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Assessing bureaucratic start-up costs through Mystery Calls. Evidence from the One-stop shops for doing business

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Abstract

We analyze the *mystery calls* conducted over a sample of Italian municipalities surveying the front office services provided by the One-stop shops (OSSs) for doing business. Mystery calls are phone interviews conducted by callers who pretend to be prospective entrepreneurs wanting to start a new business, and whose identity and purposes were not known to the OSSs respondents. The information on the days and on the number of phone calls needed by the interviewers to conduct the mystery calls make it possible to construct new measures of bureaucratic start-up costs and study their determinants. We find that lower bureaucratic costs are mainly associated with factors related to organization features of the OSS, such as a more intensive use of ICT and expertise of the employees. The socio-economic context where the OSS operates also plays a role, while the characteristics of the political bodies generally do not.

JEL Classification: H11, D23, K22

Keywords: bureaucratic costs; doing business; mystery calls

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