

EU News Bulletin

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

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FUNDING

Community & voluntary / NGOs Cooperation & Twinning

Two **Europe for Citizens** calls have been announced:

- Joint initiatives between community and voluntary groups/NGOs from at least 2 countries in fields including active participation; sport for active citizenship; dealing with major challenges for society (e.g. climate change or immigration); citizens influence over EU decisions through their MEPs; female participation in political life; and promoting creativity and innovation. Initiatives can involve seminars, workshops, publications, debates, discussion forums and networking between civil society organisations. (Deadline: 13 March – "projects initiated by civil society organisations")
- Twinning exchanges - open to local authorities and voluntary committees - ideally relating to some of the issues mentioned above. (Deadline: 27 February - 'town twinning / citizens meetings').

For further information, contact Mark Callanan at europaforcitizens@ipa.ie or (01) 240 3632.

Detailed information is also available at www.europaforcitizens.ie.

Innovation & ICT

Proposals are sought under the 2009 work programme of the **Information and Communication Technologies Policy Support Programme (ICT PSP)** which aims to stimulate and to accelerate the development of a sustainable, competitive, innovative and inclusive information society. It supports activities to accelerate implementation of ICT based services and systems through wider uptake and best use and the exploitation of digital content by citizens, governments and businesses. Eight themes apply:

- Health, ageing and inclusion;
- Digital Libraries and cultural heritage material for education;
- Government and governance.
- Energy efficiency in social housing and climate change actions;
- Multilingual Web;
- Public Sector and Geographical Information;
- Internet Evolution and Security (incl. RFID);
- Open innovation, user experience and living labs.

Deadline: 2 June.

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/ict_psp/participating/calls/call_proposals_09/index_en.htm

Youth Entrepreneurship

The **SME Specific Programme of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Framework Programme (EIP)** aims to support the implementation of the Small Business Act and of the Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe by promoting quality ideas in the field of education for entrepreneurship and in improving the entrepreneurial mindsets of youth.

Priority 1 supports establishing a cross-European workshop programme for entrepreneurship professors to share knowledge and learn from practitioners.

Priority 2 supports:

- a common on-line platform for entrepreneurship educators and related practitioners;
- a European Entrepreneurship Educators Network;
- entrepreneurship among female university graduates;
- the entrepreneurial mindsets of young people beyond education;
- developing innovative teaching material on entrepreneurship for higher education (real cases and experiential learning).

Deadline: 20 April.

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/funding/index.htm>

Civic Service/Voluntary Youth Placements

This call aims to implement the **Amicus** preparatory action (Youth in Action Programme), whose objectives regarding youth placements in civic service and voluntary work activities are to:

- Promote transnational approaches;
- Encourage the development of a European framework for the interoperability of existing opportunities; and
- Allow a testing and evaluation phase (specific EU cooperation projects).

Projects should inform citizens and raise awareness; evaluate organisational experience of youth placement; and place young people in civic service and volunteering projects abroad.

Deadline: 30 April

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/calls-for-proposals/call1332_en.htm

Other recent calls:

http://www.iro.ie/funding/news/funding_calls/

Partner Searches received by the IRO from other regions:

http://www.iro.ie/funding/news/partner_searches/

NEWS & POLICY

Rural broadband investment

As part of the European Economic Recovery Plan, the European Commission has earmarked €1 billion to help rural areas get online in a bid to achieve 100% high-speed internet coverage for all EU citizens by 2010. This is part of the €5 bn. of unspent EU resources reallocated by December's European Council for energy and communications infrastructure (including €100 million for the Ireland-Wales electricity interconnector).

This funding will be used in addition to private investments and national funding to allow those rural areas which are not covered by existing plans to roll out or upgrade broadband in order to be able to fully participate in the web economy. Operations that can be supported are:

- New broadband infrastructure including backhaul facilities;
- Upgrade of existing infrastructure;
- Laying down passive infrastructure (e.g. civil engineering works such as ducts, and other network elements such as dark fibre) including synergies with energy, transport and water networks.

The funding (at a 75% co-financing rate) will be injected into all Member States' national Rural Development Programmes under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and distributed on the basis of their current national shares of this fund. It is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in Ireland's case, to select the most appropriate investment opportunities according to the established eligibility and selection rules within the national Programme which will need to be modified by 30 June to allow projects to be identified and authorised so that expenditure may take place this year.

According to the IDATE Study 'Broadband Coverage in Europe 2008', Ireland currently offers broadband coverage to 87% of the population but only 73% for rural areas – on a par with the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania but below the EU25 average.

"Bridging the Broadband Gap" initiative:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/vents/broadband_gap_2007/index_en.htm

European broadband portal:
<http://www.broadband-europe.eu>

Extra support for dairy farmers

The European Commission is set to propose to national governments and the European Parliament, that the EU channel €1.5 billion that remains unspent in the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) towards dairy farmers, who are currently being affected by exceptionally low milk prices close to, or even below, intervention levels. Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel told EU agricultural ministers on 19 January that she believes the state of the market could force businesses, particularly farmers in marginal and mountainous areas, into liquidation.

Export refunds – a price support measure halted in June 2007 for milk, butter and cheese - have recently been reintroduced as short-term measures to support the dairy sector. The Commission also reintroduced private storage for butter with effect from 1 January. Meanwhile milk quotas will increase next season under the CAP 'health check' reform. This reform has also identified a series of "new challenges" in response to which part of the mooted €1.5 billion would also be spent in the form of rural development projects.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/57&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Better returns from urban development spending

Fully integrated urban development plans should form the basis for granting EU Structural Funds and receiving European Investment Bank loans for public urban development support from 2013 according to a new European Parliament report, but this will only work if sufficient resources are available and if "a minimum level" of spending in urban areas, per person and per programme period, is determined.

The *Report on the urban dimension of cohesion policy in the new programming period*, approved in the Regional Development Committee on 20 January, regrets that Member States are currently not obliged to promote urban development as a strategic priority. It urges national governments, the European Commission, and regional and local authorities to evaluate the impact of mainstreaming the stakeholder partnership approach of the URBAN initiative and to closely monitor the impact of EU policies and funds on the

economic and social situation in urban areas.

The report points out that Member States may delegate the management of structural funding for sustainable urban development measures and argues that enabling cities to take responsibility, from planning to implementation, would be "more efficient for regional and European growth" and could also improve the administrative capacity of local management, adding that this should become mandatory in the next programming period.

Better use by EU Regional Policy of financial engineering, such as JESSICA-style revolving funds, which offer credit on favourable terms, rather than relying solely on grants, as at present, is also urged as is the use of public/private partnerships (e.g. for infrastructure and housing projects), provided these are governed by a clear code of conduct, particularly for public authorities. The committee also believes that the "one programme, one fund" principle (e.g. European Social Fund for economic and social development and European Regional Development Fund for physical infrastructure investment) should be reviewed, to enable local and regional authorities to make better use of synergies between them.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/200901/20090121att46782/20090121att46782en.pdf>

EP Elections Website

The European Parliament website has launched a special section for its 2009 elections which will take place in June. Even though the campaign will mainly take place in the Member States, the Parliament also intends to participate in the debate, mainly to increase voter turnout, which has continued to decline since the first elections by universal suffrage in 1979, and which is shaping up to be very low once more.

As well as information on candidates and constituencies, the site includes sections which clarify the role of MEPs and put forward several reasons to vote as well as. It also contains a review of the Parliament's main achievements over the 2004-2009 period as well as a "looking ahead" section which examines which dossiers will be worked on in the coming months. There is also the possibility of following debates online.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2009/default.htm?language=en>

Housing Energy Investment moves closer

Despite some remaining stumbling blocks which will require adjustment, the draft regulation brought forward by the Commission in early December that would allow Member States to make 'expenditure on energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy in existing housing in favour of low-income households' eligible for co-financing under the Structural Funds is now expected to clear the Council of Ministers, which until now has been hostile to the measure.

At present, only the newer Member States are allowed to use up to 2% of their total ERDF contribution to finance housing costs in this manner. Under the expected compromise, each Member State would be allowed employ an additional 4% of total ERDF contribution though this would not necessarily target social housing, as originally proposed.

EU housing ministers agreed last November to establish specific working groups to examine how some EU policies such as state aid impact on national housing policies. Ministers recommended that the Commission should:

- conduct a study on the cost of housing to household budgets and on the cost of poor housing and lack of housing;
- promote the spread within the housing sector of new technologies and building materials which use less energy;
- strengthen research programmes to increase energy efficiency, including in existing housing; and
- provide effective follow-up to social housing projects as part of the SAVE programme in order to highlight those initiatives which lead the way in energy efficiency.

Commission proposal:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1874&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Ring-fencing of unspent regional funds?

A 20 January Opinion on the mid-term review of the 2007-2013 financial framework from the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development (REGI) calls for Structural Fund resources decommitted under the 'N+2' rule (i.e. if no payment claim is

made within two years following the year during which the aid was granted) to be reallocated within the cohesion budget. This underlines a Parliament position during the negotiations on the Structural Funds 2007-2013. The possibility of rewarding regions with high-performing programme implementation and efficient-spending profiles is among the options being tabbed to the Commission for consideration.

Other proposals from the REGI Opinion include:

- A higher proportion (than the 2013 figure of 0.35%) of EU GDP to finance Cohesion Policy in light of the new challenges ahead (climate change, adaptation to globalisation, demographic change...);
- that the future Cohesion Policy continue to cover all European regions, with the greater part of its resources concentrated on the least developed;
- a clearly defined transitional system for regions whose GDP will exceed 75% of the EU average – and which would thus lose the status of 'less developed regions';
- to increase the next Structural Fund programming period to ten years, in line with ongoing EU-level discussions about instituting five-year (as opposed to seven at present) EU financial frameworks – thereby allowing a more complete mid-term review;
- higher funding for the territorial cooperation objective.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/img/struct/files/icn_pdf.gif

Commission unveils plans to 'green' ICT

The European Commission will publish Action Plan proposals in March to boost the use of smart technologies in combating climate change, Information Society Commissioner Viviane Reding told ICT industry experts at a 22 January conference in Brussels on 'ICT for a global sustainable future'. Under the EU executive's plans, which are to set out specific policy recommendations to be pursued and which are partly based on data collected from the industry, cities, buildings and cars of the future could all be equipped, as a matter of course, with new technology to enable the measurement and reduction of CO2 emissions.

The push for massive deployment of smart technologies is thought to represent a windfall for the ICT sector which will, as a consequence of this competitive advantage, be strongly encouraged "to lead by example and reduce the energy it uses" through initiatives such as more investment in research and greener procurement.

Commission's Communication on energy efficiency through ICT (13 May 2008)

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sustainable_growth/docs/com_2008_241_all_lang/com_2008_241_1_en.pdf

Communities seek better building energy-efficiency

In a good example of the local-level influencing the EU policy agenda, the CONCERTO initiative, which funds 18 projects (including in Dundalk and North Tipperary) to develop local practices which are as self-sufficient regarding energy supply as possible, has brought together its network of experts and stakeholders across Europe to contribute to a review of EU laws regarding the energy performance of buildings. The CONCERTO communities, many of whom are testing quantitative and qualitative indicators in order to exceed the EU's 20% emissions reduction by 2020 goal, have collectively agreed that the public sector must be the front-runner in raising energy-efficiency improvement techniques and the use of renewable energy sources for buildings.

As such they have recently been working closely with the relevant Commission unit to integrate this into legislation. The network strongly favours the revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2002/91/EC) adopting many of its principles and best practices including obligations for public buildings to display energy-performance certificates in visible places, and, where newly-built, to exceed national regulations by a certain percentage. Achieving lower thresholds for size of buildings requiring compliance with standards and providing for more accurate and professional certification are among CONCERTO's further ambitions in this field.

Commission's 'Second Strategic Energy Review' (November 2008)

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/strategies/2008/2008_11_ser2_en.htm

CONCERTO Position Paper:

http://concertoplus.eu/CMS/Events_doc/EPBD_position_paper.pdf

European Public Sector Award

“Assess Yourself and Learn from the Best” is the motto of the European Public Sector Award (EPSA 2009), organised by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) to highlight the most innovative and efficient administrative initiatives and performances from the various public sector institutions across Europe and to make these more transferable. Organisations and projects from all levels – with special attention given to local and regional approaches, as well as public sector enterprises, agencies or public-private partnerships – are eligible to submit applications until 20 March.

Four thematic fields apply:

- Performance Improvement in Public Service Delivery
- Citizen Involvement
- New Forms of Partnership Working
- Leadership and Management for Change

Further information from the IRO or from <http://www.epsa2009.eu>

DG Regio announcements

- Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hubner has announced her intention to publish an orientation paper to set out the rationale for future EU Cohesion Policy by late March. This will then go before the informal ministerial meeting, on 23-24 April in Marienbad (Czech Republic).
- A working group comprising representatives of the Member States and the Commission will present its first results at the end of May on simplification of Structural Fund auditing procedures.
- A study on the administrative costs of implementing the Structural Funds is underway.
- The sixth interim report on economic and social cohesion is expected for June and will contain an analytical section on regional creativity and innovation.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm

Other recent news stories:

<http://www.iro.ie/news.shtml>

EVENTS

16-17 February, Brussels Regions for Economic Change

One of the most significant events on the annual EU Regional Policy calendar, the ‘Regions for Economic Change’ conference, will have a 2009 theme of “Networking for Results”. This initiative aims to harness the knowledge, experience and good practice developed through Regional Policy instruments, notably inter-regional cooperation programmes, to help regions to learn from one another and translate network outputs into action through mainstream policy and programmes.

Nine workshops will showcase strategies, experiences and projects intended to provide learning and networking opportunities for Structural Funds management.

Registration:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/networking/home_en.cfm

19 February, Brussels eGovernment

This OASIS workshop will bring together eGovernment policy officials, finance specialists, and representatives from technology companies to look at the introduction of ICT solutions in public finance including tax, benefits and payments and to exchange experiences, focusing on Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) and web-based services.

<http://events.oasis-open.org/home/egov-brussels-workshop/2009>

19-20 February, Adare Water Management

This year’s Mid-West Regional Authority Annual Conference is entitled ‘Ireland’s Water: What is the real cost?’ The event will address topics including ‘National Investment in Water & Waste Water Infrastructure including Funding & Pricing Mechanisms’, the Water Framework Directive and ‘River Basin Management Planning - Impact on Land-use Planning’ as well as examining enterprise and local authority perspectives on particular matters.

The key-note address will be by Minister of State with special responsibility for Local Services, Michael Kitt, T.D. Speakers include Sean O’Neachtain

MEP plus representatives of Forfás, the Shannon River Basin District, and the Water Services Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government.

Programme & Application Form:

<http://www.mwra.ie/documents/MWRAAnnualConference2009Brochure.doc>

24 February, Brussels Local & Regional Transport Networks

The current Czech Presidency of the EU hosts a conference on the Trans European Transport Network (TEN-T) entitled ‘Building the bridge: regional dimension of TEN-T’. This event aims to highlight one of the still outstanding elements for the completion of the Internal Market: transport infrastructure, especially in terms of connections with local and regional networks.

Speakers and participants will share their visions on the current state of TEN-T schemes and explore the immediate future of their political, financial and environmental strategic dimensions. Main issues treated will include the expected accomplishments of TEN-T axes on the basis of the new European Commission Green Paper; and an evaluation of possible formulas to better combine EU, national, regional and private resources to realise transport infrastructure.

<http://czechreg.eu/index.php?D=10>

10 March, London NWE Applicant workshops

The 4th INTERREG IV B North West Europe programme Call for Proposals will open on 20th March and close on 17th April. Register for the Ireland-UK Applicant Workshops at:

http://www.nweurope.eu/index.php?act=lead_event&id=1583

As of 2 February we have relocated to new premises

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