

Europe: Human Footprint

European Union (EU-15): Estimate

This *Demographic Brief* provides an estimate of the human footprint in the European Union (EU-15) at 2001. The human footprint includes the land used for agriculture and urbanization. It is estimated that less than 5% of the EU-15 land area is in urban development, while approximately 46% of the land is in agriculture.

The Declining Human Footprint: The human footprint (agricultural plus urban land) has been declining in the EU-15 over the past four decades. The current urbanization, which has developed over centuries, is estimated to cover approximately 161,000 square kilometers (2001).¹ This is considerably less than the land taken out of agricultural production in just the last 40 years. Historical data on urban land coverage is not available.²

Less Agricultural Land, Greater Productivity: Agricultural land has been reduced by 237,000 square kilometers (Table 2), an area slightly larger than Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland). The decline in agricultural land was principally the result of materially improved productivity. Europe's [agricultural productivity has increased materially over the past four decades](#), indicating that less agricultural land has been required. Moreover, the substantial Common Agricultural Policy subsidies have doubtless had the impact of artificially increasing the extent of agricultural land.

Agricultural Land: EU-15				
Year	Hectares	Square KMs	Acres	Square Miles
1961	164,470,000	1,645,000	412,763,000	635,000
1971	156,771,000	1,568,000	393,441,000	605,000
1981	152,477,000	1,525,000	382,664,000	589,000
1991	145,197,000	1,452,000	364,394,000	561,000
2001	140,831,000	1,408,000	353,437,000	544,000
1961-2001	-23,639,000	-237,000	-59,326,000	-91,000
Data from UN Food & Agriculture Organization				

Request for Information: *Demographia* [invites comments](#) on this *Demographic Brief* and would be interested in any alternative estimates of the extent of EU-15 urbanization in 1961.

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¹ Urban land area modeled using data from the University of Avignon, *Demographia World Urban Areas* and the United Nations *World Urbanization Prospects, 2009 Revision*.

² If, for example, Europe had suburbanized at the same rate as the United States, the total urban land area would have less than doubled between 1961 and 2001. However, it is likely that the rate of urban expansion has been less than that, because it is generally perceived that because there was substantially greater population growth in the United States over the period and European urban geographic expansion is generally thought to have been less.