



Belarus 2015 Crime and Safety Report

Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Assault; Fraud; Murder; Cyber; Winter weather; Riots/Civil Unrest

Europe > Belarus; Europe > Belarus > Minsk; Europe > Ukraine > Kyiv

12/23/2015

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

The criminal threat in Minsk is comparable to other large capital cities in the region; pickpockets, car thefts, and burglaries remain a constant, although official statistics of the Belarusian government show a decrease across the board. Petty criminal incidents occur on public transport in Minsk, especially the metro system and in areas frequented by large groups of people or tourists. According to the Belarusian Ministry of Interior (MOI), 93,932 crimes were recorded in Belarus in 2014, some 2,744 less or a 2.9 percent decrease from 2013. Some 20,766 crimes were registered in Minsk in 2014, a 9.6 percent decrease from 2013. Official MOI crime statistics indicated a decrease in some categories of violent and non-violent property crime in 2014, the MOI gives the following numbers and percentages: theft: 40,528 (-12.6 percent), robbery 2,171 (-11.7 percent), drug-related crimes: 7,356 (+31.5 percent), and assault with intent to rob: 289 (-7.1 percent). It is not clear if these numbers reflect all crimes that occurred in country due to host government definitions of criminal

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



categories. Over the course of 2014, there were no reported crimes against visiting U.S. officials and no crimes against U.S. diplomatic personnel.

The Belarusian economy is highly dependent on Russian subsidies and extremely vulnerable to outside shocks. The country has not recovered from the severe economic crisis of 2011 and began 2015 with another one: the ruble devalued over 35 percent against the dollar. Many expect an economic recession in 2015 after stagnant economic growth in 2014 of 1.6 percent. The official unemployment rate of less than one percent is not considered accurate, with the actual rate many times higher and labor migration to Russia common. However, many of those migrants are returning home, given the on-going economic downturn in Russia.

Short-term visitors – tourists who may not be familiar with local customs or fluent in Belarusian or Russian – remain more susceptible to street crime and confidence scams and may be specifically targeted by criminals. Marriage and dating scams via the Internet are routinely reported. There have been instances of U.S. citizens being extorted by their Belarusian “fiancées” and accomplices, losing thousands of dollars in elaborate scams.

Some 1,401 corruption crimes were registered in Belarus during the first half of 2014.

Violent crime directed against foreigners is relatively uncommon. During 2014, most violent crime categories saw a slight decrease from the previous year. For 2014, the MOI gives the following numbers and percentages: murder/attempted murder: 438 (+6.4 percent), intended infliction of grievous bodily harm: 926 (-7.7 percent), rape/attempted rape: 141(+0.7 percent).

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Harassment, extortion, protection rackets, and intimidation by groups believed to have links to organized crime have been reported against American investors or business interests. In some cases, it appears that local commercial interests believed linked to organized crime groups were behind these incidents. However, no such reports have been received in the past five years. In 2014, there were no incidents reported to the Embassy regarding American businesses being targeted by organized crime in Belarus.

Cyber

Identity theft involving ATM, credit card, and Internet fraud can also be a problem. American firms should pay close attention to computer security when establishing operations in Belarus, as the threat of cyber crime, as is the case throughout the former Soviet Union, is real.

Areas of Concern

There are no "off-limits" areas in Minsk or any part of Belarus.

Transportation-Safety Situation

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Road Safety and Road Conditions

Vehicles in Belarus are left-hand drive and drive on the right-hand side of the road (just like in the U.S.). However, driving in Minsk can be a challenge to foreigners not familiar with the street signs or traffic rules, as they do not always correspond to U.S. or Western European norms. Parking areas are normally clearly marked, but parking on sidewalks or grassy areas is prohibited. Pedestrians, especially those walking with small children, should exercise caution. Belarusian drivers may stop in busy traffic lanes to pick-up or drop off passengers while pedestrians sometimes cross busy streets outside the crosswalks without hesitation. Drivers should always be prepared to stop on short notice. Defensive driving is a fundamental rule that should always be observed.

Most of the major roads are well maintained, and traffic is able to move at normal highway speeds. Snow clearing is a well established routine, even in small villages, although it may take some time if snowfall occurs over several days.

Traffic in Minsk is heavy on weekdays during commuting hours and limited on the weekend. In Minsk, main thoroughfares are usually well-illuminated and maintained, but side streets and less commonly used avenues are not as well maintained and can be impassable during the winter. Due to heavy traffic at rush hour and local driving habits, vehicle accidents are common. The perceived seriousness of the accident, and presumed status of the vehicle occupants, have a direct correlation to the response time for police. Recent changes to local law allow for insurance exchange in minor accidents with no injuries and damages under 200 Euro. Minor fender bender accidents still see all vehicles involved immobile on the road until police arrive and a report is taken. This causes sudden traffic jams, especially in parking lots and at street corners where minor accidents are more frequent.

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political Violence Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Regional or indigenous terrorism is not considered to be a major threat in Belarus. There was one incident in December 2014 that allegedly involved approximately 20 members of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Authorities claim that the group was meeting in a small town outside of Minsk and that eight foreigners were expelled from Belarus as a result of an investigation by the Belarusian KGB (BKGB). Although the group's presence was well-known in the village and it is not alleged that they were planning any attacks in Belarus, the authorities claimed that they recovered "radical" literature when they raided the group's compound. The 12 Belarusians who were members of the group were not charged with any criminal activity. (Note: This information was reported in a televised briefing by the press spokesman of the BKGB, and subsequent requests to the government of Belarus by Embassy personnel for further details have been met with silence.).

Transnational terrorism is not considered to be a major threat in Belarus. This assessment takes into account historical data relevant to terrorist activities in Belarus and current and projected Belarusian law enforcement and security service anti-terrorist activities. Nevertheless, travelers should be aware of the State Department's periodic Worldwide Caution announcement reemphasizing the threat of terrorist actions and violence against Americans and interests overseas.

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Belarus did not have any transnational terrorism incidents in 2014. Furthermore, there have been no recorded acts of transnational terrorism committed on Belarusian territory to date. Admittedly, Belarus's borders with Russia and Ukraine are porous; transnational terrorist groups potentially could exploit them.

Terrorism Rating: Medium

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

No anti-American protests occurred in 2014. There have been no anti-American protests at the Embassy during the last several years.

Civil Unrest

Prior approval is needed from authorities to conduct a protest march or gathering. If a demonstration does not support official government policy goals, approval is rarely given. Belarus largely has been free of significant civil unrest or disorder in 2014. However, the government severely limits the right of free assembly and cracks down on demonstrations by the democratic opposition, most visibly in December 2010 when riot police beat overwhelmingly peaceful protestors and arrested over 600 individuals.

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Post-specific Concerns

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Belarus has no operating commercial nuclear reactors but is constructing one with financing and technical support from Moscow some 30 kilometers from the Lithuanian border. Belarus does have limited nuclear research capabilities, but no environmental or regulatory agencies consider those to be an ecological threat.

In 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (unit no. 4), located 350 kilometers southeast of Minsk in Ukraine on the border with Belarus, experienced an explosion and fire, followed by an uncontrolled release of radiation. The accident resulted in the largest short-term, accidental release of radioactive materials in the atmosphere ever recorded. Areas affected by the disaster are fenced off and restricted. An estimated 20 percent of usable land in Belarus was negatively affected, and some areas are still closed off. Food that exceeds European norms for radiation is not allowed to be sold. The government has an effective program of monitoring fresh foods and meats sold in local markets. Street purchase of produce should be avoided. Wild berries, mushrooms, and wild fowl/game should be avoided, as these have been found to retain higher than average levels of radiation. Background levels of radiation were monitored by the U.S. Embassy and other organizations and, to date, have not exceeded levels found on the Eastern seaboard of the U.S.

Personnel Background Concerns

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



There have been no significant reports of hate crimes in Belarus. In recent years, there have been an increasing number of unofficial reports of certain minority groups, such as meetings of gay, lesbian, and transgender groups, being targeted and harassed by authorities. Harassment has included police invasion of parties and meetings as well as recording the personal information of all attendees.

Drug-related Crimes

Belarus is not a major drug producing country nor a major nexus for drug smuggling to other countries. Strict internal and external controls do not allow for high volume drug trafficking; and only small drug seizures have occurred. Whether this is due to a lack of ability to counter this threat or a lack of traffic is unknown.

There are no known links to transnational terrorist and narcotics organizations; and in 2014, there were no charges or allegations of corruption of senior public officials relating to drugs or drug trafficking. Drug-related crime statistics for 2014 are: 7,356 cases (+31.5 percent from 2013).

Police Response

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Criminal activity remains a concern due to the lack of adequate Belarusian police enforcement and response. In general, law enforcement agencies do not meet U.S./EU standards, and their ability to deter street-level criminal activity is low, as is their ability to investigate criminal incidents adequately. Law enforcement has been used for political reasons. Corruption is a problem. Law enforcement agencies can be part of the problem rather than a part of the solution. Inadequate training, poor working conditions, and shortages of basic equipment contribute greatly to general ineffectiveness.

Police units rarely have English-language capability, even among officials working in units designated to combat crimes against foreign nationals. As a result, reporting a crime to the police is often a difficult and lengthy process. Subsequent follow-up to determine the status of a case often requires lengthy visits to police stations.

Under Belarusian law, individuals are required to carry personal identification documents, and it is common for law enforcement to conduct identification checks. Authorities have the right to take you to the police station and hold you for up to three hours while establishing your identity. No "probable cause" is required. Therefore, the Embassy recommends that you carry your passport at all times.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Harassment or detention by police should be reported to the U.S. Embassy at (017) 210-1283 as soon as possible. When a U.S. citizen is detained, authorities are required to notify the U.S. Embassy as soon as possible. If detained by police, it is strongly recommended that you ask (and continue to ask) for access to the U.S. Embassy immediately.

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Crime Victim Assistance

The Embassy recommends that Americans report crimes to the police and the Embassy. In the event that police will not accept a crime report, the Consular Section's American Citizen Services staff can forward the complaint to the police. Reporting a crime is also advisable even if time has elapsed, as criminals often repeat the same crime within the same general locale. Finally, a police report is also strongly recommended when an American passport has been lost or stolen.

If you become a victim of a crime in Belarus, you may contact the U.S. Embassy at (017) 210-1283 for assistance 24 hours/7 days per week.

Although there is no comparable "911" service in Belarus, the general fire emergency telephone number is 101; the police emergency number is 102; the ambulance/emergency medical services number is 103. These numbers can be used throughout Belarus. When using a cell phone, you can call 112, which is more of a general emergency number.

Medical Emergencies

Travelers who have chronic medical conditions that require specific medication should bring

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



enough medicine to Belarus since medicine may not be readily available in-country.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

There are no hospitals that provide a level of medical care equal to that found in U.S. hospitals. Please refer to <http://minsk.usembassy.gov/doctors.html> for local medical contacts and information.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

The fastest way to secure Western medical care remains medical evacuation to Western Europe. This is a very expensive option, and assistance may not arrive until several hours after the need for care arises.

SOS: 8-10-7-495-937-6477 (24/7 phone)

EURO FLITE: 8-10-358-20-510-1911 or 358-20-510-1900 (24/7 phone)

MEDEX Assistance Corporation: 8-10-1-410-453-6330 (24/7 phone)

TRICARE/SOS (for U.S. military): 8-10-44-20-8762-8133

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



There are several European firms that also provide private jet evacuations. It is unknown to what extent these companies can operate within Belarus. Prior coordination with these companies is recommended.

Recommended Insurance Posture

There are no hospitals in Belarus that accept U.S. health insurance plans for payment. Travelers to Belarus are recommended to purchase insurance that covers air ambulance evacuation services from Belarus prior to travel or have access to substantial lines of credit to cover the cost of medical evacuation.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/belarus?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-sing-le-001.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Five Internet “love” scams involving fake fiancées and travel to Gomel followed by robbery/theft/assault were reported to the Consular Section in 2012.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Foreign visitors and residents must be prepared to exercise an increased level of awareness, implement precautions that would be appropriate for any large city in the U.S. or Europe, and review their personal security measures regularly. Foreigners should maintain an increased level of security awareness, rely upon their intuition and use common sense. To avoid becoming a victim of routine street crime, be alert and aware of your surroundings. When riding public transportation, keep purses, shoulder bags, and backpacks closed, in front of you, or tucked under your arm to prevent theft. Men are advised to place wallets in a front pocket while on public transportation to prevent pick-pocketing. It is recommended to maintain a low profile and to not carry large sums of cash. If possible, leave wallets or purses secured at your residence and carry only necessary cash and identification in a front pocket. Refrain from carrying unnecessary items, such as credit cards, in your wallet or purse that you will not use. It is further recommended that you do not establish routine travel patterns and instead vary your departure/arrival times and routes as much as possible between frequented locations.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



46 Starovilenskaya St.

Minsk 220002, Belarus

Embassy is open Mon-Fri from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and is closed on American and Belarusian holidays.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Country Code: 375

Minsk City Code: 17

Regional Security Office: 210-1283

Embassy Minsk General Number: 210-1283

Website: <http://minsk.usembassy.gov>

Consular coverage for multi-post countries

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



The Regional Security Officer in Kyiv also covers security concerns in Belarus.

Embassy Guidance

The Embassy strongly recommends that all Americans visiting or residing in Belarus register with the U.S. Embassy Consular Section in Minsk. Registration will permit the Consular Section to contact American citizens quickly in the event of an in-country emergency. On-line registration is available at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>.

Public announcements and the Consular Information Sheet for Belarus are available on the Department of State website at <http://www.travel.state.gov>.

OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council in Minsk. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.