

# CHAIN ANNUAL BULLETIN GREATER LONDON 2020/21

SUPPORTED BY

**MAYOR OF LONDON**



**CHAIN**

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This bulletin presents information about people seen rough sleeping by outreach teams in London between April 2020 and March 2021. Information in the bulletin is derived from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN, which is commissioned and funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and managed by St Mungo's, represents the UK's most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping.

This year's report must inevitably be read in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which hit the UK in March 2020, shortly before the start of the period covered here. Rough sleeping figures are likely to have been impacted by people losing accommodation or employment as a result of the pandemic, while there have also been significant changes to the types of help that have been available to rough sleepers, and the ways that homelessness services can operate. Although outreach teams in London have had to make some adjustments to their working practices, they have continued to work with people on the streets throughout the pandemic, and there has not been a reduction in service which might have affected the likelihood of rough sleepers being seen and recorded on CHAIN.

Copies of the full CHAIN Greater London 2020/21 annual report can be obtained from the GLA Datastore at <http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

#### **Percentage figures in this report**

Please note that, in some cases, percentage figures given in this report are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. This may mean that individual figures in tables and charts do not add up to a combined total of 100%, or that there could be small discrepancies between percentage figures in tables and corresponding pie charts.



# HEADLINE FINDINGS

## TOTAL ROUGH SLEEPERS

11,018



people were seen rough sleeping by outreach workers in London during 2020/21.

- This represents a **3%** increase compared to the total of **10,726** people seen in 2019/20.
- **62%** of these people were seen rough sleeping just once during the period.
- Outreach teams and other support services helped **6,130 (56%)** of these people to access accommodation or return to their home area.
- Of those accommodated during the year, **3,365** were people who were recorded on CHAIN as having been placed in Covid-19 emergency accommodation provided by local authorities or the GLA under the Government's 'Everyone In' initiative.\*

## NEW ROUGH SLEEPERS



7,531

people (68% of the total) were seen sleeping rough for the first time in London in 2020/21.

- **15%** of new rough sleepers were categorised as 'unidentified' (people who were recorded without a name and only had one contact).
- **75%** of new rough sleepers reported their last settled base as being some form of long term accommodation, including **29%** who had been living with friends or family.
- As in previous years, the most frequently cited reason for new rough sleepers leaving their last settled base was being evicted or asked to leave by the person they were staying with (**42%**).

## LONGER TERM ROUGH SLEEPERS

The number of people seen across two consecutive years decreased compared to 2019/20.



- **2,126** people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 had also been seen in 2019/20 (**19%** of the total). This group are also referred to in the report as 'stock'.
- **1,361** people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 were those who had returned to rough sleeping after at least a year away (**12%** of the total).
- The stock group decreased by **11%**, while the returner group increased by **5%**, compared to an increase of **7%** for new rough sleepers.

\* It is important to note that this information will differ from figures quoted elsewhere regarding total numbers of people accommodated under Everyone In during the course of the pandemic. The figures given here do not include people who had already been booked into this accommodation prior to the start of 2020/21, or who were not also seen rough sleeping during 2020/21. CHAIN was not the primary system used by local authorities for recording provision of this accommodation.

## NATIONALITY



19% of those seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 were from non-European countries, compared to 13% in 2019/20.

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND SUPPORT NEEDS



The proportions of people seen rough sleeping who had alcohol or drugs support needs fell compared to 2019/20.

- Half (**50%**) of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 were from the UK, while just over one fifth (**22%**) were from CEE\*\* countries.
- The number of people seen rough sleeping who were CEE nationals fell by **22%** compared to 2019/20.
- Romanians continued to represent the single biggest non-UK nationality group, comprising **11%** of all people seen rough sleeping in the year.

- **29%** of rough sleepers had an alcohol need, compared to 39% in 2019/20, while **31%** had a drugs need, compared to 39% in 2019/20.
- **30%** of people seen rough sleeping this year had multiple support needs relating to alcohol, drugs or mental health.
- **84%** of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 were men.
- **10%** of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 were aged 25 or under.
- **30%** of people seen rough sleeping during the period have experience of spending time in prison.

\*\* EU expansion in 2004 and 2007 enabled people from the following countries to come to the UK to work: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. These are referred to as Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in this report.

# NUMBER OF PEOPLE SEEN ROUGH SLEEPING

11,018

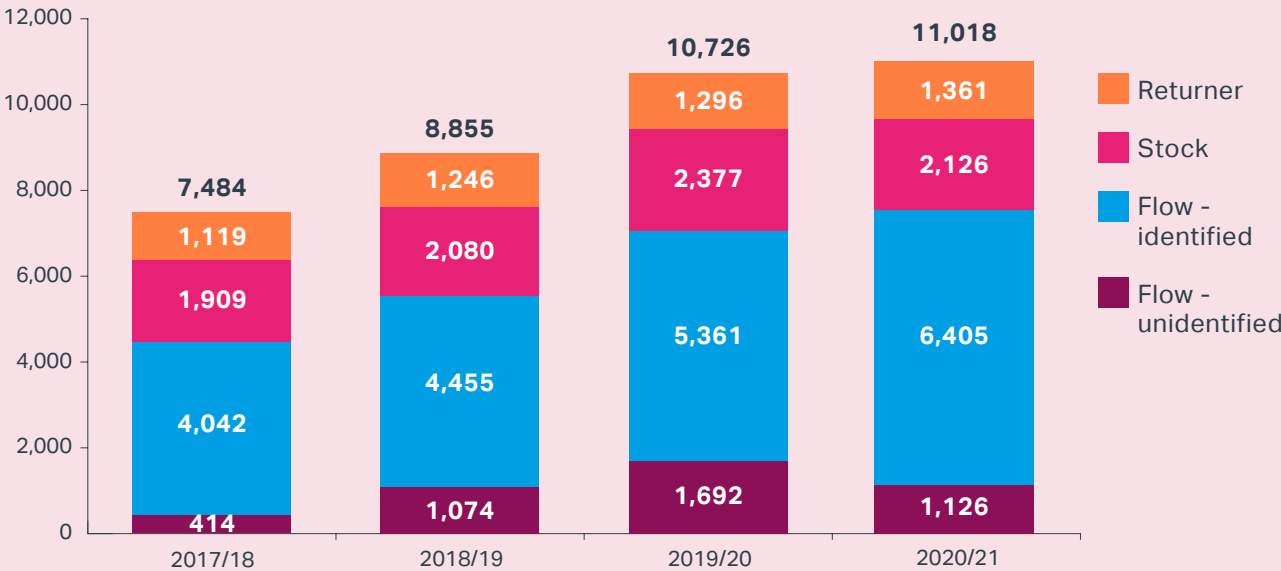
people were seen rough sleeping in London in 2020/21, which is a 3% increase compared to the total of 10,726 people seen in 2019/20. This compares to a 21% increase between 2018/19 and 2019/20, and an 18% increase between 2017/18 and 2018/19. Although the proportionate increase is much smaller than in the previous two years, this still represents an extra 292 people seen rough sleeping in London, compared to 2019/20.

7,531

people were seen rough sleeping for the first time this year (also referred to as flow), which is 68% of all people seen rough sleeping in the period. Nearly three quarters (73%) of new rough sleepers were only seen once, and 15% were categorised as 'unidentified'. Just under one fifth (19%) of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 were also seen in the preceding year (stock group). Around one eighth (12%) of people seen rough sleeping were in the returner group, meaning they had been seen rough sleeping in the past but not in 2019/20. The proportion of people in each group is broadly consistent with last year.

Figure (a)

Profile of the number of people seen rough sleeping 2017/18 - 2020/21 using flow, stock, returner model



## Category

## Description

Flow  
unidentified

People who had never been seen rough sleeping prior to 2020/21 (i.e. new rough sleepers), who were recorded without a name, and with only one contact.

Flow  
identified

People who had never been seen rough sleeping prior to 2020/21 (i.e. new rough sleepers), who were recorded with a name, and/or with more than one contact.

Stock

People who were also seen rough sleeping in 2019/20 (i.e. those seen across a minimum of two consecutive years).

Returner

People who were first seen rough sleeping prior to 2019/20, but were not seen during 2019/20 (i.e. those who have had a gap in their rough sleeping histories).



# LONG RANGE TREND

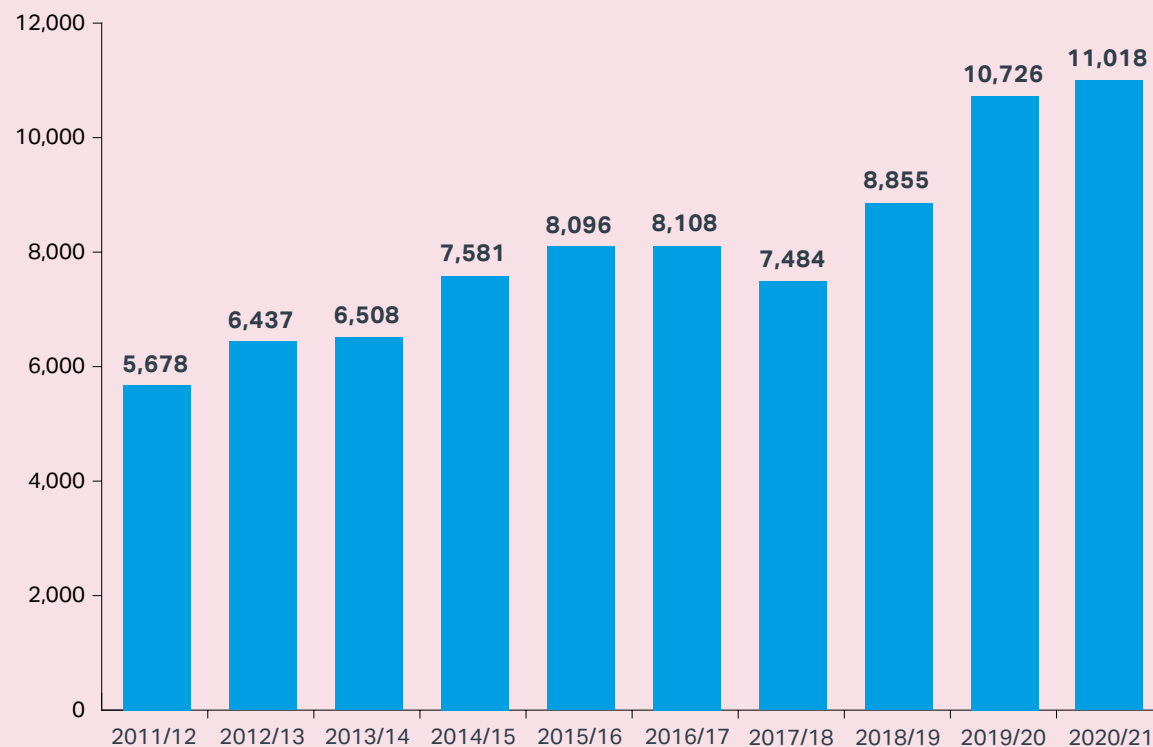
Across the last ten years, the number of people recorded rough sleeping on CHAIN has risen year on year, with the exception of 2017/18.

The 11,018 people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 is almost twice the number seen in 2011/12 (a 94% increase). The 21% increase from 2018/19 to 2019/20 was the largest proportionate rise in annual figures during the last ten years.

During 2018/19 and 2019/20, significant new funding saw a large increase in the number of outreach services and staff in London, together with the introduction of bimonthly street counts. It is likely that these factors will have had some influence on the number of people being recorded on CHAIN.

**Figure (b)**

Long range trend of number of people seen rough sleeping



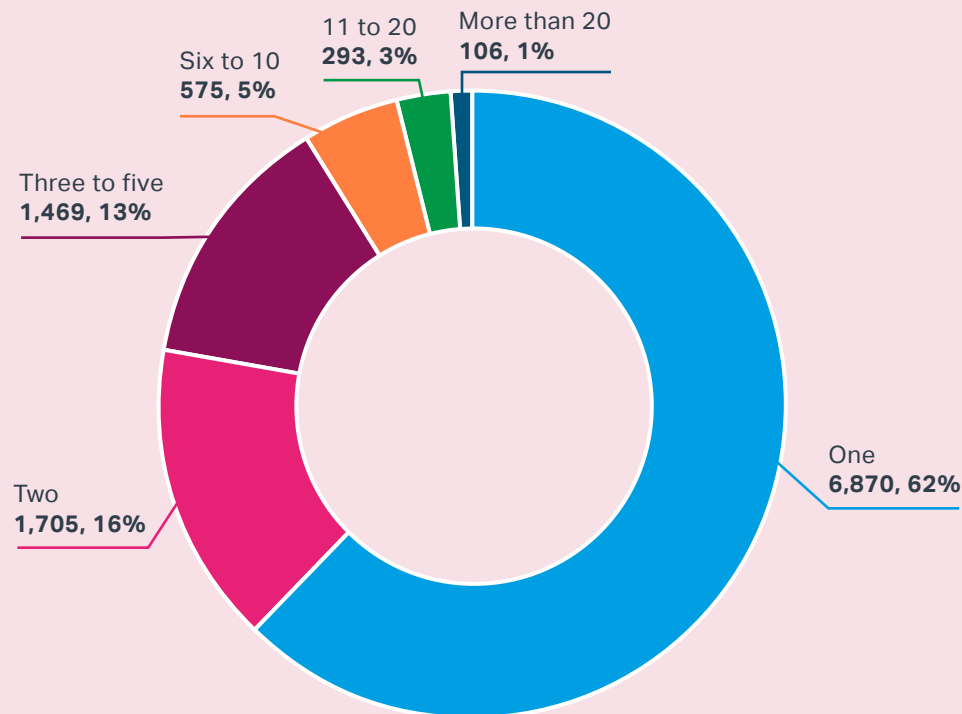
# NUMBER OF TIMES SEEN ROUGH SLEEPING

**6,870 (62%)**

people were seen rough sleeping only once in 2020/21, which compares to 6,435 (60%) seen rough sleeping just once in 2019/20. 78% were seen only once or twice. Around one in twenty people (4%) were seen rough sleeping more than ten times. Thirteen people were seen rough sleeping more than 50 times in the year, compared to three people with this many contacts in 2019/20, and none in 2018/19.

**Figure (c)**

Number of times seen rough sleeping



Base: 11,018 people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21

# MONTHLY TREND

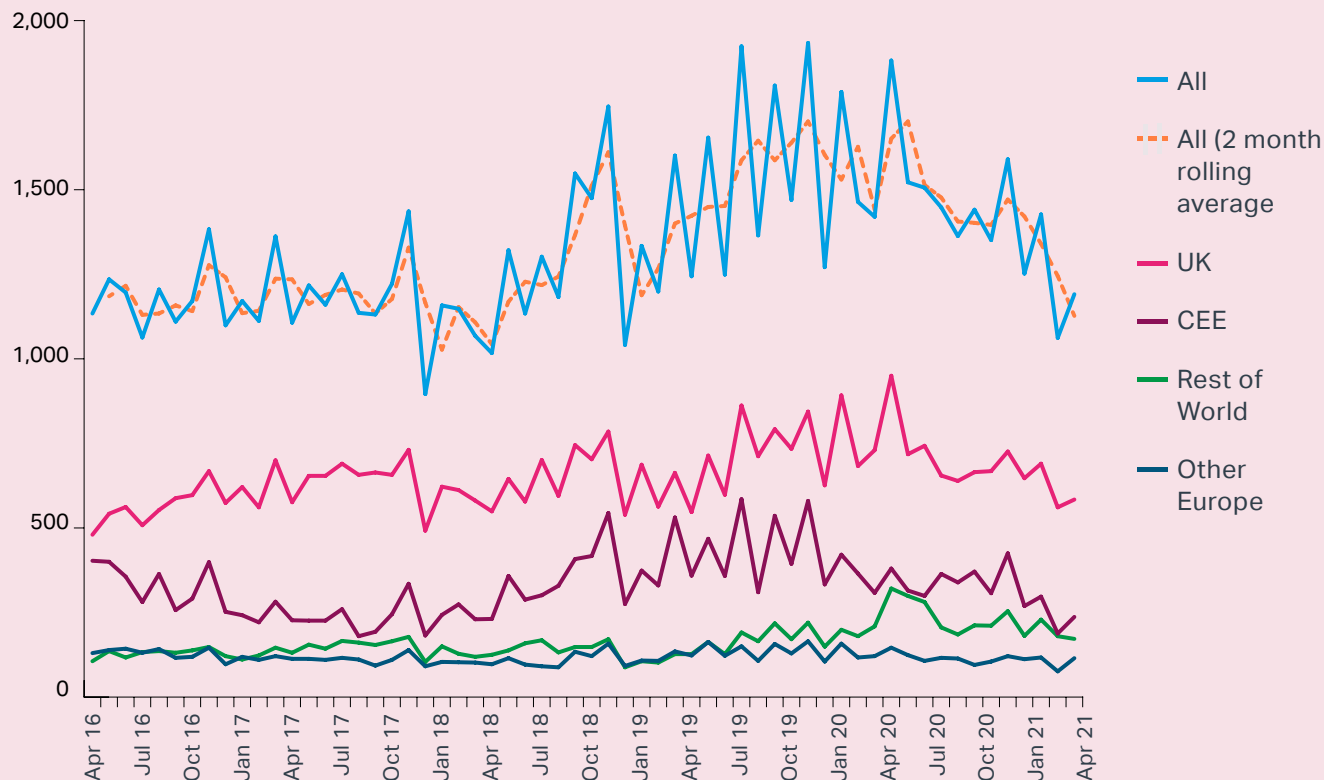
The chart shows the monthly trend in numbers of people seen rough sleeping over the last five years, broken down by nationality group.

The All line, showing overall numbers seen rough sleeping per month, indicates that the annual peak usually occurs in November, when the government's annual street count takes place, while the lowest numbers are usually recorded in December, when winter shelters and Crisis at Christmas come into operation. Peaks and troughs became much more frequent between late 2018 and early 2020, during which time bimonthly street counts were introduced as part of the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative. The All (2 month rolling average) line smooths out these variations to give a clearer indication of the ongoing trend.

The pattern for 2020/21 is somewhat different to that in previous years. The month when the greatest number of people were seen rough sleeping was April (1,882 people), which is not normally a peak month. This appears to be related to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown. Following that early peak, the ongoing trend throughout the rest of the year has been towards a decline in numbers seen rough sleeping, albeit with the usual

**Figure (d)**

Number of people seen rough sleeping month by month, April 2016 - March 2021



spike for the November street count. The lowest monthly total was recorded in February, when 1,062 people were seen rough sleeping.

The separate nationality lines show that the overall April peak was specifically reflected

in the UK and 'rest of world' groups, and that it was sustained for a longer period for 'rest of world' nationals. Conversely, the April peak was not seen amongst CEE and other European nationals.



# SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

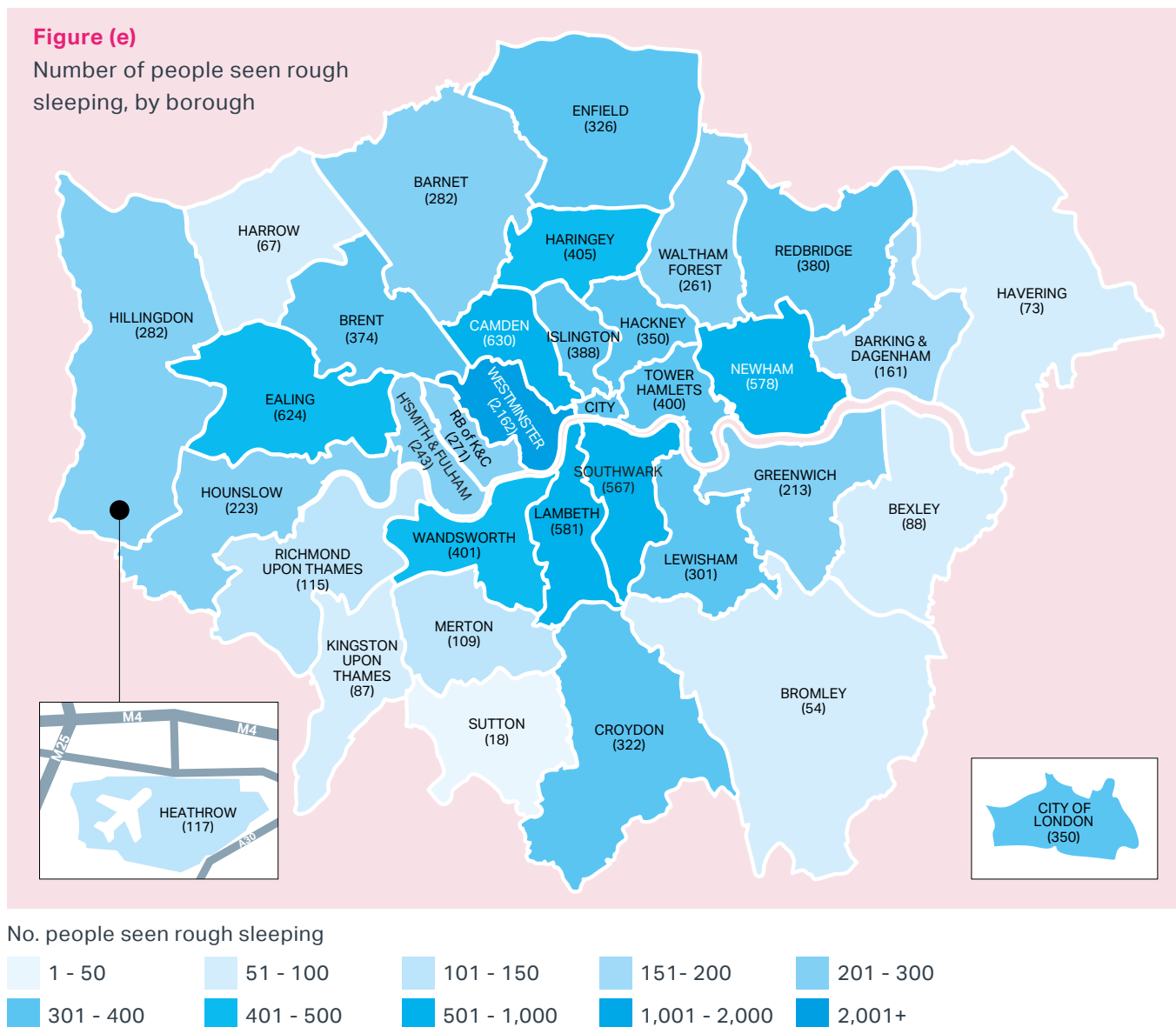
As in previous years, the borough in which the greatest number of people were seen rough sleeping was Westminster, with 2,162 people (20% of the overall London total). Six boroughs recorded more than 500 rough sleepers during the year. Of the ten boroughs with the highest numbers of rough sleepers, Westminster, Camden, Newham, and Tower Hamlets have shown a decrease in numbers compared to 2019/20.

A total of 117 people were seen rough sleeping at Heathrow airport, which is counted separately from Hillingdon, due to the specific rough sleeping issues found there.

The Mayor of London's TFL Outreach service recorded 143 people rough sleeping on buses during 2020/21.

## Top five boroughs

	Borough	2020/21	2019/20
1.	Westminster	2,162	2,757
2.	Camden	630	639
3.	Ealing	624	493
4.	Lambeth	581	431
5.	Newham	578	724



# NATIONALITY

The nationality profile of rough sleepers in London remains diverse, with a total of 129 different nationalities recorded during 2020/21. The proportion of people seen rough sleeping who were UK nationals was 50%, which is largely consistent with the proportions of 48% in 2019/20 and 49% in 2018/19. The proportion of rough sleepers from CEE countries has decreased markedly, at 22% this year, compared to 30% in 2019/20 and 31% in 2018/19.

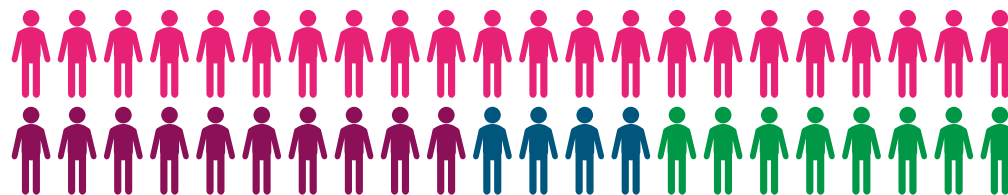
A notable trend in 2020/21 has been the increase in the proportion of people seen rough sleeping who were from non-European countries, with 19% falling into this group, compared to 13% in 2019/20. People from African countries accounted for 11% of all rough sleepers in 2020/21 (1,118 people), compared to 7% in 2019/20 (651 people) and 6% in 2018/19 (459 people). Asian nationals constituted 7% of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 (702 people), compared to 5% in 2019/20 (520 people) and 4% in 2018/19 (358 people).

As in previous recent years, Romanians (1,133, 11%) comprise the single largest non-UK nationality, with Poles (647, 6%) making up the second largest. People from Eritrea (358, 4%) and India (273, 3%) are the third and fourth most numerous non-UK nationalities.

The number of people seen rough sleeping whose nationality was not known has decreased somewhat, at 771 in 2020/21 compared to 954 in 2019/20. This may be related to the suspension of bimonthly street counts during the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning that 'unidentified' duplicate client records are less likely to be recorded, or to an increased willingness amongst some non-UK nationals to engage with outreach services while the pandemic has been underway.

**Figure (f)**

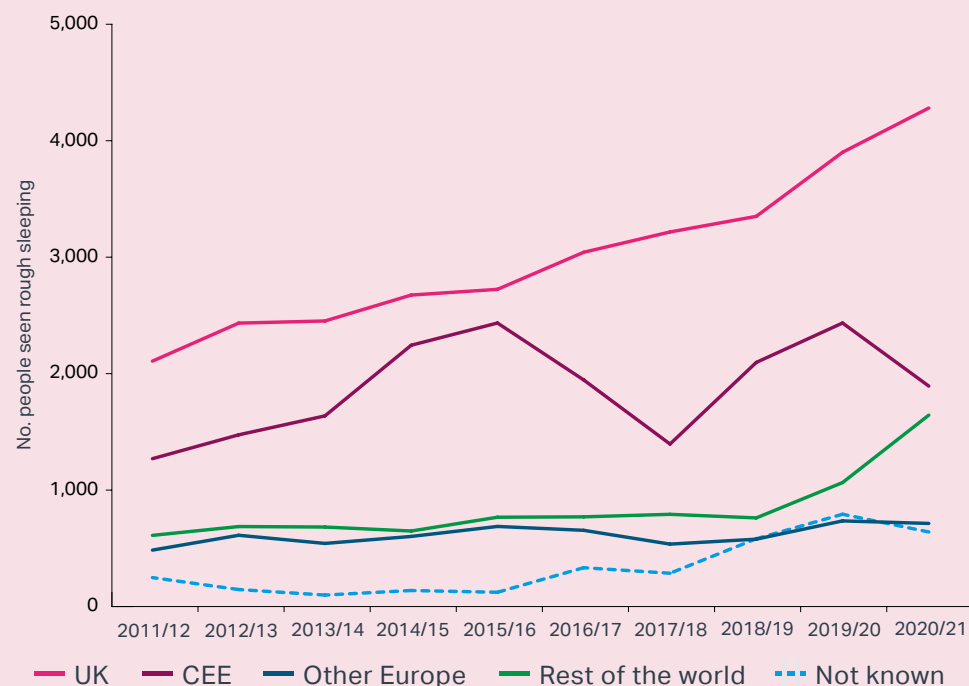
Nationality profile of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21



UK **5,139** CEE **2,274** Other Europe **859** Rest of the world **1,975**

**Figure (g)**

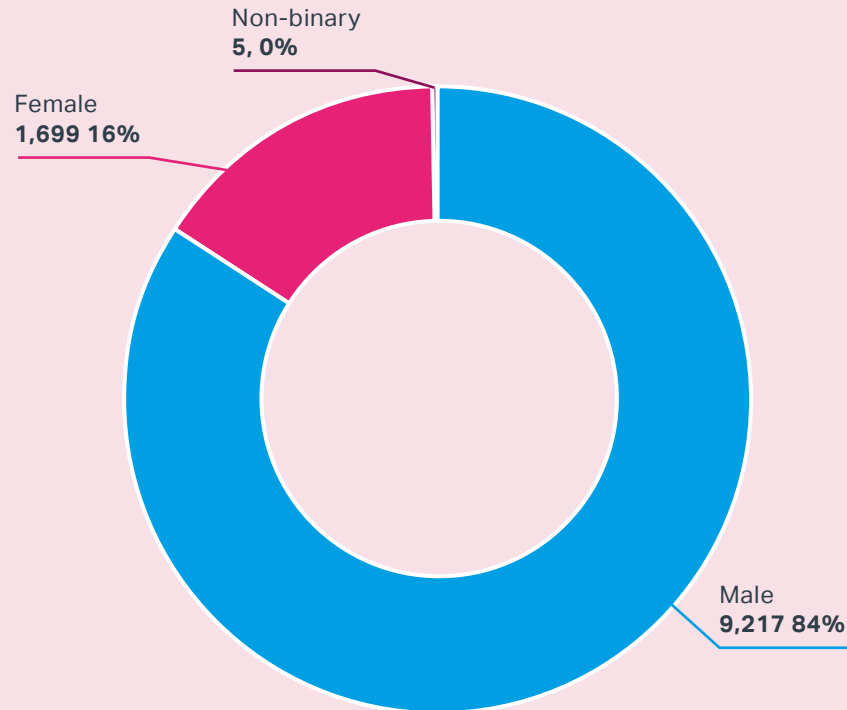
Long range trend in nationality profile of people seen rough sleeping



# DEMOGRAPHICS

**Figure (h)**

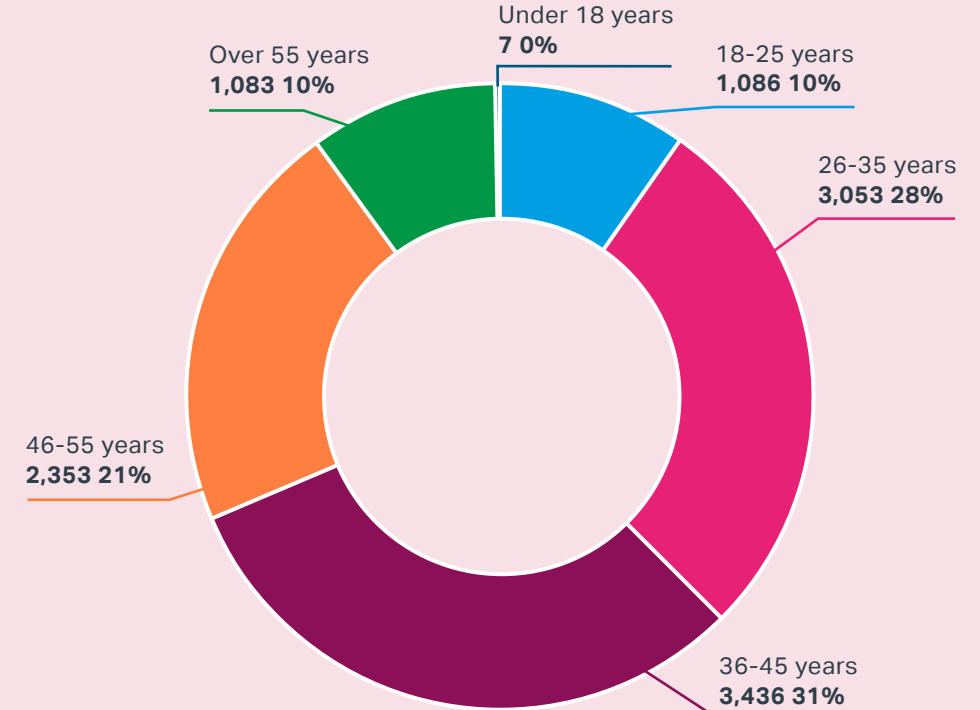
Gender profile of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21



Base: 10,921 people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 whose gender was known

**Figure (i)**

Age profile of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21



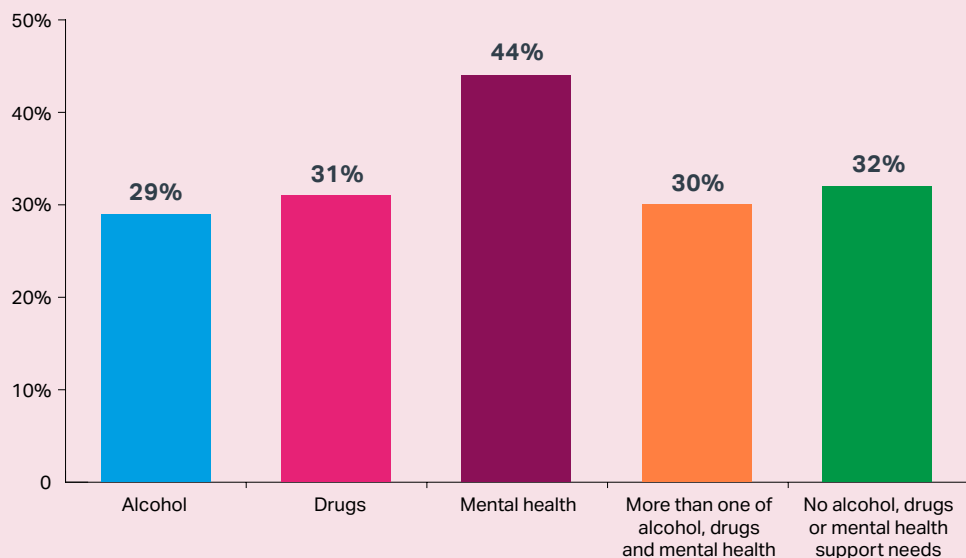
Base: 11,018 people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21

The gender and age profile of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 shows little variation from that of people seen in 2019/20. The majority of rough sleepers (84%) are male, while four-fifths (80%) are aged between 26 and 55. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of people seen rough sleeping who were aged 25 or under, with 10% (1,093 people) of rough sleepers seen in 2020/21 in this group, compared to 8% (835 people) in 2019/20.

# SUPPORT NEEDS

**Figure (j)**

Support needs profile of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21

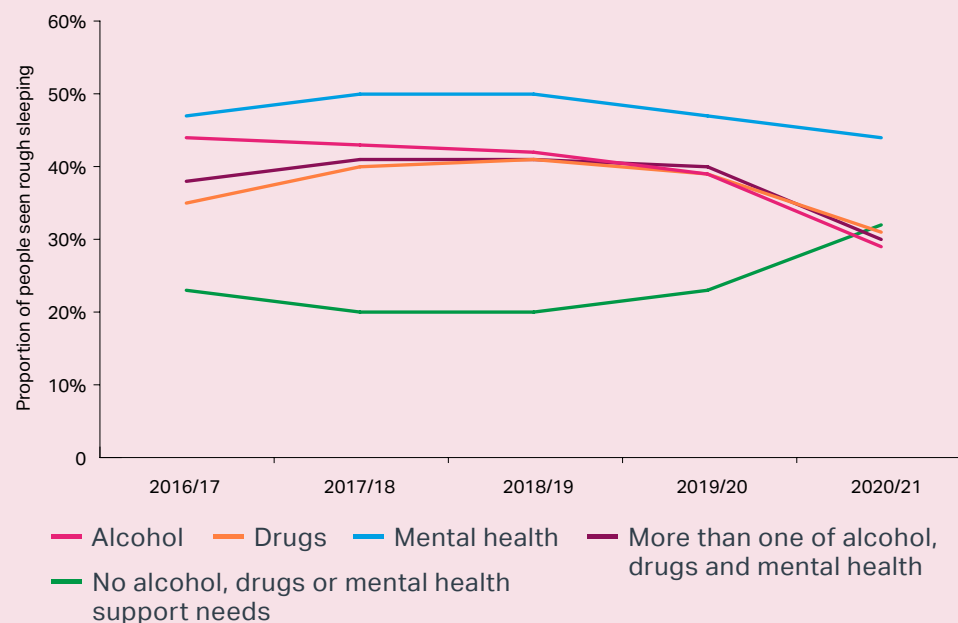


**Base:** 8,111 people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 who had been assessed for at least one of the three key support needs

The most frequently reported support need amongst people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 was mental health, with 44% of those assessed during the period having a need in this area. 29% of people assessed had a support need relating to alcohol, while 31% were found to have a support need around drug use. Just under a third (30%) of those assessed were found to have more than one of the three support needs, while a similar proportion (32%) had no support needs in these areas.

**Figure (k)**

Long range trend in support needs profile of people seen rough sleeping



There has been a noticeable decrease in the proportion of rough sleepers assessed as having support needs relating to alcohol (29% in 2020/21 compared to 39% in 2019/20) and drugs (31% in 2020/21 compared to 39% in 2019/20). The proportion of rough sleepers assessed as having a mental health need has shown a less marked decrease, at 44% this year compared to 47% in 2019/20.

It should be noted that a decrease in the proportion of individuals recorded with a particular support need does not necessarily equate to a decrease in their number, as the size of the overall base has increased.

# INSTITUTIONAL AND ARMED FORCES HISTORY

CHAIN records information about whether rough sleepers have spent time in the armed forces, prison or local authority care at any time in their life.

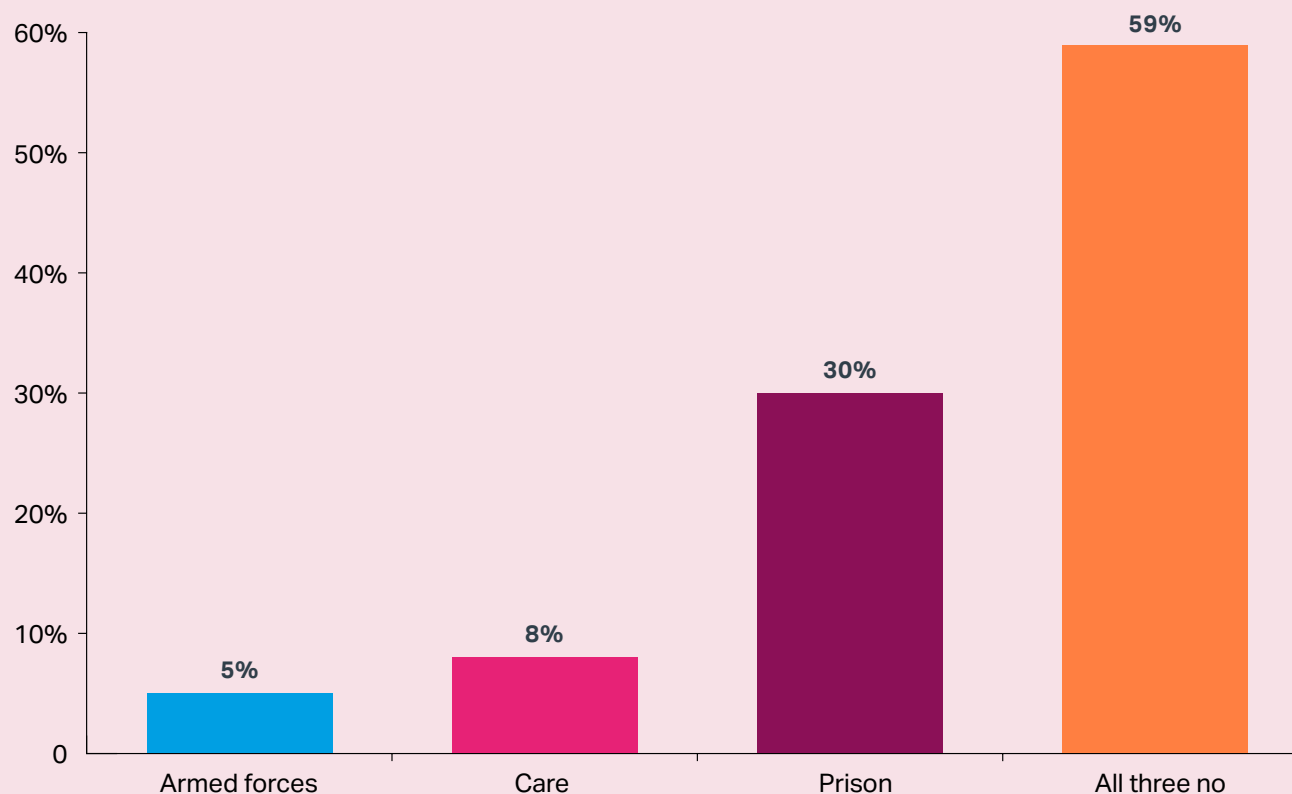
Just under one third (30%) of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 had experience of serving time in prison, while 8% had experience of the care system. Of the 643 people with experience of living in care, 97 were aged 25 or under.

Overall, 5% of people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 had served in the armed forces at some point in their lives. Looking at this in more detail, 2% (122) of people seen rough sleeping in the year were UK nationals who have served in the armed forces.

Proportions of people with experience of the armed forces, care or prison are broadly consistent with 2019/20.

**Figure (I)**

Experience of serving in the armed forces, and spending time in prison or in local authority care, among people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21



**Base:** 7,912 people seen rough sleeping in 2020/21 for whom one or more institutional or armed forces history was recorded

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Copies of this report are available from:

<http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

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