

The IRO Activities

THE IRO'S PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS ARE:

Information and intelligence

- Gather information and intelligence on the policy making processes and raise awareness of key issues
- Act as a source of EU information and advice for sub-national government in Ireland
- Provide information on EU funding opportunities

Monitoring policy

- Monitor the development of EU policy
- Facilitate communication of Irish sub-national government's needs, positions and responses to key EU decision-makers

Advice and support

- Provide support to, and act as a contact point for Irish regions and their local authorities on EU matters
- Assist, on a request basis, local and regional authorities with the development of EU projects
- Provide briefing programmes and assist with the provision of EU training

Networking

- Develop and maintain close relations with the EU Institutions, regional representations and other EU bodies
- Participate in networks, forums, and other associations that help to advance the interest of Irish sub-national authorities

Support for the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions

In addition to these functions the IRO is also the Brussels based support for *the Irish Delegation to the CoR*. In this role the IRO:

- Provides a direct presence for the Irish Delegation and its secretariat in Brussels
- Assists Irish members attending CoR meetings
- Liaises with the CoR administration and promotes Irish sub-national interests within the CoR
- Liaises with the Irish Permanent Representation.

This service is supported by and operated in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

CLOSE TO THE REGIONS

The IRO works with and on behalf of the sub-national authorities in Ireland. The office maintains direct contact with the Directors of the Regional Authorities and Regional Assemblies and is routinely engaged in coordinating the production and promotion of policy and position papers on behalf of AIR and the Irish Delegation to the CoR. It also assists local and regional authorities in developing EU projects (including accessing EU funds and finding transnational partners) and responds to general requests for information on and from sub-national authorities in Ireland.

CLOSE TO THE EU

The work of the IRO benefits from both formal and informal links with key policy and decision makers in the main institutions. Formal contact with the Institutions is facilitated through representation on the CoR and through membership of European Commission consultative forums. At an informal level, the IRO has a close working relationship with individual departments of the European Commission, as well as with MEPs, the Irish Permanent Representation, other Irish representations, regional representation offices and various other Brussels based organisations.



The IRO team

The IRO currently has two full-time staff.



Robert Collins | *Head of Office*

Robert is responsible for overall management of the functions of the office, including liaison with the Association of Irish Regions and for linkages with key government departments and the Irish Permanent Representation. He is the Co-ordinator of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions, responsible for member's briefing and liaison with the CoR administration.



Ronan Gingles | *EU Programmes and Communication Officer*

Ronan is responsible for liaison with sub-national authorities in Ireland in relation to monitoring and informing on policy developments and funding opportunities. He also has responsibility for IRO communication and information policy and for developing and maintaining relationships with EU institutions and EU bodies of relevance to the work of the IRO.

Facilities

The IRO has full use of state of the art conference facilities, meeting rooms and an exhibition and reception area.

The Irish Regions Office

Oifig Réigiún na hÉireann



Location

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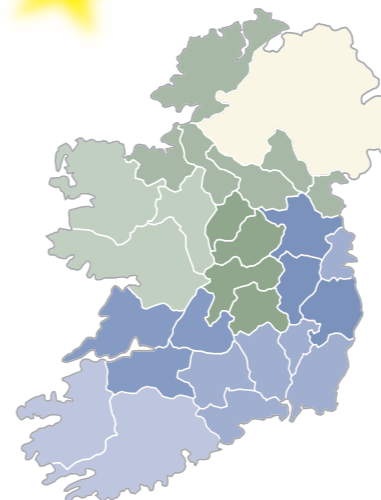
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Irish Regions Office

Ireland's Regions in Brussels



The Irish Regions Office

The Irish Regions Office (IRO) was established in 2000, with the support of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, as a Brussels based resource for the Irish members of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and their regional authorities. The activities of the office have since been expanded through a collaboration of the Association of the Irish Regions (AIR) and local authority managers to provide a wider range of services to Irish local and regional authorities.

Bunaíodh Oifig Réigiún na hÉireann i 2000, le cabhair ón Roimh Comhshaoil, Oidhreacht agus Rialtais Áitiúil, mar achmair suite san Bhrúiséal ar fáil do na mbaill Éireannach de Choiste na Réigiún agus a chuid údarás réigiúnach. Tá obair na hoifige tar éis leathnú de bhár combhartaíocht idir Cumann Réigiún na hÉireann agus na bainisteoirí contae agus catbrach a chuireann réimse seirbhísí níos leathana ar fáil do na h-údarás áitiúla agus réigiúnach.

Suite i lár an ceantar AE den Bhrúiséal, tá an ORÉ i súiomh foirfe le h-obair mar combheangail idir institiúid an Aontas Eorpach agus na leibheál áitiúla agus réigiúnach agus chun láithreach dáiríre a thabhairt do na h-údarás fo-náisiúnta Éireannach i chroí na h-Eorpa.

The establishment of the IRO is recognition of the growing impact of EU policies at the sub-national level. With almost three quarters of EU legislation now implemented at local or regional level, a priority of the IRO is to assist Irish sub-national authorities in monitoring the development of this legislation before having to implement it. The IRO also helps to maintain sub-national government's awareness of developments within the EU generally,

highlighting issues of relevance, assisting participation in the policy making process and identifying relevant funding opportunities.

Located in the heart of Brussels' EU district, the IRO is perfectly positioned to act as a link between the EU institutions and the local and regional levels and to give its sub-national partners a tangible presence at the centre of EU affairs.





Dublin

The IRO Structure

The IRO operates on the basis of an annual work programme, which is agreed with the Association of Irish Regions. It works through the Association of Irish Regions and has direct links with the local and regional government structures in Ireland and agreed working arrangements with other relevant organisations.

ASSOCIATION OF IRISH REGIONS

The Association of Irish Regions (AIR) is the national representative organisation of the eight Regional Authorities and two Regional Assemblies in Ireland. Its objectives are to express the collective view of its membership on matters concerning their constitution and the functions for which they have statutory responsibilities, and to offer advice to Government on matters pertaining to economic and social development, including matters relating to balanced regional development.

The Association also aims to facilitate the exchange of information and experience between its members, including arranging meetings, conferences, seminars, and producing publications which further the objective of improving the quality of service which members can give to their authorities and to the public. AIR is composed of the current and former Cathaoirleach (chairperson) and the Directors of each Regional Authority and Regional Assembly.

Sub-National Governance in Ireland

The Republic of Ireland, which covers a land area of 68,895 sq. kms. and has a population of 4.24 million (2006), has a relatively centralised administration. However, the local and regional levels have important responsibilities in a number of key areas. Local authorities are the main providers of local government services at county/city level. At regional level 8 Regional Authorities co-ordinate certain activities of the local authorities and play a monitoring role in relation to the use of EU Structural Funds. The country is further designated into two NUTS II Regions and two Regional Assemblies are responsible for managing the regional programmes of the Structural Funds.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

There are 34 local authorities in Ireland, including 29 county councils and 5 city councils. At sub-county level there are a further 80 town authorities, which carry out a representational role. Local authorities are multi-purpose bodies with responsibility for an extensive range of services. These are typically broken down into eight broad categories:

- Housing
- Planning
- Roads
- Water Supply and Sewerage
- Development Incentives and Controls
- Environmental Protection
- Recreation Facilities and Amenities
- Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare

In addition to these functions, a fundamental role of democratically elected local government is representation of local communities, voicing local concerns and responding to local needs.

In recent years local government has undergone a number of reforms, including: the establishment of City/County Development Boards (CDBs), which aim to improve coordination between various local agencies and partners in an integrated process; and the establishment of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), which comprise elected representatives and representatives of the social partners and community and voluntary groups at local level. The role of the SPCs is to assist the members of local authorities in formulating and reviewing policy.



Mid-East



Mid-West



West

REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

The Regional Authorities were established by the 1991 Local Government Act and came into existence in 1994. Under this Act, the Regional Authorities have two main functions: to promote the co-ordination of public service provision and to monitor the delivery of EU Structural Fund assistance in the regions. The Regional Authorities have specific responsibility for:

- Reviewing the Development Plans of local authorities in their region and in adjoining regions;
- Preparing Regional Planning Guidelines and Regional Economic and Social Strategies;
- Promoting cooperation, joint actions, arrangements and consultation among local authorities and other public bodies.

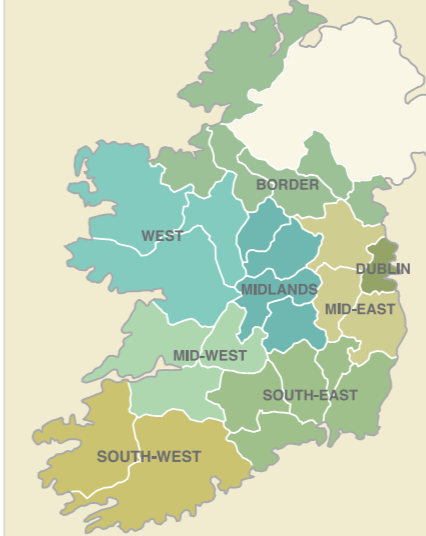
The members of the Regional Authorities are not directly elected, but nominated from among the elected members of the local authorities in the region.



Midlands



South-West



Regional Authority	Area (sq. kms)	Pop. (2006)
Border	12,156	468,375
Dublin	922	1,187,176
Mid-East	6,055	475,360
Midlands	6,524	251,664
Mid-West	7,870	361,028
South-East	9,406	460,838
South-West	12,161	621,130
West	13,801	414,277

REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

The regionalisation arrangements negotiated by the Government in the context of Agenda 2000 resulted in the designation of Ireland into two NUTS II Regions for EU Structural Funds purposes: the Southern and Eastern Region (S&E Region) which is a 'regional competitiveness and employment' region for the 2007-2013 period; and the Border Midland & Western Region (BMW Region) which is designated as a 'phasing-in' region under the 'regional competitiveness and employment' objective for 2007-2013.

Two Regional Assemblies were established and came into effect in July 1999. The Assemblies comprise of elected representatives nominated by the local authorities from the membership of the Regional Authorities within each region.

The main responsibilities of the Assemblies are:

- to manage and monitor the Regional Operational Programmes
- to monitor the general impact of all EU funds and national programmes on the region
- to promote coordination in the provision of public services in the Assembly areas
- to make public bodies aware of the regional implications of their policies and plans

The Assemblies also host the Interreg IVB contact points in Ireland for the North West Europe, Atlantic Area and Northern Periphery programmes. The S&E Assembly is also the managing authority for the Ireland-Wales cross-border programme.



Regional Assemblies	Area (sq. kms)	Pop. (2006)
BMW region	32,481	1,134,316
S&E region	36,414	3,105,532



South-East



Border