



Frank De Saer

## TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ECONOMY STATISTICS

In our information society, the demand for fast and accurate information is growing rapidly. Today, all types of businesses rely heavily on the rapid availability of information from the FPS Economy. This information helps them to determine successful strategies. The National Institute of Statistics clearly anticipated the growth of these needs and has radically modernized their services. They have implemented SAS solutions that greatly improve and accelerate both data collection procedures and the delivery of accurate macroeconomic data. The integrated platform is a win-win for customers and NIS collaborators alike.

### Sector

Government

### Business Issue

Growing demand for fast delivery of accurate economy statistics

### Solution

SAS® 9, SAS Enterprise Intelligence Platform and SAS® Enterprise Guide®

### Benefits

Higher level of service to customers:

- A much **wider variety of statistical information** on macroeconomic indicators
- Empowers customers to **retrieve information on-demand**, without delay

More efficient internal organization:

- **Faster collection of field information** with SAS data integration concepts
- **ICT rationalization** by setting up a single platform for the creation of all types of analyses and reports
- **Better time-to-market** for the integration of new data and for the release of new indicators

## SAS SOLUTIONS ENABLE FPS ECONOMY TO IMPROVE ITS DATA DELIVERY SERVICE

Since 1962, the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) of the Federal Public Service Economy has provided statistics regarding the Belgian economy. NIS collects, processes, and delivers comprehensive information on a wide range of topics such as population sizes, business demographics, profitability indicators, employment rates, energy consumption patterns, and monetary exchange figures.

### A business intelligence platform to prepare for the future

Today, demand for this information is growing rapidly and expectations run high. ICT director Frank De Saer of the FPS Economy observes that “Today’s businesses need accurate information to define and optimize their strategy, and they want it without delay. The same goes for public policy makers, research centers, students, and even families. We realized several years ago that it would be difficult to maintain our service quality if we didn’t radically modernize our platform and processes of collecting, processing, and making data available.”

Early in 2007, NIS made the decision to implement an integrated SAS Business Intelligence platform. The system accelerates data collection significantly,

enables in-depth analysis of these data, and produces a much wider array of statistics with far less manual effort.

### Accelerated data collection

Comprehensive data collection has always been the core business of the NIS. But it has often been rather labor-intensive, since much of the data had to be gathered using single-purpose questionnaires. This time-consuming method has now been almost entirely abandoned in favor of automated data collection from secondary data sources such as income tax and VAT administration records, the Crossroads Bank for enterprises, energy consumption databases, and various other relational databases in use by federal and regional authorities. “These databases are available to us; we only have to ensure that we use them efficiently,” says De Saer. “We chose SAS because of the powerful integration features. It offers the perfect platform to bring all of these disparate sources together in a single data warehouse for further analysis and processing.”

### Better time-to-market by building on data warehouse

Thanks to this data warehouse, new statistics can be created and published

“SAS clearly is a motivator for our internal collaborators, which is important to keep them engaged for our business.”

**Frank De Saer,**  
ICT director of the FPS Economy

“With SAS, we no longer need full year time-frames to produce new indicators. They can often be delivered within a month or even a week.”

much faster. De Saer observes that SAS has enabled the NIS to completely revise and improve their production of analytical information. “We advanced from an era where every statistic was built up from scratch, going from the preparation for data collection, to processing, analysis, reporting, and publishing. We often needed a time-frame of approximately a full year to produce a new indicator.”

Now with SAS, the time-to-market for new statistics is much quicker — and more accurate and comprehensive. They often can be delivered within as little as a month or in some cases even a week by taking advantage of the integrated SAS architecture. The SAS solution has a complete set of inflow tools to collect data and store it in the data warehouse. Furthermore, integrated analysis and reporting tools enable the NIS to effectively query this data warehouse. “We no longer need to calculate every statistic manually. Thanks to SAS, this is now accomplished automatically. In addition, all information is stored in our data warehouse so that it is instantly available anytime it is needed,” states De Saer.

### Easy to adapt and expand

The integrated platform is a win-win for customers and NIS collaborators alike. According to De Saer, “SAS is easy to adapt and expand. This allows us to rapidly adapt to new requirements that always seem to pop

up.” For instance, new statistics can easily be added. And regarding accessibility, “SAS enables us to build a secure Web portal to make our statistical information readily available to customers and NIS collaborators.”

The integrated SAS reporting and query tools are already empowering the internal NIS staff. The NIS statisticians have easy access to the data, which can be easily understood without the need for ICT specialists to build ad-hoc queries, as it is documented in business metadata. Power users also have access to statistical analysis toolsets to prepare new statistics with available or enriched data.

### Integrated system ensures stability

De Saer also points out that the FPS Economy attached great importance to controlling and minimizing operational and technical risks when choosing and deploying the platform. “SAS was the only supplier to offer a completely end-to-end integrated system,” he emphasizes, “including OLAP functionality, comprehensive reporting capabilities, ETL, Data Integration, and Web solutions. Other suppliers offered a collection of tools from different vendors, requiring additional interfacing efforts. The integrated SAS solution was technically superior and promised to be more stable, guaranteeing integrated security and metadata in both the short and the long run.”

The transition started with a comprehensive proof-of-concept (POC), enabling SAS to demonstrate full functionality with real NIS data very early into the project. “It was a head start for the project which is now already on full cruising speed, preparing the NIS service for the future.”



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