

EU News Bulletin

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

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Irish Regions Office



INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION

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ICT PSP - Energy Efficiency & Sustainability in Urban Areas

Funding for ICT use in energy efficiency and sustainability in urban areas and public buildings and spaces will be available through a call to be launched on 29 April (until 9 September) under the ICT Policy Support Programme within the context of the Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme (CIP). The call covers Objectives 2.1 (pilot actions on "ICT for energy efficiency in public buildings and spaces, including lighting") and 2.3 (networks for "consensus building and experience sharing in ICT for energy efficiency and sustainability in urban areas") relating to smart distributed power generation or sustainable urban development and management. *Further information from http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/sustainable-growth/infoday20080423-24_en.html*

Thematic twinning networking

Local Authorities involved in EU twinning networks (multilateral cooperation based on a chain of established bilateral links of at least 5 towns/cities/counties) may apply for funding towards thematic workshops, conferences, citizens' meetings, and communication tools to be undertaken during the coming 2-year period. Proposed activities should foster public debate on the priority themes of the *Europe for Citizens* Programme (e.g. developing a European identity based on common values; fostering ownership of the EU among citizens; enhancing tolerance, mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue....) and involve experts and community members active in the subject area. Grants of between €30,000 and €150,000 are available with a 1st June deadline. *More details are available from the updated Programme Guide at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.htm.*

Under a separate measure, less ambitious 1-2 day conferences to discuss issues of common concern involving 3 or more twinning authorities may also be funded (including flat daily rates for participants). The annual deadline for this is 1st December. *Imogen Sudbery of the IPA is Europe for Citizens National Contact Point. Contact her via europedorcitizens@ipa.ie or 0872547088.*

2008-2009 LIFE+ timetable

The following provisional calendar has been announced for the roll-out of *Life+*:

- 30 June: Submission of national annual priorities to the Commission
- 15 July: Publication of the call
- July-November: Workshops for potential applicants
- 21 November: Deadline to send proposals to Member State authorities

Thereafter, 2009 will involve Member States' comments to the Commission; eligibility, evaluation and revision of submissions; and the signing of grant agreements before the first batch of projects get underway in January 2010. Existing application forms and guidelines may be used as a template to prepare proposals for now. *Subscribe to the monthly LIFEnews at <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/subscribe/newsletter/index.html> to be alerted directly when the 2008 application package is published.*

CONCERTO III

As featured last month, the *CONCERTO III* initiative will open a call at the end of April (valid until Autumn). The specific aim has been clarified to fund local sustainability strategies based on the integration of demand-side energy efficiency (eco-buildings) and the supply side use of renewables that have the support of the local authority and market actors. Another call is likely in June. Page 5 carries a full profile of the SERVE project previously approved under CONCERTO. See <http://www.concertoplus.eu/>

NEWS & POLICY

Better local/regional input to future National Programmes

Three year National Reform Programmes (NRP) setting out the measures to be taken to improve competitive economic performance were formulated in 2005 as part of the relaunch of the Lisbon Agenda and its refocusing on growth and jobs. Programmes were based upon an agreed set of guidelines, covering macro-economic, micro-economic and employment policies. Ireland's Lisbon programme has since put in place a range of measures to support R&D, to address infrastructure deficits and to provide training and lifelong learning opportunities across the economy.

With the forthcoming second generation of NRPs in mind, the European Council at its recent summit has pointedly acknowledged that "increased ownership of the growth and jobs agenda at all levels of government will lead to more coherent and effective policymaking". This recognition of the (potential) role of the local and regional level in delivering growth and a buoyant jobs market "invites the Commission and Member States to strengthen the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the Lisbon process" - setting out a vision whereby sub-national input and perspectives as well as those of economic and social actors should be more fully incorporated.

This is a further emphasis upon the importance of *territorial cohesion* alongside its economic and social counterparts and is of importance to Ireland as the negotiation of the original NRP took place almost entirely within the social partnership process and has been explicitly tied in with ensuring the full implementation of the Towards 2016 agreement. The Council *also* "welcomes the progress made in targeting cohesion funds in support of national reform programmes" and calls on Member States "to ensure that expenditure reflects the earmarking commitments made". *Further details from www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms/Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/99410.pdf*

Vocational Training Mobility

Students in higher education have been able to avail of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to underpin cross-border mobility exchanges since 1989. Now learners in manual or practical activities are set to get their

own EU-wide system to recognise national vocational education and training (VET) qualifications after the Commission proposed plans on 10 April to harmonise them into a comprehensive system. The proposed new European Credit system for Vocational Education and Learning (ECVET) will look to improve trainee mobility across Europe by ensuring that the very fragmented framework of national education systems are much better integrated and that training completed in one Member State is recognised in another. This should give an estimated 17 million trainees more access to and choice of lifelong learning opportunities. The system "will make it much easier for individual trainees to complete their training courses in different training establishments and in different countries thereby boosting mobility of learners throughout Europe" explained Education Commissioner Ján Figel. If ultimately adopted, Member States would implement the initiative on a voluntary basis.

For more information on ECVET visit http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/ecvet/index_en.html

Ending Street Homelessness

A lack of emergency accommodation and outreach services catering for the needs of the homeless costs lives every Winter across Europe and can only be addressed effectively as part of a wider holistic strategy. That's the key message of a European Parliament written declaration initially put forward by Mary Lou McDonald among others and adopted on April 10 which calls on the Council to agree on an EU-wide commitment to end street homelessness by 2015; on the Commission to develop a European framework definition of homelessness, gather comparable and reliable statistical data, and provide annual updates on action taken and progress made in EU Member States towards this goal; and on Member States to devise 'winter emergency plans' as part of a wider homelessness strategy. Homelessness was identified as a priority by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council in 2005, and is a priority under the 'active inclusion' strand of the EU social protection and inclusion strategy.

Further information from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/plenary/writtenDecl/wdFastAdopted.do?language=EN>

i2010: Rural Europe Offline

A report released on 18 April on the results so far for *i2010*, the EU's digital strategy for growth and jobs, shows that of the more than 250 million EU citizens regularly using the internet, 80% have access to some form of broadband connection. However, the key focus of the report is that this accessibility is far from evenly spread.

On the issue of universal broadband service provision, market liberalisation in telecommunications has led to a concentration on providing service infrastructure to urban areas – leaving rural, remote, aging and poor areas which are seen to entail increased investment costs and unattractive rates of poor returns with substandard or no service. This is why EU rules on state aid permit public financing or partnerships to deliver broadband or other new technologies to such areas.

With 64% DSL coverage in rural areas (2006), Ireland trails the EU average (72%) but its urban-rural gap is not as pronounced as Greece, Slovakia, Latvia, Italy, Poland, Lithuania or Germany. All told, *i2010* contains a mixed bag of information society development reviews for Ireland:

- National broadband coverage stands at 86% (2006) – slightly below EU average (89%).
- At 17.4% of the population (2007), the gap is rapidly being closed on EU average broadband penetration (20%).
- Broadband subscriptions doubled from 2006 to 2007 to account for 54% of the market, but the older narrowband technology remains very widespread (there are an above average number of households with an internet connection) – thus, on the more bandwidth consuming services and applications, Ireland is placed among the lowest ranking countries.
- Public (32%) and (particularly) business (89%) use of e-government services is impressive despite more needing to be done to make such services fully available online and more sophisticated.
- Medium and high Internet skill levels in the general population are not high;
- While ICT skill levels are close to the average for the workforce there are concerns as to the falling percentage of employees having specialist skills.
- The economy is among the leading performers in e-commerce and in

use of certain related applications such as e-invoices.

- There are very high levels of ICT use in facilitating coordination and greater integration between agencies (notably the Revenue Commissioners and the Companies Registration Office) and in making it easier for business to be set up and to meet associated compliance procedures.

The Commission's i2010 report is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/i2010>

'European Maritime Day'

May 20th 2008 has been designated 'European Maritime Day' – the inaugural annual celebration of the importance of the sea and oceans and the series of interrelationships that bind together all maritime and marine-related issues and activities in Europe. This overall recognition of the various maritime sectors, the key role of the marine environment and of Europe's coastal regions follows upon the 2007 publication of the Green Paper 'Towards a Future Maritime Policy for the Union: A European vision for the oceans and seas' and is very much in line with the joined-up and cross-cutting approach of the Integrated European Maritime Policy currently being developed.

To tie in with this first day and to raise public awareness and increase visibility of the importance of the oceans and of maritime identity, the Commission is encouraging coastal regions and cities, ports, and other maritime associations and stakeholders to organise and promote local and transnational events and festivities such as environmental actions or open harbour days. It is hoped that the celebrations will grow in scale in the years to come. You can find out more about EU Maritime Policy and the role of regions from http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/panorama/pdf/maq23/maq23_en.pdf

Better Air Quality

The Environment Council of Ministers endorsed a new directive on 14 April to limit the amount of fine particle emissions in the air that can cause a range of health problems. The tiny airborne pollutants, dust and atmospheric microparticles in question are emitted from a wide range of sources, including transport, industrial facilities residential fireplaces and agriculture. They can have a significant negative impact on human health as they are small enough to pass

unfiltered through the nose and mouth, penetrating deep into human lungs and bloodstreams where they can cause potentially fatal respiratory and/or pulmonary diseases including asthma, emphysema and bronchitis which collectively lead to the premature death of some 350,000 EU citizens annually.

According to Commission studies, an average European lives eight months less as a result of fine particle matter in the air: this rises to 3 years less in more polluted areas. The new Air Quality Directive simplifies current European legislation on ambient air quality by merging five separate texts into a single legal act. As of 2010, the new rules require the 27 Member States to reduce such urban air pollution by 20% within 10 years. This figure is a target value to be attained by January 2010, but will become a binding ceiling from 2015.

This is part of a series of forthcoming legislative proposals to improve air quality. These include further reduction of the Member States' permitted national emissions of key pollutants; reduction of emissions associated with refuelling of petrol cars at service stations; addressing the sulphur content of fuels; improving the eco-design and reducing the emissions of domestic boilers and water heaters; and reducing the solvent content of paints, varnishes and vehicle refinishing products. *Further details from* <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st07/st07690-ad01.en08.pdf>

Linguistic diversity strategy

"Multilingualism is a cross-cutting policy, involving people at every level of society", according to its dedicated Commissioner Leonard Orban. A new European strategy to promote multilingualism will focus on its role in social integration, its importance in legal and educational systems and the support which new technologies can bring to it. This will be based on the results of a consultation carried out in late 2007 which prioritised:

- early age learning – preferably in the country of the new language;
- regional languages and the linguistic diversity of the EU as an asset to be safeguarded;
- media promotion of an intercultural society model based on tolerance rather than confrontation;
- the cost value of the EU working in 23 official languages.

The policy document is to be adopted by the Commission in September. *Visit the Europa Language Portal at* <http://europa.eu/languages/en/home> :

Recycling and Incineration 'Recovery'

EU recycling rules and targets came under intense scrutiny in early April as the Environment Committee of the European Parliament sought to make them more efficient and less fragmented than is currently the case with the 12 separate directives (WEEE, packaging waste, used vehicles, etc.) in place. This came during a second reading of the highly contentious Waste Framework Directive revision arising from the Thematic Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling (2005).

MEPs ultimately held firm that the five-stage waste handling hierarchy (in the preferred order of prevention; re-use; recycling or composting; recovery of energy by incineration; and landfill disposal) should be strictly adhered to, with any departures justified on the basis of life-cycle 'thinking'. This is meant to find expression in a 2020 target for 50% of domestic waste and 70% of industrial waste to be recycled in tandem with improved efforts at national level to stabilise waste production by 2012 at the latest.

The status of incinerators was especially debated with a narrow acceptance of a compromise prevailing whereby they could be classified as 'recovery' operations when, at least partly, burning waste for energy – thereby being eligible for financial support under state aid rules – but only provided they are subjected to EU energy efficiency criteria.

For further details on the Thematic Strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste visit:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/strategy.htm>

New Irish Member of CoR

The Irish Government has nominated Cllr. John Lahart, South Dublin County Council, to be a member of the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR). Cllr. Lahart is a Fianna Fail councillor for the Terenure-Rathfarnham ward since 1999 and replaces Ms. Maria Corrigan on the CoR who is now a member of Seanad Éireann. Cllr. Lahart's nomination will soon be formally approved by the Council of Ministers and he will after take part in CoR activities as a member of the COTER and CONST Commissions.

Further information from the IRO.

EVENTS

1-3 May, Liverpool Intercultural Cities

Taking place in this year's European Capital of Culture, the Intercultural Cities Conference will take a fresh look at migration, diversity and urban life. The conference aims to engage and inspire everyone interested in the intercultural city, particularly those responsible for planning and regeneration, local economy, community cohesion, education and cultural services to show how new thinking is needed. Political leaders, policy makers and practitioners from major cities including London, Madrid, Berlin, Istanbul, Marseille, Manchester and Liverpool will share their experiences and provide examples of how being intercultural can bring social, cultural and economic advantages. For more information visit <http://inter.culture.info/icc>

7 May, Brussels ICT-based Regional Innovation

ERIS@, the European Regional Information Society Association, is hosting an information day to profile its services and benefits to regions as a proven means of low-cost, low-risk exchange and collaboration and a repository for expertise and best practice in exploiting ICTs beyond their technological function as pervasive tools for profound regional economic and social development. The event will also explore funding and synergy opportunities under the CIP, FP7 and the Structural Funds with representatives from the relevant Commission DGs.

Find out more by registering at www.ianis.net/resources/Pages/displayEvent.aspx?ItemID=1892

8-9 May, Carrick-on-Shannon LIFE 'Restoring Raised Bogs'

A two-day international conference will mark the end and publicise the results of the LIFE-Nature project "Restoring Raised Bog in Ireland". The project, managed by Coillte, focused on the restoration of 14 raised bog sites within

the EU Natura 2000 network of protected sites and is the largest raised bog restoration project ever undertaken in Ireland. Day 1 will consist of presentations by the project team and other experts in the field. Day 2 will be spent visiting project sites in the vicinity of Carrick-on-Shannon. Further information and registration details from <http://www.raisedbogrestoration.ie/>

13 May, Waterford Female Entrepreneurship

As part of the INTERREG IIIA funded project Female Entrepreneurship in Ireland and Wales (FEIW), the Centre for Entrepreneurship at Waterford Institute of Technology and its partners at Aberystwyth University are jointly hosting a conference on the development of enterprise policy for women entrepreneurs entitled 'The Shape of Tomorrow – The dawning of a new enterprise policy for women'. The conference will examine enterprise policy in relation to its role of providing an environment that increases the levels of entrepreneurial activity among women – something with the potential to deliver greater wealth and prosperity in the economies of Ireland and Wales. Further details from www.whysofeiw.com

20-21 May, Dublin Castle, Satellite Information & Regional Growth

This non-technical workshop provides an opportunity for public bodies and companies to learn from successful examples of how regions and cities have already benefited from transforming satellite data into ready-to-use operational information for purposes including traffic and pollution management or infrastructure development.. The event, which will also look at influencing future EU policy and the development of industry services, is jointly organised by Eurisy, an NGO promoting the strategic importance of space for sustainable economic, environmental and social development policies, and the Assembly of European Regions (AER) with the support of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Enterprise Ireland. Further details from www.eurisy.org

The PASCAL research and policy development alliance aims to develop, and explain emerging ideas about place management, social capital and learning regions. PENR3L (PASCAL European Network of Regions of Lifelong Learning) is a programme designed to establish a dynamic working network of expertise centres and forward-looking local and regional authorities that will work together to accelerate the growth of learning cities and regions, ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The two initiatives are combining forces to showcase their findings with the 'Learning Regions' role in Regional Development and Re-generation' conference. The key focus will be on the impact learning regions (including those which cross administrative and geographical boundaries and have both urban and rural dimensions) have in terms of regional regeneration and development outcomes that have flowed from the efforts to develop them. Programme and registration details from: www.ul.ie/dllo/conference/

PUBLICATIONS

South-East Region Bioenergy Implementation Plan

The South-East Regional Authority has developed a Regional Bio-Energy Implementation Plan setting out a roadmap towards becoming Ireland's leading bioenergy region. This is the first such plan from an Irish region and was undertaken in partnership with the local authorities, local energy agencies, the Environmental Protection Agency, Teagasc and Sustainable Energy Ireland.

Download the plan from:
<http://www.sera.ie/Draft%20Bioenergy%20Plan%20-%20Public%20Consultation.htm>

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FEATURED PROJECT

SERVE

...Sustainable Energy for the Rural Village Environment

North Tipperary is set to become a beacon of sustainable energy use in Europe following the awarding late last year of €4.1 million in EU grant-aid to make existing homes in the area more energy efficient, and to develop the renewable energy district heating system at Ireland's first eco-village, in Cloughjordan.

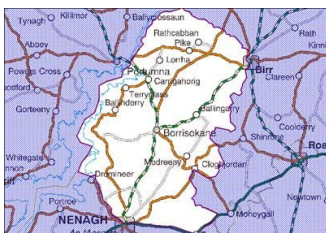
The SERVE energy project is being spearheaded by a consortium of partners including North Tipperary County Council, the Cloughjordan eco-village, Irish renewable energy equipment suppliers and international experts, and is being led by Tipperary Institute.

Community-level solutions

The project is being funded under the Seventh Framework energy sub-programme CONCERTO which aims to develop concrete community-level strategies and actions towards sustainable energy management systems integrating renewable energy sources (RES) together with energy efficiency (EE) techniques to deliver the highest possible level of local energy self sufficiency.

Grant support

It started in November 2007 and will provide grant support over a three year period. Residents of Toomevara, Borrisokane, Terryglass, Dromineer and Ballingarry, as well as other rural dwellers in the area, will be able to apply to North Tipperary County Council for subsidies for energy efficient upgrades including roof and wall insulation, energy-efficient windows and state-of-the-art heating controls.



Renewables

As well as reducing the amount of energy being used in the locality, this initiative aims to promote renewable

energy systems, in particular the pioneering district heating system at the Cloughjordan eco-village. This will be powered by state-of-the-art wood-chip boilers and solar panels. Each home in the eco-village will be metered to measure energy use, and the whole process will be closely monitored, so that other communities can learn from the experience.

The project also aims to show-case the installation of a small number of micro-wind turbines at particular locations in the region, along with researching how the area's future electricity needs can be met from renewables.



Integrating the eco-village into the wider community

"The concept evolved out of discussions with eco-village members about how their project could be integrated into the wider community, and how the aims of their project could be promoted beyond their membership," said Seamus Hoyne, project co-ordinator and lecturer in the rural development department in Tipperary Institute.

"This led to a proposal to CONCERTO which involves not only support for the development of the eco-village but also, and equally importantly, to improve the energy efficiency of existing towns and villages in the region," he said.

Already, feed-back from local communities about the grant support is very positive, with community leaders confident many people will avail of the opportunity to make their homes more energy-efficient, and thus save on bills.

"We are delighted that an idea which was spawned by the creation of our eco-village is leading to immediate practical benefits for the people of North Tipperary," said Rónán Kennedy, chairperson of the eco-village development company, Sustainable Projects Ireland Ltd.

"The grant-aiding of our wood and solar-fuelled district heating system is also very welcome," said Mr Kennedy. "It is an important part of our project, both for individual members who will be able to avail of its renewable energy, and in terms of our village's educational role in demonstrating sustainable living."

Construction work at the eco-village, where house sites are still available, started in early 2007.

Showcasing technologies

The project will importantly showcase technologies which are being supplied by Renewable Energy Management Systems Ltd and Surface Power Ltd, both Irish energy companies. Expertise is also being provided by the Danish Energy Consulting Network; CREA, an international socio-economic research company based in Croatia; Econect, a UK company specialising in local renewable energy systems; and the CIRCA Group, experts in the administration and management of EU Projects.

Council role

North Tipperary County Council has a lead part to play in the project as it will administer the grants support programme for existing buildings. "We are delighted to be involved in this project as North Tipperary County Council has taken an active role in the promotion and development of sustainable energy," said Terry O'Niadh, County Manager. "This project is an additional practical example of how we can influence change in our community for the better. This links with our existing work on sustainable energy under the Regional Planning Guidelines and our support of the Tipperary Energy Agency since 1998."

Achievements to date

To date the project has seen the district heating network being installed within the eco-village site and planning applied for the construction of the boiler house and solar panel array. North Tipperary County Council expects to be in a position to launch the grants support programme in May 2008. The first houses will start to be constructed in the Eco-village in the coming months. In addition, a baseline energy survey and socio-economic analysis will also begin in the summer of 2008.

The impact of the project will be monitored and assessed for a further two years after its conclusion.

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