

Pazardzhik

Population (2013)	270 504
Area (sq. km.)	4 456.9
Number of settlements	117
Share of urban population (%)	62.4

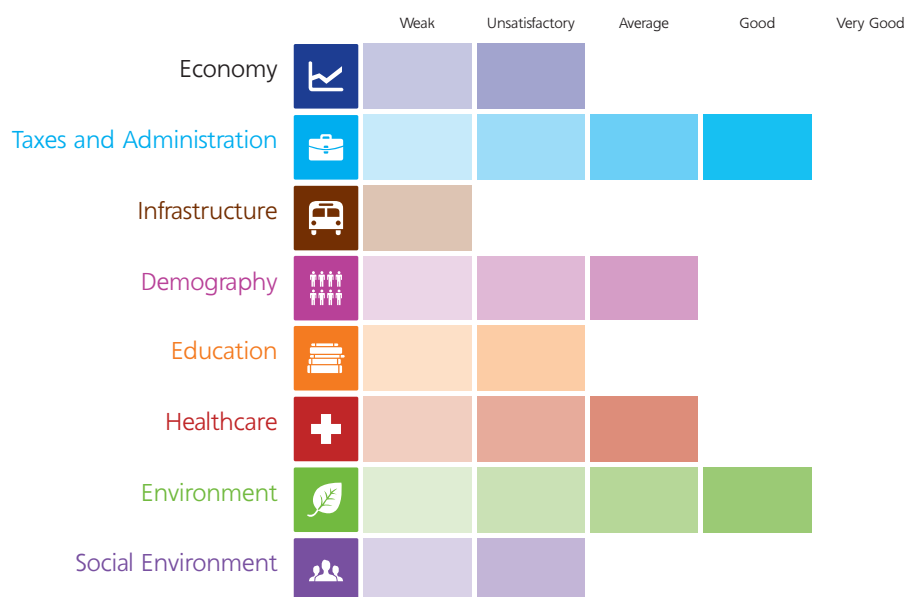


Overview

The economy of Pazardzhik District features a predominant industrial and agrarian profile. Although cumulative foreign direct investments in enterprises have been twice as low as the national average per capita as at the end of 2012, Pazardzhik District has been one of the small number of districts wherein the inflow of foreign investments has also preserved its level during the crisis years. The employment rate has outranked the country's average before the crisis, but a serious drop has followed since 2009, which only started to be offset in 2013.

Businesses' representatives in Pazardzhik District have given higher grade than the national average in respect of the performance of local administration, although the degree of use of e-services, rendered by local administration, has continued to be low.

The annual average population of Pazardzhik District has decreased faster for the past 10 years relative to the general trend in the country, but the age structure of the population has been more favourable in the district.



Economy

The economy of Pazardzhik District has a clear industrial and agrarian profile. In 2011, industry accounted for 48.4% of the gross value added (the country's average being 30.5%), the services sector – 42.6% (64.1% for the country) and agriculture – 9% (5.4% for the country). GDP was 6,661 BGN per capita in 2011, much lower than the country's average of 10,248 BGN. In 2009, GDP per capita dropped to 5,390 BGN (almost 1% less than 2008) but has recovered in the following two years and has reached a higher level than prior to the crisis. Foreign direct investments in non-financial enterprises have totalled 1,580 euro per capita as at the end of 2012 but have been approximately twice as small as the country's average (3,005 euro per capita). Nonetheless, it should be noted that even during crisis years, the inflow of foreign direct investments have continued to grow at high rates in the district, unlike most districts in Bulgaria; the biggest investments have been in manufacturing, more particularly in paper products, confectionery, optics and medicines.

The unemployment rate has been about 5% prior to the crisis and it was even lower than the national average in 2007 and 2008. The crisis also affected the labour market in the district rather negatively in 2012. The unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ reached 18.3% compared to the country's average of 12.3%. The labour market started to recover in 2013, and the unemployment rate decreased to 13%. The employment rate featured the same trend in the district. The employment rate has outranked the country's average before the crisis, but a serious drop has followed since 2009, which started to be offset in 2013.

The total of sums paid under contracts with municipalities of Pazardzhik District as beneficiaries, under operational programmes, has been 356.8 BGN per capita as at 31 January 2014, which has been slightly lower than the country's average (379.8 BGN).. The municipalities of Panagyurishte and Peshtera have drawn the most funds (1,160.9 and 1,403.9 BGN respectively), and the least – the municipality of Septemvri (80.4 BGN per capita).

Taxes and administration

Businesses' representatives in Pazardzhik District have given a higher grade than the national average in respect of the performance of local administration in the IME's survey from May 2014. Businesses have given a better-than-average assessment of the incorruptibility of employees in the district, speed of service, appropriate qualifications and responsiveness of employees. Corruption perceptions are also more favourable than the national ones; the judicial system have relatively received the most negative evaluation, which businesses throughout the country consider the most corruptible. Business representatives have stated that companies from the industry they belong to had made informal payments for amendments in local regulations for the benefit of certain business interests and for favourable decisions of judicial authorities.

The rates of local taxes and charges, included in the survey, are about the average levels for the country, excluding the household waste charge for non-residential properties of legal entities. In 2014, it was 11.7‰ on average in Pazardzhik District and therefore more than 60% higher than the country's average of 7.2‰.

Businesses have assessed the quality of rendered e-services 3.1 points compared to the country's average of 3.4. Only 28.3% of the surveyed people have responded that they had used e-services provided by the local administration for the past year. This share has been 38.6%, which demonstrates much lower use of the e-government in Pazardzhik District. Obviously, the district's administration does not provide sufficient information on how to use technologies, in order to facilitate the interaction with it because the 2014 Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies by the "Access to Information Program" Foundation (AIP) was 38.8 points – much lower than the country's average of 44.1 points and much less than the maximum of 82.4 points.

Infrastructure

Pazardzhik was one of the six districts featuring more than 50% of good quality roads in 2013. With 52.6%, Pazardzhik has performed much better than the national average of 39.6%. In 2013, there was a serious increase in the number of good quality roads – from 44% in 2012 – as a result of the rehabilitation of a number of second-class roads in the district.

The share of people who have access to and use the internet has remained at much lower levels than the national average. The relative share of households in Pazardzhik District with internet access was 36.1% in 2013 (Bulgaria's average being 53.7%), and the relative share of people (aged 16 to 74) that have used the internet in the past 12 months was 36.7% (56.2% for the country).

Demographics

The population of Pazardzhik District has decreased faster for the past 10 years relative to the general trend in the country. Although the rate of natural increase had lower absolute value (minus 4.2‰) than the country's average in 2013 (minus 5.2‰), the net migration rate also remained high in 2013 – minus 4.7‰.

The district's age structure is more favourable than the average rate for the country. The age dependency ratio (65+ to 0–14) was 126.4% (average of 142.3% for the country) in 2013, and the ratio 65+ to 15–64 was 28.2% (average of 29.3% for the country). In 2013, Pazardzhik was the top third district in respect of the coefficient of demographic replacement represented as the ratio of the population aged 15–19 to the population aged 60–64 – 70.6% in 2013 compared to 61.5% for Bulgaria. This means that 71 youngsters per hundred retired persons will join the labour market when the latter abandon it.

Education

The indicators in the education category for the district do not demonstrate good results. The low general assessment in this category was reasoned by the high share of dropouts from primary and secondary education (3.4% in 2012 compared to the national average of 2.3%) and repeaters (1.3% in 2012 in comparison with 1% for the country) and also by the low relative share of graduates in the district – in 2013, 16.6% of the population aged 25–64 had tertiary education compared to the country's average of 25.6%.

Pupils in Pazardzhik achieved grades from the state matriculation exams that were about the average ones in 2014, and the number of failures, although being higher than the country's average (4.8%), have improved in recent years – from 6.9% in 2013 to 5.8% in 2014.

Healthcare

The number of physicians in Pazardzhik District is similar to the one in Bulgaria; however, there is an insufficient number of doctors with certain specialities. The number of health insured persons was less than its national counterpart in 2013 – 82.6% in comparison to 86.1%. Beds in multi-profile hospitals for active medical treatment are sufficient in the district (5.9 per thousand people) in relation to the country (4.6 per thousand), but the number of people accepted for treatment are higher – 279.3 per thousand in comparison to 219.9 per thousand for the country.

The survey conducted in May 2014 showed that 41.3% of the population had travelled out of Pazardzhik District in the past 12 months to get medical services. The lack of specialist has been stated as the main reason thereof (58.1%). During the same period of time, 25.8% have stated that they had had to make informal payments for healthcare. This is a slightly higher share than the national average of 24.7%.

Environment

The district's citizens have given 3.3 points in respect of the environmental quality (from 1 to 5), which has been as much as the average assessment in Bulgaria. Carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere has been much too lower in Pazardzhik District than the country's average rates. In 2012, carbon dioxide was 48.7 tonnes per sq. km in the district in comparison with the country's average of 346.3 tonnes.

The share of the population living in settlements with access to a public sewerage system has already neared the country's average values. Simultaneously, the share of the population having access to sewage, connected to waste water treatment plants, remained low in 2012 – 27.2% in comparison with the country's average of 56.1%.

Social environment

The reason for the relatively low grade of Pazardzhik District in this category is the low standard of living in the district. People living in households with low work intensity were 23.1% in 2011 and their number was twice as big as the country's average. More than half of the population lives in material deprivation – 52.9% in comparison to 44.1% throughout the rest of the country. This indicator has grown seriously since the beginning of the crisis when the share of people living in material deprivation has reached 60%, but the decrease has been considerable thereafter.

The population of Pazardzhik District visited cinemas and theatres ten times less compared to the country in 2013, although the regional centre has a theatre staging more than 200 plays annually.

The survey conducted among the district's citizens in May 2014 has made it clear that 35% of the population would move to reside in any other district.

Key indicators for the district of Pazardzhik

Indicators / year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
GDP per capita (BGN, current prices)	5 390	6 219	6661	n.a.	n.a.
Annual average employment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	49.9	46.3	43.6	41.8	44.4
Annual average unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	9.4	15.5	18.1	18.3	13
Relative share of people living below the district's poverty line (%)	23	23.7	29.4	n.a.	n.a.
Age dependency ratio, 65+ to 15-64 (%)	23.8	24.4	26.7	27.3	28.2
Rate of natural increase (‰)	-2.5	-3.4	-4.6	-4.5	-4.2
Net migration rate (‰)	-4.1	-6.0	-2.5	-3.2	-4.7
Relative share of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education (%)	15.2	15.2	16.9	16.8	16.6
Percent of failed students at state matriculation exams (%)	6.4	6.5	4.6	6.8	5.8
Average grade at state matriculation exams	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.1	4.2
Share of roads in good condition (%)	n.a.	43.4	43.0	44.0	52.60
Relative share of households with Internet access (%)	23.8	25.9	38.7	40.4	36.1
Share of the population with access to public sewerage systems, connected to WWTP (%)	25.9	26.0	26.1	27.20	n.a.
Health insured persons as share of the population (%)	84.3	81.4	84.4	83.4	82.6
Cases of hospitalization per 1,000 people	138.6	129.4	135.4	265.0	279.3
Average annual income per household member, BGN	3 690	2 989	2 972	3 460	3 755