

Directorate General Strategy, People and Data

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0. General Operating Rules

BELab operational guides

Statistics Department. BELab Unit

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1 Introduction

Microdata bases are a valuable source of information about the behaviour of economic agents. Their use may provide for a better and deeper understanding of reality. So that the research community may have greater access to high-quality microdata, the Banco de España data Laboratory (BELab) has been set up to pave the way for non-commercial research projects.

2 Who can access BELab?

Any researcher affiliated with recognized institutions in the field of research, who are conducting projects for scientific purposes, as well as doctoral candidates and master's students aiming to develop their doctoral thesis or master's final project using BELab data.

2.1 Recognized research entities

In order to request access to the BELab databases, it will be essential that researchers belong to a research entity. BELab automatically recognizes all research entities registered in [ES_DataLab](#)¹.

Only if your entity is not included in this registry, and you want to access the BELab data, you will be required to complete the form that allows you to evaluate whether your entity meets the criteria that allow it to be recognized as a research entity with access to the BELab.

The following criteria will be taken into account in the evaluation of the research entity:

- Having research as one of its main activities, for example, universities, research institutes or research departments within another organization. This condition will be justified based on the public regulations for the creation of the entity (statutes, etc.) that reflect the research nature of the institution.
- Having a reputation as an organization that produces quality research. To assess this criterion, the list of publications and research projects in which the entity has participated will be considered.

The form must be signed by a representative of the entity, who must be a person with authority to make commitments on behalf of the organization (for example, a university rector, vice-rector for research, general director, president or similar).

2.2 Researchers

Once the organization has been recognized as a research entity, access can be requested by submitting a research project proposal. To do so, the corresponding application form must be completed, including the researchers who will access the microdata, designating one of them as the “principal investigator”. This will be the official interlocutor with the

¹ ES_DataLab is a platform that arises from the agreement signed by the INE, the AEAT, the Social Security, the (SEPE) and the Bank of Spain to contribute to the development of research by facilitating the research community and allowing joint access to the databases of the participating institutions for scientific work of public interest.

Laboratory staff and will be responsible for compliance with the rules for access and use of the data by the research team.

The researchers named in the application must meet the following requirements:

- Be employees of the research entity (or work for it as contractors, only in justified cases), or be students (doctoral or master's) under the direction of a supervisor employed by the research entity; the supervisor must be identified in the research proposal as the principal investigator and the senior student as an individual researcher.
- The purpose of the data request is to carry out research. This purpose will be verified by considering the research plan, the curriculum vitae of the researcher or researchers and the planned dissemination of the results. Funding is an additional element that can be used in case of doubt, and if they are relevant in the context. There is no assessment of the quality of the research, but only that the intended use is indeed research.
- The link between the researcher and the research entity must allow the latter to impose disciplinary sanctions on the researcher in case of improper, negligent or deliberate use of the data.
- Advanced knowledge of one of the programming languages available in the BELab for the mass processing of its data sets will be positively valued.
- In case of changes in the research team, the BELab must be informed of the new researchers who must sign the confidentiality declaration.

In case of doubt, the BELab will ask the researcher for more information and/or clarifications.

3 Available data

Updated information on the sets of microdata available at the Banco de España laboratory, together with user guides and [interactive information](#) for exploring the laboratory's databases in detail, can be found on the [BELab website](#)

Further, to facilitate the design of the code and reduce the time spent at BELab, researchers may make use of a sample file with fictitious data of all the variables for each of the sets of microdata available.

4 Modes of Data Access

There are two modalities of data access:

- On-site access (data room) through a secure room within the Bank of Spain, with isolated computers. Available at the Bank of Spain facilities in **Madrid** and at the **Barcelona** branch office.

- Remote access, which allows controlled access to the databases without the need to travel to the secure room located at the Bank of Spain facilities. This mode of access requires the signing of additional documentation, which will be sent to the researcher once their request has been approved.

The possibility of remote access will be determined by the level of data sensitivity. The "Available Data" section of the BELab website provides information for each database regarding whether remote access is available.

5 How to gain access to the data?

Researchers interests in accessing BELab must submit a curriculum vitae outlining their research activities along with the application form, where the research purpose will be explained. Both documents should be sent through the contact form available on the Banco de España's website.

A Technical Research Evaluation Committee of BELab will assess the application and communicate their decision via email to the provided address.

6 Data confidentiality and conditions of use

The information within BELab is confidential. The confidentiality rules that researchers must adhere to in order to access the data are specified in the application form. Specifically:

- Use the microdata from BELab solely and exclusively for the study for which they have been requested, and without any commercial purpose.
- Do not redistribute the data to a third party.
- Refrain from any actions that may breach confidentiality.
- The researcher assumes full and exclusive responsibility for the use of the provided data.
- Access to the data will conclude as soon as the study for which access was granted is completed, or upon reaching the designated end date.

For remote access, there are additional clauses that will be provided if this modality is requested.

7 Data room locations

▪ BELAB

Alcalá 522, 4th floor
28027 Madrid

▪ BARCELONA BRANCH OFFICE

Plaza de Cataluña, 17
08002 Barcelona

8 Software available in BELab workstations

The laboratory workstations are equipped with statistical software for data processing, such as Stata, R, Python, and Octave. These workstations are isolated and do not grant access to the internet or email. Therefore, the installation of libraries and packages not already present on these workstations must be requested through BELab's technical staff.

9 Protocol for output extraction

When a researcher needs to extract information from BELab, they should get in touch with BELab personnel to initiate the review process. For further details, please refer to the [Output Control Guide](#).

10 Policy for the storage of data used in the project

Regarding the storage of data used in a project, three types of information are distinguished:

1. **Original Data:** The original data matrix used in the research project will be stored for a minimum of five years. With each update, a new version will be saved with a new DOI.
2. **Intermediate Data:** Once the researcher confirms the completion of their project and leaves the laboratory, this information **will be deleted**.
3. **Final Data:** Final programs and output from each research will be saved. This information will be stored for a period of five years.