



HOW TO DO AN INTERNATIONAL BACKGROUND CHECK

If you're hiring international employees, you probably have a lot of questions. After all, taking on international teams can involve a slew of new laws and considerations. One question you may have is how to conduct background checks for your international hires. The answer depends on numerous factors, but we're here to help you get started with a step-by-step guide to background checks for international employment.

WHY CONDUCT INTERNATIONAL PRE-EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND CHECKS



Fulfill legal
requirements



Confirm
credentials



Prevent crime
and protect others



Find the best
new hires

Why Conduct International Pre-Employment Background Checks

Background checks are a standard part of the pre-employment process in many countries, and with good reason. With all the complexities involved in international background checks, you may be tempted to skip this step. But conducting background checks for all your employees — including your international ones — can deliver some valuable benefits. They can help you:

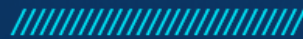
- **Fulfill legal requirements:** Depending on the country, some types of pre-employment screening may be legally required. At the least, you must make sure a person has a legal right to work in the country where you're hiring. You may also need to check a person's credentials and history to ensure there isn't a legal issue with employing them. For example, the government may require some workers to have specific degrees or certificates.
- **Confirm credentials:** Confirming a person's credentials is also a key part of employing someone truly qualified for the job at hand. You may assume the degrees or work experience listed on a person's resume or genuine, but you can't know for sure without verifying the information.
- **Prevent crime and protect others:** Especially when it comes to criminal background checks, you want to avoid hiring someone who could put your other employees or customers at risk. If you hire someone with a known criminal history related to a crime they end up committing as your employee, you could be considered negligent and become liable. You also want to ensure you do not hire a dishonest person who could commit theft or other crimes that hurt your company.
- **Find the best new hires:** Ultimately, conducting background checks is about finding the best possible candidates to join your team. You want to hire workers who will perform well and stay with your company for a long time. Screening potential hires is one way you can ensure you choose the right candidates for each position.

Steps for Conducting International Background Checks

Let's take a look at the steps you must work through to conduct background checks for your international hires. This guide provides a general overview since the exact process will depend on where you're hiring and what information you need to obtain.



DETERMINE WHAT TYPES OF CHECKS YOU NEED TO DO



Citizenship or visa

Employment history

Education credentials

Criminal record

Credit history

Social media presence

Medical records

Driving record

1. Determine What Types of Checks You Need to Do

The term “background check” or “pre-employment screening” may entail a few different types of checks. Note that some of these background check types may be irrelevant for specific positions or legally prohibited in certain countries. Some possible things you, as an employer, may want to check before hiring someone include the person’s:

- **Citizenship or visa:** A necessary step in most cases is to ensure a job candidate has a legal right to work in the country where you are hiring. This may mean confirming their citizenship or checking to make sure they have a valid working visa. If you employ someone who does not have a right to work in the country, you could face fines and legal action.
- **Employment history:** One thing you may want to investigate is an applicant’s employment history. Essentially, you want to verify that the work experience a person reports on their resume is accurate and uncover any potential issues with an applicant’s history as an employee. This may also involve checking references an applicant included on their resume.
- **Education credentials:** If an applicant is using their education to qualify for a position with your company, you’ll want to ensure they truly have the credentials listed on their resume. You can ask applicants to submit their official transcripts, or you can investigate their education history as part of your background check.
- **Criminal record:** Criminal background checks focus on uncovering any criminal history a job applicant may have. A criminal history can raise red flags you’ll want to see early on. For example, if you’re hiring someone who will be working with children, you would want to ensure they do not have a history of sexual misconduct.
- **Credit history:** Credit checks are common when you’re applying for a loan or as a tenant, but employers can use credit checks, as well. This is more common in the financial sector. When you’re hiring someone to work with finances, a check into their personal credit history may be justified.
- **Social media presence:** An informal check of candidates’ social media accounts has also become increasingly common. A U.S. study found that [70% of employers research candidates](#) via social networking sites during the hiring process, and more than half of these employers have chosen not to hire someone based on what they found online. However, you must be careful not to use information you find, like political affiliation, to discriminate unfairly during the hiring process.

- **Medical records:** A person's medical history is irrelevant in many cases, but for some jobs that involve a lot of physical activity, you may want to know if a person is physically up to the task. Generally, you must have a job applicant's permission to obtain their medical records. In some countries, including many Latin American countries, medical examinations are a standard part of the screening or onboarding process. In these cases, the examination may be enough without the need to obtain records.
- **Driving record:** A motor vehicle record is relevant if you're hiring someone who will drive as part of their job duties. For example, if you're hiring a delivery driver, you want to make sure that person does not have a history of traffic violations. Even if driving is only a small part of the job description, you may still want to check a person's driving record.

2. Research the Law

There is no simple explanation of how to do background checks on international employees because you'll have to abide by the laws of that employee's country — and these laws differ from country to country. You may have a process in place for screening employees in your home country, but something you're used to doing could be illegal in another country.

This is mainly because each country takes its own approach to privacy. While some countries are committed to public records and open access, others may be more committed to confidentiality. You'll need to research to learn what laws govern background checks and employment practices more broadly in the country where you're hiring. You may want to consult a lawyer in the country to help you remain compliant.

Look especially for any legal prohibitions against certain types of checks. Some countries prohibit employers from conducting certain types of background checks or only allow access to things like criminal records in special circumstances.

For example, if you're hiring in France, you can only [conduct background checks that are directly relevant](#) to the job position. This means criminal background checks are only justified if you're hiring someone who will work with money, for instance. Likewise, medical checks are

only allowed if an applicant's health directly relates to their job duties.

Many other laws can affect the way you conduct background checks for foreign employees. For instance, some countries may have laws in place that prohibit employers from making conditional job offers contingent on the results of a background check. In these cases, you will need to screen employees before making job offers.

To further complicate matters, you have to look at local laws as well as national laws. Make sure you know if there are any separate legal requirements in the jurisdiction where you are hiring. Furthermore, you should also research what is customary so you don't confuse or offend job candidates with what they would perceive as unusual requests for information.

Finally, if you're conducting a global background check for employees who have lived and worked in other countries in the past, you may need to extend your check to those countries, as well. That means you'll need to research the laws and procedures for those countries in addition to the candidate's current country of residence.

3. Obtain Authorization From Candidates

In some countries, you can only conduct background checks with the express permission of job applicants. In the United States, for example, [you need employees to sign a waiver](#) to access their medical, military, or education records.

You may want to ask applicants to consent to background checks as part of the initial application process so there are no surprises for applicants who make it to the end of the hiring process. To formally request background checks, however, you may need to have applicants do more than simply check a box on an online application questionnaire. Some countries may require a physical signature from the applicant.

Once you understand what types of checks you are permitted to do and have obtained the necessary permission from applicants, you can initiate the process for any applicants you are considering hiring. You may wait and conduct these checks during the onboarding process, as

long as employees understand their job offer is contingent on verifying all the information they provided is accurate.



4. Check References and Order Reports

The procedure for conducting a background check will look different depending on the type of check and the country where you are hiring. This is because every country has its own agencies and means of accessing records. There is no international database you can access. For each type of check you want to conduct, determine who or what agency you need to contact to initiate the check.

Employers or hiring agencies may be able to handle some aspects of the process on their own. For example, you can check applicants' social media accounts without hiring an agency or putting in a formal request. You can also directly contact previous employers and references. Keep in mind that, depending on where you are hiring, you may encounter language differences. Procure a translator if needed to facilitate your conversations with personal references, previous employers, and institutions.

Beyond these types of checks, you'll need to contact the proper agencies to order the additional checks you need. Some countries will have clear procedures for this, but not all. In

Mexico, for example, [you have to hire a private investigator](#) to produce a comprehensive background check. If you're conducting a background check on your own, you'll need to order records from government agencies or private companies to get the information you need.

Note that some countries will not have equivalent agencies or record repositories to the ones you may be used to. For example, France [does not have a major credit reporting](#) agency.

Some employers choose to outsource the background check process by hiring a third-party company that specializes in conducting background checks. If you choose to do this, make sure you contract with a company in the country where you are hiring. You should also ensure the company will deliver the information that is relevant for your hiring purposes.

5. Review Findings

Finally, you need to review the reports you obtain, either from your own legwork or from the third-party provider you hired. Consider whether any information has direct implications for the job position you're filling.

In some cases, the results of a background check leave you with a legal obligation not to hire an individual. This may be the case if a candidate does not have a legal right to work in the country or does not have education credentials legally required for the job, for example.

In other cases, there may be negative information you can choose to overlook at your own discretion if you believe a candidate is right for the job. A best-case scenario is that your background check confirms that a person's application is accurate and assures you that they are a trustworthy person who will be an asset to your team.