The Governance of Land Use

COUNTRY FACT SHEET NORWAY

The planning system

Levels of government and their responsibilities

Norway is a unitary state with three levels of government; the national level, 19 counties and 428 municipalities. The national government has few direct responsibilities related to land-use planning. Primarily, it creates the framework laws and policy documents that structure spatial planning. Norway has a comprehensive planning system in which spatial planning and sectoral planning is done in parallel. The *Ministry of Local Affairs and Modernisation* is the national planning authority. It is not directly involved in the actual planning process except in rare cases in which the national government takes over municipal planning. The *Ministry of Climate and Environment* designate protected areas according to the biodiversity act. The national government funds major infrastructure projects, but transport authorities usually use the regional and local planning system in their planning. National level planning is rare, but is becoming more frequent, in particular the case of transport planning. More commonly, however, transport authorities and other federal authorities submit their plans to local and regional governments to be incorporated in local and regional plans. If local or regional plans conflict with national objectives, the national government can object to local plans through transport authorities or through its county commissioners that serve as its regional representatives.

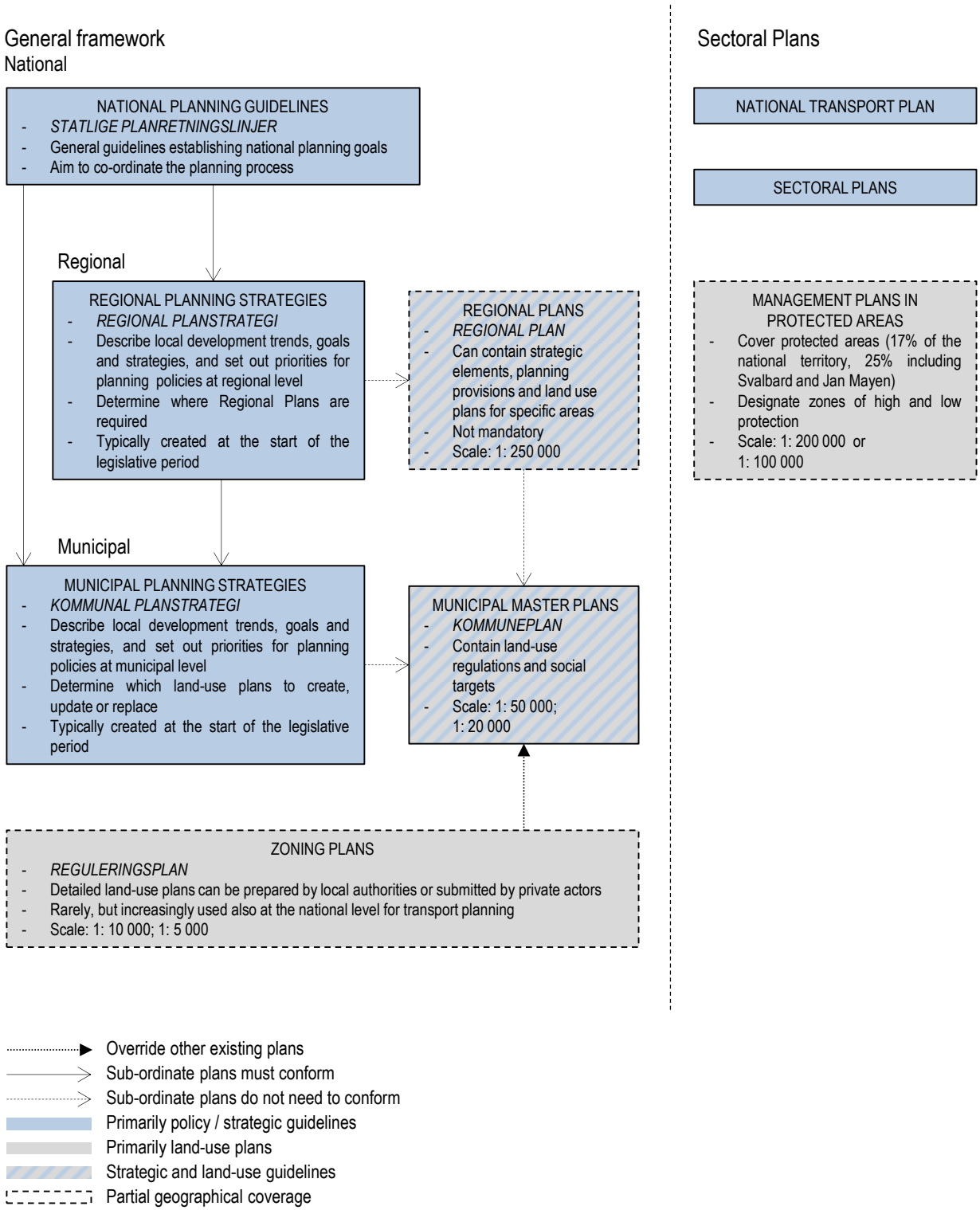
County governments serve as planning authorities and supervise planning of local governments. They are also responsible for the adoption of regional plans. These plans focus on issues of regional importance, such as land-use and transport planning, mountain and outdoor recreation planning and river and coastal planning. The influence of regional plans is limited but is increasing in urban areas where the need for inter-municipal co-ordination is greater.

Municipalities are the main planning authorities in Norway. They are responsible for the preparation and approval of local strategies, the municipal master plan and local zoning plans. In the case of local zoning plans, most plans are prepared by developers or sectoral authorities and submitted to the municipalities for political approval. If objections to planning proposals are raised, *County Commissioners* co-ordinate negotiations. If no amicable solution can be found through these negotiations the decision whether or not to approve a plan is taken by the *Ministry of Local Affairs and Modernisation*.

Spatial and land-use plans

No national spatial plan exists in Norway. At the county level, two types of plans exist. *Regional Planning Strategies* are regional development strategies that are typically prepared at the beginning of each legislative period. They describe socio-economic trends and policy objectives for the county. They are general planning documents that do not focus on the spatial dimension, but they determine the areas for which *Regional Plans* are needed. Currently, *Regional Planning Strategies* have to be approved by the national government, but there are on-going discussions to drop this requirement.

Organisation of spatial and land-use planning in Norway



Regional Plans are non-statutory plans. They are prepared as required by *Regional Planning Strategies* and contain a mix of general guidelines, strategic plans and detailed zoning plans. The land-use categories that they contain are not regulated by law and frequently vary from those in other plans. Typically, *Regional Plans* play only a minor role in the policy-making process and receive little attention unless they concern a subject of national importance. However, they can provide guidelines for regional and local planning and can contain formal objections to local plans.

At the municipal level, *Municipal Planning Strategies* play a comparable role to *Regional Planning Strategies* at the county level. They allow municipalities to specify independently which land-use plans have to be made and which have to be updated. *Municipal Master Plans* are the main spatial planning documents of municipalities. They are comprehensive plans for local development and cover all spatially relevant policy fields. They contain general guidelines, strategic plans and a land-use plan for the entire municipality. Generally, *Municipal Master Plans* are approved by municipalities, but county and national government can object to them. Currently, political priority is given to reducing the number of objections in order to strengthen local autonomy and capacity. *Municipal Master Plans* can also be imposed by the national government as *State Land Use Plans*. This is rare and primarily serves to facilitate the planning of national transport infrastructure, such as national roads, railways and airports. The scale of zoning plans in *Municipal Master Plans* varies from 1: 20 000 in small municipalities to up to 1: 200 000 in the largest municipalities.

Zoning Plans are the most detailed plans and typically have scales of 1: 5 000 or 1: 10 000. They are mostly prepared for areas for which development is foreseen, but are also used to protect areas from development. There are two kinds of local zoning plans; public plans made by the planning authority and submitted plans made by private actors and public authorities. Between 80% and 90% of all *Zoning Plans* are prepared by private developers and public authorities. These plans are submitted to municipalities for political approval. As in the case of *Municipal Master Plans*, the national government and in particular transport authorities can also impose their own *Zoning Plans* on municipalities.

Land Conservation Management Plans are sectoral plans for protected areas and national parks that specify the level of protection and allowed use. They contain small scale zoning regulation, typically at scales of 1: 100 000 or 1: 200 000.

Major laws and regulations

Besides the framework legislation provided by the *Planning and Building Act*, three laws are particularly important in determining land use. First, the *Act for Biodiversity* concerns nature conservation, the protection of species and other environmental issues. It affects protected areas, outdoor activities, second homes, hydropower, agriculture, forestry and fish farming. Second, the *Cultural Heritage Act* affects primarily urban areas. Third, the *Agricultural Act* affects rural areas and tries to limit the loss of agricultural land to urban sprawl. In addition to these three acts, a variety of other laws and regulations affect land-use planning.

Co-ordination mechanisms

To foster co-ordination, all public authorities must inform each other early in the planning process about their proposed policies. In order to foster vertical co-ordination, regular meetings between regional and local authorities are held. Horizontal co-ordination occurs primarily through the planning process of the *Regional Plans* and *Municipal Master Plans*, which involve all concerned public authorities.

Expropriations

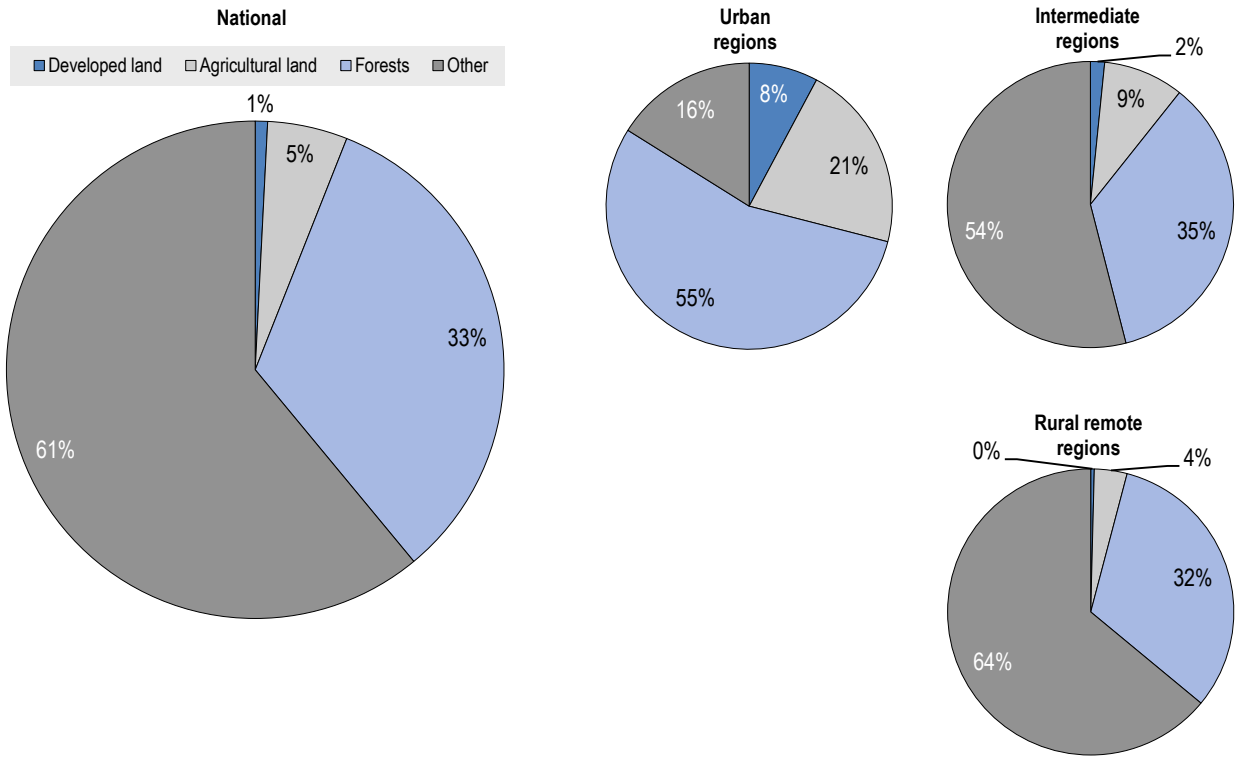
Land can be expropriated by the government and by public organisations that have been granted this power. The law specifies 55 reasons for expropriation including the construction of public building and infrastructure, housing and some commercial undertakings. While all levels of government can expropriate land, nowadays it is primarily used by national transport authorities and rarely by local governments.

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

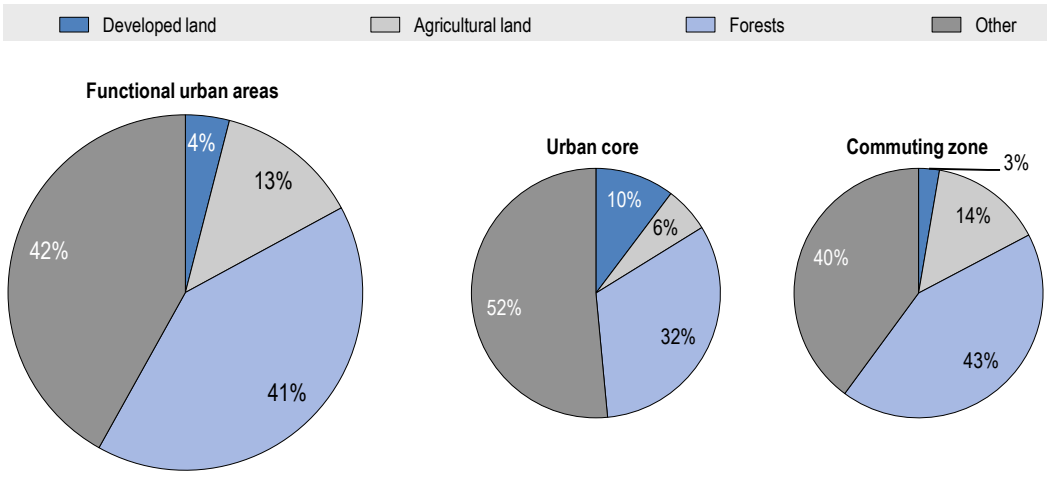
The first nation-wide planning system was established in Norway in 1965 in order to co-ordinate spatial planning and economic planning. In 1985, the system was transformed into a comprehensive planning system that integrated different kinds of planning for mountain and costal planning and transport planning. At the same time, private developers gained the right to submit privately prepared plans to municipalities and local participation in the planning process was strengthened. A major reform was conducted in 2008, when the planning system was made more flexible with the introduction of the *Regional* and *Local Planning Strategies*, which allow counties and municipalities to determine independently for which areas to prepare plans. This reform also gave submitted zoning plans a more formal role and introduced procedural requirements for them. The most recent major reform occurred in 2014, when responsibility for planning was transferred from the *Ministry of the Environment* where it had resided since 1972 to the *Ministry of Local Affairs and Modernisation*.

Land cover in Norway

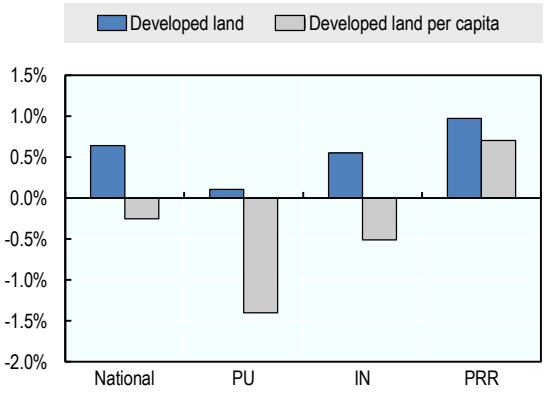
Land cover at the national level



Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

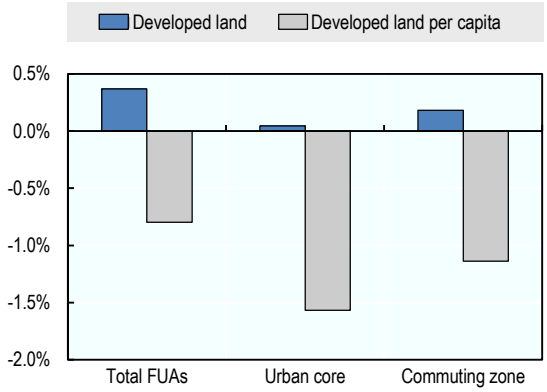


Annual change in developed land, 2000-12



Note: PU: Urban regions, IN: Intermediate regions, 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 Norway

Norway has a very low share of developed land and of agricultural land with 1% and 5% of the total land mass, respectively. Its per capita area of developed land is only slightly higher than OECD average and below that of other northern European countries. Little growth in developed land since 2000 has taken place in urban areas. As population increased significantly, per capita use of developed land declined strongly in these areas. In contrast, in rural areas, the growth of developed land was approximately proportional to the increase in population.

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

Land cover at the national level in Norway

Land cover (km^2)	National	Urban regions	Intermediate regions	Rural regions close to cities	Rural remote regions
Total area	32 4000	5 362	72 123		246 515
Total developed land	2 651	418	1 185		1 048
Percentage of total	0.8%	7.8%	1.6%		0.4%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	16.3	0.4	6.3		9.6
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	0.64%	0.11%	0.55%		0.97%
Agricultural land	16 778	1 136	6 583		9 059
Percentage of total	5.2%	21.2%	9.1%		3.7%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-1.0	0.02	-1.3		0.3
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.01%	0.001%	-0.02%		0.003%
Forests	106 978	2 941	25 439		78 598
Percentage of total	33.0%	54.9%	35.3%		31.9%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-209.8	-15.7	-48.4		-145.8
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.19%	-0.52%	-0.19%		-0.18%
Land cover per capita (m^2)					
Total developed land per capita	532	357	542		643
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	-0.26%	-1.40%	-0.51%		0.70%
Agricultural land per capita	3 365	971	3 012		5 556
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-0.90%	-1.51%	-1.07%		-0.26%
Forests per capita	21 456	2 515	11 638		48 207
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-1.08%	-2.02%	-1.24%		-0.45%

Land cover in functional urban areas (FUAs)

Land cover in FUAs (km^2)	FUAs	Urban core	Commuting zone
Total area	24 237	4 169	20 068
Total developed land	978	429	549
Percentage of total	4.0%	10.3%	2.7%
Annual change in developed land, 2000-12	3.5	1.0	2.5
Annual percentage change in developed land, 2000-12	0.37%	0.23%	0.48%
Agricultural land	3 168	247	2 921
Percentage of total	13.1%	5.9%	14.6%
Annual change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.7	-0.2	-0.5
Annual percentage change in agricultural land, 2000-12	-0.02%	-0.08%	-0.02%
Forests	9 938	1 345	8 593
Percentage of total	41.0%	32.3%	42.8%
Annual change in forests, 2000-12	-27.9	-1.1	-26.8
Annual percentage change in forests, 2000-12	-0.28%	-0.08%	-0.31%
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	419	225	527
Annual percentage change in developed land per capita, 2000-12	-0.80%	-1.57%	-1.14%
Agricultural land per capita	1 356	22	2 340
Annual percentage change in agricultural land per capita, 2000-12	-1.18%	-1.61%	-1.32%
Forests per capita	4 255	430	5 379
Annual percentage change in forests per capita, 2000-12	-1.43%	-1.84%	-1.91%

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