

Žilinský kraj - Characteristic of the region

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Location, area, geographical conditions

Žilinský kraj is located in the northwestern part of Slovakia. The region is spread over an area of 6 808.4 km². It occupies 13.9% of Slovak territory and it is the third largest region in the Slovak Republic. The northwestern border is also the state border with the Czech Republic and in the north it borders with the Republic of Poland. The region has common borders with three other Slovak regions – Trenčiansky kraj, Banskobystrický kraj and Prešovský kraj.

The diversity of the landscape structure characterized the territory of the Žilinský kraj. From the valley flood plains of watercourses (Váh, Kysuca, Turiec, Orava rivers), through the agricultural and forest landscape to the alpine landscape of the ridge zones of the mountains Západné Tatry, Nízke Tatry, Chočské vrchy, Veľká Fatra, Malá Fatra, Javorníky and Strážovské vrchy. It is mainly a mountainous landscape with a low proportion of arable land, which has an attractive natural environment, particularly suitable for the development of tourism, water and winter sports. The climate of Žilinský kraj is from moderately warm to cold humid. The lowest temperatures within Slovakia were measured in Oravská Lesná municipality. The main stream of the region is Váh river, which arises from the confluence of two rivers Čierny Váh and Biely Váh in the cadastral area of Kráľová Lehota municipality. The small flows of Váh river are significantly improved, especially by the largest dams Liptovská Mara build up on Váh river and Oravská priehrada on Orava river. The rivers Kysuca, Turiec, Rajčianka, Revúca, Belá and Varínka also form the river network. The highest place in the region is Kriváň hill (2 492 m above sea level), the lowest place is the outflow of Váh river from the region in the cadastral area of Maršová – Rašov municipality (286 m above sea level).

Mineral resources of the region creates large deposits of stone used in construction and for decoration, reserves of gravel and sand. Limestone is mined as a raw material for the production of cement and lime in the area of Malá Fatra mountain. There are peat deposits and wood mass reserves in Horná Orava area.

There are 4 national parks in the region – Tatranský národný park, Národný park Nízke Tatry, Národný park Veľká Fatra and Národný park Malá Fatra, 3 protected landscape areas – Strážovské vrchy, Kysuce and Horná Orava, 57 national nature reserves, 62 nature reserves, 40 natural monuments, 18 national natural monuments, 17 protected areas and 7 bird protection areas.

Žilinský kraj includes five natural historical regions Horné Považie, Kysuce, Liptov, Orava and Turiec.

According to the territorial-administrative arrangement based on the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No 221/1996 Coll. Žilinský kraj is broken down into 11 districts: Bytča, Čadca, Dolný Kubín, Kysucké Nové Mesto, Liptovský Mikuláš, Martin, Námestovo, Ružomberok, Turčianske Teplice, Tvrdošín and Žilina. The smallest district is Kysucké Nové Mesto district with an area of 173.7 km², which occupies 2.6% of the total area of the region. The largest district is Liptovský Mikuláš district (1 341 km²), which takes for almost a fifth of the regional area.

There are 315 municipalities in the region, 19 of them have the urban status. Almost a quarter of the regional population lives in the three largest towns – Žilina, Martin and Liptovský Mikuláš.

Demographic background

The population of Žilinský kraj reached 688,106 persons as of December 31, 2022, and its share in the Slovak population was 12.7%. The population density per 1 km² was 101 inhabitants. The district with the highest population density was Žilina district with 197 inhabitants per km². The smallest density, only 40 inhabitants per 1 km², was in Turčianske Teplice district.

There were born 6,720 children, died 7,327 persons and by migration region lost 812 inhabitants. In total, the population of the region decreased by 1,419 people. Since 2020, the share of the post-productive population prevails over the pre-productive in the region. In 2022, the share of seniors exceeded the share of children under 14 by 1.1 p.p and reached 17.1%. The productive population (15–64) made up 66.8%, while its share has been decreasing every year in the last ten years. The average age of the inhabitant reached 41 years.

In 2022, 3,610 couples got married, 961 marriages were divorced. The number of marriages and divorces increased by 0.8% year-on-year, but their numbers were still lower than in the years before the pandemic.

Economic and social specifics

The region is one of the important economic regions with a developed industry providing enough working opportunities. The proportion of the economically active population was 52.1% and the economic activity rate reached 62.3% in 2022. The employment rate of the population in age group 20 to 64 years was at the level of 79.3% and the unemployment rate reached 3.9%. The average nominal monthly earnings achieved EUR 1,400 and lagged behind the national average by 6.7%.

At the end of 2022, 33.2 thous. legal persons (85.9% of them were enterprises) and 62.2 thous. natural persons (95.2% of them were self-employed persons) run a business in Žilinský kraj.

The enterprises focused their activities mainly in the sector of trade, followed by industrial production, professional, scientific and technical activities as well as construction. Nearly 37% of self-employed persons did business in construction, 16% in industry and 13.5% in the trade.

In assessing of economic position in terms of GDP, Žilinský kraj belongs to regions with medium output in the framework of Slovakia. In 2022, the regional gross domestic product reached a value of EUR 12,396 mill. at current prices. The share of the region in the national GDP was 11.3%. Converted per inhabitant, it amounted to EUR 17,842 at current prices, which was 10.7% less than the national average.

According to economic activities in 2022, the share of industry sector accounted for the largest share of gross added value (27.1%). The proportion of trade, transport, accommodation and food service activities accounted for 15.8% and the proportion of public administration, defence, compulsory social security, education, health and social work 14.7%.

Extensive mountains in Žilinský kraj predetermine that the share of agricultural land (35%) is the lowest in comparison with other regions. The cultivation of cereals, potatoes and fodder in crop production characterized a crop production of the region. Compared to other regions, sheep and cattle breeding strongly represented an animal production, especially in Liptovský Mikuláš district. Poultry farming is most widespread in Turčianske Teplice district.

The largest industrial company in the region is the automobile plant KIA near Žilina town. The production of machines is developed in Považie area and Turiec area, the production of iron and electronics in Orava area, and the production of paper in towns Žilina and Ružomberok. Hydroelectric power plants in Váh river are also of great importance. The industrial subjects of the region achieved turnover at the value of EUR 21.2 bill. and employed 70.1 thous. persons.

The second highest volumes of construction production reflected a strong position of the construction in Žilinský kraj. Construction subjects with the seat in this region carried out construction production by own employees reaching the amount of EUR 924.1 mill. and contractually agreed construction production with the value EUR 1,484.6 mill during the year 2022. There were built 2,985 dwellings in the region, the most in Žilina district (785 dwellings).

Žilinský kraj has a very good transport position within Slovakia on important international and domestic roads. The main route from the Czech Republic to Ukraine and the route from Bratislava and Šahy to Poland pass through it. At the end of 2022, the length of the road network was 2,065 km, of which 119 km were motorways. Traffic inspectorates registered 427 thous. motor vehicles, more than 70% of them were passenger cars. The organization of railway transport predetermines Žilinský kraj as the place of connection of the Slovak railway network to the pan-European system. The connection is provided by the main line Bratislava – Košice, which passes through Žilina, and by lines from neighbouring Poland and the Czech Republic, which pass through Čadca towards Žilina. Žilina is an important transport junction for both the region and Slovakia. The railways Žilina – Rajec, Čadca – Makov in Kysuce and Kraľovany – Trstená in Orava have a regional character. International airport is located 10 km from the center of the region in Dolný Hričov municipality.

A wide network of school facilities consisting of 386 kindergartens, 260 primary schools, 30

grammar schools and 55 secondary vocational schools provided education in 2022. The seat of the University of Žilina is located in the centre of the region, the Catholic University in Ružomberok, the Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš and the Jessenius Faculty of Medicine of the Comenius University is located in Martin.

Žilinský kraj provided health care in 1,666 facilities, which also included 9 hospitals, 1,303 outpatient health care facilities and 5 institutes for treatment. The region is rich in the occurrence of mineral and thermal waters. They are used for treatment in the spas Rajecké Teplice (deceases of musculoskeletal and nervous system), Turčianske Teplice (urological and rheumatic diseases), Lúčky (female reproductive diseases) and Liptovský Ján (diseases of digestive system and rheumatic diseases). Geothermal springs in municipalities Liptovský Ján, Bešeňová, Rajec, Oravice and Stráňavy are used for recreational purposes. The mineral waters Budiš, Fatra and Korytnica are also used as table waters.

Žilinský kraj is an important cultural region of Slovakia with a rich cultural and historical potential. There were available to visitors 9 theatres including small and independent, 11 galleries, including branches, 44 museums and 226 libraries in 2022. The most famous national cultural monuments are manor house in Bytča, which was originally built as a water castle, open air museum with forest railway in Vychylovka, castle in Oravský Podzámok, Slovak National Museum in Martin, the first building of Matica Slovenská (the institution for development and consolidation of Slovak patriotism) in Martin, forest railway in Oravská Lesná, the museum of Slovak poet P.O. Hviezdoslav in Dolný Kubín and the ruins of Strečno castle near Žilina. The unique folk architecture in Čičmany, a wooden nativity scene in Rajecká Lesná are also known, as well as a world unique – the wire work exhibition of the Považské Múzeum, located in Budatínsky hrad castle in Žilina. The Vlkolíneček settlement – a monument reserve of folk architecture is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. There is a rare UNESCO monument – a Gothic wooden church from the 15th century in Tvrdošín.

Not only a number of cultural and historical monuments, but especially the natural beauty of the north Slovakia mountains, caused the second highest number of visitors in comparison with other regions. Nearly 1,087.4 thous. guests visited the region in 2022, who had 1,271 accommodation facilities at their disposal, which was the most among the regions of Slovakia.