



The Volunteer Development Worker Scheme

The Department of Social Protection has special arrangements in place to protect the social welfare rights of Volunteer Development Workers (VDWs). This leaflet is intended to explain these arrangements.

What is the Volunteer Development Worker Scheme?

The Department operates a scheme whereby VDWs can qualify for Credited Contributions, or 'VDW Credits', in respect of a period spent working in a developing country and any preparatory period beforehand.

The award of VDW Credits has been in place since 6 April 1983.

These 'Credits' can help you qualify for certain social welfare benefits and pensions after you return from the developing country.

In addition, certain qualifying conditions for entitlement to Maternity Benefit, Health and Safety Benefit, Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit and Treatment Benefit have been relaxed for returned VDW. Therefore, it is important that you identify yourself as a returned VDW when making a claim.

Who is considered a Volunteer Development Worker (VDW)?

A person is classified as a VDW by the Department of Social Protection if they are working temporarily outside Ireland in a developing country on "Volunteer Terms" and their work has been arranged by or through:

- a non-governmental agency in Ireland,
- a governmental or non-governmental agency in any Member of the European Union (other than Ireland),

or

- directly with the Government of the developing country.

"Volunteer Terms" means that the remuneration you receive for the work undertaken is consistent with local rates of pay in the developing country.

What is a Developing Country?

For the purposes of the VDW Scheme, a "Developing Country" is any country which has been designated as such by the Department of Social Protection, in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and having regard to countries designated as Developing Countries by the United Nations, the World Bank or the International Labour Organisation.

How do I qualify for 'VDW Credits'?

In order to qualify for 'VDW Credits' you must be a VDW as defined across.

You must also satisfy the following conditions:

General Conditions

You must:

- be over 16 years of age,
- have been resident in this State immediately prior to taking up the employment,

and

- be employed under conditions of remuneration similar to local conditions applying in the developing country.

Contribution Conditions

You must have paid a minimum of 104 weeks PRSI at **Class A** since starting work.

If you have less than 104 **Class A** contributions paid then Comhlámh will pay **Class A** contributions to bring your total up to the required 104. After the outstanding number of contributions are paid, you will be awarded 'VDW Credits' for the remainder of your overseas assignment up to a limit of 5 years. (If you are a public servant, see next page)

Points to Note

- Where there are two consecutive Tax Years in which no contribution has been paid or credited immediately prior to you going abroad as a Volunteer Development Worker, Comhlámh will pay Class A contributions for the first 26 weeks of your assignment and you will be awarded 'VDW Credits' for the remainder of your assignment up to a limit of 5 years.
- Members of Religious Orders whose work involves pastoral duties are not considered to be VDWs for the purpose of this scheme.

Is there a limit to the length of time for which I can qualify for 'VDW Credits'?

Yes, 'VDW Credits' can only be awarded for a maximum of 5 years. Different periods of work as a VDW are aggregated for the purpose of calculating the 5 years. For example, if you were a VDW for three years previously, and wish to go abroad as a VDW for another three years, you will only qualify for 'VDW Credits' for two years of your second assignment.

Where the period of your assignment abroad exceeds 5 years, you will, where possible, be awarded 'VDW Credits' for the period that is most beneficial to you.

What can I claim if I have been awarded 'VDW Credits'?

'VDW Credits' are normally "fully reckonable", that is they are treated as paid contributions. Therefore, on your return to this country 'VDW Credits' can help you qualify for certain social welfare benefits and pensions.

Certain qualification conditions are relaxed and benefit years are extended for the payment of Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Maternity Benefit and Treatment Benefit for the year the Volunteer Development Worker returns to this country and the relevant succeeding benefit years.

It is very important that you identify yourself as a returned VDW when making a claim for one of these payments to ensure that the relaxed qualification conditions are applied to your claim. Details of the qualifying conditions applying to returned Volunteer Development Workers can be obtained from the relevant area of the Department. See table below:

Type of benefit	Contact point:
Maternity Benefit / Health and Safety Benefit	Social Welfare Services McCarter's Road Ardarvan Buncrana Co. Donegal Telephone: 01 471 5898 LoCall: 1890 690 690 If calling from outside the Republic of Ireland please call + 353 1 471 5898
Treatment Benefit:	Treatment Benefit Section Social Welfare Services St. Oliver Plunkett Road Letterkenny Co. Donegal Telephone: 074 916 4496 LoCall: 1890 400 400 If calling from outside the Republic of Ireland please call + 353 74 916 4480
Jobseeker's Benefit:	Your local Social Welfare Office
Illness Benefit:	Information Officer at your local Social Welfare Office

- Log on to www.welfare.ie.
- LoCall Information Line **1890 66 22 44** or if calling from outside the Republic of Ireland please call **+353 71 91 93313**.
- Drop in to your local Citizens Information Centre, your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office.

What if I am a Public Servant paying modified Social Insurance (PRSI Classes B, C, or D)?

If you worked as a permanent public servant and paid PRSI at **Class B, C or D** immediately before commencing your assignment overseas, you will still be entitled to VDW credits for the period of the assignment. Depending on the period of your assignment abroad, these 'credits' may entitle you to claim Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Treatment Benefit, Maternity Benefit when you return.

However, your 'VDW Credits' cease to be fully reckonable for benefit purposes if you re-enter employment at PRSI **Classes B, C or D**.

As stated at on page 2, Comhlámh will pay the outstanding number of **Class A** contributions if you have less than the required 104 paid prior to the commencement of your assignment.

Career Breaks

VDWs who avail of career breaks from their normal employment in order to work abroad should contact their local Social Welfare Office if they are not re-employed immediately after their assignment ceases.

The general rule is that returned VDWs are entitled to claim Jobseeker's Benefit if the period of their career break has expired and there is no work available from their previous employer. However, if the period of the career break has not expired, you will not be entitled to claim.

How do I apply?

You can apply by completing **VOL DEV 1** form. Completed forms should be returned to your Sending Agency who will in turn forward it to Comhlámh. Ensure that you quote your correct Personal Public Service Number (PPS No.) when you complete the **VOL DEV 1** form.

Comhlámh validates the credentials of the Sending Agency and verifies that you are working overseas on "Volunteer Terms".

Following validation, Comhlámh contacts the Special Collection Section of this Department and the period of your assignment is noted by this office.

What should I do when I get home?

If your assignment has been validated by Comhlámh, it is **extremely important that either you or your sending organisation informs Comhlámh immediately of the date of your return. Do not wait until you make a claim.**

Following notification from Comhlámh, Special Collection Section will award 'VDW Credits' for the period of your assignment abroad up to a limit of 5 years.

Without notification that you have returned to this country, 'VDW Credits' cannot be awarded and this may result in delaying your entitlement to social welfare payments.

Health Benefits

For information on Health Benefits while working abroad as a VDW, contact your local office of the Health Service Executive or the Department of Health at (01) 635 4000.

Where can I get more information?

For further information about the 'VDW Credit' Scheme, contact:

Special Collection Section

Social Welfare Services
Cork Road
Waterford

Telephone: (01) 471 5898

LoCall: 1890 690 690

If calling from outside the Republic of Ireland please call + 353 1 471 5898

Comhlámh

12 Parliament Street
Dublin 2

Telephone: (01) 478 3490

Website: www.comhlamh.org