

What is the Women's Rough Sleeping Census (WRSC)?

The WRSC is an annual action research project designed to improve local authority and Central Government understanding of the scale and nature of women's rough sleeping. It was designed in 2022 in recognition of the fact that research, lived experiences of women and the experiences of services have all demonstrated that existing rough sleeping data underestimates women, as women are less likely than men to bed down visibly when rough sleeping due to the constant threat of gender-based violence.

The census was piloted in London in 2022 and has grown each year, taking place in 101 local authorities in 2025. The Government's National Plan to End Homelessness (2025) has recommended that all local authorities undertake the WRSC in order to gather accurate and inclusive data on women's experiences of homelessness. The WRSC has found that there are 10 x the number of women sleeping rough in England than existing data suggests, and their experiences are hidden, transient and intermittent, requiring significant changes to practice and policy if women's rough sleeping is to be tackled effectively.

How does the WRSC work?

The census is a two-part methodology:

1. For one week in September, cross sector services within each local authority undertake a brief, anonymised snapshot survey with women, asking them about their recent experiences of homelessness. Services undertake 'gender informed' outreach shifts over the week at different times and in different locations to find women, and services (health, substance use, housing and homelessness, migrant services, foodbanks, etc) can also complete the survey with women they see over the week or speak to by phone.
2. In the month of October, each local authority holds a 'Local Insights' meeting where data on women known to be sleeping rough within the last three months is provided by different cross sector services, cross-referenced to remove duplicated so that a robust estimate is reached. Services then discuss local challenges, debrief on census week and agree changes to local practice and provision based on the learning.

What will local authorities gain from taking part?

Local authorities who participate have reported multiple benefits, including:

- Accurate and inclusive annual data on women's rough sleeping and hidden homelessness which has been used to design, commission, fund and deliver women's specific provision locally. Examples include women's only accommodation, women's specialist roles, women's drop in, women's SWEP provision, etc.
- Capturing the experiences of women experiencing homelessness and the experiences of services supporting them to make local practice, policies and strategies gender-informed, equitable and inclusive.
- Improved cross sector joint working and more effective local systems.

What will it cost?

The Census can be undertaken during the course of normal service delivery as long as some time can be allocated for specific gender informed outreach during census week.

All training and materials needed to participate are provided free by the national census team. Areas are asked to fundraise for supermarket vouchers and/or care packs to give women to thank them for participating.

Find out more here: <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/womens-rough-sleeping-census/>

