

Gender-informed outreach guidance

London Women's Census 2022



This guidance was created by SHP, Women's Development Unit (Solace and The Connection at St Martin's), and St Mungo's following a cross sector consultation attended by representatives from the WiSER project (Solace), Find and Treat (UCLH), Glassdoor, The Connection at St Martin's Street Engagement Team, St Mungo's outreach and St Mungo's Women's Safe Space.

BACKGROUND

Why is there a need for 'gender-informed' outreach?

Research, lived experience and the experiences of services tell us that women are some of the most vulnerable within the rough sleeping and homeless population, yet we also know that women are under-represented in rough sleeping statistics and provision. Key data sources used to understand rough sleeping come from street count figures based on recording practices which are not adapted to women's patterns of homelessness. It follows that if services are commissioned based on this data, they will not be meeting the needs of those who are not captured in this data. There are also particular risks to women who are rough sleeping, including extremely prevalent experiences of gender-based violence and abuse, and an average age of death of 41.6 years old, even lower than male counterparts (45.9 years) despite women in the general population having a longer life expectancy.

How can gender-informed outreach be part of the solution?

The Life Off the Streets women's workstream has been tasked with organising a women's census which aims to better capture data about the extent of women's rough sleeping. The census has the support of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), the Greater London Authority (GLA), London Councils and the Life Off the Streets Core Group.

The methodology used will differ from the normal rough sleeping snapshot count in recognition of the fact that women sleep rough less visibly and are less likely to come into contact with outreach teams as a result. This is the first undertaking of its kind on this scale and the aim is to gather more accurate data, in order to demonstrate the need for a strategic commitment to ending women's rough sleeping.

Gender-informed outreach takes into account the different experiences and patterns of rough sleeping for women, adjusting hours, routes, hotspots and approaches to better match women's experiences. It is also done with an understanding of women's safety risks and needs, how these may impact interactions and emergency responses which may be needed.

What will the census consist of?

The census will take place across a full working week ~~19th-23rd September~~. **Please note, the date of the census has changed and is now being delivered across the week of 3rd -7th October.**

With support from as many organisations as possible from across London, the census will consist of the following:

- Gender-informed outreach shifts across all participating London boroughs.
- A simple, anonymised survey to be completed by services likely to encounter women who are rough sleeping (e.g. day centres, women's services, health services).
- Data collection from StreetLink and Housing Options.

The census is supported by researchers at PraxisCollab. Their expertise will ensure data can be analysed effectively, help minimise double counting and make recommendations for further work in this area.

GUIDANCE

Who should conduct the gender-informed outreach shifts?

Each borough taking part in the census will conduct at least one day of gender-informed outreach shifts within the census time period (3rd-7th October).

All outreach should be done in twos. Outreach shifts will be undertaken by outreach staff from each borough, paired with a volunteer if necessary. Male outreach workers/volunteers must be paired with a female outreach worker or volunteer. All workers and volunteers taking part in the census must have watched a short, recorded gender-informed outreach training session and read this guidance prior to undertaking a shift. Details on the training session and recording can be found on the website [here](#).

When planning your outreach shift, if teams need volunteers to support capacity, please contact the census team with details.

In census week, we will send a template form to all outreach teams taking part on which to record basic details about your shift to inform the methodology recorded in the report.

When should the gender-informed outreach shifts be conducted?

Research and lived experiences tell us that women are often less visible to outreach services at night, so each borough's gender informed outreach shift should take place in the daytime, between 7am and 7pm, on any day within the census period (3rd-7th October).

We are asking each borough taking part to conduct a minimum of 6 hours of gender-informed outreach. Times may vary according to the capacity of outreach teams and volunteers, but we suggest this can be split in to two shifts – one approximately 10am to 1pm, and a further shift approximately 4pm – 7pm). This shift should be conducted across one day and should cover the entire borough. This is to ensure at least one consistent shift across all boroughs. Teams should plan their shift according to this guidance.

If outreach workers have the capacity to do more, they can conduct the survey at other points during the week as long as:

- The survey is conducted between the hours of 7am and 7pm;
- Workers conducting the survey still follow this guidance (i.e. everyone conducting the survey has seen the training and this guidance, there is at least one woman in each outreach pair conducting the survey, workers are using the same parameters of who to include, written information about the use of respondents' data is provided, and £5 vouchers are offered to respondents seen on outreach);
- Any additional shifts on which the survey is conducted are also recorded on the form collecting outreach shift details.

The purpose of this census is to expand the context in which counting is done, but is important that these parameters are adhered to so that we are confident in results, we can fully detail the methodology and can produce meaningful data.

Non-rough sleeping/non-commissioned outreach teams

Services who deliver outreach but who don't deliver specific commissioned rough sleeping outreach (e.g. Find and Treat teams, drug and alcohol services, services supporting sex workers) can also conduct the survey on their outreach shifts. Again, if they do so, they should adhere to the following:

- Workers conducting the survey should still follow this guidance (i.e. everyone conducting the survey has seen the training and this guidance, there is at least one woman present when

conducting the survey, workers are using the same parameters of who to include, and written information about the use of respondents' data is provided);

- Fill in the template form to note the details of shifts on which the survey is conducted.

Non-rough sleeping outreach teams can otherwise conduct their shifts as normal, for example without changing the time at which their shift normally goes out. (We are aware that many specialist shifts use different practices and may be more likely to see more women on their usual night shifts). Services may also wish to link up with commissioned outreach teams in their area.

If non-rough sleeping teams would appreciate being able to offer the £5 voucher for the survey, or have any further questions, please get in touch.

Which places/areas in each borough should the gender informed outreach shifts go to?

We would ask that each borough map out their gender-informed outreach shift prior to census week, using their own local intelligence and that of local services.

In addition to normal outreach routes and 'hotspots' for rough sleeping/street activity, gender-informed outreach shifts should also go to:

- Quieter streets, car parks, parks/green spaces and areas where women could be concealed rough sleeping/sheltering
- Inside train/tube/bus stations including toilets
- Libraries
- McDonald's/Burger King etc (including toilets)
- A&E waiting rooms
- Around soup kitchens/inside churches or other places of worship which may provide shelter
- Around homeless health services – GPs, mental health drop in, substance use drop ins
- Around day centres and hostels (where women may not be living but may have reason to go to/be near)
- Around Housing Options departments where women may present
- Inside freely accessible public spaces in which women can be inconspicuous and are unlikely to be asked to move on, for example Southbank Centre.

Who should the outreach workers approach?

The methodology of this census recognises that women who are rough sleeping may not be physically bedded down in a sleeping bag when workers see them, and aims to reach out to a broader range of women whose rough sleeping patterns and circumstances may look different.

Each gender-informed outreach shift will have at least one professional outreach worker undertaking it, and professional judgement will be key in determining who to approach (when a woman's housing situation may not be clear), and also how to approach (ensuring that the approach is appropriate, sensitive to a woman's circumstances and not perceived as intrusive). Other than professional judgement, and approaching women who are bedded down, about to bed down or sitting/standing next to bedding (as per a normal shift), the following tips could be useful in knowing who to approach:

- Women who are engaged in any form of street activity (begging, street drinking, in groups with other people who are clearly or likely to be sleeping rough).
- Women in enclosed spaces such as train/tube stations, McDonalds, A&E waiting rooms, libraries etc. who appear to be vulnerable and/or may not be using the services in the intended way but may be sheltering there, and/or may have a number of belongings with them.
- If workers observe patrolling police/PCSOs, ask them whether they are aware of any women who appear vulnerable/may be experiencing homelessness in the area. Professional judgement should

always be used when working with the police, and this suggestion is for local intel purposes on women's locations only: women should not be approached to do the survey with any form of police involvement or presence.

Important to note: Women's rough sleeping can be complicated and often not linear – for example, women may have a hostel bed space but spend some time sleeping rough with a partner, because they feel unsafe in the hostel or for other reasons. They may even have their own tenancy but not feel able to return to it due to certain risks or other reasons. Some women may be alternating between rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness or insecure housing e.g. sofa surfing, or staying with a dangerous partner. The research survey will ask a clear, clarifying question of all women so it is clear whether or not the survey is relevant for them, so outreach workers will not need to determine someone's exact circumstances in order to proceed.

The survey will include an introduction to be used by those disseminating the survey, for example:

'We are conducting research to get an accurate understanding of women's experiences of rough sleeping and improve support and services for women. By sleeping rough we mean having nowhere at all to go at night: for example sleeping outside on the ground or in a tent, sleeping in a doorway or stairwell, sitting/sleeping in places which are open late or 24/7 (such as fast-food restaurants, bus and train stations), walking all night, sex working at night but not having anywhere to sleep during the day, travelling on transport all night, staying in derelict buildings. You might not do this every night, but it might be something you do on and off or have done within the last 3 months.

We have 10 short questions to ask you, if you did want to take part in the survey. It takes less than 5 minutes to complete and you would receive a £5 voucher as a thank you for your time This is entirely voluntary.

Your data will be anonymised and you don't need to tell us your name. Researchers will collect the results and write a report about the numbers of women who were recorded in this survey. We will use this information to help improve support and accommodation services for women who are rough sleeping. If you wish to take part.

Thank you.

Is this something applies to you/your circumstances? [Y/N] Are you currently or have you recently been rough sleeping? [Y/N]

When did you last sleep rough? Last night/within the last week/1month/3 months]

This introduction will also include an explanation of how respondents' data will be used, which will be provided in leaflet form for women to take if they wish.

What will the survey be like and how will the survey be done?

The survey will be on an online survey platform so outreach workers/volunteers can access it easily via smartphone or tablet when they are with women. Workers will be given a written explanation of the intention of the research to read through with women, which will make clear that participation is entirely voluntary, there are no identifying questions and the resulting research will be completely anonymised. Once the information has been given to the woman, she will decide if the survey is relevant for her and if she wants to take part. Participants will be offered a £5 Sainsbury's voucher for their time, which will be given to outreach workers prior to the shift.

The survey questions are being finalised by researchers, and are likely to include the following themes:

- Age on last birthday (this will not record DOB)
- Where they stayed the previous night
- Ethnicity
- Duration and frequency of homelessness

- Sex and gender
- Services they are accessing
- Whether they have already been asked these questions by someone else this week

NB. Anyone who identifies as a woman should be offered the opportunity to take part in this survey. Those who identify as non-binary and feel the study's gender themes are relevant to their experiences should be offered the opportunity to take part in this survey. To note, the survey will include questions on sex and gender identity to increase specificity of the data collected and enable respondents to record their identity.

The question themes have been carefully selected from a range of possible options. Each option has been evaluated with the aim of achieving a careful balance of data quality, sensitivity and specific research needs of the women's census.

We hope that this census will begin to provide insights and evidence of the experiences of women who are rough sleeping, including the way different identities intersect with those experiences.

As well as asking women to complete the survey, what other information should workers have with them?

Some women who are approached may just want to do the survey and not require additional support, but it is likely that some women will need direct assistance and advice and may not have been seen by the outreach team before. As each shift will have at least one professional outreach worker carrying it out, they will be able to provide information and advice as standard. We also ask that all outreach workers put together borough specific information packs with handouts prior to undertaking the gender informed outreach shift, to ensure that women encountered who need assistance can be given the right information. This should include:

- Contact details and map to local day centre/advice service
- StreetLink self-referral information
- Local Housing Options department information
- Useful numbers to call – National Domestic Abuse helpline, Samaritans, Police non-emergency, NHS 111
- Local VAWG and women's services, including domestic abuse support service, local Rape Crisis service, and Ascent advice helpline for the area (Solace or Women and Girls Network)
- Immigration advice service information
- Welfare benefits contact information
- Crisis team contact number (borough specific)
- Mental health support via text message details (text SHOUT to 85258 free confidential 24/7 messaging mental health support service)

All workers should be equipped with information on how to refer into any emergency safe spaces that are available to their borough (night shelters, respite rooms etc).

Each outreach team should follow their usual policies and procedures with respect to safeguarding concerns and other emergency situations (including women who are pregnant, at immediate risk, or under 18).

Outreach teams should make use of telephone translators (such as LanguageLine) where needed to make sure that all women are able to fully participate in this survey.

What about CHAIN?

The CHAIN team are developing a feature which will allow street contacts to be designated as having been recorded as part of the Women's Census. Detailed instructions of how to use the feature will be provided when the development has been completed.

During the gender-informed shift, outreach workers should use the new Women's Census feature to record:

- Bedded down street contacts for all women they see sleeping rough
- Non-bedded down contacts for women not seen sleeping rough but engaged in street activity.

Please see the accompanying guidance on recording street contacts on CHAIN for more information about which settings meet the definition for recording a street contact.

If it is the first time the service has recorded information about the person on CHAIN, they should give them the CHAIN: Information for Clients leaflet (i.e. 'Privacy Notice'), as per the usual procedure.

Some locations visited as part of the gender-informed shift will not meet the definition for a standard street contact (e.g. inside a library or a fast food restaurant). If a woman is encountered in one of these settings, outreach workers should not record a street contact or create a new client record on CHAIN. However, they should still ask the woman to complete the survey, as outlined previously.

You should offer the CHAIN Privacy Notice to anyone whose information you are recording on CHAIN who has not already received a Notice from your service. The Privacy Notice should not be offered to women who are not being recorded on CHAIN and are only asked to complete the survey.

The distinction between information taken for CHAIN purposes and information taken for the census via the survey should be made clear to ensure any women taking part are aware of where their information is being recorded and how it will be used. Outreach workers should be careful not to record information which was not given to them specifically for outreach and CHAIN purposes: information provided by respondents for the census should be recorded in the census survey only, unless specific permission is provided.

What else should the outreach workers and volunteers take with them?

It would be helpful if outreach workers could offer water/energy bars/toiletries/other items to help with engagement. The census team are working to procure donations to support with this where possible.

What support will be offered to workers and volunteers taking part in the gender-informed outreach shifts?

Each outreach shift will have at least one professional for every two people, so this assumes a good level of training and knowledge on safe outreach practice, dynamic risk assessment, etc. However, we would ask that all workers and volunteers taking part in the gender-informed outreach shifts attend or watch a recorded training session, whether they have previous experience or not. This will include:

- An overview of the census work, why and how women's homelessness looks different to men's and the additional risks women face when rough sleeping.
- Guidance about how to collect good quality, standardised data using the survey template as well as data collection FAQs.
- A brief overview of the other issues women experiencing homelessness are likely to also be affected by (mental ill health, VAWG, substance use etc).
- An overview of the impact of trauma on clients and the staff who support them. This will include an overview of trauma-informed interactions, guidance for dealing with any issues that arise on shift, guidance on keeping workers safe emotionally and a suggested debrief process for the end of the shift.
- Suggested safe working practices – agreeing a safe word, when to not approach a woman etc.

Visit the census webpage to register for the session or watch the recording: <https://www.connection-at-stmartins.org.uk/womens-census/>

What happens after the shift?

The surveys should be completed in real time with each woman/immediately after the interaction. The results will go directly to the census team via the online survey platform.

If a client is on CHAIN or is eligible to be put on to CHAIN, we ask that this be done in a timely way as per the normal practice of the outreach team leading the shift, either the same day after the shift or the next day.

All the survey results recorded will go to the census team and then on to PraxisCollab, the researchers who are analysing the data gathered for the women's census. Relevant data from CHAIN will be provided in aggregate or pseudonymised form. The researchers will use this to prepare a report which will include findings and recommendations from the census.

This piece of work would not be possible without the time, commitment and effort of everyone involved. On behalf of the Life off the Streets women's workstream, we would like to say a huge thank you to all staff, volunteers and services who are taking part in the census activity.

Further details:

Please sign up to the census mailing list to ensure all updates, resources and relevant forms for the census reach you, including the final report once published: <https://forms.office.com/r/Dfkey1UUiE>

Census webpage: <https://www.connection-at-stmartins.org.uk/womens-census/>

Contact address: womens.census@cstm.org.uk