

# Working Overseas

**JobWatch**  
Employment Rights Legal Centre

The aim of this Fact Sheet is to assist people wishing to apply for work overseas. JobWatch has concerns about some recruitment practices. Working in another country seems exciting but there are a few important issues to look into to avoid exploitation and other problems.

This Fact Sheet does not set out to discourage people from working overseas but rather to point out some of the traps and issues to consider. Being prepared by checking out the employer (if practicable) and knowing exactly what to expect is important to help make the overseas working experience as positive as possible.

Travellers should consider the issues raised in this Fact Sheet before accepting an overseas offer of work.

## Advertisements

JobWatch has received complaints from job seekers who applied for overseas jobs that did not exist! We have also had complaints about job seekers paying money for employment contacts in other countries. The contacts never came through with the employment promised.

Common sense should always be used when looking for work overseas. Does it make sense that local people are not available to do the work?

## Issues to think about before accepting overseas work

It is essential to think about the reasons for going overseas. Is your priority the job or travel? Are you travelling to experience another culture or because of financial necessity?

In addition, JobWatch recommends that you consider the following issues:

### 1. Political issues

Callers to JobWatch have alerted us about advertisements for employment in war zones or areas with civil unrest. Working in a country where there is civil unrest is dangerous and even life threatening. It is important to weigh up whether the risk of going there to work is worth it.

### 2. Cultural issues

Is fluency in another language required? Are there customs that could limit/restrict your lifestyle? Research the country through travel guides, travel agents or the internet to find out this sort of information.

### 3. Cost of living

- Is it costly to live in the country/city?
- Will the job provide enough money to live on without breaching any visa requirements?
- Would the standard of living in Australia be achievable there?

We also recommend reading the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's publication "Essential Information for Australians living and working overseas". Visit [smartraveller.gov.au/tips/working\\_os.html](http://smartraveller.gov.au/tips/working_os.html)

**Note!**  
Check with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to see if the country is on their travel warnings list.

## Disclaimer

This Fact Sheet contains information of a general nature only and is not a substitute for professional legal advice. You should obtain legal advice from a lawyer about your particular situation before acting on any of the following information. This Fact Sheet is designed for employees and prospective employees in Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland only. If you are not from these states, you should obtain advice about your specific case as soon as possible.

**JobWatch**  
[www.jobwatch.org.au](http://www.jobwatch.org.au)

Melbourne metro: (03) 9662 1933  
Qld, Tas and regional Vic: 1800 331 617

Mon-Fri 9am-5pm  
and until 8:30pm on Wed  
(all times in AEDT)

### 3. Cost of living (cont.)

Some countries have limits on the amount of hours a visitor can work - this could also affect the level of income expected. Check if there are these limits, and learn more about local cost of living.

### 4. Visas

Is a special working visa needed and who pays for it? Complying with the guest country's visa requirements is essential. Travelling to a country illegally, on falsified or misleading documents, or working without the relevant work permit/visa could lead to prosecution, deportation and even prohibition from travelling to that country ever again.

### 5. Employment conditions

- Does the country have minimum employment standards/conditions and does the position offered abide by these?
- What are the wages and conditions like?
- Would you be entitled to things like paid annual leave and sick leave, and is superannuation available?
- Will the wages be enough to live on?

Not all countries have minimum rates of pay and conditions like those set down by Modern Awards, Enterprise Agreements and legislation in Australia. Do your own research into what employment conditions are available in the country.

### 6. Other conditions

Will you need to organise health or travel insurance? Is there a public health system or is private insurance required? Not all countries have universal health coverage like Australia. Some may have reciprocal schemes in place for Australians to get medical or health coverage, but you should find out about these things before leaving Australia. Also consider if you need vaccinations or preventative medication before you leave Australia by visiting your doctor.

### 7. Accommodation

Who pays for it, who provides it and who finds it? What about relocation costs? Finding accommodation that is reasonable in price in an unfamiliar country can be difficult. Paying the cost of relocation on top of the cost of establishing new accommodation is very expensive. Always find out who is bearing the costs for relocation before accepting a job offer.

### 8. Agencies

Employment agencies that advertise work overseas often charge for their services. This can range from a registration fee, to charges for putting job seekers in contact with an employer. Usually the agency is not the employer and is therefore not a party to the employment contract. This can be a problem if you try to take legal action against the agency about an employment issue.

Some of the questions to ask an agency are:

- Are there any fees?
- Is there a refund if no work is available?
- Is there a contract?
- Who is the employer?

**Note!**  
You can always contact the relevant embassy or consulate to find out all visa and work permit requirements, as well as employment conditions in the country.

**Note!**  
You should not have to pay to work. Employers contract agencies to find workers so they are the ones who should pay.

## 8. Agencies (cont.)

When offered a job by an agency, you may wish to tell the agent that you want to contact the employer directly to confirm the job offer.

## 9. Job offers

After receiving a job offer, always ask for a letter of offer and a duty statement or job description. They should include the following information: the duties, hours of work, wages and general entitlements (e.g. annual leave, sick leave, period of engagement, travel allowances, accommodation costs and overtime rates).

## 10. Employment contracts

- Is there a contract?
- Can changes be negotiated?
- Is there a penalty for getting out of the contract?

Always try to get written contracts checked by a lawyer. No one should ever sign anything they haven't read and fully understood. Always keep copies of signed contracts. When leaving a job always give the correct amount of notice (usually stipulated in a contract or terms of employment). This is to avoid any penalties that could be incurred.

Before signing a contract, it is advisable to check if there are relevant trade unions for your type of work in the applicable country. Also check if the country allows for freedom to join unions and/or to engage in union activity.

## Where to get help

### JobWatch's free and confidential Telephone Information Service

**P:** (03) 9662 1933 (Melb Metro), 1800 331 617 (Regional Vic, Qld, Tas)

**W:** [jobwatch.org.au](http://jobwatch.org.au)

Fair Work Infoline (Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman)	13 13 94
Fair Work Commission	1300 799 675
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)	1300 555 135
Community Legal Centres Australia	02 9264 9595
ACTU Worker Information line (for referral to a union)	1300 362 223
Law Institute of Victoria's Legal Referral Service	03 9607 9311
Queensland Law Society (for referral to a lawyer)	1300 367 757
Law Society of Tasmania (for referral to a lawyer)	03 6234 4133

## Checklist

- Read travel guides or visit the internet to obtain information about the country you intend to work in.
- Contact the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for more information.
- Contact the consulate or embassy of the relevant country in Australia for more information.
- Before you sign a contract, seek further assistance from JobWatch, your union, or a lawyer.
- Contact the Australian union that covers the type of work, to see if they have received any complaints.

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JobWatch acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are located and where we conduct our business. We pay our respects to ancestors, and Elders, past, present and emerging.