

Institutional announcement

13 April 2021

The National Statistics Institute, the Tax Agency, the Social Security and the Banco de España agree to commence joint work on developing a system of access to their databases for scientific purposes in the public interest

Efficient management of the information in databases is a key activity in States' pursuit of their main functions, notably with regard to evidence-based decision-making on the design and implementation of public policies. Moreover, it is universally acknowledged that data-based scientific research contributes significantly to economic and social development.

The existence of numerous administrative records and statistical databases, along with advances in the technologies for handling them, mean that sizeable amounts of information are available in all areas that can be harnessed for the benefit of society, through their use for scientific purposes. The existence of such a wealth of information has caused an increase in demand by researchers, which is being partially met by the information access systems put in place in some institutions.

In this respect, the National Statistics Institute (INE), the Tax Agency (AEAT), the Social Security (SS) and the Banco de España (BE), in their capacity as holders of a significant amount of administrative information and granular data collected for statistical purposes, have agreed to start working together on the design of a collaborative data system to which researchers will have access, provided that the information is to be used for scientific purposes in the public interest. In addition, they will promote the future incorporation of other institutions that hold administrative records or other granular databases of research interest.

The new system is conceived as a joint initiative of the four institutions and, in this connection, it will not do away with the procedures currently in place to provide customized information to researchers.

Privacy and personal data protection

The agreement reached by the four institutions will enable many needs of researchers and scientists to be met in benefit of the public interest, through harnessing the information in their records and databases. The use of this information will be in accordance with the rules that guarantee statistical secrecy, data confidentiality and the protection of personal data in these databases.

Given that Spanish and European statistical legislation and the European statistics Code of Practice confer to INE a relevant role in the use and management of administrative records for statistical purposes, the four institutions agree that INE shall act as *Coordinator* of this joint access system. This coordination role, similar to set up in other developed countries, allows a rational use of and savings for public resources, since INE has already been performing similar tasks in its statistical production.

The system will have a *Governance Committee*, comprising representatives of the four institutions. Its mission will be: to define the databases to be made available for researchers; to approve access requests for the different purposes envisaged; to collaborate with the other institutions providing databases; and, broadly, to monitor the proper functioning of the system, having regard always to the principles of sound management, rationality and proportionality.

To provide access to different users, a *Remote Secure Access Technical System* to the different records and databases will be set up, supplementing the secure access procedures currently in place in the laboratories or dedicated spaces of the four institutions.

Access to information

INE, AEAT, SS and the BE may grant access to the microdata bases administered by them, for scientific purposes in the public interest and with the necessary guarantees of security, statistical secrecy, personal data protection and observance of current law.

In addition to the statistical databases from its surveys, INE may also grant access to administrative records, both those compiled or coordinated by it, and those held by another institution but that the INE uses for compiling its statistics (by consulting, in this latter case, all access requests to the holders of the related records).

Access to researchers for scientific purposes in the public interest must be legally supported. Thus, the four institutions agree to continue working to adapt the legislative and legal framework specific to each institution in order to meet this objective. Moreover, the agreement shall take the form of a collaborative agreement.