

Social Security Numbers For Noncitizens



How do I apply for a Social Security number and card?

In general, only noncitizens who have permission to work from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can apply for a Social Security number. To apply for a Social Security number:

- Complete an *Application For A Social Security Card* (Form SS-5); and
- Show us original documents proving your:
 - Immigration status;
 - Work eligibility;
 - Age; and
 - Identity.
- Take your completed application and original documents to your local Social Security office.

Immigration status

To prove your U.S. immigration status, you must show us the current U.S. immigration document, I-94, *Arrival/Departure Record*, issued to you when you arrived in the United States. If you are an F-1 or M-1 student, you also must show us your I-20, *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status*. If you are a J-1 or J-2 exchange visitor, you must show us your DS-2019, *Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status*.

Work eligibility

For most foreign workers, we only need to see your I-94, *Arrival/Departure Record*. Some foreign workers also must show their work permits from DHS (I-766 or I-688B). International students must present further documentation. For more information, see *International Students And Social Security Numbers* (Publication No. 05-10181).

Age

You must 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, to prove your age.

Identity

We can accept only certain documents as proof of identity. An acceptable document must be current (not expired) and show your name, identifying information and preferably a recent photograph. Social Security will ask to see your current U.S. immigration documents. Acceptable immigration documents include your:

- Form I-551 (includes machine-readable immigrant visa with your unexpired foreign passport);
- I-94 with your unexpired foreign passport; or
- Work permit card from DHS (I-766 or I-688B).

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 work eligibility and identity. ***However, you must provide at least two separate documents.***

We will mail your number and card as soon as we verify your documents with DHS. While you wait for your Social Security number, your employer can use a letter from us stating that you applied for a number. Your employer can use your DHS documents as proof of your authorization to work in the United States. Employers can find more information on the Internet at www.socialsecurity.gov/employer/hiring.htm.

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What can I do if I need a number for tax purposes?

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*.

Do I need a number for other government services?

Lawfully admitted noncitizens can get many benefits and services without a Social Security number. You do not need a number to conduct business with a bank, register for school, apply for educational tests, obtain private health insurance, apply for school lunch programs or apply for subsidized housing. You cannot get a Social Security number for the sole purpose of obtaining a driver's license.

If you do not have permission to work, you may apply for a Social Security number only if:

- A federal law requires you to provide your Social Security number to get a particular benefit or service; or
- A state or local law requires you to provide your Social Security number to get general assistance benefits that you already have qualified for.

If you need a number to meet state or local requirements, you must bring us a letter from the government agency. It must be on letterhead stationery (no form letters or photocopies) and:

- Specifically identify you as the applicant;
- Cite the law requiring you to have a Social Security number;
- Indicate that you meet all the agency's requirements, except having the number; and
- Contain an agency contact name and telephone number.

If you are assigned a number for nonwork purposes, you cannot use it to work. If you use it to work, we will inform DHS.

Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at 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 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 treat all calls confidentially. 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.