

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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Gender Equality in Local Development

The European Commission has published a call for proposals for transnational projects to promote gender equality in local development. This call aims to promote projects in two specific areas: 1. How to encourage balanced participation of men and women in local development; and 2. How policies implemented at local level can encourage the promotion of gender equality. Possible initiatives include: exchange of good practices; development of products, strategies and methods; awareness-raising activities, seminars; etc. Projects must involve parties from at least three countries (Member States of the EU, members of the EEA, candidate countries). The total budget is around €4.3 million. The maximum grant per project is €500,000 or up to 80% of total eligible costs. Co-financing must be in cash. Deadline for applications: 28 April 2006. Further details at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/calls/2005/vp_2005_020/call_en.pdf

EU/Asia Business Cooperation

The European Commission is currently seeking proposals for projects under the Asia-Invest II Programme, an initiative to promote and support business cooperation between the EU and Asia. The Programme provides assistance to intermediary business organisations to facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships between companies, in particular SMEs, in the EU and South and South-East Asia and China. It also aims to strengthen the business environment and to increase trade and investment flows between the two regions. The total budget available under the current call is €6.25 million. The deadline for proposals is 30 March 2006. Further

details at:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/asia-invest/index_en.htm

Urban Transport Awards

The NICHES consortium, an EU initiative on mainstreaming urban transport innovation, recently launched the OSMOSE Awards. The Awards will reward local authorities that have introduced "innovative and daring measures" in order to meet urban transport challenges in a sustainable and effective way. The Awards will particularly look at the most promising new concepts, initiatives and projects which occupy a "niche" position but which have the potential to become 'mainstream' urban transport policies in the future. The Award is open to local and regional authorities and their local partners. Deadline for applications: 31 May 2006. Further details at (click on "Awards"): <http://www.osmose-os.org/>

Preventing and Combating Violence

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the Daphne II programme, which aims to prevent and combat violence against children, young people and women, and to protect victims and groups at risk. Priorities for 2006 include: peer violence and peer protection mechanisms; EU legislation relating to violence; participation of children, young people and women in violence prevention and victim support; indicators and related data collection; extraction of policy issues from existing Daphne-funded projects; and exchange, adaptation and use of existing good practices. The total budget for 2006 is €9 million. Funding of up to 80%, or €50,000 to €175,000 per project is available. Deadline for applications: 10 February 2006. Further details at:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/funding/daphne/funding_daphne_en.htm

NEWS & POLICY

New Guidelines on Regional Aid for 2007-2013

On December 23, the European Commission adopted new guidelines on Regional Aid for the period 2007-2013. As foreseen in the draft Guidelines (see EU News Bulletin no. 18), Member States will have the final decision in selecting areas qualifying for Regional Aid. In relation to Ireland, the BMW Region will be eligible for Regional Aid under Article 87(3)(c) in 2007-2013. Eligibility under Article 87(3)(c) will also extend to other areas outside the BMW Region which have an unemployment rate above 115% of the national average (based on EUROSTAT data for the most recent 3 years) and to other sub-regions (e.g. counties or similar with a minimum population of 20,000) with demonstrated economic disadvantage.

An overall limiting factor on the extent of the qualifying area in Ireland is the “eligible national population coverage” limit of 50%. However, special transition arrangements will also apply to the Southern & Eastern (S&E) region in order to facilitate the smooth transition to the new State aid regime. Under this arrangement, additional areas within the S&E region may exceptionally be designated as eligible for Regional Aid under Article 87(3)(c) until 1 January 2009. This additional designation can encompass a further 25% of the population, on top of the 50% referred to above. Areas eligible under Article 87(3)(c) ordinarily 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, however, benefit from special transition arrangements, whereby the reduction in aid intensities from current levels would take place in two stages. *Further details at: http://www.eu.int/comm/competition/state_aid/regional/*

EU Strategy on Biofuels

The European Commission is expected to publish an EU strategy on biofuels at the beginning of February. This strategy, drafted by DG Agriculture, will expand on the proposals contained in the Biomass Action Plan presented at the beginning of December (see EU News Bulletin no. 22). The strategy advocated by DG Agriculture will focus as a priority on cutting production costs, with the use of economic incentives to boost production and consumption of biofuels.

Specific measures proposed include: a review of the 2003 Biofuels Directive (2003/30/EC); progress the draft Directive tabled in December on encouraging public procurement of “green” vehicles (see EU News Bulletin no.22); and encourage support for biofuel production and biomass in the context of Structural Funds and rural development programmes. With regard to agriculture, the Commission proposes to boost the supply of raw materials by: including sugar (for biofuels) in the land set-aside regime and eligibility for the energy crops premium (€45/ha); reviewing the regime on differentiated treatment of agricultural produce for energy production in 2006; assessing the scope for transferring surplus cereals bought into intervention to energy production; better informing farmers on support regimes on raw materials for biofuels; the drafting of a forestry action plan; a review of legislation on animal by-products and waste to facilitate the alternative production of biofuels. The Commission will also encourage R&D on biofuels and second-generation biofuels. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

EU Presidency to Fast-track Biomass Action Plan

The European Council Presidencies for 2006, Austria and Finland, have published “The Operational Programme of the Council for 2006,” which sets out the main priorities and objectives for the Council in 2006. Some of these include: climate change; renewable energy and environmental technologies; the EU’s new Sustainable Development Strategy; adoption of the EU’s new research programme and the new Competitiveness and Innovation Programme by June 2006; and adoption of the new lifelong learning programme. Energy issues and climate change are high priorities for the Austrian Presidency, which has announced that it will be pushing for a rapid adoption of the Commission’s Biomass Action Plan, presented in December (see EU News Bulletin no. 22). The Biomass Action Plan is now on the agenda of the Agriculture Council of 23-24 January. On the basis of this plan, and the forthcoming Communication on biofuels (see previous article), the Austrian Presidency also plans to take stock of the role renewable energy sources play within the CAP and to review the energy crop support arrangements during 2006. *Further details at: http://www.eu2006.at/en/The_Council_Presidency/Priorities_Programmes/index.html*

New Irish CoR Delegation Announced

On January 19, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr Dick Roche, T.D., announced the Government’s nominations to the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) for the 2006-2010 term. The CoR is the EU’s advisory body on local and regional issues and has 317 members, including 9 Irish members. The Irish delegation for 2006-2010 will include three new members, Cllr. Denis Landy (South Tipperary Co. Council and South East Regional Authority), Cllr. Patrick McGowan (Donegal Co. Council and Border Regional Authority) and Cllr. Cathal Crowe (Clare Co. Council and Mid West Regional Authority). They will join six existing members (Cllr. Maria Corrigan (Dun Laoghaire Rathdown), Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald (South Tipperary), Cllr. Constance Hannify (Offaly), Cllr. Declan McDonnell (Galway city), Cllr. Seamus Murray (Meath) and Cllr. Paul O’Donoghue (Kerry)) who have been reappointed for another term. Three new alternate members have also been appointed, Cllr. Peter Coyle (Fingal Co Council), Cllr. Pat Doran (Wicklow Co. Council) and Cllr. Mary Shields (Cork Co Council). Six of the existing alternate members have been reappointed: Cllr. Terry Brennan (Louth), Cllr. Veronica Cawley (Sligo), Cllr. Michelle Mulherin (Mayo), Cllr. John Pender (Carlow), Cllr. Noreen Ryan (Limerick), and Cllr. Barney Steele (Longford). *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

Region’s not Consulted on Lisbon Reform Programmes

A survey conducted by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) between September and October 2005 shows that only 17% of local and regional authorities are satisfied with their role in the preparation of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs). Under the revised Lisbon Strategy, Member States were required to draw up NRPs by the end of 2005, identifying key policy priorities for the next three years. The CoR survey highlights low levels of consultation with local and regional authorities in the preparation of the NRPs, despite European Commission recommendations to the contrary. Furthermore, where authorities were consulted, it appears that their proposals were generally not recognised as a “major contribution” by national coordinators (80% of cases). The survey indicates significant differences between Member States,

however. In Latvia, virtually all sub-national authorities interviewed had some involvement in compiling the country's NRP. The figure is 83% in Belgium and Austria, 80% in Italy and 78% in Spain. By contrast, there was little participation of local and regional authorities in Ireland, the Czech Republic, Portugal and Slovenia. The CoR is currently analysing the published NRPs in order to make a comparison with the survey results. This analysis will form part of the CoR's contribution to the spring European Council on March 23-24. *Further details at:* http://www.cor.eu.int/document/Highlight/cdr45-2005_di_en.pdf

Report Highlights Ireland's Poor Innovation Performance

The 5th edition of the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) highlights significant weaknesses in Ireland's innovation performance and suggests the country "could be entering a difficult transition phase towards developing domestic R&D and innovation capabilities." Published on January 12 the EIS highlights significant national differences in European innovation performance. Sweden, Finland Switzerland, Germany and Denmark are the EU's innovation leaders. Most of the new Member States are in a catching-up process or are losing ground, while most of the "old" Member States, including Ireland, are in a larger group of average performing countries. Ireland is ranked 11th out of 25 EU Member States and mixes above average and below average performance. Ireland performs well in areas such as the share of high tech exports, the supply of science and engineering graduates and standards of tertiary education. However, the report suggested that Ireland now faces the challenge of making the transition from an economy based on foreign investment to one based on innovation. Many indicators point to serious difficulties in making this transition, including: a declining share of high tech exports; a fall-off in business R&D and university R&D funded by the business sector; and a drop in venture capital supply (136% of EU average in 2000 to 92% in 2003). *Further details at:* <http://www.trendchart.org/scoreboards/scoreboard2005/index.cfm>

Thematic Strategies on Waste and Resource Use

On December 21 the European Commission's Environment Directorate

presented two new thematic strategies, one on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste and one on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources. The Thematic Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling aims to decouple environmental impact from resource use by promoting a "life-cycle approach," incorporating prevention, recycling and recovery. It includes a legislative proposal to revise the 1975 Waste Framework Directive to incorporate: mandatory national waste prevention programmes; special measures to improve the recycling market; simplification of waste legislation; measures to shift the focus of waste policy towards better use of resources. The complementary Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources aims to decouple resource use from economic growth (GDP and municipal waste had almost identical growth rates of 19% between 1995 and 2003). Both Strategies will be covered in more detail in the next edition of the EU Policy Review. *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/waste/strategy.htm>

Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment

On January 13, the European Commission launched a new Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment. The strategy highlights the challenges confronting Europe's urban areas (poor air quality, high levels of traffic and congestion, urban sprawl, greenhouse gas emissions and generation of waste and waste water) and presents a range of measures designed to assist local authorities in addressing these issues, in particular through the implementation of EU environmental legislation. The measures proposed include: Guidance on integrated environmental management and sustainable transport; Training and capacity-building to develop skills in urban environmental management; Support for EU wide exchange of best practices (a new pilot network of focal points on urban issues (the "European Knowledge Platform"); and a new Commission internet portal for local authorities. The Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment will be covered in more detail in the next edition of the EU Policy Review. *Further details at:* http://www.eu.int/comm/environment/urban/thematic_strategy.htm

New Directive on Flooding

On January 18, the European Commission proposed a new Directive to help Member States prevent and limit flooding and the damaging effects on human health, the environment, infrastructure and property. The new directive will require Member States to carry out preliminary assessments to identify river basins and coastal areas at risk of flooding. Flood risk maps and flood risk management plans will then have to be prepared for vulnerable zones. The Commission anticipates a higher risk of floods in Europe in the coming decades, due to both climate change (higher intensity of rainfall and rising sea levels) and also due to failure to manage river systems properly (constructions in flood plains, etc.). The proposed flood risk management plans will include measures on prevention, protection, and preparedness. This will be covered in more detail in the next edition of the EU Policy Review. *Further details at:*

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/water/flood_risk/index.htm

EU Constitution by 2009

A Report adopted by the European Parliament on January 19 argues that no further EU enlargement is possible, after Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, on the basis of the Treaty of Nice and calls for the adoption of the EU Constitution by 2009. The Report calls for the initiation of a broad public debate on the future of European integration organised through a large number of 'Citizens Forums' in the Member States. This would mean an extension of the 'reflection period' beyond the one-year agreed in 2005. MEPs propose that these debates should be structured around specific topics, involving political parties, employers' and employees' representatives, civil society, the academic community and the media. The main themes should be the integration process, the EU's global role, the European social and economic model, security and justice and the financing of the EU. MEPs support keeping the existing Constitutional treaty text, but with the addition of further "significant measures that take account of the concerns expressed by France, the Netherlands and others."

Further details at: http://www.europarl.eu.int/news/public/story_page/005-4526-16-1-3-901-20060119STO04525-2006-16-01-2006/default_en.htm

EVENTS

10 February 2006, Ravenna (Italy)

The conference, “EMAS & Environmental Budget” will look at how voluntary instruments for environmental management and transparency can help local authorities. The event will provide an opportunity to discuss the potential of voluntary instruments and tools currently available to local authorities (EMAS, Local Agenda 21, etc..) and to consider the revision of the EMAS Regulation. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office, or e-mail: laworkshop@ervet.it*

20-21 February, Brussels

The European Commission has designated 2006 as the European Year of Workers' Mobility. To launch this initiative the Commission is organizing a conference on, “Workers' Mobility: a right, an option, or an opportunity?” The conference will provide an opportunity to discuss the role and impact of mobility in the framework of the Lisbon objectives and will set the tone for discussions and pilot actions during the Year. It will also provide an opportunity to officially launch the new EURES platform, which will provide EU citizens with direct access to job vacancies published by public employment services in the EU. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/workersmobility2006/events_en.htm*

9 March 2006, Brussels

“Making Connections,” is the title of the second meeting of international and European officers in local and regional authorities. The event, which is being organised by the International Coordinators in Europe, will be divided into two sessions: “Local and Regional Authorities and the EU: What kind of relationship?” and, “International Decentralised Cooperation,” which will include developments in twinning. Speakers include Mrs Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy and Mr Louis Michel, Commissioner for Development. Registration by January 31. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

3 - 4 April 2006, Graz (Austria)

The conference, “Green Public Procurement: how to turn policy into practice” is being organised by the European Commission in association with ICLEI (the Local Government for Sustainability Association) and the Austrian EU Presidency. The event is targeted at purchasers and policy makers from local, regional and national authorities, the private sector, consultancy firms and international networks and will focus on demonstrating good practices and assisting purchasers to turn policy into practice. *Further details at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/gpp/media.htm> or www.iclei.org/itc/gpp2006*

30 May- 2June, Brussels

The theme for this year's Green Week, the European Commissions' annual environmental event, will be “biodiversity”. The Commission recently launched a consultation on biodiversity and is due to publish a Communication on this topic later in the year. The aim of the week-long event (which includes conference, workshops, exhibitions, etc..) is to bring actors from local, regional and national authorities, businesses and NGOs together to discuss key environment topics and to network and exchange experience. *Further details will be published in early February at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/greenweek/index_en.htm*

PUBLICATIONS

“Green” Public Procurement

The European Commission recently published, “Buying Green! A handbook on environmental public procurement”. The aim of the handbook is to explain to local and regional authorities how to integrate environmental considerations into public procurement procedures. It can be downloaded at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/gpp/handbook> or ordered from: Ms Jill Michielssen, European Commission, Tel: 32-2-2961557, e-mail: jill.michielssen@cec.eu.int

Public Procurement for an Accessible Europe

A new Reference Manual for the inclusion of accessibility criteria in public calls for tender under the EU's Public Procurement Directives was published on January 16. The “Build for All Reference Manual” is targeted at national, regional and local authorities across Europe, in their specific role as procurers, owners and managers of public infrastructure. It is also aimed at other public entities, including all publicly funded bodies and agencies that procure works through the use of the Public Procurement procedures established by European Law. *Further details at: <http://www.build-for-all.net>*

NETWORKS

EU Urban Knowledge Network

The European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) was launched as a pilot project under the Dutch EU Presidency in 2004. To date, 15 EU Member States and two city networks, Urbact and Eurocities, have participated in this initiative, which supports the sharing of knowledge and experience on tackling urban issues. EUKN focuses on six themes: social inclusion and integration; housing; transport and infrastructure; urban environment, economy; knowledge and employment; security and crime prevention. Supported by a network of national desks, the EUKN Secretariat is hosted by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and the Dutch Knowledge Centre for larger towns and cities. *Further detail at: <http://www.eukn.org/eukn/>*

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