Social Security Numbers for Noncitizens

Does a noncitizen need a Social Security number (SSN)?

Generally, only noncitizens authorized to work in the United States by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can get an SSN. Employers use an SSN to report your wages to the government and to determine eligibility for Social Security benefits. You need an SSN to work, collect Social Security benefits, and receive certain government services.

Lawfully admitted noncitizens can get certain benefits and services without an SSN. You don't need an SSN to get a driver's license, register for school, get private health insurance, or apply for school lunch programs or subsidized housing.

Some organizations use your SSN to identify you in their records. Most, however, will identify you by some other means if you request it.

Although many companies, such as banks and credit companies, may ask for your SSN, you generally aren't required to provide one if you don't have one. You can get many services without an SSN, including getting a driver's license.

How can I get an SSN and card?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, you can apply for an SSN card:

- In your home country before coming to the United States when filing an application for an immigrant visa with the U.S. Department of State. In most cases, if you apply for an SSN with your immigrant visa application, you don't have to visit a Social Security office in the United States. Your SSN card will be mailed to the address that you provide on your immigrant visa application. For more information see ***www.ssa.gov/ssnvisa/***.
- If lawfully present in the United States and applying for permanent resident status from DHS, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This can be done on the same USCIS application via Form I-485 (*Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status*). For more information, see ***www.ssa.gov/ssnvisa/ebe.html***.

Please contact us if you do not receive your SSN card within 14 days after receiving your Permanent Resident Card ("Green Card") from USCIS after your Form I-485 (Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status) is approved. USCIS collects information on behalf of Social Security to process the SSN card. It is important that you provide all information requested on the form. We may be unable to fully process your request for the SSN card if we do not receive the necessary information. While some information is not required for processing the immigration document, we use the name, date of birth, parent's names, country of birth, gender (i.e., male/female) to process the SSN card.

What should I do if I can't apply using one of the methods above?

If you are unable or choose not to apply for an SSN using one of the methods above, we recommend you wait 10 days after arriving in the United States to apply for an SSN. This will make it easier for us to verify your DHS documents online. This will also speed up the processing of your SSN application.

- If you are lawfully present in the United States, you should start your application online by visiting our Request a Social Security number for the first time page at ***www.ssa.gov/number-card/request-number-first-time***. To complete the application process, you must visit your local Social Security office or Card Center with the required documents within **45 days of starting the process**. You may be eligible to self-schedule an appointment to visit a local Social Security office. If you are unable to self-schedule an appointment, please call to make the appointment before visiting. Refer to the section below for what you need to bring to the Social Security office.
- If you cannot start the application online, you will need to complete an Application for a Social Security Card (Form SSA-5) available at ***www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf***. To complete the application process, you must call to make an appointment to visit your local Social Security office or Card Center with the required documents.
- You must call us at **1-800-772-1213** (TTY **1-800-325-0778**), to schedule an appointment for your visit. A member of our staff can answer your call from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

We will mail your SSN card as soon as we have all your information and have verified your documents with the issuing offices.

What do I need to bring to the Social Security office?

You need to prove your identity and work-authorized immigration status.

To prove your identity and work-authorized immigration status, you will need to show us your current U.S. immigration documents and your unexpired foreign passport. Acceptable immigration documents include your:

- Form I-551 (*Lawful Permanent Resident Card, Machine-Readable Immigrant Visa*)
- Form I-94 (*Arrival/Departure Record*)
- Form I-766 (*Employment Authorization Document/EAD*)
- Admission stamp showing a class of admission permitting work

Exchange visitors: If you're a J-1 or J-2 exchange visitor, we also need to see your DS-2019, Certificate of *Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status or EAD*. If you are a J-1 student, student intern, or international visitor, you must provide a letter from your sponsor. The letter should be on sponsor letterhead with an original signature that authorizes your employment.

International students: If you're an F-1 or M-1 student, we need to see your Form I-20, *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status* or *Designated School Official (DSO) letter*. For information on other documents that you must provide, read *International Students and Social Security Numbers* (Publication No. 05-10181).

You need to prove your age.

You must present your foreign birth certificate if you have it or can get it within 10 business days. If not, we can consider other documents, such as your unexpired passport or a document issued by DHS, as evidence of your age.

Important: All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. We cannot accept photocopies or notarized copies of documents. We also cannot accept a receipt showing you applied for the document.

We may use one document for two purposes. For example, we may use your DHS EAD as proof of both your identity and work-authorized immigration status. Your birth certificate or passport may serve as proof of age. **However, you must provide at least two separate documents.**

How much does applying for an SSN and card cost?

Applying for an SSN and card is free.

What if I need an SSN for reasons other than work?

You may not be authorized by DHS to work in the United States. If not, you can only get an SSN if you can prove you need it for a valid nonwork reason.

Government benefits or services: If you do not have permission to work, you may only apply for an SSN if one of the following criteria applies:

- You need an SSN to satisfy a federal statute or regulation that requires you to have one to receive a federally funded benefit. This applies to you whether you are residing inside or outside the United States.
- You need an SSN to satisfy a state or local law that requires you to have one to receive public assistance benefits. This applies if you are legally residing in the United States.

Applicants for a nonwork SSN are required to provide proof of identity, citizenship status, and age. Examples of the documents are listed below:

Proofs of identity and age

- Form I-94 (Arrival-Departure Record)
- Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) Certification Letter
- Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Certification Letter

If you need an SSN to meet requirements for a government benefit, you must provide acceptable documentation of your identity, age, and citizenship status. You must also bring a letter from the government agency offering the benefit. It must be on letterhead stationery (no form letters or photocopies) and:

- Specifically identify you as the applicant
- Specifically state the nonwork reason an SSN is required
- Cite the law requiring you to have an SSN
- Indicate that you meet all agency requirements, except having an SSN
- Contain an agency contact name, signature, and telephone number

Do you need a number for tax purposes?

You may not need an SSN for tax purposes if you aren't authorized to work in the United States. You can apply for an *Individual Taxpayer Identification Number* from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Visit the IRS in person, or call the IRS toll-free number, **1-800-TAXFORM** (**1-800-829-3676**), and request Form W-7, *Application for IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number*.

A business or government agency may ask you for an SSN. If you are not authorized to work in the United States, ask if they can identify you in some other way. In most cases, you'll be able to get the service or license you need without an SSN.

If you are assigned an SSN for nonwork purposes, you cannot use it to work.

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