

CALL FOR EVIDENCE FOR AN INITIATIVE (without an impact assessment)

This document aims to inform the public and stakeholders about the Commission’s work, so they can provide feedback and participate effectively in consultation activities.

We ask these groups to provide views on the Commission’s understanding of the problem and possible solutions, and to give us any relevant information they may have.

TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an EU strategy for islands
LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT	DG REGIO - Unit 03 (Cities, communities, people)
LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE	Communication
INDICATIVE TIMING	Q2-2026
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	-

This document is for information purposes only. It does not prejudice the final decision of the Commission on whether this initiative will be pursued or on its final content. All elements of the initiative described by this document, including its timing, are subject to change.

A. Political context, problem definition and subsidiarity check

Political context

Islands are part of the EU’s geographical fabric, reflecting a wide variety of landscapes, communities and economic and social realities. The combination of their geographical diversity, distinctive socio-economic profiles, insularity, remoteness and economic and environmental vulnerabilities, as well as their exposure to climate change, results in a specific set of long-standing structural challenges. At the same time, their distinctive geography and rich natural and cultural heritage also present development and security opportunities, which are not always used to their full extent. By capitalising on their specific strengths, islands can serve as test beds for innovation in areas such as sustainable transport and mobility, water management, clean energy, climate mitigation and adaptation, tourism, digital innovation and the blue economy, while supporting sustainable tourism, re-enforcing the EU’s security and defence, and at the same time ensuring living standards for island communities and access to opportunities comparable to those of people living on the mainland.

A political commitment to focus on the specific economic and social challenges faced by islands is highlighted in the mission letter of [Executive Vice-President Fitto](#). This commitment builds on a broad spectrum of EU policies and initiatives for a more aligned and coordinated approach to addressing the diverse challenges faced by islands, both directly and indirectly. The focus on a more strategic approach to support islands was further strengthened in [the cohesion policy mid-term review](#) proposal of 1 April 2025, which committed to launching a consultation on the development of a strategy for islands, and through the [European Ocean Pact](#), published in June 2025.

The commitment to prepare a strategy for islands also responds to a long-standing call by the European Parliament [[resolution on EU islands and cohesion policy: current situation and future challenges 2021/2079\(INI\)](#)] and island stakeholders for a strategic framework for addressing the **unique challenges of islands**.

This also aligns with similar calls for action from the Consultative Committees, notably the 2023 [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Main challenges faced by EU islands, and mountainous and sparsely populated areas \(C/2024/1572\)](#) and the 2022 [Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on enhancing Cohesion Policy support for regions with geographic and demographic handicaps \(Article 174 TFEU\) \(CDR-2959-2022\)](#).

Problem the initiative aims to tackle

EU islands have very diverse geographic and socio-economic profiles. While some islands have become thriving hubs at the forefront of economic development including tourism, others continue to face challenges arising from insularity, including limited connectivity, economic vulnerability, structural demographic pressures and social constraints, which limit their capacity for sustainable growth and resilience.

Through its sectoral policies and targeted initiatives that support, among other things, territorial cohesion, connectivity, energy and digital transitions, and maritime policy, the EU has played a key role in supporting islands, addressing many of their specific challenges and creating opportunities to harness their socio-economic potential and improve quality of life for local communities. While these policies have made significant contributions, their impacts could have been achieved more efficiently through a more coherent approach. This has been noted by the European Parliament and the Consultative Committees, which continue to highlight areas where coordination across EU policies could be strengthened, and concerns regarding the limited consideration of the insular dimension in relevant sectoral legislation.

The fragmented landscape of EU sectoral policies, initiatives and funding instruments can make it challenging for Member States to design and implement coherent national policies to support islands. This fragmentation can reduce the overall impact of policies on the ground and create additional administrative burdens. Islands, including authorities of smaller islands, with limited capacity, may face particular difficulties in fully accessing and benefiting from available EU support and funding. These challenges highlight the need for a more coherent and integrated approach that can both improve the delivery of existing policies and ensure that the specific needs of islands are properly reflected in EU initiatives.

At territorial level, islands and the mainland are often part of the same administrative regions ¹, which form the basis for the application of EU cohesion policy. Similarly, macro-regional and sea-basin strategies typically address challenges of islands, coastal areas and the mainland in an integrated manner. Across policy sectors, particularly in transport, joint planning between coastal areas and island communities is essential. It is therefore important to address the unique development needs of islands while harnessing the complementarities between islands and mainland regions.

Although the EU outermost regions are islands, their specificities, as defined under Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), require a dedicated EU strategy for outermost regions. A separate call for evidence for this strategy was launched in November 2025.

Basis for EU action (legal basis and subsidiarity check)

Legal basis

[Article 174](#) ² TFEU refers to the EU's role to 'develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion' and refers to islands as regions facing 'severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps', which are therefore entitled to receive targeted attention.

Practical need for EU action

The Communication on the EU strategy for islands aligns with the subsidiarity principle by complementing and supporting actions taken at local, regional and national levels. EU action in particular enables local authorities, including those from islands, to develop and implement tailored policies that address the specific geographical and socio-economic challenges of these territories. The Communication provides guidance and resources to foster sustainable development and ensure that no community is left behind.

The initiative will also take into account the principle of proportionality in its planned content. As a non-legislative instrument, it seeks to reduce financial and administrative burdens for the EU, as well as for national, regional and local authorities and stakeholders.

B. What does the initiative aim to achieve and how?

¹ NUTS 2 basic regions (for regional policies) and NUTS 3 small regions (for specific diagnoses) under Eurostat's nomenclature of territorial units for statistics: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts>.

² [EUR-Lex - 12008E174 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

Setting up a coordinated policy framework for the development of EU islands will guide EU action and empower Member States to better steer the programming and implementation of their national policies and EU support. The strategy aims to achieve this through a set of interlinked objectives:

1) **strengthening the economic competitiveness** and attractiveness of EU islands as dynamic territories, by supporting traditional sectors (agriculture, fisheries, tourism) and economic diversification, encouraging innovation and smart specialisation, including in the blue economy, and improving connectivity within islands and with wider markets, both digitally and through transport links;

2) **fostering resilience and sustainability** by advancing decarbonisation and strengthening renewable energy systems to reduce energy dependency, promoting circular and resource-efficient practices, including in waste and water management, and improving the capacity of islands to prepare for, adapt to, and mitigate climate-related risks;

3) **addressing structural demographic challenges and helping to encourage people to remain in their regions if so desired ([right to stay](#))**, by improving access to affordable housing and public services including education, training and health, as well as supporting cultural heritage and local identity;

4) **supporting islands as strategic contributors to the EU's defence and security**, including in the areas of energy and transport critical infrastructure, migration and border management, and threat detection and response capabilities.

The strategy will set out proposals and recommendations to improve the coordination, complementarity and targeting of EU policies and funding instruments for islands. It will also support the design of national and regional partnership plans in the next programming period.

Likely impacts

The strategy will contribute to a more coherent approach to EU sectoral policies and initiatives, facilitating the design and implementation of national plans or strategies for islands, particularly by smaller authorities. By creating an overarching strategic framework, the strategy aims to make EU policies more efficient and better targeted, and reduce administrative barriers and lower costs for authorities and stakeholders, enabling territories to fully realise their economic, social and environmental potential.

Building on this, authorities should be better able to plan and implement policies tailored to specific geographical, economic and social realities, fostering resilience, promoting sustainable development and improving quality of life.

Overall, the initiative will reinforce the EU's commitment to islands and strengthen the uptake and impact of EU support, ensuring that policies are responsive to their unique needs and challenges.

Future monitoring

Monitoring of the strategy's implementation will be ensured through data collection as part of different actions carried out by the initiative. It will feed future evaluations and impact assessments.

As support to islands is one of the pillars of the European Ocean Pact, monitoring will also be carried out through the announced monitoring and reporting framework, notably the Ocean Pact Dashboard and the State of the Ocean Pact Report.

C. Better regulation

Impact assessment

The initiative will take the form of a Commission Communication. It will set out a common strategic approach and recommendations for the future.

It does not create new funding streams or legislative proposals. In addition to this call for evidence, insights from recent activities, such as the stakeholder consultations conducted during the preparation of the Ocean Pact, will also help to build the knowledge and evidence base for the strategy. Other Better Regulation tools, such as a public consultation or impact assessment, though not legally required for this type of initiative, would offer no added value.

Consultation strategy

The aim of this call for evidence is to invite the general public and stakeholders to share their views on the main challenges faced by EU islands, their concrete proposals for overcoming these challenges, and their expectations from the EU policies. The feedback from the key stakeholders will contribute to the evidence base used to develop the strategy's recommendations.

The primary stakeholders include, among others, national, regional and local authorities, civil society, local communities, other stakeholders and representatives based on islands, and other stakeholders working on island development issues.

The public is invited to respond to this call for evidence. Contributions can be submitted in any of the EU's 24 official languages, via the '[Have your Say](#)' portal (the Commission's central public consultations page). The call for evidence is promoted through the Commission's communication channels and through identified stakeholders. A synopsis report, comprising a summary of all consultation results, will be prepared and made publicly available, along with all the contributions received.

Why we are consulting

The Commission is seeking opinions and experiences from the public and stakeholders across the EU islands and beyond, to gather views on the issues listed below.

1. **Key challenges and priorities:** what are the main short-term and long-term challenges faced by EU islands and which policy areas should the strategy prioritise?
2. **Existing policies, complementarities and relevant legislation:** which existing EU policies, initiatives and legislation perform well, and how should the new strategy complement actions at national, regional and local levels?
3. **Stakeholder expectations and proposed measures:** what do stakeholders expect the EU to deliver and what concrete measures would they propose to support islands in key policy areas?
4. **Youth and the right to stay:** what are the main challenges faced by young people on islands, and what impacts should the strategy have to ensure the attractiveness of these territories as places where people of all ages want to live their lives, thus giving them the effective right to stay in the place they call home?

Target audience

Everyone is invited to participate in this consultation. The Commission particularly encourages contributions from stakeholders based on EU islands. Input is also welcome from regional and local authorities, especially those responsible for islands, as well as from grassroots and youth organisations based on islands.

Contributions are also invited from European institutions, European and national networks of island authorities, academics, people and organisations working in the blue economy, NGOs and networks engaged in policy-related work.