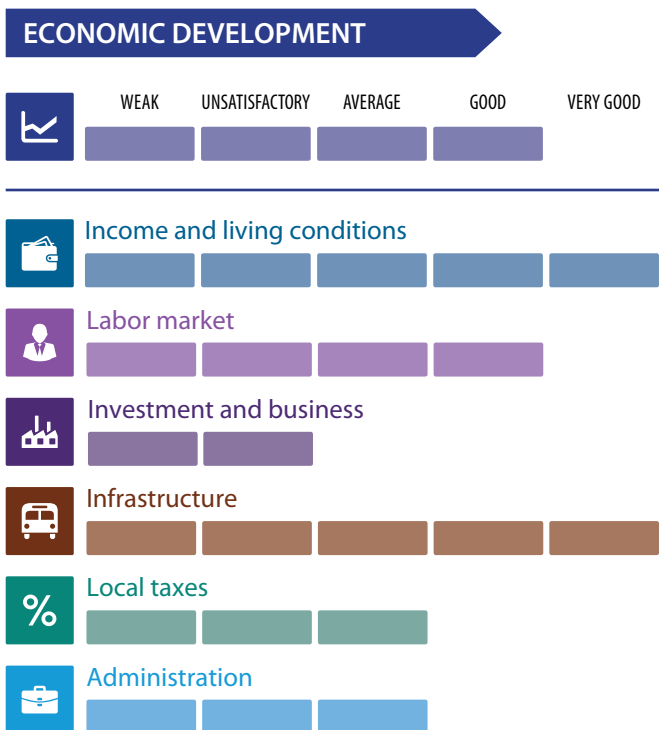# Stara Zagora district

▶ Population (2023)	290,350
▶ Territory (sq. km)	5,151
▶ Number of settlements	206
▶ Share of urban population (%)	71.2

Incomes in Stara Zagora continue to increase significantly and the standard of living is rising. Employment and unemployment are declining simultaneously, with both indicators being more favorable than the respective national averages. Production value is high, placing the district in the top three in the country. Unlike most districts with a high degree of economic development, Stara Zagora maintains relatively low local taxes. The transparency rating of the work of the local administrations is relatively low.

The natural population increase in Stara Zagora remains below the national average. Students' results are close to the country's average. Access to doctors (both GPs and specialist physicians) is relatively good. The pharmacy network is well developed. The number of crimes is relatively high and the detection rate is close to the national average. Stara Zagora's low score in the environment category is primarily due to the extremely high proportion of disturbed area. Cultural life in the district is relatively active.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WEAK   UNSATISFACTORY   AVERAGE   GOOD   VERY GOOD

Income and living conditions

Labor market

Investment and business

Infrastructure

Local taxes

Administration

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

WEAK   UNSATISFACTORY   AVERAGE   GOOD   VERY GOOD

Demography

Education

Healthcare

Security and justice

Environment

Culture and tourism

📈 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ▪▪▪▪

💳 Income and living conditions ▪▪▪▪▪

Incomes in Stara Zagora continue to increase significantly and the standard of living is rising, ranking the district second in this category, immediately below the capital. In 2022, GDP per capita in the district was 37,100 BGN, which marked a record growth for the country. Salaries and pensions also continue to rise at a faster rate than nationally. The average gross annual salary of people employed under labor contract has reached 19,000 BGN, and the average monthly pension – 831 BGN, against 784 BGN countrywide.

The upsurge in incomes also impacts the poverty level in the district. The share of the population living below the national poverty line has dropped to 23.1%, although it remains above the national average of 20.6%. The decrease is also reflected in the Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality.

👤 Labor market ▪▪▪▪

The performance of the local labor market is relatively good, placing Stara Zagora immediately below the top five in this category. In 2023, employment and unemployment declined simultaneously, with both indicators being more favorable than the national average. The employment rate reached 79.0%, compared to 76.2% nationally, while the unemployment rate was 4.1%, versus 5.3% in the country.

The share of the working-age population is stable at 57.0%, but remains slightly below the national average of 58.5%.

The educational structure of the workforce in the district has undergone an improvement. In 2023, the population aged 25–64 with higher education increased to 23%, versus the national average of 31%. At the same time, the share of the population with primary or lower education went down and was relatively low – 14%, compared to 15% in the country. The relatively high share of the workforce with secondary education is therefore in line with the district's industrial profile.

🏭 Investment and business ▪▪

Stara Zagora district retained its relatively low number of enterprises in 2022 – 57 per 1,000 population, compared to 70 per 1,000 population in the country. However, production value in the district is high and with 161,300 BGN per employed person, Stara Zagora ranks among the top three performers, preceded only by the districts of Sofia and Vratsa. TFA acquisition expenditures have increased to 3,200 BGN/person.

However, by the end of 2022 accumulated FDI flows decreased to 3,000 EUR/person.

Stara Zagora also ranks third in the country in terms of spending on research and development – 109 BGN/person in 2022.

The district's performance as regards the utilization of European funds is not so good. By 30 June 2024, payments made to beneficiaries of EU projects amounted to 2,684 BGN/person, compared to 3,175 BGN/person nationally. Within the district, the leader in utilization of EU funds is the municipality of Gurkovo, with over 5,000 BGN/person, and the bottom place is held by Galabovo municipality, with less than 1,000 BGN/person.

🚌 Infrastructure ▪▪▪▪▪

Stara Zagora ranks among the top three districts in this category, below Varna and Plovdiv.

The density of the rail network in Stara Zagora district is considerably higher than average. The density of the road network is slightly lower, but the share of highways and first-class roads is 29%, compared to 19% in the country for 2023. The share of roads with good quality surface has increased significantly and exceeds the national average.

Households' access to the internet has gone up to equal the national average of 89%.

The district is lagging behind as regards the share of the population living in settlements with a public sewerage network – 68% in 2022, compared to 75% nationally. 65% of the households have access to a public sewerage network connected to a wastewater treatment plant, against 67% in the country.

% Local taxes ▪▪▪

Unlike most districts with a high degree of economic development, in 2024 Stara Zagora again kept its municipal tax rates relatively low. The biggest differences compared to the respective national averages concern the tax on non-residential immovable property for legal entities and on non-gratuitous acquisition of property. The tax on retail trade remains higher than average, while that on motor vehicles is close to the national average.

Within the district, the lowest average tax rates are those in the municipality of Bratya Daskalovi, and the highest ones – in the municipality of Stara Zagora city.

💼 Administration ▪▪▪

The local administrations' self-assessments of the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop shop services recorded an improvement in 2024, albeit remaining below the respective country's averages. The average AIP Active transparency rating of the local municipalities for 2024 also again remained relatively low – 67.5% in the district, compared to 69.3% nationally.

The share of own revenues in the total revenues of the district's municipalities for 2023 is 22%, versus 27% in the country, and the coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues is 68%, against 74% in the country.

⚕ SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ▬ ▬

⛪ Demography ▬ ▬ ▬ ▬

In 2023, the natural population increase rate of –7.3‰ in Stara Zagora district remained below the national average of –6.8‰. At the same time, Stara Zagora continues to attract population and its net migration rate is positive at 2.1‰.

The share of children under 4 years of age is equal to the national average – 4.5%, but that of people aged 65 and over is higher – 24.6% in the district, compared to 23.8% in the country.

Population density is below average – 1,019 people/sq. km in urbanized areas, against 1,221 people/sq. km in the country in 2023.

📖 Education ▬ ▬ ▬ ▬

The net enrolment rate of schoolchildren in 5th–7th grade continued to rise in 2023 and was again above the national average. The share of school year repeaters, however, also increased, reaching 1.6%, versus 1.2% nationally. The alignment between vocational education and the profile of the local economy is relatively low, mainly due to a significant shortage of students in industry-related programs, given that manufacturing has such a strong presence in the local economy.

In 2024, students' results in the district were once again close to the national average. The average score in the NEA in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 39.4 p., against 42.9 p. nationwide. The average result in the State matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 4.31, compared to "Good" 4.30 nationally, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) amounted to 7.9%, against 8.7% nationwide.

The number of university students in the district has increased to 19.8 students per 1,000 population, versus 29.6 students per 1,000 population nationally.

✚ Healthcare ▬ ▬ ▬

The share of people with health insurance has gone up to 93%, against 95% nationwide. Average life expectancy has registered a slight increase to 72.9 years, but remains below the national average of 73.5 years.

Access to doctors in Stara Zagora district – both GPs and specialist physicians – is relatively good, with 1,441 people on average per one GP, compared to the national average of 1,701 people per doctor. The number of beds in the local general hospitals has not yet reached the national average. Hospital bed occupancy, however, is above average. In 2023, the available hospital beds in the district amounted to 5.2 per 1,000 population, versus 6.1 beds per 1,000 population nationwide, while hospital bed occupancy was 58%, versus 56% nationally.

The pharmacy network is relatively well developed.

⚖ Security and justice ▬ ▬ ▬ ▬

The workloads of the local judges and the speed of delivery of justice were close to the respective national averages in 2023. The average actual workload of judges in the District court was 13.5 cases per month per judge, compared to 14.4 cases in the country, and in the Administrative court it was 15.1 cases, compared to 14.8 nationally. 91% of criminal cases (the same as in the country), 73% of administrative cases (compared to 72% in the country) and 74% of civil cases (compared to 65% in the country) were completed within 3 months.

The number of crimes in Stara Zagora district is relatively high, and the detection rate – close to the national average. The crimes against the person and property registered in the district in 2023 increased to 12.9 per 1,000 population, compared to 11.3 per 1,000 population in the country, while the detection rate went up to 54%, versus 53% in the country. The relative number of police officers is relatively low – 3.9 per 1,000 population, compared to 4.2 per 1,000 population countrywide.

🍃 Environment ▬

The poor rating given to Stara Zagora and its place at the very bottom in the environment category is based predominantly on the persistence of an excessively high share of disturbed area – 3.2% in 2023, against 0.4% in the country, which was once again the highest figure for the whole country that year. At the same time, the share of forest areas is close to the national average – 32% in the district, against 33% in the country. The volume of household waste generated by the district's residents is also close to the national average – 463 kg/person per year, compared to 488 kg/person nationally. However, the share of that waste handed over for treatment and recycling is low – 56%, compared to 76% in the country.

The cooling degree days index in the district is high, and households' drinking water consumption is relatively low.

🎭 Culture and tourism ▬ ▬ ▬

Stara Zagora has a relatively active cultural life. In 2023, visits to the local cinemas, theaters and libraries relative to the population continued to increase. Visits to the local museums also went up to 1,010 per 1,000 population and again exceeded the national average of 770 per 1,000 population.

The number of beds in accommodation establishments in Stara Zagora district is 18 per 1,000 population, compared to 56 per 1,000 population in the country, and in 2023 the number of overnight stays reached 2,188 per 1,000 population, compared to 4,167 per 1,000 population in the country. The number of guest nights booked via online sharing economy platforms has doubled within a year, though still remaining far below the country's average.

Key indicators for the district of Stara Zagora

Economic Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	20,165	37,138	n.a.	**25,956**
Average gross annual salary of people employed under labour contract (BGN)	16,673	18,980	n.a.	**21,242**
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	28.1	29.1	23.1	**20.6**
Share of the working-age population (%)	58.4	57.0	57.0	**58.5**
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	78.0	79.7	79.0	**76.2**
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	4.4	4.3	4.1	**5.3**
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	15.8	17.1	14.1	**14.8**
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	22.0	22.0	23.0	**30.5**
Production value (BGN/employed person)	107,126	161,326	n.a.	**122,377**
Expenditures on the acquisition of tangible fixed assets (BGN/person)	2,757	3,191	n.a.	**4,257**
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (cumulative) (EUR/person)	3,563	2,971	n.a.	**4,544**
Share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	66.3	67.8	n.a.	**75.0**
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	38.9	39.4	63.1	**40.4**
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	80.0	74.9	67.7	**74.1**
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	63.8	65.0	67.5	**69.3**

Social Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Natural population increase rate (‰)	n.a.	−11.2	−7.3	**−6.8**
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	2.2	2.1	**6.4**
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.96	3.83	4.31	**4.30**
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	31.9	33.7	39.4	**42.9**
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	89.6	90.9	91.5	**89.9**
Average life expectancy (years)***	72.7	72.4	72.9	**73.5**
Share of people with health insurance (%)	89.4	92.5	93.0	**95.0**
Population per one GP (persons)	1,463	1,430	1,441	**1,701**
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	10.6	12.3	12.9	**11.3**
Share of criminal cases closed within 3 months	92	89	91	**91**
Households' consumption of municipally supplied drinking water (liter/person/day)	94	94	n.a.	**103**
Generated household waste of serviced population (kg/person/year)	422	463	n.a.	**488**
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	57	56	n.a.	**76**
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	307	489	577	**684**
Overnight stays in accommodation establishments (number/1,000 population)	1,032	1,703	2,188	**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.