

Montana District

▶ Population (2019)	127,001
▶ Territory (sq. km)	3,635.6
▶ Number of settlements	130
▶ Share of urban population (%)	64.3



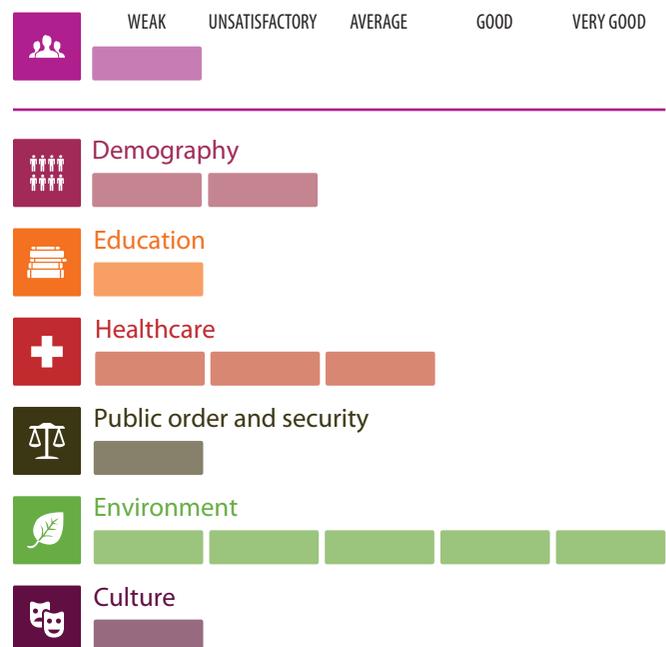
Montana is among Bulgaria's districts that have the worst indicators for incomes and quality of life: a prerequisite for the high poverty levels among its population. The unfavorable trends in the local labor market place Montana last in the country in this category. The rise in economic activity in 2019 led to an increase in the unemployment rate. Investment activity in the district is relatively weak. Montana performs well in terms of the utilization of European funds. This is the region with the smallest share of highways and first-class roads in the country. The average municipal taxes for 2020 gave the district the top place in the ranking for the lowest taxation rates. The performance of the district administration has received relatively good ratings.

The continuing tendency towards population ageing in the whole of Bulgaria is particularly pronounced in Montana district. The natural growth rate continues to fall and is the second lowest in the country. The performance of Montana district as regards the indicators for education is relatively weak. Access to doctors in the area is relatively good. The number of beds in the local general hospitals also remains higher than the national average. The maintenance of public order and security is evaluated as poor. The district ranks well in terms of its environmental indicators. The share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling remains high. In 2019, Montana remained the district with the least active cultural life in the country.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■■

Income and living standard ■■

Montana is among Bulgaria's districts with the worst indicators for incomes and standard of living. In spite of the low starting point, the growth rate of GDP per capita in the district has been two times smaller than the average one in the country and in 2018 it reached 9,000 BGN, against 15,600 BGN nationally. Salaries and incomes have also been rising at a relatively slow pace. The gross annual salary in Montana district was 10,100 BGN in 2018, versus the national average of 13,800 BGN, while in 2019 the annual income per household member was 4,644 BGN, compared to 6,013 BGN as the country's average.

The low salaries and incomes serve as a prerequisite for the large proportion of the population living in poverty. In 2019 the share of people living below the national poverty line was 47.4%, or double the average figure for the country of 22.6%. The proportion of people living in material deprivation was 22.7%, versus 19.9% nationwide.

Labor market ■■

The unfavourable trends in the local labor market place Montana last in the country in this category for 2019.

Economic activity did grow considerably compared to the previous year, but its rate of 68.6% still remained lower than the national average of 74.3%. Since, however, the labor market suffers from a number of problems, the growth in economic activity only leads to a rise in unemployment figures. In 2019 employment fell by 4 p.p. to 48.2% and remained the lowest in the country where the average rate was 70.1%. At the same time, unemployment rose by 5 p.p. to reach 20.4%, against the national average of 4.2%, and again placed Montana last.

A major challenge facing the labor market is posed by the relatively low educational status of the workforce. The share of people with a university degree is almost three times smaller than the national average – 10%, versus 28%, while the share of the workforce with primary or lower education constitutes 30%, whereas on a national scale the figure is 18%. As regards both indicators, tendencies in Montana district over the past few years have been unfavourable.

Investment and economy ■■

Investment activity in Montana district is comparatively weak. In 2018, Montana remained one of the districts with the smallest relative number of enterprises – 36 per 1,000 persons, compared to the national average of 59 per 1,000 persons. Also, it was among the districts with the lowest rates of investment. FTA expenditures even fell to 1,157 BGN/person, versus 2,750 BGN/person nationally. There is also a decline in FDI, which, with a rate of 274 EUR/person remained over ten times lower than the national average of 3,560 EUR/person.

In spite of a certain increase over the past few years, in 2018 production value in the district remained as low as 13,000 BGN/

person, compared to 25,900 BGN/person as the national average.

On the other hand, Montana district has performed quite well as regards the utilization of EU funding. By 15 June 2020 payments made in the district to beneficiaries of EU operational programs reached 2,202 BGN/person, versus an average of 1,976 BGN/person nationally. Within the district, the top places in the utilization of EU funds are occupied by the municipalities of Montana and Georgi Damyanovo.

Infrastructure ■■

The density of the road and railroad network in Montana district is close to the national average. However, the share of highways and first-class roads in it is the smallest in the country – 9.8% in 2019, against 18.6% nationally. Only 28.9% of road surfaces are in good condition, compared to the national average of 41.4%.

The relative share of households with internet access is on the increase and has reached 78%, against 75% nationwide.

Local taxes ■■■■■

The average level of municipal taxes in Montana for 2020 made the district the leader with the lowest taxation rates in the country. For all five monitored local taxes, the rates in Montana district were lower than the respective national average. The biggest difference was in the retail trade tax. In the municipalities within the district it was 5.10 BGN/sq.m on average, compared to 12.93 BGN/sq.m in the country. For its part, the tax on taxi transportation in the district was lower by over 33%, while taxes on motor vehicles and on non-residential real estate of legal entities were 20% lower than the average nationwide rates.

Administration ■■■■■

Montana district demonstrates relatively good results in the Administration category. Similar to the rest of the country, cadastral map coverage has been on the rise and in 2019 it included almost the entire territory of the district.

In 2020, the local authorities' self-assessment on the development of e-administration and on the provision of one-stop shop services showed improvement.

The transparency ratings of the local administration decreased slightly in 2020 but they still remained above the national average. Within the district, the highest ratings for this indicator were achieved by the municipalities of Boichinovtsi, Berkovitsa and Chiprovtsi.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ■

Demography ■■■

The continuing tendency towards population ageing is particularly conspicuous in Montana district. The natural growth rate is still declining and is the second worst in the country after that in Vidin district. In 2019 it was -14.5% , versus the national average of -6.7% . Ongoing out-migration also contributes to the fast shrinking of the population in the district. The net migration figure for 2019 dropped to -6.1% .

The above mentioned processes have a strong negative impact on the age dependency ratios in Montana district. The ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0-14 is a whole 195%, compared to 150% in the country, and to those aged 15-64 it is 44%, against 34% nationally.

A relatively low share of the population of Montana district lives in urban areas – 64.9%, versus the national average of 74%. The population density in the urban territories is also among the lowest in the country – 894 persons/sq.km against 1,510 persons/sq.km on a national scale.

Education ■■

The performance of Montana district as regards the indicators in the education category was relatively poor in 2019. Enrolment in 5th-8th grade came down to reach 81.1%, against the national average of 86.6%. At the same time, the percentages of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education increased and remained higher than the national averages.

The average score in the 2020 external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was again among the lowest in the country, with 27.8 points on average for the students from Montana district and 36.3 points in the country on average. However, the district's figure marked a slight improvement compared to the past two years. At the same time, students' results in the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature were close to the national average. The average score was 4.15, compared to 4.20 nationally, while the share of "failed" grades (below 3.00) was 6.5%, against 8.2% nationwide.

The number of primary and secondary school teachers relative to the total student population has been growing at the same rate as the average one in the country and remains close to the average values.

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

Healthcare ■■■■

Access to doctors in Montana district is relatively easy. The proportion of population cared by GPs is 1,443 persons to 1 GP, compared to 1,688 persons to 1 GP as the country's average. The relative number of specialist physicians is close to the national average.

The number of beds in the local general hospitals is higher than in the country on average. In 2019, hospitals provided 688 beds

per 100,000 persons, versus the national average of 550 per 100,000 persons.

The hospitalization figures for 2019 reached 267 per 1,000 persons, compared to 254 per 1,000 nationally.

Public order and security ■■

The maintenance of public order and security in Montana district is evaluated as poor. Although the local criminal judges have smaller workloads – an average of 7.7 cases a month per one judge, compared to 9.1 nationally – delivery of justice is relatively slow. In 2019, the proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months fell to 80%, against the national average of 90%, while pending cases rose to 15%, against 10% nationwide.

Montana is among the districts with the highest crime rates. In 2019, the registered crimes against the person and property numbered over 13 per 1,000 persons, versus 11 per 1,000 persons nationwide. Nevertheless, the rate of detection has been on the rise and again exceeds the national average.

Environment ■■■■■■

The performance of Montana district in terms of the state of the environment remained very good in 2018. The volume of carbon dioxide emissions was tens of times lower than the national average – 7.3 t/sq.km, compared to 274.8 t/sq.km in the country. The amount of household waste generated annually also remained relatively small – 268 kg/person, against the average of 409 kg/person nationwide. The share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling remained high – 95%, compared to 71% as the national average.

The share of the population with access to wastewater treatment plants remained extremely low (35.5%, compared to 63.9% for the country), and so did the share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (59.9%, compared to 76.2% in the country).

Culture ■■

In 2019, Montana was once again the district with the least active cultural life in the whole country. Visits to local theatres and cinemas increased but were many times lower than the national averages. Visits to theatres amounted to 88 per 1,000 persons, compared to 362 per 1,000 persons in the country on average, and museum visits numbered 155 per 1,000 persons, against the national average of 770 per 1,000 persons.

2019 marked the first time a cinema was opened in the district, with visits to it numbering 97 per 1,000 persons – a figure, however, still too far from the average one for the country of 659 per 1,000 persons.

Since 2015, there has been no library in the district large enough to be included in the official NSI statistics

Key indicators for the district of Montana

Indicators of economic development	2017	2018	2019	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	8,659	9,033	n.a.	15,615
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	4,507	4,507	4,644	6,013
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	9,297	10,129	n.a.	13,775
Share of the poor relative to the national poverty line (%)	n.a.	45.7	47.4	22.6
Employment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	57.3	52.2	48.2	70.1
Unemployment rate of the population aged 15-64 (%)	9.7	15.3	20.4	4.2
Share of the population aged 25-64 with primary or lower education (%)	21.0	25.6	30.3	17.6
Share of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education (%)	14.4	12.6	10.0	28.0
Production value (BGN/person)	11,546	13,048	n.a.	25,855
Expenditure on fixed tangible asset acquisition (BGN/person)	1,234	1,157	n.a.	2,750
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	286	274	n.a.	3,560
Share of households with Internet (%)	51.5	67.8	78.0	75.1
Share of roads in good condition (%)	28.4	30.5	28.9	41.4
Density of the road network (km/100 sq.km territory)	17.1	17.1	17.2	17.9
AIP active transparency rating of the local self-government (%)*	68.8	73.0	71.0	70.7

Indicators of social development	2017	2018	2019	National average
Natural population growth rate (‰)	-13.5	-14.0	-14.5	-6.7
Net migration rate (‰)	-5.0	-5.7	-6.1	-0.3
Average grade in the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.82	3.95	4.15	4.20
Average grade in the external exam in mathematics at the end of 7 th grade (points)**	26.6	25.2	27.8	36.3
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	81	84	90	89
Net enrolment of the population in 5 th -8 th grade (%)	84.7	82.9	81.1	86.6
Share of people with health insurance (%)	87.3	87.2	88.8	88.8
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,224	1,505	1,443	1,688
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	15.0	12.2	13.1	11.1
Workload of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	7.4	6.3	7.7	9.1
Share of the population with access to public sewerage networks (%)	59.6	59.9	n.a.	76.2
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	264	268	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	95.2	95.3	n.a.	70.9
Visits to the cinema per 1,000 persons	0	0	97	659
Visits to the theater per 1,000 persons	134	82	88	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.