



Building an Evidence-based knowledge for European Islands as a condition for a European Policy for Islands

A Hybrid workshop organized by the Network of the Insular Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the EU (INSULEUR) in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and with the cooperation of the CPMR Islands Commission and the European Small Islands Federation (ESIN)

Brussels, 28th of June 2023 (10.30-13.00)

European Economic and Social Committee

Address: rue Belliard 99, 1040 Brussels, Room: JDE 63

A preparatory internal technical meeting of INSULEUR will be organized from 09.00 to 10.30 CET.

****Interpretation in [languages tbc]***

****Registration (separate registration needed for each event)***

General Assembly <https://forms.gle/QzqiVRNVkijvqk4A7>

Workshop <https://forms.gle/P2HvqihgK1j5YHGE7>

Deadline for Registrations: Monday, June 26th.

Background document

1. Introduction

A recent Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on June 7, 2022, on EU islands and cohesion policy: current situation and future challenges (2021/2079(INI)), called, among others, for a specific EU **policy tailored for islands**. It underlined the fact that *“ the lack of statistical data on islands is hindering the development of targeted policies, called on the Commission to set up a European Institute for Disadvantaged Territories, related to Article 174 TFEU, to collect reliable and aggregated statistical data, including gender-disaggregated data, that is regularly updated using harmonized criteria at all administrative levels, called on the Commission to improve the collection of statistical data on European islands and to introduce territorial proofing in impact assessments of its proposals, with the aim of developing targeted policies and assessing how proposed legislation would affect citizens and businesses based in the different regions”*

Moreover, the European Parliament pointed out that *“islands are not all currently covered by EU legislation on territorial classification and called on the Commission to start a discussion on this, with a view to including islands in the common classification of territorial units for statistics and to consider setting up a programme similar to the European urban initiative to support partnerships between European islands in order to establish innovative approaches to island-specific problems and to share best practices and implement solutions that are beneficial for citizens and businesses”*

The NUTS classification subdivides the economic territory of the EU Member States and the UK into territorial units (regions). The NUTS classification includes three hierarchical levels, each Member State and the UK are divided into NUTS 1 regions, which in turn are subdivided into NUTS 2 regions and then divided further into NUTS 3 regions.

Each of these regions is allocated a specific code and name. Since several different regions within Europe have the same name, a distinction has been made by adding to each of these the abbreviation for the country concerned.

The NUTS classification serves as a reference for the collection, development, and harmonization of the European Union’s regional statistics, for socio-economic analyses of the regions and for the framing of EU regional policies.

The only available information for Islands is coming from the 31 Island Regions that are European statistical units (Member states, NUTS II or NUTS III) for which some common basic data are available.

2. The requirement of Data for Islands

Social and economic patterns and trends based on present data shows that little information is available at the level of individual islands. This situation renders the design and monitoring of strategies, and the formulation and implementation of specific actions to tackle the issues faced by islands, difficult. Islands are in a situation where they are facing constant problems. This situation requires more frequently updated information on demographic change, labor market situations, economic activities, and the provision of services of general interest.

The non-availability of data at Island level and the lack of estimation of “the cost of insularity” are obstacles that do not allow the formulation, implementation and monitoring of a policy adapted to the specific characteristics and needs of islands. The availability of reliable, comparable, and comprehensive statistics is an essential component of evidence-based decision making, and the lack and “*systematic truncation of statistical data sets on islands is hindering the development of targeted policies with an inherent risk of biased results failing to properly reflect island specificities*”. (European Commission, ADE, 2012).

3. The Relevance of Statistics for Evidence Based Decision making for Islands

Eurostat's mission is to provide **high quality** statistics and data on Europe. It is an uncontested fact that high quality statistics are needed as a basis for informed decisions in all spheres of life. Data is in fact collected on several social, economic, and environmental themes, such as population, health, living conditions, education, the labor market, the economy, international trade in goods, agriculture, business statistics and tourism, communications and the information society, research and development, transport, energy, and the environment. Nonetheless, the data as presently collected only gives a general snapshot of the country, and when it comes to islands in no way it portrays the difficulties currently faced by these territories. The pandemic has only made the compilation of statistical indicators more urgent.

Indicators are considered useful for testing hypotheses, model validation, creating information for policy and the development of knowledge base. Indicators alone should not be used as a stand-alone source of information for assessment and should be supplemented with other qualitative and quantitative data for the improvement of understanding of processes, outcomes, and paths.

Following the pandemic crisis, composite indicators are also necessary for assessing the resilience of an island community, this being a positive step towards a better understanding and operationalization of the concept of resilience.

As the situation stands now long-term development plans and strategic development frameworks for islands are being compiled without due consideration of demographic circumstances. This leads to a situation where Economic and public sector reforms are implemented in many Islands without due consideration of contemporary population dynamics.

There is always the possibility of using indicators collected and used by International Institutions and Bodies. For example, the UNEP isolation indicator is very useful for measuring the isolation of islands through tourism movements. More isolated islands have a smaller intensity of tourism movements, and those which are less isolated have a higher intensity of tourism movement ratio. But there are also exceptions from this rule such as for example territories which are more isolated and with a higher intensity of tourism movement such as the Canary Islands. On the other hand, there are those islands which are less geographically isolated but which in turn have a smaller intensity of tourism movement.

4. The Way Forward Being Proposed by INSULEUR

INSULEUR has always asked for the creation of a specific structure (Observatory) on Insular Economies. This structure should become a reliable reference center, i.e. provide comprehensive information and data that will help offer insular companies and public sector bodies the capability to make informed business decisions in their areas of interest.

This body will be responsible for the data collection, research and in-depth analysis of specific data sets. Its primary role will investigate the economic situation and the evolution of specific economic sectors in Islands, combining a sectoral and geographical approach.

Primary data should be collected by the Chambers members of INSULEUR through an annual survey on the economic situation, which will record the opinion of entrepreneurs as regards the evolution of their turnover, their financial situation, employment, and investments.

It will also undertake sectoral studies on specific economic sectors such as industry, construction, trade, services (especially those directly impacted by tourism) and sustainable development (integration of environmental and energy issues).

It will also carry out a comparative evaluation (benchmarking) of Islands and other coastal areas or regions.

Another important role will also be to monitor the evolution of trade, in terms of goods, volumes, and the identification of client regions/states in order to measure the competitiveness of Insular products.

The Observatory should also be in a position to develop a statistical indicator which will evaluate the level of divergence of islands from the European average for generic statistical indicators such as the gross domestic product and the national average household income.

The availability of such statistical indicators should lead to a proper evaluation of the existing policy measures for islands leading to a discussion on their adequacy and the possibility of developing alternative measures.

The final objective should be to support policymakers at different levels in adapting islands' realities and to enable islands to play a more active role in the EU both economically and socially.

Draft Program

10.30-10.50 Introductory Session

- **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, President of the ECO Section, EESC
- **Eleftherios Kechagioglou**, President, Greek Small Islands Network
- **Joseph Borg**, President of INSULEUR and the Gozo Business Chamber

10.50 – 11.20 The position of Islands

Key speakers:

- **Claire HELLY**, Project Officer, CPMR Islands Commission
- **Gianni Chianetta**, Founder & Director, Greening the islands

11.20-13.00 European and National Institutions' responses

- **François ALFONSI**, MEP, REGI Committee Member, European Parliament
- **Merja HAAPAKKA**, Policy Coordinator, European Commission, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (on line)
- **Ioannis Vardakatsanis**, President, ECO Section, EESC
- **Manolis Koutoulakis**, General Secretary of Insular Policy, Greek Government

Discussion with the audience