

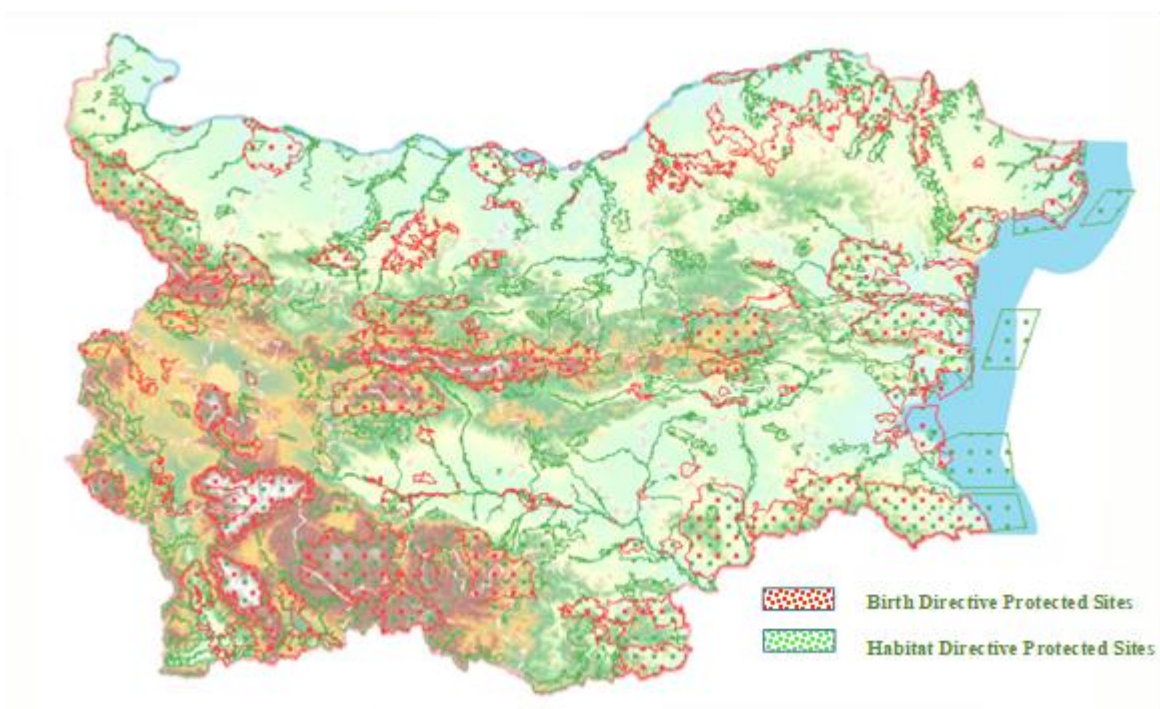
The biodiversity conservation, as part of the nature conservation, has a crucial role in the fight against climate change. Sustainable ecosystems that are in good condition have a greater potential to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change and therefore to limit global warming.

The European Union's response to this challenge is creating the NATURA 2000 protected areas network, which aims to contribute to ensuring biodiversity in the European Union by preserving or restoring the favorable status of certain types of natural habitats and habitats of species of wild animals and plants. The network is being set up in all Member States of the European Union and currently covers almost one fifth of the total territory of the European Union.

The European Commission's approach to funding biodiversity policy is to integrate biodiversity investment needs into the main EU funding instruments and to achieve synergies with climate finance, including implementation of ecosystem approaches for mitigation and adaptation.

In 2019, the National Audit Office of the Republic of Bulgaria carried out a performance audit of Efficiency of the management of the NATURA 2000 network for the period 01.01. 2016 - 31.12.2018 in order to protect the environment and the local population in the areas of the network. In the framework of the audit were analyzed and assessed the establishment of the NATURA 2000 ecological network in Bulgaria, as part of the European ecological network, the established organization for network management in Bulgaria, the monitoring, control and reporting of the network status and the progress made in implementing national strategic documents in this area.

NATURA 2000 Network in Bulgaria



A number of weaknesses have been identified and the main ones are:

- Delays in the establishment of the NATURA 2000 network in Bulgaria due to lacks in the harmonization of national and European Community legislation, absence of a strategic framework with certain national goals and ineffective actions to declare protected areas;

- Inefficient organization for management of the NATURA 2000 network, as a result of unclear responsibilities assigned for the establishment and management of the network, lack of a working mechanism for effective communication and coordination between the bodies involved in the process, failure to implement many measures for management planning of protected areas, undeveloped system for monitoring and evaluation and lack of reliable management information, which would enable the objective assessment and transparent reporting of public expenditures and the outputs;
- Insufficiently effective systems for monitoring, control and reporting on the state of the network due to lack of internal rules and procedures and the introduction of an annual procedure for reporting on the state of biodiversity and on the state of NATURA 2000 protected areas, including a collection procedure of primary and aggregate data for reporting under the defined indicators for monitoring the biological diversity state.

Given these weaknesses, the Bulgarian National Audit Office concludes that the management of the NATURA 2000 network is not effective.

Recommendations were given to the Minister of Environment and Water and the Minister of Agriculture to eliminate the identified gaps and weaknesses. The expected effect of the implementation of the recommendations was not fully achieved by September 2021, when the follow up was carried out.