

The Governance of Land Use

Country fact sheet Sweden

The planning system

Levels of government and their responsibilities

Sweden is a unitary country with 3 levels of government; the national level, 21 counties and 290 municipalities. The national government has several instruments to affect land-use planning. As in most unitary OECD countries, it is responsible for the framework legislation that defines the system of land-use planning and provides the guidelines that municipalities have to follow in their plan-making process. It also defines the building code and designates areas that are strictly protected from development for nature or heritage protection. Furthermore, it exercises control of sectoral policies that affect land use through its state bodies, such as the *Swedish Transport Agency*, the *Swedish Environmental Protection Agency* and the *Swedish Energy Agency*.

At the regional level, the national government is represented through *County Administrative Boards*, which represent the national government's interests in the planning process, in particular with respect to the guidelines stated in the *Planning and Building Act*. Furthermore, they are supposed to provide municipalities with data and advice and to co-ordinate in the case of conflicts between municipalities. While *County Administrative Boards* are deconcentrated parts of the national administration, *County Councils* are the intermediate level of government in Sweden. The *County Council* is a directly elected regional body mainly responsible for health care and public transport. Ten *County Councils* (out of 21) have additional responsibilities such as regional development.

National legislation makes regional spatial planning obligatory for the Stockholm region, but not for other Swedish regions. Although no regional spatial plans exist outside of the Stockholm region, the government requires that there is a regional development strategy in each county. This strategy may contain spatial elements and influences land-use decisions.

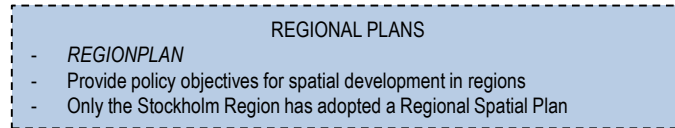
Municipalities have three main responsibilities related to land use. First, they are responsible for local planning. They prepare *Comprehensive Plans* and *Detailed Plans* and issue building permits based on those plans and other relevant regulations. In order to make their comprehensive plans more strategic, municipalities are supposed to consider a regional perspective. Second, they are responsible for the provision of housing through public housing companies, which provide a significant share of all rental accommodation in Sweden. Third, they provide the technical infrastructure required to develop land, such as roads and water and sewage disposal networks. Municipalities have the possibility to form inter-municipal associations to jointly take care of their responsibilities.

Furthermore, many municipalities have substantial land holdings. This gives them an important tool to shape land use in their territory, either by choosing directly how to use the land they own or by deciding to sell it to private developers.

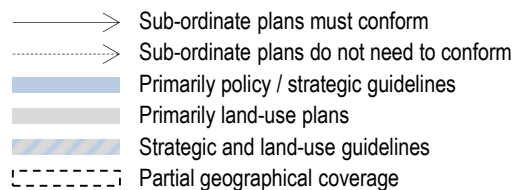
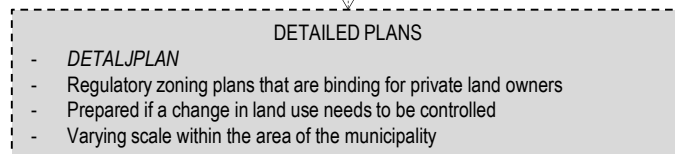
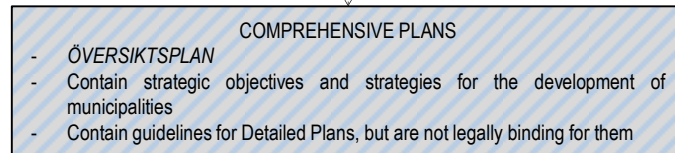
Organisation of spatial and land-use planning in Sweden

General framework

Regional



Municipal



Spatial and land-use plans

No formal spatial plan at national level exists in Sweden. At the regional level, the legal framework allows *County Councils* to prepare *Regional Plans*, but this is not mandatory, except for the county of Stockholm, which has produced a regional spatial plan for the greater Stockholm area.

Municipalities prepare two types of plans. The *Comprehensive Plan* is their main tool for strategic planning. It is legally required and covers the entire territory of a municipality, but it does not contain any legally binding provisions for land owners. It

forms the basis of decisions on the use of land and water areas. Comprehensive plans must be reviewed by the municipal council at least once during each legislative period. Their compliance with national guidelines is checked by the *County Administrative Boards*. The statement of the county administrative board forms a compulsory planning document within the comprehensive plan. It reflects primarily considerations how to incorporate national interests in local planning.

The *Detailed Development Plan* is the statutory instrument to regulate land use at municipal level. It gives obligations and rights to land owners. These rights are protected during an implementation period that can vary between 5 and 15 years. *Detailed Plans* are only prepared in areas where it is necessary to control a change in land use and are valid until they are repealed or replaced. *Special Area Regulations* are more simple planning instruments that are also binding and are primarily used outside built-up areas.

Major laws and regulations

The *Planning and Building Act* is the main framework legislation that defines the land-use planning system in Sweden. It is complemented by the *Environmental Code*, which contains the most relevant regulations related to the permitted land uses. Other legislation relevant to land use can be found in the *Roads Act*, the *Public Water and Wastewater Act* and in the *Real Property Formation Act*, which provides the legal framework related to land ownership.

Co-ordination mechanisms

The main formal co-ordination mechanisms between levels of government and other relevant actors and stakeholders are mandatory consultations that occur in the plan-making process and before granting building permits. In practice, consultations are channelled through the *County Administrative Boards*, which play a co-ordinating role.

Expropriations

Expropriations are regulated by several different laws depending on the underlying reason for expropriation. The *Expropriation Act* provides the general framework for expropriations and specifies broader reasons for expropriation, such as infrastructure projects, housing developments and resource extraction. It provides a basis for expropriation if no special laws exist on which it would be based. The *Real Property Formation Act* gives municipalities and private land owners the right, but also the obligation to expropriate land in specific circumstances. Furthermore, it gives the cadastral authorities the right to order the transfer of a property or parts of a property to another property to facilitate plot formation and re-allotment of agricultural or forest properties. If legal requirements for expropriation are met, the expropriation procedures are straightforward. However, in the vast majority of cases that would fall under either of the two acts, land transfers are negotiated amicably.

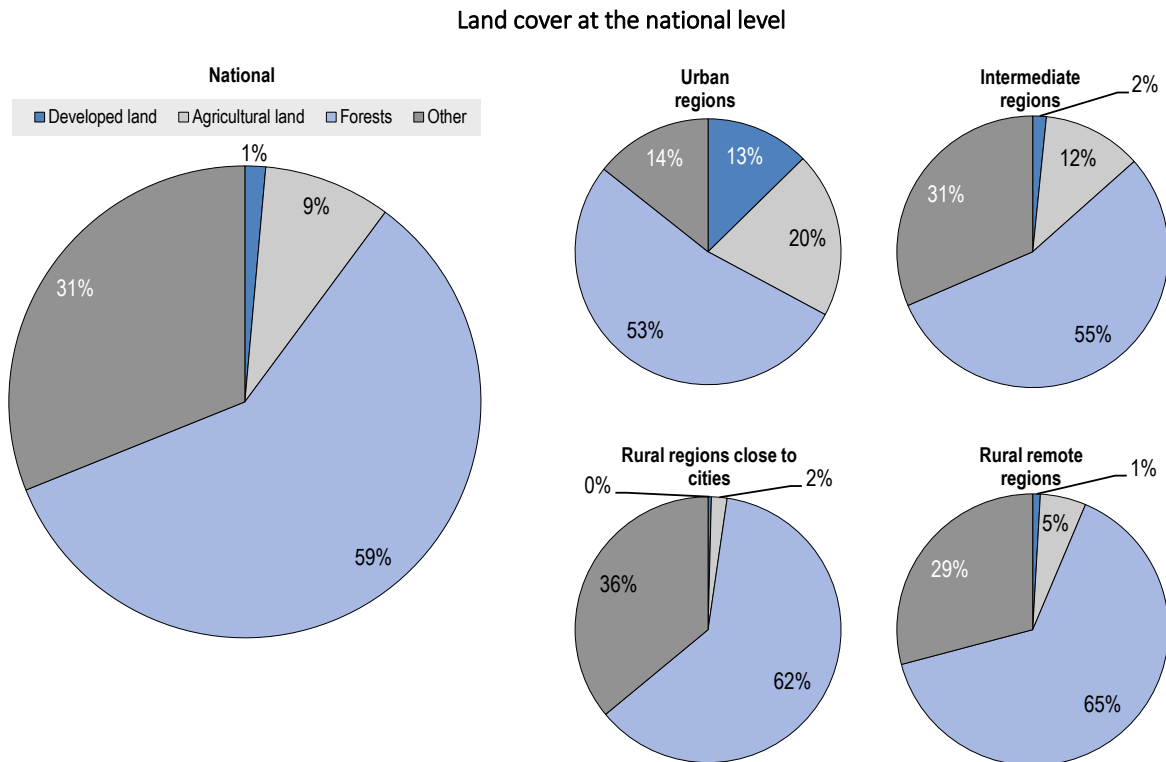
Recent and planned reforms to the system of land-use planning

The most important reform of the past decades occurred in 1987 when sole responsibility for land-use planning was transferred to municipalities with the introduction of the *Planning and Building Act*. Another important reform occurred in 1999

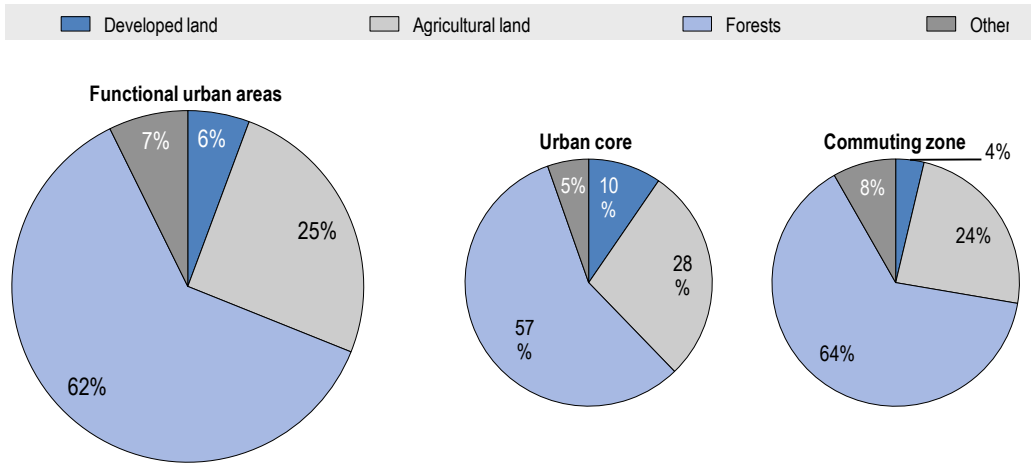
with the introduction of the *Environmental Code*. This reform merged several older laws into a single act and clarified the division of tasks between the *Planning and Building Act* and environmental legislation. In 2011 changes to the *Planning and Building Act* were made. The reform introduced new requirements for comprehensive plans to incorporate national and regional objectives. In 2013 the government established a committee to further investigate the need for regional spatial planning and better co-ordination of planning at the regional level.

Sweden's national strategy for sustainable regional growth and attractiveness 2015-2020 also focuses on spatial planning, emphasising the need to better co-ordinate local comprehensive planning and regional development efforts. The strategy emphasises that by 2020 each county should have integrated a spatial perspective in its regional development policies.

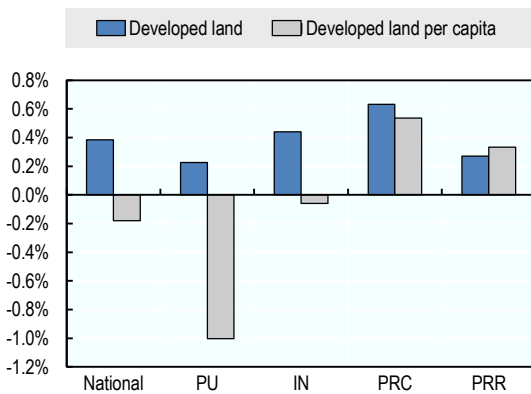
Land cover in Sweden



Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

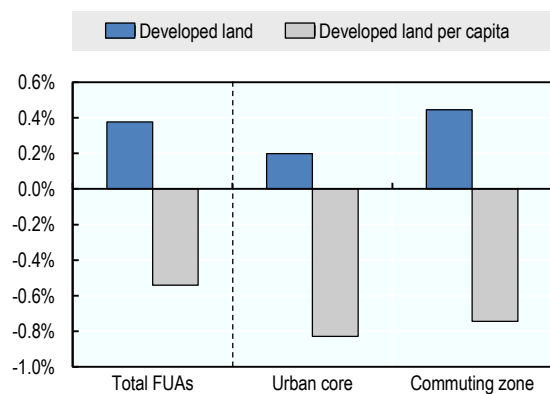


Annual change in developed land, 2000-12



Note: PU: urban regions, IN: intermediate regions, PRC: rural regions close to cities, PRR: rural remote regions.

Annual change in developed land in functional urban areas from 2000 to 2012



Note: Values for urban cores and commuting zones refer only to FUAs with more than 500 000 inhabitants.

Land-use trends in Sweden

Similar to other sparsely populated countries, only a very small part (1.4%) of Sweden's land mass consists of developed land even though the country has one of the highest per capita land consumption with 671 square metres of developed land. Since 2000, a disparity in development patterns has emerged. Primarily urban regions experienced the smallest increase in developed land, but by far the highest population growth. As a result, per capita land use declined strongly in those regions. In contrast, in intermediate and rural regions, it stayed roughly constant or increased.

Source: OECD calculations based on Corine Land Cover dataset.

Land cover at the national level in Sweden

Land cover (km ²)	National	Urban regions	Intermediate regions	Rural regions close to cities	Rural remote regions
Total area	449 493	7 017	248 443	59 209	134 824
Total developed land	6 360	888	4 021	236	1 215
Percentage of total	1.4%	12.7%	1.6%	0.4%	0.9%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	23.9	2.0	17.2	1.4	3.2
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	0.38%	0.23%	0.44%	0.63%	0.27%
Agricultural land	39 227	1 417	29 332	1 124	7 355
Percentage of total	8.7%	20.2%	11.8%	1.9%	5.5%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-8.7	-0.6	-7.8	0.1	-0.4
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.02%	-0.05%	-0.03%	0.01%	-0.01%
Forests	264 133	3 707	136 901	36 536	86 988
Percentage of total	58.8%	52.8%	55.1%	61.7%	64.5%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	359.1	-3.0	50.4	114.1	197.7
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	0.14%	-0.08%	0.04%	0.32%	0.23%
Land cover per capita (m²)					
Total developed land per capita	671	425	686	908	955
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	-0.18%	-1.00%	-0.06%	0.54%	0.33%
Agricultural land per capita	4 137	677	5 007	4 329	5 777
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-0.59%	-1.27%	-0.52%	-0.08%	0.05%
Forests per capita	27 854	1 773	23 367	140 705	68 331
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-0.43%	-1.31%	-0.46%	0.22%	0.29%

Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

Land cover in FUAs (km ²)	FUAs	Urban core	Commuting zone
Total area	45 648	15 331	30 317
Total developed land	2 589	1 468	1 121
Percentage of total	5.7%	9.6%	3.7%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	9.5	4.9	4.6
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	0.38%	0.34%	0.43%
Agricultural land	11 596	4 323	7 273
Percentage of total	25.4%	28.2%	24.0%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-5.1	-3.0	-2.2
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.04%	-0.07%	-0.03%
Forests	28 133	8 715	19 418
Percentage of total	61.6%	56.8%	64.0%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-29.1	-10.5	-18.6
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.10%	-0.12%	-0.10%
Land cover per capita in FUAs (m²)			
	FUAs (50 000+ inhabitants)	Urban core (only FUAs 500 000+)	Commuting zone (only FUAs 500 000+)
Total developed land per capita	515	338	744
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	-0.12%	-0.44%	-0.26%
Agricultural land per capita	2 307	239	3 611
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-0.54%	-0.83%	-0.74%
Forests per capita	5 596	378	5 559
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-0.60%	-0.81%	-0.83%

Source: All land cover statistics for Sweden are based on OECD calculations based on *Corine Land Cover dataset*.