Country profile of Bulgaria

Bulgaria has made significant improvements to its environmental performance since its accession in 2007. While Bulgarian legislation accurately reflects the environmental requirements agreed at EU level, their implementation on the ground remains a challenge.

Air quality continues to give cause for serious concern. Construction developments in Natura 2000 areas, poor integration of nature and biodiversity policy into other sectorial policies, weak administration, and a lack of adequate management plans and conservation objectives are some of the main threats to nature and biodiversity in Bulgaria.

River basin management plans indicate significant gaps, which are also reflected by the very low connection and treatment rates for urban waste water. Drinking water, however, achieves high compliance rates in Bulgaria, and over 90 % of its bathing waters are of good and excellent quality.

Main challenges

The main challenges Bulgaria faces with regard to implementing EU environmental policy and law are:

• Ensuring better protection of human health by enforcing effective and efficient solutions to reduce air pollution.
• Providing and implementing the investments required to ensure the appropriate collection and treatment of urban waste water.
• Ensuring the sound enforcement of Nature protection legislation.

Main opportunities

With relatively modest efforts, Bulgaria could perform better on issues where a sound knowledge base and good practices already exist. This applies in particular to:

• Ensuring the implementation of the adopted Waste Management Plan and the Waste Prevention Programme, including the measures for closure and rehabilitation of all non-compliant landfills and enforcing the ‘pay-as-you-throw’ principle.
• Integrating the nature and biodiversity policy into other sectorial policies, and defining conservation objectives and measures for the adequate protection and management of the Natura 2000 sites.

Points of excellence

Where Bulgaria leads in environmental implementation, it could share its innovative approaches more widely among other countries. Concrete examples include:

• Bulgaria has adopted a well-structured and coherent Waste Management Plan, used as a model by other Member States.
• Bulgaria achieves nearly 100 % compliance rate as regards the quality of its drinking water.
**About the Environmental Implementation Review**

Europeans want common decisions followed by swift and efficient implementation. Weak implementation generates high societal, economic and environmental costs and creates an uneven playing field for businesses. More than 75 % of European citizens consider EU environmental legislation is necessary to protect the environment in their country, and nearly 80 % agree that the EU institutions should be able to check that environmental laws are being applied correctly in their country.

In the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), the European Commission analyses the main challenges and opportunities regarding the implementation of EU environmental legislation and policies in each Member State. The findings are published in short but comprehensive country reports released every two years. The reports are meant to stimulate a positive debate both on shared environmental challenges for the EU, as well as on the most effective ways to address the key implementation gaps and improve environmental outcomes by each Member State. These reports rely on more detailed implementation reports collected or issued by the Commission under specific environmental legislation and the State of the Environment Reports by the European Environment Agency. The EIR reports will not replace the specific instruments to ensure compliance with the EU’s legal obligations. Climate change has not been addressed in the first report.

This factsheet presents the highlights of the EIR country report for Bulgaria.

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**Towards a circular economy**

The transformation of our economies from linear to circular provides an opportunity to reinvent them and make them more sustainable and competitive. In turn, this will stimulate investments and bring both short- and long-term benefits for the economy, the environment and citizens.

To date, there is no overarching circular economy policy programme in Bulgaria. Despite the growing demand for environmentally friendly products and services, stakeholders remain reluctant to invest in these areas.

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**Waste management**

Bulgaria should focus on the implementation of the separate waste collection obligation to increase recycling rates and prioritise the separate collection of bio-waste. The aim is to increase composting rates; mobilise investment towards the first steps in the waste hierarchy and avoid building excessive infrastructure for the treatment of residual waste; and, as a matter of priority, address non-compliant landfills and enforce the pay-as-you-throw principle.
Nature protection

Bulgaria needs to complete the Special Area of Conservation designation process, to put in place conservation objectives and measures for the sites, to provide adequate resources in order to maintain or restore species and habitats of Community interest to a favourable conservation status across their natural range, and to ensure effective management of the sites.

Marine environment

Bulgaria’s marine waters are part of the Black Sea marine region. The main threats to this region are land-based sources of pollution (e.g. nutrients coming from the River Danube). The Black Sea fish stock has deteriorated dramatically over the past three decades, with the diversity of commercial fish caught declining from about 26 species to six. This deterioration is due to eutrophication, the introduction of alien species and overfishing.

Water quality and management

According to its first generation of river basin management plans, only 47.2% of natural surface water bodies achieve a good or high ecological status and 34% of heavily modified or artificial water bodies have a good or high ecological potential. However, significant deficiencies in such plans indicate gaps in the monitoring system, assessment of pressures, and methodologies for the classification of the status of water bodies. This has resulted in a high level of uncertainty concerning the pressures and the status and effectiveness of the Programmes of Measures.

As regards drinking water, Bulgaria achieves very high compliance rates of 99-100% for the microbiological, chemical and indicator parameters laid down in the Drinking Water Directive.

Bulgaria has maintained at least a sufficient quality of 96.8% for its bathing waters, although a slight drop to 71.3% has been observed in those of excellent quality.

Bathing water quality 2012-2015

*The category ‘good’ was introduced in the 2015 bathing water report.
Air pollution

Measurements show that Bulgarian citizens all over the country breathe air that is considered harmful to health, with significant economic impacts for labour productivity and the health-care system. Although, in general, concentrations of PM2.5 and PM10 have declined over the years, they remain much higher than the limits set by the EU and the World Health Organization to protect the population’s health. Bulgaria has the highest concentrations of urban PM2.5 of all EU-28 Member States, as well as the highest PM10 concentrations.

This makes Bulgaria the country with the highest share of external costs associated with air pollution in the EU, resulting in the loss of more than 2 million working days and more than 11 thousand premature deaths per year.

Environmental taxation

The high energy intensity of the economy contributes, through energy taxation, to the higher than average share of revenues for environmental taxes. However, the environmental targeting of the tax system remains questionable as the share of revenues from pollution taxes are below the EU average. Proper implementation of existing environmental taxes based on the ‘polluter pays’ principle, including on air pollution, landfilling and energy sources, could help change taxpayer behaviour and contribute to achieving environmental goals. Offsetting, at least partially, the increase in energy taxation with resource efficiency measures could keep the overall costs for energy consumers down and reduce high energy bills for end-users.

Effective governance and knowledge

Unstable policies and lack of trust in key public institutions, such as the judiciary, constitute significant deterrents to investment in the Bulgarian economy. Corruption remains a significant concern and the national authorities’ response to this problem continues to be hampered by weak and fragmented institutions.

In general, the Bulgarian legal order establishes a clear system of access to justice in environmental matters.

Bulgaria’s performance on the implementation of the INSPIRE Directive as an enabling framework to actively disseminate environmental information to the public is lagging behind.