

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# N I G E R



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION  
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



October 2007



# A WELCOME LETTER

The first Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Niger 45 years ago on September 7, 1962, the year after the Peace Corps was created by President John F. Kennedy. Since that time, approximately 3,000 Volunteers have served productively in Niger as teachers, education specialists, agricultural extension agents, natural resource managers, community health agents, and in a variety of specialized positions. With this strong and unbroken record of service, the Peace Corps is well-known and highly respected by the government and people of Niger. The year 2007 marks the 45th anniversary of Peace Corps/Niger's uninterrupted service to the people of Niger; we hope you will be an integral part of future celebrations.

Niger, a predominantly Muslim country, has no history of religious extremism or violence. Its government and people supported the presence of Americans in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, and some 500 American officials, nongovernmental organization (NGO) staff, and missionaries, as well as 120 Peace Corps Volunteers, continue to live and work here in good security. However, being Muslim, Niger is inherently a more conservative society than the U.S. and therefore working here demands certain compromises not common to all Peace Corps assignments.

You were selected for this program because we believe you have the skills to contribute to Niger's development as well as the dedication, flexibility, maturity, and resourcefulness to handle the challenges of living in one of the world's poorest countries.

The Peace Corps will provide you with training, but no amount of training can replicate the experience of living in a Nigérien community. You will need to demonstrate initiative and adaptability in order to be successful. Each Volunteer post is different, as are the skills and interests of each Volunteer, and you will have to develop your own individual work plan.

Your job will be challenging physically, emotionally, and intellectually, but will reward you with exceptional opportunities for personal and professional growth. You will have a great adventure in service, an experience that those who have gone before you have found to be one of the most rewarding of their lives.

Mary Abrams  
Country Director  
Peace Corps/Niger



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Map of Niger

<b>A Welcome Letter</b>	<b>1</b>
-------------------------	----------

<b>Peace Corps/Niger History and Programs</b>	<b>7</b>
---	----------

History of the Peace Corps in Niger	7
History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Niger	7-9

<b>Country Overview: Niger at a Glance</b>	<b>11</b>
--	-----------

History	11
Government	11-12
Economy	12-13
People and Culture	13
Environment	14

<b>Resources for Further Information</b>	<b>17</b>
--	-----------

<b>Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle</b>	<b>25</b>
--	-----------

Communications	25-26
Housing and Site Location	27-28
Living Allowance and Money Management	28-29
Food and Diet	29-30
Transportation	30
Geography and Climate	31
Social Activities	31-32
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior	32-33
Personal Safety	33
Rewards and Frustrations	34-36

<b>Peace Corps Training</b>	<b>39</b>
Overview of Pre-Service Training	39
<i>Technical Training</i>	40
<i>Language Training</i>	40-41
<i>Cross-Cultural Training</i>	41-42
<i>Health Training</i>	42
<i>Safety Training</i>	42
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service	43
<b>Your Health Care and Safety in Niger</b>	<b>45</b>
Health Issues in Niger	45
Helping You Stay Healthy	45-46
Maintaining Your Health	46-47
Women’s Health Information	47-48
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	48-49
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	49-51
Safety and Security—Our Partnership	52-58
<i>Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk</i>	52-53
<i>Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk</i>	53-54
<i>Support from Staff</i>	54-57
<i>What if You Become a Victim of a Violent Crime?</i>	57-58
Security Issues in Niger	59
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime	60
Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in Niger	60-62
<b>Diversity and Cross-Cultural Issues</b>	<b>65</b>
Overview of Diversity in Niger	66
What Might a Volunteer Face?	67
<i>Possible Issues for Female Volunteers</i>	67-68
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color</i>	68
<i>Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers</i>	69
<i>Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian,         or Bisexual Volunteers</i>	69

<i>Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers</i>	69-70
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities</i>	70

<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>73</b>
-----------------------------------	-----------

<b>Welcome Letters From Niger Volunteers</b>	<b>79</b>
--	-----------

<b>Packing List</b>	<b>87</b>
---------------------	-----------

<b>Pre-departure Checklist</b>	<b>95</b>
--------------------------------	-----------

<b>Contacting Peace Corps Headquarters</b>	<b>99</b>
--	-----------



# PEACE CORPS/NIGER HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



## **History of the Peace Corps in Niger**

The Peace Corps entered Niger in 1962 with seven Volunteers teaching English. Programming continued to be centered on education through the 1960s. Over the years, in response to the expressed needs of the government of Niger, the program expanded to include health, agriculture, natural resource management, and, most recently, municipal and community development.

## **History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Niger**

Currently, Volunteers in Niger are in five programs: agriculture, natural resources management, community health, community and youth education, and municipal and community development. Those in the first three programs are stationed in small (200–1,000 population) rural villages, while education and municipal and community development Volunteers are in regional capitals, small towns, and large rural villages. Municipal and community development Volunteers will be stationed in both small and larger communities. A few Volunteers are assigned to work with special projects and local or international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

The Peace Corps works with government agencies and community leaders to place Volunteers from the different sectors in villages located within a 30-mile (50-kilometer) radius of regional towns where government service agencies are located. This clustering permits mutual support and synergy. For example, community health Volunteers might

work to raise awareness of the importance of vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables while agriculture Volunteers demonstrate irrigated gardening and fruit tree propagation. Education Volunteers may work with village-based Volunteers from other sectors to promote girls' education or adult literacy.

The AIDS pandemic strikes across all social strata in many Peace Corps countries. The loss of teachers has crippled education systems, while illness and disability drains family income and forces governments and donors to redirect limited resources from other priorities. The fear and uncertainty AIDS causes has led to increased domestic violence and stigmatizing of people living with HIV/AIDS, isolating them from friends and family and cutting them off from economic opportunities. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will confront these issues on a very personal level. It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, and violence can have on Volunteers. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might die during your service. Because of the AIDS pandemic, some Volunteers will be regularly meeting with HIV-positive people and working with training staff, office staff, and host family members living with AIDS. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, malaria and malnutrition, motor vehicle accidents and other unintentional injuries, domestic violence and corporal punishment are problems a Volunteer may confront. You will need to anticipate these situations and utilize supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength so that you can continue to be of service to your community.

Most Volunteers in Niger stay at their initial sites for the duration of their two-year assignment. Some extend their stay in Niger for a third year to work in a variety of ways, including as Volunteer leaders working with international organizations and NGOs, or as a continuation of their first two years of service.

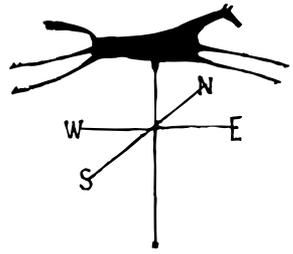
There are currently about 120 Volunteers in Niger—the number varies throughout the year as new groups arrive and those completing their service depart. About 60 percent are female. Almost all are under 40 years of age; most are recent college graduates, ages 22 to 25.

The Peace Corps office in Niamey includes administrative and program offices; a medical unit with a five-bed infirmary; a warehouse; a motor pool; and an information resource center, where Volunteers can gather information for projects, write reports, and hold planning meetings.

There is a Volunteer transit house in Niamey for the use of Volunteers who are visiting the capital, and there are Peace Corps offices and transit houses in several regional towns.



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: NIGER AT A GLANCE



## History

People have lived in Niger since prehistoric times, when the Sahara was much wetter and supported abundant wildlife. Hunter-gatherer societies left some magnificent rock art to record their presence in the northern part of the country. Islam came to Niger across the Sahara in the 12th century and gradually spread throughout the country. There were several Muslim kingdoms that spread into what are now Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali.

In the late 19th century, the French extended their colonial rule from the Atlantic eastward through Chad, and Niger became part of French West Africa. It gained its independence in 1960.

## Government

At independence, Niger became a constitutional democracy, with an elected president and a National Assembly. This government was overthrown in 1974 and Niger was governed by a military dictatorship until 1999. The 1990s were a period of a great political instability.

A 1996 military coup led to the departure of many international aid agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development. In late 1999, however, democratic elections were held, and the new government of President Mamadou Tandja brought renewed stability. President Tandja was reelected in 2004, and elections were also held for the newly created local government bodies. With the restoration

of democracy, many international donors returned, and there has been renewed economic growth. The next presidential elections are scheduled for 2009.

## **Economy**

Niger's harsh climate, geographic isolation, lack of natural resources, environmental degradation, and rapid population growth (3.6 percent annually) make it one of the world's poorest countries, ranking 177 out of 177 on the 2005 United Nation's Human Development Index. The per capita GDP in 2004 was \$228. All of Niger's economic and social indicators are grim. The following indicators are from a United Nations Development Program report released in 2006:

- Of 1,000 children born, 259 die before their fifth birthday.
- Thirty-nine percent of school-age children attend primary school.
- Twenty-seven percent of the population over age 15 is literate.
- Forty-six percent of households have access to potable drinking water.
- Forty percent of children under five are below normal weight.

The majority of the people you work with will be concerned primarily with meeting basic needs that are taken for granted in much of the rest of the world.

Niger has few natural resources. There are large uranium deposits near Arlit in the northern part of the country, and in the 1970s, a worldwide uranium boom ushered in a brief period of strong economic growth and infrastructure improvements. In 1980, however, with the decline of the

nuclear power industry, the uranium market collapsed and Niger entered a period of rapid economic deterioration, aggravated by recurrent droughts and political instability. A recent World Bank study found the average Nigérien worse off today than three decades ago.

Millet, a type of grain, is the staple food in most of the country. To be eaten, it must be pounded into flour, which is then cooked and eaten with a sauce of vegetables or occasionally meat. Sorghum, which is also grown, is prepared similarly. Along the Niger River, which runs through the southwestern part of the country, rice and other irrigated crops are common, and rice is a common food in urban areas.

## **People and Culture**

The ethnic groups represented in Niger are Hausa (56 percent), Zarma (22 percent), Fulani (8.5 percent), Tuareg (8 percent), and several others. More than 90 percent of the population is Muslim. Adherents of Islam in Niger tend to be more moderate and tolerant than the fundamentalists who often make headlines in the Western media, and there has been no terrorist activity by such groups in Niger. Indigenous belief systems and Christianity also have numerous practitioners.

French is the official language. It is widely spoken in urban areas and commonly used in government offices, international and nongovernmental organizations, and the media. However, learning one or more of the national languages (Hausa, Zarma, Fulfulde, Tamashek, and others—each tending to predominate in different regions) is a must for living and working in rural areas and becoming integrated into the community.

## Environment

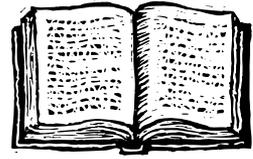
Niger is a large country—almost twice the size of Texas—with a very hot and dry climate. The northern two-thirds of Niger lie within the Sahara Desert, and most of its 12 million people live in the semi-arid zone across the southern third of the country known as the Sahel. About 80 percent are subsistence farmers and herders who use the same production techniques that have been practiced for hundreds of years. The rest of the population lives in Niamey (the capital, a city of about 1 million people) and a few towns, such as Maradi, Zinder, Agadez, Tahoua, Dosso, and Diffa.

Increasing population pressure on the limited amount of arable land and a prolonged dry cycle over the past four decades have resulted in severe loss of vegetative cover (grasses, shrubs, and trees) in most areas and an accompanying decline in soil fertility. Desertification, the process of land degradation associated with the gradual southward creep of the Sahara, has affected a substantial area in Niger. Despite extensive development efforts and some limited successes (such as those highlighted in the February 11, 2007, *New York Times* article, “In Niger, Trees and Crops Turn Back the Desert,” by Lydia Polgreen), Niger continues to suffer from periodic droughts and famines and is barely self-sufficient in food production even in relatively good years.

## NOTES



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Niger and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it.

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own experiences, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and we hope you will keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

## **General Information About Niger**

### **[www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com)**

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Niamey to how to convert from the dollar to the CFA franc. Just click on Niger and go from there.

### **[www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/africa/niger](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/africa/niger)**

Visit this site to learn all you need to know about Niger from a traveler's perspective.

### **[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)**

The U.S. State Department's website issues background notes periodically on the social and political history of countries around the world.

**[www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm](http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm)**

This site includes links to all the official sites for governments worldwide. Scroll down to Niger.

**[www.geography.about.com](http://www.geography.about.com)**

This online atlas includes maps and geographical information. Search for Niger to find information and links to other sites, such as the Library of Congress, that contain comprehensive historical, social, and political background.

**[www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp)**

This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states.

**[www.worldinformation.com](http://www.worldinformation.com)**

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

## **Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

**[www.rpcv.org](http://www.rpcv.org)**

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the “friends of” groups for most countries of service, made up of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups who frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities.

**[www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org)**

The site of the organization Friends of Niger, which includes many returned Peace Corps/Niger Volunteers as well as other people who have served in or visited Niger and want to contribute to its development.

**<http://www.rpcvwebring.org>**

This site is known as the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Web Ring. Browse the Web ring and see what returned Volunteers are saying about their service.

**[www.peacecorpsonline.org](http://www.peacecorpsonline.org)**

An independent news forum for returned Volunteers

**[www.peacecorpswriters.org](http://www.peacecorpswriters.org)**

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

## **Online Articles/Current News Sites About Niger**

**[www.joelmayer.com/niger/](http://www.joelmayer.com/niger/)**

A site with links to a variety of information about Niger, hosted by a returned Peace Corps Volunteer

**[www.allafrica.com/niger/](http://www.allafrica.com/niger/)**

AllAfrica Global Media is a multi-media content service provider, systems technology developer and the one of the largest electronic distributors of African news and information. worldwide.

**[www.tamtaminfo.com](http://www.tamtaminfo.com)**

Brief news stories on Niger, sometimes confused with stories on the state of Niger in neighboring Nigeria (in French)

**[http://www.woyaa.com/English/Africa\\_\\_Caribbean\\_Islands\\_/Africa/Western\\_Africa/Niger/index.html](http://www.woyaa.com/English/Africa__Caribbean_Islands_/Africa/Western_Africa/Niger/index.html)**

Provides links to a number of interesting sites on Niger (in English and French)

**<http://www.africaaction.org/index.php>**

Website for the advocacy group Africa Action

## **International Development Sites About Niger**

**<http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index.asp?lang=en&ISO3=NER>**

Information on food and agriculture in Niger (in French)

**[www.unicef.org/programme](http://www.unicef.org/programme)**

Information about UNICEF's work in Niger

**[www.africare.org/about/where-we-work/niger/](http://www.africare.org/about/where-we-work/niger/)**

Africare's work in Niger

**[http://www.crs.org/our\\_work/where\\_we\\_work/overseas/africa/niger/index.cfm](http://www.crs.org/our_work/where_we_work/overseas/africa/niger/index.cfm)**

Catholic Relief Services' page on Niger

## **Recommended Books**

1. Beckwith, Carol, and Marion Van Offelen. *Nomads of Niger*. Abradale Press, 1993. (Photographs)
2. Chilson, Peter. *Riding the Demon: On the Road in West Africa*. Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1999. Account of a former Volunteer's experiences with a bush-taxi driver.
3. Decalo, Samuel. *Historical Dictionary of Niger*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1979. Description of the people and historical events through 1976; includes a bibliography.
4. De Gramont, Sanche. *Strong Brown God: The Story of the Niger River*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991. Epic history of early European explorers of the Niger River written by a Pulitzer Prize winner.

5. Diatta, Haoua. *Shadow of Africa: Life of an African Ambassador's Wife*. 2000. Written by the wife of the Nigérien ambassador to the United States, this book gives a rare insight into the history, culture, and international politics of Africa and Niger.
6. Stoller, Paul. *Gallery Bundu*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

### **Books About the History of the Peace Corps**

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960's*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.

### **Books on the Volunteer Experience**

1. Banerjee, Dillon. *So You Want to Join the Peace Corps: What to Know Before You Go*. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 2000.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
4. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.

5. Herrera, Susana. *Mango Elephants in the Sun: How Life in an African Village Let Me Be in My Skin*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999
6. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.
7. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
8. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

## NOTES



# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



## **Communications**

### ***Mail***

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. If you expect U.S. standards for mail service, you will be in for some frustration.

Mail service in Niger is relatively good compared with that in other African countries. Letters and packages mailed from the United States by air (or from Niger to America) usually take two to six weeks to arrive. Packages mailed by surface typically take six months or more, so this method is not recommended. Note that incoming packages are subject to customs duties (generally small). Some mail may simply not arrive (fortunately, this is not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen).

Despite the delays, we strongly encourage you to write to your family regularly and to number your letters. Family members typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so it is a good idea to advise them that mail is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly. You might also suggest that family and friends number their letters for tracking purposes and write “Airmail” and “Par Avion” on the envelopes. You should bring a supply of U.S. stamps for sending mail to the United States via travelers. DHL service is available in Niger, and though it is very expensive, this is the best way to mail valuable or time-sensitive items such as airplane tickets.

Your mailing address in Niger will be:

Name of Trainee/Volunteer  
Corps de la Paix  
B.P. 10537  
Niamey, Niger

### ***Telephones***

Telephone service in Niger is not always reliable and landlines are not readily accessible. Volunteers do not have telephones in their homes, whether they live in small villages or large towns. Most large towns have commercial phone centers that offer phone and fax services, but outgoing calls can be expensive. Some Volunteers have access to a phone at their workplace, however it is not appropriate to make long distance calls from these phones. Cellphone service is becoming increasingly available throughout the country; many Volunteer villages have cellphone coverage although often it is often just sufficient to provide SMS capabilities. Like landlines, outgoing cell phone calls can be expensive and many Volunteers arrange times to receive calls from home. You, your relatives and friends should be prepared for a significant change in the regularity, reliability, and speed of communication you currently enjoy.

Volunteers are not permitted to use the telephones at the Peace Corps office to call family or friends unless the call pertains to an emergency and is approved in advance by the country director.

### ***Computers, Internet, and E-mail Access***

There are increasing numbers of private telecenters and Internet cafes in larger towns. These generally work well for e-mail, but Internet access is both slow and expensive. Volunteers can access e-mail at the Peace Corps office in Niamey and at regional Peace Corps offices, but not at the training center.

## Housing and Site Location

Most agriculture, environment, and community health Volunteers live in villages of 200 to 1,000 people within a few miles of other Volunteers and roads served by public transportation. You may be anywhere from 60 to 750 miles (100 to 1,200 kilometers) from Niamey. You are likely to be one of only a handful of people—perhaps the only person—in the village with anything beyond the equivalent of a sixth-grade education. Many sites have a rural health clinic or a primary school, but some do not. Housing is provided by each community and consists of a traditional one- or two-room house of adobe brick with an adobe or thatch roof. Most Volunteer houses have a small yard surrounded by an adobe or thatch enclosure.

For most rural Volunteers, there will be no running water or electricity. You will obtain your water from a well and rely on a kerosene lamp or candles for light in the evening. Most of the year, you will sleep outside, with only a mosquito net, which the Peace Corps provides, between you and the stars. You will become adept at using a squat latrine and taking a bucket bath—pouring water over yourself from a bucket. Although it may sound like a two-year camping trip (and in some ways it is), your site will become your home. With time, you will find ways to make yourself comfortable, and soon enough, you will forget how strange some of these conditions once seemed.

Education and municipal and community development Volunteers are posted in small towns of 10,000 to 100,000 people, located near clusters of rural-based Volunteers. Housing consists of a small mud brick or cement house or an apartment provided by the government of Niger. The towns have the education infrastructure and partners you will need in your assignment. Some of the towns have Peace Corps regional offices, headed by a Volunteer regional

representative. There may also be Volunteers working with international and nongovernmental organizations such as UNICEF and CARE. Most of these sites are on the main road that crosses the country from east to west.

Municipal and community development Volunteers will be posted in a range of community sizes and depending on their community will either live more like Education or rural Volunteers.

Although running water and electricity are available in most towns, there may be limited hours of electricity use and frequent power failures.

### **Living Allowance and Money Management**

As a Volunteer in Niger, you will receive four types of allowances. The first is a living allowance to cover your basic living expenses. This allowance is reviewed at least once a year through a survey of Volunteer expenses to ensure that it is adequate. The living allowance is paid in local currency (CFA francs) and is intended to cover the cost of food, utilities, household supplies, clothing, recreation and entertainment, transportation, reading materials, and other incidentals. Volunteers typically find that this allowance is more than adequate for maintaining their health and well-being, and you are discouraged from supplementing the allowance with money from home. You will find that you receive more remuneration than your Nigérien counterpart or supervisor; if you serve in a smaller village, you may be the only person with a regular income.

You will also receive a vacation allowance of \$24 per month, paid quarterly in CFA francs along with your living allowance. After you are sworn in as a Volunteer, you will receive a one-time settling-in allowance to purchase items you need to set

up your house, such as a bed, pots, and dishes. The Peace Corps will supply you with a tabletop gas stove for cooking, a mosquito net, a water filter, a basic medical kit, and a bicycle and helmet.

If the Peace Corps requires you to travel, you will also be given additional money for transportation and meals. This amount is established by the administrative officer based on the actual cost of transportation and lodging.

Although most Volunteers find they can live comfortably in Niger with these four allowances, many Volunteers bring money (in U.S. traveler's checks) or credit cards for out-of-country travel. You are strongly discouraged from supplementing your income with money from home. The living allowance is adequate, and it is important for Peace Corps Volunteers to live at the economic level of their neighbors and colleagues.

Credit cards are not accepted in Niger except in one or two banks for cash advances. For safekeeping, you can store money, passports, and other valuables in the Peace Corps office safe in Niamey.

## **Food and Diet**

Although the local diet is heavy on starches (millet, sorghum, and rice), Volunteers use creativity, home gardens, and provisions from stores in larger towns to maintain an adequately diverse diet. The limited supply of fresh fruit and vegetables and their extreme seasonality make it difficult to maintain a strict vegetarian diet. During the hot season, it is often difficult to find fresh vegetables in villages. Nonetheless, there are Volunteers who are strict vegetarians and who remain healthy by making an extra effort to ensure adequate nutrition. Others become meat eaters during their service in

Niger. Meat is sometimes difficult to find in villages, but it is always available in larger towns. Bread is available in towns and larger villages, and there are small stores where you can usually find imported foods, such as pasta, tuna, cornflakes, and so on.

## **Transportation**

The villages in which rural-based Volunteers live are typically located within nine or so miles (15 kilometers) of a road serviced by public transportation. Volunteers must walk or bike from their village to wherever there is regular road traffic. Depending on the region, the available vehicle (for which the generic term is bush taxi) might be anything from a station wagon to a Land Rover to a minibus, varying in age from fairly old to older than you are. Vehicles are usually crowded and uncomfortable and are subject to frequent breakdowns. On the two major highways (east-west and north-south), large buses provide more regular and somewhat more comfortable service. Volunteers are also able to hitch rides with Peace Corps staff members when they visit Volunteers, and with vehicles operated by various foreign aid projects. There are also monthly shuttles to and from the regional transit houses by Peace Corps vehicles. In a few larger towns, taxis are available for local transportation.

If conditions allow, Volunteers in areas where bicycles are useful are issued these and trained in their maintenance. They are also issued helmets, which are required for riding at all times. Volunteers often use bicycles for transportation from their villages to regional transit houses or to visit neighboring Volunteers. However, a good proportion of Volunteers live in villages where the sandy soils make walking more practical than bicycling.

## **Geography and Climate**

Except for a mountainous area in the northern Sahara, Niger is mostly flat, with some low hills, ridges, and rainy-season riverbeds. The Niger is the only major river in the country. The climate is harsh, ranging from extremely hot (around 120 degrees Fahrenheit and rarely below 90 degrees) in April and May to dry and cool between November and February when the nights are cool enough (as low as 40 degrees in northern areas) to require a blanket and the days cool enough to require warmer clothes. Winds off the Sahara sometimes make the air very dusty. The rainy season, from June through late September, is characterized by periods of increasing heat and humidity punctuated by violent, brief downpours. Rain is very unlikely at other times of the year.

## **Social Activities**

Nigériens are very social people; they are warm and inviting to an extent that is rare in the U.S. and many other Western countries. This social tendency is so strong that individuals who are not social may be viewed as somewhat odd. Hanging out, talking, and laughing are desirable and will become an integral part of your life in Niger. Even if you do not talk a lot, hanging out quietly with Nigériens is viewed as being social. Privacy and solitude, on the other hand, are viewed as undesirable by most Nigériens. Your friends and neighbors will attempt to ensure that you are never alone (except, of course, when going to the latrine, taking a bath, getting dressed, etc.). In many cases, this is because they have never encountered someone of such a different background—they are only trying to be good hosts and friends. But if you establish your personal limits early on, you will find that with time and patience you and your neighbors will reach a comfortable understanding and you will grow to love the social warmth of Nigériens.

However within this very social attitude is a distinct difference between how men and women interact. Often women and men spend time isolated from each other and public displays of affection between men and women are considered very inappropriate.

### **Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior**

Being well dressed with clean clothes is important in Niger. Though their country is hot, dusty, and poor, Nigériens take a lot of pride in their personal appearance. It can be insulting, even to people you know well, to wear clothing that is torn, dirty, or too revealing in any setting other than your house or while performing hard physical labor. This is not to imply that you need dress clothes for work, but you will be expected to be neat and clean. Collared shirts and casual slacks or jeans for men, and blouses and below-the-knee skirts or dresses for women, are acceptable. (Pants for women are acceptable only in some areas and should never be tight.) Lightweight cotton or other fabrics made for the tropics are best. Tank or sleeveless tops, shorts, and tight-fitting clothes (e.g., items made of Lycra and tight jeans) are not acceptable for men or women. You can have appropriate, inexpensive, and beautiful clothing made by local tailors.

Although officially secular, Niger is an Islamic country, and most people—especially in the countryside—are devout and conservative in dress and behavior. Alcohol is available in larger towns, but public drinking and boisterous behavior are considered inappropriate. Drugs are illegal and socially taboo, as well as strictly prohibited by Peace Corps regulations. Alcohol use is considered inappropriate in this strict Muslim culture because when you drink your lucidity is reduced and the alcohol affects your behavior. In a culture that values open social interaction, drugs that affect how you interact (including alcohol) are viewed very negatively.

Because of the negative connotation of alcohol consumption in Nigérien society, you will find that you have to modify your behavior. You will be staying with Nigérien host families particularly during training and you will need to conduct yourself with respect for Nigérien cultural sensitivities. Alcohol is not allowed on the training site and you are not allowed to have it or consume it at your host family homes.

## **Personal Safety**

Information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is outlined in the Health Care and Safety section, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well off 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, although most Niger Volunteers complete their two years of service without personal security incidents. Although the “differentness” of being in Niger makes such personal safety issues seem more prominent, it is important to remember that Volunteers in Niger report feeling very safe in their homes which is often not the case for how students feel on even moderate size campuses. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Niger. However, you are expected to take significant responsibility, use common sense, and respect Nigérien social norms for your own safety and well-being.

## Rewards and Frustrations

You would be correct in concluding, after reading this book, that serving as a Volunteer in Niger is an extraordinarily assignment—both demanding and rewarding. Living in a mud hut in an isolated village with no electricity or running water, learning new languages, functioning in a culture far different from your own, being face-to-face with grinding poverty, lacking a structured work environment—these are just a few of the challenges you will face. Work will proceed at an excruciatingly slow pace from the Western perspective, and there will be times when you will wonder if change is taking place at all.

Impatience and overexcitement due to frustration are viewed by Nigériens as personality weaknesses and will rarely, if ever, produce a favorable result. Rather than losing your cool, you are better off making fun of the situation with a couple of wry comments or a proverb in a local language. Nigériens rely heavily on their sense of humor in the face of extreme difficulties.

Despite these frustrations and bouts of doubt, with patience and perseverance you will ultimately make a significant contribution to your assigned community in Niger. Moreover, you will have considerable flexibility and the opportunity to exercise your initiative and creativity. Along the way, you will learn a great deal—about Nigériens, about living in a developing country, about poverty, about who you are, and about what it means to be an American in the global context. You will make close friends and be amazed by their hospitality and ability to cope with extreme adversity. When your assignment is over, you will join 3,000 returned Volunteers from Niger who view their service here as one of the most interesting, formative, and worthwhile periods in their lives. And your service will continue for the rest of your life as you share what you have learned with others.

The Peace Corps, particularly in Niger, is not for everyone. The level of motivation and commitment required to successfully serve here exceeds that needed in most other work environments. If you are up to the challenge, we look forward to working with you.

***How will living and working in communities affected by HIV/AIDS affect me?***

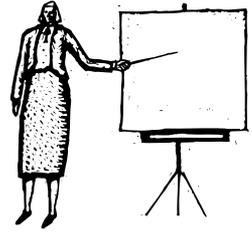
The AIDS pandemic strikes across all social strata in many Peace Corps countries. The loss of teachers has crippled education systems, while illness and disability drains family income and forces governments and donors to redirect limited resources from other priorities. The fear and uncertainty AIDS causes has led to increased domestic violence and stigmatizing of people living with HIV/AIDS, isolating them from friends and family and cutting them off from economic opportunities. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will confront these issues on a very personal level. It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, and violence can have on Volunteers. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might die during your service. Because of the AIDS pandemic, some Volunteers will be regularly meeting with HIV-positive people and working with training staff, office staff, and host family members living with AIDS. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, malaria and malnutrition, motor vehicle accidents and other unintentional injuries, domestic violence and corporal punishment are problems a Volunteer will have to confront in a more immediate way than is usual in the U.S. You will need to anticipate these situations and use supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength so you can continue to be of service to your community.

Fortunately, in Niger, unlike many other African countries, AIDS has not yet reached pandemic proportions, and other killer diseases, notably malaria, are much more common. The official rate of HIV prevalence is about 2 percent, and victims are mostly concentrated in larger cities.

## NOTES



# PEACE CORPS TRAINING



## Overview of Pre-Service Training

An intensive eight- to nine-week pre-service training program at the Peace Corps training center in Hamdallaye (about 18 miles, or 30 kilometers, northeast of Niamey) will prepare you and approximately 35 other Volunteers for your service in Niger. The amount you need to learn is vast and you should think of pre-service training as the initial step in a continuing process of learning that will last for your entire stay in Niger.

Pre-service training will include French or one of the national languages (depending on where you are assigned), cross-cultural adaptation, guidelines for personal health and hygiene, development issues, safety and security issues, community entry skills, nonformal education techniques, and a few technical skills related to your particular sector. In addition to language classes, there will be hands-on activities, field trips, readings, seminars, and self-directed learning. For most of the training, you will live in the village of Hamdallaye with a Nigérien family who will speak the local language you are learning. You will also spend some time in the field with experienced Volunteers to observe and learn development skills and coping strategies.

During training, you will need to reevaluate your commitment to Peace Corps service in Niger. Participating in training is not a guarantee of becoming a Volunteer. While we fully expect you to be successful, there are definite goals and competencies you must attain before you can be sworn in as a Volunteer.

### ***Technical Training***

Technical training will prepare you to work in Niger by building on the skills you already have and by helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to Niger's needs. The Peace Corps staff, Nigérien experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Niger and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and meet with the Nigérien agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. The technical training element of pre-service training is largely introductory. You will learn more technical skills at in-service training scheduled after you have been in your post for about three months and have a better understanding of your own community's needs.

### ***Language Training***

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are the key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is the heart of the training program, and you must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Experienced Nigérien language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people.

Each Volunteer needs to become functional in a national language (Hausa or Zarma). French is also important, especially for education, community development, health

and municipal development Volunteers and for Volunteers who want to move into leadership positions and assignments with international and nongovernmental organizations. Keep in mind that many generations of Niger Volunteers have managed to become proficient in these languages and that you, too, are likely to do so. Self-study materials and ongoing tutoring will be available throughout your service.

You are encouraged to review or begin to study French as soon as possible after accepting your invitation. Your local library or university language department should be able to suggest some resources. Peace Corps/Niger, in conjunction with Peace Corps/ Washington, has developed a Zarma and Hausa learning tutorial that is available online at [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov) and can be accessed after you have accepted your invitation to serve -- you are encouraged to practice both languages. Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. Interested trainees are offered two nights per week of optional language tutoring. Your goal is to achieve basic social communication skills so you can practice and develop language skills further on your own once you reach your site.

### ***Cross-Cultural Training***

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Nigérien host family. This is the best way to learn about Nigériens' daily lives, diet, customs, and attitudes. Host families also assist in language learning and in introducing trainees to community activities. The Peace Corps takes great care in selecting the families who will host you. They understand what you will be trying to accomplish and are willing to assist you. Keep in mind that your ways are as different to them as theirs are to you. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, non-formal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

### ***Health Training***

Niger's dry and dusty environment makes it difficult to maintain proper personal hygiene and health. Thus, one has to make an extra effort to remain healthy. In addition, the medical resources available in Niger are not comparable to those in the West or even in some neighboring African countries. Health can also be affected by the limited availability of fruits and vegetables in certain seasons and relative isolation from your peers.

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. You will be expected to practice preventive healthcare and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in Niger. Nutrition, mental health, safety and security, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also covered.

### ***Safety Training***

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. The importance of appropriate social behavior is a critical part of your risk management. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

## **Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service**

In its commitment to quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to increase their technical, language, and cross-cultural skills. During your service, there are usually four training events. The titles and objectives are as follows:

- *In-service training*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences after having served for three months at their post.
- *Regional language training*: Helps Volunteers improve their language skills by focusing on regional dialects and job-related vocabulary.
- *Midservice conference*: Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- *Close-of-service conference*: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these training events are adapted to Niger-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is the integrated and interrelated training events, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service. These training opportunities are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the Peace Corps staff and Volunteers.



# YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN NIGER



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. Peace Corps/Niger maintains a clinic with two full-time medical officers, who take care of Volunteers' primary healthcare needs. Additional medical services, such as radiology and dentistry, are also available in Niger at local clinics. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to a country in the Africa region where more services are available or to the United States.

## **Health Issues in Niger**

With careful adherence to the preventive measures you will be taught during pre-service training, it is possible to remain healthy throughout your service in Niger. However, sickness is more common, and standards of hygiene and food handling are lower, than in the United States. Although there is a great deal you can do to minimize risks, Volunteers do suffer gastrointestinal disorders, upper respiratory infections, and other medical problems from time to time.

## **Helping You Stay Healthy**

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications (including malaria prophylaxis), and information to stay healthy. Your responsibility will be to use these resources to best protect yourself. Upon your arrival in Niger, you will receive a medical handbook and at the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first-aid needs.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical office. However, during this time, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, Peace Corps does not provide these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officers in Niger will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be cared for in Niger, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

## **Maintaining Your Health**

As a Volunteer, you must accept responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The old adage “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not well developed. The most important of your responsibilities in Niger is to take preventive measures against disease.

Malaria, which is endemic in Niger, requires strict adherence to the prophylactic regime of mefloquine or doxycycline as well as the use of barrier methods such as mosquito nets and insect repellent to prevent mosquito bites. Failure to adhere strictly to the recommended malaria prophylaxis may result in your being administratively separated from Peace Corps.

Overexposure to the sun is also a risk, so it is important to

wear sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses. Due to the relatively unsanitary conditions, you will need to treat all minor wounds promptly to prevent them from becoming infected.

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include gastrointestinal disorders such as food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, and typhoid. Your medical officers will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Niger during pre-service training.

Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, exist in Niger just as they do in the United States therefore you are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other STDs. If you choose to be sexually active, using a condom every time you have sex will reduce your risk. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV or other STDs. You will receive more information from the medical officers about this important issue.

It is critical to your health to promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and you must immediately inform the medical officers of significant illnesses and injuries.

### **Women's Health Information**

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. The medical officers can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer.

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but also have programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care for a pregnant Volunteer. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that Peace Corps medical and programmatic standards for continued service can be met during pregnancy.

Feminine hygiene products can be purchased in local markets, but they are expensive. The Peace Corps medical office in Niger supplies Volunteers with a limited selection of feminine hygiene products. You should bring a three-month supply of any products you will require during training. If you require a specific product for the rest of your stay, please bring a two-year supply with you or arrange to have supplies sent from home.

## **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

The Peace Corps medical office provides Volunteers with a medical kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office or regional transit houses.

### ***Medical Kit Contents***

Ace bandages

Acetaminophen 325 mg (Tylenol)

Adhesive tape

*American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*

Antacid tablets (Tums)

Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)

Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)

Band-Aids  
Butterfly closures  
Cepacol lozenges  
Chlorine dropper bottle  
Clomtimazole 1% antifungal cream  
Condoms  
Cough lozenges  
Dental floss  
DiGel tablets  
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)  
Hydrocortisone cream 1%  
Ibuprofen 400 mg  
Insect repellent  
Lip balm  
Malaria kit  
Stool sample kit  
Oral rehydration salts  
Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)  
Pseudoephedrine HCL (Sudafed)  
Scissors  
Sterile gauze pads  
Tetrahydrozaline eyedrops (Visine)  
Tweezers  
White petroleum jelly  
Zinc oxide

### **Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist**

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, you should contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and take it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, both at your pre-departure orientation and after you arrive in Niger. You will be given malaria prophylaxis tablets to take prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, we will order refills during your service (i.e., after you have sworn in following pre-service training) as long as these medications are documented in your overseas health records. Some of your medications could be substituted at the discretion of the medical officer.

While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or non-prescription medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements. You will be given multivitamin and calcium tablets to supplement your diet.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace it, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. We discourage you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce the risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. Niger does not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. Moreover, Niger has frequent dust storms that can pose problems for contact lens wearers. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions, or replace or repair sunglasses, unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in healthcare plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary healthcare from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service healthcare benefits described in the Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook*. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or preexisting conditions might prevent you from reenrolling in your current plan when you return home.

## **Safety and Security—Our Partnership**

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property thefts and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems. In addition, more than 85 percent of Volunteers surveyed in the 2006 Peace Corps Volunteer survey say they would join the Peace Corps again.

The Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you. This *Welcome Book* contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety. All of these sections include important safety and security information.

The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest and most secure way possible, because working to maximize the safety and security of Volunteers is our highest priority. Not only do we provide you with training and tools to prepare for the unexpected, but we teach you to identify and manage the risks you may encounter.

### ***Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk***

*There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control.*

Based on information gathered from incident reports worldwide in 2006, the following factors stand out as risk characteristics for assaults. Assaults consist of personal crimes committed against Volunteers, and do not include property crimes (such as vandalism or theft).

- Location: Most crimes occurred when Volunteers were in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings).
- Time of day: Assaults usually took place on the weekend during the evening between 5:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m.— with most assaults occurring around 11:00 p.m.
- Absence of others: Assaults usually occurred when the Volunteer was unaccompanied. In 73 percent of the sexual assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied and in 48 percent of physical assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: Fourteen (14) percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers. Twenty-six (26) percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by assailants.

### ***Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk***

Before and during service, your training will address these areas of concern so that you can reduce the risks you face. For example, here are some strategies Volunteers employ:

#### Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft:

- Know the environment and choose safe routes/times for travel
- Avoid high-crime areas per Peace Corps guidance
- Know the vocabulary to get help in an emergency
- Carry valuables in different pockets/places
- Carry a “dummy” wallet as a decoy

#### Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of burglary:

- Live with a local family or on a family compound
- Put strong locks on doors and keep valuables in a lock box or trunk

- Leave irreplaceable objects at home in the U.S.
- Follow Peace Corps guidelines on maintaining home security

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of assault:

- Make local friends
- Make sure your appearance is respectful of local customs; don't draw negative attention to yourself by wearing inappropriate clothing
- Get to know local officials, police, and neighbors
- Travel with someone whenever possible
- Avoid known high crime areas
- Limit alcohol consumption

***Support from Staff***

In March 2003, the Peace Corps created the Office of Safety and Security with its mission to “foster improved communication, coordination, oversight, and accountability of all Peace Corps’ safety and security efforts.” The new office is led by an Associate Director for Safety and Security who reports to the Peace Corps Director and includes the following divisions: Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security; Information and Personnel Security; Emergency Preparedness, Plans, Training and Exercise; and Crime Statistics and Analysis.

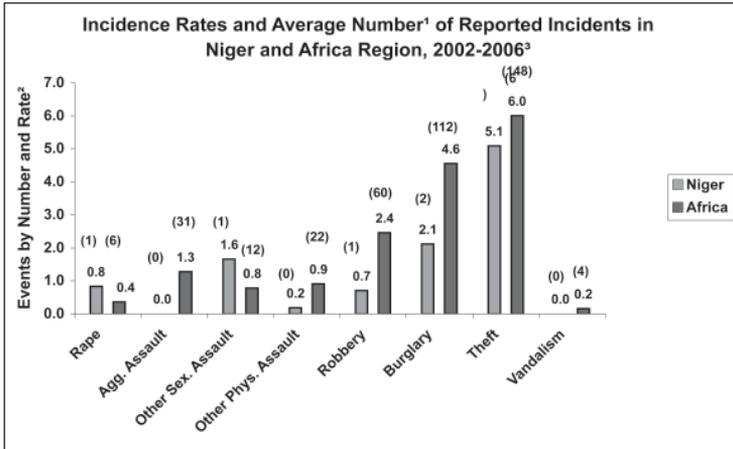
The major responsibilities of the Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security Division are to coordinate the office’s overseas operations and direct the Peace Corps’ safety and security officers who are located in various regions around the world that have Peace Corps programs. The safety and security officers conduct security assessments; review safety trainings; train trainers and managers; train Volunteer safety wardens, local guards, and staff; develop security incident response procedures; and provide crisis management support.

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure that the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff provides support by reassessing the Volunteer's work site and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Niger as compared to all other Africa region programs as a whole, from 2002–2006. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

To fully appreciate the collected data below, an explanation of the graph is provided as follows:

The incidence rate for each type of crime is the number of crime events relative to the Volunteer/trainee population. It is expressed on the chart as a ratio of crime to Volunteer and trainee years (or V/T years, which is a measure of 12 full months of V/T service) to allow for a statistically valid way



<sup>1</sup>The average numbers of incidents are in parenthesis and equal the average reported assaults for each year between 2002–2006.

<sup>2</sup>Incident rates equal the number of assaults per 100 Volunteers and trainees per year (V/T years). Since most sexual assaults occur against females, only female V/Ts are calculated in rapes and minor sexual assaults. Numbers of incidents are approximate due to rounding.

<sup>3</sup>Data collection for Niger began as of 2002; due to the small number of V/T years, incidence rates should be interpreted with caution.

Sexual Assaults are termed Other Sexual Assault and Other Physical Assault per CIRF definitions as of the year 2006. Prior to CIRF and prior to 2006, Sexual Assaults were termed Minor Sexual Assault Assault and Minor Physical Assault per ANSS definitions.

Source data on incidents are drawn from Assault Notification Surveillance System (ANSS), Epidemiologic Surveillance System (ESS), and Crime Incident Reporting Form (CIRF); the information is accurate as of 07/16/07.

to compare crime data across countries. An “incident” is a specific offense, per Peace Corps’ classification of offenses, and may involve one or more Volunteer/trainee victims. For example, if two Volunteers are robbed at the same time and place, this is classified as one robbery incident.

The chart is separated into eight crime categories. These include vandalism (malicious defacement or damage of property); theft (taking without force or illegal entry); burglary (forcible entry of a residence); robbery (taking

something by force); other physical assault (attacking without a weapon with minor injuries); other sexual assault (fondling, groping, etc.); aggravated assault (attacking with a weapon, and/or without a weapon when serious injury results); and rape (sexual intercourse without consent).

When anticipating Peace Corps Volunteer service, you should review all of the safety and security information provided to you, including the strategies to reduce risk. Throughout your training and Volunteer service, you will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas including safety and security. Once in-country, use the tools and information shared with you to remain as safe and secure as possible.

### ***What if you become a victim of a violent crime?***

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of violent crimes. The Peace Corps will give you information and training in how to be safe. But, just as in the U.S., crime happens, and Volunteers can become victims. When this happens, the investigative team of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) is charged with helping pursue prosecution of those who perpetrate a violent crime against a Volunteer. If you become a victim of a violent crime, the decision to prosecute or not to prosecute is entirely yours, and one of the tasks of the OIG is to make sure that you are fully informed of your options and help you through the process and procedures involved in going forward with prosecution should you wish to do so. If you decide to prosecute, we are here to assist you in every way we can.

Crimes that occur overseas, of course, are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities in local courts. Our role is to coordinate the investigation and evidence collection with the regional security officers (RSOs) at the U.S. embassy,

local police, and local prosecutors and others to ensure that your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country. OIG investigative staff has extensive experience in criminal investigation, in working sensitively with victims, and as advocates for victims. We also, may, in certain limited circumstances, arrange for the retention of a local lawyer to assist the local public prosecutor in making the case against the individual who perpetrated the violent crime.

If you do become a victim of a violent crime, first, make sure you are in a safe place and with people you trust and second, contact the country director or the Peace Corps medical officer or the safety and security coordinator. Immediate reporting is important to the preservation of evidence and the chances of apprehending the suspect. Country directors, medical officers, and safety and security coordinator are required to report all violent crimes to the Inspector General and the RSO. This information is protected from unauthorized further disclosure by the Privacy Act. Reporting the crime also helps prevent your further victimization and protects your fellow Volunteers.

In conjunction with the RSO, the OIG does a preliminary investigation of all violent crimes against Volunteers regardless of whether the crime has been reported to local authorities or of the decision you may ultimately make to prosecute. If you are a victim of a crime, our staff will work with you through final disposition of the case. OIG staff is available 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week. We may be contacted through our 24-hour violent crime hotline via telephone at 202.692.2911, or by e-mail at [violentcrimeline@peacecorps.gov](mailto:violentcrimeline@peacecorps.gov).

## Security Issues in Niger

When it comes to your safety and security in the Peace Corps, you must be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target of crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Niger. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally will not steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns, for instance, are favorite work sites for pickpockets. The following are safety concerns in Niger.

**Motor vehicle accidents.** “Bush taxis,” the most common mode of motorized transportation in rural areas, are overloaded, poorly maintained, and unsafe. They should be avoided to the extent possible (because they’re often the only transportation available, Volunteers are taught to evaluate and choose the least risky bush taxi to take). Volunteers should not travel on roads and highways at night unless absolutely necessary because of the high risk of accidents.

**Robbery/burglary.** In urban markets, bus stations, and other areas where crowds are present, purse snatching and pick pocketing are common. Money and other valuables should be kept secure. While unusual, theft can occur even in rural villages. Houses should be kept locked and valuables should be kept in a locked trunk when you leave your village.

**Violent crime.** Though this is very rare in rural villages, it is a growing concern in larger cities, particularly in Niamey, the capital. There are certain high-crime areas (which will be pointed out to you) that must be avoided, particularly after dark. In cities, Volunteers should travel in groups of two or more at night.

## **Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime**

You must be prepared to take on a large responsibility for your own safety. Only you can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your house is secure, and develop relations in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to Niger, do what you would do if you moved to a large city in the United States: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Niger will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention wherever they are in Niger, but they are likely to receive more negative attention in highly populated centers than at their sites, where “family,” friends, and colleagues look out for them. They are also likely to attract more attention if they are behaving outside the norms of Nigérien society (drinking, wearing inappropriate clothing, etc.). While exclamations sometimes occur on the street in larger towns, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, avoid eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention. Keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. You should always walk with a companion at night.

## **Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in Niger**

The Peace Corps’ approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your two-year service and includes

the following: information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. Niger's in-country safety program is outlined below.

Peace Corps/Niger's office will keep Volunteers informed of any issues that may affect Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be offered in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, Volunteers will be contacted through the emergency communication network. Thus, it is imperative that Volunteers keep the Peace Corps/Niger office informed of their whereabouts so that they can be contacted in the event of an emergency. If a Volunteer seems to be missing, even for a short period of time, we must assume something is wrong and initiate extensive search procedures.

**Volunteer training** will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Niger. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout your two-year service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural, health, and other components of training.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and work sites. Site selection is based in part on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications,

transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

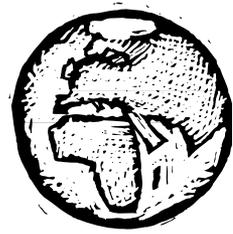
You will also learn about Peace Corps/Niger's detailed **emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, Volunteers in Niger will gather at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, Volunteers must **immediately report** any security incident to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.

## NOTES



# DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



In fulfilling the Peace Corps' mandate to share the face of America with our host countries, we are making special efforts to see that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent years. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other despite our many differences.

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, our diversity poses challenges. In Niger, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in Niger.

Outside of Niger's capital, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the perception that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Niger are justly known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community in which you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Niger, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers will not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

### **Overview of Diversity in Niger**

The Peace Corps staff in Niger recognizes adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During pre-service training, sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. We look forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, and sexual orientations, and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who take pride in supporting one another and demonstrating the richness of American culture.

A challenge for Volunteers from groups with less representation in the Peace Corps may be the lack of a common background with other Volunteers in Niger. Currently, the group of Volunteers in Niger is fairly homogenous: relatively young (mostly between 22 and 30) and largely Caucasian and middle class. Volunteers who have expressed a need for special support include those who are older than the majority, those who belong to minority ethnic groups, and those who are homosexual. If you are in such a category, you should come prepared to cope with being possibly the only one in your minority group.

## **What Might a Volunteer Face?**

### ***Possible Issues for Female Volunteers***

Women's roles are very distinct in Nigérien culture. Women are charged with caring for the family and work long, hard hours to prepare food, obtain water, and rear children. In addition, women do not enjoy the same level of equality as most women in the United States do. Few are educated—only 8 percent of women in Niger are literate—and very few hold responsible positions in government or other organizations. Many men have several wives. In strict Muslim households, especially in the eastern part of the country, women are sometimes cloistered (e.g., required to stay in their homes unless accompanied by their husband). Certain physically challenging tasks, including pounding millet and drawing water, are considered exclusively women's work and are not done by men. These cultural practices can be shocking to some Volunteers. However, almost all find that they can work successfully with both women and men in Niger.

Female Volunteers have much more freedom than Nigérien women and are not expected to adhere strictly to gender roles. This provides them with a unique perspective on Nigérien life. As foreign women, they are sometimes allowed to participate in both male and female activities, whereas male Volunteers are almost exclusively limited to socializing with other men. This does not mean, however, that female Volunteers are entirely free of expected gender roles. Although a female Volunteer is more accepted by men, she is still a woman and therefore considered different. For example, female Volunteers must keep their knees covered, with either long skirts or baggy pants.

Nigérien women usually marry between the ages of 13 and 18, unless they reside in cities. As a single woman living alone in a community, you may be approached by men who wish to

court or date you. Even though these approaches typically come in the form of normal Nigérien humor, they can be very irritating, and female Volunteers will have to develop methods of handling such situations. There is less need for concern regarding overt sexual harassment or assault in Niger than in some other countries. Nigérien culture greatly minimizes physical contact because of the influence of Islam, and the chief of a village will look out for a female as he would a daughter. Nevertheless, it is important to keep your relations as platonic as possible to ensure good working relationships with people in your community.

### ***Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color***

People of color may confront special challenges in Niger. One of the most common is being mistaken for someone from your race's or ethnic group's country of origin. Along with this, Nigériens may not believe that you are a U.S. citizen, as the majority of people from the United States they have seen or heard about are of European descent.

African-American Volunteers have found that being black in Africa has advantages as well as challenges. You may be more easily accepted by your community, since you are not visibly different. Villagers' expectations may be higher because of your race; they may expect you to be more like them and not afford you the same allowances in language learning and cultural adaptation that they grant to your white peers. In public places, you may be taken for Nigérien and thus expected to conform more closely to cultural norms, such as the Muslim dress code for women. Some African-American Volunteers have struggled with being told by their villagers that they are not truly black.

There is a support system among Volunteers to help you adjust to similar issues in Niger.

### ***Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers***

There are and have been Volunteers over the age of 40 in Niger. The Peace Corps welcomes the experience and special skills of these older Volunteers. Like other Volunteers, you should be prepared for the harsh climate and basic living conditions, and you will need to take special care of your health because of the lack of medical facilities in Nigérien villages. Because there are so few older Volunteers in Niger, you may find yourself missing the company of people of similar age. There is a high degree of respect for older people in Niger. As the average life span is only in the upper 40s, you will be considered “older” if you are older than 40.

### ***Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers***

Nigérien culture has been described as homophobic, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers may find it difficult to serve here. Because of the negative attitudes regarding homosexuality, it would very difficult to maintain a positive working relationship with villagers and be open about your sexual orientation. You are likely to find a support system within the Volunteer group, but you are unlikely to be able to be open outside that circle.

### ***Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers***

Islam is the predominant cultural influence in Niger. It arrived in the 12th century, and more than 90 percent of the population is practicing Muslims. Although there are a few militant Islamic groups in the country, the government has been able to prevent incidents of violence. The government is officially secular, and other religions are well tolerated. There are some 400 Christian missionaries in the country, most of them Americans. Volunteers are free to practice their own religion in Niger as long as they do not engage in proselytizing. Note, however, that there are no Christian churches outside major towns.

Nigériens may inquire about your religion out of curiosity or try to influence you to become Muslim. However, this is not so much because they object to other religions as because they are concerned (like those of many religions) for your afterlife, as they believe one cannot go to heaven unless one practices the “right” religion.

### ***Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities***

As a disabled Volunteer in Niger, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In Niger, as in other parts of the world, some people hold prejudicial attitudes toward individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. And there is very little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States.

The Peace Corps program in Niger focuses on rural villages and small towns. It would be extraordinarily difficult, as well as unsafe, for anyone with a serious physical handicap to live in rural Niger. Even in Niamey and regional capitals, there are no public accommodations for people with serious physical disabilities.

That being said, as part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodation, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Niger without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. The Peace Corps/Niger staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in their training, housing, job sites, or in other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

## NOTES



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Niger?**

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds this allowance. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The authorized baggage allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with combined dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 80 pounds total, with a maximum weight allowance of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave receivers are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution. Please check the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website for a detailed list of permitted and prohibited items at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

## **What is the electric current in Niger?**

It is 220 volts, 50 cycles (the European standard). Note, however, that only Niamey and larger towns have electricity. Volunteers should not bring electric appliances unless they are battery or solar powered.

**How much money should I bring?**

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover their expenses. Often, Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are the safest, but not always the most convenient, ways to bring money. Credit cards can sometimes be helpful for ordering plane tickets to Europe or the United States online, but they are virtually useless for travel in Niger and the surrounding region. Some high-end restaurants and hotels in major West African cities (not Niamey) do accept credit cards—Visa is the best bet. Although you will find places to cash traveler's checks, the process can be a hassle. Fees are high, and in some countries you have to show the bank your receipt of purchase. Generally speaking, cash is easier to exchange. If you bring traveler's checks, euros are preferable to dollars. The Peace Corps office has a safe where you can store money and other valuables upon arrival in Niger.

**When can I take vacation and have people visit me?**

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps cannot provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

### **Will my belongings be covered by insurance?**

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Do not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available. The Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for such losses.

### **Do I need an international driver's license?**

Volunteers in Niger do not need to get an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating motorized vehicles. However, you may want an international driver's license for travel when you are on vacation.

### **What should I bring as gifts for Niger friends and my host family?**

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away. Items can also be purchased locally.

### **Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?**

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until they have completed about half of their pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with ministry

counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers are assigned to rural villages or small towns and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require more than a 12-hour drive to reach the capital. There is at least one “veteran” Volunteer based in each of the regional capitals, and six Volunteers are currently based in Niamey.

### **How can my family contact me in an emergency?**

The Peace Corps’ Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, you should instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. The Office of Special Services is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week (including holidays) at 800.424.8580, extension 1470, or 202.692.1470. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580 and asking to be connected to the Niger country desk officer or desk assistant.

### **Can I call home from Niger?**

Yes. International calls can be made from Niamey and most larger towns, but telephone service is expensive and is not always reliable. Cellphone coverage is increasingly available throughout Niger, but cellular service is expensive and is not always reliable.

**Should I bring a cellular phone with me?**

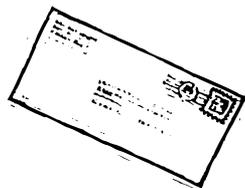
Some Peace Corps/Niger sites have cell phone coverage and a many Volunteers own cell phones. The U.S. cellphones are not compatible with the Niger cellphone system, but you can purchase cellphones locally.

**Will there be e-mail and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?**

E-mail access is available at the Peace Corps office in Niamey and at the regional offices. It is also available at private telecenters in most larger towns. The connections, however, are still slow, of limited capacity, and expensive, so Internet access, while possible, is problematic. Because of the lack of electricity in villages, computers are not useful for Volunteers assigned to rural areas. Community and youth education sector Volunteers, who are normally stationed in small towns with access to electricity, may want to bring a laptop. If you do bring a computer, please insure it as the Peace Corps is not responsible for its safekeeping or upkeep. We do strongly recommend you bring a flash drive so you can store and work on documents during the infrequent times you are working on a computer.



# WELCOME LETTERS FROM NIGER VOLUNTEERS



*Fofo*

Hello incoming Peace Corps Trainees!

You are about to embark upon the adventure of a lifetime. A thousand different fears and concerns must be running through your heads right now as you go about trying to prepare for this new phase of your life. We all remember how we felt getting our bags packed and saying goodbye to friends—thrilled, scared, excited, anxious. One minute on top of the world and ready to get out of the States, the next minute wondering if we could really go through with this. Remember this is the beginning of the next two years of your life. Have fun with your packing, and bring your favorite music, pictures, clothes, and toys. If we could do it again, knowing what we do now, we would lighten up a bit and have fun with packing. We look forward to meeting each one of you. See you in Niger. Have patience.

—April Conway and Teresa Torres, Team Balleyara

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Greetings & congratulations on your invitation to serve in Peace Corps/Niger!

I remember getting my invitation packet in the mail, and my first two thoughts were (1) relief that the long application process was finally at its end, then (2) momentary disquiet: “Wait, so this ‘Niger’... Where is that again?” Now, two years on, I can safely say that this once unknown place has become my new home.

You probably have a million questions flying through your head about what you are in for in Peace Corps/Niger. I have to disappoint you by saying that I can’t answer a fraction of your questions about what your specific experience will be like. Instead, I’ll offer a few insights into service here that I’ve picked up.

**Peace Corps will take care of you.** From the moment you step off the plane until your official swearing-in ceremony nine or so weeks later, you will be in some of the most capable hands in Niger—the training staff at the training site of Hamdallaye. Their task is monumental—essentially teaching you how to live in this totally unfamiliar place, via crash courses in language, cross-culture, and technical training—but they pull it off with aplomb, giving you a rock-solid base to stand on when you go out to your post for the first time. The support continues throughout your service, where any technical, emotional, medical, cultural, etc. need will be addressed at the drop of a hat. The most important support, however, will come from your fellow Volunteers, with experience to impart, stories to tell, a shoulder to lean on, or a laugh to share.

**Nigériens will take care of you.** But you didn't join Peace Corps just to get a few weeks' training about a different culture—you joined to meet and live with people of another culture and to help them meet their needs. Though I haven't traveled the whole world over, I can safely say that Nigériens must rank among the top five peoples of the world in terms of general niceness. Your curiosity will be rewarded with openness, excitement, and curiosity in return. You will be amazed to see Nigériens drop everything they are doing if you appear the least bit lost, or lead you by the hand around a market to help you find what you're looking for. Nigériens are also some of the most patient people I've ever encountered and thus are wonderful language tutors. Indeed, Nigériens are so calm and trustworthy that I've never felt as tranquil and safe in all my life as when I am in my village. I feel most at home in this country when I spend my evenings at my friend's house, talking about the weather, family, village gossip, or just looking up at the stars and constellations—I feel like one of the family.

**There will be tough times...** It would be dishonest to suggest that things are honky-dory all the time in Niger, for they are not. It is hot pretty near constantly (though it's doable, and for my money, heat is better than cold or constant mugginess anytime), and there is the double-shock of leaving all that

is familiar and diving into a totally foreign world. Work, too, can be tough, from the generally unstructured work schedule to problems in communication to under-motivated counterparts—but this is where your new Nigérien and Peace Corps support system comes in. Everyone wants you to have a successful service and will be quite happy to help you do so.

**...but above all, have patience!** With time, most of the frustrations will diminish or pass, as you learn to manage your new existence here. There is a phrase here that pretty well sums up life in Niger: in Zarma it's "*kala suuru*," in Hausa it's "*sai hankuri*," and it means "have patience." Coming from America, at first I denied the need for patience, then despaired at everyone telling me to have patience, but I came to accept it as inescapable truth. Just as patience is what turns grapes into wine, so, too, does patience (and persistence) turn your small troubles into successes. My last few months at my village filled me with these small triumphs. Learning the language, which is a daily challenge, finally became comfortable, and I was able to joke and turn puns like I did back home. My friendships grew deeper roots, and I was struck dumb with pride the day the young men in my village got together to clean up not just the area surrounding the newly dug well, but the whole village. The pace of life is a bit more languid here, but the rewards for patience—and service in Peace Corps/Niger in general—are very rich indeed.

— Michael Redman

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When I came to Niger, I was kind of a hypochondriac. Other than wondering how I was going to survive the heat, the thing I most worried about before I moved here was surviving illnesses. Naturally, I was the first one from my training group to get sick. By day seven, I had amoebic dysentery with a heaping side of bacteria. On my 20th trip to the bathroom, I realized my worst fear was coming true: I was going to die in this country!

As I'm writing to you in my third year (i.e., one more than normal) as a Peace Corps Niger Volunteer, clearly, I didn't

die. Instead, I received fast medical help (on that occasion and several others) and returned to training classes just a day later.

This story illustrates one thing you can be sure of as soon as you step off the plane in Niamey: You will be fully supported by competent and caring training, administrative, and medical staff.

After training, you will probably be placed alone in a village or a town; but you'll never really be alone. Generally, you will have other Volunteers in nearby villages, and you should be able to get into your regional capital within a day. Also, most Volunteers have cellphones and many have cellphone reception at their sites. This makes it easy for you to contact people and for people to contact and find you.

Most importantly, your local community will look after you from the moment you are introduced as "their Volunteer." For example, within my first two weeks at post, I got very ill again. I was a virtual stranger in the town of Matameye when I stumbled out to the road, delirious and barely aware of my surroundings. Within moments, a small group of townspeople helped me sit down, quickly found me a bush taxi and told the driver where I needed to go in Zinder. They put me in the front seat of the car, and the driver took me to the Zinder hostel gate.

From that day on, I felt safer and more protected in Matameye than I've ever felt anywhere else. You, too, will quickly become a part of a local community that will care about you (and, in turn, you will care about the people in that community; will protect you and you will want to protect; and will share in your many joys and frustrations as a Volunteer.

So, welcome to the Peace Corps, and congratulations on your assignment to Niger! Get ready for an experience of a lifetime. Oh, and one more thing: In addition to the Texas, the Nalgene bottle, and the CD player (I'm dating myself—I mean, iPod) you'll probably bring, pack a good sense of humor. You're going to need it, because you'll be laughing at yourself a lot.

— Katie Dick

Greetings! *Barka!* Let me be one of the first people to welcome you to a country that I have absolutely fallen in love with. I was in your shoes exactly one year ago from the moment I'm writing this. We all had the same worries, such as if our bags would be light enough to get cleared. Looking back now I realized I packed some of the most useless things (or at least items that could be purchased here). Just remember this when you're taking your luggage down to the gym scale in the hotel for the third time the night before you take off!

The worries of how on Earth I was going to be a health Volunteer with a degree in political science, worrying how or if I could handle the challenges of living in a different culture...these are all a thing of the past and certainly you will share some of them. Just know that you are not alone in your anxieties. Let me reassure you that you'll look back on those days and your first few days in-country and laugh. My best advice is to take it all in. I can say confidently that my time in Niger has been the best 12 months of my life as well as the fastest. And smile. Smile because you're "employed" for the next two years. Smile because you just got a lot of new friends. Smile because you're coming to a country where the people are ready to love you—even when you can't speak their language, they will have the patience to teach you and, most importantly, laugh with you. And smile because you're about to get the best education the world has to offer. So welcome to Peace Corps/Niger! Can't wait to meet you.

With patience nearly anything is possible, at least in Niger.

— Sarah Pharr

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What I love most about being a Peace Corps Volunteer in Niger is the familial relationships I have formed. My next-door neighbors have adopted me as one of their own children, and I am equally devoted to them.

I've learned from my work in Niger that patience actually does help a difficult situation. Although it's a challenge for strangers who understand little initially, once we learn

patience we can fully experience the value of the culture in Niger.

My greatest accomplishment as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Niger has been my work in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS. Our messages of prevention are being heard and we can stop this disease from killing thousands of Nigériens.

To summarize my experience with the Peace Corps in Niger, I will tell people in America that strength in community produces a network of sharing from which we could learn a lot. The people here are the most giving ones I've known.

— Tiffany Martindale

.....

As the last person to get my lost bag from my staging, I would like to offer you a bit of packing and sanity advice. Seven out of 54 of us had one bag lost by Air France en route to Niamey. Probably some of you will also arrive in Niamey before your luggage does. If this happens to you, you may be inclined to panic, but please don't. Your bag will eventually arrive, and before it does, you will have the opportunity to learn two of Niger's greatest lessons long before the rest of your staging mates: patience and resourcefulness. Everything you need you can get in Niger. Although I didn't believe this at first, by the time my bag arrived (one month later), I found most of its contents frivolous.

Of course it sucks when your bag is lost. So, as you repack your bags for the hundredth time, I offer you some tips that may help you if your bag goes missing.

1. Carry anything you are emotionally attached to (pictures, letters, etc.) and your toothbrush on the plane with you. These are the only things that are irreplaceable in Niger. (Of course you can buy a toothbrush here, but it's a good thing to have upon arrival.)

2. Pack things you will need right away in both bags. Having one use-right-away bag and one use-later bag is not recommended because the latter may be the bag that arrives with you.

3. Lock your luggage. If your bag takes a tour of Africa before arriving in Niamey, a small lock will deter petty thieves.

4. Just in case, make friends with someone at staging who wears your size.

Have a safe trip. I will see you in Niger!

— Anne Radday



# PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Niger and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later but more likely you'll find you brought too much rather than too little. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Niger.

Many Volunteers end up wishing they had not brought so many clothes and toiletries and had concentrated instead on more personal items like music and photos. However, we recommend that you avoid bringing anything you would be heartbroken to lose. Since there are a variety of jobs, each with different clothing requirements, you should consider your particular job in deciding what to bring. Health, municipal and community development, and education Volunteers have a greater need for professional-looking clothing than agriculture and natural resource Volunteers, who spend most of their time in the field. But all Volunteers should be neat and presentable. Despite your worst fears, there is a cool season in Niger, when night temperatures become quite tolerable. Make sure your clothes are comfortable and durable because they will take a beating during hand laundering. Keep in mind that it is relatively cheap and easy to have local tailors make great-looking traditional clothes (or copies of what you bring with you).

## **General Clothing**

- Ten or so pairs of cotton underwear (boxer shorts, bras, etc.)
- Three to five cotton T-shirts (white not recommended)
- Two or three dress shirts
- One or two pairs of shorts for sports (but note that shorts are not normally worn by men or women in public)
- Two or three pairs of lightweight, loose-fitting cotton pants (tailors can duplicate them), the darker the better
- Two or three skirts for women, below-knee length (short skirts are inappropriate, and pockets are handy)—knees should be well hidden, even when seated
- One sweater/sweatshirt (fleece)
- Two or three pairs of cotton socks (not white due to dust)
- One dressy outfit for official functions (e.g., good-looking dress or pants and a collared shirt; ties are rarely worn so they are optional); do not bring anything that needs dry cleaning
- Belts (for when your clothes no longer fit you as you'll probably lose weight)
- One or two brimmed hats or baseball caps
- One pair of loose fitting jeans
- Swimsuit (sometimes a pool may be available)
- Water-resistant windbreaker

## **Shoes**

- One pair of sturdy sandals (e.g., Tevas, Birkenstocks, Chacos)

- One pair of tennis shoes
- One pair of dress shoes for official functions (e.g., loafers or boat shoes for men and nice sandals for women); if your sandals are nice enough they will be fine for most official functions

Note: Sand, dust, rain, mud, and mildew are prevalent in Niger, so you may want to waterproof or otherwise protect clothing and footwear.

### **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

- Thin, lightweight towel
- Nail clippers and nail file
- Good pair of scissors (for hair cutting and other things)
- Two pairs of prescription glasses (if you wear them), and maybe one tinted pair, with sturdy cases.
- Three-month supply of any prescription medication you take (including birth control pills)
- Facial astringent/face wipes (if you prefer a specific brand)
- Special soaps and hair conditioners (if you have a preference)
- Three-month supply of shampoo for training
- Earplugs
- Toothpaste (only if you want your favorite brand, as it can be purchased in Niger)
- Tampons (three-month supply), *only* if you prefer a particular brand (some but not all brands can be purchased in Niger)

## **Kitchen**

- Swiss army knife or Leatherman with can opener, bottle opener, blade, corkscrew (do NOT pack this in your carryon bag)
- Sturdy water bottles (e.g., Nalgene) or canteens; two quart size is ideal (small-mouth bottle easier to drink out of while traveling)
- Spices for cooking (e.g., cinnamon, oregano, basil, curry powder); most can be purchased in Niger
- Dry sauce mixes and instant drink mixes (a nice treat)
- Small and large plastic food storage (zip-lock) bags (there are lots of plastic bags in Niger but not many zip-lock ones)
- Hard candies (note that chocolate melts, except for peanut M&M's)
- Plastic containers (to protect a camera, tapes, and food)
- Dried fruit/granola/energy bars
- Jerky and/or tuna in a pouch
- Pudding

Note that Peace Corps/Niger has a cookbook specific to cooking in Niger. Also almost any food you want can be sent from home.

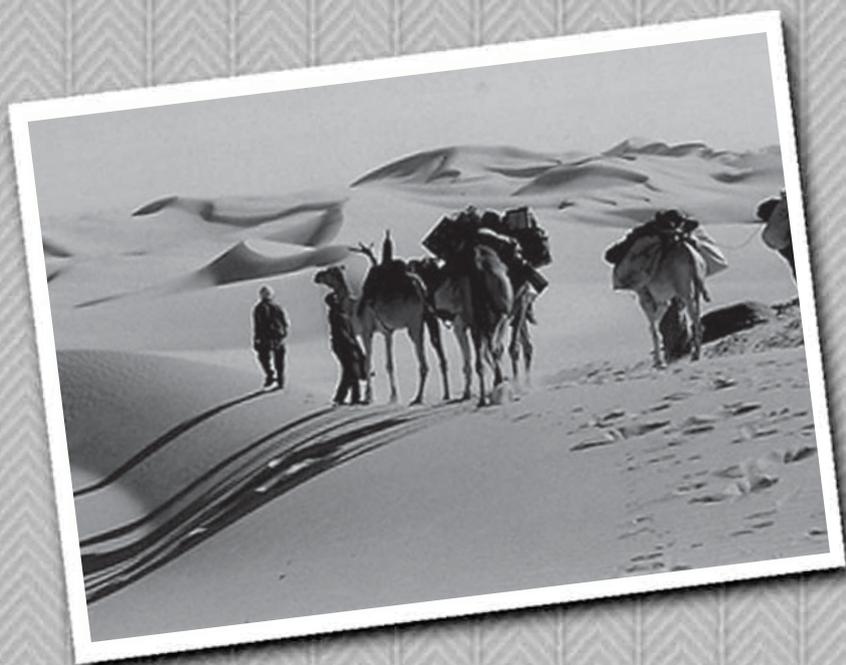
## **Miscellaneous**

- Sleeping bag (very light, highly compactable one is best)
- Pillow (optional)
- Combination lock (key locks available locally)
- Sturdy but inexpensive waterproof watch
- A sturdy day pack or fanny pack

- Batteries for anything electronic that you bring
- Solar battery recharger (note that it is usually easier to just buy new batteries and battery rechargers can burn out from the heat)
- Alarm clock
- Backpack—internal frame, well constructed (not too large)
- U.S. and world maps
- Paperbacks (there are many at the Peace Corps office, but recent releases make good additions)
- Games (e.g., deck of cards, chess, checkers, Othello, Frisbee, backgammon); many are available in the transit houses
- Photos of family, friends, and scenery (a great way to get to know people)
- Musical instruments
- Materials for hobbies and crafts (you will have more free time and fewer distractions)
- Calendars, holiday cards, thank-you notes, stationery, address book, good writing pens
- U.S. driver's license (for travel outside Niger)
- Credit cards (for travel outside of Niger)
- Padded envelopes for sending items home (like film)
- Twelve to 20 ID photos (for visas and other forms; photo-booth quality is OK, though this can be done in Niger )
- Duct tape
- Cassette, iPod, or MP3 player
- Your favorite music and blank cassettes (CDs will get scratched)
- Shortwave radio (for BBC and Voice of America news broadcasts; inexpensive ones can be purchased in Niamey)

- Flashlight or headlamp and spare bulbs (also available in Niger)
- Self-adhesive U.S. stamps for mailing letters with people traveling to the United States
- Camera with a dustproof case (smaller is better as it is more inconspicuous), including digital equipment to download to a computer
- USB sticks (highly recommended since you will share computers and therefore run the risk of losing information stored directly on the shared computers)
- Your favorite movie on DVD or VHS (You will have access to a TV sometimes)

## NOTES



# PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items will be relevant to everyone, and the list does not include everything you should make arrangements for.

## Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470).
- Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* handbook to family and friends.

## Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish your service, so if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

## Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a six-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

## **Insurance**

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have preexisting conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

## **Personal Papers**

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

## **Voting**

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

## **Personal Effects**

- Purchase personal property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

## **Financial Management**

- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through Volunteer Financial Operations at 800.424.8580, extension 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.



# CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



The following list of numbers will help you contact the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters with various questions. You may use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the Peace Corps toll-free number and extensions with your family so they have them in the event of an emergency during your service overseas.

## **Peace Corps Headquarters**

### **Toll-free Number:**

800.424.8580, Press 2, then  
Extension # (see below)

### **Peace Corps Mailing Address:**

Peace Corps  
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters  
1111 20th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20526

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Toll-free Extension</b>	<b>Direct/Local Number</b>
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Africa Region	Ext. 1850	202.692.1850
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: <a href="mailto:niger@peacecorps.gov">niger@peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2327	202.692.2327
	Desk Assistant E-mail: <a href="mailto:niger@peacecorps.gov">niger@peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2329	202.692.2329

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Toll-free Extension</b>	<b>Direct/ Local Number</b>
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (Sato Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.818.8772
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions <i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 (24 hours)

# PEACE CORPS

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters

1111 20th Street NW · Washington, DC 20526 · [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov) · 1-800-424-8580