

Foreign Workers and Social Security Numbers



Social Security numbers are used to report a person's wages to the government and to determine a person's eligibility for Social Security benefits. You need a Social Security number to get a job, collect Social Security benefits, and receive some other government services.

If you're temporarily in the United States to work, your employer will ask for your Social Security number. In general, only noncitizens authorized by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to work in the United States can get a Social Security number.

Although many other businesses, such as banks and credit companies, also ask for your number, you aren't required to provide it. You can get many services without a Social Security number, including a driver's license.

What do I have to do to work in the United States?

First, you must have documents showing your U.S. immigration status and authorization to work in the United States. Then, you should apply for a Social Security number and card from the Social Security Administration.

How do I apply for a Social Security number and card?

Applying for a Social Security number and card is free. To apply for a Social Security number at your local Social Security office:

- Complete an application for a Social Security card; and
- Show us original documents proving your:
 - Identity;
 - Work-authorized immigration status; and
 - Age.
- Take your completed application and original documents to your local Social Security office.

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

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

Identity and work-authorized immigration status

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

- Unexpired foreign passport with a current admission stamp showing a class of admission permitting work;
- Form I-551, *Permanent Resident Card*;
- Form I-94, *Arrival/Departure Record* showing DHS work authorization; or
- Form I-766, *Employment Authorization Document*, (EAD, work permit from DHS).

Exchange visitors: A J-1 visitor also must show us a DS-2019, *Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status*. Additionally, J-1 students, student interns, and international visitors must show a sponsor letter to prove employment. The letter should be on sponsor letterhead with an original signature that authorizes your employment.

International students: An F-1 or M-1 student also must show us a Form I-20, *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status*. Additional documentation proving work eligibility may be required. For more information, ask for *International Students and Social Security Numbers* (Publication No. 05-10181).

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 passport or a document issued by DHS, as evidence of your age.

How long will it take to get a Social Security number?

We must verify your documents with DHS before we assign a Social Security number to you. After receiving verification from DHS, we'll mail your Social Security card. Most of the time, we can verify your documents quickly with DHS online. If your documents can't be verified online, DHS may take several weeks to respond to our request. We're working closely with DHS to reduce these delays.

Do I need to have my number before I start working?

We don't require you to have a Social Security number before you start work. However, the Internal Revenue Service requires employers to use your Social Security number to report your wages.

While you wait for your Social Security number, your employer can use a letter from us stating you applied for a number, and your immigration documents can prove your authorization to work in the United States.

Employers can find more information online at www.socialsecurity.gov/employer/hiring.htm.

Contacting Social Security

Visit www.socialsecurity.gov anytime to apply for benefits, open a **my Social Security** account, find publications, and get answers to frequently asked questions. Or, call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer case-specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Generally, you'll have a shorter wait time if you call after Tuesday. We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service, so a second Social Security representative monitors some telephone calls. We can provide general information by automated phone service 24 hours a day. And, remember, our website, www.socialsecurity.gov, is available to you anytime and anywhere!