



Diaspora engagement mapping MARSHALL ISLANDS

Facts & figures

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad²



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **23.06%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **66.91**

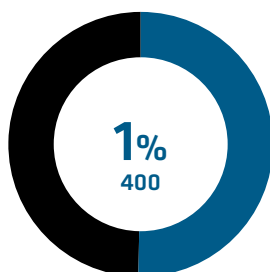
Emigration



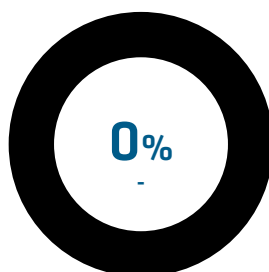
% of emigrants in
total population



% of which
in the EU



♂ 50.5%
♀ 49.5%



♂ -
♀ -

Voting from abroad:

By post



Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from [UNDESA \(2024\)](#) and remittances from the [World Bank \(2024\)](#).

Top countries of destination



Guam	257
Micronesia (Fed. States of)	94
Northern Mariana Islands	45
Guinea	4

1 With an exception: A child born abroad of Marshalllese parents who obtains the citizenship of the country of birth is allowed to retain dual citizenship until the age of 17. At 17, the individual has one year to renounce the other citizenship or Marshalllese citizenship will be lost - Immigration Law of the Marshall Islands and the Constitution of the Marshall Islands, dated December 21, 1978

2 Permitted in legislative elections - [Voting from Abroad - The International IDEA Handbook \(2007\)](#)

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 1986** ● The Compact of Free Association (COFA) is a major bilateral agreement governing the relationship between the Marshall Islands and the US. It allows Marshallese people to work and travel to the US freely.
- 2003** ● The **Strategic Development Plan Framework – Vision 2018** sets out the Marshall Island's vision for 2003 – 2018 with regard to sustainable development. The country's vision at this time included a government view that Marshallese emigrants to the United States would play an important role in the development of the country through remittances.
- 2020** ● The **National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2020-2030** is a broad consensus on the objectives that have to be met in the next 10 years for Marshallese people. Under the good governance pillar, policies exist which facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of Marshallese people. The NSP also notes the challenge of 'Out migration/brain drain', which presents the issue of young people having migrated to the US or other countries for education choosing not to return to the Marshall Islands.

Practices

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Marshallese Youth Academy (MYA)

Implemented by the Marshallese Education Initiative (MEI), an Arkansas-based NGO formed in 2013 that promotes the cultural, intellectual and historical awareness of Marshallese people, the Marshallese Youth Academy offers a programme for Marshallese diaspora youth in North West Arkansas. Students under the MYA learn about leadership, receive mentoring, and learn of the importance of Marshallese culture.

Women`s initiative Programme

The Marshallese Women's Advocacy Program, also implemented by the MEI, promotes women's empowerment through wholistic health practices.

Arkansas Atoll 2021 - ongoing

Arkansas Atoll is a podcast series sharing the stories of the Northwest Arkansas Marshallese, including their migration history, their present hurdles, as well as their hopes for the future. Through the voices of the community members, it discusses not only the recent COVID-19 crisis and health disparities faced by the Marshallese community, but also the relationships between the US and the Marshall Islands, as well as the status of the Marshallese as both nuclear and political refugees. The podcast is a co-production between the Arkansas Vault at the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History and the School of Journalism and Strategic Media in the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas.



Observations

The “Observations” and “Obstacles” sections contain additional information on the context of diaspora engagement that does not fit directly into the other sections. They are based on a combination of literature review and comments from the authors. New information is incorporated during the annual updates. Readers are invited to verify the relevance of the information at the time of reading, as the context may have evolved.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands’ (RMI) diaspora engagement revolves around the COFA agreement. This agreement has impacted migration, population growth and the connection with migrants abroad, and has been a factor in the formation of Marshallese diaspora and its related activities, including sustainable development through remittances. While dual citizenship is not permitted, citizens of the Marshall Islands are eligible to work in the United States as non-immigrants for an unlimited length of time.³

The COFA agreement has been very beneficial, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the RMI government could help their citizens in the US and several other countries.⁴ They had a major hand in the repatriation of Marshall Islanders, by sponsoring Air Marshall Islands charter flights for people living in America. US\$500 payments were also provided to those citizens caught overseas when borders closed.⁵

The COFA has also affected the population growth rate of the Republic of the Marshall Islands with an average age just under 23⁶ as the agreement has led to many young people migrating, primarily to the US.

Furthermore, the COFA agreement has allowed for greater diaspora engagement. Large-scale celebrations of RMI Constitution Day in Springfield, USA demonstrate the importance of cultural events for the Marshallese diaspora.⁷

In light of a change in U.S. presidency, the Marshall Islands government, together with Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia, was seeking a joint meeting with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other U.S. authorities to ensure the safety and protection of the citizens of all three COFA states against increasingly restrictive immigration measures. In addition, on 28 January 2025, the Marshallese government also issued an official letter to reaffirm the immigration rights of Marshallese citizens under COFA. These diplomatic actions were responses to citizens’ growing concerns over the immigration situation in the U.S.⁸

3 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau.

4 Johnson, G., (5 October 2020) Marshall Islands considering repatriating first group from USA. RNZ.

5 IOM Rapid Assessment of the Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 on Labour Mobility in the Pacific Region.

6 IOM Republic of the Marshall Islands IOM Country Strategy 2017-2020. pp2.

7 Marshallese Community in Arkansas.

8 <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/marshall-islands-seek-us-meeting-citizens-panic-over-trump-migrant-crackdown-2025-01-31/>

Obstacles



- **Low prioritisation:** Climate change and rising sea levels are the main issues on which the government is currently focused; its lack of resources does not allow for much attention on other issues.
- **Lack of funding:** The Marshallese Government faces financial constraints that limit support of diaspora engagement activities. Individuals take the responsibility to organise events to bring the community closer in countries like the USA.
- **No incentive to return:** RMI has the highest rate of youth unemployment in the Pacific,⁹ few educational opportunities and a low level of access to healthcare. Moreover, the lingering effects of radiation due to nuclear testing¹⁰ and rising sea levels constitute significant deterrents for diaspora return.¹¹

⁹ ILO in Marshall Islands.

¹⁰ Atomic Heritage Foundation: [Marshall Islands](#).

¹¹ Letman, J., (19 November 2018). [Rising seas give island nation a stark choice: relocate or elevate](#). National Geographic.

Annex:

List of actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 520+ institutions](#)



Diaspora related institutions



- **At a Regional Level**

Pacific Community (SPC)

RMI is a member of the Pacific Community, an international development organisation that focuses on scientific and technical expertise. SPC's Social Development Programme is involved in managing the Festival of Pacific Arts (FESTPAC), created in 1972 as a tool for preserving Pacific culture.

Pacific Islands Forum

RMI has been a member of the Pacific Islands Forum since 1987. It is an inter-governmental organisation that seeks to foster cooperation between countries and territories of the Pacific Ocean. Its work covers migration issues, and the forum has organised regional meetings on climate change and migration, as well as workshops for immigration officials from the region.

Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC)

RMI is a member of the Pacific Immigration Development Community (known as the Pacific Immigration Director's Conference until 2018). PIDC is a regional consultative process that gathers official immigration agencies of the Pacific region and enables the heads of the participating states' immigration agencies to discuss issues of mutual interest and foster cooperation. Other objectives of PIDC include modernising national immigration legal frameworks in the region.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

IOM operates a sub-office in Majuro, in RMI. With the recent admission of the Federated States of Micronesia as a member state, IOM is exploring opportunities to expand its activities across the region, including RMI, into areas such as combating trafficking in persons, labour migration, climate change and cultural orientation.

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Editing & update:
EUDiF (2026)



Implemented by



Funded by
the European Union



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