



# London Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2023

## Information session for services

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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 from men
2. What is the census
3. How to complete the survey with women who access your service during census week
4. How to take part in your borough-based census data meeting

How do women  
experience rough  
sleeping?

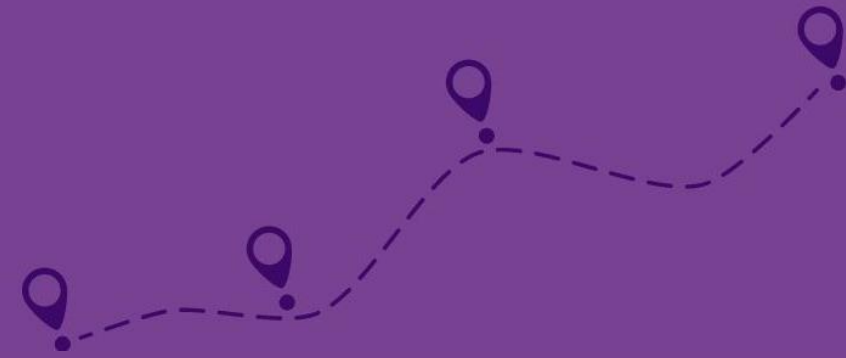


# Women's rough sleeping

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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

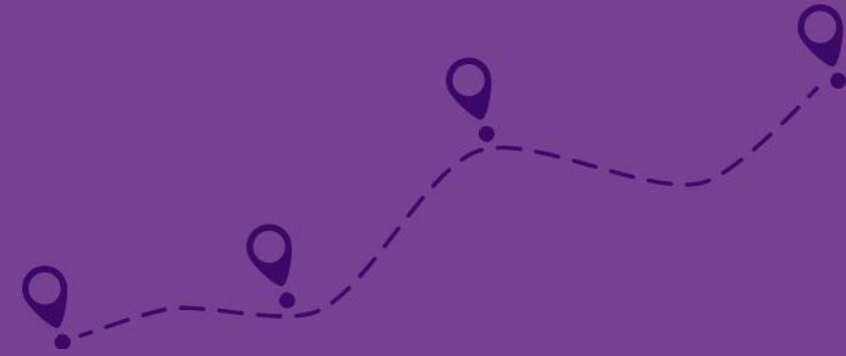


# Women's rough sleeping and violence

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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?

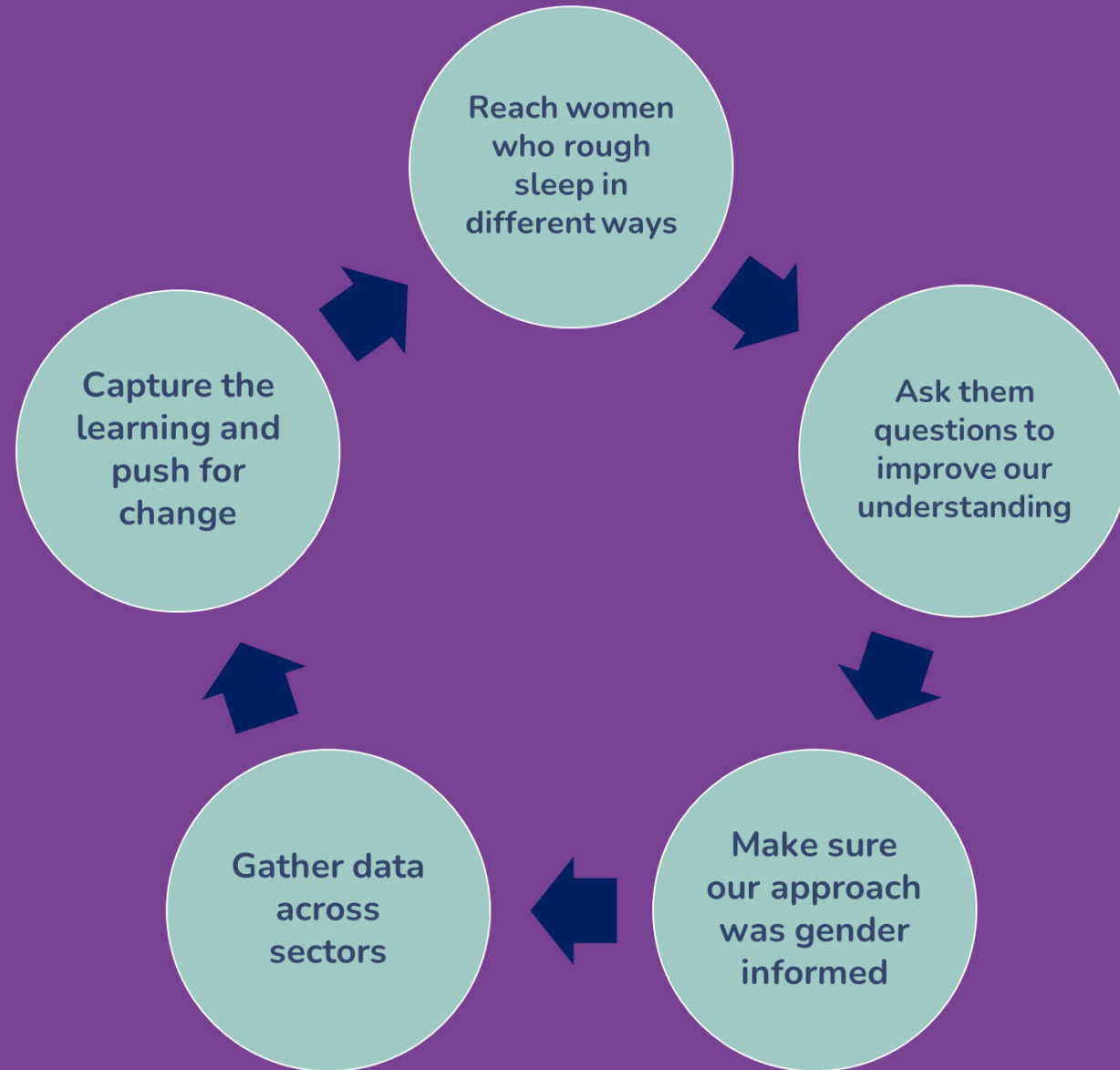
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The women's rough sleeping census is a new approach to gathering data on women who are sleeping rough. The census is designed to be inclusive of women whose patterns of rough sleeping may be hidden, intermittent and transient, meaning they are currently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



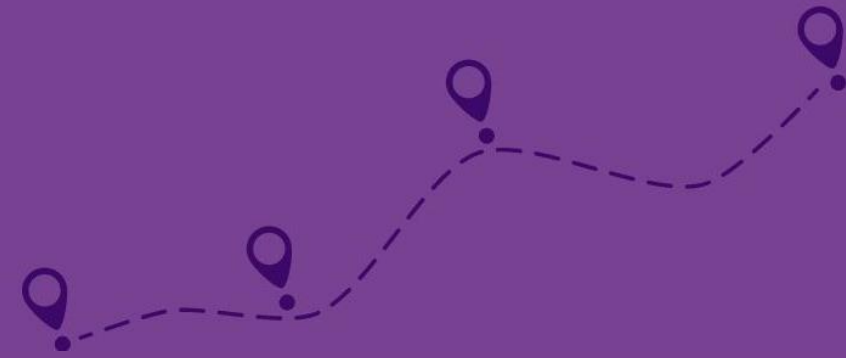
Researchers at PraxisCollab supported development of the methodology and wrote up the report



# What happened in the 2022 census?

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- 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.



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

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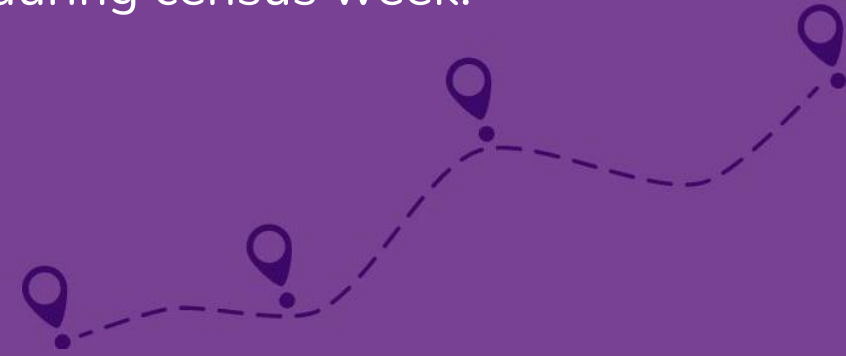
The 2023 census is **25<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October** and consists of two components:

## 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:

- Services conduct the survey with women they support during census week;
- 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) and;
- Outreach teams conduct the survey on gender-informed shifts during census week.



# 2023 London Women's Rough Sleeping Census

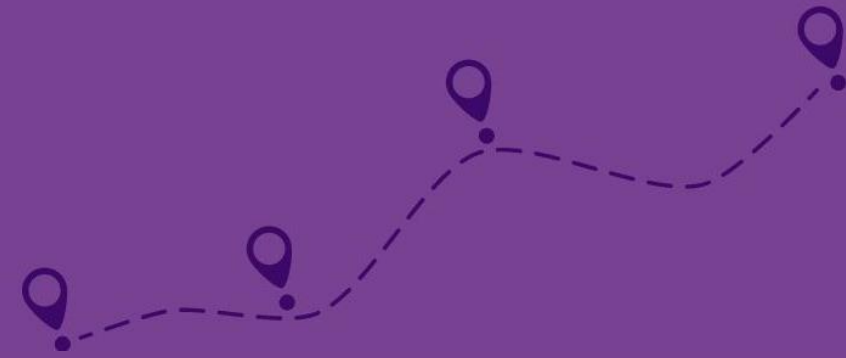
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## 2. Data meeting

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 London Women's Rough Sleeping Census

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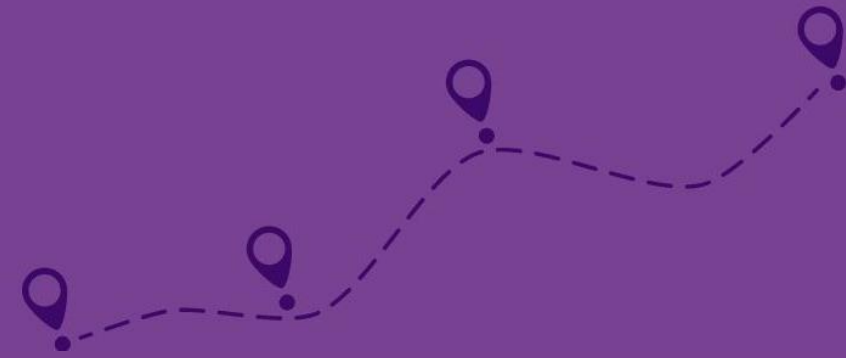
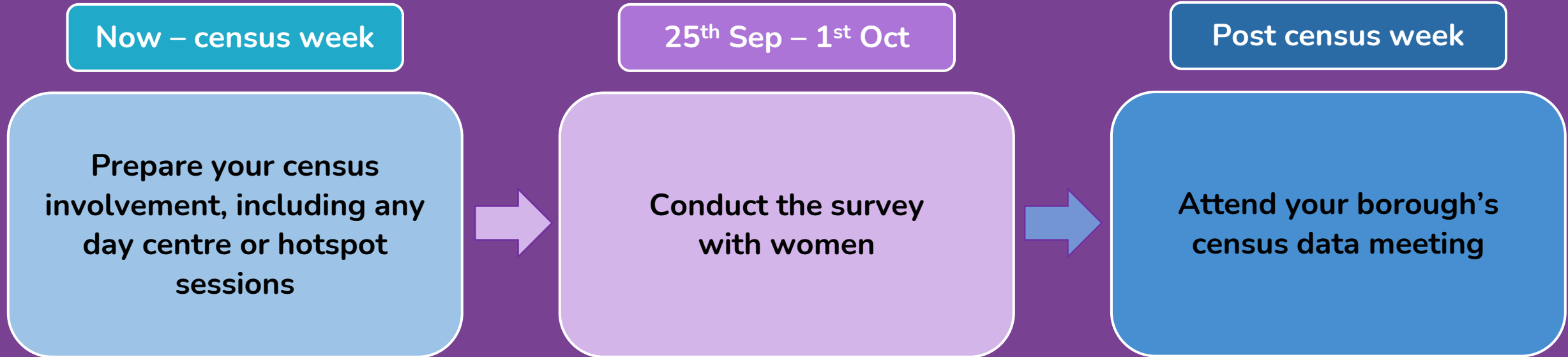
Based on the 2022 census findings that women's rough sleeping is often **hidden, transient and intermittent**, we have developed a gender-informed definition of rough sleeping for the 2023 census:

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 services need to do?



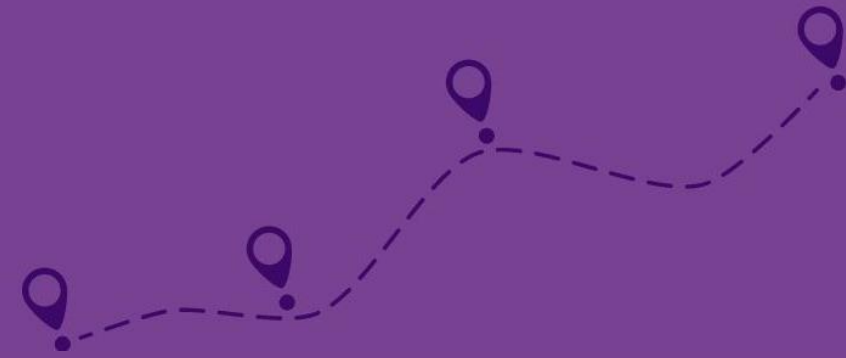
How to do the survey  
with women who use  
your service during  
census week



# Why do we need services to take part?

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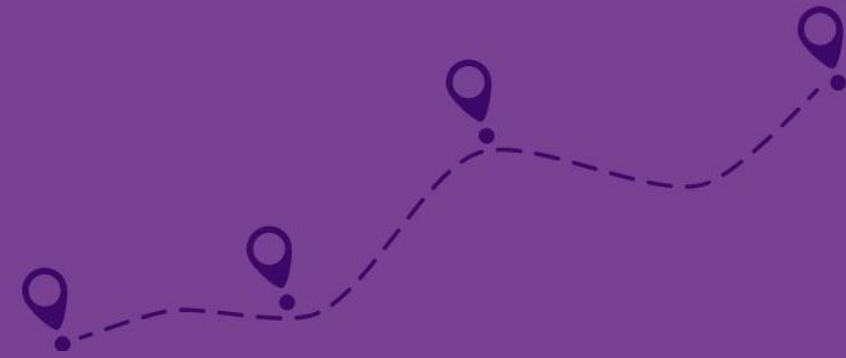
- Women's rough sleeping is often hidden, meaning women are less likely than men to be found by homelessness outreach services.
- They may however be accessing other types of services - GP, hospital, substance use, women's services, community services, food banks, etc.
- Taking a cross sector approach 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.
- It can also better reflect the range of expert support provided to women across London.



# Which services can take part?

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- Any service in London that provides support to 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 women who experience homelessness, it's likely that some of the women you work with might be rough sleeping and can be included in the census.

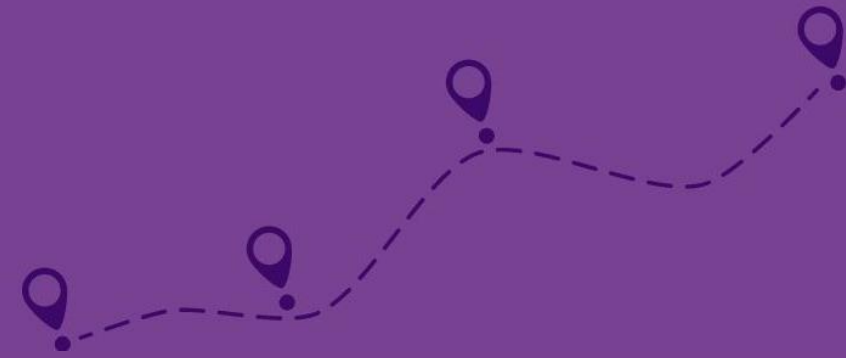




# When should you do the survey?

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- Throughout the census week, **25th September – 1st October**.
- 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** – we may be able 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 borough, please let your Borough Lead know.



# Day centre or hotspot ‘census sessions’

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You might deliver or know of services, day centres or hotspots in the borough which might be well-attended by women and could be good places to conduct the survey.

## In your service

You could work with other services and the borough lead to arrange a ‘census session’ or day in your day centre/building/service.

- You could host a women’s day and arrange for in-reach services to attend – such as health, wellbeing or domestic abuse practitioners.
- You could take the opportunity to encourage women to attend your service and link up with local services who can encourage women they work with to attend.
- 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.



# Day centre or hotspot ‘census sessions’

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## Hotspot areas:

You might also know of other areas or services in your borough which women are likely to attend – they could be allocated as hotspot areas with volunteers allocated to complete the census survey with women. For example, a busy homeless health service, A&E, train station.

If so, let your borough lead know.

## Vouchers and volunteers

The census team can provide £5 voucher incentives and arrange for co-located volunteers for your census days or session for one day in the week. The team can also arrange for volunteers to attend your borough’s identified hotspot area.

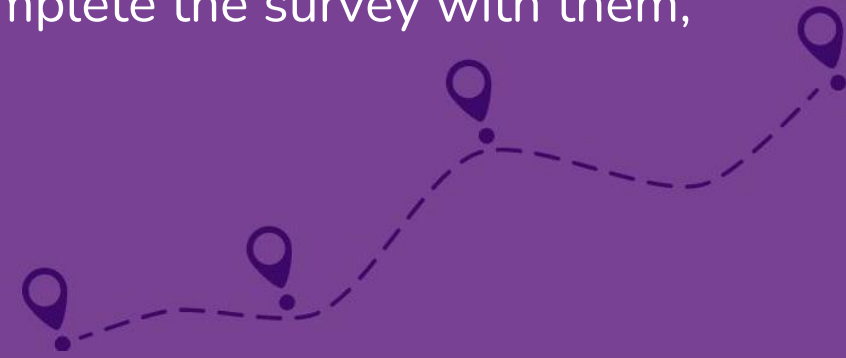
**Let your borough lead or the census team know if you’d like to host a census session or census day in your service and request volunteers and vouchers.**



# Who should you ask to take part in the survey?

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- The survey is for all women who have slept rough in the last 3 months (using the gender informed definition of rough sleeping).
- The survey is for anyone who identifies as a woman and people who identify as non-binary and feel the study's gender themes are relevant to their experiences.
- 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 service user's circumstances before introducing the census and offering to complete the survey with them, for example 'Do you have a safe place to stay at night?'




# Try this....

*"Hello, how are you doing today? We're taking part in research to try and help women who are experiencing homelessness. 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 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."*

*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.*

*“They need to be given that space, it’s important for them to feel like somebody wants to hear what’s going on inside, that means a lot to me, that would mean a lot to them, because we recognise that’s what you need, we all need that.”*



# The census survey

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- 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.)

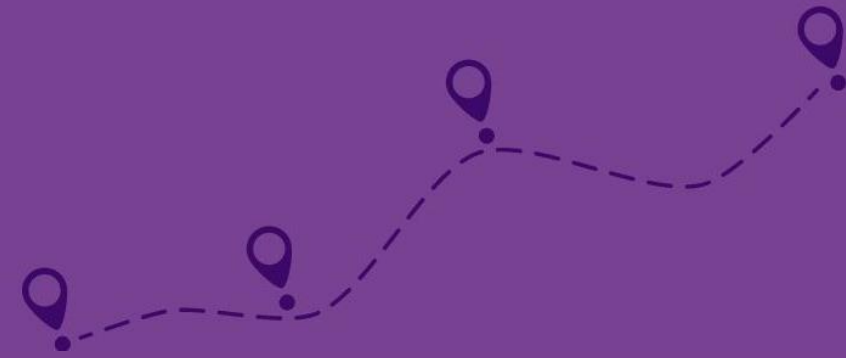




# How to complete the survey with women

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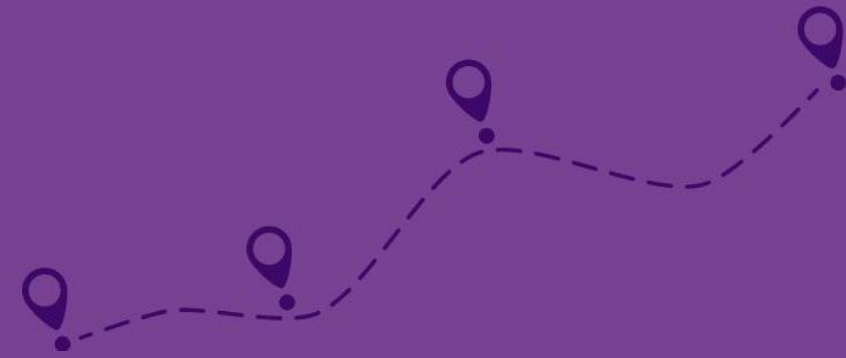
- The surveys should be completed in real time on the online survey platform, or if completing on paper, filled in online immediately after the interaction – make sure to submit them on time so that they can be counted.
- The survey should be conducted with respondents, rather than sending on the survey 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. Services may also wish to nominate a particular member of staff or volunteer to conduct the survey.
- All those conducting the survey should have read the guidance.



# How to complete the survey with women

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- 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.
- Make use of telephone translators where possible.



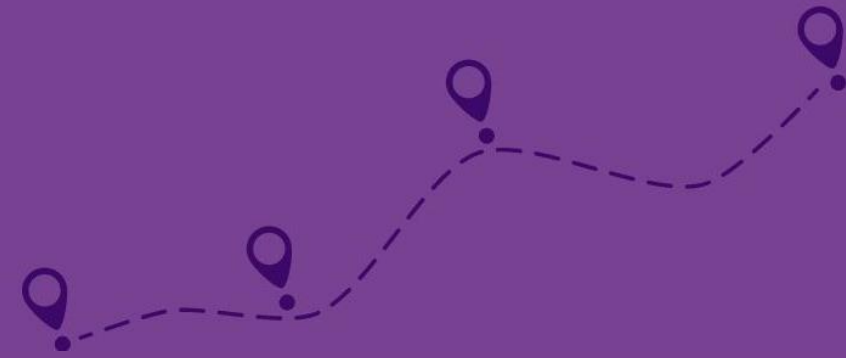
Making every  
contact count and  
safety planning



# Making every contact count: further support for women

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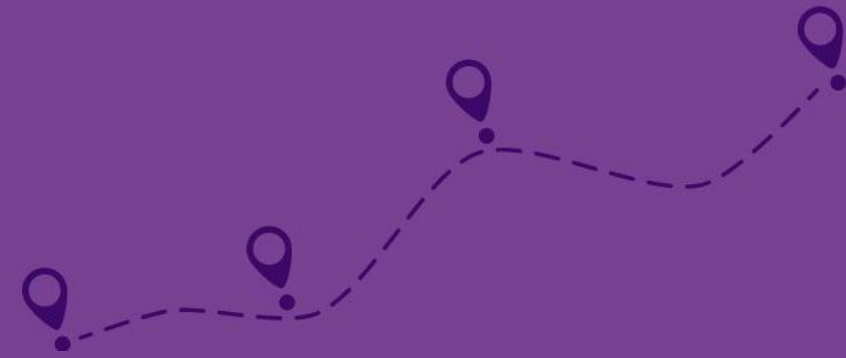
- Some women may require additional support or signposting, or unknown risks may become apparent to services.
- Services should follow any usual procedures in providing information, advice and support.
- Support may involve completing referrals to other services, using Duty to Refer processes, carrying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



# Making every contact count: further support for women

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- Services could also consider where they may be able to take further action to support service users within their role, perhaps through working closely with other agencies.
- For signposting purposes, services should use existing local knowledge, and a services information template can also be downloaded from the census webpage for services to fill in.
- Practitioners should also 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.

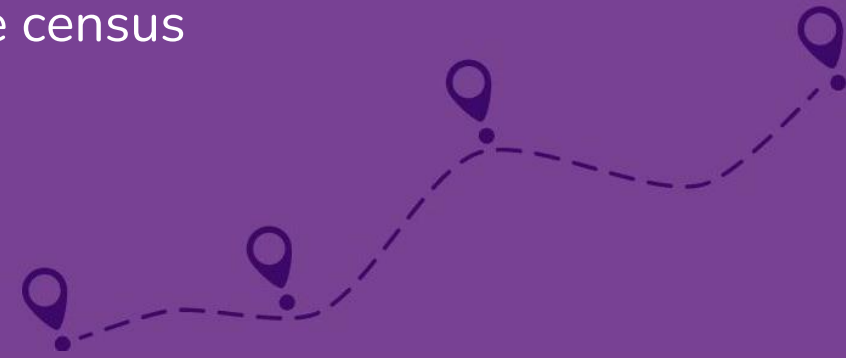


# What your information sheets should include:


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- 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
- Local VAWG and women's services, including domestic abuse support service, local Rape Crisis service, and Ascent advice helpline for the area
- Immigration advice service information
- Useful numbers to call – National Domestic Abuse helpline, Samaritans, Police non-emergency, NHS 111, mental health support

See the census guidance for a more comprehensive list, and use the census information sheet template



*“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.”*

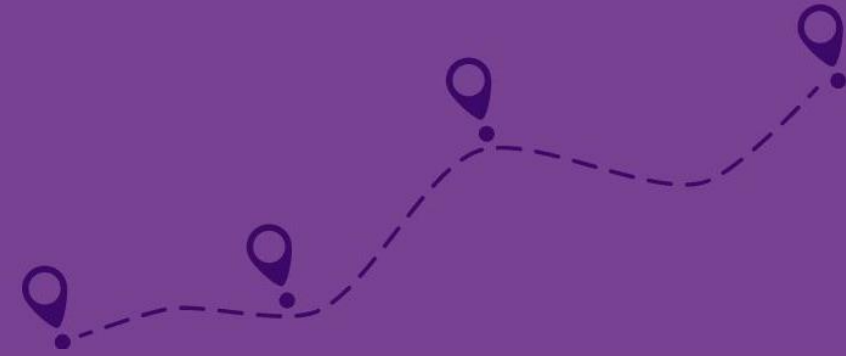


# Basic safety planning

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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

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- 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 census survey?

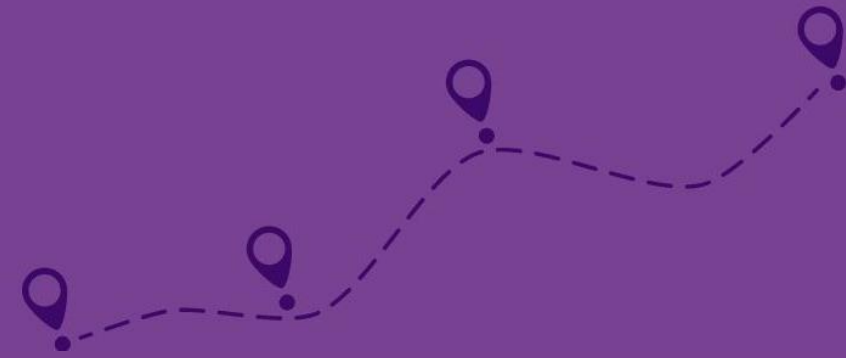
How to take part in  
borough census data  
meetings for the  
2023 census



# What is the census data meeting?

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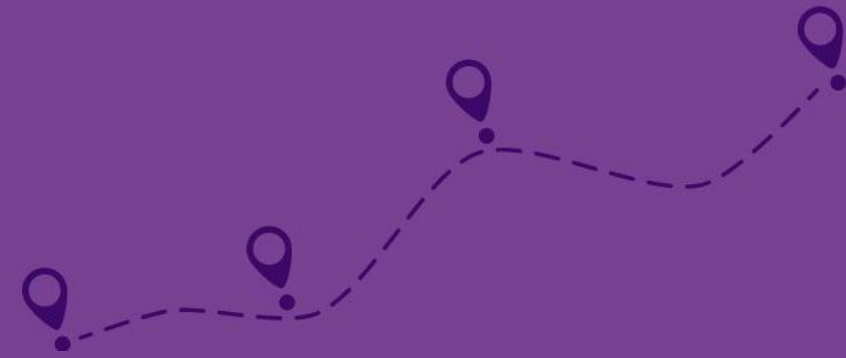
- The data meeting is a new part of the census this year.
- Different services in a borough can come together to share numbers of women they are working with who they know to be rough sleeping, and experiences of your service users.
- The data meeting draws on knowledge of local services to provide a 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?

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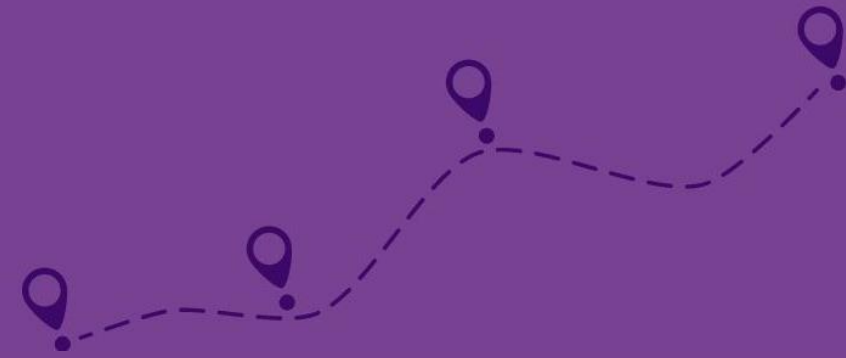
- All services should compile a list of women they are working with prior to the meeting.
- Include women who have worked with your service and who you know have experienced rough sleeping **according to the census definition** in the last three months (July to September 2023).
- If your service regularly 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?

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- 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.
- Prior to the meeting, all attending services should have signed a simple data sharing agreement for the meeting itself.



What next?  
Actions for your team



# What's next? Actions from now – October 2023

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1. Tell the census team or your borough lead if your team will be participating in the census (the census team can tell you who your lead is)
2. Read the [2023 census guidance](#) and share with your team
3. Let us know any volunteering needs by 11<sup>th</sup> September - 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!
6. Compile a list of women for the data meeting, using the guidance. One person from your service to attend the data meeting.

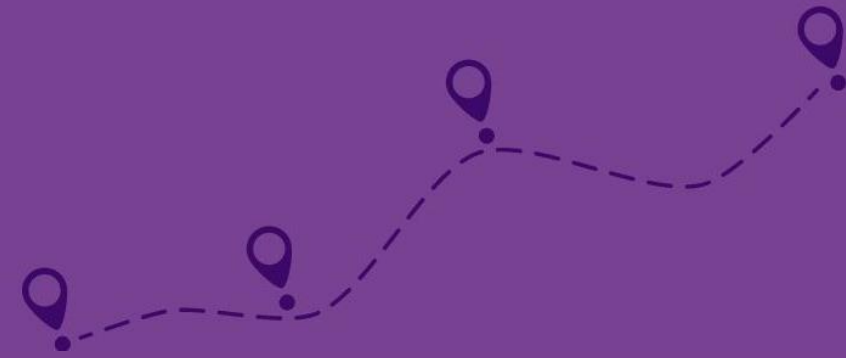




# Women's Census 2023: Useful links

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- 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](mailto:womens.census@solacewomensaid.org)

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