EU News Bulletin

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

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FUNDING, NETWORKING & PROJECTS

Flood Relief

The devastating flooding across parts of Ireland has brought the issue of EU funding into stark perspective. Each year the EU sets aside €1 billion for the Solidarity Fund (EUSF) to retrospectively meet a small proportion of the costs associated with emergency operations undertaken by public authorities to alleviate damage caused by major natural disasters.

The following activities may qualify:

- Immediate infrastructure restoration;
- Temporary accommodation and emergency services;
- Securing of prevention infrastructures
- Protection of cultural heritage;
- Clean-up operations.

This is limited to non-insurable damage.

The fund (proper) only kicks in once damage entails costs above a certain threshold having been incurred. For Ireland (based on reported national income), this figure is set at €972.729 million. Eligible damage costs below this may be aided at a 2.5% rate while costs beyond that can be reimbursed at 6%.

However, even if this level of expense is not reached, €75 of the annual budget has been ring-fenced for circumstances "where a region has been affected by an extraordinary disaster, mainly a natural one, affecting the major part of its population, with serious and lasting repercussions on living conditions and the economic stability of the region." This mechanism has been deployed in relation to severe flooding on a number of occasions in recent years: providing aid (at the 2.5% rate) to a value of €11.78m for Romania (2009), € 8.25m for Slovenia (2008), € 9.3m for Greece (2007) and € 20.35m for Bulgaria (2007).

Crucially the application, which is tabled by the national government, must be made within 10 weeks of the first reported damage occurring. According to available figures, having dealt with the June Italian earthquake and January's hurricane damage in France, €385m remains in the 2009 reserve including €63.22m for extraordinary regional disasters.

More information

Call: Third Country Nationals and Refugees

The separate 2009 Calls for applications to the European Integration Fund (EIF) and European Refugee Fund (ERF) have been launched. EIF supports efforts made in enabling third-country nationals of different economic, social, cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds to fulfill the conditions of residence and to facilitate their integration into society. ERF supports and encourages the efforts made by the Member States in the reception of refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons. Local Authorities, Urban Partnerships and Integrated Local Development Companies are eligible for support as are Community & Voluntary and NGO organisations. These funds are administered in Ireland by Pobal on behalf of the Office of the Minister for Integration (OMI). Regional information sessions on the two calls will be held in the new year:

- 11 January, Kilkenny
- 13 January, Dublin
- 14 January, Sligo
- 19 January, Limerick.

Pobal

Contact: rtierney@pobal.ie or cflanagan@pobal.ie

Annual Work Programmes 2009:

Integration Fund

Refugee Fund

Deadlines: 26 February 2010

Call: Maritime transport routes and port hinterlands

Port authorities may be interested in a joint short-sea shipping routes call for proposals for **'Motorways of the Sea'** projects. The purpose of this initiative is to improve existing inter-port freight transport logistics routes or to establish new viable and regular maritime connections in the (wider) North Sea which links Ireland with Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and Norway. At a minimum, proposals should include the development of equipment or infrastructure (e.g. hinterland access roads) in ports situated in at least two of these countries. Public and private interests (e.g. transport operators) should be involved. The projects selected under this process will have priority status to take part in the April 2010 Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)

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call for proposals which may co-finance studies, infrastructure or the setting up of fleet management systems.

More information

Micro-finance fund advances

A Commission plan to create a micro-finance facility to help people at risk of losing their jobs to start their own micro-enterprises was backed in principle by the European Parliament in early November, although the funding arrangements remain undecided. Under this initiative, the Commission had proposed to make €100m in support available to provide eligible candidates with loans of up to €25,000. This budget was to be sourced from a reallocation from the Progress fund for employment, social affairs and equal opportunities.

The Parliament Employment and Social Affairs Committee's report on the matter recommends a €50 m increase on the allocation and holding off on any definitive decision in regard to the use of the Progress fund, pending investigation of the possibility of establishing a separate budget line for these purposes. MEPs have also called for clarification that the future fund would not replicate existing SME liquidity initiatives such as Jeremie and Jasmine at EU-level, or indeed, national, regional and local level equivalents.

Lifelong Learning website

The Executive Agency for Education, Audiovisual & Culture has launched a new website on the EU Lifelong Learning programme, providing clearer and updated information on the programme as well as useful summaries on the funding opportunities available including the call launched in October.

More information

Project: South Tipperary water management

South Tipperary County Council and Waterways Ireland are among the partners in a newly-approved Interreg 4C project. *Waterways Forward* aims to improve the management of inland waterways and the regions adjacent to them by promoting an integrated, sustainable and participatory approach.

The partners, public authorities and other relevant institutions from 12 European countries, will each bring forward good practices and share their experiences as part of the joint design of recommendations for management models and regional action plans to implement these in particular circumstances: including the River Suir as far inland as Clonmel. The models are intended to create a sound basis for devising and applying policies to boost the all-round socio-economic development of such waterways areas in a balanced manner while respecting the environment.

Only 10 percent of all submitted projects have been approved under this particular call. The next call for proposals will open on 9 December but will be dedicated exclusively to Capitalisation Projects focusing specifically on the transfer of already existing good practices into Structural Funds Regional Programmes. A further call for the more standard Regional Initiative Projects has been confirmed to be opened in late 2010. This is likely to be targeted on particular themes.

Interreg IVC

Project: Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown urban rehabilitation

SURE is a newly-approved URBACT II Thematic Network involving Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and local authorities from Hungary, Cyprus, Finland and Portugal. The network's overall objective is to enhance sustainable growth by focusing on the diversification of local economies in areas of medium-sized cities where a few economic sectors tend to dominate disproportionately.

This is to be achieved by developing an integrated socio-economic urban rehabilitation model based on heightened community involvement, to complement ongoing physical renewal efforts, in deprived residential and partly industrial urban areas. The intention is to use the network as an opportunity to build the capacity of community leaders, partners and stakeholders in disadvantaged areas - mainly in terms of enterprise development and local employment - and to draw up community-led Local Action Plans to coordinate the harnessing of existing services, proper targeting of local needs, and attracting required investment. Loughlinstown and Shanganagh, which have been designated by the national RAPID urban regeneration framework programme, are the target districts in the Irish case.

The initial Development Phase, including completing baseline studies, building stakeholder involvement and developing a detailed methodology, runs until May 2010 whereupon results will be evaluated to determine the appropriateness to proceed to the Implementation Phase where partners would exchange and work together to each develop full Local Action Plans.

DLR County Council has previous Interreg experience through Southside Partnership's involvement in the North West Europe *SPAN* (Strategic Planning Action Network) project to review engagement and participation in physical planning processes and in local governance structures.

SURE

List of newly approved URBACT networks
Note: All require additional partners by May 2010 – contact the lead partner.

Other recent calls:
www.iro.ie/funding/news/funding_calls/

Partner Searches received by the IRO from other regions:
www.iro.ie/funding/news/partner_searches/

NEWS & POLICY

'2020 Strategy' Consultation

The process of formulating a successor to the current Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs in order to greatly shape the future direction of EU policy-making over the next decade moved a step closer on 24 November with the launch by the Commission of a consultation on what's being called the '*EU 2020' Strategy*. Interested parties are being asked to contribute their views on the best ways to provide a new framework for creating and consolidating economic recovery by delivering greener and more socially inclusive growth (a "sustainable social market economy") where prosperity can flow from knowledge, innovation and better use of resources.

The 2020 Strategy is intended to focus on key policy areas where collaboration between the EU and its Member States (who will be invited to set national objectives) can deliver the best results through improved delivery. A set of themes has been put forward as drivers of the Strategy:

- Creating value by basing growth on knowledge;
- Empowering people in inclusive societies; and
- Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy

The Commission will table a detailed proposal incorporating contributions received to the Spring European Council in March 2010.

Although there is no explicit mention of the role of regions or Cohesion policy in the current consultation document, the Commission has acknowledged that the Strategy can only be effectively pursued through partnership between the EU, national and regional/local levels.

Submission deadline: 15 January 2010
More information

Future of Transport

To mark the closing of a period of consultation that the Commission launched in June with its 'A Sustainable Future for Transport' Communication and its Green Paper 'Trans-European Transport Network: A policy review', a high-level stakeholders' conference was held on 20 November in Brussels on the future of the European transport system. The discussion themes included an alternative fuels' policy; the deployment of innovative technologies for clean vehicles; and traffic management; responding to the needs of transport users and workers.

Identifying practical and desirable policy measures for the next decade is the first step towards the drafting of a renewed Transport White Paper, expected to be completed in the second half of 2010. Further definition on the form that this should take will be known after the December European Council delivers its conclusions. Commission priorities currently centre on the decarbonisation of transport and using the sector to boost new sources of growth and competitiveness. Particular emphasis is being put on the creation of green corridors, the formation of a core network of Trans-European Transport (TEN-T) projects; and the creation of a sizeable dedicated fund for transport and related issues. Already the new Barroso Commission has allocated transport its own Directorate-General: until now it had shared with energy.

More information

New energy standards in buildings

2021 will almost certainly signal the cut-off point after which all new buildings in the EU will have to be powered largely from renewable sources, including by means of on-site production, and meet tougher energy-efficiency standards. This follows a 17 November deal between MEPs and EU Member States, pending approval early next year from the European Parliament as a whole, that what's being termed a 'nearly zero emissions' standard should apply from that time onwards.

This updating of the 2002 Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, had become the subject of prolonged and difficult negotiation between the two institutions and was being seen as a test of the EU's credibility ahead of the UN climate summit in Copenhagen. The heating, cooling and lighting of buildings accounts for around 40% of the EU's carbon dioxide emissions.

Governments will be responsible for defining the vague 'nearly zero' standards nationally but will also be required to draw up plans to promote the conversion of existing buildings to energy performance compliance over the coming years through such means as smart meters and high-efficiency heating, plumbing and air-conditioning systems. By mid-2011 they will also need to provide a list of national incentives including grants, technical assistance and loan schemes to assist with the transition. EU support will also be forthcoming.

A very significant further stipulation is that publicly owned (or rented) buildings will need to comply with the new standards by the end of 2018.

While Ireland's Building Energy Rating (BER) system would appear to cover the new requirements for certification of all new build and market/rental properties, once national law is brought into line with the Directive (probably by 2012) the threshold at which this would apply for public buildings - if frequently visited by the public - will fall from the current 1000m2 to 500m2 and then as low as 250m2 by 2017.

Some protected historic buildings, small houses (under 50m2), temporary buildings, holiday homes, industrial sites, low energy demand workshops and agricultural buildings, and places of religious worship are to be exempted from the terms of the Directive.

More information

Integrated Local Development for EU-wide challenges?

Could Integrated Local Development (ILD) strategies - tackling economic, social and physical environment issues together - provide the most effective way of addressing strategic EU-wide challenges? A Eurocities network seminar on 3 November explored the potential for the Union to embrace and support this approach in the post 2013 funding period.

Over 60 representatives from member cities, senior officials of the European Institutions, and external experts shared their views and overwhelmingly came to the conclusion that this approach presents unquestionable benefits and efficiencies. A key added value aspect was felt to be the breaking down of 'silo thinking' in policy development, governance and service delivery by encouraging synergies, pooling of resources and joint initiatives between sectors and across administrative boundaries. A second was that it offers an informed means to optimise the effectiveness of interventions thanks to local expertise and experience of needs and opportunities.

From a purely EU perspective, this localised character was considered to offer great visibility to actions which could in turn improve public understanding of strategic European objectives if clear links were made to the means of delivery. Delegates also pointed out that the norms of EU funding coordination (relatively long-term timescales; stakeholder participation in planning and implementation; impact monitoring and evaluation etc.) naturally lend themselves to ILD approaches and have already contributed to capacity-building in many local and regional administrations. Interesting examples profiled from cities with experience in this field included Malmo's strategic combination of different EU funds to address different aspects within the same overall plan and

the Hungarian approach of using the design of integrated city plans as a prerequisite for receiving Structural Funding.

A full proposal for a pan-European ILD approach to addressing common challenges in a coordinated yet distinctive way will be developed by Eurocities and transmitted to the Commission over the coming months.

More information

Citizens' Initiatives

On 11 November, the European Commission launched a Green Paper as part of a wide public consultation to help to define the practical details of the Citizens' Initiative foreseen in the Lisbon Treaty. This new idea enables proposals for action relating to an area of EU competence, once supported by one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States, to be directly put to the Commission. This is intended to facilitate an increase in direct public influence on EU policy-making: currently citizens can petition the European Parliament to debate an issue. The Green Paper identifies questions regarding how the Initiative might best work in practice including the possible formats for petitions and means of validation of signatures.

Green Paper

Online public services commitment

The fifth Ministerial eGovernment Conference in Malmö from 19-20 November was the setting for the signing of a declaration by all EU Member States on a joint vision and set of policy priorities for developing smarter online public services by 2015. The key eGovernment service objectives outlined are:

- To empower businesses and citizens through improved end user input into how support mechanisms, access to information, and the policy-making process are determined and delivered;
- To facilitate mobility in the single market by providing seamless cross-border assistance with setting up business, studying, working, residing and retiring in Europe;
- To enhance effectiveness and efficiency by reducing the administrative burden and improving public administrations' organisational processes and use of ICT to improve energy efficiency.

The Commission sees eGovernment as a key step towards boosting Europe's competitiveness through time and cost savings and has welcomed the declaration as a step forward in making this approach more accessible,. It is currently working in cooperation with Member States to set concrete targets for the eGovernment agenda in Europe and is expected to launch an Action Plan in the second half of 2010 proposing measures to achieve the objectives set out in the ministerial declaration.

Declaration

eGovernment benchmarked

The eighth eGovernment in Europe benchmarking report ('*Smarter, Faster, Better eGovernment*'), also released at the Malmö conference, indicates that the availability and quality of online public services has risen significantly across the continent over the last two years. For 12 basic citizen and 8 basic business services, an average 71% of transaction and automation processes are now deemed to be available online - up from 59% in 2007 with Austria, Malta, Portugal, and the UK providing 100% availability.

Ireland (83%) places tenth overall on these terms having surpassed the average EU performance since the 2007 evaluation when just half of all the applicable services were provided online in this country. Having fallen behind from 2005-2008, business (88%) and citizen (80%) provision have since leapfrogged a number of other countries. The improvement is mirrored in the assessment of the sophistication of access to the same set of services when broadened to include information and both one-way and two-way interaction process as criteria. Here, Ireland, (94%) ranked 9th, is adjudged to be a "fast grower".

The visibility and availability of eProcurement opportunities to potential suppliers (100%) is the strongest area of Irish performance – one of only two countries to have reached the target set by the Commission's i2010 eGovernment Action Plan and far in excess of a Europe-wide 56% rate. In terms of user experience for Irish national government portals, service provision within 'one stop shops' is a distinct strength (100% coverage). While above the EU average, performance on accessibility standards compliance; usability (including progress tracking and help functionality); user-feedback monitoring; and user-focused design (structure and ease of finding information) is less strong.

Benchmarking Report

Industrial pollutants register

A comprehensive European pollutant release and transfer register (E-PRTR) has been launched by the European Commission and the European Environment Agency (EEA). This response to the Aarhus Convention on improved public access to environmental information makes available details from across Europe on individual industrial facilities' emissions of pollutants to air, water and land.

It includes annual data (currently from 2007) for 91 substances and covers more than 24,000 facilities involved in 65 separate economic activities. Additional information on waste management practices and the extent of pollutants from 'diffuse' sources released to water, such as nitrogen and phosphorus loss from agriculture, are also provided. The annual information is to be updated each April.

Register

Volunteering package

On 27 November, the Council of Education, Youth and Culture Ministers officially designated 2011 as the *European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship* (EY2011). The year will focus on four main objectives: i) work towards an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering; ii) empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering; iii) reward and recognise achievements gained in volunteering activities; and iv) raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering.

Following a proposal from the Commission and general support from the European Parliament, a €3 million budget was ultimately allocated for preparatory initiatives to be held during 2010, with a further €8m for activities taking place in 2011 itself. It is expected that EY2011 will primarily fund exchange of best practices, studies and research,

conferences and awareness raising campaigns across the EU, as well as at national and regional level. A co-ordinating body will have to be appointed in each Member State.

In reaching their deliberations, MEPs underlined the potential benefits of voluntary activity in terms of integrating refugees and legally resident immigrants into society. However, they also warned that an emphasis on volunteering must not be regarded as a substitute for either paid work or action by the public authorities including provision of basic social services.

The Committee of the Regions contributed to this process through an Opinion (report) by Cllr. Declan McDonnell (Mayor of Galway), which proposed:

- an annual Europe-wide day to promote volunteering;
- a European award for the most volunteer-friendly city, local or regional authority – to recognise the role of public policy at these levels in promoting and facilitating voluntary activity; and
- an EU Volunteers Award – to recognise individual commitment and achievement.

The Opinion also suggests that 2011 should lay the foundations for an Action Plan for Volunteering to provide for a better recognition and support for volunteering in various EU policy areas and programmes.

Council Conclusions

Parliament view

CoR Opinion

Local homelessness strategies

FEANTSA, the European federation of national organisations working with the homeless, has launched HABITACT, an online exchange forum on best practices and experiences between local authorities and social policy administrations on successful approaches to tackling homelessness. HABITACT is open to all local practitioners who are working in the area of homelessness. Among the expected outputs is the opportunity to pool expertise to allow for the joint development of common approaches to address common challenges.

Habitact

FEANTSA

Environmental Assessment: review of directives

With the European Commission scheduled to revise the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive by the end of 2010, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) is preparing a report on the application and effectiveness of the EIA and the closely associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directives. As part of this process the CoR has launched a targeted consultation.

Deadline for responses: 8 January
(send to subsidiarity@cor.europa.eu)

Urban Mobility Action Plan consultation

Similarly, the CoR launched a separate consultation on the Action Plan on Urban Mobility on 16 November. Its purpose is to look at best practices and innovative solutions implemented within Europe's cities and regions which contribute to the goal of sustainable urban mobility. Feedback received will be factored into the CoR opinion on the Action Plan, which is due for completion in the spring.

Deadline for responses: 8 January
(send to subsidiarity@cor.europa.eu)

Parental Leave: 4 months across board

Employment Ministers agreed to strengthen the minimum requirements for parental leave at their 30 November meeting. From early 2012, a new revised directive will apply in national legislation to give effect to a recent agreement between European employers and trade unions whereby all employees, regardless of whether they are fixed-term, part-time or temporary workers (although a qualification period of no more than a year may be required) will enjoy longer periods of leave and better protection against discrimination. The new rules mean that each working parent will be able to take four months off per child, of which at least one month must come from each parent. Upon conclusion of the leave period, parents returning to work will have the right to request reasonable flexible working arrangements.

More information

EVENTS

On request and whenever possible, IRO staff can attend meetings and seminars in Brussels on behalf of local & regional authorities.

Civil Protection - Regional & Local levels Brussels, 14 December

In an attempt to establish a more strategic approach to natural and man-made disasters, in February the European Commission adopted two Communications: one on the Community-approach to reducing the impact and another on a strategy for supporting risk reduction in developing countries. The Brussels regional offices of Emilia-Romagna, the East of England and the State of Hessen are now jointly organising a conference entitled 'For a Culture of Civil Protection: the role of Regions and Local Authorities'. The aims of the event are to underline the importance of a culture of civil protection and, particularly, to highlight the critical role that regions and local authorities can play in developing and sharing knowledge, information and best practices – possibly as part of a broader effort to establish interregional dialogue at a European level.

Contact the IRO for the full programme. Register: Jennifer.carson@east-of-england.eu

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