

URBAN
PLANNING



Spatial planning in Ukraine



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ABOUT THIS PAPER

Thematic paper series

This paper is one of nine drafted in 2025 by national entities in Ukraine as part of a UN-Habitat-commissioned collection entitled *Thematic Paper Series Informing Urban Recovery Approaches in Ukraine*, comprising of:



Urban Governance

- Citizenship: Urban Futures in Ukraine
- Municipal Governance Issues in Ukraine
- Decentralization and Recovery: Local Recovery Planning in Ukraine



Urban Land

- Land and Property Issues in Housing and Urban Development in Ukraine



Urban Planning

- Spatial Planning in Ukraine



Urban Housing

- Housing Provision and Outcomes in Ukraine
- Tracing the Path of Social Housing Policy in Ukraine



Urban Skills

- Built Environment Professionals: Education and Practice in Ukraine
- Built Environment Professionals: University Education in Ukraine

Executive summary

This document provides an overview of Ukraine's spatial planning system at a pivotal stage of transformation. Based on a desk review and supported by a rich set of bibliographic references, it examines the system's historical evolution, legal and institutional framework, planning instruments and implementation context. The analysis is situated within a rapidly evolving legislative and regulatory environment shaped by the 2020–2021 governance reform which combined political, fiscal and administrative decentralization, formation of new territorial units and local planning autonomy. Ukraine's longstanding European integration agenda and simultaneous reconstruction needs arising from full-scale invasion since 2022 shape the resources, values and decision-making context, which now includes multiple international stakeholders and funding streams. The paper considers not only the formal structure of the planning system, but also the gap between legal requirements and the practical capacity of institutions, professionals and local self-government bodies to implement spatial planning under current conditions.

Ukraine's contemporary planning system reflects a layered legacy of imperial, Soviet and post-independence reforms. During the Soviet period, planning was highly centralized, closely linked to state economic planning, and supported by a network of state planning institutes. The system produced detailed and hierarchical planning documents, often based on standardized norms and assumptions of state control over land and development. Since independence from 1991, Ukraine has had to adapt this inherited system to the requirements of private property, market-based development, local democracy and local self-government. However, many structural features remain influential, including a strong plan hierarchy, legal rigidity, detailed technical requirements and a tendency to view spatial planning primarily as a regulatory and land-use designation process.

Recent reforms have significantly changed the planning landscape. The 2011 Law *'On Regulation of City Planning Activity'* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011) contributed to improved access to planning documentation, changes in development procedures, and clarification of planning rights. Decentralization after 2014 further shifted responsibilities for land and spatial development towards local self-government bodies. The 2020–2021 reforms introduced the Comprehensive Plan for the Spatial Development of the

Territory of the Territorial Community, which is intended to integrate urban planning and land management across the entire territory of each hromada. This reform has the potential to support more coherent territorial planning by linking settlements, agricultural land, infrastructure, environmental assets, public services and development areas within a single planning framework.

In parallel, the implementation of Comprehensive Plans has proved more demanding than initially anticipated. These documents are legally binding, technically complex, data-intensive and costly to prepare. Many municipalities, particularly smaller territorial communities, lack the financial resources, planning staff, GIS specialists, updated cartographic materials, and overall institutional capacity required to develop, manage and update such plans. The result is a significant mismatch between the ambition of the legal framework and the practical ability of many local self-government bodies to deliver it. Without sustained state support, technical assistance and clear prioritization, the preparation of Comprehensive Plans is likely to remain slow and uneven across the country.

The performance of the planning system is therefore constrained less by the absence of legislation or the quality of its design than by implementation capacity, institutional coordination, and sustained funding. Ukraine has a comprehensive statutory planning framework, but its effectiveness is severely weakened where planning documents are outdated and incomplete. Detailed Plans remain one of the most frequently used local planning instruments and can have a direct effect on land use, investment and development rights. In practice, they are often linked to immediate development pressures and may be used to adapt wider planning provisions to specific investment interests. Common risks include uncoordinated development, inadequate infrastructure, and poor provision of public services. Such risks underline the importance of stronger implementation mechanisms, clearer public-interest safeguards and improved links between spatial planning, land management, infrastructure provision and municipal investment planning.

Public participation, digitization and environmental planning have been progressively incorporated into Ukraine's spatial planning framework, but remain uneven in practice. Public hearings, publication of

planning documents, and mechanisms for public comment are now part of formal procedures, while newer approaches to Comprehensive Plans and recovery planning have also introduced early-stage engagement provisions. However, participation is often still limited in scope or occurs after key spatial choices have already been shaped. Digitization has improved access to planning information and offers important opportunities for transparency and evidence-based decision-making, but interoperable geospatial infrastructure, local data systems and routine monitoring remain insufficiently developed. Similarly, Strategic Environmental Assessments and landscape planning provide important entry points for integrating environmental priorities, but their influence on core planning decisions remains inconsistent.

The full-scale invasion has added further complexity to an already demanding reform process. The planning system must now operate in a context of destruction, displacement, demographic change, uneven regional impacts, constrained public finances and urgent reconstruction needs. Statutory planning instruments were largely designed for more stable development conditions and are not sufficiently flexible for addressing wartime recovery of damaged settlements, rapidly changing local conditions, and shortened, iterative planning horizons. Reconstruction pressures may create risks of fragmented, ad hoc development if urgent investment is not guided by coherent spatial strategies. The key challenge is to ensure that recovery planning does not only rebuild damaged assets, but also supports more resilient, inclusive, climate-responsive and economically viable communities in the future. This requires a mediating planning layer and instruments, such as recovery programmes and integrated development strategies, that can be updated more often but provide spatial coordination and foster synergies between projects.

Longer-term pressures also require closer attention. Population decline and urban shrinkage, internal displacement, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change, and inefficient land consumption practices all have significant spatial implications. Yet planning practice often continues to assume growth, expansion and land take, even where demographic and fiscal conditions may suggest the need for consolidation, reuse, adaptation

and careful infrastructure planning. Ukraine's EU accession process offers an opportunity to strengthen alignment with European principles relating to territorial cohesion, environmental protection, public participation, climate adaptation and sustainable land management. However, this will require not only legislative harmonization, but also the practical ability of institutions and municipalities to implement these principles in day-to-day planning, highlighting the need to develop professional education and national-level planning fora.

Overall, the paper shows that Ukraine has made substantial progress in reforming the legal architecture of spatial planning. The central challenge now lies in making the system workable, strategic and responsive under highly uncertain conditions. Spatial planning can play a critical role in Ukraine's recovery and long-term development if it is supported as a core public function. This would require investment in local planning capacity and multi-level coordination, better integration between spatial planning and public investment and stronger local development control. Continuing the improvement of digital infrastructure, meaningful public participation, and strengthening nature protection can enable the under-resourced system to respond to rapidly shifting social, economic and climate realities.

Further research needs

Further research is needed to understand how the reformed planning system is functioning in practice across different types of territorial communities, including frontline, heavily damaged, shrinking, rural, and relatively fast-growing areas. Priority topics include the real cost, timeframe and quality of Comprehensive Plan preparation; municipal staffing and GIS capacity; the role of private development interests in shaping Detailed Plans; the effectiveness of public participation; the implementation and enforcement of adopted plans; and the integration of environmental, landscape and climate priorities into spatial decision-making. Comparative case studies of territorial communities that have prepared or are preparing Comprehensive Plans may be particularly valuable for identifying practical barriers, transferable lessons, and targeted support needs for recovery and long-term planning reform.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BMZ – Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development)

CID – Center for Innovation Development

CO₂ – Carbon dioxide

DBN – Derzhavni Budivelni Normy (State Building Standards or State Construction Norms of Ukraine)

DSTU – Derzhavnyi Standart Ukrainy (State Standard of Ukraine)

ESPON – European Spatial Planning Observation Network

EU – European Union

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

GDB – Geodatabase

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GeoJSON – Geographic JavaScript Object Notation

GIS – Geographic Information System

GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)

IDC – Integrated Development Concept

INSPIRE – Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community

IT – Information Technology

LDN – Land Degradation Neutrality

NSDI – National Geospatial Data Infrastructure of Ukraine

OCHA – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PDF – Portable Document Format

PPP – Public-private partnership

RDNA – Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment

SCN – State Construction Norms

SEA – Strategic Environmental Assessment

SECAP – Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan

SUMP – Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan

UAH – Ukrainian Hryvnia

UCS-2000 – Ukrainian Coordinate System 2000

UN – United Nations

UNCCD – United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

UNECE – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USESFC – Unified State Electronic System in the Field of Construction

XML – Extensible Markup Language

General introduction to the thematic paper series

Four years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 – and close to 12 years since the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and City of Sevastopol in 2014 – war continues to inflict untold suffering on the Ukrainian people.¹ Hostilities since 2022 have caused widespread damage and destruction to Ukraine's built environment – from housing, utilities, and transport networks, to social infrastructure and cultural assets. In this compound crisis of urban systems, many cities have shifted focus from long-term development to continuous emergency repair and risk management. Most recent estimates put the cost of reconstruction and recovery at 587.7 billion USD – a figure that has grown year on year since 2022.² The sector incurring highest damage in dollar terms is housing: 14 per cent of the national housing stock, affecting some 3 million households, has been damaged or destroyed, requiring 61.1 billion USD for reconstruction and recovery needs.³ As at January 2026, around 3.7 million people have been displaced within Ukraine since 2022, with a further 5.8 million now refugees outside the country. This comes in the context of an earlier wave of conflict-related disruption and displacement from 2014.⁴

In a country that is 70 per cent urban by population,⁵ Ukraine's cities are central to both crisis and recovery. Total recovery and reconstruction needs are spatially concentrated in frontline areas and major urban oblasts.⁶ Urban centres are 'facing both supply constraints and high demand from displaced populations'.⁷ There is an urgent and pressing imperative to respond to impacts on the built environment and critical infrastructure amidst large-scale humanitarian need. Even as hostilities continue and despite funding constraints, the Ukrainian

Government has a strong ambition to 'build back better' – including a desire to revitalize existing towns and neighbourhoods through area-based approaches that support local-level investment and contribute to recovery,⁸ as flagged by the most recent Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment 5.⁹ The Assessment also highlighted that effective recovery planning requires reforms that enhance the institutional and technical capacity of the country's public sector to prepare, implement and monitor investment projects.¹⁰ Strengthened data collection and research is identified as one of the main priorities for a durable recovery.¹¹

Addressing the challenges now facing Ukraine demands a long-term analytical perspective stretching back even earlier than 2014 – to factor in Soviet and post-Soviet structural legacies that continue to fundamentally shape the conditions, constraints, and opportunities facing contemporary urban recovery planning. In particular, Ukraine's post-1991 transition produced privatized housing systems with fragmented ownership and maintenance backlogs, aging and underinvested infrastructure, deindustrialized urban economies and shrinking city dynamics, evolving decentralization reforms, and an increasingly mobilized civil society with expectations for democratic governance.

In this historical context, national, sub-national and sectoral recovery strategies need to be developed and implemented in ways that also embed measures to build capacity within the built environment professions. The war has affected the availability of Ukrainian expertise within urban development, which was already scarce pre-war. This presents a real risk to the Government's widely supported aim to build back

- 1 In terms of mortalities, hostilities since 2022 have also left over 15,000 civilians dead, and injured over 41,000 others. (OHCHR, 2026).
- 2 World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations (2026)
- 3 The most recent Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment 5 indicates that 74% of total damage since 2022 occurred in 4 sectors: housing (requiring 61.1 billion USD for reconstruction and recovery needs over the 10-year period 2026–2035; transport (40.3 billion USD); energy (24.8 billion USD); commerce and industry (19.2 billion USD). (Government of Ukraine, World Bank Group, European Commission & United Nations, 2026 p24). As the report notes, 'The total needs include expenses related to rebuilding with improved standards (...) and account for inflationary pressures' (World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations, 2026 p30).
- 4 Ukraine already had the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Europe as at July 2021, with over 1.4 million people fleeing (Mikheieva & Kuznetsova, 2023 [for IOM]).
- 5 World Bank Group (n.d.) (2023 figures)
- 6 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p27)
- 7 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p24)
- 8 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p54)
- 9 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026)
- 10 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026, p11)
- 11 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026, p42)

better. While several organizations have emerged to support capacity development in Ukraine on urban and territorial development and management, access to contextually relevant knowledge and best practices on these issues is still limited.

In response to urban recovery needs, UN-Habitat collaborates with the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, providing strategy and policy advice. In line with its mandate to promote socially and environmentally sustainable and resilient towns and cities, UN-Habitat supported a variety of not-for-profit and public Ukrainian entities to produce thematic documents on nine inter-related aspects of Ukraine's built environment. Each document considers the historical context and key issues of each topic in relation to urban recovery, presenting authors' valuable understandings of the respective topic.

Under the theme **Urban Governance**, the document *'Citizenship: Urban futures in Ukraine'* examines how civic participation and citizenship may interplay with inclusive and democratic urban recovery processes. The document *'Municipal Governance Issues in Ukraine'* identifies institutional and administrative features as well as opportunities and constraints affecting municipalities' capacity to engage with recovery. The document *'Decentralization and Recovery: Local Recovery Planning in Ukraine'* assesses how historic decentralization reform has shaped the role of local self-government bodies in planning and implementing recovery. Under the theme of **Urban Land**, the document *'Land and Property Issues in Housing and Urban Development in Ukraine'* covers the evolution of land ownership and property rights issues including in terms of their criticality to reconstruction and housing redevelopment. Under the theme of **Urban Planning**, the document *'Spatial Planning in Ukraine'* sets out the planning environment and associated frameworks guiding coordinated spatial reconstruction across national, regional, and local levels. Under the theme of **Urban Housing**, the document *'Housing Provision and Outcomes in Ukraine'* examines mechanisms through which housing is financed, delivered, and regulated, and is complemented by the document *'Tracing the*

Path of Social Housing in Ukraine' which explores the evolution of social housing and implications for expanding affordable housing provision. Under the final theme, **Urban Skills**, the document *'Built Environment Professionals: Education and Practice in Ukraine'* assesses the professional capacity available to plan, design, and implement urban reconstruction, while the document *'Built Environment Professionals: University Education in Ukraine'* evaluates higher education systems preparing future built environment professionals for reconstruction and urban development.

While many documents on recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine start from accounts of damage from 2014 and 2022, this series takes a longer perspective, actively exploring the selected themes across the Soviet and post-Soviet transition and reform periods.

Collectively, the series conveys the voices of academics, practitioners and civil society activists from diverse disciplines and backgrounds, representing local expert knowledge and experience rooted in the Ukrainian context. They offer a multi-dimensional diagnostic foundation and common language to inform evolving and multi-level discussions on the country's urban challenges and opportunities, as well as options for the future and how Ukraine might achieve them. In particular, the series aims to contribute to the continuing processes of decentralization and democratization. If decisions about towns and cities are to be driven locally and with context sensitivity, a wider literacy and shared understanding regarding the built environment, including its planning and management, is needed. The thematic documents respond to this need, increasing the availability and accessibility of knowledge on urban topics, and providing extensive references for further reading. UN-Habitat hopes the series will serve as a knowledge resource for policymakers, local officials, practitioners, development partners, researchers engaged in Ukraine's urban recovery, as well as general readers; and will contribute to recovery discourse, processes and outcomes that are context-appropriate, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

Introduction

Spatial planning in Ukraine remained underrepresented in international academic discourse until the mid-2010s, with limited visibility of analytical and scientific research in widely accessible publications. Major contributions to the study of spatial planning in Ukraine include the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Territorial Review* (OECD, 2013), the *Country Profile on Housing and Land Management* prepared by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, 2013), and the *Urbanization Review* commissioned by the World Bank (World Bank, 2015). These papers highlighted growing regional disparities, and the need for attention to the demographic conditions of urban population shrinkage, and to the positive dynamics of streamlining land development procedures and digitalizing planning.

Today, Ukraine lacks a single, dominant, internationally visible planning association, and the professional field faces constraints related to data availability, consistency, and the development of robust causal analysis within the planning system. While the system of centralized state urban design and planning institutes has collapsed, few new coordination or collaboration mechanisms have taken their place. This condition curtails effective interfacing between the government and practitioners, impeding their capacity to collectively identify and respond to challenges across the sector. The government has largely focused on the legal framework of the system, seeking to advance it while only marginally addressing issues related to institutional capacity, the professional community, the practical impacts of planning, and local planning needs - including those arising under wartime conditions.

A major reform of the spatial planning system has been underway in Ukraine since 2020, initiated through amendments to the Law of Ukraine 'On Regulation of City Planning Activity' (Verkhovna Rada, 2011) and the introduction of the Law of Ukraine 'On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Planning the Use of Land' No. 711-IX (Verkhovna Rada, 2020), which established new instruments such as Comprehensive Spatial Plans for territorial communities. These changes are closely linked to the broader decentralization process and aim to align planning practices with European approaches by integrating land-use and urban planning documentation into a unified digital cadastre. The practical consequences of these reforms, including their impact on governance capacity, coordination, and implementation at the local level, remain insufficiently understood, particularly in light of disruptions caused by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia from 2022. Emerging challenges, including the green and energy transition, the circular

economy, and climate change adaptation – and their need for integration into future planning processes - are also insufficiently reflected in policy and professional debates.

To address the outlined issues, this document is guided by the following questions:

- How did the Ukrainian planning system and urban development evolve, and how did that influence today's conditions?
- What are the core components of the planning system as it is evolving, and which stakeholders are involved?
- How can the performance of the planning system be assessed, and to what extent does it align with both established requirements and its practical application?
- What existing and emerging challenges does Ukraine face in relation to spatial development, and what is the role of the planning system in addressing them?

STRUCTURE OF DOCUMENT

Chapter 2 situates Ukraine's spatial planning system in historical perspective, tracing the imperial, Soviet and post-independence legacies that continue to shape contemporary planning law and practice. Chapter 3 outlines the institutional and legal framework for spatial planning, including governance responsibilities, the legal basis for planning, and the roles of planners, local urban development councils, landowners and developers. Chapter 4 reviews the main planning instruments and processes, covering statutory and soft planning tools, public participation, digitization, Strategic Environmental Assessment and state expertise. Chapter 5 assesses the performance of the planning system in practice, with attention to plan preparation, implementation, development control and the planning capacities of local self-government bodies. Chapter 6 examines existing and emerging challenges, including the spatial implications of war, recovery and reconstruction needs, uneven regional conditions, and alignment with the European Union legal and policy framework. Chapter 7 concludes by summarizing key take-aways and identifying limitations and priorities for further research.

METHODOLOGY

This document is based on a desk review of policy, grey and academic literature focused on spatial planning policy and practice. Preliminary findings were presented and feedback gained at a multi-stakeholder workshop held in Kyiv in March 2025. UN-Habitat reviewed a draft version of the current report.

Historical context

IMPERIAL HERITAGE AND PLANNING

Spatial planning in Ukraine has been practised professionally in some form since the 17th century, with Italian, Polish, and Ukrainian architects producing the first planned settlements. Examples of late Renaissance and Baroque¹² planning include the cities of Zhovkva, Drohobych, and Lviv. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Ukrainian territories fell under the control of Austro-Hungarian and Muscovite rule.

Larger towns, cities, agglomerations

Under the Russian Empire, first-generation systemic city plans for Odesa (1802), Kyiv (1813), Yekaterynoslav (1792-1811), Poltava (1803) and Mykolaiv (1789-1795) laid out the urban grid morphology that broadly remains to this day. Agricultural and irregular land plots were reassembled to fit the new layout of the streets, and private capital was invited to develop the blocks. Some major public areas were reserved for administrative and sacred buildings, army facilities, and urban mansions.

Yekaterynoslav (today's Dnipro), for instance, as a newly established colony, was provided with its first major plan in 1792. It focused on a central representative square (never realized) with a church and the local prince's palace. The land plots were then slowly formed and transferred to wealthy nobles, traders and early industrialists according to the plan. Poltava is another example of similarly grand first-generation plans. From 1803 to 1810, a whole new provincial city centre was planned as a perfect circle and executed in the following decades in a single style and colour palette.

Second-generation plans of the late 1830s to mid-1850s were developed to facilitate the urbanization and legalization of major landowners' holdings as part of the buildable city lands. These plans captured the existing city structures and extended the grid-like blocks to the outskirts of the cities, whilst imposing compulsory land reassembly on owners to structure land plots according to these grids. Odesa was the fastest-growing city in the Russian Empire and its urban plans were revised on multiple occasions.



Figure 1: Contemporary use and outskirts planning in Odesa, from the 'Plan of Odesa' by Jules Fauchere (lith. d'A. Braun à Odessa., 1830, in Odesa History, n.d.).

Third-generation plans were developed in the late 1800s and largely followed the original classicist projects from earlier on, but introduced significant infrastructure systems including major railways, wastewater management, and electricity generation and distribution networks. These plans placed less emphasis on zoning and instead prioritized infrastructural development and general spatial outlines of the housing areas.

Importantly, all major plans were subject to central approval, with building permits issued from St. Petersburg. This resulted in significant delays, with many development projects waiting years for review. This system was not even partially decentralized until the first decade of the 20th century, thus severely constraining local government in exercising urban control.

Villages and small towns

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the development of villages and small towns in Ukraine was shaped by agricultural economies, feudal landownership, and evolving administrative structures under both the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. Villages typically formed around natural water sources, churches, and communal gathering spaces, with irregular layouts reflecting the local terrain and agrarian lifestyle (Subtelny, 2009). In Right-Bank Ukraine¹³ and Halychyna, under Polish and later Austrian rule, manorial estates played a central role in structuring

¹² Around the late 16th to 18th centuries.

¹³ Historical territories to the west of Dnipro River (mainly Polissya, Podillya and Volyn with such towns as Uman, Bar, Zhytomyr, Ternopil, Kamjanets, Lutsk). Does not include Bessarabia and Black Sea coast.

rural settlements, with peasant households arranged around noble residences and markets (Rybchynskyi, 2015). In Left-Bank Ukraine,¹⁴ controlled by the Russian Empire, state policies influenced settlement patterns, including the expansion of military settlements and state-owned peasant communities (Plokhii, 2015). Small towns (*mistechka*), often with a strong Jewish presence, became vibrant centres of trade and crafts, featuring market squares, synagogues, and town halls (Petrovsky-Shtern, 2014). Near the turn of the century, multiple new settlements were rapidly emerging near the industrial, mining and even agricultural industries in the East and South of Ukraine. These would define the territorial structure and layout of south-eastern Ukraine up to the present day.

20TH CENTURY SOCIALIST PLANNING

Centralised planning system, UkrSSR conditions

Following World War I and the establishment of Bolshevik occupation,¹⁵ planning remained highly centralized. Planning was organized through the *Dipromisto* (*Giprograd*) system of bureaus,¹⁶ with the core office in Kyiv and regional branches in Odesa, Kharkiv and Dnipro.

Under Soviet rule, economic and spatial planning were merged within a centrally coordinated system. A programme of rapid industrialization and urbanization was implemented, producing new industrial centres and expanding existing ones (for example, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv), guided by a so-called constructivist-functionalist planning paradigm characterized by the strict separation of residential and employment areas. In the short window between 1924 and 1934, major complexes were erected, most notably Derzhprom in Kharkiv – a representation of the new planning age.

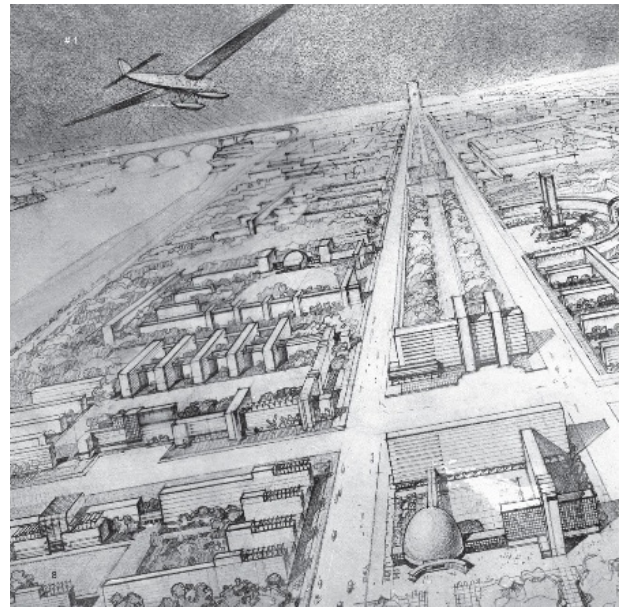


Figure 2: Perspective of the second planning district of the socialist city of Velikiye Zaporizhzhia, designed by architect Viktor Andreev, 1930, prepared by Dipromisto. Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of Ukraine, reproduced via the Zaporizhzhia Heritage portal, n.d.).

Interwar planning in Western Ukraine

During the interwar period, regional centres such as Uzhhorod, Lviv, and Lutsk emerged as exemplary cases of urban planning and architectural development, reflecting the dynamic interplay of modernist, functionalist, and national revival styles. Uzhhorod, a new centre of the region under the Czechoslovak administration, experienced significant infrastructural advancements, with a focus on civic institutions and landscaping. Lviv, a multicultural hub, blended Polish, Ukrainian, and European influences, resulting in bold modernist housing projects, streamlined public buildings, and innovative transport infrastructure. Lutsk, influenced by Polish urban policies, saw the integration of neoclassical and modernist elements, particularly in administrative buildings, military infrastructure, and housing, expressing a vision of a modern regional centre.

¹⁴ Refers to the part of Ukraine located on the left (east) side of the Dnieper River when looking downstream toward the Black Sea.

¹⁵ Refers to the period during which Bolshevik Soviet authority was established in Ukraine following the Russian Revolution (c. 1917–1921).

¹⁶ The *Dipromisto* (in Ukrainian; *Giprograd* in Russian) system comprised a network of state-run, multidisciplinary planning institutes responsible for producing urban and regional plans within the centralized Soviet planning framework.

Advanced planning system and the infrastructure of planning institutes

However, it was the post-World War II period when the expansion of industry, mass transit, and rapid urbanization drove the territorial organization of the country and the chief characteristics of most cities. Industrialized housing construction and streamlined architectural design, combined with the almost complete state control over the land, resulted in

microrayons combined into mass housing districts. The microrayon became the practical embodiment but also the theoretical core of urban planning, evolving from the neighbourhood unit of Perry¹⁷ to cater for medium-density socialist development. Its social centre was a school facility, surrounded by typified five to nine-storey buildings, with a predefined set of basic everyday services, such as groceries, launderettes, repair shops, hairdressers.

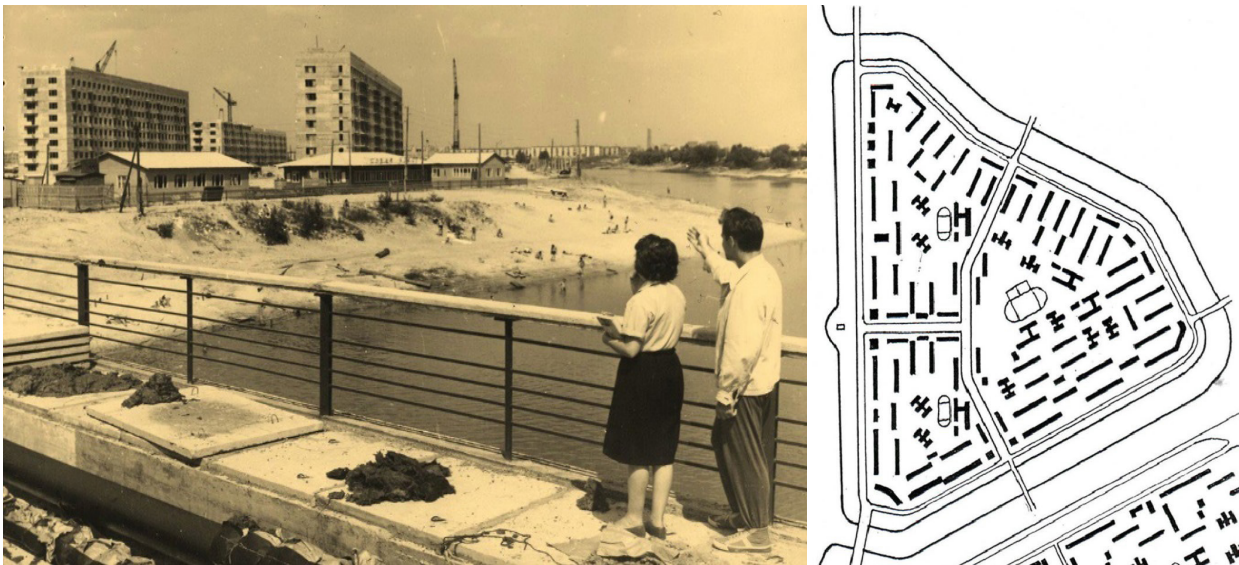


Figure 3: Photo and plan of the Rusanivka district, consisting of three microrayons, in 1961. Source: The State Scientific Architecture and Construction Library.

Highly standardized parameters were employed across the USSR, facilitating the rapid construction of mass housing estates. Such a level of predictability and centralization pushed the concept of spatial planning to the limits. On the level of a large city masterplan, planners often had to take into account specific prices for construction materials and types of mass housing units within the plan's contents, leading to a high level of detailing and rigidity, resulting in the typified, architecturally indistinguishable districts.

The late Soviet planning system matured into a multi-layered heterarchy where state planning institutes with varying specializations covered both the spatial planning and construction sectors and were competing with industrial interests and local party leaders regarding the forms of future development. Formally, the system was hierarchical: both the decision-making bodies and the plans were arranged in the form of a Russian doll with every level nested into the level above

(Anisimov et al, 2024). As documents were secret due to the security-sensitive nature of topographic maps used for military planning, only a small number of individuals had access to them - mostly limited to the state design institute's employees. National planning schemes and oblast schemes were developed by the central institutes, while city plans and detailed district plans were elaborated by local branches of these institutes.

However, planning documents were often commissioned too late and the developments were either left incomplete or bypassed altogether due to the urgent demands of large industrial enterprises. Further, in the residential development sector, state construction companies and trusts (*domobudivnyi kombinat*) dominated decision-making and local politics, with planners mostly relegated to subordinate roles, severely limiting their freedom and creativity.

¹⁷ Clarence Perry was an American urban planner from the early 20th century who developed the idea of the neighbourhood unit, a model for organizing cities into self-contained residential areas with schools, local shops, parks, walkable streets, and boundaries formed by major roads.

Importantly, there was no planning law in the sense of a codified spatial planning act until the end of the USSR (Golubchikov, 2001). As there were neither private actors nor private property, it was not necessary to regulate the sphere with laws, but merely with resolutions, plans and state standards. When Ukraine gained independence, it was required to establish a formalized planning system largely from the ground up, reflecting the transition to a market-based and legally regulated environment.

EVOLUTION OF PLANNING VALUES AND PRACTICES SINCE 1991

The first two decades of independence were characterized by a significant slowdown in planning activity and a backlog in legislation development. There has been a decreased role of the state in spatial planning and especially in urban development. Legal changes chiefly concerned the establishment of private building laws and the formalization of private property ownership. In the early 2000s, urban and landscape planning in Ukraine remained in the Soviet paradigm, dominated by functional zoning and master plans with limited consideration of environmental aspects.

The local level has undergone the most significant changes since 2011. The Law 'On Regulation of City Planning Activity' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011) was the first comprehensive reworking of the planning system, chiefly aimed at streamlining the development process while clarifying the relationship between the authorities and landowners regarding planning rights. It introduced alterations to the development of graphic and textual materials, deregulated several development stages with declaration-based preparatory and construction works, and introduced the principles of 'silent agreement'¹⁸ and 'organizational unity'¹⁹ in the development permit application system (UNECE, 2013). Additionally, according to the Law 'On the Access to Public Information' (Verkhovna Rada, 2011), the planning process became public from 2011: general plans were no longer secret documents and competition for plan development was allowed (Lytvynchuk & Denysenko, 2022). However, the

significance of the institution of the local chief architect decreased, and the local urban planning council lost the right to veto projects under review.

Since 2014, the increase in the fiscal and administrative responsibilities of local councils, resulting from the decentralization reform which laid out preconditions for full-fledged local self-governance, culminating in a transfer of control and responsibility for land and spatial planning to local self-government bodies from the regional state administrations (Restrepo Cadavid et al., 2015; OECD, 2022). Since 2015, strategic environmental assessment (SEA) has been integrated into urban planning documentation as part of the process of harmonizing Ukrainian legislation with that of the European Union.

While various approaches were considered during the implementation of decentralization from 2017 to 2021, a unified and comprehensive planning framework covering the entire territory of each municipality was ultimately adopted. It upheld the principle of conformity,²⁰ with plans being legally binding and offering a detailed vision for future land use. Covering vast areas of up to 300km², these plans integrate binding land use regulations and place state, municipal, and private lands under local self-government oversight. While this approach made planning more holistic, it also became rigid, prioritizing land use designations over cross-sectoral or spatial goals. The system overall maintained a strict hierarchy on the local level - Comprehensive Plan, General Plan, Detailed Plan - with each layer adding more binding details and progressively limiting discretion (Anisimov et al., 2024).

Since 2023, work has been underway on a new Urban Development (Building) Code intended to address long-standing deficiencies in Ukraine's planning system. As of 2026, the code remains under development, while a series of related legislative and regulatory reforms have been introduced to support reconstruction, improve governance, and align planning practices with European standards. Some changes, however, are aimed at liberalizing development, and threaten the plan-based principle of development stated in the law.

18 'Silent agreement' denotes the granting of approval in the absence of a response from the competent authority within a prescribed period.

19 'Organizational unity' refers to the integration of permit procedures under a single coordinating entity.

20 That is, that planning decisions must conform to the established hierarchy of plans and legal frameworks.

Institutional and legal framework

GOVERNANCE MODEL AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Spatial planning operates in close alignment with the country's governance levels and administrative

structure, providing a framework for coordinated decision-making.

		Law-making	Policy-making	Plan-making*	Decision-making	Monitoring/supervision
National level	Parliament (Verkhovna Rada)	+	+		+	
	Cabinet of Ministers		+		+	+
	Ministry of Development of Communities, Territories and Infrastructure		+	+	+	
	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources		+		+	+
	Ministry of Culture and Information Policy		+		+	+
Regional level	Oblast Council/ Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea/		+		+	+
	Oblast state administration/ State administration of Kyiv and Sevastopol				+	+
	Authorized body of architecture and urban planning			+	+	+
	Rayon (district) council				+	
	Rayon (district) state administration				+	
Local level	Council and executive body of the territorial community		+		+	+
	Authorized body of architecture and urban planning			+	+	+

* commissions spatial plans, but do not design them internally

Figure 4: Authorities' responsibilities regarding spatial planning as at 1 January 2025. Adapted from Anisimov et al., 2024

National level

In Figure 4, the first (national) level includes the state and supra-regional levels and such instruments as Ukraine's general planning scheme, regional state strategy, and Recovery Plan. The Parliament of Ukraine (*Verkhovna Rada*) is the supreme body responsible for law-making. It is also responsible for setting the settlement and municipal borders. The Cabinet

of Ministers is responsible for commissioning the national general planning scheme, regional strategy, and creation of by-laws to regulate planning. The Ministry of Recovery²¹ (previously the Ministry of Regional Development) is directly responsible for the status of the planning system, including the decrees, standards and orders defining specifics of plans. While it approves regional state strategies, it does not review or approve local planning documentation. Sectoral

²¹ Ukraine's recovery-oriented planning and reconstruction framework was institutionally consolidated in December 2022 through the establishment of the Ministry for Development of Communities, Territories and Infrastructure of Ukraine, created by merging the Ministries of Infrastructure and Communities and Territories Development. The ministry became the central body responsible for reconstruction, regional development, and spatial planning in the context of post-war recovery.

ministries other than the Ministry of Recovery, such as the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, have strong influence on the planning sphere. The Ministry of Culture is the holder of the state registers of heritage buildings and sites, and is also responsible for approving city-wide historical-architectural reference plans and giving certain permits on development in United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sites.²² The Ministry of Environment maintains cadastral records of the nature reserve fund and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) databases, and is responsible for decision-making regarding the use of land within the nature reserve fund.

Regional level

The second (regional) level comprises the oblast and district (rayon) tiers. At the oblast level, governance is exercised by the Oblast Council and the Oblast State Administration, while at the rayon level, it is carried out by the Rayon Council and the Rayon State Administration. Although by law regional administration is an executive body of the regional council, in practice - and especially under war conditions - almost all decisions are made by the head of regional administration, who is appointed by the President (Barynova, 2024; Tkachuk, 2019). The regional government is responsible for the development of the regional strategy and the regional planning scheme, and the designation of natural reserves and protected areas. It also acts as a substitute executive body of architecture and urban planning in cases where this function does not exist at local self-government level, commissioning and pre-approving plans for local council determination.

Local level

The third (local) level includes the territorial communities and settlements. A 'territorial community' comprises the totality of all registered citizens within the municipal boundary. As communities encompass many settlements, one administrative centre within the municipality is designated as the seat of local self-government. The local self-government body and its executive body of planning and architecture (treated separately in the law) are directly responsible for local land use planning. They are tasked with the approval

of construction projects, as well as monitoring and commissioning of planning documentation.

LEGAL BASIS FOR PLANNING

Legal basis

The core laws of spatial planning are the Law 'On the Principles of Town Planning' № 2780-XII (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1992), the Law 'On Regulation of City Planning Activity' № 3038-VI (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011); and the Law 'On amendments to some legislative acts of Ukraine regarding land use planning' № 711-IX (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020). Multiple resolutions exist that define the plan development process and regulate data and information interoperability standards.

A particular inherited feature from the socialist system is that there is not only a law on planning, including by-laws and resolutions, but also State Construction Norms (SCNs) for the development of planning documentation. Ukraine has several of these, the most important being SCN B.1.1-14:2021 'Composition and Content of Urban Planning Documentation at the Local Level' (Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, 2021) and SCN B.2.2-12:2019 'Planning and Development of Territories' (Ministry of Regional Development, Construction and Housing and Communal Services of Ukraine, 2019). Akin to the format of technical standards on buildings and structures (Eurocodes²³), these pre-define types and layouts of streets, methods for calculating population change and spatial housing needs, and distances from residential areas to shops and schools. Because many parameters and spatial decisions are predetermined through the SCNs, the plan review is highly technical, and evaluates complex and multi-layered plans based on these rigid nationally set parameters, instead of conceptual aspects pertaining to the expected quality of natural environment, preservation of building stock or sustainable mobility goals (see Section 4.5.2).

Defining planning

In Ukraine, a definition of spatial planning remains absent in legislation. 'Urban development' or 'town planning' (*mistobuduvannia*) documentation is a designation of all legally binding plans, as outlined in the Law 'On Regulation of City Planning Activity' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011). 'Urban

22 UNESCO World Heritage Sites are cultural or natural properties recognized as having outstanding universal value and inscribed on the World Heritage List under the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

23 Eurocodes are a harmonized set of European standards providing detailed technical rules for the structural design of buildings and infrastructure.

development activity' is defined broadly, encompassing planning, legal decisions, implementation of plans, and even monitoring. Similarly broad is the supplementary term '*planning and development of the territories*', which is defined as an activity of state bodies, local self-government bodies, legal entities and individuals, which '*provides for (...) prognosing development, establishing evidence for land use, reconciliation of state, public and private interests (...) development of the planning documentation, reconstruction of object and territories, monitoring of development (...)*' according to Law № 711 (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011). Lack of clarity between different spheres and responsibilities can be related to this issue. Specifically, education and certification are tied to these headline terms, with geographers, geoscientists and social scientists not considered legitimate planning actors.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF OTHER ACTORS

Planners (private and public)

Planners obtain professional certification through the accreditation process for architects and engineers (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2011). All plans are commissioned externally from the local self-government body and developed by an organization with certified architects, planners, and land surveyors, which can be privately or publicly owned. The number of organizations qualified to prepare such plans is critically narrow, and commissioning is organized via public tenders with price-led criteria, a definitive fault of the general procurement system. It leads to underpricing, low salaries and preparation of poor-quality plans, while doing little to spare public funds. Many practitioners are also employed by the organizations providing urban development expertise, comprising expert reviews of planning documentation according to state standards. (Further detail can

be found in a sister document; '*Built Environment Professionals: Education and Practice in Ukraine*' in the current series, (Ro3kvit, 2026)).

Local urban development council

The local urban development council is an advisory body of local self-government that usually consists of local architects, restorers, academics and municipal employees. It assesses development proposals and Detailed Plans, issuing opinions or requesting further clarification. It cannot, however, veto a project. Apart from this format, expert participation in the form of peer reviews, councils, and commissions is not a popular practice. The practice of planning competitions is also limited, with the majority being simple architecture contests. Architecture competitions are mainly organized by the local self-government's authority for architecture.

Landowners and developers

Landowners and developers are key stakeholders in Ukraine, shaping the real estate market and spatial growth through lobbying and political influence. Weak public involvement, low trust, and opaque land ownership grant them significant freedom in advancing commercial interests, including streamlined planning and permitting. While municipalities formally commission Detailed Plans, landowners finance and drive their development, effectively shaping territorial vision. With the housing market heavily dominated by commercial projects, now including subsidized housing, public developers offer little competition, allowing private actors to dominate economic and technical discourse in the construction sector. Further detail on planning and development rights can be found in a sister document in the current series, '*Land and Property Issues in Housing and Urban Development in Ukraine*' (Anisimov et al., 2026).

Planning system instruments and processes

STATUTORY PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

In Ukrainian law, urban planning documentation is divided into three levels according to the administrative structure: state, regional, and local (Figure 5). Planning documents formally follow a hierarchical structure designed to promote consistent territorial development. Lower-level plans were required to fully conform to higher-level planning documents. However, in 2021, this strict conformity principle was partially replaced with a more flexible approach between

regional and local plans, allowing Regional Plans and local Comprehensive Plans to consider broader state interests rather than adhering rigidly to higher-level documents. Despite this shift, local-level plans are still subject to strict compliance requirements. Therefore, at local level all single-settlement General Plans must adhere to Comprehensive Plans for multi-settlement territorial communities. Similarly, all Detailed Plans for sub-settlement areas must adhere to both General Plans and Comprehensive Plans.

Structure of planning instruments in Ukraine (1 January 2025)

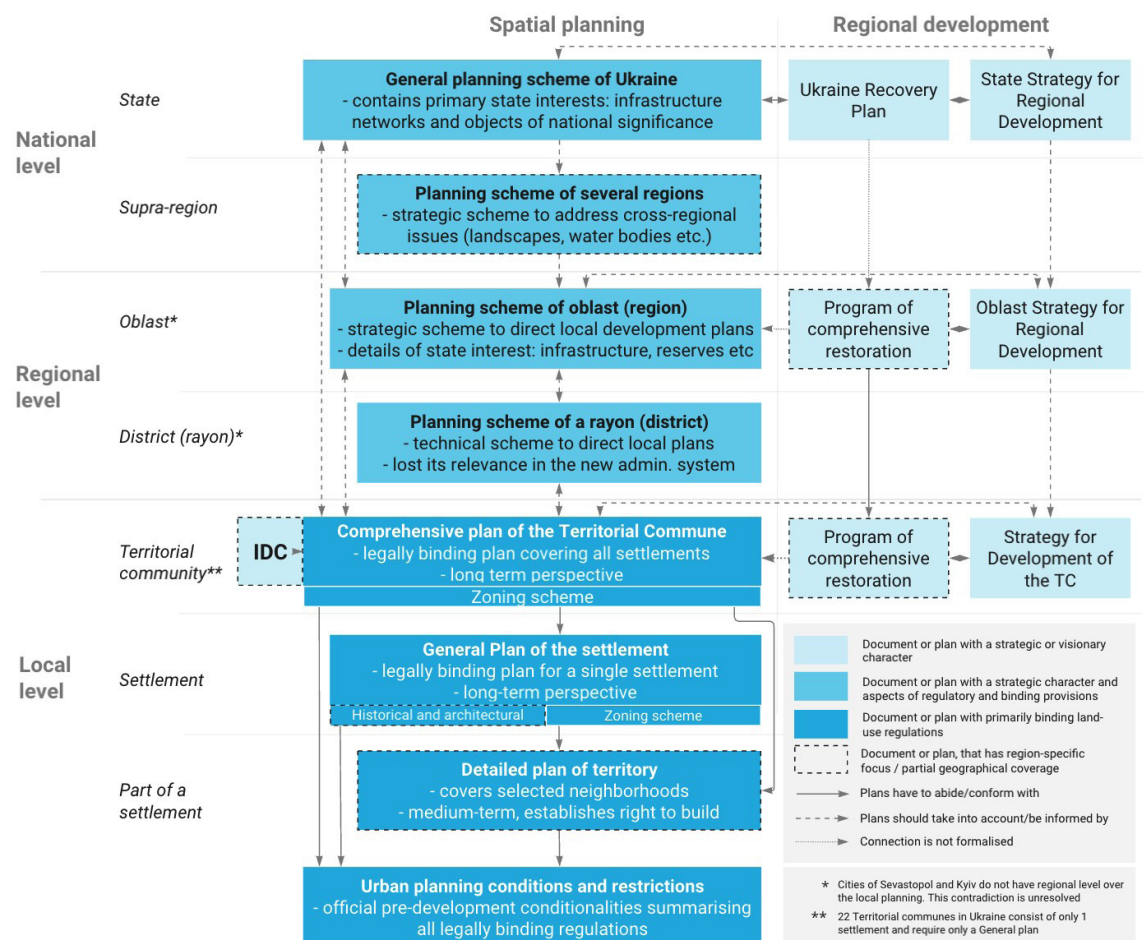


Figure 5: Structure of planning instruments in Ukraine as at 1 January 2025. Adapted from Anisimov et al., 2024

National planning

The *General Scheme of Planning of the Territory of Ukraine* (Генеральна схема планування території України) (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2002) establishes priorities and conceptual approaches for national land use and spatial development. As a legally binding framework, it is intended to guide subordinate strategic and vision documents. Defined as a key urban planning instrument, the Scheme outlines

principal directions for spatial organization and land-use decisions at the national level. Its preparation, implementation, and monitoring are regulated by the Law 'On the General Scheme of Planning of the Territory of Ukraine' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2002). Originally adopted for a 20-year period, the Scheme has since expired.

Although designed to guide national and regional development, the General Scheme of Planning has

progressively lost its relevance. This is particularly evident in light of the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014, as well as the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation from 2022. At present, its provisions are largely outdated and misaligned with Ukraine's evolving socio-economic and territorial context. Ongoing uncertainties related to territorial integrity, infrastructure, property rights, and population movements limit its applicability to current and future planning. Even prior to these developments, the Scheme's rigid, centralized approach insufficiently accounted for regional diversity, local needs, and implementation mechanisms, contributing to planning decisions being made outside its framework. In 2020, a draft law proposing amendments to the Law 'On the Regulation of Urban Development Activity' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020) to update the General Scheme was introduced; however, it has since been put on hold.

The *2021-2027 State Strategy of Regional Development of Ukraine* (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020) has been viewed by some as limited in quality, scope, and sensitivity to regional contexts (Kharchenko, 2023). Its review in 2024 attracted substantial criticism concerning the quality and design of its provisions and its limited analytical depth. Only a limited number of its provisions appear to have had practical consequences, such as the revived Regional Development Fund. Currently, a new 2028-2034 Strategy is under development that aims to meaningfully align with EU Cohesion Policy and the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework (Council of the European Union, 2020, consolidated 2026), which is expected to centre on National and Regional Partnership Plans.

Regional level

A *Planning Scheme of the Territory of Oblast* (Схема планування території області) is commissioned by the oblast state administration, which is then approved by the oblast council. As a statutory document with partially binding authority, it defines key objects and areas of state interest. The scheme sets priorities for territorial resource use, aligning national objectives with the interests of neighbouring administrative units, including transport, economic development, regional social infrastructure, and key water and energy systems. It designates critical environmental protection areas and provides guidelines for comprehensive planning. Sectoral plans must incorporate their

provisions. In addition to the Planning Scheme of the Territory of Oblast, the *Oblast Development Strategy* currently plays a key role in securing national budget funds and guiding oblasts in setting priorities and allocating resources. However, its impact on actual spatial development remains limited. The process of updating them is ongoing. Previously, *Oblast Planning Schemes* at the oblast level aligned with *Oblast Development Strategies*, bridging strategic and spatial planning, but this connection has weakened in recent years as the schemes became outdated. While these schemes still shape infrastructure decisions at the oblast level, their influence on local decision-making is unclear due to scale limitations. A total of 16 of Ukraine's 24 oblasts now have approved oblast-level *Programmes of Comprehensive Recovery of Oblast*, but it is unclear if they will play an impactful role in local recovery policies and allocation of rebuilding resources.

Although still in existence, *Rayon Planning Schemes* (Схема планування території району) are no longer being developed and primarily serve as a provisional framework for areas lacking local planning documentation.

Local spatial planning and detailed planning

The *Comprehensive Plan for the Spatial Development of the Territory of the Territorial Community* (*Comprehensive Plan*) [Комплексний план просторового розвитку території територіальної громади] was introduced in 2021 as a statutory binding plan that integrates spatial planning and land management documentation. It covers the territory of the entire territorial community. Its aims are twofold: to establish a vision of the desired spatial form and structure of the territory and to provide detailed regulations (zoning) of the land use, including housing, forestry, agriculture, and other uses. As a relatively new addition to the Ukrainian spatial planning system, the Comprehensive Plan was expected to be highly influential, particularly in merging planning and land use documentation (USAID, 2021).

Moreover, simultaneous land-use and spatial zoning is prescribed and is in principle required to be placed automatically into official digital cadastres upon plan approval. Its effect on local-level decisions is yet to be assessed noting that, as of 1 January 2026, only three approved Comprehensive Plans have, in practice, been entered into either the Land Cadastre or the State Urban Cadastre.²⁴

²⁴ This is reportedly due to the misalignment of the scale and topographic base in the Land Cadastre case, and multiple errors of GeoJSON (a digital geospatial data format used to store and exchange map-based information) attributes in the State Urban Cadastre case, precluding its digital verification and approval.

In a given territorial community, the statutory system dictates that there should be one multi-settlement Comprehensive Plan and several single settlement General Plans. However, a Comprehensive Plan is not developed if the territorial community consists of only one settlement, such as in the cases of Mykolaiv, Odesa, or Nikopol urban territorial communities. These municipalities commission only the General Plan.

Comprehensive Plans came into existence after changes in 2020 to the Land Code, in the form of amendments to the Laws of Ukraine '*On Land Management*' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2003) and '*On Regulation of City Planning Activity*' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011) and are developed according to Resolution No. 926 of 2021 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2021). Legislative changes have sought to consolidate most planning instruments into the Comprehensive Plan. While in principle all territorial communities are expected to develop Comprehensive Plans, previously approved *General Plan* and *Zoning Scheme* continue to shape land use within settlements. While the law effectively required hromadas to have approved Comprehensive Plans by the end of 2024, recent amendments postponed the deadline to 2028.

The *General Plan of the Settlement* (General Plan) [Генеральний план населеного пункту] serves as both local town planning and land management documentation, regulating development, construction, and land use in accordance with the Law of Ukraine '*On the Regulation of Town Planning Activity*' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020). Developed and approved in the interests of the territorial community, it balances state, public, and private interests. For settlements with up to 50,000 residents, this General Plan may integrate Detailed Plans for the entire area. Historical settlements are additionally required to develop a *Historical-Architectural Reference Plan* as part of the General Plan. Though legally binding, they are frequently disregarded in historic city areas due to developer pressure and investment interests, compromising their integrity and effectiveness.

General Plans can indirectly facilitate urban expansion because settlement boundaries may only be officially changed through their adoption or amendment. In some cases, large areas of territorial-community land can be redesignated as settlement territory, creating a legal pathway for suburban growth and the loss of undeveloped land.

The *Detailed Plan of the Territory* (Detailed Plan) [Детальний план території] defines the land uses, social infrastructure provision, street layouts, and other

infrastructure objects on a given territory, typically using maps at a scale of 1:500. The Detailed Plan also constitutes local planning and land management documentation and can be used to enforce land plot adjustment. Detailed Plans are most often developed for areas earmarked for new construction or a change of use (e.g. from residential to industrial or agricultural uses). They can also function as substitutes for small settlements if a valid General Plan is lacking. When approved, Detailed Plans become an integral part of the Comprehensive Plan of the Territorial Community. Making changes to the Detailed Plan of the settlement is allowed subject to conformity with the Comprehensive Plan and General Plan. Change of use, sale or lease of communal land for development purposes without a Detailed Plan is prohibited, according to Law No. 3038-VI '*On Regulation of City Planning Activity*' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011). The Detailed Plan is the most frequently used local planning tool, directly shaping land use, investment, and spatial development. Many municipalities rely on it to adapt General Plan provisions to immediate needs, sometimes contradicting overarching plans. This can be achieved by setting new, smaller functional zones that only marginally correspond to those in the General and/or Comprehensive Plan. However, multiple Detailed Plans have been successfully challenged in court by civil society groups on this non-correspondence basis.

Urban Planning Conditions and Restrictions [Містобудівні умови і обмеження] are the most direct regulatory tool shaping spatial development and therefore exert a direct impact on development outcomes. However, recent legislative changes have weakened the discretionary role of municipalities and limited the scope of these conditions and restrictions, creating the potential for increasingly automated approval procedures. The list of requirements which planning permission applicants must adhere to is very simple; the set of conditions and restrictions that can be imposed by the local self-government body in response is narrow and constrained; and the absence of an official reply by the end of the designated 20-day period leads to unconditional approval of the planning application. Special provisions now also apply to energy infrastructure development outside planned areas, which can be delivered without developing a new plan (Amendments to Law No. 3038-VI '*On the Regulation of City Planning Activity*' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011), passed in 2019 and 2023). Unless complemented by other regulatory mechanisms, these changes may further limit the capacity of local self-government bodies to effectively manage and guide spatial development.

SOFT PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

Although lacking regulatory force, soft (non-statutory) planning instruments increasingly provide opportunities to shape local development priorities and investment decisions through strategic guidance and sector-specific interventions.

- The *Integrated Development Concept* (IDC) is a relatively new non-statutory strategic planning tool that complements statutory urban development documentation without possessing direct regulatory status. Originating in Germany, the instrument has been promoted since 2010 through the activities of *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) as part of the implementation of the Leipzig Charter. The first such programme was realized in Lviv in 2009 to 2011. An IDC can be commissioned by a local self-government body, which must provide for the meaningful involvement of local residents and businesses in its formulation. The concept establishes medium to long-term (10 to 20 year) spatial, environmental, and socio-economic development priorities for a territory based on sustainable development principles. Its application today, however, is narrow: it serves as the terms of reference for developing local Comprehensive Plans. In locations with no approved IDC, the terms of reference for the Comprehensive Plan are formulated via public discussions. The influence of IDCs remains limited due to their advisory nature. Adoption by the municipality is voluntary, depending on local council approval. To date, few local self-governments have adopted the concept.
- *Resilience-oriented planning* is a recent approach increasingly applied in place of integrated development planning in highly unstable contexts, particularly in frontline and other conflict-affected areas. In addition to addressing immediate security and recovery challenges, it places a strong emphasis on disaster risk reduction and climate resilience.
- Sustainable Urban Mobility Programmes (SUMPs) frequently constitute a major source of planning actions in larger cities, particularly in relation to mobility planning and investment. Although they are sector-specific in scope, they function as operational instruments offering ready-to-deploy solutions for transport-related investment and management.
- In Ukraine, the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) (*План дій сталого енергетичного розвитку та клімату*) is a non-statutory strategic document developed primarily within the framework of the Covenant of Mayors initiative (Covenant of Mayors East, 2026). It establishes local targets and measures for energy efficiency, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, renewable energy development, and climate adaptation, thereby supporting the integration of climate policy into municipal development and governance.
- *Environmental and landscape planning*: Landscape planning (a term borrowed from the German *landschaftsplanung*) in Ukraine is evolving into an important component of contemporary spatial planning. Landscape planning involves a comprehensive analysis of natural conditions and ecology as the basis for the development of a landscape plan as a component of the Comprehensive Plan. Several conservation target areas are typically considered in landscape planning: 1. Conservation of biodiversity; 2. Functionality and productivity of natural resources, and adaptation to climate change; 3. The feeling and perception of nature and landscape (Golubtsov, 2023). Experts emphasize that the landscape plan should be understood not as a conventional zoning instrument, but rather as an action-oriented territorial framework that identifies priority goals and actions aimed at maintaining or achieving optimal landscape conditions (Maruniak et al. 2024). The period from 2020 to 2025 was particularly significant for environmental and landscape planning because it saw the introduction of new spatial planning legislation, Comprehensive Plans, and related environmental planning provisions that formally created opportunities for integrating landscape considerations into territorial development. However, its application in practice remains selective and inconsistent, with limited institutional recognition and unclear professional consensus regarding its role and methodology. Implementation during this period has largely comprised spatially confined conservation interventions, rather than on mainstreamed environmental and landscape concerns within a systematic and integrated planning framework. Moreover, under current socio-economic and wartime conditions, projects focused on the preservation and expansion of green and blue space and infrastructure are generally not treated as priority interventions and consequently receive less funding than projects addressing urgent and immediate reconstruction needs.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AS AN EMERGING FIELD

Public participation in urban development is a relatively recent feature of Ukraine's planning system, having developed in the aftermath of the 2011 legislative reforms and subsequently reinforced by heightened civic participation following the 2014 'Revolution of Dignity'.²⁵

In practice, however, public participation mechanisms often function primarily as channels through which authorities communicate planned actions and decisions. While opportunities for public input are formally provided, including through public hearings and consultations, the extent to which such contributions influence final outcomes is not always clear. Stakeholder engagement processes may involve consultation with selected groups and representatives during the preparation of urban planning documentation, while other interested parties may have more limited opportunities to contribute. As a result, concerns have been raised that participatory processes can, in some instances, serve more to validate pre-determined decisions than to facilitate meaningful public involvement in decision-making. Often, there is a lack of publicly available information not only about the inception or nature of a particular project, but also about the development process itself - including in regard to how public representations are documented and taken into account; the decision-making process; and ways to appeal decisions (*Ro3kvit*, 2023). Such practices damage perceptions of the interaction between citizens and authorities, to the extent that people may feel disempowered or manipulated due to involvement only after main decisions have been made. While there are exceptions, for most projects the range of interaction options are limited. This is reflected in the absence of a clear framework for participation (see Section 4.3), limited education and capacity regarding civic engagement, and the near-absence of earmarked funding for participatory activities in public budgets.

In Ukrainian legislation, public deliberation regarding planning and urban development is inconsistently defined and encompasses various forms of public participation. Public discussion is a broad term, and under the Law 'On Regulation of City Planning Activity' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011), local self-government bodies must ensure public discussion takes place on city planning documentation (general schemes, zoning plans, and Detailed Plans), including by:

- Publishing decisions on planning documents and their potential legal, economic, and environmental impacts;
- Making drafts and environmental reports publicly available online;
- Collecting and considering public feedback;
- Holding public hearings;
- Resolving disputes through conciliation commissions;
- Publishing the results of public input.

While reference is often made to these multiple forms of public participation, only public hearings are always legally required and clearly regulated, as provided for by Resolution No. 555 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2011). As a result, public participation in practice often consists of late-stage hearings that primarily serve as notifications rather than as meaningful stakeholder engagement. After the COVID-19 pandemic and latterly due to the full-scale invasion, these hearings can be conducted online, are sometimes limited to emailed comments, and may offer limited opportunities for direct exchange beyond the publication of written responses by the authorities.

Recent reforms have introduced more inclusive approaches. Resolution No. 1159 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2022) outlines a structured public discussion process for developing a Programme of Comprehensive Recovery, requiring active citizen participation and feedback. Similarly, Resolution No. 926 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2021) mandates multiple stages of public discussion, such as workshops and strategic sessions, during the early development of Comprehensive Plans and General Plans. However, Detailed Plans still rely on pre-existing public hearing procedures, with limitations on genuine engagement.

Ukrainian citizens also use other forms of participation in decision-making at the local level, including:

- Local participatory budgeting: A popular and widespread instrument for citizen engagement before the 2022 full-scale invasion, but highly criticized for being used to allocate funds to routine municipal expenditures, and for the disproportionate influence of organized patron groups close to the authority for raising votes.
- Local petitions: This is another popular instrument that can raise a community-wide issue for review by the local self-government body, as provided for in law.

²⁵ The Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014), also known as Euromaidan, was a nationwide protest movement that led to major political change and reform in Ukraine.

DIGITIZATION PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Digital requirements for planning

While already a supportive element for planning, recent reforms have rendered digital data a prerequisite for planning practices. All documentation must be developed in digital format and must be publicly available according to the Law 'On Access to Public Information' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011, as amended), with local governments obliged to ensure transparency and general availability of urban planning documentation on the Municipal Cadastre, State Land Cadastre and State Urban Cadastre levels. In practice, infrastructure and capacity to achieve this is highly constrained at the local level and among professionals.

Resolution No. 632 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2021) and the subsequent Order No. 56 (Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, 2022) prescribe a detailed technical specification for the electronic document of the Comprehensive Plan, facilitating the systematic incorporation of planning information into the State Land Cadastre and the State Urban Cadastre.²⁶ Maps must be developed using a 1:10,000 topographic scale and a national geodetic reference system (UCS-2000). The law stipulates that specialized geospatial data shall be entered into the relevant cadastres no later than five working days after the approval of urban planning documentation, as well as on the public website of the local municipality and national open data web portal.

National geospatial data infrastructure

With the approval in 2020 of Law № 554-IX 'On the National Geospatial Data Infrastructure' (Verkhovna

Rada of Ukraine, 2020), there were high expectations of a streamlined and accessible system aimed at ensuring effective decision-making by state authorities and local self-government bodies; meeting the needs of society in all types of geographic information; and integration into the global and European geospatial data infrastructures, including the European Union's Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE). More specifically, the national geospatial data infrastructure comprises a network of geoportals interconnected through standardized geoinformation services. These services enable the exchange and integration of data across a federated system of geospatial databases, which may be geographically distributed yet function as a unified national network. However, as at 1 March 2025, the national geodata portal exists as a pilot project with limited access.²⁷

General scheme of registers, and digital land and property system in Ukraine

Figure 6 shows the principal components of Ukraine's digital land and property system and the institutional relationships between key registers and cadastres. Through the National Geospatial Data Infrastructure, these systems support the integration of information on land tenure, property rights, land use, and urban development. In Figure 6, 'USESFC' refers to the *Unified State Electronic System in the Field of Construction*, Ukraine's national digital platform for administering planning, permitting, construction, and development processes. It is an integrated information system rather than a register. It provides an integrated electronic environment that supports cadastre system implementation as well as interoperability with the National Geospatial Data Infrastructure.

²⁶ In accordance with the resolution, the comprehensive plan is developed in the form of an electronic document in the form of a set of files in the following formats:

- Geodatabase transmitted in the format of File Geodatabase (GDB) or JavaScript Object Notation (GeoJSON)
- eXtensible Markup Language (XML), which contains a set of information that is subject to entry into the State Land Cadastre
- Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF), which contains text, tabular and graphic materials of documentation.

²⁷ See State Service of Ukraine for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre (n.d.) web source: <https://nsdi.gov.ua>.

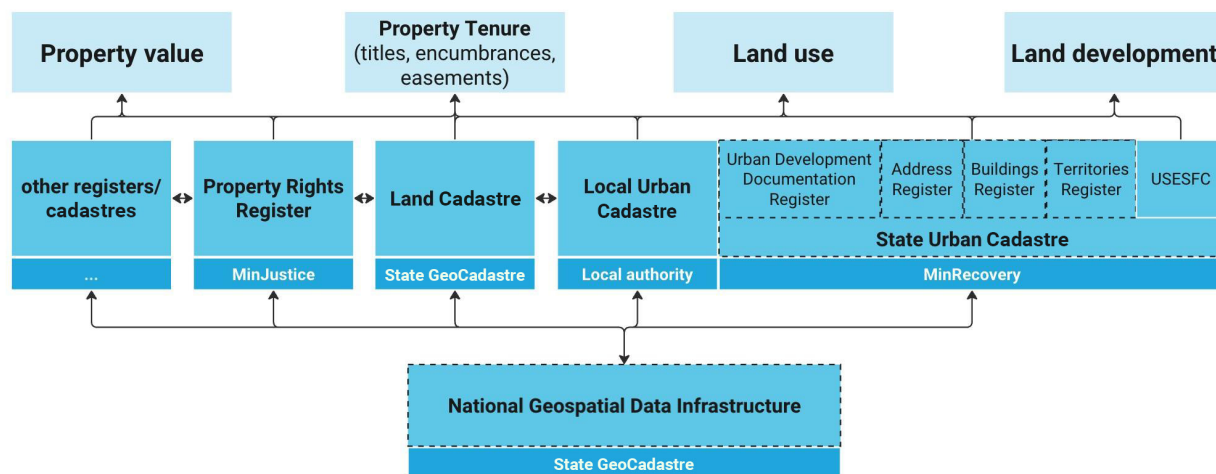


Figure 6: General scheme of registers, and digital land and property systems in Ukraine.

Local data

Geospatial data as well as topographic and orthophotography maps are the basic layers for planning. Critically, over 91 per cent of hromadas were without an updated cartographic base according to a January 2023 survey of 440 hromadas (All-Ukrainian Association of Communities, 2023). This is significant because it blocks the development of Comprehensive Plans, which require an updated 1:10,000 cartographic basemap before being commissioned.

Following the decentralization reform, the local statistics system has not been fully updated to align with the new administrative structure. In practice, it remains fragmented, lacking standardization, validation, and unified reporting formats. The absence of a cohesive legal framework and methodology of data collection undermines its reliability and limits the

extent to which local statistics can effectively support decision-making. Recent reporting has indicated that 66.5 per cent of 600 surveyed hromadas are not satisfied with the data available (USAID, 2024; Center for Innovation Development, 2024).

Figure 7 indicates that hromadas have significantly transitioned to digital methods of data management, with spreadsheets and specialized software being the predominant formats for collecting and processing information across most sectors. However, the degree of digitization across sectors varies considerably: administrative functions such as local budgets, social protection, demographics, and health rely primarily on electronic systems, whereas sectors such as science, technology and innovation, labour market; and foreign trade exhibit higher proportions of uncollected or unprocessed data, suggesting gaps in local statistical capacity at hromada level.

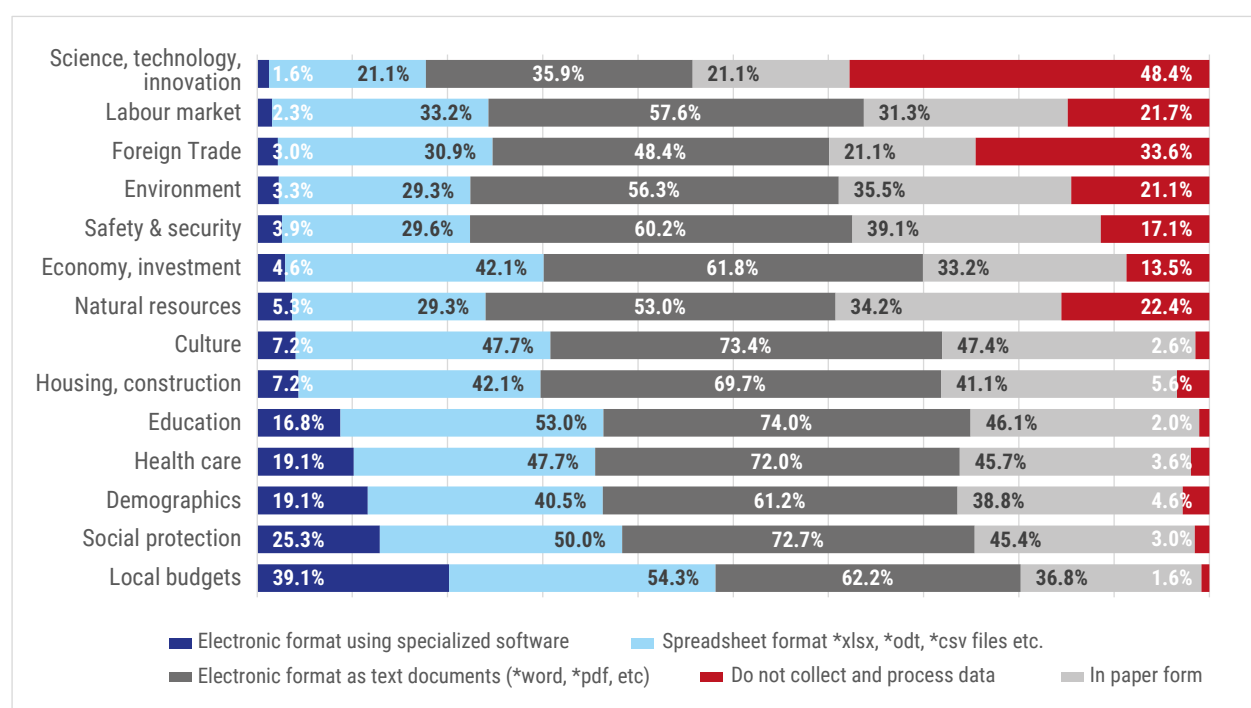


Figure 7: Hromada survey responses on the format in which they collect and process data (Center for Innovation Development, 2024).

There are several geographic information systems (GISs) at the local and regional level, such as city geoportals, local cadastres, and analytical dashboards, which are largely unrelated to each other. For instance, in Lviv territorial hromada, there is a separate dashboard²⁸ a geoportal²⁹ and, in parallel, a local urban cadastre.³⁰ While abundant in data, the respective formats of the various GISs are not fully interoperable with the regional or national infrastructure.

CROSS-CUTTING PROCESSES

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a procedure for evaluating the environmental impacts of state planning documents, including in terms of public health, alternative solutions, and mitigation measures. The SEA process involves defining the assessment scope, drafting a report, conducting public and transboundary consultations, and integrating findings into planning decisions, as mandated by the Law No. 2354-VIII 'On Strategic Environmental Assessment' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2018) - a law that has been amended multiple times and as recently as 2025. In urban development plans, SEA is incorporated into the 'Environmental Protection' section of planning

documents, following Article 11 of the law. The SEA report, prepared before approval, covers objectives, environmental and health conditions, potential risks, mitigation strategies, monitoring plans, and public engagement. It must also assess short and long-term impacts, compliance with environmental obligations, and transboundary effects. Additionally, the *State Construction Standard B.1.1-13:2021* (Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, 2022) requires an 'Environmental Protection' chapter, which overlaps with SEA by analyzing environmental conditions and proposing measures for sustainability, resource management, and ecological networks.

State expertise

Comprehensive Plans, General Plans, and other regional and state-level planning documents must undergo expert review, as required by Law No. 3038 'On Regulation of City Planning Activity' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011) and detailed in Resolution No. 548 'On Approval of the Procedure for the Development of Urban Planning Documentation' (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2011). While this step is an essential part of the planning process, several flaws undermine its effectiveness. First, the preparation of the planning document and also its expert review are both procured

28 Lviv City Council. (n.d.[a]). City Dashboard (Панель міста). <https://dashboard.city-adm.lviv.ua/>

29 Lviv City Council. (n.d.[b]). Lviv Geoportal. <https://map.city-adm.lviv.ua>

30 Lviv City Council. (n.d.). Urban Cadastre of Lviv (Містобудівний кадастр Львова). <https://mbk.city-adm.lviv.ua/>

through the state electronic procurement system, Prozorro, with contract awards generally based on the lowest-priced bid. This cost-driven procurement model may limit the quality and comprehensiveness of expert assessments, increasing the likelihood of more superficial reviews. Second, the review process is guided by state construction norms that have been described by stakeholders as highly prescriptive and not responsive to local conditions and priorities: they apply to historical settlements, new urban areas and peri-urban territories indiscriminately. Also, the construction norms are still heavily influenced by late modernistic planning paradigm, so planning provisions such as pedestrianized and tramline streets, bicycle highways, and multi-use landscapes will not pass the

expertise, as there is no corresponding provision in the state norms. Consequently, the assessment process may place greater emphasis on procedural compliance than on the contextual appropriateness of planning proposals. Finally, expertise outcomes are limited to either approval or rejection of the plan. If a plan fails the review, the cost of revisions can be prohibitively high and is often not covered by procurement budgets, potentially leading to project abandonment. According to stakeholders, outright negative reviews are uncommon, reflecting the relatively small community of certified planning experts and a preference for resolving issues through consultation prior to the formal review outcome.

Planning system performance

It is important to note that legal provisions may not always be fully effective in practice. Where the planning framework is highly prescriptive but planning documentation remains incomplete or absent, land development processes can become more complex, increasing reliance on *ad hoc* administrative arrangements and discretionary quasi-legal decisions,

while creating opportunities for development outside the intended regulatory framework. Figure 8 gives a general overview of these intricate conditions in regard to the completion status of planning instruments at a range of scales and their perceived practical influence on local spatial development.

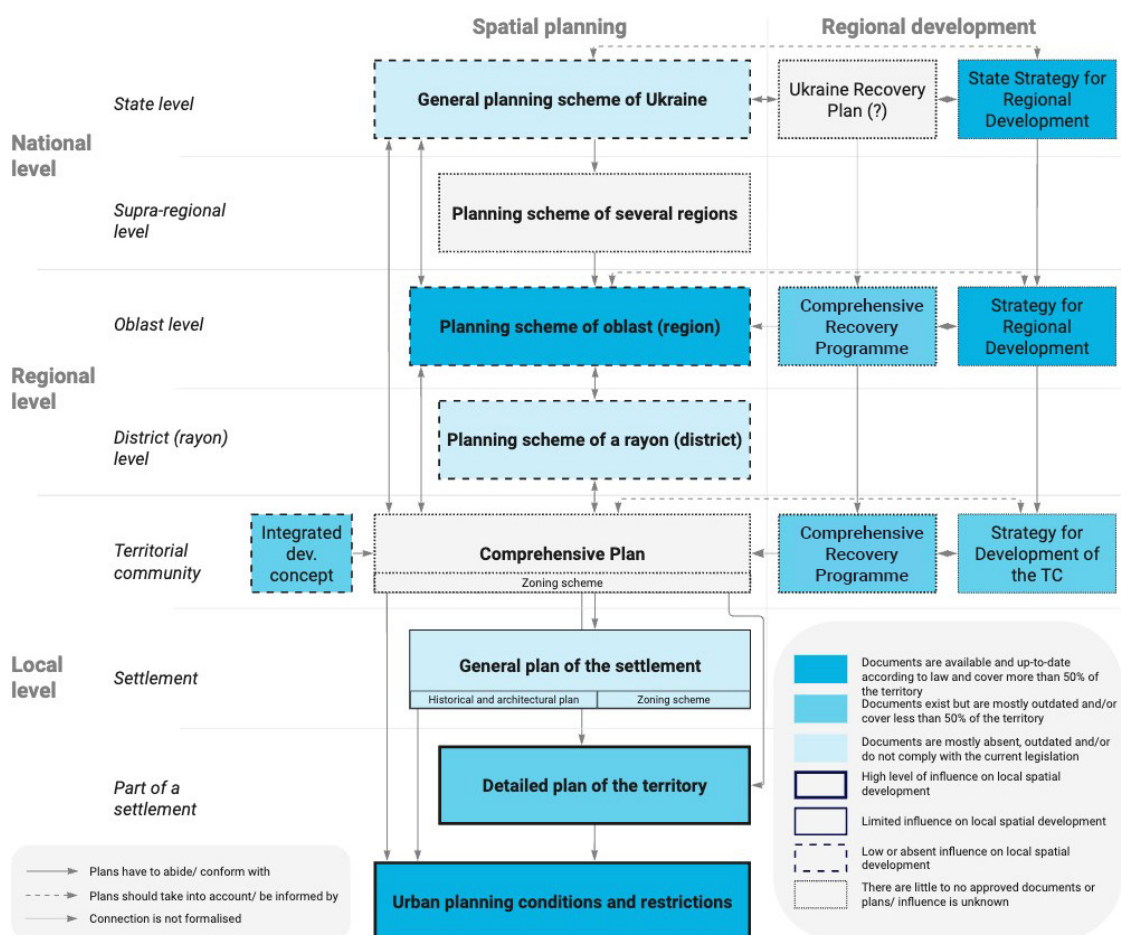


Figure 8: The production and influence of plans at different levels on spatial development as at 1 January 2025

GENERAL ISSUES OF THE SYSTEM IN PRACTICE

Stakeholders have noted that the planning system has become increasingly cumbersome, exhibiting a degree of procedural prescription reminiscent of Soviet-era planning practice. While an indefinite planning horizon may reduce the administrative and financial burden on local authorities with limited capacity for plan updates, it also weakens the strategic function of planning by removing a clear timeframe for implementation. Without defined delivery horizons, such plans offer limited certainty as to when and what development will occur, reducing their responsiveness to a rapidly evolving socioeconomic context, but also disconnecting public investments from new private projects. In practice, this tends to result either

in the entrenchment of legacy land use patterns or in substantial areas of land being designated for residential development well in advance, with the pace of build-out determined largely by the availability of access roads and electricity, while social infrastructure and public transportation remain on the maps only.

Discrepancies in the scope and density of required plans in legislation compared to the available planning capacity have not been fully addressed. Although the legislation provides for state financial support for the preparation of Comprehensive Plans, such funding has generally not been made available in practice. Since 2021, there have been no separately allocated public funds for this purpose, and the formulation of Comprehensive Plans as required by Law № 711-IX 'On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on

Land Use Planning' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020) which entered into force in 2021 is critically limited, with only seven municipalities having adopted plans by 2026 – a count up by only four compared to 2025.³¹ Forty more are underway, and another 50 have made the official political decision but not started actual plan preparation.³²

Crucially, the legislation does not establish a clear institutional or financial framework for the implementation, monitoring, and periodic updating of Comprehensive Plans, despite these functions being essential to the effectiveness of the overall planning system. Additionally, the new process for identifying, considering and integrating national interests into regional and local planning documents has not yet been widely implemented or evaluated in practice, and its effectiveness in supporting coordinated spatial planning remains to be demonstrated.

Each oblast (region) is expected to have a Planning Scheme; each rayon (district) another; and every territorial community a Comprehensive Plan; along with multiple General Plans for major settlements. Additionally, many cities must develop Historical Reference Plans for conservation and regeneration purposes. These plans are extensive, averaging 100 to 300 pages in length with 10 to 15 layers of spatial maps covering landscape, transportation, and other key aspects, complete with legally binding land-use designations. For example, Lviv Oblast, with a population of around 2.5 million, consists of 74 territorial communities and 78 urban settlements, 54 of which are officially 'historical'. This alone would require around 200 up-to-date digital and online planning

documents, excluding Detailed Plans, which can number up to 50 per territorial community.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT - EXAMPLE OF A DETAILED PLAN

Planning document production begins with the commissioning of its formulation in accordance with the established procedure for the preparation, amendment, updating and approval of urban planning documentation. In the case of a Detailed Plan (Figure 9), production costs may be financed by the landowner or developer; however, the municipality remains the formal commissioning authority and is responsible for overseeing the plan-making process. The procedure includes an open price-based tender for companies holding architectural licenses, though this can be substituted with a competition and subsequent commission depending on the decision of the local authorized body for urban development and architecture.

Unlike a Comprehensive Plan or a General Plan, a Detailed Plan is not required to undergo an expert review. However, local urban development councils commonly consider draft plans at public hearings and seek expert comments, including confirmation of compliance with applicable legal and technical requirements, such as ownership, setbacks and land coverage. While no compulsory public involvement or collaborative terms of reference creation are currently stipulated, the public hearing can have a significant impact if conducted properly, in terms of emerging comments being reviewed and taken into account by the plan developers. In practice, there is often limited time or funds to make significant changes.

31 Currently, 2028 is designated a cut-off year for amending or using older plans, and only full redrafting of these will be allowed, based on a new Comprehensive Plan.

32 Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine (2026)

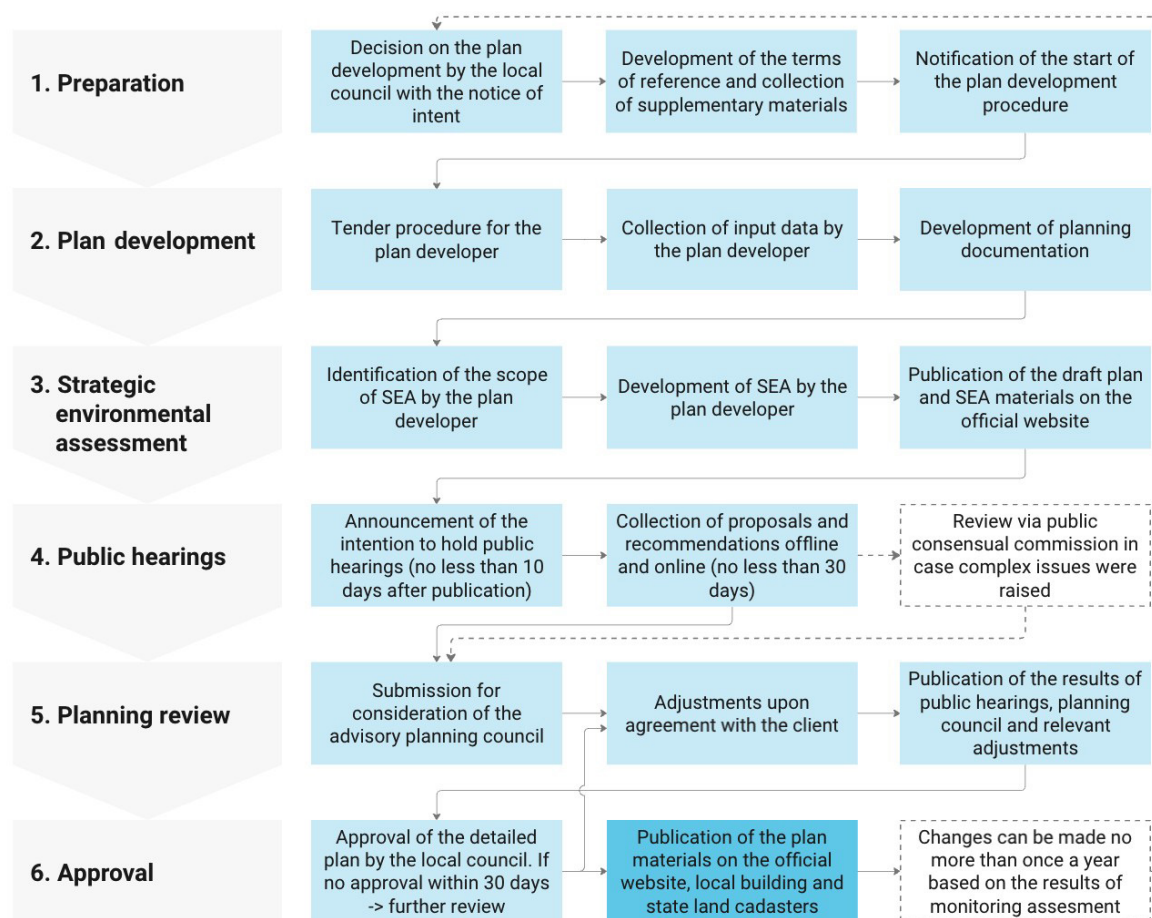


Figure 9: Development of a Detailed Plan in Ukraine as at 1 January 2025

As the SEA is conducted at the final stages of planning, the potential for it to influence the document is limited. Only individual changes that do not violate the general nature of the document can be made late in the process, which significantly reduces the effectiveness of the SEA (Marushevskyi, 2023). Even where legal requirements are met, plan implementation often results in significant land loss, soil sealing, emissions and reduced CO₂ storage capacity. While planned investments in surface water management and protected riverbanks may offer some environmental benefits, extensive greenfield development will inevitably lead to degradation and increased emissions—none of which are acknowledged in the SEA. Developed by the same entity that created the plan, the SEA often legitimizes planning decisions rather than critically assessing their sustainability. It identifies predominantly positive effects on air quality, water quality, soil health and biodiversity, although the basis for these conclusions is not always clearly reconciled with the potential environmental implications of the proposed development.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

The effectiveness of plan implementation and enforcement may be constrained by the limited development of mechanisms such as development area designation, inspections and sanctions, suggesting scope for further strengthening of the regulatory framework. Public investment allocation and timing is another major issue that undermines planning legitimacy and effectiveness.

Legally, mechanisms for plan implementation are very weak in Ukraine. As prescribed in the law, the implementation mechanisms are the regional and local socio-economic programmes. However, they are approved for different timescales and are not obliged to refer to spatial planning documents. Apart from the internal funding sources and loans or grants that are dispensed based on local socio-economic programmes, there often remains only private funding for development projects. Particularly problematic is that the ongoing public investment reform do not

have to align with spatial planning documents, but only with regional and local strategies (Ministry of Finance, 2023). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in their classical form are rare as the legislation is not developed, and their management is complex and opaque. Concession and similar procedures require strong legal capacity, which is lacking at the local level.³³

Private development rights are not time-bound, and there is a right on the owner's side not to build or to build at any given moment, as long as the zoning allows it.³⁴ This leads to the 'overzoning' of many parts of the settlements, where development rights are issued but not activated for decades.

Development control consists of permitting, control and certification shared between the state inspectorate and local self-government body, depending on the scale of the municipality and class of construction in question. Development projects in Ukraine are classified according to their consequence class (class of responsibility), which determines the applicable planning, permitting, and oversight requirements. Three consequence classes are defined.

- **SS1 (minor consequences)** applies to developments with limited potential risks to human life, property, and the environment, typically including buildings with a total floor area of up to 500m², a height of up to four storeys, and an occupancy of no more than 50 people.
- **SS2 (medium consequences)** covers developments with moderate potential impacts, generally including projects designed for 50–400 occupants or those presenting a moderate level of environmental, economic, or social risk.
- **SS3 (significant consequences)** applies to developments with the highest level of potential consequences, including facilities accommodating more than 400 people, engineering infrastructure, buildings exceeding 73.5 m in height, cultural heritage assets, and projects with the potential for significant environmental, economic, or social impacts.

For smaller municipalities, only SS1-type projects can be controlled locally. Local controlling inspectorate in bigger municipalities can identify violations, prescribe

necessary changes, and fine the developers and builders for SS2-class as well, according to Resolution No 553 of 23 May 2011 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2011). However, since 2022, SS1-class objects have been heavily deregulated, and there are very narrow options for exerting oversight for this type of construction (see Resolution No. 722 of 24 June 2022 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2022)). For SS3-type projects, it is always centralized and partially virtual by the State Inspectorate of Architecture and Construction (see Law No. 711-9 on 'Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Regarding Land Use Planning' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020)). Under martial law, a resolution was issued that banned almost all inspections and further limited local development control (Resolution No. 303 of 13 September 2022 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2022)).

Monitoring is a particularly weak component in the plan-making process. While core legislation alludes to monitoring and each plan duly includes a section on monitoring, the function is not often conducted in practice, not least as there are no associated sanctions or punishments. In this context and in the general absence of demand for public review, monitoring is relegated to an 'optional' rather than necessary activity.

PLANNING CAPACITIES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS

The institutional capacity of local self-government bodies is a critical consideration in the implementation of Ukraine's spatial planning reforms. While the legislative framework establishes ambitious planning requirements, there remains limited information on the extent to which municipalities are equipped to prepare and implement the required planning documentation within the envisaged timeframes. Although focused evidence is limited, available studies indicate significant capacity constraints at the local level. Even under the relatively more stable conditions of 2021, local authorities faced considerable challenges, with responsibilities often remaining unclear: around 60 per cent of hromadas reported uncertainty regarding their planning responsibilities, while approximately 35 per cent indicated that they lacked the capacity to undertake general planning functions (Figure 10), let alone more specialized spatial planning tasks (OECD, 2022).

33 See sister document in the current series on *Land and property issues in housing and urban development in Ukraine* (Anisimov et al, 2026).

34 See sister document in the current series on *Land and property issues in housing and urban development in Ukraine* (Anisimov et al, 2026).

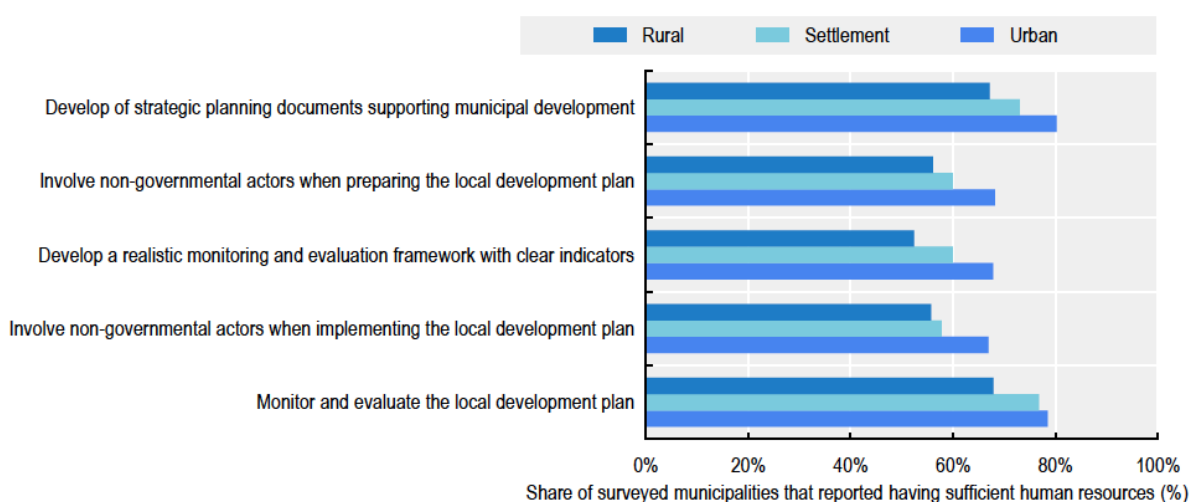


Figure 10: Availability of human resources in municipalities to carry out development planning-related tasks (OECD, 2022).

More recent comprehensive assessments are not yet available. However, available evidence suggests that many municipalities continue to face constraints in both financial and human resources required to commission, manage, and oversee plan preparation (Decentralization, 2023). These capacity limitations have, in some cases, contributed to delays in the preparation and adoption of planning documentation at the local level.

The costs of developing a Comprehensive Plan vary from EUR 70,000 to EUR 500,000 (Prozorro, n.d.), which are significant sums particularly for smaller municipalities. For instance, the total budget of Medzybzh Town Community, a 320km² unit with 8,000 inhabitants, was UAH 140,680,000 in revenue. Running a full plan-making procedure including a new topographic base may cost in the region of UAH 10-12 million, representing up to 8 per cent of the total budget (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine (n.d.); Prozorro³⁵). For many hromadas, these costs represent a substantial financial commitment and must be balanced against other urgent capital investment needs, including school renovations, road repairs, and wastewater infrastructure.

The indicative timeframe of 31 weeks for preparing a spatial plan (USAID AGRO, 2021) has, in practice, proven difficult to achieve and may have created

unrealistic expectations regarding the resources and time required for plan preparation. Implementation in practice typically takes considerably longer, owing to multiple stages of procurement, consultant selection and contracting, data collection, technical preparation, public consultation, and final approval by the local council. These extended timelines also have financial implications given limited budgets and other pressing priorities.

The reform envisaged that shortages of local geospatial and cadastral expertise would be mitigated through the development of the State Urban Cadastre. However, this objective has yet to be fully realized. Consequently, many adopted planning documents remain available only as PDF files rather than as interoperable geospatial datasets, limiting their functionality, integration with digital planning systems, and - in some cases - raising questions regarding their legal and operational status.

The suspension of USAID-funded programming has interrupted support for the preparation of dozens of Comprehensive Plans, including in terms of the provision of technical assistance to local councils. As a result, work on many plans has been paused, and the online support platform for plan preparation, 'Plan Hromad',³⁶ is no longer accessible.

³⁵ The Prozorro procurements page can be found [here](#) and in the bibliography.

³⁶ The online platform can be found at <https://plangromad.com.ua/>

Existing and upcoming challenges in planning

CONTEXT

Ukraine had significantly updated its planning system in the years 2020 to 2021, under the expectation of partial peacetime conditions and economic growth. However, according to the Fifth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA5) (World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, and

United Nations, 2026), direct damage resulting from Russia's full-scale invasion has reached US\$195.1 billion as at 31 December 2025. The destruction is unevenly distributed across the territory of Ukraine, with concentrations in the southeastern frontline regions as well as in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv regions (Figure 11³⁷).

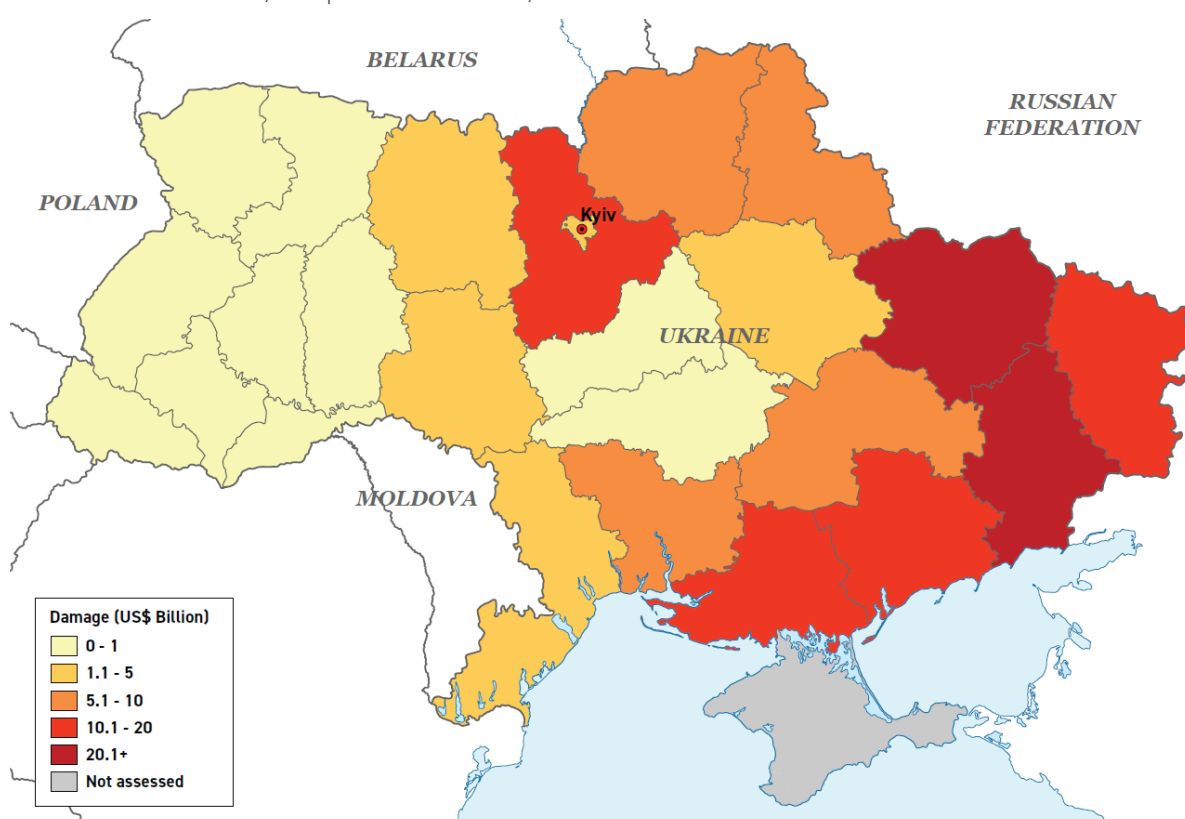


Figure 11: Damage and recovery needs across Ukraine as assessed for the Fifth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA5). (World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, and United Nations, 2026).

According to the United Nations (UN), some 15 per cent of Ukraine's population, or nearly 5 million people, is estimated to be food insecure as of January 2025 (OCHA, 2025). As documented in earlier editions of the RDNA, the impacts of the invasion are demographically uneven, with those mobilized to fight, women, persons with disabilities, children and youth, internally displaced persons, and older persons among those disproportionately affected. Ukraine's estimated real GDP in 2024 was 78 per cent of its pre-full-scale invasion (2021) level.

The highest estimated needs are in transport (16.4 per cent of total needs); energy (15.4 per cent); housing (15.3 per cent); commerce and industry (10.8 per cent), agriculture 9.4 per cent); and social protection and livelihoods (7.3 per cent) (World Bank Group,

Government of Ukraine, European Commission, and United Nations, 2026:17).

However, total financing available in 2026 is dramatically lower than identified priority recovery needs for 2026 across all sectors (World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, and United Nations, 2026:55 Table 3). This indicates the limited capacity of the state to undertake reconstruction measures.

Heavily war-affected regions

The nature of current challenges across regions varies with the geography of conflict impact (Figure 11). In the southern and eastern regions, the primary focus remains on immediate recovery and attack response,

37 For Figure 11, data limitations apply for certain regions. The source does not cover the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

with long-term development priorities relegated to secondary importance.

Taking into account the RDNA5 findings (World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, and United Nations, 2026) and the priorities that communities on the ground most often raise, the top challenges are arguably not directly related to statutory spatial planning: instead, prevailing concerns include safety and security; evacuation, shelter, and other emergency response tactics; preservation and rapid repair of critical infrastructure including heating, water and electricity.

It is important to note that even before the full-scale Russian invasion, many of the eastern region's industrial enterprises were technologically outdated, inefficient, and in crisis. The decline of many heavy industries - due to the loss of export connections, a shrinking workforce, and outdated production facilities - has prompted significant economic shifts. New sectors have emerged, driving the transformation of urban economies. Ukraine's major cities have become centres of innovation, with economic activity now concentrated in financial services, IT, and trade, marking a transition from industry to knowledge-based and service-oriented economies, which requires new planning tools (Restrepo Cadavid et al, 2015).

A key challenge for spatial planning is to navigate the link between addressing short-term urgent needs on one hand and medium and long-term strategic planning on the other, while keeping the territorial communities running without imposing unnecessary planning burdens on them.

Safer backbone regions

In contrast to the heavily war-affected areas, the central and western regions face the challenge of accommodating and integrating populations and economic activity displaced by the conflict. Since the onset of the full-scale invasion, internal migration has led to significant population declines across much of eastern Ukraine and population increases in many western regions. Simultaneously, the country's principal industrial centres operating before 2022 have been directly affected by military operations, reshaping patterns of economic activity and territorial development.

Prior to the full-scale invasion, the limited diversity of Ukraine's housing market had already contributed to the emergence of isolated, high-value gated residential developments, reinforcing spatial inequalities within cities (UNECE, 2013). The segregation of citizens

by class associated with such developments also is concentrated in a limited selection of cities and towns. The war from 2022 has further highlighted these structural imbalances. New housing investment continues to be concentrated in a relatively small number of larger cities and in higher-value neighbourhoods, while many existing residential areas – particularly those developed during the second half of the twentieth century, where the majority of the population resides – continue to experience ageing infrastructure, declining living conditions, and limited reinvestment. As a result, current patterns of development are not sufficient to address the country's widespread housing needs or to support more balanced and inclusive urban regeneration.

Here, the imperative for rapid recovery and economic revitalization creates a risk that short-term, *ad hoc* interventions may take precedence over investments in integrated, equitable, and strategically planned development. The meaningful participation of built environment professionals and residents in urban planning decision-making remains limited. Insufficient mechanisms for inclusive public consultation can result in planning decisions that do not fully reflect community needs or long-term sustainability objectives. As reconstruction progresses, municipalities face the challenge of responding to immediate priorities while ensuring that current decisions contribute to resilient, inclusive, and sustainable urban development over the longer term (Danish Association of Architects & National Union of Architects of Ukraine, 2025).

RECOVERY OR DEVELOPMENT?

The absence of a national framework policy or of formulated goals for urban planning at the national level precludes a common language and vision for processes and systems on the local level. Two issues appear highly problematic:

- The development of plans and land-use regulations is highly complex and formalized. Comprehensive Plans are extensive and technically demanding documents that can be difficult to prepare and implement - particularly by smaller territorial communities. Once adopted, they establish detailed land-use designations and development conditions that can be difficult to amend, potentially limiting the ability to respond to evolving needs and sustainability objectives.
- Regulatory requirements for construction have been progressively simplified, with building permit processes increasingly automated and digitalized.

Together, these factors mean the lack of actualized plans for many territories, which are nevertheless built up by landowners without the guidance of spatial plans and infrastructure provision.

Overall, the current planning system is perceived by stakeholders as ‘pro-development’, prioritizing land

development and value maximization, with planning instruments facilitating the conversion of lower-value land into higher-value urban development (Figure 12). In this context, environmental functions, ecosystem services, and other public-interest considerations may receive comparatively limited weight within planning and land-use decisions.

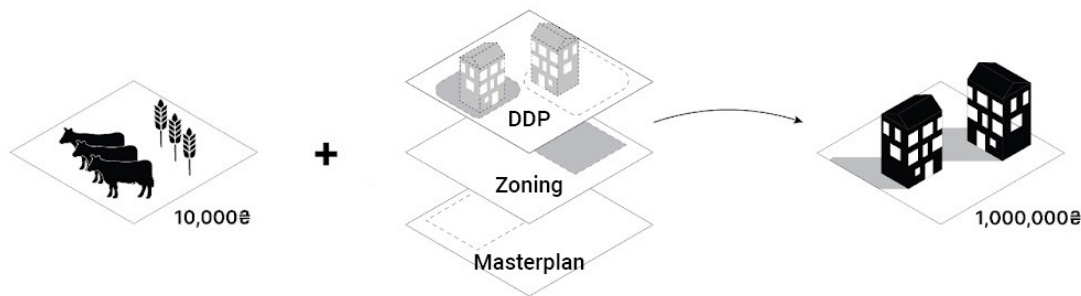


Figure 12: Pro-development stance in planning in Ukraine

The current balance of rights and responsibilities within urban development has, in practice, tended to favour larger development companies. Limitations in development control mechanisms may reduce transparency and competition in planning decision-making and land development. These conditions can encourage dispersed urban expansion that is not coordinated with the timely provision or planning of public infrastructure.

Many of Ukraine’s existing urban plans were prepared within a national policy context that assumed continued growth. However, concerns have been raised for over a decade regarding the need to align planning approaches with evolving demographic realities, particularly sustained population decline (Figure 13) across much of the country (Resterpero et al., 2015).

With more than 90 per cent of settlements now experiencing population loss, there is a growing need for more flexible and adaptive planning approaches that prioritize the conservation of natural, landscape, and cultural assets while supporting quality of life within increasingly constrained fiscal conditions. This changing context also highlights the importance of reviewing the existing national settlement system, which remains embedded in the now-expired *General Planning Scheme of the Territory of Ukraine* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2002), and considering the development of an updated national settlement plan or scheme. While this represents an important dimension of Ukraine’s spatial development, a comprehensive assessment of the settlement system falls beyond the scope of the current document.

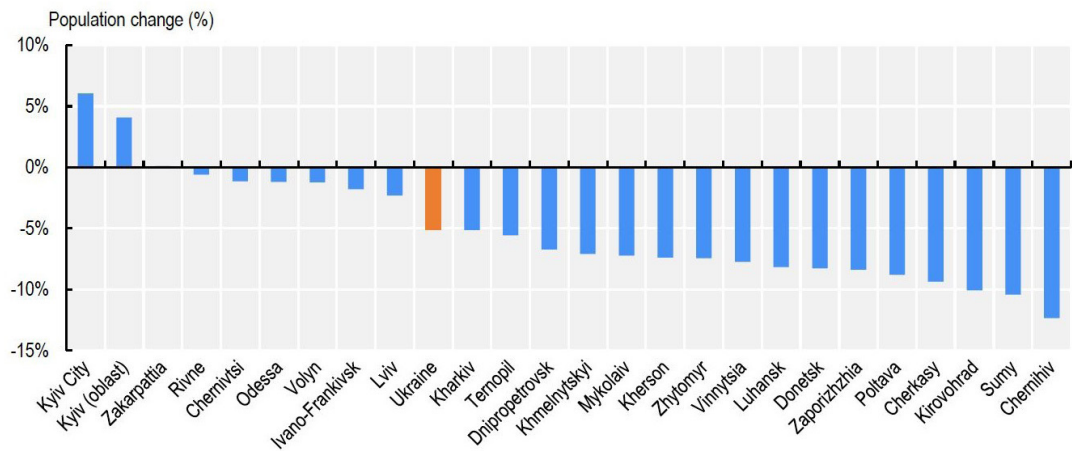


Figure 13 Population change by oblast, in Kyiv City, and in Ukraine overall from 2010 to 2021 (OECD, 2022). ³⁸

38 Figure 13 excludes the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastapol City due to the unavailability of data after 2014.

EUROPEAN UNION LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ALIGNMENT CHALLENGES

The European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019) provides an increasingly important policy framework for urban and spatial development, promoting energy efficiency, climate neutrality, biodiversity conservation, and the sustainable use of land and natural resources. For planning, measures aimed at restoring habitats and rivers and limiting urban expansion are provided in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (European Commission, 2020) together with related initiatives including the EU Soil Strategy (European Commission, 2021), the Nature Restoration Regulation (European Union, 2024) and the Soil Monitoring and Resilience Directive (Council of the European Union, 2024) demand a country-wide restoration of ecosystems, protection of biodiversity, and more sustainable patterns of land use.

These initiatives include targets to expand protected areas to at least 20 per cent in each member state, and ensuring that at least 10 per cent of agricultural land consists of high-diversity landscapes and 50 per cent of wetlands are out of agricultural use, while strengthening protection measures for existing natural areas. As Ukraine progresses towards closer alignment with the EU acquis, these policy directions are expected to increasingly influence national spatial planning and land management. In particular, the EU's objective of achieving zero net land take by 2050 (European Commission, 2021) is likely to encourage planning approaches that prioritize the efficient use of previously developed land including urban regeneration and, conversely, the avoidance or mitigation of unnecessary greenfield development. More recent EU legislative proposals have further refined this objective by

placing greater emphasis on limiting soil sealing, soil destruction, and land artificialization (Council of the European Union, 2024).

Ukraine faces significant challenges related to the sustainability of land use, particularly in the southern and central regions. As one of the world's most extensively ploughed countries, agricultural production is dominated by maize, sunflower, rapeseed, and soybeans, which together account for more than half of cultivated production areas and approximately 40 per cent of all agricultural land. These land-use patterns, combined with prevailing agricultural practices, have contributed to soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and increasing risks of land degradation and desertification ([Ecodia, 2021](#); FAO, 2022; UNCCD, 2019).

The first generation of Comprehensive Plans for territorial communities will play an important role in determining Ukraine's capacity to support a green transition. The extent to which these plans incorporate measures to protect landscapes, rivers, soils, and other natural assets, while guiding sustainable patterns of land use and urban development, will have long-term implications for environmental resilience. Decisions taken at this stage are likely to shape future planning options. Early land-use designations established through Comprehensive Plans will be difficult to amend later on, as they will establish property-related development rights and expectations. Strengthening the integration of biodiversity conservation, landscape protection, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable land management within local and regional planning frameworks is therefore critical. Delaying such measures may increase the environmental, economic, and institutional costs of achieving future sustainability objectives.

Conclusions

This document has examined key issues shaping spatial planning in Ukraine during a period in which immediate recovery needs arising from the full-scale invasion ongoing since 2022 are being addressed alongside broader efforts to strengthen the institutional, legislative, and governance frameworks that will underpin the country's long-term recovery and sustainable development. It has covered the historical legacy of the post-Soviet planning system, key 2020 reforms, decentralization, implementation challenges, demographic change, environmental sustainability, EU alignment, and conflict-related damage reconstruction among other issues.

Viewed from these angles, Ukraine's spatial planning system is at a pivotal stage of transformation. Recent reforms have established a more integrated and decentralized planning framework, strengthened the legal basis for comprehensive territorial planning, and laid important foundations for greater alignment with European planning principles. However, implementation continues to be constrained by limited institutional and technical capacity, complex planning procedures, uneven local resources, and the unprecedented challenges posed by the full-scale invasion. In parallel, long-term demographic change, environmental degradation, climate commitments, and the country's EU accession process require a planning system that is adaptive, strategic, and capable in practice of balancing reconstruction with sustainable territorial development. The conflict-related recovery response therefore represents not only an opportunity to rebuild damaged settlements and infrastructure, but also to further modernize Ukraine's spatial planning system so that it better supports resilient, inclusive, climate-responsive, and economically viable communities in the long term. Achieving this will require continued investment in local planning capacities, stronger integration across sectors and levels of government, meaningful public participation, and planning approaches that safeguard natural assets while responding to evolving social and economic realities.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The following key takeaways synthesize the report's principal findings on the historical evolution and current performance of Ukraine's spatial planning system, as well as the institutional, demographic, environmental and recovery-related challenges that will shape its further development.

Evolution of the planning system

- Ukraine's contemporary spatial planning system reflects a layered legacy of imperial, Soviet,

and post-independence reforms, with many institutional structures and planning practices continuing to influence present-day decision-making. Strong hierarchical connections and a Top-down model of legally binding plans remain major core components, partially evolved from Soviet-era planning.

- The planning system is tightly connected to the administrative levels. Decentralization and the 2020 to 2021 planning reforms fundamentally reoriented the system by making the territorial community (hromada) the principal planning stakeholder and introducing integrated Comprehensive Plans covering entire municipal territories.
- Though the reforms represent a significant step towards integrated and European-oriented planning, implementation has proved substantially more demanding than originally envisaged because of technical complexity, lack of dedicated funding and uneven local institutional capacity.
- While some advances in landscape planning have taken place, the majority of planning instruments remain inherently heavily pro-development, leaning towards increases in land take, infrastructure construction and settlement area expansion, even under population stagnation or decline.
- Public participation has been progressively incorporated into the planning framework, although its implementation is uneven across the country.
- Multi-level governance, metropolitan planning and intermunicipal cooperation in spatial planning are almost non-existent and limited progress has been achieved in the last years. This precludes effective synergies, capacity-gap substitutions as well as extended deliberation and expert inputs.
- The challenges of delivering the 2020 model of the planning system with the complete adoption of Comprehensive Plans across the country are now clear. There are calls both to simplify the system and to adjust to wartime conditions of restricted planning horizons and unpredictability.

Performance of the planning system

- Ukraine possesses a comprehensive statutory planning framework, yet the effectiveness of the system is constrained less by legislation than by implementation capacity, financing, institutional coordination, and regulatory complexity.
- Significant disparities in financial, technical, and human resources between local self-government bodies limit the ability of many municipalities to prepare, implement, monitor, and regularly update planning documentation. Local self-

government bodies require significant public support for specialists and grant funding for plan development.

- Localism and investment-seeking from the local self-governments presents a significant challenge, as the municipal borders are treated as contained administrative units, with little regard to externalities occurring in neighbouring municipalities. Absence of a national and regional guidance on land use and planning is a threat to integrated and sustainable spatial development in the future.
- Progress towards digitization has improved transparency and access to planning information, as well as an advanced property-planning interface, but interoperable digital planning systems, geospatial data infrastructure, and routine monitoring remain insufficiently developed. Data gaps also bring significant complications to plan-development processes.
- Planning culture remains project-oriented, with more general and high-level plans receiving limited political attention and funding priority. Under resourced planning expert community is not vividly present in the local and national debates. Such institutions as national planning congress or ministerial planning committee are absent, limiting evidence and practice-based knowledge sharing for the higher-level decision-making in the government.
- The prevalence of developer/landowner-oriented decision-making relegates local self-governments and planners to subordinate roles, limiting expert scrutiny and independent voice regarding the procedures and impacts of future development. Disconnection between spatial plans and available public funding leads to the overreliance on private landowners being in charge of spatial development and setting the rules of the game.

Existing and upcoming challenges

- Current statutory planning instruments were largely designed for stable development conditions and therefore have limited flexibility to address wartime recovery, destroyed and damaged settlements, population displacement, and rapidly changing local circumstances. Some instruments to react to wartime issues in terms of statutory urban planning documentation have been rolled out but not institutionalized, which will limit the spatial coordination of reconstruction and investment.
- Issues of shrinking and limited fiscal space are not yet reflected in planning practice. The impact of population decline on urban planning,

infrastructure maintenance, and land-use strategies is poorly considered, while becoming an ever-bigger challenge.

- Long-term pressures of climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and unsustainable land use require a stronger strategic focus on territorial resilience and sustainable land management within planning practice.
- Ukraine's European Union accession process presents an opportunity to further align spatial planning legislation and practice with European standards relating to environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, land consumption efficiency, integrated territorial development, and public participation. Access to EU funding will be conditional on the establishment of new territorial planning instruments, such as intermunicipal, metropolitan and regional plans to set up optimal scale for such investments. Further reforms are needed that will focus on establishing multi-level and horizontal governance arrangements for spatial planning, securing stable funding for plan development and supporting capacity-building. Nation-wide recovery from Russia's full-scale invasion requires a more resilient and effective planning framework capable of addressing demographic change, climate adaptation, and evolving development priorities under conditions of uncertainty.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Given the breadth of the subject and the rapidly evolving legislative, institutional, and wartime context, several important topics in the current document could only be addressed at a high level. Many of the reforms examined - particularly those introduced from 2020 onwards - remain at an early stage of implementation, and their long-term impacts on planning quality, governance, and spatial development outcomes cannot yet be fully assessed.

The report also highlights a broader limitation affecting the planning profession itself: the continued lack of comprehensive, systematic evidence on how planning functions in practice. While legislative developments are well documented, considerably less is known about implementation, enforcement, institutional performance, and the effectiveness of planning instruments across different territorial contexts. The disruption caused by the full-scale invasion has further complicated data collection and the evaluation of planning outcomes.

Further research would therefore be valuable in several areas, including on the following:

- The implementation of the 2020 to 2021 planning reforms, including the preparation and implementation of planning instruments – particularly Comprehensive Plans - across different types of territorial communities. The outcomes of planning, moving beyond legislative analysis to assess how statutory and non-statutory (soft) planning instruments influence land use, development patterns, environmental protection, investment decisions, and infrastructure provision. Surveys and case studies may be used to evaluate implementation and outcomes.
- Institutional and local government capacity, examining financing, procurement processes, digital capabilities, and their influence on planning quality and delivery. The availability, capacity, and technical expertise of planning professionals and institutions to implement policies effectively should also be further investigated.
- Recovery planning in practice, including how planning systems operate under wartime conditions, support reconstruction, integrate damaged and occupied territories, and respond to displacement and demographic change.
- Environmental and landscape planning, particularly the practical integration of landscape planning, climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, river basin protection, soil preservation, and green infrastructure within Comprehensive Plans.
- Digital transformation of planning, including the impact of digital tools on decision-making, transparency, and on data management in planning processes; the effectiveness of the State Cadastres, the National Spatial Data Infrastructure; interoperability between information systems; and the practical use of geospatial data in planning and decision-making.
- Public participation and governance, assessing how consultation processes influence planning decisions in practice, the inclusiveness of participation, and opportunities to strengthen transparency and accountability.
- Development control, in terms of the effectiveness of development control mechanisms, compliance monitoring, enforcement, and the relationship between statutory planning and investment decisions.
- Demographic change and the national settlement system, examining the implications of sustained population decline, internal displacement, and changing settlement patterns for future national and regional spatial strategies.
- European integration, evaluating the progressive alignment of Ukraine's planning system with the European Union acquis, including environmental legislation, territorial cohesion, climate policy, and integrated spatial planning approaches.
- International comparative analysis of planning systems in neighbouring - or otherwise comparable - countries to evaluate, regulatory frameworks, governance and practices on the ground. International comparison may help situate Ukraine's spatial planning system within broader debates on decentralization, land governance, post-crisis recovery, digital planning, environmental integration and EU alignment, potentially strengthening evidence and learning for the ongoing evolution of the country's spatial planning system.

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