

Montana District

► Population (2021)	122,179
► Territory (sq. km)	3,636
► Number of settlements	130
► Share of urban population (%)	64.0



Montana is one of the districts with relatively low incomes and quality of life. Trends in the labor market are unfavorable. The low education of the workforce remains a challenge. Investment activity in the district is relatively low. The density of the road and rail networks remains lower than the national average. The average level of local taxes in the municipalities of the district is the second lowest in the country. The local administrations' self-assessments on the development of e-government and the provision of administrative one-stop-shop services are significantly below the national average.

The continuing tendency towards population ageing in the whole of Bulgaria remains particularly conspicuous in Montana district. Students' results are relatively low. The number of beds in local general hospitals has been increasing and remains significantly higher than the national average. The district has recorded the highest number of registered crimes against the person and property in the country over the last two years. The amount of household waste in the district is low, and its management is good. Cultural life in the Montana region is among the least intense in the country.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■

Income and living standard ■■

Montana is among Bulgaria's districts with relatively low incomes and quality of life. GDP per capita in the district has been increasing but its value remains relatively low – 10,000 BGN, compared to 17,300 BGN in the country in 2020. Salaries and incomes have also increased but remain relatively low. The average gross annual salary of employed people has reached 12,500 BGN, against 16,700 BGN nationally.

These indicators are the main prerequisite for the high poverty levels in the district. Montana is one of the districts (alongside Vidin) with the highest share of the population living below the poverty line – 42.0%, compared to 22.1% nationally, although this is the lowest level of this indicator for the last 4 years. The share of the population living with material deprivation has been decreasing and in 2020 it was 13.5%, versus 19.4% in the country.

Labor market ■■

The unfavourable trends in the local labor market again rank Montana second lowest in the country in this category for 2021, followed only by Targovishte district. Economic activity in the district again fell drastically – by over 5 p.p., after its sharp rise in the year before, and reached 63.4%, compared to 72.0% nationwide. At the same time, employment rates went up and unemployment rates fell, but both remain significantly less favorable than the national averages. The employment rate in the district is 52.5%, (compared to 68.1% in the country. The unemployment rate decreased significantly – by 7.0 p.p., which is the largest drop in the country, but remains relatively high – 17.1% compared to 5.3% in the country.

A major challenge that still faces the labor market in the district is the low educational status of the workforce. The share of people aged 25–64 with a university degree is among the lowest in the country – 14.0%, against 29.6% nationally. The share of the workforce with primary or lower education has shrunk but again remains high – 24.1%, whereas on a national scale the figure is 16.6%.

The demographic replacement rate as a ratio of the population aged 15–19 to that aged 60–64 has increased slightly to 66.3%, compared to 69.4% nationally. This means that for every 100 people who are about to leave the labor market in the next few years, there are 66 young people who will join the workforce.

Investment and economy ■■

Investment activity in Montana district again remained comparatively slack in 2020. The relative number of enterprises was among the lowest in the country – 36 per 1,000 persons, compared to the national average of 60 per 1,000 persons. FTA acquisition expenditures registered a slight increase but also remained among the country's lowest – 1,300 BGN/person, versus 3,300 BGN/person nationally. Also, the district

was among those with the lowest rates of FDI per capita, with 288 EUR/person, compared to the national average of 3,900 EUR/person.

Production value in the district rose considerably to 15,700 BGN/person in 2020, against the national average of 27,200 BGN/person.

Utilization of EU funding in Montana district is relatively high. By 30 June 2022, payments made in the district to beneficiaries of EU operational programs reached 2,692 BGN/person. Within the district, the top place in the utilization of EU funds is occupied by the municipality of Montana city – 4,231 BGN/person.

Infrastructure ■■

Montana district's performance in this category is among the worst in the country. The density of the road and railroad networks remains below the national average. The share of highways and first-class roads is half that in the country – 9.1% in 2019, against 18.5% nationally. This can also explain the relatively poor condition of the roads – in 2021, only 27% of the road surface was in good condition, compared to 42% in the country.

Internet access in the district is increasing but remains relatively low – it is available to 70.2% of households, compared to 83.5% in the country. The share of households with access to a gas supply has increased to 4.5%, compared to 5.3% in the country. Installed RES capacities remain relatively limited.

Local taxes ■■■■■■

The average level of municipal taxes in Montana for 2022 was again the second lowest in the country, after that in Vidin district. The average tax rates on motor vehicles and retail trade were the second lowest in the country, and the tax on non-residential real estate of legal entities – the third lowest. Within the district, Medkovets is the municipality levying the lowest local taxes, and the municipalities of Chiprovtsi and Valchedram – the highest.

Administration ■■

In 2022, the local authorities' self-assessment on the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop-shop services fell considerably below the respective national averages. The AIP transparency rating of the local administration was also lower, albeit slightly, than the country's average – 69.5%, against 70.2% in the country.

The cadastral map coverage of the district's territory is close to the national average – 97.1% in the district, compared to 97.4% in the country in 2021.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ■

Demography ■■■

The continuing tendency towards population ageing is particularly conspicuous in Montana district. The natural population growth rate again registered a decline in 2021 and at -23.2‰ (versus -13.2‰ nationally) was the second worst in the country after that in Vidin district. The district fails to attract people and the net migration figure is also negative at -2.9‰.

The trend towards population ageing is also visible in the district's age dependency ratios although in 2021 they registered a decrease. The ratio of the population aged over 65 to that aged 0-14 was 190.9%, compared to 149.3% in the country, and to that aged 15-64 it was 43.7%, compared to 34.0% in the country.

A relatively low share of the population of Montana district lives in urban settlements – 64.0%, versus the national average of 73.1%. Population density in urban settlements is relatively low.

Education ■■■

In the past few years, the rate of enrolment in 5th-7th grade has been lagging behind the country's average. In 2021 it was 81.8%, against 85.9% in the country. The percentages of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education are higher than the national averages. The number of primary and secondary school teachers relative to the total student population has gone up to 102 teachers per 1,000 students, compared to 98 per 1,000 students nationally.

The average results of the students from Montana district were again relatively low in 2022. The average score in the external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 27.8 p., which ranked it far behind the national average of 35.3 p. The average result in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language was "Good" 3.78, compared to 3.97 nationally. The share of "fail" (below 3.00) grades was close to the national average – 17.2% in the district, versus 17.0% nationally.

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

Healthcare ■■■■

Access to doctors in Montana district remained relatively good in 2021. The proportion of the population cared for by GPs is 1,547 persons to one GP, compared to 1,734 persons to one 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 7.15 beds per 1,000 persons, versus the national average of 5.62 beds per 1,000 persons.

Infant mortality in the district continues to be relatively high. The hospitalization figures are also much higher than the national average – 241.8 per 1,000 persons, compared to 222.6 per 1,000 persons nationally.

Public order and security ■■

Montana again remains among the regions with the weakest performance in the sphere of security and justice for 2021. The main reason for this is that the district has recorded the highest number of registered crimes against the person and property in the last two years. The number of crimes in 2021 was 13.6 per 1,000 persons, compared to 9.8 per 1,000 persons in the country. Despite this, the share of detected crimes is higher than the national average – 57.2%, compared to 51.7% in the country.

The indicators for the justice system also assign the district a low ranking. Although the workloads of criminal judges are among the lowest in the country, the delivery of justice is relatively slow. One local judge hears an average of 6.2 criminal cases per month, compared to 9.0 cases per judge per month in the country, and the share of cases completed within 3 months is 86%, versus 89% nationally. The share of pending cases has reached 15.6%, against 11.8% in the country.

Environment ■■■■■

The performance of Montana district as regards the state of the environment is good. This is mainly due to the smaller amount of household waste and its management. In 2020, the average amount of household waste generated annually was 286 kg/person, against the average of 409 kg/person nationwide. The share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling was 87.36%, compared to 69.3% as the national average.

The relatively low urban population accounts for the relatively low share of households living in settlements with public sewerage networks – in 2020 it constituted 61.0%, compared to 76.3% in the country. Access to public sewerage networks connected to wastewater treatment plants was also low – available to 35.2% of the households, compared to 66.7% in the country.

The share of forest areas is relatively low – 23.2%, against 33.1% in the country, but the share of disturbed areas is also relatively low – 0.12%, against 0.42% for the country in 2021.

Culture ■■

In 2021, cultural life in Montana was once again among the least intense in the country. It revived somewhat but not sufficiently to make up for the huge shrinking of the year before, caused by the onset of the pandemic and the ensuing restrictions on public events. Cinema visits went up to 123 per 1,000 persons, with 351 per 1,000 persons nationwide. The local theatres and museums managed to attract 49 persons per 1,000 population and 79 persons per 1,000 population respectively, compared to the national averages of 129 persons per 1,000 population for theatre visits, and 426 per 1,000 people for museum visits in 2021. 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

Economic Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	9,572	10,027	n.a.	17,299
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	11,165	12,487	n.a.	16,687
Relative share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	47.4	46.3	42.0	22.1
Annual average economic activity rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	60.5	68.7	63.4	72.0
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	48.2	52.1	52.5	68.1
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	20.4	24.1	17.1	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with primary or lower education (%)	30.3	28.2	24.1	16.6
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with higher education (%)	10.0	11.3	14.0	29.6
Production value (BGN/person)	14,982	15,717	n.a.	27,213
Expenditures for acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN/person)	1,201	1,267	n.a.	3,348
Foreign direct investment to non-financial enterprises, per capita (cumulative) (EUR/person)	280	288	n.a.	3,877
Relative share of households with internet access (%)	78.0	58.2	70.2	83.5
Share of roads in good condition (%)	28.9	35.2	27.0	42.0
Road network density (km/100 sq. m territory)	17.2	16.9	16.9	18.0
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	71.0	72.0	69.5	70.2

Social Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-14.5	-18.2	-23.1	-13.2
Net migration rate (‰)	-6.1	5.4	-2.9	1.9
Average grades in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.15	3.94	3.78	3.97
Average grade in the National external examination in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	27.8	30.1	27.8	35.3
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	81.1	83.0	81.8	85.9
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	94	98	102	97
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	88.8	87.7	88.5	88.7
Number of people per general practitioner	1,443	1,502	1,547	1,734
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 persons	13.1	13.8	13.6	9.8
Actual workload of penal judges in the district court (cases/month)	7.7	5.6	6.2	9.0
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage systems (%)	61.3	61.0	n.a.	76.3
Household waste generated per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	287	286	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	87.6	87.6	n.a.	69.3
Number of visits to cinemas per 1,000 people of the average annual population	97	96	123	351
Number of visits to museums per 1,000 people of the average annual population	155	67	79	426

* The 2021 data are included in the 2022 study.

** The data refer to the 2021-22 academic year, while the State matriculation exams took place in 2022. The same is valid of the previous years.