



# The Governance of Land Use

## Country fact sheet Ireland

### The planning system

#### *Levels of government and their responsibilities*

Ireland has two levels of government; the national government and 31 local governments at the county or municipality level. In between the two levels, three indirectly elected Regional Assemblies exist.

At a national level two main organisations have responsibility for planning, the *Department for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government* and the *Planning Appeals Board (An Bord Pleanála)*. The Department is responsible for the framing of planning legislation, for devising a *National Planning Framework (NPF)* and for issuing guidance documents in respect of national planning issues such as rural housing, wind energy, retailing, etc. *An Bord Pleanála* was established in 1977 and provides an arbitration forum in which any decision made by a planning authority on a planning application can be reviewed at the request of the applicant or another interested party. It is also responsible for the determination of applications for strategic infrastructure development and for dealing with proposals for expropriation of land.

Following the enactment of the *Local Government Reform Act 2014* the eight existing regional authorities were dissolved. In their place, three new Regional Assemblies came into effect in 2015. The aim of the new assemblies is to co-ordinate, promote and support strategic planning and sustainable development and promote effectiveness in local government and public services.

The physical planning system in Ireland is operated by the 31 local authorities. The elected councils (operating at local authority or municipal district level) prepare the *Development Plans*, the *Local Area Plans* and the *Landscape Character Assessments*. Furthermore, they designate protected structures and conservation areas and provide non-statutory guidance, for example on the design of new developments. Every development project requires planning permission from the local authority unless it is designated strategic infrastructure at the national level. In 2014, *Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)* were established in each local authority. They prepare *Local Economic Development Plans* and work with other actors to implement them. Furthermore, LCDCs ensure that local planning is consistent with other plans.

#### *Spatial and land-use plans*

The *National Spatial Strategy (NSS)* is Ireland's national spatial planning framework from 2002-20. It has provided the strategic context for spatial planning by regional authorities in their regional planning guidance roles and for planning authorities in their statutory planning functions. Furthermore, it has influenced the National Development Plan that steers investment in transport, housing, water services and communications infrastructure. The NSS is to be replaced by a successor document, the *National Planning Framework*.

## Organisation of spatial and land-use planning in Ireland

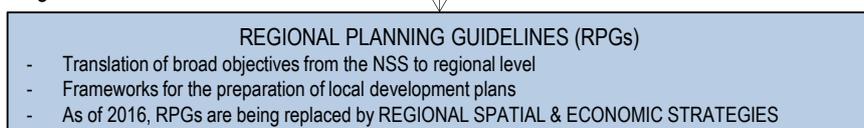
### General framework National



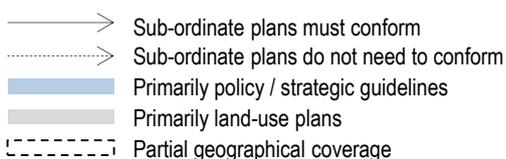
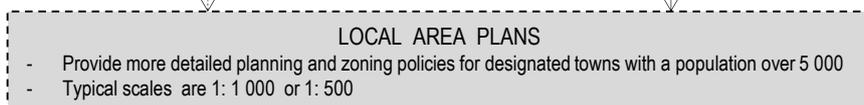
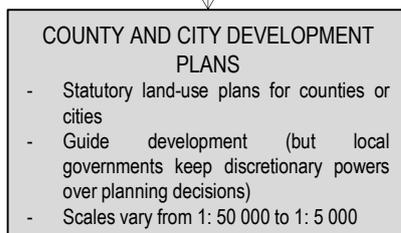
### Sectoral Plans



### Regional



### Municipal



*Note:*  
As of 2016, the NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY is being replaced by a new NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK.

Following the replacement of the 8 Regional Authorities with 3 Regional Assemblies in 2015, the REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES are being replaced with the new REGIONAL SPATIAL & ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

As of the time of writing, *Regional Planning Guidelines* exist that were supposed to translate the broad objectives of the *National Spatial Strategy* to the regional level and to provide guidance to local authorities in their planning decisions. Following the replacement of the Regional Authorities with Regional Assemblies, the *Regional Planning Guidelines* will be replaced by *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies*. These strategies will be drawn up in conjunction with the various enterprise and economic development agencies.

Local councils are responsible for making statutory land-use plans (*County or City Development Plans*). *Development Plans* detail the overall strategy of the council for the planning and sustainable development of an area and generally consist of a written statement and maps drawn at relatively small scales of between 1: 50 000 and 1: 5 000. Hierarchically below *Development Plans*, *Local Area Plans* exist as a second tier of land-use plans. They are detailed land-use plans at scales usually between 1: 1 000 and 1: 500. *Local Area Plans* are prepared for designated towns with a population of over 5 000 inhabitants.

The six year *Local Economic and Community Plans* (LECP) promote the development of the relevant area through a more co-ordinated and collaborative approach to planning and service delivery. They are prepared by the above-mentioned LCDCs. LECPs need to be consistent with *Development Plans*, *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies* and *Regional Action Plans for Jobs*.

The *Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2016-2035* is prepared by the National Transport Authority. The plan provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over a 20 year period. It also provides a transport planning policy for other agencies involved in land-use planning, environmental protection, and delivery of other infrastructure.

### **Major laws and regulations**

The planning code is made up of both primary and secondary legislation (i.e. acts and regulations). The framework is set out in the *Planning and Development Act 2000* and its amendments and the detail is prescribed in the *Planning and Development Regulations*. The Department for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government produces a range of guidelines designed to help planning authorities. Following a proposal by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, the government can designate a particular site or sites for the establishment of a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) to contain developments of economic or social importance. Furthermore, environmental assessment regulations have a major impact on the planning process.

### **Co-ordination mechanisms**

Vertical co-ordination takes place primarily with the goal plan to ensure local land-use plans comply with national strategies. Regional Assemblies have a role in ensuring the compliance of development plans and local area plans with the *Regional Planning Guidelines* (to be superseded by the *Regional Spatial Economic Strategies*).

At the national level, the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government has the power to direct a planning authority to take measures in relation to a development plan, or a local area plan. This possibility is used if a planning authority

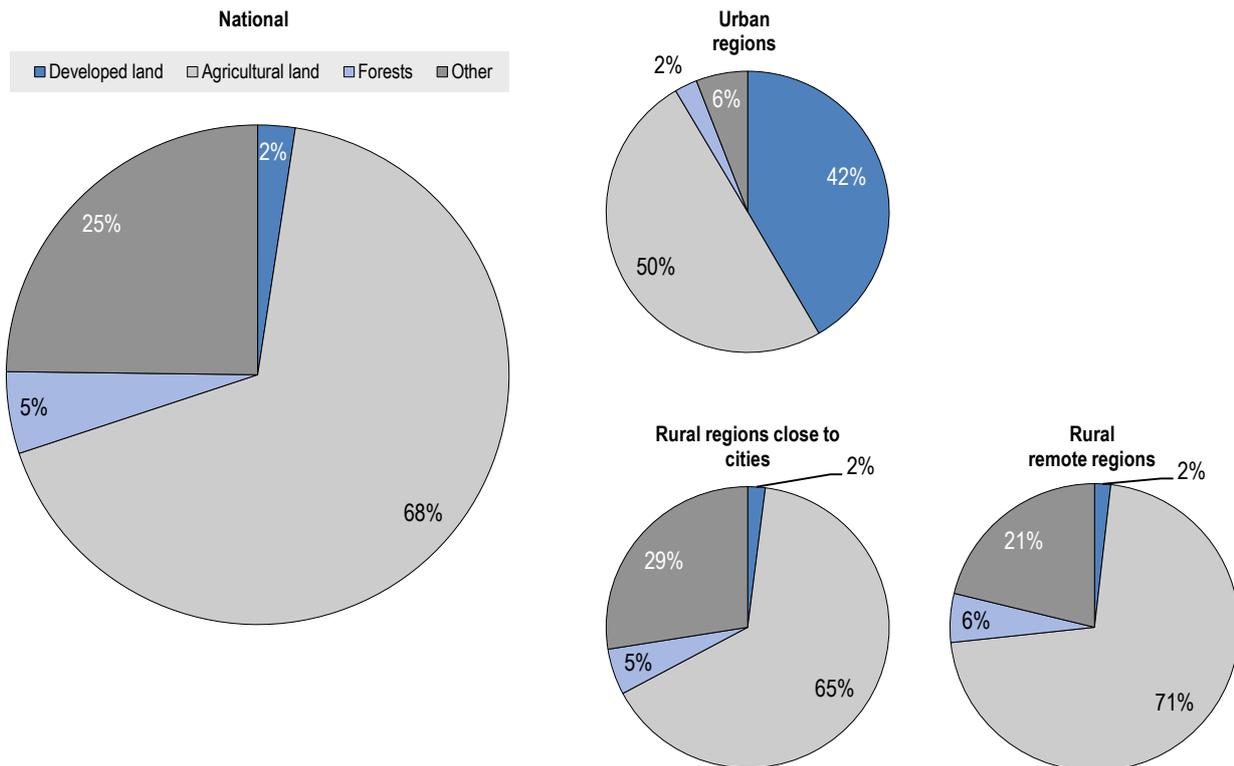
has ignored or has not taken sufficient account of the Minister’s statutory observations, if a plan fails to set out an overall strategy for proper planning and sustainable development, if a plan is not in compliance with the Planning Acts or if a plan in the Greater Dublin Area is not consistent with the transport strategy.

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

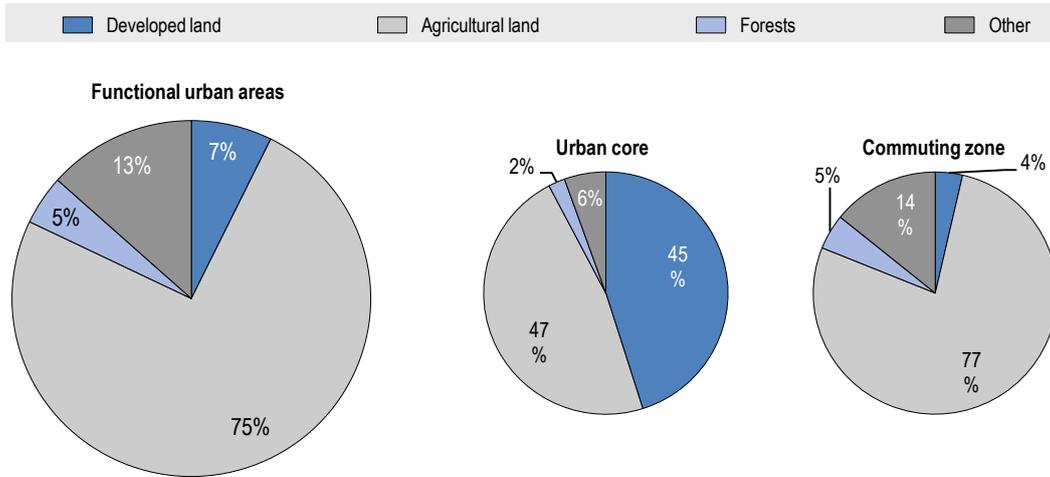
A nationwide planning system was established in Ireland in 1964. Since then, the system has seen frequent incremental reforms, most importantly with the introduction of national and regional plans and a fast-track planning procedure for major infrastructure projects in 2006. In addition to the recently completed or on-going reforms that have been mentioned above, other reforms relating to governance of land-use are the enactment of the *Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015* and new guidelines for sustainable housing (*Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities*).

**Land cover in Ireland**

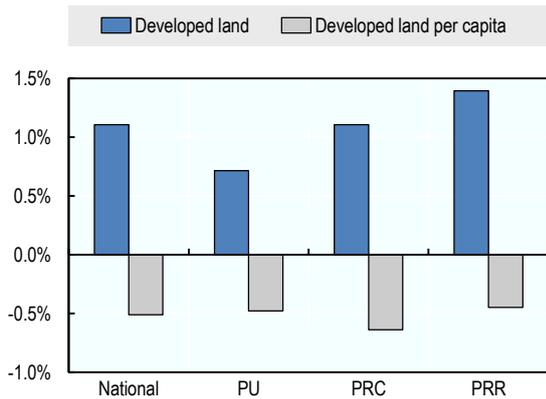
Land cover at the national level



### Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

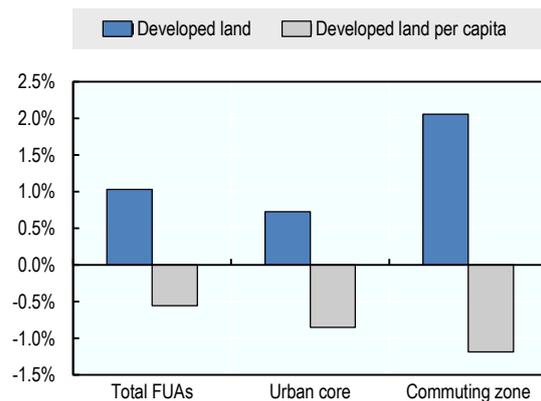


### Annual change in developed land, 2000-12



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 Ireland

With more than 1% annually between 2000 and 2012, Ireland has experienced the third highest growth rate of developed land of all 28 analysed OECD countries. Despite this strong growth, per capita use of developed land declined across all regions, as the population grew even faster than the area of developed land over the same time period. Land cover in Ireland is dominated by agricultural land, which covers 68% of the country – one of the highest rates in the OECD. Due to its relatively low population density, only slightly more than 2% of the land is developed.

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

## Land cover at the national level in Ireland

Land cover (km <sup>2</sup> )	National	Urban regions	Intermediate regions	Rural regions close to cities	Rural remote regions
Total area	6 9972	905		40 543	28 524
Total developed land	1 695	376		792	527
Percentage of total	2.4%	41.6%		2.0%	1.8%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	17.5	2.6		8.2	6.7
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	1.10%	0.72%		1.11%	1.39%
Agricultural land	47 265	452		26 426	20 388
Percentage of total	67.5%	49.9%		65.2%	71.5%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-44.5	-2.6		-22.2	-19.7
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.09%	-0.56%		-0.08%	-0.10%
Forests	3 713	23		2 135	1 555
Percentage of total	5.3%	2.6%		5.3%	5.5%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-8.4	0.1		-6.0	-2.4
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.22%	0.38%		-0.28%	-0.15%
<b>Land cover per capita (m<sup>2</sup>)</b>					
Total developed land per capita	370	298		392	406
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	-0.51%	-0.48%		-0.64%	-0.45%
Agricultural land per capita	10 314	358		13 072	15 699
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-1.69%	-1.73%		-1.81%	-1.91%
Forests per capita	810	18		1 056	1 197
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-1.82%	-0.81%		-2.00%	-1.97%

## Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

Land cover in FUAs (km <sup>2</sup> )	FUAs	Urban core	Commuting zone
Total area	12 103	1 078	11 025
Total developed land	888	486	402
Percentage of total	7.3%	45.1%	3.6%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	8.6	3.1	5.5
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	1.03%	0.66%	1.51%
Agricultural land	9 050	509	8 541
Percentage of total	74.8%	47.2%	77.5%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-11.9	-3.1	-8.8
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.13%	-0.59%	-0.10%
Forests	539	24	515
Percentage of total	4.5%	2.2%	4.7%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-0.5	0.1	-0.5
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.09%	0.25%	-0.10%
<b>Land cover per capita in FUAs (m<sup>2</sup>)</b>			
	FUAs (50 000+ inhabitants)	Urban core (only FUAs 500 000+)	Commuting zone (only FUAs 500 000+)
Total developed land per capita	356	298	463
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	-0.56%	-0.85%	-1.19%
Agricultural land per capita	3 630	359	6 737
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-1.70%	-2.12%	-3.33%
Forests per capita	216	18	456
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-1.66%	-1.31%	-3.23%

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