Worker Fact Sheet

Employment Rights & Resources for Workers Granted Asylum or Refugee Status

If you have been granted asylum or refugee status, you have permission to live and work in the United States that doesn't expire. Several federal laws protect your right to work, regardless of where you live in the United States.

This fact sheet will help you learn more about your rights and how to get help if you have questions or problems.

What kinds of jobs can I get?

You can work in almost any job for which you are qualified. Under a part of the Immigration and Nationality Act, your status as someone granted asylum or refugee status generally can't prevent you from getting a job.

For information about discrimination, call the Immigrant and Employee Rights Section (IER). IER is part of the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. The law IER enforces is found at 8 U.S.C. § 1324b.

If you see that an employer only wants to hire U.S. citizens or does not want to hire someone granted asylum or refugee status, the employer might be committing unlawful discrimination.

What can I expect after I am hired?

Payroll and tax forms

Your employer will report your wages to the Social Security Administration and deduct taxes based on the information you provide. If you get a job but are still waiting for your Social Security number, the Social Security Administration instructs employers that employees are allowed to work while waiting for their Social Security number. If your employer submits a tax form called a W-2 before you get your Social Security number, your employer will write "Applied for" in the Social Security number field of a paper W-2 or enter all zeros (000-00-0000) in the Social Security number field of an electronic W-2.

Form I-9

- All employers have to complete a Form I-9 when they hire someone.
- When you are hired, you will have to show your employer documentation that proves your identity and permission to work in the United States.
- You fill out Section 1 of the Form I-9.

Call IER at 1-800-255-7688 if you have questions about the documents you can present or if your employer will not accept your valid document.

- As someone granted asylum or refugee status, you mark the fourth box for "Alien authorized to work" (or "A noncitizen authorized to work" in some versions of the Form I-9) in Section 1.
- You don't enter an expiration date in Section 1 because your permission to work doesn't expire. Instead, mark "N/A" in the expiration date field.
- After you fill out Section 1, your employer will fill out Section 2 with you. This is when you show documentation.
- You decide which documentation to present from the Lists of Acceptable Documents, which are attached to the Form I-9. You may have several of the documents on these lists.

If your employer is unfamiliar with a valid document you present, such as an I-94 issued to someone granted asylum or refugee status or a Department of State Transportation Boarding Letter, they can call IER for assistance.

The Social Security number field on the Form I-9 is optional, unless your employer uses E-Verify. You do not need to have a Social Security number to complete the Form I-9 and to begin working for pay. You may call IER's hotline or contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission if a company requires you to have a Social Security number to get a job.

E-Verify

- E-Verify is an electronic system that compares information from the Form I-9 with government records to confirm that a worker has permission to work in the United States.
- Not all employers use E-Verify. If you get a job with an employer that uses E-Verify, your employer must obtain your Social Security number to create an E-Verify case.
- If you do not have your Social Security number yet, your employer can wait and create an E-Verify case after you receive your Social Security number. E-Verify instructs employers to let an employee work while waiting for their Social Security number if the employee can complete the Form I- 9, even if it takes weeks or months.

- There are many other rules regarding E-Verify.

You can call the E-Verify hotline or IER if you have questions.

What protections do I have against discrimination (difference in treatment) at work?

An employer generally can't refuse to hire you, or fire you because of your citizenship status. Citizenship status includes a person's immigration status.

An employer generally can't refuse to hire you, or fire you because of your place of birth, first language, accent, or other national origin indicator.

National origin discrimination complaints against employers that have four to 14 employees go to IER. National origin discrimination complaints against employers with 15 or more employees go to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Although there are some exceptions, these protections cover you when you apply for jobs, when a company hires (or chooses not to hire) you or fires you.

There may be additional protections under federal, state, or local law. For questions about citizenship status, immigration status, or national origin discrimination, contact IER.

For questions about discrimination based on national origin, race, religion, sex, color, age, disability, or genetic information, call the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

During the Form I-9 process, an employer can't reject your government identification and unrestricted Social Security card because of your citizenship, immigration status, or national origin.

An employer also can't reject your valid documents or ask you for specific documents, such as an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), because of your citizenship, immigration status, or national origin. If you call the Immigrant and Employee Rights Section (IER) for help, IER may call your employer and provide information on the law to help resolve the issue.

What protections do I have against other kinds of unfair treatment?

You have the right to be paid for all work you do under the Fair Labor Standards Act. Some workers are also eligible for overtime pay (one and one-half times the regular rate) after 40 hours of work in a work week. Some state and local laws require overtime pay in other situations as well. Contact the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division for more information.

You also have a right to safe and healthful workplace conditions and the right to speak up if you are concerned about danger without fear of negative consequences. To learn more or ask for an inspection, contact the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

With few exceptions, you have the right to join with your coworkers to ask your company to improve your wages or working conditions. Most workers also have the right to form, join, and support a union in the workplace. For questions about your labor rights, contact the National Labor Relations Board.

Updated April 2025

All help described below is free.

U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division
Immigrant and Employee Rights Section (IER)

1-800-255-7688
1-800-237-2515 TTY
www.justice.gov/ier

Free interpretation is available. In certain situations, and with your permission, IER may contact your employer to help resolve problems.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
1-800-669-4000
1-800-669-6820 TTY
www.eeoc.gov

U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division (WHD)
1-866-487-9243
1-877-889-5627 TTY
www.dol.gov/whd

U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Health Administration (OSHA)
1-800-321-6742
1-877-889-5627 TTY
www.osha.gov

U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA)
1-800-722-1213
1-800-325-0778 TTY
www.ssa.gov

DHS E-Verify
1-888-897-7781
1-877-875-6028 TTY
www.e-verify.gov

U.S. National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)
1-866-667-6572
1-866-315-6572 TTY
www.nlrb.org