

General terms of use

The Research Data Centres of the Statistical Offices of the Federation and the Federal States provide the scientific community with official statistics microdata for scientific purposes. The data use is based on section 16 (6) and section 31 (2) of the Federal Statistics Act (Bundesstatistikgesetz – BstatG) and is subject to certain requirements that are stated below.

The use of official microdata is

1. regulated by law,
2. committed to confidentiality,
3. bound to a specific user or group of users,
4. bound to a specific purpose,
5. temporary,
6. contractually agreed,
7. liable for costs.

1. Regulated by law

The legal foundation that the services of the Research Data Centres of the Federation and the Federal States is based on is the Federal Statistics Law (Bundesstatistikgesetz – BstatG). It regulates in detail the conditions under which data may be provided for scientific projects. Most relevant are section 16 (1) item 4 for the provision of absolutely anonymised data and section 16 (6) which regulates the provision of formally and factually anonymised data.

2. Committed to confidentiality

The RDC are legally bound to check all statistical results for statistical confidentiality that were created within the context of scientific projects based on provided microdata. This serves the protection of data according to section 16 (6) of the Federal Statistics Law (BStatG). Should individual cases be part of the output then they have to be blocked consistently across all results of a project. Data users who plan to re-identify individual cases are liable to prosecution and are expelled from further data uses. If a data user unintentionally re-identifies individual cases they have to immediately inform the RDC about it. The protection of data also includes the fact that external variables may only be matched to the requested data if this was brought into agreement with the RDC in advance – if possible in the context of the request for data access.

The confidentiality rules which are applied in the RDC to ensure confidentiality are described in chapter 3 of the brochure “Regulations on the analysis of microdata in the Research Data Centres of the Federal Statistical Office and the Statistical Offices of the Federal States (RDC)”.

3. Bound to a specific user or group of users

Scientific facilities assigned with independent scientific research are eligible for use. These are universities and scientific institutions. If a scientific institution applies for access to microdata for the first time, its eligibility for use will be legally assessed. The assessment process generally takes several weeks. The data may only be used by persons who belong to the eligible facility, meaning they are enrolled in the institution, their thesis or dissertation is supervised by the institution, they are employees of the institution or have a guest researcher's status. In addition, it is necessary that users are committed to statistical confidentiality in accordance with section 16 (7) of the Federal Statistics Act (BStatG) when using a Scientific Use File or visit a Safe Centre. This commitment can be carried out in any statistical office.

4. Bound to a specific purpose

The use is restricted to scientific projects only. These may be, for example, qualification works like master or doctoral theses, but also third party funded research projects, projects funded with own resources or research projects on behalf of ministries. The microdata may only be used within the project described within the data application process. A separate application form must be submitted if data is to be used in another context. However, several publications may originate from one applied project.

5. Use is temporary

All requested data sets can be used for a period of three years. There is a possibility of lengthening the period for another three years (liable for costs). This limitation is also valid if the reduced user charge for doctoral students is utilized. If the reduced charge for students is utilized then the data may only be used for one year, an extension is excluded. The use of the data for research projects is temporary because it is bound to a specific purpose – that is a project of limited duration. The data may not be provided for permanent tasks. Within the regular duration of a project, the use may be extended with other statistics, additional survey years or external variables. Within the scope of a peer review process of publications based on RDC microdata there is the possibility to apply for a stationary phase of at most three years (liable for costs).

6. Contractually agreed

For the use of data a user contract is concluded between the scientific institute requesting the data and the RDC. In this contract, the duration of use is determined and the rights and obligations of both contractual partners are regulated. Those include, for example, the obligation of the RDC to supply the data and the obligation of the institution resp. the data user to stick to the statistical confidentiality. The contract also regulates other framework conditions of the use of data like, for example, the obligation of the data user to not use mobile devices (e. g. mobile phone, laptop) which would allow the user to acquire or record additional knowledge.

The contract also regulates the citation that is to be used for publications based on the used official microdata. In addition, it is contractually agreed that the RDC is provided with at least one (printed or electronic) copy of the publication.

7. Liable for costs

A fee is charged for the use of official German microdata. The amount of the fee depends on the number of statistics used, survey years and ways of data access. Additional costs arise if the requested data is not part of the standard data supply but has to be processed specifically for a project (project-specific procession). Extensions by other statistics, additional survey years or external variables are also liable for costs.