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Name Change in Germany — Process, Costs, and Reasons

How to change your first or last name in Germany: reasons, procedure, required documents, and costs.

Deutsche Begriffe: Namensänderung | Standesamt | Vorname | Nachname | Namenserklärung | Gebühren

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When Can I Change My Name?

In Germany, a Namensänderung (name change) is **not simple** — you need a **valid reason**. This is because your name serves for **identification** and should not be changed arbitrarily.

There are two types of Namensänderung:

1. Private law Namensänderung — upon marriage, divorce, or adoption (through Standesamt, relatively simple)

2. Public law Namensänderung — for other reasons (through Standesamt or the name change authority, more difficult)

Private Law Namensänderung — Automatic Occasions

Upon Marriage

- You can adopt your **partner's name** as your married name
- **Double name** possible (e.g., Müller-Schmidt)
- Both can **retain** their names
- Application at the **Standesamt** when registering the marriage

Upon Divorce

• You can resume your **birth name**

• Or retain your **married name**

• Or resume a **former married name**

• Application at the **Standesamt** after the divorce

Upon Adoption

• **Minors:** automatically receive the adoptive parents' name

• **Adults:** Namensänderung possible upon request

For Children

• **Einbenennung:** stepchild receives the new spouse's name (§ 1618 BGB) — consent of both biological parents required

• **Change of family name** for unmarried parents' children possible

Public Law Namensänderung — Valid Reasons

If you want to change your name **without** marriage/divorce/adoption, you need a **valid reason** (§ 3 NamÄndG):

Recognized Reasons

• **Psychological distress** caused by the name (e.g., offensive, ridiculous, hard to pronounce)

• **Gender reassignment** — for transgender individuals (since 2024 also possible via Selbstbestimmungsgesetz)

• **Severe psychological distress** caused by the old name (e.g., due to violence, stalking, abuse)

• **Religious conversion** — if the old name doesn't fit the new faith

• **Integration** — adapting a foreign name to German spelling or choosing a German name

Insufficient Reasons

• "I simply don't like my name"

• Fashion reasons (celebrity name, etc.)

• Simple dislike of the surname

• Family conflicts alone (without special distress)

Special Case: Foreign Names

Foreigners have **easier conditions**:

• **Angleichungserklärung** (§ 94 BVFG) — you can adapt your name to German spelling (e.g., latinize Cyrillic or Arabic names)

• **Naturalization** — during naturalization, you can adapt your name or choose a German name

• **Hard-to-pronounce names** — shortening or simplification is possible if the name causes problems in everyday German life

How Do I Apply for a Namensänderung?

Responsible Authority

• **Standesamt** — for Namensänderung upon marriage, divorce, birth

• **Namensänderungsbehörde** (name change authority) — for public law changes (usually the Standesamt or Ordnungsamt of your city)

• **Court** — for disputes or rejections

Required Documents

• **ID card** or passport + residence permit

• **Birth certificate** (current, not older than 6 months)

• **Residence certificate**

• **Justification** — written explanation of the valid reason

• **Supporting documents** — e.g., psychological assessment, police report, medical certificate

• If previously married: **Marriage certificate and divorce judgment**

• **Consent declaration** of spouse (for name changes of married persons)

• For children: **Consent** of both parents (and child from age 5)

Process

1. Consultation at the Standesamt/Namensänderungsbehörde

2. Submit application with all documents

3. Review by the authority (possibly hearing third parties: spouse, police)

4. Decision — approval or rejection (processing time: 2–12 months)

5. Implementation — update ID documents, accounts, contracts with new name

Costs

Type of Namensänderung	Cost
Namensänderung upon marriage/divorce	€25–50
Public law Namensänderung (surname)	€50–1,500
Public law Namensänderung (first name)	€25–500
Angleichungserklärung (for foreigners)	€25–60
ID card (reissue)	€37
Passport (reissue)	€70

Fees for public law Namensänderung depend on your **income** and the **difficulty** of the case.

What Must I Do After the Namensänderung?

Immediately

• **ID card** and **passport** — apply for new ones

• **Residence permit** — update (Immigration Office)

• **Residence certificate** — update (Registration Office)

• **Tax ID** — remains the same, but inform the tax office

Within a Few Weeks

• **Bank** — change account name, order new debit card

• **Employer** — notify of new name (payroll, social insurance)

• **Health insurance** — request new card

• **Insurance policies** — update all insurances

• **Landlord** — name plate, doorbell, rental agreement

• **Postal service** — set up mail forwarding (6 months, €28.90)

Later

• **Driver's license** — update Namensänderung (recommended)

• **Vehicle registration** — update registration document

• **Diplomas/Certificates** — usually the old name remains; reissuance is often possible

• **Contracts** — mobile phone contract, electricity contract, gym membership, etc.

Selbstbestimmungsgesetz (since November 2024)

Since November 1, 2024, the **Selbstbestimmungsgesetz (SBGG)** applies: transgender, intersex, and non-binary persons can change their **gender entry and first name** at the Standesamt — **without** expert assessment or court proceedings.

Process

1. Declaration at the Standesamt — in person, notify 3 months in advance

2. Self-certification — you declare that the change corresponds to your gender identity

3. Waiting period: 3 months between notification and declaration

4. Costs: approx. €30–50

Tips for Foreigners

1. Use Angleichungserklärung — simpler and cheaper than regular Namensänderung

2. During naturalization — adapt your name simultaneously (saves fees)

3. Documents from your home country — bring birth certificate with apostille and translation

4. Consultation — migration counseling can help with questions about name law

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