

Undervalued & Underrepresented

Local Government in
Ireland Compared with
Other Democracies





Introduction

Ireland has one of the most centralised systems of government of any democracy. Councillors here have fewer powers than in almost every other country and limited revenue raising and spending powers. We are also underrepresented compared to other nations.

This document takes a snapshot of how local government operates in Ireland and in 34 other democratic jurisdictions (the other 26 EU member states; the United Kingdom (and its constituent parts), Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States). Each country's outline is very brief but can provide a useful insight into how local government operates and is valued. It also suggests that we can do much more here to strengthen local government.

While direct comparisons are not always possible and many countries have different levels of local and regional government (with varying numbers of councillors and powers), it is clear that local government is considerably weaker in Ireland. This has had the consequence of more time being taken up at national level by government departments and agencies, as well as by national legislators, on issues that could be more effectively addressed in a stronger local government system, as happens in most other countries.

A continual erosion of the powers of local councils and councillors has stripped city and county authorities back to being simply being agents of local administration.

I hope that this document contributes to a debate as to how we might rebuild local democracy. It is also intended that we might learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions.

We need to look at how we can devolve more powers to local authorities in areas such as education, policing and transport. The

continued centralisation of powers by the Custom House (our Department of Local Government) needs to be checked and the principle of subsidiarity should underpin government decision making.

While some centralised decision making always makes sense in the provision of certain services, the move away from local government has led to poor levels of accountability on the parts of agencies established to make those decisions: the Health Service Executive, Irish Water, the Office of the Planning Regulator.

There is a significant opportunity with the election of a directly elected Mayor for Limerick to radically reshape how local government operates. However, it is essential that the office has real powers and resources to make a difference.

We have fewer councillors per capita than any other EU country and other democracies examined. There are 949 elected councillors in Ireland for a population of 5.1 million. Compare that to similar if slightly larger European countries. Denmark, with a population of 5.9m has 2,432 while Finland, with a population of 5.6m has 8,859 councillors.

We need to consider whether we have enough councillors around the country given the increasing demands on their time. Should we introduce a ratio of councillors to the general population, as happens for elections to the Dáil, and as happens in other jurisdictions?

A number of countries (Austria, Estonia, Malta, Scotland and Wales as well as some parts of Germany and Switzerland) allow those aged 16 and over to vote in local elections, while 17 is the voting age in Greece. The lower voting age encourages greater youth participation in politics. Unlike for General Elections here where Constitutional change is required, reducing the voting age to 16 for our Local and European Elections can be done by means of legislation. I have a Bill before the Oireachtas to that effect.

Increasingly, under Irish legislation, those who serve on our local authorities are being denied the opportunity to serve on the boards

of State Agencies. While this is understandable in the context of national legislators, it does not make sense to exclude those who can come through a competitive process but then are ruled out simply because they choose to serve the public in their communities.

I am very grateful for the work of Nicolas Coerver, a student at Boston College, who interned with me at Leinster House during 2022, who assisted with research for this document, as well as to various embassies of the countries studied for their assistance. I am also appreciative of the work of my secretary, Patrick Higgins, in helping with this paper.

We need to encourage more people from a diverse range of backgrounds to run for local office. It is an enormous privilege to serve our communities. Our councillors and local authority staff do tremendous work on the ground. They can be more effective by giving them real responsibilities and supports to make decisions closest to the communities where they are based.

Malcolm Byrne

Senator Malcolm Byrne

January, 2023



Local Government in Ireland

Population: 5.1 million

While local government in Ireland dates back centuries, modern local government can be traced to the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898. Modern local government was established at this time during British rule and ironically, local government had more powers during this period.

After Irish Independence, local government took a different turn. With a new central government came the creation of state institutions which over time, removed many powers from local government.

Currently, the system of local government in Ireland consists of city and county councils. Councillors are elected by the electorate in their county constituency through a multiseat proportional representation voting system. There are 31 total councils in the Republic of Ireland with 949 city and county councillors. Most of the local authorities are based on County boundaries that were drawn up by the English prior to the 17th Century.

Terms of office are for five years. Mayors or Chairs are elected by the councillors for one year terms. Despite having a very limited role in government due to the restrictions on local powers, councillors, in most cases, are not permitted to sit on State Boards.

Currently, local government includes certain responsibilities in the areas of planning, local roads, libraries, the arts, and the environment. Local councils were previously responsible for significant aspects of education, water services and health. However, these responsibilities were stripped from local government as government power became more centralised.

While, following a referendum, the Constitution recognises local



government, this has had little real impact other than ensuring that elections are held every five years and that they cannot be portponed by central government.

Funding for local authorities in Ireland relies on certain local charges, the Local Property Tax, commercial rates paid by businesses, but heavily on grant funding from central government.

Local Government in Other Jurisdictions

Australia

Population: 26.1 million

Local government in Australia comprises councils that govern areas designated by the federal government of Australia as “local government areas.” Council members are referred to as councillors and the lead councillor is the mayor. There are 547 councils in Australia. The average local government area serves around 30,000 people.

Elected members of councils generally serve 4 year terms. Each council has an average of 9 members (roughly 4,923 councillors) who are elected by the people in their constituency. Councillors are sometimes referred to as aldermen and mayors are sometimes referred to as president.

The councils of Australia are responsible for local roads, footpaths, cycle ways, street signage and lighting, waste management, including rubbish collection and recycling, parking, recreational facilities such as parks, sports fields and swimming pools, cultural facilities, including libraries, art galleries and museums, services such as childcare and aged care, sewerage, town planning, building approvals and inspections, land and coast care programs, pet control. Local government is also important because it regulates and maintains the services and activities of each local government area.

In Australia, local councillors are allowed to sit on state boards. Generally, no one person may sit on more than two state boards at one time.

Austria

Population: 9.1 million

In Austria there are elections at all levels (local, regional “Bundesländer”, central state). Mayors are elected by the local councils, similarly to Ireland. The municipal (local) elections are held every 5 to 6 years. There are currently 2,098 municipalities in Austria.

Since Austria is a federal state, local governments have significant responsibilities: levying municipal taxes, managing finances, appointing municipal officials, local security police, road works and planning, safety, and certain agricultural activity.

Belgium

Population: 11.7 million

Belgium was formerly a unitary state until 1970. Since then, local legislative bodies have been increasingly important in Belgian government and politics. In Belgium there are 581 municipalities. 300 of these municipalities are in the region of Flanders, which has 5 provinces. Another 262 municipalities are in the region of Wallonia which also has five provinces. There are 19 in the Brussels capital region.

Mayors in Belgium act as a representative of both the regional and national government, while at the same time holding the office of the executive of the municipal government. In Flanders and the Brussels capital region, mayors are appointed by the regional government. In Wallonia, however, the Mayor is the local councillor that received the largest number of votes in the local elections. The term for mayors is six years.

Councillors are directly elected to local councils. Local councils may have anywhere from 7 to 55 councillors depending on the population of the municipality.

The regional government is responsible for environment, energy, transportation, public works, and some economic and labour matters. The municipal government is responsible for cultural matters such as education and tourism.

Bulgaria

Population: 6.8 million

The Republic of Bulgaria comprises three levels of governance: central, district and municipal. The country has 28 districts and 265 municipalities.

Bulgaria is highly centralised State, as the National Council of Ministers directly appoints district governors and all districts are fully dependent on the State's Budget, whereas Municipalities are less dependent on the State's budget. The Municipalities (obshtini) constitutes the only level at which self-government is exercised.

There are 3,160 mayors, who are either directly elected by the people for a period of 4 years if the district has more than 350 inhabitants or appointed by the Councils if the population figure is lower than 350. In Bulgaria, councillors are not permitted to sit on State Boards.

Canada

Population: 38.4 million

There are around 3,700 municipal governments (in 3,573 municipalities) throughout Canada, spread across 10 provinces and 3 territories. Local governments' interactions with the federal government are limited in order to preserve the jurisdiction of the provincial government.

Functions and responsibilities of Canadian local government include fire and police services, transportation, education, planning and development, economic functions, levying taxes, and public utilities. Provincial governments have greater functions received from the federal government, and the provincial government also gives functions and power to local government.

Depending on the province or territory, elections for local government members are held every year, two years, three years, or four years (in most places every four years). Municipal governments consist of a council that usually has 10-20 councillors and a mayor (the exception being Montreal which has 50 councillors). Municipal elections in Canada generally elect both the mayor and municipal council directly, as well as a school board.

There are no restrictions regarding Canadian State Boards.

Croatia

Population: 4.1 million

In the Republic of Croatia, there is a total of 576 units of local and regional (regional) self-government. This comprises 428 municipalities and 127 cities, and 20 units of regional self-government (counties). In addition, the city of Zagreb, as the capital of the Republic of Croatia, has the special status of a city and county. The number of representatives in local government bodies differs anywhere from seven to 47 members depending on the size of the municipality.

Local government functions include landscaping and housing, spatial and urban planning, communal economy, childcare, social welfare, primary health care, education and primary education, culture, physical culture and sport, consumer protection, protection and improvement of the natural environment, firefighting and civil protection, traffic in its area, and other activities in accordance with special laws.

Croatia devotes important representation to its minority groups, which make up about 15% of the population. Minority groups have representatives on all levels of government, including the national legislature and local councils.

Mayors are directly elected in Croatia and are referred to as “Lord Mayors.” Other members of the council and deputy mayors are also directly elected. Local taxes make up the largest portion of taxes paid by the people to the government.

While Croatia does not have a direct equivalent to the Irish State Board, local legislators are allowed to hold multiple offices at once and can even hold regional and national legislative offices. However, there must not be a conflict between the two offices held by the local councillor. There are also certain preventions to limit the central government’s influence on local government.

Czechia

Population: 10.7 million

Czechia is divided into 14 Regional Councils and 6,377 Municipal Councils. The Regional Councils can have 45, 55 or 65 members depending on size. Similarly for the Municipal Councils which can range from five to 55 members.

Elected every four years, local councils have extensive powers over local matters and they choose their own Mayor for the term. The councils can also hold a local or regional referendum on a local policy decision,.

Local councillors are permitted to sit on State Boards

Cyprus

Population: 1.2 million

Local government in Cyprus consists of four levels: district, municipal, rural, and village governments. In Cyprus there are 24 municipal

councils and 355 community councils.

Councillors are elected directly and so are the mayors. Elections are held every five years.

The responsibilities of municipal and rural governments include levying taxes, providing public services, ensuring water supply, waste disposal, social services, and planning.

Denmark

Population: 5.8 million

Denmark is divided into 98 municipalities (kommuner) and five regions (regioner), each covering several municipalities. Only the municipalities are considered local authorities. Overall management of and responsibility for the entire local community is vested in the local council. The council may make decisions on any municipal matter.

All local councillors are elected for a four-year period in local government elections. In the local elections on 16 November 2021, 2,432 members were elected to the 98 local councils. The affairs of the five regions are governed by five regional councils. Each council has 41 members. The councils are elected for a four-year period in general regional elections, which are held on the same day as the local government elections. A councillor cannot be a member of both the council in the municipality and the council in the region. There are also “sub-local councils” which focus on smaller issues within the local government structures, however these are not required by the constitution: they are merely an option for local councils.

Most welfare tasks fall on the shoulders of local government, which differs from most countries. Local government also provides funding for most of its functions with a few exceptions where the central government splits some of the costs. Given Denmark’s highly decentralised nature, major responsibilities include primary education, social welfare services, health, utilities, environment and spatial planning, and road management.

Danish Mayors have four-year terms. The Mayor is chosen by the members of the local council.

Estonia

Population: 1.3 million

There are 79 local government bodies in Estonia divided into 15 cities and 64 parishes. These decide and organise local issues independently. Irrespective of their size, they perform similar functions and offer the same services to their citizens. Estonia has 1,717 councillors in total in the 79 municipalities.

Local government councils are elected by the residents of the municipality or town who are entitled to vote, on the basis of the Local Government Council Election Act. They are elected by secret ballot for a term of four years. Only citizens of Estonia and of the European Union residing in the territory of the municipality, who are at least 16 years old and whose address details are entered in the Estonian population register of the municipality or town in the territory of the municipality, are entitled to vote in the elections.

The election of the Mayor is carried out by the Council for a maximum term of four years. From the day of election, the mayor is empowered to form a local government. The mayor acquires the powers provided for by law and the city statute from the day of his confirmation of office.

Members of local councils may not hold public office (mayor, parliament, government or mayor of a municipality) while they are serving as a member of a local council.

Finland

Population: 5.6 million

Finland is a unitary state organised on a decentralised basis. There are 19 regions including the autonomous region of Åland Islands, and

310 municipalities. Both regional development and regional land use planning are statutory tasks of the regional councils.

The number of councillors elected depends on the population of a municipality. According to Section 16 of the Local Government Act (410/2015) the number of councillors varies as follows:

Population	Councillor
at most 5,000	13
5,001 - 20,000	27
20,001- 50,000	43
50,001 - 100,000	51
100,001 - 250,000	59
250,001 - 500,000	67
over 500 000	79

In 2021, 8,859 councillors were elected to municipal councils.

Local authorities are responsible for healthcare (primary and secondary, dental and social services, education, culture and sports programming, land use planning, local infrastructure (constructing and maintaining streets, energy, water, harbors), public transport, and promoting local business and employment.

Local elections are held every four years. Councillors are permitted to sit on state boards with no restrictions.

France

Population: 65.6 million

In France, local government units are called territorial collectivities. These territorial collectivities consist of regions, communes, departments, and overseas territories. France has a strong policy of

decentralisation.

France has 21 regions and 5 overseas territories. There are 101 departments (with anywhere from 13-71 cantons per department) and over 36,500 communes throughout France.

Regional and overseas territorial functions include economic development, social development, education, cultural promotion, and regional planning. Regions have the largest role of any local government and are most connected to the central government of France. Regional councils are directly elected with an executive that is selected by the body.

Departmental functions include welfare, health, employment, budgeting, property, and administration. Department General Councils are elected every six years with one councillor for each canton. The President of the General council acts as the executive, whose main job is to prevent departmental laws from conflicting with national laws.

The smallest level of local government, the commune, consists of an elected council who in turn selects a mayor and the “mayor’s assistants.” The communal government runs policing, security, health, fire and safety, and local budgeting. Mayors act as the executive of the communal council, but also represent the central government on the smallest level.

In France, there is a Council of State to which members can be appointed by the recommendation of the Minister of Justice. Department heads and councillors are often chosen to be members of the council. This council is not directly corelative to the Irish State Boards as the Council of State is largely a legal advisory to the national executive, but there are some similarities.

Germany

Population: 84.3 million

Apart from the three city States (Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen), the

States are divided into municipal units of administration. There are 400 of them: 106 urban and 294 rural councils. The size of the council depends on the population of the respective town or region, but usually would be between 20 and 80 members.

Local government is in charge of all “local affairs”, i.e. the municipality’s finances, staff, land etc. This includes municipal infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals, ...), utilities (water, electricity etc), services to the citizens (issuing IDs, passports, marriage, birth and death certificates etc.) and some cultural events (town fairs, markets, public swimming pools, in some cases theatres and cinemas).

There are three categories of tasks that local government can consider:

- Optional: Municipalities decide whether, and if yes, how to provide these services. This includes sports facilities and other cultural initiatives, as well as support for local enterprise or tourism
- Mandatory, but independent: These must be provided (by federal or State law), but the municipality is autonomous in how to do so. This includes schools and kindergartens, utilities, fire protection, local elections, social amenities (homeless shelters etc.) and more.
- Mandated by Order: These must be provided, because the federal or State legislature has so decided, including the manner in which to execute the task. This includes rules regarding official documents (how to issue passports etc) and how to administer federal or State election in the respective constituencies.

In order to finance all this, municipalities receive money from the federal budget. They also raise their own taxes, notably local business tax and property tax on land. They also receive 15% of their inhabitants’ income tax (the rest is split evenly between the State and federal levels).

In the three city states, Mayors are elected directly by the public and serve as head of the State and municipal government. In 11 of the 13 non-city States, town mayors and chairs of rural councils are elected directly by the people. In the remaining two States, the councils elect

one of their members as chairperson. Length of term differs between each State, but is mostly between five and seven years, in some places up to ten.

Members of municipal councils can be elected into State or federal parliaments or serve in other roles.

Greece

Population: 10.3 million

In Greece, there are 332 municipalities which are divided into 1,036 municipal units and 6,136 communes. Local government in Greece can be traced back millennia to the ancient city-states.

Communes are governed locally by a council which consists of 7 to 11 members. Municipal units and municipalities have councils as well, however there are anywhere from 11 to 45 members of these councils. These councils select 2 to 6 members that will sit on a town hall committee. Members of local councils are elected every four years on the basis of party. Three fifths of the council seats go to the party that wins a plurality and two fifths goes to the losing party. Mayors are the head of the council, and are likewise elected by party.

Responsibilities of Greek local government include: security and police, fire services, civil protection, nurseries and kindergartens, repair and maintenance of all schools, adult education, hospitals and health departments, family and youth services, retirement homes, public housing and town planning, water and waste treatment, cemeteries, environmental protection, theatres, museums, libraries, parks, sports and leisure facilities, roads, gas supplies, Irrigation, regulation of farming and fishing, commerce and tourism, licensing certain business enterprises.

Hungary

Population: 9.6 million

Hungary has 3,178 are settlement municipalities (including 23 districts of the capital) and 19 county municipalities, all of which have their local Council. The total number of Councillors nationally is 16,787. These local Councils have extensive powers over all affairs in their Council area.

Municipal mayors and local government representatives are elected for five years by the voters. The President of the County Representative Body (Assembly) is elected by the County Assembly from among its own members for the duration of his term of office.

The local government representatives and mayors may pursue other activities or accept remuneration for their activities provided that there is no conflict of interest.

Iceland

Population: 366,425

Icelandic local government is particularly small due to the size of the country. However, local government has been essential to the Icelandic way of life for over a thousand years. Iceland has relied on these local governments to reach their constituents on a level that the national government cannot.

Currently, Iceland has 64 municipalities that contribute to a “national association.” This Association of Local Authorities defends the views of municipalities on a national and international level. The Association’s responsibilities are taken care of by departments that include finance and economics, law, wages, information, and international development. By decree of the Local Government Act, the Association of Local Authorities is the representative body of the all the municipalities in the country (not unlike a parliament). However, it differs from the Althing (Icelandic parliament) in that it “formulates common policy on individual issues.” There is also a special agreement

between the Althing and the Association of Local Authorities so that each might not overstep their authority.

In Iceland, there are municipal elections in which the people directly elect who will represent their municipality, including mayors. In 49 out of the 64 municipalities the voting is ranked choice.

Local authority members are not technically prohibited from sitting on a state-board-type body. However, Iceland's national association of local authorities has similar powers to the state board.

Italy

Population: 60.3 million

Local government in Italy is divided between four types of bodies. These types are regions, cities, towns, and provinces. There are 20 regions throughout Italy with each region having its own regional council. There are also over 8,000 communes. Each commune has a mayor and each communal council consists of 15 to 80 members depending on the size of the place they are representing.

Communal local government consists of a communal council that is directly elected, a communal committee that acts as an executive body, and a mayor. Mayors are also directly elected.

Powers and responsibilities of local government include levying taxes, providing police services (although the national police supersede local police), health services, transportation, sanitation and waste disposal, and street lighting.

While Italy does not have a direct equivalent to the state boards, particular members of local government are allowed and sometimes encouraged to participate in central government.

Latvia

Population: 1.8 million

Following legislative changes in 2020, the number of local government bodies in Latvia was reduced from 119 to 43. The Republic of Latvia now is divided into ten City Councils and 33 Municipal Councils.

There are 758 councillors in local governments in Latvia with the largest number (60) on Riga City Council. The number of councillors to be elected to the City and Municipal Councils are determined according to the number of inhabitants registered in the Population Register in the administrative territory of the respective municipality on the day the elections are announced. Municipality Councils: up to 30 000 inhabitants - 15 councillors; between 30 001 and 60 000 inhabitants - 19 councillors; more than 60 000 inhabitants - 23 councillors. City Councils: up to 50 000 inhabitants - 13 councillors; more than 50 000 inhabitants - 15 councillors.

Local government has extensive powers concerning activities that take place within the Council area. A councillor may combine his or her office with another office in the municipality, or the State, or with another employer, unless the law provides for restrictions on combining offices.

Lithuania

Population: 2.6 million

The counties of Lithuania are divided into 60 municipalities. The number of council members in each municipality depends on its size.

There are 51 municipal council members in municipalities with more than 500,000 inhabitants; 41 members of the municipal council in municipalities with a population of 250,000 to 500,000; 31 – 100000 to 250000; 27 – 50000 to 100000; 25 – 20000 to 50000; 21 – 10000 to 20000, and 15 – in municipalities with a population up to 5000.

Local government in Lithuania implements and enforces national and local laws. Functions not outlined under jurisdiction of the state fall under local government jurisdiction. Some of the functions of local government include drawing-up and approval of the municipal budget, healthcare, education, management of land and property, meal services, housing services, infrastructure and planning, protection of municipalities, and other local services (outlined in Chapter 2 Article 6 of Law on Local Self-Government).

Members of municipal councils are elected for four years. The permanent residents (voters) of this municipality have the right to elect the members of the municipal council. The term of office of the mayor is four years.

The Law on Elections to Municipal Councils was supplemented with Article 88-1 and established in Paragraph 1 of this Article that the duties of a member of the council are incompatible with the duties of the President of the Republic, a member of the Seimas (parliament), a member of the Government or a state official, as well as with the duties of the county governor or deputy county governor, with the duties of a municipal civil servant of the municipal ombudsman or municipal ombudsman, with the duties of the director of the municipal administration and his or her deputy or civil servant of the municipal administration.

Luxembourg

Population: 632,275

Local government in Luxembourg is relatively small, given the size of the country. Luxembourg's local government is centered around communes (also called municipalities). There are currently 106 municipalities in Luxembourg, which are represented by various councils. The population of the municipalities ranges from 300 to 100,000 people. Luxembourg is attempting to merge many municipalities in a effort to optimise local government.

Councillors are elected directly every six years. The mayor and aldermen, however, are appointed by the elected members of the council. The mayor is ceremonially appointed by the Grand Duke of Luxembourg; the aldermen are ceremonially appointed by the Home Secretary.

Generally, municipalities are responsible for water supply, municipal roads and buildings, sanitation and sewage, fire services, safety, and in some cases their own budget.

There are generally no restrictions on councillors serving in other functions.

Malta

Population: 525,285

Malta is a unicameral parliamentary republic with two tiers of government: national and local, including six regional councils. Local Government is enshrined in Malta's Constitution and is governed by the Local Government Act (Chapter 363, Laws of Malta). Legal responsibility for local government rests with the Minister responsible for local government.

Local elections, like in Ireland, are held every five years in conjunction with the European elections (Malta also uses the PRSTV system of voting).

There are 68 Local Councils and a total of 464 local Councillors.

Local government is enshrined in Malta's constitution. Article 115A of the Constitution states that 'The State shall adopt a system of local government whereby the territory of Malta shall be divided into such number of localities as may by law be from time to time determined, each local authority to be administered by a local council elected by the residents of the locality and established and operating in terms of such laws as may from time to time be in force.'

Mayors are directly elected by the people. The candidate obtaining

the majority of votes from the party obtaining the majority is elected as a Mayor.

There are no restrictions for a Local Councillor to sit on a state board.

Netherlands

Population: 17.7 million

There are three levels of government in the Netherlands: the central government, the provinces and the municipalities.

The country is divided into twelve provinces. The Provincial Councils are elected every four years by direct elections. The number of seats that can be distributed is between 39 and 55, based on the number of inhabitants of the province. The provinces, in turn, are subdivided into municipalities: as of 2022, the Netherlands has 344 municipalities. The Municipal Council is the highest administrative body in the municipality. The councillors take all decisions that are important to the municipality. They are elected by the inhabitants of the municipality for a period of four years. The number of councillors depends on the number of residents. Municipalities with the smallest population class have nine councillors. Municipalities with the largest population class have 45 councillors. In total there are approximately 8,600 councillors active in the Netherlands.

A municipality implements national policy and its own policy. The municipality can decide autonomously on many matters. The municipality issues passports, gives benefits to those who cannot support themselves, is responsible for schools, makes zoning plans, supervises housing, builds and maintains streets and roads, collects household waste and funds swimming pools and libraries. Since 2015, as a result of a policy of decentralisation, the municipalities have also taken over tasks from the central government such as youth care and youthwork and care for the chronically ill and the elderly.

In the Netherlands, the Crown (the King and the responsible Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations) appoints the mayor. The Crown generally follows the recommendation of the municipal

council. Therefore, the mayor is de facto elected (proposed) by the council, after a careful selection procedure in which the King and Commissioner also plays an important role. A mayor is appointed for a period of six years. A mayor can be reappointed for a second six-year term.

Article 13 of the Local Government Act regulates which functions are incompatible with membership of the council. For example, a municipal councillor may not also be a minister, state secretary, member of the Council of State, member of the Netherlands Court of Audit, National ombudsman or commissioner of the King. The membership of the municipal council can go together with the membership of Provincial States and of Parliament (the Senate or House of Representatives).

New Zealand

Population: 4.9 million

Local government in New Zealand is unique in that it is a unitary state in which all aspects of local government are derived from the central government. There are currently around 78 local authorities in New Zealand. Local authorities are split into two categories: territorial authorities and regional councils. Health boards are another legislative body on the local level which are solely responsible for health services and challenges. Members of health boards are elected, although they can be replaced by the Minister of Health of New Zealand. There are 11 regional government councils and 67 territorial authorities. 13 of these territorial authorities are unitary and are considered cities.

The New Zealand Parliament is charged with delegating responsibilities it sees fit to the local governments. This means that local government in New Zealand has limited power. Responsibilities of local government include providing social, economic, cultural, and environmental well-being to its citizens.

The elected councils sometimes employ a chief executive to execute the acts of the legislative bodies. However, in some instances mayors

and councillors are directly elected by the people in their constituency. In New Zealand, councils are allowed to choose how they are to be elected.

New Zealand local legislators may be allowed to be on certain boards based on special circumstances.

Norway

Population: 5.5 million

Norway has two forms of local government: municipalities and county authorities. There are 428 municipalities within 19 county authorities throughout Norway. Oslo is the only municipality with county authority functions. Each county has a central government representative called the County Governor. Depending on the size of the municipality, municipal councils may have anywhere from 11 to 43 members. County councils have a very similar system.

County and Municipal councillors are elected every four years. Both the municipal and county councils select their chair (who acts as the mayor).

The county authority's duties include upper secondary school, regional development, county roads and public transport, regional planning, business development, culture (museums, libraries, sports), cultural heritage and environmental issues.

The local municipality's duties include primary and lower secondary school nurseries and kindergartens, primary healthcare, care for the elderly and disabled, social services, local planning, agricultural issues, environmental issues, local roads, harbours, water supply, sanitation and sewers, and culture and business development.

County Governors are unable to be elected as local councillors. Executives, auditors, county secretaries, and government administrators are also barred from being elected to municipal and county councils.

Poland

Population: 37.8 million

Since reforms introduced in 1999, there are three levels of local and regional government in Poland. The biggest and first level are voivodships that are divided into powiats and powiats into gminas.

There are 16 Voivodships, 380 Powiats, and 2478 Gminas.

There are 46,797 councillors on all levels. There are 39,549 serving on the Gminas, 6,278 in the Powiats and 561 in the Voivodships. There are also 409 councillors elected in the districts of the capital city, Warsaw.

The Voivodship is effectively a regional authority that oversees many aspects of regional policy, including management of European Union funding.

Powiats have relatively limited powers, since many local and regional matters are dealt with either at Gmina or Voivodship level. Some of the main areas in which the Powiat authorities have decision-making powers and competences include: education at high-school level (primary and middle schools are run by the gminas), healthcare (at county level), public transport, maintenance of certain designated roads, land surveying, issuing of work permits to foreigners, and vehicle registration.

Mayors or City Presidents (depending on the city size and powers) are directly elected during the local government elections, for 5 years with a maximum of two terms.

Generally local councillors are able to sit on state boards, provided that they have the necessary qualifications.

Portugal

Population: 10.1 million

In Portugal, local authorities are independent from the central government and office holders are elected directly by that region's citizens.

Local government has a broad range of powers, including (but not restricted to) promoting health, education, housing within the community, facilitating access to energy and transport, promoting culture and protecting consumers, civil protection, and preserving and enhancing the environment.

Mayors are elected directly and the duration of each term is four years.

Romania

Population: 19 million

Romania has a quite centralised system of government. There are 41 counties in Romania, 103 municipalities, 217 other cities, and 2,861 communes. There are also 12,957 villages, however these villages have no official local government administration. These territories are called administrative divisions.

There are mayors and councils in Romania, however they do not hold as much power as in some other European states. Mayors and councils are elected by the people of Romania by county. There is also a "prefect," chosen through a competitive selection process, who acts on behalf of national government at local level.

The powers of local government are almost solely executed by the prefect. The prefect can object to any laws passed by local government and challenge them in court. Should a prefect challenge a local law, that law will be suspended until the matter is resolved in court. Local government is solely responsible for specified local matters.

Slovakia

Population: 5.5 million

The fourth chapter of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (Articles 64 - 71) set out the responsibilities of local government and these are well protected. The State delegates the performance of tasks to local authorities under the conditions set out by the Constitution.

As a unitary state, Slovakia is composed of 2,930 local government structures: 138 city councils, 39 city district councils, 2,753 municipalities and 8 self-governing regions.

Executive power in municipalities is held by the mayor who is elected directly by the citizens. The municipalities administer their own finances.

The total number of councillors in the local municipalities number 20,646 and the total number of councillors for the regions is 416.

In the municipal elections, voters will receive two ballots, one for the election of the mayor, the other for the election of deputies (councillors).

Slovenia

Population: 2.1 million

The Slovenian Constitution, adopted in 1991, guarantees local self-government. The basic organisational unit of local self government is the municipality. There are 212 municipalities in Slovenia, of which 11 are urban municipalities.

The municipal council is the highest decision-making body on all matters concerning the rights and duties of the municipality. It has from 7 to 45 members (45 in Ljubljana) depending on the size of the municipality. In cases where the municipal council has up to 11 members, they are elected under a majority voting system, whereas if it has 12 members and more, they are elected under a proportional voting system. Members of a municipal council are elected for a four-

year term of office and perform their duties on a non-professional basis.

In the ethnically mixed areas populated by the Italian or Hungarian national communities, each community has at least one representative in the municipal council. In twenty municipalities, the Roma also has at least one representative in the municipal council. Foreign nationals can also be elected into municipal councils.

The responsibilities devolved to municipalities under the Local Self-Government Act are the following: Firefighting, and assistance and rescue services to help with natural disasters; Education (pre-school, primary, adult); Childminding facilities; Family and youth assistance; Rest homes; Social welfare; Housing; Urban planning; Spatial planning; Water, energy and sewage; Household refuse; Cemeteries; Environmental protection; Culture (libraries); Sport and leisure; Promotion of agriculture; Economic development of the municipality; Promotion of tourism; Management of municipal property; Construction and maintenance of local public roads; Organisation of municipal warden services.

The mayor is elected by the people under a majority voting system for a four-year term of office to represent the municipality and act on its behalf. The mayor represents the municipal council, convenes and chairs the municipal council meetings but does not have the right to vote in these meetings. As mayor they have the exclusive competence to propose that the municipal council adopt the municipal budget, the annual financial statement of the budget and the act on the organisation of the municipal administration. The mayor is a municipal official and may perform their office on a professional or a non professional basis. They have at least one vice-mayor who is appointed from among the members of the municipal council.

A professional mayor may not be a member or perform management, control or representation activities in companies, economic interest associations, cooperatives, public institutes, funds, agencies and other entities under public or private law, except in associations and

political parties. There are some restrictions on non-professional mayors with regard to roles in public authorities or providers.

Spain

Population: 46.8 million

In Spain, local government has extensive powers. The two basic forms of local government areas are municipalities and provinces. Provincial governments make up the autonomous communities that govern themselves. There are 8,112 municipalities and 50 provinces throughout Spain.

Castile and Leon has the most municipalities of any autonomous community, with 2248, while Murcia has the least, with 45. Madrid is the largest municipality with over three million residents and Illan de Vacas is the smallest with only six residents. Most municipalities have fewer than 5,000 residents.

The functions of municipalities differ depending on the size of the municipality. All municipalities are responsible for public lighting, planning, cemeteries, sanitation, sewers, public cleaning, drinking water, roads, and food services. Municipalities with more than 5,000 people are responsible for public parks, libraries, and markets. Municipalities with more than 20,000 people are responsible for civil defence, sports, social work, and fire safety. Those with more than 50,000 people must provide public transport for their residents.

Local elections are held every four years in Spain. There are roughly 66,000 local representatives (the equivalent of councillors) leading to high levels of representation in Spanish local government. Spanish and EU citizens are allowed to vote in local elections (citizens of some countries such as Norway are allowed to vote as well). Mayors are most often elected indirectly (chosen by the municipal councils) with a few exceptions. Mayors are only directly elected in very small municipalities.

Council members are not restricted from participating in other political positions.

Sweden

Population: 10.4 million

Sweden has 290 municipalities that are responsible for public services.

Municipal and city councils are elected by the people every four years. Mayors are then selected by the council.

Sweden gives its local governments a significant degree of autonomy and allows for local government to levy taxes as well. Government in Sweden is quite decentralised and allows councils to have more decision-making power than most.

Municipalities are charged with responsibilities including sanitation, childcare, education, social care, elderly services, health services, environmental services, emergency services, and urban planning.

Sweden is also divided up into 21 counties, and members of county councils are sometimes also able to operate at local levels.

Switzerland

Population: 8.8 million

Switzerland is divided into 26 local regions called cantons. These cantons have their own local government structures, in which 5 to 7 members sit on a local council. Each councillor usually runs a specific department in their canton. The canton governments are responsible for budgeting, activities, planning, and executing federal and cantonal laws.

Municipalities generally have a council with a president (mayor) selected by the council who acts as the executive. However, councils may be replaced by town meetings in smaller communes. Switzerland

has a semi-direct democracy because every citizen is allowed to vote in referenda on laws.

In Switzerland there are also 2,172 communes. The communal authorities act as a smaller local government under the cantonal government. The responsibilities of the communes include local planning, education, social welfare, and fire service. Cities will have their own parliaments and referendums. There are also communal taxes.

United Kingdom

Population: 67.3 million

Local government in the United Kingdom differs based on each UK constituent country.

England

Population: 56.5 million

Local government in English consists of 333 local authorities, with four different types of local authorities: London borough councils, county and district councils, metropolitan councils, and unitary authorities. English local authorities are divided up into wards represented by councillors. There are 7,026 wards throughout England, with roughly 20,000 councillors.

Functions of local government include maintaining roadways, planning, and levying taxes. Some local authorities may join together to provide other necessary functions such as fire services, sanitation, and public transport.

Only 16 local authorities in England have directly elected mayors. All other local authorities have either appointed executives or the council acts as the executive.

Councillors are allowed to sit on a Care Board in England however they are prevented from being the local authority representative on that board. Care Boards have functions related to healthcare.

Wales

Population: 3.3 million

Local government in Wales is divided between 22 principal areas or counties. Each principal area is represented by a council made up in total of 1,254 councillors.

Functions of Welsh local government include housing, education, social services, roadway maintenance, sanitation, environmental protection, planning, and economic development.

Welsh mayors are largely ceremonial and are selected by the area councils. However, should the council wish for a popular election of a mayor, they are allowed to hold a mayoral election.

Councillors are unable to sit on state boards, and local authority employees are unable to become a councillor.

Scotland

Population: 5.5 million

Local government in Scotland consists of 32 local authorities called Scottish Councils. There are 1,227 councillors in Scotland. Wards within local authorities are typically represented by 3 to 4 councillors.

The functions of Scottish Councils include education, social care, libraries, and planning.

Mayors in Scotland are generally called Provosts or Conveners and have a ceremonial role only.

Councillors are allowed to sit on state boards so long as they do not conflict with their role as councillor.

Northern Ireland

Population: 1.9 million

Local government in Northern Ireland comprises 11 local government districts in Northern Ireland consisting of 462 councillors.

The functions of local government in the North are more limited than those in England, Scotland or Wales. Functions include sanitation, planning, economic development, and community services.

Mayors in Northern Ireland are the council chair selected by the rest of the council.

United States

Population: 334 million

Each state divides power not outlined in the federal constitution between itself and local governments. In the United States there are two forms of local government (counties and municipalities). However, in some places the county has no government or a structure with minimal power.

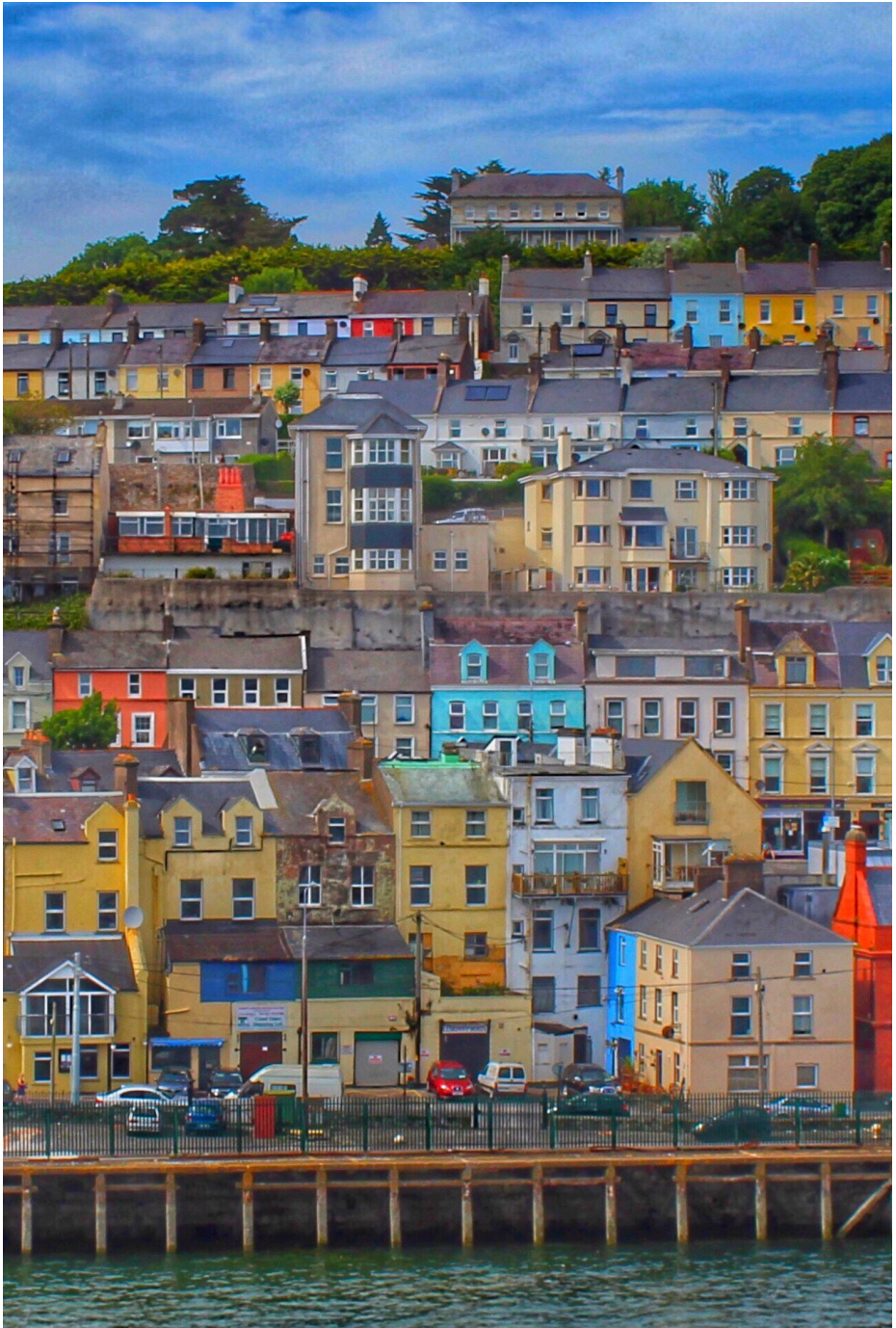
Cities and towns (municipalities) are responsible for “parks and recreation services, police and fire departments, housing services, emergency medical services, municipal courts, transportation services (including public transportation), and public works (streets, sewers, snow removal, signage, and so forth).” Schools are generally a responsibility of local government, and many cities and towns have separate councils with the sole purpose of tackling challenges facing the school district.

While the state government has control over these services as well, it is generally left up to the towns. However, the local government’s power is derived from the state and, most importantly, the people. Mayors, councils, and other bodies are directly elected by the people in each municipality/county. In rare instances mayors or leaders of certain bodies may be selected by a council or body, or they may be

appointed. Upon the vacancy of an office this will usually be the case as well (at least until an election can be held).

There are currently about 89,000 local government structures throughout the United States. The number of local bodies in each state varies, with Illinois having almost 7,000 and Hawaii only having 21. The number of local legislators is 500,396 which makes up about 96% of all legislators in the United States. These legislators make major decisions on the services of which they are responsible.

Different states have different rules regarding “dual office holding.” In some states local and state legislators are allowed to hold multiple offices on the local level. Some states also allow for local legislators to take part in state politics. However, state legislators are not usually allowed to hold local office, as these are viewed as “incompatible offices.” It does appear that in some states, federal legislators may be allowed to hold local office, however, this is very rarely seen.



Local Government Representation




This chart does not allow for exact comparisons, as some countries have local elected officials at different levels. The range of powers and responsibilities vary extensively. However, it does allow for a comparison of the total number of elected local representatives in each country.

Country	Municipalities	Local Councillors	Population	People per councillor
Ireland	31	949	5,123,536	5,399
Australia	547	4,923	26,101,810	5,302
New Zealand	78	936	4,901,913	5,237
Portugal	308	2,064	10,136,251	4,911
Scotland	32	1,227	5,463,300	4,453
Northern Ireland	11	462	1,903,100	4,119
Greece	332	2,988	10,319,535	3,454
Switzerland	2,172	2,548	8,783,205	3,447
United Kingdom	398	22,943	67,326,569	2,934
England	333	20,000	56,489,800	2,824
Latvia	43	664	1,843,756	2,777
Wales	22	1,254	3,267,501	2,606
United States	19,522	135,531	334,951,103	2,471
Denmark	98	2,432	5,833,692	2,399
Belgium	581	5,370	11,692,086	2,177

Bulgaria	265	3,160	6,841,966	2,165
Netherlands	344	8,600	17,717,600	2,060
Lithuania	60	1,502	2,645,100	1,761
Malta	68	464	525,285	1,132
Poland	2,478	39,549	37,762,312	955
Germany	2,627	91,945	84,328,144	917
Iceland	64	416	366,425	881
Norway	428	6,420	5,507,594	858
Estonia	79	1,717	1,328,352	774
Canada	3,573	53,630	38,415,364	716
Spain	8,112	66,000	46,791,659	709
Finland	310	8,859	5,558,227	627
Hungary	3,155	16,787	9,610,402	573
Sweden	290	19,140	10,416,585	544
Italy	8,000	120,000	60,280,780	502
Romania	2,861	40,067	18,976,782	474
Luxembourg	106	1,484	632,275	426
Slovenia	212	5,512	2,079,520	377
Cyprus	355	3,550	1,225,215	345
Croatia	555	14,430	4,053,795	281
Slovakia	2,927	20,646	5,465,021	265
France	36,500	255,500	65,567,292	257
Czechia	6,377	63,770	10,749,390	169
Austria	2,098	60,741	9,111,075	150



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