

EU News Bulletin

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

Number 21 – November 2005

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



Irish Regions Office



INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION

FUNDING 1

Science Shops
Active European Citizenship
Mobility of Workers
European Youth Foundation

NEWS & POLICY 2

Budget impact for rural/regional funds
EC to Adopt Bio-Energy Action Plan
Positions Polarised on Sugar Reform
EC adopts work programme for 2006
Ireland's National Reform Programme
Culture 2007 programme approved
Education & youth progs approved
.eu Registration from 7 Dec 2005
Ireland behind in internet usage
EU transparency initiative launched

EVENTS 4

Shaping regional futures
Employment week 2006
eEurope: cutting edge technology
Shaping EU regional policy

PUBLICATIONS 4

New web service on regional foresight

NETWORKS 4

Local initiatives on social exclusion
Asylum & immigration

FUNDING

Science Shops

On November 15 the European Commission published a call for proposals for pilot projects to support research projects undertaken by Science Shops (small entities, often linked to 3rd level colleges, that carry out research, usually free of charge, on behalf of citizens and local community groups) for community/voluntary groups. Proposals should be based on the needs of local communities and can address either the scientific analysis of a problem, the enhancement of knowledge around a topic and/or the development of community services. The Commission plans to expand this initiative in 2007-2013. Closing date for proposals: 30 March 2006. Total indicative budget: €1 million *Further details at: <http://www.cordis.lu/science-society/calls.htm> information on Science Shops at: www.livingknowledge.org*

Active European Citizenship

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the Community Action Programme to Support Bodies Working in the Field of Active European Citizenship. Support will take the form of operating grants to co-finance expenditure associated with the permanent work programme of bodies which pursues an aim of general European interest in the field of active European citizenship or an objective forming part of the EU's activities in this area (e.g. research, studies, reflection, training tools promoting a sustained dialogue with civil society organisations, promoting active European citizenship at local and regional level; dissemination and exchange of information, etc.). Total budget €3.4 million. Deadline for applications: 30 December 2005. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/dqs/education_culture/activecitizenship/5905/index_en.htm*

Mobility of Workers

The European Commission has published a call for proposals relating to the organisation of cooperation, awareness raising activities and pilot projects aimed at enhancing mobility opportunities for workers in Europe. The call also aims to promote the exchange of good practice and to inform relevant stakeholders about the rights of workers to free movement as well as the instruments to support mobility in the EU. Proposals must be developed and implemented by a partnership involving at least two of the following: public authorities and social partner organisations operating at European, national, regional or local level, non-governmental organisations, businesses, academia, associations, foundations, municipalities, chambers of commerce and the media. Total budget: €4 million. EU co-financing of up to 85%. Between 20 and 30 projects will be funded (average grant between €100,000 and €150,000). Deadline for applications: 12 December 2005. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/calls/tender_en.cfm*

European Youth Foundation

The latest call under the European Youth Foundation aims to support voluntary youth initiatives promoting mutual understanding, peace and cooperation among the people of Europe and the rest of the world. Eligible actions include: international youth meetings; research projects and the production of information/documentation; the running costs of international non-governmental youth organisations and networks; and pilot projects covering a wider range of actions. Total budget: €3 million. Deadlines: February 1 and April 1 2006 *Further details at: http://galadriel.coe.int/fej/portal/media-type/html/country/null/user/anon/page/default.psm1?js_language=en*

NEWS & POLICY

EU Budget Impact on Rural and Regional Funds

On October 20, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso presented a five-point plan to help restart stalled negotiations on the EU budget for 2007-2013. The five suggestions in the plan include: 1. A Globalisation Adjustment Fund; 2. A higher share of Structural Fund spending on schemes to boost competitiveness; 3. More funds to be transferred from farm support to rural development; 4. Giving MEPs scrutiny rights over spending on external policies; and 5. A wide-ranging review of all spending and revenue in 2009. In relation to point 2, Mr Barroso is proposing that Member states should set a target of 60% (and possibly up to 75% in Ireland) of Structural Fund spending for "Lisbon" measures (R&D, innovation, energy efficiency, etc.). A similar measure for rural development is also proposed.

In relation to point 3, Mr Barroso is proposing that from 2009 an additional 1% per annum of the CAP budget would be transferred from direct payments to rural development. The concept of "modulation", introduced in the 2003 CAP reform, means that each year a percentage of direct payments (3% in 2005, 4% in 2006 and 5% from 2007 until 2012) is transferred to rural development. If Barroso's new proposal were agreed then the rate of modulation would increase to 6% from 2009 to 2012, providing an additional €3.2 billion for rural development (or approx. €13-€14 million per year in Ireland). On November 8 the UK Presidency tabled a new paper to progress discussions on the future EU budget, which incorporates Barroso's proposals. In particular, Member States are asked to consider whether the proposed transfers to rural development should be voluntary or compulsory and in which year they should begin. The Presidency will present a more detailed proposal on the budget in advance of a special meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on December 7, which will prepare for the EU summit on December 15. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office*

Commission to Adopt Bio-Energy Action Plan

The European Commission is expected to adopt a Bio-Energy (biomass, bio-fuels) Action Plan on November 23. The

plan will have three key goals: to guarantee a stable supply of energy, to protect the environment and climate and to boost employment in rural areas. The plan will specifically target biomass for heat and power generation (forest and agricultural residues and organic matter in municipal waste) and cereals and oilseeds for bio-fuel production. One of the main energy policy targets of the EU is to double the share of the Renewable Energy Sources (RES) from 5.4% in 1997 up to 12.0% by 2010. Various legislative actions have been undertaken in order to facilitate this target but progress has been slow.

The Action Plan will include a range of measures to address obstacles to the production of bio-energy. For example, Member States will be encouraged to reduce taxes on biomass fuels, to draw up national Biomass Action Plans and to organise consumer information campaigns on the benefits of biomass. The Commission will also propose a revised version of the Bio-fuels Directive 2003/30/EC in 2006 in which national targets will be set, mandatory quotas will be imposed on fuel suppliers and an environmental certification system for bio-fuels will be established. In addition, a Directive promoting the public procurement of "clean" vehicles will be proposed and, early in 2006 a Communication on the use of bio-fuels in the Common Agricultural Policy will be issued. Other measures proposed include legislative amendments to allow ethanol to be used in petrol and bio-diesel to be used in diesel and monitoring of oil producers to ensure no hindrance of the bio fuels industry. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/res/biomass_action_plan/index_en.htm*

Positions Polarised on Sugar Reform

The EU's Agriculture Ministers continued their standoff over the EU's upcoming sugar reform at their Agricultural Council meeting in Luxembourg on October 25. Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel insisted on the need for an agreement (with the reforms to apply from 1 July 2006) before the Hong Kong meeting of the WTO in December. However, at the Council meeting, eleven Member States, including Ireland, Greece, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland and Poland presented the Commissioner with a letter protesting against the EU's reform plans, in which they pushed for the objective of "keeping a viable sugar sector" in their countries. The letter calls

for the sugar price cuts to be "significantly less" than the 39% proposed by the Commission. It also calls for additional compensation "for Member States where a significant reduction in production will be recorded". The Commission is now working on a compromise proposal which it believes will satisfy these 11 Member States and pave the way for an agreement on the reform at the next Council meeting on November 22. A high-level group of senior Member State officials met in Brussels on November 8 and 11 to progress the discussions.

Further details at: <http://www.eu2005.gov.uk/>

Commission Adopts Work Programme for 2006

The European Commission adopted its Work Programme for 2006 on October 25. Entitled "Unlocking Europe's Full Potential", the work programme sets out the EU's major political priorities for 2006. It focuses in particular on the key strategic objectives which the Commission set out at the start of its mandate: prosperity, solidarity, security and Europe as a world partner, and identifies over 90 different legislative initiatives, executive and other acts that the Commission intends to adopt to help realise these priorities. In terms of prosperity, the Commission sees 2006 as a critical year for the revised Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs and, through its partnership with the Member States (in the form of National Reform Programmes - see following article) it intends to reinvigorate the process of structural reforms in Europe. 2006 will also set the scene for a new generation of programmes in areas such as the Structural Funds, rural development, innovation, research and education. In relation to the Structural Funds, the Work Programme envisages the adoption of the Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion. The adoption of a proposal for a Council Regulation concerning EU financing for the International Fund for Ireland is also foreseen. The Commission highlights the difficulties surrounding the failure to ratify the EU Constitution and the still unresolved debate on the EU budget. In relation to the latter, the Commission expectation is that "2006 should see intensive preparations to have the full range of funding programmes up and running by 1 January 2007". *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/atwork/programmes/index_en.htm*

Ireland's National Reform Programme

On October 25, Minister for European Affairs, Noel Treacy presented to the Dail Ireland's National Reform Programme under the EU's "Jobs and Growth Strategy". In April 2005, the Member States and the European Commission agreed to re-launch the Lisbon Agenda, focusing primarily on boosting growth and jobs in the EU. As part of this agreement each Member State is required to prepare a 3 year National Reform Programme, setting out the measures being taken at national level to help achieve the Lisbon objectives. The European Commission, for its part, will focus on measures to be taken at EU level. Ireland's National Reform Programme, which was to be presented to the Commission at the end of October, draws together a comprehensive set of policies and measures aimed at consolidating and sustaining Ireland's economic and job creation performance. The programme also reports on Ireland's positive overall contribution so far to the Lisbon goal to turn the EU into the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy by 2010. *Further details from Philip Hannon. Tel: +353 (0) 1 6194398 or 353 (0) 87 2870891*

Council approve Culture 2007 programme

At their meeting on November 14, EU Culture Ministers reached partial political agreement on the Culture 2007 programme (2007-2013), approving its content but not its financing (pending agreement in the EU budget for 2007-2013). The budget proposed by the Commission is €408 million, a significant increase from the €236.5 million for the current Culture 2000 programme (2000-2006). The new programme will give priority support to three objectives: promoting transnational mobility for those working in the cultural sector in the EU, encouraging transnational circulation of works of art and cultural products and encouraging intercultural dialogue. It provides for three strands of intervention: direct financial support for cultural actions, support for bodies active at European level in the field of culture and support for analyses and the collection and dissemination of information. This item will be on the Culture Council's agenda for a future meeting in order to finalise the budget and its breakdown. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education/culture/newprog/index_en.html*

Approval for Lifelong Learning and Youth Programme

Meeting in Brussels on November 15, EU Education Ministers provisionally approved (subject to agreement on the EU budget for 2007-2013) a new integrated programme for Lifelong Learning for the period 2007-2013, a new Youth in Action programme 2007-2013. Budgets for both programmes will be finalised at a later date. The European Commission has foreseen a budget of €13.6 billion over seven years for the Lifelong Learning Programme (up from €3.9 billion for 2000-2006). The programme aims to improve the quality of training and education systems in the EU and is comprised of four sectoral programmes concentrating on: school education (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci) and adult education (Grundtvig). Within this integrated programme, the Erasmus student exchange programme receives the lion's share of the current budget (43%), followed by Leonardo da Vinci (27%) and Comenius (12%). The new programmes will be managed in a more decentralised way than in the past by a network of national agencies. With a proposed budget of €915 million for 2007-2013, Youth in Action will target young people aged between 13 and 30 in EU Member States and third countries. Like the new lifelong learning programme, management will be more decentralised. Youth in Action brings together a range of initiatives, including youth exchanges, the European Voluntary Service and "Youth for the world", aimed at developing projects with third countries. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education/culture/newprog/index_en.html*

.eu Registration from 7 Dec 2005

Eurid, the independent organisation selected by the European Commission to operate the new registry for .eu has announced that its first phase of registrations for the new Top Level web Domain will begin on 7 December 2005. This marks the start of a 4-month "sunrise" period during which public bodies or the holders of existing trademarks or other prior rights can register. Registrations for .eu will be fully open to the public from the beginning of April 2006. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/policy/doteu/index_en.htm Or: <http://www.eurid.eu/>*

Internet usage in Ireland below EU average

A report published by Eurostat on November 7 highlights a continuing digital divide in the EU, stemming largely from differences in education and employment status. While 85% of students in the EU used the internet during the first quarter of 2004, only 40% of the unemployed and 13% of the retired did so. With regard to education, 77% of respondents with a tertiary education had used the internet within this period, compared to 52% of those who had completed secondary education and 25% with a lower secondary education. The report suggests that missing infrastructure, a lack of incentives to use ICT and a lack of computer literacy are all-important in producing such a divide. Ireland fairs badly in comparison to other EU Member States, with total internet usage at only 34%, as compared to the EU25 average of 47%. Usage among students in Ireland is 56% (EU25 average of 85%), usage among employees is 42% (EU25 average of 60%), usage among the unemployed is 17% (EU25 average of 40%) and the figure for the retired is 11% (EU25 average of 13%). Ireland also comes bottom of the EU15 in terms of computer ownership, internet connection and broadband access. *Further details at: http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-NP-05-038/EN/KS-NP-05-038-EN.PDF*

EU Transparency Initiative launched

On November 9, the European Commission adopted a new initiative to improve transparency of the institution and its policies. Among a number of activities proposed, is one concerning "enhanced information about projects and end beneficiaries of EU funds". For funds in shared management such as the Structural Funds, the Commission is proposing to establish, as a first step, links between the Commission's central portal on the web and the information provided by the Member States. As a second step, the Commission plans to discuss with Member States the introduction of a legal obligation to publish information about projects and end beneficiaries of funds under shared management. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/commission/barroso/kallas/transparency_en.htm*

EVENTS

1-3 Dec 2005, Cologne (D)

Within the broad context of regional development in Europe, the Region Cologne/Bonn will host a triple Conference-Series called 'SHARE - Shaping Regional Futures' from 2005 to 2009. The objective of SHARE is to examine how regions in Europe deal with the dual approach of bringing the Lisbon as well as the Gothenburg strategy into action in the context of regional development. The first conference will take place in Cologne on December 1-3, 2005. Follow-up conferences will take place in December 2007 and 2009. *Further details:* <http://www.regionale2010.de/de/share/registrierung/index.html>

16-18 May 2006, Brussels

Employment Week 2006 will provide another opportunity for practitioners and European decision-makers to connect and discuss the latest policies and trends in employment. The theme for this year's event is, 'Working together for growth and jobs' and the following issues will be addressed: employment in the future global economy, adapting to change, work-life balance, building partnerships, promoting mobility. *Further details at:* <http://www.employmentweek.com/>

18-19 May 2006, Newry (N. Ireland)

The conference, "eEurope for All: Cutting Edge Technology" aims to provide an opportunity for the public and private sectors, and community and voluntary organisations to view exhibitions of cutting edge technology from across Europe. In particular, the conference aims to facilitate the exchange of experience, good practices and demonstration projects. The event will also provide an opportunity for governments and business from across the EU to actively contribute to defining the EU's i2010 ICT strategy. The conference is supported by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the European Commission. *Further details at:* <http://www.e-europe4all.net/index.htm>

8-9 June 2006, Leuven (BE)

In the context of ongoing enlargement of the EU, the key role of regional policy within the Lisbon agenda and EU budget constraints, the conference, "Shaping EU Regional Policy: Economic Social and Political Pressures" will examine the future scope of EU regional policy from both strategic and practical perspectives. The conference, which is being organised by the Regional Studies Association, will discuss the role and meaning of 'territorial cohesion' and will examine the basic outlines for, and controversies surrounding, the development of the EU regional policy for the new programming period 2007-2013. A call for papers for this conference has also been published (deadline: 31 January 2006). *Further details at:* <http://www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/events/cfp/belgium2006.pdf>

PUBLICATIONS

New Web Service on Regional Foresight

CORDIS, and the Foresight unit of the European Commission's Directorate General for Research have jointly established a new web service for science and technology foresight. The CORDIS Foresight service gives an overview of EU supported activities in this area and includes a new section on 'Regional Foresight,' which gives an overview of the many foresight activities aimed at supporting regional policies, including conferences on 'Building the Future on Knowledge' and 'Europe's Regions Shaping the Future', information on the expert group Blueprints for Foresight in the Regions, as well as Country Guides of Regional Foresight. The CORDIS Foresight service also includes sections on news and events, publications, tools, future vision, and includes links to relevant contacts. *Further details at:* <http://www.cordis.lu/foresight/home.html>

NETWORKS

Local Initiatives to Combat Social Exclusion (LOCIN)

LOCIN is a European Resource Center on Local Initiatives in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion. The network operates through an internet-platform, coordinated by the European Anti-poverty Network (EAPN) and supported by the European Commission. Six national networks of EAPN (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy and the UK), working with researchers from universities and research centres, are the project-partners. However, the internet platform is freely accessible and multi-lingual. A key aspect of the site is a database with information on over 160 local initiatives (examples of good practice and innovation) to combat poverty and social exclusion. *Further details at:* <http://www.locin.info/about.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