# PALAU

## Disaster Management Reference Handbook

August 2026



CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT & HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
WWW.CFE-DMHA.ORG

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## Front Cover

U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Mason Tran

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# Letter from the Director

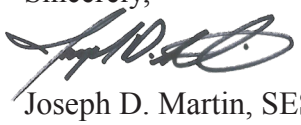
Small, Pacific Island states confront challenging natural environments that threaten their people and economies.

There is high potential for a major storm or regional drought to devastate Palau through loss of lives, livelihoods, and property. The country's small size and remoteness present challenges to building resilience by increasing the time it takes for international assistance to arrive after a disaster. To overcome these obstacles, Palau relies on strong partnerships between the government and the Palauan people, as well as on expansive relationships with regional and international stakeholders. By contributing to regional security, the country also increases the potential availability of support from partners when local resources are insufficient to achieve resilience alone.

As a state in free association with the United States (U.S.), Palau has joined the U.S. in building a multi-faceted relationship that enhances the security and prosperity of both parties, in addition to helping build regional and global resilience. As part of the U.S. Government's efforts to bolster Palau's security through its national disaster management institutions, the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM) and Palau's National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) collaborate on projects. Meanwhile, U.S. forces undertake various exercises - for example, Pacific Partnership - in Palau to ensure that the country has the facilities and experience needed to defend its security alongside U.S. partners. Concrete contributions to NEMO's operational excellence are tangible ways the U.S. and Palau can demonstrate the benefits of Pacific regional security cooperation.

This updated Palau Disaster Management Reference Handbook is also a facet of that relationship. It provides a baseline of information on the country's risk landscape, including hazards, vulnerabilities, and coping capacity. It is intended to support planners and other civilian and military personnel who are executing a disaster management activity alongside Palauan stakeholders.

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. Pacific Command (US PACOM) 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.

## Contact Information

Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance
456 Hornet Ave
JBPHH, HI 96860-3503
Telephone: +1 (808) 472-0518
https://www.cfe-dmha.org

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Palau is exposed to hazards that have the potential to create a disaster that affects the entire population. Like many of its fellow Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), Palau's small population and economy mean the country has limited resources for expanding coping capacity. Thus, it has built strong bilateral and multilateral partnerships. This Disaster Management Reference Handbook offers Palau's disaster management (DM) partners a resource for understanding both the potential for disasters in the country and the network of people and institutions ready to respond.

### *Understanding the Risk*

Tropical cyclones and droughts are the most common hazard events that lead to declarations of states of emergency and appeals for international assistance. The entire country is exposed to both hazards, and vulnerabilities are high in both remote areas and areas of dense population. In the recent past, major cyclones and El Niño-correlated droughts have affected nearly the whole population either by damaging thousands of homes or undermining water and food security. Historic cyclones have caused damage and loss well above 5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Palau's people are clustered mostly in shoreline communities. The high concentration of people in Koror tends to centralize both resources and risk since more people and more valuable assets can all be impacted by a single event. Less populous islands or remote areas of Babeldaob may experience overall fewer human casualties or property damage, but responding to events in these areas is more difficult logistically due to the country's limited transportation network. Delayed responses can escalate losses as a percentage of the community's people and assets. Any future increase in the frequency or severity of storms and droughts will also strain community resources.

### *National and International Resources*

The National Disaster Risk Management Framework is the underlying conceptual document guiding all aspects of DM in Palau. It outlines institutional roles and responsibilities, describes chains of reporting and authority, and details standard operating procedures (SOP) for the National Emergency Operations Center.

The lead agency is the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO). It provides advice to and administrative support for Palau's political leaders, who sit on the Disaster Executive Council, and for the National Emergency Committee, which directs DM at the operational level. Moreover, NEMO provides critical national-level support for state and local responders. When a disaster happens, the NEMO Coordinator works across all levels of government and society.

As with many PICTs, Palau's local, national, and regional relationships are crucial components to address gaps in technical expertise, equipment, funding, or materials. Palau's government works with United Nations (UN) entities, Pacific regional organizations, and other countries to deliver projects that identify hazards, reduce vulnerability, and enhance coping capacity among communities. This work relies on national organizations like the Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS) and on civil society.

Palau's bilateral partners are key DM stakeholders. Appeals for assistance in the wake of disasters have seen funding and supplies delivered by Australia, Japan, Taiwan, and the United States (U.S.). The Compact of Free Association (COFA) between Palau and the U.S. offers Palau resources, especially from technical and scientific agencies. The U.S. military presence is common but not permanent, and U.S. forces regularly participate in DM-oriented training and exercises alongside Palauan responders and other DM practitioners from Australia, Japan, Taiwan, and international organizations.

# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

The location and geographic characteristics of the Republic of Palau expose the country to hydrometeorological hazards, while social and economic factors mean that many of its people are vulnerable to the impacts of severe hazard events. The hundreds of islands that make up Palau lie in the western Pacific Ocean. The small population is concentrated in Koror, and more than 90% of people reside within 1 kilometer (km; 0.6 miles [mi]) of the coast. This population concentration means that most infrastructure – roads, electricity and water plants, and health and education facilities – lie in coastal zones.

A sovereign state in free association with the U.S. since the 1990s, Palau's small market is closely linked to the U.S., and the economy is weighted heavily toward the public sector and tourism. The national government is responsible for working to reduce the risks of disaster impacts, but community-led action is the most common first line of disaster risk reduction (DRR).

## Geography and Environment

Palau is an archipelago in the western Pacific Ocean. It comprises approximately 340 islands, islets, and atolls.[1] The country's islands lie between 2° and 8° North and 131° and 135° East, approximately 800 km (500 mi) from both the Philippines to the west and Papua New Guinea to the south.

With just 490 km$^2$ (189 mi$^2$) of land area,[2] Palau is one of the world's smallest countries. The coastline stretches 1,519 km (944 mi), and the highest point, Mount Ngerchelchuus, rises to 242 meters (m; 793 feet [ft]) above sea level.[3] The largest island, Babeldaob, accounts for some three-quarters of the total land area and is home to the national capital, Ngerulmud. Meanwhile, Koror, with just 18 km$^2$ (7 mi$^2$) of land, is home to roughly two-thirds of the country's population and is the country's economic hub. Of the hundreds of islands, eight are inhabited. From northeast to southwest, the inhabited islands are Kayangel, Babeldaob, Koror, Peleliu, Angaur, Sonsorol, Pulo Anna, Hatohobei, and Helen Reef.

Most of the islands are volcanic in origin, and they are mostly low-lying in terms of elevation. However, some are formed of uplifted limestone. Babeldaob, the second largest island in Micronesia, is covered by forests and grasslands, and its raised interior feeds many rivers and watersheds that fall to wetlands and mangroves at the coast, which are fringed by beaches.[4] Figure 1 shows a map of Palau.[5]

Palau's year-round climate is hot and humid, with average daily temperatures of approximately 28°C (82°F). There are several major influences on the climate and weather; they include the Indo-Pacific Warm Pool, the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), the West Pacific Monsoon, and the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO). The country lies within the Pacific Warm Pool, an area where sea surface temperatures remain above 28°C (82°F) throughout the year; this water temperature affects both ocean life and weather and climate patterns.[6] The ITCZ is a band of precipitation that moves northward and southward seasonally;[7] as it crosses over Palau, it generates a monthly average of approximately 200 millimeters (mm; 7.87 inches [in]) of rainfall. Annual precipitation concentrates during the wet season – June through August; in addition to the ITCZ, seasonal rainfall is driven by the West Pacific Monsoon. Finally, conditions can vary in response to phases of ENSO. In Palau, El Niño events typically produce drier- and cooler-than-normal conditions, particularly in Koror, while La Niña phases bring increased precipitation.[8]

Rainfall varies significantly from year to year. Average precipitation for the period 1991-2020 stood at 3,400 mm (134 in).[9] With many communities reliant on rainwater catchment for fresh water, drought is a major concern. The most severe drought episodes on record have coincided with strong El Niño events, notably in 1982–1983, 1997–1998, and 2015–2016, each of which resulted in water shortages severe enough to require water rationing.[10]

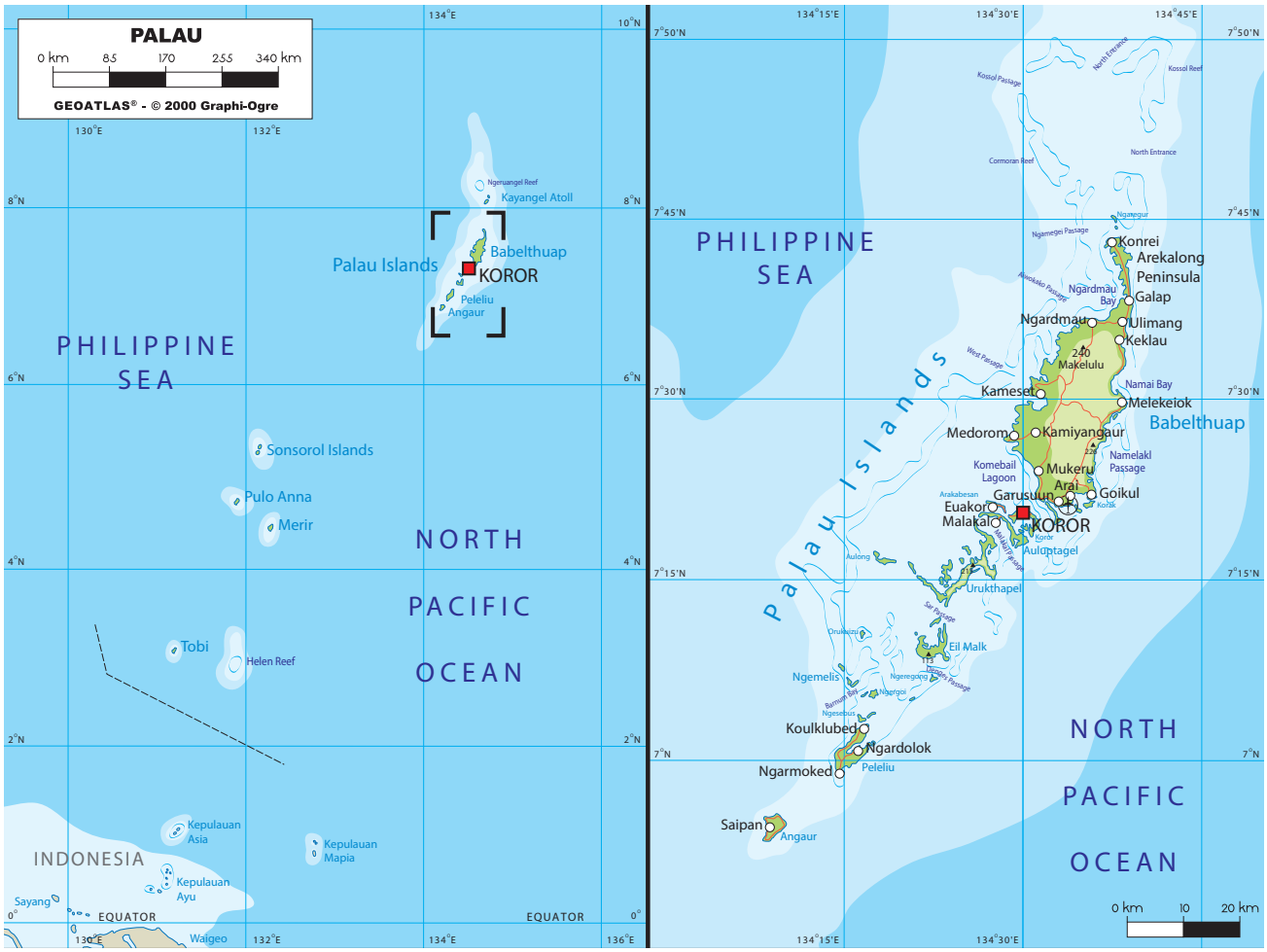



Figure 1: Map of Palau

Despite the magnitude of societal exposure to drought impacts, tropical cyclones represent the most significant recurring hydrometeorological threat. Although the country lies approximately 1,448 km (900 mi) south of the main Pacific cyclone belt and is not generally in the immediate path of storms, historical records confirm substantial exposure. Between 1945 and 2013, 68 tropical cyclones passed through or near Palau's territory. In the past decade, one major storm caused substantial damage.[11] Cyclones can and do form and pass by the country throughout the year.

## Society and Demographics

As of the 2020 census, the total population was 17,614, 11.8% fewer people than registered by the 2005 census. Nearly 78% of all residents live in urban areas. Of note, Palau's sex ratio is 116 males for every 100 females due to recruitment and employment of male workers from other countries. Nearly one-quarter of the population is under 18 years of age, and some 11% are 65 years of age or older.[12]

The population, by island and state, is detailed in Table 1.[13]

There is some cultural variety among communities throughout the islands. Ethnically, approximately 70% of people are Palauan (of Micronesian heritage with Malayan and Melanesian admixtures), 28% are Asian (predominantly Filipino, followed by Chinese, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese), and 2% are of European descent. Most local people can communicate in both Palauan and English. Two communities from the outermost Southwest Islands maintain separate languages: Sonsorolese and Tobian (from Hatohobei). Palau is among a small number of PICTs organized along matrilineal lines, a social structure that shapes community decision-making, land tenure, and the distribution of traditional authority.[14]

| Island | State | Population (2020) |
|---|---|---|
| Angaur | Angaur | 114 |
| Babeldaob | Aimeliik | 363 |
| | Airai | 2,529 |
| | Melekeok | 318 |
| | Ngarard | 396 |
| | Ngardmau | 238 |
| | Ngeremlengui | 349 |
| | Ngatpang | 289 |
| | Ngchesar | 319 |
| | Ngarchelong | 384 |
| | Ngiwal | 312 |
| Hatohobei | Hatohobei | 39 |
| Kayangel | Kayangel | 41 |
| Koror | Koror | 11,400 |
| Peleliu | Peleliu | 470 |
| Sonsorol | Sonsorol | 53 |

Table 1: Population, by Island and State (2020)

## Vulnerable Groups

The impacts of hazard events are not felt evenly across societies. Some groups of people are more vulnerable to adverse effects due to physical circumstances, location, or financial and material resources. While age, sex, finances, and disability status do not automatically make a person more vulnerable, these elements of a person's identity and life can complicate both preparation for and recovery from a disaster. By integrating representatives of vulnerable groups into community and national DM processes and planning, these vulnerabilities can be mitigated, improving outcomes for all of society.

### Noncitizen Populations

The constitution limits citizenship to ethnic Palauans. Members of other communities, even those born in the country or holding long-term legal residency, are not eligible for citizenship, and no naturalization pathway exists. Noncitizens make up approximately one-third of Palau's resident population. They are prohibited from purchasing land, and discrimination in employment, wages, housing, education, and access to social services has been reported.

Palauan law does not provide a formal legal framework for granting asylum or refugee status. The government has, however, extended some protection against the expulsion or return of potential refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. While the constitution sets out the fundamental rights of citizens, it does not explicitly protect racial or ethnic minorities from violence or discrimination, and authorities have been observed to pursue crimes committed against foreign nationals with less alacrity than those committed against citizens.[15]

While there have been no publicized instances of noncitizens – guest workers or visitors – being discriminated against during disaster responses, there is some potential for these communities to have less opportunity to build individual or household resources to withstand the impacts of a hazard event. With fewer social linkages to support their participation in preparedness activities, noncitizens may be more likely to incur loss or damage during a disaster and less likely to be able to access services to redress loss or harm to themselves.

People Living with Disabilities

People living with disabilities may be disproportionately affected by hazard events. In Palau, they face significant economic and social barriers to building resilience. Approximately 3.4% of the population, more than 2,800 individuals, live with at least one disability, the most common being related to vision, mobility, and hearing. The vulnerability of these people is shaped across housing, transportation, and access to services because of shortfalls in accessibility, alternative communications media, and scarce financial resources.

Transportation is one of the top challenges. Vehicles that are accessible for people living with mobility disabilities are available only in limited numbers and generally require advance booking. Therefore, spontaneous travel and access to employment, education, and medical care can be limited. The national government has taken steps in recent years to address these barriers. In 2024, a supplemental budget allocation of US$500,000 was directed to the Palau Housing Authority to fund eight accessibility focused housing projects intended to better serve people living with disabilities as well as older residents.[16]

Poverty

Although Palau ranks among the higher-income PICTs, nearly one-quarter of its population lives in poverty. There are significant disparities in income distribution across the country. The poorest 20% of households account for only about 9% of national income, compared with 42% captured by the wealthiest 20%; this concentration of resources limits the ability of low-income and vulnerable groups to improve economic circumstances in preparation for loss or damage during a disaster.[17]

Within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Palau designated the elimination of poverty in all its forms as a primary goal. To achieve this goal, the country is currently concentrating its efforts on supporting the economy, strengthening the agricultural sector, and improving health services.

A key subsector of the population for whom poverty is a challenge is the youth. The Palau National Youth and Cheldebechel Council (NYCC) is a program dedicated to advocating for youth empowerment and social inclusion. Palau NYCC, established in 2004, collaborates with the government and non-governmental organizations (NGO) to offer services and activities – e.g., career counseling programs and school-specific initiatives – to enhance Palau's labor market. The members of the NYCC represent youth from all 16 states to promote programs and opportunities that support youth; they conduct research and database management to monitor well-being and address issues such as substance abuse, unemployment, and conflicts with the law. With their data, the NYCC often formulates policy mandates to achieve youth empowerment.[18] They play an important role in upskilling young workers and providing them with better employment opportunities in hopes of reducing future poverty rates. On 10 April 2024, Palau NYCC became a chartered non-profit organization.[19]

Sexual- and Gender-Minority Communities

Palauan law does not include protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and the constitution defines marriage as between a man and a woman. Same-sex marriage is prohibited under a constitutional amendment adopted by referendum in 2008, and public opposition can sometimes be mobilized into protest even though Palau signed the UN Human Rights Council's 2011 Joint Statement on Ending Acts of Violence and Related Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.[20] These legal obstacles and societal mores may limit the ability of people who are part of a sexual or gender minority to find safe and stable housing, to maintain employment, and to participate in community initiatives that build resilience to shocks.

The NGO Living All Inclusive in Belau (LAIIB) has reported bullying of sex- and gender-minority individuals as well as discrimination within the healthcare system, and

it notes that cultural stigma frequently prevents affected people from seeking redress. According to LAIIB, care for sexually transmitted infections in state-run facilities tends to emphasize abstinence and the perceived harms of same-sex activity rather than the provision of treatment, while private clinics, typically operated by foreign practitioners, are reported to deliver less judgmental care. No formal reports of violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics have been documented. NGOs working in this space indicate that such incidents may go unreported or be misclassified, and they suggest that available data likely understate actual incidence.[21]

Women

Women in Palau undertake many caregiving and customary obligations. Research confirms that Palauan society generally regards women as the primary caregivers within the family, and this expectation persists regardless of educational achievement or employment outside the home. During customary occasions such as funerals or births, women holding specific positions within a clan may be required to take leave from work to carry out their traditional responsibilities.[22] Given these expectations, the burdens placed on women in the wake of a disaster can be expected to rise significantly. Therefore, during preparedness activities, DM authorities will need to integrate women – especially those in positions of traditional leadership – to inform planning for how to address the needs of caregivers.

As of 2025, the World Bank reported that nearly 60% of Palau's women participated in the labor force.[23] More than 92% of working women are employed in the services sector where employment can be less secure in an economy that relies on the health of the global economy to drive tourism receipts. There may also be significant gaps in reporting women's work as a large proportion are believed to work in the informal sector.[24] Figure 2 shows women's labor force participation in Palau, in comparison to its fellow PICTs, as of 2025.[25] Informal employment and services jobs mean that many women's positions and financial security are more precarious than their male counterparts' jobs; when shocks disrupt a society, it is commonly informal and service jobs that disappear first and these employees who do not have financial cushions.

In addition to demands as caregivers and fewer economic opportunities, Palau's women continue to suffer abuses. World Bank data from 2023 showed that 9.2% of women aged 15-49 years were subjected to physical and/or sexual violence in the 12 months preceding the survey.[26] Rape, including spousal rape, is a criminal offense punishable by up to 25 years of imprisonment, a substantial fine, or both, and domestic violence is similarly classified as a criminal offense. The government enforces these laws effectively when incidents are reported; however, underreporting remains a significant concern, as many victims are reluctant to involve police due to societal and familial pressure. About one-third of women in the country have experienced physical or sexual violence after the age of 15 years, and the primary perpetrators are intimate partners or male family members. Support services are

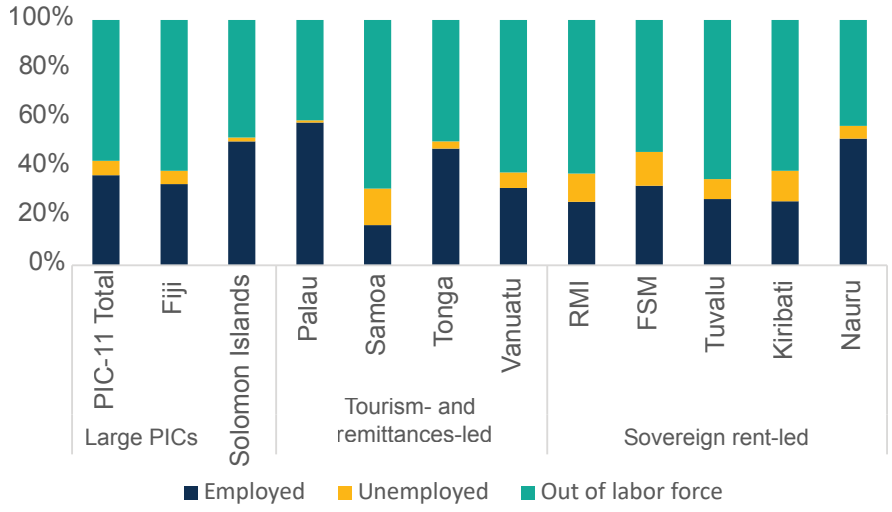



Figure 2: Labor Force Participation Rate of Women in Pacific Island Countries (PIC)

delivered through a combination of NGOs and government actors.[27] In periods after disasters, as social and financial strains mount, women commonly report increased domestic abuse.

## Government

Palau is a sovereign country in free association with the United States. It has a presidential system of national government, some representation by traditional chiefs, and state and hamlet administrations that address issues closest to the communities within their jurisdictions. While DM is overseen and coordinated at the national level, communities are critical to effective hazard identification, risk mitigation, and response. National and state authorities support hamlet and community initiatives through formal programs.

The Constitution was adopted on 1 January 1981, and Palau achieved full independence from U.S.-administered UN trusteeship on 1 October 1994.

The President serves as both Head of State and Head of Government and is elected by popular vote alongside the Vice President. A Council of Chiefs, comprising one traditional chief per state, operates as an advisory body to the President on matters concerning customary law and tradition as well as their relationship to the Constitution and national legislation.

The legislature, the Olbiil Era Kelulau (National Congress), is bicameral and consists of a 13-member Senate, elected nationally, and a 16-member House of Delegates, with one representative elected from each of the country's 16 states. All legislators serve 4-year terms.

The judicial branch comprises the Supreme Court, National Court, Court of Common Pleas, and Land Court. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court presides over both the appellate and trial divisions of the system.[28]

Under the Palau Constitution, the country's 16 traditional municipalities are formally recognized as states. The Constitution's adoption granted these states the authority to convene their own constitutional conventions and to elect their own leaders.[29] Each state elects its own governor and legislature.[30]

Babeldaob, the largest island, is divided into 10 states: Aimeliik, Airai, Melekeok, Ngarard, Ngardmau, Ngeremlengui, Ngatpang, Ngchesar, Ngarchelong, and Ngiwal. The other six states are (from north to south) Kayangel, Koror, Peleliu, Angaur, Sonsorol, and Hatohobei. The administrative divisions below states are hamlets. Some states house hamlets that are now uninhabited, as residents have moved to other settlements; these communities retain their traditional leadership and clan structures and continue to be represented in state legislatures.[31]

### Compact of Free Association

The COFA between Palau and the U.S. was first signed in 1986 and entered into force in 1994. Its political provisions are indefinite in duration, while the economic provisions operate on 20-year terms subject to periodic review. Under the COFA, the U.S. holds exclusive military operating rights in Palau and assumes responsibility for the country's defense and security. In exchange, the U.S. provides Palau with economic assistance through sector grants and trust fund contributions, access to a range of federal services and programs (including postal and meteorological services), and the right for Palauan citizens to enter, work, study, and reside in U.S. states and territories. The current COFA, signed into law in March 2024, is valued at approximately US$900 million across fiscal years 2024-2043; it includes expanded support for the environment, health care, education, and infrastructure. Oversight and coordination of Compact funding are administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior.[32]

## Economic Profile

Palau's economy is exposed to external shocks that affect the international tourism market, global trade, or the U.S. economy, since Palau uses the U.S. dollar as its currency. Disasters – cyclones or droughts – that affect the islands deliver losses through not only damaged assets but also disrupted livelihoods. Meanwhile, global disasters like the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic both halt international tourist arrivals

and deliver blows to the economies of Palau's major bilateral donors. The country's ability to sustain investment in education, health care, and resilient transport, energy, and communications infrastructure requires workforce stabilization through targeted skills training at home to offset both the rising cost of guest laborers from elsewhere in Asia and outflows of high-skilled Palauans to the U.S. market, where they can freely work.

Palau is classified as a "high-income country," which the World Bank defines as having a gross national income (GNI) per capita of US$13,935 or higher, as of 2026.[33] Despite this status, the country receives a large amount of official development assistance (ODA); as of 2023, ODA made up some 12% of GDP, a proportion that ranked the country in the most-reliant quintile of developing countries in terms of ODA-to-GDP ratio. The U.S. and Japan have traditionally been the leading sources of development financing, but in the past two decades, Australia and Taiwan have become critical sources. At times, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has equaled bilateral ODA sources as a financer of infrastructure (water, sanitation, and energy), government, and civil society. ODA from the U.S. is mostly linked to Compact funds.[34]

Beyond ODA, the economy is dependent on three main sectors: tourism, agriculture, and fishing. Tourism has historically been the primary revenue source, contributing approximately 78% of GDP at its 2015 peak. Additional major revenue contributors include public administration (29% of GDP), trade (24%), and construction (12%).[35]

The COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions that saw Beijing discourage Chinese citizens from visiting Palau meant that, in 2024, the country welcomed just over 52,000 international visitors,[36] a significant drop from 2015's total of 168,000.[37] The collapse of international tourism during the pandemic led to a 10.3% contraction in Palau's GDP in 2020; that decline was followed by a further 10.8% decrease in GDP in 2021.[38] Recovery was slow at first, with 1.5% and 2.2% GDP growth in 2022 and 2023, respectively;[39] then, it skyrocketed to 12% growth in 2024, followed by 6.9% in 2025, and projections for 6% and 3.7% in 2026 and 2027, respectively,[40] on the strength of the revived tourism sector and expected Compact grant disbursements. Nonetheless, projections are not all rosy; ongoing global market shocks related to conflict continue to inject doubt into the global oil markets, thereby putting pressure on airlines and on Palau's own energy market, which is heavily reliant on imported diesel for electricity production.

The government is the single largest employer, and the public sector accounts for a substantial share of formal wage employment.[41] In addition to direct employment in public administration (government and public services), much of this work is spread across four state-owned enterprises (SOE) – Palau Public Utilities Corporation (PPUC), Palau National Development Bank, Palau National Communications Corporation (PNCC), and Belau Submarine Cable Corporation. They dominate the electric power, water, telecommunications, and banking sub-sectors and control one-quarter of total fixed assets in the economy even though they contribute only about 4% of GDP annually.[42]

The 2020 Population Census found that the country's working-age population numbered 14,200 people, with an overall labor force participation rate of 67% - 73.6% among men and 59.2% among women. Unemployment was low at 0.8% overall, though it stood at 3.3% among young people. Most employment is in the services sector (77.6%), with almost all formally employed women (92.4%) working in this sector; industry employed 16.7% of workers and agriculture 5.7%. Most of Palau's workforce is concentrated in medium-skill occupations, including skilled agriculture, crafts and trades, services and sales workers, and clerical.[43]

# DISASTER PROFILE

The most frequent and damaging hazard events are tropical cyclones and droughts. During storms, the built environment and agriculture suffer the effects of high winds, heavy rainfall, and storm surges that cause saltwater intrusion into freshwater resources and cropland. During droughts, agricultural production and public health suffer from disruptions to water services, including irrigation and sanitation. Palau's people experience the impacts of these events in their lives, livelihoods, and communities. The intersection of society, infrastructure, and hydrometeorological hazards in the coastal zone has implications for long-term security, as it threatens socio-economic and political stability.

## Hazards

Palau is exposed primarily to hydrometeorological hazards, although there remains a remote risk from seismic hazards. The most frequent hazard events are tropical cyclones and droughts. Cyclones and tidal events can drive flooding. The country also contends with occasional outbreaks of diseases with epidemic and pandemic potential, and it confronts key technical or anthropogenic hazards.

### *Cyclones (Typhoons)*

The region's cyclone season is year-round although seasonal peaks are apparent in Palau during the first six and last three months of the year.[44] "Typhoons" are western Pacific Basin tropical cyclones that reach sustained winds of greater than or equal to 64 knots (118 km per hour [kph]; 74 mi per hour [mph]).

Over the second half of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st, Palau was affected by an average of one tropical cyclone per year. However, during a recent 5-year period (2018-2022), there were 20 storms that either made landfall or passed close enough to the country to affect it.[45] As of July 2026, no storms have impacted Palau since 2021.

The country is technically situated just south of the "typhoon belt" that runs between 10° and 40°N latitude in the Pacific Ocean, west of the International Dateline. Palau's proximity to the spawning grounds for many tropical cyclones and the size of these storms mean that the islands regularly experience storm effects even if they do not receive a direct hit. Passing storms disrupt livelihoods and ecosystems as they deliver high winds that damage buildings, infrastructure, and trees, while storm surges push saltwater into cropland, accelerate coastal erosion, and alter lagoon patterns.[46] An estimated 99% of the population and nearly all transport, education, and healthcare facilities are exposed to some cyclone effects – especially wind damage.[47]

While they do not frequently bring major damage to Palau, tropical cyclones can be devastating. In successive years, Palau was hit by Typhoons Bopha (2012) and Haiyan (2013). The first delivered damage totaling US$15-20 million (7-9% of GDP), and the second delivered US$9.7 million (4.3% of GDP) in damage.[48] Because of the small size of the overall economy, a single storm can erase a huge proportion of wealth and disrupt crucial production and services – health, education, food production, communications, and utilities. Moreover, displacement from damaged homes creates stress, health risks, and potential social ills – e.g., domestic violence or child exploitation. In the case of these two cyclones, Palau's inability to recover and rebuild from one storm before the next struck was a key part of the long-term impact. The need for a significant uptick in external assistance for recovery and development meant the country relied more heavily on bilateral donors – a situation that, if frequently repeated, can expose the country to predatory practices or diplomatic pressure.

ENSO does seem to influence cyclone formation trends in the western Pacific. During the neutral phase of ENSO, strong trade winds blow warm air into the western Pacific, and

cyclones would be expected to form in the waters around Palau's eastern neighbor, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), before moving northwestward, often impacting the western states of FSM (Chuuk and Yap) and Palau before moving toward the Philippines or East Asia. During an El Niño (warm) phase, Palau tends to see fewer storms because their formation moves eastward, and they consequently are far to the north of Palau by the time they reach its longitude.[49]

***Droughts***

The dry season generally runs from January to April, and a drought would typically be noticeable between January and June.[50]

Droughts throughout the western Pacific tend to correlate with the El Niño (warm) phase of the ENSO, and particularly strong El Niño events have, in the past, led to particularly severe droughts. During an El Niño year, Palau may receive greater-than-average rainfall at first, during the tail end of the wet season, which generally runs from May to October. By August, dry conditions begin, and rainfall falls below average during the period November-April before normal conditions resume about mid-year the next year. Generally, this pattern means that Palau experiences the dryest conditions in the first half of the year following an El Niño, and in particularly bad years, hydrological conditions do not return to normal until September.[51] This pattern may be favored by the fact that the peak of El Niño-correlated drying typically coincides with the peak of Palau's normal dry season.[52]

The country is highly dependent on rainfall, including catchment, for its fresh water. Upland reservoirs and rivers are used to deliver piped and treated water to about 90% of residential and industrial customers.[53] Meanwhile, many communities, especially in remote areas, still manage rainwater catchment systems for consumption and irrigation.

All sectors of society and the economy can be impacted by drought, as illustrated by the US$3.2 million (1.1% of GDP) in damage caused by the 2016 drought. Not only did water shortages affect some 80% of the country,[54] but the Jellyfish Lake (Ongeim'l Tketau), a UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site and a major tourism draw, saw a die-off of jellyfish.[55] The site required a 2-year closure to allow jellyfish numbers in the lake to return to a healthy level.[56] This type of die-off has been noted during multiple past El Niño-driven droughts, including in 1981-1982, 1997-1998, 2018, and 2022.[57] Consequently, the country deals with a blow to the tourism sector that comes on top of impacts to food and water security with every drought.

***Epidemic Diseases***

Communicable and vector-borne diseases are common but not commonly deadly across Palau. Emerging and infectious diseases are considered a high risk for the country.[58]

Because of the limited national health infrastructure, there is high potential for communicable or vector-borne illness to spread swiftly and overwhelm national capacity to stop the spread and treat infected people. Many ailments can spread in the wake of other hazard events, especially flooding or storms that disrupt access to clean water and electricity or that damage shelters. Standing water left after heavy rains and flooding can harbor microorganisms or provide breeding places for vectors. Meanwhile, a lack of hygiene facilities promotes the spread of germs. Finally, in the wake of a disaster, the need for medicines and health care will be higher, and shortages could lead to uncontrolled spread of diseases or late treatment.

The country has dealt with outbreaks of bacterial and viral infections, such as conjunctivitis or Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease. Community and public health information and action campaigns – especially in schools – have resolved the outbreaks in as short as a few weeks. The most significant disease of epidemic potential is dengue, a mosquito-borne virus that commonly causes fever, pain, and rash but can escalate to a syndrome requiring hospitalization. Palau's most recent dengue outbreak ran through most

of 2019 and saw nearly 600 cases and 2 deaths.[59]

### *Flooding*

As with most hydrometeorological hazards in Palau, flooding can be impacted by ENSO. Warmer El Niño phases are associated with lower sea levels in the western Pacific, while colder La Niña phases bring higher sea levels around Palau. These higher sea levels can drive more coastal flooding when high tides or storms push waters further inland. Consequently, La Niña periods can see greater coastal erosion.[60] About one-quarter of the population is directly exposed to coastal flooding from storm surges.[61]

Babeldaob, the largest island, has five major watersheds that are important sources of fresh water for the communities along rivers and downstream from reservoirs. The island commonly sees short-duration, heavy rains (50 mm [2 in] in fewer than 30 minutes), and these downpours have historically led to some river flooding and washouts of roads and bridges. Moreover, these rains and floods wash sediment and soil down steep slopes into near-shore waters where they can negatively impact corals. While human casualties from flooding are uncommon, some estimates find that average annual flood losses can reach US$250,000.[62]

All islands have some exposure to coastal flooding from storm surges, as shown in Figure 3.[63] With much of Peleliu and Angaur exposed, the airfields on these two islands are also exposed to storm surge impacts. Meanwhile, major areas of densely-populated Koror have high exposure to storm surge flooding, and this exposure means that urban services – education, communications, health care, and utilities – are susceptible to disruption.

### *Landslides*

Given steep slopes in inland areas and the frequency of heavy rains, landslides are possible in parts of the country. An estimated 22% of the population may be at some risk of effects from a landslide. Although risk is concentrated on Babeldaob, there are some zones of higher risk in Koror, home to the largest population.[64] The impacts of landslides on Palauans include damage to the built environment, including homes, and to cropland, as well as soil and rocks that cover roadways and cut off whole communities indefinitely. Several times in the past five years, heavy rains have driven landslides that temporarily covered portions of the Compact Road that encircles Babeldaob; the most frequently impacted areas were Ngatpang and Aimeliik states. Landslides have disrupted access to Koror for residents of states north of Ngatpang along Babeldaob's western coast.[65]

### *Seismic Hazards*

The western Pacific is a scene of significant seismic activity, and large-scale earthquakes can deliver tsunamis even to shores far from the tsunamigenic temblor. Palau is at very low risk of damaging earthquakes. Moreover, the topography of the ocean floor around the

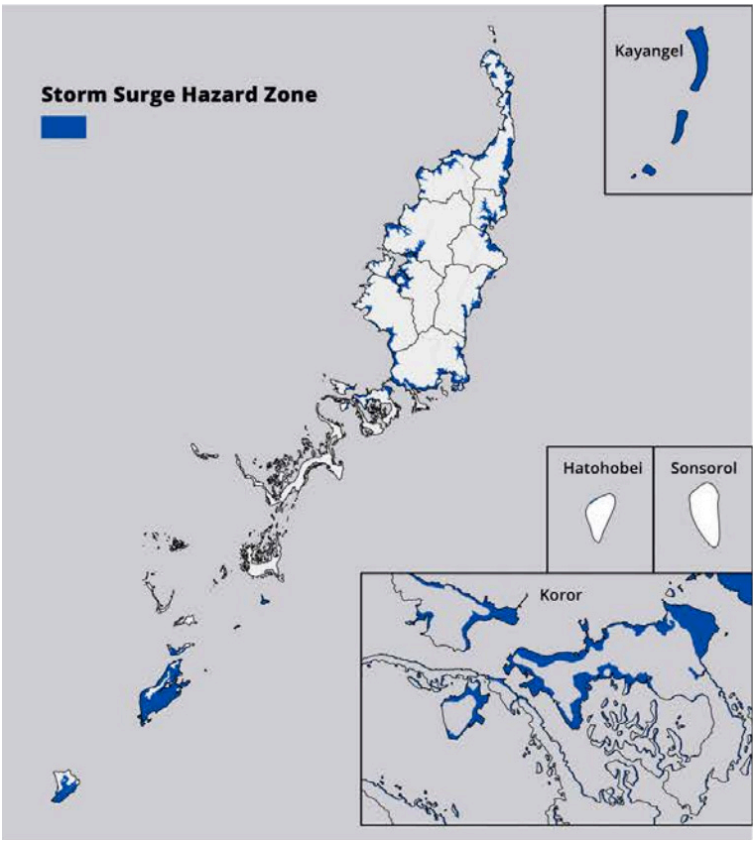



Figure 3: Storm Surge Hazard Zone

country and the islands' fringing reefs offer protection from most tsunamis. The eight tsunamis recorded in the country's history have caused little damage.[66] Nonetheless, the country relies heavily on its coastal areas for lives and livelihoods, and long-term changes in the ocean can damage the country's coral reefs and erode their protective capacity. Key areas of dense habitation and arable lands could be inundated by a future tsunami, and an estimated 23% of the present population would be exposed to tsunami waves.[67]

### *Technical Hazards*

The country has enumerated the anthropogenic hazards to which it is at high, medium, and low risk. Major threats are linked to natural resources and to ecosystem interactions with human systems. For example, oil spills, water contamination, human-wildlife conflict, emerging and infectious diseases, and industrial fires are considered the hazards that pose the greatest threat to the country. In the medium-risk category are residential fires, invasive species, and hazardous materials spills. For all other anthropogenic hazards – i.e., terrorism, structural collapses, infrastructure failures, and civil and political unrest – the country is considered to be at low risk.

This assessment of risk does not preclude ill effects from one of the "low-risk" hazard types. Aside from the COVID-19 pandemic, the worst anthropogenic hazard incident in the country occurred in September 1996, when the Koror-Babeldaob Bridge collapsed. Although casualties were limited – two people died and four were injured – the country had to declare a state of emergency because the failure meant there was no direct road link or water services pipe between the main population center – Koror – and key facilities, including the airport and water treatment plants on Babeldaob. Although construction on a replacement began in 1997, the final Japan-Palau Friendship Bridge – named because of key Japanese support to construction – did not open to the public until 2002,[68] closing a difficult 6-year period for national transport and commerce.

## 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 Palau 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, potentially include international military support to civilian responders. It may support practitioners working toward Palau's preparedness and capacity to mitigate hazard impacts.

The data used in this section come from several sources.[69] They include but are not limited to several key entities: the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), the Government of Palau, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Note that 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 and limits inclusion of events in the database to those that meet at least one of the following thresholds:

- At least 10 deaths (including dead and missing)
- At least 100 affected (people affected, injured, or left homeless)
- A call for international assistance or an emergency declaration[70]

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.[71] In fact, for small island states like Palau, 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.

The most significant point is that Palau rarely experiences a disaster of the magnitude that makes it eligible for inclusion in the EM-DAT. In the period 2000-2026 (April), the country experienced five disasters that meet the EM-DAT criteria. They include three typhoons, one drought, and one epidemic (dengue).

Sources other than EM-DAT are primarily narrative and relate to assessments of specific disasters rather than means to compare and track disasters over time and space.

The country's population is concentrated in Babeldaob, Koror, and, to a lesser extent, Peleliu and Angaur. These closely situated islands also are commonly impacted by the same events – especially storms, but also communicable diseases due to more frequent passenger travel among these islands than among the more remote states and islands. Figure 4 narrates the five disasters since 2000 and illustrates the concentration of disaster impacts on the central islands.

In addition to geographical concentration, disaster impacts appear to cluster in the period between October and April, as shown in Figure 5, which illustrates the period when the five catalogued events directly affected the country.

The set of months where disasters appear to cluster overlaps broadly with the dry season – i.e., the period when the effects of an insufficient rainy season will become apparent. Even the major dengue outbreak in the dataset peaked between December and March, after the rainy season. In the case of dengue, heavy rains may leave standing water that promotes mosquito breeding and drives an outbreak in subsequent months – i.e., the dry season.

While data for the past quarter century appear to suggest that storms, too, cluster between November and April, cyclones may form in the region at any time of year. A separate catalogue covering a 68-year period (1945-2013) noted 68 tropical cyclones that came within 200 nautical miles (370 km; 230 mi) of Palau. Thus, the country has potentially seen effects from an average of one tropical cyclone per year. A survey of the months during

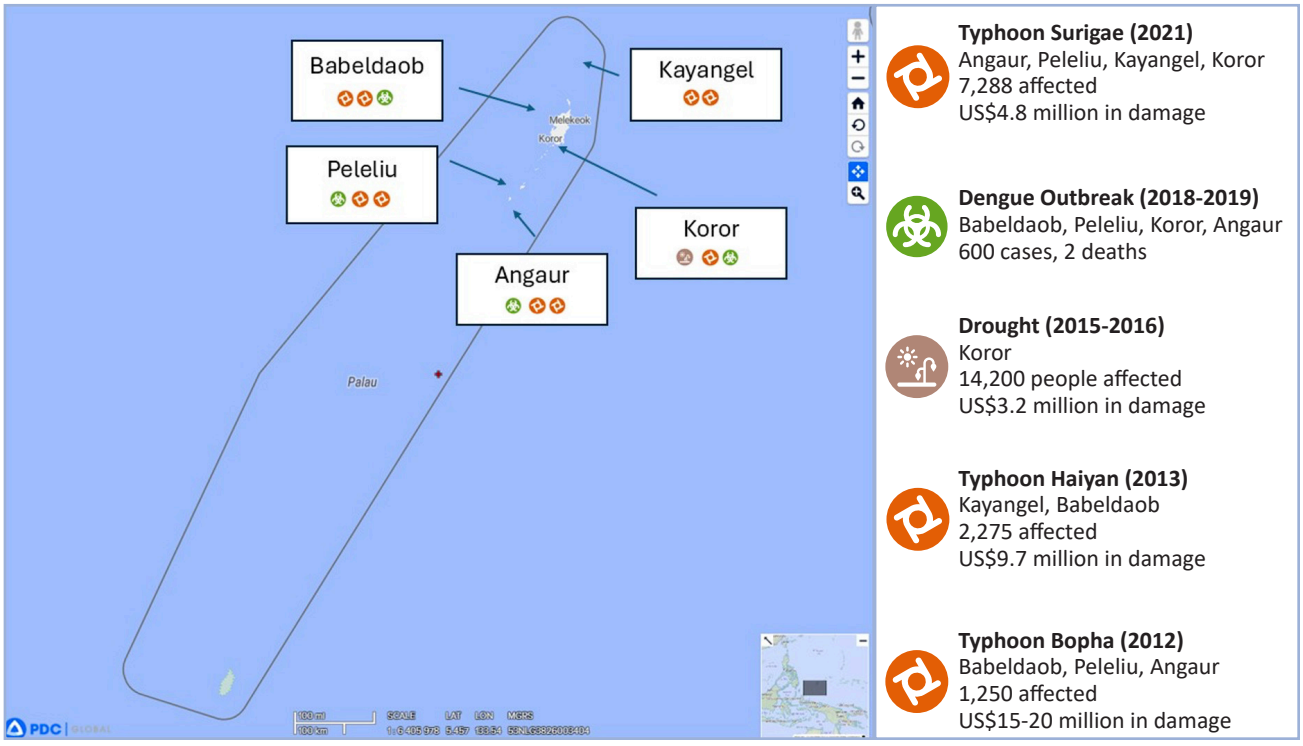



Figure 4: Map of Disasters that Impacted Palau (2000-2026)

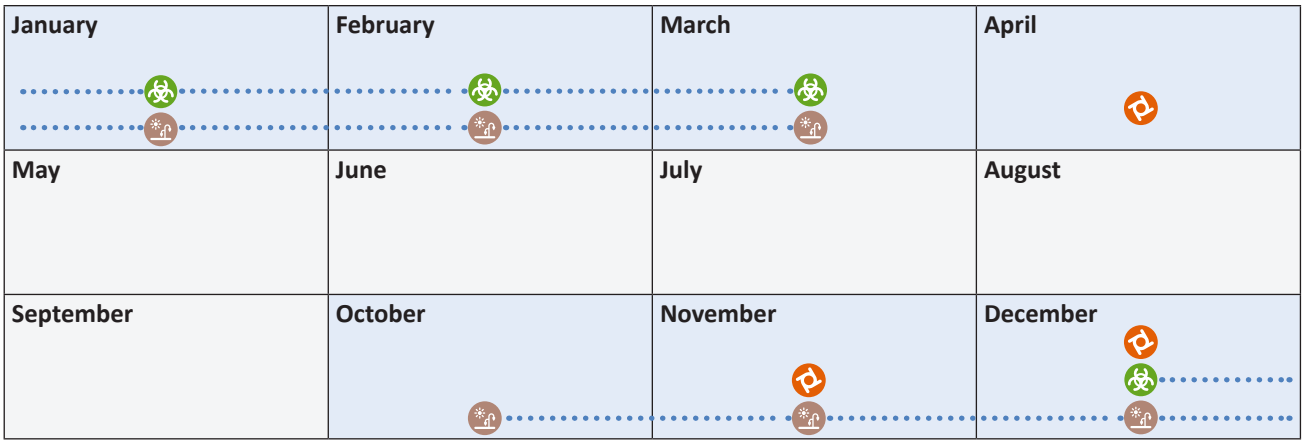



Figure 5: Disaster Impacts, by Month of Onset in Palau (2000-2026)

which these cyclones passed by Palau finds that November and December, with 13 and 12 storms, respectively, are the months with the most cyclones recorded. The period March-June has also seen numerous occurrences with 5-7 cyclones in each of these 4 months over the study period. For the entire 68-year period, no cyclones were recorded in August, and 1 was recorded in September.

Twenty of the catalogued cyclones were the strongest typhoon category, and eight of these strongest storms passed within 35 nautical miles (65 km; 40 mi) of Palau. Four of these closest typhoons were recorded between 1959 and 1967, and two of them were very recent – Bopha (2012) and Haiyan (2013)[72] – and caused significant damage across Palau.

Despite this apparent clustering, the extremely small number of disaster events in available datasets should not be interpreted as indicating lower risk either during part of the year or overall. Cyclones technically can form at any time during the year, high tides that drive coastal erosion can put communities at risk of flooding during any month, and international connections can deliver a disease with epidemic potential to the country any day.

## Recent Disasters

This section describes the impacts of the three major disaster events Palau experienced in the past decade. It focuses on the largest events because these are the events most likely to trigger a request for international assistance and, therefore, involvement by foreign military assets in delivering humanitarian assistance. This focus should not be interpreted as ignoring the cumulative effects of multiple smaller-scale events. Recurrent small-scale flooding or landslides that cut off communities and destroy assets can erode societal coping capacity that would otherwise be built up in preparedness for a larger-scale event. These narratives should be considered as hinting at what types of assistance Palau may require during a major disaster and informing Palau's partners about types of support required to enhance mitigation and response capacity.

### *Typhoon Surigae – April 2021*

On 16 April 2021, Typhoon Surigae, a Category 5 cyclone, passed by Palau's northernmost state, Kayangel.[73] Photo 1 shows a NASA Aqua satellite Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) image of the storm on 16 April.[74]

At the time of its closest approach, the cyclone packed winds of up to 136 kph (85 mph), and it delivered heavy rainfall and pushed ashore storm surges that peaked at 23 m (75 ft) in height. All 16 states of Palau felt some effects – mostly rain and winds. Across the inhabited islands, some 1,500 houses, along with residents' belongings and many small farms, were damaged or destroyed. In addition, water and power infrastructure, communications equipment, and roads were damaged; lives across the country were disrupted.

Kayangel bore the brunt of the damage with nearly all homes sustaining some damage from

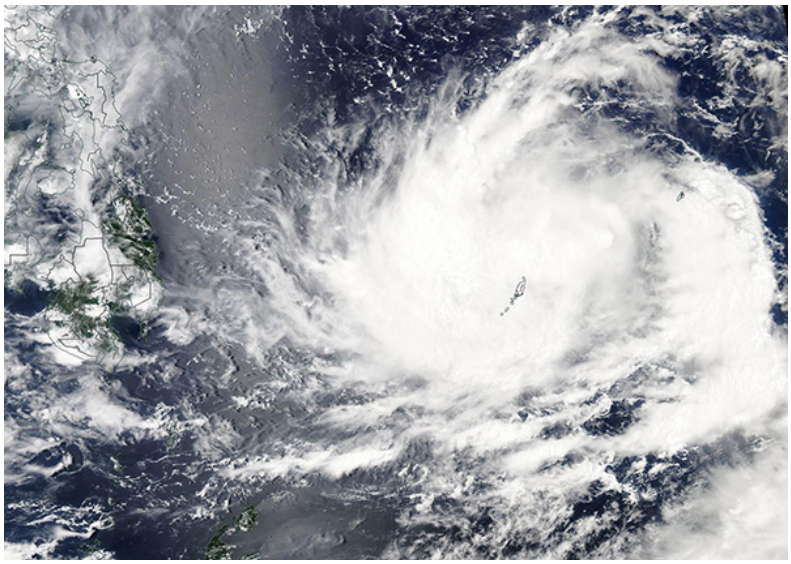


Photo 1: Typhoon Surigae Passes over Palau (NASA)

winds and storm-driven waves. In addition, the island's rainwater catchment systems and electrical equipment were inundated and rendered unusable. There was no power for weeks, and a combination of standing water and lack of hygiene supplies and systems made contagious and mosquito-borne illnesses a concern.[75]

The government declared a national disaster and appealed for international assistance.

- On 20 April, the Government of Japan provided relief supplies and equipment – e.g., water purifiers and generators – delivered through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).[76]
- On 21 April, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided immediate funding for procurement of emergency shelter, relief supplies, and support for water, sanitation, and hygiene.[77]
- On 24 July, the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Guam was able to collect supplies from Guam and deliver them to Kayangel.[78]
- The IFRC and Australian government mobilized relief items that had been stockpiled in Malaysia, and the World Food Programme's (WFP) Pacific Humanitarian Air Service transported them to Palau.
- The Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) delivered assessment and coordination support to NEMO.[79]

As the country continued to experience prolonged need, USAID provided additional financial support and airlifted shelter supplies to the country in mid-May.[80] As supplies arrived, the PRCS used small boats to distribute them to outer islands.[81]

Although no one was killed, homes, education and health facilities, and agricultural lands were all damaged.[82] A month after the storm, the government estimated that damages totaled US$4.8 million (nearly 2% of GDP).[83]

### *Dengue Outbreak – 2018-2019*

The Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) activated its emergency response team on 7 December 2018, a week after two cases of dengue serotype-3 had been confirmed at the national hospital. By 20 December, 27 cases had been confirmed, with most of them in Koror. The MHHS team focused its work on community awareness and prevention measures, with vector-control specialists distributing information, conducting mosquito spraying, and participating in community clean-ups to remove mosquito breeding sites.[84] By September 2019, when the outbreak finally died out, there had been 586 confirmed cases of infection, and 2 deaths had been attributed to dengue. While 13 states reported cases, Koror was the scene of 72% of infections.[85]

### *Drought – 2016*

An El Niño-related drought affected many PICTs, including Palau, in 2016.

As early as November 2014, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) had alerted PICTs to the likelihood of El Niño conditions prevailing in the Pacific Basin through 2015.[86] However, it was not until November 2015 that climatologists were confirming that very strong warming was occurring and would likely peak around the turn of the year, with impacts lasting well into 2016 and potentially into 2017.[87] By March 2016,

the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) had reported drought across Palau, with some areas in extreme drought, and Palau's government declared a state of emergency.[88]

From December 2015 to March 2016, rainfall in Koror was the lowest recorded in 65 years.[89] The PPUC reported that the Ngerimel Dam, Koror's only dammed reservoir and one of two sources of water for the Koror-Airai Water System, had dried up,[90] and water levels in the Ngerikiil River (the other source for Koror) were at 19% of capacity. Consequently, 80% of Palau's population (more than 14,000 people) experienced water shortages and poor sanitation. There were wildfire outbreaks and crop failures. Children exhibited higher rates of malnutrition.[91]

Japan was among the donor countries to respond; JICA delivered water containers and water bladders.[92] With all farm irrigation halted and significant crop losses reported, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) delivered technical assistance to the government,[93] and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) activated its cooperation agreement with the government to participate in needs assessments and provide technical support, including mobilizing financial support from USAID to manage critical water equipment and drill emergency boreholes.[94]

On 28 April 2016, weather services noted that the El Niño was weakening. By early May 2016, the government began to lift water use restrictions after rains had begun alleviating the drought conditions. While the PPUC began to extend the hours of water service to residents of Koror, they requested sustained conservation efforts.[95] Because of damage to crops and agriculture, international humanitarians supported the country with emergency food assistance through June 2016.[96] Figure 6 shows the extent of drought across the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands, including Palau, after a year of El Niño-influenced precipitation changes.[97] The figure illustrates that, as of May 2016, Palau had received less than 400 mm (16 in) of rainfall, less than 12% of its annual average precipitation total.

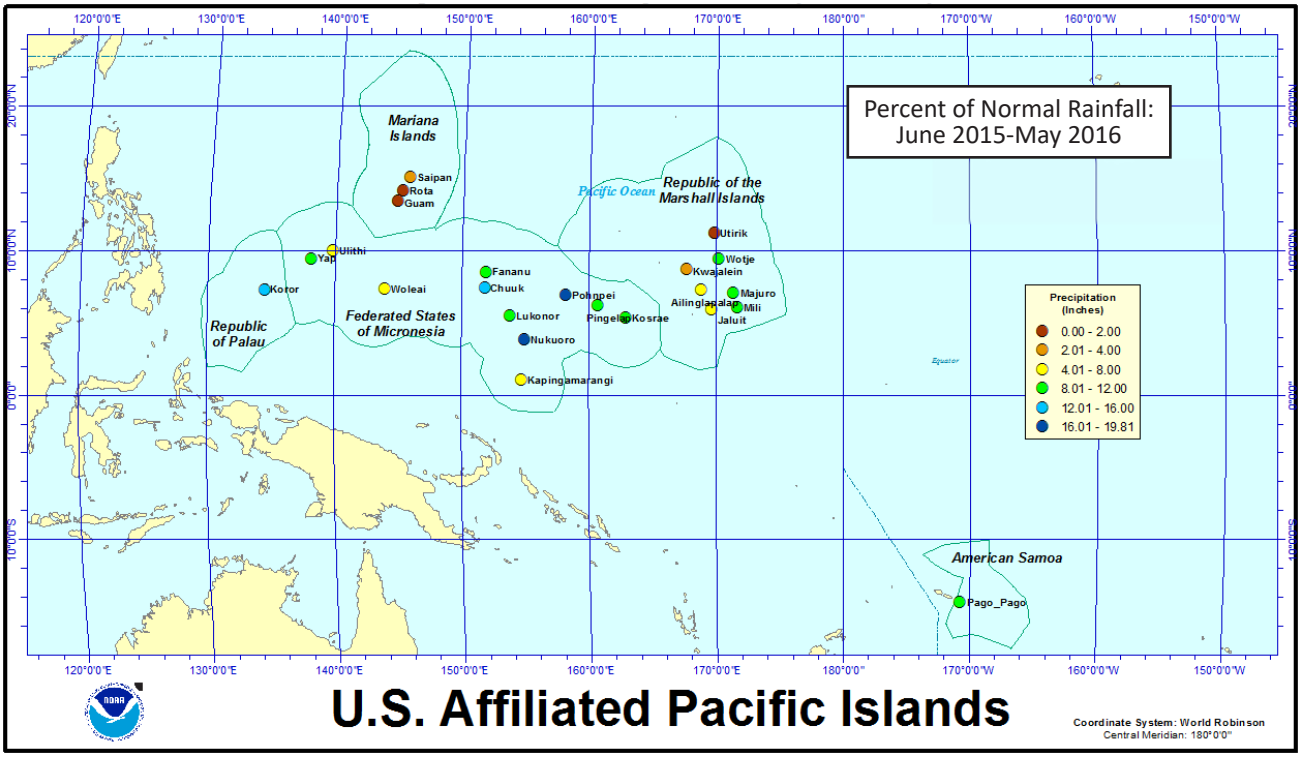



Figure 6: Percent of Normal Precipitation for June 2015-May 2016 in the Northwest Pacific (NOAA)

# DISASTER MANAGEMENT POLICY, PLANNING, AND RESPONSE

NEMO is responsible for coordinating and implementing preparedness, response, and immediate relief nationwide. Frameworks and guidance for response are published, and responsibility for key response actions is clearly spelled out. State and local authorities have the responsibility for immediate response after hazard events within their jurisdiction, but they work closely with NEMO and other national agencies. Because of its small size and limited resources, Palau maintains strong regional and international relationships that serve to enhance national DM capacity.

## National Disaster Management System

Palau's national DM system operates based on a framework enacted by executive order. It establishes an all-hazards structure of institutions and processes with roles and responsibilities for authorities at national, state, and local levels. Moreover, it lays the foundation for responses to adhere to an incident command system with functions allotted to agencies based on their areas of expertise.

### Laws, Policies, and Frameworks

The only aspect of DM formalized in law is that the President has the power to declare a State of Emergency under the constitution. In the absence of other legislation pertaining to DM, the National Disaster Risk Management Framework (NDRMF) provides details of the institutional arrangements and operational procedures for DM.[98] The NDRMF derives its legal authority from Executive Order 397 (2016).

National Disaster Risk Management Framework (NDRMF)

Originally published in 2010 and amended in 2016, the NDRMF is a full-scope, all-hazards framework for DM. The objective is to strengthen whole-of-government and whole-of-society capacity to mitigate the impact of hazard events through effective preparedness, response, relief, and recovery.

At its development, the NDRMF was explicitly linked to the Palau National Master Development Plan, under which sustainable development was required to consciously consider disaster risk mitigation. The Hazard Mitigation Subcommittee (or Risk Reduction Committee) of the National Emergency Committee (NEC) was the central mechanism overseeing this aspect of the NDRMF.[99]

In addition to links to domestic plans, the NDRMF also has linkages to the global Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (FRDP), the latter of which was approved by the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 2016. These regional and international frameworks emphasize identification of hazards, assessment of risk from those hazards, development of institutions to govern risk management, national planning and investment to mitigate risk, and informed decision-making before, during, and after a hazard event.

Although the NEC has the power to approve or reject changes to the NDRMF, NEMO is the agency tasked with its implementation. As such, NEMO provides technical advice and guidance for developing and maintaining plans that fall under the NDRMF.[100]

### Committees, Offices, and Posts

Based on the NDRMF, DM has a tiered structure that covers the national government at the strategic level, the national committees and offices that coordinate DM at the operational level, and the on-site authorities in states and communities that respond immediately to hazard

events at the local level.

The levels are occupied by the Disaster Executive Council (DEC), the NEC and its Central Control Group (CCG), and Incident Command Posts (ICP); coordinating across these levels is the NEMO Coordinator as the National Disaster Coordinator (NDC). Figure 7 illustrates this structure.[101]

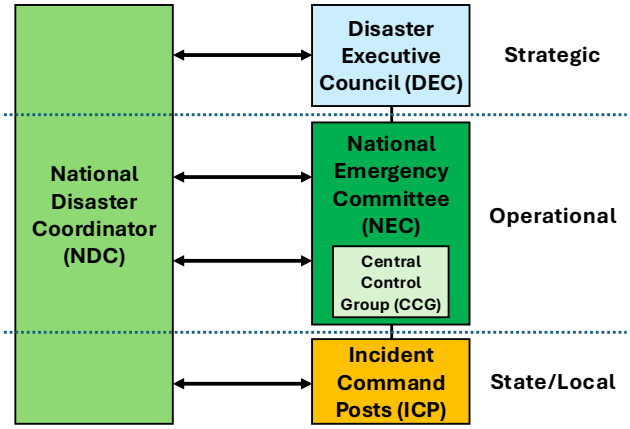



Figure 7: Tiered Structure for Disaster Management

Disaster Executive Council (DEC)

The DEC is chaired by the President and comprises all Cabinet Ministers, a Council of Chiefs representative, the Chair of the Governor's Association, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Delegates.

The DEC's role is to provide overall strategic direction and oversight for DM.[102] With the President at its head, it declares the beginning and end of a State of Emergency, and it can commit national or state resources to DM during a State of Emergency. The DEC, represented by either the President or Minister of State, requests international assistance.[103]

National Emergency Committee (NEC)

Beneath the DEC, the NEC is chaired by the Vice-President and comprises representatives from a wide range of government agencies alongside representatives from NGOs.[104] It meets quarterly[105] and receives administrative support from NEMO.[106]

The NEC is responsible for:

- Implementing and monitoring all aspects of the NDRMF
- Providing policy oversight to improve agency coordination and support
- Undertaking command, control, and coordination of operations for any declared national disaster or emergency
- Operating the National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC)
- Determining national action plans for disaster response
- Issuing early warnings through all available communication channels
- Prioritizing and allocating resource support to the ICPs
- Seeking support and advice from the DEC, as required
- Requesting (through the DEC) and coordinating use of external assistance
- Providing regular situation reports and status updates to the DEC during a State of Emergency
- Recommending declaration and end of a State of Emergency
- Initiating and compiling initial damage assessment reports and submitting them to the DEC with recommendations
- Overseeing recovery efforts according to priorities set by the DEC

The NEC has three sub-components:

- NDC - The NEMO Coordinator is the NDC. The NDC directs and controls all government agencies and their resources during a disaster response.
- CCG – Flexible in its membership, a CCG may be established by the NDC to implement and manage response operations. It activates plans and procedures, liaises across government and non-government entities, activates disaster assessments, deploys technical teams, collates assessment reports and prioritizes resources based on those reports, coordinates media releases, and identifies and coordinates international relief needs and sources.
- Hazard Mitigation Subcommittee – Chaired by the Director of the Bureau of Public Works, this body is focused on DRR. With NEMO's support, it seeks and applies

international and regional support for DRR programming while providing advice and support on DRR to the NEC.

The NEC operates the NEOC according to published SOPs. The primary NEOC is at the NEMO office, at Medeu-ra-Kesebelau, Airai State. The secondary NEOC is at the Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting base. Both are near the international airport.[107]

National Emergency Management Office (NEMO)

Falling under the Vice-President's office, NEMO provides secretarial support to both the DEC and the NEC. It is the lead agency for overall DM and is responsible for setting up and maintaining the NEOC and exercising the NEOC SOP annually.

Led by the Coordinator, NEMO is responsible for:

- Coordinating implementation of the NDRMF and its subordinate plans
- Providing technical assistance to all ministries and departments in maintaining disaster and contingency plans and SOPs
- Acting as Secretariat to the NEC
- Maintaining operational readiness of the NEOC
- Coordinating planning and execution of national DM exercises
- Developing, delivering, monitoring, and coordinating all government-run public DM awareness campaigns
- Serving as a liaison for all government agencies, NGOs, and community groups with DM projects[108]

In recent years, NEMO has expanded its stock of pre-positioned relief supplies. In May 2024, it received from IOM three storage containers, each with a capacity of 28,200 kilograms (62,170 pounds). One was placed in Kayangel, one in Angaur, and the third in Peleliu. Due to the country's geographic dispersal and the potential for high seas or storms to make inter-island travel dangerous or impossible, the ability to stock even small quantities of relief supplies and equipment in safe spaces on the outer islands is critical.[109]

Beyond these outer-island containers, NEMO's main office in Airai is the location for a warehouse, being built under the Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing Program (PHWP), an initiative implemented by the Pacific Community (SPC) and funded by Australia, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. In November 2025, construction broke ground on the facility, which will store shelter materials, hygiene kits, solar-powered lanterns, and kitchen sets, among other supplies.[110]

Incident Command Post (ICP)

On-site management of disasters takes place at an ICP or several ICPs, depending on the location and scope of the hazard event. ICPs are run using the National Incident Management System (NIMS).[111] An Incident Commander from the lead agency operates the ICP. The Incident Commander is the key point of contact for the NDC and NEOC.

**Incident Command**

The NIMS guides NEMO staff and the NEC during response operations.

The NEOC is the hub for disaster response operations. It is equipped with communications, back-up power, and water systems to ensure readiness and continuity in case of a major disaster, including one that impacts the area of Airai state where the NEOC is located. It is staffed by NEMO and trained operation room teams.

The NEOC's functions are:

- Provide for overall command, control, and coordination of national disaster response
- Gather, collate, and disseminate information
- Serve as point of contact for mass media through the Public Information Officer (PIO) from the President's Office
- Prepare and disseminate situation reports
- Facilitate damage and needs assessment processes
- Maintain effective communication and

information systems
- Coordinate all government, non-government, private, regional, and donor assistance
- Manage the logistical arrangements for immediate and medium-term relief supplies

Based on the NDRMF, various ministries, agencies, and offices are tasked with Emergency Support Functions (ESF) that reflect their areas of expertise and the types of emergencies that may be encountered. Table 2 lays out the key ESFs and their lead and support agencies.[112]

Ministry of Health (MHHS)

In addition to having the lead for the "Medical, Health, and Sanitation" ESF, MHHS' Bureau of Public Health is the lead during health

| ESF | Lead Agency | Support Agency / Agencies |
|---|---|---|
| Direction | DEC | Leadership Executives |
| Management and Coordination | NEC | NEMO |
| Command and Control | NDC (at national level) or Incident Commander (at incident level) | All other agencies |
| Public Information | PIO, President | Other PIOs, Bureau of Public Safety (BPS), Bureau of Domestic Affairs (BDA), PNCC |
| Warning and Alerting | NEMO or BPS or National Weather Service (NWS), depending on the hazard | BPS, BDA, PNCC |
| Law Enforcement/Fire | BPS | State Government Rangers, Customs, Council of Chiefs |
| Search and Rescue | BPS – Marine Law Enforcement Division | State Government Rangers, Tour Agencies, Belau Tourism Association, NEMO |
| Medical, Health, and Sanitation | MHHS, Environmental Quality Protection Board (EQPB) | Private clinics, Fire, PRCS |
| Power, Water, and Sewer | PPUC, Bureau of Public Works (BPW) | State Government, private sector |
| Communications | PNCC | BPS, PRCS, private sector |
| Engineering and Public Works | BPW, Capital Improvement Project | Private sector |
| Environmental Protection (e.g., Hazardous Materials [HAZMAT], oil spill, chemical releases) | EQPB, BPS | BPS, Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism (MNRET), MHHS, private sector |
| Mass Care (Food) | Ministry of Education (MOE) | PRCS, NGOs |
| Shelter Management | MOE | PRCS, BPS, MHHS, State Governments, Palau Community College (PCC) |
| Relief Management | Division of Property and Supply, Ministry of Finance (MOF) | MOE, State Governments, donors, PRCS |
| Initial Damage Assessment | Depending on emergency (where and who), HAZMAT teams, NEMO | All agencies |
| Comprehensive Damage Assessment | BPW, NEMO | All agencies, PRCS |
| Transportation (land and sea) | Bureau of Commercial Development, MOE | All agencies, NGOs, private sector |
| Air Transport | Bureau of Aviation | Local and regional agencies |
| Terrorism / Civil Unrest / Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) | Ministry of Justice | All agencies |
| Climate Change Adaptation | MNRET | NWS, PCC, Bureau of Agriculture, Palau International Coral Reef Center, donor agencies, EQPB |

**Table 2: Lead and Support Agencies for Emergency Support Functions**

emergencies. MHHS has a multi-hazard plan for coordinating emergency measures and maintains a dedicated emergency operations center (EOC) that can take the lead under the NEOC for health emergencies. Located at the national hospital, the Health EOC can be mobilized within 60 minutes of disaster notification.[113] In addition, MHHS led the drive for the country to develop an emergency medical team (EMT), KLEMAT, which became fully operational in 2022 and is being integrated into the NDRMF and National Hospital Emergency Plan. KLEMAT has procured a deployment-ready cache of supplies and equipment and can provide fully self-sufficient tented outpatient and emergency medical services during a disaster.[114]

Bureau of Public Safety (BPS)

BPS falls under the Ministry of Justice. In addition to multiple tasks as a support agency, divisions within BPS have primary responsibility for the "Warning and Alerting," "Law Enforcement/Fire," "Search and Rescue," and "HAZMAT" ESFs. BPS staff from the Division of Patrol (police) and Division of Fire and Rescue (firefighting, EMT) are first responders across the islands. The main fire station is in Koror, and 20 personnel are spread across substations, where they maintain fire trucks and ambulances, as well as other equipment.[115] The Palau Fire and Rescue Services (PFRS) have, in recent years, upgraded their vehicles and equipment through partnerships with UN agencies and bilateral donors, especially Japan, with the goal of ensuring that the 50+ responses they conduct every year are efficient and safe.[116]

From the Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Station, located immediately next to the international airport and close to NEMO's main office, PFRS can respond swiftly to a crash or other incident that impacts the airport. PFRS' fire and rescue teams and EMTs have trained with international partners, including U.S. military forces during the Koa Moana[117] and Cope North series of exercises, as shown in Photo 2.[118] By training and exercising for eventualities that require them to clear the runway, PFRS fire and rescue teams and EMTs support the country's ability to receive international support flown in after a disaster.

## Subnational and Local Implementation

Below the national level, Palau is administered through states and hamlets, the latter of which are the most local level of government authority and most commonly integrate traditional leadership. The NDRMF recognizes that communities will take immediate action to help themselves, and government structures are intended to support this type of community-based action. The scale of an event determines if it is an "incident," "emergency," or "disaster." These distinctions relate to the number of agencies involved in a response, where the coordination hub operates, and the role of the NDC. In general, local – up to state-level – leaders have authority to conduct responses within their jurisdictions.




Photo 2: Palau Firefighters and U.S. Air Force Personnel Rehearse Rescues, Cope North 23

### States and Hamlets

Each state has a DM plan, developed in coordination with NEMO and implemented with national and community support. This work is executed and monitored by State Governors and State Emergency Committees (SEC). The Governor and SEC establish and manage the state EOC based on an SOP developed for the specific context of each state. Governors and SECs collaborate to develop community disaster plans and work with NEMO to exercise plan activation.[119]

Under the 2016 Palau Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction Toolkit, hamlets were tasked with creating Hamlet Emergency Committees (HEC) to coordinate DM at the most local level. By integrating the leadership of traditional chiefs, representatives of traditional women's and men's groups, youth, people living with disabilities, faith leaders, representatives of the PRCS, and members of elected councils, the HEC is expected to combine traditional and state-led forms of public outreach, control of emergencies, and any relief or recovery activities needed.

HECs have responsibilities before, during, and after a disaster; they include:

- Preparedness: conduct public awareness, implement DRR, mobilize resources, train, monitor, network with other HECs and the state, and develop community DM plan
- Emergency: receive and forward warnings, control response, manage evacuation shelters or safe areas, organize search and rescue, provide first aid, arrange medical assistance, conduct initial damage assessments and report to state, request assistance from state, and plan and implement relief operations
- Recovery: facilitate rehabilitation, conduct subsequent damage assessments, coordinate rehabilitation assistance, ensure DRR is integrated into reconstruction, and evaluate HEC performance and effectiveness[120]

Beyond the SEC and HEC, state and hamlet councils have a major role in ensuring public awareness of threats and how to respond to alerts and warnings. For example, these councils are tasked with ensuring that tsunami information signs are posted in high-risk areas throughout their jurisdictions; these signs must be clear and understandable to a majority of the population in the area. Similarly, state and local leaders share responsibility for preparing evacuation maps, demarcating safe zones, and preparing shelter and hygiene facilities at those safe zones.

Governors and representatives of SECs and HECs have a duty to activate DM plans when they receive warning of a potential major hazard event. Once the state EOC is activated, it collates updates from hamlets within the state and transmits data to NEMO. The state EOC also helps coordinate evacuations or other large-scale actions across hamlets in the state.

Finally, state governments are key nodes in damage assessment. They coordinate initial damage assessments, provide personnel to participate in recovery needs assessments, and ensure local communities are represented in and can support assessments and recovery planning.[121]

### National Role

State governors have authority to oversee responses within their jurisdictions. However, even if a disaster impacts only one state, the NDC will consult with the Governor, who may be designated as the State Coordinator and can liaise with the NDC and NEOC for national-level support.

The three levels of events for the purpose of mobilizing a response are:

- Incident – routine event with a single or small number of agencies responding; low in resource needs; coordination at the incident scene; NDC informed of the situation
- Emergency – requires a multi-agency response, managed at a local level; NDC informed that, should the event worsen, a disaster event may ensue; NEC on standby
- Disaster – widespread, large-scale event beyond the capacity of available national resources; invokes a Declaration of a State of Emergency

As soon as possible after a disaster, an initial damage assessment is conducted by trained personnel from the affected state(s) and delivered to the NEOC.[122]

## Civil-Military Coordination in Disaster Response

Palau does not maintain a national military force. Any foreign military assets involved in a disaster response in Palau will coordinate their tasks with their respective lead civilian government agencies, as well as with Palau stakeholders, international agencies, local civil society, and other foreign militaries, as required to avoid duplication of effort, working at cross-purposes, or accidents.

Based on the COFA that came into effect between Palau and the U.S. in 1994 and that was renewed in March 2024, the U.S. has full authority and responsibility for defense and security matters. Palauans may volunteer for service in the U.S. armed forces.[123] The COFA sets out that U.S. forces may undertake various exercises and cooperation projects in Palau to ensure that, without any permanent bases, the country still has the facilities and experience required to support U.S. forces working in or transiting through the country. Most recently, the U.S. has restored the Peleliu airstrip and is installing over-the-horizon radar.[124] While this work clearly supports security operations, use during a disaster could support swift response.

There have been no recent examples of disaster responses that involved U.S. or other foreign military support. The 2021 response to Typhoon Surigae did see U.S. uniformed service support in the form of U.S. Coast Guard deliveries of emergency supplies to Kayangel, but this support utilized different mechanisms, resources, and legal frameworks than would U.S. military support.

## International / Regional Organizations

PICTs tend to have small populations, narrow economic bases, and limited human, financial, and material resources for sustaining global advocacy, multinational coordination, and international knowledge sharing. However, these states and territories have long recognized that working together offers them greater reach and influence. Pacific regional organizations for shared political, scientific, economic, and social action are critical to Palau's sustained involvement in global DM innovation and execution. The country combines regional cooperation with steady participation in global DM collaboration, mostly through the UN entities represented in the region.

When Palau's domestic resources are insufficient to respond to a disaster, with the approval of the DEC, the Ministry of State may convene the diplomatic missions in Palau and make an appeal for assistance. The President may also make appeals directly to other countries' governments. These requests will usually be based on advice from the NEC, which bases its recommendations on assessment reports. The Ministry of State conducts consultation and oversees contact with donor states and organizations.[125]

In addition to cooperation with the international community for humanitarian relief during an emergency, Palau is an active participant in international and regional organizations that offer it access to knowledge and technical support for DM in normal times.

### Pacific Regional Organizations

Palau is an active member of organizations and communities that offer PICTs political, economic, and social solidarity and an opportunity to pool their resources for positive change on challenges that could have dire consequences. While the PIF, as the region's key political organization, sits astride regional collaboration, it and eight other entities make up the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), which works to strengthen Pacific regionalism through consolidating knowledge, expertise, and resources.[126]

Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)

PIF is the region's key political forum, bringing together the national leadership of 18 Pacific countries and territories for collaboration

and cooperation to address key challenges.[127] Palau has been a member of the PIF since 1995,[128] and as it prepares to host the annual PIF Leaders Meeting in September 2026, it is preparing to help move PIF forward on the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, the Forum's key policy for building a resilient, sustainable, and secure Pacific.[129]

***2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent***

Endorsed by the PIF Leaders in 2022, the 2050 Strategy works across seven thematic areas, one of which is "Climate Change and Disasters," in recognition of the threat posed to all PIF members by extreme weather – e.g., cyclones, drought, and flooding. The theme covers issues of DM governance, protecting vulnerable populations, promoting research and technology useful in DM, building resilience, and partnership and cooperation.[130] Under the first phase of implementation (2023-2030) of the 2050 Strategy, there are key regional collective actions toward the theme; they include but are not limited to:

- Enhance community preparedness for, response to, and recovery from disaster events
- Strengthen humanitarian response to ensure the safety of communities and robust disaster recovery
- Further build the technical capacity of and enhance regional coordination among national practitioners and institutions

CROP and regional agencies support PIF members' work across these actions through leadership councils and working groups to track and harmonize programs,[131] including through the FRDP.

***Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP)***

Endorsed by the PIF Leaders in 2016, the FRDP integrates work toward resilience to both climate change and disasters through partnerships and coordinated action at the local, national, and regional levels. Intended as a complement to national policies on DM, the implementing mechanism is the Pacific Resilience Partnership, which integrates various working groups that bring together CROP agencies with national, private-sector, academic, and non-government stakeholders to address the technical aspects of regional DM.[132]

Pacific Community (SPC)

SPC is the region's primary scientific and technical organization. It delivers science, research, and technology to members to meet the SDGs that touch upon climate, ocean, land, culture, rights, and governance.[133] Palau became one of the 27 SPC members in 1983.[134]

In its Strategic Plan for 2022-2031, SPC's first key focus area is "Resilience and Climate Action," aligned with the 2050 Strategy's "Climate Change and Disasters" theme, in recognition of the major climate hazards that loom over the region. Pathways for SPC action include building disaster risk knowledge, collecting and analyzing data, promoting localized adaptation and mitigation actions and technologies, integrating data and innovation for energy, water and sanitation, and resilience, and engaging in international dialogue for all Pacific peoples.[135]

***Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing Program (PHWP)***

Under SPC's PHWP, 15 regional countries are set to operate warehouses with pre-positioned supplies. Each warehouse will be independently managed and owned by their host countries who can utilize them for domestic disaster responses. Because of the distances that separate many of the PICTs, disaster response logistics can be slow, costly, and difficult. By pre-positioning and managing stockpiles within these countries, locally led responses can be accelerated and meet more immediate demands before external assistance can arrive. The PHWP has four pillars – infrastructure, supplies, warehousing systems, and capacity – all involving SPC and a logistics specialist agency. It requires each country to participate substantially through stakeholder engagement, workshopping, validation, and planning.

Palau's first PHWP scoping mission was in October 2024, and the in-country workshops and site assessments were in May 2025.[136] Supported by SPC and funding from the governments of Australia, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, construction on Palau's warehouse broke ground in November 2025. The NEMO-run facility will store shelter kits, hygiene items, solar lights, kitchen sets, and other non-food items. Moreover, the program will deliver skills training and resources for logistics and stockpile inventory and mobilization management.[137]

### *Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific (BSRP)*

The BSRP project is a European Union-funded and SPC-implemented program. In Palau, BSRP led to the development of Palau's Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Toolkit in 2016. It provides guidance to stakeholders who are willing to support local communities in their efforts to minimize the risks of disasters and create an effective disaster response and recovery systems. The toolkit assists stakeholders in identifying the hazards, vulnerabilities, and capacity of individual communities, followed by DRR planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.[138]

### United Nations (UN)

The UN Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Micronesia, headquartered in FSM, has responsibility for UN programming in five countries – FSM, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Palau. The UN Resident Coordinator (RC) at the MCO in FSM will function as the UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) for Palau during emergencies; the UN RC/HC has responsibility for the work of UN entities involved in response and can field requests for assistance from the government of the affected state.[139]

There are 13 UN entities resident in the covered countries; they are the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, FAO, IOM, International Telecommunications Union, UN Trade and Development, UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Children's Fund, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UN Office for Project Services, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2027, the UN system works to address progress toward the SDGs across 14 PICTs, including Palau.[140] The SDGs, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and other agreements all share an emphasis on community safety and resilience by 2030.

### *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*

The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) is the UN's lead agency for coordinating national and local governments, inter-governmental organizations, civil society, and the private sector in work across the Sendai Framework targets to achieve substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods, and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities, and countries by 2030. There are four priorities for action: understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, investing in DRR for resilience, and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to "build back better" in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.[141] NEMO is the national focal point for Palau's work toward the Sendai Framework targets.[142]

### *Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)*

The 17 SDGs are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN member-states in 2015. Taken together, they are a call to action that recognizes that ending poverty and deprivation cannot be realized without accompanying strategies to improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth while tackling

climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests.[143] While Palau has not reported on indicators toward all 17 SDGs,[144] its extension of public services and reduction in pollutants form part of its work that not only promotes sustainable development but also reduces disaster risk.

***UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2027***

The UNSDCF covers 14 PICTs covered by 3 UN MCOs – Fiji, Micronesia, and Samoa. It reflects not only a commitment to work toward the SDGs but also to uphold the objectives of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, the FRDP, and SPC's Strategic Plan for 2022-2030. Work toward the UNSDCF entailed development of Country Implementation Plans (CIP). Within the UNSDCF, Cooperative Framework Outcome 1 is "Planet," with the goal of, "By 2027, people, communities and institutions are more empowered and resilient to face diverse shocks and disasters, especially related to climate change, and ecosystems and biodiversity are better protected, managed and restored." In addition to each country, regional partners include several of the CROP agencies and local communities.[145]

The Palau CIP for 2025-2027 was signed in May 2023 after consultations among government, development partners, civil society, and the private sector. Action on the CIP is slated to focus on Palau's national development priorities – i.e., climate change, disaster risk preparedness, education, health, and food security – but will also aim to reduce gender-based violence and inequality. The CIP details the UN entities involved across the country; they include 17 agencies implementing 120 projects totaling some US$15 million in investment across all SDGs.[146]

<u>International Organization for Migration (IOM)</u>

IOM has long worked with national and state governments, as well as communities, to enhance their coordination skills and resources, especially in terms of communication and information sharing across pre-, mid-, and post-disaster periods. The IOM sub-office in Koror, Palau, works under the IOM Micronesia office in Pohnpei, FSM. It supports Palau's work toward the 2050 Strategy and other global and regional frameworks related to human security, mobility, and resilience.[147] In 2024, IOM began delivering support to Palau to develop the country's first migration policy with a focus on enhancing coordination and data analysis to inform decision-making on migration and displacement.[148]

IOM's work in Palau also includes supporting NEMO's development of climate-resilient disaster shelters. Across 11 states, NEMO, IOM, U.S. military civic action teams, and the PRCS have coordinated with the MOE to refit school facilities to function as a network of safe spaces that withstand high winds, heavy rains, and flooding. They are all equipped with rainwater catchment systems, solar lighting, generators, and water filtration systems to increase their resilience to a variety of hazard impacts. Once handed over to their communities, these shelters become hubs before, during, and after emergencies, under the stewardship of PRCS's Red Cross Disaster Action Teams.[149]

<u>United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</u>

UNDP's work in the Pacific Islands encompasses various development aspects from education and health to poverty reduction and entrepreneurship. Given Palau's status as a higher-income country, its work with UNDP is targeted at specific capabilities, especially related to DM.

With funding and support from JICA, UNDP implemented the Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience in the Republic of Palau (EDCR) project between 2019 and 2023. The project delivered various fire and rescue vehicles along with equipment for weather and tide monitoring and short- and long-range communication to improve the ability of all communities to monitor their environment and access hazard information, including warnings and alerts. Moreover, refurbishment of NEMO's NEOC by UNDP and partners meant a more

efficient use of the space, and five containerized storage facilities were handed over to NEMO for storing and protecting equipment and supplies for executing emergency response.[150]

UN Women

From its Pacific Office in Fiji, UN Women conducts some programming in Palau, mostly through the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, launched in 2017.[151] Through this Fund, the "Women's Empowerment through Emergency Preparedness, Crisis Response and Recovery" project ran during 2018-2020 to work alongside eight local organizations to train 200 women in preparedness, response, and recovery so that they can act as first responders and community leaders on DM. The implementing partners were PRCS and the Centre for Women's Empowerment Belau,[152] the latter founded by three leading local female politicians to work toward two goals: promote and support women in politics and address social issues through political leadership.[153]

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

UN OCHA's Office of the Pacific Islands covers 14 PICTs, including Palau. The office supports national efforts to protect lives and livelihoods and to ensure swift surge of capacities to allow the international humanitarian system to quickly link up with a disaster-affected country's national responders. OCHA maintains staff within the region and can utilize the global UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system and roster to surge this support into the region.[154] The office also acts as the Secretariat for the PHT in support of the RCs of disaster-affected states. It is the focal point of contact for NEMO for the PHT.[155]

**Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT)**

The PHT formed in 2008 as an initiative of the UN OCHA Office of the Pacific Islands to improve the timeliness, effectiveness, and predictability of humanitarian response in 14 PICTs, including Palau. Working with the governments of the PICTs, the PHT supports the development of institutions and processes to ensure systems in place to respond to disasters are coordinated, resourced, and effective. During disasters, it supports affected governments, NGOs, and communities by delivering assistance.

The PHT integrates UN entities, NGOs, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, represented by the IFRC. It uses the humanitarian cluster (sector) system to organize its work, with regional coordinators from 10 Cluster Support Teams, one for each of the main sectors of humanitarian response – e.g., education, health, shelter. Broadly, Cluster Support Teams comprise UN entities and implementing NGOs, and their function is to support national clusters, sectors, working groups, or ESF lead agencies under national leadership. The PHT can mobilize funding or other resources, maintain emergency stocks, provide technical expertise, support national coordination and information management, assist in needs assessments, and help ensure effective communication across response stakeholders.[156]

In Palau, the PHT's Regional Anticipatory Action Technical Work Group, led by UNFPA Pacific, has worked with national partners – NEMO and NGOs – to integrate sexual and reproductive health and prevention of gender-based violence into DM planning and training.[157]

## Other Disaster Management Partners

Civil society, volunteers, and traditional leadership structures provide Palau with an active, local, culturally informed constellation of organizations who are first responders when their own communities or their neighbors are impacted by a disaster. Foremost among the national organizations is PRCS, which is a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and holds representation on the NEC. Its global, regional, and national network allows it to act swiftly and with significant resources. However, it is joined by many smaller organizations whose main work

may not be DM but who are important for addressing the needs of vulnerable Palauans when disasters strike. Finally, the importance of support from bilateral partners for the country's government and civil society DM practitioners cannot be overstated.

**Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS)**

PRCS is a non-profit humanitarian organization, established as an auxiliary to the government by a resolution of the National Congress in 1997. It was recognized as a member of the IFRC in 1997.

The PRCS headquarters is in Koror,[158] and it has a network of more than 300 volunteers nationwide;[159] they work across the National Society's programs to build Palauan communities' resilience to the impacts of disasters and climate change, promote safe and healthy living, expand Red Cross volunteerism across society, and ensure openness and transparency in PRCS management and governance.[160] PRCS' Executive Director or that person's designated representative sits on the NEC.[161]

As part of its "Disaster Risk Management – Preparedness and Response" line of effort, PRCS established Red Cross Disaster Action Teams (RDAT) starting in 2018. Now present in all 16 states, these all-volunteer teams regularly undergo training by NEMO and the MHHS, and they have skills and resources to respond quickly in their own communities. RDATs' roles and responsibilities include:

- Conduct initial damage and needs assessments
- Share accurate and timely information
- Support communication between communities and response agencies
- Guide individuals and families to available services and assistance[162]

The 5-year strategic plan for PRCS for 2023-2027 emphasizes strengthening RDAT capacity, implementing low-tech community-based preparedness and DRR, developing low-cost, low-tech initiatives to address climate change, supporting implementation of SOPs with state governments and other agencies, and partnering with relevant agencies to strengthen DM, especially response.[163]

PRCS benefits from the network of 11 Red Cross National Societies in the region, as well as ties to the 180 other National Societies worldwide. The IFRC facilitates connections among all Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies in alignment with the Pacific regional emphasis on cooperation and solidarity, as elaborated in the 2050 Strategy and FRDP. Palau is a stakeholder in the IFRC Global Climate Resilience Programme, which aims to scale-up locally led, climate-smart DRR and build community-level resilience. Moreover, Palau continues to work with IFRC on early warning, anticipatory action, and forecast-based financing initiatives. In times of disaster, PRCS can reach out to IFRC and the global network of National Societies for resources, technical support, and advocacy.[164]

**Non-Governmental Organizations**

Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (BANGO)

BANGO formed in 2018 to provide a representative network body for Palau's civil society, non-governmental, and community-based organizations. It offers a platform for coordinating work and exchanging knowledge and best practice for groups working to implement the SDGs, Sendai Framework, FRDP, and other national, regional, and international sustainable development objectives. While its main focus is to provide skilled mentorship and group representation for Palau's civil society, BANGO also advocates with the government for resources to enhance civil society's capacities[165] and bridges Palauan NGO activities with other regional NGOs through the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (PIANGO).[166]

In 2025, BANGO announced the Facility Aiding Locally-Led Engagement (FALE Belau), which brings together 28 representatives from civil society, disability groups, the diaspora, youth networks, women's groups, academia,

international NGOs, faith-based organizations, and NEMO. FALE Belau now serves as BANGO's humanitarian arm for national crisis response. With the backing of SPC's PHWP and in partnership with PIANGO's FALE Pacific, FALE Belau is a community-led and -driven mechanism to build community capacity to make DM decisions and deliver assistance directly to affected people.[167]

Mechesil Belau

Mechesil Belau – Women of Palau – comprises the traditional women leaders from each of the 16 states. For more than 30 years, Mechesil Belau has held an annual conference that brings in participation from government and non-government partners. Together, they focus on developing practical actions that will preserve, promote, and protect local culture and traditions amidst societal modernization. Mechesil Belau wields significant influence over policies and even laws because of the group's ability to translate Palau's traditionally matrilineal society into modern governance. Although women hold few official government positions, Mechesil Belau has an important role in appointing traditional male chiefs to the national council that advises legislators. Moreover, they are key to transmitting to the next generation practices that promote food security,[168] and the ability to mobilize this knowledge and these skills is a critical component of reducing societal vulnerability in the face of escalating hazard risk.

Omekesang

Omekesang is a civil society organization advocating for the rights of people living with disabilities. Its normal work is to promote improved access to facilities and services for Palau's approximately 2,600 people living with disabilities. With limited transport options for people with mobility-related disabilities, access to medical services, education, and community activities is expensive or unavailable.[169] This shortfall translates into a DM challenge because of the potential for Palauans living with mobility-related disabilities to be unable to independently evacuate from at-risk areas or to access disaster shelters.

**Bilateral Partners**

Palau's fellow PICTs are the country's main partners for frequent collaboration and mutual support across the DM cycle. However, additional partners have significant history in providing resources for Palau's DM institutions and first responders. The U.S., based on the bilateral COFA, is potentially the foremost partner for security cooperation and collaboration on DM. However, other countries deliver financial and material aid in times of emergency, and they work with NEMO, government departments and agencies, first responders, and communities to enhance DRR and DM.

Japan

In the century since 1920 when Japan took over Germany's Pacific colonies, which included Palau, Japan's role in the islands has shifted from colonial ruler to cultural touchstone to economic and diplomatic partner. In the 1980s and 1990s, Japan was a key investor in Palau's ports, fisheries, and transport and tourism sectors. During the first quarter of the 21st century, Japan worked to support Palau's efforts to address the impacts of climate change through adaptation and energy sector modernization.[170] Most recently, Japan has invested in Palau's DM capacity through knowledge sharing, skills training, and equipment purchases.

The Japan-funded EDCR project, run by UNDP in collaboration with Palau's government, focused on building Palau's resilience to disaster impacts. Launched in 2019 and running to 2023, it integrated not only the NEC but the PNCC, Weather Service Office, and additional government bureaus.[171] Its contributions to Palau's DM capacity included mobile storage units for NEMO to place at their offices and on Kayangel, Peleliu, and Angaur to ensure that NEMO can execute a response anywhere in the country.[172] Additional equipment and expertise covered radios and

sirens at EOCs and in vulnerable locations, generators, automated weather stations, data-collection buoys, LIDAR mapping of key inhabited coastal areas, training for technicians tasked with maintaining the equipment, and a full retrofit of the NEOC.[173]

Multiple times in the past 25 years, Japan has delivered disaster assistance to Palau. After Typhoon Bopha struck in December 2012, the Government of Japan, through JICA, dispatched emergency relief supplies to Palau. The 150 jerry cans, 20 sets of plastic sheeting, 100 blankets, and 20 water purifiers were handed over to the PRCS for distribution to victims.[174] In November 2013, JICA delivered generators and sleeping pads, along with other supplies in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan's passage over the country.[175] Most recently, after Typhoon Surigae devastated parts of the country in 2021, the Government of Japan, through JICA, delivered portable water containers, water purifiers, and generators.[176]

Taiwan

At Palau's independence, Taiwan built a relationship with the country through delivery of technical support for agriculture, health care, entrepreneurship, and education. As part of its partnership with Palau, Taiwan recently delivered technical expertise to multilateral programs to reduce the vulnerability of Palauan households, especially small farmers, through food security and farm-to-market projects to increase production, reduce exposure to climate hazards, and promote agri-business.[177]

Taiwan stakeholders also participate alongside U.S. agencies to enhance Palau's DM capacity. For at least four years, Taiwan's National Science and Technology Center for Disaster Reduction (NCDR) has supported successive DM workshops in Palau led-by US PACOM's CFE-DM as part of the U.S. Navy's Pacific Partnership mission.

- In 2021, Taiwan's NCDR supported a 3-day DM workshop that included expert exchanges on early warning, search and rescue, inter-agency coordination, and enhancing telecoms for crises. Taiwan's Coast Guard and National Fire Agency also participated in the workshop,[178] which emphasized information-based emergency operations and saw Taiwan sharing best practices and expressing openness to boosting Palau's DM capacity through data analysis for DM.[179] During the 2021 workshop, Taiwan's NCDR agreed to install a weather sensor network and develop a GIS- and cloud-based system to enhance Palau's capacity to anticipate and respond to meteorological threats.
- In July 2022, Taiwan's NCDR supported a 3-day DM workshop in Koror and checked on progress on the installation of the GIS- and cloud-based meteorological system.[180] The Smart Sensor Network system was completed in July 2023, and Taiwan led portions of the 2024 workshop for Palau to operate the system.
- In January 2024, Taiwan's NCDR led the first day of a 3-day DM workshop covering practical training on the operation and maintenance of the Smart Sensor Network system. NCDR then worked with Palau's NEMO to troubleshoot and perform maintenance on the system.[181]
- In September 2025, Taiwan's NCDR supported a 2-day Strategic Communications in Disaster Management course led by CFE-DM. It presented its experiences in sharing information with government agencies, the public, and the mass media during disasters.[182]

In 2022, Taiwan and Palau signed an agreement to collaborate on disaster risk management. NEMO and NCDR agreed to focus on sharing DM expertise and research in addition to Taiwan providing training and workshop opportunities to Palau.[183] A subsequent US$1 million grant from Taiwan focused on supporting Palau's efforts to adapt in the face of impacts from climate change and disasters.[184]

# CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The concentration of Palau's people and economic activity in Koror and Airai States means that infrastructure is also concentrated in these areas. Most transport, utilities, and communications infrastructure reaches remote communities, but connectivity can be disrupted by the effects of hazard events – e.g., storm winds may bring down trees onto electric power distribution lines, or rockfalls may block critical roads.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Industries is responsible for overseeing the development, maintenance, and regulation of Palau's infrastructure, and it continues to promote national development and sustainable growth, including more robust and resilient transport, energy, water, sanitation, and communication networks. Not only are these networks critical for bolstering individual and community capacity to withstand the impacts of a disaster, but they facilitate – or, if damaged, can hinder – a response.

## Transportation

Road transport is critical for local movement among settlements, but cargo and passenger transport among the islands follows air and sea routes. The country's small air network centers around the main international airport – Roman Tmetuchl International Airport (or Palau International Airport). It serves as the main gateway for international passengers. There are also two small airfields on outlying islands, and both have been renovated in recent years with U.S. military assistance. Maritime transport is critical for cargo because Palau depends heavily on imported goods. The main seaport, Malakal Commercial Port (Port of Koror), serves as the country's maritime hub.

A source of further details on logistics infrastructure and services for disaster response planning is the Palau Logistics Capacity Assessment conducted and published by the by WFP via the Logistics Cluster: https://lca.logcluster.org/palau

### Airports

The National Aviation Administration regulates civil aviation affairs. Palau has one airport and two airfields. The main point of entry for international travelers is Palau International Airport, officially named Roman Tmetuchl International Airport. It is in Airai State near the commercial hub of Koror. The two airfields are situated on Peleliu and Angaur. These airfields are managed and operated by their respective state governments and primarily serve local and emergency transport needs. Figure 8 shows Palau's airport network in a map created in 2018 by WFP via the Logistics Cluster.[185]

Major international and regional airlines serve the international airport. Domestic air travel is supported by small charter operators, including Smile Air, which caters to tourists and inter-island travel, and Pacific Missionary Aviation, which is based in FSM's Yap State and offers flights to Palau's outer islands. Air cargo transport services are provided by United Airlines Cargo, which integrates freight services into passenger flights, and Asia Pacific Air, a subsidiary of Tan Holdings.

Roman Tmetuchl International Airport

Roman Tmetuchl International Airport is located 10 km (6.2 mi) from Koror.

- IATA: ROR
- ICAO: PTRO
- Elevation: 54 m (176 ft) above mean sea level
- Runway (9/27): 2,194 × 45 m (7,200 × 150 ft)
- Runway surface: asphalt and concrete

The length of the runway may restrict the operation of fully loaded cargo aircraft. The

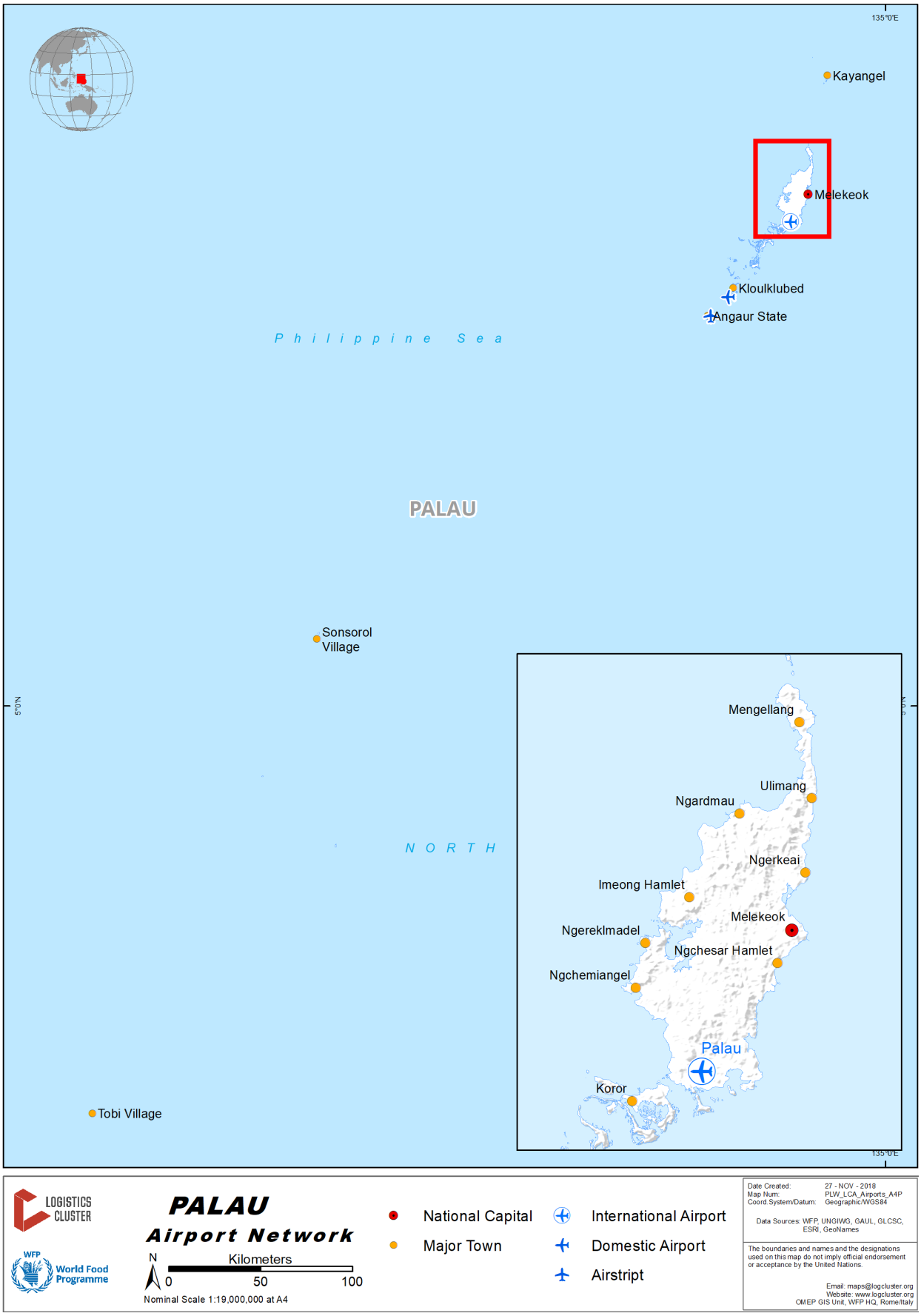



Figure 8: Palau Airport Network

largest aircraft that can be offloaded on bulk cargo or pallet is a Boeing 767. Elevators/high loaders have a maximum capacity of 10 metric tons (11 tons). There is no storage area. The airport does not have helipads, but there is open space that can be utilized as such if necessary.[186]

The airport operates under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and U.S. air traffic control, which includes operational and safety reviews to ensure compliance with international aviation standards. The airport currently features three aprons. A significant expansion was launched in 2019 as Palau's first public-private-partnership infrastructure project worth approximately US$32 million. Additional analysis is underway to determine whether the runway can be extended to accommodate larger aircraft.[187]

Peleliu Airfield

Peleliu Airfield (FAA Location Identifier: C23) is a small airfield 5 km (3.1 mi) from the town of Kloulklubed.

- Elevation: 3 m (9 ft)
- Runway (4/22): 1,829 × 12 m (6,000 × 40 ft)
- Runway surface: gravel

Originally built by Japan during World War II, Peleliu Airfield was, until recently, only usable by light aircraft. The U.S. Marine Corps rehabilitated the runway in 2024. It was recertified in June 2024, and the milestone was marked by the 22 June 2024 landing of a KC-130J Super Hercules aircraft,[188] as depicted in Photo 3.[189]

Angaur Airfield

Angaur Airfield is a small domestic airstrip 1 km (0.6 mi) from the village of Ngaramash.

- Elevation: 6.1 m (20 ft)
- Runway (05/23): 2,134 × 46 m (7,000 × 150 ft)
- Runway surface: gravel

Prior to landing, aircraft are advised to get approval from the Angaur state office as there are no ground handling facilities on site.

Angaur Airfield was originally constructed by the U.S. Army during World War II. U.S. Civic Action Team Palau completed the Angaur Airfield Renovation Project in August 2020; the project involved Army, Navy, and Air Force engineers[190] alongside Palauan companies Surangel and Sons Co. and CTSI.[191] The renovated airfield was validated for military and commercial aircraft use by the 6 September 2020 landing of a U.S. Air Force C-130 Hercules.[192] The airfield is in use for domestic flights on a very limited basis.[193]

## Seaports

The National Infrastructure Investment Plan (2021–2030) outlines efforts to modernize transport systems, including enhancing port facilities.

Malakal Port

Malakal Commercial Port, also known as Port of Koror, is Palau's primary seaport and receives all types of international vessels. The commercial port plays a critical role as the main port of entry for foodstuffs, fuels, and other cargo. The privately-owned port is not used for domestic or inter-island transport. It lies within a naturally protected lagoon that offers safe harbor conditions year-round.[194]



**Photo 3: First Military Fixed-Wing Aircraft Lands at Peleliu after Recertification (2024)**

There are two approaches – the East Passage (Malakal Pass; 07°16'29" N, 134°27'42" E) and the West Passage (Toagel Mlungui; 07°32'43" N, 134°27'11" E). The West Passage entrance serves as the approach for the Aimeliik Tanker Terminal, which only serves oil tankers, and Palau Pacific Resort Bay, which is a designated area for passenger ship-port interface. East Passage is restricted to vessels of up to 3,500 gross register tonnage (GRT). Vessels larger than 3,500 GRT enter or exit through West Passage.

Malakal Commercial Port can accommodate vessels with a maximum draft of 7.2 m (23.6 ft). Major channel entrances experience currents up to 2.5 knots (4.6 kph; 2.8 mph) during initial change of tides.[195]

Palau and the U.S. are planning significant upgrades to modernize the port. The wharf surface requires repairs as it has been subsiding over decades of heavy loading associated with container storage and movements. The Malakal Port and Harbor Improvement Project will repair, strengthen, and extend the northeast face of the wharf by 55 m (181 ft), which will provide an estimated 10,400 $m^2$ (112,000 $ft^2$) of additional container storage and operational space. The project also will replace a corroded building, remove debris from the water, and install lighting for night operations and a modern stormwater system that prevents stormwater from flowing into Malakal Harbor. The completed project should enable larger vessels to bring goods to Koror, increase Palau's capability and capacity for commercial port operations, and provide the U.S. military with improved options for logistical support.[196]

Other docks and landings

- Babeldaob Island – Bkurrengel Dock (Aimeliik), Kamasang Dock (Aimeliik), and Marina (Airai) are among the key landings
- Peleliu Island – Peleliu Dock and Ramp
- Angaur Island – Angaur Dock
- Kayangel Island – Kayangel Dock
- Sonsorol Island – Beach landing sites
- Hatohobei Island – Beach landing site[197]

## Roads

Palau has a road network of 125 km (78 mi), of which 36 km (22 mi) are paved roads on Koror and Babeldaob. Primary roads are sealed asphalt, and many secondary roads are cemented paved roads. There are 89 km (55 mi) of unpaved roads on various islands.

Eight main bridges provide connections between Koror and Babeldaob. The Koror-Babeldaob "Japan-Palau Friendship" Bridge is a reinforced concrete, portal frame, cable-stayed bridge with a total length of 413 m (1,355 ft). It was built by the Kajima Corporation of Japan in 2002 to replace the former bridge, which was built in 1978 and collapsed in 1996. Also in Koror, the main connection to Malakal Island and the main port is via a causeway. The main roadway on Babeldaob Island is known as the Compact Road. It loops around the island. Secondary roads connect the Compact Road to villages and vary in quality.[198]

Koror and Airai States have well-maintained roads. Villages may have bumpy or muddy road conditions, especially after rainfall, and four-wheel-drive vehicles are better suited for those routes. Many roads are single-lane, undivided, and have no sidewalks and little or no shoulder on the roadside. This necessitates driver caution and slower speeds, especially when pedestrians walk near traffic. Overtaking another vehicle is prohibited. The speed limit is 30 kph (18 mph) in urban areas and 45-50 kph (28-31 mph) in rural areas. The legal driving age is 18 years.[199]

Key Roads

- Babeldaob – The main network is the Babeldaob Loop "Compact" Road, which is a paved highway that circles the island and connects states on the island.
- Koror – There is a significant network of paved roads, which are mainly local. They connect to Babeldaob through causeways and bridges.
- Peleliu – A network of sealed roads connects the main town to the port.
- Angaur – A small network of sealed roads connects the port to the main town.

- Kayangel, Sonsorol, and Hatohobei – No major roads.[200]

Roads in Palau are susceptible to flooding, particularly with many roads located along the coast. Coastal flooding affects daily life as waves overtop roads and disrupt access. Some streets flood regularly during spring tides.[201]

### Navigable Waterways

Most navigable waterways in Palau are inter-island sea routes. While there are several rivers on Babeldaob, the largest of the nine inhabited islands, most are too shallow or short to be navigable.

Peleliu and Angaur State governments operate their own ferry services. Peleliu State operates ferry services between Peleliu and Koror. Angaur State operates ferry services between Angaur and Koror. Schedules may change without notice, especially due to inclement weather.[202] More remote islands, including Hatohobei and Sonsorol, are serviced quarterly through chartered dive vessels, such as Peleliu Adventures. These services are often constrained by weather conditions, particularly high winds and ocean swells.

Surangel and Sons Co. is among the private companies that operate tug and barge systems for transporting construction materials. The company's Surangel Barge & Tugboat Services operate out of Airai and provide inter-island cargo transport, particularly for heavy equipment, construction materials, and bulk goods. These services are critical for connecting main islands to remote outlying islands, especially where there is limited port infrastructure.[203]

## Communications

National communications networks reach most communities, but there are few redundancies, and damage to nodes in the network – electric power, subsea cable, or cellular towers – will disrupt the delivery of time-sensitive information on hazards, emergencies, and relief. Most of the communication infrastructure is state-owned and -operated. However, the national mass media are private and independent. The Palauan population is connected through high uptake of mobile telephone services, and many Palauans are also internet users. The government and national agencies – including NEMO – are active online, through both dedicated websites and social media. Government and citizen engagement through digital platforms is an opportunity for information sharing among DM agencies, technical experts, and communities.

### Early Warning Systems and Information Sharing

While NEMO is responsible for developing community awareness programs, technical and implementing agencies – some belonging to international and bilateral partners – are key stakeholders in the early warning system (EWS). The EWS encompasses not only scientific observations and the issuance of bulletins regarding a threat but also the technical systems and processes for passing that information to the public and community knowledge regarding what to do when a warning is received. Various stakeholders are involved in sharing information before, during, and after a hazard event to ensure that the authorities, implementing partners, and affected communities understand risks and available resources.

Under NEC guidance, forecasts and alerts from technical agencies trigger additional actions through the national EWS.[204] For emergency operations, the NEOC may be activated based on warnings or alerts received from technical agencies, on-the-ground personnel, or mass media (traditional or social). Once the NEMO Coordinator receives an alert validated by experts, NEMO staff convene and take additional steps, which include:

- Consulting the NEC and recommending activation of the NEOC
- Alerting NEC members to activate their respective agencies' emergency procedures
- Initiating notification procedures for additional authorities and the public[205]

**Key EWS Nodes**

- NEMO Coordinator – EWS focal point; receives warnings from all technical and non-technical sources, validates them, and convenes NEMO staff to address their content
- Weather Service Office (WSO) Palau – The meteorologist-in-charge at WSO Palau sits on the NEC; can issue tropical cyclone bulletins and warning messages to the public without routing them through the NEC
- Additional technical agencies – Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, Joint Typhoon Warning Center, Japan Meteorological Agency
- PNCC – installation and maintenance of telecoms equipment
- Non-technical-agency sources – public safety officers (police), mass media, or other government agencies on the scene of a disaster

There are at least 24 sirens located throughout the country, and there are high-frequency (HF) radio and broadcast radio and TV stations, all of which operate alongside traditional mechanisms – e.g., conch shells or bells – to alert communities to threats.[206] In the more populated areas, mass media – public and private – carry warnings to the public. In more remote states and outer islands, HF radio is the key medium for carrying early warning messages.[207] Once a message is radioed to community officials or to PRCS staff in an at-risk area, non-technical warning bells can be rung. Communities that use these systems have worked with WSO Palau, NEMO, PRCS, and others to ensure that residents know how to respond when such warnings are issued.[208]

The NDC is the central authority for developing, prioritizing, and releasing messages to ensure accurate and timely information reaches the public as well as to ensure that responders can communicate over frequencies that are not congested. For mass media statements, the PIO prepares and releases statements cleared by the NEC.[209]

**Meteorology and Hydrology**

WSO Palau is fully supported by NOAA's NWS (U.S.).[210]

There are several automatic weather stations located from Kayangel in the north to as far south as Peleliu,[211] but there have been outages in recent years. Additional weather and tide monitoring equipment are operated for research purposes across and around the islands by organizations such as the Coral Reef Research Foundation (CRRF) and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO) at the University of California San Diego (UCSD).[212]

The NWS administers WSO Palau, located at the international airport in Airai State. It also administers WSOs throughout U.S.-affiliated PICTs in the northwestern Pacific and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Honolulu, Hawaii.

The NWS' Weather Forecast Office (WFO) Guam provides twice-daily marine and island forecasts and marine advisories such as small craft advisories, high surf advisories, and warnings.[213] It is also responsible for issuing tropical cyclone watches and warnings for Palau and other areas of the northwestern Pacific. It delivers these bulletins to the WSOs in Palau, FSM, Marshall Islands, and the U.S. territories.[214]

## Information Sharing Focal Points

**NEMO**

P.O. Box 100, Koror, Palau
Tel: +680-587-6366 or -6367
Fax: +680-587-6368
Facebook: @PalauNEMO
E-mail: *nemo@palaugov.org*
Web: *https://www.palaugov.pw/the-national-emergency-management-office/*

**WSO Palau**

P.O. Box 520, Koror, Palau, 96940-0520
Tel: +680-587-1033 or -6287 or -6288
Fax: +680-587-1436
Recorded Forecast:
+680-587-1103 – English
+680-587-1104 – Palauan

Facebook: @wsopalau
Web: *https://www.weather.gov/gum/WSOPalau*

**Palau Red Cross Society**
6043 Koror, Palau 96940
Tel: +680-488-5780 or -5781
24/7 Line: +680-775-PRCS (7727) or -SAFE (7233)
Facebook / Instagram / X: palauredcross
Email: *admin@palauredcross.org*
Web: *https://www.palauredcross.org/*

## Telecommunications Infrastructure

The national telecommunications (telecoms) provider delivers nearly all fixed and mobile telephone and broadband services. Internet access has expanded rapidly in the past decade with completion of subsea fiber-optic cables. While the cost of mobile telephone plans and broadband internet has fallen in recent years, it remains expensive by global standards. One-third of the population does not use the internet, but most communities have at least some mobile telephone coverage. Despite its reach, the network has minimal built-in resilience. An incident – natural or anthropogenic – that severs a subsea cable or damages land-based equipment could render one or all communities unable to communicate with each other or the rest of the world.

PNCC is the sole national telecoms service provider. Belau Submarine Cable Corporation (BSCC), established in 2016, oversees subsea cable construction and operation. Both are state-owned and financed by a combination of public budgets (tax revenue) and loans from Australia and Japan. PNCC is BSCC's largest customer.[215]

As of late 2025, there were 25,400 mobile cellular telephone subscriptions in the country. There is, therefore, a mobile teledensity of well over 100%. About 98% of connections are 3G, 4G, or 5G; the remainder are limited to voice and SMS rather than mobile broadband.[216]

In early 2026, PNCC announced a partnership with U.S. companies to expand the 4G network and build out 5G nationally by mid-2027. This expansion of mobile services through an Open Radio Access Network (RAN) is expected not only to improve connectivity and network resilience in the main islands and bring down some costs but also to ensure that the southwestern islands are served.[217] PNCC mobile telephone coverage maps indicate the following:

- 2G/3G coverage on Kayangel
- 2G/3G/4G coverage on Babeldaob
- 3G/4G concentrated in Koror and Airai States
- 2G/3G/4G coverage is present on Peleliu
- 2G/3G is available on Angaur[218]

More than two-thirds of the population – an estimated 11,400 people – use the internet.[219] BSCC delivered the Palau-Guam fiber-optic cable and is building out other international connections.[220] While there was some excitement in 2025 that Starlink, an internet provider using low-earth orbiting satellites, would be introduced, in April 2026, the government put a moratorium on additional telecoms operators entering Palau's market.[221]

## Mass and Social Media

The country's media environment is characterized by a small market, mostly private ownership, and relative independence. Radio and online information sources are the most widely accessed. While the mass media experience few limits on what they say, government is active on social media, and it commonly delivers information directly to the public. Traditional mass media outlets may be less useful to the public than social media during an emergency, as official DM agencies commonly use social media platforms, and Palauans are increasingly active on social media, which could provide a means for government DM offices to receive feedback or community-based information regarding hazards or disaster impacts.

There is a small market and small labor force available for mass media enterprises. Many outlets depend on government advertising revenue to cover operating expenses. What is more, there are few professional journalists or

other media workers. The country's increasingly online society is forcing Palauan media outlets to adopt an online-first mode of delivery. Meanwhile, journalists report that they have increasingly experienced difficulty in gathering information from the government, as public officials use their social media accounts to post information and interact directly with the public rather than issuing press releases or taking questions from journalists.[222]

Commercial mass media outlets are susceptible to constraints from financial backers, mostly government advertising.[223] There are two privately-owned newspapers, three private radio stations, and one state-owned radio station. No television is produced locally. Local print outlets are in English; radio programming is in Palauan and English. Cable TV networks – usually via PNCC – are available and carry global programming.[224] Regional and international media outlets are freely accessible.[225]

Print
- Tia Belau – bi-weekly in print; available online and through email
- Island Times – bi-weekly in print; available online and through Facebook

Radio
- Palau Wave FM 89.9, PWFM – news and entertainment in Palauan and English; also available online and via Facebook
- Eco Paradise FM 87.9 (Koror), FM 89.1 (Babeldaob), AM 1584, T8AA – state-owned; news, entertainment, talk in Palauan and English; also available through Facebook
- Diaz Broadcasting FM 89.5, WWFM – news, entertainment, and talk in Palauan and English; also available through Facebook and YouTube
- Island Rhythm FM 88.0, KRFM – music in Palauan and English; also broadcasting through Facebook

Facebook
- Office of the President (@PalauPresident)
- Island Times (@islandtimespw)
- Eco Paradise (@divisionofmedia)
- Diaz Broadcasting
- Palau Wave[226]

Despite the overall freedom of media activity, many Palauans cannot afford internet access, and some outer-island communities have no options for access. This infrastructural shortfall limits the variety of information sources available to some communities and limits their ability to participate in information sharing for various purposes – political, business, social, and even DM.[227]

There are upwards of 15,400 unique social media identities based in Palau. If each identity represents a different person, then nearly 90% of the population participate in social media. However, it is probable that many users have more than one identity – i.e., they use more than one platform. Facebook is ubiquitous.[228]

## Utilities

Residents of Koror and adjacent states on Babeldaob are connected to centralized electricity, water, and wastewater services delivered primarily through PPUC, the SOE responsible for building and managing these systems.

Although electricity service has been extended to the whole population, generation remains dependent on diesel. All oil products are imported, and this dependence means the country's people and economy can be hit hard by international oil market swings. Similarly, nearly the whole population has access to piped water and improved sewerage, but heavy reliance on a small number of groundwater sources and rainwater exposes most communities to disruptions during extreme weather or equipment failures that take a plant offline. Households in remote atolls, primarily Kayangel, Sonsorol, and Hatohobei, rely predominantly on rainwater catchment, and they are at high risk of water shortages and health impacts from drought. All utilities are small-scale and require significant investment to maintain and modernize.

## Power

Electricity access for 100% of the population was achieved in 2020.[229] PPUC's national electric grid comprises two main diesel-fired generation plants – Malakal (24 Megawatts [MW]) and Aimeliik (10 MW)[230] – and some solar generation, as well as 183 km (114 mi) of 13.8-kilovolt distribution lines. It serves 7,000 customers, 80% of which are residences. The distribution lines are highly susceptible to damage and disruption from falling branches and severe weather.[231]

The electricity supply remains heavily dependent on imported diesel fuel, sourced primarily through Singapore and South Korea. This reliance on imported diesel exposes Palau to the same international price volatility that affects its fellow PICTs. In 2022, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, fuel prices rose nearly 15% as global markets adjusted to reduced availability of Russian petroleum exports.[232] Similar disruptions have impacted the country in the wake of hostilities in the Strait of Hormuz. Notching an average of 20.5 million liters (5.4 million gallons) of imported diesel annually,[233] Palau has sought to reduce its exposure to price swings and began work to encourage adoption of home solar systems through the Net Metering Act. Between 2019 and 2024, installation of rooftop solar led to a rise in the contribution of solar energy to total energy use from 5% to 30%. PPUC has also developed a 2-MW solar farm anticipated to further increase the renewable share of the national grid.[234]

In addition to expanding the grid and shifting to renewable energy, resilience in the electricity sector requires PPUC to continue developing redundant systems. In 2026, PPUC announced that it is not only replacing old powerlines but also installing power loops. By 2026, there were two loops in southern Babeldaob – east coast and west coast – to ensure that outages are isolated rather than impacting the entire island network. Within 10 years, PPUC expects to also build a northern loop on Babeldaob to reduce outages to northern communities.[235] Additional adjustments – installing battery back-up, improving insulation, and diversifying inputs – will allow the country to weather disruptions more easily.

## Water and Sanitation

More than 98% of the population has access to piped treated water, typically supplemented by household rainwater catchment systems. Households in remote atolls, primarily Kayangel, Sonsorol, and Hatohobei, rely predominantly on rainwater collection.[236]

Most of Palau's population relies on the Ngerikiil River and Ngerikiil Dam for freshwater supplies. They produce 3.8 million liters (1 million gallons) and 11.4 million liters (3 million gallons) of water per day, respectively, and serve roughly three-quarters of the national population through the Koror-Airai Water Treatment Plant, located in Airai State near Koror. These sources are within the Ngerikiil watershed in Airai State; the watershed spans approximately 284 $km^2$ (110 $mi^2$) and constitutes the primary potable water supply for both Airai State and Koror.

There is a secondary watershed within Koror, at Ngerbeched. Meanwhile, Peleliu and Angaur use local supplies of groundwater and rainwater. Kayangel lacks a defined watershed and is, therefore, entirely reliant on rainwater catchment. Nationally, annual rainfall averages approximately 3,700 mm (146 in), with peak precipitation occurring during the June–August monsoon season; precipitation generates an estimated 1.1 trillion liters (300 billion gallons) of surface water runoff annually.[237]

Per capita water consumption is notably high at approximately 250 liters (66 gallons) per day,[238] while the UN advocates for a floor of 50-100 liters (13-26 gallons) per capita per day.[239] This demand is manageable at present given Palau's small population and limited industrial base, but freshwater resources are vulnerable to several impacts. Sedimentation from inadequate erosion control, saltwater intrusion into groundwater, and intensifying drought cycles all threaten supply reliability. A severe drought in March 2016 (the driest period in 65 years) produced significant water shortages, sanitation

failures, crop losses, and elevated malnutrition risk, illustrating the consequences of supply disruption in an isolated island context. Infrastructure challenges further exacerbate vulnerability; limited funding has slowed upgrades to the Koror-Airai Water Treatment Plant, and watershed conservation is hampered by resource limitations and staff turnover.[240]

Roughly 95% of Koror's population is connected to a sewerage system, the rehabilitation of which was completed in 2020. Babeldaob's Melekeok State, in which Palau's capital is situated, is served by a separate and considerably smaller sewer system. In the outlying islands, onsite sanitation predominates, with most households relying on a septic tank, pit latrine, or comparable arrangement. Palau's first Voluntary National Review on the SDGs, published in 2019, reported that every household has some form of toilet facility, with approximately 92% using flush toilets and 8% using "benjos" (Type III toilets that are attached to storage tanks). Onsite sanitation requires additional support. Septic tanks serve as the primary onsite solution in areas beyond the reach of centralized sewer networks, yet their maintenance presents a substantial challenge. Many tanks are neither emptied on a regular basis nor properly managed, and this gap leads to environmental contamination and associated health risks. Deficient design and construction standards compound the problem by producing system failures where groundwater levels are high or soil conditions are poor. Compounding these issues, limited public awareness and education regarding septic system upkeep contribute to improper use and maintenance practices.

Palau operates two centralized wastewater collection and treatment systems. These existing facilities are frequently overwhelmed, especially during heavy rainfall, which causes overflows and the discharge of untreated effluent. Leaks and blockages within the sewer network are among the contributing factors and pose a significant threat to the marine and freshwater ecosystems that underpin Palau's biodiversity and tourism industry.[241]

## Health Systems

Palau has made significant improvements in health outcomes and the health system in recent decades. There is universal health care, and telemedicine options have increased access across remote islands. Palau's National Health Insurance has been in place since 2010, with private insurance also available, and over 90% of the population has health insurance.[242]

Palau has one government hospital, Belau National Hospital in Koror, and eight Community Health Centers (CHC). Five of the CHCs are on Koror and Babeldaob, and the remaining three are on Angaur, Peleliu, and Kayangel. There are also two private clinics in Koror. Belau National Hospital has various imaging and diagnostic equipment, and the radiology department has received support from Japan, Taiwan, the U.S., and other donors. The lack of doctors specializing in diagnostic imaging is being addressed by visiting doctors and training supported by the NGO Peace Winds America.[243]

The MHHS is modernizing its public health system, including working on a rollout of a national electronic health record system, which aims to reduce data silos, adopt modern technologies, and strengthen workforce capacity.[244]

Palau's national strategic health priorities include:

1. Strengthen health security, combat antimicrobial resistance, and conduct noncommunicable disease (NCD) surveillance activities
    a. Improved International Health Regulations (2005) core capacity
    b. Emergency response and preparedness
    c. National Emergency Medical Team (KLEMAT)
    d. Integrated disease surveillance, logistics contingencies, and regional laboratory mechanism
2. Promote universal health coverage
    a. Equitable health resource distribution
    b. Health financing
    c. Quality assurance
    d. Improved health communications and data systems

3. Health promotion to improve healthy behaviors and reduce risk factors
   a. Tobacco and alcohol use
   b. Mental health
   c. NCD self-management
   d. Healthy ageing
   e. Environmental health and climate change impacts[245]

Figure 9 shows Palau's top 10 causes of death and disability for 2023, as well as the percent change in the top 10 between 2013 and 2023. NCDs account for seven of these causes, and their shares of deaths increased from 2013 to 2023.[246] The 2023 Adult Hybrid Survey in Palau revealed that trends in risk factors for NCDs included a rise in hypertension prevalence and adults who were overweight, even as there was progress in lowering cholesterol levels and increasing nutrition awareness, medical check-ups, and female cancer screening.[247] Palau's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan for NCD Prevention and Control identifies six areas of action to reduce NCDs: 1) tobacco control; 2) reducing harmful alcohol use; 3) improving nutrition; 4) increasing physical activity; 5) reducing metabolic risk factors; and 6) mental health.[248]

The National Emergency Medical Team (Kapalua Leku Mati or KLEMAT) was established in June 2022, following a WHO initiative to facilitate EMT training and cache procurement in the Pacific. KLEMAT's establishment was facilitated by a Technical Working Group that also works on integrating KLEMAT into the NDRMF, the Belau National Hospital Emergency Plan, and the national budget. KLEMAT's SOPs drew from WHO's classification and minimum standards for EMTs and adapted them to a small island context. Team personnel roles include medical director, focal point coordinator, administrator (NEMO), team leader, emergency medical technician, clinical lead, nurse, nurse specialist, logistician, environmental health, active and support services (PRCS), and pharmacist and maintenance (Belau National Hospital).

KLEMAT regularly conducts training in coordination with WHO and other partners to expand its roster and maintain emergency readiness. In May 2023, the Australian Defence Force sponsored two KLEMAT members to attend short courses in Australia. In December 2023, KLEMAT conducted a 3-day simulation exercise on Ngercheu Island at Carp Island Resort, as depicted in Photo 4.[249] The training exercise, which included radio communications with the EOC, setting up a triage center, and receiving patients, was supported by Australia, Japan, Taiwan, and the U.S.[250] In October 2024, MHHS and WHO conducted EMT training including hands-on sessions, urban and rural scenarios, introduction to the latest equipment and technology, and cultural competence in emergencies.[251] KLEMAT is capable of responding throughout Palau and, given its training and deployment-ready equipment, has the potential to respond regionally.[252]

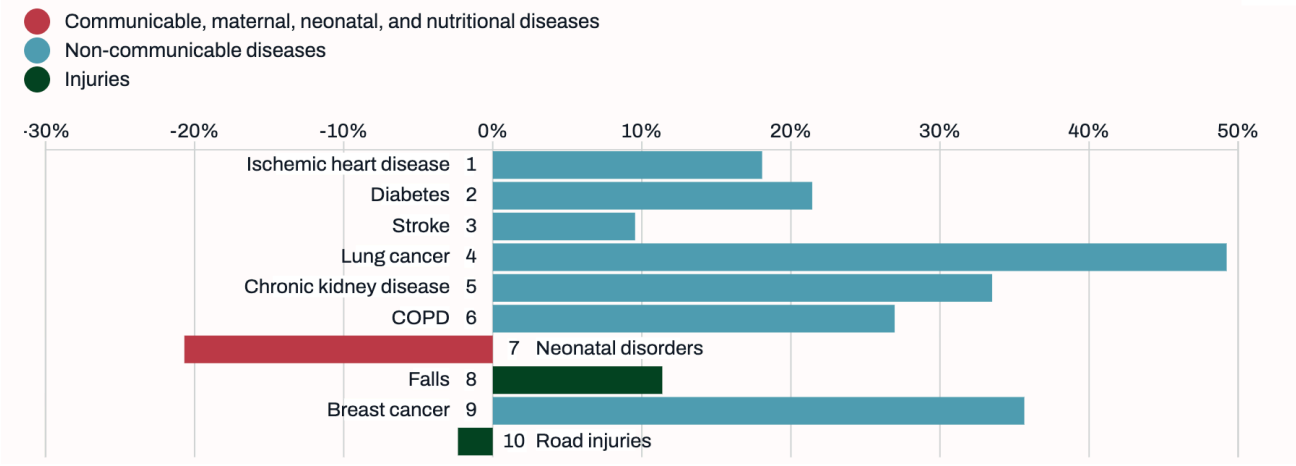



Figure 9: Top 10 Causes of Death and Disability (2023) and % Change (2013-2023)



Photo 4: Palau's Emergency Medical Team Conducts a Field Training Exercise (2023)

## Shelter and Housing

Although formal homelessness is rare, Palau does confront challenges related to affordable, resilient housing. There is uneven access to the financial and material resources residents need to undertake projects that improve their homes' ability to withstand a major storm. Between 2008 and 2025, Palau recorded 4,100 individual disaster-related displacements; all were caused by storms.[253] Concerted efforts to not only provide safe haven to people evacuating at-risk areas but also to reduce the potential for damage to homes are underway and integrate government and civil society actors.

Palau has 44 emergency shelters, of which 20 are school buildings. As of 2023, NEMO had designated and assessed evacuation shelters in all 16 states.

A 2019 initiative with NEMO and IOM assisted communities in ensuring resilient shelters, developing DM plans, and training community leaders in shelter management.[254] IOM supported the building or upgrading of eight disaster shelters designed to function as a connected national network of safe spaces accessible to all people during emergencies. The shelters are built to withstand high winds, heavy rainfall, and flooding. As of February 2026, four of the shelters had been strengthened and handed over to Palauan communities, with support from IOM in coordination with NEMO.[255] One of the first shelters delivered by the NEMO-IOM initiative was Ngiwal State's Ngermechau Multipurpose Center, which was handed over in December 2024. The resilience upgrades included typhoon tie-downs for water tanks, high-powered fans, and a portable wheelchair ramp.[256]

Community-based PRCS RDATs are also being trained to manage shelters before, during, and after emergencies in order to reinforce local leadership and ownership. As such, the disaster shelters are expected to function as more than emergency refuges and could become community hubs that support preparedness, connection, and adaptation.[257]

A strength of the country is that there are low rates of formal homelessness. Nonetheless, Palauans face rising housing costs that present affordability challenges that, among other outcomes, push young Palauans to live overseas.

The 2023-2026 Palau Development Plan Housing revealed that housing assistance is a high priority for over 71% of households. The National Housing Commission (NHC) administers the Housing Development Loan Project (HDLP) and addresses housing development issues. The HDLP is a US$15-million program established in 2019 as the government response to the housing crisis. It provides financial support for new home construction.[258] The Palau Housing Authority (PHA) also provides housing support aimed at low-income families through low-interest loans for construction, renovation, extension, or repair – including from fire or water damage – as well as emergency reconstruction.[259] PHA has funded new homes and renovations, but it has faced financial shortfalls.[260]

## Food Security

Palau faces various challenges to food security. A reliance on imported, cheap, processed foods has undermined healthier food habits, while a changing climate contributes to low agricultural productivity. Traditional practices still influence the county's food supply, and there is growing interest in better supporting traditional resources to improve food security. However, the food supply is vulnerable due to import dependence, limited domestic production, and declining wild fish stocks. Disruptions in supply chains from natural disasters, political instability, or market shifts can quickly impact food availability.

Since the 1980s, the country's food imports have steadily increased, while the contribution of agriculture to the economy has steadily declined.[261] As in many Pacific Island countries, imported food, NCDs, and overnutrition are interconnected. An estimated 76% of Palauan adults are overweight. The daily consumption of fruits and vegetables is 240 grams (g; 8.4 ounces [oz]) per capita, whereas the WHO recommends 400 g (14 oz) per capita daily for a healthy diet. Almost two-thirds of dietary energy consumed is from foods "to limit or avoid," as categorized by the Pacific Guidelines for Healthy Living.[262] Imported food products include meat, dairy, fish, cereals and grains, vegetables and fruit, sugars, coffee, tea, cocoa, spices, lard, and oils.

Palau's diet does include locally grown staples such as taro, breadfruit, coconut, fish, pork, and chicken, many of which are cultivated and harvested at the community level. However, the country heavily depends on imported food, partially due to agricultural capacity and the absence of a significant food processing industry.[263]

Palau's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment (MAFE) prioritizes food security and food sovereignty as the first among their six strategic objectives. This objective encompasses reducing reliance on imports and supporting local producers by promoting climate-resilient agriculture and aquaculture practices, supporting smallholder farmers and fishers through training, infrastructure, and market access, and strengthening seed banks, agroforestry, and traditional farming systems.[264] Accordingly, MAFE has supported seed distribution, community farming projects, and training programs to encourage citizens to reclaim fallow land and rebuild knowledge of traditional farming techniques that ensure steady access to local fruits, vegetables, and food staples.[265]

In line with the Palau Green Growth Plan, MAFE aims to triple agricultural production by 2030 by replacing imports, commercializing production, diversifying support for subsistence farming, and using nature-based and innovative solutions.[266] In 2025, MAFE reported distribution of 89,659 taro seedlings and provision of 70 table-top gardens to state farms. The same year, technical assistance, with support from the Taiwan Technical Mission, was delivered to 12 home gardeners, 7 commercial farms, and 7 school farms. In fisheries, 4,883 milkfish fingerlings were distributed to 3 farms, and 14,000 rabbitfish were released by students in 7 states.[267]

MAFE coordinates with MHHS to improve health, food security, and well-being in an integrated approach towards the Healthy Islands vision, which was endorsed by Pacific health ministers in 1995 and called for Pacific people to live in balance with their environment. Local markets are increasingly carrying homegrown produce, and some schools have launched pilot farm-to-table projects where locally sourced produce is incorporated into school lunch programs.[268]

Despite plans to tackle insufficient local production, integrated food security will also require reduction of crops' exposure to hazards. The country's ability to protect food trees, fields, fisheries, and food storage and processing facilities from damage during storms, droughts, or high tides is a long-term challenge that will require regional and international cooperation to share knowledge, skills, and resources.

# CONCLUSION

As a small island country, Palau faces specific hazards and disaster challenges. It meets these challenges with a combination of community action, public-sector leadership, and international cooperation.

The country is exposed to tropical cyclones, via both direct hits and indirect effects from passing storms. It is also commonly impacted by drought and tidal surges. ENSO's phases are key influences that can exacerbate or attenuate broader seasonal trends. El Niño events often extend the dry season and have contributed to severe droughts. La Niña events often bring increased precipitation and storms to Palau, and their typically higher sea levels commonly lead to saltwater intrusion into dry ground or fresh water sources.

Given the country's small population and economy, tropical storms can have outsized impacts. Typhoon Bopha struck Palau in 2012 and, although it did not cause human casualties, it left extensive damage on Babeldaob and resulted in massive damage. Two more times since that storm, large tropical cyclones have struck the country. Though human casualties have been minimal, damage has been significant. Residents of areas affected by storms were forced into long-term displacement. Homes, businesses, and agricultural assets were severely damaged, and the losses set back the national economy.

Following a severe drought in 2016, Palau amended the NDRMF, the main policy and planning document, to provide a more comprehensive, all-hazards framework and improve whole-of-government disaster preparedness, response, recovery, planning, and budgeting. The Framework is an effort to ensure top-to-bottom coordination even as affected communities are the first responders.

Across the national government, the DEC provides strategic DM direction and oversight. At the operational level, NEMO serves as the lead agency for overall DM, with the NEMO Coordinator serving as the NDC, while the NEC monitors and implements the disaster framework. Locally, an ICP is set up on-site for tactical-level responses in affected states and communities.

Palau, like many PICTs, is actively engaged with regional and international organizations that support DRR, strengthen DM capacity, and promote sustainable economic development. Palau is a member of Pacific regional organizations that develop and implement strategies and programs to build regional resilience to shocks. Its commitment to the 2050 Strategy and FRDP has helped shape national policies and projects that align with those regional goals, and it is also among the first PICTs to construct a humanitarian warehouse under SPC's PHWP. Additional partners include UN agencies and bilateral donor governments who support projects to develop safe shelters, promote resilient communications networks, share best practices on EOC operation, and develop community-based expertise on food security, among other aspects of DM.

The COFA between Palau and the U.S. was renewed in 2024 and plays a critical role in continuing economic assistance to Palau. This assistance includes technical and scientific agency work, which also supports DM and resilience efforts. The COFA grants the U.S. authority and responsibility for Palau's security and defense, and the U.S. military regularly engages in training and exercises, including those relating to disaster preparedness and response, participating alongside Palauan and other DM practitioners from regional countries and international organizations.

# 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*[269]

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[270]

In general, the goal of indexing risk is to inform decisionmakers and DRR 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.[271]

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.[272]

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 level of risk and 10 the highest) for each of the dimensions, categories, and components of risk, as well as an overall risk score.[273] The higher the score the more at-risk a country is. In the 2026 INFORM Risk Index, Palau had an overall risk score of 2.1/10, which INFORM categorizes as the "Very Low" risk class and

lands Palau as the 165th most at-risk country of 191 countries in the Index. The Hazards and Exposure dimension score takes into account a combination of natural and anthropogenic hazards, and Palau rated 1.2/10 or 181st of 191 countries. The Vulnerability dimension score was 2.4/10 or 156th of 191, and the Lack of Coping Capacity dimension score was 3.3/10 or 131st of 191. Physical exposure to Tsunamis and Coastal Flood, each at 4.4/10, were the greatest threats in the Hazards and Exposure dimension. Economic Dependency measured 6.3/10, the most significant component of risk in the Vulnerability dimension. [Lack of] DRR rated 4.9/10 to be the most significant risk in the Lack of Coping Capacity dimension. Figure 10 shows the INFORM Risk dashboard for Palau for 2026.[274]

## U.S. Government Disaster Management Engagement

The bilateral relationship between Palau and the U.S. is largely defined by the COFA, most recently amended in 2023, with the amendments coming into force in March 2024. Within the COFA are articles spelling out sectoral grant assistance for developments in Palau's education, health, small business, and public infrastructure sectors, and there are specific financing arrangements for aspects of DM.

As with any sovereign state, Palau's national government must seek or welcome international assistance to trigger U.S. government disaster response operations. However, programming to develop DM capacities in non-emergency periods can be conducted by U.S. government agencies alongside agencies of the Palau national or state governments. There are on-going projects that bring together U.S. and Palauan DM partners.

To build preparedness rather than simply react to large-scale events, U.S. government stakeholders participate in regular engagements for training, information sharing, and capacity enhancement. Among the key stakeholders in Palau are US PACOM and its subordinate commands and units.[275]

### U.S. Country Team

The Chief of Mission (COM) of the U.S. Embassy in Palau oversees work by various U.S. departments and agencies, many of them working on programs spelled out in or funded through the COFA. For example, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency is conducting a feasibility study on relocation of Palau's only hospital – Belau National Hospital – to reduce its exposure to coastal hazards. Meanwhile, bilateral initiatives on security and resilience involve additional partners – e.g., US PACOM and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

#### *INDOPACOM Commander's Visit*

In May 2026, Adm. Samuel J Paparo, commander of U.S INDOPACOM (now US PACOM), visited Palau to meet with senior Palau government officials to reaffirm the bilateral partnership between the United States and the Republic of Palau and to discuss the COFA and legal and diplomatic framework that underpins the relationship between the two nations. During the visit, Paparo toured the restored airfield on Peleliu, rehabilitated by Marines and Sailors of Marine Corps Engineer Detachment Pacific Palau as part of strategic U.S. investment. For the first time in 80 years, the airfield can support fixed-wing military aircraft, a key capability for any DM response in Palau. Additionally, the restoration represents a tangible expression of U.S. commitment to access, basing, and overflight in this strategically vital region.[276]

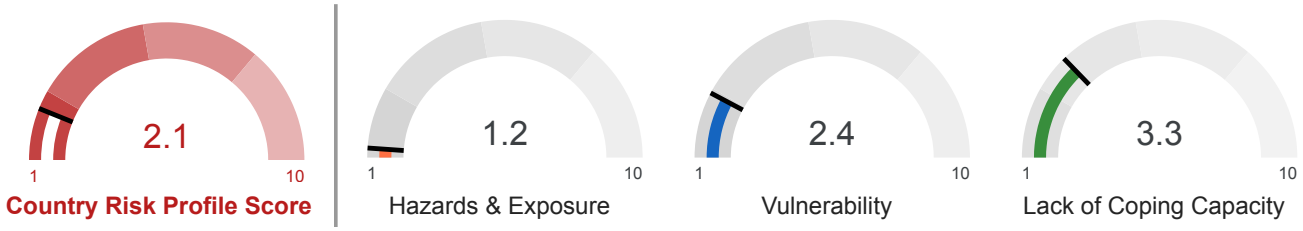



Figure 10: INFORM Risk Index Dashboard, Palau (2026)

### *Crisis Management Exercise*

On 23-24 February 2026, the U.S Embassy conducted a 2-day crisis management exercise with key local government agencies and diplomatic partners. Focusing on tsunami response and coordination, the simulation tested the EWS, evacuation procedures, communication protocols, and coordination between U.S. and Palauan government response teams to ensure a swift, unified response. Participants included representatives from PRCS, KLEMAT, and diplomatic and Embassy personnel. The exercise provided an opportunity to practice established protocols, pinpoint areas requiring improvement, and reinforce the bilateral DM partnership. It also supports Palau's designation by UNESCO as "Tsunami Ready," an international recognition backed by NOAA that acknowledges communities that are demonstrating effective tsunami preparedness measures.[277]

### *Ocean Conference 2022*

The Government of Palau and the U.S. hosted the seventh Our Ocean Conference in Koror, Palau, 13-14 April 2022. Under the theme, "Our Ocean, Our People, Our Prosperity," the conference was an initiative of the U.S. Department of State to focus on the ocean-climate nexus and the importance of a healthy ocean to small-island developing states and all communities where the ocean serves as a primary resource.[278]

### U.S. Embassy in Republic of Palau

Omsangel/Beklelachieb
Airai, Palau 96940
Tel: +680-587-2920
Web: *https://pw.usembassy.gov/*
Facebook: USembassyKoror
Instagram: usembassy_palau

## Responses in the Past Five Years (2021-2026)

The U.S. State Department is the lead federal agency for U.S. international disaster response. Within the Department, the Office 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 capacities are needed; as such, the Department may request U.S. military support for unique capacities and specified durations. The U.S has conducted only limited disaster response missions in Palau.

### *2021 – Typhoon Surigae*

On 23 April 2021, Typhoon Surigae passed over northern Palau, close to Kayangel. It brought sustained winds of up to 136 kph (84 mph) and heavy rainfall; together, they caused landslides, storm surges, debris, power outages, water cuts, and road blockages across all 16 states. Damage assessments estimated that approximately 1,500 houses sustained damage and 150 were destroyed, alongside losses of personal belongings and agricultural investments.[279] The U.S., through the former USAID, provided US$100,000 in immediate assistance to support affected people, and the U.S. airlifted relief supplies worth approximately US$56,000.[280]

## DoW DM Engagements

When the capacity of state and national authorities is outstripped by the requirements 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 assistance, 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 Combatant Command (e.g., US PACOM) 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.

While the U.S. commonly delivers disaster relief in a bilateral fashion, it coordinates not only with the affected state but with other key responders. In the Pacific, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and Palau's fellow PICTs frequently provide humanitarian support. 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 Palau responders and partner states.

### *Strengthening Palau's Emergency Communications - 2026*

In May 2026, the CFE-DM, part of US PACOM, directed an effort to improve Palau's disaster readiness through modernization of the country's emergency communication systems. The team collaborated with NEMO and PRCS on the project, which aims to strengthen first-responder coordination during crises. Over a 2-week period, the U.S. led work to install and test an emergency management radio network, including 10 new radios at PRCS facilities throughout the country and mobile units fitted into a NEMO response truck and boat. The mission enjoyed essential contributions from the U.S. Marine Corps Engineering Detachment Palau, U.S. Marine Corps Combat Logistics Battalion 1, and U.S. Army Soldiers from the 1st Theater Information Advantage Detachment and the Oceania Engagement Team.[281]

### *Civic Action Team Palau*

U.S. soldiers participated in a Civic Action Team (CAT) Palau rotation from July 2025 through February 2026.[282] CAT Palau was designed to provide the Republic of Palau with aid in special developmental needs through their six mission sets: trades apprenticeships, medical action, community outreach, community construction, camp maintenance, and World War II monument maintenance.[283] The 13-member CAT Palau team tackled critical infrastructure projects across the islands while also training 10 local apprentices in construction trades. The training was hands-on education that allowed the local apprentices to acquire formal credentials. The team worked on a 2-lane access road by clearing vegetation and grading terrain. Additionally, they worked on critical plumbing work for the fire department, including toilet installations and a water tank system.[284]

### *Task Force Koa Moana*

Task Force Koa Moana is a U.S. Marine Corps and Navy task force organized under I Marine Expeditionary Force. It is designed to strengthen and enhance relationships between the U.S. and partner nations in the Indo-Pacific region (particularly Oceania), conduct security cooperation and community engagement missions, and serve as a Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team afloat in support of US PACOM strategic and operational objectives.

The task force is organized into multiple units with expertise in engineering (construction, infrastructure), medical services, maritime law enforcement, and explosive ordnance disposal capabilities. It has accomplished more than 100 operations over the years.

In 2025, Koa Moana 25 delivered 100 first aid kits to the Belau National Hospital before the opening ceremony of the Pacific Mini Games. Distributed throughout the islands, these kits were placed at medical stations in the sport venues. In the weeks following the Mini Games, the Koa Maona 25 medical team scheduled another delivery of medical supplies for the Belau National Hospital and planned to continue to support the Palauan healthcare community with additional staffing for the local centers and hospital, as well as provide medical training and assistance through Palau's established public health initiatives.[285]

In 2024, throughout exercise Koa Moana 24, Marines and Sailors undertook a range of engineering projects, including the renovation of schools, facilities, and historical memorials. They also facilitated key leader engagements and conducted knowledge exchanges with subject matter experts from both the U.S. and the partner nations. Koa Moana 24 employed

several supporting episodic engagements. Expeditionary Fire and Rescue Marines from Marine Wing Support Squadron 373, 3rd Marine Air Wing, provided external support by training local Aircraft Rescue Firefighting teams in Palau and FSM.[286]

In Palau in 2023, the Koa Moana team improved roads and a firing range and participated in medical collaborations, disaster preparedness exercises, clean-up of Lake Ngardok, disposal of over 1,800 kilograms (4000 pounds) of explosives, and the consolidation and destruction of UXO around the Peleliu airfield. They also participated in reforestation activities in Ngardmau and attended community activities.[287]

The annual Koa Moana missions have allowed service members to strengthen relationships with local agencies in Palau and improve joint operations to help make the country a safer place.[288] Photo 5 shows Koa Moana 25 Marines with Combat Logistics Battalion 15, Combat Logistics Regiment 17, 1st Marine Logistics Group, as they work on communications equipment in support of NEMO.[289]

### *Pacific Partnership*

Pacific Partnership is the U.S Navy's largest maritime humanitarian and civic assistance mission conducted in the Indo-Pacific through four lines of effort: DM, engineering, medical, and host nation outreach. The mission has evolved over the years from primarily a direct care mission to an operation focused on enhancing partnerships through host-nation subject matter expert and civil-military exchanges. For the 2025 mission, stops included Palau, FSM, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Samoa. The DM line of effort prioritized partner-led workshops and exercises across the Pacific to strengthen national readiness, synchronize multinational support, and reinforce local ownership of their disaster response systems.[290]



Photo 5: U.S. Marines Work on Emergency Communications Equipment in Palau (2025)

# Additional Resources

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

| International and U.S. Government Sources |
|---|
| **U.S. Embassy in Palau**<br>https://pw.usembassy.gov/ |
| **UN Multi-Country Office**<br>https://micronesia.un.org/en/about/palau |
| **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030**<br>United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)<br>**https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/what-sendai-framework** |
| **National Disaster Preparedness Baseline Assessment – Palau**<br>Pacific Disaster Center (PDC)<br>**https://www.pdc.org/ndpba/** |

| National Resources |
|---|
| **National Emergency Management Office**<br>https://www.palaugov.pw/the-national-emergency-management-office/ |
| **National Disaster Risk Management Framework**<br>https://www.theprif.org/sites/theprif.org/files/2020-08/Palau%20Amended%20Risk%20Management%20Framework%202016.pdf |

| Regional Resources |
|---|
| **Pacific Islands Forum**<br>https://forumsec.org/pacific-islands-forum |
| **Pacific Community**<br>https://www.spc.int/ |
| **Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines for the Use of Foreign Military Assets in Natural Disaster Response Operations ("APC-MADRO Guidelines")**<br>The Asia-Pacific Conferences on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations (APC-MADRO) & OCHA, 2014<br>**https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/asia-pacific-regional-guidelines-use-foreign-military-assets-natural-disaster-response**<br>*Reference guide for states planning and executing foreign military support for regional disaster response.* |
| **Multinational Force Standing Operating Procedures (MNF SOP) – Annex C: Humanitarian Assistance/ Disaster Relief**<br>Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT), US PACOM<br>**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)**<br>*Annex on international humanitarian assistance; part of broad standing procedures for regional multinational force operations other than war.* |

| U.S. DoW Resources |
|---|
| **USINDOPACOM Foreign Disaster Response in the Indo-Asia-Pacific April 1991 – January 2024**<br>CFE-DM, US PACOM<br>**https://www.cfe-dmha.org/Publications/New-Releases**<br>*Contemporary historical synopsis of foreign disasters the U.S. DoW responded to in the Indo-Pacific.* |
| **Humanitarian Assistance Response Training – Disasters (HART-D) Course**<br>CFE-DM, US PACOM<br>**https://www.cfe-dmha.org/hart-d**<br>*Target Audience: O3-O6, E6-E9, and DoW civilians who may plan for or execute a Foreign Disaster Relief mission or participate in disaster response activities in exercises or security cooperation engagements.* |

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ° | degree(s) – of temperature (C or F) or of latitude and longitude (N, S, E, and W) |
| $ | dollar(s) – of the U.S. |
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| BANGO | Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations |
| BDA | Bureau of Domestic Affairs |
| BPS | Bureau of Public Safety |
| BPW | Bureau of Public Works |
| BSCC | Belau Submarine Cable Corporation |
| BSRP | Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific |
| CAT | Civic Action Team |
| CCG | Central Control Group |
| CHC | Community Health Center |
| CIP | Country Implementation Plan |
| COFA | Compact of Free Association |
| COM | Chief of Mission |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease 2019 |
| CROP | Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific |
| DEC | Disaster Executive Council |
| DHR | Office of Disaster and Humanitarian Response (of the U.S. State Department) |
| DRR | disaster risk reduction |
| DM | disaster management |
| EDCR | Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience in the Republic of Palau |
| EM-DAT | Emergency Events Database |
| EMT | emergency medical team |
| ENSO | El Niño–Southern Oscillation |
| EOC | emergency operations center |
| EQPB | Environmental Quality Protection Board |
| ESF | Emergency Support Function |
| EWS | early warning system |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization |
| FRDP | Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management |
| FSM | Federated States of Micronesia |
| g | gram(s) |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GRT | gross register tonnage |
| HC | Humanitarian Coordinator (of the UN) |
| HEC | Hamlet Emergency Committee |

| | |
|---|---|
| HF | high frequency |
| ICP | Incident Command Post |
| IFRC | International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies |
| in | inch(es) |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| ITCZ | Intertropical Convergence Zone |
| JICA | Japan International Cooperation Agency |
| km / $km^2$ | kilometer(s) / square kilometer(s) |
| kph | kilometers per hour |
| m / $m^2$ | meter(s) / square meter(s) |
| MAFE | Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment |
| MCO | Multi-Country Office (of the UN) |
| MHHS | Ministry of Health and Human Services |
| mi / $mi^2$ | mile(s) / square mile(s) |
| mm | millimeter(s) |
| MNRET | Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism |
| MOE | Ministry of Education |
| MOF | Ministry of Finance |
| mph | miles per hour |
| MW | Megawatt(s) |
| NCD | noncommunicable disease(s) |
| NCDR | National Science and Technology Center for Disaster Reduction (of Taiwan) |
| NDC | National Disaster Coordinator |
| NDRMF | National Disaster Risk Management Framework |
| NEC | National Emergency Committee |
| NEMO | National Emergency Management Office |
| NEOC | National Emergency Operations Center |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| NIMS | National Incident Management System |
| NOAA | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration |
| NWS | National Weather Service |
| NYCC | National Youth and Cheldebechel Council |
| OCHA | Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (of the UN) |
| ODA | official development assistance |
| PCC | Palau Community College |
| PFRS | Palau Fire and Rescue Services |
| PHT | Pacific Humanitarian Team |
| PHWP | Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing Program |

| | |
|---|---|
| PIANGO | Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organizations |
| PICTs | Pacific Island Countries and Territories |
| PIF | Pacific Islands Forum |
| PIO | Public Information Officer |
| PNCC | Palau National Communications Corporation |
| PPUC | Palau Public Utilities Corporation |
| PRCS | Palau Red Cross Society |
| RC | Resident Coordinator (of the UN) |
| RDAT | Red Cross Disaster Action Team |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SEC | State Emergency Committee |
| SOE | state-owned enterprise |
| SOP | standard operating procedure |
| SPC | Pacific Community |
| U.S. | United States |
| UN | United Nations |
| UN Women | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNDRR | United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNSDCF | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development (former agency; now under the U.S. Department of State) |
| UXO | Unexploded Ordnance |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| WMO | World Meteorological Organization |
| WSO | Weather Service Office |

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Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance
456 Hornet Avenue, Building 76, Joint Base Pearl Harbor - Hickam, Hawaii 96860-3503
Telephone: 808.472.0518 | DSN: 315.472.0518

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