

EU News Bulletin

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

Number 19 – September 2005

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



Irish Regions Office



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ADMINISTRATION

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ESF Innovative Actions

The deadline for the third round of applications under the ESF Article 6 fund is 25 January 2006. For the period 2004–2006, Article 6 will support the development and testing of "Innovative approaches to the management of change". Within this theme, innovative measures will focus on two sub-themes: (1) innovative initiatives to promote active ageing and to raise the employment rate of older workers, and (2) innovative solutions to restructuring by enhancing the capacity for adaptation and anticipation of workers, enterprises and public authorities. Actions must involve organisations from at least two of the EU15 Member States. Co-financing of up to a maximum of 75% is available. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/esf2000/article_6_2000_2006_programme_en.htm

Good Practice from ESF Projects

The next deadline for proposals for the "Transfer and Dissemination of Innovation from ESF Article 6 Projects" is 16 February 2006. This call relates to the transfer and dissemination of innovative approaches and methods that have been developed by Article 6 projects in the 2000-2006 programming period. Applicants must be a promoter of, or a named partner in an Article 6 project. The "receiving agent" must include at least one private or public body that has been identified as being a potential beneficiary of the innovative content developed as part of the project. The budget for this round is approx. €2 million. Co-financing of up to 85% is available. *Further details at:* http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/emp/vp_2004_017/library

Town Twinning

The second of two calls for proposals for 2006 under the Town Twinning initiative was published by the European Commission on September 20, 2005. This second call concerns "citizens meetings". Support will be provided for meetings which: 1. Reinforce the participants' commitment to European integration; 2. Foster mutual understanding and friendship between citizens of twinned towns; and 3. Are based on large local participation and active involvement. The deadlines for applications are: 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 Aug and 30 Sept. 2006); and 1 June 2006 (actions starting between 1 Oct and 31 Dec 2006). *Further details at:*

http://europa.eu.int/comm/towntwining/call/call_en.html Contact in Ireland: Mark Callanan (IPA), E-mail: mcallanan@ipa.ie, Tel: +353 1 240 3632

Enterprise and Innovation

The European Commission's Enterprise Directorate is expected to publish calls for two new programmes, INNONET and INNOACTIONS, on 5 October 2005. The INNONET call will contain two strands – A Coordinated Action providing 100% financing up to €3m per project, and a Specific Support Action providing 100% financing up to €200,000. 50% co-financing of up to €3m will be available under the INNOACTIONS call. INNONET is designed to fund networking, analysis and joint initiatives between local, regional, national, and European actors in innovation. Projects can look at activities such as: entrepreneurship and start ups; seed funding; clusters; public-private partnerships; technology transfer; non-technological / social innovations; policy learning, etc.. *Further details will be posted at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/ind ex_en.htm

Support to Cultural Organisations

The European Commission has published a call for proposals in the framework of the Community Action Programme to promote the permanent activities of bodies pursuing an aim of general European interest in the field of culture. Eligible bodies must be part of at least one of the following categories: (1) Bodies fulfilling the role of cultural 'ambassador', promoting awareness of Europe's Common Culture Heritage; (2) Bodies or networks of bodies active in the cultural field which represent the interests of stakeholders at Community level (3) Bodies organizing European cultural events such as prize-givings, festivals or cultural exhibitions with a real European dimension. Applicants must be active in at least 7 different European countries. Total budget for 2006 is €3,462,000. Up to 80% EU co-financing is available. Deadline for applications: 28 October 2005. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/eac/ot/her_actions/support_eur_org/form_sup_en.html

NEWS & POLICY

No Agreement on Structural Funds Regulations

While there is broad agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on most aspects of the future EU Structural Funds Regulations, agreement still has to be reached on a number of specific issues. In particular, the Parliament is concerned that the most recent draft proposal presented by the Council does not adequately address five key issues: 1. It does not give sufficient scope for "phasing-out" regions (those losing Objective 1 eligibility as a result of the statistical effect following EU enlargement) to finance the same measures as regions fully covered by the new Convergence Objective; 2. It does not sufficiently strengthen the principle of partnership; 3. The urban dimension is not adequately addressed, particularly regarding the definition of cities eligible for financial support; 4. Parliament wants an EU and not a national performance reserve; and 5. MEPs want greater scope for re-using resources lost through application of the N+2 rule (funds not spent within two years of the year in which it is granted). MEPs are keen to proceed with the adoption of the

Structural Funds Regulations even without agreement on the Financial Perspective (EU budget for 2007-2013). However, the British EU Presidency does not share this view. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

New Rules on State Aid to Regional Airports

On September 7 the European Commission adopted new rules laying down the conditions under which start-up aid can be granted to airlines to operate new routes from regional airports. The Commission also adopted guidelines for airports and Member States on the public financing of airports. Eighteen months after its ruling on State aid granted to Ryanair by Charleroi airport, the Commission's new guidelines aim to apply the principles of this decision to all EU airports. In particular, the guidelines set out rules for State aid to regional airports handling fewer than 5 million passengers annually. For airports over 10 million passengers, State aid is not considered justified, while medium-sized airports can only receive subsidies on an exceptional basis. In relation to Ireland, all airports except Dublin should qualify under the 5 million passengers rule and will, therefore, be able to offer special discounts to attract airlines. Under the plans, public sector airports will be able to offer start-up aid for a maximum of 3 years (5 years in the least developed regions) to cover up to 30%-50% of the cost of opening new routes or increasing frequencies. Activities that fall within the prerogatives of State responsibility, such as the construction or renovation of airports, would still in principle be allowed to receive subsidies. Management and maintenance of airports, however, would not be eligible for State aid, unless public service obligations are imposed. *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/1097&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

A New Era in EU Environment Policy

On September 21 the European Commission's Environment Directorate will publish a Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution, one of seven Thematic Strategies to be published by the beginning of 2006. The other six strategies will cover "Soil Protection", "the Urban Environment", "the Sustainable use of Pesticides", "the

Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment", "the Sustainable Use and Management of Resources", and "Waste Recycling." The publication of the Thematic Strategies is significant in that, together with the EU Water Framework Directive they will encompass the EU's entire environment policy up to 2020. The idea behind the Thematic Strategies is to provide a more holistic approach to addressing key environmental issues, ensuring better inter-linkages within and between environmental and other sectoral policy areas and also ensuring that environmental policy is developed on a sound economic as well as scientific basis. The publication of the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution follows a programme of technical analysis and policy development known as CAFÉ (Clean Air for Europe, see: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/pdf/2001/com2001_0245en01.pdf), which was launched in March 2001. It aims to provide a long-term, strategic and integrated policy framework to protect against negative effects of air pollution on human health and the environment. Each Thematic Strategy will take the form of a package comprised of (1) an overall approach towards the thematic issue, highlighting issues and solutions (an "umbrella" document); and (2) specific legislative proposals for some of the strategies. *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/newprg>

Social Inclusion Programme Approved by Parliament

The European Parliament has adopted a new integrated Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS), which will support EU wide actions in the area of social inclusion in the period 2007-2013. The programme, which will complement European Social Fund (ESF) actions at national or regional level, will finance studies, awareness-raising campaigns, exchanges of information and good practice, monitoring and evaluation exercises and networking initiatives. It will bring together four existing Community Action Programmes (employment, social inclusion, discrimination, and gender equality) as well as a number of budget lines in relation to working conditions. The Council has already reached provisional agreement on a draft proposal for the new programme. Only budgetary aspects remain to be discussed, pending agreement on the Financial Perspective (overall EU budget for

2007-2013). The Commission has proposed a programme budget of just over €600 million for the 7 years. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2004/jul/esf_progress_en.html*

LIFE Environment Projects Approved

The European Commission has announced the selection of 89 projects (out of the 534 applications) under the LIFE-Environment programme, including 2 projects in Ireland. Waste management projects will receive the greatest proportion of the funding, almost €27 million (or 39% of the total). Both Irish projects are in the area of waste management (1. Manufacture of composite pallet blocks using waste wood and tyre-derived materials, and 2. Environmental compliance in the automotive supply chain – see link below). Other areas to receive funding include the management of ground and surface water, land-use management and minimising the environmental costs of economic activity. Separate LIFE funding is also being allocated to nature conservation projects (LIFE-Nature, €69 million), including one in Ireland, and to environmental projects in countries outside the EU (LIFE-Third Countries, €6 million). *Further details on selected LIFE projects at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/project/index.htm> The call for proposals for LIFE 2005-2006 is currently open. The deadline for applications is 30 November 2005 (LIFE Environment) and 30 September 2005 (LIFE Nature). Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/funding/index.htm>*

EU R&D Investment Stagnates

Figures published recently by the European Commission show worrying trends in R&D investment and innovation in Europe. The growth rate of R&D intensity (R&D expenditure as % of GDP) has been declining since 2000 and is now close to zero. Europe is on track to miss the objective it set itself to boost spending on R&D from 1.9% to 3% by 2010. One of the reasons for this has been a slow-down in business funding of R&D and the lack of commitment of some Member States to achieve the 3% objective. Comparisons of R&D intensity between Member States for 2003 put Sweden and Finland at the top of the rankings, with figures of 4.27% and 3.49% respectively, well

above the EU-25 average of 1.93%. R&D intensity in Ireland has been declining in recent years and stood at 1.12% in 2003, well below the EU average and below most of the EU15. Ireland also fares badly in terms of R&D expenditure by the business / enterprise sector (0.78%), which is again below the EU average (1.23%) and even below China (0.82%). The publication, "Key Figures 2005 on Science Technology and Innovation," which includes official data on the evolution of R&D activities in Europe up to 2003, is available at: <http://www.cordis.lu/indicators/>

MEPs in Favour of Saving EU Constitution

On September 15, at their first meeting to "reflect" on the stalled EU Constitution, members of the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee expressed support for the idea of trying to "save the EU Constitution and improve it". The Committee is currently in the process of drafting a report entitled "The period of reflection: the structure, subjects, and context for an assessment of the debate on the European Union", which should be finalised in time to be voted on at the Parliament's December plenary. The report will set out the Parliament's position on the debate on the future of Europe during the "period of reflection" agreed by EU leaders in June, following the two No votes in France and the Netherlands. The reports co-rapporteur, Andrew Duff (ALDE, UK) has indicated his clear preference for salvaging and re-working the Constitutional Treaty, which has already been ratified by 14 Member States. Mr Duff believes that attention should now focus on trying to improve the present draft Treaty, focussing on the "political signals" sent out by the no votes on issues such as employment, the European social model and economic governance. Most members of the Committee believe that a new version of the EU's Constitutional Treaty should be voted before the European Parliament elections in 2009. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

New Irish CoR Members

Two new Irish members of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) were appointed by the Council of the EU on September 20: Cllr Maria Corrigan (Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Dublin Regional Authority), who replaces Royston Brady, and Cllr. Paul O'Donoghue (Kerry County Council and

South West Regional Authority), who replaces Annette McNamara. Four new alternate members were also appointed: Cllr. Mary Freehill (Dublin City Council), Cllr. Michelle Mulherin (Mayo County Council), Cllr. Terry Shannon (Cork City Council) and Cllr. Barney Steele (Longford County Council). The term of office of the new members and alternate members is until the end of January 2006, the end of the current mandate of the CoR. A new Irish delegation will then be appointed for a further four-year period. *Further details at: <http://www.iro.ie/delegation.html> or from the Irish Regions Office.*

Green Paper on Energy Efficiency at Local Level

With the recent adoption of a Green Paper on energy efficiency, "Doing more with less", the European Commission has launched a debate on Europe's future energy policy. In particular, the Commission has called on energy agencies to lead a discussion at local and regional levels. Local and regional authorities, as well as other bodies are encouraged to contribute to this open discussion on the future of European energy policy. *Copies of the Green Paper can be requested from: ren-publications@cec.eu.int or downloaded from: europa.eu.int/comm/energy/efficiency/index_en.htm Contact details for local and regional energy agencies in Ireland are available at: http://www.irish-energy.ie/content/content.asp?section_id=718&language_id=1*

Consultation: Young People in Europe

The European Commission recently launched an open consultation on "Young people in Europe: promoting active citizenship and implementing the European Youth Pact." This online consultation encourages participants to give their opinions about the current situation of young Europeans' and to suggest new priorities that could be adopted at EU level. The consultation focuses on three main themes: information, integration and participation of young Europeans; education, employment and mobility; and promoting active EU citizenship for young people. The consultation will close on 15 October 2005 and the results of the consultation will be published on the European Youth Portal in December 2005. *Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=youthpact&lang=en>*

EVENTS

27 September 2005, Dublin

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice (CFJ) is organising a one-day conference on "The Future of Europe - Uniting Vision, Values and Citizens?" The conference will address the questions: where does the EU go now? Identity, culture and democracy: what does it mean to be an EU citizen? The Lisbon Strategy: a sustainable future for Europe? Migration in Europe: Fortress Europe or Opportunity Europe? Speakers include: An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, Peter Sutherland and Alan Dukes. *Further details from: Mr David O'Gorman, CFJ. Tel: 01 855 6814, e-mail: dogorman@cfj.ie*

28-29 September, Brussels

The Interact secretariat is organising a two-day seminar on the new 'European territorial cooperation' (ex-INTERREG) objective. Over the two days, presentations will provide updates on the status of the proposals in the draft Regulations, the timetable and budget for the new programmes, and input on how to prepare the new programmes. Workshops will also bring together smaller groups to discuss specific issues. If you have not already received an invite and you would like to attend please, please e-mail: ip.qt@interact-eu.net. *Further details at: <http://www.interact-eu.net/227138/242330/0/777161>*

5-7 October 2005, Surrey (UK)

The South East Region (UK) is hosting a conference on "Greening the Green Belt" to examine the lessons learnt since the Green Belt idea emerged over 50 years ago. The Green Belt is recognised as having been successful in preventing urban encroachment into the countryside, but as having failed to actively support farming, or to encourage new and appropriate ways of using and managing the land. The conference aims to discuss ways of addressing these issues. The event is being organised by PURPLE: Peri Urban Regions Platform Europe as

part of the UK's Presidency of the European Union 2005. *Further details at: <http://www.purple-eu.org/>*

19-20 October 2005, Brussels

The first workshop of the Mutual Learning Platform (MLP) working group on 'Regional foresight' aims to facilitate the dissemination of regional foresight experience and expertise to regional actors. Particular attention will be paid to foresight as a means of building cohesion and competitiveness at transregional level. The MLP is a European Commission initiative which aims to enable EU regions to fully enter the knowledge-based society and benefit from increased investment in research and innovation. Participation is free but the event is limited to 50 participants. *Further details at: http://www.innovating-regions.org/network/events/eventDetails.cfm?eve_id=304 or contact: Ms Nathalie Brahim, Tel: +352 441012 2200, E-mail: n.brahim@innovating-regions.org*

27 October 2005, Brussels

The workshop, "Evolving Regional Governance Systems in Europe" will provide an overview and analysis of regionalisation in Europe and will look at current developments and future perspectives from different European regions. The workshop is being organised by the East Finland Region and will look specifically at recent reforms in local and regional governance in Finland and Denmark. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

27-28 October 2005, Liverpool (UK)

The conference, "Promoting an Innovation Culture in the Regions," is being organised by the Innovating Regions in Europe (IRE) network in collaboration with the Northwest Development Agency (UK). The aim of the conference is to present regional initiatives that have contributed to the creation of a culture of innovation at regional level. *Further details at: http://www.innovating-regions.org/network/events/eventDetails.cfm?eve_id=314*

NETWORKS

S³- Sharing Solutions on Structural Funds

The S³ - *Sharing Solutions on Structural Funds* project examines the tools used by Managing Authorities across Europe to develop, deliver and manage European Structural Funds. Its main aim is to enhance the level of co-operation between Regions in different countries and promote the sharing and adoption of best practices in European programming. The project network, made up of a mix of old and new EU members, aims at providing policy makers with a guide to 'what works well' and 'what doesn't work so well' in terms of Structural Funds management. *Further details at: <http://www.s3-interreg.net/newsletter.htm>*

Asylum & Immigration

ERLAI is a Brussels-based network of regional and local representatives focusing on asylum and immigration. Membership currently includes around 20 regions and local authorities from 6 EU Member States. The group meets regularly to share good practice from the regions and to liaise with the EU institutions on legislative developments and funding opportunities, including exploring possibilities for joint projects and facilitating funding bids. *Further details at: <http://www.emiliaromagnasociale.it/wc/m/emiliaromagnasociale/home/immigrazione/Erlai/Presentation.htm>*

Irish Regions Office
6 Rond-Point Schuman,
B-1040 Brussels
Fax: +32 2 2828475
Website: www.iro.ie

Robert Collins
E: robert.collins@iro.ie
Tel: +32 2 282 8474

Eamon O'Hara
E: eamon.ohara@iro.ie
Tel: +32 2 282 8477