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PRESS RELEASE

The 2007 social balance sheet

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Each year, the National Bank carries out an analysis of the provisional findings drawn from the social balance sheets filed by enterprises established in Belgium. These findings are only provisional as they are based on a reduced sample population.

The reduced population put together for analysing the results for the year 2007 counts 44,718 companies. According to this sample, employment grew on average by 2.3 p.c. compared with 2006. An increase in staff numbers was observed in all the company size categories and across all branches of activity, but it was above the average in SMEs and in certain branches of the tertiary sector. The number of part-time workers increased at a faster rate (4.3 p.c.) than full-time workers (1.6 p.c.). The growth in part-time work can only be partly explained by the recruitment of staff working shorter hours. It is indeed also a result, and particularly in medium-sized and large enterprises, of changes in the work regimes of existing staff, who wish to strike a better balance between work and family life or to ease the transition between working life and retirement. The part-time employment rate therefore rose once again. The rise was more marked among the male workforce, although starting from a lower level. The relative importance of part-time work is still very uneven from one branch of activity to another and tends to be higher in branches with the highest proportion of women.

Staff movements registered during the year 2007 were higher than in 2006. Nevertheless, net entries were lower than during the previous year. In enterprises filing a full-format social balance sheet, for which more detailed information is available about incoming and outgoing workers, the net increase in the number of workers resulted from the combination of net entries of workers with higher or secondary education qualifications and net exits of holders of a primary education certificate. It is observed that reasons for job departures differ according to the size and branch of activity of the companies: in 2007, for example, the majority of staff departures could be explained by temporary contracts ending in medium-sized and large enterprises, while in small firms, voluntary departures were the main reason for this. Roughly half of all entries and exits of staff involve workers with an open-ended contract. Staff mobility is therefore not the privilege of temporary workers: 15.2 p.c. of permanent employees left their employer during the year 2007. This staff turnover rate is higher in groups of firms where working and pay conditions as well as career opportunities are less favourable.

The share of temporary employment contracts continued to grow in 2007, to reach 6.6 p.c. of the total, compared with 6 p.c. three years earlier. Permanent contracts nevertheless still account for the lion's share of employment. Temporary agency work gained further ground in companies filing a full-format social balance sheet - the only firms for which this information is available - accounting for 4.1 p.c. of the total number of FTE workers in 2007, proportionally the biggest temporary workforce of all, ahead of workers on fixed-term contracts (3.8 p.c.) and workers on secondment (2.9 p.c.). Labour force adjustment instruments vary from one branch to another: in industry, for example, it is the temporary work formula that is most widely used, while in trade, transport and communication, there is wider recourse to workers on secondment, and in other services to workers under fixed-term contracts.

Hourly labour costs rose by 2.8 p.c. on average. The rise was more noticeable for full-time workers (2.9 p.c.) than for part-timers (2.2 p.c.). The cost of one hour of work averaged 33.8 euro in 2007, but hourly costs vary considerably according to the characteristics of the firms. They usually increase with size and tend to be on average lowest in the horeca (hotels and catering) sector and highest in energy and water, as well as in financial and insurance services.

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As regards training, the overall performance observed in 2006 for the whole population still falls well below the targets set out in the solidarity pact between the generations: training costs only accounted for 1.17 p.c. of the wage bill, while a target of 1.9 p.c. was specified for this same year, and the worker participation rate in training courses was a mere 35.2 p.c., whereas a 50 p.c. target has been fixed for the year 2010. An increase (of 4 p.c. for the financial indicator and of 0.2 p.c. for the participation rate) was nevertheless recorded between 2006 and 2007 in the reduced population. However, it should be noted that these results are biaised by the over-representation of large enterprises in this reduced population, which tend to report their training efforts more regularly than small firms.

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