

Summary of the grant proposal "Einrichtung eines Zentrums für Record-Linkage"

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By linking existing research data from different sources, their analytical power can be significantly increased at relatively low costs. As most datasets in Germany are not provided with unique identifiers (such as the Social Security Number), but can only be linked by specifications such as name and address, making data accessible that way generally requires to employ sophisticated record linkage techniques.

An additional challenge arises from data protection regulations in Germany. Installing a "German Record-Linkage-Center" should make it easier to find solutions for recurring problems with individual record-linkage applications. The centre is designed as a long-term infrastructure facility, open for all disciplines. The main objective is to increase the number and quality of record-linkage applications in all fields in order to make optimal use of the analytical power of existing data, and to unlock new data sources for science.

The Center offers the following services:

1. Individual consultation for scientists and research groups on design and handling of record linkage projects. The focus lies on technical knowledge transfer and information on data protection.
2. Performance of data linkage or single steps of data linkage as commissioned works;
3. Provision of technical maintenance of record linkage software for interested researchers;
4. Function as clearing house for linkage of sensitive data;
5. Clarification of legal matters for upcoming record linkage projects;
6. Regular organisation of workshops to provide essential technical skills for record linkage projects;
7. Maintenance of a homepage as an information portal for potential users;
8. Maintenance of a directory of record linkage projects in Germany;
9. Promotion and Mediation of international co-operations in the field of microdata linkage;
10. Provision of reference databases useful for data-linkage (e.g. municipality keys, geo-coordinates, postal codes);
11. Organisation of national and international conferences in the field of record linkage.

The project is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The implementation and realization of the project takes place in co-operation between the University of Duisburg-Essen (Institute of Sociology) and the Institute for Employment Research of the Federal Employment Agency (Research Data Centre).