

Sofia District



▶ Population (2020)	232,574
▶ Territory (sq. km)	7,062.3
▶ Number of settlements	284
▶ Share of urban population (%)	59.0

The high GDP per capita and salaries are a precondition for the relatively low poverty levels in Sofia district. The development of the local labor market in 2020 was very good, which again manifests the deep interrelation between the economies of the capital and the district of Sofia. The good economic development is also accompanied by high investment activity. The density of the road network is higher than the national average, and the share of highways and first-class roads is the second largest in the country. The average level of local taxes in the municipalities of Sofia district is generally close to the national average. The performance of the local administrations in the district is poor. While during the pandemic year 2020 the capital was losing

population, Sofia district was the leader in attracting new residents. At the same time, however, the rate of natural population growth in Sofia district continued to fall, which was manifested in the deteriorating age dependency ratios. The performance of the students in the district is relatively poor. The district recorded the highest number of hospitalizations. Its performance in the category of public order and security remained poor in 2020, mainly due to the relatively slow delivery of justice, even though the workloads of the local judges have been going down and have fallen below the country's average. The share of generated waste handed over for treatment and recycling is extremely small. The cultural life in the district preserves its low intensity.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living standard

In 2019, Sofia district overtook Stara Zagora in GDP per capita and climbed to the second place in the country, after the capital. Salaries in the district have been rising at a rate close to the national average, though incomes remain at relatively low levels. The average annual gross salary of employed people has reached 14,600 BGN, against 15,200 BGN as the country's average. The average gross annual income per household member in 2019 was 4,800 BGN, compared to 6,000 BGN in the country.

The relatively high values of GDP and salaries in the district have kept poverty levels relatively low. In 2019, the share of the population living with material deprivation was 14.5%, compared to 19.9% in the country, and those living below the national poverty line made up 17.6%, versus 22.6% nationwide.

Labor market

The development of the local labor market in 2020 continued to be very good, which once again shows the deep interrelation between the economies of the capital and of Sofia district. Economic activity in the district increased significantly and for the third consecutive year exceeded the national average, with a figure of 79.7%, compared to 73.7% for the country. This growth was accompanied by an increase in employment to 78.8%, compared to 68.5% in the country, thus placing Sofia district at the top in employment. Unemployment also remained extremely low.

The profile of the workforce in Sofia district is characterized by a large number of people with secondary education – 75%, compared to 54% in the country, while the shares of people with a university degree and of those with primary or lower education are relatively low. This structure can be accounted for by the proximity of most of the district's settlements to the capital, the latter attracting the university graduates and naturally leaving the processing industry to develop in its geographical periphery.

The population replacement rate as a ratio of people aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64 has dropped to 61.3% and is lagging increasingly behind the national average.

Investment and economy

The positive economic development of the district is associated with high investment activity. In 2019, the district reported the second highest figures in the country for FDI, preceded only by the capital. They amounted to 6,569 EUR/person, versus 3,655 EUR/person countrywide. Production value also ranked the district second in the country, with 47,300 BGN/person, compared to 28,000 BGN/person nationally.

FTA acquisition expenditures shrank to 2,803 BGN/person, compared to 3,155 BGN/person nationally. The number of enterprises in the district remains relatively low, while the share of large enterprises among them is relatively high.

Utilization of EU funds has gone up but is still lagging behind the country's average. By 15 June 2021, payments made in Sofia district to beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 2,159 BGN/person, compared to 2,217 BGN/person nationally. Within the district, the leader in the utilization of EU funds was the municipality of Kostinbrod.

Infrastructure

Sofia district has a very well developed infrastructure. The density of the road network is higher than the national average, and the share of highways and first-class roads is the second largest in the country after that in Shumen district, with 30.2%, compared to the national average of 18.5%. At the same time, however, the quality of the roads remains relatively low, with only 31.7% of the road surfaces in good condition, versus 41.4% in the country in 2019.

The railroad network density is also relatively high.

In spite of its considerable increase, in 2020 access to the Internet in the district was still relatively limited, with 73.0% of the households connected to it, compared to 78.9% on average in the country.

Sofia district ranks second (after Gabrovo) in terms of the share of households connected to a gas supply – 8.7%, against 3.1% in the country.

Local taxes

In 2021, the average level of local taxation in Sofia district remained generally close to, yet lower than the average one for all Bulgarian municipalities. Higher than average continued to be the taxes on non-residential immovable property of legal entities and on non-gratuitous acquisition of property. By contrast, significantly lower than the average rates were the taxes on motor vehicles, taxi transportation and retail trade.

Administration

The performance of the municipal administrations in Sofia district is poor. While almost the entire territory of the country is already covered by the cadastral map (91.4%), in 2019 the coverage in the district was only 75.3%. The self-assessment of the municipal authorities for the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop-shop administrative services in 2021 also remained lower than the national average.

In 2021, Sofia continued to be among the districts with the lowest transparency assessment of its local administrations, and in spite of the considerable improvement, the rating reached 65.3%, compared to 73.2% on average for the country. Within the district, the highest ratings were achieved by the municipalities of Chelopech, Svoge and Chavdar.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ■

Demography ■■■■■

While during the pandemic year 2020 the capital was losing population, Sofia district was the leader in attracting new residents. The net migration rate reached levels that set a record for at least a twenty-year period not only for the district, but in the country as a whole – 63‰. At the same time, however, the rate of natural population growth in Sofia district continued to fall and remained below the national average at –12.3‰, against –6.7‰ nationwide. This process is reflected in the deteriorating age dependency ratios in the district. In 2020, the ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 reached 173.3%, compared to 150.6% nationally, and to those aged 15–64 it was 37%, versus 34.1% nationwide.

Sofia is among Bulgaria's districts with a low level of urbanization – 59.0% of its population is urban, against 72.9% countrywide, and with a low population density of 756 persons/sq. km, compared to the national average of 1,506 persons/sq. km.

Education ■■

The net enrolment rate in 5th–8th grade in Sofia district remains relatively high, although in 2020 it dropped to 89.8%, compared to 86.5% on average for the country. In 2020, the number of teachers in primary and secondary education in the district was 90 per 1,000 students, versus 87 per 1,000 students nationally. The share of dropouts from primary and secondary education decreased to figures already below the country's averages, though the percentage of repeaters remained higher.

Students' performance was also relatively poor. In the external examination in mathematics after 7th grade in 2021, they achieved an average score of 31.8 points, versus 37.9 points nationally. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was 3.99, compared to the average of 4.21 countrywide, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) reached 11%, against the national average of 7%. The number of university students in Sofia district is relatively small – 7 students per 1,000 persons, compared to the national average of 32 students per 1,000 persons in 2020.

Healthcare ■■■

Access to doctors – both GPs and specialist physicians – in the district is slightly below the national average. In 2020, one GP cared for an average of 1,846 people, compared to 1,727 people per GP in the country. The share of people with health insurance rose to 87.3%, but failed to reach the national average of 88.7%.

The number of beds in the local general hospitals relative to the population in the district remained, as always, higher than the national average, reaching 5.75 beds per 1,000 people, compared to 5.52 beds per 1,000 people nationally. Sofia is also the district with the highest number of hospitalizations – 207 per 1,000 persons in 2020, compared to 138 per 1,000 persons nationally.

Infant mortality rates went up in 2020 and now exceed the national average.

Public order and security ■

The results for Sofia district regarding the provision of public order and security in 2020 remained poor. That was mostly a consequence of the slow delivery of justice, although the workloads of the local criminal judges had been going down and fell below the national average. One criminal judge in Sofia district heard an average of 5.6 cases a month, compared to 8.6 cases per judge in the country. At the same time, there was a decrease to 77% of the criminal cases closed within 3 months, compared to the average of 90% nationwide, and pending cases rose to 22%, versus 11% countrywide.

The indicator values for security and justice in Sofia district are close to the national average. The number of registered crimes against the person and property is 9.7 per 1,000 persons, compared to the national average of 9.9 per 1,000 persons. The detection rate is 53.3%, versus 52.1% for the country

Environment ■

The annual volume of generated household waste rose to 487 kg/person in 2018 and was among the highest in the country. However, an exceptionally small share of the waste was handed over for treatment and recycling – 19%, compared to 71% for the country.

In spite of the low level of urbanization, the share of households in the district with access to public sewerage networks is high – 78.2%, compared to the national average of 76.4%. At the same time, access to sewerage networks connected to wastewater treatment plants is lower – in 2019 it was 40.5%, against the average share of 64.6% in the country.

Carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere amount to 30 t/sq. km and remain considerably lower than the national average.

Culture ■

In 2020, cultural life in Sofia district still sustained its low intensity, which can probably be attributed to the region's proximity to the capital, which allows a large part of the population relatively fast and easy access for to the biggest city in the country. No visits to libraries and theaters have been reported for the district, while cinema and museum visits dropped due to the pandemic and the countrywide restrictions on visits to cultural events. Cinema visits shrank by 59% to 32 per 1,000 persons, compared to 190 per 1,000 persons nationwide. Visits to museums were reduced by half but remained higher than the national average – 732 per 1,000 persons, compared to 322 per 1,000 persons countrywide.

Key indicators for the district of Sofia

Indicators of economic development	2018	2019	2020	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	15,654	16,276	n.a.	17,170
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	4,853	4,844	n.a.	6,013
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	13,425	14,586	n.a.	15,209
Share of the population living below the national poverty line (%)	20.4	17.6	n.a.	22.6
Employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	73.3	77.7	78.8	68.5
Unemployment rate of the population over 15 years of age (%)	0.7	(0.4)	(0.9)	5.2
Share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	12.3	10.9	13.6	16.9
Share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	13.6	12.0	11.3	29.2
Production value (BGN/person)	48,092	47,296	n.a.	28,027
Expenditure on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets (BGN/person)	3,140	2,803	n.a.	3,155
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	6,064	6,569	n.a.	3,655
Share of households with Internet (%)	51.3	67.3	73.0	78.9
Share of roads in good condition (%)	30.8	31.7	n.a.	41.4
Road network density (km/100 sq. km territory)	21.4	21.4	21.4	17.9
AIP active transparency rating of local government bodies (%)*	58.0	57.3	65.3	73.2

Indicators of social development	2018	2019	2020	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	–9.8	–9.3	–12.3	–9.5
Net migration rate (‰)	–1.1	–1.2	63.0	4.4
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.92	4.00	3.99	4.21
Average grade in the National external exam in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	28.4	31.0	31.8	37.9
Net enrolment of the population in 5th–8th grade (%)	91.3	91.6	89.8	86.5
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	84	87	90	87
Share of population with health insurance (%)	86.3	87.3	87.3	88.7
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,758	1,771	1,846	1,727
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	13.5	11.2	9.7	9.9
Workloads of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	9.6	9.5	5.6	8.6
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	77.2	78.2	n.a.	76.4
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	487	n.a.	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	18.9	n.a.	n.a.	70.9
Visits to cinemas per 1,000 persons	67	78	32	190
Visits to museums per 1,000 persons	1,178	1,430	732	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.