

Worker eligibility fraud is the enemy of good immigration policy.

Creating a path to citizenship for the over 11 million undocumented workers is certain to boost the American economy, as it will undeniably expand the pool of legal workers. The question on everybody's mind, however, is once we overhaul our immigration system, how do we prevent a replay of the 1986 amnesty that saw a new, stronger wave of undocumented aliens? You do it by verifying and authenticating who is eligible to work.

Unfortunately, the current E-Verify and paper Social Security card system is a deeply flawed way for the nation's seven million employers to realistically determine an individual's identity and status. E-Verify is over reliant on flawed databases and susceptible to identity theft and fraud. In fact, a 2009 Westat study found that 54 percent of all unauthorized workers were found to be eligible for employment through E-Verify—largely because “many unauthorized workers obtain employment by committing identity fraud that cannot be detected by E-Verify.” As the Social Security card is extremely easy to counterfeit—and the number itself easy to pass off—a security hole is created in the system that renders all attempts at meaningful verification useless.

Plugging the security hole: an electronic, tamper- and fraud-resistant card.

The most secure method to preserve the employment verification system – and bring exceptional value to all citizens – would be to issue all authorized US workers an upgraded, electronic, Chip-and-PIN Social Security card. By doing so, it would:

Ensure that only authorized workers can find work.□

Workers with an upgraded Social Security card along with their secret PIN number would prove that the cardholder is who they say they are, and are eligible to work. This makes it easy for citizens and legal immigrants to get work.

Give employers peace of mind that workers are who they say they are.

The cards are authenticated when inserted in the employer's inexpensive card reader, and the employee is verified when they input their PIN. Because this is a Chip-and-PIN transaction, it is a high-assurance operation. This cannot be done with easily counterfeited paper or mag-stripe cards. It also eliminates the need for employers to be document experts.

Allow workers to provide solid proof of their right to work.

The current Social Security card is a piece of paper with an individual's Social Security number typed on it. In the real world, it proves neither the holder is who they say they are or that they are entitled to work in the US, as it could be stolen, forged, or passed off. Because the upgraded Social Security card is electronic and verified as authentic every time it's used in the system, it authenticates the holder of the card as legitimate when they type in their secret PIN, allowing the worker to prove their right to work.

Discourage future undocumented workers.

More than 1 million new legal permanent residents come to America (as well as more than a half-million illegal immigrants) every year for one compelling reason: they want to work. As the Washington Post Editorial Board put it in 2013, we need to "make it easy for companies to detect and reject undocumented job applicants and for the government to prosecute employers who flout the law. If illegal immigrants can't get jobs, they won't come to this country. An effective solution would be to issue tamper-proof, biometric ID cards – using fingerprints or a comparably unique identifier – to all citizens and legal residents." Only an electronically verified, chip-and-PIN Social Security card does that.

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