

Registering baby for U.S. birth certificate, passport and social security number

By Sarah Holsen

Downloaded from <http://www.lausannemom.com/USbirthregistration.pdf>

The process of registering one's baby for citizenship and a passport in the non-Swiss parent's/s' country/ies can seem confusing and requires preparation so I thought I would write a post about what we had to do for our two-month-old daughter in the hopes that it will make things easier for new parents out there. Some of the steps can be taken before the baby's arrival, which, looking back, we should have done.

I am from the US and my husband is German so we had to register our daughter as a citizen of both countries after receiving the necessary Swiss birth certificate. (By the way, our daughter was born at CHUV and the hospital took care of the official Swiss paperwork for us. However, though the confirmation of her birth came to us in the mail shortly after she was born, it was NOT the birth certificate. In order to get a birth certificate you have to apply online here: <https://www.sec-ud.ch/etatcivil/> (click on 'acte de naissance') and pay around CHF30 before they'll issue it and send it to you by post. The birth certificate, which is in several languages, including English, was necessary for us to register her as a US citizen.)

For the U.S. side of things (which includes US birth certificate, passport and social security number), the steps we took are as follows:

One

I looked up "Report of Birth Abroad" on the US embassy Bern site (http://bern.usembassy.gov/birth_abroad.html). Then I emailed the consulate office in Geneva with the information they require (applicant's full name, date and place of birth, home address in Switzerland, phone numbers, e-mail address and the best time to be reached).

Two

In the email reply to me (which arrived within 24 hours) I was told to visit the consulate and bring the following paperwork with me:

- Marriage certificate
- Divorce certificate (if applicable)
- If only one of you is from the US then the proof that you, as the US citizen, lived FIVE years in the States, two of those after your 14th birthday
- The international version of the baby's birth certificate (this is the *acte de naissance* that I referred to above)
- Two 5x5 cm photos of the baby
- Both parents' passports

Three

I had read on the web page that there were also several forms to fill out and that these would be sent to me by post. However, the consulate employee who emailed me back did not mention them so I called and requested them by post. When they arrived, I filled them out in preparation for our visit to the consulate. Please note that the signatures for the birth certificate and passport must be done IN PERSON at the consulate or embassy.

Four

After you have all of the paperwork together, you can mail the forms and copies of the important documents to the consulate ahead of time. However, we just took everything with us and showed up in person without sending anything first. It was no problem - we didn't even have to wait. (An aside, the US consulate in Geneva has no obvious signage on the outside of the building in which it's located. It is called the "American Center" and the office is very small. You have to go through a security check to enter.) The US government requires at least one parent to bring the baby to the consulate or embassy to complete the paperwork - if both can't go, notarized signatures and letters - see the above web site for more details - of the absent parent are required for the birth certificate and passport. Please also note that all documents presented when the applicant comes in person must be originals or certified copies (this statement is taken directly from the embassy web page).

Five

For us, the biggest nuisance was having to collect evidence of my (not my husband's) minimum five years' (60 months) residency in the US. This evidence can include high school and/or university/grad school transcripts and/or a letter from an employer stating the dates you worked for them. Other proof might be acceptable - these were the examples I was given, though. I didn't have 60 months' worth of evidence in my university transcripts so I had to contact my high school and request that transcript as well. This took over a week - something I could have done before the baby was born.

Six

Once you're at the consulate with all the documents and the photos (and they're quite picky about the photo size and head size within the photo - if the photos don't meet their requirements, there's a photo shop near the consulate to which you can go quickly and have them retaken), the procedure takes very little time. We were in and out within 45 minutes and we got the passport and birth certificate exactly 2 weeks after we visited. Considering the number of applications they probably get, I thought this was very quick - we're still waiting for the German passport and proof of citizenship, for which we applied the day after we went to Geneva.

It is also possible to go to the embassy in Bern if that is more convenient than Geneva. In fact, all paperwork is processed in Bern even if you apply at the consulate in Geneva. However, I was told (by a rather unhelpful and not so polite person at the embassy) that the paperwork MUST be sent in 1 to 2 weeks ahead of time (there is a big difference between one and two weeks if you're in a hurry!) if you choose to go to Bern. Needless to say, we went instead to Geneva where that is not a requirement.

Oh - and to get all of these things done for your baby costs USD150 or CHF165 (at the currency rate they're going by at the moment).

There are probably details I've left out so I'd be happy to answer any questions on our experience by email. In addition, if anyone is interested in the procedure for German documentation, I'm happy to email about that, too. My address is [sarah_holsen\(AT\)hotmail.com](mailto:sarah_holsen(AT)hotmail.com).

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