

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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Intelligent Energy — Europe

On October 7, the European Commission published a call for proposals for the 'Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE)' 2005 programme. €51 million is being made available for projects relating to energy efficiency, renewable energy, the intelligent use of energy in transport, and horizontal actions, including the creation of local energy agencies. IEE is specifically aimed at activities which help to raise awareness, change attitudes or policies, and/or facilitate the development of new legislation, new investment or market transformation. EU co-financing of up to 50% is available. On average successful projects receive around €500,000 in grant aid. At least three EU partners are required. Deadline for proposals: 31 January 2006, or 30 November 2005 and 28 April 2006 for type 3 actions (events). *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/intelligent/index_en.html *An Information Day will be held in Dublin on October 25. Contact:* matthew.kennedy@sei.ie

Innovation Policy

On October 5, the European Commission's Enterprise Directorate published a call for proposals on "Support to innovation policy learning and development". The call includes 5 strands, the first 3 of which may be of interest to local/regional organisations. Strand 1, INNO-Nets supports cooperation and exchange on innovation policy at programme level (regional or national). Co-funding of up to 100% is available, with funding per project of €200,000 - €3.0 million (total budget: €11.5 million). Strand 2, INNO-Actions complements INNO-Nets and supports cooperation and exchange at the level of programme measures or actions. Co-funding of up to 50% is available, with funding per project of up to €3.0 million (total budget: €11.5 million). Strand 3, INNO-Net Learning

Platform supports partners wishing to work together to prepare for a future INNO-Net call. A total budget of €2.5 million is available. Deadline for proposals: January 5, 2006. An information day and partner forum will be held in Brussels on October 24 and 25. *Further details at:*

<http://www.cordis.lu/innovation/en/home.html> or from the Irish Regions Office

New Enterprise Awards for Local/Regional Bodies

On October 11, details of a new annual competition for local and regional bodies, the European Enterprise Awards, were announced by the European Commission and the UK EU Presidency. The aim of the awards is to recognise excellence in promoting entrepreneurship, encouraging enterprise in disadvantaged areas, reducing red tape, improving enterprise education, and promoting sustainable business practices. The competition is open to all local and regional authorities, as well as public-private partnerships, educational programmes, and business organisations. The Awards will be officially launched on 14 November 2005. Deadline for entries at national level: 31 May 2006, and at European level: 15 September 2006. *Further details at:* <http://www.european-enterprise-awards.org>

Local Awards for 'Young Active Citizenship'

The Young Active Citizens Award aims to support cooperation between local/regional authorities and young people. Organised by the Council of Europe, the award aims to encourage the active participation of young people in society at local level. In 2005, the award focuses on the role of education in developing active citizenship, democratic culture and social cohesion. Applications must come from either a local/regional authority or a youth organisation. Eligible projects must have

been carried out between January 2004 and September 2005, and involved people between the ages of 16 and 30. Closing date for submissions: 30th October 2005. *Further details at:* [Http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_cooperation/youth/2._priorities/award.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_cooperation/youth/2._priorities/award.asp)

Democracy & Remembrance

The European Commission has published a call for proposals for projects that contribute to encouraging EU citizens to engage in further building a democratic Europe. The call is divided into two thematic areas: 1) **Remembrance:** promoting exchanges of opinions and experience on World War II in Europe, raising awareness, especially among young people, of its causes and consequences. 2) **Democracy:** raising awareness of European values and objectives and encouraging reflection, debates or action on the dangers to democracy, or on the consolidation and future of the EU and its democratic values. All projects must actively involve citizens, especially young people, and should encourage transnational aspects. Total budget: €2.5 million. EU co-financing of up to 50%. Deadline for applications: 15 November 2005. *Further details:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/activecitizenship/index_en.htm

NEWS & POLICY

New Structural Funds Instruments Announced

On October 14, European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Danute Hubner, announced details of two new initiatives for regional policy, JASPER and JEREMIE. JEREMIE stands for Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises and is a joint initiative of the Commission and the European Investment Fund (EIF) to address the lack of risk capital for SMEs. JEREMIE's capital will come from the Structural Funds and loans from the EIF. To avail of JEREMIE, managing authorities would make contact with the EIF and together they would work out an action plan aimed at achieving a supply of financial engineering and micro-credit services sufficient to meet the ambitions of the business development part of their regional programme. Enterprises could then apply for venture capital, loan guarantees, equity or other forms of

financing through local financial intermediaries accredited by the EIF. JASPERS stands for Joint Assistance to Support Projects in the European Regions. This is a service provided by the Commission, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) aimed at providing financial and technical assistance to national and regional authorities preparing large projects for co-financing through the Structural Funds. The overall aim is to improve the quality of large projects. JASPERS will consist of a cell of 50 specialists based at the EIB's offices in Luxembourg. Local offices will also be established in the Member States. The Commission plans to launch JEREMIE at the beginning of 2006, which means it could be used in the context of the current programming period. JASPERS should also be operational at the beginning of 2006, when the preparation of new programmes for the 2007-2013 period begin. *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/05/594&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

New Hope of Deal on 2007-13 Budget

There is renewed optimism that an agreement on the EU budget for 2007-13 could be brokered by the end of the year. Sources close to the negotiations now believe that a deal is more likely under the UK Presidency than under the Austria Presidency in the first half of 2006, when the UK would be expected to toughen its stance over the controversial EU rebate. Later in October the UK will present a brief report on the series of bilateral meetings it has held with all Member States. Following this, there will be a round-table at the October 27-28 informal summit of EU leaders. The Presidency then plans to table an issues paper in time for a November 4 meeting of EU ambassadors (COREPER). A key issue still to be resolved in the negotiations is the distribution of funding between priorities, with the UK and other countries pushing for a shift in resources from agriculture and cohesion policies to policies aimed at boosting growth and competitiveness. There has been speculation that funds earmarked for the new Structural Funds Competitiveness & Employment Objective, for which Ireland is eligible, could be shifted out of the Structural Funds. If this were to happen these could be administered directly from

Brussels, rather than via national or regional programmes. Following the November 4 meeting, a new draft compromise on the 2007-13 budget is expected around the middle of November. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office*

New Features of Territorial Cooperation 2007-13

On September 28-29, the Interact secretariat organised a conference in Brussels on, "Steps Towards Territorial Cooperation Programmes 2007-13", which highlighted some important new developments in relation to future cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation programmes (Interreg). In relation to the budget for Territorial Cooperation 2007-13, in the ongoing negotiations Member States have shown a clear preference for cross-border cooperation. In the latest proposal from the Council €5.7 billion (or 77% of the total Territorial Cooperation budget of €7.3 billion) is allocated to the cross-border strand, up from €4.0 billion in the current period. With this increased budget, and greater flexibility for cooperation across maritime borders (150 km rule) the Commission expects an increase in the number of cross-border programmes. However, to avoid a proliferation of programmes the Commission is promoting the concept of trilateral or multilateral cross-border programmes. Such an arrangement might, for example, be foreseen in a cross-border programme between Ireland-Northern Ireland-Scotland. Other new features of all future territorial Cooperation programmes include the Lead Partner Principle (in future all projects will have to designate a lead partner), the requirement for all projects to have partners from at least two countries, and the requirement that projects also meet at least two of the following four criteria: joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing or joint financing. *Further details at:* <http://www.interact-eu.net/227138/242330/0/777161>

Rural Development Regulation Adopted

The EU's rural development proposals for the period 2007-13 were officially adopted by EU Farm Ministers at their September 19 Agriculture Council. The Regulation (legal proposal), on which the Council had reached unanimous political agreement on June 20, establishes the mechanism for delivering EU rural development funding

from 2007. The agreement sets lower minimum spending thresholds for three of the four axes of rural development policy: 10% for the improvement of competitiveness and forestry (Axis 1) and for diversification measures (Axis 3), instead of the 15% initially proposed. And 5% for the LEADER Axis, instead of 7%. The 25% rate is maintained for Axis 2 (land management). The final Regulation also includes more flexible rules on funding for SMEs, and earmarks more money for forestry. Installation aid for young farmers has also been raised from €40,000 to €55,000, and rates of support in outermost and less-favoured areas have been increased. The overall budget of €88.75 billion was left unchanged. However, this is subject to agreement on the overall EU budget for 2007-13. The Commission is currently consulting with the Parliament (Rapporteur: Mairead McGuinness, MEP) and the Council on the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development 2007-13, which will guide Member States and Regions in drawing up their national and regional strategies. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/index_en.htm

EP wants more Support for Research in Regions

On October 11, the European Parliament's Committee on Industry held a first debate on the European Commission's proposals for the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP7). Presenting a draft report, Jerzy Buzek (Polish MEP), Parliament's rapporteur argues that the Commission's proposal to double research funding represents "a minimum" for any agreement on the overall EU budget. He also specifically calls for an increase in funding for "Regions of Knowledge", an initiative aiming to strengthen the research potential of the regions by bringing together regional authorities, universities, research centres, enterprises and other interested parties (the Commission has already proposed €140 million for this initiative - see EU Bulletin no. 15). On September 21 the European Commission presented more detailed proposals for the FP7, following the broad outline published in April 2005. The Commission has retained all the elements of its original proposals, including the increased budget, despite signs that the research budget is coming under pressure in the budget negotiations. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/future/index_en.cfm

Regional Unemployment in 2004

Regional unemployment rates varied widely across the EU25 in 2004, from 2.4% in the region of Dorset & Somerset in the UK, to 32.8% in Réunion in France. In the EU25 as a whole, unemployment was stable between 2003 and 2004, at 9.2%. Of the 254 regions, 44 had an unemployment rate of 4.6% or less in 2004. This included the Southern & Eastern Region in Ireland where the overall unemployment rate was 4.5%, unchanged from 2003. Overall unemployment in the BMW region was 4.7% in 2004, down from 5.3% in 2003. The data on regional unemployment are taken from a report published by Eurostat. *Further details at:*

http://epp.eurostat.ec.eu.int/pls/portal/occs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PREREL/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2005/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2005_MONTH_10/1-07102005-EN-AP.PDF

Shannon Stopover Under Threat

Aviation talks between the EU and the US officially resumed on October 17 and a second meeting has been scheduled for November. The aim is to reach an initial agreement on the abolition of restrictions on air services between the EU and the US before the end of the year. Previous negotiations were interrupted in June 2004, when the Council of Ministers refused to give the go-ahead to the Commission to conclude an agreement. However, on October 6, the Council gave its backing to a resumption of negotiations. In a clear change of policy, Ireland was one of the Member States that pressed strongly for a restart of talks with the US. The Irish Government, which until recently had opposed an Open Skies agreement has now become one of its most enthusiastic backers. The creation of a single aviation space would lead to the end of the Shannon stopover (currently, half of all transatlantic flights must stop at Shannon on their way to Dublin), however, the Government also believes that it would boost both the value of Aer Lingus and the numbers of US visitors to Ireland. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

MEPs want Non-GDP Regional Indicators

In a resolution on territorial cohesion adopted in plenary session in

Strasbourg on September 28, the European Parliament has joined calls for new regional development indicators other than GDP. The motion urges the European Commission to study new territorial indicators for measuring regional development and objectively assessing obstacles to development. The resolution highlights the decentralisation and accessibility index, infrastructure and transport provision, research/innovation, education and training activity, level of diversification of productivity, and the local unemployment rate. The resolution also urges the Commission to set up a system for gauging the impact of EU policies on territorial cohesion, in association with ORATE, the European network observatory on town and country planning. The Parliament has called on the Commission to draft a White Paper on territorial cohesion, incorporating these issues, before 2007. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

MEP's Call for Action on Renewable Energy

In a non-binding parliamentary report adopted on September 29, MEPs restated their call for an ambitious mandatory target of at least 20% for the share of renewable energy in the EU's energy mix by 2020. The existing 2001 Directive on Renewable Energies aims to increase the share of renewable energy sources from 6% to 12% of the EU's total energy consumption by 2010. However, Member States, including Ireland, are not on track to meet their national targets set out in the directive. MEPs have called on the Commission to come up with new legislative initiatives to address market distortions penalising the production of renewable energy. The report calls for a renewed focus on initiatives to promote fair market access for renewables and to promote biomass (MEPs suggest the use of Structural Funds to promote the use of biomass and the abolition of all unnecessary tax burdens for the users of biomass). The European Commission is expected to adopt two documents on renewables on November 23: an action plan on biomass, which will set a new target of 18 million tons of oil equivalent (Mtoe) in biofuels by 2010; and a report on systems supporting renewable energy in the EU. On 31 December 2005 the Commission will also publish a report on the implementation of the Renewables Directive. *Further details at:*

<http://www.europarl.eu.int/oeil/file.jsp?id=5199472>

EVENTS

9 Nov. 2005, Liverpool (UK)

Northern Exposure – Euro Partnership Event 2005 will present experiences of transnational cooperation in the North of England regions - Yorkshire & Humber, North East and North West and will highlight some of the regions' priorities for future transnational cooperation. The event will also include an exhibition or "Project Village", showcasing successful transnational co-operation projects between the North of England regions and regions of other EU Member States. *Further details from: Jill Millington, Tel: +44 (0) 1942 737928 or email: jill.millington@nwra.gov.uk*

23 Nov. 2005, Brussels

The North West of England is organising a conference on "Tourism and Regeneration – Best Practice in the North West of England". The event will include presentations of best practice in the North West and will also provide an opportunity to explore ways of building partnerships with other regions across the EU, in preparation for joint cooperation in tourism-related activities under future European funding programmes. *Further details from: Nikki Johnston, Cheshire Brussels Office, Tel:+32 (0)2 229 5376, Email: johnstonn@cheshire-brussels.com*

23-24 Nov. 2005, Brussels

The conference, "Building Cohesion in an Ageing Europe," will highlight the importance of the issue of ageing to regional and cohesion policy in the context of the future round of Structural Funds. It will feature the launch of a report by Professor John Bachtler and Dr Martin Ferry of the European Policies Resources Centre at the University of Strathclyde on existing regional and sub-national strategies aimed at addressing ageing. Key speakers include: Graham Meadows, Director General, DG Regional Policy, and Konstantinos Hatzidakis MEP, Greece, Rapporteur on Cohesion Policy. *Further details at:*

<http://www.ace.org.uk/AgeConcern/News/4968.htm> Tel +44 (0)20 8765 7602 or e-mail: eventsdept@ace.org.uk.

29 Nov. 2005, London (UK)

The Committee of the Region's Second Conference on Subsidiarity will examine the challenges and prospects of subsidiarity for local and regional authorities. The event, which falls during the period of reflection on the EU Constitution, also provides an opportunity to consider what steps the EU should take in order to bring its policies and legislation more into line with citizens' expectations. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

30 November 2005, Brussels

The conference, "The Landfill Directive: A Practical Solution?" is being jointly organised by the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions (CoR). The conference will present the findings of a recent CoR survey of local and regional authorities on the implementation of the Directive and also the results of a European Commission study on the implementation of the Directive at national level. There will also be presentations of good practices and a debate on the future of the Landfill Directive. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

7-8 March 2006, Paris (FR)

'The First Economic Forum of European Regions' is a major European event which will assess the changing economic environment of regions (globalisation, cross border cooperation, new innovation models – clusters, etc..) and examine new dynamic policies to support regional development. The conference will have three spaces: The Exhibition, to promote territories; The Forum, to share know-how on the knowledge-based economy; and The Village, to support and consolidate European networks. The event is organised under the patronage of the President of the Committee of the Regions and the President of the European Commission. *Further details at: <http://www.euroreg.fr>*

PUBLICATIONS

Regions: Statistical Yearbook 2005

Eurostat, the EU's Statistical Office, has just published a new edition of the Statistical Yearbook of the EU Regions, covering the 254 regions of the 25 EU Member States and the 14 regions of Bulgaria and Romania (defined at NUTS II level). This year, the publication includes chapters on population, agriculture, GDP, household accounts, labour market, transport, science, technology and innovation, business, health, urban statistics, education and tourism. *Further details at: http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=0,1136162,0_45572073&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL or contact: eurostat-pressoffice@cec.eu.int*

Local & Regional Structures in Europe

"Local and regional structures in Europe" is a new publication of the Council of European Municipalities & Regions (CEMR). Published on September 26, it explains the local, intermediate and regional levels of over thirty European states and describes the electoral or designation system and the main functions for each level, as well as the types of mandates and the competences. *Further details at: http://www.ccre.org/bases/T_599_28_3_524.pdf*

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