

Sofia district

▶ Population (2023)	226,420
▶ Territory (sq. km)	7,062
▶ Number of settlements	284
▶ Share of urban population (%)	60.1



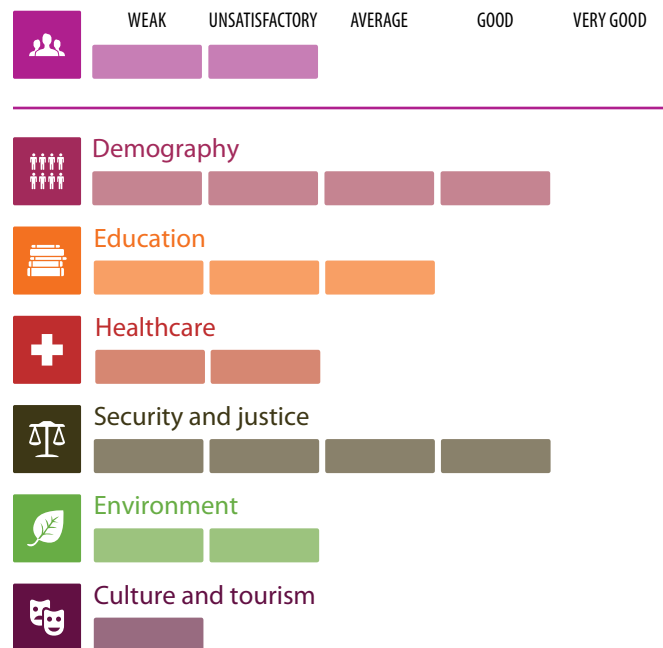
Sofia remains among the three districts with the highest GDP per capita. Salaries and pensions are relatively high. The development of the local labor market continues to be positive. The share of the workforce with secondary education is the highest in the country. The good economic development in the district is accompanied by high investment activity. The density of the road network is high, as is the share of highways and first-class roads. The local taxes on retail trade are lower. The performance of the municipal administrations in the district is relatively good.

The rate of natural population increase in Sofia district remains below the national average. The performance of its students is relatively poor. Access to doctors – both GPs and specialist physicians – is slightly below the national average. The workloads of the local judges in the district are below the national average, which also impacts the speed of delivery of justice. The volume of generated household waste is high, while the share of that waste handed over for treatment and recycling is low. Cultural life in Sofia district retains its low intensity. At the same time, its tourism is better developed than in most other districts.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living conditions

Sofia remains among the three districts with the highest GDP per capita, below only the capital and Stara Zagora. Salaries and pensions have continued to rise and remain relatively high. The average annual gross salary of people employed under labor contract is 19,300 BGN and the average monthly pension has reached 814 BGN.

The Gini coefficient for income inequality is relatively low. However, poverty is rising and is above the national average. In 2023, the share of the population living below the national poverty line was 26.1%, compared to 20.6% nationally.

Labor market

The local labor market continued to develop well in 2023, which once again shows the deep interrelation between the economies of the capital and of Sofia district. The share of the working-age population is around the national average. Employment is declining but remains above average with a rate of 78.4%, compared to 76.2% nationally. The unemployment rate has steadied at 4.9%, versus 5.3% nationally.

The profile of the workforce in Sofia district is characterized by the predominance of people with secondary education – 72%, compared to 55% in the country, which is the highest number countrywide, while the shares of people with a university degree and of those with primary or lower education are both relatively low. This structure can be accounted for by the proximity of most of the district's settlements to the capital, the latter attracting the university graduates and naturally leaving the process industry to develop in its geographical periphery.

Investment and business

The positive economic development of Sofia district is associated with high investment activity, which ranks it second in the country, only below the capital. In 2022, the district's TFA acquisition expenditures amounted to 4,600 BGN/person, which was the third highest figure in the country (after those in the capital and Plovdiv). FDI reached 8,200 EUR/person and was also the second highest figure nationally. Production value in Sofia district is the country's highest relative to the employed persons – 268,300 BGN per employed person, against half that amount on average countrywide. More than half of the net sales revenues are export revenues – 55%, compared to 29% in the country, which places the district second in this indicator, after Ruse district.

The number of enterprises in the district remains relatively low, though the share of large enterprises among them is relatively high.

Utilization of EU funds has recorded an increase and now almost equals the national average relative to the population. By 30 June 2024, payments made in Sofia district to beneficia-

ries under EU operational programs amounted to 3,172 BGN/person. Within the district, the leader in the utilization of EU funds is the municipality of Kostinbrod.

Infrastructure

Sofia district has a very well-developed infrastructure. The density of the road and rail network is higher than the national average, and with 31%, compared to the national average of 19%, the share of highways and first-class roads is the second highest in the country after that in Shumen district. At the same time, however, road quality remains relatively low, with only 32% of the road surfaces in good condition, versus 40% in the country in 2023.

Access to the Internet in the district remains relatively limited, with 79% of the households connected to it, compared to 89% on average in the country.

The share of households in the district with access to a public sewerage network is high – 80%, compared to the national average of 75%. At the same time, access to a sewerage network connected to a wastewater treatment plant is lower – 42%, against the average share of 67% in the country in 2022.

Local taxes

In 2024, the average level of local taxation in Sofia district's municipalities was among the high ones in the country. Considerably higher than average were the taxes on non-residential immovable property for legal entities and on non-gratuitous acquisition of property. By contrast, significantly lower were the tax rates on retail trade.

Within the district, the highest average tax rates are levied by the municipalities of Svoge, and the lowest ones – by Bozhurishte municipality.

Administration

The performance of the municipal administrations in Sofia district is relatively good. Their self-assessments of the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop-shop administrative services went up in 2024, though remaining below the respective national averages.

Sofia district comes second (after the capital) regarding the share of own revenues in the total revenues of the district's municipalities – 40%, compared to 27% nationwide, as well as regarding the coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues – 103%, versus 74% nationally.

In 2024, Sofia district was once again among those with a relatively low AIP rating for the transparency in the work of its local administrations – 62.8%, compared to 69.3% on average in the country.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

The rate of natural population increase in Sofia district remains below the national average at -8.6% in 2023, against -6.8% nationwide. The net migration rate is positive at 3.4% .

The age structure of the population is similar to the average one nationally. The share of children under 4 years in the district is 4.6% , compared to 4.5% in the country, and the share of people aged 65 and over is 24.0% , against 23.8% in the country.

Sofia is among Bulgaria's districts with a low population density – 747 persons/sq. km, compared to the national average of $1,221$ persons/sq. km.

Education

The proportion of children in Sofia district attending kindergartens has gone up and now equals the national average. The net enrolment rate in 5th–7th grade in the district has continued to decline and in 2023 it remained below the national average – 87% , compared to 90% in the country. The share of school year repeaters is high. The district has relatively few students in agriculture and construction-related programs and employees with professional qualifications in those sectors, while the number of those in manufacturing is relatively high.

The performance of the district's students in 2024 again remained relatively poor. The average score in the NEA in mathematics after 7th grade was 35.1 p., versus 42.9 p. nationally. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 4.15 , compared to the average of "Good" 4.30 countrywide, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) was 8.3% , against the national average of 8.7% .

The number of university students in Sofia district is relatively low – 5.0 students per $1,000$ population, compared to the national average of 29.6 students per $1,000$ population in 2023.

Healthcare

Access to doctors in the district – both GPs and specialist physicians – is below the national average. In 2022, one GP cared for an average of $1,831$ people, compared to $1,701$ people per GP in the country. The share of people with health insurance has increased slightly, though in 2023 it still remained the lowest one nationally – 85% in the district, against 95% in the country.

The number of beds in the local general hospitals relative to the district's population is close to the national average. However, hospital bed occupancy is higher – 61% in the district, compared to 56% in the country. The number of pharmacies relative to the population is also commensurate with the national level.

The infant mortality rate has increased slightly, but is below the national average. The average life expectancy now remains practically unchanged – 72.5 years in 2023.

Security and justice

The workloads of the local criminal judges were below the national average in 2023, which impacted the speed of delivery of justice. The number of civil cases closed within 3 months was 90% , compared to the average of 65% nationwide, and that of administrative cases – 82% , against 72% countrywide. Where criminal cases are concerned, the speed of delivery of justice has increased and now the share of those closed within 3 months is close to the national average.

The indicator values for security in Sofia district are higher, albeit slightly, than the national average. The number of registered crimes against the person and property is 10.0 per $1,000$ population, compared to the national average of 11.3 per $1,000$ population, and the detection rate is 59% , versus 53% in the country. The relative number of police officers in the district is 4.5 per $1,000$ population, compared to 4.2 per $1,000$ population in the country.

Environment

Sofia district's performance in this category is unsatisfactory. The main reason for this is the management of household waste. The annual volume of waste generated in Sofia district is relatively high – 496 kg/person, versus 488 kg/person nationwide, while the share of this waste handed over for treatment and recycling is low, although in 2022 there was an increase to 26% , compared to 76% in the country.

The share of forest areas is relatively high (46% , compared to 33% in the country), and that of disturbed area is close to the national average (0.5% , against 0.4% in the country).

The cooling degree days index in the area is extremely low. Household consumption of drinking water is also lower than average.

Culture and tourism

In 2023, cultural life in Sofia district still sustained its low intensity, probably due to the district's proximity to the capital, which allows a large part of the population a relatively fast and easy access to the biggest city in the country. No visits to libraries and theaters have been reported for the district, while cinema visits number 81 per $1,000$ population, versus 684 per $1,000$ population nationwide. Visits to museums have gone up, though their relative number has failed to recover its pre-pandemic level.

At the same time, tourism is better developed than in most other districts. The number of beds in accommodation establishments is 36 per $1,000$ population, ranking Sofia district eighth in the country. The number of overnight stays is $2,900$ per $1,000$ population for 2023.

Key indicators for the district of Sofia

Economic Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	19,263	25,014	n.a.	25,956
Average gross annual salary of people employed under labour contract (BGN)	17,697	19,330	n.a.	21,242
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	21.8	23.0	26.1	20.6
Share of the working-age population (%)	59.2	58.2	58.2	58.5
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	81.4	81.1	78.4	76.2
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	5.5	4.9	4.9	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	14.2	14.4	11.7	14.8
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	12.4	14.2	16.6	30.5
Production value (BGN/employed person)	216,029	268,325	n.a.	122,377
Expenditures on the acquisition of tangible fixed assets (BGN/person)	3,157	4,581	n.a.	4,257
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (cumulative) (EUR/person)	7,289	8,247	n.a.	4,544
Share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	77.0	80.2	n.a.	75.0
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	35.4	30.5	32.0	40.4
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	98.8	102.2	103.5	74.1
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	57.9	57.7	62.8	69.3

Social Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Natural population increase rate (‰)	n.a.	–11.1	–8.6	–6.8
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	–0.1	3.4	6.4
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.77	3.58	4.15	4.30
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	29.6	28.3	35.1	42.9
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	90.0	87.6	87.2	89.9
Average life expectancy (years)***	72.1	72.6	72.5	73.5
Share of people with health insurance (%)	82.9	84.2	84.8	95.0
Population per one GP (persons)	1,839	1,788	1,831	1,701
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	9.5	9.7	10.0	11.3
Share of criminal cases closed within 3 months	82	78	90	91
Households' consumption of municipally supplied drinking water (liter/person/day)	99	96	n.a.	103
Generated household waste of serviced population (kg/person/year)	501	496	n.a.	488
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	17	26	n.a.	76
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	30	65	81	684
Overnight stays in accommodation establishments (number/1,000 population)	2,306	2,871	2,900	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.