



## Burgas Region, Bulgaria

Burgas Sea Garden

### General overview

Burgas is one of the fastest-growing metropolitan regions of south-east Bulgaria (1). Influenced by the Black sea, three large lakes (Mandra Lake, Atanasovsko Lake and Burgas Lake) and the Strandja Mountain, the climate is mild in winter and moderate in summer. The Region's main city, Burgas, is an important commercial and transport hub, its international airport serving more than 2.5 million passengers annually and its port being one of the biggest on the Black Sea coast. Pan-European Transport Corridor N°8, which is the shortest land connection between the Adriatic and the Black Sea coasts, passes through the Burgas Region. The city of Burgas is also a growing cultural and educational centre (2).

Because of its many facilities and connections to resorts along the southern coast of the Black Sea, the Burgas Region is a favourite among tourists. The Burgas Mineral Baths, which comprise one of the most ancient balneotherapy centres in the Balkans, are located 15 km from Burgas city, further enhancing the resort complex.

According to data for 2016: the Burgas Region covers an area of 7748 km<sup>2</sup>; it had a population of 412 684 (5.8% of Bulgaria's population); the average population density was 53/km<sup>2</sup>; infant mortality was 5.8‰ while the average for the

country was 6.5‰; and the crude death rate was 13.2‰ with two leading causes: cardiovascular diseases and neoplasms. The average life expectancy in the Burgas Region in the period 2014–2016 was 74.9 years (71.6 for males and 78.20 years for females) (3).

In 2015, Bulgaria spent €1117 per head on health care, less than half the European Union (EU) average (€2797). Only half of the total health expenditure is publicly financed, and out-of-pocket payments in Bulgaria are the highest in the EU – 48%. Around 12% of the population lack insurance coverage. The revenue base for the Social Health Insurance remains narrow due to low incomes, many uninsured individuals and a large informal sector (4). The Ministry of Health in Bulgaria is responsible for health-policy decisions at the national level. At the regional level, political and financial autonomy and responsibility for health and health care are delegated to the municipal level. For example, in the Burgas Municipal Development Plan 2014–2020, improving health-related quality of life is a strategic goal. There are 20 medical centres in the region, including 9 multiprofile hospitals and 11 specialized hospitals, as well as 3 hospices and more than 70 outpatient medical-care centres.

Public health covers the implementation of activities related to children and school health care, involving over 119 medical specialists attached to more than 90 medical offices in kindergartens and educational institutions.

In the Municipality of Burgas, there are 10 municipal medical centres of which 5 are outpatient centres and 5 are specialized hospitals. The medical centres are owned by the Burgas Municipal Council.

Other public health activities relate to providing services to vulnerable groups, which involves the intervention of health mediators. Caring for the elderly is also a public health priority. The regional authorities provide various types of social support to people with incomes below the minimum wage.

The Burgas Region is a metropolitan area full of dynamism and engagement. Public health is a priority in its municipal policies. The Region's inhabitants, community organizations and public authorities all contribute on a daily basis to assuring its healthy profile. As the city authority, Burgas Municipality has a social responsibility to, and statutory tasks associated with, protecting public health and building a sustainably healthy future for the Region.



## Strengths

The strengths of the Burgas Region include:

- ✓ its upward development, which has prompted a lot of people seeking better living opportunities to settle in the Burgas metropolitan area;
- ✓ the touristic attraction of the Burgas metropolitan area (it is one of the most visited destinations in Bulgaria);
- ✓ natural prerequisites for healthy lifestyles and economic development in the form of its environment, climate and coast.
- ✓ the presence of the Faculty of Public Health of the Burgas University "Professor Dr Asen Zlatarov" and the support it provides to health-care services (higher medical education being a priority in the Region).



## Aspirations

The Burgas Region is aiming to:

- ✓ strengthen prevention programmes;
- ✓ improve the health literacy and health culture of the population, adolescents in particular;
- ✓ improve demographic processes in the Region towards trends that are more favourable than those at the national level for all indicators – birth rate, mortality, natural growth.

## Challenges

These are related to:

- ✓ the increasing population over working age and difficulties associated with ensuring the long-term care of people with chronic illnesses;
- ✓ finding ways of financing and sustaining public health-care activities, most of which are currently underfinanced;
- ✓ reducing health inequities among urban/rural inhabitants, and in socially marginalized groups.

## Potential areas of collaboration

The Burgas Region is interested in collaborating with other regions on:

- ✓ benchmarking towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (5) at the regional level;
- ✓ developing a telemedicine centre in the Region;
- ✓ developing innovative programmes on health promotion, urban health and health informatics;
- ✓ Collaboration in these areas could bring about improvement in, and novel approaches to, creating a healthy region, healthy settings, healthy families and healthy people.

## Working groups

The Burgas Region is interested in participating in working groups on:

- ✓ the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)(5)/equity;
- ✓ environment;
- ✓ participatory approaches/resilience.

## People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

*Political focal point*

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