



# Foreign Workers and Social Security Numbers

A Social Security number (SSN) is 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 certain government services.

Your employer will ask for your SSN to report your wages. 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 obtaining a driver's license.

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

To work in the United States, you must be authorized to work. Work authorization can be a result of your immigration status, or you may need to apply for work authorization separately through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). After receiving work authorization, you will need a work authorized SSN that your employer will use to report your wages.

## What noncitizens can apply for a Social Security number?

In general, only noncitizens authorized by the USCIS 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 card is free. If you are outside the U.S. you should apply for an SSN through Enumeration At Entry (EAE) on your immigrant visa application (Form DS-230 or DS-260). If you are lawfully present in the U.S., you may apply through our Enumeration Beyond Entry (EBE) program. Under EBE, you answer the SSN specific questions on the USCIS Form I-765 (Application for Employment Authorization) or the Form I-485 (Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status).

You may also update your citizenship records at Social Security, change your name if needed, and request an updated replacement card. You can do all of these things by completing the "Social Security Update" questions on the Form N-400 (Application for Naturalization).

USCIS collects information on behalf of Social Security to process the SSN card. It is important for you to 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, parents names, country of birth, and sex (i.e., male/female) to process the SSN card.

The SSN card is mailed to the address provided on the USCIS application. Please visit [www.ssa.gov/ssnvisa/ebe.html](http://www.ssa.gov/ssnvisa/ebe.html) for more information.

If you don't receive your SSN card within 14 days after receiving your immigration document, please contact your local Social Security office.

If you are unable or choose not to file for an SSN using EAE or EBE to apply for a work-authorized SSN, visit our Request a Social Security number for the first time page at [www.ssa.gov/number-card](http://www.ssa.gov/number-card). You will need to:

- Start the application online.
- Self-schedule an appointment to visit a local Social Security office or Card Center.

**If you are age 12 or older an in-person interview is required unless you file using EAE or EBE.**

To complete the application, bring us original documents (we cannot accept notarized copies) proving your:

- Identity.
- Age.
- Work-authorized immigration status.

**You must provide at least 2 separate documents.** 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.

**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. If you cannot start the application online, you must contact a local Social Security office or Card Center to complete the application and show us your 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?

If you file using EAE or EBE you should receive your SSN card within 14 days after receiving your EAD, I-551 Permanent Resident Card, or your Certification of Naturalization.

If you file an application with Social Security, we must verify your documents with DHS before assigning you an SSN. 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 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 working. However, the Internal Revenue Service requires employers to use your SSN to report your wages.

While you wait for your SSN, 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](http://www.ssa.gov/employer/hiring.htm).

## Contacting Us

The most convenient way to do business with us is to visit [www.ssa.gov](http://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; 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 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., weekdays. 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.** You can also use our automated services via telephone, 24 hours a day, so you do not need to speak with a representative. If you need to visit an office, you must have an appointment.



Securing today  
and tomorrow

Social Security Administration

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