

Pazardzhik district

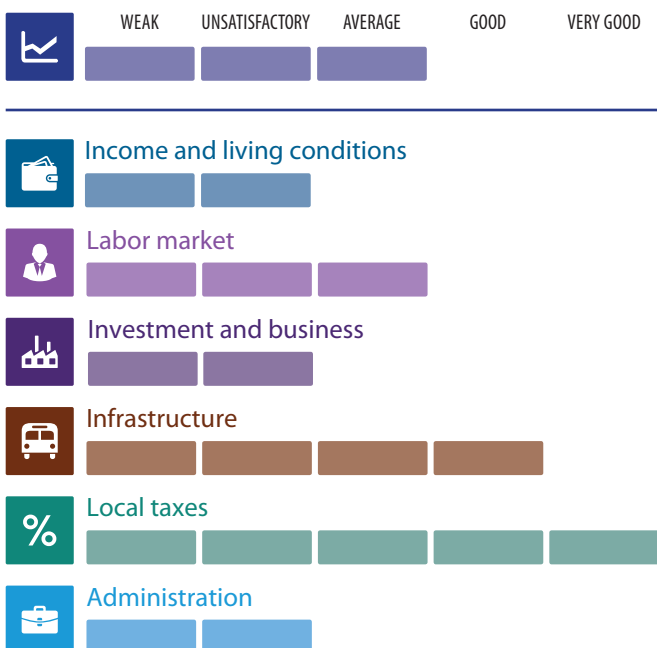
| | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| ▶ Population (2021) | 229,814 |
| ▶ Territory (sq. km) | 4,457 |
| ▶ Number of settlements | 118 |
| ▶ Share of urban population (%) | 61.4 |



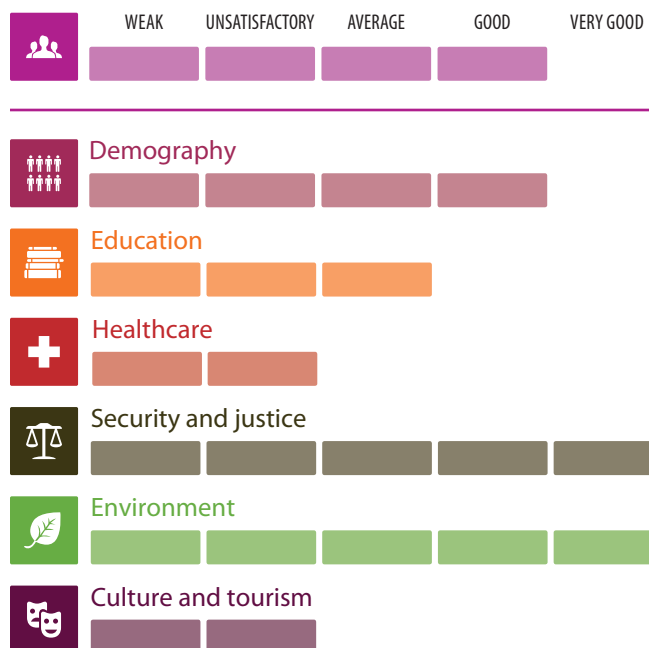
GDP, salaries and pensions in Pazardzhik district have continued to grow, but remain relatively low. 2022 marked a considerable rise of the employment rate, while the unemployment rate remained steady. The educational profile of the workforce remains a challenge for the local labor market. Investment and business activity in the district is not particularly brisk. The quality of the road surface remains relatively high. The average level of local taxes is relatively low. The AIP active transparency rating of the local administration has registered a slight decrease and remains relatively low.

Age dependency ratios in the district continue to worsen, but are still more favorable than the national average. Students' results remain relatively low. Access to GPs in the district is better than in the country on average, but there is an obvious shortage of specialist physicians. The workloads of the local criminal judges are comparable to the national average, but the delivery of justice is significantly faster. Pazardzhik district retains its place as the country's leader in installed RES capacities. Cultural life in the Pazardzhik region is among the less active ones in the country.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living conditions

In 2021, GDP, salaries and pensions in Pazardzhik district continued to grow, though remaining relatively low. GDP per capita reached 11,700 BGN, compared to 20,200 BGN in the country on average. The gross annual salary of persons employed in a labor or service contract was 14,800 BGN, compared to 18,700 BGN in the country. Pensions are growing at a rate above the national average and their average monthly amount has reached 488 BGN, compared to 537 BGN in the country.

The Gini coefficient for income inequality is close to but below the national average for 2022. The share of people living below the national poverty line has shrunk but remains above the national average – 27.0% in the district, versus 22.9% nationally.

Labor market

The share of the working-age population in the district continues to decline and is moving away from the national average – in 2022 it was 57.8% in the district, compared to 58.5% in the country. The economic activity rate has risen to 72.7%, against 73.6% in the country. This increase has been accompanied by a significant rise in employment and a stabilization of the unemployment rate, with both rates being less favorable than the respective national averages. The employment rate has reached 68.7%, compared to 70.4% nationally, and that of unemployment remains 7.3%, versus the national average of 5.2%.

The educational profile of the workforce remains a persistent challenge facing the local labor market. In 2022, the share of people with a university degree continued to decrease and came down to 14.5%, against an average of 29.8% in the country, while the share of those with primary or lower education shrank to 25.6%, versus 16.0% nationally.

The demographic replacement ratio of people aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64 is 57.2%, compared to the national average of 65.7%. This means that for every 100 people who are about to leave the workforce in the next few years, there are 57 young people who will join the labor market.

Investment and business

Investment and business activity in Pazardzhik district was not particularly brisk in 2021, although there have been some noticeable positive developments. The number of enterprises remained low – 44 per 1,000 people, against the national average of 60 per 1,000 people. There was an increase in foreign and domestic investment to levels above those in most districts. FTA acquisition expenditures have reached 2,400 BGN/person, and FDI – 1,800 EUR/person. Production value in Pazardzhik district has continued to rise, reaching 20,400 BGN/person.

As regards utilization of EU funding, Pazardzhik district has also recorded some increase, though the amounts remain relatively

low. By 30 June 2023, payments made in the district to beneficiaries of EU operational programs amounted to 1,904 BGN/person, against 2,836 BGN/person nationwide. Within the district, the municipality with the highest rate of utilization was that of Panagyurishte, and the one with the lowest – the municipality of Rakitovo.

Relative research and development expenditure is increasing.

Infrastructure

In 2022, the density of railroad network in Pazardzhik district again remained higher than the national average. The road network density and the share of highways and first-class roads were lower than the respective national average figures but road surface quality remained relatively high. The share of road surface in good condition increased to 57.7%, compared to 41.1% in the country.

In 2019, the district population's access to the internet retained its level of 85.1% of the households and remained below the national average of 87.3%.

Local taxes

The average level of local taxes in the municipalities of Pazardzhik district remained relatively low in 2023. Of the five monitored taxes, the only exception was the tax rate on non-gratuitous acquisition of property, which was higher, albeit slightly, than the national average. Considerably lower than the average ones in the country were the local tax rates on non-residential immovable property for legal entities, on motor vehicles, taxi transportation and retail trade.

Within the district, the municipalities of Sarnitsa and Bratsigovo levy the lowest local taxes, while the highest rates are in the municipalities of Pazardzhik, Velingrad and Lesichovo.

Administration

In 2023, the local authorities' self-assessments on the development of e-government and on the provision of one-stop shop services retained in general their levels and remained below the respective national averages. The performance of the district's e-government was rated at an average of 3.22 p. out of 4 p., versus the national average of 3.35 p., and the provision of one-stop shop services – at 3.1 p. out of 4 p., compared to 3.4 p. nationally. In 2023, the AIP Active transparency ratings of the local administration dropped slightly to 65.2%, against the national average of 70.3%, and remained relatively low.

The share of own revenues in the total revenues of the municipalities in the district remains at a level of 22.6%, versus 29.0% in the country for 2022, while the coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues has decreased to 66.2%, against 84.2% nationally.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

The natural population growth rate of -10.5% is close to but below the national average of -9.7% . At the same time, Pazardzhik manages to attract new residents and the net migration rate is positive at 4.2% .

Age dependency ratios remain more favorable than in the country on average. In 2022, the ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 reached 167.9%, compared to 165.9% in the country, and of people aged 65+ to those aged 15–64 it was 38.5%, against 37.7% nationally.

The proportion of urban population in Pazardzhik district remains relatively low – 61.4%, versus the national average of 73.6%, while the average density of the population living in urban settlements is relatively high – 1,867 persons/sq. km, against 1,404 persons/sq. km on average nationwide.

Education

Pazardzhik is among the districts with the worst performance in the indicators for the education category. The net rate of enrolment in 5th–7th grade has increased but still remains relatively low – 88.9% in the district, against the national average of 90.7%. School year repeaters make up an excessively high percentage – 2.0%, versus 1.2% nationally. The misalignment between vocational education and the profile of the local economy is worsening – there is a shortage of manufacturing-related courses at the expense of a disproportionate number of trainees in ICT courses.

The average results of the district's students in 2023 again remain relatively low. The average score in the NEA in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 29.5 p., versus 35.3 p. in the country. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 3.54 in the district, compared to 3.93 nationally, and the share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) – 25.3%, versus the average of 17.9% nationwide.

There are no universities or branches of universities in the district of Pazardzhik.

Healthcare

Life expectancy in the district continues to decline, but remains close to the national average. However, the infant mortality rate is increasing and is relatively high. The district's health insurance coverage rate increased in 2022 and came close to the national average.

Access to GPs in the district is better than the national average but there is a definite shortage of specialist physicians. The availability of beds in the local general hospitals is traditionally higher than average and in 2022 there were 7.3 beds per 1,000 people, versus the national average of 5.9 beds per 1,000 people. Hospitalization figures are extremely high – 302 per 1,000 people, versus 235 per 1,000 people nationally.

Security and justice

Pazardzhik is among the districts with the best performance in the category assessing security and justice in 2022.

The workloads of the local criminal judges are comparable to the national average of 10.1 cases per judge per month, but delivery of justice is considerably speedier. The share of criminal cases closed within 3 months is 95%, against the national average of 89%, and pending cases amount to 7%, compared to the national average of 12%.

The number of crimes in the district remains relatively small, while their detection rate is above the country's average. In 2022, the registered crimes against the person and property amounted to 7.7 per 1,000 people, versus 11.6 per 1,000 people nationwide. The detection rate was 52%, against 49% nationally.

Environment

Pazardzhik's performance in this category places the district almost at the top (second only to Smolyan). The main reason for this is that Pazardzhik continues to be the leader in terms of installed RES capacities – 5.51 kW per person, compared to 0.85 kW per person in the country.

Although in districts with a relatively high share of rural population connectivity to public sewerage systems is usually limited, in Pazardzhik district such access in 2021 was close to the country's average – 71.1%, compared to 74.8% nationally. However, connectivity to wastewater treatment plants lags significantly behind, with 43.7%, versus 66.8% nationally.

The amount of household waste generated in the district is above average. The share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling has registered a considerable increase, reaching 72% in the district, versus 74% nationally.

Pazardzhik is the district with the second highest share of forest areas, where it is outranked only by Smolyan – 54% in the district, versus 33% countrywide. The share of degraded land, for its part, is close to the national average – 0.4%.

Culture and tourism

In 2022, cultural life in Pazardzhik district again remained among the least active in the country. Cinema visits went up to reach 169 per 1,000 people, but their number remains considerably lower than the national average of 590 per 1,000 people. The trend in visits to libraries is similar. Visits to local museums increased at a rate faster than the national average and reached 705 per 1,000 people, compared to 619 per 1,000 people nationwide.

The number of beds in accommodation facilities has reached 36 per 1,000 people, versus 55 per 1,000 people in the country, and the number of overnight stays – 3,732 per 1,000 people, versus 3,739 per 1,000 people in the country. The share of people employed in the culture, sport and entertainment sector as a share of all employed people in the district is half the average figure.

Key indicators for the district of Pazardzhik

| Economic Development Indicators | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | National average |
|--|--------|--------|------|------------------|
| Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices) | 10,995 | 11,653 | n.a. | 20,212 |
| Average gross annual salary of people employed in a labor or service contract (BGN) | 13,090 | 14,842 | n.a. | 18,733 |
| Share of people living below the national poverty line (%) | 32.9 | 30.6 | 27.0 | 22.9 |
| Share of the working-age population (%) | 59.5 | 59.5 | 57.8 | 58.5 |
| Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%) | 67.4 | 64.9 | 68.7 | 70.4 |
| Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%) | 9.7 | 7.3 | 7.3 | 5.2 |
| Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%) | 24.2 | 27.2 | 25.6 | 16.0 |
| Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%) | 15.6 | 15.2 | 14.5 | 29.8 |
| Production value per capita (BGN) | 17,006 | 20,367 | n.a. | 31,242 |
| Expenditures on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN) | 1,911 | 2,372 | n.a. | 3,097 |
| Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises per capita (cumulative) (EUR) | 1,710 | 1,807 | n.a. | 4,098 |
| Share of households with broadband internet access (%) | 81.7 | 85.1 | 85.1 | 87.3 |
| Share of road surfaces in good condition (%) | 49.6 | 54.7 | 57.7 | 41.1 |
| Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%) | 66.6 | 68.8 | 66.2 | 84.2 |
| Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)* | 70.4 | 65.3 | 65.2 | 70.3 |

| Social Development Indicators | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | National average |
|---|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Natural population growth rate (‰) | n.a. | n.a. | -10.5 | -9.7 |
| Net migration rate (‰) | n.a. | n.a. | 4.2 | 4.2 |
| Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature** | 4.03 | 3.80 | 3.54 | 3.93 |
| Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)** | 30.9 | 30.1 | 29.5 | 35.3 |
| Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%) | 79.8 | 78.4 | 88.9 | 90.7 |
| Average life expectancy (years)*** | 73.8 | 72.4 | 71.8 | 71.9 |
| Share of people with health insurance (%) | 85.1 | 85.8 | 93.0 | 93.5 |
| Population per one GP (persons) | 1,669 | 1,671 | 1,598 | 1,678 |
| Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population | 7.3 | 7.2 | 7.7 | 11.6 |
| Share of pending criminal cases (%) | 10.4 | 7.0 | 6.6 | 11.6 |
| Share of the population living in settlements with a public sewerage network (%) | 72.6 | 71.1 | n.a. | 74.8 |
| Generated household waste per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year) | 358 | 480 | n.a. | 445 |
| Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%) | 5.9 | 72.3 | n.a. | 74.0 |
| Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population) | 43 | 121 | 169 | 590 |
| Overnight stays in accommodation facilities (number/1,000 population) | 1,546 | 2,032 | 3,732 | 3,739 |

* The 2022 data are included in the 2023 study. The same is valid for the previous years.

** The data refer to the 2022-23 academic year, while the State matriculation exams took place in 2023. The same is valid for the previous years.

*** Data are for three-year periods and are updated annually.