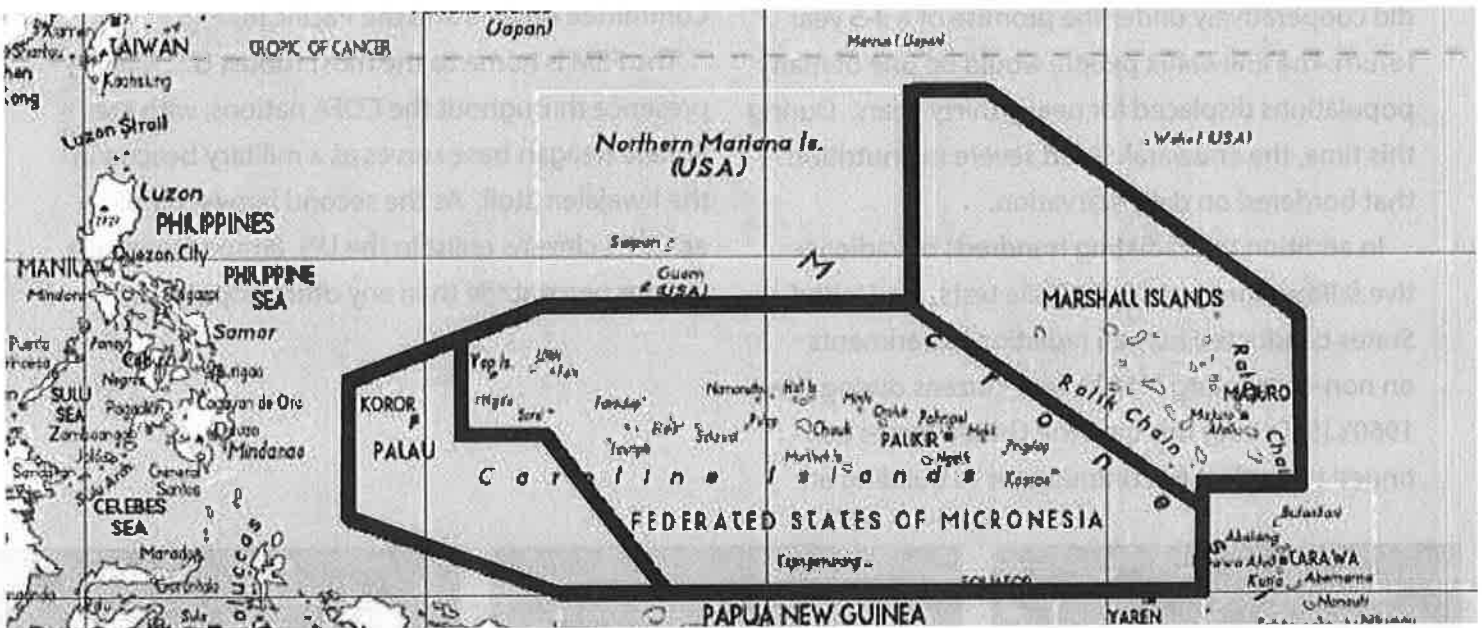


COFA OREGON FACT SHEET

January • 2015

COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION (COFA) *The countries of Republic of Palau (ROP), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) have a unique immigration relationship with the United States. These independent nations have allowed the U.S. Military to occupy their land and sea territory in exchange for security and long term restitution for health and environmental damages. For over 60 years, the U.S. has performed atomic nuclear testing and ballistic missile exercises, displacing families and damaging the economy. The US Congress entered into Compacts with the FSM, RMI and ROP in 1986 and 1994 respectively, with the option for renewal in 2023. The U.S. has secured continued use of many military ranges until 2066. Each Compact provides for the health, housing and security of COFA citizens who remain in their home countries and provides the right for COFA citizens to live and work in the United States.*



GROWING FAST IN OREGON The United States has seen a rapid increase of COFA residents. In the last decade, the resident Marshallese population alone has increased by over 300%, rising from a population of 7,000 to 22,000. This accounts for nearly one-third of the RMI population worldwide. While there is a lack of quality data, estimates range to as much as 55,000 COFA residents who now reside in the U.S., including U.S. territories.[1] The 2010 Census reveals Pacific Islanders are the fastest growing racial group in Oregon at a 68% increase, with COFA citizens as a significant driver. With an estimated 3,000 COFA in Oregon, we are home to the 5th largest population in the country. In fact as of 2012, Marshallese is the 3rd most commonly spoken language in Salem-Keizer schools. [2]

WHY THE COMPACT Before the Republic of Palau (ROP), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) sought independence, the United States oversaw these islands as trust territories assigned by the United Nations in the aftermath of WWII. Within this trust, the United States was sworn to “protect the inhabitants against the loss of their lands”. [3]

Instead, from 1946-1958 the U.S. utilized their land and shores for weapons testing. The U.S. blasted island waters in what was called the “Pacific Proving Grounds”, detonating the nuclear equivalent to 7,200 Hiroshima bombs.[4] To perform these tests, the U.S. misled residents into leaving their land, which they did cooperatively under the promise of a 3-5 year return. The Enewatak people would be one of many populations displaced for nearly thirty years. During this time, the Enewatak faced severe malnutrition that bordered on daily starvation.

In addition to irradiating hundreds by radioactive fallout from botched missile tests, the United States conducted human radiation experiments on non-consenting Marshallese citizens during the 1960’s.[5] During this time the United States continued to neglect its commitment to building an

economic and educational infrastructure throughout these freely associated states, as mandated in the trusteeship. Our failure to do so was documented through reprimand by a 1961 United Nations report and by Congresswoman Patsy Mink, who noted the “United States [had allowed] these islands to decay”. [6] The FSM arguably bore the brunt of nuclear devastation. A lawsuit was brought against the United States for damages resulting from the nuclear tests. This action prompted a treaty between the U.S., originating with the Marshallese, which is now known as the Compact.[7] However, the United States’ continued failure to properly compensate the state to agreed terms was noted by our own Foreign Affairs Committee on Asia and the Pacific.[8]

The FSM is home to the most robust U.S. Military presence throughout the COFA nations, with the Ronald Reagan base serves as a military beacon in the Kwajalen atoll. As the second largest employer, COFA citizens enlist in the U.S. armed forces at a greater percentage than any other population.





"I work hard at PDX airport making sure that passengers who need assistance make it to their planes on time, making minimum wage with no benefits.

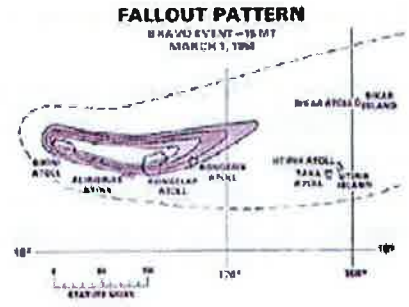
I'm a single mother of five kids. Many of my coworkers qualify for OGP, but I am excluded. Not having insurance means that when I get sick, I do nothing. I get some Tylenol or Aspirin from Winco or Fred Meyer."

-Kasil Kapriel | Portland Int'l Airport worker from the Chuuk State of the FSM

FACTORS FOR MIGRATION All three states have a traditional subsistence based economy, including the cultivation of farmed goods and fisheries. Military bases and U.S. services, such as the USPS, DOE, DOI, FAA and DHHS introduced wage economies to the region. The wage economy lured citizens from outer islands to move to the larger islands with military garrisons. Wages were a promising prospect for those who have had their land co opted by the military or have found their land uninhabitable due to nuclear and natural disaster. However, in acknowledgment of U.S. assistance remaining the main source of GDP, a COFA trust was introduced at the time of amended compact renewals. Financial divestments by the U.S., and recession of 2009 greatly affected the Trust. With low growth rates, the trust is expected to have been reduced by 33% by the time of COFA renewal in 2023. These factors have catastrophically shrunk COFA economies in recent years. In turn, U.S. migration has increased significantly.

The low-lying island atolls of COFA nations are especially vulnerable to natural disaster and ecological changes.[9] Between 2007-08, rising tides left salt deposits all but 10% of taro crops. With several years needed to dilute these salt deposits, many residents decided to leave the crops behind. In the fall of 2008, high swells over the Marshallese capital forced evacuations. Many citizens rely on imported and canned foods, unable to grow their own. Rising uncertainty about the safety and livelihood once shared across the Pacific has acted as an accelerant to migration, both to the larger islands and the United States.

The Marshallese face a unique struggle produced by the residents from outer islands who seek refuge within the larger capitals. Factors such as military occupation, a nuclear legacy, and the introduction of foreign, processed foods have contributed to the abnormally high rates of TB, leprosy, obesity, diabetes, high-blood pressure, heart disease and a slew of radiogenic diseases affecting the COFA population. Overcrowding has exacerbated existing poor-health conditions. The Marshallese spend 16.5% of their GDP on health expenditures, ranking them 5th of the entire world; the United States ranks 3rd. The FSM and ROP rank 7th and 18th respectively, with 13.4% and 10.7% expenditures on health. The need, expense, and inadequate infrastructure force many to leave to the U.S. in hopes of better conditions for themselves and often, to support their families back home.



BROKEN PROMISES COFA citizens find it a struggle to receive assistance while in the United States. COFA workers, legally allowed to work in the U.S., pay taxes but are barred from receiving public assistance such as Medicaid, TANF, Section 8, and SNAP programs. Once beneficiaries, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA) passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton in 1996 categorically excluded COFA residents from many federally funded services based on residency status, reversing decades of federal policy due to anti-immigrant attitudes.[10] Additionally, those seeking educational opportunities in the U.S. are barred from receiving federal loans, and are only eligible for Pell Grant. This is especially troubling as many COFA live under 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and can not afford health insurance, even with state subsidies. A lack of disaggregated data makes invisible the struggle of COFAs both in Oregon and the greater country; it is this invisibility that highlights the failure to fulfill our commitment to the health and education of our immigrant neighbors.

AT A GLANCE Scattered along an archipelago, four island groups comprise the Federated States of Micronesia. FSM citizens see the highest out-migration rate of all COFA states. The dominant ethnic identification is that of Chuukese. The fifth island group along this archipelago is the Republic of Palau.

The three states gained independence when their compacts were ratified; FSM and RMI in 1986 and ROP in 1994.

COFA ORGANIZING & ADVOCACY APANO is partnering with the COFA Alliance National Network and local community based organizations to build leadership and develop campaigns to improve the opportunity and well-being of COFA communities in Oregon and across the United States. To learn more and get engaged, please sign up at www.apano.org or call (971) 340-4861.

¹ Trusteeship Agreement For The Former Japanese Mandated Islands, July 18, 1947, Id. art. 6, §§ 2 & 3, at 3303, at 6. ; this section states the United States' role to "protect the health of inhabitants" and "protect from loss of land".

²Palikir, Pohnpei, "FSM Five-Year Compact Review" Compact Review Committee, Federated States of Micronesia, 2011.

[1] APIAHF. "Medicaid Reinstatement for COFA Migrants: Fact Sheet". 2014, July.

[2] Oregon Department of Education: School Funding Task Force; Hearing minutes, 2014, Mar. 21

[3] Trusteeship Agreement for the Former Japanese Mandated Islands art. 6, July 18, 1947, 61 Stat. 3301, 8 U.N.T.S. 189.

[4] Pevec, Davor. "The Marshall Islands Nuclear Claims Tribunal: The Claims of the Enewetak People". 2008, Mar. 10.

[5] Yamada, S. "Cancer, Reproductive Abnormalities and Diabetes in Micronesia: The effect of Nuclear Testing" Pac Health Dialogue, 2004, Sept. 11(2):216-21

[6] Mink, Patsy T. (1970-71). "Micronesia: Our Bungled Trust". Texas Int'l Law Forum 6: 181-208.;

[7] The Compact of Free Association, U.S.-Marsh. Is., June 25, 1983, 99 Stat. 1770 (1986)

[8] <http://www.hcfa.house.gov/111/56559.pdf>

[9] Hezel, F. X., "High Water in the Low Atolls". Micronesian Counselor, 2009, Dec. 13

[10] Wasem, Ruth Ellen, "Noncitizen Eligibility for Federal Public Assistance: Policy Overview and Trends", Congressional Research Service. 2014, Sept. 24