

# 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

### **Treaty of Rome Grants Programme**

The European Parliament has recently announced details of its grants/subsidies programme for 2007. The programme for 2007 includes the co-financing of informative and awareness-raising television and radio programmes and public debates, conferences or seminars whose main theme is the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. It also includes support for large-scale events, including fairs and exhibitions with a European theme, which celebrate and commemorate the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. About €5 million will be available and the closing date for applications is 27 October. Further details at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/tenders/invitations.htm>

### **CAP Information Measures**

The European Commission has published a call for proposals for information measures relating to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The aim of the call is to promote communication on the reformed CAP and its emphasis on decoupling and rural development. The types of activities to be supported could include: information campaigns in rural areas; conferences and seminars; TV and radio campaigns; study visits; workshops in rural areas targeting farmers and potential beneficiaries of rural development measures; and other types of measures, such as publications and web portals that offer a significant added value. The total budget is €3 million, with EU co-financing of up to 50%, or, in exceptional cases, 75%. Deadline for applications: 24 November 2006. Further details at: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/c/236/c\\_23620060930en00710080.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/c/236/c_23620060930en00710080.pdf)

### **Sustainable Energy Awards**

As part of its Sustainable Energy Europe Campaign, the European Commission has launched annual EU Sustainable Energy Awards. The Awards are open to all bodies that become partners in the Campaign. The aim is to highlight the most outstanding, ambitious and innovative programmes or actions to promote sustainable energy in the EU. The winning projects will be promoted and showcased as examples of excellence. The Awards Ceremony will take place on 1 Feb. 2007, during the first EU Sustainable Energy Week. Deadline for submissions: 3 Nov. 2006. Further details at: <http://www.sustenergy.org/tpl/page.cfm?pageName=procedure>

### **European Enterprise Awards**

The 2007 call for proposals for the European Enterprise Awards is expected in the next few weeks. The aim of the annual awards is to recognise excellence in promoting entrepreneurship, encouraging enterprise in disadvantaged areas, reducing red tape, improving enterprise education, and promoting sustainable business practices. The competition is open to all local and regional bodies, NGOs, and educational and business organisations. Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/smes/awards/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/smes/awards/index_en.htm)

### **Town Twinning & Civil Society**

Calls for proposals under the Town Twinning and Civil Society initiatives are expected at the end of October 2006. Both calls fall under the Active European Citizenship programme, which supports actions to promote dialogue and twinning between local and regional authorities and their twinning associations/committees. Further details at: [http://eacea.cec.eu.int/static/en/citizenship/programmes2004\\_2006.htm](http://eacea.cec.eu.int/static/en/citizenship/programmes2004_2006.htm)

## NEWS & POLICY

### **New Energy Efficiency Action Plan**

On October 18, the European Commission adopted a new Energy Efficiency Action Plan, which aims to cut energy use in the EU by 20% by 2020. As a priority, the Plan emphasises the need for full implementation of the already comprehensive framework of EU legislation on energy efficiency, which includes the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and the Energy End-use Efficiency and Energy Services Directive, adopted in December 2005. The latter requires Member States to draw up National Action Plans by June 2007 to achieve 1% yearly energy savings over nine years, starting from 2008. Sectors covered include households, industry and the public sector. The Directive also provides for a public sector obligation to take energy efficiency into account in the procurement of vehicles, buildings and other equipment. The new Action Plan also sets out a further ten "priority actions" to be pursued in the period 2007-2012. Some of these include: expanding the scope of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive in 2009, to include minimum performance requirements for new and renovated buildings; a new regulatory framework in 2007 to promote decentralised electricity generation; proposals in 2007 for minimum performance requirements and regulations for district heating; a Green Paper on Urban Transport, to encourage the use of public transport, car-sharing, non-motorised transport modes and telecommuting; energy efficiency awareness and education initiatives; and a Convention of Mayors of European cities in 2007 to exchange best practices. A mid-term review will take place in 2009. *Further details:* [http://ec.europa.eu/energy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/index_en.htm) The Plan will be covered in more detail in the next edition of the EU Policy Review.

### **€60m for International Fund for Ireland**

On October 12, the European Commission adopted a proposal to continue EU support for the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) at the rate of €15 million per year for the period 2007-2010. The total EU contribution of €60 million will make up more than 50% of the overall IFI budget for the 4-year period. The other

contributors to the Fund are the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The IFI was originally established by the UK and Irish governments in 1986 to help promote economic and social development and encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between unionists and nationalists throughout Ireland. In 2005 it was decided that the Fund would end its operations in 2010. Accordingly, a strategy entitled "Sharing this Space" has been adopted, which sets out the objectives of the Fund for the final years of its operations. A key priority will be to create the capacity within the community to continue the work of the IFI beyond its lifetime. Since its creation, the IFI has committed over €830 million to nearly 6,000 projects. The proposed Regulation will now be transmitted to the European Parliament and the Council for adoption, probably in December 2006. *Further details at:* <http://www.internationalfundforireland.com/>

### **€37.5m for Ireland's Fishing Communities**

Ireland is to receive €37.5 million in EU aid under the new European Fisheries Fund (EFF) for the period 2007-2013. This follows a decision by the European Commission on October 4, fixing the annual indicative EFF allocations for each Member State for this period. From January 2007, the EFF will replace the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) as the EU's core instrument for financial support to the fisheries sector and fishing communities. It will run for seven years with a total budget of €3.8 billion. The main objective of the EFF is to support the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Key objectives include: strengthening the competitiveness and the viability of operators in the sector; promoting environmentally-friendly fishing and production methods; providing support to people employed in the sector; and fostering the sustainable development of fishing communities. The latter aims to build on the experience of the LEADER and PESCA Initiatives by promoting a bottom-up approach to the development of measures designed to address the specific development needs of fishing areas. Aid will be available to those employed either in the fisheries sector or in related businesses. Projects promoting the role of women will also be encouraged. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/structural\\_measures/arrangements\\_2007\\_2013\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/structural_measures/arrangements_2007_2013_en.htm)

### **Grant Aid for Energy Crops**

On September 22, EU Agriculture Commissioner, Mariann Fischer Boel, announced a proposal to allow Member States to grant national aid of up to 50% of the costs of establishing multi-annual crops in areas on which an application for the energy crop aid has been made. The proposal aims to boost the production of feedstocks for renewable energy and accompanies the first report on the operation of the energy crops scheme. The €45/hectare aid scheme for energy crops was applied for the first time in 2004 to provide an incentive for farmers to grow raw materials for biofuels. The area covered by the scheme in 2006 was between 1.2 and 1.3 million hectares (ha), close to the limit of 1.5 m ha. However, recent data suggests a dramatic increase in the demand for energy crops within the next few years and the Commission is therefore, keen to further boost production. The Commission also proposed to extend the energy crop scheme to the eight new Member States which currently do not benefit from it, and to increase the maximum area which can benefit from the aid to 2 million ha. *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1243&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&quiLanguage=en>

### **New EU Laws on Road Safety**

On 5 October, the European Commission presented two draft Directives on road safety, one on rear view mirrors for trucks, and the other on infrastructure management. The new Directive on rear view mirrors will expand the scope of the existing Directive 2003/97/EC, which requires the fitting on all trucks registered from 2006/2007 of 'anti-blind spot' rear view mirrors. Vehicles registered before this date, are not currently subject to the Directive's provisions. However, under the terms of the new Directive, the fitting of anti-blind spot rear view mirrors will be compulsory on all trucks over 3.5 tonnes, except vehicles registered more than ten years before the entry into force of the text. The second draft Directive relates to good infrastructural management. The aim of this Directive is to ensure that safety imperatives are taken into account at all stages of design, construction, renovation and exploitation of road infrastructures. The provision only concerns roads included in the Trans-European Transport Network (e.g. Cork-Dublin-Belfast Road). The proposal requires Member

States to compile safety impact studies before approving road construction or renovation projects. Security audits are also required during construction and regular safety inspections once the road becomes operational. This second Directive, which will have important implications for local authorities, will be covered in more detail in the next edition of the EU Policy Review. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/transport/roadsafety/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/roadsafety/index_en.htm)

### **Funding for Six Regional Airports in Ireland**

On September 26, the European Commission approved Irish government proposals to finance infrastructure developments at six regional airports. The proposed capital investment programme will last 5 years (2006-2010) and provides funding of up to €65.5 million. The measure approved by the Commission provides for two types of public funding: Investments to improve safety and security, which can be granted aid of up to 90% of eligible costs; and public funding for the expansion or improvement of facilities at the airport, which is allowed up to 75% of eligible expenditure. The Commission found that the proposed scheme is in line with EU State Aid rules as the financing is set to achieve a clear objective of general interest without leading to undue distortion of the market. The six airports to avail of the public funding are located at Donegal, Sligo, Knock, Galway, Kerry and Waterford. All six airports are considered under EC rules as “small regional airports.” In 2005 they had a combined passenger through flow of 1.3 million (the three “State” airports of Dublin, Shannon and Cork had combined passenger numbers of 25 million for the same period). *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

### **Ireland Failing to Protect Natural Habitats**

The European Commission has requested that Ireland implements two judgments of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) concerning the protection of natural habitats. The first case involves Ireland's failure to meet a 1995 deadline to complete a list of nature sites to protect its most endangered natural habitats and species, as part of the EU-wide Natura 2000 network. Ireland had made significant advances in designating natural habitats up to 2004 but progress has since stalled. To

date, required sites for wet heaths, bog woodland, salmon, freshwater crayfish, twaite shad and the Killarney fern have not been formally presented. The second case involves Ireland's failure to take sufficient measures to recover vegetation in uplands that were damaged by overstocking of sheep from the 1980s onwards. In June 2002, Ireland was condemned by the ECJ on two counts: firstly, for not protecting the 25,000 hectare Owenduff-Nepin Beg Complex special protection area (SPA) in County Mayo and, secondly, for not protecting the wider habitats of the Red Grouse. The Commission is concerned that, over four years after the judgment, Ireland has still not properly evaluated the success or otherwise of sheep reduction measures across several hundred thousand hectares of uplands elsewhere in Ireland, or put in place any necessary restrictive measures. Failure to satisfy either judgment will expose Ireland to the risk of substantial fines. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/community\\_law/eula/w/index\\_en.htm#infractions](http://ec.europa.eu/community_law/eula/w/index_en.htm#infractions)

### **Bulgaria and Romania to join EU in January 2007**

On September 26, the European Commission adopted its final monitoring report on Bulgarian and Romanian preparation for EU membership. Based on the progress achieved, the Commission considers that both countries will be ready to join the EU on 1 January 2007. In the report, the Commission indicates, however, that both countries will be closely monitored on some remaining areas of concern. These include the justice system, the fight against corruption, police co-operation and the fight against organised crime, money-laundering, integrated administrative control system for agriculture (IACS), transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE), and financial control. If the requirements are not met, the Commission has the possibility to invoke certain safeguards. Following the adoption of this latest enlargement report, the Commission has now called for an “enlargement pause,” until such time as “the necessary institutional reform has been undertaken.” This raises doubts about the imminent accession of Turkey or the Western Balkans. However, the Commission President José Manuel Barroso did suggest that he “would like Croatia to join as quickly as possible.” *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/acceding\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/acceding_en.htm)

### **New EU programme for Employment & Social affairs**

On September 27, the European Parliament cleared the way for the adoption of the EU PROGRESS programme - the new programme for employment and social affairs, which enters into force on 1 January 2007. PROGRESS will incorporate the four existing Community Action Programmes on EU social policy, as well as a number of initiatives relating to working conditions. The programme will have a total budget of €743.5 million for the period 2007-2013. It will be divided in 5 sections corresponding to 5 main fields of activity: (1) the European Employment Strategy, (2) the open method of coordination in the field of social protection and inclusion, (3) working conditions, (4) anti-discrimination and diversity, and (5) gender equality. The programme will finance analyses, mutual learning, awareness-raising and dissemination activities, as well as contributing to the operating costs of the main networks in the EU. It will also support the formation of working groups, training seminars, the creation of specialist EU networks and observatories, staff exchanges between national administrations and cooperation with international institutions. EU funding of up to 80% of eligible costs is envisaged. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/progress/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html)

### **Broadband: Sharing Experience**

The Innovative Actions Network for the Information Society (IANIS), which is co-financed by the European Commission's Regional Policy Directorate, has launched a questionnaire survey on broadband deployment and procurement. The survey aims to determine if local and regional authorities are interested in sharing information and experience, and are willing to cooperate with other public authorities to pool their broadband provision requirements. Depending on the response to the survey, a website may be developed which would act as a repository for regional/local/community plans and programmes, case studies, sample business cases, procurement notices, information on broadband providers and links to other sites of interest. The deadline for completing the questionnaire is 15 December 2006. *Further details at:*

[http://www.ianis.net/broadband\\_survey/index.php?lang=en](http://www.ianis.net/broadband_survey/index.php?lang=en)

## EVENTS

### 2-4 Nov 2006, Zaragoza (Spain)

“How to tackle insecurity in cities?” is the title of this conference being organised by the European Forum for Urban Safety (EFUS). The conference will consist of a series of thematic workshops on issues such as the link between urban safety and urban planning, the role of cities in the governance of security, new forms of exclusion, and the challenges posed at local level by international migrations. Speakers include the Vice-President of the European Commission and the President of the Committee of the Regions. *Further details at:* [http://zaragoza2006.fesu.org/rubrique.php?id\\_rubrique=11](http://zaragoza2006.fesu.org/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=11)

### 9 November 2006, Brussels

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is organising a seminar on the future of rural communities in Europe. The seminar aims to assess the current situation of rural communities in Europe, identifying the perspectives for their future as well as their contribution to the future of Europe. Two parallel workshops will show cases of best practice in diversifying rural economies and in delivering public services. Speakers will include the deputy director general of the European Commission's DG Regional Policy, Michele Pasca-Raymondo. The context for the conference is the forthcoming review of EU rural development policy in 2008/2009. *Further details at:* [http://www.ccre.org/news\\_detail\\_en.htm?ID=900](http://www.ccre.org/news_detail_en.htm?ID=900)

### 16 November 2006, Brussels

“Elderly care and the EU – Quality Assurance and Competence Development” is the theme of a seminar being organised by the Stockholm Region. The aim of the seminar is to showcase the work of the City of Solna, Sweden, in establishing a model service for elderly care, an increasingly important issue for local and regional authorities in Europe. *Contact: Ms Jessica Rabenius, Tel: +32 (0)2 740 06 07, e-mail: [jessica.rabenius@stockholmregion.org](mailto:jessica.rabenius@stockholmregion.org)*

### 30 Nov -1 Dec 2006, Lahti (Finland)

This workshop on 'Effective regional innovation systems' aims to provide participants with a deeper understanding of what a regional innovation system is and how it functions. Organised by the Innovating Regions in Europe (IRE) network, which is sponsored by the European Commission, the workshop will facilitate an exchange of experience on how regions can further develop and strengthen their innovation systems and how to develop regional partnership for innovation. *Further details at:* [http://www.innovating-regions.org/network/events/eventDetails.cfm?eve\\_id=400&period=current](http://www.innovating-regions.org/network/events/eventDetails.cfm?eve_id=400&period=current)

### 21-24 March 2007, Seville (Spain)

"Taking the Commitments to the Streets" is the theme of the Fifth European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns, which is being organised by the city of Seville and its partners in the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign. The conference aims to provide an opportunity for learning and the exchange of experience on fostering sustainability at local and regional level. *Further details at:* <http://www.sevilla2007.org/index.php?id=2997>

## NETWORKS

### Online Evaluation Platform

Evalsed is a free online and interactive resource providing guidance on the evaluation of socio-economic development. Developed and published by the European Commission, it promotes exchange of experience and good practice as well as increasing the relevance of evaluation to decision-making. Evalsed consists of two main parts: a *Guide* and three *Sourcebooks*. A *Guide*, which defines the role of evaluation in socio-economic development, provides guidance on how to design and implement evaluations, and elaborates on evaluation methods and techniques; and *Sourcebooks*, which present evaluation approaches for particular themes and policy areas,

evaluation methods and techniques and resource material on evaluation capacity building (including case studies and examples of good practice from different EU Member States). *Further details at:* <http://www.evalsed.com>

## PUBLICATIONS

### Guide to Regional Innovation

Regional Policy Commissioner, Danuta Hübner, has launched a new guide to help regions develop and improve their approach to innovation. The document contains practical guidance and examples of good practice drawn from 15 years of experience with innovative regional strategies and actions. Improving knowledge and innovation for growth is one of the main priorities of the new Structural Funds programmes for 2007-2013. The aim of the guide is to help regions to learn from each other and to share the positive impact of their experiences with European regional policy. The guide is specifically intended to assist Member States and regions in finalising their National Strategic Reference Frameworks and their operational programmes. The guide: *Innovative Strategies and Actions: Results from 15 Years of Regional Experimentation* will shortly be available on the Inforegio website, at: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/funds/2007/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/2007/index_en.htm)

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