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## Marriage Certificate and Marriage — Civil Registry Marriage in Germany

How civil registry marriage works, what documents you need, and what a marriage certificate contains.

**Deutsche Begriffe:** Eheurkunde | Standesamt | Heirat | Eheschließung | Aufgebot | Beglaubigung | Apostille

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### Getting Married in Germany — the Legal Framework

In Germany, only **civil registry marriage** (Eheschließung) is legally valid. Church, religious, or traditional ceremonies have **no legal effect** — they are a private celebration that can take place additionally.

The marriage is performed by the **civil registry office** (Standesamt). The competent office is the Standesamt of the place of residence of one of the two partners.

### Prerequisites

#### General Prerequisites

- Both partners must be **of legal age** (18 years old)
- Both must be **unmarried** (no existing marriage or registered civil partnership)
- **No close family relationship** (siblings, parent-child)
- **Free will** — the marriage must be entered into voluntarily (forced marriages are forbidden and punishable)

#### Special Considerations for Foreigners

If one or both partners **do not have German citizenship**, additional rules apply:

**1. Certificate of Marital Capacity** (Ehefähigkeitszeugnis) — a document from your home country confirming that you are allowed to marry under the law of your country. Not all countries issue this certificate — in this case, you can apply for an **exemption** from the Higher Regional Court (Oberlandesgericht).

**2. Residence Status** — you do not need a specific residence status to marry in Germany. You can marry with a visa, toleration, or permission. The Standesamt **cannot** refuse to perform the marriage because of your residence status.

**3. Legalization/Apostille** — Foreign documents often need to be provided with an **Apostille** or **legalization** and **translated into German** (certified translation).

## What Documents Do I Need?

### German Citizens

- **ID card** or passport
- **Current birth certificate** (no older than 6 months, request from the Standesamt of your place of birth)
- **Certificate of residence/registration confirmation** (from the registration office)
- If previously married: **Divorce decree** with proof of finality or **death certificate** of ex-partner

### Foreign Citizens

In addition to the above:

- **Valid passport** + any residence status documents
- **Birth certificate** — certified, with Apostille/legalization, translated
- **Certificate of Marital Capacity** — from your home country (with Apostille, translated)
- **Certificate of Single Status** — if no Certificate of Marital Capacity is available
- **Possibly name registration** or marital status certificate
- If previously married: foreign **divorce decree** (must be recognized in Germany!)

**Tip:** Clarify **early** (3–6 months before the wedding) with the Standesamt which documents are exactly needed — requirements vary depending on your country of origin.

## Marriage Process

### 1. Registration for Marriage

- **Schedule an appointment** with the Standesamt (often possible online)
- **Submit documents** — the Standesamt reviews the documents (time: 2-8 weeks)
- **Schedule the wedding ceremony**

### 2. The Wedding Ceremony

- Takes place in the **wedding room** of the Standesamt (or at an approved venue)
- **Civil registry officer** conducts the ceremony
- Both partners declare their **willingness to marry** ("Yes, I do")
- **Two witnesses** are optional (no longer required since 1998, but customary)
- **Ring exchange** — not required, but traditional
- Duration: approximately **20-30 minutes**

### 3. Marriage Certificate

After the ceremony, you receive the **marriage certificate** (Eheurkunde) — the official document of your marriage.

## The Marriage Certificate (Eheurkunde)

### What Is in the Marriage Certificate?

- **Names** of both spouses (birth name and any married name)
- **Date and place of birth**
- **Date and place** of marriage
- **Standesamt number** and **registration number**
- **Religious affiliation** (if desired)

### What Do I Need the Marriage Certificate For?

- **Name change** — at the registration office and other authorities
- **Change of tax class** — with the tax office (tax class III/V or IV/IV)
- **Family reunification** — for spouse's visa

- **Inheritance rights** — proof of marriage in case of death
- **Insurance** — family insurance in the GKV

## Costs

Service	Cost
Registration for marriage	40-60 €
Wedding ceremony (at Standesamt)	30-100 €
Wedding ceremony (outside, e.g., castle)	100-500+ €
Marriage certificate (1st copy)	12 €
Additional copies	6 € each
Exemption from Certificate of Marital Capacity (OLG)	40-300 €
Certified translation	30-100 € per document

**Total Costs (typical):** For a German-foreign couple with translations and certifications: **200-600 €** (without celebration).

## Name Rights After Marriage

### Options

- **Joint surname** — one partner's name becomes the family name
- **Hyphenated name** — e.g., "Müller-Schmidt" (only for the partner changing their name; children receive only the married name)
- **Both keep their names** — each retains their birth name

### For Foreigners

Which name law applies depends on your **citizenship**. Generally, you can choose whether the law of your home country or German law applies.

## After the Wedding — Important Steps

- 1. Registration office** — register your new name (renew ID card/passport)
- 2. Tax office** — request tax class change (often worthwhile: III/V for different incomes)
- 3. Health insurance** — possibly family insurance for your spouse

**4. Bank** — name change on your account

**5. Employer** — notify of new name and tax class

**6. Residence status** — possibly change of residence status (family reunification → independent residence right after 3 years)

**7. Driver's license** — name change (recommended, not required)

## Recognition of Foreign Marriages

Marriages concluded **abroad** are **generally** recognized in Germany if they were valid under the law of the country where they were concluded.

### Exceptions:

- **Child marriages** (under 16 years) — invalid in Germany since 2017
- **Forced marriages** — not recognized
- **Polygamous marriages** — only the first marriage is recognized

**For official purposes** in Germany, you often need a **certified translation** and **Apostille** of your foreign marriage certificate.

## Tips

**1. Start early** — begin gathering documents 6 months before your desired date

**2. Contact the Standesamt** — each office has its own requirements, especially for foreign documents

**3. Certified translators** — use only recognized translators (list available from the Regional Court)

**4. Certificate of Marital Capacity** — can take months, apply early in your home country