

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

The 2006 call for proposals under the Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE) programme was published at the end of May. IEE supports projects and one-off events in the area of renewable energy and energy efficiency, as well as the establishment of local/regional energy agencies. Priorities for 2006 include: energy performance in buildings; retrofitting of social housing; innovative approaches to energy efficiency; electricity and heat from renewables; promoting sustainable energy communities; and promoting "energy citizenship." Total budget: €48.1 million, with co-financing of up to 50%. Deadline for proposals: 31 October. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/intelligent/call_for_proposals/index_en.htm or contact Matthew Kennedy (SEI): tel: +353 1 8082070*

Integration of Third Country Nationals

The 2006 call for proposals for the programme on Integration of Third Country Nationals (INTI) is expected in late June/early July. INTI supports preparatory actions promoting the integration of people who are not citizens of the EU. It aims to promote dialogue with civil society, develop integration models, seek out and evaluate best practices in the integration field and set up networks at European level. The total budget will be in the region of €5 million. *Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/inti/funding_inti_en.htm*

Workers' Mobility

The European Commission has launched a call for proposals for pilot projects to promote worker's mobility.

The aim of the call is: to develop and test innovative instruments to facilitate geographic and labour market mobility; and to transfer between sectors, regions and countries or mainstream existing successful instruments and practices in the area of mobility. Proposals must involve partnerships, preferably at transnational level. Total budget: €2 million, with co-financing of up to 85%. Deadline for applications: 17 July 2006. *Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/tenders/index_en.cfm*

EU-US Coop in Education and Vocational Training

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the ATLANTIS Programme to promote better understanding and interaction between citizens of the EU and the US. There are two actions supported under this call: transatlantic degree consortia projects or 'Transatlantic Degrees;' and policy-oriented measures, which provide support to multilateral EU-US projects and activities designed to enhance collaboration in higher education and vocational training. Total budget: €4 million. Deadline for applications: 7 July. *Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/eu-usa/call_en.html*

Action Programme for Civil Protection

The 2006 call for proposals within the framework of the Community action programme in the field of civil protection was published on 19 May. The programme aims to support efforts at national, regional and local level for the protection of persons, property and environment in the event of natural and technological disasters. It provides financial support to facilitate cooperation, exchange of experience and mutual assistance. Deadline for applications: 6 July. *Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/civil/prote/cp14_en.htm*

NEWS & POLICY

Progress on Ireland's Rural Development Strategy

Ireland has submitted its proposed National Rural Development Strategy to the European Commission and it is expected that this will now be approved in July. In the meantime, work has already commenced on the preparation of the national rural development programme and a first draft is expected at the end of July. There will then be a public consultation, probably in August/September, with a view to finalising the programme in September/October. It is expected that an open call for proposals for the delivery of Axis 3 and Axis 4 (LEADER Axis) by local action groups will then be published in October/November. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

New Draft Structural Funds Regulations

The latest drafts of the five Structural Funds Regulations are now available online, following agreement by the Council on 5 May 2006. The draft Regulations are expected to be presented to the European Parliament in July. If there is agreement, they will be published in the Official Journal on July 20. The document numbers for the different Regulations are: General Regulation: 8750/06; European Regional Development Fund: 8751/06; Cohesion Fund: 8749/06; European Social Fund: 8752/06; European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation: 8754/06. To access the Regulations simply insert the document number into the field, "document number" of the search tool available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/servlet/driver?page=Advanced&typ=&lang=EN&fc=REGAISEN&srm=25&md=100&msid=639>

New Financing Instruments for Regional Policy

Three new financial engineering initiatives for the EU's cohesion policy were officially launched in Brussels on 30 May. **JEREMIE** (Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises) involves a collaboration with the European Investment Fund (EIF) and aims to improve access to finance for micro to medium-sized enterprises (i.e. will make it possible to

use the Structural Funding to lever additional funds from the EIF in order to provide venture capital, micro credit, loans and other financial engineering at regional level); **JESSICA** (Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas), which involves a collaboration with the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) and aims to provide solutions to the financing of projects for urban renewal and development using a combination of funding mechanisms; and **JASPERS** (Joint Assistance in Supporting Projects in European Regions), which involves a collaboration with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), is aimed at helping national and regional authorities to prepare large infrastructure projects. The three new initiatives, which are foreseen in the soon to be adopted Structural Funds Regulations for 2007-2013, represent a new emphasis by the Commission on leveraging additional and complementary sources of finance for EU regional development, in the context of a more restricted Structural Funds budget. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/comm/regional_policy/funds/2007/jjj/background_en.htm

Commission Urges Regions to get Ready for FP7

Regions should not wait for the official adoption of the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development 2007-2013 (FP7) to consult their regional innovation partners and fine-tune innovation strategies. This was the key message from the European Commission at a conference in Brussels on 12 May 2006 to discuss the role of regions in European research. The conference was specifically aimed at promoting and stimulating partnerships between regional and local authorities, universities and research centres, and enterprise and other economic actors. By fostering such partnerships, and encouraging their participation in specific projects at European level, the Commission hopes to boost research and innovation at local and regional level. The Commission is encouraging EU regions to participate in the FP7 right from the start. For the 2007-2013 period the programme includes two schemes specifically targeted at EU regions: 1. **Regions of Knowledge**, to support existing regional research-driven clusters (bringing together local and regional authorities, universities, research centres and enterprises) and the emergence of new ones; and 2. **Unlocking the Research Potential**, to

develop the research potential in the EU's less favoured regions by reinforcing their science and technology capacities and supporting twinning of their institutions with those of technologically advanced regions. The Commission is also promoting greater use of Structural Funds to support R&D and innovation activities. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/research/future/index_en.cfm

Agreement on European Fisheries Fund

EU Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers reached agreement on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) on 19 June. This agreement on the EFF brings to an end a long-running saga, which saw Ministers fail to reach agreement both on 22 May 2006, and before that, in June 2005. The new EFF, which will have a budget of approximately €3.8 billion, will fund measures to secure sustainable fisheries and diversify economic activities in fishing areas. An important feature of the new EFF is the provision of aid for diversification in fishing regions most affected by job losses. This aid is intended to lessen economic dependence on the fishing sector in these regions and, informed by the LEADER and PESCA Initiatives and driven by a bottom-up approach, will promote the development of measures designed to address the specific development needs of the fishing areas concerned. The next step for the EFF is the publication of the implementing Regulation, which is to be drawn up between July and October, so that it can come into force on time in January 2007. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/comm/fisheries/what_snew/new_en.htm

Agreement on Citizens Programme

EU Cultural Ministers reached political agreement on the "Citizens for Europe" programme for 2007-2013 at their Council meeting on 18 May. Over the next seven years, the programme will have a budget of €235 million. Four types of actions will be financed: "**Active citizens for Europe**," including town twinning and other transnational and cross-sectoral citizens' projects and support measures (47% of the total budget); "**Active civil society in Europe**," to ensure structural support for European public policy research organisations (think tanks) and organisations of civil society at European level (29 %); "**Together for**

Europe,” which provides support for high-visibility events such as commemorations, the celebration of European achievements, artistic events, European-wide conferences and prizegivings, etc. (10%); and “Active European remembrance,” to support projects to remember the holocaust, etc.. (4%). Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/activecitizenship/new_programme_en.htm

GDP Growth in Irish Regions

On June 13, Eurostat published the regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ranking for the year 2003 in the EU. In terms of the Irish regions, the Southern & Eastern Region had a GDP of 149.2% of the EU25 average in 2003, while the Border Midland and Western Region had a GDP of 92.5% (GDP for Ireland as a whole was 134.1% of EU25 average). Both regions were up over a percentage point on the 2002 figure. The figure for Northern Ireland was 92.8% of the EU25 average (the overall UK figure was 116.2%). The three leading regions in the ranking were Inner London (278% of the EU25 average), Brussels Capital in Belgium (238%) and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (234%). Further details at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.eu.int/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PREREL/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2006/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2006_MONTH_05/1-18052006-EN-AP.PDF

Consultation on New Ireland - N. Ireland EU programmes

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has launched a public consultation process on the future cross-border co-operation programme and the next PEACE programme, by publishing on 29 May a consultation document setting out a series of questions to assist in the preparation of the new programmes. The new PEACE programme will have the same eligible area as currently applies, while the cross-border Territorial Cooperation programme (the successor to INTERREG IIIA) will apply in Northern Ireland, the border counties of Ireland and, for the first time, western parts of Scotland. The consultation period will run until the 26 June 2006. A Consultation Toolkit has been produced to assist organisations to hold their own consultations with their members/stakeholders. As part of the public consultation, the SEUPB will also hold a series of public meetings in

Ireland and Northern Ireland. Submissions received will feed into the draft Operational Programmes, which will be published for a further three-month consultation in the autumn. Further details at: <http://www.seupb.org/newprogrammesconsultation.htm>

Consultation on De Minimis

Further to its recent proposals to increase the “de minimis” aid threshold from €100,000 to €150,000 (see EU News Bulletin no. 25), the European Commission is now inviting interested parties to submit comments on the proposals. Comments should be sent to: European Commission, Directorate-General for Competition, Consultation on *de minimis* (HT 368), State aid Registry, B-1049 Brussels. Fax +32-2 296 12 42, e-mail: stateaidgreffe@ec.europa.eu. The deadline for submitting comments is 10 July 2006. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/competition/state_aid/overview/sar.html (see under “Block Exemption”)

Consultation on Biofuels

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on a review of the 2003 Directive on the Promotion of the use of Biofuels or other Renewable Fuels for Transport. The general terms of the review have been outlined in the recently published Biomass Action Plan and Biofuels Strategy (see EU News Bulletin no’s 22 and 24). To add to this, and in preparing its progress report (due by the end of 2006), the Commission’s services are seeking the views of public authorities, businesses, non-governmental organisations and other interested parties on the following questions: 1. Is the objective of promoting biofuels still valid? 2. The directive sets a reference value of 5.75% for the market share of biofuels in 2010. Will this share be achieved with existing policies and measures? If not, why not? 3. Looking towards 2010, does the EU system of targets for biofuels need to be adapted? If so, how? 4. Should a certification system be introduced to avoid using “poor performing” biofuels or give more support to “better performing” ones? 5. Looking towards 2015/2020, should further measures be adopted to promote biofuels? 6. Other technical issues. Deadline for responses: 10 July 2006. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/legislation/biofuels_consultation_en.htm

Consultation on New Maritime Policy

On June 7, the European Commission published a Green Paper on EU maritime policy, thereby launching a 12 month consultation with EU citizens on future EU policy in relation to oceans and seas. The objective of the Green Paper, entitled ‘Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union: A European vision for the oceans and seas,’ is to examine the economic activities of Europeans which are linked to, or impact on, the oceans and seas, and the policies dealing with them, with a view to finding better ways of enabling Europeans to derive more – and sustainable – benefit from the oceans. Before the end of 2007 the Commission will submit a Communication to the Council and the Parliament summarising the results of the consultation process and proposing the best way forward. Further details on the consultation, which will run until 30 June 2007, are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy_en.html

Consultation on EU Environmental Strategy

To prepare for the mid-term review of the 6th Environmental Action Programme (EAP), the European Commission has launched an internet consultation for stakeholders. The 6th EAP sets out EU environment policy for the period 2001-2010. EU citizens and organisations are invited to submit their view, reactions and recommendations on the 6th EAP before 14 July 2006. A recent report by the Institute for European Environmental Policy was highly critical of the implementation of the programme, suggesting that EU environmental policy had been “politically downgraded” because of the Union’s priority focus on the Lisbon agenda for economic growth and jobs. Information on the 6th Environment Actions Programme is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/index.htm> The online consultation can be accessed at: <http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=consult6EAP&lang=en>

Finnish EU Presidency

On July 1 Finland takes over the EU Presidency. The Finnish Presidency has indicated that it intends to give priority to energy efficiency and renewable energy. Further details at: www.eu2006.fi

EVENTS

27 Aug - 2 Sept, Maramures (Romania)

The 11TH Assembly of European Regions summer school will focus on the theme, "Practical Skills for Regional Co-operation in Europe." The event is aimed at officers and politicians working in international affairs in regional administrations and the objective is to provide participants with hands-on training in the skills needed to successfully undertake international co-operation projects and to present international work to the regions and their citizens. Workshops will be provided in areas such as project management, lobbying, press and communications, intercultural communication and presentation skills. *Further details at:* <http://www.a-e-r.org/events/summer-school/2000-2009/summer-school-2006.html>

6 October 2006, Sligo (Ireland)

This year's Association of Irish Regions (AIR) annual conference will focus on the theme of, "Sustainable Energy: The Untapped Resource of our Regions." Speakers include Ms Mary Coughlan, T.D. Minister for Agriculture, as well as experts in the areas of renewable energy policy and practice. Registration is now open. *Contact: Mr Jim Stone, Association of Irish Regions, Tel: +353 57 93 52996 Fax: +353 57 93 52997, e-mail: jstone@midlands.ie*

9-13 October 2006, Brussels

Registration for Open Days 2006 is due to open before the end of June. Those interested in attending are encouraged to register early, as events are likely to be booked up very quickly. The theme for Open Days 2006 is, 'Investing in Europe's Regions and Cities: Public and Private Partners for Growth and Jobs' (see EU News Bulletin no. 25). The Irish Regions Office is part of the conglomerate, "Dynamic Regions for Sustainable Development", one of the 14 "conglomerates" of Brussels based regional offices that will co-host the event. This conglomerate will organise

two seminars, one on "Developing Regional Research & Innovation Potential," and another on "Regional Innovation for Sustainable Development." *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/od2006/registration.cfm?nme nu=4

25-27 October 2006, Gozo (Malta)

The 2nd International Conference on the Management of Coastal Recreational Resources, organised by the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics (ICoD), will focus on aspects of coastal management related to recreational amenities such as beaches, marinas and ecotourism. The Conference will consider issues of concern to both the tourism and the environmental sector, and address sustainable management practice in these fields. *Further details at:* <http://mcr2.icod.org/mt/>

29-31 January 2007, Brussels

The 2007 European Renewable Energy Policy Conference is being organized by EREC and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Germany, during the German Presidency of the EU. The conference, which is being co-funded by the European Commission, aims to pursue a two-fold objective: to evaluate the different existing policies and future initiatives regarding renewables and to present the industry's perceptions of what is needed for further market uptake of renewable energy technologies; and to provide a discussion forum for market and policy prospects, exchange of experience, reinforced policies and new renewable energy initiatives. *Further details at:* <http://www.erec-renewables.org/events/2007PolicyConference/default.htm>

7-10 May 2007, Milan, Italy

A call for abstracts has been launched for the next European Wind Energy Conference, which is being organised by the European Wind Energy Association. The deadline for the Call is 7 September 2006. EWEC is one of Europe's biggest wind energy events, attracting participants from over 50 countries. *Further details at:* <http://www.ewec2007.info>

PUBLICATIONS

Good Practice Guide to Innovation and Start-Ups

The European Commission has just published a new manual on good practice in encouraging innovation and company start-ups. The new PAXIS manual describes some 65 good practices in policy design, innovation financing, technology transfer and start-up development. Managed by the Commission's Enterprise Directorate-General under the 6th Framework Programme, PAXIS (Pilot Action of Excellence on Innovative Start-ups) promotes the setting-up and development of innovative companies across Europe. *Further details at:* ftp://ftp.cordis.lu/pub/paxis/docs/paxis_manual.pdf

Fourth Progress Report on Economic & Social Cohesion

Disparities in investment in R&D and in progress towards the information society continue to determine the EU's regional economic and social disparities. This is the main conclusion of the European Commission's Fourth Progress Report on Cohesion, which includes an analysis of economic and social disparities in the enlarged EU and an overview of recent developments in cohesion policy. The report reveals worrying disparities in modern infrastructure, research and education, which limit regions capacity for excellence and innovation. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/pdf/interim4/4inter_en.pdf

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