Blagoevgrad district

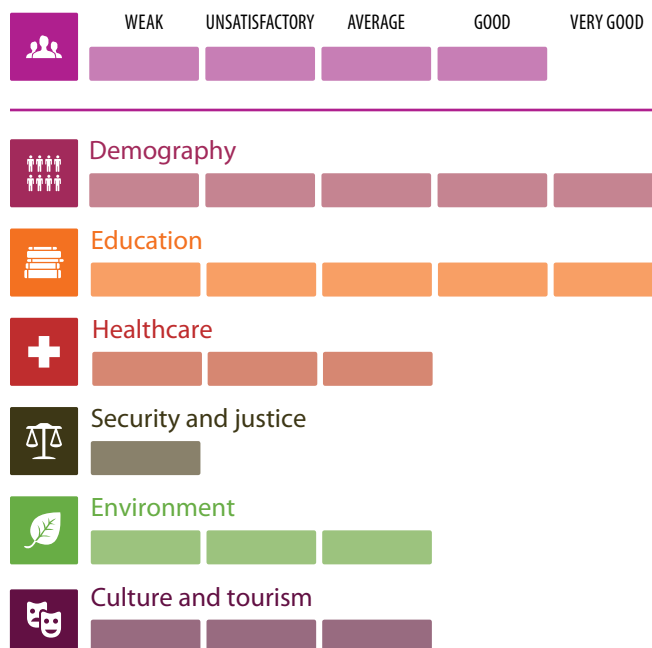|	
▶ Population (2023)	287,077
▶ Territory (sq. km)	6,449
▶ Number of settlements	274
▶ Share of urban population (%)	59.9

GDP per capita in Blagoevgrad district continues to increase, albeit at a slightly lower rate than the national average. Employment remains above average, but the unemployment rate is significantly less favorable. The relative volumes of investment and production value are below the national average. Blagoevgrad is among the districts with the best quality of road surfaces. The district is also notable for the relatively low level of its local taxes. The municipalities' self-assessments of the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop shop services stand around the national average.

Blagoevgrad is among the districts with relatively good results in the area of demographic indicators. The share of children in kindergartens is high. Students' results for 2024 are around the national average. Healthcare in the district suffers from a shortage of doctors and hospital beds. The crime rate in the district is low and the detection rate relatively high, but the delivery of justice remains sluggish. The share of forest area is high. The intensity of cultural life in Blagoevgrad district is traditionally not among the country's highest, but tourism is well developed.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WEAK · UNSATISFACTORY · AVERAGE · GOOD · VERY GOOD

- Income and living conditions
- Labor market
- Investment and business
- Infrastructure
- Local taxes
- Administration

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

WEAK · UNSATISFACTORY · AVERAGE · GOOD · VERY GOOD

- Demography
- Education
- Healthcare
- Security and justice
- Environment
- Culture and tourism

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living conditions

GDP per capita in Blagoevgrad district has continued to increase, albeit at a slightly lower rate than the national average, and in 2021 it reached 16,000 BGN. At the same time, the growth rates of salaries and pensions are almost identical with the average ones in the country, though they too remain relatively low. The gross annual salary of persons employed under labor contract in the district is 13,800 BGN, against 21,200 BGN nationally, and in 2022 it was the lowest in the whole country. The average pension in 2023 was 711 BGN, versus 784 BGN nationally.

The relative share of the population living below the national poverty line has fallen slightly, reaching 21.6% and in 2023 it surpassed the national average. The Gini coefficient, which measures the extent of income inequality in the district, has continued to decline and in 2023 it stood at 27.6%, compared to 37.2% nationally.

Labor market

The share of the working-age population in Blagoevgrad district continues to decrease, falling to 59.5% in 2023, though remaining relatively high when compared to 58.5% countrywide. The employment rate has also declined slightly, but it too remains above the national average – 76.6% in the district, versus 76.2% in the country. The unemployment rate, however, remains almost double the national average – 10.0% in the district, against 5.3% nationally.

The educational structure of the workforce continues to be relatively unfavorable, though it shows some improvement. In 2023, the share of the population aged 25–64 with university education rose to 21%, compared to 31% in the country, while the share of people with primary and lower education fell to 16%, versus 15% nationally.

Investment and business

The number of non-financial enterprises relative to the population in the district remained high in 2022, with 78 companies per 1,000 population, compared to 70 per 1,000 population nationally. The relative volume of investment and production value remains below the national average. TFA acquisition expenditure has increased to 2,400 BGN per capita and FDI – to 1,700 BGN. Production value per capita has reached 86,000 BGN per employed person. Expenditure on research and development has gone slightly up but remains relatively low.

Utilization of EU funds has continued to increase and now stands at a level considerably above the national average relative to the population. By 30 June 2024, payments made to beneficiaries under EU operational programs reached 4,400 BGN/person, once again placing Blagoevgrad district third in the country after Sofia (capital) and Gabrovo. The largest recipient in the district is Bansko municipality.

Infrastructure

Due to the district's geographic location at the country's periphery and the relatively large proportion of mountainous terrain, the density of its road and rail network is low. For the same reason, its share of highways and first-class roads in the country's road network is small. Nevertheless, Blagoevgrad remains among the districts with the best road quality – 66% in 2023, compared to 40% in the country, second only to Sliven district as regards the share of road surfaces in good condition.

The relative share of households with internet access in Blagoevgrad district went considerably up in 2023 and for the first time exceeded the national average.

The share of the district's population with access to a public sewerage network has decreased but remains above the national average – 78% in the district, versus 75% countrywide. However, Blagoevgrad is the district with the lowest connectivity to waste water treatment plants – 35%, against the national average of 67%.

Local taxes

Contrary to general nationwide trends, the district is relatively well developed economically, while in 2024 the level of local taxes again remained quite low. The average level of the tax burden for all monitored taxes is relatively small. Indeed, Blagoevgrad is the district with the lowest average tax rates for non-gratuitous acquisition of property. The tax rate for non-residential immovable property of legal entities is also significantly lower than average, as is that for motor vehicles. Closest to the average, but again below it, is the average tax rate the municipalities of Blagoevgrad district levy on retail trade.

Within the district, Blagoevgrad municipality levies on average the highest local taxes and Satovcha – the lowest.

Administration

The share of own revenues in the total revenues of the municipalities in Blagoevgrad district continued to decline in 2023, remaining extremely low at 17.9% on average in the district, compared to 26.9% nationally. Similarly, the coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues remained low at 50.2%, versus 74.1% nationally.

In 2023, the self-assessments of both the development of e-government and the provision of one-stop shop services in Blagoevgrad's municipalities were near the national average.

The AIP transparency rating of the local administration in Blagoevgrad's municipalities, though on the rise, remains below the national average – 63.4% in the district, versus 69.3% nationally.

🏛 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ▪▪▪▪

⚏ Demography ▪▪▪▪▪

In regard to demographic indicators, Blagoevgrad has achieved relatively good results, though similar to all other districts in the country, the trend towards fast population aging is in evidence here as well.

In 2023, the natural population increase rate in the district decreased to –4.4‰, against the national average of –6.8‰. The district continues to attract new residents and its net migration rate is positive, albeit a bare 0.6‰.

Population aging in the district again remained below the national average in 2023. The share of children aged under 4 was 4.5%, equal to that in the country, but that of people aged 65 and over remained relatively low at 22.2%, versus 23.8% nationwide.

Population density in the district's urban settlements is relatively high, with 2,022 persons/sq. km, versus 1,221 persons/sq. km on average in the country.

▤ Education ▪▪▪▪▪

Blagoevgrad remains among the districts with the highest share of children attending kindergarten (second only to Smolyan district) – 94% in 2023, compared to the national average of 88%.

Blagoevgrad is also among the districts with the highest rate of enrolment in 5th–7th grade – 94% in 2023, compared to 90% countrywide. The percentage of school year repeaters remains considerably lower than the respective national average. The alignment between vocational education and the profile of the economy is relatively weak.

In 2024, students' achievement in Blagoevgrad district again remained close to the national average. The district's average score in the NEA in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 41.1 p., compared to 42.9 p. in the country. For its part, the average result in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature was "Good" 4.31, versus 4.30 nationally. The share of "fail" (below 3.00) grades was 8.3%, against 8.7% nationwide.

The relative number of university students is on the decline, which is in line with the general nationwide trend, and has reached 27.7 students per 1,000 population, against 29.6 students per 1,000 population in the country.

✚ Healthcare ▪▪▪

The percentage of people with health insurance in Blagoevgrad district is 94%, against 95% nationally for 2023. The healthcare system in the district continues to suffer from a shortage of medical staff – both GPs and specialist physicians – and of hospital beds. The number of beds in the local general hospitals is 4.0 per 1,000 population, compared to 6.1 beds per 1,000 population as the national average. Nevertheless, hospital bed occupancy remains relatively low at 52%, compared to 56% nationally. Access to pharmacies is higher than average.

Infant mortality rates remain low – 4.0‰, versus 4.9‰ nationwide. Life expectancy in the district has gone up and remains relatively high at 74.9 years, compared to 73.5 nationwide.

⚖ Security and justice ▪

The share of cases closed within 3 months in the district again remained relatively low in 2023 – 88% of the criminal cases (against 91% in the country), 67% of the administrative cases (against 72% in the country) and 64% of the civil cases (against 64% in the country). The average actual workload in Blagoevgrad's District Court is close to the national average – 13.6 cases a month per judge, compared to 14.4 cases nationally. However, the Administrative Court is the busiest one compared to those in the rest of the country's districts – one judge hears on average 19.1 cases per month, compared to 14.8 nationally.

Although there are relatively few police officers in the district, in 2023 the number of crimes again remained low and the detection rate relatively high. The number of police officers is 3.2 per 1,000 population, compared to 4.2 per 1,000 population nationally. Registered crimes against the person and property in Blagoevgrad district amounted to 8.8 per 1,000 population, versus 11.3 per 1,000 population as the national figure. 60% of those crimes were cleared, against 53% on average for the whole country.

🍃 Environment ▪▪▪

The amount of household waste generated in the district continues to be relatively low – an annual of 398 kg/person in 2022, against 488 kg/person on a national scale. The share of waste handed over for treatment and recycling has remained low and even continues to decrease, falling to 33%, against 76% as the national average.

By 30 June 2024, the relative volume of installed RES capacities in Blagoevgrad district is commensurable with the national average. The share of forest area is high – 52%, compared to 33% nationally, and that of disturbed area low – 0.1%, versus 0.4% in the country for 2023.

🎭 Culture and tourism ▪▪▪

The intensity of cultural life in Blagoevgrad district has traditionally not been among the country's highest and this can be seen from the data for 2023. Cinema visits increased, reaching 479 per 1,000 population, against 684 per 1,000 population nationwide and visits to the theatre rose to 143 per 1,000 population, against 349 per 1,000 population in the country. The number of museum visits went up to 651 per 1,000 population, against 770 per 1,000 population nationwide. Numbers for library visits stood at 659 per 1,000 population, compared to 679 per 1,000 population nationwide.

At the same time, the district performs relatively well in the tourism-related indicators. The number of beds in accommodation establishments is 71 per 1,000 population, versus 56 per 1,000 population in the country, and the number of overnight stays has risen to 6,259 per 1,000 population, compared to 4,167 per 1,000 population countrywide. Guest nights booked via online sharing economy platforms number 801 per 1,000 population, compared to 500 per 1,000 population nationally.

Key indicators for the district of Blagoevgrad

Economic Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	12,629	16,041	n.a.	**25,956**
Average gross annual salary of people employed under labour contract (BGN)	12,226	13,833	n.a.	**21,242**
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	19.1	22.9	21.6	**20.6**
Share of the working-age population (%)	61.0	59.8	59.5	**58.5**
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	75.0	76.9	76.6	**76.2**
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	9.1	9.4	10.0	**5.3**
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	18.8	18.4	16.2	**14.8**
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	21.0	20.4	20.7	**30.5**
Production value (BGN/employed person)	67,797	85,975	n.a.	**122,377**
Expenditures on the acquisition of tangible fixed assets (BGN/person)	1,795	2,425	n.a.	**4,257**
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (cumulative) (EUR/person)	1,693	1,739	n.a.	**4,544**
Share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	83.7	78.0	n.a.	**75.0**
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	65.6	63.9	65.6	**40.4**
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	61.3	59.9	50.2	**74.1**
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	61.3	61.2	63.4	**69.3**

Social Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Natural population increase rate (‰)	n.a.	−7.5	−4.4	**−6.8**
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	0.3	0.6	**6.4**
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.91	3.84	4.31	**4.30**
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	35.0	33.3	41.1	**42.9**
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	92.9	94.5	94.0	**89.9**
Average life expectancy (years)***	74.3	74.0	74.9	**73.5**
Share of people with health insurance (%)	90.2	93.0	94.0	**95.0**
Population per one GP (persons)	1,775	1,742	1,743	**1,701**
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	7.3	8.9	8.8	**11.3**
Share of criminal cases closed within 3 months	82	87	88	**91**
Households' consumption of municipally supplied drinking water (liter/person/day)	119	122	n.a.	**103**
Generated household waste of serviced population (kg/person/year)	360	398	n.a.	**488**
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	41	33	n.a.	**76**
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	258	333	479	**684**
Overnight stays in accommodation establishments (number/1,000 population)	3,047	4,799	6,259	**4,167**

* The 2023 data are included in the 2024 study. The same is valid for the previous years.

** The data refer to the 2023-24 academic year, while the State matriculation exams took place in 2024. The same is valid for the previous years.

*** Data are for three-year periods and are updated annually.