



Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)


is unacceptable behavior and prohibited conduct for all UN Volunteers, who are responsible for meeting standards set out in the [SECRETARY- GENERAL'S BULLETIN ON SPECIAL MEASURES FOR PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE \(ST/SGB/2003/13\)](#)

ZERO TOLERANCE
FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE



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Secretary-General

We will not tolerate anyone committing or condoning sexual exploitation and abuse. We will not let anyone cover up these crimes with the UN flag. Every victim deserves justice and our full support. Together, let us deliver on that promise.

Honouring our values 

In the mandatory training on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (accessible on [UNV eCAMPUS](#) for all UN Volunteers [here](#)), you have all learnt about the UN's zero tolerance policy for SEA.




In case you are new to the UN system and have not yet taken the course, **please complete it as a matter of utmost priority.**

What is Sexual Exploitation and Abuse?

Sexual Exploitation means any actual or attempted abuse of position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

Sexual Abuse means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

EVERY PERSON UNDER THE UNITED NATIONS FLAG MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING PROHIBITIONS:

-  **It is strictly prohibited** to have any sexual activity with anyone under the age of 18 years (regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally or in my home country). Mistaken belief as to the age of the person is no excuse.
-  **It is strictly prohibited** to have sex with anyone, in exchange for money, employment, preferential treatment, goods or services, whether or not prostitution is legal in my country or the host country;
-  **It is strictly prohibited** to engage in any other form of sexually humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour;

UN Volunteers work around the globe to provide assistance to beneficiaries of the United Nations activities. In carrying out our duties, **we have an obligation to protect the most vulnerable populations** and that is why the UN takes special measures to protect beneficiaries of assistance.

	Sexual Exploitation (SE)	Sexual Abuse (SA)
Who?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Us + Beneficiary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Us + Beneficiary
What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse of vulnerability, differential power, or trust • Victim's sexual activity generates benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical intrusion of a sexual nature • Use of force or coercion
Examples?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering money, gifts, or a job in exchange for sex • Withholding due services or blackmailing for sex • Hiring prostitutes • Threats of sexual exploitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwanted kissing, touching, grabbing, or rubbing • Threats of an unwanted sexual act • Raping or attempted rape • Any sexual activity with a child

Sexual exploitation includes abusing a position of vulnerability for sexual purposes. We frequently work amongst vulnerable populations and there may be an inherently unequal power dynamic between staff and beneficiaries of assistance. **If there is any risk that a sexual act might constitute exploitation or abuse, it is better to err on the side of caution.**

Here are some FAQs based on the SEA policies

(extracted from the full document [here](#))

>> Aren't the rules on sexual exploitation and abuse an intrusion into my private life? Isn't what I do in the privacy of my own home, or outside of office hours, my own business?

When you are serving with the UN, you are a representative of the Organization during your free time as well as during your working day. You are held to a very high and very strict standard of conduct because your behaviour, both professional and personal, is always associated with and reflects on the image of the Organization.

>> Why should we have to follow UN rules when the laws of the country say something different? Shouldn't the UN respect local customs?

The SGB sets out the standards of behaviour expected of UN personnel and partners and forms part of our contractual obligations. The UN should respect local customs. Having an additional set of standards does not mean that the UN does not respect local laws and customs, it simply means it has adopted an additional higher standard and requires its staff to behave in a particular way. The two are not contradictory.

>> So, no sex with prostitutes and no sex with under 18-year olds – then is it OK to have sex with a national who does not fall under the previous categories and she/he consents?

The focus is not on the individual or whether there is consent, but on the nature of the relationship. If the relationship is an abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, it is sexual exploitation and is prohibited. UN personnel are often in a position of considerable power over the local population. UN personnel have money, food and shelter whereas the local population might often be very

vulnerable and not always have easy access to these essentials. Because of the risk of abuse of power, sexual relationships between UN personnel and the local population are strongly discouraged.

>> How can I know if the person I am having sex with is over 18 or not?

That is your responsibility. People lie and even have false birth certificates or identity documents. If you are not sure, don't do it. If you have sexual relations with a person under 18 years old, it may not only be a violation of the SGB, but is a criminal act as well.

>> What does it mean to “strongly discourage” sexual relationships with beneficiaries of assistance?

Sexual relationships between UN staff and beneficiaries of assistance are strongly discouraged because they are likely to be based on inherently unequal power dynamics. The SGB does not impose a blanket prohibition on such relationships but any relationship that is sexually exploitative or sexually abusive is prohibited. If there is any doubt, the relationship should not be entered into. UN personnel are expected to uphold the highest standards of conduct. Even the perception of sexual exploitation and abuse can result in damage to the credibility of the individual and the Organization.

>> What is wrong with having sex with a prostitute if the person is an adult and fully consents to it? I'm not harming anyone and in my home country/culture as well as the mission country/culture, prostitution is legal and using the services of prostitutes is accepted.

There is one standard of conduct for UN personnel regardless of what country or culture they are from and regardless of the country or culture in which they are serving. The SGB is the minimum standard of conduct, irrespective of local laws. When you accept an assignment with the UN, you accept to abide by its standards of conduct. The UN is held to a high standard of conduct. Furthermore, prostitution in war - ravaged societies, developing countries and in countries hosting a peacekeeping mission frequently involves extremely vulnerable women and children, including persons who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation. In most communities, the vast majority of women in prostitution don't want to be there. Few seek it out or choose it, and most are desperate to leave it. The lack of economic options for women in vulnerable circumstances may result in prostitution and exploitative sex being one of the few avenues they have for obtaining money to meet basic needs.

Finally, it is important that you **immediately report all cases of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) / Sexual Harassment (SH)** using various channels, including your host entity established protocols.

For any questions related to the policy on SEA, contact your host entity or support@unv.org.
