

Stara Zagora District

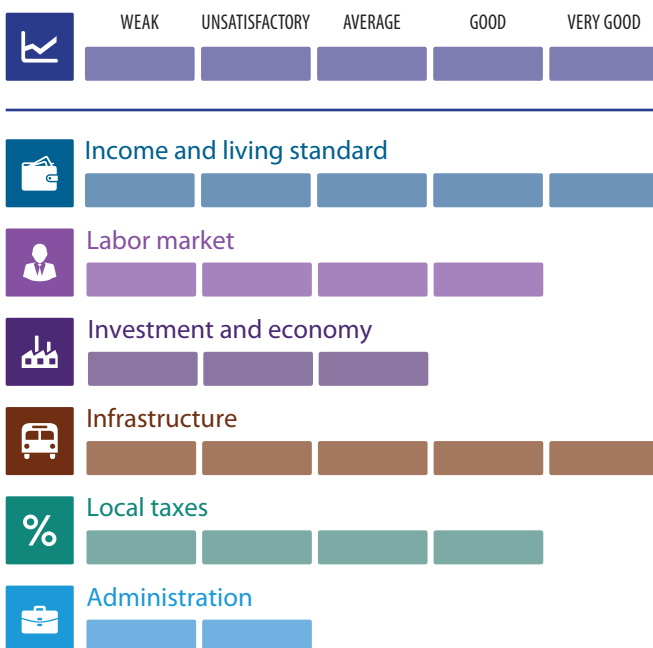
▶ Population (2019)	313,396
▶ Territory (sq. km)	5,151.1
▶ Number of settlements	206
▶ Share of urban population (%)	72.4



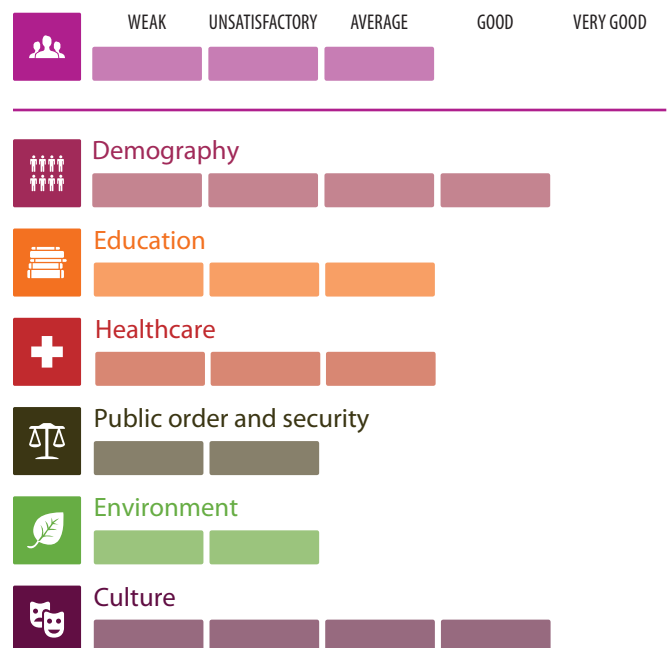
Stara Zagora district ranks second in the country after the capital in GDP per capita, and third in average salaries. Poverty indicators are close to the national average. In 2019, there was practically no unemployment in the district, and employment figures were among the highest in the country. However, this did not result in overcoming the existing deficits in the educational structure of the workforce. Stara Zagora is among the leaders in production value and attracts a relatively large volume of investment. Thanks to the Trakia highway, the share of first-class roads and highways is relatively large, but road quality is gradually deteriorating. Local taxes in the district remain below the national average, despite some increases. The results of the municipal administrations' self-assessment of the administrative services they provide

are deteriorating and so are the ratings of the municipal authorities' transparency. The district has deteriorating demographic indicators, while the relatively low negative net migration rate keeps population numbers at a relatively constant level. School education has achieved results similar to the national average, with an improvement in the teacher-student ratio. The healthcare system provides relatively good access to doctors and morbidity in the area is low, though infant mortality is alarmingly high. The judicial system in Stara Zagora is among the busiest in the country, yet it manages to be relatively efficient. The district has the highest carbon emissions in the country, and the amount of household waste is growing. Among the cultural activities in the district, museums attract most of the interest.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living standard

Thanks to the energy complex located on its territory, GDP per capita in Stara Zagora district is the second highest in the country after that in the capital. In 2018, it was 17,300 BGN/person, but in recent years its growth has been relatively slow. After an increase of 32% over the previous five years, in 2018 the average annual gross salary reached 13,200 BGN, placing the district third in the country after the capital and Sofia district.

Despite the high levels of GDP and average salaries, in 2019 household incomes remained below the national average – after a minimal improvement in the previous two years, they reached an average of 5,600 BGN per household member. In terms of the poverty indicators, the figures for Stara Zagora district were almost identical to the national average – 23% of the households in the district were below the national poverty line, and 20% were living with material deprivation.

Labor market

Unemployment in Stara Zagora district was extremely low in 2019. The unemployment rate among the population aged 15+ fell from 11% in 2014 to 1.4% in 2019, the lowest after that of Sofia district. Along with low unemployment, the labor market in the district was characterized by a very high employment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 – nearly 75%, compared to the national average of 70%.

In 2019, the share of the working population with higher education increased slightly to 21% but remained significantly below the national average of 28%. However, the share of the workforce with primary or lower education was slightly above average – nearly 19%, and the indicator showed a gradual deterioration within a three-year period. The demographic replacement 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, was 69%, which indicates an impending contraction of the labor force.

Investment and economy

In 2018, production value in the district was relatively high and with 25,200 BGN/person, Stara Zagora was preceded only by Sofia (capital city), Sofia district, Burgas and Plovdiv. FDI accumulated by the end of 2018 reached 2,937 EUR/person, remaining relatively unchanged for five years in a row. FTA acquisition expenditure again showed a gradual increase in 2018 and reached 2,621 BGN/person.

The district's performance in terms of the utilization of European funds was not so good. Within the two programming periods, by 15 June 2020 payments made to beneficiaries of EU projects amounted to 1,579 BGN/person, compared to 1,976 BGN/per-

son for the country on average. The district has a relatively small number of enterprises on its territory – in 2018 they were 48 per 1000 persons, compared to the national average of 59 per 1,000 persons.

Infrastructure

With the Trakia highway passing through the territory of the district, the share of highways and first-class roads in the total road infrastructure is high – 29%, compared to 19% for the country on average. In recent years, however, the quality of the road network has deteriorated considerably.

The density of the road network in Stara Zagora district is similar to the national average – 17.5 km/100 sq.km, and has been increasing in recent years. The density of the railway network is also high – 5.1 km/100 sq.km, against 3.6 km/100 sq.km on average for the country. In recent years, access to high-speed Internet has been expanding: in 2019 it was already available to 78% of the population.

Local taxes

Unlike most districts with a high degree of economic development, in 2020 Stara Zagora kept its municipal tax rates relatively low. The tax on motor vehicles after taking into account the environmental component was exactly equal to the national average of 1.51 BGN/kW. The annual tax on taxi transportation of 312 BGN on average was very close to the legal minimum and was among the lowest in the country, probably due to the lack of such a service in most municipalities in the district. In 2020, there was a significant increase in the average tax on the immovable property of legal entities – up to 1.55‰, though the rate remained well below the national average of 2.01‰. Of all the monitored taxes, the only one which was higher than the average one countrywide was the retail trade tax – 13.87 BGN/sq.m retail space.

Administration

In 2019, the cadastral map coverage in the district exceeded 95% of its territory. However, the self-assessment of the municipalities in Stara Zagora district regarding the electronic services provided by them declined to an average of 2.91 p. out of 5 p., and that of administrative services at one-stop shop also decreased to 2.56 p. The average AIP Active transparency rating of the local municipalities also fell from 71% in 2019 to 65% in 2020.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

In line with the trend within the whole country, the natural growth rate in Stara Zagora district has been deteriorating in recent years and in 2019 it decreased to -7.6% , or 1 p.p. below the national average for that year. At the same time, the net migration rate in the district has been fluctuating around a balance between the number of immigrants and emigrants, and in 2019 its value was -1.8% . The indicators for demographic replacement show that the population ageing processes in the district are accelerating.

Stara Zagora district is relatively urbanized, with a 72% share of the urban population. However, population density in the cities is decreasing and in 2019 it was 1,482 persons/sq.km, compared to 1,666 persons/sq.km a decade earlier.

Education

The ratio between the numbers of teachers and students has been improving gradually, with the number of teachers per 1,000 students increasing from 60 in 2015 to 87 in 2019. The district is also among the leaders in school enrolment, with 91.4% of the children in the respective age groups attending junior high school. Despite these favorable trends, however, the share of repeaters remains high – 1.41% of all students, compared to the national average of 0.89%. The share of dropouts has also been increasing and in 2019 they made up 3.7%, compared to an average of 2.9% nationwide.

In most years, the students from Stara Zagora district have achieved results in the matriculation exams close to the national average and in the summer session of 2020 their average grade in Bulgarian language and literature was 4.18, against 4.20 on average for the country. Slightly below the average – 7.9% – was the share of “fail” grades (below 3.00). There was some improvement in the results at the exam in mathematics after 7th grade, where the students from the district achieved an average of 31.8 points, which, however, is still lower than the national average of 36.3 points for 2020.

Healthcare

In recent years the indicator of access to GPs in Stara Zagora district has deteriorated to 1,485 people per doctor on average, but this ratio is still far more favorable than the national average of 1,688 people per doctor. The index assessing the provision with specialist physicians is slightly less favorable than the national average. The district’s health system has a relatively good coverage: in 2019 people with health insurance constituted 90% of the total population.

The number of beds in the general hospitals in Stara Zagora district is relatively small – 498 per 100,000 people or below the national average of 550 per 100,000 people, and the figure has

been fluctuating in recent years. Patient care loads have been generally low, with 189 out of every 1,000 people having undergone hospital treatment in 2019. Infant mortality, however, took a sharp upward turn in 2019 to reach 10.4‰, which is the second highest rate after that in Sliven district.

Public order and security

The courts in Stara Zagora district have some of the biggest workloads in the country. In 2019, criminal judges heard 11.2 cases per month on average, with a tendency for this number to rise. However, the speedy delivery of justice is similar to the national average.

In recent years, there has been a minimal decline in crime rates in the district, with crimes against the person and property in 2019 down to 11.4 per 1,000 persons, compared to 12.6 per 1,000 persons in 2015. Detection of this type of crime has also been improving, fluctuating between 53% and 55% in the past few years.

Environment

Due to the operation of coal-fired power plants in its territory, Stara Zagora is the district with the largest carbon emissions in the country – 3,831 t/sq. km of carbon dioxide, or almost four times more than in the capital. The amounts of household waste generated by the district’s residents have also been on the rise and in 2018 they reached 412 kg /person per year, compared to 296 kg/person only two years earlier. The share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling increased to 86% in 2018, versus 71% as the country’s average.

The district is lagging behind as regards the share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage – 72% in 2018, compared to 76% nationally. Of the households who have access to public sewerage networks, 62% are connected to a wastewater treatment plant.

Culture

From among the indicators for the intensity of cultural life, the highest value in Stara Zagora is reported for visits to museums – 1,060 visits per 1,000 persons in 2019. Above the national average were visits to theaters – 459 per 1,000 persons, compared to 362 per 1,000 persons countrywide. On the other hand, interest in cinemas and libraries was more modest that year, with 635 and 572 visits per 1,000 persons respectively.

Key indicators for the district of Stara Zagora

Indicators of economic development	2017	2018	2019	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	17,550	17,273	n.a.	15,615
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	5,478	5,478	5,610	6,013
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	12,248	13,190	n.a.	13,775
Share of the poor relative to the national poverty line (%)	n.a.	17.8	23.1	22.6
Employment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	70.1	71.0	74.7	70.1
Unemployment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	2.9	2.3	1.4	4.2
Share of the population aged 25-64 with primary or lower education (%)	14.9	18.0	18.7	17.6
Share of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education (%)	17.8	19.0	20.7	28.0
Production value (BGN/person)	23,892	25,207	n.a.	25,855
Expenditure on fixed tangible asset acquisition (BGN/person)	2,434	2,621	n.a.	2,750
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	2,829	2,937	n.a.	3,560
Share of households with Internet (%)	66.8	71.4	77.9	75.1
Share of roads in good condition (%)	46.6	40.7	37.6	41.4
Density of the road network (km/100 sq.km territory)	17.6	17.5	17.5	17.9
AIP active transparency rating of the local self-government (%)*	60.1	71.0	65.1	70.7

Indicators of social development	2017	2018	2019	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	-7.0	-7.3	-7.6	-6.7
Net migration rate (‰)	-0.1	-1.2	-1.8	-0.3
Average grade in the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.01	4.06	4.18	4.20
Average grade in the external exam in mathematics at the end of 7 th grade (points)**	28.0	30.9	31.8	36.3
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	73	81	87	89
Net enrolment of the population in 5 th -8 th grade (%)	91.1	92.9	91.4	86.6
Share of people with health insurance (%)	89.3	89.3	90.0	88.8
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,368	1,471	1,485	1,688
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	11.9	11.0	11.4	11.1
Workload of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	11.5	10.0	11.2	9.1
Share of the population with access to public sewerage networks (%)	71.9	72.0	n.a.	76.2
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	405	412	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	85.0	86.3	n.a.	70.9
Visits to the cinema per 1,000 persons	677	596	635	659
Visits to the theater per 1,000 persons	384	426	459	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.