



Hiring Refugees Awaiting Their Social Security Numbers

Refugees* who are legally authorized to work in the U.S. may still face delays when receiving their Social Security Numbers (SSNs) from the Social Security Administration (SSA). This was the case for many Afghans who were evacuated to the U.S. via humanitarian parole, and faced significant waiting times.

Companies may believe that they can only hire candidates who have already received their SSNs – but this is inaccurate, as no federal laws prohibit companies from hiring an individual without an SSN, so long as such individual is authorized to work in the U.S. In fact, authorized individuals can work while they are awaiting their SSNs, and companies can update all relevant documentation (i.e., Form I-9 or Form W-2) once their SSNs are received.

This resource illustrates some approaches companies can take to hire refugees who are awaiting their SSNs. It also includes steps companies should follow after a refugee employee's SSN has been received.

** This resource uses "refugee" as a catch-all term for all forcibly displaced migrants in the U.S., including asylees, asylum seekers, humanitarian parolees, refugees, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and victims of human trafficking.*

The following are a list of adjustments companies can make at different stages of the hiring process to accommodate refugees who are still awaiting their SSNs. Please note that this is not legal guidance. Consult with your company's legal team before using any of them.



Pre-hire: Companies can adjust their application and screening processes to ensure that refugee candidates who are awaiting an SSNs are not wrongfully screened out.



MODIFY YOUR COMPANY'S HR/APPLICATION SOFTWARE

Companies may use HR software that requires an SSN to be inputted by applicants during the application process. This may create an unnecessary restriction for employees who are still awaiting their SSNs. Companies looking to remove this barrier can work with internal or external partners to implement the following solutions:

- ▲ Include an option for applicants to select "I don't have a Social Security Number" or "Applied for a Social Security Number" via a check box or drop-down menu in job application forms, underneath the box where an SSN is usually required.
- ▲ Allow applicants to enter a numerical code, such as nine zeros (i.e., "000-00-0000"), in the SSN field, to allow them to move forward with their application form.

✓ ADJUST YOUR COMPANY'S METHOD FOR CONDUCTING BACKGROUND CHECKS

Although SSNs are not legally required for employment screening, many companies and third-party vendors rely on them to run background checks. However, given that many refugees face longer-than-expected wait times to receive their SSNs, this requirement disqualifies some qualified refugee candidates from moving forward with their application. Companies may consider the following solutions:

- ▲ Inform the vendor conducting your background checks that your company intends to hire more refugees – some potentially awaiting their SSNs – and ask it to modify procedures or develop alternatives to accommodate this group, such as conducting partial background checks with other information (e.g., the candidate's full name, date of birth, and address) when an SSN is unavailable. Companies should conduct a follow-up background check once the refugee employee presents their SSN.
- ▲ If your company is not prepared to hire refugees who do not have SSNs, wait to collect their SSNs until after the initial application phase. Because the background check step usually comes later in the hiring process, candidates may have received their SSNs by the time the check is necessary, which eliminates the need for additional work-arounds.



*Due to the U.S. government's comprehensive security vetting of forcibly displaced migrants, which covers the individual's experience before arriving in the U.S., companies can focus their background checks exclusively on candidates' time in the U.S. For more information about the U.S. government's vetting of refugees, see Tent's "Background Checks and Vetting for Refugees in the U.S." resource, available on the **Members' Hub**. This information may be relevant to share with your background check provider/team. (Note that the extent of vetting differs depending on the individual's legal immigration status).*



Post-hire: Inform relevant staff, and any third-party partners, about the correct documents needed to complete I-9 employment verification and report an employee's wages.

✓ CLARIFY THE DOCUMENTS NEEDED TO VERIFY EMPLOYMENT

Employers may not ask an employee for an SSN to complete their Form I-9, as requesting specific documentation to establish an individual's work authorization is a violation of federal law. All employees are entitled to submit either one List A document, or a combination of items from List B and List C (as outlined by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) to complete their employment verification. That said, HR teams should offer clear instructions for completing the I-9 form and be willing to accept all qualifying documents that appear to be genuine, including a Social Security card, if offered by the employee.



If your company uses E-verify

Companies using E-verify to verify employment will find that an E-verify case cannot be created without an SSN. In this instance, if an employee has not yet received their SSN, companies should attach an explanation to the employee's Form I-9 and wait to create an E-Verify case as soon as the SSN is available. If the employer is unable to create a case by the third business day after the employee's first day of employment, they should select "Awaiting Social Security Number" when prompted by E-Verify.

ADAPT YOUR COMPANY'S WAGE REPORTING PROCESS

Employers can only verify an employee's SSN for wage reporting purposes. Unlike the requirements for employment verification, companies are legally required to include an SSN or ITIN on each employee's Form W-2 (Wage and Tax Statement). To file Form W-2 for refugees who are still awaiting their SSNs, companies can:

- ▲ If filling on paper: Enter "Applied For" on the W-2 form instead of inputting a number.
- ▲ If filing electronically: Enter nine zeros (i.e., "000-00-0000") in the SSN field until employees who have not yet received their SSNs are able to present it.

Once an employee's SSN is received, companies can submit a Form W-2c (Corrected Wage and Tax Statement) to the SSA, either on paper or electronically.



If the original Form W-2 was filed electronically, any correcting Form W-2c must be filed electronically. If the original Form W-2 was filed on paper, any correcting Form W-2c must be filed on paper.



After an employee receives their SSN

Refugees who apply for their SSNs should receive their Social Security card within two weeks. However, this may take up to four weeks if the SSA is unable to immediately verify their immigration documents, according to the Social Security Administration. That said, once an employee's SSN is received, companies should complete the following actions:

1. Confirm that the employee's name on new hire documents matches the name on their Social Security card, and that all other work authorization documents appear to relate to the employee.
2. Companies using E-verify must create a case using the employee's SSN as soon as it becomes available. Companies not using E-verify should have the employee update their existing Form I-9 with the newly received SSN, and initial and date the correction. Then companies should attach a written explanation of why the information was missing in the first place.
3. File Form W-2c (Corrected Wage and Tax Statement) to the SSA, including the employee's SSN.
4. Ask the employee to complete a new W-4 and state withholding form (if applicable).
5. Complete any relevant internal reporting requirements, and input the SSN where applicable.
6. For additional security, consider running another background check on the refugee employee with the newly provided SSN.



Companies can confirm the status of a specific SSN application by collecting a written and signed statement from an employee that includes their personal information (e.g., full name, gender, date and place of birth, father's and mother's full name, address) and supposed SSN application date. Employers can then directly contact the SSA to confirm the employee's application status.

Next Steps:

The Tent Partnership for Refugees can work with companies to help them address specific hiring and integration barriers. To learn more about Tent and its services, reach out at info@tent.org.

About the Tent Partnership for Refugees

With more and more refugees displaced around the world, businesses have a critical role to play in helping refugees integrate economically in their new communities. Tent was launched in 2016 by Hamdi Ulukaya, the CEO and founder of Chobani – a multibillion dollar food company in the U.S. – to mobilize global businesses to fill this gap. Today, Tent is a [network of over 400 major companies](#) committed to helping hundreds of thousands of refugees access local labor markets by helping them become job-ready and connecting them to work. Find out more at www.tent.org.

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