

The U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria presents the Winter 2014 newsletter for U.S. citizens living and traveling in Bulgaria. We want to share what we can do for you.

You can also visit our website at sofia.usembassy.gov

(ACS) Unit

The American Citizen Services
United States Embassy /



Season's Greetings

U.S. Embassy Sofia Newsletter

Winter 2014 Issue / Planning Ahead

Check Your Passport!

We encourage you to **check your passport expiration date** before making any travel arrangements.

Make sure to plan ahead during busy travel seasons when wait times for an appointment with our office increase. Even after your appointment, it can take time to receive your travel documents. Please note the Embassy will be closed in observance of the following holidays:

Upcoming Holiday Closures:

Wednesday through Friday, **December 24-26**—Christmas Holidays

Wednesday, **December 31**—
New Year's Eve

Thursday & Friday, **January 1 & 2** —
New Year's Holidays

Check Entry Requirements for Your Destination!

Some countries require that a U.S. passport have six months validity remaining on it to permit entry. Some airlines will not allow passengers with less than six months of passport validity to board their flights.

The U.S. Embassy cannot require other countries or airlines to make exceptions to their own rules, so please check your passport to ensure you have at least six months validity.

For more information on the country you plan to visit, please visit our Country Specific Information webpage listed below.

Traveling with Children?

Please be aware that due to the increasing frequency of child abductions in disputed custody cases, some countries may require notarized permission letters from the absent parent(s) and/or birth certificates for children (under age 18) who are traveling without one or both parents or legal guardians. Failure to produce said letters and/or birth certificates could result in travelers being refused entry into some countries. Many countries like Bulgaria also require the letter to have an apostille and be officially translated into the language of the country. For more information visit the Country Specific Information webpage.

Country Specific Information

www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country.html



Social Security Information

Apply Online!

You can apply for Social Security retirement, spouse, Medicare only or disability benefits on the internet at <https://secure.ssa.gov/iClaim/rib>. It is secure, fast and easy. Once you submit the application online, print the receipt, and wait. SSA will contact you in about 6-8 weeks to review your claim and to request needed documents, if needed.

The online hours of operation for the Social Security Administration office in the U.S. are weekdays 5 AM - 1 AM Eastern Time (ET), Saturday 5 AM - 11 PM ET, Sunday 8 AM - 11:30 PM ET and holidays 5 AM - 1 AM ET.

Important information for all Social Security beneficiaries in Bulgaria

ATTENTION CHASE DEBIT CARD USERS: The CHASE debit card program was discontinued effective of 12/12/2014, and no payments will be credited to any CHASE card after this date. The cards will still be active and users will be able to withdraw or charge money until further notice. Chase will notify all their clients of the final deactivation date of the cards. After that date, any residual amounts of money on the account will be issued via a paper check to their clients. If you are currently receiving your SSA, OPM or VA benefits via a CHASE debit card, please be aware that SSA is planning to suspend benefits beginning with the 01/02/2015 payment.

If you do not want your benefits to be suspended, the following are the only available options:

- Have your benefits deposited into a US Bank account, if possible. This is the preferred option, and we encourage you to explore this possibility in order to ensure a safer and uninterrupted service. If you have a bank account in the U.S., please give us the Routing Transit Number (RTN), the Depositor's Account Number (DAN), along with your Social Security number. We will be happy to send your Social Security payments to your account in the U.S.
- Continue to receive your benefits through via paper check, until we have a definite direct deposit solution for residents of Bulgaria who receive Social Security benefits.



Social Security Information (cont.)

ATTENTION ALL SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFICIARIES IN BULGARIA

SSA is actively working with the Treasury Department on expanding the available payment options in Bulgaria, and will inform the Public as soon as they are made available. In the meantime, the method of payment to those who have been enrolled in Direct Express and who do not have a US bank account, will be automatically changed to that of paper checks.

For those who have received funds to the Direct Express card, but who have been unable to access those funds, please call Direct Express customer services at 1-765-778-6290 (collect), and state that you are cancelling Direct Express and request the balance be sent by paper check to the address on record.

If you are receiving payment successfully via Direct Express, and do not wish to change the method of payment, please let us know at the U.S. Embassy (ACS_Sofia@state.gov or +359-2-937-5100 weekdays between 9am and 12pm), and we will pass your information to the SSA.

CG's Corner

I wanted to take a moment to wish you all a very Happy and Safe Holiday season from everyone at the U.S. Embassy in Sofia. We hope you enjoyed the newsletter and gained some important information!

Many of you will be traveling for the holidays, so we'd like to remind you of the services that consular sections around the world can provide. Most services are offered by appointment, so check the website of the embassy closest to you on how to make an appointment. For appointments with our consular section in Sofia or additional information, please be sure to visit our website at bulgaria.usembassy.gov.

And if you have any suggested topics you would like to see included in future newsletters, please let us know.

PASSPORTS:

We can process your application for passport renewal, add pages to your passport, or report and replace a lost or stolen passport.

CONSULAR REPORT OF BIRTH ABROAD:

We can process your application for a Consular Report of Birth Abroad for children up to eighteen years of age.

NOTARY SERVICES:

We can provide notary services.

ENROLL WITH US:

We can assign you wardens and send email updates to those enrolled with us via STEP.

VOTING:

We can help you with absentee voting.

EMERGENCIES:

Assisting travelers in distress (emergency passports, arranging medical care, assisting victims of crime or arrested/detained U.S. citizens, death of a U.S. citizen)

FEDERAL BENEFITS:

We can act as liaison for your Social Security and Veteran Affairs benefits.

What Can ACS Do for You?

TRAVELING AND LIVING IN BULGARIA:

We maintain information about Bulgaria at www.travel.state.gov regarding safety, security, Bulgarian visa requirements and more.

SENDING MONEY:

We can help your family members or friends send emergency funds to you.

ACS staff cannot discuss visa cases, please contact the appropriate visa office directly for assistance.

Nonimmigrant Visa Unit

Inquiries about specific Nonimmigrant Visa cases may be made only in writing and addressed to the attention of the Chief of Consular section.

U.S. Embassy, Consular section
16 Kozyak St., Sofia 1408, Bulgaria
Fax [+359 \(2\) 937-5209](tel:+35929375209)
E-mail: niv_sofia@state.gov

Immigrant Visa Unit

Telephone: [+359 \(2\) 937-5444](tel:+35929375444) (9:00 am to noon)
Fax: [+359 \(2\) 937-5122](tel:+35929375122)
E-mail: iv_sofia@state.gov