



# **Sporad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm**

## **Offshore Project**

### **Environmental Impact Assessment Report**

#### **Appendix 6.1: Detailed Social and Economic Baseline, Volume 2c**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 OVERVIEW

1.1.1.1 This Appendix of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) presents a detailed social, economic and cultural baseline which has been used primarily to inform the baseline and assessment of the proposed Spiorad na Mara Offshore Wind Farm (hereafter referred to as the Project) with respect to socio-economics. This Appendix accompanies **Chapter 6: Socio-economics, Volume 2a** of the EIAR. Baseline data presented here has also informed other relevant chapters of the EIA, including **Chapter 20: Other Sea Users and Recreation, Volume 2a**, and **Chapter 22: Offshore Human Health, Volume 2a**.

1.1.1.2 This Appendix should be read in conjunction with the project description provided in **Chapter 3: Project Description, Volume 1a** and the relevant parts of the following chapters and appendices:

- **Chapter 6, Volume 2a**, which uses information presented in this Appendix in the baseline and assessment;
- **Chapter 15: Offshore Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, Volume 2a**, which provides further baseline relevant to cultural heritage;
- **Chapter 20, Volume 2a**, which uses information presented in this Appendix in the baseline and assessment;
- **Chapter 21: Commercial Fisheries, Volume 2a**, which provides further baseline relevant to commercial fisheries;
- **Chapter 22, Volume 2a** which uses information presented in this Appendix in the baseline and assessment; and
- **Appendix 6.2: Focus Group Summary Report, Volume 2c**, which describes focus groups conducted with members of the local community.

### 1.1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1.1.1 Spiorad na Mara Limited (hereafter referred to as 'the Applicant') is proposing to develop the Project. The Project is an offshore wind farm (OWF) that will consist of up to 60 fixed-bottom wind turbine generators (WTGs).

1.1.1.2 The Project will include both offshore and onshore infrastructure. This EIAR supports the application for the offshore components of the Project as outlined in **Chapter 1: Introduction, Volume 1a**. The offshore components of the Project (the Offshore Project) includes all infrastructure and activities located seaward of Mean High Water Springs (MHWS) within the Array Area and Offshore Cable Area of Search (OCAS) (**Figure 1.2: Project Layout, Volume 1b**). Further detailed information is provided in **Chapter 3: Project Description, Volume 1a**.

1.1.1.3 The Offshore Project is situated off the northwest coast of Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the Array Area is located approximately 5-13 km offshore and is approximately 161 km<sup>2</sup> in size. It will comprise WTGs, foundations, Offshore Cables, Offshore Substation Platform (OSP) (if required), and Landfall. The Array Area combined with the OCAS is defined as the Offshore Project Boundary. The water depths across the Array Area range from 37 m-67 m with the southwest corner of the Array Area reaching 72 m. The proposed WTGs and fixed foundations will be located within a Turbine Area of approximately 140 km<sup>2</sup>, within the Array Area.

## 1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS APPENDIX

1.2.1.1 This Appendix describes the social, economic and cultural baseline, under the following headings:

- Historic socio-cultural influences in the Western Isles;
- Governance and administration;
- Population and Socio-economic characteristics, including:
  - Demographics
  - Socio-economic characteristics
- Land use, community services and wellbeing, including:
  - Land use and natural resources;
  - Housing;
  - Transport and connectivity;
  - Community services and facilities; and
  - Community wellbeing and resilience.
- Culture and identity, including:
  - Material heritage and archaeology;
  - Living heritage activities; and
  - Community identity.
- Future baseline.

1.2.1.2 The Appendix is supported by **Figure 6.1, Figure 6.2, and Figure 6.3, Volume 2b.**

## 1.3 STUDY AREAS

1.3.1.1 The baseline presents data for the relevant study areas used in **Chapter 6, Volume 2a.** These are:

- The **national study area** of Scotland/*Alba*;
- The **local study area**, comprising the local authority area of Na h-Eileanan Siar (referred to here as 'the Western Isles');

- The **island study area**, comprising either the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* or the Isles of Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*, depending on data availability<sup>1</sup>; and
- Two **Smaller Study Areas (SSAs)** where there are epicentres of activity or where more localised effects may occur, which are the Stornoway SSA and the West Side SSA.

1.3.1.2 The **West Side SSA** comprises communities along the west coast of Lewis between Uig/Ùige and Ness/Nis that are expected to experience the greatest level of visibility of the proposed offshore wind farm (OWF). The West Side SSA is made up of the wards of An Taobh Siar agus Nis and Sgìr' Ùige agus Càrlabhadh.

1.3.1.3 The **Stornoway SSA** comprises the town of Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* where it is assumed that a limited number of construction workers who may require temporary accommodation on the island would be most likely to be housed. The SSA of Stornoway is made up of the electoral wards of Steòrnabhagh a Deas and Steòrnabhagh a Tuath.

## 1.4 DATA SOURCES

1.4.1.1 The baseline uses published data and literature from credible government, industry, and academic sources, including (but not limited to) the Office for National Statistics (ONS), National Records of Scotland (NRS), Scottish Government, Visit Scotland, and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES). A full list of references is provided in Section 10.

1.4.1.2 Alongside published data and academic literature, the baseline also includes evidence gathered through a series of focus groups and interviews conducted with residents and interest groups in Lewis who may be directly impacted by the construction and operation of the Project. Further information regarding the focus groups, including the methodology and a summary of findings, is provided in **Appendix 6.2, Volume 2c**, and details of stakeholder interviews are provided in **Chapter 6, Volume 2a**. It is acknowledged that the focus groups captured the views of a relatively small sample of the population of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, and that the views expressed by participants are therefore not necessarily representative of the wider community.

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<sup>1</sup> As far as possible the baseline uses the Isle of Lewis as the island study area, however Census data is available for the island group of Lewis and Harris and so this is used where Census data is referred to.

## 2 HISTORIC SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN THE WESTERN ISLES

- 2.1.1.1 This section describes key historical events affecting land ownership and the cultural context in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, including population and settlement patterns. These include early colonial settlement, attempts at venture capitalism, forced displacement, voluntary and involuntary out-migration, loss of significant numbers of young people (especially men) to war and disaster, and changes to land rights and crofting law.
- 2.1.1.2 Early settlement history of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* included periods of Celtic and Norse settlement, which contributed to shaping the cultural characteristics of the island in the present day. Before land colonisation by Lowland settlers in the 16th century, the island was ruled by a system of clans of mixed Viking and Celtic heritage. Between the 16th and 20th centuries, the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* underwent a significant period of socio-economic and cultural transformation, underpinned by fundamental changes to patterns of land ownership and land use. These changes, which occurred across the Highlands and Islands, fundamentally altered the fabric and character of the island.
- 2.1.1.3 The Fife Adventurers (1598-1609) were early venture capitalists who attempted to set up plantations on the Irish model on Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*. Orchestrated by the Scottish Crown, the process was deeply influenced by machinations of Clan Mackenzie in efforts to dispossess the MacLeods. Directed by James VI, this experiment at colonisation was then attempted elsewhere in Europe and North America (MacCoinneach, 2025).
- 2.1.1.4 The Highland Clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries were a defining period in Scotland/*Alba*. Landlords, seeking higher profits, evicted many tenants across the Highlands and Islands to replace them with more lucrative sheep farming or sporting estates. Thousands of families were displaced during this time, and many were resettled on poorer-quality land near the coast in what were often very small plots, or crofts. This had a lasting impact on Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and many rural communities across Scotland/*Alba*, and the Clearances remain in the collective memory.
- 2.1.1.5 Successive landowners and industrialists James Matheson (1796-1878) and Lord Leverhulme (1851-1925) attempted to 'improve' the island through the introduction of manufacturing and the radical transformation of land holdings and land use. They were met with significant opposition from the local population leading to two significant phases of land raids and occupation in the 1880s and 1920s (Undiscovered Scotland, 2024). These acts of rural resistance are widely recognised to have secured greater rights of access to land through the passing of the 1886 Crofters Holdings Act and the 1919 Land Settlement Act. Modern-day patterns of land ownership are a result of this history, as Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* witnessed the first transfer of land into community ownership leading to the creation of the Stornoway Trust in 1923 (Buchanan,

1998). The Western Isles now has the highest percentage of community-owned land in Scotland/*Alba* (Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), 2024).

- 2.1.1.6 Industrial developments run through these historical periods, with a number of industries coming and going from the islands. The notable industries associated with Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* include the herring boom in the late 19th century (Macleod, 1998), the wool and tweed industry, and others associated with initiatives introduced by Lord Leverhulme (Visit Outer Hebrides, 2024). More recently there have been proposed developments in industries including renewable energy, ship building and fabrication, and recently a deep-water terminal in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. Some of these, for example, the proposed Redland/Lafarge superquarry in Harris/*Na Hearadh*, have resulted in legal and political battles that lasted for many years, and they highlight the tension between economic development and environmental preservation in rural and isolated communities (McIntosh, 2001; Mackenzie, 1998).
- 2.1.1.7 The conflict between corporate and community ownership models of renewable energy generation remains a central issue in discussions about renewable energy development on the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*. Several projects proposed in the recent past have galvanised significant opposition from local community members, who felt that proposals did not respect the environmental, cultural and historical relationship between people and the land, but were supported by individuals from local government and the business sector (Kallis, 2021). Some of the proposals mobilised counterproposals and resulted in the community land purchase of the Galson estate that led to the Baile an Truseil wind project (Fisher, J., and K Brown, 2009).
- 2.1.1.8 The cumulation of development experiences on the island coincides with the present reported disparity between trust in national government in the islands compared with elsewhere in Scotland/*Alba*. The Scottish Household Survey 2023 measured levels of trust in Scottish government institutions across all regions of Scotland/*Alba*. This survey found that in the Western Isles, 22% 'tend to distrust' the Scottish Government, and 29% 'distrust [the Scottish Government] greatly', whereas across Scotland/*Alba* as a whole, 23% 'tend to distrust' or 22% 'distrust greatly'. Higher levels of trust were also found in urban areas than in remote rural areas, but no differences in this metric were found between areas when compared for area deprivation or other characteristics. The data from this survey suggested that issues of trust in the islands and areas defined as remote may not be related to obvious inequality metrics (Scottish Government, 2023).

### 3 GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

- 3.1.1.1 The Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* forms part of the Western Isles archipelago, located off the north-west coast of Scotland/*Alba*. The Western Isles, or Outer Hebrides, consists of over 70 named islands, 15 of which are inhabited, including Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, Harris/*Na Hearadh*, North Uist/*Uibhist a Tuath*, Benbecula/*Beinn na Faoghla*, South Uist/*Uibhist a Deas* and Barra/*Barraigh*. The local planning authority for the Western Isles is Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES), which has its headquarters in the town of Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*. Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* is the main administrative centre and centre of population for the islands, with the rest of the population living in 280 settlements across the islands (NatureScot, 2019).
- 3.1.1.2 Scottish local elections are held under the single transferable vote system, a form of proportional representation. At the most recent elections in 2022, 29 councillors were elected to represent the nine wards that make up CnES, with independent councillors representing the majority of wards and retaining control over the council (Ballot Box Scotland, 2022). The Western Isles forms the constituency of Na h-Eileanan an Iar in both the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament. The constituency is currently represented by Alasdair Allan MSP (Scottish National Party) in the Scottish Parliament and by Torcuil Crichton MP (Labour Party) in the UK Parliament.

## 4 POPULATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

### 4.1.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

#### Population

- 4.1.1.1 The population of the Western Isles recorded in the 2022 Census is 26,140 (NRS, 2022). Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* is the most populous island in the archipelago with 19,680 inhabitants. Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* is the only large town in the Western Isles. Approximately 7,375 live within the Stornoway SSA which accounts for 37.5% of the population of Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and 28.2% of the total population of the Western Isles. The remainder of the population live across the 280 settlements that are scattered across the Western Isles (NatureScot, 2019).
- 4.1.1.2 As shown in **Table 4-1**, there is generally a slightly higher proportion of female residents than male residents across all geographies. The exception to this is the West Side SSA, where 51.6% of the population is male and 48.3% is female. Population density is low across Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles more widely, with only nine people per hectare, compared with 70 people per hectare in Scotland/*Alba* (ONS, 2021).

Table 4-1: Population composition

	<b>Stornoway SSA</b>	<b>West Side SSA</b>	<b>Lewis and Harris/<i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i></b>	<b>Western Isles</b>	<b>Scotland/<i>Alba</i></b>
Total population (2022)	7,375	4,448	19,680	26,140	5,439,842
Population change since 2011	-554	-201	-1,351	-1,544	144,439
Males (%)	48.4	51.6	49.6	49.6	48.6
Females (%)	51.6	48.3	50.3	50.4	51.4
Population density (2020) people per ha	N/A	N/A	9	9	70

Source: NRS, 2022; ONS, mid-year population estimates 2020

- 4.1.1.3 Between the 2011 Census and the 2022 Census the population of Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* fell by 1,351 and the population of the Western Isles by 1,544, which equates to approximately 6% of the population of each area. The Stornoway SSA recorded a fall in its population of 554, or 7% of the total. The West Side SSA recorded a decrease of 201, equivalent

to approximately a 4% of its population in 2011<sup>2</sup>. Across this period Scotland/*Alba* as a whole recorded an increase in its population of 3%.

## Age

4.1.1.4 **Table 4-2** sets out Census data showing the proportion of the population by age (NRS, 2022). The population of Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles is older than the average for Scotland/*Alba*, and this is reflected in the data for the two SSAs. The proportion of the population who are children under the age of 16 is below average in both SSAs, Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles, and is particularly low in the West Side SSA at 13.3%. The West Side SSA also has the lowest proportion of residents who are of working age (56.2%) and the highest proportion of residents aged 65 and over (30.5%).

Table 4-2: Age profile (%)

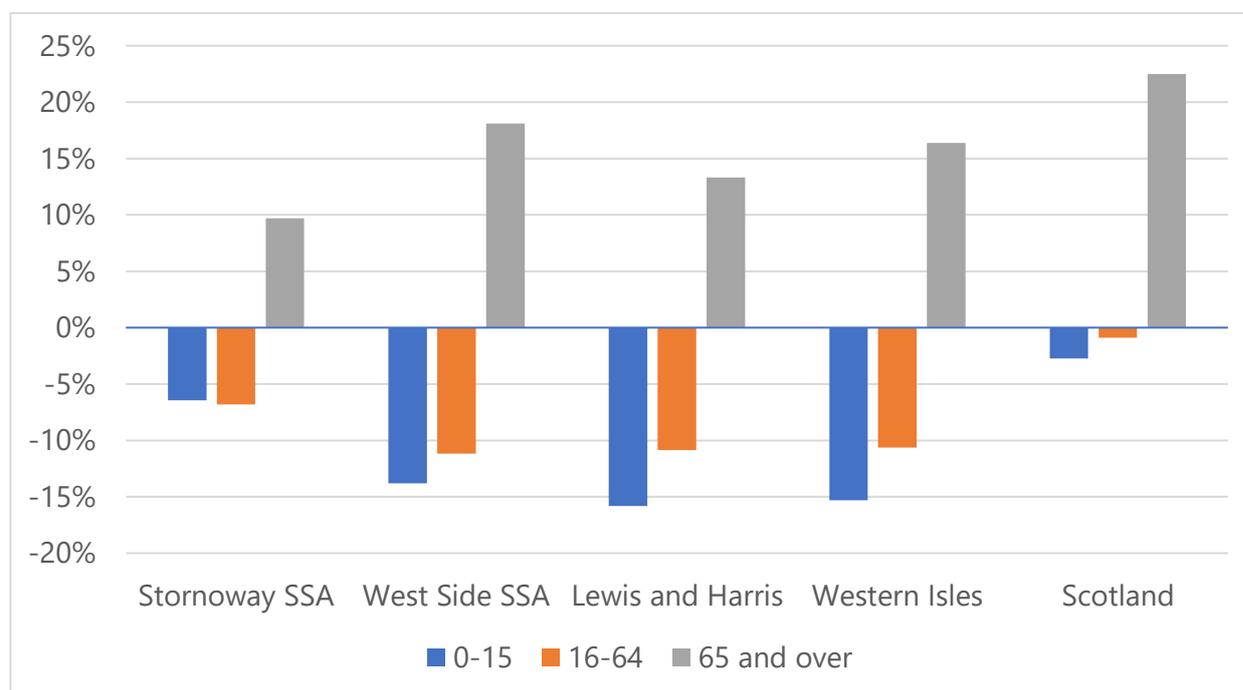
Age	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
Population aged 0-15	15.6	13.3	15	15.2	16.4
Population of working age (16-64)	60.3	56.2	58.6	58.2	63.6
Population aged 65 and over	24.1	30.5	26.4	26.6	20

Source: NRS, 2022

4.1.1.5 **Plate 4-1** shows the percentage change in the population aged 0-15, 16-64 and 65 and over between the 2011 Census and the 2022 Census. This illustrates that all areas in Scotland/*Alba* recorded a decrease in the population aged 0-15 and 16-64, and an increase in the population aged 65 and over. Compared to the national average, however, the two SSAs, Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles all recorded a considerably greater reduction in the number of children and of working aged residents, and a smaller increase in the number of older residents.

<sup>2</sup> There was a change in ward boundaries in 2017 and so ward level data for 2011 and 2022 is not directly comparable. The 2011 data for the two SSAs has been compiled based on data zones to reflect the 2022 ward boundaries as closely as possible.

Plate 4-1: Percentage change in population by age group, 2011-2022



Source: NRS, 2022 and 2012

## Ethnicity

4.1.1.6 **Table 4-3** uses data from the 2022 Census and shows the proportion of the population by ethnic group (NRS, 2022). The data shows that 96.1% of residents of Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* are from White British or White Scottish ethnic groups. This is in line with the figure for the Western Isles, and considerably higher than the average for Scotland/*Alba* (87.1%). There are smaller than average proportions of residents from all other ethnic groups in both Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles. The Stornoway SSA has a higher proportion of Asian residents (1.2%) than Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* (0.6%) and the Western Isles (0.6%), but a smaller proportion than the national average (3.9%).

Table 4-3: Proportion of the population by ethnic group (%)

Ethnic group	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
White Scottish or White British	94.9	96.6	96.1	96.1	87.1
Other White ethnic groups	2.6	2	2.2	2.2	5.8
Asian ethnic groups	1.2	0.3	0.6	0.6	3.9
African ethnic groups	0.2	0	0.1	0.1	1.1
Caribbean or Black ethnic groups	0	0	0	0	0.1
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.6	1.1

Ethnic group	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Other ethnic groups	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.9

Source: NRS, 2022

## Nationality

4.1.1.7 **Table 4-4** shows the proportion of the population by country of birth (NRS, 2022). Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh and the Western Isles both have a higher proportion of residents born in Scotland/Alba (82.9% and 82.6% respectively) and elsewhere in the UK (13.3% and 13.6% respectively) than Scotland/Alba as a whole (79.4% and 10.4% respectively). In the Stornoway SSA, the proportion of residents born in Scotland/Alba is higher again at 87.7%, but the proportion of residents born elsewhere in the UK is considerably smaller at 7.9%. In the West Side SSA, by contrast, there is a higher than average proportion of residents born outside of Scotland/Alba but elsewhere in the UK, at 19%.

Table 4-4: Country of birth (%)

Country of birth	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Scotland/Alba	87.7	77.5	82.9	82.6	79.4
Elsewhere in the UK	7.9	19	13.3	13.6	10.4
Elsewhere in Europe	2.2	1.5	1.9	1.9	4.7
Outside Europe	2.2	1.8	1.9	1.8	5.5

Source: NRS, 2022

4.1.1.8 **Table 4-5** shows the proportion of the population by national identity (NRS, 2022). The data shows that a higher than average proportion of residents of Stornoway SSA, Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh and the Western Isles describe their identity as Scottish only. In Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh and the Western Isles, the proportion of residents who describe their identity as British only is also higher than average. The proportion of residents with a non-UK identity only is considerably lower in Stornoway SSA (2.9%), Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh (2.1%) and the Western Isles (2.1%) compared with Scotland/Alba as a whole (6.5%).

Table 4-5: Proportion of the population by national identity (%)

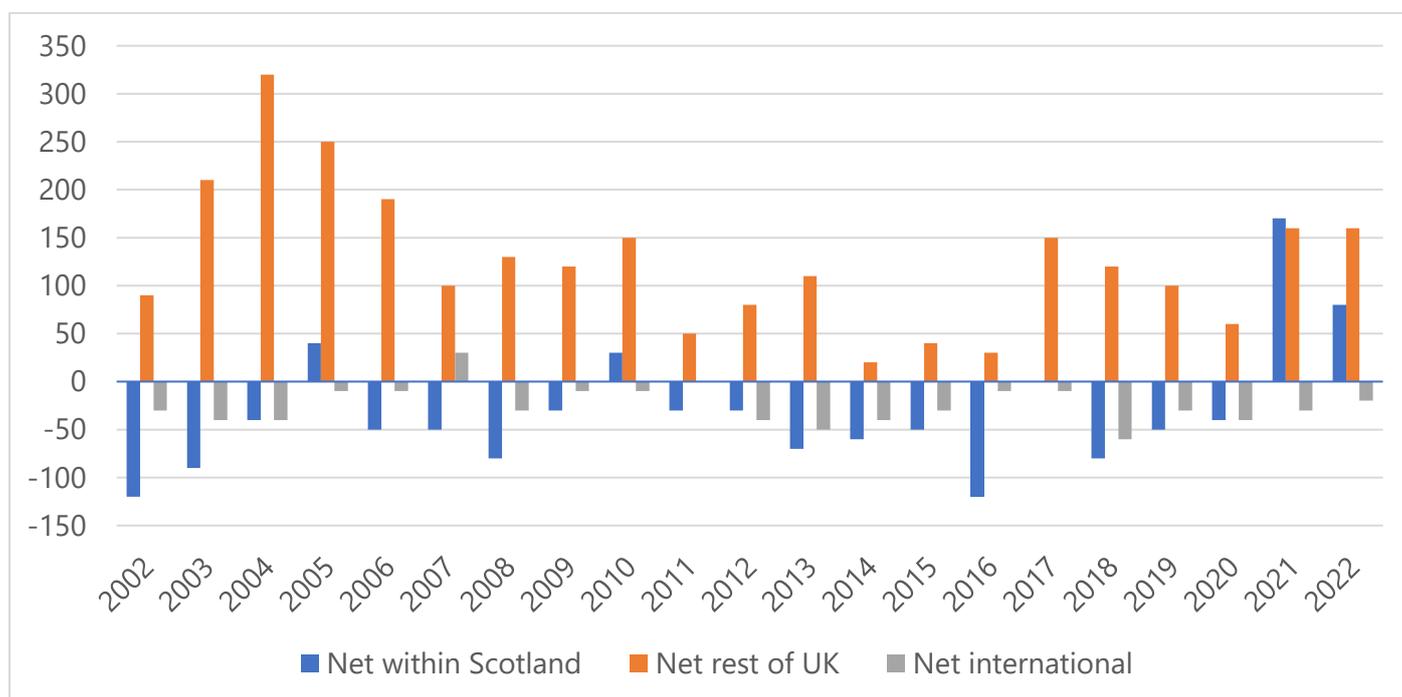
Nationality	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhass agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Scottish identity only	72.4	65.1	69	70.3	65.5
British identity only	12.9	17.8	15.1	14.3	13.9
Scottish and British identity only	7.9	7.3	8.2	7.5	8.2
Scottish and any other identity	1.2	1.8	1.4	1.3	2
English identity only	2	5.3	3.3	3.3	2.3
Any other combination of UK identities	0.6	1	1	1.1	1.2
Other identity only	2.9	1.6	2.1	2.1	6.5
Other identity and at least one UK identity	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3

Source: NRS, 2022

### Migration patterns

4.1.1.9 **Plate 4-2** shows net migration to and from the Western Isles over the period from 2002 to 2022 (NRS, 2022). The Western Isles generally recorded net in-migration through the 2010s, before recording net out-migration between 2013 and 2016 and again in 2018. Since the Covid19 pandemic, there has been net in-migration, driven primarily by people moving from elsewhere in Scotland/*Alba* and the UK. The data suggests that international migration is not a major factor in population change in the Western Isles.

Plate 4-2: Net migration to the Western Isles, 2002-2022



Source: NRS, 2022

4.1.1.10 There is some evidence to suggest that populations in some parts of the Western Isles may be stabilising, in part due to in-migration of working-age people, and that the drivers for out-migration may be more complex than a shortage of employment opportunities. For example, analysis of local school rolls shows that, although secondary school rolls are decreasing, primary school rolls on some islands are generally steady, suggesting that population decline amongst adults of child-rearing age may be slowing (Codel, 2019). The availability of housing is identified as a key constraint that prevents people from moving to island communities to take up job opportunities (Codel, 2019). This is discussed further below.

### Deprivation

4.1.1.11 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a relative measure of deprivation at data zone level across seven 'domains'. These are income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime, and housing. The index of multiple deprivation is presented as an average across<sup>3</sup> the areas with West Side SSA having the highest average deprivation ranked at 2,962 out of 6,976.

4.1.1.12 **Figure 6.3, Volume 3** shows that there are varying degrees of deprivation across the isles of Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*, with the electoral ward of An Taobh Siar agus Nis

<sup>3</sup> Figures at IG and LA level are the presented as the average Datazone rank and can be read as the average rank an area would have if it were a datazone where a lower rank = relatively more deprived.

within the West Side SSA having the highest proportion of residents living in income deprivation (12.0%) with Loch a Tuath directly adjacent having the lowest proportion of residents living in income deprivation (6.3%) (Scottish Government, 2020). There are pockets of deprivation within Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, with parts of the town centre falling into the 30% most deprived areas in Scotland/*Alba* in terms of income and employment.

## 4.1.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Employment and economic activity

4.1.2.1 **Table 4-6** sets out data from the Census 2022 that shows that there is a slightly higher proportion of residents in the Western Isles who are economically active (59.3%) compared to the national average (56.9%) (NRS, 2022). Across all localities the most common reason for being economically inactive is being retired, although the proportion of residents recorded as retired is larger on the Isle of Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* than seen nationally (28.1% and 23.3% respectively). The proportion of residents who are retired is particularly high in the West Side SSA, at 31.7%.

Table 4-6: Economic activity (%)

Economic activity	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
Economically Active	59.8	55	58.8	59.3	56.9
Economically Inactive	38.3	44	39.4	39.1	39.1
Economically Inactive – Retired	26.1	31.7	28.1	28	23.3
Economically Inactive – Student	2.7	2.3	2.4	2.4	4.9
Economically Inactive – Looking after home/family	2.2	3.6	2.7	2.6	3.4
Economically Inactive – Long term sick/disabled	5.7	4.0	4.3	4.2	5.2

Source: NRS, 2022

4.1.2.2 **Table 4-7** shows that unemployment is lower in the SSAs, Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles than the average across Scotland/*Alba*. There is a similar pattern in terms of unemployment benefit claimants with all areas were below the national average of 3.3% (DWP, 2024). However, **Table 4-7** shows that, across all geographies, people are less likely to be in full-time employment, and more likely to be in part-time employment or to be self-employed than the average for Scotland/*Alba*. Part-time employment is highest in the Stornoway SSA at 23.8% compared with a Scottish average of 20.2%, and self-employment is highest in the West Side SSA at 19.7% compared with 13% for Scotland/*Alba*.

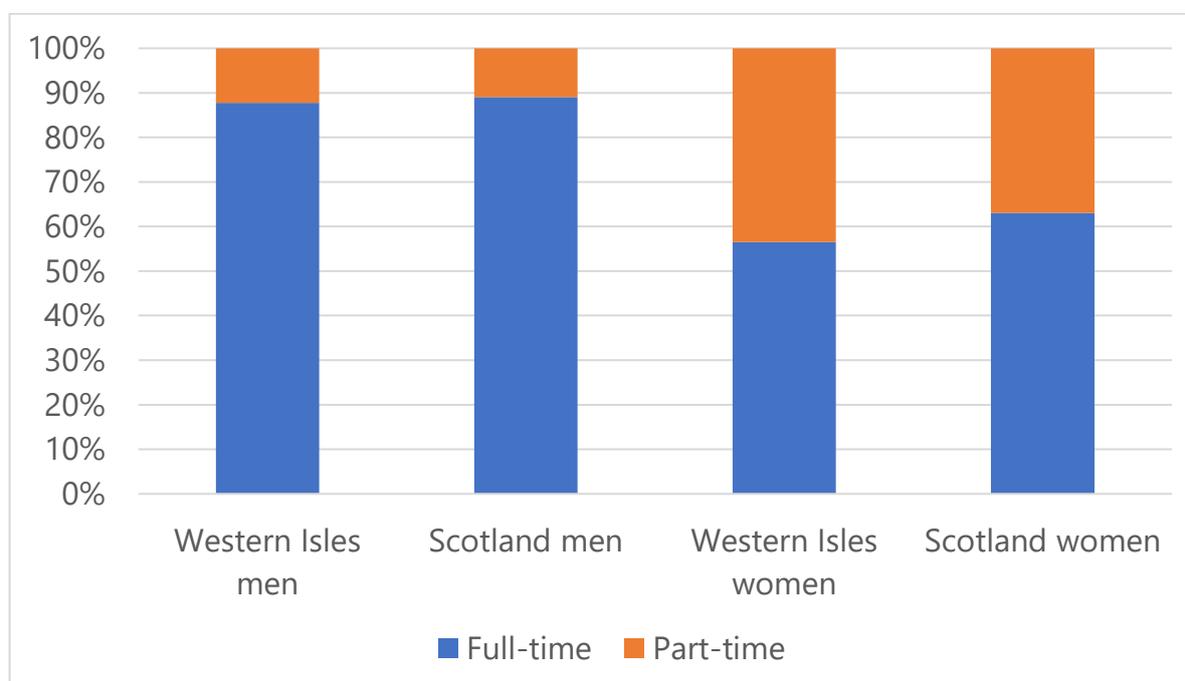
Table 4-7: Employment (%)

Employment (as % of economically active)	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Full-time employment	61.2	55.6	58.7	57.9	63.4
Part-time employment	23.8	21.7	23.1	23	20.2
Self-employed	13	19.7	15.6	16.6	13
Unemployed	2.2	3.3	2.9	2.9	4.7

Source: NRS, 2022

4.1.2.3 The data shows differences in the working patterns of men and women, with women in the Western Isles less likely than average to be in full-time employment and more likely to be in part-time employment. **Plate 4-3** shows the proportion of men and women in employment by full-time and part-time work in the Western Isles compared with Scotland/Alba. In the Western Isles, 56.5% of women in employment are in full-time work, compared with 63.1% of women in employment in Scotland/Alba. Evidence from focus groups with members of the local community suggests that new developments are perceived as tending to disproportionately favour men: “Hard-hat kinds of jobs” [Focus group 1].

Plate 4-3: Part-time and full-time employment by sex



Source: NRS, 2022

## Jobs, industry and occupation

4.1.2.4 Data from the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES), set out in **Table 4-8**, shows that there were approximately 9,050 jobs in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* in 2024, and 12,275 in the Western Isles. However, the data on the proportion of employee jobs that are full-time and part-time reflects the Census data above, which shows a higher than average proportion of part-time jobs and a lower than average proportion of full-time jobs in both the Western Isles and Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*. Data at sector levels shows that rates of part-time employment are highest in the retail, accommodation and food services sectors, and that 55.6% of employees in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector in the Western Isles are recorded as part-time (ONS, 2025).

Table 4-8: Job characteristics

	<b>Total employee jobs</b>	<b>% full-time employee jobs</b>	<b>% part-time employee jobs</b>
Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	9,050	60.7%	38.7%
Western Isles	12,275	56.4%	41.1%
Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>	2,551,000	66.9%	33.1%

Source: ONS, 2025 (Numbers may not sum due to rounding)

4.1.2.5 **Table 4-9** uses Census data and details the occupational level of those in employment in the various study areas (NRS, 2022). Across all the geographies, the largest share of the workforce is employed in professional occupations. This is in line with the national trend, although the proportion employed in professional occupations varies across the areas: Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* has the largest proportion of workers in professional occupations at 17.3%, and West Side SSA the lowest, at 16.6%.

Table 4-9: Occupation (%)

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Stornoway SSA</b>	<b>West Side SSA</b>	<b>Lewis and Harris/<i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i></b>	<b>Western Isles</b>	<b>Scotland/<i>Alba</i></b>
Managers, Directors and Senior Officials	6.8	7.8	7.5	7.6	7.8
Professional Occupations	16.9	16.6	17.7	17.3	20.6
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	11.6	12.3	11.4	11.2	13.9
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	9.9	9.4	9.3	8.9	9.6
Skilled Trade Occupations	13.7	15.6	14.7	15.8	11.2
Caring, Leisure and Other Service Occupations	11.6	11.4	11.4	11.2	9.5

Sector	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	7.2	5.4	6.5	6.3	8.2
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	8.6	11.6	9.6	9.5	7.6
Elementary Occupations	13.7	10	11.9	12.1	11.7

Source: NRS, 2022

4.1.2.6 The Western Isles is recognised as an economically fragile area, which is reliant on primary industries such as fishing and agriculture (Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership, 2019). The latest data from the Census shows that the largest sector in Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh by employment is human health, which accounts for 17.2% of the workforce, above the national average of 14.6% (NRS, 2022). Human health is also the largest sector of employment across all the other geographies. Further information on healthcare provision in the study area is provided in Section 5.1.4.

4.1.2.7 Across Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh and the Western Isles, other sectors that employ a larger than average proportion of the workforce include agriculture, forestry and fishing; construction; and transport and storage (NRS, 2022). In the West Side SSA, there is also a higher than average proportion of residents employed in manufacturing (11.2%, compared with 8.4% for the Western Isles and 8% for Scotland/Alba), education (9.8% compared with 8.9% for the Western Isles and 8.2% for Scotland/Alba), and the arts, entertainment and recreation sector (3.2% compared with 1.9% for the Western Isles and 2.7% for Scotland/Alba).

Table 4-10: Employment by industry (%)

Sector	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	2.9	2.7	3.6	5.1	1.6
Mining and quarrying	2	2.3	2	1.7	1.6
Manufacturing	8.3	11.2	8.7	8.4	8
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.7
Water supply, sewage waste management	0.6	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.7
Construction	9.5	9.8	9.1	8.9	7.3
Wholesale and retail	10.8	8.5	10	9.6	11.2
Transport and storage	7.7	7.4	7.4	7.9	4.9

Sector	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Accommodation and food service	5.4	5.4	5.8	6.1	6.9
Information and communication	1.9	2.2	1.9	1.7	2.9
Financial and insurance	1.6	1	1.2	1.2	4.3
Real estate	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.9	1
Professional and scientific	3.2	4.2	3.6	3.6	5.8
Admin and support services	3.9	2.8	3.7	3.7	4.7
Public admin and defence	9.2	8	8.9	8.8	9.1
Education	8.4	9.8	8.9	8.9	8.2
Human health	17.2	16.3	17.2	16.6	14.6
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1.5	3.2	1.9	1.9	2.7
Other	4.2	2.8	3.7	3.5	3.8

Source: NRS, 2022

### Key sectors

4.1.2.8 The logic model described in **Chapter 6, Volume 2a** identified potential wider socio-economic effects for traditional established industries, including those that rely on access to natural resources such as agriculture, commercial fishing, and tourism. This section provides further detail on the role of each of these sectors within the economy of the Western Isles.

#### *Agriculture*

4.1.2.9 A report by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) reveals that agriculture accounts for a higher share of private businesses, turnover and employment in island economies than across Scotland/Alba as a whole (SRUC, 2024). The report highlights the multiplier effects associated with the high percentage of agriculture businesses, and their relative importance along local supply-chains and into the wider rural economy.

4.1.2.10 More than one in three people in the Western Isles has a connection with agriculture, mostly in the form of crofting (SRUC, 2024). Crofting is a diverse agricultural activity, which is usually small-scale and follows a yearly calendar of growing and animal husbandry. Raising store lambs is the most common product of crofting, followed by the rearing of calves (NatureScot, 2019). A Scottish Government report on the economic condition of crofting in 2022 found that crofting remains 'economically challenging'. The average income from crofting of respondents to a survey conducted for the report was £4,538 per annum, and a third of respondents reported that they made no income from crofting activities in the last twelve months. The majority of crofters who responded to the survey 'agreed that crofting is not economically viable without

household members supplementing their income from non-crofting activities’ (Scottish Government, 2022). Many croft tenants have diversified their income through other occupations combined with crofting activity.

4.1.2.11 Current legislation, such as the Crofting Reform Act of 2010, aims to sustain crofting communities by providing financial assistance and encouraging new generations to take up crofting. There is a continuing emphasis on protecting crofters' rights, promoting sustainable agriculture, and ensuring that crofting remains a viable way of life in the Western Isles. Most croft tenants have diversified their income through other occupations combined with crofting activity. Barriers and constraints to crofting are identified as imperfect digital and transport connectivity, as these create additional costs (including costs relating to unreliability of services) (SRUC , 2024).

4.1.2.12 Crofting is discussed further in relation to land use, in Section 5, and in relation to culture and identity, in Section 6.

*Commercial fishing, aquaculture, and fish/shellfish processing*

4.1.2.13 Commercial fishing is also important. Data from BRES shows that, in 2024, there were 75 people working in commercial fishing in the Western Isles, which accounted for 0.6% of total employment in the area. This is considerably higher than the national average of 0.1%. (ONS, 2025). In the West Side SSA, commercial fishing sector represented 1.1% of employment, and in the Stornoway SSA it represented 0.2% of employment.

4.1.2.14 The aquaculture sector and fish processing supply chain are also important employers. BRES data shows there were 175 people in the Western Isles working in the aquaculture sector in 2024, 1.4% of all employment in the area. There is a particular concentration in the West Side SSA where there were 50 people working in aquaculture, 5.4% of all employment. The processing and preserving of fish, crustaceans and molluscs employed a further 150 people in the Western Isles, including 10 in the West Side SSA (1.1% of all employment).

4.1.2.15 As shown in **Table 4-11**, in total 3.3% of employment in the Western Isles in 2024 was in fishing, aquaculture, or fish and shellfish processing and 7.6% in the Western SSA. However, Bakkafrost, who ran a harvesting station in Arnish/*Airinis* (within Sgir'Uige agus Ceann a Tuath nan Loch ward) and a processing plant in Marybank/*Bruach Màiri*, temporarily closed both sites in July 2024 for at least 18 months, with the reported loss of 80 jobs in 2024 (Stornoway Gazette, 2024).

Table 4-11: Fishing, aquaculture and fish/shellfish processing employment

	West Side SSA		Stornoway SSA		Western Isles		Scotland/Alba	
	Jobs	% of total						
Fishing	10	1.1	15	0.2	75	0.6	3,000	0.1
Aquaculture	50	5.4	0	0.0	175	1.4	2,250	0.1

	West Side SSA		Stornoway SSA		Western Isles		Scotland/Alba	
	Jobs	% of total						
Processing and preserving of fish, crustaceans and molluscs	10	1.1	30	0.4	150	1.2	6,000	0.2
Total	70	7.6	45	0.6	400	3.2	11,250	0.4

Source: ONS, 2025

4.1.2.16 90% of fish landings in the Western Isles are shellfish. Deep sea, finfish, and white fish account for the remaining 10%. A significant proportion of the shellfish are exported (NatureScot, 2020), with the primary market for Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* shellfish exports being Continental Europe. Baseline data presented in **Chapter 21, Volume 2a** shows that the key species landed from the commercial fisheries local study area are Norway lobster, langoustine or prawn; lobster; brown crab; Ballan wrasse; razor clam; king scallop; velvet crab; horse mackerel; and mackerel. Further information on fish and shellfish landings is provided in **Chapter 21, Volume 2a** which includes baseline data for a defined local study area across the west and east sides of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*.

#### *Tourism*

4.1.2.17 Tourism is a major contributor to the economy of the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the wider Western Isles. The Outer Hebrides Visitor Survey, commissioned by CnES in partnership with VisitScotland, found that there were approximately 219,000 visitors to the Western Isles in 2017, adding £65m to the economy, which amounts to approximately 10-15% of the overall economic activity on the islands (CnES and Visit Scotland, 2018). Tourism directly supports the equivalent of over 1,000 full-time jobs on the islands and retailers and restaurants in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* obtain up to 40% of their sales from visitors. Focus group and interview findings highlighted the dependence of many residents on tourism for some or all of their income, including crofters on the west coast.

4.1.2.18 The Outer Hebrides Visitor Survey found that over 80% of visitors to the Western Isles were from the UK, with the majority coming from other parts of Scotland/*Alba*. On average leisure visitors stayed for six days. The most popular reasons leisure visitors gave for visiting the Western Isles were the scenery and landscape (71%), that they had always wanted to visit (49%), and to get away from it all (36%). The history and culture of the islands was also an important draw, accounting for 32% of leisure visits (CnES and Visit Scotland, 2018).

4.1.2.19 An increasing number of visitors arrive by cruise ship, particularly since the completion of Stornoway Deep Water Terminal in 2024, which increased capacity at Stornoway Port and allowed it to accommodate large cruise liners (McLaughlin and Harvey). The current cruise

schedule for 2026 shows cruise ships arriving at Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* between April and September, with activity peaking in August when there are expected to be 13 arrivals, with passenger numbers varying between 110 and 3,560 passengers (Cruise Timetables, 2026).

4.1.2.20 Beaches and coastal scenery are one of the main attractions for tourists to Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the Western Isles. Scottish Natural Heritage notes that the importance of the island's coastal character acts as a base for all other tourist activities on the island: 'The 'tourism product' for the islands cannot be considered in isolation from this landscape' (Taylor, 2010). The Outer Hebrides Visitor Survey reported that 77% of leisure tourists responded that they had visited and enjoyed beaches or coastal scenery as part of their Hebridean holiday (CnES and Visit Scotland, 2018). Coastal wildlife and birdwatching form another important attraction for visitors, with a number of designated sites and trails within the West Side SSA, including:

- Loch Ordais, Bragar/*Bhràdhagai*;
- Loch Na Muilne RSPB reserve, Arnol/*Àrnoil*;
- Barvas/*Barabhas* Machair;
- Stoth, Eoropie/*Eòropaidh*;
- Loch Stiaphabhat SSSI, Ness/*Nis*;
- Butt of Lewis/*Rubha Robhanais*;
- Visit Scotland's *Birds of Prey Trail*, Barra/*Barraigh* to Ness/*Nis*.

4.1.2.21 Other outdoor activities such as walking and cycling are popular, with 15% of leisure tourists reporting that they visited the Western Isles to take part in a specific sport or activity. The Hebridean Way trail is a route for both cyclists and walkers, which links Vatersay/*Bhatarsaigh* in the south with Lewis in the north (Visit Outer Hebrides, 2025). On Lewis, the trail splits at Achmore/*An t-Acha Mòr*, with the walking trail ending in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* and the cycling trail continuing up the west coast, where it is located within the West Side SSA. The Hebridean Way attracts some cycle-tourists, including guided and self-supported groups and individuals.

4.1.2.22 The Timeless Way is a walking route linking Vatersay/*Bhatarsaigh* with the Butt of Lewis/*Rubha Robhanais* (Long Distance Walking Association, 2025). It follows a similar route to the Hebridean Way cycle trail between Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* and Carloway/*Càrlabagh*, along the A858 road. Outer Hebrides Tourism devised a self-guided 'Peter May Trail' which includes key sites throughout the Western Isles featured in the novels by Peter May. Of the seventeen sites on the trail, twelve are located on the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, and one on Harris/*Na Hearadh*. Nine are located in the West Side SSA, and two are in the Stornoway SSA (Visit Scotland, 2025). Information on core paths is included in Section 5.1.1 of this report.

4.1.2.23 Many scenic and cultural tourism receptors are located along the west coast, including a high concentration of sites of historic and archaeological interest such as Callanish/*Calanais* Standing Stones, Dun Carloway/*Càrlabagh* Broch, the Arnol/*Àrnoil* Blackhouse, Garenin/*Na Garrannan*

Blackhouse Village and the Trushal Standing Stone/*Clach an Trushal*. Visitor numbers are not available for all receptors, but Callanish/*Calanais* is reported to be the most visited attraction in the Western Isles, with approximately 150,000 visitors each year (Calanais, 2025). The visitor centre at Callanish/*Calanais* is currently closed for redevelopment to increase capacity following growth in visitor numbers in recent years (Calanais, 2025)).

- 4.1.2.24 Sea tours including boat trips to St Kilda/*Hiort*, the Flannan Islands/*Na h-Eileanan Flannach* and the Shiant Isles/*Na h-Eileanan Mòra* are popular, as are the west coast beaches such as Dalmore/*Dail Mhor*, Dalbeg/*Dail Beag*, Bosta/*Bostadh*, Eoropie/*Eòropaidh* and Shawbost/*Siabost* for walking and other recreational activities including sea sports. Lewis and the Western Isles are recognised as a globally important surfing destination, with the majority of surf spots and two surf schools also located on the west coast.
- 4.1.2.25 While there is little commercialised surf culture in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, the island attracts visitors as a surfing destination and has a large and devoted community of local surfers who have formed a strong subculture on the island, and two surf school businesses which are run by local surfers. Interview participants highlighted the open Atlantic perspective of the west coast surf locations as integral to the experience of surfing at these locations: *'When you're surfing at Barvas/Barabhas or Bragar/Bhràdhagair, you're open to the Atlantic, you're open to a whole new perspective, it's an entirely different sensory experience'*.
- 4.1.2.26 Many visitors also come for Gaelic language and cultural interests. The Comunn Eachdraidh Nis, Grinneabhat, and other cultural centres which provide resources such as exhibitions and archive material are located in the West Side SSA. There are also a number of popular cultural events throughout the year, including the annual HebCelt music festival and Faclan book festival, which draw many visitors. These take place in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. In addition to the arts centre An Lanntair in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, Harris/*Na Hearadh* and the wider Western Isles are home to a number of art practitioners, many of whom take direct inspiration from the landscape, coastal environments, and intact biodiversity. The direct dependence of many artists on landscape and cultural character were highlighted in some interviews and focus groups.
- 4.1.2.27 Some characteristics of tourism in the islands are likely to have changed since the Outer Hebrides Visitor Survey was conducted in 2017 due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. As noted above, there have been changes associated with the increase in cruise ship tourism due to construction of the new Stornoway Deep Water Terminal, which adds a new tourist demographic and one-day visitors to the tourism industry. Outer Hebrides Tour Guides Association (OHTGA interview) reported that the most popular bus tour for cruise ship visitors is a circular route across the Barvas/*Barabhas* Moor to the west coast and back to Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* via Achmore/*An t-Acha Mòr*, due to the concentration of cultural heritage sites along the coast, and estimated there could be tens of thousands of visitors per year if cruise passengers are included in visitor numbers.

### Tourist accommodation

4.1.2.28 In relation to visitor accommodation, the 2017 Visitor Survey reported that about a quarter (27%) of Western Isles tourists stayed in a hotel, others opted for self-catering facilities (28%) or a bed and breakfast (24%) (CnES and Visit Scotland, 2018). Business visitors account for 55% of hotel stays, while leisure visitors are more likely to book into self-catering (34%). The average stay at a self-catering facility (7.6 nights) was almost double that of the average hotel stay (4 nights). Hotel accommodation on Lewis is concentrated in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, with further hotels at Borge/*Borgh*, Balallan/*Baile Ailean* and Carloway/*Càrlabhagh*.

4.1.2.29 **Table 4-12** provides information on accommodation stock in the Western Isles in 2024 (CnES, 2025). The largest share of visitor accommodation comprises self-catering units or serviced apartments, followed by hotels, camping and caravanning, and guest houses, B&Bs and lodges. Across Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*, there is a total of 5,129 tourist bedspaces.

Table 4-12: Accommodation stock, Western Isles

Type of accommodation	Number of providers	Maximum bedspaces
Camping, caravanning and touring	29	726
Guest houses, B&B, lodges	119	723
Hotels	29	898
Self-catering / serviced apartments	947	4,847
Pods / chalets / static caravans	107	449
Hostels	15	247
Total	1,246	7,890

Source: CnES, Outer Hebrides Visitor Levy Report (CnES, 2025)

4.1.2.30 **Table 4-13** shows occupancy rates for different types of tourist accommodation for the Western Isles in 2024. Hotels in the Western Isles in 2024 had average occupancy across the year of 68.9%, for rooms, and 52.4% for bedspaces (Visit Scotland, 2025). Self-catering unit occupancy was 65.3%. Data for Scotland/*Alba*, not available at local authority level, shows that occupancy varies significantly throughout the year, with hotel room occupancy peaking at 90.9% in September and falling to 36% in January (Visit Scotland, 2025).

Table 4-13: Tourism accommodation occupancy

Occupancy	Western Isles
Hotel (rooms)	68.9
Hotel (beds)	52.4
Guest house and B&B (rooms)	62.7
Guest house and B&B (beds)	88.3 <sup>4</sup>
Self-catering units	65.3

<sup>4</sup> In 2023, this figure was 52.4%

Source: VisitScotland/Alba, 2025

- 4.1.2.31 Many beaches in Lewis/Eilean Leòdhais have neighbouring designated campsites for campervan parking, with facilities such as toilets available. However, residents have raised concerns around the impact of visitors choosing to camp, or park campervans overnight, away from designated sites. For example, local news reports have highlighted issues around campervans using carparks adjacent to cemeteries – many of which are situated close to beaches – restricting access for local people visiting cemeteries, and in some cases causing concern around ‘disrespectful behaviour’ (Stornoway Gazette, 2023). In November 2022, it was reported that CnES had agreed to measures to ban camping and overnight parking at cemeteries in the Western Isles (BBC, 2022).
- 4.1.2.32 There has recently been the suggestion of a campervan tax of £15-£20 a night for visitors taking campervans onto the Western Isles, to be collected and reinvested in local communities (Stornoway Gazette, 2024). The potential for tourism-related conflict in the Western Isles due to visitor pressure on infrastructure and services was reported after the experiences of the pandemic highlighted how the social vulnerabilities of the island communities could be exacerbated by sudden decreases and increases in visitor numbers (Currie et al., 2021).

### Earnings

- 4.1.2.33 Data from the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), set out in **Table 4-14**, shows that in 2025 median gross weekly pay for residents of the Western Isles was slightly higher than the Scottish average, at £780.3 compared with £775.6 (ONS, 2025). Workplace-based earnings in the Western Isles (£762.7) were below the Scotland/Alba average (£773.8). The difference between resident-based and workplace-based earnings indicates that some residents are likely to be accessing higher-paid employment outside the local authority area or through remote working arrangements. ASHE data is not available below local authority level.

Table 4-14: Median gross weekly pay

Median gross weekly pay	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Resident based	£780.3	£775.6
Workplace based	£762.7	£773.8

Source: ONS, 2025

### Skills and qualifications

- 4.1.2.34 **Table 4-15** details the highest level of qualification received by the population aged 16 and over, using data from the Census 2022 (NRS, 2022). The West Side SSA is the only location that has a higher proportion of the population with degree level qualifications than seen nationally. Despite this it also has one of the highest proportion of residents with no qualifications – with all localities with above national average proportions of residents with no qualifications. All

localities also have higher than average proportions of residents with apprenticeship qualifications.

Table 4-15: Highest level of qualification (%)

Sector	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
No Qualifications	18.7	18.6	17.3	17.8	16.7
Lower school qualifications	17.1	15.3	16.5	16.9	18.9
Upper school qualifications	10.6	9.4	10.5	10.5	11.1
Apprenticeship qualifications	10.9	11.1	10.7	10.6	7.6
Further education & sub-degree higher education	14.3	11.8	13.3	13	13.2
Degree level qualifications	28.6	33.8	31.5	31.1	32.5

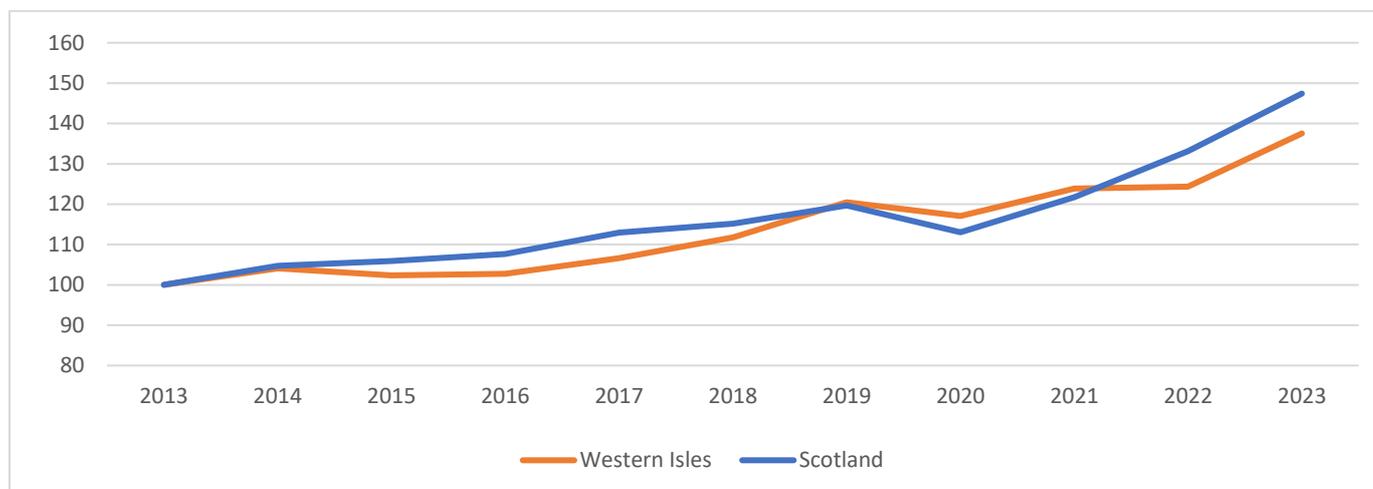
Source: NRS, 2022

## GVA

4.1.2.35 In 2023, GVA in the Western Isles was £645m which accounted for 0.4% of the total GVA of Scotland/Alba (ONS, 2025). There has been strong GVA growth in the area with an uplift of 37% over the last ten years, however this falls behind the national uplift (+47%) over the same period. However, GVA growth in the Western Isles over the last five years aligns more closely to that seen nationally (+23% and 28% respectively).

4.1.2.36 **Plate 4-4** shows the indexed GVA growth over the last decade for both the Western Isles and Scotland/Alba. The graph shows that the GVA growth across Scotland/Alba has outperformed the Western Isles year-on-year over the whole period. However, the data for 2019 – 2020 suggests that the Western Isles was less impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic than seen nationally with approximately half the rate of decline in the Western Isles than Scotland/Alba. This could be a reflection of the rural and more self-sufficient nature of the island economy which may have increased resilience to the pandemic.

Plate 4-4: Indexed GVA growth (indexed at 100)



Source: ONS, 2025a

4.1.2.37 GVA per FTE in the Western Isles in 2023 was £69,730, which was lower than the national average in 2023 of £85,774 (ONS, 2025). The Western Isles has the fourth lowest GVA per FTE of all the local authorities in Scotland/*Alba*, with only Dundee City and Inverclyde recording a lower rate. However, GVA per population was the 20<sup>th</sup> lowest in Scotland/*Alba*, which could suggest that the lower rate of GVA per FTE is a reflection of the structure of the economy in the Western Isles and the relative importance of sectors such as agriculture that generally record lower rates of productivity.

### Business

4.1.2.38 In 2024, the total number of VAT-registered business units in the Western Isles was 1,535 (ONS, 2025). This is a 2% increase since 2019. By contrast, Scotland/*Alba* recorded a decrease of 3.1% in the number of VAT-registered business units over the same period. Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* also recorded a small decrease of 1%. Of business units in the Western Isles, 81.8% are classed as micro businesses (0-9 employees), 16% as small businesses (10 – 49 employees) and 2% as medium businesses (50 – 249 employees) with no large businesses (250+ employees). This is broadly similar to the national profile – however 0.4% of businesses nationally are classified as large.

Table 4-16: Employment size of VAT based local units (%)

VAT based local units by size	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
Local units employing 0 to 9 people (micro)	79.9	81.8	80.7
Local units employing 10 to 49 people (small)	17.2	16	15.6
Local units employing 50 to 249 people (medium)	2.5	2	3.2

VAT based local units by size	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Local units employing 250 + (large)	0	0	0.5

Source: ONS, 2025

4.1.2.39 **Table 4-17** shows the proportion of VAT-registered business units by sector, and again underlines the importance of agriculture to the local economy of Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh and the Western Isles, with close to a quarter of business units in the Western Isles being in agriculture, forestry and fishing.

Table 4-17: VAT based local unit by sector (%)

VAT based local units by sector	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	13.2	22.5	8.1
Mining, quarrying and utilities	2.0	2.0	1.1
Manufacturing	5.9	4.9	4.6
Construction	8.3	8.1	10.9
Motor trades	2.9	2.3	2.7
Wholesale	2.5	2.6	3.3
Retail	8.3	6.8	10.4
Transport and storage	4.9	5.2	3.8
Accommodation and food services	8.8	8.8	8.6
Information and communication	3.4	2.9	3.9
Financial and insurance	1.0	1.0	1.8
Property	2.0	2.0	3.5
Professional, scientific and technical	9.3	7.2	12.5
Business administration and support services	6.9	6.2	7.7
Public administration and defence	3.4	3.3	1.3
Education	2.5	2.9	2.4
Health	7.4	6.5	5.8
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	5.9	4.6	7.7

Source: ONS, 2025

### Offshore and onshore wind supply chain

4.1.2.40 Currently there are around 9GW of operational onshore (~60% of UK capacity) and 2GW of offshore (~19% of UK offshore capacity) wind capacity developed in Scotland/Alba (Scottish Parliament, 2023). The Scottish supply chain for onshore wind is therefore more developed than for offshore wind, but it is assumed that there are transferable skills and capabilities within the onshore wind supply chain that could be applied to offshore wind projects in future. Modelling

by ClimateXChange based on BVG data shows the predicted FTE profile by local authority for the operation and maintenance stage of onshore wind projects. This analysis predicts that the Western Isles could have 34 FTEs in the operation and maintenance stage by 2030 (ClimateXChange, 2024). As this figure represents the onshore sector only, any offshore jobs would be additional to these.

- 4.1.2.41 The bulk of Scotland/*Alba*'s existing offshore wind farms and those currently in development are located off the east coast of Scotland/*Alba*. However, the 2022 ScotWind leasing round included five projects off the north and west coast (Sporad na Mara, MachairWind, Talisk, Havbredey and West of Orkney), and there are measures in place to further develop the offshore wind supply chain. The Scottish Government's 'Pathway to 2030' programme, which involves over £7bn of investment in onshore electricity transmission infrastructure, includes a 1.8GW subsea HVDC link from Arnish/*Airinis* near Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* (the Western Isles Connection Project) to north of Scotland/*Alba* mainland, enabling large volumes of electricity to be exported to the mainland (SSEN, 2025).
- 4.1.2.42 The UK Government's Industrial Strategy (2025) estimates that the offshore wind sector could support up to 100,000 jobs across Great Britain by 2030, with the Crown Estate aiming to bring an extra 20-30 GW of extra seabed leases to the market by 2030 (Department for Business and Trade, 2025). The Strategy also commits to increasing the UK's supply chain capabilities with the Clean Energy Supply Chain Fund being established, with £300m already being announced for offshore wind. The Scottish Government's Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy outlines a commitment to lead the world in offshore wind, and all ScotWind projects are now required to produce a Supply Chain Development Statement to support the local supply chain (Scottish Government, 2020).

## 5 LAND USE, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND WELLBEING

### 5.1.1 LAND USE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

5.1.1.1 The Western Isles archipelago is formed of 119 islands, of which 15 are currently inhabited. The islands cover approximately 300,000 hectares and are said to have a coastline of over 3,000km, constituting one-sixth of Scotland/*Alba's* coastline. The range of habitats is varied and highly scenic. Settlement is more heavily associated with the coast than the inland areas. As noted in Section 4, the majority of the population resides in rural settlements, with around 26% of the population living in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, the only large town (NatureScot, 2019).

#### Land ownership

- 5.1.1.2 Following devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament (1999), abolition of feudal tenure and the launch of the Scottish Land Fund (both in 2000) and the Land Reform Act (2003), several communities used the Community Right to Buy to acquire ownership of their land from previous landowners. A total of 534,868 acres (5.36%) of land in the Highlands and Islands is currently community owned, including around 70% of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* (Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), 2024). The land within the Stornoway SSA and the majority of land within the West Side SSA is in community ownership, with land within the West Side SSA owned by Carloway Estate Trust, Barvas Estate Trust, and Galson Estate Trust. Stornoway Trust is the largest community landowner in the UK. The landfall area is in a small pocket of private ownership.
- 5.1.1.3 Some estates that established community ownership prior to 2015 were able to benefit from government subsidies for renewable energy projects. Other renewable schemes are owned by Community Development Trusts, which are separate from community owned estates. Horshader Community Development Trust has its own renewable energy generation scheme, for the benefit of South Shawbost/*Siabost*, Dalbeg/*Dail Beag* and Dalmore/*Dail Mhor* communities. Renewables schemes fund decentralised services such as school buses, woodland projects, or other benefits such as winter fuel payments (Horshader Community Development Trust, 2024).
- 5.1.1.4 Carloway and Barvas Estate Trusts lack renewable schemes and do not have associated revenue. Barvas Estate Trust did not raise enough funds to buy the full land rights, leaving its previous landlord with the rights to the waterways, and resources such as wind (Currie, Pinker, & Copus, 2019; Community Land Scotland, 2025). Since November 2024, however, a proposed community-owned wind farm has received a grid offer from SSEN. While there are currently some uncertainties around this project, if consented it would result in a 43MW onshore wind project shared between Galson Estate Trust, Barvas Estate Trust, and Carloway Estate Trust.

## Land characteristics and use

- 5.1.1.5 The Western Isles are of outstanding conservation importance, with a large number and extent of international and national statutory conservation sites. The conservation value of the islands has been enhanced by a history of sympathetic human management via crofting and earlier systems of low impact land management which has protected and enhanced many of the habitats. Traditional farming methods are largely non-intensive and human impacts have been light throughout history, compared with mainland Scotland/*Alba*. The island habitats are vulnerable, with extremely slow recovery rates of fragile species due to the harsh climate and physical conditions (NatureScot, 2019).
- 5.1.1.6 The land cover in the Western Isles comprises of peatland (roughly 70%), machair, and woodland, and this cover is similar in Lewis. The interior of Lewis is an extensive plain of low-lying peatlands. The Barvas/*Barabhas* Moor makes up a large part of this area. Much of this 300 square kilometre area is known as the Lewis Peatlands and has been designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In the West Side SSA there is little woodland, with more found in the Stornoway SSA including publicly accessible woodland at Lews Castle Grounds.
- 5.1.1.7 The peatlands have provided a source of fuel since the Bronze age and are traditionally used for summer grazing and for fishing in freshwater lochs and burns. Until the 1950s the peatlands were also inhabited seasonally during the summer months, when families took their livestock to the moor and stayed in family shielings (small stone houses) in a practice called transhumance (Urras Coimhearsnachd Bhràdhagair agus Àrnoil, 2020). Crofts have designated peat banks, and although transhumance is no longer carried out, many families know where their shielings are located. Many peat mounds, approximately 2m high and 510m long, are located along the Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* to Barvas/*Barabhas* road.

## Residential

- 5.1.1.8 The West Side SSA consists of mostly undeveloped land with residential dwellings and villages/towns, commonly found along the coast. The northwest coast of Lewis communities are noted to be some of the most densely populated rural areas in the UK (Visit Scotland, 2025). Townships or villages are evenly spaced along the west coast of the island and have several thousand residents.
- 5.1.1.9 From Ness/*Nis* in the north of Lewis, villages run along the coastal side of the A857 (the only road linking these townships with the rest of the island) to the junction at Barvas/*Barabhas*. At Barvas/*Barabhas*, the road diverges South-East to Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* over the Barvas/*Barabhas* moor. The A858 goes west from the junction towards Carloway/*Càrlabhagh*, through settlements including Bragar/*Bhràdhagair* and Shawbost/*Siabost*. Most settlements in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* consist of a combination of modern houses and the older (traditionally thatched) blackhouses within nearby crofts, some of which have been restored as heritage assets.

## Crofting

- 5.1.1.10 Crofting is a form of land tenure in the Highland and Islands of Scotland/*Alba*, and the predominant land use in the Western Isles, with around 77% of the land area held in crofting tenure and subject to crofting legislation (Rural Housing Service, 2007). The Crofters Holding Act (Scotland) 1886 created a distinct form of land tenure in the crofting areas of Scotland/*Alba*, founded on three principles which tied people to the land: secure tenure, fair rents and compensation for improvements, and the right to bequest the croft holding to a family member. Crofters have a duty to be resident on or within 32km of their croft, not to neglect their croft, and put it to purposeful use (Crofting Commission, 2025).
- 5.1.1.11 As of 2023, there are 3,905 registered crofters on the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* (Registers of Scotland, 2025). The West Side SSA covers large areas of crofting and common grazing land. Crofts on the west coast of Lewis are typically arranged in narrow strips of land running from the coast towards the moorland. Crofters also have access to a larger territory than their specific croft, which includes areas of common grazing on the coastal machair and moor. The traditional movement of livestock between different areas of machair, croft and moorland have contributed to the maintenance of the balance of biodiversity on the island (NatureScot, 2020). Feedback from focus groups suggested that the senses of identity associated with land and place (e.g. related to crofting, Gaelic culture, island way of life or ancestry) is not only connected to people's villages or to isolated areas, but to wider and interconnected territories including the moorland, mountains and coast.
- 5.1.1.12 A report by SRUC draws attention to the importance of agricultural housing (especially crofts) for the availability and stability of the workforce (SRUC, 2024). The SRUC report also emphasises the benefits of low intensity land management to the high proportion of environmental designations and priority habitats such as peatlands and machair, and species (e.g. wading birds, corncrakes, hen harriers).

## Shielings

- 5.1.1.13 Crofting families tend to have family connections to the Lewis peatland, through their family shielings (summer dwellings), with some retaining this connection to the moorland and continuing to use shielings albeit for shorter periods of time, due to changed work patterns (Focus group feedback). Shielings can also be associated with individual crofts.
- 5.1.1.14 There are hundreds of shielings, including traditional shielings made of stone, but also modern wooden huts, located throughout the Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* moorlands, including in the West Side SSA. Although many shielings are marked on Ordnance Survey maps, these are not necessarily comprehensive. There is one shieling village still in regular use and upkeep by a number of families at Cuidhshader/*Cuidhsìadar*, which is within the West Side SSA.

5.1.1.15 Local experts in the community possess detailed knowledge of the moorlands and the history of family connections to different sites within it. This is partly because transhumance – summer movement of livestock to the moorland where families would stay in the shielings – was carried out up until the 1950s, well within living memory, which means people who still retain this knowledge of the land are intricately connected with the landscape in a way that is highly unusual in the United Kingdom (Urras Coimhearsnachd Bhràdhagair agus Àrnoil, 2020).

### Grazing

5.1.1.16 Crofters can make use of the landscape for their grazing animals, through access to the common grazing areas on machair, moorland and mountain. Common grazing areas are areas of land used by a number of crofters and others who hold a right to graze stock on that land. The practice of managed grazing is important for cultural continuity and can enhance biodiversity.

5.1.1.17 In the Western Isles roughly 66% (176,541ha) of declared land is common grazing, highlighting the importance of common grazings to the Western Isles compared with other areas of the Highlands and Islands (for example, Orkney had 1,947 Hectares). Ness/Nis General Common Grazings in the West Side SSA is one of the largest in Scotland/*Alba* with over 5,000 hectares of land, and approximately 400 active croft addresses (Crofting Commission, 2025).

5.1.1.18 Crofters can elect a Grazings Committee in each community, which is appointed to manage, maintain and improve common grazings. According to the Crofting Commission, a Grazings Committee ensures that common grazings can be regulated and protected by crofting law. 'Having Grazings Committees is fundamental to safeguarding the future of Common Grazings land and they are often a valuable source of knowledge about crofting in their area. Grazings committees also help to sustain communal working and the management of community assets in crofting areas' (Crofting Commission, 2025). Access to common grazing areas is essential to maintaining crofting practices and having access to the land for continuing to manage a way of life as well as a livelihood.

5.1.1.19 Other uses of common grazings include forestry plantations, peatland restoration, and other projects, such as renewable energy production (Crofting Commission, 2025).

### Peat cutting

5.1.1.20 Peat is cut by crofters as a domestic fuel source, which is used either exclusively or in combination with other fuels. In the Scottish Islands Survey 2023, 9.9% of respondents reported that they cut peat for heating their homes. This percentage is for all Scottish islands, and may be higher in Lewis due to the high percentage of peat bog coverage on the island and its cultural importance. The greater reliance on peat as a source of fuel has been highlighted as being connected to other issues associated with island and rural communities, including high levels of fuel poverty in the Highlands and Islands, and a lack of mains gas connections in rural areas

(Scottish Government, 2023). The cultural significance of peat cutting is discussed further in Section 6.3.

### Core paths and access

5.1.1.21 Core paths within the West Side SSA and Stornoway SSA are (CnES, 2010):

- Core Path 1 (Butt of Lewis/*Rubha Robhanais* West Coast Path);
- Core Path 3 (Garenin/*Na Gearrannan* to Bragar/*Bhràdhagair* Coastal Path);
- Core Path 4 (Newmarket Gateway All Abilities Path);
- Core Path 5 (Great Bernera/*Beàrnaraigh* Circular Route);
- Core Path 6 (Lewis Castle Grounds Path).

5.1.1.22 Shorter routes in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* itself can be found in the Lewis Castle Grounds where there are paths for walking and mountain biking. There are a few more freeform routes suggested for walking on the coasts of the island, including the coastal path that spans from Garenin/*Na Gearrannan* to Bragar/*Bhràdhagair*.

5.1.1.23 As noted in Section 4.1.2, the Hebridean Way is a walking and cycling trail spanning almost 200 miles across 10 islands, finishing on Lewis, and the Timeless Way is a walking route linking *Vatersay/Bhatarsaigh* with the Butt of Lewis/*Rubha Robhanais*.

### Machair

5.1.1.24 The machair in the Western Isles is situated almost exclusively on the west coast of the islands. Machair is a rare habitat found exclusively in North-West Scotland/*Alba* and Ireland/*Èire*, characterised by low-lying coastlines, shell fragments in sand, specific wind and rainfall conditions, and the interaction of humans and traditional grazing patterns which favour biodiversity and provides habitat for important pollinators (NatureScot, 2019). Intact machair is habitat to a large variety of plant species, birds and pollinators, and it is very unusual to see so many species in one place. Indigenous bird species include corn bunting, corncrake, lapwing, redshank, snipe, and oystercatchers; machair is also home to rare species of bees (Scotlink, 2025).

### Freshwater

5.1.1.25 The Western Isles has a high ratio of freshwater to landmass, and 15% of the UK's freshwater surface area (CnES, 2023). The peatlands hold a high reservoir of water, as well as many small lochs and intricate pool systems. The rivers of Barvas/*Abhainn Bharabhais*, Arnol/*Abhainn Àrnol*, Dell/*Abhainn Dhail* and Cross/*Abhainn Chrois* are some of the main waterways in the complex river systems flowing through the Lewis peatlands to the west coast. The River Creed/*Abhainn Ghrioda* is a renowned salmon and sea trout fishery that enters the Minch just to the southwest of Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. There are many other smaller rivers and water sources within the study area.

5.1.1.26 Lochs, rivers and tributaries are used across the Western Isles for freshwater fishing. The salmon and sea trout runs have struggled in recent years due to a number of pressures (Barvas Estate Trust, pers. comm., 9 September 2024).

### Fisheries and aquaculture

5.1.1.27 As discussed in Section 4.1.2, commercial fishing is an important part of the local economy, with shellfish accounting for the majority of landings. Shellfishing takes place most frequently on the coasts of the island, compared to trawler fishing which takes place in more open waters. The main active area for shellfishing is in the bays around Bernera/*Beàrnaraigh*, where there are 20 active sites; this is followed by the 12 active sites situated in Loch Erisort and Loch Leurbost within the Lochs district. Most fishing activities are of a small scale after recent downscaling by local fishermen of their boats. The majority of registered vessels are under 10m length (177 boats) compared with larger vessels (37 boats), making Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* the district with the second largest fleet of small boats out of all Scottish districts. Only Shetland has a larger fleet under 10m (213 vessels) (Scottish Government, 2025).

5.1.1.28 The socio-economic assessment considers effects on employment in the commercial fishing and aquaculture sectors. Commercial fisheries are covered in more detail in **Chapter 21, Volume 2a**, and aquaculture in **Chapter 20, Volume 2a**.

### Deer stalking and salmon fishing

5.1.1.29 Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* is advertised as being a site for deer stalking, with 'some of the most remote and demanding stalking to be found anywhere in the British Isles' (RJH Sports, 2025). Estates organise trips for hunters in which they are accompanied by experienced stalkers. Within the Barvas Estate, the Estate acts as the landlord for the shooting rights which are leased out to Reith Ecosse Ltd. The Barvas Estate Trading Company, Urras Bharabhais (Trading) Ltd, own and lease out a salmon hatchery, which is without a tenant as of September 2024 (Barvas Estate Trust, 2024).

### Seaweed harvesting

5.1.1.30 Seaweed is harvested in many ways on Lewis. Processes vary from cutting the seaweed by hand, collecting washed up seaweed from beaches, or using seaweed harvesting boats. Sites currently licenced by Crown Estate Scotland/*Alba* for seaweed harvesting on Lewis are situated in the bay at Shawbost/*Siabost* beach and at Loch Erisort/*Loch Èireasort*. Seaweed can also be harvested on privately owned areas of foreshore such as Arnish/*Àirinis*, where Hebridean Seaweed Company is situated.

## Utilities

### *Electrical infrastructure*

5.1.1.31 In the Stornoway SSA, there is a partially constrained Grid Supply Point at Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, as well as substations at Battery Point and Marybank/*Bruach Màiri* - Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, and a partially constrained substation at Arnish/*Àirinis*. Partially constrained electrical infrastructure indicates that the electricity network has partial capacity to transport electricity required or produced from a new connection (SSEN, 2025). In the West Side SSA, there is a constrained substation at Barvas/*Barabhas* and Callanish/*Calanais*, as well as a constrained substation at Gisla/*Giosla* in the Uig/*Ùige* area. Constrained infrastructure means that the network does not have the capacity to transport electricity required or produced from a new connection (SSEN, 2025).

### *Telecommunications infrastructure*

5.1.1.32 Telecommunications masts provide coverage for mobile voice and data across most of the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, with weaker signal in the hills of Uig/*Ùige*. Indoor coverage is far worse than outdoor coverage, with most networks rated as "limited" by Ofcom (Ofcom, 2025). The phase-out of landlines, planned by British Telecoms (BT) for 2025, is likely to affect people in more remote rural areas. In the Western Isles, areas with poor mobile network coverage and/or the higher frequency of power outages mean that landlines are more of a lifeline than they are in cities or areas with higher connectivity, especially for older people.

### *Wastewater treatment*

5.1.1.33 Water treatment works are located at various locations in the west coast and Stornoway SSAs. Treated effluent and Combined Sewer Overflow are discharged at locations near to communities along all coasts. All outfalls are listed as being in public ownership in the legal status, which means that Scottish Water is responsible for the sewerage. Treated effluent is discharged from the wastewater treatment works to the appropriate location (Scottish Water, 2019).

### *Waste disposal*

5.1.1.34 Bennadrove Landfill and Civic Amenity Site is located at Marybank/*Bruach Màiri*, near Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, and is the only landfill site in the Western Isles. Household waste and recycling collections are carried out by CnES every three weeks (for organic food, garden waste, mixed recycling and non-recyclable waste) or every nine weeks (glass recycling). These collection schedules do not tend to coincide, i.e. the collections often fall in different weeks and on different days (CnES, 2025).

## 5.1.2 HOUSING

5.1.2.1 The Scottish Human Rights Commission identified the right to housing as an area in which Scotland/*Alba* is not currently meeting its core human rights obligations in the Highlands and

Islands. The Commission found evidence of high levels of homelessness, an overall lack of sufficient adequate housing, a lack of access to services, lack of affordability, and concerns around the inability to heat homes (Scottish Human Rights Commission, 2024). This section sets out available baseline data relating to housing provision and affordability within Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles.

### Housing stock and characteristics

5.1.2.2 Housing in the Western Isles has traditionally been associated with crofting, with homes built on or near to the family croft. **Table 5-1** shows the proportion of households by type (NRS, 2022). The proportion of households living in detached houses or bungalows is close to three times the national average in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles. Conversely, the proportion of households living in terraced housing, and flats, maisonettes or apartments is considerably lower than the national average.

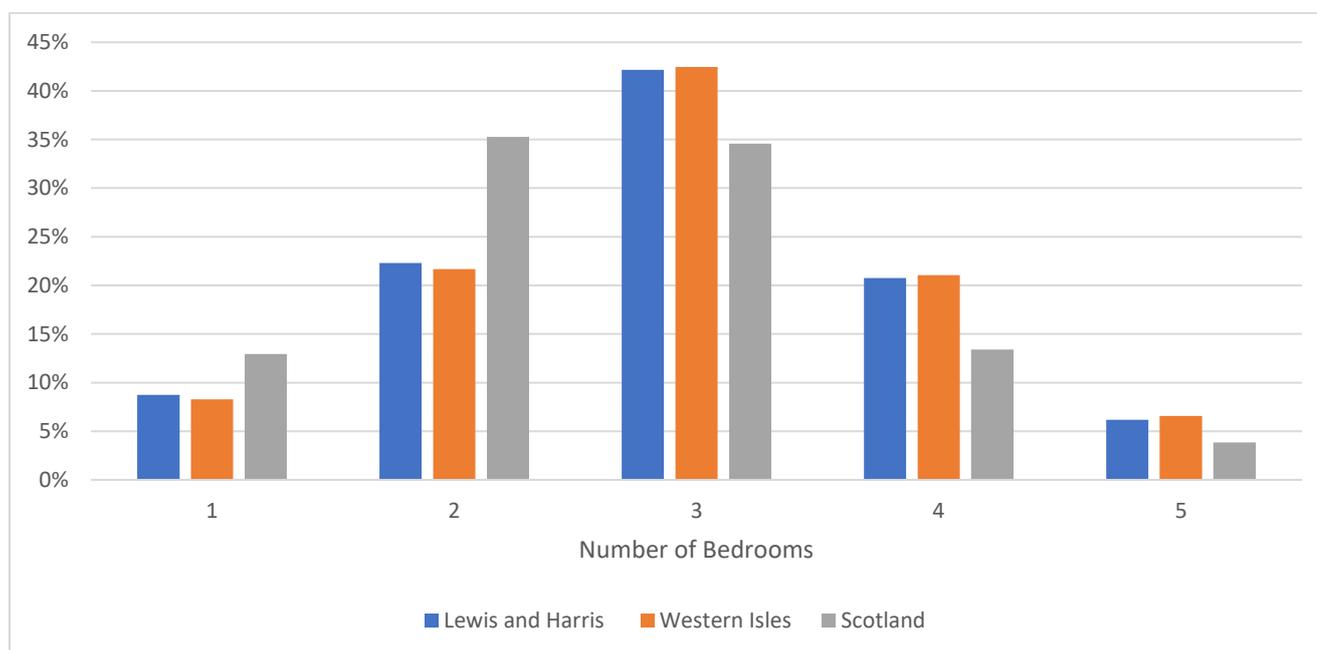
Table 5-1: Household type (%)

Household type	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
Detached house or bungalow	64.4	66.3	23.9
Semi-detached house or bungalow	20.7	20	23.3
Terraced house or bungalow	7.8	7.8	18.2
Flat, maisonette or apartment	6.9	5.7	34.4
Caravan or other mobile or temporary structure	0.1	0.2	0.2

Source: NRS, 2022

5.1.2.3 Error! Reference source not found. shows the proportion of properties by the number of bedrooms. This shows that dwellings in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles generally have more bedrooms than in Scotland/*Alba*.

Plate 5-1: Number of bedrooms



Source: NRS, 2022

5.1.2.4 **Table 5-2** shows the proportion of households that are considered to be overcrowded (NRS, 2022). Households are classified as overcrowded if there is at least one bedroom less than needed for household requirements using standard definitions. The proportion of households recorded as overcrowded is 0.8% in both Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles, lower than the Scottish average of 2.4%. This is in line with the evidence presented above which shows that properties in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles generally have more bedrooms and are more likely to be detached than in Scotland/*Alba* as a whole.

Table 5-2: Occupancy rating (bedrooms) (%)

	Household overcrowded
Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	0.8
Western Isles	0.8
Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>	2.4

Source: NRS, 2022

5.1.2.5 **Table 5-3** shows the proportion of households by tenure (NRS, 2022). The rate of owner-occupation is higher in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles than Scotland/*Alba* as a whole, with close to three quarters of households living in owner-occupied housing, including over half who live in homes that are owned outright. The proportion of households living in social rented or private rented housing is considerably lower in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles than across Scotland/*Alba* as a whole.

An increase in demand for private rented properties has been reported recently, potentially due to the level of deposits required when buying a home, making properties unaffordable, particularly for first time buyers (CnES, 2023).

Table 5-3: Household tenure (%)

Household tenure	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/Alba
Owned: total	74.1	74.4	63.2
Owned outright	50.8	52.3	33.9
Owned with a mortgage or loan	22.2	21.3	28.4
Shared ownership	0.2	0.1	0.3
Shared equity	0.8	0.7	0.6
Social rented	17.7	17.1	22.5
Private rented	5.3	5.7	12.9
Living rent free	2.9	2.8	1.4

Source: NRS, 2024

### Housing condition

- 5.1.2.6 The Outer Hebrides Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) for 2023 - 2042 was issued by CnES in September 2023 and provides the evidence used to determine the longer-term estimates of housing needs within the Western Isles. Evidence presented in the HNDA shows that, whilst only a small number of homes in the Western Isles could be described as Below Tolerable Standards (a basic level of repair a property must meet to make it fit for a person to live in), an estimated 63% of stock shows evidence of disrepair and 43% of stock shows evidence of disrepair to critical elements, which are central to weather-tightness, structural stability and preventing deterioration of the property (CnES, 2023).
- 5.1.2.7 **Table 5-4** shows the proportion of households living in accommodation with different types of central heating (NRS, 2022). The proportion of households with gas central heating is considerably lower in Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh (15.7%) and the Western Isles (12.5%) than in Scotland/Alba as a whole (74.7%), reflecting the fact that 90% of households in the Western Isles do not have access to the gas grid and are therefore reliant on other methods (CnES, 2023). There are also higher proportions of households using solid fuel and using two or more types of central heating, reflecting the continued use of peat as a domestic fuel source in many island communities.

Table 5-4: Central heating (%)

Central heating	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/ Alba
No central heating	3	3.5	2.1
Gas	15.7	12.5	74.7
Electric	15.9	17.2	9
Oil	37.2	37.4	5.1
Solid fuel (excluding wood)	2.2	2.4	0.3
Wood or biomass	0.9	0.8	0.5
Other renewables	10.9	11.4	1.1
District or communal heat system	0.1	0	0.5
Other	0.5	0.5	0.5
Two or more types of central heating	13.6	14.2	6.1

Source: NRS, 2022

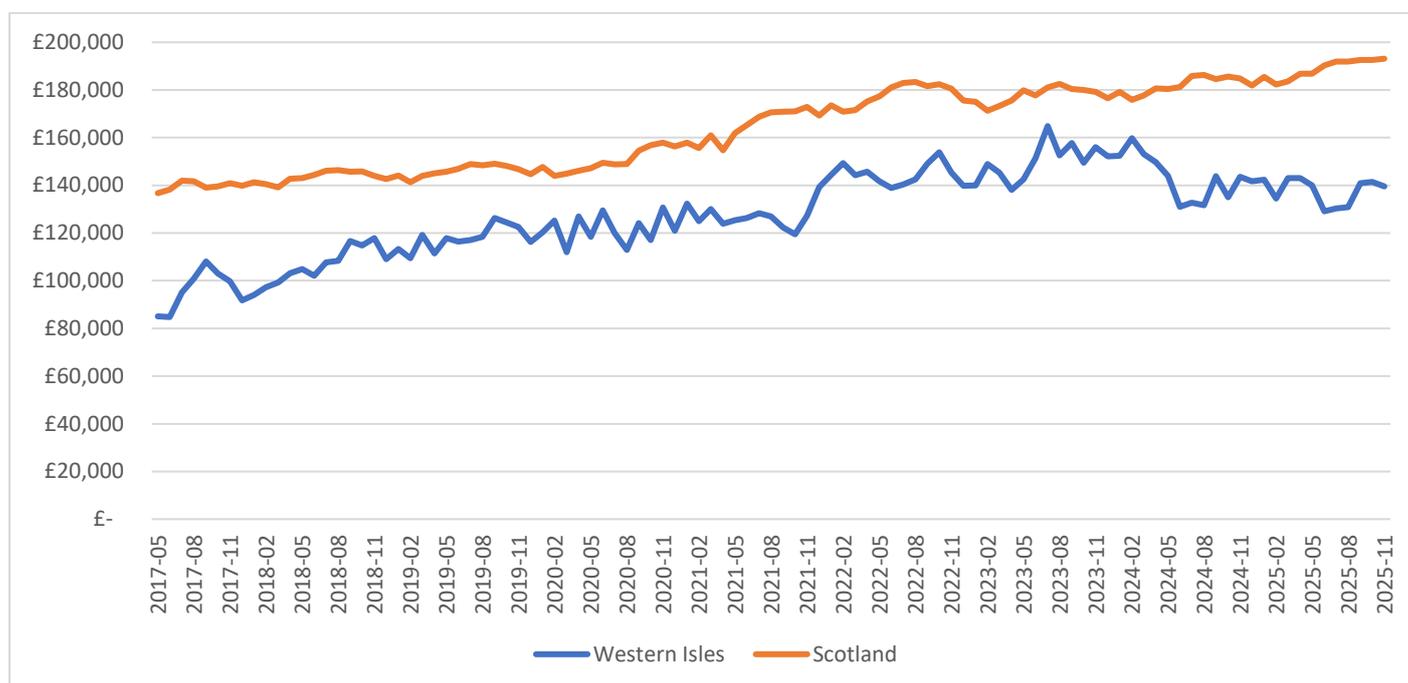
5.1.2.8 Oil-fired central heating and electric storage heaters can often be ageing and inefficient, costing more to run than more efficient gas combi boilers or air source heat pumps (CnES, 2023). The My Life in the Highlands and Islands Research report published by HIE in October 2022 summarised the findings of an Ipsos survey conducted between January and March 2022. Over half (53%) of respondents in the Western Isles reported that their home is expensive to heat and 21% said it is difficult to heat, slightly above average for the Highlands and Islands (Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), 2022).

### House prices

5.1.2.9 Lower numbers of sales transactions compared to other local authority areas can lead to a more volatile housing market with changes in prices influenced by the type and number of properties sold in any given period. In September 2025 there were 36 house sales in the Western Isles, while in the Highland Council local authority area, for example, there were 347, and in the City of Edinburgh/Dùn Èideann there were 1,001 (UK House Price Index, 2025). For this reason, prices are best analysed in the context of their longer-term trends.

5.1.2.10 **Plate 5-2** shows the change in average house prices across the Western Isles and Scotland/*Alba* between May 2017 and November 2025. Over this period, average prices in the Western Isles have increased by 64.1%, from £85,101 to £139,617. In Scotland/*Alba*, average prices have increased by 41.3%, from £136,715 to £193,114. As **Plate 5-2** shows, however, there has been some volatility across the period, with some sharp falls in prices recorded in 2021 and 2024.

Plate 5-2: Change in house prices in the Western Isles and Scotland/Alba, 2017-2025



Source: UK House Price Index, 2024

### Community Trusts/Landowners

5.1.2.11 Some of the Community Trusts in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* have sought to build homes, creating more affordable housing within each community, with a view to reversing population decline. Urras Sgìre Oighreachd Bharabhais (Barvas Estate Trust) for example is working with Hebridean Housing Partnerships (HHP) to look at potential social housing projects within the estate (Barvas Estate Trust, 2024). Great Bernera Community Development Trust is currently scoping out sites to offer plots for affordable self-build and social housing (Great Bernera Community Development Trust, 2025), and two homes have been built on the Pairc Estate, owned by Pairc Trust (Pairc Trust, 2025).

### Empty homes, second homes and short-term lets

5.1.2.12 The Empty Home Project was established for the Western Isles in 2018, with the aim of bringing more empty homes back into use. Between 2018 and 2022, there have been 156 resolved cases across Lewis (45 in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* and 111 in rural Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*) with 120 remaining active (17 in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* and 103 in rural Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*). Of those resolved, some have been renovated and sold or rented out, some have been demolished and others are now in use as second homes. Across the Western Isles the area with the greatest concentration of second homes following assistance from the project is Harris/*Na Hearadh* with 33, rural Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* with 24, and Barra/*Barraigh* with 21 (CnES, 2023).

- 5.1.2.13 The Data Map Scotland Airbnb Scotland/*Alba* Survey 2023 revealed statistics relating to properties listed for short-term lets on Airbnb. Although the highest densities of Airbnb properties are to be found in city centres, the Western Isles has the highest number of Airbnb properties per 1000 population (at 17.79), followed by Argyll and Bute/*Earra-Ghàrdheal agus Bòd* (15.37), Highland/*Gàidhealtachd* (14.98), and Orkney (10.91). The Survey also recorded a rise in the number of Airbnb properties in the Western Isles from 443 properties in 2022 to 474 in 2023 (Data Map Scotland, 2024).
- 5.1.2.14 More than 950 accommodation providers in the Western Isles have registered under Short Term Let regulations. Of the Western Isles' 812 'secondary letting' properties, 418 are in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, 171 in Harris/*Na Hearadh*, 169 in Uist/*Uibhist* and 54 in Barra/*Barraigh*. Within Lewis, 142 were registered in the Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* wards and 98 in Sgìr' Ùige agus Carlabhagh ward (Wilson, 2023). 139 registrations under the Short Term Let regulations were for other types of secondary rentals, such as renting out an individual room in the home, or traditional B&B accommodation.
- 5.1.2.15 Although not all accommodation providers are local residents, Airbnb and other types of short-term rental accommodation provides diversified income for many islanders. The popularity of self-catering houses can, however, be felt acutely amongst local populations. The impact of local homes being used for Airbnb or second homes is scarcity in the market and increased prices, pricing many islanders out, especially younger people (WeLoveStornoway, 2023).

### Housing need

- 5.1.2.16 The HNDA estimates a future housing need of an additional 51 housing units per annum in the Western Isles over the next ten years, comprising owner-occupied, social rented and private rented units. This is in the context of a projected decrease in both population and household numbers, despite changing family and household patterns. Key issues identified in the report include the ageing population and the increasing number of older people living alone, often in older properties that can be more difficult to adapt; affordability for first-time buyers, particularly in desirable rural areas; and limited supply of social housing units (CnES, 2023).
- 5.1.2.17 The HNDA was prepared prior to the announcement of the UK and Scottish Government funded Islands Growth Deal, which it is anticipated will create over 1,300 sustainable jobs across Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. This could create additional pressures on the housing market, including in Lewis. It was reported in focus groups and interviews that locally, across the Western Isles, businesses already experience difficulties attracting and retaining staff due to a lack of available, affordable housing. The strain on the housing market, especially the lack of housing such as flats and shared accommodation for young people to move back to the island after leaving for tertiary education, was consistently mentioned among interview and focus group participants as a barrier to reversing depopulation.

5.1.2.18 It has recently been reported that SSEN will help to fund the construction of new homes on Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, initially for use by construction workers involved in the construction of the proposed Lewis Hub, before being made available to the local community (Hebrides News, 2025).

### 5.1.3 TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY

#### Public transport

5.1.3.1 The National Islands Plan Survey reported that respondents to the survey believed island communities face different transport challenges when carrying out their daily lives compared to those living in less rural areas of the mainland and urban areas (Scottish Government, 2021). For example, the Second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) Final Report concluded that the cost of transport on islands is much higher, relative to income, than in the rest of Scotland/*Alba* (STPR2, 2022). In addition, public transport services in rural areas often involve long journeys, sparse bus timetables and expensive tickets. Integrated ticketing is seldom available and as a result multiple tickets are often required, adding to the price and complexity of travel (STPR2, 2022). The cost of public transport and the lack of regular services can be an obstacle to employment for people looking for work (STPR2, 2022).

5.1.3.2 The only public transport network operating within Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* is the local bus service. All buses in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* are run directly by CnES, though some routes are operated by private bus hire companies on behalf of CnES. Most routes, and particularly those on the west coast, run relatively limited services, even on weekdays. There are no bus services available on Sundays, fewer on Saturdays than weekdays, and fewer in the evening than daytime. Outside of the school term some routes have fewer than five buses running each day. Whilst some of the bus routes and services are interconnected with each other, there is limited connection to other transport services on the island, including ferries and the airport.

5.1.3.3 It is recognised that the continued reduction in population makes running and maintaining a financially viable local bus service in rural Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* more challenging (TAS Partnership Limited, 2023).

#### Cycling

5.1.3.4 As noted in Section 4.1.2, the Hebridean Way is a long-distance trail for walkers and cyclists which runs along the A858 through the West Side SSA. There is limited off-road cycling infrastructure on Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, and a low proportion of residents who choose to cycle to work. Further information on how people travel to work is provided below.

## Harbour and port facilities

5.1.3.5 Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* is the main port for the Western Isles. The port hosts industry, passenger and tourism infrastructure including the fishing fleet, Arnish/*Àirinis* fabrication yard, commercial slipway, coastguard and lifeboat station, cruise ships and the passenger and freight ferries. Charges for use of the port are paid to Stornoway Port Authority. The Stornoway Deep Water Terminal, which was completed in 2024, increased the capacity of the port to accommodate large cruise liners and to support fabrication and transportation of renewable energy components. The inner harbour has a marina for small yachts. Stornoway Port Authority Port Masterplan sets out plans for the growth and development of the port over the period to 2037 (Stornoway Port Authority, 2017).

## Ferry services

5.1.3.6 Caledonian MacBrayne (or CalMac) is the major operator of passenger and vehicle ferries to the west coast of Scotland/*Alba*, serving ports on the mainland and 22 of the major islands. Three routes serve Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*:

- Ullapool/*Ulapul* (Wester Ross/*Ros an Iar*) - Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* (Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*);
- Uig/*Ùige* (Skye/*an Eilean Sgitheanach*) – Tarbert/*an Tairbeart* (Harris/*Na Hearadh*); and
- Berneray/*Beàrnaraigh na Hearadh* (North Uist/*Uibhist a Tuath*) – Leverburgh/*An t-Òb* (Harris/*Na Hearadh*).

5.1.3.7 The main Ullapool/*Ulapul* – Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* route, usually served by the MV Loch Seaforth ferry, acts as a 'lifeline service, supporting almost all the trade, commuting and personal travel to and from the islands off Scotland/*Alba*'s west coast' and it is 'intertwined with all aspects of island life' (Cebr, 2022). The MV Loch Seaforth, which serves this route, has capacity for 700 passengers, and 376 lane meters of capacity for vehicle traffic. It runs an average of five crossings per day (two return passenger services and a dedicated overnight freight service). Under normal operating conditions the MV Loch Seaforth completes the Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* to Ullapool/*Ulapul* journey in around two hours and forty minutes.

5.1.3.8 In 2024, the main Ullapool – Stornoway/*Ulapul* – *Steòrnabhagh* route carried a total of 290,665 passengers and 101,953 cars, a decrease of 3.3% in passengers and 8.6% in cars since 2023 (Caledonian MacBrayne, 2025). The Uig – Tarbert/*Ùige* – *an Tairbeart* route and the Berneray – Leverburgh/*Beàrnaraigh na Hearadh* – *An t-Òb* routes recorded an increase in both cars and passengers. The Ullapool – Stornoway/*Ulapul* – *Steòrnabhagh* route performance figures indicate that overall annual reliability of the service was 94% and overall annual punctuality was 89%, with seasonal variations (Caledonian MacBrayne, 2024). In 2023-24, there were higher rates of cancellation between October and March, and poorer punctuality in August. Winter cancellations are more likely due to wind and swell conditions.

- 5.1.3.9 The 'My Life in the Highlands – Report 2022' found that 64% of respondents to the survey were dissatisfied with ferry reliability and 64% were dissatisfied with ferry frequency (Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), 2022a). In 2024, the recorded reliability and punctuality of Caledonian MacBrayne services across Scotland/*Alba* was 98.1% and 99.4% respectively (Scottish Transport Statistics, 2024). However, perceived reliability was only around 40%. The Scottish Islands Survey 2023 similarly reported that the perceived reliability of ferries is lower than reported statistics (Scottish Government, 2023). This is reflected in focus group findings that suggest that one of the biggest challenges of island life is the dependence on ferry links to the mainland.
- 5.1.3.10 Although the statistics suggest that ferry services may be more reliable than people perceive, the knock-on effects of a late or cancelled ferry (or connecting trains and flights) can be financially costly and cause other social effects such as abandonment of plans or cancelled events. The Road Equivalent Tariff, introduced by Transport Scotland/*Alba* in October 2008, boosted demand for car bookings on ferries in Scotland/*Alba* by around 20% (Transport Scotland, 2021). While most traffic is accommodated, difficulties in booking a space have risen, increasing the costs and risks of travel. The existing fleet is highly utilised and timetables are stretched, so operational changes to accommodate community needs or respond to disruptions are difficult (Cebr, 2022).

#### Air services

- 5.1.3.11 Air services on the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* arrive and depart from Stornoway Airport, 2.5 miles outside of Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. There are currently daily commercial flights to Inverness/*Inbhir Nis*, Edinburgh/*Dùn Èideann* and Glasgow/*Ghlaschu*, and a more limited commercial service to the Isle of Benbecula/*Beinn na Faoghla*. The most recent passenger numbers for Stornoway Airport during FY2023/24 were 105,007 total passengers. This represented a 1% increase on FY2022/23. Passenger numbers across the network of the Highlands and Islands airports sit at around 1% below pre-pandemic levels which were around 120,000-130,000 annual passengers in 2019/2020 (Highlands and Islands Airports Limited, 2024).

#### Travel to work

- 5.1.3.12 **Table 5-5** shows the distance travelled to work by residents of Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*, the Western Isles, and Scotland/*Alba* (NRS, 2022). 16.6% of residents in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and 17.7% of residents in the Western Isles travel more than 60km, compared with 14.7% for Scotland/*Alba*. A 60km radius from Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* extends to western parts of the mainland, Skye/*an Eilean Sgitheanach* and Harris/*Na Hearadh*, suggesting that these figures represent people who commute outside the island to work.

Table 5-5: Distance travelled to work

Distance travelled to work (%)	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/ Alba
Work at or mainly from home	28.4	28.9	31.6
Less than 2km	12.5	11.4	8.6
2km to <5km	11.2	10.2	12.9
5km to <10km	10.5	10.3	11.8
10km to <20km	9.7	9.8	10.8
20km to <60km	11.2	11.7	9.6
60km or more	16.6	17.7	14.7

Source: NRS, 2024

5.1.3.13 **Table 5-6** shows the method of travel to work for those residents who do not work at or mainly from home (NRS, 2022). This illustrates the importance of car or van availability in Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh and the Western Isles, with higher than average proportions of residents who commute either as a driver or passenger in a car or van, and lower than average proportions of residents who commute on foot, by bicycle or by public transport. There are notably high proportions of residents who commute by 'other' methods, reflecting the role of ferry and air travel for those who commute off the island for work.

Table 5-6: Method of travel to work

Method of travel to work (%)	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/ Alba
Driving a car or van	75.5	76.3	67.1
Passenger in a car or van	6.3	6.4	5.2
Taxi or private hire	0.7	0.6	0.9
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	0.2	0.2	0.3
On foot	7.4	6.8	10.6
Bicycle	0.7	0.7	2
Bus, minibus or coach	3.5	3.3	8.4
Train	0.7	0.7	3.3
Underground, subway or tram	0.1	0	0.3
Other	4.9	5	1.9

Source: NRS, 2024

## 5.1.4 COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES

5.1.4.1 A key theme to emerge from the focus groups and interviews was the pressure on service provision in Lewis/Eilean Leòdhais and the Western Isles. The challenges faced by service

providers were consistently acknowledged by almost all focus groups and interview participants as being at capacity, struggling to recruit staff or lacking funding to deliver the desired level of service.

5.1.4.2 This section provides an overview of service provision and facilities on Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*.

### Community facilities

5.1.4.3 The majority of commercial and retail activity on the island is located in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* town centre. There are small convenience stores and community shops at Cross/*Cros* (Ness/*Nis*), Barvas/*Barabhas*, Carloway/*Càrlabhadh* and Timsgrarry/*Timsgearraidh* (Uig/*Ùige*), and a mobile shop that visits villages once per week. There are approximately 40 honesty shops (small roadside kiosks selling local produce such as eggs) in Lewis, including at least 12 within the West Side SSA.

5.1.4.4 Many smaller rural communities have community centres which serve a variety of purposes including serving school clubs, coffee mornings, classes and clubs, exhibitions and other events such as summer fairs and celebrations of national holidays.

### Education

5.1.4.5 There are 12 primary schools in Lewis, including five (Shawbost/*Siabost* School, Uig/*Ùige* Primary School, Breasclate/*Breascleit* School, West Side School/*Sgoil an Taobh Siar*, and Lionel School) that are within the West Side SSA and two (Laxdale/*Lacasdail* School and Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* Primary School) that are within the Stornoway SSA. Others are located at Back School/*Sgoil a Bhac*, Tong School/*Sgoil Thunga*, Pairc School/*Sgoil na Pairce*, Sgoil an Rubha, and Sgoil nan Loch. There is one secondary school (The Nicolson Institute) in Lewis/*Leòdhas*, located in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. Scottish Government school estate statistics show that, in 2025 the Nicolson Institute had 1,038 pupils, 94.4% of its total capacity of 1,100.

5.1.4.6 Primary schools on the island are generally below their capacity, with those within the SSAs ranging from 36.0% of total capacity (Uig/*Ùige* Primary School) to 74% of total capacity (*Sgoil an Taobh Siar*/West Side School) (Scottish Government, 2025). The primary school at Tolsta/*Tolastadh* was temporarily closed in 2019, and the primary school at Bernera/*Beàrnaraigh* was temporarily closed in 2021. English medium provision at Breasclate/*Breascleit* School, and Gaelic medium provision at Pairc/*Pairc* School, were also temporarily closed from 2020. In June 2025 it was recommended that CnES should begin the statutory consultation process for the permanent closure of Tolsta/*Tolastadh* and Bernera/*Beàrnaraigh* Schools from academic year 2025/26 (CnES Education, Sport and Children's Services Committee, 2025).

5.1.4.7 According to a CnES response to a FOI request, challenges facing schools in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* include a national shortage in STEM subject teachers that means that it is difficult to fill vacant posts even where it is a permanent contract. In the most rural schools, maternity or long-term sickness absence cover roles can be difficult to fill across

almost every subject, with schools often relying on retired or supply staff (CnES, FOI request, July 2024). Factors that can affect teacher recruitment include unreliable transport links, the availability of affordable housing, and flexible working, requests for which are sometimes made as a result of the shortage of childcare for teachers' own children (CnES, FOI request, July 2024).

- 5.1.4.8 In November 2022, a 'Gaelic First' Policy was approved by CnES, which commits to promoting a Gaelic First ethos in all areas of local authority operations, and promoting the social, cultural, economic and educational value of Gaelic to the Isles. Since then, all early learning, nursery and school enrolment, operates the default language stream is Gaelic Medium unless the choice is made during the enrolment process to opt for English Medium (CnES, 2023).

### Tertiary education

- 5.1.4.9 There is one tertiary educational centre located in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, which is part of UHI North, West and Hebrides, formerly Lews Castle College and formerly UHI Outer Hebrides. UHI North, West and Hebrides has a student body of approximately 9,000 and offers distance learning across a range of subject areas, including vocational courses in subjects such as seamanship, fashion, engineering, horticulture and hospitality, and in-person degree level courses and research in subjects such as energy, pollution, peatlands, society, education and tourism.

### Childcare

- 5.1.4.10 There are thirteen childcare providers serving Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, and as of July 2024 there are also eight registered childminders. There is limited capacity in most settings and, according to an FOI request from CnES, childminders are all at capacity, with waiting lists. Staff shortages in the childcare sector in the Western Isles are reported due to a range of factors including difficulties in recruiting staff with appropriate qualifications and skills in Gaelic, particularly in rural areas; existing staff changing career or moving between settings; and difficulties fitting work around the school day (CnES, FOI, July 2024). Findings from focus group discussions revealed that a lack of childcare availability means that some parents lack the choice to go back to work, creating more challenges for parents and young families to move into island communities.

### Healthcare services

- 5.1.4.11 A&E services are provided by the Western Isles Hospital (WIH), a 212-bed hospital located in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. It includes general medicine, geriatrics, paediatrics, general surgery, orthopaedics, obstetrics, and gynaecology and psychiatry. When treatment cannot be provided on the island, patients are generally transported to Inverness/*Inbhir Nis* or Glasgow/*Ghlaschu*, making air links to those locations essential for island residents' healthcare provision. Pharmacies and dental practices are available in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. The Western Isles has community health services available for all age groups. There is a 5-bed Acute Psychiatric Unit

(Scotland M. W., 2023), which accepts referrals for people suffering from an acute episode of mental illness, 2 care homes for older people (Taigh Shiphoint and Bethesda), and 1 for adults with disabilities (Ardseileach). Capacity in care homes on the island is limited, and staff recruitment, retention, and age profile are reported issues (CnES FOI, November 2025).

5.1.4.12 GP practices are located in communities across the island, including in Carloway/*Càrlabhagh* and Borve/*Borgh* within the West Side SSA, and in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. The latest available data (2022) (Scotland P. H.) on healthcare facilities shows that there were 9 practices on the Western Isles serving an average of 3,176 people per practice. This ranks as the 3rd lowest out of all local authorities in Scotland/*Alba*. Based on the number of GPs working on the island, the GP to patient ratio is one GP to 848 patients, compared to 1 to 1,132 nationally. All the practices are accepting new patients, however, to become a permanent patient you need to be living in the area for over 3 months. Practices in the Western Isles are serving the second highest proportion of patients over the age of 75.

5.1.4.13 In 2022, HIE commissioned Ipsos to conduct a survey of adults aged 16+ living within the Highlands and Islands, including the Western Isles. The survey gathered data on how households feel about issues including availability of services, housing and employment. In relation to healthcare, the survey concluded that:

- A large majority (82%) of households in the Western Isles have access to a GP permanently located within a 20-minute drive of their local area.
- More than six in ten can access a permanent or visiting dentist (65%), midwife or health visitor (63%), and home care services (62%) within a 20-minute drive.
- 57% can access a physiotherapist within a 20-minute drive.
- Over half (52%) say they can access mental health services either in person or online, although one in three do not know of their availability (Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), 2022).

5.1.4.14 Whilst the evidence shows availability of health facilities, there are also signs that the current health care provision is facing pressures, including in relation to recruitment. It was noted that 48.7% of staff in post were over 50 and 13.85% of staff are over 60. The reduction in working aged population has already significantly impacted NHS Western Isles (Isles, NHS Western Isles, 2020). NHS Western Isles noted that overspend in 2019/20 was in part due to the requirement to use agency staff to enable services to be provided across the island.

### Places of worship

5.1.4.15 There is a high ratio of churches per head of population in the Western Isles, including 44 churches in Lewis. Most communities have a church, with several denominations represented, including Church of Scotland/*Alba*, Free Church of Scotland/*Alba*, Free, Associated and Reformed Presbyterian, Salvation, Brethren, and the New Wine Church. Churches have a range

of service and bible study times in addition to Sunday services. There is also a mosque in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*, which opened in 2018 and serves approximately 60 residents.

### Cemeteries

5.1.4.16 Cemeteries can be found along the coast of the West Side SSA, in Bosta/*Bostadh*, Dalmore/*Dail Mhor*, Bragar/*Bhràdhgair*, Barvas/*Barabhas*, and Habost/*Tàbost*, and at Sandwick/*Sanndabhaig* in the Stornoway SSA. Each of these directly overlooks the ocean and is in current use for burials and visits to family graves. Funerals and burials are important occasions on Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, with traditional rituals, some of which are still practised. For example, funerals and burials are usually conducted as soon as possible after a death, and much sooner after a death than mainland rituals.

### Leisure and recreation

5.1.4.17 Access to green or blue outdoors space within a five-minute walk of home is higher across the Scottish islands than for Scotland/*Alba* as a whole. Data from the Scottish Islands Survey shows that 91% of residents of the Scottish Islands have green or blue outdoor space within a five-minute walk of their home (Scottish Government, 2023), compared with 70% across Scotland/*Alba* (Scottish Government, 2022).

5.1.4.18 Swimming in open water, known as wild swimming, is a popular activity at beaches and lochs, and a number of informal swimming groups meet regularly and organise swims in local areas such as Uig/*Ùige* and Shawbost/*Siabost*. Sea sports such as surfing, paddleboarding and sea kayaking are also popular among locals as well as visitors, with the majority of surf spots located on the west coast, between Ness/*Nis* and Dalmore/*Dail Mhor*, and at Cliff and Mangersta in Uig/*Ùige*. NMPi mapping suggests that the most frequented area to surf, sea kayak or paddleboard on the island is along the west coast, particularly between Ballantrushal/*Baile an Truiseil* and Carloway/*Càrlabhaigh* (Marine Scotland, 2023). Strava heatmapping shows concentrations of surfing activity at Barvas/*Barabhas* and Dalmore/*Dail Mhor* beaches (Strava, 2025).

## 5.1.5 COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE

### Health and wellbeing

5.1.5.1 **Table 5-7** sets out Census data on self-reported general health (NRS, 2022). In general, across Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles there are slightly higher proportions of residents who report their health as good or very good, and slightly lower proportions of residents who report their health as bad or very bad. This is not the case in the SSAs, where the proportions of residents reporting their health as good or very good are below the local and national averages. There are also higher proportions of residents describing their health as fair, bad or very bad.

Table 5-7: Self-reported general health (%)

Self-reported general health	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/ Alba
Very good	47.9	45.8	49	48.7	48
Good	28	29.1	28.5	29.2	30.9
Fair	16.4	17.5	15.8	15.7	14.2
Bad	5.8	6	5.2	4.9	5.3
Very bad	1.9	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.6

Source: NRS, 2022

5.1.5.2 **Table 5-8** sets out Census data on long-term health conditions (NRS, 2022). This shows that the proportion of residents who do not have a long-term health condition is lower in both SSAs than the local and regional averages, at 43.8%. While the proportion of residents with mental health conditions is lower than the national average in both Stornoway SSA and the West Side SSA, there are higher than average rates of residents with physical disabilities and with long-term illness, disease or conditions. A similar pattern is recorded across Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh and the Western Isles. There are also higher than average proportions of residents who are deaf or partially hearing impaired, or blind or partially vision impaired, possibly reflecting the age profile of the population.

Table 5-8: Long-term health condition (%)

Long-term health condition	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh	Western Isles	Scotland/ Alba
Deaf or partially hearing impaired	8.2	10.3	8.6	8.5	7.1
Blind or partially vision impaired	3.2	2.8	2.9	3	2.5
Full/partial loss of voice or difficulty speaking	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Physical disability	11.4	12.2	10.6	10.2	9.7
Mental health condition	9.9	7.3	8.3	8	11.3
Long-term illness, disease or condition	23.2	23.2	22.4	22.3	21.4
None of the above	43.8	43.8	46.9	47.7	47.6

Source: NRS, 2022

- 5.1.5.3 Between 2022 and 2024, life expectancy figures (ONS, 2025) show a slight regional variation between Scotland/*Alba* overall and the Western Isles. In Scotland/*Alba*, male life expectancy was 77.1 years, while female life expectancy reached 81.1 years. In comparison, the Western Isles recorded a slightly lower life expectancy for males at 76.8 years, but a higher figure for females at 80.8 years. These differences may reflect regional health determinants, lifestyle factors, and access to healthcare services. Importantly, healthy life expectancy (i.e. how many years a person might live in a 'healthy' state) in the Western Isles was reported as 67 years for males which is seven years above the national average. Health life expectancy for females is 64 years, which is 4 years above the national average (NHS Western Isles, 2025).
- 5.1.5.4 Data from the Community Planning Outcomes Profile suggest that across the Western Isles there is a generally higher level of wellbeing among the population, with above average life expectancy, low crime, high levels of employment, and above average attendance and attainment among school age children (Scot PHO, 2024). However, there are challenges associated with alcohol, children referred to the children's reporter for offences<sup>5</sup>, connectivity, care at home for older people with high levels of care needs, and road safety. There is also an issue with smoking prevalence amongst 16 – 34 year olds with 33% smoking on the Western Isles, more than double the national rate (16%).
- 5.1.5.5 Research has found that young people (and LGBT+ young people in particular) in remote rural island communities are in need of additional support and education around sexual health, relationships and parenthood. Barriers to accessing this support include the availability of services, lack of transport to services, knowing healthcare staff personally, and the fear of being judged negatively in their community (MacGilleEathain, 2024)

### Physical Activity

- 5.1.5.6 The 2021 Scottish Household Survey (Survey, 2021) provides insight into physical activity levels across the country, including the Western Isles. Locally, participation in sport over the previous month was slightly below the national average, with 53% of respondents reporting participation in sporting activity, compared to 58% across Scotland/*Alba*. Despite a slightly lower participation rate, usage of local sports facilities in the Western Isles was in line with national figures. Satisfaction with these facilities was higher in the Western Isles, with 51% of respondents stating they were very or fairly satisfied, compared to 46% nationally. This suggests that while participation is slightly lower, the quality and accessibility of local facilities are viewed positively by the community.

### Mental Health

- 5.1.5.7 The Public Health Scotland's Mental Health Indicators project provides a mean adult mental health wellbeing score (aggregated from 2019 – 2023) across the NHS boards in Scotland/*Alba*

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<sup>5</sup> This was disputed by a representative of the police in Stornoway.

(Observatory, 2024). NHS Western Isles has the highest score of all the boards (higher is better) and is greater than the national average. That said, the suicide rate in the Western Isles is significantly higher than the national average, particularly among men (NRS, 2024), potentially linked to alcohol misuse, although there is a very wide confidence interval for Western Isles data due to the small population size, which may skew statistics.

5.1.5.8 Findings from the eighth annual Mental Health and Learning Disability Inpatient Census (Government, 2024) provides a snapshot of the individuals receiving care in mental health, addiction, and learning disability inpatient beds. According to the Census there were five patients being treated in psychiatric, addiction or learning disability beds by NHS Western Isles. This ranks as the lowest amongst the NHS boards, however, this is running at an 100% occupancy rate.

### Social Isolation

5.1.5.9 Living alone and social isolation can be a cause of both physical and mental health problems (CDC, 2024). One of the main causes is feeling marginalised or disconnected from your surroundings. The Western Isles Health Board area has the second highest proportion of single-person households among Scotland's/Alba 14 Health Boards. It is also considerably greater than the national average, (41% and 36% respectively) (Isles, Health Needs Assessment for the Western Isles, 2025). This is further exacerbated in the older demographics, with every age group older than 65 being above the national average.

### Children and young people

5.1.5.10 **Table 5-9** shows indicators related to children aged 0-19 in absolute low-income families (defined as a family with an income below 60% of median income) (DWP, 2025). Income is measured before housing costs are deducted and a family must have claimed one or more of: universal credit, tax credits or housing benefit at any point in the year to be classed as low income in these statistics.

5.1.5.11 The data shows that 10.5% of children aged 0-19 in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* were recorded as being in absolute low-income families in 2024. The overall proportion (13.07%) of children aged 0-19 in absolute low-income families is lower in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* compared to the Western Isles (10.8%) and Scotland/*Alba* (13.2%<sup>6</sup>).

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<sup>6</sup> Statistical disclosure control has been applied to these count figures to avoid the release of confidential data. Breakdowns may therefore not sum to the total amount of children in absolute low-income families due to the disclosure control applied. Sporad na Mara EIA Technical Appendix\_Social and economic baseline\_final draft\_clean, Volume 2c Page 5-51

Table 5-9: Children in absolute low-income families (%)

Children in low income families	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
Children aged 0-19 in absolute low-income families (2024)	10.5	10.8	13.2
Children aged 0-19 in relative low-income families (2024)	12.1	13.2	16.3

Source: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2025

## Older people

5.1.5.12 **Table 5-10** sets out data on the proportion of pensioners recorded as living in poverty in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*, the Western Isles, and Scotland/*Alba* (DWP, 2023).

Pensioners in poverty are those in receipt of Pension Credit. In August 2023, 14.7% of residents Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* aged 65 and over were in receipt of Pension Credit. This is slightly higher than the proportion of claimants in the Western Isles (14.2%) and higher than the proportion of claimants in Scotland/*Alba* (12%).

Table 5-10: Pension credit claimants, August 2023

Pension credit claimants	%
Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	14.7
Western Isles	14.2
Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>	12

Source: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2023

## Participation in community life

5.1.5.13 The Scottish Community Needs Index (SCNI) ranks local areas in Scotland/*Alba* according to a range of indicators relating to three domains: civic assets, connectedness, and active and engaged community (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, 2024). Areas are ranked between one and 1,279, with a rank closer to one representing higher levels of need and a rank closer to 1,279 representing lower levels of need. As **Table 5-11** shows, Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles both have lower levels of need according to this index than Scotland/*Alba* as a whole.

5.1.5.14 Voter turnout can also be taken as an indicator of community participation in public life. In the Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*, voter turnout at the most recent local elections in 2022 was 56.2%, slightly higher than the Western Isles (56%) and above the Scottish average (46.8%) (Electoral Commission, 2022).

Table 5-11: Participation in community life

	SCNI rank	Voter turnout at local elections
Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	1,059	56.2%
Western Isles	1,069	56%
Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>	641	46.8%

Source: Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, 2024; Electoral Commission, 2022

## Crime

5.1.5.15 The Western Isles as a whole is a low crime area, with a total of 572 recorded crimes in the year 2024-25 (Scottish Government, 2025). This equates to a rate of recorded crime of 220 crimes per 10,000 population, compared with the national rate of 545 crimes per 10,000 population for Scotland/*Alba*. Total crime in the Western Isles fell by 9% between 2023-24 and 2024-25, and by 12% over the decade between 2015-16 and 2024-25.

5.1.5.16 **Table 5-12** shows crimes by category in the Western Isles. The largest share of crimes in 2024-25 were non-sexual crimes of violence (which accounted for 21.5% of all crimes) and crimes against society (19.1% of all crimes) (Scottish Government, 2025).

Table 5-12: Recorded crimes in the Western Isles, 2020-2025

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Non-sexual crimes of violence (%)	25.4	27.5	34.0	24.1	21.5
Sexual crimes (%)	7.4	8.5	8.1	5.5	7.1
Crimes of dishonesty (%)	17.4	14.3	22.1	20.3	19.0
Damage and reckless behaviour (%)	16.6	12.5	15.4	15.2	14.3
Crimes against society (%)	29.6	24.5	36.5	24.2	19.1
Coronavirus restrictions (%)	3.7	0.3	0.0	n/a	n/a
Total crimes	706	618	820	630	572
Rate per 10,000 population (total crimes)	271	236	314	242	220

Source: Scottish Government, 2025

## Energy and fuel poverty

5.1.5.17 Fuel poverty is defined by the Scottish Government as any household spending more than 10% of their income on energy after housing costs have been deducted (Scottish Parliament, 2019). In 2022, 791,000 households (31% of all households) in Scotland/*Alba* were estimated to be in fuel poverty, of which 472,000 (18.5% of all households) were in extreme fuel poverty. In April 2022, Energy Action Scotland/*Alba* completed a mapping exercise showing the Western Isles local authority area to have the highest level of fuel poverty in Scotland/*Alba*, at 57%. It was stated that the reasons the Western Isles is the most fuel poor part of the country are the inclement weather conditions, dependence on electric heating and low levels of energy efficiency in homes (Energy Action Scotland, 2022).

5.1.5.18 The Scottish Islands Survey 2023 found that levels of fuel poverty and the cost of living were rated lower than the Scottish average across the Scottish islands on every measure that they reviewed (Scottish Government, 2023). In 2022, island respondents were found to have below Scottish average ratings for questions related to how well they were managing financially, and whether they were able to keep their homes comfortably warm. 6.8% of island residents reported that they were concerned about being able to pay for heating or hot water for the home in the next two to three months. 45.1% agreed with the statement ‘My home sometimes felt uncomfortably cold in the winter’. This is higher than the response at the Scottish level, where 77% responded that their home is always warm enough. 8.1% of island residents reported that they had had to choose between heating their home or buying food or essentials for themselves and their families.

### Digital connectivity

5.1.5.19 **Table 5-13** shows data for indicators covering broadband speed and availability and data usage. In Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh*, the average broadband download speed of 49.47Mb/s is similar to the Western Isles average (51.27Mb/s) and slower than the Scotland/*Alba* average (142.10Mb/s). Upload speeds are also slower than the Scottish average. The proportion of premises with broadband speeds that fall below the Universal Service Obligation (USO) is above average, at 3.1% in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and 3.6% in the Western Isles. This is reflected in SIMD data which shows that the proportion of premises without access to superfast broadband is slightly higher in Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles than Scotland/*Alba* as a whole.

Table 5-13: Broadband speed and availability

Indicator	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
Broadband Download Speed (Mb/s) (May-2023)	49.47Mb/s	51.27Mb/s	142.10Mb/s
Broadband Upload Speed (Mb/s) (May-2023)	10.48Mb/s	10.77Mb/s	17.91Mb/s
Premises with broadband speeds below the Universal Service Obligation (USO) (May-2023)	3.1%	3.6%	0.6%
Premises without access to superfast broadband (at least 30Mb/s download speed) (2020)	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%

Source: Ofcom, 2023 and Scottish IMD, 2020

### Food security

5.1.5.20 Access to food in the Highlands and Islands is identified by the Scottish Human Rights Commission as a significant human rights issue, particularly in the islands (Scottish Human Rights Commission, 2024). Most of the food in the local supermarkets in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* is imported from the mainland via ferry. This presents a challenge when the ferry is unable to run

due to circumstances such as weather or mechanical faults, making the supply of fresh produce such as milk, fruits, and vegetables vulnerable to connectivity issues. While improving ferry services allows the accessibility to more goods from out with the island, it also means that the island has gradually become less self-sufficient, and ferry disruption has a greater impact on daily life.

5.1.5.21 Food banks on the island are available in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh*. The Food Bank in Barvas/*Barabhvas* had demand for its service but closed in October 2024 due to a lack of donations. Food security can be improved by local food production, which includes food grown on crofts for individual use and sales, and a number of community food growing projects providing communal growing spaces. Community food projects on Lewis include Horshader community allotment and polycrubs<sup>7</sup> in Shawbost/*Siabost* and Dalmore/*Dail Mhor*, Tolsta Community Development Ltd. polycrub, and Grinneabhat community raised beds and polycrub in Bragar/*Bhràdhagair*.

### **Social capital and mutual support**

5.1.5.22 Social capital refers to the interactions between people and communities, and how networks, dependencies and relationships, especially those involving 'goodwill', can be a resource within a society (Adler & Kwon, 2002). For an individual, social capital is formed through the nature of their social relations. Focus group participants highlighted social capital and mutual support as important and highly valued features of community life on Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, which contribute to the island community's resilience. A number of groups referred to examples such as non-monetary labour exchanges and swaps between neighbours, close family ties, and high levels of mutual support within the island. This included references to compensating for strained social services and infrastructure, discussed above, which can present everyday challenges to residents. The community food projects discussed above also provide resilience and support the self-sufficiency of islanders.

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<sup>7</sup> Polycrubs are polycarbonate greenhouses, originally designed in Shetland. Until 2024, grants were available for construction of polycrubs.

## 6 CULTURE AND IDENTITY

6.1.1.1 This section describes some elements of living and past culture that are distinct from mainland Scottish culture, some of which are intangible and cannot be quantified. Further information relating to cultural heritage is provided in **Chapter 15, Volume 2a**.

### 6.2 MATERIAL HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

#### 6.2.1 HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

6.2.1.1 Many communities in the Western Isles have their own historical society (Comunn Eachdraidh) which gather and preserve local historical and cultural heritage in the form of physical museum artefacts and oral history archive material. In Lewis, the majority of these are concentrated on the west coast: Ness/*Nis*, Barvas/*Barabhas* and Brue/*Bru*, the west coast, Carloway/*Càrlabagh*, Bernera/*Beàrnaraigh* and Uig/*Ùige* all have their own Comunn Eachdraidh, and as a result local history is well-documented.

#### 6.2.2 STANDING STONES

6.2.2.1 The geology of the west coast of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* is distinct from other parts of the Western Isles and Scotland/*Alba*. Formed of Lewisian Gneiss and known to be some of the oldest rock on the planet, rock and stone is a natural part of the material culture of the island. The most obvious uses of stone in the material cultural heritage of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* are the standing stones and megaliths on the island. The most well-known are at Callanish/*Calanais* where there are multiple stone circle sites that are understood to be interconnected with one another and with the wider landscape, notably the range of hills to the south of the stones known as Cailleach na Mointeach (The Old Woman of the Moors) and an 18.6 year lunar cycle (McHardy, 2010). This extended site forms a significant part of the landscape and history of the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, as well as an important visitor attraction. For many people, including but not exclusively those following Pagan or New-Age beliefs and tradition, it is perceived to be a sacred landscape.

6.2.2.2 Trushal Standing Stone/*Clach an Trushal* is the largest standing stone in Scotland/*Alba* and is also located on the west coast of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*. There is evidence that other monoliths might have stood around or together with the Trushal Standing Stone/*Clach an Trushal* but have been removed (Historic Environment Scotland, n.d.). Its location makes it highly visible from the sea and suggests that it could be a significant sea mark used by fishermen.

### 6.2.3 OBJECTS AND ARTEFACTS

- 6.2.3.1 Many objects and artefacts which have been preserved or discovered are everyday household items dating from the Bronze Age such as pots and pottery sherds, crofting tools, saddle querns for milling grain, and glass beads. Hoards of objects dating from various periods are sometimes found preserved in the peat and under the sand dunes of the machair.
- 6.2.3.2 A number of historically and archaeologically significant artefacts have been found in coastal cemeteries on the island, and sometimes within the historical gravesites nearby which they succeeded, including but not limited to cist burials and other Iron Age excavations at Swainbost (Duffy, MacGregor, & Hunter, 2007). Other sites noted for their archaeological significance include the cemeteries at Barvas/*Barabhas*, Bragar/*Bhràdhagair* and Dalmore/*Dail Mhor* (Barrowman, Francoz, Hooper, Rennie, & Tompsett, 2020).
- 6.2.3.3 The burial ground near Barvas/*Barabhas* beach has been intermittently excavated since 1976. Most findings have been either Prehistoric or Norse, and include flint, arrowheads, tools, pottery, a saddle quern for grinding grain, jewellery, including the iron bracelet and a brooch found within an Iron Age burial (MacLeod M. , 2000).
- 6.2.3.4 Whale hunting took place in the islands until 1934, during which time men travelled from the islands to work in the whaling industry, which created global connections, with stories of whaling being brought back to the islands (Hebridean Connections, 2025). Whalebone is therefore another material associated with the material cultural heritage of the islands, evident in the Whalebone Arch in Bragar/*Bhràdhagair* and the Lewis Chessmen, found in Uig/*Ùige* in the 19th Century. The origins and makers of the Lewis (or Uig/*Ùige*) Chessmen are unclear and subject to speculation, with some believing they were crafted in Norway or Iceland, demonstrating the connection between the Western Isles and the Nordic/Viking world (Visit Outer Hebrides, 2025).

### 6.2.4 WOOL AND HARRIS TWEED

- 6.2.4.1 Due to the large numbers of sheep reared in the Western Isles and wider Scotland/*Alba*, wool is a material linked to Scottish and island identity, and used in many products including tweed. Originally tweed cloth was made entirely by hand, but the popularity of tweed in the nineteenth century led to a period of global production of imitation Harris Tweed. This eventually led to a protected heritage industry trademark for Harris Tweed, to indicate 'a tweed made from pure virgin wool produced in Scotland/*Alba*, spun, dyed, and finished in the Outer Hebrides and Hand-woven by the Islanders at their own homes in the Islands of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, Harris/*Na Hearadh*, Uist/*Uibhist*, Barra/*Barraigh*' (Angus MacLeod Archive, 2025). The tweed industry is a significant employer on the island and there are currently around 200 certified weavers in the Western Isles, either working in one of three mills, including

Carloway/Càrlabhadh Mill which is situated on the west coast of Lewis, or in their own homes (Harris Tweed Authority, 2025).

## 6.2.5 ST KILDA / HIORT

- 6.2.5.1 Forty miles west from the nearest landmass, St. Kilda/*Hiort* is an archipelago with four main islands and forms the westernmost point of the Western Isles and the United Kingdom. The traditions and culture of the archipelago are well known and protected, along with its biodiversity importance, as a double UNESCO World Heritage Site. Although St Kilda/*Hiort* had its own unique culture before its population decline and eventual evacuation in 1930, it is culturally connected to the broader history of the Western Isles, through familial links and cultural heritage. Some of these connections can be understood through recognising similar traditions that exist in the living culture and traditions in the Western Isles, such as subsistence hunting for seabirds (i.e. the Guga Hunt), which was the main food source on St Kilda/*Hiort*. St Kilda/*Hiort*'s Norse place names such as Soay/*Soaigh*, meaning 'Sheep Isle' (Ferguson, 2006) also indicate a shared settlement history.
- 6.2.5.2 Between the months of April and September, commercial boat tours, cruises, and privately chartered boats bring visitors to the main island of Hirta/*Hiort*. Within the last 20 years, tourism has increased significantly, with St. Kilda/*Hiort* hosting an average of 5,112 visitors annually (The Scotsman, 2022). The increase in tourism, along with factors such as climate change, risk of invasive non-native species and avian influenza, poses a threat to the archipelago's indigenous ecosystems which house the largest population of seabirds in North-West Europe (National Trust for Scotland, 2022).

## 6.3 LIVING HERITAGE ACTIVITIES

### 6.3.1 CROFTING

- 6.3.1.1 Crofting forms an important aspect of local cultural identity (SRUC, 2024), highlighting how agriculture is connected economically and culturally to wider island life. It is described as 'the foundation of life, language and culture, important for maintaining rural population in areas where it would otherwise have disappeared' (NatureScot, 2019). It is interconnected with ways of life and the local island Gaelic culture and makes a significant contribution to the social and economic fabric of the islands (NatureScot, 2019).
- 6.3.1.2 A number of traditions relating to crofting are practised in the rural communities of Lewis and elsewhere in the Western Isles, such as animal feed production using landrace grains and seasonal grazing. Annual activities such as the movement of livestock and disease management are carried out on a communal basis in some communities (Mahon, 2024). The importance of

natural resources to islanders, particularly for the continuation of local traditions and intergenerational transmission of skills and Gaelic language, was highlighted in focus groups.

### 6.3.2 PEAT CUTTING

6.3.2.1 The wide and specific Gaelic vocabulary associated with peat in its natural form as moorland blanket bog, and relating to the cultural practice of peat cutting, reflects the depth of the tradition of cutting peat for fuel and use of the moorland (Campbell, 2013). Traditional peat cutting is a seasonal, intergenerational and communal activity, carried out at peat banks associated with individual families or crofts. As such, it is an activity that is strongly associated with identity and belonging, and is a key part of transmission of traditional skills and language. This was highlighted by focus group participants, including the youth focus group who perceive the intactness of Gaelic culture as being intertwined with family continuity, seasonal communal activities and passing on traditional skills.

### 6.3.3 FISHING

6.3.3.1 Many people keep a boat for recreational fishing or small-scale subsistence fishing, and the catch is often shared with neighbours or friends. In Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, a number of coastal communities such as Great Bernera/*Beàrnaraigh* are still active fishing communities where there is continued but fragile transmission of traditional knowledge through continued intergenerational fishing activity, carried out either on a small scale or recreationally. Fishing is highly present in cultural memory, preserved through stories and songs. There is a vast body of knowledge relating to the seabed, sea conditions, fish habitats held by fishers. In addition, those who fish hold knowledge relating to safety and navigation, such as intricate coastal mental maps and knowledge of sea marks, and as such the relationship between coastal communities and the sea forms a significant part of cultural identity of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and of the Western Isles as a whole (Sheòrais, 2005).

### 6.3.4 THE GUGA HUNT

6.3.4.1 A tradition of the Ness/*Nis* community in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, the hunt for Guga (young gannet) takes place on the island of Sula Sgeir, 40 miles off the Ness/*Nis* coast. The Guga hunt has traditionally taken place annually since the 15th century but has been suspended in recent years due to the pressures of Avian Influenza on the gannet population. It is monitored and licensed by NatureScot, which gives a quota of birds to be killed for food. A license for 500 birds was granted for the 2025 season (BBC, 2025). The hunt is carried out using pole and noose to catch birds from open cliff faces over two weeks during August, by a group of hunters who stay on the island for the entire period of the hunt. The birds are caught, then processed and preserved using salt on Sula Sgeir before being transported back to mainland Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* to form a part of the traditional winter diet. Guga is still a popular food source when

the hunt is permitted to take place (Hebridean Connections, 2025). This is another practice which ties people to place.

### 6.3.5 CEILIDH CULTURE

6.3.5.1 The ceilidh tradition is a part of the living culture that preserves the oral tradition. Ceilidh comes from the Gaelic word for a 'visit' or 'gathering', reflecting its origins as a social event. In the Western Isles and elsewhere in the *Gàidhealtachd* ('the realm of the Gael', or the Highlands and Islands), in contrast to the use of the term on the Scottish mainland to refer to traditional dancing, ceilidh culture is reflected in community and connection. The continuation of language and transmission of traditional knowledge is dependent on such events where there is intergenerational gathering.

6.3.5.2 Oral traditions such as song, storytelling and transmission of place-specific knowledge are a part of the cultural heritage of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the Western Isles. The Gaelic Bards were oral historians and poets who played an important role in communities. Until the late twentieth century the Bardic tradition was still intact in many of the rural villages. The oral rather than written nature of the Gaelic literary tradition means that there are inherent limitations on the extent to which the canon of Gaelic song, stories and poetry can be quantified or described. A fraction of this canon of oral history has been recorded or transcribed and can be found in sources such as *Bliadhna nan Òrain* (*Bliadhna nan Orain*, n.d.) or *Tobar an Dualchais* (*Tobar an Dualchais*, n.d.). Modern Gaelic poetry and literature adds to the quantity of written material and much of it follows similar themes to traditional songs such as connections to land and emigration.

## 6.4 COMMUNITY IDENTITY

### 6.4.1 GAELIC LANGUAGE

6.4.1.1 Scottish Gaelic is a written and spoken language within the *Gàidhealtachd* (Maclean, 2021). It is a member of the Celtic language family, closely related to Manx and Irish Gaelic, and more distantly related to the other Celtic languages Welsh, Breton and Cornish. It has a history of use since the 4th Century in Scotland/*Alba*, and displaced Pictish to become the majority language of Scotland/*Alba* until around the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. In North West Scotland/*Alba*, its use strengthened after the loss of Norse sovereignty and eventually displaced the Norse language in that region (Maclean, 2021). Gaelic was spoken as a first language across much of Scotland/*Alba* until the Scots language became more dominant in the South and East of the country. The Western Isles form 'a vibrant part of the *Gàidhealtachd*, with a different cultural context to the rest of the country' (NatureScot, 2019), and Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* is the current and ancestral territory of a significant proportion of first-language speakers of Scottish Gaelic (McEwen-Fujita, 2010).

6.4.1.2 Scottish Gaelic is classified as ‘Definitely Endangered’ according to the UNESCO criteria for language endangerment, meaning the language is no longer learnt as a mother tongue in the home (UNESCO, 2024). However, according to stakeholder interviews, observation and the draft *Gaelic Plan for North West Lewis / Plana Gàidhlig Iar-Thuath Leòdhais* (2025), which covers the area from Ness/Nis to Lochganvich, in the Western Isles the language might be close to UNESCO’s classification of ‘Vulnerable’ (“most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains”), albeit with large degrees of variation between households. The Gaelic Language (Scotland/Alba) Act 2005 was passed by the Scottish Parliament with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland/*Alba*, making it equal in status to the English language.

6.4.1.3 **Table 6-1** sets out data from the 2022 Census which shows that, across Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles, more than a quarter of the population (aged three and above) can speak, read and write Gaelic, compared to 0.8% nationally (NRS, 2022), while more than half have some skills in Gaelic, compared to 2.5% nationally. In the West Side SSA, 62.45% have some skills in Gaelic, while in the Stornoway SSA the figure is lower, at 48.7%. The *Gaelic Plan for North West Lewis / Plana Gàidhlig Iar-Thuath Leòdhais* (2025) suggests that this data may be an underestimate due to the possibility that Gaelic speakers may under-report their skills.

Table 6-1: Gaelic language skills (%)

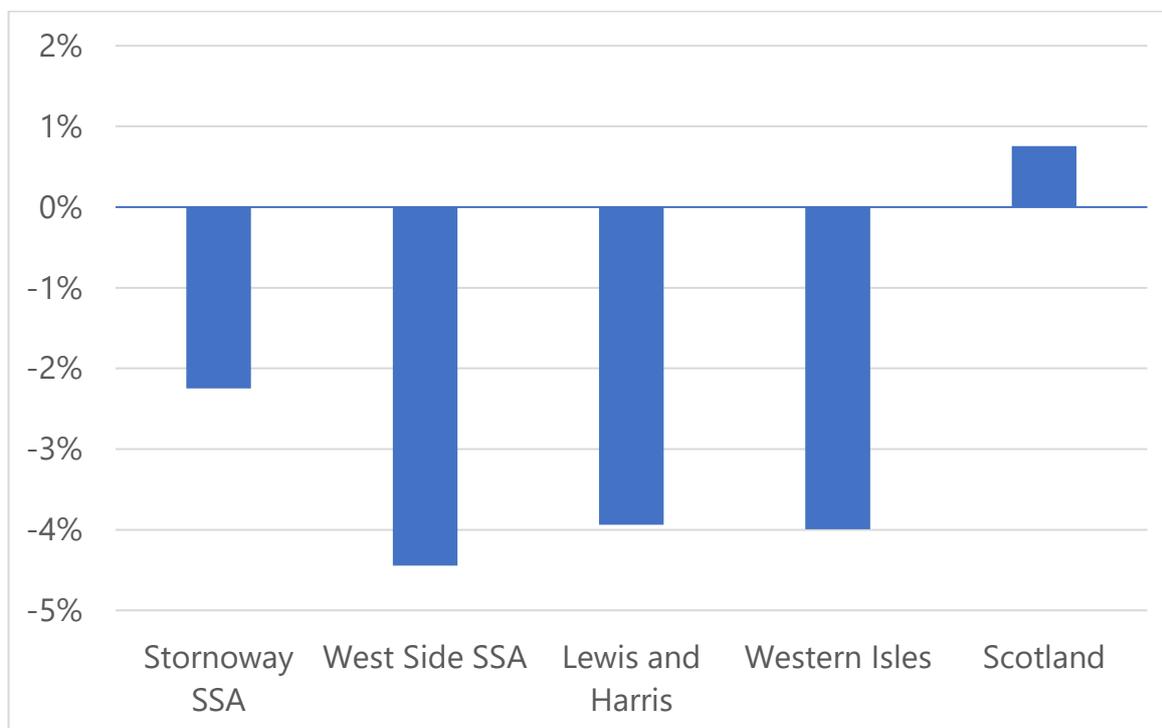
Gaelic language skills	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
Speaks, reads and writes Gaelic	18.9	35	25.3	27.3	0.8
Understands but does not speak, read or write Gaelic	13.1	8.8	11.2	11.2	0.9
Speaks but does not read or write Gaelic	10.1	10.7	10.8	11.6	0.3
Speaks and reads but does not write Gaelic	5.1	6.7	5.9	5.8	0.1
Reads but does not speak or write Gaelic	1.1	0.9	1	1	0.2
Other skills in Gaelic	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.1
No skills in Gaelic	51.3	37.6	45.4	42.8	97.5

Source: NRS, 2022

6.4.1.4 The 2022 Census shows that, since 2011, there has been an increase in both the number and percentage of Gaelic speakers at the national level, but a decrease in both the number and

percentage of speakers at the local level within the Western Isles. **Plate 6-1** illustrates the change in the proportion of residents aged over three with some skills in Gaelic between 2011 and 2022.

Plate 6-1: Change in the proportion of residents aged over three with some skills in Gaelic, 2011-2022



Source: NRS, 2022 and 2011

6.4.1.5 Reasons for this are attributed to natural as well as human factors. Gaelic has been supported by Scottish Government initiatives such as through provision of resources for language learners and Gaelic media. It was reported in stakeholder interviews, as well as a recent survey of Gaelic speakers in North West Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, and the resulting *Gaelic Plan for North West Lewis / Plana Gàidhlig Iar-Thuath Leòdhais (2025)*, however, that Gaelic has not been adequately supported by Scottish Government via national strategies at the community or local level in areas such as the Western Isles, where there are high numbers of speakers and where intergenerational transmission of the language still occurs. Demographic change may play a role in the reported decline of Gaelic within the Western Isles, as older people for whom Gaelic was their first language may have died since the 2011 Census was carried out. Historically, significant decline in Gaelic language use on the west coast of Lewis has also been triggered by rapid socio-economic change connected to boom-and-bust industry, and disruption to self-directed work such as tweed weaving and crofting, caused by the growth in wage labour (McEwen-Fujita, 2010).

6.4.1.6 The Gaelic language spoken in the Western Isles is distinct from the standardised variety of Gaelic taught to learners, and within the Western Isles there are also a number of different

language varieties. The local language contains ecological and cultural knowledge associated with crofting and land stewardship, which is traditionally passed on through the oral tradition. The roles of community cohesion and intergenerational transmission of language are recognised as critical to language survival (UNESCO, 2024). Such knowledge systems are also established to be of value to biodiversity and climate change adaptation (UNESCO, 2003). The Gaelic context is culturally distinct from the English-speaking world by way of its oral tradition, holistic worldview, and the responsibility and relationship to land expressed in the Gaelic word *Dùthchas* (Meighan, 2022).

- 6.4.1.7 North West Lewis is a recognised area of linguistic significance. At present, the vitality of the language is at a critical point where there is a general decline in use and a minority who can speak, read and write in Gaelic, but the majority of people in the area have some skills in Gaelic. It is becoming less common for families to pass on the language through community-based traditional skills, which is contributing to a loss of language.
- 6.4.1.8 The *Gaelic Plan for North West Lewis / Plana Gàidhlig Iar-Thuath Leòdhais* reports a lack of confidence in relation to the language, which combined with the trend of Gaelic becoming a language associated with the classroom rather than the home domain is a threat to language survival. It also highlights other threats such as demographic changes. These include a continuation of younger Gaelic speakers moving away, and more English speakers settling in traditionally Gaelic speaking areas.
- 6.4.1.9 However, there is a rich resource in the form of community members with knowledge of Gaelic culture, language and traditions. This resource is currently not supported at a level that would maximise its potential. Community and family activities that support transmission of the language are highlighted as being of critical importance for the survival of the language outside the formal setting of the classroom, and are not currently receiving adequate funding. The Plan also highlights a desire locally for more job opportunities related to Gaelic language and culture, integration of Gaelic into everyday life, and the broader need for consistent funding of policies, activities and programmes aimed at Gaelic language maintenance and revival.
- 6.4.1.10 A majority of school children are enrolled in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in the North West Lewis area, however, there are challenges associated with inclusivity of incomers, and lack of support for non-Gaelic speaking parents of children in GME to become fluent themselves. Outside of GME classroom learning, Gaelic language learning opportunities are available at Grinneabhat and conversation sessions are held at Comunn Eachdraidh Nis. It is reported in the *Gaelic Plan for North West Lewis / Plana Gàidhlig Iar-Thuath Leòdhais* that there is a high demand for classes but a lack of trained Gaelic tutors available to teach.
- 6.4.1.11 The *Gaelic Plan for North West Lewis / Plana Gàidhlig Iar-Thuath Leòdhais* sets out a number of priority action areas for maintaining and reviving Gaelic in the area. These include Language Accessibility and Support; Image and Confidence; Community and Cultural Activities; Education;

Intergenerational Engagement; Employment and Funding; Visibility and Promotion; Government and Policy, and Housing.

## 6.4.2 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TIES

- 6.4.2.1 Gaelic speaking communities have naming traditions that are distinct from English naming traditions. These exist in the Highlands and Islands and are particularly pronounced in the Western Isles and in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*. It is of culturally distinct importance within these communities to know which family, rather than which geographical area, a person comes from in order to understand someone's personal and family identity. It is noted that in the Gaelic culture, people belong to place, rather than a place belonging to people (Urras Coimhearsnachd Bhràdhagair agus Àrnoil, 2020).
- 6.4.2.2 Through distinct Gaelic naming traditions, kinship ties can be recorded, remembered and communicated. Distinctive nicknames and use of a Gaelic patronymic formed from the father's name and ancestry (or sometimes matronymic coming from the mother's side) express kinship ties and identity (MacLeod, 2019). These naming traditions are common in the Hebrides, particularly in the rural communities of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* where large proportions of the community are Gaelic speakers with ancestral ties to the island, some who claim links to the same village going back to the first farmers. As such, Gaelic naming traditions are distinct markers of cultural identity and belonging.

## 6.4.3 PLACE NAMES AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

- 6.4.3.1 Many place names in the Western Isles preserve Norse historical influence on the islands during the 9th to the 14th centuries, at which time the Norse language may have been spoken side by side with Gaelic. A greater Norse influence can be seen in Orkney and Shetland but is less prominent in place names on mainland Scotland/*Alba*. While in Orkney and Shetland there is little evidence of place names that pre-date the Norse settlement, in the Hebrides, there is evidence of early Celtic names which still survive in Gaelic and English forms (National Library of Scotland, 1981).
- 6.4.3.2 The Lewis moorland in particular is a unique cultural landscape with thousands of connected toponyms which would have been used for navigation when it was inhabited, and associated stories and terminology which highlight its cultural importance. The moorland was also the location of summer dwellings (*àiridhean*) which were in use until the 1950s for transhumance. The inhabitation of the island interior in the earlier periods of settlement is occasionally seen in the unearthing of artefacts from underneath the peat. As there is strong continuity of community in Lewis, knowledge of the landscape, including place names, stories, folklore and songs relating to the moor and the supernatural are still accessible to an extent that is not possible in other parts of the UK. The naming of small landscape features was common and the density of place names reflects the extent of human habitation, use and influence of the natural

environment, family connections to places and other place-related aspects of family or community identity (Urras Coimhearsnachd Bhràdhagair agus Àrnoil, 2020).

6.4.3.3 Settlement patterns in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the Western Isles are heavily associated with the coast. Other manifestations of islanders' relationship with the sea have been discussed above, including in relation to the "blue economy" (fisheries, aquaculture, seaweed harvesting, etc.). The sea also has an influence on other socio-cultural elements such as the use of the coastal machair for crofting, visual arts and oral traditions, and recreational activities. Comments from an interview participant highlight that the locations of local cemeteries close to beaches at Barvas/*Barabhas*, Bragar/*Bhràdhagair*, and Dalmore/*Dail Mhor* creates a connection between modern day activity and sites of ancestral significance and spiritual importance 'The cemetery where my ancestors are buried looks over the sea where I surf, so there is something precious about this coast. There's a sense of identity interwoven with that, a sense of 'this is who we are', and we're in connection with the landscape' [Interview participant]. Everyday experiences, such as the necessity of crossing a body of water in order to leave the island, also mean that islanders have to be attuned to the rhythms of the marine spaces around the island, and most islanders are familiar with and have to adapt to the ocean's seasonality, volatility, and rhythms; tides, sea swell and weather conditions all have a moderating influence on daily life.

#### 6.4.4 BELIEFS

6.4.4.1 Local belief systems are embodied in both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the island, and form part of the local identity across the island and in local communities. Lewis has a well-known tradition related to observance of Sunday as a day of rest, but the contemporary spiritual identity of the island is more complex and includes a number of different Presbyterian congregations, as well as Catholic and Episcopal churches, smaller Christian groups, and a mosque. There is also a Secular Society which is in favour of reducing Sabbath observance. There are elements of cultural heritage that reflect belief systems dating from pre-Christian eras, the Celtic church, the Viking era, and the Protestant Reformation. There is also a presence of New Age and Pagan groups who attend the Callanish/*Calanais* stones at key dates in the Pagan calendar.

6.4.4.2 Chapels, Norse mills and healing wells populate the west coast of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and have been mapped and described in detail. There are at least 21 chapels on the west coast of Lewis between the Butt of Lewis/*Rubha Robhanais* and Uig/*Ùige*, notably Teampall Mholuidh (Chapel of St Moluag) near Eoropie/*Eòropaidh*, and Teampall Mhoire (St Mary) underneath the sand dunes at Barvas/*Barabhas*. Teampall Eoin (St John) at Bragar/*Bhràdhagair* also has a Celtic or Norse name, Cill Sgàire. There are at least another 11 chapels on the east side of the island. Most of these chapels are situated near the shore, often close to cemeteries, and they form an 'unspoken part of the landscape and the history of the place' (MacLeod F. , 2022). They also form part of the story of early Christianity and other spiritual belief systems practiced on the

island. Healing properties are associated with water sources on the island, which is another testament to earlier belief systems and ways of understanding the world.

6.4.4.3 The relevance of the island’s archaeological heritage and other historic sites to the present population are varied, acting as tourism attractions but also places which embody ancestral ties to place, as expressed in focus groups: "*Gearrannan and the Blackhouse are tourist attractions, but they're also a part of our history and culture.*" [Youth focus group]. Many focus group participants expressed a sense of custodianship of the natural environment, through low intensity farming, intergenerational activity and preference for conservation over development. Some participants mentioned ancestral connections to the land and the cultural obligations to future generations inherent within the Gaelic cultural worldview.

## 6.4.5 RELIGION

6.4.5.1 **Table 6-2** shows the proportion of the population by religion (NRS, 2022). Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* (39.2%) and the Western Isles (35.3%) have a higher proportion of residents who describe their religion as Church of Scotland/*Alba* than the Scottish average (20.4%). The SSAs, Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles also record higher than average proportions of residents who describe their religion as ‘other Christian’. This is particularly the case in the West Side SSA, where 22.7% of residents are recorded as ‘other Christian’ compared with 5.1% nationally. It is likely that this reflects the local importance of the Free Church of Scotland/*Alba*, formed following the Disruption of 1843 which split the Church of Scotland/*Alba*. Across the SSAs, Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* and the Western Isles, there are lower than average proportions of residents who state they have no religion, and lower than average proportions of residents who belong to other religions.

Table 6-2: Religion (%)

Religion	Stornoway SSA	West Side SSA	Lewis and Harris/ <i>Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh</i>	Western Isles	Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>
Church of Scotland/ <i>Alba</i>	42.9	36.2	39.2	35.3	20.4
Roman Catholic	4.3	2.9	3.6	12.1	13.3
Other Christian	14.3	22.7	19	16.2	5.1
Buddhist	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Hindu	0.2	0	0.1	0.1	0.6
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0.1
Muslim	1.1	0	0.3	0.2	2.2
Sikh	0	0	0	0	0.2
Pagan	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.4
Other religion	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2
No religion	32.1	30.8	31.6	29.9	51.1

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Stornoway SSA</b>	<b>West Side SSA</b>	<b>Lewis and Harris/Leòd has agus Na Hearadh</b>	<b>Western Isles</b>	<b>Scotland/ Alba</b>
Religion not stated	4.7	6	5.2	5.1	6.2

Source: NRS, 2022

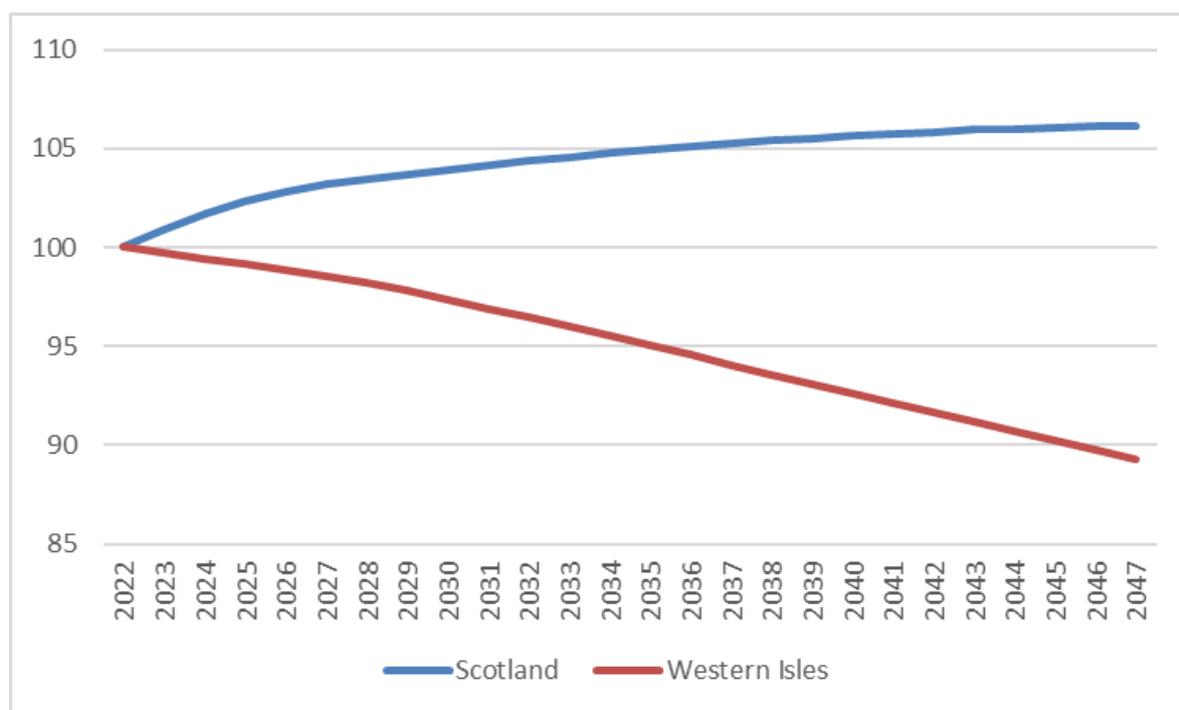
- 6.4.5.2 The church (both Church of Scotland/*Alba* and Free Church of Scotland/*Alba*) has a lasting influence on life in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, particularly regarding Sabbath observance. Historically, no work or recreational activities were allowed on Sundays. Until recently, this was reflected in the closure of shops, the suspension of public transportation, and restrictions on leisure activities. At present, some pubs and restaurants in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* are open on Sundays, and it is also possible to buy fuel at one garage. While some of the restrictions have eased, the Sabbath remains a day of observance for many. The recent decision by the Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* Tesco supermarket to open on Sundays was a front page local news article and subject of a petition, indicating the polarising nature of the subject of Sabbath observance on the island.
- 6.4.5.3 Many church services in Lewis are conducted in Gaelic which has helped preserve the language. The psalm singing tradition, where unaccompanied singing of Gaelic psalms is performed in a unique, emotive style, is also a significant cultural and religious practice that is still observed in some congregations.

## 7 FUTURE BASELINE

### 7.1.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

7.1.1.1 The latest subnational population projections for Scotland/Alba are 2022-based, i.e. they are estimated based on the population data from the 2022 Census. According to these projections, the population of the Western Isles is expected to decrease by 930, or 3.6%, over the decade from 2022 to 2032, while the population of Scotland/Alba is expected to increase by 4.4%. Over the period from 2022 to 2047, it is projected that the population of the Western Isles could decrease by nearly 2,802, or 10.7%. Over the same period, the population of Scotland/Alba is projected to increase by 6.2% (NRS, 2025). **Plate 7-1** shows indexed population change over this period, for the Western Isles and for Scotland/Alba.

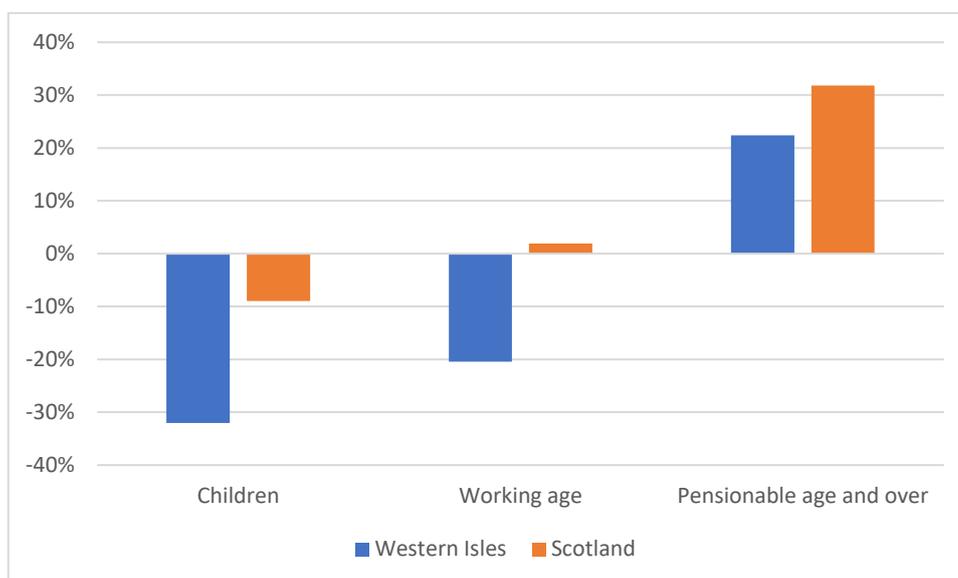
Plate 7-1: Indexed population change



Source: NRS, 2025

7.1.1.2 **Plate 7-12** shows the projected change in the population by age group over the period from 2022 to 2047, in the Western Isles and in Scotland/Alba. It shows that the population of children and people of working age is expected to fall by over 30% in the Western Isles, while it is expected that there will be an increase in the population who are of pensionable age. Scotland/Alba is expected to see smaller decreases in the population of children and working-age people, and a larger increase of over 30% in the population of people of pensionable age (NRS, 2025).

Plate 7-2: Projected population change by age group, 2022-2047

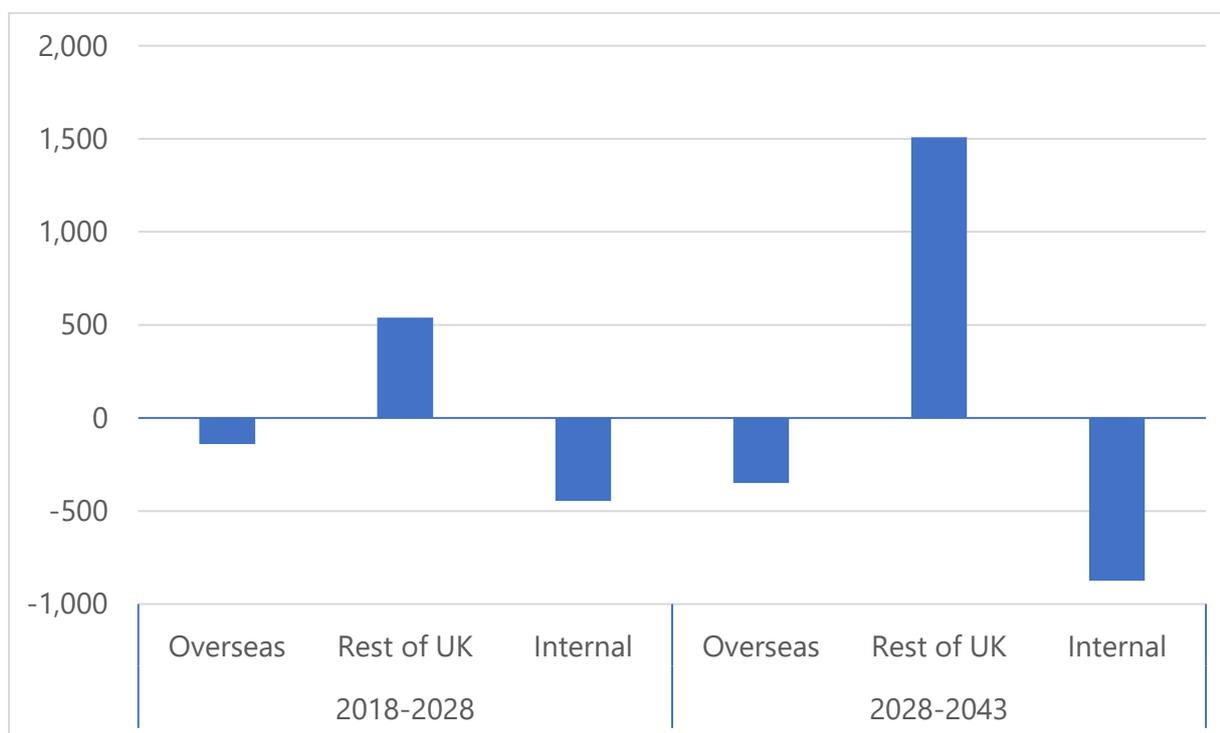


Source: NRS, 2025

7.1.1.3 Analysis by Copus and Hopkins suggests that the predicted decrease in the population of the Western Isles – the largest projected for any local authority in Scotland/*Alba* – is associated with ‘an age structure which is both a legacy of past out-migration and forms a key driver of the future trend’. They point out that the relatively small number of children and young people compared with older people, rather than the absolute number of older people, will lead to a shrinking working age population, which requires significant net in-migration to counteract (Copus, A. and J Hopkins, 2018).

7.1.1.4 **Plate 7-3** uses components of change data from the subnational population projections and shows that, between 2018 and 2028, the Western Isles are projected to experience net out-migration, with higher numbers of people moving overseas and elsewhere in Scotland/*Alba* and slightly lower numbers of people moving into the islands from the rest of the UK. Between 2028 and 2043, it is projected that the Western Isles will experience net in-migration, driven by a high number of people moving from elsewhere in the UK. However, total net migration in this period would be 283, considerably lower than the decrease in population associated with natural change (i.e. the difference between births and deaths).

Plate 7-3: Projected migration, 2018-2028 and 2028-2043, Western Isles



Source: NRS, 2020

## 7.1.2 SERVICE PROVISION

7.1.2.1 As noted elsewhere in this baseline, the decrease in the population, particularly among children and working-age people, could have implications in terms of the sustainability of public services in the longer-term, including primary schools. Given the projected decrease in the population of children, it is likely that this trend could continue, due to decreasing demand and falls in school rolls.

7.1.2.2 Conversely, it is likely that there will be increasing demand for healthcare provision associated with an ageing population, which could put pressure on local GP, hospital and care services, particularly in the context of a falling working-age population which could make it more difficult to recruit qualified staff.

## 7.1.3 GAELIC LANGUAGE

7.1.3.1 The future of Gaelic is uncertain and complex. The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community: A comprehensive sociolinguistic survey of Scottish Gaelic (Ó Giollaigáin et al., 2020) suggested that within 10 years indigenous islander Gaelic communities could disappear. An alternative projection is that Gaelic will become a language based more in urban settings and academia, encouraged by resources like Duolingo (which introduced its Scottish Gaelic course in 2019) and

mainland GME schools. Some believe that activities like crofting keep Gaelic alive as they have rich and specific vocabularies tied to them.

- 7.1.3.2 Gaelic media continues to grow, including TV and radio broadcasting, social media, journalism and more. There has also been a resurgence in Gaelic drama programmes shot and set locally on the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, including *An Clò Mòr* and *An t-Eilean*, a four-part thriller that is now the most expensive Scottish Gaelic series ever made at £1 million per episode (The Guardian, 2024).
- 7.1.3.3 There have also been infrastructural changes to curb language loss in the younger population (the minority age group of Gaelic speakers) – these include GME in the Western Isles becoming an opt-out system rather than opt-in (BBC, 2020).

#### **7.1.4 LAND USE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

- 7.1.4.1 Climate change is likely to continue to impact on land use, by changing the suitability of land for different types of agricultural use and also by requiring changes in the way that land is managed to support more sustainable and regenerative approaches (Scottish Government, n.d.)
- 7.1.4.2 Under the UKCP09 high emissions scenario, the predicted average sea level increase for the Lewis and Harris/*Leòdhas agus Na Hearadh* coastal area is 0.55m by 2080. This has been assessed as potentially increasing the number of residential properties at risk of coastal flooding from approximately 40 to 160, and the number of non-residential properties from 90 to 190. It is also noted that coastal flood modelling by SEPA does not factor in the impacts of warming climate on wave overtopping or storminess, which could cause an increase in the impacts of coastal flooding (SEPA, n.d.).

## 8 SUMMARY

### 8.1 GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

8.1.1.1 The Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* forms part of the Western Isles archipelago, located off the north-west coast of Scotland/*Alba*. The Western Isles, or Outer Hebrides, consists of over 70 named islands, 15 of which are inhabited. The local planning authority for the Western Isles is Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES), which has its headquarters in the town of Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*. Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* is the main administrative centre and centre of population for the islands, with the rest of the population living in 280 settlements across the islands (NatureScot, 2019).

### 8.2 POPULATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

8.2.1.1 In relation to population and demographics, the baseline data shows that Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the Western Isles have an ageing population and have recorded a decrease in population over the last decade. While this has implications for the sustainability of service provision, with businesses and service providers reporting difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, it is part of a longer history of population instability driven by a range of complex social and historical factors. Furthermore, in recent years the Western Isles has generally recorded net in-migration, driven primarily by people moving from elsewhere in Scotland/*Alba* and the UK, and there are some indications locally that population decline amongst working-age people may be slowing.

8.2.1.2 Economic activity in the Western Isles is above the Scottish average, however people are more likely to be self-employed or in part-time employment than elsewhere in Scotland/*Alba*. It is likely that this reflects the continued importance of crofting, and the tendency of crofters to work alongside their crofting activities. Data shows that incomes from crofting can be relatively small, and that the majority of crofters therefore diversify their income through other occupations. However, crofting continues to play a key role in the economic and cultural life of the Western Isles, with around a third of residents maintaining a link with agriculture. Fishing, aquaculture and fish/shellfish processing are also important employers, particularly in certain locations.

8.2.1.3 Tourism is a major contributor to the economy of the Western Isles, directly supporting the equivalent of over 1,000 full-time jobs on the islands. Focus group and interview findings highlighted the dependence of many residents on tourism for some or all of their income, including crofters. Beaches and coastal scenery are one of the main attractions for tourists to Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the Western Isles. Outdoor activities such as walking and cycling, water-based activities such as boat tours and surfing, and the cultural heritage of the islands are also important draws for tourists, with many key receptors located along the west coast of

Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* such as Callanish/*Calanais* Standing Stones, Garenin/*Na Gerrannan* Blackhouse Village, and numerous beaches.

## 8.3 LAND USE, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND WELLBEING

- 8.3.1.1 Crofting is the predominant land use in the Western Isles, with around 77% of the land area held in crofting tenure and subject to crofting legislation (Rural Housing Service, 2007). As of 2023, there are 3,905 registered crofters on the Isle of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* (Registers of Scotland, 2025). Crofts on the west coast of Lewis are typically arranged in narrow strips of land running from the coast towards the moorland. Crofters also have access to a larger territory than their specific croft, which includes areas of common grazing on the coastal machair and moor. Common grazing areas are areas of land used by a number of crofters and others who hold a right to graze stock on that land. In the Western Isles roughly 66% (176,541ha) of declared land is common grazing (Crofting Commission, 2025).
- 8.3.1.2 Housing in the Western Isles has traditionally been associated with crofting, with homes built on or near to the family croft. The baseline data presented above shows that there are higher than average proportions of detached houses, higher rates of home ownership, and lower rates of over-crowding than the Scottish averages. House prices are also below average. However, the availability and affordability of housing is a key issue in the islands, with high numbers of second homes and Short Term Let properties contributing to a scarcity of accommodation for the local population. It was reported in focus groups and interviews that businesses already experience difficulties attracting and retaining staff due to a lack of available, affordable housing, and that the lack of housing for young people is a barrier to reversing depopulation.
- 8.3.1.3 Another key theme to emerge from the focus groups and interviews was the pressure on public service provision in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the Western Isles, including a lack of capacity and difficulties in recruiting staff. There can also be challenges in accessing services. The WIH in Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* provides A&E and other general medical services, however for more specialist treatment patients are transported to Inverness/*Inbhir Nis* or Glasgow/*Ghlaschu*. Despite these challenges, however, the baseline data suggests that there is generally a higher level of wellbeing among the population in the Western Isles compared with the national average, although there are particular issues associated with alcohol, connectivity, care at home for older people, and road safety.
- 8.3.1.4 In relation to transport and connectivity, the main Ullapool/*Ulapul* – Stornoway/*Steòrnabhagh* route is described as a 'lifeline service' for residents, businesses, and for freight. The dependence on ferry links to the mainland was highlighted as one of the main challenges of island life by focus group participants. Demand for ferries to the island has increased in recent years, and residents can sometimes experience difficulties in booking the services they need. Most food in

local supermarkets is imported from the mainland via ferry, presenting further challenges for the local population when the ferry is unable to run due to inclement weather or mechanical faults.

## 8.4 CULTURE AND IDENTITY

- 8.4.1.1 Crofting, fishing and other traditional activities such as peat cutting are interconnected with the local Gaelic culture. Some elements of this culture, including the spoken language, are in decline on the Western Isles at the same time as other traditions are being revitalised. Census data shows that, between 2011 and 2022, there has been a decrease in proportion of Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles, while nationally across Scotland/*Alba* there has been an increase. Factors that have contributed to the decline in Gaelic within the Western Isles include the ageing population, socio-economic change, and the decline in traditional industries such as tweed weaving. Despite this, however, Gaelic remains an important feature of the cultural heritage of the Western Isles, and of the west coast of Lewis in particular, with 62.4% of the population of the West Side SSA able to speak, read or write Gaelic.
- 8.4.1.2 Another feature of the cultural identity of Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais* and the Western Isles is the role of the church, with higher than average proportions of residents describing their religion as either Church of Scotland/*Alba* or 'other Christian' (indicating the importance of the Free Church of Scotland/*Alba*). The church has a lasting influence on life in Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, particularly regarding Sabbath observance. While some restrictions have eased in recent years, the Sabbath remains a day of observance for many, and Sabbath observance can be a polarising subject on the island.
- 8.4.1.3 Focus group participants highlighted social capital and mutual support as important and highly valued features of community life on Lewis/*Eilean Leòdhais*, which contribute to the island community's resilience. While there are relatively high rates of people living in fuel poverty and a combination of social factors that drive out-migration among younger people and people of working-age, the mutual support in some communities is perceived to compensate for the strained social services and infrastructure which present everyday and intersectional challenges to residents, including those seeking affordable childcare, housing, or other services.

## 9 GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

9.1.1.1 A list of key terms and acronyms used in this appendix are provided in **Table 9-1** and **Table 9-2**.

Table 9-1: Acronyms and abbreviations

Term	Definition
ASHE	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
BRES	Business Register and Employment Survey
CalMac	Caledonian MacBrayne
CnES	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FOI	Freedom of Information
FTE	Full Time Equivalent (employee)
GME	Gaelic Medium Education
GVA	Gross Value Added
GW	Gigawatt
Ha	Hectare
HDD	Horizontal Directional Drill
HHP	Hebridean Housing Partnership
HIE	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
ICIA	Island Communities Impact Assessment
HNDA	Housing Need and Demand Assessment
HVDC	High Voltage Direct Current
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MHWS	Mean High Water Springs
MLWS	Mean Low Water Springs
MW	Megawatt
NRS	National Records for Scotland/Alba
OHTGA	Outer Hebrides Tour Guides Association
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OSP	Offshore Substation Platform
OWF	Offshore Wind Farm
PHO	Public Health Observatory
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCNI	Scottish Community Needs Index
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SRUC	Scotland/Alba's Rural College
SSA	Smaller Study Area
SSEN	Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks
STPR2	Second Strategic Transport Projects Review

Term	Definition
TJB	Transition Joint Bay
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USO	Universal Service Obligation
VAT	Value Added Tax
WIH	Western Isles Hospital
WTG	Wind Turbine Generator

Table 9-2: Glossary

Term	Meaning
The Applicant	Spiorad na Mara Limited (the Project owner).
Aquaculture	Farming of fish, shellfish and other aquatic organisms in controlled environments, either marine or freshwater.
Array Area	The offshore area within which the offshore wind turbine generators (WTGs), associated foundations, Offshore Cables, and Offshore Substation Platform (OSP) (if required), will be located. This area encompasses the Turbine Area that will contain all above water surface infrastructure (WTGs / OSP) and an additional area within which further below water infrastructure (foundations and cables) may also be located.
Array Cables	The offshore electrical and communication cables that connect infrastructure located within the Array Area, for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scenario 1: Array Cables will be used to connect Wind Turbine Generators (WTGs) to each other, and to connect WTGs to the OSP.</li> <li>• Scenario 2: Array Cables will be used to connect WTGs to each other.</li> </ul>
Business unit	The smallest level of business for which statistical information is available. A unit represents an individual site such as a factory or shop within a business enterprise.
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	The local authority for the Western Isles/ <i>Na h-Eileanan an Iar</i>
Core path	Paths drawn up by local authorities or National Park authorities in Scotland/Alba to allow public access.
Crofting	A form of agricultural land tenure in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland/Alba.
Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR)	The Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) prepared to assess the likely significant effects of the Project on the environment.
Full-time equivalent	Equivalent to the workload of one full-time employee.
Future Baseline	Refers to the situation in future years without the Project.
Gàidhealtachd	Term for the area of Scotland/Alba in which Gaelic is commonly spoken, often synonymous with the Highlands and Islands.
Gross Value Added	Measure of the economic output of an area, industry, or sector of the economy.

Landfall	This consists of works from offshore Horizontal Directional Drill (HDD) exit pits (located below MLWS) to onshore at the Transition Joint Bays (TJB) (located above MHWS). The infrastructure and installation methods associated with the Landfall involves both onshore and offshore components.
Multiple deprivation	A relative measure of deprivation in Scotland/Alba across seven 'domains': income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime, and housing.
Offshore Application	The application for Marine Licences under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 (between 0 and 12nm) and a Section 36 consent under the Electricity Act 1989.
Offshore Cables	Electrical and communication cables located within the Array Area and Offshore Cable Area of Search. The Offshore Cables consist of Array Cables, Array Cables to Landfall, and Export Cables.
Offshore Cable Area of Search (OCAS)	The area within which the offshore electrical and communication cables between the Array Area and Landfall up to Mean High Water Springs (MHWS) will be located.
Offshore Project	The components of the Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm (the Project) located seaward of Mean High Water Springs (MHWS).
Offshore Project Boundary	The 'red line boundary' encompassing the Offshore Project.
Offshore Substation Platform (OSP)	The optional offshore substation located within the Turbine Area. Includes the platform and associated components which allows the voltage to be increased to meet onward transmission requirements.
Onshore Application	The application for consent under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).
Onshore Transmission Works (OTW) / Onshore Project	The components of the Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm (the Project) located landward of Mean Low Water Springs (MLWS).
Onshore Transmission Works Boundary / Onshore Project Boundary	The 'red line boundary' encompassing all temporary and permanent works associated with the OTW/Onshore Project.
Project	The Spiorad na Mara offshore wind farm development. This term describes the whole development, including all offshore and onshore components.
Project Boundary	The 'red line boundary' encompassing all offshore and onshore components of the Project.
Study Areas	Study Areas are determined for each technical discipline and are described within each technical chapter.
Transition Joint Bay (TJB)	The point at which offshore cables are connected to Onshore Cables. The TJB is located onshore above MHWS.
Turbine Area	A reduced area within the Array Area where above water surface infrastructure would be located i.e. wind turbine generators (WTG) and Offshore Substation Platform (OSP) (if required). This area has been

	developed and refined through stakeholder engagement and environmental assessment.
Wind Turbine Generators (WTG)	The wind turbines that generate electricity consisting of tubular towers and blades attached to a nacelle housing mechanical and electrical generating equipment
Working age	For the purposes of statistical analysis this is generally taken to be between the ages of 16 and 64.

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