

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SOME DEMOGRAPHIC AND LAND-USE PARAMETERS IN BULGARIA

BORIS KOLEV – MARIA GROZEVA

Bulgarian socio-economic policy aimed at development of an efficient and equitable integration in the EU economic structures. The regional development policy is a part of this policy. The National Regional Development Strategy (NRDS) for the period 2005–2015 promulgated 2005 is the fundamental document formulating the long-term objectives and priorities of the regional policy of Bulgaria. The main tasks of this Strategy are as follows:

- to define the strategic objectives of regional development for the period already mentioned;
- to provide milestones for definition and application of sectoral policies of regional impact and to lay the basis for coordination of the regional development with the rest of the policies in the planning regions;
- to ensure coordination between the regional development policy and territorial planning policies with a view to achieving a balanced territorial development;
- to provide a framework for planning and programming documents at all territorial levels.

The implementation of all these objectives will be impossible without investigation of the existing territorial disparities in the individual territorial levels and especially at the NUTS II (planning regions) and NUTS III levels (administrative districts).

A monitoring of the implementation of the principals, objectives and priorities of the Strategy will be performed by the Partnership on NRDS by periodic 3-years report. This report will contain propose decisions about activities to be undertaken with a view to overcoming the barriers and difficulties to its implementation.

This is a brief presentation of regional distribution of several demographic and land-use (arable land, forests and artificial areas) parameters. Some of these analyses are at NUTS II, and some of them – at NUTS III level.

Active population (2002) at NUTS II level.

The average rate is 48.4% in 2002 at the national level. Two planning regions are below this average level – North-West (43.7%) and North-Central (45.7%). These values are a result basically of the ageing of the population. Three regions have values compared to the national average (North-East – 48.4%; South-East – 48.6%; South-Central – 47.4%). The only one region above average value is South-West – 52.1%.

Population density at NUTS II level (2003).

The national value of this parameter is 70.3 inh/km². With the respect to the population density the least populated are North-West Region (48.3 inh/km²) and South-East Region (53.4 inh/km²). Close to the latter are the values for North-East Region (64.4 inh/km²) and North-Central Region (64.9 inh/km²). The South-Central Region (70.7 inh/km²) is just at the national level. The highest population density is characteristic for the South-West Region (103.9 inh/km²). The main factor is the population of the capital Sofia situated in this region. Vast areas with low density, mainly in the mountainous and rural parts, exist in each of the planning regions, while the large cities and district centers stand out with high population density. The disparities in Bulgaria in term of the Population Density indicator are quite moderate in comparison with those in many of the European regions. For example, the correlation between the highest and the lowest populated regions was 2:1 in 2003.

Population density at NUTS III level (2003).

The districts of Sofia (37.5 inh/km²), Lovech (39.6 inh/km²), Vidin (40.4 inh/km²), Smolyan (42.3 inh/km²), Dobrich (44.2 inh/km²), Yambol (44.6 inh/km²), Montana (47.7 inh/km²), Silistra (48.3 inh/km²), Haskovo (48.8 inh/km²) are with the least population density. Five of these kinds of districts are in the Northern part of the country and the rest are in the Southern Bulgaria. The highest value of population density is characteristic for the capital district of Sofia. The districts of the second and the third city of the country (Plovdiv and Varna) are with high density also. 22 of all 28 administrative districts are below the average population density of the country.

Urbanization at NUTS III level (inh. of cities over 20 000 inh. against the total population of the region).

The highest share of population living in the cities over 20 000 inh. of the total number of population at NUTS III level is characteristic of the district of Sofia capital. With the respect of the share of population living in this group of cities, the least is the district of Sofia (18.1%). The following group of these administrative units is between 20 and 30% – Smolyan (23.9%), Razgrad (26.4%), Kardzhali (28.2%), Targovishte (28.5%), Silistra (29.5). Four districts (Vratsa, Lovech, Plevn and Pazardzhik) have values between 30 and 40%, six (Vidin, Montana,

Veliko Tarnovo, Dobrich, Shumen, Haskovo and Blagoevgrad) – 40–50%, seven (Burgas, Sliven, Yambol, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Kyustendil and Pernik) – 50–60% and three districts (Gabrovo, Ruse and Varna) – 60–70%. This share is an important parameter for the present stage of urbanization in Bulgaria. Normally the districts with a large population have the highest percentage of population living in the cities over 20 000 inhabitants (Sofia – capital district, Varna, Ruse, Plovdiv, Burgas).

Employment per Primary sector at NUTS III level (2003).

As a result of the structural reform the employment level has dropped in all the regions and administrative units – districts, although substantial differences in the rates of the industrial regions. The statistical data show that the lower share of employment in the Primary sector there are in the capital district of Sofia – 0.8%, Gabrovo – 2.9%, Plovdiv – 3.1%, Varna – 3.4% etc. There are still several districts in this group below 5% – as Vidin, Vratsa, Haskovo, Blagoevgrad and Kardzhali. The following group consists most of the rest of NUTS III level units (Montana, Veliko Tarnovo, Lovech, Pleven, Ruse, Dobrich etc.). Four districts only are in the group between 10–15% employment level in the Primary sector (Kyustendil, Sofia-district, Silistra and Stara Zagora). The last two groups of districts are with relatively well-developed agriculture and forest economy.

Employment per Secondary sector at NUTS III level (2003).

The national average percentage of this kind of employment is 31.6%, but there are some territorial differences in the country. Logically, the capital district of Sofia is below this level (19.2% of the employees are in the industry). The following group includes two districts only – Varna (21.4%) and Vidin (24.4%). The main factor for this situation in Varna is the well-developed Thirstier sector and especially tourism. Quite different is the case of Vidin. Practically, there is no functioning industry, even the existing one is with very old potential and structure. The rest of districts are above already mentioned national value. The highest share of the employees in the Secondary sector are districts of Blagoevgrad (51.1%) and Gabrovo (52.1%). This is due to existence of well-established district centers. Obviously, it's necessary to make efforts for its restructuring and modernization.

Employment per Tertiary sector at NUTS III level (2003).

The sector structure of employment at national level shows that the share of employees in this sector is 63.2% of total number of employees in all sectors and activities. An important fact is that the most of the NUTS III level units have the share close to the national level. Naturally, the highest level is characteristic for the capital district (80.0% of the total number of employees in all sectors). Varna (75.2%) and Burgas (66.4%) are the following group because they have very good developed tourist industry. Some of the old industrial centers – Gabrovo, Haskovo, Lovech, Blagoevgrad are characterized of the level below the national one.

Agricultural areas as a percent of total area at NUTS III (2003).

Agricultural areas occupy 58.7% of the total territory of Bulgaria. The percent of this type of land is different in the individual planning regions. The regions in the North part of the country are above average percentage because there are vast plain territories (North-West – 71.5%, North-Central – 68.6%, North-East – 69.2%). Contrarily, the South Bulgarian regions are characterized by lowest percent of the agricultural areas because these territories are more mountainous than the North of the country (South-West – 46%, South-Central – 49.6%, South-East – 57.8%).

Forest areas in percent of total area at NUTS II level (2000).

The average percent of the forest area is 33.6% of the total national territory. Predominantly, the most forested areas are in the mountainous parts of the South regions – South-West (47.2%), South-Central (42.5%), South-East (35.0%). The other three regions are below the average percentage of forest areas.

Artificial areas in percent of total territory at NUTS II level (2000).

The artificial areas include the territories of settlements, mines, dams, transport and other infrastructural networks, plants. The national average level is 7.7% of the country's territory. Two regions are below this level – South-East (7.2%) and South-West (6.9%). The North-Central (8.5%) and North-West (8.2%) regions are above this percent.

Density of roads per surface (km per sq. km)

The last statistical data show that the average density of roads per sq. km of the national territory is 0.17 km. The values of this characteristic are almost equal to all planning region (North-West – 0.17 km; North Central – 0.19 km; North-East – 0.18 km; South-East – 0.15 km; South Central – 0.17 km and South-West – 0.16 km). The situation is almost the same at the NUTS III level (districts). The districts of Gabrovo (0.25 km/km²) and Pernik (0.23 km/km²) are with relatively highest density. That is why they are among the least districts by their territory. Some of them are in the group with density between 0.10 km/km² (Blagoevgrad) and 0.17 km/sq. km (Vratsa, Montana, Burgas, Sliven, Stara Zagora etc.). The following districts are above 0.17 km/sq. km – Shumen, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Smolyan, Sofia. That means the density of road network per surface is relatively homogenous in all regions (NUTS II) and districts (NUTS III).

Density of roads per 1000 inhabitants (2003)

Since 2003, the local IV category road network (at the municipality level) is already not a part of the national road system. The average density of roads is 2.47 km per 1000 inh. The South-West Region (1.55 km) is under this value because its great number of population. Here is situated the capital Sofia. North-West Region has the highest value (3.58 km) among Bulgarian regions. A significant part

(22.0%) of the length of the roads of a high class is on the area in this region. North Central Region occupies the second place by this indicator. The highest value of this parameter at district level has recorded for the capital one – 9.51 km. This fact is may be explained by better-developed road network. District of Vidin (4.98 km) is at the second place. The lag behind in the development of the road network is the greatest in North-West Region.

Density of rails per surface (2001)

The density of the railway network (0,039 km/km²) is lower than the density of the old 15 EU Member states and of some other Eastern European countries. The railway network density is slightly above the national average in South-West (0.045 km/km²), North Central (0.045 km/km²) and South Central Region (0.040 km/km²). This kind of transport is less developing in the northwestern and south-eastern parts of the country. Relative share of the length of the railway lines in the individual planning regions is as follows: South Central – 26.1%; South-West – 21.1%; North Central – 18.7%; North-East – 15.5%; North-West – 9.4% and South-East – 9.2%.

Density of rails per 1000 inhabitants at NUTS III level

The density per 1000 inh. is less in the districts of the capital Sofia Blagoevgrad and Ruse than the other administrative districts of the area of the planning regions. That is why Blagoevgrad and Ruse are peripheral districts and Sofia is the biggest Bulgarian city with very short length railway network on its territory. On the other hand the districts of Blagoevgrad and Ruse are traversed by a little part of the entire railway network.

Density of rails per 1000 inhabitants at NUTS II level

The territory serviced the best is the North-West Region because it is rare populated in comparison with the other regions. The North Central region is at the second place by this indicator. The density per 1000 inh. in South-West Region is the least. The main factor for this fact is that it is the most populated region of the country with 9.4% of the length of the entire national network only.

Connectivity to transport terminals at NUTS II level

Transport accessibility (roads). The territorial distribution of roads of a higher class is of decisive importance for the mobility of the population and the transport access to services of a higher quality. The predominant part of such roads in the country is on the area of South-West, South Central and North-East planning regions (respectively 22.0%, 21.7% and 20.0% of the total length of such roads). This is explained by the location there of particularly important centers from the settlements network – the city of Sofia (South-West), Plovdiv (South Central) and Varna (North -East), which have caused priority construction of highways and Class A roads specifically in these regions. The least portion of this class network

is built in the area of the North-West Region (5.3%), to be explained by the absence of any significant center in the settlement network there. The spatial development of the road network determines also the possibilities for transport accessibility of the population to the centers offering a certain type of services (health care, education, culture, administrative services, etc.). In Southern Bulgaria, more than 80% of the population has access to these services in the framework of 90 minutes ride and in the South-West Region these values are above 90 minutes, while in the Northern Bulgaria the access is more difficult and only 60% of the population of the North-West Region have such access within 90 minutes.

Accessibility to railway transport.

In view of the specifics of the railway transport, an indicator of great importance for the accessibility by transport, apart from the spatial development of the railway network, is also the number of stations and stops, servicing the individual planning regions. The territory serviced the best is that of the South Central Region, which is traversed by one quarter of the entire national railway network, following by the South-West and the North Central Regions with 21.1% and 18.7% respectively. Peripheral in terms of the railway infrastructure are South-East and North-West Regions.

Air transport.

From the existing 10 civil airports in the country, 5 (Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas and Gorna Oryahovitsa) officially have the international airport status, but the activities are concentrated at the Sofia, Varna and Burgas airports. They service predominantly international destinations. A total of 2 660 158 passengers and 13 228 tons of goods were serviced by regular passenger, charter and cargo flights at the five international Bulgarian airports in 2001. These are among main disparities in regional distribution of some basic demographic, land-use and transport parameters in Bulgaria.

References

- Bulgaria by the end of 2006: Socio-economic analysis, Agency for Economic Analysis and Forecasts, Sofia, April 2004.
Regional Development Act, promulgated State Gazette vol. 14/20 Feb. 2004.