Foreign Workers And Social Security Numbers

Are you temporarily in the United States to work? If you are, your employer will ask for your Social Security number. Social Security numbers are used to report your wages to the government and to determine eligibility for Social Security benefits. Social Security numbers can be assigned to foreign workers who are authorized to work in the United States.

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

First, you must have documents from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) showing your U.S. immigration status and eligibility to work while in the United States. Then, you should apply for a Social Security number and card from the Social Security Administration.

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

Applying for a Social Security number and card is free. 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

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

(over)

DHS work permit as proof of both work eligibility and identity. ***However, you must provide at least two separate documents.***

How long will it take to get a Social Security number?

We must verify your documents with DHS before we assign a Social Security number to you. We will issue your Social Security number and mail your card after receiving the verification from DHS. Most of the time, we can verify your documents quickly with DHS online. If your documents cannot be verified online, it may take DHS several weeks to respond to our request. We are working closely with DHS to reduce these delays.

Do I need to have my number before I start working?

We do not require you to have a Social Security number before you start work. However, the Internal Revenue Service requires employers to report wages using a Social Security number. 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 may use your immigration 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***.

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.

Social Security Administration
SSA Publication No. 05-10107
December 2005 (Recycle prior editions)