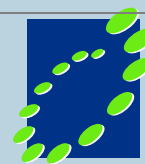


EU News Bulletin

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

Ireland-Wales programme: first call

The first call for proposals under the new Ireland-Wales Interreg IVA programme 2007-13 opened on 16 November, with a deadline of 18 January 2008. Applications are now invited for joint projects which address the two programme priorities: knowledge, innovation and skills for growth; and climate change and sustainable regeneration. Potential beneficiaries include national, regional and local authorities, state agencies, third level institutions, research centres, private enterprises, and voluntary and community organisations. All projects must have at least one Irish and one Welsh partner. The total programme budget is €52.7 million, with project co-financing of up to 75%. *Further details at: www.IrelandWales.ie or contact Antoinette Jordan, Development Officer, Ireland Wales Programme, Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly, tel +353 51 318100, e-mail ajordan@seregassembly.ie*

First call under Interreg IVC

The first Interreg IVC call for proposals was published in October. This new programme aims to support cooperation between EU regions in order to improve the effectiveness of regional development policies and contribute to increased regional competitiveness. Specifically it aims to: enable local and regional actors across the EU to exchange experiences and knowledge; match regions less experienced in certain policy fields with more advanced regions; ensure the transfer of good practices into Structural Funds mainstream programmes. The total budget is €302 million, with co-financing of between 75% (Ireland) and 85%. Deadline for applications: 15 January 2008. *Further details at: http://www.interreg4c.net/news.html#_22*

Urban networks

A first call for proposal has been published under the new URBACT II programme, which aims to promote cooperation and exchange of experience between urban areas in Europe. The new programme is part of the European Commission's new Regions for Economic Change initiative. This first call invites proposals for the creation of 23 thematic networks and 7 working groups. Details of the new programme and the application pack will be published on the URBACT website by the end of November. In the meantime, the URBACT Secretariat has opened a "project ideas tool", which allows interested parties to propose a network or working group idea and to look for partners. The networks will have a maximum budget of €710,000 and the working groups, €300,000. *Further details at: <http://urbact.eu/>*

R&D Funding for SME's

The European Commission has launched a new EU-funded programme to support research and development (R&D) by SMEs. The new programme, known as Eurostars, funds research projects led by SMEs using a combination of both national and EU funding. A total of €100 million is provided from the EU's 7th Framework Research Programme (FP7) up to 2013, with an estimated €400 million from the national research budgets. Eurostars is being run as a partnership between the Commission and the inter-governmental research initiative Eureka. It will only fund SMEs with less than 250 employees and which invest at least 10% of their annual turnover in R&D activities. The programme operates a continuous call for proposals, with two deadlines each year. The first of these deadlines is 8 February 2008. *Further details at: <http://www.eurostars-eureka.eu/>*

NEWS & POLICY

New EU Funding Programmes for Northern Ireland

On November 6, the European Commission adopted three Structural Fund programmes for Northern Ireland for the period 2007-13. EU investment of €724 million will be made available through the three programmes: the PEACE III programme; the cross-border co-operation programme with Ireland and Scotland; and the Regional Competitiveness and Employment programme. The Regional Competitiveness and Employment programme will focus on three key priorities: 1. Sustainable Competitiveness and Innovation, including the creation of six new centres of excellence in R&D; 2. Sustainable Enterprise and Entrepreneurship; and 3. Improving Accessibility and Protecting and Enhancing the Environment. The programme has a total budget of €614 million, with €307 million coming from the EU.

The PEACE III programme aims to further reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region. The programme will carry forward key aspects of the PEACE I and II programmes and will have a budget of €333 million, including €225 million from the EU. The Northern Ireland-Ireland-Scotland cross-border co-operation programme will have a budget of €256 million, including €192 million from the EU. This programme, which builds on the previous cross-border programmes between Ireland and Northern Ireland, will now also include parts of Western Scotland. To maximise the impact of the three programmes, a special European Commission task force has been established, which involves a coordinated approach by Commission services. *Further details at:* <http://www.seupb.ie>

Ireland Submits Energy Efficiency Plans

Ireland has become the seventeenth EU Member State to submit a national energy efficiency action plan to the European Commission, as required under the 2006 Energy End-use Efficiency and Energy Services Directive. The Irish plan, released on 3 October, aims to achieve energy efficiency savings of 20% by 2020, including 33% for the public sector. Irish

energy demands have grown by 70% in the past 15 years but the new plan aims to achieve savings of €1.7 billion. Key measures include energy efficiency programmes for all government departments, local authorities and other public sector buildings such as hospitals. Green public procurement guidelines will be issued and all public bodies will be required to purchase energy-efficient lighting from the end of 2007 (including street and traffic lights). An energy rating system for public buildings will also be introduced from 2008. Ireland was three months late in submitting its plan, which was due at the end of June. A number of other Member States still have plans pending. *Further details at:* <http://www.dcmnr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/6AF7E508-151A-4117-8B30-03698CDA66C4/0/NationalEnergyEfficiencyActionPlan.pdf>

Clonakilty in 10 best European rural tourism destinations

Clonakilty in West Cork was named as one of the ten "European Destinations of Excellence" (EDEN) at the European Annual Tourism Forum in Lisbon on 26 October. This year's EDEN Awards focused on rural tourism destinations of excellence. Clonakilty won the award on the basis of its "amenities of natural beauty" and the variety of activities the area has to offer. It was noted that, "in addition to an abundance of activities on land and sea, music sessions and fresh local produce there are also a full range of heritage sites, galleries, pubs, walking routes and fishing points." The aim of EDEN is twofold: to draw attention to the value, diversity and shared characteristics of European tourist destinations; and to promote destinations where commercial success goes hand in hand with social, cultural and environmental sustainability. It also creates awareness of Europe's tourist diversity and quality, besides promoting Europe as the foremost tourism destination in the world. Ten countries, including Ireland, participated in this year's EDEN Awards, for which national juries made the selections. Next year, seven more Member States of the EU and Turkey will participate. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/services/tourism/european_destinations_of_excellence

Micro-Credit in Europe

At the end of November, the European Commission will adopt proposals to

reinforce the development of micro-credit in the EU. The proposals, in line with the EU's Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs, aim to bridge the gap between potential demand and the currently insufficient supply of micro-credit (loans of up to €25,000) in Europe. The Commission will focus on two key issues. Firstly, it intends to invite the Member States to adapt the national institutional, legal and commercial frameworks necessary to promote a more favourable environment for the development of micro-credit. Secondly, it will recommend the setting up of a new facility to provide expertise and support for the development of non-bank micro-finance institutions (MFIs) in the Member States. It also proposes to draft a code of conduct and design a micro-credit "label" to create confidence in micro-credit. Financial support for this new facility could come from the existing technical assistance budget of the Structural Funds. It is expected that this new centralised facility will also establish a micro-credit fund which would help finance the loan activities of MFIs. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm

New R&D Info Service for Local & Regional Authorities

CORDIS, the EU's online information service for research and development, has launched a new "Regional Gateway" service for local and regional authorities. The objectives of the service are to enable regions to promote their local research activities and infrastructure in the broader European context and to provide local actors in the participating regions with a tangible interface to EU research. It provides geographically-tailored access to information as well as information and links to additional EU-supported resources, initiatives and services which assist local actors to benefit from EU research and innovation activities. CORDIS is encouraging local and regional authorities to send them regional news, information on research activities and R&D infrastructure services to be highlighted and integrated into the Regional Gateway. In order to promote the new service, workshops are being organised in different regions to provide practical advice on the diverse CORDIS services. *Further details at:* http://cordis.europa.eu/regions/home_en.html or e-mail regions@cordis.europa.eu

Positive Assessment of Structural Funds for 2007-13 Health Check to Streamline CAP

National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRFs) for the Structural Funds were adopted by the European Commission for all 27 Member States by 8 October 2007. The first assessment of these documents by the Commission concludes that the Structural Funds will make a decisive contribution to the EU's Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs over the period 2007-13. For 2007-13, the Structural Funds will receive 35.7% of the total EU budget, or €347 billion. The average budget earmarked for Lisbon-type investments is around 62% (Convergence regions) and 77% (Regional Competitiveness and Employment regions), amounting to over €215 billion. Environmental protection and risk prevention and the promotion of entrepreneurship and energy efficiency are also important priorities in most of the strategies. Ireland's National Strategic framework, "Supporting and Enabling Dynamic Regions" sets out the direction for investment by the Structural Funds in Ireland over the next seven years. Further details at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/07/419&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Golden Stars Awards for Best Town Twinning

The awards ceremony of the Golden Stars for twinning took place in Brussels on 8 November, during the Europe for Citizens Forum 2007. The Golden Stars Awards are given to projects that encourage active civic participation in EU issues. The winning town twinning projects in 2007 included: 1. Twinning on conservation of energy and natural resources, involving towns from the UK and France; 2. Twinning on educating young people on the EU and European citizenship, involving towns from France and Slovakia; 3. Twinning on exchange of experience on racism, xenophobia and gender equality, involving towns from Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Belgium, UK, Germany, France and the Netherlands; 4. Twinning on European integration, involving towns from Germany, UK, France and Poland; and 5. Twinning on solidarity towards disabled persons, involving towns from Poland, Germany, Hungary, France, Russia and Denmark. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.html

On November 20, the European Commission unveiled its latest proposals for further modernising the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The so-called 'Health Check' of the CAP addresses three main questions: how to make the direct aid system more effective and simpler; how to make market support instruments, originally conceived for six Member States, relevant to today; and how to confront new challenges, from climate change, to biofuels, water management and biodiversity. The Commission paper puts forward a number of proposals on these issues, including: moving away from payments based on historical receipts towards a "flatter rate" system; gradually reducing payments to big farmers, starting from a level of around €100,000 per year; reviewing the Cross Compliance standards (including introducing new measures on climate change, etc.); gradually increasing milk quotas, up to their abolition in 2015; and the abolition of set-aside. The Communication also proposes increasing the rate of 'modulation', (i.e. the transfer of money from direct aid to the rural development budget) from 5% currently to 13% in 2013. The Commissions proposals are designed to kick start a six-month consultation. As part of this process, Cllr Seamus Murray, Irish member of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), is drafting a CoR report on the Health Check. Next May, the Commission will then present legislative proposals, which it hopes will be adopted by agriculture ministers by the end of 2008 and could come into effect immediately. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/healthcheck/index_en.htm

Report on EU Sustainable Development Strategy

On 24 October, the Commission issued its first progress report on the EU's revised Sustainable Development Strategy, adopted in June 2006. The report concludes that action to turn around persistent unsustainable trends in the EU need to be stepped up. In particular, it confirms that Europe must implement its climate change policies and markedly increase the use of alternative energy; take bolder steps towards environmentally friendly transport; increase efforts to halt biodiversity loss; and continue to lead in the fight against poverty and for global sustainable development. The report is accompanied by a lengthy staff working

paper which contains a summary of the main EU policies in favour of global sustainability. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/sustainable/welcome/index_en.htm

EU Court Delivers Blow on Environment Sanctions

The European Commission's hope of issuing specific criminal penalties to polluters received a set-back when the European Court of Justice, in a ruling on 23 October, reiterated its previous decision, that the Commission can oblige Member States to introduce common penalties for environmental pollution but may not determine what sanctions should be introduced for different environment crimes. The ruling has important implications for a controversial piece of legislation proposed by Brussels earlier this year under which certain environmental transgressions, such as unlawful treatment of waste or unlawful possession of protected wild plants and animals could be treated as criminal offences. However, officials are now looking to the new Reform Treaty, which may be in place by 2009, to overcome this issue. Further details at: <http://curia.europa.eu/en/actu/communiqués/cp07/aff/cp070076en.pdf>

EU Lead Energy Technologies

On 22 November, the European Commission will publish a Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET Plan) aimed at helping the EU reach its targets for renewable energies and CO2 emissions. The purpose of the SET Plan will be to "accelerate the availability of energy technologies" and "engage European industry in the process so that it can gain world leadership in this sector." While it is not yet certain what the SET Plan will contain in detail, the Commission points to the potential of 14 energy technologies and the need for a longterm policy outlook. Renewables, such as solar and wind, are listed along with nuclear and 'decarbonised' fossil fuel power generation for their short term potential. Fusion energy, hydrogen, fuel cells and 'new generation' nuclear reactors are listed as part of a long-term vision and several 'key future technology options' are also highlighted, including geothermal, carbon capture and storage and ocean energy. Further details at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/07/469&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

EVENTS

23 Nov 2007, Galway (Ireland)

As part of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, Galway Chamber of Commerce is hosting a conference on regional development. The conference will be opened by Noel Treacy TD., former Minister for European Affairs and will include panel discussions on regional access and infrastructure, regional economic development and competitiveness and sustaining rural development. Further details at: www.galwaychamber.com or contact maeve@galwaychamber.com

6-7 December, Porto

This year's European Enterprise Awards ceremony will take place at the SMEs and Entrepreneurship "Successful Local Strategies" conference. There are five categories in the awards: Entrepreneurial Trailblazer Award, Enterprise Support Award, Red Tape Reduction Award, Investment in People Award and Responsible Entrepreneurship Award. Candidates must show how their actions have incrementally facilitated businesses and boosted their region's economy during the two-year period prior to the year of the award. Further details at: <http://www.iapmei.pt/iapmei-mstplindex.php?msid=11>

10-11 Dec 2007, Maastricht (The Netherlands)

This seminar will focus on "Supporting the Programme Monitoring Committees in EU Structural Funds". The key elements of the seminar include: how to ensure the quality and efficiency of Operational Programmes; how to improve decision-making on project approval, in particular on project selection criteria; how to enhance assessment, monitoring and remedial actions; and how to improve the composition and general functioning of the Programme Monitoring Committees. The seminar is being organised by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) and the registration deadline is 7 December. Further details at: <http://www.eipa.nl>

12 Dec 2007, Lahiti (Finland)

"Promoting eInclusion at local and regional level in the EU" is the topic of this seminar jointly organised by the city of Lahiti, Päijät-Häme regional council (FI) and the Committee of the Regions, in association with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). With the recent launch of the European strategy for eInclusion, the seminar will focus on the local and regional dimension of eInclusion in Europe. Speakers will include representatives from the European Commission, as well as experts in the fields of ICT. Further details at: http://www.ccre.org/docs/einclusion_lahti_programme_en.pdf

11-14 March 2008, Vienna (Austria)

The EASY-ECO Vienna Conference 2008 "Governance by Evaluation: Institutional Capacities and Learning for Sustainable Development" is organised by the Research Institute for Managing Sustainability at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration. The conference will address the following key topics: institutional aspects of sustainable development evaluations; policy learning and sustainable development evaluations and methodological challenges and innovations with regard to sustainable development evaluations. The registration deadline is 9 January 2008. Further details at: <http://www.easy-eco.eu>

NETWORKS

Cross-border Network

On 8-9 November, the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) organised a major European conference on the political and operational issues of cross-border cooperation. On the occasion of the conference, the MOT, a network of institutions from 9 European countries, opened its membership to other cross-border areas in order to establish a European Network, the "Euro-MOT". It also formed alliances with other European networks in order to strengthen its capacity to influence the future direction of cross-border

cooperation in Europe. Further details from: Domitille Ayrat, Tel: +33 (0)1 55 80 56 86, e-mail: domitille.ayrat@mot.asso.fr or at: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/Bandeauweb/documentation.html>

PUBLICATIONS

Consultation Procedures in European States

This 250 page study assesses systems for consultation between central governments and the national associations of local and regional government. It covers 35 European countries, and explains the State, the degree of decentralisation, the territorial organisation and the consultation procedures relating to national and European policy and legislation. Further details at: http://www.ccre.org/bases/T_599_45_35_24.zip

Twinning for tomorrow's world

This practical handbook gives an overview of town twinning activities in Europe and in the world. It features example of good practices on various issues such as citizenship, social inclusion, sustainable development or local economic development. It also provides details of the new EU programme, "Europe for Citizens", which includes support for town twinning, and provides guidance on how to apply. Further details at: http://www.ccre.org/bases/T_599_45_3_524.zip

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