

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. 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?

You have to get documents from the **Department of Homeland Security** (DHS) (formerly the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service) showing your immigration status and eligibility to work while in the United States.

You should apply for a Social Security number and card from the **Social Security Administration**. Generally, you will need at least two documents which, together, prove your:

- Age;
- Identity;
- Immigration status (DHS documents); and
- Work eligibility (DHS documents).

Note: Sometimes we use one document for two purposes. For example, your passport may be used as proof of your age and proof of your identity; or your DHS documents may be used as proof of your identity and legal immigration status.

However, at least two separate documents are required.

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

Applying for a Social Security number and card is free. When you apply for a Social Security number at a Social Security office, you must complete Form SS-5, **Application for a Social Security Card**, and provide the necessary documents. All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. We cannot accept photocopies or notarized copies of documents. Here are some examples of the documents you must bring:

Age: A birth certificate is generally the best evidence of age, and must be presented if it is in your possession or can easily be obtained. If not, we

can consider other documents, such as your passport or a document issued by DHS, to prove your age.

Identity: We must see a document other than your birth certificate that shows the name you want on your Social Security card. We prefer a recently issued document with a photograph, such as a document issued by DHS.

Immigration status: We need to see the DHS document I-94, **Arrival/Departure Record**, issued to you when you arrived in the United States showing your lawful immigrant status.

Eligibility to work: For most foreign workers, we only need to see your I-94, **Arrival/Departure Record**. And, if you are an exchange visitor, you must provide your IAP-66, or DS-2019, **Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status**. (If you are in the United States as a student or an international visitor, you will also need an original, signed letter from your sponsor showing that you are authorized to work.)

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 card within two days of 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 or months to respond to our request. We are working closely with DHS to reduce these delays.

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

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