

# Sofia (capital) district

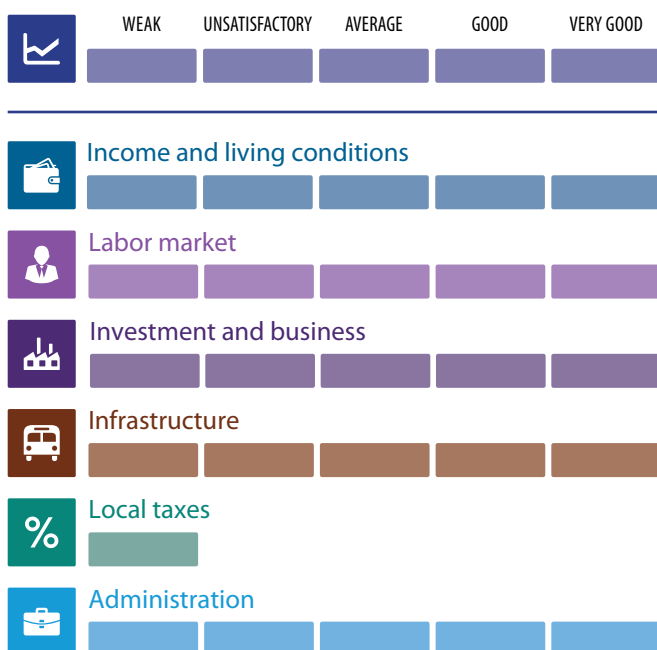


▶ Population (2023)	1,286,965
▶ Territory (sq. km)	1,341
▶ Number of settlements	54
▶ Share of urban population (%)	95.1

Sofia (capital) has the highest GDP per capita, with a value of more than double the national average and far above that in the district ranking second in this indicator – Sofia district. Its labor market is well developed. Sofia is also the undisputed leader in investment activity. Sofia Central Railway Station is one of the main railway hubs in the country. The capital is the district with the highest local taxes in the country. It is the district with the highest share of own revenues in its total revenues, as well as with the highest coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues.

Sofia is the district with the most favorable demographic picture. The capital is once again the leader in the education indicator, with a high rate of enrolment in 5th–7th grade, a low share of repeaters, good student performance and a high number of university students. The number of specialist physicians is among the highest in the country. The pharmacy network is well developed. Delivery of justice is relatively slow, and the crime detection rate is low. The share of disturbed area is high. Sofia remains the district with the most intensive cultural life.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Income and living conditions

The capital is the district with the highest GDP per capita, with a volume more than twice the national average and far above that of Sofia district, the second-ranking district in this category. In 2022, GDP per capita in Sofia reached 53,700 BGN, against 26,000 BGN in the country.

Salaries and pensions have also been growing and their amounts are significantly higher than average. The average annual gross salary of people employed under labor contract has reached 29,700 BGN, against 21,200 BGN in the country, and the average monthly pension – 957 BGN, versus 784 BGN in the country. What is more, the rate of increase of both indicators is considerably faster than in the country.

The capital is also the district with the lowest poverty level. The share of the population living below the national poverty line is 8.1%, compared to 20.6% nationally in 2023. At the same time, however, the Gini coefficient for income inequality remains high.

### Labor market

The capital's good performance in the indicators for economic development is again manifested in the favorable dynamics of the local labor market in 2023. The share of the working-age population remains the highest in the country at 63.0%, compared to 58.5% nationally. Employment continues to be extremely high, and unemployment is the lowest in the whole country. The employment rate is 82.4%, against 76.2% nationally, and the unemployment rate – 1.6%, versus 5.3% nationally.

The capital is once again the district with the best educational status of its workforce. The share of the population aged 25–64 with a university degree is 54%, against 31% in the country, while employed people with primary or lower education make up 5.0%, compared to 15.0% nationally.

### Investment and business

In 2022, Sofia remained the undisputed leader in investment activity. The district has the largest number of enterprises relative to its population – 100 per 1,000 population, compared to an average of 70 per 1,000 population in the country. After their decrease in the previous year, TFA acquisition expenditures have again recorded an increase, reaching 8,800 BGN/person, compared to 4,300 BGN/person in the country. FDI is also far above the country's average, reaching 11,700 EUR/person, against 4,500 EUR/person nationally.

Production value has also continued to rise, though relative to the population it ranks Sofia (capital) fifth, after the districts of Sofia, Vratsa, Stara Zagora and Ruse. For its part, the share of export earnings in net sales revenues is lower than average – 26%, versus 29% nationally.

The capital's dominance in research and development expenditure is massive – in 2022 it was 734 BGN/person. By compari-

son, the next highest value in the country is in Plovdiv district – 112 BGN/person.

By 30 June 2023, the capital again occupied the top place as regards utilization of EU funds. Payments made to beneficiaries under EU operational programs amounted to 4,719 BGN/person, versus 3,175 BGN/person in the country.

### Infrastructure

There are no roads from the national road network within Sofia (capital) district, but its territory is bordered directly by several highways. In addition, Sofia Central Railway Station is one of the main railway hubs in the country and the capital district's density of the railway network of 12.4 km/100 sq. km territory significantly exceeds the national average of 3.6 km/100 sq. km.

The share of households with access to high-speed internet is again very high, having risen in 2023 to 96%, compared to 89% in the country.

The high degree of urbanization in the district also accounts for the high share of population with access to a public sewerage network – 96% of the population, versus 75% nationally, while the whole sewerage network is connected to a waste water treatment plant – 96% compared to 67% on average countrywide.

### Local taxes

The average level of local taxation in Sofia (capital) district again remained the highest in the whole country for 2024. The biggest differences in comparison to the national figures were recorded in the retail trade tax (20.00 BGN/sq. m, compared to 13.09 BGN/sq. m in the country) and the tax on non-gratuitous acquisition of property (3.00% versus 2.82% in the country).

Of all the monitored taxes, the only ones that remained below the average nationwide rate were the tax on immovable non-residential property for legal entities (1.88‰, against 2.15‰ in the country) and on motor vehicles – 1.33 BGN/kW, compared to 1.56 BGN/kW nationwide.

### Administration

Sofia has again outranked Varna and now occupies the top place in this category as well. Provision of one-stop shop administrative services again received the maximum points in 2024. However, the self-assessment on the development of e-government remains below average. The AIP active transparency rating of the district's local administration bodies has declined, but remains higher than the national average – 70.8%, against the national average of 69.3%.

The capital is also the district with the highest share of own revenues in the total revenues – 67%, versus 27% in the country, as well as the highest coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues – 110%, versus 74% in the country in 2023.

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Demography

In 2023, Sofia (capital) was once again the district with the most favorable demographic picture in the country. Although even in the capital the natural population increase rate is negative, it still outpaces all other districts with a value of  $-1.5\%$ , compared to the national average of  $-6.8\%$ . Sofia (capital) continues to attract new residents and its net migration rate is  $6.6\%$ .

Sofia is also the district with the lowest share of the population aged 65 and over –  $19.2\%$ , compared to  $23.8\%$  in the country. At the same time, the share of children under 4 years is relatively high –  $4.9\%$ , versus  $4.5\%$  nationally.

The district's specificity accounts for the almost total urbanization of its territory, and its population density is four times the country's average.

### Education

The capital remains the national leader in the education category, with a high rate of enrolment in 5th–7th grade, a low share of repeaters, good student performance and a high number of university students.

The share of school year repeaters is  $0.5\%$  – the third lowest in the country (after the districts of Smolyan and Ruse). The capital district has a high alignment between vocational education and the profile of the local economy, mainly because of the high numbers of students in transport and ICT-related programs and employees with vocational qualifications in those sectors, and the low numbers of those in agriculture and industry.

In 2024, the students from the capital achieved the highest average score in the country –  $54.7$  p. in the NEA in mathematics after 7th grade, which is far above the national average of  $42.9$  p. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was also the highest nationwide – "Very good"  $4.65$ , compared to the average of "Good"  $4.30$  countrywide, while the share of "fail" grades (below  $3.00$ ) was  $3.7\%$ , against the national average of  $8.7\%$ .

### Healthcare

In 2023, the capital remained among the country's districts with very good healthcare, second only to Pleven and characterized by easy access to specialist physicians, a well-developed pharmacy network, high life expectancy and low infant mortality.

The average life expectancy in the capital is the highest in the country –  $75.4$  years, compared to  $73.5$  years in the country.

The indicator for access to GPs is less favorable than the national average. However, the number of specialist physicians relative to the population is the second highest in the country, after that in Pleven district. The hospital bed capacity is slightly more limited than the country's average, though hospital bed occupancy is relatively high. The pharmacy network ensures good overall coverage. The infant mortality rate is less than half the national average.

### Security and justice

The capital's poor assessment and its bottom place in the whole country in the indicator for security and justice is a consequence of the heavy workloads of the local judges and the slow delivery of justice, as well as of the low detection rate.

In 2023, one criminal judge in Sofia (capital) heard an average of  $23.1$  cases a month, which is the highest figure nationwide, compared to  $14.4$  cases per judge in the country. Workloads in the Administrative Court are also among the heaviest in the country. Those heavy workloads have a negative impact on the speed of delivery of justice. The proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months is  $88\%$ , compared to the average of  $91\%$  nationwide, of administrative cases the share is  $67\%$ , versus  $72\%$  in the country, and that of civil cases –  $46\%$ , against  $65\%$  countrywide.

The proportion of police officers relative to the population is above the national average. The number of crimes against the person and property registered in the capital district increased in 2023 to reach  $11.9$  per  $1,000$  population, which is close to, though above the national average. At the same time, the crime detection rate continues to be the lowest countrywide, with  $37\%$  cleared crimes, versus  $53\%$  nationally.

### Environment

In 2022, the capital remained among the districts with a high annual volume of generated household waste –  $548$  kg/person, compared to  $488$  kg/person nationally. However, practically all waste was handed over for treatment and recycling, compared to  $76\%$  on average in the country.

The share of disturbed area is high –  $1.3\%$ , versus  $0.40\%$  nationally, while the figures for installed RES capacities relative to the population are among the lowest in the country.

The cooling degree days index in the district is low. However, the capital city is the district with the highest consumption of drinking water by households –  $125$  liters per person per day, compared to  $103$  liters nationally.

### Culture and tourism

In 2023, the capital was once again the district with the second most active cultural life after Burgas.

Visits to cinemas, theaters, museums and libraries have grown fast. With the exception of the relative number of museum visits, the values recorded for all other indicators are considerably above the average ones nationwide. Visits to the cinema, theatres and libraries are over twice the national average.

Tourism in the capital is less well represented. In 2022, the number of beds in accommodation establishments was  $12$  per  $1,000$  population, versus  $55$  per  $1,000$  population in the country, and the number of overnight stays was  $1,614$  per  $1,000$  population, versus  $3,739$  per  $1,000$  population in the country.

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## Key indicators for the district of Sofia (capital)

Economic Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	45,241	53,746	n.a.	<b>25,956</b>
Average gross annual salary of people employed under labour contract (BGN)	25,724	29,698	n.a.	<b>21,242</b>
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	11.3	11.7	8.1	<b>20.6</b>
Share of the working-age population (%)	64.4	62.9	63.0	<b>58.5</b>
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	79.8	83.8	82.4	<b>76.2</b>
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	2.0	1.6	1.6	<b>5.3</b>
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	4.2	4.0	4.7	<b>14.8</b>
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	57.7	57.6	54.1	<b>30.5</b>
Production value (BGN/employed person)	106,286	131,197	n.a.	<b>122,377</b>
Expenditures on the acquisition of tangible fixed assets (BGN/person)	7,757	8,796	n.a.	<b>4,257</b>
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (cumulative) (EUR/person)	11,235	11,719	n.a.	<b>4,544</b>
Share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	96.6	96.1	n.a.	<b>75.0</b>
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	<b>40.4</b>
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	114.5	113.3	109.5	<b>74.1</b>
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	74.8	74.8	70.8	<b>69.3</b>

Social Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Natural population increase rate (‰)	n.a.	–3.4	–1.5	<b>–6.8</b>
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	7.9	6.6	<b>6.4</b>
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.42	4.24	4.65	<b>4.30</b>
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	47.3	46.6	54.7	<b>42.9</b>
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	89.1	93.4	92.7	<b>89.9</b>
Average life expectancy (years)***	74.9	74.8	75.4	<b>73.5</b>
Share of people with health insurance (%)	89.0	91.6	97.4	<b>95.0</b>
Population per one GP (persons)	1,755	1,767	1,798	<b>1,701</b>
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	10.3	11.7	11.9	<b>11.3</b>
Share of criminal cases closed within 3 months	84	85	88	<b>91</b>
Households' consumption of municipally supplied drinking water (liter/person/day)	127	125	n.a.	<b>103</b>
Generated household waste of serviced population (kg/person/year)	522	548	n.a.	<b>488</b>
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	100	99	n.a.	<b>76</b>
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	814	1,315	1,493	<b>684</b>
Overnight stays in accommodation establishments (number/1,000 population)	896	1,614	1,703	<b>4,167</b>

\* 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.