

Silistra

Population (2012) 117 814
Area (sq. km) 2 846,3
Number of settlements 118
Share of urban population (%) 45,1



Overview

Silistra District is one of the least developed in the country, and on most studied criteria is ranked near the bottom of the list.

The most serious problem seems to be the local economy the structure of which is characterized by a large proportion (one quarter) of agriculture, and underdeveloped industry and services. Economic activity in the district is low, judging by the number of companies weighted to the population, and investment activity is meagre. Silistra has attracted the least foreign direct investments from among all districts in the country. This is probably attributable to the poor state of infrastructure and the inadequate business environment. According to its standard of living, the district ranks last in the country, with a GDP per capita of BGN 4,485/person in 2010. The labour market is characterized by very low employment rates and relatively high unemployment. Significant investment is needed in local infrastructure: roads, sewerage systems, waste water treatment plants. The district is suffering from a serious demographic problem, as the population shrinks significantly faster than the national average.



Economy

Silistra is the poorest district in the country with a GDP per capita of BGN 4,485, or only 48% of the national average. Economic activity is low; the number of companies per 1,000 of the population is 32, which is far from the national average (50). In the period of 2007-2011, the number of companies increased by 310, but these were mainly micro-enterprises and for the most part had no employees.

The investment activity is relatively low in terms of the expenditures for acquisition of fixed tangible assets. The lack of foreign investment in the district also emerges as a serious problem. Silistra District is characterized by the lowest foreign direct investment per capita in the country, and these have been on the decline since 2011, i.e. there is a net outflow of foreign investment.

Silistra District has a specific structure of the economy. It is characterised by the high share of agriculture in gross value added: 24.6% (the highest share of the primary sector in the country in 2011), which is higher than that of industry (19.1%).

The lack of investment and the structure of the local economy largely explain the poor state of the labour market. In 2012, the average unemployment rate was 16% (12.3% for the country), and reported the third largest annual increase. Employment is the fourth lowest in Bulgaria: 39.4%. Under these conditions, the average income per household member (BGN 3,337) was also significantly lower than the national average (BGN 4,327) for 2012.

The meagre economic activity is to some extent offset by the relatively strong activity of local institutions to attract EU funds under Operational Programmes. As of the end of 2012, an average of BGN 163.2 per capita was disbursed; this value is close, but still lower than the national average (BGN 171.4/person).

The district has the highest number of farms (13,500) in the North Central region, and agriculture accounts for about 18% of employment. There are 14.4 ha of arable land per person of the population, which is more than double the national average value for this indicator.

Taxes and Administration

Businesses in Silistra District enjoy relatively low local taxes and charges. All basic rates are slightly below the national average.

The local authorities' work received ratings from the business community that are close to the national average. On the topic of corruption, there was a very large number of respondents who chose to refrain from giving a definite answer: nearly two-thirds of respondents declined to answer the questions about the level of corruption in local authorities (district and municipal administrations, the police, courts).

The main problems facing businesses in the district are the stagnant local market, the quality of infrastructure and the quality of the workforce.

In terms of future plans, businesses in the district are rather conservative: nearly half of respondents believe that the amount of investment and number of employees will not change over the next 12 months.

Infrastructure

The territory of Silistra District is crossed by Trans-European Transport Corridor No 7 (the Danube River). There are two ports in the towns of Silistra and Tutrakan. The Silistra - Calarasi ferry service has not been operational since 2010. There are no highways and express roads in the district.

In 2011, the density of the road network (17.8 km/100 sq. km.) did not change and remains close to the national average, which is 17.6 km/100 sq. km. The road surface is of quality close to the national average: 39% of it was rated in good condition. Some improvement of the road network occurred at the end of 2012 with the completion of the new road connecting the border municipalities Kaynardzha and Lipnitsa, which is 17 km long. It should connect the district with neighbouring Romania through the Kaynardzha - Carvan border check point, the opening of which has been delayed and it is not yet clear when crossing the border will be possible.

The quality of infrastructure is emphasized by business representatives as one of the major drawbacks to the development of the district. The construction of the third bridge over the Danube River at Silistra - Calarasi would give some impetus to the district, but so far no concrete decisions have been made on this.

The access to the Danube is not used actively enough. In 2013, the concession procedure for the port of Tutrakan was suspended due to the lack of investor interest. There is a need to connect the town of Silistra with

Varna by express road, which could boost the development of the Silistra port. Another serious problem facing the development of the district is the absence of gasification.

Over 56% of households in the districts have access to the Internet, and in 2012 their number increased by 16 percentage points; in this way, the value exceeded the national average.

Demographics

The population of Silistra District is decreasing almost twice as fast as the national average. The share of the urban population is 45%, making it the least urbanised district in Bulgaria.

The Silistra District is sparsely populated, with the number of persons per square kilometre being half the national average. The deterioration of the ratio of people of working age to those in retirement is also continuing, which indicates an ageing population.

The rate of natural increase for 2012 was -8.1‰ compared to -5.5‰ average for the country. Another major problem is the negative net migration rate (the difference between the number of people who moved into and those who moved out of the district). The population of Silistra District mostly leaves for the districts of Varna and Sofia (capital) or foreign countries.

Education

The quality of education in Silistra District yielded an average score. A noteworthy development is the declining share of "fail" scores at the state exam in Bulgarian language and literature. In the first four years of the state matriculation exam, the share of students scoring below the "pass" mark (3) was higher than the national average. Over the past two years there has been improvement and the proportion of "fail" marks is now below the average rate for Bulgaria. The average score from state exams remained at a relatively constant level.

Some improvement is observed in terms of the net enrolment rate in grades 5th through 8th that for the second consecutive year is over 81% and marks an improvement of 4.4 percentage points compared to 2007. In most districts, this indicator is deteriorating.

Healthcare

In the "Healthcare" category, Silistra District is ranked in one of the last places in the country; only the districts of Razgrad and Targovishte have lower rankings. The three districts have identical problems. In Silistra District, there is a noticeable shortage of both general practitioners and specialist doctors. One general practitioner is in charge of 1,841 patients, at a national average of 1,491. One cardiologist covers 19,636 people, which is more than three times the average for Bulgaria, while one specialist in Internal Medicine is in charge of 9,063 people, compared to 5,263 average for the country. The number of hospital beds per 1,000 population is also relatively small.

On the background of these characteristics of healthcare, 11.5% of respondents rated the healthcare system in the district as "very good" or "excellent". According to one in four respondents, corruption in the district is high. Nearly 30% of those who used health care services in the past 12 months were forced to travel outside the district. The main explanation given is the lack of specialists.

Environment

The quality of the environment in Silistra District received an overall good rating. Yet, the district is characterized by an underdeveloped sewerage system, and the lack of waste water treatment plants. Below 52% of the district's population lives in settlements with public sewerage systems, and only 0.6% of them are connected to the waste water treatment plants. Such plants are available only in the towns of Dulovo and Sitovo, and in the village of Glavinitsa. There is no clarity on the developments with the treatment plant in the village of Srebarna which was constructed a long time ago but serious violations were later established. At the end of 2012, the construction of a waste water treatment plant started in the town of Silistra. The project envisages the construction of more than 15 km of new sewerage pipes, as well as the reconstruction and replacement of another 16 km of existing pipes. The treatment plant and its adjoining infrastructure are expected to be completed within 27 months.

The ambient air quality is relatively good; the main problems are caused by the solid particles from residential heating in the winter months. There are no large industrial polluters in the district.

Social Environment

The rating given to the social environment in Silistra is good. The population is rather satisfied with various aspects of life such as health, education, social life, housing, and security. The district enjoys a low crime rate compared to most other parts of the country. Recorded crimes reached 9.2 per 1,000 in 2012, and their number has been decreasing compared to previous years.

The population of Silistra sees its low standard of living as a major problem. The share of the poor against the official poverty line in the district is relatively high: 30.2%. One in three residents of the district lives in material deprivation, but on this indicator Silistra District actually looks better when compared with the country as a whole. The district has the lowest proportion of people living in households with low work intensity: 2.1% compared with an average of 10.1% for Bulgaria.

Key indicators for the district of Silistra

Indicators / year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	4 990	4 505	4 485	n.a.	n.a.
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	44,3	43,6	39,3	39,3	39,4
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	11,6	7,6	11,4	12,5	16,0
Relative share of people living below the district's poverty line (%)	22,8	20,7	30,2	n.a.	n.a.
Age dependency ratio, 65+ to 15-64 (%)	25,7	26,5	27,6	30,6	31,5
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-5,9	-5,3	-6,8	-7,7	-8,1
Net migration rate (‰)	-7,8	-6,1	-7,7	-2,0	-2,4
Relative share of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education (%)	15,1	14,2	13,1	15,4	15,8
Percent of failed students at state matriculation exams (%)	4,6	6,5	6,7	4,5	5,1
Average grade at state matriculation exams	4,3	4,1	4,1	4,3	4,1
Share of roads in good condition (%)	n.a.	n.a.	24,8	40,0	39,0
Relative share of households with Internet access (%)	20,0	20,7	20,8	40,0	56,5
Share of the population with access to public sewerage systems, connected to WWTP (%)	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,6	n.a.
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	81,2	84,9	82,7	86,8	85,6
Infant mortality rate (‰)	9,2	11,2	3,5	10,5	7,8
Number of registered crimes per 1,000 persons of the population	8,7	9,8	10,0	9,3	8,7