

EU News Bulletin

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

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Irish Regions Office



INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION

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FUNDING

Support for Victims of Terrorism

The European Commission has published a call for proposals aimed at: 1. Supporting the victims of acts of terrorism and/or members of their families to overcome the consequences, primarily by improving legal assistance and advice; and 2. Mobilising the general public against terrorism in all its forms. The total budget available is €1.8 million, with EU co-financing of up to 80%. Partners from at least three Member States are required. The deadline for proposals is 5 September 2006. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/victims_terrorism/funding_victims_terrorism_en.htm

Secure Motorway Rest Stops

The European Commission has published a call for proposals for pilot projects to promote secure resting places for travellers along the trans-European road network (which includes the N7/N8 Dublin-Cork route and the N1 Dublin-Belfast in Ireland). Pilot projects should aim to reduce the risks of crime for road users: cargo theft, vehicle theft and theft of driver's belongings in the vehicle or attacks against drivers. As far as possible, insurance companies and police authorities should be involved in defining the adequate security standards. A project should aim to define and validate common requirements of secure rest places for at least 5 Member States and/or to construct secure parking slots in trans-border regions or on trans-border corridors involving at least two sites in two EU countries. The total budget is €5.34 million, with up to 50% EU co-financing. Deadline for applications: 8 September 2006. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/energy_transport/grants/proposal_en.htm

Equal Opportunities for All

The European Commission has published a call for tender for the organisation of a pan-European information and promotional campaign on the *European Year of Equal Opportunities for All*. 2007 has been designated as the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. The aim of the Year is to launch a major debate on the benefits of diversity for European Societies and to make EU citizens more aware of their rights to enjoy equal treatment and a life free of discrimination. The campaign will take place in all countries participating in the Year and the successful contractor will need to have offices or operational partners based in each participating country. The maximum budget is €5.1 million. Deadline for tendering is 8 September 2006. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equality2007/index_en.htm

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the Leonardo da Vinci programme on the development and testing of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF aims to facilitate the transfer and recognition of qualifications throughout the EU. The objective of this call is to award grants to approximately ten proposals to develop and test the principles and mechanisms of the future EQF, and to exchange experiences in developing national and sectoral frameworks. Project partnerships must consist of organisations drawn from five or more countries. The total budget is €1 million, with EU co-financing of up to 75%. Grants of between €50,000 and €125,000 are envisaged. The deadline for proposals is 18 August 2006. Further details at: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/calls/2206/index_en.html

NEWS & POLICY

€25m for Environmental Projects in Ireland

The EU Environment Council meeting in Luxembourg on 27 June reached agreement on the LIFE+ programme for the period 2007-2013. LIFE+, which will have a budget of €2.1 billion, is the main EU funding instrument for the environment and will support demonstration and information and communications activities in all four priority areas of the EU's Sixth Environment Action Programme - climate change; nature and biodiversity; health and quality of life; and natural resources and waste – as well as the programme's seven Thematic Strategies. An important change in LIFE+ as compared to previous LIFE programmes is that the management of the programme will be largely decentralized, with around 80% of the budget allocated to the Member States for financing projects and measures through national programmes.

Ireland's share of the budget will be around €3 - €3.5 million per annum of which at least 40% will be for Nature and Biodiversity. Public and private entities will be able to apply for LIFE+ funding, at rates of up to 50%, or in some cases, up to 75%. Ireland's national programme will be drawn up by the Department of the Environment Heritage & Local Government (DEHLG), in consultation with other Departments and Agencies. There will also be a public consultation on the draft programme. A national agency will be designated to implement the programme in Ireland and it is expected that the first call for proposals will be published in June 2007. *Further details at:*

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/new/s/futureoflife.htm> Or contact: Mr James Blake, DEHLG, e-mail: James.Blake@environ.ie Tel: +353 (0)1 8882304

Structural Funds 2007-2013: Legislative Package Approved

On July 4, the European Parliament gave its approval to the legislative package for EU Cohesion policy for the period 2007 to 2013 with the adoption of five separate Regulations: the General Regulation, which lays out the common rules in programming, managing, controlling and evaluating the Structural Funds; and four other Regulations which outline specific rules on the

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European grouping of territorial co-operation (EGTC). The Regulations were adopted without amendments. However, in the course of discussions with the Council, the Parliament did succeed in negotiating a number of modifications, which were incorporated into the final text. These were primarily aimed at: enhancing environmental considerations in the management of the Funds; improving and promoting accessibility for people with disabilities; strengthening the partnership principle; extending the eligibility of non-recoverable VAT to all member states (ERDF); including eligibility of social housing renovation aimed at saving energy and protecting the environment (ERDF); and strengthening the fight against social exclusion, non-discrimination and gender equality (ESF). The Council rejected, however, the Parliament's proposal on retaining unspent money within the overall Structural Funds budget, instead of returning it to the general EU budget. The Structural Funds Regulations are now expected to get final approval from the Council in the coming days and to be published in the Official Journal in July 2006. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/newregl0713_en.htm

Strategic Guidelines for Structural Funds 2007-2013

On July 13, the European Commission adopted its proposal for EU Strategic Guidelines for the Structural Funds for 2007-2013. These guidelines identify the areas of intervention on which the Member States and regions should focus in preparing their Operational Programmes. It is expected that the Guidelines will be formally adopted by the Council of Ministers on 5 October. The final version of the Strategic Guidelines differs little from the draft presented by the Commission in July 2005. The three central priorities are unchanged: making Europe and its regions more attractive targets for investment and employment; improving knowledge and innovation; more and better quality jobs. In each of these three areas the proposal outlines priorities for intervention from which Member States and regions can draw inspiration. The proposal does not retain the suggestion aired by several cities of adding a fourth priority focusing on enhancing the urban dimension. However, a separate Communication on

“cohesion policy and cities” was also adopted by the Commission, alongside the Strategic Guidelines (the initial version of this Communication was presented in December 2005). This Communication is also designed to help in the preparation of the new round of Structural Funds programmes, focusing more specifically on the urban dimension. Suggested interventions include building the attractiveness of cities, networking between cities, promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and the knowledge economy, supporting SMEs, decreasing disparities between neighbourhoods and social groups, and tackling crime. *The Community Strategic Guidelines are available at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/index_en.htm *The Communication on cohesion policy and cities can be found at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/urban/index_en.htm

Commission Adopts EU Forest Action Plan

On June 15, the European Commission adopted an 18-point EU Forest action plan covering the period 2007-2011. The plan has four main aims: to improve long-term competitiveness; to improve and protect the environment; to contribute to the quality of life; and to foster coordination and communication. In order to improve the long-term competitiveness of the forest sector, the plan encourages innovation and research activities as well as training for forest owners and forest workers. In line with the EU's Biomass Action Plan and Biofuels Strategy, it also proposes actions aimed at increasing the use of forest resources for energy production. It includes specific steps to contribute to EU environmental objectives on climate change and biodiversity, encourages environmental education, and proposes exploring the potential of urban and peri-urban forests. To promote enhanced cross-sectoral cooperation in order to balance economic, environmental and socio-cultural objectives in forest-related policies, the plan proposes developing cooperation and exchange of information between the different policy areas and between Member States, notably by means of a standing forestry committee to be created under the auspices of the European Commission. Forests currently cover 37.8% of the EU land area, ranging from 73.9% of total land area in Finland to 9.7% in Ireland. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action_plan/index_en.htm

Registration Opens for Open Days 2006

Online registration for Open Days 2006: European Week of Regions and Cities was opened on June 29. This year's event will take place from 9-12 October in Brussels and will focus on the theme, "Investing in Europe's Regions and Cities: Public and Private Partners for Growth and Jobs." For the first time, the event will also feature an "Investor's Café" aimed at bringing together private investors and decision-makers from local and regional government. In all, Open Days 2006 will include 111 different workshops and seminars, hosted by the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the consortia of participating regional offices in Brussels. The Irish Regions Office is a partner in the consortium, "Dynamic Regions for Sustainable Development" and will host a seminar on 11 October on the subject of, "Developing Regional Research & Innovation Potential." The lead partner in this consortium (the Brussels offices of the Centre, Auvergne, Limousin regions (France)) will also host a seminar on October 10 on the topic, "Regional Innovation for Sustainable Development." *Further details at:* www.opendays.europa.eu

Local Events to Mark the EU's 50th Anniversary

The European Commission office in Dublin is currently putting together a calendar of events for 2007, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. Local authorities, local communities or other organisations that are organising, or are interested in organising events to mark the anniversary, or indeed on other topics of EU interest, are invited to contact Mr Graham Blythe at: Graham.Blythe@cec.eu.int or Tel: (01) 634 1111.

Meanwhile, the European Commission, in association with the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions has launched a "Happy Birthday EU" logo competition. Art and design students, and design professionals who have graduated in 2006, are invited to design a birthday logo that will be the official symbol for the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome next year. The closing date for the competition is 30 September 2006. The prize for the best logo is €6,000, with second and third prizes of €4,000 and €2,000 respectively. *Further details at:* www.logo-competition.eu

Ireland Not Conforming with Habitats Directive

The European Commission has sent a final written warning to Ireland over its non-conformity with the EU Habitats Directive. Issues raised include the failure to make proper provision for decision-making on land-use and other plans that affect Natura 2000 sites; weak provisions on enforcement where damage is caused to protected habitats through illegal actions; and lack of proper provision for ensuring that clearfelling and replanting of commercial conifer forests does not adversely affect sensitive species such as the endangered Freshwater Pearl Mussel. In a separate case, the European Commission has requested Ireland to take further steps to ensure that, from next year onwards, its wild salmon fishery fully respects the terms of the Habitats Directive. At present Ireland allows the use of drift nets at sea which catch high numbers of salmon bound for certain spawning rivers where salmon numbers are low. Under the Directive, however, annual authorisation must be subject to a prior scientific assessment and should only be given where the assessment confirms that no negative effects will arise or where, alternatively, the conditions for an exception or derogation are met. The 2006 assessment showed negative effects, but drift-netting was nevertheless authorised by the Irish authorities. If Ireland fails to take the appropriate remedial action, the Commission may decide to bring the case before the Court of Justice. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/sgb/droit_com/index_en.htm

Ireland Well Below EU Average for Computer Literacy

A Eurostat report published in June 2006 shows that in Ireland, 46% of people aged between 16 and 74 have no basic computer skills and that 69% do not regularly use the internet. The Eurostat survey, conducted in 2005, found that on average, 37% of EU citizens aged between 16 and 74 had no basic computer skills, but that significant differences existed between Member States, age groups and between different education levels. The highest rates of computer illiteracy were found in Greece (65%), Italy (59%), Hungary (57%), Cyprus and Portugal (both 54%), Lithuania (53%) Poland (50%) and Ireland (46%). The survey also found that 69% of people in Ireland do not regularly use the internet. Again, this was well above the EU average of 57% and put

Ireland eight from the bottom in the EU25 table. By contrast, in countries like Denmark (10%) and Sweden (11%) the level of computer illiteracy were considerably lower. A breakdown of the age groups shows that in the EU25, on average, 65% of people aged 55 to 74 had no computer skills at all, compared with 29% of people in the 25-54 age group. The survey also indicates that, on average in the EU25 only 11% of those with higher education had no basic computer skills, ranging from 2% in Sweden to 24% in Estonia. *Further details at:*

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portals/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PREREL/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2006/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2006_MONTH_06/4-20062006-EN-AP.PDF

Public Consultation on EU Drugs Policy

On June 26, the European Commission adopted a Green Paper on increasing civil society's participation in shaping EU drugs policy. The Commission believes that a more structured dialogue between the EU and all the organisations involved in the fight against drugs is necessary and that such a dialogue will lead to a better understanding of the drugs problem and more effective policy and intervention. The consultation will remain open until the end of September. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/consulting_public/news_consulting_public_en.htm

Consultation on Reducing CO2 Emissions from Cars

The European Commission has launched an online public consultation on the review of the EU strategy for reducing CO2 emissions from cars and increasing fuel efficiency. The existing EU strategy, based on voluntary commitments from automobile manufacturers has had limited success and the Commission is now looking at other available options for cutting car emissions. The consultation, launched on 12 June 2006, will last for eight weeks and invites citizens to share their views on their choice of cars, their awareness about the climate change impact of road transport, and different options for reducing CO2 emissions from passenger cars and light commercial vehicles. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=CO2andcars>

EVENTS

17-21 Sept 2006, Belfast

This second international conference on *Geoparks* is being organised under the auspices of UNESCO with the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland. Plenary sessions and educational workshops will teach delegates more about Geoparks, including how to promote geological heritage and sustain local communities through activities such as quality tourism. The conference will also highlight criteria for applying for membership of the European and Global Geopark Networks. There are 35 UNESCO Geoparks across the world, five of which are in the UK and Ireland. *Further details at:* www.geoparks2006.com

25 Sept 2006 Bruges (Belgium)

This conference on "*Biomass for Energy - Challenges for the Future*" will look into the areas of energy-crops, anaerobic digestion, wood and energy markets. It will also examine European policy, innovation, state of the art, potential technology, production/cultivation, harvesting, and conversion technologies. *Further details at:* <http://www.northseabioenergy.org/default.asp?objectid=17294>

5-6 Oct 2006, Warsaw, Poland

The National Association of Polish Counties, in partnership with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, Energy-Cities and the Renewable Energy Institute is organising a second European conference on *local energy management*. The objective of the conference is to promote improved energy efficiency and increase the share of renewable energy at local level by promoting the exchange of experience and encouraging networking between local authorities, their energy specialists and energy agencies. The conference will include best practice examples and workshops on rational use of energy, renewable energy and energy planning. *Further Details at:* <http://www.eo.org.pl/index.php?lng=en>

6 Oct 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: jistone@midlands.ie*

18-20 Oct 2006, Paris

The first *World e-Gov Forum* will consider the question, "which connected society do we want?" The event will provide a meeting platform for e-government interests and will focus on the following topics: Society: needs and expectations of citizens in relation to e-services and their accessibility; Economy: new markets, job creation and new business opportunities; Solidarity: new forms of partnership, cooperation and exchange; and Indicators: tools of follow-up and evaluation being used as barometer of change. *Further details at:* http://www.worldegovforum.com/article.php3?id_article=71

NETWORKS

Creating Sustainable Local Communities

The CONCERTO initiative was launched by the European Commission in 2003, in the context of the 6th Framework Programme for Research & Technological Development. The initiative supports 28 local communities in 9 projects across 12 European countries in demonstrating actions that promote sustainability and energy efficiency. The focus is primarily on demonstrating the environmental, economic and social benefits of integrating renewable energy sources with energy efficiency techniques through a sustainable energy-management system operated at local level. CONCERTO Plus was launched to coordinate and support the demonstration communities by

providing a broad platform for sharing experiences and know-how transfer. It also provides a framework for European-wide dissemination of information on CONCERTO communities and general actions. *Further details at:* <http://www.concertoplus.eu/>

EU Network of Regions Active in the Audiovisual Sector

The Valencia region (Spain) has launched an initiative to set up a European Network of Regions active in the audiovisual sector. The aim is to establish a permanent forum of Regions with a shared interest in the development of the audiovisual sector and in participation in relevant European projects. The initial objectives of the network would be to: agree common positions on policies related to the audiovisual sector, in order to influence EU policy-making; implement a fast-track channel for information and the exchange of ideas, expertise and good practices; and, assist in building partnerships for EU projects. *For further information please contact the Irish Regions Office.*

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Please Note:

There will be no EU News Bulletin in August. The next edition will be available in September 2005.