

EU News Bulletin

The inside track on EU affairs for Ireland's local and regional levels.

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[@IrishRegions_EU](https://twitter.com/IrishRegions_EU)

FUNDING, NETWORKING & PROJECTS

Call: INTERREG North West Europe

On 7 April, the INTERREG VB North West Europe (NWE) programme for 2014-2020 launched its opening call for proposals. The programme will address Innovation, Low-Carbon (i.e. reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and Resource and Materials Efficiency issues by supporting transnational cooperation on the following themes:



- * To enhance innovation performance of enterprises;
- * To facilitate the implementation of low-carbon, energy and climate protection strategies.;
- * To facilitate the uptake of low-carbon technologies, products, processes and services in sectors with high energy -aving potential;
- * To facilitate the implementation of transnational low-carbon solutions in transport systems;
- * To optimise (re)use of material and natural resources.

The programme will be operating a two-stage application process designed to streamline its operation by identifying promising ideas at an early stage. This will require prospective participants to put

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together an initial Concept Note outlining the intended results their project would deliver if approved and what this would deliver for the programme area. The best evaluated among these will be invited to proceed to a second stage of elaborating full work plans fleshing out their project and its budget in collaboration with the programme staff. A (retrospective) lump sum of €30,000 to cover preparation costs is payable upon submission of this full application – regardless of whether or not it is ultimately approved.

An ERDF budget of €372 million will be made available for the co-financing of projects (at up to 60% rate) over the course of the programme. No specific amount has been indicated for the current call.

Deadline for Stage One Concept Notes: 18 May

Subsequent Stage One deadlines for the second and third calls for proposals have already been established at this early stage for 30 November and for 31 May 2016.

NWE Programme Manual

INTERREG EUROPE to get underway in June

Pending its expected formal approval by the Commission over the coming weeks, the INTERREG EUROPE programme (succeeding INTERREG IVC) is gearing up for a mid-June launch of its inaugural call for proposals with a submission deadline a month later. This is the inter-regional element of EU Territorial Cooperation – linking 30 European countries in an effort to improve the effectiveness of local and regional development approaches and instruments through policy learning transfer of knowledge and best practices.



INTERREG EUROPE will continue to be largely based on the traditional ‘interregional cooperation projects’ partnership approach, with a heightened focus on capturing the actual on-the-ground impact arising from such interventions. The programme will also place greater emphasis than before on efforts to improve policies and programmes that are specifically part of EU Cohesion policy – namely the European Structural & Investment Funds. As such, Irish applicants would be advised to explore the potential for synergies with the ERDF programmes operating at regional level, and the cross-border and transnational INTERREG Programmes. In all cases, there will be a need for relevant authorities in charge of the policy field in question to be either on-board or officially supportive of bids.

The programme’s four Priorities are:

- * ‘Strengthening **research, technological development and innovation** (i.e. infrastructure and capacities or the delivery of innovation by players in regional innovation chains in areas of “smart specialisation” and innovation opportunity)’
- * ‘Enhancing the **competitiveness of SMEs** in all stages of their life cycle to develop and achieve growth and engage in innovation’. Key focusses include internationalisation, entrepreneurship, business financing, intellectual property and technology transfer,
- * ‘Supporting the shift towards a **low-carbon economy** in all sectors’. This covers energy efficiency, renewable sources and sustainable urban transport.
- * **Environment and resource efficiency:** i.e. protection and development of natural and cultural heritage or increasing green growth, eco-innovation and environmental performance management as part of an industrial paradigm shift towards the circular economy.

It is envisaged that one-third (€107.5 million) of the overall ERDF budget set aside for projects will be made available on this occasion. A high rate of ERDF co-financing is available – up to 85% for public bodies or 75% for private non-profit bodies. It has previously been intimated by the programme authorities that there might be four calls in total – although not necessarily on an annual basis.

[continued overleaf]

New financial instruments for climate and biodiversity challenges (LIFE programme)

The LIFE Programme has launched two new financial instruments this past month.

The **Natural Capital Financial Facility (NCF)** will provide loans and investment in funds to support projects which promote the preservation of natural capital, including biodiversity and adaptation to climate change. The logic of this intervention is to demonstrate that such projects can not only deliver on biodiversity and climate adaptation objectives, but also save costs and generate revenue. This should enable the establishment of a pipeline of replicable, bankable operations that will serve as a "proof of concept" and that will demonstrate to potential investors the attractiveness of such operations.

Eligible projects, which may be proposed by public authorities, land owners or businesses, could address 'Payments for Ecosystem Services' (based on the "beneficiary pays" principle); 'Green Infrastructure' (for the provision of goods and services such as green roofs/walls, ecosystem-based rainwater collection/reuse systems, flood protection and erosion control); 'Biodiversity offsets' (conservation actions intended to compensate for the residual, unavoidable harm to biodiversity caused by development projects, based on the "polluter pays" principle but without reducing the costs of compliance with legal obligations to deliver such offsets); or 'Innovative pro-biodiversity and adaptation investments' (the supply of goods and services based on new approaches to ecological restoration/conservation or innovative business models such as harnessing ethical investments and adding value through certification and standards schemes).

A total of €100-125 million will be available with the LIFE programme contributing €50 million as a guarantee for the investments plus a €10 million support facility for technical, financial, business planning or environmental advice and capacity-building towards the preparation and implementation of projects for which there is a reasonable probability of NCF

funding once developed in full. The size of projects will typically be between €5 million and €15 million. The NCF intends to provide finance to project developers both directly as well as indirectly through financial intermediaries. At any time, potential project developers can contact the EIB ([NCF Instrument@eib.org](mailto:NCFInstrument@eib.org)) to express an interest in the facility and discuss the suitability of their ideas including the business model, biodiversity and climate adaptation impacts, the potential for demonstration effect, replicability and transferability, and the ability of the project to leverage additional project funding.

Further details

www.eib.org/ncff

The NCF will be presented and discussed during a workshop on 8 May in Brussels.

Meanwhile, the **Private Finance for Energy Efficiency (PF4EE)** aims to support Member States in making progress with meeting the targets of their National Energy Efficiency Action Plans. This is to be achieved by addressing the limited access to adequate and affordable loan financing for the implementation of projects in this area – a challenge reflected in the recent Juncker Investment Plan. €80 million of the LIFE budget has been set aside for this purpose and an eight-fold leverage effect is anticipated. The PF4EE will combine lending from the EIB to intermediary banks in Member States with risk protection against losses associated with making loans for energy efficiency projects, and technical assistance for the financial intermediaries in developing tailored loan programmes for energy efficiency projects.

The loan beneficiaries could include local authorities undertaking small energy efficiency investments which are capable of using energy savings to repay up-front borrowing costs. Loans anywhere within a range of €40,000 to €5 million in value are envisaged.

Further details

Call: URBACT 'Action Planning Networks'

The first Call for Proposals as part of the third generation of the URBACT programme to promote sustainable integrated approaches which combine the social, economic and environmental dimensions of urban development and contribute to the delivery of the Europe 2020 strategy, was opened on 30 March.

URBACT III is about enabling practitioners and decision-makers from across Europe to work together on developing integrated solutions to shared urban challenges. This collaboration – networking, learning from one another's experiences, drawing lessons and identifying good practices – is intended to improve capacity to manage sustainable urban policies; to strengthen the ability to design integrated strategies and to generate new ideas addressing specific challenges; to improve policy implementation approaches; and to build and share access to knowledge and know-how on all aspects of sustainable urban development in order to improve urban development policies.

To reach these objectives, the programme offers three distinct types of transnational intervention in relation to integrated sustainable urban strategies and actions: 'Action Planning Networks' (APNs) supporting policy design, 'Implementation Networks' (supporting enhanced delivery aspects such as the monitoring and timely delivery of actions for plans for which funding has been secured, including via EU Cohesion policy instruments) and 'Transfer Networks' (supporting the transfer of good practice as identified and tested in other EU cities, so as to improve implementation). This first call will be confined to supporting the creation of up to 20 APNs. A further 20 are expected to be supported under a subsequent call. It will be early 2016 before the first calls in search of Implementation or Transfer networks are launched.

Each partner city, town, district or metropolitan area involved in an APN is required to produce its own Integrated Action Plan as a concrete tool by which to drive, and to lay the groundwork enabling the longer-term implementation of, new ways of improving or solving particular local situations through engagement with the community. As part of this process, in order to ensure a participatory approach to policy-making, the establishment and involvement of an URBACT Local Group of relevant stakeholders in the co-design of each plan is a

further prerequisite. This partnership should not only provide for horizontal integration by bringing together different administrative departments, as well as elected representatives and decision-makers in charge of policy areas to be addressed, but also representatives of communities, residents, and other local beneficiaries of the action, as well of delivery agencies, third sector and private interests when relevant.

70% of the overall budget for



exchange and learning activities will be devoted to 5 themes: Research, technological development and innovation; Shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors; Environment & resource efficiency; Employment and labour mobility; and Social inclusion & combating poverty. There will also be more limited scope to address: Access to, use and quality of ICT; Competitiveness of SMEs; Climate change adaptation, risk prevention & management; Sustainable transport & bottlenecks in key network infrastructures; and Education, skills & lifelong learning. Networks will be required to select one primary themes but to explore the contributions their proposed activities can make towards others also.

A two-phase process (6 months for development followed by 2 years for delivery) will apply. A total budget of between €600,000 and €750,000 is envisaged for each APN. This should cover the involvement of an indicative 8-12 partners – mainly cities and towns. The ERDF co-financing rate for Ireland will be 70% of this amount.

Deadline for submission of applications: 16 June.

Further details

Guide to Action Planning Networks

Project Ideas database

The URBACT National Contact Point is Mark Boyle, National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), NUI Maynooth, who will review Irish submissions before final application stage.

Contact: issplatform@nuim.ie, Tel. 01 7083350

Urbact Ireland Facebook

Twitter: @Urbact3Ireland

9 Irish projects approved by INTERREG Northern Periphery

Of 13 applications approved under the opening call of the INTERREG VB Northern Periphery & Arctic (NPA) programme, 8 will have an involvement from a total of 14 Irish organisations as part of their transnational partnership consortium. In total, approximately €13.4 million in ERDF assistance was allocated on this occasion, representing 24% of the programme's funding budget. The Atlantic coastal counties (and cities) stretching from Donegal to Cork are part of the eligible territory.

The approved Priority Axis 1 – Innovation projects of direct interest to Ireland are:

- * **TARGET** [Sligo Local Enterprise Office; Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre; Cavan Local Enterprise Office]: This project will develop tools to enhance capacity of manufacturing companies to adapt and embrace new technologies and innovation. The toolbox developed will consist of subsets such as Digital manufacturing (robotics and simulation), New ideas and thinking (human centred and environmental thinking, competitiveness), Business models and modern product innovation.
- * **IMPROVE** [ERNACT (Lead Partner); Donegal County Council]: to increase the innovation capacity and knowledge awareness of the six participating regions in the field of developing technology-driven public services by strengthening linkages between all stakeholders in the innovation chain and by using transnational cooperation to fill knowledge gaps. The increase will be measured using a *Regional Awareness Scoreboard* with the objective of the baseline score changing from *average/good* to *good/high* across the participating regions as a result of the project.
- * **URCHIN** [Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology]: addressing the challenges of fishing, sustainable and responsible harvesting of stocks, legislation and supply chains for sea urchin products from isolated and environmentally-challenging areas through innovation and technology transfer.
- * **SPARA2020** [Northern & Western Regional Assembly]: to address EU Cohesion goal issues of better and more sustainable accessibility conditions for peripheral and sparsely populated areas by focusing on the unique social and economic development challenge of air access to support local communities and employers' needs for investment, purchasing power, tourism and welfare. This project will deliver increased innovation within public service provision of airports which are supported directly and indirectly by local, regional and national governments.

There are a further four approvals with Irish involvement as part of the Priority Axis 2 – Entrepreneurship:

- * **Craft Reach** [Teagasc]: to develop and test services to help quality craft businesses grow and prosper in peripheral areas by improving their business models and their premises, lifting their artisanal products onto the international market and using businesses as focal points in the local community and as inspiration for young people.
- * **Creative Momentum** [Western Development Commission (Lead Partner); NUI Galway]: tackling the peripherality and distance to market challenges experienced by entrepreneurs in the creative and cultural industries across the programme area, as well as their low levels of economic diversity by providing enterprise development and market expansion spaces, services and supports with a transnational focus based on a shared vision that good ideas should transcend distance, that creativity is not bounded by geography and that there is a comparative advantage to be gained from a peripheral perspective.
- * **SAINTS** [Northern & Western Regional Assembly]: working with SMEs to make them more aware of how to capitalise on the business opportunities in guided 'slow adventure' experiences – offering simple nature-based, immersive journeys, living and travelling in wide-open, 'wild' spaces – through marketing to new, distant customer markets in urban centres around the world.
- * **Cool Route** [Cork Institute of Technology (Lead Partner); Donegal County Council; Royal Cork Yacht Club]: investigating all aspects of the practical logistics and business potential to establish a bi-directional yacht cruising route along the offshore areas stretching from the South of Ireland, to Northern Ireland and Western Scotland and onwards to Norway. This new sea route will be marketed internationally with a common branding, booking and information system as an eco-tourism product exploiting the natural resources of the zone in a sustainable and environmentally viable manner.

The programme's second call closed on 10 April with 14 applications received. These will be decided upon in June. The third call is scheduled for the autumn, with a start date in August and a deadline in October, followed by decisions in December. In addition, a separate call for short-term Preparatory Projects remains continuously open to enable focussed development of future project ideas and their transnational partnerships.

Further details

Preparatory Projects



Project: FIERE – Furthering Innovative Entrepreneurship Training

Tipperary County Council is currently leading a partner consortium, which also includes the Centre for Enterprise Development & Regional Economy (CEDRE) in Waterford IoT, to deliver the FIERE (Furthering Innovative Regions of Europe) project. The initiative, which is funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 'GRUNDTVIG' action for adult education, aims to support local communities and regional economies by specifically focusing on the development of entrepreneurial and innovative skills and attributes of policy makers, managers, administrators, enterprise development officers, community leaders, founders of community and social enterprises and organisers/managers of local community entities.

The project consortium – involving partner regions in Portugal, Greece, Bulgaria, Iceland and Italy as well as the South-East – have carried out a joint survey to get a picture of the level of innovative entrepreneurship skills of staff from public, private, community & enterprise and voluntary sectors and their interest in embarking on training in this area. The 450 responses have indicated a very positive interest in the concept with the skills identified as most important from a personal and organisational point of view being resourcefulness, resilience and analytical thinking.



The feedback from the surveys will support the development of an Entrepreneurial Skills Training Programme aimed at increasing the capacity and capability of individual employees to behave, think and act more entrepreneurially and will be delivered in each partner region during 2015. National reports summarising findings of the surveys, plus one consolidated report of overall findings have been published.

Survey reports

Contact: info@fiereproject.eu

Intangible heritage for local development

Tourism/cultural actor organisations from the Brittany and Poitou-Charentes regions of France are seeking European partners to participate in a future project on 'Promotion of natural and cultural heritage for the economic development of an area' to be tabled under the INTERREG Atlantic Area VB programme. This will require joint work on intangible heritage promotion in order to revitalise local area socio-economic development through actions such as development and networking of hubs promoting European legends in rural areas; creation of training courses about mediation and animation of the subject matter; and diversified new cultural offerings in order to accentuate the attractiveness of the touristic destinations.

Contact: [Nicolas Mezzalira, direction@centre-arthurien-broceliande.com](mailto:direction@centre-arthurien-broceliande.com)

www.centre-arthurien-broceliande.com

Deadline for expressions of interest: 30 April

Please note: The Atlantic Area Programme for 2014-2020 is not expected to launch its first call for proposal in the immediate future.

CITYFIED: Energy-efficient Districts project seeks Irish cities/towns

CITYFIED is an EU-funded Smart Cities & Communities project to develop a replicable, systemic and integrated strategy to adapt European urban ecosystems into the Smart Cities of the future based on district-level solutions. Its focus is on reducing energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the use of renewable energy sources by developing and implementing innovative technologies and methodologies for building renovation, smart grid and district heating networks and for their interfaces with ICT and mobility. The project centres on three large-scale renovation demonstration sites – Laguna de Duero-Valladolid (Spain), Lund (Sweden) and Soma (Turkey).



In addition to having secured the involvement of 11 replication ‘city clusters’, the project is now formulating a second tier ‘Community of Interest’ to act as further potential replication targets for the project results via networking activities and information sharing. Through peer-to-peer exchanges, online learning opportunities and study tours, 40 more cities/towns or associations will be able to avail of access to technology insights and innovative, tested and cost-effective methodologies and procedures for planning, deploying and replicating energy-efficient district retrofitting actions, heating solutions and integrated electricity generation as implemented in the Demo Sites. They will also be exposed to exchanges of experience on partnership management, business models and legal frameworks to support the transforming of urban areas into Nearly Zero-Energy Districts (NZED). Irish local authorities (“cities and municipalities”) have been invited to come forward and avail of this once-off offer as a means of realising their own energy transition ambitions and gaining media visibility as well as a foothold in future EU energy activities. The project authorities have also indicated a willingness to meet with interested Irish local authority representatives in Brussels while places in the Community of Interest remain available.

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NEWS & POLICY

‘Regional Knowledge Platform’

A new forum to enhance the role of regions as drivers for growth and job creation in Europe is in the offing after the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Commission’s Directorate-General for Research & Innovation struck a deal to create a joint ‘Regional Knowledge Platform’ bringing together expertise from across the EU. This stems from an exchange with Research, Science & Innovation Commissioner Carlos Moedas on the regional impact of his portfolio during the opening meeting of the CoR’s newly-established Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research & Culture (SEDEC) at the end of February.

Pointedly, during the debate, the Commissioner made a strong appeal to the CoR to take a prominent role in making the new European Fund for Strategic Investments (Juncker Investment Package) a success for funding opportunities and to use its influence to see the principles of Horizon 2020 reinforced by synergies with the Structural & Investment Funds as executed at regional level.

Although the practicalities of such a joint platform have yet to be ironed out, CoR President Markku Markkula welcomed the proposal, stressing that it would be key in providing the necessary territorial focus to investments in education, research and innovation and ensuring appropriate synergies between these elements of the so-called ‘Knowledge Triangle’ in order to fuel productivity, growth and job creation. Other CoR members commented on how a proper use of the various EU investment instruments will be crucial in tackling the innovation divide between and within Member States in terms of innovation capacity and in setting the framework conditions for innovation in the areas of knowledge, industry and green economy.

Ireland has three CoR members who sit on the SEDEC Commission: Cllr. Maria Byrne, Limerick City & County Council; Cllr. Kate Feeney, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council; and Cllr Kieran McCarthy, Cork City Council.

Further details

Juncker Plan to finance ‘unlisted’ Irish healthcare centres

A long-term, low-interest loan of €70 million towards the construction of healthcare facilities across Ireland has been announced by the European Investment Bank (EIB) as among the very first EU-backed guarantees to be approved under the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) initiative – better known as the Investment Plan for Europe or the ‘Juncker Plan.’ This is part of an initial €300 million tranche of credit financing (from a scheme with an overall investment target price tag of €315 billion), to support particular projects to a value of €850 million in 4 Member States.

In what represents the EU’s lending institution’s first venture into the financing of healthcare in Ireland, the decision will provide access to approximately half the costs of developing 14 new integrated primary-care centres under a public-private partnership between the Department of Health and investors. The facilities will be constructed, for completion in late 2016/early 2017, in the following locations: Dublin (Summerhill and Coolock-Darndale); Kildare; Wexford; Waterford; Dungarvan, Co. Waterford; Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary; Limerick; Tuam, Co. Galway; Westport, Claremorris and Ballinrobe, all Co. Mayo;

Ballymote, Co. Sligo and Boyle, Co. Roscommon. According to the Department, services to be provided will include General Practitioners, community nursing, dental, occupational therapy, physio, social work, speech & language, home help, mental health, counselling and nutrition.

The 22 April announcement – ahead of the formal launch of EFSI this summer – came somewhat from leftfield. Curiously, there was no mention whatsoever of this proposal in the preliminary ‘project pipeline’ document submitted to the Commission by the Irish authorities (as with all Member States) last November (see the November-December 2014 *Bulletin*). This document – seen as a wish-list of strategic projects for financing consideration – set out 70 potential schemes of which 11 related to the ‘Social Infrastructure’ category but none among these to healthcare specifically. The other topics for which Ireland has indicated a particular interest in EFSI are ‘Transport’; ‘Energy Union’; ‘Resources & the Environment’; ‘Knowledge and the Digital Economy’; and SME Lending .

Further details

Speeches, presentations and a video summary from the 15 April joint Committee of the Regions-OECD conference on the local implications of the Investment Plan for Europe are available from www.cor.europa.eu/investment.

Globalisation funding go-ahead for Rathcoole redundancies retraining

On 25 March, in line with a proposal from the Commission, MEPs gave their approval to last Autumn’s request by Ireland for €2.5 million in support from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) relating to the 2014 closure of the Lufthansa Technik Airmotive Ireland Ltd. plant in Rathcoole, Co. Dublin. The money will be used to co-finance support schemes designed to help 250 redundant staff with career planning, training, further education and self-employment activities which have been put in place locally by the authorities in the meantime. This represents a notable flexibility in the approach to managing EGF —recognising the exceptional impact of the closure on the (former) Dublin and Mid-East regions — as the scale of redundancy (424 jobs) did not comply with the fund’s terms of reference.



In addition, the funding will support tailored reskilling services to be provided to up to 200 under-25 NEETs (not in employment, education or training) who were unconnected to the closure. This latter element is due to the fact that the Southern & Eastern Region is eligible to avail of Youth Employment Initiative funding for the coming years.

This is the second time the ailing Dublin aircraft maintenance industry has received EGF backing. €7.4 million was provided in response to 850 SR Technics redundancies in 2010.

Parliament Decision

Commission Proposal report (February 2015)

'Digital Single Market strategy'

6 May is scheduled to see the unveiling of the Commission's 'Digital Single Market strategy' – one of the priorities of the Juncker Commission in terms of ensuring that Europe should benefit fully from the digital age with better services, more participation and new job creation opportunities. The strategy – a long-in-the-making co-production of no fewer than 13 Commission Directorates-General – is an attempt to recognise that the borderless nature of digital technologies means it no longer makes sense for each EU Member State to operate its own rules for telecommunications services, copyright, data protection, or the management of radio spectrum and that single market freedoms should apply to the outputs of the thriving internet-enabled society and economy as elsewhere. Its content is set to involve action at European level to tackle hurdles to a fully integrated European digital market across 3 strands:

1) **'Better access for consumers and business to digital goods and services'**, i.e. unlocking the potential of cross-border e-commerce by making it more straightforward and affordable; by tackling online geo-blocking restrictions; by modernising copyright law; and by simplifying cross-border VAT arrangements and costs for companies;

2) **'Shaping the environment for digital networks and services to flourish'**, i.e. efforts to boost the roll-out of faster (4G) broadband to enable new digital services, applications and content by reviewing the current telecoms and media rules by reference to evolving consumer behaviour to encourage investment in infrastructure; through a pan-European approach to management of the spectrum and its capacity; via an examination of the economic role of online platforms (search engines, social media, app stores, etc.); and by bolstering trust in online services through a personal Data Protection Regulation as well as the swift removal of illegal content; and

3) **'Creating a European Digital Economy and Society with long-term growth potential'** (i.e. helping all industrial sectors to integrate new technologies and to manage the transition to a smart industrial system) through a fast-tracking of standardisation in the interoperability for new technologies; by tapping into the economic potential of 'Big Data' while recognising its challenges (e.g. ownership); by devising appropriate frameworks for shared networks and resources such as cloud computing; and by boosting citizens' access to interoperable public e-services and generally developing digital skills.

Further details

E-Government Factsheets

The Commission's National Interoperability Framework Observatory, support by the ISA programme to promote actions for electronic collaboration, interoperability solutions, sharing and re-use between public administrations in Europe, has published the 2015 version of its eGovernment factsheets. These provide a comprehensive overview of the state-of-play and key cross-cutting and sector-specific activities on this theme for each of the 28 Member States of the EU plus six additional countries. In each case, chapters are included to cover the relevant national eGovernment strategy; legislative provisions; main actors; an overview of infrastructure in place; and services offered for both citizens and businesses. The Irish report is based on data sourced from the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform (DPER) and reflecting the *'Supporting Public Service Reform – eGovernment 2012-2015'* initiative which has identified priority action areas to place the user at the centre of eGovernment policy and introduces a new approach which aims to transform how citizens and businesses engage with the state, and reduce the costs of public service delivery and take-up. DPER is currently preparing a National Interoperability Framework in line with requirements of the Digital Agenda for Europe. In addition, a 2015 review of the factsheet on the eGovernment activities of the Commission itself will be made available shortly.



Ireland's e-Government factsheet

ISA - Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations

European Energy Efficiency Fund shines light on local retrofit financing in Ireland

On 26 March, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and the European Energy Efficiency Fund (EEEF) organised a well-attended retrofitting financing workshop in Dublin for Irish local authorities, entitled ‘Public lighting projects – where are we now, and what is possible?’. The EEEF is a joint European Commission-European Investment Bank (EIB) public private partnership mechanism to provide municipal, local and regional authorities (or entities acting on their behalf) with access to the financial means in support of actions contributing towards the achievement of the EU ‘20/20/20’ climate protection goals of a one-fifth cut in both greenhouse gas emissions and in energy consumption (through improved efficiency), coupled with a similar extent of increase in the use of renewable energy. It operates via a revolving system of direct loans and partnering arrangements with intermediary financial institutions to facilitate appropriate, small-scale but economically viable public sector energy investments in efficiency, renewables or clean urban transport which would otherwise struggle to progress due to budgetary constraints.



The event discussed funding opportunities and structures for public lighting projects under the EEEF as well as the €70 million National Energy Efficiency Fund.

A project in the city of Venlo (population: 100,000) in the Netherlands, where 16,000 public lights are undergoing a retrofit to deliver significant primary energy savings, financed by an EEEF loan of €8.5 million, was showcased. A ‘clinic’ event enabled

officials from 15 local authorities planning their own public lighting projects to discuss best-practice guidelines, tender documents and evaluation criteria with Dutch counterparts.

Further details

Separately, the EEEF is already providing technical assistance financing of €336,000 for, at least the first stage – an ongoing energy performance review of 49 buildings (schools, further education centres and administrative offices) across the Mid-West – of the €16.4 million Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) ‘Lets Conserve Energy Together Better’ initiative. This scheme is aiming to facilitate the development of 39 energy efficient deep retrofit projects (fabric insulation and heating system upgrades); the installation of renewable energy systems (biomass and heat pump systems as well as micro wind generators) to provide 20% of overall energy consumption; as well as low-cost actions like energy metering in a further 10 leased premises. The fund may be ultimately used to provide up to €5 million for the investment requirements also. An estimated 20 full-time jobs are envisaged from the operation phase of the initiative with 50 being provided during installation.

Further details

Roscommon County Council has also already accessed EEEF technical assistance to the tune of €184,000 to facilitate the development of a €6.61 million scheme for a biomass-fired district-heating scheme. The plan involves an initial 16 of the largest public buildings in Roscommon Town being connected to a new district heating network.

Further details

‘Social planning at the local level’

The European Social Network (ESN) – the network bringing together perspectives on the planning, financing, research, management, regulation and delivery of local-level services such as health, social welfare, employment, education and housing -- recently launched a new report which features different social planning approaches across the EU. Based strongly on foundation concepts such as the need for a holistic approach (from monitoring to evaluation), mapping the needs of the population through data collection and aggregation, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders, ‘Social planning at the local level’ explores key themes to enable local authorities to design and implement effective and efficient services to address the needs of vulnerable groups in challenging socio-economic contexts. These

are: effective collection and use of data to drive change; how to better sequence and structure the process to consider all relevant aspects and stakeholders; what field and managerial tools to deploy; and building partnerships including cross-sector cooperation and the development of platforms for the engagement of users and the local community. The topics are illustrated through an analysis of processes, models and instruments collected from 10 ESN members – including the Electronic Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (eNISAT) tool for the assessment of older people’s needs. Dublin City Council and the Health Service Executive are among the current members of ESN.

Report

www.esn-eu.org



Mid-term review of White Paper on Transport

In 2011, the Commission adopted its White Paper: ‘Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system’. This sought to define a long-term strategy that would help the EU transport system achieve the overall goal of the Common Transport Policy, i.e. to provide current and future generations with access to safe, secure, reliable and affordable mobility options which would also serve the needs of the economy, while minimising undesirable impacts such as congestion, accidents, air and noise pollution, and climate change effects and future constraints such as oil scarcity. This was set within a context of long-term objectives to be achieved by 2050, including removing the presence of conventionally-fuelled cars from cities; a 50% shift of medium distance intercity passenger and freight journeys from road to rail and waterborne transport; a 40% use of sustainable low-carbon fuels in aviation; and cutting shipping emissions by at least 40%.

In establishing the vision for a future transport system based on better integration between modes and wide deployment of new technologies for traffic management, travel planning and vehicle manoeuvre, as a first step, three specific requirements were identified for attention:

- * A 60% reduction of transport-related greenhouse emissions (in line with the EU target of reducing emissions by 80%) by 2050 (1990 baseline)

- * A need to drastically decrease oil dependency by decarbonising transport-related activities; and
- * Limiting the growth of congestion.

Consequently, a set of 40 concrete initiatives – covering internal market barriers, technological innovations, the creation and financing of a ‘core’ TEN-T trans-European transport network, and wider global considerations, e.g. the international market and technical standardisation – were devised for completion over an initial 10-year period.

Four years on, following substantial action in the fields of infrastructure, internal market, security and passenger rights, but with much remaining to be achieved in relation to technological, pricing and social aspects, a stocktake of progress is now underway as part of the Commission’s impact assessment process. This online consultation aims to gain insights and input from stakeholders in relation to examining performance in delivering upon the roadmap’s aims, the continued validity of the original analysis, and the possible need to refocus in relation to key challenges for transport policy. Among the developments since 2011 which may influence a rethink are the emergence of new technological opportunities, oil price fluctuations, the continued economic crisis and the adoption of the 2030 climate and energy framework by the European Council.

Deadline for submissions: 2 June

Consultation

White Paper (2011)

Local Infrastructure Planning and Investment: Challenges, Experiences and Solutions

In recognition of the ongoing difficulties and capacity constraints faced by sub-national governments in planning, financing and implementing effective infrastructural investments to underpin growth and development, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) is inviting concerned representatives (officials and politicians) of local and regional authorities to share their perspectives on the key challenges involved in order to develop a greater overall sense of understanding. The multiple choice and confidential questionnaire is organised around the key set of principles addressed in the OECD’s 2014 ‘Effective Public Investment across Levels of Government’ toolkit.

The results of the survey will be jointly released in June by the OECD and CoR in a summary paper that will be circulated to all respondents and presented to high-level forums of policy-makers and international institutions. Input provided will also feed into the CoR’s monitoring and political activities related to the kick-off of the European Structural & Investment Funds Operational Programmes for 2014-2020, the implementation of the Juncker Investment Plan and the ongoing review of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Deadline for responses: 29 May.

‘Infrastructure Planning and Investment Across Levels of Government: Current Challenges, Experiences and Possible Solutions’

OECD Toolkit

'Urban Platforms': connecting city service delivery via ICT

The European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities (EIP-SCC) brings together cities, industry and the general public to improve urban life through the development of more sustainable integrated solutions based on applied innovation, better planning (including a more participatory approach), higher energy efficiency, better transport solutions, and intelligent use of ICT. In relation to this last topic, the 'Urban Platform' focus within the 'Integrated Infrastructures and Processes' Action Cluster has launched a survey to determine the necessary elements and steps to accelerate how cities can extract the benefits of modern ICT by deploying solutions that help digitalise and interconnect their range of services.

This is based on the assumption that cities are, increasingly, developing and operating their own 'City Platform' as the main backbone to deliver many existing sector systems – e.g. Energy-Efficient

Buildings, Smart Grids, Intelligent Transport Systems, e-Health – and that most new applications and services specifically designed for the city and its citizens will run off this basis in the future. The objective of the exercise is to identify the essential elements of interoperability and points of system interaction in order that services/applications could be developed through open/public application programme interfaces (APIs) and technology provision by different suppliers. The questionnaire aims to collect information of the current state of play across Europe by scoping existing platforms, the needs and motivations of stakeholders, identified obstacles, roadmaps etc. It also hopes to gather information and views on how cities deal with cross-cutting issues (e.g. legal, regulatory and financial) in the setting-up of the an Urban Platform. The analysed feedback will be shared during the EIP-SCC Market Place General Assembly on 21 May in Berlin.

Further details

<http://ec.europa.eu/eip/smartcities/>

EVENTS

Green Infrastructure

5 May, Brussels

The '*Green Infrastructure: A European success story*' conference will take stock of progress in the implementation of the Commission's 2013 Green Infrastructure strategy to enable nature to deliver a range of benefits to ecosystems and people, including for health and quality of life, as well as its contribution to high-level EU priorities including the Europe 2020 Strategy. It will also provide an opportunity to exchange best practices among policy-makers, businesses and civil society, and to illustrate how local and regional authorities can boost the social, economic and environmental dividends from investment in Green Infrastructure to citizens, including through participative planning processes. The event is co-organised by the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) in cooperation with the European Parliament's Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainable Development and with its Urban Intergroup.

Further details

Register

This conference will also be web streamed live [here](#)

New-look INTERREG programmes

7 May, Brussels

The Committee of the regions will host a lunchtime information briefing to provide an overview on the 2014-2020 generation of INTERREG programmes for cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation and their current states of implementation. Presentations from staff of various programme authorities as well as from the Commission's DG for Regional & Urban Policy (DG REGIO) will cover the principal differences compared to the previous period (with a special focus on INTERREG Europe), the thematic priorities and the key challenges involved. The main INTERREG events and activities planned in 2015 and beyond will also be highlighted.

Registration

Live webstream

Life Programme Information Days 2015

21 May, Newmarket, Co. Cork

27 May, Custom House, Dublin

The national information day to coincide with the 2015 call for proposals of the LIFE 2014-2020 programme (see earlier article) supporting environmental and climate action projects will focus on practical issues such as tips on preparing and writing an application and avoiding common pitfalls that arise with projects during the implementation phase. In addition to the LIFE National Contact Point (NCP) within the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government, who will be on hand to assist prospective applicants, confirmed speakers on the day will include representatives from the EU LIFE External Monitoring Team in Brussels and from National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) who have a key role in relation to LIFE Nature &

Biodiversity priority applications. The LIFE CAISIE, LIFE Freshbox and WISER LIFE projects will also each provide presentations on their own activities as well as their experience of dealing with the application process. Spaces will be prioritised for those who intend to apply during the 2015 or subsequent LIFE calls. The NCP provides a year-round project screening service to potential applicants based on completion of a concept template.

An alternative, scaled-down information session will take place during the final conference of the Duhallow LIFE project in Newmarket, Co. Cork on Thursday 21 May. The following day will see the launch of IRD Duhallow's new Raptor LIFE project.

Further details (both events)

Project Concept Template

Register by contacting LIFE@environ.ie

Innovating public services through service design (SPIDER project)

9-10 June, Dublin

In conjunction with Irish Design 2015, the Northern & Western Regional Assembly, as partners to the ongoing SPIDER transnational project, will host a conference on 'Innovating public services in challenging times: Why service design is making a difference'. This project, supported by INTERREG IVB North West Europe, is seeking to demonstrate, through a series of sub-projects, how design processes based on end-user perspectives can impact upon the way services are innovated and to deliver tangible solutions in order to encourage a re-think of how best to address complex public services challenges such as budget cuts and an ageing population. The event aims to stimulate ideas, projects and connections that will lead to the creation of new public services approaches that are simpler, better and more effective at a reduced cost.

Register

www.thespiderproject.eu

Internationalising Business Opportunities (TESLA project)

16 June, Galway

As joint partners to the INTERREG IVB North West Europe TESLA (Transnational Ecosystem & Laboratory and Action) project, the Northern & Western Regional Assembly and Lónra, the network of the region's Institutes of Technology Innovation Centres and the NUI Galway Business Innovation Centre (BIC), is hosting a one-day conference on 'Internationalising Business Opportunities'. The event will bring together Incubation Centre Managers, Enterprise Support Agencies, Commercialisation Specialists and early-stage businesses throughout Europe to showcase the positive outcomes of this €3.8 million transnational innovation project supporting pilot actions for high-potential start-ups (HPSUs) with recognised export potential. TESLA has been providing emerging technology firms with supports in areas such as EU Procurement, Entrepreneurial Finance, New Product Development and Internationalisation mentoring and training since 2012. Cork Institute of Technology are among the other members of the TESLA partnership.

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<http://teslaproject.eu/>