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The Peace Corps

The Peace Corps is an independent agency that sends American volunteers to serve at the grassroots level in developing countries in order to advance three goals:

- promote world peace and friendship by improving the lives of the communities where volunteers serve,
- help others understand American culture, and
- share volunteers' experiences with Americans at home.

President John F. Kennedy proposed the Peace Corps as part of a broader national service initiative—a proposal Congress enacted with the Peace Corps Act of 1961 (P.L. 87-293, as amended). More than 245,000 volunteers have served in 144 countries to date. (Unless noted, data are as of September 2025. For further information, see CRS Report RS21168, *The Peace Corps: Overview and Issues*.)

Ways to Serve

Most volunteers (96%) serve in the traditional 27-month program, which comprises three months of language and technical training followed by two years of service embedded in a host community. Volunteers work in a partner institution, such as a nonprofit organization, a municipal program, or a school, with a designated counterpart—a community member who is the volunteer's conduit to the local community. Host communities are typically remote; 79% of volunteers serve in a rural town, village, or outer island, generally placing Peace Corps volunteers at the farthest reaches of U.S. foreign assistance.

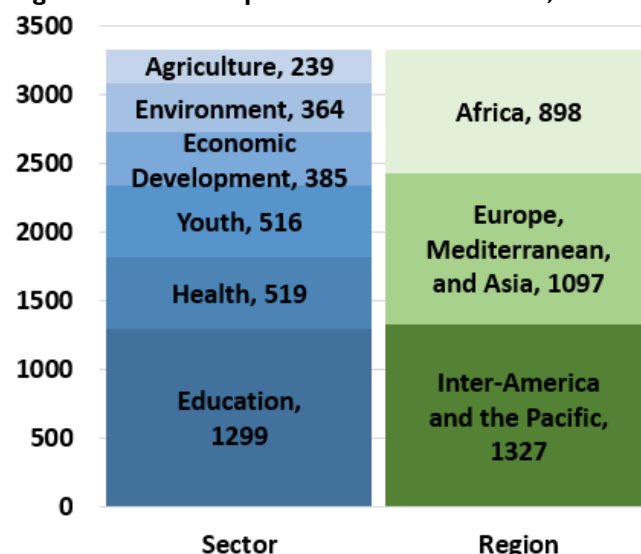
The Peace Corps has two other volunteering models. A small share (4%) serves in Peace Corps Response, a more flexible, short-term program for professionals with specialized skills and some work experience. Since 2020, the Peace Corps has also provided remote volunteers through an ongoing Virtual Service Pilot, which has facilitated 1,301 engagements, including in countries where the Peace Corps historically had large programs but no longer can due to safety issues (e.g., Ukraine and Ethiopia).

Geography and Sectors

The Peace Corps currently operates in 60 countries (Figure 1), with one new country (Palau) expected to accept volunteers in 2026. The largest region by number of volunteers is the Inter-America and Pacific region, a recent change. Historically, sub-Saharan Africa has hosted the most volunteers and remains the region with the most country programs.

Volunteers serve across six sectors: agriculture, community economic development, education, environment, health, and youth in development. Education has been the largest sector (39% of volunteer assignments) for decades.

Figure 1. Peace Corps Volunteer Distribution, 2025



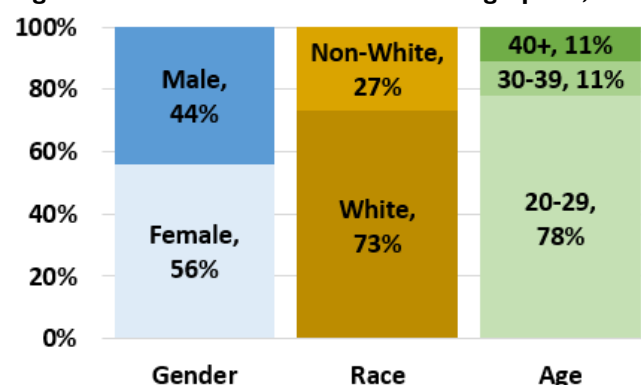
Source: Peace Corps, *Agency Financial Report, FY2025*.

Note: Includes two-year and Response volunteers and trainees.

The Volunteers

Volunteers come from every state. According to surveys, they are motivated by personal growth, cultural exposure, and a wish to help others. In 2025, around 80% of volunteers were under age 30 (Figure 2), and more than 95% held a college degree. The non-white share of the volunteer force grew from 15% in 2001 to about 27% in 2025. The share of female volunteers in 2025, about 56%, is below the 63% average from 2010 to 2020. About four-fifths of volunteers would recommend the Peace Corps to others.

Figure 2. Volunteer Force: Select Demographics, 2025



Source: Annual Volunteer Survey, 2025.

Notes: Reflects volunteer reporting, not actual volunteer data. Figures within 3% of actual values, but the Peace Corps stopped reporting demographic data in its annual reports in 2025.

Budget and Volunteer Force Trends

The Peace Corps' annual appropriation were typically around \$410 million from 2015 to 2022, rose to \$430.5 million for each year from FY2023 to FY2025, and returned to \$410.5 million in FY2026 (**Table 1**). The FY2026 appropriation represents a 22.5% cut in inflation-adjusted terms since FY2015. The Biden Administration proposed a funding increase in its final two Peace Corps budget requests to expand to new countries, cover inflation-fueled cost increases, and improve recruitment. The second Trump Administration's first two requests proposed maintaining the Peace Corps' budget at \$430.5 million. Congress enacted a \$20 million cut in FY2026, and a House-reported measure would maintain that level of \$410.5 million for FY2027. The Senate has not acted on FY2027 appropriations for the Peace Corps.

Table 1. Peace Corps Funding and Volunteer Levels, by Fiscal Year
(funding in millions, U.S.\$)

	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Request	430.5	495.0	479.0	430.5	430.5
Enacted	430.5	430.5	430.5	410.5	—
Volunteer forecast	3,900	5,180	4,590	4,140	4,000
Volunteer actuals	2,290	3,620	3,322	—	—

Source: Budget requests and public laws.

Notes: Includes Inspector General. Volunteer numbers are those funded with the Peace Corps appropriation. FY2027 not yet enacted.

The volunteer force shrank in FY2025 to 3,322, about half of prepandemic levels and less than half of the 2011 peak of around 9,000. The Peace Corps has as many country programs as prepandemic but has been unable to fill all volunteer slots. Most staff have said recruitment shortfalls damaged relationships with community partners. The Trump Administration announced a goal to reach 8,000 volunteers by 2030. The Peace Corps has never met a statutory goal, set in 1985, of 10,000 volunteers.

Recent Developments

Under the second Trump Administration, the Peace Corps has undertaken a reorganization, cut 40% of its U.S. staff, and reshuffled its senior management. The agency also halted its FY2022-FY2026 strategic plan and issued an interim performance plan for FY2026, which sets three strategic objectives: (1) align the agency's global portfolio, (2) optimize staffing to save costs, and (3) bolster volunteer opportunities. Peace Corps is working on a new five-year strategic plan. President Trump nominated Riley Barnes, an Assistant Secretary of State, to be Director of the Peace Corps in April 2026.

In addition to organizational and strategic changes, the Peace Corps has announced several programmatic developments. It plans to implement an executive order (E.O. 14204) directing no further aid to South Africa by phasing out its program there. In February 2026, the Peace Corps announced a Tech Prosperity Corps, a new cohort to support deployment of "American artificial intelligence" (AI) in Peace Corps countries participating in the American AI Exports Program.

Selected Issues

No Member has introduced a Peace Corps reauthorization measure in the 119th Congress, unlike in the prior three Congresses. Members continue to engage with the agency through oversight, annual appropriations, and consideration of Trump Administration nominees. The following topics may be among the areas of focus in those interactions.

Role of the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps' three goals have not changed since the agency's founding. Some Members have raised concerns that sending inexperienced young people to poor countries reflects Western paternalism, but the Peace Corps in 2011 found that "energetic, well-rounded generalists" are good representatives of the United States. Members may consider these goals anew, as well as assess how recent Peace Corps programmatic changes align with the agency's cultural exchange mandate and the skills of its largely generalist volunteers.

Agency Independence. Independence from foreign policy strategy is a long-standing feature of the Peace Corps. Dean Rusk, Secretary of State at the agency's founding, argued that making the Peace Corps a foreign policy instrument "would rob it of its contribution to foreign policy" by diminishing the agency's capacity to foster goodwill between volunteers and their host communities. State Department policy mandates its operational separation from the Peace Corps in a way that is "not comparable to those of other U.S. government agencies."

Certain events under the second Trump Administration may lead Members to question the status of that separation. The current Acting Director, Christopher Landau, is also serving as Deputy Secretary of State, and it is unclear if Assistant Secretary Barnes would step down from his current role if confirmed. The agency's interim performance plan is oriented on advancing an "America First" foreign policy, and the Tech Prosperity Corps focuses on the export of U.S. products, not necessarily partner country development. Members may assess whether these moves integrate the Peace Corps with foreign policy priorities, including weighing measures to formalize its foreign policy alignment (e.g., H.R. 5233) or to clarify its independence.

Volunteer Numbers. The Peace Corps has sought to attract more volunteers, including by offering better benefits and greater service flexibility. Members may reexamine the 10,000-volunteer goal, assess recruitment strategy, and weigh in on a purported U.S. trend against volunteerism.

Sexual Assault. The Peace Corps was largely found to have implemented reforms recommended by a Sexual Assault Advisory Council that dissolved in 2023, following prepandemic reports that between a fifth and a third of volunteers experienced sexual assault. Over 90% of volunteers reported feeling safe where they live and work in 2024, similar to historical levels. Members may request updated sexual assault statistics and consider authorizing or reauthorizing defunct advisory groups on volunteer safety.

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