

EU News Bulletin

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

Number 44 – December 2007

Produced by the Irish Regions Office (IRO), Brussels
in association with the Institute of Public Administration (IPA)



Irish Regions Office



FUNDING **1**

"Regions of Knowledge"

Atlantic Area programme

Lifelong learning

URBACT call for expertise

NEWS & POLICY **2**

Structural Funds progs. launched

Funding for Irish transport projects

Renewables "burden" based on GDP

GDP "outdated" as wellbeing indicator

Action plan on territorial cohesion

Preparing Europe's small businesses

Environmental checklist

Open Days 2008 launched

Irish women outside the labour force

Ireland's GDP 150% of EU average

EVENTS **4**

Sustainable energy; Local

employment; Regions for Economic

change; Rural development; World

biofuels; Structural Funds

NETWORKS **4**

Sustainable use of closed landfill sites

PUBLICATIONS **4**

Waste recycling

FUNDING

Regions of Knowledge

In November, the European Commission published seven calls for proposals under the Capacities programme of the Seventh Framework Programme for Research (FP7), which includes sub-programmes on: 'Regions of Knowledge', research infrastructure, research for SMEs, research potential, science in society, support for coherent development of research policies, and international cooperation. There are two calls under the "Regions of Knowledge" sub-programme, the first has a budget of €9.3 million and concerns the analysis, mentoring and integration of research agendas at local and regional level, and the definition of joint action plans. The second has a budget of €8 million and is concerned with facilitating the emergence of new regional research driven clusters and the mutual exchange of information. The closing date for both calls is 14 March 2008. Further details at: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html

Atlantic Area Programme

The first call for projects under the new Atlantic Area Territorial Cooperation Programme will open on 17 March 2008, with a closing date of 12 May 2008. The programme, which was officially launched in Portugal on December 14, aims to support cooperation between regions in the "Atlantic Area", which includes all of Ireland and parts of Spain, France, Portugal and the UK. The priority themes include: innovation, the environment, access (including transport), and sustainable urban & regional development. The total programme budget is €159 million and the maximum rate of co-financing is 65%. The application form & guidance pack for applicants will soon be available on the programme website:

www.coop-atlantico.com or contact:
Michael O' Brien, Programme Liaison
Officer, BMW Regional Assembly, tel:
094-9862970, e-mail:
mobrien@bmwassembly.ie

Lifelong Learning

The European Commission has published a call for proposals under the Lifelong Learning programme. With a budget of nearly €7 billion for 2007-13, the new programme replaces the existing education, vocational training and e-Learning programmes, which ended in 2006. The programme consists of four sub-programmes, covering schools, higher education, adult education and vocational education and training (Leonardo da Vinci). The latter aims to increase placements in enterprises to 80,000 per year by the end of 2013. The total budget earmarked for this call is €901 million. The first deadline for applications is 8 February 2008. Further details at: <http://ec.europa.eu/lfp>

URBACT Call for Expertise

The URBACT II programme has launched three calls for applicants for the provision of expertise: the first concerns the constitution of an URBACT II pool of validated thematic experts; the second call is for the selection of the six experts who will constitute the external assessment panel responsible for assessing and ranking all eligible projects resulting from the 1st call for proposals; and a third call concerns the selection of the three thematic managers who will be in charge of managing and implementing capitalisation activities on cross-cutting themes at programme level (Starting date: March 2008). Further details at: http://urbact.eu/news-events/single-news/article/call-for-applicants-for-the-provision-of-expertise.html?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=211&cHash=422f407afe

NEWS & POLICY

Ireland's Structural Funds Programmes Launched

On 14 December, EU Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner, and Dick Roche, Minister of State for European Affairs, officially launched the implementation of the Structural Funds programmes in Ireland for the period 2007-13. An important new feature of this new programming period is that the Regional Assemblies are now entrusted with the task of managing the entire ERDF budget. The Border, Midland and Western (BMW) Regional programme, with an EU investment of €228.7 million, will concentrate on innovation, information and communication technologies; environment and risk prevention, and urban development and improvements to secondary transport networks. The Southern and Eastern Regional programme, with an EU investment of €146.6 million, will focus on innovation and the knowledge economy; environment and accessibility; and sustainable urban development. A third programme on Human Capital investment will be supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) and covers the entire country. The programmes were launched nationally on 17 December by Mr. Brian Cowen, Minister for Finance at a joint meeting of the BMW and S+E Regional Assemblies in Tullamore. In total, Ireland will benefit from €901 million under the Structural Funds in 2007-13. In addition to the above programmes, Ireland also participates in three cross-border programmes, with a total investment of €469.5 million, and three transnational programmes: the Atlantic Area, North West Europe, and Northern Periphery programmes, with a total investment of €494.6 million. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas/2007/ireland/index_en.htm

Irish Projects Proposed for Transport Funding

Two projects involving Ireland are among the projects proposed by the European Commission for funding under the new Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) multi annual programme. The first concerns studies on the Ireland-UK-Benelux road link, including a package for improvements and upgrades on bottleneck sections. This project could receive €80.71 million if approved. The second project

concerns studies on an inter-connector tunnel: a planned railway tunnel to run under Dublin city centre, facilitating a road/rail axis between Ireland, the UK and mainland Europe. This project could receive around €10 million. The selection of projects reflects the Commission's desire to concentrate support on critical cross-border routes and to promote sustainable modes of transport. Following the publication of four calls for proposals, the Commission received 221 project proposals (for the available budget of €5.1 billion), from which a total of 43 projects were finally selected. These proposed projects are now sent to the Member States and to the European Parliament for final approval. It is expected that the Commission will adopt its final project funding decisions at the beginning of 2008. *Further details at:* <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0443:FIN:EN:HTML>

Renewables 'Burden' to be Based on GDP

Following the agreement by EU leaders in March 2007 on a 20% target for renewables by 2020, the European Commission is currently in the process of preparing the relevant legislation. In this context, the Commission is devising a system on how to share the 20% target between the Member States and has indicated that the minimum contribution of individual Member States to EU renewable energy targets could be calculated on the basis of GDP. Currently, 8.5% of EU energy consumption stems from renewable energies, meaning the share would need to be increased by 11.5% over the next 12 years to reach the 20% target. The system to be proposed by the Commission would work in two phases. First, each Member State would be required to increase renewable energy use by 5.75%. Then, the remaining 5.75% increase would be adjusted according to GDP, with wealthier Member States assigned a higher percentage than poorer ones. Member States with low potential for wind, solar, hydro or other non-fossil fuel energy production may be allowed to purchase certified renewable energy credits from other Member States with a higher renewables output. In January 2008, the Commission is expected to put forward a larger package on renewable energies and climate change, including a proposal for a comprehensive 'framework directive' on renewable energies. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/index_en.htm

GDP 'outdated' as indicator of wellbeing

The European Commission is working on a new initiative to measure the progress, wealth and wellbeing of nations, which aims to measure 'true' progress, taking environmental and social indicators into consideration. A world statistics forum in June 2007 agreed that national statistical offices, academics and public and private bodies would work with civil society on new approaches, going beyond conventional economic indicators such as GDP, which is widely used by economists to measure individual countries' economic performance but whose value as an indicator for the standard of living is considered to be limited. The Commission has already started to work on an index that would also measure progress on environmental issues. The aim is to move towards a low-carbon economy, preserving biodiversity, promoting resource efficiency and achieving social cohesion. Indicators planned for the environment include air and water quality. Indicators for social issues are proving more complicated, however. According to the Commission, the EU is committed to taking the lead in the move to integrate non-economic factors into policy-making by 2010. The Commission is to present a communication with a concrete roadmap for action by early 2008. In 2009/2010 a preliminary version of the EU indicator is due to become operational. *Further details at:* <http://www.beyond-gdp.eu/>

Action Plan on Territorial Cohesion

On 23-24 November, EU ministers responsible for regional and spatial development adopted the first action plan for the implementation of the EU's territorial agenda (promoting an integrated development policy to respond more effectively to specific territorial needs, and to provide opportunities for regions and cities to respond to the challenge represented by enlargement). The action plan proposes 15 actions designed to be implemented in the period 2007-11 and based around the following priorities: to influence key EU dossiers and to give a territorial and urban dimension to other sectoral policies of the EU; to strengthen multi-level governance at EU and Member State level based on shared partnership between European, national, regional and local actors and to develop knowledge on spatial

development at the EU level. The new EU Treaty, signed on 13 December, explicitly adds territorial cohesion as a third dimension of regional policy, which should contribute to strengthening the role of local authorities and civil society at EU level. It also recognises the need to address territorial disparities, which have a negative impact on the overall competitiveness of the European economy. The Commission will adopt a Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion in September 2008, opening a wider public consultation on this issue. *Further details at:* http://www.eu2007.pt/NR/rdonlyres/FA5E91FD-B0A3-4A0B-A68C-B2B85BB7AAE1/0/20071203DiscursoAcoresRomania_en.pdf

Preparing SMEs for change

On 26 November, the Commission opened a new session of the Restructuring Forum, devoted to the adaptation of SMEs to change. The Forum's mission is to ensure that the various initiatives in this area are properly coordinated; this requires the participation of the Commission, other European institutions, social partners and outside specialists. The Forum highlights the specific challenges that restructuring poses for SMEs and aims to create a platform for the exchange and discussion of best practices. Although their base is local or regional, it is generally recognised that SMEs, just like large companies, must adapt to factors such as increasing international competition, movements of capital and globalisation, the speed of technological change and the rapid cyclical shifts which characterise modern economies. However, generally, they do not have the same support structures as large companies to deal with these transformations, and the changes affecting them have not been closely monitored. Good practices regarding reaction to and management of change have already been identified in the following fields of action: anticipating and monitoring change in the SME sector, supporting SMEs in preparation for change and managing restructuring, improving the skills base, training and competence development in SMEs, and supporting SMEs with initiatives by large companies. These will be presented and disseminated in the Forum. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/restructuring/forum_en.htm

Environmental Sustainability Check-List

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) regional funding team, with the input of those participating in steering and monitoring committees, the European Commission, national Ministries of Finance and the private sector, has developed a set of questions to assess the compliance of proposed Structural Funds projects with the environmental and sustainable development requirements of the European Commission. These questions serve as a checklist to be applied when a project pipeline is being assessed by the managing authorities and the monitoring committees. It should serve all stakeholders in the various committees and is applicable to all programmes. Project check-list questions are both procedural as well as content-oriented. *Further details from: Stefanie Lang, WWF European Policy Office, Brussels 0032-2-7400930, slang@wwfepo.org or at: http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/who_w_e_are/offices/index.cfm*

Open Days 2008 launched

On December 14, the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission jointly launched the application procedure to participate in Open Days 2008: European Week of Regions and Cities. The aim of this, the sixth annual OPEN DAYS, to be held on 6-9 October 2008, is "to convey a joint vision of future European policy on economic, social and territorial cohesion, shared and implemented by regions and cities." The week long event, which will go under the title "Regions and Cities in a Challenging World", will feature around 120 workshops, grouped under four themes: Innovating regions: promoting research, technological development and innovation; Sustainable development: regional responses to climate change; Cooperation and networking: exchange of best practice in regional development; and looking forward: a European cohesion policy for tomorrow. Regions and cities wishing to participate have until 5 March 2008 to submit their application via the Open Days website, which provides details of the application procedure and conditions of participation. The CoR and the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional Policy will select 200 official partners. *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

Irish women outside the labour force in 2006

One woman in ten aged 25-54 in the EU was economically inactive in 2006 due to family responsibilities, with Ireland having one of the highest percentages inactive at 23.1%. Ireland's total percentage of inactive women aged between 15 and 54 was 29.5%. The main reason for prime-aged women to be outside the labour force during the main working period is that it is also the time when families are established and children are raised. Inactivity rates for women varied greatly between Member States: the UK had the lowest percentage, followed by Sweden and Denmark. At the other end of the scale, Malta, followed by Ireland and Luxembourg had the highest rates. Inactive persons are persons who are neither employed nor unemployed while family responsibilities may include marriage, pregnancy, childcare, serious illness of another member of the family or a long vacation. This data comes from a report issued by Eurostat focusing on people outside the labour force. *Further details at:* http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portals/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PRERE_L/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2007/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2007_MONT_H_12/3-06122007-EN-AP.PDF

Ireland's GDP almost 150% of EU Average

GDP per inhabitant in Ireland was almost 150% of the EU average in 2006, while Luxembourg was more than two and a half times the EU average, according to figures released by Eurostat on 17 December. The Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Belgium were between around 20% and 30% above the average. The UK, Finland, Germany and France recorded figures between 10% and 20% above the EU average, while Spain, Italy and Greece were around the average. Cyprus and Slovenia were about 10% below the EU average, while the Czech Republic, Malta and Portugal were between 20% and 25% below. Estonia, Hungary and Slovakia were about 35% below the average, while Lithuania, Latvia and Poland were between 40% and 50% below the average. Romania and Bulgaria were around 60% below the EU average. On December 11, Eurostat also released a report on regional unemployment in the EU. *Further details at:* http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=2173,49288229&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&ci=1130656,0

EVENTS

29-31 January 2008, Brussels

The Seventh ManagEnergy Plenary Conference, "The Contribution of Local & Regional Actors Towards a Sustainable Europe" takes place as part of EU Sustainable Energy Week 2008, which runs from 28 January to 1 February 2008. The conference includes a discussion with Andris Piebalgs, the Energy Commissioner, as well as Mayors from a number of European cities committed to local energy action and representatives of sustainable energy actions in both Europe and the US. There will also be an opportunity to find out about the 2008 Intelligent Energy – Europe (IEE) call for proposals during the IEE Info Day on 31 January. Further details at: www.eusew.eu

18-19 February 2008, Vienna (Austria)

The Fourth Meeting of the OECD and the Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance will focus on 'Partnerships for Skills and Competitiveness.' Organised by the Centre for Social Innovation in Vienna, the event will seek to identify the best ways for partnerships to contribute to the design and implementation of skills development strategies which can boost competitiveness and make the economy more inclusive. Over 150 partnership practitioners, managers, national coordinators of partnership networks, and policy makers from OECD Member and non-member countries are expected to attend. Further details at: <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/forum/partnerships> or contact: Jana Macháčová, Tel: +43 / 1 / 49 50 442 – 48, e-mail: machacova@forum.zsi.at

25-26 February 2008, Brussels

The European Commission is organising a "Regions for Economic Change" conference on the theme 'Regions learning from one another'. The conference will in particular focus on providing participants with practical examples of how they can cooperate and learn from one another as they start to implement the 2007-2013 programmes. Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/ecochange/index_en.cfm

29 February 2008, Lillehammer (Norway)

The Assembly of European Regions is organising this conference on the future of Rural Development Policy and Rural Regions. The objective of the conference is to debate and put forward concrete recommendations for future EU rural development policy, and also to identify and disseminate information on innovative tools and methods for diversifying the economy of rural areas. A call for papers has also been published. Further details: <http://www.a-e-r.org/events/regional-policies-committee/2008/conference-rural-development.htm>

12-14 March 2008, Brussels

The World Biofuels Markets Congress is expected to attract around 1300 participants from 58 countries and is Europe's largest gathering of biofuels professionals. This year's agenda includes over 200 speakers and is organised into three streams with five workshops. Several networking events are also built into the programme, which will also include over 100 exhibitors. Further details at: <http://www.worldbiofuelsmarkets.com>

17-19 March 2008, Berlin (Germany)

The 3rd International Annual Symposium on EU funds "ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, EFF, first experiences in the new programming period 2007-2013" is being organised by the European Academy for Taxes, Economics & Law for representatives of public authorities and organisations in all EU Member States dealing with the managing, financing, approving and auditing of EU Funds. In four panels on ERDF, ESF, EAFRD and EFF with interactive seminars, experts from the European Commission, European Court of Auditors and national and regional authorities will offer detailed information on each fund. Experts and practitioners will explain how to build up efficient administrative structures that comply with the expectations of the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors. Further details at: <http://www.europaeische-akademie.net/en.html>

NETWORKS

Sustainable Use of Closed Landfill Sites

SufalNet is a European network established in the framework of the Interreg IIIC programme to develop model strategies on the examination, after-care and redevelopment of former and abandoned landfills. The network includes 21 local and regional partners from across Europe, including Cork County Council in Ireland. On 14 November 2007, SufalNet held its final conference in Brussels, where it presented the successful results of its examination of the future use of the 150,000 closed landfills in the EU. Further details at: <http://www.sufalnet.net/project>

PUBLICATIONS

Waste Recycling

The new publication "LIFE and waste recycling: Innovative waste management options in Europe" examines the contribution that the LIFE programme has made to promoting innovative waste management in Europe. It sets out the major European waste legislation and provides information on a series of LIFE projects engaged in innovative solutions for waste management through recovery, recycling or reuse. Further details at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/lifefocus/env.htm>

Irish Regions Office
6 Rond-Point Schuman,
B-1040 Brussels
Fax: +32 2 2828475
Website: www.iro.ie

Robert Collins
E: robert.collins@iro.ie
Tel: +32 2 282 8474

Eamon O'Hara
E: eamon.ohara@iro.ie
Tel: +32 2 282 8477

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.
Irish Regions Office 2007