

Algarve Crime - Removing the Opportunities

The annual crime statistics released by Government in early April showed that overall reported crime in the Algarve increased slightly from 21,505 cases in 2016 to 21,907 last year (1.8%) compared with Portugal as a whole (up 3.3%). Violent crime decreased very slightly by 0.3% to 994 cases compared with the national decrease of -8.7%

Safe Communities Portugal has undertaken an initial analysis of the report and more detailed figures provided by Direção – Geral da Política de Justiça, to determine the crime situation for the Algarve and identify any noticeable crime trends. This is important because knowing the trends enables us all to take appropriate crime precautions.

Putting the figures in context

Firstly it is important to put all this in context, of what is happening in the rest of Portugal as well as Europe as a whole. In Portugal over the last 10 years crime has decreased around 20.8% whereas in the Algarve it has decreased 25% during the same period. This is good news especially when considering the significant growth in tourism in the last few years. From a European perspective Portugal has the lowest crime rate.

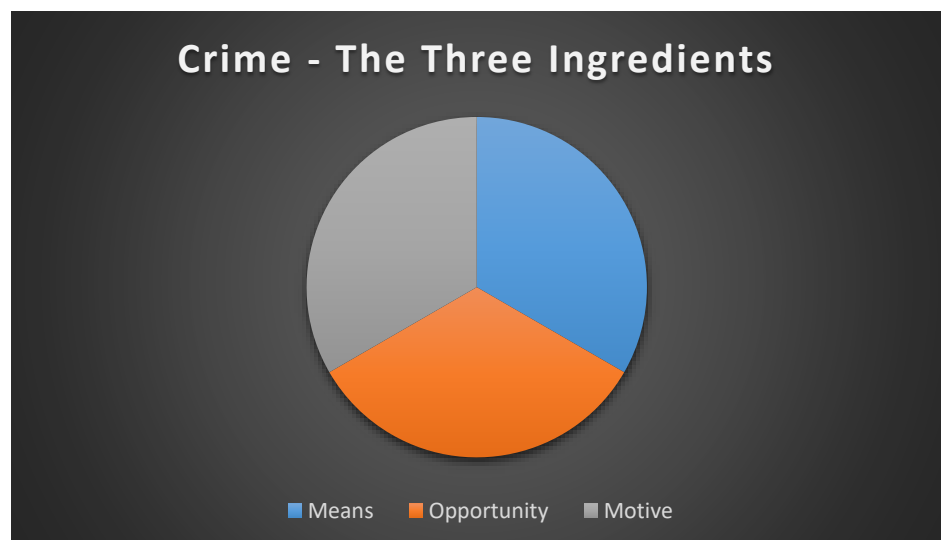
In comparing European figures for two of the most common crimes of theft and burglary, in 2015 (the latest figures available for Europe), the chances of you being a victim of burglary in Portugal were 50% less than in France; 48% less than in Germany and 54% less than in England and Wales. For thefts the figures are 55% less; 50% less and 58% less respectively (*Source Eurostat*).

The Algarve – the main trends

The increase in overall crime reverses the general decrease since 2008 when the total of crimes reported stood at 29,248. This is the first increase since 2010.

The highest recorded crimes in the Algarve were again drink driving, followed by opportunist theft; minor assault and other damage.

In the overall categories, crime against persons stood at 4819 cases up 0.6% from 2016 and crimes against property 11,772 cases, up 9.1%. The level of property crime is higher than the national average and crime against persons lower.



The main areas of **increased** crime compared to 2016 were Burglary without break-in 718 (28.6%); Theft from supermarkets 62 (51.2%); other fraud 962 (34.5%); Opportunist theft 1456 (24.4%); Street robbery with snatching 278 (11.1%); Drug trafficking 393 (7.3%) and Pickpocketing 625 (12.6%).

The increase in the number of burglaries **without** break-in and opportunist theft shows that people are failing to take simple crime prevention measures to protect property. This sort of crime can be reduced, by taking simple measures to protect items such as smart phones, handbags etc. Often opportunist thefts are not reported if the amount stolen is low – so the true figure is likely to be much higher.

The increase in fraud cases shows a continuing upward trend, not only in the Algarve, but Portugal as well as other countries. In the Algarve it represents a threefold increase compared to 2008. These include, fraudulent adverts in newspapers; door step sellers and other miscellaneous frauds. In addition, Computer/communications Fraud amounted to 411 cases, compared to just 15 cases in 2008! Such on-line fraud includes on-line shopping fraud; villa letting scams etc.

Areas where crimes **decreased** included: Burglary with break-in 1148 (-23.8%); Street robberies without snatching 292 (-12.0%); Minor assault 1364 (-4.2%); Threats and coercion 892 (-1.7%); other thefts 713 (-7.5%); Theft from Motor vehicles 1252 (- 14.7%) and Theft of motor vehicles 401 (-10.5%).

The decrease in thefts from motor vehicles is welcomed as this is against the national trend where such crime increased by 5.5% compared to 2016. It appears that the message about leaving valuables in cars is getting across. This is noteworthy as there has been a significant increase in tourism in 2017 and hire cars are often the targets for this type of criminality.

Violent crime

Good news is that during 2017 there were no robberies at banks, pharmacies, or on public transport in the Algarve. Robberies at commercial establishments were the lowest for 10 years. There were 47 cases of rape recorded and 47 cases of sexual abuse against children, an increase of four compared to 2016. Domestic violence stood at 1437 cases a slight increase from 1366 the previous year.

Residential robberies increased from 35 to 56 cases. Approximately 10% of all residential robberies in Portugal are in the Algarve, which is disproportionate to the number of residents which is only 4.3% of the population. Although 2016 was a lower year than usual the increase is obviously a cause for concern and a matter Safe Communities will discuss with police.

Geographical distribution of crime

Compared to 2016, seven municipalities showed a decrease, seven showed an increase and two remained about the same. In terms of the distribution of crime, Loulé had the highest number of reports 3755 cases; followed by Albufeira 3277 cases: Faro 3118 cases, reflecting generally the areas with the highest population and number of tourists. At the lower end of the scale Alcoutim had the least number of reported crimes, just 89, followed by monchique 157 and Castro Marim 2013.

In 2017 a total of 46.3% of overall crime was concentrated in the central Algarve in the three municipalities: Albufeira, Loulé and Faro. In 1993, 53.7% of crimes were concentrated in these three municipalities and in 2001, 49.3%. Although crimes are still lower in the western and eastern Algarve, the distribution over the last 24 years has tended to shift slightly in those directions, probably in line with population expansion.

What we can all do to prevent crime

Although there are ups and downs, many of the ups are crimes which are preventable. We do not live in a perfect world. To commit a crime requires three ingredients “means, “motive and “opportunity”. Therefore reducing the opportunity for criminals to carry out crime, leads to a safer society. This has been demonstrated

with the vast reduction in thefts from motor vehicles. Attention now needs to be turned to our homes and by protecting our belongings in the street, in the markets and in crowded areas etc. A challenge for 2018.

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Safe Communities Portugal.

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