

# 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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## FUNDING

### **Local Enterprise Awards**

The European Enterprise Awards, launched by the European Commission at the end of 2005, aim to recognise excellence in promoting enterprise and entrepreneurship at local level, including encouraging enterprise in disadvantaged areas, reducing red tape, improving enterprise education, and promoting sustainable business practices. The Awards are open to local and regional authorities, local development bodies, educational programmes and business organisations. Deadline for entries at national level: 31 May 2006, and at EU level: 15 September 2006. *Further details at:* <http://www.european-enterprise-awards.org> or from Mr Colm Hackett, Enterprise Ireland. Tel: +353 1 609 2125, e-mail: [colm.hackett@enterprise-ireland.com](mailto:colm.hackett@enterprise-ireland.com)

### **Urban Mobility Award**

The OSMOSE Awards aim to reward local authorities who have taken the initiative to introduce innovative new measures to meet the challenges of urban transport in a sustainable and effective way. The Awards look in particular at the most promising new concepts and initiatives which have the potential to become 'mainstream' urban transport solutions. The deadline for applications is 30 September 2006. *Further details at:* <http://ange.archangelis.com/typo3/niches/index.php?id=74>

### **Raising Awareness of Sustainability**

The Towards "Class A" Award recognises good communication activities by local authorities in raising awareness of energy and water consumption and the CO2 emissions of public buildings. The Award is open to

all local authorities throughout Europe who are members of the Display Campaign (see link below). Local authorities wishing to participate in the Award should submit a completed application form and details of the local media response or involvement in the campaign. Deadline for submissions: 2 June 2006. *Further details at:* <http://www.display-campaign.org> (click on TCA Award)

### **Network for Vocational Training**

The European Commission has launched a call for proposals with a view to awarding a grant to one organisation in each EU Member State to lead and coordinate a consortium of key organisations in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET). The selected consortium will be expected to provide a structured and decentralised system for collecting validated data on VET and related issues, and to support efforts to disseminate it at European and national level. The total budget for the project duration (12 months) is €763,000. The budget for Ireland is approx. €29,000. Maximum EU co-funding is 70%. Deadline for applications: 28 April 2006. *Further details at:* [http://www.cedefop.eu.int/ban\\_generic.asp](http://www.cedefop.eu.int/ban_generic.asp)

### **Spring Day Schools Competition**

Schools throughout Ireland are being invited to participate in the annual "Spring Day in Europe" event, which runs from 21 March to 9 May 2006. The event aims to encourage schools from across the EU to hold exchanges, debates and meetings with local, regional, national or international personalities, to give pupils and teachers the opportunity to gain information and a better understanding of the EU. *Further details at:* <http://www.springdayireland.com>

## NEWS & POLICY

### **Decentralisation of LIFE+ Programme**

The European Commission is currently finalising preparation for the LIFE+ programme (2007-2013), the EU's main funding instrument for environment policy. While the general focus of the new programme will be largely similar to the current period, a key difference will be the decentralisation of around 80% of the budget, which will be allocated to the Member States for financing projects and measures through national programmes. Each Member State is to be allocated a decentralised budget, based on their population, population density, number of Sites of Community Interest (SCIs) and number of SCIs relative to the EU total. Weightings will be attached to all of these factors to ensure a fair dispersal of funds and several corrective measures will apply.

Member States will then distribute funds according to national annual working programmes, which will be developed in consultation with the European Commission (probably by the Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in Ireland). The work programmes will be consistent with EU added value criteria. There will be two multi-annual programming periods: 2007 to 2010 and 2011 to 2013. The European Commission has proposed a LIFE+ budget of €2.19 billion for 2007-2013, but this is likely to drop to somewhere between €1.5 and €2.0 billion. Assuming agreement on the Financial Perspective in the coming weeks (see article below), LIFE+ should enter into force at the beginning of 2007. The multi-annual programme would then be adopted and Member States would draw up their national plans, in order to allow activities on the ground to start during 2007. *Further details at:*

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/news/futureoflife.htm>

### **Commission Propose Increase in "De Minimis" Threshold**

On March 9 the European Commission presented proposals to raise the ceiling of the current "de minimis" Regulation from €100,000 to €150,000. According to the current Regulation, public financial support not exceeding €100,000 over a period of 3 years in favour of a given company is deemed to have no substantial effect on competition and trade between Member

States, and therefore not to constitute State aid. The Commission proposal to increase the ceiling to €150,000 aims to take account of inflation and GDP growth in the EU since the *de minimis* ceiling was last revised. The proposal also extends the scope of application, under certain conditions, to the marketing and processing of agricultural products. In line with earlier Commission proposals and, more particularly, the new draft for a block exemption covering certain types of regional aid, the scope of the *de minimis* rule will be limited to transparent types of aid, for which it is possible to determine in advance the precise aid amount they include. The Commission's draft proposal will now be sent to the Member States for initial feedback. Further consultations will take place from June to November with both Member States and other interested parties. *Further details at:*

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/state\\_aid/others/action\\_plan/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/state_aid/others/action_plan/)

### **€500 million Globalisation Adjustment Fund**

On March 1 the European Commission published proposals for a new annual fund of €500 million to assist regions and sectors affected by major changes in world trade patterns. The new European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) would enable the EU to support workers made redundant as a result of trade-related adjustment changes and would complement the efforts of the Member States at national, regional and local levels. The one-off, tailor-made services to be funded by the EGF would include job search assistance, personalised retraining, promoting entrepreneurship, or assisting self-employment. Special temporary 'in-work supplements', such as allowances for those participating in training, might also be supported, as well as complementary wage allowances for workers over 50. The measures are designed to help workers laid off by multinational or national companies, including SMEs, find and retain a new job. Workers employed by sub-contractors or suppliers of a company where collective redundancies have been announced could also qualify for assistance. The EGF would support actions for up to 18 months. To trigger the Fund, there must be a minimum of 1,000 redundancies in a given company or sector. At company level, job losses must be in a region where the unemployment level (measured at NUTS III level) is above the national or EU average. At sectoral level, job losses

must represent at least 1% of the regional employment level (measured at NUTS II level). The Commission's objective is for the Fund to be operational from 1 January 2007. *Further details at:* [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/emplweb/news/news\\_en.cfm?id=131](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/emplweb/news/news_en.cfm?id=131)

### **Boost for Broadband in Ireland**

The European Commission has authorised a national programme to boost broadband availability in Ireland. The programme involves the creation of open-access Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) in over 120 Irish towns at a cost of €170 million, some of which will come from the EU Structural Funds. The Commission concluded that the aid was not likely to distort competition within the EU and is therefore allowable under EU State aid rules. The new carrier-neutral, fibre-optic networks will be installed in areas where such infrastructure is not supplied by local operators. The management and exploitation of the networks, which remain in public ownership, will be tendered out to a wholesale operator. This wholesaler will then offer its services to telecommunications companies, which will provide broadband electronic communications services to end-users. This funding is for Phases II and III of the MANs programme. Phase I has already been completed with networks built in 26 towns. *Further details at:* <http://www.dcmnr.gov.ie/Communication/Latest+News/>

### **Parliament Steps Up Pressure Over EU Budget**

A unanimous vote of the European Parliament's budget committee on March 6 threatened to end the EU's current Inter-Institutional Agreement on multi-annual budgeting unless the Parliament's demand for an increased EU budget for 2007-2013 (bigger than the €862 billion agreed at the EU summit in December 2005) is met. The Parliament in particular wants increased spending on research and development and is firmly against any cuts in spending on education and culture. If the threat of the Budget Committee is carried out, it would mean the EU budget would have to be agreed annually instead of on the basis of the 7-year Financial Perspective. There is also now a real danger that this current impasse in the budget negotiations

between the Commission, the Parliament and the Council could lead to delays in the launching of programmes in 2007. The issue will be next on the agenda for the Parliament's plenary session on 22-23 March. The agreement of the Parliament is required before the EU budget can be adopted. Further details at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/financial\\_observatory/next\\_steps/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/financial_observatory/next_steps/index_en.htm)

### **Commission Advice on Structural Funds Programming**

Speaking in Brussels on March 7, Danuta Hubner, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, confirmed that the Commission had begun discussions with Member States on their Strategic Reference Frameworks for using the Structural Funds in 2007-2013. Mrs Hubner also outlined the European Commission's framework for advising regions on Structural Funds programming and in particular on how they could make best use of the Structural Funds to foster regional research and innovation. The Commissioner indicated that the Commission was encouraging a priority focus on five key elements: 1. The need to develop more sophisticated and ambitious strategies using the tools which the EU has supported, such as Regional Foresight or Innovative Actions; 2. The need to intensify collaboration between the private sector, public research organisations and public authorities; 3. The need to be results-oriented with regard to investments and ensure that the mechanisms and know-how are in place to translate research results into commercially viable products and services; 4. The need to derive maximum benefit from the foreign direct investment which many regions have attracted over the last few years by ensuring that local small and medium-sized businesses can integrate themselves into multi-national supply chains; and 5. The need to support innovative clusters – and not just in high-technology sectors – as a basis for lasting public-private co-operation. Further details from the Irish Regions Office.

### **Irish Regions Office Selected for Open Days 2006**

The Irish Regions Office has been selected as part of one of the 14 "conglomerates" of Brussels based regional offices which will co-host Open

Days 2006: European Week of Regions and Cities. Open Days is an annual week-long event organised by the European Commission's Regional Policy Directorate (DG REGIO) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR), in association with selected regional representation offices in Brussels. The aim of the event is to showcase regional policy initiatives from across the EU and to facilitate the exchange of views and experiences. The overall theme of Open Days 2006, which takes place in Brussels from 9-12 October, is 'Investing in Europe's Regions and Cities – Public and Private Partnership for Growth and Jobs.' For this year's event the Irish Regions Office has teamed up with the Brussels offices of the regions of Auvergne-Centre-Limousin (FR), Andalucia (ES), Pardubicky (CZ), Banska Bystrica Region (SK), Trencin Region (SK), Saarland (DE), and the South West Region (UK) to form the conglomerate, "Dynamic Regions for Sustainable Development." This conglomerate will organise two seminars during Open Days 2006, one on "Developing Regional Research & Innovation Potential," and another on "Regional Innovation for Sustainable Development." In all, the event will feature up to 80 seminars and workshops. Further details at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/conferences/od2006](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/conferences/od2006)

### **The Role of Regions in "Communicating Europe"**

In response to the White Paper on European Communication Policy, presented by the European Commission on 1 February, the Assembly of European Regions (AER) has put forward 22 recommendations, which it intends submitting to the Commission as part of the public consultation process. In particular, the AER is calling on the Commission to: commit to organising a specific stakeholder forum with local and regional authorities; support the creation of a European Regional Training Institute that would provide lifelong learning opportunities to regional politicians and officers on matters of European integration; extend the idea of a European communication training programmes to the regional level; support the concept of giving European affairs higher billing in school curricula; and support the introduction of an 'institutional twinning' mechanism between regional administrations in order to encourage the exchange of good practice on the transposition and implementation of European legislation.

The AER also calls for an annual structured dialogue with the President of the European Commission, to take place prior to the approval of the Commission's work programme. The AER would also like the Commission to look at the degree of consultation with local and regional authorities in impact studies on European legislation and to bring forward concrete recommendations to improve this situation. Finally, it suggests that regional authorities should provide information to citizens on programmes funded by the EU, for example through information centres, and it calls on Member State Permanent Representations in Brussels to pledge to regularly exchange information and maintain contact with regional representatives in Brussels. Further detail at: <http://www.aer.org/news/2006/2006030902.html>

### **Gender Equality Road Map for 2006-2010**

On March 3, the European Commission published a roadmap on equal opportunities between men and women over the period 2006-2010. The roadmap presents 21 specific activities to be undertaken over the next five years. This includes the setting up of a new €50 million European Institute for Gender Equality, reviewing all existing EU gender equality law, increasing awareness of gender inequality, ensuring gender equality is considered in all policies, and pressing for better statistics in the area of gender equality. The roadmap aims to tackle six priority areas: economic independence; the reconciliation of work, private life and family life; equal participation in decision-making; eradication of gender-based violence; removal of gender stereotypes; promotion of gender equality in EU external policies and development. The Commission's general aim is to incorporate the principle of gender equality into other EU policy instruments, such as the Structural Funds, the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, etc. In relation to the Structural Funds, the Commission is encouraging the use of funds to provide support for meeting the Barcelona target, which aims to guarantee that at least one-third of all children under 3, and 90% of children aged between 3 and 6, have a place in childcare services by 2010. Further details at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/emplweb/news/news\\_en.cfm?id=136](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/emplweb/news/news_en.cfm?id=136)

## EVENTS

### 6 April 2006, Brussels

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is organising this seminar on, “*Promoting Endogenous Local Economic Development Strategies: the Case of the Creative Industry.*” The main objective of the seminar is to discuss the policy options available to local and regional authorities to create a supportive environment for entrepreneurship and integrated local economic development. In addition to looking at examples of good practice from across the EU the seminar will also look at EU funding opportunities in support of local economic development initiatives. The seminar is free of charges. Registration deadline is March 24. Further details at: [http://www.ccre.org/news\\_detail\\_en.htm?ID=729](http://www.ccre.org/news_detail_en.htm?ID=729)

### 27 April 2006, Brussels

This event on, “*Empowering Local Authorities to Develop Public Assets for Sustainable Energy*”, aims to disseminate and obtain feedback on a toolkit, developed for local authorities under the European Commission’s Sixth Framework Programme. The toolkit is being developed to assist in empowering local authorities to develop public assets for sustainable energy. The event is specifically aimed at local authority and sustainable energy representatives. Further details from Ms Hannah Isaac, Energy for Sustainable Development Ltd. Tel: +44 1225 816833, Mob:+44 7787 508479, E-mail: [Hannah@esd.co.uk](mailto:Hannah@esd.co.uk)

### 15 to 17 May, Stockholm (Sweden)

The City of Stockholm together with ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) is organising the conference, “*A future with zero CO2 emissions*”, which will look at how local and regional authorities can join forces to promote climate protection and renewable energy. The City of Stockholm has set itself the target of zero CO2 emissions by the year 2050. Parallel sessions will focus on how to tackle climate change through sustainable mobility, land use

planning, energy efficiency and renewables, etc. and on the role of local and regional authorities. Further details at: [http://www.ccre.org/news\\_detail\\_en.htm?ID=729](http://www.ccre.org/news_detail_en.htm?ID=729)

### 25-26 May 2006, Clare (Ireland)

“*Enhancing an Enterprise Culture: The Role of Local Authorities*,” is the title of a conference being organised by Clare County Council. The aim of the conference is to highlight how local authorities, working in close partnerships with the key state agencies, can play an important part in attracting investors into an area and contribute to sustaining local enterprise. The conference will be particularly relevant to local development agencies, local authorities, members of city/county development boards and other public bodies. Speakers include: Mr Tony Killeen, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, as well as the chief executives of IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Shannon Development. Further details at: [http://www.clarecoco.clare.ie/news/May\\_Conference.html](http://www.clarecoco.clare.ie/news/May_Conference.html)

### 6 October 2006, Sligo (Ireland)

This year’s Association of Irish Regions annual conference will focus on the theme of, “*Sustainable Energy – The Untapped Resource of our Regions.*” Further details to follow in future editions, or contact: Mr Jim Stone, Association of Irish Regions, Tel: +353 57 93 52996 Fax: +353 57 93 52997, e-mail: [jstone@midlands.ie](mailto:jstone@midlands.ie)

## PUBLICATIONS

### New Website for Commission Representation in Ireland

The European Commission Representation in Ireland recently launched a new streamlined website. The website is a one-stop shop for people looking for information about the EU. It gives access to a range of

useful information about how the EU works, what it does for citizens and how to send feedback to the Commission, with web pages on legal rights, citizens’ questions, press queries, and a special schools page. The website address is: [www.euireland.ie](http://www.euireland.ie)

## NETWORK

### Europolis

Europolis is a European Commission-funded project that focuses on the role of medium-sized cities in the wider European spatial development. The project brings together 14 medium-sized cities from Belgium, Germany, England and France, as well as national and regional regulatory authorities. Partner cities have a population of between 50,000 and 300,000 inhabitants. The project is based on urban actions carried out jointly by all the partners in the cities on local projects aimed at controlling urban growth. The objective is to work together on specific projects in order to devise, test, share and spread across Europe new sustainable urban development practices. Further details at: <http://www.europolis.equipement.gouv.fr/>

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