

RESULTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF *SDG15* OF THE GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract

This paper presents research and progress analysis of the implementation of the EU *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) with regard to the way how they affect biodiversity conservation issues. The study focus is up-to-date data on selected criteria and indicators related to the decisions and policies of the EU and Bulgaria in particular which aim at biodiversity conservation. Special attention has been paid to *SDG15 Life on land*, and the results for Bulgaria have been analysed in terms of the indicators that can be identified in the complex and diverse aspects of protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of ecosystems, while finding opportunities to interrupt the increasingly intensive loss of biodiversity worldwide. Global data have also been analysed, and a comparative analysis has been made with the results achieved in Bulgaria.

Keywords: sustainable development, environment, biodiversity.

Ключови думи: устойчиво развитие, биоразнообразие, показатели.

JEL: JEL: O5; Q53, Q57.

Introduction

Despite ambitious nature conservation policies and targets at the global and European Union (EU) levels presented in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Convention of Biodiversity, Aichi Targets, Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Policy Framework; EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, EU Nature Directives, Natura 2000, Water Framework Directive (WFD), Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives, etc., biodiversity is increasingly under threat. Biodiversity and ecosystem degradation continues at an alarming rate at a global level, especially in forest ecosystems that contain 80% of terrestrial biodiversity worldwide [1, 2, 5–8], and ambitious conservation and restoration targets [10, 15–21] are not enough to change the current global trend. Strong socio-ecological and policy-related interdependencies exist between different goals related to biodiversity, forests, climate and water; global biodiversity goal achievement presupposes coherent policy frameworks at the international, national and local levels.

In 2017, the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) Global Indicator Framework, which included 232 indicators, was proposed, providing a globally unified indicator system for quantitative assessment, periodic monitoring, and reporting of the national or regional SDGs [9, 12].

The main goal of this study is to analyse the progress of the implementation of the EU Sustainable

Development Goals, especially SDG13, SDG14 and SDG15, in Bulgaria in all aspects that concern biodiversity conservation issues. Special attention has been paid to *SDG15 Life on land*, and the results for Bulgaria have been analysed in terms of the indicators that can be identified in the complex and diverse aspects of protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of ecosystems, while finding opportunities to interrupt the increasingly intensive loss of biodiversity worldwide. Global data have also been analysed, and a comparative analysis has been made with the results achieved in Bulgaria.

1. Methods and objects

The areas chosen for this study were woodlands in Bulgaria which are also in the focus of BIOCONSENT project (Table 1). The research approach of this study is the part of BIOCONSENT project research approaches. The results of project will be applied in four (sub-) national case studies in Bulgaria (BG), Germany (DE), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE) and in one EU-wide case study EU. These case studies reflect different but typical bio-physical gradients and policy/socio economic contexts in Europe (Table 1). They will cover all spatial scales of regional, national and European level.

The progress on the indicators and on the targets of SDG15 has been analysed for Bulgaria; the

methodology of this study is based on Bulgarian NSI data [22]. The theme of SDG15 is sustainable utilization of terrestrial ecosystems; it aims to ‘*protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems*’ [12, 22]. SDG15 targets and indicators are related to goal theme in three aspects: sustainable forest management, ending and reversing land degradation and conservation of biodiversity. Targets *15.1 Conserve and restore terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, 15.2 End deforestation and restore degraded forests, 15.4 Ensure conservation of mountain ecosystems and 15.5 Protect biodiversity and natural habitats* focus on the state of terrestrial ecosystems with an emphasis on monitoring and managing forests and vegetation; target 15.3 directly indicates the level of land deg-

radation; the other seven targets, including 15.1 and 15.4, emphasize biodiversity conservation in terms of important sites for biodiversity conservation, species abundance, management and financial support. Ensuring effective forest resource management, combating land desertification and protecting biodiversity are three important aspects [12, 13] for protecting, restoring and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems according to SDG15.

Through the analysis of SDG15 in the period 2015–2022, we analysed the progress in Bulgaria regarding sustainable forest management, ending and reversing land degradation and conservation of biodiversity.

Table 1. Multi-level case study research design in BIOSONSENT

National/ EU scale	Subnational scale	Regional (Landscape and forest stand) scale
Bulgaria	Yundola (South West Bulgaria) and Teteven (Central Bulgaria)	Mixed (spruce, fir, pine, beech) forests in Rila-Rhodope high mountains and beech forests in the Balkan high mountains; forest use for timber, bioenergy, biodiversity (Natura 2000), drinking water (WFD); old growth forests; restoration needs after climate change impacts.
Germany	Baden Württemberg (South Western Germany)	Mixed (Douglas fir, spruce, beech) forests in the Back Forest low mountains and lowlands riparian deciduous (oak, beech, hornbeam) forests along the Rhine River; active forest use for timber, biodiversity (Natura 2000 sites), drinking water (WFD) and recreation; restoration needs after climate change impacts (storms; bark beetle).
	North Rhine Westphalia (Western Germany)	Low mountain spruce forests and lowlands riparian deciduous (oak, beech) forests along the Rhine River; very active forest use for timber, biodiversity (Natura 2000), drinking water and recreation; severe restoration needs after climate change impacts (storms, bark beetle).
Spain	Catalonia	Pine forests in central Catalonia in mountains and lowland; some forest use for timber, but important services such water (WFD), biodiversity (Natura 2000), non-wood forest products and recreation; restoration needs after climate change driven drought and wildfires
Sweden	Norrbotnen County	Spruce and pine dominated forests in lowland and mountainous areas; intensively used for timber production but also including protected nature reserves; Natura 2000 and non-protected old growth forests with high conservation/biodiversity values. Also, recreation, non-wood products, reindeer pastures and cultural values. Restoration needs exist in intensively used forest areas.
EU	EU27	A range of managed and unmanaged forest ecosystems across bio-geographical regions (e.g., Boreal, Continental, Mediterranean) in the EU27 used for timber, biodiversity (Natura 2000; old-growth forests), climate and water protection. Restoration needs after climate change impacts (storms, fires, bark beetle), and intensive forestry.

2. Results and discussions

The forest sector is key to the bio-economy in Europe. The use of wood materials can contribute to a significant reduction of CO₂ emissions in terms of the greenhouse effect, renewable energy and energy efficiency [11, 21, 24, 25]. Wood is a natural, renewable, reusable raw material; forests play a major role in minimizing negative effects on climate, environment and biodiversity when wood is obtained from sustainably managed forests. Forest biomass is currently the most important source of

renewable energy and accounts for about half of the total renewable energy consumption in the European Union [23, 25].

The main scientific objective of BIOCONSENT is to address knowledge gaps and policy needs through the development and provision of Decision Support (DS) that will enable the achievement of EU objectives related to conservation and restoration and of SDGs concerning the biodiversity-forest-water-climate nexus. BIOCONSENT will generate DS that can help maintain and restore forest biodi-

versity while reducing climate change, improving water quality and safeguarding a sustainable and multifunctional use of forests.

One of the important steps towards the success of the project for the EU and in particular for Bulgaria is the knowledge and analysis of what has been achieved with the implementation of a set of political and management decisions at the European and national level. Such a step has been

taken in the current analysis of progress on one of the EC's main goals for Sustainable Development, SDG15, which is related to biodiversity conservation.

In Bulgaria, as well as in the other member countries, the progress with SDG15 is monitored on the basis of statistical data. For Bulgaria, some of the indicators are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. National set of indicators for monitoring progress with SDG15 [22]

Indicator ID	Indicator name
15.1.E.179	Share of forest area
5.1.U.180	Average proportion of Freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas covered by protected areas
15.2.U.181	Proportion of forest area with a long-term management plan
15.2.U.182	Proportion of forest area within legally established protected areas
15.2.E.183	Soil sealing index
5.4.U.184	Average proportion of Mountain Key Biodiversity Areas covered by protected areas
15.5.N.185	Share of terrestrial natural habitats of conservation importance, assessed in a favourable nature conservation status, compared to all reported under Art. 17 of the Habitats Directive in the Alpine, Continental and Black Sea biogeographic regions of the country
15.5.N.186	Share of the species of conservation importance, assessed in a favourable conservation status, compared to all reported under Art. 17 of the Habitats Directive in the Alpine, Continental and Black Sea biogeographic regions of the country
15.5.N.187	Share of the breeding bird species in the country, in which are observed stable or increasing long-term population trends, compared to all reported bird species under Art. 12 of the Birds Directive domestically breeding birds
15.5.U.188	Red List Index
15.6.U.189	Total reported number of Standard Material Transfer Agreements transferring plant genetic resources for food and agriculture to the country
15.7.N.190	Registered cases of poaching and illegal traffic in wild animals and plants trade.
15.0.E.191	<i>Natura 2000</i> protected areas

Table 3: Indicators in the National set of monitored indicators that are reported by the Ministry of Environment and Water (MEW)

Indicator ID	Source	Unit of measure	2019
15.5.N.185	MEW	%	12,64
15.5.N.186	MEW	%	38,58
15.5.N.187	MEW	%	67

Source: <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/19425/goal-15-life-land#>

Table 3 presents data on three of the indicators in the national set of monitored indicators presented in Table 2 that are reported by the Ministry of Environment and Water. The data show good levels for Bulgaria of the relative share of:

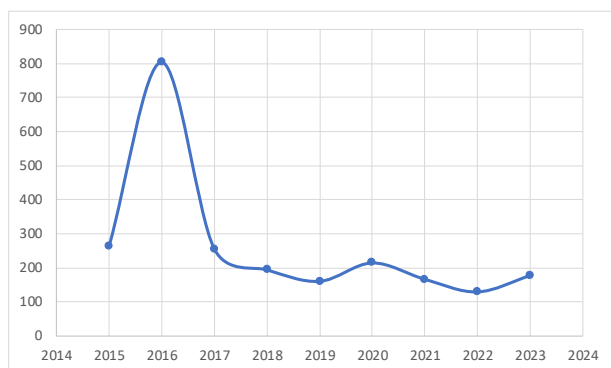
- the terrestrial natural habitats of conservation importance, assessed in a favourable nature protection state, compared to all reported under Art. 17 of the Habitats Directive in the Alpine, Continental and Black Sea biogeographic regions of the country;
- the species of conservation importance, assessed in a favourable conservation status, compared to all reported under Art. 17 of the Habitats Directive in the Alpine, Continental and Black Sea biogeographic regions of the country;
- the breeding bird species in the country, in which are observed stable or increasing long-

term population trends, compared to all reported bird species under Art. 12 of the Birds Directive domestically breeding birds.

The development of indicator 15.7 N 190 *Registered cases of poaching and illegal traffic in wild animals and plants trade* is monitored on the database of the Ministry of Environment and Water and the Ministry of Agriculture. The progress on this indicator can be seen in Fig. 1. It becomes clear that registered cases of poaching and illegal traffic in wild animals and plants trade are on the decrease.

Ecosystems on land [12, 13, 22] play the role of a buffer against rising temperatures and help to adapt to climatic changes. Well maintained ecosystems preserve biological diversity and improve the living environment. Because of its extremely diverse climatic, geological, topographic and hydrological conditions Bulgaria is characterized by rich

biological diversity, as well as preserved nature. The species, founded on its territory, are 26% of species described in Europe which represent over 2% of the world's species.



Source: <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/19425/goal-15-life-land#>

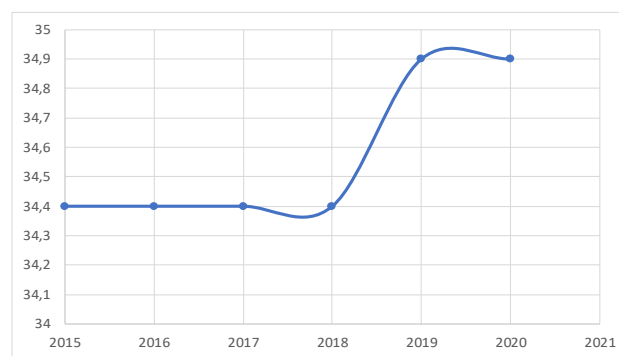
Fig. 1. Registered cases of poaching and illegal traffic in wild animals and plants trade (15.7.N.190) in number of detected violations/ per year

More than 1/3 of the country's territory is occupied by forests, and they contribute to the absorption of more than 1/5 of greenhouse gases.

Unfortunately, forests, as well as all other ecosystems in Bulgaria, fall into one of the latitudes most affected by climate change, which will make them particularly vulnerable in the coming decades and will put at risk their functions, status and possibility of conservation and development [13].

The risks to biodiversity in Bulgaria are related to the loss of habitats as a result of the development of cities and infrastructure, unsustainable agriculture, polluted air and the exploitation of species

of economic importance. Bulgaria has not made any particular progress regarding the creation of management bodies for protected areas under *Natura 2000*, although the area of these territories is growing (Fig. 2). Annual biodiversity data are re-published in agreement with data providers who are also responsible for data quality. Topics and databases covered are: *Natura 2000 terrestrial protected areas by Member State* (Source: *Natura 2000 Barometer*; European Environment Agency (EEA) and European Commission) and their relative coverage of the area of national marine waters. The data source for the marine water area is Member States' reporting under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and published on WISE MARINE (Marine Information System for Europe) (Source: WISE MARINE (Marine Information System for Europe), EEA and European Commission).



Source: <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/19425/goal-15-life-land#>

Fig. 2. Natura 2000 protected areas (15.0.E.191), %

Table 4. Natura 2000 – current network of protected areas

	Number of zones	Area [ha]	Territory [ha]	Water area [km ²]	% of the territory of Bulgaria
Protected areas under the Habitats Directive	233	3 615 603	3 367 916	2476.87	30.3 %
Protected areas under the Wild Birds Directive	120	2 616 550	2 562 061	544.89	23.1%
Total protected areas <i>Natura 2000</i>	340*	4 155 839	3 873 704	2821.35	34.9%

Source: <https://www.moew.government.bg/bg/priroda/natura-2000/>

* –13 pcs. of 33 with a common limit under both Directives

Table 5. Indicators in the National set of monitored indicators that are reported by the UN Global data base (GDB)

Indicator ID	Source	Unit of measure	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
15.1.U.180	UN GDB	%	94.99	94.99	94.99	98.67	98.67	98.67	98.67	98.67
15.2.U.181	UN GDB	%	95.83	96.01	96.35	96.71	97.05	97.39	-	-
15.2.U.182	UN GDB	%	18.37	18.37	18.37	18.37	18.37	18.37	-	-
15.4.U.184	UN GDB	%	97.49	97.49	97.49	99.33	99.50	99.50	99.50	99.50
15.5.U.188	UN GDB	Index	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94
15.6.U.189	UN GDB	Number	193	206	222	238	246	254	261	266

Source: <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/19425/goal-15-life-land#>

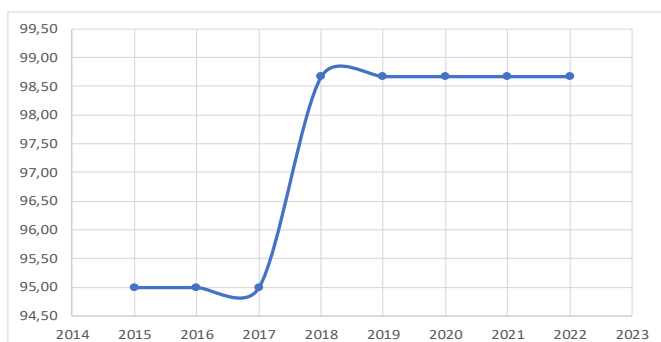
Currently, the network of protected areas includes:

- 120 protected areas for the protection of wild birds covering 23.1% of the territory of Bulgaria;

- 233 protected areas for the protection of natural habitats covering 30.3% of the territory of Bulgaria.

The areas and their relative share of the total territory of Bulgaria are presented in Table 4.

Table 5 presents the progress of the remaining main indicators that are included in SDG15. According to the data of the UN Global Data Base the average proportion of freshwater key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas increased from 13.7% in 2000 to 98.7% in 2022. According to the data of the UN Global Data Base and Fig. 5, it becomes clear that the average proportion of freshwater key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas increases and maintains a high share after 2006.



Source: <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/19425/goal-15-life-land#>

Fig. 3. Average proportion of Freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas covered by protected areas, in %

According to the data of the national set of monitored indicators that are reported by the UN Global data base (Table 4, Table 5 and Fig. 3):

- the proportion of land area covered by forest increased from 30.5% in 2000 to 35.9% in 2020;
- the average proportion of freshwater key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas increased from 13.7% in 2000 to 98.7% in 2022;
- the average proportion of terrestrial key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas increased from 12.4% in 2000 to 99.3% in 2022;
- the forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme increased from 0.0 thousands of hectares in 2000 to 2,343.6 thousands of hectares in 2022;
- the proportion of forest area under a long-term management plan increased from 84.3% in 2000 to 97.4% in 2020
- the proportion of forest area within legally established protected areas increased from 6.4% in 2000 to 18.4% in 2020;

- in 2022, the average proportion of Mountain Key Biodiversity Areas covered by protected areas was 99.5%;
- In 2023, the Red List Index was at 0.9;
- Total reported number of Standard Material Transfer Agreements transferring plant genetic resources for food and agriculture to the country increased from 129.0 in 2012 to 266.0 in 2022.

Conclusions

Some of the basic conclusions according to the analysis of data on the progress with SDG15 in Bulgaria are:

- In order to ensure the protection of natural habitats and habitats of species, plans, programs, projects and investment intentions, which alone or in combination with others, may have a significant negative impact, are subject to an assessment of their compatibility with the subject and objectives of conservation of the protected areas.
- The main mechanisms for the management of protected areas are orders declaring them protected and regulating specific regimes of activities to ensure their effective protection, as well as the management plans which make the functional zoning of respective territories and provide regimes and norms of activities depending on their conservation significance.
- The development of management plans for protected areas is regulated in the Law on Protected Areas, which has led to issuing an ordinance on the Terms and Conditions for the Development and Approval of Management Plans for Protected Areas.

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РЕЗУЛТАТИ ЗА БЪЛГАРИЯ ПО ИЗПЪЛНЕНИЕ НА SDG15 ОТ ГЛОБАЛНИТЕ ЦЕЛИ ЗА УСТОЙЧИВО РАЗВИТИЕ

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Резюме

Докладът представя изследване и анализ на напредъка по изпълнение на целите за устойчиво развитие на ЕС (GSDGs) във всички аспекти, които касаят проблемите на опазване на биоразнообразието. Проучени са актуални данни по избрани критерии и показатели, които имат пряко или косвено отношение към решенията и политиките на ЕС и България в частност, касаещи опазване на биоразнообразието. Особено внимание е отделено на SDG15 Live on land и са анализирани резултатите на България по отношение на показателите, които се проследяват в сложните и многообразни аспекти на запазване, възстановяване и стимулиране на устойчивото използване на екосистеми и търсене на възможности за прекъсване на все по-интензивната загуба на биоразнообразие в световен мащаб. Анализирани са и глобални данни и е направен сравнителен анализ с постигнатото в България.