

(English version)

Question for written answer E-000622/25
to the Commission
Elena Kountoura (The Left)
(11 February 2025)

Subject: Urgent need for a fair European strategy for sustainable development and resilience of EU island regions

The EU's islands and coastal regions face serious, long-standing problems ⁽¹⁾, such as limited connectivity with the mainland, inadequate basic infrastructure and shortages in health, education and social services ⁽²⁾. These problems are particularly evident on the hundreds of Greek islands, where the cost of living for residents and workers has more than doubled in recent years. Unbearable transport costs, the rapid increase in short-term housing rentals and the lack of available housing in tourist destinations lead to continuous price increases in basic goods and services, making life relentlessly difficult for residents. In addition, they are disproportionately affected by the climate and energy crises, natural disasters, environmental and demographic data. Island tourist destinations are at immediate risk of their sustainable and resilient development being undermined, as social, economic and territorial inequalities intensify ⁽³⁾, while small islands face an increased risk of desertion ⁽⁴⁾.

In view of the above:

1. Does the Commission intend to propose a new European strategy and transition plan for the sustainable and resilient development of EU islands and the immediate tackling of inequalities with a corresponding flexible financial framework in the Cohesion Policy?
2. What initiatives will the Commission take to improve connectivity and infrastructure resilience and development, and ensure affordable housing in island regions?
3. Does the Commission intend to propose a new permanent regional, decentralised fund for the prevention and management of natural disasters in vulnerable regions and in particular on EU islands?

Submitted: 11.2.2025

Answer given by Executive Vice-President Fitto on behalf of the European Commission
(4 April 2025)

Islands face specific economic and social vulnerabilities, arising from their insularity and remoteness. Their distinct needs require tailor-made approaches.

Through EU cohesion policy, which is designed to tackle regional, economic and social disparities, particular attention is paid to these areas, as enshrined in Article 174 of the TFEU.

In the 2021-2027 period, at least EUR 14.8 billion are allocated from cohesion policy (from the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund) for investments supporting islands.

This is to support investments for competitiveness, green transition, better connectivity, housing, sustainable tourism and inclusive growth. Member States can also use cohesion policy to support disaster risk management, particularly financing prevention and response measures.

Islands and coastal communities are a key focus in the preparation of the Ocean Pact. The Commission is launching a study on the opportunities and resilience in coastal communities to support its future work ⁽¹⁾.

In addition, the Commission will put forward a European Affordable Housing Plan which will consider the housing situation in island regions.

The Commission's 'Clean energy for EU islands' initiative ⁽²⁾ accelerates decarbonisation of islands' energy systems and facilitates exchange of best practices.

¹ See the study of the Committee on Regional Development, 'Islands of the European Union: State of play and future challenges', published in March 2021. The insular nature creates structural problems of dependence on sea and air transport, which constitute a public service on which the daily life of European citizens living on islands depends, with additional costs for the import and export of goods, mainly energy raw materials and consumer products, as well as for the transport of passengers.

² There are significant shortages of auxiliary and medical personnel, ambulances and medical equipment.

³ One of the starkest disadvantages of islands lies in their geomorphological and natural conditions. Therefore, islands have a double or triple natural disadvantage when their insular nature and mountainous morphology are combined with the fact that they are part of an archipelago.

⁴ Since 1950, 51 Greek islands have been deserted.

⁽¹⁾ Results are foreseen for Q4 2025.

⁽²⁾ <https://clean-energy-islands.ec.europa.eu/>

Furthermore, the EU's trans-European transport network policy ⁽³⁾ incorporates the new concept of a European Maritime Space to strengthen the integration of islands into the European Single Market and advance territorial cohesion.

Preparations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework are still ongoing, and it is too early to anticipate any decisions on new funding for any policy area.

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/1679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, amending Regulations (EU) 2021/1153 and (EU) No 913/2010 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013, OJ L, 2024/1679, 28.6.2024.