

Montana District

▶ Population (2020)	126,198
▶ Territory (sq. km)	3,635.6
▶ Number of settlements	130
▶ Share of urban population (%)	63.7



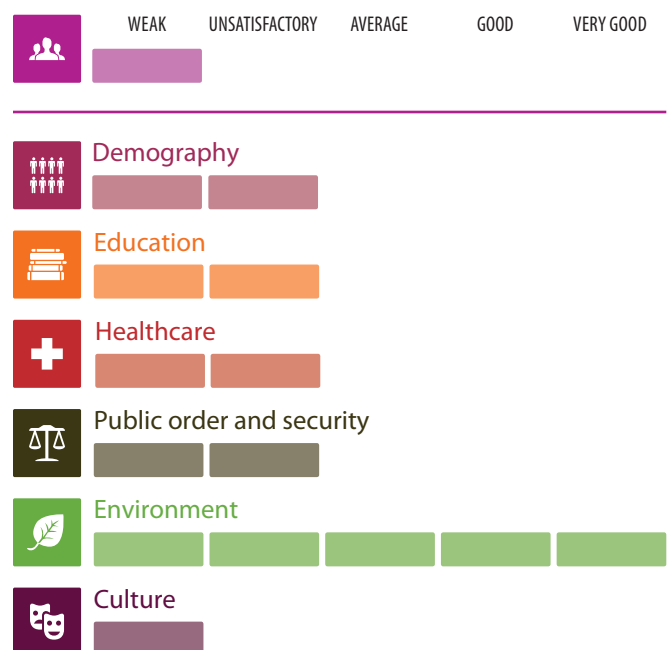
Montana is one of the districts with the lowest incomes and quality of life in Bulgaria, which is the main prerequisite for the high poverty levels among its population. Economic activity has registered the highest growth rate in the country but, at the same time, this has been accompanied by the highest rates of increase in both employment and unemployment, even though they remain considerably less favourable than average. Investment activity is relatively low but utilization of European funds is relatively high. This is the district with the lowest share of highways and first-class roads in the country. The average rate of local taxes is the second lowest in the country. The self-assessment ratings of the local administrations for the development of electronic government continue to lag behind.

The continuing tendency towards population ageing in the whole of Bulgaria remains particularly conspicuous in Montana district. Students' results were once again extremely low in 2021. The shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education have declined. Access to doctors in the district is relatively good. The workloads of the local criminal judges are considerably lower than the country's average, which has an impact on the speed of delivery of justice. In 2020 Montana recorded the highest number of registered crimes. The district stands well in terms of its environmental indicators, which is mainly due to the low volumes of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, as well as to the smaller amounts of household waste and its management. Cultural life is characterized by its low intensity.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■■

Income and living standard ■■

Montana is among Bulgaria's districts with the lowest incomes and quality of life. GDP per capita in the district went up in 2019 but at a rate half the national average and its value remained relatively low – 9,500 BGN, compared to 17,200 BGN in the country. Salaries and incomes also increased but remained relatively low. The average gross annual salary of employed people reached 11,200 BGN, against 15,200 BGN, and the income per household member was 4,600 BGN, compared to 6,200 BGN nationally.

These indicators are the main prerequisite for the high poverty levels in the district. Compared with the country as a whole, Montana has the highest share of population living below the poverty line – 47.4%, compared to 22.6% nationally. The share of population living with material deprivation was 22.7% in 2019, versus 19.9% in the country.

Labor market ■■■

The unfavourable trends in the local labor market in 2020 put Montana in the second lowest place in the country in this category, followed only by Targovishte district. Economic activity registered the highest growth rate in the country (7.6 p.p., against a decrease of 0.6 p.p. in the country in 2020) and for the first time it was higher than the national average, reaching 76.2%, compared to 73.7% nationwide. At the same time, this growth was accompanied by the highest rates of increase in both employment and unemployment. Employment went up considerably – by 3.9 p.p., versus a decrease of 1.6 p.p. countrywide, but the low base again placed Montana district last in the country with an employment figure of 52.1%, versus 68.5% nationwide. Unemployment rose by 3.7 p.p., compared to 1.0 p.p. nationwide and its figure remains the highest in the country at 24.1%, against the national average of 5.2%.

A major challenge facing the labor market is posed by the low educational status of the workforce. The share of people aged 25–64 with a university degree is the lowest in the country – 11.3%, versus 29.2% nationally, while the share of the workforce with primary or lower education is among the highest, constituting 28.2%, whereas on a national scale this share is 16.9%.

The demographic replacement rate as a ratio of the population aged 15–19 to that aged 60–64 has continued to decrease and has fallen to 65.5%, compared to 67.1% nationally. This means that for every 100 people who are about to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are 65 young people who will join the workforce.

Investment and economy ■■■

Investment activity in Montana district again remained comparatively low in 2019. The relative number of enterprises was among the lowest in the country – 36 per 1,000 persons,

compared to the national average of 61 per 1,000 persons. FTA acquisition expenditures registered a slight increase but also remained among the country's lowest – 1,200 BGN/person, versus 3,200/person nationally. Also, the district was among those with the lowest FDI stocks per capita, with 280 EUR/person, compared to the national average of 3,700 EUR/person.

In spite of that, production value in the district rose considerably to 15,000 BGN/person; however, it remained far below the national average of 28,000 BGN/person.

Utilization of EU funding in Montana district is relatively high. By 15 June 2021, payments made in the district to beneficiaries of EU operational programs reached 2,439 BGN/person, versus an average of 2,217 BGN/person nationally. Within the district, the top place in the utilization of EU funds is occupied by the municipality of Montana.

Infrastructure ■■■

The density of the road and railroad network in Montana district is close to, though below, the national average. However, the share of highways and first-class roads is the smallest in the country – 9.1% in 2019, against 18.5% nationally. Only 28.9% of the road surfaces are in good condition, compared to the national average of 41.4%.

The relative share of households with internet access has registered a considerable decline and in 2020 it was among the lowest in the country – 58.2%, against 78.9% nationwide.

Local taxes ■■■■■■

The average level of municipal taxes in Montana for 2021 was the second lowest in the country, after that of Vidin district. The average tax rate on motor vehicles was the lowest in the country, the retail trade tax – the second lowest, and the tax on non-residential real estate of legal entities – the third lowest. The rates on non-gratuitous acquisition of property and on taxi transportation are also considerably lower than the average rates nationwide.

Administration ■■■■

In 2021, the local authorities' self-assessment on the provision of one-stop shop services came close to the respective national averages, but those on the development of e-government continued to lag behind.

The 2021 transparency ratings of the local administration went up, but the increase was too small and for the first time they fell below the national average. Within the district, the highest ratings for this indicator were achieved by the municipalities of Boichinovtsi and Valchedrum.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ■

Demography ■■■

The continuing trend towards population ageing is particularly conspicuous in Montana district. The natural population growth rate again registered a sharp decline in 2020 and at -18.2% (versus -9.5% nationally) was the second worst in the country after that of Vidin district. The trend toward in-migration, which was observable in almost all other districts, was in evidence in Montana as well, raising the net migration figure to 5.4% and for the first time to a positive value. This marked a slight improvement in the age dependency ratios, though their levels remained strongly unfavorable. In 2020 the ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 was 194.5%, compared to 150.6% in the country, and to those aged 15–64 – 44.1%, against 34.1% nationally.

A relatively low share of the population of Montana district lives in urban areas – 63.7%, versus the national average of 72.9%. Population density in the urban settlements is relatively low – 889 persons/sq.km, against 1,506 persons/sq.km on a national scale.

Education ■■■

In the past few years, the rate of enrolment in 5th–8th grade has been lagging behind the country's average. In 2020 it was 83%, against 87% in the country. The shares of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education have been on the decrease but remain higher than the national averages. At the same time, the number of primary and secondary school teachers relative to the total student population has been declining but still remains slightly higher than average, with 88 teachers per 1,000 students, compared to 87 per 1,000 students nationally.

The average results of the students from Montana district were again extremely low in 2021. The average score in the external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade went up to reach 30.1 p., but it was once again far behind the national average of 37.9 p. The average result in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature ranked Montana last in the country, alongside Yambol and Silistra – it was 3.94, compared to 4.21 nationally. Nevertheless, Montana can again boast a relatively low share of “fail” (below 3.00) grades, which were below 6%, against 7% nationwide.

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

Healthcare ■■■

Access to doctors in Montana district remained relatively easy in 2020. The proportion of population cared by GPs is 1,502 persons to 1 GP, compared to 1,737 persons to 1 GP as the country's average. The relative number of specialist physicians is close to, though below the national average.

The number of beds in the local general hospitals has been rising and remains considerably higher than in the country on average, with 6.93 beds per 1,000 persons, versus the national average of 5.52 per 1,000 persons.

Infant mortality in the district recorded a sharp rise and in 2020 it was twice the national average. Much higher were also the hospitalization figures – 204 per 1,000 persons, compared to 138 per 1,000 persons nationally.

Public order and security ■■■

In 2020 the local criminal judges in Montana district had considerably smaller workloads than in the country on average, which affected the speed of delivery of justice. One local judge heard an average of 5.6 cases, compared to 8.6 cases per judge nationally. The proportion of criminal cases closed within 3 months was 92%, against the national average of 90%. At the same time, the share of pending cases remained relatively high – 13%, against 11% nationwide.

In 2020, Montana was among the districts with the highest numbers of registered crimes against the person and property. They numbered 13.8/1,000 persons, versus 9.9/1,000 persons nationwide. Nevertheless, the rate of detection again exceeded the national average – 54.1%, against 52.1% in the country.

Environment ■■■■■

The performance of Montana district as regards the state of the environment remains very good. This is mainly due to the low volumes of carbon dioxide emissions, as well as to the smaller amounts of household waste and its management. In 2018, the average amount of household waste generated annually was 268 kg/person, against the average of 409 kg/person nationwide. The share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling was 95%, compared to 71% as the national average.

The relatively low share of urban population accounts for the relatively low share of households living in settlements with public sewerage networks – in 2019 it constituted 61.3%, compared to 76.4% in the country. Access to public sewerage networks connected to wastewater treatment plants was available to 35.6%, compared to 64.6% in the country.

Culture ■

In 2020, cultural life in Montana was once again characterized by its low intensity. The negative impact of the pandemic and the restrictions on cultural events had practically no effect on cinema visits in the district. They dropped by 1% but their number relative to the population remained comparatively low – 96 per 1,000 persons, while nationwide they numbered 190 per 1,000 persons. The decrease in museum visits was comparable to that of the country's average, but they too remained among the lowest in the country, with 67 per 1,000 persons, compared to 322 per 1,000 persons nationwide. 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	2018	2019	2020	National average
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	9,033	9,522	n.a.	17,170
Average annual income per household member (BGN)	4,507	4,644	n.a.	6,013
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	10,129	11,165	n.a.	15,209
Share of the population living below the national poverty line (%)	45.7	47.4	n.a.	22.6
Employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	52.2	48.2	52.1	68.5
Unemployment rate of the population over 15 years of age (%)	15.3	20.4	24.1	5.2
Share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	25.6	30.3	28.2	16.9
Share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	12.6	10.0	11.3	29.2
Production value (BGN/person)	13,048	14,982	n.a.	28,027
Expenditure on the acquisition of fixed tangible assets (BGN/person)	1,157	1,201	n.a.	3,155
Cumulative foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (EUR/person)	274	280	n.a.	3,655
Share of households with Internet (%)	67.8	78.0	58.2	78.9
Share of roads in good condition (%)	30.5	28.9	n.a.	41.4
Road network density (km/100 sq. km territory)	17.1	17.2	16.9	17.9
AIP active transparency rating of local government bodies (%)*	73.0	71.0	72.0	73.2

Indicators of social development	2018	2019	2020	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	–14.0	–14.5	–18.2	–9.5
Net migration rate (‰)	–5.7	–6.1	5.4	4.4
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.95	4.15	3.94	4.21
Average grade in the National external exam in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	25.2	27.8	30.1	37.9
Net enrolment of the population in 5th–8th grade (%)	82.9	81.1	83.0	86.5
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	84	90	88	87
Share of population with health insurance (%)	87.2	88.8	87.7	88.7
Population per one GP (number of people)	1,505	1,443	1,502	1,727
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 people	12.2	13.1	13.8	9.9
Workloads of criminal judges in office (cases/month)	6.3	7.7	5.6	8.6
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	59.9	61.3	n.a.	76.4
Generated household waste per capita (kg/person/year)	268	n.a.	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	95.3	n.a.	n.a.	70.9
Visits to cinemas per 1,000 persons	0	97	96	190
Visits to museums per 1,000 persons	138	155	67	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.