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2026 CAGLIARI DECLARATION

Europe's Islands: From Recognition to Action

**Adopted by the General Assembly of the CPMR Islands Commission,
meeting on 29TH April 2026 in Cagliari.**

IN A NUTSHELL

Ensuring that European islands receive adequate recognition and support they deserve is a matter of social justice, grounded in the principle that island communities must have equal rights, opportunities and access to essential services and resources, regardless of their geographical constraints. At a time of growing geopolitical uncertainty, these territories also represent strategic hubs along the European Union's maritime borders, making their resilience and sustainable development not only a local concern, but a broader European priority. This requires concrete delivery tools, including island-proofing and an 'insularity clause', reliable year-round connectivity, and robust governance and monitoring based on shared indicators.

In a rapidly evolving European and global context, islands remain indeed strategically positioned as key assets for the EU, acting as drivers of sustainable development and central actors in territorial cohesion, innovation and resilience. They play a crucial role in strengthening the EU maritime dimension, supporting the sustainable blue economy and driving the transition towards climate neutrality. Serving as reservoirs of biodiversity, they also contribute significantly to tackling the triple planetary crisis by conserving and restoring unique ecosystems, while fostering sustainable, innovation-driven growth. Last but not least, islands are repositories of cultural "biodiversity", guardians of languages, traditions and heritage that not only strengthen their inner solidarity and nurture their historical identification and attractiveness but are also connected to forms of know-how, resilience, as well as to attitudes toward experimentation, creativity, and problem-solving. Yet, these territories continue to face structural constraints – linked to insularity,

remoteness, other inherent vulnerabilities such as climate impacts and lack of resources, demographic crisis (in the form of high pressure or depopulation) and limited accessibility – which are still too often overlooked in broader EU policy frameworks, thus limiting their citizenship rights and their growth potential. For all these reasons, islands require targeted and place-based policy responses. Apart from island regions, in the case of Island Member States, these constraints operate across the entire national territory, generating economy-wide impacts due to the absence of internal territorial buffers and alternative connectivity options.

As the EU shapes its policy agenda for the coming years, notably in the context of the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, it is essential that the unique realities of islands are fully reflected and integrated into EU policymaking. In this regard, the long-awaited EU Strategy for Islands represents an outstanding opportunity to establish, for the first time, a coherent European framework addressing the specific needs and potential of island territories. Similarly, the upcoming revision of the EU Strategy for the Outermost Regions marks an important occasion to reassess the tools and policy coordination needed to address both long-standing challenges and emerging international dynamics.

In this context, this year's Final Declaration aims to provide valuable insights and concrete recommendations on key cross-cutting priorities for island territories, while putting forward more targeted reflections on the development and governance of the forthcoming EU Strategy for Islands and the revision of the EU strategy for the Outermost Regions. In doing so, it builds on the contributions already submitted by the Islands Commission to the respective calls for evidence, aiming to further guide the European institutions in shaping these key policy frameworks for a better consideration of the realities, challenges and strategic potential of Europe's islands.

The CPMR Islands Commission hereby:

1. Urges the EU to advance towards a truly place-based approach in policymaking, capable of addressing the structural realities of insularity through tailored policy responses, including the cumulative impacts of EU policies, in different kinds of island territories. It welcomes **the forthcoming EU Strategy on the “Right to Stay”** and stresses that enabling citizens to build their future in the place they call home is equally vital for islands and Outermost Regions, where structural constraints continue to drive demographic and socio-economic imbalances. Consequently, it is essential that this new Strategy fully reflects the specific characteristics of demographic challenges in island contexts, which often differ significantly from those faced by other territories, such as rural regions.
2. Calls for **Territorial Impact Assessments (TIAs) to become a systematic and compulsory element** of the EU policymaking process, ensuring that the impacts of EU legislation on different types of territories – including islands territories such as island regions, Island Member States and double-insular territories – are properly considered. In the context of the ongoing revision of the EU Better Regulation framework, simplification should not come at the expense of territorial analysis: on the contrary, robust TIAs are a key tool to ensure that EU legislation is better designed, more proportionate and responsive to territorial realities. It recalls that no legislative or regulatory EU initiative with a significant territorial impact should be adopted without an explicit assessment of its consequences on island territories.
3. Calls on the European Commission to address the persistent **lack of reliable and sufficiently disaggregated data on islands**, which continues to limit evidence-based policymaking and the proper assessment of EU policies’ territorial impacts. Strengthening the availability, comparability and interoperability of island-relevant data, notably through enhanced cooperation with Eurostat, ESPON and academic initiatives on insularity, is crucial to support more informed and effective EU decision-making.¹
4. As negotiations on the **2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework** advance, it stresses that EU funding instruments and compensation mechanisms must continue to support territorial cohesion and adequately respond to the structural challenges faced by islands and Outermost Regions, including Island Member States where insularity affects the whole national territory. As regards the Outermost Regions, existing compensation arrangements must be safeguarded. Cohesion Policy must remain a cornerstone investment policy for balanced development across the Union, while implementation frameworks should remain proportionate, simplified and workable for small and centralised administrations. Insular territories should have fair and equitable access to the resources needed to address their development gaps, support

¹ Island-relevant data should include, where pertinent, indicators capturing seasonal pressures (e.g., tourism intensity), housing affordability and access to essential services, and connectivity costs and reliability. Furthermore, it is essential to support islands in their digital transition. Much of the island economic fabric is composed of SMEs and micro-enterprises, and in many cases, particularly in tourism-dependent islands, the data landscape remains highly fragmented. This fragmentation, combined with limited resources and capacities, makes digital modernisation a complex and long-term challenge. Targeted support, capacity-building and investment are therefore crucial to enable digital uptake, improve data management and foster innovation, ultimately strengthening the competitiveness and resilience of island economies.

sustainable transitions, improve energy interconnectivity, and strengthen their innovation capacities. Additionally, it calls for a structured dialogue between European institutions and Member States to ensure that the allocation and implementation of EU funds, primarily managed at national level, and State aid effectively reach island territories. Such implementation does not always guarantee that support effectively addresses the specific needs of islands, highlighting the need for more targeted and territorially sensitive delivery of funding instruments.

5. Welcomes the upcoming first-ever **EU Islands Strategy** and, in line with the key messages outlined in the CPMR IC contribution to the related Call for Evidence², expects it to:
 - a) Not be limited to a simple framework document, diagnostic exercise, or internal guidance or awareness-raising tool. The Strategy must translate into operational commitments, concrete measures, measurable objectives, and include a clear implementation timeline.
 - b) **Promote the emergence of a genuine EU “insularity mindset” through systematic island-proofing of EU policies.** Building on Article 174 TFEU and the recognition of islands’ permanent handicaps, including the specific realities of Island Member States where insularity operates across the entire national territory, the future Strategy should establish a systematic island-proofing approach across EU policies with strong territorial impact and consider the introduction of an “insularity clause” in key policy areas such as cohesion, transport, energy, agriculture, fisheries and state aid. This approach should ensure the consistent consideration of insular realities, structured consultation of island authorities, and avoid one-size-fits-all solutions across Member States. This island-proofing approach should be operationalised through clear guidance, dedicated contact points, and accountability mechanisms, ensuring early and structured consultation of island authorities.
 - c) **Reflect the diversity of island territories, while ensuring a coherent, place-based and sustainability-driven scope.** The Strategy should build on island regions’ political priorities, as highlighted in the [2023 IC Palma Declaration](#), and address the economic, environmental and social pillars through targeted and concrete policy measures. It should notably support economic diversification, sustainable tourism (including managing tourism pressures – seasonality, carrying capacity – and their impacts on housing and services), connectivity and mobility, climate action, energy transition, biodiversity protection, social cohesion, housing, cultural and demographic challenges. Overall, it should promote an integrated, place-based approach, enhancing resilience and competitiveness while addressing structural constraints such as remoteness and limited resources. In particular connectivity, including maritime and air links, should be explicitly recognised as a lifeline function in island contexts, often with no viable modal alternative, requiring reliable, resilient and affordable provision, particularly in single-port

² See the [CPMR Islands Commission’s contribution to the European Commission’s Call for Evidence for the future Islands Strategy](#) for further details.

or highly exposed system. EU transport decarbonisation frameworks (including ETS and sustainable fuels obligations) should therefore avoid creating disproportionate costs for residents and businesses, through appropriate place-based flexibility and/or compensation mechanisms. Particular attention should be given to small islands, archipelagos, and territories experiencing double insularity, where compounded accessibility constraints and limited-service access require targeted and differentiated policy responses and where territorial fragmentation further amplifies the challenges linked to insularity and calls for territory-sensitive policy responses and concrete tailored measures.

- d) **Develop an inclusive multi-level and participatory governance framework ensuring the involvement of island authorities**, as a precondition for its effectiveness. Island regional and local authorities must be involved at all stages, from design to implementation and monitoring, ensuring co-ownership and policy relevance. It calls for the islands strategy to be subject to an annual implementation report, presented to European institutions as well as to regional and local authorities of island territories, in order to ensure transparency, accountability, and tangible results. Dedicated governance structures should be established, bringing together EU institutions, Member States and island stakeholders. In this context, an **EU Islands Coordination Platform** could provide strategic guidance, political coordination and a space for regular dialogue on the Strategy priorities, implementation, and monitoring.
- e) **Strengthen the necessary evidence base by developing an EU knowledge framework on islands and addressing persistent data gaps** through the establishment of an **EU Islands Advisory and Technical Board** to provide expertise, analysis and policy input. The Board should rely on a dedicated Eurostat unit on islands and strengthen cooperation with academia, research networks and EU bodies such as ESPON to ensure the availability of reliable, comparable and disaggregated data reflecting insular realities, including national-scale insularity in Island Member States and their island regions as well as its economy-wide effects. This framework, supported by funding and programmes, should guide territorial impact assessments and evidence-based policymaking.
- f) **Ensure long-term political visibility and coordination of EU action for islands** by providing a stable, permanent and overarching framework for strengthened cooperation among EU institutions, Member States and insular stakeholders. A biannual **EU Islands Forum** should facilitate exchanges, cooperation and peer learning bringing together quadruple helix stakeholders and their networks, and, a permanent **EU Islands Secretariat**, supported by adequate EU funding, could support effective coordination, communication and operational assistance for the implementation of the Strategy and its governance arrangements.
- g) **Call for the establishment of concrete EU compensation mechanisms** to offset the permanent structural handicaps of insularity, in line with Article 174 TFEU. These **should include dedicated financial instruments and adapted regulatory frameworks**

addressing additional costs related to transport, maritime and aviation connectivity energy, market access and public service provision. They should recognise permanent insularity-related costs as a source of structural market failure. They should also include, through an island-adapted EU State aid framework, proportionate flexibility (notably under GBER and de minimis where justified) and compensation mechanisms for permanent insularity-related costs, ensuring real equality between island and mainland territories in a proportionate and verifiable manner.

6. Welcomes the ongoing revision of the **EU Outermost Regions (ORs) Strategy and the accompanying Simplification Package** and³, expects it to:

- a) **Provide a more strategic vision aligned with the realities and ambitions of ORs** and strengthen the adaptation of EU legislation and funding tools to their specificities, namely in the next MFF, and in coherence with Article 349 TFEU. This requires a joint and coordinated treatment for the Outermost Regions, equivalent to that of less developed regions and regardless of their GDP. This approach shall be based on **a long-term vision and adapted investment framework**, guaranteeing sustained EU investment in essential infrastructures, connectivity, skills and economic diversification, so that ORs can address structural vulnerabilities and fully leverage their economic, social and environmental potential.
- b) **Promote a fair, place-based climate and energy transition**, recognising the high exposure of ORs to climate risks and the challenges linked to non-interconnected energy systems, thus enabling tailored energy transition pathways that reinforce their resilience, modernise energy systems, support local green skills and address energy poverty. Improved coordination and complementarity between post-disaster emergency and recovery operations should be promoted, while ensuring the specificities of ORs are reflected in Member States' National Adaptation Strategies and Action Plans. Similarly, the EU's clean energy framework should be better integrated into the revised Strategy, with targeted support for local green skills and stronger efforts to systematically address energy poverty.
- c) **Guarantee sustainable, reliable and affordable connectivity**, by fully considering the dependence of ORs on maritime and air links in the design and implementation of EU transport and climate policies, including the 2026 review of the ETS. The adaptation and resilience of transport and digital infrastructures remain essential to territorial cohesion and accessibility and should be supported through dedicated financial measures, including via the Social Climate Fund, as well as by re-establishing territorial accessibility as a priority within the Connecting Europe Facility. This is particularly critical for archipelagic outermost regions, where connectivity challenges are compounded by

³ See the [CPMR Islands Commission's contribution to the European Commission's Call for Evidence for the revised Outermost Regions Strategy](#) for further details.

internal fragmentation, generating additional costs for inter-island transport that must be explicitly recognised and compensated within the EU regulatory and funding frameworks.

- d) **Unlock the strategic potential of ORs in the blue economy and regional cooperation.** ORs' maritime spaces, fisheries, aquaculture potential and ocean-related research capacity represent major assets for the EU, alongside partnerships with neighbouring regions. Their contributions to the EU's maritime, environmental and geopolitical priorities should be supported by notably preserving a stand-alone and adequately funded EMFAF, improving data collection and assessment methods on ORs fisheries and reinforcing regional partnerships.
7. Insists on the need for **clear governance, implementation mechanisms, and monitoring tools** for both strategies, ensuring that their objectives translate into tangible actions and measurable results for Island and Outermost Regions' communities, in a manner that is proportionate and adapted to administrative capacities and avoids duplication with existing structures. This should include appropriate indicators, regular reporting, and structured dialogue with regional and local authorities to easily track progress, assess territorial impacts, and adapt policy responses, as necessary. This should enable adaptive management, adjusting measures over time based on evidence and evolving territorial pressures.
8. Strongly encourages the European Commission to actively foster coordination and synergies of these strategies with other key relevant European initiatives, in particular the upcoming **Strategy for Coastal Communities and the one on Sustainable Tourism**, in order to increase policy coherence, avoid fragmentation and enhance their overall impact, through complementary and mutually reinforcing actions.⁴
9. Considers it paramount that both strategies are firmly anchored in the EU long-term policy and investment framework, notably the **post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and future Cohesion Policy**, which should strengthen the territorial and place-based dimension of EU action, ensuring the preservation of the historical *acquis* of the Outermost Regions and guaranteeing adequate access to funding for islands. All of the above aims to support the sustainable development and growth of these regions, with sufficient flexibility to reflect insular realities and avoid rigid or one-size-fits-all approaches, without exacerbating disparities with mainland territories.

Unanimously approved

⁴ This coordination should notably ensure coherence on managing tourism pressures in islands, including housing impacts and the regulation and enforcement of short-term rentals. In this context, it also recalls the European Committee of the Regions own-initiative Opinion "For a sustainable and resilient tourism in the European Union: balanced and adaptive management strategy" (NAT-VIII/005, adopted in plenary on 10-11 December 2025), and encourages the Commission to take its recommendations into account in the forthcoming EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy.