

# Stara Zagora district

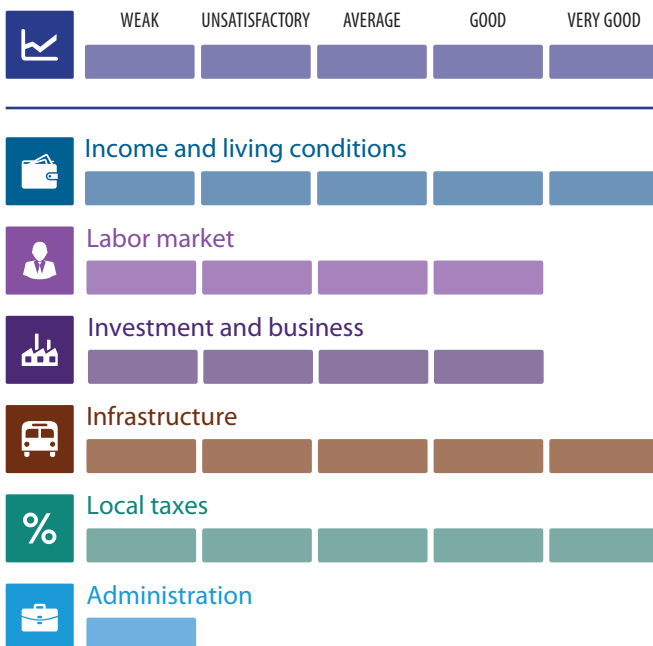
▶ Population (2021)	296,507
▶ Territory (sq. km)	5,151
▶ Number of settlements	206
▶ Share of urban population (%)	71.3



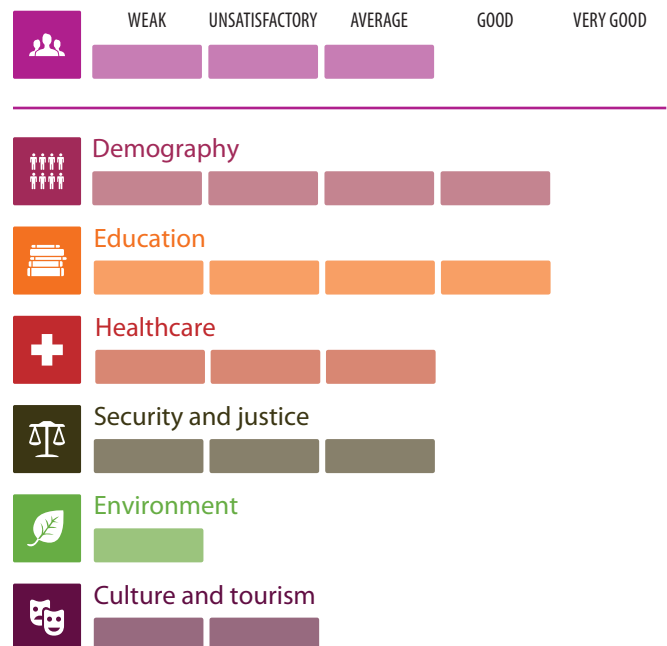
GDP per capita in the district has grown significantly and Stara Zagora now ranks second in this indicator. The performance of the local labor market is relatively good. The figures for investment and business activity place the district among the country's leaders. The share of highways and first-class roads is relatively high. Unlike most districts with a high degree of economic development, Stara Zagora maintains relatively low local taxes. The self-assessments of local administrations on the provision of one-stop shop administrative services are the lowest in the whole country.

The natural population growth in Stara Zagora remains below the national average. Students' results are close to the country's average. Average life expectancy has declined, though relatively modestly, and for the first time is above the national average. Criminal judges in the district have relatively heavy workloads, but this does not have an adverse effect on the speed of delivery of justice. Stara Zagora's low score in the environmental category is primarily due to the extremely high proportion of degraded land. Cultural life in the district is relatively active.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Income and living conditions

GDP per capita in Stara Zagora rose considerably in 2021 to reach 20,200 BGN, ranking the district second in this category and immediately below the capital. Salaries and pensions also continue to rise. The average annual gross salary of people employed in a labor or service contract has reached 16,700 BGN, compared to 18,700 BGN nationally, and the average monthly pension – 567 BGN, against 537 BGN nationally.

The poverty level in Stara Zagora district continues to rise and exceeds the national average. In 2022, the share of population living below the national poverty line reached 29.1, versus 22.9% in the country.

### Labor market

The performance of the local labor market is relatively good and places Stara Zagora among the top three in this category (after the capital and Varna) for 2022. Economic activity has increased to 75.9%, versus 73.6% countrywide. This increase has been accompanied by a rise in employment and a drop in unemployment. The employment rate has reached 75.0%, compared to 70.4% nationally, while the unemployment rate is 4.3%, versus 5.2% in the country.

The educational structure of the workforce in the district has undergone a slight improvement. In 2022, the population aged 25–64 with higher education retained its share of 22.0% and remained below the national average of 29.8%. However, the share of population with primary or lower education was relatively small – 17.1%, compared to 16.0% in the country. The relatively high share of the workforce with secondary education is therefore in line with the district's industrial profile.

The population replacement rate of those leaving the labor market by those joining it – that is, the ratio of the population aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64, is 67.3%, versus 65.7% in the country, which indicates an impending contraction of the labor force.

### Investment and business

Stara Zagora district has a relatively small number of enterprises, retaining in 2021 the rate of 49 per 1,000 people, compared to 60 per 1,000 people in the country. However, production value in the district is high and with 34,000 BGN/person reported for that year, Stara Zagora ranked among the top three performers and was preceded only by Sofia (capital) and Sofia district. Accumulated FDI flows by the end of 2021 amounted to 3,600 EUR/person, placing the district fourth in the country in this indicator. FTA acquisition expenditures increased to 2,800 BGN/person.

Stara Zagora also ranks fourth in the country in terms of spending on research and development – 81 BGN/person in 2021.

The district's performance as regards the utilization of European funds is not so good. By 30 June 2023, payments made to beneficiaries of EU projects amounted to 2,358 BGN/person, compared to 2,836 BGN/person nationally. Within the district, the leader in utilization of EU funds is the municipality of Gurkovo (with over 4,000 BGN/person, and the bottom place is held by the municipalities of Galabovo, Bratya Daskalovi and Opan (with less than 1,000 BGN/person).

### Infrastructure

The density of the railway network in Stara Zagora district is considerably higher than average. The density of the road network is slightly lower, but the share of highways and first-class roads is 28.7%, compared to 18.5% for the country for 2022. Nevertheless, the share of roads with good quality surface has been lagging behind the average figures – 39.4%, versus the national average of 41.1% for 2022.

Households' access to the internet has been rising, but remains below the national average – 86.5%, against 87.3% in the country.

### Local taxes

Unlike most districts with a high degree of economic development, in 2023 Stara Zagora kept its municipal tax rates relatively low. The biggest differences compared to the respective national averages concern the tax on non-residential immovable property for legal entities and on non-gratuitous acquisition of property. Taxes on taxi transportation are also considerably lower. Conversely, the tax on retail trade is higher than average, while that on motor vehicles is close to the national average.

Within the district, the lowest average tax rates are those levied by the municipalities of Bratya Daskalovi and Chirpan, and the highest ones – by the municipality of Stara Zagora city.

### Administration

In 2023, the self-assessment of the local administration on the development of e-government improved slightly, though remaining low. However, the self-assessment on the provision of one-stop shop services has declined and is the lowest in the country. The average AIP Active transparency rating of the local municipalities also remained relatively low in 2023 – 65.0% in the district, compared to 70.3% nationally.

The share of own revenues in the total revenues of the district's municipalities is 24.5% (versus 29.0% in the country) for 2022, and the coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues is 74.9% (versus 84.2% in the country).

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Demography

The natural population growth rate of  $-11.2\text{‰}$  in Stara Zagora district remains below the national average of  $-9.7\text{‰}$  for 2022. At the same time, Stara Zagora continues to attract population and its net migration rate is positive at  $2.2\text{‰}$ .

In 2022, the district's rate of population ageing was similar to the national average. The age dependency rate as a ratio of the people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 was 165.2%, compared to 165.9% nationally, and to the 15–64 age group it was 40.0%, versus 37.7% countrywide.

The share of urban population and the density of the population in the district are also close to the country's average – 71.3% of the population live in urban areas, against the national average of 73.6%. Population density is 1,384 persons/sq. km, compared to 1,404 persons/sq. km nationally in 2022.

### Education

The net enrolment rate of schoolchildren in 5th–7th grade has gone up and in 2022 it was close to the national average. The share of school year repeaters has increased to 1.6%, versus 1.2% nationally. The alignment between vocational education and the profile of the local economy is among the worst in the country, mainly due to a significant shortage of students in industry-related courses, given that manufacturing has such a strongly presence in the local economy.

In 2023, students' results in the district were close to the national average. The average score in the NEA in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 33.7 points, against 35.3 points nationwide. The average result in the State matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 3.83, compared to 3.93 nationally, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) amounted to 17.1%, against 17.9% nationwide.

The number of university students in the district has increased to 19 students per 1,000 people, versus 33 students per 1,000 people nationally.

### Healthcare

The share of people with health insurance has gone up to 92.5%, against 93.5% nationwide. Life expectancy has been declining, but at a relatively limited rate, and in 2022 for the first time it exceeded the national average with 72.4 years, compared to 71.9 years nationally. Infant mortality has also declined but remains relatively high.

Access to doctors – both GPs and specialist physicians – in Stara Zagora district is relatively good, with 1,430 people on average per one GP, compared to the national average of 1,678 people per doctor. The number of beds in the local general hospitals has gone up but has not yet reached the national average. In 2022, the available hospital beds in the district amounted to 5.2 per 1,000 population, versus 5.9 beds per 1,000 population nationwide. Hospitalization numbers are close to but below the

national average – 201 per 1,000 people, against 235 per 1,000 people countrywide.

### Security and justice

The workloads of criminal judges in Stara Zagora district have remained relatively heavy, but in 2022 once again this did not have a negative impact on the speed of delivery of justice. One local judge heard an average of 11.5 cases per month, compared to 10.1 cases monthly per judge in the country. The share of criminal cases closed within 3 months was 89%, which equaled the national average, and that of pending cases – 11%, compared to 12% in the country.

The number of crimes in Stara Zagora district is relatively high, and the detection rate – relatively low. The registered crimes against the person and property constitute 12.3 per 1,000 people in the district, compared to 11.6 per 1,000 people in the country, while the detection rate is 48%, versus 49% in the country.

### Environment

The poor rating given to Stara Zagora in the environment category is based predominantly on the excessively high share of degraded land – 3.34% in 2022, against 0.43 in the country, which was once again the highest figure for the whole country that year. At the same time, the share of forest areas is close to the national average – 32% in the district, against 33% in the country.

The household waste generated by the district's residents in 2021 was close to the national average – 422 kg/person per year, compared to 445 kg/person nationally. However, the share of that waste handed over for treatment and recycling was low – 57%, compared to 74% in the country.

The district is lagging behind as regards the share of population living in settlements with a public sewerage network – 66.3% in 2021, compared to 74.8% nationally. 64.1% of the households have access to a public sewerage network connected to a wastewater treatment plant, against 66.3% in the country. The installed RES capacities relative to the population are twice the national average.

### Culture and tourism

Stara Zagora has a relatively active cultural life. In 2022, visits to the local cinemas, museums and libraries continued to increase, though their numbers failed to reach their pre-pandemic levels. Visits to the local theaters also went up to 751 per 1,000 people and again exceeded the national average of 619 per 1,000 people.

The number of beds in accommodation facilities in Stara Zagora district is 17 per 1,000 people, compared to 55 per 1,000 people in the country), and the number of overnight stays has reached 1,703 per 1,000 people, compared to 3,739 per 1,000 people in the country for 2022.

## Key indicators for the district of Stara Zagora

Economic Development Indicators	2020	2021	2022	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	16,233	20,165	n.a.	<b>20,212</b>
Average gross annual salary of people employed in a labor or service contract (BGN)	15,010	16,673	n.a.	<b>18,733</b>
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	25.9	28.1	29.1	<b>22.9</b>
Share of the working-age population (%)	58.2	58.4	57.0	<b>58.5</b>
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	73.3	72.2	75.0	<b>70.4</b>
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	6.2	4.4	4.3	<b>5.2</b>
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	16.4	15.8	17.1	<b>16.0</b>
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	21.6	22.0	22.0	<b>29.8</b>
Production value per capita (BGN)	25,415	34,039	n.a.	<b>31,242</b>
Expenditures on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN)	2,500	2,757	n.a.	<b>3,097</b>
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises per capita (cumulative) (EUR)	3,111	3,563	n.a.	<b>4,098</b>
Share of households with broadband internet access (%)	76.0	78.8	86.5	<b>87.3</b>
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	37.3	38.9	39.4	<b>41.1</b>
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	79.4	80.0	74.9	<b>84.2</b>
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	69.3	63.8	65.0	<b>70.3</b>

Social Development Indicators	2020	2021	2022	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	n.a.	n.a.	-11.2	<b>-9.7</b>
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	n.a.	2.2	<b>4.2</b>
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.12	3.96	3.83	<b>3.93</b>
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	33.9	31.9	33.7	<b>35.3</b>
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	91.4	89.6	90.9	<b>90.7</b>
Average life expectancy (years)***	74.0	72.7	72.4	<b>71.9</b>
Share of people with health insurance (%)	89.3	89.4	92.5	<b>93.5</b>
Population per one GP (persons)	1,502	1,463	1,430	<b>1,678</b>
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	10.3	10.6	12.3	<b>11.6</b>
Share of pending criminal cases (%)	8.6	9.1	10.7	<b>11.6</b>
Share of the population living in settlements with a public sewerage network (%)	70.6	66.3	n.a.	<b>74.8</b>
Generated household waste per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	386	422	n.a.	<b>445</b>
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	78.8	56.6	n.a.	<b>74.0</b>
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	168	307	489	<b>590</b>
Overnight stays in accommodation facilities (number/1,000 population)	722	1,032	1,703	<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.