Bosnia-Herzegovina 2015 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Transportation Security; Riots/Civil Unrest; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Winter weather; Other

Europe > Bosnia and Herzegovina; Europe > Bosnia and Herzegovina > Banja Luka; Europe > Bosnia and Herzegovina > Mostar; Europe > Bosnia and Herzegovina > Sarajevo

1/14/2015

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats

The vast majority of crimes that affect the American and international communities are non-violent street crime, theft, and opportunistic burglary. Begging, pickpocketing, vehicle break-ins and other related crimes of opportunity are prevalent. Petty theft and pickpocket incidents are common, focusing primarily on tourist areas and public transportation. Residential break-ins are also common within the international community, particularly late night burglaries. Reports of home-invasion confrontations associated with burglaries are rare. Crime, while generally non-violent, may occur anywhere and at any time.

Violent crime (murder, carjacking, rape, and mugging) not associated with organized crime
groups is not a significant concern.

There is a significant organized crime element, with numerous criminal gangs involved in smuggling, trafficking, and other transnational crime. There have been incidents of violent attacks in public places that have been attributed to organized crime. Violence among members of these groups or their affiliates is quite common. As a result of the 1992-1995 war, military grade weapons and munitions are abundant in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). Consequently, violent crimes are often committed with war-era munitions, such as assault rifles and grenades. The expatriate community is not specifically targeted, although members could become victims due to circumstance or proximity.

As of January 2015, the following crime statistics from January-September 2014 were available for Sarajevo Canton: 5 murders, 3 rapes, 228 domestic violence incidents, 3,348 property crimes (includes 563 residential burglaries), 607 auto thefts, 29 shooting/firearms incidents and 7,953 traffic accidents (includes 15 fatalities and 894 injured persons).

Areas of Concern

The greatest concentration of crime incidents are in Sarajevo and other larger towns such as Banja Luka, Tuzla, and Mostar.

Transportation-Safety Situation

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Road Safety and Road Conditions

Mediocre road conditions, inclement weather, poorly-maintained vehicles, incautious pedestrians, and inattentive drivers can make BiH a challenging place to operate a motor vehicle. Vehicle accidents are a major concern, as drivers speed and drive recklessly, including passing in no passing zones and on blind curves. Depending on the location, emergency medical care may not be readily available to treat victims.

The vast majority of roads in BiH are two-lane and in poor condition. There are only approximately 60 kilometers of paved four-lane highway throughout the country. Intercity roads tend to be narrow and often without guardrails, which is particularly dangerous given the country’s mountainous topography. These dangers are compounded by BiH's adverse and unpredictable weather, which often includes heavy fog, rain, ice, and snow. Night-time driving presents additional hazards, as most roads outside of city limits do not have proper lighting. Extreme caution should be exercised while driving vehicles in any part of BIH, particularly at night and during the winter season. It is recommended that you arrive at your destination before nightfall.

Public Transportation Conditions

Individuals opting to use public transportation should be wary of pickpockets and impostor ticket controllers.
Taxicabs are plentiful, inexpensive, and generally considered safe; look for a functional meter and for the letters “TA” on the vehicle license plate.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

In October 2014, BiH held general elections with no security or safety incidents.

Political Violence: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Terrorism Threat: High

During the 1992-1995 war, a large number of Islamic fighters traveled to BiH to aid the Bosnian Muslim war effort. Several hundred of those fighters remained active in Islamic fundamentalist congregations and organizations, contributing to the gradual radicalization of certain segments of the Bosnian Muslim community. In April 2010, members of a radical Wahhabist movement detonated a bomb at a police station in Bugojno (70 kilometers southwest of Sarajevo), killing one police officer and injuring six. In October 2011, a lone
A gunman affiliated with a local Wahhabi movement fired an assault rifle upon the U.S. Embassy, damaging the building and injuring one police officer.

BiH is not without organized crime elements willing to participate in the support and financing of terrorist organizations. Although international terrorist networks have not conducted direct terrorist attacks against Western interests in BiH, extremist groups that may have ties to terrorist support structure and financing do exist.

In 2014, approximately 200 local citizens traveled to Syria and Iraq making BiH one of the main source-countries per capita of foreign fighters in that war. In September and November, SIPA conducted two arrests of multiple persons suspected of joining or supporting the foreign fighters.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Only in rare cases have demonstrations been directed toward U.S. diplomatic facilities. Following Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February 2008, protestors attacked the U.S. Embassy’s branch office in Banja Luka.

Civil Unrest
Peaceful demonstrations are relatively common. Most protests are fueled by wage or pension issues. Since 2010, all have remained moderate, though in 2013 there was an increase in protests against the host government.

In April 2010, between 5,000-6,000 war veterans demonstrated violently against a proposed reduction of their benefits at a BiH government building. Numerous police and protesters were injured during this incident.

Members of BiH's Muslim community organized modest protests in public venues during Israel's November 2012 military actions in Gaza. These protests remained peaceful.

Similarly, the 2012 releases of films and cartoons perceived as being disrespectful to Islam elicited minimal response in BiH; a few gatherings occurred in the areas of mosques.

On June 6, 2013 a protest in front of Parliament kept local government officials and visitors inside the building until 0430 the following day. The protest was non-violent and aimed at a solution to the personal reference number (JMBG) issue, wherein legislation was needed to provide a means for younger citizens to obtain a JMBG. Some babies needed critical medical care in other countries but were not issued BiH passports because they did not have a JMBG. The protests continued daily, varying in numbers, until the end of June 2013.

In early February 2014 protests incited by disgruntled citizens against the local government broke out including in Sarajevo, Tulza, Mostar, and several other cities. Protestors set ablaze the Sarajevo Canton Building and the Presidential Building, and nearly 150 police officers
sustained injuries during the riot. The protests continued for several months, though on a smaller scale and generally peaceful.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

BiH is divided into two entities, and State-level presidency consists of three presidents (Serb, Bosniak, and Croat) each of whom holds the chairmanship for eight months at a time. The three “constituent peoples” have different visions for the future of the state, contributing to political tension. The leadership for the Republic of Srpska (RS, Serbia) directly challenges the authorities of the state government, and RS President Milorad Dodik has made public statements suggesting that he would support a referendum on secession, which would provoke a very strong reaction from other citizens, some of whom have warned of renewed fighting if this were to happen. Incidents of inter-ethnic violence among the Bosniak (Muslim), Croat (Catholic), and Serb (Orthodox Christian) ethnicities appear to remain low. Due to the ethnically-aligned administrative structure of the country, even economic issues have a nationalist bent.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

BiH has been the subject of disasters -- earthquakes, floods, landslides, forest fires, droughts, and heavy snowfall. There were numerous small-scale earthquake tremors in 2014. In the past 125 years, there have been four (in 1888, 1935, 1969, and 1981) earthquakes of 6.0 or higher.
greater magnitude along the Sarajevo Fault, which cuts across BiH from northwest to southeast. The 1969 quake, which registered 6.0, left 15 dead, over 1,000 people injured, and 36,000 residences damaged in the Banja Luka area.

In February 2012, a heavy snowstorm shut down the city for nearly a week.

The winter brings poor air quality to Sarajevo due to excessive use of coal, wood, and more noxious materials for heating residences. In December 2013, experts reported extremely high levels of contaminants in Sarajevo's air quality, reaching between 400 and 800 micrograms per cubic meter.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

BiH has a significant presence of landmines and unexploded ordinance (UXO) as a result of war. Landmines have killed approximately 600 people since 1996. While the number of casualties has decreased over the years, there are still a few incidents reported every year. There are an estimated 120,000 landmines in known minefields throughout BiH. Several mountains around Sarajevo contain known or suspected minefields, which mark former lines of confrontation or munitions depots with UXO. Most minefields are marked, though some signs and ribbon have shifted or disappeared over time. De-mining experts recommend that people remain on paved or hard-packed surfaces. Outdoor activities should be conducted in officially cleared areas or with a reputable guide.

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Police Response

Crime Victim Assistance

BiH police authorities are very responsive to requests for assistance from the U.S. Embassy. Local police are generally helpful to the international community but have limited resources (including manpower and resources), minimal English (or other foreign language capability), and insufficient capability to deter and/or detect crime.

Crimes should be reported to local authorities; 122 is the emergency contact number throughout the country. American citizens are also advised to contact the U.S. Embassy Consular Section at 387-(0) 33-704-000 if arrested/detained or if they are a victim of crime.

Police/Security Agencies

The intrinsic political and law enforcement structures throughout BiH impact effective coordination of police investigations.

Medical Emergencies
Medical care in BiH is limited, especially outside Sarajevo.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

In the event of a medical emergency, dialing 124 from any landline or mobile phone will connect callers to an ambulance service.

Hospital contact numbers in Sarajevo are:

Kosevo Hospital +387 33-297-000 (switchboard). The urgent-care center at Kosevo hospital, KUM, can be reached at +387 33 297 708 or +387 33 297 955. There is no guarantee that hospital staff will speak English.

Nakas State Hospital can be reached at 387-033-285-100. The Nakas hospital emergency department is at +387 33 285 261.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

There is no air ambulance service. For an emergency air evacuation, an air ambulance must be brought from another country or arrangements must be made (at a very high level) for a government helicopter to transfer an acutely ill patient to another country. This is very rarely accomplished.
CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Many European-made prescription and over-the-counter drugs are available in Sarajevo and other major towns, but supply shortages are common. Americans should seek routine medical treatment and fill prescriptions prior to arriving in country.

Abandoned dogs poses concern, particularly in Sarajevo. There are over 11,000 abandoned dogs throughout the city, and many of them are in packs. While most dogs appear docile, there has been an increase in reports of dog attacks in 2014. Efforts to address the dog population are in progress, but there is no immediate solution.

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/bosnia-and-herzegovina.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams
If you are in a vehicle accident, contact the local authorities. Do not negotiate a payment with the other driver as it may be a scam.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Situational awareness is the best defense against non-violent crime. All Americans should maintain control of their belongings at all times.

Quality locks, grilles on windows and vigilant alarm use have proven the best deterrent to residential burglaries.

To minimize your risk of injury or crime always lock your vehicle doors, keep the windows up, and use your seatbelt. In December 2013, some criminals had the ability to interfere with victims’ ability to remotely lock their vehicles. When unsuspecting victims left their car supposedly locked, the perpetrators entered the unlocked vehicle and retrieved possessions left behind.

Local and international news should be monitored for events that may affect the local security situation.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information
Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

1 Robert C. Frasure Street
71000 Sarajevo

Regular business hours: Monday-Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Embassy Contact Numbers

The U.S. Embassy Consular Section/American Citizen Services (ACS) and Regional Security Office can be contacted through the Embassy switchboard operator: 387-(0) 33-704-000.

The Embassy’s website is: http://sarajevo.usembassy.gov

Embassy Guidance

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The Sarajevo Country Council was launched in 2010. The RSO office initiated an OSAC Country Council re-launch in September 2014. If you would like to inquire about joining the Council, please contact the RSO office. The RSO avails its services to non-governmental organizations or businesses with a nexus to U.S. interests.