



REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS HAZARDS & DISASTER MANAGEMENT

JUNE 2026



The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is exposed to a range of natural hazards including coastal erosion, disease outbreaks, drought, flooding, king tides, sea level rise, tropical cyclones, and tsunamis.

Around two-thirds of RMI's 37,000 people reside in two urban centers – Majuro and Ebeye. The rest of the population is spread among the outer islands. This population distribution results in crowded conditions, increased exposure, and limited resources among many living in Majuro and Ebeye, while outer island communities have limited or delayed access to disaster preparedness, response, and relief services and resources.

- **Drought and flooding** have been the most destructive hazard events over the past 25 years. Drought sometimes affects all atolls and islands. Flooding caused by storm surge, king tides, and wind-driven waves has damaged houses, roads, and other infrastructure.
- **National agencies** lead the disaster management (DM) structure and operate the strategic and operational levels of disaster preparedness and response; plans take a community-centered approach.
- **Resources are limited.** RMI relies on international partners, particularly the United States (U.S.), with which it entered into a Compact of Free Association (COFA) in 1986, with a new agreement finalized in 2024.
- **Under the COFA**, the U.S. is responsible for the defense and external security of RMI and provides economic assistance. RMI provides exclusive access to its land and waterways, including hosting the U.S. Army Garrison - Kwajalein Atoll Reagan Missile Test Site.

Facts about RMI

RMI is an archipelago nation in the western Pacific Ocean



Capital: Majuro



Total Population: 36,914 (2026 est.)



Total Land Area: 181 square kilometers (70 square miles) of land on 29 atolls, 5 islands, and over 1,200 islets spread over more than 2 million square kilometers (770,000 square miles) of ocean



Government: Executive, Legislative (Nitijela), and Judicial



Traditional Government: Council of Irooj, a consultative upper house for traditional leaders; comprises 12 tribal chiefs; advises the Nitijela



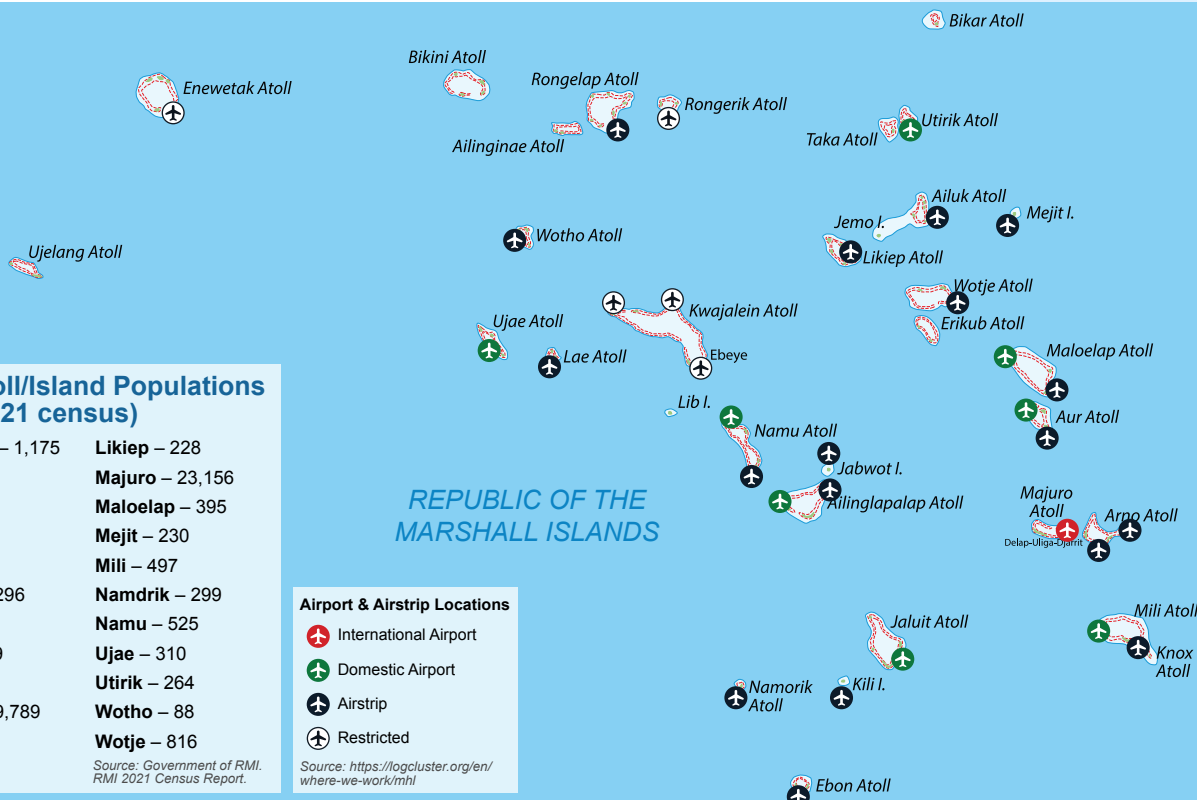
Languages: Marshallese and English



Major Airports/Airfields:

- **Amata Kabua International Airport (Majuro)**
Runway: 2,412 x 46 meters (7,913 x 150 feet)
- **Bucholz U.S. Army Airfield (Ebeye)**
Runway: 2,200 x 60 meters (7,218 x 197 feet)

Additional airfields listed on map below



Atoll/Island Populations (2021 census)

Ailinglaplap – 1,175	Likiep – 228
Ailuk – 235	Majuro – 23,156
Arno – 1,141	Maloelap – 395
Aur – 317	Mejit – 230
Ebon – 469	Mili – 497
Enewetak – 296	Namdrik – 299
Jabat – 75	Namu – 525
Jaluit – 1,409	Ujae – 310
Kili – 415	Utirik – 264
Kwajalein – 9,789	Wotho – 88
Lae – 133	Wotje – 816
Lib – 156	

Source: Government of RMI.
RMI 2021 Census Report.

Airport & Airstrip Locations

- International Airport
- Domestic Airport
- Airstrip
- Restricted

Source: <https://logcluster.org/en/where-we-work/mhl>

HAZARDS

RMI's location and low-lying geography expose the country to multiple hazards. The most impactful in recent years have been disease outbreaks, drought, flooding, and storms.



Coastal Erosion

- Caused by king tides, sea level rise, tropical cyclones, and tsunamis
- Ongoing risk to infrastructure as many buildings are close to the shoreline



Disease Outbreaks

- History of chikungunya, dengue, hepatitis A, and zika outbreaks
- May overwhelm RMI's healthcare system
- Outer-island communities at greater risk due to limited resources



Drought

- Tends to coincide with El Niño events
- Dry season runs from January to March, sometimes extending into April during severe droughts
- Causes drinking water shortages and food insecurity
- Especially impactful for the outer islands
- RMI dependent on rainwater; freshwater sources are vulnerable to saltwater contamination



Flooding

- Caused by extreme rainfall, wind-driven waves, extreme tides, and storm surge
- Impacts infrastructure, including houses and roads



King Tides

- Can result in economic loss and infrastructure damage
- Exacerbated by other events, such as storms, which can drive further inundation



Sea Level Rise

- Average elevation nationally is only 2 meters (6.6 feet) above sea level
- Increases the risk of erosion, saltwater contamination of groundwater, and flooding caused by storms, tides, or tsunamis



Tropical Cyclones

- Direct impacts are uncommon, but associated rain, waves, and wind are possible
- Height of cyclone season is September-November
- Extra-tropical storms forming north of the islands drive wave inundation



Tsunami

- Earthquakes in the region may drive tsunamis
- Potential to wash over the islands
- Tsunamis in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in inundation depths of 3-4 meters (10 - 13 feet)



DISASTER PROFILE

A survey of disasters during the period 2000-2026 can reveal RMI's response capacity and indicate required preparedness, recovery, and response support.



January 2024: Storm surge

- On 20 January 2024, a storm in the northern Pacific drove surges that damaged infrastructure and agriculture
- Roi Namur Islet in Kwajalein Atoll was the worst affected; Arno Atoll and the runway in Ailinglaplap were also affected



2023-2024: Drought

- Beginning in November 2023, RMI experienced little to no rainfall
- In February 2024, communities turned to marginal groundwater sources, which were later contaminated by the January 2024 storm surge
- By March, severe drought conditions affected over 5,200 people



2021-2022: Drought

- Abnormal dryness began in the northern islands in late December 2021
- By June 2022, more than 9,000 people were affected as extreme drought persisted in Wotje and nearby atolls



May 2020: Dengue outbreak

- From July 2019 to May 2020, more than 3,388 cases of dengue-like illness were reported, and there were at least 2 deaths



2016-2017: Hepatitis A outbreak

- Almost 200 people, mostly children, were affected
- An immunization campaign helped curtail the outbreak



2015-2016: Drought

- The entire population was affected when a severe El Niño event led to below-average rainfall
- For 2016 alone, estimated losses were US\$4.9 million, equivalent to 3.4% of GDP
- Damage to key crops drove food insecurity



March 2014: King tides

- A State of Emergency was declared; nearly 1,000 people were displaced
- Damage was reported to 70 houses, roads, fruit trees, and water and sanitation facilities
- Majuro and the outer islands of Arno, Mili, Maloelap, Kili, and Wotje were affected



December 2008: Storm surge

- Majuro and some of the outer islands flooded
- At least 20 homes in Majuro were damaged
- Houses and crops on the outer islands were damaged or destroyed



2000: Cholera outbreak

- A cholera outbreak on Ebeye saw 400 cases of the disease and at least 6 deaths

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) is the operational coordinator of disaster response planning and execution. The National Disaster Council provides overall strategic guidance to DM policy and planning.

National Disaster Council — Leads DM at the strategic level; oversees and provides direction for response and recovery

- Comprises representatives from government departments, civil society, and the private sector
- Oversees and provides direction to the National Emergency Operations Committee, Recovery Coordination Committee, and Disaster Resilience Committee
- Advises the Cabinet on DM matters
- Reviews national disaster plans and recommends Cabinet approval
- Liaises with international partners to facilitate coordination of support for DM

National Emergency Operations Committee — Manages operational activities; coordinates and oversees disaster response operations; ensures disaster preparedness is undertaken

Recovery Coordination Committee — Coordinates recovery planning through agency and local plans

Disaster Resilience Committee — Directs and promotes resilience planning

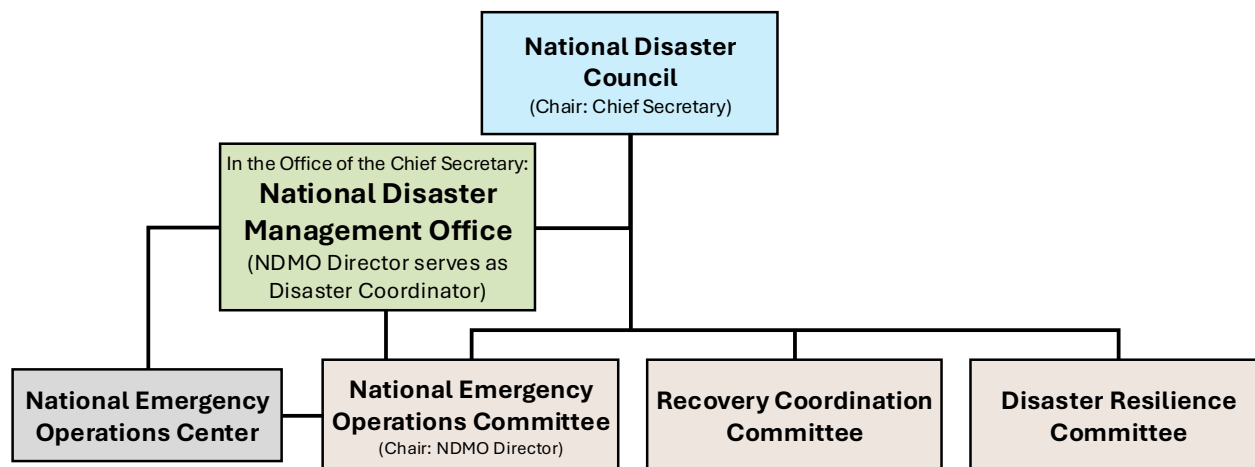
National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) — Provides operational-level oversight; operates from the National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC) in Majuro

- Administrative secretariat to the National Disaster Council
- Establishes and maintains the NEOC and directs operations
- Establishes response units for assessment and provides initial response
- Coordinates response to assist the National Emergency Operations Committee in implementing the National Emergency Response Plan
- Prepares standard operating procedures and national plans and assists government entities to prepare their plans

Key Documents

Disaster Risk Management Act (2023) — Provides the legal framework for the DM system

National Disaster Risk Management Arrangements (2017) — Provides structure to enable the continuous identification, monitoring, and assessment of current and possible future hazards and vulnerabilities



NATIONAL CLUSTERS AND LEAD AGENCIES

Responsible for coordinating and planning the disaster response of their functional sector through cluster members

- EDUCATION** — Ministry of Education, Sports and Training
- AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY** — Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce, Division of Agriculture and Forestry
- GENDER AND PROTECTION** — Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs, Gender and Early Childhood
- HEALTH** — Ministry of Health and Human Services
- WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE** — Majuro Water and Sewer Company & Environment Protection Authority
- INFRASTRUCTURE** — Ministry of Works, Infrastructure and Utilities & National Telecommunications Authority
- SHELTER** — Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs & Ministry of Education, Sports and Training
- LOGISTICS** — Ministry of Finance, Banking and Postal Services & Ministry of Transportation, Communication and IT



INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE REQUESTS

RMI may request or accept international assistance if national capacity is insufficient to effectively respond and deliver relief to communities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade usually makes a request for international assistance, which typically initiates the appeal process by convening a meeting of diplomatic missions based in RMI. The President, as head of state, may also make an appeal to any foreign government directly.

International Partners

- United Nations (UN) entities – The agencies likely to be involved in a disaster response are the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UN OCHA), and World Health Organization (WHO). Disaster risk reduction activities are supported by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).
- Regional Organizations - Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance (PIEMA), Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT)
- International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- Multilateral financial institutions – Asian Development Bank, World Bank
- Key bilateral partners – Australia, Germany, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan, U.S.

COFA – Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

The COFA establishes that the U.S. shall provide disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery assistance to RMI. Beginning in fiscal year 2025, both governments each make an annual contribution of US\$500,000 into the Disaster Assistance Emergency Fund.

Initial Disaster Relief and Recovery – The U.S. may provide initial disaster relief and recovery assistance to RMI under Article X, “United States Disaster Preparedness, Relief, and Recovery Services and Related Programs,” of the COFA upon a “Declaration of Humanitarian Need” by the U.S. Chief of Mission.

Compact Disaster Declaration — If the President of RMI determines that the disaster event requires a greater response from the U.S., a request may be submitted to the U.S. Chief of Mission for the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency to issue a “Compact Disaster Declaration,” which can be issued when certain criteria have been met. Following a Declaration, the U.S., in consultation with RMI, prepares a “Relief and Recovery Assistance Plan.”

Disaster Preparedness – The U.S. may also make available mitigation and disaster risk management programs to RMI to prepare for and lessen the effects of disasters.



U.S. ASSISTANCE

Under the COFA, in addition to providing for the defense of RMI, U.S. assistance supports health, infrastructure, and disaster preparedness.

The Majuro Weather Service Office (WSO) falls under the National Weather Service (NWS) of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which provides services in accordance with the COFA. The WSO is supported by the NWS' Weather Forecast Office Guam. The NWS' Pacific Tsunami Warning Center and International Tsunami Information Center provide tsunami information and warnings.

The U.S. military provided disaster response support to RMI following the storm surge event in January 2024. U.S. agencies also supported response efforts during the 2021-2022 drought.

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