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Qualifying conditions for our schemes change from time to time. Always check with your local Social Welfare Office to see if qualifying conditions have changed or contact our Information Services at (01) 704 3000.

The information in this booklet is correct at the time of going to print.

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

## 1. The Volunteer Development Worker Scheme

The Department of Social and Family Affairs operates a scheme whereby Volunteer Development Workers (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 Volunteer Development Worker 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, Unemployment Benefit, Disability Benefit and Treatment Benefit have been relaxed for returned Volunteer Development Workers. Therefore, it is important that you identify yourself as a returned VDW when making a claim.

## 2. Who is considered a Volunteer Development Worker (VDW)?

A person is classified as a Volunteer Development Worker (VDW) by the Department of Social and Family Affairs if they are working temporarily outside Ireland in a developing country on “Volunteer Terms” and their work has been arranged by or through:

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

## 3. What is a Developing Country?

For the purposes of the Volunteer Development Worker Scheme, a “Developing Country” is any country which has been designated as such by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Comhlámh, and having regard to countries designated as Developing Countries by the United Nations, the World Bank or the International Labour Organisation.

## 4. How do I qualify for 'VDW Credits'?

In order to qualify for 'VDW Credits' you must be a Volunteer Development Worker as defined at Part 2 across.

You must also satisfy the following conditions:

### General Conditions

- you must be over 16 years of age
- you must have been resident in this State immediately prior to taking up the employment
- you must be employed under conditions of remuneration similar to local conditions applying in the developing country.

### Contribution Conditions

- You must have paid a minimum of 52 weeks PRSI at Class A since starting work.

If you have less than 52 Class A contributions paid and your assignment has been organised through Comhlámh, then Comhlámh will pay Class A contributions to bring your total up to the required 52. 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 Part 7.)

## 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 Volunteer Development Workers for the purpose of this scheme.

## 5. 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.

## 6. 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 Unemployment Benefit, Disability 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:

<b>TYPE OF BENEFIT</b>	<b>CONTACT POINT</b>
<b>Unemployment Benefit:</b>	<b>Your local Social Welfare Office</b>
<b>Disability Benefit:</b>	<b>Information Officer at your local Social Welfare Office</b>
<b>Maternity Benefit:</b>	<b>Maternity Benefit Section Social Welfare Services Office St. Oliver Plunkett Road Letterkenny Co. Donegal  Telephone: LoCall 1890 690 690</b>

**TYPE OF BENEFIT****CONTACT POINT**

**Health & Safety Benefit:** Health and Safety Benefit Section  
 Social Welfare Services Office  
 St. Oliver Plunkett Road  
 Letterkenny  
 Co. Donegal

**Telephone: LoCall 1890 690 690**

**Treatment Benefit:**

Treatment Benefit Section  
 Social Welfare Services Office  
 St. Oliver Plunkett Road  
 Letterkenny  
 Co. Donegal

**Telephone:**

**LoCall: 1890 690 690 ext. 44480**  
**Dublin: (01)704 3000**

## 7. 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 Unemployment Benefit, Disability 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 Part 4, Comhlámh will pay the outstanding number of Class A contributions if you have less than the required 52 paid prior to the commencement of your assignment.

## 8. Career Breaks

Volunteer Development Workers 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 Volunteer Development Workers are entitled to claim Unemployment 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.

## 9. How do I apply?

You can apply by completing the enclosed **PRSI 15** 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.) (previously known as your RSI No.) when you complete the **PRSI 15** form.

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

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

If your assignment has not been organised by or through Comhlámh, you should contact:

**Special Collection Section**

Department of Social and Family Affairs  
Social Welfare Services Office  
Cork Road  
Waterford

Telephone: (051) 356 010/356 011

## 10. What should I do when I get home?

If your assignment was organised either by or through 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.

## 11. Health Benefits

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

## 12. More Information

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

### **Special Collection Section**

Social Welfare Services Office  
Cork Road  
Waterford

Telephone: Waterford (051) 356 010/356 011  
Dublin (01) 704 3000

For information about Comhlámh, contact:

### **Comhlámh Ltd.**

10 Upper Camden Street  
Dublin 2

Telephone: (01) 478 3490

Fax: (01) 478 3738

Website: [www.comhlámh.org](http://www.comhlámh.org)

Information on Social Welfare Services is available on the Internet at [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie).

Information booklets and application forms are also available

- from your local Social Welfare Office  
or
- on the Internet at [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)  
or
- by telephoning the Department's LoCall Leaflet Request Line at **1890 20 23 25**.

## 13. Glossary of Specialised Terms

Benefit Year:	Calendar year in which a person makes a claim
DB:	Disability Benefit
Relevant Tax Year:	Tax year on which payment of benefit is based
PPS No:	Each person paying Social Insurance in Ireland should have an unique Personal Public Service Number (PPS No.). The PPS No. was previously known as the RSI No.
PRSI:	Pay-Related Social Insurance
UB:	Unemployment Benefit
VDW:	Volunteer Development Worker