



Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Improvised Explosive Device; Religious Violence; Separatist violence; Religious Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Floods; Hate Crimes; Employee Health Safety; Financial Security

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

2/23/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post 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, particularly late-night burglaries, are also common. Reports of home-invasion confrontations associated with burglaries are rare. Crime, while generally non-violent, may occur anywhere and at any time.

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As of January 2016, the following crime statistics from January-September 2015 were available for Sarajevo Canton. A total of 4,125 criminal offenses were reported in Sarajevo Canton, a decrease of 9.4 percent compared to the same period in 2014. The following is a breakdown of reported cases for this 2015 period: 4 murder, 4 rape, 192 domestic violence, 2,952 property crimes, 523 burglaries of residences, 570 car thefts, 18 explosions, 43 shooting/firearms incidents, 8,508 traffic accidents.

Violent crime (murder, carjacking, rape, mugging) not associated with organized crime groups is not a significant concern. There is a substantial 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. Consequently, violent crimes are often committed with war-era munitions (assault rifles, grenades). The expatriate community is not specifically targeted, although members could become victims due to circumstance or proximity.

Cybersecurity Issues

Cyber crime is rare and mainly consists of relatively unsophisticated website defacement and attempts to obtain personal data.

Other Areas of Concern

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

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.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Mediocre road conditions, inclement weather, poorly-maintained vehicles, careless pedestrians, and inattentive drivers can make Bosnia & Herzegovina (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.

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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.

To minimize your risk of injury or crime always lock your vehicle doors, keep the windows up, and use your seatbelt.

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.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

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Airport services are reliable but somewhat limited. There are several daily flights to major transit hubs (Istanbul, Vienna, Munich). During the winter, extreme fog can cover much of Sarajevo, causing inbound and outbound flights to be canceled.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: 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 October, 2011, a lone gunman affiliated with a local Wahhabi movement fired an assault rifle upon the U.S. Embassy, damaging the building and injuring one police officer.

In April, 2015, a man walked into a police station in the Republica Srpska and opened fire with an automatic rifle, killing one police officer and injuring two others before being killed by police forces. Upon opening fire, the attacker yelled "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great").

In November, 2015, a gunman walked into a small betting parlor on the outskirts of Sarejevo and opened fire, killing two Bosnian soldiers in uniform. The individual stepped back into the street and opened fire at another soldier sitting in a city bus. The gunman detonated a hand grenade, killing himself. Following a police investigation, it was believed that the attacker had become radicalized and specifically targeted members of the BiH armed forces.

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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. Throughout 2015, the State Investigation and Protection Agency has conducted several raids, arresting persons suspected of joining or supporting the foreign fighters.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

There is no general anti-American sentiment, and much of the younger generation speaks at least some English. 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.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

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Civil Unrest

Peaceful demonstrations are relatively common. Most protests are fueled by wage or pension issues. Since 2010, all have remained moderate.

- 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 protestors were injured.
- 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.
- In 2013, there was an increase in protests against the BiH government.
- 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 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

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smaller scale and generally peaceful.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

BiH is divided into two entities, and the State-level presidency consists of three presidents (Serb, Bosniak, Croat) each of whom holds the chairmanship for eight months on a rotating basis. 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) 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) ethnic groups appear to remain low. Due to the ethnically-aligned administrative structure, even economic issues are overshadowed by nationalist considerations.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

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BiH has been the subject of disasters: earthquakes, floods, landslides, forest fires, droughts, heavy snowfall. There were numerous small-scale earthquake tremors in 2015. In the past 125 years, there have been four (in 1888, 1935, 1969, 1981) earthquakes of 6.0 or greater magnitude along the Sarajevo Fault that 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 May, 2014, BiH experienced some of the worst flooding in its history. Following heavy rains, many large rivers overflowed, destroying thousands of homes and displacing citizens throughout the country.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

The disruption of critical infrastructure response services after a catastrophic event is extremely likely. Formulating a personal plan is important for such situations.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) travelers may experience harassment in the event of public displays of affection.

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Police Response

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 (manpower, response capabilities), minimal English (or other foreign language capability), and insufficient capability to deter and/or detect crime.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

American citizens detained by the police should contact the Consular Section through the U.S. Embassy switchboard at +387-(0) 33-704-000.

Crime Victim Assistance

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

Police/Security Agencies

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

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.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Sarajevo

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.

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Available 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.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Abandoned dogs pose a 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 reports of dog attacks in 2015. Efforts to address the dog population are in progress, but there is no immediate solution.

The winter brings poor air quality to Sarajevo due to excessive use of coal, wood, and more noxious materials for heating residences. In December 2015, Sarajevo and other cities throughout BiH experienced approximately three weeks of dense smog.

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

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OSAC Country Council Information

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 office avails its services to non-governmental organizations or businesses with a nexus to U.S. interests. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

1 Robert C. Frasure Street

71000 Sarajevo

Regular business hours: Mon-Fri, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Embassy Contact Numbers

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Embassy switchboard operator: +387-(0) 33-704-000.

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

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens should register with the U.S. Embassy's American Citizens Services through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at www.travel.state.gov.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Situational awareness is the best defense against non-violent crime. Try not to draw undue attention to yourself. Report any suspicious activity to local police. All Americans should maintain control of their belongings. American visitors should take normal precautions such as removing all valuables from plain sight when leaving their vehicles, not leaving high value items such as smart phones and cameras unattended, and covering their hand when entering their PIN at ATMs.

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Observe sound security practices when making monetary transactions. Carry only the amount of cash that you intend to use. Maintain accountability of your travel documents and credit cards.

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

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

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