

Census guidance for outreach

London Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2023



Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for teams which deliver any sort of prospective outreach in London (ie conducting outreach shifts to work with people they know, but also to find and support people not already known to the service). You might deliver outreach focused on rough sleeping, health, substance use, supporting sex workers, community or another type of outreach, but your team should encounter or work with women who are rough sleeping, even if only occasionally.

If you do not deliver outreach as above, please see the guidance for services on our website [here](#).

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BACKGROUND

Why is there a need for a census and 'gender-informed' outreach?

Research, lived experience and the experiences of services tell us that women are some of the most at-risk within the rough sleeping and homeless population, yet we also know that women are under-represented in rough sleeping statistics and provision. Key data sources used to understand rough sleeping come from street count figures based on recording practices which are not adapted to women's patterns of homelessness. It follows that if services are commissioned based on this data, they will not be meeting the needs of those who are not captured in this data.

There are also particular risks to women who are rough sleeping, including extremely prevalent experiences of gender-based violence and abuse, and an average age of death of 43 years old, even lower than male counterparts (45 years).

How can gender-informed outreach be part of the solution?

The Life Off The Streets women's workstream delivered the first London Women's Rough Sleeping Census in 2022 with the support of London Councils, the Greater London Authority (GLA), the Life Off the Streets Core Group, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The census is being repeated in 2023.

The census aims to bring visibility to the experiences of women who are rough sleeping and may not be represented in data, policy or services. By using methods which consider gendered experiences, we aim to:

- Collect anonymised data to build a more comprehensive understanding of women's experiences of rough sleeping;
- Use the findings to advocate for targeted support for women and inform policy and practice;
- Test, support and encourage good practice; and
- Help support services and sectors to forge links and share good practice to result in joined-up support for women.

The methodology used differs from the usual rough sleeping snapshot count in recognition of the fact that women sleep rough less visibly and are less likely to come into contact with outreach teams as a result. The methodology therefore uses a gender-informed definition of women's rough sleeping and gender-informed outreach to gather data through a survey completed directly with women.

Gender-informed outreach takes into account the different experiences and patterns of rough sleeping for women, adjusting hours, hotspots and approaches to better match women's experiences. It is also done with an understanding of women's safety risks and needs, how these may impact interactions and emergency responses which may be needed.

What will the census involve?

The census will take place from 25th September to 1st October 2023.

With support from as many organisations as possible from across London, the census will consist of two components in 2023:

1. Census survey

A short survey to be completed with women who have recently experienced rough sleeping. This helps us to hear directly from women themselves about their experiences.

Answers to the survey are gathered in three main ways:

- Outreach teams conduct the survey on gender-informed outreach 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).

2. Census 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 to achieve 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.

GUIDANCE

An overview: what does your outreach team need to do?

1. Familiarise yourselves with this guidance and attend August census outreach training (or watch the recording online)
2. Use this guidance to plan your gender-informed census outreach shifts for census week (25th September – 1st October)
3. Attend the census data meeting in your team's borough, after census week.

How should the outreach shifts be planned?

Outreach teams should plan their shifts according to this guidance and with careful consideration of the particular environment and experience within their borough. We recommend seeking local intelligence, particularly from any women's specialist services, and looking at the patterns of women's rough sleeping that your outreach team observes, including any recent patterns and changes.

Where teams see few women and do not have access to any specialist local intelligence, we recommend following this guidance closely.

Some areas might see few women during usual outreach and snapshot counts: this may be for a multitude of reasons, but we encourage all areas to use this as an opportunity to test gender-informed practices.

We also encourage outreach teams to meet with other services in the borough to plan your census involvement. This can provide local intelligence to help with planning shifts; can offer opportunities to deliver joint shifts, increasing capacity and sharing expertise; and teams can learn about any women's spaces or day centre sessions which are offering support and opportunities to women during census week.

Gender-informed definition of rough sleeping

The London Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2022 found that women's rough sleeping is often:

Hidden: Women often avoid bedding down on the streets and will shelter/sleep in places that outreach are unlikely or unable to access as part of their routine shifts.

Transient: Women often stay on the move i.e. walking all night or moving locations regularly for safety reasons.

Intermittent: Women may sleep rough interspersed with other forms of dangerous hidden homelessness, such as sex working in exchange for a place to stay overnight or staying in flats belonging to unknown or

unsafe people. They may make decisions about where to sleep/shelter on a night by night basis based on their assessment of risk and what options are available.

The 2023 Census is therefore defining women's rough sleeping as:

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).

NB. The survey will ask people about their experiences over the last three months: anyone completing the survey does not have to be rough sleeping at that time and does not have to be seen bedded down.

When should the gender-informed outreach shifts be conducted?

We are asking each borough taking part to conduct a minimum of 6 hours of gender-informed outreach within the census week (25th September to 1st October).

Outreach shifts should total enough hours to allow the team to cover all identified hotspots in the borough and test practices more likely to reach women. If outreach teams have capacity to do additional hours of gender-informed outreach across the census week, we encourage you to do so.

Following consultation with outreach teams and other specialist services, as well as women with lived experience, we recommend that shifts are conducted during the following times:

- between 6am and 9am (to reach women as they are waking up or moving on);
- during the daytime (to reach women who might be using spaces open in the daytime, such as libraries);
- between 9pm and 1am (to reach women who might be moving on or bedding down as retail outlets close).

Outreach teams may not be able to cover all of these times, but may wish to use local intelligence to inform which shifts may be of particular benefit in your area. Where outreach teams are able to, testing shifts at each of these times would be beneficial.

In census week, all teams should record basic details about their gender-informed shifts (e.g. times, no. of workers), in a template form provided. This will inform the methodology recorded in the report.

Who should conduct the gender-informed outreach shifts?

Outreach should be done in twos. Outreach shifts will be undertaken by outreach staff from each borough, paired with a volunteer if necessary. Men outreach workers/volunteers must be paired with a woman outreach worker or volunteer. All workers and volunteers taking part in the census must have attended or watched a recorded census outreach training session and read this guidance prior to undertaking a shift. You can access the recorded training session on the website [here](#).

If you need volunteers to support capacity or ensure that you have enough women on your shifts, please contact the census team with details by 11th September 2023.

Which locations should the gender-informed outreach shifts go to?

We ask that each borough plan their gender-informed outreach shifts using their local intelligence and that of local services. Intelligence could come from other specialist services, staff working at the locations outlined below, community safety teams, security and enforcement teams, and local police. However, the census survey should not be conducted by or with anyone in security or police uniform.

We suggest that outreach teams consider the areas in which they usually see women rough sleeping and consider that women are much more likely to use more concealed and inconspicuous places.

Following consultation, we suggest focusing on the following types of spaces where women are more likely to be seen:

- Quieter streets, estates and stairwells
- Parks/green spaces, graveyards, benches
- Gated garden squares
- Car parks, including underground or multi-storey car parks
- Restaurant and shop doorways
- Libraries
- Inside train/tube/bus stations – particularly including toilets at night or in the early morning
- A&E waiting rooms – particularly including toilets
- McDonald's/Burger King etc - including toilets
- In shop and restaurant doorways, particularly just before opening or after closing
- Around soup kitchens/inside churches or other places of worship
- Around homeless health services – GPs, mental health drop in, substance use drop ins
- Around day centres and hostels (where women may not be living but may have reason to go to or be near)
- Around Housing Options departments where women may present
- Inside freely accessible public spaces in which women can be inconspicuous and are unlikely to be asked to move on, e.g. shopping centres, or open access arts centres like the Southbank Centre.

Not all outreach teams will be able to access all of these areas, particularly where there are safety concerns, but consider this within your team's and local area's context.

Who should the outreach workers approach?

The methodology of this census recognises that women who are rough sleeping may not be physically bedded down in a sleeping bag when workers see them, and aims to reach out to a broader range of women whose rough sleeping patterns and circumstances may look different, as per the definition.

Each gender-informed outreach shift will have at least one professional outreach worker undertaking it, and professional judgement will be key in determining who to approach (when a woman's housing situation may not be clear), and also how to approach (ensuring that the approach is appropriate, sensitive to a woman's circumstances and not perceived as intrusive). Other than professional judgement, and approaching women who are bedded down, about to bed down or sitting/standing next to bedding (as per a usual shift), the following tips could be useful in knowing who to approach:

- Women who are engaged in any form of street activity (begging, street drinking, in groups with other people who are clearly or likely to be sleeping rough).
- Women in enclosed spaces such as train/tube stations, McDonalds, A&E waiting rooms, libraries etc. who appear to be vulnerable and/or may not be using the services in the intended way but may be sheltering there, and/or may have a number of belongings with them.

- If workers observe patrolling police/PCSOs, ask them whether they are aware of any women who appear vulnerable/may be experiencing homelessness in the area. Professional judgement should always be used when working with the police, and this suggestion is for local intel purposes on women's locations only: women should not be approached to do the survey with any form of police involvement or presence, or with anyone in uniform.

We recommend that outreach teams approach women sensitively and without making any assumptions. Outreach workers may wish to open up a conversation about the census and/or their work, and gently enquire about the person's current circumstances. The survey will have an opening blurb to be used as an introduction, and we have some example opening lines below.

Important to note: Women's rough sleeping can be complicated and often not linear – for example, women may have a hostel bed space but spend some time sleeping rough with a partner, because they feel unsafe in the hostel or for other reasons. They may have their own tenancy but feel unable to return to it, perhaps due to risk. Some women may be alternating between rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness or insecure housing e.g. sofa surfing, or staying with a dangerous partner. Workers don't need to be sure of a woman's exact circumstances in order to proceed: if she would like to take part in the survey, we will be able to understand her experience from her survey responses.

Try something like 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."

Can the census survey be conducted outside of gender-informed outreach?

If outreach workers have the capacity to do so, they can conduct the census survey with women they meet outside of the gender-informed shifts. Outreach teams can also do more than the minimum 6 hours of gender-informed shifts if they have capacity to do so. Please note all shifts on the recording form.

Regardless of when the census survey is conducted, we ask that any team members conducting the census have watched the training. Workers should also be mindful of the circumstances and whether any women staff or volunteers are present. Whenever the census survey is completed, workers should explain the census, provide the privacy notice and offer the £5 voucher as a thank you for taking part.

Although the census survey can be conducted outside of gender-informed shifts, it is important to deliver the specific gender-informed census shifts so that teams can test different practices and use local intelligence to reach different women and in a different way. In the 2022 census, 14% of respondents were not working with any services, highlighting the importance of trying to reach more women.

What should non-rough sleeping/non-commissioned outreach teams do?

Services who deliver outreach but who don't deliver commissioned rough sleeping outreach (e.g. Find and Treat teams, drug and alcohol services, services supporting sex workers, women's specialist outreach, community outreach) can also conduct the survey on their outreach shifts. If services don't conduct women-specific outreach, we suggest following the guidance in this document as far as possible.

Where services deliver women-specific outreach and have practices which are already tailored to and work well for women, we suggest conducting your shifts as usual.

Services may also wish to deliver combined shifts with other outreach teams or services in their area, including the commissioned rough sleeping team. This can help to share expertise and local intelligence in both directions, can support multi-agency working and can expand the support offer to any women seen on shifts.

We encourage any outreach teams to get in touch if you have any additional questions.

What will the survey be like and how will the survey be done?

The survey will be on an online survey platform so outreach workers/volunteers can access it easily via smartphone or tablet when on shift. A printable version of the survey will be available for use if needed. The survey link will be available to access from the census website shortly prior to census week.

Workers should provide a privacy notice to women and explain the purpose of the research. Workers should make clear that participation is entirely voluntary, there are no identifying questions and the resulting research will be completely anonymised. Once the information has been given to the woman, she can decide if the survey is relevant for her and if she wants to take part.

Participants will be offered a £5 Sainsbury's voucher as a thank you, which will be given to outreach workers prior to the shift if requested from the census team by 11th September. There will also be a printable copy of the survey in case outreach workers are unable to use the online survey platform during the shift.

The survey questions for 2023 are being finalised, and will 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 (this will not record DOB)

NB. Anyone who identifies as a woman should be offered the opportunity to take part in this survey. Those who identify as non-binary and feel the study's gender themes are relevant to their experiences should be offered the opportunity to take part in this survey.

The question themes have been carefully selected from a range of possible options. Each option has been evaluated with the aim of achieving a careful balance of data quality, sensitivity and research needs.

As well as asking women to complete the survey, what other information should workers have with them?

Any contact made between outreach workers and women experiencing rough sleeping and homelessness is important for the census, but is also a vital opportunity to start to connect women with support, information and resources, or build on an existing relationship. Each contact should therefore be as meaningful as possible, and, as in usual outreach practice, should provide women with choice, information and should be responsive to her needs at that time and at her pace.

Some women who are approached may just want to do the survey, but it is likely that some women will need direct assistance and advice and may not have been seen by the outreach team before. As each shift will have at least one professional outreach worker carrying it out, they will be able to provide information and advice as usual. We also ask that outreach workers familiarize themselves with information about women's services and support in the area, and familiarize themselves with safety planning techniques and responses. This might be needed if workers meet a woman who discloses that she is in a dangerous situation or relationship, for example, or who has recently experienced violence, including sexual assault.

Outreach teams should also provide service information sheets to women met during the census: outreach teams should edit the census template provided to make it specific to your borough, including timings and addresses for any local women's services or spaces.

As reported in our lived experience consultations, many women experiencing rough sleeping and homelessness may be unsure of how or where to access support, and service information sheets can provide her with vital information that she can use and refer to in her own time, even if she is unable or unwilling to talk to outreach workers when they approach, or is hampered in doing so by those around her.

Your borough-specific services information sheet should include:

- 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 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.

How can we receive vouchers and volunteer support?

The census provides £5 vouchers as a thank you for women who are met on outreach shifts and take part in the census survey. Vouchers will be posted to commissioned rough sleeping teams if requested by 11th September.

Vouchers are limited, but if other outreach teams would like to be able to offer the £5 voucher for the survey conducted on outreach, please get in touch.

To support capacity for the census and to ensure there is at least one woman in every outreach pair, the census team can allocate volunteers where possible to commissioned rough sleeping outreach teams. Teams should contact the census team to request volunteer allocations by 11th September and we will do our best to meet the team's needs.

If you request volunteers for your service, you will need to coordinate directly with them once allocated. Volunteers will also need to be supervised when shift.

If other outreach teams require volunteers to support capacity and gender balance, please get in touch with the census team. Numbers of volunteers will be limited, but we will try to offer support if possible.

What about CHAIN?

CHAIN has a feature which allows street contacts to be designated as part of the Women's Census. You can find details of how to use this feature on the census webpage prior to census week.

The distinction between information taken for CHAIN purposes and information taken for the census via the survey should be made clear to ensure any women taking part are aware of where their information is being recorded and how it will be used.

What else should the outreach workers and volunteers take with them?

It would be helpful if outreach workers could offer water/energy bars/toiletries/other items to help with engagement and to meet any basic and immediate needs where possible.

If the census team are able to procure donations to support with this, we will let outreach teams know.

What happens after the shift?

The surveys should be completed in real time with each woman. The results will go directly to the census team via the online survey platform. Where it has been necessary to use paper copies of the survey, the information should be input into the online survey platform as soon as possible. Survey responses dated after 1st October or submitted online after 4th October will not be counted.

If a client is on CHAIN or is eligible to be put on to CHAIN, we ask that this be done in a timely way as per the normal practice of the outreach team leading the shift, either the same day or the next day.

All the survey results recorded will go to the census team who are analysing the data gathered for the women's census. Relevant data from CHAIN will be provided in aggregate or pseudonymised form. The team will use this to prepare a report which will include findings from the census.

Representatives from the outreach team should then attend the borough-wide census data meeting, which should take place shortly after census week.

CENSUS DATA MEETING

If you are coordinating your borough's census data meeting, please see additional guidance on the census webpage.

If you are representing your team at a census data meeting, you need to prepare in advance by:

- Familiarising yourself with this guidance;
- Reaching out to the census borough lead to confirm the date and time of the meeting and your attendance;
- Signing and returning the data sharing agreement and;
- Compiling a list of women who meet the criteria listed below.

What is the purpose of the census data meeting?

The census survey is important for hearing directly from women about their experiences of rough sleeping. The data meeting, however, can provide quantitative information about women rough sleeping in the borough and in London, supporting a representative understanding of the numbers of women rough sleeping in each area (regardless of whether or not they are seen during the census week or snapshot count).

The data meeting also provides the opportunity for a range of services across the borough to come together and share their experience of supporting women who are rough sleeping in the area.

How will the meeting work?

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.

How will the data be used?

Any identifying information shared in the meeting should be minimal and for the purposes of the meeting only: by signing the data sharing agreement, services agree to not use or share this information outside of the meeting. The data submitted in the meeting will have all identifying information removed before it is submitted to the census team. Any personal or identifying information which is sent to the census team in error will be removed by the census team at the earliest possible opportunity.

The census team will then use the data from each borough's meetings and from the census survey to write the census report: data collected from the meeting and census survey will be treated separately, rather than being combined. The census team will also provide a basic breakdown of census results from their area to local teams and the local authority. No personal or identifying information will be shared.

It should be noted that although we encourage all services to attend, no service will be required to provide data at the census data meeting: involvement is by choice.

Compiling your list

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 – you may want to note down some additional information for your own use (e.g. we joint work with x service for this individual, or x individuals we work with have no suitable housing options available), but no further identifying information should be shared at the meeting. In the meeting, you may want to note if you think any women on your list may use an alias.

If your service does not record case management information, simply note the total number of women who meet the criteria.

Criteria for inclusion:

- Have worked with your service in the last three months (July to September 2023)
- Have experienced rough sleeping according to the census definition at any point within the last three months (July to September 2023)

You may also wish to mention women who you are aware of and concerned about, but who aren't working with your service, for example women you may have received Streetlink referrals for but haven't been found, or women you see regularly who haven't yet worked with the service. These numbers will be recorded separately, but will be taken into account.

In the data meeting, there should also be an opportunity to discuss any themes and system challenges your service notices in providing support for women who are rough sleeping. You may therefore wish to note anything your team would like to raise.

What if my service can't attend the data meeting?

If you wish to take part in the meeting, but cannot attend due to scheduling conflicts, you should provide your compiled list to the meeting organiser at least 24 hours prior to the meeting time.

If your service works across multiple boroughs or pan London and you can't attend all the borough data meetings, please contact the census team who can support you to submit your data for use in each of the relevant data meetings.

FURTHER DETAILS

What support will be offered to teams taking part in the census?

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

Each outreach shift will have at least one professional for every two people, so this assumes a good level of training and knowledge on safe outreach practice, dynamic risk assessment, etc. However, we would ask that all workers and volunteers taking part in the gender-informed outreach shifts attend or watch a recorded training session, whether they have previous experience or not. This will include:

- An overview of the census work, women's homelessness and rough sleeping and the additional risks women face when rough sleeping
- Guidance about how to conduct the survey and outreach shifts, and how the data meeting will work
- An overview of trauma-informed interactions and suggested safe working practices.

Visit the census webpage to register for the session or watch the recording:

www.solacewomensaid.org/our-partnerships/london-womens-rough-sleeping-census-2023

You can contact the census team with any questions.

For more information

Sign up to the census mailing list to ensure all updates, resources and relevant forms for the census reach you, including the final report once published: <https://forms.office.com/r/Dfkey1UUjE>

Webpage: www.solacewomensaid.org/our-partnerships/london-womens-rough-sleeping-census-2023

Contact address: womens.census@solacewomensaid.org

The census would not be possible without the time, commitment and effort of everyone involved. On behalf of the Life Off The Streets women's workstream, we would like to say a huge thank you to staff, volunteers and services who are taking part in the census activity, and women with lived experience who have contributed to and informed this work.

Thank you to all the practitioners who took part in census focus groups and feedback sessions, which supported us to develop the 2022 and 2023 methodologies and informed this guidance. Thank you to The Marylebone Project for supporting their service users to contribute to the census and this guidance.

Thank you as well to The Connection at St Martin's who contributed to designing and delivering the 2022 census through the Women's Development Unit, and PraxisCollab researchers who helped design the census methodology and questionnaire in 2022, and produced the 2022 report Making Women Count.