

Blagoevgrad District

▶ Population (2016)	311,576
▶ Area (sq. km)	6,449.5
▶ Number of settlements	281
▶ Share of urban population (%)	59.6



Overview

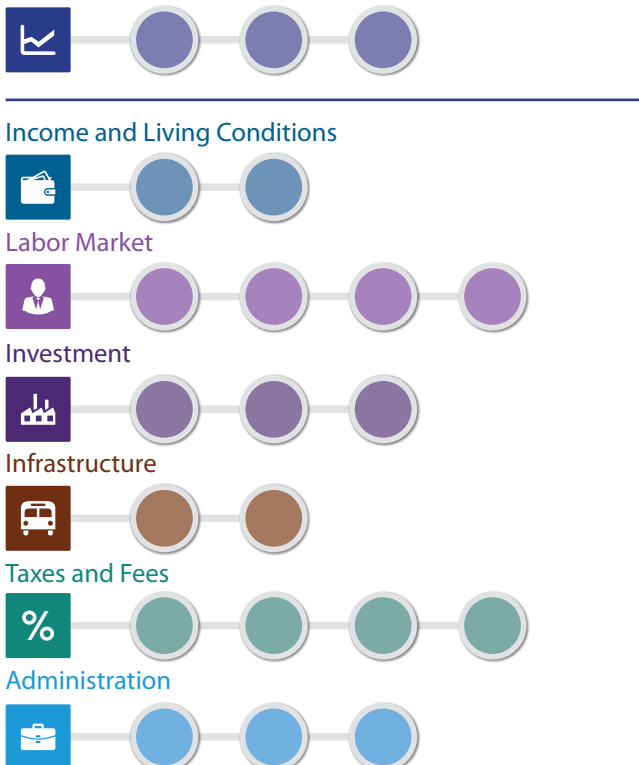
The welfare of the residents in the district has improved, though it remained below the national average figures. Employment also continued its upward movement, whereas unemployment decreased though the reason for this was the population's lower economic activity, not the opening of new job opportunities. There was still a noticeable tendency for the number of people with university degrees among the local population of working age to go down despite the presence of some of the country's leading universities. Investment has been on the increase in recent years though it has stayed below the national average relative to the population. The

level of local taxes and fees in the district's municipalities is relatively low.

Blagoevgrad is still among the districts with a relatively favorable age structure. Education is relatively good. There is a shortage of medical specialists and the number of hospital beds is somewhat small, which explains the relatively small number of patients in local hospitals. Blagoevgrad is still underperforming in administration of justice – in terms of the speediness of solving cases, despite the low crime rate. The environment is in a relatively good condition but cultural life cannot boast any particular intensity.

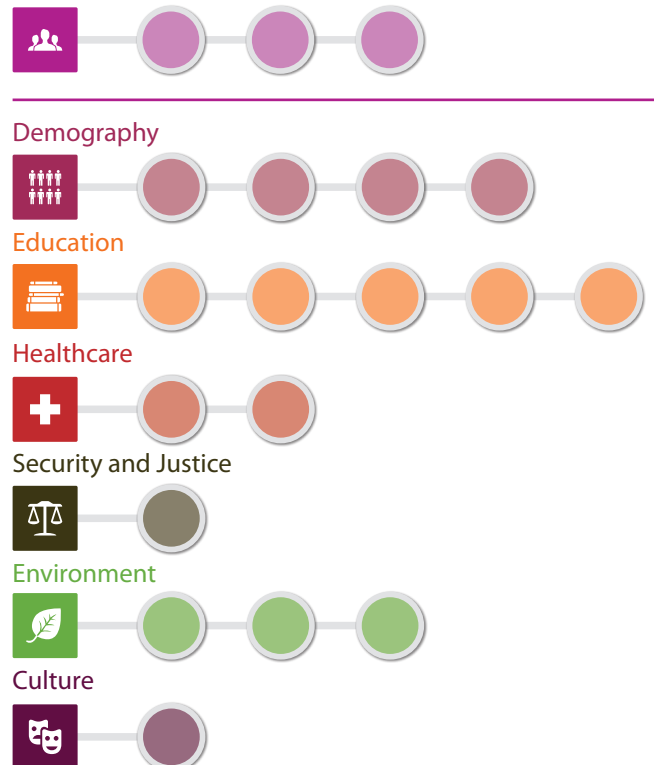
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Weak Unsatisfactory Average Good Very good



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Weak Unsatisfactory Average Good Very good



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ●●●

Income and Living Conditions ●●

Despite the increase of both GDP and income per capita in 2015, figures are still considerably below the national average. GDP per capita grew by 4% compared to 2014 to reach 7,889 BGN, while the national average rose to 12,339 BGN (7%). The average annual gross salary in the district increased by 5% to reach 7,181 BGN but remained lower by about 1/3 than the national average.

The tendency towards salary growth in 2015 influenced the growth in household income that year. In 2016, however, income per household member remained below the national average but registered a slight drop to 4,461 BGN annually. The main reason was the shrinkage in incomes from salaries, which implies a possible decrease in salaries in 2016. The share of the population living below the country's poverty line increased in 2015 to values above the national average.

Labor Market ●●●●

In 2016, for a second successive year, the employment rate in the district went up to stay above the national average, while unemployment dropped but was still slightly above average for the country: 8.3% vs. 7.7% respectively. These positive tendencies, however, were due totally to the decreasing population as a whole, and the workforce in particular, which lost 4,600 people. The number of people in employment (aged 15–64) dropped by 1,100, whereas unemployment decreased because some of the unemployed in 2015 became economically inactive. The number of people aged 25–64 with university degrees in the district was slowly going down in recent years and in 2016 it was already considerably below the national average level: 19.4% vs. 27.7% nationally. In view of the fact that some of the leading universities in the country are located in the district, this tendency shows that after getting their degrees most young people do not stay in it. The working age population's educational structure is positively affected by the rapidly dropping share of the population with primary and lower education, though it is still higher than the national average.

Investment ●●●

In the last few years the number of non-financial enterprises in Blagoevgrad district grew considerably faster than the average in the country (to 62 per 1,000 people vs. 55 per 1,000 nationally). Yet, investment continued to be below the country average in 2015. FTA expenditure per capita grew to reach 1,799 BGN/person – still far below the national average of 2,937 BGN/person. Foreign investment remained almost two times lower than the national average: 1,433 euro/person vs. 3,250 euro/person nationally. Still, during the last years the district registered some inflow of

foreign investment – its growth rate being above the national average.

Operational program funds utilization also registered some increase. As of 30th June 2017 the sums paid to beneficiaries from the district amounted to 317 m BGN or 1,017 BGN/person (vs. the national average of 1,344 BGN/person). Most funds were utilized in the Bansko municipality: 2,283 BGN/person, whereas the least were utilized by the municipality of Belitsa (248 BGN/person).

Infrastructure ●●

Blagoevgrad is one of the districts in the country with the lowest density of road and railway infrastructure. The share of highways and first class roads was also lower: 13.7% vs. the national average of 18.6% in 2015, but it has been on the increase with the successive stages in the construction of the “Struma” highway coming to completion. Road surface quality deteriorated in 2016 but the share of roads in good condition was still above the national average.

In terms of Internet access and usage, figures show that Blagoevgrad continues to be among the districts close to the national average, as the indicators grow in tune with the general tendencies.

% Taxes and Fees ●●●●

Local taxes and fees in the municipalities of the district of Blagoevgrad are relatively low. All monitored taxes had average levels in Blagoevgrad municipalities lower than the national average rates. Municipalities in the district have maintained rates that are somewhat higher only in the case of waste collection fees for non-residential property of legal entities.

Among the district's municipalities only Blagoevgrad and Bansko kept higher rates for local taxes and fees in 2017. Most municipalities did not raise their taxes and fees in 2017 compared with 2016.

Administration ●●●

The cadastral map coverage of the district's territory did not increase in 2016, remaining at 13.8% vs. the national average of 22.5%. The municipalities of Satovcha, Simitli, Strumyani, Hadjidimovo and Yakoruda do not have a single hectare of cadastral coverage yet – a hindrance to investment in these municipalities.

In 2017, the ratings for the development of electronic government and the availability of one-stop shop administrative services were comparable with the national average. The same goes for the transparency of local authorities.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ●●●

Demography ●●●●

In 2016 the district of Blagoevgrad still ranked among the districts with relatively favorable age dependency ratios, though the population went on ageing, following nation-wide tendencies. The natural growth rate was also almost twice the national average, though being negative: -3.5‰ vs. -6.0‰ nationally. Migration from the district was still high as well: the net migration rate in 2016 was -4.5% .

The district is still relatively poorly urbanized. 59.6% of the population lives in towns compared to 73.3% nationwide.

Education ●●●●●

In 2016 Blagoevgrad was one of the districts with the highest enrolment in 5th–8th grade, and the rate retained this upward tendency to reach 84.1% while the national average was 78.2%. The indicators on repeaters and school dropouts were almost twice more favorable than the national average as well. In 2016 the percentage of repeaters in the district went down to 0.6% vs. the national average of 1.1%, while that of dropouts went down to 1.5% vs. the national average of 2.9% in 2015. The grades at matriculation exams of students from Blagoevgrad went up in 2017, though still below the national average: 4.12 vs. 4.22 nationally.

In 2016 the number of university students fell in the district for the third successive year – similar to national tendencies.

Healthcare ●●

In 2016 the share of health-insured people in the district remained close to the national average: 88.8% in the district vs. 88.1% nationally. The availability of general practices was also similar to the rest of the country (1,659 people per GP vs. 1,611 people in the country), but in the district there was still a relatively high shortage of specialists. In 2016, a specialist in the district was responsible for 770 people vs. 530 nationally. Nevertheless, an improvement has been noticeable in this indicator during the last few years: in 2013, a specialist was responsible for over 850 people.

In 2016 Blagoevgrad was also among the districts with the lowest number of available beds in general hospitals relative to the population (3.3 per 1,000 people compared to 5.1 per 1,000 people nationally), as well as the smallest number of hospitalizations (180 per 1,000 people vs. 235 per 1,000 people nationally).

Security and Justice ●

Blagoevgrad district kept its poor performance in administration of justice in 2016. The share of criminal cases at the district court which were closed within 3 months dropped to reach 83% while the national figure went up to 89%. The rate of pending cases in the district (11%) was also above the national figure of 8%. At the same time, the workloads of judges in the district were still lower than the national average, though following the national tendencies, they went on rising for the second successive year. In 2016, a criminal judge in the district saw 8.8 cases a month whereas the national average was 9.4 cases.

Registered crimes in the district of Blagoevgrad have traditionally been fewer than the national average. Besides, they have been dropping for the fourth successive year to reach 9.9 per 1,000 people vs. the national average at 12.6 per 1,000 people. The crime clearance rate was higher in 2016, reaching 59% vs. 48% nationally.

Environment ●●●

The environment in the district is in relatively good condition. The share of the population in areas with public sewerage systems quickly rose in 2015 to reach 80.9% (vs. 75.5% nationally). Because of the district's relatively low urbanization, the share of the population with access to sewerage systems connected with wastewater treatment plants was still low: 31.2% vs. 62.3% nationally in 2015.

Atmospheric pollution with carbon dioxide was dozens of times lower than the national average in 2015. The same year carbon dioxide emissions were 14.1 t/sq. km vs. 323.8 t/sq. km nationally.

Culture ●

Cultural life in the district is not very lively. The average number of visits to theaters and museums relative to the population remained about two times smaller than the national average in 2016. Visits to theaters dropped to 108 per 1,000 people vs. 322 per 1,000 people on average for the country.

The highest value for the district was registered by the indicator for library visits. Since 2009, interest in the local libraries has grown considerably to reach 432 visits per 1,000 people, which was still below the national average of 605 per 1,000 people.

Key Indicators for the District of Blagoevgrad

Indicators of economic development	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	7,425	7,574	7,641	7,589	7,889	n.a.
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	3,225	3,823	4,132	4,181	4,502	4,461
Average annual gross salary (BGN)	5,990	6,271	6,566	6,818	7,181	n.a.
Relative share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	12.4	15.3	18.2	16.0	23.6	n.a.
Annual average economic activity rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	70.5	73.0	73.2	73.0	70.8	69.8
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	64.6	65.4	63.3	62.6	63.4	64.0
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	8.4	10.4	13.5	14.1	10.3	8.3
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with tertiary education (%)	16.6	17.7	18.0	19.6	19.5	19.4
Number of non-financial enterprises per 1,000 people	50	53	55	58	62	n.a.
Expenditure on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN)	1,228	1,105	1,335	1,563	1,799	n.a.
Cumulative FDI to non-financial enterprises per capita (EUR)	798	957	1,108	1,214	1,433	n.a.
Relative share of households with internet access (%)	42.3	54.9	60.5	61.9	63.3	64.0
Share of roads in good condition (%)	56.6	55.0	51.9	49.1	59.7	46.0
Share of territory included in cadastral maps (%)	11.3	11.3	12.8	12.9	13.8	13.8

Indicators of social development	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-2.1	-2.6	-2.7	-3.6	-3.4	-3.5
Net migration rate (‰)	-3.2	-4.8	-3.7	-4.5	-5.3	-4.5
Average grades at state matriculation exams	4.46	4.19	4.29	4.41	4.24	4.04
Percent of failed students at state matriculation exams ("average" 3.00)	3.49	5.37	3.77	2.68	6.13	10.50
Net enrolment rate of the population in 5th–8th grade (%)	84.5	83.8	83.5	82.9	84.0	84.1
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	86.6	86.1	84.9	86.3	88.9	88.8
Cases of hospitalization in general hospitals per 1,000 people	127.1	159.7	168.6	143.5	182.8	179.5
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	12.8	12.9	12.0	11.1	11.0	9.9
Clearance rates for crimes against the person and property registered during the year (%)	36.1	33.4	39.0	40.6	49.3	59.1
Share of pending criminal cases (%)	1.5	11.9	13.5	10.5	15.4	11.2
Share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage systems, connected to WWTP (%)	26.3	26.3	26.5	26.8	31.2	n.a.
Carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere (t/sq. km)	21.6	20.8	16.6	11.3	14.1	n.a.
Number of visits to cinemas per 1,000 people	285	308	323	307	318	345
Number of visits to theatres per 1,000 people	113	104	131	124	138	108