



Gender & Disaster Australia

Mildura

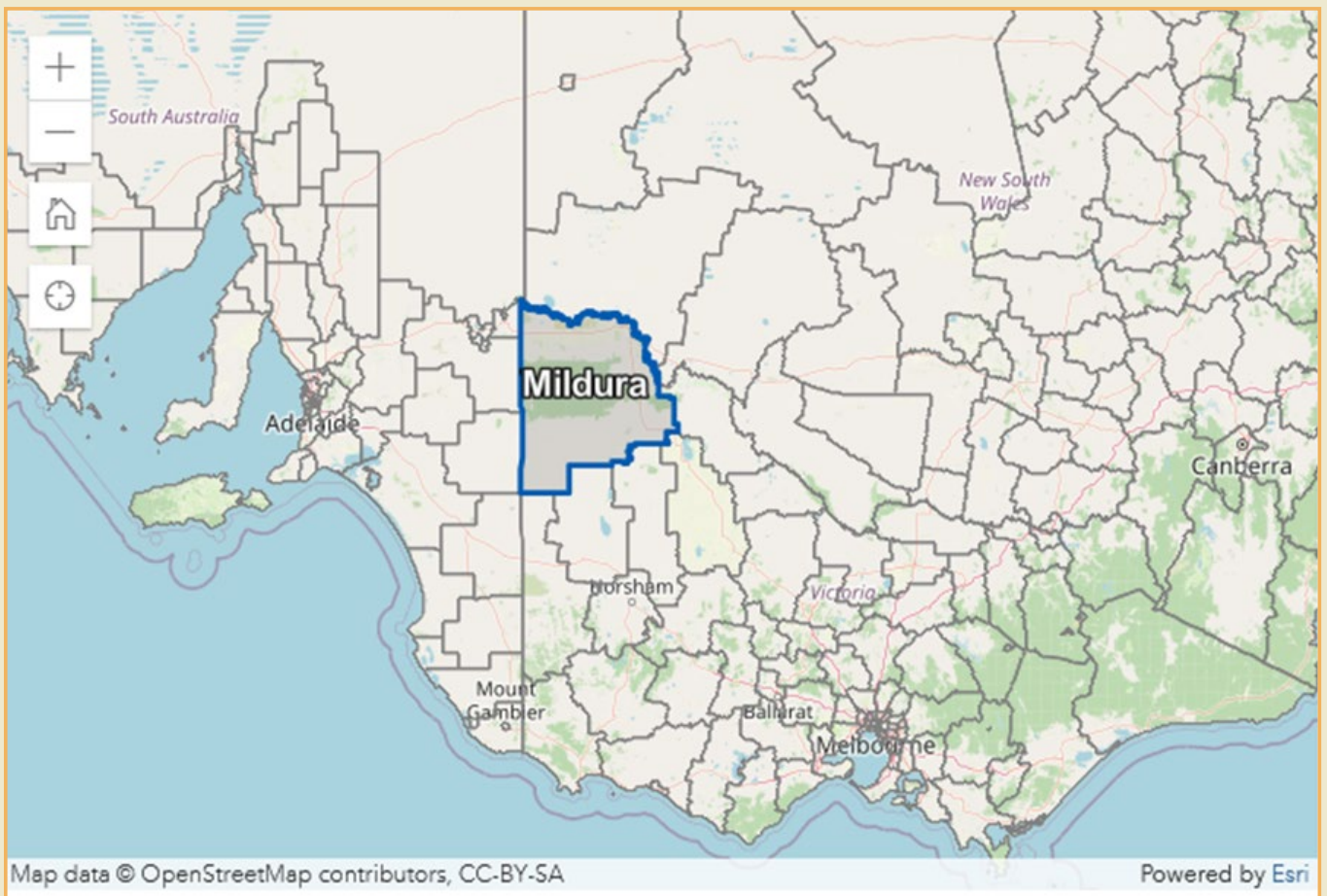
DISASTER CONTEXT

Socio-demographics from
a gendered perspective





Mildura



The LGA of Mildura. From <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>





INTRODUCTION

Mildura is the largest regional city in North-West Victoria and is located at the intersection of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, in the Mallee region. It is situated on the riverine plains of the Murray river, Australia's longest river. The Mildura region encompasses the city of Mildura, the townships of Ouyen, Merbein, Red Cliffs, Irymple, Meringur, Nangiloc and Walpeup. The region is composed mostly of flat alluvial plains, created by the regular flooding of the river.¹ Agriculture is a central part of the local economy. In 2020, the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector was the largest performing sector economically, generating \$370 million.² Mildura is located in the Murray-Darling basin, which accounts for 80% of Australia's irrigated grape production (dried and table grapes as well as for wine production).³ The city of Mildura has an elevation of 60 meters on average, but the areas around the river are lower.⁴

Droughts affect the Mildura region on a regular basis, but the drought called the Big dry or Millennial drought⁵ was longer than usual, starting in the mid-1990's and finishing in 2010 with the beginning of the La Niña cycle. The second half of 2010 and 2011 was the wettest year on record at that time.⁶ Mildura also has a history of flooding.⁷ In 2011, 108mm of rain fell in 4 hours during a

storm, causing a flash flood.⁸ The 1956 floods were the worst recorded, when the Murray reached 39 meters in Mildura.⁹ During the 2019 Black Summer Bushfires of 2019, the town of Mildura was affected by high heat (40°C) and dust storms.¹⁰ In 1975 and 1976, large bushfires at Mildura destroyed 93,800 and 35,000 hectares respectively.¹¹

The most recent disaster affecting Mildura was the 2022-23 floods, which were considered to be the worst in 70 years.¹² The floods started on October 6 2022¹³ and in December 2022, the Murray river had reached a height of 38.4 meters at Mildura.¹⁴ By the end of January 2023, the Murray had descended to a level too low for businesses to operate - a common phenomenon after a flood.¹⁵

It is too early for academic literature on the social impacts of the 2022 floods to have been published. However, several studies have explored the "Millennium drought" and its effect on the rural and farming communities. Anderson (2017)¹⁶ explains how the drought has formed a local identity for the farmers of the Mallee region, linked to the colonial narrative of settlers battling a harsh environment.

Another study (Askew, Sherval, McGuirk, 2014)¹⁷ explains that the difficulties farmers experienced during the drought were not only linked to the

1 https://researchportal.scu.edu.au/esploro/fulltext/report/Assessment-of-acid-sulfate-soil-materials/991012820874902368?repld=1266933100002368&mid=1367370910002368&institution=61SCU_INST

2 <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/victorias-regions/mildura>

3 <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/surveys/irrigation/grapes>

4 <https://www.floodmap.net/Elevation/ElevationMap/?gi=2157698>

5 <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/environment-the-big-dry/>

6 Askew, L.E., Sherval, M., McGuirk P., (2014) "'Not just drought!' Drought, Rural Change and More: Perspectives from Rural Farming Communities" in Connell, J., *Rural Change in Australia : Population, Economy, Environment*, edited by Rae Dufty-Jones, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

7 <https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/flood-guides/mildura-rural-city-council>

8 <https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/flood-guides/mildura-rural-city-council>

9 <https://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2006/09/12/1739132.htm>

10 <https://www.9news.com.au/national/mildura-fire-dust-storm-covers-city-as-bushfires-rage-vic/daf4f80d-4e53-4de9-b1d8-af949d2088d4>

11 <https://www.redeagle.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Victorias-Bushfire-History-1802-to-Present.pdf>

12 <https://www.9news.com.au/national/mildura-floods-worst-in-70-years-community-facing-devastation/b973a49f-07a2-4cda-be97-bd1057d5c9f7>

13 <https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/flood-guides/mildura-rural-city-council>

14 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-17/murray-river-flood-peak-pushes-historic-figures/101785070>

15 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-01/murray-river-floods-business-water-level-cannot-operate-low/101906764>

16 Anderson, D. (2017) 'Talk of the town in dry country', in Driscoll C, Darian-Smith K, Nichols D (eds) *Cultural Sustainability in Rural Communities*, Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315575384>

17 Askew, L.E., Sherval, M., McGuirk P., (2014) "'Not just drought!' Drought, Rural Change and More: Perspectives from Rural Farming Communities" in Connell, J., *Rural Change in Australia : Population, Economy, Environment*, edited by Rae Dufty-Jones, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.



drought, but to declines in prices of certain products, increases in farm sizes, declines in the traditional family farm and global market pressure. According to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE), there was a decrease in average farm incomes of \$29,000 between 2005 and 2007¹⁸. Another study explores the devastating social and economic effects of the drought on farmers, many of whom had to take up an "exit grant" because their farm was no longer economically viable. The authors observe that the government provided assistance from a crisis management approach, whereas more holistic and long-term support including mental health support would have been more appropriate (Askew and Sherval, 2012).¹⁹

Further, Anderson (2009)²⁰ analyses the oral history of women health workers in the Mallee region during the Millennium drought. Their work with women in rural communities allowed them to identify key issues: stress and high anxiety linked to the lack of rain, isolation and shame due to the loss of property in the context of family histories of farming, depression (including social withdrawal and potential suicide), domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, and fear. Because of the difficulties seeing a GP and accessing mental health services, families played an important role in helping to cope with the drought. The author explains that the drought is a gendered experience, because of systemic and cultural practices including patrilineal landholding in rural Australia and the gendered division of labour. Consequently, women usually work outside of the farm while also having to take care of the household and the farm finances.

Women's unpaid work is overlooked, and the agricultural industry relies on this silenced female workforce. However, this trend may be changing as younger women increasingly refuse to do so much work.²¹

Finally, a study conducted by Mallee Family Care in 2019²² explored the physical and mental health impacts of the extreme heat happening every summer on public housing tenants in Mildura. The study defines extreme heat according to Australia's Bureau of Meteorology definition : heatwaves of at least three days, when the average temperature reaches the district heat health temperature threshold, which is 34 degrees for the Mallee District and Mildura. Public housing in Mildura is provided by the Victorian State Government's Department of Health and Human Services. Summer temperatures reach very high levels, and the majority of public housing does not have any form of air conditioning²³. In 2016, public housing tenants made up 14% of the renting population, and 25% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Many of the tenants already experienced higher levels of disadvantage, chronic physical and mental health conditions and vulnerability to extreme heat than the rest of the population. Extreme heat has physical effects (heat stroke and heat exhaustion, dehydration and headaches, negative impacts on breathing) and mental health effects (mental exhaustion, mood changes, anxiety and despair). Additionally, there is an increase in adults, children and youth in the streets at night because it is cooler than their homes, and an increase in substance abuse.

18 Askew, L.E., Sherval, M., McGuirk P., (2014) "'Not just drought!' Drought, Rural Change and More: Perspectives from Rural Farming Communities" in Connell, J., *Rural Change in Australia : Population, Economy, Environment*, edited by Rae Dufty-Jones, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

19 Askew, L.E., Sherval, "Short-term Emergency or Recurring Climatic Extreme : A Rural Town Perspective on Drought Policy and Programs", *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol 71, No 3, pp 209-302.

20 Anderson, D. (2009) Enduring Drought Then Coping With Climate Change: Lived Experience And Local Resolve In Rural Mental Health, *Rural Society*, 19:4, 340-352

21 Anderson, D. (2013). Climate lived and contested: Narratives of Mallee women, drought and climate change. *Hecate*, 38(1/2), 24-41.

22 Lander, J. Breth-Petersen, M., Moait, R., Forbes, C. and Stephens, L. Dickson, M. (2019). Extreme heat driven by the climate emergency: Impacts on the health and wellbeing of public housing tenants in Mildura, Victoria. Report prepared for Mallee Family Care. https://www.malleefamilycare.org.au/MFCSite/media/PDFDocuments/PublicHousing/2019/MalleeFamilyCare_PublicHousing_Report_2019.pdf

23 Lander, J. Breth-Petersen, M., Moait, R., Forbes, C. and Stephens, L. Dickson, M. (2019). Extreme heat driven by the climate emergency: Impacts on the health and wellbeing of public housing tenants in Mildura, Victoria. Report prepared for Mallee Family Care. https://www.malleefamilycare.org.au/MFCSite/media/PDFDocuments/PublicHousing/2019/MalleeFamilyCare_PublicHousing_Report_2019.pdf



DISASTER BACKGROUND

Kind of disasters affecting this region/town: floods, bushfires, drought, extreme heat, dust storms

Recent major disaster: November and December 2022 major floods

- Fatalities: 0
- People displaced:
 - o At the start of November, some people whose homes or businesses were close to the river evacuated in preparation for the floods²⁴.
 - o The Alfred Deakin Centre in Mildura was transformed into a relief centre²⁵ and the Mildura Rural City Council Community Relief and Support Service was open to help communities impacted by the floods (relief, accommodation support and information).²⁶ As of 25 November, 32 roads were closed in the Mildura region.²⁷
- Properties and infrastructure affected:
 - o building damage due to water inundation:²⁸ around 33 private properties and 27 commercial properties²⁹ within the municipality of Mildura
 - o 60km of roads impacted by the floods across the municipality of Mildura³⁰
 - o hundreds of hectares of table grapes in the region were flooded³¹
 - o citrus production was also impacted³²
 - o tens of millions of dollars in summer tourism lost³³ and job losses as a consequence³⁴

24 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-24/mildura-nichols-point-bruces-bend-ordered-evacuate-amid-flooding/101694372>

25 <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/parts-of-mildura-told-to-evacuate-as-swollen-murray-river-rises-20221124-p5c12x.html>

26 https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/CommNews/Community-Newletters/Community_Newsletter_-_Mildura_and_District_-_25th_Nov_2022_Final.pdf?v=202211251430

27 https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/CommNews/Community-Newletters/Community_Newsletter_-_Mildura_and_District_-_25th_Nov_2022_Final.pdf?v=202211251430

28 <https://www.sunrasiadaily.com.au/news/6031053/flood-help-allowance-extended-to-mildura>

29 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1GgIE1yJIE>

30 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1GgIE1yJIE>

31 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2022-12-09/victoria-murray-river-flood-persist-farm-grape-harvest/101747920>

32 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2022-12-09/victoria-murray-river-flood-persist-farm-grape-harvest/101747920>

33 <https://www.sunrasiadaily.com.au/news/6041069/feds-offer-support-through-floods>

34 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-10/murray-river-floods-ruining-tourism-season-north-west-victoria/101742850>





ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

- Mildura LGA is ranked:³⁵
 - o 128 out of 544 LGAs in Australia (where 544 is most advantaged)
 - o in the 3rd decile (out of 10, where 10 is most advantaged)
 - o in the 24th percentile (out of 100, where 100 is most advantaged)



HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS

- Housing affordability
 - o Median rent: \$265/week (VIC: \$370/week | Aus: \$375)³⁶
 - o Renter households where rent payments are greater than 30% of household income: 30.1% (VIC: 30.9% | Aus: 32.3%)³⁷
 - o For a household on the median income for Mildura (around \$70,000), rental accommodation is classed as “moderately unaffordable”.
- Homelessness (before the 2022 floods):³⁸
 - o According to the Council to Homeless persons, there were 264 people without a home in Mildura in 2022.
 - o Homelessness affects 39 people per 10,000 (Victorian average : 42 per 10,000)
 - o In 2022, 46% of the homeless population were women and 23% were children 18 and under.



MENTAL HEALTH

- Mental health conditions (any): 9.9% (VIC: 8.8 % | Aus: 8.8%)³⁹
- Suicide rate for Statistical Area 3 Mildura⁴⁰
 - o Age-standardised rate per 100 000: 15.8 (VIC :10.5)
 - o 43 deaths 2017-2021
 - o Victoria’s Indigenous suicide rate increased by more than half between 2022 and 2023, and Mildura is one of three areas in Victoria with the highest suicide rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.⁴¹

Area	SA3 Mildura	SA4 North West	Victoria	Australia
Age-standardised suicide rate per 100,000 population	15.8	15.7	10.5	12.6
Rate for males	n/a	26.3	16	19.2
Rate for females	n/a	n/a	5.3	6.1

³⁵ [2033.0.55.001 - Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), Australia, 2016](https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24780) (third data cube LGA Indexes, SEIFA 2016)

³⁶ <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24780>

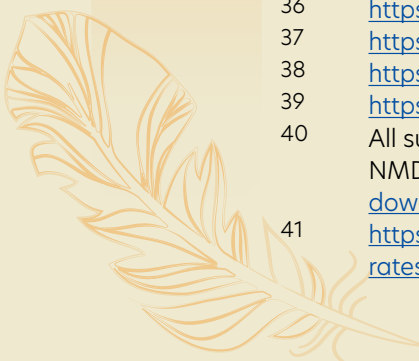
³⁷ <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24780>

³⁸ <https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/220906-Mildura-profile.pdf>

³⁹ <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24780>

⁴⁰ All suicide rate stats come from Data table: 2021 National Mortality Database - Suicide, Table NMD S10, available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/data-downloads>

⁴¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/milduraswanhill/programs/breakfast/mildura-first-nations-suicide-rates/13727726>





GENDER EQUALITY

*Lone parent status*⁴²

- One-parent families (Mildura LGA): 18.4% (VIC: 15.2% | Aus:15.9%) - 81.4% female-led (VIC: 80.9% | Aus:80.4%)

*Mothers' index*⁴³

- Mildura LGA is ranked 71 out of 79 LGAs in VIC where 1 is the 'best place for a mother to live'

Unpaid care

- Unpaid domestic work⁴⁴
 - o 8062 men did 5 or more hours of unpaid domestic work per week compared to 12985 women
- Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability⁴⁵
 - o 2298 men compared to 3785 women provided unpaid assistance
- Unpaid childcare⁴⁶
 - o 4642 men compared to 6702 women provided childcare (whether for their own child or other children)

*Violence against women*⁴⁷

- The second most prevalent offence in the Mildura LGA is breaching of a family violence order (466 cases in 2022)
- Family incident (Jan-Dec 2022, rate per 100,000 population): 3,291.8 (VIC: 1400)
- Sexual offences are the the fifth most prevalent offence against the person in Mildura LGA (111 cases Jan-Dec 2022)⁴⁸

⁴² <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24780>

⁴³ The mothers' index consists of composite scores from five different indicators relating to maternal wellbeing (maternal health, children's wellbeing, educational status, economic status and socio-economic disadvantage), with each indicator given equal weighting. Scores were sorted from low to high and ranked from 1 to 79 (1 being the best place for a mother to live) to give the overall Mothers Index rank for each LGA in VIC. <https://apo.org.au/node/63692>

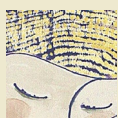
⁴⁴ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/geography/suicide-by-local-areas,sheet G24>

⁴⁵ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/geography/suicide-by-local-areas,sheet G25>

⁴⁶ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/geography/suicide-by-local-areas,sheet G26>

⁴⁷ <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-crime-data-by-area>

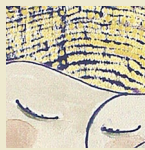
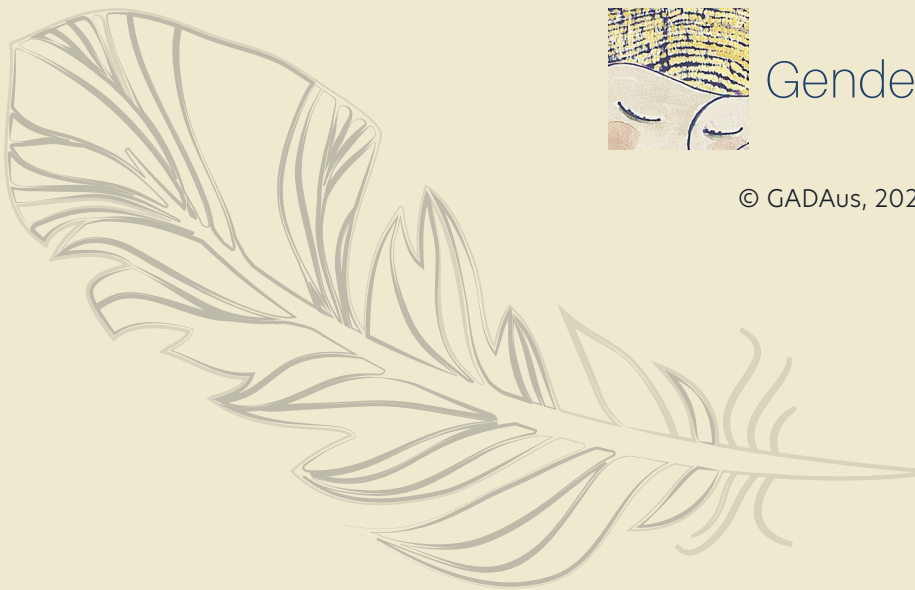
⁴⁸ <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-crime-data-by-area>

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR MILDURA LGA COMPARED TO VICTORIA AND AUSTRALIA⁴⁹**

	Mildura LGA	Victoria	Australia
Median age	40	38	38
Indigenous status	4.6%	1%	3.2%
Both parents born in Australia	65.9%	42.4%	45.9%
Non-English language used in household	13.7%	30.2%	24.8%
With university education	12.7%	29.2%	26.3%
Year 10 as highest qualification	11.8%	7.3%	10%
Part-time workers	31.3%	32.3%	31.2%
Unemployed	5.2%	5%	5.1%
Personal income	\$694/week	\$803/week	\$805/week
Household income	\$1341/week	\$1759/week	\$1746/week
Rate of people on Disability Support Pension per 10,000 population ⁵⁰	475	281	296

⁴⁹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24780>

⁵⁰ <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/dss-payment-demographic-data> calculated by dividing number of DSP recipients listed in March 2021 spreadsheet by population of LGA (<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24780>) state (<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/2>), and country (<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/AUS>) multiplied by 10,000



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