

Silistra

GDP per capita, current prices, BGN (2009)	4505
Population (2011)	119006
Employment rate of the population over 15 years (2011)	38,3
Area (sq. km.)	2846,3



Overview

The district of Silistra is located in North-Eastern Bulgaria. In addition to the town of Silistra, that is the district centre, it covers 124 populated areas in 7 municipalities: Alfatar, Glavinitsa, Kaynardja, Dulovo, Silistra, Sitovo, and Tutrakan.

Silistra has been among the most slowly developing districts in Bulgaria over the past 10 years. Throughout that period, the district failed to attract foreign and domestic capital to stimulate the economic activity in the region and ensure a durable increase in employment and incomes. The geographical isolation of the district and the low living standard are the key reasons for a large proportion of residents to relocate further inside the country. The district performs below the national average in the fields of education, healthcare, economic development, and infrastructure. The business environment and social environment are the only categories attracting positive ratings, that is the result of the quiet country life, relatively clean environment and relatively low levels of local taxes and charges in most local municipalities.



Economy

Silistra is the district with the lowest standard of living as measured by GDP per capita: BGN 4,505 in 2009. Over the period 2000-2009, this indicator only registered a minor increase. The slow increase in the gross product per capita is also keeping the growth of income per household member at low values; this latter indicator has been increasing at one of the slowest rates in the country. The economic downturn in the district is further evidenced by the fact that in four of the last 10 years, local incomes actually fell on an annual basis, the pre-crisis 2007 being one of them.

In 2010, employment of the population over 15 years was among the lowest in the country: under 40%, and unemployment was a little over the national average. Both indicators deteriorated in 2011, when the average number of persons employed fell to 21.2 thousand people. The only district with lower employment is Vidin: 18.3 thousand people. The traditionally high unemployment that persisted even in the economically favourable pre-crisis years is evidence of the low economic activity and shrinking labour market in the district.

Silistra is the district that attracted the smallest amount of foreign direct investment in 2010: only EUR 14 million. Foreign capital shrank to almost half its 2008 figure. In 2011, the municipalities in the district absorbed nearly EUR 16 million under EU operational programmes, which, in proportion to the number of local population, gives it twelfth position among the country's 28 districts.

Business Environment

The majority of local taxes are at levels below the national average, except for the fee for use of industrial goods' markets is a little higher. Also high are the rates for the annual retail license tax in Tutrakan and Dulovo, that is nearly twice the size of that in other communities. The main factors conducive to an improved business environment, according to local companies, are EU funds absorbed locally. The most negative impact, on the other hand, is attributed to the low local consumption and shortage of properly trained employees on the local labour market.

Nearly half of respondents had used electronic services provided by the local administration in the 12 months prior to the survey, and over 75% of these gave e-services a high rating. A variety of electronic services are available in Silistra, Dulovo and Alfatar, while the other municipal administrations only provide basic services. Silistra, Glavnitsa and Tutrakan are the municipalities declaring they are most prepared to provide one-stop-shop services.

Despite the high marks given to electronic services provided by the municipal and district administrations, local business representatives rated the speed of administrative services as being the lowest in the country. As in Ruse, the activity of the district branches of state institutions was highly appraised compared to the rest of the country.

Infrastructure

The density of road infrastructure in the district is in line with the national average, but the density of railway lines is nearly 50% lower, that is determined by the district's isolation from the main railway lines in the country. The low percentage of households with Internet access (a mere 20.8% in 2010) is largely the result of the low level of urbanisation in the district. The relative share of persons aged 16 to 74 who used the Internet in 2010 is about 26% - among the lowest values for the country. In 2011, both indicators registered a significant growth; the proportion of households with Internet access practically doubled. Losses in the transport of water in the public water supply and irrigation systems are low and continue to decline in both volume and relative to the population, although consumption remains relatively constant.

Demography

The negative demographic trends over the past ten years are among the key factors impeding the development of Silistra District. During the period 2001-2011, the population of the district shrank by nearly 16%. Silistra is the least urbanised district in the country, after Kardzhali; at the end of 2011, 45% of the district's population lived in cities and bigger town. When compared to 2001, the increase is only 0.4 percentage points. As a result from the decrease of the number of people, Silistra is turning into the most sparsely populated region in the country; in 2010, there were only an average of 923 people for every square kilometre.

The proportion of people over 65 to those under 14 years of age and to the active population show clear trends of deteriorating demography in the district. Over the period 2001-2011, the number of people aged over 65 years increased by more than 50% compared to that of children under 14. This is confirmed by the high negative rate of natural increase of the population (between minus 5 and 7‰ for the period 2001-2011). Throughout the period, more people were leaving the district than moving in to settle there; most of those leaving headed for Varna, and a smaller proportion - to Ruse and Sofia.

Education

Over the period 2001-2011 the number of students in primary and secondary education dropped by 33%, and the number of teachers - by 35%. Over the same period, 29 out of a total of 79 schools in district were closed down. Silistra and Sliven are the districts in the country with the lowest group enrolment rate of students in Grades 5 through 8 for 2010: less than 75%. In 2011, however, there was significant improvement on this count, and enrolment exceeded 81%. The number of school dropouts in the period 2000 - 2010 fluctuated between 2.4% and 3.7%, but persistently showed values above the national average. At the same time, the rate of repeaters remains one of the lowest for the country, that shows that the children experiencing difficulties in school are more inclined to leave it than to repeat the year.

As far as can be judged by the scores achieved by students at the state matriculation exams in recent years, the quality of secondary education in the district is close to the average for the country. Since the introduction of the matriculation exams in 2007, the most successful school year was 2011/2012. School graduates from Silistra District achieved an average score of 4.13 (4.18 for the country), and 5.1% of them scored below the lowest „pass“ grade of 3.00 (at 5.49% for the country). A negative trend is, observed, however, in the number of people aged between 25 and 64 years with tertiary education, as their number has decreased from 15.8% of the population in 2004 to 13.1% in 2010.

Healthcare

Throughout the period 2000-2011, only three hospitals have been operating in Silistra District. The number of GPs remained constant throughout the period, but despite the gradual decline in the number of residents, relative to the population their number remains lower than the national average. The number of specialist doctors is also slipping, with a particularly noticeable drop in the number of specialists in general medicine. Surveys among the local population showed that just over 20% of the residents of the district had to leave it in order to receive the necessary health care services.

The number of patients treated in hospitals increased by nearly 35% in the period 2001-2005. Since 2007, there has been a downward trend, and in 2010 and 2011 the number of patients was already below 2001 values. On the background of the shrinking population, this shows increased morbidity of the population compared to the years before 2001. At the end of 2011, persons with valid health insurance were 86% of the total population, two percentage points below the national average. The majority of residents of the district gave high ratings to local health services.

Environment

Silistra is one of the districts with the lowest emissions of harmful substances into the atmosphere; over the period 2001-2010, their volume was almost halved. This is largely due to the closing down of some of the largest industrial complexes in the district over the past 10 years. The household waste generated per capita is also below the national average; for the past decade, their volume has shrunk more than twice.

The lack of wastewater treatment plants continues to be a major problem for district centres along the Danube (Vidin, Ruse and Silistra). The plant has been designed and is under construction, but due to a number of problems related to project documentation, it has not yet been commissioned. At the end of 2012, only 45% of the district's population lives in areas with access to public sewerage systems. However, the majority of the population is satisfied with the quality of the environment in the district.

Social Environment

Crime in the area is among the lowest in the country; in proportion to its population, the only districts with lower crime rates are Kardzhali and Smolyan. In 2009, nearly 10% of persons were living in households with low intensity of economic activity, and two out of three fell in the group of people living in material deprivation. The proportion of people whose income is below the relative poverty line in the district is over 20%, i.e. at levels similar to the national average in 2009.

We should note the low score given to local hospitals and the judiciary. Despite the extremely low level of income in the district, the local population generally reports higher life satisfaction than the national average. Residents of the district gave high marks to local environment and living conditions, and the institution benefiting from the highest level of confidence with the population (both in terms of their performance and probity) are schools. Around 13% of respondents said they would leave the district if given the opportunity, that is relatively low compared to other districts.

