

Vratsa District

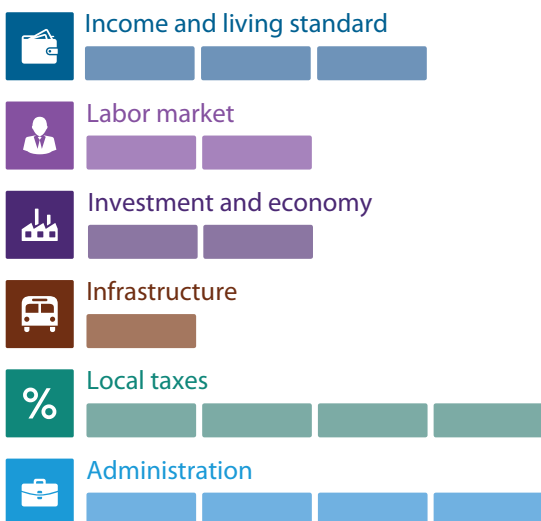
▶ Population (2019)	159,470
▶ Territory (sq. km)	3,619.8
▶ Number of settlements	123
▶ Share of urban population (%)	58.9



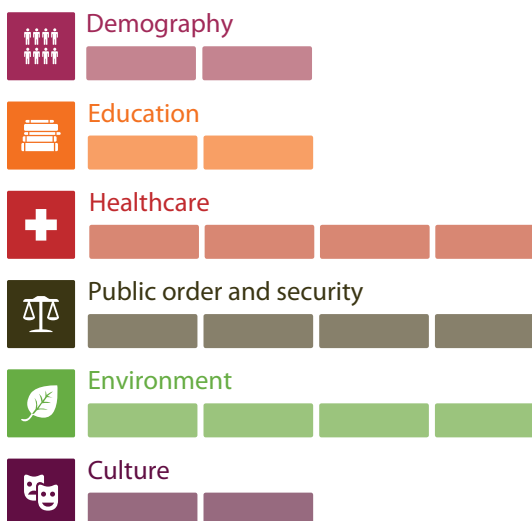
In 2018 GDP per capita in Vratsa district grew three times faster than the average rate of increase in the country and almost reached the national average. At the same time, due to the unfavourable conditions of the labor market, the rate of increase in both salaries and incomes was below the country's averages. Economic activity and employment figures were on the rise, too, but they still remained far beneath the average ones for the country as a whole. The labor market faces the additional challenge of the population's deteriorating educational structure. Investment activity in Vratsa district is relatively low. In 2020 the municipalities kept local tax rates relatively low. The district administration has performed relatively well.

The demographic indicators place Vratsa among the districts with a considerable rate of population ageing. In 2020, students' results were again lower than the national averages. Healthcare in Vratsa district is in a relatively better condition. The proportion of GPs in the district is lower than the average one in the country but the figures are close. The shortage of hospital beds is still a problem awaiting solution. The workloads of local criminal judges are relatively low and therefore delivery of justice is speedier. Crime rates remain relatively high but detection rates are also high. The low share of the population living in urban areas and low population density account for the limited access to public sewerage systems. The intensity of the district's cultural life is low.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living standard

In 2018 GDP per capita in Vratsa district rose three times faster than the average rate in the country and for the first time it almost reached the national average – 15,000 BGN in the district versus 15,600 BGN nationally. However, due to the relatively unfavourable development of the labor market, salaries and incomes were rising at rates below the respective national averages. The gross annual salary in the district reached 12,500 BGN, whereas the national average was 13,800 BGN. Some improvement in annual incomes was eventually noticed in 2019, when they registered a rise of 14%, against 8% nationwide, and reached 5,209 BGN per household member, compared to 6,013 BGN as the country's average.

In 2019 poverty rates in the district of Vratsa were relatively high. The proportion of people living in material deprivation was 24.2%, versus 19.9% nationwide, while the share of those living below the poverty line was 38.9%, compared to the national average of 22.6%.

Labor market

In 2019 economic activity in Vratsa district registered a considerable rise of 6.8 p.p., reaching a rate of 67.5%, but that failed to compensate for the fluctuations in the rates of increase from the previous years and remained far below the national average of 74.3%. A similar development was noticeable in employment rates – they rose by 5.3 p.p. to 59.8%, compared to 70.1% in the country on average. Unemployment figures remained relatively high – 7.7%, whereas the national average was 4.2%.

A major challenge before the labor market in the district is the deteriorating educational structure of the workforce, where no improvement has been registered in the last five years. The share of people with a university degree is 21%, against 28% as the national average, and of those with primary education or less – 21%, whereas on a national scale the figure is 18%.

Investment and economy

Investment activity in Vratsa district is relatively weak. Vratsa is among the districts with the smallest relative number of enterprises. In 2018 it rose to 38 per 1,000 persons but remained far below 59 per 1,000 persons, which was the national average. Foreign and local investment was also considerably lower than in the country as a whole. FTA expenditures amounted to 1,682 BGN/person versus the national figure of 2,750 BGN/person. Cumulative FDI, for its part, reached a negligible 654 EUR/person, compared to the national average of 3,560 EUR/person, or 5 times lower.

The result of these factors is the relatively low production value in Vratsa district. Despite being on the rise, in 2018 it amounted to only 15,500 BGN/person, against 25,900 BGN/person as the national average.

On the other hand, Vratsa was among the top ranking districts as regards utilization of EU funding. By 15 June 2020 the pay-

ments made in the district to beneficiaries of EU operational programs amounted to 2,484 BGN/person, while the national average was 1,976 BGN/person. Within the district, the highest figures for utilization of EU funding were registered by the municipalities of the city of Vratsa and Mezdra.

Infrastructure

Vratsa is one of the districts with poorly developed infrastructure. Although the density of the road and railroad networks nearly equals the national averages, the share of highways and first-class roads is almost two times lower than the national average – 10%, against 19% respectively. These are factors affecting the figures for road quality – in 2019 only 28.4% of road surfaces were in good condition, compared to the national average of 41.4%.

More positive tendencies are noticeable in the data on the digital infrastructure. In 2019, the relative share of households with internet access in Vratsa district reached 71.1%, against the average of 75.1% nationwide.

Local taxes

In 2020, the municipalities in Vratsa district still kept local rates relatively low. From the five monitored rates in 2020, only the one on the non-residential immovable property of legal entities was higher than its average counterpart in the country – 2.28%, versus 2.01% respectively.

The greatest difference was registered in the retail trade tax. Its average figure for Vratsa district was 6.81 BGN/sq.m, against 12.93 BGN/sq.m in the country as a whole. The average annual tax rate for taxi transportation was also considerably lower – 364 BGN, versus the national average of 498 BGN.

Administration

Vratsa district registers relatively good results regarding the functioning of its local administration. Joining the trend in the country as a whole, cadastral coverage rose considerably and in 2019 it reached 88.8% of the district's territory, versus the national average of 91.4%.

The local authorities' self-assessment on the development of e-administration and on the provision of one-stop shop services also showed better results in 2020, when they registered figures that compensated for the decline in the year before. The provision of one-stop shop services was rated 3.76 p. out of 5 p., versus the national average of 3.09 p., which is among the highest results in the whole of Bulgaria. Almost every municipality in the district reported a rating of 4 p.

Only the AIP Active transparency ratings of the local administration decreased in 2020 and for the first time fell below the national average – 69.9%, compared to 70.7% respectively. Within the district, the highest ratings were achieved by the municipalities of Mezdra, Kozloduy and Byala Slatina.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

The demographic indicators place Vratsa among the districts with the most conspicuous tendency towards population ageing. The natural population growth rate has maintained persistently low levels, with -11.4‰ in 2019 against -6.7‰ in the country on average. Out-migration remained at relatively high levels, affecting the net migration figure which fell to -7.9‰ for 2019.

These processes have a negative impact on the age dependency ratios. In 2019, the ratio between people aged 65+ and those aged 0-14 rose to 178.1%, against 150.1% for the country on average, and the ratio between people aged 65+ and those aged 15-64 increased to 39.7%, with 33.8% as the national average.

Vratsa is among the districts with a relatively low share of population living in urban areas – 59%, versus the national average of 74%. The average density of the population living in urban areas – 760 persons/sq.km – is twice as low as that on a national level, which is 1,510 persons/sq.km.

Education

In 2019, net enrolment in 5th-8th grade fell once again but still remained higher than the national average. At the same time, the shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education were still quite high.

The numbers of primary and secondary school teachers continued to rise in 2019 and reached figures higher than the national average. In 2020, students' results for the district were once again lower on average than the national figures. The margin is especially wide for the 2020 external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade, with 28.9 points for the district, compared to the average of 36.3 points in the country. The average score in the matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature was also relatively low – 4.08, compared to 4.20 nationally.

Vratsa district is not among the top ranking ones in higher education. There are, however, two university branches which had an enrolment of over 1,000 students in 2019.

Healthcare

In 2019, Vratsa district performed relatively well in healthcare. The share of health-insured persons continued to rise to levels exceeding the national average. The proportion of doctors – both GPs and specialist physicians – was lower than, though close to the country's average. Still, the serious shortage of hospital beds remained an ongoing challenge. The number of beds in local general hospitals was 443 beds per 100,000 persons, while the national average was 550 per 100,000 persons.

Hospitalization figures fell to 176.2 per 1,000 persons and for the fifth consecutive year were below the national average of 253.7 per 1,000 persons.

Public order and security

The workloads of criminal judges in Vratsa district continued to decrease, reaching levels well below the average one for the country. In 2019 one local judge heard an average of 6.6 cases a month, compared to 9.1 cases per judge nationally. Small workloads impact the speed of delivery of justice – the proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months was 95%, against the national average of 90%.

The number of crimes in the district is relatively high, but detection rates are also high. In 2019, the registered crimes against the person and property fell to 14.1 per 1,000 persons, versus 11.1 per 1,000 persons nationwide. The detection rate was 64.6%, versus the national figure of 52.1%.

Environment

In 2018, carbon dioxide emissions in the district of Vratsa still remained nearly three times lower than the average ones in Bulgaria, amounting to 101.4 t/sq.km, compared to the national average of 274.8 t/sq.km. The amounts of waste generated by households also remained relatively small – 278 kg/person per annum, versus 409 kg/person in the country. However, the proportion handed over for treatment and recycling continued to rise, reaching 67% and thus coming quite close to the national figure of 71%.

The relatively low shares of the population living in urban areas and the small population density in Vratsa district can account for the limited access of the households to public sewerage systems. In 2018, 57.6% of the population had access to public sewerage networks, compared to the national average of 76.2%. Public sewerage networks with access to wastewater treatment plants were available to 51.2% of the population, compared to the average of 63.9% countrywide.

Culture

The low intensity of its cultural life remained a characteristic of Vratsa district in 2019. Only the number of visits to local libraries remained high and at 565 per 1,000 persons, it came close to the national average of 683 per 1,000 persons. Museum visits amounted to 131 per 1,000 persons, versus 770 per 1,000 persons in the country on average. Visits to the local cinemas registered a considerable increase compared to the previous year and reached 367 per 1,000 persons, against the average of 659 per 1,000 persons nationwide.

Key indicators for the district of Vratsa

Indicators of economic development	2017	2018	2019	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	11,684	15,018	n.a.	15,615
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	4,582	4,582	5,209	6,013
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	11,460	12,489	n.a.	13,775
Share of the poor relative to the national poverty line (%)	n.a.	29.0	38.9	22.6
Employment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	55.3	54.5	59.8	70.1
Unemployment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	11.1	10.1	7.7	4.2
Share of the population aged 25-64 with primary or lower education (%)	23.5	20.8	20.7	17.6
Share of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education (%)	19.9	21.5	21.0	28.0
Production value (BGN/person)	13,622	15,540	n.a.	25,855
Expenditure on fixed tangible asset acquisition (BGN/person)	1,488	1,682	n.a.	2,750
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	651	654	n.a.	3,560
Share of households with Internet (%)	64.0	65.5	71.1	75.1
Share of roads in good condition (%)	22.0	26.5	28.4	41.4
Density of the road network (km/100 sq.km territory)	18.0	17.9	17.9	17.9
AIP active transparency rating of the local self-government (%)*	72.6	74.0	69.9	70.7

Indicators of social development	2017	2018	2019	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	-12.2	-11.4	-11.4	-6.7
Net migration rate (‰)	-6.3	-7.5	-7.8	-0.3
Average grade in the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.00	3.98	4.08	4.20
Average grade in the external exam in mathematics at the end of 7 th grade (points)**	26.3	26.2	28.9	36.3
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	80	86	94	89
Net enrolment of the population in 5 th -8 th grade (%)	91.9	93.0	89.9	86.6
Share of people with health insurance (%)	91.1	91.4	93.5	88.8
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,520	1,709	1,679	1,688
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	15.5	15.4	14.1	11.1
Workload of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	7.9	7.3	6.6	9.1
Share of the population with access to public sewerage networks (%)	57.2	57.6	n.a.	76.2
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	289	278	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	63.5	67.5	n.a.	70.9
Visits to the cinema per 1,000 persons	238	191	367	659
Visits to the theater per 1,000 persons	157	135	166	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.