

Sofia district

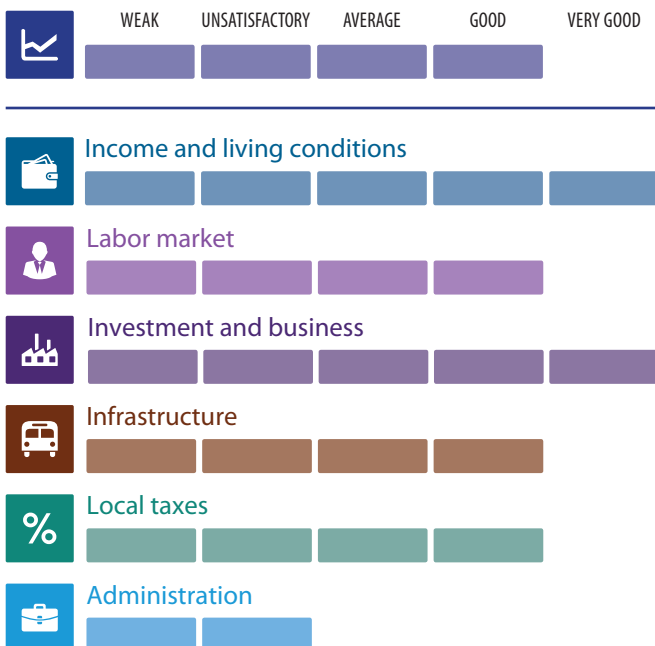
▶ Population (2021)	231,989
▶ Territory (sq. km)	7,062
▶ Number of settlements	284
▶ Share of urban population (%)	60.3



Sofia district has recorded the lowest growth rate of GDP per capita, thus losing its second place in the ranking. Salaries and pensions remain relatively high. The development of the local labor market continues to be good. The good economic development in the district is accompanied by high investment activity. The density of its road network is high. The average level of the local taxes levied by the district's municipalities is generally high. The transparency in the work of the local administrations remains poor. The share of own revenues in the total revenues of the district's municipalities is the lowest in the country.

The rate of natural population growth in Sofia district remains below the national average. The district is among those with relatively low level of urbanization. The performance of its students is poor. Access to doctors – both GPs and specialist physicians in the district – is slightly below the national average. Delivery of justice is slow. The volume of generated household waste is among the country's highest, while the share of that waste which has been handed over for treatment and recycling is among the lowest. Cultural life in Sofia district retains its low intensity. At the same time, its tourism is better developed than in most other districts.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living conditions

Sofia district recorded the lowest growth rate of GDP per capita for 2021 (5% versus 17% nationally), thus ceding its second place to Stara Zagora in the ranking along this indicator. However, salaries and pensions have been rising at the national average rate and remain relatively high. The average annual gross salary of people employed in a labor and service contract has reached 17,700 BGN and continues to be the second highest in the country (again after the capital). The average monthly pension amounts to 552 BGN.

The relatively high values of GDP and salaries in the district have kept the poverty level relatively low in the past few years. In 2022, the share of the population living below the national poverty line was 23%.

Labor market

The development of the local labor market in 2022 continued to be good, which once again shows the deep interrelation between the economies of the capital and of Sofia district. Economic activity in the district decreased slightly but continued to be considerably above the national average – 75.7% in the district, compared to 73.6% in the country. This growth was accompanied by a decrease both in employment and in unemployment. The employment rate dropped to 74.9%, against 70.4% nationally, and the unemployment rate – to 4.9%, versus 5.2% countrywide.

The profile of the workforce in Sofia district is characterized by a large number of people with secondary education – 71.4%, compared to 54.2% in the country, while the shares of people with a university degree and of those with primary or lower education are both relatively low. This structure can be accounted for by the proximity of most of the district's settlements to the capital, the latter attracting the university graduates and naturally leaving the process industry to develop in its geographical periphery.

A persisting challenge facing the local labor market is population ageing. The population replacement rate as a ratio of people aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64 is 63.3% for 2022, versus the national average of 65.7%.

Investment and business

The positive economic development of the district is associated with high investment activity. In 2021, the district reported FTA acquisition expenditures of 3,200 BGN/person, which were the third highest figures in the country (after those in the capital and Plovdiv). FDI amounted to 7,300 EUR/person and was the third highest nationally. Production value has been growing at a fast rate and almost equals that of the capital district, thus increasing even more (almost twice) the distance between these two districts and the rest of the country.

The number of enterprises in the district remains relatively low, while the share of large enterprises among them is relatively high.

Utilization of EU funds has recorded a slight increase. By June 30th 2023, payments made in Sofia district to beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 2,770 BGN/person. Within the district, the leader in the utilization of EU funds was the municipality of Kostinbrod.

Infrastructure

Sofia district has a very well-developed infrastructure. The density of the road network is higher than the national average, and with 30.2%, the share of highways and first-class roads is the second largest in the country after that in Shumen district, compared to the national average of 18.5%. At the same time, however, road quality remained relatively low, with only 30.5% of the road surfaces in good condition, versus 41.1% in the country, for 2022.

Access to the Internet in the district remains relatively limited, with 75.0% of the households connected to it, compared to 87.3% on average in the country.

Local taxes

In 2023, the average level of local taxation in Sofia district was among the highest in the country. Higher than average continued to be the taxes on non-residential immovable property for legal entities and on non-gratuitous acquisition of property. By contrast, significantly lower than the average rates were the taxes on taxi transportation and retail trade.

Within the district, the highest average tax rates are levied by the municipalities of Samokov and Botevgrad, and the lowest ones – by the municipalities of Mirkovo and Chelopech.

Administration

The performance of the municipal administrations in Sofia district is unsatisfactory. The self-assessments of the municipal administrations on the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop-shop administrative services in 2023 also remained below the respective national averages.

In 2023, Sofia district continued to be among those with the lowest assessment of the transparency in the work of its local administrations, with a rating of 57.7%, compared to 70.3% on average in the country.

The share of own revenues in the total revenues of the district's municipalities is the lowest in the country – 14.7%, compared to 29.0% nationwide. At the same time, the coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues is above average at 102.2%, versus 84.2% nationally.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ■

Demography ■■■■

The rate of natural population growth in Sofia district remains below the national average at -11.1% in 2022, against -9.7% nationwide. The net migration rate is also slightly negative at -0.1% .

Population aging in the district is similar to that nationwide. In 2022, the ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 was 166.3%, compared to 165.9% nationally, and to those aged 15–64 it was 38.4%, versus 37.7% nationwide.

Sofia is among Bulgaria's districts with a relatively low level of urbanization – 60.3% of its population is urban, against 73.6% countrywide, and with a low population density of 740 persons/sq. km, compared to the national average of 1,404 persons/sq. km.

Education ■■■■

The proportion of children in Sofia district attending kindergarten is lower, but close to the national average. The net enrolment rate in 5th–7th grade in the district has continued to decline and in 2022 it remained below the national average – 87.6%, compared to 90.7% in the country. The district has relatively few students and employees with professional qualifications in agriculture and construction, while the number of those in manufacturing is relatively high.

The performance of the district's students in 2023 remained relatively poor. The average score in the NEA in mathematics after 7th grade was 28.3 p., versus 35.3 p. nationally. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 3.58, compared to the average of 3.93 countrywide, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) reached 21.2%, against the national average of 17.9%.

The number of university students in Sofia district is relatively small – 5.6 students per 1,000 population, compared to the national average of 33.2 students per 1,000 population in 2022.

Healthcare ■■■■

Access to doctors – both GPs and specialist physicians in the district – is slightly below the national average. In 2022, one GP cared for an average of 1,788 people, compared to 1,678 people per GP in the country. The share of people with health insurance has increased slightly, though in 2022 it still remained the lowest one nationally – 84.2% in the district, against 93.5% in the country.

The number of beds in the local general hospitals relative to the population in the district is close to the national average.

The infant mortality rate has continued to fall and in 2022 it was below the national average. The average life expectancy is already above the country's average, with Sofia being the only district where the average life expectancy increased in 2022.

Security and justice ■■

Sofia's performance regarding the provision of security and justice in 2022 remained poor and ranked the district among the bottom three in the country, together with Montana and the capital district. That was mostly a consequence of the relatively slow delivery of justice, although the workloads of the local criminal judges were below the national average. One criminal judge in Sofia district heard an average of 8.6 cases a month, compared to 10.1 cases per judge in the country. At the same time, the number of criminal cases closed within 3 months was 78%, compared to the average of 89% nationwide, and pending cases amounted to 20%, which is the highest figure for this indicator countrywide, where the average was 12%. For their part, the indicator values for security in Sofia district are higher, albeit slightly, than the national average. The number of registered crimes against the person and property is 9.7 per 1,000 population, compared to the national average of 11.6 per 1,000 population. The detection rate is 54%, versus 49% in the country.

Environment ■■

Sofia is among the three districts (together with Razgrad and Silistra) with the lowest score in this category. The main reason for this is the volume of household waste and its management. The annual volume of waste generated in Sofia district is among the highest in the country – 501 kg/person, versus 445 kg/person nationwide, while the share of this waste handed over for treatment and recycling is among the lowest – 16.7%, compared to 74% in the country for 2021.

In spite of the relatively low level of urbanization, the share of households in the district with access to public sewerage networks is high – 77.0%, compared to the national average of 74.8%. At the same time, access to sewerage networks connected to wastewater treatment plants is lower – 41.3%, against the average share of 66.8% in the country.

The share of forest areas is relatively high (47%, compared to 33% in the country), and that of degraded land is close to the national average (0.46%, against 0.43% in the country).

Culture and tourism ■■

In 2022, cultural life in Sofia district still sustained its low intensity, probably due to the region's proximity to the capital, which allows a large part of the population a relatively fast and easy access to the biggest city in the country. No visits to libraries and theaters have been reported for the district, while cinema visits numbered 65 per 1,000 people versus 590 per 1,000 people nationwide. Visits to museums went up and their relative number is among the highest in the country, although they could not yet recover their pre-pandemic level.

At the same time, tourism is better developed than in most districts. The number of beds in accommodation facilities is 38 per 1,000 people, ranking Sofia district eighth in the country. The number of overnight stays is 2,871 per 1,000 people for 2022.

Key indicators for the district of Sofia

Economic Development Indicators	2020	2021	2022	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	17,146	19,263	n.a.	20,212
Average gross annual salary of people employed in a labor or service contract (BGN)	15,857	17,697	n.a.	18,733
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	22.8	21.8	23.0	22.9
Share of the working-age population (%)	59.1	59.2	58.2	58.5
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	78.8	75.2	74.9	70.4
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	7.5	5.5	4.9	5.2
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	13.6	14.2	14.4	16.0
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	11.3	12.4	14.2	29.8
Production value per capita (BGN)	49,856	57,137	n.a.	31,242
Expenditures on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN)	3,430	3,157	n.a.	3,097
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises per capita (cumulative) (EUR)	6,704	7,289	n.a.	4,098
Share of households with broadband internet access (%)	73.0	74.1	75.0	87.3
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	30.2	35.4	30.5	41.1
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	77.9	98.8	102.2	84.2
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	65.3	57.9	57.7	70.3

Social Development Indicators	2020	2021	2022	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	n.a.	n.a.	-11.1	-9.7
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	n.a.	-0.1	4.2
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.99	3.77	3.58	3.93
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	31.8	29.6	28.3	35.3
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	89.8	90.0	87.6	90.7
Average life expectancy (years)***	73.1	72.1	72.6	71.9
Share of people with health insurance (%)	87.3	82.9	84.2	93.5
Population per one GP (persons)	1,846	1,839	1,788	1,678
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	10.0	9.5	9.7	11.6
Share of pending criminal cases (%)	22.3	21.6	20.3	11.6
Share of the population living in settlements with a public sewerage network (%)	76.2	77.0	n.a.	74.8
Generated household waste per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	488	501	n.a.	445
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	9.8	16.7	n.a.	74.0
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	32	30	65	590
Overnight stays in accommodation facilities (number/1,000 population)	2,217	2,306	2,871	3,739

* 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.