

Stara Zagora

GDP per capita, current prices, BGN (2009)	9207
Population (2011)	332340
Employment rate of the population over 15 years (2011)	45,1
Area (sq. km.)	5151,1

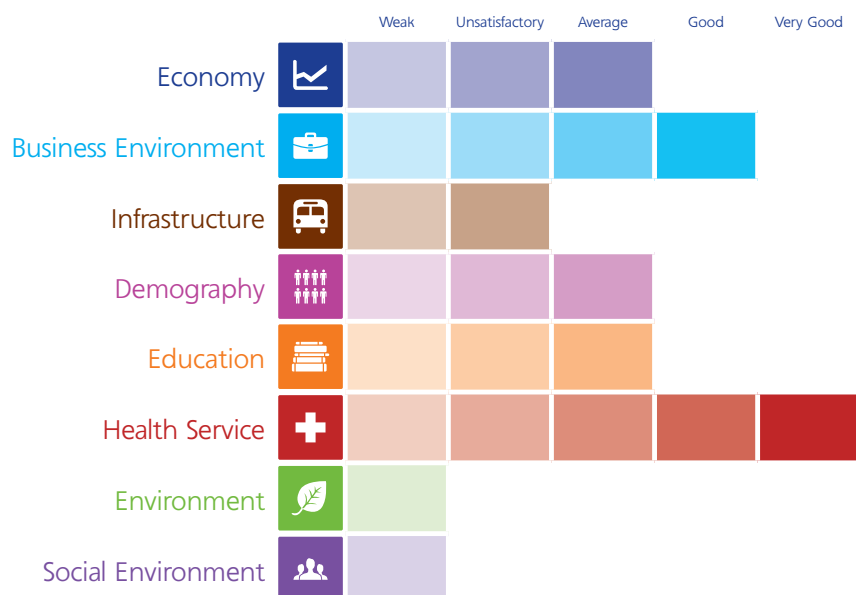


Overview

The district of Stara Zagora is located in the Eastern part of South Bulgaria. It is divided into 11 municipalities covering 206 populated areas. The larger municipalities are Stara Zagora, Kazanlak, Radnevo, and Maglij. The ratings given to the economy and business environment in the district are high compared to elsewhere in the country, while healthcare is considered the second best nationwide. The district's weaknesses include the quality of natural and social environment.

Stara Zagora stands out with the fourth highest output per capita, that is largely due to the major energy companies operating there: „Maritza Iztok 2“ and „Mini Maritza Iztok“. Local taxes and informal payments in the area are among the lowest in the country.

The volume of harmful emissions is the highest among all districts, and is due to the large enterprises in the energy sector, and the well-developed heavy industry. People in Stara Zagora are most dissatisfied with the social environment and infrastructure. One in ten lives in a household with low intensity of economic activity.



Economy

The area had the fourth highest output per capita in 2009 after Sofia (city), Varna and Sofia District. It has traditionally enjoyed a large volume of production, that in 2000-2009 was growing at a slower rate than the national average and was left behind the districts of Varna, Smolyan, Plovdiv, Sofia District and the city of Sofia. The district is one of the few where the GDP per capita continued to grow during the crisis in 2009. The strong production is due mostly to companies in the energy sector and related business, and heavy industry.

Income per household gives the district sixth position after Smolyan, Sliven, Pernik, Pleven and Sofia (city) in 2010, and in 2011 the district even climbed to third position after Sofia (city) and Pernik. Stara Zagora was the leader in income growth per household member during the period 2001-2011, meaning that it has been quickly closing the gap with other districts on this indicator.

The number of persons employed in the district is also high and only slightly behind the districts of Ruse, Varna, Blagoevgrad, and Sofia (city). In the period 2000-2009, their number increased, although at a slower pace than in other districts. As a result of the economic crisis, the employment rate dropped in 2010-2011.

The district is not characterised by a large number of companies to the population, and the increase in their number over the years has been slightly below average. This is due to the several major companies in the district that employ many workers. The number and size of companies has a positive influence on the volume of foreign investments; the rate of investment is relatively high and ranks only below the best performing municipalities of Gabrovo, Varna and Sofia (city).

The absorption of EU funds per capita for projects of municipal administrations in the district is the second lowest in the country, after Sofia (city).

Business Environment

The ratings given to the business environment in the district are among the highest in the country, after districts such as Ruse, Vratsa, and Targovishte. The district is characterised by low local taxes (among the 10 lowest in the country). The municipal waste charge is the third lowest, after the districts of Vidin, Dobrich, and Gabrovo. The charge on market stalls is also below the national average, but higher than in other districts.

The level of corruption in the district is about average. According to the business survey, the highest level of corruption is in the police and judiciary. However, the performance of the judiciary is considered one of the best in the country after Targovishte and Burgas. According to local companies, informal payments are the exception rather than the rule.

The administration's performance is rated second worst in the country after Sofia. The main problems in Stara Zagora are the slow service, unfriendly administration and unclear requirements.

Infrastructure

The density of the road network in the district is relatively low, despite the slight improvement in the period 2002-2010. The road network continued to increase by 2007, then remained at constant levels by 2010. The survey conducted among local citizens and businesses shows that the condition of the infrastructure is not adequate.

In 2012, a section of Trakia Highway was commissioned between Stara Zagora and Nova Zagora, which will no doubt have a positive impact on the district. Under construction is the Maritsa Highway linking Trakia with Kapitan Andreevo. Its construction will also help develop the district as it not only facilitates access to south-eastern Bulgaria, but will ensure a connection to the traffic of people and goods to and from Turkey and the Middle East.

On the other hand, the railway network is one of the most developed in the country after Plovdiv, Ruse and Sofia (city). It expanded in 2004-2009, but since 2010 its condition has not changed much.

Just over 30% of households had access to the Internet in 2010, that ranks Stara Zagora slightly below average because of the high concentration of households with internet access in Sofia (city). Access is high and over the years there has been no significant growth in the district. The proportion of people aged between 16 and 74, who used the Internet in the last 12 months, is below the national average. Over the years it increased more slowly than households' access to the Internet, but still exceeds it.

Losses in the transport of water in the district in 2010 were among the highest, with only Veliko Tarnovo, Sliven, Yambol and Pazardzhik „performing better“ on this indicator. In 2006-2010, transport losses decreased slightly, with the most pronounced decline in 2010.

Demography

The population density in the district is slightly above average. It has traditionally not been very high, and in the period 2000-2011, the population decreased by just over 10%. The rate of natural increase and net migration are negative, but lower than the national average. In 2011, the largest proportion of those who left Stara Zagora moved to the districts of Sliven, Plovdiv and Sofia (city). Population mobility is the high in the district, but does maintain a balance: the annual number of those moving out of the district is close to the number of newcomers.

People aged over 65 years were 30% of people aged between 15 and 64 in 2011, slightly above the country average. The ratio has been gradually increasing over the years, but at a slower pace than in other districts. In 2011, over 70% of the population was living in cities and bigger towns, that is slightly below the national average.

Education

The number of university students per capita in the district is relatively low, but the district centre is home to the Trakia University, that has the largest agricultural school in the country. In the period 2000-2011, the number of university students in the district increased by over 60%.

The number of primary and secondary schools to the population exceeds the national average. Between 2003 and 2008, the decrease of the number of schools was slower compared to the rate of decrease of the number of students. During the same period, 26 schools were closed. At the same time, the teacher/student ratio is one of the lowest in the country after Varna, Sofia, Haskovo, Yambol and Sliven. Over the years, the ratio has been relatively stable, except for the period 2004-2007, when it increased because of the serious decline in the number of students. The latter continued to decline after 2007, but this was accompanied by layoffs of teachers. School dropouts were relatively few in 2010. Stara Zagora ranks after districts such as Sofia, Kardzhali and Sofia (city). A significant improvement has been observed since 2006, in the following four years dropouts decreased by nearly 50%. However, the proportion of repeaters is the fourth highest in the country after Sofia, Plovdiv, and Dobrich.

The average grade score from the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature in 2010 was among the highest in the country, after Varna, Sofia (city) and Sofia. The district also boasts the smallest number of students who failed the exam: only 2.9% in 2010. In 2011-2012, there was some deterioration on this count, too.

Healthcare

The number of hospitals relative to the population is higher than the national average, with more hospitals available only in the districts of Gabrovo, Sofia, Vratsa, and Smolyan. Hospitals have been progressively increasing in number in the period 2000-2005, then there was a sharp increase in 2006-2007, and a gradual decline leading up to 2011. Compared to the population, there was a relatively large number of GPs available in 2010, while cardiologists and specialists in „Internal Medicine“ are slightly below the country average.

The number of patients who sought hospital treatment in 2010 was among the highest in the country after Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo, Yambol, Varna, Sofia (city) and Pleven. Over half the population of the district believes that corruption in hospitals is very high, yet about 35% of respondents admit they made informal payments. Nevertheless, more than half of the population is satisfied with healthcare in the district, but over 66% had sought hospital care outside it.

People with valid medical insurance in the district are 88% of the population, that is slightly above the national average. Their share over the years has been relatively stable, and in 2011 it exceeded the 90% mark, that was one of the highest rates in the country.

Environment

Emissions of harmful substances into the atmosphere per square kilometre of area are the highest in the country, because of the large energy installations and heavy industry. The household waste collected has been traditionally low, although it registered a slight increase in the period 2007-2010.

Less than 70% of the population lived in areas with a sewerage system in 2010, that is below the country average. The capacity of water treatment plants is one of the lowest in the country and also ranks 70% below average. There were three wastewater treatment plants for secondary treatment in 2010. A fourth one in Bolyarovo became operational recently. As at 2012, three new installations were under construction, which will significantly improve the situation in the region.

Social Environment

Life satisfaction in Stara Zagora district is relatively low, and people are most dissatisfied with social life and infrastructure. Meanwhile, over 30% of people are satisfied with housing, education, health, and the environment. One in ten lived in a household with low intensity of economic activity in 2009, that is nearly 40 per cent above the national average. Nearly 25% of the population is below the poverty line. Both indicators deteriorated in recent years, that is especially pronounced in separates living in households with low intensity of economic activity: from 7 thousand in 2008 they increased to 20 thousand in 2009.

Crimes against the person per capita were relatively high in 2010, but remain below average. In the period 2002-2008, there was a decline in crime, but then it increased again and in 2010 was at one of the highest levels for the period 2000-2010.