Information sheet
“Postal secrecy and data protection”

July 2026

Companies that provide postal services on a commercial basis or are involved in the provision of such services are required to maintain postal secrecy with regard to their postal services.

They are also subject to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Federal Data Protection Act (BDSG), which are supplemented by the provisions of sections 67 to 71 of the Postal Act (PostG).

1. Postal secrecy

More detailed rules on postal secrecy are set out in section 64 PostG. Under this provision the particulars of postal traffic of certain natural or legal persons and the content of postal items are subject to postal secrecy. The particulars of postal traffic include all traffic data that does not relate to the content of a specific postal item itself such as the name and address of the sender and recipient, the place and time the postal item was handed over and how the service was used. The particulars must be directly related to the postal traffic. The protection of postal secrecy applies to all postal services within the meaning of section 3 para 15 PostG. This includes the conveyance on a commercial basis of

- letter-post items
- parcels
- goods consignments and
- books, catalogues, newspapers or periodicals as long as these are conveyed by companies that provide postal services for letters, parcels or goods consignments.

Accordingly,companies and those who work for them are prohibited from procuring, for themselves or for others, any information regarding the content or particulars of postal traffic beyond what is necessary for the provision of postal services. An exclusion from this ban is only possible for the cases set out in section 64(4) paras 1-4 PostG. However, the exception criteria are to be interpreted very strictly and are generally subject to the condition of necessity.

This means that the measures stated in the law can only be considered if and to the extent that there is no other way to attain the desired information or objectives.

The obligation to maintain secrecy also applies after postal service operations have ceased. Violations of postal secrecy are punishable by fine or imprisonment under section 206 of the Criminal Code (StGB). Postal secrecy also applies within the company.

2. Data Protection

For the permissibility of data processing at postal operators, the data protection provisions of the GDPR and the BDSG apply. They are supplemented by the rules of sections 67 to 71 PostG.

Personal data may only be processed with prior consent or when a legal arrangement permits or prescribes processing. The principles of the GDPR for the processing of personal data must be respected. They are set out in Article 5(1) GDPR and essentially contain the obligations listed below.

Personal data must be:

a) processed lawfully, fairly and in a manner in relation to the data subject ("lawfulness, fairness and transparency");

b) collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and may not be further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes ("purpose limitation");

c) adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed ("data minimisation");

d) accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date; every reasonable step must be taken to ensure that personal data that are inaccurate, having regard to the purposes for which they are processed, are erased or rectified without delay ("accuracy");

e) stored in a form that allows the identification of the persons in question only as long as necessary for the purposes for which they are being processed ("storage limitation");

f) processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures ("integrity and confidentiality").

Personal data may therefore only be processed on instructions from the controller. In addition to individual instructions from superiors, the following are considered instructions: process descriptions, time schedules, service agreements, general work instructions as well as operational documentation and manuals.

Section 68 PostG is a legal arrangement that allows and prescribes the processing of personal data. The following items may be processed:

- **Addresses and personal data for the purpose of delivery**
  Communication of the current address to other postal service providers for the purpose of ensuring the proper provision of postal services, communication of the current address to the sender with the recipient's consent, communication of P.O. box addresses by the operator of the P.O. box facility to everyone, communication of data for the correct delivery of mail items to the holder's P.O. box to other postal operators, processing of personal data of recipients and substitute recipients of postal items as necessary for the proper delivery of postal items, address verification (section 68 PostG).

- **Identification data**
  To ensure that postal services are performed properly, postal service providers may require the parties involved in the postal service to identify themselves by presenting an official identification document. If interest in collecting proof of identity is particularly vital, the type of identification document, the issuing authority and the number and date of issue of the identification document may be processed (section 69 PostG). It is prohibited to request a copy of the identification document. The data collected must be deleted no later than six months after expiration of legal or contractual limitation periods (section 69(4) PostG).

- **Personal data in connection with found letters**
  Service providers may process personal data if doing so is necessary for delivering, returning or billing postal items that were not intended to be transported by them but nevertheless entered their operational processes. They may open such items if sufficient sender or recipient details are not recognisable on the envelope and it is not possible to hand over the items to the postal service provider chosen by the customer (section 70 PostG).

Data not related to the content of postal items may not be processed.

Violations of data protection provisions may result in supervisory action and sanctions by the Federal Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information in accordance with Article 58(2) GDPR.
In addition, there are numerous special criminal and administrative offence provisions under which the unauthorised inspection, storage, modification, sharing, use or other procurement, deleting or making such data unusable is prohibited and punishable by penalties or fines (eg sections 202a, 303a StGB and section 42 BDSG).

Further information on postal secrecy is available on the Bundesnetzagentur website at http://www.Bundesnetzagentur.de/ and on data protection on the Federal Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information website at http://www.bfdi.bund.de/.