Blagoevgrad District

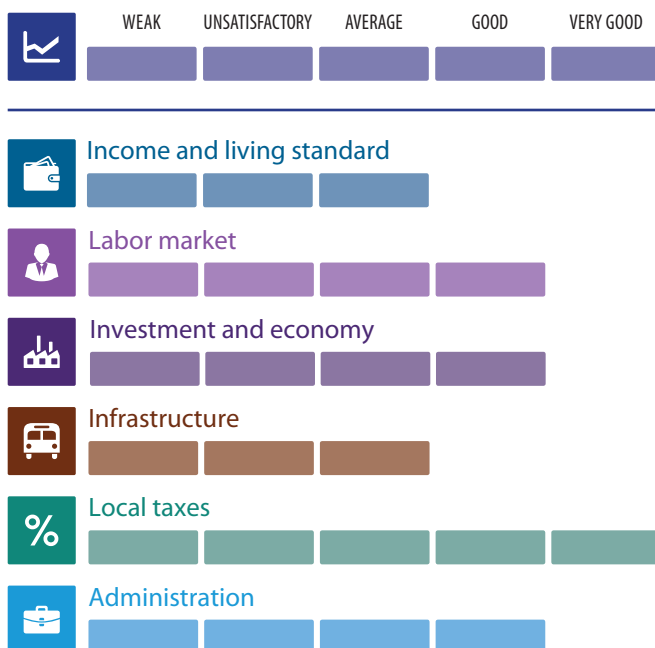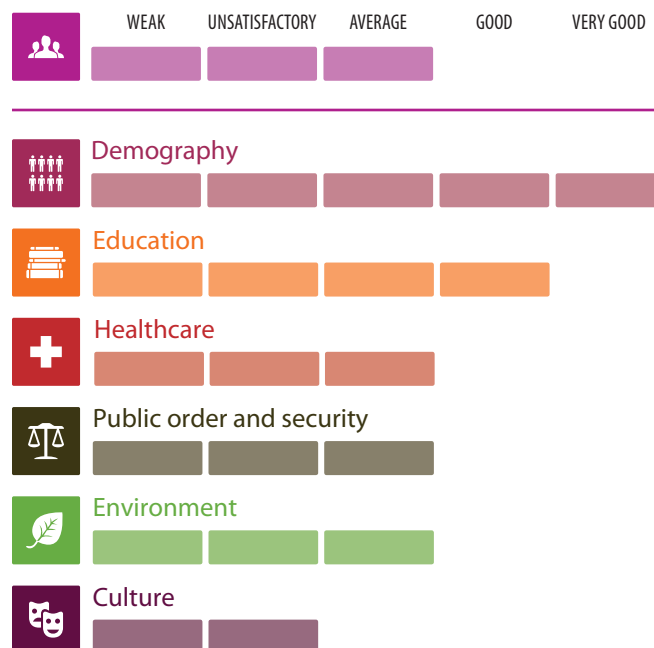|	
► Population (2019)	302,694
► Territory (sq. km)	6,449.5
► Number of settlements	274
► Share of urban population (%)	60.2

Blagoevgrad district's economy has been developing very well. GDP has been growing faster than the country's average, though it is yet to reach that level. Incomes have exceeded national averages and in 2018 labor market trends remained favorable. Blagoevgrad is among the districts with the highest economic activity, employment continues to be high and unemployment low. Investment activity has improved slightly but is still far below the average level of the country as a whole. The quality of the road infrastructure has improved. Local taxes and fees remain lower than the national averages. In 2020 the assessment of the functioning of the local e-administration and the provision of one-stop shop services in the district's municipalities continued to improve and once again reached levels slightly above the average ones of the country as a whole. Blagoevgrad district has performed relatively well in terms of demographic indicators. The share of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education is considerably below the national average. Grades in both matriculation and external evaluation exams come close to the country's average. At the same time, healthcare in the district suffers from shortages of medical staff. The crime rate remains relatively low and detection high. Blagoevgrad district still ranks high as regards air quality. Cultural life, however, has shown no considerable progress and remains poorly developed.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

	WEAK	UNSATISFACTORY	AVERAGE	GOOD	VERY GOOD

Income and living standard

Labor market

Investment and economy

Infrastructure

Local taxes

Administration

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

	WEAK	UNSATISFACTORY	AVERAGE	GOOD	VERY GOOD

Demography

Education

Healthcare

Public order and security

Environment

Culture

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ▪▪▪▪▪

Income and living standard ▪▪▪

Since 2015, GDP per capita in Blagoevgrad district has risen considerably. In 2018 the annual growth rate of nearly 11% even exceeded the national average of slightly over 9%. Nevertheless, the value of that indicator remained considerably lower – 9,700 BGN/person, while the national average was 15,600 BGN/person. The average annual income per household member also increased and in 2019, for the first time in 15 years, it surpassed the national average. Salaries, however, still remain persistently low. In 2018 the average annual gross salary of employed people was 9,000 BGN compared to 13,800 BGN for the country as a whole. In spite of the low pay, however, poverty levels in Blagoevgrad district remain close to the national average and in 2019 the relative share of people living in material deprivation in the district was 19.6%, compared to the national average of 19.9%. The percentage of those living under the national poverty line was 23.9%, versus 22.6% on a national scale.

Labor market ▪▪▪▪

In 2019, the labor market in Blagoevgrad district continued its positive development. Economic activity rose to 79.3% and at 5 p.p. higher than the national average, it reached an all-time maximum for that district. Blagoevgrad also held second place in economic activity after Veliko Tarnovo district. At the same time, employment reached 75.2%, which is not only a record for the district, but also significantly higher than the national average (70.1%). The unemployment rate dropped to 4.1%, which is three times lower than in 2014.

The population replacement ratio (63.3%) of the population aged 15-19 to those aged 60-64 is slightly below the national average, which means that in the near future the workforce will be shrinking at a faster pace than in other districts. A problem the district is still facing is the relatively low educational level of the population. In 2019, the share of working-age people with higher education was 21.8%, versus 28% for the country on average, and of those with primary education or less was 19.9%, against the national average of 17.6%.

Investment and economy ▪▪▪▪

In 2018, the number of non-financial enterprises in the district continued to rise and remained among the highest in the country, reaching 72 per 1,000 persons, against the national average of 59 per 1,000 persons. Investment in Blagoevgrad district is also on the rise but the figures are still well below the national averages. In 2018, FTA expenditure was 1,768 BGN/person, while the national average was 2,750 BGN/person. FDI was 1,636 EUR/person, against 3,560 EUR/person on the national level. Production value per capita in the district also remained at the relatively low level of 18,400 BGN/person, against the national average of 25,900 BGN/person, and registered only a negligible increase in 2019.

Blagoevgrad district remains one of the leaders in utilization of EU funds. By 15 June 2020, payments made in the district to beneficiaries under EU operational programs reached 2,623 BGN/person, compared to 1,976 BGN/person on a national level. The top place in the region was again held by the Bansko municipality.

Infrastructure ▪▪▪▪

Due to the relatively large proportion of mountainous terrain, in 2019 Blagoevgrad remained among the lowest ranking districts in the country for the density of the road and railroad networks. Nevertheless, with the completion of several lots of the Struma highway, over the past few years the indicators for the share of highways and first-class roads and for road surface quality have improved. In 2019 a total of 69.6% of the roads in the district were in good condition, against the average of 41.4% for the country.

The relative share of households with broadband internet access remained unchanged in 2019, and at 71% was slightly below the national average of 75%.

Local taxes ▪▪▪▪▪

Blagoevgrad district's economy is well developed compared to most regions, and in 2020 the five monitored local tax rates again remained lower than the national averages. Within the district, only the Petrich municipality raised two tax rates beginning 2020 – those on the immovable property of legal entities and on the non-gratuitous acquisition of property.

Administration ▪▪▪▪

Similar to the rest of the districts, cadastral map coverage in Blagoevgrad district showed considerable increase in 2019, reaching 98.5% of the territory, against the national average of 91.4%.

Assessments of the local e-administration and one-stop shop services in the district's municipalities have continued to improve and in 2020 again slightly exceeded the national averages. Within the district, the municipalities receiving top evaluations are those of the city of Blagoevgrad, Bansko and Gotze Delchev. The AIP active transparency ratings of the local administration have also improved, although in 2020 they again failed to reach the national average. The highest ratings were achieved by the Bansko, Razlog and Blagoevgrad municipalities.

🏛 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ▬▬▬

🏛 Demography ▬▬▬▬▬

In regard to demographic tendencies, Blagoevgrad has achieved relatively good results, although similar to all other districts in the country, the tendencies are still negative. The rate of natural population growth rate in the district rose for the second year in a row and although in 2019 it again remained negative (–4.1‰), it was lower than the national average of –6.7‰. The net migration rate was also negative, yet lower than that of the neighboring districts of Smolyan and Kyustendil.

The share of urban population in the district remained unchanged and relatively low in 2019 – 60%, against the national average figure of 74%. At the same time, the population density of the district's settlements remained high at 2,270 persons/sq.km, versus 1,510 persons/sq.km on average for the whole country.

The ratios of the district's age dependency of people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 and 15–64 continued to decline in 2019, following the trend characterizing the whole country.

📖 Education ▬▬▬▬

The rate of enrolment of schoolchildren in 5th-8th grade in the district continues to be relatively high. In 2019 it rose further to reach 92.4%, compared to the national figure of 86.6%. The percentage of school year repeaters remained below the national average. But even though the number of dropouts from primary and secondary education was below average, over the past few years their share has been climbing. Student performance is close to the national average both in terms of external evaluation scores at the end of 7th grade and of the results in the 2020 matriculation exams. The number of teachers in primary and secondary education rose considerably in 2019 to reach 90 per 1,000 students, exceeding the national average of 89 teachers per 1,000 students.

The number of university students as a share of the total population has been on the decline, in line with the trend typical of the country as a whole, in spite of Blagoevgrad being one of Bulgaria's districts with universities on their territory.

➕ Healthcare ▬▬▬

The percentage of people with health insurance in Blagoevgrad district continued to rise in 2019 and it again exceeded the national average. At the same time, the healthcare system in the region kept suffering from shortages of medical staff and beds in the local general hospitals. Statistics on the relative share of GPs and specialist physicians in the district were less favorable than the average ones for the country. The number of hospital beds continued to rise in 2019, reaching 360 per 100,000 persons, with 550 beds per 100,000 persons as the national average.

The number of patients treated in the local hospitals was considerably lower than the national average – 173 per 1,000 persons, while in the country as a whole it was 254 per 1,000 persons. Having in mind the smaller number of physicians and hospital beds, the assumption is that the population in the district seeks medical care in the capital.

⚖ Public order and security ▬▬▬

Although in 2019 court workloads in Blagoevgrad district were lower than the national average, delivery of justice did not move ahead at a matching speed. The share of criminal cases that were closed within 3 months was 86%, with 90% as the national figure, while pending cases comprised 13%, compared to 10% as the national average. Statistics have shown a downward trend over the past three years.

The crime rate in the district remains lower compared to the rest of the country, and in 2019 detection rates continued to improve, exceeding the national average. Registered crimes against the person and property in Blagoevgrad district dropped to 8.4 per 1,000 persons, with 11.1 per 1,000 persons as the national figure. 55% of those crimes were cleared, against 52% for the whole country on average.

🍃 Environment ▬▬▬

Blagoevgrad district still ranks very high in the country in air quality. Carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere are 20 times lower than the national average per sq.km. Although the district has a relatively dense sewerage network, its connectivity to waste water treatment plants is low – 33% in 2018, against the national average of 64%.

The amount of household waste generated in the district is relatively low – an annual of 304 kg/person, against 409 kg/person on a national scale. However, a very small part of it is handed over for treatment and recycling – 15.2%, against 70.9 % as the national average.

🏛 Culture ▬▬

All the indicators for 2019 in this category once again give Blagoevgrad district a relatively low ranking. Theater visits went up but still remained considerably below average – 123 per 1,000 persons, compared to 362 per 1,000 persons nationwide. In 2019 museums, too, again failed to enjoy much popularity, with 457 visits per 1,000 persons, against the national figure of 770 per 1,000 persons. Library visits were 408 per 1,000 persons, against 683 on a national level, and cinema visits numbered 443 per 1,000 persons, while the national average was 659 per 1,000 persons.

Key indicators for the district of Blagoevgrad

Indicators of economic development	2017	2018	2019	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	8,792	9,736	n.a.	**15,615**
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	5,193	5,193	6,079	**6,013**
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	8,297	9,024	n.a.	**13,775**
Share of the poor relative to the national poverty line (%)	n.a.	26.0	23.9	**22.6**
Employment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	69.2	71.0	75.2	**70.1**
Unemployment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	4.5	4.8	4.1	**4.2**
Share of the population aged 25-64 with primary or lower education (%)	19.6	19.2	19.9	**17.6**
Share of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education (%)	19.9	20.7	21.8	**28.0**
Production value (BGN/person)	18,050	18,422	n.a.	**25,855**
Expenditure on fixed tangible asset acquisition (BGN/person)	1,576	1,768	n.a.	**2,750**
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	1,535	1,636	n.a.	**3,560**
Share of households with Internet (%)	63.3	71.4	71.1	**75.1**
Share of roads in good condition (%)	47.5	62.5	69.6	**41.4**
Density of the road network (km/100 sq.km territory)	10.5	11.0	11.1	**17.9**
AIP active transparency rating of the local self-government (%)*	64.8	65.0	68.3	**70.7**

Indicators of social development	2017	2018	2019	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	−4.6	−4.5	−4.1	**−6.7**
Net migration rate (‰)	−3.4	−4.5	−3.9	**−0.3**
Average grade in the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.04	4.06	4.24	**4.20**
Average grade in the external exam in mathematics at the end of 7th grade (points)**	32.3	35.0	34.4	**36.3**
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	79	82	90	**89**
Net enrolment of the population in 5th-8th grade (%)	92.6	91.8	92.4	**86.6**
Share of people with health insurance (%)	88.4	88.8	90.6	**88.8**
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,610	1,732	1,701	**1,688**
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	10.9	9.3	8.4	**11.1**
Workload of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	8.7	9.2	8.3	**9.1**
Share of the population with access to public sewerage networks (%)	81.0	81.9	82.2	**76.2**
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	345	304	n.a.	**409**
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	1.6	15.2	n.a.	**70.9**
Visits to the cinema per 1,000 persons	343	363	443	**659**
Visits to the theater per 1,000 persons	111	96	123	**362**

* The data for 2019 are included in the 2020 study. The same also applies for the previous years.
** The data refer to the 2019-2020 academic year while the matriculation exam was held in 2020. The same also applies for the previous years.