

EU News Bulletin

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

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Irish Regions Office



FUNDING **1**

First call under Interreg IV NWE

First call under Interreg IV NP

LIFE+ programme begins

Culture 2007-2013

Sustainable energy awards

NEWS & POLICY **2**

Ireland's Strl. Funds priorities agreed

Ireland's rural dev prog approved

Launch of Interreg IVC

Afforestation scheme approved

Guidance on EU funding for regions

Launch of EU budget review

RTD funding for SME's

Broadband in Ireland still lagging

Blow for EU biofuels plan

Consultation on sustainable dev.

Lessons of local employment initiatives

EVENTS **4**

Knowledge based regional economies;

Creative city regions; Climate change

in Ireland; URBACT; Structural Funds
communications, Mediation.

NETWORKS **4**

Renewable Energy Regions Network

PUBLICATIONS **4**

New EU LIFE website

FUNDING

First call under new North West Europe programme

The first call for proposals under the new Interreg IV programme for North West Europe (NWE) opened on 17 September 2007, with a deadline for applications of 15 October 2007. Hereafter, calls for proposals are due to be launched every 6-8 months until 2010. The programme aims to support transnational cooperation projects in the NWE area (including all of Ireland), which contribute to sustainable regional development. A total budget of €353m is available, with EU cofinancing of up to 50%. An information event on all six Interreg programmes takes place in Dublin on Oct 23. *Further details at: <http://www.nweurope.org/page/document.php?id=1771> or from Ronan Gingles (Contact Point Ireland), Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly, tel: 051 860711, e-mail: rgingles@seregassembly.ie*

First call under Northern Periphery Programme

The first call for proposals under the new Interreg IV programme for the Northern Periphery (NP) is expected to be published in early October 2007, with a deadline of 31 October 2007. The NP programme aims to address the specific challenges associated with northern, peripheral regions such as sparse population and rurality, with a special focus on innovation, the environment, accessibility and rural-urban links. For the period 2007-13, Ireland benefits from an expansion of the programme area, which now includes counties Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Galway, Mayo, Clare, Limerick, Cork, Kerry. *Details at: <http://www.northernperiphery.net/2007/how-to-apply-g.asp> or contact Michael O'Brien, BMW Regional Assembly (Contact Point Ireland), tel: 094 9862970, e-mail: mobrien@bmwassembly.ie*

LIFE+ programme begins

The European Commission has published draft application guidelines for the 2007 call for proposals under the LIFE+ programme. For the period 2007-2013, LIFE+ will replace LIFEIII as the EU's main financial instrument for environment policy. The draft guidelines are published to help project applicants begin work on their proposals. The final application guidelines will be published with the call for proposals on September 27, with a deadline for applications of 30 November 2007. The total budget for LIFE+ is €2.1 billion. *Details at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplus.htm>*

Culture 2007-2013

The European Commission has published a number of calls for proposals under the new Culture programme 2007-13. These calls include support for multi-annual cooperation projects and cooperation measures (sectoral or cross-sectoral cultural actions of a shorter duration and smaller scale, which aim at exploring avenues for longer-term cooperation among cultural operators) - deadline 31 Oct 2007; Networking of organisations operating in the field of cultural policies (deadline: 1 Oct 2007); and literary translations (deadline: 1 Oct 2007 and 1 April 2008). *Details at: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/index_en.htm*

Sustainable Energy Awards

The European Commission is now inviting entries for the Sustainable Energy Europe Awards, which aim to promote, showcase and reward outstanding projects and programmes in the field of sustainable energy and energy efficiency. The competition is open to bodies active in the field of sustainable energy innovation. Deadline for entries: 19 October 2007. *Details at: http://www.sustenergy.org/tpl/page.cfm?pageName=award_competition*

NEWS & POLICY

Ireland's Structural Funds Priorities Agreed

On July 27, the European Commission approved Ireland's National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), which includes Ireland's strategy and priorities for the implementation of the Structural Funds for the period 2007-2013. The NSRF, which was negotiated during the first half of 2007, sets out in broad terms how Ireland will invest €750 million in EU funding over the next seven years. Key priorities set out in the NSRF, include: 1. Promoting investment in human capital through up-skilling the workforce, increasing participation in the workforce and activating groups outside the workforce. 2. Supporting innovation, knowledge and entrepreneurship in the regions; and 3. Strengthening the competitiveness, attractiveness and connectivity of the National Spatial Strategy, through improved access to quality infrastructure and promoting environmental and sustainable development. The broad priorities in the framework will be implemented through three operational programmes: one for the Southern and Eastern Region (supported by the European Regional Development Fund-ERDF), one for the Border, Midland, Western Region (ERDF) and one national programme for developing human resources (European Social Fund-ESF). Adoption of these programmes is expected before the end of 2007. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas/2007/fiche/ie_en.pdf

Ireland's Rural Development Programme Approved

On July 24, the Rural Development Committee of the European Commission approved Ireland's Rural Development programme for the financial period 2007-2013. Under the programme Ireland will receive €2.33 billion from the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which with national co-financing will give an overall budget of €5.78 billion. The programmes will focus on three key areas: 1. Boosting innovation and competitiveness in the agriculture sector; 2. Agri-environmental and forestry measures; and 3. Rural diversification. Over €425m will be provided for the latter, which will replace the existing LEADER+ programme. This represents a trebling of funding for such activities over the next 7 years,

compared to the 2000–2006 period. This part of the programme will be delivered by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs through a network of Local Action Groups, as was the case for LEADER+. The selection process for the Local Action Groups to deliver the Programme at a local level is expected to commence in September 2007. *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/07/310&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&quiLanguage=en> or at: <http://www.pobail.ie/en/PressReleases/htmltext.8487.en.html>

Launch of New Interregional Cooperation Programme

EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, Danuta Hübner, officially launched the new Interregional Cooperation Programme (Interreg IVC) at a conference in Lisbon on 20-21 September. For the period 2007-13, Interregional Cooperation is supported by a single programme covering all 27 Member States, as well as Norway and Switzerland. The new programme is a core element of the EU's new Regions for Economic Change initiative, which aims to support regional and urban networks, identify and promote uptake of good practice in economic modernisation, and to disseminate best practice throughout all EU regions. The programme has two thematic priorities: 1. Innovation and the Knowledge-based Economy; and 2. The Environment and Risk Prevention. The total budget for the period 2000-13 is €405 million, with an ERDF contribution of €321 million, and the remainder cofinanced by Member States. The first call for projects was also launched at the conference, and will close in mid-January. All public authorities can submit projects to the joint secretariat in Lille (F). *Details at:* http://www.interreg3c.net/web/fic_en

Afforestation Scheme Approved for Ireland

On September 12, the European Commission authorized that Ireland could pay national aid worth more than €900 million over the period 2007-2013 to encourage afforestation. Ireland has the second lowest rate of forest cover in the EU, at just 10% of the country's total land area. The scheme aims to bring this up to 17%. Aid of up to 100% will be available for the establishment of forests, conditional on compliance with

the Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland, and with environmental and forestry practice guidelines. Short-rotation species are excluded from the scope of the aid scheme. Under certain circumstances an additional annual premium for maintenance costs and income foregone will be made available after forest establishment. Farmers establishing new forests and existing forest owners will be encouraged to create high-nature-value forests. A yearly compensation payment will be offered for a commitment to higher environmental standards in the management of the forests, which go beyond the commitments normally required for planting. The Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme complements Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013. The programme will be administered by the Department of Agriculture and Food. *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1316&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&quiLanguage=en>

Guidance on EU Funding for Regions

On September 10, the European Commission published a policy paper calling on Member States and the regions to play a leading role in making the best use of European funds. For the period 2007-2013, there are a range of funding programmes to help regions harness their research and innovation potential and to promote economic development, including: the Structural Funds; the Seventh Research Framework Programme (FP7), particularly the Regions of Knowledge sub-programme; and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP), which supports enterprise and entrepreneurship actions. The European Commission proposes various actions to help national and regional authorities make better use of these funds, including: A practical guide to help research institutions and companies to identify the most appropriate source of funding for their project; Improving information exchange with national/regional authorities so that they know which organisations receive FP7 and CIP grants, with a view to providing complementary support from national, regional and European funds; Regular events at which those involved in research, innovation and regional development can come together to share ideas, exchange best practice

and access support and advice. *Further details at:*
<http://ec.europa.eu/research/research-cohesion.html>

Launch of EU Budget Review

On September 12, the European Commission formally opened the review of the EU's 20 year old budget rules with the launch of a consultation document on the future of the EU finances. Adoption of the consultation paper, entitled "Reforming the budget, changing Europe", marks a first public step in the process of the reform of all aspects of EU spending and resources, as agreed in May 2006 by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. In the paper, the Commission proposes new funding priorities for the future, including: scientific and technological progress, Europe's ageing population, social and economic gaps between regions, climate change, energy, migration, security and foreign policy. The Commission also highlights the problem of the EU's own resources and correction mechanisms, touching on two political hot potatoes: a possible EU tax and the UK's annual rebate from the EU budget. It also suggests reform budgetary tools, such as the CAP, which still accounts for more than 40% of the EU's €100 billion annual budget. The consultation is open to all interested parties at local, regional, national and European levels interested in shaping the Commission's work on the Budget Review. The consultation will run until 15 April 2008. In spring 2008 there will be a political conference organised in association with the European Parliament with an initial analysis of the results of the public debate. Based on that the Commission will present the Budget Review at the end 2008/beginning 2009. *Further details at:*
http://ec.europa.eu/budget/reform/index_en.htm

R&D Funding for SME's

Proposals for a new EU-funded programme to support research and development (R&D) by SMEs were adopted by the European Commission on 12 September. The new programme, known as Eurostars, will fund research projects led by SMEs using a combination of both national and EU funding. A total of €100 million is expected to be provided from the EU's 7th Framework Research Programme (FP7) up to 2013. This will be coupled with an estimated €400

million from the national research budgets. Eurostars will be run as a partnership between the Commission and the inter-governmental research initiative Eureka. SMEs will send their proposals for R&D projects to the Eurostars secretariat in Brussels, which will be run by Eureka. The programme will operate a continuous call for proposals, with two 'cut-off dates' each year. It will only fund SMEs with less than 250 employees, which invest at least 10% of their annual turnover in R&D activities. These activities will have to involve multi-partner, multi-national projects which are led by SMEs, but open to other types of participants such as universities, research organisations and large companies. They will also have to target market-oriented research and development, aimed at short to medium term commercial results. The programme will be officially launched in Brussels on 2 October and will have a first application cut-off date of 3 December 2007. *Details at:*
<http://www.eurostars-eureka.eu/>

Take up of Broadband in Ireland still below EU average

The European Competitive Telecommunications Association's (ECTA) bi-annual Broadband Scorecard shows that broadband penetration in Ireland, at 14%, still lags behind the EU average of 19.9%. However, recent growth has been strong, estimated at 38% in the last six months as compared to average growth in the EU of 16%. Growth of broadband penetration in the EU is attributed largely to increased competition from new entrant telecoms providers using Local Loop Unbundling (LLU), cable and alternative technologies. The countries with the highest levels of penetration are mostly characterised by strong competition through a combination of local loop unbundling and cable. Despite EU-wide rules to apply unbundling since 2001, 17 of the 25 countries examined still have very low levels. ECTA is hoping that governments will use the Review of the EU Telecoms Framework, to be issued later this year, to ensure that measures like unbundling are enforced effectively and in a future-proof way. Take-up of broadband in the EU has reached an all time high and has now drawn parallel with the US and Japan. The ECTA collates and publishes data twice yearly, tracking progress on broadband penetration and local loop unbundling in the 25 EU Member States. Local Loop Unbundling (LLU) is the process whereby competitors rent the last mile from the national telecom's incumbent

and offer their own broadband services to consumers. *Further details at:*
http://www.ectaportal.com/en/news_item.php?id=751

Blow for EU Biofuels Plan

The EU's plan to boost the production and use of biofuels in Europe received a damaging blow on September 11 with the publication of a new report on biofuels by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The report warns that state subsidies for biofuels could lead to food price hikes and damage to forests and natural habitats, while the impact in terms of the fight against climate change may be only limited. This calls into question the EU's agreed commitment to ensure that 10% of transport fuels come from biofuels by 2020. The report also predicts that a global shift towards biofuels would lead to soaring food prices, which would strongly affect developing countries. State subsidies - instead of adequate prices for biofuels in the market - would subsequently create pressure to replace forests or wetlands with farms for bio-energy crops. The authors of the report therefore urge governments to phase out biofuel subsidies, instead using the money to fund research into so-called second-generation fuels, which are being developed to use waste products and so emit less CO₂. *Further details at:*
http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2007/OECD_Biofuels_Cure_Worse_Than_Disease_Sept07.pdf

New Tool for Regional Data Analysis

The European Commission's statistical office, Eurostat, has launched a new interface on its website which enables users to customise graphs and maps for publications and presentations. Based on 1,300 predefined and continuously updated tables the current version includes adaptable economic, social and sustainable development indicators to facilitate use depending on the countries and data classes covered. Of regional interest is the long-term indicator's section, where data relating to population density, GDP and unemployment levels can be incorporated into tables and maps created by the user. *Further details at:*
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=3013

EVENTS

11-12 Oct 2007, Kilkenny (Ireland)

The conference, Developing Competitive Knowledge-based Regional Economies is being organised by Waterford Institute of Technology, in association with the Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly. The conference will look at the role of RTD and innovation in developing knowledge-based regional economies and will present an effective process and methodology for creating an RTD investment policy for regions – the CRIPREDE Adaptive Model. Further details from Louise Dalton at e-mail: ldalton@wit.ie or tel: +353 51 302946, or Orla Kelly at e-mail: okelly@seregassembly.ie or tel: +353 5186 0706.

18 Oct 2007, Dublin (Ireland)

“Creative City Region” is the title of this one day conference being hosted by Dublin Regional Authority. The aim of the conference is to promote awareness in the Dublin City Region of the concept of creative cities, the factors shaping creative cities and international developments in creative city regions. It also aims to identify initiatives which can be taken at national and at Dublin level to ensure that Dublin is a leading player in the global creative economy and society in the future. Details at: www.dublinpact.ie or email: vcraigie@eircom.net

19 October 2007, Killarney (Ireland)

This year's Association of Irish Regions (AIR) annual conference will focus on the theme, “The Challenge of Climate Change for the Island of Ireland”. The keynote speaker at this, the 10th AIR annual conference, will be Mr John Gormley, TD and Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government. The Minister and other expert speakers will 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

4-6 Nov, Berlin (Germany)

This URBACT conference in Berlin has three key objectives: to assess the results of the 70 URBAN programmes now coming to an end; to draw conclusions on URBACT, now in its closing stages; and to launch URBACT II – an instrument for exchange between cities and a network to support the implementation of urban aspects of the new Structural Funds programmes for 2007-2013. Further details at: <http://urbact.eu/news-events/events.html>

26-27 November 2007, Brussels

“Telling the story. Communicating Cohesion Policy together” is the title of this conference being organised by the European Commission's Regional Policy Directorate General. Over 400 participants from authorities managing the Structural Funds all over Europe are expected to attend the conference, which will discuss how to communicate effectively on Cohesion Policy and showcase examples of successful information campaigns and the most interesting information measures. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/commu/conferences/november07/index_en.cfm?nmenu=4

10–12 April 2008, Belfast

The European Mediation Conference 2008, “Building Relationships and Getting Results”, jointly hosted by Mediation Northern Ireland and the Scottish Mediation Network, will coincide with the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The conference aims to advance mediation in the service of social and economic progress in a changing Europe. Key objectives include: raising the awareness of mediation among policy makers; exploring developments in the practice of mediation; and strengthening relationships in the European mediation field. Further details at: www.mediationnorthernireland.org

NETWORKS

Renewable Energy Regions Network

The Renewable Energy Regions Network (RENREN) aims to enhance co-operation between local administrations and companies on biomass, wind, oceans, solar, geothermal and hydro-energy. The network was launched on 17 April 2007 in Brussels. The objective is to promote the exchange best practice and information between administrations but also to enhance co-operation between private companies and raise public awareness on renewable energy via educational programmes. Further details from the Irish Regions Office.

PUBLICATIONS

New EU LIFE website

The new website for the LIFE programme, the EU's financial instrument supporting the environment and nature conservation, is now online. The site includes a new news section, as well as information on the nine LIFE themes, funding, publications and more. It also includes details on the first call for proposals under the new LIFE+ programme, which will provide funding opportunities for various environment-related projects for the next seven years. To find out more about LIFE and LIFE+, visit <http://ec.europa.eu/life>

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Irish Regions Office 2007

FEATURED PROJECT:

European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN)

IRISH PARTNER:

Midland Regional Authority

Background to ECTN

The ECTN provides a platform for exchange and cooperation among professionals from the cultural and tourism sectors in Europe. It was founded following a conference on cultural tourism in Brussels in 2003 and has the following objectives:

- To facilitate sharing of research.
- To facilitate the development of trans-national projects.
- To ensure improved co-operation and integration between tourism and cultural sectors.
- To enable exchange of experience and best practice.
- To develop common responses to relevant European Commission Consultation papers.
- To link with other relevant networks.

Following the first annual conference in Barcelona in 2004, ECTN successfully submitted an application for Interreg IIIC funding, with 10 partners from eight member states (Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Spain, Sweden, UK), led by the Wales Tourist Board and including the Midland Regional Authority, Ireland. The key outputs from the project were:

- A guide to best practice based on a database of best practice case studies from across Europe.
- Two annual conferences and four thematic workshops.
- Staff exchanges between six countries.
- Creation of ECTN web site www.cultural-tourism.net

Over the last two years, the ECTN has actively contributed to discussions and debates on cultural tourism, including: the Luxembourg Presidency conference on cultural tourism, a European Tourism Ministers Conference in Vienna, a Europa Nostra Cultural Tourism Conference in Malta, the North Sea Commission Cultural Tourism Group, and a European Routes of Industrial Heritage Conference. The ECTN has

also made submissions to a European Economic and Social Committee hearing on Tourism and Culture, and to a Committee of the Regions hearing on Cultural Tourism. The ECTN recently submitted a response to the European Commission's consultation on sustainable tourism.

The Importance of Cultural Tourism

Cultural Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of European Tourism. The World Travel Organisation has estimated that 37% of all trips have a cultural element and that this is growing every year. The future prospect for the sector are positive with an ageing population, increasing levels of affluence and education, a growing middle class and increasing consumer sophistication.

Cultural tourism is also, arguably, one of the most sustainable of all the development activities available to Europe as it relies on the conservation and enhancement of the existing cultural asset base, it does not exclude any destination from participation (rural or urban, coastal or inland), it is less vulnerable to seasonality and stimulates higher-paying visits and demands higher-paying service and employment opportunities. Cultural Tourism can therefore make a significant contribution to the Lisbon Strategy and the Gothenburg Agenda.

The Challenges for Cultural Tourism

If Cultural tourism is to be developed and promoted in a sustainable manner, however, there are three major challenges that need to be addressed:

1. Effective destination management to protect the cultural resource from the negative impacts of tourism and ensure that the local community secures real benefits whilst improving the quality of the visitor experience.
2. Ensuring that some of the wealth generated by cultural tourism goes to help conserve and support the cultural resource.
3. Ensuring that cultural tourism is developed with the support of local people.

Addressing these challenges will require the cultural and tourism sectors to work together in an integrated manner. ECTN has a key role to play in bringing the two sectors together at the European level to work towards creating sustainable

cultural tourism destinations which offer a quality visitor experience whilst securing benefits for the host community and addressing any negative impacts.

The Future of ECTN

A core group of members are now working to put ECTN on a permanent footing funded through membership subscriptions with the creation of an international association under Belgian law with a formal board. The following membership categories are proposed:

- Regional Governments or small member states – old member states (€5,000)
- Regional organisations (€2000)
- City /county councils – old member states (€1,500)
- Universities/ HE institutions (€750)
- NGOs – old member states €500.

A shadow Board has been elected to oversee the transition to a formal association with representatives from the following countries – England, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Wales.

The Barcelona Conference 22-23 November

The fourth annual conference of ECTN will be hosted by the Catalan Government and Barcelona University on the 22-23 of November and will focus on the theme of developing a practical model for the development and management of sustainable cultural tourism destinations. Further details on the ECTN website, at: www.cultural-tourism.net

For Further Information on ECTN

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