

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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Networking Institutes of Technology

The European Commission has published a call for proposals for pilot projects promoting cooperation between European Institutes of Technology (institutes facilitating collaboration between education, research, and innovation). The call aims to increase Europe's technology transfer capacity by means of closer integration of the knowledge triangle (education, research, innovation). This is to be achieved by supporting the establishment of pilot networks that will design, implement and test new models of integrated partnerships between the actors involved in technological innovation and transfer. Applicants must include partners from at least six different Member States. Total budget: €5 million, with co-financing of up to 75%. The maximum grant will be €1.5 million. Deadline for applications: 15 August 2007. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/calls/grants_en.html

Promoting Digital Content

The European Commission has published a call for proposals for indirect actions under the eContentplus Programme, which aims to make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable. The call is open to proposals concerning: Best practice networks for geographic information; best practice networks for educational content; targeted projects for educational content; best practice networks and targeted projects for digital libraries; targeted projects for scientific/scholarly content; and a thematic network on language resources. Total budget: €46.7 million. The deadline for receipt of proposals is 4 October 2007. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/econtentplus>

Information on the European Parliament

In the context of the 50th anniversary of the first sitting of the European Parliament in 2008, the European Parliament is offering financial assistance to projects providing information about the role of the European Parliament, issues at stake for the EU, and how EU citizens can better make their voice heard. Projects can include television programmes, debates and conferences, events, including fairs and exhibitions, as well as websites and other internet-based initiatives. The total budget is €5 million and the deadline for proposals is 1 October 2007. *Further details at:* http://www.europarl.europa.eu/tenders/2008_call_for_proposal/call_for_proposals_2008_en.doc

Illegal Immigration

The European Commission has launched two calls for proposals, for grants totaling €14 million, for actions in the areas of the return of illegal immigrants, employment of returnees, information on immigration and reception challenges. The aim is to fund short-term actions to address the Member States' difficulties in these areas. Applications for funding are expected from public authorities, as well as non-governmental and international organisations. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/intro/funding_2004_2007_en.htm

RegioStars Awards

The deadline for the RegioStars Awards (see EU News Bulletin no.36) has been extended to 28 September 2007 (from 29 July 2007). RegioStars is open to projects that have received funding from the ERDF. The aim is to identify and showcase good practices in regional development in the EU. *Further details:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/innovation/regiostars_en.htm

NEWS & POLICY

New EU Programme for SMEs

'For environmentally-friendly and competitive SMEs' is the title of a new €5.0 million programme adopted recently by the European Commission. The programme, which will run for the period 2007-2013, aims to help SMEs to respond to environmental challenges by adapting to a new socio-economic model. The programme forms part of the Life+ Programme, the EU's financial instrument for the environment. Implementation of the programme will be through a five-pronged action plan, which aims to: 1. Provide better legislation; 2. Provide for 'tailor-made' environmental management systems, which are more accessible to SMEs; 3. Establish a pluriannual financial programme to encourage public authorities or business assistance networks to introduce initiatives to promote sustainable production in SMEs; 4. Develop local expertise in terms of the environment for SMEs; and 5. Improve communications and promote more target information provision. The programme will be implemented in cooperation with Member States and organisations that support SMEs, such as Euro Info Centres (EIC) and, as of 2008, the new support and innovation network for businesses. *Further details at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/fund/ing/lifeplus.htm>*

New Treaty a Step Forward for Regions and Local Authorities

The EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) has given its support to the new draft EU Treaty, which was agreed by heads of state and government at the European Council in Brussels on 23 June. CoR President, Michel Delebarre, said he was satisfied that the new proposals preserved most of the institutional rights for local and regional authorities contained in the draft Constitutional Treaty. These include: recognition of and respect for local and regional self-government; the new definition of the subsidiarity principle enshrined in the protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, which includes the right of the CoR to bring an action before the European Court of Justice in the event of the subsidiarity principle not being observed; recognition of territorial cohesion and

the listing of cultural and linguistic diversity among the EU's objectives; the granting of special status to the most remote regions; and the progress made with regard to participative democracy.

Mr Delebarre also welcomed a new protocol recognising the role of local and regional authorities in managing services of general interest, which he said would go a long way towards removing the legal uncertainty that currently exists in this area. Despite this positive appraisal, however, Mr Delebarre said it was important to remain vigilant, suggesting that any departure from the current situation could have consequences for the ratification of the Treaty. *Further details at http://www.cor.europa.eu/en/press/press_07_06093.html*

Call to Join Subsidiarity Monitoring Network

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) has launched a call for applicants to take part in its subsidiarity monitoring network. At the EU summit on June 22, the European Council reaffirmed that subsidiarity and proportionality are to be key principles underpinning the reform of the European institutions (within the framework of the new Treaty). With European Council backing, the CoR is therefore preparing the ground to ensure that these principles are applied effectively in practice. As part of this process, it is inviting local and regional authorities to join the 49 existing partners in a Subsidiarity Monitoring Network.

The network, which was set-up in October 2005 and was tested on a pilot basis in 2005/2006, makes it possible for local and regional authorities, which are responsible for implementing around 70% of EU legislation, to receive European Commission legislative proposals directly and to respond in a structured format. Each year, the CoR will work with the Commission to identify priority issues for submission to the network. The issues selected in 2007 are: public health (white paper on health strategy); employment and immigration (framework Directive on the immigration of workers, Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of highly skilled workers); and the new energy policy for Europe. *Further details at: http://www.cor.europa.eu/en/activities/sub_net.htm Information on joining the network is available at: <http://subsidiarity.cor.europa.eu>*

Europe's Green Capital

The European Commission's Environment Directorate is currently finalising plans for a new initiative to highlight and promote good environmental practices in EU cities. The initiative, to be known as Green Capitals, is to be the environmental equivalent of the EU's Capital of Culture initiative. Each year, starting from 2010, one city will be selected to be the EU's Green Capital. The criteria for selection will include, the city's progress in making environmental improvements over the last 10 years, its future ambitions in terms of the urban environment, and its willingness and capacity to work in partnership with the European Commission. Participating cities will not have to be capital cities. The first call for candidates will be launched at the end of 2007/early 2008 for the selection of the EU Green Capitals for 2010 and 2011. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

Intercultural Cities Network

Intercultural Cities is a new Council of Europe programme to enhance and support community efforts to exploit the benefits of cultural diversity. As communities across Europe grow increasingly diverse, their governance models, their public and media discourse, the management of their institutions and their policies determine whether this diversity becomes an asset or a threat.

To help communities meet this challenge, the Intercultural Cities Programme will study successful experiences in a range of cities in Europe (and possibly beyond) and harness this experience to encourage the development of structures, policies and practice in other cities through good practice exchange and city-to-city mentoring.

In addition to the direct exchange, good practice will be made publicly available by means of an annual Intercultural Cities share fair as well as web and print-based publications. City authorities ("city" can mean a larger city, a medium or small-size town, or a large neighbourhood or district within a city) interested in participating in an initial pilot phase of the programme (2008-2010) are invited to contact: *Irena Guidikova, Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage, Council of Europe, Tel: + 33 3 88 41 32 19, e-mail: irena.guidikova@coe.int before the 30 September 2007.*

Open Days Registration Begins

Registration for Open Days 2007: European Week of Regions and Cities began on 11 July 2007. Those interested in attending are encouraged to register as soon as possible as events, accommodations, etc.. tend to fill very quickly. This year's event, which takes place in Brussels from 8-11 October, will include over 150 seminars focusing on the theme of, "Making it happen: Regions and cities deliver growth and jobs". Over 5,000 participants are expected. The Irish Regions Office will participate as a member of the 'Celtic Connections' conglomerate, which will organise and host two seminars, one on Maritime Policy (on Tuesday, 9 October 2007, 14.30-16.30) and one on Energy Policy (on Wednesday, 10 October 2007, 11.30-13.30). *Further details and registration at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/od2007/index.cfm

Consultation on e-Inclusion

The European Commission has launched an online consultation on e-inclusion. The feedback from the consultation will contribute to the preparation of a strategy on e-Inclusion, which is to be finalised by the end of 2007, and also to the launch of a new initiative in 2008. The strategy is a response to the objectives of the Riga Ministerial Declaration of June 2006, in which Member States commit to: addressing the needs of older workers and the elderly in information and communication technologies (ICT); reducing geographical digital divides; enhancing e-accessibility and usability; improving digital literacy and competences; promoting cultural diversity in relation to inclusion; promoting inclusive e-government; and mobilising appropriate instruments, in particular EU funds, public procurement, research, public private partnerships and exchange of good practice. The consultation questions include the following: Has there been adequate progress since 2005 in your country and across Europe? Should new EU legislation be introduced to address e-accessibility? Could the introduction of more stringent requirements have positive economic and social benefits? The deadline for submission is the 15 August 2007. *The consultation document and the Riga Declaration are available at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=einclusion>

Consultation on Climate Change

On June 29, the European Commission adopted a Green Paper on adapting to the impacts of climate change. The publication of the Green Paper opens a public consultation period that will end in November 2007. The impacts of climate change are expected to be significant in Europe, particular for the natural environment, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism and healthcare. Coastal zones, low-lying deltas and densely populated river plains are likely to be the worst affected. Climate change could also lead to major population shifts, including in neighbouring regions.

Given these current and future impacts, adapting to climate change is now seen as an indispensable complement to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Green Paper sets out four lines of priority actions to be considered: 1. Early action to develop adaptation strategies in areas where current knowledge is sufficient; 2. Integrating global adaptation needs into the EU's external relations and building a new alliance with partners around the world; 3. Filling knowledge gaps on adaptation through EU-level research and exchange of information; and 4. Setting up a European advisory group to analyse coordinated strategies and actions. The responses to the consultation will feed into the development of a Communication on adaptation to climate change to be published by the Commission by the end of 2008. *Further details at* http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/adaptation/index_en.htm

Consultation on Discrimination

The European Commission has launched an online consultation on combating discrimination in the Member States and at EU level. The public consultation aims to help the Commission to plan new measures to tackle discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in areas beyond the job market. The consultation falls within the framework of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, which aims to raise people's awareness of their rights to equal treatment and to promote a broad debate on the benefits of diversity to society. The consultation will run from 4 July to 15 October 2007. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm

Wide Variation in GDP across the EU27

Based on first preliminary estimates, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per inhabitant varied from 37% to 280% of the EU average across the 27 Member States in 2006. GDP per inhabitant in Luxembourg was the highest in the EU, at 280% of the EU27 average. Ireland had the second highest GDP per capita, at 144%, followed by the Netherlands (131%), Austria (129%) and Denmark (127%). Belgium, Sweden, the UK, Finland, Germany and France were all between 10% and 25% above the average, while Italy and Spain were slightly above the average. Cyprus, Greece and Slovenia were between 5% and 15% below average, while the Czech Republic, Malta and Portugal were between 20% and 25% below. Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland were between 30% and 50% below the EU27 average, while the two new Member States, Romania and Bulgaria, were more than 60% below the average. *Further details at:*

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/07/90&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&quiLanguage=en>

Rural Development Programmes Approved

On June 20, the EU Rural Development Committee (consisting of representatives of the 27 Member States) gave a positive opinion on Rural Development programmes for the Netherlands, France and mainland Finland for the period 2007-2013. The Committee also gave a positive vote on the Italian National Network (the 21 regional programmes for Italy still have to be approved). This follows the approval in May of programmes for the Czech Republic and Sweden. Financial aid of €973 million for the Netherlands, €10.8 billion for France, €6.6 billion for Finland and €82.9 million for the Italian National Network programme has been allocated. The Commission is expected to formally adopt the programmes in the coming weeks. The approval of programmes for the other countries, including Ireland, will follow in the next few months. Ireland's draft Rural Development Programme was submitted to the Commission at the end of May 2007. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index_en.htm

EVENTS

13 Sept 2007, Rotherham, UK

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council is hosting a Fairtrade Towns Conference, which aims to help local authorities to share good practice and effective approaches toward achieving and utilising the Fairtrade status. It also aims to highlight the benefits of getting involved, for example, improving civic engagement, promoting community cohesion, educational opportunities and possible trade links. *For further info, contact Ann Todd on +44 1709 822732 ann.todd@rotherham.gov.uk*

9 October 2007, Brussels

The second "Better Regulation – Waste" conference is being organised by the environment administration of the Brussels-Capital Region and the Association of Cities and Regions for Recycling and Sustainable Resource Management (ACR+). The conference will deal with topics such as national prevention programmes, biodegradable waste and waste shipments. *Further details at: www.acrplus.org/conferences*

11-12 October 2007, Kilkenny, Ireland

The conference, Developing Competitive Knowledge-based Regional Economies is being organised by Waterford Institute of Technology in the framework of two EU funded projects. The first part of the conference will look at the role of RTD and innovation in developing knowledge-based regional economies. The second part will present an effective process and methodology for creating an RTD investment policy for regions. *Further details from Louise Dalton at ldalton@wit.ie or at 051-302946*

8 - 9 November 2007, Lille, France

Organised by the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière on the occasion of its 10th anniversary, this major European conference, entitled, "Cross-border territories: day-to-day Europe" is expected to attract around

800 participants to discuss the political and operational issues involved in cross-border cooperation and the future of territorial cooperation in Europe. *Further details at: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu>*

22 - 23 Nov 2007, Barcelona (Spain)

The fourth annual conference of the European Cultural Tourism Network will be hosted by the Catalan Government and Barcelona University. This year's conference will focus on developing a practical model for the development and management of sustainable cultural tourism destinations. Details will be posted on the following website during August 2007: www.cultural-tourism.net

28 Jan to 1 Feb 2008, Brussels & Other Cities

Under the umbrella of the Sustainable Energy Europe Campaign (SEE), the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy and Transport, the European Institutions, the Slovenian EU Presidency and major stakeholders concerned with sustainable energy have begun preparations for the second EU Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW). Registration will open on 1 October 2007. *Further details at: www.eusew.eu*

NETWORKS

New Network on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment

Local and regional authorities from across Europe have joined forces with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) to form the WEEE-PIN network (Waste Electric and Electronic Equipment - Public Interest Network). The network aims to represent the views of its members in the current review of the 2002 EU Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment. A number of problems have arisen with the implementation of the Directive and the new network aims to contribute to finding appropriate solutions. The WEEE-PIN intends to follow the Directive's review process in order to

ensure that the review takes account of the various impacts of producer responsibility systems on municipalities and on waste management sectors in Europe. The WEEE-PIN network is an initiative of the Association of Cities and Regions for Recycling and Sustainable Resource Management (ACR+). *Further details at: <http://www.acrplus.org/WEEE-PIN>*

PUBLICATIONS

EU Environment Policy Review 2006

The fight against climate change was the main environmental issue on the European Commission's political agenda in 2006. However, in its recently published Environment Policy Review 2006, the Commission points out that this was not the only pressing environmental issue. With the 2006 renewal of the Sustainable Development Strategy, the importance of sustainability in all EU policy areas was also highlighted and, at the end of 2006, the chemicals regulation REACH was adopted. The Commission expects that the adoption of REACH will ensure that all dangerous chemical substances will now be replaced by safer ones. The Environment Policy Review 2006 is accompanied by a Staff Working Paper, which presents statistics on key indicators in different areas of the 6th Environment Action Programme, as well as an overview of last year's environment policy initiatives in the Member States. *The documents can be downloaded at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/policyreview.htm>*

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Irish Regions Office 2007

FEATURED PROJECT

South-East Regional Authority Bio-Energy Initiative

A number of national and European initiatives on renewable energy have been launched in recent months. Many of these have to be implemented at local and regional level, which presents new economic development opportunities and challenges for regions and local authorities.

In this context, the South East Region of Ireland is seeking to become a leading region in the area of bio-energy. The region has already made good progress in this area, but a structured regional framework is necessary to allow the region to comply with national and EU policy and to maximise its resource potential.

The South-East Regional Authority (SERA) is, therefore, currently engaged in two initiatives in relation to the development and promotion of bio-energy, namely the EU funded REGBIE+ initiative and the development of a Regional Bio-Energy Implementation Plan.

Increasing the Market for Biomass

The REGBIE+ project, which is part financed by the EU Intelligent Energy Europe Programme, has the following objectives:

- To support and strengthen local and regional actors to increase market penetration of bio-energy heating systems
- To remove market barriers and stimulate the market for biomass heating systems
- To support bio-energy initiatives in partner regions
- To provide information and raise awareness of the uses of bio-energy sources
- To stimulate investment in bio-energy heating systems
- To involve key market actors
- To support the implementation of the EU Biomass Action Plan

The Partners in the project include regions from Germany, Sweden, Austria, Italy, France, Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, the UK and Ireland. For more information on the REGBIE+ project, please see www.regbieplus.eu

Bio-Energy Implementation Plan

The sustainable development of Ireland's bio-energy potential and its deployment in the heat, electricity and transport sectors requires a fully coordinated approach at national, regional and local level. In the South-East, local authorities, state agencies within the Region and the private sector will need to work together if the Region is to meet its contribution to national targets.

In light of this challenge, SERA, with financial support from Sustainable Energy Ireland, is drawing up a Regional Bio-Energy Implementation Plan, the preparation of which is being overseen by a multi-disciplinary Steering Committee with representatives from a number of different local, regional and national bodies, including:

- The South-East Regional Authority
- Carlow Kilkenny Energy Agency
- Tipperary Energy Agency
- Waterford Energy Bureau
- Wexford Energy Management Agency Limited
- Sustainable Energy Ireland
- Teagasc
- Local Authorities
- The Environmental Protection Agency

The aim of the project is to establish a structured regional framework for the development and promotion of bio-energy in the Region through the development and implementation of a Regional Bio-Energy Implementation Plan, a draft of which has now been completed.

The South-East Region has significant bio-energy potential in the form of agricultural land, forestry and waste residues from municipal, agricultural and industrial resources. All of these resources can be used to generate heat and electricity for the residential, commercial and industrial sectors or transformed into biofuels for the transport sector. The development of these bio-energy resources in the region will contribute to both regional and national security of supply and fuel diversity objectives.

Increased use of these resources will help the South-East to contribute to meeting national renewable energy targets, to comply with climate change mitigation policies, waste policies and

assist in rural development by providing new markets and employment opportunities in the forestry and farming sectors.

The Regional Bio-energy Implementation Plan will provide a framework for the implementation of a number of actions and strategies at local and regional level in close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders in the region. The target audience for the plan, when finalised, will be Government and the following:

- Farmers, developers, producers, suppliers, the public, consumers...
- Local authorities (planning, environment and housing sections in particular)

It is expected that these groups will use the document in the following ways:

- The document will be used by farmers to increase their knowledge and awareness of the opportunities arising from the development of bio-energy as an alternative form of agriculture.
- Suppliers, producers and developers will have easy access to plans for developing bio-energy in the Region and to data on potential commercial opportunities.
- The plan will promote a consistent approach among local authorities in the region to the planning, development and management of bio-energy and ensure that developers receive coherent information.

The South-East aims to be a leader amongst the Irish Regions in developing a Bio-energy Implementation Plan and will take cognisance of all legislation and policy relevant to bio-energy development and to look at all the possible markets. The draft plan will be available for public consultation in early August 2007 on www.sera.ie. The Steering Committee welcomes comments and views on the Plan.

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