



Peace
Corps

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

FISCAL YEARS 2025–2029

December 2024

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PEACE CORPS - DECEMBER 2024

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ACRONYMS

BHO	Behavioral Health and Outreach
GBV	Gender-based violence
LPF	Logical project framework
MS	Manual section
PACA	Participatory analysis for community action
PCMO	Peace Corps medical officer
PCSSO	Peace Corps safety and security officer
SAAC	Sexual Assault Advisory Council
SAPR	Sexual Assault Prevention And Response
SARRR	Sexual Assault Risk Reduction And Response
SANE	Sexual assault nurse examiner
SARL	Sexual assault response liaison
SIMS	Security Incident Management System
SSI	Safety and security instruction
SSM	Safety and security manager
SSA	Safety and security assistant
TG	Technical guideline
VPF	Volunteer preference form

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



The statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence around the world demand our attention. Approximately one in three women worldwide have endured physical or sexual violence. Less than 40 percent of these women seek help, and less than 10 percent of those seeking help report incidents to law enforcement authorities.¹ Global data on male victims/survivors of sexual violence is scarce due to non-reporting and legal and cultural norms that may not recognize sexual assault against men.²

As a U.S. Government agency operating in some of the most remote communities in more than 60 countries, we are challenged to do everything within our ability to help stop this pervasive global issue, both for the safety of Peace Corps Volunteers and for the communities in which they serve. That is why I am pleased to present the *Peace Corps Sexual Assault Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan: Fiscal Years (FY) 2025–2029* to guide the agency's next phase of action in support of sexual assault prevention.

In recent years, and since the Peace Corps Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program was established in 2013, there has been an emergence of researchers, organizations, and advocates raising awareness about the pervasiveness of sexual violence around the world and contributing quality data and best practices to the field. At the Peace Corps, we have leveraged this important research to further strengthen the SAPR program and to help inform our ever-evolving approach to sexual assault prevention. Accordingly, the agency prioritized the SAPR program's enhancement in the *Peace Corps FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan*. Progress on the measurable performance goals of this plan is reported to Congress and the public each fiscal year.

In March 2022, we issued the brief [Broadening the Peace Corps Approach to Sexual Assault Prevention](#) to publicly announce the agency's expansion of the SAPR program. Central to this advancement was a shift in the framework through which we view sexual violence—from a public safety lens to a public health approach, following current research and best practices. Like many individuals and organizations, the Peace Corps historically took a public safety approach to sexual assault, focusing on the behaviors and structures that can reduce an individual's risk of exposure to perpetrators of sexual assault. I am incredibly proud of the work we have accomplished in this space, prioritizing Volunteer safety and security in our operational systems and codifying it in policy.

These safety and security systems and policies have laid a solid foundation for the SAPR program to broaden its scope to prevention, incorporating a public health lens that includes the health, safety, and well-being of communities. Because Volunteers live and work across the globe, partnering directly with communities to advance a variety of issues—including gender equity, health care, economic development, and education—our agency is in a unique position to join the worldwide effort to advance sexual assault prevention work by addressing its root social and economic drivers.

Our 2022 brief included a “roadmap” outlining the investments and commitments that the Peace Corps would make to integrate and affirm sexual assault prevention as a key approach of the SAPR program. I am pleased to report that *all* components of this roadmap have been completed—one of them being the creation and publication of this prevention strategy and implementation plan.

The driving force behind this strategy is three foundational principles critical to advancing a public health approach to sexual assault prevention:

¹ “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women.” *UN Women*, accessed 19 November 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.
² Borumandnia, Nasrin, Naghmeh Khadembashi, Mohammed Tabatabaei, Hamid Alavi Majd, “The Prevalence Rate of Sexual Violence Worldwide: A Trend Analysis,” *BMC Public Health* 20, no. 1835 (2020), <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09926-5>.

- Fostering a culture of sexual assault prevention within our organization, for our Volunteers, and in service of the host countries we work alongside
- Reducing real and perceived barriers to reporting sexual assaults by improving our quality of care and bolstering our victim-centered, trauma-informed approach
- Improving organizational accountability to support continuous improvement and transparency

To ensure implementation and long-term success, each of these principles is further categorized into strategic objectives and individual, concrete goals.

I am deeply thankful to our Peace Corps staff, Volunteers (current and returned), subject matter experts, and numerous stakeholders for prioritizing the ongoing enhancement of the agency's SAPR program. I have every confidence that the agency will play an important role in stopping this pervasive global issue. At its core, sexual violence is a threat to world peace and friendship, and our team is prepared to face this direct affront to our mission.

The Peace Corps is committed to this vital work at every level. We look forward to providing updates on the agency's progress related to this plan and broadly on our efforts to stop this global threat to equality, safety, and well-being.



Carol Spahn
Director
December 10, 2024

Returned Volunteers who have been impacted by sexual violence, or any crime while serving in the Peace Corps, can contact the Office of Victim Advocacy, which is available 24 hours a day and can provide confidential services and referrals, by phone or text at 202.409.2704 and email at victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2013, the Peace Corps Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program has worked to reduce the risk of sexual assault and provide a compassionate, victim-centered, and trauma-informed response when it occurs. The agency has recently expanded this program to include prevention as a key strategy. The *Peace Corps Sexual Assault Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan: Fiscal Years 2025–2029* builds on the SAPR program's strong foundation to integrate current research and best practices as part of its ongoing strengthening and improvement.

Theory of Change

Primary Prevention: If the Peace Corps' activities can augment host country efforts to address root causes of sexual violence, then protective factors³ will be strengthened to foster environments that minimize the risk of sexual violence among host communities, Peace Corps Volunteers, and Peace Corps staff.

Secondary and Tertiary Prevention: If Volunteers experience and/or perceive fewer barriers to reporting sexual assaults, and if the Peace Corps integrates a trauma-informed approach in operations, then Volunteer victim/survivors⁴ will be more likely to report sexual assault incidents to the Peace Corps and access comprehensive support services, which will lessen the immediate and long-term impacts of sexual violence for Volunteers and minimize re-victimization and re-traumatization.

Foundational Principle 1: Fostering a Culture of Sexual Assault Prevention

Strategic Objective 1.1: Institutionalize prevention into Peace Corps operations

Goal 1: Record and utilize information on adverse Volunteer incidents with host families, counterparts, and community members to inform future Volunteer assignment and site management decisions

Lead Office: Office of Global Operations (Quality Assurance)

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of the Chief Information Officer

Goal 2: Measure the effectiveness of all SAPR trainings for staff to enhance staff capacity and strengthen organizational practices

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Staff Learning and Development, Office of Safety and Security, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services

Goal 3: Review key Peace Corps policies, procedures, guidance, and trainings to continually streamline and strengthen sexual assault prevention within Peace Corps operations

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Overseas Programming and Support, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel

Goal 4: Include evaluation of employees' ability to uphold the principles and practices of the SAPR program in performance plans and reviews

Lead Office: Office of Human Resources

³ See page 9 for more information on protective factors.

⁴ Because some individuals who have experienced sexual assault prefer the term "victim" while others identify with "survivor," this strategy uses both terms interchangeably.

Strategic Objective 1.2: Promote the strengthening of protective factors in host communities through the Peace Corps' programming

Goal 5: Review 100 percent of Peace Corps reference logical project frameworks with a prevention lens, specifically to identify how each program strengthens protective factors and minimizes risk factors

Lead Office: Overseas Programming and Training Support

Supporting Offices: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Office of Global Health and HIV

Goal 6: Strengthen the development of protective factors in the Peace Corps' programming by piloting the integration of activities that promote social-emotional well-being

Lead Office: Office of Global Health and HIV

Supporting Office: Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support

Goal 7: Create guidance for Volunteers who receive reports from host community members about sensitive information, such as gender-based violence, early pregnancy, HIV, and sexual assault

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Overseas Programming and Support, Office of Global Health and HIV

Foundational Principle 2: Reducing Real and Perceived Barriers to Reporting Sexual Assault

Strategic Objective 2.1: Strengthen sexual assault response procedures and services

Goal 8: Streamline the confidentiality and communication protocols for sexual assault response

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel

Goal 9: Implement an electronic Volunteer Preference Form to strengthen communication and documentation of sexual assault response services

Lead Office: Office of Safety and Security

Supporting Office: Office of the Chief Information Officer

Goal 10: Conduct a trend analysis of the psychological services provided to Volunteer victims/survivors of sexual assault for learning and improvement

Lead Office: Behavioral Health and Outreach

Strategic Objective 2.2: Integrate trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centered care to Volunteers who have experienced sexual assault

Goal 11: Update 100 percent of SAPR trainings, policies, processes, communications, and survey instruments to ensure they are based on a victim/survivor-centered approach that is trauma-informed and inclusive of intersecting identities

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel

Goal 12: Design and implement new trauma-informed training modules for Peace Corps staff

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel

Foundational Principle 3: Improving Organizational Accountability

Strategic Objective 3.1: Increase the transparency and accessibility of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program

Goal 13: Produce and publish on the Peace Corps website a comprehensive SAPR Performance Review and Report in FY 2026 and FY 2028

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention & Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel, Office of the Director, Office of the Executive Secretariat, Office of Communications

Goal 14: Integrate SAPR into Peace Corps' communications operations, including using social media to inform current, future, and returned Volunteers about the agency's work on sexual assault prevention and response

Lead Office: Office of Communications

Supporting Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Goal 15: Train Peace Corps recruiters, placement specialists, and country desk officers to provide comprehensive information to applicants and invitees regarding the Peace Corps SAPR program

Lead Office: Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

Supporting Offices: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Office of Global Operations

Strategic Objective 3.2: Increase feedback mechanisms within the Peace Corps network

Goal 16: Collect and analyze feedback from Volunteers for integration into the Peace Corps' sexual assault response processes and procedures

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning

Goal 17: Collect and analyze feedback from Designated Staff and other key staff for integration into the Peace Corps' sexual assault response processes and procedures

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

INTRODUCTION

When the United Nations described sexual violence as a “preventable pandemic,”⁵ they drew attention not only to its global pervasiveness—sparing no country or society—but also to the world’s ability and shared responsibility to end it. Approaching this issue through a lens of prevention is a powerful perspective that is guiding researchers, organizations, Federal agencies, and governments to better understand the issue and support communities and societies to prevent sexual assault.

As an agency, the Peace Corps believes that violence, in all its forms, is a direct threat to the Peace Corps mission of promoting world peace and friendship. Sexual violence also hinders progress toward the agency’s three goals⁶ and how Peace Corps Volunteers live and work with their host communities. The Peace Corps is committed to realizing the [United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally](#), which declares that “preventing and responding to gender-based violence around the world is a matter of human rights, justice, equity, and equality.”⁷ The Peace Corps, together with other U.S. Government partners, is dedicated to scaling best practices, enhancing partnerships, and improving capacity to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV).⁸

In accordance with the *Kate Puzey Volunteer Protection Act of 2011*,⁹ the Peace Corps launched the Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) program in 2013 which aimed at reducing incidences of sexual assault against Peace Corps Volunteers and equipping Peace Corps staff with the necessary tools and training to respond appropriately when sexual violence against Volunteers occurs. Since its inception, the SARRR program has implemented many improvements at the Peace Corps and elevated an approach to sexual assault training and support that is trauma-informed and centered around the needs of Volunteers.

Guided by current research, best practices in the field, and the feedback of agency stakeholders, the Peace Corps published a roadmap toward expanding the scope of the SARRR program to include sexual assault prevention in 2022.¹⁰ Signaling its commitment to this expanded approach, the Peace Corps officially changed the name of the SARRR program to the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program. That expansion ignited a series of additional programmatic and operational enhancements to the SAPR program that are documented in the *SAPR Performance Review and Report for Fiscal Years 2021-2023*.¹¹

The Peace Corps is deeply committed to building on this strong foundation and progress to contribute to the worldwide effort to end sexual violence. This *Sexual Assault Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan* elaborates the approach the agency will take to continue strengthening its programs, operations, and efforts around three foundational principles:

1. Fostering a culture of sexual assault prevention
2. Reducing real and perceived barriers to reporting sexual assault
3. Improving organizational accountability

This bi-directional strategy aims to reinforce an organizational culture of belonging so that Volunteer¹² victims/survivors are seen, heard, and supported. The strategy also focuses externally by leveraging the Peace Corps’

5 “The Preventable Pandemic: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence,” United Nations, Accessed November 15, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/preventable-pandemic-sexual-and-gender-based-violence>

6 The Peace Corps three goals are: 1) To help the countries interested in meeting their need for trained people; 2) To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and 3) To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

7 U.S. Department of State, *United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally 2022* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/reports/united-states-strategy-to-prevent-and-respond-to-gender-based-violence-globally-2022/>

8 GBV is an umbrella term used to define any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived sex, gender, gender identity or expression, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity.

9 The *Kate Puzey Volunteer Protection Act of 2011* mandated that the Peace Corps: provide comprehensive sexual assault risk-reduction and response training to Volunteers; develop and implement a comprehensive sexual assault policy; establish an Office of Victim Advocacy and a Sexual Assault Advisory Council; and take other specified measures to enhance Volunteer safety and security and the Peace Corps response to victims of sexual assault.

10 Peace Corps, *Broadening the Peace Corps Approach to Sexual Assault Prevention* (Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps, 2022), https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/20220315_SARRR_Brief_and_Roadmap_FINAL.PDF

11 Peace Corps, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Performance Review and Report: Fiscal Years 2021-2023*, (Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps, 2024), https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/24_FY21-23_SAPR_Report_V05.pdf

12 In this document, the term “Volunteer” is inclusive of Peace Corps Trainees, Peace Corps Volunteers, and Peace Corps Response Volunteers.

unique relationship with host communities around the world, connecting the agency’s programming to support community elements that address the root causes of sexual violence.

The field of sexual violence prevention and response is one that has and will continue to evolve, and the Peace Corps is dedicated to updating and advancing this strategy according to the field’s best practices.

Public Health Approach to Sexual Violence Prevention

The most notable best practice in sexual violence prevention research is the shift from a *public safety approach* to a *public health approach*. Traditionally, the Peace Corps and other organizations have focused on an individual’s safety and security behaviors to reduce their risk of sexual assault. For example, in the Peace Corps’ context, emphasis had traditionally been placed on advising Volunteers against travelling at night or avoiding certain locations to reduce their vulnerability to any type of victimization. Through the public safety approach, the Peace Corps has developed a strong foundation of safety and security systems and policies, training resources, site management operations, and support protocols for the SAPR program to build upon as the agency expands to embrace a public health approach to sexual assault prevention.

Whereas the public safety approach focuses primarily on individual safety, the public health approach to sexual violence prevention strives to provide the maximum benefit to the largest number of people. This opens additional pathways for the agency to deepen its investment in sexual assault prevention at every level, including widening the focus on Volunteer safety to include the well-being of host communities. The public health approach also brings new opportunities to build upon the agency’s longstanding development programs to address the root causes of sexual violence, such as harmful gender norms. Supporting host communities to become safer environments will serve both the members of those communities and the Volunteers who live and work in them.

Utilizing the agency can consider how context, norms, and social conditions are interrelated and impact behavior, including acts of sexual violence. When viewed through a public health lens, levels of prevention are defined and organized into three categories based on the timing of when the efforts occur in relation to an act of sexual violence:

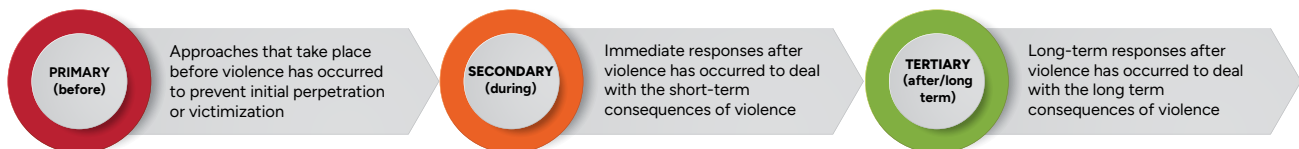


Figure 1. Public Health Approach to Sexual Violence Categories of Prevention

- 1. Primary Prevention:** Primary prevention interventions take place *before* sexual violence occurs (e.g., site management processes¹³ and development programming¹⁴). These actions focus on promoting environments and social norms that inhibit sexual violence.
- 2. Secondary Prevention:** Secondary prevention interventions are implemented *immediately after* sexual violence occurs (e.g., emergency medical care) to care for the physical, mental, and safety needs of the victim/survivor and to prevent re-traumatization or re-victimization.
- 3. Tertiary Prevention:** Tertiary prevention actions are the long-term interventions implemented *after* sexual violence has occurred (e.g., long-term mental health care) to prevent further re-traumatization or re-victimization.

¹³ Site management processes refer to the many actions that occur within a host community before a Peace Corps Volunteer is assigned or arrives at that community. These actions include site selection, host family selection, counterpart selection, and housing inspections for safety and security. For months before a Volunteer arrives, staff work through the extensive site management process for each Volunteers’ community site assignment.

¹⁴ Development programming refers to the work undertaken by a Volunteer alongside counterpart(s) in the community. Programming is organized within the Peace Corps six sectors to which Volunteers are assigned: Agriculture, Community Economic Development, Education, Environment, Health, and Youth in Development.

Because of its focus on the root causes of sexual violence, organizations around the world recognize that adopting a public health approach is more sustainable, cost-efficient, and effective than a public safety approach¹⁵ and is also more likely to have a greater long-term impact on communities.¹⁶ For the Peace Corps, one approach does not exclude the other. The agency is strengthening its SAPR program by investing in the public health approach to prevention to complement its existing public safety approach.

The Socio-Ecological Framework

Globally, laws alone have been ineffective in reducing the prevalence of sexual violence.¹⁷ This is largely due to the influential role that deeply rooted social norms (i.e., the informal rules that govern behavior in groups and societies) play in determining behavior and outcomes.¹⁸ Combined with existing power structures, these social norms lead to disproportionate sexual violence against women and other minorities, including marginalized communities, who have historically faced systemic gender inequality.¹⁹

To shift social norms, the Peace Corps will ‘move upstream’²⁰ to address the root causes of sexual violence by examining the various levels of society through which social norms are established, reinforced, and/or changed. Known as the socio-ecological framework,²¹ this model considers the individual, interpersonal, community, and public policy factors that influence all aspects of people’s lives.

Understanding the dynamics at play among these levels can help identify opportunities for the Peace Corps’ programming to promote protective factors that can lower the risk of sexual violence.

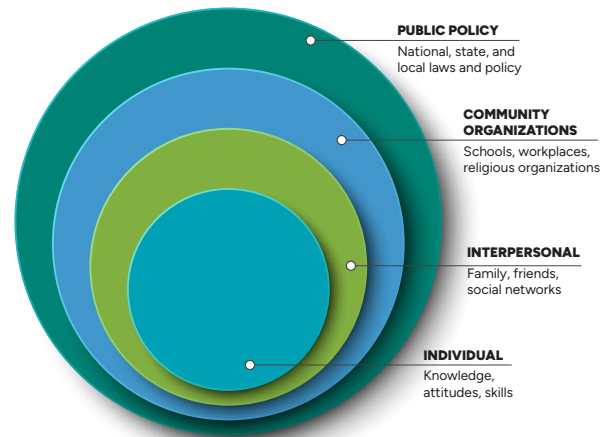


Figure 2. Socio-ecological framework

Risk and Protective Factors

Sexual violence is not caused by any single factor. Rather, a combination of factors at the different levels of the socio-ecological framework can *increase or decrease* the likelihood of sexual violence occurrence. These are known as risk and protective factors. To support the long-term prevention of sexual violence, the public health approach works to reduce risk factors and strengthen protective factors.

A *risk factor* is a characteristic that increases the likelihood of a person becoming a victim/survivor or a perpetrator of sexual violence. It is important to note that not everyone who is identified as being at risk becomes a victim/survivor of violence or a perpetrator of violence. Furthermore, victims/survivors are *never* responsible for the actions of an offender.

Risk factors include, but are not limited to:

- alcohol and drug use;
- lack of concern for others;

¹⁵ “Focusing on Prevention: Ending Violence against Women.” UN Women, Accessed November 15, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/prevention>

¹⁶ Mary Ellsebert, Diana J Arango, Matthew Morton, Floriza Gennari, Sveinung Kiplesund, Manuel Contreras, Charlotte Watts, “Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls: What Does the Evidence Say?,” *The Lancet* 385, no. 9977 (2015), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673614617037>

¹⁷ Woodrow Wilson Center. “Gender-Based Violence and Rule of Law: Improving Protections for Women.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Wilson Center, 9 December 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyTvR7Z3bjg>.

¹⁸ Alexander-Scott, Michaeljon, Emma Bell, and Jenny Holden, “Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG),” DFID Notes (January 2016), <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7ff8e3e5274a2e87db717b/Shifting-Social-Norms-tackle-Violence-against-Women-Girls3.pdf>

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally 2022*.

²⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Sexual Violence Prevention: Beginning the Dialogue*, (Atlanta, Georgia: CDC 2004), <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/4323>

²¹ “About Violence Prevention,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 9 April 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/violence-prevention/about/index.html>

- aggressive behaviors and acceptance of violent behaviors;
- adherence to traditional gender role norms;
- prior sexual victimization or perpetration;
- poverty;
- lack of employment opportunities; and
- societal norms that tolerate sexual violence.

Conversely, a *protective factor* is a characteristic that decreases the likelihood of a person becoming a victim/survivor or perpetrator of sexual violence. As an agency, the Peace Corps seeks to identify and build upon existing strengths—or protective factors—to address violent behaviors like sexual assault. Protective factors include, but are not limited to:

- emotional health and connectedness;
- empathy and concern for others;
- strong support networks;
- resilience;
- conflict resolution skills; and
- societal norms that do not tolerate sexual violence.²²

The Peace Corps' partnership with over 60 countries uniquely positions the agency to contribute to sexual violence prevention at a community level, and with extensive global reach. The public health approach to prevention offers an evidence-based pathway to leverage the agency's development work to strengthen the protective factors that can decrease the likelihood of sexual assault occurrence, while reducing risk factors.

The Peace Corps' gender equitable development programming is designed for Volunteers to work alongside community counterparts to build social capital (the benefits that individuals and groups access through social relationships), as well as to identify, discuss, and challenge community norms to foster an environment that does not support violence. Interventions that build social capital have been shown to increase agency and empowerment among adolescent girls,²³ one of the primary beneficiaries of the Peace Corps' programming.

The Peace Corps' approach to addressing root causes of violence, such as gender equity and power dynamics, is also associated with better behavioral outcomes.²⁴ In fact, studies indicate that community mobilization efforts in areas of sexual violence prevention have significant impact on norms change, a decrease in violent victimization and perpetration, and an increase in empowerment.²⁵

Theory of Change

The theory of change underpinning the Peace Corps *Sexual Assault Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan* is informed by the public health theory that to prevent sexual violence, *protective factors* must be strengthened in communities, families, relationships, and individuals, and *risk factors* must be reduced.²⁶

This strategy's theory of change is twofold:

²² "Risk and Protective Factors." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 23 January 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/sexual-violence/risk-factors/index.html>

²³ Saul, Janet, Gretchen Bachman, Shannon Allen, Nora F. Toiy, Caroline Cooney, Ta'Adheeka Beamon, "The DREAMS Core Package of Interventions: A Comprehensive Approach to Preventing HIV among Adolescent Girls and Young Men," *Plos One* (December 7, 2018), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6285267/pdf/pone.0208167.pdf>

²⁴ President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, *PEPFAR DREAMS Guidance* (Washington, D.C.: PEPFAR, 2021) https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/01-2021-08-17DREAMS_GuidanceFinalMarch2018Update_PEPFARSolutions.pdf

²⁵ "Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls: What Does the Evidence Say?," 1555.

²⁶ "Risk and Protective Factors." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2024.

- **Primary Prevention:** If the Peace Corps' activities can augment host country efforts to address root causes of sexual violence, then protective factors will be strengthened to foster environments that minimize the risk of sexual violence among host communities, Peace Corps Volunteers, and Peace Corps staff.
- **Secondary and Tertiary Prevention:** If Volunteers experience and/or perceive fewer barriers to reporting sexual assaults, and if the Peace Corps integrates a trauma-informed approach in operations, then Volunteer victim/survivors will be more likely to report sexual assault incidents to the Peace Corps and access comprehensive support services, which will lessen the immediate and long-term impacts of sexual violence for Volunteers and minimize re-victimization and re-traumatization.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE 1: FOSTERING A CULTURE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION

Summary

An organizational culture is comprised of the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices of a workplace. By deliberately and consistently fostering a culture of sexual assault prevention across the Peace Corps, the agency's prevention work will be more durable, successful, and embedded within all operations.

In FY 2022, the Peace Corps initiated an educational campaign to introduce the sexual assault prevention approach to over 3,000 staff members in the U.S. and over 60 countries. In addition to facilitated in-person and virtual meetings, the SAPR team also created a training module on sexual assault prevention, which all Peace Corps staff are now required to complete. Additional dialogues and trainings on prevention were held in-person at multiple Peace Corps staff and leadership conferences throughout FYs 2022 and 2023.

However, shifting an organizational culture takes time, engagement, and consistency. A gap analysis conducted in 2022 found that while the Peace Corps already has a robust repository of programming documents, policies, procedures, and training materials to support sexual assault prevention, staff had varying understanding of sexual assault prevention. The analysis also concluded that the agency lacked an overarching strategy to establish a prevention approach.²⁷ This strategy will help to advance the agency's organizational values and expectations related to sexual assault prevention.

The Peace Corps believes that, just as it seeks to shape community attitudes and norms around sexual violence to create a safer environment for community members and Volunteers, it must also continue to strengthen and shape its organizational culture so that its workforce, programs, and activities consistently reflect the agency's prevention priorities. Therefore, a critical element of this sexual assault prevention strategy is designed to ensure that sexual assault prevention is not simply relegated to an office or program, but rather an integral part of the Peace Corps' identity and is strongly reflected in the agency's operations and programming.

Strategic Objective 1.1: Institutionalize prevention into the Peace Corps' operations

In 2022, the Peace Corps publicly announced its commitment to widening the scope of its sexual assault program to include prevention. Fully realizing this strategic shift requires embedding a prevention lens within agency policies, procedures, programming, training, and communications so that the public health approach to sexual assault prevention is inseparable from the day-to-day operations of the Peace Corps.

Work to Date: In developing this strategy, the Peace Corps has undertaken several actions to support the priority of prevention across the agency. The Peace Corps hired its first senior prevention specialist in FY 2022 to oversee the work and integration of prevention in all operations. Additionally, agency staff are currently embedding primary prevention approaches into many of the Peace Corps' operations. For example, security policies and procedures are designed to promote Volunteer safety, security, and community integration. Staff conduct regular reviews of country-level crime data to understand crime trends and develop appropriate mitigation strategies. Revised security trainings for Volunteers (internally known as the Global Core) have been designed to help them navigate the cultural context of their countries of service, be aware of potential threats, and reduce their risk of experiencing a crime. Post staff conduct assessments of all host families according to a standardized vetting process and facilitate orientations for host families and counterparts, which includes modules on sexual harassment, sexual assault, and how to support Volunteers.

Goal 1: *Record and utilize information on adverse Volunteer incidents with host families, counterparts, and community members to inform future Volunteer assignment and site management decisions*

²⁷ EvalGroup, *Peace Corps Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program (SAPR): Gap Analysis* (Los Altos, California: EvalGroup, 2023).

Rationale: Serving abroad is not without risk. Crime occurs in every country, including the U.S. The agency’s robust information management systems optimize its ability to document security incidents experienced by Volunteers. By further strengthening the linkages within these information systems, the Peace Corps will be better positioned to leverage documented security incidents and/or crimes that involved host families, counterparts, and other community members to guide the Peace Corps’ site management strategies and strengthen Volunteer safety.

Lead Office: Office of Global Operations

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of the Chief Information Officer

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	System update completed				

Goal 2: *Measure the effectiveness of all SAPR trainings for staff to enhance staff capacity and strengthen organizational practices*

Rationale: To deepen and maintain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that Peace Corps staff have regarding sexual assault prevention and response, the agency requires all staff to complete at least two training courses on the topic. An initial training is required during the first month of employment and a refresher training is required annually. Select staff receive trainings, as outlined in the table below.

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	AUDIENCE	FREQUENCY
Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Training	Provides an introduction to the Peace Corps SAPR program, including what is sexual assault and how staff can support Volunteer victims/survivors	All Staff	Within 30 days of the start of employment
SAPR Post All-Staff Training	The topic of this annual training for overseas staff changes each year. The FY 2021 training focused on culturally informed support in the context of sexual assault. The FY 2022 training examined active listening and validation skills with victims/survivors. And the FY 2023 training explored interpersonal support skills for Volunteers who have witnessed violence.	Overseas Staff	Annually (alternates between in-person and online training every other year)
Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking	Provides information and Peace Corps resources to assist staff on how to help fellow employees who are experiencing violence; to address performance issues that may be a byproduct of violence; and to create an organizational culture that supports victims/survivors of violence	All U.S. Direct Hires and Personal Service Contractor Staff	Within 60 days of the start of employment, and every three years afterward
Domestic Staff SAPR Refresher Training	This training was updated in 2022 to focus on the SAPR program’s expansion to include prevention.	Domestic Staff	Annually

Orientation Week: Sexual Assault Prevention and Response	This live virtual presentation provides a high-level overview of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program.	Overseas U.S. Direct Hires	First week of employment
Overseas Staff Training: SAPR Overview	This in-person session reviews key elements of the SAPR program and provides a deeper-level understanding of the services available to Volunteer victims/survivors under the restricted and standard reporting options.	Overseas U.S. Direct Hires and select Locally Employed Staff at post	Within the first six months of employment for overseas U.S. Direct Hires. Within the first 18 months of employment for select Locally Employed Staff
Overseas Staff Training: Intimate Partner Violence	This in-person session strengthens overseas Peace Corps staff awareness of intimate partner violence and how to respond to protect Volunteer safety.	Overseas U.S. Direct Hires and select Locally Employed Staff at post	Within the first six months of employment for overseas U.S. Direct Hires. Within the first 18 months of employment for select Locally Employed Staff
Overseas Staff Training: Taking the Call	This in-person session provides practical training to overseas Peace Corps staff on how to respond to a Volunteer report of sexual assault.	Overseas U.S. Direct Hires and select Locally Employed Staff at post	Within the first six months of employment for overseas USDH. Within the first 18 months of employment for select Locally Employed Staff
Overseas Staff Training: Trauma-Informed Volunteer Support	This in-person session strengthens awareness of the psychological and emotional impacts that trauma can have on a person and examines communication methods that are trauma-informed.	Overseas Direct Hires and select Locally Employed Staff at post	Within the first six months of employment for overseas U.S. Direct Hires. Within the first 18 months of employment for select Locally Employed Staff

Members of each post's Designated Staff²⁸ require additional trainings to hone their abilities to deliver trainings to Volunteers and provide response services to Volunteer victims/survivors:

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	AUDIENCE	FREQUENCY
Training for New Designated Staff at Post	This training provides certification for new designated staff members and is required for access to restricted reports.	New SSMs, PCMOs, and SARLs	Within 45 days of entering on duty as a designated staff member
Designated Staff Quarterly Meetings	This in-person meeting brings together the designated staff at each post to deepen their knowledge and skills on a range of SAPR related topics.	All Designated Staff	Once per quarter

²⁸ The first responders and service providers for Volunteer victims/survivors of sexual assault are known as Designated Staff. This team at each Peace Corps post is comprised of the following: Peace Corps medical officers (PCMO), safety and security manager (SSM), safety and security assistant (SSA), back-up SSM, and sexual assault response liaisons (SARL). Additionally, the regional Peace Corps safety and security officer (PCSSO) is a remote member of the Designated Staff who the SSM or SSA can reach out to for guidance, when needed.

Interim SARL Training ²⁹	Provides training to provisionally certify new SARLs to perform the functions of this role until they are able to attend the next available initial SARL training.	New SARLs	Once, upon being appointed a SARL
Initial SARL Training	This in-person, 40-hour training for new SARLs provides the necessary information and skills to certify them to perform the SARL role, including but not limited to: the dynamics of sexual assault, impact on victims; Peace Corps' policies and procedures related to sexual assault; the roles and responsibilities of the team members involved in the response including SARLs; and how to effectively and compassionately respond to Volunteers who report a sexual assault.	New SARLs	Once, upon being appointed a SARL
SARL Continuing Education Requirement	SARLs are required to complete 10 hours of continuing education each calendar year. At a minimum, one of these hours must include a training on victim support ethics.	SARLs	10 hours per year
All SARL Conference	This in-person, three-day conference brings all SARLs together to deepen their knowledge and skills on best practices in supporting Volunteer victims/survivors of sexual assault.	SARLs	Every three years
OHS SAFE Training	This online training familiarizes PCMOs with the process of sexual assault forensic exams (SAFE).	PCMOs	Within 45 days of start of employment, and annually after that
Continuing Medical Education (CME)	All PCMOs engage annually in a five-day, in-person continuing medical education training which includes topics related to supporting victims/survivors of sexual assault.	PCMOs	Once a year
SSM Training on Trauma-Informed Interviewing	This forthcoming online training will train new SSMs in trauma-informed interviewing approaches.	New SSMs	Within 45 days of entering on duty
SSM Conference	This in-person, five-day conference for SSMs and SSAs is focused on safety and security issues, including sexual assault and stalking.	SSMs and SSAs	Every two years

²⁹ A Sexual Assault Response Liaison (SARL) is a full-time Locally Employed Staff member who has volunteered and received training to serve as a first responder—in addition to their primary Peace Corps staff role. SARLs are key members of the Designated Staff who liaise directly with Volunteer victims/survivors to provide support and accompaniment throughout the in-country sexual assault response process.

While the Peace Corps tracks completion of these required trainings to ensure compliance, a comprehensive evaluation every three years will provide key insights into their effectiveness and role in fostering a culture of sexual assault prevention across the agency.

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Staff Learning and Development, Office of Safety and Security, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets		Determine scope of work (SOW) for evaluation and methodology	Conduct evaluation of all SAPR trainings	Revise trainings according to evaluation findings	Implement revised trainings

Goal 3: *Review key Peace Corps policies, procedures, guidance, and trainings to continually streamline and strengthen sexual assault prevention within the Peace Corps’ operations*

Rationale: The Peace Corps sets forth authoritative policies, procedures, guidance, and training requirements for Volunteer and staff safety, including as it relates to sexual assault prevention and response, through the following Peace Corps Manual Sections (MS), safety and security instructions (SSI) and medical technical guidelines (TG):

- MS 204 Volunteer Conduct
- MS 240 Immunity from Disciplinary Action in Sexual Assault and Stalking Incidents
- MS 241 Anonymous Sexual Assault Hotline
- MS 242 Stalking of a Volunteer
- MS 243 Responding to a Sexual Assault
- MS 244 Sexual Assault Response Liaisons
- MS 246 Volunteer/Trainee Sexual Misconduct
- MS 270 Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security
- MS 649 Peace Corps Staff Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking Policy
- SSI 101 Overseas Staff Training
- SSI 120 Post Designated Staff Training Guidelines
- SSI 202 Response to Threatening Situations
- SSI 310 Safety and Security Volunteer Training Guidelines
- SSI 350 Response Orientation
- SSI 401 Site History Documentation
- SSI 410 Housing Standards and Inspection Process
- SSI 415 Host Family Selection Criteria and Approval Process
- SSI 420 Guidance for Host Family and Counterpart Orientation/Information on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment
- SSI 500 Legal Environment Survey Guidelines
- SSI 510 Annual Crime Data Review Process

- SSI 520 Annual Review of Reasons for Not Reporting
- SSI 550 Responding to Sexual Harassment of Volunteers/Trainees by Individuals other than Peace Corps Staff/Volunteers
- TG 540 Clinical Management of Sexual Violence
- TG 542 Sexual Assault Forensic Exam and Evidence Collection by the PCMO
- TG 543 TeleSANE Program³⁰
- TG 545: Sexual Assault: Mental Health Assessment and Care

Of particular note, the procedures for *MS 243 Responding to Sexual Assault* provide authoritative instructions, roles, and responsibilities for all staff in their response to a report of a Volunteer sexual assault. The review of these procedures, among other things, will clarify which staff have a specific need to know details of sexual assault cases; describe criteria for residence changes, site changes, and service changes; include an updated conversation guide; and incorporate recently updated security assessment tools.

As the SAPR program continues to evolve according to current research, these key sources of operational guidance that support primary, second, and tertiary levels of prevention will be reviewed by expert consultants and Peace Corps staff. They will be updated on a regular basis to ensure they continue to meet best practices for implementing the public health approach to prevention.

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Overseas Programming and Support, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	50 percent completed	75 percent completed	100 percent completed		

Goal 4: *Include evaluation of employees’ ability to uphold the principles and practices of the SAPR program in performance plans and reviews*

Rationale: All Peace Corps staff, overseas and domestic, have a direct or indirect role to play in supporting sexual assault prevention and response. To clarify this as an organizational value and expectation, each staff member’s responsibilities in sexual assault prevention and response will be evaluated and integrated into performance plans and performance reviews.

Lead Office: Office of Human Resources

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Completed				

³⁰ TeleSANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) is a program that supports the PCMO with expert SANE consultants to provide trauma-informed health care services and forensic examination after a sexual assault.

Strategic Objective 1.2: Promote the strengthening of protective factors in host communities through Peace Corps’ programming

Rationale: One of the most recognizable features of the Peace Corps is the collaborative development programming conducted by Volunteers and their counterparts in community spaces. The Peace Corps’ development work in all sectors is well-suited to promote protective factors in host communities as there is promising evidence that development programs that include topics such as life skills, positive youth development, economic empowerment, constructive male engagement, positive parenting, youth sexual and reproductive health, and/or gender equitable teaching practices can lead communities to critically question harmful social norms.³¹ It is crucial to engage with social norms as they are often one of the root drivers of sexual violence.

Norm-shifting occurs over time and becomes stronger as more people engage with new ideas. Community programs, such as those led by Volunteers and counterparts, can inspire groups of community members to engage in consistent reflections that lead to a collective shifting of attitudes and actions. Research from promising prevention practices reinforces the idea that viewing behavior change as a collective process within the community is more effective than one of individual change.³²

Goal 5: Review 100 percent of Peace Corps reference logical project frameworks with a prevention lens, specifically to identify how each program strengthens protective factors and minimizes risk factors

Rationale: All of the agency’s reference logical project frameworks³³ play a role in supporting individual and community health and well-being. While this work is not new to the Peace Corps, the agency has not previously articulated how its work of building individual and community strengths (through methods such as the Participatory Analysis for Community Action, or PACA)³⁴ address the root causes of sexual violence (i.e., risk factors) and enhance protective factors.

Lead Office: Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support

Supporting Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Office of Global Health and HIV

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Prevention lens resources for reference logical project frameworks in development	Prevention lens resources for reference logical project frameworks in development	100 percent of reference logical project framework resources updated with a prevention lens		

Goal 6: Strengthen development of protective factors in Peace Corps’ programming by piloting the integration of activities that promote social-emotional well-being

Rationale: Safe and emotionally stable environments with strong support networks can mitigate a person’s exposure to physical, emotional, and sexual violence.³⁵ The Peace Corps will create tools for posts to integrate activities that support social-emotional well-being into programming to enhance participants’ emotional health, adaptive mindsets, and support networks.

31 “Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls: What Does the Evidence Say?,” 1555.
 32 Jewkes, Rachel, Samantha Wilson, Lori Heise, Laura Washington, Nwabisa Shai, Alice Kerr-Wilson, Andrew Gibbs, Erin Stern, Nicola Christofides, “Elements of the Design and Implementation of Interventions to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Associated with Success: Reflections from the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls? Global Programme,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 12129 (19 November 2021), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8621962/>.
 33 Each Peace Corps project that is implemented in a host country has a corresponding Logical Project Framework (LPF) that includes the logic model and monitoring and evaluation plan. Post LPFs are designed based on sector reference LPFs and detail the project’s theory of change, desired outcomes, activities undertaken to achieve those outcomes, and the rationale for why those activities will lead to the desired outcomes.
 34 PACA is Peace Corps unique approach to appreciative, participatory, gender-sensitive, inclusive, sustainable development. PACA is how Peace Corps Volunteers facilitate participatory development at each phase of the project/activity life cycle. Specifically, Volunteers and their project partners use PACA to facilitate the development of relationships, and the subsequent brainstorming, design, iteration, implementation, adjustment, and improvement of every collaborative project.
 35 “Social-Emotional Learning.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 15 September 2023, <https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/violence-prevention-practice/node/208/#/>.

Lead Office: Office of Global Health and HIV

Supporting Office: Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets		Tools completed			

Goal 7: Create guidance for Volunteers who receive reports from host community members about sensitive information, such as gender-based violence, early pregnancy, HIV, and sexual assault

Rationale: As trusted members of their host communities, Volunteers may receive information from community members who have experienced/are experiencing GBV, early pregnancy, HIV, and/or sexual assault. Handling this sensitive information is vital for protecting the safety and security of both the community member and the Volunteer. The Peace Corps will work with internal and external experts to formulate standard guidance for posts and Volunteers on how to respond to reports of sensitive information from community members.

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Overseas Programming and Support, Office of Global Health and HIV

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Guidance distributed to posts				

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE 2: REDUCING REAL AND PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO REPORTING SEXUAL ASSAULT

Summary

The potential consequences from experiencing sexual violence and its associated trauma can be serious, wide-ranging, and long-term,³⁶ ranging from physical injuries to longstanding and chronic conditions, including mental health conditions. Compounding this harm is the social stigma of sexual violence, which may lead to shame, fear, guilt, and avoidance, resulting in victim/survivors not reporting a crime or seeking services.³⁷

In the public health framework for sexual assault prevention, the immediate and long-term responses to reports of sexual assault play critical roles in secondary and tertiary prevention levels. Research indicates that nearly 50 percent of victims/survivors of sexual violence experience more than one incident of sexual assault in their lifetime—this is known as re-victimization.³⁸ Trauma-informed care is recommended for reducing the risk of someone who has experienced sexual assault from being re-victimized and/or re-traumatized.³⁹

Since 2013, Peace Corps has implemented robust sexual assault response procedures to ensure that Volunteer victims/survivors have access to quality security, medical, psychosocial, and legal services to support their safety and recovery.⁴⁰ However, services may only reach Volunteer victims/survivors who feel confident in the Peace Corps' response protocols and services, especially with regard to concerns of confidentiality, stigma, fear of retaliation, and loss of control. The Peace Corps is committed to continually improving its approach to sexual assault response, both in the quality of services provided to Volunteer victims/survivors and in identifying and minimizing real and perceived barriers that may hinder a Volunteer victim/survivor from reporting a sexual assault.

In 2019, the reporting rate of Volunteers who experienced sexual assault was estimated to be fewer than 50 percent.⁴¹ Globally, the issue of underreporting is exacerbated by complex layers of cultural nuance and power dynamics.⁴² Most experts agree that there is widespread underreporting of sexual violence⁴³ and, far too often, the data is inconsistent, incomplete, or simply nonexistent.⁴⁴

For the Peace Corps, the low reporting rate of sexual assault demonstrates that the agency has a significant opportunity to leverage best practices and current research to reduce the real and perceived barriers to reporting. It should be noted that within this context of underreporting, a rise in Volunteer reports of sexual assaults may not necessarily indicate a rise in actual sexual assault incidents, but rather a decrease in unreported sexual assaults.

Work to Date: The Peace Corps has made significant investments in trauma-informed approaches in recent years. In FY 2022, the SAPR program created a staff development video series entitled *On Being Trauma-Informed*. Consisting of 15 interviews with agency staff, this series explores the meaning of being trauma-informed and the impacts of not utilizing a trauma-informed approach with victims/survivors.

In FY 2023, the Peace Corps contracted with a consulting firm to support the agency's cultural shift toward being trauma-informed and victim-centered by conducting a comprehensive review of Peace Corps sexual assault

36 Basile, Kathleen C., Susan DeGue, Kathryn Jones, Kimberley Freire, Jenny Dills, Sharon G. Smith, Jerris L. Raiford, *STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence* (Atlanta, Georgia: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016), <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/39126>.

37 Palermo, Tia, Jennifer Bleck, Amber Peterman, "Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender-Based Violence in Developing Countries," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 179, no. 5 (12 December 2013), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3927971/pdf/kwt295.pdf>.

38 Walker, Hannah E., Jennifer S. Freud, Robyn A. Ellis, Shawn M. Fraine, and Laura C. Wilson, "The Prevalence of Sexual Revictimization: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Sage Journals* 20, no. 1 (8 February 2017), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1524838017692364?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori:rid:crossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%20%20pubmed

39 "Research to Practice Paper: Trauma-informed Responses to Sexual Assault." Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research, <https://noviolence.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Trauma-Practice-Paper-FINAL-002.pdf>.

40 Many elements of the Peace Corps Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program is in alignment with the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Protection Act of 2011 and the Sam Farr and Nick Castle Peace Corps Reform Act of 2018. However, the widening of the program to include sexual assault prevention goes above and beyond these Congressional mandates.

41 "2019 Annual Report of Crime Against Volunteers," Peace Corps, September 2020, https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/Annual_Report_of_Crimes_Against_Volunteers_2019.pdf

42 Power dynamics exist at multiple levels and within many identities. Examples include: between male and female; between a host community member and a Peace Corps Volunteer; between a historically marginalized person and those in traditional positions of power; or between different socioeconomic classes.

43 Borumandnia, Nasrin, Naghmeh Khadembashi, Mohammad Tabatabaei, Hamid Alavi Majd, "The Prevalence Rate of Sexual Violence Worldwide: A Trend Analysis," *BMC Public Health* 20, no. 1835 (2020) https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7706187/pdf/12889_2020_Article_9926.pdf.

44 "Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender-Based Violence in Developing Countries," 602.

policies, trainings, and guides using a trauma-informed lens. The agency also worked with multiple stakeholders and the external consulting firm to revise the comprehensive safety and security training package (known as the Global Core) that all Volunteers receive in the pre-service and in-service environments as well as in the *My Safety Guide*.⁴⁵ These trainings were reviewed and updated to ensure that trauma-informed approaches/practices were embedded within each training.

From FYs 2021 to 2023, the Peace Corps delivered role-based trauma-informed trainings to all staff with a direct responsibility to support Volunteers who have experienced sexual assault, specifically: safety and security managers and assistants; Peace Corps medical officers; and sexual assault response liaisons. Additionally, in FY 2024, the Peace Corps conducted a series of in-person and live virtual seminars to advance the agency’s trauma-informed organizational culture and demonstrate trauma-informed facilitation techniques to senior staff, associate directors and regional directors at Peace Corps/Washington DC, members of the SAPR team, country directors at posts, and members of each post’s Designated Staff.

Strategic Objective 2.1: Strengthen sexual assault response procedures and services

The quality of care and services that a victim/survivor of sexual assault receives can have a direct impact not only on their individual short-term and long-term recovery, but also on whether a victim/survivor reports a sexual assault from the start. Volunteers must have confidence in the agency’s response procedures and services, and that their sensitive information will be handled with care and dignity in order to make a report of sexual assault to a Peace Corps staff member. The Peace Corps will continue to leverage current research to further strengthen the agency’s response procedures and services to support the recovery process of Volunteer victims/survivors.

Goal 8: Streamline the confidentiality and communication protocols for sexual assault response

Rationale: While the Peace Corps has robust confidentiality policies⁴⁶ in place, reporting a sexual assault means sharing sensitive details with others, which alone may be the primary barrier that prevents some victims/survivors from accessing services. Without a full understanding of which staff has access to their sexual assault information, and why, Volunteer victims/survivors may choose to not report.

To strengthen the Peace Corps victim-centered approach to sexual assault response, the agency will review, limit, and clarify which essential Peace Corps staff may have limited or complete access to sexual assault case information in order to effectively provide response services to the Volunteer victim/survivor. Helping Volunteers understand the deliberately restricted scope of information shared may alleviate concerns regarding loss of control over the details of their personal experience.

Additionally, the Peace Corps will streamline its response communication protocols so that Volunteer victims/survivors may limit their direct communication about the sexual assault to only one designated staff member who will coordinate their support services.

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Confidentiality protocols completed	Communication protocols completed			

⁴⁵ The Peace Corps *My Safety Guide* is a comprehensive resource written by returned Volunteers that covers safety and security risks that are common to Peace Corps service. The guide complements safety and security trainings and policies.

⁴⁶ The Peace Corps policies on confidentiality are codified in *MS 271 Confidentiality Protection*, *MS 294 Confidentiality of Volunteer Information*, and *TG 150 Medical Confidentiality (Protected Health Information)*.

Goal 9: Implement an electronic Volunteer Preference Form to strengthen communication and documentation of sexual assault response services

Rationale: The Volunteer Preference Form (VPF) is a key part of the Peace Corps sexual assault response protocol. It explains the support services and reporting options,⁴⁷ and the Volunteer victim/survivor indicates through the VPF which services and reporting option they prefer. In September 2024, the Peace Corps introduced a new electronic VPF that was integrated into the agency’s Security Information Management System (SIMS), enabling the agency to better track the services that Volunteer victims/survivors request. (The paper VPF will remain available, especially for in-person staff conversations with Volunteer victims/survivors and can be uploaded by staff to SIMS after intake.)

To ensure that these services are clearly and consistently communicated by staff across all Peace Corps posts, in October 2024, the agency released a conversation guide to accompany the VPF in the procedures for *MS 243 Responding to a Sexual Assault*. The guide is particularly useful to staff for whom English is a non-native language, as it will help them convey information to Volunteers in a trauma-informed manner and ensure that no services are overlooked.

Lead Office: Office of Safety and Security

Supporting Office: Office of the Chief Information Officer

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Completed				

Goal 10: Conduct a trend analysis of the psychological services provided to Volunteer victims/survivors of sexual assault for learning and improvement

Rationale: To support mental well-being, an important service offered to Volunteer victims/survivors of sexual assault are consults with psychologists within the Peace Corps Behavior Health and Outreach (BHO) unit. Utilizing ten years’ worth of data, the agency is undertaking an analysis of utilization trends from these consults to analyze the patient population (who is selecting the service), the session format (mean, median, and mode), patient outcomes, and pre/post data from telehealth questionnaires. Additionally, the analysis will include data on BHO’s ability to meet its responsiveness standard of 72 hours. This data analysis will assist the agency in strengthening this key service for Volunteer victims/survivors.

Lead Office: Behavioral Health and Outreach

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Trend analysis completed				

Strategic Objective 2.2: Integrate trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centered care to Volunteers who have experienced sexual assault

A trauma-informed care approach recognizes that trauma can have a direct impact on how, whether, and when a victim/survivor accesses sexual assault response services.⁴⁸ It can also minimize potential barriers to reporting through appropriate policies, procedures, and practices. The Peace Corps believes that if Volunteers who have experienced sexual assault have confidence that their physical and psychological safety will be supported in a

⁴⁷ Volunteer victims/survivors have two options for reporting a sexual assault, known as Restricted and Standard Reports. Each reporting option has its own confidentiality protocol and service options available. See page 12 of the *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Performance Review and Report: Fiscal Years 2021-2023* for more information, https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/open-government/24_FY21-23_SAPR_Report_V05.pdf.

⁴⁸ "Trauma-Informed Care." *Trauma Informed*, 2021, <https://www.traumapolicy.org/topics/trauma-informed-care>.

trauma-informed manner—and centered on their needs—then the potential for Volunteer victims/survivors to seek services may expand.

The Peace Corps will promote a victim/survivor-centered approach that strives to be trauma-informed, non-stigmatizing, and that endeavors to treat all with dignity and respect regardless of intersecting identities. There is an opportunity to adopt trauma-informed practices across the entire SAPR program from policies, procedures, and trainings to the data and surveys gathered and the communications shared (See Goal 11). This preventive or holistic trauma-informed lens will endeavor to provide a common approach and language for all members of the Peace Corps network (Volunteers, staff, community partners, etc.) to have a sense of belonging and to be seen, heard, and valued.

Goal 11: *Update 100 percent of SAPR trainings, policies, processes, communications, and survey instruments to ensure they are based in a victim/survivor-centered approach that is trauma-informed and inclusive of intersecting identities*

Rationale: The Peace Corps’ institutional values and approaches begin with its systems. For sexual assault prevention and response, this requires a comprehensive update of all elements of the SAPR program, following the external consultant’s review, to orient them toward a trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centered approach.

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets		75 percent SAPR tools updates completed	100 percent SAPR tools updates completed		

Goal 12: *Design and implement new trauma-informed training modules for Peace Corps staff*

Rationale: While the Peace Corps has made significant investments in training staff on trauma-informed communication and approaches, in-person trainings are not a sustainable model to reach the ongoing roster of staff that join the agency each year. Therefore, the Peace Corps will work with an expert consultant to develop self-directed training modules that deepen staff’s knowledge, skills, and attitudes on trauma-informed approaches—including cultural considerations, self-care for trauma providers, and best practices—that will be completed by Designated Staff as part of their quarterly meetings and made accessible to all Peace Corps staff at any time for continual professional development.

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Training modules completed	Designated Staff complete modules			

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE 3: IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Summary

The work of the SAPR program is neither insular nor isolated—it is important to a multitude of Peace Corps stakeholders including staff; prospective, current, and returned Volunteers; the United States Congress; host communities; etc. Additionally, as a Federal agency, the Peace Corps' work reflects the U.S. Government's priorities on gender-based violence prevention and contributes to the larger effort to end sexual violence around the world.

The Peace Corps will demonstrate accountability by responding to recommendations from the Office of Inspector General and the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee (SAAC)⁴⁹ and fulfilling the commitments published in *Broadening the Peace Corps Approach to Sexual Assault Prevention* and this prevention strategy. Not only does accountability advance the work and values of the SAPR program within the organizational culture, but it can also deepen stakeholder trust in the agency.

Work to Date: Over the last four years, the Peace Corps has made notable investments in the SAPR program by leveraging research and best practices, especially in the area of prevention. These are comprehensively outlined in the *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Performance Review and Report: Fiscal Years 2021-2023*.

Strategic Objective 3.1: Increase the transparency and accessibility of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program

The Peace Corps will continue to promote openness with non-confidential information related to the SAPR program through multiple channels, such as the Peace Corps website, biannual reports to Congress, and webinar events. Access to this important information will serve multiple stakeholders who have a vested interest in the Peace Corps and will stand as a model to other organizations and public entities that are establishing their own policies and procedures related to sexual assault prevention and response.

Being transparent also means sharing information so that applicants to the Peace Corps can make informed choices. The Peace Corps will work toward additional information-sharing⁵⁰ throughout the recruitment process, as well as engagement across offices, so that applicants have complete and accurate information as they decide if Peace Corps service is the right choice for them.

Work to Date: Beginning in FY 2018, the Peace Corps has made public high-level, anonymized crime data in the form of country crime profile reports for each post on the Peace Corps website. These reports include data about Volunteer perceptions of safety; reported crimes against Volunteers, including sexual assault; harassment; and early termination of service.

Goal 13: Produce and publish on the Peace Corps website a comprehensive public SAPR Performance Review and Report in FY 2026 and FY 2028

Rationale: As part of its commitment to provide clarity and transparency related to the agency's ongoing work to leverage current research to inform the SAPR program, the Peace Corps will continue to publish biennial reports about the SAPR program's priorities, activities, accomplishments, and challenges. Each report will also include relevant data and statistics.

⁴⁹ The SAAC was established by Congress through the Kate Puzey Volunteer Protection Act of 2011 to respond to the needs of the Peace Corps and Volunteers as the agency strengthened its Volunteer-centered sexual assault risk reduction and response program. Initially mandated through 2018, the SAAC was extended through the end of FY 2023 by the Sam Farr and Nick Castle Peace Corps Reform Act of 2018. Per statute, the SAAC ceased formally operating on September 30, 2023. Though Congress has not, to date, reauthorized the SAAC or extended its exemption from the Federal Advisory Committee Act, the Peace Corps SAPR program remains committed to continuing to strengthen its prevention and response efforts by meeting with individual experts to review current policies and procedures.

⁵⁰ No personally identifiable information related to the SAPR program is ever shared publicly.

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Offices: Office of Safety and Security, Office of Global Operations, Office of Victim Advocacy, Office of Health Services, Office of the General Counsel, Office of the Director, Office of the Executive Secretariat, Office of Communications

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets		Report for FYs 2024 and 2025 published		Report for FYs 2026 and 2027 published	

Goal 14: *Integrate SAPR into Peace Corps’ communications operations, including using social media to inform current, future, and returned Volunteers about the agency’s work on sexual assault prevention and response*

Rationale: Ongoing communications about the SAPR program is vital to keeping the public informed about this agency priority. In particular, it is critical that prospective, current, and returned Volunteers have a deep understanding of how the Peace Corps is leveraging research, best practices, and feedback to support their needs. Bringing exposure to this important dimension of Peace Corps operations can reduce stigma, build trust in the reporting process, and meaningfully add to the societal dialogue about ending sexual violence.

Lead Office: Office of Communications

Supporting Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

Goal 15: *Train Peace Corps recruiters, placement specialists, and country desk officers to provide comprehensive information to applicants and invitees regarding the Peace Corps SAPR program*

Rationale: While every country, including the U.S., struggles with sexual assault,⁵¹ applicants to the Peace Corps naturally seek quality information to strengthen their understanding of the overseas context, especially as it relates to safety and security. To assist individuals as they make their decision about whether to apply to the Peace Corps, the agency’s recruiters, placement specialists, and country desk officers must be prepared to answer sensitive questions about sexual assault and provide accurate information about the Peace Corps Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program.

Lead Office: Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

Supporting Offices: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Office of Global Operations

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	In progress	Completed			

Strategic Objective 3.2: Increase feedback mechanisms within the Peace Corps network

In addition to leveraging research and best practices, continuous quality improvement requires the collection of

⁵¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that globally about 1 in 3 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence: <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>

data and perspectives that can be analyzed to identify the strengths and challenges of a program. As of 2024, the SAPR program is being implemented across 61 countries where Volunteers are serving, so the importance of monitoring its implementation is key to the program’s overall health.

While the SAPR program is administrated through policies, procedures, guidelines, and trainings, the end-users of the program are staff and Volunteers in each of the countries where the Peace Corps is invited to serve. Thus, these perspectives on the SAPR program are critical to providing the data and feedback needed for program monitoring and improvement.

Goal 16: *Collect and analyze feedback from Volunteers for integration into the Peace Corps’ sexual assault response processes and procedures*

Rationale: Volunteers are the priority stakeholders of the Peace Corps SAPR program. How a program’s implementation meets the needs of its clientele is critical to understanding its successes, strengths, and challenges—such as barriers to reporting. Volunteer feedback allows the agency to have a full view of the SAPR program and identify gaps in order to improve.

The Peace Corps recently revised several feedback instruments with trauma-informed questions to provide several opportunities throughout a Volunteer’s service journey to provide perspectives on the SAPR program. Analysis of this important data will elevate Volunteer feedback for the continual learning and strengthening of the SAPR program.

Lead Office: Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

Supporting Office: Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

Goal 17: *Collect and analyze feedback from Designated Staff and other key staff for integration into the Peace Corps’ sexual assault response processes and procedures.*

Rationale: At a host-country level, the designated staff are the first responders to Volunteer victims/survivors of sexual assault, following policies and procedures to provide requested services and support Volunteer health and well-being. As primary implementers, the feedback of designated staff is a critical lens on the day-to-day functioning of the SAPR program.

The Peace Corps will administer a SAPR designated staff survey in 2026 to collect comprehensive feedback that, when integrated with regularized feedback touchpoints conducted through designated staff quarterly meetings and bi-monthly case management reviews, will provide a robust set of qualitative data from which strengths and challenges in the implementation of the SAPR program can be identified and addressed.

Lead Office: Office Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Targets		Survey administered and results analyzed	Results integrated into SAPR program as applicable	Results integrated into SAPR program as applicable	Results integrated into SAPR program as applicable

CONCLUSION

The Peace Corps is committed to the prevention work outlined in this strategy—for the health, safety, and well-being of Volunteers and the members of host communities where Volunteers live and serve. To this end, the agency has broadened its overall lens to sexual violence, working with intentionality to bolster prevention activities, promote trauma-informed approaches, and strengthen accountability. Through a holistic, integrated public health approach to sexual violence prevention, the Peace Corps will not only better lead with its values and serve its bold mission of promoting world peace and friendship, but also contribute to the global work of preventing sexual violence perpetration and victimization.



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