

The Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2025

Training for building based services

Thursday 10th July 2025



Agenda

1. Why do we need a women's rough sleeping census?
2. Why should you take part?
3. What have we learned from previous years?
4. How does the census work?
5. How do services take part?
6. The census survey
7. Safety
8. How to take part in Census Local Insights meetings
9. What's next – action planning!

Why do we need a women's rough sleeping 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').

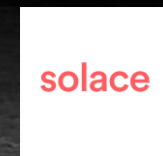
Bedded down is taken to mean either lying down or sleeping. About to bed down includes those who are sitting in/on or near a sleeping bag or other bedding.

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

Why do we need a women's rough sleeping census?



Why should you take part?



Be part of a growing movement for change

2022



2024



The census has collected the biggest data set in Europe on women's experiences of sleeping rough. More than 2000 women have been reached since the census pilot in 2022.

Their voices are being used to shape changes locally and nationally.

ITV's We Can End Homelessness: 4 women share their experiences of homelessness and working in the sector

Kicked, urinated on, tents set on fire - we reveal the realities for female rough sleepers in the UK

Government accused of neglecting women rough sleepers by dramatically undercounting them



"THAT FIRST NIGHT, I SAT AT A BUS STOP TOO AFRAID TO CLOSE MY EYES"



Exclusive: 'You have to be visible to get the help but you also need to be invisible to keep safe' - rough sleeper says

Maya Oppenheim Women's Correspondent • Tuesday 07 May 2024 10:13 BST

SUNDAY Mirror THE HEART OF BRITAIN

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

HIDDEN SCANDAL OF HOMELESS WOMEN

Rough sleepers are double official figures

EXCLUSIVE BY SIMON MURPHY
OVER a thousand women have been found sleeping rough by charity workers - nearly twice as many as government figures admit.



ATTACKED
Lainey was raped while homeless

itvX

EXCLUSIVE

Up to 9 times more women rough sleeping in England than government statistics suggest, report says

TYNE TEES | WOMEN | HOME

Kris Jepson Correspondent, ITV News

BIG ISSUE

Pioneering census sheds light on hidden reality of women's homelessness

There could be more than 5,000 women sleeping rough in England. We must find them

Last week 47 charities, networks and local authorities wrote to Angela Rayner calling for the government to step up efforts to help homeless women. Here's why it's vital to ending homelessness fast

LIZ RUTHERFOORD, NAHAR CHOUDHURY | 6 Sep 2024

We must recognise homeless women in their own right, and fund services accordingly

INSIDE HOUSING

INSIDE HOUSING

Up to nine times more women sleeping rough than government statistics say, research suggests

NEWS 07.05.24 BY ALEX TURNER

Nine times more women may be sleeping rough in England than are recorded by official rough sleeping statistics, a study suggests

Islington Tribune

Not in the stats, women are left unseen in city's homelessness

SW Londoner

HOME NEWS SPORT LIFE ENTERTAINMENT FOOD & DRINK EDITOR'S PICKS

Homeless women underrepresented in rough sleeping numbers, data suggests

28 November 2024 Kasia Flisiuk Follow @SW_Londoner

Homeless women are significantly underrepresented in rough sleeping statistics, according to findings from the 2023 Women's Rough Sleeping Census.

The 2023 Women's Rough Sleeping Census suggests that the number of women sleeping across England is significantly underreported in official government statistics.

'Women experiencing homelessness face an awful choice tonight - here's how we can help'

Lucy Campbell, Head of Multiple Disadvantage at the Single Homeless Project charity, makes the case for change and warns there will be women facing an awful choice tonight

Mirror

OPINION By Lucy Campbell
18:05, 14 Dec 2024 | UPDATED 19:28, 14 DEC 2024



Improve provision in your area

“Women’s homelessness is firmly on the agenda, senior decision makers who previously were dismissive of women’s needs are now advocating for the needs of women across commissioning and service delivery.”

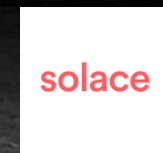
“The women’s census has resulted in the development of a women’s only accommodation service. Women clients have been more responsive to the bespoke offer for women, and clients that have struggled to sustain accommodation have responded well to the new approach, and are not just sustaining their accommodation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

Improve provision in your area

“ 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. ”

What have we learned from previous years?



What have we learned? Data

	Number of women recorded in 2024 Government Rough Sleeping Snapshot	Number of women recorded in 2024 Women's Rough Sleeping Census Survey	Number of women recorded in 2024 Census Local Insights meetings
London	186	371	578 (19/33 boroughs)
Greater Manchester	17	180	116 (7/10 local authorities)
Sheffield	8	17	104
Bristol	15	66	349
Hertfordshire	5	29	107
Coventry	2	36	84
Leeds	6	66	N/A
All census areas (88 local authorities)	337	1,014	1,777 (37 local authorities)
All Local Insights areas (37 local authorities)	166	631	1,777 (37 local authorities)
Whole of England	680 (296 local authorities)	1,014 (88 local authorities)	1,777 (37 local authorities)

What have we learned?



Women's rough sleeping is hidden, transient and intermittent – 54% in 2024 reported sleeping in places not within the existing definition.

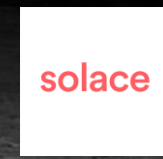


Services aren't reaching women – 77% not in touch with housing officer or council housing department, 43% not in touch with homelessness service.



Accommodation isn't preventing homelessness for women – 37% were in homelessness accommodation prior to rough sleeping.

How does the census work?



Single Homeless Project

STANDING TOGETHER
against domestic abuse



How does the census work?

The census uses a two part, gender-informed methodology, developed by researchers, women with lived experience and cross sector organisations:

- **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).
- **Census Local Insights meeting:** After census week, local services will come together in each borough to submit basic data about the number of women they work with/are aware of who are rough sleeping, and have a conversation about local challenges and possible ways forward.

How does the women's rough sleeping census work?

Challenge

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.

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.

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.

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.

Rough sleeping provision has been designed for how men sleep rough. Understanding and recognition of how women sleep rough is limited.

Approach

The census guidance for outreach to direct them to look in places women tell us they shelter/sleep – stations, 24 hour cafes, hospital toilets and waiting rooms, libraries etc.

Outreach advised to conduct day shifts in order to find women they could never access at night, and services that women access in the day can also do the census survey.

Data collection window 7 days and women asked about experiences over the past 3 months. Census survey to determine circumstances rather than needing to see the respondent in a particular place.

After the census survey week, each LA holds a 'Local Insights' meeting, bringing together data from all services and sectors who support or encounter women who sleep rough.

The census goes beyond counting and asks women questions to better understand their circumstances, and every interaction is an opportunity to link women in to support. We now have a body of data from over 2000 women across England telling us how, when and where they sleep rough.

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)."

How do services take part?



Which services can take part?

- Any service in that supports or encounters women who may be experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping.**
- This includes homelessness support services, day centres, VAWG and women's services, health teams, drug and alcohol services, community groups including faith groups and food banks, migrant support services, etc.**
- If your service sometimes works with or is open to women who experience homelessness, it's likely that some of the women you work with might be rough sleeping according to the census definition, and can be included in the census. If in doubt – offer the woman the opportunity, it will become clear through answering the questions whether her experiences are concurrent with the census definition.**

Why do we need services to take part?

- **Women's rough sleeping is often hidden, meaning women are less likely than men to be found by homelessness outreach services.**
- **They may however be accessing other types of services - GP, hospital, substance use, women's services, migrant services, community services, food banks, etc.**
- **Taking a cross-sector approach will enable us to reach more women, and give us a more accurate and inclusive data picture which takes into account women's varied circumstances.**
- **The census can also be a springboard for better partnership work going forward, and the development of cross sector pathways to respond more responsively to women's homelessness.**

When and how do you take part?

- **Throughout the census week, Monday 22nd September – Sunday 28th September 2025 inclusive.**
- **With women accessing the service during the week, in person or by phone.**
- **During the service's usual opening times.**
- **If your service is unlikely to have capacity to do the survey with women, please get in touch with your local census lead – it may be possible to co-locate a volunteer at your service for a shift during census week.**
- **If your service is based in a building that women can drop into and could host a 'census day' in your area, please let your census lead know.**

Census 'days' or hubs

- You might deliver or know of services, day centres or hotspots in your area which might be well-attended by women and could be good places to conduct the survey.
- You could work with other services and the census lead to arrange a 'census session' or day in your day centre/building/service. You could combine with activities, a BBQ, satellite services, etc.
- You can use the opportunity to encourage women to attend your service and link up with local services, as well as doing the survey.
- You might have a busy service e.g. health centre, and meet many women, but are unable to complete the surveys with them – you could choose a day to host a census session with volunteer support.

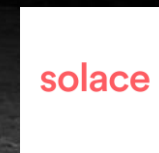
Vouchers and volunteers

The census lead/leads in your area may be able to provide vouchers to give to women to say thank you for completing the survey, and may be able to provide volunteers to come to your service and help to conduct the survey during census week. Get in contact with them to enquire.

If your service is in London, you can also contact the central census team as there is some resource to provide these things.

You could also provide food, drinks, toiletries, care packs or other incentives yourself.

The census survey



The survey

- Online survey platform, easy to access on tablet or smartphone, printed versions available if preferred.
- Written explanation of research provided, including assurances about privacy and voluntary nature of questions.
- The survey questions are being finalised, and are likely to include the following themes: Where they stayed the previous night; Duration and frequency of homelessness; Services they are accessing; Whether they have already been asked these questions by someone else this week.

Demographic questions such as ethnicity, gender, age on last birthday (this will not record DOB).

- Survey for anyone who identifies as a woman and those who identify as non-binary and feel the study's gender themes are relevant to their experiences.

How to complete the survey with women

- The surveys should be completed in real time on the online survey platform, or if completing on paper, filled in online immediately after the interaction.
- The survey should be conducted with respondents, rather than sending on the survey link to potential respondents. This is important to ensure consistency of data collection and minimise double counting, and allows practitioners to complete additional questions for the service.
- We suggest appointing a single point of contact for your service to ensure all teams and staff have the relevant information.
- All those conducting the survey should have read the guidance and watched this training.

How to complete the survey with women

- **The questions are voluntary – women can answer as many or as few as they wish.**
- **Their answers will be anonymous and answering won't impact them in any way.**
- **Don't worry if you're not sure if her experience fits within the definition: if she would like to do the survey, we will be able to understand her experience from her answers.**

Making every contact count

- The survey is for all women who have slept rough in the last 3 months (using the gender informed definition of rough sleeping).
- Professional judgement will be key in determining who to approach and how to approach (ensuring that the approach is appropriate, sensitive to a woman's circumstances and not perceived as intrusive).
- You may be aware of some women's housing circumstances, but if a woman is new to your service, it may not be clear what their circumstances are.
- Depending on the service, workers may wish to enquire more gently about a woman's circumstances before introducing the census and offering to complete the survey with them, for example 'Have you had any issues with housing recently?'.

Try this...

"Hello, how are you doing today? We're taking part in research to try and help women who are experiencing homelessness. We're asking women who come in to the service this week if they have recent experience of housing issues or not having a safe place to stay.

Is that something that you have experienced?

We won't ask anything identifying like your name or date of birth, and it's completely up to you if you want to take part or not. The questions will take a couple of minutes."

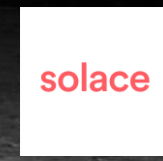
Making every contact count

“I remember when I was coming off the street when I was finally ready to ask for help, I had no idea what I was doing. I absolutely had no knowledge of where to go, what to do. And it was only by other people's help that I managed to sort of kind of piece it together, but I needed so much support along the way.”

Service information sheets

- **Your service information if they wish to contact you at a later date**
- **Contact details and map to local day centre/advice service**
- **Opening times and locations of any local women's spaces**
- **StreetLink self-referral information**
- **Local Housing Options department information**
- **Local VAWG and women's services, including domestic abuse support service, local Rape Crisis service, and Ascent advice helpline for the area (Solace or Women and Girls Network)**
- **Immigration advice service information**
- **Welfare benefits contact information**
- **Useful numbers to call – National Domestic Abuse helpline, Samaritans, Police non-emergency, NHS 111**
- **Crisis team contact number (borough specific)**
- **Mental health support via text message details (text SHOUT to 85258 free confidential 24/7 messaging mental health support service)**
- **All workers should be equipped with information on how to refer into any emergency safe spaces that are available to their borough, e.g. night shelters or respite rooms.**
- **Each outreach team should follow their usual policies and procedures with respect to safeguarding concerns and other emergency situations (including women who are pregnant, at immediate risk, or under 18).**
- **Outreach teams should make use of telephone translators (such as LanguageLine) where needed to make sure that all women are able to fully participate in this survey.**

Safety



Safety

- Some women may require additional support or signposting, or unknown risks may become apparent to services.
- Services should follow any usual procedures in providing information, advice and support.
- Support may involve completing referrals to other services, using Duty to Refer processes, carrying out safeguarding practices, MARAC referrals, safety planning, or other forms of support, with consent as required.
- Services should follow usual safeguarding procedures for anyone at high risk, which women should be informed about.

Safety

- If you are concerned that a woman at risk but it is not an emergency, try some basic safety planning, including:
- Identify and validate existing strategies she is using to manage her safety.
- Is there anywhere she can go to feel safer?
- Does she know where to go/who to call to access help and support if she needs to?
- Identify safe spaces the client can go to if she feels unsafe (and consider a range of options), women's only services, drop in centres/services, day centres, libraries, 24hr establishments, A&E.
- Can you support her to get to a safe place?
- Can you offer anything practical to increase her safety e.g. food, water, mobile phone, phone credit, personal alarm?
- Does she want to report to the police?
- Is there anyone she wants you to contact?
- Can your area provide emergency accommodation options with quick referral routes this week?
- Guidance for safety planning with women experiencing multiple disadvantage - Keeping us Safer
- [Guidance on working with survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse in homelessness settings](#)
- [Safety advice for sex workers in the UK](#)



Local Insights meetings



Local Insights meetings: Planning

- **All services should compile a list of women they are working with/aware of prior to the meeting.**
- **Include women who have worked with/been known to your service in the last three months (July to September 2025), who you know have experienced rough sleeping according to the census definition at any point within the last three months.**
- **If your service regularly records case management data about the women you work with (e.g. name, date of birth), create a list of women who you work with who meet the criteria. Your list should include only initials and year of birth for each woman.**
- **If your service does not record case management information, simply note the total number of women who meet the criteria.**

Local Insights meetings: What happens?

- **At the meeting, the organiser will address each service in turn and will ask for the number of women they have worked with who meet the census criteria.**
- **The service should then list the initials of each woman they work with.**
- **If you think your service may also have worked with that woman, you should raise this with the meeting organiser, and you and the service can check whether this is a shared case.**
- **Any confirmed shared cases will be noted as duplicates, so that the meeting organiser can calculate an accurate number of women rough sleeping in the borough.**
- **Once all figures have been shared, the meeting organiser will facilitate a conversation within the meeting about the particular experiences and needs of women who are rough sleeping within the borough, and any learnings from conducting the census.**



What next?



What next? Action plan!

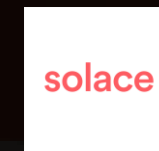
- 1. Tell the census lead in your area/the core census team that you will be participating in the census.**
- 2. Read the census guidance for services and share with your team/other services.**
- 3. Let your census lead/the core census team know your volunteering needs - we may be able to co-locate a volunteer at your service.**
- 4. Nominate people in your service to coordinate completion of the survey with women during census week.**
- 5. Conduct surveys with women who access your service during census week! Make sure all surveys are submitted at the time of filling in/before midnight on 1st October.**
- 6. Compile a list of women who have accessed your service July - September 2024 inclusive (who you know to be rough sleeping according to the census definition) for the Local Insights meeting, using the guidance. One person from your service to attend the Local Insights meeting.**



Questions



Change
Grow
Live



Single
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Project

