

EU News Bulletin

The latest news, funding and events from the EU for local and regional government

Number 17 – June 2005

Produced by the Irish Regions Office (IRO), Brussels
in association with the Institute of Public Administration (IPA)



Irish Regions Office



INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC
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LIFE 2005- 2006: first call

The European Commission has published the first call for proposals for the 2005-2006 round of LIFE-Environment Demonstration and LIFE-Nature projects. LIFE-Environment Demonstration projects are concerned with the development of innovative and integrated techniques and methods, integration of environmental and sustainable development considerations into land-use development and planning, waste and water management, clean technologies, product policy, etc. LIFE-Nature projects focus on the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna of Community and international interest. Proposals should be submitted to the national competent authorities (michael.mckenna@environ.ie at the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government for LIFE-Environment and ronan.whelan@environ.ie at Duchas for LIFE-Nature) before 30 Sept. 2005. Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/funding/index.htm> Information on previous successful projects in Ireland at: [http://www.environ.ie/DOEI/DOEIPol.nsf/0/a7a110ca056f37c780256f0f003bc800/\\$FILE/LIFE%20Irish%20Winners%201992-2004.doc](http://www.environ.ie/DOEI/DOEIPol.nsf/0/a7a110ca056f37c780256f0f003bc800/$FILE/LIFE%20Irish%20Winners%201992-2004.doc)

Culture 2000

The 2006 call for proposals under the Culture 2000 programme is expected in June with deadlines in Oct/Nov. Applications will be invited across all four sectors: performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage, and books, reading & translation. Eligible projects will have to focus on one of these sectors and be uniquely European (i.e. not just a tour of an Irish performance or exhibition). Projects must also involve at least 3 partner organisations from 3 different EU countries. The total budget per project will be €100,000 to €300,000 (1 year projects) or €500,000 per year (2-3 year projects). Funding rates vary from

50% to 60%. Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/portal/action/cooperation/cult_area_en.htm

Civil Protection

The European Commission has published the 2005 call for proposals in the field of Community Cooperation as regards Civil Protection. Proposals are sought in the following areas: 1. The exchange of best practise in prevention, preparedness and response actions in severe climatic situations; 2. Establishing best practise for the coordination of information to the public in the case of cross-border or international emergencies; 3. The use of emergency numbers; 4. Contingency planning on how to respond to basic needs; 5. Continuity planning; and 6. Encouraging the participation of citizens in civil protection volunteer organisations. Projects should involve several Member States. Relevant training courses for experts of 3 to 5 days are also an eligible action. Total budget: €2 million. Maximum co-financing: 75%. Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/funding/intro_en.htm

eLearning

A call for proposals for the eLearning programme (2004-6) was published on 31 May 2005. The programme aims to improve the quality and accessibility of European education and training systems through a more effective use of ICT. The current call covers 3 of the 4 key areas of the eLearning Programme: promoting digital literacy (€1.3 m); European Virtual Campuses (€4.1m); and Transversal Actions (€1.0m). Proposals must provide information services or learning support services, or both. Funding of up to 80% can be provided and projects must involve at least 3 partners from 3 different Member States. Deadline: 4 July 2005. Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/elearning/call_2305_en.html

NEWS & POLICY

No Agreement on EU Budget

EU leaders meeting in Brussels on June 16-17 failed to reach agreement on the EU budget for 2007-2013, leaving uncertainty over future funding for EU programmes and initiatives. Going into the negotiations the Luxembourg EU Presidency tabled proposals for an overall EU budget of 1.06% of EU GNI. This represented a compromise between the 1% being sought by the 6 main contributors to the EU budget and the 1.14% proposed by the Commission and seems to have been generally accepted. The disagreement, however, arose over how this reduced budget would be divided and where the money would come from. The Presidency proposed cuts to most budget headings, including the Structural Funds and rural development. It also tabled controversial proposals for a freezing of the UK's budget rebate (agreed in 1984 to compensate the UK for lower transfers from the CAP) at its current rate of €4.6 billion per annum.

The UK strongly resisted this, insisting they would only agree to a review of the rebate in the context of a wider reform of the budget, including the CAP budget (agreed in 2002 and which fixes farm subsidies up to 2013). The CAP budget currently accounts for about 40% of the EU budget and the UK and other Member States, most notably Sweden and the Netherlands, want this to be reduced and the money redirected to measures aimed at boosting EU competitiveness. Moves to reopen the 2002 deal on the CAP are, however, strongly opposed by France, Ireland and the other main beneficiaries.

This stand-off has now kick-started a more fundamental debate about the future direction of the EU, with the UK and others pressing for a shift away from protectionist policies, such as the CAP, and greater liberalisation of markets. The UK has since suggested a complete overhaul of the EU budget in 2008. This debate is likely to continue during the UK Presidency with an agreement on the budget now unlikely before the Austrian Presidency in the first half of 2006. Delays are therefore likely to programmes due to commence in January 2007. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

The Latest Structural Funds Proposals

In advance of the EU Summit on June 16-17 the Luxembourg EU Presidency

presented a revised "negotiating box", which proposed a €30 billion cut to the Structural Funds budget for 2007-2013. While an overall agreement on the budget was not reached, it appears that there was general agreement on the Structural Funds aspects. The biggest cuts proposed were to the Competitiveness & Employment Objective (down 20% from €57.9 billion to €46.8 billion) and the Territorial Cooperation Objective (down 43%, from €13.2 billion to €7.5 billion), the two Objectives for which Ireland would be eligible. A reduction of 4.5% (from €263 billion to just over €252 billion) was proposed for the Convergence Objective. Under these proposals, however, the original budget for regions "Phasing in" to the new Competitiveness and Employment Objective, which includes the BMW region, was to be left more or less unchanged (€9.49 billion from €9.58 billion) and €200 million was to be allocated to the PEACE Programme for 2007-2013. The Luxembourg Presidency also proposed a budget cut of €14 billion (from €88 billion to €74 billion) to the rural development budget. As a deal was not reached on the overall budget, these proposals will now pass to the UK Presidency, which starts on July 1. *Further details at: http://www.eu2005.lu/en/actualites/documents_travail/2005/06/15negbox/index.html*

EU Constitution on Hold

The other main item on the agenda at the EU Summit on June 16-17 was the EU Constitution. In light of the recent No votes in France and the Netherlands EU leaders agreed on a "period of reflection" amid fears that a knock-on effect would mean the document would be rejected in countries still planning to have referendums. Governments will come together again in one year, under the Austrian EU presidency, to review the situation. However, the EU Presidency stressed that the Constitution itself will not be renegotiated and that ratification will continue. Luxembourg Prime Minister and current head of the EU, Jean-Claude Juncker said that the current deadline for ratification, the end of October 2006, "is no longer tenable", but he stressed that countries that want to ratify the document via their parliaments may do so, while Member States planning to have referendums "will decide autonomously when those referendums are to be organised". Most countries, including Ireland, have indicated that they will postpone their decision. Luxembourg has decided to

proceed with a referendum on July 10. Poland is also pressing ahead with a referendum on October 9. So far, ten countries have ratified the constitution, two have rejected it and 13 have yet to ratify it. Legally, the Constitution can only come into force if all 25 Member States have ratified it, meaning that France and the Netherlands would have to hold second referendums. *Further details at: <http://www.eu2005.lu/en/calendrier/2005/06/16conseur/index.html>*

Rural Development Proposals Adopted

On June 20 the EU's Agriculture Council adopted the Regulation on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for the period 2007-2013. One of the key outstanding issues to be agreed was the minimum amount's to be allocated to the four different Axes. Ministers agreed that the following minimums would apply: 10% of the national envelope for Axis 1 – increasing the competitiveness of farming (from 15% in the Commission proposals), 25% for Axis 2 – agri-environmental measures (unchanged), 10% for Axis 3 – quality of life and rural diversification (from 15%) and 5% for the LEADER Axis (from 7%). While this does represent a reduction in the minimum amount of Community funding for rural diversification (Axis 3) it is somewhat less than that being sought by the European Parliament (8%) and some of the Member States. In relation to Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) it was decided that the current system should remain in force until 2010. The Agricultural Council left the overall budget unchanged from the Commission's proposals, at €88.7 billion, but specified that this is subject to change depending on the outcome of the overall EU budget negotiations. *Further details are available at: <http://www.eu2005.lu/en/index.html>*

Structural Funds - Strategic Guidelines

The European Commission is currently finalising draft Strategic Guidelines on the implementation of the Structural Funds in the period 2007-2013. The draft Guidelines, currently only available as an internal document, identify three key priorities for Structural Fund investment in the period 2007-2013: 1 - making Europe and its regions a more attractive place to invest and work; 2 - improving knowledge and innovation for growth; and 3 - more and better jobs.

These three priorities are matched by key fields of action, 11 of which have been decided upon. Actions under Priority 1 include: 1. Expanding and improving transport infrastructure, including developing secondary routes and sustainable transport projects in urban areas; 2. Improving the environmental contribution to growth and jobs; 3. Support for investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy; and 4. Helping to maintain a healthy labour force so as to extend the working lives of as many people as possible. For Priority 2 the Structure Funds will focus on: 5. Increasing and improving investment in RTD; 6. Facilitating innovation; 7. Promoting the information society for all and ensuring the dissemination of ICT; 8. Improving access to finance for research and innovation activities. In relation to priority 3, the Structural Funds will focus on projects seeking to: 9. Attract and retain more people in employment and modernise social protection systems; 10. Improve the flexibility of the labour market (teleworking, lifelong learning, etc.); and 11. increase investment in human capital through better education and skills. The draft Guidelines will be formally presented by the Commission after an agreement has been reached on the EU's future Financial Perspective. *Further details from the Irish regions Office.*

State Aid Proposals Unveiled

Less and more targeted aid, focusing on promoting growth, creating jobs and securing social cohesion are the key objectives of proposals on the reform of State aid policy, published by the European Commission on June 7. The five-year State Aid Action Plan (SAAP) also aims to make it easier for Member States to grant aid by streamlining the approval process and making the rules clearer. In line with the Lisbon Strategy, the Commission is proposing changes to current State aid regulations that will facilitate the targeting of aid towards areas such as R&D, innovation and risk capital. However, it also proposes adapting the rules to facilitate support for public services, modern transport and energy infrastructures, and social and regional cohesion. Member states will also be able to process more State aid applications without referral to the Commission, thanks to the extension of block exemptions, such as those for training and employment, R&D, environment and regional development. The reform of Regional Aid will respect the general principles set out in the SAAP. Aid will be focused on less-developed regions to ensure greater

social and economic cohesion and will be more directly linked to the broad themes of State aid policy such as promoting innovation and R&D. The Commission is expected to adopt revised Regional Aid Guidelines in mid-July. Interested parties are invited to submit comments on the SAAP until September 15, after which detailed reform proposals will be presented. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/state_aid/others/action_plan/ Comments should be sent to: stateaidgreffe@cec.eu.int (referencing "state aid reform")*

Ireland Lagging in Broadband Access

Figures released by the European Commission on June 2 show that the availability of broadband connections in Ireland is well below the EU average and lower than in many of the new Member States. While broadband access throughout the EU is growing rapidly, with more than 40 million lines now available in the 25 member states, an increase of 70% on 2004, there are significant differences between Member States. In Ireland, despite the fact that the number of retail broadband lines more than doubled in 2004, overall connections remain low, at only 138,116. In general, penetration rates (the number of lines per 100 of population) remain very low in Ireland (3%), well below the EU15 average (10%) and below the rates in many of the new Member States. The Dutch are the most enthusiastic users of broadband, with penetration there at 19%, just ahead of Denmark (18%), Belgium (16%) and Finland and Sweden (15%). The UK and France have shown the most rapid growth, nearly doubling the number of broadband lines available over the last year to reach take-up rates of 10% and 11%, respectively. The surge in broadband take-up in the EU (45,000 new broadband lines on average per day in 2004, up from 29,000 per day in 2003) is being driven by increased competition among service providers. While access to broadband services is offered via a number of different means, by far the most popular is the digital subscriber line (DSL), which now accounts for almost 80% of all broadband access. Cable modems account for the majority of the balance. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/ecomm/all_about/implementation/enforcement/index_en.htm*

Boosting the Digital Economy

On June 1 the European Commission adopted the initiative "i2010: European Information Society 2010", which aims to foster growth and jobs in the information society and media industries. i2010 provides a strategy for modernising and deploying all EU policy instruments to encourage the development of the digital economy. The Commission will in particular promote high-speed and secure broadband networks offering rich and diverse content in Europe. In its i2010 initiative, the Commission outlines three policy priorities: 1. To create an open and competitive single market for information society and media services within the EU; 2. To increase EU investment in research on information and communication technologies (ICT) by 80%; and 3. To promote an inclusive European information society. In relation to the latter the Commission will propose: an Action Plan on e-Government for citizen-centred services (2006); three "quality of life" ICT flagship initiatives; and actions to overcome the geographic and social "digital divide", culminating in a European Initiative on e-Inclusion (2008). *Further information at: <http://europa.eu.int/i2010>*

GDP in Ireland at 139% of EU Average

The latest figures from Eurostat for GDP per capita in the EU in 2004 put Ireland at nearly 40% above the EU25 average. Luxembourg was more than twice the EU25 average in 2004, while Denmark, Austria, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Belgium were all around 20% above average. Sweden and Finland were about 15% above average, France and Germany around 10% and Italy 5%. Spain was just below the EU25 average, and Greece, Cyprus and Slovenia were about 20% below average. Portugal, Malta and the Czech Republic were around 30% below average, and Hungary 40% below. Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland were around half the average, while Latvia was about 55% below the EU25 average. *Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/>*

Energy Efficiency in Public Buildings

A new campaign, "Working together towards Class A", aimed at promoting energy efficiency in public buildings is to be launched by the Energy Cities network, with support from the European Commission. The campaign

will replace the pilot project “Display”, which will end on June 30. The new campaign will continue the activities of the Display pilot project. In particular it will continue to make available an online tool that enables local authorities to calculate a building’s energy classification (energy and water consumption and CO2 emissions). The online tool provides immediate results once the data has been introduced and produces an A2 poster on the buildings energy performance, which can then be put on display. During the pilot phase over 1,200 municipal buildings in over 100 towns and cities in 19 countries made use of the campaign’s website. Energy Cities uses the information to compile statistics and make comparisons by and between countries. Energy Cities is expecting to receive data on more than 1,000 towns and cities and more than 20,000 buildings in the next two years. This initiative coincides with the launch of a consultation in Ireland on the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2002/91/EC). *Further details at:* <http://www.display-campaign.org/>

EVENTS

5-6 July 2005, Brussels

This INTERREG IIIA Programme Management Seminar is the last in a series of four. The overall aim of the event is to facilitate the sharing of information and experience between professionals working on the daily implementation of the programmes. Secretariats, Managing Authorities, Paying Authorities or similar for IIIA programmes that were not represented at the previous seminars are advised to send an e-mail to ip.qt@interact-eu.net to receive an invitation. *Further details at:* <http://www.interact-eu.net/479156/479328/557939/690098>

7 July 2005, Brussels

The Association of London Government European Service is organising a seminar on parking and traffic control in urban areas. The seminar will explain the European context, and will look at experiences from local authority organisations in the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark. Registration by July 1 at the latest

Further details from Emma Watkins: E-mail: emma.w@gle.co.uk

15-16 Sept 2005, Graz (Austria)

The conference Europe Forum 2021 global – local will introduce the Global Marshall Plan, which aims at creating a worldwide eco-social market economy and offers approaches for regional and individual strategies for action. The conference is free of charge and will be held in German and English. *Further information and online registration at:* www.oele-stmk.at

16 Sept 2005, Brussels 19 Oct 2005, Brussels

The first two workshops organised by the Mutual Learning Platform will look at “Regional Benchmarking” (Sept 16) and “Regional Foresight” (Oct 19). A core objective of the workshops is to update and complement existing benchmarking and foresight tools and disseminate them to regional actors. Particular attention will be paid to benchmarking and foresight as a means of building cohesion and competitiveness at trans-regional level. The Mutual Learning Platform (MLP) is a European Commission initiative which aims to enable all regions to fully enter the knowledge-based society and benefit from increased investment in research and innovation. *Further details at:* <http://www.innovating-regions.org> or from: Ms Irene Favero Wolny, Tel: +49 721 91 345 60, e-mail: MLP-conference@inno-group.com

19-21 Oct 2005, Valetta (Malta)

The 4th European Tourism Forum will focus on the implications for the tourism industry of the Lisbon Strategy. The Forum will in particular look at: Competitiveness - emerging skills needs and the impact of technology on tourism; Sustainable Development – the social and environmental dimensions; and Better Regulation in Tourism – the Services Directive and its impact on enterprises, workers and civil society. *Details from the Irish Regions Office*

PUBLICATIONS

New LEADER+ website

The new website of the EU LEADER+ initiative for rural development is now operational. The site enables users to find information about organisations participating in the programme, whether at European, national or local level. It also includes an “Events” section, information on the implementation of LEADER+ in the 25 Member States, the programme’s publications, and an interactive tool to facilitate partner searches: *The website address is:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index_en.htm

NETWORKS

IQ-Net

IQ-Net is a network of regional and national partners whose aim is to improve the quality of Structural Funds programming through exchange of experience. The network exchanges experience on aspects of programme development, management and evaluation, bringing together ideas from across the EU and sharing information on good practice. The network is coordinated by the European Policies Research Centre at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland. There are currently no Irish members. *Further details at:* <http://www.eprc.strath.ac.uk/ignet/default.cfm>. Contact: John Bachtler, Tel: +44 141 548 3672, e-mail: john.bachtler@strath.ac.uk

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