

Sliven district

► Population (2021)	180,058
► Territory (sq. km)	3,544
► Number of settlements	110
► Share of urban population (%)	65.2



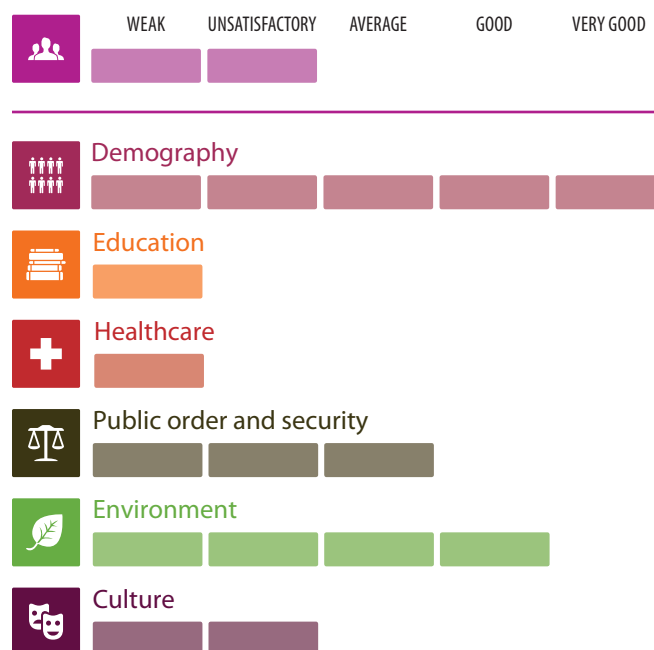
Although GDP per capita in the district of Sliven is growing, it is among the lowest in the country. The shrinking of economic activity is accompanied by a decrease in employment and an increase in unemployment. Investment activity is extremely slack and the district ranks last in this category. The basic physical infrastructure retains its high level. The tax rates on retail trade and taxi transportation are significantly lower than the respective national averages. The transparency of the municipalities in the district remains high.

The demographic picture of the district ranks it among the country's leaders on this indicator. At the same time, Sliven is among the districts with the lowest performance as regards the indicators for education. Sliven's poor rating in the healthcare category is mainly due to the extremely high infant mortality rate. The relative number of crimes in the district is close to the average in the country, while the detection rate remains considerably higher. The low proportion of the population in housing with access to public sewerage remains a challenge. The intensity of cultural life is increasing.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■

Income and living standard ■

Although GDP per capita in the Sliven region is growing, in 2020 it was among the lowest in the country, (alongside Silistra) – 8,600 BGN/person, compared to the national average of 17,300 BGN/person. Salaries and incomes in the district are also increasing, but they remain considerably below the average levels. The average annual gross salary of employed people reached 12,400 BGN, against 16,700 BGN in the country.

Sliven is the district with the highest share of the population living with material deprivation – 34.1%, compared to 19.4% in the country. The share of the population living below the national poverty line is also significantly higher than the average value – 32.0% in the district, compared to 22.1% in the country in 2021.

Labor market ■■■

Economic activity in Sliven district decreased in 2021 and its rate fell to 68.8%, compared to the national average of 72.0%. This shrinking of the activity has been accompanied by a decrease in employment and an increase in unemployment. The employment rate reached 62.4%, versus the national average of 68.1%, and unemployment was 9.4%, compared to 5.3% nationally.

The labor market still faces the challenge posed by the educational structure of the workforce. In 2021, the share of the population aged 25–64 years with primary or lower education went up and reached 38.2%, against 16.6% nationally, and was the highest in the country for that year. The share of people with higher education remained relatively limited and even fell to 20.1%, versus the national average of 29.6%.

At the same time, the district presents a rather favorable picture of its demography – 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 90.5%, while the national average is 69.4%. This means that for every 100 adults who are about to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are about 91 young people who will join the workforce.

Investment and economy ■■

Investment activity in Sliven is extremely slack, which ranks the district last in the whole country in this category. The number of non-financial enterprises in the district was 38 per 1,000 persons in 2020 and remained relatively low compared to the national average of 60 per 1,000 persons. Domestic and foreign investment also remained low. FTA acquisition expenditure decreased to 1,100 BGN/person, versus the average of 3,300 BGN/person nationally. FDI in the district amounted to 867 EUR/person, which is the same as in the year before and over four times lower than the national average of 3,900 EUR/

person. Production in the district was worth only 12,000 BGN/person, compared to the national average of 27,200 BGN/person, and decreased compared to 2019.

Sliven is also the district with the lowest utilization rate of European funds. By 30 June 2022, payments made in the district to beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 1,339 BGN/person. Within the district, the highest amounts were utilized by the municipality of the city of Sliven, though even those payments were far below the national average.

Infrastructure ■■■■■

The basic physical infrastructure in Sliven district retains its high level. The density of the road and railroad networks is comparable to the national average. In 2021, the share of highways and first-class roads remained comparatively high – 22.2%, compared to 18.5% in the country.

Sliven continues to be the district with the largest share of road surfaces in good condition – 68%, against 42% in the country in 2021. Digital connectivity is also relatively good – the share of households with internet access was 83.3% in 2021, versus 83.59% nationally. The share of households connected to a gas supply remains low – 1.0%, compared to 5.3% in the country.

Local taxes ■■■■

In 2022, the average rates of the tax on non-residential immovable property for legal entities and non-gratuitous acquisition of property were higher than in the country. At the same time, the tax rates on retail trade and taxi transportation were considerably lower than the respective national averages. The tax on motor vehicles was comparable to the average one in the country.

Administration ■■■■■

Cadastral map coverage has increased and is now above the country's average, although by a small margin, and includes almost the whole of the district's territory. The local authorities' self-assessment on the development of e-government marked a significant improvement in 2022, while that on the provision of one-stop-shop services retained its level from the year before and was lower than the national average.

The transparency of the municipal bodies in the district has continued to improve and in 2022 the average rating reached 80.1%, versus 70.2% countrywide, which again places Sliven district second in the country, after Dobrich district.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ■■■

Demography ■■■■■■

In 2021, Sliven's demographic picture again 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 -9.0‰ (versus -13.2% nationally), while the decrease was among the lowest in the country. At the same time, the district has failed to attract new residents and the net migration rate remained negative (-4.8‰).

The age dependency ratio of the people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 has decreased further, but at 108.8% it still ranks Sliven district at the top place in the country, where that ratio is 149.3%. The ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 15–64 is also lower – 33.2%, compared to 34.0% nationwide. The share of the population living in urban areas is relatively low – 65.2%, compared to 73.1% in the country, but the population density measured as the average number of people per unit settlement 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 number of teachers has been rising but it still remains the lowest in the country – 86 teachers per 1,000 students, compared to 97 teachers per 1,000 students in the country.

Students' performance in 2022 again remained weak. The average score in the external examination in mathematics after 7th grade was 25.8 points, compared to the average of 35.3 points nationally. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was also relatively low – "Good" 3.79, versus the national average of 3.97, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) was 23.1%, compared to the national average of 17.0%.

In the past few years, the rate of enrolment in 5th–7th grade has remained steady and it parallels the country's average – 85.3% in the district, versus 85.9% nationally.

Healthcare ■■

The poor results of Sliven district in the area of healthcare are mostly due to the exceptionally high infant mortality rate. In 2021 it remained the highest in the whole country and even went up to 14.8‰, against 5.6‰ nationally.

The numbers of doctors and hospital beds in Sliven district are below the respective national averages. One local GP cares for 1,916 persons on average, compared to 1,734 persons per doctor countrywide. The index for access to specialist physicians is also more unfavorable than in the country on average. The number of beds in the local general hospitals continues to be

relatively low – 4.73 per 1,000 persons, compared to 5.62 per 1,000 persons in the country in 2021.

The number of people treated in the local general hospitals is 171.0 per 1,000 persons, compared to 222.6 per 1,000 persons countrywide. The share of people with health insurance remains relatively low – 86.7%, versus 88.7% in the country.

Public order and security ■■■■

One judge in Sliven district hears an average of 7.76 cases a month, compared to 9.60 cases nationally. The proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months is 92%, compared to the average of 89% nationwide. Pending cases make up 9.5%, against 11.8% in the country.

The number of crimes in the district is close to the average crime rate in the country, but the detection rate is considerably higher. In 2021, registered crimes against the person and property in Sliven district amounted to 9.6 per 1,000 persons, against 9.8 per 1,000 persons nationwide. The detection rate was 64.4% versus the average of 51.7% in the country.

Environment ■■■■■■

The relative volume of generated household waste is close to, but below the national average – 368 kg/person per year in the district, compared to 409 kg/person in the country in 2020. The share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling is almost equal to the national average – slightly over 69%.

A challenge still facing the district is the limited share of the population with access to public sewerage networks – only 64.8%, compared to 76.3% countrywide, while the share of sewerage systems connected to wastewater treatment plants is 56.9% in Sliven district, against the national average of 66.7%.

The share of forest areas is relatively high – 42.4% (compared to 33.1% in the country), while the share of disturbed areas is around the national average in 2021.

Culture ■■■

After the sharp decline in 2020, cultural life in Silistra district grew in intensity in 2021, although none of the values of the monitored indicators managed to return to their pre-pandemic levels. Cinema visits reached 53 per 1,000 persons, against 351 per 1,000 persons nationally. Visits to the local theatres and museums numbered 81 per 1,000 persons, against 129 per 1,000 persons in the country, and 360 per 1,000 persons, against 426 per 1,000 persons nationwide respectively. Only visits to the local libraries exceeded the national average – 621 per 1,000 persons in the district, against 449 per 1,000 persons in the country.

Key indicators for the district of Sliven

Economic Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, BGN, current prices	8,172	8,616	n.a.	17,299
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	11,085	12,370	n.a.	16,687
Relative share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	33.9	34.4	32.0	22.1
Annual average economic activity rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	69.0	69.9	68.8	72.0
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	64.5	65.0	62.4	68.1
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	6.5	6.9	9.4	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with primary or lower education (%)	37.6	36.2	38.2	16.6
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with higher education (%)	20.9	21.4	20.1	29.6
Production value (BGN/person)	12,467	11,974	n.a.	27,213
Expenditures for acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN/person)	1,236	1,075	n.a.	3,348
Foreign direct investment to non-financial enterprises, per capita (cumulative) (EUR/person)	866	867	n.a.	3,877
Relative share of households with internet access (%)	77.2	83.4	83.3	83.5
Share of roads in good condition (%)	79.4	72.9	68.0	42.0
Road network density (km/100 sq. m territory)	16.4	16.4	16.4	18.0
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	77.8	79.8	80.1	70.2

Social Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-2.9	-6.4	-9.0	-13.2
Net migration rate (‰)	-10.0	-2.2	-4.8	1.9
Average grades in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.16	4.08	3.79	3.97
Average grade in the National external examination in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	29.3	27.5	25.8	35.3
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	84.9	86.4	85.3	85.9
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	83	82	86	97
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	87.5	86.4	86.7	88.7
Number of people per general practitioner	1,841	1,930	1,916	1,734
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 persons	10.2	9.4	9.6	9.8
Actual workload of penal judges in the district court (cases/month)	9.8	9.7	7.6	9.0
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage systems (%)	65.2	64.8	n.a.	76.3
Household waste generated per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	369	368	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	69.2	69.1	n.a.	69.3
Number of visits to cinemas per 1,000 people of the average annual population	90	14	53	351
Number of visits to museums per 1,000 people of the average annual population	485	280	360	426

* The 2021 data are included in the 2022 study.

** The data refer to the 2021-22 academic year, while the State matriculation exams took place in 2022. The same is valid of the previous years.