

Stara Zagora district

► Population (2021)	307,140
► Territory (sq. km)	5,151
► Number of settlements	206
► Share of urban population (%)	69.9



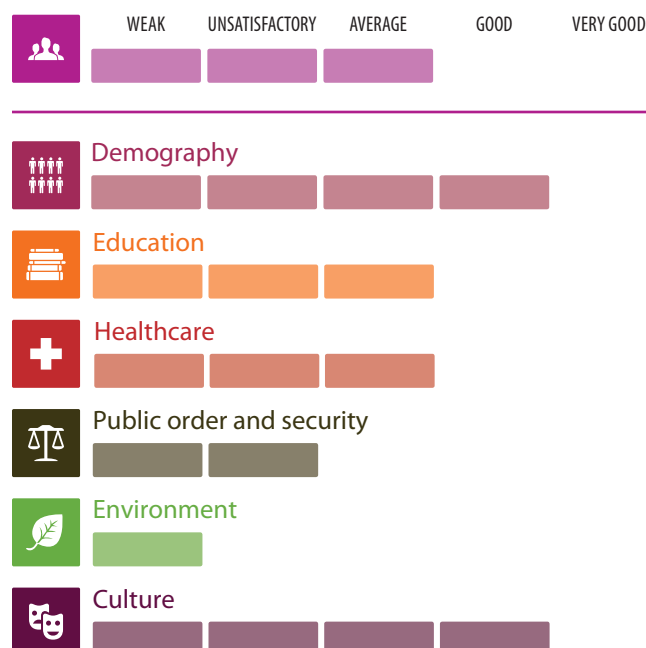
Salaries and incomes in the district continue to grow, but the poverty rate is rising. Employment is decreasing and unemployment is increasing, though both rates are more favorable than the respective national averages. There are a relatively small number of enterprises in the district, but production 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 a national level, the natural population growth in Stara Zagora has been deteriorating in recent years. The relative number of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education remain considerably higher than the national average. Access to doctors is relatively good. However, the number of beds in local general hospitals is declining. Delivery of justice is relatively speedy. Carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere and the share of disturbed areas are extremely high. Stara Zagora is among the districts with the most active cultural life.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■■■

Income and living standard ■■■■

Although GDP per capita in Stara Zagora has continued to decrease, however slightly, in 2020 the district outstripped Varna and recovered its third place in the ranking (after the capital and Sofia district). Salaries and incomes in the district also continue to rise. The average annual gross salary of employed people has reached 15,000 BGN, compared to 16,700 BGN nationally.

Poverty levels in Stara Zagora district are rising and now exceed the national average. The share of the population living with material deprivation is 22.0%, compared to 19.9% nationally, and of those living below the national poverty line it is 28.1, versus 22.1% in the country.

Labor market ■■■■

Economic activity in Stara Zagora district is declining, yet remains relatively high and over the past few years has remained consistently above the national average. The economic activity rate for 2021 is 74.5%, versus 72.0% 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 72.2%, compared to 68.1% nationally, while the unemployment rate is 3.1%, versus 5.3% in the country.

The educational structure of the workforce in the district has been improving. In 2021, the population aged 25–64 with higher education reached 22.0%, though remaining below the national average of 29.6%. However, the share of the population with primary and lower education was relatively small – 15.8%, compared to 16.6% 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 71.7% (versus 69.4% in the country), which indicates an impending contraction of the labor force.

Investment and economy ■■■■

Stara Zagora district has a relatively small number of enterprises – 49 per 1,000 people, compared to 60 per 1,000 people in the country in 2020. However, although on the decrease, production value in the district is relatively high, and with 25,400 BGN/person reported for that year, Stara Zagora was preceded only by Sofia (capital), Sofia district, Ruse, and Plovdiv. By the end of 2020, accumulated FDI retained its level – 3,100 EUR/person, compared to 3,900 EUR/person in the country. However, FTA acquisition expenditures decreased to 2,500 BGN/person, versus 3,300 BGN/person nationally; nevertheless, Stara Zagora again ranked among the top four districts.

The district's performance as regards the utilization of European funds is not so good. By 30 June 2022, payments made to beneficiaries of EU projects amounted to 2,032 BGN/person. 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 municipality.

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 2021. Nevertheless, the share of roads with good quality surface has been lagging behind the average figures – 39%, versus the national average of 42% in 2021.

Households' access to the internet has been rising, but it remains below the national average – 78.8%, against 83.5% in the country. Slightly higher is the share of installed RES capacities relative to the district's population, while the share of households with access to a gas supply is lagging behind – 4.2% in the district, against 5.3% in the country.

Local taxes ■■■■

Unlike most districts with a high degree of economic development, in 2022 Stara Zagora again kept its municipal tax rates relatively low. The biggest differences compared to the respective national averages were observed in the tax on non-residential immovable property for 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 equal to the national average.

Within the district, the lowest average tax rates are those in the municipalities of Bratya Daskalovi and Chirpan, and the highest ones – in the municipality of Stara Zagora city.

Administration ■■

Cadastral map coverage in the district has stopped increasing in the past few years and is lagging behind the country's average – 95.8% in the district, against 97.4% nationally in 2021.

The self-assessments of the local administration on the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop-shop services improved in 2022, though remaining considerably below the national averages. The average AIP Active transparency rating of the local municipalities also remained relatively low in 2022 – 63.8% in the district, compared to 70.2% nationally.

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 2021 it decreased to -14.1‰, versus the national average of -13.2‰. At the same time, Stara Zagora is among the few districts which in 2021 again managed to attract population and its net migration rate was positive - 0.3‰.

In 2021, 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 149.2%, compared to 149.3% nationally, and to the 15-64 age group it was 36.4%, versus 34.0% countrywide.

The urban population and the density of the population in the district are also close to the country's average - 69.9% of the population live in urban areas, against the national average of 73.1%. Population density is 1,457 persons/sq. km, compared to 1,489 persons/sq. km nationally in 2021.

Education ■■■■

The net enrolment rate of schoolchildren in 5th-7th grade is declining but remains at a relatively high level - 89.6%, compared to the average of 86.9% nationally in 2021. However, the shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education remain considerably higher than the respective national averages. The number of teachers has continued to rise and has reached 95 teachers per 1,000 students, compared to 97 teachers per 1,000 students nationally.

In 2022, the average score in the external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was relatively low - 31.9 points, against 35.3 points nationwide. The students in the district performed relatively well in the State matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature. Their average result was "Good" 3.96, compared to 3.97 nationally, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) amounted to 16.1%, against 17.0% nationwide.

The number of university students in the district has been on the increase but remains considerably lower than the country's average - 18 students per 1,000 people, versus 32 students per 1,000 people nationally.

Healthcare ■■■■

In 2021, the number of people with health insurance remained above the country's average - 89.4%, against 88.7% nationwide. Access to doctors - both GPs and specialist physicians - in Stara Zagora district is relatively good - 1,463 people on average per one GP, compared to the national average of 1,734 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 2021, the available hospital beds in the district amounted to 4.65 per 1,000 people, versus 5.62 beds per 1,000 people nationwide. Hospitalization numbers are close to but below the national average - 192.1 per 1,000 people, against 222.6 per 1,000 people countrywide.

The infant mortality rate in the district has gone up and is now considerably above the national average.

Public order and security ■■■■

The workloads of criminal judges in Stara Zagora district remain relatively heavy, but in 2021 once again this did not have a negative impact on the speed of delivery of justice. One local judge heard an average of 10.8 cases per month, compared to 9.0 cases monthly per judge in the country. The share of criminal cases closed within 3 months was 92%, against 89% nationally, and that of pending cases - 9.1%, compared to 11.8% in the country.

The number of crimes in the district is relatively high, but the detection rate also remained relatively high in 2021. The registered crimes against the person and property constituted 10.8 per 1,000 persons in the district, compared to 9.8 per 1,000 persons in the country, while the detection rate was 53.6% in Stara Zagora, versus 51.7% 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 and the large amount of disturbed areas. In 2021, the share of disturbed areas is 3.35%, against 0.42% in the country, while the high figure for carbon dioxide emissions is due to the presence of the country's largest coal-fired power plants operating on the district's territory. At the same time, the amount of forest areas is close to the average figure - 31.7% in the district, against 33.1% in the country.

The amounts of household waste generated by the district's residents in 2020 were 380 kg/person per year, with 83.2% handed over for treatment and recycling, compared to 69.3% in the country.

The district is lagging behind as regards the share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage - 70.6% in 2020, compared to 76.3% nationally. Of the households with access to public sewerage networks, 65.7% are connected to a wastewater treatment plant, against 66.7% in the country.

Culture ■■■■

In 2021, Stara Zagora was once again among the districts with the most active cultural life. After the sharp decline in 2020, cultural life in the district intensified in 2021, although none of the values of the monitored indicators managed to return to their pre-pandemic level. Cinema visits reached 307 per 1,000 persons, against 351 per 1,000 persons nationally. Visits to the local theatres and museums numbered 161 per 1,000 persons, compared to 129 per 1,000 persons in the country, and 570 per 1,000 persons, against 426 per 1,000 persons nationwide respectively. The local libraries attracted 507 visits per 1,000 persons, versus 449 per 1,000 persons in the country.

Key indicators for the district of Stara Zagora

Economic Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	16,361	16,233	n.a.	17,299
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	13,914	15,010	n.a.	16,687
Relative share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	23.1	25.9	28.1	22.1
Annual average economic activity rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	75.7	74.9	74.5	72.0
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	74.7	73.3	72.2	68.1
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	(1.4)	(2.2)	3.1	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with primary or lower education (%)	18.7	16.4	15.8	16.6
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with higher education (%)	20.7	21.6	22.0	29.6
Production value (BGN/person)	26,929	25,415	n.a.	27,213
Expenditures for acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN/person)	2,849	2,500	n.a.	3,348
Foreign direct investment to non-financial enterprises, per capita (cumulative) (EUR/person)	3,111	3,111	n.a.	3,877
Relative share of households with internet access (%)	77.9	76.0	78.8	83.5
Share of roads in good condition (%)	37.6	37.3	38.9	42.0
Road network density (km/100 sq. m territory)	17.5	17.6	17.6	18.0
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	65.1	69.3	63.8	70.2

Social Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-7.6	-10.1	-14.1	-13.2
Net migration rate (‰)	-1.8	3.7	0.3	1.9
Average grades in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.18	4.12	3.96	3.97
Average grade in the National external examination in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	31.8	33.9	31.9	35.3
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	91.4	91.4	89.6	85.9
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	90	91	95	97
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	90.0	89.3	89.4	88.7
Number of people per general practitioner	1,485	1,502	1,463	1,734
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 persons	11.4	10.3	10.8	9.8
Actual workload of penal judges in the district court (cases/month)	11.2	10.2	10.8	9.0
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage systems (%)	71.5	70.6	n.a.	76.3
Household waste generated per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	381	380	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	83.3	83.2	n.a.	69.3
Number of visits to cinemas per 1,000 people of the average annual population	635	168	307	351
Number of visits to museums per 1,000 people of the average annual population	1,060	405	570	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.