

# **Comprehensive Baseline Report on Haskovo Labour Market and Economy**

**WP5 “Haskovo Labor Market and Economic Development  
Strategy”**

**Deliverable 5.1.1.  
Methodological approach for preparing the baseline report and  
a contextualization of the economic market in Haskovo**

2025



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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This ***Baseline Report on the Labour Market and Economy of Haskovo Municipality*** was developed under the CARE-GET project and represents Deliverable (D) 5.1.1. of Work Package 5 “Haskovo Labor Market and Economic Development Strategy”.

D5.1.1 contains statistical information and includes an analysis of the state of the economy of Haskovo municipality, examining local labour market conditions and development opportunities. The study includes an assessment of the workforce, the structure of the local labour market, the presence of key industries, investments and wage trends. An important aspect is the consideration of demographic factors, educational level, professional qualifications and their correlation with economic development and business needs. The analysis of the economic situation of Haskovo municipality, local labour market conditions and development opportunities provides an important basis for directing efforts towards the healthcare sector and attracting talent. It reveals the economic potential of the region, which is key for the development of high-tech industries. Examining the labour market provides information on the availability of qualified personnel which can be engaged in this sector, as well as the need for additional training and programmes to improve qualifications.

The characteristics of the region can be used to attract young and ambitious professionals seeking development in promising areas. If Haskovo municipality offers good living and working conditions, this can become an advantage for attracting talent both from the country and abroad.

Medical technologies can be positioned as a sector that contributes to the sustainable development of the region, improving healthcare and the quality of life of the local population.

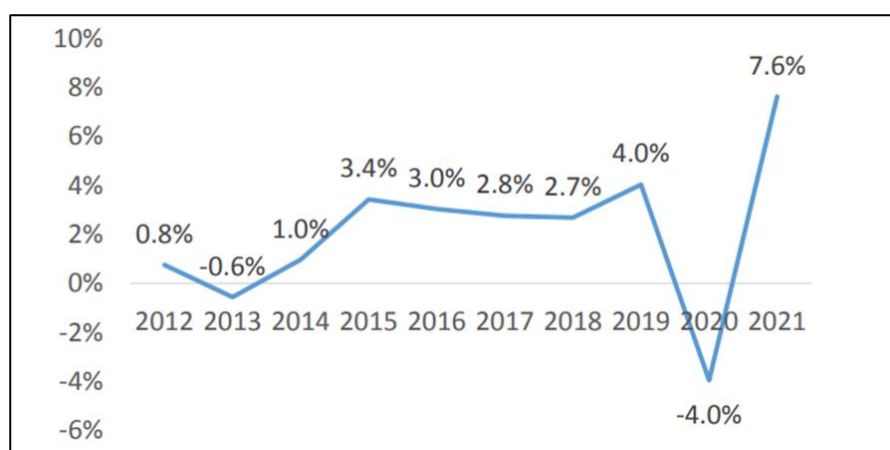
This analysis provides a strategic basis for directing efforts towards the development of medical technologies, combining economic potential, the availability of qualified personnel and the opportunities for attracting investments and talents, turning Haskovo into a promising center for innovation and development. The report sets the basis for subsequent analyses under the project, presenting the framework and methodologies to be used to identify skills shortages and mismatches in the workforce at the local level, especially in the healthcare sector and related areas.

The methodology for conducting the study of the labour market and economy in the municipality of Haskovo includes several consecutive stages that provide a comprehensive picture of economic activity and employment dynamics. The process began with the collection and analysis of secondary data from official sources – the National Statistical Institute, the Directorate of the Labour Bureau of Haskovo, higher education institutions on the territory of the municipality and the municipal administration. The next stage was the additional collection of primary information through surveys with employers and representatives of the workforce, which allowed for the identification of specific challenges and trends. An online survey was conducted among employers. A total of 50 employers voluntarily participated in the

survey, representing sectors such as manufacturing, construction, trade and services, mechanical engineering, real estate, insurance, healthcare, professional activities, and scientific research, as well as consultancy services in business and other management. A detailed analysis of the survey is presented in the report under D5.1.2. Factors such as demography and qualification of the workforce were considered. The analysis continued with an assessment of the main economic indicators such as the sectoral structure of the economy, investment activity, employment levels, unemployment, average wages, etc. Comparing this data with regional or national trends allows for the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the local labour market, based on which recommendations are formulated for improving working conditions, attracting investment, developing educational programmes and policies to stimulate economic growth, with the goal of creating a sustainable and competitive local economy.

At the time of development of this report, the last year for which official statistical data for was available was year 2023 (official data for 2024 will be published in the second half of 2025). There were two ways to approach the current study – the first one would be to use data for the 5-year period from 2019 to 2023. This period, however, includes the year of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020), during which not only at regional, but also at national level and throughout the world, a sharp decline in economic activity and economic indicators has been observed. Moderate improvement of economic activity has been recorded in 2021, while in the following two years the economic indicators have gradually normalized.

**Figure 1. Annual GDP growth in Bulgaria for the period 2012–2021**



*Source: National Statistical Institute*

The dynamics of 2020 data would distort and unnecessarily complicate the analysis of economic development. Therefore, for the purposes of the present analysis, the second approach was applied – to analyse the period 2021–2023, during which economic processes develop according to their own logic, without the impact of force majeure factors.

During the period 2021–2023, the economy of Haskovo Municipality recorded sustainable growth, characterized by increased enterprise revenues, growing labour productivity, and a stable labour market. However, demographic processes, the shortage of qualified labour, and weak foreign investment remain key challenges. The municipality plays a leading role in the regional economy with predominant sectors such as manufacturing, mechanical engineering, food and beverage industry, wine production, construction, transport, and trade.

The growth of non-financial enterprises' revenues reaches 2.8 billion leva in 2023, but the number of employed persons decreases by 2.84%. From 2021 to 2023, unemployment increases, but in 2024 a decline begins. The main problems on the labour market are the shortage of specialists in mechanical engineering, construction, and transport, as well as engineering personnel. The demographic crisis deepens the mismatch between labour supply and demand.

Investment activity remains insufficient – the costs of acquiring fixed assets and foreign direct investment are significantly lower than the national average. Salaries in the municipality are growing, but also remain lower than the national average, especially in manufacturing.

The change in the values of the main economic indicators for the municipality of Haskovo during the period 2021–2023 is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Dynamics of the main economic indicators**

Economic indicator	2021	2022	2023
Number of enterprises	5 186	↑ 5,660	↑ 5,779
Operating income (thousand BGN)	2,447,840	↑ 2,786,902	↑ 2,794,419
Expenses for fixed assets (thousand BGN)	141,586	↑ 154 183	↑ 172,369
Foreign investments (thousands of euros)	91,999.4	↓ 87,863.6	↓ 82,716.3
Employed persons (number)	23,023	↓ 22,706	↓ 22,370
Average gross annual salary (BGN)	13,452	↑ 14,599	↑ 16,934

*Source: National Statistical Institute*

Addressing the challenges facing the labour market requires an active policy to attract investment, modernize enterprises, and promote high-tech and innovative industries. In order to retain and develop the local workforce, improvements in working conditions, incentives for business, and adaptation of the education system to the

needs of the economy are necessary. If timely measures are not taken, economic activity and employment in the region may deteriorate, but with the right investments and a strategic approach, Haskovo Municipality has the potential to establish itself as an economic center.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the labour market and economy in Haskovo municipality serves as a key tool for understanding the dynamics of local development, identifying challenges and opportunities, and formulating strategies for sustainable growth. In the context of contemporary economic trends, special attention is given to two important aspects: the development of the healthcare sector and the implementation of new technologies, which play an increasingly important role in transforming the local economy and social infrastructure.

Healthcare sector is of strategic importance to any community, as its condition and development directly impact the quality of life, social stability, and economic activity. In Haskovo municipality, healthcare is not only a fundamental component of social policy but also a potential driver of economic growth, especially in the context of the growing demand for high-quality healthcare services and innovations. The introduction of new technologies in the healthcare sector, such as process digitalization, telemedicine, and the use of modern equipment, creates opportunities to improve efficiency, accessibility, and service quality.

Moreover, the implementation of new technologies in healthcare has the potential to stimulate the development of related industries, such as information technology, medical equipment manufacturing, and workforce training. This, in turn, can lead to the creation of new jobs, an increase in workforce qualifications, and the strengthening of the local economy.

The present analysis examines the state of the labour market and economy in Haskovo municipality, with a particular focus on the healthcare sector and the role of new technologies. Key indicators, trends, and challenges are explored, as well as development opportunities that can contribute to the sustainable economic and social growth of the region.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for developing the baseline report on Haskovo labour market and economy was designed to provide an in-depth and systematic analysis of the key aspects related to the municipality's economic development and labour market dynamics. The first step in the process was defining the objectives of the report, which included delivering up-to-date information on the state of the labour market, identifying the main economic sectors, analysing the demographic and socio-economic

characteristics of the population, and outlining the challenges and opportunities for development.

Once the objectives were clearly defined, the scope of the study was determined, considering the geographical boundaries of the region, the period to be analysed, and the specific aspects of the economy and labour market to be examined. A crucial part of the methodology was data collection, which was carried out through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was gathered from official sources such as the National Statistical Institute, local educational institutions, and the Haskovo Labour Bureau Directorate. Qualitative data was obtained through surveys conducted with representatives of the business community and employees in the healthcare sector.

Following data collection, the next step involved processing and analysing the data. Quantitative data was analysed using statistical methods to identify trends, correlations, and key indicators of economic development and labour market performance. Qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis to uncover the main issues, opportunities, and perspectives identified by the study participants.

After the data analysis, the report was structured into logically sequenced sections that covered the main aspects of the study. These sections included: introduction, explanation of the methodology, brief overview of the municipality of Haskovo, including its geographical location and demographic data, analysis of the economic situation and the healthcare sector, overview of educational institutions within the municipality, analysis of the labour market, identification of challenges and opportunities, and recommendations for future actions. Each section was supported by clear and reliable data, as well as by graphs and tables, to facilitate the understanding of the presented information.

This methodology ensures that the report is comprehensive, objective, and valuable for informing future decisions and strategies aimed at the development of Haskovo municipality's economy and labour market.

#### **4. PRESENTATION OF HASKOVO MUNICIPALITY**

The Municipality of Haskovo is part of Haskovo District, which consists of 11 municipalities<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgaria is administratively divided into 265 municipalities.



**Figure 2. Municipalities in the territory of Haskovo district**



Source: [Regional Profiles. Development Indicators](#), IME, 2024.

Haskovo Municipality is located in Southern Bulgaria and is one of the constituent municipalities of Haskovo District. The territory of Haskovo Municipality (739.8 sq. km) occupies about 13.3% of the territory of Haskovo District (5,543 sq. km). The municipal center (the city of Haskovo) is located 227 km from the capital – Sofia.

**Figure 3. Geographical location of Haskovo municipality**



Source: National Statistical Institute



The pan-European transport corridors No. 4, No. 9, and No. 10 pass through the territory of Haskovo Municipality, which determines the excellent transport connectivity. International transport exchange is carried out through the Kapitan Andreevo border checkpoint on the border with the Republic of Turkey (external border for the European Union), as well as through the nearby Kapitan Petko Voyvoda border checkpoint and Makaza border checkpoint, which are on the border with the Republic of Greece. The quality of the roads in the municipality has increased over the years, but remains lower than the national average.

There are 37 settlements in the municipality of Haskovo – 1 city (the municipal center is the city of Haskovo) and 36 villages.

Haskovo Municipality is the largest in terms of population in Haskovo District (207,114 inhabitants as of 31.12.2023) with a share of 38.3%.

The population of Haskovo Municipality is 79,335 (31.12.2023), of which 47.3% are men and 52.7% are women. The municipal center (city of Haskovo) has a population of 63,776, while the other 15,559 people live in the villages of the municipality. Among the villages with the largest population are: village of Uzundzhovo – 1,688 people, village of Malevo - 1,059 people, village of Voivodovo – 923 people, village of Stamboliyski – 680 people and village of Krivo Pole – 645 people. The share of the urban population (80.4%) is higher than the national average (73.5%).

In the municipality of Haskovo, 57.5% of the population is of working age. 15.5% of the population is of under-working age, and the remaining 27.0% are outside the labour market due to their advanced age. In the city of Haskovo, the situation is similar – 58.3% of the population is of working age, 15.6% are of under-working age, and 26% are of over-working age.

**Table 2. Population under, at and over working age in Haskovo Municipality, 31.12.2023**

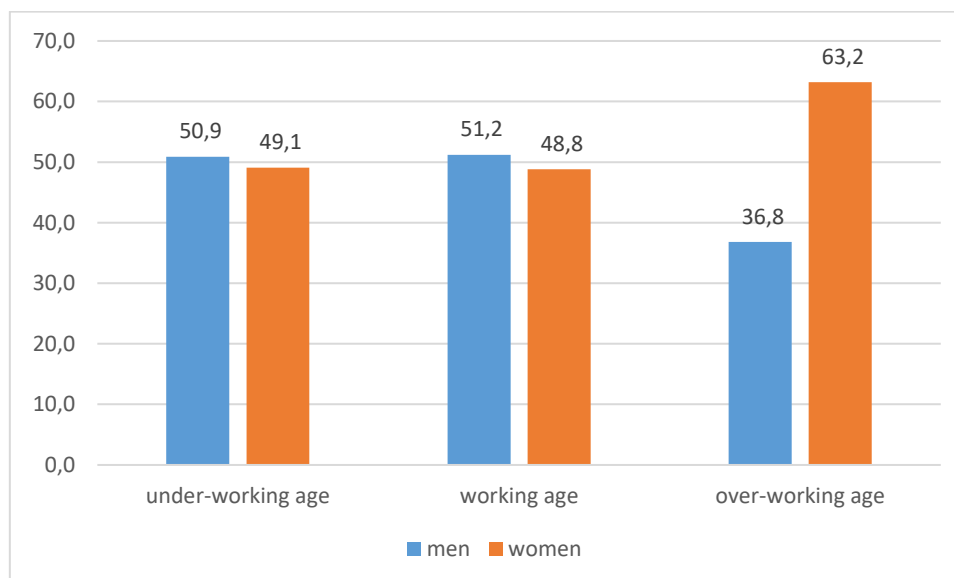
Population by age	Total			Including in the city of Haskovo		
	Everything	Men	Women	Everything	Men	Women
Under working age	12,299	6 265	6,034	9,980	5,088	4,892
Of working age	45,611	23,359	22,252	37,191	18,782	18,409
Above working age	21,425	7,894	13,531	16,605	5,952	10,653
<b>Total</b>	<b>79,335</b>	<b>37,518</b>	<b>41,817</b>	<b>63,776</b>	<b>29,822</b>	<b>33,954</b>

*Source: NSI*

The share of men and women of working age and under-working age in Haskovo Municipality is approximately equal – 51 % men and 49 % women. However, there is

a significant difference in the gender distribution. It is found in people over working age, which is also typical for the rest of the country (37 % men and 63% women).

**Figure 4. Share of men and women of under-working age, working age and over-working age in Haskovo Municipality**



*Source: NSI*

The higher life expectancy of women, a trend characteristic of the whole country, can be explained by biological, social and health factors that lead to a lower average life expectancy of men. This fact has important social and economic consequences. The higher share of women among the elderly population suggests the need for specific policies and services aimed at supporting this group, such as health care, social services, and programmes for active living in old age. Furthermore, this demographic structure can influence the allocation of resources and the planning of social infrastructure in the municipality, considering the needs of elderly women, who are the majority of the population above working age.

Over 26% of the municipality's population is over working age, and 15.6% is under working age, indicating a relatively small number of children and young people who are about to enter working age. This population structure has several important implications. First, the high share of people over working age implies an increased burden on the social and health systems, as this group has greater needs for pensions, health care and social services. Second, the relatively low share of the young population is an indicator of a declining birth rate or migration of young people to other regions or countries. This leads to a reduction in the potential workforce in all economic sectors, including healthcare.

Targeted policies are needed to retain older workers through retraining programmes, combined with the development of strategies to retain young people through skills acquisition and vocational training that is in line with local labour needs.

The demographic and geographical characteristics of the Haskovo municipality have a direct impact on the labour market, creating both opportunities and challenges. The excellent transport connectivity and the strategic location of the municipality, which is close to important transport corridors and borders, make it attractive for investment and business development, especially in logistics, manufacturing, and trade. This can lead to the creation of new jobs and stimulate economic activity. However, the demographic structure of the population raises serious questions about the sustainability of the labour market.

The aging population and the high share of people over working age can make it difficult for local businesses and limit the ability of the municipality to attract new investments, especially in sectors that require a large number of workers, but despite these challenges, there are also opportunities to adapt the labour market to demographic realities. The municipality can focus on attracting investments in sectors that require less labour but have high added value, such as medical technologies, information technologies and automation. In addition, Haskovo's strategic location can be used to attract labour from other regions or even neighbouring countries, creating conditions for migration and integration of new personnel.

## **5. ECONOMIC STATE OF HASKOVO MUNICIPALITY**

The economy of Haskovo Municipality develops as part of larger territorial units – Haskovo District, South Central Region, and the national economy. Therefore, in this analysis of the current state of the economy, data at the municipal level are compared with data at the regional and national levels.

In general, the industry of Haskovo district is characterized by a well-developed sectoral structure and well-established market traditions. The main industries in the municipality are: processing industry, production of machine parts, furniture industry, food industry, wine production and garment industry.

All three main economic sectors function well on the territory of the Haskovo municipality: Primary economic sector (mining of raw materials), Secondary economic sector (processing industry and construction) and Tertiary economic sector (services).

The local economy has a multi-sectoral character. There is almost no economic activity that is not represented in the municipal economic landscape. The economic profile of the municipality presents sectors and economic activities for which there are available resources and traditions in their development. The emergence of a number of economic activities is a result of the economic development of the city of Haskovo, which is an economic, transport and service center, a large market not only in the municipality, but also in the Haskovo region. The municipality specializes in a number of industrial areas that are based on both established traditional productions and new ones related to the use of the local raw material base, as well as on field resources.

### 3.1. Structure of enterprises in Haskovo municipality

The economic characteristics of the municipality are largely determined by the number and type of operating enterprises. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a key unit in the local economy, as they not only produce a significant share of the gross domestic product, but also provide a large part of the employment of the population. In Haskovo district, the share of small and medium-sized enterprises is 99.9%.

The data for Haskovo Municipality are similar – in the period 2021–2023, SMEs account for 99.9% of all enterprises. In addition to the number, the share of micro-enterprises with up to 9 employees also grew slightly during the same period – 93.39% (2021), 93.67% (2022) and 94.06% (2023). The share of small enterprises (10 – 49 employees) is about 5%, and of medium-sized enterprises (50 to 249 employees) is about 1% for the same period.

***Table 3. Number of enterprises in Haskovo Municipality according to the number of people employed in them***

Enterprise size	2021	2022	2023
Micro enterprises – up to 9 employees	4,843	5,302	5,435
Small enterprises – from 10 to 49 employees	283	303	288
Medium-sized enterprises – from 50 to 249 employees	55	51	52
Large enterprises – over 250 employees	5	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 186</b>	<b>5,660</b>	<b>5,779</b>

*Source: NSI*

During the analysed period, the number of micro enterprises increased steadily, while the number of small enterprises fluctuated, and medium-sized and large enterprises showed a slight decline. Small and micro enterprises are evidently more flexible and adaptable to local conditions. The challenges faced by medium-sized and large enterprises highlight the need for targeted policies to support larger businesses, which have the potential to create more jobs and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

### 3.2. Leading economic sectors in Haskovo municipality

The economy of Haskovo Municipality is distinguished by a relatively balanced industrial-agricultural specialization and a characteristic territorial structure, expressed in the localization of the leading industrial production facilities in the municipal center – the town of Haskovo.

According to NSI data, the average number of employees under an employment or service relationship in Haskovo Municipality in 2021 was 23,023 people (46.3% of employees in Haskovo District), in 2022 – 22,706 (46.4% of employees in Haskovo District), and in 2023 – 22,370 people (45.8% of employees in Haskovo District). These

data rank Haskovo Municipality in first place in the district in terms of workforce availability and economic activity.

According to NSI data for 2023, the municipality's economy generates 46.5% of the revenue from the activities of Haskovo district. At the national level, this share is 0.5%.

**Table 4** *Share of revenue from the activities of enterprises in Haskovo Municipality*

2023	Municipality of Haskovo		Haskovo District		Republic of Bulgaria	
	thousand BGN	thousand EUR	thousand BGN	thousand EUR	thousand BGN	thousand EUR
Operating income	2 794 419	1 428 764	6 015 660	3 075 758	529 692 000	270 827 219
<b>Share of revenues of Haskovo Municipality</b>	<b>-</b>		<b>46.5%</b>		<b>0.5%</b>	

*Source: NSI*

Leading sectors by number of enterprises in 2023 in the municipality are:

1. Sector G. Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles – with 39% of the total number of enterprises;
2. Sector C. Manufacturing Industry – with 10.1% of the total number of enterprises;
3. Sector A. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing – with 9.9% of the total number of enterprises;
4. Sector M. Professional activities and scientific research – with 7.1% of the total number of enterprises;
5. Sector H. Transport, storage, and mail – with 6% of the total number of enterprises on the territory of the Haskovo municipality.

**Table 5 Main economic indicators of non-financial enterprises by economic activities in Haskovo municipality**

Economic activities	2021		2022		2023	
	Number of enterprises these	Operating income (thousand BGN)	Number of enterprises these	Operating income (thousand BGN)	Number of enterprises these	Operating income (thousand BGN)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5 186</b>	<b>2,447,840</b>	<b>5,660</b>	<b>2,786,902</b>	<b>5,779</b>	<b>2,794,419</b>
A. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	147	96,079	536	159,066	574	137,559
B. Mining industry	4	263	..	..	..	..
C. Manufacturing industry	607	638,016	593	658,405	581	689,295
D. Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels	34	7,859	65	2,851	105	2,973
E. Water supply; sewerage services, waste management and remediation	15	35,693	..	46,292	..	40,706
F. Construction	220	288,705	250	271,997	251	197 131
G. Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	2,263	1,004,486	2,263	1 186 179	2,257	1,228,680
H. Transport, storage and mail	334	166,574	343	225,055	348	214,989
I. Hotel and restaurant industry	259	40,245	247	38,811	250	49,350
J. Creation and dissemination of information and creative products; telecommunications	65	14,357	73	16,779	83	17,274
L. Real estate transactions	229	23,625	233	29,543	237	40,941
M. Professional activities and scientific research	383	21,274	405	30,006	409	35,010
N. Administrative and support activities	80	13,210	95	20,447	100	26,009
P. Education	35	971	38	1,198	36	1,236
Q. Human health and social work	162	78,551	161	80,347	176	90,527
R. Culture, sports and entertainment	44	12,565	37	..	35	12,720
S. Other activities	305	5,367	306	5,850	323	..

Source: NSI

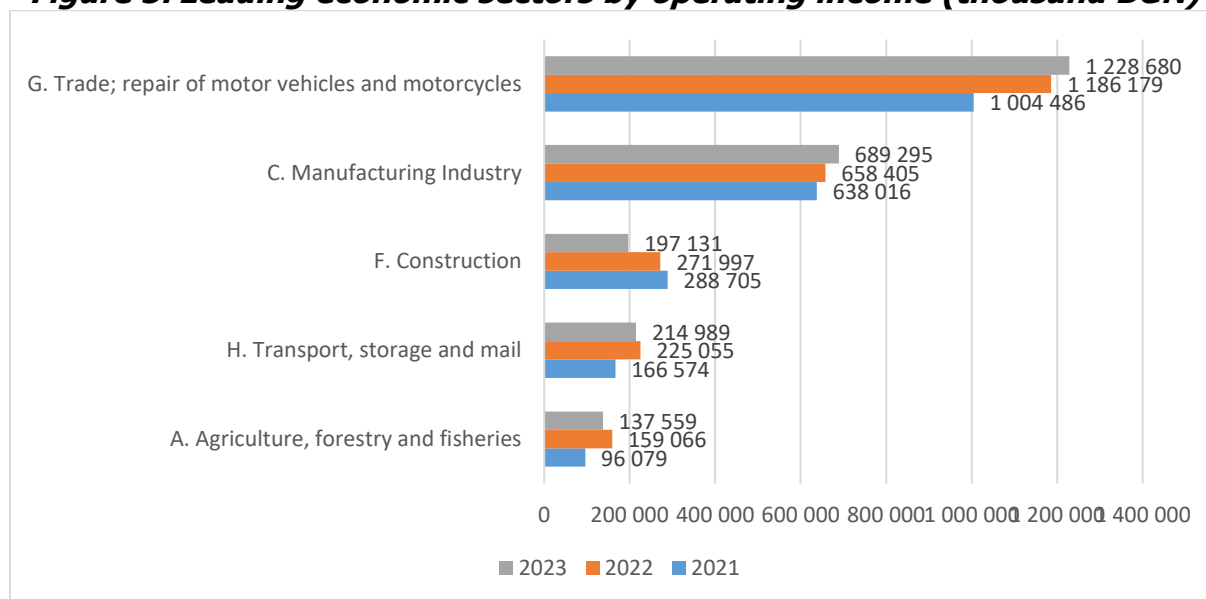
NSI data for 2023 show that on the territory of the municipality, the five leading sectors of the economy according to the revenues from their activities are:

1. Sector G. Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles – 44% of total revenues;
2. Sector C. Manufacturing Industry – 24.7% of total revenues;

3. Sector N. Transport, storage, and mail – 7.7% of total revenues;
4. Sector F. Construction – 7.1% of total revenues;
5. Sector A. Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries – 4.9% of total revenues.

During the analysed period, the number of enterprises in sector Human health and social work increased, along with their revenues. Although it is not among the top sectors, healthcare has a significant presence in the economy of Haskovo Municipality.

**Figure 5. Leading economic sectors by operating income (thousand BGN)**



Source: NSI

The largest share of operating revenues is generated by enterprises in sector G “Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles”. For the period 2021–2023, the number of enterprises decreased slightly, but their operating revenues increased by over 22%.

In second place in terms of operating revenues is sector C “Manufacturing Industry”. Over the three-year period, this sector also saw a decline in the number of enterprises - by about 4%, but operating revenues for the period increased by over 8%.

The number of enterprises in sector F “Construction” in 2023 increased by 14.1% compared to 2021. However, despite this increase, the revenue from the activities of construction enterprises decreased over the three observed years, with the total decline being over 31%.

In sector H “Transport, storage and mail” in 2023, the number of enterprises increased by 4.2% compared to 2021. Revenue from operations in 2022 also increased by over 35% compared to 2021, but at the same time as the increased number of enterprises in 2023, a decline in revenue from operations was observed compared to the previous year. Despite this decline, the trend for the period is upward - the growth in revenue from operations in 2023 compared to 2021 is over 29%.



Similar processes are taking place in the fifth most important sector for the economy of Haskovo Municipality – A “Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries”. The number of enterprises has increased significantly – in 2023 they were 390% more than in 2021. Revenues from activities in the sector also increased from 2021 to 2023 by over 43%.

Key takeaways:

- Dominance of Trade and Manufacturing – Sector G (“Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles”) remains the leading economic sector, both in terms of revenue (44% of total revenues) and number of enterprises (39%). Despite a slight decline in the number of enterprises from 2021 to 2023, revenues increased significantly (+22%), indicating a trend of market consolidation. The Manufacturing Industry (Sector C) also saw a decrease in the number of enterprises (-4%) but experienced revenue growth (+8%), suggesting productivity improvements and business scaling.
- Structural shifts in Construction – While the number of enterprises in the Construction sector (F) grew by 14.1%, total revenues declined by over 31%, pointing to possible challenges such as reduced demand, cost pressures, or lower project profitability.
- Fluctuations in Transport and Logistics – The Transport, Storage, and Mail sector (H) experienced growth in both enterprises (+4.2%) and revenues (+29% from 2021 to 2023). However, despite this overall positive trend, a revenue decline in 2023 suggests market volatility or external economic pressures affecting profitability.
- Emerging role of Professional Services – Sector M (“Professional activities and scientific research”) is among the top five by enterprise count (7.1%), signalling a growing knowledge-based economy. While this sector is not among the highest in revenue generation, its expansion suggests potential opportunities for workforce specialization and skill development.
- Implications for the labour market and skills demand – The trends indicate a transformation in Haskovo’s economic landscape, with increasing efficiency in trade and manufacturing, challenges in construction, and expansion in agriculture. The shifting sectoral dynamics highlight the need for a workforce equipped with specialized skills, particularly in healthcare and related fields, where addressing labour shortages and aligning education and training programmes with market demands will be essential.

### 3.3. Analysis of economic indicators

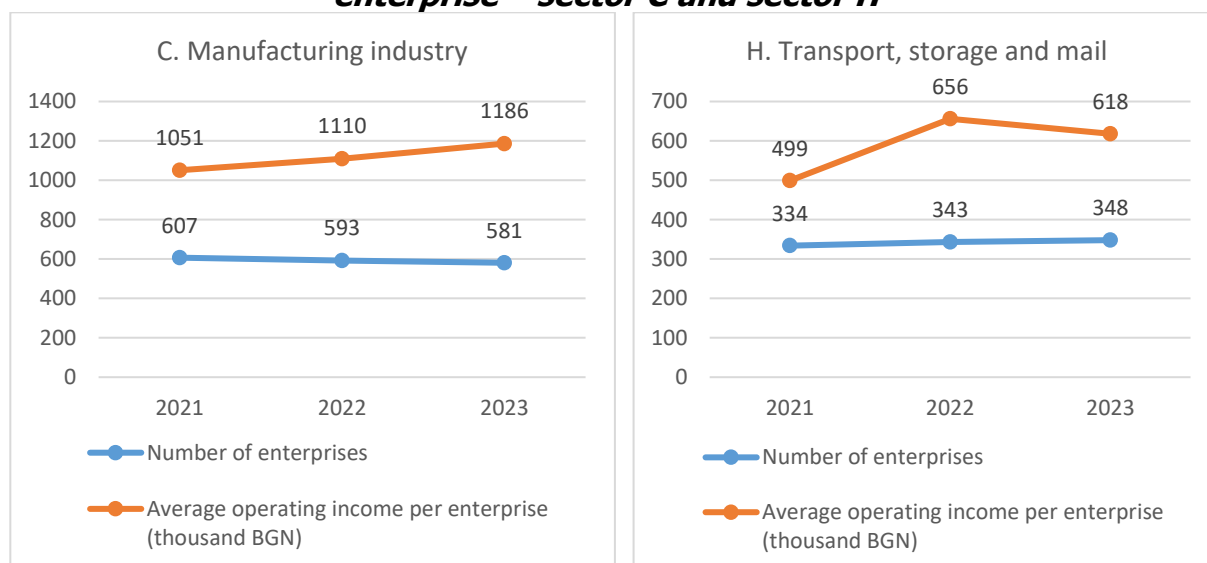
There is an increase in the number of enterprises on the territory of Haskovo municipality and an increase in their operating revenues, but a more detailed analysis of the data forms two groups of enterprises by economic sectors, based on the available data for all three years.

The **first group** includes sectors in which **the improvement of economic indicators is accompanied by an increase in the average efficiency of**

**enterprises.** For the purposes of this analysis, efficiency is assessed by the ratio of revenues from activities in the sector to the number of enterprises. This group includes the sectors: C "Manufacturing industry", H "Transport, storage and mail", I "Hotels and restaurants", L "Real estate operations", M "Professional activities and scientific research", N "Administrative and support activities" and Q "Human health and social work".

For the period 2021–2023, this trend is most clearly expressed in sector C "Manufacturing industry" and sector H "Transport, storage and mail", which are among the leaders in the municipality by the indicator "revenue from activity" (Fig. 6).

**Figure 6. Number of enterprises and average operating income per enterprise – sector C and sector H**



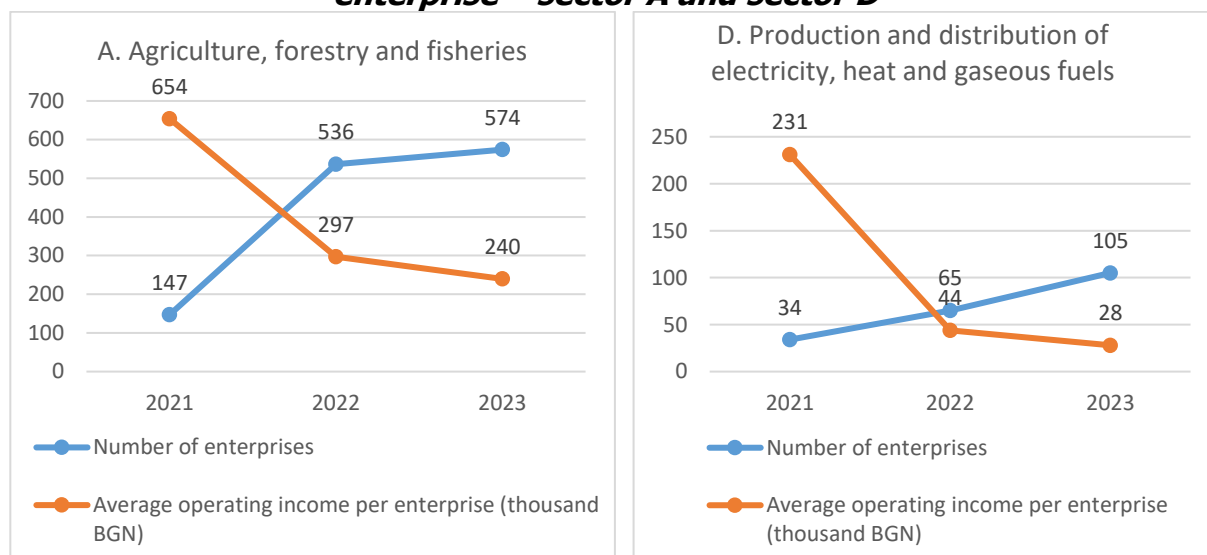
Source: NSI

Data on enterprises in this group of sectors show that, regardless of whether the number of enterprises increases or decreases over the three-year period, total operating revenues, and average revenue per enterprise, more or less, increase, which is a positive trend for the relevant sector. If both the number of enterprises and the revenues of the sector increase, this means that the industry as a whole is expanding – there is greater demand, more business opportunities, or economic conditions are conducive to growth. If the growth is sustained and not due to temporary factors (such as subsidies or short-term market opportunities), this is a sign of sustainability, the use of better business models and technologies, or expansion of activity. **A growing number of enterprises means that there is interest in the sector – low barriers to entry, a growing market, or favourable business conditions.**

In the second group of enterprises, for the period 2021–2023, an increase in revenue from activity in the sector and an increase in the number of enterprises are observed, but the average revenue per enterprise is decreasing. These are the sectors: A "Agriculture, forestry and fisheries", D

"Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels", F "Construction", G "Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles" and J "Creation and dissemination of information and creative products; telecommunications". The decrease in the average revenue per enterprise is particularly pronounced in sectors A "Agriculture, forestry and fisheries" and D "Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels" (Fig. 7).

**Figure 7. Number of enterprises and average operating income per enterprise – sector A and sector D**



Source: NSI

For enterprises in sector A "Agriculture, forestry and fisheries", the decline in operating revenues generated by one enterprise in 2023 compared to 2021 is 58.19%.

For sector D "Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels", the average decline in sales revenue per enterprise over the three-year period was 73.3%.

These data reveal several important trends in the development of the economic sectors in this group:

- **The increase in the number of enterprises may be the result of reduced barriers to entry into the sector, new economic opportunities, or policies that encourage the start-up of new firms.**
- The decrease in average revenue per enterprise shows that despite the increased number of enterprises, revenue is being distributed among more players, which in most cases is an indicator of **increased competition or an increase in other economic challenges leading to a decline in sales revenue.**
- Market fragmentation – many new entrants are likely to be smaller in size and with lower revenues, which could lead to a decline in the average revenue per entrant. This could indicate **increased fragmentation in the**

**sector or a change in the business model, with no clear dominant players with high revenues.**

Comparing the number of enterprises by sector with the number of persons employed under an employment or service relationship illustrates some of the reasons for the observed trends.

***Table 6. Average number of employees under employment or service relationship in Haskovo Municipality***

<b>Economic activities</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
A. Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries	810	865	715
B. Mining industry	..	..	..
C. Manufacturing industry	6,307	5,783	5,637
D. Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels	269	243	197
E. Water supply; sewerage services, waste management and remediation	686	503	480
F. Construction	1,257	1,327	1,376
G. Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	4 350	4,658	4,431
H. Transport, storage, and mail	1,464	1,500	1,454
I. Hotel and restaurant industry	892	834	938
J. Creation and dissemination of information and creative products; telecommunications	223	228	229
K. Financial and insurance activities	424	457	462
L. Real estate transactions	153	141	154
M. Professional activities and scientific research	318	297	322
N. Administrative and support activities	640	679	565
O. Government	1,312	1,316	1,410
P. Education	1,887	1,965	1,951
<b>Q. Human health and social work</b>	<b>1,567</b>	<b>1,476</b>	<b>1,579</b>
R. Culture, sports and entertainment	234	209	205
S. Other activities	229	223	263
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23,023</b>	<b>22,706</b>	<b>22,370</b>

*Source: NSI*

*Note: " .. " – confidential data*

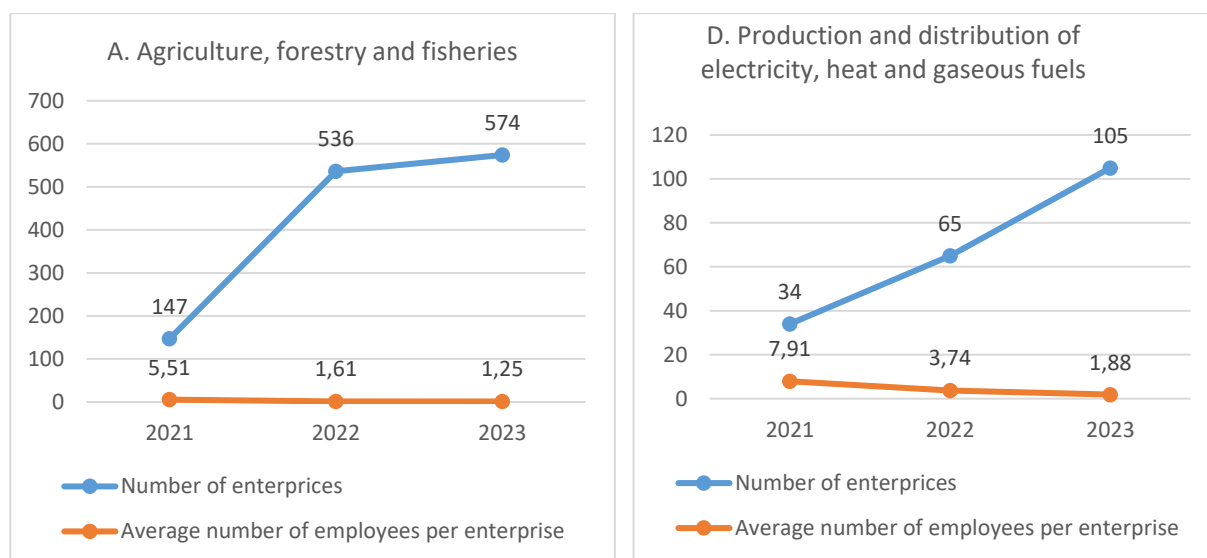
Leading sectors in terms of employees in Haskovo Municipality in 2023 are:

1. Sector C. Manufacturing Industry – 25.2% of the total number of employees;
2. Sector G. Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles – 19.8%;
- 3. Sector P. Education – 8.7%;**
- 4. Sector Q. Human health and social work – 7.1%;**
5. Sector H. Transport, storage and mail – 6.5% of the total number of employees in the municipality.

For the period 2021–2023, in sector A “Agriculture, forestry and fisheries” and sector D “Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels”, the increase in the number of enterprises is most pronounced, accompanied by a decrease in the average number of employees per enterprise.

The significant workforce presence in education (8.7%) and healthcare & social work (7.1%) highlights the importance of these sectors for employment, yet potential labour shortages may arise due to increasing demand for qualified professionals. The decline in average employees per enterprise in agriculture and energy suggests a shift toward automation and smaller-scale operations, which may further influence workforce availability. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing healthcare and related field labour shortages, ensuring workforce planning and training initiatives are effectively tailored to meet the region’s evolving economic and social needs.

**Figure 8. Number of enterprises and average number of employees per enterprise – sector A and sector D**



Source: NSI

The decrease in the average number of employees in an enterprise in 2023 compared to 2021 for sector A “Agriculture, forestry and fishing” is 77.3%. For sector D

"Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels" this decrease is 76.2%.

The decrease in the average number of employees in an enterprise in 2023 compared to 2021 is less pronounced in sectors C "Manufacturing industry" and N "Administrative and support activities".

In sectors F "Construction", H "Transport, storage and mail", I "Hotels and restaurants", J "Creation and dissemination of information and creative products; telecommunications", L "Real estate operations", M "Professional activities and scientific research" and Q "Human health and social work", the decrease in the average number of employees in 2023 compared to 2021 is insignificant, and in sectors G "Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles", P "Education", R "Culture, sports and entertainment" and S "Other activities" a slight increase in the average number of employees is observed .

### 3.4. Investments in fixed assets in Haskovo Municipality

Expenditures for the acquisition of fixed assets in the territory of Haskovo Municipality for 2021 represent 45.6% of these expenditures in Haskovo District. For 2022, expenditures in the municipality are 42.2% of district expenditures, and in 2023 – 30.9% of district-level expenditures. Haskovo Municipality continues to have the largest share of expenditures for the acquisition of fixed assets in Haskovo District, but this share is decreasing.

Investment activity in Haskovo Municipality is weak compared to the national indicators. Expenditures for acquisition of fixed assets are increasing, but remain low – 2 200 BGN (1 125 €) per capita compared to 2 700 BGN (1 380 €) for Haskovo District and 5 200 BGN (2 659 €) per capita in the country.

During the period 2021 – 2023, the most significant share of the costs for the acquisition of fixed assets in the territory of the Haskovo municipality is accounted for by the processing industry, trade, repair of cars and motorcycles, transport, warehousing, and post offices, as well as the hotel and restaurant industry.

***Table 7 Expenses for acquisition of fixed assets by enterprises in Haskovo Municipality (thousands of BGN)***

Sectors	2021	2022	2023
<b>TOTAL FOR HASKOVO MUNICIPALITY</b>	<b>141,586</b>	<b>154 183</b>	<b>172,369</b>
1. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	11,912	13,248	12,804
2. Mining and other industries (excluding manufacturing); water supply; sewerage services, waste management and recovery	4,878	2,999	8 154
2a. Manufacturing industry	44,902	35,652	41,575
3. Construction	16,133	16,536	16,723

Sectors	2021	2022	2023
4. Trade; repair of cars and motorcycles; transport, storage and mail; hotels and restaurants	39,652	54,795	55,913
5. Creation and dissemination of information and creative products; telecommunications	1,261	1,056	782
6. Financial and insurance activities	165	758	393
7. Real estate transactions	10,419	10 156	7,513
8. Professional activities and scientific research; administrative and support activities	5,664	4 360	10,714
9. Government; education; human health and social work	3 174	5,895	9,722
10. Other services	3,426	8,728	8,076

*Source: NSI*

The rate of increase in fixed assets in 2023 compared to 2021 in the sectors of Government; education; human health and social work is significant – over 300% growth. The investments come from national public and European funds and consist of improvements to building facilities, standard infrastructure, and standard equipment for educational and healthcare institutions. High-tech equipment makes up a small part of the investment due to the significant need for basic investments.

In the “Manufacturing Industry” sector, there is a decrease in the costs of acquiring fixed assets in 2023 compared to 2021 by 7.4%. As a share of investment costs in the municipality, for the three consecutive years the sector has observed a progressive decline – from 31.7% in 2021 to 24.1% in 2023.

Expenditures for the acquisition of fixed assets in the sectors “Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles”, “Transport, storage and post” and “Hotel and restaurant services” increased by 41% in 2023 compared to 2021. Of the expenditure for the acquisition of fixed assets in the municipality of Haskovo, these sectors have a share of 27.9% in 2021, 35.5% in 2022 and 32.4% in 2023.

Investments in fixed assets (machinery, equipment, buildings, means of transport and production infrastructure) have a direct impact on the productivity of both individual enterprises and economic sectors as a whole. More modern machinery and equipment lead to faster and better-quality production with fewer defects, reducing the time required to complete tasks. Technological investments allow for mechanization, which reduces the need for human labour for routine tasks.

To boost investment activity in the acquisition of fixed assets, a favourable economic environment, access to financing, technological advances, and a stable market outlook are necessary. Companies also need to have a clear business strategy and see the return on such investments.

Based on the above data, the following key conclusions can be drawn:

- Shift toward public services – Investment in healthcare, education, and social work has tripled, reflecting a shift towards modernizing public infrastructure,



potentially driven by external funding and policy changes. This may impact workforce needs in healthcare and education.

- Declining Manufacturing, growing Services – Manufacturing's investment share is decreasing, while trade, transport, and hospitality investments are increasing, signalling a shift toward service-based sectors and potential workforce transitions.
- Need for stronger investment ecosystem – Fixed asset investments in Haskovo are low compared to national averages, highlighting the need for a better economic environment and access to financing, especially to be able to support the growth of the MedTech Hub and digital health initiatives.

### 3.5. Foreign direct investments in Haskovo Municipality

Foreign direct investments in Haskovo Municipality in 2021–2023 have the most significant share in the district – 67.52% for 2021, 61.86% for 2022 and 52.80% in 2023.

**Table 8 Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises as of 31.12. (thousand euro)**

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Republic of Bulgaria	28 184 293.0	29,376,480.0	32,717,943.7
Haskovo District	136,242.2	142,035.2	156,660.8
Municipality of Haskovo	91,999.4	87,863.6	82,716.3
<b>Share of Haskovo Municipality in relation to Haskovo District</b>	<b>67.52%</b>	<b>61.86%</b>	<b>52.80%</b>

*Source: NSI*

Although Haskovo Municipality accounts for more than half of the foreign direct investments in the region, there is a negative trend, showing a decline in both percentage terms and volume of investments. Moreover, FDI remains well below the national average in 2023 – 1.97 thousand euros per person in Haskovo Municipality (compared to 5.1 thousand euros per person in Bulgaria).

Foreign direct investment can play a key role in implementing the innovation development priorities of the South-Central Region, set out in the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization (ISIS) 2021–2027. Directing such investments to the innovation sector could be achieved by creating a favourable business environment that attracts capital in areas such as high-tech manufacturing, digital services, sustainable energy solutions and research.

### 3.6. National strategic documents affecting the economy of Haskovo Municipality

The National SME Strategy 2021–2027 also includes aspects of regional policy. Regional priority sectors at the district level have been identified from the analysis of regional specialization. The regional concentration of high-tech production and knowledge-intensive services is extremely uneven with two clearly defined poles – Sofia-city district, the absolute leader, and the rest of the country, which lags behind in terms of the number of employed persons, total revenues, and turnover per employee in the specified activities. In this sense, the sectoral concentration of SMEs in the districts of Bulgaria shows that targeted and intensive interventions are needed to promote the development of SMEs in all other less developed districts of the country.

***Table 9 Regional specialization in Haskovo District according to the National SME Strategy 2021 – 2027.***

District	Regional specialization in high-tech manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services	Regional specialization in other sectors of the manufacturing industry	Specialization in sectors outside the scope of this strategy
Haskovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C27 Manufacture of electrical products</li> <li>• <b>C28 Manufacture of general and special purpose machinery and equipment</b></li> <li>• M71 Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C10 Food production</li> <li>• C14 Clothing manufacturing</li> <li>• C25 Manufacture of fabricated metal products, excluding machinery and equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• F43 Specialized construction activities</li> <li>• I56 Restaurant services</li> <li>• <b>Q86 Human health care</b></li> </ul>

*Source: National SME Strategy 2021 – 2027*

The summarized opinion of the employer organizations and all stakeholders in the field directs its capacity towards the development of the following thematic areas of ISIS 2021–2027: “Informatics and ICT” and “Mechatronics and Microelectronics”.

Given the emphasis on human health care (Q86) and manufacturing of general and special purpose machinery and equipment (C28), the labour market in Haskovo is likely to experience an increased demand for highly skilled professionals in healthcare (e.g., medical staff, healthcare technicians) and technical fields (e.g., engineers). Focusing on healthcare-related skills, including medical technology and telemedicine, will be essential for aligning workforce development with the evolving demands of the MedTech sector. This approach ensures that Haskovo’s workforce can effectively meet both short-term demands and long-term sectoral shifts.

**Table 10. Regional prioritization in Haskovo District according to the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization (ISIS) 2021–2027.**

District	Informatics and ICT	Mechatronics and - microelectronics	Industries for healthy - living	New technologies in the creative and recreational industries	Clean technologies , circular and low-carbon economy*
	1	2	3	4	5
Haskovo	X	X			X

Source: ISIS 2021 – 2027

Note: \*The fifth thematic area for smart specialization is horizontal and is valid for all regions in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The innovation strategy for smart specialization is an important tool for promoting economic growth and increasing competitiveness through investments in science, technology, and innovation. For the municipality of Haskovo, it can contribute to the development of key industries such as manufacturing, mechanical engineering, and energy, by stimulating the implementation of new technologies and improving production efficiency. By promoting partnerships between businesses, universities and research centers, the strategy can help create better-paid jobs, improve the qualifications of the workforce, and retain young people in the region. In the long term, it can improve the innovation potential of the municipality, attract investments, and turn Haskovo into an attractive place for the development of technological and high-value-added industries.

The alignment between Haskovo's smart specialization domains outlined in the ISIS 2021-2027 and the CARE-GET project offers promising synergies for economic growth and technological innovation. With a focus on Informatics and ICT, Mechatronics and microelectronics, and Industries for healthy living, these priorities directly complement the MedTech, telemedicine, and digital health objectives of the CARE-GET project. This correlation suggests that Haskovo can leverage its smart specialization strategy to attract investment in key technological sectors, while simultaneously fostering a highly skilled workforce to support the MedTech sector. These efforts can drive long-term economic development, enhance healthcare capabilities, and position Haskovo as a competitive hub for innovative, high-value industries.

## 6. HEALTH CARE IN HASKOVO MUNICIPALITY

The main health challenges in Haskovo district are related to socially significant diseases, typical for the entire country - cardiovascular diseases, respiratory infections, chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. Similar to national trends, oncological diseases also affect a significant part of the population. Factors such as the

aging demographic structure, access to medical care and preventive measures taken by health authorities have an impact on the health status of the population.

The protection and improvement of public health is an important priority in the policy of the Municipality of Haskovo, aiming to ensure accessible quality medical care, carried out through high-tech equipment by a sufficient number of qualified specialists. In the field of healthcare, the Municipality of Haskovo provides the necessary conditions and directly manages and controls the activities related to health care in nurseries, kindergartens, and schools.

According to NSI data for 2023, there are 5 medical institutions for hospital care in the municipality, of which 3 are municipal:

- "Specialized Hospital for Active Treatment of Pneumo-Phthisiological Diseases-Haskovo" Ltd.;
- "Specialized Hospital for Active Treatment of Oncology-Haskovo" Ltd.;
- "Center for Mental Health-Haskovo" Ltd.

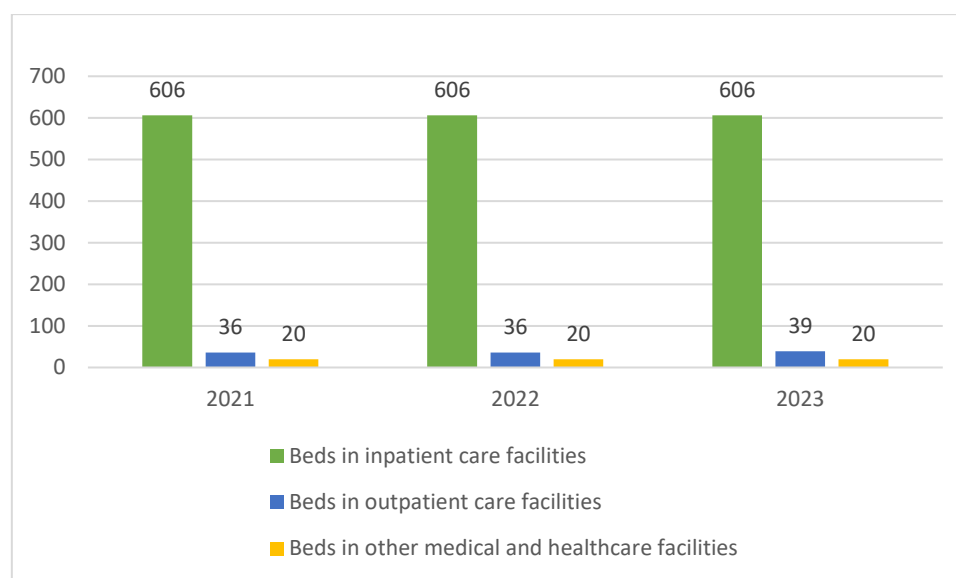
Regarding outpatient care, the company "Diagnostic and Consultative Center I – Haskovo" Ltd. is municipally owned.

The number of outpatient care facilities on the territory of Haskovo municipality is as follows:

- Diagnostic and consultation centers – 2
- Medical centers – 16
- Independent medical diagnostic and medical technical laboratories – 25
- Other medical and health facilities – 5

During the period 2021–2023, the municipality of Haskovo maintained the bed capacity in hospitals and other medical and healthcare facilities, while in 2023 the number of beds in outpatient medical facilities increased by 3, which is an insignificant increase.

**Figure 9. Bed capacity in medical institutions on the territory of Haskovo municipality**



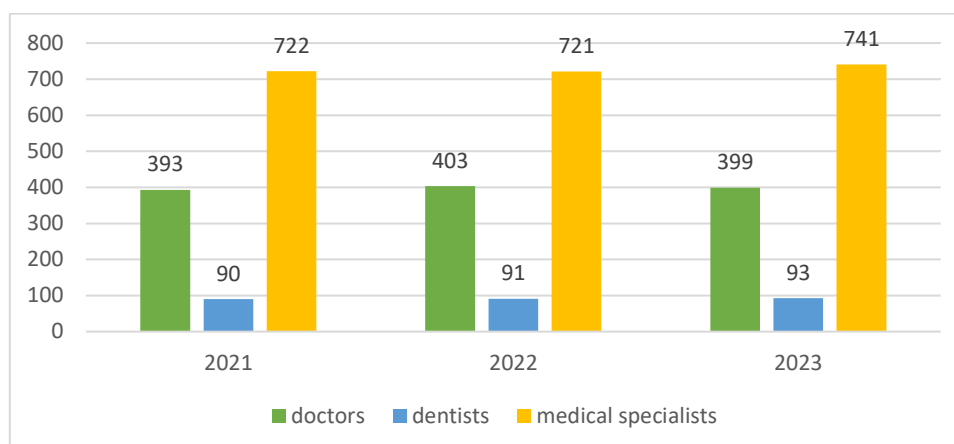
*Source: NSI*

The total number of beds in the municipality is 665, which represents 63% of the hospital beds in the territory of Haskovo District in 2023.

The health system of Haskovo withstands the sustainable trend of population aging in the municipality and the district with only a minimal adjustment in the bed capacity in the health facilities on the territory of the municipality.

During the period, a decline in beds in inpatient and outpatient care facilities (plus hospital beds in other medical facilities) was observed at the regional level, while an increase in beds in inpatient care facilities and in the bed base of outpatient care facilities and other medical facilities was observed at the regional and national levels. Over the same period, the number of doctors in Haskovo Municipality has increased minimally, without a clear trend, by 1.53%, or 6 doctors, as has the number of dentists, which has increased by 3.33%, or 3 people. The number of healthcare professionals has increased by 2.63%, or 19 people (Fig. 10).

**Figure 10. Health personnel in medical institutions in Haskovo municipality**



*Source: NSI*

A 2.6% rise in healthcare professionals (19 people) indicates minor staff reinforcements, but does this cover critical shortages, or is there still a gap in key medical specialties?

An increase of 1.5% (6 doctors) and 3.3% (3 dentists) is insufficient to maintain the quality of healthcare services, considering the likely rise in demand for healthcare due to the aging population.

The 2.6% increase in healthcare professionals (19 individuals) represents a marginal growth in staff, which does not address the critical shortage of personnel in key medical specialties.

#### Key takeaways:

- Minimal increase in healthcare workforce – the number of doctors, dentists, and healthcare professionals in Haskovo Municipality has seen only a modest increase (1.53% for doctors, 3.33% for dentists, and 2.63% for healthcare professionals), signaling potential future challenges in meeting the growing healthcare demands of an aging population.
- Growing demand for specialized care – as the population in Haskovo continues to age, there will likely be an increased need for specialized healthcare services, particularly in geriatrics, chronic disease management, and palliative care, which will require targeted workforce expansion.
- Telemedicine and digital health opportunities – the slight increase in outpatient care facilities, along with national trends towards telemedicine, indicates opportunities for expanding digital health solutions in Haskovo. This could enhance healthcare accessibility while also generating demand for professionals skilled in digital health technologies.
- Shift toward preventive and primary care – given the healthcare challenges related to cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and respiratory infections, there will be

an increased focus on preventive care and primary healthcare services, creating opportunities for nurses, dietitians, and health educators in the local labour market.

- Potential need for MedTech specialists – the emphasis on modernizing healthcare facilities and the integration of high-tech equipment suggests that the region will need a growing number of MedTech professionals to manage and maintain advanced medical technologies, offering opportunities in medical research, telemedicine, and health-specialised IT sectors.

In 2023, there were 1,937 patients per general practitioner, while in 2021 the number of patients was 1,932. The slight increase in the number of patients per general practitioner suggests a growing strain on healthcare providers. This small increase could indicate a gradual rise in demand for healthcare services, which may contribute to longer wait times and a higher workload for general practitioners, potentially affecting the quality of care and leading to burnout among medical professionals.

On the territory of the city of Haskovo, there is a Regional Emergency Medical Care Center - Haskovo (with a staff of 251 people as of June 2023) with branches in Haskovo, Dimitrovgrad, Harmanli, Simeonovgrad and Svilengrad, which are the receivers of the emergency and urgent medical care departments of the respective municipal hospitals. In addition to the municipality of Haskovo itself, the Emergency Medical Care Branch – Haskovo serves three more municipalities: Haskovo, Mineralni bani and Stambolovo.

#### Key takeaways:

- Pressure on General Practitioners – the slight increase in the number of patients per general practitioner (1,937 in 2023 vs. 1,932 in 2021) suggests a growing strain on healthcare providers. This small increase could indicate a gradual rise in demand for healthcare services, which may contribute to longer wait times and a higher workload for general practitioners, potentially affecting the quality of care and leading to burnout among medical professionals.
- Regional Emergency care load – the presence of the Regional Emergency Medical Care Center in Haskovo, serving multiple municipalities, underscores the central role of Haskovo in providing emergency medical services across the region. This centralized system may face increased pressure as healthcare demands rise, particularly given the aging population and the high burden of chronic diseases in the region. This may lead to resource constraints and the need for additional staff and equipment to maintain efficient service delivery.
- Workforce and resource needs in emergency care – with 251 staff members in the Regional Emergency Medical Care Center and its branches spread across multiple municipalities, there is a clear need for ongoing investment in human resources and training to keep up with the region's healthcare demands. The strain on emergency services may require targeted recruitment of additional healthcare professionals, such as paramedics, nurses, and emergency doctors, as well as



investments in medical equipment to ensure a high-quality response to urgent medical situations.

- Opportunities for Healthcare innovation – given the broad geographic coverage of the Emergency Medical Care Center, there may be opportunities to integrate telemedicine and digital health solutions to enhance emergency response and remote care. Technologies such as telehealth consultations and remote patient monitoring could help alleviate some of the pressure on physical infrastructure, ensuring faster responses and better patient management across a larger area.

## 7. EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN HASKOVO MUNICIPALITY

The education system in Haskovo Municipality represents one of the main social priorities for the administrative unit. Despite the reduction of the population, which is also reflected in a general decrease in the number of students on the territory of the municipality, the policy pursued by the local government shows that it can adapt to changes of this kind, preserving the basic ratios of children / teachers / separate classes, as well as the number of functioning educational institutions for preschool, school, and higher education. Despite the positive ability of the educational system to respond to changes, remaining with almost the same parameters in terms of infrastructure and human resources, a future decrease in the population and, respectively, students will lead to the need for consolidation of educational institutions and classes.

### 5.1. Primary and secondary education

As of 2023, the education system of Haskovo Municipality includes 26 schools:

- 19 general education schools (1 primary, 14 basic, 2 secondary and 2 specialized high schools);
- 1 sports school;
- 6 vocational high schools.

The municipality has 33.8% of the schools in Haskovo district, and students in all types of Haskovo municipal schools (primary, junior high and high school) in 2023 are 32.3% of all students in the district. The territorial location of the schools makes it possible to ensure compulsory education for students.

According to NSI data for the academic years 2020-2021 – 2022-2023, there was no change in the number of schools in the municipality. Over the same period, students in general education schools in Haskovo municipality decreased by 2.7% or 202 students (Table 11).

**Table 11. Structure of school education in Haskovo municipality**

	<b>2020- 2021 academic year</b>	<b>2021- 2022 academic year</b>	<b>2022- 2023 academic year</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>			
I - IV class	3239	3079	3041
Grade 5–7	2510	2642	2517
Grade 8–12	1742	1727	1731
Students for I, II and III degree professional qualification	2790	2837	-
<b>TEACHERS</b>			
I-IV class	319	292	290
Grade 5–7	194	226	228
Grade 8–12	155	150	148
<b>INDEPENDENT PARALLELS IN GENERAL, SPECIAL AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS</b>			
I-IV class	403	-	-
Grade 5–7	298	-	-
Grade 8–12	183	-	-
Parallels for I, II and III degree professional qualification	120	-	-
<b>GRADUATED</b>			
Primary education	778	826	-
Secondary education	344	324	-

*Source: NSI*

For the indicated period, the most serious is the decrease in the number of students from I to IV grades – 6.11% or 198 students. Only among students in general education schools - from V to VII grades, a minimal increase of 0.28% or 7 students was observed. Vocational training also increased by 1.68% for the years 2020-2021 – 2021-2022.

The ratio of students to independent classes is as follows:

- Grades I – IV: 8.04 students per 1 independent class;
- Grades V – VII: 12.93 students per individual class;
- Grades VIII – XII: there are 9.52 students per 1 independent class.

The indicators are quite low, which on the one hand means more opportunities for attention from the teacher to each individual student, but on the other hand this puts a financial burden on the school system. If the number of children in the Haskovo municipality continues to decrease, there will be a need to consolidate educational institutions and reduce the number of independent classes.

For the period 2020-2021 – 2022-2023, the total number of teaching staff has also decreased, albeit insignificantly, by 0.3% or by 2 specialists. Following the downward

trend in students from grades I to IV, the indicator for the number of primary school teachers also decreased at the highest rate – 9.09% or 39 people, while that of teachers from grades V to VII increased by 17.53% or 34 people. Teachers in the largest grades – grades VIII–XII, also decreased, with the decrease being 4.52% or 7 teachers.

In the number of graduates from general education schools in the territory of Haskovo municipality for the period 2020-2021 – 2021-2022, there was an increase in the number of primary education graduates by 6.17% or 48 children and a decrease in the number of secondary education graduates by 5.81% or 20 children.

## 5.2. Higher education

There is no independent higher education institution in the municipality of Haskovo, but there are branches of two higher education schools on its territory:

- Regional Center for Distance Learning – Haskovo at the University of National and World Economy (Sofia)
- Branch of the Thracian University – Stara Zagora (former Medical College – Haskovo)

***The Regional Center for Distance Learning (RCDL) – Haskovo*** is a unit of the University of National and World Economy. It offers specialties only in the form of distance learning. At the educational and qualification level “bachelor” training is carried out in the specialties “Economics”, “Management and Administration” and “Accounting and Control”.

In addition to the bachelor’s degree, RCDL – Haskovo also accepts students for a master’s degree, which is paid. The specialties are “Business Administration” – 2 semesters, “Communication Management” – 2 semesters, “Local Government” – 2 semesters, “Accounting and Control” – 2, 3 and 4 semesters.

The number of students who have studied in the last 4 academic years and are currently studying at the Regional Center for Distance Learning – Haskovo is:

- 2021/2022 – 666 students, of which 541 bachelors, 125 masters;
- 2022/2023 – 611 students, of which 507 bachelors, 104 masters;
- 2023/2024 – 599 students, of which 492 bachelors, 107 masters;
- 2024/2025 – 687 students, of which 587 bachelors, 100 masters.

The RCDL – Haskovo does not educate foreign students.

***The Haskovo Branch of the Thracian University – Stara Zagora*** is the successor of the Medical College – Haskovo. Within the branch, 1 department operates – “Healthcare”, for specialties in regulated professions:

- Nurse – educational and qualification degree "Bachelor" in professional field 7.5. Health care;
- Midwife – educational and qualification degree "Bachelor" in professional field 7.5. Health care;
- Kinesitherapy – educational and qualification degree "Bachelor" in professional field 7.4. Public Health.

The number of students studying in the last 4 academic years is:

- 2021/2022 academic year – 227 students;
- 2022/2023 academic year – 233 students;
- 2023/2024 academic year – 252 students;
- 2024/2025 academic year – 270 students, of which 269 Bulgarian citizens and 1 foreign student with dual citizenship.

In Bulgaria, the Council of Ministers approves the number of students admitted to state higher education institutions. There is a nationwide demand of nurses and midwives, which is also reflected in the increasing number of students at the branch in Haskovo.

The distribution of students by courses and majors is presented in Table 12.

***Table 12 Number of students by courses and majors***

<b>Course, specialty</b>	<b>2021-2022 academic year</b>	<b>2022-2023 academic year</b>	<b>2023-2024 academic year</b>	<b>2024-2025 academic year</b>
I course - Nurse	46	55	51	49
II course - Nurse	30	37	48	46
III course - Nurse	36	30	35	45
IV course - Nurse	34	28	32	31
I course - Midwife	20	20	24	21
II course - Midwife	17	13	9	20
III course - Midwife	16	17	11	9
IV course - Midwife	17	17	13	7
I course - Kinesitherapy	11	6	15	19
II course - Kinesitherapy	-	10	5	11
III course - Kinesitherapy	-	-	9	5
IV course - Kinesitherapy	-	-	-	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>270</b>

*Source: Haskovo Branch of the Thracian University – Stara Zagora*

The data on student enrollment in the Haskovo Branch of the Thracian University – Stara Zagora shows a steady increase in total students over the four academic years, from 227 in 2021-2022 to 270 in 2024-2025, reflecting a growing interest in healthcare-related education. The Nursing programme remains the most popular, with relatively stable enrollment across all four years, though slight fluctuations occur in

each course. The Midwifery programme shows a decline in upper-year students, particularly in the third and fourth years, suggesting potential dropout rates or lower retention. The Kinesithrapy programme, introduced more recently, has expanded progressively, with the first full cohort reaching the fourth year in 2024-2025. Overall, the data suggests increasing demand for healthcare education, but retention challenges, particularly in the Midwifery programme, may need to be addressed.

Kinesithrapy programme has shown a gradual expansion, with no fourth-year students in earlier years but now reaching 7 students in 2024-2025, confirming its progressive establishment within the university's structure. The steady total increase in students signals growing demand for healthcare education, yet the variations between programmes and courses highlight potential issues in retention, curriculum structure, or student motivation that could benefit from further investigation.

The drop in fourth-year Midwifery students suggests challenges in retaining students throughout the programme. To address this, the university could explore mentorship programmes, scholarships, or curriculum adjustments to improve student engagement and completion rates. Additionally, identifying career placement opportunities or incentives (such as guaranteed employment in regional healthcare facilities) may encourage more students to complete their studies.

The consistent demand for Nursing indicates that the programme remains a crucial pillar of healthcare education in Haskovo. Given the gradual increase in Kinesithrapy students, expanding infrastructure, introducing more practical training partnerships, or securing funding for modernized lab facilities could further attract students. The presence of a growing aging population in the region may also justify additional specializations in geriatric nursing or rehabilitation therapies.

The fluctuations in first-year student numbers across all programmes suggest a need for more targeted recruitment efforts. This could include marketing campaigns highlighting job prospects, collaboration with local high schools, and international outreach, especially since the university has only recently begun admitting foreign students.

Based on regularly conducted surveys among graduates of the "Nursing" and "Midwifery" specialties at the Haskovo Branch, data is obtained on the professional realization of the graduates.

**Table 13. Professional realization of the students of the Haskovo Branch of the Thracian University – Stara Zagora**

Indicators	2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Nurse	Midwife	Nurse	Midwife	Nurse	Midwife	Nurse	Midwife
Share of graduates working in the specialty	98%	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	86%	30%
Share of diplomas - that have been implemented in the Republic of Bulgaria	95%	93%	100%	100%	100%	100	86%	30%
He has awarded - diplomas that have been realized - abroad.	3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Source: Haskovo Branch of the Thracian University – Stara Zagora*

The first class of students in the “Kinesitherapy” specialty is expected to graduate in 2025.

At first sight there is a high job placement rate for nurses and midwives until 2023, but 2024 marks a drastic decline, particularly for midwives, raising concerns about job market saturation, changing healthcare needs, or working conditions. While most graduates stay in Bulgaria, future strategies should focus on better job alignment, career diversification, and improved workforce planning, especially as the first kinesitherapy graduates enter the market in 2025.

The steady increase in student enrolment over the last four academic years, from 227 in 2021-2022 to 270 in 2024-2025, suggests a growing interest in healthcare professions, particularly in nursing, midwifery, and kinesitherapy. This trend is a positive indicator for the local labour market, as it indicates a future supply of qualified healthcare professionals to address the growing demand driven by an aging population and increasing health challenges in the region. The fact that the majority of students are Bulgarian citizens highlights the potential for retaining local talent within the municipality. Additionally, the focus on regulated healthcare professionals ensures that graduates will be well-prepared to meet the professional standards required in the sector, contributing to the overall improvement of healthcare services in Haskovo and the broader region. This aligns with the region’s need to expand its healthcare workforce to support its growing healthcare infrastructure and services.

The lack of higher education institutions in the municipality of Haskovo has a significant impact on retaining young people, despite the presence of two university branches, one of which offers training for medical professionals. These branches cannot compensate for the lack of diversity in academic programmes and the scale of higher education that young people seek.

The branch that trains medical professionals plays an important role in the development of the healthcare sector in the region. It provides an opportunity for young people interested in healthcare to receive education without leaving the city. This is particularly important for the local healthcare system, which requires qualified personnel to address the challenges of an aging population and increasing healthcare needs. However, this branch cannot meet the interests of all young people with aspirations in medicine, and many are forced to leave Haskovo to continue their education at universities in other cities. This leads to a drain of talent and potential that could otherwise contribute to the development of the local economy and social environment. Even some of those who study at the medical branch leave the region after graduation, as they find better professional opportunities in larger cities, where healthcare facilities are better equipped and offer higher salaries.

The lack of higher education institutions with diverse academic programmes also limits the social and cultural dynamics of Haskovo. Universities typically create an environment that attracts young people and fosters the development of innovation, cultural events, and social initiatives. In Haskovo, this environment is limited, which contributes to a sense of stagnation and a lack of prospects among young people. The healthcare sector, which could be a key factor in retaining professionals, suffers from insufficient investment and development opportunities, further complicating the retention of young specialists.

Despite the presence of university branches, the absence of full-fledged higher education institutions remains a serious issue for retaining young people in Haskovo. The healthcare sector has the potential to play an important role in this process, but to achieve meaningful change, it is necessary to improve infrastructure and create conditions for professional development that will motivate young people to stay and contribute to the municipality's growth.

## **8. LABOUR MARKET IN HASKOVO MUNICIPALITY**

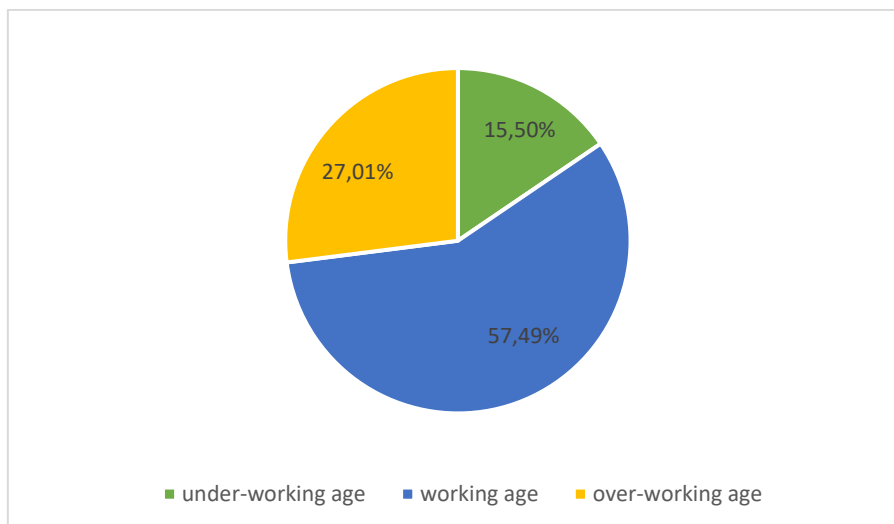
The labour market is a key factor in the economic development of a region, as it reflects the dynamics of employment, unemployment, and the quality of the workforce. The human factor is the connecting link between the other factors of production and their full use. The analysis of the main indicators, such as the number of employees, the unemployment rate, and the structure of employment by sector, allows to assess the stability and prospects of the local economy. Changes in the labour market are often the result of demographic trends, investment activity and technological innovations, which affect the demand and supply of labour.

Haskovo Municipality faces challenges due to the deteriorating demographic situation and the shortage of qualified personnel of working age. The share of the working age population in the municipality is decreasing and remains relatively low compared to the national average. By 2023 In 2018, 57.49% of the population of working age were



45,611 people. There were 12,299 people under working age, or 15.5%, and 21,425 people over working age, or 27% of the residents of the municipality (Fig. 11).

**Figure 11. Share of the population of Haskovo municipality under-, at and over-working age**



*Source: NSI*

The employment rate reached 59.5% (compared to 70.4% in the country), and the unemployment rate reached 5.4% (compared to 5.2% in the country). During the period 2021–2023, a gradual increase in unemployment levels was observed: 2021 – 4.7%; 2022 – 5.2%; 2023 – 5.4%. In 2024, unemployment in the municipality decreases.

Challenges facing the local labour market remain the educational structure of the workforce and the aging population. The share of university graduates among the population aged 25–64 is 22.57% (compared to 29.8% in the country), and that of people with primary and lower education – 29.53% (compared to 16.0% in the country).

The demographic replacement rate, as the ratio of the population aged 15–19 to that aged 60–64, is decreasing. The natural and mechanical growth rates are negative. If the trend continues, in a few years the labour market will experience a noticeable shortage of labour.

According to the data on the average number of employees under an employment or service relationship in the municipality of Haskovo (Table 5), the largest number of employees are in the following sectors:

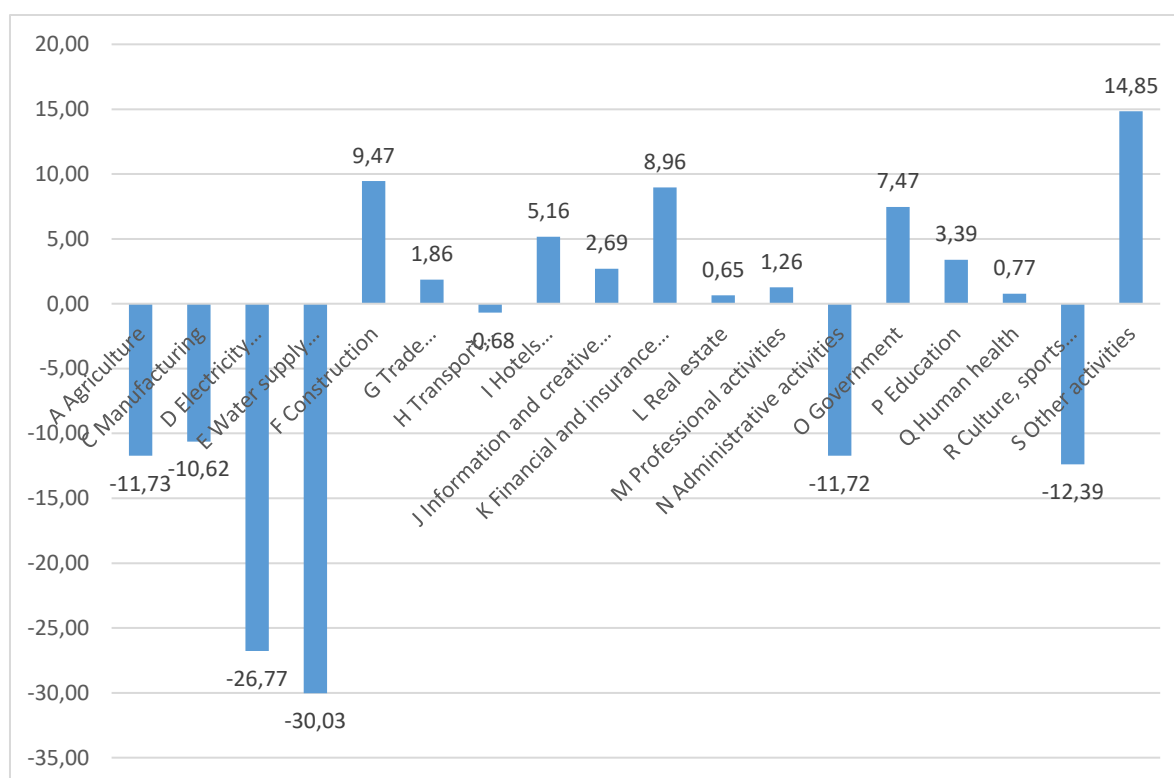
- C “Manufacturing Industry”
- G “Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles”
- R “Education”

- Q “Human Health and Social Work”
- O “Government”

In total, the number of people employed under an employment or service relationship in the municipality during the 3-year period under review is decreasing – in 2021, 23,023 people were employed, in 2022 – 22,706, and in 2023 – 22,370. The decrease in 2023 compared to 2021 is 653 people, or 2.84%.

The largest decline is in sector E “Water supply; sewerage services, waste management and remediation” – 30.03% fewer people were employed in the sector in 2023 compared to 2021, followed by sector D “Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels” – 26.77%, and sector R “Culture, sports and entertainment” – 12.39 %.

**Figure 12. Dynamics of the number of employees under an employment or service relationship for the period 2021 – 2023.**



Source: NSI

The number of employed people also decreased by a double-digit percentage in sectors A “Agriculture, forestry and fishing”, N “Administrative and support activities” and C “Manufacturing industry”.

When reviewing the ratio between the dynamics of the number of enterprises by economic sector in the period 2021–2023 and the dynamics of the number of

employees, it is observed that in sectors A "Agriculture, forestry and fishing" and D "Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels", the increase in the number of enterprises is accompanied by a decrease in the total number of employees. The economic sectors in which a negative growth in the number of employees is observed, while at the same time the number of enterprises is decreasing in 2021–2023, are sector C "Manufacturing industry", N "Administrative and support activities" and R "Culture, sports and entertainment".

One possible reason for the increase in the number of enterprises and the decrease in the number of employees in the sector is that the newly created enterprises are mostly small companies or sole traders who do not hire additional staff, but rely solely on the owner or a very limited number of employees. At the same time, traditional larger enterprises that provide more employment may shrink, restructure or even close.

One of the possible factors for reduced employment is economic stagnation or decline, unfavourable business environment, including high taxes, administrative complications, lack of investment and difficult access to financing. Companies encounter financial difficulties, lose customers, cannot adapt to the market environment and eventually close.

Another factor in reducing the number of employees may be the increasing automation and digitalization of production and services. More and more new companies are relying on technologies that replace human labour, using computerized systems, machines, and software solutions, which allows them to work with fewer staff. **The digital economy is also changing the requirements for the workforce**, allowing remote work, outsourcing and the use of external contractors, which may lead to a decrease in traditional full-time positions.

Demographically, population decline and the migration of working-age people also have an impact. If young and qualified personnel leave the region in search of work in larger cities or abroad, even if new companies are established, they may face difficulties in finding workers. This is further exacerbated by the aging population and the declining number of active working-age people. In addition, more and more people may prefer flexible forms of work, such as freelance work, part-time or project-based employment, instead of traditional long-term employment under an employment contract. This in turn leads to changes in the structure of the labour market, reducing the officially reported number of employed people.

It is also possible that part of the economy is moving into the 'grey' sector, where people work but are not registered as employed. In such a case, the statistics do not fully reflect real employment.

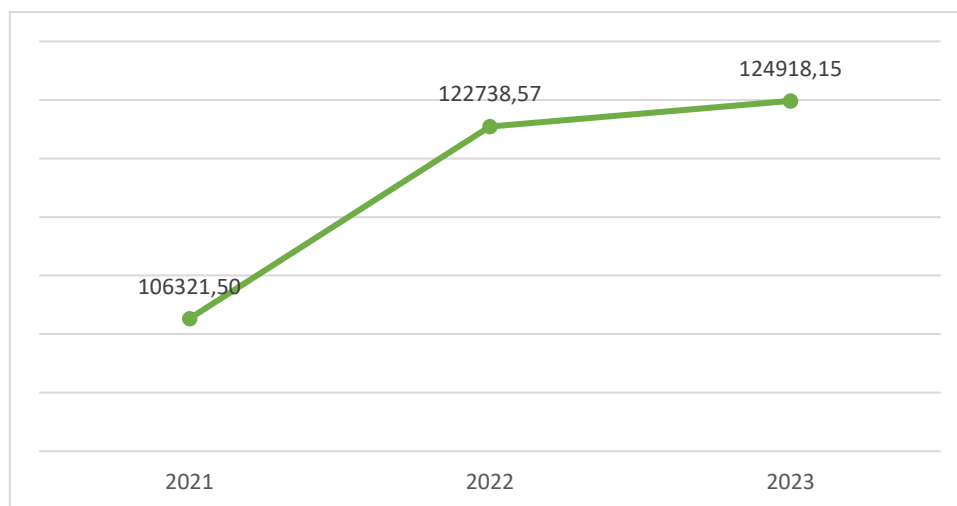
Structural changes in the economy can further worsen the situation. If a region relies heavily on a single sector, such as manufacturing or agriculture, the decline of that sector can lead to both mass closures and job losses, with no alternative industries to compensate for the decline. The lack of diversification makes the economy more vulnerable to crises.

External factors such as global economic problems, changes in trade policies, reduced exports or technological transformations that make some business models unprofitable may also have an additional impact. All these processes together create a vicious circle in which the reduction of enterprises leads to layoffs and unemployment, and the contraction of employment further limits economic activity, which in turn aggravates the situation for other businesses. Thus, the region may fall into a situation of prolonged economic decline if adequate stabilization and development measures are not taken.

Labor productivity is an economic indicator that measures the efficiency of human labour use in a given region. It is directly related to the number of enterprises and the number of employees, as it reflects how efficiently the labour force is used in the region. If the number of enterprises is decreasing, but income and labour productivity are increasing, this may be a sign of economic restructuring, automation, or a shift to higher value-added sectors. Conversely, if the number of employees is decreasing at the same time as the number of enterprises, without significant growth in productivity, this may indicate an economic contraction or difficulties for business.

The assessment of labour productivity in the municipality of Haskovo was made through the ratio of income from activity by economic sectors to the average number of employees by year for the period 2021–2023. For the indicated period, labour productivity in the municipality increased by over 17% (Fig. 13). When carrying out this assessment, data for all economic sectors were considered.

**Figure 13. Labor productivity (BGN) in Haskovo Municipality, 2021–2023**

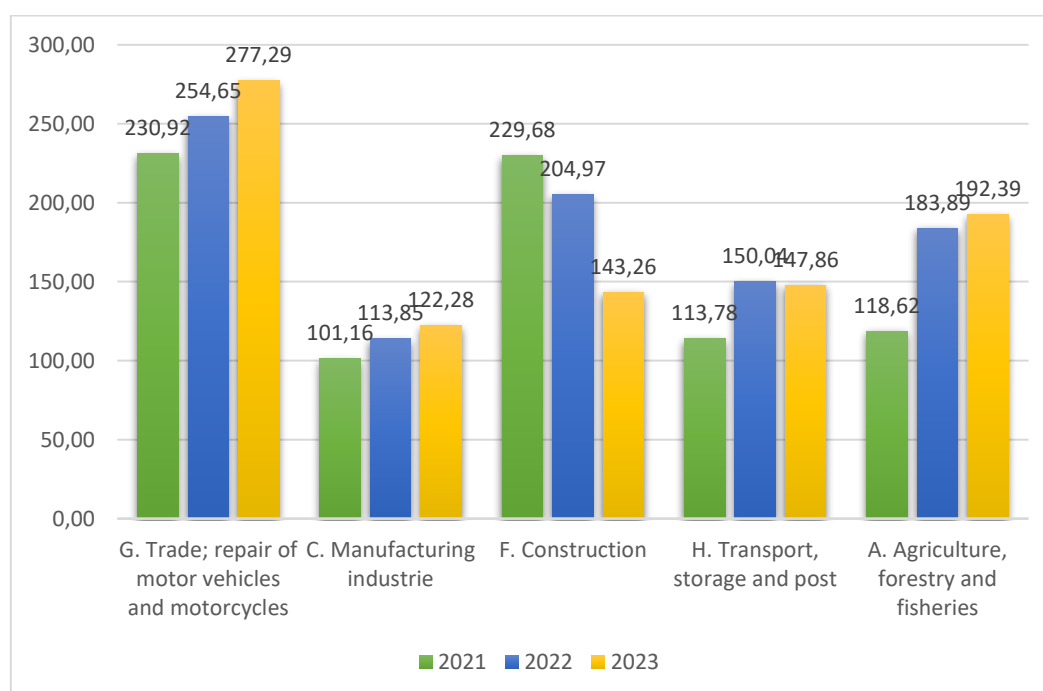


*Source: NSI*

When analysing employment data, it is striking that two economic sectors with predominantly state funding are among the top five sectors with the largest average number of employees under an employment or service relationship – these are the education and public administration sectors.

An assessment of labour productivity on the territory of Haskovo Municipality by economic sectors was made by examining data on the leading economic sectors according to revenue from activity – in first place is sector G “Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles”, followed by sectors C “Manufacturing industry”, F “Construction”, H “Transport, storage and post” and A “Agriculture, forestry and fisheries”. It is evident that, in addition to revenue from operations, the trade sector is also leading in labour productivity.

**Figure 14. Labor productivity in the leading sectors in terms of operating income in Haskovo Municipality for the period 2021–2023 (thousand BGN)**



Source: NSI

During the three-year period under review, labour productivity increased in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, in the transport sector in 2023 there was a slight decline compared to 2022, and there was a pronounced decrease in labour productivity in the construction sector.

Unemployment is one of the main indicators of the state of the labour market and economic activity. It reflects the number of economically active persons who are looking for but cannot find work, and its level is influenced by a number of factors, including economic growth, investment, demographic trends and structural changes in the economy.

According to data from the Labour Bureau Directorate – Haskovo, the number of registered unemployed persons in Haskovo Municipality for the last 3 years (2022–2024) is 1,715 people as of 31.12.2022, 1,779 people as of 31.12.2023 and 1,654 people as of 31.12.2024.

The average data for the period 2022–2024 shows that 700 people (40.79% of the unemployed) who were registered with the Labour Bureau maintained their registration from 1 to 4 months, 443 people (25.23%) – from 6 to 12 months, 253 people (14.74%) – up to 1 month and 220 people (12.82%) – from 4 to 6 months. 110 people (6.41 %) of the registered persons were unable to find a job for over 1 year.

**Table 14** *Duration of registration with the Labour Office of unemployed persons*

Duration	2022	2023	2024	Average for the period
up to 1 month	303	242	214	<b>253</b>
from 1 to 4 months	750	704	645	<b>700</b>
from 4 to 6 months	226	238	197	<b>220</b>
from 6 to 12 months	374	437	489	<b>433</b>
from 1 to 2 years	49	133	76	<b>86</b>
over 2 years	13	25	33	<b>24</b>

*Source: Labour Bureau Directorate - Haskovo*

The most sought-after professions on the labour market in the Haskovo municipality region are divided into the following sectors:

- Tourism, hospitality and restaurant industry – chefs, sous chefs, waiters, bartenders, auxiliary kitchen staff, receptionists and hotel administrators
- Transport – the demand for drivers remains high and with a tendency towards increased need – a total of 125 positions are announced for 2024, 102 of which are for trucks and heavy goods vehicles, a significant part of which are for international transport
- Trade – sales consultants, cashiers, suppliers
- Mechanical engineering and metalworking – welders, locksmiths, auto mechanics, machine operators, mechanics, machinists, assemblers and fitters. A large part of these positions remain permanently unoccupied due to the lack of sufficiently qualified unemployed people of working age. The largest employer in the region is Yazaki-Bulgaria Ltd. – part of the Japanese leader in the production of automotive components Yazaki Corporation. The company continues to recruit personnel for the positions of machine operator; cable installer; mechanic, machine tools; engineers; technician, production equipment. Another large employer in the same industry – Ariete BG Ltd. is also experiencing difficulties in recruiting personnel for operators, manipulators, and mechanics of machine tools.
- Tailoring industry – demand is decreasing compared to the years before 2020. There are only 26 vacancies advertised, with the reasons mainly rooted in the growing share of online commerce

According to information from the LBD – Haskovo, **shortage professions in the municipality for which there is a shortage of labour:**

- Engineers and technical staff
- Drivers, international transport
- Auto mechanics
- Welders, locksmiths, mechanics, fitters
- Electricians in industry and construction, electricians
- Machine operators in manufacturing

The services that the Labour Office offers to job seekers are:

- Information about job vacancies
- Information on programmes and measures to preserve and promote employment
- Information and employment mediation
- Psychological support
- Career guidance
- Inclusion in adult education
- Inclusion in a procedure for validation of professional knowledge, skills, and competencies
- Motivating active behaviour on the labour market and inclusion in employment and training programmes and measures
- Tuition scholarship, transportation, and accommodation for the duration of the study.

According to national law, the incentive measures for unemployed persons include: measures to encourage entrepreneurship of unemployed persons who have started an independent business activity (as a micro-enterprise under Art. 3 and Art. 4 of the SME Act); provision of funds to unemployed persons with an approved business project who have not used rights under Art. 47 para. 1 and Art. 49 para. 1 of the SME Act in the previous 3 years, for starting an independent business activity (as a micro-enterprise under Art. 3 and Art. 4 of the SME Act) – up to BGN 5,000 (Art. 49 para. 1 of the SME Act); provision of additional monthly amounts for reimbursement of paid social security contributions by a self-insured person, in minimum amounts, for a period of up to 12 months from the start of the activity (Art. 49 para. 4 of the SME Act); promoting the territorial mobility of unemployed persons (Art. 42, para. 2 of the LNA).

Employers can benefit from the following services:

- Information for job seekers;



- Information on programmes and measures to preserve and promote employment;
- Employment mediation;
- Inclusion in employment and training programmes and measures;
- Preferences for maintaining and/or increasing employment;
- Internship and/or apprenticeship preferences;
- Preferences to encourage territorial mobility of employed persons.

According to a national law, the incentive measures and programmes for employers are:

- Funds for subsidized employment (under Art. 36, para. 1 of the Employment Law):  
(for the different types of groups of persons in an unequal position on the labour market):
  - unemployed young people up to the age of 29
  - unemployed people with permanent disabilities
  - long-term unemployed persons
  - of unemployed persons – parents (adoptive parents), with children up to 4 years of age
  - unemployed persons over 55 years of age
  - unemployed people with primary or lower education
  - unemployed persons without professional qualifications
  - unemployed persons who have served a sentence of 'imprisonment'
- According to Art. 36, para. 2 of the LNA: Funds for training of employed persons, for acquiring Professional Qualification or for acquiring Key Competencies – for unemployed persons employed under the terms and conditions of Art. 36, para. 1 of the LNA;
- Under Art. 36 para. 3 of the Employment Act: Funds for a responsible person (mentor) provided by the employer for the employees under Art. 36 para. 1 (for a period of 3 months);
- For internships for unemployed persons based on professional qualifications acquired by them in the last 24 months (in a profession or part of a profession required for the position held) – Article 46 of the Employment Act;
- Training and employment measures - work-based training for unemployed persons:
  - under the dual system of training – under Article 46a of the Education and Training Act;
  - creation of 'green jobs' – under Article 55e of the Law on Green Jobs;

- For employers of micro-enterprises – for the first 5 open jobs, to which they hire unemployed persons referred by the territorial divisions of the Employment Agency (Art. 50 of the Employment Act);
- For the employment of unemployed persons who have been continuously registered for at least 6 months or unemployed persons up to the age of 24 or unemployed persons over 50 years of age, or unemployed persons with primary and lower education;
- For the employment of unemployed persons with permanent disabilities;
- For apprenticeship of unemployed persons (Art. 55d of the Employment Act) – for each new job where an unemployed person with primary or lower education and no qualifications is hired on a full-time or part-time basis for an apprenticeship, referred by a division of the Employment Agency, the employer is provided with amounts for remuneration for the time during which the person was employed, but for no more than 12 months;
- National Programme for Employment and Training of People with Permanent Disabilities – the aim is to increase the employability and ensure employment of unemployed people with permanent disabilities registered with the Labor Bureau Directorate or people of working age who have successfully completed a course of treatment for drug addiction, as a prerequisite for overcoming their social isolation and for their full integration into society;
- National Retirement Assistance Programme – support for the transition from unemployment to work and retirement of unemployed persons over 60 years of age who are looking for work and are registered in territorial divisions of the Employment Agency;
- National Programme for Training and Employment of Long-Term Unemployed Persons – the aim is to provide employment to registered long-term unemployed persons. Increasing the employability of persons by including them in training courses leading to increased knowledge and qualifications;
- National Career Start Programme – the main goal of the programme is to provide opportunities for unemployed young people graduated from higher education to gain work experience, to facilitate the transition between education and employment;
- National Programme “Melpomene” – the programme targets unemployed individuals with specific experience, professional qualifications, knowledge, and skills in the field of theatre arts;
- National Programme “Activation of Inactive Persons” – Activation and inclusion in the labour market of inactive, including discouraged persons and young people up to 29 years of age (inclusive), who do not work, do not study and are not registered in territorial divisions of the Employment Agency, and of unemployed persons, through individual and group application of tools and services to attract and motivate them to register in a territorial division of the Employment Agency and encourage their inclusion in training, return to the education system and/or employment. Motivation of unemployed persons of

working age, subject to monthly social assistance, for labour engagement, through organization of their work under municipal programmes for community service;

- Regional employment programmes – Regional employment programmes are an important employment policy tool through which local organizations and communities can solve problems in local labour markets by creating new jobs for unemployed people from vulnerable groups.

Some of these programmes can be a valuable tool in planning measures for high-tech development of Haskovo Municipality. They provide a framework for activating the local labour market, training, and qualification of personnel, as well as social integration of different groups of the population, which is of key importance for the successful implementation of high-tech initiatives such as MedTechHub and telemedicine.

By using these programmes, the municipality can focus its efforts on:

- Training of personnel: Training and employment programmes can provide a qualified workforce to meet the needs of the high-tech sector.
- Social engagement: The inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, long-term unemployed and inactive people, will contribute to the social sustainability of the project and reduce social tension.
- Economic stimulation: By creating new jobs and attracting investments, the programmes can support the economic development of the region.
- Modernization of the labour market: Programmes can help adapt the local labour market to the requirements of high-tech industries by encouraging retraining and innovation.
- Retention of young people: Through the programme “Career Start”, the municipality can retain young people in the region by providing them with prospects for professional development in innovative sectors.

Incorporating these programmes into the strategic planning for high-tech development will allow the municipality of Haskovo to use the available resources and create a sustainable basis for economic growth, social integration, and technological progress.

According to the list of job vacancies announced in Labour Bureau Directorate – Haskovo, current at the time of the development of this report, employers are looking for 12 specialists with higher education in the field of humanitarian education, engineering and technical sciences and medicine, 52 vacancies are for workers with secondary education, including 10 machine operators (sewing), 6 gas lift operators and 5 production equipment technicians, and 65 jobs can be filled by workers with primary education, including 20 machine operators and 30 cable installers (Appendix 1).

The analysis of unemployment provides important information on the dynamics of the labour market, but for a more complete picture it is necessary to consider the level of

wages. The development of employment and the level of unemployment are often linked to the movement of wages, which reflect both economic conditions and the balance between the demand and supply of labour. High unemployment can limit wage growth, while the shortage of qualified personnel in certain sectors can lead to an increase in wages in them. Therefore, the examination of wage data will complement the analysis of the labour market by showing trends in income and purchasing power in the region.

According to NSI data, the average gross annual salary of those employed under an employment or service relationship in Haskovo Municipality is comparable to that of Haskovo District, but significantly lower than the national average.

**Table 15** *Share of the average gross annual salary in Haskovo Municipality*

	<b>2021</b>		<b>2022</b>		<b>2023</b>	
	(thousand BGN)	(thousand Euro)	(thousand BGN)	(thousand Euro)	(thousand BGN)	(thousand Euro)
Republic of Bulgaria	18,733	9,578	21,242	10,861	24,485	12,519
Haskovo District	12,906	6,599	14,308	7,316	16,344	8,357
Municipality of Haskovo	13,452	6,878	14,599	7,464	16,934	8,658
<b>Share by country</b>	<b>71.8%</b>		<b>68.7%</b>		<b>69.2%</b>	
<b>Share relative to Haskovo district</b>	<b>104%</b>		<b>102%</b>		<b>104%</b>	

*Source: NSI*

The highest gross salaries in the municipality in 2023 are received in the energy sector, followed by the two sectors with predominant state funding, which are also among the top five sectors with the largest average number of employees under an employment or service relationship – these are the sectors of public administration and education. In fourth place in 2023, gross annual salaries remain in healthcare, and in fifth – in the financial and insurance sector.

**Table 16** *Average gross annual salary of employees under an employment or service relationship (BGN)*

<b>Economic activities</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,452</b>	<b>14,599</b>	<b>16,934</b>
A. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	10,391	11,713	14,319
B. Mining industry	..	..	..
C. Manufacturing industry	13,360	14 102	16,371
D. Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels	25,791	27,163	34,318
E. Water supply; sewerage services, waste management and remediation	11,008	12,276	14,056
F. Construction	10,518	11,305	11,941
G. Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	9,645	11,380	13,023
H. Transport, storage and mail	8,756	9,704	11,750
I. Hotel and restaurant industry	8,528	9,321	9,810
J. Creation and dissemination of information and creative products; telecommunications	18,299	21,188	22,526
K. Financial and insurance activities	17,191	19,576	23,578
L. Real estate transactions	12,940	14,038	16,003
M. Professional activities and scientific research	9,287	11,499	12,332
N. Administrative and support activities	9,074	9,186	11,212
O. Government	21 201	22,998	26 103
P. Education	20,014	21,817	26,579
<b>Q. Human health and social work</b>	<b>21,884</b>	<b>22,143</b>	<b>24,287</b>
R. Culture, sports and entertainment	10,618	12,904	15,178
S. Other activities	9 225	10,862	11,845

*Source: NSI*

The healthcare sector in Haskovo remains one of the highest-paying industries, with an average gross salary of 24,287 BGN in 2023. However, compared to the education and public administration sectors, its wage growth has been relatively slower. This trend suggests that while healthcare remains a stable and essential sector, it may face challenges in attracting and retaining skilled professionals, especially if salaries do not keep pace with rising living costs or competing job opportunities in other well-funded public sectors. Given the increasing demand for medical services due to demographic shifts such as an aging population, future salary growth in healthcare could become a critical factor in workforce sustainability. If wages stagnate while workload pressures rise, there is a risk of workforce shortages, prompting the need for policy interventions to ensure competitive pay, improved working conditions, and incentives for healthcare professionals to remain in the region. Investments in digital health, telemedicine, and specialized training programmes could also help modernize the sector and attract more qualified professionals, ensuring long-term resilience.

The lowest salaries in the Haskovo municipality are those employed in the hotel and restaurant industry, and for the period from 2021 to 2023, the average gross annual salary increased by only 1,282 BGN.

It is noteworthy that the average gross annual salary of an employee in sector C "Manufacturing Industry", which ranks second in the municipality by the "income from activity" indicator, over the three observed years is similar to the average gross salary for the municipality as a whole and is approximately two times lower than the average salaries by year in the best-paid sector - energy.

The average gross annual salary in the leading sector by the indicator "revenue from activity" - sector G "Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles", in 2021 was significantly lower than the average for the municipality, but in the next two years there was a significant growth and in 2023 it was 35% higher compared to 2021.

In the fields of transportation, construction and agriculture, average salaries in 2021-2023 are growing, but remain below the average for the municipality.

The fact that the average gross annual salary is higher in sectors with predominant state funding, such as education and public administration, compared to the manufacturing and service sectors, indicates that the state policy in setting public sector salaries is aimed at ensuring stable and relatively high salaries to attract and retain qualified personnel. The relatively lower salaries in the manufacturing and trade sectors are likely to be a sign of challenges facing businesses, such as competitive pressure, high input costs and relatively lower profit margins. This may indicate that despite the contribution of these sectors to the economy, salaries remain constrained by market conditions and company profitability.

If public sector wages continue to grow faster than private sector wages, this could lead to a diversion of labour to government and education and limit the real economy's access to qualified specialists, which in turn could have long-term consequences for economic growth and competitiveness in Haskovo Municipality. To maintain economic balance, it is important to have an even development of wages in the public and private sectors.

The private sector can improve its competitiveness and productivity by investing in innovation, modernizing production technologies, and implementing new business models. Companies that automate and digitize their processes can reduce costs, increase efficiency, and increase labour productivity. Improving the skills of the workforce through training programmes, implementing good management practices, and creating incentives to increase individual productivity also plays an important role.

Another opportunity to increase competitiveness is the optimization of business processes, including better production planning and resource management, which allows for reducing losses and increasing the quality of products and services. Expanding markets, seeking new customers, and entering international trade networks can also contribute to higher sustainability and growth of companies.



Collaboration between companies, universities and research institutions can stimulate the development of new technologies and high-value-added products. In addition, the private sector can improve its performance through better human resource management, flexible forms of employment and the creation of a favourable work environment that retains qualified personnel and increases their motivation.

In the long term, the sustainable competitiveness of the private sector depends on its ability to adapt to changing economic conditions, invest in development, offer innovative products and services, and find a balance between work efficiency and employee satisfaction.

## **9. CHALLENGES OF THE LABOUR MARKET IN HASKOVO**

The labour market in Haskovo Municipality faces significant challenges related to the shortage of qualified personnel and the mismatch between the skills sought and those offered.

Most employers in the municipality assess the state of the labour market as bad, and only a small part find it satisfactory. All are experiencing serious difficulties in finding qualified employees, with sectors requiring specific expertise being most severely affected. The main reasons for this, according to the surveyed employers, are insufficient qualification of local staff, lack of desire for work among unemployed persons in the municipality and a limited number of people willing to work in certain sectors.

The most sought-after personnel in Haskovo Municipality are technical personnel, general workers, and executive personnel, but finding them is a challenge, especially when the positions require specific skills.

The most used method of finding new employees is through personal contacts – friends, acquaintances, and family, while more formal methods, such as the Labor Office and advertisements on specialized websites and other media, are used less frequently. This shows to some extent a distrust in official mediation mechanisms and a dependence on informal networks, which limits the possibilities for structured and effective communication between employers and potential workers.

According to employers, the most valued qualities in employees are the level of qualification in a specific field, professional experience, and motivation to work. In this context, a significant part of them is of the opinion that educational programmes should be modernized and dual training should be more widely used, so that young graduates can more easily adapt to the real needs of the market. In addition, most employers believe that the current workforce needs additional training or qualification courses, especially in the field of technical skills and working with machines and equipment. In some sectors, such training is already organized in-house or with the help of external trainers, but in construction, the prevailing opinion is that additional training is not necessary.



The fact that some employers regularly organize training for additional qualification of their employees, while others, especially in the construction sector, do not consider this necessary, reflects the different views and needs depending on the nature of the work and the specifics of the industry. In some sectors, such as manufacturing, services and technology, training is key to improving qualifications, improving efficiency, and adapting to new technologies and working methods. Employers in these areas probably realize that investment in staff development not only increases productivity, but also contributes to the competitiveness of the company in the long term.

On the other hand, in construction, this approach may not be perceived as necessary, as many of the activities rely on traditional skills and routine processes that are acquired through practice rather than formal training. In this sector, it is common for workers to learn craft skills directly in the field, learning on the job, and some employers may feel that additional training courses do not have a significant impact on their output. However, construction is also a sector in which innovation, workplace safety and effective process management play an increasingly important role. The introduction of new technologies, construction materials and methods requires additional skills and knowledge, as well as increased awareness of safety requirements.

Despite the difficulties in finding qualified workers, very few employers have turned to hiring foreigners from outside the EU. Those that have done so believe that foreign workers demonstrate higher quality of work and greater loyalty compared to local staff. This raises the question of whether opening up the market to international labour could be one of the options for addressing the shortage of personnel in some sectors.

Interestingly, despite serious difficulties in finding staff, most employers believe that working conditions in their sector, including remuneration and development opportunities, are competitive compared to other areas of the economy. This suggests a gap between employers' perceptions and the reality of the market, as despite these conditions there is a lack of sufficiently motivated and qualified job candidates. Changes in workers' attitudes play a significant role. Younger generations often have different expectations for career development, work-life balance, and working conditions. If employers do not offer modern opportunities for growth and competitive pay, people are more likely to choose alternatives such as self-employment or working abroad. Social factors also influence work motivation. In certain cases, part of the working population relies on social benefits, informal employment, or income from the shadow economy, which reduces interest in formal employment.

Another important issue is the regulatory framework that regulates the labour market. All employers are convinced that labour legislation does not meet current challenges and needs improvement. This could include greater flexibility in the conditions for hiring workers, easing administrative burdens, or promoting training and retraining programmes.

Given the existing problems, almost all employers expect the labour market situation to worsen in the coming years, and only a small proportion believe that there will be no significant change. This pessimistic expectation is indicative of the deepening difficulties in securing qualified personnel and the lack of sustainable solutions that could help improve the situation.

Addressing the problems caused by the shortage of qualified personnel, the mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the requirements of the business, as well as regulatory obstacles that make it difficult to adapt to the dynamic changes in the economy, requires focused efforts in several key aspects – reforming educational programmes and integrating more practical training, incentives for additional qualification and retraining of the workforce, as well as legislative changes that would facilitate the process of hiring and retaining employees for employers. If adequate measures are not taken, the danger of deepening the crisis on the labour market in the region is very real, which could limit economic growth and the competitiveness of local businesses.

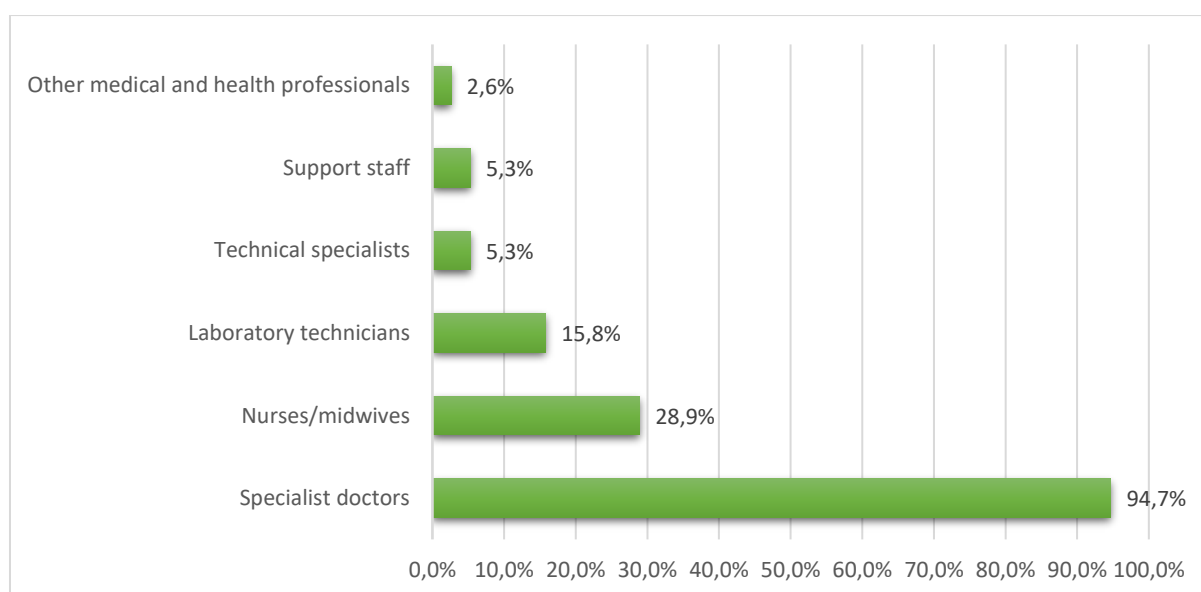
The above-mentioned challenges and trends in the labour market in Haskovo Municipality are reflected to varying degrees in all economic sectors. One of the key sectors in which the problems with the lack of specialists are particularly noticeable is healthcare. The shortage of medical personnel, combined with the growing needs of the population, creates difficulties for the effective functioning of the healthcare system in the region. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the state of the labour market in the healthcare sector in order to outline the specific challenges and opportunities for overcoming them.

To assess the skills shortage and mismatch of the local workforce in the healthcare sector, a survey was conducted among those working in this field in the Haskovo municipality. Of the respondents, 86.8% work in a hospital, and 13.2% in a diagnostic and consulting center. 47.4% of the respondents are doctors, 21.1% are nurses or midwives, 13.2% are senior management personnel – directors, managers, heads of clinics, heads of departments, etc., 13.2% are administrative personnel, and 5.3% are pharmacists.

The analysis of the survey results shows several key aspects of the current state of the sector, the difficulties, and opportunities for improvement.

More than half of respondents – 68.4% – believe that their healthcare facility has enough staff to meet the needs of their patients. However, a significant percentage – 31.6% – indicate a shortage, which most often affects specialist doctors, nurses/midwives, and laboratory technicians. The most frequently lacking are specialist doctors, followed by nurses and midwives, which also highlights the problems in the nursing sector. The lack of laboratory technicians is also reported as an important problem by some respondents. Less significant, but still present in the responses, are the lack of technical specialists and support staff, as well as other medical and health professionals.

**Figure 15. Most frequently missing specialists in healthcare facilities**



*Source: Questionnaires*

Among the main reasons for staffing problems, the prevailing opinion is the insufficient number of qualified personnel on the local market. This reason is particularly strongly supported by senior management, who unanimously point to the lack of personnel as the main problem. Low remuneration is also a serious obstacle to attracting new specialists, with more than a third of respondents citing this factor. Low remuneration as a reason for staff shortages is indicated by both nurses/midwives and doctors. Other reasons also cited are the outflow of personnel to other sectors or countries and difficult working conditions.

Of the skills lacking in healthcare facilities, specific medical specialties are most often cited, followed by skills for working with modern equipment and technologies, which are deficient according to half of the respondents. IT competencies and skills for crisis and emergency management are cited as significant problems by a small proportion of survey participants.

In terms of recruitment, the biggest problem remains the lack of qualified candidates, especially doctors with sought-after specialties. This shows that efforts to attract healthcare professionals are seriously hampered by the lack of suitable local staff. Lack of practical experience and knowledge of working with modern medical and IT equipment are also cited as problems, although to a lesser extent.

The issue of opportunities for improving the qualifications of healthcare personnel in Haskovo Municipality is of great importance, with the survey results showing what is offered and what needs exist in this regard. The majority – 68.4%, of respondents believe that their healthcare facilities offer opportunities for additional training. However, a significant percentage of participants – 31.6%, indicate that such opportunities are not provided. For those who give a positive answer, the most

common areas in which training is offered include specialization in various medical specialties in the field of healthcare, additional qualifications in this field, language courses, computer literacy and training in various areas of medical technology.

Regarding the need for additional training, 57.9% of respondents expressed a need to improve their skills to perform their duties more effectively, which indicates that despite the availability of certain training opportunities, staff feel a lack of appropriate qualifications to deal with new challenges and technologies in healthcare. For those who indicated a need for training, the most frequently mentioned skills were working with new technologies and specific medical equipment, foreign language training (especially English), learning new methodologies in medicine, and training related to the modernization of existing equipment.

The results of the survey clearly show the attitudes of healthcare workers in Haskovo Municipality regarding their workload and the reasons for it. The workload was assessed as normal by 78.9% of the respondents, 13.2% of the participants considered their workload to be high, and of those who gave this answer, 80% of them were doctors, and 20% were senior management personnel. 7.9% of the respondents defined their workload as very high, and among them the share was equally distributed between senior management personnel, doctors, and nurses/midwives.

The lack of sufficient medical staff was cited as a major factor in the high workload, highlighting the shortage of medical professionals. The lack of support staff was also a factor cited by 36.4% of respondents.

The level of stress at work is high for a significant proportion of respondents. The most frequently cited solutions to reduce stress levels are hiring additional staff, providing additional training, including in "soft" skills, providing better financial conditions for work, and improving working conditions. The greatest need is for additional staff, with 71.1% of respondents indicating that hiring new staff would ease their workload and reduce stress. This reflects the serious shortage of staff, especially doctors and nurses, which was mentioned as a major problem in the answers to the previous questions.

New technologies and digital tools are widely used in healthcare facilities in Haskovo Municipality, with 92.1% of respondents confirming that their healthcare facility uses them. This is a positive sign of modernization and progress in the sector, which uses modern technologies to improve the workflow and quality of healthcare services, but the assessment of staff training ranges from excellent – for 50% of those who answered the question, to unsatisfactory for 15.8%. A large proportion of respondents – 84% – believe that they need additional qualifications to work with new equipment, technologies, and digital tools.

According to the survey participants, measures to improve the skills and competencies of healthcare workers include acquiring new knowledge, conducting practical courses to acquire and improve new skills, and conducting training to work with innovative technologies and equipment.

### Key takeaways regarding the identified challenges of the labour market in Haskovo

- **Shortage of qualified personnel:** Employers in Haskovo Municipality face significant challenges in finding qualified employees, particularly in sectors that require specific expertise like healthcare, manufacturing, and technical roles. This shortage hinders the region's economic development and puts pressure on businesses to maintain productivity.
- **Mismatch of skills:** There is a clear disconnection between the skills that local workers possess and the qualifications needed by employers, especially in specialized fields such as healthcare, engineering, and technology. This skills gap creates a barrier to growth, particularly in high-demand sectors like MedTech and healthcare.
- **(Increasing) demand for healthcare workers:** The healthcare sector is especially impacted by a shortage of medical professionals, including specialist doctors, nurses, midwives, and laboratory technicians. As the population ages and healthcare needs increase, this shortage presents a significant challenge to providing quality care and achieving health sector goals in the region.
- **Limited use of formal recruitment channels:** Many employers rely heavily on informal recruitment methods such as personal networks, friends, and family, instead of using formal channels like the Labour Office or job advertisements. This limits the ability to reach a broader, more diverse talent pool and reduces the effectiveness of structured recruitment.
- **Lack of training and upskilling programmes:** There is a widespread lack of investment in continuous skills development and retraining programmes across various sectors, including healthcare. This is especially evident in the MedTech sector, where technological advancements demand a workforce with up-to-date technical skills, hindering the region's ability to attract investments and maintain competitive industries.
- **Workforce demotivation:** Local workers, particularly younger generations, are seeking better career development opportunities, work-life balance, and competitive pay. When employers do not offer these modern opportunities for growth, the region faces a brain drain as young professionals opt for self-employment or move abroad in search of better prospects.
- **Workforce workload and stress:** High workloads and stress levels, especially among doctors and senior management, are attributed to insufficient staffing. Solutions like hiring more staff, improving working conditions, and offering targeted training are essential to address these challenges.
- **Regulatory barriers:** Outdated labour laws and rigid hiring practices make it difficult for employers to quickly adapt to changing market needs. These regulatory hurdles, such as limited flexibility in hiring or difficulties with retraining and employee retention, are contributing factors to the workforce shortage and limit the potential for growth, particularly in sectors like healthcare and MedTech.
- **Staff shortages and retention challenges:** Haskovo's healthcare sector faces a shortage of qualified personnel, worsened by low wages, difficult working conditions,

and the outflow of staff to other sectors or countries. This hampers recruitment, especially for specialized roles.

- Training needs for modern/ digital skills: Despite existing training opportunities, many healthcare workers lack the necessary skills to work with new technologies, medical equipment, and IT systems, highlighting a need for further qualifications, particularly in digital tools and modern methodologies.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

The economic development of the municipality of Haskovo during the period 2021–2023 is characterized by sustainable growth in business revenues, increased labour productivity and a stable labour market, but also by challenges related to an aging population, a shortage of qualified labour and a relatively low level of foreign investment. The municipality is the largest in terms of population in Haskovo District and plays a leading role in the regional economy, concentrating a significant share of enterprises, employment, and business activity.

The economic structure of the municipality is diverse, with the main industries including manufacturing, mechanical engineering, furniture and food industries, winemaking, and the garment industry. In addition, the trade, construction, transport, and agriculture sectors also have a significant impact on economic activity. In the period 2021–2023, there is a trend of increasing the number of enterprises, especially in agriculture and energy, but this is accompanied by a decrease in the average number of employees in one enterprise, which may be a sign of a more fragmented economic structure with small and medium-sized companies.

An important positive aspect is the growth in revenues from the activities of non-financial enterprises, which reach almost 2.8 billion leva in 2023, which is a sure sign of the stability of the local economy. At the same time, although labour productivity increases by over 17% over the three-year period, the total number of employed or service-related persons in the municipality decreases by 2.84%, which points to restructuring of the economy, automation of individual industries or a lack of a sufficient number of qualified personnel.

The labour market shows some contradictory trends. On the one hand, unemployment is increasing from 4.7% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2023, which may reflect the declining economic activity in some sectors. On the other hand, in 2024, unemployment is already starting to decrease, which is a positive signal of recovery. However, serious structural problems remain - the aging population and the shortage of qualified personnel in key sectors such as mechanical engineering, transport and construction are making it difficult for employers and creating imbalances in the labour market. The lack of sufficient personnel with engineering and technical skills also creates serious challenges for the industrial development of the municipality.



Demographic factors have a significant impact on the economy of Haskovo Municipality. The population is decreasing and aging, with the demographic replacement rate showing a worsening trend – fewer young people of working age compared to the growing share of older people. This process in the long term may lead to a shrinking workforce and lower economic activity if measures are not taken to retain young people and attract new qualified personnel.

Investment activity data show that the cost of acquiring fixed assets remains low – 2.2 thousand BGN per capita compared to 5.2 thousand BGN on average for the country. This is a signal that local business needs stronger incentives for investment and modernization. At the same time, foreign direct investment (FDI) in the municipality retains the leading share in the district – 52.8% in 2023, but remains far below the average levels for the country (1.97 thousand EUR per capita compared to 5.1 thousand EUR national average). The lack of large foreign investors limits the potential for high-tech production and better-paid jobs.

Salaries in the region show steady growth – from BGN 13,452 average gross annual salary per employee in 2021 to BGN 16,934 in 2023, but remain below the national average. The highest salaries in the municipality are traditionally received in energy, public administration and healthcare, while low-paid sectors remain the hotel, restaurant and some manufacturing sectors. It is noted that incomes in the processing industry – one of the leading sectors in terms of operating income – are not significantly higher than the average for the municipality, which potentially limits the interest of workers in this sector.

For the analysed period, there was an increase compared to the previous year in most of the main economic indicators. A decrease was observed in foreign direct investment and the number of employees.

Haskovo Municipality has a solid economic foundation, but targeted measures are needed to address key challenges. An active policy is needed to attract investments, especially in areas with high added value, as well as to promote innovation and modernization of existing enterprises. Improving the investment climate and increasing spending on fixed assets can increase the competitiveness of the region.

In view of demographic trends, more serious attention is needed to policies to attract population and increase the birth rate to prevent future labour shortages. A possible solution is to encourage migration to Haskovo, including by improving the urban environment, infrastructure, and job opportunities.

To improve the standard of living in the region, it is important to work towards higher wages in key sectors, especially manufacturing and processing, which generate significant revenues but do not offer sufficiently competitive wages.

Another top priority should be to address the problem of the lack of qualified personnel. Employers in the Haskovo municipality are facing serious challenges, due to the shortage of qualified labour, demographic processes, and economic characteristics of



the region. The emigration of young and educated personnel to larger cities and abroad further complicates the recruitment of personnel, especially in the lower-skilled sectors. At the same time, rising labour costs are not always accompanied by sufficiently high productivity, which creates additional pressure on business.

A major problem remains the gap between the working conditions offered and the expectations of workers. Low wages, harsh conditions and precarious employment lead many people to seek alternatives in other regions or abroad. In addition, the local education system and training opportunities do not always meet the needs of businesses, especially in industrial and technological sectors. This creates a significant imbalance in the labour market, where employers have difficulty finding specialists with specific skills.

Solving these problems requires a comprehensive approach. Improving working conditions, better pay and investing in qualifications and training are important. If businesses offer competitive conditions and educational institutions adapt curricula to economic realities, the possibility of balancing the labour market will be greater. Investment in knowledge and skills is becoming a key factor for the economic stability of the municipality, and over time, even more conservative industries will realize the need for training and qualification of their personnel.

The main challenges facing the health sector in Haskovo Municipality also include a shortage of qualified personnel, especially specialist doctors and nurses, as well as the need for additional training and improvement of working conditions.

The lack of sufficient specialist doctors, nurses and support staff leads to significant difficulties in the work of medical institutions in the municipality. The main problems here are related to the relatively heavy workload and high levels of stress due to insufficient staff and excessive administrative workload. To retain and attract specialists in the health sector, it is necessary to improve working conditions, increase the number of medical staff and provide opportunities for additional training, including in the direction of increasing digital and technological competencies. By implementing policies for upgrading qualifications, using online training, and creating incentives for young specialists to stay in the municipality, the staff deficit in the sector can be reduced.

In the long term, the improvement of the investment climate and the adaptation of the labour market to modern economic realities will be of key importance for the sustainable economic development of Haskovo. For this purpose, it will be necessary to activate business, local authorities, and the education sector in the development of measures for professional qualification and retraining. Stimulating investments in technological industries, improving wages in promising sectors and promoting the relationship between educational institutions and enterprises can create conditions for reducing the mismatch between the skills sought and offered on the labour market.

If these challenges are not addressed in a timely manner, the situation on the labour market may deteriorate. Through targeted reforms and investments in human capital,

Haskovo Municipality can establish itself as an attractive place for economic development, offering sufficient specialists and stable professional prospects for workers. The sustainable development of the municipality depends on its ability to balance demographic changes, attract investments and provide a qualified workforce for its leading industries.



## ***Appendix 1.***

### **Job vacancies announced by the LaboUr Bureau Directorate - Haskovo as of February 18, 2025.**

<b>Num ber</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Specialty/experience</b>
30	Installer, cables	Mainly	
20	Machine operator	Primary, Secondary	
10	Sewing machine operator	Average	Professional experience
6	Gas station attendant	Average	Testimony
5	Technician, Production Equipment	Average	
4	Crane operator	Mainly	
4	Laboratory assistant	Average	
2	General worker	Mainly	
2	Assembler	Secondary, primary	
2	Worker, tire and rim replacement and repair	Secondary, primary	
2	Mixer	Secondary, primary	
2	Truck driver (international transport)	Average	Category CE
2	Specialist, technical department	Average	English language, computer literacy
2	Cashier	Average	
2	Grocery store sales consultant	Average	
2	Electrician, construction	Medium special	Electrical engineering, experience
2	Nurse	Higher	Nurse
2	Engineer, manufacturing processes	Higher	English language, computer literacy
1	Hotel waiter/maid	Mainly	
1	Fireman	Mainly	Legal capacity
1	Manicurist	Primary, Secondary	
1	Manicurist	Average	Professional experience
1	Waiter	Average	
1	Technician	Average	Technical

1	Office assistant	Average	Computer literacy
1	Operator, steam and water heating facilities	Average	Electrical engineering and energy
1	Driver, light truck	Average	Category B
1	Machine operator, pasta	Average	
1	Assistant educator – 4 hours	Average	
1	Salesperson, general merchandise (goods dealer)	Average	In category, 2 years of experience
1	Credit product sales consultant	Average	
1	Autopatrol	Average	Category B
1	Reporter, production	Average	Dairy industry technology
1	Receptionist, hotel	Average	Computer skills
1	Fashion designer	Average	
1	Hairdresser	Average	
1	Electrician	Average	Legal capacity, experience
1	Machine operator, metalworking machines	Secondary technical	Electronics, electrical engineering or other technical specialties
1	Technical specialist (vehicle inspections)	Higher, secondary	Motor transport equipment
1	English teacher	Higher	Philology
1	Operational accountant	Higher	Accounting and control
1	Mechanical engineer, quality controller	Higher	Mechanical Engineering
1	Mechanical engineer, designer	Higher	Mechanical Engineering
1	Doctor – 7 hours	Higher	Medicine
1	Teacher, foreign language	Higher	Pedagogy, philology
1	Engineer, thermal power engineering	Higher	Energy, technical sciences
1	Cleaner/hygienist – 2 hours		