



Kosovo 2014 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Faith-based Organization; Financial Security; Fraud; Human Trafficking; Anti-American sentiment; Separatist violence; Riots/Civil Unrest; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Oil & Energy; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Drug Trafficking; Disease Outbreak

Europe > Kosovo; Europe > Kosovo > Pristina

2/7/2014

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

Kosovo is rated High for residential and non-residential crime. High unemployment and other economic factors encourage criminal activity. Crimes of opportunity are the most prevalent type of crime in Kosovo. Furthermore, street crimes consisting of theft and purse snatchings are serious problems in Kosovo, especially in Pristina. Criminals are often armed with handguns, as weapons are fairly easy to obtain. The international community can be a target of crime, as criminals assume that members of the community are affluent. Likewise, international community members' homes, businesses, and vehicles can be targeted for burglaries.

While violent crimes can occur, reporting on Americans as victims of violent crime is limited. Most incidents of physical assault occur in bars in downtown Pristina and are related to alcohol consumption. Typically, these assaults stem from a personal issue between the victims and their assailants, not from anti-American sentiment. However, the November 2013

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beating of two American missionaries may portend a mounting, if minimized, Islamist threat in Kosovo.

Major credit cards are generally accepted at hotels for the final bill, but it is inadvisable to use them for incidental purchases, as each use increases the chance of compromise. ATM fraud is increasing in Kosovo.

Organized crime, particularly in northern Kosovo, has included explosives thrown at the homes of rival groups and suspicious fires damaging rival businesses. A combination of long-standing ethnic tension, weak economic conditions, organized crime groups, and the availability of military-grade weapons have led to sporadic acts of violence throughout the country. On rare occasions, violence has also occurred in downtown Pristina. Violence and the threat of violence for the purpose of political intimidation has, for the most part, been isolated to the region in and around North Mitrovica, as hardline Serb nationalists have employed violence to prevent individuals from cooperating with the government of Kosovo. While violence related to organized crime has not historically been directed at Americans, U.S. citizens may become inadvertent victims of politically-motivated violence.

High-profile attention to an organ trafficking case involving private citizens and allegations of war-time organ trafficking resulted in heightened awareness of the potential for trafficking crimes, but little evidence suggests criminals engaged regularly in this type of offense. Government agencies and their international supporters pursue an active program of discouraging all forms of human trafficking, especially trafficking of women to other countries for the sex trade, and have significantly improved awareness and investigation efforts.

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Overall Road Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Caution is highly advised while driving in Kosovo. Driving is far more difficult than driving in the U.S. for many reasons: unfamiliar traffic patterns, largely unobserved traffic laws, stray livestock, horse-drawn carts, infrastructure problems, ongoing road construction projects, and even the occasional homemade vehicle. People often drive recklessly, passing on blind curves and hills, speeding, and disobeying posted traffic signs. While Kosovo police occasionally set up “speed traps,” they are not active in enforcing traffic laws. Defensive driving is a must. Attempt to limit your driving to hours of daylight. Always wear your seatbelt.

Roads within the larger metropolitan areas are typically in fairly good condition, but many are under a continual state of construction or repair. Be particularly careful at night, as lighting along roadways is limited. Roads often lack proper reflective markings and safety measures (i.e. lane markers and guardrails) normally seen on U.S. roads. Modern highways are under construction. The highway to Albania was recently completed.

Cross streets only in marked crosswalks, and given the option, use crosswalks that offer functioning Walk/Don't Walk signals. Even if you have the right-of-way, be mindful of the often poor observance of traffic safety practices by local drivers. Additionally, some crosswalk signals are not synchronized with the traffic lights. A green walk signal does not guarantee safety in crossing the street. Always check for traffic before crossing the street, and be aware of possible speeding cars while in the crosswalk.

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Due to a lack of traffic enforcement, poor road conditions, and general lack of knowledge about driving rules/etiquette, vehicular accidents are common. Local drivers and passengers often do not use proper seat restraints for both adults and children, which increases the potential life threatening injuries in a vehicular accident. If an accident occurs, vehicles must remain in place until police arrive and complete their accident report; otherwise, the person who leaves the scene may be found at fault.

Taxis are an inexpensive, safe, and reliable means of transportation, but make sure your taxi has a meter and that the driver activates it upon departure. Rail transportation is very limited, unreliable, and unsafe. Buses are often overcrowded, and RSO does not recommend their use within Pristina and Kosovo. Pristina International Airport is the only commercial airport in the country. A new airport terminal facility recently opened. Western European airlines, such as Austrian Air and Adria, fly into Pristina on a regular basis, as does Turkish Air and several smaller "budget" airlines.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The international/transnational terrorism threat problem in Kosovo is similar to that faced by most European nations. The presence of U.S. military units provides anti-American terrorists with potential targets. Kosovo has seen a rise in Islamic extremism, especially in areas outside of Pristina. Kosovo does not have a strong visa program, and its porous borders

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contribute to the influx of suspected terrorists.

Civil Unrest

Vetëvendosje, an ethnic Albanian “self-determination” group with members elected to the Assembly, actively participates in political, social, and economic demonstrations in Kosovo. They are known to clash with Kosovo Police, resulting in violence and the arrest of group leaders and members. Vetëvendosje frequently protests international organizations active in Kosovo, and the activity of the U.S. Embassy and Ambassador, and the ongoing dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, calling for more vigorous exercise of Kosovo’s sovereignty. Vetëvendosje often relies on a strategy of physical intimidation and the use of mobs. An unrestrained mob accosted the U.S. Ambassador in 2013 outside a government building in Pristina, causing minor injury. Vetëvendosje saw electoral success with Shpend Ahmeti winning the mayorship of Pristina. However, his election more likely reflects Mr. Ahmeti’s personal popularity rather than a groundswell of popular support for Vetëvendosje.

Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) veterans are also apt to demonstrate for political reasons. A group violently demonstrated at and disrupted the opening ceremony of the new highway linking Albania and Kosovo. The action was in protest of EULEX’s indictment of former KLA members and politician Fatmir Limaj.

Protests occur in Pristina regularly. The frequency of protests increases during times of political tension. These demonstrations are normally non-violent and take place in the downtown area near government or international organization buildings. Protests are more likely in ethnically divided areas or areas of ethnic tension.

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Religious or Ethnic Violence

In addition to the rise in Islamist extremism, Kosovo is plagued by ethnic tension, resulting in some violence. Americans are generally well received throughout the country, particularly in Kosovo-Albanian communities. There is greater tension within the Serb-majority municipalities of Zvecan, Leposavic, Zubin Potok, and North Mitrovica. Many Kosovo-Serbs do not recognize Kosovo's independence, and residents of those areas are suspicious of U.S. support for Kosovo efforts to establish legitimate government institutions in those municipalities. Within the past year, there have been several bombings and shootings aimed at opposing attempts to exert authority by the government and at international entities operating in Kosovo. An official from EULEX was the victim of a targeted shooting in 2013 while on business in Zvecan Municipality, north of Mitrovica. Additionally, multiple projects funded by USAID were subject to bombings in the north. While not directly targeting U.S. personnel or facilities, these terrorist activities are considered to be in retaliation for accepting U.S. funding.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Kosovo is located in a seismically active area, making it susceptible to earthquakes. There are three principle seismic zones in Kosovo: Prizren-Peje, Ferizaj-Viti-Gjilan, and Kopaonik. Within the available data range (from 1900 to present), the highest Richter scale reading for

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the Prizren-Peje zone was 6.6 (in 2002), compared with 9.0 (in 1922) for the Ferizaj–Viti–Gjilan zone, and 6.0 (in 1980) for the Kopaonik zone. Between 1900 and 2000, historical records catalogued the following earthquakes by intensity: 82 earthquakes at >5 intensity; 34 >6 intensity; 12 >7 intensity; 10 >8 intensity; and 3 >9 intensity. The most recent significant earthquake occurred in April 2002, centered in Prizren, with a strength of 6.6 and that killed one person and injured at least 60 people. The most recent earthquake occurred on March 10, 2010, with a strength of between 4.6 and 5.2, centered in Istog (60 km/37 miles northwest of Pristina), with no significant reports of damage. A series of three tremors were felt in Pristina as recent as November 2013.

The Pristina municipality estimates that 70 percent of new private construction (primarily single-family homes and new apartment blocks) built since 1999 do not comply with established construction standards, and a major earthquake could devastate these buildings.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

The Kosovo A power plant generates 2.5 tons of dust hourly from burning lignite, also known as “brown coal,” which is “considered the dirtiest of all fossil fuels.” According to a European Commission report, “air pollution in Kosovo causes 835 premature deaths, 310 new cases of chronic bronchitis, 600 hospital admissions and 11,600 emergency visits each year.”

Kosovo Electricity Corporation (KEK) is a public utility with operations spanning coal mining, power production through coal (along with limited hydroelectric and power imports), and power distribution. KEK is the sole public supplier of electricity in Kosovo. It is the major heavy industry, employing nearly 8,000 people, and its coal-fired power plants (KEK A and KEK B) are near Pristina. These generating units were designed for a 30-year operating life and are

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now between 25 and 47 years old. Plans are to retire KEK A units by 2017 and KEK B units by 2024. In 2009, it was projected that KEK A and B together (after repairs planned but unfinished in 2010) would have been able to provide 960 MW of total operating capacity, but even if such repairs had been accomplished, the gains realized would still have been below the capacity needed to meet Kosovo's peak demand (1 GW [2009 data]).

If either KEK A or B were to fail, the other plant would be unable to meet demand alone. A single plant would force KEK administrators to reduce power distribution severely until they could replace power generation capacity. If both were to fail (simultaneously or sequentially), KEK could still provide limited power generation through imports (largely from Serbia) and small hydroelectric operations, but these alone would fall well short of existing demand and would force severe power distribution limits.

The ability to collect revenue from consumers has long plagued KEK and other service providers. In December 2010, the Pristina central heating plant (providing hot water for radiant heat to much of the city) shut down due to its inability to collect payments. This led affected consumers to increase electric consumption via electric space heaters, further driving up demand. Kosovo and the international community continue to work toward a solution in which an outside consortium creates a new series of high-capacity electric plants, but until then, power demand will continue to outstrip supply.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Theft

Protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) is poor. The government has made several efforts to improve the legal basis for IPR protection, including adopting best practices legislation, and regulations. As part of the Ministry of Trade and Industry's IPR Strategy for

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2010–2014, three IPR-related laws were adopted by the Assembly, and the National Council for IPR Protection was established. It aims to increase inter-ministerial and agency coordination on implementing IPR protection. Despite these initiatives, the government has yet to take serious action to ensure enforcement of its IPR-related laws and regulations. A number of counterfeit consumer goods (notably CDs, DVDs, and clothing items) are available for sale and are openly traded.

That said, corporate espionage is not a significant problem.

Privacy Concerns

Kosovo has developed an EU-compliant legal framework to protect personal information integrity for all citizens and residents. Implementation remains quite uneven. Kosovo is also still in the early stages of developing checks and balances to ensure appropriate oversight of legal evidence chains (including wiretaps). American investors should be aware that the business environment depends heavily on family and regional connections, so personal or proprietary information may be available to a broader audience.

Regional Travel Concerns and Restricted Travel Areas/Zones

There are no restrictions of movement or curfews in Kosovo. However, due to continued ethnic tensions and the potential for political violence, extreme care should be exercised in visiting the northern municipalities of Zvecan, Leposavic, Zubin Potok, and North Mitrovica. All

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official U.S. Embassy travel to those areas requires approval and escort from the Regional Security Office.

Drug-related Crimes

Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. The Kosovo Police continue to make arrests of persons in possession of heavy amounts of marijuana (up to 85kg) and, increasingly, heroin. Western experts consider Kosovo “primarily a transit country for Afghan drugs destined for Europe.” Major shipment seizures are probably indicative of organized crime activity, but there is no evidence of narco-terrorism.

Police Response

The police carry out normal police functions and are assisted by international officers. The judicial system is still developing under international oversight. The European Union Rule of Law mission (EULEX) provides monitoring, mentoring, and advice to local rule of law authorities and institutions. Additionally, EULEX police investigate and prosecute select complex and sensitive offenses such as high profile corruption cases, war crimes, and some organized crime.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

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U.S. citizens detained by the Kosovo Police should immediately contact U.S. Embassy Pristina's Consular Section for American Citizen Services during normal business hours or the Embassy Duty Officer when the Embassy is closed. In addition, any incidents of police corruption, bribery, or harassment should be reported to U.S. Embassy Pristina.

U.S. Embassy Pristina

30 Nazim Hikmet Street (Dragodan area), Pristina, Kosovo

Consular Section:

Telephone: +381-38-5959-3119

Email address: consularpristina@state.gov

Embassy Duty Officer:

Telephone: +381 38 5959-3000 (ask for the Duty Officer)

Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime

If an American becomes the victim of a crime, contact the Kosovo Police and U.S. Embassy Pristina. A working knowledge of Albanian will be necessary when contacting any host emergency services.

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Alarm Center (the central emergency clearinghouse): 112

Police

From landline: 92

From cell phone (using Vala or Ipco service providers): 192

Fire Department

From landline: 93

From cell phone (Vala): 193

From cell phone (Ipco): 933

Ambulance

From landline: 94

From cell phone (Vala): 194

From cell phone (Ipco): 944

Various Police/Security Agencies

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The Kosovo Police (KP) is the primary law enforcement entity. The KP works closely with EULEX international police officers. In the event of a security incident that the KP could not manage, EULEX would serve as the second responder, and military units of the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) as the third responder. As part of their routine duties, KFOR soldiers man border checkpoints and ports of entry, conduct border patrols, perform community policing function and provide other security services, such as Explosive Ordnance Disposal.

Medical Emergencies

Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics

The following medical facilities offer 24-hour emergency medical treatment:

University Clinical Center: Tel: 038 500 600 ext 2341 or 3572

Euromed Clinic: Tel. 038-534-072

Rezonanca Clinic: Tel. 038 243 801, or 038 243 802

International Medicine Hospital: For cardiac or vascular disease only, no 24 hour emergency room. Tel. +381-500-601

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Recommended Air Ambulance Services

The companies listed below do not imply a commercial endorsement by the U.S. government or U.S. Embassy Pristina. These companies are generally accessed by an ongoing contract with a business or individual but may also assist a non-member.

SOS International: Tel. +44 208 762 8008 (London), <http://www.internationalsos.com/en/>

Healix House, Ltd.: Tel. +44 (0) 20 8481 7720 (UK),
<http://www.healix.com/product/companies/47>

Global Rescue Services: Tel. +1 617 459 4200 (US)

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC recommends that all travelers to Kosovo be up-to-date on all “routine vaccines” such as influenza, chickenpox (or varicella), polio, measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), and diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT). In addition to these vaccines, the CDC also recommends vaccines for Hepatitis A and B, as well as a rabies vaccination series for those individuals with high occupational risks (i.e. veterinarian) and for those individuals that are likely to be exposed to rabies-infected wildlife. The CDC also notes that tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) is prevalent in forested areas of Europe and there have been documented cases of the avian bird flu (H5N1) in several countries in Eastern Europe. The annual incidence rate of tuberculosis is high in some countries in the region. West Nile Virus was detected in Kosovo

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and neighboring countries in 2012. For more information, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/kosovo.htm>.

It is recommended to follow food safety precautions to prevent food borne illnesses. Foods should be cooked long enough and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause illnesses. Fruits and vegetables should be washed, peeled, or boiled prior to eating. The CDC recommends avoiding all unpasteurized dairy products. The U.S. Embassy Pristina does not consider the tap water potable. It is recommended to drink distilled or bottled water.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Best Situational Awareness Practices

A little common sense goes a long way. As a general rule, people should be alert to their surroundings and keep control of all personal belongings, especially when in crowded public places such as public transportation areas and open markets. The relatively high unemployment level is a significant factor in crimes of opportunity. Therefore, make an effort to blend in with your surroundings.

Pay special attention to your actions and your surroundings to avoid becoming a victim of pickpocketing. Carry a wallet in a front pocket and put your hand in your pocket to hold onto it when in a crowd. Better yet, leave your unneeded wallet with your driver's license and U.S. department store credit cards in a secure place at home or in a hotel safe. Make a copy of

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your passport data page and carry the paper copy instead of your actual passport. Leave your passport in a secure place at home or in a hotel safe. Consider paring down the amount of cash and other items you carry to what you reasonably need. When walking with a purse or bag, ensuring it is closed and tucking it under your arm is probably sufficient. Do not leave your purse or bag over the back of your chair at a restaurant. Watch to ensure that no one kicks your bag or purse out from under your table at a restaurant, and be particularly vigilant of where you place your belongings when at a sidewalk café.

If you use an ATM, it is recommended to use an ATM attached to a bank as opposed to a free-standing ATM. While Kosovo remains primarily a cash economy, do not carry large sums of cash.

Of note, there is a tradition of firing firearms into the air as an act of celebration. These incidents, termed “celebratory fire,” frequently occur during major holidays, particularly December 31 for New Year’s Eve and February 17 for Kosovo Independence Day. In Pristina, celebratory fire has often occurred the evening of major elections and after local soccer/football games. Weddings can also result in celebratory fire. Quite often, these incidents occur in conjunction with major fireworks displays. People have been injured (and occasionally killed) by the falling bullets. During instances in which celebratory fire occur, you should consider staying indoors or seek overhead cover to avoid injury.

The Embassy strongly recommends that American citizens avoid large public gatherings, especially political rallies and demonstrations, due to the potential for violence. While most demonstrations are relatively peaceful, every demonstration has the potential to become confrontational and may escalate to violence. Additionally, large, jostling crowds are an especially attractive target for pickpockets and a potential target for terrorists.

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Avoid vendors selling knock-off designer products and counterfeit DVDs. The U.S. government does not condone violations of Intellectual Property Rights agreements, and U.S. Customs will enforce these laws upon your return to the U.S.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Pristina

30 Nazim Hikmet Street (Dragodan area), Pristina, Kosovo

Operating Hours: Monday-Friday, 0800-1700

Embassy Contact Numbers

Main Operator: (381) 38-5959-3000

Facsimile: (381) 38-548-614 or (381) 38-549-890

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Consular/American Citizen Services: +381-38-5959-3119, consularpristina@state.gov

Embassy Duty Officer: +381 38 5959-3000 & ask for the Duty Officer

Regional Security Office: +381 38 5959-3114 & ask for the Duty RSO

Marine Post One: +381 38 5959-3114

OSAC Country Council Information

Kosovo has no active OSAC Country Council. However, you may obtain additional country specific information from the Kosovo page via the OSAC portal at www.osac.gov

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