

2024

ROADSHOW

Isle of Skye
& Kyle of
Lochalsh

June 2024



The Scottish Women's Convention

Introduction

In June 2024, the SWC Team travelled to the Isle of Skye, carrying out multiple Roadshow events, prior to visiting Kyle and Lochalsh. While in the area, we hoped to understand the issues facing women, with multiple themes arising throughout our conversations across both areas.

During our visit, we heard of a region on the brink, facing the incredible challenges posed by an influx of visitors. Women expressed concern around the sustainability of current tourism levels, highlighting that the attractiveness of the region had contributed to a myriad of problems, including strain on local roads and public transport and a reduction in housing levels. Lack of affordable housing was emphasised as the greatest contributor to the loss of young people, which then in turn has eroded the quality of health, social and childcare provision. It was also highlighted that due to the framing of the area as an idyll, large numbers of retirees were choosing Skye and Kyle as their home, placing further strain on an already struggling system.

The following report outlines these key areas in more detail, placing women's views at the centre of debate. We then conclude with ten key recommendations, which we believe support the hopes of women in Skye and Kyle.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC):

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Tourism

Tourism makes up a significant proportion of the Isle of Skye's local economy: prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was estimated that tourism provided £211 million for Skye, with there being approximately 650,000 visitors in 2019¹. Visitation to the island was stopped as of 2020, due to the pandemic, with national/international lockdowns preventing the continuation of tourism, yet numbers have continued to rise since this period. Across 2023, international travel to Scotland rose, surpassing levels seen in 2019, up 15%, with visitor spending increasing by 41%². Unfortunately, Skye and Kyle-specific data is lacking, however, when one considers the 2019 figures provided, visits to Skye made up approximately 19% of all visits to Scotland, a significant proportion. It is therefore likely that tourism will continue to be highly influential within Skye and Kyle's local economy.

When speaking with women, they highlighted the importance of tourism to the region, explaining that the sector provides employment and security for many local people. Women expressed concern surrounding the announced closures of visitor centres³, explaining that due to the reliance on tourism in the area, visitors should be provided with good quality, reliable sites in which they can gather information and advice. They did not agree that a 'digital-first strategy' would be fully workable in the region, citing poor connectivity and digital literacy skills. Women felt that this move would likely negatively impact residents, as tourists would become more reliant on this group for assistance.

- **“An interesting thing, I went to the information centre in Portree...they explained that the information points are all closing...That seems crazy, it's a very centralised view of things”**

Furthermore, despite understanding the need for tourism in the region, attendees did feel that the emphasis on tourism had created a difficult situation for locals, impacting almost all elements of their lives. As stated, in 2019 there were 650,000 visitors to Skye and Kyle, compared to a population size of approximately 13,100 people⁴. The majority of tourists arrive in the area over the summer months, placing a heavy management burden on the hospitality and leisure services provided by local people. Women went on to state that there was regular disruption to public services, believing that the region was at a “tipping point”, edging on disaster. SkyeConnect, an organisation which aims to foster sustainable tourism on Skye through the improvement of local infrastructure, has suggested that the current situation is untenable, actively worsening the livelihoods of locals⁵. As well as negatively impacting public service-provision, women highlighted the reduction in local culture, believing that the over-reliance on tourism may degrade established communities.

- **“There does need to be a better balance between tourism and other jobs. We are very heavily weighted towards tourism; I think we need to balance it better.”**

¹ Press and Journal. (2020). Year-Long Economic Study Finds Skye Visitors Boosted Economy by £211 Million Pre-Lockdown. Available at: <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands-islands/2343962/year-long-economic-study-finds-skye-visitors-boosted-economy-by-211-million-pre-lockdown/>

² VisitScotland. (2023). International Tourism Performance. Available at: <https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/about-our-visitors/international/annual-performance-report>

³ The National. (2024). Where are the VisitScotland Centres That Will Close? See the Full List. Available at: <https://www.thenational.scot/news/24214243.visitscotland-centres-will-close-see-full-list/>

⁴ NHS Highland. (2019). Skye and Lochalsh: Population and Demography. Available at: <https://nhshighland.publichealth.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SkyeAndLochalsh-PopulationAndDemography.pdf>

⁵ SkyeConnect. (2021). Our Manifesto: Making Skye a Truly Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. Available at: <https://skye-connect.com/our-manifesto/>

- “...I mean the Highlands are so tourist dependent now, it’s a huge part of our local economy, so essentially, we welcome tourists, because that’s what keeps us going. It just needs to be better co-ordinated.”
- “The idyllic doesn’t exist anymore. When I go to a place, you want to speak to real people, hear what the craic is, you get a feeling for the place, but Skye is losing that.”

Transport

One area that is particularly impacted by tourism in Skye and Kyle, is transport. Women provided countless examples of dangerous driving by tourists, explaining that the sheer number of vehicles on the road makes the likelihood of crashes high. The rate per 100,000 of patient hospitalisations as a result of road traffic accidents is higher in Skye, Lochalsh and West Ross than the wider Highland region⁶, evidencing the fears of women. In an effort to reverse this worrying trend, attendees drew attention to the ‘Keep Left’ campaign, which was relaunched in 2024. The campaign was originally established in 2019 after car accidents, caused by individuals driving on the wrong side of the road, resulted in serious injuries⁷. Campaigners have distributed stickers for hire cars and wrist bands to remind drivers to remain on the left, however women in attendance believed that there should be improved road signage across the island, clearly stating the ‘Keep Left’ message. Women also stated that the quality of the roads could contribute to accidents, pointing to the number of potholes and poor maintenance of road markings. Overall, the road infrastructure of Skye and Kyle requires improvement, with a focus on increased signage.

- “...the ‘keep left’ campaign. There have been quite a few instances, very close calls, where tourists have drove on the wrong side of the road”
- “I’ve had someone coming down towards me, coming out of a layby on the wrong side of the road, it was very scary.”
- “I mean the main road isn’t too bad, but... the potholes, people are coming, and the roads have been like this for years, roads without white lines for years.”

With regards to transport more widely, attendees explained that public transport options were poor, contributing to social isolation. Women highlighted the lack of buses on offer across the region, explaining that main roads were relatively well-served, but this did not extend into very rural areas. They stated that the reliance on personal vehicles prevented older women, who no longer drove, easy access to community and public services. It was also found to be a problem in relation to tourism, as tourists were then more likely to rent a car adding to congestion and actively harming the environment. Alternatively, women suggested that a circular bus route which covered a wider geography, could reduce overall dependency on personal vehicles.

⁶ NHS Highland and Public Health. (2023). Skye, Lochalsh and West Ross: Partnership Profile. Available at: <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/media/pd3e144h/adulthealth-skyelochalshandwestross-2023.pdf>

⁷ BBC News. (2024). Crash Survivors Restart ‘Keep Left’ Driving Campaign. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czvveyj7vy7o>

- “I can speak from experience, it depends where you live, if you live on the main road, then you’re okay, but if you live more rural, then there’s nothing.”
- “The bus is haphazard and there aren’t enough...we need more public transport”

Furthermore, women pointed to the poor reliability offered through the island’s ferry route. They accepted that due to the island’s bridge to and from the mainland, their need would be perhaps less pertinent than other areas. However, they explained that the consistent removal of the ferry from Skye, negatively impacted the local economy, changing visitors’ travel plans. Women went on to criticise the wider public transport network route, explaining that there was a lack of integration, with timetables often not matching and separate ticketing systems contributing to higher costs. Similar issues were found to be the case during the [SWC’s 2024 work around transport](#), with the integration of public transport networks being women’s key want from the Scottish Government.

- “The other thing is CalMac...they keep taking our boat away, because we have the bridge...but that means...the tour buses don’t come because they can’t get across on the boat, so that impacts a local business, then employment.”
- “It’s brilliant if you get a ferry, and there’s a bus waiting for you, but realistically, the bus will have left five minutes before the ferry gets in”

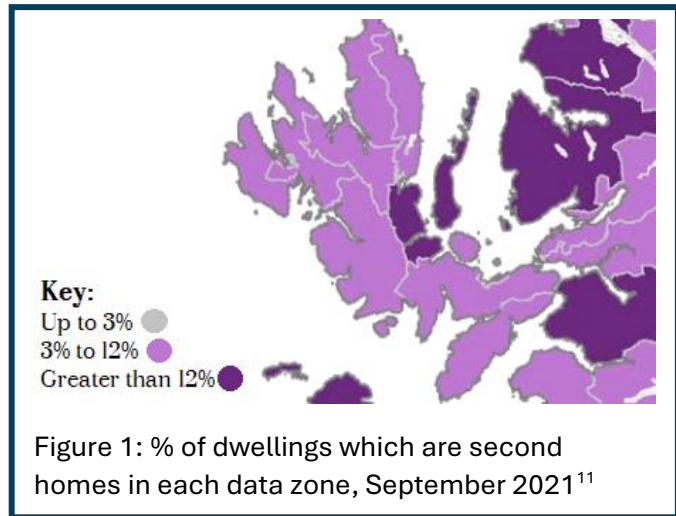
In addition, the impact of transport on disabled women in Skye and Kyle was brought to the attention of the SWC Team. As stated, women found the standard of the roads to be poor, however this was also the case on pavements. Women who made use of walking aids explained that the pavements were uneven and there were few dropped curbs, causing them to take personal risks. Disabled women also experienced issues when accessing public transport in the area, facing discrimination and inequity when utilising services. They stated that some buses were not accessible, commonly having high steps and that drivers could at times lack understanding of disabled women’s needs, being actively hostile. Disabled women cited these reasons as significant barriers to utilising public transport, preventing them from travelling across the country. Ensuring that disabled women have access to good quality, reliable public transport is vital, as this group are less likely to hold a driver’s license than non-disabled people in Scotland: 55% compared to 77%⁸. Therefore, we recommend improving public transport offerings across Skye and Kyle of Lochalsh, incorporating accessibility, as well as comprehensive training for all drivers/transport staff.

- “...I’ve had to give up my [drivers’] license because of my disability, I walk now, and the pavements are terrible. I just walked down here, but I had to walk down the road itself because the pavement wasn’t wide enough for my walking aid.”
- “My mum has difficulty getting on and off the bus, and that’s always a worry for us.”
- “There was a driver on my way to Glasgow who threatened to leave me behind because I took too long going into the shops to use the toilets and coming back...I always rush back now, and the last time I did that I tripped because the paving outside is so bad, I ended up in the clinic with five stitches and a cracked rib. So, I think I’ll be getting the train from now on”

⁸ Transport Scotland. (2021). Disability and Transport 2021. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/jzxntw2c/disability-and-transport-2021.pdf>

Housing

The topic of housing was consistent throughout conversations with women, being of considerable concern for many. They focused on the rising cost of houses in Skye and Kyle, explaining that many young people were priced out of the market, contributing to a loss of skills. Data gathered by Lloyds Banking Group highlights the significant rise in prices seen in Ross, Skye and Lochaber, with the average house price being £234,950 in 2022/23, an increase of 11% from the previous year. The average deposit paid for a home in Ross, Skye and Lochaber had also risen to £75,558, 22% higher than in 2021/22⁹. The private rental market has also experienced a rise, with Highland-wide data showing a 3.2% increase between 2023 and 2024¹⁰.



Some attendees believed that the considerable rise in housing prices was closely linked to tourism, with many properties becoming lucrative options on the holiday home market through second home ownership. In Scotland, only 0.9% of all dwellings are second homes, however, across Skye and Kyle, this figure increases to between 3 and 12%, varying by data zone, as shown in Figure 1¹¹. Women recommended that improved controls be placed on second homes, believing that profits should actively benefit the local community. Regulation which allows councils to double council tax on second homes have been in place since April 2024¹². The Highland Council have opted to implement this legislation¹³, aligning with the wants of women in Skye and Kyle, however future impacts must be closely monitored.

- “For the younger generation especially, it’s very tricky...If someone is selling a townhouse in London, and then buying up three or four houses, there’s no way”
- “As my daughter will say, you’re lucky if you have a family who have a croft, because if you don’t then it is much harder to get a house.”
- “A change to second homes, that’s what we need. It all comes into play. It’s happened in my lifetime...I have seen that change; my generation has seen that change.”

Women in attendance also raised the recently introduced Scottish Government policy surrounding short-term lets. The short-term lets licensing scheme is mandatory for all short-

⁹ Lloyds Banking Group. (2023). Ross, Skye and Lochaber, Scotland. Available at: [ross-skyeandlochaber-constituency-factsheet \(lloydsbankinggroup.com\)](https://lloydsbankinggroup.com/ross-skye-and-lochaber-constituency-factsheet)

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics. Housing Prices in Highland. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/S12000017/#rent_price_scot

¹¹ National Records of Scotland. (2022). Households and Dwellings in Scotland, 2021. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/household-estimates/2021/house-est-21-report.pdf>

¹² Scottish Government. (2023). Increasing Housing Availability Using the Tax System. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/increasing-housing-availability-using-the-tax-system/>

¹³ The Highland Council. (2024). Highland Council Tax and Scottish Water and Wastewater Service Charges: Financial Year 2024-25. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/28623/council_tax_and_scottish_water_and_waste_water_service_charges_2024_and_2025

term let accommodation, including holiday cottages, B&Bs, guest houses, rooms within a home and unconventional accommodation, such as pods and yurts. Those with short-term lets must procure a license from their local council, adhering to multiple regulatory requirements¹⁴. Attendees stated that these regulations had unfairly impacted local people who manage short-term let accommodation, which prior to regulation, they had run with fewer controls and costs. Women also pointed to the number of holiday homes in the region, explaining that under short-term let licensing, guests are not able to work during their stay. Guidance outlines that *“accommodation is not provided of the principal purpose of facilitating the provision of work or services by the guest to the host or to another member of the hosts household”* and *“the guest does not use the accommodation as their only or principal home”*¹⁵. Including rules such as these are vital in tackling issues such as slavery and exploitation, which women highlighted as positives of the legislation. However, some attendees proposed that without additional homes being built, there would be a continued loss of skills.

- “...they brought in that legislation, so they have to do certain things...my old neighbour...they started renting out their spare rooms, and they’ve been hammered by the new legislation.”
- “...people used to come here and work for half the year...but they can’t now because there’s no housing. If I could let for six months...the tourist season, then I would...but you can’t now...it doesn’t help local employers.”

As well as the private market, women explained that the social housing provision on the island and surrounding areas was poor. They provided multiple examples of family members and friends struggling to find social housing, remaining on housing lists for long periods of time. Women believed that this was worsened through Skye and Kyle’s inclusion within the Highland Housing Register, as part of the Highland Council boundary. They proposed that this meant those residing in Skye and Kyle could be placed elsewhere, and in turn, individuals from outwith the area could receive priority and be given a home, based on a point system. Additionally, women believed that there was not enough affordable social housing available in general, worsening the situation. This had resulted in homelessness for some, and due to poor availability of accessible homes, left those with additional needs wanting. Therefore, women hoped to see an increase in social homes, with a focus on affordability and access.

- “But in my opinion, the big problem is housing. Everything goes back to the lack of social, affordable housing.”
- “...someone we employ, she was moving around from flat to flat...and eventually she was homeless. Despite that, she still managed to make it into work...She eventually managed to get a flat of her own, but that took years, so you have to really want to be here.”
- “A family member had motor neurone disease, and we tried to find him appropriate housing up here and we couldn’t.”

Throughout conversations with women surrounding housing, the concept of population change was an underlying issue. They proposed that through the lack of affordable housing in Skye and Kyle, young people are electing to seek opportunities elsewhere, draining the area of valuable skills and professions. Skye and Kyle-specific data surrounding population increase/decrease is lacking, however Highland Council-wide data is available. This data highlights a population

¹⁴ Scottish Government. (2024). Short-Term Lets: Regulation Information. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/short-term-lets/>

¹⁵ The Highland Council. (2024). Short-Term Lets Licensing. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20021/short_term_lets/1021/short_term_lets/2

increase of 13.9% between 2001 and 2021, compared to an 8.2% increase seen across Scotland more widely. Across the Highland region, there is to be a 0.5% increase by 2028, however this is fuelled through an increase of 34.1% in over 75-year-olds, while 0-to-15-year-olds are to decrease by 11% over the same period¹⁶. These projections evidence attendee's concerns, which focus on an increasingly aged population placing pressure on public services. Ultimately, women proposed that through more affordable housing, younger people would be more likely to remain in Skye and Kyle or choose to move to the area, actively tackling the issues caused by a predominantly elderly population.

- "...we went to the pub nearby the other night, we were the only two people in there, Sunday afternoon, five o'clock, the Euros [EUFA European Football Championships] are on...but there is no-one around...what the community is, is being watered down all the time."
- "...young couples have tried to get houses there, but they can't compete."
- "I'm a trustee for an organisation, and I've seen it when we advertise for jobs, there is no housing...there's really nothing."

Health and Social Care

Women also focused on healthcare provision, explaining that services were under immense strain due to high tourist numbers and lack of staff. Women pointed to the high number of emergency call outs, recounting stories of tourists being ill-equipped to negotiate difficult walks in changeable weather. Between 2023 and 2022, there was an increase of 11 incidents, with Mountain Rescue teams spending 2,249 hours in 2023 providing vital support¹⁷. The service provided by Scottish Mountain Rescue is reliant on local volunteers, placing increased pressure on residents of Skye and Kyle.

- "...the island cannot cope with the amount of people on the island over the summer, because it's so heavy with tourists."

Women also felt that recent changes to Portree emergency care created a difficult emergency care situation, placing locals and visitors at risk. With the development of Broadford Hospital, a decision was made which resulted in Portree Hospital's Out of Hours (OOH) Service and Minor Injury Unit running reduced hours. This was met with significant discontent from local people, resulting in a review in 2018, which found that *"the proposal to provide all OOH urgent and emergency care services at one community hospital site in Broadford, are neither sufficiently accessible nor equitable, for all the population served"*¹⁸. Despite recommendations being made in 2018, Portree OOH services have not been re-established, much to the condemnation

¹⁶ National Records of Scotland. (2022). Highland Council Area Profile. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/highland-council-profile.html>

¹⁷ Scottish Mountain Rescue. (2024). Statistics Report 2023. Available at: https://issuu.com/scottishmountainrescue/docs/smr_statistics_report_2023_v5

¹⁸ Lewis D Ritchie. (2018). Independent External View of Skye, Lochalsh and South West Ross Out of Hours Services. Available at: <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/media/h15jktoa/out-of-hours-skye-report-may-2018.pdf>

of local women. It has recently been announced that 24/7 urgent care will be available from the 16th of August 2024, with services being provided between Broadford and Skye dependent on the time of the day. The urgent care model proposed however, remains a reduced offering for women in Skye through the usage of appointments and, those in need must communicate through an intercom system¹⁹. Recent incidents, such as the death of a woman at the Skye Live Festival²⁰, as well as a severe allergic reaction suffered by another woman²¹, have highlighted the clear need for improved emergency care provision.

- “...he [Sir Lewis Ritchie] said that it should be open 24 hours a day, that was supposed to take place, but here we are years later, and they haven’t.”
- “...I mean somebody died at the Skye Festival, and then someone almost died”

Attendees went on to explain that the lack of readily available emergency care, was fuelled by a lack of staff. They believed that the number of visitors to the area was not effectively managed by NHS Highland, proposing that more staff were needed to avert disaster. Low staffing numbers is a recognised issue across NHS Highland, with the retention of employees becoming difficult through poor local amenities and little to no housing being readily available. However, with such high tourism figures, as outlined above, Skye and Kyle require comprehensive provision, which caters for visitors, as well as locals, all year round.

- “...the hospital is absolutely screaming for staff, but they can’t get them, because they have nowhere for them to live.”
- “You’re asking about the NHS, but they have nowhere to live, it doesn’t matter if you’re a doctor or a dentist, they’re highly paid, they can’t find a place to live.”

One area of healthcare that has been significantly reduced is maternity care. Women provided traumatic birthing stories, which centred around the long journey time to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness. They explained that despite the development of the new Broadford Hospital, which includes a maternity unit, women are still expected to travel to Raigmore, with gynaecology and obstetrics being provided there²². Women stated that the Broadford maternity unit has limited access, being highly dependent on a low number of midwives. Attendees highlighted the fantastic care that they had received from midwives across Skye and Kyle, however, were concerned around the likelihood of burn-out of these essential workers. Similar issues were highlighted by women across Wick in [our 2024 Roadshow Report](#), with the lack of care, actively worsening health and wellbeing outcomes for local women. Therefore, ensuring that rural women have access to localised services is imperative to improving outcomes.

- “Maternity services! It is such a shame that mums-to-be don’t have the choice of having their child on Skye as there is a lack of midwives.”
- “They do have brilliant midwives here, but they’re understaffed”
- “There was a baby born in the back of a car. A baby born in the back of a car...Can you imagine the stress?”

¹⁹ NHS Highland. (2024). SLR Recommendations Implementation Plan. Available at: <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/media/kw2jtdj/slr-recommendations-implementation-plan-june-2024.pdf>

²⁰ BBC News. (2024). Forbes Calls for Hospital Probe After Skye Festival Death. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpwgg1322vdo>

²¹ BBC News. (2024). Swinney Says Emergency Care on Skye ‘Not Good Enough’. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd1814je0dno>

²² NHS Highland. (2024). Broadford Hospital (Skye). Available at: <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/your-services/in-person-services-and-locations/hospitals/broadford-hospital-skye/>

Additionally, women raised concerns around mental healthcare across Skye and Kyle. They focused on the impact of social isolation on women, particularly older women, who lacked access to a personal vehicle or public transport. Attendees believed that this had been worsened through an increase in online and telephone consultations, proposing that this form of appointment could be appropriate in some situations, however face-to-face elements must be maintained throughout mental health services. It was also explained that those requiring psychiatric treatments and clinical psychology support, would be expected to travel to New Craigs Hospital in Inverness. Women believed that this journey could be off-putting for those in need of treatment, creating an additional barrier to support.

- “Mental health services limp along year to year.”
- “Unless you live in the villages or towns you could be in the middle of nowhere, really reliant on your car.”
- “They’re doing this [telephone/video consultations] a lot more now...that sometimes is adequate, but there are things that can be missed when it comes to mental health”

Aside from healthcare, women also highlighted significant gaps in social care across Skye and Kyle. They stated that current provision is not enough to cater to the area, with this likely to worsen as time progresses and the population continues to age. NHS Highland estimates state that by 2030, there will be a 23% increase in over 85-year-olds and a year-on-year increase of 3% for those requiring care at home²³. Women were concerned surrounding who would provide this care, explaining that there are not enough carers currently, and that there are few care home spaces available. Some attendees were aware of situations where those requiring care home beds, had been placed far away from loved ones, resulting in deterioration. Therefore, ensuring that there is sufficient care home space and care home staff is imperative to improve the outcomes for the older women of Skye and Kyle.

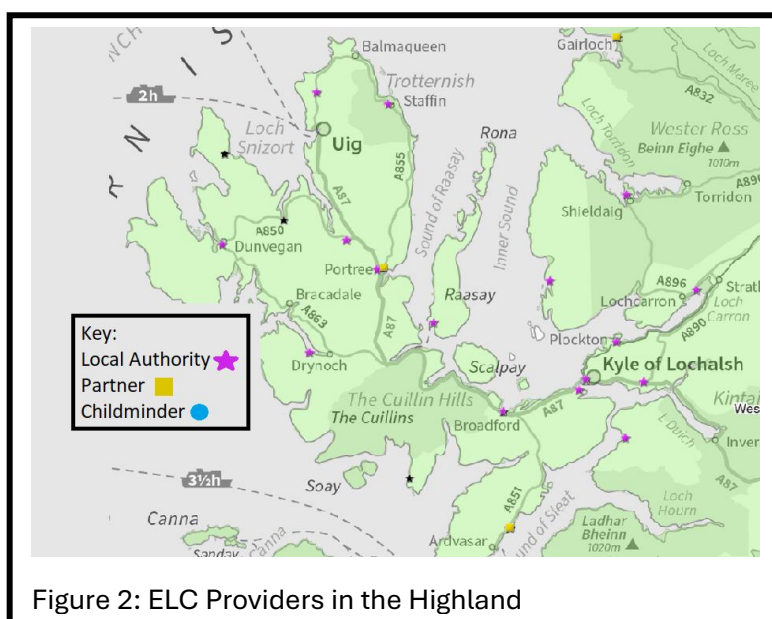
- “I think the island population is probably increasing, but just the wrong age group is increasing. It’s people who are retired.”
- “So many people don’t live in those second homes as well, or they will when they retire, putting more pressure on our services.”
- “There should be some blocks of flats or houses which are for older people”



²³ NHS Highland. (2023). Skye and Lochalsh. Available at: <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/media/p1vm1b5x/2023-06-20-skye-and-lochalsh-current-provision-and-future-need.pdf>

Childcare & Education

Women went on to highlight the current childcare situation in Skye and Kyle, with it being aptly described as “non-existent”. As shown in Figure 2²⁴, there is a clear lack of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) available to families, with any available being provided through local authority-led nurseries and schools. Women were particularly disheartened by the absence of childminders, who could provide care throughout school holidays and after-school. The Scottish Government have revealed plans to reverse the loss of childminders across the country, through increased funding for the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA). This funding is to be used to provide a £750 start-up grant for newly registered childminders, a mentoring scheme for existing childminders and the scaling up of recruitment. However, the SCMA’s recruitment programme is to be trialled in 16 local authority areas, not including the Highland region²⁵. During conversations, attendees regularly referred to this lack of childcare as detrimental to their livelihoods, negatively impacting their ability to participate in the labour market. Similar sentiments were expressed during [SWC work surrounding childcare](#) in early 2024, with ELC offerings preventing women from returning to employment through poor provision and a lack of flexibility. Therefore, it would be valuable for the Scottish Government to consider the lived impact of ELC provision on women, as well as including the Highland region within the SCMA’s recruitment scheme.



- “...there’s no afterschool care, no childminders, there’s literally nothing!”
- “I think maybe for young parents, it’s a real issue...it’s an issue unless you have family who can help you out.”
- “My main thing is childcare, it’s definitely a problem. I mean for me, my wee boy is a wee bit older now, but we don’t even have afterschool care...my work has become a split shift, and luckily my employer is happy with that, but it’s unusual”
- “I almost chuckle to myself when we chat about the possibility of Scotland getting wraparound care, but we are so far from that.”

As stated, the poor childcare provision in Skye and Kyle has prevented women in many cases from entering the labour market, further worsening their economic standing. Women did, however, highlight that through the lack of childcare, they had turned to entrepreneurship,

²⁴ Highland Council. (2024). Early Learning and Childcare Providers in Highland. Available at: <https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d6c5c19dccb44cbbb01a81887dd203e3>

²⁵ Scottish Government. (2024). Recruiting and Retaining Childminders. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/recruiting-and-retaining-childminders/>

starting their own businesses. Women highlighted that this had provided them with new opportunities, building experience and partnerships across the region. Yet, this was explained to place incredible pressure on women, with many feeling that they were not supported to establish or continue with their businesses. The price of childcare also contributed to this, with some women choosing to give up their work, as they could no longer balance childcare costs and self-employment. Ensuring that there is improved support for women entrepreneurs aligns with the findings of the independent review commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2023. The review found that there was a lack of formal pathways into entrepreneurship and less investment for women than men²⁶. Therefore, improving childcare provision, while also increasing the level of formal support for women entrepreneurs is vital in creating a sustainable local economy in Skye and Kyle.

- “I just stopped my business, I couldn’t do it anymore, I was making myself ill...I thought I could just go back to it when the kids are bigger”
- “...me and my friends have had to start our own businesses because it’s the only way of handling it [childcare], but even then, that becomes over-saturated”
- “There’s no focus on entrepreneurship as well actually, and I would say a lot of the women here work for themselves, because they can manage the childcare.”

When discussing childcare, women went on to discuss education options for young people, explaining that schools across the island were closing. This was accounted to the drop in pupil numbers, linking with points above surrounding an aging population. Women expressed concern around the reducing number of children residing in Skye and Kyle, and the impact this would have on the longevity of the area’s communities. In 2020, the Scottish Government confirmed that multiple new schools were to be built across Scotland, including a new primary school in Broadford - this project is still underway, with funding approved in September 2023²⁷. Whether a large-scale primary school which caters to a wide geographical area is supported by women remains unclear. Some women welcome the establishment of modern facilities, however it was raised that this will contribute to a further decline of smaller communities, as families are more likely to reside in an area with a nearby primary school. The reduction in school numbers has also been fuelled by the loss of teaching staff, being closely associated with the low number of homes available for workers. Women were worried on the impact closures would have on children, with the quality potentially being impacted.

- “...my sister was in with mum and dad, then they were in a static caravan...then the school closed, so they decided, what’s the point?”
- “The schools are all bursting at the seams in the bigger places, but the small ones are all closing”
- “Everywhere is so short-staffed, and I mean, I know that that’s everywhere in Scotland, but when you’re talking about our hospitals and schools, that’s not good...People are struggling”

In relation to education, women also suggested that the mental health of young women and children is deteriorating as a result of multiple factors in schools. Attendees were concerned around bullying, suggesting that bullying reduced some young peoples’ attendance, further worsening anxiety levels. They stated that social media plays a large part in modern-day bullying, with abuse taking place in-person and online. It was also proposed that the Covid-19

²⁶ Stewart, A. and Logan, M. (2023). Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship. Available at: [Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Pathways-A-New-Approach-for-Women-in-Entrepreneurship)

²⁷ Highland Council. (2023). School Estate Management: Broadford Primary School. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/878/schools/845/school_estate_management/4

pandemic has had a significant impact on young women's mental wellbeing, with some struggling with the return to pre-pandemic education. Woman deemed that the common result of anxiety amongst young people was the withdrawal from society and education, placing increased pressure on mothers to provide at-home schooling and mental care support. It is therefore vital that the Scottish Government provide effective mental health support for young women, as well as in-school projects which take an anti-bullying approach.

- “...there are some kids that experience bulling...and there is someone in their year who hasn't been able to attend classes for about four months...because of name calling.”
- “It just doesn't stop at the end of the school day anymore, does it? It's all online, it's 24/7.”
- “A lot of it [anxiety] is post-Covid. A lot of children benefited from not being at school, but then being back... and the whole thing about social skills, and then that impacts women and mothers, because if kids are at home, then what do you do?”



Conclusion

In summary, the women residing in the Skye and Kyle area face multiple challenges. High tourist levels are pushing the region to breaking point, placing extreme pressure on a road system which is not equipped for the number of visitors, and worsened through a lack of good quality public transport. This latter point disproportionately impacts disabled women in the area, preventing them from easily participating in public life. Tourism has also negatively impacted the housing market, pricing out local people and therefore contributing to a loss of skills and young people. The result of these losses, is a health and social care system struggling to cope with the needs of local people and tourists, placing lives at risk. This has also contributed to a complete lack of childcare providers in the region, further worsening women's ability to be economically active, despite their continued perseverance through entrepreneurship. Therefore, the below ten key recommendations have been made, which we believe align with the wants of the women of the Isle of Skye and Kyle of Lochalsh.

10 Key Recommendations

1. Review decisions made to close all tourist information centres in Scotland, taking the decision at a case-by-case basis.
2. Install 'Keep Left' signage across the region, focusing on popular tourist destinations, in an effort to reduce accidents.
3. Establish an island-wide, integrated transport network, which enables locals and visitors easy access across the region, with a clear focus on accessibility for those with mobility needs.
4. Closely monitor the impact of newly adopted council tax powers, making changes where necessary.
5. Significantly increase the number of social housing available across Skye and Kyle, enabling the retention of economically active individuals.
6. Re-establish emergency care in Portree Hospital, better protecting locals and visitors.
7. Increase the number of midwives working in the area, to reduce the likelihood of traumatic birth experiences.
8. Carry out long-term planning to increase care home spaces and care staff.
9. Include the Highland Council area within the Scottish Childminding Association's recruitment programme roll-out.
10. Provide increased support for women entrepreneurs, through improved funding and networking opportunities.

Thank You!

Thank you to the women who joined us on the Isle of Skye and Kyle of Lochalsh to provide their lived experiences and views. Our work would be impossible without the continued support of women, and we are forever impressed by the strong roles women carry out across their communities.



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