

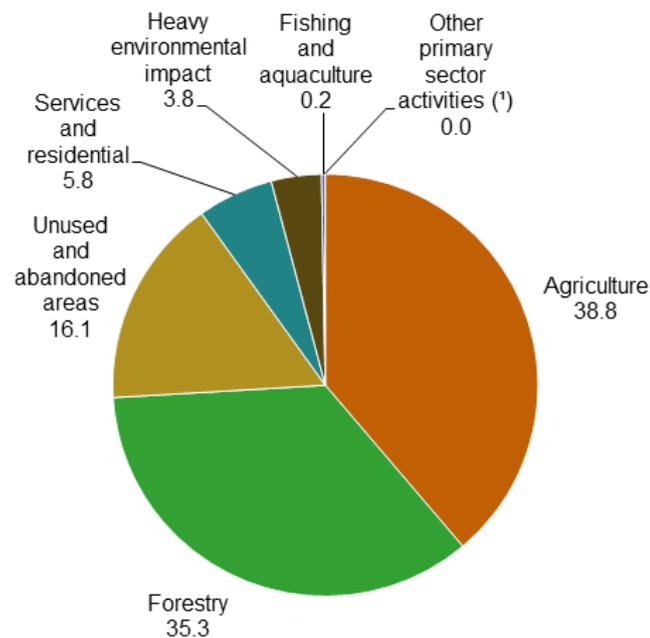
Data extracted in June 2025.  
Planned article update: June 2029.

### Highlights

In 2022, agricultural land accounted for 38.8% of the EU's total area.

In 2022, more than a third of the EU's total area was used for forestry, with national shares among the EU countries ranging from a high of 63.7% in Finland down to a low of 3.4% in Cyprus and close to none in Malta.

**Land use, EU, 2022**  
(% of total area)



(\*) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: lan\_use\_oww)

eurostat 

**Land use, EU, 2022 Source: Eurostat (lan\_use\_oww)**

Land is the basis for many biological and human activities on Earth. Agriculture, forestry, industry, transport, housing and other services use land as a natural and/or an economic resource. Land is also an integral part of ecosystems, it's indispensable for [biodiversity](#) and the carbon cycle. Land can be divided into 2 interlinked concepts:

- [land cover](#) refers to the biophysical coverage of land (for example, crops, grass, broad-leaved woods, or built-up areas)

- [land use](#) indicates the socioeconomic use of land (for example, agriculture, forestry, recreation or residential use).

Land cover and land use data form the basis for spatial and territorial analyses which are increasingly important for

- the planning and management of agricultural, forest, wetland, water and urban areas
- nature, biodiversity and soil protection
- the prevention and mitigation of natural hazards and [climate change](#) .

This article presents statistical data on land use within the [European Union \(EU\)](#) . The statistics presented form part of the data collection exercise for the [Land Use and Cover Area frame Survey \(LUCAS\)](#) , undertaken between March 2022 and July 2023. LUCAS is the largest harmonised land field survey implemented across the EU.

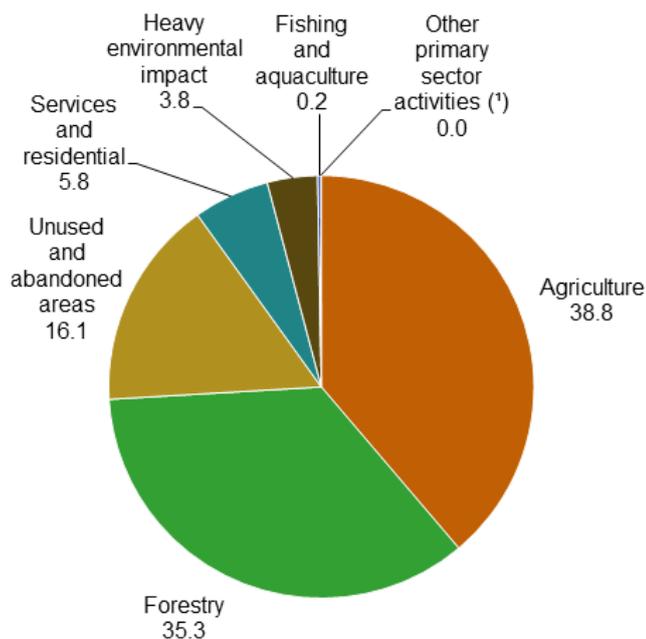
Note, there is a complementary article about [land cover statistics](#) in the EU.

## Land use in the EU

Land areas can be used for a variety of different purposes at the same time. For example, a forest can be used, among other purposes, for forestry, hunting and/or recreation. The statistics presented in the article below refer to **primary (or main)** land use.

Agricultural land is the most common primary land use category in the EU; it accounted for 38.8% of the EU's total area in 2022 (see Figure 1). A slightly smaller share (35.3%) was used primarily for forestry, while 16.1% of the EU's total area was unused or abandoned; the LUCAS survey is based on field visits, with land use determined based on visible signs when surveyed.

## Land use, EU, 2022 (% of total area)



(\*) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: lan\_use\_oww)

eurostat 

**Figure 1: Land use, EU, 2022 Source: Eurostat (lan\_use\_oww)**

The remaining land use categories had much lower shares

- 5.8% of the EU's total area was used for services and residential purposes – for example, commerce, finance and business; community services; recreation, leisure and sports; residential; and nature reserves
- uses having a heavy environmental impact – such as mining and quarrying, energy production, industry, water and waste treatment, and construction – accounted for 3.8%
- the lowest shares were recorded for fishing and aquaculture (0.2% of the total area) and the residual category of other primary sector activities (0.0%).

Between 2018 and 2022, the area of unused and abandoned land across the EU increased by 49 800 km<sup>2</sup>, representing an overall rise of 8.1% (see Figure 2). This was the largest absolute increase in land use (measured in square kilometres), with the only other notable gain recorded for land used for services and other residential purposes (up 4 900 km<sup>2</sup>).

In relative terms, unused and abandoned areas recorded the fastest growth across the EU between 2018 and 2022 (up 8.1%). The next highest growth rates were observed for land used for other primary sector activities (up 7.3%) and for services and residential purposes (up 2.1%).

By contrast, land used for forestry in the EU decreased by 27 900 km<sup>2</sup> between 2018 and 2022, representing an overall decline of 1.9%; this was the largest absolute decrease in land use. Notable decreases were also recorded for

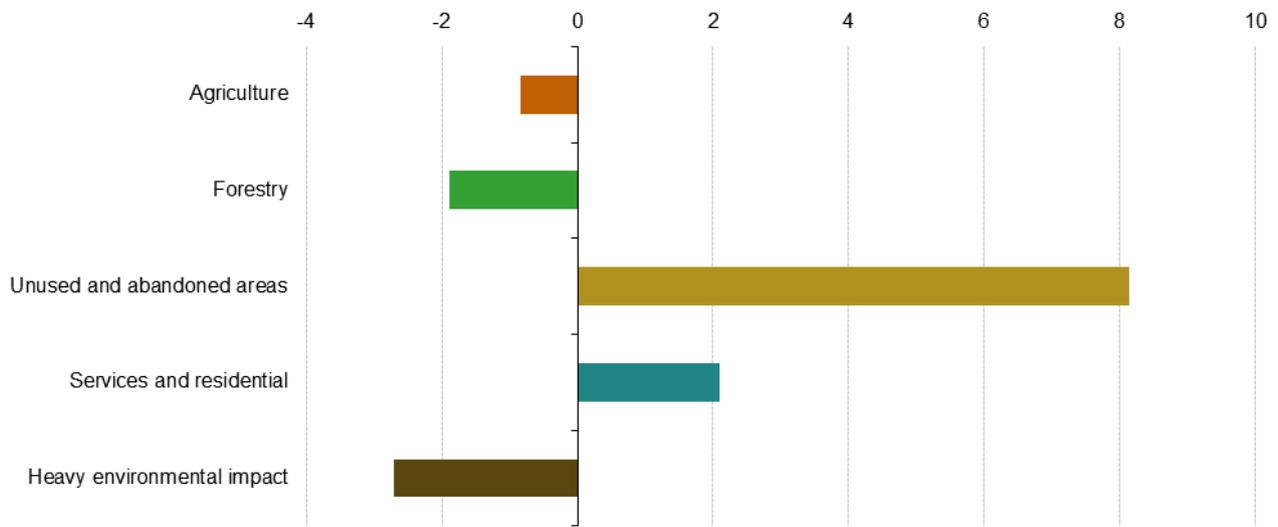
- land used for agriculture – a fall of 13 600 km<sup>2</sup>
- land used for fishing and aquaculture – a fall of 8 700 km<sup>2</sup>.

In relative terms, land used for fishing and aquaculture fell at, by far, the fastest rate across the EU (down 45.9%) between 2018 and 2022. There were also declines recorded for

- land use with a heavy environmental impact – down 2.7%
- forestry – down 1.9%

- agriculture – down 0.8%.

### Change in land use, EU, 2018–22 (%, based on km<sup>2</sup>)



Note: the overall change in land use for fishing and aquaculture was -45.9%, while that for other primary sector activities was 7.3%.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: lan\_use\_oww)



**Figure 2: Change in land use, EU, 2018–22 Source: Eurostat (lan\_use\_oww)**

## Land use in EU countries

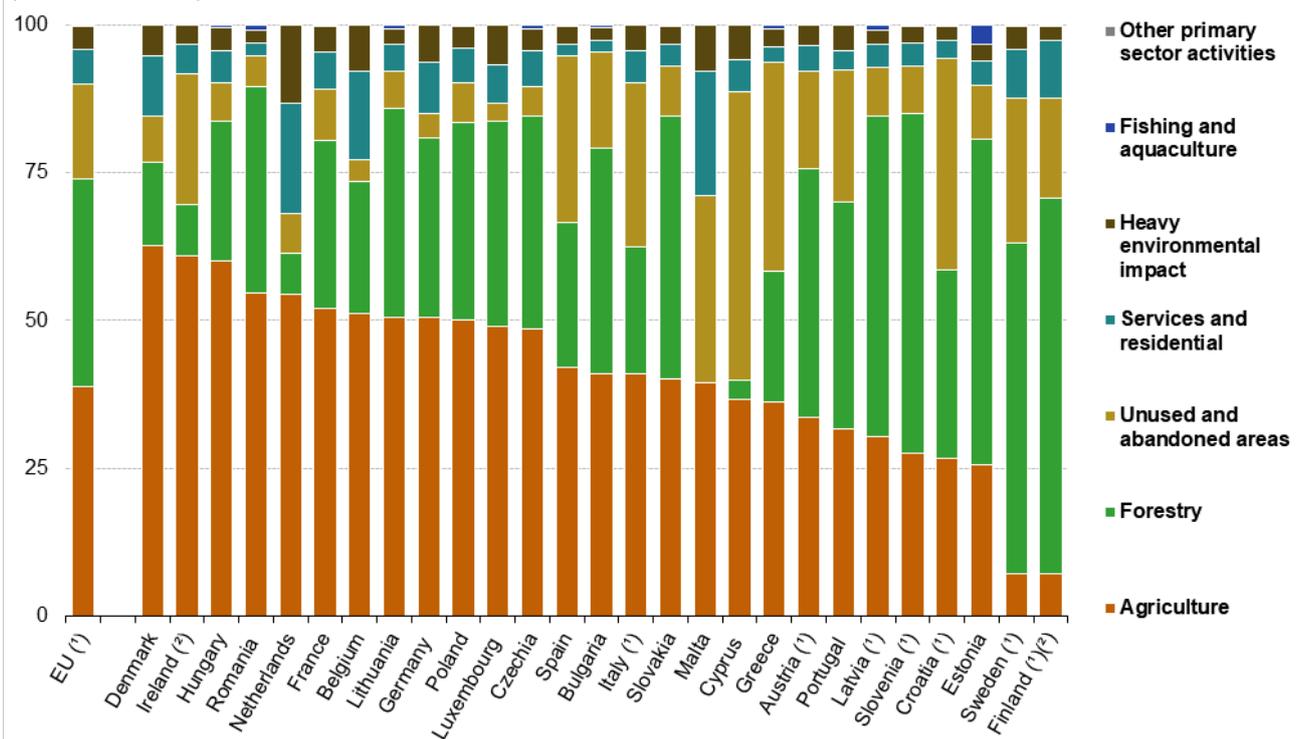
Land under agricultural use encompasses various land cover types, the most common being arable land, permanent crops and grassland. Small areas of other land cover types – such as artificial land (for example, farm buildings or roads) and water (for example, irrigation ponds) – can also be used for agricultural purposes.

### Almost two thirds of the total area of Denmark was used for agricultural purposes

In 2022, there were 10 EU countries where more than half of the total area was used for agricultural purposes (see Figure 3). Denmark recorded the highest share (62.7% of the total area), while both Ireland and Hungary reported shares above 60.0%. At the other end of the range, agricultural land use played a relatively minor role in Sweden (7.2%) and Finland (7.1%). These 2 Nordic countries were the only countries within the EU where less than a quarter of the total land area was used for agriculture: Estonia (25.6%) had the next lowest share.

## Land use, 2022

(% of total area)



Note: ranked on the share for agriculture. Malta: forestry, not available. Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta: fishing and aquaculture, not available. The share for other primary sector activities is almost zero for every country.

(\*) Other primary sector activities: low reliability.

(\*) Fishing and aquaculture: low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: lan\_use\_oww)

eurostat

Figure 3: Land use, 2022 Source: Eurostat (lan\_use\_oww)

### More than half of the total area of Finland, Slovenia, Sweden, Estonia and Latvia was used for forestry purposes

Unsurprisingly, forestry is often the dominant land use in EU countries with extensive woodland cover and typically low agricultural land use. As mentioned above, not all woodland is used for forestry; alternative uses include recreation, hunting, protected areas or no visible use. In 2022, more than half of the total area of Finland, Slovenia, Sweden, Estonia and Latvia was used for forestry purposes, with Finland having the highest share at 63.7%. At the other end of the spectrum, forestry accounted for less than 10.0% of the total area in Ireland, the Netherlands and Cyprus; note that there was negligible use of land for forestry in Malta.

In 2022, 16.1% of the EU's total area had no visible land use or was abandoned. These areas may be used for fishing and hunting, but large portions are excluded from any socioeconomic use – for example, because they lie within protected areas where such activities are either prohibited or heavily restricted. Additionally, some areas are remote or difficult to access, limiting use. Sparsely populated, rural and arid regions in southern EU countries often have a relatively high share of unused or abandoned land. In Cyprus, unused and abandoned areas represented the primary land use in 2022, accounting for almost half (48.7%) of the total area. Several other southern EU countries – Italy, Spain, Malta, Greece and Croatia – recorded somewhat the next highest shares, between 27.8% and 35.8%, respectively.

### Residential land use accounted for 2.8% of the EU's total area

In 2022, services and residential land use covered 5.8% of the EU's total area. Approximately half of this category was devoted to residential purposes (2.8% of the total area), with smaller shares for arts, entertainment and leisure (2.1%), community services (0.6%) and commerce, finance and business services (0.3%). In Malta, the share for services and residential land was more than a fifth (20.9%) – the highest in the EU – reflecting its high population density. In fact, residential purposes made up nearly 3 quarters (71.2%) of Malta's services and residential land

use. Among the other EU countries, services and residential land use also accounted for more than a tenth of the total area in Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands.

### **Transport, communication networks, storage and protective works constituted more than four fifths of the EU's land use with heavy environmental impact**

In 2022, land use with a heavy environmental impact covered 3.8% of the EU's total area. By far the most common type within this category was transport, communication networks, storage and protective works, which together accounted for more than four fifths (80.9%) of the subtotal in this category. Other types of land use in this category had much lower shares in this subtotal: mining and quarrying (6.1%), industry and manufacturing (4.4%), energy production, water and waste treatment (both 2.7%), construction (2.5%) and other primary sector activities (0.8%).

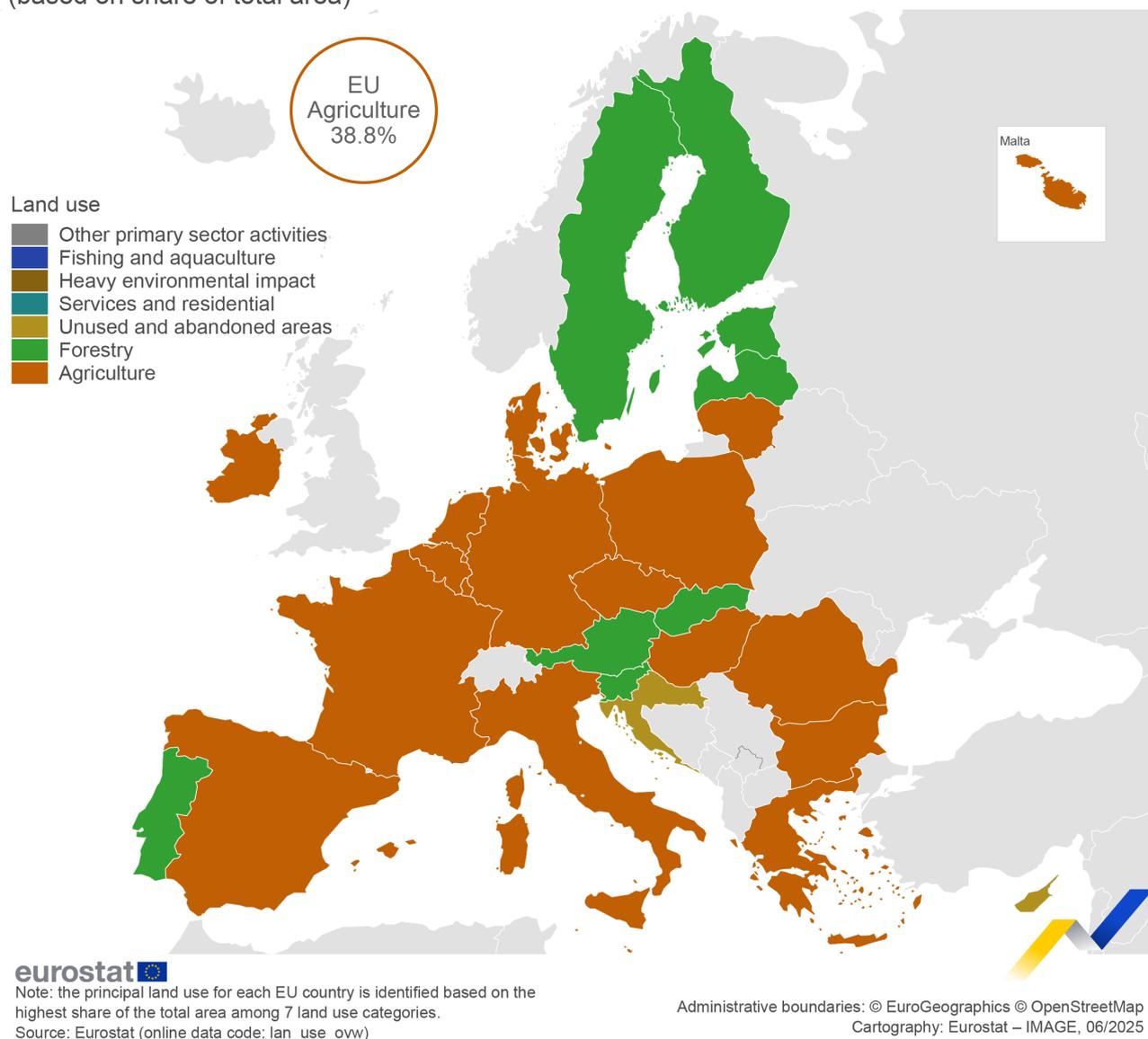
Among EU countries, land use with a heavy environmental impact accounted for 13.1% of the total area in the Netherlands – the only EU country with a double-digit share. This may be linked to its high-density transport network and large storage areas serving ports and logistical services. The neighbouring, relatively densely populated countries of Belgium (7.7%), Luxembourg (6.7%) and Germany (6.2%), which lie at the heart of western Europe's transport system, recorded the next highest shares, along with Malta (7.9%). These were the only EU countries to report shares above 6.0%.

Map 1 shows the principal land use for each EU country, based on the highest share of the total area among 7 land use categories.

- Agricultural land accounted for an absolute majority – more than 50.0% – of the total area in Denmark, Ireland, Hungary, Romania, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Lithuania, Germany and Poland.
- Agriculture was also the principal land use in Luxembourg, Czechia, Spain, Bulgaria, Italy, Malta and Greece, although its share was less than 50.0% (but remained higher than for any other category).
- Forestry was the principal land use in Finland, Slovenia, Sweden, Estonia and Latvia, each with more than half of their total area covered by forest.
- Forestry was also the principal land use in Slovakia, Austria and Portugal, although it accounted for less than 50.0% of the total area.
- Croatia and Cyprus were atypical, with unused and abandoned areas being the principal land use. In both cases, this category accounted for less than 50.0% of the total area.

## Principal land use, 2022

(based on share of total area)



Map 1: Principal land use, 2022 Source: Eurostat (lan\_lcv\_oww)

## Source data for tables and graphs

- [Land use statistics – LUCAS: tables and figures](#)

## Data sources

Eurostat's Land Use and Cover Area frame Survey (LUCAS) is a field survey that follows an area-frame sampling scheme. The survey is conducted through direct observations made *in situ* by trained land surveyors. When a location is impractical or inaccessible (such as in urban or mountainous areas), high-resolution aerial imagery is used as an alternative. LUCAS collects data for land cover and land use that are based on consistent definitions and methodology. The survey also provides territorial information facilitating the analysis of the interaction between agriculture and the environment. Furthermore, it may be used as a vehicle for other data collection exercises. For example, recent surveys have taken soil samples from approximately 10% of the points visited.

LUCAS 2022 was conducted from March 2022 to August 2023. Data on land cover and land use were collected for approximately 200 000 field points and for 200 000 photo-interpreted points; these points were selected from a standard 2 km grid covering a total of more than 1 million points all over the EU. The land cover and the visible land use data were classified according to the harmonised LUCAS land cover and land use [classification](#) , while information was also collected on irrigation management and structural elements in the landscape. Furthermore, at approximately 10% of the selected field points a topsoil sample was taken to help assess environmental factors, update soil maps, validate soil models and measure the quantity of organic carbon in the soil.

The LUCAS microdata for 2022 may be accessed directly on [Eurostat's website](#) .

More detailed background information on the LUCAS survey can be found in this [article](#) .

The previous LUCAS data collections were conducted in 2015 and 2018. The date for the next LUCAS survey is, at the time of writing, not yet finalised.

## Context

Most changes to landscapes aren't visible on a day-to-day basis and the natural features that form landscapes (for example, valleys, plateaus and plains) are, by and large, the result of geographical processes that have taken place over a very long period of time. Alongside these natural processes, human intervention has increasingly left an imprint on the environments in which we live and work. Land has become a natural and economic resource used for multiple purposes

- agriculture and forestry
- mining, manufacturing and construction
- distributive trades, transport and other services
- residential and leisure use.

Land is also an integral part of ecosystems and indispensable for biodiversity and the carbon cycle.

Land use data are important for an understanding of how environmental systems function, and their assessment over time provides a means for evaluating the impact that any changes in land use may have on biodiversity and ecosystems. As such, harmonised and reliable statistics from LUCAS provide a crucial source of information for monitoring a wide range of policy areas.

Land use change is often considered to be a primary driver for changes in biodiversity and ecosystems. The development of transport and distribution networks as well as intensive agriculture and urban sprawl has led to Europe's landscape being increasingly broken up into small pieces. This pattern of fragmentation has the potential to affect levels of biodiversity and could result in negative impacts on flora and fauna.

## Explore further

### Other articles

- [Agri-environmental indicators](#)
- [Forests, forestry and logging](#)
- [Land cover statistics](#)
- [Landscape features in agricultural land](#)
- [LUCAS – Land use and land cover survey](#)
- [Sustainable development goal 15 – life on land](#)

## Database

- [Land cover and land use, landscape \(LUCAS\) \(lan\)](#) , see:

Land use overview by NUTS 2 region (lan\_use\_ovw)

- [Land cover and use – Primary data](#)
- [Land cover and use – 2022 microdata](#)

## Thematic section

- [LUCAS – Land cover and use](#)

## Publications

- [Diversified landscape structure in the EU Member States – Issue number 21/2011](#)
- [LUCAS – EU land use and cover area survey –2021 edition](#)
- [New insight into land cover and land use in Europe – Issue number 33/2008](#)
- [Eurostat regional yearbook \(2011\) – Chapter 12](#)

## Methodology

- [Land cover and land use, landscape \(LUCAS\) \(lan\) \(ESMS metadata file – lan\\_esms\)](#)
- [Land cover and use – Information on data](#)
- [LUCAS 2022 – Classification](#)
- [LUCAS 2022 – Instructions for surveyors](#)
- [LUCAS 2022 – Sample and subsamples design – Criticalities and solutions – 2022 edition](#)

## External links

- [European Commission – Copernicus Land Monitoring Service – CORINE land cover data](#)
- [European Commission – Directorate-General for the Environment](#)
- [European Commission – INSPIRE – Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe](#)
- [European Commission – Joint Research Centre – European Soil Data Centre \(ESDAC\)](#)
- [European Environment Agency – Land use](#)

## Visualisation

- [Eurostat statistical atlas – Land use](#)
- [LUCAS photos](#)