

## Banskobystrický kraj - Characteristic of the region

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### Location, area, geographical conditions

Banskobystrický kraj with an area of 9,454 km<sup>2</sup> is the largest region, occupying almost a fifth of Slovakia's territory. It is located in the southern part of central Slovakia, bordering the Republic of Hungary in the south, Košický kraj in the east, Trenčiansky kraj and Žilinský kraj in the north and Nitriansky kraj in the west.

The territory of the region belongs to the basin of the rivers Hron, Ipeľ and Slaná. Banskobystrický kraj is characterized by a great geomorphologic diversity, from alpine locations in the north of the area, through rugged central part with mountains interrupted by valleys, to the slightly undulating lowlands of Juhoslovenská kotlina basin in the south of the area.

The highest point of Banskobystrický kraj is the hill Ďumbier (2,044.5 m above sea level) located in Nízke Tatry mountain in Brezno districts. The lowest point in the region is the bank of the Ipeľ river at the outflow from the region in the cadastral area of the municipality Ipeľské Predmostie in Veľký Krtíš district (126.4 m above sea level).

The region has a long tradition in the field of mining. Deposits of gold, silver and copper had been used since the 13th century, especially in towns Kremnica, Banská Štiavnica and Banská Bystrica. At present, the local mining activities are in decline and the branch of mining is moving to areas with non-metallic minerals. Significant silicate deposits are located in the silicate zone near Lučenec with the occurrence of non-metallic ceramic, refractory and various additional raw materials for the production of ceramic materials and glass. Magnesite ore is mined and processed in the vicinity of Revúca. Building stone occurs mainly in the north, brick raw materials in Poltár district, gravel in the southern districts and quartzite in Žiar nad Hronom district.

There are 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 bird protection areas.

According to the territorial-administrative arrangement in compliance with the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic 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. There are 516 municipalities, 24

of them are towns. The largest district is Rimavská Sobota district (it occupies 15.6% of the regional area), the smallest is okres Banská Štiavnica (it occupies only 3.1% of the regional area). Urban population represents 51.5% of total population. The towns with the highest population exceeding the number of 40 thous. inhabitants at the end of 2021 are Banská Bystrica and Zvolen. Almost 19% of the regional population lives in them.

## Demographic background

By the end of 2023, there were 614,356 inhabitants living in the Banskobystrický kraj, which corresponded to 11.3% of the population of Slovakia. The population density reached only 65 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and was the lowest among the regions. The most densely populated was the Banská Bystrica district, where 133 inhabitants lived per 1 km<sup>2</sup>, the least populated was the Krupina district with 36 inhabitants per 1 km<sup>2</sup>.

In the region, there has been a long-term population decline, which is caused by a higher number of deaths than births as well as by the migration of residents outside the region. Even in 2023, fewer children were born (5,063) and more people died (7,114). Also, 1,370 more people moved out than moved in. In a long-term comparison, the share of seniors in the population is increasing, while the shares of children and residents of productive age are decreasing. Since 2015 the senior component of the population prevails over the children component. The share of children under the age of 14 in 2023 was 14.9% and was 4.5 p.p. lower than the share of the population older than 64 years. The productive population was 65.7%. The average age of the population reached 43 years.

In 2023, 2,987 engaged couples were married and 979 marriages were divorced. Year-on-year, the number of marriages decreased by more than 6%, and the number of divorces remained approximately at the same level. In a ten-year comparison, the numbers of both, marriages and divorces, were higher than during the pandemic, but lower than in the years before it.

## Economic and social specifics

The economically active population made up 51.9% of the population, the employment rate (20-64) reached 73.8% and the unemployment rate 9.7%. The average nominal monthly earnings reached EUR 1,340 and was the second lowest in comparison with other regions. It lagged behind the national average by 10.7%.

From the view of business organizations as of December 31, 2022, there were 28.7 thousand legal persons, 81.1% of them were enterprises and 38.3 thous. natural persons, nearly 91.4% of them were self-employed persons. Enterprises focused their business on the sectors of trade, of professional, scientific and technical activities and of industry. The most of self-employed persons (more than one-fifth) operated in construction.

The gross domestic product of the region achieved of EUR 9,892 mill. at current prices and

accounted for 9% of national GDP. Recalculated per capita it represented a value of EUR 15,877 in current prices and was behind the national average by 20.5%.

Industry accounted for more than one quarter on regional gross value added, public administration, defence, compulsory social security, health and social work for 17.4% and trade, transport, accommodation and food service activities 16.3%.

Medium-quality agricultural land makes up 43% of the regional territory. The southern part of the territory focuses mainly on agricultural production (growing cereals, maize and grapes). Meadows and pastures, located in the northern area, are used for breeding of cattle and sheep. Sheep numbers in this region have been the most numerous for a long time, mainly in Rimavská Sobota districts. The region is also characterized by the largest area covered by forests, which create almost half of the regional area. The logging (mainly in northern and north-eastern part of region) exceeds several times the values of other regions.

The industry is mainly oriented for the production of metals and metal products, the production of other non-metallic mineral products, the production of food and beverages and the production of machinery and equipment. Turnover reached EUR 7.7 billion in 2022, but in comparison with the other regions were the second lowest. This sector provided working opportunities for 49.3 thous. persons, which is the least within Slovakia.

The construction also lagged behind other regions. Construction production carried out by own employees reached EUR 515.7 mill. and contractually agreed construction production EUR 566.3 mill. There were built 1,025 dwellings in the region, the least in regional comparison. The most of them have been approved in Banská Bystrica district (305) and Veľký Krtíš district (138).

The mountains and valleys in Banskobystrický kraj adversely affect the construction of the communications. Natural conditions do not allow significant development of individual modes of transport. The length of the road network in 2022 was 3,218 km, of which expressways made up 141 km, which is the most in a regional comparison. There were registered 382 thous. motor vehicles in the region. Passenger cars created nearly 71% of them.

Education represents a wide network of school facilities. There were 385 kindergartens, 265 primary schools, 27 grammar schools and 58 secondary vocational schools in 2022. The Matej Bel University, the Academy of Arts and Faculty of Health Care of the Slovak Medical University have its seats in Banská Bystrica, the Technical University seated in Zvolen and the Ján Albrecht Music and Art Academy in Banská Štiavnica.

The care for health of the population provided 1,593 health facilities in 2022. There were included 26 hospitals, dominated by the F. D. Roosevelt University Hospital, 1,215 outpatient health care units and 6 institutes for treatment. Spas and spa care in towns and municipalities Sliač, Kováčová, Dudince, Brusno, Číž and Sklené Teplice have also significant role.

In the field of culture, Zvolen is an important center, 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. There were together 15 theatres including small and independent and 22 permanent cinemas in the

territory of the region. Visitors also had at their disposal 4 galleries and 27 museums and readers could visit 242 libraries.

Banskobystrický kraj offers many cultural and natural monuments. The towns Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica and Kremnica have been declared for urban monument reserves, while Banská Štiavnica has been inscribed on the World Heritage List. The municipalities Špania Dolina, Štiavnické Bane and Sebechleby – Stará Hora are monumental reservations of rural settlements. The natural beauties of the northern part of the region are widely used as centres of winter tourism. During the year 2022, 546.7 thous. visitors travelled to the region and they were accommodated in 695 accommodation facilities.