Working in the Secure Data Center Safe Room, Cologne

Dear Researcher,

Thank you for your interest in working with sensitive data in the Secure Data Center Safe Room. Working with highly detailed and sensitive data involves stricter access measures and researchers must adhere to additional terms and conditions. If you are new to working with data in the Secure Data Center Safe Room, then we ask you to read through this guide carefully to make sure applying to access sensitive data through our Safe Room is appropriate for you.

The application process

You must first complete a Data Use Agreement. This form collects information about the data you wish to analyze and your proposed project including a description of your research question(s), methodology and planned publications. This Agreement is then checked for completeness and passed to the data owners for approval. Once approval is granted, we can then proceed with setting up your project and scheduling your visit to the Safe Room.

The Secure Data Center Safe Room

The Safe Room is a secure room, with four workstations that can facilitate visits by a maximum of four researchers on any single day (outside of pandemic restrictions). Researchers are not permitted to take personal belongings into the Safe Room, including electronic devices, so lockers are provided to allow you to securely store your belongings during their visit. You should take your belongings with you at the end of the day, even if your visit will last more than one day.

During your visit, you will be provided with paper on which to make notes. At the end of each day, these notes will be screened by the Secure Data Center team to ensure that no data has been copied or that no information that could be disclosive is included. After screening, you can take the notes with you when you leave.

The virtual working environment

Once your contract has been approved, an individual work environment is p r e p a r e d for you. You will be working locally on a virtual machine (VM) which you will log into using your unique username and password. These login credentials will be given to you upon arrival on your first day.

You will then be signed into the virtual environment of the Secure Data Center. The virtual environment is a completely sealed off area, you will not have access to any other desktops or working USB hubs or drives or the internet. You will not be able to move files in or out of the virtual environment yourself, therefore if you wish to have files such as syntax or contextual data uploaded into your VM, you should submit a request to the Secure Data Center team. All files must undergo a series of checks so you should allow 2 weeks for such requests to be processed.

Guidelines for Data Protection and Data Security

You must not make any attempts to de-anonymize the provided data or to disclose the identity of individual respondents.

You must not attempt to extract data from the VM or to copy them or to pass them on in any way (e.g. no photos, no copying, no hacking of the VM).

You must not give access to the provided VM to any unauthorized persons, i.e. also e.g. when you leave the room only for a short moment please always log out of the VM or lock the access.

Research output procedures

All files (research output) that you generate and would like to use outside the Safe Room must be checked by the Secure Data Center team before they can be sent to you. We examine your outputs to ensure that they cannot be used by anybody to identify an individual or certain geographic entities from the data you have used (known as Statistical Disclosure Control). There are also restrictions as to the format and size of outputs, and more detailed information about our output rules will be provided once we have received a Data Use Agreement from you.

As a rule, we estimate approximately 3 weeks for this control. However, the duration depends, among other factors, on the volume and complexity of your output. This means that the clearer you structure and comment your log files and results, the easier we can understand and assess your work, and the quicker we can complete the control.

Scheduling your Safe Room visit

Visits are only possible upon prior arrangement. Our main location is in Cologne, and we are open for visits Monday – Friday 9:00 AM – 4.30 PM.

We also have two additional access points at GESIS Mannheim (open Monday – Tuesday 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM, for users of Allbus, GESIS-Panel and GLES – Germany data only) and the UK Data Service SecureLab, UK.

Please note that closures for Public Holidays will apply in all locations.

If you have questions or need further advice, please contact the Secure Data Center who will be happy to assist and advise.