



The Governance of Land Use

COUNTRY FACT SHEET FRANCE

The planning system

Levels of government and their responsibilities

France has four levels of government; the national government, 18 regions, 101 departments, and 35 885 municipalities. The national government is active in land-use governance primarily through its responsibility for the legal framework concerning land-use planning, environmental policy and other policy fields. Furthermore, it plans and finances infrastructure projects of national importance such as motorways and railways as well as facilities such as universities. No national level spatial plan exists in France.

The influence of regions on land use comes primarily through their involvement in the planning and financing of large scale infrastructure projects. Furthermore, regions prepare a general strategic plan that outlines their policy priorities and develops a spatial vision for the region (see below for more information).

The intermediate level of government between regions and municipalities (the *departments*) does not have any formal responsibilities in the field of land-use planning. It has limited influence on land use through its responsibilities for other policy fields, such as the construction of schools and departmental roads.

Several different types of inter-municipal authorities exist in France, depending on the population size of urban agglomerations. Especially inter-municipal associations in larger urban areas play an important role in the French planning system. They are responsible for creating strategic plans that focus on providing a coherent strategy for the entire urban agglomeration. These plans are legally binding for local land-use plans.

Municipalities are responsible for creating local land-use plans and for issuing building permits. With an average number of 1 735 inhabitants, municipalities in France are among the smallest within the OECD. While they can form inter-municipal associations to create local land-use plans (*PLUI*), the responsibility for issuing building permits always rests with an individual municipality. Subject to the approval of the national government, municipalities can also create dedicated urban planning agencies that provide advice on urban planning and land management issues and draft local and inter-municipal plans. Currently, 51 of those agencies exist in France.

Spatial and land-use plans

France has three levels of spatial plans. Regional plans (*SRADDT*) are guiding documents for regional spatial policies and can show political investment priorities. In most parts of the country, they are not binding for lower level plans. However, Île-de-France (i.e. the greater Paris region), Corsica and the French overseas territories have slightly different regional plans. These plans are more detailed, contain limited zoning regulations and provide binding frameworks for lower level plans. Currently, regional plans are supplemented by three additional plans; a *Climate, Air and Energy Regional Plan (SRCAE)*, an *Ecological Consistency Regional Plan (SRCE)* and an *Infrastructures, Transportations and Inter-modality Regional Plan (SRIT)*. In the future, these plans will be combined into a single regional plan.

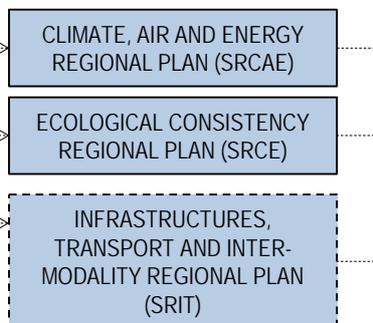
Organisation of spatial and land-use planning in France

General framework

Regional



Sectoral Plans



Metropolitan



Municipal



- Sub-ordinate plans must conform
- ⋯→ Sub-ordinate plans do not need to conform
- Primarily policy / strategic guidelines
- Primarily land-use plans
- ▨ Strategic and land-use guidelines
- ⋯ Partial geographical coverage

Note:

SRADDT, SRCAE, SRCE and SRIT are being replaced by the REGIONAL PLANNING, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY SCHEME (*SCHÉMA RÉGIONAL D'AMÉNAGEMENT, DE DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE ET D'ÉGALITÉ DU TERRITOIRE (SRADDET)*), which will be legally binding for subordinate plans. The deadline for regions to adopt a SRADDET is 31 December 2018.

At an intermediate level, the *SCoT* is a type of plan located between regional plans and local land-use plans. They are prepared by inter-municipal associations and aim to guide local land-use plans. They provide strategic spatial development guidelines connecting the issues of housing, transport and urban planning. Furthermore, they

contain small scale land-use plans (often at a scale of 1: 100 000) to steer local plans. *SCoTs* are legally binding for local plans. While it is not mandatory for municipalities to adopt a *SCoT*, municipalities without it are not allowed to approve development in undeveloped areas. Thus, especially municipalities in large urban areas have strong incentives to adopt a *SCoT* and most have done so.

At the local level, local land-use plans (*PLU* or *PLUI*) provide detailed zoning regulations at scales that typically range from 1: 5 000 to 1: 2 000. They are prepared either by a single municipality or jointly by inter-municipal associations. As of 2017, a new law mandates the preparation of inter-municipal plans instead of plans for single municipalities unless more than 25% of the municipalities accounting for at least 20% of the population of an inter-municipal association veto the preparation of a joint plan. While a large majority of municipalities in France are covered by a local land-use plan, a few mainly smaller ones in rural areas are not. Those municipalities refer to national planning regulations for land-use decisions.

Major laws and regulations

Four particularly important laws concerning land use exist in France. The law on solidarity and urban regeneration establishes metropolitan plans (*SCoT*) and local land-use plans (*PLU*). It aims at co-ordinating urban planning, housing and transport policies and sets the objective that cities of more than 50 000 inhabitants should have at least 20% social housing. In 2014, a new law introduced flexible rent ceilings and abolished previous legislation preventing the construction of small housing units. Two laws concern mountainous and coastal areas, respectively. They specify particular environmental protection standards for the covered areas and measures to stimulate tourism and other economic activity related to the specific landscapes.

Co-ordination mechanisms

Formal vertical co-ordination mechanisms between levels of government are limited and are primarily related to the hierarchical structure of the planning system, in which lower levels of government must align their plans to higher level plans. Plans at the same hierarchical level must take each other into consideration, which is less demanding and implies only that one plan does not block the measures foreseen in another plan. Horizontal co-ordination is provided by the newly created *Public Action Territorial Conferences*. These meetings assemble all regional and local authorities under the chairmanship of the regional council president and are supposed to facilitate an integrated and cross-disciplinary planning process.

Expropriations

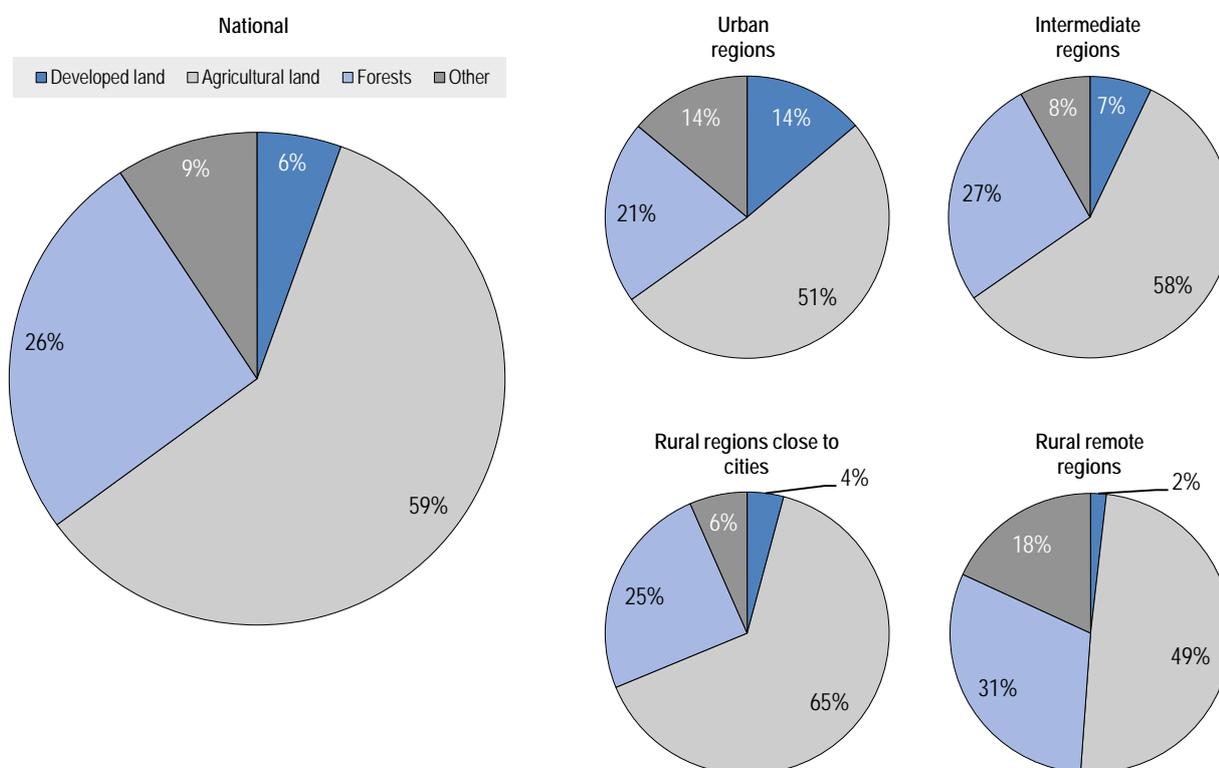
Land can be expropriated by all levels of government as well as by public utilities. Expropriations for private uses of land are not possible. Reasons for expropriations are the construction of infrastructure, public buildings, and housing developments as well as the establishment of nature reserves. In urban areas, land can furthermore be expropriated in designated urban renewal zones in order to facilitate urban renewal projects.

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

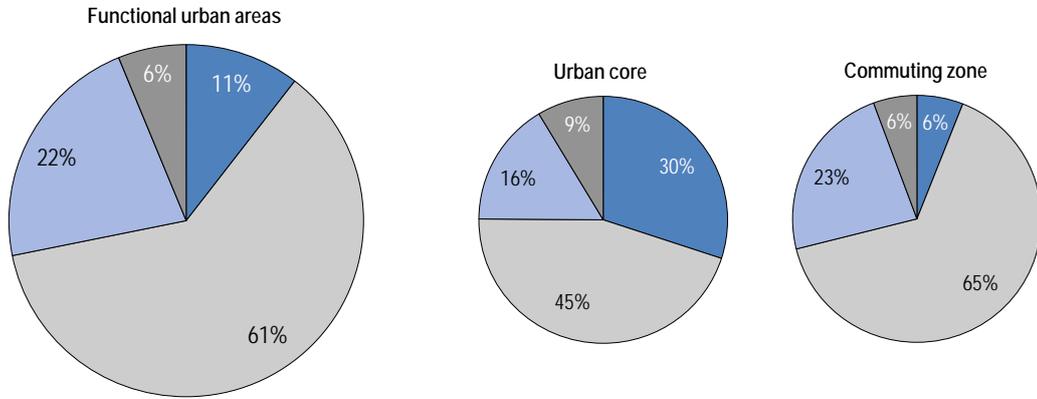
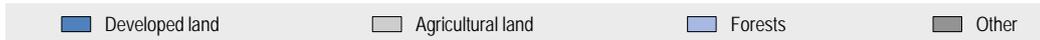
The general system of land-use planning in its current outlines has been in place since 1967, but has been frequently modified since then. Current reforms aim at establishing a two/three tier hierarchical planning system by introducing new regional plans that are legally binding for metropolitan and local plans. The deadline for the adoption of such plans is the end of 2018. Furthermore, a change in emphasis from land-use planning at the very local level to an intermediate level is taking place. Since 2014, the law foresees joint land-use plans created by groups of municipalities as the default option and sets criteria for municipalities to opt out of the joint planning process.

Land cover in France

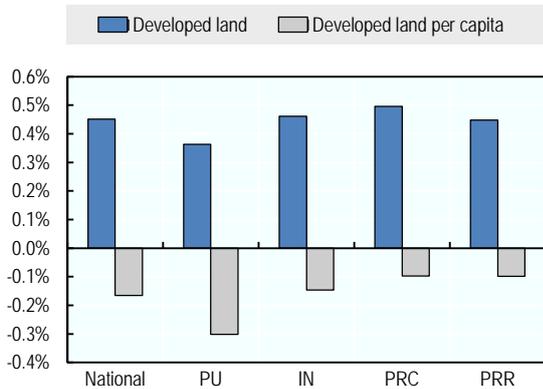
Land cover at the national level



Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

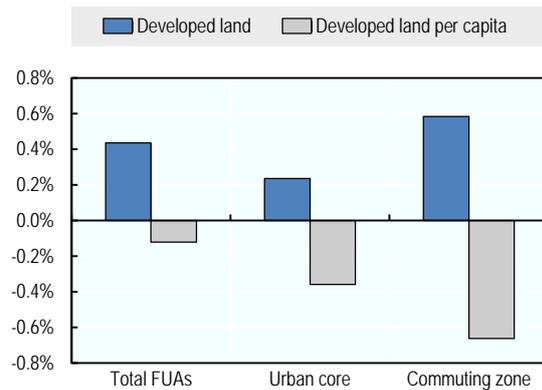


Annual change in developed land, 2000-12



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 France

France has seen a consistent growth of developed land across all four types of regions within the OECD urban-rural classification. However, the growth rate of developed land has generally been below the population growth rate. As a consequence, the per capita efficiency of land consumption has improved. While large urban areas have experienced a suburbanisation trend regarding population movements, this pattern is only partially reflected in the development of land and the per capita land consumption has declined especially strongly in commuting zones.

Source: OECD calculations based on *Corine Land Cover dataset*.

Land cover at the national level in France

Land cover (km ²)	National	Urban regions	Intermediate regions	Rural regions close to cities	Rural remote regions
Total area	549 197	48 127	159 331	263 484	78 255
Total developed land	30 184	6 623	11 251	10 907	1 403
Percentage of total	5.5%	13.8%	7.1%	4.1%	1.8%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	132.4	23.5	50.4	52.4	6.1
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	0.45%	0.36%	0.46%	0.50%	0.45%
Agricultural land	326 284	24 709	92 774	170 172	38 629
Percentage of total	59.4%	51.3%	58.2%	64.6%	49.4%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-120.7	-20.3	-46.8	-47.8	-5.8
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.04%	-0.08%	-0.05%	-0.03%	-0.02%
Forests	141 706	10 115	42 415	65 119	24 057
Percentage of total	25.8%	21.0%	26.6%	24.7%	30.7%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-225.6	-25.3	-28.0	-156.2	-16.1
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.16%	-0.25%	-0.07%	-0.24%	-0.07%
Land cover per capita (m²)					
Total developed land per capita	476	301	515	640	564
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	-0.17%	-0.30%	-0.15%	-0.10%	-0.10%
Agricultural land per capita	5 148	1 122	4 244	9 989	15 528
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-0.65%	-0.74%	-0.66%	-0.62%	-0.56%
Forests per capita	2 236	459	1 940	3 822	9 670
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-0.77%	-0.91%	-0.67%	-0.83%	-0.61%

Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

Land cover in FUAs (km ²)	FUAs	Urban core	Commuting zone
Total area	151 813	28 237	123 576
Total developed land	15 894	8 483	7 411
Percentage of total	10.5%	30.0%	6.0%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	67.3	28.3	39.1
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	0.44%	0.34%	0.55%
Agricultural land	93 135	12 726	80 409
Percentage of total	61.3%	45.1%	65.1%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-62.3	-26.6	-35.8
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.07%	-0.21%	-0.04%
Forests	33 344	4 588	28 756
Percentage of total	22.0%	16.2%	23.3%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-34.8	-1.8	-33.1
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.10%	-0.04%	-0.11%
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	386	226	533
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	-0.12%	-0.36%	-0.66%
Agricultural land per capita	2264	177	3898
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-0.62%	-0.87%	-1.30%
Forests per capita	811	100	1660
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-0.66%	-0.71%	-1.49%

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