Social Security Numbers for Noncitizens

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

Unless you are a noncitizen who wants to work in the United States, you probably don't need an SSN.

Generally, only noncitizens authorized to work in the United States by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can get an SSN. SSNs 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 work, collect Social Security benefits, and receive other government services.

Lawfully admitted noncitizens can get many benefits and services without an SSN. You don't need a number 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 SSNs to identify you in their records. Most, however, will identify you by some other means if you request it.

We can't assign an SSN solely for you to get a driver's license or access a service that requires a credit check.

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.

How can I get an SSN and card?

If you are an immigrant, you can apply two ways:

- You can apply in your home country before you come to the United States when filing an application for an immigrant visa with the U.S. Department of State. In almost all cases, if you apply for an SSN and card with your immigrant visa application, you don't have to visit a Social Security office in the United States. (For more information, see ***www.ssa.gov/ssnvisa***).
- If you are lawfully present in the United States, you must contact your local Social Security office. (See the section below for what you need to submit to the Social Security office).

If you are a nonimmigrant, you can apply two ways, depending on your visa status:

- If you are lawfully present in the United States and plan to apply for work authorization or lawful permanent resident status from DHS, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), you can apply for your SSN or replacement card. This can be done on the same USCIS application Form I-765 (*Application for Employment Authorization*), or via Form I-485 (*Application for Lawful Permanent Residency or to Adjust Status*). (For more information, see ***https://www.ssa.gov/ssnvisa/ebe.html***).
- If you are lawfully present in the United States and your visa status allows you to work, then you must contact your local Social Security office to apply.

What do I need to submit 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, 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).
- Admission stamp showing a class of admission permitting work.
- Form I-94 (*Arrival/Departure Record*).
- Form I-766 (*Employment Authorization Document/EAD*).

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 students 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.

You need to complete an application.

You will need to complete an *Application for a Social Security Card* (Form SS-5).

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.**

When should I apply?

If you cannot apply using one of the forms noted above, we recommend you wait 10 days after arriving in the United States to apply for an SSN to make it easier for us to verify your DHS documents online. This will speed up the processing of your SSN application.

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

How much does applying for an SSN and card cost?

Applying for an SSN and card is free.

What if I need a number for reasons other than work?

If you aren't authorized by DHS to work in the United States, you can get an SSN only if you can prove you need it for a valid non-work reason. That might happen, for example, if a state or federal law requires you to have an SSN to get benefits to which you have already established entitlement.

If you need a number for tax purposes, and 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 An *Individual Taxpayer Identification Number.*

If a business or government agency asks you for an SSN and 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.

Contacting Social Security

The most convenient way to do business with us from anywhere, on any device, is to visit ***www.ssa.gov***. There are several things you can do online: apply for benefits; get useful information; find publications; and get answers to frequently asked questions.

Or, you can call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** or at **1-800-325-0778** (TTY) if you're deaf or hard of hearing. We can answer your call from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., weekdays. You can also use our automated services via telephone, 24 hours a day. We look forward to serving you.

Securing today and tomorrow

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