



## Bulgaria 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Financial Security; Fraud; Burglary; IEDs; Threats; Murder-for-hire; Information Security; Counterfeiting; Human Trafficking; Cyber; Winter weather; Anti-American sentiment; Elections; Riots/Civil Unrest; Faith-based Organization; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Floods; Wildfires; Employee Health Safety; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Surveillance; Hate Crimes; Drug Trafficking; Disease Outbreak

Europe > Bulgaria; Europe > Bulgaria > Sofia

2/15/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Bulgaria is a relatively stable country with few specific threats targeting American citizens, businesses, or organizations. Located strategically as a gateway between the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, Bulgaria is one of the key exterior borders of the European Union.

Post Crime Rating: Medium

### Crime Threats

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) reported an 1.7 percent decrease of all registered crimes in 2015 compared to 2014. 42 percent of cases were resolved in 2015, compared to 40 percent in 2014. According to the MOI, since 2000 the majority of incidents involving U.S. citizens

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were economic, including ATM skimming, credit card fraud, theft, robbery, and motor vehicle theft. The volume and the type of reported incidents suggest that Americans are not being targeted as a nationality. The MOI has launched an outreach campaign targeting crimes against tourists, allocating additional resources and training for officers on the Black Sea coast and in winter resorts during tourist seasons.

The registered number of murders increased by 20 percent during the past year but it is less than half of that of the U.S.

There was a reduction in pickpocketing by 12.5 percent.

Thefts from homes and non-violent burglaries remain the most frequently registered property crimes. End-of-year statistics indicate that registered burglaries in 2015 decreased by 13.6 percent compared to 2014. Burglaries predominantly occur during the night; however, a quarter take place during the daytime, according to statistics from security companies. Multiple break-ins have been reported while the tenants are inside their homes. Burglaries of homes are more often perpetrated by professional criminals. Thefts from adjacent buildings (attached garages, storerooms, etc.) and thefts with no element of burglary are more often conducted by opportunistic criminals. While professional criminals almost exclusively look for valuables with a quick turnover (cash, jewelry, electronics), the non-professionals steal anything they can use, trade, or resell.

Registered robberies decreased by 20 percent in 2015 compared to 2014 and were concentrated mainly in Sofia, where 40 percent of all robberies occurred. Other cities with high rate of robberies are: Burgas, Plovdiv and Varna. The targets of armed robberies were

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financial institutions, gas stations, retail stores, and restaurants.

Europe's open borders and uneven patchwork of vehicle databases make car theft relatively easy. The MOI registered 3,957 car thefts in 2015, with more than 60 percent of them being stolen in Sofia, representing a nine percent increase over 2014. Less than nine percent of stolen vehicles are recovered. Car thieves target new luxury cars, various models of SUVs, and older cars that are usually dismantled and sold for parts. In the last few years, the main markets for the stolen vehicles have been the Middle East, Albania, Kosovo, Russia, and Georgia. Reports also state vehicles were stolen and moved into Syria to be used by terrorist groups, including once in a suicide attack.

The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by criminal elements against each other and by hate groups remains a challenge for law enforcement, although the total number has decreased since its height in the 1990s and early 2000s. The MOI registered 20 IED attacks in 2015, compared to 16 in 2014. Another seven were disabled by the authorities in 2015.

A continuing trend over the past three years of anonymous telephonic bomb threats has impacted OSAC constituents. In 2015, 307 telephonic bomb threats were registered, 120 of which were inspected by an EOD team. Bomb threat calls were directed at schools, shopping malls, court houses, airports, railway stations, and large office compounds – some including private American businesses. The police have handled these disruptive threats, both in terms of the initial public safety response and the follow-up investigation. No actual devices have been located during these incidents.

Contract killings by organized crime groups largely dropped off following the arrest of five "Killers" gang members beginning in 2010. In 2014, another "Killers" group, disrupted in

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Plovdiv, is suspected of being responsible for the contract killing of customs officers in 1998. Five contract killings and an unsuccessful RPG attack targeting criminal actors were reported in 2015.

Document fraud is a challenge and impacts OSAC constituents when hiring and conducting due diligence. The majority of fraudulent documents are university diplomas, electronic payment documents, and identification documents. According to U.S. law enforcement, genuine blank Bulgarian passports, including biometric data customized to specification, can be found on the black market for 250 Euros. These are primarily used to gain access to the EU. Authorities disrupted a major document fraud ring in November 2015. There were fake identity documents of people with Arabic names among the pieces of evidence discovered by the police. Open sources reported multiple cases throughout the year involving ISIL fighters and a wanted Russian mobster who travelled in the EU on fake Bulgarian passports.

There has been a decline in seized counterfeit currency. The BGN 20 bill is most frequently counterfeited, followed by BGN 10 and BGN 50 bills.

Value added tax (VAT) fraud cases have been widely covered in the press. Numerous police operations against groups dealing with VAT fraud have been conducted in 2015. Some 42 financial crimes and 24 crimes against the banking system were registered in 2015.

Bulgaria has a combination of talented computer programmers and a tradition of organized crime. ATM skimming, computer hacking, and other electronic intrusions are a risk.

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According to U.S. law enforcement, Bulgarian criminals have a significant role in ATM and credit card skimming-related frauds throughout the world. Bulgarian transnational organized criminal groups manufacture the skimming devices and send their teams to other countries to skim credit cards. These groups send the proceeds back to their Bulgarian bosses. The increase of ATM skimming in Sofia, Varna, and Burgas has increased several-fold. Criminal groups install skimming devices not only to test the devices but to profit from the skimmed cards. These criminal groups are targeting high-volume ATMs, usually around tourist areas or shopping centers. Numerous police operations against criminal groups dealing with skimming fraud have been conducted all over the world in 2015. Bulgarian criminal groups operating worldwide steal more than 50 million Euro (including 8 million BGN domestically) on an annual basis.

While Bulgaria is not a major regional financial center, money laundering remains a concern. The law has statutes to address financial crimes, but American and European experts have identified weaknesses in the legislation. Recent improvements, including closing a loophole in Bulgarian financial laws regarding cash transaction reporting, have been made.

Official corruption remains a serious challenge, according to the European Cooperation and Verification Mechanism report. Statistics show that 98 percent of public procurement deals are won by two percent of the companies in Bulgaria. Cases of corruption schemes aimed at draining public money are common. Inefficiency and corruption within the judiciary are considered a major stumbling block against investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption and organized crime. Americans are most likely to encounter corruption at state-run medical facilities and from traffic police.

Illegal migration and smuggling have challenged Bulgaria's law enforcement authorities. Bulgaria has struggled with housing/caring for the asylum seekers and refugees. In response

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to the migration crisis, the country has witnessed a political backlash from ultranationalists.

## Cybersecurity Issues

Europe's southeastern region poses significant cyber threats to the U.S., Canada, and the rest of Europe. Bulgaria is the fourth major source of cyber threats with seven percent of all global data breaches in the world originating in Bulgaria in 2012, according to a study based on some 47,000 reported cyber-related incidents. The Bulgarian Computer Emergency Readiness Team registered locally 2,949 alerts for cyber attacks in 2014, 67 percent of which were in the form of malicious code and 18 percent in the form of distributed denial-of-service attacks. In December 2014 alone, 319 attacks were registered, 37 of which were identified as threats with very high risk.

## Transportation-Safety Situation

Over-charging by taxi drivers, poor road conditions, and aggressive driving are the most frequent road risks faced by Americans.

## Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions are generally underdeveloped, aside from some of the main roads and highways that have been renovated or newly constructed over the past few years. Most of

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these major highways and roads are still under construction. Secondary roads are often poorly maintained. The government plans to continue and complete the construction of new highways and renovate roadways, including main boulevards and some secondary roads in the larger cities. This process causes heavier traffic and could lead to more road accidents.

In some cities, late at night, traffic lights blink yellow in all directions, leaving right-of-way unclear and contributing to accidents.

Heavy truck traffic along the two-lane routes from the Greek border at Kulata to Sofia and from the Turkish border at Kapitan Andreevo to Plovdiv creates numerous hazards. Motorists should expect delays at border crossings.

Travel conditions deteriorate during the winter, as roads become icy and potholes become larger. Traffic difficulties are experienced even more on small streets in Sofia, where the snow is not cleared, and the tenants must have a four-wheel-drive vehicle to drive safely. Rockslides and landslides may be encountered in the mountains and Black Sea area.

Aggressive driving habits, the lack of safe infrastructure, and a mixture of late model and older vehicles, livestock, and animal-drawn carts on the roads contribute to road accidents and fatalities. In 2015, 7,296 road accidents claimed 680 lives and injured 8,946 individuals.

Motorists should avoid confrontations with aggressive drivers. In particular, many drivers of late-model sedans speed and drive erratically. Violent altercations are not unheard of, some

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including the use of firearms.

All drivers are obliged to observe local traffic laws, which in some cases are different from those in the U.S. Bulgarian law allows Americans to use their U.S. driver's license for up to one year; however, an international driving permit is recommended. Drivers operating motor vehicles must obey the signals given by traffic police officers. All fines for traffic violations are paid either electronically or via wired bank transfer. The Bulgarian Traffic Law is available at: [http://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/8714091D-3F2D-4C6E-9544-90BA1F8D2C9C/0/04\\_Law\\_Traffic\\_EN.pdf](http://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/8714091D-3F2D-4C6E-9544-90BA1F8D2C9C/0/04_Law_Traffic_EN.pdf).

Avoid leaving valuables in plain view, especially in cars with foreign license plates, and exercise caution while stopping at gas stations, motels, or roadside restaurants. Visitors should insure their cars against theft with one of the major insurance companies. Cars have been reported stolen when drivers leave their vehicle with the engine running during cold weather.

### Public Transportation Conditions

Inter-city buses are newer, frequent, relatively fast, and comfortable.

There have been several fires on trains over the past few years. Criminals do operate on trains.

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Sofia has a modern, clean, and relatively safe Metro.

It is recommended that travelers use official taxi companies, which include “OK Supertrans” in Sofia; “Trans Taxi” in Varna; and “Eko Taxi” in Burgas. The biggest problem at airports is related to “rip-off” taxis. They usually have an accomplice inside trying to lure travelers to the vehicle. Some of their logos are designed to look like other companies (“CK” v. “OK”).

#### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Airline transportation is reliable, and there have been no registered airplane accidents in the past 30 years. The national carrier, Bulgaria Air, is in compliance with the safety standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization. There are few reports of thefts, scams, ATM skimming, or pickpocketing at the four major airports (Sofia, Plovdiv, Burgas, Varna). Official taxi companies have desks inside the arrival terminals, and it is recommended that taxis be ordered at these desks.

#### Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

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## Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Continued migration of asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries through Bulgaria to points north and west, continuing deportations of people considered to be national security risks, and increasing extraditions of suspected foreign terrorist fighters from Bulgaria continued to raise the country's counterterrorism profile. In response to perceived increased threats, the government has worked to enhance its prevention and enforcement tools, including by criminalizing foreign fighters, developing a new counterterrorism strategy, enhancing operations of its National Counterterrorism Center, and announcing plans to draft a comprehensive law on measures against terrorism. Bulgaria does not provide safe haven to terrorists or terrorist groups.

There is a new government strategy and action plan for countering violent radicalization and terrorism that is awaiting approval by the Council of Ministers after it was posted for public comment in November. The strategy aims to strengthen and optimize interagency coordination in combatting terrorism. It spells out mechanisms for improved cooperation with civil society, business organizations, local communities, and religious leaders. According to the draft action plan on the strategy on countering radicalization and terrorism, the government will have a national program by 2020 for members of extremist groups to disengage, de-radicalize, and rehabilitate.

## Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

There are several small political parties and organizations with anti-American rhetoric. Most active are the ultra-nationalists from the political party "ATAKA," the nationalists from the

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youth organization “BNS,” and followers of the “Skinheads” sub-culture. Occasionally, anti-U.S. protests are organized in front of the U.S. Embassy and other parts of the country.

### **Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

Bulgaria’s population is generally peaceful in its political orientation. Since the democratic changes in 1989, there have been several democratic, non-violent transfers of government power. Nine groups (eight parties and the independents) were elected to sit in the Parliament after the October 2015 elections. The Parliament composition is fragmented. The leading party -- Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) – controls only 35 percent of the seats in Parliament, complicating the government’s and the Parliament’s functioning.

Past election cycles have seen protest activity, localized violence, blocking of main roads and government buildings, and minor security incidents (arsons, vandalism, provocations, explosions.) in/around political party offices, election events, politicians, etc.

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

### **Civil Unrest**

Bulgarians often hold demonstrations to protest or advocate specific causes. Some political parties and organizations, particularly ultranationalist groups, have hired protestors from local

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soccer fan clubs who have been violent on occasion. Most neo-Nazi and extreme-right groups are associated with soccer fan clubs and publicly demonstrate their associations during soccer games. These groups do not differentiate between police, opposition groups, and innocent bystanders.

The most significant non-violent protests in 2015 were anti-government protests in February and police protests against cuts to their benefits in November. November 2015 also saw a protest in front of the Turkish Embassy in Sofia, following the downing of a Russian fighter jet by Turkey a few days prior. The crowd threw rocks and paint at the building causing exterior damage.

#### Religious/Ethnic Violence

Religious violence tends to be focused on Muslims and Christian missionary groups. The Grand Mufti of Bulgaria issued a statement with the National Council of Religious Communities in Bulgaria condemning the Paris attacks in January and November. The Grand Mufti has been a voice of tolerance and moderation but has complained that the government is not a strong enough partner in this effort.

U.S. missionaries have been targets of harassment and assaults. They have been physically assaulted and threatened directly and indirectly. There have been cases of beating missionaries, assaulting them with object, and one account of robbery.

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Ethnic violence tends to be focused on Roma or, to a lesser extent, the Turkish minority. In June 2015, there were several days of violence and ethnic tensions involving the country's 10 percent Roma minority.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

Bulgaria is in a seismically active area. In 2015, there was a 4.2 magnitude earthquake outside Sliven and a 3.8 magnitude earthquake off the Black Sea coast. The last significant earthquake occurred on May 22, 2012, and registered a 5.8. Its epicenter was 15 miles from Sofia, close to Pernik. OSAC constituents are urged to take steps to prepare themselves and review safety measures.

Flooding primarily occurs during the spring/winter months. Floods are more likely in smaller villages and towns due to insufficient infrastructure to handle heavy spring rainstorms and winter runoff. In January 2013, melting snow and heavy rain in Smolyan and Kardzhali increased the levels of some reservoirs and rivers. The situation became critical, as a river overflowed and submerged a road section between Nedelino and Krayna. In June 2014, 11 people were killed in Varna in flash floods and mud slides.

In July 2014, a severe hailstorm hit part of Sofia. Substantial damage was reported to vehicles, building roofs, windows and façades. Another severe hailstorm with similar

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consequences was reported in Lovech.

Cold weather and sizable snow fall can cause serious transportation problems, floods, and electrical outages. In case of heavy snowfall, roads may not be plowed or salted and can be extremely dangerous or closed to traffic. Three tourists survived an avalanche in the Pirin Mountains in January 2014, and one person was killed by an avalanche in the Rila Mountains on December 26, 2013. January 2015 also saw an avalanche on Mount Vitoshka that claimed two lives.

Forest/wildfires are more likely in mountain areas during the summer. During 2015, 145 forest fires were reported (compared to 39 fires in 2014). Wildfires were concentrated in Sofia, Haskovo, Sliven, Yambol, and Razgrad.

Hot weather can cause serious transportation and health problems. In late July 2014, a Code Orange for extremely hot weather was declared with temperatures reaching 100-104F.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

The polluted air was the reason the EU commission announced infringement proceedings against the country's environment sector in 2014.

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There were several industrial accidents in 2014. The most serious left 15 workers dead after an ammunition plant explosion in October 2014. Ten people were injured in a similar incident at the TEREM military ammunition plant in Kostenets in August. A third incident occurred in December at an ammunition plant in Maglizh, leaving one person dead and three wounded. In all cases, government regulators cited numerous irregularities during inspections, according to press reports.

### Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available. Websites that allow free illegal downloading of software are accessible from Bulgarian IP addresses, despite almost a decade of efforts to disrupt these operations. Music revenue per capita is US\$0.40 compared with US\$2.00 in Croatia and US\$14.00 in US, and Bulgaria ranked 68th out of 129 countries on an International Property Rights Index in 2015.

Alcohol and tobacco products are frequently counterfeited. According to a survey by the Center for the Study of Democracy, every fifth cigarette in Bulgaria is illegal, and cigarette smuggling is more profitable than smuggling narcotics. Several companies, including OSAC constituents, have reported difficulty when seeking recourse for patent and trademark infringement at the Bulgarian Patent Office.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) crimes are a challenge for officials and the private sector. OSAC constituents using security offices, investigations, and disruption programs have met limited success in detecting, deterring, and disrupting criminal efforts. They have used the information gathered during these efforts to develop stronger countermeasures. Those constituents relying on courts or a legal department-centric strategy to protect their brand

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express frustration with the lack of speed, effectiveness, and outcomes of their efforts. There have been a number of significant IPR investigations, including some in concert with other EU countries. The MOI and the Customs Service continue to combat contraband garments, shoes, cosmetics, and other products bearing counterfeit trademarks. According to a report by the European Commission in 2013, 28 percent of all counterfeit goods seized annually within the EU were stopped at Bulgaria's border. A report from the Commission in 2014 showed a 72 percent decrease of seized goods.

## Privacy Concerns

American businesses involved in high profile and politically-charged sectors (energy, finance, similar industries with a higher risk of privacy concerns) should contact their corporate security headquarters or consult with the Regional Security Office about specific issues and countermeasures.

## Personnel-Background Concerns

Harassment of minorities by skinheads and neo-Nazis has been reported. Several attacks against foreigners were highly publicized in Sofia in 2014. In August 2015, there was a fight between skinheads and Roma in downtown Sofia. The media widely reported incidents of assaults and harassment of refugees and asylum seekers.

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Concerns about the rise of xenophobia, racism, and extreme nationalism in the society have been expressed by Amnesty International, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, and the Jewish organization, "Shalom," as well as other organizations.

## Drug-related Crimes

The MOI reports that drug-related crimes are rising. Drug abuse and addiction continue to climb, and the age of first-time drug users is dropping. Bulgaria is a "gateway" country for the transit of illicit drugs and contraband. Bulgaria serves as a major transshipment point for heroin from Southwest Asia along the Balkan Route to Europe. Organized crime groups are heavily involved in drug trafficking. Heroin and synthetic drugs are the primary drugs transported through Bulgaria, principally via overland methods, including Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR) trucks, passenger vehicles, buses, vans, and small trucks. Small amounts are smuggled by air. Varna and Burgas are used as entry points for controlled substances, including cocaine, that are smuggled into the Balkans, Greece, and Western Europe. In 2015, the Ministry of the Interior, National Customs Agency and State Agency for National Security reported that 219 kg of heroin, 32 kg of cocaine, nearly 70 tons of marijuana (including 9,934 cannabis plants), and 31,964 pills of synthetic drugs were seized.

## Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping as a tactic used by organized crime largely dropped off following the arrest of the "Impudent" gang in December 2009. Kidnapping was primarily used between rival criminal groups for ransom or because of unresolved financial dealings. The "Impudent" gang was accused of at least 13 high-profile abductions in 2008-2009.

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On March 5, 2013, the 10-year old daughter of a drug kingpin was violently kidnapped by three masked, armed men as she left her house for school. Her bodyguard/driver was shot twice in the back. The girl was released after 48 days in captivity.

There were no significant kidnapping incidents in 2015.

## **Police Response**

Police officers are not allowed to issue spot fines or accept cash for any reason. Traffic police officers are not allowed to issue on-the-spot fines for minor traffic violations due to modifications in the Traffic Act. Per the law, requests for spot fines is a form of extortion.

## **How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment**

In cases of lawful police detention or police harassment, U.S. citizens are encouraged to contact the American Citizen Services unit in the Consular section at the U.S. Embassy for advice and assistance immediately. The ACS emergency number is: (+359) 2 937 5101 or e-mail at: [ACS\\_Sofia@state.gov](mailto:ACS_Sofia@state.gov).

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## Crime Victim Assistance

If a U.S. citizen is a victim of a crime, s/he should call the National System for Single European Emergency Call Number (NSSEECN): 112. It is accessible throughout Europe on all phones and can connect callers with emergency services. It is also highly recommended that all U.S. citizens report security incidents to the American Citizen Services unit in the Consular section of the U.S. Embassy.

## Police/Security Agencies

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) is the primary law enforcement body in Bulgaria, encompassing the National Police Service, Border Police, Fire and Civil Protection, Migration, Chief Directorate for Combating Organized Crime, and overseeing the 28 regional police directorates and over 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 American citizens would 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 Minister of Finance. NCS counteracts the contraband channels of different goods and drugs. It is also responsible for collecting all duties and excises paid to the state budget.

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The National Investigative Service (NIS) is the investigative arm of the Prosecution Service, which is part of the Judiciary. They work with the Ministries of Interior and Justice to carry out 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 but, since February 2015, has no law enforcement authority. They coordinate closely with intelligence services and law enforcement agencies depending on the nature of their investigation.

## **Medical Emergencies**

Medical providers are trained to a very high standard, but most hospitals and clinics, especially in rural areas, are not equipped or maintained to U.S. or Western European standards. Basic medical supplies and over-the-counter and prescription medications are widely available, but highly specialized medication and/or treatment regimens may not be. Not every hospital/clinic is equipped to care for pediatric patients. If you are in need of emergency services for an infant/child, please call ahead to ensure those services will be available.

In the event of a medical emergency, call the emergency number 112 to request an ambulance. Dispatchers are unlikely to speak English, and this service will not transport a

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person to a private hospital. Ambulance service can be slow; in large cities, it may take 30+ minutes. If there is a medical emergency in Sofia, it may be quicker to call a taxi or ask a friend or colleague to drive you to a hospital.

### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

You can find a list of hospitals and physicians on the U.S. Embassy's website at:  
[http://bulgaria.usembassy.gov/list\\_of\\_hospitals2.html](http://bulgaria.usembassy.gov/list_of_hospitals2.html)

### Available Air Ambulance Services

Since March 2014, air ambulance services are available from Heli Air Services Company (<http://www.heliair.bg/en>).

Another air ambulance company is International SOS (Geneva: +41 22 785 6464, Fax: + 41 22 785 6424; Frankfurt: +49 61 023 588, Fax: +49 61 022 02644)

### Recommended Insurance Posture

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Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the U.S. may cost thousands of dollars. It is imperative that U.S. citizens have enough cash (or access to cash) to cover a medical emergency. Most doctors and hospitals expect immediate cash payment for services rendered.

### Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

A European study found that Bulgaria has the most polluted air among EU countries. Four of Europe's cities with the highest levels of particulate matter – Pernik, Plovdiv, Pleven, and Dobrich – are in Bulgaria. High concentrations of particulates were found in the air in Pernik for about 180 days of the year (compared to about 15 days a year for Paris and Stuttgart). Bulgaria also has the highest concentration of carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide.

Tuberculosis (TB) continues to be a serious health concern. For further information, please consult CDC's information on TB at:  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2014/chapter-3-infectious-diseases-related-to-travel/tuberculosis>.

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/bulgaria>. The CDC maintains an international travelers' hotline at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or, by fax, at 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299).

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## **OSAC Country Council Information**

OSAC stands ready to assist American companies with security-related information. OSAC's Bulgaria Country Council's Charter was signed on November 29, 2012. Over 75 companies are part of the Country Council, with representation in many different sectors, including High Tech, Energy, Academia, Entertainment, Retail, Banking/Finance, Service, Logistics, and Faith-based Organizations. If you are interested in more information about the Bulgaria Country Council, please contact the Regional Security Office either by phone (+359 2 937 5316) or via e-mail (DS\_RSO\_Sofia@state.gov). To contact OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Sofia

16 Kozyak Street

Sofia 1408, Bulgaria

The Consular Section is open 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, Monday-Friday, except on American and Bulgarian official holidays.

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## Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone: +359 (2) 937 5100

Fax number: +359 2 937 5320

General e-mail: [sofia@usembassy.bg](mailto:sofia@usembassy.bg)

Emergencies involving U.S. citizens 24 hours a day: +359 2 937-5101 (via the U.S. Embassy Duty Officer)

U.S Citizen Services unit (during business hours):

Fax: +359 (2) 937-5209

E-mail: [acs\\_sofia@state.gov](mailto:acs_sofia@state.gov)

Website: <http://bulgaria.usembassy.gov/service.html>

## Embassy Guidance

Before doing business in Bulgaria, American companies should check with the U.S. Embassy's Foreign Commercial Service office and American Chamber of Commerce regarding the business environment and opportunities in Bulgaria.

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U.S. citizens should enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>, so that the Embassy can keep them up to date with important safety and security announcements and help families and friends get in touch with registered U.S. citizens in an emergency. U.S. citizens should also pay attention to Warden Messages published on Embassy and OSAC websites.

## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

### Scams

Organized crime groups exert a strong influence in some bars/nightclubs and control a great deal of the prostitution business. Special attention should be paid to the drink prices at high-end bars and nightclubs. There have been instances of visitors charged exorbitant prices. Bills have been as high as several hundred dollars for drinks, and in some establishments, the management may use force to secure payment.

Another scam involves a suspect(s) puncturing a victim's tire. While the driver changes the tire, the suspect(s) burglarizes the vehicle.

A trend of vehicle lock jamming emerged in 2013, wherein thieves use radio frequencies to block the victim's key fob. Jamming will leave their car unlocked despite the owner pressing the "lock" button. When the driver walks away, the criminals steal contents/valuables. In some cases, criminals have also stolen vehicles using devices that mimic an electronic key. These

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incidents have been prevalent at shopping centers, gas station convenience stores, and school drop-off areas.

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

Maintain a low profile; dress inconspicuously; use alcohol sparingly; and avoid disputes. When using public transportation or transiting crowded markets, shopping streets, malls, etc. be particularly wary of pickpockets. Pickpocketing is often preceded by a diversion in the form of an argument or fight. Safeguard belongings when visiting cafes or restaurants and while using public transportation. Do not leave luggage unattended. Visitors should be wary of beggars and people selling trinkets and other items.

Be wary of skimming devices placed on ATMs. Take actions to protect your PIN, although that does not eliminate the risk. U.S. citizens should use ATMs inside trusted banks and similar institutions only, and limit use of credit cards to trusted retailers and institutions. Closely monitor your bank statements for anomalies. Privacy information should be destroyed by shredder or similar destruction method.

Residents should take measures to protect their dwellings, including installing window grilles/shutters, solid doors with secure locks, and an alarm system that is monitored by a security company with an armed response capability. Do not keep valuables in visible places or close to entry doors and balcony doors.

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Companies that plan to open offices should take measures to protect their offices. Some bank vaults and private company offices reportedly have been broken into using jamming equipment in an attempt to circumvent alarm systems.

While demonstrations are generally peaceful, it is strongly recommended to avoid areas where they are being held.

Be aware that body language norms differ from those in the U.S. Shaking one's head side to side means "no" in the U.S. but means "yes" in Bulgaria and conversely an up-and-down nodding in the U.S. means "yes" while it means "no" in Bulgaria. Even people living in Bulgaria for years may not pick up on subtle changes in body language that could provide warning of hostile intent. Understanding and acknowledging this limitation and a heightened awareness is important for all travelers and expatriates.

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