

# EU News Bulletin

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

## Number 36 – March 2007

Produced by the Irish Regions Office (IRO), Brussels  
in association with the Institute of Public Administration (IPA)



Irish Regions Office



INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION

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## FUNDING

### **European Enterprise Awards**

Building on the success of 2006, the European Commission has launched the second European Enterprise Awards, which recognise and rewards initiatives by local and regional authorities to support entrepreneurship. 400 local authorities from more than 20 countries participated in the competition in 2006, the first year of the awards, with Meath County Council reaching the finals. National competitions start this month in order to select and submit entries to the European competition by September. *Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepren/eurship/smes/awards/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepren/eurship/smes/awards/index_en.htm)*

### **RegioStars 2008 Award**

On March 8, EU Regional Policy Commissioner, Danuta Hübner, launched RegioStars 2008, a new annual award for innovative projects in regional development. RegioStars is open to projects that have received funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or pre-accession aid instruments. The aim is to identify and showcase good practices in regional development in the EU. Regional authorities are being encouraged to submit an application on behalf of an eligible innovative project in their region. Deadline for proposals: 29 June 2007. *Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/innovation/regiostars\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/innovation/regiostars_en.htm)*

### **Climate Star 2007**

Climate Alliance (see below, under Networks) has launched the Climate Star 2007 Award for outstanding activities and good practice in climate protection at local level. Projects selected will be awarded a Climate Star. This year's theme for the Award is sustainable mobility. All local authorities,

cities in Europe that can present local climate protection activities in this area are eligible to apply for a Climate Star. The deadline for registering interest is 31 May 2007. The deadline for applications is 30 June 2007. *Further details at: <http://www.climate-star.net/>*

### **Supporting e-Business**

The European Commission has published a call for proposals on "Reinforcing synergies between public policies in support of e-business for SMEs." The call aims to support and facilitate the exchange of best policy practices between e-business policy makers and/or SME support networks. The ultimate beneficiaries will be SMEs, which will be assisted to better understand e-business processes, improve their skills and participate in e-business networks. Total budget: €600.000, with EU co-financing of up to 50%, or a maximum of €120.000 per project. Approximately 5 projects will receive funding. Deadline for applications: 16 May 2007. *Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/funding/grants/themes\\_2007/pp\\_4.1.2/specifications\\_v2.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/funding/grants/themes_2007/pp_4.1.2/specifications_v2.pdf)*

### **Researcher career development**

The European Commission has published a series of calls for proposals under the People strand of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for Research. These calls focus specifically on lifelong training, career development and researcher mobility. The calls are targeted at experienced researchers and aim to enhance their individual competence diversification by promoting inter-sectoral experience. Total budget: €72 million. Deadline for applications: 14 August 2007. *Further details at: [http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.FP7DetailsCallPage&call\\_id=44](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.FP7DetailsCallPage&call_id=44)*

## NEWS & POLICY

### Agreement on New EU Energy Policy

Meeting in Brussels on March 9, EU leaders reached agreement on a new EU Energy Policy, originally presented by the Commission on January 10 (see EU News Bulletin no.34). A key part of this new policy is a commitment to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the EU by 20% (on 1990 levels) by 2020, and by 30% if the international community agrees to do the same in the context of discussions on the next round of the Kyoto agreement. To reach that goal, Member States agreed to a target of 20% of energy consumption from renewables, including 10% biofuels in the total vehicle fuel consumption, and a 20% improvement in energy efficiency by 2020. However, despite agreement on overall EU targets, the controversial issue of the burden-sharing of these commitments between Member States has still to be agreed. This task will fall to the European Commission, which is due to present the first legislative proposals at the end of 2007. According to official data presented at the Council by the Commission, renewables accounted for just 2% of total energy consumption in Ireland in 2004, the lowest in the EU, with Belgium, Luxembourg and Malta. The EU average was 6%. The Council also broached the controversial issue of nuclear energy and, despite pressure from France, refused to recognize nuclear energy as a "renewable energy." Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/news/environment/070309\\_1\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/news/environment/070309_1_en.htm)

### Weaknesses in Ireland's Innovation Performance

The latest European Innovation Scoreboard highlights weaknesses in Ireland's innovation performance, particularly in the areas of broadband penetration and lifelong learning. The scoreboard, which was published by the European Commission on February 22, assesses data from 2005 on different indicators of innovation in the EU Member States. It concludes that Ireland's innovation performance is slightly above the EU average, but still at the lower end of the EU15 and only slightly ahead of the better performing new Member States. While the situation in innovation drivers is generally good, broadband penetration is low and only 8% of the population is currently

participating in lifelong learning. However, Ireland scores higher on levels of youth education attainment, with high levels of science and engineering graduates and a large proportion of the population with tertiary education. In general, the report concludes that innovation and entrepreneurship is improving in Ireland. In particular, innovation expenditure has increased considerably. However, some worrying trends include: a decline in exports of high-technology goods from 39% of total exports in 1999 to 29% in 2004, and a drop in employment in high-tech services (from 4% of the total workforce in 2000 to 3.5% in 2005). In addition, broadband penetration in Ireland has improved less than the EU average since 2004 (from 1.7% to 4.4% in Ireland, from 6.5% to 10.6% in Europe). Evidence to date, however, suggests a higher rate of uptake in Ireland in 2006. Further details at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/07/74&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

### Interreg IV – Call for Project Ideas

The Joint Technical Secretariats (JTS) for the new North West Europe (NWE) and Atlantic Area (AA) territorial cooperation programmes 2007-13 are inviting the submission of ideas for transnational projects from potential beneficiaries. Both programmes are currently being finalised and the first call for proposals is expected in mid-2007. In the meantime, the JTSs, the programme implementation bodies, are encouraging potential beneficiaries to submit ideas online. This will help to promote awareness of project ideas and facilitate contact with potential local and transnational partners. Once an idea has been registered, potential beneficiaries are advised to start networking by attending events organised by the JTSs at regional, national and transnational level, and to look at the list of ideas submitted by other promoters. Further details on the NWE programme at: <http://www.nweurope.org/page/document.php?p=1756> or contact: Ronan Gingles, INTERREG NWE Liaison Officer, Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly, Tel: 051 860711, e-mail: [rgingles@seregassembly.ie](mailto:rgingles@seregassembly.ie) Further details on the AA programme at: <http://www.atlantique-2007-2013.org/index.php?id=9&L=2> or contact: Michael O'Brien, BMW Regional Assembly, Tel: 094 9862970, e-mail: [mobrien@bmwassembly.ie](mailto:mobrien@bmwassembly.ie)

### Partner Fair for New Northern Periphery Programme

The Joint Technical Secretariat for the new Northern Periphery (NP) territorial cooperation programme will hold a networking and project development event in Derry on 24-26 April 2007. The programme for this "partenariat" event includes presentations on the new programme and focused workshops to develop project ideas on tackling common challenges through transnational cooperation. Delegates from across the programme area will be invited, although places are limited and targeted in the first instance at those interested in the programmes priority themes. Ireland will participate in the NP programme for the first time in 2007-13. Eligible areas in Ireland include the counties of Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Galway, Mayo, Clare, Limerick, Cork and Kerry. The programme has two main priorities for the 2007-13 period: 1. Communications, innovation and business development; and 2. Natural and cultural resources and sustainable local development. Further details at: <http://www.northernperiphery.net/2007/> contact: Michael O'Brien, BMW Regional Assembly, Tel: 094 9862970, e-mail: [mobrien@bmwassembly.ie](mailto:mobrien@bmwassembly.ie)

### Celtic Regions Unite for Open Days 2007

The Irish Regions Office (IRO) has been selected as part of the Celtic Regions consortium to participate in this year's Open Days: European Week of Regions and Cities, which will take place from October 8-11, 2007. The Celtic Regions consortium is one of 24 consortia that will co-organise Open Days 2007. Other partners in this consortium include the Brussels offices of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the South West UK, Brittany (France), Asturias (Spain) and Norte (Portugal) The theme of this year's event is, "Making it happen: Regions Deliver Growth and jobs," focussing on the implementation of the new round of Structural Funds programmes for the period 2007-13. The Celtic Regions consortium will organise two events, one on sustainable energy policy and one on maritime policy. Open Days 2007 will also include an "Investors Café", hosting seminars, stands and networking opportunities in different "thematic villages." Between 1 and 7 October and 12 and 31 October, the conglomerates are also encouraged to organise local events in their regions. These events should target the general public and potential beneficiaries of the Structural Funds and can be organised

in the context of launching the new Operational Programmes. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/conferences/od2007/about.cfm?nmenu=2](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/od2007/about.cfm?nmenu=2) or from the Irish regions Office.

### **Open Days - Call for Papers**

The European Commission's Regional Policy Directorate has published a call for papers from which it hopes to identify about 100 speakers for the 40 workshops it will organise as part of Open Days 2007. The deadline for the call is March 28. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/conferences/od2007/call.cfm?nmenu=33](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/od2007/call.cfm?nmenu=33)

### **EU Regional Policy Priorities for 2007**

On March 13, Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner presented her own work programme for 2007. The Commissioner's top priorities for 2007 include the completion of the 2000-2006 Structural Funds programmes (many of which run for another 2 years) and the launch of the new programmes for 2007-2013. The latter includes the finalisation of all the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and the approval of the 328 Operational Programmes for the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, and the 122 Operation Programmes for the European Social Fund. Other priorities for the Commissioner in 2007 include: the presentation of the Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion (Sept 27); the fourth cohesion forum; a series of conferences within the Regions for Economic Change initiative; Open Days 2007; a Commission conference on communicating Cohesion Policy (Nov 26-27); a Communication on the contribution of Cohesion Policy to the growth and jobs agenda, and another on the Outermost Regions. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/hubner/focus/focus\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/hubner/focus/focus_en.htm)

### **Events in Ireland to Mark the EU's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

The representation of the European Commission in Ireland is organising a programme of events from 22 to 25 March to mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. Some of the events being planned include: a briefing by EU Internal Market Commissioner, Charlie McCreevy; a conference in Galway

entitled, "Europe at 50: A mid-Life Crisis"; a special broadcasting of the BBC's Any Questions? radio show from Dublin; and an "Open Day" at the European Commission Representation Office in Dublin. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/press\\_office/events\\_ireland/50thanniversary\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/press_office/events_ireland/50thanniversary_en.htm)

### **Consultation on Urban Transport**

On February 26, the European Commission launched a consultation on the future EU Green Paper on urban transport. The consultation invites suggestions on what can be done at EU level, beyond simply facilitating the exchange of best practice, to support improvements in urban mobility. It also poses questions such as: can sustainable mobility plans developed by local authorities be made compulsory? Can measures be taken to encourage walking and cycling? Or can freight logistics be improved so as to be more effective? Part of the consultation also focuses on the question of the development of a market for clean cars. The Commission presented proposals for a Directive on the purchase of clean vehicles by public authorities in December 2005. However, these proposals, which seek to oblige public authorities to spend 25% of their annual vehicle budget on clean cars, are currently being blocked by the Council of Ministers. Comments on this subject are likely to be used by the Commission to modify its proposals to make them more acceptable to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. The Green Paper is due to be published by the Commission in the second half of 2007. It will be followed by a further consultation lasting until spring 2008, and the adoption of an action plan at the end of 2008. Deadline for submissions: 30 April 2007. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/clean/green\\_paper\\_urban\\_transport/public\\_consultation\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/clean/green_paper_urban_transport/public_consultation_en.htm)

### **Energy Technology Consultation**

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on the development of an EU Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan. The SET-Plan is one of the main ideas in the EU Energy Policy presented by the European Commission on 10 January, and agreed at the Spring European Council on 8 March. The purpose of the plan will be to identify the technologies with the most potential to make

Europe's energy system sustainable. It will identify barriers to their development and take-up, as well as the policies needed to overcome these barriers. It is envisaged that the plan will be drawn up by the end of 2007, and then endorsed by the Spring European Council in 2008. *Further details at:*

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=setplan&lang=en>

### **Consultation on the Future of European Society**

On March 14, the European Commission launched a public consultation on the 'social reality' of Europe. The consultation aims to generate views on the social changes taking place in Europe (in the nature of work; modern family life; demographic trends; the position of women in society; social mobility and the incidence of poverty and inequality, etc..). It invites views on access to education and employment as well as on the implications of changing social relationships. The results of the consultation will feed into forthcoming EU policy initiatives. The Bureau of European Policy Advisors of the European Commission has prepared a background document to animate and support the public consultation. The consultation is open until the 31 December 2007. *Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/citizens\\_agenda/social\\_reality\\_stocktaking/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/citizens_agenda/social_reality_stocktaking/index_en.htm)

### **Ireland's Low Tax Burden**

In 2005 Ireland had the sixth lowest tax burden of the EU27 and the lowest of the older EU15 Member States. In 2005, tax revenue (i.e. the total amount of taxes and social contributions) in the EU27 stood at 40.8% of GDP, compared with 40.4% in 2004. However, among the Member States there were substantial differences in the tax-to-GDP ratio. In 2005 Sweden (52.1%) recorded the highest ratio, followed by Denmark (51.2%), Belgium (47.7%) and France (45.8%). The lowest ratios were observed in Romania (28.8%), Lithuania (29.2%), Slovakia (29.5%), Latvia (29.6%), Estonia (31.0%) and Ireland (32.2%). Ireland's total tax burden declined slowly, from about 35% in the mid 1990's to 29.8% in 2002 and has since been gradually increasing again. *Further details at:*

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portals/docs/PAGE/PGP\\_PRD\\_CAT\\_PRERE/PGE\\_CAT\\_PREREL\\_YEAR\\_2007/PGE\\_CAT\\_PREREL\\_YEAR\\_2007\\_MONT\\_H\\_03/2-20032007-EN-BP.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portals/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PRERE/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2007/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2007_MONT_H_03/2-20032007-EN-BP.PDF)

## EVENTS

**16-18 April 2007,  
Hämeenlinna (Finland)**

EISCO 2007 will focus on how to unleash the potential benefits of ICT at local and regional level and will highlight the potential contribution of local and regional authorities to the EU's "i2010 strategy". The conference will address five thematic areas: citizens' e-participation in local decision-making processes; e-capacity building and e-inclusion programmes; broadband infrastructure and new wireless solutions; local e-government interoperability and e-security; and the new generation of municipal services in a multi-channel environment. The programme includes speakers from Laois, Mayo and Donegal County Councils. *Further details at: [www.eisco2007.org](http://www.eisco2007.org)*

**18 April 2007, Brussels**

The South-East Regional Authority and the Centre for Entrepreneurship at Waterford Institute of Technology are organising an open forum on "Implementing the Regions of Knowledge Initiative – the Experience of the REFORM and CRIPREDE Projects." The aim of the forum is to disseminate the experiences and lessons learned in implementing the REFORM and CRIPREDE projects, both of which are part-financed by the European Commission under its FP6 Regions of Knowledge 2 Initiative. Ciaran Dearle from the European Commission will also present information on the new Regions of Knowledge initiative 2007-2013. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

**18-20 April, 2007 Dublin**

The seminar, "Enhancing the capacity of partnerships to influence policy" is being organised by the OECD and will focus on skills development and on the role of local partnerships in designing and delivering skills development strategies. The seminar will facilitate an in-depth discussion on the value of partnerships in influencing policy makers at local, national and international levels. The target groups are partnership managers,

practitioners and coordinators, and their counterparts in the public sector. *Further details from: Elisa Campestrin at: [elisa.campestrin@oecd.org](mailto:elisa.campestrin@oecd.org)*

**10-11 May 2007, Brussels**

The Erik Network (European Regions Knowledge based Innovation Network) is organizing an international conference on "Knowledge for Regional Innovation - Towards Regions for Economic Change." The event will provide an opportunity for local and regional authorities, practitioners and businesses to debate the role of regions in promoting economic growth through innovation, entrepreneurship and the growth of the knowledge economy. EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Danuta Hübner will also address the conference. *Further details at: [www.eriknetwork.net](http://www.eriknetwork.net)*

**12-15 June 2007, Brussels**

"Lessons from the past, challenges for the future," is the theme of Green Week 2007, the annual forum on EU environment policy. The event will look at what has been achieved, what could have been done better, what drives change, how lifestyles need to change, and how innovation and technology can help the EU to achieve its environment goals. From 3 June – Brussels Environment Day – to 15 June an exhibition on environmental innovation and technologies will also be held in a large covered exhibition space in a public park near the conference centre. *Further details at: <http://greenweek.europa.eu>*

## NETWORKS

**Climate Alliance**

The Climate Alliance is an association of European cities and local authorities which aims to combat global climate change. Since its foundation in 1990, over 1000 European cities and local and district authorities have joined the Climate Alliance. Regional authorities and NGOs also collaborate as associated members. Member organisations share the view that climate protection begins within the direct sphere of influence of local government, involving cooperation with

citizens, associations and companies that goes far beyond mandatory tasks. The Climate Alliance is coordinated by its European Secretariat in Frankfurt, Germany, with the support of national and regional coordination offices and contact points. *Further details at: <http://www.klimabuendnis.org/english/association/frameset.htm>*

## PUBLICATIONS

**Information Society and the Regions**

The role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in bringing new social and economic opportunities to Europe's regions is the subject of a new booklet published by the European Commission's Information Society and Media Directorate General. The brochure highlights projects involving Structural Funds support for the provision of telecommunications infrastructure, aiming to stimulate new electronic services and innovative ICT applications. ICT is one of the priorities for the next round of the Structural Funds (2007-2013). Member States and regions are encouraged to focus on developing ICT products and services, but also on developing infrastructure platforms and on experimentation in their new Operational Programmes to feed their innovation strategies. *Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/policy/link/documents/regions.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/policy/link/documents/regions.pdf)*

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