



# 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 that 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 an SSN 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 coming to the United States when filing an application for an immigrant visa with the U.S. Department of State. In most 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](http://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, there are two ways that you can apply, depending on your visa status:

- If lawfully present in the United States and applying for work authorization or 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 [www.ssa.gov/ssnvisa/ebe.html](http://www.ssa.gov/ssnvisa/ebe.html)).

- If 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 you:

- Form I-551 (*Lawful Permanent Resident Card, Machine-Readable Immigrant Visa*).
- Form I-94 (*Arrival/Departure Record*).
- Form I-766 (*Employment Authorization Document/EAD*).
- Admission stamp showing a class of admission permitting work.

**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. This will 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 an SSN for reasons other than work?

You may not be authorized by DHS to work in the United States. If so, you can get an SSN only if you can prove you need it for a valid nonwork reason.

**Government benefits or services:** If you do not have permission to work, you may apply for an SSN only if one of the following applies:

- A federal law requires you to provide your SSN to get a particular benefit or service.
- A state or local law requires you to provide your SSN to get general assistance benefits for which you already have qualified.

Applicants for a nonwork SSN are required to provide proof of identity and age documents. Examples of the documents are listed below:

- **Proofs of identity and age**
  - Form I-94 (Arrival-Departure Record).
  - Form I-862 (Notice to Appear).
  - Form I-385 (Alien Booking Record).
  - Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) Certification Letter.
  - Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Certification Letter.

- **Proofs of identity only**

- Form I-220A (Order of Release on Recognizance).

**NOTE:** Form I-220A (Order of Release on Recognizance) does not meet Social Security requirements to serve as proof of age.

If you need an SSN to meet state or local requirements, **in addition to the identity and age document, you must submit a letter from the government agency.** It must be on letterhead stationery (no form letters or photocopies) and:

- Specifically identify you as the applicant.
- Specifically state the nonwork reason the SSN is required.
- Cite the law requiring you to have an SSN.
- Indicate that you meet all agency requirements, except having the SSN.
- Contain an agency contact name, signature, and telephone number.

## Do you need a number for tax purposes?

You may not need an SSN for tax purposes if 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 IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number*.

A business or government agency may ask you for an SSN. If 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.

**If you are assigned an SSN for nonwork purposes, you cannot use it to work.**

## Contacting Us

There are several ways to do business with us including online, by mail, by phone, and in person. If you cannot use our online services, we can help you by phone when you call our national toll-free 800 number.

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 may not need to speak with a representative. 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. 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.**



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