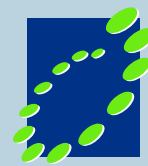


EU News Bulletin

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

Number 45 – January 2008

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



Irish Regions Office



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FUNDING

Second Call under North West Europe Programme

The second call for proposals under the INTERREG IVB North West Europe (NWE) Programme will open on 7 April 2008 with a closing date of 9 May 2008. The programme aims to support transnational cooperation projects in the NWE area that contribute to sustainable regional development. Five priorities have been identified: more attractive metropolitan areas; sustainable mobility management; land use and water systems; stronger ecological infrastructure with reduced ecological footprint; and promoting co-operation between sea and inland ports. A total budget of €353 million is available, with EU co-financing of up to 50%. The eligible area covers all of Ireland, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Luxembourg, and parts of the Netherlands, Germany, France and Switzerland. *Further details at:* <http://www.nweurope.org/> or from the INTERREG NWE Liaison Officer, Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly, tel: + 353 (0)51 860711, e-mail: info@seregassembly.ie

Second Call under Northern Periphery Programme

The second call for proposals under the new Interreg IV programme for the Northern Periphery (NP) opened on 16 January 2008. 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 and Kerry. Proposals for funding should address the two priorities of the programme:

promoting innovation and competitiveness in remote and peripheral areas and sustainable development of natural and community resources. No specific budget has been allocated for this second call, but between 2007-13 the Programme will commit around €45 million. After the first call, in which 12 projects were approved, 32.5% of these funds have been allocated. The deadline for applications is 7 March 2008. *Further 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

Intelligent Energy Europe

The Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE) 2008 call for proposals will be published in late February 2008. Under the call, €50 million will be available to support projects in the areas of renewable energy and energy efficiency, with co-financing of up to 75% of eligible project costs. The types of actions supported will include: 1) European projects: involving at least 3 partner organisations from 3 different eligible countries and with a maximum funding period of 3 years and a budget of between €0.5 - €2.5 million; and 2) Setting up of new local/regional energy agencies: only local/regional public authorities can apply and the maximum funding period is 3.5 years. An Info Day on the new call takes place in Brussels on 31 January 2008. National info days will be held from March 2008. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/call_for_proposals/index_en.htm Irish contact: Matthew Kennedy, Sustainable Energy Ireland. Tel: + 353 1 8082070, e-mail: Matthew.Kennedy@sei.ie

Spatial Planning

The launch of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) 2007-2013 programme and its

first four calls for proposals and interest take place on 21 January 2008. The four calls cover: 1. Applied research projects, on themes such as cities and urban areas and development opportunities in different types of rural areas; 2. The ESPON 2013 database; 3. A call for interest and ideas of stakeholders for using targeted analysis based on ESPON results; and 3. A call for interest in the Knowledge Support System creating a pool of experts in the field of territorial research and analysis. ESPON's budget for 2007-13 is €45.4 million. *Further details at: http://www.espon.eu/mmp/online/websit e/content/programme/1455/index_EN.htm*

NEWS & POLICY

New Renewables Targets for Member States

On 23 January 2008, the European Commission will publish its proposal for a new framework directive on the promotion and use of renewable energy sources, including an update of the biofuels directive. The Commission's proposals will form part of a wider package of proposals on renewable energy and climate change, which will also include a Communication on carbon capture and storage, legislative proposals on carbon trading, and a review on the need for harmonisation of national support schemes for renewable electricity. The new framework directive on renewable energy will provide the legal framework for achieving an EU target of 20% of energy from renewable sources by 2020. A particularly sensitive aspect of the Commission's proposals concerns how responsibility for achieving this target is to be shared between the Member States. The Commission is expected to present a mathematical formula based on a two step approach: an equal increase of 5.75% by all Member States, and another average increase of 5.75% divided according to GDP per capita in 2005 (to increase the total EU-wide renewables share from 8.5% in 2005 to 20% in 2020). In this context, Ireland, which now has the second highest GDP in the EU, is expected to be allocated a relatively challenging target. *Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/index_en.htm*

Trade in Renewable Energy Certificates

Under plans currently being considered by the European Commission (see previous article), Member States may be authorised to meet their national renewable energy targets using green energy certificates bought from other EU countries. The plans are part of the Commission's proposals on how to divide responsibility of meeting the EU target 20% of energy from renewable by 2020 between the Member States. Draft proposals currently being discussed by the Commission suggest that trading of green energy certificates could be a central element of the upcoming directive on renewables. Under the proposals, Member States would be responsible for issuing 'guarantees of origin' (GOs) to producers of heat and electricity coming from renewable energy sources. These certificates could then be traded between EU Member States to help meet national renewable energy targets. *Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/index_en.htm*

Commission Rethinking Biofuels Target

As part of its deliberation on the new renewables directive (see article above on "New Renewables Targets for Member States"), the European Commission is re-thinking the EU target for biofuels. In March 2007, as part of a wider package of measures aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emission, EU leaders agreed that 10% of transport fuels should come from biofuels by 2020. However, since then numerous reports have warned that some biofuels contribute very little to cutting emissions and others can lead to rainforest destruction, drive up food prices, or prompt dislocation of poorer farmers in the rush to convert land to the production of biofuels. In response, the EU environment commissioner has indicated that the pending guidelines will take account of these reports, suggesting that the biofuels target may have to be adjusted downwards in order to avoid damage to the environment and rural communities. *Further details at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/biomass/biofuel/index_en.htm*

New Funding for the European Transport Network

The European Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed

a Cooperation Agreement on 11 January establishing a Loan Guarantee Instrument for Trans-European Transport Network projects (LGTT). This new instrument aims to facilitate greater participation of the private sector in the financing of European transport infrastructure, especially for investments in Trans European Transport Network (TEN-T) projects, where there is a high level of revenue risk in the early operational period. The LGTT, which forms part of the TEN-T programme will partially cover this risk and thereby significantly improve the financial viability of TENs investments. The capital contribution of €1.0 billion is intended to support up to €25 billion of total capital investment. For the period 2007-2013 alone, the investment needs of the TEN infrastructure is expected to be around €300 billion and significant financial gap in public sector resources is anticipated. This can only be overcome by mobilising private investment in large infrastructure projects. The LGTT will complement two other financial instruments of the European Commission tailored for TEN-T projects: the Risk Capital Facility and Availability Payment Schemes. *Further details at: http://www.eib.org/attachments/press/2008-005-fact_sheet_en.pdf*

Slow Start for Groupings for Territorial Cooperation

The first meeting of the expert group on European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), established by the Committee of the Regions in October 2007, took place in Brdo (Slovenia) on 17 January 2008. The main objective of the meeting was to encourage Member States to speed-up the approval of national provisions to enable stakeholders to use this instrument. So far, only five countries have completed this process. It also explored other issues related to the establishment of EGTCs, including: creating Euro-regions, coordination between local and transnational networks, cooperation in border areas and cooperation between urban centres. The EGTC is a new EU instrument created to facilitate the management of cross-border, transnational and regional projects in areas such as economic development, environmental protection, mobility and healthcare services (often funded by EU or national programmes). The EGTC Expert Group works as a bridge between practitioners and institutions. Its role is to: monitor the adoption and implementation of provisions at Member State level; facilitate the exchange of

experiences and best practice; identify the potential role of EGTC as a tool for cohesive territorial development; and improve communication on EGTC opportunities and challenges. Ireland is represented on the expert group by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). *Further details at:* <http://www.cor.europa.eu/en/activities/egtc.htm>

Naming Structural Funds Beneficiaries

As of 2008, the European Commission will launch infringement proceedings against Member States that fail to publish the names Structural Funds beneficiaries. The new Structural Fund regulation requires that the names of all final beneficiaries and the amounts they received in the previous year are the subject of an annual publication, starting in 2008 (also applies to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) from 2009). This information will have to be accessible to all citizens through a website set up by the national authorities in each country. The aim of this new rule is to increase transparency and to dissuade beneficiaries from overestimating their financial needs (the 2006 annual report from the EU Court of Auditors revealed a historically high error rate of 12% in the implementation of Structural Funds during that year). *Further details from the Irish Regions Office.*

European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 was officially launched in Ljubljana on 8 January, at a conference on "Intercultural Dialogue as the Fundamental Value of the EU". The objectives of the Year are to emphasise interaction between cultures, deepen relations between nationalities and religions, and promote a strengthening of understanding, tolerance, solidarity and a sense of a common destiny among EU citizens. The event in Ljubljana kicks off a series of activities across Europe, including: 27 national projects and seven pan-European flagship projects involving people from all Member States; fifteen recognised personalities from Europe's cultural scene, known as the 'Ambassadors' of the Year, will help to promote the Year's objectives; six debates on topics such as migration, minorities, education, cultures and religions will be organised with Commissioners and well-known personalities; and youth events with a

theme of inter-religious relations. Intercultural dialogue has traditionally been a theme in projects subsidised by the Commission's main funding programmes in the fields of education (the Lifelong Learning Programme), culture (the Culture Programme) and youth (the Youth in Action Programme). The objectives expressed for the Year will be a priority for the future in these funding programmes, whose combined budget exceeds € 8.6 billion for the period 2007-2013. *Further details at:* www.dialogue2008.eu

Regional Unemployment in the EU

Regional unemployment rates in the EU ranged from 2.6% to 28.5% in 2006. In Ireland, regional unemployment varied from 4.3% (for both 2005 and 2006) in the Southern & Eastern Region to 4.4% (2005) and 4.6% (2006) in the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) region. Total unemployed in Ireland was 4.3% in 2005 and 4.4% in 2006. Unemployment rates for young people (18 to 25 year olds) varied from 5.0% to 59.9% in the EU in 2005/2006, while the percentages for Ireland remained static at 8.6% for both years. This corresponded to 8.7% (2005) and 9.8% (2006) in the BMW region and 8.5% (2005) and 8.2% (2006) in the Southern and Eastern region. In these two years the overall unemployment rate for women in the EU fell from 9.7% to 9.0%, while in Ireland, women's unemployment rates in 2005 and 2006 were 4.0% and 4.1%. This corresponded to 4.6% and 5.1% respectively in the BMW region and 3.8% for both years in the Southern and Eastern region. The data on regional unemployment, compiled on the basis of the EU Labour Force Survey, are taken from a report published by Eurostat, the EU's Statistical Office. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

Dublin City Council Wins Ambulance Case

The European Court of Justice has ruled in favour of Ireland in a case brought by the European Commission against Ireland regarding the provision of ambulance services in Dublin. The Commission claimed that the provision of ambulance services in Dublin was a public contract, covered by EU public procurement rules, and that there should have been an open call for tender. However Dublin City Council organised emergency ambulance services as a health authority up to

1960, then as a local authority through its permanent fire brigade service. The Court stated that Dublin City Council provides such services to the public in the exercise of its own powers derived directly from statute. As the Commission failed to show that there was, in fact, an award of a public contract and a subsequent requirement for a public call for tenders, the action was dismissed. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/press_office/news_of_the_day/ambulanceservcase_en.htm

Consultation on 'School Fruit Scheme'

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on a 'School Fruit Scheme'. The consultation seeks to collect the opinions and experiences of stakeholders and interested members of the public on four policy options on the implementation of a European 'School Fruit Scheme'. The options, which range from a low level of intervention by the Commission to active participation in the management and funding of a school fruit scheme, are set out in a comprehensive consultation paper. The paper was prepared by a Commission working group, taking into account the results of a series of hearings and discussions which have already taken place with sector representatives, experts in and outside agriculture as well as Member States. The public consultation is open until the end of February 2008. *Further details at:* http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/fruitveg/sfs/public/index_en.htm

Consultation on Development Policy

The European Commission has launched an on-line consultation on Policy Coherence for Development (PCD). The consultation aims to gather views on PCD issues as identified in a European Commission report published in September 2007. 13 domains have been defined for this consultation, which include development policies related to climate change, environment, energy, information society, migration, transport and the social dimensions of globalisation. Comments provided will feed into the preparation of a Commission Communication on PCD due in March 2008. The consultation is open until 30 January 2008. *Further details at:* <http://ec.europa.eu/development/about/consultation/?action=viewcons&id=3>

EVENTS

7-10 Feb. 2008, Verona (Italy)

Bioenergy World 2008 is an exhibition for the international bioenergy community which will bring together actors from across the three bioenergy sectors - solid, liquid and gaseous. The event, which is expected to attract around 150 000 visitors from the global agricultural and bioenergy community, will focus on the latest EU legislation and incentives aimed at stimulating an increase in the use of biomass and biofuels across the 27 Member States. Further details at: <http://www.bioenergy.com/>

27 February 2008, Killarney (Ireland)

The South West Regional Authority's conference "How to Speak the Same Language" is targeted at businesses which need to interact more regularly and successfully with publicly funded research organisations. The conference will bring together a range of experts from both industry and research backgrounds who will illustrate by example and first-hand experience, what is required to engage effectively with each other and give the basic tools and insight to understand the benefits of being proactive in terms of a company's attitude to innovation. Further details at: <http://www.driveproject.eu/index.cfm/page/conference>

29 February 2008, Dublin

The Agmet group is holding a one day conference on "Energy and the Irish Climate - Harnessing the Irish climate for energy" at the Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. Agmet is an Irish based organisation, founded in 1984 to support agricultural meteorology in Ireland and to bring it to a wider audience. Four keynote speakers will deliver papers on: wind energy; biomass for energy; marine energy and solar energy. Further details at: <http://www.irbea.org/index.php>

5-6 March 2008, Dublin

This seminar programme is hosted by the Environmental Sciences Association of Ireland (ESAI) in conjunction with

EnviroSkills, a newly formed network that will concentrate on technical training for environmental consultants and related industries. The event comprises a water seminar focusing on the EU Water Framework Directive; a waste seminar hosted by the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM) Ireland; an energy seminar and additional seminar sessions on energy efficiency. Further details at: <http://www.environment-ireland.com/>

7-8 April, 2008, Maribor (Slovenia)

One of the objectives of the new Slovenian Presidency of the EU is to continue the discussion initiated by the European Commission at the Fourth Cohesion Forum, held in September 2007, and to define methods for the improvement of the effectiveness of EU regional policy. The purpose of this conference is to review regional policy from the aspects of structure, goals and working areas, and to identify deficiencies that need to be eliminated in the further phases of discussion. Further details at: <http://www.eu2008.si/en/>

27-29 May 2008, Prague (Czech republic)

The annual international conference of the British-based Regional Studies Association will take place this year at the Economic University of Prague. Entitled "Regions: the dilemmas of integration and competition", the conference will include specific sessions on: European Regional Policy; Regions – Hubs of Global Knowledge; Labour Market Dynamics, Human Capital and Migration; Rural Economic Development; City Regions; Multilevel Governance; Sport & Tourism Culture; Regional Identities & Imaginations; Democracy & Regions; Local & Regional Economic Development; Environmental Issues in Local & Regional Development. A call for contributions has been launched, with a deadline of 28 February. Further details at: <http://www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/>

NETWORKS

NEREUS, the network of European regions with an interest in the use and

development of space technologies was established on 18 December 2007. Created at the instigation of the Midi-Pyrénées Region (France), NEREUS aims to create a forum for exchange and discussion between EU Regions and the stakeholders in European space policy (the Member States, the European Space Agency, the European Commission and the space industry). NEREUS also aims to represent regions in the European decision-making process in the field of space policy. So far, 35 regions from 10 EU Member States (none from Ireland) have expressed an interest in joining the network. 23 regions have already signed the Political Charter of NEREUS. Further details at: <http://www.nereus-regions.eu/>

PUBLICATIONS

Metropolitans

On 23 January 2008, EuroNews will launch a new monthly magazine called Metropolitans, focusing on European cities. The eight minute news magazine will examine different aspects of European cities: politics, the economy, social and environmental issues, education, arts and culture, etc... Each month, the magazine will focus on one city, interviewing political leaders, economic decision makers, citizens and other stakeholders. The first edition in January will focus on Manchester (UK), followed by Düsseldorf (Germany) in February, Gijón (Spain) in March, Lyon (France) in April and Katowice (Poland) in May. Further details at: http://www.euronews.net/create_html.php?page=home&lng=1

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