

Haskovo District

▶ Population (2019)	225,317
▶ Territory (sq. km)	5,533.3
▶ Number of settlements	261
▶ Share of urban population (%)	72.2



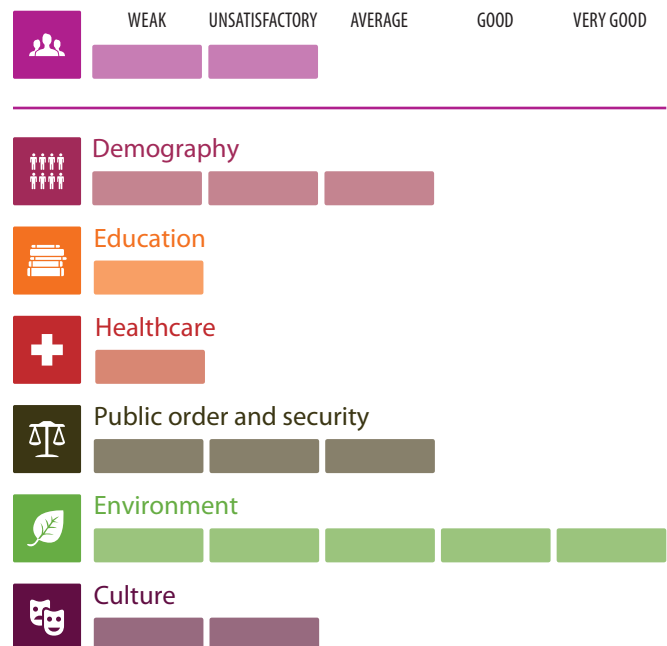
Haskovo district is among the least economically developed regions in southern Bulgaria. Both GDP per capita and average salaries are significantly lower than the respective national averages. Household incomes have been gradually rising, yet the problems of high poverty levels and material deprivation remain. The dynamics of the labor market is favorable, with very low unemployment rates and employment already above average, too. There is a visible shortage of university graduates in the district, while the share of people with primary education has been growing in recent years. Investment activity can be described as “timid”. The infrastructure is relatively well developed and its quality is gradually improving. Local taxes remain lower than the national aver-

age, and in 2020 some of them got reduced even further. Both the natural growth rate and net migration rates in the area are deteriorating. There are major challenges facing the coverage of the school education system and the prevention of early dropping out of school, but exam results have been improving. Access to GPs and specialist physicians is relatively difficult and the infant mortality rate is high. Figures for security and justice in Haskovo are close to the national average, and crime rates are declining. The generated household waste is almost entirely handed over for treatment and recycling, and its volume is gradually decreasing; there is also a decline in carbon emissions. Interest in cultural events in the district is low, with theaters attracting most of it.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■■

Income and living standard ■■

Haskovo is the district with the lowest GDP per capita in southern Bulgaria after Sliven, and in 2018 it had only 8,500 BGN per capita. Economic growth is similar to the national average. The average annual gross salary is the fifth lowest in the country – only 9,600 BGN, and its annual growth did not exceed the national average until 2018.

Thanks to the relatively favorable conditions on the labor market, in 2018 households' incomes came close to the national average, with an annual average of 5,678 BGN per household member in the district, compared to 6,013 BGN for the country. However, the indicators for poverty levels and social exclusion give cause for concern, as in 2019 nearly 30.9% of the population were below the national poverty line for that year, against 22.6% on average countrywide, and 23.8% lived with material deprivation, compared to 19.9% on average nationally.

Labor market ■■■■

In 2019, unemployment practically disappeared from the labor market in the district. NSI reported an unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ of only 0.4%, but with the proviso that the data were of low accuracy. In 2018, a year earlier, unemployment was 3.1%, which was again considerably below the national average. Employment was also relatively high – 70.9%, having increased by more than 15 p.p. compared to 2012.

The share of university graduates in the age group 25-64 has been gradually increasing, but remains at 20.2%, or 8 p.p. below the national average. However, the share of people with primary or lower education has also been growing, and in 2019 they constituted 24.0%, compared to the national average of 17.6%.

Investment and economy ■

Between 2014 and 2018, cumulative FDI increased almost fourfold, but remained at the extremely low level of 801 EUR/person. The expenditures for acquisition of FTA were also low, reaching 1,197 BGN/person in 2018, which is a minimal increase from the average of about 1,100 EUR/person for the period 2013-2017. Despite the growth in the past year, the district has also underperformed in the utilization of EU funds, as by the middle of 2020 their volume had reached only 1,302 BGN/person, compared to 1,976 BGN/person for the country on average; the only exception was the municipality of Svilengrad with 5,287 BGN/person. There is a clear trend in the district towards a rise in the number of enterprises, which reached 53 per 1,000 persons in 2018. Within the period of economic recovery, production value increased at a slower pace than the

national average rates, except for 2018. The lag therefore widened and in 2018 the production value per capita amounted to only 12,600 BGN, or less than half the average for the national economy.

Infrastructure ■■■■

Haskovo district has a relatively well developed road network, with a density of 20.7 km/100 sq.km in 2019. The share of first-class roads and highways in the road network registered that year is also high – 21.5%, compared to the national average of 18.6%, with the Maritza highway passing through the territory of the district. The condition of the road surfaces has been improving in recent years, but the share of roads in good condition remains below the national average – 36.8%, compared to 41.4% countrywide. The density of the railway network is also slightly above the national average, with 3.7 km/100 sq. km territory in the district. Access to high-speed internet has visibly improved and between 2009 and 2019 the share of households connected to it increased from 24% to 68%, but the lag behind the leading districts in Bulgaria still remains.

Local taxes ■■■■

The levels of the monitored local taxes in the municipalities on the territory of the district are close to the national average. In 2020, the average amount of the annual tax on taxi transportation was reduced to 324 BGN, which brought it close to the minimum value of 300 BGN. There was also a decrease in the patent tax for retail trade – from an average of 12.77 BGN/sq.m retail space down to 11.96 BGN/sq.m. The taxes on non-gratuitous acquisition of property and on the immovable property of legal entities remained at their current levels. However, the tax on motor vehicles was above the national average – 1.55 BGN/kW after taking into account the environmental component, compared to 1.51 BGN/kW respectively.

Administration ■■■■

The self-assessment of the district's municipalities of their capacity to provide electronic services has been improving, with the average value for 2020 at 3.10 out of a possible 5 p. The results from their self-assessment on the provision of one-stop shop administrative services has also gone up to 2.97 p. The AIP active transparency rating of the local authorities has also increased to reach an average of 67.3% for the municipalities in the district, but remains below the national average of 70.7%.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

The natural growth rate in Haskovo district has gradually been deteriorating, reaching -8.7% in 2019, compared to -5.4% in 2009, and staying below the national average for the entire ten-year period. The district is also losing population due to the negative net migration ratio, but not at such a rate – in 2019 the difference between settler and emigrant numbers was -3.8% of the population. These are processes that accelerate the trend towards population ageing in the district, so for every 100 people aged 0-14 in 2019 there were 158 over the age of 65. The age dependency ratios between the number of people over 65 and those of working age were also more unfavorable than the national average – 37%, compared to 33% at the national level.

The district is undergoing a slow process of urbanization: within a decade the share of urban population increased by 2 p.p. and reached 72.2% in 2019. At the same time, the population density in the urban areas of the district remained below average – 1,045 persons/sq.km, having steadily declined in recent years.

Education

The low coverage of the school system still remained a challenge in 2019, as only 83% of children were enrolled in 5th to 8th grade. After a decline of 1 p.p. compared to the previous year, the level fell by 4 p.p. below the national average. The share of dropouts from primary and secondary education was also significantly higher – 3.7%, as well as the number of repeaters – 1%. Despite some improvement in recent years, in 2019 the teacher-student ratio for primary and secondary education reached only 84 teachers per 1,000 students, compared to 89 per 1,000 students on average for the country.

Although the results of the students in Haskovo district at the 2020 matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature remained below the national average, they showed some improvement and reached an average grade of 4.07. However, the share of “fail” (below 3.00) grades remained high at 12.5%, but an increase was recorded in most districts anyway. At the external exam in mathematics after 7th grade, the students from the district achieved an average of 32 out of a possible 100 points, again slightly below the national average of 36 points.

Healthcare

The indicator for access to GPs in Haskovo district is more unfavorable than the national average, as in 2019 there was one doctor per 1,847 persons, compared to 1,688 persons nationally. The index for access to specialist physicians also reveals that the local health system is facing problems. The number of beds in general hospitals is relatively low – 356 per 100,000 people and its increase in recent years has been slow.

The health system coverage is relatively good – in 2019, 90.1% of the population of the district had health insurance. Morbidity rates have gradually been declining, with 194 out of every 1,000 persons being treated at local hospitals. However, the infant mortality rate remains high – 8.2%, with no signs of improvement.

Public order and security

In 2019, 90% of criminal cases in the district were closed within 3 months, but the figure shows a drop from previous years, when it was 92-94%. A relatively rapid increase is observed in the share of pending cases, which rose from 7.1% in 2015 to 9% in 2019, even though the workloads of criminal judges had declined. Thus, while in 2015 they heard 9.8 cases on average per month, in 2019 they were already hearing 8 cases.

As in most other districts, there is a similar trend in Haskovo towards a decrease in the number of crimes against the person and property. In 2019, 10.1 such crimes per 1,000 people were registered there. At the same time, between 2009 and 2019 the share of detected crimes increased by 12 p.p. and reached 59%.

Environment

Haskovo is among the leaders in waste processing, with 96% of all generated household waste in 2018 handed over for recycling and treatment. The amounts of generated waste have also been slowly declining, reaching 316 kg/person per year, compared to the national average of 409 kg/person. There are no significant changes in the share of the population with access to public sewerage: in 2018 it amounted to 72.7%. The share of households whose sewerage is connected to a waste water treatment plant increased to 54.2%. On the other hand, in 2018 carbon emissions decreased to 108 t/sq.km, or almost three times below the national average.

Culture

Haskovo district reports generally unfavorable values of the indicators for intensity of cultural life included in this category. Compared to the average values for the country in 2019, the least difference was recorded as regards theater visits – 298 per 1,000 persons, versus 362 per 1,000 persons nationally. Cinema was the least attractive form, with only 98 visits per 1,000 persons per year, or almost seven times below the national average. An increase was in evidence as regards museum visits, but interest remained low with just 251 per 1,000 people, compared to the national average of 770 visits per 1,000 people.

Key indicators for the district of Haskovo

Indicators of economic development	2017	2018	2019	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	7,807	8,545	n.a.	15,615
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	5,119	5,119	5,678	6,013
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	8,537	9,623	n.a.	13,775
Share of the poor relative to the national poverty line (%)	n.a.	28.5	30.9	22.6
Employment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	64.3	66.0	70.9	70.1
Unemployment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	4.7	3.1	0.4	4.2
Share of the population aged 25-64 with primary or lower education (%)	20.0	21.0	24.0	17.6
Share of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education (%)	17.3	20.1	20.2	28.0
Production value (BGN/person)	11,211	12,598	n.a.	25,855
Expenditure on fixed tangible asset acquisition (BGN/person)	1,094	1,197	n.a.	2,750
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	442	801	n.a.	3,560
Share of households with Internet (%)	66.1	72.3	68.1	75.1
Share of roads in good condition (%)	34.8	33.7	36.8	41.4
Density of the road network (km/100 sq.km territory)	20.7	20.7	20.7	17.9
AIP active transparency rating of the local self-government (%)*	63.5	63.0	67.3	70.7

Indicators of social development	2017	2018	2019	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	-8.3	-8.5	-8.7	-6.7
Net migration rate (‰)	-0.9	-5.2	-3.8	-0.3
Average grade in the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.87	3.84	4.07	4.20
Average grade in the external exam in mathematics at the end of 7 th grade (points)**	27.7	28.8	32.0	36.3
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	74	77	84	89
Net enrolment of the population in 5 th -8 th grade (%)	84.4	84.7	82.6	86.6
Share of people with health insurance (%)	88.2	88.5	90.1	88.8
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,774	1,809	1,847	1,688
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	11.5	10.2	10.1	11.1
Workload of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	9.5	9.1	8.0	9.1
Share of the population with access to public sewerage networks (%)	72.6	72.7	n.a.	76.2
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	327	316	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	98.0	96.1	n.a.	70.9
Visits to the cinema per 1,000 persons	103	72	98	659
Visits to the theater per 1,000 persons	258	291	298	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.