Social Security Numbers and Cards

Can noncitizens get a Social Security Number (SSN) and card?

It depends. Only noncitizens in certain immigration statuses are allowed to apply and receive a Social Security number (SSN) and card. These include:
- Lawful permanent residents (green card holders)
- Noncitizens who have permission to work in the United States, such as U visa holders.
- Noncitizens who need an SSN for certain public benefits not related to employment.

The Social Security Administration will not issue an SSN solely for the purposes of obtaining a driver's license, or "cell phones, credit cards, bank accounts, mortgages, marriage and professional licenses, various forms of insurance, admission to academic institutions and financial aid for student loans."

Does a Social Security card authorize work in the United States?

Not necessarily. An SSN, by itself, does not give permission to work or live in the United States. It just means an individual is part of the Social Security system. Some noncitizens can obtain SSNs in order to collect public benefits for which they are otherwise entitled. Cards issued for this purpose will have an annotation "Not Valid for Employment."

Can an immigrant granted permission to work by the Department of Homeland Security obtain an SSN?

Yes. Immigrants who have permission to work in the United States, even temporarily, can apply for an SSN.

Does an SSN expire?

No. Once an SSN has been assigned it is an individual's unique number for the rest of his or her life in the United States. However, the individual's work authorization may expire. The expiration of work authorization does not invalidate an SSN but it does mean the individual cannot continue to work until it is renewed.

What happens to a Social Security account if an individual leaves the United States?

The SSN number remains valid. However, generally, if an individual leaves the United States for more than six (6) months, he or she is no longer eligible for Social Security benefits. There are exceptions, especially if the individual lived in the United States for a long period of time, or if he or she is a citizen of certain countries for which the United States has an agreement. If there is concern about receiving benefits while abroad, visit the Social Security website at ssa.gov. People in this situation should also speak with an attorney specializing in Social Security benefits.

What happens if someone uses a fake SSN to work?

Using a fake SSN is a crime, which can lead to jail time and deportation from the United States.

What if a person uses someone else's SSN?

Using another person's SSN is a form of identity theft and can lead to very serious criminal penalties. Even using an SSN with someone else's permission, such as a family member, is not permitted.

What if someone gets a real SSN, but uses fake information to get it?

Once again, using false information to obtain a Social Security card is a crime and makes the card invalid.

Can a person continue to use a fake SSN or someone else's SSN once that person has a valid SSN?

No. Once a person has a valid SSN that is the only number that person should use for employment, taxes, loans, mortgages or anything else that requires it.

Although the law does not require that an employer terminate an employee for having used a false identity, an employer may seek to terminate the employee for providing false information on the employment application. However, an employer cannot fire an employee solely because he or she is an immigrant, and must apply the same policy to everyone else. People in this situation may consider consulting an employment attorney to advise them of their rights before approaching their employer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, visit the Department of Justice's Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices website at **justice.gov/crt/about/osc**.

What can a person without an SSN do if a bank, health insurance or other program requests an SSN?

First, make sure that person is eligible for the account or benefit for which he or she is applying. Some applications require an SSN as proof of U.S. citizenship or legal status, both of which may be requirements for eligibility.

If the person is eligible for the benefit, he or she can ask whether an alternate form of identification would be acceptable. In other cases, the person may also request a letter from the Social Security Administration that indicates he or she is not eligible for a Social Security card.

Can someone without an SSN apply for a driver's license?

That depends on each state's requirements. In Illinois, individuals without an SSN can apply for a Temporary Visitor Driver's License (TVDL). The TVDL allows them to drive in Illinois (when coupled with insurance) but cannot be used for identification purposes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on how to apply for a TVDL, visit the Illinois Secretary of State website at **cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/ drivers/TVDL/home.html**.

Can individuals pay taxes even though they are not eligible for an SSN?

Yes. Taxpayers can apply for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), which can be used instead of an SSN to track and file taxes.

FOR INFORMATION on the ITIN, visit the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) website at **irs.gov**. Taxpayers can also contact the Center for Economic Progress at (312) 252-0280 or **economicprogress.org**, or Ladder Up at (312) 409-4719 or **goladderup.org**. For Ladder Up's Spanish line, call (312) 409-4318.

Please remember that having an ITIN does not authorize the individual to work in the United States.

Applying for a Social Security Card

Visit the SSA website, **ssa.gov**, for step-by-step directions on how to apply for a Social Security number and card.

Remember that an applicant for a Social Security card must be able to prove:
- U.S. citizenship or lawful immigration status
- Work authorization (if not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident)
- Age and identity

The application can be mailed or hand delivered to the local Social Security office. For a list of offices visit **ssa.gov** or call (800) 772-1213.

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