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# Factsheet – Information provided by civil status offices

## 1. Data protection

Civil status data are subject to particularly stringent protection. Civil status registries are not permitted to provide researchers with any information about living persons. If you require data about living relatives, we recommend that you should establish direct contact with the people concerned.

On the strength of an authorisation granted by the cantonal authority supervising civil status registries (supervisory authority) and on the basis of the provisions outlined below, civil status registries permit researchers to inspect older civil status registers or, in special cases, provide written information about deceased persons (cf. para. 3.2). They do not provide any verbal information about civil status data.

The supervisory authority does not grant any permission to inspect citizens' registers that are kept in the *Burgergemeinden* or burghers' communities. Applications for such permits must be submitted to the respective *Burgergemeinden*.

## 2. Registration system

### 2.1 Event registers

**Births, acknowledgements of paternity, marriages and death** are registered at the **place where they occur** (i.e. at the place of birth, death, acknowledgement and marriage). These data are collected in event registers and are located in the relevant civil status registries. Our website tells you which civil status registry is responsible for which municipality

### 2.2 Collective registers

Collective registers have been kept in the **place of origin** since 1822. As a rule, these **citizens' and family registers** are in the safekeeping of the civil status registry that is responsible for the place of origin. A register sheet is created for every family in accordance with the principle applicable at that time, in particular on the occasion of a marriage; this sheet lists not only the husband or father, but also his wives and children. Research into the distaff line, however, is far more time-consuming because on get-

ting married, every wife obtained a new place of origin. Our website tells you which civil status registry is responsible for which place of origin.

### 3. Forms of information

#### 3.1 Inspection of civil status registers of earlier times

##### 3.1.1 Inspection subject to a permit (no archive records)

On request, and subject to permission granted by the supervisory authority, a civil status registry allows enquirers to inspect civil registers of earlier times, i.e., in concrete terms, **registers** that have been **closed** and whose **protection terms have expired**.

An individual register is closed with the registration of the event (birth, death, marriage, acknowledgement of paternity). A family or citizens' register is deemed closed when all the persons listed on the sheet have been transferred to a different register or all the persons listed on the sheet are deceased.

This means that the following civil status registers may be inspected on the strength of permission granted by the supervisory authority:

- birth registers: 1900 up to 100 years before expiry of the permission;
- death registers: 1960 to 2003;
- marriage registers: 1930 up to 80 years before expiry of the permission;
- citizens' registers: journal sheets started in 1876 to 1928 (prior to 1876: no permission required);
- family registers (from 1929): generally no inspection.

The requisite qualifications and criteria and the documents to be submitted for inspection subject to permission are listed on the application form. This form can be printed out on our website or be obtained from the supervisory authority. It must be filled in completely and submitted to the supervisory authority.

The supervisory authority makes a possible permit contingent on certain requirements, not least in the interest of data protection:

- researchers must be able to read old German handwriting (*Kurrent script*) and have a good knowledge of the way in which the civil status registers are kept. If the researchers do not have a sufficient knowledge of *Kurrent script* and/or of the way in which the civil registers are kept, personal inspection of the civil status registers is permitted only with the assistance of the civil status registry for which a fee is payable. Interested persons may likewise employ a genealogist who does have this knowledge;
- the ledgers must be treated with every possible care during the inspection;
- the registers must not be removed from the premises of the civil status registry;
- owing to the provisions of data protection law, no photographs must be taken and no photocopies must be made of civil status registers;
- if in the course of their work, researchers come across data concerning living persons, such data may only be used with the consent of the persons concerned, such consent to be obtained by the researcher.

The permit covers all of the civil status registers referred to above in the Canton of Bern. When making an appointment and inspecting the registers, researchers must provide the civil registry with as much

information as possible about the person to whom the research relates and the most precise data possible about the registers that they wish to inspect. Indefinite enquiries (e.g. to inspect all the registers that may be accessed at the civil status registry) may be declined by the civil status registry.

If researchers hold a permit and know the exact position in the register, the civil status registry can make a copy of the particular register sheet against payment, including an attestation of accuracy or issue a civil status register document against payment (e.g. family certificate, birth certificate). The exact position in the citizens' register records the place of origin and the first names and surname of the person concerned, together with further information such as date of birth or wife's maiden name. The exact position in the individual register contains the first names and surname, the place and date of the event of the person concerned.

### **Costs**

The supervisory authority charges a fee of CHF 150.00 for an annual permit. A six months' permit costs CHF 100.00.

Provision of the registers by the civil status registry only includes making the register required by the researcher available at the place of work. Explanation of the register technology, consultation of the index of contents for the search and, in particular, helping the researcher to read are not included in the provision of the registers. If this additional work is required by the researcher, a charge will be made and billed or collected by the civil status register (CHF 75.00/half hour).

### **3.1.2 Inspection for which no permit is required or orders of simple copies from archive records against payment**

#### **3.1.2.1 Archive records which are usually kept by the civil status registry**

The following registers can be inspected at a civil status registry without a permit or uncertified copies can be ordered against payment after stating the concrete reference(s):

- birth registers: 1876 - 1899;
- death registers: 1876 - 1959;
- marriage registers: 1876 - 1929;
- citizens' registers: journal sheets started prior to 1876.

#### **a) Inspection without a permit**

To be able to inspect such registers without a permit, researchers will first have to register with the supervisory authority by filling in the form entitled *Gesuch um Datenbekanntgabe aus Zivilstandsregistern des Kantons Bern* [Request for disclosure of data from civil status registries of the Canton of Bern].

When the ledgers are being inspected, they will have to be treated with the utmost care. The registers must not be removed from the office premises of the civil status registry. Pursuant to provisions of data law, no photographs must be taken of civil status registers.

Civil status registries charge a fee of CHF 75.00 per half hour for assistance in the consultation of registers that is not limited to mere supervision (such as the search for or interpretation of entries).

## b) Orders of uncertified copies against payment

Civil status registries only issue uncertified copies against payment if a researcher specifically states the reference(s). This means

- for individual registers: name(s) and surname, place and date of the event;
- for citizens' registers: place of origin, volume and sheet number.

Civil status registries will charge researchers CHF 75.00 per half hour for looking up the reference. The basic fee for issuing copies will amount CHF 30.00 plus CHF 2.00 per copied page and postage.

### 3.1.2.2 Archive records in the Cantonal Archive

With only a few exceptions, the Bernese parish books (baptism, marriage and death registers kept from approx. 1530 until 1875) are stored in the Cantonal Archive. Most parish records were written in the old-style German script (*Kurrent script*). Researchers will have to have a basic knowledge of this script to be able to read the registers.

The parish records can be inspected online at [www.be.ch/kirchenbuecher](http://www.be.ch/kirchenbuecher).

Otherwise, the digitalised parish records can be accessed at dedicated computer terminals in the Cantonal Archive.

Contact: State Archive of Bern, Falkenplatz 4, 3001 Bern; tel. +41 (0)31 633 51 01

Internet: [www.be.ch/staatsarchiv](http://www.be.ch/staatsarchiv).

## 3.2 Written information for researchers about dead direct-line ancestors of their own

Written information (confirmation provided by a civil status registry) for researchers is limited to data about their own **dead** direct-line ancestors (parents, grandparents, great-grandparents), i.e. data about the latter's children will not be provided.

Confirmation by a civil status registry of information limited to the data of one register sheet will cost CHF 30.00 plus postage.

## 4. No inspection of more recent civil status registers

Civil status registries do not permit researchers to inspect **more recent civil status registers** that are **not closed** and registers that are closed but **whose protection term has not yet expired**, nor does it provide any written information about such registers. This applies to family registers, among others.

You can find the addresses and telephone numbers of the Bernese civil status registries at [www.be.ch/zivilstandsamt](http://www.be.ch/zivilstandsamt) (in German and French only).