



**BROKEN
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United
Nations Human Rights Council 4th Cycle – 50th Session

Right to Education

Country Review: Marshall Islands

Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK

April 2025

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Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 that monitors and minimises worldwide human rights violations in education. We aim to promote universal and equal access to education for all.

We encourage and support achieving societal peace with our international sponsors and partners by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling educational inequalities.

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I. Introduction

1. The following report has been drafted by Broken Chalk as a stakeholder contribution to the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review [UPR] for the Marshall Islands. Broken Chalk's main objective is to combat educational human rights violations, and the contents of this report and its recommendations will primarily focus on the Right to Education.
2. The Marshall Islands have a 6-2-4 schooling system, which is compulsory for the first 8 years and is generally completed by the age of 14.ⁱ Education is free until secondary Education, and English is the language of instruction.ⁱⁱ
3. Over the past four years, the government of Marshall has advanced various reforms to improve education quality. The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Training drafted a new educational sector plan for 2021-2023. This report addresses the primary challenges in the education of the Marshall Islands, including improving schools, promoting inclusivity and equality, and enhancing collaboration among educational institutions.ⁱⁱⁱ
4. The new educational sector plan has adopted several noteworthy projects. The Marshall Islands have chosen to enhance the institutional capacity of early childhood education. To achieve this, the Ministry has evaluated the current capacity of institutions and reinforced existing structures by developing regulatory frameworks, new curricula, and training programs.^{iv}
5. In addition, the Ministry of Education has strengthened the quality of teachers in primary education, established a multi-track education system to improve chances of entry into college programs, and some learning achievements have been enhanced, as shown by the MISAT tests (a national test verifying the proficiency of Marshallese students in various subjects). There has been an increase in performance for primary students from 26% in 2013 to 29% in 2023, while secondary students have had lower performances from 17 % in 2013 to 14 % in 2024.^v The government also incorporated gender equality and social inclusion into the educational decision-making agenda.^{vi}
6. While acknowledging these efforts, Broken Chalk deems that the Marshall Islands still face various educational challenges. The most prominent issues concern the impact of climate change on education, the challenges of children with disabilities^{vii}, and labour mobility for teachers^{viii}.
7. Despite new reform initiatives, the Marshall Islands ranks the lowest among the Pacific States regarding climate action and protection.^{ix} Persistent challenges include a high prevalence of diabetes and deafness among children^x, which underscores the need for new tailored policy plans. One of the most alarming trends is related to labour mobility, as teachers face difficulties commuting across the country due to its unique geographical configuration. This results in a shortage of available teachers and the presence of micro-classes.^{xi}

II. Brief overview of the last UN-UPR cycle

8. Before the upcoming fourth cycle, the Marshall Islands were last reviewed in the 36th session of the UPR, which took place in 2020. The country received 189 recommendations, ten of which were related to the Right to Education.^{xii}
9. Broken Chalk welcomes the Marshall Islands' decision to support every recommendation received. Among the most prominent topics addressed were the elimination of discrimination, support for mental and physical health, ensuring access to education, and enhancing student attendance rates.^{xiii}
10. The Marshall Islands' 2020 national report to the UN-UPR highlights the country's efforts to improve education. Regarding discrimination in education, some key strategies entailed pursuing education programmes for teachers focusing on education for deaf students or those

with severe disabilities. Other policies entail new curricula to educate students on human rights, gender equality, and non-discrimination, as well as a comprehensive programme in collaboration with the World Bank to support issues such as poor nutrition and a lack of early learning opportunities. While these initiatives address some challenges highlighted by reviewing states, no measures address mental and physical health, ensure access to education, or improve attendance rates.^{xiv}

11. Nonetheless, the country has taken adequate measures to improve the standards of the right to education, particularly in light of the recommendations received from the OHCHR. The Marshall Islands have had key legislative developments since the last UN-UPR, including the Child Rights Protection Act, which promotes new safeguards for children. Additionally, it has promoted the realization of the right to education in a non-discriminatory manner through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the National Policy on Disability Plan (2014-2018), and the 2019 Gender Equality Act.^{xv}
12. Overall, these measures have improved key concerns raised by the OHCHR, such as making child marriage illegal and the consequent impact on education, enhancing a non-discriminatory education environment, creating a plan for safeguarding people with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities, combating gender discrimination and violence against women in educational environments.^{xvi}

III. Climate Change-Related Impacts on Education

13. The Marshall Islands are one of the lowest countries in the world. They are composed of 29 coral atolls with a population of 37,548. ^{xvii}Rising sea levels and temperatures have recently made the country vulnerable to typhoons, spring tides, and drought. ^{xviii}According to research conducted by the World Bank, rising sea levels in the atoll nation will likely endanger 40 percent of existing buildings in the capital, Majuro, with 96 percent of the city being at risk of flooding. During COP 26 in Glasgow, the World Bank highlighted that such events are likely to be climate change-induced. Schools, hospitals, and other essential infrastructure will be at risk if these trends continue.^{xix}
14. Research on vulnerability to climate change is not promising, suggesting that more catastrophic events may happen again. Satellite measurements show that sea level increases are three times higher than the average growth rate. Furthermore, temperatures are expected to rise between 1.4 and 3.1 °C, and sea levels are projected to increase by 0.35 m by the end of the century.^{xx}
15. The correlation between climate change and education in the Marshall Islands is currently not a primary concern and remains invisible; however, it is likely to become one of the factors impairing the right to education, particularly regarding accessibility.
16. The Marshall Islands have a long history of migration, with data showing that studying abroad, along with health and economic opportunities, are the primary drivers of migration. However, climate-related stressors may become a dominant driver of migration.^{xxi} Broken Chalk considers that there is a high risk of climate change-induced migrations affecting students. While a high trend of migration for better education has been ongoing for many people for over eighteen years, concerns remain about possible forced migration for those students in pre-primary, primary, and elementary schools who typically attend compulsory education in the islands.
17. Broken Chalk is concerned about the possible impacts of natural hazards on educational infrastructure. The Republic of the Marshall Islands, in collaboration with the World Bank, has highlighted serious infrastructural risks in the urban atolls of Majuro and Kwajalein. ^{xxii}Such risks must be addressed to reduce climate-related impacts on children's right to education in the Marshall Islands.

IV. Disability and Education

18. Over the last few years, the Marshall Islands government has implemented various measures to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The government adopted the Marshall Islands National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development (2014-2018) and, in 2015, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.^{xxiii} Furthermore, in March 2015, the country ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.^{xxiv}
19. The operational structure to make such measures effective comprises two central organs. The Ministry of Education of the Marshall Islands provides special educational measures for children with disabilities in the school system. The other key organisation is the Marshall Islands Disabled Persons Organization (MIDPO), which represents the common interests of persons with disabilities.^{xxv} In the latest policy developments, the country, after enshrining the rights of persons with disabilities, has attempted to align its laws with the standards of the CRPD.
20. Among the latest good practices, the Marshall Islands have created new strategies to raise awareness about children with disabilities in education. These include and are not limited to outlining their unique premises^{xxvi}, including special education rights and obligations in the Marshall Islands Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2015)^{xxvii}, the work of the Disability Coordination Office (CDO) to enhance the quality of life and participation of children with disabilities in the community, developing special programs to increase school attendance of children with physical disabilities^{xxviii} (Public School System Rules and Regulations) and finally educating the community about Special Education during the RMI Disability Awareness Week^{xxix}.
21. Nonetheless, persons with physical, sensory, intellectual and mental disabilities faced difficulties in accessing education, especially entering public buildings and obtaining adequate transportation.^{xxx} Broken Chalk, after reviewing stakeholder information, considers that the main challenges are administering services for children with disabilities living on remote islands, improving the quality of teaching for children with disabilities, increasing parent involvement in special education, and adapting current financing plans for special education to the CRPD standards.
22. More specifically, the Education Digest (2023) of the Marshall Islands shows that there is a significant difference in attendance for CWD across the various atolls, with Majuro and Kwajalein Atoll obtaining satisfactory results, while the participation rates are far lower in other atolls.^{xxxi} Additionally, the educational resources in these two atolls are more advanced than those in others, particularly in terms of the number of teachers available for CWD classes in English. However, the data in the report still suggests that schools in the RMI are not yet ready to satisfy the needs of CWD. Only 18 of 256 private and 97 of 1021 public schools are equipped with special education infrastructure.^{xxxii} This entails accessibility and infrastructural issues that persist for CWD. Combining these problems with the unequal distribution of resources in the two largest atolls also raises challenges, such as mobility and infrastructural disadvantages, for CWD living in the other 27 atolls.
23. On the other hand, the RMI receive substantive investments in the education of CWDs through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a special agreement with the United States. The agreement stipulates that the RMI must utilise these funds in a manner previously agreed upon and subsequently undergo a review process by the United States. Broken Chalk welcomes the opportunity for the RMI to receive financial support in education; at the same time, such investments should be aligned with the standards of the CRPD, in addition to the desired enforcement requested by the United States. Broken Chalk considers that, given the RMI's possible resource constraints, the IDEA can be amended to include CRPD standards clauses.

V. Mobility Across the Atolls and Related Challenges

24. Pacific Islands are characterised by unique geography, extreme dispersion, and remoteness from larger markets. For example, compared to the average distance of 5000 km in mainland countries, the Marshall Islands are 11.000 km from the main markets. Such remoteness entails high transport costs and overall tricky mobility in the Pacific Islands. In the 2023 Annual Report, UNICEF identified labour mobility as a significant educational challenge.^{xxxiii}
25. Regarding education, such remoteness impacts teachers' work and students' school accessibility. Various reports highlight a connection between secondary school accessibility and the need for enhanced school transportation.^{xxxiv} Dozens of teachers and students are absent from school due to transportation challenges, and students attending schools in remote locations are particularly disadvantaged by the high transportation costs and delays in receiving technical assistance.^{xxxv}
26. The Republic of the Marshall Islands, regarding school transportation, mentions in section 326 of the Marshall Islands Public School System Act that " The Public School System may provide suitable transportation to and for Special Education, preschool, elementary and secondary students as resource permits.^{xxxvi} In addition, the RMI Rules and Regulations of the Public School System refer to school transportation again^{xxxvii}, but without adding any details on specific policies to enforce such laws. It is also interesting to examine the wording of the law, which states that using the phrase 'may provide suitable transportation' does not guarantee certainty in mobility across the atolls.
27. Mobility across the atolls considerably impacts the educational situation in the Marshall Islands. The policies of various schools typically include the presence of one or more vehicles to ensure transportation. However, such measures do not help to address issues such as the massive out-migration of students and the presence of secondary schools exclusively in the largest atolls, which raises concerns about accessibility to education for students from outer islands. In addition, research already shows that in rural schools (located on outer atolls), the level of enrollment is remarkably lower, and education finishes earlier.^{xxxviii} This data suggests that mobility across the atolls can significantly hinder the right to education of Marshall Island students.

V. Recommendations

28. Broken Chalk recommends upgrading school infrastructure to withstand extreme weather and elevating facilities in high-risk flood zones. It further suggests implementing comprehensive risk management plans to safeguard education from natural calamities, which increasingly disrupt mobility and access to education.
29. Broken Chalk advocates for incorporating emergency response plans and climate change awareness programs into education, and advocating for cross-border agreements with international organisations or states to fund climate-adaptive strategies is necessary.
30. Broken Chalk suggests delivering more efficient services to children living in outer classrooms through satellite classrooms, travelling teachers, and digital learning.
31. Broken Chalk advocates for improving transportation access and strengthening school infrastructure to comply with the CRPD standards of accessibility.
32. Broken Chalk emphasizes the necessity of integrating the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act with the requirements of the CRPD to maximise a rights-based approach.

33. Broken Chalk urges the government of the Marshall Islands to ensure students from outer atolls have reliable access to education. To do so, connecting remote islands with school boats and shuttle systems will be necessary.
34. Broken Chalk recommends amending the Marshall Islands Public System Act to ensure that transportation services are guaranteed rather than optional. Ultimately, the government should consider developing precise enforcement mechanisms to implement effective transportation policies.
35. Broken Chalk urges the Marshall Islands to ratify the UN Convention Against Discrimination in Education and insert disability as a ground of discrimination in the Constitution.

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