Overall Crime and Safety Situation
U.S. Embassy Ouagadougou does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or
integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The ACS Unit cannot recommend a
particular individual or location and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service
provided.
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED OUAGADOUGOU AS BEING A
HIGH-THREAT LOCATION FOR CRIME DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S.
GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.
Please review OSAC’s Burkina Faso-specific webpage for proprietary analytic reports,
Consular Messages, and contact information.
Burkina Faso is a land-locked country in the center of West Africa with one of the highest
poverty rates in the world. The government of Burkina Faso maintains friendly relations with
the U.S. and receives aid/development assistance from several U.S. government agencies,
American NGOs, corporations, and private charities.
Crime Threats
Street crime (pickpocketing, purse snatching, backpack/cell phone theft) is pervasive in major
cities. Cellular telephones, jewelry, laptops, money and other items of value are the frequent
targets of thieves. The majority of street crime is committed after dark and is often perpetrated
by one or two individuals on motorbikes. Street crime typically increases in Ouagadougou
around the holidays, the bi-annual West African Movie Festival (FESPACO), and the
bi-annual Regional Craft Festival (SIAO).
While most streets in Ouagadougou are safe and non-threatening during daylight hours, they
become less safe at night, especially in isolated areas around bars/nightclubs that tend to
attract unsavory individuals after dark. Crime is known to occur in affluent residential areas
such as Ouaga 2000, Zone du Bois, and Koulouba. The United Nations Circle and Avenue Kwame N’Krumah are also high crime areas. Criminals in urban areas may carry a knife or other sharp weapon in order to cut the strap on bags, purses, or backpacks and can become violent if the victim is noncompliant. Ordinarily, thieves do not threaten victims with weapons, although there have been thefts and attempted thefts involving firearms and knives.

Bribery and fraud are prevalent.

Rape and sexual assault continue to occur periodically in smaller towns and in Ouagadougou. Hotel security is generally adequate against petty crime, but residential thefts/home invasions occur occasionally in the expatriate community (Ouaga 2000, Koulouba, Zone du Bois) and in other parts of Ouagadougou. Thieves surreptitiously entered residences at night and avoided direct confrontation with the occupants. Most perpetrators exploited an unlocked door or window.

Roadside banditry continues to be a problem, and banditry can take place anywhere along the country’s roads. Bandits generally do not harm victims who comply with their demands, but they have been known to fire warning shots or even attack vehicles that do not stop. Local police cite the Eastern Region beyond Koupela (toward Fada N’Gourma) as banditry-prone due to its isolated location and intermittent cell phone coverage. According to police statistics, more than half of all reported roadside banditry incidents occurred in this area.

Other Areas of Concern

Due to credible threat information, the U.S. Embassy and many other diplomatic missions restrict their employees from traveling to the northern Sahel region, which is marked by the area to the north of Djibo, Dori, and the connecting east-west road, inclusive of these locations.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic and road conditions in Ouagadougou make driving difficult and hazardous. In addition to regular car/truck traffic, there is a huge volume of mopeds, pedestrians, bicycles, donkey carts, hand-cranked wheel chairs, and hand-pulled wagons on main thoroughfares. As a result, the average safe speed is 25-30 MPH, making for long commutes around Ouagadougou.

Pedestrians and mopeds dash in/out of traffic, often directly in front of oncoming vehicles. Drivers of every type of vehicle selectively obey traffic laws, often engaging in unsafe driving practices. Mopeds have the right-of-way, and operators seem to believe this permits them to
drive with complete disregard for their own or others’ safety. The law requires moped operators to carry driver’s licenses and wear helmets, but the police do not enforce this law. As a result, it is quite common to see accidents involving mopeds, often with injuries/fatalities. Drivers must go well beyond the norms of defensive driving. European rules of the road are theoretically followed in Burkina Faso. Yield to aggressive drivers and maintain a cool head in traffic – even if you have the right of way.

Hazards on side roads can be worse than on main thoroughfares. Commercial areas are overcrowded with pedestrians, taxis, trucks, hand carts, innumerable vendors, and even beggar children. Most of the country’s roads are gravel surfaces or dirt tracks. On neighborhood roads, drivers may encounter young children at play, dogs scavenging in trash piles, and livestock grazing. Exposed rocks, loose gravel, potholes, broken concrete/tile, and scattered pieces of wood often litter the deeply rutted dirt roads. The streets in the neighborhoods where many of the embassy staff live may be paved, but the asphalt may be crumbling, especially at the edges.

Paved roads between major cities are used by pedestrians, bicyclists, motorbikes, livestock, donkey carts, cars, buses, and trucks. Any vehicle on the road may be overloaded or in a state of disrepair. There may be long stretches between major cities on which one must detour to an unimproved road.

Night driving can be especially challenging. Many cars and motorbikes do not have or use their headlights, and many areas do not have streetlights. Bicyclists and pedestrians in dark clothing are practically invisible in the dark. The same carelessness and general lack of safety awareness among daytime drivers becomes more dangerous at night. In some neighborhoods, packs of domesticated dogs roam the dark streets. All these factors combine to create a very taxing, perilous nighttime driving experience.

There is no roadside assistance; in the event of a mechanical breakdown, it could be hours before help arrives. Personnel are instructed to carry plenty of food/water when traveling outside the cities. Embassy personnel are advised to have a well-maintained vehicle, two good spare tires, and many have had to purchase new car batteries because Burkina Faso’s intense heat significantly drains battery life.

If you have an accident, do not move your vehicle until instructed to do so by a police officer. For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC’s Report, Driving Overseas: Best Practices or Road Safety in Africa.

Public Transportation Conditions
The Embassy discourages the use of public transportation (buses, green-colored taxis) as much as possible.

Buses on the highways have been involved in catastrophic accidents and are commonly the target of roadside bandits. The green taxis are often mechanically unsafe, allow multiple patrons during one trip, do not normally possess a fare meter, and have been connected to criminal activity targeting passengers (although rare in 2016).

However, there are a handful of yellow taxi cab services that are acceptable. The companies include: Allo Taxi, Chic Taxi, City Cab, and Taxi Jaune. All of these taxi cab services utilize centralized dispatchers, fare meters, seatbelts, and are relatively well-maintained automobiles.

Aviation/Airport Conditions
The airport in Ouagadougou was built in the 1960s and has almost certainly outgrown its capacity constraints. It is located in the center of the city, approximately 1.5km southeast of the main commercial area.

As there is no direct commercial air service to the U.S. by carriers registered in Burkina Faso, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed the government’s Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards.

Other Travel Conditions
Few streets are named, and some street names have changed in recent years, sometimes repeatedly. When navigating the city, note landmarks rather than street names. The majority of paved roads do not have adequate markings; this leads to confusion among drivers.

Terrorism Threat
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED OUAGADOUGOU AS BEING A HIGH-THREAT LOCATION FOR TERRORIST ACTIVITY DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns
Burkina Faso has seen a large uptick in extremist activity in 2016. According to local police sources, the country has endured nine significant incidents believed to be extremist-related:
The kidnapping of a western couple in Djibo (January);
An attack against a hotel and café in Ouagadougou (January);
Two cross-border attacks on police stations in Koutougou (May) and Intangom (June);
An attack on local businesses in Markoye (June);
An attack on a Customs office in Markoye (September);
An attack on a military detachment in Intangom (October); and
An attack on a military detachment in Nassoumba (December).

2016 was the deadliest year, in terms of terror attacks, in Burkina Faso.
Regional Islamist elements that could impact Burkina Faso include: al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar al Dine, Ansar al Sharia, al-Murabitoun, and Boko Haram. These elements could be in-country or may easily access the country through the porous borders with Mali and Niger.

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

**THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED OUAGADOUGOU AS BEING A HIGH-THREAT LOCATION FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.**

**Civil Unrest**

Demonstrations, marches, and other gatherings are common in Ouagadougou. Although most are generally peaceful, there have been incidents of violence, looting, road blockages, tire burning, and destruction of property. Instances may arise where the best and safest course of action is to temporarily shelter-in-place.

**Post-specific Concerns**

**Environmental Hazards**

Flood has been a major problem during the rainy season in parts of the country, severely damaging roads and buildings. Ouagadougou experienced its last major and destructive flood in September 2009 that caused extensive damage to roads, levies, and residential areas. A number of small villages on the outskirts of Ouagadougou were completely destroyed, and more than 10,000 people became homeless and were temporarily displaced. The central hospital sustained significant damage, and several Embassy residences were evacuated.

**Critical Infrastructure**

Occupational hazards do exist, including buildings not being constructed according to code or insufficient enforcement of safety standards.

**Personal Identity Concerns**

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In 2015, a mob attacked members of the LGBT community in Bobo-Dioulasso, following an attempt to ban homosexuality by a political party. At minimum, members of the LGBT community find life in Burkina Faso extremely difficult and, at worst, dangerous. Societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity remains an issue, and religious/traditional beliefs do not tolerate homosexuality. There are regular reports of verbal and physical abuse against members of the LGBT community. LGBT employees have passed partners off as relatives, even within the Embassy, to avoid the possibility of intolerant behavior.

Women should dress conservatively to avoid harassment. At some local social occasions (weddings, dinners, church, ceremonies) and at many official events, women and men are seated separately. This sometimes impacts negatively on the ability of diplomats to conduct business.

Physically disabled individuals would have a very difficult time in Burkina Faso, as facilities generally do not attempt to meet access standards.

Drug-related Crimes
Illegal drugs are available; however, Burkina Faso is mostly known as a transit country for the illegal drug trade. There are no indications that illegal drugs are connected to narco-terrorism.

Kidnapping Threat
There continues to be a persistent threat of kidnapping in the Sahel region, and Burkina Faso had its first kidnapping incident of a Westerner in April 2015. In January 2016, a Western couple was kidnapped in Djibo (southwest Sahel). Extremists have claimed responsibility for both kidnappings, and two individuals have not been recovered. Regional instability in Mali and Niger contribute to increased vulnerabilities in Burkina Faso.

Police Response
The Burkinabe law enforcement authorities take extra measures to protect Westerners and international business interests. However, its practices, procedures, and expertise often fall below the standards expected in developed countries.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment
Americans are advised to call the U.S. Embassy (tel: 2549-5300) immediately and ask to speak with the Consular Officer or Duty Officer if they have been detained or harassed by local police. Consular officers can help Americans understand the local criminal justice process and find an attorney if needed.

Crime Victim Assistance

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National Police, 2530-6383, 2530-7100, or 17

Gendarmerie, 2530-6271 or 16

You may also dial 10-10, which will connect to the Ministry of Security. They will dispatch the appropriate law enforcement entity, but English comprehension may be limited.

Police/Security Agencies
Fire Department: 18

Ambulance Service: 18, 2530-6644, or 2530-6645

Medical Emergencies
Contact Information for Available Medical Services
The U.S. Embassy maintains a list of Medical Centers and Facilities in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso.
Available Air Ambulance Services
SOS Medecins Senegal
Contact Person: Dr. Massamba Diop
Address: Baie de Soumbedioune
Rue 62 x64, BP 731, Dakar
Emergency/Office Phone: 00221-33889-15-15
Probable Response time: 6 hours

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance
The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for Burkina Faso.

OSAC Country Council Information
There is currently no active Country Council in Ouagadougou. Please contact OSAC’s Africa team if you are interested in private-sector engagement in Ouagadougou or have questions about OSAC’s Country Council programs.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information
Embassy Address and Hours of Operation
The U.S. Embassy Ouagadougou is located at Secteur 15, Ouaga 2000 Avenue Sembène Ousmane, rue 15.873, southeast of the Monument aux Héros Nationaux.
Hours of operation: Mon-Thurs, 0730-1700 and Fri, 0730-1230, excluding U.S. and local holidays.
Embassy Contact Numbers
American Citizen Services (Consular Section) (226) 2549-5720
Regional Security Office: (226) 2549-5521
After-Hours Duty Officer: (226) 7720-2414
Website: http://ouagadougou.usembassy.gov/
Embassy Guidance
The Embassy strongly recommends that U.S. citizens enroll in the Department of State’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates, and makes it easier for the U.S. embassy or nearest U.S. consulate to contact you in an emergency. If you do not have Internet access, enroll directly with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. You should remember to keep all of your information in STEP up to date; it is particularly important when you enroll or update your information to include a current phone number and e-mail address.
Additional Resources
Burkina Faso Country Information Sheet