

Smolyan district

- ▶ Population (2023)
- ▶ Territory (sq. km)
- ▶ Number of settlements
- ▶ Share of urban population (%)

92,107
3,193
240
57.3



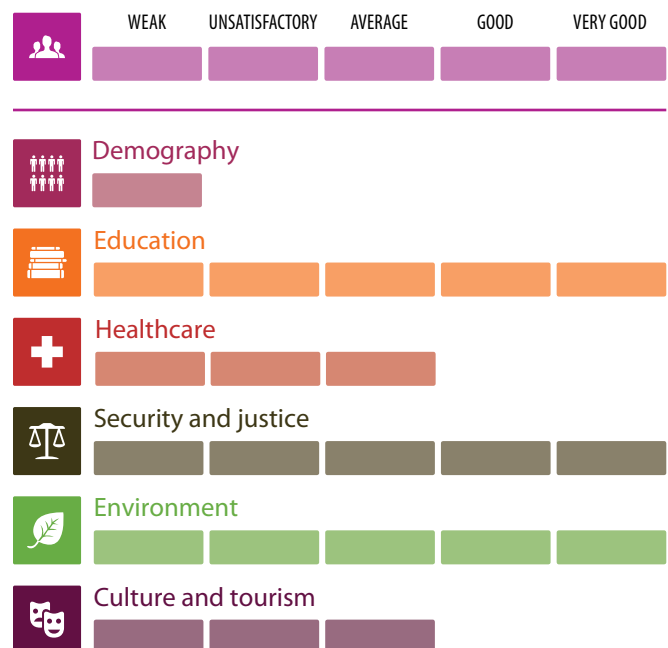
GDP, salaries and pensions in Smolyan district continue to rise. The poverty level is declining. Employment and unemployment are rising, with both indicators remaining relatively unfavorable. Business and investment activity has been showing some improvement. There are no railways, highways or first-class roads in the district. Local taxes in the district are relatively low. Smolyan is among the three districts with the lowest share of own revenues in the total municipal revenues and is the district with the second lowest coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues.

The population of the district is among the fastest aging in the country. Smolyan continues to rank among the districts with the highest educational results. The health insurance system covers practically the entire population of the district. Workloads in Smolyan's courts are relatively low, which impacts the speed of delivery of justice. Smolyan is the district with the lowest number of registered crimes. The district also ranks first regarding the share of forest area and has the lowest share of disturbed area. The intensity of its cultural life remains weak, but tourism is strongly represented.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living conditions

GDP per capita in Smolyan district continued its growth in 2022, reaching 16,400 BGN. Salaries and pensions are also rising, though at a lower than average rate. The average annual gross salary of people employed under labor contract has reached 14,600 BGN, though it remains below the average amounts in the other district. For its part, the average monthly pension is 761 BGN, which is close to the national average.

The Gini coefficient for income inequality is shrinking and is significantly lower than the 2023 average. The poverty level in the district has also registered a sharp decline and is half that of the previous year. In 2023, the share of the population living below the national poverty line was 14.7%, against 20.6% countrywide.

Labor market

The share of the working-age population in Smolyan district continues to decline and is lower than the national average – 56.0% in the district, compared to 58.5% in the country for 2023. There has been a simultaneous rise in employment and unemployment, with the two indicators remaining less favorable than the respective national averages. The employment rate is 74.7%, compared to 76.2% in the country, and the unemployment rate – 10.2%, against 5.3% nationwide.

The educational structure of the workforce in the district remains relatively good. In 2023, the share of the people aged 25–64 with primary or lower education was 13%, versus the national average of 15%, while the number of those with a university degree was 25%, against 31% nationally.

Investment and business

In 2022, business and investment activity in the Smolyan region continued its upward trend, though on the whole, the district's performance remains unsatisfactory. The number of non-financial enterprises in the district was 61 per 1,000 population, compared to 70 per 1,000 population in the country. TFA acquisition expenditure per capita increased to 3,100 BGN, and FDI – to 866 EUR per capita. Production value grew to 69,700 BGN per employed person, though it remained among the lowest in the country. Research and development expenditure per capita was also lower than average, while the share of export earnings in net sales revenues decreased slightly to 20%, versus 29% in the country.

Utilization of European funds in Smolyan district is relatively good. By 30 June 2024, payments made in the district to beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 3,800 BGN/person, against 3,200 BGN/person in the country. Within the district, the highest amounts were utilized by the municipality of Smolyan city.

Infrastructure

The specific geographic location of the district as a border region and its mountainous terrain account for its relatively poorly developed infrastructure. Smolyan lacks railroads, highways and first-class roads. The density of its road network remains below the national average. Road surface quality remained relatively high in 2023 with the share of roads with surfaces in good condition reaching 58%, against the country's average of 40%.

Households' access to the internet has registered a decrease, but remains around the national average.

In 2022, 71% of the population were living in settlements with a public sewerage network, compared to 75% in the country. However, Smolyan district is still lagging behind in terms of the connectivity of its sewerage networks to waste water treatment plants, with a coverage of only 45% of the local population, compared to the national average of 67%.

Local taxes

In 2024, Smolyan again ranked among the districts with relatively low local taxes. The biggest differences with the respective national averages can be observed in the taxes on retail trade and on motor vehicles. The average retail trade tax in the municipalities of Smolyan district for that year was 8.02 BGN/sq. m, versus 13.09 BGN/sq. m in the country. The tax on motor vehicles and passenger cars was 1.38 BGN/kW, compared to 1.56 BGN/kW nationally. Among the monitored taxes, the rate was higher for the tax on immovable non-residential property for legal entities.

Within the district, the municipality levying the lowest average taxes is that of Borino, and the highest – of Dospat municipality.

Administration

The self-assessments of the local administrations of the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop shop services have continued to increase, though in 2024 they again remained below the respective national averages. The AIP Active transparency rating of the local administration also remained below the national average – 63.4% in the district, compared to 69.3% in the country.

Smolyan is among the three districts with the lowest share of own revenues in the municipalities' total revenues – 16%, versus 27% in the country, as well as the district with the second lowest coverage (only ahead of Targovishte) of municipal expenditures with local revenues – 48%, versus 74% in the country.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

Smolyan's population is among the fastest aging in the country and its demographic picture places it among the three districts (only ahead of Vidin and Gabrovo) with the worst indicators in this category. The rates of both natural population increase and net migration again remained strongly negative in 2023. The natural population increase rate was -11.8% , versus -6.8% nationwide, and for yet another consecutive year the net migration rate was the lowest in the country with a value of -1.6% .

Smolyan is also the district with the lowest number of children. The share of children under 4 years is 2.9%, compared to 4.5% in the country, and the share of the population aged 65 and over is 28.9%, compared to 23.8% in the country.

The density of the population remains around the country's average – 1,217 persons/sq. km, compared to 1,221 persons/sq. km in the country.

Education

Smolyan continues to rank among the districts with the best performance in the education category, where it is outranked only by Sofia (capital city) and Varna. The district ranks first regarding the share of children attending kindergarten – 97%, compared to the national average of 88%. The net enrolment rate of schoolchildren in 5th–7th grade is also the highest in the country – 95%, compared to the average of 90% nationally, while the share of school year repeaters is the lowest countrywide – 0.3%, against 1.2% nationally. However, the index of the alignment between vocational education and the profile of the local economy is low – 34.8 p., compared to 53.1 p. in the country. The main reason for this is the low interest in manufacturing-related programs at the expense of a relatively high number of students enrolled in ICT courses.

The performance of the district's students in 2024 was again much better than the country's average. The average score in the NEA in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 44.3 p., against 42.9 p. nationwide. The average result in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 4.48 in the district, versus "Good" 4.30 nationally, which ranks Smolyan district second only to the capital. For its part, the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) was 4.1%, against 8.7% nationwide, and was also the second lowest nationwide.

Healthcare

The healthcare insurance system covers practically the whole of the district's population. The average life expectancy is among the highest in the country, and the infant mortality rate – among the lowest for 2023. Access to GPs is relatively easy, though the number of specialist physicians is still considerably lower than the average one in the country.

Bed capacity in the local general hospitals is around the country's average – 6.0 beds per 1,000 population, versus 6.1 beds nationwide. However, hospital bed occupancy remains relative-

ly low – 48%, versus 56% countrywide. The number of pharmacies relative to the population is around the national average.

Security and justice

Smolyan district is the leader in the justice and security category. The workloads in the local courts are relatively low, which impacts the speed of delivery of justice. In 2023, the share of criminal cases closed within 3 months was the highest in the country – 98%, against 91% nationally, of administrative cases – 88%, versus 72% nationally, and of civil cases – 84%, compared to 65% countrywide.

Smolyan is also the district with the lowest number of crimes. Registered crimes against the person and property number 5.0 per 1,000 population, against 11.3 per 1,000 population as the national average. At the same time, the detection rate in the district is high – 63% in the district, compared to 53% countrywide. The relative number of police officers is also relatively high – 5.2 per 1,000 population, compared to 4.2 per 1,000 population in the country.

Environment

Smolyan is the district with the best performance in the environment indicators. It is actually the district with the highest share of forest areas – 71%, against 33% in the country, and with the lowest share of disturbed area – 0.1%, versus 0.4% nationwide for 2023. The cooling degree days in the district is also the country's lowest.

The amounts of household waste generated in the district are relatively small – 355 kg/person per year, against 488 kg/person on a national scale. At the same time, the share of this waste handed over for treatment and recycling is also low, though in 2022 it increased to 66%, compared to 76% in the country.

The installed RES capacities are almost three times larger than in the country relative to the population.

Culture and tourism

In 2023, the intensity of cultural life in the district again remained not particularly strong, although all monitored indicators recorded an improvement. Cinema visits numbered 169 per 1,000 population, against 684 per 1,000 population nationally, visits to the theaters went up to 177 per 1,000 population, compared to 349 per 1,000 population in the country, and those to the local museums amounted to 470 per 1,000 population, against 770 per 1,000 population in the country. Local libraries attracted 183 visits per 1,000 population, against 679 visits per 1,000 population nationally.

However, tourism in the district was again strongly represented in 2023. The number of beds in accommodation establishments reached 130 per 1,000 population, which is the fourth highest number relative to the population after those in the seaside districts (Burgas, Dobrich and Varna). The number of overnight stays in the district is also high, ranking the district fourth in the country with 8,773 per 1,000 population.

Key indicators for the district of Smolyan

Economic Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	12,609	16,425	n.a.	25,956
Average gross annual salary of people employed under labour contract (BGN)	13,379	14,633	n.a.	21,242
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	23.0	28.7	14.7	20.6
Share of the working-age population (%)	57.7	56.5	56.0	58.5
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	69.4	72.0	74.7	76.2
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	8.6	10.0	10.2	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	12.9	13.0	13.0	14.8
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	24.3	24.3	24.9	30.5
Production value (BGN/employed person)	56,906	69,691	n.a.	122,377
Expenditures on the acquisition of tangible fixed assets (BGN/person)	2,714	3,086	n.a.	4,257
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (cumulative) (EUR/person)	692	866	n.a.	4,544
Share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	72.9	71.3	n.a.	75.0
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	50.1	56.5	57.6	40.4
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	52.3	43.6	47.9	74.1
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	66.9	66.9	63.4	69.3

Social Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Natural population increase rate (‰)	n.a.	-14.7	-11.8	-6.8
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	-4.5	-1.6	6.4
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.12	4.09	4.48	4.30
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	39.4	37.6	44.3	42.9
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	91.8	95.7	94.6	89.9
Average life expectancy (years)***	74.0	73.4	73.8	73.5
Share of people with health insurance (%)	97.5	100.0	100.0	95.0
Population per one GP (persons)	1,552	1,450	1,472	1,701
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	4.3	5.1	5.0	11.3
Share of criminal cases closed within 3 months	95	95	98	91
Households' consumption of municipally supplied drinking water (liter/person/day)	84	85	n.a.	103
Generated household waste of serviced population (kg/person/year)	349	355	n.a.	488
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	52	66	n.a.	76
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	95	137	169	684
Overnight stays in accommodation establishments (number/1,000 population)	6,045	7,993	8,773	4,167

* The 2023 data are included in the 2024 study. The same is valid for the previous years.

** The data refer to the 2023-24 academic year, while the State matriculation exams took place in 2024. The same is valid for the previous years.

*** Data are for three-year periods and are updated annually.