

(English version)

Question for written answer E-001524/25
to the Commission
Elena Kountoura (The Left)
(14 April 2025)

Subject: Need to incorporate specific measures to better support the health coverage of islands in the EU cohesion policy framework

EU island regions face chronic and structural problems with regard to access to basic health services. This issue is exacerbated by geographical isolation, seasonal population pressure, the inability to attract medical and nursing staff and the inadequacy of infrastructure. Despite the fact that the TFEU recognises insularity as a permanent structural handicap, these specific problems do not appear to be dealt with sufficiently under the current cohesion policy strategy and priorities. ⁽¹⁾

Taking into account the desperate shortages of doctors, nurses and basic health infrastructure on at least 15 Greek islands, as reflected in data from the Panhellenic Federation of Public Hospital Employees in view of Easter and the upcoming tourist season ⁽²⁾, and the resolution of the European Parliament ⁽³⁾ calling on the EU to draw up a dedicated strategy and agenda for islands, with clearly defined priorities for action and funding, and stressing the need to improve health infrastructure and upgrade primary healthcare provision, access to healthcare and the provision of support, in order to encourage the establishment of healthcare professionals, can the Commission say:

1. Does it intend to establish a specific horizontal priority and category of funding and targeted support for basic public health services on islands within the framework of the cohesion funds?
2. Does the Commission intend to establish specific rules, targeted financial support and binding criteria for strengthening healthcare services in island regions under the post-2027 cohesion policy framework, in order to take account of the specific situation of islands with regard to access to healthcare services?

Submitted: 14.4.2025

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

Health services and infrastructure are already a priority under Cohesion Policy enabling Member States to promote equal access to healthcare and strengthen health system's resilience ⁽¹⁾.

Implemented through shared management, national authorities can tailor investments addressing territorial needs, as access to basic healthcare is vital to support the right to live where people reside.

For Greece, some EUR 416 million ⁽²⁾ under the European Regional Development Fund, support health infrastructure and equipment at all levels of the National Health System across regions, including Primary Healthcare, eHealth and telemedicine ⁽³⁾.

Complementary, some EUR 323 million ⁽⁴⁾ under the European Social Fund Plus, support measures targeting marginalised and isolated communities such as the creation of 127 Local Health Units ⁽⁵⁾ and Mobile Healthcare Units ⁽⁶⁾, promotion of citizen registration with a personal doctor, the development of integrated information technology systems, long-term and mental healthcare actions, especially in remote areas, and staff training to improve access and quality ⁽⁷⁾.

¹ Despite financial support from EU cohesion policy funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), for action in the area of health, the problem of poor and unequal health coverage on islands remains acute and, in many cases, it is getting worse. This highlights the need for more targeted, established and permanent measures.

² For more information, see https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/ygeia/468921_kentra-aerodiakomidon-ehoyne-ginei-ta-nisia#goog_rewarded

³ For further information, see European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2022 on EU islands and cohesion policy: current situation and future challenges (2021/2079 (INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0225_EN.html.

⁽¹⁾ In total, EUR 7.4 billion have been allocated by Member States across the EU from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Interreg to support health-related investments under Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027. These include improvements in healthcare infrastructure, long-term care, and digitalisation, in line with national and regional smart specialisation strategies. Examples of ERDF support include investments in health infrastructure and equipment, that improve access to mainstream high-quality healthcare and long-term care (LTC) services across the EU. Cohesion policy also supports research and innovation linked to healthcare, digitalisations and e-health, based on Member States' and regions' smart specialisation strategies (S3).

⁽²⁾ Public expenditure.

⁽³⁾ Through 13 regional programmes.

⁽⁴⁾ Public expenditure.

⁽⁵⁾ Local Health Units (TOMYs) — Τοπικές Μονάδες Υγείας (TOMY).

⁽⁶⁾ Mobile Healthcare Units (KOMYs) — Κινητές Μονάδες Υγείας (KOMY).

⁽⁷⁾ European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) investments fall under the horizontal intervention field 160 and 16-Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A231%3ATOC>) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1060/oj/eng>.

To help islands and outermost regions address multi-faceted problems, the Commission will launch a consultation on an Islands Strategy as announced in the communication of 1 April 2025 ‘A modernised Cohesion policy: The mid-term review’ ⁽⁸⁾.

The Commission will keep working with Member States to mobilise reforms and investments based on community needs, encouraging them to address the specific challenges of their islands through Cohesion Policy support ⁽⁹⁾.

Since deliberations on the post-2027 framework of Cohesion Policy are still ongoing, it is premature to comment on its content at this stage, as its final outcome will depend on the results of discussions with the co-legislators.

⁽⁸⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/publications/communications/2025/a-modernised-cohesion-policy-the-mid-term-review_en.

⁽⁹⁾ The Commission’s Communication on ‘The road to the next multiannual financial framework’ clearly sets out the need for a simpler, more focused and more impactful budget with a leaner budgetary architecture consolidating current spending programmes to overcome a currently fragmented funding landscape. [6d47acb4-9206-4d0f-8f9b-3b10cad7b1ed_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip25_1111).