



Moldova 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; IEDs; Winter weather; Anti-American sentiment; Riots/Civil Unrest; Bribery; Financial Security

Europe > Moldova; Europe > Moldova > Chisinau

1/26/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

Crime Threats

Moldova is a relatively safe country. Pickpocketing and petty theft continue to be the most common problems encountered by foreigners. These types of crimes are most common in crowded areas in major population centers. Pickpocketing in Chisinau appears most common on public transportation and in bars and restaurants.

Vandalism against vehicles is uncommon but occasionally reported. A U.S. Embassy employee's privately owned vehicle's tires were slashed while parked in a secure lot downtown. A suspect or motive was never identified. Thefts of items from vehicles also occasionally occur if vehicles are parked on the street overnight. Several U.S. Embassy employees have experienced vehicle break-ins when parking on the street in front of their

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residences.

Although rare, especially in communities that include diplomatic housing, occasional home burglaries do occur. U.S. diplomatic residences are not specifically targeted, but other foreign diplomatic residences have experienced burglaries in the past. In addition, petty thefts of objects left outdoors (trash cans, children's toys, etc.) have occurred at Embassy residences.

Carjackings, home invasions, kidnappings, and related violent crimes are exceptionally rare. Police reporting in 2015 indicates a slight increase in the number of home invasions and break-ins in more affluent neighborhoods compared to previous years; incidents are generally non-violent.

Organized crime exists but is very rarely violent and almost never affects the international community. In October 2015, a prominent businessman's SUV was destroyed by a low grade improvised explosive device. There were no injuries or damage aside from the destroyed vehicle. No arrests were made, and the motive remains unknown.

Moldova's location is ideal for smuggling (commercial goods are the most frequently smuggled items -- usually to avoid customs charges) into the European Union. Such activity is common but rarely has an impact on international visitors.

Other Areas of Concern

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The Embassy has no curfews, restrictions on travel, or “off-limits” areas in Moldova, although some caution is advisable when traveling in the separatist Transnistria region in eastern Moldova. Crime appears to be uniform throughout Moldova, including in Transnistria. However, the Embassy’s ability to visit and regularly report on activity in this area is limited by the ongoing political conflict there. While the Embassy has no security prohibition on traveling to this area, American diplomats are required to obtain Embassy permission before they go and are not authorized to remain overnight. Reports of difficulty crossing the myriad checkpoints that lead into this area are common. Visitors are often stopped for long periods or are turned around. U.S. Embassy policy is to show American passports only to Republic of Moldova officials. Travelers to Transnistria are encouraged to adhere to all posted traffic signs and to follow verbal orders of security personnel posted there.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Roads are underdeveloped for the region. Moldovan roads are among the poorest quality in Europe. The Embassy urges great caution when driving at night, as most street lights are not operational or power is unavailable. In rural regions, horse-drawn wagons and livestock are common on roads, and most wagons lack reflective warning signs, making them difficult to see during times of limited visibility.

Many pedestrians dress in dark clothing and walk alongside or even on the streets due to the poor quality of most sidewalks. This is especially common in the winter because of the lack of

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snow removal. Clearing streets after rainstorms or heavy snowfall is sporadic in Chisinau and rare outside the capital.

Moldovan drivers often fail to take appropriate safety measures. There are many new, untrained drivers. Travelers should be cautious, as drivers can drive erratically, including driving at speeds above or below the posted limit. When driving, one should park in garages or other well-lit areas. Car alarms are recommended.

In 2014, Moldova installed traffic cameras on several major roadways in and around Chisinau. The cameras have been effective in reducing speeding on key roads, but speeding motorists continue to be a problem throughout the country.

Moldova revised its drinking and driving laws in early 2009. Any person suspected of consuming alcohol before driving will be taken to the nearest police station for investigation. Individuals with a Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) between .03 and .079 will be charged with an administrative offense and fined. BACs at .08+ are prosecuted criminally and can be subject to substantial fines and/or incarceration. Embassy policy forbids the consumption of alcohol before driving.

Public Transportation Conditions

Minibus accidents are frequent and often fatal. The Embassy strongly encourages travelers to only ride in minibuses equipped with seatbelts.

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Taxis from reputable and established companies are generally considered safe. However, there has been an increase in reports of females being assaulted in taxis late at night or in the early morning hours. The Embassy strongly encourages the use of only official taxis.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There have been no incidents of terrorism directed toward American interests in Moldova. An October 2009 grenade attack in Chisinau's central square was rumored to have been carried out by an individual or group with the intention to undermine the government but was later determined to have been carried out by ex-convicts for non-political reasons. In May 2014, an armored car was robbed by several individuals wielding fully-automatic weapons in a military-style attack, which resulted in the deaths of two security guards. The individuals responsible for the robbery were captured in July 2014 and were determined to be criminals with prior military service, but unrelated to terrorist or political organizations.

Recent events in eastern Ukraine have brought Moldova onto the sidelines of regional politics. While there is increased border security and accusations of Moldovans fighting with the

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separatists in eastern Ukraine, no violence has been reported as a direct result of the instability in Ukraine. However, in 2015, there was an increase in arrests of Moldovan citizens being charged with supporting and/or participating in the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

There are no known transnational terrorist groups operating in Moldova. With little Moldovan control over the eastern borders between separatist Transnistria and Ukraine, the Embassy remains vigilant of the risk of terrorist groups from outside of Moldova entering its territory. The Embassy works closely with Moldovan security services on counter-terrorism issues.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Incidents of anti-American sentiment are rare but increasing in the aftermath of political events in 2016, in which the U.S. government is largely perceived as having an orchestral role. In public rallies and on social and traditional media, the U.S. has been criticized and the Ambassador's name used in public statements denouncing U.S. policy toward Moldova.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

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Public protests and demonstrations occur frequently, especially since a banking crisis in 2014 when approximately 15 percent of GDP disappeared from the country's three largest banks at the time. Permits are required for most forms of public demonstrations; they are easily obtained and traded amongst groups. There is an additional provision for "spontaneous protests." The process requires that the police inform affected parties of the protest. The police appear to always fulfill this obligation. Permits are not necessary for groups fewer than 25; this provision also has no time or place restrictions.

In April 2009, Moldova experienced its most serious civil unrest in a decade due to a disputed local parliamentary election; a large protest degenerated into vandalism and looting. Many considered the police response heavy-handed, as civilians were killed and many more injured or beaten in subsequent interrogations. Many police were also injured. While subsequent political developments appear to have quelled much of the discontent that fomented this demonstration, the nation's evolving political situation is unpredictable. A November 2010 election kept most of the previous government in power, and in March 2012, after much political wrangling and intrigue, the parliament elected a president. The largest political party, the Communists, abstained from the vote, but there has not been any political violence attributed to the final settlement. National elections were held in November 2014 and were peaceful and generally accepted to have been transparent.

In Chisinau, there were competing/alternating demonstrations between European Union supporters and Communist Party members in the downtown area in the final quarter of 2013 during the Vilnius summit. The demonstrations were exceptionally large gatherings (10,000+) concentrated around the central government building, were announced ahead of time, and were issued valid permits. The Ministry of Internal Affairs supervised these events, which were peaceful with a festival atmosphere.

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In September 2015, the largest protest in recent history took place in downtown Chisinau's Main Square. The political party Dignity and Truth (DA) organized 40,000+ supporters to protest against governmental corruption and to call for the resignation of several political figures. The protest was peaceful and calm aside from a few isolated scuffles between police and splinter elements. Following the protest, supporters occupied the main square with 300+ tents, a portion of which remain in place as of this report's submission. A rival tent camp sponsored by opposition parties protesting the government and corruption also remains in place in front of Parliament, where rallies are periodically held.

In January 2016, large protests similar to the September 2015 events resumed, and often morphed in marches through the center of Chisinau, stopping at key government and other buildings.

Post-specific Concerns

Personnel-Background Concerns

The general population is not outwardly ethnically diverse, so persons of color will garner elevated levels of attention. If an offense does take place, it is typically a verbal assault. The best defense often is to create distance and relocate oneself to a safe place.

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Police Response

Police response to crimes, especially in areas widely frequented by foreigners, is good but hampered by a lack of resources. The police are particularly capable at basic policing, but a lack of equipment hampers their ability to carry out complex investigations. The Embassy is working with the government to improve policing abilities. U.S. citizens should also note that most authorities primarily speak Romanian or Russian and have limited English language abilities.

Further, the taking of photographs in and around the vicinity of the security zone, peacekeeping posts, bridges, military installations and “official government buildings” is often considered to be prohibited by local and peacekeeping authorities. In many of these locations, but not in all, signs prohibiting photography are posted. For more information on this, please review OSAC’s report “Picture This” at: <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=17303>.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Solicitation of bribes by authorities at all levels is a concern. Driving infractions are subject to official adjudication. Bribery should not be condoned, offered, or participated in.

Crime Victim Assistance

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If a visitor experiences trouble or becomes a victim of a crime, police can be called at: 902. If you need to report a crime and are unable to communicate with authorities because of the language barrier, the U.S. Embassy can assist with translation. The Embassy local guard force operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and all guards speak basic English. The 24-hour number of the Embassy is (373) (22) 408-300.

If you experience a fire emergency, the number to contact the fire department is 903.

The number for emergencies related to natural gas leaks is 904.

Medical Emergencies

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

In the event of a medical emergency, visitors can dial 901 for an ambulance. Limited medical services are available, but the quality of these services may not be up to Western standards. U.S. citizens should note that, in general, medical care is of a much lower level than in the U.S.

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Medpark International Hospital in Chisinau has new, Western standard inpatient hospital rooms and surgical suites. Medpark recently received Joint Commission accreditation and can handle routine and minor medical emergencies.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Air ambulance services are available from operations outside of the country, but none are based in Moldova.

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/moldova>.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Chisinau Country Council was launched in June 2012 and held a second annual meeting in June 2013. Although U.S. private sector involvement in the country is limited, there are enough security concerns to sustain interest, and the Country Council continues to grow. The Country Council established a Steering Committee and met three times in 2015. Please contact the Regional Security Officer for additional information and to participate in Country Council events. Current OSAC information available for Moldova can be found on the OSAC

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website at: OSAC Moldova. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located at 103 Mateevici Str., Chisinau, Moldova

Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri from 0830-1730

Embassy Contact Numbers

Main tel: (373) (22) 408-300

fax (373) (22) 23--3044.

Embassy Duty Office, on call 24/7: (373) 069-11-0851.

Regional Security Office: (373) (22) 408-989.

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

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Embassy Guidance

Americans living in or visiting Moldova are encouraged to register on-line with the Consular Affairs Section through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at: [STEP Registration](#). For the most up-to-date security and safety information on Moldova, please refer to the Department of State's Country Information for Moldova at: [Country Information](#). Additional Embassy and Consular information can also be found on the Embassy Chisinau website at: [US Embassy Chisinau](#).

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

To avoid potential incidents, visitors should maintain the same personal security awareness that they would in any mid- to large-sized U.S. city. Those who take normal security precautions will likely enjoy a safe stay in Moldova. One should take normal safety precautions, such as avoiding unlit alleyways and parks during late hours.

Large amounts of cash and expensive jewelry should be secured in a hotel safe or left at home; be cautious of flashing valuables. Personal belongings should be well protected at all times. Visitors are advised not to leave valuables in plain sight in parked vehicles, as there

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have been reports of car windows being smashed, and items being stolen from vehicles.

Visitors should avoid ATMs late in the evening and should only carry the amount of cash necessary for the day's purchases.

When dining out, always pay servers and wait staff directly instead of leaving money behind with the bill. Local establishments usually do not take responsibility for items left behind by patrons, including currency left as payment. On one occasion, an argument over a partially unpaid bill at a bar escalated into violence resulting in the emergency medical evacuation of an American student.

Families taking up residence are encouraged to keep their garage doors closed when unattended and their property clear of items that may be considered tempting to criminals.

Visitors should closely monitor Consular information concerning issues of potential concern.

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