

Smolyan district

- Population (2021)
- Territory (sq. km)
- Number of settlements
- Share of urban population (%)

99,318
3,193
240
56.9



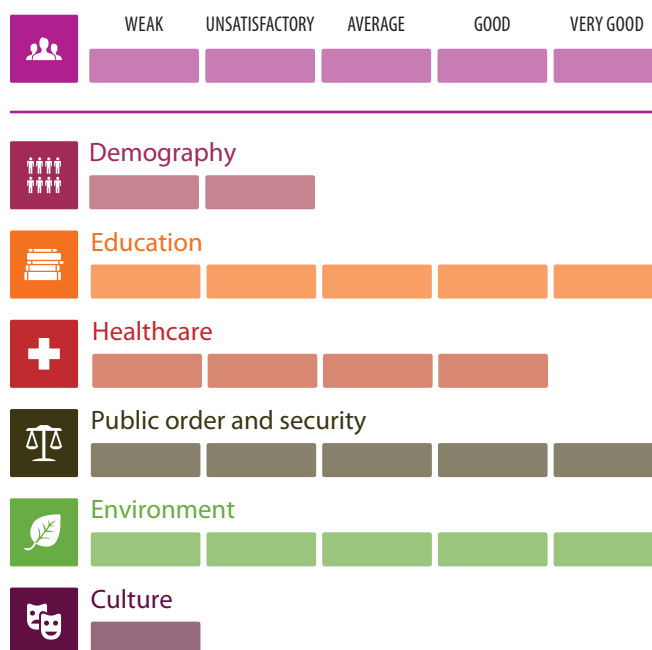
GDP, salaries, and incomes in Smolyan district continue to rise. The poverty level is about average. Employment and unemployment are falling, with both indicators remaining relatively unfavorable. The number of enterprises, the volume of production, domestic, and foreign investment are all shrinking. There are no railways, highways, and first-class roads in the district. Smolyan is among the districts with relatively low local taxes. The transparency rating of local self-government bodies is decreasing and remains below average. The population of the district is among the fastest

ageing in the country. Smolyan continues to rank among the leaders in the education category. The shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education are low. The share of people with health insurance is high. Smolyan is the district with the lowest workload of the local judges and with the smallest number of registered crimes. The district also ranks first with the highest share of forest areas and the lowest share of disturbed areas. The intensity of its cultural life is gradually increasing, but it nevertheless remains weak.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■■■

Income and living standard ■■■■

GDP per capita in Smolyan district has continued to grow and in 2020 it reached 12,000 BGN, compared to 17,300 BGN nationally. Salaries and incomes are also rising. In 2020, the average annual gross salary of employed people was 12,000 BGN, compared to 16,700 BGN in the country. In 2021, household incomes again remained higher than the national average.

Poverty levels in the district are close to the national average. The share of the population living with material deprivation is 18.5%, versus 19.4% in the country, and that of the population living below the national poverty line is 23.0%, against 22.1% countrywide.

Labor market ■■■■

In 2020, economic activity in Smolyan shrank to 70.8%, and its rate fell below the national average of 72.0%. This shrinking was accompanied by a decline in both employment and unemployment, with the two indicators remaining less favorable than the respective national averages. The employment rate reached 64.6%, compared to 68.1% in the country, and the unemployment rate – 8.8%, against 5.3% nationwide.

The educational structure of the workforce in the district has shown a slight improvement and is again relatively high. In 2021, the share of people aged 25–64 with primary or lower education declined to 12.9%, versus the national average of 16.6%, while the number of those with a university degree went up to 24.3%, against 29.6% nationally.

A huge challenge for the continuing development of the local labor market continues to be population ageing. Smolyan is the district with the lowest population replacement rate as a ratio of the people aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64, which was 42.3% in 2021, compared to 69.4% nationwide. This means that for every 100 adults who are about to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are 42 young people who will join the workforce.

Investment and economy ■■■■

In 2020, business and investment activity in the Smolyan region deteriorated, as the number of enterprises, production volume, and domestic and foreign investment shrank. The number of non-financial enterprises in the district reached 51 per 1,000 persons, compared to 60 per 1,000 persons in the country. FTA acquisition expenditure per capita decreased by 15% to 2,200 BGN, versus 3,300 BGN in the country, and FDI – by 36% to 565 EUR per capita, compared to 3,900 EUR per capita countrywide. Production value shrank to 15,600 BGN, but the decline was not so great (1.4%).

Utilization of European funds in Smolyan district is relatively good. By 30 June 2022, payments made in the district to

beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 2,800 BGN/person. Within the district, the highest amounts were utilized by the municipalities of Nedelino and Smolyan city.

Infrastructure ■■

The specific geographic location of the district as a border region and its mountainous terrain account for its relatively poorly developed infrastructure. Smolyan lacks railroads, highways, and first-class roads. The density of its road network remains below the national average. Road quality remained relatively good in 2021, with the share of roads with surfaces in good condition reaching 50%, against the country's average of 42%.

Households' access to the internet has registered an increase, but in 2021 it was again lower than the national average – 73.6% in the district, versus 83.5% in the country. The share of households connected to a gas supply is practically nil, against 5.3% in the country on average. Installed RES capacities have reached 2.8 kW/person, versus 0.6 kW/person nationally.

Local taxes ■■■■

In 2022, Smolyan again ranked among the districts with relatively low local taxes. The biggest differences with the respective national averages were observed in the taxes on retail trade and motor vehicles. In 2022, the average retail trade tax in the municipalities in Smolyan district was 7.73 BGN/sq. m, versus 12.99 BGN/sq. m in the country. The tax on motor vehicles and passenger cars was 1.37 BGN/kW, compared to 1.54 BGN/kW nationally. Among the monitored taxes, the rates in the district were higher for the tax on immovable non-residential property for legal entities.

Within the district, the municipalities levying the lowest taxes are those in Smolyan city, Nedelino, and Borino, and the highest – the municipality of Dospat.

Administration ■■■■

The self-assessment of the local administration on the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop-shop services dropped in 2022 and fell below the respective national averages. The AIP Active transparency rating of the local administration also decreased and remained below the national average – 66.9% in the district, compared to 70.2% in the country.

Cadastral map coverage in Smolyan district has been rising steadily and in 2021 it already covered practically the whole of its territory.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

The population of Smolyan district is one of the fastest ageing in the country. In 2021, the district recorded one of the lowest declines in the natural population growth rate, but also one of the largest decreases in the net migration rate, with both figures remaining negative. The natural population growth rate was -16.8‰, versus -13.2‰ nationwide, and the net migration rate collapsed from -1.6‰ to -8.9‰.

The district's age dependency ratios have been deteriorating fast and are considerably less favorable than in the country on average. In 2021, the ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0-14 reached 229.6%, compared to 149.3% nationally, and to the 15-64 age group it was 41.6%, versus 34.0% countrywide.

The urban population in the district is relatively low - 56.9%, against the national average of 73.1%. At the same time, the density of the population remains relatively high - 1,717 persons/sq. km, compared to 1,489 persons/sq. km in the country.

Education

Smolyan continues to rank among the districts with the best performance in the education category, where it is second only to Sofia (capital city). The net enrolment rate of schoolchildren in 5th-7th grade is one of the highest in the country - 91.8%, compared to the average of 85.9% nationally. The proportion of teachers to students in primary and secondary education is the highest in the country - 130 teachers per 1,000 students in 2021, compared to the national average of 97 teachers per 1,000 students. The shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education are the lowest in Bulgaria.

The performance of the district's students in 2022 again exceeded the national average. The average score in the external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 39.4 points, against 35.3 points nationwide, and was the third highest in the whole country, preceded only by that in the capital and Varna district. The average result in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature reached "Good" 4.12 in the district, versus 3.97 nationally, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) was 9.6%, against 17.0% nationwide, which ranked Smolyan district second only to the capital.

Healthcare

Smolyan district performs quite well in the healthcare category. The percentage of people with health insurance is among the highest in Bulgaria - 97.5% in 2021, compared to 88.7% nationwide, which can also be explained by the high rate of population aging and the large share of pensioners in the district. Access to GPs is relatively easy, though the number of specialist physicians is still considerably lower than the average one for the country.

Bed capacity in the local general hospitals is close to the country's average - 5.60 per 1,000 persons, versus 5.62 per 1,000 persons nationwide. The relative number of patients treated in

the local hospitals is 179.1 per 1,000 persons, versus 222.6 per 1,000 persons countrywide.

Public order and security

In 2021, Smolyan was again the top-ranking Bulgarian district in the public order and security category. The workloads of the local criminal judges were the lowest in the country, with a monthly average of 3.3 cases per judge, compared to 9.8 cases per judge nationally. This has had a beneficial effect on the speed of delivery of justice. The share of criminal cases closed within 3 months was the highest in the country - 95%, against 89% nationally.

Smolyan is also the district with the lowest crime rates in the country. Registered crimes against the person and property number 4.5 per 1,000 persons, with 9.8 per 1,000 persons as the national average. At the same time, the detection rate in the district is extremely high - 69.7% in the district, compared to 51.7% countrywide.

Environment

Smolyan is among the districts with very good performance when it comes to the environment indicators. It is also the district with the largest forest areas - 69.5%, against 33.1% in the country, and with the lowest share of disturbed areas - 0.08%, versus 0.42% nationwide.

In 2020, 73.4% of the population lived in settlements with a public sewerage network (compared to 76.3% in the country), which is a comparatively high figure in view of the low level of urbanization in the district. However, Smolyan district is still lagging behind in terms of the connectivity of sewerage networks to wastewater treatment plants, with a coverage of only 42.7% of the local population, compared to the national average of 66.7%.

The amounts of household waste generated in the district are relatively small - 333 kg/person per year, against 409 kg/person on a national scale. The share of this waste that has been handed over for treatment and recycling is also low - 48.0%, compared to 69.3% in the country.

Culture

After the sharp decline of 2020, the intensity of cultural life in the district grew in 2021, although none of the values of the monitored indicators managed to return to their pre-pandemic level, so Smolyan district's overall performance in this category remains poor. Cinema visits numbered 95 per 1,000 persons, against 351 per 1,000 persons nationally. Visits to the local theatres and museums numbered 42 per 1,000 persons, against 129 per 1,000 persons in the country, and 176 per 1,000 persons, against 426 per 1,000 persons nationwide respectively and visits to local libraries amounted to 152 per 1,000 persons, against 449 per 1,000 persons nationally.

Key indicators for the district of Smolyan

Economic Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	11,742	12,028	n.a.	17,299
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	11,106	12,037	n.a.	16,687
Relative share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	21.2	24.4	23.0	22.1
Annual average economic activity rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	73.0	74.0	70.8	72.0
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	66.5	65.2	64.6	68.1
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	8.8	11.9	8.8	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with primary or lower education (%)	14.3	14.0	12.9	16.6
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with higher education (%)	23.5	23.5	24.3	29.6
Production value (BGN/person)	15,866	15,649	n.a.	27,213
Expenditures for acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN/person)	2,591	2,197	n.a.	3,348
Foreign direct investment to non-financial enterprises, per capita (cumulative) (EUR/person)	889	565	n.a.	3,877
Relative share of households with internet access (%)	82.4	73.6	76.3	83.5
Share of roads in good condition (%)	53.8	55.1	50.1	42.0
Road network density (km/100 sq. m territory)	16.9	16.9	16.9	18.0
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	67.5	72.2	66.9	70.2

Social Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-9.7	-14.4	-16.8	-13.2
Net migration rate (‰)	-8.4	-1.6	-8.9	1.9
Average grades in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.53	4.44	4.12	3.97
Average grade in the National external examination in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	38.1	42.6	39.4	35.3
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	90.9	90.8	91.8	85.9
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	125	130	130	97
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	97.0	95.6	97.5	88.7
Number of people per general practitioner	1,569	1,605	1,552	1,734
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 persons	6.0	5.2	4.5	9.8
Actual workload of penal judges in the district court (cases/month)	5.2	3.6	3.3	9.0
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage systems (%)	73.1	73.4	n.a.	76.3
Household waste generated per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	333	333	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	48.0	48.0	n.a.	69.3
Number of visits to cinemas per 1,000 people of the average annual population	149	38	95	351
Number of visits to museums per 1,000 people of the average annual population	154	96	176	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.