

# Social Security Numbers For Noncitizens



## Does a noncitizen need a Social Security number?

Unless you are a noncitizen who wants to work in the United States, you probably do not need a Social Security number.

Generally, only noncitizens authorized to work in the United States by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can get a Social Security number. Social Security numbers are used to report an individual's wages to the government and to determine a person's eligibility for Social Security benefits. You need a Social Security number to work, collect Social Security benefits and receive some other government services.

Lawfully admitted noncitizens can get many benefits and services without a Social Security number. You do not need a number to get a driver's license, register for school, obtain private health insurance, or to apply for school lunch programs or subsidized housing.

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

We cannot assign you a Social Security number solely so you can get a driver's license or a service that requires a credit check.

Although many companies, such as banks and credit companies, may ask for your Social Security number, you are generally not required to provide one if you don't have one.

## How can I get a Social Security number and card?

There are two ways you can apply:

- 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 a Social Security number and card with your immigrant visa application,

you do not have to visit a Social Security office in the United States. (For more information, see [www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnvisa](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnvisa)); or

- You can visit a Social Security office in person.

If you are not an immigrant or did not apply for a Social Security number on your immigrant visa application, you must have your papers from DHS 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 by visiting an office. We recommend you wait 10 days after arriving in the United States to apply for a Social Security number. This will make it easier for us to verify your DHS documents online, which will speed processing of your Social Security number application. Applying for a Social Security number and card is free. To apply:

- Complete an *Application For A Social Security Card* (Form SS-5);
- Show us at least two original documents proving your:
  - Identity and immigration status,
  - Work eligibility and
  - Age; and
- 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 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 work permit 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.***

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

## Identity and immigration status

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

- Form I-551 (includes machine-readable immigrant visa with your unexpired foreign passport);
- Form I-94 (*Arrival/Departure Record*); or
- Forms I-766 or I-688B (employment authorization documents).

**Exchange visitors:** If you are a J-1 or J-2 exchange visitor, we also need to see your DS-2019, *Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status*.

**International students:** If you are an F-1 or M-1 student, we need to see your Form I-20, *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status*. For information on other documents students must provide, ask for *International Students And Social Security Numbers* (Publication No. 05-10181).

## Work eligibility

To apply for a Social Security number to work in the United States, you must show us current immigration documents with work authorization. Immigration documents proving work authorization include Form I-94 (showing a class of admission with DHS work authorization), Form I-766, I-688B or I-551.

## Age

Present your birth certificate if you have it or can easily obtain it. If not, we can consider other documents, such as your passport or a document issued by DHS, as evidence of your age.

## What if I need a number for other reasons?

If you are not authorized by DHS to work in the United States, you can get a Social Security number 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 a Social Security number to obtain benefits to which you have already established entitlement.

If you need a number for tax purposes and you are not authorized to work in the United States, you can apply for an *Individual Taxpayer Identification Number* from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Visit 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 a Social Security number 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 will be able to get the service or license you need without a Social Security number.

## Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) or call toll-free, **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We treat all calls confidentially. We can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We provide information by automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.