

Young Islanders Network

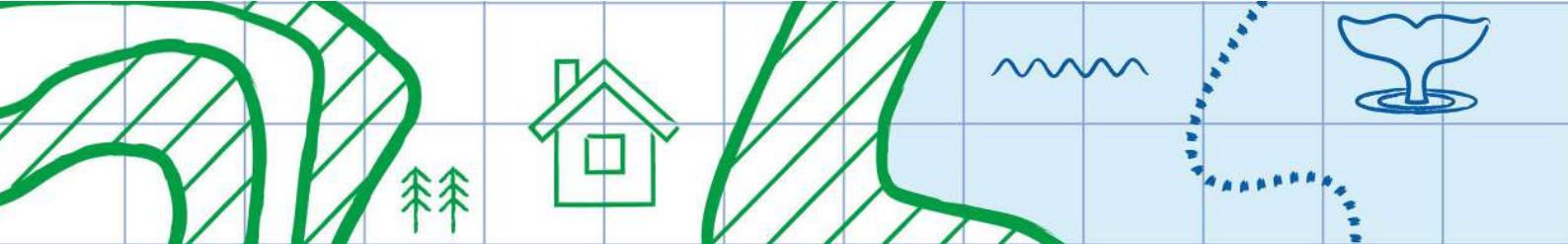


Ferry Safety Report

November 2025



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Executive Summary

Following our Transport Challenge Report in 2023, the Young Islanders Network heard from young people that they often feel unsafe due to adult behaviour whilst travelling on ferries. This is both on ferry travel to Mainland Scotland and inter isles ferries.

Young members think that feeling safe while travelling is essential and were disheartened to hear reports of behaviour that prevents young people from travelling more frequently or having to take extra precautions to feel safe.

This survey report offers an overview of what makes young islanders feel unsafe aboard ferries and offers actionable, real-life solutions. We are not demanding extreme steps, we demand our voices to be taken seriously and engaging conversation with stakeholders to ensure young islanders feel safe aboard ferries.

Delivered in partnership with Scottish Government, the Young Islanders Network (YIN) aims to build a community for young islanders and empower them to play a meaningful part in the making and development of the National Islands Plan.

Born from the Islanders Communities Challenge Pilot, YIN now plays a direct role in policy-making and meaningful consultation, not only within the National Islands Plan but across other policies in Scottish Government.

Our YIN Challenges turn ideas into action. Led by young people, these projects capture real island experiences and influence decisions at national level while building skills, confidence, and pride in where we live.

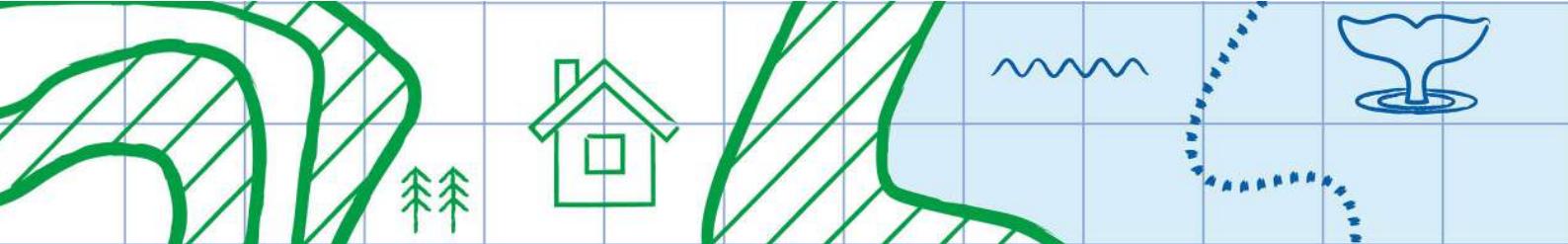
Respondent Profile

The survey engaged 61 participants, with a notable split in age: 56.7% were under 25, while 43.3% were over 25. This highlights that the findings reflect perspectives from both younger and older islanders, not exclusively youth voices.

Safety Perceptions

Almost half of respondents (49.2%) reported feeling unsafe on ferries, indicating a significant concern across age groups. Feedback shows an almost even split in safety concerns, with most issues linked to overnight northern crossings. Key factors contributing to feelings of insecurity include drunk passenger behaviour, limited staff presence, and poor communication during incidents.



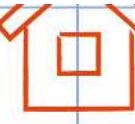
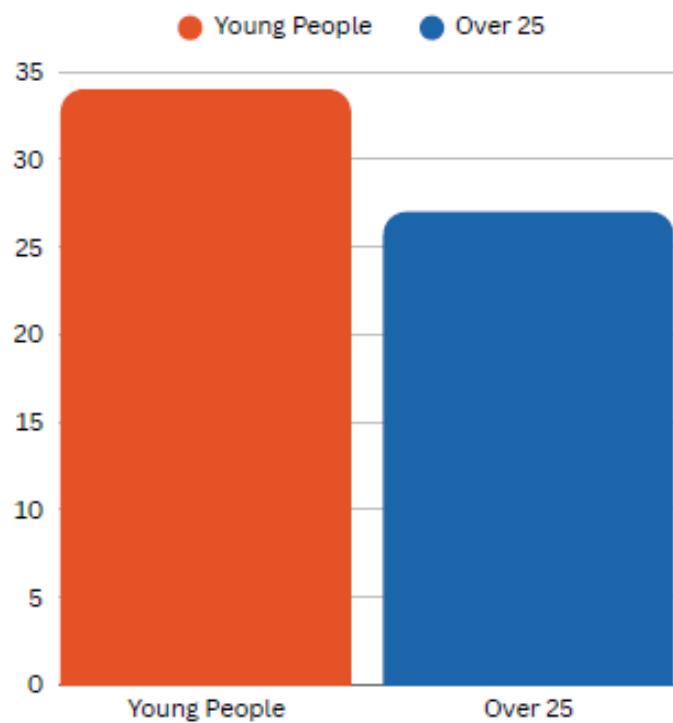


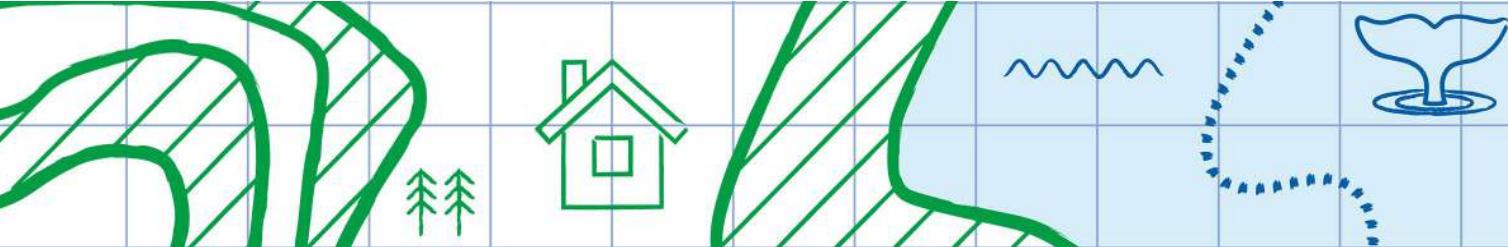
Methodology

Young people created this survey to engage with islanders to allow us to take their views forward to Ferry Operators and the Ferries Communities Board.

The survey was co-produced with YIN Reps and Champions and distributed online via YIN channels. Respondents came from Arran, Bute, Lewis & Harris, Orkney, Shetland, and Uists, with an age split: 56.7% young people, 43.3% over 25.

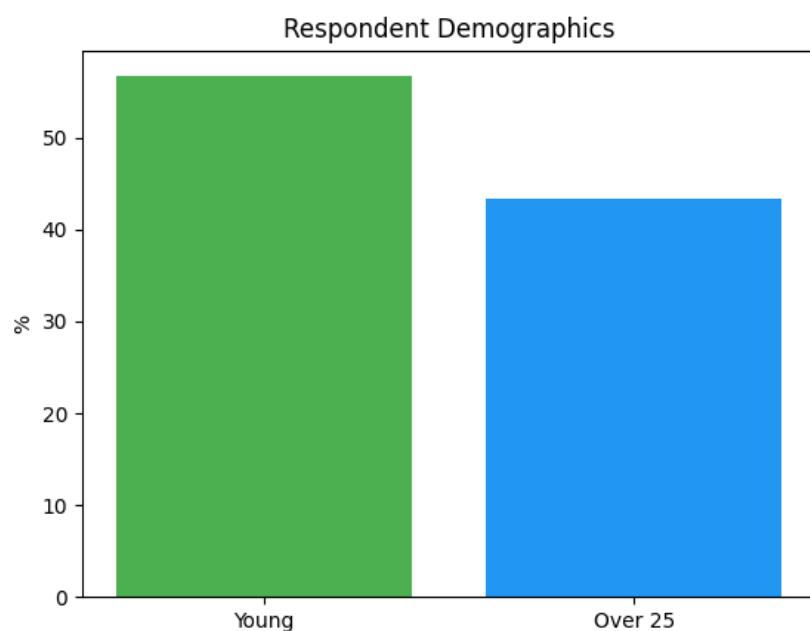
61 people responded to our survey, of those, 34 were young people and 27 were over the age of 25.

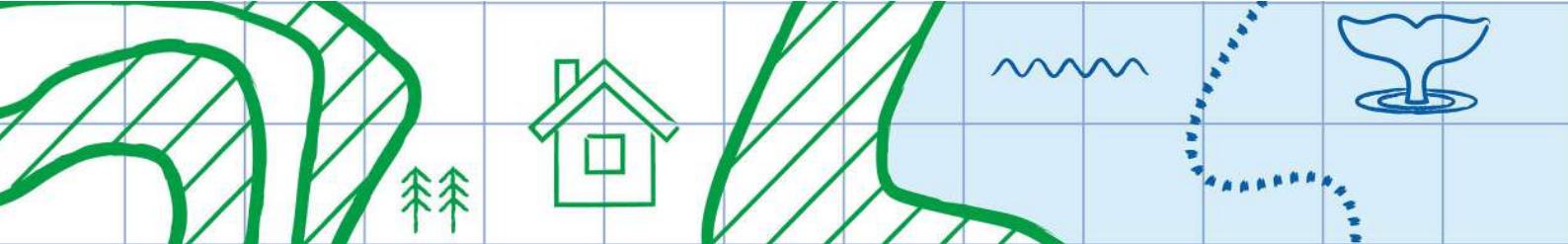




Respondents were asked to select which island they lived on. This helped us to highlight trends and understand which ferry provider they were discussing. Most respondents were from Shetland, with the highest number of young people responding from Arran and Shetland with 10 respondents each.

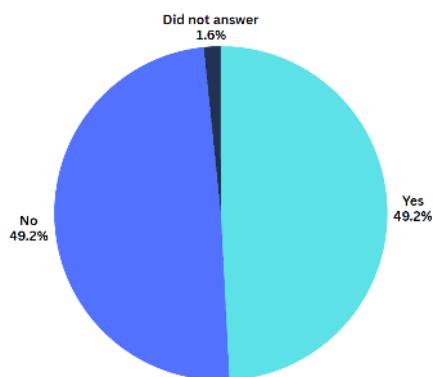
Arran	12
Bute	1
Lewis & Harris	10
Orkney	11
Shetland	25
Uists, Benbecula and Eriksay	1





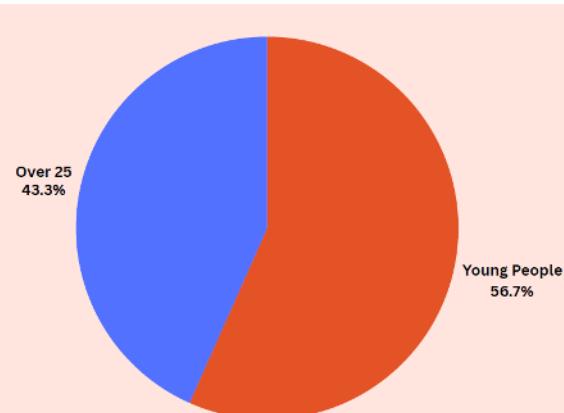
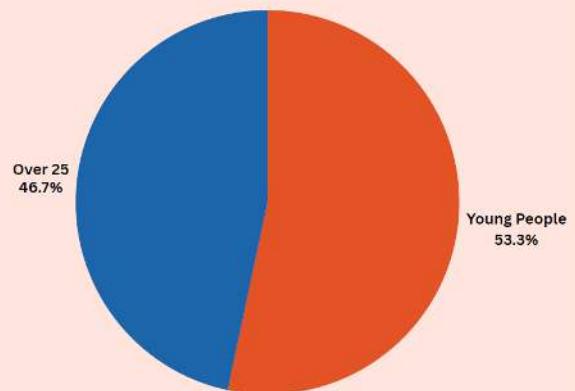
Analysis

Q1. Have you ever felt unsafe while travelling on island ferries?



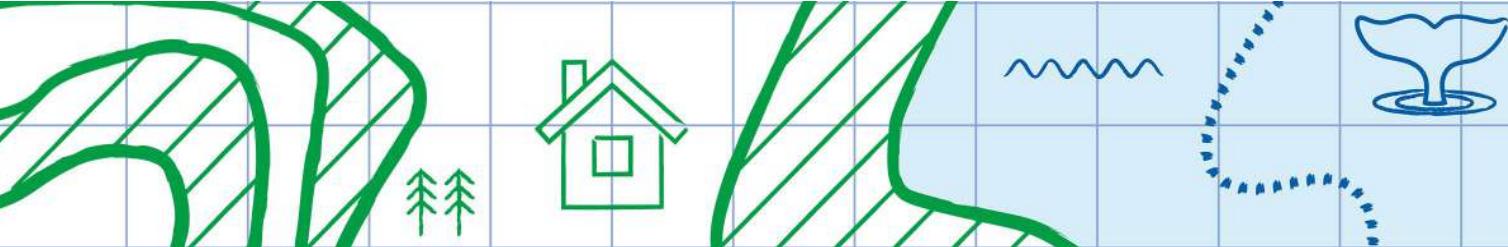
30 People answered “Yes” to this question.

Of those that answered “Yes”, 16 were Young People and 14 were Over 25.



30 People answered “No” to this question.

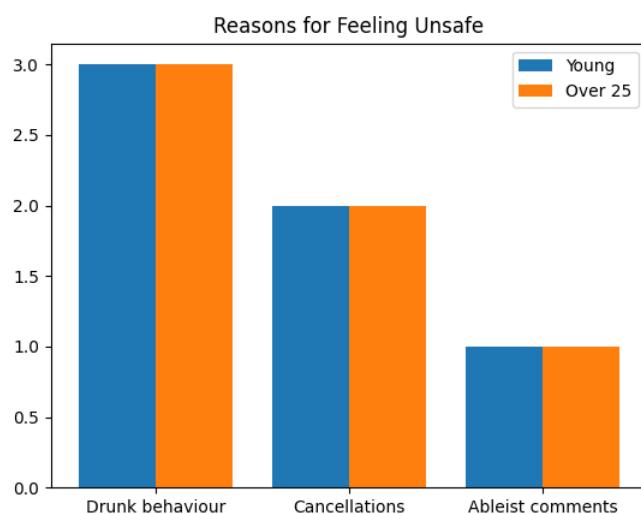
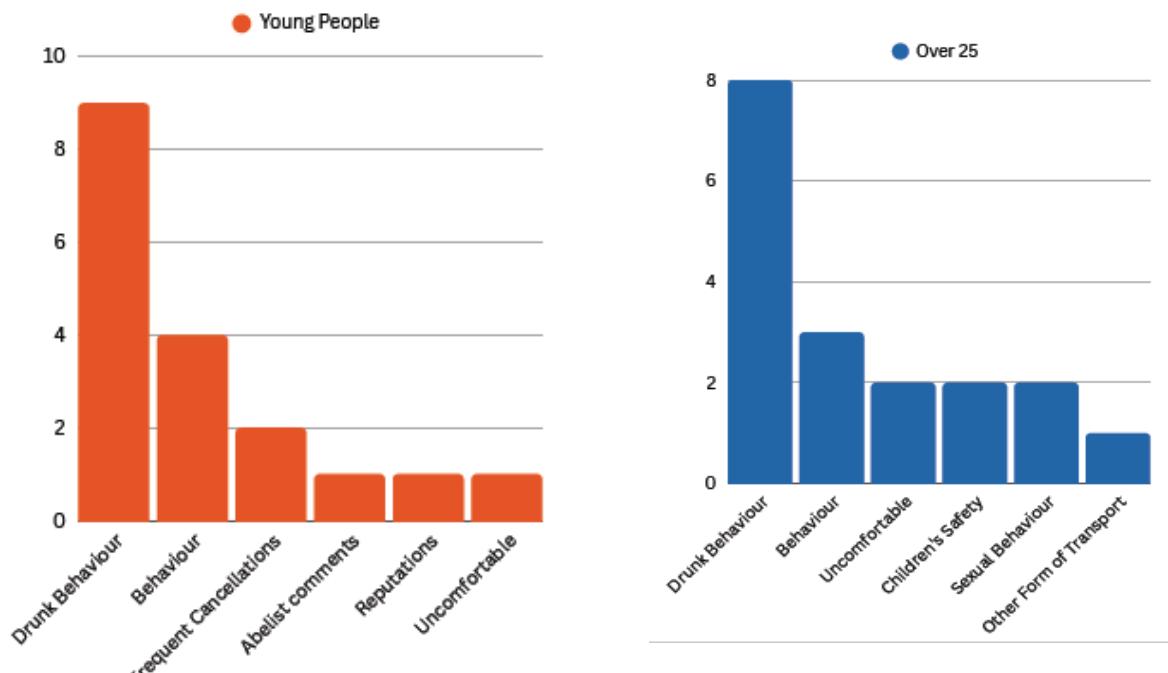
Of those that answered “No”, 17 were Young People and 13 were Over 25.

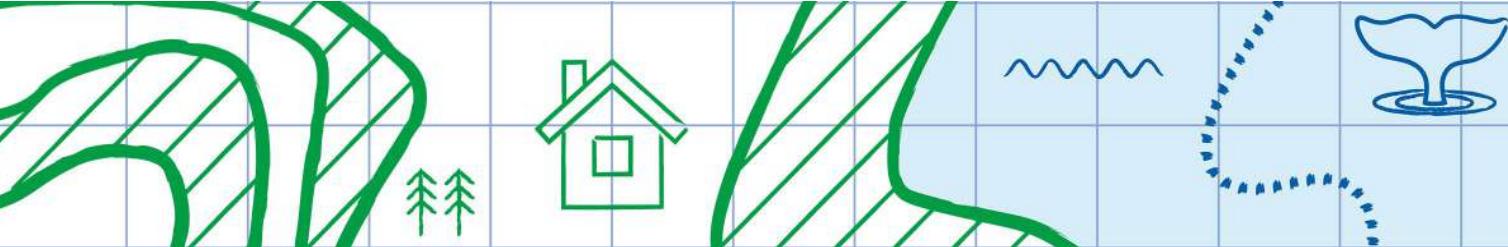


Q2. If yes, please let us know if this was due to someone's behaviour or another factor.

Young people listed reasons for feeling unsafe as drunk behaviour, frequent cancellations, ableist comments, reputations and feeling uncomfortable.

Over 25s listed the reasons for feeling unsafe as drunk behaviour, feeling uncomfortable, children's safety and sexual behaviour.





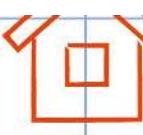
Q.3 Is there anything the ferry companies could do to make you feel safer?

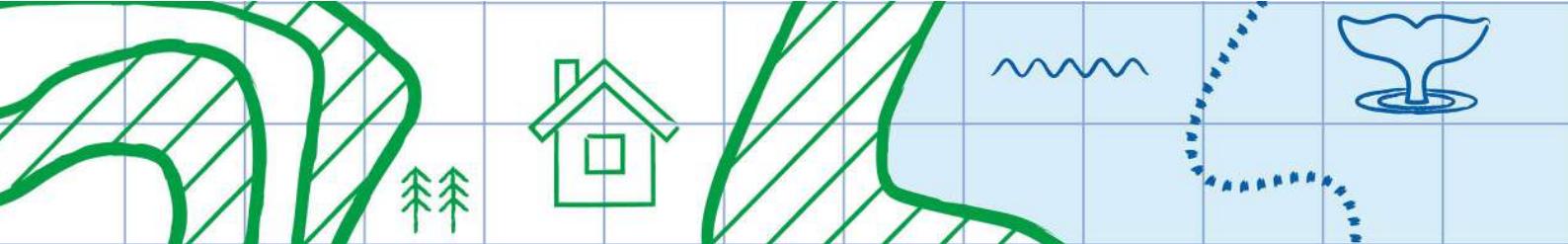
Young people's responses:

- Higher staff presence
- Watching the quantity of alcohol consumed
- CCTV
- Staff training
- Refuse to allow boarding of drunk people
- Ensure ferries can sail to prevent frequent cancellations
- Invest in better ferries
- Designated sleeping space free from alcohol
- Better security
- Provide better sleeping arrangements
- Cabins for children and people with disabilities
- Pod lounges separated into genders
- Staff being accessible and taking young people's concerns seriously
- Posters in bathrooms
- More seating areas

Over 25s responses:

- Female only pod areas
- Shared cabins
- Refuse entry to drunk passengers
- No alcohol on ferries
- Staff remind parents of supervision
- Improve safety in children's play areas
- More cabins
- Staff training
- Higher staff presence
- Stop serving drunk passengers
- Option of stating "solo female traveller" on booking



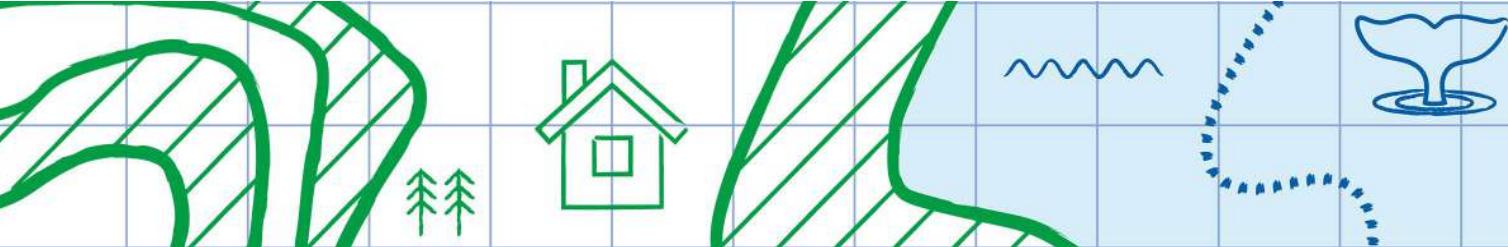


Recommendations

Based on the responses from the survey, YIN propose the following actions to improve safety and safeguarding on the ferries, especially with overnight accommodation.

1. Create a Ferry Safety Panel under Transport Scotland with young representation
2. Include youth voice in decisions by ferry companies
3. Standardize safety briefings, making them youth-friendly with clear details on where to seek support
4. Introduce alcohol policies
5. Train staff in de-escalation
6. Improve sleeping arrangements





Conclusion

For young islanders, ferry travel is a need rather than a choice; it is a lifeline and requirement for education, employment, access to health services, as well as socialising. If the issue of island youth not feeling safe on essential transportation services affects their mobility and belonging to the island communities.

It is apparent that these co-produced survey responses offer real-life solutions. It is clear that they are not demanding extreme steps but need increased presence in terms of staffing, clearer guidelines on safeguarding, improved sleeping facilities, consistent alcohol policy and staff development that makes concerns, especially from young people, seriously considered. Most of these can be accomplished through enhanced communication.

Young islanders believe that a ferry safety issue must be dealt with from a safeguarding perspective and not from a purely operational focus. The implementation of a Ferry Safety Panel with youth representation and a consistency of safety briefing messages would be a strong commitment to listening and heeding the voices of island communities.

The Young Islanders Network (YIN) is pleased to engage in ongoing dialogue with ferry companies, Transport Scotland, and the Ferries Communities Board to move these recommendations forward. By doing this work together and in partnership with those with lived experience, we can ensure that ferry travel is a secure and inclusive space for all islanders.

