

Stara Zagora District

▶ Population (2020)	312,398
▶ Territory (sq. km)	5,151.1
▶ Number of settlements	206
▶ Share of urban population (%)	69.6



GDP per capita in Stara Zagora decreased in 2019 and the district lost its second place in this indicator. However, salaries and incomes in the district continue to rise. Economic activity is declining, but remains relatively high and over the past few years has been consistently above the national average. Employment and unemployment rates are more favorable than the respective country averages. There are a relatively small number of enterprises in the district, but production value is relatively high. The share of road surfaces in good condition lags behind the average figures. Stara Zagora maintains relatively low local taxes. The self-assessments of local administrations for the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop-shop administrative services are poor.

In line with the trend on the national level, the natural population growth in Stara Zagora has been deteriorating in recent years. The shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education remain almost twice as high as the national average. Access to doctors is relatively good. However, the number of beds in the local general hospitals is declining and lagging further behind the national average. The workloads of criminal judges in the district are relatively heavy, but this does not have a strong negative impact on the speed of delivery of justice. The poor assessment of Stara Zagora in the environment category is primarily due to the extremely high level of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere. The pandemic is having a negative impact on the district's cultural life.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living standard

GDP per capita in Stara Zagora decreased in 2019 and the district lost its second place (after the capital), now outranked by Sofia district and Varna. Nevertheless, salaries and incomes in the district continued to rise, though at a slower rate than in the country, and remained relatively high. The average annual gross salary of employed people reached 13,900 BGN, and the average income per household member went up to 5,600 BGN.

In terms of the poverty indicators, the figures for Stara Zagora district were almost identical to the national average – 23.1% of the households in the district were below the national poverty line, versus 22.6% in the country, and 19.8% were living with material deprivation, compared to 19.9% nationally.

Labor market

Economic activity in Stara Zagora district is declining, but remains relatively high and over the past few years has remained consistently above the national average. The economic activity rate for 2020 is 75.5%, versus 73.7% countrywide. However, its decrease has been accompanied by a decline in employment and rising unemployment, though both rates are more favorable than the respective national averages. The employment rate is 73.3% (compared to 68.5% nationally) and is among the highest in the country.

The educational structure of the workforce in the district has been improving. In 2020, the population aged 25–64 with higher education reached 21.6%, though remaining below the national average of 29.2%. However, the share of the population with primary and lower education was relatively small – 16.4%, compared to 16.9% in the country. The relatively high share of the workforce with secondary education is therefore in line with the district's industrial profile.

The population replacement rate 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, is 69.1% (versus 76.1% in the country), which indicates an impending contraction of the labor force.

Investment and economy

There are a relatively small number of enterprises in Stara Zagora district – 49 per 1,000 people, compared to 61 per 1,000 people in the country in 2019. However, production value in the district is relatively high and with 26,900 BGN/person that year, Stara Zagora was preceded only by Sofia (capital), Sofia district, Burgas and Plovdiv. By the end of 2019, FDI stock had grown twice as fast as in the country on average and reached 3,111 EUR/person, compared to 3,655 EUR/person in the country. FTI acquisition expenditures had been gradually increas-

ing and in 2019 they reached 2,849 BGN/person, again ranking Stara Zagora among the top five districts.

The district's performance as regards the utilization of European funds is not so good. By 15 June 2021, payments made to beneficiaries of EU projects amounted to 1,783 BGN/person, compared to 2,217 BGN/person for the country on average. Within the district, the leader in the utilization of EU funds was the municipality of Gurkovo, and the bottom place was held by Bratya Daskalovi.

Infrastructure

The density of the railway network in Stara Zagora district is considerably higher than average. The density of the road network is slightly lower, but the share of highways and first-class roads is 28.7%, compared to 18.5% for the country in 2020. Nevertheless, the share of roads with good quality surface has been lagging behind the average figures – 37.6% in 2019, versus 41.4% nationally.

Households' access to the internet has decreased slightly and in 2020 it was already below the national average. Slightly higher is the share of households with access to a gas supply, as well as installed RES capacity relative to the district's population.

Local taxes

Unlike most districts with a high degree of economic development, in 2021 Stara Zagora kept its municipal tax rates relatively low. The biggest differences compared to the respective national averages were observed in the tax on the immovable property of legal entities and on non-gratuitous acquisition of property. Taxes on taxi transportation were also considerably lower. Conversely, the tax on retail trade was higher than average, while that on motor vehicles was close to the national average.

Administration

In 2019, cadastral map coverage in the district exceeded 95% of its territory. The self-assessments of the local administration on the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop shop services improved in 2021, though remaining considerably below the national averages. The average AIP Active transparency rating of the local municipalities also went up but remained relatively low – 69.3% in the district, compared to 73.2% nationally. Within the district, the highest ratings were achieved by the municipalities of Gurkovo and Nikolaevo, and the lowest ones were those of Galabovo municipality.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

In line with the trend in the whole country, the natural population growth rate in Stara Zagora district has been deteriorating in recent years and in 2020 it decreased to -10.1% , versus the national average of -9.5% . At the same time, the net migration rate went up in almost the whole country and for the first time in a number of districts it reached a positive value. Stara Zagora district was no exception, though its migration rate remained relatively low -3.7% .

In 2020, the district's rate of population ageing was similar to the national average. The age dependency rate as a ratio of the people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 was 150.7%, compared to 150.6% nationally, and to the 15–64 age group it was 36.4%, versus 34.1% countrywide.

The share of urban population in the district shrank by nearly 3 p.p. to 69.6%, against the national average of 72.9%. At the same time, the density of the urban population remained close to the country's average $-1,477$ persons/sq. km, compared to 1,506 persons/sq. km nationally.

Education

The net enrolment rate of schoolchildren in 5th–8th grade remains at a relatively high level -91.4% , compared to the average of 86.5% nationally. However, the shares of repeaters and drop-outs from primary and secondary education remain almost twice as high as the respective country averages. The number of teachers continues to rise and in 2020 for the first time it exceeded the national average -88 teachers per 1,000 students in the district, compared to 87 teachers per 1,000 students nationally.

In 2021, the results of the students in Stara Zagora district were below the national average. The average score in the external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 33.9 points, against 37.9 points nationwide. The average result in the State matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature was 4.12 in the district, versus 4.21 nationally, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) reached 8%, against 7% nationwide.

The number of university students in the district has been on the increase, but remains almost twice as low as the country's average -17 students per 1,000 people, versus 32 students per 1,000 people nationally.

Healthcare

In 2020, the number of people with health insurance went down, though remaining above the country's average. Access to doctors $-$ both GPs and specialist physicians $-$ in Stara Zagora district is relatively favorable $-1,502$ people on average per one GP, compared to the national average of 1,727 people per doctor. However, the number of beds in the local general hospitals has been on the decrease and is falling further behind the national average. In 2020, the available hospital beds amounted to 4.74 per 1,000 people, versus 5.52 beds per 1,000 people nationwide. Hospitalization numbers are close to but

below the national average -123 per 1,000 people, against 138 per 1,000 people countrywide.

The infant mortality rate shrank by half in 2020 and came close to the national average.

Public order and security

The workloads of criminal judges in Stara Zagora district remain relatively heavy, but in 2020 this did not have a strong negative impact on the speed of delivery of justice. One local judge heard an average of 10.2 cases per month, compared to 8.6 cases monthly per judge in the country. The share of criminal cases closed within 3 months reached 93%, against 90% nationally, and that of pending cases -10% , compared to 11% in the country.

The number of crimes and the detection rate in the district remained close to the respective national averages in 2020. The registered crimes against the person and property constituted 10.3 per 1,000 persons in the district, compared to 9.9 per 1,000 persons in the country, while the detection rate was 54.2% in Stara Zagora, versus 54.2% in the country.

Environment

The poor rating given to Stara Zagora in the environment category is based predominantly on the excessively high carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere. In 2019, those emissions amounted to 3,655 t/sq. km of carbon dioxide, or almost four times higher than in Sofia (capital), which is the district that comes second after Stara Zagora. The high figure is due to the presence of the large coal-fired power plants operating on the district's territory.

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, for the first time exceeding, albeit slightly, the national average. At the same time, the share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling increased to 86%, versus 71% in the country.

The district is lagging behind as regards the share of population living in settlements with public sewerage -71.5% in 2019, compared to 76.4% nationally. Of the households with access to public sewerage networks, 62.1% are connected to a wastewater treatment plant, against 64.6% in the country.

Culture

The pandemic and the nationwide restrictions on cultural events in 2020 had their negative impact on the district's cultural life as well. Cinema visits dropped by 74% to 168 per 1,000 persons, while nationwide they fell to 190 per 1,000 persons, and library visits decreased by 20% to 456 per 1,000 persons, compared to 480 per 1,000 persons nationwide. Museum visits were reduced by 62%, though they remained above the national average, with 405 visits per 1,000 persons, compared to 322 per 1,000 persons in the country.

Key indicators for the district of Stara Zagora

Indicators of economic development	2018	2019	2020	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	17,273	16,276	n.a.	17,170
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	5,478	5,610	n.a.	6,013
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	13,190	13,914	n.a.	15,209
Share of the population living below the national poverty line (%)	17.8	23.1	n.a.	22.6
Employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	71.0	74.7	73.3	68.5
Unemployment rate of the population over 15 years of age (%)	2.3	(1.4)	(2.2)	5.2
Share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	18.0	18.7	16.4	16.9
Share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	19.0	20.7	21.6	29.2
Production value (BGN/person)	25,207	26,929	n.a.	28,027
Expenditure on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets (BGN/person)	2,621	2,849	n.a.	3,155
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	2,937	3,111	n.a.	3,655
Share of households with Internet (%)	71.4	77.9	76.0	78.9
Share of roads in good condition (%)	40.7	37.6	n.a.	41.4
Road network density (km/100 sq. km territory)	17.5	17.5	17.6	17.9
AIP active transparency rating of local government bodies (%)*	71.0	65.1	69.3	73.2

Indicators of social development	2018	2019	2020	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-7.3	-7.6	-10.1	-9.5
Net migration rate (‰)	-1.2	-1.8	3.7	4.4
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.06	4.18	4.12	4.21
Average grade in the National external exam in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	30.9	31.8	33.9	37.9
Net enrolment of the population in 5th–8th grade (%)	92.9	91.4	91.4	86.5
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	81	87	88	87
Share of population with health insurance (%)	89.3	90.0	89.3	88.7
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,471	1,485	1,502	1,727
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	11.0	11.4	10.3	9.9
Workloads of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	10.0	11.2	10.2	8.6
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	72.0	71.5	n.a.	76.4
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	412	n.a.	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	86.3	n.a.	n.a.	70.9
Visits to cinemas per 1,000 persons	596	635	168	190
Visits to museums per 1,000 persons	865	1,060	405	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.