



Irish Regions Office

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FUNDING

Interreg IIIC Fourth Call

The Interreg IIIC North, East and West zones launched the fourth call for project proposals on 14 June 2004. In the North and West zones (including Ireland) the deadline for applications is 8 October 2004. The deadline in the East zone is 19 November 2004. In the South zone, the third call for proposals is still open for Regional Framework Operations (RFO). Project ideas and partner search requests are now being posted on the "Operation idea and partner search database", available on the Interreg IIIC website: www.interreg3c.net

Interreg IIIC Consultation Days

If you are developing an Interreg IIIC application and would like to discuss your proposal with an advisor, you can request an appointment at the West zone secretariat on one of the following dates: 28 June 2004, 13 July 2004, 28 July 2004, 6 Sept. 2004, or 7 September for lead partners of projects. To make an appointment, contact: *Lioudmila Batourina*, West zone secretariat. Tel: +33 3 28 38 11 11. E-mail: lioudmila.batourina@interreg3c.net

LIFE III

Following the decision to extend the LIFE III programme to December 2006, the next call for proposals is expected in late June 2004. This call will concern LIFE-Environment,

LIFE-Nature and LIFE-Third Countries, as well as Co-op, Starter and Preparatory Measures. The expected deadline for applications will not be before the end of October 2004. *Further details at:*

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/funding/index.htm>

Culture 2000

The next call for proposals under the Culture 2000 programme is also expected at the end of June 2004. This call also comes following a decision to extend the Programme until 2006. The forthcoming call is expected to invite applications for both annual projects (up to 12 months) and multi-annual projects (24-36 months). The call will be similar to previous calls with one important difference - this call will be unrestricted in terms of the types of projects it will fund. Previous calls have always focused on a particular sector (i.e. heritage, visual arts, etc). *Further details at:*

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/culture/eac/index_en.html

PEACE II Extension

At the European Council Summit in Brussels on June 17 and 18, Heads of State "took note" of the current difficulties in the Northern peace process, and supported British and Irish government efforts to re-establish devolved institutions. To support these efforts, the European Council called on the Commission to "examine the possibility of aligning interventions under the PEACE II programme and the International Fund for Ireland with those of the other programmes

under the Structural Funds that come to an end in 2006, including the implications in financial terms". If it agrees, it would mean funding could be continued for a further two years. It would also mean that funding which has not been fully taken up could be channelled back into the programme.

European Employment Strategy

The Commission has published an open call for proposals concerning "Awareness-Raising for the European Employment Strategy". The objectives are: to improve awareness raising about EU labour market challenges and the recommended policies of the European Employment Strategy; to contribute to the implementation at the national level of the employment Guidelines and the Recommendations of the European Employment Strategy (see article below). Total budget: €750,000. Deadline: 13 August 2004. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/calls/2004/vp_2004_015/tender_en.pdf

NEWS & POLICY

New Structural Funds Regulations to be published in July

The European Commission has indicated that the new Structural Funds regulations will now be published on 14 July 2004. There will be four regulations in total: A General Regulation - setting out the structure of the Objectives (Convergence, Regional Competitiveness and Employment, and

Cooperation) and including most of the rules relating to all funds. The new General Regulation will contain 75 articles (currently 60), however, the implementing regulations for financial management, publicity and eligibility are to be dropped. It will include the criteria for allocating resources to regions or Member States for each Objective. Three Fund Regulations (ERDF, ESF, Cohesion) – will mainly concern the types of actions that can be financed by the funds within each Objective. The ERDF fund will finance an extensive list of actions under the Convergence objective. However, eligible actions under Regional Competitiveness (which will apply to Ireland) will be much more restrictive and will be based on the three headings in the Cohesion Report: 1) *Accessibility* – telecoms and investment in secondary regional transport networks. 2) *Innovation* – focused around improving the environment for SMEs (including technology transfer, university/business links). This is unlikely to fund physical infrastructure such as the building of science parks. And 3) *Environment and risk prevention* – renewable energy and energy efficiency, urban public transport, improving the environmental performance of businesses, regeneration of polluted sites and risk prevention. The European Parliament has the right of co-decision on the Fund Regulations (not the General Regulation), which means that it has an equal right to amend any element of the proposal. The new Regulations are expected to give regions more flexibility in implementing the new programmes. Financial allocations will only be agreed at the priority level (not measure level in future), although the Commission will request a more detailed definition of each priority. The Commission also seems

likely to respond to the widespread support for Interreg interregional actions.

CoR adopts Opinion on Third Cohesion Report

At its plenary session on June 16 – 17, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) adopted an Opinion on the Commission's Third Cohesion Report. While broadly welcoming the Commission's proposals and budgetary projections, the CoR Opinion does make a number of recommendations, including: greater flexibility in determining which regions are eligible for state aid; regional and local authorities to be given more responsibility for identifying and implementing cohesion policy measures; a clearer definition of the criteria required for urban areas to apply for support; and more financial help for people living in rural areas. In addition, the CoR wants 'natural effect' regions – regions which would have exceeded the 75% GDP per capita threshold without enlargement - to be eligible for state aid for a transitional period and the "N+2" rule to be replaced with an "N+3". *Further details from the IRO.*

The Future of EU Research Policy

On 16 June 2004 the European Commission presented its ideas on the future of EU research policy (and the 7th Framework Programme) in a strategy document entitled, "Science and technology, the key to Europe's future". In line with the Financial Perspective, published in February, the Commission document proposes doubling EU research funding to an average of €10 billion a year for the duration of the next

framework programme, and to devote it to six major objectives: the creation of European centres of excellence; the launching of technology initiatives in promising industrial fields (energy, mobile communications, etc.); stimulating basic research; making the EU more attractive for researchers by promoting the development of science careers; developing research infrastructure of European interest; and strengthening coordination between national research programmes. The document also refers to the Commission's intention to decouple the increase in budget from staffing through greater decentralized management and to its desire to take full advantage of complementarity with the Structural Funds. The Commission is now inviting views and comments regarding future EU research policy. Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/future/index_en.html

EU to Increase Support for Renewable Energy

In the context of disappointing progress in the development of the EU's renewable energy potential, the European Commission has suggested the establishment of a new EU Framework Programme for Energy, which would lend support to local and regional measures to remove non-technical barriers to the development of decentralised energy technologies. On May 26 the Commission published a first report on the implementation of the "Renewables" Directive by the Member States, which shows that Member States are not on track to meet their national indicative targets. The EU target for electricity from renewable is

22.1%. The report estimates that under current circumstances, only 18% or 19% will be achieved. Only four Member States are set to meet their national targets: Germany, Denmark, Finland and Spain. Ireland has a target of 13.2%, which would represent an increase from 3.6% in 1997 and 5.1% in 2002. Overall, the Commission estimates that an additional investment of €10 to €15 billion is required to achieve the 22.1% target. It therefore recommends the roll out of the successful support mechanisms of Germany, Denmark and Spain to the other countries and for Member States to provide greater financial support for renewables, particularly through tax exemptions. It is also recommending increased support from EU funds, including the structural and cohesion funds, explicit provisions in the financial framework for 2007-2013, and the creation of a new financial instrument at Community level (new EU Framework Programme on Energy). Further details at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/res/index_en.htm

The EU Constitution – Challenges for the Local and Regional Level

The EU must be ready to embrace a "new political culture" in order to ensure that the local and regional levels achieve more say in shaping European legislation – a key objective of the new EU Constitution. This was one of the main messages to emerge from a Committee of the Regions (CoR) conference on subsidiarity, held in Berlin on 27 May. For the first time, the EU Constitution introduces a local and regional dimension into the definition of subsidiarity. Its "Protocol on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and

Proportionality" states that the Commission must "where appropriate, take into account the regional and local dimension" before proposing legislation. If the CoR believes that legislation initiated by the Commission is in breach of the principle of subsidiarity, it can launch proceedings at the European Court of Justice. The CoR conference focused on two crucial aspects of this new development: how the CoR and its partners can monitor the application of the new consultation rules envisaged by the Constitution, and what they can do if the European Commission fails to consult regional and local authorities in the manner prescribed. One of the proposals put forward is for the establishment of a new "subsidiarity network", which would promote greater cooperation between the CoR, national parliaments and regional and local representative bodies in order to better monitor the application of the subsidiarity principle. Further details at: http://www.cor.eu.int/en/acti/acti_eve.html

New LEADER+ Observatory

The European Commission is expected to announce the awarding of the contract for the new European LEADER+ Observatory on June 24th (may be delayed!) to the Kantor Group (www.kantor.gr), a Greek consultancy company. In May of 2004, the Kantor Group acquired Qwentex (www.quentex.be), the Brussels based consultancy firm that actually submitted the successful bid. The Kantor group also recently (March 2003) acquired the UK consultancy firm, LRDP (www.lrdp.co.uk), the organisation that manages the UK LEADER+ network and which previously managed the UK LEADER II network.

Ireland's Rural Areas Slow to Benefit from Economic Growth

A recent study on the Quality of Life in Europe's rural areas, carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, indicates that, despite high levels of economic growth in recent years, many aspects of life in rural Ireland have more in common with poorer countries in the EU15 (Greece, Portugal) and the new Member States than with the wealthier EU countries. In relation to public health services the study concludes that, "the satisfaction level in Ireland is close to lower income countries such as Greece and Portugal, and very close to the average in the new Member States". In terms of other quality of life indicators, such as levels of deprivation, computer use and ownership, satisfaction with the quality of public transport, and leisure time, rural Ireland also fairs badly in comparison to the EU15. Overall, the report concludes that inhabitants of rural areas in Europe are disadvantaged in comparison with their urban counterparts in terms of income, health care, housing, education and access to information technology. *Further details at:* http://www.eurofound.eu.int/living/qual_life/index.htm.

Ireland's GDP at 131% of EU average

In 2003 GDP per capita in Ireland reached 131% of the EU25 average, second only to Luxembourg which was more than twice the EU25 average (however, GDP per capita in Luxembourg tends to be overestimated, due to the large share of cross-border workers in total employment, who contribute to GDP but are not taken into consideration as part of

the resident population which is used to calculate GDP per capita). A recent Eurostat study shows that Ireland was about one third above average, while Denmark, Austria, the Netherlands and the UK were around 20% above average. At the bottom of the list were Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Latvia, all of which recorded figures of between 40% and 50% of the EU25 average. *Further details at:* <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/dashop/print-product/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&product=2-03062004-EN-AP-EN&mode=download>

Ireland must increase focus on Childcare

At a meeting on June 1st the EU's Employment and Social Policy Council reached agreement on new employment Guidelines and Recommendations for the implementation of Member State employment policies. The 2004 Employment Recommendations include two new elements: the integration of the 10 new Member States into the employment policy framework and the implementation of the recommendations made by the Employment Task Force, chaired by Wim Kok (see: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/employment_strategy/task_en.htm). In relation to Ireland the report recommends a greater focus on increasing the supply and affordability of childcare facilities, using ESF which is dedicating 11% of its funding in Ireland to such measures. The specific recommendations and priorities for each Member State will be adopted at the next Council meeting. *Further details at:* http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/lsa/80703.pdf

New Regional Fisheries Bodies to be Established

On 24 May, EU Fisheries Ministers agreed on funding measures for seven new Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). The RACs will provide local communities, fishermen, scientists, NGO officials and local politicians with a voice in the management of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The new RACs will receive funding of up to €250,000 for the first year, to be gradually phased out over a five-year period. The new Councils could be operational as soon as next year. Further information is available at: <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/04/121&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

EVENTS

8 September 2004, Brussels

The ERRIN network (see under Networks) is organising a seminar on "The Future of EU Funding for Innovation – A Response from the Regions". The seminar will respond to a request from the Commission for views from regional innovation actors on future funding options and will aim to inform actors in the EU legislative process of the factors affecting the utility of EU funding for regional economic development. The IRO will assist in organising the event, which will include a speaker from the Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly. *Further details from the IRO.*

16-22 September 2004, European Mobility Week

This year's European Mobility Week, in which towns and cities are encouraged to promote walking, cycling and public transport, will run from 16-22 September. The annual "In town, without my car!" day will take place on 22 September. *Details at:* <http://www.mobilityweek-europe.org/>

21-22 October 2004. The Hague (NL)

The Randstad regions and the Province of Zuid-Holland are organising a "European Conference on City and Countryside". Workshops topics include: spatial planning and the impact of changing patterns of food production and consumption in urbanised areas, and social and economic innovation and restructuring of farming in rural areas in the vicinity of cities. The conference will serve to stress the importance of European policy to support the redevelopment of rural areas in urbanised regions. *Further details at:* <http://www.newbalance-eu.org>

The Hague, 15-17 November 2004

The themes for this years IST (Information Society Technologies) conference are "people" and the "economy". IST 2004 will address EU policies, strategies and research activities in all areas of the information society. The event will include a conference, an exhibition of research results, and networking facilities for participants. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/information_society/istevent/2004/index_en.htm

NETWORKS

The ERRIN Network

The European Regions Research & Innovation Network (ERRIN) is a Brussels based network of regional offices with a specific interest in research and innovation. Originally established in May 2001, ERRIN was relaunched in May 2004 having secured funding from the European Commission. In the coming months ERRIN will pursue an ambitious work programme aimed at assisting regions to maximise their participation in EU research and innovation initiatives, and to communicate the views of the regions to the EU institutions on the development of EU research and innovation policy. The Irish Regions Office is a member of ERRIN. *Contact: Edward Cameron, Tel: +32 (0)2 238 1041, e-mail: Edward.Cameron@errin-brussels.org Website: www.errin-brussels.org (to be launched in July)*

PUBLICATIONS

New Guide to Successfully Publicising the Structural Funds

DG Regional Policy recently published a new "Practical Guide to Communicating on the Structural Funds 2000-2006". The guide aims to assist Managing Authorities in meeting the challenge of developing effective information and publicity measures

about the Structural Funds (as required under Article 46 of Regulation (EC) 1260/1999). The Guide consists of a series of factsheets, which seek to clarify various points in the Regulation and also to provide practical guidance on good communication techniques. *Further details at:* http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/country/commu/index_en.htm

Local Evaluation 21

Local Evaluation 21 is the Local Authorities' on-line self-assessment tool for local sustainable development processes. It can be used free of charge to evaluate processes and progress towards sustainable development from a local authority perspective. Local Evaluation 21 is based on two on-line questionnaires to be completed by a local authority representative, together with any stakeholder organisations or companies invited to take part. Local Evaluation 21 was developed by the LASALA research project (Local Authorities' Self-Assessment of Local Agenda 21), financed by the Commission's DG Research. *Logon to:* <http://www.localevaluation21.org>.

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