

Prešovský kraj - Characteristic of the region

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Location, area, geographical conditions

Prešovský kraj is located in the northeastern part of the Slovak Republic. With an area of 8,972.7 km², it covers 18.3% of the country's total area and is the second largest region in Slovakia, after Banskobystrický kraj. The long northern border is also the state border with the Republic of Poland. To the east, it borders Ukraine, to the south with Košický kraj, and to the southwest it borders Banskobystrický kraj on a small stretch, while to the west with Žilinský kraj.

The northernmost point of the region is located in the cadastral area of the village of Becherov, the southernmost point in the village of Sečovská Polianka, the westernmost point in the village of Vysoké Tatry, and the easternmost point, which is also the easternmost point of Slovakia, is in the village of Nová Sedlica. The highest point of the region, which is also the highest point of Slovakia, is Gerlachovský štít (2,654.5 m above sea level), and the lowest point is the bank of the Ondava river near its exit from the region in the village of Nižný Hrušov (104 m above sea level). The relative elevation difference is 2,550 m. Due to the differences in altitude and the terrain's ruggedness, the region is divided into three climatic areas: cold, moderately warm, and warm.

The terrain of the region is very rugged. The largest areas are occupied by the mountains Spišská Magura, Podtatranská brázda, Spišsko-šarišské medzihorie, Levočské vrchy, Bachureň, Šarišská vrchovina, Pieniny, Ľubovnianska vrchovina, Čergov, Busov, Ondavská a Laborecká vrchovina, Beskydské predhorie and Bukovské vrchy. These mountains create Vonkajšie Západné Karpaty sub-province. The territory of Prešovský kraj also include mountains Vysoké Tatry, Podtatranská kotlina, Kozie chrbty, Nízke Tatry, Hornádska kotlina and Branisko (mountains of Fatransko-tatranská oblast area) as well as the mountains Slovenský raj and Čierna hora, which are included in Slovenské rudohorie mountain range. Košická kotlina basin, Slánske vrchy hills and Vihorlatské vrchy hills still extend by their northern parts to Prešovský kraj.

The upper sections of the main rivers Hornád, Torysa, Topľa, Ondava, Laborec and Poprad are located on the territory of Prešovský kraj. The Poprad and Dunajec rivers form part of the border with the Republic of Poland. The Poprad river basin covers a very significant area of the Vysoké Tatry mountain range, where eleven water supply streams are used to provide drinking water for the entire region. The Starina reservoir, and especially the Veľká Domaša, hydrologically and qualitatively influence the rivers they are located on.

The region has rich mineral resources, the most significant of which include deposits of rock

salt, limestone, building stone, brick-making raw materials, zeolite, and manganese ore.

There are five national parks in the region – Tatranský národný park, Pieninský národný park, Národný park Nízke Tatry, Národný park Slovenský raj, and Národný park Poloniny, 2 protected landscape areas – Vihorlatský prales, and Východné Karpaty, 51 national nature reserves, 90 nature reserves, 5 national natural monuments, 33 natural monuments, 10 protected areas, and 10 protected bird areas.

Administratively, the region is divided into 13 districts in accordance with the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 221/1996 Coll.: Bardejov, Humenné, Kežmarok, Levoča, Medzilaborce, Poprad, Prešov, Sabinov, Snina, Stará Ľubovňa, Stropkov, Svidník, and Vranov nad Topľou. The largest district by area is Poprad (1,104.6 km²) and the smallest is Stropkov (388.9 km²). The region has 665 municipalities, of which 23 have town status. Prešovský kraj has the lowest proportion of urban population in Slovakia, at just 44.7%. The most populous city in the region is Prešov (82.6 thous. inhabitants), which is also the third-largest city in Slovakia. The second-largest town in the region is Poprad (48.9 thous. inhabitants).

Demographic background

With a population of 808,810 as of December 31, 2023, Prešovský kraj is the most populous region, accounting for 14.9% of the total Slovak population. The population density is 90 inhabitants per km², the second lowest after Banskobystrický kraj. The Prešov district has the highest population density (187), while Medzilaborce has the lowest (25).

The region has long been characterized by the highest birth rates. In 2023, 9,099 children were born, significantly exceeding the number of deaths (6,924 people). The region was the leader in natural population growth among the three regions with natural population increase (Prešovský, Bratislavský, and Trnavský kraj). In contrast, migration has led to a significant decline in population, in 2023 by 1,455 more persons left the region than moved in. Despite negative migration, the population of the region totally grew by 720 persons.

Prešovský kraj, compared to other regions, is the youngest in terms of population, with the number of children under 14 years of age exceeding the number of people aged over 65. In 2023, children made up 18.4% of the population, which exceeded the share of seniors by 2.3 percentage points. The mean age of the population was 40 years, the lowest in the regional comparison.

Despite high marriage rates over the long term, the region registered a decline in new marriages in 2023, with 4,362 couples marrying, 8% less than in 2022, marking the second lowest figure in the past 10 years. On the other hand, the number of divorces increased by 6%, with 1,050 marriages ending, representing the third-highest figure since 2014.

Economic and social specifics

Due to a lack of job opportunities, residents of Prešovský kraj often migrated for work to other regions or abroad. The unemployment rate, meaning the proportion of unemployed people among the economically active population, has been the highest among the regions for a long time, reaching 10.8% in 2023. The economically active population, meaning both employed and unemployed individuals over 15 years old, made up almost 50% of the total population. The economic activity rate (the proportion of economically active people to the population over 15 years of age) was 61.3%. The employment rate (the proportion of population aged 20 to 64 employed to the entire population in the same age group) was 72.2%. The average monthly wage reached 1,342 EUR, which was 286 EUR below the national average.

Business activity was influenced by the conditions and opportunities created in the region. By the end of 2023, 29.2 thous. legal entities operated in the region, of them 24.2 thous. were enterprises. Over 16% of enterprises operated in trade, 15% in industry, and 15% in construction. In addition, 62.9 thous. natural persons worked in Prešovský kraj, 59.7 thous. of them operating based on the trade law. Almost 40% of self-employed persons focused on construction, more than 17% in manufacturing, and almost 12% in trade.

Prešovský kraj is one of the less productive regions of Slovakia in terms of GDP. The regional GDP, which is the total value of all produced products and services in 2023, was 11.4 bill. EUR, accounting for 9.3% of the national GDP. GDP per capita was 14,108 EUR, which was 37.4% below the national average.

More than a quarter of the gross value added of the region was generated by industry, followed by trade, transport, accommodation, and food and beverage service activities with a share of 18.8%, and public administration, defence, compulsory social security, healthcare, and social assistance with a share of 17.2%.

Agricultural land occupies more than 40% of the total area of the region. Nearly two-fifths of it is arable land, where cereals, fodder crops, oilseeds, and potatoes are mainly grown. The region is one of the largest potato producers in Slovakia. In terms of animal production, cattle farming predominates, especially in the Bardejov district, and sheep farming, especially in the Kežmarok district.

Industry in the region is diverse, with no clear focus on any particular production sector. It includes the metalworking, woodworking, food, electrical, machinery, chemical, textile, and clothing industries, and is mainly concentrated in the towns. Notable enterprises in the region include Tatravagónka in Poprad, Lear Corporation Seating Slovakia in Prešov, Pivovary TOPVAR, a.s., MECOM GROUP in Humenné, MILK-AGRO in Prešov, Nexis Fibers in Humenné, Bukóza Export-Import in Vranov nad Topľou, Chemosvit folie in Svit, Bukocel in Hencovce, and others. In 2023, industrial enterprises generated turnover of 7.7 bill. EUR and employed 51.4 thous. persons.

The construction sector achieved average results in comparison with other regions. In 2023, construction production created by own employees amounted to 819.4 mill. EUR, and construction production based on contracts reached 909.2 mill. EUR. There were completed 2,041 new apartments, with the most in Prešov district (557 apartments).

Prešovský kraj has a significant location for international transport, both north-south and east-west. The main Slovak north-south road corridor runs through it: Bratislava – Žilina – Poprad – Prešov – Košice. In the east-west direction, the international corridors Poland – Stará Ľubovňa – Prešov and Poland – Svidník – Prešov continue along the same route to Košice and Hungary. Major international railway lines include Žilina – Košice – Medzilaborce and Plaveč – Prešov – Košice. The region also has an international airport in Poprad, mainly serving the Tatras region, the other parts of the region have an air connection via International Airport in Košice. Public bus transport is provided by a wide network of bus routes, and the region has an extensive road network with 3,186 km of roads. There are 122 km of highways and expressways, and in 2023, almost 440 thous. motor vehicles were registered, with nearly 73% being passenger cars.

Education is represented by a wide network of educational institutions. In 2023, the region had 536 kindergartens, 376 primary schools, 38 grammar schools, 63 secondary vocational schools, and 1 conservatory. The University in Prešov, College of International Business ISM Slovakia and the Faculty of manufacturing technologies of the Technical University in Košice have the seat in the centre of the region.

Healthcare in 2023 was provided by 1,971 healthcare facilities, including 17 hospitals, 1,554 outpatient care units, and 8 institutes for treatment. The region also offers health spas for respiratory diseases in Vysoké Tatry, gastrointestinal diseases in Bardejov, cardiovascular diseases in Vyšné Ružbachy, and dermatological treatments in Červený Kláštor. The region is rich in natural mineral waters used for spa treatments, as well as table mineral waters like Ľubovnianska, Sulínka, Salvator, Baldovská, and Cigeľka.

For visitors, the region offers a wide range of cultural events. In 2023, there were 7 theatres, 19 permanent cinemas with 36 screening rooms, 5 galleries, and 27 museums. There were 212 libraries available to readers.

The region is proud of its many cultural and historical landmarks, with special attention given to the towns of Levoča, Prešov, Bardejov, Poprad, and Kežmarok. Prešov is the administrative, economic, cultural, and social centre of the region, home to significant ecclesiastical institutions of the Greek Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Slovakia.

The natural beauty of the region and favourable climatic conditions have excellent conditions for the development of tourism. The most visited areas include the Vysoké Tatry mountains and the districts of Bardejov, Kežmarok, Prešov, and Stará Ľubovňa. In the region, there were 1,060 accommodation facilities, which were used by over a million visitors in 2023. In regional comparison, Prešovský kraj was the third most visited region.