



Industry

Public Sector

Business Issue

Need to adjust processes swiftly to accord with changing policies

Solution

SAS® Intelligence Architecture, data warehouse and analytics

Benefits

Faster response, legislative change, higher motivation of employees and better service to clients



Karel Baeck, Director General
Jean-Marie Delrue, Assistant Director General

Information-driven Belgian National Employment Office improves its decision making

Unemployment benefits represent a major proportion of social security expenditure in all European countries. This is particularly true in Belgium, where unemployment benefits historically account for a high percentage of the social welfare safety-net budget alongside pensions, family allowance and health insurance. The sums involved are truly important. Using advanced instruments to support the decision-making process, Belgium's National Employment Office is optimizing the allocation of public funds while guaranteeing better service to the unemployed.

Need for efficiency

The Belgian National Employment Office (NEO) is a public sector body whose role is to implement unemployment legislation. From its Central Administration office and 30 Regional Unemployment Offices, the NEO's 5,000 employees (some 4,200 of whom are based in the Regional Unemployment Offices) are responsible for managing and auditing the payment of benefits and allowances of some €6.5 billion each year.

The NEO's major field of work involves unemployment benefits, early pensions and career breaks. Over recent years, these areas have seen a number of additional initiatives aimed at integrating the long-term unemployed into the social circuit in a meaningful way. New missions are imposed, increasing the pressure of work at the NEO.

Better customer service

One of the NEO's most important tasks is the monthly audit of all benefits and allowances. Some 1,400,000 different individuals receive unemployment benefits during the course of each year, but the details on the files change dramatically as people find work and new claimants sign on. The NEO has an average of around 1,200,000 payments each month. Over 96 percent of the data are input automatically on the 1,800 terminals in the Regional Unemployment Offices, which are connected to the Central Administration office's mainframe via their Local Area Network.

"This produces massive volumes of data," says Jean-Marie Delrue, Assistant Director General. "Then there's the fact that the Unemployment Offices have strict time limits in which to process their files. As a public service department, we have a duty to consider the unemployed as our clients and it is unacceptable to allow people to go without benefits simply because their files have not been processed and decisions taken in good time. Processing files within the allowed time is therefore one of the 267 indicators we use to audit the work of the Local Unemployment Offices."



“MISUS, the National Employment Office's SAS® Data Warehouse, helps us to detect and find solutions to problems with the implementation of employment legislation faster and more efficiently. Before we had the system, these problems often only came to light years later when it was too late to do anything about them.”

Karel Baeck
Director General,
National Employment Office Belgium

Next to these time limits the NEO also uses strict quality standards for the correctness of file treatment. Based on the SPC method (Statistical Process Control), each month a sample of treated files is taken. This sample is checked on a number of measured elements and, for example, 98 percent of the files in the verification process have to be treated correctly. The growing digitalization of work processes and workflows, via the development of national projects, has led to an even better performance in terms of efficiency and quality of file treatment.

Management cockpit

“To give ourselves a faster, more comprehensive overview of the NEO's work and allow us to compare this view with general economic and employment trends in Belgium and the other countries of Western Europe, we have used SAS to build the MISUS (Management Information System for Unemployment Services) Data Warehouse. All the data are stored in the data warehouse on a monthly basis,” says Karel Baeck, Director General. “Every month, we discuss the results achieved and any action to be taken by each Unemployment Office with the 30 Office Directors. In our ‘Management Cockpit’ analysis, we look closely at the progress made by each Office, using data going back to October 1993. We separate out incidental variations and structural trends, and constantly try to identify their causes.”

The data warehouse became operational in May 1996, and the monthly meetings have been held in the specially equipped “Management Room” since early 1997. The Assistant Adviser is at the Directors' disposal during the meetings to retrieve relevant information from the data warehouse. The results of their queries are displayed immediately in the Management Room for further discussion, often prompting new demands. Three information specialists support the programming and functioning of the MISUS system.

Changing mentality

Adds Jean-Marie Delrue, “The interactive query facilities available with the SAS data warehouse make our discussions more lively and more complete. Often we find that the answer to one question prompts further questions: that's when we see how fast and flexible MISUS is and how easily we can dig down deeper to reveal the underlying trends. The diversity of the query routes also significantly broadens the scope of our discussions.”

"Since we have been monitoring our results monthly in the 'Management Cockpit', several indicators have improved significantly," continues Delrue. "The number of files returned due to incomplete data has fallen from around 11–12 percent to just seven percent. The average processing time for each file, the number of disputed files per Unemployment Office and other indicators have also shown similar progress." There was some initial resistance to the system because it was set up to measure only quantity and not quality. "However, unemployed people tend to regard the number of days they have to wait before receiving their benefits as an important quality aspect."

"Considering the unemployed as clients was indeed a small revolution within the NEO," remarks Baeck. "After a while, we observed that some Directors were going too far in their endeavours to achieve high scores for their own Unemployment Office. Many even set higher standards in some fields, causing stress and demotivation among their staff and raising costs per file processed. Thanks to tools such as MISUS, we have now established a good balance between optimum allocation of the resources available to us and optimum service to our 'external clients', the unemployed. The NEO has signed an administration contract with the Belgian government in which 39 concrete objectives are set. At the end of each year the Office has to fulfil all these objectives, such as quick and correct file treatment, efficient use of financial resources and the improvement of our customer services. The MISUS system is an excellent tool to follow up our objectives."



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