

## POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES IN 2023

Demographic situation in Bulgaria in 2023:

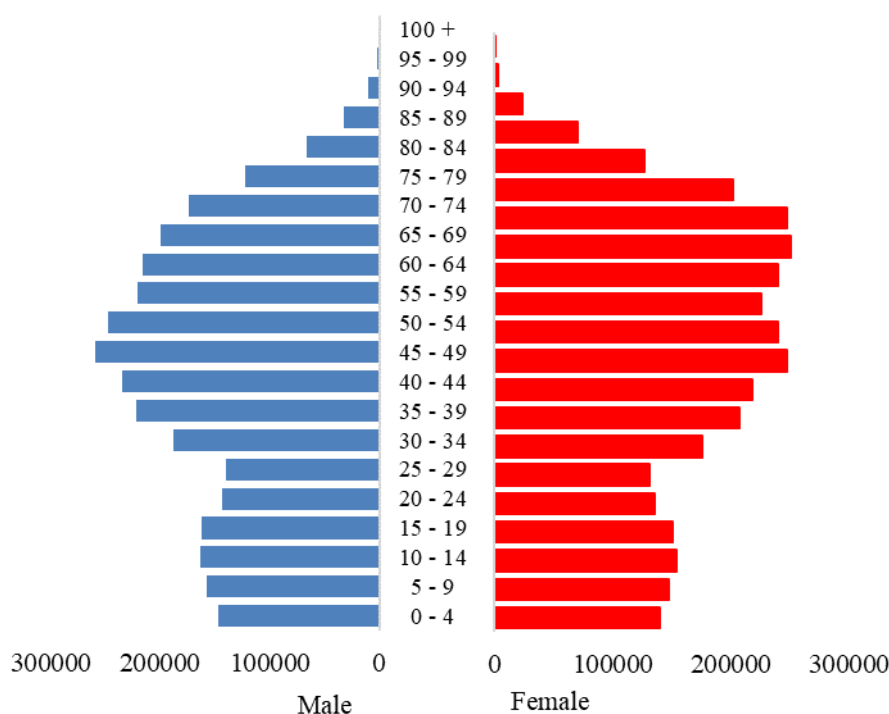
- Number of population decreases and population ageing continues;
- Number of live births increases;
- Number of deaths decreases;
- Number of marriages and number of divorces decreases;

### Population number and structures

As of December 31, 2023, the population of Bulgaria was 6 445 481 persons, representing 1.4% of the EU population<sup>1</sup>. Compared to 2022, the country's population decreases by 2 229 persons or by 0.03%<sup>1</sup>.

Male population was 3 097 698(48.1%) and female - 3 347 783(51.9%), or 1 000 males corresponded to 1 081 females. Males prevail among the population, aged up to 55 years. The number and share of females in the total population have increased among the elderly.

**Figure 1. Age structure of the population as of 31.12.2023**



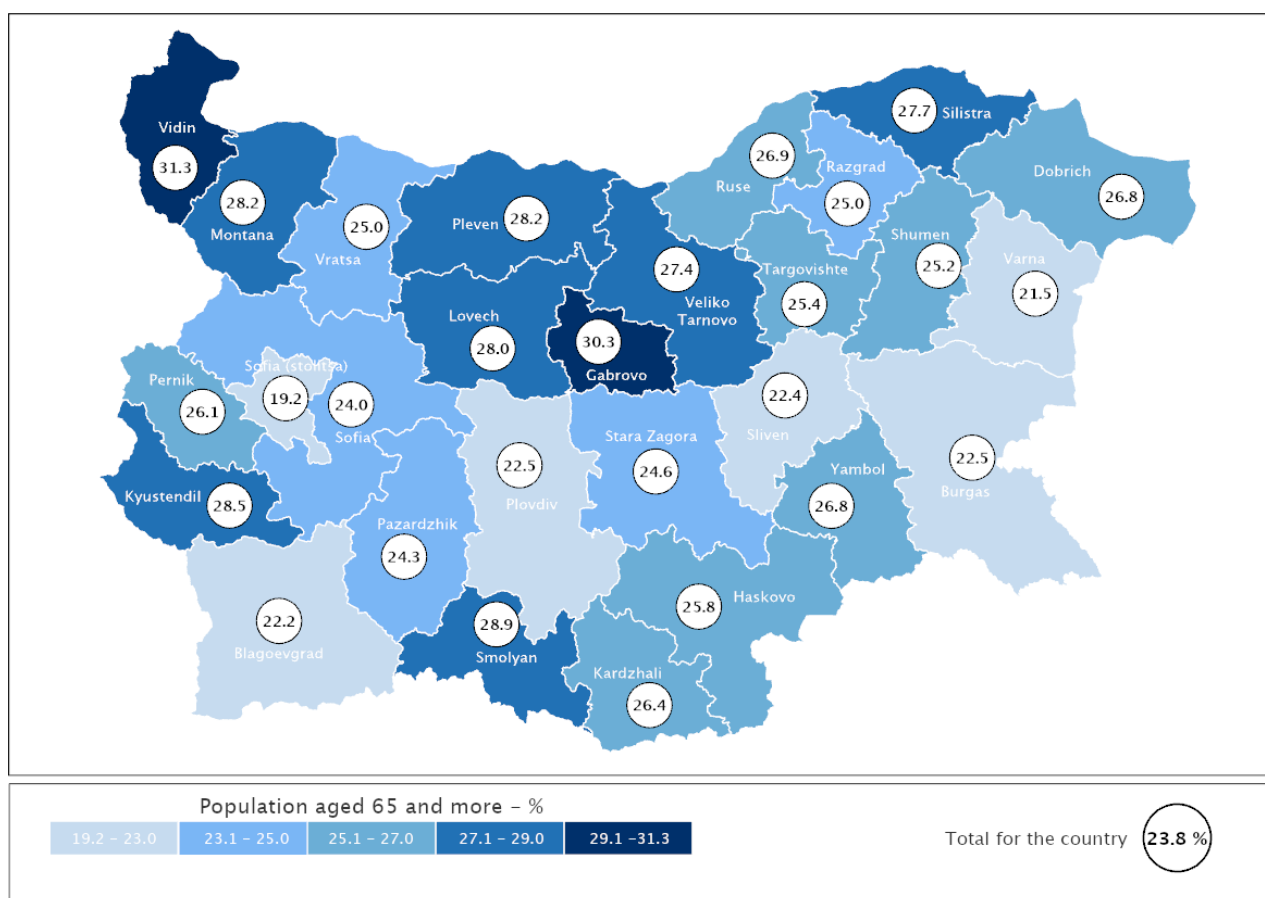
<sup>1</sup> In the international comparisons, data on EU member states refer to 2022. Source: Eurostat - <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>.

By the end of 2023, the number of persons aged 65 and over was 1 530 909, or 23.8% of the country's population. Compared to 2022, the share of the population aged 65 and over increases by 0.3 percentage points.

The share of females aged 65 and over is 27.7%, compared to 19.5% of males. The difference is due to the higher mortality among the male population and consequently - lower life expectancy.

The share of persons aged 65 and over is highest in districts Vidin (31.3%), Gabrovo (30.3%) and Smolyan (28.9%). In 22 districts, the share of people aged 65 and over is higher than the country's average. The lowest is the share of the elderly population in districts Sofia (stolitsa) - 19.2%, Varna - 21.5% and Blagoevgrad - 22.2%.

**Figure 2. Share of population aged 65 and over by district as of 31.12.2023**



The share of the population aged 65 and over for EU-27 is 21.3%. The highest is the share of the elderly population in Italy (24.0%), followed by Portugal (24.0%). In seventeen EU member states, including Bulgaria, the share of the elderly is above 20.0%.

As of 31.12.2023, **children up to 15 years of age in the country are 911 025, or 14.1% of the total population number.**

The share of the population under 15 years of age is highest in districts Sliven - 18.9%, Yambol - 15.2% and Burgas - 14.9% of the district population. As a total, in 17 districts the share of children up to 15 years

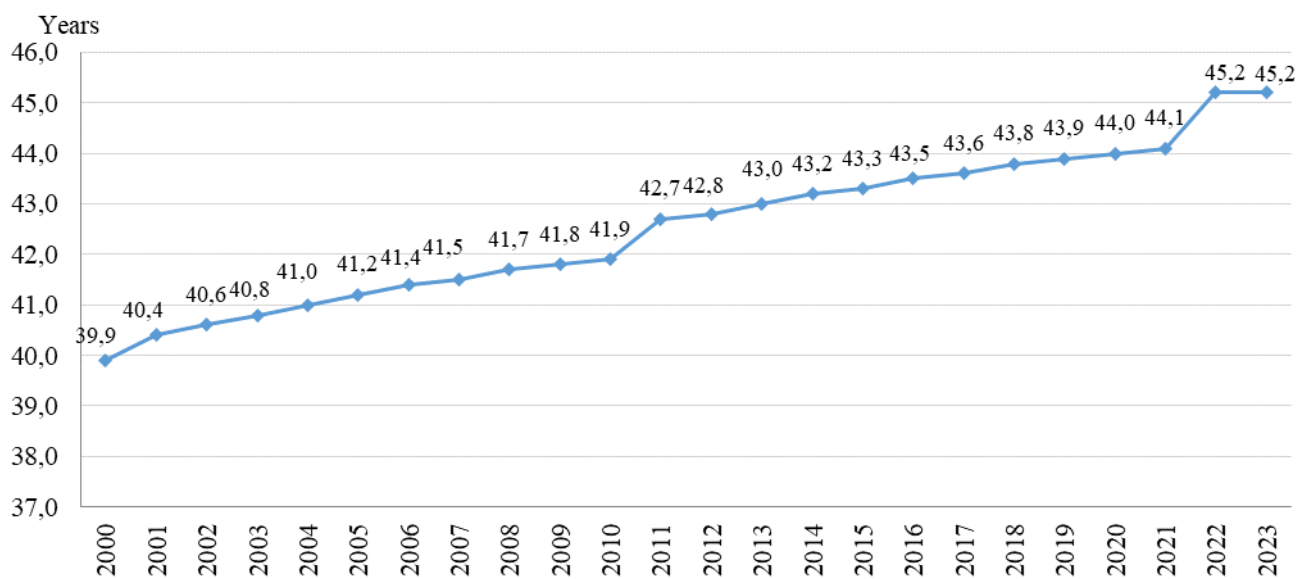
is lower than the country's average. The lowest is the share registered in districts Smolyan - 10.6%, Vidin - 11.5% and Gabrovo - 11.7%.

The share of the youngest EU-27 population in the beginning of 2022 is 14.9%. The lowest shares are observed in Italy - 12.4%, Portugal - 12.9% and Malta - 12.7%, and the highest - in Ireland - 19.3%, Sweden - 17.4% and France - 17.3%.

As of 31.12.2023, **the age dependency ratio<sup>2</sup>** in the country was **61.0%**, or to each person in 'dependent' ages (under 15 and over 65 years) corresponded less than two persons in 'independent' age. The ratio in urban areas is 57.6%, and in rural - 71.3%. As a total, in all districts, the age dependency ratio is over 50.0%. The lowest is the ratio in districts Sofia (stolitsa) - 51.5%, and the highest is in Vidin (74.8%), Gabrovo and Yambol - 72.3% each.

The population ageing over the years lead to an increase of the population **mean age**. It has increased from 40.6 years in 2002 to **45.2 years at the end of 2023**. The mean age of the population is 44.4 years in urban areas, compared to 47.5 years in rural areas.

**Figure 3. Mean age of the population**



The number of population and relative share of population **under, at and over working age changes**. The last two are influenced not only by the population ageing, but also by legislative changes<sup>3</sup> concerning the retirement age.

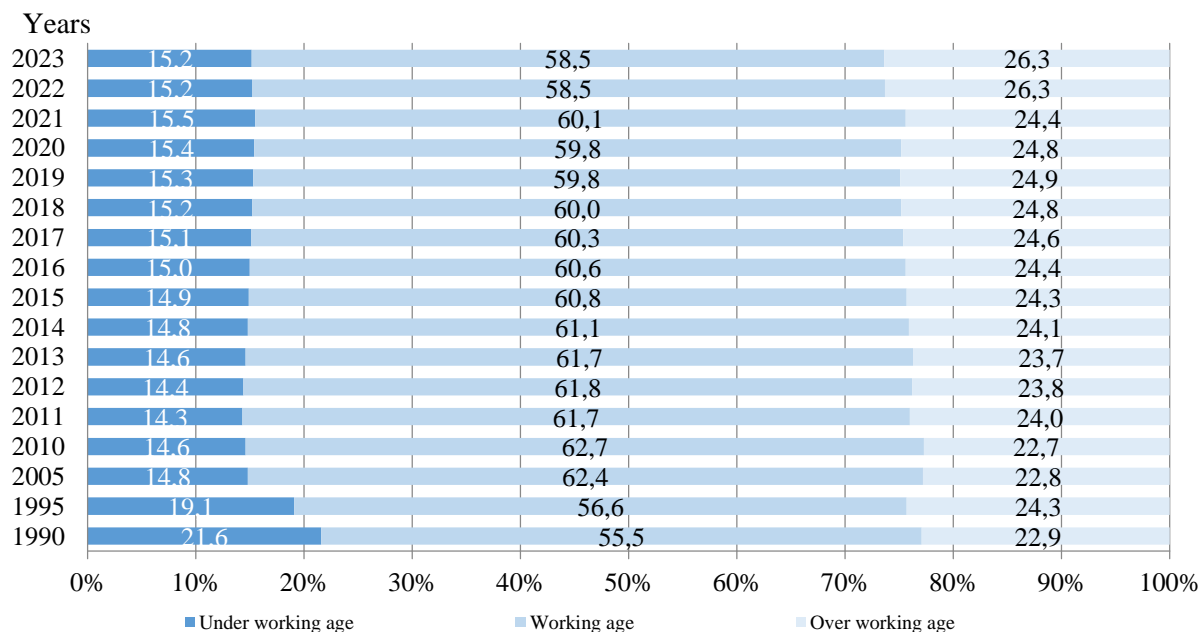
In 2023, at working age were women up to completion of 62 years and men up to completion of 64 years and 6 months. **The number of the population at working age as of 31.12.2023 is 3 769 thousand persons, or 58.5%** of the total population, of which males are 1 971 thousand and females - 1 798 thousand persons.

<sup>2</sup> Number of persons in 'dependent' ages (persons under 15 years of age and 65 and more) per 100 persons in 'independent' ages (persons aged 15 to 64 years) calculated in percentage.

<sup>3</sup> Age limits used for distribution of population under, at and over working age are defined according to Ordinance on pensions and length of insurance, adopted by the Decree of the Council of Ministers No. 30 (State Gazette 21/17.03.2000).

By the end of 2023, the number of the population over working age was 1 698 thousand persons, or 26.3%, and under working age were 977 thousand persons, or 15.2% of the country's population.

**Figure 4. Population under, at and over working age as of 31.12.**



The reproduction of the population at working age is characterized by **the coefficient of demographic replacement**, showing the ratio between the number of persons entering working age (15 - 19 years) and the number of persons exiting it (60 - 64 years). As of 31.12.2023, the **coefficient of demographic replacement** was 69.

Most favourable was the value of the indicator in districts Sliven - 90, Sofia (stolitsa) - 83 and Varna - 79. The lowest was the ratio in districts Smolyan - 43, Kardhzali - 47 and Silistra where 100 persons exiting working age are replaced by 53 persons entering it.

### Territorial distribution of population

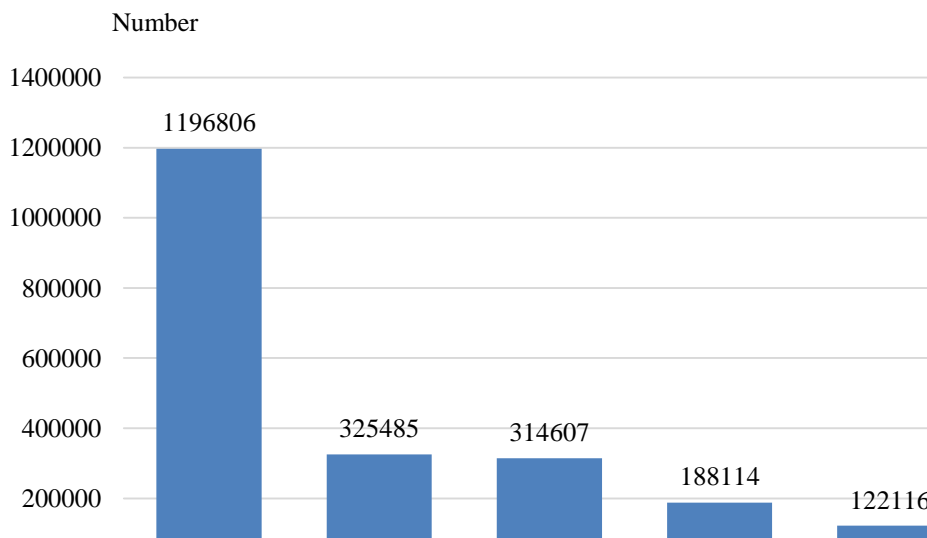
**As of 31.12.2023, 4 738 461, or 73.5% of the total country's population, resided in urban areas and 1 707 020, or 26.5% - in rural ones.**

There were 5 256 settlements in Bulgaria by the end of 2023, of which 257 - towns and 4 999 - villages. There were 201 settlements without population. The highest was the number of settlements without population in districts Veliko Tarnovo and Gabrovo - 67.

The population number was between 1 and 49 persons incl. in 1 245 of the settlements, or 23.7%.

There were six towns with a population above 100 thousand persons and 35.2% of the country's population lived there.

**Figure 5. Towns with more than 100 000 inhabitants as of 31.12.2023**



According to the country's administrative-territorial structure, there are 6 statistical regions, 28 districts and 265 municipalities in Bulgaria.

#### *Statistical regions*

Half of the country's population (51.5%) lives in Yugozapaden and Yuzhen tsentralen regions. The smallest, according to the population number, is the Severozapaden region - 664 thousand persons, or 10.3% of the country's population.

The population number decreased compared to 2022 in two statistical regions - Severozapaden region - by 1.1% and Severen tsentralen - by 0.9 %.

#### **1. Population by statistical region as of 31.12.2023**

Statistical region	Population as of 31.12.2023 - in numbers	Population as of 31.12.2023 - %	Population growth - in numbers	Population growth - %
Severozapaden	664024	10.3	-7478	-1.1
Severen tsentralen	680359	10.6	-5975	-0.9
Severoiztochen	826134	12.8	2250	0.3
Yugoiztochen	951167	14.8	2757	0.3
Yugozapaden	2019167	31.3	2613	0.1
Yuzhen tsentralen	1304630	20.2	3604	0.3

#### *Districts*

The lowest is the number of the population in district Vidin - 71 773 persons, or 1.1% of the country's population and the highest is in district Sofia (stolitsa) - 1 286 965 persons (20.0%). Four districts have a



population above 300 thousand persons and in three of them, Sofia (stolitsa), Plovdiv and Varna, lives more than one third of the total country's population (36.5%).

## 2. Population by districts as of 31.12.2023

Districts	Population as of 31.12.2023 - in numbers	Population as of 31.12.2023 - %	Population growth - in numbers	Population growth - %
<b>Total</b>	<b>6445481</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-2229</b>	<b>-0.03</b>
Blagoevgrad	287077	4.5	-1084	-0.40
Burgas	384446	6.0	5850	1.50
Varna	434191	6.7	3344	0.80
Veliko Tarnovo	202232	3.1	-1801	-0.90
Vidin	71773	1.1	-981	-1.30
Vratsa	147619	2.3	-1255	-0.80
Gabrovo	94862	1.5	-1095	-1.10
Dobrich	146635	2.3	-573	-0.40
Kardzhali	146562	2.3	4054	2.80
Kyustendil	107673	1.7	-1030	-0.90
Lovech	112225	1.7	-1131	-1.00
Montana	114526	1.8	-1646	-1.40
Pazardzhik	225261	3.5	-948	-0.40
Pernik	111032	1.7	-714	-0.60
Pleven	217881	3.4	-2465	-1.10
Plovdiv	633586	9.8	2070	0.30
Razgrad	100696	1.6	-411	-0.40
Ruse	187830	2.9	-1793	-0.90
Silistra	94739	1.5	-875	-0.90
Sliven	170051	2.6	-532	-0.30
Smolyan	92107	1.4	-1247	-1.30
Sofia	226420	3.5	-1190	-0.50
Sofia (stolitsa)	1286965	20.0	6631	0.50
Stara Zagora	290350	4.5	-1502	-0.50
Targovishte	95609	1.5	-592	-0.60
Haskovo	207114	3.2	-325	-0.20
Shumen	149699	2.3	71	0.00
Yambol	106320	1.6	-1059	-1.00

Compared to 2022, the population has increased in five districts. The highest was the increase in Kardzhali - 2.8% and Burgas - 1.5% districts. In 22 districts a decrease is observed, the highest in Montana district - 1.4% and in Vidin and Smolyan districts - 1.3% each.

#### Municipalities

The distribution of population by municipalities is not uniform. There are 81 municipalities with a population below 6 000, and hardly 4.5% of the population lives there. At the same time, there are eight municipalities with a population over 100 thousand people and 40.8% of the country's population lives there. The highest is the number of the population of municipality Stolichna (1 286 965), followed by Plovdiv (325 485) and Varna (323 386). The lowest is the number of the population of municipality Treklyano - 470 persons.

### 3. Municipalities according to the population number as of 31.12.2023

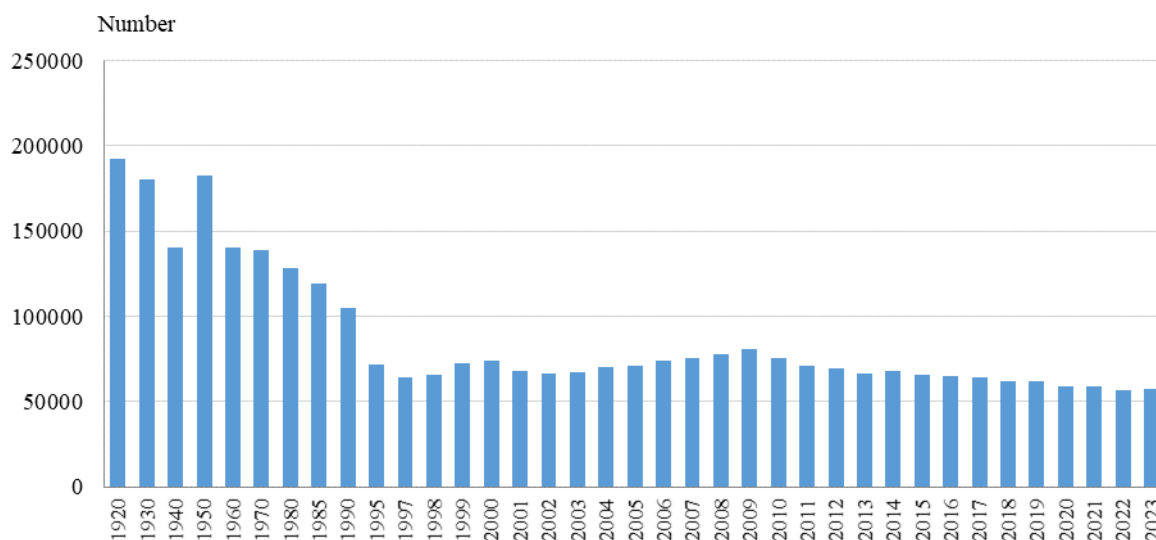
Size of municipality	Municipalities		Population	
	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6445841</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Up to 5999	81	30.6	291447	4.5
6000 - 19999	121	45.7	1332922	20.7
20000 - 49999	44	16.2	1339821	20.8
50000 - 99999	12	4.5	849475	13.2
100000 and more	8	3.0	2631816	40.8

Basic factors influencing the changes of population number and structures are the demographic processes - fertility, mortality and migration.

#### Fertility

There were 57 478 children born in 2023, of which **57 197 (99.5%) - live-born**. The number of live births increased by 601 children, or 1.1% compared to the previous year.

**Figure 6. Live-born children within the period 1920 - 2023**



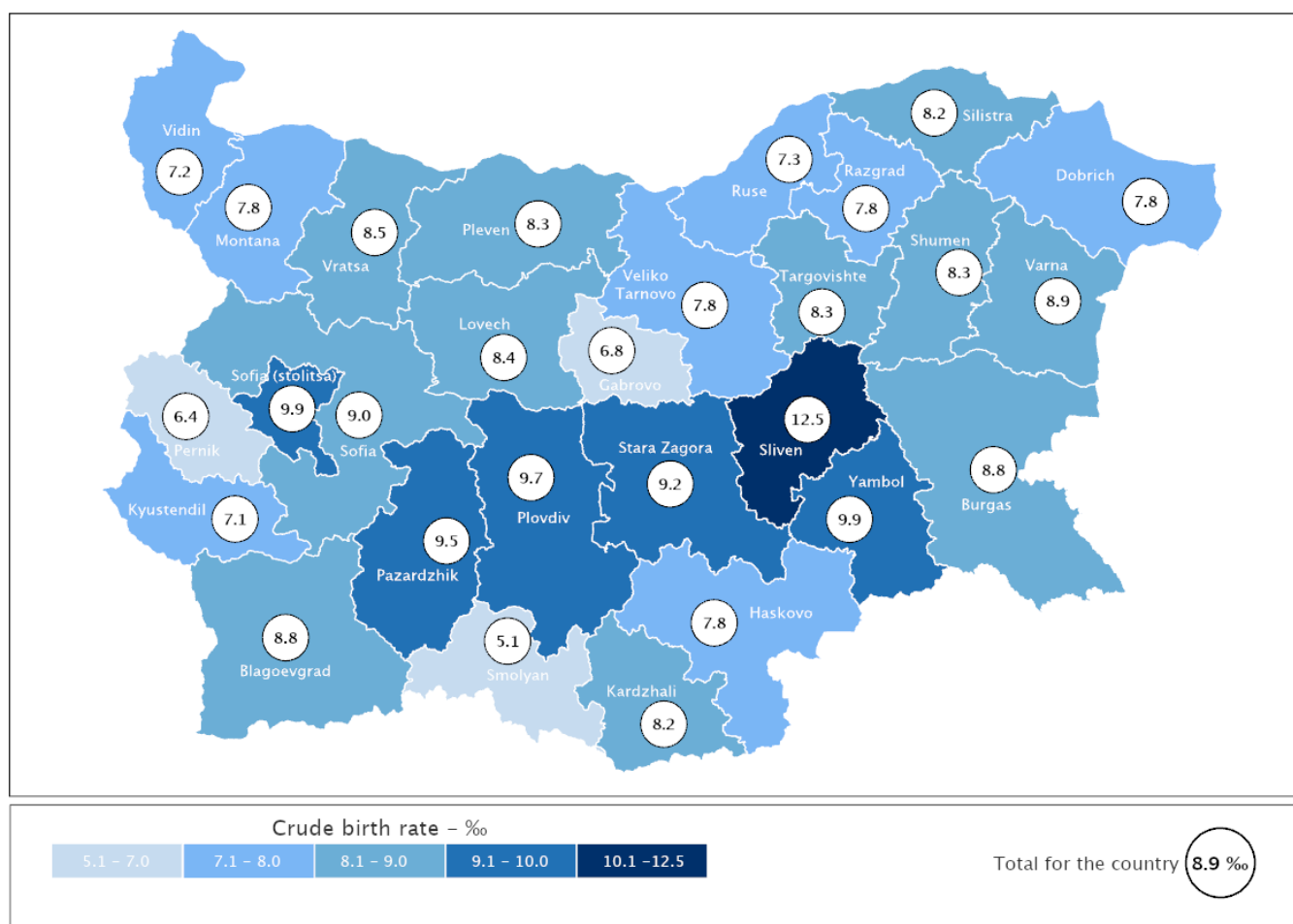
**The crude birth rate<sup>4</sup> in 2023 is 8.9‰.**

The number of live-born males (29 318) is by 1 439 higher compared to the live-born females (27 879), or 951 females correspond to 1 000 born males.

The number of live-born children in urban areas is 42 388 and in rural - 14 809. The crude birth rate in urban areas is 8.9‰ and in rural - 8.7‰.

In Bulgaria, the highest is the crude birth rate in the districts Sliven - 12.5‰, Sofia (stolitsa), Yambol - 9.9‰ and Plovdiv - 9.7‰. The crude birth rate is lower than the country's average in 21 districts and the lowest is in districts Gabrovo - 6.8 ‰ Pernik - 6.4‰ and Smolyan - 5.1‰.

**Figure 7. Crude birth rate by district in 2023**



**The crude birth rate in 2022 for EU-27 was 8.7‰ according to Eurostat data.** The highest crude birth rate was observed in Cyprus - 11.2‰, France - 10.7‰, Ireland - 10.5‰, and Sweden - 10.0‰. The lowest crude birth rate was registered in Italy - 6.7‰.

<sup>4</sup> Number of live-born children per 1 000 persons of the average annual population during the year.



The number of women in fertile age (15 - 49 completed years), or the size and fertility of the fertile contingents in the country, influences considerably the fertility levels and the character of population reproduction.

The number of women in fertile age as of 31.12.2023 was 1 269 thousand. It has decreased by 9 thousand compared to the previous year and by 356 thousand compared to 2012.

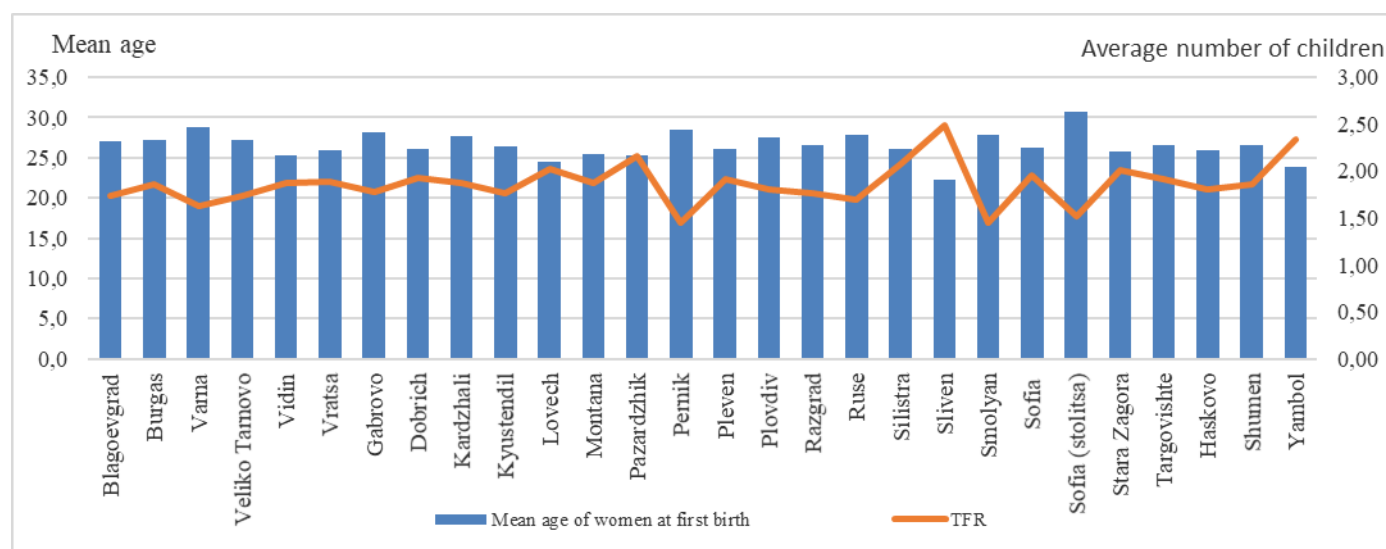
The number of children born by mothers aged below 18 years decreases from 2 871 in 2022 to 2 775 in 2023. The number of children born by mothers of age 40 and more years increased from 2 410 in 2022 to 2 654 in 2023.

Half of the births (48.4%) in 2023 were first ones, 37.2% second and 13.5% - third or higher of rank.

Total fertility rate (TFR)<sup>5</sup> is one of the basic indicators characterising the fertility. **The average number of live-born children per woman in 2023 was 1.79** and it increased with 0.01 compared to 2022.

The mean age of women at first birth was 27.7 in 2023. Compared to 2022 it increased by 0.1 years. The mean age of women at first birth varies between 22.2 in Sliven district to 30.8 in Sofia (stolitsa) district.

**Figure 8. Mean age at first birth and TFR by district in 2023**



There were 1 047 multi-foetal births registered in 2023, or 5 less than in 2022. In 1 036 of the cases, two children are born, in 11 - three children.

**The number of children born outside marriage in 2023 was 34 357, or 59.8%** of the total number of births. The share of extramarital births in rural areas (64.9%) was higher than in urban (58.0%). For 81.1% of the extramarital births, data on the fathers exists, i.e. most probably the children are growing up in families by parents cohabiting without marriage.

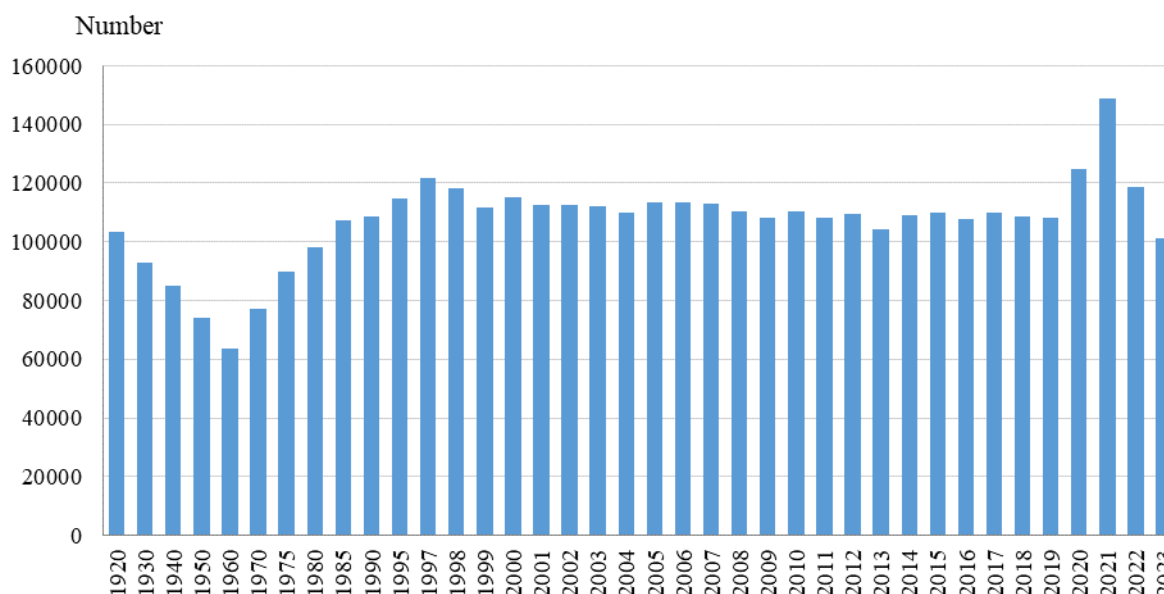
<sup>5</sup> Average number of live-born children, a mother would give birth to during her entire fertile period according to the age-specific fertility rates during the reporting year.

The highest share of extramarital births is registered in districts Lovech (77.8%), Vratsa (77.6%) and Vidin (75.2%). The share of extramarital births is lower than 50.0% in the districts Kardzhali (35.9%), Razgrad (45.1%), Blagoevgrad (48.8%) and Silistra (49.4%).

## Mortality

The number of deaths in 2023 was 101 006 and the crude mortality rate<sup>6</sup> - 15.7‰. Compared to the previous year, the number of deaths has decreased by 17 808, or by 15.0%. The crude mortality rate remains high.

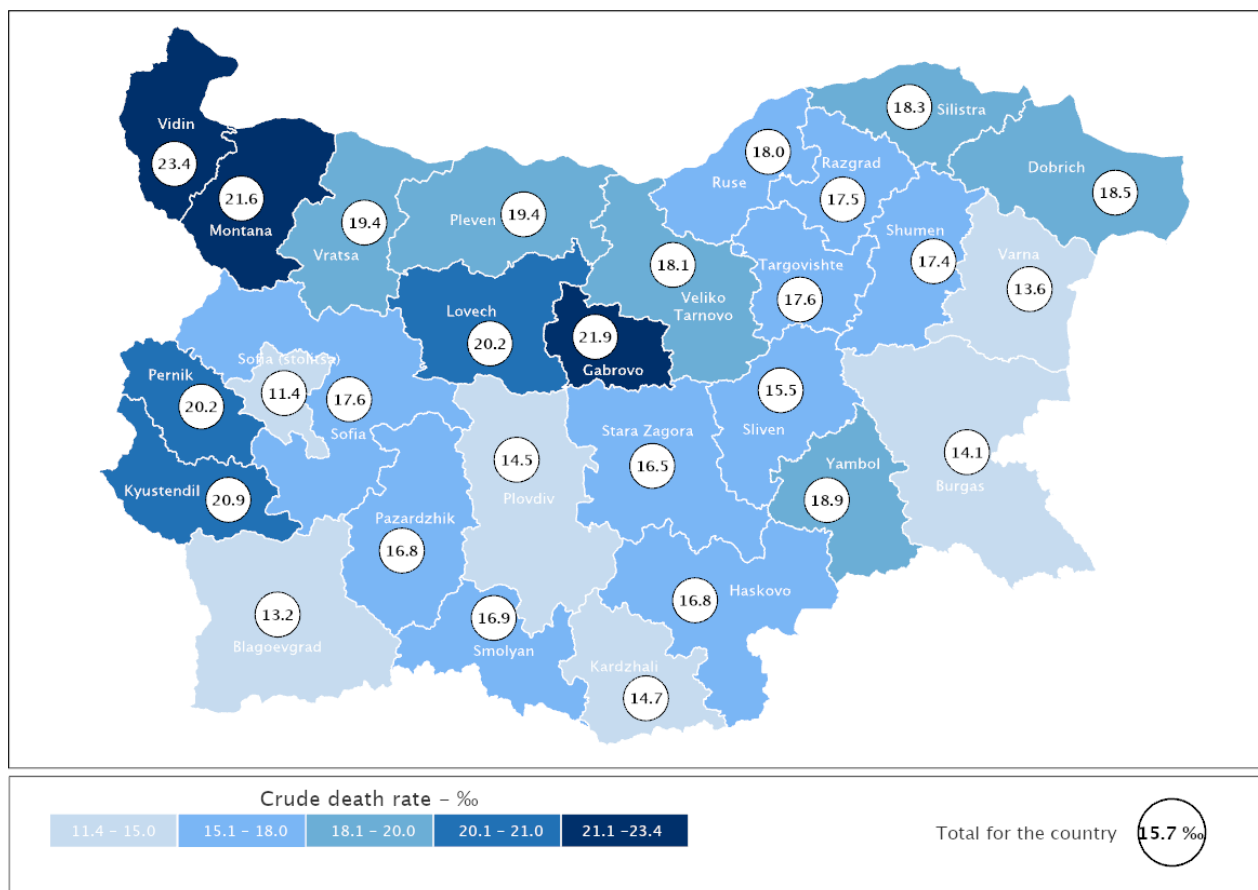
Figure 9. Deaths within the period 1920 - 2023



Mortality among males (16.9‰) continues to be higher than among females (14.5‰). In 2023, there were 1 076 deaths of males per 1 000 deaths of females. The considerable differences in mortality in urban and rural areas also remain unchanged. The mortality rate in rural areas (21.0‰) was higher than in urban ones (13.7‰). In regional aspect, the highest mortality rate was in the districts Vidin - 23.4‰, Gabrovo - 21.9‰ and Montana - 21.6‰. In eight districts mortality was less than the average in the country, the lowest was in Sofia (stolitsa) - 11.4‰.

<sup>6</sup> Number of dead persons per 1 000 persons of the average annual population during the year.

Figure 10. Crude death rate by district in 2023



The mortality rate for EU-27 in 2022 was 11.5%. The mortality rate in Bulgaria was highest among the EU member states. The lowest was the mortality in Ireland and Luxembourg - 6.8%, and Malta and Cyprus - 8.0% each. Except in Bulgaria, rather high compared to the average EU-27 value is the mortality in Latvia - 16.4%, Lithuania - 15.1% and Croatia - 14.8%.

The premature mortality<sup>7</sup> in 2023 (20.1%) has increased compared to 2022 (19.2%). There were considerable differences in the premature mortality indicator for male and female population. The dead females aged under 65 years represented 12.5% of all dead females, while among the males it was 27.1%.

281 children up to 1 year of age died in 2023 and the infant mortality rate<sup>8</sup> was 4.9%. The infant mortality rate was 13.3‰ in 2002 and 4.8‰ in 2022.

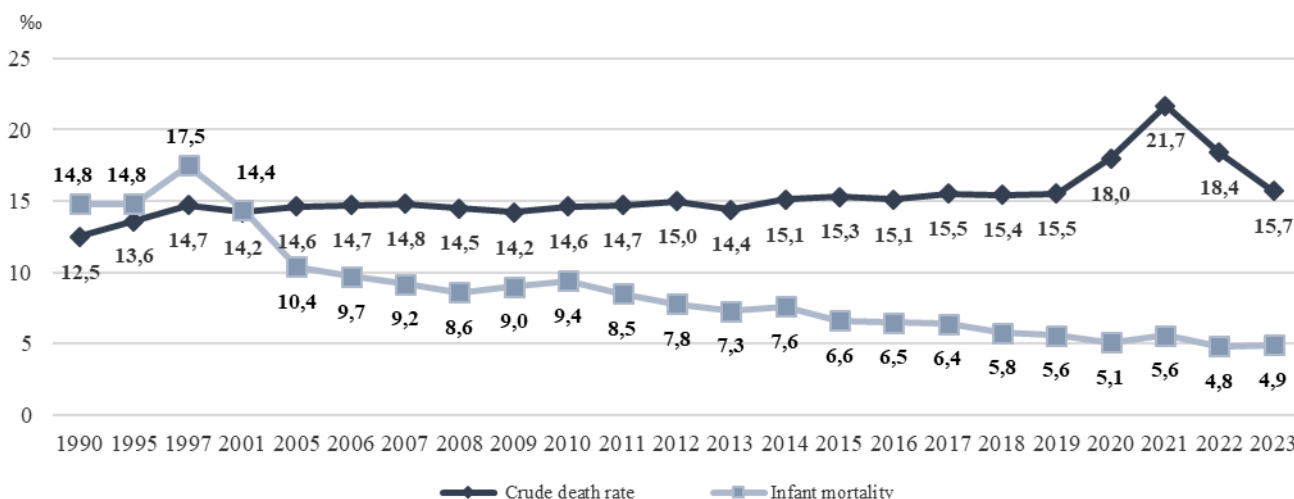
The infant mortality rate for 2023 was lower than the country's average in 13 districts. The lowest values were registered in the districts Kyustendil - 1.3‰, Gabrovo - 1.5‰ and Veliko Tarnovo - 1.9‰. The highest

<sup>7</sup> Share of deaths of persons below 65 years of age of the total number of deaths.

<sup>8</sup> Number of children who die up to 1 year of age per 1 000 live born.

infant mortality rate was registered in the districts Razgrad (12.8‰), Sliven (10.8‰) and Stara Zagora (8.6‰).

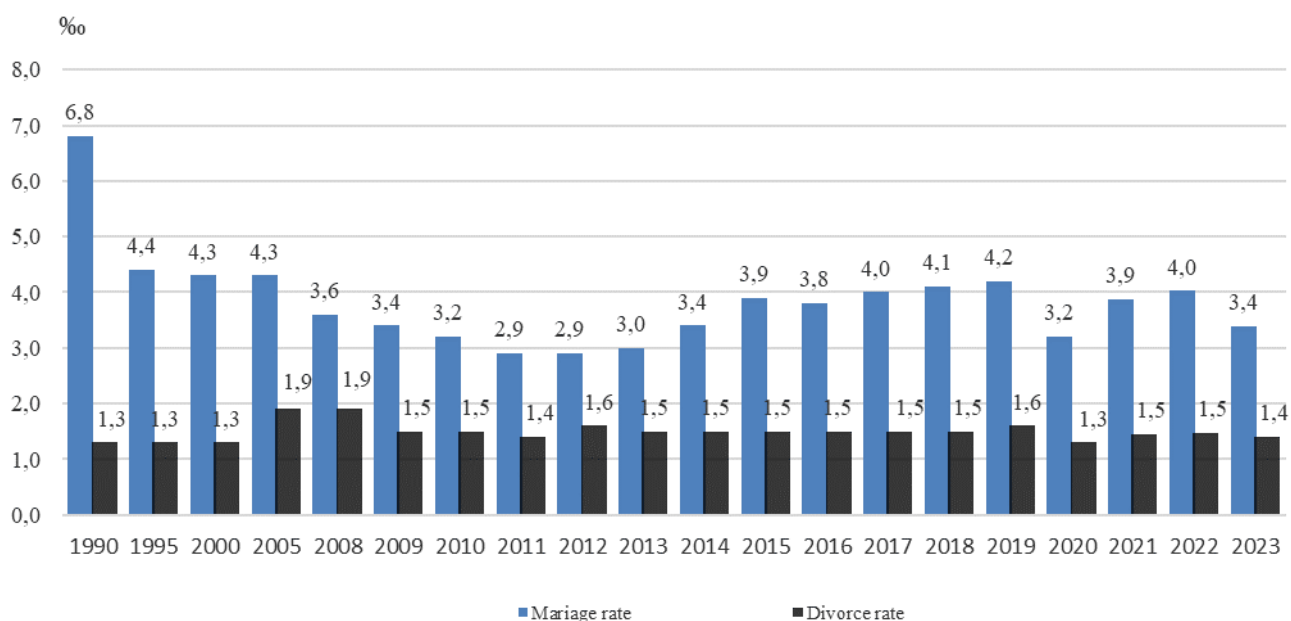
Figure 11. Crude death rate and infant mortality rate



## Marriages and divorces

There were 21 800 juridical marriages registered in 2023, or 4 213 less than the previous year. The marriage rate<sup>9</sup> is 3.4‰. Nearly three quarters of the total marriages number (16 105) are registered among the urban population.

Figure 12. Marriage and divorce rates (per 1 000 population)



<sup>9</sup> Number of marriages per 1 000 population.

The mean age at first marriage in 2023 was 33.4 for males and 30.3 years for females. Compared to the previous year, the mean age at first marriage has increased by 0.4 years for males and 0.2 for females.

84.6% of females and 84.2% of males have married for the first time in 2023.

The most marriages per 1 000 people of the population are registered in districts Sofia (stolitsa) - 4.1-‰ and Razgrad - 3.9‰. The marriage rate is the lowest in district Pernik - 2.4‰.

**The number of divorces in 2023 was 9 088**, or 437 less than the registered in 2022. Out of the total number of divorces, 77.6% refer to the urban population.

The highest is the number of divorces by ‘mutual agreement’ (67.8%), followed by divorces due to ‘incompatibility of temperament’ (19.3%) and ‘virtual parting’ (11.8%).

The divorce is not the first one for 11.1% of females and 11.7% of males who divorced in 2023.

The average duration of a marriage before the divorce in 2023 is 15.4 years.

## Internal migration

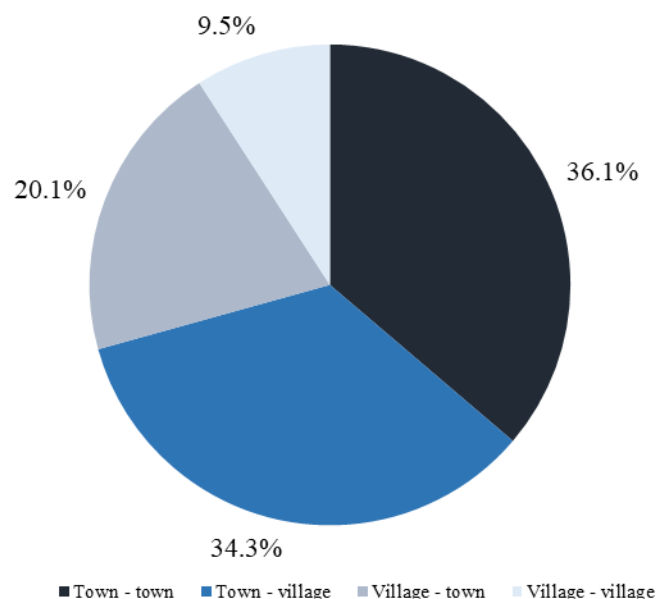
**107 836 persons changed their residence within the country in 2023.**

Among the migrants within the country, 47% were males and 53% - females.

The share of internal migrants in the age group 0 - 14 years was 15.8%, persons aged 15 - 64 years - 66.3% and persons aged 65 years and over - 17.9% of all internally migrated persons.

The share of the flow ‘town-town’ was the highest one (36.1%), followed by the flow ‘town-village’ (34.3%) and ‘village-town’ (20.1%). Considerably lower was the number and share of the flow ‘village - village’ (9.5%).

**Figure 13. Directions of the internal migration in 2023**





Out of the internal migrants, the highest was the number of people who chose their new place of residence being Sofia (stolitsa) (15 319). The districts with the largest relative shares of migrants to Sofia (stolitsa) were Sofia - 10.8% and Blagoevgrad - 8.7%.

The lowest were the shares of migrants to Sofia (stolitsa) from the districts Razgrad - 0.7%, Silistra and Targovishte - 0.8%.

### International migration

**15 227 persons changed their current address in Bulgaria with an address abroad in 2023** - 60.9% males. The emigrants aged 0 - 14 were 6.2%, those aged 15 - 64 years were 84.1% and emigrants over 65 years of age - 9.7%.

The most preferred destination countries were Germany (18.1%), the United Kingdom (16.9%) and France (8.4%).

Persons who changed their address abroad with an address in Bulgaria, or the immigration flow, included Bulgarian citizens who have returned to Bulgaria and citizens of other countries granted residence permits or status in Bulgaria. **There were 56 807 persons who changed their address abroad with an address in Bulgaria in 2023.** Males represented 53.7% of the total number of immigrants and females - 46.3%.

Among the immigrants to Bulgaria, 14.1% were in the age group 0 - 14 years, persons aged 15 - 64 years are 73.1% and the oldest, persons aged 65 years and over - 12.8%.

The highest was the share of immigrants from Türkiye (25.0%), Ukraine (17.5%) and the Russian Federation (9.7%).

### Population natural and migration growth

The population number and structures are defined by the size and intensity of the natural and migration growth.

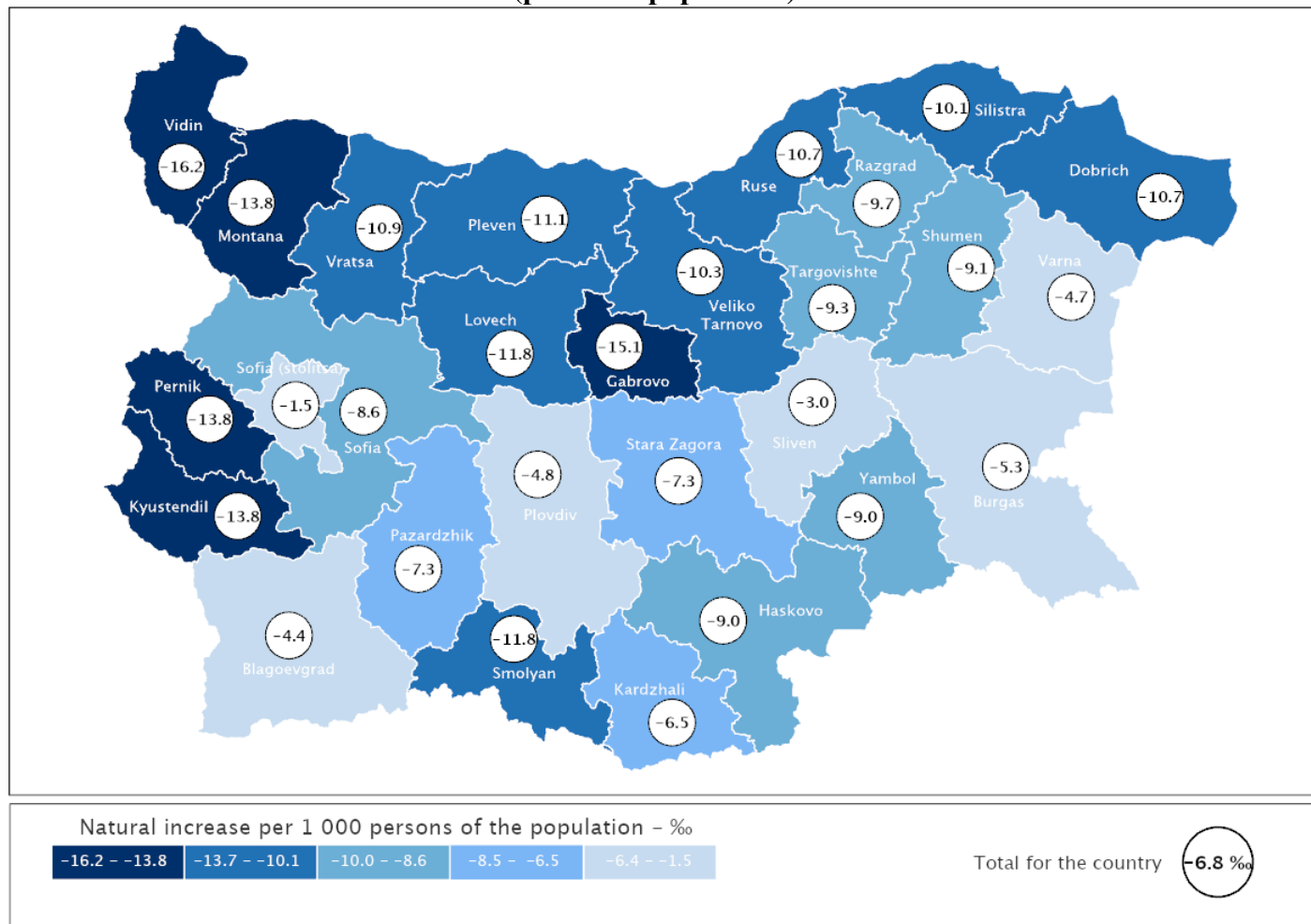
The difference between the number of live births and deaths represents the natural increase of population. The country's demographic development after 1990 is characterised by a negative natural increase. **Due to the negative natural increase, the country's population decreased by 43 809 persons in 2023.**

The population decrease, **measured through the natural increase rate, is minus 6.8%<sup>10</sup>**. The natural increase rate in urban areas is minus 4.8‰, compared to minus 12.3‰ in rural areas.

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<sup>10</sup> Difference between the number of live births and number of deaths per 1 000 of the average annual population.

**Figure 14. Natural growth by districts in 2023  
(per 1 000 population)**



**The natural increase in all of the country’s districts in 2023 was negative.**

The lowest is the negative growth in the districts Sofia (stolitsa) (-1.5%), Sliven (-3.0%) and Blagoevgrad (-4.4%). the highest is the population decrease due to the high negative growth in the district Vidin - minus 16.2%, followed by Gabrovo - minus 15.1% and Montana, Pernik and Kyustendil - minus 13.8% each. Higher than minus 10.0% is the natural growth in thirteen country districts.

**The natural increase rate for EU-27 in 2022 was minus 2.9%.**

In 6 EU member states the natural increase was positive and the highest was the rate in Ireland (3.8%), Cyprus (3.2%) and Luxembourg (3.1%). Except in Bulgaria, a rather high negative natural increase was registered in Latvia - minus 7.9% and Lithuania - minus 7.4%.

Net migration (growth due to international migration) influences considerably the population number and structures. The net migration growth in 2023 was positive - plus 41 580 persons - the difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants.



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The decrease of population due to the international migration measured through the coefficient of net migration is +6.4‰<sup>11</sup>.

In 2023 highest migration growth was registered in Kardzhali (34.5‰), Burgas (20.6‰) and Varna (12.3‰). Highest population decrease due to the negative migration growth was registered in districts Smolyan (-1.5‰) and Yambol (-0.9‰).

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<sup>11</sup> Ratio of the net migration to the average annual population.





## Methodological notes

The population number and structures by the end of the year are calculated based on the population data for the preceding year and data on the population's natural and migration movement during the reference year. In the census years, recalculation of the population is done as of the end of the respective year.

For calculation of the demographic indicators average annual population number is used. The average annual population is an average value calculated on the bases of population at the end of the previous year and at the end of the reported year.

The source of the data on population number and structures is the Statistical Register of the Population maintained by NSI. Data source on natural and migration movement of population (births, deaths, marriages, divorces, migration) is the Unified System for Civil Registration and Administrative Services of the Population (Bulgarian acronym ESGRAON). Demographic events are registered through standard documents ESGRAON-CDS (Current Demographic Statistics): notification for birth, notification for marriage, notification for divorce, notification for death and address card for change of a present (current) address.

Data sources on international migration are the Unified System for Civil Registration and Administrative Services of the Population, document ESGRAON-CDS: notification for change of present address; National Revenue Agency; National Social Security Institute; Ministry of Interior; Estimates of emigration flows.

Data on population number and demographic events are distributed according to the administrative-territorial division of the country as of 31.12 of the reference year (settlements, municipalities, districts) and statistical regions according to the 'present address'. The last is the address corresponding to the residence declared by the person and officially registered.

The age of the population by the end of the year is calculated as of 31.12. in completed years.

The persons' age at occurrence of a demographic event is calculated in completed years based on the date of birth and the date of the respective event, i.e. the age completed at the time of the event.