The Governance of Land Use

COUNTRY FACT SHEET GREECE

The planning system

Levels of government and their responsibilities

Greece has two subnational levels of government in addition to the national government; 13 regions (*περιφέρειες*) and 325 municipalities (*δήμοι*). Furthermore, seven decentralised administrative units (*αποκεντρωμένες* διοικήσεις) exist that are a deconcentrated part of the national government.

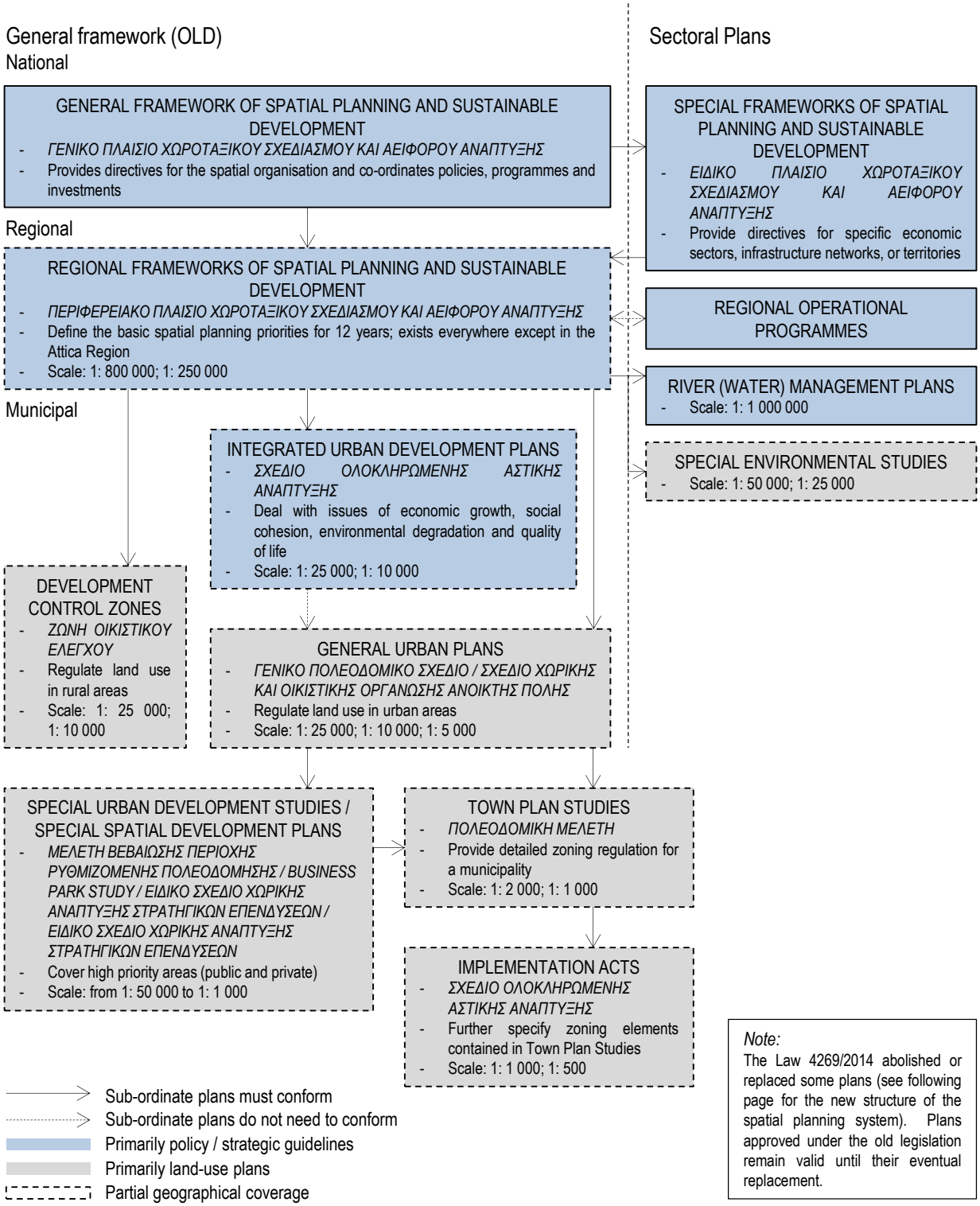
In the complex system of spatial planning in the country, the national government has by far the most important responsibilities. It is in charge of the framework laws on regional and urban planning, environmental protection and regional development. In addition to all laws concerning these fields, it also enacts all by-laws concerning the planning process. More unusually, the national government also approves almost all of the large number of spatial plans in the country. Of the 25 different types of spatial plans that exist, 22 are approved by the national government, out of which 47 are jointly approved with the decentralised administrations.

Regions have very few responsibilities on land use. Mainly, they concern advisory roles in the creation of some spatial plans. The decentralised administrative units are responsible for approving a detailed land-use plan and jointly approve four other plans together with the national government. Municipalities play advisory roles in the approval of some local land-use plans. They were also responsible for the approval of a local land-use plan that has legally been abolished in 2014 (some plans of this type under preparation at the time of their legal abolition will still be completed and eventually approved by the municipality).

A special role is played by *Enterprise Greece*, a business promotion agency that has the authority to fast track strategic investment projects. It is involved in the preparation and approval of *Special Spatial Development Plans of Public Properties* and of *Special Spatial Development Plans of Strategic Investments.* Both plans can override regular plans and can also speed up environmental licensing. Due to these functions, Enterprise Greece is arguably more important for land-use decisions than any level of subnational government in Greece.

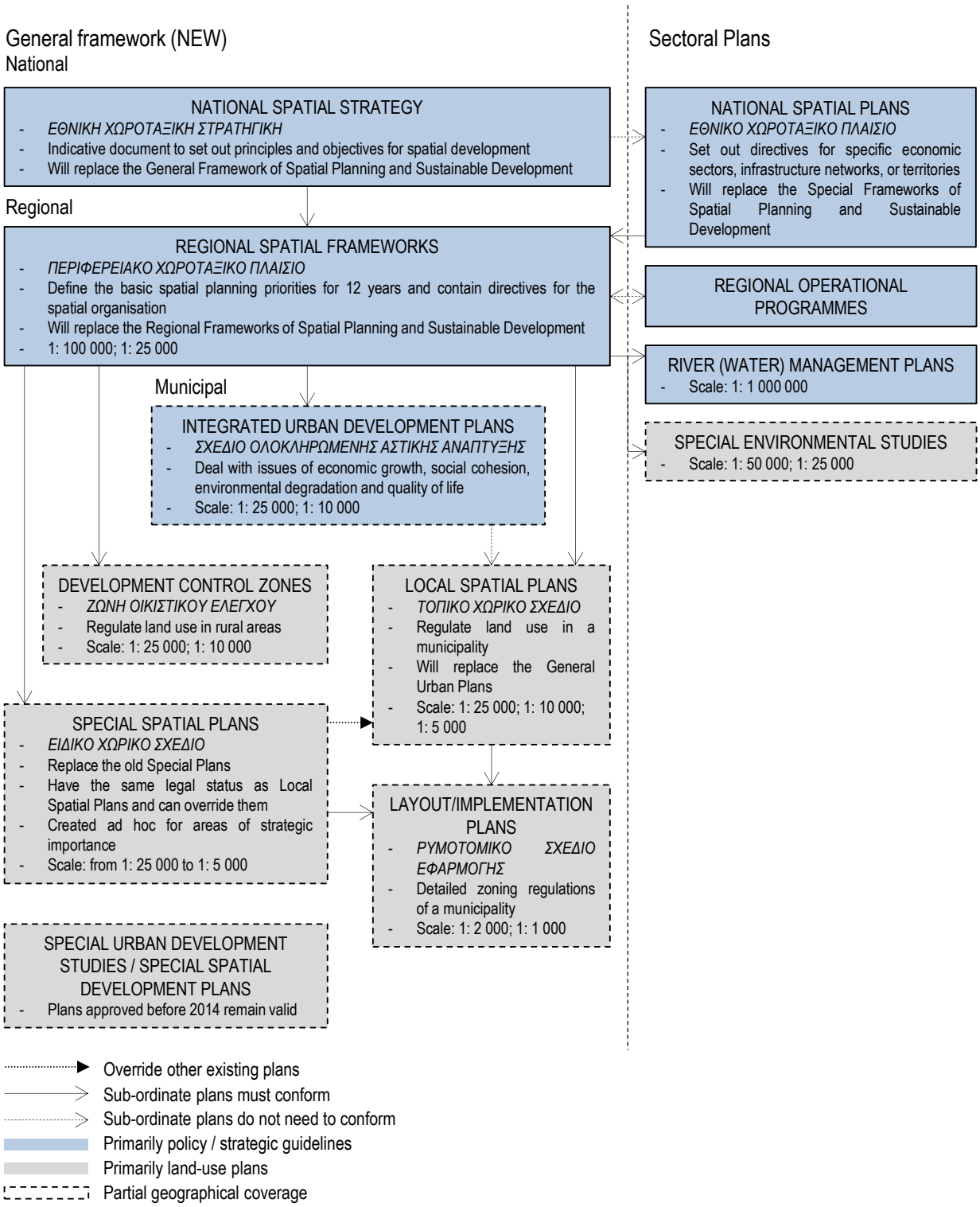
An important issue in Greek land-use governance is the question of enforcement. Generally, a large number of illegally constructed buildings exist in Greece. In most cases, developers face no or only mild fines and it is unusual that the demolishment of illegally constructed structures is enforced. Partly, the reason for this is the absence of any administrative permitting procedure that confirms that a new construction is in accordance with existing land-use plans.

Organisation of spatial and land-use planning in Greece



Note:
The Law 4269/2014 abolished or replaced some plans (see following page for the new structure of the spatial planning system). Plans approved under the old legislation remain valid until their eventual replacement.

Organisation of spatial and land-use planning in Greece



Spatial and land-use plans

Greece has 25 different types of spatial plans, by far the largest number of all OECD countries. The picture is further complicated by a reform in 2014 that has only been partially implemented as of 2016. The diagrams on the previous pages provide an overview of the structure of land-use plans before and after the reform.

The very large number of spatial plans has several origins. Some of the existing plans were legally abolished earlier, but remain in effect because they have not been replaced by more recent plans. In many other cases, specific types of plans exist for specific purposes, such as special plans for different types of urban development. Lastly, there is a significant overlap between plans. The same area might be covered by four different types of zoning plans.

Major laws and regulations

As in most countries, the building code is an important law that regulates various aspects of construction activity. It is generally relevant for all types of developments, unless more specific rules have been established by a particular plan covering the area.

Two important decrees regulate development in areas outside of town plans and areas inside settlements without a town plan. They are enacted by the national government but interpreted and enforced by municipalities. Since these areas correspond to a substantial part of the national territory, these decrees have an important impact, although sometimes they are weakly enforced. Another important decree specifies the categories of land use that could be included in the different land-use plans. Although this decree has been abolished with the recent reform, it remains in force for all old land-use plans until they are replaced.

Co-ordination mechanisms

As land-use planning is almost exclusively the domain of the national government, little scope for co-ordination between levels of government exists and municipalities have few incentives to align their policies with those of the national government beyond what is legally required.

In order to achieve horizontal co-ordination between different branches of the national government, one ministry has an overall responsibility for land-use policies and produces strategic plans that are supposed to guide the entire government. However, as strategic plans are only guiding instruments with few enforcement mechanisms, it is within the responsibility of individual ministries whether they take them into account.

Expropriations

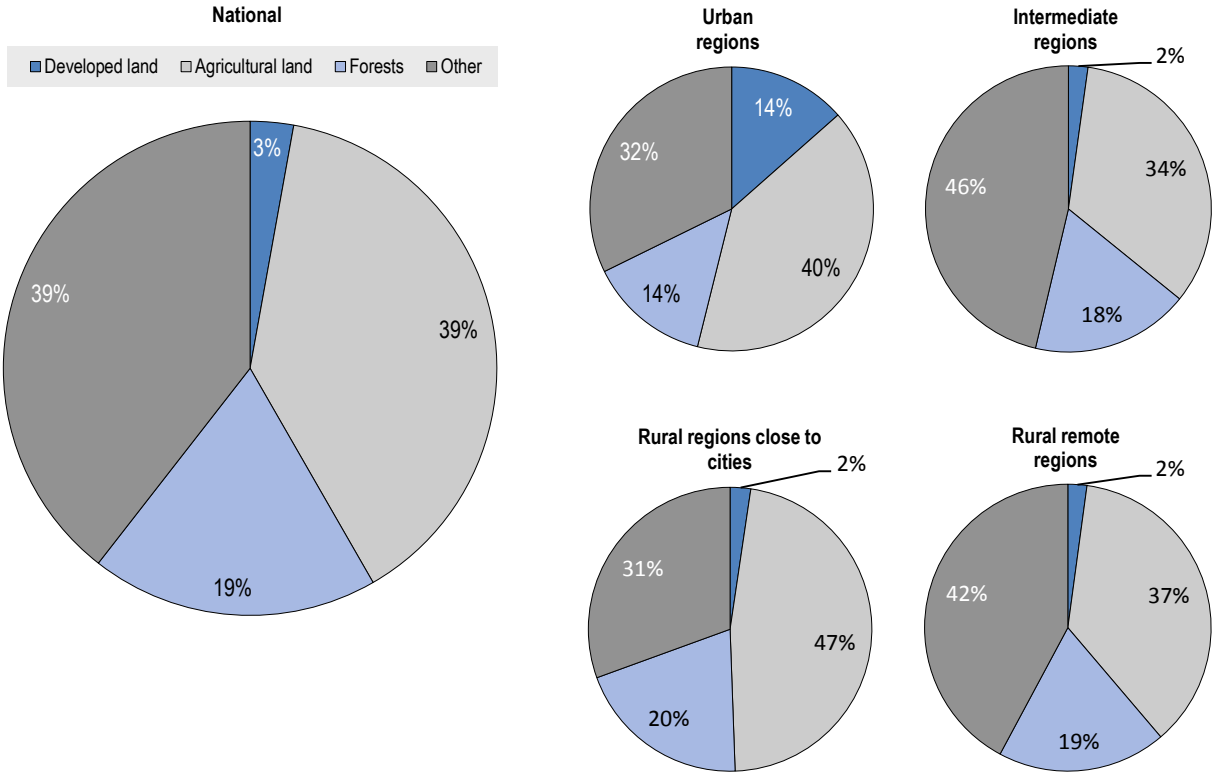
In Greece, land can be expropriated for public use and for private use for a fairly large number of reasons, including public infrastructure, resource extraction, nature reserves, housing developments, and commercial developments. In all cases, the central criterion is whether a planned development provides a public benefit. In this context, the meaning of public benefit goes beyond a pure monetary gain for the state or a private actor and usually includes social aspects as well.

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

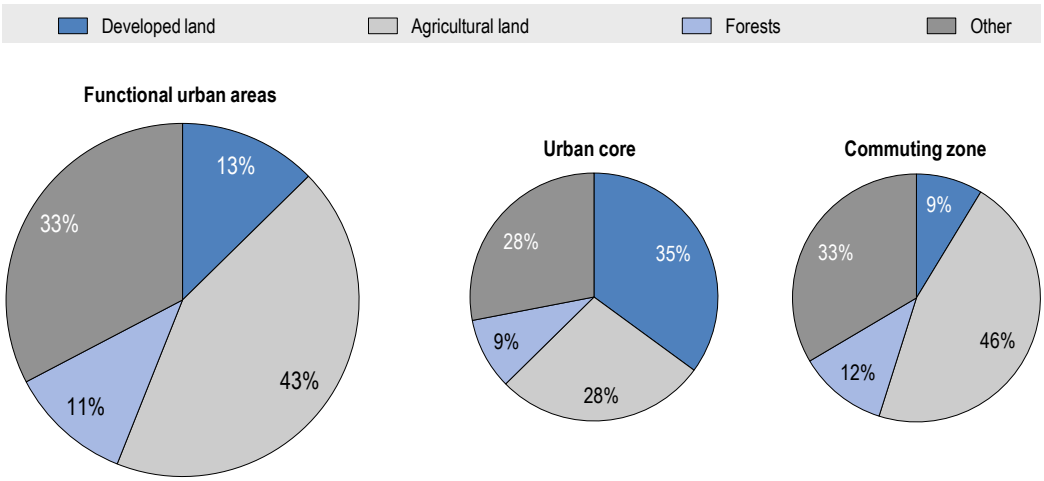
In its broad outline, the current system of land-use governance has been in place in Greece since 1983. However, numerous reforms have been made since then. Most recently, a reform in 2014 has replaced several old land-use plans with new ones and changed the categorisation of land-uses in plans. However, this reform has in large parts not been implemented and a modification of it was under preparation as of the time of writing.

Land cover in Greece

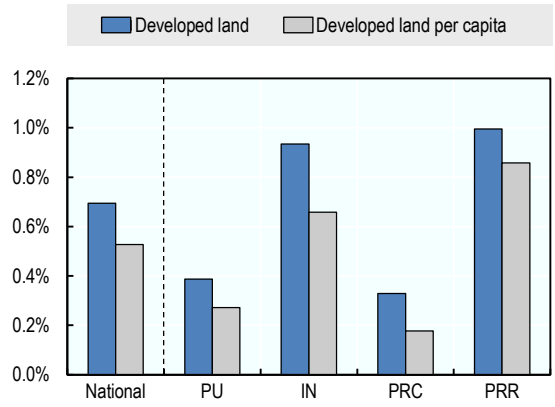
Land cover at the national level



Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

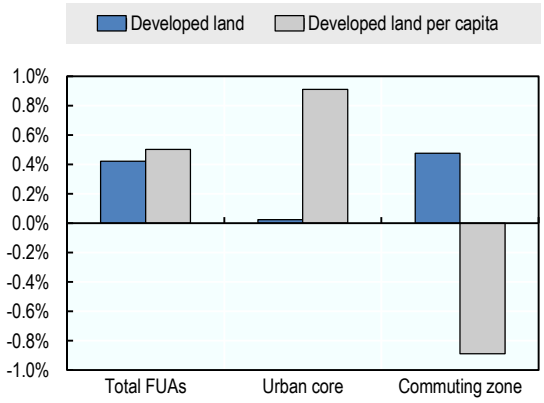


Annual change in developed land, 2000-12



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 Greece

Greece has a per capita land consumption that is somewhat below OECD average. Between 2000 and 2012, it experienced significant increases in its total share of developed land as well as in its per capita land consumption. Over the same time period, a strong suburbanisation pattern emerged. Population in the commuting zones of urban areas grew significantly, whereas it declined in urban cores. This was partially matched by increasing shares of developed land in commuting zones. As of the time of writing, no more recent land cover data is available that can show the full effect of the economic crisis. Outside of large urban areas, Greece is characterised by a relatively low share of developed land, as well as of forested land.

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

Land cover at the national level in Greece

Land cover (km^2)	National	Urban regions	Intermediate regions	Rural regions close to cities	Rural remote regions
Total area	131 949	7 467	15 946	29 966	78 569
Total developed land	3 742	1 008	351	703	1 681
Percentage of total	2.8%	13.5%	2.2%	2.3%	2.1%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	24.8	3.8	3.1	2.3	15.7
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	0.69%	0.39%	0.93%	0.33%	0.99%
Agricultural land	51 269	3 016	5 361	14 110	28 782
Percentage of total	38.9%	40.4%	33.6%	47.1%	36.6%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-21.9	-3.3	-4.8	-1.4	-12.5
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.04%	-0.11%	-0.09%	-0.01%	-0.04%
Forests	24 872	1 034	2 853	6 000	14 985
Percentage of total	18.9%	13.8%	17.9%	20.0%	19.1%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-42.4	-2.5	-4.5	-0.3	-35.1
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.17%	-0.24%	-0.16%	-0.01%	-0.23%
Land cover per capita (m^2)					
Total developed land per capita	336	198	302	470	497
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	0.53%	0.27%	0.66%	0.18%	0.86%
Agricultural land per capita	4 609	593	4 621	9 436	8 515
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-0.21%	-0.22%	-0.36%	-0.16%	-0.18%
Forests per capita	2 236	203	2 460	4 012	4 433
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-0.33%	-0.35%	-0.43%	-0.16%	-0.37%

Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

Land cover in FUAs (km^2)	FUAs	Urban core	Commuting zone
Total area	7 866	1 182	6 685
Total developed land	995	414	581
Percentage of total	12.6%	35.0%	8.7%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	4.1	0.5	3.6
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	0.42%	0.12%	0.64%
Agricultural land	3 413	326	3 087
Percentage of total	43.4%	27.6%	46.2%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-3.5	-0.5	-3.0
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.10%	-0.14%	-0.10%
Forests	888	110	777
Percentage of total	11.3%	9.3%	11.6%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-4.3	-1.5	-2.9
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.47%	-1.23%	-0.36%
Land cover per capita in FUAs (m^2)	FUAs (50 000+ inhabitants)	Urban core (only FUAs 500 000+)	Commuting zone (only FUAs 500 000+)
Total developed land per capita	180	94	299
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	0.50%	0.91%	-0.89%
Agricultural land per capita	616	1	779
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-0.02%	-0.46%	-1.51%
Forests per capita	160	6	225
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-0.39%	0.35%	-2.16%

Note: Changes in per capita values for land cover in TL3 regions computed using 2001 population figures.

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