

Vratsa district

► Population (2021)	153,700
► Territory (sq. km)	3,620
► Number of settlements	123
► Share of urban population (%)	59.0



Vratsa is the district with the greatest increase in GDP per capita in 2020. Salaries and incomes also continued to grow. Employment is increasing and unemployment is decreasing but the rates still remain less favourable than in the country on average. Economic and investment activity is relatively slack. The whole district performs poorly in terms of the indicators for infrastructural development. The average level of local taxes in the local municipalities is relatively low. The local administrations' transparency ratings lag behind those in the country.

Age dependency ratios are still significantly less favorable than the national averages. The indicators in the field of primary and secondary education remain relatively good, but students' results are relatively low. Healthcare suffers from a shortage of specialist physicians and hospital beds. The number of registered crimes against the person and property in Vratsa district is among the highest in the country. Access to public sewerage networks is limited. The cultural life in the district is not particularly intensive.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■■

Income and living standard ■■■■

In 2020, Vratsa was the district with the greatest increase in GDP per capita. It rose by nearly 17%, against 0.2% nationwide, and reached 15,600 BGN/person, thus outstripping districts such as Gabrovo, Burgas, and Plovdiv. Salaries and incomes in the district have continued to grow. The gross annual salary of employees has gone up to 15,500 BGN, compared to 16,700 BGN in the country.

However, these processes do not yet affect the general level of poverty in the district. In 2021, the share of the population living with material deprivation was 25.7%, against 19.4% in the country, and the population living below the national poverty line was 33.5%, versus 22.1% countrywide.

Labor market ■■■

Economic activity in Vratsa district has gone up but it still remains relatively slack. Its rate in 2021 was 65.2%, compared to 72.0% in the country. Alongside this process, employment has been increasing and unemployment decreasing, but both continue to be less favourable than the country averages. The employment rate is 58.5%, compared to 68.1% in the country, and the unemployment rate – 10.1%, compared to 5.3% in the country.

Vratsa is among the districts with a pronounced industrial profile and the share of the workforce with secondary education is relatively high. In 2021, the share of the population aged between 25 and 64 with a university degree dropped to 18.8% (compared to 29.6% in the country), while that of people with primary or lower education increased to 24.1%, compared to 16.6% in the country.

Population ageing has a major effect on the local labor market. The demographic replacement rate as a ratio of the population aged 15–19 to that of 60–64 in the district is 65.8%, compared to 69.4% in the country. This means that for every 100 people who will have to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are 66 young people who will join the workforce.

Investment and economy ■■■■

Economic and investment activity in Vratsa district remained relatively limited in 2020. The relative number of non-financial enterprises was 37 per 1,000 persons, against 60 per 1,000 persons as the national average. FTA expenditure acquisition rates in the district typically fluctuate by a lot. In 2020, they rose considerably (by 22%) to reach 1,839 BGN/person, compared to the national figure of 3,348 BGN/person. A huge rise was recorded in FDI, but its amount relative to the population remained small – 769 EUR/person in the district, against 3,877 EUR/person in the country.

Contrary to the trend characteristic of most other districts, in 2020 production value in Vratsa district continued to rise,

though at a slow rate, amounting to 17,600 BGN/person, against 27,200 BGN/person as the national average.

Vratsa is among the top-ranking districts as regards utilization of EU funding. By 30 June 2022, such payments made to beneficiaries of EU operational programmes reached 3,169 BGN/person. Within the district, the municipalities of Vratsa city and Mezdra take the top places for utilization of EU funding.

Infrastructure ■■

The whole of Vratsa district performs badly as regards the indicators for infrastructural development, and together with the districts of Vidin and Montana it occupies one of the bottom three places in the country.

The density of the road and railroad networks nearly equals the national averages but road quality remains extremely low. The share of highways and first-class roads is 9.9%, against 18.5% in the country. In 2021, the share of roads with surfaces in good condition was 27%, compared to the national average of 42%.

Households' internet access in Vratsa district also lags behind the country's averages. The share of households connected to a gas supply is 2.7%, against 5.3% in the country. Installed RES capacities have reached 0.389 KW/person, compared to the national average of 0.615 KW/person.

Local taxes ■■■■

In 2022, the average rate of the local taxes in the district's municipalities again remained relatively low. The retail trade tax rate in the district was almost half the national average – 6.84 BGN/sq. m, against 12.99 BGN/sq. m nationally. The rates for the motor vehicle tax, the tax on non-gratuitous acquisition of property, and taxi transportation were also lower.

Of the monitored tax rates, only the average one on non-residential immovable property of legal entities was higher in 2022 than its average counterpart in the country.

Within the district, the highest local taxes are levied by Kozloduy municipality, and the lowest ones – by Mizia municipality.

Administration ■■■■

Although cadastral map coverage has been rising, in 2021 Vratsa was the district with the smallest share of territory covered by the cadastre – 89.9%, compared to 97.4% in the country.

In 2022, the level of e-government in Vratsa district again remained relatively low but that of the provision of one-stop-shop services was still relatively high. The transparency ratings of the local administration have fallen and they lag behind the national average.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ■■■■

Demography ■■■

While in the previous ten years the natural population growth rate in the district had remained at the relatively stable yet low level of around –11‰, in the past two years it fell sharply and in 2021 it was –20.0‰, against –13.2‰ in the country on average. At the same time, the net migration rate has also fallen to –5.3‰. The age dependency ratios remain significantly less favorable than the national average. In 2021, the ratio of the population aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 was 174.2%, compared to 149.3% in the country, and to those aged 15–64 it was 39.8%, against 34.0% in the country.

The urban share of the population remains low – 59%, compared to 73.1% in the country, and its density is twice as low as the national average – 737 people/sq. km compared to 1,489 people/sq. km in the country.

Education ■■■■

The indicators of Vratsa district in the field of primary and secondary education remain relatively good, but the results are relatively low. In 2021, Vratsa again remained among the districts with the highest net enrolment rate in 5th–7th grade – 92.3%, compared to 85.9% in the country. The number of teachers was also higher than the national average – 112 per 1,000 students, versus an average of 97 per 1,000 students nationally. The shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education were close to the average ones.

Students' results in 2022 were again relatively poor. The average score in the national external examination in mathematics after 7th grade was 26.4 points, compared to 35.3 points nationally. The average score in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 3.75 versus 3.97 nationally. The number of "fail" (below 3.00) grades was 24.1%, compared to 17.0% in the country.

Vratsa is not among the leaders in the field of higher education, although it is home to two branches of higher education institutions. The number of students in the district is 8 per 1,000 persons, compared to 32 per 1,000 persons countrywide.

Healthcare ■■■■

The share of health-insured persons in Vratsa district is traditionally higher than the national average – 93.8%, versus 88.7% in the country in 2021. The relative number of GPs is close to the national average but healthcare in the district suffers from a shortage of specialist physicians and hospital beds. In 2021, the number of beds in the local general hospitals was 4.61 per 1,000 persons, while the national average was 5.62 per 1,000 persons.

Over the past three years, the infant mortality rate has remained steady and below the national average. In 2021 it was down to 4.0‰, against 5.6‰ nationwide. However, the number of people treated in the local general hospitals is relatively

low – 183 per 1,000 persons, compared to the national average of 222.6 per 1,000 persons.

Public order and security ■■■■

The workloads of criminal judges in Vratsa district have been rising and moving close to the national average. This, however, has not had a negative effect on the speed of justice delivery. In 2021, one local judge heard an average of 8.5 cases a month, compared to 9.0 cases per judge nationally. The proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months continues to be the highest in the country – 97%, against the national average of 89%. Vratsa also remains the district with the smallest share of pending cases – 3.6%, compared to 11.8% in the country on average.

The number of registered crimes against the person and property in Vratsa district again remains among the highest in the country and second only to Montana district – 13.4 per 1,000 persons, versus 9.8 per 1,000 persons nationwide. Still, the detection rate in 2021 was higher than the national average – 54.3%, versus the national figure of 51.7%.

Environment ■■■■

In 2020, the amounts of waste generated by households remained relatively small – 251 kg/person per annum, versus 409 kg/person in the country. However, the share handed over for treatment and recycling was again lower than the national figures – 55.3%, versus 69.3% respectively.

The relatively low share of the population living in urban areas and the small population density in Vratsa district can account for the limited access of the households to a public sewerage system – 57.7%, compared to the national average of 76.3%. Access to public sewerage networks connected to wastewater treatment plants is also relatively low – available to 51.4% of the population, compared to the average of 66.7% countrywide.

The share of forest areas is low – 14.8% in 2021, versus 33.1% in the country, and the share of disturbed areas makes up 0.22% of the district's territory, compared to 0.42% in the country.

Culture ■■■

Cultural life in the district remained at a standstill in 2020 due to the pandemic and the countrywide restrictions on visits to cultural venues. In 2021 it livened somewhat, though the district continued to lag behind the average values of the nationwide indicators. The number of cinema visits went up to 228 per 1,000 persons, compared to 351 per 1,000 persons as the national average. Theatre and museum visits reached 61 and 93 per 1,000 persons respectively, compared to the national averages of 129 and 426 per 1,000 persons. Visits to the local libraries numbered 446 per 1,000 persons and thus came close to the national average of 449 per 1,000 persons.

Key indicators for the district of Vratsa

Economic Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	13,347	15,572	n.a.	17,299
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	13,874	15,537	n.a.	16,687
Relative share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	38.9	33.2	33.5	22.1
Annual average economic activity rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	64.9	63.6	65.2	72.0
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	59.8	57.1	58.5	68.1
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	7.7	10.3	10.1	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with primary or lower education (%)	20.7	22.4	24.1	16.6
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with higher education (%)	21.0	22.9	18.8	29.6
Production value (BGN/person)	17,592	17,615	n.a.	27,213
Expenditures for acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN/person)	1,513	1,839	n.a.	3,348
Foreign direct investment to non-financial enterprises, per capita (cumulative) (EUR/person)	505	769	n.a.	3,877
Relative share of households with internet access (%)	71.1	71.5	67.9	83.5
Share of roads in good condition (%)	28.4	34.5	27.2	42.0
Road network density (km/100 sq. m territory)	17.9	17.9	18.2	18.0
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	69.9	73.9	64.7	70.2

Social Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-11.4	-13.9	-20.0	-13.2
Net migration rate (‰)	-7.8	2.3	-5.3	1.9
Average grades in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.08	3.99	3.75	3.97
Average grade in the National external examination in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	28.9	30.3	26.4	35.3
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	89.9	91.8	92.3	85.9
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	97	109	112	97
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	93.5	92.6	93.8	88.7
Number of people per general practitioner	1,679	1,762	1,727	1,734
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 persons	14.1	13.0	13.4	9.8
Actual workload of penal judges in the district court (cases/month)	6.6	6.4	8.5	9.0
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage systems (%)	57.8	57.7	n.a.	76.3
Household waste generated per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	252	251	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	55.1	55.3	n.a.	69.3
Number of visits to cinemas per 1,000 people of the average annual population	367	111	228	351
Number of visits to museums per 1,000 people of the average annual population	131	45	93	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.