

EU News Bulletin

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

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Irish Regions Office



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ADMINISTRATION

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Call for Proposals: Town Twinning

The first of two calls for proposals for 2006 under the Town Twinning initiative was published by the European Commission on July 12, 2005. This first call concerns "conferences, training seminars and information campaigns." The deadlines for applications are: 17 Oct. 2005 and 1 March 2006. The second call for proposals, concerning meetings of citizens, will be published in September 2005. The deadlines for submission of applications will be: 15 Nov. 2005 (for actions starting between 15 March and 31 May 2006); 1 Feb. 2006 (actions starting between 1 June and 31 July 2006); 3 April 2006 (actions starting between 1 August and 30 Sept. 2006); and 1 June 2006 (actions starting between 1 Oct. and 31 Dec. 2006). The overall theme for 2006 is, "Dialogue on Europe". Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/towntwinning/index_en.html or from Mark Callanan (IPA), E-mail: mcallanan@ipa.ie, Tel: +353 1 240 3632

Culture 2000

The 2006 call for proposals under the Culture 2000 programme was published on July 12, 2005. Applications are now being invited in all four sectors: music and performing arts, cultural heritage, plastic and visual arts, literature and books and translation. Projects must involve at least 3 partners from 3 different EU countries. The total budget for this call is €28 million. Funding per project of between €50,000 and €300,000, with co-financing of up to 60% is available. Deadline for applications: 17 October 2005 for annual and translation projects and 28 October 2005 for multi-annual projects. Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/eac/index_en.html

EU Prize for Cultural Heritage

Applications are now being invited for the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage, the Europa Nostra Awards. The aim of the Awards is to reward outstanding achievements in: 1. Architectural heritage, cultural landscapes, works of art or archaeological sites; 2. Studies in the field of cultural heritage; or 3. Dedicated service to heritage conservation. Six monetary prizes of €10,000, as well as medals and diplomas will be awarded. Deadline for entries: 15 September 2005 (1 and 3 above) and 1 August 2005 (2). Further details at: <http://www.europanostra.org/>

Vocational Training

Pre-proposals are now being invited for the 2006 round of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The programme promotes transnational cooperation to foster innovation in and improve the quality of European vocational education and training. It provides support for trainee mobility and for innovative pilot projects covering a wide range of topics related to vocational education and training. Co-financing of up to 75%. Deadline for pre-proposals: 30 September 2005. Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/leonardo/new/leonardo2_en.html

Support for eBusiness

The European Commission has published a call for proposals aimed at facilitating the exchange of best practice to promote e-business for SMEs. This call aims to bring together policy makers who design and implement national, regional, local or sectoral initiatives in support of e-business. Proposals should involve at least two partners with a view to transferring a successful e-business practice from one to the other (ideally, one partner should be from a new Member State or acceding or

candidate country). Maximum funding per project: €75,000. Co-financing of up to 50%. Deadline: 10 August 2005. *Further details at:*

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/funding/grants/themes_2005/calls_prop_2005.htm

Intelligent Energy Europe

The European Commission is expected to publish the third call for proposals under the 'Intelligent Energy – Europe' (EIE) programme at the end September 2005 (deadline of early 2006). Approximately €50 million will be available for energy efficiency, renewables, the intelligent use of energy in transport, and horizontal actions, including the creation of local energy agencies. Final details of the 2005 call will be set out in the annual work programme for 2005, which is expected to be published in August or September. An Information Day on the 2005 call will be held in early October in Brussels. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/intelligent/call_for_proposals/index_en.htm

NEWS & POLICY

UK Pressing for EU Budget Deal in December

The UK Presidency of the EU is expected to present a new compromise deal on the EU budget for 2007-13 in September or October 2005. At a briefing in Brussels on July 11, the UK ambassador to the EU, Sir John Grant, said the Presidency would hold bilateral consultations with the other 24 Member States between now and September with a view to drafting a new compromise by the end of September or October. He stressed that the UK would do "all it could" to get a deal by the end of its Presidency in December. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair has already suggested the possibility of an agreement on the budget at the summit meeting in December 2005. Attempts to reach a deal on the 2007-13 budget broke down at the June 16-17 Brussels summit after five member states, including the UK, blocked a compromise drawn up by the previous Luxembourg Presidency which would have provided for a budget of €871 billion over seven years, or 1.06% of EU GDP. Without agreement on the EU budget, amounts available for a range of programmes, including the Structural Funds, rural

development, etc. remain unknown. Furthermore, delays in finalising the budget may cause delays in starting many of these programmes. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office*

Structural Funds: Strategic Guidelines

On July 6 the European Commission adopted draft Community Strategic Guidelines on the implementation of the Structural Funds in the period 2007-2013. A public consultation on the Guidelines is now open until September 30. The aim of the Strategic Guidelines is to identify key European priorities for Structural Funds investment in the period 2007-2013. Member States and their regions will then be required to take account of these overarching priorities in defining their own national priorities (to be presented in the form of National Strategic Reference Frameworks) and, subsequently, in preparing their operational programmes. A principle aim of the Guidelines is to ensure the Structural Funds are focused on the Lisbon Strategy. Three key priorities or guidelines have been identified: 1. Making Europe a more attractive place to invest and work, which includes measures for infrastructure, the environment and supporting renewables and energy efficiency; 2. Knowledge and innovation for growth; and 3. More and better jobs. The publication of the draft Guidelines by the Commission now presents an important opportunity for regions, local authorities and other interests to input their views and comments. Following the consultation and, subject to agreement on the EU budget for 2007-2013, the Guidelines will then be presented to the Council for final agreement. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/index_en.htm

Parliament Adopts Structural Funds Reports

At its plenary session on 4-7 July the European Parliament adopted two reports on the European Commission's Structural Fund proposals for the period 2007-2013, calling for a number of amendments that could benefit Irish regions. In adopting the Hatzidakis report the Parliament calls for an extension of eligible measures in the "natural effect" regions, which includes the BMW region in Ireland, to include 'Convergence' (Objective 1) type measures. If accepted, this would

greatly increase the range of activities that could be funded in these regions. Parliament also calls for a gradual transition in State Aid ceilings for the "natural effect" regions (instead of the immediate reduction originally proposed by the Commission). With regard to Territorial Cooperation, the Parliament opposes the imposition of an arbitrary 150km limit for defining maritime regions eligible for cross-border cooperation programmes (the current proposals state that funding for maritime cross-border cooperation can't apply in cases of regions separated by more than 150km of sea. A relaxation of this limit could provide an opportunity for more Irish regions to participate in cross-border programmes). Parliament also calls for the inclusion of interregional cooperation as an independent component of the new Territorial Cooperation Objective, similar to the current Interreg IIIC programme. Finally, MEPs call on the Member States to strengthen links with regional, local and urban partners in order to make optimum use of their specific knowledge both in the preparation of programmes and in their implementation. *Further details at:*

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/sipade2?PUBREF=-//EP//nonsgml+report+A6-2005-0177+0+doc+word+V0//EN&L=EN&LEV=3&NAV=S&LSTDOC=Y>

Rural Development: Strategic Guidelines

On July 5 the European Commission adopted EU Strategic Guidelines for rural development for the period 2007-2013. Following political agreement by the Agriculture Council on the new Rural Development Regulation on June 20, the Strategic Guidelines now set out six strategic priorities for rural development for 2007-2013: 1. Improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors; 2. Improving the environment and countryside; 3. Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification; 4. Building local capacity for employment and diversification; 5. Translating priorities into programmes; and 6. Complementarity between Community instruments. Specific actions are proposed for each of these priorities. On the basis of the Guidelines, which must now be agreed by the Council, each Member State will prepare its national rural development strategy. Once agreed with the Commission these will then constitute the reference framework for the preparation of rural development programmes. Member States should

present their rural development programmes to the Commission by the beginning of 2006. In the course of 2006, the Commission will then propose appropriate alterations, the aim being to ensure their application from the beginning of 2007. This, however, depends on a timely agreement on the overall EU budget for 2007-2013. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/ca/preform/rdguidelines/index_en.htm

The Future of Regional State Aid

In the coming weeks the European Commission will present draft Regional State Aid Guidelines for the period 2007-2013. These Guidelines, once approved by the Council, will determine what regions will be eligible to provide State aid to business in the future and at what rates. The Irish Regions Office has seen an advance copy of the draft Guidelines, which reveal that, while the European Commission will set the criteria which will determine eligibility for regional aid in the 2007-2013 period, Member States will actually have the final decision in selecting qualifying areas. In relation to Ireland the draft Guidelines propose that the following regions will be eligible for regional State aid under Article 87(3)(c) in 2007-2013: 1. The BMW region; 2. Regions which form contingent zones, located within NUTS II or III regions which have an unemployment rate which is above 115% of the national average (based on EUROSTAT data for the most recent 3 years); and 3. Other sub-regions (e.g. counties or similar) with demonstrated economic disadvantage. An overall limiting factor on the extent of the qualifying area in Ireland will be an "eligible national population coverage" limit of 50%. Areas eligible under Article 87(3)(c) potentially qualify for maximum aid intensities of 10-15% for large enterprises, 20-25% for medium enterprises and 30-35% for small enterprises. The BMW region will also benefit from special transition arrangements, whereby the reduction in aid intensities would take place in three phases. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

Public Consultation on Broadband Access

On July 14 the European Commission opened a public consultation on policy measures needed to bring high-speed internet access to Europe's under-served areas. Stakeholders, including

local/regional authorities are now invited to contribute views on a Commission staff working paper entitled "Broadband access and public support in under-served areas". The paper highlights the fact that, despite significant progress in terms of broadband access in the EU in recent years, commercial deployment in remote and scarcely populated areas has been constrained by high costs. In January 2005, broadband was available to 90% of the urban population in the EU15 and in the European Economic Area (EEA), but to only 62% of the rural population (as outlined in EU News Bulletin no. 17, figures released on June 2 show that broadband availability in Ireland is even below the EU average). The paper examines the development of the rural broadband markets in the EU and concludes that, although commercial forces are expected to drive further broadband deployment, some areas are likely to suffer delayed coverage or will be excluded from the rollout of broadband-enabled services altogether. Two policy responses are proposed: 1. Strengthening national broadband strategies; and 2. Improving the exchange of best practices. The public consultation will close on Friday September 16, 2005. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/i2010/digital_divide/index_en.htm

Boost for Wireless

On July 14 the European Commission adopted a decision to make available additional radio spectrum throughout the EU for radio local area networks (RLANs) – commonly known as "Wi-Fi". This decision, which is to be implemented by Member States by 31 October 2005, will make two specific frequency bands (5150-5350 MHz and 5470-5725 MHz) available in all Member States for wireless access systems. The additional radio spectrum, which will make wireless access to the internet faster and more widespread, is expected to significantly boost the application of WiFi in the coming months. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/information_society/policy/radio_spectrum/index_en.htm

Increased Irish Participation in Town Twinning

In 2005 there were 27 applications from Ireland (from a total of 2270 applications) under the EU's Town Twinning programme. This was up from 14 in 2004, one of the biggest increases of any Member State. With projects selected from 4 out of the 5 phases

under the 2005 call, 34 Irish towns (see below) have so far been approved to receive funding, either as applicants or as partners, under the action for "citizens meetings". Only one Irish town, Bundoran, was awarded funding under the action for "conferences seminars and training". In almost all cases Irish towns are partnered with French towns. The Irish towns approved for funding under the 2005 call include: Athenry, Athy, Baile an Fheirteirigh, Ballinamuck, Ballymahon, Balrothery, Bray, Bundoran, Cahersiveen, Camp, Carrickmacross, Cashel, Celbridge, Charleville, Cloghane & Brandon, Fermoy, Ferns, Galway, Inniscarra, Kanturk, Kildare, Kilrush, Leixlip, Listowel, Longford, Loughshinny, Lusk, Macroom, Newbridge, Piltown, Roscommon, Skerries, Sligo, Tipperary and Tubbercurry. Approximately 70% of all eligible project applications under the Town Twinning programme receive funding. *Further details, including details of the latest call, are available at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/townwinning/index_en.html *The Irish contact is Mark Callanan at the IPA, E-mail: mcallanan@ipa.ie, Tel: +353 1 240 3632*

Ireland in Breach of Environmental Law

The European Commission is to pursue infringement proceedings against Ireland in five cases involving breaches of EU environmental law. In one case, Ireland has received a final written warning for not heeding a 2004 European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling on the phasing out of ozone depleting substances. If this case is not resolved, the Commission can ask the ECJ to impose a fine on Ireland. Two other cases concern environmental impact assessment (EIA) on fish farms, projects for the restructuring of rural land holdings, projects for the use of uncultivated land or semi-natural areas for intensive agriculture and water management projects for agriculture. The Commission is also sending Ireland a final warning on how it is applying EIA rules to forestry projects (allowing afforestation of areas of landscape and nature sensitivity without appropriate impact assessment). Finally, Ireland has also been sent a final warning for failing to notify the Commission of its national implementing legislation for an EU law on noise. *For information on infringements, see:*

http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/sqb/droit_com/index_en.htm#infr_actions *For rulings by the ECJ, see:* <http://curia.eu.int/en/content/juris/index.htm>

EVENTS

2-5 October 2005, Rome (IT)

The 49th International Federation of Housing and Planning (IFHP) World Congress, entitled "Urban futures: continuities and discontinuities," will address the question of, how the historical heritage of cities is being affected by the needs of current urban development and how this will determine the future of our cities. Registration fee: €190- €880. Further details at: <http://www.ifhp2005rome.it>

7 October 2005, Carlow (IRL)

This year's (2005) Association of Irish Regions annual conference will focus on the topic, "Realising the Potential of our Regions - Drivers of Growth Post 2006." In the context of a reduction in Structural Funds transfers to Ireland in the period beyond 2006, and against the backdrop of the publication of the National Spatial Strategy and, more recently, Regional Planning Guidelines, the conference will explore what the future holds for the regions and how their potential can best be realised. Speakers include former Taoiseach, Dr Garret Fitzgerald, and current Minister for Transport, Mr Martin Cullen, TD. Further details from Sarah Coffey at: E-mail: scoffey@midlands.ie or Tel: +353 506 52996.

18 October 2005 Brussels

The Prelude Challenge conference will look at, "The Role and Contribution of Regions in a European Research Area (ERA)". The conference will in particular discuss how to structure dialogue between regional research institutions, economic actors and political decision makers. The Prelude Challenge was created as a platform for academic exchange and prospective thinking on how to capitalise on future technological change through regional development. Mr Tom Kirby, Director of the Mid-West Regional Authority is the current Chariman of Prelude Challenge. Registration to fossati@prelude-portal.org. Further details at: http://www.cor.eu.int/conferences/Regional_European_Conferences_JulyAugust05.htm

5-6 December 2005, Cambridge (UK)

The conference "e-Business: The Way Forward" will look at successful public policy initiatives for the promotion of e-business practices by European enterprises, in particular SMEs. The results of the conference will constitute the basis for establishing future thematic priorities for policy action on e-business related issues, at both national and European level. The conference is being organised by the European Commission in association with the East England Development Agency. Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/ict/conferences/cambridge.htm>

15-16 June 2006, Are (Sweden)

The 7th Environment Conference of the Regions Of Europe will address the topic, "Challenges for a Sustainable Europe – Contributions from the Regions." The conference is being organised by ENCORE, the network of regional Environment Ministers. The main emphasis of the 2006 conference will be on the importance of cooperation between EU regions in addressing key issues such as climate change, governance, mobility and education. Further details at: <http://www.encoreweb.org>

PUBLICATIONS

e-Government in the EU Member States

On June 27 the eGovernment Observatory published a report on 'eGovernment in the Member States of the European Union', providing the most extensive information to date on the advancement of e-government in the enlarged EU. This report is the compilation of the eGovernment Observatory Factsheets for the 25 EU Member States, which have just been updated. These Factsheets provide an overall picture of the situation and progress of e-government in each Member State, presenting for each one of them a wide and consistent range of information. Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/chapter/203>

NETWORKS

Retis – Social Inclusion Network

Retis or the European Transregional Network for Social Inclusion was established in October 2002 and is a political institution comprised of European regional and local authorities that wish to reflect on and act together in the area of social policies, in particular social inclusion policies. Retis has 82 members (regions, provinces, prefectures, cities and associations of cities) from 21 different Member States. In December 2002, the European Commission's Directorate General of Employment and Social Affairs agreed to partially underwrite Retis' operations within the framework of the measure, "Funding of European networks active in combating poverty" of the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion (2002-2006). Further details at: <http://www.retis-eu.org/>

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Please Note:

There will be no EU News Bulletin in August. The next edition will be available in September 2005.