

# 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

### ***New Town Twinning Initiative***

The European Commission has published a provisional schedule for the new Town Twinning and Civil Society initiatives (part of the new Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-2013). The provisional annual deadlines for applications under the Town Twinning initiative from 2007 are; 10 January, 1 April, 1 June, and 1 September. For 2007, however, funding will only be available for twinning exchanges taking place after 1 May 2007. From 2008, events taking place from 1 Jan will be fundable. The annual deadline for applications for thematic networking of twinned towns (conferences, workshops) is 15 March. The deadline for civil society projects (transnational cooperation projects on the theme of European citizenship) is 15 February 2007. *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)

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### ***Europe for Citizens***

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under Action 2 of the new 'Europe for Citizens' programme 2007-2013. The objectives of the call are: a) to foster action, debate and reflection on European citizenship and democracy, shared values, and common history and culture through cooperation between civil society organisations at European level; and b) to encourage interaction and dialogue between citizens and civil society organisations. Grants will be provided to support the operational activities of the organisations selected (personnel costs, overheads, etc.). Eligible applicants must be European public policy research organisations (think tanks, etc.) or civil society organisations operating at European level. Deadline

for applications is 22 December 2006. The total budget for 2007 is €1.9 million. *Further details at:*

<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/citizenship/index.htm>

### ***Cultural Cooperation***

The European Commission has published a conditional call for proposals under Strand 1.1 (multi-annual cooperation projects) and Strand 1.2 (cooperation measures) of the new Culture Programme 2007-2013 (formerly the Culture 2000 programme). The call is subject to formal approval of the new Programme, which is expected in the coming weeks. The Programme aims to enhance cultural cooperation between artists, cultural stakeholders and cultural institutions with a view to encouraging the emergence of European citizenship. Activities to be supported include: transnational mobility of people working in the cultural sector; transnational circulation of artistic and cultural works and products; joint cultural initiatives; and intercultural dialogue. The total budget is €27.5 million, with co-financing of up to 50%. Deadline for applications: 28 February 2007. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/index_en.html)

### ***European Enterprise Awards***

The launch of the European Enterprise Awards 2007 is expected during the week of 27 November 2006. 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)

## NEWS & POLICY

### **Regional Aid Maps for Ireland Approved**

The European Commission has approved regional State aid maps for Ireland for the period 2007-2013. Based on levels of economic development, the regional aid maps define the areas where public aid to businesses is allowed and establishes the maximum permitted levels of such aid. All the proposed aid ceilings are those for investments in large enterprises. For medium sized enterprises these aid ceilings can be increased by 10% and for small enterprises by 20%. Under the terms of the regional aid map for Ireland for 2007-2013, the BMW region will be eligible for an aid ceiling of 30% until 31 December 2010 and 15% from 1 January 2011 until 31 December 2013. The South East region will be eligible for an aid ceiling of 10% for the whole period 2007-2013, as will the islands of Bear, Cape Clear, Dursey, Heir, Long, Sherkin, Whiddy in the South-West region. In the Mid-West and South-West regions, the counties of Clare, Limerick (City and County), North Tipperary, Kerry and the Cork Urban Regeneration Area will be eligible for an aid ceiling of 10% for the period 2007-2013, but for SMEs only (so the maximum permitted aid intensities are 20% for medium sized enterprises and 30% for small enterprises). Clare, Cork (city and county) Limerick (City and County), Kerry and North Tipperary will also be eligible for an aid ceiling of 10% for large enterprises for the period 2007-2008. The changes represent a significant shift from the current period (2000-2006), where the whole population of Ireland is living in eligible areas: the BMW region currently qualifies for a maximum aid intensity of 40%, while the rest of the county qualifies for rates of 20%, 18% and 17.5% (Dublin). *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/06/396&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

### **New Networks of Excellence in Regional Development**

On November 8, the European Commission agreed an initiative to promote the development of new advanced networks for exchange and mutual learning in regional development. The new "Regions for

Economic Change" initiative will be implemented through the Interregional Cooperation and Urban Development strand of the Territorial Cooperation Objective 2007-2013. The aim is to ensure that new innovative ideas emanating from regional programmes are identified and disseminated as quickly as possible. Under the new initiative, Interregional Co-operation will continue to operate as at present (i.e. under Interreg III C). Volunteer networks of participating Member States, regions and cities will select their own development themes and pursue them through joint networks, co-financed by the ERDF. However, a new element for 2007-2013 will be that the Commission will itself propose a number of themes focusing on economic modernisation and the renewed Lisbon Agenda. Member States, regions or cities that choose to pursue these themes, will have the possibility of working more closely with the Commission. Another new element is a new "fast-track" option, through which the Commission itself will establish and animate volunteer networks around certain priority themes in order to provide a rapid testing ground for policy ideas. Two other novelties include, the introduction of an annual Regions For Economic Change conference and annual awards. The annual conference will coincide with the Spring European Council. The first in the series will be held in Brussels on 7 to 8 March 2007 and will deal with questions related to technology transfer, eco-innovation and accessibility. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/conferences/regioneconomicchange/index.en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/regioneconomicchange/index.en.cfm)

### **Meath in Finals of European Enterprise Awards**

Meath County Council is one of 51 organisations selected to participate in the finals of this year's European Enterprise Awards. The winners are due to be announced in Brussels on 7 December. More than 400 regional and local authorities took part in this year's awards, which has six different categories. Meath County Council was selected as the Irish entry for its "Hidden Resources" campaign, which aims to position County Meath to better take advantage of business and investment opportunities arising from its proximity to the Dublin metropolitan area. The campaign was initiated by the Council's Economic Development Office in 2004 and has so far included: an investment of some €15m in major broadband infrastructure in nine towns

in the county; the creation of a unique skills database through the website [www.workinmeath.ie](http://www.workinmeath.ie), in conjunction with Meath County Enterprise Board; the identification of strategic locations for business investment in the county; and general promotion of Meath as a business location. The campaign has so far succeeded in attracting over 1,000 new jobs to the county Meath. *Further details on the Awards are available at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/smes/awards/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/smes/awards/index_en.htm)

### **Energy Tops EU Priorities for 2007**

On October 24, the European Commission adopted its work programme for 2007. The work programme identifies 21 strategic initiatives that will be the main focus of its work in 2007, and sets out a further series of priority actions to be adopted over the next 12 to 18 months. The 2007 strategic priorities build on the four overall priorities for the Barroso Commission: prosperity, solidarity, security, and a stronger voice in the world, as well as the issue of communicating with EU citizens and progressing dialogue on the EU Constitution. The priorities for action in 2007 include a new phase of activity at EU level on the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs. Energy will also be a top priority in 2007, and the Commission will present the first *Strategic Energy Review* for Europe, accompanied by an Action Plan for the development of an EU energy policy. In parallel, the Commission will put forward a Green Paper on options for international co-operation on climate change post-2012, as well as publishing a White Paper, "Towards a European Climate Change Adaption Programme" (Green Paper to be published at the end of 2006). Other key priorities for 2007 include: the publication of the 4<sup>th</sup> Report on Economic & Social Cohesion, which will assess the impact of the Structural Funds and feed into a wider review of EU policy in 2008/2009; a Communication on a future EU maritime policy; a Green Paper on urban transport; a Communication on the implementation and enforcement of EU environmental law; and the publication of a European e-Inclusion strategy. The Commission also plans to step up implementation of the White Paper on a European Communication Policy, working with institutional partners in the Member States. Finally, 2007 will also see the further enlargement of the EU to include Romania and Bulgaria and will

also mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, with various events being planned in the Member States to mark this occasion. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/programmes/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/programmes/index_en.htm)

### **New Lifelong Learning Programme Adopted**

On 25 October, the new EU Lifelong Learning Programme was adopted, with a total budget of €7 billion for the period 2007-2013. The new programme will bring together all existing EU education and training support into a single programme, which will have four pillars, or sub-programmes. Under these pillars, grants and subsidies will be awarded to projects that enhance the transnational mobility of individuals, promote bilateral and multilateral partnerships, or improve quality in education and training systems through multilateral projects encouraging innovation. The four pillars are: 1. The Comenius programme (€1.0 billion), for pre-school and secondary education; 2. The Erasmus programme (€3.1 billion), targeting formal higher education, including trans-national student placements in enterprise; 3. The Leonardo de Vinci programme (€1.7 billion), which concerns vocational education and training, including placement in enterprise of persons other than students; and 4. The Grundtvig programme (€358 million), which supports all forms of adult education. These four pillars will be joined by a 'transversal programme' (€369 million), which will pursue four key activities: policy cooperation and innovation in lifelong learning; promotion of language learning; development of innovative ICT-based content, services and practices for lifelong learning; and the dissemination and exploitation of results of actions supported under the programme. The first Call for proposals under the new Programme is scheduled for February/March 2007. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/newprog/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/newprog/index_en.htm)

*The contact point in Ireland is Léargas:* <http://www.leargas.ie/>

### **New “Youth in Action” Programme**

On October 25, the new EU Youth In Action Programme was adopted. The new programme, which will cover the period 2007-2013, has a budget of €885 million and will be accessible to young people aged between 15 and 28 (13 to 30 for some actions). The main

objective of the programme is to promote more active involvement of young people in their communities and in society generally. The programme will support projects under five headings: 1) Youth for Europe, which promotes active civic participation by supporting exchanges, mobility and initiatives for young people and their projects; 2) European Voluntary Service, promoting transnational voluntary services, and which addresses societal issues. 3) Youth of the world, which will open up the programme to projects with countries outside the EU; 4) Youth Workers and Support Systems, supporting exchanges, training and information schemes for youth workers, and projects to promote partnerships with regional or local entities; and 5. Support for Policy Cooperation, which will promote co-operation among decision-makers on youth policy. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/newprog/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/newprog/index_en.html)

*The contact point in Ireland is Léargas:* <http://www.leargas.ie/>

### **Partners Sought for European Ecotourism network**

“Touring Nature” is a pan-European ecotourism network, established by the Assembly of European Regions (AER) to promote the objectives of Agenda 21 on sustainable rural tourism for the 2007-2013 period. AER is now looking for partners to participate in the network, which will provide a framework for long-term international cooperation, and which will promote economic development based on ecotourism in rural areas. The main activities of the network include: an educational project involving local professionals in sustainable development; the creation of a tool to assess an area's ecotourism potential; and international actions promoting natural and cultural assets through involvement of local stakeholders (e.g. local action groups, and groups of villages). The network will also create pan-European routes connecting the recognised “Touring Nature” areas and this will be promoted via a website as a high quality ecotourism product. *For further details, contact: Touring Nature, email: [touringnature@wanadoo.fr](mailto:touringnature@wanadoo.fr), Tel: +33 (0) 4 76 41 91 82.*

### **9 May Initiative – Europe Day**

The European Commission has issued an invitation to EU regions and local authorities to participate in

the “9 May Initiative – Europe Day” 2007. The aim of the initiative is to raise awareness among young people of European external aid and development cooperation by dedicating the 9 May to discussions in schools around Europe. In 2007, the event will also include the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EU. Participating regions and local authorities are required to: identify participating schools (ideally at least 15); select two schools to receive “Ambassadors” (EU representatives that will visit the schools); and organise events at schools or public places (town halls, theatres etc) in collaboration with the local schools, and arrange media coverage of these events. For its part, the European Commission will: provide the overall coordination of the initiative; send publications and other educational material to schools; send project material to teachers; and recruit two “Ambassadors” per region to participate in the final event. The deadline for participation in the initiative for 2007 is 19 December 2006. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/europeaid/agenda/9may/about\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/europeaid/agenda/9may/about_en.htm)

### **Ireland still Lagging on Broadband Connection**

A recent report from Eurostat shows that households and businesses in Ireland continue to have one of the lowest levels of broadband connection in the EU. In general, in the EU25 broadband internet access continued to increase in 2006. 32% of households had a broadband connection during the first quarter of 2006, compared to 23% in 2005. The proportion of households with a broadband connection in 2006 was highest in the Netherlands (66%), Denmark (63%) and Finland (53%) and lowest in Greece (4%), Slovakia (11%), Cyprus (12%) and Ireland (13%). Broadband usage has also risen sharply among enterprises with more than 10 employees, rising from 63% in 2005 to 75% at the beginning of 2006. The highest levels were recorded in Sweden and Finland (both 89%), Spain (87%) and France (86%), and the lowest in Poland (46%), Cyprus (55%), Lithuania (57%) and Latvia (59%) and Ireland (61%). *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/06/146&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

## EVENTS

### 25-26 January 2007, Brussels

"Regional policy responses to demographic challenges" is the title of this conference being organised by the European Commission's Regional Policy Directorate General. The conference will look at how European regional policy can help regions to respond to demographic challenges and will showcase examples of best practice in order to provide learning opportunities for Structural Funds managing authorities and others. This is the second in a series of three conferences to be held between now and the Fourth Cohesion Forum in June 2007 on the general theme, "Regions for Economic Change." Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/conferences/demographicchallenge\\_jan07/programme\\_en.cfm?nmenu=4](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/demographicchallenge_jan07/programme_en.cfm?nmenu=4)

### 29 Jan – 2 Feb 2007, Brussels

On the initiative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Transport and Energy, the European Institutions and major stakeholders concerned with sustainable energy are organising the first *European Sustainable Energy Week*, a series of events on renewable energy and energy efficiency. The week-long event will include over 40 different workshops and seminars on topics such as, "Regional Energy Efficiency Strategies", "Local and Regional Sustainable Energy Solutions", and "the Creation of a Regional Energy Cluster with a Kyoto Perspective." Further details, including registration, at: <http://www.eusew.eu>

### 15-16 February 2007, Noord Brabant (Netherlands)

The region of Noord Brabant, in association with the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions is organising a conference "European Regions As Champions For Biodiversity 2010". The conference will focus on how regions can promote biodiversity by, firstly, becoming more closely involved in EU policy on biodiversity and, secondly, by translating policy objectives into action on the ground. Further details at: <http://www.biodiversitybrabant.nl/>

### 16-17 April 2007, Barcelona (Spain)

Eurisy, an international organization established to promote the benefits of space for European society, is organising a Conference on "Future Challenges for Local and Regional Authorities: How can Space Technology help?" This conference aims to provide an opportunity for representatives of local and regional authorities to learn about new services, exchange experience, meet with service providers and institutions, and propose ideas for future services (for example, in areas such as monitoring the natural environment, pollution, land use, real estate, traffic management, tracking of goods and people, natural disaster management, etc). Further details at: <http://www.eurisy.org>

### 20-24 August 2007, Wageningen (Holland)

Next year's Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology will focus on the theme, 'Mobilities, Vulnerabilities and Sustainabilities: new questions and challenges for rural Europe'. The congress will examine how the mobility of people impacts on the sustainability of different rural areas and will consider how rural areas and communities can meet the challenges of increasing mobility in ways that reduces negative impacts and enhances sustainability. Further details at: <http://www.esrs2007.nl/>

## NETWORKS

### Renewable Energy Network

ELREN, the European Leader+ Renewable Energy Network, has decided to open its membership to organisations other than LEADER groups. New members could include local authorities, local development agencies, education and research institutions, and SMEs and other organisations working in the area of renewable energy. Prospective members will have to sign an agreement to commit themselves to the objectives of ELREN, which include: facilitating the exchange of technical know-how and basic commercial information; facilitating co-operation

opportunities in the field of energy production from renewable sources; promoting energy efficiency in buildings; encouraging the application of micro technologies in rural areas by local public institutions, agencies, SMEs and private households; disseminating basic information on national policies, legislation and available funding/incentives. Further details at: <http://www.elren.net/> or contact: Jadranka Cace, Tel: +31-20-4720135, e-mail: [jadranka@rencom.nl](mailto:jadranka@rencom.nl).

## PUBLICATIONS

### Regions Statistical Yearbook

The 2006 edition of "Regions: Statistical Yearbook" is now available online. The yearbook covers the 254 regions of the 25 EU Member States, defined at NUTS II level (level 2 of the Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics), and the 14 regions in Bulgaria and Romania. It contains chapters on population, GDP, household accounts, labour market, urban statistics, science, technology and innovation, business, health, transport and agriculture. New this year is the chapter on labour productivity. Further details at: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?pageid=1073.46587259&dad=portal&schema=PORTAL&p\\_product\\_code=KS-AF-06-001](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?pageid=1073.46587259&dad=portal&schema=PORTAL&p_product_code=KS-AF-06-001)

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