



London Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2023

Information session for outreach teams

Eleanor Greenhalgh
Solace Women's Aid

Lucy Campbell
Single Homeless Project

A black and white photograph showing the silhouette of a woman with her hair in a ponytail, looking down and to the right. The background is a blurred indoor setting with some architectural elements.

Today we'll be talking about...

1. How and why women can experience rough sleeping differently

2. What is the census

3. How to undertake gender and trauma informed outreach shifts as part of the 2023 census

4. How to take part in your borough-based census data meeting

How do women
experience rough
sleeping?

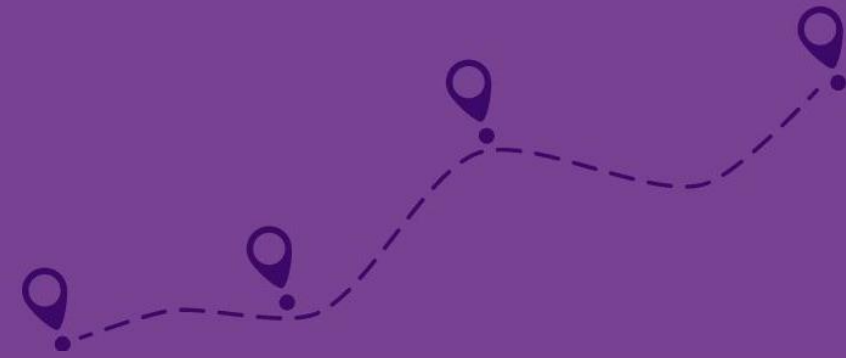




Women's rough sleeping

Women will visibly rough sleep as a last resort. They are more likely to be:

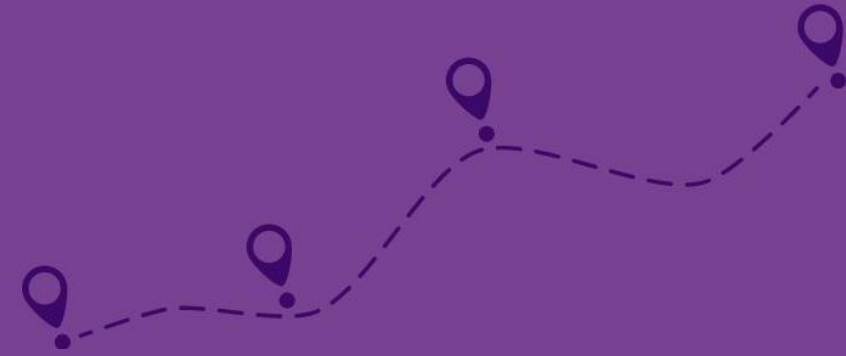
- Walking around all night, being constantly on the move
- Seeking shelter in more 'hidden' locations, A&Es, public transport, 24hr establishments
- Concealing their gender whilst rough sleeping
- Alternating between some/all of the above with other forms of homelessness, including sofa surfing and staying with abusive partners



Women's rough sleeping and violence

From research, lived experience and services, we know that women experience:

- 'Near universal' experiences of abuse and violence
- Sexual assault, harassment and increased risk of sexual exploitation, and predatory behaviour from men
- Women describe feeling scared and constantly at risk
- A perception of needing to form relationships with men for protection
- Mixed-gender services can feel unsafe due to risk of sexual harassment and violence, and exploitation in male-dominated spaces



One women's story of hidden rough sleeping



[Watch Michelle's story here](#)

What is the census, and
what did it tell us
about women's rough
sleeping?



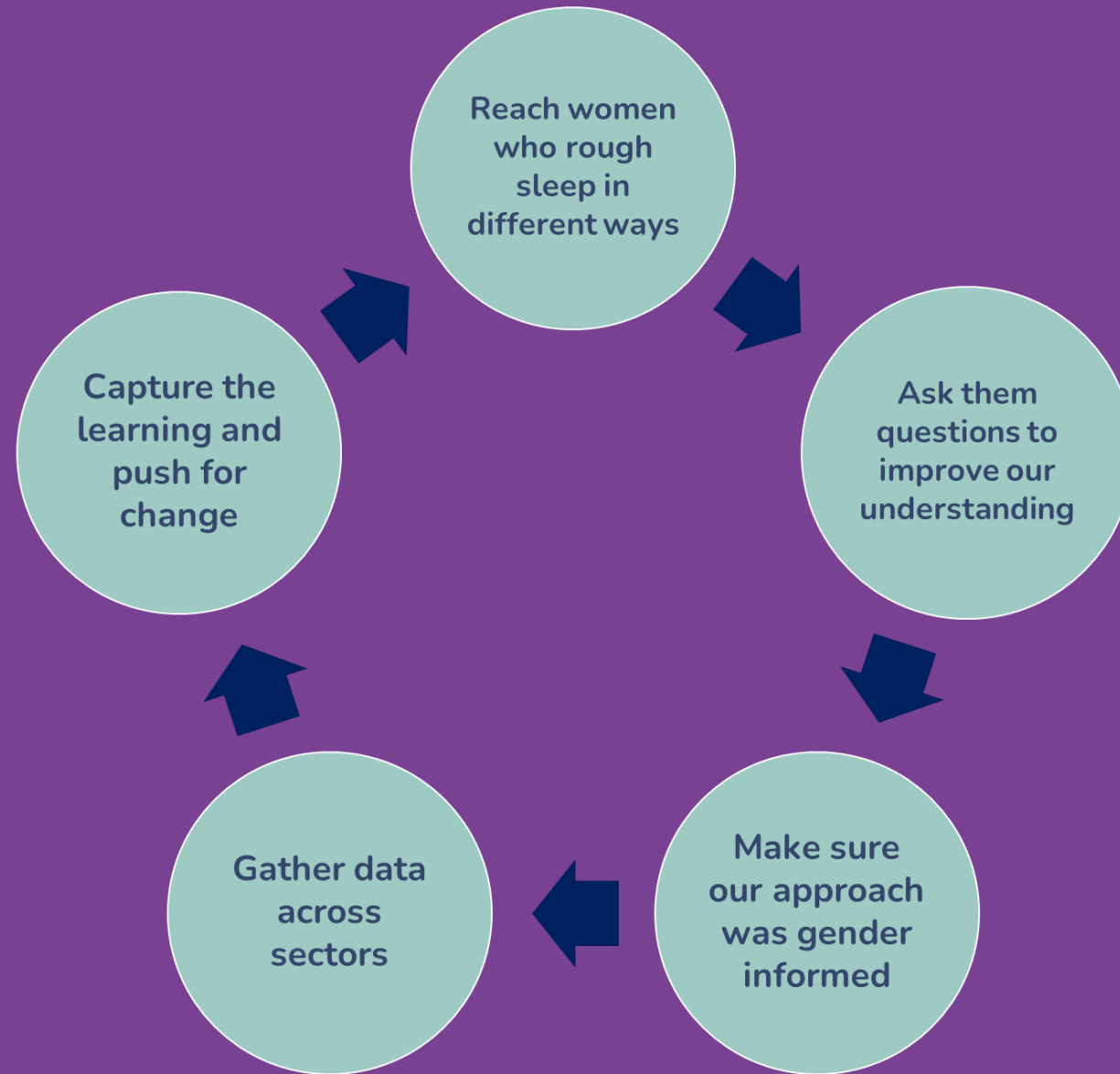
What is the Women's Rough Sleeping Census?

The women's rough sleeping census is a new approach to gathering data on women who are sleeping rough. The census is designed to be inclusive of women whose patterns of rough sleeping may be hidden, intermittent and transient, meaning they are currently missed from official data on rough sleeping. The census collects data in three ways:

- Over a 7 day period, outreach services conduct gender informed outreach shifts to find women who are rough sleeping, and complete a short, anonymised survey with them about their circumstances.
- Over the 7 day period, other services who may encounter women who are rough sleeping invite women who access their services to complete the survey. This could be health services, substance use services, VAWG services, migrant services, etc.
- After the 7 day census period, a data meeting is held in each Local Authority, where services come together to share anonymised data on women they are working with who they know are sleeping rough.



What did we want the census to achieve?



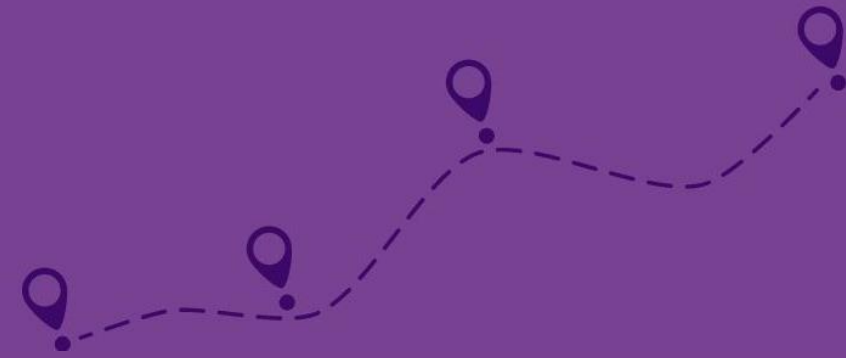


Pilot supported and overseen by the Life off the Streets women's workstream.

Researchers at PraxisCollab supported development of the methodology and wrote up the report

What happened in the 2022 census?

- We delivered the first Women's Rough Sleeping Census in London in 2022.
- The first census involved a census survey completed with women in services and during census gender-informed outreach shifts.
- 24 out of 33 London boroughs took part, and 154 women completed surveys with us.
- 13 boroughs recorded more women in the census than in the 2022 snapshot. 71 more women were seen across those boroughs in the census.
- 3 boroughs who recorded 0 women in the 2022 snapshot saw women in the census.
- The census saw 8% more women than in the 2022 snapshot for London, despite taking place in 9 fewer boroughs.



A person in a dark hoodie is walking away from the camera down a long, narrow, dimly lit corridor. The walls are made of light-colored, curved panels. A grid window is visible in the upper left. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

What did the census find?

"Women's rough sleeping is often hidden, transient and intermittent."

"Women were sleeping in a wide variety of places, including hospital toilets, disused garages, squatting, on public transport, standing outside hospitals."

"Rough sleeping is not currently defined in a way that incorporates how women experience rough sleeping...More work is required to develop a definition that is meaningful and relevant to women's experiences."



How will the 2023
census work?



2023 London Women's Rough Sleeping Census

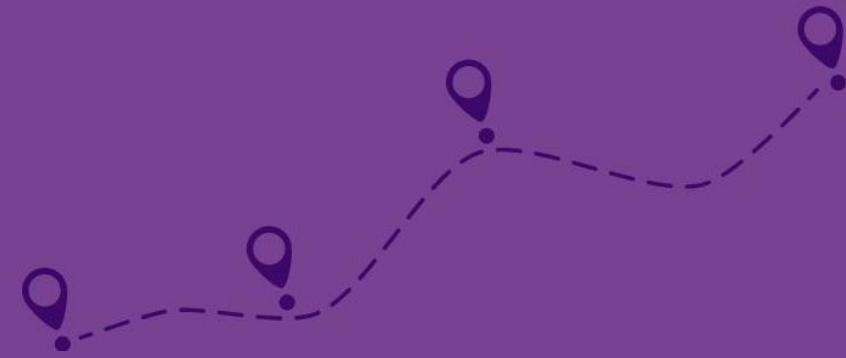
The 2023 census is **25th September to 1st October** and consists of two components:

1. Census survey

A short survey to be completed with women who have recently experienced rough sleeping.

Answers to the survey are gathered in three main ways:

- Outreach teams conduct the survey on gender-informed shifts during census week;
- Services conduct the survey with women they support during census week and;
- Services come together to host women's census sessions in their borough during the census week (e.g. in day centres or at other key local hotspots).



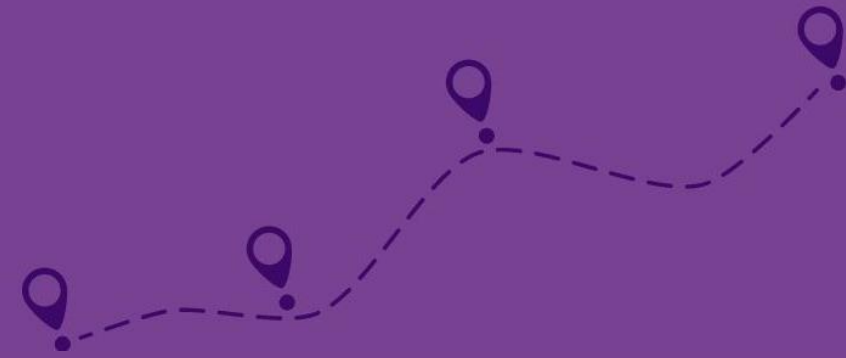
2023 London Women's Rough Sleeping Census

2. Data meeting

After census week, local services will come together in each borough to submit basic data about the number of women they work with who are rough sleeping.

This can help us get an anonymised, representative picture of women rough sleeping in each borough.

Each borough will have a census lead to help coordinate and support services taking part in each area. You can find out about your borough's census lead by contacting the census team.



2023 census definition

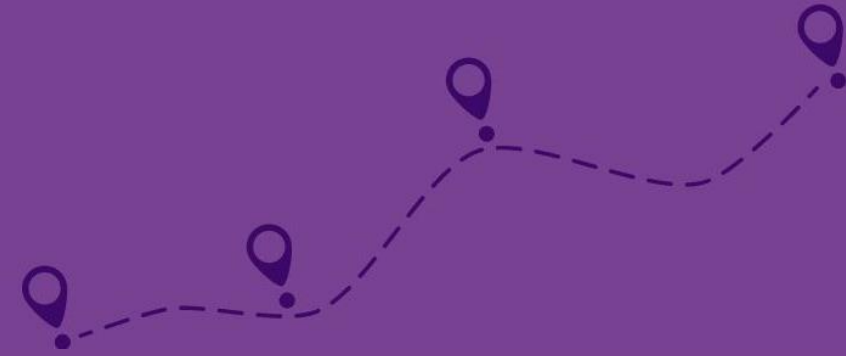
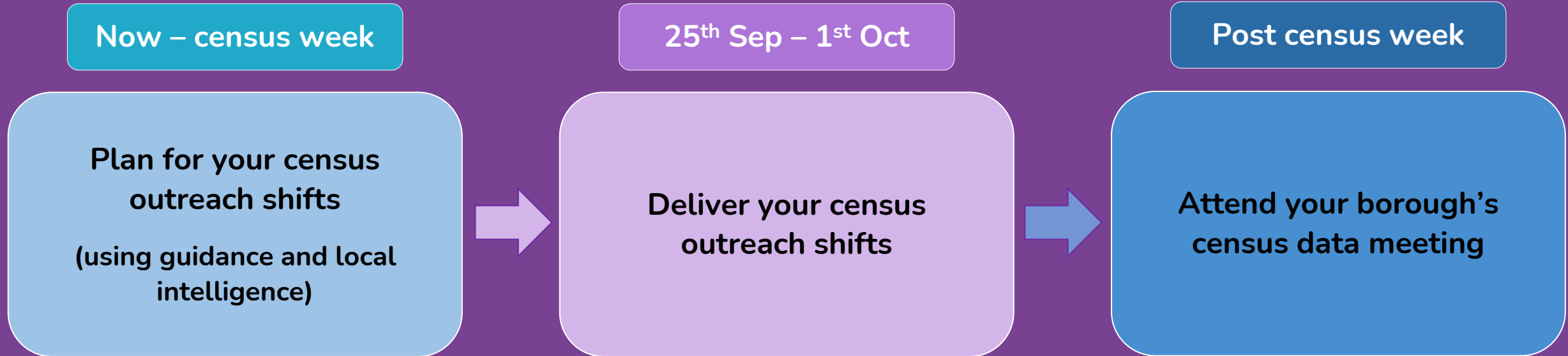
Based on the 2022 census findings that women's rough sleeping is often **hidden, transient and intermittent**, we have developed a gender-informed definition of rough sleeping for the 2023 census:

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.



What will outreach teams need to do?



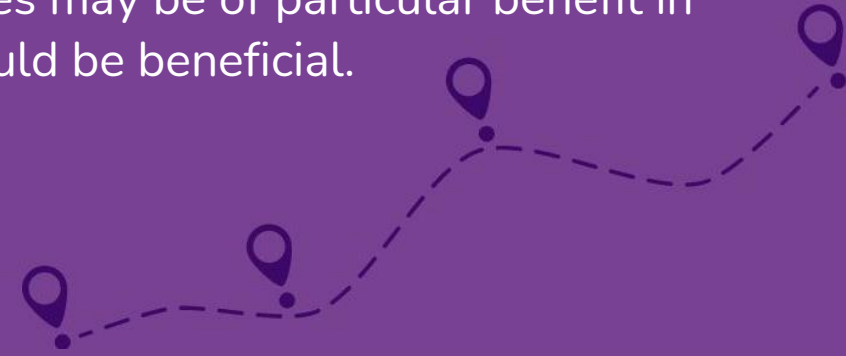
How to undertake
gender-informed
outreach shifts for
2023 census



Gender-informed outreach shifts: when?

- Each borough should conduct a minimum of 6 hours of gender-informed outreach within census week. The shifts should allow enough time to cover all of the hotspots within the borough.
- Following consultation with practitioners and women with lived experience, we recommend the following shift times:
 - Between 6am and 9am
 - During the daytime
 - Between 9pm and 1am

Outreach teams may wish to use local intelligence to pick which shift times may be of particular benefit in your area. Where you are able to, testing shifts at each of these times would be beneficial.



Gender-informed outreach shifts: where?

Each borough should plan their shifts using local intelligence from their team and local services.

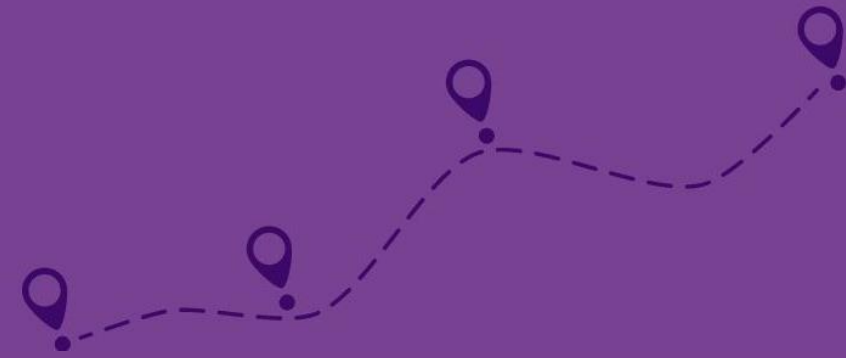
Following consultation, our guidance outlines spaces where women are more likely to be seen, including:

- Quieter streets, estates and stairwells
- Parks/green spaces, graveyards, benches and car parks
- Inside train/tube/bus stations – particularly including toilets at night or in the early morning
- A&E waiting rooms, libraries, McDonald's/Burger King etc - including toilets
- Around day centres, hostels, health and other services (where women may not be living but may have reason to go to or be near)
- Inside freely accessible public spaces in which women can be inconspicuous and are unlikely to be asked to move on, for example shopping centres, arts centres e.g. Southbank Centre.



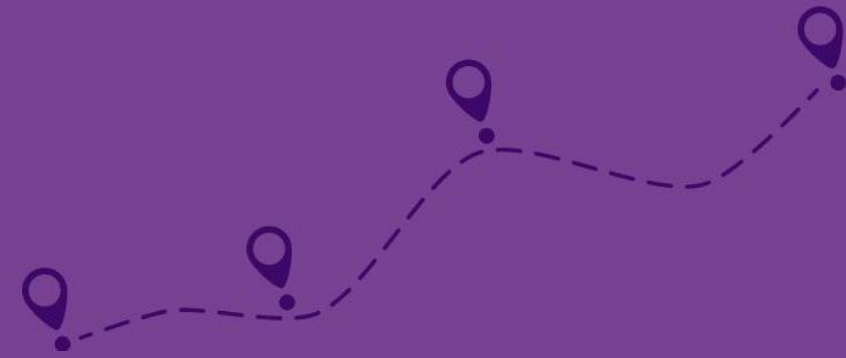
Gender-informed outreach shifts: outreach pairs

- Census outreach should be done in pairs, including outreach staff from the borough and a volunteer if necessary.
- Men outreach workers/volunteers must be paired with a woman outreach worker or volunteer.
- If you need volunteers to support capacity or ensure that you have enough women on the shifts, please contact the census team with details by 11th September 2023.
- All those taking part must have attended this training or watched a recorded session and read the guidance.



Different types of outreach teams

- If your service isn't a commissioned rough sleeping team and delivers women-specific outreach – for example, women's Housing First, sexual health vans, support for sex workers – your shifts are likely already designed to reach women. You may therefore not wish to make many changes.
- If your service isn't a commissioned rough sleeping team and you face restrictions, such as going out with a health van to particular locations at particular times, you might not be able to adapt your shift practices.
- If teams don't conduct women-specific outreach, or have close restrictions, we suggest following the census guidance as far as possible.



Gender-informed outreach shifts: who to approach?

- Women who are rough sleeping may not be physically bedded down when you see them, or at all.
- Professional judgement will be key in determining who to approach, and how to approach. Other than professional judgement and usual outreach practice, the following tips could be useful:
 - Women who are engaged in any form of street activity
 - Women in enclosed spaces such as train/tube stations, McDonalds, A&E waiting rooms, libraries etc. They may appear vulnerable, may not be using the services in the intended way, may have many belongings with them
 - Staff, security, police and PCSOs may be aware of women who may be experiencing homelessness in the area. (NB. women should not be approached to do the survey with any form of police involvement or presence, or with anyone in uniform).



Try this....

"Hello, we're outreach workers, how are you doing today? Is it ok if we speak to you? Thank you. We are hoping to speak to women who have recent experience of not having a safe place to stay. Is that something that you have experienced?"

We have some information that might help, and we would also like to ask few questions for some research that's being done to help women experiencing homelessness. 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. We are offering £5 vouchers for your time – the questions will take couple of minutes."

You may wish to avoid the term rough sleeping and it might be useful to describe some of the types of circumstances in the definition.

A few thoughts from women with lived experience:

Wear your badge
and make sure she
knows who you are

Listen to her, validate
her, show her we
want to hear her voice

Be friendly, calm and casual,
reassure her that nothing
will come back on her

Don't ask her
intrusive questions,
or ask too much –
it might be
retraumatising


Ask 'how can I help you,
what do you need at the
moment?'

She is an expert in her
situation - ask some
questions, listen to her and
offer some support and
information if she'd like

If she doesn't want to talk
right now, 'when's a good
time for you?'

Don't promise anything you
can't deliver

“People just don't even want to make eye contact with you and it makes you feel like you don't even exist, it's awful. To have someone actually sit down and pay attention to you and, asking you questions about yourself...it must just be a really lovely experience.”



Census survey and recording



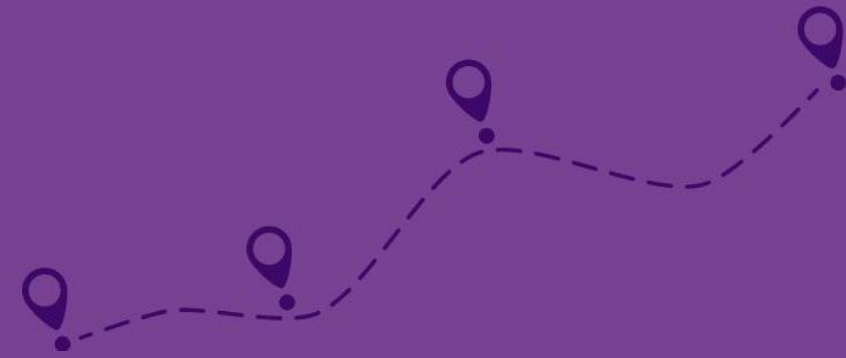
Gender-informed outreach shifts: the survey

- Short survey of 10 questions to be completed with women. A few additional questions for practitioners (e.g. service type, location, date of survey completion).
- The survey questions are being finalised and are likely to 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).



Gender-informed outreach shifts: the survey

- 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.
- Women will be offered a £5 supermarket voucher as a thank you.
- 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.
- The survey is for anyone who identifies as a woman and for people who identify as non-binary and feel the survey's gender themes are relevant to their experiences.

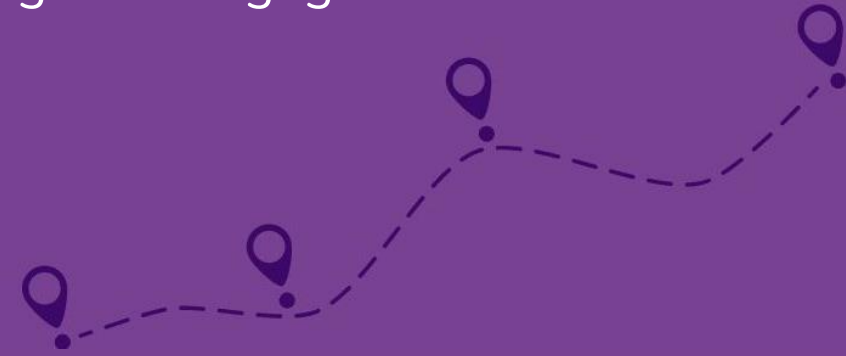


Gender-informed outreach shifts: recording

- The surveys should be completed in real time on the online survey platform, or filled in online immediately after the interaction.
- We ask outreach teams to fill in a brief recording form to log the dates and times you conducted your gender-informed shifts.
- CHAIN has a feature which allows street contacts to be designated as part of the Women's Census. We will provide instructions for how to use this feature.

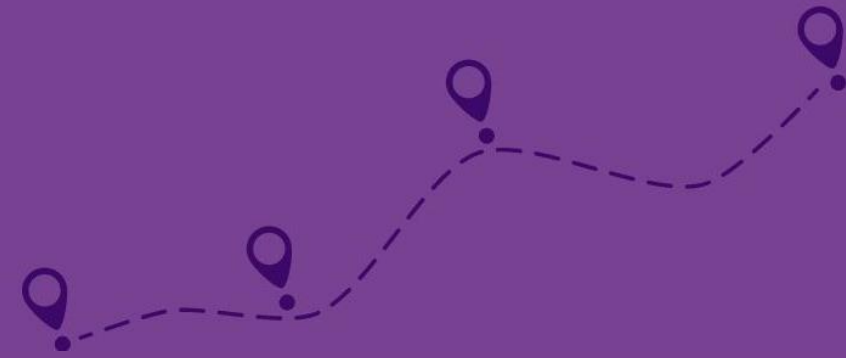
Outreach workers should use the Women's Census feature to record:

- Bedded down street contacts for all women they see sleeping rough.
- Non-bedded down contacts for women not seen sleeping rough but engaged in street activity.



Making every contact count

- Any contact is a vital opportunity to connect women with support, information and resources, or build on an existing relationship.
- Each contact should be responsive to her needs and her pace.
- Practitioners should familiarise themselves with any local women's services and safety planning techniques, safeguarding responses and service contacts should they encounter disclosure of risk, abuse or assault.
- Adapt the census information sheet to include services and timings for your borough. Practitioners can offer this sheet to women they meet, whether they do the survey or not.
- Practitioners should be equipped to make emergency referrals as necessary.
- Make use of telephone translators where possible.



“Somebody coming right to where you are and giving you information, that’s a massive thing and that means that you really step into my world. I tell you, cause that woman could be sexually abused the night before, and you’ve just come in and she didn’t even know that she could have left, she didn’t have nowhere to go and you’ve come in with the leaflet, and said here’s a phone number, it was an exit point for her, and that’s a brilliant outcome.”

Trauma-informed
outreach and safety
planning



Trauma informed outreach approach

Open and clear about your purpose

Enable choice and control: "Is now an ok time to talk?"

Be aware of your body language. Give space. Offer choice: "Is it ok if I sit here?"

Be prepared to respond to disclosures of trauma/abuse

Be mindful that the person might be with a perpetrator/be being watched by a perpetrator

Avoid re-traumatisation/no unnecessary questions and don't push for answers

Have information ready and offer help and advice

Check in with your partner; have a safe word, debrief after shift

Safety – for you and for her

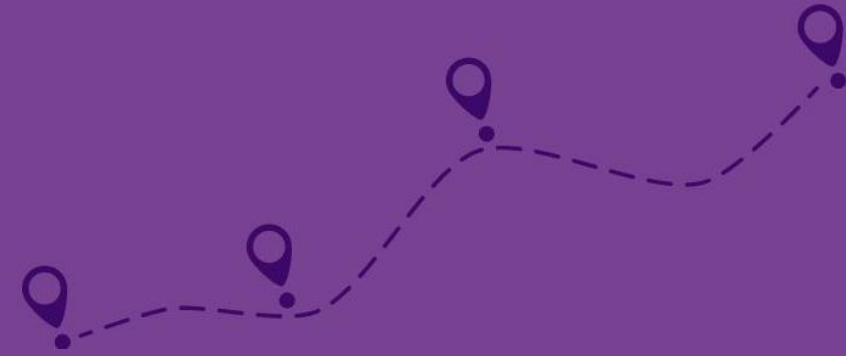
- If you meet a woman under 18 and are concerned she is rough sleeping or at other high risk, follow usual safeguarding procedures.
- If you meet a woman who is pregnant and rough sleeping, follow usual safeguarding and support procedures.
- Women in very poor health may need urgent support. Contact your local health teams, as well as emergency services as required.
- For women who are in immediate danger or risk of harm, discuss some basic safety planning with her (see next slide) or contact support/emergency services if she is willing to do so.
- If you witness a woman being abused or assaulted or at any point feel like you are at risk, remove yourself from the situation immediately and call 999 or 101, depending on the immediacy of the risk.



Basic safety planning

If you are concerned that a woman is at risk but it is not an emergency, try some basic safety planning:

- Identify and validate existing strategies she is using to manage her safety.
- Is there anywhere she can go to feel safer? Can you support her to get to a safe place?
- 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). E.g. women's only services, drop in centres/services, day centres, No Second Night Out assessment centre, libraries, 24hr establishments, A&E, someone she knows and identifies as safe.



Basic safety planning

- Can you offer anything practical to increase her safety right now? E.g. food, water, mobile phone, phone credit, personal alarm.
- Does she want to report to the police? Can you support her to do so?
- Is there anyone she wants you to contact?

Resources

[Keeping us Safer - Guidance for safety planning with women experiencing multiple disadvantage](#)

[Working with survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse in homelessness settings](#)

[Safety advice for sex workers in the UK](#)





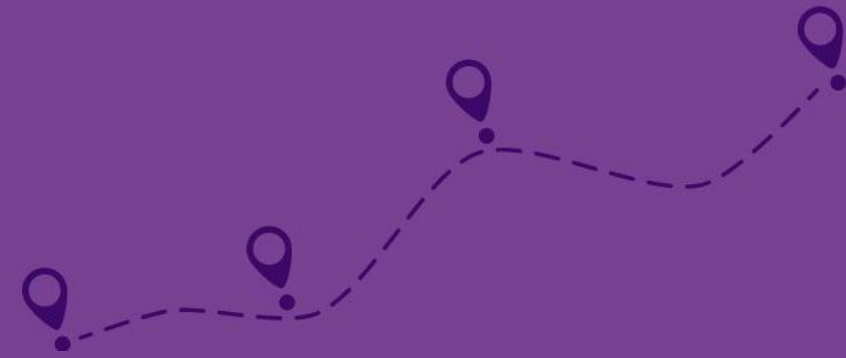
Any questions about
the gender informed
outreach shifts?

How to take part in
borough census data
meetings for the
2023 census



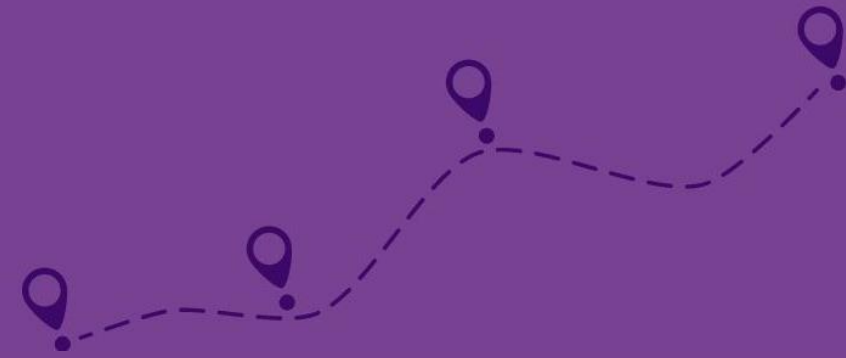
What is the census data meeting?

- The data meeting is a new part of the census this year.
- Different services in a borough can come together to share numbers of women they are working with who they know to be rough sleeping, and experiences of your service users.
- Feedback from the 2022 census told us that some teams didn't meet women they knew to be rough sleeping during census week, but wanted to make sure they were included.
- The data meeting draws on knowledge of local services to provide a more accurate and inclusive estimate of women known to be in this situation, including those not visible during census week, whereas the census survey allows us to hear from women themselves.



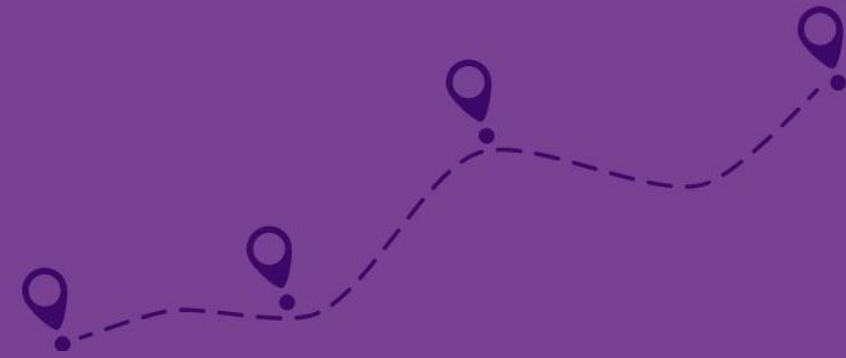
What should we do before the census data meeting?

- All services should compile a list of women they are working with prior to the meeting.
- Include women who have worked with your service, and who you know have experienced rough sleeping in the last three months (July to September 2023).
- If your service regularly records case management data about the women you work with (e.g. name, date of birth), your list should include 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.



How will the census data meeting work?

- At the meeting, the organiser will ask each service for the number of women they have worked with who meet the census rough sleeping definition, and to list their initials.
- If you think your service may also have worked with that woman, you and the service can check whether this is a shared case. Any shared cases will be noted as duplicates.
- The meeting organiser will then facilitate a conversation about the experiences and needs of women rough sleeping within the borough, and any learnings from conducting the census.

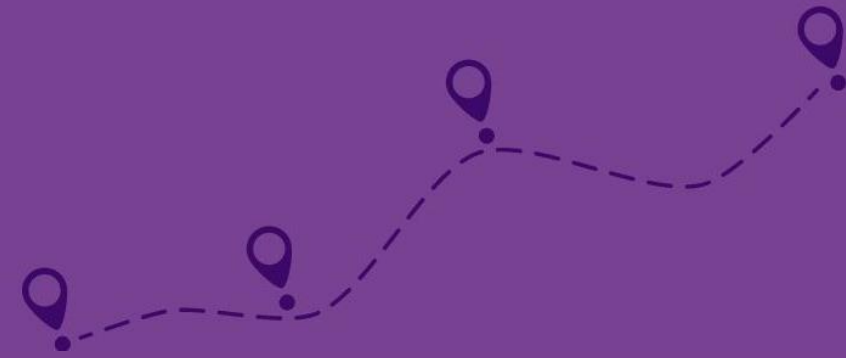


What next?
Actions for your team



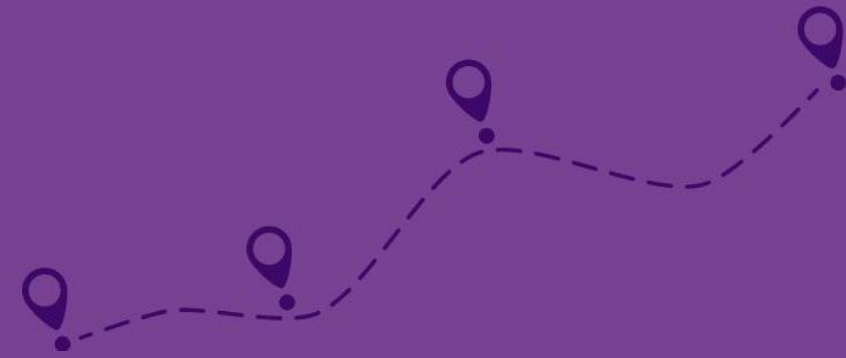
What's next? Actions from now – October 2023

1. Plan your outreach shifts
2. Tell us that your team will be participating in the census
3. Request any vouchers and volunteer support by 11th September
4. Edit your borough-specific info sheets and create any care packs
5. Conduct your gender-informed outreach shifts in census week!
6. Fill in the recording form about your census shifts, submitted all surveys, and update CHAIN
7. Compile a list of women for the data meeting. Attend the data meeting.



Women's Census 2023: Useful links

- You can get support from your area's borough lead or the main census team
- Check out the [webpage](#) for more info and read the [guidance](#)
- Sign up to the [mailing list](#)
- Check out our census [information sheet](#)
- Please spread the word and encourage services to take part!





THANK YOU!

Any questions?

Contact us:

womens.census@solacewomensaid.org

Eleanor Greenhalgh
Women's Rough Sleeping Policy Manager
Solace Women's Aid

Lucy Campbell
Head of Multiple Disadvantage Service Transformation
Single Homeless Project