

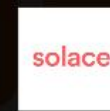
# The 2025 Women's Rough Sleeping Census

Monday 22nd - Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> September

Evidence the true scale of women's rough sleeping in your area, hear directly from women about their experiences of homelessness, and use your data to improve your local policies, partnerships, and provision.

*For more info email [womens.census@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:womens.census@solacewomensaid.org) and copy in Lucy Campbell on [lcampbell@shp.org.uk](mailto:lcampbell@shp.org.uk)*

Information session for  
census leads/organisers -  
National  
19.06.2025



Single Homeless Project

STANDING TOGETHER  
against domestic abuse

LONDON COUNCILS


# Contents

A person is walking away from the camera down a long, brightly lit hallway. The ceiling is a grid pattern, and the walls are light-colored. The person is wearing a dark jacket and pants. The hallway is empty except for the person.

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Why should local  
authorities take part  
in the women's  
census?



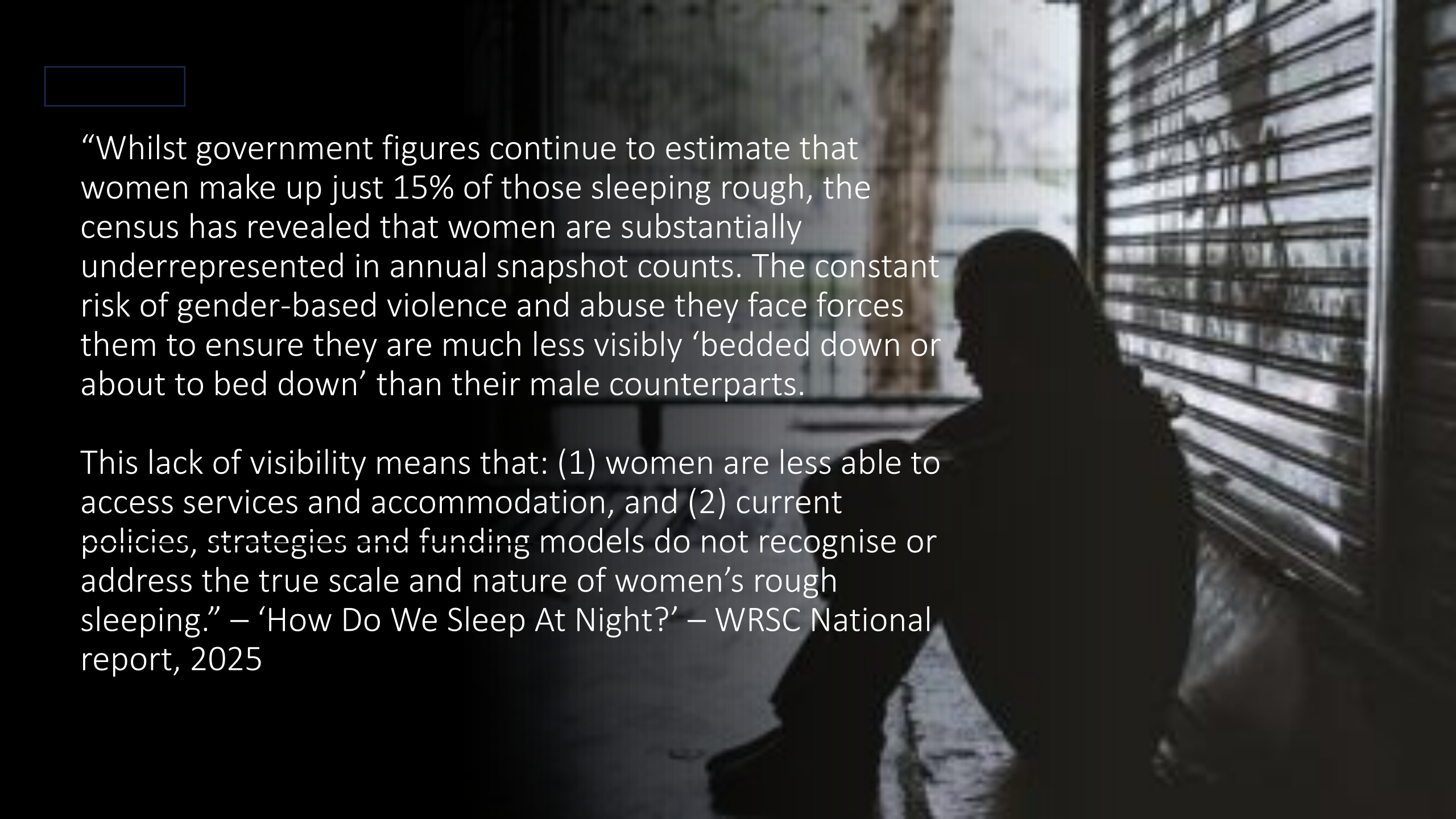


**Rough sleepers** are defined for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates as:

- people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments)
- people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or ‘bashes’).

Bedded down is taken to mean either lying down or sleeping. About to bed down includes those who are sitting in/on or near a sleeping bag or other bedding.

**The annual rough sleeping snapshot** records those people seen sleeping rough on a single night in Autumn each year.

A person is sitting on a bench in front of a window with horizontal blinds. The person is in silhouette, looking out the window. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a building or structure outside. The overall tone is somber and reflective.

“Whilst government figures continue to estimate that women make up just 15% of those sleeping rough, the census has revealed that women are substantially underrepresented in annual snapshot counts. The constant risk of gender-based violence and abuse they face forces them to ensure they are much less visibly ‘bedded down or about to bed down’ than their male counterparts.

This lack of visibility means that: (1) women are less able to access services and accommodation, and (2) current policies, strategies and funding models do not recognise or address the true scale and nature of women’s rough sleeping.” – ‘How Do We Sleep At Night?’ – WRSC National report, 2025

# Findings

**2000+** women reached in years 1, 2 and 3

10 x more women identified than by snapshot counts

## Researchers found...

- Women's experiences tend to be hidden, transient, intermittent and fall outside Government definition of rough sleeping.
- 54% of women had slept/sheltered in places that would not be counted in the snapshot.

Almost 40% of women had been in some form of homelessness accommodation PRIOR to this episode or rough sleeping.



	2024 Government Rough Sleeping Snapshot	2024 Women's Rough Sleeping <b>census</b> survey	2024 <b>census</b> Local Insights meetings
<b>London</b>	186	371	578 (19/33 boroughs)
<b>Greater Manchester</b>	17	180	116 (7/10 local authorities)
<b>Sheffield</b>	8	17	104
<b>Bristol</b>	15	66	349
<b>Hertfordshire</b>	5	29	107
<b>Coventry</b>	2	36	84
<b>Leeds</b>	6	66	N/A
<b>All census areas</b> (88 local authorities)	337	1,014	1,777 (37 local authorities)
<b>All Local Insights areas</b> (37 local authorities)			1,777 (37 local authorities)
<b>Whole of England</b>	680 (296 districts)	1,014 (88 local authorities)	1,777 (37 local authorities)

What are the benefits  
for your area?



## Interpersonal and relational

- Improved relationships
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Increased understanding and awareness

## Services and practice change

- 4 new women's accommodation services
- 2 funding applications for accommodation
- 4 new women's drop ins
- 1 new winter women's service
- 1 new specialist women's support role
- Focus groups of service users reviewing service provision
- New multi-agency case conference groups
- Change to outreach shift, verification and casework practices in over 10 local authorities

## Local and combined authorities, and national impact

- New local authority training offers
- Creation of new gender-informed resources for and by teams
- New policy papers and strategies recommending changes
- Gender-informed amendments to KPIs and data collection
- Identification of particularly at risk and underserved groups
- Onto the agenda at strategic and operational levels
- Ministerial visits, departmental meetings and support
- Press coverage – television, radio, print

# What are the benefits for your borough?



- *“The women’s census has resulted in the development of a women’s only accommodation service. Women clients have been more responsive to the bespoke offer for women, and clients that have struggled to sustain accommodation have responded well to the new approach, and are not just sustaining their accommodation but are thriving!”*

*“We used the census data to successfully apply for funding for a new Respite Rooms style service for women, as well as a women’s only SWEP provision.”*

*“We are showing we believe women, and will put interventions in place as soon as they need them.”*

2. How does the  
census work?



# How does the census work?



- **Census survey:** 1. Outreach teams conduct the survey on gender-informed shifts 2. Cross sector services conduct the survey with women they support 3. Services come together to host women's census sessions in their borough (e.g. in day centres or at other key local hotspots).
- **Local Insights meeting:** After census week, in October, local services will come together in each borough to submit basic data about the number of women they work with who are rough sleeping.

## Women's rough sleeping census methodology

Challenge	Approach
<p>Women are less likely to bed down visibly on the streets as they conceal themselves due to constant high risk of violence. This means they are often not seen in rough sleeping counts and not 'verified' as sleeping rough.</p>	<p>Created guidance for outreach to direct them to look in places women and research tell us they shelter/sleep – stations, 24 hour cafes, hospital toilets and waiting rooms.</p>
<p>Women are even less visible to outreach at night as this is the most dangerous time for them. They will walk all night, sex work in flats or hotels, or accept high-risk offers of shelter from strangers from rather than face the streets at night.</p>	<p>Outreach advised to conduct day shifts in order to find women they could never access at night.</p>
<p>Women's patterns of rough sleeping are transient and intermittent – meaning snapshot counts are highly likely to underrepresent them and traditional outreach shifts are unlikely to result in them being found and verified.</p>	<p>Data collection window 7 days and women asked about experiences over the past 3 months. Survey to determine circumstances rather than needing to see the respondent in a particular place.</p>
<p>Women are often known to non outreach/housing services (health, Violence Against Women and Girls, substance use), but data is not shared between these sectors.</p>	<p>The census includes all services and sectors who support or encounter women who sleep rough, in order to build an inclusive data picture.</p>
<p>Rough sleeping provision has been designed for how men sleep rough. Understanding and recognition of how women sleep rough is limited.</p>	<p>The census goes beyond counting and asks women questions to better understand their circumstances, and provides the opportunity to link them with services. We now have a body of data from over 2000 women across England telling us how, when and where they sleep rough.</p>

# Gender informed definition of rough sleeping



- "Having nowhere safe to stay at all: for example, sleeping outside on the ground or in a tent, sitting/sleeping in places which are open late or 24/7 (such as fast-food restaurants and hospitals), walking all night, sex working at night but not having anywhere to sleep during the day, using drugs in other people's accommodation at night but not having anywhere to sleep during the day, etc. Women may not do this every night, and rough sleeping may be interspersed with other forms of hidden homelessness such as staying in accommodation belonging to unsafe/unknown people/perpetrators, staying in 'cuckooed' flats, or staying with friends/family/associates on a very insecure and transitory basis (e.g. nightly or weekly, or regularly being forced to leave immediately)."

# Census survey questions



- Short survey of 10 – 12 questions to be completed with women. A few additional questions for practitioners (e.g. service type, location, date of survey completion).
- The survey questions include:
  - When they last slept rough and frequency of rough sleeping;
  - Where they stayed prior to rough sleeping;
  - Services accessed;
  - Demographic questions.
- All questions are multiple choice (with free text option).
- The survey is an online form (with paper version for teams to print if needed.)
- In 2025 we are adapting the questions slightly to also gather experiences of hidden homelessness.

Any questions?



How to take part this  
year: Planning the  
census in  
your borough



# Who should lead on the census in your borough?



- The census can be led by any organisation or team that works with women experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping.
- The census does not have to be led by the local authority, although securing buy-in and support from the local authority is very valuable.
- It works well to have two or three census leads/coordinators – often someone within the council plus a couple of voluntary sector leads.

# How to get started



- Map your local services and get a planning group together – check whether you're missing any useful representatives in that group. This group can make initial decisions and plans.
- If not LA led, try to get buy-in from the local authority, or keep them updated on your plans.
- Reach as wide a range of services as possible (which may take some engagement and communications work). Having a few organisations from different sectors on board from the start can help with this.
- Don't be discouraged if not everyone is on board! The census, even on a small scale, can help to demonstrate what's happening for women locally and bring attention to this issue.
- Include women with lived experience in your planning group.
- Please confirm you are taking part and who your lead/leads are.

# Topics to discuss when planning



- Which services can take part in the census? List them and think about how to reach them.
- How will you engage services with the census? E.g. Open information session, joining networks and forums, team meetings, email groups.
- How can we ensure all participating services access the training and guidance?
- Lived experience – how will you involve women in planning and delivery of the census?
- What resources do you need?
- Will you want to deliver training or information sessions/briefings? You may want to deliver training that's specific to your area/teams.

# Services to involve



- Women's organisations and teams, including local domestic abuse services, sexual violence support services, women's homelessness teams, services supporting women in the sex industry.
- Drug and alcohol support services
- Health teams, including A&E departments, homeless health teams, sexual health teams.
  - Health teams can be very stretched, but many are keen to be involved – especially if they can be supported to do so, e.g. by providing volunteer support during census week.
- Immigration advice and support services/services supporting migrant people
- Community voluntary services – food banks, soup kitchens, faith-based services.
- Housing department teams and housing officers, who might encounter women new to homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Homelessness support services and homelessness and rough sleeping outreach teams.

# Involving women with lived experience



- Which areas and times do they suggest for gender-informed shifts?
- What services do women use locally/where are they likely to be?
- How can outreach teams sensitively speak to and approach women?
- What support would they want to be offered, what are their immediate needs?
- How can women with lived experience be involved? Peer researchers?

## **Ways to involve women with lived experience:**

- Consultation or workshop sessions for input into planning (compensation for time)
- Contribute to training for teams – e.g. what do they think outreach teams need to know?
- Planning census women's/wellbeing sessions
- Involvement in delivery of the census – on shifts, volunteering in services etc

Any questions?



Resources you  
will need and support  
we will provide



# What support can we give you?



- We will provide guidance and free online training sessions, info sessions and drop ins.
- We will provide the census survey but you will need to copy it and make a survey link for local use. We will provide the workbook and guidance for the local insights meetings.
- We can meet you 121 to provide support and advice, and we can present at your network meetings/help you to influence locally if needed.
- We will provide all necessary data protection guidance to ensure you can collect data ethically and share your local data to be included in the national evaluation.

# Resources



- £10 vouchers for women and care packs if possible.
- Can you recruit volunteers to help do the survey on outreach/in services?
- Guidance/training/info sessions are provided but you need to encourage services to attend and do your own local versions.
- Documents are provided but some need local adaptation (survey link, services information for women, posters).
- Census drop ins/safe spaces/extra bedspace provision, etc.

Census week -  
conducting the  
census survey



# Conducting the survey



- Rough sleeping outreach/other outreach services must deliver a minimum of 6 hours of gender-informed outreach over census week. More than 6 hours is preferable.
- Select times and locations in which teams are more likely to see women in the local area and ensure there are women on shifts.
- Teams may wish to arrange joint outreach shifts with other specialist and local teams.
- Teams can be thinking and preparing over the preceding few months – i.e. noticing where they meet women and identifying times and hotspots in which they're more likely to meet women.
- Teams who deliver outreach shifts normally during the course of the week can also do the survey with women they encounter.
- Specialist women's outreach teams very likely already have expertise in reaching women and may not need to adapt their shifts to become gender-informed, but can conduct their survey on their usual shifts.


# Conducting the survey: Non outreach services



- The survey should also be conducted by services who do not deliver outreach.
- This can apply to a large range of services, including drug and alcohol services, women's services, domestic and sexual abuse services, health services, migrant or immigration support services, housing departments, food banks, soup kitchens, youth services, homelessness advice and support services, day centres.
- Accommodation services can also conduct the survey with their residents.
- Services can conduct the survey with women who attend their service; who they have contact with during that week either in person or by phone; or clients who they specifically contact to complete the survey as they know them to have experienced rough sleeping in the last three months.
- Services may wish to host one or more census sessions during the census week. These can be wellbeing days or women's sessions with activities and support for women.
- These sessions can allow services to conduct the survey with women attending the service; arrange support from volunteers; and encourage women to access support.

Any questions?



A person in a dark hoodie is walking away from the camera down a long, brightly lit hallway. The hallway has a curved wall on the right side and a dark floor. The lighting is warm and yellow, creating a strong contrast with the dark foreground. The person is centered in the lower half of the frame, walking towards a bright opening at the end of the hallway.

# Organising and hosting the local insights meeting

# What is the local insights meeting?



- The local insights meeting is the second element of the census and allows as many women as are known to services to be represented in the census data, including those who may not have been seen during census week.
- It supports multiple services to come together to provide their insights and experiences about the challenges they face in effectively supporting women experiencing rough sleeping.
- One local insights meeting should be delivered for each borough (for example in combined authorities, each borough in the combined authority should deliver a data meeting).
- The meetings should be led either by the local census organisers or an appointed lead within the borough, such as the rough sleeping lead. It is helpful for this lead to have awareness and relationships with multiple organisations within the borough.
- As with the census survey, the data meeting is most effective when it includes as many organisations and sectors as possible. Only 1 or 2 representatives need to attend from each service.

# What to do before the LI meeting



**Prior to the meeting**, the lead for the data meeting will need to:

- Set date for the meeting in the month of October 2025.
- Invite relevant local cross sector services to the meeting and provide them with the guidance.
- Edit the data sharing protocol to include the names of all attending parties and ask services to sign and return.
- Request attending services to come to the meeting with the names and DOB for women they support who they know have slept rough according to the census definition in the last 3 months. You may wish to send several reminders about this.
- Familiarise yourself with the data meeting workbook - you or a colleague can enter data into this during the meeting.
- Previous years show that the more services that take part, the more women are identified.

# What will happen at the LI meeting?



- Introduce and explain how the meeting will work.
- Check that everyone has signed the data sharing protocol.
- Reiterate the criteria for the data to be submitted (see the guidance or workbook for a reminder).

## **Meeting agenda:**

- Collect numerical data from each service and cross-reference for any duplicate clients, using the data meeting workbook.
- Facilitate a discussion on the challenges that services encounter when supporting women experiencing rough sleeping.
- Facilitate a discussion to debrief on the census week.

# Considerations for rural areas



# Rural areas



Many of the difficulties of reaching and counting women are similar to the difficulties of reaching and counting people who are rough sleeping in more rural areas

These challenges can include:

- Outreach across a large area or across different and more difficult environments, such as forest.
- More limited outreach resources relative to the size of the area, including outreach only covering hotspots.
- A concentration of services in one or two urban or more central areas.

For these areas, we suggest flexibility in thinking about how to reach women and deliver outreach. There is more detail in the guidance, but here are a few tips:

- Reach out to more services – are there health services, community services/hubs etc you can work with in smaller towns/areas?
- Could you focus on one area per day to concentrate your resources?
- Intelligence gathering from women with lived experience and cross sector services will be essential.
- Focus on centres and services in the day being equipped to do the survey more than outreach.
- Ensure you do a LI meeting if it is impossible to cover your area using outreach.

Who might  
be missing from  
your data?



# Who might be missing from your data?



**Some women may be difficult to reach/include, even using the gender-informed methodology.**

- Women's challenges can be compounded further by intersectional experiences.
  - For example, trans women are likely to be at an even higher risk of violence and therefore even less visible to services; migrant women may face barriers in approaching services due to language barriers and fear of immigration enforcement; young women may feel unable to access services, or reach homelessness in a different way; global majority women may face racism that deters them from support.
- While the census can change practices to reach more women, there can be a danger of still missing many women – while the census cannot and is not expected to count every woman, it is very important that the census in each area can reach a cross-section of groups, including migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, younger women, women from the global majority.
- The census needs to include people with a wide range of different experiences of women's rough sleeping so that its results can inform and design support that works for all women. It is also vital that all women feel that they can take part in and be represented by this work.
- For those who have delivered the census before, it is worth considering how to reach any groups who may be underrepresented in your data.
- Reach out to your local specialist and by-and-for services to understand how best to reach these groups.

Top tips



# Top tips!



## **Start as early as possible**

- The earlier you're able to start, the easier this will be.

## **Engaging services, particularly those outside the homelessness sector, can take time.**

- Plan enough time for this and ask for help from other services and sectors: services may not immediately see the relevance of this work to them or understand how they can be involved.

## **Some services may have capacity issues, particularly by and for services and health services.**

- If they can't be involved in census week, can they be involved in another way? Could volunteers come to their service? Could they come to the local insights meeting? Could they provide case studies or lived experience involvement?

## **Be aware that services may drop out in census week, due to staffing or capacity issues.**

- This may require you to rearrange shifts or you might unexpectedly be unable to deliver a shift or reach a particular service. Contact the central census team who may be able to put volunteers in place if so.

## **Many teams can worry a lot about duplication: don't worry too much about this!**

- The census will never count every single woman who is rough sleeping in an area and therefore will never claim that the census numbers are exact figures. There are mitigation factors and it is much more important to reach as many women as possible: it is much more likely that we'll miss women than count women twice.

## **Make every contact count**

- Can you get services and accommodation options ready to support the women that you meet? Can you have a budget for emergency accommodation/phones/food etc to immediately help women? Census is a good time to try something new.

Any questions?





# Any questions?



## Get in touch:

[Lcampbell@shp.org.uk](mailto:Lcampbell@shp.org.uk)

[Womens.census@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:Womens.census@solacewomensaid.org)

## Upcoming training:

Census outreach training

Census services training

[www.solacewomensaid.org/womens-rough-sleeping-census](http://www.solacewomensaid.org/womens-rough-sleeping-census)