



Varna Region, Bulgaria

Varna - Sea Garden

General overview

The Varna Region is situated in the north east of Bulgaria. Its capital city, Varna, the largest Black Sea port in Bulgaria, is an attractive touristic, cultural and educational centre.

Covering 3820 km², the Region has 12 municipalities with a total population of 472 654 (6.4% of the Bulgarian population). The average population density is 124/km² (1).

In 2016, the average life expectancy in the Varna Region was 75.3 years (72 years for men and 79 for women). Infant mortality in 2016 was 4.9‰ while the average for the country was 6.5‰. In the same year, the crude death rate for the Region was 12.9‰ with four leading causes: cardiovascular disease, neoplasms, and diseases of the digestive and respiratory systems (2,3).

In 2017, Varna received the European Youth Forum award, “European Youth Capital”, on the strength of the city’s five universities (Varna Medical University, the Technical University of Varna, Varna University of Economics, Varna Naval Academy and Varna Free University) with more than 40 000 students from more than 40 countries, six research institutes with highly qualified academic staff, and an extensive educational infrastructure with more than 100 schools.

In Bulgaria, health care is funded through social health insurance, although the main sources of health funding are out-of-pocket payments (47.7 % in 2015), followed by social health insurance (41.9 % in 2015) (4). The Ministry of Health of Bulgaria is responsible for health-policy decisions at the national level, which affect the Varna Region as much as the other 27 regions in the country.

A specific feature of the Bulgarian political structure is that the regions are not represented by governments at their level (elected by the population of the regions) and are not included in health-policy decision-making. Political and financial autonomy and responsibility for health and health care are delegated to the municipal level.

The health budget of the Varna municipality for 2016 was approximately 6% of the total municipal budget. The Varna municipality has an extensive health-care network, including hospitals for active treatment, centres for specialized and primary out-patient care, nurseries, and institutions for care of the elderly and adults and children with physical or mental disabilities. It is one of the few municipalities that provide health care in schools.

There are currently 19 hospitals in the Varna Region, 8 of which are multiprofile and 11 specialized. In addition, there are more than 600 centres for specialized outpatient care, 7 hospices and almost 400 primary-care practices.

Public health activities at the local level are focused mainly on child health, and funding is provided for: child care in nurseries (ages 1–3 years); child nutrition (food provided in kindergartens and schools, and through kitchens where lunches for children can be bought at a reduced price); health care in kindergartens and schools; the childhood obesity programme; screening for and the prevention of spinal deformities in children; screening for hearing problems in children; and tooth sealants for children aged 6–7 years.

Other public health programmes/activities at the local level relate to: health-care mediation (provision of services to ethnic minorities, especially the Roma population); the disinfection and deratization of public places; the provision of support for couples with fertility problems; and the prevention of health problems in women.



Strengths

The strengths of the Varna Region include its:

- ✓ sound economy (it has one of the strongest economies of all regions in Bulgaria);
- ✓ well-developed, well-equipped health-care establishments, the staff of which are highly professional;
- ✓ natural resources, including the Black Sea, an enormous number of mineral-water and thermal-water sources, and specific spa-related resources, such as mud (used in treatment therapies);
- ✓ pleasant moderate climate in the long summer season (June–September);
- ✓ active participation and involvement in the public health initiatives of Varna Medical University and several university hospitals.



Aspirations

The Region is aiming to:

- ✓ develop a regional health strategy for reducing social/health inequalities, based on Health in All Policies (HiAP) (5,6);
- ✓ strengthen health-system integration in the region;
- ✓ integrate health and social services.

Challenges

These include:

- ✓ hidden, but existing, health inequities among ethnic, urban, rural, and socially disadvantaged groups;
- ✓ the lack of a political process at the regional level;
- ✓ the current strong sectoral approach towards health.

Potential areas of collaboration

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

- ✓ benchmarking towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (7) at the regional level;
- ✓ the development and improvement of local health-information systems;
- ✓ the development of innovative programmes on the promotion of public health, financed at the local level.

Working groups

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

- ✓ the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (7)/ equity;
- ✓ the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action;
- ✓ participatory approaches/resilience.

People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

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