

Banskobystrický kraj - Characteristic of the region

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Location, area, geographical conditions

Banskobystrický kraj, with an area of 9,454 km², is the largest region in Slovakia, covering almost a fifth of the Slovakia's territory. It is located in the southern part of central Slovakia, bordered to the south by the Republic of Hungary, to the east by the Košický kraj, to the north by the Trenčiansky kraj and Žilinský kraj, and to the west by the Nitriansky kraj.

The region's territory belongs to the river basins of the Hron, Ipel', and Slaná rivers. Banskobystrický kraj is characterized by a great geomorphologic diversity, ranging from high mountainous areas in the north to the rugged central part with mountains interrupted by valleys and to the gently rolling and flat areas of the Juhoslovenská kotlina basin in the south.

The highest point in of the Banskobystrický kraj is Ďumbier peak (2,044.6 m above sea level), located in the Nízke Tatry mountain in Brezno districts. The lowest point in the region is the bank of the Ipel' river near its exit from the region near the Ipel'ské Predmostie municipality in the Veľký Krtíš district (126.4 m above sea level).

The region has a long tradition in mining. Deposits of gold, silver, and copper have been exploited since the 13th century, especially in towns Kremnica, Banská Štiavnica, and Banská Bystrica. Currently, mining activities are in decline, and the centre of mining is shifting to areas with the occurrence of non-metallic minerals. Significant deposits of silicates are found in the silicate zone near Lučenec town, with occurrences of non-ore ceramic, refractory, and other supplementary raw materials for the production of ceramic materials, stoneware, porous materials, and glass. In the vicinity Revúca town, magnesite ore is mined and processed. Building stone is mainly found in the north, clay raw materials in the Poltár district, gravel sand in the southern districts, and quartzite in the Žiar nad Hronom district.

The region has 4 national parks – Národný park Nízke Tatry, Národný park Slovenský raj, Národný park Muránska planina, Národný park Veľká Fatra, 4 protected landscape areas - Poľana, Cerová vrchovina, Štiavnické vrchy and Ponitrie and 10 national natural monuments, 54 natural monuments, 23 national nature reserves, 109 nature reserves, 42 protected areas and 8 protected bird areas.

According to the territorial and administrative arrangement in accordance with the National Council of the Slovak Republic Act No. 221/1996 Coll., the region is divided into 13 districts – Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, Brezno, Detva, Krupina, Lučenec, Poltár, Revúca, Rimavská Sobota, Veľký Krtíš, Zvolen, Žarnovica, and Žiar nad Hronom, containing 516

municipalities, including 24 towns. The largest district in terms of area is the Rimavská Sobota district (covering 15.6% of the region's area), and the smallest is the Banská Štiavnica district (covering only 3.1% of the region's area). More than half of the population (51.4%) lives in towns. The largest cities are Banská Bystrica (74.3 thous. inhabitants) and Zvolen (39.6 thous. inhabitants).

Demographic background

At the end of 2023, Banskobystrický kraj had a population of 614,356, which represented 11.3% of Slovakia's total population. The population density was only 65 people per km², the lowest among all regions. The most densely populated was Banská Bystrica district, where 133 people lived per km², while the sparsest was Krupina district, with 36 people per km².

The region has experienced a long-term population decline due to a higher number of deaths than births, as well as migration out of the region. In 2023, fewer children were born (5,063) than people died (7,114). Furthermore, 1,370 more people moved out of the region than moved in. The population is aging. Since 2015, the number of people over 65 years of age has annually exceeded the number of children under 14. In 2023, children made up 14.9% of the population, which was 4.5 percentage points lower than the proportion of seniors (65.7%). The mean age of the population was 43 years.

In 2023, 2,989 couples got married, and 979 marriages ended in divorce. The number of marriages decreased by more than 6% year-on-year, while the number of divorces remained roughly the same. In a decade-long comparison, the number of marriages and divorces was higher than during the pandemic but lower than in the years before it.

Economic and social specifics

In 2023, economically active residents, i.e., working and unemployed over 15 years, made up more than 52% of the population. The economic activity rate, i.e., the ratio of economically active to the population over 15 years old, was 63.5%. The employment rate (the ratio of working aged 20 to 64 to the entire population in the same age group) was 75.1%, and the unemployment rate, i.e., the share of unemployed from the economically active population, was 8.8%. The average nominal monthly salary reached 1,432 EUR, which was 196 EUR below the national average.

As of December 31, 2023, there were 28.4 thous. legal entities operating in the region, 81.5% of which were enterprises, and 37.7 thous. natural persons, 91.4% of whom were self-employed persons. Enterprises focused on trade, next to the professional, scientific, and technical activities, as well as to the industry. The highest number of self-employed persons worked in construction (22.7%) and trade (16.5%).

Gross domestic product (GDP), which is the value of all goods and services produced in the region during 2023, was 10.8 bill. EUR at current prices, accounting for 8.8% of the national

GDP. GDP per capita was 17,458 EUR, which was 22.5% below the national average.

More than a quarter of the region's gross added value came from the industrial sector, followed by trade, transportation, accommodation, and food services, with a share of 16.3%, and public administration, defence, compulsory social security, healthcare, and social assistance, with a share of 15.8%.

Agricultural land of medium quality constitutes 43% of the total area of the region. Agriculture is primarily focused in the southern part of the region, where crops such as cereals, corn, and grapes are grown. Meadows and pastures in the northern part of the region serve as the base for livestock and sheep farming. The number of sheep in the region has long been the highest, with the largest farms located in the Rimavská Sobota district. The region is also the largest forested area in Slovakia, nearly half of its territory is covered by forests. The region far exceeds other regions in timber production, especially in its northern and northeastern parts.

In terms of industrial sectors, the largest representation is in metal and metal product manufacturing, production of other non-metallic mineral products, food and beverage manufacturing, and machinery and equipment manufacturing. Industrial companies in the region employed 45.9 thous. person in 2023, and their turnover amounted to 6.9 bill. EUR. Compared to other regions in Slovakia, turnover and employment in industry were the lowest.

Banskobystrický kraj was also one of the less productive regions in the construction sector. The value of construction production carried out by own employees reached 580.1 mill. EUR, and the value of contractually agreed construction production was 694.1 million euros. These were the second-lowest values among the regions. In the region, 1,517 apartments were completed, the fewest among the regions. Most of the apartments were built in the Banská Bystrica (427) and Brezno (234) districts.

The region's rugged terrain adversely affects the construction of transport infrastructure. The natural conditions do not allow for significant expansion of the transportation network. In 2023, the total length of the road network was 3,216 km, with expressways accounting for 141 km, the highest among the regions. Nearly 395 thous. motor vehicles were registered in the region, with 71% being passenger cars.

Education is represented by a wide network of educational institutions. In 2023, the region had 387 kindergartens, 264 primary schools, 25 grammar schools, 56 secondary vocational schools, and 3 conservatories. The Matej Bel University, the Academy of Arts and Faculty of Health Care of the Slovak Medical University had its seats in Banská Bystrica, the Technical University seated in Zvolen and the Ján Albrecht Music and Art Academy in Banská Štiavnica.

Healthcare in the region was provided in 2023 by 1,594 healthcare facilities, including 27 hospitals, 1,218 outpatient healthcare units, and 8 institutes for treatment, with **F. D. Roosevelt University Hospital** being the dominant facility. Health resorts and spa care also play an important role, they are located in spa towns Sliač, Kováčová, Dudince, Brusno, Číž, and Sklené Teplice.

In the field of culture, the Zvolen town is a significant centre, with seat of drama scene of the

Jozef Gregor Tajovský theatre. There is annually organized a festival of drama – Zvolenské zámocké hry. The Banská Bystrica is the seat of the opera scene and ballet scene of this theatre. In 2023, the region offered a total of 15 theatres, including small and independent ones, 22 permanent cinemas with 32 screening rooms, 4 galleries, and 30 museums. There were 245 libraries available to readers.

Banskobystrický kraj offers many cultural and natural monuments. The towns of Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, and Kremnica have been declared urban monument reservations, with Banská Štiavnica being listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Municipalities Špania Dolina, Štiavnické Bane, and Sebechleby – Stará Hora are heritage reservations of rural settlements. The natural beauty of the northern part of the region is widely used for winter tourism. In 2023, the region was visited by almost 625 thous. guests, who were accommodated in 716 accommodation facilities.