

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN

CYPRUS



1 INTRODUCTION

Cyprus is an island in the eastern Mediterranean, with a total population of about 854,300 (of whom 788,457 live in the part of the island under control of the government) and a land area of 9,251 sq km.

Since 1974, following the Turkish military intervention, almost 37% of the republic's territory is under Turkish occupation.

This profile deals with local government only in the part of the island under the control of the internationally recognised government of the Republic of Cyprus.

The Republic of Cyprus is a unitary state with a president as head of state and head of government. The president is directly elected for a five-year term of office. A candidate must gain an absolute majority to be elected.

The legislative power of the republic is exercised by the House of Representatives. Following a constitutional amendment in 1985, the house has 80 seats – 56 for Greek Cypriot and 24 for Turkish Cypriot deputies – with deputies elected by universal suffrage of

adults over the age of 18. Direct and secret ballots are held on the same day for both communities. However, since 1964 Turkish Cypriot members have not attended the house, and no elections have been held among the Turkish Cypriot community in accordance with the republic's constitution. Despite this anomaly, the House has kept vacant the seats allocated to the Turkish Cypriot community. These seats remain at the disposal of Turkish Cypriot deputies should they be elected according to the constitutional provisions.

The president appoints an executive council of ministers. The council is constituted to have 11 members. The president may appoint people from outside the House of Representatives to these ministerial posts.

Cyprus is divided into six districts for administrative purposes, each with a district office. It has a comprehensive system of local government comprising municipalities (urban areas) and communities (rural areas).

Local government contribution to GDP was 0.93% for 2005.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF CYPRUS

2.1 Position of local government in the state

The current trend is for decentralisation of powers and functions from central to local government.

Cyprus became a full member of the EU in May 2004.

In the most recent parliamentary elections in May 2006: the Communist Party (AKEL) received 31.13% of the vote (18 seats); the Democratic Rally got 30.34% (18 seats); the centre-right DIKO party received 17.92% of vote (11 seats); the social democratic EDEK party received 8.91% (5 seats); Evropaiko Komma party got 5.75 (3 seats) and Kinma Demokrats received 1.56% (1 seat). Voting is compulsory in both national and local government elections.

The most recent presidential elections took place in February 2003. The next elections are due to take place in 2008.

Cyprus is divided into six administrative districts: Ammochostos; Keryneia; Larnaka; Lemesos; Lefkosia; and Pafos. Keryneia, all but a small part of Ammochostos and parts of Lefkosia and Larnaka are in the Turkish occupied area. Each district has a district office, a government office run by a district officer who is a senior civil servant. The district officer coordinates government activities in the area and is accountable to the Minister of the Interior.

The Minister of the Interior is responsible for local government.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

The constitution is silent on local government.

However, the Council of Ministers signed the European Charter of Local Self-government in October 1986 and the House of Representatives ratified it in 1988.

3.2 Main legislative texts

There are two main pieces of legislation that deal with local government:

- The 1985 Municipalities Law; a comprehensive law on local government which replaced all earlier legislation

- The 1999 Communities Law; this reformed the status and roles of the former improvement boards and village authorities.

There have been 35 amendments updating the 1985 Municipalities Law and five amendments updating the 1999 Communities Law.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

Cyprus has two types of authority:

- Municipalities: urban authorities which include major towns and tourist areas
- Communities: rural authorities that cover around 85% of the total area.

Municipalities have more powers and responsibilities and greater autonomy than communities.

There are currently thirty-three municipalities; nine of these, which were within the Turkish region, have been relocated though they still maintain their legal status. Refugees can vote in two places – in the municipalities in which they are temporarily resident and in the municipalities of their origin.

Municipalities can also be created following a plebiscite in an area or a group of villages with a population of more than 5,000. Similarly a municipality may be abolished if the population falls below 4,000 over three consecutive years.

There are 580 communities – 390 in the area controlled by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and 190 in the occupied area.

4.2 Distribution of local governments and population

The average population of the municipalities is 19,171 – the largest municipality is Lemesos with a population of 94,250 and the smallest is Pano Lefkara with a population of 921.¹

The largest community is Geri, which has a population of 6,443. There are 19 communities with a population of 10 or fewer, including the four smallest, each of which has a population of just 2. There are 28 communities with no population.

Over two-thirds of the population (70%) lives in urban areas.²

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

5.1 Structure of municipalities

Councillors stand for election either as members of a coalition or as independent candidates. Voters can express a preference for particular candidates, but for not more than one in four councillors being elected.

Table 1. Distribution of population in Cyprus

Type of authority	Number	Population of largest	Population of smallest	Average population
Municipalities	33	94,250	921	19,171
Communities	580	6,443	2	588

The number of councillors in each council varies according to the number of voters in the electoral area, the smallest being 8 and the largest 26.

Leaders of municipalities are called mayors; they are directly elected by the first-past-the-post system. Elections are held at the same time as the council elections. Mayors and councillors serve for a five-year term. A deputy mayor is elected by secret ballot of all the councillors at the first meeting of the council.

Candidates must be at least 25 years old to be eligible to stand for election as mayor or as a councillor. As with national elections, voting is compulsory.

Municipalities must by law have a management committee.³ This committee prepares the budget, annual report and annual accounts, and assists and advises the mayor. The council appoints the members of the management committee, comprising not less than one-third and not more than a half of the membership of the council, with the mayor and deputy mayor being *ex officio* members.

Other committees can be set up at the discretion of the council. These have a consultative rather than an executive role.⁴ The members are generally councillors though co-option of other people is allowed. Committees are expected to reflect proportionally the different parties, coalitions and independents on the council. Chairpeople must be members of the management committee.

Mayors are given an annual stipend that is determined by the council and approved by the Council of Ministers.

Approximately one-fifth of councillors are women. Two Mayors are women.

5.2 Communities

Leaders of communities are called presidents. Presidents and other council members are elected every five years.

There are 13 women presidents in the 358 community councils in the government-controlled area.

5.3 Local government staffing

Municipalities recruit staff directly under conditions specified in their approved regulations.

Central government provides administrative and technical assistance to most communities through the appropriate district office.

5.4 Independent scrutiny

Scrutiny is provided by the Auditor General of the Republic.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

6.1 Municipalities

The main responsibilities of municipalities are:

- Town planning
- Water supply
- Sewers and drainage systems
- Street maintenance
- Public health protection
- Cemeteries
- Resting schemes and institutions
- Slaughterhouses
- Theatre regulation and control.

Larnaka, Lemesos, Lefkosia and Paphos have enhanced roles in town planning delegated by the Minister of the Interior under powers from the 1972 Town Planning Law.

Sewerage boards are separate and independent bodies with their own staff. The members of the municipal councils form the boards, which are chaired by the mayor. The boards control the construction, supply, maintenance and operation of sewerage systems.⁵

According to the Municipalities Law, municipalities have discretionary powers for municipal markets and cultural and leisure facilities and the power to issue permits for the construction and alteration of buildings.

Moreover, under the Foreshore Protection Law, coastal authorities can issue licences for beach sports activities and facilities.

6.2 Communities

Communities are responsible for:

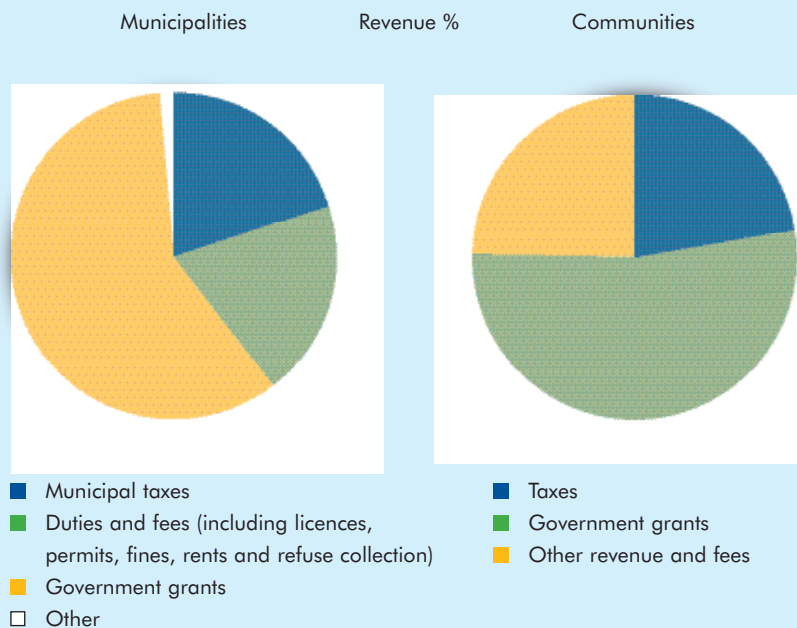
- Public health
- Water supply
- Sewers and drainage systems
- Cleanliness
- Street maintenance
- Cemeteries
- Resting schemes and institutions
- Slaughterhouses
- Theatre regulation and control.

7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

The aggregate revenue of local government

Figure 1. The financial structure of local government revenue in Cyprus



an annual state grant. Projects are approved by the government on a project-by-project basis with financial assistance of between 70–100% of the total cost.

7.3 Expenditure

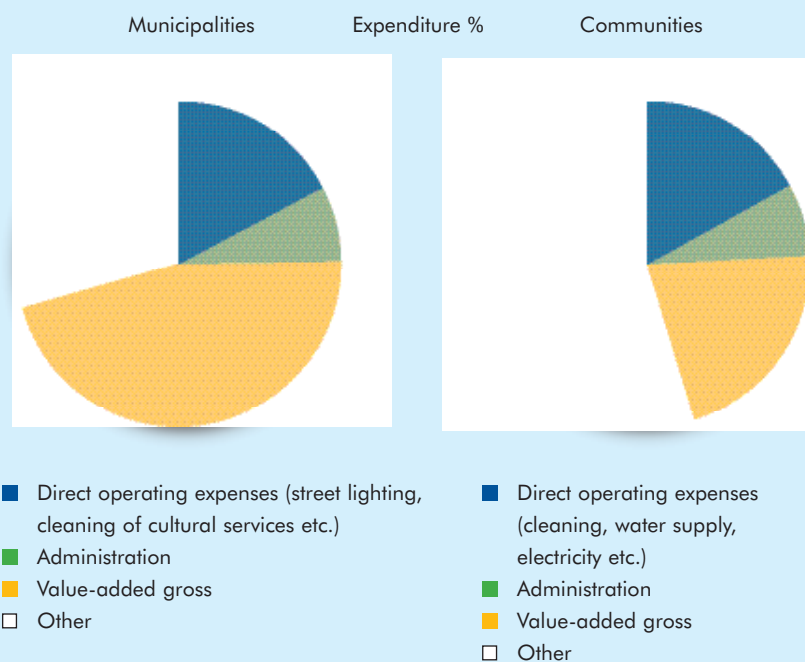
The aggregate expenditure of local government was C£174.2m (US\$374m) in 2003. Municipalities spent their money on:

- 1. Direct operating expenses – street lighting, cleaning, cultural services etc. 17.3%
- 2. Administration 7.5%
- 3. Value-added gross 45.9%
- 4. Other 29.3%

Communities spent their money on:

- 1. Direct operating expenses – cleaning, water supply, electricity etc. 17.1%
- 2. Administration 7.3%
- 3. Value-added gross 21%
- 4. Other 54.6%

Figure 2. The financial structure of local government expenditure in Cyprus



8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM) was set up in 1981. Membership is voluntary. All 33 municipalities are members. The UCM promotes the development of local government autonomy and represents local government to central government and other national and international bodies.

The Cyprus Union of Communities (CUC) was set up in 1991 as the Pancyprian Federation of Community Unions, changing its name in 1996. It promotes members' interests and greater self-sufficiency for communities, facilitates discussion, represents the views of its members to central government and other bodies, and collects data and information.

The Union of Cyprus Municipalities has strong links with a number of European and international local government bodies. It is a member of CEMR, UCLG, CLGF and is represented on the Council of Europe's CLRAE.

in 2005 was C£166.8m (US\$358.1m).

Municipalities obtain their revenue from:

- 1. Municipal taxes 20.1%
- 2. Duties and fees, including licences, permits, fines, rents and refuse collection 19.6%
- 3. Government grants 59.12%
- 4. Other 1.18%

Communities derive their revenue from:

- 1. Taxes 22.5%
- 2. Government grants 52.9%
- 3. Other revenue and fees 24.6%

7.2 Revenue-sharing

Following discussions with the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, the government has agreed to link the annual government fund given to municipalities to a set percentage of state revenues from direct and indirect taxes. This is regarded as a very positive step towards financial independence for the municipalities.

In addition to the annual state revenue grant, the government contributes special grants for municipalities' development projects. Such grants vary according to the project and the financial situation of the council.

As from 2004 communities do not receive

9 E-GOVERNMENT

The Republic of Cyprus has recently developed a national e-government strategy, which is currently being implemented. The links between central and local government are still under consideration.

The government is encouraging local government to develop its own e-government strategy. At present both the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (www.ucm.org.cy) and the Union of Cyprus Communities (www.ekk.org.cy) have their own websites.

The official government website provides

general information on Cyprus, and information on ministries and services, direct to the public. The website provides for citizen feedback and several frequently requested application forms such as those regarding house and land acquisition or planning permission requests can be downloaded directly.

In 2005 there were an estimated 192,784 internet users.⁶



10 ENVISAGED REFORMS

Reforms envisaged to be implemented over the next few years include:

- Granting a greater amount to the state budget for local government, thus giving councils greater financial stability and independence
- Transferring more powers and responsibilities from central to local government
- Encouraging neighbouring authorities to look at the possibility of joint provision of services to reduce costs.

11 SUMMARY

Local government in Cyprus is well established and gaining greater independence as it develops a firmer financial footing.

However, the political situation in terms of the division of the island because of the presence of Turkish troops is a barrier to the further enhancement and strengthening of democratic structures.

References

- 1 Cyprus Population Census, 2001
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Municipalities Law 1985, Articles 44, 47
- 4 Ibid., Article 45
- 5 Sewage Systems Law 1, 1971
- 6 CIA World Factbook 2007.

Service	Delivering authority			Remarks
	Central	Municipalities	Communities	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION				
Police	●			Local authorities may appoint traffic police (within their boundaries)
Fire protection	●			
Civil protection	●			
Criminal justice	●			
Civil justice	●			
Civil status register	●			
Statistical office	●			
Electoral register	●			
EDUCATION				
Pre-school	●			
Primary	●			
Secondary	●			
Vocational and technical	●			
Higher education	●			
Adult education	●			
Other	●			
SOCIAL WELFARE				
Kindergarten and nursery	●	●	●	Local authorities may establish and run nursing homes
Family welfare services	●			
Welfare homes	●	●	●	
Social security	●			
PUBLIC HEALTH				
Primary care				
Hospitals	●			
Health protection	●	●	●	
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING				
Housing	●			
Town planning	●	●	●	
Regional planning	●			
TRANSPORT				
Roads	●	●	●	
Transport	●	●		
Urban roads	●			
Urban rail				
Ports	●			
Airports	●			
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION				
Water and sanitation	●	●	●	
Refuse collection and disposal		●	●	
Cemeteries and crematoria		●	●	
slaughterhouses		●	●	
Environmental protection		●	●	
Consumer protection	●			
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS				
Theatre and concerts	●	●	●	
Museums and libraries	●	●	●	
Parks and open spaces	●	●	●	
Sports and leisure	●	●	●	
Religious facilities		●	●	
UTILITIES				
Gas services	●			
District heating	●			
Water supply	●	●	●	
Electricity	●			
ECONOMIC				
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	●			
Economic promotion	●			
Trade and industry	●			
Tourism	●	●		

● = discretionary service by the local authority