

Statistical business registers in the CIS countries: evidence from the UNECE Questionnaire Surveys

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Abstract. The UNECE Statistical Division has been conducting questionnaire surveys and collecting information on statistical business registers in the region on a regular basis since 1995. The paper describes the results of the last two questionnaire surveys (2004 and 2006) carried out among the CIS countries, focusing on the observed changes in the sources, the coverage of statistical units, the included variables, and in the usage of statistical business registers. The comparison of these countries' practices reveals important disparities in the status of the business register and its use for economic statistics. On the other hand, it demonstrates some convergence in approaches to statistical business register and attempts to follow more closely the advanced practice of European Union and North American countries.

Keywords: Statistical business register, sources for business register, statistical units, business register variables

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INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly globalising world economy the notion of Business Register (BR), definition of the statistical unit of business activity entering it, its demographic and other characteristics, based on which Statistical organizations seek to measure the national and world economic activity, are continuously evolving. Also, the conceptual approaches towards BR tend to vary across countries, and frequently there are differences in treatment of certain spheres of socio-economic activity in the individual country (i.e., public sector versus private enterprises) regarding the registry. There exist also BR comparability issues - across countries and over time - related to codification of economic activities (classifications are periodically revised and updated) and degree of coverage. And besides, some countries have still to develop their BRs for statistical purposes, and in some cases even to create such a register.

This paper aims to assess the status and improvements made by CIS countries in the development of their statistical business registers over the past several years. Using the questionnaire, the UNECE collected data and information on BRs from a number of CIS countries in 1995, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006. However, since the form of the questionnaire was modified substantially in 2000, and some questions were introduced or omitted in surveys thereafter, comparisons over time are problematic, especially referring to the years before 2002. Therefore, in this paper mainly the results of the UNECE's collection of 2004 and 2006 business register questionnaire data are discussed. For both these inquiries, replies were received from the following 10 CIS countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Turkmenistan replied only in 2004, while no replies were received from Uzbekistan.

The first part of the paper briefly describes the structure of the UNECE questionnaire indicating some recent changes to it. It also draws attention to certain characteristics of CIS countries that affect responses to the questionnaire and comparability of collected data. The second part of this paper is devoted to the analysis of the 2006 Questionnaire Survey results, with an emphasis on the sources used to compile national statistical business registers and their observed evolution since the 2004 Survey. The availability of data on four types of statistical units by variable and according to the sections of NACE/ISIC is also assessed and briefly analysed across the countries and in comparison with the results of the previous Surveys. The paper

concludes with observations on the use of statistical business registers (based on the results of 2004 Survey) and suggestions for possible further improvements in utilizing the existing administrative sources for their maintenance.

I. STRUCTURE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Although the questionnaire has been modified somewhat since 2002, its body of main areas remains essentially the same. These areas are designed to provide a synthesized picture of the business register in an individual country, while at the same time allowing comparisons with the business register systems in other countries.

Key areas covered in the questionnaire are:

- Use of different sources (by unit typology);
- Number of units, persons occupied, and turnover (by NACE/ISIC sections);
- Coverage by variables of the register (by unit typology).

The section of the questionnaire on “sources” serves to collect information on sources used by the country for detecting the existence of a unit or (changes in) any relevant variable attached to it. Four types of units are identified: legal unit, enterprise, local unit, and enterprise group. Since countries may have different names for what is essentially the same source, e.g. the same type of administrative register, the questionnaire provides a listing of various types of administrative registers and asks the respondent to identify those within the list that are used, and to provide the equivalent name for it in the country. A category “other sources” is provided so that the country can include sources that are not on the suggested list.

The section “number of units by NACE/ISIC” asks for each unit type the distribution by the sections of the NACE Rev. 1 (or ISIC Rev. 3.1) activity classification. For enterprises and local units, the questionnaire requests data on persons occupied and turnover. This Survey part facilitates overall analysis of the most active and populated activities and helps to examine the nature of the relationship between local units, enterprises and legal units in a country. An additional box in this section of the 2006 questionnaire seeks information on cut-off thresholds

for the units to be included in the BR. Countries are asked to explain if there are any legislative, administrative or practical reasons which might keep certain units may outside the scope of the business register.

The section of the questionnaire referring to “variables” serves to provide information on the availability or non-availability of each of the twelve internationally most often used business register variables (in the EU, officially mandated variables; a detailed list is provided at the end of the questionnaire), including the number of units for which the variable is available and future plans in that respect. As this information is broken down by unit type, main variable characteristics by unit type can also be determined.

Characteristics of CIS Countries Affecting Responses to the Questionnaire

Since the very beginning, the UNECE questionnaire on Business Registers (BRQ) was developed together with the Eurostat in order to collect information from the UNECE member countries not covered by Eurostat on a more or less comparable basis. However, it has to be noted that the business registers adopted in the CIS states are much more diverse than those of the EU countries which share common regional goals and are geared toward the implementation of a standardised business register.¹ This diversity in the CIS region is due to a number of factors: geographical size of the countries, disparate stage of economic development, existence (or lack of) of legislation conducive to statistical business register development, to name a few.

Before highlighting the results of the 2006 round of data collection, a word of caution is due on interpreting and comparing the information. The BR provisions as set forth in the questionnaire serve as a guideline. Some CIS countries have made considerable effort to align the framework of their business registers with those existing in EU member and candidate countries, both with regard to the definition of statistical units and their variables. Others have followed their own

¹ The European Commission’s Business Registers Regulation, which harmonized the BRs used by the Member States for statistical purposes, dates back to 1993 (EC 2186/93). The new up-to-date Regulation on BRs is expected to take force in 2007: it was adopted by the European Commission already in the spring 2005, but it was delayed at the European Parliament (approved in June 2006) and due to the newly introduced comitology procedure is still waiting for an agreement between the legal services of the Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament.

statistical and business practices in the development of their business registers, particularly in regard of certain types of units (Kazakhstan, Belarus, the Russian Federation).

Some of the CIS countries are still in relatively early stages of developing a statistical business register. Consequently, data remain unavailable for a number of sections in the questionnaire, and certain areas which are of concern for more developed registers remain neglected in favour of more pressing needs, such as the basic setting up of business register foundations.

As a result of these differences and of differing statistical and national legislation, full comparability of information is not always possible. Nonetheless, analysis of the questionnaire responses offers a good opportunity to obtain a preliminary overview of the level of development of business registers in the CIS countries.

II. 2006 SURVEY RESULTS

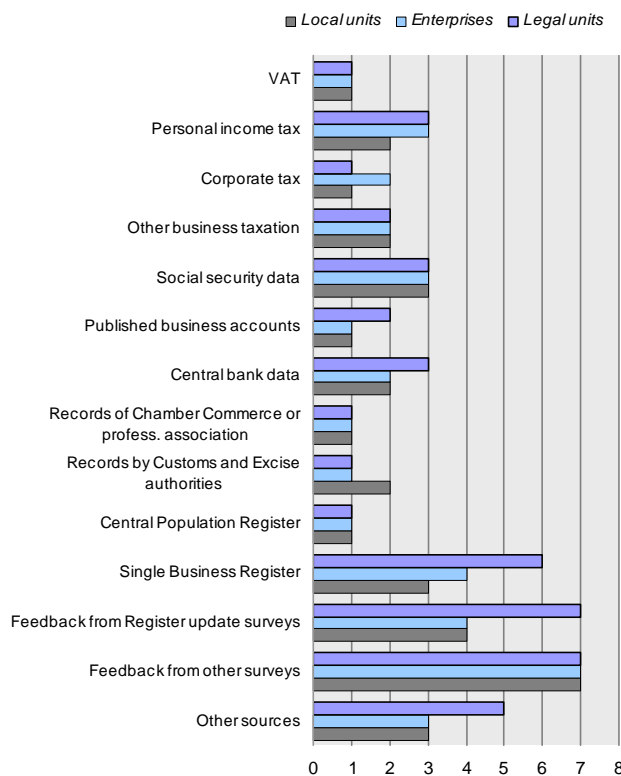
Use of Sources

A variety of sources are used by the CIS countries for detecting the existence of units and/or of changes in their variables. Although in most countries the legislation requires central registration of units and the administrative sources seem to be quite developed, only four out of ten countries obtain the information on births, deaths and change of activity from tax, social security, commercial and other registers. This information is further supplemented by feedback from surveys conducted by the statistical offices. The rest of the CIS countries tend to rely predominantly on register surveys or on other surveys with their own objectives, which also contain data on business register units.

Three principal sources are most often mentioned by CIS countries (chart 1):

- (1) Feedback from surveys
- (2) Single business register
- (3) Other sources

Chart 1. Sources for detecting the existence of legal units, enterprises and local units



All countries use feedback from surveys as a key source for at least one of their unit types. While earlier versions of the questionnaire indicated only that feedback from surveys was a key source, the last four questionnaires were modified so that countries can indicate specifically what type of surveys are being used.

In seven replies, *special register update surveys* are shown as the main source to set and maintain the statistical business register, in particular for legal units. For enterprises and local units, however, *feedback from other surveys* is used predominantly. This type of source is mentioned by seven out of ten statistical offices, specifying mainly regular structural business surveys or employment surveys with annual or quarterly frequency. An economic census of enterprises, conducted usually at longer intervals, is mentioned only by the Russian Federation. Other *ad hoc* business surveys and employment surveys or censuses are also mentioned by some countries.

As replies indicate, countries seem to rely on *other sources* as well – five out of ten responses point them out. However, these results should be interpreted with caution. It appears that some of the CIS countries were not able to relate their practice to tax registers in the form explicitly

specified in the questionnaire and, instead of distinguishing between different types, mention their tax register/information provider under “other sources” (Armenia, Kazakhstan). Different departmental information is also used; among them are records (registers) of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Industry and Energy, other licensing authorities and organisations.

Six countries use the *single business register* as a key source. Even if certain units (local) are often not covered there, this register constitutes, along with feedback from surveys and other sources, the main component of the statistical business registry system.

Four CIS countries use either various tax registers and/or social security data. There seems to be no qualitative change in this practice since the last two surveys: only Ukraine uses all five tax-related sources, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan rely on one of the tax registers and social security data, and Moldova – on the Personal income tax register. Such limited usage of administrative sources differs noticeably from the practice in most European Union and EFTA countries, where social security and tax registers, particularly VAT registers, are used quite extensively for BR entries on legal units and enterprises.²

Only Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation indicate the use of records of customs and excise authorities. Apart from Kyrgyzstan, none of the responding countries has indicated the use of records of the chamber of commerce and professional organisations or the central population register. Such limited use of the various existing administrative sources for feeding statistical business registers might, on one hand, indicate inconsistencies in data management systems and, on the other, a lack of coordination and cooperation between the government institutions.

Regarding unit typology, the most frequently used sources for each type of unit appear to be approximately the same as above. For legal units, enterprises and local units, the most common source is feedback from surveys. For local units, “other sources” is as frequently used as the single business register. Only Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation have information on enterprise groups in their business registers, for which they obtain data exclusively from “other sources”.

² According to the Eurostat’s BR Annual Inquiry 2005 [3], data from social security and personal income tax registers were used as a source for BR in at least one half of surveyed countries (EU-25, EFTA and EU-candidate countries), and VAT register data were used in more than 75 per cent of them.

Population and size of statistical units by Section of NACE Rev. 1/ISIC Rev 3.1

Starting in 2001, the UNECE BR Questionnaire Survey asked for information on the number of statistical units by NACE/ISIC sections, together with data on unit size, measured by the number of persons occupied or by turnover. However, many CIS countries, in questionnaires prior to 2006 (or 2004) had to use a convergence key to fill in some sections or were able to provide only the total number of units, as the breakdown by NACE/ISIC sections was not considered reliable enough. By 2006, all reporting countries had finalised their transition from the CBNE (Classification of Branches of the National Economy) to the NACE/ISIC classification. Nevertheless, as some CIS countries are still in the process of constructing their business registers, financial constraints and changing legislation impose limits on their capacity for full/complete unit coverage.

In most countries, the statistical business register displays a good coverage of the incorporated units, for which sufficient information exists, coming from different administrative registers, licensing and supervisory authorities. The coverage of small businesses or individual entrepreneurs, however, seems to be still inadequate in a number of countries. Very often these units either fall outside the scope of the administrative registers or their status is still unclear and the parts of statistical business registers designed to cover them are not in practice yet (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia).

In contrast to the practice of many European countries,³ enterprise groups do not seem to be monitored for BR purposes in the majority of CIS countries. Only Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation regularly provide some information on them.

As table 1 attests, among the CIS countries more efforts have been made to ensure good reporting of legal units and enterprises, and to a much lesser extent that of local units. (Note that in Belarus, Republic of Moldova, and the Russian Federation, the legal unit is identical to the enterprise.) Small countries like Armenia, Georgia and Moldova do not yet cover local units in their business registers, while in replies of some other countries the number of reported local units is much smaller than the number of enterprises. Therefore any assessment of the coverage of

³ According to the Eurostat's Annual Inquiry 2006 [2], information on enterprise groups was incorporated and monitored in the BR in two thirds of its surveyed countries.

local units and their distribution according to the NACE/ISIC sections should be made with great caution.

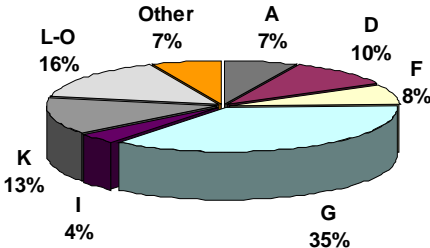
Table 1. Number of units reported in UNECE BRQ - 2006

(in thousands)

Country	Legal units	Enterprises	Local units
Armenia	23.3	8.9	..
Azerbaijan	67.5	29.4	39.7
Belarus	41.2	41.2	3.6
Georgia	149.3	28.2	..
Kazakhstan	226.9	107.0	115.5
Kyrgyzstan	20.8	21.5	3.5
Moldova	29.0	29.0	..
Russian Federation	4597.2	..	898.4
Tajikistan	39.1	28.8	3.7
Ukraine	1014.1	344.5	374.8

The 2006 Survey shows that in all ten countries there is a relatively good coverage of legal units and enterprises in all economic activities, except for some services sections where small units prevail. In a few countries, agriculture may also be insufficiently covered (Armenia, Georgia).

Chart 2. Structure of registered legal units, BRQ-2006
(sections of NACE Rev.1, mean for 9 countries)



The highest number of units is observed in section G of NACE Rev. 1/ISIC Rev. 3.1, “Wholesale and retail trade” (chart 2). It accounts for above 30 per cent of all legal units in six countries out

of nine and reaches 44 percent in the Republic of Moldova. Only in Tajikistan, and to a lesser degree in Kyrgyzstan, is the share of this branch in the total number of legal units well below the region’s mean.

Chart 3. Registered enterprises, BRQ-2006

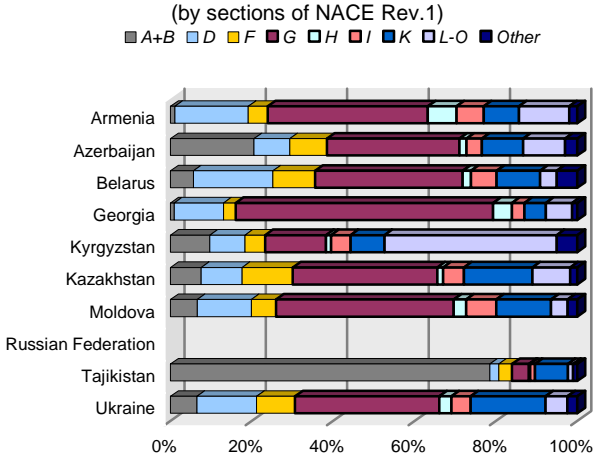
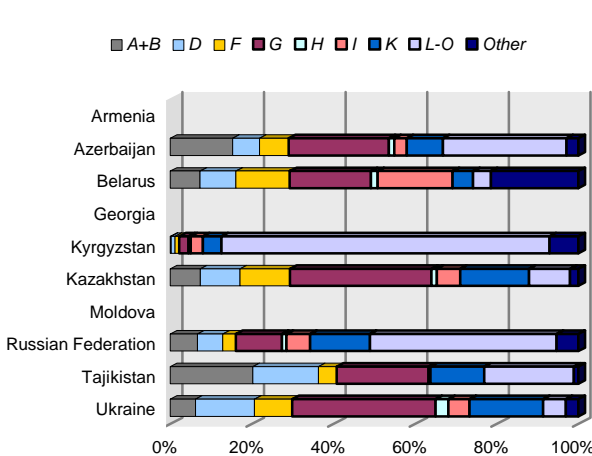


Chart 4. Registered local units, BRQ-2006
(by sections of NACE Rev.1)

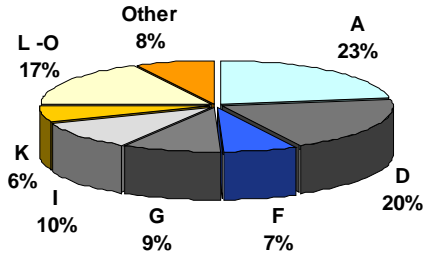


Enterprise population shows a similar distribution by economic activities – wholesale and retail trade is the most populated activity in seven (out of nine) countries (chart 3). Other activities with a large number of registered units are “Manufacturing” (section D) and “Real estate, renting and business activities” (section K), where in addition there is lower variation among countries.⁴ “Manufacturing” is the second biggest branch in Armenia, Belarus and Georgia. “Real estate, renting and business activities” is the second most densely populated activity in Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation. In Tajikistan, more than 60 per cent of legal units and enterprises are registered in “Agriculture, hunting and forestry” (section A). The agricultural sector has a high share in the total number of enterprises (around 20 per cent) in Azerbaijan as well. In regard of units’ distribution by activities, Kyrgyzstan seems to be an exception: the majority of registered units are reported in “Other community, social and personal service activities” (section O), with trade (section G) being the second. For local units, where data are available, the non-market services account for a large share in at least one third of the surveyed countries (chart 4).

⁴ In surveyed countries, “Manufacturing” (D) and “Real estate, renting and business activities” (K) each account on average for 11 per cent of enterprise population with variation coefficients of 43 and 37 per cent, respectively.

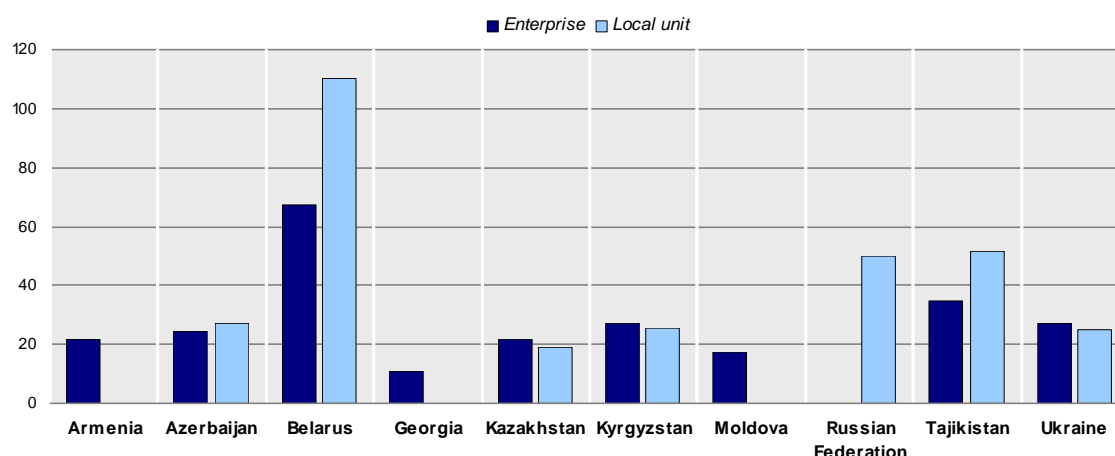
Nine out of ten countries provided data on public enterprises, although the definition of the latter may not strictly correspond to the internationally used definition of a public undertaking. In some cases it refers only to the state-owned enterprises and does not necessarily include municipal enterprises, etc. Here the most populated activity is “Real estate, renting and business activities” (section K), followed by “Other community, social and personal service activities” (section O). In fact, enterprises in non-market services (sections L to O) account for three quarters of all registered public enterprises in Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation and for two thirds in Tajikistan.

Chart 5. Enterprises: occupied persons, BRQ-2006
 (by sections of NACE Rev.1, mean for 9 countries)



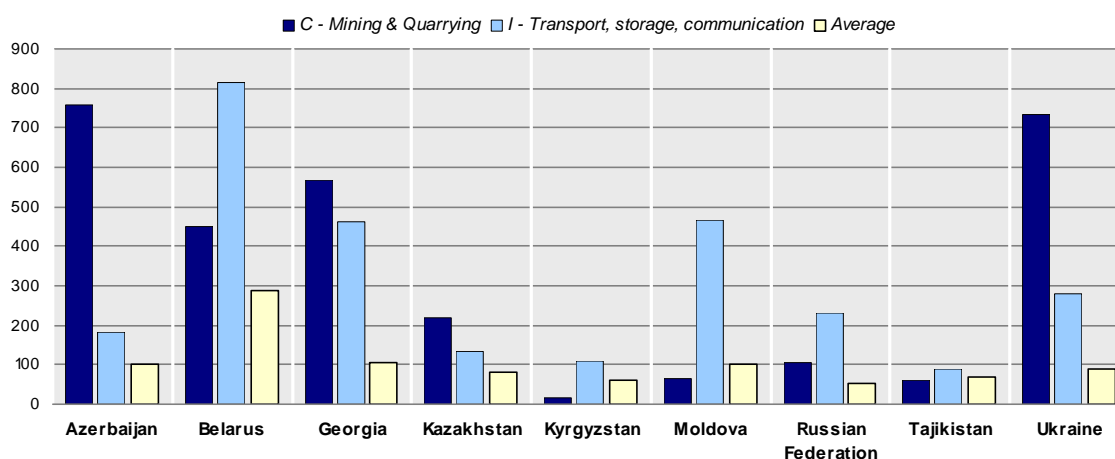
As mentioned earlier, the UNECE questionnaire also asks information on occupation and turnover by economic activity at the NACE/ISIC section level and by type of unit (enterprise, local unit, public enterprise) as included in the business registers of the countries. The enterprise data show that the activities which employ most people are “Agriculture, hunting and forestry” (section A), “Manufacturing” (section D) and “Transport, storage and communications” (section I)” (chart 5). “Trade”, “Manufacturing” and “Transport” produce the largest turnover in the surveyed countries. For public enterprises, the main activities in terms of people occupied are the industrial branches, together with the non-market services “Education” (section M) and “Health and social work” (section N).

Chart 6. Average number of occupied persons per unit, BRQ-2006



Medium-sized enterprises, employing between 20 and 30 people on average, are typical for most of the countries (chart 6). In Belarus bigger units dominate – the average number of persons occupied per registered enterprise is 68. These numbers are notably higher than the median figure of 5 employees per enterprise in countries surveyed by Eurostat in 2006 [2]. However, it has to be borne in mind that the coverage of the business register can have significant influence on the estimated size of enterprises. As mentioned earlier, in some CIS countries the business registers are less comprehensive or statistical units are differently defined. This could lead to omission of small units from the register, hence influencing the average number of persons occupied.

Chart 7. Average number of occupied persons in public enterprise, BRQ-2006



Usually, the largest enterprises are found in section E “Electricity, gas and water supply”, ranging from an average of 115 employees in Kazakhstan to 697 employees in Belarus. Small businesses

(in terms of persons occupied) are predominant in wholesale and retail trade (section G) and also in some other service activities, although specific differences between countries exist.

As a general rule the public enterprises are of bigger size. Here the average number of persons varies in the range between 52 in the Russian Federation and 286 in Belarus. Together with energy, sections C and I - “Mining and quarrying” and “Transport, storage and communication” - also have the largest sized enterprises (chart 7).

Changes of number and size of units

The general dynamics of registered units in CIS countries is presented in table 2. The growth is calculated on the basis of information available from the 2006 and 2004 rounds of the BR Questionnaire Survey. The reference period of the data in some cases are two subsequent years, and in others – two years apart, as indicated in the last column of the table.

Table 2. Percentage change of unit population, BRQ 2004 - BRQ 2006

Country	Legal units	Enterprises	Local units	Reference period
<i>Armenia</i>	-0.1	-14.6	..	2004/2003
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	8.0	3.2	4.9	2004/2003
<i>Belarus</i>	-52.7	2005/2004
<i>Georgia</i>	23.6	7.4	..	2005/2004
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	8.9	9.7	10.4	2005/2004
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	13.1	12.8	8.8	2005/2004
<i>Moldova</i>	1.2	1.2	..	2005/2003
<i>Russian Federation</i>	4.1	..	520.1	2005/2004
<i>Tajikistan</i>	10.6	-18.6	-3.6	2005/2003
<i>Ukraine</i>	9.3	8.2	8.9	2005/2003

Overall with a few exceptions, between the 2004 and 2006 Surveys the changes in number of legal units and enterprises fall within the +/- 15 per cent interval. The growth rates of local units generally show a similar pattern as enterprises, although the sample is much smaller. Then again, the information on local units in the 2004 and 2006 Surveys do not seem to be of comparable level, particularly in the case of the Russian Federation, where the number of registered local units

jumped six-fold between the two Surveys. The apparent registered increase in the numbers might be related to improved methodology and coverage in the business register, as well as to the organisational changes, rather than to growth in economic activity. Inconsistencies of the data for some CIS countries imply a need for further investigation of the way local units are identified and treated in the business registers. The revealed changes in unit population by NACE/ISIC sections might provide some indications on that score.

The comparisons with data reported on statistical units in earlier Surveys (1998 or 2000) are even more suspect for most CIS countries. For a number of countries the business register data during the period of economic transformation remain quite volatile.

Examination by Variables

According to the 2006 BR Questionnaire Survey, all countries include in their business registers variables foreseen in the national regulations, which in some cases only partly match the number of variables used/recommended internationally. For legal units, all nine countries reporting have integrated into their business registers the following variables from a suggested list:

- (a)- identity number
- (b)- name and address
- (d)- date of incorporation
- (f)- legal form of unit

Only a few countries, however, include variable (e) - date on which legal unit ceases to be legally responsible, and some other variables.

Regarding enterprise units, variables (a) to (f) are reasonably well covered by CIS countries. But variables (g), (h) and (i) are reported much more rarely (Table 3). Compared to the information reported in the 2002 and 2004 questionnaires, variables for enterprises and local units seem to be slightly better covered in current business registers.

Table 3. Variables registered in the business register, BRQ-2006

	ARM	AZE	BLR	GEO	KAZ	KGZ	MDA	RUS	TJK	UKR
Enterprise variables										
a - identity number	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes
b - identity number(s) of the LeU(s) legally responsible for the enterprise	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes
c - activity code of the enterprise at four-digit level of NACE Rev1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes
d - secondary activities, if any, at NACE Rev1/ISIC Rev3.1 four-digit level	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	No
e - size: measured by the number of persons occupied	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes
f - date of commencement of activities of the enterprise	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes
g - date of final cessation of activities of the enterprise	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes
h - net turnover from sale of goods and services	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	..	Yes	Yes
i (opt) - net assets	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	..	Yes	No
Local unit variables										
a - identity number	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
b - name, address including postcode	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
b (op) - telephone, electronic mail, fax numbers and telex address	..	No	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
c - activity code at the four-digit (class) level of NACE Rev1	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
d (op) - secondary activities, if any, at the four-digit level	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
e - size of labour force	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
f - date of commencement of the activities	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
g - date of final cessation of activities	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	No	Yes	Yes
h - geographical location code (territorial units)	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
i - reference to associated registers which can be used	..	No	Yes	..	No	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
j - ID number in the register of the enterprise on which the LoU depends	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	..	Yes	Yes	Yes
k - activity carried out in the LoU constituting an ancillary activity	..	No	No	..	No	No	..	No	Yes	No

Concluding remarks

Utility of the business register

There are a variety of purposes for which countries use their business registers. In their responses to the 2004 questionnaire (this information was not collected during the 2006 round), almost all CIS countries indicated that business registers were used as a basis for sampling frames. Use of business registers for grossing up survey results, survey editing and imputation, data tabulation and as an information source for research and development statistics were also often mentioned

by the CIS countries. Most countries use the registers for production of data on business demography, but only Armenia, the Russian Federation, and to a lesser degree Tajikistan and Ukraine use them for deriving economic statistics as well. The information contained in the business registers is usually disseminated (mainly via publications).

Wider use of administrative sources is a necessity

In their responses to the questionnaire, several countries mentioned the utility of the business register for monitoring and for easing the burden on businesses caused by statistical surveys. Enhancing this utility of the business register, as well as increasing awareness of it among the business community, is an important task. The international practice shows that one way to achieve this is better cooperation and information-sharing amongst various governmental and municipal institutions. An initial step could be shifting the emphasis from special surveys as the main source of information for business registers towards greater reliance on the tax and other administrative registers, and establishing common data monitoring and management systems. Certainly, such a shift may require changes/adjustments in the countries' legislation dealing with information sharing and confidentiality. There might also be cost implications for updating ICT equipment and software, re-training of personnel, etc., as well.

Next step - harmonisation of methodological approaches and practices

Using existing administrative sources and publicly available information (published accounts, annual reports to shareholders, etc.) could also improve the quality of business registers in respect to both timeliness and coverage. It could also help to easier identify the dormant and dead units.

Recent experience of several east European countries, including Moldova and a few other CIS countries, indicates that harmonising methodological approaches with those used by more advanced market economies brings a marked improvement in the reliability and comparability of business registers and their utility for business and other statistics. Employment of internationally accepted practices, such as profiling of large and complex enterprises, delineation of enterprise groups, and others, might allow statistical institutes to monitor an important part of economic activities more efficiently, particularly in larger countries where such enterprises are common.

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