STANDARDIZATION OF THE DATA COLLECTION OF BUSINESS STATISTICS IN BELGIUM

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the century governmental public services are confronted with less means in terms of budget and people. Beside the limited state budget context, there was also a growing demand and a political willingness to reduce the administrative burden. Apart from the more classic burden reducing techniques, the Belgian NSI decided to draw the card of e-government.

A study in 2007 had pointed out the structural business survey as the most expensive business-survey organized by the NSI. Administrative simplification technics such as avoiding goldplating, sample-reduction and avoiding double questioning were applicated on the survey. In terms of e-government the NSI choose to use XBRL as a standard.

The successful use of XBRL technology for SBS formed the base for a transformation and standardization of the process of data collection of several other business statistics. Until 2010 data collection and data processing in the Belgian NSI have been organized per survey. This organisation of different production lines (stovepipes) had resulted over the years in the implementation of a great variety of data collection tools and software: Blaise,xls files, txt files, xml files, coolgen, cobolt, Java, XBRL… This mix made the entire data collection process inefficient and rigid.

In order to standardize the data collection and processing, some lines were drawn out, resulting in the following action plan: All surveys should be web based using only 2 tools: Blaise or XBRL. All existing surveys that do not use one of these 2 formats would be converted. In accordance with the rationalization of the web survey tools, the number of internal processing systems would also be reduced as much as possible. A single declaration platform would be created for all web surveys. The integration of surveys in existing software systems would be further investigated and implemented. The B2G information flow should be web-based as much as possible. Paper forms should gradually disappear. The use of XBRL for the collection of statistical data must be expanded further (e.g. Structure of earnings, tourism, road transport,…) And finally the standardization of the export of processed data to the data warehouse of Statistics Belgium.

In 2017 the standardization process was finalized. Since then the Enterprise section of the data Collection Department Section has 22 surveys in XBRL format, monitored in one single system 'StatData' which is directly connected with the Business Register. Also all the surveys follow the same standardized process in terms of loading the sample, loading data to prefill forms, creation of follow-up, creation of userids, creation of web forms and the export of data. Apart from the cost reduction, all these 'identical' steps also allow more flexibility in terms of human means, as input, output and data-processing of different surveys have similar characteristics.