptured one of its key leaders, Nikolaos Maziotis, in 2014 and arrested three associates in 2015, charging them with membership in a terrorist organization. Police arrested Maziotis's wife, Pola Roupa, as an associate in 2017. In February 2020, police arrested alleged accomplices of Pola Roupa and charged them with weapons crimes and involvement with a terrorist organization.

There are several smaller groups of unknown operational capacity present in Greece, including Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei and the Group of Popular Rebels.

Radical anarchist groups also are active, using arson, gas canister attacks, and Molotov cocktails to promote their anarchist/leftist ideologies. Incidents have targeted journalists, politicians, and political party offices and appear to be an effort to cause property, rather than bodily, damage. Often, these groups make anonymous calls to the media and police or post messages on anarchist websites giving advance warning of an attack.

International terrorism continues to be a concern, including the Turkey-based Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP/C). Police have conducted several high-profile investigations resulting in the arrests of DHKP/C members.

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

Anarchists have attacked U.S. multinational companies, resulting in significant property damage. Anarchists have placed incendiary devices at ATMs belonging to Greek and U.S. banks, destroying several. Anarchists usually conduct attacks against U.S. business interests with the intent to cause damage, embarrassment, or financial loss.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

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

Civil Unrest

Demonstrations take place in Athens and Thessaloniki on an almost daily basis. Organizers include labor unions, political parties, leftist anti-authoritarian groups, student groups, and other groups in the public and civilian sector. Demonstrations generally target the political and economic policies of the government, and can vary in size. Avoid all areas affected by the annual November 17 demonstrations, including the U.S. Embassy.

In 2019, there were nearly 1,150 protests in Attica prefecture (Athens, Piraeus, suburbs, and townships), with a majority of the demonstrations attracting fewer than 200 people. Demonstrations in Attica decreased approximately 10% from 2018, continuing a downward trend.

In Thessaloniki, over 100 demonstrations passed or took place very close to the U.S. Consulate, stable from 2018; 14 demonstrations of these targeted the U.S. or NATO. Participation numbers varied between 30 and 10,000. Thessaloniki prefecture recorded just over 300 protests as a whole, a significant decrease from 2018, with a majority attracting fewer than 200 people.

Approximately 1,650 demonstrations occurred elsewhere in Greece during 2019.

Although most demonstrations are peaceful, anarchist groups may infiltrate demonstrations to create chaos. Violent anarchist groups often join public demonstrations to clash with police and vandalize public and private property.

In Athens, violent anarchists often gather in the Athens University or Polytechnic University areas or at Exarchia or Omonia Squares. From there, they usually march toward the city center, particularly to Syntagma Square. In Thessaloniki, the most prominent anarchist gathering areas are the Arch of Galerius (Kamara) and the campus of Aristotle University.

In 2019, anarchist groups conducted several attacks on Greek government facilities and foreign embassies, attempting to embarrass the Greek authorities. These attacks seek to cause property damage including:

- May 15, 2019: Anarchists threw cans of beer filled with paint at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador.
- May 25, 2019: A group of individuals came out of the Aristotle University and used Molotov cocktails to attack an anti-riot police squad stationed outside the Turkish Consulate.
- June 25, 2019: Individuals used Molotov cocktails to attack the offices of “KINAL” political party located at Charilaou Trikoupi Street.
- September 15, 2019: Perpetrators attacked the New Democracy political party’s local offices in Glyfada and caused material damages.
- October 24, 2019: Vandals attacked Penteli town hall, splashing paint onto the building’s facade and scattering flyers expressing support for migrants and refugees being relocated to the mainland, in a bid to decongest camps on the Aegean islands.

Riot control methods include the use of tear gas/water cannon. Dtag informed about demonstrations from local news sources and hotel security. Find information regarding demonstrations on OSAC’s [Greece-specific page](#), the U.S. Embassy [website](#), and on the Embassy Consular Section [Facebook page](#).

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Greece is in a seismically active region and is at risk for earthquakes. The most intense recent earthquake hit the Athens area in July 2019, measuring 5.3 on the Richter Scale. Other sizeable earthquakes occurred in November 2019 on Antikithira island (6.1) and in July 2019 on Zakynthos island (3.8).

Forest fires are a continuing concern during the summer season. Fires have increased substantially in size and scope over the last several years. The increase is due to not only extreme weather conditions and lack of rainfall, but also arson and negligence.

In July 2018, a series of wildfires began in the coastal areas of Athens. By the end of the year, 100 people died and another 72 were injured. Authorities evacuated or rescued more than 700 residents, mainly from seaside settlements located north of the port town of Rafina (e.g. Kokkino Limanaki and Mati). Wildfires affected more than 4,000 residents.

Disaster preparedness [information](#) and specific suggestions to help mitigate the impact of wildfires and earthquakes is available from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In any natural disaster, follow the instructions of local authorities. Reach the [General Secretariat for Civil Protection](#), which responds to emergencies, at +30-210-335-9932/33.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Theft

The main intellectual property issues are copyright infringement and the sale of counterfeit trademarked merchandise. However, according to industry sources, counterfeit sales continue to decline due to the codification and legal authority for police to confiscate counterfeit merchandise. In February 2020, police raided three warehouses in the Exarcheia neighborhood housing counterfeit merchandise.

Personal Identity Concerns

U.S. nationals of African, Asian, Hispanic, or Middle Eastern descent have reported being subject to harassment. While such incidences are infrequent, exercise caution, especially at night near Omonia and Exarchia Squares in Athens, where police frequently conduct sweeps for illegal immigrants. The Hellenic National Police operate dedicated units to combat racial violence; contact them at 11414.

Review the State Department's webpage on security for [female travelers](#).

There are no legal restrictions on same-sex sexual relations or the organization of LGBTI+ events in Greece. Anti-discrimination laws protect LGBTI+ individuals in Greece, and laws against hate speech cover gender identity. However, NGOs report that social discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is widespread in Greece, and violence against LGBTI+ individuals remains a problem. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [LGBTI+ travelers](#).

Review OSAC's report, [Freedom to Practice](#), and the State Department's webpage on security for [faith-based travelers](#).

While Greek law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical or intellectual disabilities and local law requires access to buildings, sidewalks, and public transportation, application and enforcement of these laws is lacking. Parked vehicles often occupy or block handicapped parking spaces and sidewalk ramps. Sidewalks often are narrow with broken paving stones, large holes, trees, and street signs. Buildings with ramps might lack accessible elevators or bathrooms. A small percentage of public buildings (primarily in Athens) have full accessibility. Some buildings and intersections include accommodations for visually-impaired travelers. The Athens metro and Athens International Airport are fully accessible with ramps and elevators. The Greek [Deputy Ombudsman for Social Welfare](#) handles complaints related to persons with disabilities, especially those related to employment, social security, and transportation. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [travelers with disabilities](#).

Drug-related Crimes

Greece continues to be a transit point for drug trafficking between drug-producing countries in the east and drug-consuming countries in the west. Drug trafficking remains a significant issue in Greece's battle against organized crime. Available data through December 2019 reflects a slight increase in the number of narcotics-related cases for that year.

Other Issues

Refuse invitations by strangers on the street to come into local bars, especially in the Monastiraki, Syntagma, or Glyfada. This is a ploy to extort large amounts of cash for supposedly purchased drinks, with the threat of physical harm if you refuse to pay. The scam normally involves young women and men who speak excellent English.

Visitors during Easter should exercise caution when attending celebrations that occur at midnight on Holy Saturday. Festivities have typically involved the large-scale use of fireworks, some of which are homemade and illegal. There have been incidents in which spectators have suffered severe, sometimes fatal, injuries.

Review OSAC's report, [Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography](#).

Customs authorities strictly regulate the export of Greek antiquities, including rocks from archaeology sites. Do not remove anything, no matter how small, from archaeological or historical sites. Do not purchase protected antiquities and carry receipts for any purchases that may appear to be antiquities. 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 emergency line in Greece is **112**. Service in English, French, and German is available. If you are a victim of a crime, the central police phone number is **100**. Reach the Athens tourism police by dialing **1571**. For racially motivated incidents, please contact **11414**. For local first responders, please refer to the Embassy's [Emergency Assistance page](#). Download the State Department's Crime Victims Assistance [brochure](#).

Although Greece has a large national police department, severe budget constraints and antipathy toward the police have limited their efficacy in deterring crime. Police skills, tactical skills, and emergency response capabilities are adequate, although access to resources fall short of U.S. law enforcement standards in many respects. Significant traffic congestion often hampers police emergency response and emergency medical services.

Police may detain you for questioning if you do not have your passport.

Police/Security Agencies

Athens Tourism Police: The specially trained Athens tourism police offer tourists information and help. All Athens tourism police officers speak foreign languages and wear a shoulder patch noting "Tourism Police" on their uniforms.

DIAS: This is a unit of motorcycle police responsible for police patrols and emergency response in Athens, Piraeus, and their suburbs. Each DIAS unit consists of two uniformed police officers on a motorcycle.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD): The mission of the EOD is to identify, collect, and render safe IEDs and improvised incendiary devices. It assists in crime scene investigations in relation to explosive devices.

Criminal Investigations Police Directorate (Forensics Lab): This Directorate is Athens-based with a subdivision in Thessaloniki and a nationwide responsibility. The Directorate consists of the Department of Fingerprints, Department of Science Laboratories, Department of Chemical Laboratories, Department of Scientific Investigations, Department of Modus Operandi, Department of Statistical Data, Department of Archives, and Department of Internal Operations.

Police Directorate for Countering Special Violent Crimes (Counter-Terrorism Unit): This unit is responsible for the investigations of terrorist-related incidents. The unit reports directly to the Chief of the Hellenic Police. There are two divisions: one in Athens and one in Thessaloniki.

EKAM - Special Suppressive Counter-Terrorism Unit (SWAT): This unit responds to serious, exceptionally dangerous situations, along with incidents contaminated by chemical/biological agents, or radiological/nuclear substances. EKAM supports and participates in search and rescue operations, and coordinates evacuations during major disasters or accidents.

Medical Emergencies

Dial **166** for medical emergencies. The emergency operator will receive the call, assess the nature of the emergency, and direct the ambulance to pick up and transport the patient to the assigned on-call public hospital. This service will not transport patients to private hospitals.

Most public medical facilities in Greece offer adequate care, although service quality and hospital appearance may differ from the United States. Some private hospitals have affiliations with U.S. facilities and provide high-quality care. Many doctors trained in the United States or elsewhere in Europe. Public hospitals often employ minimal nursing staff overnight and on weekends in non-emergency wards. Consider hiring a private nurse or having family spend the night with the patient, especially a minor child. Find contact information for available medical services and available air ambulance services on the [U.S. Embassy website](#).

Private hospitals usually require proof of adequate insurance or cash before admitting a patient. Patients bear all costs for transfer to or between hospitals. The U.S. Department of State strongly recommends purchasing international health insurance before traveling internationally. Review the State Departments webpage on [insurance overseas](#).

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

OSAC Country Council Information

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

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

91 Vasilisis Sophias Avenue, 10160 Athens
Regular hours: 0830 – 1700, Monday – Friday (Greek and American holidays excluded)
Telephone: +30-210-721-2951. Emergency: (24/7): +30-210-720-2490/2491
Website: <https://gr.usembassy.gov/>

Other U.S. Diplomatic Posts In Greece

[U.S. Consulate Thessaloniki](#), 43 Tsimiski, 7th Floor, 54623 Thessaloniki. +30 2310 242 905, +30 2310 376 300. Email: usconsulate@state.gov.

Helpful Information

Before you travel, consider the following resources:

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