

EU News Bulletin

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

Number 47 – March 2008

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



Irish Regions Office



FUNDING **1**

Interreg IVB Atlantic Area

Concerto III

Drug Prevention & Information

Programme

Daphne III – Fight against Violence

NEWS & POLICY **2**

Public-Private Partnerships

Energy-efficient housing

Next stages for Lisbon Strategy

EU Spring Summit - Climate Change Reaction

Regions stake claim for 'growth & jobs' role

Innovative Regions awards

Cross-border traffic prosecutions

Irish Chair for ECOS Commission

Public views on Cohesion Policy

EVENTS **4**

Local climate protection; sustainable energy cities and regions;

'Cities of the Future'; Regional Networking in Technology Transfer & Innovation; BMW and S&E Regional Assembly Annual Conferences.;

NETWORKS **4**

GMO-Free Regions

FUNDING

Atlantic Area

The Atlantic Area programme supports transnational cooperation projects linking Ireland with those areas of the UK, France, Spain and Portugal which border the ocean. Its first call opened on March 17 across its four priorities: entrepreneurial & innovation networks; marine and coastal environment protection; improved accessibility and internal links; and sustainable urban and regional development. A budget of €158m is available with ERDF grant support of up to 65%. The deadline for receipt of applications is May 12.

Further details from www.coop-atlantico.com or from Michael O'Brien, BMW Assembly, (094 9862970 or: mobrien@bmwassembly.ie)

CONCERTO III

CONCERTO is a major Commission energy sub-action under the Seventh Framework Programme. CONCERTO III continues the theme of a predecessor programme that supported local and regional authorities, utilities and energy service providers, energy agencies and technology providers in developing concrete strategies and actions towards sustainable energy-management systems operated on a community level within geographically-defined local zones (including North Tipperary and Dundalk). An emphasis is placed on demonstrating the environmental, economic and social benefits of integrating renewable energy sources (RES) together with energy efficiency (EE) techniques to deliver the highest possible level of self-supply of energy in a given zone. CONCERTO offers a €150m budget until 2013 with rates varying between 50% and 100% of eligible costs. The 2008 Call for Proposals will be launched with an Information Day in Brussels on 4 April. Further details from: <http://concertoplus.eu> and

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/seven_rd_framework_programme/index_en.htm

Drug Prevention

The current EU Action Plan on Drugs sets out a list of concrete actions to reduce the prevalence of drug use among the population and the resultant social harm and health damage. The Drug Prevention & Information Programme aims to contribute to the achievement of those actions by preventing and reducing drug use, dependence and drug-related harms; and by contributing to the improvement of information on drug use. A current call (JLS/DPIP/2008) offering operating grant support to NGOs or other organisations to support the activities included in the 2008 annual activity programme is underway with a March 27 deadline.

Further details from:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/drugs/doc/og_call_2008_en.pdf

Daphne III

By funding preventive measures and by providing support and protection, this programme aims to safeguard children, young people, women and groups at risk against all forms of violence. It is closely aligned with Community policies related to public health, human rights and gender equality, as well as actions aimed at protection of children's rights, and the fight against trafficking of human beings and sexual exploitation. A Call for Proposals (JLS/DAP/2007-1) providing Action Grants, intended to co-finance specific transnational projects on themes including treatment programmes, national legislation, targeted awareness-raising, studies and data collection, and policy issues is now open with an application deadline of 22 April. Annual project grants of €75,000-€200,000 (up to 80% of costs) are available.

Further details from:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/daphne3/doc/ag_call_2007_en.pdf

NEWS & POLICY

Guidelines on Public-Private Partnerships

The European Commission has published guidelines on the establishment of institutionalised Public-Private Partnerships (IPPP) - undertakings jointly held by public and private partners and usually set up to provide services to the public, in particular at the local level. The Commission's guidance is based on a ruling of the European Court of Justice, the "Stadt Halle" case, which requires transparent and competitive award procedures whenever public contracts or concessions are awarded to public-private partnerships. The guidelines clarify the EC rules that apply when an IPPP is set up. In so doing, it provides greater legal certainty not only for the public sector but also for private investors. An Interpretative Communication - C(2007)6661 - expresses the Commission view that under Community law one tendering procedure suffices when an IPPP is set up, clarifying that Community law does not require a double tendering - one for selecting the private partner to the IPPP and another for awarding public contracts or concessions to the public-private partnership - when an IPPP is established. The Communication also affirms that, as a matter of principle, an IPPP must remain within the scope of its initial object, i.e. the original contract awarded, and cannot obtain any further public contracts or concessions without another procedure in accordance with EC public procurement rules. However, it is acknowledged that IPPP are usually set up to provide services over a fairly long period and must, thus, be able to adjust to certain changes in the economic, legal or technical environment. *Access the text of the Interpretative Communication from:* http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/publicprocurement/ppp_en.htm

Energy-Efficient Housing to be funded by ERDF

The European Commission intends to adapt legislation on the Community's Structural Funds by April to allow the co-financing of housing-related energy investments within the EU15. The current Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund (1080/2006) provides that housing-related expenditure of any kind is only eligible in the 12 new member states – thwarting attempts to co-finance energy-related investments in buildings

elsewhere. Regional policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner has now announced a change in emphasis to allow all EU Member States to bring forward certain energy measures in favour of buildings so as to "increase the possibilities of investing in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy". Regulation 1828/2006 on the application of Structural Funds will now require amendment in order that housing expenditure for energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy will be reclassified as energy expenditure.

EU Spring Summit – Climate Change Reaction

The spring 2007 European Council meeting of Member State leaders established the '20-20-20' climate change objectives: a 20% cut in CO2 emissions, a 20% increase in energy efficiency and 20% renewables usage in energy production (including 10% biofuels) by 2020. This year's summit seems to have reined in that apparent enthusiasm. National leaders expressed concerns and doubts about areas including the commitment to a 10% reduction of energy consumption by public administrations; the scale of renewables uptake envisaged by the Commission; and the impact of converting farmland to biofuel energy use. Other areas of ongoing disagreement include the revision of the Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) and burden-sharing for the sectors it does not cover, auctioning of energy sector allowances, and how energy-intensive industries may fare in the face of competition from countries not subject to strict environmental standards in the absence of an international agreement. The conclusions have met with a lukewarm response in places with environmental groups expressing disappointment at a perceived lack of ambition and a failure to stand up to heavy industry pressure. In particular, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has accused leaders of reverting to an over-emphasis on the need to analyse the economic impacts of climate protection on large polluters and of laying open the possible exemption of certain industrial sectors from the ETS 'polluter pays' principle without supporting the potential for innovation, jobs and trade opportunities that measures to reverse climate change could deliver.

Further details from:

http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/n_0000004_923.asp

'Fifth Freedom' & 'Flexicurity' – the next stage of Lisbon

Following two years of solid economic growth and job creation since the Lisbon Agenda was renewed with a 'growth and jobs' focus, the EU Council's spring summit's response to increasing public concern over challenges such as climate change and social exclusion brought an agreement to place these matters towards the forefront of future approaches. A statement from the Slovenian Presidency after the meeting noted that "economic growth and high-quality jobs are a guarantee of social progress and social cohesion. The new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy ensures a better balance between concern for citizens and the environment on the one hand and efforts for a competitive, knowledge-based market economy on the other. The new emphases are, in essence, a heightened concern for citizens and social issues, pro-active responses to climate change, and a more modern view of innovation and creativity". Member states have agreed upon the following priorities:

- national action plans to reduce the number of early school leavers;
- future industry skills requirement assessment (accounting for technological change and ageing population impacts) - notably in the key business opportunity areas of climate and energy-efficient technologies;
- the removal of barriers to the free movement of knowledge (now the EU's "fifth freedom"), thus advancing long-established RTDI goals by boosting cross-border mobility of researchers, students, scientists and university teachers;
- the "flexicurity" labour market principle which combines greater skills training availability and higher benefits for the unemployed with easier hiring and firing rules for employers to be implemented at national level;
- reducing administrative burdens on businesses including red tape hindering them from operating across the entire EU Single Market through approval of the 'Small Business Act' (see last month's Bulletin) including financing and support measures aimed specifically at helping SMEs access new markets and calls for the earliest possible implementation of the Services Directive.

Further details from:

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0314E_C_Lizbona.html

Regions stake claim for 'jobs and growth' role

Europe's cities and regions are more significant players than other 'stakeholders' and, as such, expect to be "fully involved in decision making, implementation and follow up" of the Lisbon Strategy. So explained Luc Van den Brande, the new president of the Committee of the Regions in presenting a Resolution (report) entitled 'The Strategy for Growth and Jobs – Handling the "Lisbon paradox"' to the EU spring Council on 14 March. The report was drawn up by the CoR's Lisbon Monitoring Platform, in which 104 EU cities and regions participated and demonstrates that a majority are dissatisfied with their engagement to date and calls for a revisiting of approaches whereby they could play a more important role and be more fully involved at every stage in delivering the strategy's objectives. The report underlines the importance of inter-regional cooperation into the next Structural Funds programming period and calls on the states to put in place the new regional cooperation instrument adopted with the Structural Fund regulations and to stop considering cooperation as a form of 'regional external relations'. This was the first time that a CoR President has been received by the President of the Council during a summit and came in response to previous requests that the CoR should analyse the revised Lisbon Strategy's effects and its outlook beyond 2008. As such, Mr. Van den Brande said that the CoR is "prepared to make its contribution" and to report regularly to the Council. *Access the report at:* <http://cor.ip.lu/cor/cms/ui/ViewDocument.aspx?contentid=f6c35187-e754-4f22-9ce8-e8daee1a411>

Innovative Regions Awards

RegioStars is the awards system for the most innovative ERDF or Cohesion Fund co-financed project relating to economic modernization involving the EU's regions. Tied in with the Regions for Economic Change initiative it sets out to identify especially good practices in regional development and to highlight original approaches and methodologies which could be more widely trialled and implemented in other regions. A ceremony in Brussels in February profiled a shortlist of 26 finalists (from 71 projects nominated) before the prizes for 2008 across 3 categories went to Alsace ('energy efficiency and renewable energies'); Øresund and Wales (both 'support clusters and business networks'); and West Midlands and

Yorkshire & Humber (both 'technology transfer from research institutes to SMEs'). The search for the 2009 winners is now underway with nominations being sought for specified activities in the fields of 'Research, Technological Development and Innovation'; and 'adaptation to or mitigation of climate change'. Nominees may be part of a succession of projects that are sequentially funded by one of the EU financial instruments or may have been demonstrably inspired by a good practice in a region of another Member State. *Further details from:* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/ecochange/regiostars_en.cfm?nmenu=4

Cross-border traffic prosecutions on cards?

The days of non-resident drivers who break traffic laws beyond their own borders escaping punishment could well be numbered after the European Commission adopted a proposal for a directive that should establish a system of EU-wide prosecution of speeding, drunk driving, failure to use seatbelts and running the red light offences (19 March). As much as 5% of all traffic offences across the EU are estimated to fall into this category – thereby going un sanctioned as national police systems are currently not empowered to pursue the matter in another jurisdiction. The draft directive seeks to create an EU-wide electronic data exchange network (to join-up national databases) and the necessary legal instruments to identify and prosecute perpetrators. This is part of the Commission's continuing efforts to cut the 43,000 killed annually on the EU's roads. "Today, drivers too often think they can escape fines when they are abroad. This proposal should put a stop to this," said EU Transport Commissioner Jacques Barrot. Provided technical issues on the mutual recognition of financial penalties can be overcome, the Commission hopes to find an agreement by next spring, and Member States should then have two years to contribute to the establishment of the data exchange system. *Further details from* <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/08/168&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&quiLanguage=en>

Irish Chair for ECOS Commission

Cllr Connie Hanniffy has been elected as chair of the Commission for Economic and Social (ECOS) Policy at

the Committee of the Regions. A member of Offaly County Council, the Midland Regional Authority and the Border Midland and Western Regional Assembly, Mrs Hanniffy will serve for the next two years in the post. The new chair said she was honoured to take up the appointment "at a time when we will be considering a number of important issues which will have significance for the competitiveness of all our regions". Among her priorities are developing ever more proactive dialogue with the European Commission and Parliament, as well as improved follow-up of CoR opinions throughout the EU law-making process to highlight local and regional authorities' valuable contribution to decision-making. As part of her tenure, in September in Athlone, Cllr. Hanniffy will host a meeting of ECOS along with a conference which will focus on the proposed Small Business Act for Europe and its implications for SMEs. *Further details from the IRO:*

Cohesion policy popular but 'could do more'

The Irish remain among the most positive nationalities when it comes to attitudes to and recognition of EU Regional Policy as a tool of solidarity, but the European public generally would like it to be used more ambitiously. These are the findings of the latest Eurobarometer survey which reveal that 85.7% of 27,000 citizens surveyed in January support the policy's aim of narrowing the gap between the richest and most disadvantaged regions but, less altruistically, 58.1% wish to see it continue to help all regions. An impressive 83.4% of those polled consider that Cohesion Policy should expand in the future to take on challenges such as climate change, globalisation and our ageing population. In terms of awareness of local impacts, recognition of the policy or its hundreds of thousands of individual projects is unsurprisingly highest in those countries which have benefited most with Ireland (64%) registering among the highest scores. By contrast, only around one in three surveyed in the Netherlands or newcomer Bulgaria were directly aware: interestingly, as carried in the January edition of the Bulletin, EU countries will soon be required to publish comprehensive lists of the projects that receive Regional Policy funding to keep their national public up to date. The survey was part of a wider recent public consultation consulted by DG REGIO on the future of regional policy. *Further details from:* http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_234_en.pdf

EVENTS

Local climate protection 1-4 April, Aachen and Heerlen

Local politicians and experts from across Europe will meet at the International Annual Conference of the Climate Alliance to address the cross-border significance of the local level in combating climate change. The occasion will also demand stronger political and financial support at European and national level to enable local authorities to establish climate protection goals and implement associated strategies. Workshops dealing with the applied implementation of climate protection measures will be offered on the following topics: climate protection and local economy; adaptation to climate change; retrofitting of existing buildings; energy efficient public procurement; energy alternatives in transport; and energy bridges between North and South. *Further details from:*

<http://www.climatealliance.org/aktuell/mv2008-uebersicht.htm>

Sustainable Energy Cities 9-11 April, Cork,

Following on from the launch of the 'Covenant of Mayors' pledge (see last month's Bulletin) by local and regional authorities to exceed stated EU objectives in the fields of greenhouse gas emissions, increased energy efficiency and use of renewables through the implementation of Sustainable Energy Action Plans, one of the 95 signatories, Cork County Council, will host the 13th Energie-Cités Rendezvous entitled 'Towards Europe's sustainable energy future...Local authorities are ready to act!'. This event will provide an open discussion on local implications of European energy strategies with Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Eamon Ryan and European Commission DG Energy and Transport representatives as well as detailed profiles of ongoing local energy initiatives throughout the network. A forum to develop Intelligent Energy Europe and INTERREG projects will also be arranged along with a site visit to the 'Baile Glas' Sustainable housing estate. *Further details from:*

<http://www.energie-cites.eu/conference>

'Cities of the Future' Forum 10 April, Brussels

Urban policy makers and representatives of regions and cities and the business sector may be interested in a conference highlighting the economic, social and environmental challenges facing European cities and towns on energy, mobility, transport and housing issues and the necessity for sustainable urban development. The event is organised by the Committee of the Regions in cooperation with the European Commission DGs for Energy & Transport and for Enterprise & Industry along with Eurocities, the network of major European cities. It will include a political debate with Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs addressing the issues of sustainable mobility and energy efficiency for the city of tomorrow as well as an afternoon workshop to discuss the role of enterprises in contributing to sustainable urban solutions to make cities more attractive. An exhibition on best practice examples of energy efficiency and sustainable mobility in European cities will also take place.

Further details from:

<http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/PresentationTemplate.aspx?view=detail&id=42e982bf-7dff-4a55-860a-ad8cfe126748>

Regional Networking and International Partnerships in Technology Transfer & Innovation 23-25 April, Valencia

The TTI conference is the annual gathering of Europe's largest and longest-standing association of technology transfer and innovation support practitioners who come together to share experience, exchange ideas and to build and strengthen their profession. This year's event is on the theme "From Regional Networking to International Partnerships in Technology Transfer and Innovation Support". Session themes include strategies and tactics of networking and creating partnerships on different geographical levels; open innovation; and public-private partnerships for improved technology transfer. The latter topic focuses exclusively on the outcomes of an EU-funded project called STAIRS, which aims to implement new strategies for improved trans-regional technology transfer involving public and private sector players.

Register at:

http://www.tii.org/2008AC_Valencia

Quality of Life: The Key to Successful Regions (BMW Regional Assembly Annual Conference)

1 May, Portlaoise,

Contact: Pauline Grennan,

Tel: 094 9862970,

email pgrennan@bmwassembly.ie

EU Territorial Co-operation Programmes (Interreg) 2007- 2013 - what's in it for regional and local bodies in Ireland? (Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly Annual Conference)

16 May, Druids Glen

Contact: Karen Coughlan,

Tel: 051 860700,

Email: kcoughlan@seregassembly.ie

NETWORKS

European GMO-free Network

2003 European Commission recommendations on Guidelines for the development of national strategies and best practice to ensure the coexistence of GMO crops and conventional/organic farming prompted 43 regions to establish the GMO-free network to underline regional variations in matters such as farm and field sizes, production systems, and cropping patterns. The network's 6th conference takes place in Bilbao on 24-25 April and will look at regulation, the implementation of GM-free areas at regional scale, common labelling, the CAP Health Check, and political strategies for the network.

Further details from:

<http://www.gmofree-euregions.net/>

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

Ronan Gingles
E: ronan.gingles@iro.ie
Tel: +32 2 282 8477

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.
Irish Regions Office 2008.