

MUNICIPALITY OF SFÂNTU GHEORGHE

BASIC INFORMATION

According to the national census of 2011, the number of town inhabitants was 56,006. Based on these statistics, 76.9% were of Hungarian ethnicity, while 21.9% were Romanians; but nearly 10% of the population of Sfântu Gheorghe was of the Roma minority (the census questionnaire permits respondents to choose only one ethnic category, and usually Roma people declare they belong to the majority population of the settlement). Due to the relatively high proportion of the Roma minority, one of the areas of interest is Roma migration - Roma usually speak the Hungarian language.

The town is the capital of Covasna County, the smallest county by population in the central region of Romania.

Secondary education in Sfântu Gheorghe is provided in both the Romanian and Hungarian language. There is a special needs institution for young people with physical and mental disabilities; there are three technical colleges (one of them providing education in the Romanian language) offering training in mechanical engineering, information technology, the textile industry, the building industry, transportation, health care, business and tourism; and there is an art college and four secondary schools (one of them teaching in Romanian).

Tertiary education is represented by a local department of the Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) with its main location in Cluj (it runs two BA courses: management and business administration) and by Sapientia University (BA in agronomy). However, BBU is currently experiencing economic headwinds, and course in business administration may end, after a similar BA programme started in the Hungarian language in Cluj.

Sfantu Gheorghe is the biggest town of the region in population size. But in terms of economic development, other municipalities are of greater importance: Miercurea Ciuc (around 39,000 inhabitants) and Odorheiu Secuiesc (approximately 34,000 inhabitants). There are also a few smaller towns with a lower economic development level: Târgu Secuiesc (with approximately 18,000 inhabitants) and Gheorgheni (population around 18,000).

Compared to other communities, a higher density of businesses can be found in Brasov, Miercurea Ciuc and Odorheiu Secuiesc than in Sfântu Gheorghe (40 versus 30 companies per 1000 inhabitants).

The municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe is located in the smallest county in the central region of Romania. The area shows a strong rural character, fitting the category of semi-peripheral counties such as Bistrița-Năsăud, Sălaj, Mureș, Harghita, etc. Covasna County consists of a low proportion of municipalities/settlements: there are five towns, two of them relatively significant, and 122 villages. Of the five towns, only Sfântu Gheorghe has a population above 50,000 inhabitants. The other towns have under 20,000 inhabitants, two of them under 10,000 (Baraolt and Întorsura Buzăului). With agriculture, so long the mainstay of the local economy, it stands to reason that the county structure has a decidedly rural character. Regardless of the ongoing debate, the literature's evidence on the strong correlation between urbanization and a region's level of development cannot be overlooked, and the municipality needs to acknowledge that a high level of economic development cannot be achieved without significant urbanisation.

Despite Sfântu Gheorghe's provincial character, *it is the municipality with the highest proportion of expenditure on cultural activities relative to total expenditure of all the municipalities in Romania*. Although this category of expenditure is secondary from the perspective of economic development, the strategic approaches of the municipality and local initiatives could make investment in this area attractive.

Proximity to a big urban centre (Brasov), which attracts resources in areas important to Sfântu Gheorghe (tourism, culture, the knowledge-based economy) represents a potential source of competitive advantage. While Sfântu Gheorghe does not compete directly with Brasov - a much bigger city - it could take advantage of being close to an important economic centre.

Sfântu Gheorghe holds a relatively good position at the regional level, regarding accessibility and connectivity. Ongoing projects in the process of planning and implementation, will further improve these two elements; for example, the construction of an airport close to the municipality of Brasov. However, its location near Brasov may serve as both an advantage (employment of its labour force) and a disadvantage (residents of Sfântu Gheorghe may choose Brasov to spend their free time on shopping and using services there). In certain sectors, Sfântu Gheorghe cannot compete with Brasov; but means of improving specific services, particularly those related to leisure and tertiary education need to be considered in the mid- to long-term.

