# Vratsa district

- ▶ Population (2021) — 152,813
- ▶ Territory (sq. km) — 3,620
- ▶ Number of settlements — 123
- ▶ Share of urban population (%) — 59.9

*(Map showing municipalities: KOZLODUY, ORYAHOVO, MIZIA, Hayredin, BYALA SLATINA, Borovan, KRIVODOL, VRATSA, MEZDRA, ROMAN)*
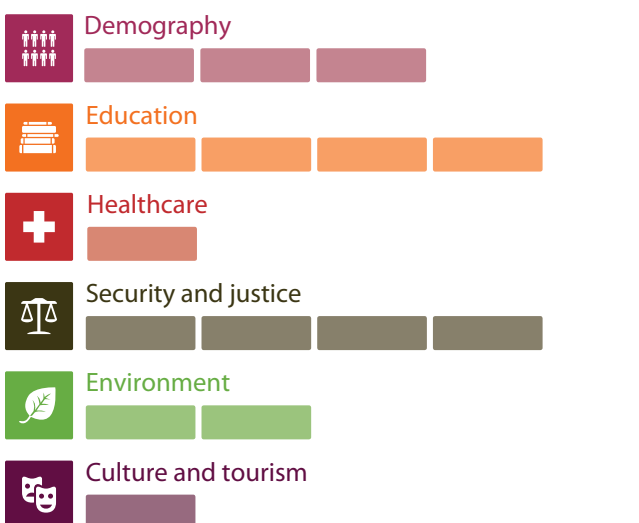
GDP per capita in Vratsa district continues to grow. The average gross annual salary of employees is the third highest in the country. In 2022, employment and unemployment rates went up simultaneously. Vratsa is among the districts with a strong industrial profile and the share of the workforce with secondary education is relatively high. Economic and investment activity in the district remains relatively limited. Road quality is not improving. Local taxes are low. The transparency in the work of municipal administrations is declining.

Age dependency ratios are still significantly less favorable than the national averages. The indicators in primary and secondary education remain relatively good, but students' results are relatively low. Healthcare suffers from a shortage of specialist physicians and hospital beds. The number of registered crimes against the person and property in Vratsa district is the highest in the country. Access to public sewerage networks is limited. The share of forest areas is low. Cultural life and tourism in the district are insufficiently developed.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WEAK | UNSATISFACTORY | AVERAGE | GOOD | VERY GOOD

- Income and living conditions
- Labor market
- Investment and business
- Infrastructure
- Local taxes
- Administration

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

WEAK | UNSATISFACTORY | AVERAGE | GOOD | VERY GOOD

- Demography
- Education
- Healthcare
- Security and justice
- Environment
- Culture and tourism
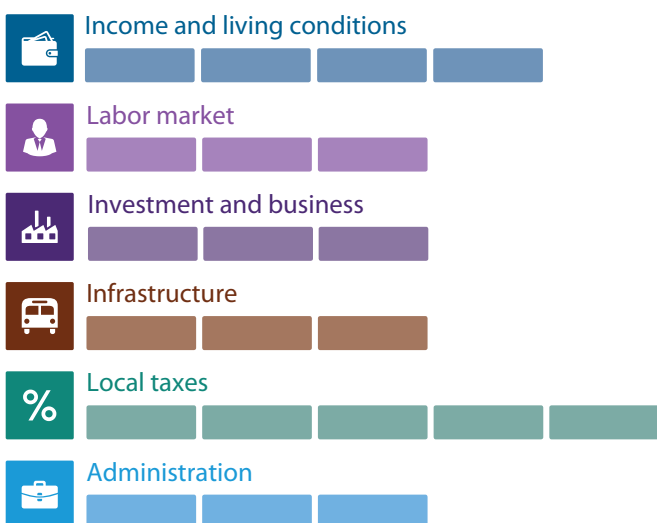
# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ▄▄▄

## 📇 Income and living conditions ▄▄▄▄

In 2021 and after the record increase of the previous year, GDP per capita in Vratsa district continued to grow, reaching 17,800 BGN/person. Salaries and pensions also increased at the average national rate. The gross annual salary of employees has gone up to 17,300 BGN and is the third highest in the country (after those in the capital and Sofia district), mainly on account of the employees in the Kozloduy nuclear power station. The average monthly pension is 529 BGN and is also higher than in most districts. However, the general level of poverty in the district remains high. In 2022, the share of the population living below the national poverty line was 31.5%, versus 22.9% countrywide.

## 👤 Labor market ▄▄▄

The share of the working-age population in the district is decreasing and is lower than the national average – 57.3% in 2022, compared to 58.5% in the country. Economic activity continues to grow but is still significantly lower than the national average – 67.8% in the district, compared to 73.6% in the country. This increase has been accompanied by a simultaneous rise in employment and unemployment, both of whose figures are significantly less favorable than the respective national averages. The employment rate in Vratsa district is 61.4%, against 70.4% in the country, while the unemployment rate is 10.7%, against 5.2% in the country.

Vratsa is among the districts with a pronounced industrial profile and the share of the workforce with secondary education is relatively high. In 2022, the share of the population aged between 25 and 64 with a university degree dropped to 15.6%, versus 29.8% in the country, while that of people with primary or lower education decreased to 22.5%, compared to 16.0% in the country.

Population aging has a major effect on the local labor market. The demographic replacement rate as a ratio of the population aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64 in the district is 65.0%, compared to 65.7% in the country. This means that for every 100 people who will have to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are 65 young people who will join the workforce.

## 🏭 Investment and business ▄▄▄

Economic and investment activity in Vratsa district again remained relatively limited in 2021. The relative number of non-financial enterprises was 38 per 1,000 people, against 60 per 1,000 people as the national average. FTA acquisition expenditure shrank. FDI stock, however, rose considerably in 2021 to reach 1,240 EUR/person.

In 2021, production value in Vratsa district continued to rise and reached a record rate of increase of 65%, reaching 29,000 BGN/person.

Vratsa is also among the top-ranking districts as regards utilization of EU funding. By 30 June 2023, payments made to beneficiaries of EU operational programs reached 3,545 BGN/person, versus 2,836 BGN/person nationally. Within the district, the municipalities of Vratsa city, with over 5,000 BGN/person, and Mezdra, with over 3,000 BGN/person take the top places for utilization of EU funding.

## 🚍 Infrastructure ▄▄▄

The density of the road and railroad networks in Vratsa district nearly equals the national averages but road quality remains extremely low. The share of highways and first-class roads in the district is 9.9%, against 18.5% in the country. In 2022, the share of roads with surfaces in good condition was 34.3%, compared to the national average of 41.1%.

Households' internet access in Vratsa district also lags behind the country's average.

## % Local taxes ▄▄▄▄▄

In 2023, the average rate of the local taxes in the district's municipalities again remained relatively low. The average retail trade tax rate in the district is almost half the national average – 6.84 BGN/sq. m, against 13.04 BGN/sq. m nationally. Also lower are the rates for the motor vehicle tax, the tax on non-gratuitous acquisition of property and taxi transportation.

Of the monitored tax rates, in 2023 only the average one on non-residential immovable property of legal entities remained higher than its average counterpart in the country.

Within the district, the highest local taxes are levied by Kozloduy municipality, and the lowest ones – by Mizia municipality.

## 💼 Administration ▄▄▄

The average share of own revenues in the total revenues in the district's municipalities is relatively low – 20.4%, compared to 29.0% in the country. The coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues is also lower than the national average – 80.7%, against 84.2% in the country.

The 2023 self-assessment of Vratsa district's local municipalities regarding the development of e-government remains relatively low but that on the provision of one-stop shop services is relatively high. The transparency ratings of the local administration have fallen and lag behind the national average

# ⚭ SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ▪▪

## ⚏ Demography ▪▪▪

The natural population growth rate in the district remains considerably lower than the national average level, with –14.5‰ in the district, against –9.7‰ in the country on average. At the same time, the net migration rate is nil. The age dependency ratios remain significantly less favorable than the national average. In 2022, the ratio of the population aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 was 174.9%, compared to 165.9% in the country, and to those aged 15–64 it was 40.3%, against 37.7% in the country.

The share of urban population remains low – 59.9%, compared to 73.6% in the country, and its density is half the national average.

## ☰ Education ▪▪▪▪

The indicators of Vratsa district in the field of primary and secondary education remain relatively good, but the results are relatively low. The share of children attending kindergarten is high – 90.6% (compared to 87.3% in the country). In 2022, Vratsa again remained among the districts with the highest net enrolment rate in 5th–7th grade – 91.7%, compared to 90.7% in the country. The share of school year repeaters has decreased slightly and equals the national average of 1.2%. The alignment between vocational education and the profile of the economy in the district has improved and in 2023 it was close to the national average.

Students' results in 2022 were again relatively poor. The average score in the NEA in mathematics after 7th grade was 26.7 p., compared to 35.3 p. nationally. The average score in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 3.58, versus 3.93 nationally. The share of "fail" (below 3.00) grades was 24.5%, compared to 17.9% in the country.

The number of university students in the district is 8.3 per 1,000 people, compared to 33.2 per 1,000 people countrywide in 2022.

## ✚ Healthcare ▪

Vratsa ranks among the districts with the least developed healthcare (outranking only Yambol and Sliven) in 2022.

The average life expectancy is 70.5 years, compared to 71.9 years in the country. The share of health-insured population in Vratsa district is traditionally higher than the national average – 95.2%, versus 93.5% in the country in 2021. Healthcare in the district suffers from a shortage of doctors – both GPs and specialist physicians – and of hospital beds. In 2022, the number of beds in the local general hospitals was 4.7 per 1,000 people, while the national average was 5.9 beds per 1,000 people. The small number of doctors and hospital beds explains the relatively low hospitalization figures – 188 per 1,000 people, versus 235 per 1,000 people countrywide. In 2022, the infant mortality rate went up and was among the three highest in the country.

## ⚖ Security and justice ▪▪▪▪▪

The workloads of the criminal judges in Vratsa district have continued to rise and in 2022 they were slightly above the national average. One local judge heard an average of 10.7 cases a month, compared to 10.1 cases per judge nationally. The proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months continues to be the highest in the country – 97%, against the national average of 89%, while the share of pending cases is the lowest in the country – 4%, compared to 12% nationally.

The number of registered crimes against the person and property has continued to rise and Vratsa is now the district with the highest relative number in the country, outpacing only Montana district – 16.4 per 1,000 people in Vratsa, versus 11.6 per 1,000 people nationwide. Still, the detection rate in 2022 remained higher than the national average – 55%, versus 49% nationally.

## 🍃 Environment ▪▪

In 2021, the amounts of waste generated by households remained relatively small – 332 kg/person per annum, versus 445 kg/person in the country. However, the share handed over for treatment and recycling was again lower than the national average – 54%, versus 74% respectively.

The relatively low share of population living in urban settlements and the small population density in Vratsa district can account for the limited access of the households to a public sewerage system – 55.7%, compared to the national average of 74.8%. Access to public sewerage networks connected to wastewater treatment plants is also relatively low – available to 51.1% of the population, compared to the average of 66.8% countrywide.

Installed RES capacities in the district are close but below the national average per capita. The share of forest areas is low – 15% in 2022, versus 33% in the country, while degraded land makes up 0.22% of the district's territory, compared to 0.43% in the country.

## 🎭 Culture and tourism ▪

Cultural life and tourism are not strongly represented and in 2022 the district was still lagging behind the national average. Cinema visits increased but remained relatively low at 303 per 1,000 people, compared to 590 per 1,000 people nationally. Visits to local museums numbered 143 per 1,000 people, compared to 619 per 1,000 people nationally, and visits to libraries were 542 per 1,000 people, compared to 584 per 1,000 people in the country.

The number of beds in accommodation facilities relative to the population in the district is extremely low at 9 per 1,000 people, compared to 55 per 1,000 people nationally in 2022. Overnight stays are also relatively low at 731 per 1,000, against 3,739 per 1,000 nationally in the country. The share of people employed in the culture, sport and entertainment sector is 0.40%, against 1.02% countrywide.

# Key indicators for the district of Vratsa

| Economic Development Indicators | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | National average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices) | 15,572 | 17,781 | n.a. | 20,212 |
| Average gross annual salary of people employed in a labor or service contract (BGN) | 15,537 | 17,324 | n.a. | 18,733 |
| Share of people living below the national poverty line (%) | 33.2 | 33.5 | 31.5 | 22.9 |
| Share of the working-age population (%) | 57.4 | 57.6 | 57.3 | 58.5 |
| Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%) | 57.1 | 58.5 | 61.4 | 70.4 |
| Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%) | 12.5 | 10.3 | 10.7 | 5.2 |
| Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%) | 22.4 | 24.1 | 22.5 | 16.0 |
| Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%) | 22.9 | 18.8 | 15.6 | 29.8 |
| Production value per capita (BGN) | 17,615 | 29,013 | n.a. | 31,242 |
| Expenditures on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN) | 1,839 | 1,788 | n.a. | 3,097 |
| Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises per capita (cumulative) (EUR) | 769 | 1240 | n.a. | 4,098 |
| Share of households with broadband internet access (%) | 71.5 | 67.9 | 79.6 | 87.3 |
| Share of road surfaces in good condition (%) | 34.5 | 27.2 | 34.3 | 41.1 |
| Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%) | 70.3 | 72.5 | 80.7 | 84.2 |
| Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)* | 73.9 | 64.7 | 64.6 | 70.3 |

| Social Development Indicators | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | National average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Natural population growth rate (‰) | n.a. | n.a. | −14.5 | −9.7 |
| Net migration rate (‰) | n.a. | n.a. | 0.0 | 4.2 |
| Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature** | 3.99 | 3.75 | 3.58 | 3.93 |
| Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)** | 30.3 | 26.4 | 26.7 | 35.3 |
| Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%) | 91.8 | 92.3 | 91.7 | 90.7 |
| Average life expectancy (years)*** | 72.5 | 71.4 | 70.5 | 71.9 |
| Share of people with health insurance (%) | 92.6 | 93.8 | 95.2 | 93.5 |
| Population per one GP (persons) | 1,762 | 1,727 | 1,724 | 1,678 |
| Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population | 12.9 | 13.0 | 16.4 | 11.6 |
| Share of pending criminal cases (%) | 4.5 | 3.6 | 3.9 | 11.6 |
| Share of the population living in settlements with a public sewerage network (%) | 57.7 | 55.7 | n.a. | 74.8 |
| Generated household waste per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year) | 306 | 332 | n.a. | 445 |
| Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%) | 50.1 | 54.4 | n.a. | 74.0 |
| Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population) | 111 | 228 | 303 | 590 |
| Overnight stays in accommodation facilities (number/1,000 population) | 367 | 473 | 731 | 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.