

## Chapter 3

# Islands on the move: exploring climate-related (im)mobilities in the Mediterranean region and small islands

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### Abstract

The global climate crisis is reshaping human mobility patterns, leading to a diverse array of responses, from migration to displacement and adaptation in place through planned relocations. However, while research on climate (im)mobility has broadened beyond linear narratives, it remains geographically narrow. So far, for instance, the Mediterranean has received limited attention. Mediterranean small islands, in particular, with their distinct ecosystems, economies, and cultural heritage, face mounting climate risks that demand urgent focus, especially regarding the exploration of how environmental change intersects with human (im)mobility. I address this topic by first reviewing current adaptation strategies in small islands and SIDS – with an emphasis on human (im)mobility and policy advances – and then assessing the lessons learned for Mediterranean small islands to identify research gaps, policy limits, and future directions.

Keywords: Climate Crisis, Climate (Im)Mobilities, Mediterranean, Small Islands, Adaptation, Mobilities regimes.

### Riassunto

La crisi climatica globale ridisegna la mobilità umana, generando una molteplicità di risposte: dalla migrazione allo spostamento forzato, fino all'adattamento in loco tramite reinsediamenti pianificati. Pur avendo ampliato i suoi orizzonti di conoscenza, la ricerca sulla mobilità climatica resta geograficamente confinata. Nonostante sia uno hotspot climatico, ad esempio, il Mediterraneo ha ricevuto finora scarso risalto. In particolare, le piccole isole del Mediterraneo, contraddistinte da ecosistemi, economie e patrimoni culturali singolari, sono esposte a rischi climatici sempre più pressanti che richiedono un'attenzione urgente, soprattutto per indagare le dinamiche di interazione tra i cambiamenti ambientali e (im)mobilità umana. In questo capitolo affronto questo tema: prima di tutto analizzando le strategie di adattamento in atto nelle piccole isole e nei SIDS – con un focus sulla mobilità umana e sul progresso politico-normativo – e in seguito valutando le lezioni emerse per le piccole isole mediterranee, al fine di identificare gap di ricerca,

limiti politici e direzioni future.

Parole chiave: Crisi Climatica, (Im)Mobilità Climatiche, Mediterraneo, Piccole Isole, Adattamento, Regimi di mobilità.

## 1. Introduction

The climate crisis is reshaping human mobility patterns across the world, leading to a diverse array of responses, from international migration to internal displacement and adaptation in place through planned relocations (IDMC, 2024; Wiegel, Boas and Warner, 2019; Ajibade and Siders, 2022). Research benefits from growing global evidence that mobility can be a key livelihood and risk management strategy under climate change (Cundill *et al.*, 2021). Studies on the climate-mobility nexus have expanded significantly, revealing its multidimensional, relational, and political nature, while also paying more attention to internal and short-distance migration, and forced and voluntary immobility (Zickgraf, 2018). Moreover, a wider range of intersecting factors, including cultural and emotional determinants, are now recognized (Parsons, 2019).

The mobilities turn in the social sciences (Sheller and Urry, 2006) has significantly contributed to deconstruct analytically flawed, linear and simplistic assumptions on human migration as a global emergency, security issue and humanitarian crisis (Baldwin, Fröhlich and Rothe, 2019). However, emergency-focused narratives still dominate media and political discourse. As Giacomelli (2023: 8) observes: «In a context still marked by climate change denial and hostility towards migrants, the interconnected imaginaries of climate change and migration are increasingly fraught with tension. In the contemporary world, even though the two phenomena are structural, political, and long-term events, they are often narrated as short-term and circumscribed crises. This has led to their political and media manipulation, distorted perceptions of reality, the proliferation of fake news, and consequently, has generated the Panicocene, the era of panic». Such narratives exploit fear-mongering about some ‘othered’ migrants as a «key device through which populist right wing parties and alt-right political movements have gained traction in many European countries» (Bettini, Beuret and Turhan, 2021: 323), depoliticizing climate mobilities by diverting attention from their root causes. The politics of human movement is one that perpetuates and extends *hierarchies of mobility* (Tazzioli, 2021) on a global scale. This is particularly evident along the shores and waters of the Mediterranean, where some of the most intense struggles and tragedies have unfolded, highlighting, once again, the profound consequences of

unjust mobility regimes (Sheller, 2018). While security-focused border measures have been hastily assembled in the EU, the intricate factors driving migration in the context of climate change in the region are understudied. Above all, they remain almost unexplored in the Mediterranean region, globally recognized as a climate change hotspot. This chapter attempts at opening up a debate on this topic. To this end, the following sections will first present a brief global overview of migration as a form of adaptation. The focus will then shift to small islands as emblematic spaces of the Anthropocene (Chandler and Pugh, 2021), before narrowing further to examine the Mediterranean region and its small islands.

## 2. Current perspectives in human mobility and climate change adaptation

Human mobility is increasingly framed as a potentially positive adaptation response, but significant challenges persist in making it a viable, transformative option for all (Baldwin and Fornalé, 2017; Farbotko *et al.*, 2018). These challenges are further compounded by the lack of international recognition of climate and environmental drivers as valid bases for refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>1</sup>.

Since the 2000s, climate migration has been identified as a possible proactive adaptation strategy, supported by organizations like the IOM (The Government Office for Science, 2011; McLeman and Smit, 2006). In a second phase, the inherent limitations of the discourse have been explored and exposed. Studies have warned that the narrative of the migration as adaptation, while capable of facilitating adaptation for designated groups under prescribed conditions, can create vulnerabilities, erode social and cultural capital, reduce adaptive capabilities through subtle

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<sup>1</sup> The refugee status is based on discriminatory persecution causes and environmental or climate factors do not fit in this framework. Therefore, the term “climate refugee” has no legal meaning and is nowadays refused by many as it is grounded in racialized views and discourses (Hiraide, 2023). There is no international or EU agreement on the protection of climate migrants. Some countries (Italy, Germany, and New Zealand) have begun experimenting with complementary protection measures and schemes – such as humanitarian or disaster-related visas and temporary protection schemes – but these initiatives remain rare, inconsistent, and largely ad hoc, subject to sudden legal shifts (<https://openmigration.org/analisi>).

yet potent mechanisms, and fuel systemic governmental inertia at the macro level (Vinke *et al.*, 2020). The migration-as-adaptation thesis is also critiqued for lacking climate justice-oriented principles, with scholars arguing that it embodies a neoliberal agenda that prioritizes the production of *adaptable subjects*, «able to respond tactically to anthropogenic alterations of the biophysical world while becoming ever more the subjects of capitalist market relations» (Felli and Castree, 2012: 1).

Significant research gaps remain in climate (im)mobility studies, due to reliance on single case studies, limited interdisciplinary collaboration, and insufficient evaluation of adaptation outcomes. Studies are also geographically skewed. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian Ocean regions are receiving much attention as emblematic sites of the micro-scale materialization of the climate crisis. Instead, the intersection of climate change-induced extreme events and human (im)mobility dynamics in Mediterranean small islands and Small Island States (SIS) such as Malta, remains understudied, lacking context-specific, place-based perspectives and strategies essential for effective adaptation.

### 3. Climate Change Adaptation trajectories in Small Islands and SIDS

Climate change threatens low-lying coastal and island communities globally. Small islands, particularly SIDS, are deemed exceptionally vulnerable<sup>2</sup> to its effects due to their unique characteristics, despite their negligible contribution to the climate crisis (IPCC, 2022). Therefore, they are a primary focus for climate risk, adaptation, and sustainable development research.

As a diverse group of islands, varying in physical, socio-cultural, economic, and political landscapes, SIDS are united by shared and existential environmental and developmental challenges and have acted through the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in global climate

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<sup>2</sup> Specific language of vulnerability influences the way small island nations are perceived by the international climate community (Moore, 2010). Tactically employing this language has implications for gaining benefits (Corbett, Xu and Weller, 2019) and the construction of “nationness” (Malatesta and Schmidt di Friedberg, 2017).

governance, contributing to the Paris Agreement's 1.5 °C target (Baldacchino and Antat, 2023). As expressed by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres at COP24 in Katowice «small island states know better than any of us the importance of meeting that goal<sup>3</sup>».

Mitigation efforts are crucial for small islands and SIDS, but inevitable climate changes mean adaptation – whether through avoiding, protecting, accommodating, advancing, or retreating – becomes a central concern in their climate politics. It's therefore crucial to identify the current state of adaptation knowledge and strategies, including mobility, in small islands. Focusing on SIDS, Klöck e Nunn (2019) categorized three main bodies of literature on adaptation centred on: assessing climate vulnerabilities, adaptive capacities and potential for adaptation in island countries and communities (Hay, Forbes and Mimura, 2013); identifying drivers and barriers to adaptation to explain when and how adaptive capacity translates into adaptation action (Kuruppu and Willie, 2015); examining individual and communities adaptation interventions, mainly through qualitative in-depth case studies in SIDS. Addressing adaptation in SIDS, Robinson (2017; 2020) identified adaptation typologies, trends and actions, emphasizing the main vulnerabilities, actors and sectors involved and detecting 20 families of adaptation actions spanning from observation and assessment, education and knowledge management to implementation and management and planning, institutions and policies. Key elements to enhance adaptation include institutional, governance, financial and cultural factors. Along with fragmented research and limited interdisciplinarity as barriers, climate adaptation faces ecological, economic, socio-cultural, technological, and physical limits (Thomas *et al.*, 2021) that require political action. Despite this, policy attention remains insufficient (Berkhout and Dow, 2022).

Given that transformative change is required to limit warming to 1,5° above pre-industrial levels (IPCC, 2018) transformative<sup>4</sup> adaptation is

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<sup>3</sup> Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are among the worst affected by climate extreme events due to the region's unique geographic, cultural and socio-economic conditions (WMO, 2024). Mainstream media and policy frameworks often reproduce narratives of mass displacement from PICs. However, while victimizing portraits persist, Pacific islanders and governments «have stopped worrying about the apocalypse and started fighting climate change» (Kirsch, 2020: 834) becoming highly vocal on climate and social justice.

<sup>4</sup> In general, there is lack of clarity on 'good', 'sustainable', and 'transformative' adaptation (Pelling, 2011).

fundamental (Pelling, O'Brien and Matyas, 2015). It is defined as a systemic change for sustained equitable growth which can secure sustainable societal development while ensuring social equity, optimizing financial efforts to strengthen resilience on various scales, and minimizing the risk to local livelihoods amplified by accelerating climate change (Leal Filho *et al.*, 2022). In (poorer) small islands and SIDS, where many adaptation interventions fail to meet basic needs and goals and can even be maladaptive (Magnan *et al.*, 2016; Nunn and McNamara 2019), understanding how adaptation can be more effective, inclusive and sustainable is pivotal. However, partly due to the «dualistic conceptualization of the world in which social and environmental processes are conceived as separate yet interacting forces» (Nightingale *et al.*, 2020), there remains a dominant tendency to rely on technical solutions while neglecting the role of power and politics in driving transformative change, thus hampering it (Nightingale, Gonda and Eriksen, 2022). In island and coastal areas, this is represented by the widespread use of top-down hard protection measures, such as seawalls, to combat shoreline retreat and protect coastal communities. While these short-term fixes have proved insufficient and also created new challenges by disrupting coastal processes and damaging ecosystems (Nunn, Klöck and Duvat, 2021), they persist as visible expressions of the dominant techno-adaptation expert-driven paradigm «framed to accommodate threats, not to prevent them» (Gray, 2023). Accommodation and advance strategies like building elevation and land reclamation follow a similar pattern (Duvat, 2020; Brown *et al.*, 2023). Transformative adaptation is hindered by a range of documented barriers, including funding gaps, lack of technical expertise and knowledge, limited stakeholder engagement and coordination, insufficient political will for long-term solutions, and a disregard for place attachment and other relevant socio-cultural dimensions. As adaptation studies progress, research is shifting towards trans-disciplinary approaches, challenging mainstream adaptation models based on standardized models, dominant economic values, and techno-optimism. The incorporation of feminist, decolonial, intersectional and indigenous perspectives in adaptation research is slowly but powerfully changing the dominant paradigm (Klepp and Chavez-Rodriguez, 2018; Walshe and Argumedo, 2016). This shift is crucial for many SIDS, where locally led and non-western nature-based adaptation, along with indigenous knowledge, are opening up new

possibilities for transformative change (Westoby *et al.*, 2020; Latai-Niusulu *et al.*, 2024; Rarai *et al.*, 2022).

### *3.1 Mobility as climate change adaptation in small islands and SIDS*

Studies of the climate-mobility nexus in small islands and SIDS have evolved from focusing on the quantitative influence of climate change on migration decisions (van der Geest *et al.*, 2020) to addressing the complexities of (im)mobility through in-depth qualitative analysis (Yee *et al.*, 2022). This qualitative shift highlights that islanders' migration practices often contradict mainstream assumptions. For example, in PICs (Pacific Island Countries), some inhabitants are involuntarily immobile due to resource limitations, whereas others deliberately choose to remain in at-risk areas because of strong place attachment, family ties, and socio-cultural identity (Suliman *et al.*, 2019). This is mirrored in the Maldives, where out-migration is rarely the preferred option, even with high awareness of environmental risks (Stojanov *et al.*, 2017).

Beyond immobility or unplanned mass mobility, studies have also emphasized the role of international labour migration as an adaptive strategy and focused on translocality, which «understands human mobility as a process with connectedness to multiple places, rather than a trajectory with static place-based outcomes (e.g. displaced, resettled, returned)» (McMichael *et al.*, 2021: 85). An increasingly important place in the debate is occupied by planned relocation, defined as «the permanent movement of whole communities to destination sites out of harm's way» (Bower, Weerasinghe and Mokhnacheva, 2022: 48). Assessing relocation success is complex due to diverse economic, political, social, and cultural factors. In general, some of the most valued variables include: the proximity and the speed of relocation, the capacity to keep the community together, the reduction of hazards exposure or the improvement for people to access education and health services and find new opportunities for income or savings (Bower *et al.*, 2023). Studies on climate-induced mobilities in the Pacific islands highlight the need for justice-oriented approaches, particularly in planned relocations (Piggott-McKellar *et al.*, 2024). Ultimately, much research focuses on climate-induced mobilities governance and policy in small islands, emphasizing the advocacy for regional and national migration policies to prevent maladaptation (Thornton *et al.*, 2021), the integration

of mobility into disaster risk reduction and adaptation plans (Thomas and Benjamin, 2018), and the promotion of a collaborative transnational law approach to address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate-induced migration (Ui Shafi, 2024).

#### 4. Mediterranean as a Climate Change Hotspot: Adaptation Needs, Strategic Goals, and Policy Frameworks

The Mediterranean is experiencing climate change at an accelerated pace, exceeding global averages, and is well-defined as a hotspot area (Giorgi, 2006; IPCC, 2022). Within the Mediterranean hotspot sub-areas identified by Lazoglou *et al.* (2024), the island of Cyprus and adjacent coastal areas, the Iberic Peninsula with the Balearic Islands and southern Italy with parts of Sicily require urgent attention. The most likely climate extremes in the Mediterranean region include more severe heat waves (Christidis, Mitchell and Scott, 2023), prolonged droughts with water scarcity especially in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries and territories (Skrimizea and Parra, 2019), flash floods and associated risks in terms of economic losses (tourism, agriculture, fishing...) and human lives (PlanBleu, 2012). Major impacts would be on coastal areas and ecosystems as well as on the nearly 15,000 islands and islets dotted throughout the basin (MedECC, 2020), which need special protection measures (Damery *et al.* 2023). However, difficulties to collect climate change data on a micro-insular scale persist, despite some innovative approach in climate simulations (Adinolfi *et al.*, 2025).

To address climate change through mitigation and adaptation strategies, the Mediterranean region is shifting towards long-term, preventive risk management considering both hard and soft solutions with a growing emphasis on nature-based solutions (PlanBleu, 2012). In 2016 the *Barcelona Convention* endorsed the *Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Areas*, aimed at building a common regional strategic approach to climate resilience and adaptation in coastal areas through best practices and innovative technologies. The framework, however, lacks direct focus on Mediterranean small islands. The *Interreg EURO-MED Programme 2021-2027* supports cooperation

across Mediterranean borders and provides funds for projects by various stakeholders to enhance climate change adaptation, focusing on environmental and natural heritage protection and restoration, green living areas promotion and sustainable tourism. The recent Plan Bleu (2025) report identifies adaptation as the top priority for the Mediterranean countries, urging collaborative action: «like the Pacific islands» (*ibidem*: 64), they should adopt shared positions and proactive diplomacy to push for greater global emission reductions and enhanced adaptation funding for the South.

Strategic adaptation plans in small islands continue to be overlooked in national and regional frameworks. Cyprus and Malta developed their *National Adaptation Strategies* (NASs) in 2014 and 2012, respectively. Cyprus also adopted a *National Adaptation Plan* (NAP), with updated NAS versions in 2017 and 2025. These strategies outline adaptation measures for vulnerable sectors, aiming to boost stakeholder engagement, climate knowledge, and monitoring systems. In Malta, the Climate Action Authority (CAA) is leading the update of the 2012 NAS and coordinating regional efforts to enhance Mediterranean cooperation. Spain's NAP 2021-2030 recognizes island territories' specific needs for a just ecological transition, environmental quality and better infrastructure planning. Here, the Balearic Islands are mentioned as particularly vulnerable to increases in the sea surface temperatures, heat waves, sea level rise and changes in average river flows, with flash floods expected. As an autonomous community, the Balearic Islands have approved their own climate change laws. Italian minor islands are mentioned in the Italian NAS with reference to the negative impact of climate change on water resources and receive special funding for environmental protection and risk reduction from the *National Strategy on Inner Areas*<sup>5</sup> (Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne, SNAI 2014-2020; 2021-2017). Here, no specific mention of adaptation measures can be found. The 2024 report *La transizione ecologica nelle isole minori* published by the Isole Sostenibili Observatory (Battistelli *et al.*, 2024) represents a valuable contribution to enhance adaptation in Italian minor islands, with practical data, insights and recommendations for adaptive options in limited spaces.

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<sup>5</sup> Internal or inland areas are those characterized by a significant distance from the main centres offering services, particularly those related to education, mobility, and socio-health services. Therefore, minor islands in Italy fall under this definition.

## 5. Exploring mobility in the context of adaptation in the EU

The EU's approach to climate-related human mobility is contradictory: while it emphasizes its commitment to climate action and human rights protection, the attitude towards in-migration reflects a securitized and racialized gaze that inform hesitant and inconsistent migration policies (Scodanibbio, 2024) with no mention of climate justice principles. The EU Parliament referred to the issue of environmental refugees as a major humanitarian and security crisis in 1999 (EU Parliament, 1999). A decade later, the *Communication on the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility* (EC, 2011) signalled a shift toward viewing migration as a form of adaptation, seemingly moving beyond the previously dominant securitization lens. This also marked a turning point in the EU's foreign policy, expanding its role in migration-related policies and development assistance. The 2021 EU Adaptation Strategy (EC, 2021) further reinforced this shift by allocating adaptation funding to third countries, particularly Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and SIDS. If the document acknowledges the potential for migration as adaptation for both countries of origin and destination and exhorts to explore the link between environmental degradation, migration and development, the document distinctly frames climate migration as a challenge to be addressed in 'sending countries', particularly Sub-Saharan African States, where the World Bank predicts up to 70 million people migrating by 2050 due to climate change<sup>6</sup>. The EU prioritizes external support for adaptation in non-EU regions, positioning itself as a committed partner in addressing climate challenges beyond its borders. Internally, «the integration of migration into EU adaptation strategies remained sporadic across official documents» (Scodanibbio, 2024: 2) and major emphasis continues to be placed on addressing, controlling and limiting 'irregular' migration. Overall, the phenomenon of inter-regional environmental displacement and migration remains marginal and a substantially low priority within the EU policy agenda, characterized by reactive rather than anticipatory strategies. When addressed, climate-induced migration is primarily discussed in terms of its projected impact

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<sup>6</sup> Many people migrating due to intersecting factors such as climate change impacts continue to be labelled as economic migrants (see Ministero della Transizione Ecologica 2021, p.9).

on Third Countries, especially those «on Europe’s doorstep» (EU Parliament, 2022: 2), which would likely become «a desired destination for large numbers of climate migrants» (*ibidem*). The focus on migration as «erupting always elsewhere» (New Keywords Collective, 2016: 3) obscures growing displacement and relocation risks within Europe, where extreme climate events are increasingly jeopardizing in-place adaptation. Despite its importance and relevance for the near future, there is scarce evidence or reliable data on this phenomenon in Europe (Brandano *et al.*, 2023). This underestimation demands urgent Europe-wide academic and policy attention, especially giving that climate mobilities will be «the new normal, rather than the exception» (Boas *et al.*, 2019: 902). The European Environmental Agency (EEA, 2024) through its Climate-ADAPT Platform is among the first to refer to environmental-induced managed retreat as a tool for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation within European countries, with several examples and case studies. Southern European countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece are mentioned as particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts – increasingly influencing people’s lives, tourism flows, economic production and biodiversity health – and in need of targeted attention. However, no specific policy debate has addressed climate-induced mobilities in the Mediterranean.

*5.1. Opening up the debate on climate-induced mobilities in the Mediterranean islands: proposals for future exploration*

While risks from slow and rapid-onset extreme events in the Mediterranean basin and coastal areas are increasingly assessed (MedECC, 2020), climate-induced human mobility in the region remains understudied. This oversight is concerning given the accelerating impacts of climate change in the Mediterranean<sup>7</sup>, including sea-level rise, flooding, wildfires and water scarcity, which particularly affects island populations. In public discourse and migration policies, many Mediterranean small islands are specifically

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<sup>7</sup> The necessity to explore the “combined effects and interactions of climate change and socioeconomic dimensions and trends and scenarios, taking into account the socio-cultural specificities of the Mediterranean communities, such as: Migration; Demographics; Conflict and social stability; Gender; and Vulnerable groups (e.g. children, older people, and indigenous populations)” is found in the Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Areas (2017, p.22).

portrayed as receiving and transit destinations of asylum seekers, reinforcing the dominant narrative of the Mediterranean as the EU's border or 'front door'. As territories receiving large numbers of migrants, sometimes far outnumbering the local population (Haase and Maier 2021), small islands such as Lampedusa (Italy) or Lesbos, Samos and Chios (Greece) are often framed as gateways to continental Europe. When climate change is analysed in relation to human mobility dynamics, the discourse remains limited to the risks for island populations of becoming the first to bear the consequences of climate-induced mass migration from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)<sup>8</sup>. No study has examined how climate change can influence current (seasonal) out-migration flows, fuelled by the limited development of Services of General Interest (SGIs) and economic activities, which adversely affects the quality of life in small islands. A rare project concerning climate-related disasters and extreme weather influence on refugee reception, local livelihoods, and host-refugee dynamics on Lesbos is conducted at the Chr. Michelsen Institute<sup>9</sup>. The aim is to address the gap by exploring how the impacts of the climate crisis – e.g. limited access to quality water – affect asylum seekers, who already face poor shelter and limited protection, as well as the resident population and key island livelihoods like tourism and olive oil production, by integrating local perspectives and concerns.

Research and policy continue to overlook the role of climate change in mobility factors in Mediterranean small islands. Despite growing awareness of the need to relocate some coastal settlements, infrastructure or productive activities as a form of adaptation to climate-related risks such as flooding, sea-level rise and coastal erosion, the limited availability of data on this topic hinders effective policy and action<sup>10</sup>. Some interest is shown by Battistelli *et al.* (2024), who raise concerns about potential relo-

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<sup>8</sup> Explore ICOS: Monitoring the Mediterranean's changing climate at Lampedusa Island <<https://www.icos-cp.eu/news-and-events/news/exploreicos-monitoring-mediterraneans-changing-climate-lampedusa-island>>.

<sup>9</sup> <<https://www.cmi.no/projects/3076-cmi-climatemigrationres-hmo-borderland>>.

<sup>10</sup> A first, comprehensive set of in-depth reflections on the effects of the climate crisis on Italian coastal areas is detailed in the Società Geografica Italiana's (SGI) latest report, *Paesaggi sommersi* (2025). While this report features an initial debate on the necessity – and complexities – of coastal planned relocation and managed retreat in Italy, it contains no specific mention of this topic in relation to small islands, highlighting a critical research gap to address.

cation measures for the islands of Capraia and Procida, where most land development for housing and infrastructure has occurred in areas classified as hydrogeologically at risk, vulnerabilities now exacerbated by extreme climate events. In the Spanish context, the Balearic Islands, affected by severe storms and flooding in 2024, have prompted discussions on introducing construction bans in flood-prone areas as a strategy to reduce flood risks and prevent future mass evacuations<sup>11</sup>. Summer wildfires and flooding in Greek Islands have raised concerns on tourism disruptions and community displacements, recommending adaptive measures in the tourism sector (Lemesios *et al.*, 2024).

To establish a more coordinated, coherent, and effective EU response to climate mobility, research must prioritize the investigation of human (im)mobility dynamics in the context of adaptation in the Mediterranean region and Mediterranean small islands. The wider literature on the topic can be a valuable support. As observed elsewhere, climate change in the region is likely to intersect with existing challenges, including poor SGIs and unequal access to them, unbalanced tourism flows, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and limited economic opportunities, particularly for younger generations. A key research priority is to identify the factors that influence the decision to move or stay in the Mediterranean small islands. This requires understanding the links between climate extreme events and potential economic decline across vital sectors – like biodiversity, tourism, and fishing – already impacted by ongoing depopulation. Furthermore, emphasizing non-material factors such as identity, place attachment, and the construct of *islandness* (Foley *et al.*, 2023) will significantly enrich the evidence base for evaluating migration-as-adaptation strategies relevant to the Mediterranean region and small islands. By leveraging lessons learned from island communities globally, the EU can forge a new path for addressing climate-induced human (im)mobility within the diverse socio-environmental context of the Mediterranean, initiating a much-needed policy debate specific to the future of the region’ small islands.

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<sup>11</sup> Balearic Islands – Important developments on flood zones – Monereo Meyer Abogados <<https://www.mmmm.es/en/news-lawyers/news/balearic-islands-important-developments-on-flood-zones/>>.

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