

Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2024

This document outlines what the Women's Census is and how it will happen in 2024. The census will operate as in 2023 and the website will contain updated detailed guidance nearer the time so that all services can fully plan their involvement.

Dates:

Monday 23rd September – Sunday 29th September 2024

(The census takes place over 7 days so that services who are open at the weekend can include any women they meet. The census does not require weekend work where this is not already part of a service.)

What is the census?

Every year, data is collected about people who are rough sleeping across England. Women are underrepresented in this data, despite research, lived experience and services telling us that women are some of the most vulnerable within the rough sleeping population.

Key data sources used to understand rough sleeping come from 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 included in it.

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.

Who is the census for?

The census is designed to collect information about women who experience very hidden and high-risk forms of homelessness, such as rough sleeping. Our census definition of rough sleeping (below) includes people who might not always be sleeping outside on the street.

The census is also designed for a wide range of services and sectors to take part. 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. Your service might be a VAWG, health, drug and alcohol, migrant support service or a community group.

We encourage any service who supports women to get involved as this will give us the best idea of what's happening for women who sleep rough in the area, and ensures your service and the women you support are represented.

We also know that many services are working so hard to support women who are homeless and rough sleeping: this is an opportunity to reflect this diversity of support within the data.

Some services might only work with a small number of women who meet the description – that's ok! Any involvement is helpful as women may be dispersed across a lot of services: if everyone takes part, we can get a real sense of this.

How will it work?

There are two components to the census in 2024. The census is operating in the same way as in 2023.

1. Census survey

This is 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, including:

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

After census week, local services 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 area.

See below for a census outline and examples of how your service could get involved.

What support will be provided?

In the months leading up to the census, the webpage and mailing list will be updated with detailed guidance and the resources required for the census. Recorded training and information sessions will be uploaded by August.

If your area is new to the census, the census team can meet your local census organiser/lead to provide information and answer questions, or you can email us with any questions at womens.census@solacewomensaid.org.

If your local authority area is taking part, there will be a lead organiser who should be able to support with questions, help connect local services together and lead planning for the area's involvement in the census.

Most areas provide £5 incentive vouchers for women who complete the survey and some areas also arrange volunteers to support outreach shifts and services (if requested): your local census organiser should be able to provide further information about this.

What will happen with the information collected?

The survey data will be collected anonymously. The census team will write a report which will outline the data and the findings. No personally identifying information will be shared.

The data and report can help illustrate the picture of women's rough sleeping and inform changes in policy and practice to help women in your area and nationally to get better, targeted support.

To find out more, see the national report produced from the [2023 census](#).

What will it say about my service?

The census is a coming together of a vast range of services who care about women who are rough sleeping. There won't be any data directly attached to your service.

This exercise does not work to highlight any particular service or area, but aims to overcome systemic practices which have meant that women have traditionally been undercounted; share and encourage good practice; and support services and sectors in developing links with each other.

Definition of women's rough sleeping – Census 2024

The 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 2024 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).

What do I need to do next?

Sign up to the mailing list! This will make sure you get all the up-to-date census information.

Is your local authority area taking part? If not, are you able to arrange for or encourage your local authority area to take part? Any organisation can lead the census.

Can your service take part? If your area is taking part, can your service be involved? If so, make sure it's in your service's calendar and let your local census organiser know. There will be resources and recorded training on the website over the coming months, and your local census organisers should send you further information about what's happening in your local area.

If you can help further, you might be interested in the following:

Can you help to spread the word in your sector? If so, let your local census organiser know! You might know about meetings they could attend, or you might be able to share census information with different services.

If you're in London, email the women's census inbox if your service can take part, or if you can lead the census in your borough.

Contact us:

Keep checking the webpage for all the latest information:

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

Email: Womens.census@solacewomensaid.org

Census 2024 Outline

July - September

Census planning

Services and outreach teams plan and prepare their census involvement, including reading updated guidance and watching training recordings. Services should inform their local census organiser that they're taking part.

Service plans for census week might include planning women's/census sessions and spaces; connecting with other teams; and planning staff or volunteer support for completing the census surveys during census week. The local outreach team/s plan their week of gender-informed outreach and any joint shifts, using the guidance and intelligence from local services.

Planning can also include noting key hotspot areas and encouraging teams to be aware of women they meet over the summer who could take part in the census.

Local organisers may hold planning meetings services can attend.

23rd September – 29th September 2024

Census week

Census outreach shifts across each borough, using gender-informed guidance. Survey conducted with women seen on shift.

Survey conducted with women attending services during census week.

Targeted census survey or women's sessions in day centres: these sessions might be hosted at a day centre with in-reach support from other services, and might be planned as a health or wellbeing day, for example.

Volunteers might be stationed at a local A&E service, or homeless health practice, or in a local transport hub. Locations and dates for any census sessions are decided by the services in each borough.

Census survey data is collected anonymously.

October

Post-census meeting

Services attend a post-census meeting in their borough at which they can submit basic, anonymised data about the number of women they work with who are rough sleeping.

Attendees should sign the data sharing protocol and prepare in advance using the census guidance.

Data from the meeting is anonymised after the meeting.

Examples of service involvement:

Homelessness day centre, women's centre, drug and alcohol drop in, etc

As well as doing the survey with women who attend the service, you could host a census survey session on one day during the week, perhaps collaborating with other services to provide multi-agency support or a wellbeing day. Volunteers could be arranged to conduct the survey with women who attend.

This can be an opportunity to link up with other local services, or encourage women in the borough to attend your service's women-only session, for example.

A&E, homeless health GP practice, pop up health session/van, etc

You could arrange with your local census organiser or local services for volunteers to be allocated to your service on a day during the census week. You could put up posters to help explain and advertise what's happening.

Clinicians and practitioners can suggest that women speak to one of the volunteers if they think that the survey might be applicable to them.

In-reach

You could do the survey with women in organisations that you attend during census week; encourage the different organisations you work with to take part; or support organisations to deliver their women's census session, perhaps by providing in-reach services.

Outreach

If you deliver outreach, but you're not the commissioned rough sleeping provider, you might want to conduct your own outreach and complete the survey with women you see on shift. Or, you might want to team up with the local rough sleeping outreach team and do joint shifts: this can support sharing of each other's expertise and can help provide capacity to the borough to reach as many people as possible.

Practitioner

You could encourage or support your service to take part in the census, and/or you could volunteer to support outreach or women's census sessions during the week. You could also support organisers and leads to connect up with different local services.