

# Sliven district



▶ Population (2021)	172,690
▶ Territory (sq. km)	3,544
▶ Number of settlements	110
▶ Share of urban population (%)	65.4

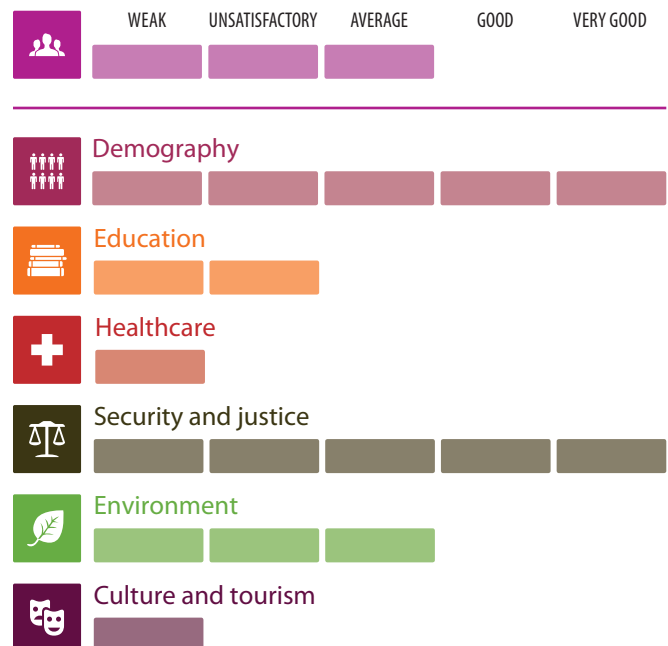
Although GDP per capita in Sliven district has been growing, it is among the lowest in the country. The contraction in economic activity is accompanied by a decrease in both employment and unemployment. The labor market continues to face the challenge posed by the educational structure of the workforce. Investment activity is extremely slack. The basic physical infrastructure retains its relatively good level. The tax rates on retail trade and taxi transportation are significantly lower than the respective national averages. The transparency of the work of the municipalities in the district remains high.

The demographic conditions of the district rank it among the country's leaders in this indicator. At the same time, Sliven is among the districts with the lowest performance as regards the indicators for education and healthcare. Most notably, there is an acute shortage of both GPs and specialist physicians. The relative number of crimes in the district is close to the average one in the country, while the detection rate remains considerably higher. The low proportion of the population in housing with access to public sewerage remains a challenge. The culture and tourism sectors show relatively low intensity.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Income and living conditions

Although GDP per capita in Sliven district has been growing and its rate of increase is even higher than average, in 2021 it remained among the lowest in the country (alongside Silistra and Haskovo) – 10,400 BGN/person, compared to the national average of 20,200 BGN/person. Salaries and pensions in the district are also increasing. The average annual gross salary of people employed in a labor or service contract has reached 14,000 BGN, against 18,700 BGN in the country. The average monthly pension has reached 503 BGN, compared to 537 nationally.

The share of the population living below the national poverty line is significantly higher than the average value – 29.2% in the district, compared to 22.9% in the country for 2022.

### Labor market

The share of working-age population in the district is relatively low – 55.0% in 2022, compared to 58.5% nationally. In 2022, economic activity in Sliven district decreased for the second year in a row and its rate fell to 65.9%, compared to the national average of 73.6%. This reduction in activity has been accompanied by a decrease in both employment and unemployment. The employment rate stands at 60.5%, versus the national average of 70.4%, and the unemployment rate – at 7.9%, compared to 5.2% nationally.

The labor market still faces the challenge posed by the educational structure of the workforce. In 2022, the share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education went down to 37.8%, against 16.0% nationally, which was again the highest in the country for that year. However, the share of those with higher education went up to 21.1%, versus the national average of 29.8%.

At the same time, the district's demography presents a rather favorable picture – the population replacement rate as a ratio of the people aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64 is the highest in the country – 87.4% in the district, against the national average of 65.7%. This means that for every 100 adults who are about to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are about 87 young people who will join the workforce.

### Investment and business

Investment activity in Sliven is extremely slack and the district ranks last in the whole country in this category. The number of non-financial enterprises in the district for 2021 is 39 per 1,000 people and remains relatively low, compared to the national average of 60 per 1,000 people. Domestic and foreign investment also remains low. FTA acquisition expenditure amounts to 1,200 BGN/person, versus the average of 3,100 BGN/person nationally. FDI stock in the district is 726 EUR/person, which marks a decrease from the year before and an increase of almost five times against the national average. Production in the

district is worth 14,200 BGN/person, compared to the national average of 31,200 BGN/person.

Sliven is also the district with the lowest utilization rate of European funds. By 30 June 2023, payments made in the district to beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 1,598 BGN/person. Within the district, the highest amounts were utilized by the municipality of the city of Sliven, though even those payments were far below the national average.

### Infrastructure

The basic physical infrastructure in Sliven district retains its relatively high level. The density of the road and railroad networks is comparable to the national average. In 2022, the share of highways and first-class roads again remained relatively high – 22.2%, compared to 18.5% in the country.

Sliven continues to be the district with the largest share of road surfaces in good condition – 68%, against 41% in the country in 2022. The share of households with internet access has decreased and is relatively low.

### Local taxes

In 2023, the average rates of the tax on non-residential immovable property for legal entities and non-gratuitous acquisition of property were higher than the average figures in the country. At the same time, the rates of the taxes on retail trade and taxi transportation were considerably lower than the respective national averages. The tax on motor vehicles was comparable to the average one in the country.

Within the district, the highest average taxes are levied by Sliven municipality and the lowest ones by Tvarditsa municipality.

### Administration

Sliven is among the districts with relatively good performance in the category representing the work of the administration. Over the past two years, the local authorities' self-assessments on the development of e-government have been very high. Those on the provision of one-stop shop services remain lower than the national average, though they too marked an increase in 2023.

The transparency of the municipal bodies in the district has continued to improve and in 2023 its average rating reached 80.5%, versus 70.3% countrywide, which again places Sliven district second in the country, after Dobrich district.

The share of own revenues in the total revenues of the district's municipalities is 21.6%, compared to 29.0% in the country for 2022, and the coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues is 87.4%, against 84.2% nationally.

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Demography

Sliven's demographic conditions for 2022 place the district among the country's leaders in this category. The natural population growth rate is the second highest in the country (after the capital) at  $-5.9\%$ , versus  $-9.7\%$  nationally. At the same time, the district has managed to attract new residents and the net migration rate is positive, though not too high  $-0.6\%$ . The age dependency ratio of the people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 has increased, but at 117.4%, it still ranks Sliven district at the top place in the country, where that ratio is 165.9%. The ratio of the people aged 65+ to those aged 15–64 is also lower than the national average  $-37.5\%$ , compared to 37.7% in the country. The share of population living in urban areas is relatively low  $-65.4\%$ , compared to 73.6% in the country, but the population density measured as the average number of people per unit urban area remains the second highest in the country after that in the capital.

### Education

Sliven is the district with the lowest score as regards the indicators for education. The share of school year repeaters is the highest in the whole country  $-3.6\%$  in 2022, which is triple the national average of 1.2% for that year. The rate of enrolment in 5th–7th grade has gone down and is the lowest in the whole country.

The alignment between vocational education and the profile of the local economy is high  $-61.9\%$ , compared to 53.6% nationally, which is due the high share of admissions and employment in manufacturing and the low share in the ICT and construction sectors.

Students' performance in 2023 remained poor. The average score in the NEA in mathematics after 7th grade was 25.3 points, compared to the average of 35.3 points nationally, and was the lowest in the whole country. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was also relatively low – “Good” 3.65, versus the national average of 3.93, and the share of “fail” grades (below 3.00) was 23%, compared to the national average of 17.9%.

### Healthcare

Sliven is the district with the lowest score as regards the indicator for healthcare due to an acute shortage of both GPs and specialist physicians. One local GP cares for 1,859 persons on average, compared to 1,678 persons per doctor countrywide. The number of beds in the local general hospitals continues to be relatively low  $-4.9$  beds per 1,000 people, compared to 5.9 beds per 1,000 people in the country for 2022.

At the same time, the number of people treated in the local general hospitals is also low  $-180$  per 1,000 people, compared to 235 per 1,000 people countrywide, which suggests that the local residents seek health services outside the district. The share of people with health insurance is 90.3%, versus 93.5% in the country. The average life expectancy is also low.

### Security and justice

The workloads of criminal judges in the district are close to the national average, but in 2022 the speed of delivery of justice again remained considerably higher. One local judge hears an average of 9.8 criminal cases a month, compared to 10.1 cases per judge nationally. The share of criminal cases closed within 3 months is 93%, against the national average of 89%, and the share of pending cases  $-7\%$ , versus 12% in the country.

The number of crimes in the district is close to the average one in the country, but the detection rate is considerably higher. In 2022, registered crimes against the person and property in Sliven district amounted to 11.3 per 1,000 people, against 11.6 per 1,000 people nationwide. The detection rate was 60%, versus the average of 49% in the country.

### Environment

The relative volume of generated household waste is close to, but below the national average  $-403$  kg/person per year in the district, compared to 445 kg/person in the country for 2021. The share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling is almost equal to the national average  $-73\%$  in the district, compared to 74% nationally.

A persisting challenge facing the district is the limited share of population with access to a public sewerage network  $-62.6\%$ , compared to 74.8% countrywide, while the share of sewerage systems connected to wastewater treatment plants is 56.7% in Sliven district, against the national average of 66.8%.

The share of forest areas is relatively high  $-42\%$ , compared to 33% in the country, and that of degraded land  $-$  around the national average. The figures for installed RES capacities relative to the population are also close to the national average.

### Culture and tourism

Cultural life in Sliven district shows relatively low intensity. Cinema visits have increased but their number remains many times lower than the country's average  $-70$  per 1,000 people in 2022, against 590 per 1,000 people nationally. Visits to the local theatres are also considerably lower in number  $-81$  per 1,000 people, against 129 per 1,000 people in the country. Only visits to the local libraries exceed the national average, albeit slightly  $-605$  per 1,000 people in the district, against 584 per 1,000 people in the country.

The tourism sector also continued to underperform in 2022. The number of beds in accommodation facilities was 13 per 1,000 people, compared to 55 per 1,000 people in the country, and the number of overnight stays  $-527$  per 1,000 people, versus 3,739 per 1,000 people nationally. The share of people employed in culture, sport and entertainment is three times lower than the national average.

## Key indicators for the district of Sliven

Economic Development Indicators	2020	2021	2022	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	8,616	10,439	n.a.	<b>20,212</b>
Average gross annual salary of people employed in a labor or service contract (BGN)	12,370	14,033	n.a.	<b>18,733</b>
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	34.4	32.0	29.2	<b>22.9</b>
Share of the working-age population (%)	57.0	57.2	55.0	<b>58.5</b>
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	65.0	62.4	60.5	<b>70.4</b>
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	11.0	8.4	7.9	<b>5.2</b>
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	36.2	38.2	37.8	<b>16.0</b>
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	21.4	20.1	21.1	<b>29.8</b>
Production value per capita (BGN)	11,974	14,238	n.a.	<b>31,242</b>
Expenditures on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN)	1,075	1,234	n.a.	<b>3,097</b>
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises per capita (cumulative) (EUR)	867	726	n.a.	<b>4,098</b>
Share of households with broadband internet access (%)	83.4	83.3	67.8	<b>87.3</b>
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	72.9	68.0	68.0	<b>41.1</b>
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	83.0	83.8	87.4	<b>84.2</b>
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	79.8	80.1	80.5	<b>70.3</b>

Social Development Indicators	2020	2021	2022	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	n.a.	n.a.	-5.9	<b>-9.7</b>
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	n.a.	0.6	<b>4.2</b>
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.08	3.79	3.65	<b>3.93</b>
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	27.5	25.8	25.3	<b>35.3</b>
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	86.4	85.3	82.1	<b>90.7</b>
Average life expectancy (years)***	72.4	71.2	70.8	<b>71.9</b>
Share of people with health insurance (%)	86.4	86.7	90.3	<b>93.5</b>
Population per one GP (persons)	1,930	1,916	1,859	<b>1,678</b>
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	9.4	9.5	11.3	<b>11.6</b>
Share of pending criminal cases (%)	7.7	9.5	6.7	<b>11.6</b>
Share of the population living in settlements with a public sewerage network (%)	64.8	62.6	n.a.	<b>74.8</b>
Generated household waste per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	420	403	n.a.	<b>445</b>
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	76.1	72.8	n.a.	<b>74.0</b>
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	14	53	70	<b>590</b>
Overnight stays in accommodation facilities (number/1,000 population)	285	419	527	<b>3,739</b>

\* The 2022 data are included in the 2023 study. The same is valid for the previous years.

\*\* The data refer to the 2022-23 academic year, while the State matriculation exams took place in 2023. The same is valid for the previous years.

\*\*\* Data are for three-year periods and are updated annually.