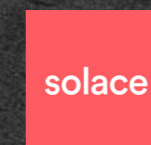




Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2025
National Report

Missing Women

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and Daisy Hilton



Acknowledgements

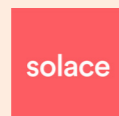
We dedicate this report to the women who are without a safe place to sleep. The women who are fearful, cold, feeling alone and without hope. The women who are being ignored, shunned, abused and violated.

We are so grateful to the women who took the time to complete the Census survey and share their experiences with us. We will continue to amplify your voices, to tell your stories, and to call for a homelessness system that is safe, accessible and equitable for all women.

Across England, the Women's Rough Sleeping Census (WRSC) is led and delivered by numerous local authorities, cross sector services, third sector services, and volunteers, all working together to drive change for women experiencing homelessness.

With thanks to all the professionals who work so hard to support these women, who strive to make their situations better and who are frustrated and disheartened by the ongoing systemic failures that prevent them from having more impact.

The WRSC design, coordination and delivery is led by Solace Women's Aid and Single Homeless Project, with data analysis for the national report provided by Change Grow Live and Crisis. In London, the WRSC coordination and delivery is supported by London Councils and the Greater London Authority.



**Change
Grow
Live**

Foreword



I want to begin by thanking everyone who has supported and worked on the Women's Rough Sleeping Census. Your commitment is vital to bringing the hidden experiences of women sleeping rough into the light.

Once again, the findings of the census reveal a reality far bleaker than the official statistics. In some areas, the number of women sleeping rough was more than ten times higher than the government snapshot count. Shockingly, in six local authorities, the government snapshot counts recorded zero women, but thanks to the Women's Rough Sleeping Census (WRSC), 162 women were identified as sleeping rough in those areas. These are women who otherwise would have fallen through the cracks.

We know that women's rough sleeping is often hidden, transient and unsafe, yet we continue to employ the same methods, proven not to work, for the official government count. Solace and Single Homeless Project have led the way in showing how a more accurate count is possible, and the best practices behind it. It is vital the government start to listen. I have said it many times before, but we can have no hope of tackling the problem if we don't know the true scale of it first. Every one of these are women with hopes, dreams, and loved ones – every single one of these women deserves to be counted, and ultimately supported out of homelessness.

Many of these women have described nights spent hiding from harm, relying on strangers for shelter, or taking risks to stay alive. Nearly half were not in contact with a local housing authority or homelessness organisation, and almost one in ten received no support at all. This is not just a failure of services – it is a systemic failure to protect women from harm and exclusion. We need gender-informed policies, equitable access to services, and immediate measures to ensure safety and support.

I fully support the recommendations in this report.

As part of the national strategy to end homelessness we must address the failures of current data, dismantle barriers to support, and commit to sustainable, gender-informed solutions. We cannot wait. Too many women remain invisible, at risk, and unsupported.

This Census is more than data. It is a call to action. We must see these women, respond to their needs, and act urgently. Only then can we ensure that every woman has a path to safety, stability, and dignity.

Paula Barker MP

Member of Parliament for Liverpool Wavertree and Co-Chair of the APPG for Ending Homelessness

V's story

I was a rough sleeper in a busy central London area. I say 'rough sleeper', but in my case, I was barely getting any sleep.

As a woman, I was often afraid to sleep, so I wouldn't sleep at all, especially at night.

The area I was in is notorious for pick pockets and bag thieves, so I had to be hyper-vigilant 24/7, which was awfully draining. I was severely sleep deprived. If I did sleep, it would be in the train station toilets, and I'd often get kicked out by the station staff. I'd only be able to nap for about 30 minutes before they'd notice.

Advances were made to me by men, who would see me sitting outside the station late at night. The minute they realised I was vulnerable and homeless, they would begin to offer me money to do things with them, which I'd always turn down. I would sit in a corner, and have men stand by me and urinate or vomit after a drunk night out, which I found horrible. I made sure to stay around busy central

areas, as the stations were always open and well-lit, with cameras. So if anything was to happen to me someone would know.

Being on the streets while severely mentally ill and being on the autism spectrum felt like an extreme sport. I found it really hard, especially as I had no one to talk to about my problems.

I had no friends, no shoulder to cry on, no sofa to sleep on. I felt so unsupported, alone, and suicidal.

While I was rough sleeping I reached out to multiple organisations for support, but most of them just pushed me from pillar to post.

We need more services like Women @ The Well. Upon going there, I was very surprised that such an organisation existed, a place where you could eat, play games, engage in activities, get help with your homelessness, take a shower, and do

your laundry - all of which I did. They were very welcoming, and helped me to get placed into a hostel.

Before I was permitted to go to the hostel, I had to have a Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) number, and be verified as a rough sleeper, which was a hassle and prolonged my homelessness. Not everyone is going to want to sleep whilst on the streets - I didn't, because it didn't feel safe for me. So because they didn't see me on the ground sleeping, they couldn't verify me. It was only when staff from Women @ The Well staff intervened and vouched for me being a rough sleeper that I was verified and received a CHAIN number.

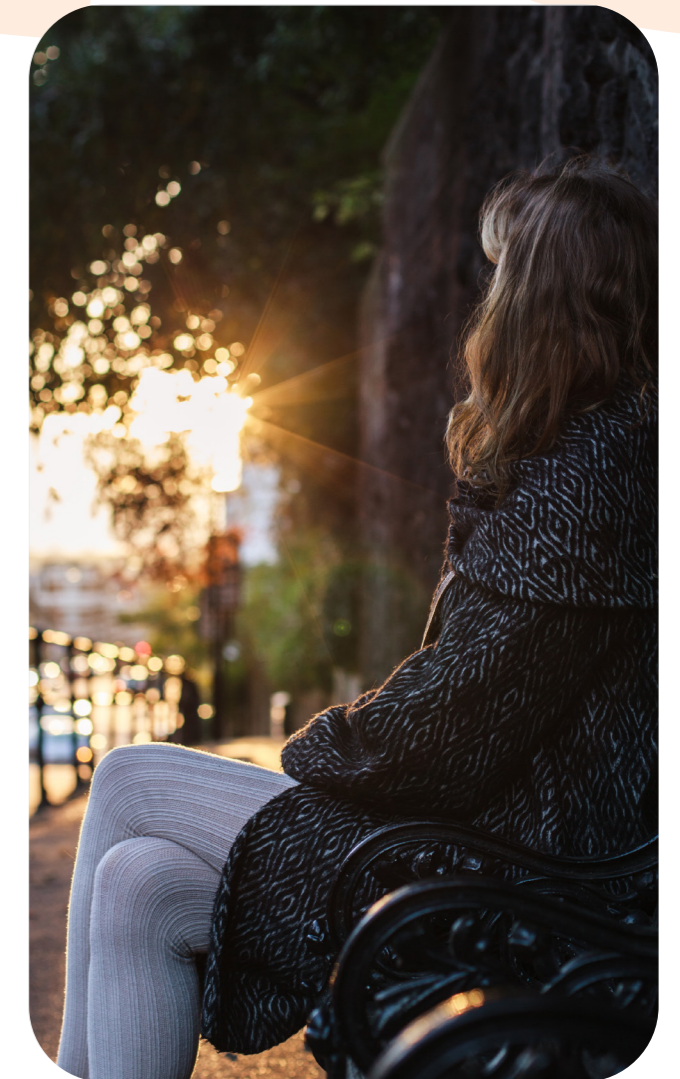
When I was homeless, I was harassed, assaulted and preyed on. I believe no woman should be rough sleeping, and that the moment a rough sleeping woman reaches out for support, they should receive this support and a CHAIN number the same day, and be placed into a hostel immediately. I also strongly believe that the verification/CHAIN number process needs to be re-modelled.

The Women's Rough Sleeping Census is crucial, because there are a lot of women rough sleeping, whose lives and safety are constantly at risk.

Women need to be protected and supported at all costs, because they are at higher risk of harm than men while being homeless.

WRSC respondent, 2025

Ending a homelessness journey is saving a life. Luckily for me I got the right help at the right time, and now I have my lovely one bed flat which brings me peace that homelessness couldn't.





Executive summary

The Women's Rough Sleeping Census (WRSC) has now received over 3,300 survey responses from women in over 100 local authorities in England since its pilot in London in 2022. With four years of data to reflect on, clear patterns are emerging, revealing the systemic inequities that women face when homeless.

Women's homelessness is systematically under-recorded, under-responded to, and too often rendered invisible by policies and practices designed around predominantly male experiences of homelessness. This invisibility is compounded by racism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism, which intensify exclusion for the most marginalised women. Whilst homelessness and rough sleeping are dangerous and devastating for everyone, women's rough sleeping is compounded by two key factors: near-universal experiences of violence and abuse, and inequitable policies and data systems that fail to capture, or address, women's experiences - leading to a lack of adequate services.

With the 2025 government snapshot count repeatedly estimating that women are only 15% of those sleeping rough in England, the WRSC continues to reveal significant disparity with government data - challenging their mission to halve long-term rough sleeping and its causes.

Key findings

from the 2025 Women's Rough Sleeping Census

1. Women's rough sleeping remains significantly underestimated by existing data sources.



1,406

women were identified as having slept rough in the previous three months

across 101 local authority areas implementing the WRSC survey.

480 survey responses were received from London alone, and 187 from Greater Manchester.

2969 women were individually identified in the multi-agency Local Insights meetings across 42 local authorities.

x10 This is ten times as many women sleeping rough in those areas than were identified through the 2025 MHCLG rough sleeping snapshot count.

162 vs 0

162 women were identified through Local Insights meetings in six local authorities where snapshot counts recorded zero women highlighting the limitations of current measurement approaches.



In London, the number of women counted by the WRSC survey was 2.4 times that counted by the MHCLG rough sleeping snapshot count.



Outside London, the WRSC survey identified more than four times the number counted in the snapshot.¹

2. Women's rough sleeping is hidden, transient and intermittent. Women are sleeping rough in locations and ways which are not recognised within the existing government definition of rough sleeping.



27%

of women sleeping rough had stayed with a stranger/new acquaintance in the last three months.



24%

of women had slept rough every night in the previous three months.

65%

of women sleeping rough had slept/stayed in places that would not be captured in MHCLG rough sleeping snapshot counts, such as on a bus.



49%

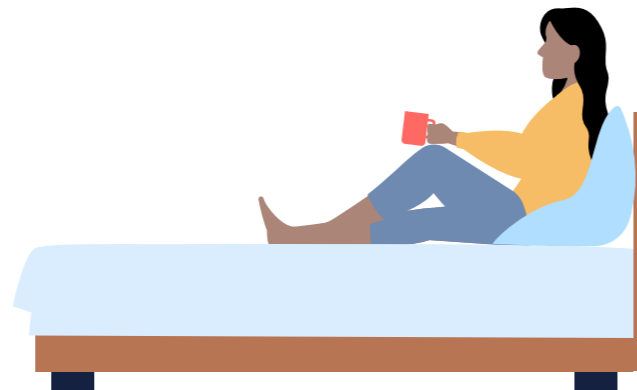
of women had slept rough for over a third of that period.

¹ Outside London, the WRSC is completed by 24% of local authorities, underlining the importance of increased local authority participation.

3. Women's rough sleeping is not being prevented or resolved by existing approaches and provision.

45%

of women had been in some form of homelessness accommodation immediately prior to this current instance of sleeping rough.



80%

of women sleeping rough were **not accessing** support from a council housing department.

47%

of women sleeping rough were **not accessing** support from a homelessness organisation.

38%

of women sleeping rough were **not accessing** support from either a housing officer or a homelessness organisation.

9%

of women sleeping rough were **not accessing any services.**

4. Women who experience rough sleeping and hidden homelessness are at constant risk of gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation.



Qualitative data confirm that domestic abuse is a major causative factor in women's homelessness, and rough sleeping then places them at great risk of further exploitation, abuse and victimisation.

When I slept rough, I felt unsafe no matter where I ended up. I often thought about just stealing something so I could go back to prison, which would make me safe. I found myself staying with men who had hurt me in the past terrified of not being able to escape, but more terrified of waking up to being raped in the street.

WRSC respondent, 2025



5. Women who are hidden homeless are experiencing a form of homelessness that is not recognised, quantified or responded to by either statutory or rough sleeping provision, leaving them trapped in dangerous circumstances which often lead them to rough sleeping.



140

additional women were identified as having experienced only forms of hidden homelessness in the last three months.

Women report remaining trapped in their situations as they are categorised as both ineligible for housing assistance when they approach the council, and ineligible for rough sleeping pathways and provision as they are not yet rough sleeping.

Qualitative data reveal that many women experience mental exhaustion and are at high risk, due to having to stay with abusive family members or partners, or other people who they do not feel safe with, often having to leave at a moment's notice.

Women experiencing hidden homelessness were more likely to be in touch with a domestic abuse/sexual violence service.



When I went to housing [services], they were not bothered about me wanting to kill myself, just said they don't have a duty to me. They said if you're rough sleeping we would come look for you, but how do I know where I'm going to be sleeping and when?

WRSC respondent, 2025

Recommendations

The WRSC National Manifesto for Change sets out recommendations in five key areas that the government needs to address in order to make homelessness and rough sleeping systems and services safer, more accessible and more effective for women.

Whilst the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) 2025 National Plan to End Homelessness references some of the WRSC recommendations and includes positive steps - most notably the commitment to end traditional bedded down 'verification' - the Plan does not include a dedicated or strategic response to tackling women's homelessness and rough sleeping. Building on the previous WRSC National Manifesto for Change and in relation to the new National Plan, the 2026 WRSC recommendations to government are as follows:

1. Definition:

The 2010 government definition of rough sleeping should be amended in line with the findings and recommendations of the Women's Rough Sleeping Census, to reflect women's experiences, and to be inclusive of the many other people who rough sleep less visibly.

2. Data:

The government should fund and resource the Women's Rough Sleeping Census nationally and issue guidance to local authorities on how to adopt the census, enabling every local authority to gather accurate, inclusive data. The government should use national census data to inform policy, strategy and funding decisions.

3. Equity and safety:

The government should provide clear, actionable, gender-informed guidance and ringfenced funding to enable local authorities to ensure services and systems are equitable, accessible, gender-informed and safe for women, including supported accommodation and temporary accommodation.



4. Integration:

The government should ensure that all toolkits referenced within the Plan to End Homelessness (including the prevention toolkit, the outreach toolkit, the complex needs toolkit and the temporary accommodation toolkit), are gender-informed; addressing women's linked experiences of rough sleeping, homelessness, gender-based violence and multiple disadvantage. The toolkits should also include clear guidelines and responsibilities on how local authorities should address and remove the structural and intersecting barriers to housing and support faced by global majority women, migrant women including women with No Recourse to Public Funds, LGBTQI+ women, women with disabilities and older and younger women.

5. Prevention and intervention:

a) The government should expand priority need for Housing Support to explicitly include all survivors of rape, sexual assault and sexual exploitation, through legislative amendments. Homelessness prevention guidance must also be amended to address the full intersection of VAWG, immigration status, and homelessness, which puts migrant survivors and survivors with No Recourse to Public Funds at extremely high risk.

b) The government should collaborate with the WRSC and the third sector to undertake research to better understand,

quantify and respond to women's experiences of hidden homelessness, which are currently not identified, prevented nor resolved by statutory or rough sleeping provision.

The WRSC also recommends that local authorities and cross-sector organisations that support or encounter women who experience rough sleeping and hidden homelessness take immediate action to better respond to women locally, using the findings of the WRSC.

Over 100 local authorities in England took part in the 2025 WRSC, with many areas using data and learning from previous years to make innovative and inspiring changes locally. These include introducing gender-informed outreach practices year-round, designing and funding new women's services and accommodation based on WRSC data, and making local policies and strategies more inclusive of women's experiences. Whilst there is a clear need for national, government-directed policy, resource and system change, local authorities can and do lead the change they want to see, without waiting for national direction.

The Women's Rough Sleeping Census is more than a data collection project. It is a national movement for change, and councils, organisations, practitioners and volunteers across the country are using the methodology to make a vital difference for women in their areas, driven by what women experiencing rough sleeping tell us they want and need.



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Introduction

Over 3,300 responses to the Women's Rough Sleeping Census (WRSC) have been collected across England since 2022. Findings consistently highlight how systemic failures caused by gender-blind policies, funding models, and data collection methods leave services unable to prevent or respond effectively to women's experiences of rough sleeping.

The Census has repeatedly evidenced that women form a much higher proportion of the rough sleeping population than the 15% stated in government estimates.² Due to the risk of gender-based violence, women hide the fact that they are rough sleeping - often staying in locations not visited by outreach teams - and as a result are unknown to services and are less able to access accommodation. This has resulted in policies, strategies and funding models that operate from inaccurate assumptions about the scale and nature of women's rough sleeping.

For the fourth year running, WRSC data show that current responses to rough sleeping in England fail to address women's homelessness. Thousands of women get trapped in rough sleeping due to insufficient and unsuitable homelessness interventions and accommodation. Part of the trajectory into rough sleeping often includes other dangerous forms of hidden homelessness, so in this latest WRSC, we have also asked women about their experiences of hidden homelessness.



² Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025 - GOV.UK



National neglect and local system change



If everyone was able to be housed during covid, why can't they be housed now?

WRSC respondent, 2025

2.1

Political context

2025 marked a significant year for homelessness, with rough sleeping across England reaching a record high in September, when the Women's Rough Sleeping Census took place. Use of temporary accommodation also reached a peak, with 132,410 homeless households living in temporary and often unsuitable accommodation as of October 2025.³

In response to this national crisis, in December 2025, the MHCLG published its long-awaited 'National Plan to End Homelessness',⁴ a landmark, cross-government strategy addressing rough sleeping and statutory homelessness concurrently.

Clear strides were made. This included a proposed Duty to Collaborate, funding for those facing multiple disadvantage, an evaluation of sanctuary schemes, and toolkits on homelessness prevention for survivors of abuse. The plan also committed to ending the unlawful use of B&Bs for families beyond six weeks, the practice of discharging people from hospital onto the streets, and, in line with the WRSC's National Manifesto for Change, removing rough sleeping 'verification' barriers to accessing support.⁵

In prioritising prevention, the strategy also recognised that, for "some groups of people, particularly women, young people, care leavers, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people and LGBTQI+ people, face barriers to accessing public services due to discrimination or because services do not meet their needs." But this raises the question: who exactly are services then designed for? Who is served by, or supported through, these pathways to support, if not these cohorts of individuals,

and how effective is a strategic plan to end homelessness if it does not seek to create equity? Furthermore, whilst local areas were encouraged to undertake initiatives such as the WRSC, the absence of any stronger requirements or support to do so limits the plan's ability to address systemic gaps.

Most notably, the plan commits to halving long-term rough sleeping. While this is an important aim, it is a flawed premise if the reduction is to be based on existing rough sleeping data sets which the WRSC has repeatedly shown to be inaccurate. A problem cannot be halved if the starting point does not represent the full picture, which is undeniably the case as local authorities across England continue to identify hundreds more women rough sleeping than the official government figures show.

December 2025 also saw the government publish its cross-government strategy 'Freedom from Violence and Abuse', which is linked to their pledge to halve violence against women and girls within a decade.⁶ Domestic abuse is the leading cause of women's homelessness. Since the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) granted priority need to those fleeing domestic abuse, it has been the second most common reason local authorities have had to provide a

homelessness relief duty, accounting for more than 15% of all household applications.⁷ The Strategy acknowledged how crucial safe housing is for both safety and recovery, amongst other things, committing to fund the Safe Accommodation Duty for the next three years.

Yet the scarcity of suitable and safe forms of accommodation for women - including emergency homelessness provision - has contributed to an epidemic of women forced into precarious forms of living, including rough sleeping, hidden homelessness, or returning to their perpetrator. And whilst the consolidation of rough sleeping, homelessness and domestic abuse funding into a single grant might simplify delivery, without a gender-informed understanding of women's experiences, there is a risk that funding previously directed towards women and survivors may be absorbed into more generic responses that will not meet women's needs.

The government has committed to halving long-term rough sleeping and halving violence against women and girls (VAWG), but one cannot be achieved without addressing the other. Crucially, for many women who answer the WRSC survey, both their experiences of rough sleeping and VAWG remain invisible, unmeasured and undocumented.

³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2026) Statutory homelessness in England: July to September 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-july-to-september-2025> (Accessed: 7 April 2026).

⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025) A national plan to end homelessness. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-national-plan-to-end-homelessness/a-national-plan-to-end-homelessness>

⁵ Single Homeless Project, Solace Women's Aid (2024). Women's rough sleeping census manifesto. Available at: <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Womens-Rough-Sleeping-Census-Manifesto.pdf>

⁶ Home Office (2025) Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/freedom-from-violence-and-abuse-a-cross-government-strategy>

⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2025). Statutory homelessness in England: Financial year 2024-25. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2024-25/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2024-25>

2.2

Women's Rough Sleeping Census policy and influencing work

“I recognise the significant impact the Census has had to date in surfacing hidden experiences of vulnerable women and supporting more gender-informed service provision.”

Fomer Minister for Homelessness and Democracy, Rushanara Ali MP, June 2025

The escalating levels of homelessness in England present a dire national crisis. Whilst the findings of this report add further evidence to this bleak picture, it is important to also recognise how far we have come in using the findings of the WRSC to influence change. Over the last 18 months, influencing work at a national level has gotten underway, engaging with MPs, civil servant officials, commissioning bodies and ministerial departments - outlining the findings of the WRSC to highlight recommendations of the WRSC National Manifesto, and pushing for system change.

- The APPG for Ending Homelessness 2025 report recommended that the government's Homelessness Strategy should adopt all WRSC recommendations.⁸
- The government's Ending Homelessness Strategy committed to ending traditional 'verification' in line with the WRSC recommendations and encouraged all local authorities to undertake the WRSC.

- In Europe, the WRSC has been recognised by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)⁹ and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹⁰ as a best practice data collection initiative.
- The London Mayor's Rough Sleeping Plan of Action committed to ending traditional 'verification' in line with the census' London Manifesto for Change asks and committed to an outreach review encompassing WRSC learning.¹¹
- The Rough Sleeping Risk Assessment tool¹² made gender-informed changes based on WRSC recommendations, and the Rough Sleeping Monthly Management information changed to report on gender.¹³

The WRSC has successfully amplified women's voices to affect tangible practice and policy change across England, and the WRSC coalition will continue to do so until women's experiences and needs are no longer sidelined into a section or footnote. In March 2026, the census team, backed by almost 50 national cross-sector organisations, wrote to the minister for Homelessness and Local Government, Alison McGovern MP, highlighting the strategic neglect of women in the National Plan to End Homelessness, and asking for MHCLG collaboration with WRSC and related sectors to ensure that women are not left behind as the Plan is enacted.¹⁴

⁸ All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (2025). 'Homes, Support, Prevention - Our Foundations for Ending Homelessness'. Available at <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/u12jh3kb/homes-support-prevention-our-foundations-for-ending-homelessness-final-2.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.feantsa.org/resources/women-first-european-good-practices-addressing-womens-home-less-ness>

¹⁰ https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/01/oecd-monitoring-framework-to-measure-homelessness_7b704e9d/3e98455b-en.pdf

¹¹ Greater London Authority (2025) The Mayor's Rough Sleeping Plan of Action. London: Available at: <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/housing-and-land/mayors-priorities-londons-housing-and-land/homelessness/>

2.3

Local responses to women's rough sleeping

The standardised exclusion and undercounting of women across the country has had serious implications for the commissioning and resources of services that cater for women's specific needs. Yet despite only running for a few years, the Census has led to tangible improvements that prevent and tackle homelessness for women. Many local authorities across the country have been able to fund and commission services for women using their census data.

“The Women's Census has resulted in our development of a women-only accommodation service, which began in April 2025 and is going really well!”

Local Authority Census lead, 2025

Other changes include:

- A subregional long-term accommodation service for women was funded
- A women-only winter shelter has been funded for three years in a row
- Women-only Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) provision was provided for the first time.
- A safe and secure women's only floor with specialist support was funded and opened.

“Piloting the Census gave us the opportunity to gather data that had never been collected before in the county, and women were often missed. It provided us with an opportunity to highlight the gaps, barriers and inequity within our support... and tailor our services towards women.”

Local Authority Census lead, 2025

Areas that participated have also reported innovative changes to their local strategies, policies and training, and services offers, with many adopting gender-informed outreach all year round. With local authorities expected to complete not only a Needs Assessment but a refreshed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy by March 2027, having accurate data on women's experiences is pivotal, as is having sufficient suitable provision. We urge local authorities and housing providers to consider the trends of this WRSC when considering both current provision and future demand.

This year, we are highlighting two case studies which exemplify the positive local change that is made possible by participating in the WRSC.

services-people-experiencing-homelessness-including-sleeping-rough/mayors-rough-sleeping-plan-action

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-national-plan-to-end-homelessness/a-national-plan-to-end-homelessness#pillar-2--targeted-prevention>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rough-sleeping-data-framework-october-to-december-2025/rough-sleeping-data-framework-october-to-december-2025-technical-notes>

¹⁴ Single Homeless Project, Solace Women's Aid. (2026). Coalition urges government to address 'invisible' women's homelessness in National Plan. Available at: <https://www.shp.org.uk/coalition-urges-government-to-address-invisible-womens-homelessness-in-national-plan/>



Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole

“In Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP), we have been working with the Rough Sleeping Data Framework (RSDF) since 2022, initially as early adopters. This work quickly demonstrated to us that the biggest issue in BCP in terms of rough sleeping was long-term cases, both numerically and proportionately, and therefore this became one of our local priorities as a Homelessness Partnership.

However, whilst the RSDF has proved to be a very useful set of indicators, it is also limited on its own, and for example, does not specifically measure gender (or ethnicity, sexuality, etc.). We were therefore aware that there would be missing data, not least in terms of hidden forms of rough sleeping (which disproportionately affects certain groups, including women) and that anecdotal evidence reflected this. The existing verification methods at the time compounded this issue. Lack of data or evidence can be a blocker to arguing for specific provision and funding, so any help with the provision of this is helpful to provide the truest picture possible, whilst we also need to listen to the voices and stories of people, including those who are at risk of being missed.

This was one of the reasons we were very keen to participate in the Women’s Rough Sleeping Census after the initial pilot in London, and so we became involved when the census expanded to national areas in 2023. Our first WRSC was really well received and supported by our local partnership, being successfully joint led by our outreach provider St Mungo’s and Housing, with wide support from health services, the VCSE sector, etc. From year one of our involvement, this work demonstrated the scale of the local issue, reflecting other areas nationally, and began to provide data evidence to back up anecdotal stories. At the time, we were preparing our Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) application and the accompanying gap analysis.



Our census data and learning provided specific context and allowed us to better make the case for women only provision as part of this programme.

Our application was successful and led to our developing a block of 11 brand new flats for women, with 24/7 support, as part of a wider SHAP housing-led programme. The service opened in July 2024, run by the successful provider Two Saints, and has been full and a tremendous success from the start. There is a clear focus on empowerment, strengths and maximising the involvement of the women who live there, helping to meaningfully change lives for the better. There has also only been one eviction, which is particularly noteworthy as most of the women had experienced long-term rough sleeping and previous accommodation offers had not been the right fit for them, often due to being mixed, primarily male-dominated services. There has also been a significant reduction in sex working from many of the women accessing the service.

In addition to this new service, other improvements influenced by our participation in the census have included positive changes to the ‘verification’ process, and a women-only drop-in. Our delivery of the census for the past three years has also raised the profile of the scale and nature of women’s rough sleeping and has led to wider conversations and work to better address the experiences of other people facing disproportionate and overlapping risks of hidden rough sleeping and violence and abuse, such as the LGBTQI+ community.”





Camden

“In Camden, there are a wide range of factors pushing people into vulnerable situations, often leading to homelessness and rough sleeping. These including the high cost of rent, a reduction in the availability of rental properties, cuts to benefits and the gap between local housing allowance and the cost of rent, an increase in poverty following the cost-of-living crisis, domestic abuse and other gender-based violence, and leaving Home Office accommodation. This paints a challenging picture for homelessness in Camden, and we are seeing significant increases in people sleeping rough in our community, second only to the London Borough of Westminster in London.


Whilst street-based rough sleeping is increasing, it is also important to note that some people are often under-represented in the statistics we have because they are not as visible when homeless. For example, they might sit on night buses, walk throughout the night, sit in fast-food restaurants, in unsafe accommodation or stay with people who might exploit them.

These experiences are especially common among women, which is why we have undertaken the Women’s Rough Sleeping Census every year since it was piloted in 2022. We also undertook a research project in Camden in 2021 in partnership with Single Homeless Project and the University of York, which piloted an outreach survey approach to better understanding women’s homelessness in Camden, and was instrumental to the development of the Census the following year.

The Census data and the cross-agency learning it involved has informed our ambitious new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy 2025-2030. In the strategy, we set out a definition of rough sleeping informed by the Census that is broader than the current Government definition, and includes people who sleep and shelter in public places that are open all day (for example A&E departments and fast-food restaurants) and those who walk all night or use public transport to sleep on.

We also commit to tackling hidden homelessness, including reaching women and others who are ‘sofa surfing’, staying with friends or family and not accessing mainstream homelessness services. We have recently re-tendered our rough sleeping outreach provision and awarded the six-year contract to Single Homeless Project who will be piloting a preventative, cross-sector ‘No Wrong Door’ approach to tackling rough sleeping, with the ambition to ensure that women and other people who traditionally fall through the gaps between service models are able to access the support they need, when they need it. This will include women’s specialist workers, close partnership working with domestic abuse and VAWG specialists, and regular, partnership gender-informed outreach.”





**I sleep on
the bus if
I've got a
day ticket,
but then
they kick
you off.**

WRSC respondent, 2025

The 2025 Women's Rough Sleeping Census

Census design

The Census triangulates data to provide more robust estimates on the scale of women's rough sleeping. It has two main methods:

- A brief anonymised survey conducted with women who identify themselves to outreach teams or other services as having slept rough in the previous three months. This survey is conducted over seven days through gender-informed outreach shifts¹⁵ and with women who access building-based services during that time. The survey questions enable women to tell us how, when and where they experience rough sleeping/hidden homelessness, and to comment further on their circumstances if they wish.
- Local Insights meetings where cross-sector services share information on women known by professionals to have slept rough within the previous three months. This data is cross-referenced by name and date of birth, and duplicates are removed, providing a robust figure for identified women known to be rough sleeping in each local authority.

The 2025 WRSC took place across England between 22 and 28 September 2025, across 101 local authorities. Survey responses were received from all 33 London boroughs

(though participation was limited in some locations), and from a further 68 local authorities across England. Over 40% (42) of participating local authorities completed Local Insights meetings as part of the Census, 16 of which were in London.

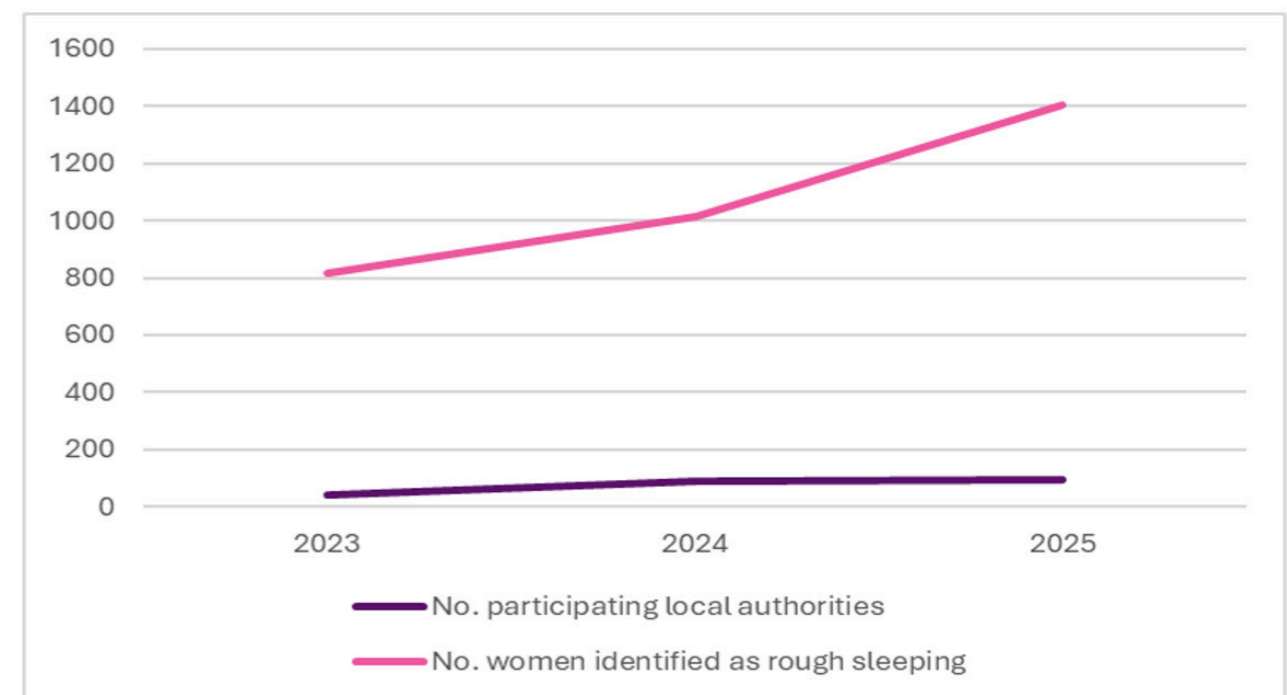
3.1

Key findings

The 2025 Census was completed by 1,671 women.

One thousand four hundred and six women had slept rough in the three months prior to the Census (84% of women surveyed). As shown in figure 1, there has been a slight (15%) increase in the number of local authorities participating in the WRSC this year. However, the number of women identified as sleeping rough has increased by 39% since the 2024 WRSC¹⁶. This is likely to be a result of areas forming strong multi-agency partnerships over the course of completing the WRSC for multiple years, which facilitates identification of more women.

Figure 1: Number of women identified as rough sleeping by the WRSC 2023-2025



¹⁵ Gender-informed outreach recognises that tailored approaches are required to give more responsive, personalised and holistic care to meet women's specific needs, England.

¹⁶ Wright S., Greenhalgh E., Nathie L. and Campbell L. (2025) How do we sleep at night? Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2024 Report. WRSC 2024

Table 1: Geographical distribution of 2025 Census results ¹⁷

London borough	No. of women rough sleeping	Rest of England	No. of women rough sleeping
Camden	70	Greater Manchester	187
Lambeth	52	Bristol	86
Westminster	42	Leeds	61
Ealing	37	Coventry	60
Newham	29	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	45
Waltham Forest	25	Nottinghamshire	40
Tower Hamlets	24	Nottingham City	39
Haringey	23	Newcastle	37
Southwark	22	Southampton	31
Islington	18	Gloucestershire	29
Brent	14	Lincolnshire	29
Barking and Dagenham	13	Oxfordshire	29
Lewisham	13	Liverpool City Region	28
Greenwich	12	Preston	24
Hackney	11	Sheffield	22
Redbridge	9	Exeter	21
Kensington and Chelsea	8	Plymouth	19
Enfield	7	Brighton and Hove	15
Hillingdon	7	Hull	15
Hounslow	7	South Tyneside	15
Wandsworth	6	Gateshead	14
Bexley	4	Reading	13
Hammersmith and Fulham	4	Cambridge	10
Havering	4	Cornwall	10
Bromley	3	Maidstone	10
City of London	3	Doncaster	9
Merton	3	Thanet	8
Richmond upon Thames	3	Shropshire	6
Barnet	2	York	6
Croydon	2	Tonbridge & Tunbridge Wells	4
Harrow	1	Basingstoke and Deane	3
Kingston	1	Solihull	1
Pan London	1		
Subtotal for London	480	Subtotal for the rest of England	926
GRAND TOTAL			1406

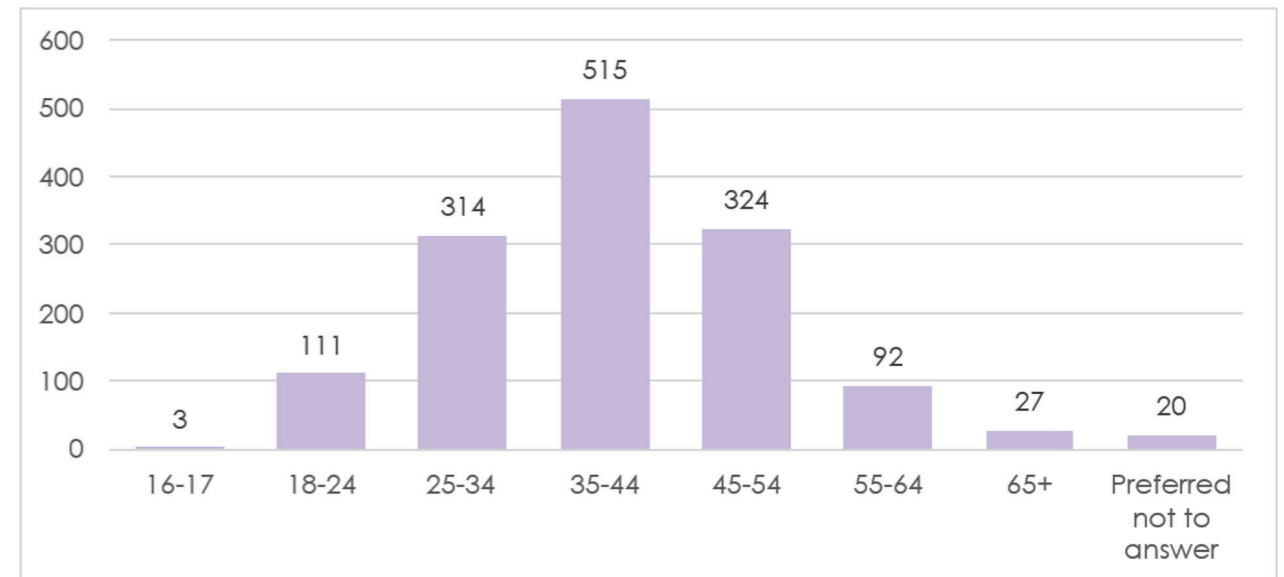
¹⁷ This list does not individually name all participating local authorities due to grouped participation of district councils, county councils and combined authorities, (i.e.: Oxfordshire County Council, Greater Manchester, and Gloucestershire).

3.2 Women who are rough sleeping

Age

As with the 2024 Census, the largest age category for the women was between 35 and 44 years old. Just over a third of women (37%) were in this age bracket. Two per cent of the women were aged over 65 years old. The stark decline in the number of women above the age 35-44 is striking, highlighting that the average age of women sleeping rough is 43 years old: two years less than men sleeping rough, and far removed from the life expectancy of the general population (83 for women and 79 for men). This sadly indicates that many of the women completing this survey are experiencing homelessness close to the average age of death, demonstrating the importance of urgent action.

Figure 2: Age of women who slept rough



Gender

Ninety-eight percent of women described themselves as female, with 1% describing themselves as non-binary and 1% not answering when asked what their gender is. Two percent of the women had changed their gender since birth. These demographics broadly align with population statistics for non-binary, trans and gender-fluid populations.

However, research from LGBTQI+ organisations such as Stonewall Housing and AKT has found that rates of homelessness for transgender people are higher than cisgender counterparts. This raises questions around whether the WRSC is under-identifying trans and non-binary communities, as one might expect an over-representation within the survey, or certainly within more hidden forms of homelessness locations such as sofa-surfing and engaging in sex work.

Comparisons of these populations with government snapshot statistics are limited by the 'not known' and binary categories used. Irrespective, whilst small in proportion, their presence has important implications for service provision given the specific vulnerabilities faced by trans or non-binary communities. Ensuring sufficient provision for these individuals is also crucial in light of the Supreme Court Ruling in 2025, which may see previously trans-inclusive housing options become inaccessible.

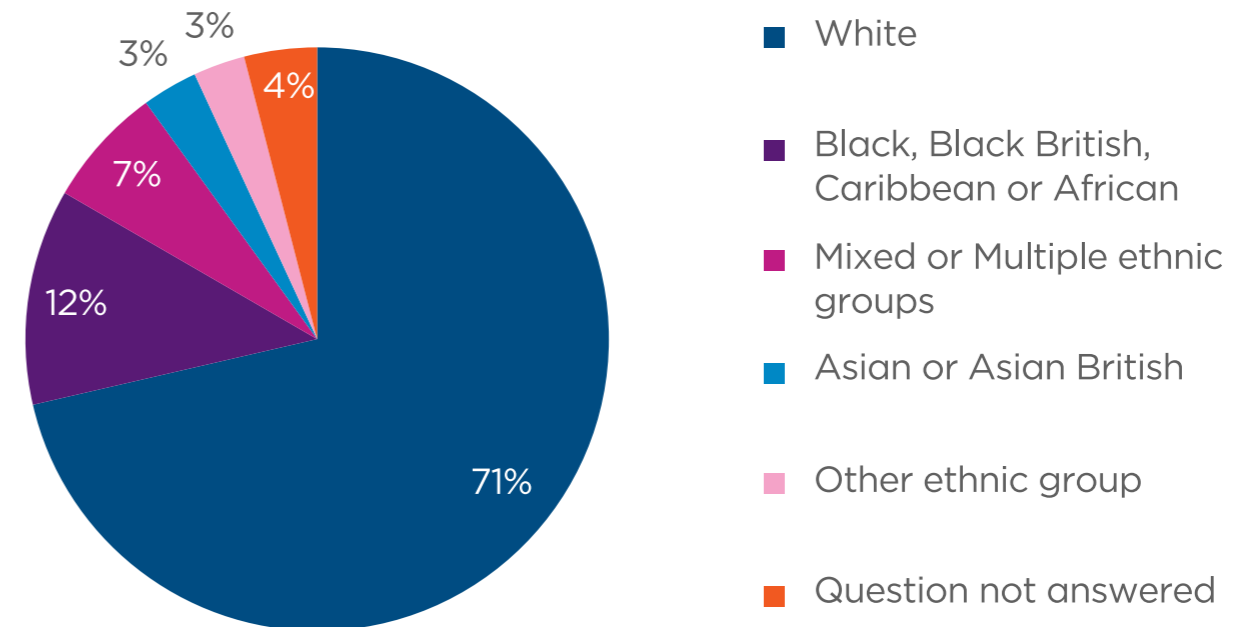
“Women, trans people and non-binary people are in more danger with the rise of right-wing extremism causing more attacks”
WRSC respondent, 2025

Ethnicity

The ethnic breakdown of women was also very similar to the 2024 Census, with 71% of women being white, 12% Black, 7% mixed heritage and 3% Asian. The ethnic breakdown of women indicates further over-representation of Black and mixed ethnic groups compared to national population statistics. Across London, 25% of the WRSC responses were from women self-describing as Black, nearly double the findings of the 2021 ONS census (13.5%),¹⁸ but aligning with CHAIN Q3 2025 data of 24%.¹⁹

This vast over-representation reflects systemic inequality, structural disadvantages such as poverty, and racial discrimination within housing systems, including policies such as no recourse to public funds. High levels of homelessness are perpetuated by the fact Black families are less likely to be offered social housing through statutory homelessness systems, with 24% of white families securing a home compared to only 10% for Black families.²⁰ Interestingly, whilst the London WRSC and CHAIN data for those who are Black was similar, such was not the case for white people (49% versus 24%).

Figure 3: Ethnic breakdown of women who were rough sleeping



¹⁸ Regional ethnic diversity - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures
¹⁹ Rough sleeping in London (CHAIN reports) - London Datastore
²⁰ How racism causes homelessness - Single Homeless Project

Frequency of Rough Sleeping

Figure 4 summarises the frequency with which women reported sleeping rough. Just under a quarter of the women (24%) had slept rough every night in the three months prior to the census. 14% had slept rough for more than two thirds of that period. Just under half (49%) of the women interviewed had slept rough for more than a third of that time.

Figure 4:
Frequency that women had slept rough in the previous 3 months

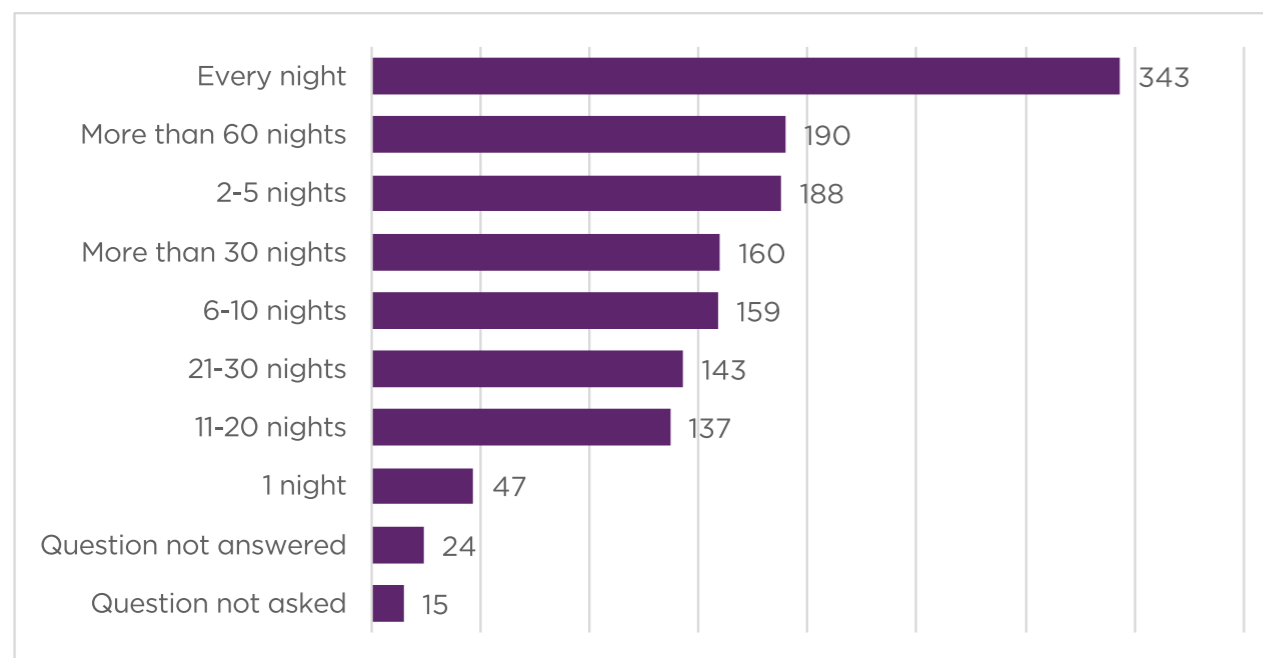
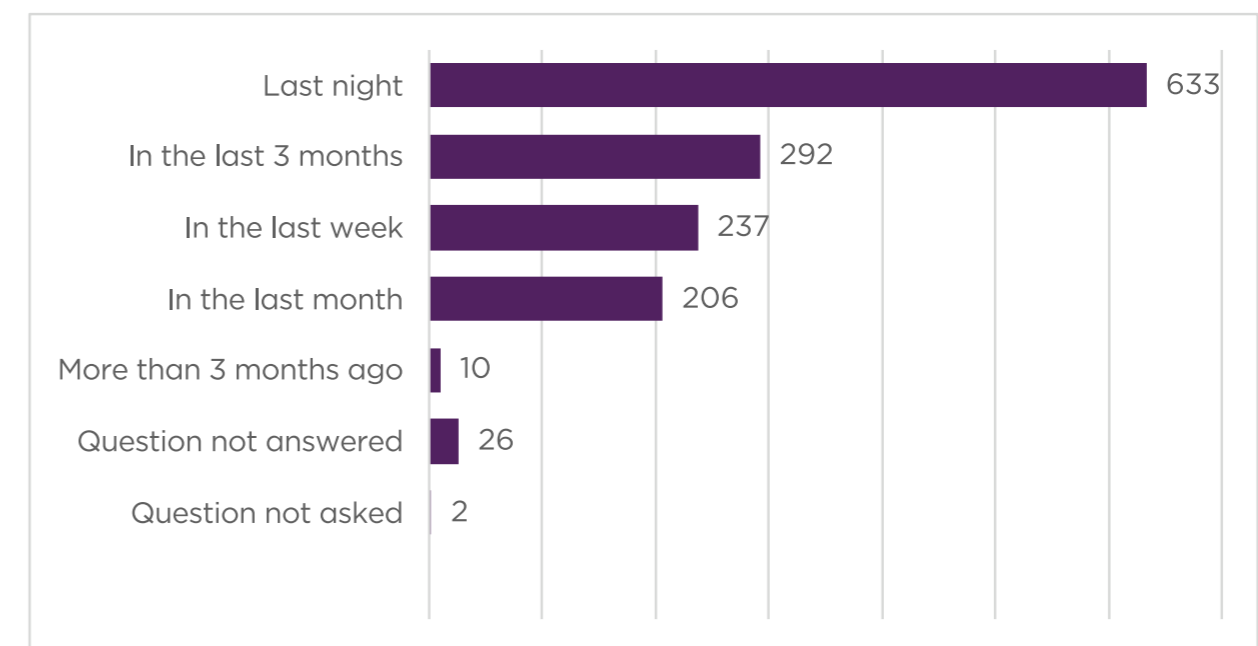


Figure 5 reveals how recent the women's last experience of rough sleeping was. For just under half of the women (45%), it had been the previous night. Just under two thirds (62%) had slept rough in the week prior to the Census.

Figure 5: Most recent experience of rough sleeping



These findings raise three points. First, women's homelessness remains inherently transient, with nearly 75% of respondents describing going in, and out of, rough sleeping - as opposed to a consistent state. Second, whilst it may be transient, women sleeping rough is neither rare, nor infrequent, meaning outreach teams should be able to regularly identify and support these women through gender-informed

outreach shifts. Third, the hidden or transient nature of women's homelessness is not a sole explanation for their undercounting. The fact that nearly 25% of women who sleep rough are doing so every night suggests there is a level of sustained visibility and presence of women, but that current outreach practice and data collection methods mean they are consistently missed and not recognised as being homeless.

Locations

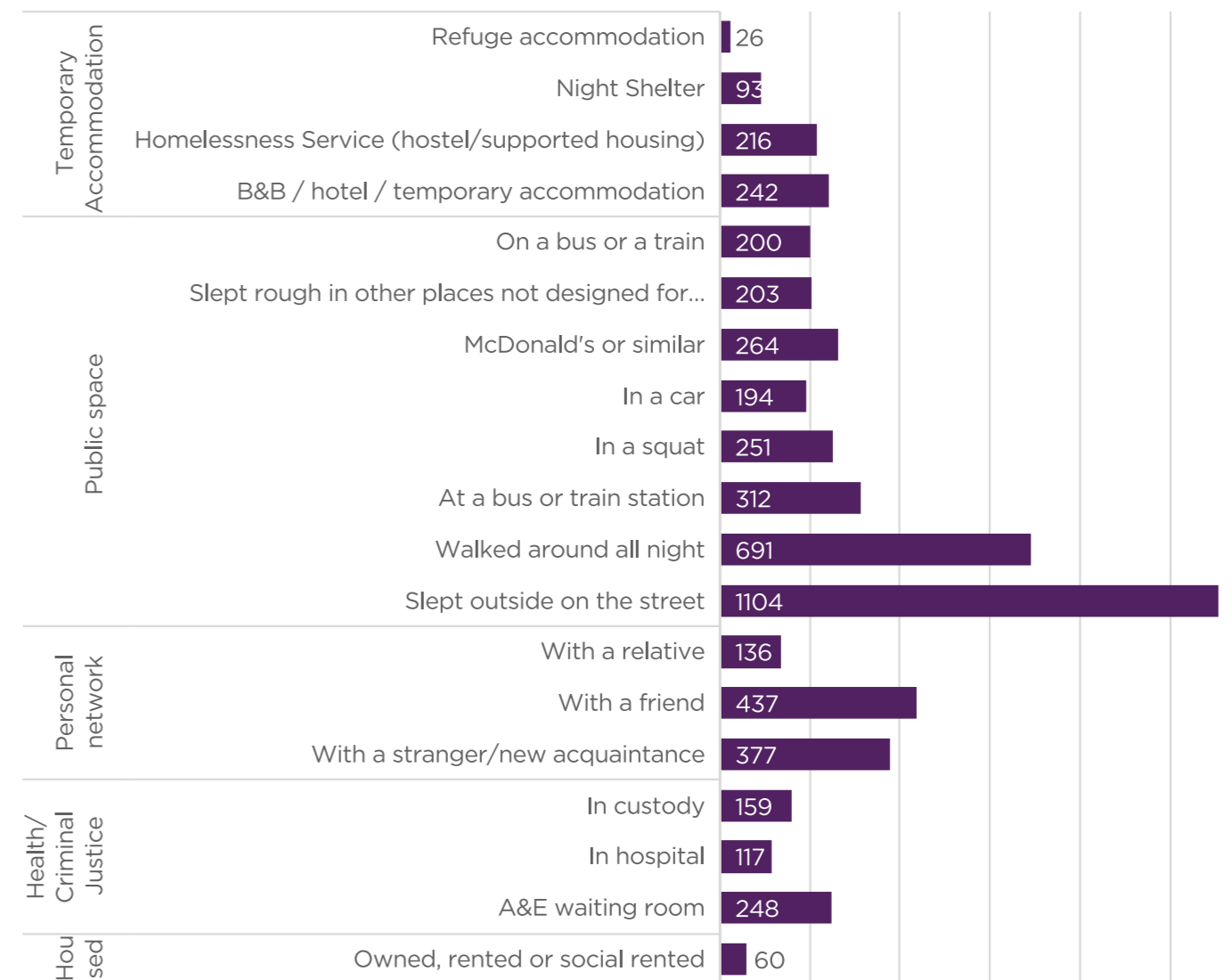
In terms of locations where the women had slept, on average, each woman had slept in four different locations over the three months prior to the Census. The most common location, reported by 79% of the women, was sleeping outside on the street. Although it is worth noting that this might be women sleeping during the day, when it is safer, and therefore they still might not be spotted by outreach teams. Half (49%) reported walking around all night and a third (31%) had stayed with a friend. Over a quarter (27%) had stayed with a stranger/acquaintance; an arrangement often then involving survival sex work.

“Men offer me places to stay but they always fancy me and want sex from me eventually. I don’t feel safe in the place I have to stay because there are men there who use drugs and who try to get me to sleep with them.” - 2025 census respondent.

Figure 6 shows the frequency with which women used different locations overnight for the three months prior to the Census.



Figure 6: Locations where the women slept/spent overnight in the previous three months

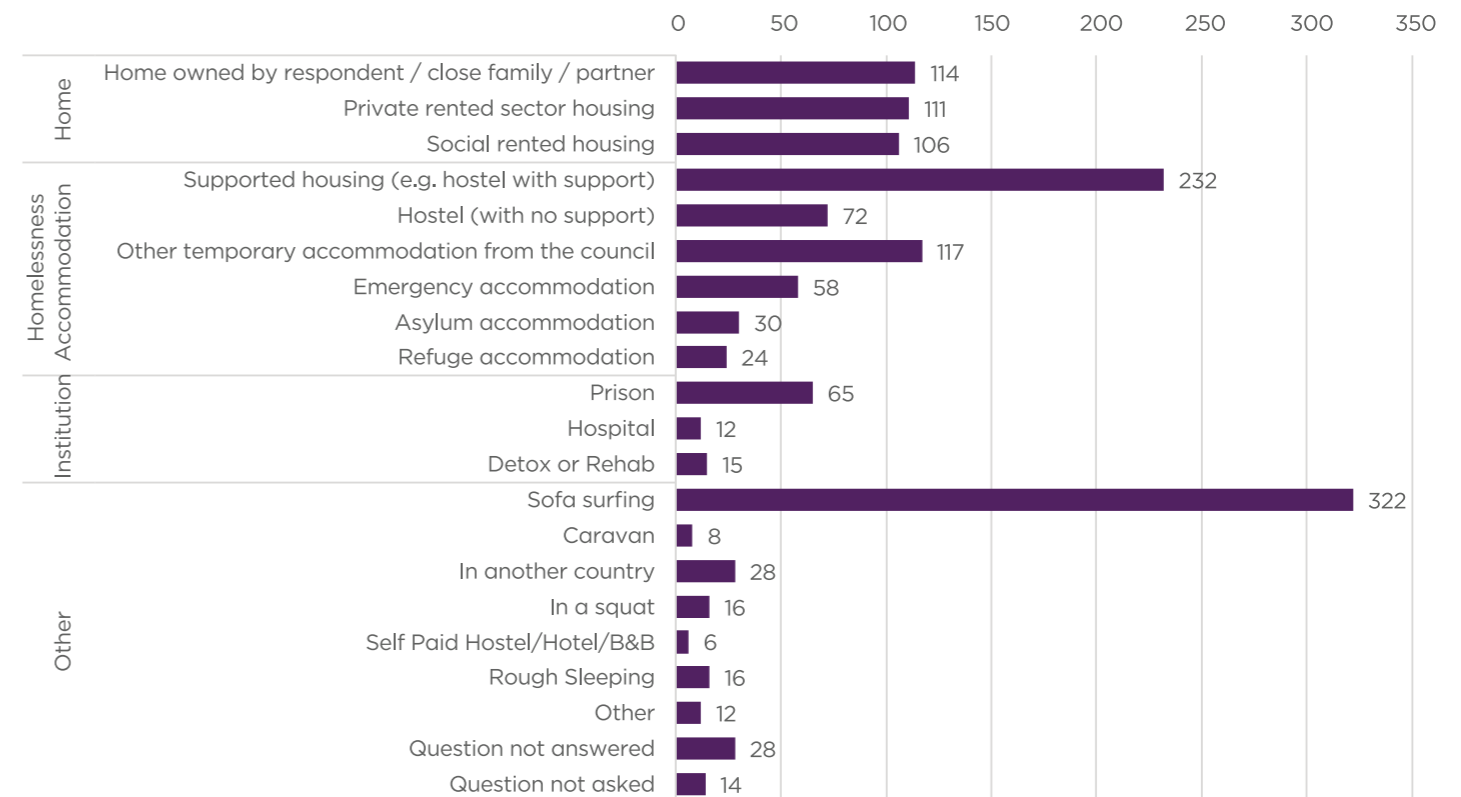


Comparing 2024 and 2025 Census data, there has been a 12% increase in women reporting that they walked around all night and a 4% increase each in use of all night cafes, police custody and A&E waiting rooms.

Figure 7 presents where women were staying prior to sleeping rough. Just under a quarter (23%) had been sofa surfing, demonstrating the high proportion of women who engage in more forms of ‘hidden homelessness’. Commonly, the women we identify for the survey are staying with friends, family and associates on an insecure or transitory basis (e.g. nightly, weekly, or regularly being forced to leave immediately). They are also often living with family or a partner in unsafe circumstances (i.e. experiencing domestic abuse and therefore have nowhere safe to be).

Almost half (45%) of the women had been in some form of homeless accommodation – such as supported accommodation, temporary accommodation, hostels or refuges – prior to rough sleeping. This is higher than the 37% of women reported in the 2024 Census. Most disconcerting is the fact that 232 women (17%) slept rough directly after leaving supported housing provision. Yet again we have stark evidence of how current homelessness provision is failing to prevent or resolve women’s rough sleeping, causing women to remain trapped in cycles of different forms of homelessness. Unless we adapt current provision and accommodation for women’s needs, this will not change.

Figure 7: Location prior to sleeping rough ²¹



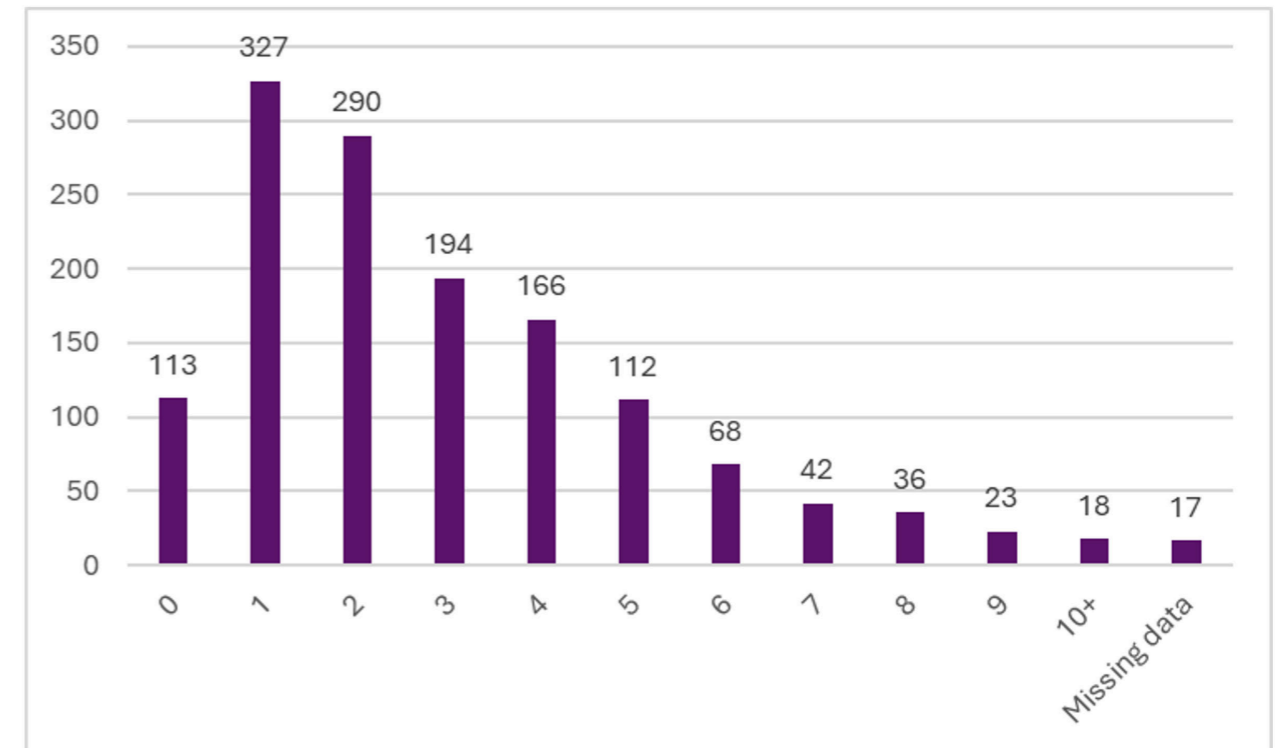
²¹ Sixteen women (1%) gave a location that they did not realise counted as rough sleeping itself, such as ‘Other - in a tent’.

Services being accessed

Figure 8 shows how 9% (113) of women sleeping rough were not accessing any services, suggesting these women are falling through the gaps of support, and are uncertain how or where to turn. The majority of women were in touch with at least one service, as presented below - with 23% of women accessing one service, 21% accessing two services, and 14% accessing three services. One percent (18 women) were in contact with 10 or more services, the maximum number of services being 18, and yet still were unable to have their homelessness resolved. This suggests that women are indeed interacting with services - but these might not have the cross-collaboration, resource or capacity to also support their housing needs. With most women receiving support from only a very small number of organisations, there is a need to make every contact impactful and to encourage cross-sector partnership work. This also demonstrates the importance of frameworks such as the proposed duty to collaborate, which would require public bodies to work together to prevent homelessness. This includes making sure that irrespective of where, when or how women engage with services, they are navigated through to the right support.



Figure 8: Number of services being accessed by women who were sleeping rough.



The services that women were accessing are listed by order of frequency in Table 2.

Of note is the fact that:

- 80% of women sleeping rough were **not accessing** support from a council housing department.
- 47% of women sleeping rough were **not accessing** support from a homelessness organisation.
- 38% of women sleeping rough were **not accessing** support from either a housing officer or a homelessness organisation.

Table 2: Services that women who were rough sleeping were in contact with.

Service	Number of women	Percentage
Homelessness organisation	750	53%
Drug or alcohol support service	551	39%
Food bank	312	22%
Jobcentre	285	20%
Housing officer or council housing department	284	20%
Mental health service	280	20%
Physical health service	244	17%
Soup kitchen	219	16%
Sex worker support	201	14%
Women's centre/service	194	14%
Probation	172	12%
Domestic abuse or sexual violence service	150	11%
Social worker/ social services	142	10%
Police	123	9%
Religious or faith group	87	6%
Housing association	41	3%
Citizens Advice	32	2%
Prison service	19	1%
Education	13	1%
One-stop shop	10	1%
Other	3	1%
None	72	5%
Missing data	17	2%

Women are in touch with a broad range of services, including (but not limited to):

Drug and alcohol support services

As was the case for 2024, the 2025 WRSC reveals that the second most accessed service was drug and alcohol support – far outweighing the contact that women had with general health services. This is not surprising as problems with alcohol and other drugs are common among people who are experiencing homelessness²² and they face considerable barriers to accessing health services.²³ Longer term homelessness is associated with greater prevalence of injecting drugs, suggesting a need for targeted harm reduction support.²⁴ However, needle and syringe programmes (NSPs) are rarely designed with women's specific needs in mind, particularly those related to trauma or experiences of gender-based violence. Barriers to accessing such services leave women more likely to rely on partners or friends to collect needles on their behalf – limiting opportunities for health advice, blood borne virus testing, and wider support.²⁵

That women who sleep rough engage with drug and alcohol services more than healthcare provision highlights the importance of making each harm reduction or treatment contact facilitate access to wider health pathways. Services need to

provide safe, gender-sensitive spaces that meet the specific needs of women who are homeless (e.g. by providing advocacy support). Both central government and local authorities need to resource harm reduction care that prevents health inequalities from escalating.²⁶

“I want help with addiction first, then the rest comes after. Although I don't have safe housing etc., I'm trying to deal with the biggest issue first before I can start to think about everything else.”
- WRSC respondent, 2025.



I drink a lot because of the stress which leads to hospital admissions.

WRSC respondent, 2025

²² Rough sleeping questionnaire 2025: Headline findings - GOV.UK

²³ Homeless Link. (2025). The Unhealthy State of Homelessness 2025: Findings from the Homeless Health Needs Audit. *Unhealthy_State_of_Homelessness_2025.pdf*. Groundswell. (2020). Women, homelessness and health: a peer research project. <https://groundswell.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Womens-Health-Research-Report.pdf>

²⁴ Better Outcomes through Linked Data: Rough sleeping and substance use treatment - GOV.UK

²⁵ Gibson, K., & Hutton, F. (2021). Women Who Inject Drugs (WWID): Stigma, Gender and Barriers to Needle Exchange Programmes (NEPs). *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 48(3), 276-296.

²⁶ Better Outcomes through Linked Data: Rough sleeping and substance use treatment - GOV.UK; In some areas there is targeted funding/provision around 'homeless health' - including via the Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant - but only a small proportion is specifically allocated to responding to women's needs

Health services

Health services (both physical and mental) were being accessed by 20% of respondents. Whilst for many, poor mental health was driving their homelessness, a large proportion of women described the physical and emotional harms resulting from rough sleeping. For example, the cold exacerbated pre-existing health conditions, especially for older women, and made it difficult to manage their health and take medication. Sleeping in cars was specifically referenced as causing physical health issues.

Accessing health services was also linked to difficulties in maintaining hygiene. Women described a lack of access to toilets, having nowhere to wash or change, and the difficulty of dealing with their period while homeless. The stress often led them to self-medicate with alcohol or other drugs, which could then cause them health problems. Unsurprisingly, many women described feelings of hopelessness and despondency. Many felt alone and isolated. It is therefore imperative that housing providers and local authorities are in touch with these health providers and consider where a commissioned service would be most useful.



It's really hard when you're on your period and need clean changes of underwear.

WRSC respondent, 2025

"My health has rapidly deteriorated and I'm losing weight. I have serious spinal issues that need to be operated on."

- WRSC 2025 participant

Sex work support

Fourteen per cent of WRSC respondents said they were in touch with sex work support, up from 3% of respondents in 2024. An additional 7% requested support in this area, highlighting the dangers of sex work and their experiences of survival sex.

Other women described the common experience of being propositioned for sex work while sleeping rough despite not participating in this. Stigma is a significant issue, with women experiencing heightened levels of social judgement around sex work, whilst concerns about personal safety, confidentiality, and the suitability of services further limit women's engagement.

"I have been in some bad situations in the past staying at punters' houses as I didn't want to sleep on the streets. I have been locked in houses and expected and been forced to have sex as rent payment. Treating me like a sex slave and being verbally and physically aggressive. I have been in situations where a punter has brought other men in to have sex with me for free. Scary situations."

- WRSC 2025 participant

Barriers to support: What women asked for

For the 2025 Census, we also asked women what areas in their life they would benefit from support in, to determine the main gaps and barriers. Fifty-three per cent of women expressed a desire for support around housing. Some of these responses were from women not in contact with services, whilst others came from women already in contact with services but who still have unmet housing needs.

Open-text responses reveal that many had not accessed the support or outcomes they wanted through local councils - some felt bounced around or had faced the barriers of not being recognised as having priority need or a local connection. Women described feeling dismissed or unheard by council homelessness services:

"The council makes me feel like they don't care... we call up but it's like talking to a brick wall." - WRSC respondent, 2025.

"I wouldn't say my experience is very good because when I really needed that help, they told me I had to wait for my assessment... then she just cancelled my appointment... now they have closed my case." - WRSC respondent, 2025.

"I felt very let down by the council... they said they don't have a duty to me... they said if you were rough sleeping we would come look for you, but how do I know where I'm going to be sleeping and when?" - WRSC respondent, 2025.

Several women referred to the long and frustrating process of bidding on social housing and feeling that others were getting properties ahead of them. Experiences with services more generally included being given false hope, having to jump through hoops, being unable to access support until something bad had already

happened, and feeling ignored, dismissed, not listened to, or not given a chance. Some felt that support staff they had worked with did not fully understand or relate to their situation, were not 'street-trained' or not 'strong' enough.

This demonstrates the importance of trauma-informed training for housing providers, especially given the high prevalence of abuse these women are experiencing, and we would urge local authorities to roll out consistent, sector-led training on both domestic abuse, and women's homelessness.

Women broadly called for support with seeing their children/regaining custody; support to stop using drugs; support to exit sex work; domestic abuse/VAWG support; floating housing-related support; mental health support; trauma-informed and neurodiversity-inclusive services; support for prison leavers; physical health services (including access to medication, dentists, opticians, and sexual health care); help with food poverty; and access to hobbies/groups/activities.

With many of these issues, women described a disjointed process - with services not communicating with each other, services being closed down, and a lack of available support over weekends. Respondents felt that particular groups were disadvantaged in terms of support

access - specifically older women and women using drugs. Systemic and operational barriers would, in part, be addressed at a local level if housing providers were more transparent around the support availability within their area, including clarity on opening hours, multiple communication channels, and signposting to other forms of support across a variety of mediums. It would also be beneficial for areas to have clear (MHCLG aligned) guidance around evidence thresholds for aspects such as local connection and priority need, and where this may or may not be applicable (such as in the case of those fleeing domestic abuse).

Not all descriptions were negative. Women described some positive experiences of support, including with councils, charities, IDVAs, and Housing First schemes. A small proportion of open-text responses demonstrated that where positive engagement was present, homelessness support is not only crucial, but lifesaving.



Can't thank everyone enough for all the support.

WRSC respondent, 2025

Emergency (A&E) >>



Contributing factors to homelessness

Women described contributing factors to their homelessness that included domestic abuse, cuckooing, evictions by private landlords, and issues with neighbours. This points to the multi-faceted nature of women's homelessness and the criticality of a whole-system response - engaging with health, housing, VAWG and other services.

Trauma, violence and abuse

A substantial proportion of women responding to the survey referenced abuse, exploitation and fears around their safety, indicating once again the near-universal experience of abuse for women sleeping rough - both as a cause and consequence of having nowhere safe to stay. 213 women also expressed wanting support from domestic abuse/sexual violence services, and 250 women wanted support with relationships and family.



I left my last hostel because I was being harassed.

WRSC respondent, 2025

"I have been homeless since a violent attack in my home...[I] had to leave."
- WRSC respondent, 2025.

Sexual violence was a recurring feature of women's homelessness, with participants describing rape, assault, harassment and pressure to exchange sex for safety/survival. Sexual violence evidently features as an ongoing consequence of women's homelessness, made worse by their exclusion from priority need for housing (if without a personal connection), meaning all those made a victim of sexual violence by a stranger, neighbour, roommate, or somebody else sleeping rough are ineligible for priority support.

"I don't feel safe I have been attacked so many times I have been raped several times. I have reported to the police but no outcome."
- WRSC respondent, 2025.

"There's no safety on the streets - you can be approached, molested, raped, even in parks."
- WRSC respondent, 2025.

There was a strong desire for more women's services and women-only accommodation, and more gender-considerate support, such as assistance with seeing their children, or regaining custody, existing sex work, support for domestic abuse and sexual violence, or floating support. Others expressed a need for accommodation that will accept couples.

There is not enough help to rebuild your life after a severe domestic abusive relationship ... The services to help/support women just aren't there, and one's life can just spiral into unknown chaos after it."
- WRSC respondent, 2025.

Unsuitability of accommodation

Women also described temporary and supported accommodation as unsafe, hostile, unsuitable, poor quality, or otherwise unworkable.



I'd rather sleep outside than in a night shelter.

WRSC respondent, 2025

Poor conditions in accommodation (in terms of cleanliness and pests) undermined basic dignity, whilst the location of accommodation offered to women was often unsuitable - both practically and geographically.

"Temporary accommodation is not clean, and I have an infection that is incurable. I don't want to catch any more infections. Accommodation has rats. I need clean property."
- WRSC respondent, 2025.

"I have been placed in B&B ... The stairs are too much for me to handle sometimes due to extreme heart issues ... so I end up staying out."
- WRSC respondent, 2025.

"Though I was supported into accommodation, it's not local and my support network is in [London]. I'm struggling to cope."
- WRSC respondent, 2025.

The unsuitability of homelessness provision, and other forms of accommodation for women has been evidenced through a myriad of studies from both the housing and VAWG sector, including a report from Solace Women's Aid which found that 50% of survivors felt unsafe in their temporary accommodation, and 30% of survivors interviewed, were offered accommodation without electricity/gas or water.²⁷ Such occurrences were mirrored in the WRSC survey findings, and reiterate the need for suitable, safe and sustainable forms of all accommodation for women.

The experiences of these women clearly demonstrate accommodation designed to address homelessness is not fit for purpose when it comes to women's needs, and there are serious safety and well-being concerns when housing women in either mixed-sex accommodation, or provision that fails to account for their additional needs.

"We need more female accommodation for young women. I feel scared in my current accommodation because people are smoking and using drugs and I don't do that."
- WRSC respondent, 2025.

Whilst it is necessary to recognise the shortage of all forms of accommodation for those experiencing homelessness, the regularity with which women are housed

²⁷ Solace Women's Aid. (2025). Where will I go? Access to housing for domestic abuse survivors. <https://www.solace-womensaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Where-will-I-go-Access-to-housing-for-domestic-abuse-survivors.pdf>

in unsuitable locations only to leave, raises questions around the cost-effectiveness of the current approach. Inappropriate or unsafe housing regularly results in women either unofficially exiting the accommodation, rendering it unavailable for another person in need, and/or being re-housed, all of which incur further delay and additional costs. As we have seen, there are also the additional and much more harmful costs whereby women experience further abuse in certain accommodation, such as mixed hostels, resulting in more demand for health and VAWG support and expenditure through services such as therapy. The impact of not investing exacerbates these foreseeable and often preventable consequences.



Managing accommodation without support is setting people up to fail.

WRSC respondent, 2025

Mental health and substance use

Mental health difficulties and substance use also contribute to, and exacerbate, women's homelessness. Sadly, women regularly described how substance use by other residents was also particularly problematic; both in terms of fear, and concerns around their own relapsing. At the same time, women described feeling judged by services due to their drug use and turned away from mental health services.

“There should be separate places for people who do not have any drug or alcohol addictions, as those who aren't mentally strong could very easily fall into an addiction.” - WRSC respondent, 2025.

“The service I have been placed in has led to me relapsing in drugs and alcohol due to the peer pressure that is around me.” - WRSC respondent, 2025.

For those experiencing mental health concerns, most accommodation lacked the facilities or the support they needed:

“[We need] More self-contained women's accommodation services with cooking facilities ... It's hard, particularly if you have mental health problems, to stay inside temporary hostels.” - WRSC respondent, 2025.

“Need help in the hotels ... I lost so much weight ... no money or cooking facilities. Ended up kicked out.” - WRSC respondent, 2025.

Public services failing

Examples of women being discharged from hospital or leaving prison homeless were also given as reasons contributing to homelessness. In total, 17% had said they had either been in custody or hospital (as a patient) in the last three months, whilst 4% of women had been in prison prior to rough sleeping.

The WRSC will therefore continue to hold the government to account on its cross-departmental targets to halve the number of those becoming homeless after leaving prison or discharged post-hospital.

“I have been in and out of custody... left without any accommodation which leads to breaching conditions.” - WRSC respondent, 2025.

Lastly, the immigration system and NRPf policy also contributed to women having to sleep rough:

“I was granted refugee status... left asylum accommodation and have been sleeping rough since.” - WRSC respondent, 2025.

“Immigration problems, not having recourse to public funds. Impossible to house.” - WRSC respondent, 2025.

Women with insecure migrant status or no recourse to public funds are one of the most vulnerable cohorts of women, unable to secure support such as housing

benefit, and often scared to go to public services like the council, or the police, for fear of deportation. In a climate of increasing hostility towards migrants and those claiming asylum, support for these individuals is thinning, raising questions about where these women are supposed to go. Restricting accommodation through policies like NRPf without offering any alternative risks displacing, rather than resolving or preventing homelessness.



It was a relationship breakdown with my partner... had nowhere to live when discharged from hospital.

WRSC respondent, 2025

3.3

Women’s experiences of hidden homelessness

In addition to the 1,406 women who were sleeping rough, a further 140 women (8%) who took part in the WRSC had experienced hidden homelessness *only* in the last three months. Several women in this situation referenced previous rough sleeping, but as their experiences of rough sleeping fell outside the 3-month data collection window, their responses were analysed separately from the women who had slept rough within the last three months.

‘Hidden homelessness’ encompasses other forms of homelessness that involve having no right to or not being able to stay in a safe or fixed place. Unlike statutory homelessness, hidden homelessness is not documented, and there are currently no statistics on how many women are in this situation. As described previously, hidden homelessness might involve staying with friends/family/associates on an insecure or transitory basis, for example, such as sofa surfing. These forms of homelessness exemplify the complexity of women’s homelessness - a phenomenon that is fluid, non-linear, undocumented, and often leaves women in a constant state of transition.

The decision to include and analyse women’s experiences of hidden homelessness was made by the WRSC central team in response to the fact that each year, a number of women complete the WRSC survey who are clearly experiencing homelessness and often are at high risk of harm, but who identify that

they haven’t slept or stayed in locations encompassed within the WRSC definition of rough sleeping. To exclude their responses from the national report felt at odds with the nature of the WRSC itself, which aims to improve visibility and understanding of women’s homelessness, and use data to drive system change. Each year the survey data also demonstrate that hidden forms of homelessness often precede rough sleeping for women. It is therefore vital that these women’s experiences are included in the WRSC report, to further our understanding of the trajectories of how women experience homelessness and to develop models of prevention and intervention that are accessible to women experiencing any form of homelessness.

The survey data for women who have experienced hidden homelessness only (and not rough sleeping or been in any form of statutory homelessness provision) in the last three months are reported separately in order to be able to compare the rough sleeping data to other available data sources. There are currently no known comparable data sets on women’s hidden homelessness, a systemic neglect which we address in this year’s recommendations.

Age

Comparing the following graph with Figure 2, the age profile of women who are hidden homeless is younger than those who are rough sleeping: primarily in the 25-34 years category. Early intervention and addressing housing needs at this stage is therefore crucial given the common pathway from hidden homelessness into rough sleeping.

Figure 9: Age of women who were hidden homeless.

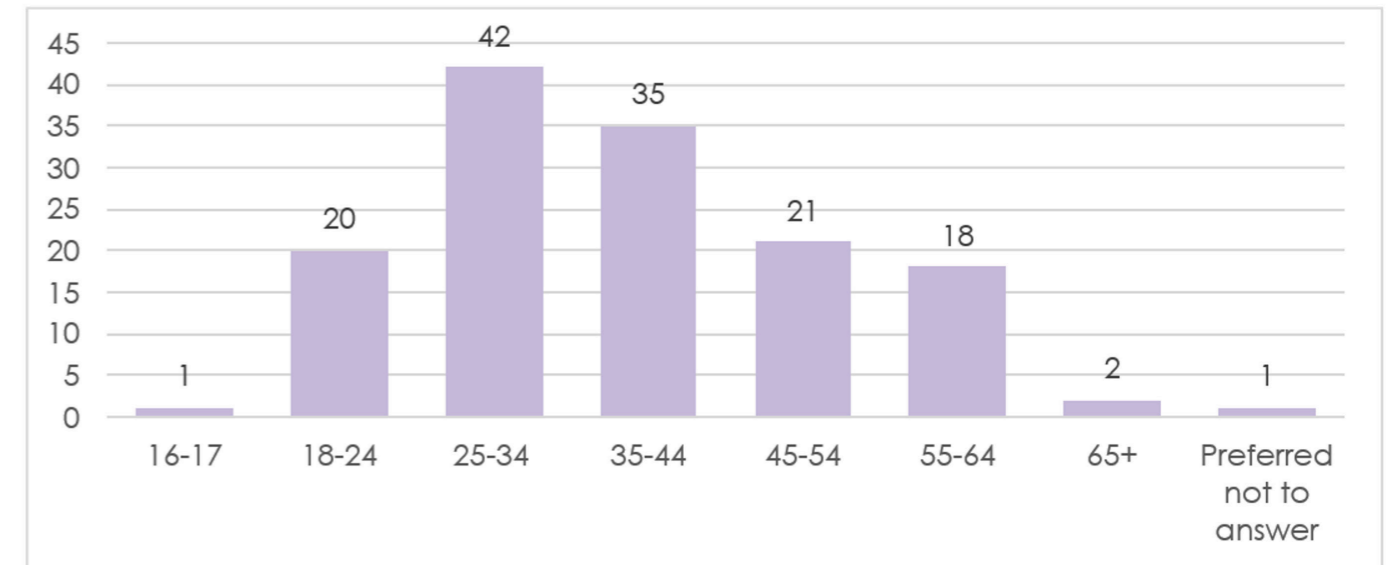
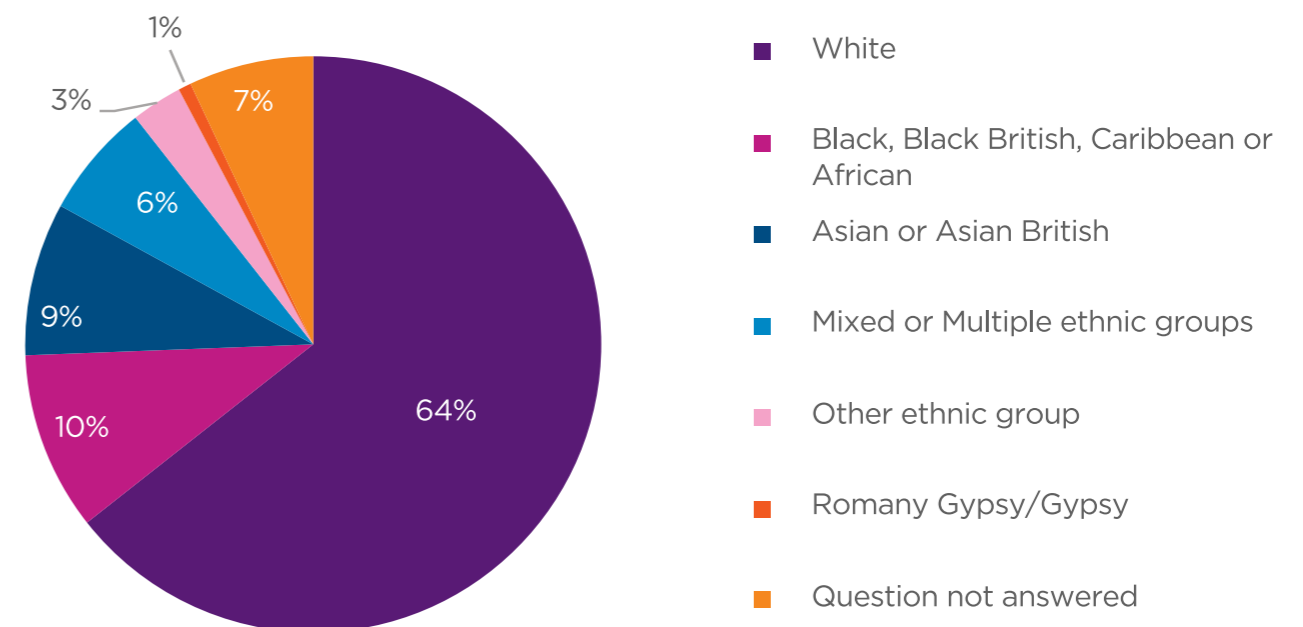


Figure 10: Ethnic breakdown of women who were hidden homeless.



Ethnicity

Figure 10 presents the ethnic breakdown for the women who were hidden homeless. As shown in Table 3, another interesting comparison between women who are rough sleeping and those who are hidden homeless, is the higher rate of Asian women who are hidden homeless. Whilst not universal nor deterministic, lower visibility of Asian women within rough sleeping and a higher visibility within hidden homelessness may be a consequence of a greater reliance

on informal community networks, in addition to gendered and cultural expectations around safety. More research to understand this pattern is needed. In the interim, it points to the necessity for an intersectional lens when supporting those without anywhere safe to go.

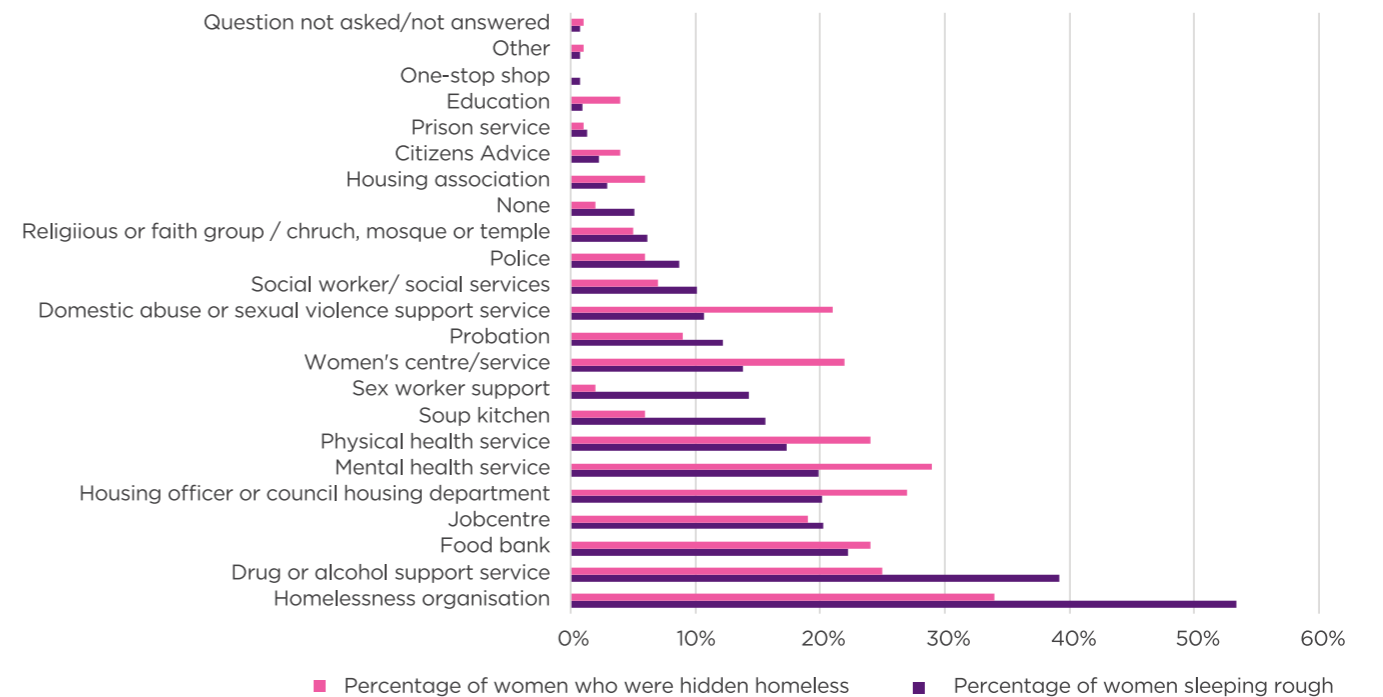
Table 3: Ethnic breakdown: women sleeping rough vs women who are hidden homeless.

Ethnic background	% women who were rough sleeping	% women who were hidden homeless
Asian or Asian British	3%	9%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	12%	10%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	7%	6%
Another ethnic group	3%	4%
White	71%	64%
Prefer not to say / question unanswered	4%	7%

Access to services

Several significant patterns and themes emerged when comparing the services that women reporting hidden homelessness were in touch with, in comparison with those experiencing rough sleeping.

Figure 11: Comparing services being accessed by women who are hidden homeless vs women who are rough sleeping.



First, reviewing the types of services: Unsurprisingly, women who were rough sleeping were much more likely to access a homeless organisation than women who were hidden homeless (53% versus 34%), most likely because those who were hidden homeless would not come into contact with outreach services, whilst also facing barriers to accessing statutory homelessness prevention support.

Figure 11 also reveals how women who were hidden homeless were more likely than rough sleeping women to be seeking support from domestic/sexual violence services (21% versus 11% respectively) and other women's services (22% versus 14%, respectively). They were also more likely to be in contact with physical health services (24% versus 17%), mental health services (29% versus 20%) and council departments (27% versus 20%). This suggests that survivors' first experience of having nowhere safe to stay is commonly hidden homelessness and is associated with the incidence of abuse - demonstrating why the prevention of homelessness requires the root causes of VAWG to be identified and addressed.

Women who were rough sleeping were also more likely to be in touch with alcohol/other drug services (39% versus 25%) and sex worker support services (14% versus 2%) than those who were hidden homeless. Given the common pathway from hidden homelessness to rough sleeping, it is reasonable to conclude that failure

to prevent women's rough sleeping leads a substantial proportion of them to use substances and undertake sex work. Such failure, rather than being a means of avoiding cost for the housing sector, simply escalates later intervention costs and shifts the burden onto the health and social care sector.

Challenges and barriers to support

There was considerable overlap between the types of challenges and barriers that women experiencing hidden homelessness and those who had experienced rough sleeping face - both within housing and broader third sector support. Below are two example themes.

1. Housing

Women described mixed experiences with housing - similar to those who had slept rough, some respondents described positive or neutral experiences, such as moving into temporary accommodation, with some saying they received sufficient support. Others reported negative experiences with services and homelessness accommodation, being unfairly evicted from housing association accommodation, services not communicating with each other, feeling disheartened by the process of bidding for social housing, the mental exhaustion of having to look for support themselves, and being placed in accommodation where they felt unsafe (for example, housed with violent/sexual offenders, or in situations where peer pressure led to relapsing on drugs/alcohol).

2. Mental Health

Many women who were hidden homeless also mentioned mental health concerns and feeling that there was not enough support available for this, as well as a desire for trauma-informed services - again, reflecting similarities to the rough sleeping cohort. Similar issues were described around substance use and domestic abuse. Differently, however, for those experiencing hidden homeless, women described the mental health impact of having to stay with their parents, staying with family but knowing they would not be able to remain there for long, sharing one room with a relative, and staying with people they did not feel safe with for a lack of other options. Several women experiencing hidden homelessness referred to having dependent children and needing to find a safe home for them as well as for themselves, and the impact this had on their mental and emotional well-being.

It is also worth noting that although these women had not slept rough in the last three months, some described past experiences of this, some implied ongoing impacts of sleeping rough, while others described feeling relieved to no longer be in that situation. Again, these experiences of women enduring ongoing, varied forms of homelessness without this ultimately being resolved, highlights that existing homelessness systems and services are failing women often for years on end.



I've been rough sleeping with my partner on and off for 20 years.

WRSC respondent, 2025

Irrespective of the perceived parameters of hidden homeless and rough sleeping, having nowhere safe to call home is impacting women emotionally, physically, financially, and socially. Whilst the challenges encountered may vary slightly for those sofa surfing and those sleeping rough, what is clear is that for most women, these different forms of homelessness are interchangeable, and part of a trajectory of women's homelessness that is neither identified, quantified, prevented or resolved by existing measures. These experiences point to the urgent need for prevention pathways that consider gender and intersectional needs and experiences and are genuinely accessible and approachable to women who currently have no power or agency to resolve their own homelessness.

**I have
been
homeless
since a
violent attack
in my home..
[I] had to
leave.**

WRSC respondent, 2025



Findings from Local Insights meetings

Local Insights meetings - where cross-sector professionals share information on women known to have slept rough within the previous three months - took place across 42 local authorities (16 London boroughs plus 26 local authorities across the rest of England).

All told, 259 organisations participated, equating to an average of seven services per site. The average was the same for both London and the rest of England.

Having removed any duplicate identifications, these meetings identified a total of 2,969 women, equating to an average of 72 women per London borough²⁸ and 70 women per non-London local authority. (Range: 11-295 in London; 3-281 outside London). The following two graphs and Appendix 1 show comparisons between WRSC data, WRSC Insights data, the national Rough Sleeping Snapshot²⁹ and (for London boroughs) CHAIN³⁰ data.

In terms of the national picture, the 42 local authorities undertaking Local Insights meetings found 1,267 rough sleeping women through the 2025 WRSC surveys but identified 2,969 women through Local Insights meetings. This compares with 290 women reported by those local authorities through the autumn 2025 Rough Sleeping Snapshot (RSS). The WRSC Local Insights data therefore suggests that there are 10.2 times as many women sleeping rough across England than RSS estimates suggest - a figure that has been consistent for the past three years.



4.1

Comparing WRSC data with other rough sleeping statistics.

Nationally (excluding London)

The 26 local authorities outside London found 937 women who were rough sleeping through the 2025 WRSC survey and identified 1,820 women through their Local Insights meetings. This compares with 152 women reported by those local authorities through the RSS.

The WRSC Local Insights data therefore suggests that there are 12.0 times as many women sleeping rough outside London than RSS estimates suggest. This compares with the 2024 finding of 11 times as many women identified through WRSC Local Insights meetings as through the RSS.

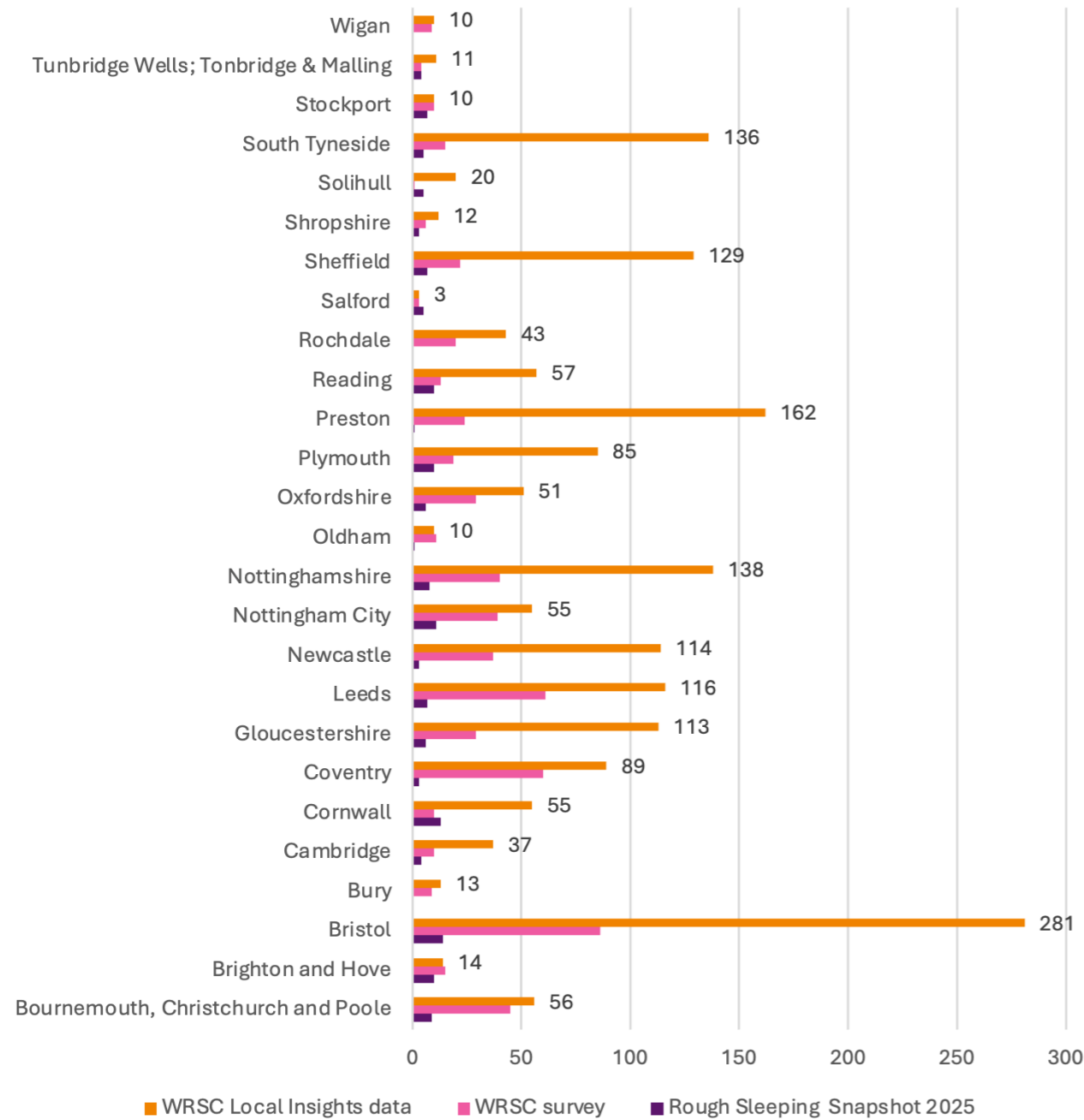


²⁸ Westminster is an outlier in that it reports a very large number of rough sleepers (295 women alone). Removing Westminster from the calculations leaves the remaining London average as 54 women per borough (range:6-136).

²⁹ Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025 - technical report - GOV.UK

³⁰ Rough sleeping in London (CHAIN reports) - London Datastore

Figure 12: Comparing WRSC survey and Local Insights with Rough Sleeping Snapshot data (outside London)



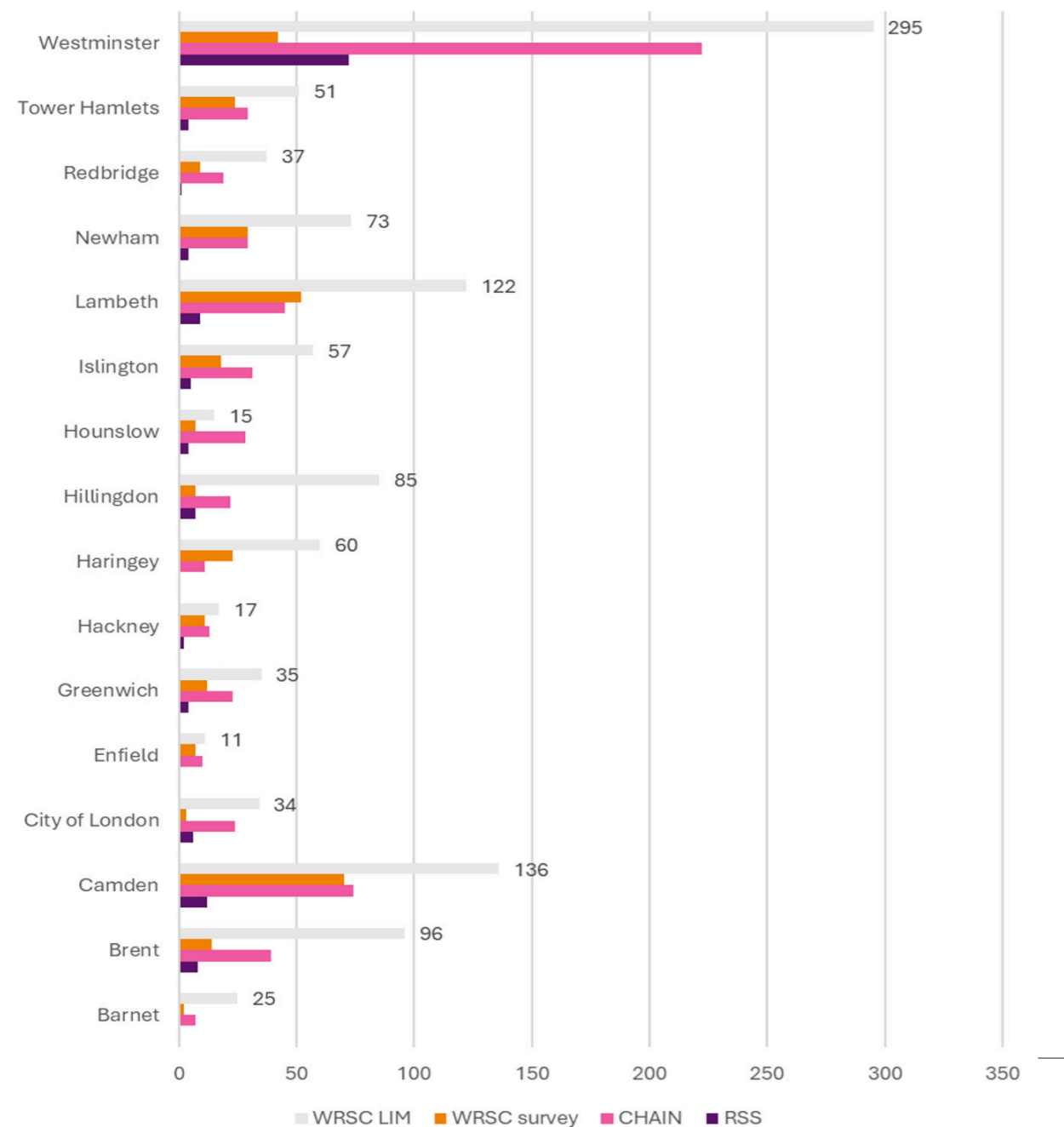
Within London

The 16 London boroughs found 330 women who were rough sleeping through the 2025 WRSC survey and identified 1,149 women through their Local Insights meetings. This compares with 138 women reported by those local authorities through the RSS. The WRSC Local Insights data therefore suggests that there are 8.3 times as many women sleeping rough within London than RSS estimates suggest.

2025 (Q3) CHAIN data estimated 626 women are sleeping rough for the 16 London boroughs who undertook WRSC Local Insights meetings. This means that the WRSC dual methodology indicates 1.8 times as many women as CHAIN. Whilst there is clearly less discrepancy between WRSC and CHAIN data than for RSS, this still suggests that carefully combining cross-sector practitioner knowledge identifies a more complete picture of women's rough sleeping than CHAIN.



Figure 13: Comparing WRSC survey and Local Insights with Rough Sleeping Snapshot and CHAIN data (London)



4.2

Themes from practitioners from Local Insights meetings

“Women just want to feel safe.”
 “Verification does not work.”
 - Local Insights practitioner

In addition to providing basic data on the women they support, Local Insights meetings are an opportunity for cross sector practitioners, outreach and support workers to discuss local challenges. Their insight is vital if we are to understand the real-world challenges in addressing women’s rough sleeping and homelessness. It also demonstrates how systems work, or do not work, in practice - identifying gaps, barriers and solutions to how women can engage meaningfully and get the support they need in their local area.

Thirty-six areas across the country fed reflections back to the WRSC team, and the findings demonstrate national consistency in the gendered nature of homelessness in relation to safety, trauma and suitability. Insights from London boroughs and other major cities see these issues intensified by scale and system complexity, whilst participating rural areas revealed more challenges linked to limited provision and isolation.

Several key themes emerged from discussions in these meetings.

1. Safety and the need for gender-specific spaces

Safety concerns dominated conversations, with most participating areas highlighting a lack of women-only accommodation or spaces. Outreach and support workers described how women experiencing homelessness regularly experience harassment, sexual assault and coercion - very often in accommodation provision supposed to keep them safe. Women frequently decline or abandon mixed settings due to fear or prior harm, and they avoid mixed spaces perceived as male-dominated, loud, or unsafe, leading to disengagement from essential services. At the same time, women-only accommodation is very limited - rarely funded due to a perceived lack of demand, and with concerns around targeted exploitation if not well-managed. This barrier was consistently identified across all participating areas, highlighting that the need for gender-specific provision is not isolated, or regional, but systemic.

“Women feel fearful about staying in mixed accommodation.”

“Women wanted to leave, or did leave [mixed accommodation] - because they didn’t feel safe.”

“Women consistently expressed a desire for women-only environments or designated times.”

“It was suggested... women’s-only spaces that are open-access.”

Practitioners also described the difficulty of supporting women who remain in relationships with perpetrators, demonstrating the need for couple-focused accommodation options (with varying levels of support), even in circumstances where domestic abuse is suspected or known. Housing officers described situations where accommodation was rejected if it did not include a woman’s partner, or that accommodation was lost because of partner behaviour or presence. In some cases, Local Insights meetings framed this decision as a choice, when this might also be linked to coercive control and more complex power and relationship dynamics.

“It is challenging to support women who are in a relationship and don’t want to be separated... couples’ options are limited.”

“Women have bedspaces available but stay away from perpetrators.”

“Couples... no ‘one size fits all’ approach to housing women.”

These Local Insights meetings illustrate the extent to which women’s housing options and pathways to support are shaped by their relationships, and as a result, demonstrate how the system is not

designed for the reality of couples sleeping rough where abuse is present. It was evident from the Local Insights meetings that services must be adapted to respond to the reality of women’s experiences, rather than impose conditions around readiness or desire to leave relationships where there is coercion, dependency or abuse. Supporting couples was consistently identified as a necessity, whilst recognising this poses significant safeguarding concerns.



2. Access, timing and information

The second theme identified through Local Insights meetings was the need for access to support to respond better to women’s experiences, needs, and patterns. Traditional 9–5 opening hours for housing providers or support teams clash with women’s nocturnal survival patterns, such as engaging in sex work, staying awake for safety and then resting during the day. Limited out-of-hours access and long waits delay critical support.

“Timing mismatch: many women are active at night and sleep during the day, making 9–5 services inaccessible.”

“The women we work with are not nine-to-five people... they’re out late at all hours.”

Furthermore, it was recognised that prerequisites to support created barriers to women. ID, phones, local connection criteria, and digital deprivation frequently block entry to housing and statutory support.

“Pre-access requirements: need for benefits and bank accounts before housing offers are confirmed.”

“Women don’t have a phone... you may buy a woman a new phone and the perpetrator may take it away.”

Across all locations, practitioners reported how women frequently described a substantial barrier to support being the lack of information. With no knowledge about the availability of services and how to access them, women relied on word-of-mouth or

chance encounters with outreach workers to access support. This gap in public awareness and readily available information renders homelessness prevention support largely inaccessible. In addition, support workers described how services often fail to work together, have poor communication, and unclear referral pathways, making it difficult for women to navigate support systems. These barriers delay access to services and leave women in unsafe situations, reducing opportunities for early intervention and leading to further traumatising as women are forced to tell their story multiple times, only to fall through the cracks once again.

“A significant proportion... expressed uncertainty about what services were available and how to access them.”

“All services have different agendas... repeating experiences of trauma.”

“No shared database... services asking the same questions... re-traumatising.”

Post-housing support gaps and the need for long-term support for some women were also discussed as support often drops off after accommodation provision, risking isolation, coercion, tenancy loss, and repeat homelessness.

“The moment women are placed the support seems to drop off... They continue to sleep rough.”

“Women staying in hostel services longer... trapped due to limited move-on.”

3. Intersecting needs and intersectional approaches

“An intersectional, trauma-informed practice may enhance... accessibility.” - Local Insights practitioner

Findings also highlighted the importance of trauma-informed and intersectional approaches to supporting women experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. Women often have histories of domestic abuse, sexual violence and trauma. Such trauma not only drives homelessness but is also exacerbated by it as women enter further unsafe situations such as survival relationships in which they endure further abuse.

Women frequently present to services with mental health needs, such as anxiety, depression and PTSD. Furthermore, substance use was identified in at least eight areas as a key, interrelated need, often linked to trauma, mental health challenges, and barriers to accessing accommodation and support.

“A majority... disclosed severe and untreated mental health issues, particularly PTSD.” - Local Insights practitioner

“Women expressed a desire to access detox... but reported feeling unsafe in male-dominated environments.” - Local Insights practitioner

“There’s very few safe spaces for women to go to, to feel that they can then discuss their treatment.” - Local Insights practitioner

The consequences of this are two-fold. Firstly, services and delivery models are rarely designed to cater to, or support these overlapping and complex needs, as they are often structured around single issues, with women expected to seek support from services that work within silos. This means not only will services struggle to support women who present with more complex needs, but other women may avoid services altogether due to feeling unsafe, judged and misunderstood.



Women also disengage from services if expected to navigate multiple systems at once without the wraparound support necessary to do so. More integrated approaches are needed that recognise the complexity of women’s experiences, specifically physical spaces and accommodation options that allow for non- judgemental substance use or sex work support.

4. Operational barriers

Practitioners consistently highlighted a range of systemic and operational barriers that limit the effectiveness of responses to women’s rough sleeping. These challenges shape how services are delivered in practice and often constrain the ability of staff to provide gender-informed, trauma-informed support.

Staffing pressures and capacity were raised across multiple areas, with services described as overstretched and under-resourced. Practitioners spoke about the impact this has on their ability to engage meaningfully with women, particularly where additional time, flexibility and relationship-building are required. Concerns were also raised around staff safety, including experiences of aggression and racial abuse, as well as limitations on lone working, which further restricted outreach capacity.

“Overstretched and under-resourced services leading to staff burnout.”

“Increase in racial attacks towards staff... policies like no lone female working.”

Verification processes and data systems were also significant barriers. Strict verification thresholds and short windows for data capturing were described as failing to identify the reality of women’s homelessness, particularly where women are less visible or move between locations. Practitioners noted that women who



are sofa surfing, staying in informal arrangements, or engaging in sex work are excluded from official counts and service eligibility. In some areas, more flexible approaches demonstrated improved engagement, suggesting that current systems may be too rigid to effectively reach women experiencing hidden homelessness.

“A proportion of women... not visibly rough sleeping but moving between acquaintances’ homes.” - Local Insights practitioner

“[A service] relaxed the use of CHAIN number requirements [and] 35-40% more women accessed their services.” - Local Insights practitioner

This is why the WRSC team has consistently called for the removal of verification as a prerequisite for support and campaigned for a ‘no wrong door approach’. The London Mayor’s Plan of Action and MHCLG National Plan to End Homelessness both have recognised this need and committed to phasing out this requirement. But detail around this is lacking. Any replacement method or supporting guidance must be intersectional, gender-informed and considerate of the hidden nature of women’s experiences if we are going to see barriers removed.

5. Siloed working and poor coordination between services

Practitioners described gaps between housing, health, mental health, criminal justice and other systems, with limited communication and joint planning. This includes differences in data and case management systems between organisations making it difficult for services to share information and coordinate support effectively.

“Different data/case management systems... easy for multidisciplinary workers to not be on the same page.”

Poor coordination was particularly evident in discharge processes, where women may be released from prison or



hospital without adequate housing or support in place, increasing the risk of immediate rough sleeping. With the Government recently committing to preventing discharge to the streets, these findings indicate that the real test will be the operational delivery on the ground.

“Prison discharge... challenging to coordinate.”

“Hospital discharge focuses heavily on physical (vs mental) health.”

“Women can be released suddenly to the streets.”

Finally, immigration status and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) were identified as significant structural barriers. Women with NRPF face extremely limited access to accommodation and financial support, leaving them at heightened risk of exploitation and harm. Insecure migrant status makes women vulnerable to abuse as perpetrators may exploit their fear of having their status shared with Immigration Enforcement to prevent them from seeking support. Especially for those fleeing violence, it is crucial that the newly announced ‘consent-based firewall’ - where somebody’s immigration status will only be shared by the police if consent is obtained - is consistently implemented.³¹

“Women with NRPF... especially vulnerable to exploitation.”

- Local Insights practitioner

“NRPF... near on impossible [to house].”

- Local Insights practitioner

In summary, practitioners working with women experiencing rough sleeping report persistent safety concerns, limited gender-specific provision, and fragmented pathways that fail to address women’s intersecting needs (i.e.: domestic abuse, mental health, neurodiversity, substance use, sex work, immigration/NRPF). The hidden nature of women’s homelessness means many are missed by verification-based systems and underrepresented in official counts.



³¹ Freedom from Violence and Abuse: a cross-government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls
Volume 1 Strategy

**I mostly walk
around all
night and end
up on a bench.**

WRSC respondent, 2025



Conclusion and recommendations

Women experience homelessness, violence and abuse, financial hardship and multiple disadvantage disproportionately to men; however, they continue to be overlooked in policy and data. Women comprise 60% of all homeless adults in temporary accommodation, experience rough sleeping at rates at least ten times higher than government data show, and experience hidden homelessness which is unquantified and currently has no clear or targeted response. They also experience gender-based violence on an unfathomable scale.

Gendered experiences of homelessness continue to be overlooked by successive governments, and the National Plan to End Homelessness has not gone far enough to set a course for tackling homelessness that will benefit women. Recording practices do not account for women's less visible patterns of homelessness and so substantially underestimate the number of women without safe housing. Service commissioning that relies on traditional snapshot counts will therefore never meet their needs.

In the 2024 census report, we called on the government to ensure women's experiences and needs were represented in their National Plan to End Homelessness, using the WRSC national manifesto³². The case was made that without having

a gender-informed definition of women's homelessness, or a gender-informed data capturing method, it would not be possible to end, halve, or even effectively address, rough sleeping. Whilst some progress has been made, more must be done to ensure effective support for women who face unsafe situations on a daily basis. As such, we propose the following recommendations:

Women's Rough Sleeping Census National Manifesto for Change: Recommendations to government

1. Definition: The 2010 government definition of rough sleeping should be amended in line with the findings and recommendations of the Women's Rough Sleeping Census, to reflect women's experiences, and to be inclusive of the many other people who rough sleep less visibly.

2. Data: The government should fund and resource the Women's Rough Sleeping Census nationally and issue guidance to local authorities on how to adopt the WRSC, enabling every local authority to gather accurate, inclusive data. The government should use national WRSC data to inform policy, strategy and funding decisions. Accurate data is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It ensures accountability,

enables evidence-based policy, and most importantly, it ensures that no one is left behind simply because systems and services don't know they are there.

3. Equity and safety: The government should provide clear, actionable, gender-informed guidance and ringfenced funding to enable local authorities to ensure services and systems are equitable, accessible, gender-informed and safe for women, including supported accommodation and temporary accommodation.

4. Integration: The government should ensure that all forthcoming toolkits (including the prevention toolkit, the outreach toolkit, the complex needs toolkit and the temporary accommodation toolkit), are gender-informed, practically addressing women's linked experiences of rough sleeping, homelessness, gender-based violence and multiple disadvantage. The toolkits should also include clear guidelines and responsibilities on how local authorities should address and remove the structural and intersecting barriers to housing and support faced by global majority women, migrant women including women with No Recourse to Public Funds, LGBTQI+ women, women with disabilities and older and younger women.



³² Women's Rough Sleeping Manifesto for Change - Solace Women's Aid

5. Prevention and intervention:

Firstly, the government should expand priority need to explicitly include survivors of rape, sexual assault and sexual exploitation, and place this into legislation through amendments to Domestic Abuse Act, Housing Act 1996, and Housing Allocations Regulations 2025.

Homelessness prevention guidance must also be amended to address the full intersection of VAWG, immigration status, and homelessness, which puts migrant survivors and survivors with NRPF at extremely high risk.

Secondly, the government should collaborate with the WRSC and the third sector to undertake research to better understand, quantify and respond to women's experiences of hidden homelessness, which are currently neither identified, prevented nor resolved by statutory provision or rough sleeping provision.

The WRSC also recommends that local authorities and cross-sector organisations that support or encounter women who experience rough sleeping and hidden homelessness take immediate action to better respond to women locally. Over 100 local authorities in England took part in the 2025 WRSC, with many areas using data and learning from previous years to make innovative and inspiring changes locally. These include introducing gender-informed outreach practices year-round, designing and funding new women's services and

accommodation based on WRSC data, and making local policies and strategies more inclusive of women's experiences. Whilst there is a clear need for national, government-directed policy, resource and system change, local authorities can and do lead the change they want to see, without waiting for national direction.

The Women's Rough Sleeping Census is more than a data collection project. It is a national movement for change, and councils, organisations, practitioners and volunteers across the country are using the methodology to make a vital difference for women in their areas, driven by what women experiencing rough sleeping and homelessness tell us they want and need. We encourage all local authorities across the country to participate in the forthcoming September 2026 census, and to use their findings to shape practice and provision for women locally.

To find out more about the Women's Rough Sleeping Census, or to be involved for 2026, please scan the QR code below to visit our website.



I hope this survey makes a difference

WRSC respondent, 2025

Appendices

Appendix 1:

Comparing Census 2025 with Local Insights, rough sleeping snapshot and CHAIN data

1/ Local authorities outside London

Local authority	Rough Sleeping Snapshot 2025	WRSC survey	WRSC Local Insights data
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	9	45	56
Brighton and Hove	10	15	14
Bristol	14	86	281
Bury	0	9	13
Cambridge	4	10	37
Cornwall	13	10	55
Coventry	3	60	89
Gloucestershire	6	29	113
Leeds	7	61	116
Newcastle	3	37	114
Nottingham City	11	39	55
Nottinghamshire	8	40	138
Oldham	1	11	10
Oxfordshire	6	29	51
Plymouth	10	19	85
Preston	1	24	162
Reading	10	13	57
Rochdale	0	20	43
Salford	5	3	3
Sheffield	7	22	129
Shropshire	3	6	12
Solihull	5	1	20
South Tyneside	5	15	136
Stockport	7	10	10
Tunbridge Wells; Tonbridge & Malling	4	4	11
Wigan	0	9	10

2/ Local authorities inside London

London borough	Rough Sleeping Snapshot 2025	CHAIN 2025 (Q3)	WRSC survey	WRSC Local Insights
Barnet	0	7	2	25
Brent	8	39	14	96
Camden	12	74	70	136
City of London	6	24	3	34
Enfield	0	10	7	11
Greenwich	4	23	12	35
Hackney	2	13	11	17
Haringey	0	11	23	60
Hillingdon	7	22	7	85
Hounslow	4	28	7	15
Islington	5	31	18	57
Lambeth	9	45	52	122
Newham	4	29	29	73
Redbridge	1	19	9	37
Tower Hamlets	4	29	24	51
Westminster	72	222	42	295

Appendix 2:

The Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2025 survey

Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2025

What is the survey for?

We're conducting research to get a better understanding of women's experiences of having nowhere safe to stay, including rough sleeping and hidden homelessness, to help improve support and services for women.

We have about 10 short questions to ask you - it takes less than 10 minutes to complete and is entirely voluntary. You are welcome to answer all or just some of the questions if you prefer.

Do you want to take part?

Homelessness can look different for everyone, especially for women. In this survey, **rough sleeping** means that sometimes you have nowhere safe to go at night, or nowhere to go at all. When that happens, you might sleep outside or in a stairwell or somewhere hidden, or you might walk around all night, or sit on transport, in a station or at McDonald's all night. You might also stay with friends or strangers and have to leave quickly and have nowhere else to go, or you might be sex working and don't have anywhere to stay. You might move between different places and circumstances, perhaps sometimes staying in accommodation and sometimes staying outside or on transport. In this survey, **hidden homelessness** means staying with a friend, family member, partner, acquaintance or stranger(s) on an insecure or transitory basis, where you may have to leave at any time, or where you don't feel safe.

Is this something you've experienced within the last three months? If so, would you like to complete the survey?

Do you think you might have completed this survey already in the last week? Because if so, you don't need to do it again.

Please note, this survey is open to all women and people who feel the gender themes of this survey apply to them.

How will we use your data?

You don't need to tell us your name, and we will assign a fake name to your data so that you cannot be identified. Researchers will collect the results and write a report about the number of women who completed the survey and their answers. We will use this information to ask for better support and accommodation services for women who are rough sleeping.

We have a leaflet about how we will use your data, which I can read out and give to you.

Thank you for your time.

About your recent experience of having nowhere safe to stay

In this section, we will ask about your recent experiences of housing and homelessness. This is to help us understand patterns of rough sleeping and how to support people. We won't be able to identify where you are rough sleeping from your answers, and your answers will be anonymised.

1. At any point in the last three months, have you experienced being homeless or not having a safe place to stay? Select one option.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

2. Where have you stayed or slept in the last 3 months? Select all that apply

- Slept outside (including on the street, in a tent, in a park, or car park) on the street
- At a bus or train station
- On a bus or a train
- Walked around all night
- Services accessible to the public e.g. McDonald's or other fast-food place, library, airport
- A&E waiting room
- In a car, van or other vehicle
- In a squat
- Slept rough - other (please describe)

- Planned stay in hospital
- In custody
- With a friend or partner
- With a relative
- With a stranger/new acquaintance, including sex work
- Night shelter
- Inside a church/religious building/place of worship
- Homelessness service (hostel/supported housing)
- B&B/ hotel/ temporary accommodation
- Refuge accommodation
- Home Office/NASS accommodation
- Housed – owned, rented or social rented
- A non-residential building (bin sheds, stairwells, public toilets, abandoned buildings)
- Question not answered
- Question not asked
- Other (please describe)

3. When did you last sleep rough?

By sleeping rough we mean having nowhere safe to go to **shelter/sleep** in the day/night. You might not do this every day/night, and sleeping rough might not mean sleeping outside. (prompt for worker - refer to definition to help give examples).

3. When did you last sleep rough?

By sleeping rough we mean having nowhere safe to go **to shelter/sleep** in the day/night. You might not do this every day/night, and sleeping rough might not mean sleeping outside. (prompt for worker - refer to definition to help give examples).

Select one option

- Last night
- In the last week
- In the last month
- In the last 3 months
- Question not answered
- Question not asked

4. Approximately how many times have you slept rough in the last 3 months?

This doesn't have to be an exact number. Select one option

- 1 time
- 2-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-20 times
- 21- 30 times
- More than 30 times
- More than 60 times
- Every day/night
- Questioned not answered
- Question not asked

5. Where were you staying most recently before sleeping rough? This question is to find out about the respondent's last place they lived in. Select one option

- Sofa surfing (with a friend, relative or acquaintance)
- Hostel (with no support)
- Supported housing (e.g. hostel with support)
- Refuge accommodation
- Asylum accommodation
- Emergency accommodation

- Council
 - Private rented sector housing
 - Social rented housing
 - Home owned by respondent/ close family/ partner
 - In another country
 - Prison
 - Hospital
 - Squatting
 - Caravan
 - Question not answered
 - Question not asked
 - Other (please describe)
-
-

6. Which services are you currently accessing support from?

(Prompt for worker: if respondent is uncertain which category their service falls into, try to establish this with them and select the most relevant option/s).

Select all that apply

- Homelessness organisation
 - Supported housing/accommodation
 - Housing officer or council housing department
 - Housing association
 - Night shelter
 - Day centre
 - Drug or alcohol support service
 - Physical health service
 - Mental health service
 - Women's centre/service
 - Domestic abuse or sexual violence support service
 - Sex work support service
 - One-stop shop
 - Food bank
 - Soup kitchen
 - Job Centre
 - Citizen's Advice
 - Social worker/ social services
 - Police
 - Probation
 - Prison service
 - Religious or faith group / church, mosque or temple
 - Migration support service
 - Education
 - None
 - Question not answered
 - Question not asked
 - Other (please describe)
-
-
-

7. Are there any areas of your life where you'd like support or you're not currently getting the support you'd like?

(Prompt for worker: These categories have been kept as general as possible. You can ask if the respondent would like any further information or signposting and provide information about local services if they are happy for you to provide it.)

Select all that apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Finances and benefits • Employment, education or training • Relationships or family • Substance use • Criminal justice • Physical health • Mental health • Faith • Domestic abuse or sexual violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex work support • Migration Support • None • Question not answered • Question not asked • Other (please describe) <hr/> <hr/> |
|---|---|

8. Now that we've answered a few questions, does this survey seem familiar? Has someone at this service or another service already done this survey with you this week?

It's ok if you've already answered this survey this week, but it's important for us to record this so that our research is as accurate as possible.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • Don't know | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question not answered • Question not asked |
|---|---|

About you

Thank you for the information you've shared. To help us understand the people who are responding to this survey, we'd like to ask some questions about you. This includes your age, ethnicity, and gender - this is to help us understand how different people experience rough sleeping. Each question has an option not to answer, or to give an answer which we may not have provided as an option.

9. How old are you?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 16 • 16-17 • 18-24 • 25-34 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35-44 • 45-54 • 55-64 • 65+ |
|---|--|

If you prefer not to answer, please leave this question blank.

(Prompt for worker: Please follow your usual safeguarding processes if the respondent is under 18).

10. How would you describe your ethnicity?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi • Asian or Asian British – Chinese • Asian or Asian British – Indian • Asian or Asian British – Pakistani • Asian or Asian British – other • Black or Black British – African • Black or Black British – Caribbean • Black or Black British – other • Mixed White and Asian • Mixed White and Black – African • Mixed White and Black – Caribbean • Mixed – other • White – British • White – Irish | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White – Other • Romany Gypsy/Gypsy (or self-describe below) • Irish Traveller • Roma • Arab • Prefer not to say • Question not answered • Question not asked • I prefer to self-describe here: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
|---|--|

11. What is your gender?

This survey is open to all women and people who relate to the gender themes of this survey in their experience of homelessness. If your gender isn't included in the options, please self-describe below.

- Woman
 - Man
 - Non-binary
 - Gender fluid
 - Questioning
 - Prefer not to say
- Question not answered
 - Question not asked
 - I prefer to self-describe here: _____
 - _____
 - _____

Is your gender the same as registered at birth?

- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
- Question not answered
 - Question not asked
- If you would like to add anything about how this has impacted your experience of rough sleeping, you are welcome to do so here.* _____
- _____

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell us? This may include anything else you feel is important for us to know about your situation that wasn't covered in the questions. (for respondents and/or staff and volunteers)

This is the last question on the form. Thank you very much for your time.

Questions for people conducting the census (staff and volunteers)

1. What type of service do you deliver?

- Homelessness organisation
 - Supported housing/accommodation
 - Housing officer or council housing department
 - Housing association
 - Night shelter
 - Day centre
 - Drug or alcohol support service
 - Physical health service
 - Mental health service
 - Women's centre/service
 - Domestic abuse or sexual violence support service
 - Sex work support service
 - One-stop shop
 - Food bank
 - Soup kitchen
 - Job Centre
 - Citizen's Advice
 - Social worker/ social services
 - Police
 - Probation
 - Prison service
 - Religious or faith group / church, mosque or temple
 - Migration support service
 - Education
 - None
 - Question not answered
 - Question not asked
 - Other (please describe)
- _____
- _____

2. Which borough is your service in? _____

If your service operates in more than one borough, please answer as relevant to this survey response, i.e. where you conducted this survey or where the respondent was most recently rough sleeping.

3. Date survey was conducted _____

4. How did you conduct the survey?

- At your service (in person or on the phone)
- On a gender-informed census outreach shift
- On another outreach shift
- Other (please describe) _____

