

# CROSSING BORDERS WITHOUT LEAVING – SHARING SECURE DATA INTERNATIONALLY

Beate Lichtwardt, and Deborah Wiltshire  
UK Data Service (UK), and GESIS (Germany)

ESRA 2023  
Milan (Italy), 19 July 2023



# ROADMAP

- International access to controlled microdata
- UKDS-GESIS connection - The story
- How we did it, key challenges and solutions
- First case studies
- Summary
- References

# INTERNATIONAL ACCESS TO CONTROLLED MICRODATA

- Due to their sensitive nature, access to secure/controlled data is highly restricted, they are only accessible remotely via a Trusted Research Environment (TRE) (UKDS SecureLab) or on-site via a dedicated Safe Room (GESIS).
- Internationally, researchers often face significant hurdles in terms of a) time and financial burden having to travel to a Safe Room, and b) being associated with a HE institution of the other country - hurdles not many can overcome.
- In recent years, work has intensified to enable data access across international borders via Safe Room Remote Access (e.g. IDAN, SSHOC).

**IDAN**  
International  
Data Access Network

The IDAN project is a collaboration between **6 RESEARCH DATA CENTRES (RDCs)** from France, Germany, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom to facilitate research use of controlled access data between these RDCs/ countries via reciprocal provision of Safe Room Remote Desktop Access.

The Network will enable researchers to work remotely on controlled access data provided by partner countries

Map labels: UKDS UK, ONS UK, CBS Netherlands, GESIS Germany, IAB Germany, CASD France



<https://idan.network/>

**Social Sciences & Humanities Open Cloud (SSHOC)** is a project funded by the EU framework programme Horizon 2020 and unites **20 partner organisations and their 27 associates** in developing the social sciences and humanities area of the **European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)**.

During the 40-month lifespan of the project, (from January 2019 to April 2022) SSHOC will transform the current social sciences & humanities data landscape with its disciplinary silos and separate facilities into an integrated, cloud-based network of interconnected data infrastructures.

The SSHOC project is divided in 9 work packages through which the project proposal is realized. Such work packages breakdown the different tasks, deliverables, and milestones of the project.

### Work Packages

- ✓ WP 1 - Project Management and Administration
- ✓ WP2 - Communication, Dissemination and Impact
- ✓ WP3 - Lifting Technologies in the SSH Cloud
- ✓ WP4 - Innovations in Data Production
- ✓ WP5 - Innovation in Data Access
- ✓ WP6 - Fostering Communities, Empowering Users, & Building Expertise
- ✓ WP7 - Creating the SSH Open Marketplace
- ✓ WP8 - Governance, Sustainability and Quality Assurance
- ✓ WP9 - Data Communities

<https://www.sshopencloud.eu/project>

# UKDS-GESIS CONNECTION - THE STORY

- SSHOC project: 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022
- WP5 ‘Innovations in Data Access’, Task 5.4 ‘Remote Access to Sensitive Data’
- One of the achievements of SSHOC WP 5.4 was to set up a remote connection between UKDS SecureLab and GESIS Secure Data Centre



For detailed documentation on framework and contract for international data use agreements on remote access to confidential data, setup, testing, and the International Secure Data Facility Professionals Network (ISDFPN), please see our References.

# HOW WE DID IT, KEY CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

- Step 1: Building the remote connection infrastructure
  - ← Contracts
  - ← Technical set-up
  - ← Data depositor permissions
  - ← Procedures
  - ← Communication
- Step 2: Testing the remote connections
  - ← Technical tests
  - ← Researcher tests

## FIRST CASE STUDIES

**"Our visit to the data centre went really smoothly. Instead of needing to travel to Germany, we were able to access excellent but restricted GESIS data from just down the road. The teams at both ends were really helpful throughout, and we are already thinking of new projects that allow us to make use of this fantastic data resource."**

## SUMMARY

- The bilateral connection UKDS-GESIS was legally and technically challenging, time consuming, and hence only possible due to the SSHOC funding received.
- SSHOC enabled us to generate and publish blueprints to facilitate future connection setups, and set a new precedent for attracting funding for advancing international data access work.
- UKDS and GESIS are currently establishing options of funding for additional access points.



## REFERENCES

- Beate Lichtwardt, and Deborah Wiltshire. (2023). [Crossing borders without leaving – sharing secure data internationally – Data Impact blog \(ukdataservice.ac.uk\)](#). 20 June 2023
- Beate Lichtwardt, Matthew Woollard, Deborah Wiltshire, & Elizabeth Lea Bishop. (2022). D5.11 ERAN Pilot: Setting up a Secure Remote Connection between two Trusted Research Environments (1,0). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6676393>
- Wiltshire, Deborah, Voronin, Yevhen, & Lichtwardt, Beate. (2022). SSHOC MS 29 Tested connections between partners with live data and researcher projects. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7684215>
- Beate Lichtwardt, Deborah Wiltshire, & Elizabeth Lea Bishop. (2022). D5.12 International Secure Data Facility Professionals Network (ISDFPN). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6583379>
- Matthew Woollard, Beate Lichtwardt, Elizabeth Lea Bishop, & Dana Müller. (2021). D5.9 Framework and contract for international data use agreements on remote access to confidential data (v1.0). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4534286>

Questions?



gesis

Leibniz Institute  
for the Social Sciences

Thank you.

Beate Lichtwardt ([blicht@essex.ac.uk](mailto:blicht@essex.ac.uk))

Deborah Wiltshire ([deborah.wiltshire@gesis.org](mailto:deborah.wiltshire@gesis.org))