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# **Safety and Security Highlights to Help You Prepare for Peace Corps Service**

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# Introduction

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Congratulations on being invited to serve in the Peace Corps! We are eager to welcome you to your country of service and hope you choose to accept your invitation to serve. Many invitees have questions about what Peace Corps service might be like and this information was created to give invitees a better sense of the safety and security program the agency manages. The health, safety, and security of Peace Corps Volunteers is our highest priority. The Peace Corps devotes significant resources to providing Volunteers with the training, support, and information they need to stay healthy and safe.

Because Volunteers serve worldwide, sometimes in remote areas, health and safety risks are an inherent part of Volunteer service. Volunteers can reduce these risks by following recommendations for locally appropriate behavior, exercising sound judgment, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. In an effort to ensure a productive, healthy, and safe experience for Volunteers, the Peace Corps reviews work and housing sites in advance, collaborates on project development with local communities, and develops and tests plans for responding to emergencies.

During pre-service training, you will learn a lot more about safety and security issues, but in the meantime, this information has been designed to provide you with an overview of the program and covers the following topic areas:

1. Possible risks you may face as a trainee or a Volunteer
2. Peace Corps' integrated approach to safety and security and the different components of this approach
3. Your role in managing potential risks
4. Basic guidance on what you can do to stay safe overseas

The Peace Corps continually updates materials for Volunteers, with specific information about safety and security risks in the areas where they serve. This enables Volunteers to make informed decisions and have a safe, healthy experience.

Shortly after accepting your invitation to serve, you will receive additional, country-specific information from the Peace Corps staff about your service. This information is a global overview and will not describe country-specific environments.

Again, we would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the Peace Corps and wish you a very successful Volunteer experience.

## Challenges and Risks of Serving Overseas

Many of the same challenges you face at home exist in the country where you will serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer. This section includes information about potential risks you may encounter while serving. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list and you will receive additional training on country-specific risks during your pre-service training.

The Peace Corps is committed to providing accurate and transparent information about Volunteer service. We maintain statistics and information that describes the nature and conditions of Peace Corps service; the challenges Volunteers face; the impact that serving in another culture will have on individual lifestyle, comfort, and safety (e.g., living with host families, conservative dress, and restrictions on movement and night travel); and the support Volunteers will receive in their respective countries of service.

From the moment an applicant is invited to serve in a particular country, specific information about potential challenges is provided. These challenges often include unwanted attention; harassment; health and safety risks; and cultural behaviors that an American might find offensive, uncomfortable, or threatening.

With this information, potential Volunteers can make informed decisions about whether Peace Corps service is right for them and whether they are prepared to live at any site in their host countries,

where local community members will be their primary support system. Once Volunteers are in-country, Peace Corps staff will keep them informed about security issues and provide guidance for maintaining their safety.

In addition, for the welfare of Volunteers, Peace Corps policy requires that Volunteers report their whereabouts when they travel away from their sites or change residences, and that they obtain Peace Corps authorization if they intend to leave their country of assignment for any reason.

## Facts and Figures

- Peace Corps Volunteers have reported 13,045 crime incidents over the last 10 years (2001-2010).
- Most crimes reported by Peace Corps Volunteers are property crimes. Over the last 10 years (2001-2010), theft, burglary, and robbery have accounted for 77 percent of all crimes reported by Volunteers.
  - Thefts include pickpocketing and stealing without confrontation (46 percent of all crimes reported).
  - Robbery is the taking of property under confrontational circumstances, which includes when a weapon is present or a demand is made by the assailant (11 percent of all crimes reported).
  - Burglary includes the unlawful entry of a Volunteer's home. Usually, burglaries happen when the Volunteer is not home (20 percent of all crimes reported).
- From 2001-2010, physical assaults accounted for 11 percent of all crimes reported by Volunteers. Physical assaults are classified based on injuries sustained during an attack by an offender. Physical assaults also include incidents where a weapon was displayed, but the offender did not attempt to take any property.
- From 2001-2010, 8.5 percent of incidents reported were sexual assaults. This includes, rape, attempted rape, and any other unwanted

touching of the Volunteer in a sexual manner. More than two-thirds of the incidents reported were "Other Sexual Assaults," which is defined as unwanted kissing or touching of a Volunteer for sexual gratification.

- Since 2006, Peace Corps has been collecting data that helps to better explain how and where incidents happen to Volunteers. From 2006-2010, most reported incidents happened in public areas (streets, open markets, beaches, etc.). Most thefts occur on modes of transportation. Burglaries most often occur in a Volunteer's residence, although a small number are reported from hotels or non-Volunteer residences. Incidents of rape most often occur in a residence.
- Based on data from 2006-2010, most incidents, other than rape, were committed by strangers. However, most rapes and attempted rapes reported by Volunteers were committed by friends or acquaintances.

## Possible Safety and Security Risks

### Natural Disasters

Floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and typhoons occur in countries where Peace Corps Volunteers serve. Although safety in a natural disaster is never guaranteed, Volunteers can protect themselves and are trained on what to do in preparation for, or in the aftermath of, a natural disaster. These events rarely occur without warning, which means Volunteers usually have enough time to get to a safe place or to make the place they are in as safe as possible. In-country Peace Corps staff will work to confirm the whereabouts and safety of all Volunteers and provide instructions and information to Volunteers on an ongoing basis in preparation for, or following, a natural disaster.

### Political Unrest

During the last decade, the Peace Corps evacuated approximately 20 countries due to political violence or civil unrest. Most of the time such situations emerge with substantial warning so the Peace Corps can take advanced measures to move Volunteers out

of harm's way. In every country, the Peace Corps has a plan in place to communicate with Volunteers and respond to instances of political unrest, should they occur. Staff at post frequently monitors news and other sources of information so the Peace Corps can mobilize resources to safeguard Volunteer welfare. In addition, the Peace Corps collaborates closely with the U.S. Embassy for additional support when managing political crises.

## Crime

Crime can pose a serious threat to Volunteer safety. Crime has increased worldwide since the Peace Corps was founded in 1961, and Volunteers may be more vulnerable to crime than the citizens of a host country, especially when outside of their own communities. Even though Volunteers live modestly by U.S. standards, they often live relatively well by host country standards, and may be considered wealthy. The material items Volunteers bring with them from home—such as new clothes and shoes, wristwatches, radios, MP3 players, cameras, and laptop computers—are often a source of wonder and temptation. Regardless of how Volunteers really live in-country, they are still Americans and are perceived to have money.

## Harassment

Harassment can be defined as any type of unwanted attention, including sexual, racial, or other non-violent verbal harassment. A Volunteer's gender, race, or outward appearance can have an impact on the prevalence of unwanted attention. During pre-service training (PST), you will be taught how to respond to unwanted attention in a culturally appropriate manner. In many countries, female Volunteers can expect to receive significant unwanted attention and harassment. The greater freedom women have in the United States in comparison to women in many Peace Corps countries may make adjusting difficult, but it is critical to create and maintain a culturally appropriate lifestyle in order to maximize personal safety.

## Sexual Assault

Rape and sexual assault are serious crimes that can impact Volunteers. The perpetrator of rape

or sexual assault can be anyone—a stranger, someone you know, someone you work with, or even another Volunteer or trainee. It is important to remember that rape/sexual assault is never the victim's fault. During pre-service training you will receive training on ways to mitigate your own and your fellow Volunteers' risk of sexual assault. You will also receive detailed information about your options should you experience a sexual assault.

The Peace Corps has assembled a multi-disciplinary working group of headquarters staff members to continually monitor instances of sexual assault committed against Volunteers and develop strategies to prevent assault and respond to Volunteers who have experienced assault.

## Corruption

Many of the countries where the Peace Corps operates experience varying degrees of corruption, from local officials requesting a "service fee" for services rendered to local law enforcement officials who use harassment as a means of supplementing their income. These types of situations can result in feelings that range from frustration to fear. Volunteers are provided with country-specific information about local corruption during their pre-service training and will have the opportunity to practice techniques and solutions for managing incidents of corruption in their host countries.

## Transportation Accidents

Just as in the U.S., automobile accidents are among the most common safety concerns for Peace Corps Volunteers. Road conditions, uneven traffic enforcement, the lack of emergency response, and poor vehicle maintenance further compound the problem. Volunteers need to develop a keen awareness of the best strategies for choosing appropriate modes of transportation and routes and travel times to minimize their exposure to risks associated with transportation accidents. In addition, the Peace Corps has policies and training to help Volunteers make good choices about transportation options.

# The Peace Corps Approach to Safety and Security

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## Overview

The health, safety, and security of Peace Corps Volunteers is our highest priority. The Peace Corps devotes significant resources to providing Volunteers with the training, support, and information they need to stay healthy and safe.

Health and safety risks are an inherent part of Volunteer service. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as wealthy are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur.

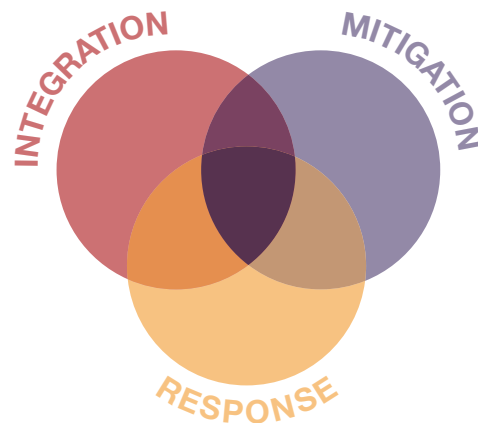
**Safety and security overseas is everyone's responsibility. It starts with Volunteers using good judgment and adjusting lifestyles appropriately, but it is truly a partnership involving many people.**

The Peace Corps has a variety of mechanisms in place to enhance your safety. For example, during pre-service training, the Peace Corps provides training and resources to help you develop language and technical skills and cross-cultural proficiency, and acquire personal safety knowledge and skills. Volunteer sites are chosen according to specific safety criteria that consider secure housing, transportation, communication, access to services, and proximity to fellow Volunteers. You will be expected to strictly abide by your post's policies regarding notifying Peace Corps staff when you are away from your site (whereabouts notification). Such policies are designed to enhance your safety.

Your Peace Corps post and the Peace Corps Office of Safety and Security are ready to support you if you become a victim of a crime. Immediate reporting of a crime to Peace Corps officials is essential so the Peace Corps can provide you with the logistical, administrative, and medical support you may need.

## The Integrated Safety and Security Model

The Peace Corps follows an integrated approach to the safety and security of Volunteers, with responsibility being shared between staff, Volunteers, and communities. The safety and security program is built on three concepts: Integration, Mitigation, and Response. These three elements overlap and work together to provide a comprehensive strategy to support Volunteers.



**INTEGRATION** reflects the principle that Volunteers are safest when they are in their respective communities and when they have established relationships with community members, host families, and others to create an effective support network. Peace Corps staff plays a key role in helping Volunteers integrate into their community through training and site preparation. Much of the training that occurs during PST is designed to help Volunteers integrate, especially through language, cross-cultural, and technical training. Site assessment and preparation is also a critical issue. By ensuring that Volunteers are placed in communities that are welcoming and supportive, staff helps ensure that community integration is possible for Volunteers. Ultimately though, integration is based on how successful a Volunteer is

at earning the respect of those with whom he or she lives and works. Although Volunteers will often be given a certain amount of respect because of their status, it is crucial that the Volunteers demonstrate respect for the community and the local culture. Factors that help Volunteers earn the respect of those around them include:

- Communicating in the local language;
- Adhering to local customs;
- Dressing in a culturally appropriate manner;
- Dedicating considerable time to working with community members on assigned projects and other community activities;
- Participating in local festivities and cultural events; and
- Demonstrating expertise in their technical fields.

These factors are stressed during PST and during other training that occurs over the course of a Volunteer's service.

**MITIGATION** reflects all the actions taken to reduce the likelihood of a safety and security incident occurring or the impact if one does occur. Through comprehensive risk assessments and effective site preparation, posts are able to identify areas where Volunteers can serve with relative safety. Housing that is consistent with the rest of the community can help ensure that Volunteers do not become easy targets for criminals. Well-developed transportation policies help reduce the risk of incidents occurring when Volunteers travel from their sites. Training and information sharing help make Volunteers aware of the risks they face and provide them with strategies to counter those risks. To a large extent, however, mitigation depends on the choices made by an individual Volunteer. In this partnership, Volunteers are responsible for their own safety and security and must adopt culturally appropriate lifestyles and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in their communities, at work, and while traveling.

**RESPONSE** strategies are in place in the event that there is a specific threat to the well-being of Volunteers. Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) provide posts with flexible strategies to address a variety of crises that may arise. Posts also have plans that enable them to respond rapidly to medical emergencies affecting Volunteers. If a Volunteer has the misfortune of being a victim of a crime, there are procedures in place to provide support quickly and throughout the entire criminal justice process. Because Volunteers themselves must be able to respond quickly and properly to any number of emergencies, training is provided throughout their service. Volunteers must react quickly and follow the established procedures when a post initiates the EAP. Volunteers must also develop their own personal action plan for how they will respond to an emergency that confronts them, including issues such as who in their communities can provide transportation in an emergency and the nearest location of reliable communication with the Peace Corps. Of paramount consideration is that Volunteers accept their responsibility to report to Peace Corps when an incident occurs, as this will trigger Peace Corps' response procedures.

While each of these components (**INTERGRATION**, **MITIGATION**, and **RESPONSE**) is important on its own, the synergistic effect creates a strong, flexible support system for the Volunteer.

- The Office of Safety and Security at headquarters in Washington, D.C., provides technical oversight and support on safety and security issues to all Peace Corps programs overseas, frequently assisting country directors in addressing specific and more complex security problems.
- Ten subregionally-based Peace Corps safety and security officers (PCSSO) provide technical oversight and guidance to post staff to help implement an effective Volunteer safety support system. They will periodically visit posts and frequently interact with Volunteers to gauge the security environment and identify opportunities to strengthen a post's security program. Because Peace Corps safety and security officers are based in the field, they are also available to support emergency situations when needed.



- Country directors at each post are responsible for implementing an effective safety support system that involves the efforts of key staff members.
- Project managers evaluate sites against an established set of programmatic and safety criteria.
- Trainers develop learning objectives designed to provide Volunteers with the necessary skills to prepare them to meet the challenges of Volunteer service.
- Safety and security coordinators (SSCs) bring together the efforts of various staff members to ensure that Peace Corps has a functioning, systematic approach to safety and security and are a key point of contact for safety and security issues and concerns.
- All country posts have Volunteer-led committees which provide support to other Volunteers and assist in communicating Volunteer needs and concerns to Peace Corps staff posts.
- Finally, Peace Corps headquarters has recently added a victim's advocate who will work closely with Volunteer victims of serious crimes to ensure that they get the appropriate support and assistance.

## Community Life

One common misconception is that Volunteers live by themselves in an isolated village, completely on their own. The reality is quite the opposite. While Volunteers are frequently assigned to remote villages, Volunteers are welcomed into communities, working and living with families and other members of the host communities that become their primary support system. The relationships and friendships Volunteers develop in their host communities are critical to their safety and security. When Volunteers become active members of their communities, they are protected like family members and are valued as contributors to development. Obviously, these important relationships cannot be developed in a 40-hour workweek, so Volunteers are really on duty all the time.

The Peace Corps is very careful in placing Volunteers, selecting sites only after a thorough assessment that considers site history; access to essential services; access to communications, transportation, and markets; availability of adequate housing; absence of significant crime or gang violence; and the potential for obtaining and maintaining the support of local authorities and the community at-large. Additionally, Peace Corps program managers and medical staff visit Volunteers periodically. If they find that a Volunteer's safety or well-being has been or is at risk of being compromised, they will work with the Volunteer and others to resolve the situation.

## Transportation Policies

In order to mitigate safety and security risks to Volunteers during overland and sea travel, Peace Corps posts have a post-specific transportation policy for Volunteers. The policy outlines the best transportation options and identifies any transportation modes that are prohibited in-country. It will also identify any areas of the country that may be off limits for travel due to security considerations. Volunteers are required to abide by their post's transportation policy at all times when traveling, and are required to abide by other posts' policies when they are visiting those posts for either official or personal reasons. While these policies cannot guarantee safe transportation, Volunteer adherence to a post's transportation policies does improve the odds of safe travel.

## Emergency Action Plans

Emergency Action Plans are developed to address both localized and widespread emergencies such as natural disasters or political unrest and they set forth the strategies developed by the Peace Corps in each country to prepare for, respond to, and recover from such crises. You will receive an EAP orientation during pre-service training and subsequent training.

The Peace Corps works very closely with each country's U.S. ambassador and the embassy's regional security officer on matters of Volunteer safety and crisis management. Copies of the EAP are submitted to the U.S. Embassy and Peace Corps headquarters.

If a situation arises that poses a potential threat to Volunteers, the Peace Corps will respond immediately to assess the nature of the threat and respond in a manner that maximizes your safety and well-being. Volunteers may be asked to “standfast” in their communities, as that may present the safest place for Volunteers to wait out the situation. Under other circumstances, Volunteers may be moved from their sites to a consolidation location or evacuated from the country altogether. If the decision is made to evacuate a country, the Peace Corps will commit every resource at hand to safeguard the well-being of each Volunteer and staff member.

## Communication

Significant changes in communication technology have altered the way Peace Corps communicates with Volunteers, even in the most remote locations. While some Volunteers do not have telephones in their homes, most have access to telephones either at work or through a public facility in their communities. Most Volunteers have cellular telephones and Internet access, and some have satellite phones. However, there are circumstances which can occasionally make it difficult to contact a Volunteer. For those very few whose community or entire region is without access to telephones or computers, there is always access to another means of communication, such as radio, courier, or a Peace Corps warden system. The Peace Corps develops sites to ensure that there are ways to reach a Volunteer in each location and requires Volunteers to establish an emergency contact system in their communities, to test it to ensure it works, and to keep their contact information up-to-date. Volunteers are expected to complete and update a site locator form that provides each post with the most reliable means of reaching the Volunteer and information about where the Volunteer lives.

## Crime Reporting and Response

The Peace Corps has instituted programs and policies that promote the safety and security of its Volunteers. The effectiveness of these policies rests primarily on the Volunteer’s adherence to these guidelines.

Although these measures do not guarantee safety, they reduce the likelihood that Volunteers will be exposed to avoidable risks. During your training, you will learn the local language(s), cultural norms, and behaviors that reduce risk. You will be expected to contact appropriate Peace Corps staff immediately if a theft, assault, or any other kind of incident that threatens your safety occurs. This enables the Peace Corps to respond quickly and help mitigate the situation. It also informs the Peace Corps’ training and prevention strategies.

## Sexual Assault

The Peace Corps takes the issue of sexual violence very seriously and is committed to supporting any Volunteer who has been a victim of sexual assault. There are procedures in place at each post to respond quickly and compassionately and additional support is provided from headquarters. Dedicated specialists from the medical, mental health, security, and legal staffs will be there to help the Volunteer manage and recover from serious crimes, such as rape and sexual assault.

### Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims

The Peace Corps is committed to providing a compassionate and supportive response to all Volunteers who have been sexually assaulted. To that end, the Peace Corps makes the following commitment to all trainees and Volunteers who are victims of sexual assault.

- **COMPASSION**  
We will treat you with dignity and respect. No one deserves to be a victim of a sexual assault.
- **SAFETY**  
We will take appropriate steps to provide for your ongoing safety.
- **SUPPORT**  
We will provide you with the support you need to aid in your recovery.
- **LEGAL**  
We will help you understand the relevant legal processes and your legal options.

- **OPEN COMMUNICATION**

We will keep you informed of the progress of your case, should you choose to pursue prosecution.

- **CONTINUATION OF SERVICE**

We will work closely with you to make decisions regarding your continued service.

- **PRIVACY**

We will respect your privacy and will not, without your consent, disclose your identity or share the details of the incident with anyone who does not have a legitimate need to know.

Peace Corps staff worldwide will demonstrate this commitment to you through our words and actions.

In the event of rape or sexual assault, Volunteers should call the country director, duty officer, or Peace Corps medical officer, who will guide them through the procedures needed to ensure their safety; provide them with appropriate medical care (including treatment of sexually transmitted infections and emergency contraception); and provide them with emotional support. The Volunteer/trainee will also be advised about his/her legal rights and about how best to preserve the option to prosecute.

# Peace Corps Volunteer Responsibilities

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## Overview

The Peace Corps has established policies and procedures to help Volunteers reduce their risks and enhance their safety and security. At the same time, the Volunteer's own conduct is the single most important factor in promoting his or her own safety and well-being. Staying safe and secure during Peace Corps service requires Volunteers to take personal responsibility for observing locally appropriate behavior, exercising sound judgment, and abiding by the Peace Corps' policies and procedures. Volunteer responsibilities can best be summarized by the Core Expectations on Page 14.

As a Volunteer, it is essential to be aware of your surroundings, understand how your conduct and actions may be perceived, and be sensitive to the affect your behavior has on your personal safety. Often Volunteers must change a range of behaviors they have grown accustomed to in the United States—including dress, living arrangements, exercise, consumption of alcohol, socializing with members of the opposite sex, going out alone at night, etc.—to minimize risks to their safety and security. Some of the changes that are required may seem contrary to values you are accustomed to in the United States, such as expectations of personal freedom and equality between sexes. The challenge is to find the right balance and behave in a manner that enables you to have a safe, productive experience. Peace Corps staff members are committed to helping you meet this challenge.

## Whereabouts Notification Requirement

Each country has established a system to collect contact and whereabouts information from Volunteers when they are away from their communities for personal reasons, annual leave, or for official work-related business.

The system ensures that the Volunteer can be reached when away from the community should an emergency arise, whether personal or related to the post as a whole. If, for example, an emergency arises at home, The Peace Corps would want to be able to promptly notify you about its occurrence and facilitate your communication with family members. Similarly, if an emergency happens at post while you are away, post would need to contact you to provide appropriate instructions about returning.

While the Peace Corps encourages you to get to know your host country during your Volunteer service, you are reminded that you are in Peace Corps to do a job. That job requires you to spend the majority of your time in your community working on your projects. When you do elect to leave your site, for either official or personal reasons, it is critical that the Peace Corps knows where you are going and how you can be reached in the event of an emergency. Each Peace Corps post has a whereabouts policy that captures this information.

During your pre-service training you will be informed about this policy and expectations for reporting whereabouts information to the Peace Corps. It is your responsibility to know and adhere to the post's whereabouts notification requirement. A Volunteer's failure to report his or her whereabouts in accordance with the post's procedures may be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including administrative separation from the Peace Corps.

## Proper Reporting and Communication with Peace Corps Staff

The safety and security coordinator (SSC) in your country of service depends heavily on information Volunteers provide in order to make safety recommendations. Even if you are not a direct victim of a crime, it is your responsibility to report incidents and crimes that occur in your area and/or on your

travel route. For example, if there is a political protest that is happening in your region, your SSC may not necessarily be aware that this is happening. Reporting this to your SSC will enable the SSC to assess the threat and risk level and make the necessary safety recommendations to other Peace Corps Volunteers.

Your SSC will guide you through the reporting process and the proper steps in order to access the support you need. The decision to report an incident to local authorities is entirely yours; the Peace Corps will ensure that you are fully informed of your options and will help you through the process and procedures involved, should you wish to do so. The responsibility for investigation and prosecution; however, rests with the host country government, not with you or the Peace Corps. In the event of a serious crime against you, the Peace Corps may, in some cases, be able to retain a local attorney to assist and represent you.

The entire reporting process will be covered during pre-service training.

## **Drugs and Alcohol**

Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol significantly increases a Volunteer's risk of being a victim of a crime or experiencing an accident or injury. Peace Corps statistics demonstrate that alcohol use is a contributing factor in many of the reported Volunteer incidents and excessive or frequent alcohol use significantly increases the likelihood that the Volunteer will become a crime victim. Additionally, excessive alcohol use contributes to unprofessional behavior and can compromise the Volunteer's ability to build effective relationships in his or her host community. Volunteers found to be involved in drug use, including unauthorized prescription drug use, will be immediately separated from the Peace Corps.

## **Bystander Intervention Training**

Bystander intervention training has been added to pre-service and/or in-service trainings as a pragmatic strategy to help Volunteers look out for one another. A bystander, or witness, is someone who

sees a situation but may or may not know what to do, may think others will act, or may be afraid to do something. Peace Corps' bystander education program teaches potential witnesses safe and positive ways they can act to prevent or intervene when there is a risk for sexual or physical violence. This approach gives Volunteers specific roles they can use in preventing an assault, including identifying and stopping situations before they happen, stepping in during an incident, and speaking out against ideas and behaviors that support sexual and physical violence. It also gives individuals the skills to be an effective and supportive ally to survivors after an assault has taken place.

## **Allegations of Misconduct or Violations of Law or Policy**

Occasionally Volunteers experience events, either at their sites or with others in the Peace Corps community, that give them cause for concern about potential misconduct, mismanagement, or other violations of law or Peace Corps policy. The most frequent example of this involves the misuse of funds by a member of a Volunteer's community, potentially even misusing funds provided to a Volunteer's project. In such cases, Volunteers should report the allegation to either the local Peace Corps office or to the Peace Corps Office of the Inspector General. Any allegations of misuse will be thoroughly investigated and you have the right to request that your involvement remain confidential. Peace Corps will take steps to ensure that you are not endangered by reporting such allegations. You cannot be penalized in any way for reporting abuses to the Peace Corps. Confidential reporting of allegations can be made to the Peace Corps Inspector General Toll-Free Hotline, (800) 223-5874 or (202) 692-2901, or by email at [oig@peacecorps.gov](mailto:oig@peacecorps.gov).

## **Risk Management Strategies**

You will receive more country-specific safety information during pre-service training. However, here are some strategies you can use anywhere in the world in order to lower the risk of becoming a target of crime.

## Awareness

Personal safety begins with awareness. Awareness begins with a clear understanding of your attitudes, values, self-esteem, personal strengths, and limitations. It continues with insight into the host culture and environment — local attitudes toward strangers, gender perceptions, values, customs, and means of communicating. In order to be alert to potential dangers and risks to your well-being, you need to be aware of what is going on in your immediate environment. Study. Observe. Ask. Some general themes for raising awareness follow:

- Assess your emotional and physical capabilities and limitations.
- Be attentive to how you are perceived by local people and behave in a manner that is neither provocative nor draws unwanted attention.
- Know the names and numbers for Peace Corps staff and local authorities. Keep an emergency card with important numbers. Strive to understand the local language and cultural norms.
- Familiarize yourself with your neighborhood and work environment.
- Be street smart. Beware of pickpockets, scam artists, overly-friendly strangers, loiterers, etc.
- Vary your travel routes and times.
- Pay attention to local media (newspapers, radio, television) and gossip. Educate yourself about any pending events (elections, demonstrations, anniversaries) that may cause civil disturbance and avoid unnecessary risks.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Take a seat on a bus or train that allows you to observe fellow passengers, but does not preclude options to change seats if necessary.
- Be alert to potential trouble and avoid it when possible.
- Establish a support network among your colleagues and community members.

- Inform yourself of the availability and reliability of local support services (police, security, medical, emergency, fire).
- Politely decline offers of food or drink from strangers.
- Accept beverages only from sealed containers; make sure there's been no tampering.

## Personal Conduct

It is important to appreciate the image you (as an American abroad) project and how this is perceived by others. Stereotypes are common; MTV, CNN, and other sources of media may depict violent conflict and/or promiscuous, well-to-do Americans. Local people's ideas about you may reflect these preconceived notions. While the Peace Corps safety and security coordinator (SSC) will provide you with safety guidance, the choices you make regarding behavior, attire, travel, possessions, relationships, etc. can influence your exposure to risk. How you behave affects not only your personal safety, but the safety of others with whom you are associated. It is incumbent upon each one of you to behave in a manner that is neither disrespectful nor provocative.

- Behave professionally and in a manner befitting your status in local society.
- Limit alcohol consumption.
- Dress in a manner that is not offensive to local cultural norms.
- Avoid clothing that shows your nationality.
- Establish personal boundaries and act to protect them.
- Exercise added caution on occasions when displaying conspicuous possessions (jewelry, MP3 player, sunglasses, camera, etc.).
- Divide money among several pockets.
- Take a patient and calm approach to ambiguity and conflict.
- Radiate confidence while walking in public places.

- Follow your instincts. If a situation is uncomfortable, remove yourself from that situation.
- Be cool when facing confrontation; focus on de-escalation and escape.
- Respect local sensitivities to photographing/videotaping, especially at airports and police and government facilities.
- Carry official identification with you at all times.
- Report any security incidents to the Peace Corps safety and security coordinator (who will advise you of options — reporting to local authorities, prosecution, corrective measures, etc.).
- Maintain a low-key profile, especially in places where there may be hostility toward Americans.

### At Home

The Peace Corps establishes minimum safety and security criteria for sites and housing at each post and conducts an assessment of each site prior to placing Volunteers. In addition, each house must be inspected by a trained individual prior to occupancy. Here are some additional security measures you might want to consider:

- Live with a local family or on a family compound.
- Ensure the sound, secure structure of your residence.
- Strictly control access to, and distribution of, keys.
- Establish rapport with neighbors.
- Set aside emergency supplies (food, water, medicine, fuel, etc.).
- Ensure that you have smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and carbon monoxide monitors, as appropriate.
- Avoid sleeping with the windows open.
- Lock your valuables in a secure container.

### While Traveling

In many of the countries where you will work, extreme caution should be exercised while traveling. You may encounter dangerous road conditions; untrained or unlicensed drivers; drivers operating under the influence of alcohol; vehicles that are poorly maintained and therefore hazardous (no headlights or taillights, faulty brakes, smooth tires, etc.); police check points or roadblocks; or bandits and other criminals. Some recommendations for travel follow:

- Plan your trips carefully. Always know where you are going.
- Before you leave, notify Peace Corps of your travel plans.
- Consult the Department of State Consular Information Sheet.
- Avoid night travel.
- Travel with others when possible.
- Keep vehicle windows rolled up and the doors locked. Use the seat belts.
- Understand the local “rules” for response should you be involved in or witness a traffic accident. In many cases, stopping for an accident can put your life at risk.
- When possible, only take official, licensed taxis. Note the license plate number of the taxi and write it down.
- Avoid getting into a taxi already occupied by others. If necessary, pay extra for a single fare. Negotiate the price before getting in the taxi. Have money ready to pay in appropriate denominations.
- Use reputable hotels, hostels, or boarding houses – your safety is worth any added cost.
- Avoid ground floor rooms at the hotel. Second through fifth floors are desirable (harder to break into, but still accessible to firefighting equipment).
- Meet visitors in the lobby. Avoid entertaining strangers in your room.

- Familiarize yourself with hotel emergency exits and fire extinguishers.
- Count the doors between your room and nearest emergency exit (in case of fire or blackout). Rehearse your escape plan.
- Keep hotel door locked with a dead bolt or chain at all times (don't forget the sliding glass door and windows).
- Identify your visitor before you open the door.
- If you are out of your room, leave the television/radio on.

### If You Become a Victim

Despite all of your efforts to reduce exposure to risks and to avoid threats, you may still become the victim of a crime or critical event. Please consider reporting any incident to your safety and security coordinator. And if you are the victim of a crime, please work with the medical office at post to discuss possible reactions, such as post-traumatic stress (even if you exhibit no symptoms).

Following are some general response strategies:

- Remain calm and alert.
- Try first to defuse the situation. Culturally appropriate greetings or humor may reduce tensions.
- If an assailant demands property, give it up.
- You can create a timely diversion by tossing your wallet, watch, etc. to the ground in the opposite direction you choose to flee.
- Against overwhelming odds (weapons, multiple assailants) try reasoning, cajoling, begging, any psychological ploy.
- Carefully note details of the environment around you (license plate number, distinguishing features, accents, clothing, etc.).
- If you feel your life is endangered and you have no other option than to physically resist, commit to the decision with every fiber of your being. Turn fear into fury.



# Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers

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**In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps Mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to:**

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship, if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others
9. Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America
10. Represent responsibly the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service

# Conclusion

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Thank you for taking the time to read this important safety and security information in preparation for your Peace Corps service. Your health, safety, and security is Peace Corps' number one priority, and we need your participation to make your Volunteer experience as safe and effective as possible. In addition to this information, the Peace Corps will soon offer

a complementary online orientation that covers general safety and security topics and introduces you to risk management strategies prior to your departure. We believe this information, combined with the online orientation, will significantly prepare you for your pre-service training and Volunteer service.

# Additional Resources

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You can learn more about the different kinds of safety and security issues a Volunteer may experience at some point during his or her service by visiting the Peace Corps website and reading the section on safety and security. For your convenience, the link is provided below.

**Peace Corps Safety and Security in Depth:**

[www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.safety.safeandsec](http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.safety.safeandsec)

Another useful resource in aiding your ability to make an informed decision is your Welcome Book, which accompanied your invitation materials. This book describes many important details about your country of service, policies, and expectations. Please be sure to read it carefully as you evaluate your commitment to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Also, refer to the *Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook* in your invitation packet for the basic policies and procedures you are expected to adhere to as a Volunteer.

You will also receive the *Family and Friends Resource Guide*, which provides additional information for friends and family members in the United States.

There are frequently asked questions (FAQs) about safety and security on the security section of the website: [www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.safety](http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.safety)

Additionally, to learn more about a country-specific safety and security situation, consult the U.S. Department of State's travel information website: <http://travel.state.gov/travel>. There, you will find a variety of travel and safety-related information geared toward the general public. This will be useful to you prior to entering the Peace Corps, as well as when you make future travel plans.





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