# Kardzhali District

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|---|---|
| ▸ Population (2020) | 159,493 |
| ▸ Territory (sq. km) | 3,209.1 |
| ▸ Number of settlements | 468 |
| ▸ Share of urban population (%) | 40.2 |

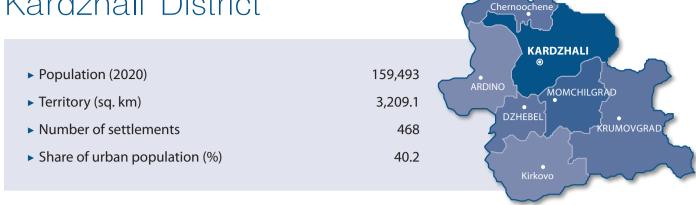Over the past few years GDP per capita in Kardzhali district has registered a steady increase. Salaries and incomes have also been rising fast, though at a rate lower than the national average and their levels are still far from the average ones in the country. In 2020 the labor market in the district again faced great difficulties. Economic activity remains the lowest in the country, employment is shrinking, and the workforce is among the least educated. FTA acquisition expenditures have increased considerably and are now already among the highest in the country, but production value remains low. A relatively limited proportion of the road surfaces is in good condition. The level of local taxes is low. The performance of the administration is poor.

Kardzhali district continues to attract considerably more population than the country on average. The share of urban population remains the lowest in the country. The number of teachers remains high. The results of the students in the district are extremely poor. Healthcare suffers from a chronic shortage of doctors and hospital beds. The performance of Kardzhali in the field of security and justice is among the best, and it is in this district that the number of registered crimes is the lowest in the country. A relatively small proportion of municipal waste is handed over for treatment and recycling, and access to public sewerage networks is severely limited. Cultural life in the district is among the least active in the country.

## 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

Over the past few years, GDP per capita in Kardzhali district has registered steady growth and in 2019 it reached 9,600 BGN/person. Salaries and incomes have also been rising, though more slowly than nationally, and their levels are still far below average. In 2019 the average income per household member rose by 3%, against 8% nationally, and remained among the lowest in the country at 4,200 BGN/person, against the national average of 6,000 BGN/person.

These indicators are also the main factor for the relatively high poverty levels in the district. The proportion of people living with material deprivation was 35.2%, compared to 22.6% in the country, while those living below the poverty line made up 23.0%, versus the national average of 19.9%.

## Labor market

In 2020, the labor market in Kardzhali district continued to face extremely serious difficulties. Economic activity remained the lowest in the country – 63.3%, against 73.7% nationally, and even decreased compared to the year before. The drop in this indicator was also accompanied by a considerable shrinkage of both employment and unemployment. The employment rate came down to 61.9%, compared to the national average of 68.5%.

One major challenge facing the labor market is still the relatively low education of the workforce. In 2020, the share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education rose to reach 34.3%, compared to 16.9% in the country, and was one of the highest in the country. The share of employed people with a university degree decreased to 17.6%, versus 29.2% nationally.

The demographic replacement rate as a ratio of the population aged 15–19 to that aged 60–64 also remains low – 48%, compared to 67% in the country. This means that for every 100 people who are about to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are half as many young people who will join the workforce.

## Investment and economy

In 2019, investment and business activity in Kardzhali district remained relatively low. Kardzhali was also the district with the lowest number of nonfinancial enterprises – 32 per 1,000 persons, against the national average of 61 per 1,000 persons. FTA expenditures rose considerably – by almost 200%, and at 3,861 BGN/person were among the highest in the country. The main reason for this increase is the newly opened gold mine in Krumovgrad.

FDI has continued to increase but is still below the national average per capita. Production value in Kardzhali district is among the lowest in the country (with only Vidin and Silistra registering worse figures) – it amounts to 10,200 BGN/person, against 28,000 BGN/person as the national average.

Utilization of EU funding has increased but still remains among the lowest in the country. By 15 June 2021, payments made in the district to beneficiaries of EU operational programs amounted to 1,516 BGN/person, against the national average of 2,217 BGN/person. Within the district, the municipalities with the highest rate of utilization were those of Kardzhali and Momchilgrad.

## Infrastructure

The density of the railroad network in Kardzhali district is among the lowest in the country. The road network density is higher than the national average but the share of highways and first-class roads is relatively low – 11.2%, against 18.5% in the country. Road surfaces in good condition are relatively limited – 33.3%, compared to 41.4% across the country.

The share of households with internet access in the district has been rising but is still below the national average. The share of households connected to a gas supply remains among the lowest in the country. The installed RES capacity is relatively large.

## Local taxes

The municipalities in Kardzhali district kept local tax rates low in 2020. The average rate of each of the five monitored local taxes was lower than the national average. The difference is especially large as regards the retail trade tax rate. Within the district, the local tax rates as a whole were lowest in the municipality of Kardzhali city, and highest in the municipalities of Ardino and Momchilgrad.

## Administration

The performance of the local administrations in Kardzhali is relatively poor. In 2021, the local authorities' self-assessment on the development of e-government and on the provision of one-stop shop services went up but remained relatively low. The Active transparency rating of the local administration was the lowest in the country – 59.4%, compared to the national average of 73.2%. Within the district, the lowest ratings were given to the municipalities in Kardzhali, Momchilgrad and Kirkovo, each below 60%.

# 🏛 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ▬▬

## ▦ Demography ▬ ▬ ▬ ▬

The natural population growth rate in Kardzhali district dropped sharply in 2020 to –7.1‰ but was higher than the national average of –9.5‰. The district continued to attract considerably more new residents than in the country on average and the net migration rate of 23.2‰ was the third highest in the country, after that in Sofia (district) and Pernik.

Age dependency ratios continued to rise but came close to the national average. The ratio of the population aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 was 151.5%, compared to 150.6% in the country, and to those aged 15–64 it was 32.9%, against 34.1% in the country.

Kardzhali remains the district with the smallest proportion of urban population – 40.2%, versus the national average of 72.9%. Nevertheless, the average density of the population living in the urban settlements is relatively high – 1,978 persons/sq. km, against 1,506 persons/sq. km on average nationwide.

## 📖 Education ▬ ▬

Enrolment in 5th–8th grade in Kardzhali district has continued to decrease and in 2020 was among the lowest in the country – 77.2%, against the national average of 86.5%. At the same time, the shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education were still comparatively small. The number of primary and secondary school teachers continued to be high – 100 per 1,000 students, versus the national average of 87 per 1,000 students.

However, in 2021 the educational results of the students from the district were once again extremely low. The average score in the 2021 external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 31.7 points, compared to 37.9 points in the country. The average grade in the State matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature was 3.98, compared to 4.21 nationally. The share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) decreased but again remained the highest one in the country – 18%, compared to the national average of 7%.

Higher education is poorly represented in the district, with 7 university students per 1,000 persons, compared to 32 per 1,000 persons countrywide.

## ✚ Healthcare ▬ ▬

In 2020, the health insurance system in Kardzhali district again covered practically the entire population. At the same time, it suffers from a chronic shortage of doctors – both GPs and specialist physicians – and of hospital beds. Kardzhali is the district with the smallest number of GPs relative to the population. There is 1 GP per 3,067 persons, whereas nationally it is 1 GP per 1,727 persons.

The number of hospital beds in the local general hospitals remains extremely low and in the past few years has even been falling, reaching 3.49 beds per 1,000 persons, compared to the national average of 5.52 beds per 1,000 persons.

Hospitalization figures in Kardzhali district are close to the national average, which suggests that there is no clearly discernible "health tourism."

## ⚖ Public order and security ▬ ▬ ▬ ▬ ▬

In 2020, Kardzhali's performance in the field of justice and security was once again among the best in the country. The workloads of the local criminal judges have increased in the past few years but they remain relatively low nevertheless, which affects the speed of delivery of justice. In 2020, there were on average 7.5 cases a month per one judge, compared to 8.6 cases per judge nationally. 96% of criminal cases were closed within 3 months, against the national average of 90%.

The number of registered crimes against the person and property in Kardzhali district is the lowest in the whole country – 5 per 1,000 persons, versus 10 per 1,000 persons nationwide. The detection rate was higher – 64.0%, versus the national figure of 52.1%.

## 🌿 Environment ▬

The volumes of carbon dioxide emissions in the district of Kardzhali again remained relatively low in 2019. The amount of household waste in the district is also among the lowest in the country – 253 kg/person, compared to 409 kg/person nationally. At the same time, however, a relatively small portion of this waste is handed over for treatment and recycling – 13%, against 71% in the country.

The share of households connected to a public sewerage system is small – 45.3%, against 76.4% in the country, and connectivity with wastewater treatment plants is similarly low – 44.8%, compared to the national average of 76.4%. These figures find their explanation in the extremely low share of population living in urban settlements.

## 🎭 Culture ▬

Cultural life in Kardzhali district retained its low intensity in 2020. The pandemic and the restrictions on visits to cultural events added their own negative impact. Visits to the local cinemas fell by 80% and were down to a bare 18 visits per 1,000 persons, against the average of 190 visits per 1,000 persons in the country. Visits to museums dropped by 61% to 39 per 1,000 persons, against the national average of 322 per 1,000 persons. Libraries lost 53% of their visitors, shrinking to 138 per 1,000 persons, against an average of 480 per 1,000 persons in the country.

# Key indicators for the district of Kardzhali

| Indicators of economic development | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | National average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| GDP per capita (BGN, current prices) | 8,472 | 9,606 | n.a. | **17,170** |
| Average annual income per household member (BGN) | 4,057 | 4,173 | n.a. | **6,013** |
| Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN) | 10,419 | 11,356 | n.a. | **15,209** |
| Share of the population living below the national poverty line (%) | 37.7 | 35.2 | n.a. | **22.6** |
| Employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%) | 58.6 | 63.7 | 61.9 | **68.5** |
| Unemployment rate of the population over 15 years of age (%) | 3.4 | (2.0) | (1.4) | **5.2** |
| Share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%) | 35.7 | 33.7 | 34.3 | **16.9** |
| Share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%) | 16.8 | 18.6 | 17.6 | **29.2** |
| Production value (BGN/person) | 9,028 | 10,206 | n.a. | **28,027** |
| Expenditure on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets (BGN/person) | 1,313 | 3,861 | n.a. | **3,155** |
| Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person) | 1,908 | 2,013 | n.a. | **3,655** |
| Share of households with Internet (%) | 84.4 | 67.5 | 77.3 | **78.9** |
| Share of roads in good condition (%) | 30.5 | 33.3 | n.a. | **41.4** |
| Road network density (km/100 sq. km territory) | 20.2 | 20.2 | 20.2 | **17.9** |
| AIP active transparency rating of local government bodies (%)* | 54.0 | 54.1 | 59.4 | **73.2** |

| Indicators of social development | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | National average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rate of natural increase (‰) | −3.7 | −3.6 | −7.1 | **−9.5** |
| Net migration rate (‰) | 15.3 | 37.2 | 23.2 | **4.4** |
| Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature** | 3.78 | 3.92 | 3.98 | **4.21** |
| Average grade in the National external exam in mathematics after 7th grade (points)** | 34.8 | 31.9 | 31.7 | **37.9** |
| Net enrolment of the population in 5th–8th grade (%) | 83.5 | 80.3 | 77.2 | **86.5** |
| Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students | 94 | 100 | 100 | **87** |
| Share of population with health insurance (%) | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | **88.7** |
| Population per one GP (number of people) | 2,576 | 2,985 | 3,067 | **1,727** |
| Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people | 5.2 | 5.1 | 5.0 | **9.9** |
| Workloads of criminal judges in office (cases/month) | 5.1 | 7.5 | 7.5 | **8.6** |
| Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%) | 45.3 | 44.8 | n.a. | **76.4** |
| Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year) | 253 | n.a. | n.a. | **409** |
| Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%) | 12.8 | n.a. | n.a. | **70.9** |
| Visits to cinemas per 1,000 persons | 100 | 90 | 18 | **190** |
| Visits to museums per 1,000 persons | 104 | 100 | 39 | **322** |

\* The data for 2021 are included in the 2021 study. The same also applies for the previous years.
\*\* The data refer to the 2020–2021 academic year while the matriculation exam was held in 2021. The same also applies for the previous years.