



IN BRIEF



# GENDER EQUALITY BRIEF FOR THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

## Women's Human Rights

The Republic of the Marshall Islands' [1979 Constitution](#) states that all persons are equal under the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the laws. The Constitution prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination of laws and executive or judicial action on the basis of a number of characteristics, including gender, race, and religious or political views. The Constitution does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Men and women have equal immigration and citizenship rights under Marshallese law. Citizens of the Marshall Islands [can apply to live, work and study in the United States without a visa](#).

[All Marshallese individuals and families are part of a clan \(bwij\)](#) which owns land under the leadership of the clan head (*alap*). Multiple *bwij* and *alap* will form a unit that is then led by a chief (*irooj* or *leroj*). Within the clan, both matrilineal and patrilineal heirs have land rights. However, the permanent authority is primarily determined and passed down along the maternal line. Some observers have likened the authority of women within this matrilineal system to that of a 'shadow government': despite the intangible institutional mechanism, their authority is influential and powerful. While the Marshall Islands is traditionally a matrilineal society in which women have considerable rights to land, [women are now less likely to live on their own land](#), and husbands are less likely to move to join their wives' families after marriage. An increasing number of women now live away from their own land – where they have respect, power, and protection – and move to their spouses' land and communities, where they may be isolated from their support systems. The colonial history of the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been identified a factor contributing to the move away from customary land practices and weakening of women's land rights. At a household level, [26% of households were headed by women](#) in 2011.

The [Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration \(Amendment\) Act 2016](#) raised the female minimum age for marriage from 16 to 18, while maintaining the male age threshold at 18. Under the Amendment, consent from

parents and guardians is not a sufficient condition to allow marriage at younger ages.

According to the [2011 Census](#), the distribution of household population 12 years old and over by marital status reveals that more than half of this population (55.4%) was married, with 29.5% legally married and 25.8% living in a common-law union or live-in status. Almost two-fifths were never married and some 3% were widowed and 1.8% were either divorced or separated. Over three-quarters of widowed persons were women; this is attributed to the difference in the age of spouses at the time of marriage (women tended to be younger than their spouses) and a higher life expectancy at birth for women compared to men. The percentage of widowed women increased with age as they tended to remarry less frequently upon divorce or the death of a spouse.

### Legal Marriage Age in the RMI

Internationally accepted age:



Average marriage age in the RMI:



Source: [Nitijela of the Republic of the Marshall Islands](#)

Under the [2011 Criminal Code](#), the minimum age of consent to sexual activity is 16 for both boys and girls. In addition to this, RMI has peer consent provisions according to which it is legal for teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16 to consent to sexual activity with a person who is less than three years older than them. The Criminal Code also contains provisions allowing a person to engage in sexual penetration with a child who is at least 14 years old if the person is legally married to the minor. Sexual offences are written in gender-neutral terms in the *Criminal Code* and apply equally to male and female perpetrators and victims.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has [prohibited human trafficking](#) through the *Criminal Code* (2011), *Child Rights Protection Act* (2015), and the *Prohibition on the Trafficking In Human Persons Act* (2017). International bodies and foreign governments have assisted the Marshall Islands in curbing human trafficking within the country and preventing the trafficking of Marshallese

residents to the US. The National Taskforce on Human Trafficking (NTHT) began conversations between the Marshall Islands Government and the US Embassy to secure funding via the US Department of State's Office for training and technical assistance to improve the monitoring and combating of, and produce a comprehensive report on, human trafficking within the Marshall Islands.

The Marshall Islands has 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](#). The inclusion of sexual orientation as grounds for non-discrimination was proposed as an amendment to the [Constitution in 2017](#), but the proposal was unsuccessful. Same-sex sexual activity was [legalised in a 2005 amendment to the Criminal Code](#).

## Governance and Participation in Public Life

The Parliament of the Marshall Islands, the *Nitijela*, is composed of 33 members. The President is the head of state and is elected by members of the *Nitijelai*. Elections are held every four years with universal suffrage.

As of April 2022, there were [two female Senators in the 33 member Nitijela](#), with women therefore accounting for 6.1% of the legislature. One female senator was serving as the Minister of Education, meaning that women therefore [held one of the 13 \(7.7%\) of executive branch positions](#). Dr. Hilda Heine was [elected as the first female President of the Marshall Islands](#) in 2016, and served in this role until 2019. Dr. Heine is the only woman to have served as the Head of State/Government in any Micronesian country.

## Female Representation in National Parliament in the RMI



\* Source: [Pacific Women in Politics April 2022](#)

\*\* Source: [Inter-Parliamentary Union March 2022](#)

In 2017, there were attempts to introduce Temporary Special Measures (TSM) in the form of electoral quotas to increase women's political representation. TSMs [reportedly](#) received some pushback, however: some perceived it as foreign intervention, while others questioned the legitimacy of female MPs elected through the quota system. Concerns were also raised that female politicians elected through TSM may lack necessary political skills.

Women's authority is a notable feature of traditional structures of the Marshallese society, albeit with certain limitations in practice. Female chiefs (*lerojj*) [rarely exercise as much exclusive power and direct authority](#) as male chiefs (*irooj*). Chiefs are [responsible for resolving disputes, as well allocating resources and managing the land](#). When women hold titular leadership roles, in practice, it is common for a younger male relative to assume the duties of leadership on behalf of their senior female relative. The male relative is considered a [maan marönrön](#), meaning 'man with power to work on behalf of the female relative'. Male relatives consult their female senior relative, especially on decisions affecting land and lineage. Notably, the *alap* – or clan head, who reports affairs to chiefs – is a position passed in a 'chronological' order from sibling to sibling, without gender restriction.

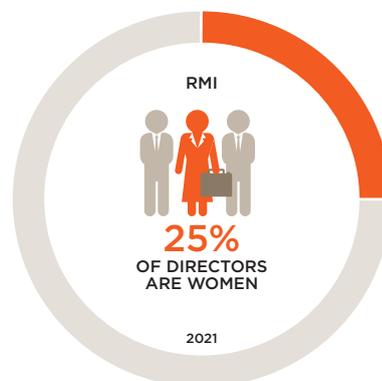
There have been some attempts to exclude women from the ability to serve in the *alap* capability. In 2005, two senators within Parliament introduced [Bill 84](#) to designate *alap* as only a 'male person, an uncle, a male elder, or the eldest male member of a lineage'. However, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) and other women's groups and individuals worked together to defeat Bill 84.

Women are involved in local community and governmental boards. Female clan heads (*alaps*) [participate in community meetings](#) deciding on land matters. Female chiefs (*Leroij*) hold influence over land on a wider scale and sit alongside their male counterparts on the Council of *Iroij*, which is an advisory body to national parliament with great influence on legislative matters affecting local land tenure. The Council includes one Land Owner and their positions are based on a one calendar year term. In 2015, [25% of the Council Members on the Council of Iroij were women](#). Over the period 1999-2015, *Leroij* held 38% of Council seats. No *Leroij* has ever been seated as a Chairperson of the Council. *Leroij* have served in mayoral positions, atoll local governments, and the local council in Majuro, and are [more likely to succeed in electoral politics](#) than individuals who do not hold the title.

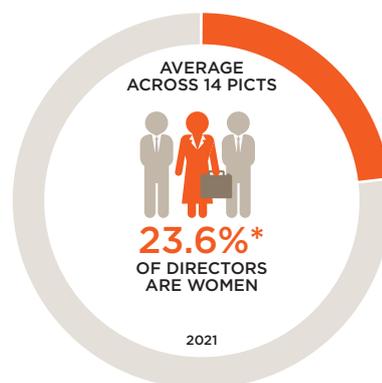
There have been initiatives to encourage political and electoral participation among Marshallese women. Examples are [mock parliaments held in 2011 and 2018](#). In 2018, many politically active women from 24 electoral districts convened in the *Nitijela* and discussed women's visions in mainstream politics. President Heine and other women interviewed about this event described it as a 'watershed' moment that led to an increasing number of women entering local government, as well as one female senator elected in 2011 and another two in 2015.

In the [2011 Census](#), 25% of senior management roles, including legislators, senior officials, and managers, were held by women. [Women held 15.9% of elected seats in deliberative bodies of local government](#) between 2017 and 2019. According to an [analysis](#) of the boards of 13 organisations – mostly state-owned enterprises in a range of sectors including transport, finance, agriculture and utilities – in the Marshall Islands conducted in 2021, an estimated 25% of Directors were women, with the highest representation of women on boards seen in organisations in the tourism (33%), finance (28%), and utilities (28%) sectors.

## Women on Boards in the RMI



Source: [Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative](#)



Source: [Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative](#)

\* Average calculated as the mean value across countries with available data.

As of February 2021, [three of the approximately 30 judges](#) in the Marshall Islands Judiciary were women. Women are underrepresented in the police force in the Marshall Islands; [6% of police officers were women](#) in 2017.

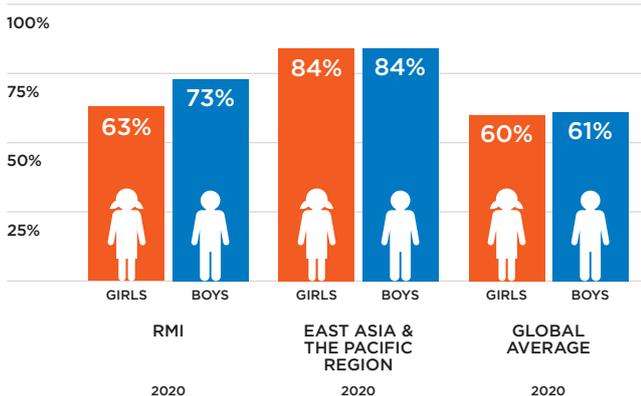
## Education

Education in the Marshall Islands is [free and compulsory from ages 6 to 18](#). Although primary education is compulsory, there have been [suggestions](#) that this is not strictly enforced by the government. This is supported by high rates of out-of-school children; there were [3,537 children and adolescents out of school](#) in 2020, 48.6% of whom were female. For students aged 14 and older to enter public high school, it is mandatory to take admissions exams. However, due to space limitations, [not all who pass the exam can attend public high school](#). Data from 2011 shows [high literacy rates in the population](#)

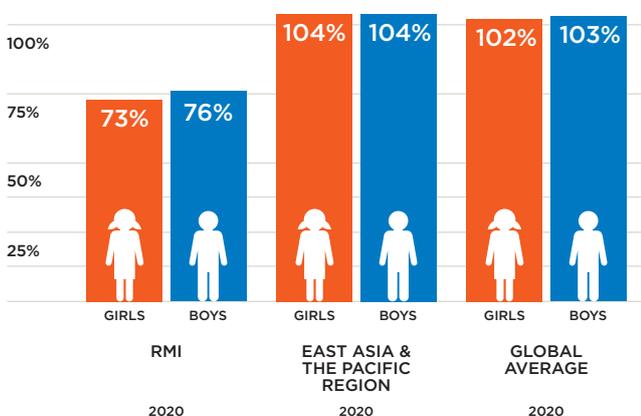
over the age of 15, with a literacy rate of 98% for both men and women.

In data from the [UNESCO Institute for Statistics \(UIS\)](#), the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in early childhood education increased significantly from 2015 to 2020 but fell for both boys and girls between 2019 and 2020. In 2020, the NER was 49.8%, compared to 62.1% in 2019. For boys, the NER was 55.1% in 2020, compared to 62.3% in 2019. In 2020, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for early childhood education was 62.5% for girls and 72.7% for boys.

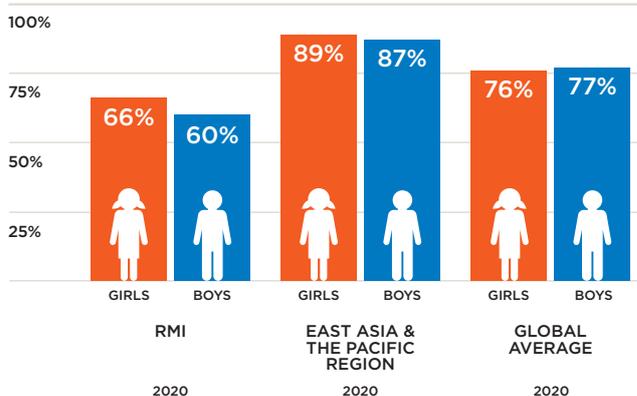
### Early Childhood Education Gross Enrolment Rates in the RMI



### Primary Gross Enrolment Rates in RMI



### Secondary Gross Enrolment Rates in the RMI



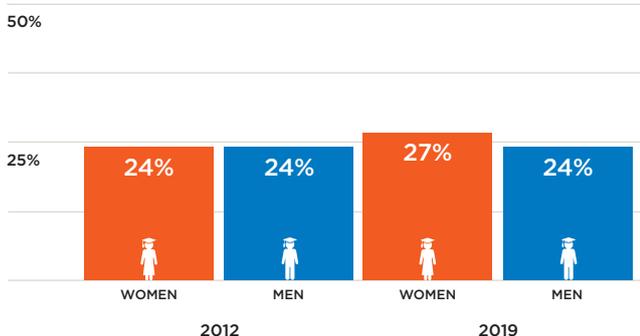
Source: [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#)

The [NER for primary education](#) in 2020 was slightly higher for boys (68.3%) than for girls (67.4%). This is significantly below the respective NERs of 95.5% for boys and 92.6% for girls in 2011. The GER for primary education was 73.4% for girls and 76.3% for boys in 2020. The Ministry of Education, Sports & Training (MoEST) [reported in 2020](#) that the COVID-19 pandemic and Dengue outbreak in 2019-2020 have impacted enrolment and retention in education. In 2020, survival rates – a measure of the retention of students in a cohort from one year to another – were higher among girls than boys, with 80% of girls and 62% of boys enrolled in Grade 1 still in education in Grade 8. Furthermore, the MoEST stated that enrolment rates may be affected by factors including the potential over-estimation of population size or the inability of the education system to accommodate all school-age children.

According to [UIS data](#), the effective transition rate from elementary to secondary school was 95.9% for girls and 90.6% for boys in 2019. The NER for secondary education was 59.2% for girls and 52.4% for boys in 2020. The GER for secondary education was 65.9% for girls and 59.5% for boys in 2020. [According to the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs in 2018](#), children living in rural areas are more likely to advance to secondary education than children in urban areas, but no further disaggregated data on this is available.

In the [2011 Census](#), 47% of men aged 25 and over completed high school and/or tertiary education, compared to 39% of women in the same age group. However, recent data show that trends in tertiary education are changing. Enrolment rates in tertiary education have increased faster among women and girls in the Marshall Islands in recent years, and in 2019 the [GER in tertiary education](#) was 27.4% among women and 24.3% among men. Post-secondary education in the Marshall Islands can be undertaken at either the College of the Marshall Islands or the Majuro Campus of the University of the South Pacific. In the Autumn term of 2021, [54% of students enrolled at the College of the Marshall Islands were female](#), while [64% of graduates from the Majuro Campus of USP were female](#) in May 2020.

### Tertiary Education Gross Enrolment Rates in the RMI

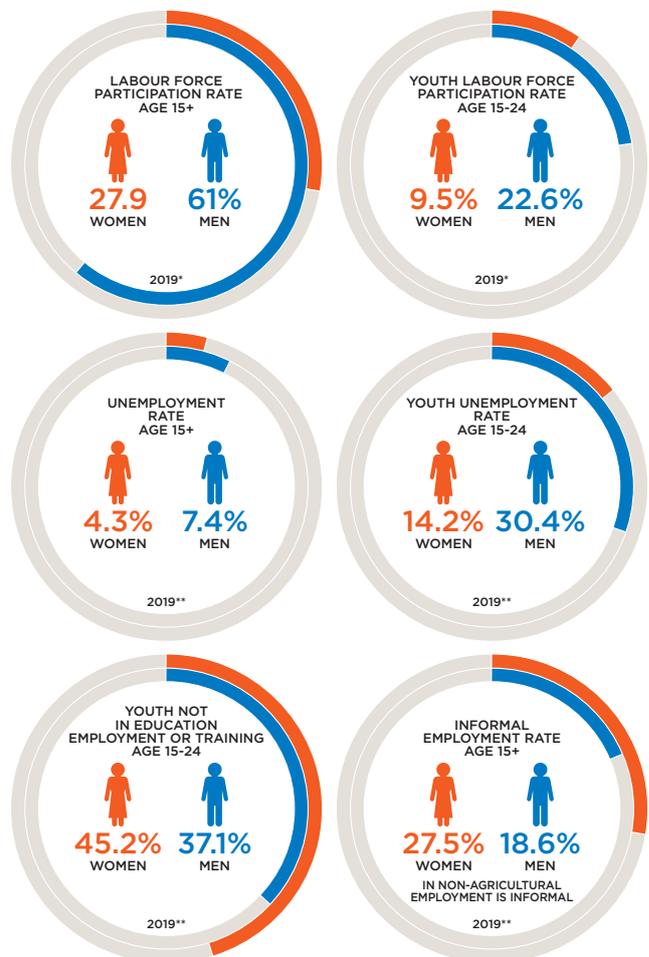


Source: [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#)

According to a 2018 [report](#) by the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs and the Pacific Community (SPC), around 99% of young female caregivers aged 15 to 24 are able to read short, simple statements or have attended sufficient years of schooling to be defined as literate. The reported stated that the number of economically active women is increasing and the number of women holding managerial positions requiring higher qualifications is also on the rise, however further analysis of the relationship between women's education and economic participation is not available.

## Women's Economic Empowerment

### Economic Empowerment Indicators in RMI



\* Source: [World Bank](#)

\*\* Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

The [labour force participation rate](#) was 27.9% for women and 61.0% for men in 2019. The [unemployment rate](#) in 2019 was 4.3% for women and 7.4% for men. [Among youth aged 15 to 24](#), the labour force participation rate was 9.5% for women and 22.6% for men, while the unemployment rate was 14.2% for women and 31.0% for men. An estimated 45.2% of young women and 37.1% of young men were [not in education, employment, or training](#) (NEET) in 2019. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimate that 18.6% of male and 27.5% of female [non-agricultural employment was informal](#) in 2019.

Women are more engaged in certain occupational categories. In the [2011 Census](#), women comprised 53% of 'clerks', 46% of 'craft and related workers', 44% of 'service

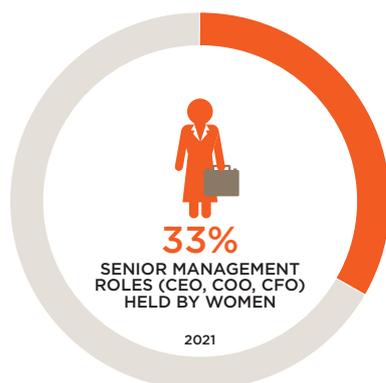
workers and shop and market sales workers', and 44% of 'professionals' within the Marshall Islands.

The industries employing the highest percentages of women in the 2011 Census were 'households that hire domestic workers' (women comprised 51% of employees); 'wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles' (51%); 'education' (49%); 'health' (48%); and 'public administration' (21%). Men were most highly represented in 'utilities and repair and installation of equipment' (96.9%); 'construction and related activities' (91.1%); and 'transportation, storage and courier activities' (90.7%).

Agricultural production in the Marshall Islands is [primarily subsistence-based](#), with small-scale industries focused on handcrafts, tuna processing, and copra production.

In 2019, [25% of managerial positions were held by women](#). In a 2021 [analysis](#) of 13 organisations in the Marshall Islands, women comprised 33% of senior management personnel, including Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and Chief Operating Officers (COO) roles. All senior management personnel held either CFO or COO roles, with no female CEOs in the analysed organisations.

### Women in Senior Management in the RMI



Source: [Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative](#)

Marshall Islands became a member of the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO) in 2007. It ratified the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (no. 182) in March 2019, but has not signed any conventions relevant to the equality of opportunity and treatment between genders, such as the Equal Remuneration Convention, the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention or the Violence and Harassment Convention. There are [no national parental leave provisions](#) available, and there are no criminal or civil protections against sexual harassment within the workplace. Under the [2008 Public Service Regulations](#), female employees in the public sector are entitled to 20 days of maternity leave at full pay for up to four births.

There is legislation to protect women from [discrimination in employment](#) on the basis of their gender; the [Employment Equal Opportunity Act](#) of 2017 ensures that all employees are treated equally in the receipt of employment benefits. There are also [legal protections that bar discrimination between men and women regarding the age at which individuals can retire](#) with full/partial benefits in the Social Security Act of 1990 and Marshall Island Social Security (Amendment) Act 2017. No mandatory retirement age exists. Pension provisions do not consider periods of absence due to childcare.

### Health/Sexual and Reproductive Health

The Marshall Islands [health service consists of two hospitals](#) – one located in Majuro and the other in Ebeye – as well as 56 healthcare centres across the atolls and islands. Both hospitals provide primary, secondary, and limited tertiary care. Patients who require extensive tertiary care are referred overseas. Health centres are run by health assistants who provide health promotion and prevention, as well as essential clinical care services. On the most remote atolls, [only infirmaries with minimally trained attendants](#) are available. Due to a shortage of funds, health service delivery in the Marshall Islands is inconsistent across different locations. While the government reviews its health programmes at the national level annually, public spending on the health sector is [considered low](#).

The average life expectancy in the Marshall Island was reported to be 72.5 years for women and 71.3 years for men during the [2011 Census](#). Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as [diabetes and cancer are the leading causes of death](#), with some reports from 2017 and 2018 stating that the issue of NCDs was at an [epidemic level](#). In 2017, 79% of female deaths and 70% of male deaths among the adult population aged 15 to 49 were attributed to NCDs. The leading causes of death for women in 2017 were diabetes (36% of deaths), cardiovascular disease (25%), cancer (21%), and pneumonia (11%). Women account for 64% of cancer deaths. The high prevalence of NCDs in the Marshall Islands has been linked to the high consumption of imported canned and instant food, lack of physical exercise and increased use of tobacco products. Among non-pregnant mothers aged 15-49, [72.7% were classified as overweight](#) and 42.1% were classified as obese in 2017. There is a lack of current data on alcohol and tobacco prevalence in the Marshall Islands.

Tuberculosis (TB) is also a leading cause of death, and [cases of multidrug-resistant TB have been reported](#). The [tuberculosis incidence rate](#) was estimated at 483 per 1,000 population in 2020.

The Marshall Islands also has a high suicide rate according to a [2018 report](#) from the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs. Of the 11 deaths by suicides in the Marshall Islands in 2017, 10 were male.

The [total fertility rate](#) was estimated to be 2.9 children per woman in 2019. More recent data is required in order to understand current trends in lifetime fertility rates. In 2018, the [adolescent fertility rate](#) was 48 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19, a significant reduction from the rate of 84.5 births per 1,000 in 2011. In 2017, [92.4% of births were attended by skilled health personnel](#). The [maternal mortality ratio](#) in the Marshall Islands was 92 per 1,000 live births in 2017. The [infant mortality rate](#) was 25.5 and the under-five mortality rate was 30.8 per 1,000 live births in 2020.

### Adolescent Fertility Rate in the RMI

Sustainable Development Goal target:	RMI:
reduce adolescent fertility rate to	
<b>less than 13 live births per 1,000</b>	<b>48 live births per 1,000</b>
women aged 15-19 by 2030	2018

Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

### Maternal Mortality Ratio in the RMI

Sustainable Development Goal target:	RMI:
reduce maternal mortality ratio to	
<b>less than 70 per 100,000 live births</b>	<b>92 per 100,000 live births</b>
by 2030	2017

Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

### Under-5 Mortality Rate in the RMI

Sustainable Development Goal target:	RMI:
reduce under-5 mortality rate to	
<b>less than 25 per 1,000 live births</b>	<b>30.8 per 1,000 live births</b>
by 2030	2020

Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

In the [2007 Demographic and Health Survey \(DHS\)](#), the contraceptive prevalence rate among married or in-union women aged 15 to 49 in the Marshall Islands was estimated to be 45%, with 42% using modern methods. The most common method was female sterilization, with 25% of surveyed married women using this method. Women in urban areas were less likely to use contraceptives, at 43%, compared to rural women, at 48%. Contraceptives are [sourced mostly from the public sector](#), with at least 94% of contraceptives dispensed in this manner. Majuro Hospital accounts for over 50% of public contraceptive supplies; Ebeye Hospital dispenses around 21% of public supplies, and outer islands health centres account for another 16%. According to [data from the Ministry of Health and Human Services](#), 16% of the total female population aged 15 to 44 used at least one method of contraception in 2017. Similar to previous findings, female sterilization was the most common form

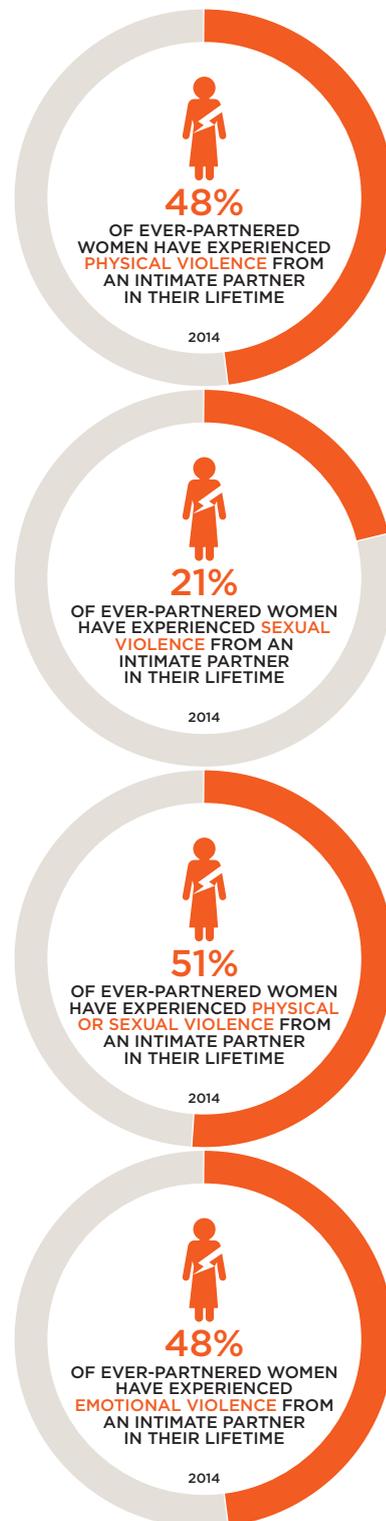
of contraception. More recent data is required to assess the current rates of unmet family planning needs, which was estimated to be 8.1% in the 2007 DHS. The rates were highest among younger women; 33.2% of married women aged 15 to 19 and 12.5% of married women aged 20 to 24 had unmet needs for family planning.

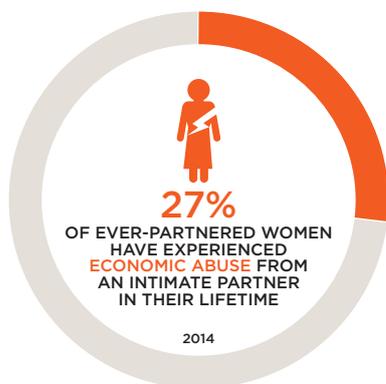
As noted by UNICEF in 2017, the limited available data on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in the Marshall Islands suggests that STIs are a public health concern. The most recent data, suggested a 12.1 per 10,000 people rate of syphilis in 2016, and a 32 per 10,000 people rate of chlamydia in 2014. Updated data is required in order to assess recent trends in STI rates in the Marshall Islands. UNDP HIV/AIDS programming in the Marshall Islands works with key populations (female sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender people) who 'have limited access to prevention and testing services due to stigma, discrimination and other social barriers'.

## Violence against Women and Girls

The 2014 Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS) is the most recent source of national data on violence against women and girls. Data for the study were collected among women aged 15 to 64 in 2012. Among ever-partnered women, 48% reported experiencing physical violence from a partner in their lifetime, with 16% of women reporting this violence in the previous 12 months. About 21% of ever-partnered women reported that they had experienced sexual violence from a partner during their lifetime, and 6% of women reported experiencing sexual violence from a partner in the previous 12 months. Overall, 51% of all ever-partnered women reported experience of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner at least once in their life. Among women who had ever been pregnant, 10% had experienced physical violence during pregnancy. The father of the child was the abuser in over 80% of cases. Of women who had experienced violence during pregnancy, 31% had a miscarriage.

## Lifetime Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence in the RMI





Source: [Ministry of Internal Affairs](#)

Attitudes towards intimate partner violence measured in the 2014 FHSS found that the majority of women believed that a man has good reason to hit his wife in at least one situation, most commonly 'if she doesn't complete her housework' (65%), 'if she disobeys him' (71%), or 'if she has been unfaithful' (75%). More than half (53%) of all ever-partnered women who have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse felt that a wife is obliged to have sex with her husband. About 88% of women disclosing physical or sexual partner violence agreed with multiple statements justifying a man's reasoning for hitting his partner. More up-to-date data is required to understand current attitudes to intimate partner violence.

According to the 2014 FHSS data, 33% of women reported experience of physical violence in their lifetime since the age of 15 that was committed by someone other than a partner. Nearly 11% of women experienced childhood sexual abuse before the age of 15, and most perpetrators were male family members. More up-to-date data is required in order to understand current prevalence rates.

A [CEDAW communication](#) in 2018 noted that, while domestic violence was prevalent in the Marshall Islands, it was rarely reported. Over half of the respondents in the FHSS had never reported their experiences with partner violence (54%). Nine out of ten women had never sought help (91%). Only 1% of women reported their abuse to the police. The main reason that women did not leave physically or sexually abusive relationships was that they believed the violence to be normal or not serious (29%).

The 2011 [Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection](#)

[Act](#) (DVPPA) criminalised domestic violence and introduced further provisions for the safety of the survivors of domestic violence, such as Law Enforcement Protection Orders. Following the legislation coming into effect in 2012, a [domestic violence unit opened in the police department in January 2013](#). In 2016, the [first national support service for survivors of gender-based violence](#), *Weto in Mour*, was established to provide information and support to survivors.

As of 2020, [48 protection orders had been issued by the courts](#) (98% issued to women), 25 of which were granted. In total, 12 cases of criminal offences against women had been successfully prosecuted between the introduction of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act in 2011 and 2020.

In line with global trends, the COVID-19 pandemic is understood to have had a significant impact on [the rate of domestic violence in the Pacific region](#), although a lack of regular data collection relating to familial and intimate partner violence in the Marshall Islands and throughout the Pacific region makes it difficult to ascertain trends in the short- and medium-term. As a member state of the Pacific Regional Working Group (RWG) on the Implementation of Domestic Violence / Family Protection Legislation, the Marshall Islands has benefited from access to support in tackling intimate partner violence during the pandemic. The Marshall Islands [reportedly established online support for victims and survivors](#) of gender-based and domestic violence to maintain accessibility of services during the pandemic.

## Gender and Protection in Humanitarian Action

The Marshall Islands is [very susceptible to natural hazards](#), particularly coastal flooding (high likelihood), and tsunamis (medium likelihood). People living below the poverty line are more vulnerable to natural hazards. Subsistence farmers dependant on natural resources for their livelihoods are also [especially affected by natural hazards](#).

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is not included in the [2020 World Risk Index](#) due to a lack of data. However, the Marshall Islands face many similar challenges to other Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which typically are classified as highly vulnerable to natural hazards.

## Climate and Disaster Profile of the RMI

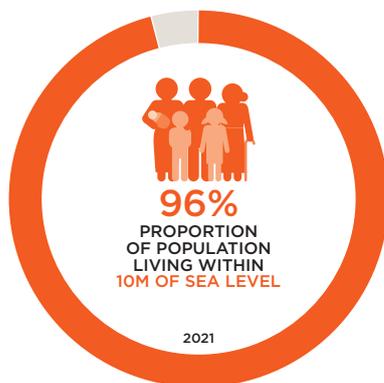


Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

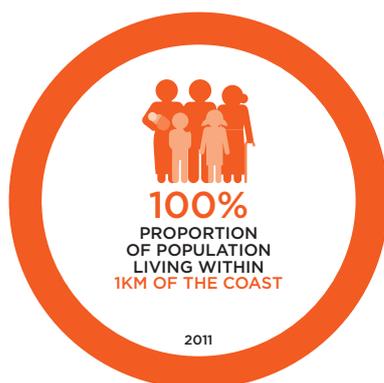
## Main Climate-Related Hazards



Source: [Australian Aid](#)



Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)



Source: [Pacific Community \(SPC\)](#)

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is ranked 135<sup>th</sup> in the [Climate Risk Index 2020](#), and was the 172<sup>nd</sup> country most affected by extreme weather events between 1999 and 2018. Climate change is [predicted to impact the Marshall Islands](#) through its effect on typhoons, rainfall patterns, annual mean temperature rises, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and coral bleaching. The maximum height above sea level in the Marshall Islands is 10m, and 100% of the population live within 1km of the coast. The rising sea level is a particular concern as the Marshall Islands faces annual flooding; which experts predict could [make the country's water sources undrinkable by 2030](#) and overwhelm the islands entirely by 2050. There have been discussions on responding to climate change effects by either raising the islands or constructing a new island resilient to sea level rises.

Another concern for the country is droughts. The Marshall Islands [depends almost exclusively on rainfall](#) for water supplies (over 90%), and droughts are destructive to physical and financial economies. Recent drought conditions in the islands have been exacerbated following the El Niño event in 2015. Furthermore, drought conditions can exacerbate saltwater levels at the bottom of reservoirs; this contaminates the limited fresh groundwater reserves, forcing citizens to rely on the limited municipal Capital water supplies in Majuro. To provide stable freshwater sources, the Marshallese government has installed several desalination units. However, these facilities are very costly to obtain and maintain, averaging fuel costs of US\$30,000 to US\$75,000 per year. In [data from 2010-2017](#), 82.5% of people had access to basic handwashing facilities.

The Marshallese government [has highlighted that women are more vulnerable than men to the effects of humanitarian crises and disasters](#), such as those linked to climate change. The 2015-2016 drought brought by El Niño in the Marshall Islands had a devastating impact throughout the society, especially for women's economic life. For instance, Marshallese women's income from handcrafts plummeted due to supply problems involving handcraft materials, such as pandanus and coconut leaves. Women had to devote increased time, effort, and cost to secure fresh water for drinking, while also completing other domestic tasks for their families. The drought also compromised many people's food security and aggravated malnutrition, notably in the outer islands. Natural disasters have resulted in an unknown number of internally displaced people, who have been forced to leave their homes and islands because of climate change.

The Gender Protection Cluster, led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, oversees gender and protection at a national level. The [Gender Equality Act](#) recognises the importance of the involvement of both women and men in disaster risk preparedness and climate change adaptation initiatives in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to improve environmental awareness. A [2016 analysis by UN Women](#) noted that the Government of Marshall Islands and Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) were working to facilitate the participation of women in disaster risk reduction and climate change initiatives. The report further noted the engagement of women-led groups in the outer islands who were using the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme to implement climate change adaptation projects. There is a lack of sex-disaggregated data on the leadership and participation of women in disaster risk reduction and climate change initiatives.

## Appendix 1: Country Background

Capital	Majuro
Population	54,516 (2021).
GDP per capita (USD)	\$4,129.90 (2020)
Human Development Index	0.704. Ranked 117th out of 189 countries and territories (2020)
Type of Government	The Republic of the Marshall Islands is a constitutional republic in free association with the United States, mandated by the 1979 Constitution of the Marshall Islands. <a href="#">There are three branches of government</a> : the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. There is also a national government comprising 33 municipalities.
Women in Legislature	<a href="#">Two out of 33 (6.1%) MPs were women</a> as of March 2022.
Legal System	The <a href="#">legal system</a> is a combination of adopted Trust Territory laws, acts of the legislature, municipal, common, and customary laws. Ultimately, the constitution remains supreme. The highest court in the Marshall Islands is the Supreme Court.
<a href="#">Ratified Human Rights Conventions</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Ratified 1993) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optional Protocol CRC-OP-IC accepted 2019</li> <li>Optional Protocol CRC-OP-SC accepted 2019</li> </ul> </li> <li>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Accession 2006) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optional Protocol CEDAW-OP accepted 2019</li> </ul> </li> <li>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (Accession 2015)</li> <li>Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) (Accession 2018)</li> <li>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) (Accession 2018)</li> <li>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (Accession 2018)</li> <li>International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) (Accession 2019)</li> <li>The Republic of the Marshall Islands has not ratified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW)</li> <li>Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Urban vs. Rural Women (%)	73.8% of the total population was urban in the <a href="#">2011 Census</a> . Sex-disaggregated data is not available.
Female-Headed Households (%)	<a href="#">26% of households were headed by women</a> in 2011.
Women in the Workforce	The <a href="#">labour force participation rate</a> was 27.9% for women and 61.0% for men age 15 and over in 2019. The unemployment rate in 2019 was 4.3% for women and 7.4% for men. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimate that <a href="#">18.6% of male and 27.5% of female non-agricultural employment was informal</a> in 2019.
Women CEOs	An estimated <a href="#">33% of senior management personnel</a> (including CEOs, CFO, and COOs) were women in 2021.
Women on Boards	An estimated <a href="#">25% of Directors were women</a> in 2021.

## Appendix 1: Country Background (continued)

The Republic of Marshall Islands is a Micronesian nation comprising an archipelago of 29 atolls, five low-lying coral islands, and 1,151 islets, with a [total land area](#) of 180km<sup>2</sup>. The Marshall Islands has an Exclusive Economic Zone of 1.99 million km<sup>2</sup>, and [shares maritime borders with the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, and Nauru](#). The islands were formerly governed by the US until they became a sovereign nation in 1986 under a [Compact of Free Association with the US](#), with further renegotiations in 2003. The currency is the US Dollar. The official languages are Marshallese and English.

The population of the Marshall Islands was estimated to be [54,516](#) in 2021, with a population density of 303 people per square kilometre. The population is young; 37% of the population were children aged under 14 in 2021. During the [2011 Census](#), 73.8% of the population lived in urban areas. Among the urban population, 70.9% lived in the capital Majuro and the remaining 29.1% lived on Kwajalein atoll.

## Appendix 2: Country Commitments on Gender

### International Commitments

Gender Commitments	Status	Actions
<a href="#">Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action</a>	Signed 1995. <a href="#">+25 year review</a> published in 2019.	Important achievements noted in the <a href="#">+25 year review</a> include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RMI elected the first female President in 2016 and the overall proportion of women in the national parliament has increased in recent years.</li> <li>• RMI have ratified a number of conventions and submitted reviews for CEDAW and the CRC.</li> <li>• Challenges identified in the +25 year review include data collection and management as well as delivery of services to rural areas.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)</a>	Accession 2006. RMI's most <a href="#">recent reporting cycle</a> took place between 2016 and 2021.	As noted in the during the most recent review period, <a href="#">RMI has made progress in a number of areas</a> since accession to CEDAW in 2006. Legislative reforms include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act in 2017;</li> <li>• Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration (Amendment) Act, which raised the legal age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18 (2016);</li> <li>• Child Rights Protection Act (2015);</li> <li>• Human Rights Committee Act (2015);</li> <li>• Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2015);</li> <li>• Amendment to the Criminal Code, by which the provisions on sexual assault were revised (2013).</li> </ul> RMI has introduced a number of policies to accelerate equality, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National policy on disability-inclusive development action plan (2014-2018);</li> <li>• National reproductive health policy (2014-2016);</li> <li>• National gender mainstreaming policy (2014);</li> <li>• Prevention of adolescent pregnancy: a three-year strategy (2014-2016).</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Country Commitments on Gender (continued)

### National Commitments

Gender Commitments	Status	Actions
<a href="#">National Gender Mainstreaming Policy of the Republic of Marshall Islands 2015-2019</a>	2014	The National Gender Policy provides a guiding framework to realise the Government's commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in the Marshall Islands. It aims to foster sustainable development, wellbeing, and peace, and to create the appropriate conditions to make sure that women and men have equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal access to services in order to reach their full potential in all areas of life.
<a href="#">Domestic Violence Prevention &amp; Protection Act</a>	2011 The Act was <a href="#">amended</a> in 2018.	The Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act criminalises domestic violence and improves access to protection orders.
<a href="#">Gender Equality Act</a>	2019	<p>The Gender Equality Act aims to 'recognize, protect, promote, and enforce the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women and girls, on an equal basis with men and boys'. The Act prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination and provides definitions of terms such as sex, gender, sexual harassment, intersectional and multiple discrimination, gender mainstreaming, and special measures.</p> <p>The Act outlines actions required in a variety of areas including violence against women and girls, access to justice, participation in public and political life, education, employment and economic empowerment, health, environment, and marriage and family relations. In addition, the Act recognises that further progress is needed to ensure the rights of women and girls with disabilities.</p> <p>Gender discrimination offences are punishable by a fine of up to US\$5,000 and up to one year in prison, although data on the rate of offences under the Act are not available.</p>
<a href="#">Employment Equal Opportunity Act</a>	2017	The Employment Equal Opportunity Act ensures that all employees are treated equally in regard to obtaining employment benefits.
<a href="#">Other related national commitments</a>		<p>Other related commitments that address gender equality and women's empowerment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marriage Act Amendment (2016) raising the age of marriage for girls to 18 in line with boys' age of marriage.</li> <li>• Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act (2017)</li> <li>• Child Protection Act (2015)</li> <li>• Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2015)</li> </ul>