

Vratsa District

▶ Population (2018)	164,097
▶ Territory (sq. km)	3619.8
▶ Number of settlements	128
▶ Share of urban population (%)	59



Though there are only seven districts in the country with higher GDP per capita and only four with a higher annual average salary than Vratsa, the living standard in the district is not very high. One of the main reasons is the poor condition of the labor market: unemployment is twice the national average, while employment went down in 2018 – contrary to the national trend. Enterprise investment activity is low and there is little interest in the district from abroad. Vratsa has traditionally been among the districts with lowest ratings in infrastructural development. There is no highway passing through the district's territory while first-class roads make up only 10% of the road network. The tax environment is relatively favorable; in 2018 Vratsa municipalities reached their highest rating ever in the AIP Active transparency rating of local government. The district has the best age structure in north-western Bul-

garia; it is the only district in the region where the population aged 65+ amounts to less than 40% of that aged 15–64. Though there is a lasting improvement visible in the work of educational establishments in enlisting and keeping children at school, the quality of education is not very high. Access to healthcare services in the district is less favorable than that in the rest of the country. On top of that, the financial problems of one of its leading general hospitals in 2018 led to further deterioration. Crime rates are high, but in detection rate Vratsa rates only second to Razgrad. The low rate of urbanized areas prevents the increase in the share of population connected to wastewater treatment plants but the overall condition of the environment remains good. Vratsa district is characterized by a relatively low intensity of cultural life.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Income and living standard



Labor market



Investment and economy



Infrastructure



Local taxes



Administration



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



Demography



Education



Healthcare



Public order and security



Environment



Culture



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Incomes and living standard

The living standard is not very high although there are only seven districts in the country with GDP per capita rates higher than that registered in Vratsa (11,684 BGN), and only four with higher annual average salaries (11,460 BGN). The reason behind is the unsatisfactory condition of the labor market, as well as the specifics of the local economy: the dominant role of energy production (the Kozloduy Nuclear power station) means that high salaries are concentrated among a relatively small number of employees, while the rest of the economy remains depressed. This fact affects the annual average income per household member: it reached 4,582 BGN in 2017, remaining far from the national average of 5,586 BGN. The relative share of the population living below the poverty line, 29%, was above the national average of 22%. The same can be said of the relative share of people living in material deprivation: 31.3% in Vratsa versus 20.9% in Bulgaria as a whole.

Labor market

The annual average rate of unemployment in the district declined for the fourth successive year. The level registered in 2018 – 10.1% – was the lowest since 2012, but it was still almost twice the national average. The downward trend in unemployment both in 2018 and in the 2015–2017 period was partly due to the declining economic activity of the working age population. In 2018 employment rates dropped to 54.4%, the lowest rate in the country after Montana (52.2%). Economic activity was also among the lowest in the country, and its downturn in 2018 was indicative of the local economy's problems.

The educational structure of the workforce is less favorable than that in most other districts. The relative share of college graduates aged 25–64 (21.5%) is below the national average (28.2%).

Investment and economy

In 2017 the investment activity of enterprises, measured by their FTA expenditure, dropped for the third successive year to reach 1,488 BGN/person. That was the lowest value in the district for the last decade with annual investment decrease from 77 to 60% of national average levels between 2014 and 2017. As of the end of 2017, FDI relative to the local population was 651 EUR/person (versus 3,459 EUR/person nationally). Entrepreneurial activity in the local population was also considerably lower than the national average with 36 enterprises per 1,000 people in 2017 versus average of 57 enterprises per 1,000 people in the country.

The only indicator where the district performed better than the national average level was utilization of EU funds: in 2019,

it reached 2,106 BGN/person or higher than the national average by about 300 BGN.

Infrastructure

Vratsa has traditionally been among the districts getting the lowest rating in infrastructural development. Road density is similar to the national average but there is no highway running through the district's territory and first-class roads make up only 10% of the road network length (versus 18.4% in the country as a whole). The only districts which had lower relative shares of roads in good condition in 2018 were Razgrad and Ruse. The density of railroads is 3.1 km/100 sq. km territory, close to the national average of 3.6 km/100 sq. km. In 2018, 65.5% of households had Internet access (versus 72.1% on average nationally).

Local taxes

Vratsa is one of the districts with a relatively favorable tax environment, with most rates of the monitored taxes below average levels. The only tax with an average rate higher in the district than that in the country is the annual tax on immovable property of legal entities. This is precisely where the most significant raise took place in the last few years. It was raised considerably (from 1.5 to 3.2‰) in the Kozloduy municipality in 2017, and from 2.0 to 2.5‰ in Mizia in 2019. In 2017 the Kozloduy municipality raised the property transfer tax from 1.5 to 2.0%. At the same time, after the initial 2017 raising of the tax rate for taxi transport to 400 BGN, it was reduced to 300 BGN in 2018. Similar to other districts in the north-west, the levels of the license tax for retailers are exceptionally low here.

Administration

In 2018 municipal administrations in the district of Vratsa achieved their highest rating up to that moment in the AIP Active transparency rating (74% compared to the national average level at 70.7%). The Mezdra municipality was ranked as the most transparent one with 86%, while that of Hairedin was rated lowest with 52%.

The self-evaluation of the district's municipal administrations on the quality and range of services offered by them was slightly above average (3.04 out of 5.00 versus the national average at 2.95 out of 5.00). At the same time, their readiness to offer one-stop-shop services to individuals and businesses (2.86 out of 5.00) was lagging behind the national average (3.07 out of 5.00).

In 2018 cadastral map coverage reached 68.8% – an enormous progress compared with the previous year (13.1%), but still below the national average (72.4%).

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

Though being one of the districts in best demographic condition in the Bulgarian north-west, Vratsa has still been lagging significantly behind national average levels. The district is the single one in the region where its population aged 65+ corresponds to less than 40% of that aged 15–64. At the same time, the better age structure can be said to increase the population's affinity to migrate: Vratsa is the district with the highest unfavorable ratio in north-western Bulgaria of the number of leavers to the number of settlers. The net migration rate in 2018 was –7.5‰, the second lowest figure after the 9.1‰ registered in 2016, and slightly better than the district of Vidin. 58.7% of the population lives in urban areas, which makes Vratsa one of the relatively poorly urbanized districts in the country.

Education

There has been a lasting improvement in the indicators for the ability of educational establishments to enlist and keep pupils in school. Vratsa is the district with the second highest enrolment rate of the population in 5th-8th grade (93% in the 2018/2019 school year) – right after the district of Gabrovo with 95%. Between 2015/2016 and 2018/2019 school years the relative share of repeaters dropped almost twice, from 1.21 to 0.66%, a level more favorable than the national average of 0.91%. During the 2017/2018 school year the relative share of dropouts from primary and secondary education rose to reach 3.15% (versus 2.98% nationally). However, the average grade school leavers from the district achieved at the matriculation exam in Bulgarian Language and literature has traditionally been below average. In the last 5 years the relative share of fail grades has also been above average: in 2019 it was 10.6% (versus 8.7% nationally).

Vratsa is not among the leaders in higher education. Still, in the district there are two branches of universities (located elsewhere) with about 1,000 students.

Healthcare

Healthcare in the district of Vratsa is characterized by an access to the services of GPs and specialists below national average levels. In addition to this, the financial problems of one of the leading general hospitals in the district led to the closing of wards and a reduction in the number of beds available to local people from 788 to 688. Thus the ratio deteriorated to 4.18 beds per 1,000 people, while the national average was 5.34 beds per 1,000 people.

At the same time, population morbidity measured by hospitalization rates has been more favorable than the national average. In 2018 the rate of people with health insurance was 91.4% of the district's population (versus 87.9% nationally).

Public order and security

The district's high rating in this area is due to the relatively effective work of the local judiciary. The workloads of criminal judges at the District court (7.3 cases a month per judge) is below the country average but unlike the situation in other districts, this fact does not entail better results in ensuring speedy trial process. In 2018 Vratsa registered the lowest share of pending criminal cases at the District court (4%), as well as one of the highest shares of criminal cases closed within three months (95.2%).

At the same time, the district registered the highest crime rate (15.4 crimes per 1,000 people). As regards the detection rate (68.7%), Vratsa, ranking just below Razgrad (72.0%), was considerably above the national average of 48.9%.

Environment

Generated household waste in the district amounted to 289 kg/person annually, visibly below 435 kg/person on average in the country as a whole. The low urbanization has obstructed the increase in the share of the population connected with wastewater treatment plants. In 2017, 57.2% of the population lived in settlements with public sewerage systems, 50.9% of them connected with wastewater treatment plants. In both indicators, the district is considerably below the national average levels of 76.0% and 63.4%, respectively. Carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere amounted to 102.2 t/sq. km of the territory: almost four times better than the country average rate.

Culture

Cultural life in the district of Vratsa is characterized by a relatively low intensity, with only libraries registering a rate of visits close to the national average rate. Local theatres fail to take advantage of the heightened audience interest nationally. Between 2015 and 2018 theatre visits in Bulgaria rose from 302 to 340 per 1,000 people, while they dropped in Vratsa from 229 to 135 visits per 1,000 people. The number of visits to local museums and cinemas was five and three times below the national average rate, respectively.

Key indicators for the district of Vratsa

Indicators of economic development	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	9,520	9,305	9,579	11,684	n.a.
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	4,234	4,426	4,547	4,582	n.a.
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	9,861	10,332	10,988	11,460	n.a.
Share of the poor relative to the country poverty line (%)	33.0	37.7	39.9	29.0	n.a.
Economic activity rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	64.4	61.0	57.9	62.3	60.7
Employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	52.9	50.3	50.0	55.3	54.5
Unemployment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	18.1	17.7	13.7	11.1	10.1
Share of people with tertiary education aged 25–64 (%)	22.1	21.1	19.2	19.9	21.5
Number of non-financial enterprises per 1,000 people	33	34	35	36	n.a.
Expenditure on fixed tangible asset acquisition (BGN per capita)	2,152	1,880	1,771	1,488	n.a.
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR per capita)	781	503	451	651	n.a.
Share of households with Internet access (%)	38.5	31.1	70.8	64.0	65.5
Share of roads in good condition (%)	21.2	15.0	24.6	22.0	26.5
Cadastral map coverage (%)	7.1	7.1	8.5	13.1	68.8

Indicators of social development	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Natural growth rate of the population (‰)	-10.8	-11.3	-10.3	-12.2	-11.4
Net migration rate (‰)	-7.4	-6.9	-9.1	-6.3	-7.5
Average grade at the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature	4.30	4.12	4.04	4.14	4.00
Percent of grades lower than 3.00 (pass level) at the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature	4.1	7.7	10.8	8.6	6.8
Net enrolment of the population in 5th–8th grade (%)	85.0	84.4	85.8	91.9	93.0
Share of people with health insurance (%)	88.6	90.8	91.7	91.1	91.4
Hospitalizations per 1,000 people	191.0	217.2	219.5	220.0	156.2
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	15.1	15.6	14.0	15.5	15.4
Clearance rate for crimes against the person and property from those registered in the current year (%)	51.4	51.1	64.0	58.8	68.7
Share of pending criminal cases from those registered in the current year (%)	8.1	5.2	4.2	4.1	4.0
Share of the population with access to sewerage connected to wastewater treatment plants (%)	32.3	51.7	50.5	50.9	n.a.
Carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere (tons of harmful emissions/sq. km)	110.8	110.8	102.2	102.2	n.a.
Visits to the cinema per 1,000 people	17	55	57	238	191
Visits to the theater per 1,000 people	279	229	184	157	135