

Pazardzhik district

► Population (2021)	247,360
► Territory (sq. km)	4,457
► Number of settlements	118
► Share of urban population (%)	62.7



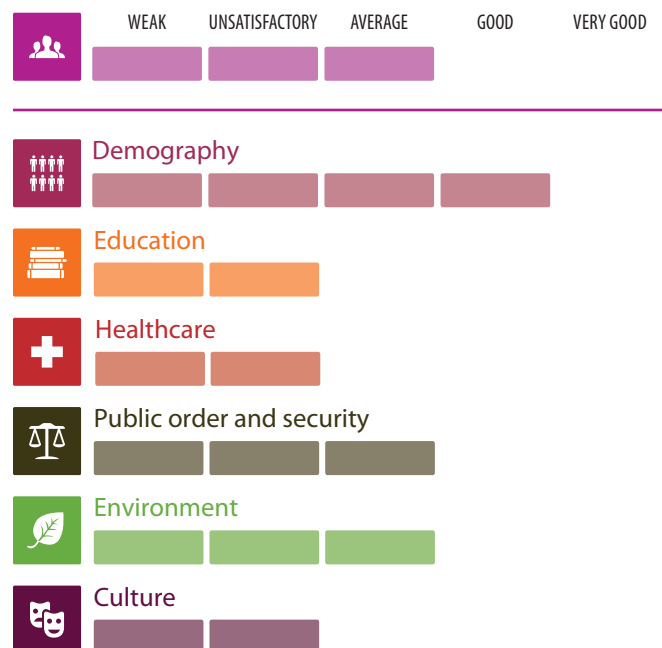
GDP, salaries, and incomes in Pazardzhik district have continued to grow, but remain relatively low. The employment rate is falling and the unemployment rate is rising. Investment and business activity in the area are not particularly brisk. However, production value continues to rise. Pazardzhik is the district with the highest rating for infrastructural development. The average amount of local taxes is relatively low. The AIP active transparency rating of the local administration has been decreasing and remains relatively low.

Age dependency ratios in the district continue to worsen but remain more favorable than the national average. Students' results again remain relatively low. Access to GPs in the district is better than the country average but there is an obvious shortage of specialist physicians. The number of crimes remains relatively small, and their detection rate is close to the country average. Connectivity to wastewater treatment plants lags significantly behind. Cultural life in the Pazardzhik region is among the least intense in the country.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ■■■

Income and living standard ■■

In 2020, GDP, salaries, and incomes in Pazardzhik district continued to grow and their rate of increase was higher than the national average, though remaining relatively low. GDP per capita reached 11,000 BGN, compared to 17,300 BGN in the country on average. The gross annual salary of employed persons was 13,100 BGN, compared to 16,700 BGN in the country. These developments account for the falling poverty levels of the local population. The share of people living with material deprivation has dropped to 23.3%, compared to 19.4% in the country, and those living below the national poverty line make up 30.6% of the residents, versus the national average of 22.1%.

Labor market ■■■

Economic activity in Pazardzhik district is traditionally close to, but below the national average. In 2021, its rate decreased somewhat and reached 70.3%, versus 72.0% in the country. This drop was accompanied by a fall in employment and a rise in unemployment. The employment rate decreased to 64.9%, compared to 68.1% nationally, and that of unemployment went up to 7.7%, versus the national average of 5.3%.

The educational profile of the workforce remains a persistent challenge facing the local labor market. In 2021, the share of people with a university degree continued to decrease and came down to 15.2%, against an average of 29.6% in the country, while those with primary or lower education increased to 27.2%, versus 16.6% nationally.

The demographic replacement ratio of people aged 15–19 to those aged 60–64 is 67.4%, compared to the national average of 69.4%. This means that for every 100 people who are about to leave the workforce in the next few years, there are 67 young people who will join the labor market.

Investment and economy ■■

Investment and business activity in Pazardzhik district were again not particularly brisk in 2020. The number of enterprises remained low – 44 per 1,000 persons, against the national average of 60 per 1,000 persons. There was an outflow of foreign and domestic direct investment. FTA acquisition expenditures in the same year marked a considerable decrease (by 15%) to 1,900 BGN/person, against the national figure of 3,300 BGN/person, and FDI fell by 10% to 1,700 EUR/person, compared to 3,900 EUR/person countrywide. In spite of that, production value in Pazardzhik district continued to rise and reached 17,000 BGN/person, against 27,200 BGN/person in the country. As regards utilization of EU funding, Pazardzhik district has recorded some increase yet the amounts remain relatively low.

By 30 June 2022, payments made in the district to beneficiaries of EU operational programs amounted to 1,600 BGN/person. Within the district, the municipality with the highest rate of utilization was Panagyurishte.

Infrastructure ■■■■

Pazardzhik is the district with the highest rating as regards infrastructural development. In 2021, the density of its railroad network again remained higher than the national average. The road network density and the share of motorways and first-class roads were lower than the respective national average figures but road surface quality remained relatively high. The share of the road surface in good condition increased to 55%, compared to 42% in the country.

In 2019, the district population's access to the internet continued its rapid rise and remained above the national average – 85.1% in the district, versus 83.5% nationwide.

Pazardzhik district is the country's leader in installed RES capacities – 4.2 kW/person, compared to 0.6 kW/person in the country.

Local taxes ■■■■

The average level of local taxes in the municipalities of Pazardzhik district again remained relatively low in 2022. Out of the five monitored taxes, the only exception was the tax rate on non-gratuitous acquisition of property, which was higher, albeit slightly, than the national average. Considerably lower than the average ones in the country were the local tax rates on non-residential real estate of legal entities, motor vehicles, taxi transportation, and retail trade.

Within the district, the municipalities of Sarnitsa and Bratsigovo levy the highest local taxes, while the lowest rates are in the municipalities of Pazardzhik, Velingrad, and Lesichovo.

Administration ■■■

Cadastral map coverage now includes practically the whole of the district's territory. In 2022, the local authorities' self-assessment on the development of e-government and on the provision of one-stop-shop services retained in general its level and remained considerably below the national average. The performance of the district's e-government was rated at an average of 3.12 p. out of 4 p., versus the national average of 3.47 p., and the provision of one-stop-shop services – at 3.08 p. out of 4 p., compared to 3.37 p. nationally. The AIP Active transparency ratings of the local administration went down in 2022 to 65.3%, against the national average of 70.2%, and remained relatively low.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

In 2021, the natural population growth rate dropped considerably for the second year in a row, reaching -14.0‰ and thus settling below the national figure of -13.2‰ . At the same time, Pazardzhik fails to attract new residents, and the net migration rate is also negative at -1.8‰ .

Age dependency ratios continue to deteriorate but remain more favorable than in the country on average. In 2021, the ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0–14 reached 139.7%, compared to 149.3% in the country, and of people aged 65+ to those aged 15–64 it was 33.2%, against 34.0% nationally.

The urban population in Pazardzhik district remains relatively low – 62.7%, versus the national average of 73.1%, while the average density of the population living in urban settlements is relatively high – 2,041 persons/sq. km, against 1,489 persons/sq. km on average nationwide.

Education

Pazardzhik is among the districts with the worst performance in the indicators for the education category. In 2021, the rate of enrolment in 5th–7th grade dropped for the third year in a row, reaching 78.4%, against the national average of 85.9%. The percentages of repeaters and dropouts from primary and secondary education were also excessively high. The relative number of teachers has shrunk slightly but continues to exceed the national average.

The figures for the average results of the district's students in 2022 again remain relatively low. The average score in the external examination in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 30.1 points, versus 35.3 points in the country. The average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 3.80 in the district, compared to 3.97 nationally. The share of "fail" grades (below 3.00) dropped by 1 p.p. to 21.2%, versus the average of 17% nationwide.

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

Healthcare

The share of people with health insurance in Pazardzhik district again remained low in 2021 – 85.8%, against 88.7% in the country. Access to GPs in the district is better than the national average but there is a definite shortage of specialist physicians. The provision of beds in the local general hospitals is traditionally higher than average and in 2021 there were 6.68 beds per 1,000 persons, versus the national average of 5.62 beds per 1,000 persons.

Hospitalization figures are extremely high – 277 per 1,000 persons, versus 222.6 per 1,000 persons nationally. Infant mortality in the district continues to decrease and for the first time in at least ten years is below the national average.

Public order and security

The workloads of the local criminal judges are lower than the national average and this affects the speed of delivery of justice. In 2021, one local judge heard an average of 7.9 cases a month, compared to 9.0 cases nationally. The share of criminal cases closed within 3 months was 92%, against the national average of 89%, and pending cases amounted to 7%, compared to the national average of 12%.

The number of crimes remains relatively small, while their detection rate is close to the country's average. In 2021, the registered crimes against the person and property amounted to 7.3 per 1,000 persons, versus 9.8 per 1,000 persons nationwide. The detection rate was 52.7%, compared to the national figure of 51.7%.

Environment

Although in districts with a relatively high share of rural population connectivity to public sewerage systems is usually limited, in Pazardzhik district such access in 2020 was close to the country's average – 72.6%, compared to 76.3% nationally. However, connectivity to wastewater treatment plants lags significantly behind, with 43.7%, versus 66.7% nationally.

The amount of household waste generated in the district remains relatively small – in 2020 it was 367 kg/person, compared to 409 kg/person in the country. At the same time, however, the share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling also remained extremely limited – 15.4%, versus 69.3% nationally.

Pazardzhik is the district with the second highest share of forest areas, with only Smolyan outranking it – 54.9% in the district, versus 33.1% countrywide. The share of disturbed areas, for its part, is close to the national average – 0.42%.

Culture

In 2021, cultural life in Pazardzhik district again remained among the least active in the country. Attendance to various cultural events went up somewhat but this was insufficient to make up for the huge shrinking in the year before, caused by the onset of the pandemic and the ensuing restrictions on all public events. Cinema visits reached 121 per 1,000 persons, with 351 per 1,000 persons nationwide. Visits to local theatres and museums were close to the respective national averages – 152 per 1,000 persons, compared to 129 per 1,000 persons, and 409 per 1,000 persons versus 426 per 1,000 persons nationwide.

Visits to libraries remain relatively low – 204 per 1,000 people in the district, compared to 449 per 1,000 people in the country.

Key indicators for the district of Pazardzhik

Economic Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	10,017	10,995	n.a.	17,299
Average annual gross salary per employed person (BGN)	11,675	13,090	n.a.	16,687
Relative share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	37.0	32.9	30.6	22.1
Annual average economic activity rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	72.9	71.1	70.3	72.0
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15 to 64 (%)	69.1	67.4	64.9	68.1
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	5.1	5.1	7.7	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with primary or lower education (%)	22.8	24.2	27.2	16.6
Relative share of the population aged 25 to 64 with higher education (%)	17.5	15.6	15.2	29.6
Production value (BGN/person)	16,513	17,006	n.a.	27,213
Expenditures for acquisition of fixed tangible assets per capita (BGN/person)	2,256	1,911	n.a.	3,348
Foreign direct investment to non-financial enterprises, per capita (cumulative) (EUR/person)	1,890	1,710	n.a.	3,877
Relative share of households with internet access (%)	68.3	81.7	85.1	83.5
Share of roads in good condition (%)	44.4	49.6	54.7	42.0
Road network density (km/100 sq. m territory)	16.2	16.9	16.9	18.0
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	65.4	70.4	65.3	70.2

Social Development Indicators	2019	2020	2021	National average
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-6.7	-10.7	-14.0	-13.2
Net migration rate (‰)	-3.9	4.8	-1.8	1.9
Average grades in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	4.07	4.03	3.80	3.97
Average grade in the National external examination in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	31.3	30.9	30.1	35.3
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	82.4	79.8	78.4	85.9
Number of teachers in primary and secondary schools per 1,000 students	99	107	105	97
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	85.8	85.1	85.8	88.7
Number of people per general practitioner	1,631	1,669	1,671	1,734
Crimes against the person and property per 1,000 persons	8.8	7.3	7.3	9.8
Actual workload of penal judges in the district court (cases/month)	10.4	8.4	7.9	9.0
Share of population living in settlements with public sewerage systems (%)	72.7	72.6	n.a.	76.3
Household waste generated per capita of serviced population (kg/person/year)	368	367	n.a.	409
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	15.4	15.4	n.a.	69.3
Number of visits to cinemas per 1,000 people of the average annual population	190	43	121	351
Number of visits to museums per 1,000 people of the average annual population	864	361	409	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.