Territorial typologies manual - island regions

This article forms part of Eurostat 's *methodology manual on territorial typologies* .

The island typology is applied at the level of NUTS regions. Island regions are defined as NUTS level 3 regions within the European Union (EU) that are entirely composed of 1 or more islands.

Classes for the typology and their conditions

Details of the typology

The island typology is a classification based on the following 2 categories

- island regions

- non-island regions (those regions that aren't defined as island regions).

Methodology for the typology

Island regions are NUTS level 3 regions that are entirely composed of 1 or more islands. In this context, islands are defined as territories having

- a minimum surface of 1 km²

- a minimum distance between the island and the mainland of 1 km

- a resident population of more than 50 inhabitants

- no fixed link (for example, a bridge, a tunnel, or a dyke) between the island(s) and the mainland.

In order to determine whether or not the above criteria are met, Eurostat uses geographical information systems of the European Commission (GISCO) which provide, among others, thematic geospatial information and information on transport networks.

NUTS level 3 island regions may correspond to a single island or they may be composed of several islands. Furthermore, an island region may be part of a bigger island that contains more than 1 NUTS level 3 region: for example, the regions that compose Ireland, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily or Crete.

The typology of island regions may (optionally) be used to distinguish 5 different subcategories, depending on the size of the major island related to the NUTS level 3 region in question

- regions where the major island has < 50 000 inhabitants

- regions where the major island has 50 000 – < 100 000 inhabitants

- regions where the major island has 100 000 – < 250 000 inhabitants

- regions corresponding to an island with 250 000 – < 1 million inhabitants, or regions that form part of such an island

- regions that form part of an island with 1 million inhabitants.

Note that the definition of an island region is such that it must be entirely composed of islands. There are many examples of islands in the EU that form part of a NUTS level 3 region characterised by its islands, but where part of the territory also contains mainland areas and where, as a result, the region is classified as a non-island region. For example, this is true along the whole of the Adriatic coastline in Croatia where each NUTS level 3 region is concurrently composed of a mainland territory and islands.

Note that prior to Brexit, the regions of Great Britain weren't considered as island regions, as Great Britain is connected to continental Europe by a tunnel under the English Channel and therefore doesn't meet the criteria of being an island. Equally, Bornholm is the only island region in Denmark, as all other Danish regions either contain a combination of mainland and islands, or are composed of islands that are connected to the mainland by way of a bridge and/or tunnel.

Note the island typology isn't defined/recognised within the NUTS Regulation , although the NUTS level 3 regions themselves are defined therein.
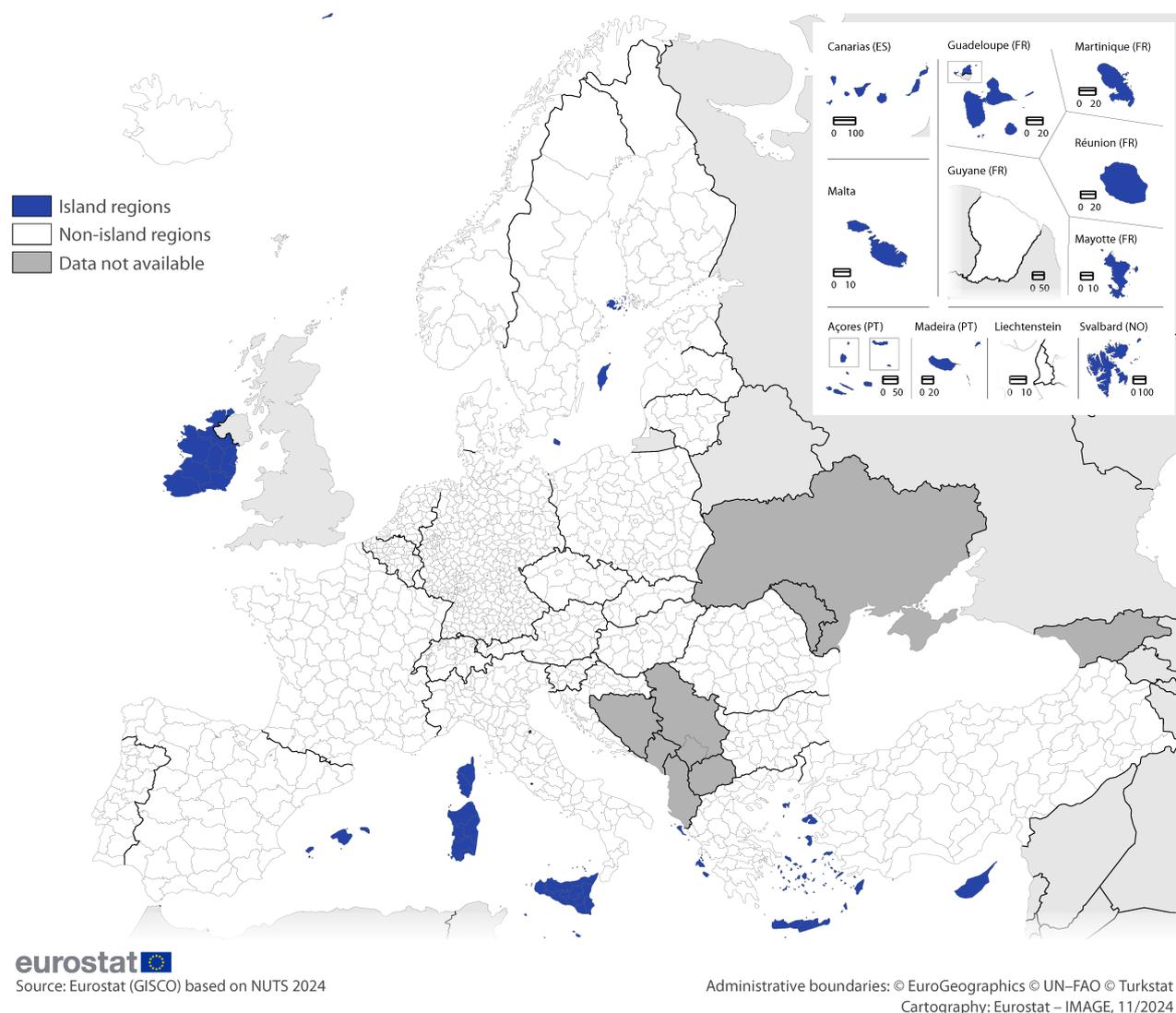
Links to other spatial concepts/typologies

There are links between the typologies for coastal areas (see Chapter 4) and coastal regions (see Chapter 7) and the island typology, given that all island regions (by definition) have a coastline.

Results

Based on the above definitions, of the 1 165 NUTS 2024 level 3 regions there are 58 island regions in the EU and 1 107 non-island regions.

Map 1 provides an overview of the final classification for the island typology.

Island typology (NUTS 2024)

Legend:
- Island regions
- Non-island regions
- Data not available

Insets: Canarias (ES), Guadeloupe (FR), Martinique (FR), Réunion (FR), Malta, Guyane (FR), Mayotte (FR), Açores (PT), Madeira (PT), Liechtenstein, Svalbard (NO)

Source: Eurostat (GISCO) based on NUTS 2024

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN–FAO © Turkstat
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 11/2024

Map 1: Island typology Source: Eurostat (GISCO) based on NUTS 2024

Changes to the typology over time

The island typology was initially defined for a Eurostat publication titled, *Portrait of the islands* , which provided information on all of the inhabited islands within the EU, except for islands with a national capital city. This meant that Ireland and the United Kingdom were excluded from the typology (the publication was released before the Channel tunnel was in operation).

For a Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (COM(2008) 616 final), an alternative approach was adopted, based on those regions whose entire population lived on an island.

Thereafter, the most recent changes made to the island typology were developed by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy in association with Eurostat, whereby the classifications were simplified (as described above) by removing the criteria for the presence of a national capital, which meant that Ireland, Cyprus and Malta could be included as island regions (despite the presence of a national capital), as could Iceland among the EFTA countries.

Changes over time that impact on the classification

The island regions classification should be updated to reflect any changes to the underlying sources of information that are used in its compilation, in other words, changes to geospatial data (for example, the construction of a new bridge or tunnel) or changes to the boundaries of NUTS level 3 regions.

The NUTS Regulation specifies that the classification of regions should remain stable for a period of at least 3 years; the most recent updates were for NUTS 2016, NUTS 2020 and NUTS 2024. After each revision of the NUTS classification, the boundaries of the regions should be re-assessed to see if they have impacted on the delineation of any island regions (for example, an island region may be merged with a mainland region).

Future developments

The next update of the NUTS classification is planned for 2028.

Further information

Glossary entry

Island region

Published indicators

A variety of different statistical surveys collect data for NUTS level 3 regions and this information may be used to calculate data for island and non-island regions. This process involves aggregating the data for NUTS level 3 regions to compute a total or an average for all island (and non-island) regions within a territory (for example a Member State, or the EU as a whole).

Visualisation tools

Eurostat publishes data for the island typology through Regions and cities illustrated .

Database

Eurostat's website provides information for a wide variety of indicators for the island typology. These statistics are available for the following statistical domains: demography, population projections, the labour market, crimes recorded by the police, economic accounts, business demography, intellectual property rights and transport. They are available here .

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