

EU News Bulletin

The latest monthly EU opportunities, news & policy, publications and events of relevance to Ireland's local and regional level.

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FUNDING, NETWORKING & PROJECTS

Call: LIFE+

The 2010 Call for Proposals for the LIFE+ programme was launched on 5 May. The programme comprises three components.

1) Nature & Biodiversity:

Innovative best practice or demonstration projects on the protection, conservation, restoration, monitoring and facilitating the

functioning of natural systems or habitats, wild flora and fauna, with the aim of halting the loss of biodiversity or that contribute to the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

2) Environment Policy & Governance:

Projects that contribute to the implementation of Community environmental policy, the development of innovative policy approaches, technologies, methods and instruments, the knowledge base as regards environment policy and legislation, or environmental monitoring. Applications dealing with sustainable management and use of natural resources and waste (including the environmental performances of products, sustainable production and consumption patterns, waste prevention, recovery and recycling) are particularly encouraged although applications are welcomed across all the following themes:

- Climate Change
- Water quality
- Air quality
- Soil (sustainable use)
- Urban environment
- Noise
- Chemicals and pesticides
- Environment and health
- Forests
- Innovation (green technologies)
- Strategic approaches (e.g. improving SMEs' environmental performance).

3) Information & Communication:

Awareness-raising campaigns and events on environmental, nature protection and, in particular, biodiversity conservation issues, as well as projects related to forest fire prevention.

The maximum co-financing rate will be 50% or 75% for projects focusing on priority Birds and Habitats Directives species/habitats. It is envisaged that successful projects will get underway in autumn 2011. No national priorities have been set for potential Irish projects. Ireland's national information day on the

call is scheduled for 3 June. Contact LIFE@mwghglobal.com for further details.

To date, just two Irish projects, both arising from the 2007 call, have been adjudged to be of sufficient quality to make use of the annual amount (this year an indicative €3.83 million) ring-fenced for projects from Ireland. Mulkear Life is led by the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board who, along with the Office of Public Works, National Parks & Wildlife Service, and the County Councils of Limerick, North Tipperary and South Tipperary, are engaged in the restoration of the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for Sea lamprey, Atlantic salmon and European otter. Meanwhile the Central Fisheries Board's CAISIE project is tackling the control of aquatic invasive species and restoration of natural communities in Lough Corrib, the Grand Canal and the Barrow.

Deadline: 1 September (submissions to the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government)

[Further details](#)

Local energy support pledges: €115 million for CO₂ reduction

Climate change mediation is increasingly being seen in EU terms as an area where the local level is best placed to deliver informed grassroots solutions which also touch on other policy areas such as regeneration and the environment. This priority was underlined in a speech by energy Commissioner Gunther Oettinger at the Covenant of Mayors Ceremony in the European Parliament on 4 May.

This Commission-backed declaration gained another 500 adherents at its first birthday celebration with representatives of these cities and regions formally pledging to play their part in significantly curtailing CO₂ emissions through local plans and actions. Covenant signatories are now set to benefit from access to a windfall of at least €115 million, unspent as

part of the European Economic Recovery package, in order to implement their sustainable energy policies. The funding is intended to be specifically used as a leverage mechanism to raise significant further investment from financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Council of Europe Bank (EBRD) and is hoped to act as a low carbon economy and employment creating stimulation tool.

The announcement was accompanied by a series of further Commission commitments to support the Covenant and local actions in sustainable energy including heightened levels of cooperation with “regional and national administrations, that support both in technical and financial terms the implementation of the Covenant in smaller cities”. The ELENA financing package which arose from the Covenant as a means of providing technical assistance to structure and implement viable project proposals under local/regional sustainable energy strategies has already been doubled to a €30 million annual fund after strong levels of uptake. ELENA has been a key factor in mobilising €1 billion worth of investment (much of this through EIB loans) in just a few months – and is set to be further reinforced over the coming years.

According to the Commissioner, other supportive instruments with cities particularly in mind are also under consideration including ‘carbon-funding instruments’. Looking to the longer term, work is ongoing to develop a dedicated ‘Smart Cities’ initiative in support of urban energy technologies within the Eight Framework Programme for Research and Technology. The Commissioner also announced his intention to bring forward a new Energy Efficiency Strategy for Europe which would give particular focus to regional and local actors.

[Further details](#)

Easier access to research funding

On 29 April the European Commission’s plan to simplify the procedures for taking part in EU research projects was unveiled. The overall aim is to make participation attractive to the best researchers and innovative companies in Europe and beyond while also maximizing transparency in this key element of delivering upon the *Europe 2020* strategy

for sustainable growth and jobs. The strategy proposes to adapt the current legal and regulatory framework to allow for more consistent application of rules (particularly on auditing), better IT systems, and improving the structure and content of calls for proposals.

Changes are also envisaged to the existing financial rules to allow more radical simplification while maintaining effective control and to allow beneficiaries of EU funding to use national accounting methods. Further down the line, a move towards “payment by results” with grant beneficiaries being paid lump sums to undertake specific scientific tasks and needing to demonstrate that they have done so effectively and efficiently – rather than reporting individual cost items – would be given consideration. The proposals will now go to the European Parliament and the Council.

[‘Simplifying the Implementation of the Research Framework programmes’ Communication](#)

[Other recent calls](#)

[Partner Searches received by the IRO from other regions](#)

NEWS & POLICY

Local & regional authorities’ role in future environmental policy

The Irish Regions Brussels Office recently attended a seminar debating the role of local and regional authorities in future environmental policy. This event was part of the research feeding into a current Committee of the Regions (CoR) Outlook Opinion on this issue.

Input from practitioners dealing with the effects of EU environmental policy is being sought by the rapporteur. As well as general thoughts about what works well and what doesn’t in environmental governance, an emphasis is being placed on examples of how environmental legislation:

- can have unintended and unhelpful consequences;

- is frequently infringed/faces substantial challenges in enforcement;
- generates economic benefit as well as preventing environmental harm.

Member States’ performance in involving local and regional authorities in the different phases of the policy-cycle is a further aspect under consideration.

Deadline for input: 21 May

[Background to last month’s seminar](#)

Contact the IRO office for a copy of the current working document.

Cities urge innovation policy rethink

The role of local authorities, particularly those in urban centres, as organisational innovators and facilitators of market-driven innovation is being needlessly overlooked by the European Commission, according to some of Europe’s biggest cities. In a recent interview with the EurActiv media website, Paul Bevan, Secretary General of the EURO CITIES network of 140 large cities has spoken of the frustration his members are feeling as their ongoing efforts to innovate on the ground and their future potential are largely overlooked in favour of a narrow focus on innovation as being exclusively the domain of the commercial and research sectors.

As well as city council’s roles in the provision of business support systems (e.g. cluster management, incubators for start-up firms), Bevan cited areas such as general public services, planning and development, and links with third level education as key platforms where cities provide opportunities for entrepreneurs and large firms alike. He also emphasised that local authorities’ level of access to citizens is a natural conduit by which to organise and deliver grassroots social innovation – particularly in regard to the way the green agenda is driving positive change in the way people live their lives. Environmental improvement generally is seen as an area ripe for exploitation through leveraging the buying power of local public procurement.

Links with the private sector were touched upon in the interview with Bevan cautioning against the Commission and European Parliament endorsing a headlong rush towards opening up services markets to the private sector without considering

whether outsourcing is actually appropriate to each city's individual situation. Nonetheless he speculated that well thought-out and relatively secure public private partnerships which availed of businesses' expertise for the public good would be a viable option as budgets continued to be put under pressure.

[Interview](#)

CoR signals Cohesion policy stance

Maintaining an ambitious regional policy at the heart of the EU's efforts to further European integration is the core message of an Outlook Opinion on cohesion policy reform adopted at its mid-April plenary session by the Committee of the Regions (CoR). The report is very much grounded in the status quo and identifies the added value of cohesion policy - beyond providing financial support - as its contribution to enabling different levels of government to pursue common objectives based on narrowing development gaps, strengthening sustainable growth and employment, and supporting social inclusion and competitiveness in specific regional contexts.

As such it endorses a continuance of the current principles of cohesion policy—multilevel governance, multiannual programme planning, partnership, focusing of effort, and indicator-based programme management and assessment.

The key recommendations of the opinion are:

- 1) cohesion policy should continue to be applied to all of Europe's regions;
- 2) the major share of resources should go to the regions in greatest need;
- 3) regions in transition (i.e. losing Objective One status) require special support in adjusting to a new designation;
- 4) the Competitiveness & Employment Objective (as with the two current Operational Programmes for the S&E and BMW regions) must continue to support all other EU regions - particularly in order to boost innovation, social cohesion and competitiveness;
- 5) existing support for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation should be enhanced;

- 6) there should be no need to conduct a full compliance audit in each funding period as established rules for national funding should be relied on; and
- 7) in the interests of subsidiarity, the role of local and regional authorities should be strengthened at every stage of the programming, implementation and assessment of cohesion policy.

This is the first official stance on the future shape of cohesion policy to be presented by a European institution. Regional policy Commissioner Johannes Hahn welcomed the report and called for a balance to be struck between EU-level priorities and the manner by which these are interpreted and realised on the ground through the implementation of cohesion policy.

[Outlook Opinion](#)

Dublin promotes its energy-smart credentials

Despite being grounded by volcanic ash, video link allowed Dublin's Lord Mayor Emer Costello to fulfill her commitment to address a major EU energy event in Brussels on 4 May. The Covenant of Mayors Ceremony showcased efforts to follow through on local pledges to exceed the formal EU energy policy objectives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (20% before 2020). 1680 European regions and cities of all sizes have now committed to implement definite plans to reduce their carbon footprint accordingly through actions and initiatives in energy efficiency, renewable use and awareness-raising among citizens.

Dublin, which has set itself a 33% CO2 reduction target over the next decade, signed the declaration last year and has since set about implementing its long-term Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) by taking stock of current energy consumption and emissions patterns and devising means by which sectors including planning & development, transport and waste management can contribute towards improvement. In particular the Action Plan identifies retrofitting of Dublin's residential sector - insulation, boiler upgrades, glazing, low energy lighting and renewable usage - as an area of enormous potential not only in terms of curbing emissions but in providing employment and energy-efficient savings

exceeding €1 billion in the city region by 2020.

In her address, Mayor Costello evidenced the entirely self-sustaining renewable energy production of Fr Collins Park, Clongriffin as an example of the groundbreaking energy work of the City Council. A number of activities coordinated by CODEMA, the energy management agency for the city and surrounding local authority areas were also singled out for praise. These include the Energy Smart Community scheme which clusters homeowners together to improve their domestic energy performance and the Greenov project (funded by Interreg North West Europe) which is creating a network of SMEs engaged in sustainable renovation.

[Covenant of Mayors](#)

Nominate your local & regional sustainable energy practices

Best practice policies and initiatives in support of sustainable energy by local and regional authorities are being sought by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) as part of a survey kick-starting an initiative to collect and disseminate interesting grassroots examples in tackling climate change.

The database highlighting areas of success in energy supply and distribution, mobility and transport, buildings, industry, agriculture, waste management, water treatment, and spatial planning will be used to improve understanding of the policy options being implemented and the challenges facing local and regional authorities. The data will be shared with all the members of the CoR Europe2020 Monitoring platform and Covenant of Mayors signatories to allow them to learn from their peers about how best to meet their obligations to cut emissions.

Examples will also be used as illustrations of the potential of cities and regions for energy action and will be integrated into the CoR's formal contribution to the new EU Energy Action Plan - shortly due to be presented in initial draft form to national energy ministers - which will set the framework for European energy policy to 2020. They will also be used to influence

the crucial May 2011 EU Council summit on energy.

Deadline: 30 June
[Further details](#)

EU 2011 Budget – first draft

The 2011 draft budget for the EU was adopted by the Commission on 27 April. The overall structure of the proposed €142.6 billion expenditure mirrors that of the 2010 budget with 45% being allocated to ‘sustainable growth’ in a bid to boost economic recovery (this includes the Structural Funds); 31% going towards market related expenditure and direct aids under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); 11% for rural development, environment and fisheries; 6% for the EU’s global activities; a similar amount for its administration; and a final 1% for “citizenship, freedom, security & justice”.

While spending on CAP and staff is frozen, there are slight year-on-year variations evident within some categories as a consequence of the increase from 2010’s €141bn figure. 40% of the budget is specifically linked to fulfilling the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth. This includes investing in research, youth and infrastructure for the future.

Among the newly proposed highlights are increases in the 2011 annual allocations of a number of funding programmes:

- Life+ support for protection of the environment will benefit from an additional 8.7%, to reach €333m;
- the 7th Framework Programme for research and technical development will grow by 13.8%, reaching an unprecedented €8.6bn;
- the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme will provide 4.4% more funding to total €548.7m (€316.1m for Entrepreneurship & Innovation; €120.6m for ICT Policy Support, and €112m for Intelligent Energy Europe);
- the Life Long Learning Programme will increase by €1.1bn - making over 200,000 extra Erasmus grants available to students to study abroad as well as 70,000 Leonardo da Vinci grants for vocational training;
- the Youth in Action programme has been given €127m to help 120,000 young people to upskill via non-formal

learning activities as well as 5,300 placements through the European Voluntary Service;

- Funding for programmes in the area of freedom, security and justice will grow by 12.8% - reflecting the importance attached to the implementation of the recently adopted EU Action Plan on citizenship, justice, security, asylum and immigration for the next five years.

Additionally the Trans-European transport and energy networks will increase expenditure to €1.3bn while over €1.5bn will be provided for the implementation of the agreed priorities and projects under the European Economic Recovery Plan: over €1bn for offshore wind energy, and energy infrastructure plus €500m towards rural broadband initiatives.

The EU budget represents approximately 1% of combined Member State wealth. The vast majority is jointly administered between the Commission and Member States. The budget procedure has been streamlined by the Lisbon Treaty with the European Parliament having just one reading but equal power alongside the Council in its adoption. The Council will make his position known in June, followed by the Parliament in October. The final budget is expected to be adopted by the Parliament in November.

[Draft 2011 Budget](#)

Debate on Future of CAP

In a bid to broaden discussion on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) beyond the farming and agri- sectors alone, DG Agriculture have launched a public debate focusing on CAP’s objectives and principles. This is being undertaken particularly by reference to the policy’s potential contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy (i.e. developing intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth) and its response to the new economic, social, environmental, climate-related and technological challenges facing European society.

Four questions are involved:

- 1) why do we need a CAP?
- 2) citizens expectations of agriculture?
- 3) why reform the CAP and how to make it meet society’s expectations? and

4) tools required for the CAP of tomorrow?

Input provided will inform the Communication on the future of the CAP after 2013, which the Commission is expected to publish towards the end of the year. Stakeholders, including individuals, are encouraged to post their comments online by 3 June.

[Further details](#)

Late payments: public-private parity

While giving its consent to rules to penalise late payment in commercial transactions at its 28 April session, the European Parliament’s Committee on Internal Market has rejected the idea of imposing an additional flat rate 5% plus interest penalty on public authorities who fall into arrears. The proposal to make an example of public sector organisations had been part of the Commission’s position (set out in April 2009) for a recast of the directive – mainly intended to benefit SMEs who suffer disproportionately from cash-flow problems caused by delays.

While Parliament has voted not to differentiate between business-to-business transactions and those involving public authorities, strict payment deadlines of 30 days (possibly extendable to 60 days under certain conditions) are now set to apply to both sectors including increases in the interest penalties and administrative fee for compensation applying beyond prescribed deadlines. The dossier will now go to the Council.

[Further details](#)

Innovation DG reaches out

The cross-cutting nature of innovation has been recognised by the announcement of an intention to establish a sub-group of ten EU Commissioners from different fields with a stake in and influence upon EU innovation policy. The move, formally tabled at the meeting of the College of Commissioners on 18 April having been suggested in January, is an acknowledgment that Research, Innovation and Science Commissioner

Máire Geogheghan-Quinn's newly-created portfolio will require the support of counterparts in various other policy areas in order to devise the new broad-based European 'Research and Innovation Plan' in time for the autumn summit of European leaders.

Under the previous Commission, innovation policy was split among numerous separate DGs. Its recent streamlining as a responsibility under DG Research brought with it a risk of becoming unresponsive to developments across a range of themes which this initiative is seeking to counter by opening itself to outside influences. The most prominent of the current Commission portfolios expected to be involved in the new committee are Industry & Entrepreneurship, Competition, Transport, Digital Agenda, and Energy and - to a lesser extent - Internal Market & Services, Regional Policy, Education, and Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion.

Commissioner Geogheghan-Quinn is also believed to want the group to shape the debate on how to reliably measure the effectiveness of EU spending on R&D as a means of assuring economic growth. This is necessary in order to allay fears at Member State level that an all-round 3% of GDP research spend (the Commission's target, agreed to in principle by national leaders at their March summit) would not represent an inefficient use of resources.

This is the largest and most advanced of the horizontal 'Commissioners' groups' proposed by Commission President José Manuel Barroso. Others are being outlined to cover the EU's future budget (2014-2020), External Relations, Internal Market, Industrial Policy, Digital Agenda, Climate Change, Pensions, and Innovative Financial Instruments.

Procurement law for review

The European Commission has announced its intention to review public procurement legislation. In the latest edition of its *Single Market News*, the Directorate-General for Internal Market & Services states that there is a need for greater flexibility in procurement rules and more speed in processing deals, given that public bodies are increasingly turning towards private investment to fund major projects.

Furthermore, the transition to electronic procurement poses new challenges at European level. While the supportive technology is now largely in place through national and regional e-procurement platforms of contracting authorities and suppliers, there is a need to ensure that the European legal and policy environment keeps pace while avoiding the emergence of a new generation of barriers to cross-border procurement based on different models, information technology systems and applications.

In the short-term the Commission is preparing initiatives in the area of concessions and is looking closely at the issue of the application of procurement legislation to cases where local or other purchasing bodies cooperate. It is also finalising an analysis of the take-up of e-procurement in which it will assess the existence of barriers to cross-border participation in electronic procurement marketplaces. Finally, it is embarking on a comprehensive evaluation of EU procurement legislation to examine the effectiveness of rules in promoting open, contestable and sound procurement. The findings will be used to inform reflection on the need for a modernisation of EU procurement rules.

Meanwhile the presentations given at a 23-24 March DG Enterprise & Industry conference on promoting innovation through procurement are now available online. The Commission has set the target to dedicate 1% of the total amount of commercial opportunities channeled through public tendering in the EU - i.e. an annual €20 billion - towards innovation. As well as pre-commercial, electronic and green procurement, issues related to public contracting authorities' aversion and exposure to risk, legal issues, fragmentation of demand, and Intellectual Property Rights were also discussed.

[Single Market News](#)

['Promoting Innovation through Public Procurement: Best Practice & Networking' conference](#)

Cross-border cooperation mechanisms

Since 2006 the EU has provided local and regional authorities engaged in cross-

border cooperation projects with the option to form a collective 'European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation' (EGTC). This is a legal mechanism whereby members of such a partnership, having first notified their respective national authorities, can jointly implement their project in a more streamlined manner without the complications presented by differences in national administrative systems.

Next year's scheduled review of the EGTC regulation presents an opportunity to improve the concept by reference to experiences to date. To feed into this process the Committee of the Regions along with the European Commission, EU Council Presidency and Interact programme has now launched a consultation targeted at Member States' governments, participants in current and future EGTCs, and local and regional authorities.

Deadline: 20 July.

[EGTC](#)

[Consultation](#)

Social Inclusion for Roma/Travellers

A new Policy Communication adopted by the European Commission on 7 April in time for International Roma Day (8 April) represents a milestone in EU efforts in support of awareness-raising measure to encourage debate on Roma rights and inclusion, particularly in light of the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010. In EU terms 'Roma' is an umbrella term encompassing various population groups including the Traveller community.

'The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe' is the first time the Commission has taken such a specific policy approach in relation to this target group. The document defines the main challenges ahead including segregation and racist violence and sets out an ambitious programme to help make policies for Roma inclusion more effective. It also outlines the complexity and interdependence of the problems faced by Roma in terms of discrimination, poverty, low educational achievement, labour market barriers, housing and poor health as well as suggesting possible mechanisms of EU

support. Finally, it highlights progress made in the past two years at EU and national levels in Roma integration.

The Commission plans to implement the following actions over the coming years:

- Mobilising the European Social Fund to support Roma inclusion;
- Taking Roma issues into account in all relevant policy areas at national and EU level: employment, social inclusion, urban development, public health, EU expansion...;
- Harnessing the potential of Roma communities to support inclusive growth as part of the overall Europe 2020 strategy.

The Commission also suggests developing a set of model approaches for social and economic integration of Roma to increase the effectiveness of public policy. These approaches would define the most appropriate mix of instruments to deal with the specific problems of Roma communities.

[‘The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe’ Communication](#)

Quality of Life perceptions: cities compared

The Commission has released the results of a November 2009 opinion poll looking at local citizens’ perceptions of the quality of life in 75 major European cities. Responses from residents of Dublin indicate a general mid-table ranking and notable improvements on the 2006 survey.

Among the standout positives (levels of satisfaction) for the national capital are:

- 93% with cultural facilities
- 86% with green spaces
- 77% with public spaces (e.g. pedestrian areas)
- 76% with outdoor recreation
- 72% with sports facilities
- 70% with public transport – although 17% found availability of services and networks to be inadequate. Dublin’s relatively long commuting times were (unusually for cities in this category) coupled with high levels of car dependency.

Less positively, in terms of health care services provided by doctors and hospitals

Dublin registered lowest of Western European cities with only 57% satisfaction. In general terms, this along with lack of job creation prospects and education & training facilities were the most often cited concerns.

53% agreed that air pollution and 55% noise pollution are major and growing problems while 52% did not find the city to be clean (although 81% believed it to be a healthy place to live). While perceptions of always feeling secure in their neighbourhood are 76%, the equivalent at city level is only 41%.

Just 28% of respondents agreed that reasonably priced quality housing was adequately available (though, not surprisingly this is a huge increase on the 2006 responses).

[‘Perception survey on quality of life in European cities’](#)

Electronic Invoicing

The EU’s Better Regulation Principles commits it to supporting the widespread use of electronic invoicing and other initiatives that can help to reduce red tape and speed up administrative procedures. A report drafted by European Commission experts and presented at a 27 April conference organised by the Spanish Presidency of the EU, indicates that this approach offers great potential in terms of improving competitiveness and cash-flow reducing costs, encouraging the development of the single market and benefitting the environment. Already this is being tapped into by some businesses and the public sector, although some remaining barriers are preventing its wider adoption.

To counter this, the study recommends that Member States raise awareness of the benefits; focus on the specific needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – offering them easy-to-use solutions with reduced processing times and management costs; harmonise the European regulatory framework by giving equal treatment to paper and electronic invoices; and adopt a common standard for invoice data forms and content.

[Further details](#)

Migrant Integration

European Ministers responsible for migrant integration have stressed the crucial role of cities in particular in promoting the social inclusion of migrants. The announcement came at a ministerial meeting in Zaragoza on 16-17 April to set directions for a shared approach to migrant integration in Europe.

Ministers reached consensus on a list of common indicators to be used for evaluating and comparing national integration policies in key fields such as education, employment, and host country language teaching. The agreed indicators cover four key areas:

- 1) (un)employment rates;
- 2) educational levels and basic skills attained;
- 3) social inclusion and health (particularly for migrants at risk of poverty); and
- 4) active citizenship (including obtaining nationality and/or long-term residence).

The Declaration arising from the conference calls for mechanisms for recognition of professional qualifications acquired outside the EU and emphasises that greater immigrant integration must be achieved through inclusion in the labour market, social inclusion, anti-discrimination measures and equal opportunity.

The European Commission is shortly expected to launch a pilot project for exchanging best practices among national governments on integration policies. The possibility of EU initiatives and support measures on integration were given a legal basis by the Lisbon Treaty but, beyond creating a coordinating mechanism, binding minimum standards at EU level are not envisaged in any way.

The Commission also used the meeting to release its latest 'Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners' focussing on the role of mass media in integration, the importance of awareness-raising and migrant empowerment, dialogue platforms, acquisition of nationality and practice of active citizenship, immigrant youth, education and the labour market.

[Further details](#)

[Handbook on Integration](#)

2013 European Youth Capital

The European Youth Forum has launched a call for applications for the 2013 European Youth Capital award. This initiative in active youth empowerment and participation in society represents an opportunity for a city to showcase its youth-related cultural, social, political and economic activities and projects. Amsterdam, Turin and Antwerp have been the previous winners.

[Deadline: 22 June](#)

Wind farm planning permissions

An EU-funded project coordinated by the European Wind Energy Association has found that the time wind farm developers must wait to receive planning permission differs very significantly from one EU Member State to another. The findings of 'Wind Barriers' reveal that it takes a wind farm application an average of three and a half years to win full administrative approval in Europe (one and a half years for offshore applications). This varies from a prompt eight months in Finland to almost 5 years in Portugal. Ireland's figure is 33.5 months – a lower mid-table ranking in terms of efficiency.

Curiously the number of organisations which need to be statutorily consulted and involved in the process is only a partial indicator of the time spans involved. This number ranges from just 5 on average in Denmark (taking 32 months) to 41 in Greece (50 months). In fact despite their highly efficient systems, Finnish and Austrian applications must pass via more than 30 different agencies prior to approval while in Portugal, as in Ireland, only 14 organisations are involved.

The report concludes that the huge lack of coherence between national systems is hampering the EU's overall potential to meet its goal of producing 20% of energy from renewable sources by 2020. It recommends the need for clearer guidelines and more strategic and streamlined approval mechanisms. It should be noted that the study relates only to administrative processes and does not examine the impact of public acceptance in delaying matters.

[Further details](#)

New vision for Tourism policy

On 14 April, in advance of the Informal Ministerial meeting on tourism, the Spanish Presidency organised the European Tourism Stakeholders Conference. This event explored ways and means to strengthen the visibility of tourism at European level and discussed the actions necessary to promote a competitive EU industry, as well as how a sustainable growth in the sector can be consolidated in an updated EU policy framework.

Contributors, including some Tourism Ministers, invited the Commission to take the following points into consideration:

- 1) putting forward a consolidated framework for EU Tourism policy, encouraging the creating of a favourable environment for the development of the sector and promoting exchange of best practice between Member States;
- 2) streamlining efforts to mainstream tourism in Community policies, including an adequate coordination of various policy initiatives that impact on tourism;
- 3) facilitating access to holidays for disadvantaged groups;
- 4) raising awareness of the importance of innovation, research and ICT for the competitiveness of the industry;
- 5) mainstreaming sustainability in sectors related to tourism;
- 6) alleviating possible obstacles to opportunities for sector development; and
- 7) reinforcing Europe's image and visibility in third countries.

[Further details](#)

Sustainable integrated urban regeneration

The EU Spanish Presidency organised a high level conference on 26-27 April in Madrid entitled 'Urban Sustainability and Integrated Urban Regeneration in Europe: Policies, Programmes and Best Practices'. The event focused on two main areas.

The first was urban sustainability, including an analysis of the progress report of the

'Reference Framework of the European Sustainable City' – the policy development and performance monitoring structure Member States' Ministers with responsibility for urban development have agreed upon as a means to realise the terms of the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities.

The second was integrated urban regeneration as an approach towards city development, with a special emphasis on climate change, the promotion of social cohesion and economic growth.

The outcomes of this event are being fed into the planning for the ministerial meeting to take place in June in Toledo where the role that urban regeneration can have on integrated urban development is to be discussed.

[Further details](#)

[Sustainable Cities Reference Framework](#)

2011 RegioStars

The annual RegioStars Awards, part of the Regions for Economic Change initiative, recognise the best in innovative practices co-funded through EU cohesion policy projects (Structural Funds and Interreg).

The following themes apply:

- networking and clustering initiatives supporting regional growth and SMEs access to global markets;
- anticipating economic change;
- promoting sustainable energy in cities;
- integrated, clean urban transport; and
- promotional photography.

Deadline: 16 July.

[Further details](#)

PUBLICATIONS

Transport & Environment achievements of Cohesion Policy

DG REGIO has published the latest set of thematic studies that assess how investment under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) performed over the 2000-2006 period. The ex-post evaluations for transport infrastructure and environmental initiatives quantify some

major achievements while also raising critical issues and offering recommendations on how cohesion policy can deliver better results from 2014 onwards. Studies on the economy, enterprise and research have already been made available.

[Further details](#)

EVENTS

Urban Planning and ICT 18-20 May, Vienna

Real Corp 2010, the 15th International Conference on Urban Planning, Regional Development and Information Society, will explore how urban planning and the use of technologies can improve quality of life, health, sustainability and prosperity in cities. Its theme of "Liveable, Healthy, Prosperous Cities for Everyone - Promising Vision or Unrealistic Fantasy?" will be addressed from various interdisciplinary perspectives including transportation, architecture, property markets, ecology, GIS and surveying.

[Further details](#)

Lifelong Learning Programme 19-20 May, Barcelona

A conference on the future of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) as part of the activities organised by the Spanish Presidency of the EU will discuss experiences to date with the current programme, and open the debate on how the EU funding programmes on Education & Training should be designed for the 2014-2020 budgetary period.

[Further details](#)

Sustainable Estuary Regions 20 May, Waterford

To mark EU Maritime Day, the South-East Regional Authority will host a conference on 'Sustainable Estuarial Regions'. The event will examine the topic of the environmental pressures faced by shared

water bodies - with a specific focus on the Waterford Estuary as a significant regional resource - and how marine spatial planning can assist with consultation between competing interests, coordinated development and integrated management approaches. Representatives of UK estuary management bodies, various sectoral agencies and the European Commission will give their perspectives.

[Further details](#)

Road research 20 May, Dublin

UCD's Critical Infrastructure Group is currently undertaking a Marie Curie Initial Training Network entitled TEAM under the Seventh Framework Programme. As part of this project a half-day debate is being organised on future roads research and the use of sustainable and cost-effective new technologies and processes for both passenger and freight transportation services and networks. Speakers will include a sustainable surface transport expert from DG Research as well as a panel of national transport, engineering and environmental specialists.

Contact emma.sheils@ucd.ie

Local responses to poverty 8 June, Brussels

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is to host a forum for local and regional authorities, organisations and EU institutions to discuss initiatives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The aim of the event is to increase awareness of innovative ways in which the local and regional levels can contribute to formulating European responses:

- More accessible local social services for the vulnerable;
- Increasing participation in the labour market; and
- Inclusive citizenship in urban and rural areas.

The CoR has recently produced a number of Opinions on this general issue as part of the 'European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion'.

[Further details](#)

Digital solutions for inclusive cities 10-11 June, Linköping, Sweden - To be streamed online

How smart ICT solutions can be used to plan and build more attractive cities and how they can stimulate more sustainable energy policies and ways of travelling and communicating are the themes of the EURO CITIES Knowledge Society Forum's next meeting. Latest research and trends in sustainable urban planning as well as individual city visions and strategies will be discussed.

[Further details](#)

Cycling cities 22-25 June, Copenhagen

The 2010 Velo-City Global conference, organised by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF), will bring together cycling experts, city planners, decision makers, NGOs and researchers to discuss the potential and challenges of cycling. The conference will offer first hand experience of the host city's many innovative initiatives in the field of cycling and will serve as a platform for the exchange of knowledge, research, ideas and experiences on how cycling relates to urban planning, sustainable mobility, climate change, quality of life and tackling obesity.

[Further details](#)



Irish Regions
Brussels Office
Oifig Réigiún na hÉireann, An Bhrúiséal

*Working for Ireland's
local and regional levels in Europe*

Rond-Point Schuman, 11
B-1040 Brussels
www.iro.ie

Robert Collins Ronan Gingles
Head of Office EU Programmes
 & Communications

robert.collins@iro.ie ronan.gingles@iro.ie

Tel: +3222331122 Tel: +3222331120
GSM: +32498120821 GSM: +32493203666

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