CFE-DM

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

Disaster Management Reference Handbook

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Letter from the Director

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is an important partner of the United States (U.S.) and hosts U.S. bases with critical facilities, including the Ronald Reagan Space and Missile Test Range. RMI also faces significant challenges due to hazards that threaten lives, health, livelihoods, and the long-term habitability of the islands. A recent overwash event highlighted RMI's growing coastal vulnerability. In January 2024, a nearby storm generated large swells and drove a storm surge that affected nearly 20,000 people and inundated 11 atolls and islands, particularly Roi Namur Island on Kwajalein Atoll. RMI also experiences chronic water insecurity. In just the last decade, RMI has been affected by three droughts that depleted rainwater catchment supplies. Furthermore, saltwater intrusion threatens the underground freshwaters lens found on some islands.

The U.S. partners with RMI to conduct various engagements related to disaster risk reduction. The U.S. Navy's Pacific Partnership humanitarian assistance and disaster response preparedness mission has visited RMI five times since 2007 to conduct disaster management workshops, engineering projects, and medical engagements. In March 2026, the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM) sponsored a 5-day Oil Spill Response Workshop in Majuro. This workshop brought together RMI government officials, emergency managers, and technical experts to strengthen collective capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from marine oil spill incidents. CFE-DM continues to support the U.S. partnership with RMI through projects alongside U.S. government agencies and military units and RMI ministries and emergency responders.

Sincerely,

Joseph D. Martin, SES
Director

About the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance

Overview

The Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM) is a United States (U.S.) Department of War (DoW, also known as Department of Defense) organization comprised of nearly 30 subject matter experts that provide academic research, civil-military coordination training, and operational insights to support decision making before, during, and after crises. The Center is designed to bridge understanding between humanitarians, civilian, and military responders. CFE-DM partners with a diverse group of governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as academic institutions to increase collaborations and capabilities in humanitarian assistance and disaster response. While maintaining a global mandate, the Indo-Pacific region is our priority of effort and collaboration is the cornerstone of our operational practice. The Center is a direct reporting unit to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and is located on Ford Island, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

Vision

Resilient Joint Forces, Allies, and Partners that are fully prepared to respond across the spectrum of humanitarian crises.

Mission

CFE-DM builds crisis response capacity in US, Allies and Partner militaries across the Indo-Pacific to save lives before, during, and after emergencies.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This handbook provides a disaster management (DM) profile of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) as a resource for civilian and military personnel who are either planning a disaster response operation in support of RMI or developing DM engagements with the RMI government or community stakeholders. It provides background information on the country, its hazards, the DM structure, and cooperation with international partners. The intent is to provide a well-rounded look at RMI's DM capacity and capabilities.

Exposure and Vulnerability

As a remotely located and widely dispersed archipelago in the central Pacific Ocean, RMI's low-lying atolls are particularly exposed to flood hazards. Drought hazards have become more frequent and severe over the past decade causing widespread water scarcity. Sea level rise threatens to exacerbate other hazards such as king tides, coastal erosion, and storm surge, all of which pose an existential threat to the islands. Less common but potentially more impactful are the occasional powerful tropical cyclones and tsunamis that could cause severe damage. RMI's geography poses a logistical challenge for disaster responders, while urbanization heightens disaster risk for many of RMI's people. Since 2000, significant disasters that have impacted RMI include droughts, storms that resulted in flooding, and disease outbreaks. The effects of drought have been far-reaching – at times affecting the entire population.

Communities are vulnerable to the impacts of major hazard events due to the characteristics of their built environments, the absence of public services, and reliance on single sources for food and water supplies. Transport, utilities, and communication networks across the country are fragile and limited, and a lack of redundancy may impact disaster preparedness and response. Transport between atolls is limited, and costs are high for shipping. Meanwhile, the country relies heavily on imported goods, particularly processed foods. Food security is threatened because of this reliance and because subsistence agriculture is exposed to hazards. Water insecurity is an even greater threat. Because groundwater supplies are limited and exposed to saltwater intrusion, fresh water comes mainly from rainfall. Housing construction varies, but the simple construction techniques used for most housing structures leave them susceptible to damage. Finally, the country's geography and limited resources will be obstacles to delivering timely health care and other services during disaster responses.

Coping Capacity

RMI's DM structure is underpinned by policies and legislation. Recent laws build upon previous legislation first instituted in the late 1990s. National DM plans have a community-centered approach, utilizing both traditional and formal societal networks. Structurally, the National Disaster Council operates and oversees DM at a strategic level, while the National Emergency Operations Committee manages operational activities. The National Disaster Management Office oversees coordination of DM and is responsible for disaster response plans. The National Emergency Operations Center is the facility in Majuro from which the National Disaster Management Office operates, coordinating activities during an emergency.

The country also makes up for its limited resources through active engagement with regional and international partners. Its bilateral relationship with the United States (U.S.) is among the most important. RMI entered a Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the U.S. in 1986. Under the agreement, the U.S. is responsible for the defense of RMI and provides economic assistance, while RMI provides the U.S. with access to its land and waterways for strategic purposes. U.S. assistance based on the COFA also supports health, infrastructure, and disaster preparedness programs. Because of the close ties underpinned by the COFA, RMI can rely on the U.S. for national security and support during large-scale disasters.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

The small island nation of RMI is comprised of 29 atolls, 5 islands, and over 1,200 islets. Its isolated location and widely scattered and low-lying atolls expose it to a range of natural hazards. Some two-thirds of the country's population of less than 40,000 people are crowded into the two major urban centers – Majuro and Ebeye. These densely populated areas are at higher risk of disasters due to overcrowding and the potential that a disaster response will overwhelm limited services and infrastructure. Meanwhile, remote outer-islands communities are also at risk from hazard impacts, as emergency relief may be delayed due to logistics and communications challenges. RMI's relationship with the U.S. is the islands' main economic driver, and the U.S. will likely be one of the key international responders to any disaster the country faces.

Geography and Environment

As a small and remote island nation, RMI's distance from major regional and international responders increases the potential challenges it faces during disaster response. Its low-lying atolls and islands are vulnerable to a range of hydrometeorological hazards.

RMI is in the central Pacific Ocean, north of the equator. Its nearest neighbors are the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) to the west, Wake Island to the north, and Kiribati and Nauru to the south.[1] The country comprises 29 coral atolls and 5 low-lying coral islands with over 1,200 islets in two almost parallel island chains that stretch over 1,287 kilometers (km; 800 miles [mi]) roughly northwest to southeast. The chains are around 200 km (125 mi) apart. The Ratak (Sunrise) chain is located in the east, and the Ralik (Sunset) chain is located in the west. The average elevation of the atolls is only 2 meters (m; 6.6 feet [ft]) above sea level.[2] The highest atolls or islands do not rise more than 6 m (20 ft) above high tide.[3] Figure 1 shows a map of the Marshall Islands.[4]

Total land area is just 181 km² (70 mi²) spread over more than 2 million km² (770,000



Figure 1: Map of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

mi²) of ocean. At 97% of its territory, RMI has the world's largest share of territory consisting of water.[5] The country shares maritime borders with FSM, Kiribati, and Nauru.[6]

Kwajalein Atoll, in the central Ralik chain, is the largest atoll and lagoon complex in the world; the lagoon covers 2,176 km² (840 mi²), although its land area is only 15.5 km² (6 mi²).[7] Most of the atolls of RMI consist of an oval-shaped coral reef surrounding a lagoon, with islets lying along the coral reef. Coconut trees, pandanus palms, and breadfruit trees are the main vegetation, but the Ratak islands and islets tend to be more wooded than those of the Ralik chain. The soil is generally sandy and poor for agriculture.[8]

The climate is tropical, generally hot and humid, with trade winds throughout the year. However, the trade winds are interrupted during the summer season by the movement of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ). As the ICTZ moves northward during the northern hemisphere summer, its convective influence can also deliver short, intense storms over RMI.[9]

The northeast trade wind belt brings trade winds from roughly December to April, with winds weaker from May to November. Average temperatures are relatively constant at approximately 27°C (80.6°F). Precipitation varies along the parallel island chains due to the relatively wide separation between north and south. In the southern atolls, rainfall is heavy and can average as much as 1,524 millimeters (mm; 160 inches [in]) per year, while the dry, northern atolls may only average 508 mm (20 in). Some of the northern atolls are uninhabited due to insufficient precipitation.

The country experiences two seasons – wet and dry – with the wet season stretching between May and November. October and November are the wettest months during the rainy period.[10] The islands experience a dry season running from around mid-December to April.[11]

In addition to the ICTZ, RMI's climate is influenced by the El Niño – Southern Oscillation (ENSO); compared to ENSO-neutral phases, the El Niño and La Niña phases may increase the possibility of extreme weather events. An El Niño event may bring drought, while a La Niña event generally results in wetter-than-normal conditions and may influence rainfall, cyclones, and flooding.

Society and Demographics

The estimated population is 36,914 people.[12] Over two-thirds of the population lives in either Majuro or Ebeye. The rest of the population resides in traditional villages on the outer islands.[13] Photo 1 shows Majuro, the capital.[14]



Photo 1: Majuro, Capital of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

Majuro, the capital, is home to around half of the population on just 9.71 km² (3.75 mi²) of land; its population density stands at 2,384 people per km² (6,175 people per mi²).[15] Ebeye, on Kwajalein, is considered one of the most densely populated areas in the world with around 9,614 people living across its 0.31 km² (0.12 mi²) of land. Its population density stands at 41,667 people per km² (107,917 per mi²),[16] while the population density of Kwajalein Atoll overall is 596 people per km² (1,546 people per mi²). For comparison, the country's total population density is 233 people per km² (605 people per mi²).[17]

Steady urbanization has created the concentration of people in Majuro and Ebeye. In 2021, 78% of the population lived on urban atolls compared to 74% in 2011 and 65% in 1999.[18] People from the outer islands have often moved to population centers in search of employment. Additionally, many young Marshallese work abroad in Hawai'i, Guam, or the continental United States.

Estimated at 21.2 births per 1,000 residents, RMI had the 61st-highest birth rate in the world in 2024. Although the rate of population growth has raised concerns about RMI's limited land and fragile natural resources, the pressure valve of out-migration to U.S. states and territories has relieved some concerns. Nonetheless, the population is young, with around one-third (30%) of people under the age of 15 years. Life expectancy is 77.5 years for females and 73 years for males.[19]

The culture of the islands is strongly influenced by the history of U.S. involvement in the region. This influence is particularly evident in terms of language and religion. Missionaries from the U.S. arrived in the islands in the 1850s and introduced Christianity, the religion most commonly followed today. However, there is no official religion.[20] Meanwhile, Marshallese and English are both official languages. Marshallese is spoken by approximately 98% of the population, and English is widely spoken as a second language.[21]

Diaspora – Marshallese in the U.S.

Increasing numbers of Marshallese are migrating to U.S. states and territories in search of education and employment, with the largest population centers in Arkansas and Hawai'i.[22] Outmigration to the U.S. has been a significant trend in the past 15-20 years, with more than 25,000 Marshallese living in the U.S.[23] According to the Marshall Islands Social Security Administration, since 2011, around one-third of the population has relocated to the U.S.[24]

Around 10,000 Marshallese live in Hawai'i.[25] However, the Marshallese community in Arkansas is the largest population of Marshallese living in the U.S. These 15,000-18,000 residents are primarily located in northwest Arkansas - in Springdale, Fayetteville, and Rogers. Springdale has the largest population, with more than 12,000 Marshallese residing there. There are smaller pockets of Marshallese found in nearby communities in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri. Families have migrated for employment and educational opportunity but face challenges due to language barriers, transportation limitations, and low-wage employment.[26]

According to the Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese in Springdale Arkansas, trends that affect Marshallese living there include poverty, food insecurity, high eviction rates, health disparities, language barriers, poor access to health care, high maternal and infant mortality rates, and high incidence of tuberculosis, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses.[27]

Vulnerable Groups

Disaster impacts can be experienced differently by different groups within a society. Individual and group characteristics can mean that some people suffer greater impacts and worse outcomes than others. Geographic location, economic status, gender, age, and disability status, among other characteristics, may contribute to obstacles to preparation for or

recovery from disasters.

The following groups highlight some of the ways vulnerability increases risk.

Labor Migrants and People Living in Poverty

Using the national measure of poverty, 7.2% of the population lived below the basic needs poverty line in 2019-2020, according to the latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey.[28] Urban areas where pockets of poverty concentrate are also highly exposed to hazards; in part, this exposure is related to the prevalence of low-lying areas where mangrove protection has diminished and land is exposed to coastal erosion. These elements are exacerbated by overpopulation in urban centers. Impoverished urban residents lack the financial and material resources to properly prepare for or mitigate disaster impacts. Recent migrants from outer islands to urban centers may also move into relatives' homes, an action that adds to family burdens and overcrowding in family units. Concurrently, recent migrants who do not have familial support are at greater risk of falling into poverty because of a lack of available resources. Recent migrants may also face discrimination from existing residents.[29]

An additional factor influences the incidence of poverty. The U.S. is both a major element in the domestic RMI economy and a destination for Marshallese citizens seeking employment in U.S. states or territories. As ever more Marshallese do opt for migration to the U.S., opportunities for those who are unable or unwilling to make the move may dwindle and leave more people with fewer resources.

Dependence on the U.S. for job opportunities is seen as a main cause of poverty among RMI's elderly. Elderly people (aged 60 years and older), who make up around 6% of the total population,[30] are at risk of food insecurity, particularly after a disaster has struck and especially if they do not have family members remitting funds from work in the U.S. Elders in poverty on the outer islands may lack access to health care. Elders living in poverty may also experience inadequate housing, which increases their vulnerability to hazards.[31] Finally, older populations can experience age-related obstacles such as limited mobility, failing health, and lack of access to hazard information. These factors may lead to difficulties with safely moving away from hazards and inability to immediately evacuate from natural disasters.

Outer-Island Residents

In RMI, remote, outer-island communities do not have access to some public services or to resilient communication networks and are likely to have to wait longer for disaster relief than residents of urbanized atolls.

Residents on outer islands can face more food insecurity following disasters if subsistence crops have been damaged or destroyed. The ability to divert imported food stocks from urbanized atolls for use as relief supplies is a costly and inefficient option as urbanized atolls' own food security would then be threatened. Even during normal times, outer islands' access to imported foods is limited by these communities' small purchasing power. When a disaster strikes, these communities will not have had the opportunity to stockpile food.

People Living with Disabilities

People living with disabilities make up around 7.6% of RMI's population.[32] These people and others with health issues are more vulnerable due to challenges with evacuating or moving away from disaster areas, a lack of shelters equipped for people living with disabilities, difficulty accessing disaster communications or early warnings, and insufficient resources to prepare. Some international groups are assisting to ensure people living with disabilities are included in disaster risk reduction planning and projects. For example, the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, with support from the Government of Australia, is supporting work to incorporate disability considerations such as ensuring accessibility in public buildings and infrastructure for World Bank-funded projects in RMI.[33]

Residents of Nuclear Testing Areas

The U.S. carried out 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands during the period 1946-1958; they included 23 tests at Bikini Atoll and 44 tests at Enewetak Atoll. Before the nuclear tests, the approximately 150 Enewetak Atoll residents were relocated to Ujelang Atoll, and the approximately 165 Bikini Atoll residents were relocated to Rongarik Atoll, then to Kwajalein Atoll, and finally to Kili Island. Two additional atolls, Rongelap and Utrōk (or Utrik), were unexpectedly affected by fallout from the 1 March 1954 Castle-BRAVO test. The residents of the two atolls were evacuated to Kwajalein Atoll before returning to Utrik in June 1954 and Rongelap in June 1957.[34] As of the 2021 census, 264 people lived on Utrik, while Rongelap was uninhabited.[35]

Cleanup efforts at Bikini and Enewetak Atolls began in the late 1960s, and a trial resettlement brought 139 residents back to Bikini Atoll in 1972. However, residents were again relocated to Kili Island in the late 1970s after observations that radioactive levels in locally grown food and water exceeded U.S. safety standards. A program was instituted to monitor the radiological environment at Bikini, which remains uninhabited.[36]

In 1977, the U.S. Defense Nuclear Agency initiated an extensive cleanup program of Enewetak Atoll. It included moving radioactive debris and soil into the "Cactus Crater," a nuclear test crater on the north end of Runit Island in Enewetak, and capping it with concrete to protect it from erosion. The structure, known as the "Runit Dome," was completed in 1980 and contains over 76,500 cubic meters (100,000 cubic yards) of radioactively contaminated soil and debris. Residents returned to Enewetak in 1980, but Runit Island remains uninhabited and was designated off-limits by the RMI government.[37] Meanwhile, the Runit Dome remains a concern to the people of Enewetak. A 2020 U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) report determined that a main pathway for human exposure would be consumption of marine wildlife that had ingested contaminated material, but it concluded that material from the containment structure does not have a measurable impact on the surrounding radiological environment of Enewetak Atoll nor on the health of the people.

Sea level rise and environmental changes are concerns for residents across RMI, including for Runit Dome. The structure is partly protected on the ocean side of the dome, but less protection exists on the lagoon side. In 2009, a high-tide storm event opened a channel from the ocean reef to the structure and deposited debris on the bottom segment of the dome's western side. The DOE determined that the structure remains vulnerable to wave overwash, flooding caused by storm surge, and the potential effects of sea level rise.[38] In 2022, the DOE conducted the "Impact of Climate Change on Runit Dome in the Marshall Islands" study to address these concerns. It concluded that changes to the radiological environment of the inhabited Enewetak Island would be less than 0.1% under the worst-case scenario of serious storm conditions and projected sea level rise over 70 years.[39] The DOE, which is required to visually assess the structural integrity of Runit Dome every four years, indicated in its 2022 report that, while cosmetic defects are visible, the structure remains sound and the concrete cap continues to adequately protect the encapsulated material.[40]

The 67 nuclear tests caused extensive environmental contamination and long-term health impacts among residents. The U.S. recognized the effects of its testing and accepted responsibility pertaining to the tests and regarding the people of the Marshall Islands. This acknowledgement is reflected in the COFA and related agreements. The U.S. Department of the Interior, primarily through the Office of Insular Affairs, has administered several programs and payments of funds related to health and education for the populations of Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap, and Utrik. Additionally, the DOE provides cancer screening and treatment through the DOE Special Medical Care Program for individuals from Rongelap and Utrik who were directly impacted by the Castle-BRAVO detonation in 1954.[41]

Women

In RMI, around 37% of women are unemployed. Additionally, while some 66% of men are classified as economically active, only 33% of women participate in the formal workforce. Culturally, men are usually seen as the breadwinner of the family and have more economic power. Women who are employed make, on average, US$3,000 less annually than men in the same occupation. Women are also less likely to be involved with development and decision-making forums at the local level. Because they are not as involved in decision-making, their potential post-disaster needs may be overlooked during planning or training projects.

Because of their lower workforce participation, lower pay rates, and unequal access to formal power structures, women are less likely to have the resources necessary to act when a disaster strikes. They have less ability to prepare – e.g., purchasing an emergency stockpile of food – respond immediately – e.g., move to a safer location - or take the time away from caring for family members to access relief programs. Finally, rates of domestic violence tend to increase as stressors rise in the wake of a disaster, and women commonly report more incidents of domestic violence after disasters.[42]

Youth

RMI's younger people, the largest age cohort, are characterized by various factors that increase their vulnerability to the impacts of disasters. They are likely to be unemployed because of a lack of educational and job opportunities. While national unemployment stands at 9.8%, around one-quarter (24.9%) of youth are unemployed and 40% are not in employment, education, or training.[43] Hazard events can impact education; in past cases, schools have closed after drought led to a lack of drinking water and reduced access to sanitation. When schools reopen, students may not be able to attend if they are needed by their families to help clean up and rehabilitate homes. Disruptions to education coupled with a lack of opportunity on outer islands can mean that youth are both unable to build financial and material resilience and insufficiently educated to understand hazard and risk information.

Government

RMI has a parliamentary system of government at the national level and 24 municipalities that deliver local-level administration. There is a means to integrate traditional leadership as advisors to the executive cabinet. For 40 years, the country and the U.S. have maintained a bilateral COFA that is the basis for their relationship and that delineates a way forward for U.S. government assistance to be delivered to RMI in case of a disaster.

RMI's constitution was adopted in 1979 when the country became independent. It provides for a unicameral parliamentary system. The legislature, the Nitijela, seats members (senators) elected to represent each of RMI's 24 electoral constituencies. There are 33 senators who serve 4-year terms. Senators elect the President from among members of the Nitijela. The President is both Head of State and Head of Government. A consultative upper house for traditional leaders, the Council of Irooj, comprises 12 tribal chiefs and advises the cabinet on customary law and traditional practice.[44]

Within the executive branch, the President nominates the Cabinet from members of the Nitijela, and Cabinet members are appointed by the Nitijela speaker.

The judicial branch comprises a Supreme Court and subordinate courts – a High Court, District Courts, a Traditional Rights Court, and Community Courts.[45]

At the local level, there are 24 municipalities: Ailinglaplap, Ailuk, Arno, Aur, Bikini & Kili, Ebon, Enewetak & Ujelang, Jabat, Jaluit, Kwajalein, Lae, Lib, Likiep, Majuro, Maloelap, Mejit, Mili, Namorik, Namu, Rongelap, Ujae, Utrik, Wotho, and Wotje.[46]

Compact of Free Association (COFA)

RMI became a sovereign state in 1979 and signed the COFA with the U.S. in 1983; the COFA entered into force in 1986. The agreement makes the U.S. responsible for

external security and defense of the territorial integrity of RMI, and it specifies that the U.S. will provide economic and financial assistance for the islands. In return, RMI provides the U.S. with unlimited and exclusive access to its land and waterways for strategic purposes.[47] Aside from providing security and defense, U.S. assistance also supports health, education, infrastructure, and disaster preparedness.[48]

The first financial package of the COFA lasted from 1986 to 2003. A new financial package was negotiated in 2003 and covered 2003-2023,[49] and the most recent agreement was negotiated in 2024 and entered force in 2025. The current agreement is valued at US$2.3 billion for fiscal years 2024-2043. It also includes greater support for the environment, climate change adaptation, health care, education, and infrastructure.[50] The agreement allows RMI citizens to enter, work, study, and live in the U.S. without a visa.[51]

The U.S. Department of the Interior is responsible for oversight and coordination of Compact funding. Additional services are available to RMI under the COFA; they include the U.S. Postal Service,[52] Federal Aviation Administration, Small Business Administration, DOE, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education, and Department of State.[53] The compact also entitles the U.S. to use the missile testing range on Kwajalein Atoll. RMI hosts the U.S. Army Garrison - Kwajalein Atoll / Reagan Missile Test Site, a key installation in the U.S. missile defense network. The U.S. Department of War (DoW), under a Military Use and Operating Rights Agreement, a subsidiary agreement of the COFA, allows the U.S. use of the missile test range until 2066, with an option of extension until 2086.[54]

During reopened negotiations in 1983, RMI specifically sought to address provisions regarding compensation for the people of the four atolls affected by U.S. nuclear tests. The U.S. agreed to set up a separate fund for the affected people and established an open-ended fund to cover personal injury claims; it agreed to set up a joint U.S.-Marshallese claims tribunal. A further agreement set up a fund to improve living conditions on Ebeye Island, where all Marshallese working on the missile range and base reside.[55]

Economic Profile

RMI's economy is small, with a small labor force and high dependence on U.S. government assistance, mostly through the COFA. It is, therefore, closely linked to the U.S. economy and uses the U.S. dollar as its currency. Beyond COFA-linked grants, fisheries and remittances from Marshallese living and working in the U.S. contribute to the economy. The country is highly dependent on imports – especially food – and is, therefore, badly exposed to global disruptions of supply chains, transportation, or financial systems. Subsistence agriculture that is prevalent on many of the country's islands is also highly exposed to natural hazards, and a substantial portion of the economy could be wiped out by a large-scale disaster.

While natural disasters are a threat to RMI's economy, "economic disasters" arising from geopolitical conflict and economic fluctuations also threaten to impact livelihoods in the country. Increases in global oil and fuel prices stemming from the conflict in the Middle East in early 2026 prompted RMI's President Hilda C. Heine to issue an Executive Order Declaring a State of Economic Emergency on 26 March 2026. Under the Executive Order, the Cabinet invoked its emergency powers under the Disaster Risk Management Act 2023. The State of Economic Emergency was issued to mitigate any potential negative effects due to RMIs heavy reliance on imported goods coupled with the high cost of shipping, which threatened to negatively impact the country's US$291 million economy due to higher fuel costs.[56]

The economy is primarily constrained due to RMI's small population, limited natural resources, and remote location. The location results in high costs for transportation, energy, and communications.[57] Additionally, natural hazards and population decline through out-migration to the U.S. curb economic growth potential. The occurrence of natural hazard

events is also harmful to the economy as these events can devastate water resources, electricity supplies, coastal ecosystems, fish stocks, and livelihoods.[58]

A key portion of RMI's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is delivered through the sale of fishing rights under the multilateral U.S.-Pacific Islands tuna fisheries treaty.[59] Although this revenue can be extremely volatile due to shifts in the ocean environment and the participation of more or fewer vessels in any given year, revenue from fisheries can make up 30% of GDP.[60] Remittances from Marshallese living in the U.S. also comprise a significant part of the economy. In 2019, Marshallese workers based in the U.S. delivered remittances that made up some 13% of GDP.[61] External grants, taxation, and shipping registry fees also deliver revenue to government coffers. On the outer islands, the production of copra is the main source of income. Subsistence farming, fishing, and small-scale livestock activity are the major economic activities outside the urban centers.[62]

While the country has notched a growing GDP in recent years, it experienced negative growth (-2.21% in 2020 and -2.5% in 2021) due to the onset of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic during which the government instituted travel bans that impacted sectors such as the tourist industry. Damage to hundreds of jobs was mitigated by financial assistance from the international donor community.[63] More recently, GDP growth for 2026 is estimated to hit 3.7%[64] after notching 2.5-3.0% gains during recovery from the pandemic.[65]

The RMI government is the country's largest employer and U.S. Army Garrison–Kwajalein Atoll is the second largest. Employment and more modern infrastructure have led to population movement to the two urban centers at Kwajalein (Ebeye) and Majuro. Commercial and retail sectors are the other major employers. Fisheries, copra, handicrafts, and subsistence agriculture are significant employment sectors.[66]

RMI has few natural resources – primarily tuna fisheries, phosphate deposits, and deep-sea materials. The agricultural sector is comprised mostly of subsistence farming on small farms. The two most important commercial crops are coconut and breadfruit. Other commercial industries include tuna processing, handicrafts, and copra, which the government subsidizes. Exports are mainly fish, copra products, and handicrafts. Imports far surpass exports.[67] The principal import is processed foods; other major imports include machinery and transport equipment, manufactured goods, and fuel, mainly from Australia, Japan, and the U.S. The tourist industry employs less than 10% of the labor force but is seen by some as a hopeful future industry with growth potential due to RMI being one of the world's four coral atoll nations, with world-class fishing and diving locations.[68]

While the economy is largely driven by the U.S., it also depends on foreign aid from Australia, Japan, and Taiwan, as well as multilateral development organizations such as the Asian Development Bank and International Monetary Fund. Additionally, organizations such as the Green Climate Fund, World Bank, and Global Environmental Facility provide finances for climate-related issues and development. These organizations provide a significant amount of funds; for instance, as of 2020, the Green Climate Fund had provided RMI some US$78 million for projects.[69]

In part, this funding reflects the dire consequences that a severe hazard event could have. In one projection, the World Bank estimated that a 1-in-10-year cyclone event combined with a 0.5-m (1.64-ft) rise in sea levels could affect over 50% of urban areas in Majuro and more than 80% in Ebeye and result in annual damage of around 30% of GDP.[70] One such historical hazard event was the 2015-2016 drought, which resulted in economic damage estimated at US$4.9 million, equivalent to some 3.4% of GDP. Broken down by sector, the agriculture, tourism, and commerce sectors sustained 43% of damage, the infrastructure sector sustained 32% of damage, and the education, health, and housing sectors sustained 24% of damage.[71]

DISASTER PROFILE

RMI is exposed to a range of natural hazards. Low-lying atolls are exposed to extreme weather events and geophysical hazards. Long-term environmental hazards exist due to nuclear contamination from past testing. Environmental changes may pose a threat to the Runit Dome, meant to contain nuclear waste from testing, and hazards may exacerbate the situation. Hazard events can also have significant impacts on food and water security, mobility, and economic growth. Responders would face traveling long distances, especially to far-flung outer atolls, limited infrastructure, and high costs to transport emergency supplies. Economic damage from disasters has also been significant considering RMI's small economy.

Hazards

RMI is exposed to coastal erosion, disease outbreaks, drought, flooding, king tides, sea level rise, tropical cyclones, and tsunami. Although it lies within the Pacific "Ring of Fire," the country is at relatively low risk of seismic activity. It may be susceptible to impacts from tsunamis generated elsewhere in the region. The country has no active volcanoes.

Disease Outbreaks

RMI has experienced several disease outbreaks in recent years – primarily chikungunya, COVID-19, dengue, hepatitis A, and Zika. Other infectious diseases that sometimes affect the islands include tuberculosis and malaria.[72] Like the rest of the world, RMI was affected by COVID-19 during the global pandemic, although it avoided cases until August 2022 when the first community transmission was recorded in Majuro.

In the first half of 2015, RMI experienced its first ever outbreak of chikungunya. While cases remained concentrated in Majuro, the disease had also spread to outer islands.[73] Dengue is endemic in the country. The most recent outbreak was in March 2021, but there was also an outbreak in May 2020 and a major outbreak that ran from May 2019 into latter 2020.[74] The country has been affected by hepatitis A and experienced a nearly year-long outbreak in 2016-2017. Almost 200 people, mostly children, were affected.[75] The Zika virus also affected RMI, much as it did other Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICT). An outbreak occurred in April 2016; surveillance found 35 cases.[76]

Drought

Drought has affected RMI over the years and delivered impacts to fresh water supply and food security. As freshwater supplies on atolls are limited and fragile, drought is a serious issue. It affects agriculture and the economy, impacts human health, and results in increased fire risk.

Because of the population's reliance on rain for drinking water and crops, periods of drought can become emergencies due to both food insecurity and the spread of disease that can occur when clean water is not available. The worst drought of the last 20 years began in 2015; by May 2016, almost the entire population had been affected. No official statistics exist to confirm displacement caused by the drought, but absenteeism rates for elementary schools on Ailinglaplap and Arno suggested that families were forced to move.[77]

An earlier severe drought started in April 2013, and it led to the government declaring a state of emergency followed by a state of disaster the following month. Up to 6,400 people across 15 atolls were forced to survive on less than 1 liter (0.25 gallons) of water per day. Many resorted to drinking brackish well water, which led to various health problems. Breadfruit and banana crops were devastated, and the production of dried coconut meat (copra) was also impacted.[78]

Rainfall on RMI is affected by ENSO, which is a climate pattern involving changes in the temperature of waters in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean and the patterns of sea level pressure, lower- and upper-level

winds, and rainfall. El Niño and La Niña are the extreme phases of the ENSO cycle. An El Niño event will typically result in less-than-normal rainfall and a threat of drought, while a La Niña event generally results in higher-than-normal rainfall.[79]

Coastal Erosion

As a country of low-lying islands, RMI faces the threat of coastal erosion, which not only decreases land area but also increases risk to infrastructure since many buildings and homes are built close to the shoreline. Erosion causes the shoreline to move inland and exposes infrastructure to wave inundation and other coastal flooding events. Erosion can be caused by various hazards, including tropical cyclones, tsunami, king tides, or sea level rise. Offshore reef structures provide a barrier for natural processes that may contribute to erosion; however, RMI's reefs have been degraded due to human activities such as shoreline development and fishing. Additionally, run-off and sewage discharge have been blamed for the reduced ability of the reef to calcify and for algae to overgrow the coral.[80]

Flooding

Flooding can be caused by precipitation events, wind-driven waves, king tides, and storm surge. Extreme rainfall can lead to significant flooding across RMI's islands. Single-day rainfall is often linked to floods of limited extent, while multi-day rainfall often leads to flooding with a broader spatial footprint. The various flooding events can damage roads, houses, and other infrastructure and carry economic impacts.

Wind-driven waves around RMI are influenced by trade winds seasonally and by ENSO interannually. The wind-wave climate shows variation between the country's northern and southern islands, but in general, wave heights are greater in the period December-March than they are during June-September.[81]

In recent years, significant wave-flood events have been recorded. On 20 January 2024, an offshore winter storm system in the northern Pacific drove a significant storm surge that impacted Roi Namur Islet in the northern sector of Kwajalein Atoll. Strong winds and waves from the storm system generated a swell that affected Roi Namur and islets in Arno Atoll, as well as the runway in Ailinglaplap.[82] Roi Namur and the islets in Arno experienced severe damage to agriculture and infrastructure and disruptions to livelihoods.[83]

Historically, the largest economic damage felt in the country stemmed from storm surges. A storm surge-driven flood in 2013 resulted in seawalls breaking and flooding on Majuro Atoll, where the airport was forced to close. In 2008, a State of Emergency was declared when storm surges impacted Majuro and Ebeye, where roads, homes, and cemeteries were damaged. At least 600 people were displaced by the event.[84]

King Tides

"King tides" is a popular term used to describe exceptionally high tides. They are the highest tides of the year and are an astronomical phenomenon resulting from the combined gravitational forces of the moon and sun. They are generally not associated with environmental change. Higher-than-normal tides usually occur during a new or full moon and when the moon is at its perigee, or closest point of approach to the earth.[85] King tides are associated with both the highest high tides of the year and the lowest low tides of the year; however, most associate the risk of king tides with extreme high tides and coastal inundation. A king tide event is most damaging when combined with a hazard such as a storm; the combination can bring additional wave inundation. As sea levels rise, king tides are expected to be more damaging and may include additional loss of land due to erosion.[86]

In 2014, RMI experienced one of its worst king tide events. On 3 March, tidal surges during the morning and afternoon high tides resulted in inundation of communities. Waves washed over shorelines and sent water and debris across roads and properties. The RMI government declared a state of emergency. In Majuro, 70 homes were damaged, with some houses destroyed. Around 940 people were

evacuated. Arno was severely impacted, and the outer islands of Mili, Maloelap, Kili, and Wotje were also affected. Tinak Health Center on Arno was destroyed. Most breadfruit, pandanus, and banana trees in affected areas were destroyed. Around 80% of sanitation facilities were affected and many household water catchments were damaged, while community water tanks were contaminated.[87]

Sea Level Rise

Sea level rise is one of the major hazards for RMI where most of the population resides close to the shoreline and the average elevation is only 2 m (6.6 ft) above sea level. Rising seas can increase the risk of erosion, wave inundation, saltwater contamination of groundwater, and flooding caused by storms, tsunami, or king tides. Sea level rise threatens the Marshall Islands' ecosystems, infrastructure, food and water security, public health, and important cultural heritage sites. When combined, the multiple risks sea level rise poses threaten the long-term stability and habitability of RMI.[88]

According to a study conducted by the government and the World Bank in 2021, a 1-m (3.3-ft) rise in sea level would mean 40% of buildings in Majuro would be inundated and entire islands would disappear. It would lead to loss of land and homes, increased coastal erosion, increased salinization in soil and groundwater sources, and loss of livelihoods. Increased salinization would also lead to crop damage and, ultimately, food insecurity.[89]

In May 2022, the World Bank approved a US$30 million "Republic of the Marshall Islands Urban Resilience Project," which includes the construction of coastal protection including sea walls, dikes, and embankments, to protect infrastructure in Majuro.[90] More recently, a multi-million-dollar project started in 2025 saw the building of a 1.81-km (1.12-mi) sea wall on the ocean side of Ebeye. The barrier is being formed by 59,000 metric tons (65,000 tons) of rock shipped from the United Arab Emirates.[91] In August 2025, construction for a 45-m (150-ft) sea wall and breakwater began in a high-risk area in Delap on Majuro Atoll.[92] While generally considered effective, the building of sea walls is logistically challenging as heavy material sometimes must be sourced from outside the country and heavy machinery must be delivered to remote islands and atolls.[93]

Tropical Cyclones

RMI borders the Pacific Ocean's "typhoon belt," but direct hits by storms are relatively rare.[94] Pacific cyclones generally develop to the east of RMI and only occasionally subject the country to their full force. However, when a tropical cyclone does occur, the damage can be devastating. The northern atolls are more exposed to the highest categories of cyclones than the southern atolls. The Northwest Pacific cyclone season runs roughly from July to November and peaks in late August and early September.[95]

Despite the relatively low risk, RMI's population is vulnerable to impacts, particularly wave inundation and flooding. Storm surge with elevated water and waves has caused damage to the low-lying atolls of the country. The coral reefs that fringe the atolls serve as the only natural line of defense. Water clearance over the reef is usually shallow and leaves coastlines vulnerable to stronger ocean surges.[96]

When cyclones form in the region, they tend to form northwest of RMI. Additionally, because of the islands' location close to the equator and at a longitude where most cyclones are just beginning to form, most cyclones do not attain their full strength near RMI but farther north and west. For example, in March 2015, although Super Typhoon Maysak affected parts of RMI, it caused severe damage to the west, across neighboring FSM.[97]

The cyclones that most recently impacted RMI include Typhoon Bavi on 11 March 2015. It caused extensive damage on Ebeye and Kwajalein. Damage across Kwajalein amounted to over US$1 million as the roofs of four buildings and other structures were destroyed. There was also some coastal flooding and considerable wind damage on Ebeye.[98] RMI also experienced effects from the outer edges of Typhoons Pam, Maysak, and Dolphin

between March and May 2015.[99] Significant historical cyclones include Cyclone Anne ("Typhoon Roy"), which destroyed 350 homes, killed 1 person, and left as many as 3,500 people homeless in January 1988. Typhoon Zelda struck in 1991 and damaged 90% of the buildings on Ujae and Lae and 60% on Ebeye, where 5,000 people were left homeless.[100] In 1997, Typhoon Paka caused US$80 million in damage to crops and affected 70% of houses on Ailinglaplap.[101]

Separate from tropical cyclones, extratropical storms can produce waves that can travel long distances and affect RMI. An event in 1979 caused inundation across Majuro. In some areas, channels were cut across the island. An estimated 100-300 houses were destroyed, and many others were damaged. The event covered some areas in sediment and caused some US$26 million in property damage. Additionally, over 5,000 people were displaced by the event.[102]

Tsunami

Located within the Pacific "Ring of Fire," RMI is at some risk of tsunami. The most likely event would be a tsunami triggered by a major earthquake elsewhere in the region but that reaches the islands.

According to the "Homeowner's Handbook to Prepare for Natural Hazards: Republic of the Marshall Islands," while a tsunami wave will not reach as high in the islands as it would in areas with continental shelves, it will be able to cross over the atolls at full speed. People outside or on the ground floor of buildings may be washed out to sea. There is a higher risk if the tsunami coincides with high tide.

RMI has been affected by recent tsunamis, including on 11 March 2011, after the Great East Japan Earthquake; no casualties and no significant damage were reported in the country, as tsunami waves were estimated at less than 1 m (3 ft) when they reached RMI. Experts attributed this height to the character of the sub-surface sea floor.[103]

Disasters by Numbers

An examination of data about past disasters in a country can indicate how future hazard events may impact the country's people, economy, and land. This section breaks down available statistics from disaster events in RMI since the year 2000 to illuminate trends over time and space to understand what types of events may necessitate an appeal for international assistance and, therefore, potential international military support to civilian responders. Moreover, it may support practitioners working toward RMI's preparedness and capacity to mitigate hazard impacts.

The data used in this section come from the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters' Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT). The EM-DAT collects and makes available to the public data on the occurrence of disasters globally. It considers disasters to be events involving an unexpected and overwhelming harmful impact on human beings; for inclusion in the database, events must meet one of the following thresholds:

- At least 10 deaths (including dead and missing)
- At least 100 affected (people affected, injured, or homeless)
- A call for international assistance or an emergency declaration[104]

The data in EM-DAT derive from multiple sources, including UN agencies, national statistics and disaster offices, and national and international technical agencies and organizations. Because of the specific criteria set out by the database and its sources, there are data limitations.[105] In fact, for small island developing states like RMI, even small numbers of people affected may mean that a significant portion of their population sustained impacts from a hazard event. Moreover, a hazard event with minimal human impacts may still wreak devastation on livelihoods that, in a larger state, would be easily absorbed by national economic and political capacity. Nonetheless, EM-DAT data are used in this section because of their standardization and clarity.

EM-DAT records nine disasters in RMI for

the period January 2000-April 2026. All events originate from natural hazards rather than anthropogenic ones.[106]

Of the nine disasters recorded, four (44%) are droughts; storms and floods account for two events each (22% each); and there was one epidemic (11%). Figure 2 illustrates the proportions of disasters by hazard type for the 26-year period.

The timing of a disaster's onset is linked to seasonal cycles in the country. The influence of wider regional climate and weather patterns, especially ENSO means that the most common hazard type – drought – generally occurs in the first half of the year. When the El Niño phase of ENSO is particularly strong, dry conditions can begin to develop by mid-year. After September, rainfall declines, and precipitation amounts are well below average by the first few months of the following year. Recovery often does not begin until the wet season is well underway (June or July) in the year following the El Niño.[107]

Since the year 2000, droughts have been declared in January, February, and May. While dryness will have begun in the second half of the preceding year, the country's response mechanisms will not begin to address impacts until they reach the thresholds set for declaring the drought a disaster under national DM laws and frameworks.

In addition to the official onsets of four droughts in the past quarter century, Figure 3 illustrates the timing of two floods, two storms, and one epidemic.

The two January storms were both heavy rain events that also delivered storm surges; the effects included inland and coastal flooding.[108] Similarly, the March and December floods were both coastal flooding events tied to storm surges that coincided with high tides.[109] Storms that come outside the normal cyclone season (September-November) can combine with other seasonal effects to exacerbate high tides and wind direction to push water on-shore.

The most common hazard event – drought – is also the one that affects the most people. The four droughts recorded in the data set for

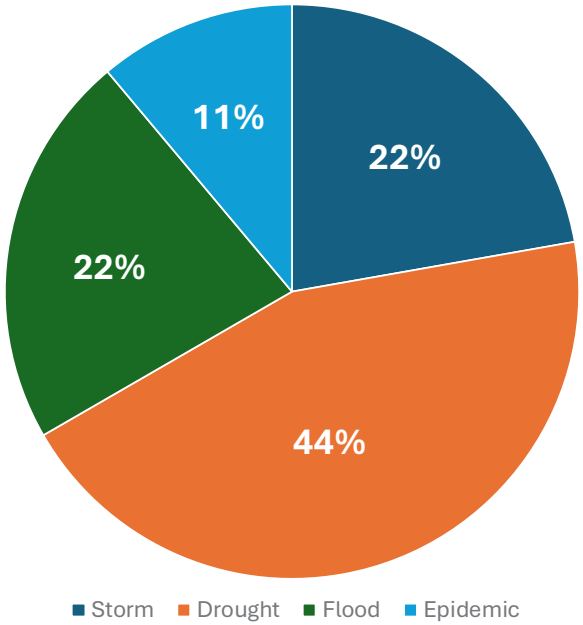


Figure 2: Percent of Disaster Events, by Hazard Type (January 2000-April 2026)

January 2000-April 2026 for RMI each affected thousands of people across the country. These effects include but are not limited to food and water insecurity, loss of livelihoods, and health impacts – water-borne disease, anemia, etc. – that follow months-long periods of dryness in already food- and water-insecure countries.

In a country with only about 40,000 people, a single event that affects thousands means that a substantial portion of the population has suffered from the event. A 2015 drought and a 2024 storm were recorded as each having affected some 20,000 people – half of the population. The implications for long-term socio-political and economic health of the entire country must be considered as secondary impacts although they lie outside the scope of the EM-DAT database and this examination.

Of note, the only recorded fatalities in the data set were six deaths during a cholera outbreak in 2000. The potential for long-term food and water insecurity to increase mortality after a drought or flooding event cannot be overstated; however, they lie outside the scope of the data set.

Figure 4 illustrates the prevalence of drought as the hazard with the greatest human toll in RMI.

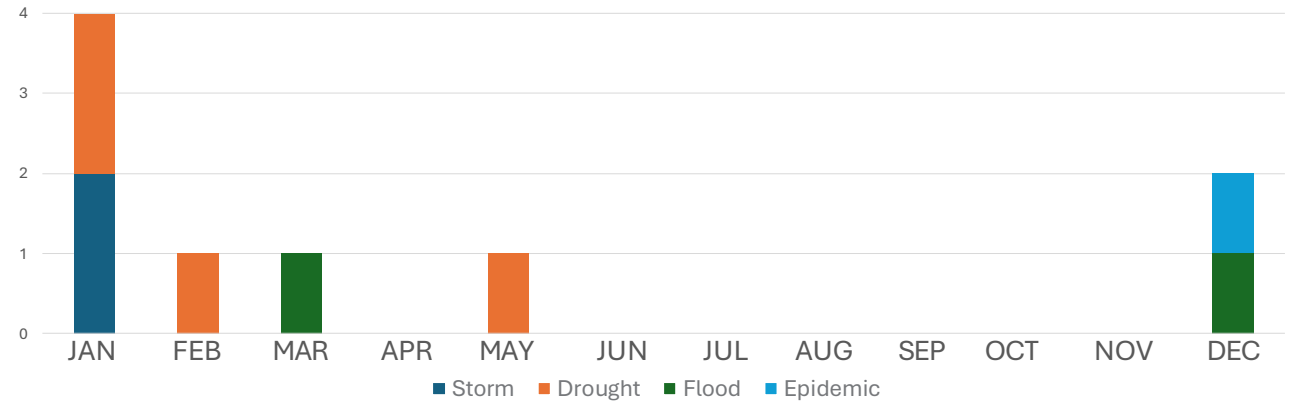


Figure 3: Occurrence of Disasters, by Hazard and Month of Onset (January 2000-April 2026)

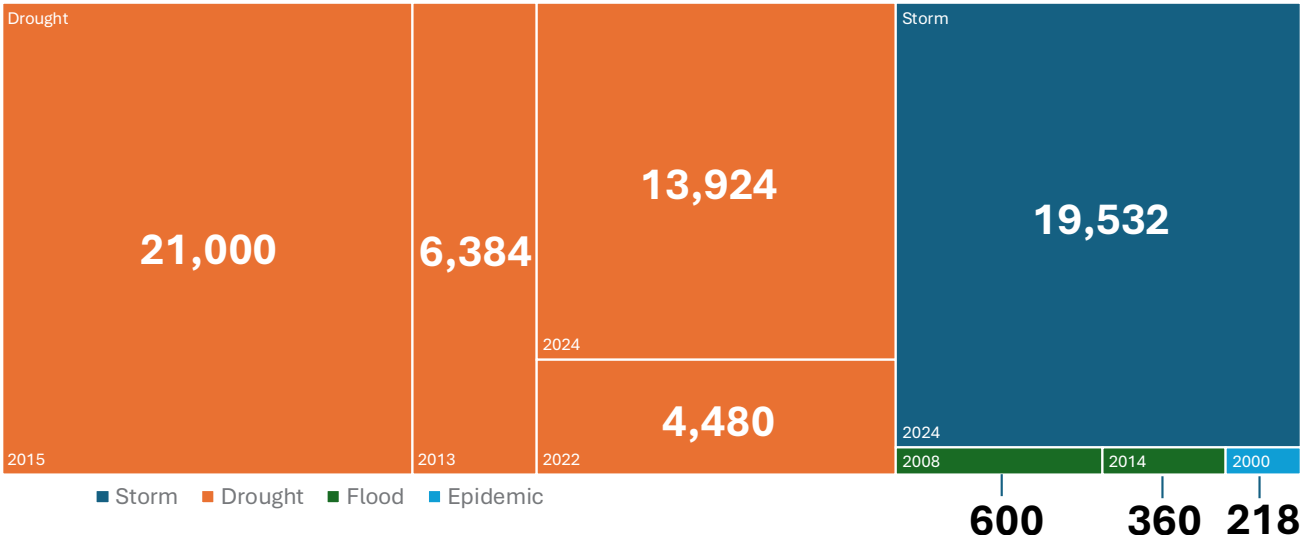


Figure 4: Number of People Affected, by Hazard Type and Event (January 2000-April 2026)

Note: The data set does not include a total number of affected people for the 2019 January storm.

Recent Disasters

The following are the major disaster events that have affected RMI over the past decade (2016-2026).

Storm Surge – January 2024

On 20 January 2024, an offshore winter storm system in the northern Pacific drove a storm surge that affected atolls and islets across RMI. It affected 19,532 people across 11 atolls and islets, including Ailinglaplap, Arno, Jabot, Jaluit, Kili, Kwajalein, Likiep, Mejit, Namorik, Namu, and Wotje. Kwajalein Atoll, particularly Roi Namur Islet, and Arno Atoll sustained the most severe damage, with homes, schools, and critical infrastructure destroyed or rendered non-operational. The storm's swell also affected the runway in Ailinglaplap.[110] NOAA assessed the event as more severe than the major flooding of December 2008.

In response, the IFRC allocated CHF 50,024 to the Marshall Islands Red Cross Society under a Disaster Relief Emergency Fund operation, conducted over eight months from 30 January to 30 September 2024. MIRCS deployed 38 staff and volunteers to conduct multi-sectoral needs assessments across nine of the eleven affected atolls, assessing 643 households to identify the most vulnerable populations. Immediate humanitarian assistance included food aid distributed to 42 households, non-food items such as blankets, hygiene supplies, and shelter toolkits, as well as 2,500 liters of clean water and 389 jerry cans delivered to 93 households

across Kwajalein and Arno atolls. Key challenges included high logistical costs, limited transportation to remote islets, tidal access constraints, and frequent flight cancellations to outer islands. The operation achieved 100% budget expenditure, with assessment findings shared with the RMI government and relevant agencies to inform continued disaster response planning.[111]

Drought – 2023-2024

Beginning around November 2023, islands and atolls across RMI experienced little rainfall. The drought that emerged lasted for months into 2024. In February 2024, communities normally reliant on rainwater for their fresh water were forced to rely on the thin, underground freshwater lens found on some islands. However, many communities affected by the storm surge in January 2024 lost access to even these marginal sources.[112] The situation worsened in March, with Kwajalein and Wotje going from abnormally dry to severe drought status; meanwhile, Majuro and Jaluit joined the abnormally dry category. Severe drought conditions affected over 5,200 people, or some 12.3% of the total population in 15 atolls and islands.[113]

Drought – 2021-2022

The Weather Service Office reported in late December 2021 that the northern Marshall Islands were seeing the early stages of drought. Mostly dry conditions persisted throughout January 2022 when a moderate drought declaration was introduced for Wotje and nearby atolls. On 1 February, the National Disaster Management Office activated the National Emergency Operations Center. It developed a response plan to address conditions on Aur, Ailuk, Jaluit, Lae, Lib, Likiep, Maloelap, Mejit, Wotho, Wotje, Mejjato/Ebadon, Utrik, Ujae, Namorik, Jabot, Ailinglaplap, and Namu. Conditions eased somewhat in May with the onset of heavy rains. However, by June, dry conditions lingered with extreme drought persisting in Wotje and nearby atolls and in islands north of Majuro; moderate drought was affecting Kwajalein and Ailinglaplap. More than 9,000 people across the islands were impacted.[114]

COVID-19 – 2020-2023

RMI reported no COVID-19 cases until 8 August 2022 when the first community transmission was recorded in Majuro. A State of Emergency was declared.[115] Widespread community transmission occurred in Majuro and Kwajalein Atolls. Schools were suspended, and mandatory mask-wearing was required. Ports were closed, and movement restrictions were implemented across all impacted islands.[116] Through local volunteer action, government resources, and support from the U.S. through COFA funds and programs, the country worked to lessen the impacts to society and the economy. As of 10 March 2023, when Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Research Center stopped tracking statistics, RMI had 15,649 confirmed cases and 17 deaths from the outbreak.[117]

Dengue Outbreak – 2019-2020

The worst dengue outbreak in RMI's history began in July 2019. As of mid-May 2020, RMI had reported more than 3,388 cases of dengue-like illness, of which more than 1,576 were confirmed in the laboratory. At least two deaths were reported.[118]

Initial cases were reported in Ebeye in May 2019, and transmission later occurred to Majuro and outer islands. The peak of the outbreak on Ebeye was in July-August 2019, but infections did not peak in Majuro until February 2020. Government Exposure Prevention Information Network teams were activated in July 2019, in early August additional health emergency protocols were activated. Twice-weekly health alert radio broadcasts, regular mass text messages, and the Ministry of Health Facebook page provided information about ongoing activities, situation reports, and warnings during the outbreak. As the situation evolved, a travel restriction was put in place that halted movement among islands and atolls. Public health officials were deployed to outer island health centers to ensure testing and treatment.[119]

Flooding – November 2019

On 27 November 2019, high tides and a wind-driven sea swell caused flooding in Majuro. Reports of waves up to 5 m (16 ft) were reported in the capital where waters flooded roads, deposited debris on roads and in yards, and temporarily cut off access to the airport. Some 200 residents were driven out of their homes by the flooding.[120]

Hepatitis A Outbreak – 2016-2017

From September 2016 through July 2017, the islands experienced a hepatitis A outbreak. Most of the people affected were children, with 8 years the median age of all people affected. Around 194 cases were reported. The country began immunization of contacts of patients in January 2017 and then launched subsequent immunization campaigns in Majuro in February and April 2017. No additional cases were reported after August 2017.[121]

King Tides – March 2016

On 10 March 2016, several hundred residents of Kili Island were forced to move when their homes were flooded by a king tide that coincided with a storm surge. The king tide also impacted parts of Majuro, where some roads were flooded, and debris was strewn across roads and in residents' yards. There were some reports of homes flooded in Majuro, but there were no reports of major damage or casualties as water only reached about 150 mm (6 in). In Kili, the Mayor reported families from the northern part of the island had moved to town areas because their houses had flooded.[122]

Drought – 2015-2016

Between 2015 and 2016, extremely low rainfall influenced by a severe El Niño event resulted in a drought. By May 2016, 21,000 people in RMI were affected.[123]

On 3 February 2016, the RMI President declared an emergency in response to intensifying drought conditions across the country as a strong El Niño affected rainfall. From December 2015, rainfall disruptions had been noted, and by February 2016, household water catchment supplies and other water storage on at least 13 atolls were depleted, and communities had run out of water. In its post-disaster assessment, the RMI government estimated that losses totaled approximately US$4.9 million, due to disruptions to national production in the agriculture, education, and industrial sectors, and increases in the costs of electricity, water and sanitation, and commerce. These losses were estimated to be equivalent to 3.4% of GDP. The drought affected approximately 53,000 people (the entire population) across 23 permanently inhabited atolls.[124]

Zika Outbreak – 2015-2016

In November 2015, the RMI Ministry of Health received reports of a traveler who was ill after a several-week stay in Majuro. Following this report, by mid-April 2016, surveillance found 34 additional cases that met surveillance definitions for Zika infection. Authorities were concerned that there was on-going low-level transmission in Majuro. One infant was born with microcephaly to a woman who had laboratory confirmed Zika. In February 2016, the RMI President declared a health emergency, and Health and Sanitation Teams began household visits, messaging, and mosquito spraying.[125]

DISASTER MANAGEMENT POLICY, PLANNING, AND RESPONSE

Due to the country's geography and the concentration of its people in Majuro and Ebeye, atoll and local authorities and communities are the first responders, while the national government oversees planning and preparation for disasters and may act as a bridge to external assistance. Limited human, financial, and logistical resources make the country's regional and international relationships critically important. Active engagement with other PICTs allows RMI to contribute to and benefit from regional solidarity and multi-country initiatives. Meanwhile, engagement with bilateral donors and multilateral organizations offers the country opportunities to shore up gaps in its domestic capacity and build partnerships that can deliver support in times of emergency.

National Disaster Management System

Parts of the national-level DM structure were reformed by legislation in 2023. Secretaries of national government departments are joined by top atoll officials on a central council that coordinates national DM action and advises the government. In order to implement policies, the operational level is occupied by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), which oversees planning and execution of disaster responses. Formalized under the 2023 law, Clusters are the technical sector coordination structures that translate policy and planning into action to address the needs of affected communities.

The Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Act of 2023 is the legal foundation for RMI's current DM structure. The law expanded the institutional structure to deliver DM, climate, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures throughout the country by promoting cooperation between national and local government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and the private sector.[126] The DRM Act also mandated the preparation of a National Disaster Risk Management Plan and a National Emergency Response Plan.[127]

The National Disaster Risk Management Arrangements (NDRMA), which predate the DRM Act but underpin the development of the current system, provide structure to enable the continuous identification, monitoring, and assessment of current and possible future hazards and vulnerabilities in order to manage associated risks. The NDRMA aim to assist RMI in implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific.[128] In addition to these international linkages, RMI approaches DRM and DRR in ways that dovetail with climate change adaptation. In its National Strategic Plan 2020-2030, RMI recognized the threat sea level rise poses to residents; it has even gone so far as to discuss the need to relocate if adaptation options are insufficient.[129]

RMI's national DM plans have adopted a community-centered approach, prioritizing meaningful engagement, effective communication, and the use of both traditional and formal social networks.[130] The declaration of a state of disaster is made by the Cabinet or President, on the advice of the National Disaster Council Chair, if a disaster has occurred or poses an imminent threat.

National Disaster Council

The National Disaster Council is the strategic-level DM lead, comprising key national leaders, including the Commissioner of Public Safety; Secretary of Works, Infrastructure, and Utilities; Secretary of Transportation, Communication and Information Technology; Secretary of Natural Resources and Commerce; Secretary of Health and Human Services; Secretary of Culture and Internal Affairs; Commissioner of the Public

School System; Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Secretary of Finance, Banking and Postal Services; Director of the Climate Change Division of the Ministry for Environment; Director of the Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office; and representatives of the Marshall Islands Mayor's Association, civil society, and the private sector.

Chaired by the Chief Secretary of the Cabinet, the Council has the responsibility to:

- Advise the Cabinet on DRM-related institutional, capacity, policy, and funding matters
- Oversee and provide strategic direction to Council sub-committees – the National Emergency Operations Committee, the Recovery Coordination Committee, and the Disaster Resilience Committee
- Review national disaster plans and recommend Cabinet approval
- Liaise with international assistance partners to facilitate access to and coordination of external support for DRM
- Oversee and provide strategic direction for disaster response and disaster recovery
- Ensure widespread awareness of the DRM threats, arrangements, and responsibilities
- Fulfill any other responsibilities allocated to it under the national disaster plans[131]

National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)

The NDMO, within the Office of the Chief Secretary (OCS), has the responsibility to:

- Facilitate participation by government agencies, local governments, private sector entities, community groups, and individuals in DRM, including climate adaptation and DRR activities from the national to the local level
- Prepare national disaster plans, with support from the National Emergency Operations Committee
- Assist government agencies and local governments to prepare their disaster plans
- Serve as the administrative secretariat to the National Disaster Council
- Establish response units to assess disaster impacts and provide initial disaster response
- Prepare standard operating procedures (SOP) for the National Emergency Operations Committee, the National Emergency Operations Center, and response units
- Assist the National Emergency Operations Committee to implement the National Emergency Response Plan during disasters by coordinating disaster response activities
- Establish and maintain the National Emergency Operations Center and direct its operation in anticipation of and during disaster events
- Publicize the national disaster plans and liaise with communities and private industry representatives to raise awareness about disaster preparedness and response
- Assist with disaster recovery by undertaking activities as necessary
- Promote disaster and climate risk reduction and undertake needed activities to assist disaster resilience
- Implement the National Disaster Council's decisions for putting into practice the 2023 DRM Act and national disaster plans

The NDMO also leads the development of response plans for disasters across numerous atolls. This process considers the existing infrastructure that supports communities during disasters; these facilities include shelters (often schools), water catchments, and dispensaries (or other medical facilities). On some atolls, the NDMO identifies the need to enhance this infrastructure or harden it against cyclones. The NDMO maintains solar-powered reverse osmosis water desalination units that can be sent to atolls during drought,[132] though there are limitations due to maintenance challenges.

The NDMO operates from the National Emergency Operations Center, located in Majuro.[133] The NDMO ensures the Center is maintained and resourced. The National Disaster Council may establish additional permanent or temporary emergency operations centers (EOC).

The Director of the NDMO is the Disaster Coordinator**.** They coordinate the overall

disaster response. In anticipation of a disaster and upon a disaster declaration, they have the responsibility to:

- Activate the National Emergency Operations Committee and the National Emergency Operations Center
- Advise the National Disaster Council on declarations
- Order evacuations and closures of roads or public spaces to maintain public safety
- Coordinate and provide direction to the Clusters, their member entities, and other agencies and organizations with functions under the National Emergency Response Plan
- Provide direction and guidance to the local government disaster committees
- Report to the National Disaster Council on all disaster response operations
- Advise the National Disaster Council on disaster response operations and advise on strategic direction, priorities, and resources to be made available
- Provide information to donors and international partners through the coordination mechanism provided in the National Emergency Response Plan

National Disaster Management Committee

Under the National Disaster Council, the National Emergency Operations Committee manages operational-level activities and is responsible for:

- Ensuring disaster preparedness is undertaken
- Coordinating and overseeing disaster response operations in anticipation of and during disaster events

The National Emergency Operations Committee is chaired by the NDMO Director. The Committee comprises Cluster leads, a Weather Services Office representative, a Marshall Islands Red Cross Society (MIRCS) representative and other national government or international agency representatives appointed by the National Disaster Council. For health disasters, a representative of the Ministry of Health and Human Services joins, and for environmental disasters, a representative of either the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce or the Environmental Protection Agency joins.

The other committees led by the National Disaster Council are:

1) **Recovery Coordination Committee** – responsible for coordinating recovery planning for implementation through agency and local plans; chaired by a government agency senior officer appointed by the National Disaster Council; the NDMO Director is the Deputy Chair; members include representatives of national government agencies, international agencies, and MIRCS
2) **Disaster Resilience Committee** – responsible for directing and promoting resilience planning through the adoption of measures to identify, assess, and reduce climate and disaster risk; chaired by a government agency senior officer appointed by the National Disaster Council; the NDMO Director is the Deputy Chair; members include representatives of national government agencies and international organizations appointed by the National Disaster Council[134]

Figure 5 is a simplified organization chart of the major government entities directly involved in national-level DM as described in the 2023 DRM Act.[135]

Clusters were formally established by the 2023 DRM Act. They provide a structure for DM work across eight functional sectors. Table 1 lists the national clusters and the government ministries or agencies that serve as the cluster leads or co-leads.[136]

Clusters are responsible for coordinating and planning response activities that fall under their functional sector and that are conducted by their members. Every Cluster prepares an SOP, approved by the National Emergency Operations Committee, to guide the work of its members.

Each Cluster Lead is a deputy or assistant secretary of a relevant government ministry

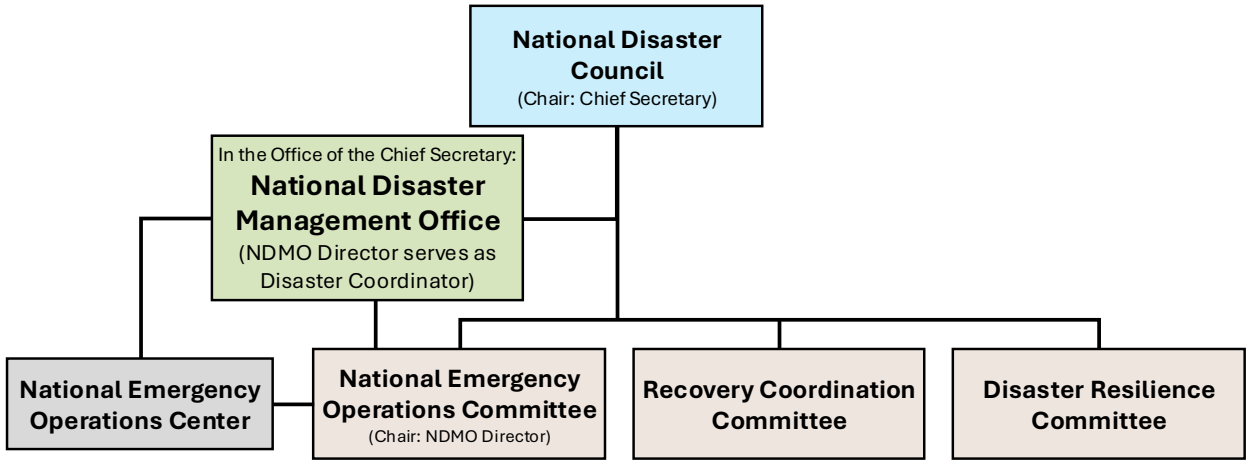


Figure 5: National DM Structure

or agency. Additional Cluster members are representatives of government agencies or NGOs whose work relates to the Cluster. Cluster members are appointed by the National Disaster Council.

Subnational and Local Implementation

Local governments, villages, and community groups are important stakeholders in disaster planning and response, and they are responsible for roles laid out in national and subnational plans. The national government supports local governments and villages in their DM planning efforts.

The 2023 DRM Act requires the establishment of Local Government Disaster Committees under the head of each local government. Each local committee is tasked with preparing a local government disaster plan, with guidance from the National Emergency Operations Committee, which then reviews and approves the plan. Local plans detail the roles and responsibilities of people and organizations, as well as the financial arrangements supporting the plan.

Outside of Majuro, the largest population center – Ebeye – has developed its local DM capacity through construction of a stand-alone EOC.

The **Ebeye EOC** is intended to promote efficient coordination of emergency responses in Kwajalein and neighboring atolls. Construction of the two-story, 270-m^2 (2,907-ft^2) building was completed in 2024. Photo 2 depicts the EOC on Ebeye Island in Kwajalein Atoll.[137]

The Ebeye EOC falls under the authority of the national OCS, and it houses NDMO staff based in Ebeye. From the EOC, they can coordinate, collect relevant information, and make critical decisions for effective disaster response. The EOC also serves as coordination

NATIONAL CLUSTERS AND LEAD AGENCIES Responsible for coordinating and planning the disaster response of their functional sector through cluster members
EDUCATION — Ministry of Education, Sports and Training
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY — Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce, Division of Agriculture and Forestry
GENDER AND PROTECTION — Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs, Gender and Early Childhood
HEALTH — Ministry of Health and Human Services
WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE — Majuro Water and Sewer Company & Environment Protection Authority
INFRASTRUCTURE — Ministry of Works, Infrastructure and Utilities & National Telecommunications Authority
SHELTER — Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs & Ministry of Education, Sports and Training
LOGISTICS — Ministry of Finance, Banking and Postal Services & Ministry of Transportation, Communication and IT

Table 1: National Clusters and Lead Agencies

space for Kwajalein Atoll's Disaster Committee members and has space for additional relevant groups, offices, and official visitors. The keys are held by the Chief Secretary, as well as the landowners, traditional leaders, and mayors, as representatives of Kwajalein leadership. In addition to OCS, the national government, the Kwajalein EOC, and DM Clusters, other users include the Project Steering Committee of Kwajalein Atoll Joint Utilities Resources (KAJUR), women's groups, Kwajalein Disaster Focal Points, National Disaster Committee members, and Cluster focal points.

In addition to Kwajalein, the Ebeye EOC serves seven other atoll communities in partnership with their local governments. Communication with these atoll communities is through Starlink internet facilitated by the National Telecommunications Authority.[138]

The EOC was built with the collaboration of the OCS and Kwajalein Atoll Development Agency, with funding assistance from the government of Japan through its Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience in the RMI through improved Disaster Preparedness and Infrastructure (EDCR RMI) Project, and with organizational assistance from the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

In 2024, Ebeye also took possession of a 10-kiloliter (2,650-gallon) water truck procured through the EDCR RMI Project, funded by Japan. The water truck allows KAJUR to secure water resources during droughts or other disruptions to the water supply. The project had similarly supplied one 40-kiloliter (10,500-gallon) water truck and another 10-kiloliter (2,650-gallon) water truck for the Majuro Water and Sewage Company.[139]



Photo 2: Ebeye Emergency Operations Center

Civil-Military Coordination in Disaster Response

RMI does not have a national military. The national police force is the Marshall Islands Police Department (MIPD), and there are several atoll or municipality-based police departments. The Commissioner of Public Safety, who leads the MIPD, sits on the National Disaster Council.

The U.S. provides territorial defense to RMI. Therefore, civil-military coordination in disaster response in RMI would most likely occur during a large-scale disaster that necessitates international assistance including foreign military assets, which would initially and primarily involve U.S. military assets. The COFA gives the U.S. the responsibility for defense of RMI, although the government of RMI retains sovereignty with all civilian decision-making, including civilian-led disaster management and response. In a large-scale disaster, RMI would need to request or be willing to accept foreign assistance in accordance with its legal process. If the U.S. were to provide assistance, including through the U.S. armed forces, in response to a disaster in RMI, the U.S. government would follow its specified inter-agency process, which includes the means and methods for civil-military coordination among U.S. civilian and military entities.

Through the COFA and its subsidiary agreements, the U.S. Army Garrison - Kwajalein Atoll Commander has authority to respond to disasters or emergencies within Kwajalein Atoll. While there is no current disaster or humanitarian response plan which designates the Garrison as a major contributor to disaster response, it is obligated to consider any official request

for assistance from the RMI government. Provision of assistance in such circumstances is generally only when it will not interfere with the Garrison's primary missions. The capabilities at the Garrison enable very limited evacuations, limited emergency medical treatment at the Level II Kwajalein Hospital, and limited maritime supply runs with its organic fleet. Any immediate response actions by Garrison personnel to save lives would be limited in scope and duration. Longer disaster responses must be requested through the embassy and directed by the U.S. State Department. Additional capabilities, such as support from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, would need to be coordinated and brought in from the wider DoW. Bucholz Army Airfield is one of two international airports in RMI and could also be made available for use in times of disaster.

The Garrison does not maintain stocks and supplies to respond to disaster events beyond a localized, small-scale disaster within the Atoll. Given the likelihood that a major disaster in the Atoll would also affect the Garrison, it would be unlikely that it could provide support externally. While it does have a robust refueling capacity, diversion of that supply for disaster response could lead to degradation of its primary missions (Missile Range operations and space surveillance). The bulk of the Garrison's workforce comprises defense contractors; thus, their activities and contribution to contingency events may be constrained by limitations of their contracts.[140]

RMI also falls within U.S. Coast Guard Oceania District (formerly District 14) and, as a freely associated state, could receive assistance from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in times of disaster.

International / Regional Organizations

RMI has significant multilateral engagement with regional frameworks and international organizations that play a role in building shared knowledge and a community of practice around DM.

Regional Bodies and Strategies

Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)

PIF is the intergovernmental organization integrating most of Oceania, particularly the PICTs, into a political forum where they can work toward shared strategies to promote economic and social well-being and represent Oceania's interests internationally. PIF is comprised of 18 members, including RMI, which joined in 1987.[141]

In 2022, PIF launched the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent as the overall framework for sustainable development of Oceania. The 2050 Strategy focuses on seven thematic areas: 1) political leadership and regionalism; 2) people centered development; 3) peace and security; 4) resource and economic development; 5) climate change and disasters; 6) ocean and natural environment; and 7) technology and connectivity. The 2050 Strategy builds upon the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security, which expanded the concept of security to include human security, humanitarian assistance, environmental security, and disasters and climate change. The Boe Declaration had identified climate change as the greatest threat to the livelihoods, security, and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.

Endorsed by PIF leaders in 2016, the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) is Oceania's regional plan to reduce exposure to risk, support low-carbon development, and improve disaster response and reconstruction. Implemented by the Pacific Resilience Partnership, the FRDP is a voluntary, non-political framework to coordinate regional action on key issues related to DRM.[142] RMI aligns its DRM planning to the FRDP, as referenced in the NDRMA.

Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance (PIEMA)

PIEMA aims to improve collaboration, strengthen communication, and increase effectiveness of emergency management agencies across 14 PICTs, including RMI. PIEMA formed in 2014 to help identify and

share regional best practices in emergency response. It helps strengthen the coordinated approach that emergency services need to take when preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters.

PIEMA brings together key emergency management sectors, namely the Regional Disaster Managers (National Disaster Management Offices), Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police Conference, and the Pacific Islands Fire and Emergency Services Association.[143]

In 2024, PIEMA held consultation meetings in the Marshall Islands to:

- Build a common understanding between RMI and PIEMA on the actions needed to finalize the draft Strategic Roadmap for Emergency Management (SREM) and determine how PIEMA can support this process; once finalized, the SREM will be a tool to secure more funding for its implementation and rollout across RMI through a jointly developed action plan
- Develop a shared understanding of the short- to long-term capacity development needs of RMI's emergency management services, which PIEMA can consider supporting in collaboration with other resources provided by other development partners
- Strengthen relationships and leadership across the NDMO, police, fire, and emergency services as the lead response agencies
- Raise the profile of disaster and emergency management and encourage greater stakeholder participation in safety and resilience building[144]

United Nations (UN)

RMI joined the UN in 1991, and UN entities have been present in RMI since 1984. The UN Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Micronesia covers FSM, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, and RMI. The UN MCO was established in 2021 to oversee and support UN engagements in the North Pacific.[145]

The Marshall Islands–UN Country Implementation Plan 2025–2027 provides a unified framework for UN support to the Government of Marshall Islands. The Plan is built around the four pillars of the Pacific UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – Planet, People, Prosperity, and Peace. The Plan outlines coordinated actions to:

- Strengthen climate and ecosystem resilience through nature-based solutions and disaster preparedness
- Expand inclusive health, education, and protection systems for outer-island and vulnerable populations
- Promote sustainable livelihoods and youth empowerment through innovation and economic inclusion
- Reinforce governance, human rights, and gender equality, including addressing the legacy of nuclear testing

The Plan has an estimated budget of US$20.6 million and supports resource mobilization and leveraging climate finance and regional partnerships.[146]

The following 11 UN agencies are implementing programs in RMI:

- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- World Health Organization (WHO)[147]

The UN agencies most likely to be involved

in disaster response are IOM, UNDP, UN OCHA, and WHO. DRR work may be done by the others, particularly UNDRR, as well as UNFPA, and UN Women.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

IOM maintains two sub-offices in RMI – Ebeye and Majuro – with both falling under the IOM Micronesia mission that covers FSM, Palau, and RMI.

In the Marshall Islands, IOM supports multiple areas of work related to human mobility, with specific attention to DRR, adaptation, resilience, protection, and regular migration pathways.[148] This work includes preventing the adverse drivers of migration by building national and community resilience in areas most impacted by climate change and natural hazards.

IOM supports DRR by partnering with the Government of RMI and stakeholders to increase the capacity to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. IOM maintains a warehouse in Majuro with pre-positioned assets that can be rapidly dispatched as part of its Disaster Resilience in the Compact Nations project.[149]

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP works closely with the Government of RMI to support sustainable development, climate resilience, and inclusive growth. UNDP's mandate is to end poverty, build democratic governance, and strengthen resilience to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In RMI, UNDP supports DRR activities, including strengthening water security through the Access to Climate-Resilient Water in the Marshall Islands project.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)

OCHA's Office of the Pacific Islands, based in Fiji, mobilizes and coordinates humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors for 14 PICTs: Cook Islands, Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, RMI, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. OCHA maintains a surge support capacity through its staff in the Pacific, the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system, OCHA global staff, standby partners, and the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT). This capacity allows OCHA to facilitate the international humanitarian system by establishing quick links with affected countries during disasters and finding different and appropriate solutions for various assistance requests.[150]

World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO has a country office in RMI, WHO Marshall Islands, which is part of the WHO Western Pacific Region. WHO Marshall Islands works with the Government of RMI and partners to strengthen health systems and address public health challenges. Its work is guided by the Pacific Islands–WHO Multi-country Cooperation Strategy 2024–2029, which lays out three strategic priorities: 1) achieve universal health coverage through integrated people-centered quality health services; 2) address noncommunicable diseases and their determinants; and 3) build resilience to key health threats, including climate change, health emergencies, and disease outbreaks. The Strategy emphasizes the vulnerability of RMI and other PICTs to health threats, including climate change, disasters, and disease outbreaks.[151]

Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT)

The PHT was established by OCHA in 2008 to improve timeliness, effectiveness, and predictability of humanitarian response in the region. The PHT is a coordination network of humanitarian organizations working together to assist PICTs to prepare for and respond to disaster.

Before a disaster strikes, PHT works with governments and partners to ensure that necessary arrangements and systems are in place to support nationally-led disaster responses, based on current national capacity and systems. During disaster response, the PHT supports the

affected government, NGOs, and communities by providing resource mobilization, emergency stocks, technical expertise, coordination support, assessment support, information management support, and communication and advocacy.

PHT members include representatives of UN agencies, NGOs, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It functions through a PHT regional cluster structure to provide support to national authorities and national clusters. Figure 6 depicts the PHT cluster structure.[152]

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)

Every UN member state, including RMI, is a signatory of the Sendai Framework, which aims to achieve a substantial reduction of disaster-related risk, loss of life, loss of livelihoods, and negative health, economic, physical, social, and environmental impacts. To prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks, it outlines seven targets and the following four priorities for action: 1) understanding disaster risk; 2) strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; 3) investing in disaster reduction for resilience; and 4) enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.[153] Marshall Islands' DM planning is guided by the Sendai Framework, as referenced in the NDRMA.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The UN SDGs have a significant influence on RMI development plans. The SDGs are 17 global objectives adopted by the UN in 2015 to end poverty; eliminate hunger; improve health and education; ensure gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and clean energy; increase economic growth; improve infrastructure; and ensure sustainability and social justice by 2030.[154] RMI's National Strategic Plan 2020-2030 was developed in alignment with the SDGs, which form part of the national monitoring and evaluation framework. RMI strives to integrate SDGs into its development, DRR, and climate adaptation plans to increase community resilience.

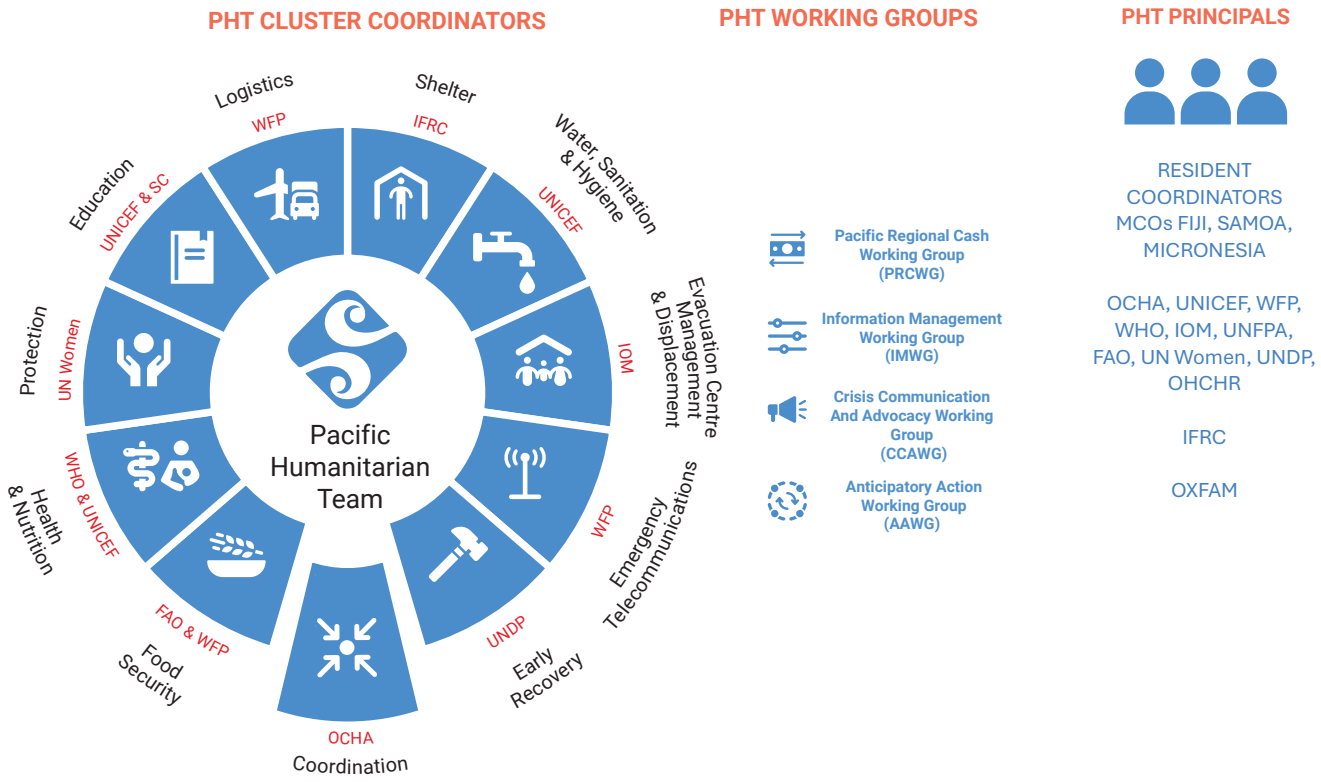


Figure 6: Pacific Humanitarian Team Cluster Structure

Other Disaster Management Partners

Civil society plays an important role in RMI to support social and economic well-being and development, including across all phases of DM.

Marshall Islands Red Cross Society (MIRCS)

MIRCS is a volunteer-based organization whose role was legally established by national law in 2013. It was admitted to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 2019.

MIRCS is an auxiliary of the government, and its services span:

- Disaster preparedness and response
- Fire victim assistance
- Blood donor recruitment
- Community first aid and safety
- Services to U.S. forces with personal emergencies (in coordination with the American Red Cross)

MIRCS implements its Disaster Risk Reduction Program, offering neighboring island communities Emergency Response Training. For disaster response, MIRCS staff and volunteers are trained and equipped to conduct rapid assessments and provide emergency relief to affected families.[155]

In January 2025, MIRCS opened its new headquarters in Uliga in Majuro Atoll. The two-story building is designed to temporarily house people displaced during disasters. The headquarters is equipped with disaster-ready kits. MIRCS also plans to deploy disaster-ready containers to the Laura area (Majuro) and to MIRCS sub-stations in the outer islands.[156]

MIRCS has 10 staff and 62 volunteers working across 4 branches and 4 local units.[157] It aims for all RMI islands to have a local presence or branch by 2027; the priorities are Majuro, Ebeye, Arno, Wotje, Kili, Jaluit, and Ailinglaplap.

The MIRCS Strategic Plan for 2023-2027 lays out the strategic goals of:

1) Build a strong and sustainable national society
2) Enhance community resilience
3) Promote health and safety

Strategic Goal 2 includes the following priority actions specific to disaster preparedness, response, and risk reduction:

- Disaster Preparedness
  - Develop and update MIRCS SOPs and contingency plans
  - Strengthen communications with island communities
  - First aid training in communities
  - Engage with schools in preparedness, e.g., evacuation plans, simulations, drills, and school safety initiatives
  - Vulnerability Capacity Assessments in populated islands
  - Partner with RMI radio communications authority
  - Recruit, train, and mobilize volunteers
  - Have the right tools and equipment
  - Maintain a database of supply stocks, emergency contact lists, Emergency Response Team (ERT) trained volunteers, etc.
  - Map the vulnerable populations and develop tools and services that can help migrants prepare for and mitigate against risks
- Disaster Response
  - Establish community-based ERTs and Disaster Response Committees to lead in disaster and emergency responses on every populated island of RMI, commencing in Majuro at Rita, Delap, and Laura
  - First aid as a minimum element of MIRCS response
  - Support migrants, particularly in situations of crisis, and advocate for their safety and dignity
  - Risk Reduction
- Develop and replicate low-cost DRR initiatives, such as addressing inundations, especially in Majuro Atoll
  - Replicate the good experiences of the Jenrok DRR project to other communities
  - Cleanliness drives[158]

The IFRC, the world's largest humanitarian network, is comprised of 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. MIRCS is one of 38 National Societies supported by the IFRC Asia Pacific Regional Office in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Under that office, it is part of the Fiji-based Country Cluster Delegation that also covers Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. IFRC provides National Societies with coordination, technical assistance, and strategic guidance for disaster response and development programs.[159]

Marshall Islands Council of Non-Governmental Organizations, Incorporated (MICNGOs)

Chartered in 2003, MICNGOs is a coalition of NGOs. The founding members are Youth to Youth in Health, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), WAAN Aelon in Majel, Mission Pacific, and Aelon Kein Ad Technical Support, all of which are community-based, non-profit organizations.[160] In 2018, the RMI Government and MICNGOs signed a Partnership Framework Agreement, the country's first formal partnership to better coordinate with civil society in improving social, environmental, and economic well-being.[161]

Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI)

WUTMI has a large presence in RMI's civil society. It is a registered NGO dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women through a wide range of programs. DM-relevant work by WUTMI includes addressing increasing awareness of gender in relation to climate and DRM. WUTMI has 22 member-chapters throughout the outer islands and enjoys strong relationships with traditional and elected leaders.

Pacific Island Health Officers' Association (PIHOA)

PIHOA was established in 1986 by the health officials of the six U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI) – American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Marianas, FSM, Palau, and RMI. PIHOA was intended to provide a regional, collective voice for advocacy and policymaking to address common health concerns to strengthen local and regional health system capabilities and capacities, as well as community resilience. It supports partnership engagement and provision of technical assistance to USAPI health departments and ministries. PIHOA membership comprises the six USAPI chief health officials, their deputies, Micronesia State-level directors, chief executive officers of USAPI public hospitals, and 13 Pacific regional professional associations, USAPI academic institutions, and development partners.

Bilateral and Multilateral Partnerships

Bilateral and multilateral aid contributes significantly to RMI's development finances. Bilaterally, the largest donors from 2008 to 2023 were the U.S. (US$1.1 billion), Japan (US$150 million), Australia (US$62.7 million), Taiwan (US$54.5 million), Germany (US$14.4 million), New Zealand (US$6.5 million), India (US$5.3 million), and South Korea (US$4.2 million), but there were more than a dozen other bilateral donors during that period. Taiwan also has awarded numerous scholarships for Marshallese students to pursue bachelors, masters, or doctoral degrees in Taiwan.[162]

Multilateral aid donors to RMI over the period 2008-2023 included the Asian Development Bank (US$80.6 million), World Bank (US$71.5 million), Green Climate Fund (US$41.4 million), European Union institutions (US$20.1 million), UN agencies (US$8.1 million), Global Environment Facility (US$4.1 million), and GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance (US$149,000).[163]

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT

RMI infrastructure faces challenges related to the country's dispersed geography and concentrated urbanization in Majuro and Ebeye. Both the main airport and seaport are located in Majuro, where they serve as the heart of the aviation and maritime networks that connect all islands. One submarine cable, from Guam, is the primary data backbone for RMI. Digital connectivity has grown significantly in recent years, although approximately one-third of the population still does not have internet access. More than three-quarters of the population have a mobile cellular telephone subscription. The entire population has access to electricity. However, electricity generation is highly dependent on imported fossil fuels, a situation that makes RMI particularly vulnerable to global oil market fluctuations.

Supported by the U.S. National Weather Service, RMI's early warning system is anchored by the Majuro Weather Service Office, which issues tropical storm watches and warnings in the Western Pacific, as well as weather forecasts, inundation forecasts, early warnings for hazardous weather and tsunamis, drought updates, and other weather-related products.

Transportation

Most transport links occur by sea or air. Therefore, maritime and aviation facilities are critical, particularly as RMI is heavily dependent on imported goods. The heart of RMI's airport network is Majuro's Amata Kabua International Airport, the country's only public international airport. Bucholz Army Airfield in Kwajalein Atoll is under U.S. military jurisdiction, although some civilian use is extended to Air Marshall Islands, United Airlines, and Asia Pacific Airways. Outer islands are sites of more than two dozen airfields, which could be key for prompt delivery of relief in emergencies. Seaports are critical for both cargo and passenger transport. In the event of a disaster, ship-based airlift capability may be requested of the U.S. military to deliver personnel and supplies via small aircraft, while ferries and ships deliver equipment or materials for longer-term recovery. Paved roads are limited to main islands while unpaved roads can be found on outlying islands.

Airports

The RMI Ports Authority (RMIPA) is responsible for operations and maintenance at Amata Kabua International Airport on Majuro. RMIPA falls under the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technologies (MTCIT).

Amata Kabua International Airport is the country's only public international airport. It is the busiest airport, serving approximately 19,000 passengers annually.[164] Air Marshall Islands operates domestic routes, while international commercial air travel is served by United Airlines, which operates routes connecting RMI to Honolulu and other Pacific destinations, and Nauru Airlines, which provides regional connections across the Pacific. Major renovation of the international airport began in mid-2024 with a two-year, nearly US$38-million improvement project, which includes resurfacing the runway and redeveloping the terminal.[165]

There are smaller airstrips across outer islands. They provide vital domestic connections throughout the country.[166]

Figure 7 is a modified map of RMI's airport network that was originally created by the Logistics Cluster and WFP in 2023.[167]

Table 2 lists details for airports and airfields, as sourced from the Logistics Capacity Assessment updated by the World Food Programme (WFP) in April 2023 and available at: https://lca.logcluster.org/marshall-islands

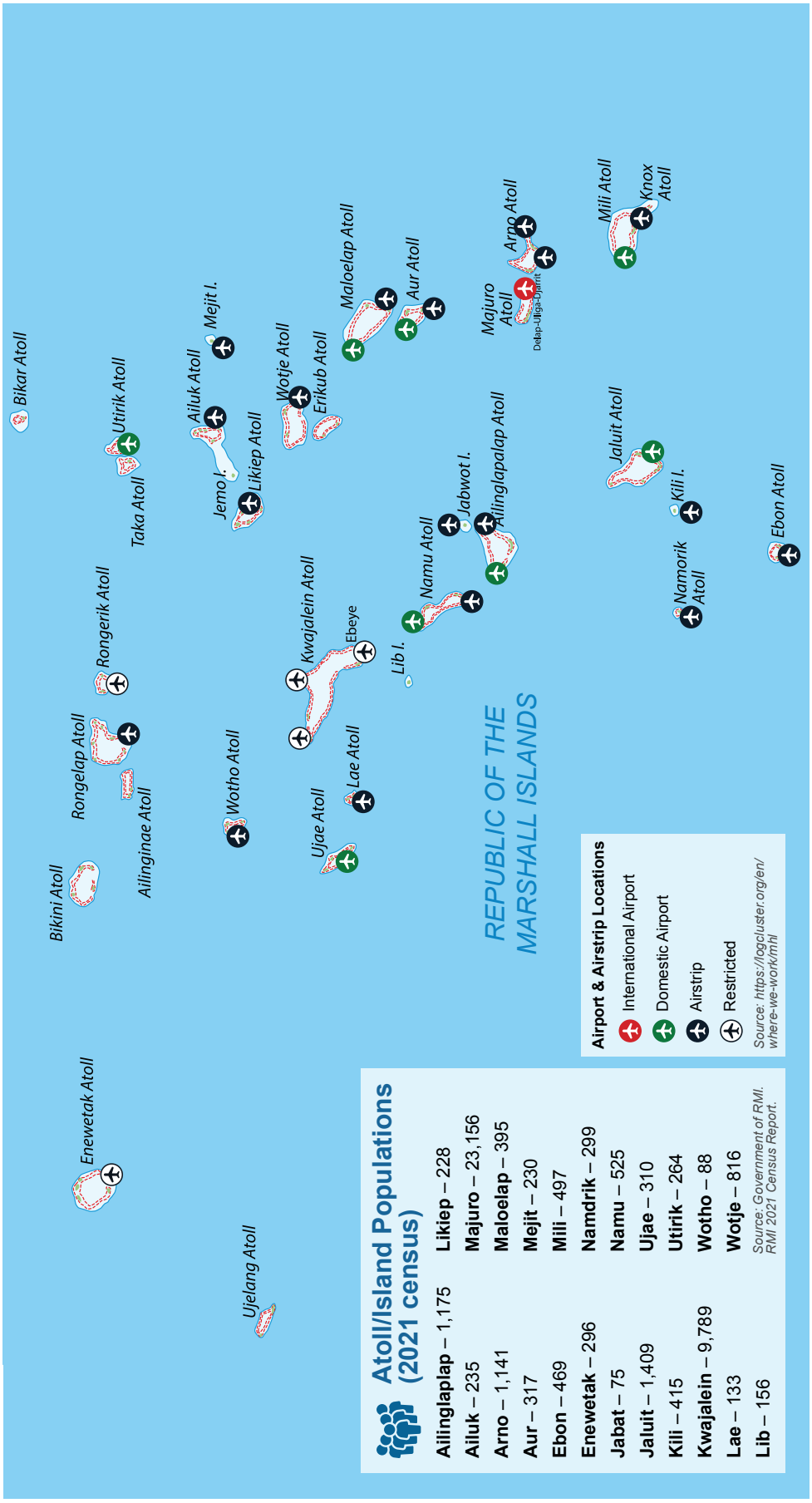


Figure 7: Map of Marshall Islands Airfield Network

Airport / Airfield	Location	IATA/ ICAO	Runway Dimensions	Elevation	Runway Surface
Amata Kabua International Airport	Majuro 7.066546°N 171.276897°E	MAJ/ PKMJ	2,412 × 46 m (7,913 × 150 ft) Helipad: 50 × 50 m (164 × 164 ft) tarmac; 100 × 50 m (328 × 164 ft) grassed	1.5 m (5 ft)	Sealed, asphalt
Ailuk Airfield	Ailuk 10.216974357766977°N 169.98296545161995°E	AIM/ MIPA	750 × 50 m (2,460 × 164 ft)	1.5 m (5 ft)	Grass, coral
Airok Airfield	Airok, Ailinglaplap 7.279229558783749°N 168.8256778111095°E	AIC/ ---	1,000 × 40 m (3,280 × 131 ft)	1.5 m (5 ft)	Grass, coral
Arno Airfield (CLOSED)	Arno	IMI/ ---	Unknown	1 m (3 ft)	---
Arno Tenak Airfield (CLOSED)	Tenak 7.137900117796403°N 171.91730042966967°E	TIC/ ---	1,150 × 50 m (3,773 × 164 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	---
Bikini Airfield	Bikini, Enyu Island, Bikini Atoll 11.64989355103401°N 165.55946441157704°E	BII/ ---	1,177 × 60 m (3,862 × 197 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	---
Bucholz Army Airfield	Ebeye 8.720992111269425°N 167.73149801112487°E	KWA/ PKWA	2,200 × 60 m (7,218 × 197 ft)	3 m (9 ft)	Sealed
Ebon Airfield	Ebon Island, Ebon Atoll	EBO/ ---	951 × 30 m (3,120 × 98 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	---
Enewetak Airfield	Enewetak, Enewetak Atoll	ENT/ ---	2,200 × 60 m (7,218 × 197 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Concrete
Jabat Airfield	Jabat (or Jabot, Jabwot) Island 7.749955809108992°N 168.97780419206387°E	JAT/ ---	700 × 30 m (2,297 × 98 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass
Jaluit Airfield	Jaluit Island, Jaluit Atoll 5.909428943259625°N 169.63718239204826°E	UIT/ ---	1,300 × 90 m (4,265 × 295 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass, coral
Jeh Airfield	Jeh, Ailinglaplap	JEJ/ ---	1,290 m (4,232 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass, coral
Kili Airfield	Kili 5.644718453794516°N 169.1254700669161°E	KIO/ ---	1,338 × 48 m (4,390 × 157 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass
Kwajalein Elenak Airfield	Elenak, Kwajalein Atoll 9.322215626590694°N 166.84668744423143°E	EAL/ ---	975 × 45 m (3,199 × 148 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass, coral
Lae Airfield	Lae	LML/ ---	629 × 40 m (2,064 × 131 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass
Likiep Airfield	Likiep 9.823962563695346°N 169.30984634976144°E	LIK/ ---	903 × 43 m (2,963 × 141 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass

Table 2: Airports and Airfields in the Marshall Islands

Airport / Airfield	Location	IATA/ ICAO	Runway Dimensions	Elevation	Runway Surface
Loen Airfield (CLOSED)	Loen (or Leuen), Namu Atoll	LOF/ ---	Unknown	1 m (3 ft)	---
Majkin Airfield	Majkin, Namu Atoll 8.163590094276003°N 168.17455591136374°E	MJE/ ---	1,129 × 54 m (3,704 × 177 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass
Maloelap Airfield	Taroa 8.708576909781303°N 171.23322970580588°E	MAV/ ---	1,127 × 48 m (3,698 × 157 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass
Maloelap Kaben Airfield	Kaben (also Kaven), Maloelap	KBT/ ---	854 × 64 m (2,802 × 210 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass, gravel
Mejit Airfield	Mejit, Mejit Island 10.283607758694638°N 170.8688927058263°E	MJB/ ---	1,229 × 48 m (4,032 × 157 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Graded coral
Mili Airfield	Mili Island, Mili Atoll 6.086957229263115°N 171.73392116530914°E	MIJ/ ---	919 × 24 m (3,015 × 79 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass
Mili Enajet Airfield	Enajet Island, Mili Atoll 6.040438033001774°N 171.98449763808262°E	EJT/ ---	967 × 96 m (3,173 × 315 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass, graded gravel
Namorik Airfield	Namorik, Namorik 5.6334335866057605°N 168.12617357901686°E	NDK/ ---	100 × 30 m (328 × 98 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass, coral
Rongelap Airfield	Rongelap, Rongelap Atoll 11.1574518058998°N 166.88696616351228°E	RGP/ ---	1,322 × 48 m (4,337 × 157 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Concrete
Tobal Airfield	Tobal (or Tabal), Aur Atoll 8.300878654759474°N 171.15928377881957°E	AUL/ ---	822 × 43 m (2,697 × 141 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Graded coral
Ujae Airfield	Ujae, Ujae Atoll 8.928246572615084°N 165.76266738624537°E	UJE/ ---	806 × 36 m (2,644 × 118 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass
Utrik Airfield	Utrik, Utrik Atoll	UTK/ ---	838 × 43 m (2,749 × 141 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Coral
Woja Airfield	Woja (or Wotja), Ailinglaplap Atoll 7.453453979911846°N 168.55246065182942°E	WJA/ ---	138 × 48 m (453 × 157 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Graded coral
Wotho Airfield	Wotho, Wotho Atoll 10.174528072109911°N 166.0043484672068°E	WTO/ ---	919 × 64 m (3,015 × 210 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Dirt
Wotje Airfield	Wotje, Wotje Atoll	WTE/ ---	1,085 × 54 m (3,560 × 177 ft)	1 m (3 ft)	Grass, coral

Table 2: Airports and Airfields in the Marshall Islands (cont.)

Seaports

Residents of RMI are heavily dependent on imported goods – food, fuel, building materials, consumer goods, etc. – that arrive via ship at the country's main international port – Majuro – before being distributed through domestic shipping routes to other atolls. Most Marshallese rely on ferries for domestic travel and freight. During an emergency, inter-atoll ships can be too slow to deliver relief supplies or responding personnel; some responders may request ship-based airlift from military partners or work to deliver personnel and supplies via small aircraft, while ferries and ships deliver equipment or materials for longer-term recovery.

MTCIT is the policy lead for ports. It has some oversight for regulation, management, and development of the overall maritime sector. It contracts for the services that connect islands through inter-island shipping. Meanwhile, RMIPA, a state-owned entity, operates the ports at Majuro, Ebeye, Arno, Jaluit, and Wotje. RMIPA also has regulatory and enforcement functions related to port use and vessel activities.[168]

With more than 75% of the population living on Majuro and Ebeye,[169] the ports of these islands are the busiest and most important in the country. Majuro is home to the Marshall Islands Shipping Corporation (MISC), which operates five vessels that deliver services across the country's atolls. The roughly quarterly sailings of each vessel provide most of the freight connectivity throughout the country.[170]

Majuro's port is served by regular shipping lines, and most cargo is containerized.[171] In addition to Majuro, the Kwajalein and Jaluit ports are considered official ports of entry.[172] Additional specialized and privately-owned facilities exist – especially on Majuro – for fisheries processing and fuel imports.[173]

Majuro - Delap and Uliga Docks

Delap, on the southeast side of Majuro Lagoon, is the international trade hub. Delap East is used for inter-island cargo and copra processing. There is an adjacent cargo handling area for movement and storage of containers and general palletized cargo.

- Main wharf: 308 m (1,010 ft) in length; 13-m (42.6-ft) draft
- East Dock: 80 m (262 ft) in length
- West Dock: 58 m (190 ft) in length
- Container yard: 25,891 m^2 (279,000 ft^2)
- Main storage terminal: 12,000 m^2 (129,000 ft^2) of multi-purpose, open storage; 1 × 400-m^2 (4,305-ft^2) warehouse
- Cargo handling: vessels' cranes must be used for offloading containers; reach loaders, trailers, and forklifts available[174]

Uliga is the main hub for shipments to the outer islands. It is the base for MISC, which operates the cargo and passenger vessels that serve outer-island routes,[175] and it is the base for government-owned and -operated Marshall Island Marine Resources Authority and RMIPA vessels.[176] The main, "L-shaped" berth serves local ferries and fishing tenders on the outside, while the inside serves as a marina for smaller commercial vessels.

- Berths (4): 120 m (393 ft) in length; 15 m (49 ft) in width; 9-m (29-ft) draft[177]
- Cargo handling: forklift available
- Storage: 1 × 600-m^2 (6,468-ft^2) warehouse; 200-m^2 (2,152-ft^2) of IOM-rented space for refrigerated containers[178]

Port of Ebeye

Ebeye's port is an international gateway but is secondary to Majuro in terms of total amount of freight handled and direct connections to other islands. It is located on the lagoon side of Ebeye Island in Kwajalein Atoll's southern corner. Ferries run directly from Ebeye's port to Kwajalein Island several times a day, six days a week.

- Wharf: 120 m (400 ft) in length; 12-m (39-ft) draft
- Additional "L-shaped" ferry dock
- Roll-on/Roll-off (RORO): 35 m (114 ft) in width; 550 m (1,800 ft) north of main dock
- Container yard: 4,380 m^2 (48,000 ft^2)
- Storage: none beyond container yard
- Cargo handling: no specialized equipment; forklifts available[179]

Arno Dock

At the southwestern end of Arno Island, the dock serves as Arno Atoll's main transport hub, serving regular ferry service between Arno and Majuro, which lies 19 km (12 mi) to the west. Small boats take people and goods between Arno dock and the other islands of the atoll.[180] Waters to the eastern side of the wharf are deepest.

- Wharf: 75 m (246 ft) in length[181]

Jaluit Port

At the southern corner of Jaluit Atoll, the Jaluit port is on the lagoon shore of Jaluit.

- Berth (1): 33 m (108 ft) in length; 10 m (32 ft) in width
- RORO ramp on the port's northern side[182]

Wotje Wharf

The port at Wotje sits inside the atoll's lagoon. The atoll is served by one of the government's transport ships. Underwater obstacles are common at the lagoon end of the dock because of damage to an earlier dock during World War II and subsequent coral growth on the debris.

- Finger wharf: 200 m (656 ft) in length[183]

Other islands and atolls generally have no wharf. When the quarterly boat arrives, it is met by smaller (3-3.5 m; 10-12 ft)[184] boats that ferry passengers and goods to shore.

Roads

Road infrastructure in RMI is primarily on the main islands. Sealed roads exist on Majuro, Ebeye, and Kwajalein (on U.S. Army Garrison Kwajalein) and are in average condition with drainage infrastructure but are still subject to flooding and pooling after heavy rainfall. Figure 8 (UN, modified) shows roads on Roi Namur in Kwajalein Atoll that were potentially affected by the 20 January 2024 storm surge from an offshore storm.[185]



Figure 8: Roi Namur Roads Potentially Affected by January 2024 Storm Surge

Roads on outer islands are mostly unpaved coral laterite. Transport around the outer islands is usually by walking track. Goods are moved using wheelbarrows or push carts on the smaller atolls, while larger atolls have pickup trucks.

On Majuro, there is only one road, approximately 50 km (30 mi) end to end, with a maximum speed limit of 40 km per hour (25 mi per hour).[186] Travel time from one end to the other is approximately two hours. Navigation is generally oriented by direction toward the airport (Rita) or away from it (Laura) or with destinations either on the ocean-side or the lagoon-side. On Ebeye, the main road runs approximately 10 km (6.2 mi), with an end-to-end travel time of roughly one hour.[187]

The preferred and most common mode of transport for locals on Majuro is a communal hop-on-hop-off shared taxi system, allowing passengers to board taxis already carrying others. Fares range from US$0.75 within the central area to US$2.00 between the airport and downtown, with longer distances reaching up to US$35.00. A shuttle bus service also operates the full length of Majuro; it departs every two hours from the Robert Reimers Enterprises parking lot to Laura at a flat fare of US$2.50 each way. Vehicle rentals, including sedans, trucks, and minivans, are available through several operators on Majuro.[188] Some of the main companies, such as Pacific International and Robert Reimers, have private commercial vehicles. Local supermarkets also have small delivery vans.[189]

Communications

The key actor in RMI's early warning system is the Majuro Weather Service Office (WSO), which issues tropical storm watches and warnings, weather forecasts, inundation forecasts, warnings for hazardous weather and tsunamis, drought updates, and other weather-related products. The office is serviced by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center for tsunami information and warnings.

The primary data connection for the country is a single submarine cable, which connects RMI to Guam. Radio and satellite communications are often utilized by RMI DM and first responder personnel during disasters and other emergencies. Portable iridium satellite terminals called chatty beetles are used for backup emergency communications on some outlying islands. An estimated two-thirds of the population have internet access, and more than three-quarters of the population have a mobile cellular subscription.

Early Warning Systems and Information Sharing

As hydrometeorological hazards are the dominant threats to RMI, weather and climate services are key players in building and operating the national early warning system (EWS). Various communication lines link the weather service providers with DM practitioners throughout the country. Some redundancy is built into the system through radio and satellite links that back up standard telecoms. However, any hazard event that knocks out power, destroys offices or equipment, or harms communications system operators puts the efficiency of response at risk.

Although the National Disaster Council ensures disaster declarations are promptly disseminated and publicized,[190] the Majuro WSO provides early warnings for hazardous weather in addition to routine forecasts. The WSO falls under the National Weather Service (NWS) of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which provides services to RMI in accordance with the COFA.[191] While RMI is still developing a comprehensive multi-hazard EWS, the WSO continues to operate as the national alerting authority for hydrometeorological hazards.[192]

The WSO provides weather forecasts, inundation forecasts, early warnings for hazardous weather, tsunamis, and other sea swell inundation, and other weather-related products. It also provides drought updates that help water managers and residents plan for low reservoir levels. While WSO Majuro also collects long-term climate data for Majuro and Kwajalein, other atolls have inconsistent data collection.[193]

The WSO accomplishes its tasks through:

- Delivery of scientific assessment and analytical services
- Manual surface aviation, synoptic, and upper-air observations and transmission of those data to the Global Telecommunication System/Integrated World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Information System
- Receipt of data from outer island focal points - e.g., mayors, disaster committees, etc.
- Receipt and interpretation of daily data from partner scientific agencies, notably NOAA
- Advice to the NDMO and Chief Secretary on key threats for consideration of further action
- Equipment for collection of information and communication[194]

The WSO is supported by the NWS' Weather Forecast Office (WFO) Guam, which issues tropical storm watches and warnings in the Western Pacific, including RMI. Figure 9 shows how RMI fits into WFO Guam's area of responsibility.[195]

WSO Majuro is also serviced by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center and the International Tsunami Information Center, both of which are administered by the NWS's Pacific Region and provide Pacific-basin tsunami watches, warnings, and information and educational services.[196]

For communications among DM authorities and practitioners, various radio and satellite options are available. High frequency (HF) radio is commonly used among outer island DM focal points. Satellite phones are held by the WSO (1), NDMO (5), MIPD (3), MIRCS (1), National Telecommunications Authority (2), and IOM. Very high frequency (VHF) radio is primarily held by police, fire, and ambulance services (150+), as well as the NDMO (2).

Chatty beetles are used as a back-up for remote outlying islands to communicate with EOCs. They are portable iridium satellite terminals in protective casing, and they allow text-based alerts and messaging in remote locations.[197] In 2023, the WSO received seven chatty beetles and dispatched a mission to Wotho and Lae to supply chatty beetles

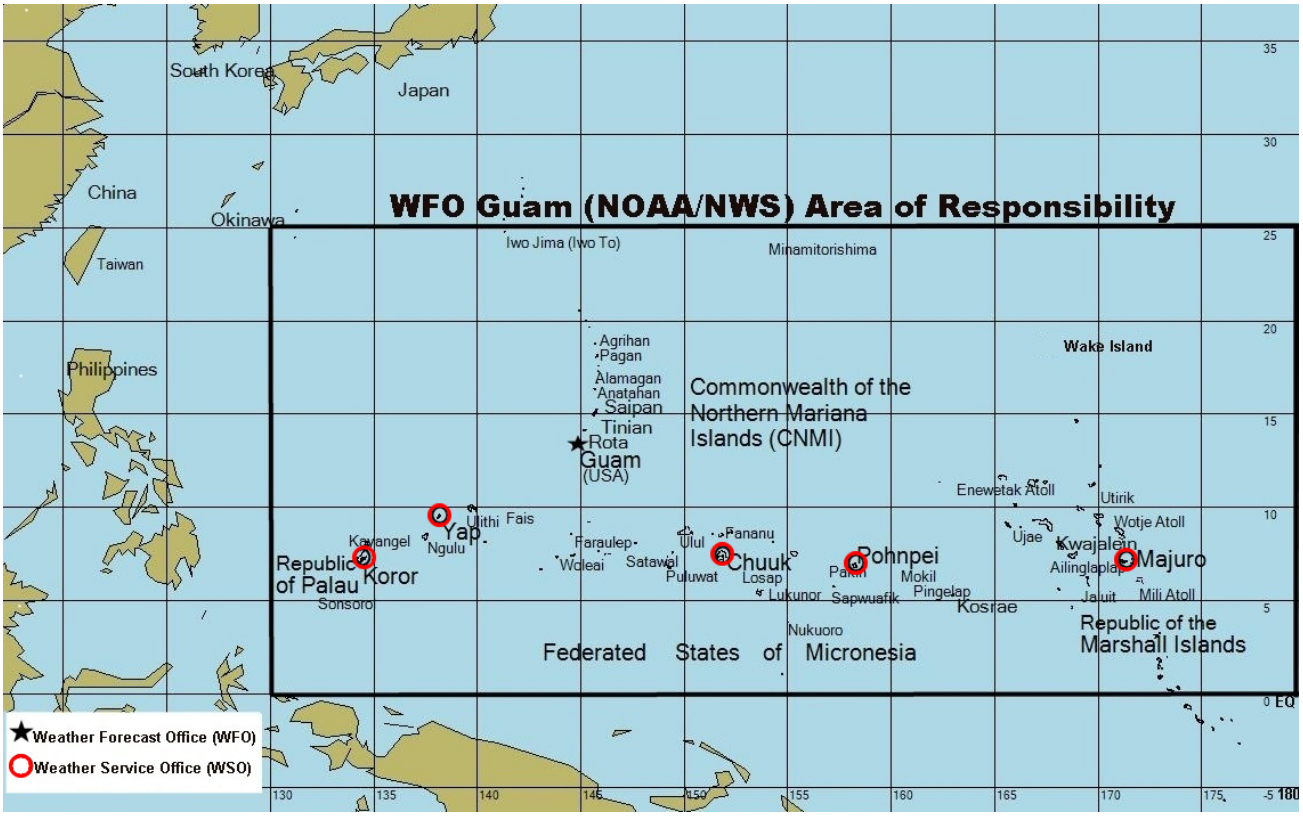


Figure 9: Guam Weather Office Area of Responsibility

equipped with solar power systems for charging. The advantages of chatty beetles over other equipment include resistance to the corrosive salt spray environment, reduced energy use and operating costs, confidential messaging, and 24-hour operationality. They can last up to 72 hours with power from solar panels. However, there are challenges with the manufacturer continuing to supply chatty beetles.[198]

Information and communications equipment was evaluated in 2024, and it was found to need upgrades and replacements to function according to standards set by WMO, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), NOAA, and others. Gaps in data management are being addressed through implementation of the NDMO information management strategy of "Bok Am Melele," which means "to get information;" this framework seeks to allow people to access disaster-related information, most likely through a website.[199] The NDMO is in the process of rebuilding its website and ensuring it is operational, and it is installing an HF emergency communication network throughout the outer islands.[200]

The government is working with the World Bank to implement a 2025-2026 project to improve the EWS. It involves technical studies to enhance the downstream end where warnings trigger action. The project also includes technical assessments of emergency management infrastructure and facilities needs in Majuro and select outer islands to review investment proposals and consider how to incorporate traditional aspects of Marshallese culture into infrastructure design.[201] The Green Climate Fund has also sponsored projects that aim to improve the national EWS and increase shoreline protection.[202]

Information Focal Points

Majuro Weather Service Office
Long Island Road, Rairok
P.O. Box 78, Majuro, Marshall Islands, 96960-0078
Tel: +692 247-5705
Fax: +692 247-3078
Web: *https://www.weather.gov/gum/WSOMajuro*

National Disaster Management Office
Tel: +692 625-6366
Email: *ndmoinfo@gmail.com*
Facebook: RMINDMO

Marshall Islands Red Cross Society
RRE Building, Room 106, Near ACE Hardware
P.O. Box 2014, Majuro, Marshall Islands, 96960
Tel: +692 625-0340
Email: *comms@marshallredcross.org*
Facebook: RMIRC
Web: *https://marshallredcross.org/*

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2nd Floor AC Construction Building, Delap, Majuro, MH
Republic of the Marshall Islands, 96960
Tel: +692 625-4705
Web: *iom.int/countries/marshall-islands*

UN Multi-Country Office Micronesia
J&T Building, Kaselehlie Street
P.O. Box 2219, Kolonia, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia 96941
Tel: +691 320-2435

Telecommunications Infrastructure

The National Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has long been the sole Mobile Network Operator (MNO) and Internet Service Provider in RMI. More recently, there has been some opening up, as Starlink was approved to launch services in the country in 2025.[203]

Established in 1987 and privatized in 1991, NTA remains majority-owned by the national government. It currently operates 2G and 4G/LTE mobile networks, with plans to introduce 5G services. In addition to mobile connectivity, NTA provides internet services through Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) and fiber-optic infrastructure in key population centers,

including Majuro, Ebeye, Jaluit, Kili, and Wotje. To extend connectivity to outer islands, NTA has deployed Demand Assigned Multiple Access systems. These systems utilize Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) links with bandwidth ranging from 512 kilobits per second (kbps) to 1 megabit per second (Mbps), combined with Wi-Fi access points, internet-connected laptops, and telephone services. These systems have been installed in approximately 70 schools across the country to support access to communications and digital resources in remote areas.[204]

There were approximately 40,100 mobile connections at the end of 2025. This number reflects an increase of 1,558 connections (4.0%) over 2024 and suggests continued growth in mobile connectivity. Meanwhile, the number of internet users declined by 831 (3.4%) between October 2024 and October 2025, with an estimated 23,600 users recorded in October 2025. These figures indicate that approximately 12,300 people (34.3% of the population) were not using the internet at the end of 2025. This absence highlights persistent gaps in digital access, particularly in remote and outer-island communities.[205]

RMI relies on the HANTRU-1 submarine cable from Guam, installed in 2009, as its primary data backbone, providing a connection of 6 gigabits per second (Gbps) to Majuro and a 2-Gbps link onward to Ebeye. The network lacks redundancy, creating a single point of failure in the event of a disruption to the Guam connection. A 100-Mbps VSAT system in Majuro serves as a scalable backup during emergencies, although the Ebeye backup system has been non-operational for several years.

NTA supports additional services, including Internet Protocol Television through its MHTV+ platform and a bulk SMS-based emergency cellular broadcast system used by the NDMO to reach up to 20,000 users. Emergency communications infrastructure includes HF radio stations in Majuro and Ebeye, satellite phones, and generator-backed facilities; however, limitations remain in system resilience, inter-agency communication methods, and equipment condition. Efforts are underway to strengthen regional connectivity through initiatives such as the UNDP-supported EDCR project.[206]

On 23 March 2026, NTA announced a landmark agreement to enhance the nation's digital connectivity and resilience by joining the Pacific Connect initiative. Supported by the U.S. Government and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), the project is designed to improve redundancy, reduce latency, and strengthen network reliability. The system will follow a "trunk and island" model, enabling RMI to own the IOKWE cable that links into Google's Central Pacific Halaihai cable that runs from Guam to the Northern Marianas. The link will allow RMI to leverage the larger transpacific infrastructure. Once operational, the initiative is expected to enhance digital access, while addressing existing connectivity vulnerabilities.[207]

Mass and Social Media

RMI's media landscape includes a mix of government-controlled and private outlets across radio, print, television, and digital platforms. The country's small size and geography are obstacles to scaling up mass media. To gather interviews and audio recordings from remote communities, media practitioners must travel considerable distances, and the ability of remote communities to send or receive information in an emergency may be limited. The country is widely recognized as one of the world's most free and independent media environments.

Three primary radio stations operate in the country. V7AB "Radio Marshalls," operated by state-run Marshall Islands Broadcasting Company, is the only station with national coverage. V7AA "The Change 104.1" provides religious programming and Armed Forces Network (AFN) Kwajalein serves the U.S. military.[208] V7AB has the broadest reach across the islands.

There are two national newspapers. The Marshall Islands Journal is a privately-owned weekly publication available in both English and Marshallese. The Marshall Islands Gazette is a government-issued monthly publication.

Print media is regarded by both practitioners and audiences in RMI as the most credible source of news and information. The Marshall Islands Journal has been operating for more than five decades and has a reputation as a trusted source of news.

While growing digitization presents challenges to the sustainability of print media in RMI, the perceived rise in misinformation and disinformation has reinforced the importance of print journalism that prioritizes accuracy, impartiality, and independence.[209]

Television services include MBC TV, operated by the state, and AFN Kwajalein, operated by the U.S. military.[210]

As of October 2025, there were 24,200 active social media user identities in RMI; this number represents 67.1% of the population. Social media user numbers increased by 2,600 (+12.1%) between late 2024 and the end of 2025. Nearly all social media users are aged 18 years and above.[211]

Facebook is the most popular social media platform, with 77% of users.[212] The emergence of social media and the digitization of information and communications are creating new challenges and opportunities for RMI's media. There is reportedly an increase in misinformation and disinformation across social media platforms, but many in the country also recognize emerging opportunities to reach communities more broadly, especially the large and growing diaspora.[213]

Utilities

Electric power and water-sanitation systems are critical to DM. However, RMI's small, diesel-dependent electricity infrastructure is extremely exposed to both market disruptions and damage or disruption from natural hazard events. Outages are common and, when they occur, they can cut off communications networks. Meanwhile, communities are heavily reliant on rain catchment for drinking water because the islands' groundwater sources, if available, are shallow and easily contaminated by wastewater, wave overwash, and other hazards. Cyclones, storm surges, or droughts that cause damage to infrastructure in either of these networks can lead to additional health and safety risks during a disaster response. Especially in remote and outer atolls, geographic isolation, poor transport connectivity, and aging or inadequate networks leave communities vulnerable.

Power

As of 2023, the World Bank estimated that 100% of RMI's population had access to electricity.[214] The country is served by two state-owned electric utilities, Marshall Energy Company (MEC) and Kwajalein Atoll Joint Utilities Resources (KAJUR). MEC coordinates power generation and distribution services for Majuro, Jaluit, and Wotje, while KAJUR, a subsidiary of MEC, services Kwajalein Atoll, including Ebeye.[215]

There are three types of island electricity systems: main grids of Majuro and Ebeye; outer-island mini-grids; and small stand-alone systems. The main grids on Majuro and Ebeye service two-thirds of the population.[216] Many outlying islands rely on generator power for their mini-grids or standalone systems. There are efforts to increase the use of renewable energy, although there are major environmental challenges – e.g., salt air corrosion on the hardware – to maintaining the technology of renewables.

In recent years, Majuro's power infrastructure has shown worrying signs. As the country is highly dependent on imported fossil fuels for electricity generation, it is exposed to global market fluctuations that directly impact the cost of electricity in the country.[217] MEC's generating capacity on Majuro relies on diesel engines ranging from 24 to 40 years in age. With no reserve or backup generating capacity, routine maintenance shutdowns already require MEC to implement rolling power cuts, and disruptions to fuel imports could entail additional disruptions.[218]

In 2024, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a US$19 million grant to enhance energy distribution in Majuro, to support low-carbon renewable energy installations, and to strengthen sector resilience

in the smaller islands.[219] Additionally, ADB is actively supporting RMI's energy sector through a multi-year management plan aimed at improving the operational performance of MEC. A 3-year supplemental management and operations assistance program commenced in 2023 to address policy, commercial, technical, regulatory, and human resource aspects of the power system in Majuro, while also identifying and preparing priority investments to enhance efficiency and reliability.[220]

Water and Sanitation

Marshallese communities are highly vulnerable to climate and rainfall changes, as the population relies mainly on rainwater harvesting to meet potable and secondary water needs.

Approximately 79% of households depend on rainwater as their primary drinking water source. Groundwater is a source of only 9% of water, and the country consequently has limited fallback capacity against any reduction in precipitation.[221] Groundwater is also vulnerable to saltwater intrusion from wave overwash or slower rises in sea level. In groundwater aquifers, a layer of freshwater (the freshwater lens) floats on top of the base layer of seawater or saline groundwater. For a historic example, Figure 10 shows a cross section of Majuro Atoll's Laura freshwater lens and illustrates its reduction throughout the 1998 drought due to increased pumping of groundwater.[222]

As of 2024, 87% of RMI's total population has access to at least basic drinking water services. Rural areas report slightly higher access levels, where 94% use basic drinking water services, compared to urban areas where 86% use basic services.[223] For sanitation, 79% of the total population has access to at least basic sanitation services; an estimated 7% of Marshallese still practice open defecation.[224]

Water insecurity is shaped by a combination of environmental pressures and deep-rooted structural challenges. The most severe challenges are experienced in remote and outer atolls, where geographic isolation, poor transport connectivity, and aging or inadequate water systems leave communities exposed. Groundwater supplies are shallow and easily contaminated, unable to sustain communities through extended dry periods. Rainwater harvesting infrastructure, meanwhile, is often constrained by limited storage capacity and deteriorates rapidly in the harsh marine climate. Prolonged droughts that lead to water shortages commonly result in disrupted education and health crises.[225]

The Majuro Water and Sewer Company (MWSC) is the primary state-owned utility

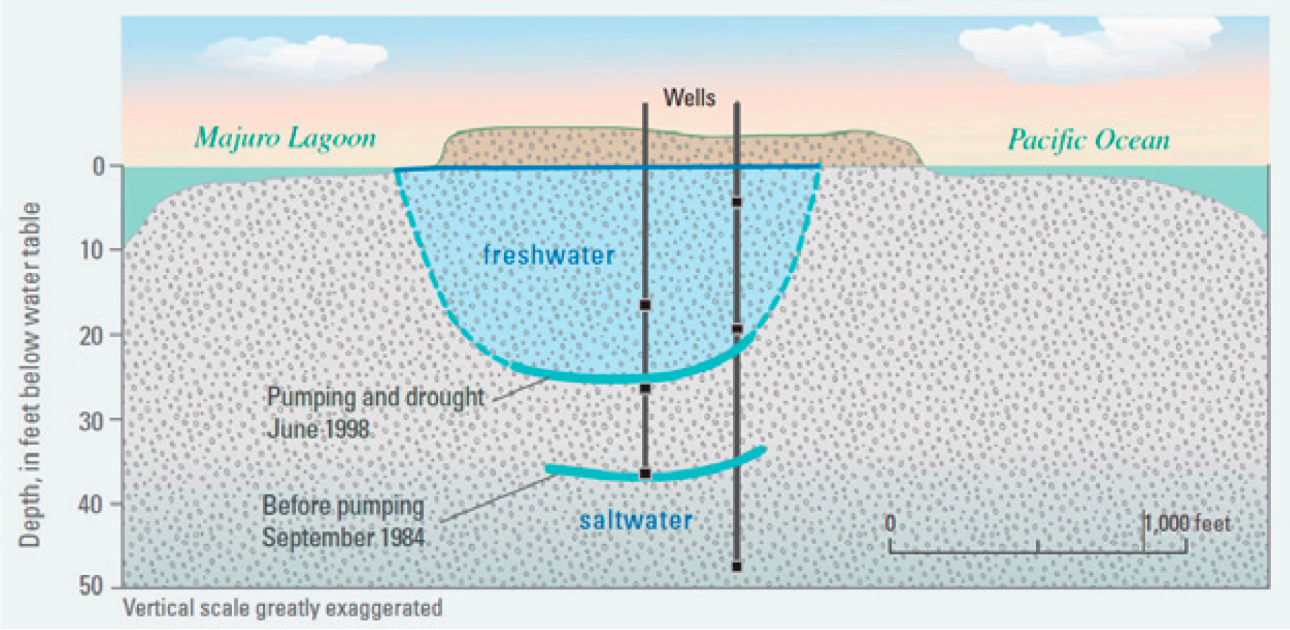


Figure 10: Majuro Atoll's Laura Freshwater Lens

responsible for water supply and sanitation services in Majuro.[226] MWSC's Water and Sanitation Strategic Plan (2017–2027) guides improvements in water and sanitation services across Majuro Atoll. On Ebeye, the Ebeye Water, Sewer and Sanitation Project significantly upgraded water and sewage infrastructure to deliver clean water through new reverse osmosis plants, increased household water pressure, improved fire hydrant systems, and sewage outfalls.[227] Additionally, as of 2026, a total of 72 Family Management Tanks have been installed across 63 community buildings, including churches, schools, and government facilities, to create a combined 3.9 million liters (1,038,000 gallons) of secure, climate-resilient water storage.[228]

In 2024, ADB committed a US$52.5 million grant to strengthen water security and urban resilience across Majuro and Ebeye. The project will upgrade Majuro's sanitation facilities while building institutional and financial capacity within the water sector. By 2031, the project aims to provide round-the-clock access to a safe, resilient, and affordable water supply for approximately 16,000 people or 70% of households in Majuro, including at least 70% of women-headed households.[229]

Health Systems

RMI faces significant challenges in delivering timely healthcare services due to its widely dispersed geography. In addition to managing ongoing communicable and non-communicable diseases, the country's health system is likely to experience increased strain during disaster events. RMI continues to strengthen its health emergency response capacity by establishing an emergency management team and collaborating with national and international partner organizations. These efforts aim to improve the resilience of the health system in responding to disasters.

There are high rates of noncommunicable diseases (NCD) – heart disease, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases. Major risk factors contributing to the prevalence of these conditions include tobacco use, poor dietary habits, sedentary lifestyles, and excessive alcohol consumption. As a result, diabetes-related conditions, heart disease, and various forms of cancer are among the leading causes of mortality. In addition to the heavy burden of NCDs, RMI continues to experience significant morbidity and mortality from communicable diseases, with tuberculosis (TB) remaining a major cause of illness and death, including reported cases of multidrug-resistant TB.[230]

The Ministry of Health and Human Services (MoHHS) has five bureaus – Primary Health Care Services, Kwajalein Health Care Services, Majuro Hospital Services, Nursing Services, and Oral Health – and three offices (Health Planning, Policy, Preparedness and Epidemiology; Administration, Personnel and Finance; and Medical Referral).[231]

In 2020, healthcare spending accounted for 13% of the country's GDP. Although a national health insurance program provides some access to medical services, the quality and availability of care remain inconsistent. Shortages of medical equipment, supplies, and adequately equipped facilities continue to constrain health service delivery. Providing health care across widely dispersed islands and atolls also presents significant logistical challenges. Key health priorities include improving maternal and child health, controlling infectious diseases, reducing NCD risk factors, and strengthening health systems and infrastructure to better withstand severe weather impacts.[232]

There are both public and private healthcare services, and access to these services varies across the population. Although some private clinics operate, most residents rely on the public system. There are two hospitals – Leroj Atama Medical Center on Majuro and Leroj Kitlang Health Center on Ebeye.[233] Both hospitals provide primary and secondary care as well as limited tertiary services. Patients requiring specialized tertiary care are typically referred to Honolulu or the Philippines. According to PIHOA, RMI makes approximately 90 to 120 off-island medical referrals each year; most of these referrals are for cancer treatment,

congenital conditions, or orthopedic surgeries.[234]

The Office of Outer Islands under the Majuro hospital manages 56 additional outer-island health centers, which are staffed primarily by health assistants who deliver health promotion, disease prevention, and essential clinical services. Additional outer-island health centers operate under the Four Atoll Healthcare Program, serving the communities of Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap, and Utrik. Telehealth services are limited and healthcare professionals rely mainly on radio communication with the Leroj Atama Medical Center.[235] In the most remote atolls, only small infirmaries are available, and they are often staffed by minimally trained attendants and equipped with limited medical supplies or equipment.[236]

The healthcare workforce is heavily dependent on expatriate clinicians. Many Marshallese health professionals emigrate, and scholarship recipients are not consistently required to fulfill service obligations in RMI. The domestic workforce is aging, opportunities for continuing professional development are limited, and there is no comprehensive strategy for recruitment or retention. Together, these factors contribute to chronic shortages in skilled health workers.[237]

The National Climate Change and Health Policy and Revised Action Plan outline strategies to strengthen the health sector's resilience to extreme weather event impacts. The policy addresses major challenges such as rising sea levels, increasing frequency of extreme weather events, and heightened health vulnerabilities.[238] It emphasized improving community health systems, enhancing disaster preparedness, and building adaptive capacity across the sector. RMI also integrates health considerations into DRR through the DRM Act of 2023. Under this act, the Secretary of Health and Human Services serves as a member of the National Disaster Council. During health-related disaster events, a representative from the MoHHS advises the National Emergency Operations Committee.[239]

The Marshall Islands Medical Assistance Team (MIMAT) conducted its first emergency management training in December 2022 in collaboration with the WHO and Palau's KLEMAT team. Members of MIMAT include staff from MIRCS, the MoHHS Health Preparedness Office, RMIPA, and the Environmental Protection Authority.[240] In 2022, MIMAT teams played a key role in responding to the surge in COVID-19 cases across RMI; they delivered essential medical supplies including personal protective equipment and anti-viral medications as well as providing critical health services.[241]

RMI collaborates with a range of regional and international organizations that support national health priorities and strengthen system capacity. It works closely with the WHO under the Pacific Islands-WHO Multi-Country Cooperation Strategy 2024-2029. This partnership focuses on advancing Universal Health Coverage through integrated, people-centered services, and on strengthening preparedness and resilience for health emergencies and disease outbreaks.[242] The country is also strengthening its national emergency response and preparedness efforts by applying the One Health approach. In September 2025, RMI partnered with WHO to build national capabilities in food safety and zoonotic disease preparedness through a multisectoral workshop. As a result of this workshop, RMI developed a joint Preparedness and Response Framework for Zoonotic Diseases and became one of the first Northern Pacific nations to adopt the Global Strategy for Food Safety.[243]

Regional collaboration is further strengthened through the PIHOA, which includes health ministers, secretaries, and directors from the USAPI – i.e., American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Marianas, FSM, Palau, and RMI.[244]

RMI is also a core member of the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network (PPHSN),[245] a regional partnership dedicated to improving public health surveillance and emergency response. The network collaborates closely with the WHO and Pacific Community (SPC).[246] Through PPHSN, RMI receives tools and support for detecting communicable disease

outbreaks. Complementing PPHSN's efforts, the Strengthening Health Interventions in the Pacific Program further supports local health capacity-building and workforce development and is accredited by Fiji National University.[247]

Shelter and Housing

RMI's atolls and islands are very low-lying, with an average elevation of less than 2 m (6.5 ft). As a result, the people and built environment are highly exposed to wave inundation and flooding caused by cyclones, tsunamis, and swells from distant storms. An assessment of structures for use as emergency shelters in Majuro identified high-priority buildings, including government facilities, schools, and churches. During emergencies, residents are advised to monitor radio and other media for information on designated shelters, which are announced by the NDMO and WSO.[248]

Housing conditions vary between urban centers and outer atolls. In urban areas, homes are typically simple wooden or cement-block structures with corrugated iron roofs, and they are often densely crowded due to limited land availability. In the outer atolls, houses are generally constructed from local materials, featuring thatched sloping roofs and walls made from plaited palm fronds.[249]

Emergency shelters in the country are primarily coordinated by MIRCS, while the Salvation Army provides social services. Staff and volunteers from these organizations are trained and equipped to conduct rapid assessments and deliver emergency relief to affected families.[250] The Salvation Army operates several community centers, including locations in Majuro and Ebeye, where it provides disaster response services such as food distribution and temporary housing assistance.[251]

As of April 2026, the World Bank is supporting the RMI Urban Resilience Project, which aims to strengthen urban resilience in public buildings and spaces, enhance national disaster preparedness and response systems, and build institutional capacity for risk informed urban planning in Majuro. The project also seeks to expand the implementation of building codes and to develop resilient, multi-purpose emergency management facilities to improve coordination and response during disasters.[252]

Food Security

Under normal circumstances, RMI is a country confronting food insecurity due to a lack of arable land, the legacy of nuclear contamination, concentrations of people away from traditional food sources, and reliance on imported food in an era when supply lines are vulnerable to geo-political and environmental shocks. The impacts of a disaster on the country's food system may include delayed deliveries, sky-rocketing prices, and contamination, among others. These impacts have the potential to leave the entire population in need of emergency food supplies. International partners will confront logistical challenges in meeting the need for food as pre-positioned stocks are exposed to hazards like storms and sea level rise, and the distances that separate RMI from key humanitarian logistics hubs are vast.

In the 2019/2020 household survey, more than one-third of households in the country reported being moderately or severely food insecure – i.e., they lack money or other resources to access food in sufficient quantity or quality.[253] A disaster in RMI would exacerbate these conditions quickly, and response efforts will need to prioritize immediate food assistance, supply chain protection, and support to the most vulnerable households to prevent hunger-related health and social problems.

The country imports approximately 90% of its food, and 80% of imported food comprises processed foodstuffs. Malnutrition, child hunger, stunting (low height for age), obesity, and NCDs are all exacerbated by the prevalence of calorie-rich and nutrient-poor foods. However, most Marshallese have no access to alternatives as the supply of local traditional crops and ocean resources is limited. Only about 10% of the national land area is used for agriculture, and fewer than half of the country's households have access to plots for subsistence agriculture. Even those households that do produce substantial

food for home consumption confront the long-term challenges of poor soil conditions, limited fresh water supply, and a loss of traditional agricultural knowledge.[254]

Nationally, rice (all imported) accounts for over 40% of daily calorie consumption, and proteins come mainly from chicken or fish, including shellfish and canned tuna, although some rural communities have higher intake of fresh-caught, local reef fish.[255] Traditional food crops – breadfruit, pandanus, bananas, pumpkin, taro, and sweet potato – are still grown, but daily consumption of all but breadfruit and pumpkin has fallen off as imported starches that are easier to store and prepare have gained preference.[256]

To boost the availability and quality of local, fresh foods, the country has sought and benefited from international partnerships, many through the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Across the islands, programming to increase food security has focused on ensuring farmers can access both knowledge and resources, especially high-quality plants and seeds, as well as expanding the pool of available livestock. Beyond providing immediate improvements to livelihoods and nutrition, programming also has a DM aspect, as it not only expands and diversifies the stock of foods available locally but also promotes post-harvest storage and preservation.[257]

In addition to FAO's long-term work to promote foundational food security, the WFP, through its Pacific Multi-Country Office, is a key player in regional preparedness and response. Despite "food" being in its name, it is one of the lynchpin practitioners of logistics, emergency telecommunications, and food security. WFP plays the roles of both technical advisor and emergency response cluster lead. In response to sudden-onset shocks, WFP, at the request of an affected government, can operate emergency logistics services, humanitarian transport (personnel and supplies), and emergency telecommunications services.[258]

Despite progress on local food security initiatives, the country's low-lying topography and exposure to the high winds, surging waves, and heavy rains that accompany storms make all crops – and nearly all storage areas – vulnerable to damage and loss. Meanwhile, drought is increasingly common, as are drought impacts on crops and water sources.

IOM is another key partner. During the 2015-2016 drought, bilateral donors funded food deliveries to outer islands. IOM, from its office in Majuro, oversaw the process of shipping thousands of pounds of food to outer islands and atolls, which would normally be better able to rely on local food products than do the urban residents of Majuro and Ebeye. The crop damage from droughts can vary from one island to another and require local, national, and international cooperation to develop a needs assessment that addresses acute and chronic obstacles to accessing food. In the 2016 drought response, the NDMO worked with the U.S. Embassy and IOM to find and deploy experts for the assessment that would lead to the food shipments.[259]

In any disaster in the country, affected communities who have lost access to food and water must rely on supplies shipped in from far distant logistics hubs. If Majuro and Ebeye are not affected, some stocks from those islands can be delivered for short-term relief of affected islands, but any overreliance on these urban centers' markets puts their own residents at risk of food shortages. If Majuro and Ebeye are impacted by a disaster event, the ability to source and transport food into RMI becomes even more of a challenge for responders.

CONCLUSION

RMI is exposed to drought and flood hazards. Sea level rise threatens to exacerbate other hazards such as king tides, coastal erosion, and storm surge. Less common but potentially more impactful are tropical cyclones and tsunamis that could cause severe damage. It is at relatively lower risk of seismic or volcanic activity, although the risk is not zero. The country confronts varying disaster response challenges, from densely populated Majuro and Ebeye to remote, outlying islands hundreds of miles away. It is confronting these challenges through a more integrated national-to-local DRM approach comprising planning, communication, and community engagement.

As one of four countries in the world that consist entirely of low-lying atolls and islands, RMI is highly vulnerable to coastal inundation. Sea level rise is exacerbating hazards across the country, where flooding and storm surges are increasingly frequent occurrences. Sea level rise and droughts are also depleting water sources. Inundation events are becoming more frequent and severe, and their impacts on critical national infrastructure not only disrupts immediate response but also carries longer-term economic consequences. The government of RMI approaches DRM, DRR, and prevention in lockstep with climate change adaptation.

RMI re-organized its DM structure with the DRM Act of 2023. Changes aimed to establish an institutional structure to deliver DM and climate measures throughout the country by promoting cooperation between national and local government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector. The National Disaster Council is the strategic lead agency providing guidance on DM policy and plans and overseeing other offices and committees. The NDMO operationally oversees disaster response and activates the National Emergency Operations Committee and National Emergency Operations Center to coordinate and conduct response operations.

Beyond immediate response activities, the National Disaster Council also oversees the Recovery Coordination Committee, which coordinates longer-term recovery planning, and the Disaster Resilience Committee, which promotes resilience and DRR planning. RMI's national DM plans have adopted a community-centered approach that aims to prioritize meaningful engagement, effective communication, and the use of traditional and formal social networks.

The 2023 DRM Act formalized the eight national clusters used by RMI to coordinate disaster response activities by functional sectors, led by the relevant government ministry or agency. If a disaster necessitates a regional humanitarian response, the OCHA-established PHT, which has a 10-cluster regional structure, would support and align with RMI's national-level response. Nationally, MIRCS plays a growing role in community disaster preparedness and aims for all RMI islands to have a local presence or branch by 2027. NGOs active in civil society include WUTMI and MICNGOs. At the regional level, RMI actively engages in Pacific organizations, including PIF, Pacific Community, and PIEMA. RMI also aligns with regional and international frameworks relevant to DRR and sustainable development, including the FRDP, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, the SDGs, and the Sendai Framework.

The COFA between RMI and the U.S. was renewed in 2023, finalized in 2024, and came into force in 2025; its conditions extend through 2043. It allows the U.S. to maintain a strategic military base and deny potential adversaries territorial access and provides RMI financial assistance for infrastructure and public services, including those pertaining to disaster management.

APPENDICES

Risk Indices

Risk calculation takes into account exposure to hazards, vulnerability, and coping capacity. Addressing all of these elements is important in reducing and mitigating disaster risk. Various indices emphasize structural or institutional risk while others emphasize hazards or losses (human and economic). Regardless of emphasis, disaster risk calculations use some form of the equation:

Disaster Risk = (Hazard × Vulnerability) / Capacity[260]

Taken from the UNDRR glossary, definitions will help clarify this formula:

- Capacity - The combination of strengths, attributes, and resources available within an organization, community, or society to manage and reduce disaster risks and strengthen resilience.
- Disaster risk - The potential loss of life, injury, or destroyed or damaged assets, which could occur to a system, society, or a community in a specific period of time, determined probabilistically as a function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability, and capacity.
- Hazard - A process, phenomenon, or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury, or other health impacts, property damage, social and economic disruption, or environmental degradation.
- Vulnerability - The conditions determined by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets, or systems to the impacts of hazards.[261]

In general, the goal of indexing risk is to inform decision makers and DRR and climate adaptation practitioners of the level of risk to and underlying capacity of the target community. The various risk calculation models support proactive crisis management frameworks and are helpful for prioritizing allocation of resources and for coordinating actions focused on anticipating, mitigating, and preparing for humanitarian emergencies.

INFORM Risk Profile

INFORM is a collaboration of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning, and Preparedness with the European Commission. It is a multi-stakeholder forum for developing shared, quantitative analysis relevant to humanitarian crises and disasters. The Joint Research Center of the European Commission is the scientific lead. There are three operational dashboards – i.e., INFORM Risk, INFORM Severity, and INFORM Climate Change.[262]

The **INFORM Risk Index** is an open-source assessment that supports prevention, preparedness, and response decisions. It measures the risk of humanitarian crises and disasters in 191 countries. The INFORM model is based on the standard dimensions of risk: Hazards and Exposure, Vulnerability, and Lack of Coping Capacity. The first dimension measures the natural and human hazards that pose the risk. The second and third dimensions cover population factors that can mitigate against or exacerbate the risk. The Vulnerability dimension considers the strength of individuals and households relative to a crisis while the Lack of Coping Capacity dimension considers factors of institutional strength.[263]

The INFORM model is split into different levels to provide a quick overview of the underlying factors leading to humanitarian risk. INFORM gives each country a risk score of 1-10 (1 being the lowest risk and 10 the highest) for each of the dimensions, categories, and components of risk, as well as an overall risk score.[264] The higher the overall score, the more at-risk a country is. In the 2026 INFORM Risk Index, the Marshall Islands had an overall risk score of 3.5/10, which INFORM categorizes as the "Low" risk class and lands the Marshall Islands as the 102nd most at-risk country in the Index. The Hazards and Exposure dimension

score takes into account a combination of both natural and anthropogenic hazards, and the Marshall Islands rated 2.6/10 or 125th of 191 countries. The Vulnerability dimension score was 4.2/10 or 80th of 191, and the Lack of Coping Capacity dimension score was 3.8/10 or 108th of 191. Physical exposure to Coastal Flood, at 8.5/10, was the greatest threat in the Hazards and Exposure dimension. Economic Dependency measured 8.3/10, the most significant driver of risk in the Vulnerability dimension. Governance rated 4.9/10 to be the most significant risk in the Lack of Coping Capacity dimension. Figure 11 shows the INFORM Risk dashboard for the Marshall Islands for 2026.[265]

U.S. Government Disaster Management Engagement

The U.S. and RMI maintain a continuing relationship with many of the conditions set under the COFA, which was most recently amended in 2024, with the amendments coming into force in May 2025. Within the agreement are articles including sectoral grant assistance for developments in RMI's postal services, weather services, civil aviation safety services, disaster preparedness, relief programs, and telecommunications services. The COFA framework establishes that the U.S. government shall provide disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery assistance to the Government of RMI. Beginning in fiscal year 2025 and ending in fiscal year 2043, both governments shall each make an annual contribution of US$500,000 into the Disaster Assistance Emergency Fund established by the Government of RMI in accordance with Section 211 (e) of the 2023 Amended Compact. RMI's national government grants the U.S. exclusive access to designated defense sites within the RMI and authority to restrict third-country military access.[266]

The U.S. State Department is the lead federal agency for U.S. international disaster response. Within the Department, the Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Response (DHR) mobilizes funding, supplies, and personnel to support a disaster-affected state when that state requests or will accept international assistance and the U.S. offers assistance within the context that the assistance meets requirements for U.S. interests. The State Department may request other U.S. federal agency support if specific capabilities are needed; as such, the Department may request U.S. military support for unique capabilities and specified durations.

U.S. Country Team

The COFA lists specific U.S. government agencies tasked with delivering services to the Government of RMI. They include the NWS, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID; now absorbed into the Department of State's Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance), FEMA, and the Department of the Interior.[267]

The September 2025 visit of Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) Commander, Admiral Samuel Paparo to Majuro marked the formal celebration of COFA implementation and the announcement of coordinated initiatives reinforcing U.S. commitment to RMI and the broader Indo-Pacific region. To address critical public safety gaps identified following an August 2025 fire that gutted the Nitijela building, the U.S. Department of State announced that it planned to provide one fire truck to the country. Simultaneously, the U.S. Department

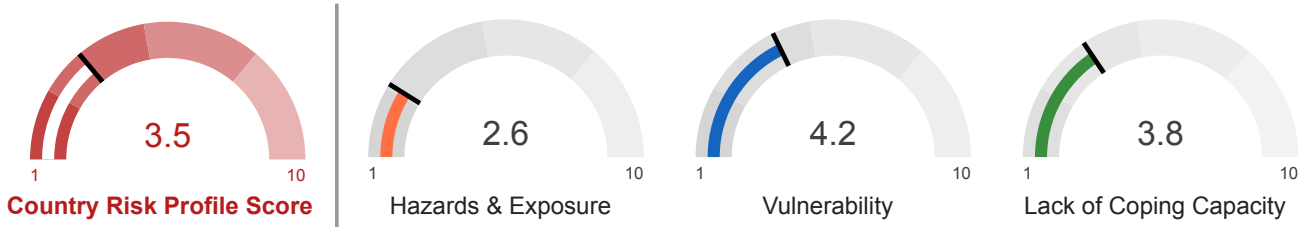


Figure 11: INFORM Risk Index Dashboard for Marshall Islands (2026)

of Agriculture is funding repairs to existing emergency equipment and procuring personal protective equipment for first responders. Separately, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency has approved funding for project scoping services at Delap Dock to initiate infrastructure improvement planning, with upgrades intended to support U.S. military readiness and RMI port capacity.

In coordination with Taiwan and RMI, the Department of State is also delivering US$8.3 million to support replacement of Air Marshall Islands' aging aircraft fleet. This investment will enhance connectivity to outer islands, including Kwajalein Atoll, and expand available disaster response airlift capacity across the dispersed islands. The U.S. reaffirmed its commitment to joint medical and engineering exercises designed to improve health outcomes for Marshallese communities. Additionally, a disaster response and humanitarian assistance exercise has been announced to strengthen RMI disaster preparedness in accordance with COFA obligations.[268]

U.S.-RMI Energy Sector Engagement – July 2025

In July 2025, U.S. DOE representatives traveled to RMI to engage with government partners, provide public and environmental health information, and discuss land use planning for nuclear-affected atolls. On 23 July, the DOE led a mission to Bikini Atoll in response to a request from Kili-Bikini-Ejit leadership to re-initiate a radiological science program. The delegation, which included RMI President Hilda Heine and U.S. Ambassador Laura Stone, conducted preliminary radiation sampling around community structures to confirm safe background radiation levels in built-up areas. Discussions centered on reestablishing a permanent DOE presence to support radiological monitoring, food safety analysis, cultural site preservation, and education opportunities in partnership with the College of the Marshall Islands. On 25 July, DOE met with Enewetak Atoll representatives to confirm approval of groundwater analysis requirements under the 2011 Insular Areas Act, including borehole refurbishment at Runit Dome, alongside discussions on dietary sampling, potable water monitoring, continuation of the whole-body counting program to measure radiation in people, and community employment and education opportunities during DOE missions to the atoll.[269]

U.S. Compact and Grant Funding for the RMI - July 2024

In fiscal year 2024, the U.S. Government provided significant funding to RMI with direct implications for disaster preparedness, climate resilience, and humanitarian assistance. Through the Technical Assistance Program (TAP), the State Department's Office of Insular Affairs awarded US$164,500 to the Jaluit Atoll Local Government for the Disaster Preparedness and Climate Resilience for Disconnected Communities Project, and US$2 million for the Runit Dome Groundwater Monitoring Program to continue environmental monitoring at Enewetak Atoll. Additionally, US$2.2 million was allocated to the RMI MoHHS for the Section 177 Health Care 4 Atolls Program, supporting health service delivery across underserved communities.

Beyond TAP funding, COFA funding provided US$20 million through the Climate Fund to support RMI efforts in addressing climate-related challenges, including sea level rise and environmental threats to the island nation's long-term viability. An additional US$20 million was allocated through the U.S. Supplemental Health Fund to improve health outcomes for the Marshallese people. These investments reflect sustained U.S. commitment to strengthening RMI's capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters and humanitarian challenges across the region.[270]

U.S. COVID-19 Equipment Support to the RMI – June 2023

On 20 June 2023, USAID delivered 60 computers, tablets, network maintenance tools,

and storage devices to the RMI MoHHS in support of ongoing COVID-19 response efforts. The handover, conducted at Majuro Hospital, built upon a previous donation of over 100 computers and tablets in 2022 and supplemented more than US$57 million in pandemic assistance provided by the U.S. Government to RMI. The equipment was delivered through the USAID Epidemic Control project and was intended to strengthen MoHHS capacity for COVID-19 surveillance, health data collection and analysis, and telehealth service delivery, including to outer-island communities.[271]

U.S. Embassy in Majuro

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DoW DM Engagements

When the capacity of state and national authorities is insufficient to meet the demands of a disaster response and the U.S. government has offered assistance, if the Department of State assesses that it requires additional capacity to deliver relief, it can request support from the DoW via an inter-agency process. If the Secretary of War assesses that U.S. military forces have the capacity to respond, the Pentagon will assign the response to a Geographic Component Command (e.g., USINDOPACOM) who can assign the response to an available and trained commander or unit. That unit will support DHR for a specified period of time. On the ground, State and DoW responders utilize a specified process to receive tasking and report the status of tasks.

To ensure that U.S. forces are ready to fulfill their tasking, U.S. military units and agencies commonly undertake preparedness activities to train with and enhance the capacity of RMI responders and partner states. In the past five years, U.S. military and Coast Guard personnel and assets have conducted multiple DM activities in RMI.

Oil Spill Response Workshop – March 2026

In March 2026, USINDOPACOM's CFE-DM sponsored a 5-day Oil Spill Response Workshop in Majuro. The workshop brought together government officials, emergency managers, and technical experts to strengthen collective capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from marine oil spill incidents. Objectives included building knowledge, developing practical skills, assessing readiness, identifying capability gaps, and fostering civil-military partnerships among participating organizations, regional bodies, and interagency stakeholders to ensure coordinated response efforts.

Instruction was provided by personnel from the RMI Environmental Protection Agency, RMI MoHHS, U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA, and PCCI, Inc. In advance of the workshop, oil spill response equipment was donated to RMI to further develop maritime oil spill response capabilities. As a complementary effort to improve maritime transportation system resilience, the Coast Guard and RMI Environmental Protection Agency collaborated to produce the first version of the RMI National Contingency Plan.[272]

Operation Christmas Drop – December 2025

On 8 December 2025, U.S. Pacific Air Forces conducted Operation Christmas Drop on Enewetak Atoll. The U.S. Air Force air dropped Christmas gifts, sponsored by the U.S., as well as Australia, Canada, Japan, and South Korea.[273] The drop at Enewetak Atoll was part of a larger operation that included packing and loading 270 bundles onto C-130 Hercules aircraft from the air forces of the sponsoring countries for delivery to 59 remote islands in FSM, Palau, and RMI; four bundles were dropped to RMI.[274] The training event demonstrated the ability of the U.S. DoW and allies to rapidly coordinate and safely deliver supplies to areas without compatible runways.

Joint Committee Meeting: Pacific Security and Maritime Resilience – November 2024

U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam personnel participated in the Joint Committee Meeting held in Majuro from 13

to 17 October 2024, alongside RMI and U.S. interagency representatives. The meeting served to strengthen bilateral maritime partnerships and identify future initiatives to advance RMI maritime security and resilience.

In a complementary effort, the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Environmental Response and Regional Activity Center (MER-RAC) supported RMI in developing a pollution response framework through the provision of training, resources, and technical expertise. These engagements aimed to enhance RMI's capacity to protect its marine environment from oil spill and hazardous substance incidents, 500h_q95 reflecting the U.S. Coast Guard's sustained commitment to maritime security across Oceania.[275]

Operation Roi Recovery – January 2024

On 20 January 2024, an offshore winter storm system in the northern Pacific drove a storm surge that affected atolls and islets across RMI. Roi Namur Islet in Kwajalein Atoll was worst affected. Under Operation Roi Recovery, the U.S. Army Garrison - Kwajalein Atoll evacuated 80 of the approximately 120 personnel who lived on Roi Namur. Personnel also assessed damage and worked to restore basic services and clear the runway on Roi Namur. The Garrison also continued water and fuel runs for the island of Enniburr, south of Roi Namur, where the Marshallese workforce lives.[276]

Pacific Partnership – November 2023

Multinational service members assigned to Pacific Partnership 2024-1 departed RMI aboard USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) on 14 November 2023, following a 14-day mission stop. During the mission, members of the medical team embarked aboard RMIS Liwatoon Mour, a Marshallese hospital ship, for a 4-day operation in Aur Atoll. Working alongside Marshallese medical providers, the team conducted a TB eradication campaign to strengthen host nation medical capacity and build interoperability between multinational and RMI health personnel.[277]

Photo 3 shows U.S. Army Captain Brian McNeilly and Nathaniel Lometo, member of the RMI sea patrol, reviewing combat tourniquet use on 10 November 2023 during a mass search and rescue drill as part of Pacific Partnership in Majuro Atoll.[278]



Photo 3: Pacific Partnership Mass Search & Rescue Drill, November 2023

Additional Resources

This appendix provides additional references, with links, to enable readers to find relevant and contextual information.

International and U.S. Government Sources
The United Nations Micronesia Marshall Islands National Study 2024/25 https://micronesia.un.org/en/285772-united-nations-micronesia-marshall-islands-national-study-202425 *Information on sustainable development and challenges in the country.*
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Multinational Force Standing Operating Procedures (MNF SOP) – Annex C: Humanitarian Assistance/ Disaster Relief Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT), U.S. Indo-Pacific Command https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/J7/MNF%20SOP%20Ver%203.4_14%20FEB%2025_vbf.pdf?ver=4LVTNxMJB8_1xpfxYdARrg%3d%3d **(D1 C1/ PDF pg. 883)** *Annex on international humanitarian assistance; part of broad standing procedures for regional multinational force operations other than war.*

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

°	degree(s) – of temperature (C = Celsius; F = Fahrenheit), of latitude and longitude (N = North, S = South, E = East, W = West)
$	dollar(s), U.S.
COFA	Compact of Free Association
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DHR	Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Response (in U.S. State Department)
DM	disaster management
DOE	Department of Energy (U.S.)
DRM	disaster risk management
EDCR RMI	Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience in the RMI
EM-DAT	Emergency Events Database, by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters
ENSO	El Niño-Southern Oscillation
EOC	emergency operations center
EWS	early warning system
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency (U.S.)
FRDP	Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
ft/ ft^2	foot / feet / square feet
Gbps	gigabits per second
GDP	gross domestic product
HF	high frequency
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
in	inch(es)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KAJUR	Kwajalein Atoll Joint Utilities Resources
kbps	kilobits per second
km/km^2	kilometer(s)/ square kilometers
m	meter(s)
Mbps	megabits per second
MCO	Multi-Country Office (of the UN)
mi / mi^2	mile(s) / square miles
MICNGOs	Marshall Islands Council of Non-Government Organizations, Incorporated
MIMAT	Marshall Islands Medical Assistance Team
MIPD	Marshall Islands Police Department
MIRCS	Marshall Islands Red Cross Society
MISC	Marshall Islands Shipping Corporation

mm	millimeters
MoHHS	Ministry of Health and Human Services
MTCIT	Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technologies
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NDRMA	National Disaster Risk Management Arrangements
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Center
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (U.S.)
NTA	National Telecommunications Authority
NWS	National Weather Service (U.S.)
OCS	Office of the Chief Secretary
PHT	Pacific Humanitarian Team
PICT	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PIEMA	Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PIHOA	Pacific Island Health Officers' Association
PPHSN	Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
RMIPA	Republic of the Marshall Islands Ports Authority
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOP	standard operating procedures
SPC	Pacific Community
SREM	Strategic Roadmap for Emergency Management
TAP	Technical Assistance Program (U.S. Department of the Interior)
TB	tuberculosis
U.S.	United States
UN	United Nations
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development (reorganized into the U.S. State Department in 2025)
USAPI	U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands
VHF	very high frequency

VSAT	Very Small Aperture Terminal
WFO Guam	Weather Forecast Office Guam
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WSO	Weather Service Office (in Majuro)
WUTMI	Women United Together Marshall Islands

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