

Pleven

GDP per capita, current prices, BGN (2009)	5142
Population (2011)	268493
Employment rate of the population over 15 years (2011)	39,6
Area (sq. km.)	4653,3



Overview

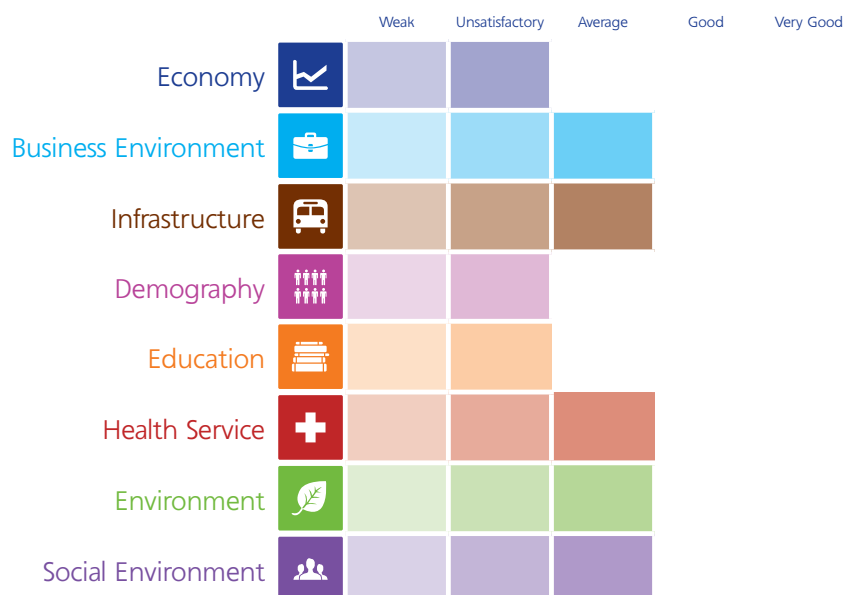
Pleven District is located in the central part of Northern Bulgaria and includes 11 municipalities with 144 populated areas: Belene, Gulyantsi, Dolna Mitropoliya, Dolni Dabnik, Iskar, Kneja, Levski, Nikopol, Pleven, Pordim and Cherven Bryag. Over two-thirds of the population lives in cities and bigger towns.

Employment of the population over 15 years is very low and only managed to exceed 40% in the period 2005-2009.

Municipalities in the district are conducting a moderate fiscal policy. The business environment in the district received favourable scores in terms of local administration, the judiciary, and the level of corruption.

Demographic developments have been extremely unfavourable: the high and ever-increasing age dependency ratio indicates worsening demography and unfavourable prospects for the labour market.

Pleven District scored fairly well in healthcare. Children's enrolment in the school system is above the national average, and the number of school drop-outs is also reduced. Most of the environmental indicators are at a good level and/or have improved over the years.



Economy

Over the period 2000-2009, Pleven District persistently reported a GDP per capita lower than the national average. This trend is even more negative because with each year, GDP per capita figures slipped further and further away from the national average, and has one of the lowest growth rates for the ten-year period.

Employment of the population over 15 years has been extremely low since 2000. It only managed to exceed 40% in the period 2005-2009, and in 2011, the district ranks fifth in the list of those with lowest employment. The income per household member in the district is relatively high and it ranks among the top ten districts with the highest incomes: BGN 3,902 against the average of BGN 3,782 for the country in 2011.

Foreign direct investment in the area is extremely low, reaching EUR 532 per 1,000 population in 2010 and far below the national average of € 2,935. In the period 2004-2010, key enterprises in the chemical, manufacturing, food and machine-building industries closed down, with severe impact on local employment and income levels. The failed privatisation and poor management by the new owners of former large companies led to the establishment of many smaller businesses operating in the same field, but with much less efficiency and access to major international markets.

The district has high expectations for revival of the local economy associated with the Belene NPP project, hoping for new jobs, increased consumption and investment. Following the decision to terminate the project, the local population now expects that companies initially attracted to the area in anticipation of its launch would withdraw from Pleven.

The area enjoys high-quality arable land, with the arable area being 85.79% of the total area. The existence of several research institutes in the field of horticulture is another factor for development. Municipalities have not performed very well in the absorption of EU funds. At the end of 2011, about EUR 67 euros per person were paid under operational programmes, that is far behind the leading districts of Gabrovo (EUR 309) and Lovech (EUR 266).

Business Environment

Municipalities in the district have been conducting a moderate local tax policy that does not differ significantly from the common practice in other districts.

Over the years, the license tax rate remained low and unchanged in almost all municipalities. The only exception is Pleven Municipality, where in the period 2008-2011 this particular tax rate was extremely high, but in 2012 it was cut by more than 30%. An interesting example is the Nikopol Municipality, that has maintained the highest business property tax nationwide since 2008.

Two divergent trends have been observed in local taxes. Over the past ten years, three municipalities drastically reduced the garbage charge (Pleven, Iskar, and Belene), while the municipalities of Dolni Dubnik, Kneja and Dolna Mitropoliya slightly increased it, but in all municipalities the 2012 levels are below the national average. With respect to the fee for use of industrial goods' markets, it has increased in all municipalities except Pordim, where the rate has been decreasing over the last decade.

The rating given to the business environment in the district is about average. It performs well in terms of local administration, the judiciary and the level of corruption.

Over half of local businesses find no major shortcomings in the way local administrations operate, and corruption levels are described as „low“.

The most common are informal payments in public procurement and the judiciary: over 30% of respondents said that the companies in the district are forced to make such payments „very often“ or „relatively often“.

Infrastructure

There is no highway crossing the district of Pleven. As at 2011, the structure of the road network was dominated by Class 3 roads (62%), followed by Class 2 roads (26%) and Class 1 roads (12%). The new road built to the town of Nikopol for the needs of Nikopol - Turnu Magurele ferry is still underused because it not part of a cross-border corridors and therefore the expected effects on the local economy have not yet emerged. The density of railway lines (4.4 km/100 km²) was above the national average in 2010, half of this length being electrified. The accessibility of railway transport (stations and stops) is also very good.

Losses in the transport of water in public water supply and irrigation systems in the district are consistently lower than the national average, and have seen a significant reduction over the last five years. This is mostly due to the on-going or finalised projects financed with EU funds for the completion, reconstruction and rehabilitation of water supply and sewerage systems, for instance in the municipalities of Iskar and Kneja.

Despite the significant increase in the share of households that use the Internet and of persons aged between 16 and 74 years who used the Internet in the last 12 months, the region lags far behind the country average for 2011.

Demography

Over the past ten years, the population in the district shrank by almost 60 thousand, or more than 18%, reaching 268,493 people in 2011. This is the third highest reduction from among all districts. This is mostly due to the negative natural increase rate, and to a lesser extent, the outbound migration of local resident to other districts; this latter process was particularly active between 2003 and 2005, and then again post- 2009. The high and constantly increasing age dependency ratio indicates worsening demography and unfavourable prospects for the labour market. After a relatively stable development until 2010, in 2011 a sharp deterioration was reported in the ratio of people of working age to people over 65 years old, that further reduces the opportunities for economic development of the district in the near future.

The ageing population, the impact of a number of economic factors and migration processes have adversely affected the age structure of households in terms of the number of children under 16 years of age. In 2011, 78.7% of households in the area had no children under 16 years of age. In seven of the eleven municipalities, over 80% of households have no children under the age of 16.

The migration intentions of the population are the lowest in the whole country, mainly because of the age structure. Official figures show that people from the district mostly migrate to foreign countries, the capital city, and the districts of Lovech and Vratsa.

Education

The drastic depopulation of the district resulted in the need to optimise the school infrastructure. The number of schools has decreased from 148 in 2000 to 118 in 2011, and the number of teachers in primary and secondary education decreased at almost the same rate as the decrease of the number of students.

The district recorded enrolment rates of students in all stages in primary and secondary education slightly above the national average, with a distinct improvement in the last five years. A positive development was observed in the proportion of school drop-outs: following an increase of this indicator from 2001 to 2006, the trend was reversed and in 2010 the district reached its lowest level in ten years of 2.85% school drop-outs from among all students. This trend however was not enough to show a significant positive effect on the inclusion of the largest possible number of children in the education system, and more emphasis is needed on the quality aspect of this process. Pleven District has traditionally reported a higher-than-average percentage of students who scored below the lowest „pass“ grade at the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature; this trend registered a peak in 2012, when 8% of local students failed the exam.

Pleven has a Medical University (UM) and a Teachers' College (a branch of the University of Veliko Tarnovo), while in the town of Dolna Mitropoliya there is an Aviation Faculty of the National Military University V. Levski. Since 2003, the number of students in the district has been growing steadily, mostly due to foreign students (in 2011, foreign students accounted for 49% of the total student population of the local Medical University).

Healthcare

Pleven District is in the same group as Sofia (city), Varna, Smolyan, and Haskovo, scoring relatively well in healthcare. In 2010, each General Practitioner in the district served a relatively small population: 1,348 people, compared with 1,583 average for the country, that indicates a relatively high accessibility to healthcare. This favourable position has been observed for the past ten years, despite the decrease of the number of GPs, as it was offset by a concomitant population decrease. The district is in the top positions according to the availability of cardiology specialists: one per 4,243 people of the population, that is comparable to the levels reported in the Varna District and Sofia (city). One of the reasons is the existing Medical University in Pleven, that naturally creates a cluster of specialists and is certainly behind the emergence in recent years of private clinics that provide quality health services and attract patients from around the country. In 2007, for example, a private general hospital opened, that is the largest hospital in north-western Bulgaria. This process leads to the highest recorded increase in the number of patients (per capita) who sought hospital treatment over the last four years.

In 2011, 89 out of every 100 people in the district had valid health insurance, that is an increase compared to 2010, i.e. the trend is positive.

Environment

Most of the environmental indicators are at a good level and/or have improved over the years. Part of the reason is the reduced economic activity and the closing down of some large industrial plants that used to be major pollutants.

The district has one operating wastewater treatment plant, that explains the low capacity for waste water

treatment. Most municipalities in the district have already completed work on the preparation of investment projects for the completion, reconstruction or rehabilitation of the water supply and sewerage system and the construction of waste water treatment plants. (Iskar, Kneja, Dolni Dabnik, Nikopol, Belene, Cherven Bryag). Just over half the population of the district live in populated with public sanitation, that is not a flattering indicator compared to the national average of 70%. The projects currently under construction will improve performance in the near future.

Social Environment

By 2008, the proportion of people living in households with low intensity of economic activity had been in line with the average for the country, but in 2009 it reached 10.5%. The percentage of the population living in material deprivation (44.3%) and the share of the poor (21.8%) remained close to the national average levels in 2009. All three indicators registered an increase compared to 2007, in parallel with the shrinking employment rate and declining economic activity in the district.

Although only 11% of local residents are satisfied with their standard of living, a mere 7% of respondents were willing to leave the district. Locals residents rated highly the performance of institutions, with the best score given to municipal administrations, regional government bodies, and schools. Nearly three quarters of local people rated the environment and living conditions as „good“.