



Angela Rayner MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

cc.

Rushanara Ali MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Building Safety and Homelessness
Jess Phillips MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Victims and Safeguarding
Baroness Merron, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health
Bridget Phillipson MP, Minister for Women and Equalities

28 August 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

We write as a coalition of leading homelessness, housing, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and health organisations and local authorities, to welcome you to your new role as Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary. We are pleased that your Government has committed to developing a new cross-government strategy to end homelessness and to halve violence against women and girls over 10 years. To be able to achieve these aims, it will be crucial to take action to change the way that women's rough sleeping and homelessness is recognised and responded to.

We are writing to you to share the [‘The Women’s Rough Sleeping Census 2023’](#) report and its findings. It shows that current data collection methods under-represent women's rough sleeping to a shocking degree, and that definitions and strategies to respond to rough sleeping are gender-biased and disadvantage women. This results in a lack of suitable and safe services for women.

What is the Women’s Rough Sleeping Census?

The Census is a gender-informed initiative driven by Solace Women's Aid, Single Homeless Project, Change Grow Live, London Councils and the Greater London Authority. It was developed in 2022 in response to growing evidence that a lack of visibility can result in women who sleep rough being less able to access services and accommodation, often falling in the gap between homelessness and VAWG services. When women do reach support, it often isn't safe or tailored to their needs, resulting in their continued homelessness and rough sleeping. Multiple intersecting inequalities can also compound the risks and barriers for some women, including Black and minoritised women and LGBTQ+ people, and in particular, migrant women face increased risks, barriers to accessing support and even more limited options.

The Census was piloted in London in 2022 and repeated in 2023 when it included local authorities from 14 additional areas across England, including Greater Manchester, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Coventry. The new report, authored by researchers at Change Grow Live, analyses data gathered from the 2023 Women's Rough Sleeping Census.

What are the key findings?:

- **The Census identified 815 women across 41 local authorities:** in the same local authorities, the **2023 Rough Sleeping Snapshot identified just 189 women.** The table set out in annex A shows the significant disparities in participating local authorities across England.

- Women's experiences of rough sleeping are often hidden, transient and intermittent, and **the locations and ways in which women sleep rough frequently fall outside of the current Government definition** of rough sleeping.
- Women reported sleeping and sheltering in 'hidden' locations including A&E waiting rooms, on buses or trains, in squats, walking around all night, and staying with strangers. **These forms of rough sleeping are not all encompassed within the current definition**, meaning that women's experiences are not recognised and their homelessness is less likely to be resolved.
- A third of respondents reported that they had been in some form of homelessness accommodation prior to rough sleeping, including temporary accommodation, homelessness hostels and refuges. This demonstrates that for many women, **the accommodation offered is not resolving their homelessness**, being unsuitable for their needs or unsustainable.
- Almost half of the respondents weren't accessing support from a homelessness service and 7% weren't accessing any services at the time, underlining that **homelessness services may not always feel like an appropriate or available option for women**.
- Participating local and combined authorities reported important outcomes from completing the census, beyond gathering the data. Outcomes include using findings to fund and open new accommodation and support services for women; fund new specialist roles; adopt gender-informed approaches; inform policies and strategies; and improve partnership working.

The findings of the 2023 census also suggest that many women across England will not be identified as rough sleeping during outreach work, meaning that they are less likely to access current targeted support and accommodation pathways. Many pathways in fact require a person to be seen rough sleeping in order to be referred. This leaves women at constant risk of violence and abuse, physical and mental ill health, and early death. Rough sleeping is dangerous and devastating for anyone, but women are especially vulnerable, and this report has demonstrated that current systems are further disadvantaging women.

What needs to be done?

We urge the Government to take action and provide the leadership, guidance and resources to support the following recommendations:

- **Make the Government's response to homelessness and rough sleeping gender-informed:** Current rough sleeping definitions, strategies and practices are based predominantly on the experiences of men. The Government should use the findings from the census to ensure its policy, strategies and guidance are gender-informed and provide an equitable response to all those who are rough sleeping, including supporting change to verification practices. All government data collected on homelessness and rough sleeping should be subject to an equalities impact assessment to ensure that methods are inclusive of women and marginalised groups.
- **Resource and lead the women's rough sleeping census:** The Government should lead the women's rough sleeping census, supporting every local authority in England to conduct it annually. This can be achieved through the resourcing of a dedicated lead to oversee the rollout of the census, and the support and assistance of the Government's rough sleeping advisors.
- **Ensure women have access to safe and suitable accommodation, including through national funding pots and guidance for local commissioners on women's pathways:** The Government should use the findings and experience of the Women's Rough Sleeping Census and specialist services to develop cross-sector pathways of support that are effective and safe for women, including specialist and women's services, and services for migrant women. This should be accompanied by guidance on improving the safety of temporary accommodation for women, the

expansion of priority need for survivors of wider forms of VAWG, and the lifting of the no recourse to public funds condition for migrant women experiencing VAWG.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how the Government's new cross departmental strategy can ensure that any actions taken are equitable and inclusive of the hundreds of women who are rough sleeping across England less visibly, without access to housing and support. We also invite you to meet with the census team, outreach workers and women with lived experience of homelessness during the 2024 Women's Rough Sleeping Census (23rd to 29th September 2024). The census will be being undertaken by around 50 authorities across the country, so we can provide a range of locations for a visit.

Yours sincerely,

The census works with teams and representatives from the housing and homelessness, domestic abuse and VAWG, health, migrant, drug and alcohol, and LGBTQ+ sectors, as well as with local authorities. The following 47 organisations have given their signature to this letter:

Solace

Single Homeless Project

Advance Charity

Agenda Alliance

Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid

Bolton Council

Change Grow Live

Changing Lives

Cllr Patricia Callaghan, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Deputy Leader, Camden

Cllr Richard Roberts, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council

Cripplegate Foundation

Crisis

DAHA

DAHA National Group

Dr Binta Sultan, Consultant Physician in Inclusion Health

End Violence Against Women Coalition

Glass Door Homeless Charity

Groundswell

Hibiscus

Islington Council

It Takes a City (Cambridge)

Kairos Women Working Together

Karma Nirvana

Leeds City Council

Look Ahead

Mama Suze

Marylebone Project

New Horizons Youth Centre

One25

Oxfordshire Homeless Movement

Pathway

Providence Row

Resolve

Social Interest Group

Southall Black Sisters

Spear

Spring Housing Association

St Martin's Charity

St Mungo's

Standing Together

Street Storage

The Connection at St Martin's

The Nelson Trust

West Northamptonshire Council

Women and Girls Network

Women for Refugee Women

Your Place

Annex A – Women’s Rough Sleeping Census 2023 data vs 2023 Government Rough Sleeping Snapshot

	2023 Government Rough Sleeping Snapshot	Gender-informed women’s census (41 Local Authorities)
London	159	391
Greater Manchester	5	188
Gloucestershire	0	21
Coventry	1	61
Nottinghamshire	1	41
National (41 Local Authorities participating in the census)	189	815
England (all Local Authorities)	568	n/a