

Sliven District

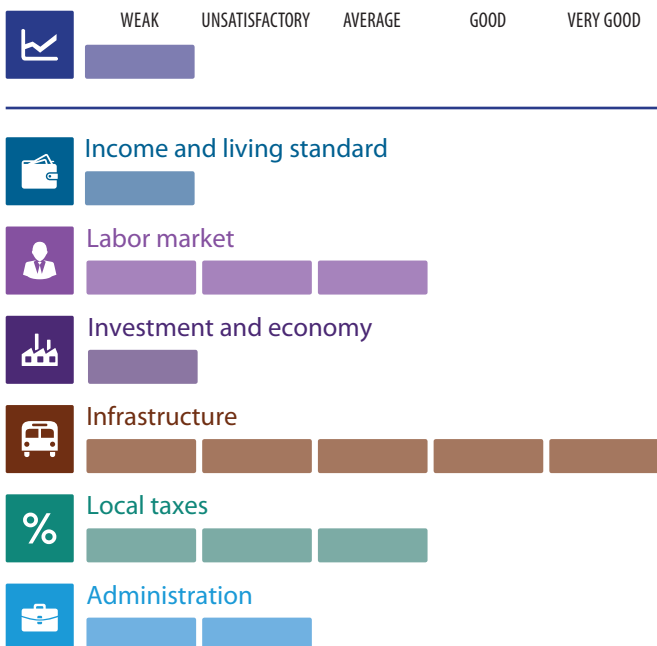
▶ Population (2019)	184,119
▶ Territory (sq. km)	3,544.1
▶ Number of settlements	110
▶ Share of urban population (%)	65.7



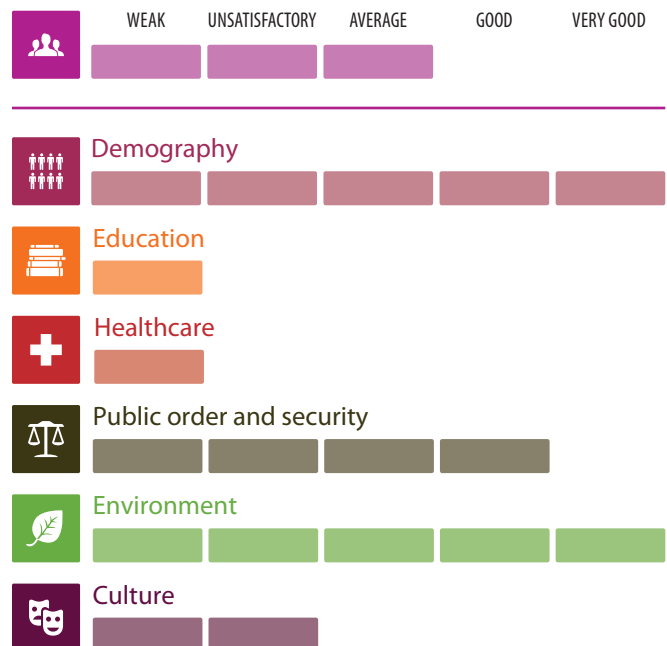
GDP and salaries in Sliven district have been growing, but at a relatively slow pace and the regional economy continues to lag behind the national trends. The most serious challenge facing the local labor market is the deteriorating educational structure of the workforce. Investment activity is extremely weak and the district ranks last in the country in this category. Sliven is also the district with the lowest utilization rate of European funds. The basic infrastructure retains its high level. Sliven is the area with the highest share of road surfaces in good condition. The average rate of local taxes in the municipalities of Sliven district differs significantly from the average rates in the country. The transparency of the local administration continues to improve.

Despite the negative demographic trends throughout the country, Sliven district presents a relatively good population picture. On the education indicators, the district scores worst in the whole country. Sliven remains the district with the highest share of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary school. The poor assessment of its healthcare is mainly due to the high infant mortality rate. The crime rate in the district is on the decrease, while the detection rate remains higher than average. The relatively high rating of Sliven district in terms of the environmental indicators is primarily the result of the low relative volume of generated household waste and the large share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling. Interest in the local libraries remains high.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■

Income and living standard ■

Despite the low base, in 2018 GDP and salaries in Sliven district grew at a slower pace than the average one for the country's economy. GDP per capita was only 7,600 BGN, which is half the national average of 15,600 BGN. The average annual gross salary increased by 10% to reach 10,000 BGN, against 13,800 BGN in the country. Despite their higher growth rate in 2019, household incomes still remained relatively low at 4,446 BGN/person, compared to 6,013 BGN/person nationally.

These indicators are also a prerequisite for a high poverty level in the district. In 2019, the share of the population living with material deprivation was 34.0%, versus 19.9% in the country. Identical to it is the share of the population living below the national poverty line – 33.9%, against 22.6% countrywide.

Labor market ■■■

The economic activity of the population has been increasing in line with the increase in employment and the drop in unemployment rates, yet in 2019 the values of all three indicators remained less favorable than in the country on average. The rate of economic activity increased by 3 p.p. to reach 71%, compared to 74% in the country. The employment rate went up to 64.5% after an increase of 3.3 p.p., versus the national average of 70.1%. The unemployment rate registered a significant drop from 9.9% in 2018 to 6.5% in 2019, compared to 4.2% nationally.

The labor market still faces the challenge posed by the persistently worsening educational structure of the workforce. In 2019 the share of the population aged 25-64 years with primary or lower education reached 37.6%, which was a record low for the country. The share of people with higher education remained relatively limited: 21%, versus the national average of 28%.

At the same time, the district presents a rather favorable picture of its demography – the population replacement ratio of people aged 15-19 to those aged 60-64 is the highest in the country at 89%, while the national average is 66%.

Investment and economy ■

Investment activity in Sliven is extremely weak, which places the district last in the whole country in this category. The number of non-financial enterprises in the district rose in 2018 to 39 per 1,000 persons, yet it remained relatively low compared to the national average of 59 per 1,000 persons. Domestic and foreign investment was also low. FTA expenditure was 1,160 BGN/person, versus the average of 2,750 BGN/person nationally. Cumulative FDI in the district amounted to 866 EUR/person, which is nearly four times lower than the 3,560 EUR/person on a national level. Production value in the district was

worth only 11,800 BGN/person – more than half the average figure for the national economy.

Sliven is also the district with the lowest utilization rate of European funds. By 15 June 2020 the payments made in the district to beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 957 BGN/person, against 1,976 BGN/person on a national level. Within the district, the highest amounts were utilized by the municipality of Sliven.

Infrastructure ■■■■■

The basic physical infrastructure in Sliven district retains its high quality. The density of the road and railroad networks is comparable to the national average. In 2019 the share of highways and first-class roads remained comparatively high.

Sliven is the district with the largest share of road surfaces in good condition – 79.4%, whereas in the country it is 41.4% on average. Digital connectivity is also relatively good, and in 2019 the relative share of households with internet access went up to 77.2%, versus 75.1% nationally.

Local taxes ■■■■

In 2020, the average rates of local taxes in the municipalities of Sliven district again remained considerably different from the country's respective averages. While the tax rates on the non-residential immovable property of legal entities and on motor vehicles remained relatively high, the local rates for retail trade and taxi transportation were about 1/4 lower than the country's respective averages. The local tax on the acquisition of property almost equaled the national average rates.

Administration ■■

Against the background of the rapid progress in cadastral map coverage in the rest of the country over the past two years – reaching nearly 91% of Bulgaria's territory – in 2019 Sliven had managed to cover only 64%, which places the district last in the whole of Bulgaria for this category.

The local authorities' self-assessment on the development of e-government and on the provision of one-stop shop services marks a significant improvement, but in 2020 the rating still remained considerably below the national average. The transparency ratings of the municipalities in the district have been steadily rising and in 2020 reached an average of 77.8%, versus 70.7% countrywide. The highest rating of over 91% was achieved by the municipality of the city of Sliven; however, there are wide margins between the ratings given to the municipalities across the district.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

In 2019, against the negative demographic tendencies in the country, Sliven district still retained its standing with relatively good population indicators. The natural growth rate, which has been on the rise, reached a level of -2.9% that year, compared to the national average of -6.7% . At the same time the population is shrinking fast due to intensive out-migration, with the net migration rate in 2019 down to -10% and being the lowest in the whole country.

The age dependency ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0-14 has marked a minimal rise, but at 109% it still ranks Sliven district first in the country, where that ratio is 150%. The share of the district's population living in urban areas is relatively low – 66%, compared to 74% in the country, but the population density measured as the average number of people per unit area remains second highest in the country after that in the capital.

Education

Sliven is the district with the lowest results as regards the indicators for education. The share of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education is the highest in the whole country. The share of repeaters increased for two years in a row to reach 3.24% in 2019, against 0.89% in the country. The number of early dropouts decreased, yet their share still remained twice as high as the national average – 5.7%, versus 2.9% respectively.

The shortage of teachers is still a big challenge facing the district. In 2019, their numbers rose considerably but remained relatively small – 83 teachers per 1,000 students, compared to 89 teachers per 1,000 students on average nationally.

Figures for the students' performance at the 2020 matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature come close to the average ones for the country. The average grade achieved by the students in the district was 4.16, versus the national average of 4.20, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) was 10.5%, compared to the national average of 8.2%. Although there was some improvement throughout 2019 and 2020, the students' performance at the external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade was again quite poor – 29.3 points compared to the average of 36.3 points nationally.

Healthcare

The poor results of Sliven district in the area of healthcare are mostly due to the exceptionally high infant mortality rate. In 2019 it rose again to reach 14.4‰ – the highest in the whole country and far above the national average of 5.6‰.

The numbers of doctors and hospital beds are close to but still below the national average. One local GP cares for 1,841 persons on average, compared to 1,688 persons per doctor countrywide. The index for access to specialist physicians is also more unfavorable than the national average. The number of

beds in the local general hospitals has been steadily increasing in recent years, but it still remains relatively low.

The number of people treated in the local general hospitals was 208 per 1,000 persons in 2019, compared to 254 per 1,000 persons countrywide.

Public order and security

Criminal judges in Sliven district have relatively heavy workloads, yet in 2019 this did not have an adverse effect on the speedy delivery of justice. One judge heard an average of 10 cases a month, compared to 9 cases nationally. The proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months reached 96%, compared to the average of 90% nationwide.

The number of crimes in the district decreased throughout 2018 and 2019, while the detection rate remained higher than the national average. In 2019 the registered crimes against the person and property in Sliven district amounted to 10.2 per 1,000 persons, against 11.1 per 1,000 persons nationwide. The detection rate fell slightly to 64.5% but it still remained considerably above the average figure of 52.1% reported that year for the whole country.

Environment

The relatively high rating of Sliven district in terms of the environmental indicators is primarily due to the low relative volume of generated household waste and the high share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling. In 2018, the volume of household waste shrank to 307 kg/person, against 409 kg/person on a national scale, while 92% of it was handed over for treatment and recycling, compared to the national average of 71%. The relative volume of carbon dioxide emissions in the district was half that of the country's average.

A challenge facing the district is the limited share of the population – only 65% – with access to public sewerage networks, compared to 76% countrywide, and the share of sewerage systems connected to waste water treatment plants – 57% in the district, against the national average of 64%.

Culture

In 2019 the number of visits to the local cinemas and museums in Sliven district still remained relatively low, while interest in libraries exceeded the national average. Registered visits to the cinemas in the district numbered 90 per 1,000 persons on average, against the national figure of 659 per 1,000 persons. Visits to the local theaters amounted to an average of 313 per 1,000 persons, compared to 362 per 1,000 persons nationally, and to museums – 485 per 1,000 persons, versus 770 per 1,000 persons nationwide. Visit to libraries increased for the third consecutive year and reached 804 per 1,000 persons, against 683 per 1,000 persons nationwide.

Key indicators for the district of Sliven

Indicators of economic development	2017	2018	2019	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	7,046	7,600	n.a.	15,615
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	3,790	3,790	4,446	6,013
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	9,113	10,005	n.a.	13,775
Share of the poor relative to the national poverty line (%)	n.a.	35.6	33.9	22.6
Employment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	58.9	61.2	64.5	70.1
Unemployment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	10.2	9.9	6.5	4.2
Share of the population aged 25-64 with primary or lower education (%)	29.2	33.4	37.6	17.6
Share of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education (%)	21.2	21.1	20.9	28.0
Production value (BGN/person)	10,891	11,803	n.a.	25,855
Expenditure on fixed tangible asset acquisition (BGN/person)	1,060	1,160	n.a.	2,750
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	737	866	n.a.	3,560
Share of households with Internet (%)	58.5	75.2	77.2	75.1
Share of roads in good condition (%)	70.4	80.0	79.4	41.4
Density of the road network (km/100 sq.km territory)	16.6	16.5	16.4	17.9
AIP active transparency rating of the local self-government (%)*	67.1	71.0	77.8	70.7

Indicators of social development	2017	2018	2019	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	-2.8	-3.6	-2.9	-6.7
Net migration rate (‰)	-4.4	-6.8	-10.0	-0.3
Average grade in the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.96	4.04	4.16	4.20
Average grade in the external exam in mathematics at the end of 7 th grade (points)**	24.0	25.8	29.3	36.3
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	68	73	83	89
Net enrolment of the population in 5 th -8 th grade (%)	84.2	85.7	84.9	86.6
Share of people with health insurance (%)	86.8	86.6	87.5	88.8
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,818	1,856	1,841	1,688
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	11.8	11.3	10.2	11.1
Workload of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	10.8	9.8	9.8	9.1
Share of the population with access to public sewerage networks (%)	65.2	65.3	n.a.	76.2
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	355	307	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	89.4	91.7	n.a.	70.9
Visits to the cinema per 1,000 persons	97	66	90	659
Visits to the theater per 1,000 persons	339	285	313	362

* The data for 2019 are included in the 2020 study. The same also applies for the previous years.

** The data refer to the 2019-2020 academic year while the matriculation exam was held in 2020. The same also applies for the previous years.