

Stara Zagora District

▶ Population (2018)	317,712
▶ Territory (sq. km)	5151.1
▶ Number of settlements	207
▶ Share of urban population (%)	72



GDP per capita in the district of Stara Zagora has continued to register the second highest level after that of the capital city. Economic growth has contributed to high salaries, relatively high household incomes, and relatively low poverty levels. Conditions in the labor market are exceptionally favorable. Unemployment is down to 2.3%, one of the lowest rates in the country, while employment is close to the highest rates characteristic of the capital. The educational structure of the workforce suits the needs of the labor market. Investment activity slowed down slightly in 2017 but Stara Zagora remained one of the six districts with the highest FTA acquisition expenditure as well as foreign direct investment per capita. Production value was high and placed the district among the leaders in the country. Infrastructure is in good condition and provides favorable conditions for industrial development in the region. However, the district needs to invest in upgrading road quality. Local tax rates are among the lowest in the country,

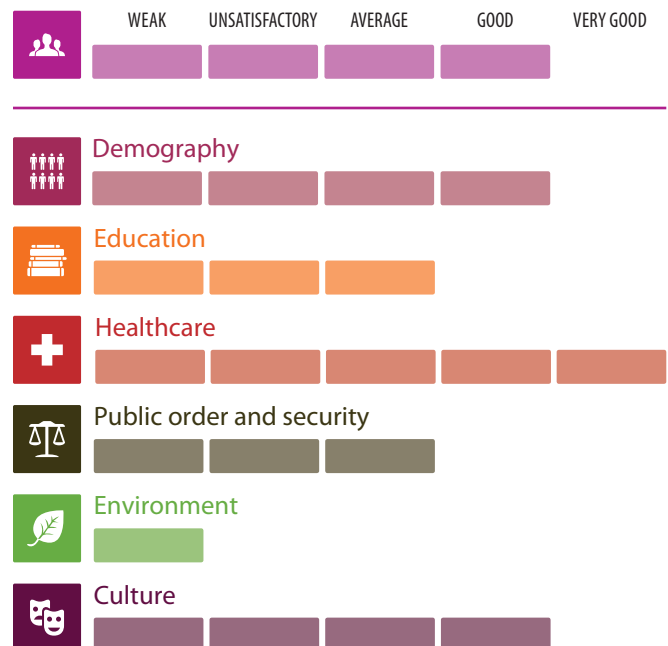
while administrations have improved their performance in the last year.

The district's population is gradually decreasing and ageing. Migration processes are relatively weak, with a negative net rate, but in comparison with others, the reported dynamics is not too negative. The educational system has achieved better results compared to the previous year; average grades at the matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature have reached national levels. The district faces the challenge of preventing school children to drop out of primary and secondary school and reducing the number of poor grades at matriculation exams. The level of healthcare is good, while doctor access rates are relatively favorable. Infant mortality is going down, though still slightly above the national average rate. In 2018 there was a sharp decline in the number of hospitalizations. High levels of atmospheric pollution are among the district's greatest problems. Generated household waste has also been on the increase.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Incomes and living standard

2017 was yet another year that saw an above-average GDP per capita in Stara Zagora, which reached 17,550 BGN. The increase of 8% was similar to the national average rate and was accompanied by increases in income. The annual average gross salary reached 12,248 BGN: the only higher salaries were in the capital. In 2017 the average income per household member was 5,478 BGN, close to the national average of 5,586 BGN but because of income structure specifics Stara Zagora was ranked seventh.

Relatively high income and the impressive GDP in the district have brought about a decline in poverty. The share of people living with income below the poverty line was 17.8% (compared to 22% on average in the country) and that of population living in material deprivation was 19% (compared to 20.9% in Bulgaria).

Labor market

The impressive development of the labor market in Stara Zagora continued in 2018. The unemployment rate dropped to 2.3%, while the only districts with lower unemployment were the capital and the district of Smolyan. The annual average employment rate of the working age population reached 71% (versus 67.6% nationally), while economic activity (72.7%) was above the national average rate of 71.5%. The only districts with higher employment rates were Sofia (capital city) and Sofia district. The population's age structure was relatively favorable, while the demographic replacement ratio, which shows the ratio between people entering the labor market and people leaving it, went over the national average figure by slightly over 2 p.p.

Despite the presence of universities in the district the share of people with university education in the workforce is one of the lowest in the country: 19% versus 28.2% nationally. At the same time, the share of people with primary and lower education aged 25–64 was similar to the national average, though slightly lower. Currently, the prevalent share of people with secondary education seems to suit the demand for labor in the regional economy.

Investment and economy

Investment activity has gone through a period of slight slowdown in recent years. FDI stock went down to reach 2,829 EUR/person in 2017 (versus 3,459 EUR on average in Bulgaria). There are 46 non-financial companies per 1,000 people operating in the district, which is below the national average but can be attributed to the large size of industrial and energy producing companies. FTA acquisition expenditure, regardless of the decline a year earlier, went through a recovery and reached

a level comparable to the national average level. Production value rose by over 10% to reach 23,892 BGN/person or close to its national average value, while the only districts with higher figures were the capital, Sofia, Burgas, and Plovdiv.

Infrastructure

The district's infrastructure indicators are very high and provide a good prerequisite for the development of industry in Stara Zagora. The district's central location and its flat terrain allow for rapid development of road and railroad infrastructure. The road network density is at a level similar to national average figures but the share of highways and first-class roads is exceptionally high: 28.6% versus 18.4% for Bulgaria. The density of railroad infrastructure has traditionally been above-average for the country. On the other hand, the share of road surfaces in good condition reported a drop from 46.6% to 40.7%, hence it is currently close to the national average level of 40.5%.

Local taxes

The average level of local taxes in the district's municipalities illustrates the efforts of local administrations to provide relatively good conditions for business development. The average rate of the tax on real estate of legal entities is the lowest in the country. That rate is highest in the municipality of Maglizh (2.5‰), and lowest in Pavel Banya (1‰). The tax on property transfer and that on taxi transportation are also below average. Municipalities in the district of Stara Zagora did not raise their tax rates in 2019.

Administration

Local administrations' positive development is visible in the significant improvement of their Active transparency rating for the last three years, which increased from 50.5% in 2017 to 71% in 2019. The municipality rated highest in the district was Gurkovo with 83.5%, up from 58% the previous year, while the one with the lowest rating was Bratya Dasklovi with 46.3% after a drop from 60.7% the previous year. Self-evaluation for offered electronic services was at the national average level while that for offered one-stop-shop services was slightly more favorable.

In 2018 cadastral map coverage reached 96.2% of the district's territory; only the districts of Kyustendil, Sofia (capital city), and Targovishte have reported higher coverage.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

Demographic tendencies have followed those in the nation as a whole: population in the district of Stara Zagora kept decreasing and ageing. The natural population growth rate dropped to -7.3% , which was slightly below the national average rate of -6.5% . The net migration rate was also negative: -1.2% ; it registered some deterioration in the last five years.

The age dependency ratio of the district's population rose slightly in recent years, albeit more slowly than the national average rate. Urbanization increased gradually: the share of urban population reached 72.3% .

Education

The net enrolment rate of pupils in 5th–8th grade in the district of Stara Zagora was one of the highest in the country: 92.9% versus the national average of 87.4% . Higher rates were reported in Vratsa and Gabrovo. The district's performance on the rest of the indicators was around the average country level. In 2017 the share of dropouts from primary and secondary education was 3.57% ; in 2018 the share of repeaters dropped slightly to 1.42% , still considerably above the national average rate of 0.91% .

There was some deterioration in the indicators for education results. An increased number of poor grades in Bulgarian language and literature led to a considerable lag in 2019: their share reached 9.7% versus 8.7% nationally. The average grade at that exam was the same as that in the country as a whole: "good" 4.06 .

Stara Zagora is the seat of Trakia University. In 2018 the number of students in higher education institutions per 1,000 people remained stable at 16 people or half the national average rate.

Healthcare

Traditionally, the level of healthcare in Stara Zagora district has been very high: one of the reasons is that Trakia University has a faculty of medicine. In 2018 the infant mortality rate dropped to 6.5 from 9.5% a year earlier, while hospitalizations dropped sharply from an average of 220.7 to 144.9 per 1,000 people.

Availability of specialist doctors is good in the district: one specialist served 447 people (versus 424 on average in the country). There were 1,471 people per GP (versus 1,673 in the country). Only GPs in the districts of Kyustendil, Lovech, and Vidin served fewer patients.

Public order and security

In 2018 the number of registered crimes against the person and property kept decreasing: a nation-wide tendency. It reached 11 per 1,000 people, below the national average rate of 12.1 per 1,000 people. The share of detected crimes was 54.7% or above the national average rate of 48.9% .

Criminal judges' workloads went down in the last three years to 10 cases a month, which was still above the national average rate of 9.2 cases.

The results reached by the system show a high rate of cases closed within three months: currently 94.8% , after an increase by almost 10 p.p. in the last five years. However, in 2018 there was an increase in the number of pending cases from 6.6 to 8.9% (close to the national average share of 8.7%).

Environment

The state of the environment in Stara Zagora district has been strongly affected by the profile of the regional economy. In 2017 carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere were ten times the national average rate and reached 4.102 t/sq. km. The main reason for such high emissions in the district's territory is the functioning of the "Maritsa-Iztok" energy complex.

Generated household waste per capita also rose in 2017 to reach 405 kg. Access to public sewerage is provided for 71.9% of the population (versus an average of 76% for the country as a whole) with 61.6% of the population having access to public sewerage connected with wastewater treatment plants.

Culture

Indicators on the intensity of cultural life in the district of Stara Zagora have been close to national average. The 10 museums functioning in the district attracted a great number of visitors. In 2018 visits reached 865 per 1,000 people, while the national average rate was 724. There are five theaters in the district and the number of performances in them has been on the increase in recent years. In 2018 theater and opera visit rates kept going up to reach an average of 426 per 1,000 people. At the same time, visits to the three operating cinemas reported a slight decrease and stayed below average. Library visits kept going down, too, and reached 431 per 1,000 people (versus 650 for the country as a whole).

Key indicators for the district of Stara Zagora

Indicators of economic development	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	14,366	13,555	16,248	17,550	n.a
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	4,957	5,090	5,151	5,478	n.a
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	10,035	10,667	11,250	12,248	n.a
Share of the poor relative to the country poverty line (%)	17.0	20.6	20.4	17.8	n.a
Economic activity rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	65.2	66.9	65.0	72.3	72.7
Employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	58.0	60.3	61.1	70.1	71.0
Unemployment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	11.0	9.7	6.0	2.9	2.3
Share of people with tertiary education aged 25–64 (%)	21.8	22.6	18.6	17.8	19.0
Number of non-financial enterprises per 1,000 people	44	46	45	46	n.a.
Expenditure on fixed tangible asset acquisition (BGN per capita)	2,760	2,674	2,091	2,434	n.a.
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR per capita)	2,964	3,173	2,855	2,829	n.a.
Share of households with Internet access (%)	53.7	61.4	66.7	66.8	71.4
Share of roads in good condition (%)	53.7	55.7	55.7	46.6	40.7
Cadastral map coverage (%)	15.0	15.7	15.7	47.2	96.2

Indicators of social development	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Natural growth rate of the population (‰)	-7.0	-6.9	-6.7	-7.0	-7.3
Net migration rate (‰)	0.5	-0.2	-0.4	-0.1	-1.2
Average grade at the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature	4.26	4.19	4.16	4.15	4.01
Percent of grades lower than 3.00 (pass level) at the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature	3.79	5.75	8.66	8.3	5.7
Net enrolment of the population in 5th–8th grade (%)	80.8	80.4	81.5	91.1	92.9
Share of people with health insurance (%)	89.0	90.1	89.7	89.3	89.3
Hospitalizations per 1,000 people	146.2	218.3	216.0	220.7	144.9
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	12.4	12.6	12.1	11.9	11.0
Clearance rate for crimes against the person and property from those registered in the current year (%)	40.3	41.7	56.1	55.9	54.7
Share of pending criminal cases from those registered in the current year (%)	6.4	5.8	4.7	6.6	8.9
Share of the population with access to sewerage connected to wastewater treatment plants (%)	61.3	61.3	61.4	61.6	n.a.
Carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere (tons of harmful emissions/sq. km)	3,678.3	4,383.6	3,686.8	4,102.2	n.a.
Visits to the cinema per 1,000 people	642	665	678	677	596
Visits to the theater per 1,000 people	359	366	392	384	426