

EU News Bulletin

The latest EU funding opportunities, news and events for local & regional government

Number 51 – July 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

Recent & Upcoming Calls

Social Services – local authority observatory networks

Local and regional authorities or associations thereof are invited to involve themselves in the development of a Network of Observatories on 'active inclusion' (adequate income support plus access to inclusive labour markets and quality social services) under PROGRESS, the Community programme for employment and social solidarity.
Deadline: 18 Aug.

Further details:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/calls/2008/vp_2008_011/guidelines_en.pdf

Interreg Northern Periphery

The Third Call for proposals will be launched on 15 August. Applications are invited under two priorities:

- Promoting innovation and competitiveness in remote and peripheral areas; and
- Sustainable development of natural and community resources.

Deadline: 26 Sept

Further details:

www.northernperiphery.net

Culture 2007-2013

This call aims to support transnational cultural projects, organisations, activities and research across 5 areas:

- Multi-annual links (deadline: 1 Oct.)

- 2 Year Cooperation projects (1 Oct.)
- Literary translation (1 Feb. 2009)
- Cooperation with third countries (cultural exchanges) (1 May 2009)
- Support for cultural organisations active at European (1 Nov.)

A budget of €43-58 million is set aside.

Further details:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/index_en.htm

Spatial Planning (ESPON 2013)

The second round of European Spatial Planning Observatory Network calls for proposals opens on 20 August for:

- Applied Research on Climate Change and Territorial Effects on Regions and Local Economies (€1 million);
- Targeted Analysis (€1.85 million) based on User Demand on:
 - o Agglomeration Economies;
 - o Development of the Islands;
 - o Cross-Border Polycentric Metropolitan Regions;
 - o Success for Convergence Regions' Economies;
 - o Potential of Rural Regions;
 - o Spatial Scenarios: New Tools for Local/Regional Territories;
 - o Transnational Cooperation;
 - o Territorial Diversity.
- Scientific Platform and Tools on Territorial Indicators and Indices (€100,000).

Information day: 9 Sept. (Brussels).

Deadline: 15 Oct.

Further details: www.espon.eu

Sustainable Energy Europe

The SEE award campaign initiative from the European Commission DG Transport & Energy aims to promote, showcase and reward outstanding and innovative sustainable energy projects and programmes.

Deadline: 31 October.

Further details:

http://www.sustenergy.org/tpl/page.cfm?pageName=award_competition

Life +

The 2008 call for proposals has been published for the 3 components of Life+:

- Nature and Biodiversity

- Environment Policy & Governance
 - Information and Communication
- Financed actions may include best-practice, demonstration projects, and awareness-raising campaigns. A total amount of €207.5 million is available.
Deadline: 21 Nov.

Further details:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplus/call/index.htm>

Imminent Deadlines

- **Road safety:** 18 Aug.
- **E-Participation:** 29 Aug
- **ICT for energy efficiency & sustainability in urban areas;**
- **ICT for user-friendly administrations, public services & inclusion:** 9 Sept.
- **Eco-innovation in firms:** 11 Sept.
- **FP7 Capacities – ICT-based e-Infrastructures:** 11 Sept.
- **Interreg Ireland-Wales:** 19 Sept
- **Europa Nostra:** 1 Oct.
- **ConcertoPlus:** 8 Oct.

See previous issues of the Bulletin.

NETWORKS

Sustainable and Competitive Tourism Regions

Tuscany, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and Catalonia plus a further 12 regions and 21 other organisations have established an interregional network to develop a platform for the coordination of regional development and research programmes in the field of sustainable tourism. The network welcomes new membership and will launch on 30-31 October with the creation of 5 working groups focused on:

- social and environmental responsibility
- quality of life of residents
- overcoming seasonal concentration
- protection of heritage and identity
- transport and mobility

It is envisaged that a bid will emerge for the September call of INTERREG IVC.

Contact the IRO for the network strategy document.

NEWS & POLICY

Urban Congestion & Road Charges

As the European Commission prepares its forthcoming Action Plan on Urban Mobility, MEPs have called upon the EU to adopt guidelines for the creation of 'green zones' and the introduction of road charging schemes regulating access to city centres. A European Parliament resolution entitled 'Towards a new culture of urban mobility', adopted on 9 July in response to the 2007 Green Paper of the same name, recommends that the Commission should develop an overall strategy on urban mobility that will result in "more rational use of private cars" and harmonised standards to alleviate traffic congestion. The resolution insists that local authorities must have the responsibility to decide on whether or not such schemes should be established in their towns and cities and should be facilitated in doing so by access to best practice in mobility management.

In advance of the forthcoming review of the EU budget, MEPs have also recommended that the EU financing of projects under the Structural Funds needs to be more closely linked to sustainable transport and environmental protection obligations including the mandatory adoption of sustainable urban mobility management programmes for cities of a certain size.

Further details:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/file.js?id=5597882>

Small Business Act: approved and set for Athlone

The Commission unveiled its much-anticipated Small Business Act (SBA) on 25 June as a key piece of legislation intended to unlock the potential of 23 million European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The SBA contains almost one hundred initiatives on cutting red tape for entrepreneurs, increasing SME investment prospects, facilitating access to public finance and improving the perception of entrepreneurship and risk-taking.

More than half of these initiatives are to be within the competence of Member States and despite indicating broad support for the Act, EU ministers meeting as the informal Competitiveness Council at Versailles on 17 July have yet to clarify how and when these are to be implemented.

On a related matter Athlone will host a 2-day conference with a strong SBA

focus entitled 'Supporting our SMEs – overcoming barriers to their development' on 29-30 September. Organised by the EU Committee of the Regions (through Cllr. Constance Hanniffy, President of the Committee's Commission for Economic and Social Policy) in conjunction with the Midland Regional Authority and BMW Regional Assembly, the conference will be opened by an Taoiseach Brian Cowen TD and will include contributions from Hervé Novelli, French Secretary of State for Trade, Crafts and SMEs, Tourism and Services, (on behalf of the EU Council Presidency); Frank Ryan, CEO of Enterprise Ireland; Maive Rute, Deputy SME Envoy with the European Commission DG for Enterprise & Industry; Philippe Vanrie, CEO of EBN - the European BIC Network; and Patricia Callan, Director of the Small Firms Association, among others.

To register for the conference contact: pgrennan@bmwassembly.ie

Making SME funding opportunities understood

The European Commission has launched a new website and announced a series of national events designed to spread awareness of and ease access to EU financial instruments in support of the activities of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The Enterprise Finance Index (EFI) website aims to provide data about access to finance to SMEs in a clear and user-friendly manner. This includes but is not restricted to the EU's main funding mechanisms: the Competitiveness & Innovation Framework Programme (offering €1.1 billion specifically towards SME growth); the Seventh Research and Development Framework Programme (FP7); and the Structural Funds.

The *EU Finance Days for SMEs* roadshow will reach each Member State's capital over the next 18 months as an exercise in reaching out to SMEs and multipliers such as incubators and financial intermediaries to explain how they can avail of the money earmarked for them through these financial instruments. Issues such as being investment-ready; the concerns and goals of investors; and building an EU-wide venture capital market to ensure that investments are not limited by borders will also be addressed.

Enterprise Finance Index:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/financing/enterprise_finance_index/index_en.htm

'EU Finance Days for SMEs': www.sme-finance-day.eu/

Interreg NWE approvals

Several Irish organisations secured a collective €2.1 million in ERDF funding after the 2nd call of the Interreg IVB North West Europe programme approved a further 12 transnational cooperation projects. South Kerry Development Partnership will act as lead partners on COLLABOR8 (identity-based economic development); Dublin Transportation Office - with sub-partners DIT, Dublin City Council and An Taisce - are to be involved in BAPTS (public transport systems); while the capital's local authority have scored a further dual success as full partners to ICMA (start-to-end journey alternatives to the private car) and ECCE Innovation (creative industries) – the latter further involving Dublin City Enterprise Board and the Digital Hub as sub-partners. This follows upon the 1st call approval of the IMCORE project (management of impacts of climate change on coastal areas) led by the Coastal and Marine Resources Centre in UCC and also involving Cork County Council.

29% of the programme's €352 million funds have been allocated to date with almost half of that having been spent on 'connectivity' (transport and ICT) projects. The 3rd Call will open from 8 September to 3 October with the usual guidance workshop for likely UK and Ireland participants being scheduled for 2 September in Chester. Members of the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) will be on hand along with the UK and Irish Contact Points and, as well as providing an up-to-date information session, one-to-one assessment clinics covering project and financial management will be available to promoters (particularly leads) who have registered a draft idea online in good time.

Workshop details:

www.nweurope.eu/index.php?act=read_news&id=1430

See page 4 for details of the NWE Annual Event on migration.

Twinning with the Developing World

"If each local authority with its [however limited] resources decided to twin itself with a town, a municipality, a district, a province or a region in the south, the world would be changed and poverty would decrease rapidly" according to Development Commissioner Louis Michel in an open letter calling for the widespread signing of a twinning convention between local authorities in Europe and counterparts in developing countries.

The third annual European Development Days will take place in

Strasbourg in mid-November with the theme 'Local authorities and development' and will recognise the most impressive and promising north-south twinning ties established since autumn 2007. To be taken into account, twinning links should be new or at the most one year old. Applications must be submitted before 20 September to devtwinning@ec.europa.eu.

Further information: www.eudevdays.eu

Changes in State Aid

A newly-approved General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) adopted on 7 July will allow Member States the freedom to grant a host of aid measures without first notifying the Commission. 26 categories of aid focussed on job creation and competitiveness as well as reducing the administrative burden for businesses and public authorities - have been designated. All are applicable to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and indeed preferential "top-ups" apply to SMEs in instances where larger firms are also deemed eligible beneficiaries.

This initiative is in line with both the Commission's 2005 State Aid Action Plan which aims to create a coherent, and user-friendly set of rules for aid and with provisions allowing Member States to support SME development under the new Small Business Act (see above).

The Regulation authorises aid in favour of regional investment and employment; research and development – particularly in the agricultural and fisheries sectors; training initiatives; technical feasibility studies; risk capital; and wage subsidies for the employment of disabled/disadvantaged workers.

Aid measures promoting entrepreneurship such as support for young innovative enterprises, newly created small businesses in assisted regions, innovation advisory and support services, and tackling difficulties faced by female entrepreneurs are also now authorised.

Additionally the Regulation offers an environmental dividend by exempting from notification a varied set of subsidies promoting environmental protection (including investment towards the attainment of standards) and energy generation/saving.

Further details:

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/competition/state_aid/reform/reform.cfm

Lifelong Learning Mobility

With a focus on "quality in mobility", the 2008 European Awards for Lifelong Learning have been given to fifteen outstanding EU-funded projects in the field of education and training which demonstrated how mobility can broaden horizons, enhance skills and create opportunities.

The awards gave particular attention to teaching staff and trainer mobility but were not restricted to the formal education system. The winning projects include a staff exchange scheme between fire services providers; religious diversity and anti-discrimination training; guidance to students in online learning resources choices; intensive study programmes developed between partner universities; and cultural translation and shared performance by pupils in different countries.

Mobility will remain at the very centre of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the EU's flagship fund in the field of education and training. New actions are already planned for the coming years:

- 'Comenius Regio' will be launched in 2009 as an action for partnerships between local and regional school authorities;
- From 2010, 'Comenius Individual Pupil Mobility' will enable secondary pupils to spend from 3 months up to one school year at a partner school abroad;
- Addition types of mobility will also be available under the Grundtvig programme for adult education.

Further details: www.qim.si/eng/

Dublin's 'City of Science' bid

Dr. Patrick Cunningham, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Irish Government headed a high-level delegation which made a 2-day visit to Brussels last month to launch the bid for Dublin to host the Euroscience Open Forum 2012 'European City Of Science'. The visit afforded the opportunity of a "back the bid" reception organised by Enterprise Ireland to brief the Irish community - particularly those engaged in EU research and technology activities - on the campaign's ambitions and how they can help it to succeed. It also allowed a platform to update international science stakeholders on important developments in Ireland supporting a growing knowledge economy rooted in science.

Further information on the bid and how you can help:

<http://www.chiefscientificadviser.ie/cityof-sciencebid/cityofscience-backthebid.html>

Economic & Natural Disasters

The €500 million European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) has begun softening the blow of significant job losses caused by companies directly affected by "major structural changes in world trade patterns". Under defined criteria, since last year Member States have been able to claim financial assistance to support retraining, upskilling or job search allowances related to significant numbers of interrelated redundancies affecting an enterprise, region or recognisable industrial sector.

Payments totalling €13.6 million have been authorised recently to the national authorities to help 3,700 dismissed workers in the Portuguese and Spanish automotive sector and the Maltese textile sector to get back to work.

However with €467 million still uncommitted, the first EGF Annual Report published in early July has seen the Commission propose simplified application procedures, with a view to clarifying and speeding up decision-making on applications and revising the EGF regulation. This move if approved, would significantly enlarge the fund's scope through a downward revision of the eligibility threshold (currently standing at 1,000 workers); an increase in the duration of aid; a widening of its fields of applicability to see it applied to redundancies caused by changes in the evolution of technologies, production patterns, access to raw materials or price fluctuations; as well as to indirect job losses (to other companies in the geographical zone concerned). The financing of mobility allowances for workers looking for jobs in other Member States is also proposed.

Meanwhile the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) has made available aid totalling €162.4 million to help deal with the consequences of devastating floods that hit parts of England, Northern Ireland and Wales last summer. This can be employed towards the cost of emergency measures such as rescue services; restoring roads, water infrastructure and schools; securing dams; providing temporary accommodation; and clean-up activities. Recent Commission proposals to extend the fund's scope to cover damage due to industrial accidents and to drop the threshold for intervention have been shelved by the Council of Ministers.

Globalisation fund:

<http://ec.europa.eu/egf>

Solidarity fund:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/solidar/solid_en.htm

EVENTS

14 August, Kilkenny Ireland-Wales Workshop

Interreg IVA Ireland-Wales are holding an applicant workshop on 14 August in the Lyrath Hotel, Kilkenny for Call 2 applicants.

Contact: rudden@seregassembly.ie

1-4 September, Turin e-Government

The 7th International EGOV Conference will provide state-of-the-art overviews of research, implementation and application in eGovernment, eGovernance eParticipation and other fields of application in the public sector. Topics for discussion include ICT4D (ICT for Development); Emergency and disaster response; and Information preservation.

Further details: www.dexa.org

11 September, Paris Cities Influence on EU Policies

The 8th *Conference des Villes* (Mayors of France's large cities) event will examine the evolving economic, social, political and cultural roles of large urban areas – particularly their combined contribution towards achieving pan-European sustainable development and the knowledge-economy goals. Investment in RTD, education and training; business competitiveness and employment generation; integrating environmental and social concerns into economic decision-making; combating social exclusion and discrimination; and promoting multiculturalism and diversity are among the topics for discussion.

Further details: www.grandesvilles.org

16-22 September European mobility week

Local authorities are invited to contribute to this week of local events promoted by the European Commission in conjunction with Eurocities, Energie-Cités and the Climate Alliance of European Cities. The theme for 2008 is 'clean air for all' and concrete sustainable transport activities relating to mobility management, quality of life, planning, accessibility, public information, commuting and negating pollution are welcome to associate

themselves with the initiative and to use this as a springboard towards implementing permanent practical measures. The 'in town without my car' campaign is part of this week.

Further details: www.mobilityweek.eu or from yvonne.butler@environ.ie

22-23 September, Luxembourg Migration and demographic change (Interreg NWE)

Interreg NWE's first Annual Event entitled 'Challenges for Changing Populations' is inviting officials, politicians and academics from the 8 eligible countries to collectively discuss issues relating to migration and demographic change including the integration of new arrivals at local/national level; the economic consequences of changing population structures; and the economic opportunities of the 'silver economy'. This is an opportunity for those working in social inclusion to hear comparative experiences and perspectives, exchange ideas and possibly take the first steps in generating activities which can compete for future NWE funding.

Further details and registration: www.nweurope.eu/index.php?act=read_event&id=1250

22-23 September, Rotterdam Deprived Urban Areas

The European Union Knowledge Network is organising "Cities of Opportunity – the urban promise of upward mobility" - a conference on altering negative public perception and harnessing the potential of deprived urban areas as well as outlining strategies to better integrate them and their populations into wider society.

Further details: www.eukn.org

25 -27 September, Naples European Information Society Conference

EISCO 2008 will assess progress on implementing the 'i2010 Digital Local Agenda' (DLA) - a strategic plan for good governance and the development of the information society in Europe's municipalities, cities and regions – through its contribution to innovation, governance and e-Inclusion by means of local digital networks and communication instruments.

Further details: www.eisco2008.eu/

6-9 October, Brussels Open Days

Every autumn, Europe's regions and cities take over Brussels for a week of information and networking events relating to regional policy themes. The *Open Days* week brings together policy-makers, officials, financial institutions, business interests, associations and NGOs and is organised by the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission's DG REGIO.

This year's Open Days, subtitled "Regions and cities in a challenging world", will include a host of workshops and seminars on topics ranging from climate change to energy, tourism, research, technological development and innovation, competitiveness, maritime, migrant integration, ICT capabilities and the creative economy.

The IRO is among the active partners to the week and has joined the 'Celtic Connections' consortium along with other regional representations from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Asturias, Galicia and Norte Portugal to deliver a 7 October conference on 'Climate Change's impact on our shores – meeting the challenges posed by extreme weather conditions'. This will include a presentation on Dublin City Council's experiences on the SAFER flood risk project funded under Interreg IIIB NWE.

Separately, NASC - West of Ireland Office, Dublin City Council and the Department of Finance will also be involved in other consortia and events.

To coincide with Open Days, the Regional Assemblies are also each organising autumn events in Ireland. The Southern & Eastern Assembly will hold a workshop on 'ICT usage and SMEs' in Dublin on 3 October and the BMW Assembly will run a seminar in Inchydoney, Co. Cork on 17 October on 'Ireland's water resources'.

Open Days is a very popular event so register promptly for seminars and accommodation at:

www.opendays.europa.eu

Irish Regions Office

6 Rond-Point Schuman, B-1040 Brussels

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

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