



Activity Report 2006

Tuarascáil Gníomhaíocht 2006

IRO



The Irish Regions Office - Brussels
Oifig Réigiún na hÉireann

Irish Regions Office

Tá an áthas orainn Tuairisc Gníomhach d'Oifig Réigiúin na h-Éireann 2006 a chur ós bhúr gcomhair. Léiríonn an tuairisc roinnt éachtaí agus tugann sí forbhreathnú forleathan ar an réimse seirbhísí a sholáthraíonn an Oifig.

The establishment of the Irish Regions Office (IRO) in Brussels in 2000 was a very important development for the Irish members to the Committee of the Regions and for the Regional Authorities, Regional Assemblies and local authorities. It marked an increased engagement of Irish sub-national authorities in the EU decision-making process and demonstrated a commitment to greater involvement in EU policy formation and in maximising the benefits that Irish authorities could derive from Ireland's membership of the EU.

The momentous changes within the European Union provide the context for our activities as regional representatives. The enlargement of the European Union increasingly requires that local and regional authorities across all states work together. The evolving relationship that Ireland has within the Union requires that EU legislation has to be developed with a better understanding of its impact on the local and regional levels and the people that we represent. It is therefore in our own interest that we take advantage of all opportunities to familiarise ourselves with how this legislation is formulated and seek to influence it where possible.

The work of the IRO in Brussels has greatly facilitated us in meeting these challenges and has ensured that we now have a stronger and more effective presence in Europe. We encourage you to read this Activity Report to see the variety of work in which it has been involved over the last year.

We would like to thank our colleagues on the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions and the Association of Irish Regions for their assistance and support during 2006. We also thank the staff of the IRO for the high quality services and supports that the office provides. Finally, we thank the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for supporting the office and recognising its work.

Cllr. Seamus MURRAY
President
Irish Delegation,
Committee of the Regions

Cllr. Mary FREEHILL
Cathaoirleach
Association of Irish Regions

In delivering its services, as set out in the annual IRO Activity Programme, the Irish Regions Office (IRO) endeavours to provide an EU information and support service which is responsive to the needs of our partners, is reliable and has an added-value.

In 2006, the IRO consolidated the range of services which have been developed over the last few years. Our information services are widely used and now well established; the assistance that we provide to authorities trying to source EU supports to develop projects is increasingly relied upon; and our support service to the Irish members of the Committee of the Regions ensures that they play an active and informed role. This report provides an overview of some of these activities in 2006.

Looking ahead, 2007 sees the start of a new period for EU funded programmes and the IRO will play its role in raising awareness of the funding opportunities that will exist for local and regional authorities and also assist them in getting involved. In this regard, the IRO's dedicated EU Funding Tracker website will be operational to provide the latest information on relevant funding calls, we will provide an enhanced advisory service and will help organise a number of information seminars, both in Brussels and Ireland.

The on-going debate on the future of Europe and the recognition of the need to better communicate Europe to our citizens, naturally implies a role for local and regional authorities. The IRO will make a contribution, work with other partners and, where possible, help inform the debate in Ireland.

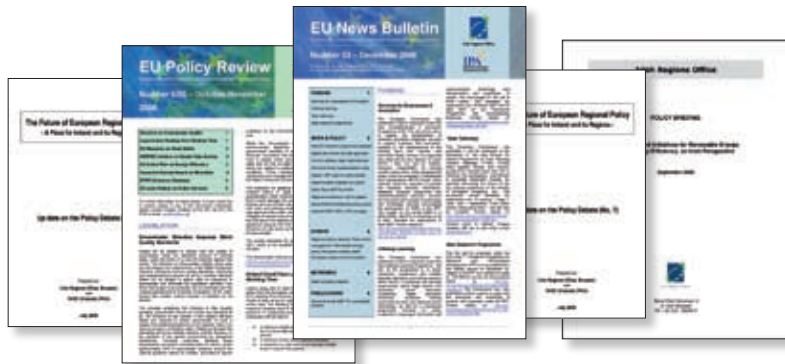
The IRO will also assist the Regional Authorities and Regional Assemblies in developing a new European Strategy, to determine policy and project priorities and give a clear focus for the activities of the Brussels office.

Finally, we count on the support of our colleagues at national, regional and local government in using the IRO's presence in Brussels, to highlight the continuing contribution of Irish local and regional authorities within the EU.

Robert COLLINS
Head of Office
Irish Regions Office

2. EU Information - An Established Service

In 2006, the IRO consolidated the information service it provides to regional authorities, regional assemblies, their local authorities and other relevant partners. This has been achieved through a range of information tools, which strive to provide regular, timely, concise and targeted information:



2.1 IRO PUBLICATIONS

The **EU News Bulletin** provides the latest information on (a) relevant policy developments; (b) funding calls and opportunities; (c) notice of European seminars and conferences; (d) key publications and studies; and (e) other items of news. While the IRO holds editorial responsibility for the EU News Bulletin, the co-operation arrangement with the IPA allows it to have an input in terms of content and circulation. In 2006, a total of 11 EU News Bulletins were produced and circulated, via e-mail, to all regional authorities, regional assemblies, local authorities and other relevant actors.

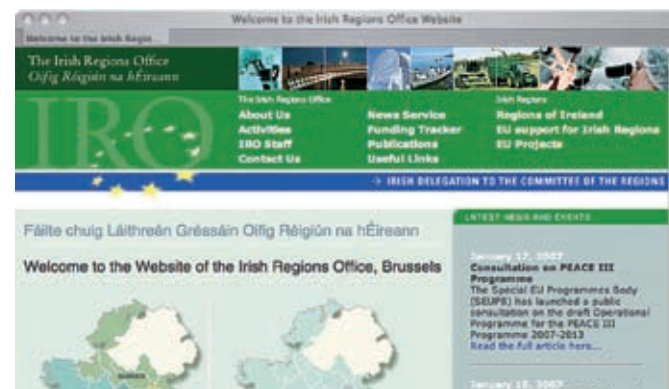
The **EU Policy Review** is a complementary publication to the EU News Bulletin and takes a more in-depth look at some priority policy developments. Editorial responsibility for the EU Policy Review is held by the IPA, with the IRO having an input on content, circulation and publication. A total of 6 EU Policy Reviews were produced in 2006.

Regular **Policy Briefings** provide more detailed information on key aspects of EU policy of particular relevance to the Irish regions and local authorities. During 2006 the IRO produced 2 Policy Briefings: (a) one in its series of Updates on EU Regional Policy (in conjunction with the NASC Office); and (b) one on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency. The IRO also updated its publication: A Guide to the EU Institutions.

In 2006, the IRO also agreed with the publishers of the bi-monthly **Council Review** journal to provide news items and information for its new regular Euro Focus section in the journal and also to contribute occasional articles to it and the Local Authority Journal.

2.2 THE IRO WEBSITE

The website is an important tool in the IRO's effort to provide relevant and readily accessible EU information. In particular, the site includes: (i) a **News Service**, which is up-dated weekly and gives users the latest information on policy, funding opportunities and other news items of interest to sub-national bodies in Ireland; (ii) a **Publications** section, which makes all IRO publications freely available to users; and (iii) an **EU Funding Tracker**, which provides information on EU funding calls and opportunities accessible directly from the European Commission and other intermediary bodies. The EU Funding Tracker service was launched on a pilot basis in 2006.



3. EU Project Work - Facilitating Greater Involvement

To facilitate the involvement of Irish regions and their local authorities in EU funded projects the IRO provided the following services:

3.1 IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES AND ASSIST PARTICIPATION IN EU PROJECTS

The IRO has facilitated a number of authorities in becoming involved in a range of EU funding proposals. This work involves attending meetings in Brussels on behalf of Irish partners, providing feedback on preparatory meetings, assisting in the bidding process and liaising with other regional offices and with the European Commission on proposals and evolving opportunities. The following are some of the activities undertaken in 2006:

Assisted *Fingal County Council* to find partners and access funding under the EU's Culture programme;

Assisted *Fingal County Council* in accessing EU funding for the establishment of a local energy agency;

Assisted *South Dublin County Council* in contributing to the consultation for the new European Development Fund (aspects relating to the role of local authorities);

Assisted the *South East Regional Authority* and the *West Regional Authority* in participating in the GASD project (maritime safety) under the EU Interreg IIIB programme;

Assisted *West Limerick Resources* in accessing information on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and other programmes to support industrial restructuring;

Assisted *Offaly County Council* in accessing information on the EU eTEN programme;

Assisted *Westmeath County Council* in accessing information on funding for a local energy agency;

Assisted *Carlow LEADER* to identify sources of EU funding for rural development initiatives;

Advised *Meath County Council* on sources of EU funding for economic development;

Assisted *Monaghan County Council* in accessing information on the Active European Citizenship programme;

Advised *Wicklow County Enterprise Board* on participation in EU projects for enterprise development;



Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Micheál Martin TD launches the DRIVE Project at the Investors Café in Brussels in October. The DRIVE project is lead by the South West Regional Authority and includes the South East Regional Authority and other regions from the UK and Germany as partners.



Mr. Eoghan Allen, South West Regional Authority and Mr. Robert Collins (right), Irish Regions Office at the Investors' Café in Brussels in October.

Advised *Carlow County Enterprise Board* on EU funding for the development of a community enterprise centre;

Assisted *Fingal County Council* in accessing information on the Active European Citizenship programme;

Advised *North Tipperary County Council* on EU funding for the development of the biofuels sector;

Assisted *North Tipperary County Enterprise Board* in accessing information on funding under the EU Programme to Support Equal Opportunities for Men and Women;

Assisted the *Border Regional Authority* in accessing information on EU funding for e-learning;

Assisted *Laois County Council* in accessing information on the EU Town Twinning Programme;

Provided *Clare County Council* with briefing material on regional State Aid policy;

Assisted *Buncrana Town Twinning Committee* in accessing information on the EU Town Twinning Programme;

Assisted *Donegal County Council* in finding partners for an Interreg IIC project.

The IRO also attended information events and disseminated information and follow-up reports on the following EU programmes: the EU LIFE Programme 2007-2013; the Intelligent Energy Europe Programme; the EU Framework Programme for Competitiveness & Innovation; the Town Twinning Programme; the EU Programme for Research & Civil Society; and the Structural Funds (JEREMIE initiative).

3.2 IDENTIFYING PROJECT PARTNERS

The IRO also facilitated Irish authorities in finding suitable partners in advance of proposals being submitted to the European Commission. This work draws on the extensive network of contacts established by the IRO in Brussels and with various regions across the EU. Some of the activities undertaken in 2006 include:

Assisted the *South East Regional Authority* and the *South West Regional Authority* in finding partners for a project funded under the Interreg IIC programme;

Assisted *Fingal County Council* in finding EU partners for a project under the Active European Citizenship programme;

Assisted *Monaghan County Council* in finding EU partners for a project under the Active European Citizenship programme;

Assisted the *Mid-West Regional Authority* in finding partners for EU funded tourism projects;

Assisted *Carlow VEC* in developing links with the Trento Region (Italy) to explore opportunities under the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme;

Assisted *Waterford Institute of Technology* to participate in a project bid under the EU's 6th Framework Programme for Research & Technological Development.

4. EU Networking - Promoting the Regions and Building Alliances

In enabling Irish regions and local authorities to be better involved in EU policy making and project implementation, the IRO works to develop networks and raise the profile of the role and activities of sub-national bodies in Ireland.

4.1 ENHANCING LINKS WITH THE EU INSTITUTIONS

The IRO has continued to consolidate its working relations with **Irish MEPs** and continues to keep all MEPs informed of the activities of the IRO and briefed on policy issues of strategic importance to the sub-national level in Ireland. The IRO is also fortunate to have the support of all Irish MEPs when arranging briefing meetings with visitor groups from Ireland.

The IRO has developed channels of communication with senior officials in key Directorates-General of the **European Commission**, in particular DG Regional Policy, DG Environment, DG Agriculture, DG Research and DG Competition. In 2006, the IRO also strengthened its links with the European Commission Representation in Dublin.

The IRO has worked to enhance its links with officials in the **Irish Permanent Representation to the EU** and to develop a good working relationship with officials on key policy areas, in order to better understand the Irish position in negotiations and highlight issues of concern to the IRO's stakeholders.

4.2 PROVIDING A REPRESENTATIONAL ROLE

During 2006, the IRO continued to play a representational role in Brussels. In this regard it:

1. hosted and met with a number of groups from other European regions and local authorities, including amongst others: Central Sweden, Finland, West Zealand (Denmark), West of Scotland, Iceland, and a delegation from the Scottish Parliament.
2. made presentations to a number of study groups on various topics, including amongst others: Monaghan VEC; Sinn Fein; Team Europe (European Commission).



Representing the Association of Irish Regions on the EUROTOOL project, Mr. Eamon O'Hara (centre) Irish Regions Office at a project development meeting in Greece in December.

3. participated in various seminars and workshops organised by the European Commission and participated in events organised by other regional offices in Brussels.
4. attended meetings on behalf of Irish regions, such as for the Association of Irish Regions at EUROTOOL project meetings; ADEP project meeting for the BMW Regional Assembly in Finland and the signing of the FEDARENE Declaration on Energy Efficiency for the Mid-West and South East Regional Authorities.
5. continued to be a member of the informal Brussels based EPRO network (Environmental Platform of Regional Offices) and maintained informal links with other European associations of local and regional government.
6. spoke at a number of conferences and seminars, including: the annual Irish Planning Institute (IPI) conference; a meeting of the South East Regional Authority and its EU Operational Committee, and a conference on an EU funded sustainable rural development project organised by Trinity College Dublin (TCD).



Mr. Hans Martens, Chief Executive of the European Policy Centre chairing the seminar on Developing Regional Research and Innovation Potential, hosted by the Irish Regions Office as part of the Open Days event in October.

4.3 FACILITATING INTER-REGIONAL CONTACTS

The location of the IRO in the heart of Brussels' EU quarter, where there are over 250 other regional offices, makes developing contacts and co-operation between Irish regions and regions in other Member States more straightforward. During 2006 the IRO:

- Facilitated a visit of a delegation from Central Sweden region to the **South West Region** in Ireland and a group from Budapest to the **Dublin Region**.
- Continued to assist the **Dublin Regional Authority** in developing stronger links with Merseyside and Belfast City Council, with a view to future co-operation on EU policy matters.
- Organised a study visit to Denmark and South Sweden for the **West Regional Authority** and assisted the **Association of City and County Councils** on a study visit to Scotland.

- Helped organise EU speakers for the **Association of Irish Regions'** annual conference;
- Assisted the **Mid-East Regional Authority** in organising a meeting of the European Silver Economy Network in Brussels

4.4 PARTICIPATION IN OPEN DAYS 2006

The IRO was selected as part of the 'Dynamic Regions for Sustainable Development' consortium, to participate in Open Days 2006 - European Week of Regions and Cities, which took place in October. Open Days provides an opportunity to profile Irish regions and their experiences with EU funds and programmes. The IRO organised and hosted one of the consortium's seminars on Developing Regional Research and Innovation Potential. Dr. Brian CALLANAN, Shannon Development made a presentation at this seminar, which was attended by over 120 people. Also, the IRO facilitated the South West Regional Authority in using the Investors' Café at Open Days to showcase the DRIVE Project, one of its EU funded projects.



Dr. Brian Callanan, Shannon Development speaking at the seminar on Developing Regional Research and Innovation Potential, hosted by the Irish Regions Office as part of the Open Days event in October.

5. Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions - Enhancing the Work and Profile of the Irish Members

These activities are undertaken as part of the Irish Delegation secretariat, which is based in the Dublin Regional Authority. There have been a number of highlights in 2006:

5.1 NEW DELEGATION NOMINATED

In January, the Government nominated the Irish members to the Committee of the Regions for 2006-2010. Mr. Dick ROCHE TD, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, met with the new Delegation, where he announced that Cllr. Seamus MURRAY would continue as President of the Delegation and also pledged on-going support to the members, including through the IRO.

5.2 INFLUENCING CoR OPINIONS

In February, the Delegation adopted its annual work programme, identifying policy priorities for 2006. Irish Delegation members were very active in influencing the content of certain CoR opinions during 2006. Three Irish members acted as rapporteur, with assistance from the IRO, on the following:

- A Framework Strategy for Multilingualism (Cllr. Seamus MURRAY);
- A Modern SME Policy for Growth and Employment (Cllr. Connie HANNIFFY);
- Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (Cllr. Maria CORRIGAN).

The IRO also assisted members in drafting and tabling a number of amendments for commission meetings and Plenary sessions. The IRO assisted members in building up alliances and gaining support for these amendments from other delegations.

At the Inaugural Plenary session in February, Cllr. Connie HANNIFFY was elected 1st Vice-President of the Economic and Social Affairs (ECOS) Commission and the IRO provides her with support in fulfilling this role.



Cllr. Connie Hanniffy with Mr. Gerry Finn, Director of the BMW Regional Assembly following the adoption of her opinion on a Modern SME Policy at the June Plenary session.



In December, Ambassador Bobby McDonagh (right) briefed members of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions on key EU policy issues

5.3 BRIEFING IRISH MEMBERS

The IRO, in conjunction with the Dublin based officer, provides Irish members with briefing documents, and speaking points when necessary, for all CoR Plenary sessions, Bureau meetings and commission meetings. During the year this resulted in approximately **50 briefings** being produced for the Irish members to the CoR.

Prompted by support from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the IRO liaised with the **Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU** in 2006 to help establish a more systematic briefing for members of the Delegation. Members met with Ambassador Bobby McDONAGH in December and with Deputy-Ambassador Ken THOMPSON in April to discuss priority policy issues and in June were briefed by Mr. Mark GRIFFIN, Environment Counsellor on EU environmental policy issues. The IRO also facilitated a number of other meetings for members with individual officials in the Permanent Representation.

5.4 ACTIVE IN CoR POLICY INITIATIVES

The IRO assisted the Delegation in participating in a number of CoR policy initiatives in 2006. The Delegation was a participant in the CoR's 2nd Test on Subsidiarity and also encouraged the involvement of Irish regions in the Committee's Lisbon Monitoring Network. The IRO also prepared the Delegation's submission on the White Paper on Communications, which was submitted in August.

5.5 SUPPLEMENTING THE WORK OF THE DUBLIN-BASED SECRETARIAT

As well as the services it provides to CoR members directly in Brussels, the IRO also supplements the support services provided to members by the Dublin office. The Dublin office assists Cllr. Seamus MURRAY, who represents the Irish Delegation at the National Forum on Europe. It also organises and prepares the seven delegation meetings held in Ireland each year and administers the working agreement between the Irish Delegation and the Association of Irish Regions on receiving input and comments on CoR draft opinions and providing policy and administrative support to the members.



Members of the newly appointed Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions met with Minister Dick Roche TD in January where he outlined the supports they would receive through the Dublin and Brussels offices.

The Irish Regions Office - Structure

The IRO acts as the Brussels contact point for the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions and provides briefing and support services to members, in conjunction with the Dublin Regional Authority, as the Irish Delegation Secretariat.

In supporting the regions, the IRO works through the Association of Irish Regions and has direct links with local and regional government structures in Ireland and their partners. In this role the IRO has agreed working arrangements with other relevant organisations.



The Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions

Ireland has nine members and nine alternate members on the Committee of the Regions. These members are nominated by the Government, on a recommendation of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. This nomination takes into account geographical and gender considerations and all members and alternate members must hold an electoral mandate. All Irish members are also automatically members of their Regional Authority.

Members

Cllr. Seamus MURRAY
(President of Irish Delegation)
Meath County Council
Mid-East Regional Authority
S&E Regional Assembly

Cllr. Maria CORRIGAN
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
Dublin Regional Authority

Cllr. Cathal CROWE
Clare County Council
Mid-West Regional Authority

Cllr. Michael FITZGERALD
South Tipperary County Council
South-East Regional Authority

Cllr. Constance HANNIFFY
Offaly County Council
Midlands Regional Authority
BMW Regional Assembly

Cllr. Denis LANDY
South Tipperary County Council
South East Regional Authority

Cllr. Declan McDONNELL
Galway City Council
West Regional Authority

Cllr. Patrick McGOWAN
Donegal County Council
Border Regional Authority

Cllr. Paul O'DONOGHUE
Kerry County Council
South-West Regional Authority
S&E Regional Assembly

Alternate Members

Cllr. Terry BRENNAN
Louth County Council
Border Regional Authority
BMW Regional Assembly

Cllr. Veronica CAWLEY
Sligo County Council
Border Regional Authority
BMW Regional Assembly

Cllr. Peter COYLE
Fingal County Council

Cllr. Pat DORAN
Wicklow County Council

Cllr. Michelle MULHERIN
Mayo County Council

Cllr. John PENDER
Carlow County Council

Cllr. Noreen RYAN
Limerick County Council

Cllr. Mary SHIELDS
Cork City Council

Cllr. Barney STEELE
Longford County Council

The Association of Irish Regions

The Association of Irish Regions (AIR) is the national representative organisation of the eight Regional Authorities and the two Regional Assemblies in Ireland. The AIR is composed of the Cathaoirleach, previous Cathaoirleach and Directors of the Regional Authorities and Regional Assemblies. Cllr. Mary FREEHILL is the current Cathaoirleach of the AIR, with Mr. Jim STONE being the Honorary Secretary.



Border, Midlands and Western Regional Assembly

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Terry BRENNAN
Director: Mr. Gerry Finn

Border Regional Authority

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Danny BRADY
Director: Mr. Matt Donnelly

Mid-East Regional Authority

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Joseph BEHAN
Director: Mr. John Byrne

Mid-West Regional Authority

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Eddie WADE
Director: Mr. Tom Kirby

South West Regional Authority

Cathaoirleach:
Cllr. Michael CONNOR-SCARTEEN
Director: Mr. John McAleer

Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Rainsford HENDY
Director: Mr. Stephen Blair

Dublin Regional Authority

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Gerry HORKAN
Director: Ms. Patricia Potter

Midlands Regional Authority

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Mark NUGENT
Director: Mr. Jim Stone

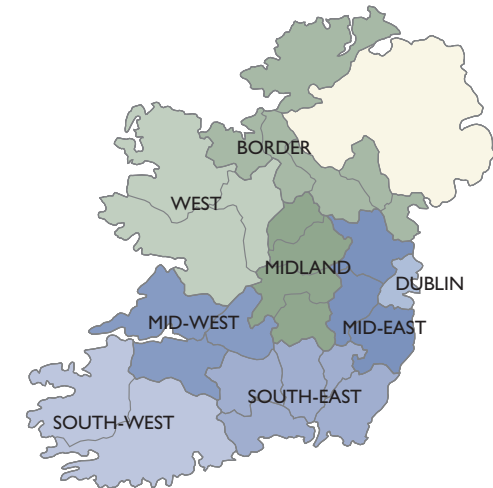
South-East Regional Authority

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Paudie COFFEY
Director: Mr. Tom Byrne

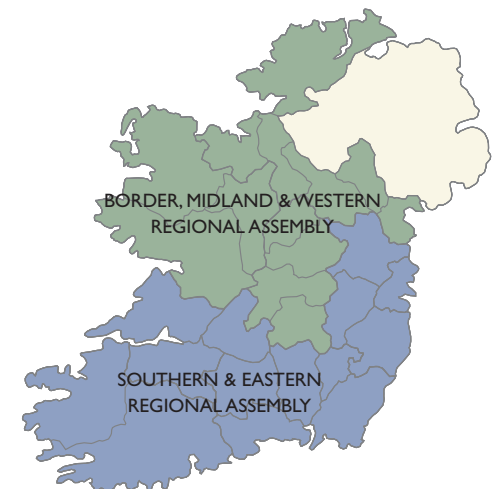
West Regional Authority

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Padraic CONNEELY
Director: Mr. Jim McGovern

NUTS III REGIONS



NUTS II REGIONS





Irish Regions Office - Brussels

The Irish Regions Office (IRO) was established in May 2000 as a Brussels based resource for the Irish members of the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the regional authorities, regional assemblies and local authorities. Its key functions are:

- To support the members of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions;
- To provide an EU information service to Irish regions and their constituent local authorities;
- To increase the opportunity for these authorities to participate in EU policy debates and project implementation;
- To improve the profile of Irish sub-national authorities in Brussels.

In delivering its services the IRO co-operates with a number of bodies, such as the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) and the NASC - West Ireland Liaison Office, to ensure complementarity and to avoid unnecessary overlaps.

This report provides an overview of the IRO's activities in 2006 and outlines the contribution the office makes to the work of the regions, local authorities and other partners in the Irish regions.

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