



What do I need to consider?

All Skillshare International Ireland's development workers are recruited and placed in response to requests from partner organisations with whom we work with in Africa and Asia. These partner organisations commonly include workers' co-operatives, schools and colleges, community associations, local development agencies, government bodies and women's groups. It's likely to be an organisation such as one of these that ultimately employs you for an agreed length of time.

As a development worker, a key aspect of your role will be to share and pass on your professional skills to the people you work with. By developing the abilities and confidence of others, your work will continue to have an impact once you leave.

Building on existing local skills and knowledge, development workers share their experience in a number of ways. You might be working closely with your colleagues as part of a team, setting up systems and processes to help strengthen the organisation by which you're employed, or engaging community and health educators in assessing needs. You may even be teaching in a classroom, or training other trainers, or perhaps working together with a local counterpart who will ultimately take over your role.

A two-way process

However, a development workers role is not all about giving. Sharing skills is very much a two-way process of mutual benefit. It's about people working together in partnership, learning from each other, sharing knowledge, and enhancing understanding and respect between cultures. By working in this way, you'll certainly gain as much as you give.

Living and working in Africa or Asia can be personally and professionally very challenging. You'll have to adjust to a new way of life, adapt to a different culture and customs, and face up to problems you've probably never encountered before. However, in doing so, you'll derive a real sense of personal growth and achievement. At work, there's often the chance to take on a high level of responsibility and to stretch your capabilities in new areas such as training and team leadership. Ultimately, you'll return home with broader professional skills and new ways of working that could benefit your long-term career.

For most, the experience of working as a Skillshare International Ireland development worker brings as positive a change to their own lives as it does to the lives of the people and communities they work with.

Meeting local needs

At Skillshare International Ireland, we have a 'needs driven' approach to our work. We operate in a way that supports locally identified needs rather than imposing our own agenda. Our aim is to find people for jobs, not jobs for people. In this way, the precise needs of the countries and communities we work with are always prioritised.

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To ensure that the contribution you're able to make is appropriate and of lasting value, every request we receive is assessed by our staff in Africa and Asia. Skillshare International Ireland's country offices are staffed entirely by local nationals as we feel strongly that the best people to identify the right opportunities for skills development are those 'on the spot'. Every placement must be shown to allow for the sharing of skills and to promote sustainable development.

What skills are needed?

Across Africa and Asia, Skillshare International Ireland's development workers are meeting an increasingly diverse range of needs. So the range of professional skills we're looking for in applicants is also incredibly varied, covering a wide range of occupations. Most placements though are in the following fields: education and vocational training, health, engineering and planning, agriculture, the environment, income generation, business management and finance. Sometimes of our work is set in a wider context such as empowering women or working with people with disabilities.

Whatever your field of work, you need to have a combination of a relevant professional qualification and work experience - normally at least two years. You must also be flexible enough to adapt your skills to suit local conditions and the resources available, and open to new ways of working. At the same time, you'll also need to be able to pass on your skills to others, not just put them to use yourself. Being effective in your role is all about sharing your skills, not just lending them.

You will have the chance to make a valuable, lasting impact on people's lives, including your own. But sharing skills works both ways. It will be a learning process for you as well as for the people and communities you work with, and most development workers gain as much as they contribute.

The most rewarding step you'll ever take

Although development workers receive a modest living allowance which affords a reasonable standard of living, salaries are not comparable with what you might earn at home. However, you can expect an experience that will be, both professionally and personally, uniquely rewarding.

Professionally, you will be a guest of the local community and will need to respect and accommodate the local culture. This may mean wearing appropriate dress and observing cultural norms. The ability to empathise with local people and share in their day-to-day worries and feelings is essential, in order to be accepted by the community. You will certainly find that problems arise and you must have the persistence and resilience of character necessary to deal with them.

You must be open-minded enough to look beyond the obvious and perceive the real causes of poverty and the way society is ordered. You will be working as part of a local team with people whose skills may be different from your own.

It is essential that you remember that your period of work will form only part of a long-term programme. You must recognise that the fruits of Skillshare International Ireland's partnerships develop gradually over the time frame of the whole programme. Trying to push the pace of progress to fit in with your own sense of achievement may not be sustainable in the long term.

Personally, you need to be aware of the culture shock you may face when you get there and may need to be able to adjust to a very different environment. Placements can be located in rural areas, small towns or deprived urban neighbourhoods and may be isolated. Quite often the pace of life is slow and you will need to be open to the fact that your priorities may not be the same as those of others.

You may be working with fewer and different resources than you are used to, and may also have to acclimatise to new inconveniences such as heat, dust, mosquitoes, lack of water, electricity and transport. There may be a lack of privacy and recreational facilities when you are not working, so you will need to go prepared with some ideas on how to cope with this. The excitement and challenge of being in a different country may soon wear off. Working in development is not for those who are 'running away' from problems, personal or otherwise. It is a positive act and you must want to do it.

Hundreds of people - people like you perhaps - have now worked as Skillshare International Ireland development workers. Many simply describe it as the most rewarding step they have ever taken.