

Kardzhali district

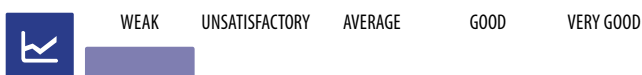
▶ Population (2023)	146,562
▶ Territory (sq. km)	3,209
▶ Number of settlements	468
▶ Share of urban population (%)	41.2



Kardzhali is among the districts with the worst performance as regards the incomes and quality of life of the population. Employment has been going down and unemployment has been going up. Investment and business activity has improved, though remaining relatively limited. The density of the road network is higher than the national average, though the share of highways and first-class roads is relatively low. The tax rates for retail trade and immovable non-residential property for legal entities levied by the municipalities in the district are considerably lower than the national average. E-government is not well developed.

The rate of natural population increase is relatively high. Students' performance in the district again remains poor. Healthcare suffers from a chronic shortage of doctors and hospital beds. Life expectancy is high. The number of registered crimes against the person and property is low and the crime detection rate is high. The amount of household waste generated in the district is low, but at the same time, only a small proportion of this waste is handed over for treatment and recycling. Cultural life and tourism in Kardzhali district are among the least active in the country.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Income and living conditions



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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Income and living conditions

Kardzhali is among the districts with the worst performance as regards the incomes and quality of life of the population.

In 2022, GDP per capita rose considerably, though its level remained relatively low – 15,400 BGN/person, compared to 26,000 BGN/person in the country. Pensions have been growing at a slower rate and remain the lowest in the country – the average monthly pension in the district is 633 BGN, compared to 784 BGN in the country. Salaries in the district have also recorded the smallest increase in the whole country for 2022 – by 8%, against 13% nationally, reaching 15,700 BGN/person, against the national average of 21,200 BGN/person.

The Gini coefficient for income inequality remains low in Kardzhali district, but the poverty level has been rising and is now high. The proportion of people living below the poverty line is 27.3%, against the national average of 20.6% for 2023.

Labor market

The working-age population is declining and remains below the national average – 56.8% in the district, compared to 58.5% in the country for 2023. At the same time, employment declined and unemployment increased. The employment rate reached 70.6%, compared to 76.2% in the country, and the unemployment rate went up to 10.2%, against 5.3% in the country.

The labor market continues to face the challenge of the population's unfavorable educational structure, which even worsened in 2023. The share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education is 20%, compared to 15% in the country, while that of the people with a university degree has gone down to 22%, versus 31% nationally.

Investment and business

In 2022, investment and business activity in Kardzhali improved but remained relatively slack. The relative number of non-financial enterprises increased and is no longer the lowest in the country – 48 per 1,000 population, against the national average of 70 per 1,000 population. TFA expenditures marked an increase to 1,800 BGN/person, and FDI registered a growth to 3,000 BGN/person.

Production in the district has been on the increase, although it remains significantly below the national average relative to the employed population – 69,800 BGN in Kardzhali, against 122,400 BGN in the country. Considerably above the national average, however, is the share of export earnings in net sales revenues – 38%, against 29% in the country, which has to do with the district being situated at the country's border.

Research and development expenditures per capita in the district again remained low in 2022.

Utilization of EU funding has increased but is still lagging behind the country's average. By 30 June 2024, payments made in the district to beneficiaries of EU operational programs

amounted to 2,529 BGN/person, compared to 3,175 BGN/person nationally. Within the district, the municipalities with the highest rate of utilization were those of Kardzhali and Momchilgrad but neither of them managed to reach the national average.

Infrastructure

In 2023, the density of the rail network in Kardzhali district again remained among the lowest in the country. The road network density is higher than the national average but the share of highways and first-class roads is relatively low – 11%, against 19% in the country. The share of road surfaces in good condition is close to, but below the national average – 35% in the district, compared to 40% across the country.

The share of households with internet access in the district has decreased and in 2023 it was still below the national average.

The share of the population living in settlements connected to a public sewerage system is among the lowest in the country – 43%, against 75% in the country. Connectivity of the public sewerage networks with wastewater treatment plants is similarly among the lowest – 38%, compared to the national average of 67%.

Local taxes

The municipalities in Kardzhali district again kept local tax rates low in 2024. The margin is especially large as regards the retail trade tax and the tax rate on immovable non-residential property for legal entities. The tax rates for non-gratuitous acquisition of property and for motor vehicles are slightly higher than the respective national averages. Within the district, the local tax rates are lowest in the municipality of Chernoochene, and highest in the municipality of Ardino.

Administration

The performance of the municipalities in Kardzhali district in this category is the second lowest in the country, ranking it only above Vidin.

In 2024, the local authorities' self-assessments of the development of e-government and of the provision of one-stop shop services remained extremely low. The transparency rating of the local administration is low as well – 67.8%, compared to the national average of 69.3%.

Similar to the processes in the rest of the country's districts, the share of own revenues in the total revenues of Kardzhali district's municipalities in 2023 decreased, going down to 18%, against 27% in the country, while the coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues shrank to 56%, against 74% in the country.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Demography

The natural population increase rate in Kardzhali district remains more favorable than the national average of -6.8% , although at -6.5% it too is still negative. The district continues to attract a great number of new residents and the net migration rate is again the highest in the country.

The share of children under 4 years in Kardzhali district is below the country's average – 4.1% , compared to the national average of 4.5% , while the share of the population aged 65 and over exceeds the national average – 26.4% , compared to 23.8% in the country,

Although a small share of the population lives in urban settlements, its density is relatively high – $1,702$ persons/sq. km, against $1,221$ persons/sq. km on average nationwide.

Education

Kardzhali is one of the three districts (alongside Lovech and Sliven) occupying the bottom places in this category.

Enrolment in 5th–7th grade in Kardzhali district has marked a decrease and is among the lowest in the country. At the same time, the proportion of school year repeaters remains relatively small. In 2024, the alignment between vocational education and the profile of the economy in the district again remained below the national average.

In 2024, the performance of the students from the district was once again poor. The average score in the NEA in mathematics at the end of 7th grade was 36.8 p., compared to 42.9 p. in the country. The average grade in the State matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature was “Good” 4.22 , compared to “Good” 4.30 nationally. The share of “fail” grades (below 3.00) in the State matriculation exams in Bulgarian language and literature, however, was 14.7% , compared to the national average of 8.7% .

Higher education in the district is poorly represented, with 3.6 university students per $1,000$ population, compared to 29 per $1,000$ population countrywide.

Healthcare

In 2023, the health insurance system in Kardzhali district again covered practically the whole of its population. Life expectancy is among the highest in the country (along with that in the capital). At the same time, healthcare in Kardzhali district suffers from a chronic shortage of doctors and of hospital beds. Kardzhali is the district with the lowest number both of GPs and of specialist physicians relative to the population. There is one GP per $2,950$ population, whereas nationally the proportion is $1,701$ per GP on average.

The number of hospital beds in the local general hospitals relative to the population remains extremely low – 3.8 beds per $1,000$ population, compared to the national average of 6.1 beds per $1,000$ population. The relative number of pharmacies in the district is also limited.

Security and justice

Kardzhali's performance in this category places the district among the top three in the ranking. In 2023, the workloads of the District Court judges were among the lowest in the country, though the workloads of the Administrative Court judges were relatively high. Delivery of justice in the district is speedy. The share of criminal cases closed within 3 months is 97% , against the national average of 91% ; that of administrative cases is 78% , compared to 72% in the country, and of civil cases – 85% , versus 65% nationally.

In 2023, the number of registered crimes against the person and property in Kardzhali district rose slightly, though remaining among the lowest in the country – 5.7 crimes per $1,000$ population, versus 11.3 per $1,000$ population nationwide. The detection rate continues to be extremely high, reaching 69% , versus the national figure of 53% , even though the number of police officers is below the average one countrywide.

Environment

In 2022, the amount of household waste in the district remained the lowest in the country – 246 kg/person, compared to 488 kg/person nationally. At the same time, however, a relatively small portion of this waste was handed over for treatment and recycling – 10% , against 76% in the country.

Kardzhali is among the districts with the largest forest areas, with a share of 54% , compared to 33% in the country. Disturbed area, on the other hand, is relatively limited – 0.1% , compared to 0.4% in the country for 2023. The installed RES capacities in the district relative to the population are higher than the national average. The amount of drinking water consumed by the households relative to the population is relatively small.

Culture and tourism

In 2023, cultural life in Kardzhali district again remained among the least active in the country, where it ranks only before Montana. The district has the lowest number of visits to local museums – 85 per $1,000$ population, against the average of 770 per $1,000$ population in the country. Visits to the cinema relative to the population have increased, though remaining over five times lower than the average ones. Visits to the local theatres and libraries are also relatively few in number.

Tourism again gets a poor rating for 2023. The number of beds in accommodation establishments has been increasing but remains low, with 19 beds per $1,000$ population, compared to 56 per $1,000$ population nationally. Overnight stays are also relatively low at 855 per $1,000$ population, versus $4,167$ per $1,000$ population nationally. Guest nights booked via online sharing economy platforms are a whole ten times fewer than the national average relative to the population.

Key indicators for the district of Kardzhali

Economic Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (BGN, current prices)	11,760	15,411	n.a.	25,956
Average gross annual salary of people employed under labour contract (BGN)	14,508	15,693	n.a.	21,242
Share of people living below the national poverty line (%)	25.5	25.9	27.3	20.6
Share of the working-age population (%)	59.6	57.0	56.8	58.5
Average annual employment rate of the population aged 15–64 (%)	72.8	74.1	70.6	76.2
Average annual unemployment rate of the population aged 15+ (%)	8.2	9.5	10.2	5.3
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with primary or lower education (%)	26.6	21.7	20.0	14.8
Relative share of the population aged 25–64 with higher education (%)	24.2	23.5	22.4	30.5
Production value (BGN/employed person)	65,054	69,814	n.a.	122,377
Expenditures on the acquisition of tangible fixed assets (BGN/person)	1,449	1,771	n.a.	4,257
Foreign direct investment in non-financial enterprises (cumulative) (EUR/person)	2,567	2,952	n.a.	4,544
Share of the population living in settlements with public sewerage networks (%)	42.7	43.5	n.a.	75.0
Share of road surfaces in good condition (%)	40.9	40.0	34.5	40.4
Coverage of municipal expenditures with local revenues (%)	71.5	57.2	56.0	74.1
Active Transparency Rating of local government bodies (%)*	66.0	66.0	67.8	69.3

Social Development Indicators	2021	2022	2023	National average
Natural population increase rate (‰)	n.a.	–9.4	–6.5	–6.8
Net migration rate (‰)	n.a.	21.6	34.5	6.4
Average grade in the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature**	3.73	3.75	4.22	4.30
Average grade in the National external assessment in mathematics after 7th grade (points)**	30.5	29.4	36.8	42.9
Net enrolment rate of the population (5th to 7th grade) (%)	76.0	86.6	84.0	89.9
Average life expectancy (years)***	75.5	74.6	75.4	73.5
Share of people with health insurance (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	95.0
Population per one GP (persons)	3,097	2,777	2,950	1,701
Registered crimes against the person and property per 1,000 population	4.7	5.1	5.7	11.3
Share of criminal cases closed within 3 months	86	93	97	91
Households' consumption of municipally supplied drinking water (liter/person/day)	74	79	n.a.	103
Generated household waste of serviced population (kg/person/year)	239	246	n.a.	488
Share of household waste handed over for treatment and recycling (%)	12	10	n.a.	76
Visits to cinemas (number/1,000 population)	27	40	128	684
Overnight stays in accommodation establishments (number/1,000 population)	837	869	855	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.