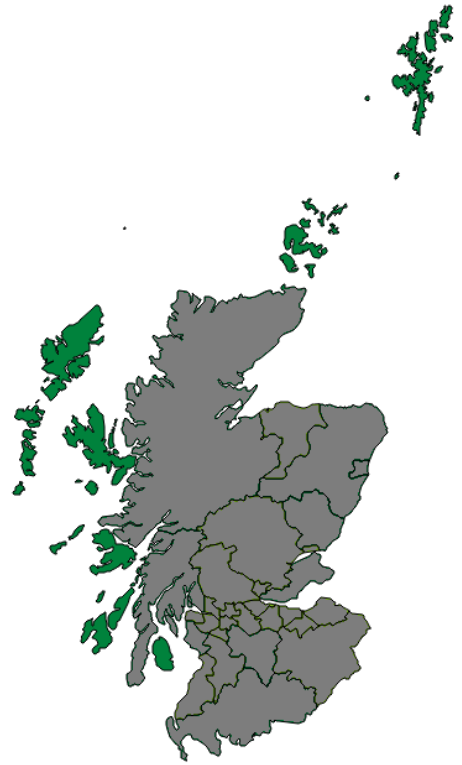


Scottish Islands Survey (2023)



Comparing perceptions of
island life in 2020 to 2023



Photo Credit: Maura MacKinnon

Location: Isle of Barra

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Scottish Islands Survey 2020/2023 Comparisons



What is the report about?

The Scottish Islands Survey (2023) informs progress towards the objectives set out in the [National Islands Plan](#) (2019) as well as the development of a new National Islands Plan to be published in 2025. It builds on data gathered in the National Islands Plan Survey (2020).

The Scottish Islands Survey (2023) collected data from November 2023 from 4,358 people from 66 islands. Responses were based on perceptions of island life in the 12 months prior to the survey. This report compares the changes found in respondents' perceptions from 2020 to 2023. The analysis of the 2023 Scottish Islands Survey (2023) is based on 394 variables produced from the survey questions. 117 of these are comparable to responses to the National Islands Plan Survey (2020). Of the comparable findings, 15% (18) have improved, 23% (27) have stayed the same and 62% (72) have declined since 2020. A full set of comparisons between the 2020 and 2023 survey findings is published as a supporting document.

This report summarises these comparisons over time structured around the 12 strategic objectives outlined in the National Islands Plan (2019). The strategic objectives cover the following topics: 1. Population Levels, 2. Sustainable Economic Development, 3. Transport, 4. Housing, 5. Fuel Poverty, 6. Digital Connectivity, 7. Health, Social Care and Well-being, 8. Environmental Wellbeing and Biosecurity, 9. Climate Change and Energy, 10. Empowered Island Communities and Strong Local Partnership, 11. Arts, Culture and Language, and 12. Education. The illustrations focus on the largest change for each strategic objective. This publication reports on the comparison between 2020 and 2023 results only and is part of a short series of spotlight reports.

Where can I find out more?

The full results of the [Scottish Islands Survey \(2023\)](#) and the [National Islands Plan Survey \(2020\)](#) are published on the Scottish Government website along with a series of supporting files and spotlights.

Supporting files

- Scottish Islands Survey (2023) Questionnaire
- Changes between the 2020 and 2023 island survey questionnaire
- The Scottish Islands Survey (2023) tables
- Comparisons between 2020 and 2023 island survey results
- Scottish Island Survey (2023) comparisons with national and regional figures
- A Data Protection Impact Assessment was also published [here](#).

Other Spotlights in this series

The Scottish Islands Survey (2023) is accompanied by three spotlight reports. The other two spotlights in the series are:

- The Scottish Island Survey (2023): Cost of living and wellbeing
- The Scottish Island Survey (2023): Island movers, leavers and returners

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank all of the survey respondents for their time and for sharing their views. The James Hutton Institute conducted the Scottish Islands Survey on behalf of the Scottish Government. We are grateful to the project's Research Advisory Group, cognitive testers, Gavin Parsons (Sabhal Mòr Ostaig) and Zoe Paterson-MacInnes for their help with preparing and promoting the survey. We also acknowledge the work of Glasgow University Q-Step intern Maura MacKinnon in the time series comparisons. Q-Step is funded by the Nuffield Foundation and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

1) Population

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	1	Intention to stay on island
Worsening	0	
Maintaining	0	

Islanders are increasingly likely to stay on their island for the next 5 years.

While this improvement is small it displays promising development in addressing population decline on the islands. Young people are more likely to stay on their island in the medium term.

Percentage of islanders who agree they are likely to stay on the island for the next 5 years...



86% of respondents in 2020 said yes



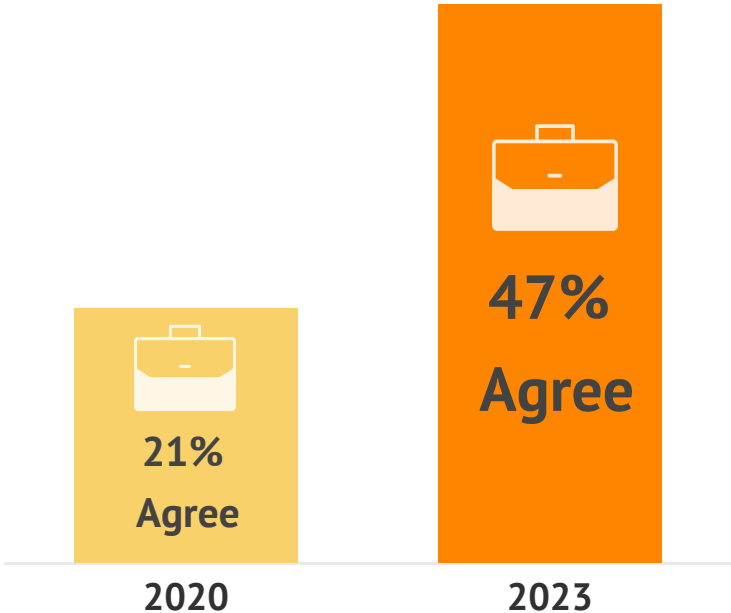
88% of respondents in 2023 said yes

2) Sustainable economic development

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	1	Business is growing
Worsening	3	Business premises, Tourist Provision, More than one job
Maintaining	2	Business support, Tourism impact

There is a strong increase in the number of islanders who agree that business is growing. Despite this, islanders perceive that support for businesses is worsening and there is less adequate tourist provision, coupled with a decreasing number of premises available for new businesses. In 2023 more people are working in more than one paid job or business than in 2020.¹

Percentage of islanders who agree that business is growing...



¹ Working in more than one paid job or business has been reported as a negative outcome in this report based on the supposition that it reflects economic insecurity. Having more than one job is common on many Scottish islands and individuals fulfilling more than one role is critical to the resilience of island communities, especially those with very small populations. This often offers variety and greater flexibility in dealing with uncertainty and it is not necessarily negative in every circumstance. While we accept this occupational structure is a common feature of island life, the increase in the number of people working more than one job could also reflect an increased economic insecurity, hence the choice to report this as a negative indicator.

3) Transport

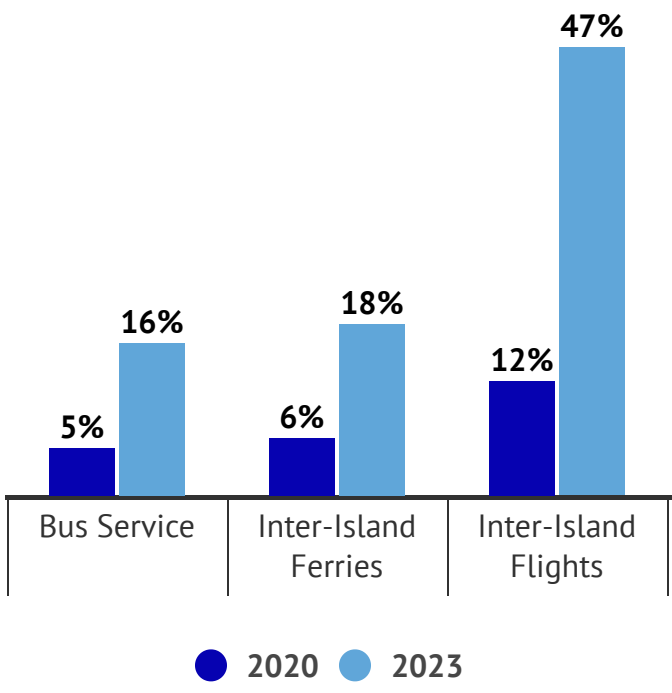
Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	8	Bus service: fares value, reliable Inter-island ferries: runs when needed, finding information, fares value Inter-island flights: runs when needed, finding information, fares value
Worsening	21	Frequency use of all public transport (5 worsening) Essential services, connecting transport Bus service: runs when needed, no access Inter-island ferries: reliable, no access Mainland ferries: runs when needed, reliable, finding info, no access Inter-island flights: no access Mainland flights: runs when needed, reliable, finding info, fares value, no access
Maintaining	3	Local bus: finding info Mainland ferries: fares value Inter-island flights: reliable

Public transport is perceived to be less available to islanders in all forms.

In addition, the frequency of use of public transport on the islands is decreasing. Perceptions of bus services, mainland ferries and mainland flights running when needed have worsened since 2020. Reliability is also perceived to be worsening in inter-island ferries, mainland ferries, and mainland flights. Finding information on mainland ferries and flights is becoming more difficult for islanders.

More positively, good value fares for residents are perceived to be improving for bus service, inter-island ferries, and inter-island flights. Both inter-island flights and inter-island ferries are increasingly running when needed and travel information is perceived to be easier to find. Bus services are perceived to be more reliable in 2023 than in 2020.


Percentage of islanders that agree they do not have access to the following...²



45% of respondents in 2020

18% of respondents in 2023


agreed that mainland flight service was reliable



58% of respondents in 2020

40% of respondents in 2023

agreed that mainland ferry service is reliable



² Not all islands offer services like inter-island flights, inter-island ferries, mainland flights and mainland ferries.

4) Housing

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	0	
Worsening	4	Enough housing, affordable housing, variety housing, self-build option
Maintaining	0	

Islanders perceive that housing options are less available than in 2020.

Islanders report that there is not enough housing, less variety in housing and self-building is declining as an option for home ownership.

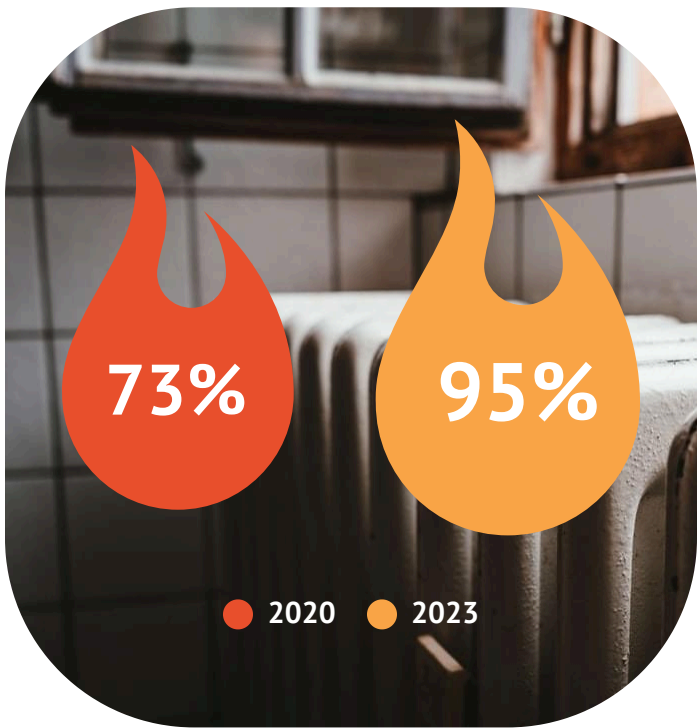


5) Fuel Poverty³

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	0	
Worsening	5	Heating bills increased, afford to warm home, home uncomfortably cold, advice for heating/bills, received help from energy scheme
Maintaining	1	Choose between essentials and heating

Fuel poverty is perceived to be growing worse in the islands. Almost all islanders report that their heating bills have increased, while fewer report that they can afford to warm their home. Furthermore, more respondents stated that their home felt uncomfortably cold in 2023 than in 2020. In 2023 more islanders have received help from an energy scheme.

Percentage of islanders who agree that their heating bills have increased...



³ The 2023 Scottish Islands Survey asked about islanders’ perceptions of energy costs, the affordability of keeping their home warm and whether their home felt cold in the winter. The survey did not collect information on modelled fuel expenditure or housing costs, which is needed to measure fuel poverty directly. It cannot be compared to official definitions of fuel poverty. A fuel poor household is defined in [Scottish legislation](#).

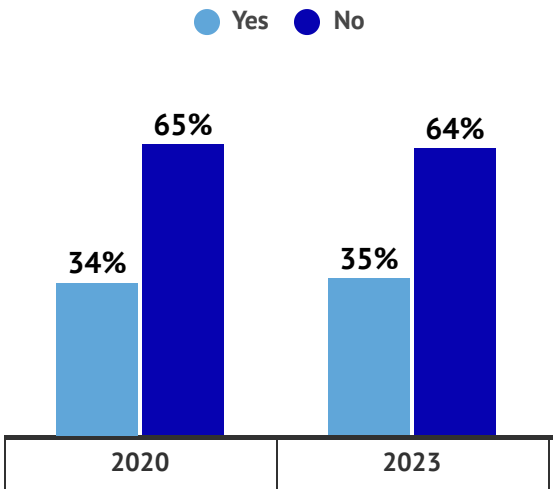
6) Digital Connectivity

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	3	Internet speed, mobile signal in home, access to online health/social care appointments
Worsening	0	
Maintaining	2	Internet reliable, mobile signal in local area

More islanders have accessed online health or social care appointments in 2023 than in 2020, 12% of which in 2023 stating this was their preferred option.

Islanders perceive that internet speed is improving, as well as mobile signal in their homes. These improvements are small but significant. Internet reliability and mobile signal in the local area is maintaining.

Accessed a health or social care appointment online



In 2023...
12% said this was their preferred option
22% said they would have preferred an in-person appointment

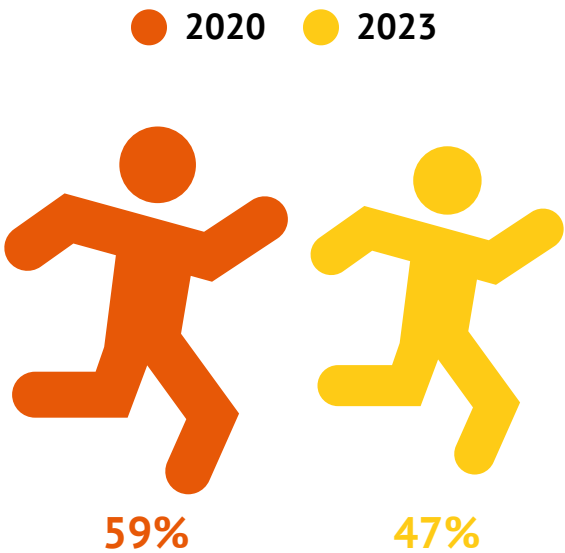


7) Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	0	
Worsening	3	Access to sports facilities, Quality of sports facilities, Affordability of sports facilities
Maintaining	1	Food bank use

Islanders perceive that sports facilities are becoming less affordable. Access to places to take part in sport and physical exercise is worsening. The quality and maintenance of sports facilities is also worsening. Use of food banks is maintaining in 2023.

Percentage of islanders who agree that sports facilities are affordable



8) Environmental Wellbeing and Biosecurity

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	0	
Worsening	4	Dispose of bulky waste, buying locally produced food, roads/paths/pavements are safe, seeing wildlife
Maintaining	9	Clean environment, air quality, green/blue space, easy to recycle, local donation facility, member of environmental organisation, Roads/paths/pavements – Good condition, accessible, safe for cycling

Islanders are buying local produce less in 2023.

Islanders perceive that it is more difficult to dispose of bulky household waste in 2023 compared to 2020. Islanders perceive that they do not see as much wildlife in their local area as they did in 2020.

Roads, paths and pavements are perceived as declining in safety for use. The condition and accessibility of roads, paths and pavements is maintaining, as well as the safety for cyclists.

Percentage of islanders who agree that they buy locally produced food

2020 2023



9) Climate Change and Energy

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	1	Access/use of electric or hybrid vehicles
Worsening	2	Green electricity supplier, renewable energy at home
Maintaining	0	

More islanders have access to or use a hybrid or electric vehicle in 2023.

Despite this, the percentage of those choosing a greener electricity supplier for their home has declined since 2020. A smaller percentage of islanders have installed equipment to generate renewable energy in their home.

Percentage of islanders that can access/use a hybrid or electric vehicle

2020 2023



10) Empowered Island Communities and Strong Local Partnership

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	0	
Worsening	10	Belonging to local community, strong sense of community, influence the following: Local authority, Health board, Housing association, Scottish Gov., UK Gov., Community council, Community orgs., Marine Planning
Maintaining	1	Community spaces availability

Fewer islanders feel they can influence community organisations in 2023. Islanders also feel less empowered to influence their local authority, the health board, housing association, the Scottish Government, the UK Government, their local community council and marine planning organisations.

Islanders perceive that the sense of community is not as strong as in 2020. The sense of belonging to the local community has also worsened for islanders.

Percentage of islanders who agree they can influence community organisations

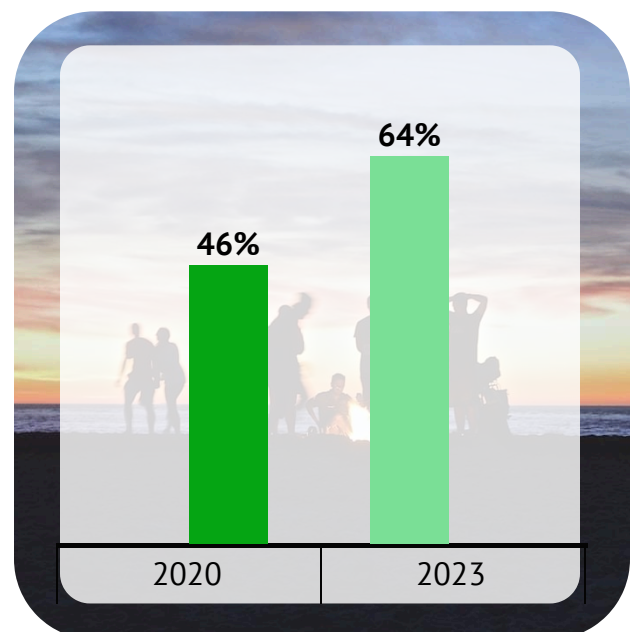


11) Arts, culture and language

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	4	Attending: community social events, live stream performance. Local dialect: understand, speak
Worsening	15	Attending: cinema, cultural festival, library, live music, historic place, art gallery, exhibition English: understand, speak, read, write Gaelic: understand, speak, read, write
Maintaining	8	Attending: Theatre, museum. Scots: understand, speak, read, write. Local dialect: read, write

Islanders are increasingly attending community social events at least once a year. They also attend live streaming events of performances more frequently in 2023. However, islanders are attending the following venues and events less frequently in 2023: cinema, library, cultural festivals, live music events, historic places, art galleries and exhibitions. Understanding and speaking a local dialect is improving in the islands. The extent to which islanders can use Scottish Gaelic is worsening, understanding Gaelic dropping from 26% in 2020 to 23% in 2023. Ability to speak, read or write Scottish Gaelic is also worsening. The use of Scots is maintaining in the islands.

Percentage of islanders that attend community social events at least once a year



12) Education

Status	Number	Question Topic
Improving	0	
Worsening	5	Primary education quality, secondary education quality, university degree access, professional training access, college qualification access
Maintaining	0	

Islanders perceived that the availability of good quality primary and secondary education is worsening.

Access to professional training and further education options, such as a University degree or a College qualification, is worsening in the islands.

75% of respondents in 2020
60% of respondents in 2023

agree that good quality secondary education is available on their island



Photo Credit: Eve MacKinnon
Location: Isle of Harris

Useful resources

- [Scottish Islands Survey Final Report \(2023\)](#)
- [Scottish National Islands Plan Survey Report \(2020\)](#)
- [The Scottish Islands \(2023\) Data Overview](#) and [Dashboard](#)
- [Scottish Islands Typologies 2024 Overview](#)
- [Scottish Island Regions 2023 Overview](#)

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