

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

LIFE+ first call

The first call for proposals under the new LIFE+ programme is expected on the 15 September 2007, with a deadline for submissions to the national coordinating body (Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government) of 30 November. Priority areas of action include: nature and biodiversity, environment policy and governance, and information and communications on the environment. The total budget for the period 2007-2013 is €1.9 billion. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/new_s/futureoflife.htm

eParticipation

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the eParticipation programme, which aims to promote the use of information and communications technologies to improve legislative and decision-making processes and to enhance public participation in such processes at all levels of government decision-making. The minimum number of participants in a proposal is three independent legal entities, from at least two different Member States. The total budget is €4.7 million, with co-financing of up to 75 %. The deadline for receipt of proposals is 13 September. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/egovernment_research/eparticipation/index_en.htm

Active Ageing

The European Commission has published an open call for proposals for preparatory actions on active ageing and mobility of elderly people. Key activities to be carried out under this call include: international exchange programmes aimed at promoting the employment of older workers or the

active involvement of older people as volunteers; or good practice projects which support active ageing and involvement of older people who have moved to another Member State or who envisage doing so. The total budget is €3.0 million, supporting 4 to 10 projects. Deadline for applications: 13 July 2007. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/tenders/index_calls_en.cfm

Cultural Heritage Awards

The annual "Europa Nostra Awards" seek to identify and promote best practices in the conservation of tangible cultural heritage, to stimulate the exchange of knowledge and experience throughout Europe, and to enhance public awareness and appreciation of European cultural heritage. Award categories include: conservation; research; dedicated service by individuals or organisations; and education, training and awareness-raising. Deadlines for entries: 15 August 2007. *Further details at:* http://www.europanostra.org/lang_en/index.html

Road Safety and Transport Optimisation

The European Commission has launched a call for proposals in the area of Transport Safety and Optimisation of Transport Systems. Activities to be supported under this call include: 1. Coaching, teaching, training, and learning initiatives involving participants in more than one Member State, which aim to improve the behaviour of road users and operators; 2. Research and dissemination of best practices; and 3. Coordination and harmonisation of standards and procedures. The total budget is €5.7 million, with co-financing of 10-50%. Deadline for applications: 9 July 2007. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/dqs/energy_transport/grants/doc/2007/transport/call_transport_2007_sub_01_en.pdf

ICT Support Programme

The first call for proposals under the new ICT Policy Support Programme, which is part of the new EU Competitiveness & Innovation Programme (2007-13), opened on 25 May 2007. The call covers three themes: 1. Efficient and interoperable eGovernment services; 2. ICT for accessibility, ageing and social integration; and 3. ICT for sustainable and interoperable health services. Total budget: €54 million. Deadline for applications: 23 October 2007. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/ict_psp/calls/call_proposals_07/index_en.htm

NEWS & POLICY

The Future of EU Cohesion Policy

On May 30, the European Commission published its Fourth Progress Report on Economic and Social Cohesion in the European Union, launching a debate on the future of EU Regional Policy and the Structural Funds. The report provides information on the economic, social and territorial situation of the enlarged EU of 27 Member States and 268 regions. It contains a detailed analysis of GDP, productivity and employment in the regions and identifies a series of challenges which will confront Member States and regions in the coming years. It also provides a first assessment of the impact of EU Cohesion Policy in the 2000-2006 programming period, as well as of preparations for the new period 2007-2013. In general, the report concludes that EU Cohesion Policy has been successful in helping to bring about economic convergence in Europe. However, due to enlargement, and to a general tendency for growth to be geographically concentrated, considerable disparities still remain. The report highlights new emerging challenges for EU regions, such as increased economic pressure from global competitors, rising energy prices, climate change, and social polarisation. With the publication of the Fourth Cohesion Report, the Commission is, therefore, launching the debate on how Cohesion Policy can best evolve to meet these challenges. During 2007/2008, the Commission will develop its approach to the EU budget review in 2008/2009. The Cohesion Forum, which will take place on the 27-28 September, will provide a

first opportunity to discuss this with relevant stakeholders. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/newsroom/index_en.htm

EC Task Force for N. Ireland

EU Regional Policy Commissioner, Danuta Hübner, was in Belfast on 8 June to discuss the activities of a new European Commission task force to support Northern Ireland's peace process. The new task force, which was announced by the Commission President, Jose Manuel Barroso, when he visited Northern Ireland in May, will examine how the administration, businesses, research institutes and other interests in Northern Ireland can become more actively involved in EU initiatives and programmes that can contribute to economic development and job creation in the region. For the period 2007-13, EU support for Northern Ireland will be largely channelled through the following instruments: The Regional Competitiveness and Employment programme, which has an EU budget of €473m; The PEACE III programme, with an EU contribution of €225m; and the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), to which the EU is providing an annual contribution of €15m from 2006 until 2010. During her visit, Commissioner Hübner met with Peter Robinson, Minister for Finance & Economic Development, the three MEPs from Northern Ireland, as well as with Mr Dennis Rooney, Chairman of the IFI, and Mr Pat Colgan, Chief Executive of the Special EU Programmes Body. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

A New Urban Policy for Europe

On 24 May 2007, EU ministers responsible for urban and spatial development signed the "Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities", which lays the foundation for a new integrated urban policy in Europe, with greater involvement of local partners in decision-making and implementation. The Charter highlights the fact that while cities generate 75-85% of the EU's GDP, many European cities are suffering from congestion, pollution, high noise levels and social exclusion. As the source of almost three quarters of energy consumption, cities also have a major role to play in the fight against climate change. The Charter presents an ideal model for the "European City" of the 21st century and agrees on common strategies for urban-

development policy. In particular, it identifies the need to strengthen inner cities by improving the mix of residential, commercial and leisure areas, as well as putting an end to urban sprawl and 'monotonous' urban development. The Charter also calls for the eradication of 'no-go' areas in European cities and recommends an increase in EU funding for cities to help them cope with these challenges. The Leipzig Charter is seen as an important development in terms of strengthening the involvement of local partners in decision-making and implementation. The forthcoming EU Presidencies – Portugal, Slovenia and France – have undertaken to follow-up on the agreement and ministers have also agreed to launch a public debate in their own countries on the integrated approach, involving cities and regions. *Further details at:* http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/download_docs/Mai/0524-AN/075DokumentLeipzigCharta.pdf

New Structural Funds Eligibility Criteria

In a resolution adopted on 23 May, the European Parliament calls for new criteria other than per capita gross domestic product (GDP) to be used to measure regions' development level and suggests that the midterm review of Cohesion Policy, set for 2009, could be the time to make such a change. The Parliament urges the European Commission to investigate the use of new indicators, such as the rate and quality of employment, the level of disparities in GDP between neighbouring regions, the decentralisation and accessibility index, infrastructure and transport provision, the level of research and innovation, education and training activities and the diversity of production. Such a move could be beneficial for Ireland, which scores highly on GDP per capita but less so on some of the proposed new indicators. Parliament also proposes that companies which receive EU funding and then relocate within the EU should be barred from obtaining public funding for their new activity and excluded from Structural Fund support and national funding for a period of seven years. The resolution also proposes that the Council and the Commission encourage the establishment of 'technology facilitators' at the local and regional level, using the existing Euro Info Centre and Innovation Relay Centre networks and financed by the Structural Funds. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

EU Investigates Rural Planning in Ireland

The European Commission has completed an investigation into the legitimacy of planning restrictions in rural areas in Ireland, following a case brought by a man (non-local) who was refused permission to build a house in rural county Wicklow. Planning guidelines in Wicklow restrict non-locals from being granted permission to build houses in rural areas. The EU investigation found this to be discriminatory, disproportionate and to constitute a restriction on the free movement of capital and the freedom of establishment guaranteed by the European treaties. The Commission investigation also identified similar issues in at least 22 other county development plans (concerning Carlow, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Fingal, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Kilkenny, Mayo, Meath, Monaghan, Laois, Longford, Limerick, Louth, Offaly, Sligo, Tipperary North and South, Wexford, Westmeath and Wicklow). The report on the case will now go to the college of Commissioners on June 27. If the Commission decides to issue a letter of formal notice then the government will have two months to respond. More details will be provided in the next edition of the EU Policy Review. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

New Instrument to Finance Research & Innovation

On June 5, the European Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed a cooperation agreement establishing a new risk-sharing finance facility (RSFF) to support research & innovation in Europe. The new instrument will help to make more financing available to promoters of research & innovation projects that face difficulties in accessing finance due to their relatively high levels of risk. The RSFF, part of the EUs 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7) & the EIB's Programme for Research & Innovation, will partially cover the financial risks assumed by the EIB when financing this type of activity. The contribution of €1 billion each from the FP7 & the EIB will unlock several billions in additional financing. Initially, the RSFF is likely to benefit mostly medium & large innovative companies & large-scale research undertakings such as European or national research infrastructure. However, it will also be open to private & public entities of any size and ownership promoting eligible RDI activities, including SMEs, research

organisations & Public-Private Partnerships contributing to FP7 objectives. Those interested can contact the EIB services via its head office in Luxembourg (RDI@eib.org). *Contacts for relevant intermediary banks will also be published on the EIBs website, at: www.eib.org/rsff*

Call for Focus on Regional Research & Innovation

The EU Research Advisory Board (EURAB) has urged the European Commission and the Member States to make better use of Structural Funds to enhance research and innovation, in particular at regional level. The EURAB report on "Energising Europe's Knowledge Triangle of Research, Education and Innovation through the Structural Funds" recommends a more strategic approach to the use of Structural Funds Programmes to "leverage development of regional research, innovation and higher education capacity". The advisory board suggests a mandatory earmarking of 20% of these funds for investment in research and innovation measures and that "this condition becomes a part of the Community strategy in the implementation process of the Lisbon strategy in Europe". Among its other recommendations (nine in total), EURAB proposes the establishment of a dedicated platform to "develop and spread best practice on the use of Structural Fund programme expenditure to stimulate the regional economic benefits of research and innovation, particularly in overcoming existing disparities across the EU". *Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/research/eurab/pdf/eurab_07_010_advice_energising_europe_knowledge_triangle_april07_en.pdf*

Ombudsman Targets Regional Offices

On June 7, the European Ombudsman launched a campaign to inform regional offices, companies, associations, NGOs schools and universities about their right to complain to the Ombudsman. Thousands of organisations from all the Member States involved in EU projects are often in direct contact with the EU administration and many encounter problems. The ombudsman is, therefore, trying to raise awareness among these target groups about the services of his office. Of all complaints the Ombudsman currently receives, 95% come from citizens and only 5% from public authorities, companies,

associations and other organisations. Typical cases by this latter group encompass late payment for EU projects, problems with tender procedures, legal errors or the refusal to give access to a document. In the framework of his information campaign, the Ombudsman has published a new information sheet explaining to regional offices, businesses, associations and other organisations how he can help settle problems with the EU administration. *Further details at: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/infosheet/en/default.htm> or from the Irish Regions Office.*

Ireland lagging in Organic Farming

The area devoted to organic farming accounted for 4.1% of the total utilised agricultural area in the EU25 in 2005. The highest proportions of organic area were recorded in Austria (11%), Italy (8.4%), the Czech Republic and Greece (both 7.2%), while the lowest were recorded in Malta (0.1%), Poland (0.6%) and Ireland (0.8%), where just under 35,000 hectares (ha) was farmed organically. Looking at the general trend, the proportion of organic farmland in the total utilised agricultural area has increased from 1.8% in 1998 to 4.1% in 2005. In nearly all Member States, the average size of organic holdings was larger than the size of other holdings: 39ha per organic holding, compared with 16 ha per holding on average. This is also the case in Ireland, where organic holdings are on average 36.5ha and holdings in general are 31.8ha. *Further details at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/07/80>*

European Greenways Award

The European Greenways Association has announced a call for candidates for the third European Greenways Award (2007). Created in 2003, the Award aims to highlight and promote projects concerned with the development of greenways in European. Categories for this year's award include: innovative greenways as a tourism resource and, greenways facilitating day-to-day mobility of citizens. A special prize may also be given to the candidate that best combines both categories. Deadline for applications: 15 July 2007. *Further details at: http://www.viasverdes-fe.com/premio_europeovv0708/default.htm*

EVENTS

16-22 Sept 2007, European Mobility Week

This years European Mobility Week will focus on the theme, "Streets for People" and the aim is to encourage local authorities to reallocate some road space to non-motorised traffic, to rethink the balance of transport modes and put more emphasis on traffic management which would allow the creation of attractive public spaces in cities. Further details at: <http://www.mobilityweek.eu/> National Coordinator for Ireland: Eddie Forsythe, e-mail: eddie_forsythe@environ.ie

20-21 Sept 2007, Lisbon (Portugal)

The EU Interregional Cooperation Forum 2007: Celebrating INTERREG IIIC – Launching INTERREG IVC will mark the launch of the new EU programme for interregional cooperation. Up to 800 representatives of local and regional authorities and other public bodies are expected to attend the forum, which will bring together organisations interested in tackling similar issues, help them build and promote ideas for new projects, and show them how to apply for INTERREG IVC funding. Further details at: <http://www.interreg3c.net>

10-12 Oct 2007, Beja (Portugal)

The "European Meeting Point: Energy for Development 2007", will examine progress on bio-energy, energy services, sustainable energy communities, carbon-economy, energy citizenship and regional development. The event aims to facilitate the integration of the above-mentioned areas into solution-oriented multidisciplinary European projects. A call for papers is open until 30 June for the presentation of case studies. Further details at: <http://www.energyanddevelopment-2007.net>

19 October 2007, Killarney (Ireland)

This years Association of Irish Regions (AIR) annual conference will focus on the theme, "The Challenge of Climate Change for the Island of Ireland". This, the 10th AIR annual conference, will bring together experts in the field to assess the impacts and implications of climate change for the local and regional levels in Ireland. Further details from Sarah Morgan, Midland Regional Authority, e-mail: smorgan@midlands.ie

28 to 31 October 2007, Jeju (South Korea)

The organisers of the second world congress of *United Cities and Local Governments* (UCLG) expect around 2,000 local representatives from 150 countries to attend this conference on, "Changing cities are driving our world". The main issues to be addressed at the congress are: Cities and the future of humanity; addressing climate change; city diplomacy; local governments building peace; 2015 - a fairer world is possible; and, local governments and a new global governance. Further details at: <http://www.uclg2007jeju.org/>

7 December 2007, Montpellier (France)

As part of the International Renewable Energies Exhibition, the Assembly of European regions (AER) is organising a conference on energy efficiency and renewable energies. The conference will include presentations from the EU institutions on current legislation in these areas and the presentation of good practices from EU regions. Further details at: <http://www.a-e-r.org/events/regional-policies-committee/2007/energaia.html>

NETWORKS

The Association for Local Democracy Agencies

Founded in 1999, the Association for Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) is an umbrella organisation for Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) in

Europe. The LDAs were established by the Council of Europe's Congress of Local & Regional Authorities to support and foster local democracy, human rights and sustainable development in South-East Europe and the South Caucasus. Their main objective is to ensure a smooth and stable transition to democracy and to assist the two regions in applying European standards in all aspects of local life. The ALDA is currently looking for new members/partners, in particular local and regional authorities from EU countries that are interested in contributing to promoting democracy and human rights at local level in the regions concerned. Further details at: http://alda-europe.eu/alda/front_content.php?idart=1

PUBLICATIONS

The Employment Impact of the Structural Funds

A new practical guide on how to measure the employment impact of the Structural Funds is now available online. The guide provides practical, step-by-step guidance on measuring employment effects using a 'bottom-up' approach. Three key steps are suggested - setting targets and estimating gross employment effects, converting gross employment estimates into net effects, and an overall assessment. The steps broadly correspond with successive stages in the programming cycle. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/sf2000_en.htm

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