



**Stadt Bern**



Department for Education  
Social Affairs and Sport

Social Services Office

# **Social assistance information sheet**



## **General information**

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### **Your Local Authority looks after you**

The Social Welfare Act of Canton Bern stipulates that the communal authorities must provide social assistance for local residents. The communal authorities have the task of eliminating the cause of major social problems and preventing the risk of poverty. In the city of Bern the Department for Education, Social Affairs and Sport (Direktion für Bildung, Soziales und Sport (BSS)) is responsible for all questions arising in the social welfare sector.

### **The Social Services Office: expert advice and help at no cost**

Should you and your family experience financial or social difficulties, you are entitled to seek help from the Social Services Office. The only precondition is that you are resident in the city of Bern. The Social Services Office will offer its services provided that no other forms of assistance are available.

### **How does the Social Services Office help?**

Help is provided depending on your personal, social and financial situation. The aim of the services provided is to show you ways of achieving personal and financial independence and to help you during this process. Financial support is provided in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Swiss Conference for Social Welfare (SKOS).

## **What services does the Social Services Office offer?**

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### **Information and mediation**

The social workers, who are both male and female, will help you in your dealings with other authorities such as compensation funds etc. Furthermore they will help establish contacts with other institutions such as advice centres, church communities, doctors, etc.

### **Advice and a sympathetic ear**

The social workers will advise you over personal, financial and general legal problems. This help is also possible if you do not receive any financial support.

### **Financial support**

If there is no possibility of income from other sources of financial assistance (e.g. insurance policies, employers, unemployment funds, personal assets), you may claim for social welfare benefits. The amount of the benefits is determined such that you are able to cover your daily living expenses. In this connection the number of persons living in the same household is taken into account. In order to calculate the benefits, an assistance budget is prepared where all your income is balanced against necessary expenditure. In principle, the Social Services Office will not assume responsibility for existing debts.

If your parents or children enjoy good financial circumstances, it is possible to claim assistance from relatives. The obligation for relatives to provide support according to Art. 328 of the Swiss Civil Code is in any case examined. According to the Social Welfare Law in certain conditions social security benefits

must be refunded. Following the payment of social security benefits, refund is compulsory if you have created your situation of hardship through gross negligence, if you receive an extraordinary income such as an inheritance or lottery winnings or if, after termination of the social benefits, you enjoy again extremely favourable economic circumstances.

## **What are your rights?**

### **Advice free of charge**

The Social Services Office provides advice free of charge. It will help you exercise your rights and make claims when dealing with public offices, institutions, employers, etc.

### **Absolute confidentiality and guarantee of constitutional rights**

The Social Services Office, within a reasonable time period, will agree with you a date for a meeting and make all the necessary enquiries. All your details will be processed in a strictly confidential manner. The social workers are bound by official secrecy and may not interfere with your constitutional rights (e.g. right of domicile).

### **Written response and right of appeal**

If your written application for assistance is refused, you will receive a written decision with instructions concerning your right to appeal. Should you not agree with the decision of the Social Services Office, you may at any time request an official ruling which is subject to appeal.

## **What are you responsibilities?**

### **Self-initiative and personal responsibility**

You must make every reasonable effort to improve your own personal and financial situation.

Reintegration into employment – and preventing future exclusion from the working process – is a central aim of the social welfare service. Helping you achieve reintegration and find employment which guarantees a level of subsistence – we can only achieve these goals if you contribute by showing the necessary personal initiative.

It is also your responsibility to deal with your own personal affairs. The Social Services Office will help only when you are no longer able to protect your own interests or fulfill your duties personally.

### **Honesty, transparency and willingness to cooperate**

The Social Services Office can only cooperate successfully with you if you provide full and true information about your own personal and financial circumstances. If you refuse to cooperate and provide the necessary explanations about your needs, we will be unable to process your application. Not disclosing information or making false statements with the aim of obtaining social benefits is a punishable offence. You must report any changes in circumstances immediately. Illegally obtained benefits must in all cases be refunded. Searches may be carried out by the Social Services Office in the case of unclear circumstances. Unlawful actions will in all cases be reported.

## **What if there are problems with the Social Services Office?**

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The social workers will ask you very personal questions in order to fully understand and correctly assess your situation. It is your duty to provide the necessary explanations. If you are not happy with the working conduct of the social worker, you should first attempt to clarify matters directly with the social worker in question. A frank discussion will often solve many problems. However, if this is not successful, you may request a meeting with the Manager of the Social Services Office to clarify the matter. Physical violence or verbal abuse and threats are not tolerated by the Social Services Office and will be reported to the Police. You have the right to consult your records – just ask the social worker dealing with your case.

## **Contact**

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Sozialdienst Stadt Bern  
Schwarztorstrasse 71, 3007 Bern  
Tel. 031 321 60 27  
E-Mail: [sozialdienst@bern.ch](mailto:sozialdienst@bern.ch)  
<https://www.bern.ch/politik-und-verwaltung/stadtverwaltung/bss/sozialamt/sozialdienst>

## **Office hours**

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Monday – Wednesday	08.30 – 11.30 am 02.00 – 05.00 pm
Thursday	02.00 – 05.00 pm
Friday	08.30 – 11.30 am 02.00 – 04.00 pm

Cash desk  
Monday – Wednesday  
and Friday 08.30 – 11.30 am

## **Receiving times for new application**

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Monday – Thursday	02.00 – 04.30 am
Friday	02.00 – 03.30 am