

Disaster context sheets leverage data to enhance community engagement

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In a new initiative designed to improve gender responsiveness before, during and after disasters, Gender and Disaster Australia (GADAus) curated a series of disaster context sheets related to 20 locations across Australia.

The disaster context sheets provide relevant social and environmental insights into disaster-affected areas. The rapid assessments support trainers, recovery and response workers and others by providing gender-disaggregated data for a clearer understanding of the disaster context. The intention is to ensure that trainers going into communities to work with them are aware of recent disasters and the social and physical landscape of the region.

It is well understood in the emergency management sector that the briefing process is fundamental to a well-planned and coordinated response.¹ It provides the foundation for the strategy and tools used to achieve the best outcome for the response. A well-coordinated and knowledgeable workforce has the greatest chance of success at minimising the effects of the emergency on communities.

There are 20 disaster context sheets that cover different geographic areas, such as a regional town, a local government area, a capital city or a whole state. They are:

- Australian Capital Territory
- Alice Springs, Northern Territory
- Bundaberg, Queensland
- Darwin, Northern territory
- Eurobodalla, New South Wales
- Greater Brisbane, Queensland
- Greater Sydney, New South Wales
- Gympie, Queensland
- Ipswich, Queensland

- Lismore, New South Wales
- Mallacoota, Victoria
- Mid Murray, Victoria
- Mildura, Victoria
- Perth, Western Australia
- Snowy Valley, New South Wales
- Tasmania
- Towong, Victoria
- Wyndham-East Kimberley, Western Australia
- Yarra Ranges, Victoria
- Yorke Peninsula, South Australia.

Where a disaster context sheet is not available for a specific region, trainers and others can easily see the breadth of information they need to be aware of by referring to a sheet developed for a similar location. The briefing process could also extend beyond the response phase and be helpful in other phases such as preparedness and recovery.

The disaster sheets were developed iteratively and designed in partnership with GADAus partners. They provide environmental, social, economic and demographic data from the Australian Census and other open-form sources. The data categories are:

- recent and historical text relating to the emergencies and disasters the area has experienced
- a written summary of the effects of recent disasters according to surveys and studies conducted in the area

- basic health statistics and studies
- a map of the region with details such as recent disaster history
- disaster statistics of:
 - fatalities
 - impact
 - displacement statistics
 - economic disadvantage statistics
 - housing affordability and homelessness data and statistics
 - local mental health data and statistics
 - gender equality statistics
 - demographic information
 - full references.

Disaggregating the data is essential because, for individuals, disasters can reinforce existing gender inequalities. Gender-differentiated effects of disasters, such as increased caring roles, reduced economic participation and increased post-disaster trauma as well as loss and suffering continue to be a feature of disasters in Australia.^{2,3,4} However, these factors can be obscured due to current reporting mechanisms.

Academic thought argues that a gender analysis is crucial to comprehending the differential effects of disasters on communities.⁵ Practitioners agree and recognise the need to incorporate gender in disaster planning to enhance community resilience and capacity.⁶ Anyone entering a community with assumptions about the people they will meet is working at a disadvantage.

The disaster context sheets are adaptable to other regions as links are provided for each dataset. GADAus encourages others to replicate these data sheets for their own regions. The disaster sheets have also been used to identify areas that require additional grant support and are used as background information in draft submissions. New disaster context sheets can be easily reproduced and, more importantly, are scalable.

By prioritising the dissemination and use of these resources, GADAus is providing crucial support to all areas of Australia, especially those that may have traditionally been isolated and overlooked in disasters.

The disaster sheets reflect the GADAus commitment to provide actionable resources that facilitate informed decision-making and targeted interventions. By equipping people with comprehensive knowledge of their communities, the sheets lay a groundwork for a well-coordinated and effective responses that creates better outcomes for communities. Well-informed recovery workers are better equipped to address the diverse needs and challenges facing communities in

the aftermath of disasters. By leveraging the insights provided by the sheets, recovery efforts can be tailored to the circumstances of each community, maximising their effectiveness and minimising potential disparities in service delivery.

Access all the disaster context sheets on the Gender and Disaster Australia website, at <https://genderanddisaster.com.au/resources>.

Endnotes

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