

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: Social Policy 'Experimentation'

This €3.5 million Call, launched on 21 September under the PROGRESS employment and social solidarity programme, aims to promote evidence-based social policy experimentation to address challenges such as to ensure constant adaptation of schemes and measures to evolving social needs; to provide for the participation of stakeholders in all steps of the policy cycle; and evaluation of the social impact of decisions.

The Call focuses on the following topics:

- Social inclusion of vulnerable groups such as Roma, migrants and their descendants, the homeless and youth.
- The quality of child care.
- Active and healthy ageing.
- The transition from education to employment for young people.

Among the actions to be financed are:

- Design, management and evaluation methodology of social experiments.
- Strategies to expand social experiments and translate findings into broader policy measures.
- Cooperation and networking activities.

Activities of 18-24 months duration should begin during the second quarter of 2012.

Deadline: 15 December

[Further details](#)

Call: Social Enterprise support

DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion have published a Call to support up to five pilot projects on models for cooperation and partnership between public institutions and commercial and social enterprises. The aim is to create specific partnerships intended to increase effectiveness on issues such as applying corporate social responsibility in local communities and solving identifiable socio-economic problems.

Applications must be developed and implemented through a transnational partnership (at least three Member States) of consortia, each of whose membership reflects the three categories of organisation. Funded actions should be geared towards identifying, measuring and approving good practices which can be reproduced in other EU countries and regions.

Activities must reflect at least one of the following priority themes:

- Evaluation and modelling of innovative social structures, new relationships between employers and workers and between various civil society actors.
- Improving the matching of business demands to the supply of services from social enterprises.
- Dissemination of successful cases of this form of cooperation.
- Stock-taking and analysis of the social impact of social economy activities on the basis of actual examples in order to improve policy-making.
- Access to credit and tax relief tailored to the social economy.

Deadline: 15 November

"All-inclusive cooperation between public authorities and enterprises for social inclusion"

Call: Lifelong Learning

The European Commission has published the 2012 general Call for Proposals for its Lifelong Learning Programme to foster cooperation, interchange and mobility between European education and training systems.

Among the key topics of relevance to local and national actors, the Leonardo da Vinci (Vocational Training) 'multilateral projects for the Transfer of Innovation' strand has a deadline of 2 February 2012 as do the 'multilateral projects, networks and accompanying measures' across Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig, and Leonardo. Mobility actions under Leonardo must apply by 3 February.

Deadlines in February and March 2012 apply.

[Further details](#)

Catch up on other recent calls for proposals through previous issues of this Bulletin: [June](#) & [July](#).

Competitive Regions Research & Innovation funding guide

The European Commission released a new Practical Guide providing information on the different funding sources and opportunities for regions to engage in research and innovation at the end of August. Covering the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), the Competitiveness & Innovation Framework Programme (which includes the Intelligent Energy Europe, ICT Policy Support Programme, and Entrepreneurship & Innovation programmes), as well as the Structural Funds, the guide traces the scope and themes of each programme, eligibility rules for funded actions and application procedures among other matters. Further project development advice is also provided, including a Checklist and

Scorecard which are intended to help stakeholders to identify, and mix, the appropriate funding programme(s) for their ambitions at every stage of developing and implementing a project.

'Competitive European regions through research and innovation'

Active Ageing funding brochure

A brochure has been published by the Committee of the Regions, European Commission and AGE Platform Europe, presenting the EU funding possibilities for regional and local initiatives to promote active ageing and inter-generational solidarity. It is hoped the brochure will make a major contribution to next year's European Year for Active Ageing, by showing what resources are available at European level and inviting regional and local stakeholders to make the best possible use of them, preferably by working in partnership with organisations from other Member States.

[Brochure](#)

Project: Dublin Energy Awareness

€1.5 million will be invested in Dublin over the next 5 years to promote the uptake of renewable energy as part of a newly approved Interreg North West Europe project. Codema (City of Dublin Energy Management Agency) will lead the delivery of 'Academy of Champions for Energy' (ACE) as an innovative approach to engaging with citizens in five countries to address the public information gap on the all-round importance of switching from conventional fossil fuels to renewable sources. The overall aim is to encourage local authorities, businesses and citizens to implement their own renewable energy projects based on a heightened awareness of factors such as cost savings, supply and demand, and technology.

A significant element of the project will focus on the joint development, along with Dublin City Council, of a multi-functional smart-energy feature in a city-centre location, with the aim of providing

information and education on energy issues in a creative and straightforward manner. This will be complemented by a dedicated renewable energy space to be developed in Kevin Street Library and which will become the main resource for renewable energy information for the public in Dublin. The site will also promote the transnational element of the project by showcasing the work of a Dutch energy-neutral village and a French biomass community farm.

Codema will work with companies such as EirGrid and Siemens who will act as sustainable energy 'champions' to share their collective knowledge and expertise on developing Ireland as a key player in the roll-out of renewable energy. An awards scheme will also recognise stand-out renewable energy actions from across Ireland, UK, Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

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NEWS & POLICY

Commission proposes integrated development approaches

The European Commission adopted a draft legislative package of regulations to frame cohesion policy for the 2014-2020 period on 6 October. The main outcome of the proposals is that the policy should be more closely aligned with the EU's long-term growth and employment objectives as established in the 'Europe 2020' strategy. This implies deploying its instruments as a means of meeting EU targets on education, job creation, innovation, research & development, climate issues and poverty.

Consequently, Member States are to be asked to enter into 'Partnership Contracts' with the Commission which would operate based on agreeing to use EU resources towards a limited set of priority development themes (chosen from a menu of 'Europe 2020' topics) and committing to the delivery of certain concrete actions which will be measured by milestones. This tighter focussing of the use of EU-assisted investment means

that 80% of Ireland's budget for the next regional programme(s) under the Structural Funds will be devoted to a combination of shifting to a low-carbon economy; research, technological development & innovation; and SME support actions. Similarly, a minimum of 20% of the European Social Fund allocation should be allocated to promoting social inclusion and combating poverty.

A further stipulation is that Member States would have to demonstrate or commit to compliance with legislative and regulatory prerequisites (e.g. full transposition of relevant EU directives or existence of national strategies in support of certain EU objectives) in order to access funding. For the first time, national macro-economic conditions and policy would also become a factor in maintaining agreed EU funding. On the other hand, efficient attainment of targets as set out in the contracts should allow access to additional funding via a performance reserve worth 5% of total programme values.

Harmonising the operation of the various EU funds for regional development (ERDF), social affairs (ESF), rural development (EAFRD), and maritime & fisheries issues (EMFF) under a single coordinated umbrella (Common Strategic Framework) creates the possibility for a more ambitious and integrated EU approach to territorial development. In this vein, sustainable urban development is being prioritised with a proposal for "integrated actions" at city level which will be financed by combining at least 5% of national ERDF allocations with allocations from the other funds. Integrated territorial development strategies could also apply to rural areas. This could potentially involve EU funding, from different sources, being delivered at local or regional level as more of a place-based blending of complementary investment in infrastructure, training and enterprise development activities, for example.

The fine details of programme design and budget allocation remain to be determined nationally as does the share-

out of funding among Member States. For Ireland a minimum of 52% of the cohesion allocation will go towards ESF activities with the remainder for ERDF. The rural development element will again be more significant in size.

The draft regulations will now be negotiated between the European Parliament and Member States with agreement expected in 2013 as part of the wider discussions over the EU Budget for 2014-2020.

[Draft regulations for cohesion policy 2014-2020](#)

Microfinancing fund to gain social focus

The Commission's 6 October unveiling of its future cohesion policy package also includes plans for an EU Programme for Social Change and Innovation (PSCI). This instrument in support of increasing the coherence of employment and social policies across the EU is envisaged as forming a third pillar of the EU Initiative for Employment and Social Inclusion 2014-2020 along with the European Social Fund (ESF) and Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF). It will integrate and extend the scope of three existing programmes beyond 2013.

The PSCI will support policy coordination, sharing of best practices, capacity-building and testing of innovative policies, with the aim that the most successful measures should be upscaled and mainstreamed within Member States using their ESF programmes. For example, the foreseen revamping of the PROGRESS programme on employment and social solidarity would involve balancing its current activities (analysis and mutual learning on policy approaches to issues such as working conditions, social inclusion and anti-discrimination) alongside a €97 million budget for additional small-scale testing of particularly innovative methods ('social innovation and experimentation').

Similarly, the proposals for an enlarged European PROGRESS Microfinancing & Social Entrepreneurship Facility include

extending its remit beyond the current objective of providing entrepreneurial financing (up to €25,000) for unemployed persons, those at risk of redundancy or those from disadvantaged categories (such as the elderly, youth, minorities and the disabled) who suffer from limited access to the conventional credit market. The new programme would additionally provide €95.5 million in support of investments to develop and expand businesses whose primary purpose is of a social nature. Funding for capacity-building of microfinance institutions (i.e. intermediaries between EU financing and microenterprises) is also envisaged. This may be especially relevant to Irish involvement which has been held back to date by the lack of an agreed organisation(s) to assume the role of intermediary finance provider in operating the EIB guarantee-backed system on a national basis.

The final element of the PSCI is the EURES information and advice services network in support of worker mobility in Europe. This is set to be bolstered at both national and EU level including targeted schemes such as the 'Your First EURES Job' scheme which is currently being piloted.

[Further details](#)

Public-Public cooperation: Procurement exemption guidance

A 4 October discussion paper from the European Commission examines the general issue of collaborative arrangements among public bodies in order to use their collective administrative, technical and other resources to perform their public interest tasks. For example, a number of municipal authorities sharing service delivery through a jointly held and controlled undertaking or dividing up relevant but related tasks between themselves.

According to EU Court of Justice case law, under certain circumstances, such cooperation does not fall within the remit of EU public procurement legislation to ensure that the relevant public

purchasing contracts are open to competition for suppliers across the internal market. However, this is a grey area for contractors and a 2010 European Parliament Report found that there is a recognised need to draw a more definite distinction between this type of arrangement and those procurement activities which should benefit from open competition among economic operators through an open tendering procedure.

The new Commission 'Staff Working Paper' seeks to distinguish between the two forms by providing clarifying guidance for stakeholders by reference to the case law. Its conclusions, which have no legal standing and create no additional rules, are intended to allow for a better understanding and application of the existing legal framework. The issue is being considered as part of the ongoing reform process of the Public Procurement Directives.

['Concerning the application of EU public procurement law to relations between contracting authorities \('public-public cooperation\)'](#)

Future shape of Rural Development

A leaked copy of the draft Rural Development regulation, not officially due for release until 12 October before being debated by agriculture ministers on 20 October, contains details of the proposals for the post-2013 policy. These represent only a marginal change from the current status quo while emphasising such issues as innovation, demographic change and renewal, a better upstream-downstream balance in the agri-food sector and support for local agri-produce.

Chief among the changes is the abolition of the current four axes approach along with the requirement for Member States to devote a minimum share of their national allocation to supporting competitiveness of agriculture and forestry; environmental improvements; and quality of life and economic diversification. Instead, six investment priorities are proposed: 1) fostering knowledge transfer in agriculture and forestry; 2) enhancing competitiveness of

all types of agriculture and of farm viability; 3) promoting food chain organisation and risk management in agriculture; 4) preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry; 5) promoting resource efficiency and the transition to a low carbon economy in agriculture and forestry; and 6) realising the jobs potential and development of rural areas. These will be reflected by a reduced number of more broadly-focussed measures with greater combination between them being allowed in order to achieve flexibility.

LEADER will no longer represent a separate fourth axis but local development actions to a value of 5% of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) contribution to each national programme will again be possible and could potentially apply across all 6 Priorities.

Overall, Member States are to be granted a good deal of flexibility to decide on how to spend their allocated rural development funds. However, greater coordination will be imposed to ensure complementarity of actions and synergies with those supported by the EU funds for Regional Development (ERDF), Social Affairs (ESF) and Maritime & Fisheries (EMFF). This is to be based on Partnership Contracts at national level (see article above on cohesion policy).

The distribution of funds across Member States has yet to be decided. This will be determined on criteria linked to the objectives of competitive agriculture, sustainable management of natural resources and balanced territorial development of rural areas, as well as taking past performance into account. Each programme may benefit from a performance reserve amounting to 5% of its EAFRD allocation plus assigned revenue which will be allocated in 2019 on the basis of a review by the Commission.

Resource-efficient economy plans tabled

Back in January the Commission published 'a Resource-efficient Europe' -

one of the seven flagships underpinning the Europe 2020 strategy. This established a framework for policies to support the shift towards a low-carbon economy and to help ensure that long-term strategies in areas such as energy, climate change, research and innovation, industry, transport, agriculture, fisheries and environment policy produce results which decouple economic growth from natural resource consumption.

As a further step, the Commission unveiled its 'Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe' on 20 September. This sets 2020 as the target date for a smarter use of those resources considered to be under the greatest pressure (ecosystem services, biodiversity, minerals and metals, water, air, land and soil, and marine) and lists a series of actions and initiatives to be taken at EU and national level in order to reach these objectives. These include proposals to change consumption patterns by creating more supply and demand for 'green' products; to use economic incentives to reward investments in efficiency; and to introduce voluntary and mandatory measures to help optimise efficiency and reward green products.

Although the paper does not yet set any legally-binding targets, it does suggest introducing joint resource efficiency indicators and objectives across the 27 EU Member States by the end of 2013, and to continue to measure progress in this area in the meantime.

[Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe](#)

Co-financing burden reduced for Irish projects

One of the ramifications of the ongoing economic crisis and severe cuts in public budgets has been greatly heightened difficulties for organisations in securing 'match funding' to complement support that they have secured from EU Cohesion, Rural Development, or Fisheries Policy with particular projects or initiatives in mind. This has slowed the progress (in some cases even the launch) of certain programmes and brought with

it the risk of decommitment of unspent allocations.

Under a Commission proposal brought forward in August, six Member States, including Ireland, would be allowed to effectively reduce their national contribution in such instances in order to inject additional financing into their economies and thereby improve funding absorption rates. The additional EU 'co-financing' arrangements would in fact come from a front-loaded reimbursement of funds already committed – bringing the EU contribution up to a maximum of 95% of total costs if requested by a Member State concerned.

The new approach would apply to activities relating to boosting competitiveness, growth and job creation. It is estimated that the benefit to the Irish economy could amount to €98 million. This exceptional temporary measure would cease to apply to Ireland as soon as the country stopped receiving support under the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism.

The Commission has requested that the Council and the European Parliament adopt the proposal in a fast-track legislative procedure by the end of this year to allow for the vital projects to get off the ground as soon as possible.

€55 million support package for unemployed Irish construction workers

An application for assistance from the European Globalisation adjustment Fund (EGF) with dealing with the effects of the economic downturn on the Irish construction industry has led to a European Commission proposal to fund 65% of a €55 million package of measures to boost the reemployment prospects of redundant workers in small and medium sized enterprises associated with this sector. The proposal will now go to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers for their approval.

The funding, announced on 5 October, is to be directed towards 5,987 affected workers deemed to be experiencing the

greatest difficulties re-integrating into the labour market. It must be used over the next 2 years to provide occupational guidance, vocational training and education programmes, enterprise/self-employment assistance, and training allowances and income supports. This is to include the provision of on- and off-the-job training for 2,258 redundant apprentices by means of alternating temporary employment and college education. Overall, ex-workers from 3,348 firms are to be targeted.

The three applications which covered "construction of buildings", "specialised construction" and "architectural and engineering" collectively represent, far and away the largest scheme sanctioned by the EGF since 2007 and brings the amount of assistance provided to Ireland by the fund to over €60 million from a total of €357.7 million to date. It is also one of the first occasions where EGF will be pressed into action on the basis of an entire industrial sector experiencing difficulties relating to broad economic circumstances rather than as a consequence of a single large employer closing business and relocating to a less expensive location elsewhere.

Further details

Globalisation Fund will be available to more workers in future

Meanwhile, on 6 October the Commission published its proposals for the new EGF Regulation. The planned changes to the fund are intended to improve its scope of operation from 2014 onwards. These include making its support available to additional categories of workers – those on fixed-term contracts, temporary agents, the self-employed and the managers of micro or SMEs – whose collective scale of redundancy satisfies the general eligibility criteria.

A more radical departure relating to the notion of dealing with the effects of "structural changes in world trade patterns and unexpected major crises" is the proposal to allow farmers to benefit from transitory support to facilitate their

adaptation to a new market situation resulting from the conclusion by the EU of trade agreements affecting agricultural products. This would be through a differentiating of their circumstances from those of other workers and a requirement for more easily fulfilled conditions.

Henceforth there will also be more emphasis placed on active measures as opposed to allowances. Time periods for approving Member States' applications will also be shortened by imposing new deadlines and streamlining procedures. An indicative amount of close to €420 million will be made available for EGF each year.

Regulation proposal

Raw materials strategy adopted by Parliament

A report adopted by MEPs on 13 September on a European raw materials strategy goes beyond a Commission proposal presented earlier this year by urging greater coordination between all 27 Member States on this policy field, and specific decision-making mechanisms to deal with related issues at the EU level. In particular, it calls for the setting up of an EU raw materials task force to draw up, monitor and review policies to ensure strategic coherence. The report also stresses the importance of setting more ambitious EU objectives for future raw materials policy, in order to guarantee a reliable and sustainable supply for European industry.

Resolution on 'An effective raw materials strategy for Europe'

Commission communication on 'Tackling the challenges in commodity markets and on raw materials'

'SME test' on new laws moves nearer

A high-level task force charged with championing the cause of SMEs in national and European policy-making has given its approval to calls for an 'SME test' to ensure that draft laws do not

impinge on the prospects of smaller companies. The inaugural meeting of the SME Envoy network of Member State representatives (including Minister John Perry) on 14 September revealed a shared ambition among members to compel legislators at both EU and national levels to factor potential impacts on this sector into their thinking in all cases. Such a system applies in 12 Member States as of now.

The network, which has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of commitments such as this made under the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA), has reached agreement to pursue two further points over the next year in a bid to facilitate and boost enterprise: making it possible to start a business within three days at a cost of no more than €100; and putting in place measures to improve SMEs' access to finance through increased availability and use of loan guarantees, together with micro-credit for start-ups and micro-companies. This latter ambition is already leading the Commission to propose an action plan to improve access to finance for SMEs before the end of the year and to work on breaking down national barriers to the venture capital market.

[Further details](#)

[DG Enterprise & Industry 'SME Test' webpage](#)

Future financing fund for firms with growth prospects

Meanwhile, in a recent interview with the EurActiv news agency, EU SME envoy coordinator Daniel Calleja Crespo confirmed that a new financing instrument for small firms is under development with the post-2014 landscape in mind. The 'Business Competitiveness & SME programme' is envisaged as comprising two complimentary elements. An equity facility would support funds that provide venture capital and mezzanine finance, and invest in enterprises with growth potential, in particular in their expansion stage. Meanwhile a loan guarantee

facility would provide schemes to assure credit and also support the securitisation of SME debt finance portfolios. Importantly, these measures are being aimed towards SMEs that demonstrate growth potential in any sector, and not only at those engaged in hi-tech research and innovation activities or working on themes that the Commission has prioritised.

[Interview](#)

New state aid rules for Services of General Economic Interest

On 16 September the Commission's DG Competition published detailed draft legislation on state aid rules for Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI). The new proposals aim to simplify and make existing rules more flexible for controlling aid provided by public authorities to companies supplying SGEI, such as utilities, waste collection, postal services, healthcare and transport. They are intended to allow for a greater number of exemptions from the notification requirement for the supply of services on a small, and often local, scale, and for specific services (hospital and local social services) which have little impact on Single Market competition.

A one-month stakeholder consultation period was opened with the publication of draft legislation. The finalised texts are due to be officially unveiled in February 2012.

Deadline: 16 October

[Consultation](#)

[Draft texts](#)

Environmental programme review: a mixed bag

In its recently released assessment of the 6th Environment Action Programme (6th EAP), the Commission paints a mixed picture of the achievements of this decade-long strategic framework for environmental decision-making which concludes next year. The programme was formulated to promote a full integration

of environmental protection requirements across all EU policies including the high-level objectives for growth, competitiveness and employment by prioritising action on climate change; nature and biodiversity; environment, health and quality of life; and natural resources and waste. Objectives set in each area were followed up with actions in seven more specific thematic strategies to either drive new policy or improve the coherence of existing measures on soil; the marine environment; air; pesticides; urban environment; natural resources; and waste recycling.

Although progress has differed across these thematic areas, overall, positive effects are evidenced in the review with greater coherence between various policy areas, particularly waste and natural resources, and with climate goals assessed as being on course – though the latter is thanks in no small part to parallel Commission-led initiatives such as the climate and energy package. Other notable achievements have included a major extension of the Natura 2000 network and the introduction of a comprehensive chemicals policy.

At the other extreme, shortcomings are cited in detail for each theme – notably an admission that the biodiversity objectives were set at overly ambitious levels. Poor standards of implementation of European environmental laws at national level remain a major factor generally while some of the programme's perceived failings are explained as being due to external factors such as certain Member States deploying the subsidiarity principle as a means to strongly resist proposed EU action on issues including forestry, the urban environment and soil degradation.

The report warns that Europe's continuing depletion of natural resources and ecosystem services will undermine its economy if left unchecked. However, the Commission has yet to confirm whether there will be a successor programme after 2012 given the different policy frameworks that have emerged in recent years which would seem to cover much

of the EAP's natural ground such as the low carbon roadmap and the overarching Europe 2020 strategy which includes sustainable growth. Nonetheless, national Environment Ministeries are thought to be supportive of a follow-on programme.

[Further details](#)

Spatial information sharing and access

The 2007 INSPIRE (Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe) Directive aims to create an EU-wide spatial data infrastructure to allow for the sharing of environmental and spatial information amongst public sector organisations and with the public. With a view towards finding the means to facilitate and speed up such access, a public consultation on the benefits of harmonising data and introducing common standards in key policy areas such as energy, climate change, biodiversity, the marine environment, and human health has now been launched by the Commission.

Deadline: 21 October

[Consultation](#)

[INSPIRE Directive](#)

MEPs call for homelessness strategy

Building on prior work carried out at EU-level on the issue, the European Parliament reiterated its call for a European strategy to fight against homelessness on 14 September. MEPs voted by a large majority to adopt a resolution from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs asking Member States to end the problem in Europe over the coming years.

On the basis that the EU has already launched the 'European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion' initiative as a cornerstone of its Europe 2020 growth strategy with a target of taking 20 million Europeans out of poverty by that date, the Parliament is calling for concrete progress on the development of an ambitious and integrated European

approach to guide national and regional homelessness strategies. As well as creating an informed framework by which to monitor the development of strategies at these levels, the resolution calls for an EU strategy to deliver a package of activities which will have practical effect on the ground:

- improved knowledge and understanding, including mutual learning and transnational exchange, on key issues in the fight against homelessness;
- a specific focus on 'housing-led' approaches (under the social innovation strand of the Platform against Poverty) in order to strengthen evidence-based practice and policy development on effective combinations of housing and floating support; and
- stronger links with EU funding streams for housing marginalised groups – particularly the Structural Funds.

The national and regional strategies, it argues, should be founded on a combination of five priorities: 1) defining concrete objectives (including prevention); 2) reducing the time that the homeless are without shelter, 3) reducing the worst forms of homelessness, 4) improving the quality of services for the homeless, and 5) improving access to a supply of affordable housing.

[Further details](#)

Ports package in pipeline

On 8 September, EU Transport Commissioner Siim Kallas signalled an intention to launch a comprehensive legislative package to help European seaports to remain competitive and to support the sector's huge potential for growth. This will aim to bring forward measures to not only safeguard ports as key engines of economic development and relatively untapped sources of employment potential but also to tackle major challenges in terms of productivity, investment needs, developmental bottlenecks, significantly contributing to

reducing transport-related CO2 emissions, and enhanced integration with adjacent cities and regions.

The key areas of interest which are to be addressed by a set of proposals to be formulated in 2013 are: 1) a competitive and open environment in port services; 2) cutting administrative red tape; and 3) improving the transparency of port financing to avoid any distortions of competition and to encourage private investment. These are to be informed by a large-scale conference on the future of European ports which is to be held next year, following which a consultation with stakeholders will be organised. The Commission's review of EU ports policy and the challenges and opportunities facing ports in the period up to 2030 was announced in the Transport White Paper published in March.

[Further details](#)

Volunteering: breaking down national barriers

Plans to boost the profile of volunteering in Europe and to improve the recognition of skills gained through participation were unveiled by the Commission on 21 September. Set against a backdrop of the current European Year of Volunteering, the Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering outlines a range of measures by which Member States could better tap into the potential of this sector whose activities are seen as making a direct contribution to the key objectives of EU policies such as social inclusion, education, skills development, employment, and promotion of citizenship.

This represents the first time the Commission has devoted a policy document exclusively to an issue which has traditionally struggled for the lack a clear legal framework. The Commission's commitment to overcoming these obstacles is particularly evident on a cross-border basis where it calls for a greater opening up of national schemes in order to foster linkages between Member States. Among the main proposals outlined is the creation of a

'European Skills Passport' to ensure straightforward recognition across Europe of professional qualifications earned through voluntary activities as well as establishing a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

[Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Activities in the EU](#)

Environmental taxation as an innovation driver

With domestic water charges seemingly on the way in Ireland, the recent Green Budget Europe Annual Conference on the potential for improving the environment using economic instruments may provide insights from the experiences of other EU Member States. The high-level event dealt with using environmental fiscal reform and associated mechanisms such as user-charges, and deposit-refund systems not only as revenue streams but as a means to drive much-needed innovation in companies. This, it is argued, could best be achieved by simultaneously encouraging both the production of environmentally friendly and energy efficient products and a decoupling of consumption from raw material depletion as part of a process of positively communicating the issue to the public. The conference also addressed the Revised Energy Tax Directive in some depth.

[Conference materials](#)

European Heritage Label approved

Sites which have significance in the history or integration of Europe are set to be able to avail of a European heritage label from 2013 onwards after the European Parliament's Culture & Education Committee reached unanimous agreement with the EU Member States on 5 October. This decision was seen as likely to have been the main obstacle to the Parliament as a whole approving the proposal in

November ahead of formal ratification in the European Council.

The scheme, which will extend a current inter-governmental initiative onto a pan-European footing, aims to promote educational activities and to raise young people's awareness of natural, archeological, or urban sites, cultural landscapes, cultural goods and objects or "intangible heritage" associated with a place, amongst other categories. The awarding of the label will be based on clear and transparent common procedures and criteria.

Every two years, Member States will be able to propose up to two candidate sites, from which the jury of independent experts will chose a maximum of one.

[Further details](#)

LIFE and local authorities: An overview

To showcase 70 of the most successful examples of local and regional authorities who have used the EU's funding instrument for the environment as a means to drive initiatives, the European Commission and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions have recently released a publication entitled '*LIFE and local authorities: Helping regions and municipalities tackle environmental challenges*'. The brochure also includes an analysis of local and regional policy challenges in the fields of mobility, climate change, waste & water management and urban planning.

[Brochure](#)

Landfill compliance key to cutting greenhouse gas

National-level policies on municipal waste management to adhere to the terms of the Landfill Directive have even more of a role in curbing European greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions than previously thought, according to a newly published European Environmental Agency (EEA) report. '*Waste opportunities – Past and future climate benefits from better municipal*

waste management in Europe' takes a life-cycle approach to calculating emissions from the biodegradable element of municipal waste – thereby demonstrating the potential impacts of various waste management strategies – by considering processing and transport factors as well as accounting for emissions avoided through replacing the displacement of fossil fuels with energy recovered from waste.

As waste generation volumes continue to rise across the EU – municipal solid waste standing at 524 kg per person across the EU (2008 figures) – the study calculates that even reaching a state of compliance by all Member States with the Directive's waste diversion targets (mainly towards anaerobic digestion to produce biogas) offers the potential of reducing methane escape from decomposing organic matter by an annual 62 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂-e) by 2020. In context this represents almost half as much more of a reduction than a 'business-as-usual' approach, based on the current regime of 40% of municipal waste being recycled and a similar amount going to landfill, would achieve over the same period (44 million tonnes). Were an all-out ban on landfill to take place with immediate effect, this is calculated to eliminate an additional 16 million tonnes of emissions annually.

[EEA Report](#)

Landscape fragmentation: lessons for planning

Which part of Ireland has best maintained its natural landscape intact in the face of pressure from urban development and transport infrastructure – thereby lessening the negative impacts on its wildlife populations? According to a new European Environmental Agency scientific report on 'landscape fragmentation' the South-West takes this plaudit narrowly ahead of both the West and Border regions. Due to their relative remoteness and low population densities, these regions are in turn a good deal less fragmented than the others, including highly urbanised Dublin which, not

surprisingly, trails in a distant last. Northern Ireland is adjudged to be significantly more fragmented than all Irish regions bar the capital.

All told, the verdict on Ireland from this first pan-European report on the topic is positive by comparison with the high fragmentation in evidence across Benelux, Malta, Germany and France. In these countries, development (sometimes in common with other human impacts such as intensive agriculture) has had widespread and very serious impacts on wildlife in terms of noise, pollution, subdivision of habitats and isolation. Changes to ecology are described as having a slow-burner effect on animal populations, indicating that further species decline across Europe is highly likely to result for ongoing steady increases in landscape fragmentation. The report also points out that the process facilitates the spread of invasive species and reduces the ecosystem services that human society relies on. The EU recently adopted a Strategy on Biodiversity and Ecosystems where green infrastructure features prominently.

The study purports to provide a foundation for environmental monitoring and protective measures for those landscapes that remain intact. It also makes the point that decision-making on infrastructure and development continues to fail to account for the value of landscapes and that considerations such as biodiversity and landscape quality are often marginalised whereas fragmentation analysis should be integrated into transport and regional planning so that cumulative effects are considered more effectively in the future.

['Landscape Fragmentation in Europe' report](#)

EVENTS

Regional Innovation Strategies

28 October, Brussels

The Regional Innovation Monitor (RIM) is a European Commission funded initiative bringing together the whole innovation community of regional stakeholders including policy makers, practitioners, researchers, and members of other networks to facilitate the exchange of good practices on regional innovation to stimulate the economy and ensure sustainable growth. It aims to provide a reference framework for the development of more effective and efficient strategies by assessing and comparing regional performances and policy impacts.

The 2nd RIM policy workshop aims to convey new perspectives, raise new questions, and advance new ideas for the development of more successful regional innovation policies. A sequence of three thematic sessions will address the topics of “smart specialisation”, “demand oriented policies”, and “the role of universities in regional development”. A presentation of findings from the project itself will be complemented by insights from policy practice to bring about an active debate and exchange of opinions among the workshops participants.

[Further details](#)

Managing and financing WEEE locally & regionally

28 October, Brussels

A new directive currently being discussed in the European Institutions will set new goals to be achieved on waste of electric and electronic equipment (WEEE), modify who is responsible for its management and recycling; and update product classification. This event will explore potential financial support to achieve the environmental goals through the LIFE+ Programme.

[Further details](#)

Creativity for Micro-enterprises

2-3 November, Kilkenny

The Interreg Ireland-Wales CIME project in support of SME creativity and innovation to adapt to economic challenges, presents the ‘Creativity in Action for Micro-Enterprises Conference 2011’. The event is designed to engage, inspire and inform Micro-Enterprises and agencies alike to take action in this direction. CIME includes the South-East Regional Authority and Kilkenny Enterprise Board as its Irish partners.

www.ciaconference2011.com

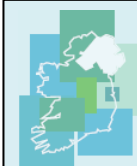
Innovation for BMW Growth

4 November, Galway

The BMW Regional Assembly and the Centre for Innovation & Structural Change at NUI Galway will jointly host a conference entitled ‘Regional Innovation: A Catalyst for Sustainable Economic Growth in the BMW Region’. This event should be of interest to industry, state agencies and regional organisations and will include an expert panel discussion on the topic: ‘Do Regional Innovation Systems contribute to Sustainable Economic Growth?’

[Further Information](#)

The staff of this office can be requested to attend events or provide representation at meetings in Brussels on behalf of local and regional authorities.



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