

# 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

### **First call under new Northern Periphery Programme**

The first call for proposals under the new Northern Periphery Programme (NPP) 2007-2013 was launched on October 5. Applications are now invited for projects that address issues concerning sparse population and rurality, with a special focus on innovation, the environment, accessibility and rural-urban links. The eligible area for the NPP has benefited from an extension for the period 2007-2013 to include 9 counties on the west coast of Ireland, as well as rural Northern Ireland, and parts of Norway and Scotland. Deadline for applications: 31 October 2007. *Further details at:* <http://www.northernperiphery.net/2007/how-to-apply-g.asp> Irish contact point: Michael O'Brien, BMW Regional Assembly. Tel: (094) 9862970, e-mail: [mobrien@bmwassembly.ie](mailto:mobrien@bmwassembly.ie)

### **Town Twinning**

The next deadline for applications under the EU Town Twinning programme is 1 December 2007. Applications are now being invited for the co-financing of “citizens meetings” (on EU related issues, and with a view to enhancing the relations between twinned towns) and/or the thematic networking of twinned towns (thematic conferences and workshops involving at least three towns, developed within the framework of town twinning). Actions proposed must take place between 1 April and 31 May 2008. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/action1/measure1\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/action1/measure1_en.html)

### **Europe Prize**

The Europe Prize is awarded by the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly to the towns and municipalities, which are most active in

promoting the European ideal (twinning, events, etc). Of the four prizes awarded, the “Europe Prize” is the most prestigious and includes a grant for a study visit for young people from the prize winning town. The deadline for applications is the 31 December 2007.

*Further details at:* <http://assembly.coe.int/Committee/ENA/EuropaPrize/EuropaPrizeE.pdf>

### **Intelligent Energy Europe 2008**

The next call for proposals under the Intelligent Energy Europe programme will open in January 2008 and will make some €50 million available to support projects in the areas of renewable energy and energy efficiency. A European Info Day on the new call will take place in Brussels on 31 January 2008, during the EU Sustainable Energy Week. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/call\\_for\\_proposals/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/call_for_proposals/index_en.htm)

### **LIFE+ call published**

The first call for proposals and the finalised application package for the new EU LIFE+ Programme 2007-2013 have now been published. LIFE is the EU’s main funding instrument for environmental policy and legislation. The new programme will focus on three components: nature and biodiversity, environment policy and governance and information and communication. The Programme has a budget of €2.143 billion, of which €187 is available for the first call. At least 50% will go to nature and biodiversity projects. The deadline for applications under this call is 30 November 2007. Applications should be submitted to the national contact points, which will then forward the proposals to the Commission. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplus.htm> Contact point in Ireland: Mr Brian Earley, Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, tel: +353 1 888 2486, e-mail: [brian.earley@environ.ie](mailto:brian.earley@environ.ie)

## NEWS & POLICY

### **Approval of Ireland-Wales Programme 2007-2013**

The European Commission has approved the cross-border cooperation programme between Ireland and Wales for the period 2007-2013. The programme forms part of the European Territorial Cooperation Objective of the Structural Funds and has a total budget of €70 million for 2007-2013, which includes €53 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The main objective of the programme is to develop the cross-border region through an integrated approach to economic, environmental, social and technological issues, and to contribute to the improvement of its competitiveness and sustainable development. The programme has two main priorities: 1. Knowledge, Innovation and Skills for Growth, and 2. Climate Change and Sustainable Regeneration. Areas eligible for support include the regions of Dublin, the Mid-East and the South-East in Ireland and the Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire and South West Wales in the UK. The South-West region in Ireland and Swansea, Flintshire and Wrexham in Wales can also take part in the programme as adjacent areas, which can receive a maximum of 10% funding. This is the third in a consecutive series of cross-border cooperation programmes between Ireland and Wales and the intention is to further develop links created in previous programming periods. The Managing Authority and Joint Technical Secretariat for the new programme is the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly, Waterford, Ireland. *Contact: Mr Simon Baily, e-mail: [sbaily@seregassembly.ie](mailto:sbaily@seregassembly.ie). Further details at: <http://www.seregassembly.ie>*

### **Atlantic Area Programme Approved**

The European Commission has officially approved the Transnational Cooperation Programme for the "Atlantic Area 2007-2013". The programme area includes Ireland and the coastal parts of Spain, France, Portugal and the UK. It covers an area of 594,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 58 million people. The main objective of the programme is to contribute to the territorial cohesion of the Atlantic Area through the reinforcement of cooperation between the participating Member States and to

consolidate the existing cooperation structures and achieve tangible operational results. This represents a substantial departure from the overall objectives of the previous programmes, in which projects were mostly limited to studies or exchanges of information. The focus of the new programme is on: long term strategic approaches, exchange of experience between a wider programme audience, transfer of know how and cross fertilisation between projects that address similar issues, pooling of a critical mass of means, and tackling real transnational issues of interest for the area. The programme involves Community support within the framework of the European territorial cooperation objective. The total budget is €159 million, with EU assistance of around €104 million from the ERDF. *Further details at: [http://www.bmwassembly.ie/interreg/interreg\\_3b.htm](http://www.bmwassembly.ie/interreg/interreg_3b.htm) Irish Contact point: Michael O'Brien, Border Midland and Western Regional Assembly, The Square, Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon. Tel: (094) 9862970 E-mail: [mobrien@bmwassembly.ie](mailto:mobrien@bmwassembly.ie)*

### **The future of EU Structural Funds**

The Fourth European Forum on Cohesion, which took place in Brussels on 27-28 September marked the launch of a new consultation period on EU Cohesion Policy (Structural Funds) after 2013. The Forum launched an EU-wide consultation on how Cohesion Policy can adapt in response to issues such as demographic change, migration, competition from the emerging economies, climate change, and on how its impact can be maximised in the future. This consultation, organised through the Commission's website, will run until 31 January 2008. It is open to the general public, to all those concerned with regional policy on the ground (NGOs, economic and social partners), to the EU institutions and to national, regional and local authorities. The results of the consultation will be presented in the spring 2008, together with the Fifth Progress Report on Economic and Social Cohesion. The conclusions will also feed into the EU budgetary review in 2008-2009 (covering the period after 2013). *Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/consultations/4thcohesionforum/home\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultations/4thcohesionforum/home_en.cfm)*

### **Aid for Energy Crops Reduced**

On October 17, the EU's The Management Committee for Direct Payments unanimously backed a European Commission proposal to reduce the area on which farmers can claim the special aid for energy crops in 2007, because the overall eligible area of 2 million hectares has been exceeded. The scheme was introduced in the 2003 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to provide an incentive for farmers to increase the production of biofuels and electric and thermal energy produced from biomass. Up to the maximum guaranteed area of 2 million hectares, farmers receive €45 per hectare as long as they have concluded a contract with a collector/first processor in order to ensure the crops will be used for processing into the relevant energy products. If the 2 million hectares is exceeded, the area on which each farmer can claim aid is reduced by a coefficient to ensure that the €90 million budget is not overrun. The area in 2007 reached approx. 2.84 million hectares and so a reduction coefficient of 0.70337 has been set. In other words, farmers will receive the €45/ha aid for just over 70% of the land on which they claimed the aid. Commenting on the decision, Mariann Fischer Boel, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, suggested that when it come to the "Health Check" of the CAP later this year, the continuation of the scheme should also be reconsidered, in light of new "binding target for biofuels and a blossoming marketplace." *Further details at: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index_en.htm)*

### **Helping SMEs to Become Greener**

The European Commission recently published a Communication on helping small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) use energy and resources more efficiently. Included in the Communication is a proposal for the creation of a programme to help SMEs implement European environmental legislation. This new Environmental Compliance Assistance Programme includes a set of measures that aim to help SMEs minimise the environmental impact of their activities and to facilitate compliance with existing legislation. The Programme intends to reduce the burden of compliance by designing instruments and policies to integrate environmental concerns into SME activities. The measures presented in

the Communication also cover the dissemination of information specifically targeted at SMEs, promoting support networks, and training activities that build local environmental expertise. Funding for the Programme's measures will come from LIFE+ funds (€5 million for 2007-13) with additional funds to be made available through the Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme (CIP) and the Structural Funds. Several measures are already planned for 2007. A website providing information on EU environmental policy for SMEs is now up and running and guides on energy efficiency, air emissions, soil and water and waste are planned. A handbook on funding opportunities will also be published. The new network replacing the Euro Info Centre Network in support of business and innovation will participate in implementing the Programme from 2008. *Further details at:*

<http://www.ec.europa.eu/environment/sme>

### **Communicating Europe in Partnership**

A new plan to "Communicate Europe in partnership", unveiled on 3 October by the Commission, proposes an "inter-institutional agreement" to align communication priorities among EU institutions and Member States. Communication priorities are to be laid down in "management partnership" agreements negotiated with each national government, in order to better communicate EU policies at national and local level. Climate change and energy, the EU's new 'Reform Treaty', growth and jobs and mobilising voters in the run-up to the 2009 European elections are among the communication priorities for the new agreement. It is also the Commission's wish that Member States do more explanatory work at an early age, with the inclusion of basic education about European integration in school curricula. The new initiative will not have extra financial resources but is intended to be included in the Commission's annual work plan and could then receive funding from the existing Community budget. The Commission intends to adopt a new strategy on how it intends to communicate via the Internet by the end of 2007, and to have launched a new audio-visual strategy by early 2008. It will then present a follow-up to its "Plan D" ahead of the European Parliament elections in 2009. *Further details at:* [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/index_en.htm)

### **Consultation on Multilingualism**

The European Commission has launched an online consultation for stakeholders and the general public on multilingualism. With the recent enlargements, the number of languages spoken in the EU has more than doubled: 23 are currently recognised as official languages, and there are over 40 more spoken by regional or ethnic minorities. The Commission is now seeking to adapt its policies and actions in the area of languages, so as to reflect the reality of an EU with over 450 million citizens and over 60 different mother tongues. The opinions of individuals, stakeholders, businesses and policy makers are now being invited to contribute to this process. To contribute to the debate, the Commission has also published a report, which highlights a number of key issues: raising awareness and enhancing motivation on language learning; the potential of the media in evoking, enhancing and sustaining motivation for language learning; languages for business; interpretation and translation – new trends and needs; regional or minority languages and research into multilingualism. The online consultation runs until 15 November 2007. *Further details at:* <http://forums.ec.europa.eu/multilingualism/en/>

### **Ireland Referred to Court on Environmental Impact Assessment**

The European Commission is referring Ireland to the European Court of Justice over shortcomings in the Irish legislation implementing the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. Under the directive, Member States are obliged to carry out environmental impact assessments (EIA) before authorising projects believed to have a significant impact on the environment. The Commission considers Ireland's approach to decisions involving the removal of historic structures and archaeological monuments to be in contravention of the directive. In a final warning sent to Ireland in June 2007, the Commission highlighted, as an example, the lack of an assessment carried out for a 2007 decision to remove a national monument situated at Lismullin in the path of the M3 motorway project near Tara in County Meath. Ireland argues that because the pre-historic site was only identified in 2007, its significance could not be taken into account in a 2003 assessment. The

Commission also considers that, because of weaknesses in Irish legislation splitting decision-making between Irish planning authorities and Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency, there are risks that outcomes required by the directive will not always be achieved. When decisions are being taken on proposed incinerators and other industrial projects, for example, Irish rules do not guarantee that interactions such as those between pollution-control measures and the landscape will be adequately assessed and taken into account. *Further details at:*

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1524&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&quiLanguage=en#nB3>

### **Agreement on Nitrates Directive**

The adoption of higher national sanctions this summer has allowed the European Commission to close its case against Ireland for breaching the Nitrates Directive. In March 2004 Ireland was condemned by the European Court of Justice for not putting in place an action programme to reduce nitrate pollution from agricultural run-off. Since then Ireland has adopted new legislation to give effect to an action programme. This involves requirements to safely store slurries, prohibit land-spreading during the winter and avoid excessive use of fertilizers. *Further details at:* <http://www.environ.ie/en/Environment/Water/WaterQuality/NitratesDirective/>

### **Irish Regions Office Recruitment**

The Irish Regions Office is recruiting a new EU Programmes and Information Officer. The appointment is designed to enhance the direct presence of the Irish Regions and their constituent local authorities in Brussels by monitoring relevant EU policies and programmes; identifying potential funding opportunities and assisting in the preparation of bids for funding; enhancing the role of the IRO as a contact point in Brussels for information on Irish sub-national government; strengthening the link between the work of the Irish Committee of the Regions members; and generally promoting the interests of the Irish regions in Europe. *Further details at:* <http://www.iro.ie/documents/IROofficer.pdf>

## EVENTS

### 8 Nov 2007, Brussels

Rewarding the best town twinning schemes and debating the issue of intercultural dialogue are the main objectives of the forthcoming forum "Europe for Citizens", which is being organised by the European Commission. The Forum will also include a debate on the Europe for Citizens programme and its role in promoting new forms of citizens' participation, new ways of mobilising citizens, and a new role for neighbourhoods in expressing citizenship. Local and regional authorities are invited to participate in this event. *Further details at:* <http://citizenforum.intbase.com/index.php>

### 8-9 Nov 2007, Bordeaux

The association of French small towns (*Association des petites villes de France - APVF*) is organising this first European meeting of small towns. Speakers will include the vice president of the European Commission Jacques Barrot, the president of the Committee of the Regions and leaders of town councils from across the EU. Topics to be discussed include the financing of public services and the role of twinning in helping small towns to think more about Europe. *Further details at:* <http://www.apvf.asso.fr/upload/uploads/file/Evenements/Programme.pdf>

### 28 Nov 2007, Brussels

The final EU conference of the Interreg IIIC project, energy' regio, will focus on climate protection through energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources. The conference will include the presentation of tools developed during the project, which ran from January 2005 to December 2007) and involved five European partners regions, including the BMW region in Ireland, working together on energy efficiency and sustainable communities, SMEs and education. *Further details at:* [www.eneryregio.net](http://www.eneryregio.net) or contact Ms. Ms Ann McCarthy, Border, Midland & Western Region, tel: +353 23 41271, e-mail: [annmccarthy@sws.ie](mailto:annmccarthy@sws.ie)

## NETWORKS

### Rural Tourism Network

The Rural Tourism International Training Network has been in operation since 2003 and promotes a common approach to the delivery of rural tourism training internationally. This European-wide network is an association for individual trainers, organisations and institutes dealing with rural tourism training and was established to promote and facilitate the joint development of training material and the exchange of experience. In September 2007, Mr. John Toland, Tourism Development Officer with Cavan Monaghan Rural Development (LEADER) was appointed Chairperson of the network. *Further details at:* [www.ruraltourisminternational.org](http://www.ruraltourisminternational.org)

### European Urban Knowledge Network

The European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experience on urban issues. It aims to support policy makers and practitioners across Europe in developing effective urban policy and to promote the vitality of Europe's towns and cities. 15 EU Member States (not including Ireland), EUROCITIES, the URBACT Programme and the European Commission participate in the EUKN. The main component of EUKN is the European urban e-library. To contribute to the e-library, each of the 15 Member States has established a National Focal Point which is responsible for collecting relevant knowledge at national level and making it available to EUKN. EUROCITIES, the European Commission and associated researchers and practitioners also provide input. *Further details at:* <http://www.eukn.org/eukn/abouteukn/index.html>

## PUBLICATIONS

### Reducing 'red tape' for SMEs

The European Commission has launched a new website that will allow entrepreneurs and other stakeholders to provide the EU executive with tips on improving European legislation and

reducing the administrative burden imposed on businesses. The launch of the new website is part of an overall package of measures aimed at reducing "red tape" on businesses by 25% by 2012 – an initiative which the Commission believes could give a €150 billion boost to the European economy by 2012. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/admin-burdens-reduction>

### Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2007

Eurostat, the EU's statistical office, has just published the Regional Statistics Yearbook for 2007. This annual publication contains facts and figures about all 268 (NUTS II) regions of the EU. This year the publication has also been extended to the EFTA countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The publication includes chapters on population, GDP, household accounts, labour market, labour productivity, urban statistics, science, technology and innovation, business, transport, tourism, education and agriculture. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

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