Sliven District

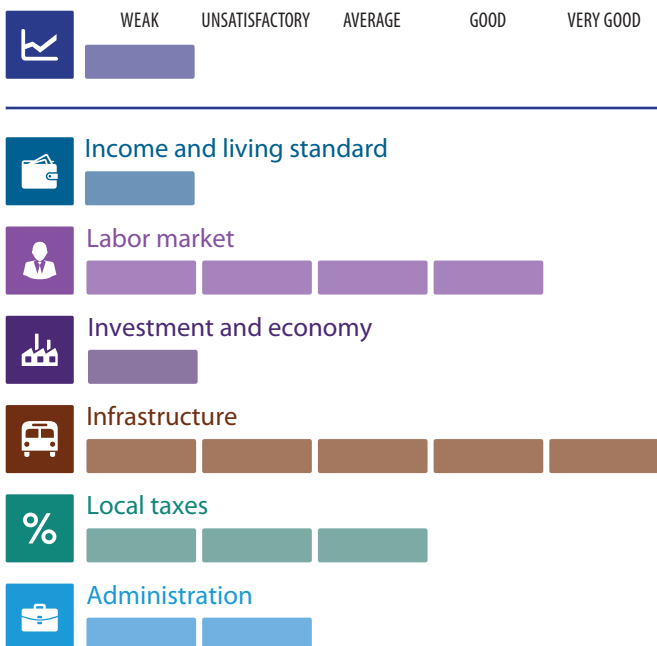- ▶ Population (2020)   183,335
- ▶ Territory (sq. km)   3,544.1
- ▶ Number of settlements   110
- ▶ Share of urban population (%)   65.2
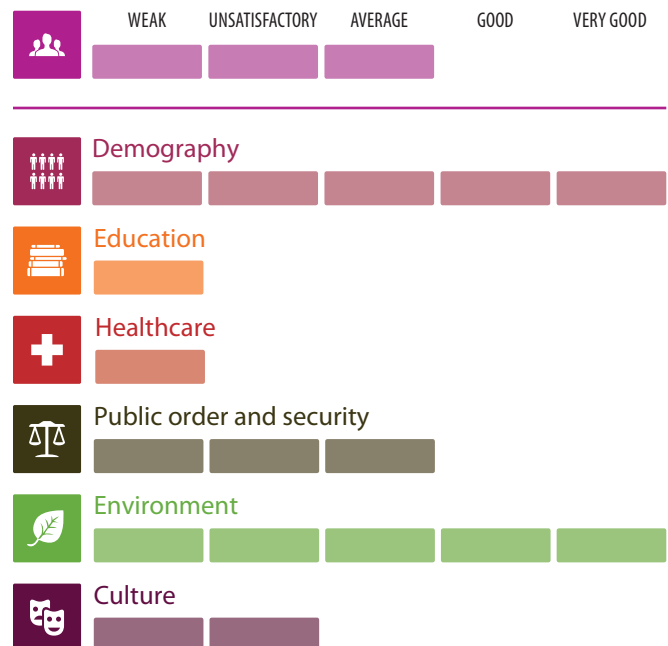
KOTEL

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SLIVEN

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Sliven is among the districts with the lowest GDP per capita and in spite of this, it has been growing relatively slowly. Household incomes remain relatively low. These indicators are also the main factor for the high poverty levels in the district. The educational structure of the workforce is still a challenge before the local labor market. Investment activity is extremely low and the district ranks last in the country in this category. The basic infrastructure retains its high level. The self-assessments of the local administrations on the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop shop administrative services are significantly lower than the respective national averages.

The demographic condition of the district ranks it among the country's leaders on this indicator. Sliven is the district with the lowest score on the indicators for education. The shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary school are the highest in Bulgaria. Sliven's poor rating in the healthcare category is mainly due to the extremely high infant mortality rate. The workloads of the local criminal judges are relatively heavy, but this does not have a negative effect on the speed of delivery of justice. The share of municipal waste handed over for treatment and recycling remains high. In 2020 the pandemic and the countrywide restrictions on cultural events affected the district's cultural life as well.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

	WEAK	UNSATISFACTORY	AVERAGE	GOOD	VERY GOOD

Income and living standard

Labor market

Investment and economy

Infrastructure

Local taxes

Administration

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

	WEAK	UNSATISFACTORY	AVERAGE	GOOD	VERY GOOD

Demography

Education

Healthcare

Public order and security

Environment

Culture

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living standard

Sliven is among the districts with the lowest GDP per capita (alongside Silistra) and has been growing relatively slowly to reach 8,100 BGN in 2019, compared to the national average of 17,200 BGN.

The average annual gross salary increased by 11% to reach 11,100 BGN, against 15,200 BGN in the country. In 2019, despite their higher growth rate throughout the year, household incomes again remained relatively low – 4,400 BGN/person, compared to 6,000 BGN/person nationally.

These indicators are also the main factor for the 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

Economic activity in Sliven district has continued to grow, though at 71.9% it failed to catch up with the national average of 73.7 in 2020. This increase has been in line with the increase in both employment and unemployment. The employment rate reached 65% in 2020, versus the national average of 68.5%, and unemployment was 6.9%, compared to 5.2% nationally.

The labor market still faces the challenge posed by the educational structure of the workforce. In 2020, the share of the population aged 25–64 years with primary or lower education reached 36.2%, against 16.9% nationally, and was among the highest in the country. The share of people with higher education remained relatively limited – 21.4%, versus the national average of 29.2%.

At the same time, the district has rather favorable demographic conditions – the population replacement rate as a ratio of the people aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64 is the highest in the country at nearly 89.5%, while the national average is 67.1%. This means that for every 100 adults who are about to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are about 90 young people who will join the workforce.

Investment and economy

Investment activity in Sliven is extremely low, which ranks the district last in the whole country in this category. The number of non-financial enterprises in the district was 39 per 1,000 persons in 2019 and remained relatively low compared to the national average of 61 per 1,000 persons. Domestic and foreign investment also remained low. FTA acquisition expenditure was 1,236 BGN/person, versus the average of 3,155 BGN/person nationally. Cumulative FDI in the district amounted to 866 EUR/person, which is nearly four times lower than the national average of 3,655 EUR/person. Production in the district

was worth only 12,500 BGN/person – more than half the average figure for the national economy, which was 28,000 BGN/person.

Sliven is also the district with the lowest utilization rate of European funds. By 15 June 2021, payments made in the district to beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 1,168 BGN/person, against 2,217 BGN/person on a national level. Within the district, the highest amounts were utilized by the municipality of the city of Sliven, though even these payments were far below the national average.

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 2020, 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%, against 41.4% in the country in 2019. Digital connectivity is also relatively good and in 2020 the share of households with internet access went up to 83.4%, versus 78.9% nationally. The share of households connected to a gas supply remains low – 1.0%, compared to 3.1% nationally.

Local taxes

In 2021, the average rate of the tax on non-residential immovable property for legal entities was the highest in the country. At the same time, the rates of the taxes on retail trade, non-gratuitous acquisition of property and taxi transportation were lower than the respective national averages. The tax on motor vehicles was comparable to the average one in the country.

Administration

Against the background of the rapid progress of cadastral map coverage in the rest of the country over the past two years – reaching nearly 91.4% of Bulgaria's territory – in 2019 Sliven had managed to include only 63.6%, which places the district last in the whole of Bulgaria in this category.

The local authorities' self-assessments on the development of e-government and on the provision of one-stop shop services have marked a significant improvement, but in 2021 the ratings were again considerably lower than the respective national averages. The transparency ratings of the municipalities in the district have been steadily rising and in 2021 they reached an average of 79.8%, versus 73.2% countrywide. The highest rating of over 88.5% was achieved by the city municipality of Sliven; however, there are wide margins between the ratings given to the municipalities across the district.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ▪▪▪

🏛 Demography ▪▪▪▪▪

In 2020, Sliven's demographic conditions placed the district in a leading position in the country. The natural population growth rate went down, but it still remained among the highest in the country at –6.4‰, compared to the national average of –9.5 ‰. At the same time, the population has been shrinking fast due to intensive out-migration. In 2020, the net migration rate rose considerably but its value remained negative (–2.2‰).

The age dependency ratio of the people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 has marked a minimal rise, but at 109.6% it still ranks Sliven district at the top place in the country, where that ratio is 150.6%. The ratio of the people aged 65+ to those aged 15–64 is also lower – 33.2%, compared to 34.1% nationwide. The share of population living in urban areas is relatively low – 65.2%, compared to 72.9% in the country, but the population density measured as the average number of people per unit area remains the 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 shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education are the highest in the whole country. The rate of enrolment in 5th–8th grade went up in 2020 and almost equaled the country average for that year.

The number of teachers has been declining and remains below the national average – 81 teachers per 1,000 students, compared to 87 teachers per 1,000 students in the country.

Students' performance in 2021 again remained weak. Sliven was the district with the lowest score in the external examination in mathematics after 7th grade – 27.5 points, compared to the average of 37.9 points nationally. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was also relatively low – 4.08, versus the national average of 4.21, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) was 8%, compared to the national average of 7%.

➕ Healthcare ▪

The poor results of Sliven district in the area of healthcare are mostly due to the exceptionally high infant mortality rate. In 2020 it went down but again remained the highest in the whole country –11.7‰, against 5.1‰ nationally.

The numbers of doctors and hospital beds are below the respective national averages. One local GP cares for 1,930 persons on average, compared to 1,727 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 in 2020 was 118 per 1,000 persons, compared to 138 per 1,000 persons countrywide. The share of people with health insurance remains relatively low – 86.4%, versus 88.7% in the country.

⚖ Public order and security ▪▪▪

Criminal judges in Sliven district have relatively heavy workloads, yet in 2020 this again did not have an adverse effect on the speed of delivery of justice. One judge heard an average of 9.7 cases a month, compared to 8.6 cases nationally. The proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months reached 93%, compared to the average of 90% nationwide. Pending cases made up 8%, against 11% in the country.

The number of crimes in the district has decreased in the past few years (similar to the average crime rate in the country), while the detection rate remains higher than the national average. In 2020, the registered crimes against the person and property in Sliven district amounted to 9.4 per 1,000 persons, against 9.9 per 1,000 persons nationwide. The detection rate went up to 67.2% and 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 the environment category 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 the country's average.

A challenge facing the district is the limited share of population with access to public sewerage networks – only 65.2%, compared to 76.4% countrywide, and the share of sewerage systems connected to wastewater treatment plants – 57.3% in Sliven district, against the national average of 64.6%.

🎭 Culture ▪▪

The pandemic in 2020 and the restrictions on cultural events affected cultural life in Sliven district no less than in the country as a whole. The number of cinema visits dropped by 84% to 14 per 1,000 persons. Museum visits suffered a smaller decline – by 48%, compared to 58% in the country – but with 280 per 1,000 persons, they nevertheless remained below the national average of 322 per 1,000 persons. At the same time, visits to the local libraries remained relatively higher in number than the national average – 604 per 1,000 persons, versus 480 per 1,000 persons in the country.

Key indicators for the district of Sliven

Indicators of economic development	2018	2019	2020	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	7,600	8,130	n.a.	**17,170**
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	3,790	4,446	n.a.	**6,013**
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	10,005	11,085	n.a.	**15,209**
Share of the population living below the national poverty line (%)	35.6	33.9	n.a.	**22.6**
Employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	61.2	64.5	65.0	**68.5**
Unemployment rate of the population over 15 years of age (%)	9.9	6.5	6.9	**5.2**
Share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	33.4	37.6	36.2	**16.9**
Share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	21.1	20.9	21.4	**29.2**
Production value (BGN/person)	11,803	12,467	n.a.	**28,027**
Expenditure on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets (BGN/person)	1,160	1,236	n.a.	**3,155**
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	866	866	n.a.	**3,655**
Share of households with Internet (%)	75.2	77.2	83.4	**78.9**
Share of roads in good condition (%)	80.0	79.4	n.a.	**41.4**
Road network density (km/100 sq. km territory)	16.5	16.4	16.4	**17.9**
AIP active transparency rating of local government bodies (%)*	71.0	77.8	79.8	**73.2**

Indicators of social development	2018	2019	2020	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	–3.6	–2.9	–6.4	**–9.5**
Net migration rate (‰)	–6.8	–10.0	–2.2	**4.4**
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.04	4.16	4.08	**4.21**
Average grade in the National external exam in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	25.8	29.3	27.5	**37.9**
Net enrolment of the population in 5th–8th grade (%)	85.7	84.9	86.4	**86.5**
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	73	83	81	**87**
Share of population with health insurance (%)	86.6	87.5	86.4	**88.7**
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,856	1,841	1,930	**1,727**
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	11.3	10.2	9.4	**9.9**
Workloads of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	9.8	9.8	9.7	**8.6**
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	65.3	65.2	n.a.	**76.4**
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	307	n.a.	n.a.	**409**
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	91.7	n.a.	n.a.	**70.9**
Visits to cinemas per 1,000 persons	66	90	14	**190**
Visits to museums per 1,000 persons	497	485	280	**322**

* The data for 2021 are included in the 2021 study. The same also applies for the previous years.
** The data refer to the 2020–2021 academic year while the matriculation exam was held in 2021. The same also applies for the previous years.