



# OSAC Country Security Report Bulgaria

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*This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State Bulgaria Travel Advisory and [Bulgaria Country Information Page](#).*

## Embassy & Consulate Contact Information

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## OSAC Country Chapter

Bulgaria has an active country chapter.

Contact [OSAC's Europe team](#) with any questions.

## Bulgaria Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers should exercise normal precautions in Bulgaria.

## Crime

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

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Crime "C" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Bulgaria.

ATM skimming, credit card fraud, and traffic incidents remain the most common threats to U.S. citizens in Bulgaria. The Interior Ministry (MOI) reported a 1.3 percent increase in all registered offenses in the Sofia region in 2024 compared to 2023. While violent assaults are a rare occurrence, there were nine reported "intentional homicides" in Sofia in 2024. The volume and the type of reported incidents suggest that U.S. nationals are not targets based on nationality. The MOI continues an outreach campaign increasing awareness of crimes against tourists, allocating additional resources and training for officers on the Black Sea coast and in winter resorts during the high tourist seasons.

Like other major European cities, pick pocketing and purse snatching occur regularly, especially in crowded markets, on shopping streets, near airport ATMs and aboard the busy tram and bus lines. Con artists often operate on public transportation and in bus and train stations. Pickpocketing often includes a diversion in the form of an argument or fight. Safeguard belongings when visiting cafes or restaurants and while using public transportation. Be wary of beggars and people selling trinkets and other items.

Europe's open borders and uneven patchwork of vehicle databases make car theft relatively easy. Car thefts and break-ins are common in residential areas and in parks. Four-wheel drive vehicles and late-model European sedans are the most popular targets. Car thieves target new luxury cars, various models of SUVs, and older cars that they can dismantle and sell for parts. In the last few years, the main markets for the stolen vehicles have been the Middle East, Albania, Kosovo, Russia, and Georgia. In January 2025, Bulgaria entered the Schengen Zone, lifting passport and customs controls at the northern borders with Romania.

A trend of vehicle lock jamming has emerged, with thieves using radio frequencies to block victims' key fobs. Jamming leaves a car unlocked despite the owner pressing the lock button. In some cases, criminals have stolen vehicles using devices that mimic an electronic key. These incidents have been prevalent at shopping centers, gas station convenience stores, and school drop-off areas. Another scam involves a suspect puncturing a victim's tire. While the driver changes the tire, the suspect raids the vehicle.

Organizations should take measures to protect their offices. Some bank vaults and private company offices reportedly have been broken into using jamming equipment to circumvent alarm systems. Burglary is a common crime. If you plan to reside in Bulgaria on a long-term basis, take measures to protect your home and consider installing window grilles, steel doors with well-functioning locks, and an alarm system.

Document fraud is a challenge and impacts OSAC members when hiring and conducting due diligence investigations. The most common fraudulent documents are university diplomas, electronic payment documents, and identification documents. According to the Specialized Prosecutor's Office, fraudulent documents including international passports, ID cards, various driving licenses, and various diplomas are available on the black market. In recent years, police have discovered counterfeit document and currency production centers in and around Bulgaria.

Organized crime groups exert a strong influence in some bars/nightclubs and control many prostitution rings. Pay special attention to drink prices at high-end bars and nightclubs, as there have been instances of visitors being charged exorbitant prices (several hundred dollars); in some establishments, the management may use force to secure payment. Do not purchase anything from a menu without prices.

Bulgaria remains one of the primary source countries of human trafficking in the EU. Traffickers exploit Bulgarian women and girls in sex trafficking throughout Western Europe and in Bulgaria, particularly in the capital, resort areas, and border towns. Traffickers exploit Bulgarian men and boys in forced labor across Europe, predominantly in the agriculture, construction, and hospitality industries.

U.S. government personnel are not prohibited from traveling to any specific areas of Bulgaria due to crime. Most criminal acts in Bulgaria take place in Sofia, although cities along the Black Sea coast, including Varna and Burgas, and popular locations in Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo, and Stara Zagora, experience upticks in criminal activity during the tourist season.

### Kidnapping Threat

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Kidnapping “K” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Bulgaria.

Kidnapping as a tactic used by organized crime decreased following the arrest of the “Impudent” gang in 2009. Kidnappings primarily involved rival criminal groups seeking ransom or unresolved financial dealings. In August 2017, masked, armed men kidnapped the 25-year-old son of a prominent businessperson as he left his house for work. They released him 11 days into his captivity after his family paid a ransom.

### Terrorism

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

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Bulgaria.

International terrorism remains a major and imminent asymmetric threat to Euro-Atlantic countries, including Bulgaria. Terrorist groups and those inspired by such organizations are intent on attacking U.S. citizens abroad. Terrorists are increasingly using less sophisticated methods of attack – including knives, firearms, and vehicles – to more effectively target crowds. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning. They may target high-profile public events (sporting contests, political rallies, demonstrations, holiday events, celebratory gatherings, etc.); hotels, clubs, and restaurants frequented by tourists; places of worship; schools; parks; tourism infrastructure; shopping malls and markets; and public transportation systems (including subways, buses, trains, and scheduled commercial flights).

While the threat of terrorism in Bulgaria remains low, foreign terrorist groups take advantage of Bulgaria's active illicit smuggling and trafficking networks that facilitate entry into Europe from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Given Bulgaria's strategic location as a crossroads between Europe and the Middle East, most of Bulgaria's counterterrorism efforts focus on disrupting foreign terrorist fighter's transit through enhanced border security activities, traveler screening, and information sharing. Migrant pressure at Bulgaria's southern borders with Greece and Turkey from regions hosting terrorist networks—primarily Syria and Afghanistan—remains an enduring problem for the country.

The State Agency for National Security (DANS) is the lead agency for counterterrorism in Bulgaria. A separate National Counterterrorism Center, operating within DANS since 2014, aims to identify suspects, exchange information, and disrupt terrorist activities. The State Intelligence Agency also contains a small, primarily analytic counterterrorism capability and an equally small operational capability focused on threats to Bulgarian interests abroad. The Ministry of Interior contains a separate Special Weapons and Tactics team that concentrates internally on domestic threats.

## Political Violence and Civil Unrest

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

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Civil Unrest "U" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Bulgaria. Civil unrest can develop quickly without prior notice, often interrupting logistics and services. Avoid demonstration activity, as even those planned to remain peaceful have the potential to turn violent.

## Elections/Political Stability

Bulgaria held parliamentary elections in October 2024, successfully forming a government in January 2025. The election was the seventh in four years after Bulgaria's political parties failed to form a governing coalition after elections in June 2024. Bulgaria has struggled to maintain governing coalitions since 2020, when anti-graft protests helped end the governing coalition.

There were no reports of major irregularities during the June elections. The election observation mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), considered the June parliamentary elections to be free and fair, while noting that "various malpractices limited voters' access to the electoral process and to information of public interest." Following reports of vote buying in the October parliamentary elections, demonstrators gathered outside the Presidency in Sofia to demand a new election.

## Protests & Demonstrations

The Bulgarian constitution guarantees the right for peaceful assembly and association, and the government mostly respects these rights. Demonstrations occur frequently. They may take place in response to political or economic issues, on holidays, European football matches, and during international events. They mainly occur in downtown Sofia in the areas surrounding Parliament and the Presidency.

Demonstrations can be unpredictable; even those intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational. There were numerous reports and video clips shared on social media of the disproportionate use of police violence against nonviolent protestors during months-long antigovernment protests in the summer of 2020, including punching, kicking, dragging, and beating handcuffed persons. In September 2020, dozens of people, including journalists and police, were injured and hundreds were arrested when anti-riot forces forcefully dispersed protesters in Sofia. Police used pepper spray, tear gas, and water cannons against protesters demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister and Chief Prosecutor, combined with an overhaul of state governance. Authorities targeted businesses and individuals associated with the protests, allegedly subjecting them to politically motivated prosecutions and financial audits.

Avoid areas around protests and demonstrations and exercise caution if unexpectedly found in the vicinity of large gatherings or demonstrations. Check local media for updates and traffic advisories. Messages regarding demonstrations are posted on the U.S. Embassy's [website](#) and via the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).

## Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

In general, Bulgarians tend not to hold anti-U.S. sentiment. There are, however, political parties and other organizations that espouse anti-U.S. rhetoric.

## Law Enforcement

The MOI is the primary law enforcement body in Bulgaria, encompassing the National Police Service, Border Police, Fire and Civil Protection, Migration, and Chief Directorate for Combating Organized Crime. It oversees 28 regional police directorates and more than 180 police stations. With more than 55,000 employees, the MOI oversees a vast mission of law enforcement, national security, public order, fire safety, border security, immigration, and traffic enforcement. Most interactions U.S. nationals have with law enforcement would be with MOI employees.

The Bulgarian customs administration is a centralized administrative structure, organized within the National Customs Agency (NCS) under the Finance Ministry. NCS counteracts the contraband channels of different goods and drugs. NCS also collects all duties and excises paid to the state budget.

The National Investigative Service (NIS) is the investigative arm of the Prosecution Service, which is part of the Judiciary. It works with the Interior and Justice Ministries to conduct investigations.

The National Protection Service (NSO) provides protective security to Bulgaria's national leadership including the president, prime minister, and visiting government dignitaries, but does not conduct criminal investigations.

The State Agency for National Security (DANS) is a domestic security agency with investigative responsibility. Since 2015, DANS has no law enforcement authority. It coordinates closely with intelligence services and law enforcement agencies depending on the nature of their investigation.

The Directorate General for Gendarmerie, Special Operations and Counter-Terrorism conducts activities related to the protection of national security and the protection of public order: preventing and intercepting terrorist acts; release of hostages; detention or disposal of particularly dangerous criminals or criminal groups; detection and neutralization of explosive devices and substances; physio-chemical research and expert assessments of explosive devices; restoration, maintenance and protection of public order in mass disturbances or crisis situations; and security of officials in the administration of state authorities in the presence of a specific threat in relation to the exercise of their functions.

## Police Response

Police services in rural areas may respond more slowly than in urban areas.

The police emergency line in Bulgaria is **112**.

## Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in Bulgaria, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State's Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)
- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

## Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Risk of Wrongful Detention "D" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Bulgaria.

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements, but there are occasional reports of arbitrary arrest and detention. If you are arrested or detained, ask police or prison officials to notify the U.S. Embassy immediately.

Corruption remains an important concern of the Bulgarian government. You may refer complaints of public corruption by e-mail to the Ministry of Justice at [anticorruption@justice.government.bg](mailto:anticorruption@justice.government.bg) or by phone to +359 2 987 0697. All grievances must be submitted in the Bulgarian language.

According to a Basel Institute of Governance survey released in May 2023, the judicial system, the public health system, and police were most affected by corruption. The National Assembly passed a whistleblower protection law in January 2023, and as part of a larger legislative package aimed at curbing government corruption, a May 2023 law created an accountability mechanism for the prosecutor general and the deputy prosecutor generals. In September 2023 parliament passed legislation to enhance the effectiveness of the country's anti-corruption commission.

The European Commission acknowledged the new legislation was a positive step but noted “a continuous issue” with poor effectiveness of investigations and a weak track record of prosecution and final convictions in high-level cases of corruption. It also asserted there were serious legal gaps regarding integrity of top executive functions such as “persons hired for ministers’ private offices.” Transparency International Bulgaria asserted the lack of transparent use of public resources, attacks against civil society, and unregulated lobbying in the legislature were factors contributing to corruption.

## Cybersecurity

ATM skimming, credit card fraud, computer hacking, ransomware-related incidents, business e-mail compromise cases, and other electronic intrusions are known risks in Bulgaria. Europe's southeastern region poses significant cyber threats. Most common victims of computer-related fraud are companies that trade entirely on the Internet.

Bulgaria is a key target for cybercrime because of its advanced internet infrastructure, high number of users, and payment systems. Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, and Burgas host many research and development centers, centers of excellence, software development hubs, service and shared centers for leading global companies and manage 24/7 international operations. Bulgaria's rapid development in the latest IT, AI, big data, and communication also triggers significant cybercrime interest. According to the [U.S. International Trade Administration](#), around 57 percent of Bulgarian organizations were subject to cyberattacks daily or monthly, highlighting the need for robust cybersecurity measures.

In 2023 and 2024, Bulgaria experienced notable developments in cybercrime, impacting businesses and prompting governmental responses. Since early 2024, over 80 Bulgarian

companies reported cybercrimes involving the unauthorized switching of their International Bank Account Numbers (IBANs). These incidents resulted in approximately €12 million in losses. The Bulgarian government adopted the “Cyber Resilient Bulgaria 2020” strategy to enhance protection for citizens, businesses, and critical infrastructure.

According to U.S. law enforcement, Bulgarian criminals have a significant role in ATM and credit card skimming-related fraud around the world. Until recently, Bulgarian transnational organized criminal groups manufactured skimming devices and sent teams to other countries to skim credit cards. These groups would then send the proceeds back to their Bulgarian bosses. There was only a moderate amount of the actual skimming of credit cards in Bulgaria, and these were usually to evaluate the devices prior to deploying them abroad. This trend has changed over the past few years, as Bulgarian criminal groups have increased their operations dramatically domestically and abroad. As a result, ATM skimming in Sofia, Varna, and Burgas has increased several-fold. Criminal groups target high-volume ATMs, usually around tourist areas or shopping centers. Protect your PIN, although that does not eliminate the risk. Use ATMs inside trusted banks and similar institutions, and limit use of credit cards to trusted retailers and institutions. Closely monitor your bank statements for anomalies. Destroy personally identifiable information by shredder or similar method.

## Import/Export Restrictions

If you plan to import an automobile to Bulgaria, be aware that customs duties on personal vehicles can be high. All documents must be originals or certified copies and contain an apostille.

The use of satellite phones and satellite communication devices is regular by the Bulgarian Communications Regulation Commission (CRC). Individuals or companies wishing to use satellite phones must ensure they have the necessary authorization or permits from Bulgarian authorities, and that their use is compliant with local telecommunication laws. Importers need to ensure the devices meet the necessary technical standards required by the Bulgarian regulatory authorities. The use of satellite phones may be limited in certain government or military areas where communication security is a concern, and their use is sometimes monitored by security agencies to prevent misuse in espionage or illicit activities. Using unauthorized satellite communication devices or operating them without the proper registration could lead to legal penalties, including fines or confiscation of the devices.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

*Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).*