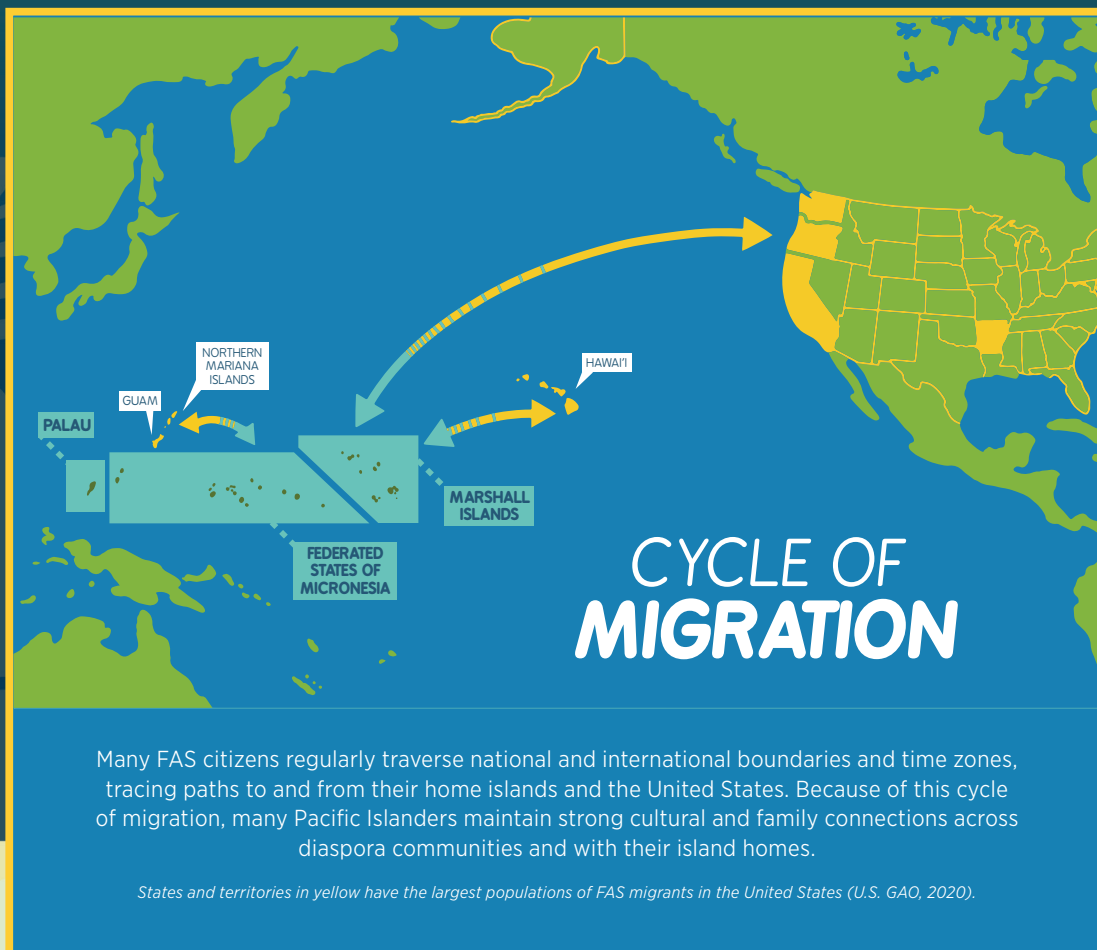


WHAT ARE THE FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES OF THE PACIFIC?

The Compacts of Free Association (COFA) are international agreements that allow citizens of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (Marshall Islands), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Republic of Palau (Palau) to freely travel, live, work, and study in the United States, and U.S. citizens to do the same within these nations. These independent countries are known as the Freely Associated States (FAS).



HOW DID THE COFA BEGIN?

In 1947, the islands that now make up the Freely Associated States (FAS) of the Pacific were designated by the United Nations as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which was administered by the United States. The FSM and the Marshall Islands became independent sovereign nations in 1986 and Palau in 1994 upon entering into Compacts of Free Association with the United States. The COFA agreements allow the United States to maintain a military presence in the Pacific region, and in exchange, the United States provides economic assistance in the form of programs, grants, and services to FAS governments.

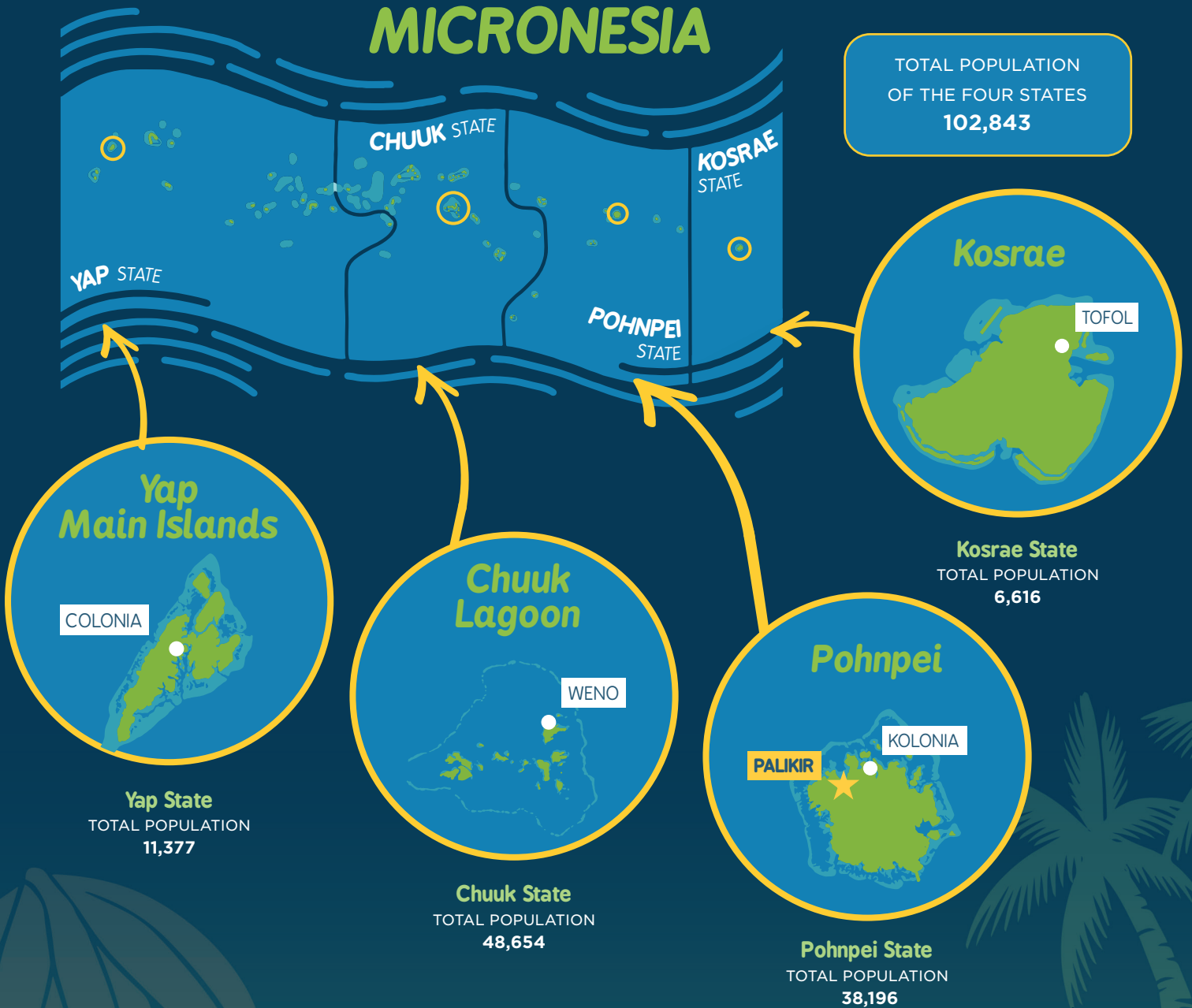
WHAT NOW?

More than 30 years since the original COFA negotiations, U.S. funding under the compacts is set to expire in 2023 for Palau and 2024 for the Marshall Islands and the FSM. Funding renegotiations will focus on issues of human rights, migration, economic assistance, and defense relations, which are expected to have an impact on students and families with ties to the FAS. Migration rights are key provisions of the COFA agreements and will not end in 2023 and 2024.

(COFA, 1985; COFA 1986; COFA 2003; Thomas, 2019)

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

TOTAL POPULATION OF THE FOUR STATES
102,843



Over 45% of households reported in the 2010 census that they had immediate family members residing outside of the FSM.

25,000+ Micronesians born in the FSM have migrated to the United States since 1986.

Population Statistics (FSM SBOC, 2010)
Migration Statistics (U.S. GAO, 2020)

WHAT IS THE IMMIGRATION STATUS OF FAS CITIZENS IN THE UNITED STATES?



- FAS citizens have a unique immigration status that allows them to freely live, work, and study in the United States; however, they are neither “legal permanent residents” nor “qualified non-citizens.” This status can complicate access to U.S. government services such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, and non-temporary driver’s licenses.
- Children born in the United States may be U.S. citizens by birth; therefore, many families have mixed citizenship. Remember that schools cannot require students and families to disclose their immigration status, and all children are entitled to public education regardless of their status.

(Siskin, 2016; IDRA, 2017)

REPUBLIC OF MARSHALL ISLANDS



The map highlights the five most populated atolls of the 24 inhabited atolls and islands of the Marshall Islands.

TOTAL POPULATION
53,158



Approximately **one-third of the population** of the Marshall Islands has relocated to the United States.

15,000+ Marshallese are estimated to live in northwest Arkansas and in nearby communities in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri.

REPUBLIC OF PALAU



TOTAL POPULATION
17,661



Palau has **one of the highest positive net migration rates** in the Pacific region, meaning that more Palauans are returning to Palau than are leaving the country.

*Population Statistics (RMI EPPSO, 2011; Palau OPS, 2015)
Migration Statistics (U.S. GAO, 2020; MEI 2021)*

WHAT BRINGS FAS CITIZENS TO THE UNITED STATES?



Education



Jobs



Visiting Relatives



Military Service



Healthcare

PRACTICING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

WITH PACIFIC ISLAND STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Culturally responsive practices are “behavioral and policy actions that acknowledge stakeholders’ cultures and utilize that knowledge to create an optimal learning environment where personal beliefs and assumptions are regularly examined, cultural identities are nurtured, institutional policies and procedures are interrogated for bias, [and] cultural competency is developed.”

(Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015)

- The Pacific region is culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, which is reflected in students’ complex identities and family networks. Provide opportunities for students to learn about and reflect on their cultural communities.
- The answer to the question “where are you from?” may seem simple, but responses from Pacific Island students are sure to vary widely. While some students may have recently arrived at your school from a Pacific island nation, others may have never lived in or visited the islands where their parents or grandparents are from. Providing space to discuss the variety of migration experiences may help break down community stereotypes and microaggressions that students may face.
- The Freely Associated States celebrate national holidays for their constitution days, independence days, United Nations Day, and many other holidays of national importance. Look up a list of holidays and consider recognizing these days in your classroom or school, using the opportunity to talk about the FAS. This can be a way to introduce Pacific island histories and learn about how groups living outside of their home islands celebrate holidays of cultural importance.



May 1: Republic of the Marshall Islands Constitution Day



May 10: Federated States of Micronesia Constitution Day
November 3: Federated States of Micronesia Independence Day



July 9: Republic of Palau Constitution Day
October 1: Palau Independence Day



October 24: United Nations Day



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Complete references, acknowledgements, and additional resources for this infographic series are available on the REL Pacific website.