

# EU News Bulletin

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

## Number 46 – February 2008

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



Irish Regions Office



### **FUNDING** **1**

*Eco-innovation*

*LIFE+*

*Science in society*

*Safer Internet Plus*

### **NEWS & POLICY** **2**

*Action plan for a low carbon Europe*

*Climate change covenant*

*Regional disparities close*

*Small Business Act*

*Innovation Scoreboard*

*CAP 'Health Check' Report*

*Environmental Information System*

*Energy efficiency at local/regional level*

*EU policy priorities for 2009*

*Volunteering*

### **EVENTS** **4**

*Wind energy; Local action on climate*

*change; Cities cycling network;*

*Climate change and road safety.*

### **NETWORKS** **4**

*Enterprise European network*

### **PUBLICATIONS** **4**

*Local & regional authorities in Europe*

*EU regional policy 2007-2013*

## FUNDING

### **Eco-innovation**

The first call for proposals under the eco-innovation strand of the new Framework Programme for Competitiveness and Innovation (CIP) is expected to be published in April 2008. This fund aims to reduce pollution and negative environmental impacts while optimising responsible resource use among the business community. Eco-innovation actions to be supported include: trialling and rolling out new technologies and production processes or business methods which lower costs and deliver environmental benefits; co-investment in risk capital funds that provide equity for companies investing in this area; fostering networks and clusters, public-private partnerships and innovative business services, facilitating or promoting green innovation; and promoting new and integrated approaches in fields such as environmental management and the environmentally-friendly 'life-cycle' design of products, processes and services addressing new needs and new markets. €433 million is earmarked for eco-innovation for 2007-2013.

Further details at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/etap/funding\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/etap/funding_en.htm)

### **LIFE+**

The 2008 call for proposals for the LIFE+ programme, the EU's financial instrument for the environment, is expected to be published in July. LIFE+ comprises three components: Nature & Biodiversity; Environment Policy & Governance; and Information & Communication. The programme has a budget of over €2 billion for the period 2007-2013, of which at least 78% will go towards the co-financing of project action grants and at least 50% will go to nature and biodiversity projects.

Further details at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplus.htm#First>

Contact point in Ireland:

Mr Brian Earley, Sustainable Development Unit, Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government.

Tel: +353 1 888 2486

e-mail: [brian.earley@envir.ie](mailto:brian.earley@envir.ie)

### **Science in Society**

The European Commission has published a second call for proposals under the Science in Society sub-programme of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for Research (FP7). This initiative aims to integrate scientific and technological activity and associated research policies within European society and culture. The call covers social affairs and research and winning projects will receive a Descartes prize for transnational collaborative research or a Prize for Scientific Communication. A total budget of €330 million has been allocated for this theme. The closing date is 28 May.

Further details at:

[http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/sis/home\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/sis/home_en.html)

### **Safer Internet Plus**

The final call for proposals to promote safer use of online technology under Safer Internet Plus will be launched in March. This programme, with an overall budget of €45 million, operates under four main actions: fighting against illegal content; tackling unwanted and harmful content; promoting a safer environment; and awareness-raising. The programme extends to new online technologies, including mobile and broadband content, online games, peer-to-peer file transfer, and all forms of real-time communications (e.g. chat rooms, instant messaging) primarily with the protection of children and minors in mind. A broader range of areas of illegal and harmful content and conduct of concern, including racism and violence, will also be addressed.

Further details at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/sip/programme/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/programme/index_en.htm)

## NEWS & POLICY

### **Action Plan for a Low Carbon Europe**

On 23 January, the European Commission published a package of proposals aimed at tackling climate change and promoting the use of renewable energy. The package includes five main elements: (1) A new Emissions Trading scheme (ETS): extending the current ETS dating from 2005 to cover all major industrial emitters such as power plants, and to include more greenhouse gases such as nitrous oxide (fertilisers) and perfluorocarbons (aluminium); (2) national emissions allowances to achieve an average 10% reduction of greenhouse gases from sectors not covered by the ETS (transport, buildings, agriculture, waste) by 2020, with richer countries asked to make bigger cuts – of up to 20% in the case of Denmark, Ireland and Luxembourg – while some poorer states will in fact be entitled to increase their emissions in these sectors [this issue is treated in more detail in an article in 'EU Policy Review' No. 01/08 – available from the publications section of [www.iro.ie](http://www.iro.ie)] (3) legally binding renewable energy targets for each EU country on the increase of renewables in overall energy mix by 2020 - for Ireland the target is 16% which is up from an estimated 3.1% in 2005; (4) a Biofuels target of 10% in Europe's transport fuels by 2020; and (5) Carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology to be credited as not emitted under the ETS. The Commission expects the proposed package of measures to be adopted by the end of 2008.

Further details at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/energy/climate\\_actions/doc/2008\\_res\\_directive\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/climate_actions/doc/2008_res_directive_en.pdf)

### **Local Authorities take Lead on Climate Change**

Hot on the heels of the Climate and Energy Package (above), the European Commission has launched a voluntary 'Covenant of Mayors' - an initiative to promote greater participation of citizens in the fight against global warming. This proposal invites Europe's local and regional authorities to make formal commitments to go beyond the objectives of the EU by reducing their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by more than 20% by 2020 and by developing Sustainable Energy Action Plans. Almost 100 local and regional authorities throughout Europe, including 15 capital cities and

Cork County Council, have already expressed their support for the Covenant with commitment to be made official no later than the 2009 EU Sustainable Energy Week. The Commission will support the sharing of best sustainable energy practices to the Covenant membership through a 'benchmarks for excellence' mechanism and will negotiate the terms of the involvement of other major stakeholders. A Covenant secretariat, funded through the Intelligent Energy Europe programme, will facilitate monitoring, networking and promotion of the tasks of this new challenge. Citizens will be informed of the achievements of their respective cities through periodic and independently monitored reports.

Further details at:

<http://www.managenergy.net/com.html>

### **Cohesion Policy bringing down Regional disparities**

The regional GDP per head figures for 2005, published by EUROSTAT on 12 February, indicate an EU-wide average value of €22,400 for each inhabitant as an approximate measure of economic activity. The figures, expressed in terms of purchasing power standards (PPS) to take account of differences in national price levels, show that while there is an extreme variance between the 24% rate in Nord-Est Romania and the 303% attributed to Inner London, 16 out of 84 convergence regions (those covering almost all of the 2004 and 2007 accession states) have now attained at least 75% of the EU27 average. Additionally, the capital city regions of Prague and Bratislava are respectively ranked in an impressive 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> places overall. For Ireland, the estimated figures are €35,420 (158%) per head across the Southern & Eastern region and €23,367 (104%) in the Border, Midland & Western region based on a national average of €32,197 (144%).

Further details at:

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?\\_pageid=0,1136162,0\\_45572073&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=0,1136162,0_45572073&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

### **European Small Business Act**

A public consultation on a new European "Small Business Act" was launched by the European Commission on 31 January. The objective of the Act is to enhance the role of SMEs in decision-making in the EU and to introduce practical measures to unlock SME growth potential. It includes new initiatives to reduce the regulatory burden on SMEs, facilitate access to the

single market/public procurement, help provide the necessary financial/human resources for SME development, and to help SMEs face the challenge of globalisation and climate change. The document underpinning the consultation identified six areas to be examined: better regulation for the benefit of SMEs; putting SMEs at the forefront of society; SME access to markets; SME access to finance, skills and innovation; turning environmental challenge into opportunities for SMEs; and enhancing the implementation of EU SME policy principles. The consultation will be open until the end of March. Based on its outcome, the Commission plans to present the "Small Business Act" for Europe in June 2008.

Further details at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sme/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sme/index_en.htm)

### **Ireland Remains an Innovation Follower**

On February 14, the European Commission published the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) for 2007 which provides an assessment of innovation performance across the EU and other leading innovative nations. The report's analysis of Ireland's innovation performance is something of a mixed bag. On the plus side, the country is adjudged to be performing strongly in terms of its public funding of innovation (despite only medium-low level R&D expenditure by both the public and private sectors), SME in-house innovation and inter-firm collaboration (despite low innovation spending and very low engagement in early-stage venture capital activity) and numbers of science & engineering graduates. Interestingly the analysis suggests an impressive efficiency in transforming innovation inputs into application outputs – particularly for hi-tech exports – although new-to-market and new-to-firm sales as well as performance in transforming such inputs into intellectual property outputs is below-par with evident relative weaknesses in patent applications and Community industrial designs being a cause for concern. Innovation prospects are also hampered by comparatively low levels of broadband penetration and life-long learning opportunities and uptake. Ireland's overall innovation performance places it in a second-tier category entitled "innovation followers" but trailing the five Member States - Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden and the UK – who continue to lead the way in Europe's attempts to close the innovation gap on the USA and Japan.

Further details at:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/234&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

### **CAP 'Health Check'**

How successful is the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and how can it meet future challenges and opportunities? This was the subject of a recent report by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) on the so-called 'CAP Health Check', announced by the Commission in November which proposes increasing modulation (cutting farm payments) with funds to go to environmental projects; abolishing most remaining market supports and interventions; tapering the Single Farm Payment at the higher levels and instituting a minimum level of payment. Cllr. Seamus Murray (Meath County Council and Mid-East Regional Authority) initiated the report by urging that the CAP be restructured as a means of maintaining sustainable agriculture and self-sufficiency in food rather than being gradually dismantled and renationalised. His report stimulated a wide-ranging and largely supportive discussion in the CoR, highlighting differing views amongst the representatives of Europe's local and regional authorities. In particular, however, Cllr. Murray's report emphasised that modulation decisions should take place at the appropriate devolved level to reflect the diversity of local and regional needs and the importance of appropriate funding for rural development measures; that the "rural development" umbrella should be carefully confined to appropriate issues and challenges only; and that soft landing measures should be put in place to facilitate the gradual phasing out of the milk quota regime by 2015. Commenting on the report, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mariann Fischer Boel also suggested that regions must be given more autonomy to exploit emerging opportunities and stressed the need to look for ways of improving quality in order to ensure that European agriculture remained competitive. *Further details from the IRO.*

### **New European Environment Information System**

A Shared Environment Information System (SEIS) to streamline the large amount of environmental data collected throughout the EU has been proposed by DG Environment. This data is used to analyse trends and pressures on the

environment and is vital when drawing up or assessing the effectiveness of policy. At present, such information is not made available in a format that policy makers and the public can readily understand and use. The objective of a

shared system is to move away from paper-based reporting by using tools such as the internet and satellite technology to collate all existing environmentally-relevant data and information and to store it in virtually interconnected databases throughout the EU. SEIS will offer Member States an efficient electronic system to fulfil their reporting obligations on EU environmental policies and legislation. It will also provide more coherent environmental information to facilitate the drafting, implementation, and effectiveness of environmental policies, and will allow EU citizens access to useful environmental information, enabling them to make informed decisions on their environment and influence public policy. A detailed implementation plan for SEIS will be presented some time in 2008 with financial support to implement it coming from the EU Research Framework programmes, LIFE, the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) and the Structural Funds.

*Further details at:*

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0046:FIN:EN:PDF>

### **Promoting Energy Efficiency at Local and Regional Level**

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) has published a study highlighting the role of local and regional authorities in promoting energy efficiency. The study, entitled "The use of renewable energy sources and measures to boost energy efficiency – significant contributions at local and regional level to combating climate change", was presented at the Seventh ManagEnergy Annual Conference on Local Energy Action in Brussels, on 29 January. It examines 10 different case studies on energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives in order to identify key factors behind their success. It underlines the role of local and regional authorities, as planners and regulators, in setting the framework to promote energy-efficient products, services and renewable energy. It also highlights the role of these authorities in influencing energy demand, by informing customers as to how they can use energy more efficiently.

*Further details at:*

<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/Docum>

[entTemplate.aspx?id=5a3a1f28-89fb-4e5a-9878-44a5f8da545a](http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/synthesis/index_en.htm)

### **EU Policy Priorities for 2009**

The European Commission has presented its Annual Policy Strategy for 2009. This is the first step in the process of determining the EU's policy objectives for 2009 and how these should be reflected in next October's Commission legislative and work programme and in the annual budget for 2009. Presenting the strategy, entitled "Putting the Citizen First", Commission President, José Manuel Barroso said that the Commission had identified five main priorities for 2009: Economic reform, more jobs, tackling climate change and energy insecurity, migration and more security for EU citizens. Work will also continue on the EU budget review with a consultation phase (currently underway) paving the way for the preparation of the next financial perspective for the period beyond 2013. The ongoing quest for better and simplified regulation will also involve a substantial number of proposals designed to reduce administrative burdens. Major landmarks for 2009 include European Parliamentary elections and the appointment of a new Commission.

*Further details at:*

[http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/synthesis/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/synthesis/index_en.htm)

### **Value of Volunteering**

Cllr. Declan McDonnell (Galway City Council and West Regional Authority) had his report on the Contribution of Volunteering to Economic and Social Cohesion adopted at the February plenary session of the Committee of the Regions. His report, which mirrored a similar undertaking by Ms. Marian Harkin MEP in the European Parliament, highlighted the lack of legal status for volunteers in the European Union and the lack of statistical data available on the economic contribution from volunteering. The need for more accurate statistics is highlighted by the fact that in Canada it is estimated that voluntary activity contributes over 7% to the country's GDP and that such estimates would be useful in European countries, in order to assist policy making and allow for voluntary activity to be better recognised and factored into budgetary discussions, for example to be used as match-funding in EU funded programmes and projects. Cllr. McDonnell's report also highlighted the role that local and regional authorities can and do play in supporting volunteering.

*Further information from the IRO.*

## EVENTS

### 31 March - 3 April, Brussels

The European Wind Energy Conference & Exhibition 2008 will focus on providing input into forthcoming legislation on renewables and on the support needed for renewable energy production. The conference will specifically focus on the barriers to be addressed by all stakeholders if wind power is to provide 12% of electricity by 2020. These include infrastructure constraints, costs, off shore developments, legislative and administrative burdens, research and innovation, public acceptance and supply chain issues.

Further details at

<http://www.ewec2008.info/index.php?id=442g>

### 2-4 April, Rovigo (Italy)

The province of Rovigo and ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) are organising a conference on "Climate Protection and Renewable Energy: Medium and Small Communities facing the Challenge". The objective of the event is to present ideas on how to develop the capacities of political decision-makers and local authority officers who need to become involved in community climate protection action. Several local authorities will outline successful local approaches to climate protection and renewable energy.

Further details at:

[http://www.ccre.org/news\\_detail\\_en.htm?ID=1244](http://www.ccre.org/news_detail_en.htm?ID=1244)

### 3-4 April, Dresden

This European Conference on Bicycle Transport & Networking will focus on the exchange and transfer of knowledge and experiences on bicycle networking of European cities. The event will address practical questions on topics such as bicycle planning and management, regulation and financing, citizen's involvement, bikes as business, networking and research aspects. Special attention will be given to how cycling, walking and public transport can work hand in hand in a joint effort to reduce car use.

Further details at:

<http://www.tu-dresden.de/srv/englisch/index.html>

### 21-24 April, Ljubljana, (Slovenia)

The second European Road Transport Research Arena (TRA) conference 'Greener, safer and smarter transport for Europe' will focus on climate change and road safety. The conference programme will be organised into several plenary, strategic and thematic sessions based on European road research needs and agendas. Conference participants will have the opportunity to meet potential project partners, as well as European Commission officials.

Further details at: <http://www.tra2008.si/>

## NETWORKS

### Enterprise Europe Network

Launched by the European Commission on the 7 February, the Enterprise Europe Network combines and builds on the former Innovation Relay Centres and Euro Info Centres (established in 1995 and 1987 respectively). The new integrated Network will boost European competitiveness by offering a "one-stop shop" to meet the information needs of companies – particularly SMEs and entrepreneurs – in Europe. Instruments include business partner searches, fast access to information on funding opportunities, individual on-site visits to companies to assess their needs, and a range of promotion and information material. Representatives of the network can also help businesses understand EU law, how it applies to their business and how to make the most of the internal market and EU programmes. The Network is made up of over 600 partner organisations in more than 40 countries across the continent. Irish members are Enterprise Ireland's headquarters and the Chambers of Commerce in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Sligo and Waterford.

Further details at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise-europe-network>

## PUBLICATIONS

### Local and Regional Authorities in Europe

The DEXIA group and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) have published the second edition of their joint study on the state of local and regional authorities in Europe. This set of 12 factsheets comprises key comparative figures on Member States' internal organisation of sub-national government, public sector finances (expenditure, public investments, public debt), Structural and Cohesion Funds, town twinning, and the proportion of women among elected representatives. DEXIA's "2007 Economic Outlook" on sub-national public finance in the EU has also been published and provides an overview of the institutional and financial situation of this tier in the 27 Member States from 2000 to 2006.

Further details at:

[http://www.ccre.org/news\\_detail\\_en.htm?ID=1240](http://www.ccre.org/news_detail_en.htm?ID=1240)

### EU Regional Policy 2007-13

A new brochure "Working for the Regions: EU Regional Policy 2007-13" is now available from the Inforegio website. The 36-page publication explains how EU regional policy works and how it supports transport, innovation, environmental and urban development in Europe's regions and cities. Cooperation between regions, evaluation of programmes, as well as audit, control and publicity requirements are other aspects covered. Figures explain how much will be spent by EU Structural Funds and on what in the 27 EU Member States in the years to come. Further details at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/presenta/pres\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/presenta/pres_en.htm)

**Irish Regions Office**  
6 Rond-Point Schuman  
B-1040 Brussels  
Fax: +32 2 2828475  
Website: [www.iro.ie](http://www.iro.ie)

Robert Collins  
E: [robert.collins@iro.ie](mailto:robert.collins@iro.ie)  
Tel: +32 2 282 8474

Ronan Gingles  
E: [ronan.gingles@iro.ie](mailto:ronan.gingles@iro.ie)  
Tel: +32 2 282 8477