

# 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 don't 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 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 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 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 Social Security numbers to identify you in their records. Most, however, will identify you by some other means if you request it.

We can't assign you a Social Security number solely for you to be able to 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 generally aren't required to provide one if you don't have one.

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

If you are an immigrant, 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 don't 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. See section below for what you need to bring with you to the Social Security office.

If you are not an immigrant, you must visit a Social Security office to apply.

## What do I need to bring 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 (Permanent Resident Card, includes machine-readable immigrant visa);
- Admission stamp showing a class of admission permitting work;
- Form I-94 (*Arrival/Departure Record*); or
- Form I-766 (*Employment Authorization Document, EAD, work permit*).

**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*. 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*. For information on other documents that students must provide, ask for *International Students And Social Security Numbers* (Publication No. 05-10181).

## You need to prove 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.

## You need to complete an application.

You will need to complete an *Application for a Social Security Card* (Form SS-5). You can do this at the Social Security office or you can find a copy of this form on our website that you can print and bring with you.

**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 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.**

## When should I apply?

We recommend you wait 10 days after arriving in the United States to apply for a Social Security number to make it easier for us to verify your DHS documents online, which will speed processing of your Social Security number application.

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.

## How much does applying for a Social Security number and card cost?

Applying for a Social Security number and card is free.

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

If you aren't 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 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 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'll be able to get the service or license you need without a Social Security number.

## Contacting Social Security

Visit [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) anytime to apply for benefits, open a *my Social Security* account, find publications or forms, 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](http://www.socialsecurity.gov), is available to you anytime and anywhere!