Foreign Workers and Social Security Numbers

Social Security numbers (SSN) are used to report a person's wages to the government and to determine a person's eligibility for Social Security benefits. You need an SSN 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 SSN.

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 an SSN, 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 an SSN and card from the Social Security Administration.

What foreign workers can apply for a Social Security number?

In general, only noncitizens authorized by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to work in the United States can get an SSN.

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

Applying for an SSN and card is free. To apply for a work-authorized SSN, you will need to:

- Complete an application for a Social Security card at ***www.ssa.gov/online/ss-5.html***.
- Show us original documents proving your:
  - —Identity.
  - —Work-authorized immigration status.
  - — Age.

Take your completed application and original documents to your local Social Security office.

Take your completed application and original documents to your local Social Security office.

You may also apply for an original SSN by answering the SSN-specific questions on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) **Employment Authorization Document (EAD) Form I-765** (Application for Employment Authorization) or **Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) Form I-485** (Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status), also commonly known as Green Card. USCIS transmits the data from approved applications to us to assign an SSN. The SSN card is mailed to the address provided on the USCIS application. Please visit ***www.USCIS.gov*** for more information.

If you are age 12 or older an in-person interview is required.

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 be able to use one document for two purposes. For example, we may use your DHS work authorization document 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, you will need to show us your current U.S. immigration documents and your unexpired foreign passport. Acceptable U.S. immigration documents include:

- 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*.
- Form I-766, *Employment Authorization Document*, (EAD, work permit from DHS).

Exchange visitors: J-1 visitors must also 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: F-1 or M-1 students must also 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 an SSN to you. After receiving verification from DHS, you will receive your Social Security card in the mail. 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 an SSN before you start work. However, the Internal Revenue Service requires employers to use your SSN to report your wages.

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

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

Contacting Us

The most convenient way to do business with us is to visit ***www.ssa.gov*** to get information and use our online services. There are several things you can do online: apply for benefits; start or complete your request for an original or replacement Social Security card; get useful information; find publications; and get answers to frequently asked questions.

When you open a personal *my* Social Security account, you have more capabilities. You can review your *Social Security Statement*, verify your earnings, and get estimates of future benefits. You can also print a benefit verification letter, change your direct deposit information, request a replacement Medicare card, and get a replacement SSA-1099/1042S. Access to your personal *my* Social Security account may be limited for users outside the United States.

If you don't have access to the internet, we offer many automated services by telephone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so you do not need to speak with a representative.

If you need to speak with someone, call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** or at our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**, if you're deaf or hard of hearing. A member of our staff can answer your call from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We provide free interpreter services upon request. For quicker access to a representative, try calling early in the day (between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. local time) or later in the day. **We are less busy later in the week (Wednesday to Friday) and later in the month.**

Securing today and tomorrow

Social Security Administration
Publication No. 05-10107
July 2022 (July 2017 edition may be used)
Foreign Workers and Social Security Numbers
Produced and published at U.S. taxpayer expense