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PRESS RELEASE

2012 social balance sheet

(Article for the December 2013 Economic Review)

Featuring a gender breakdown for certain categories, a new version of the social balance sheet introduced in 2012 helped to highlight a series of differences in the situation of working men and women. Based on the social balance sheets of 8 862 firms filing full-format accounts, this analysis covers 1 095 616 employees, 43% of whom were women.

The staff costs for every hour worked – a variable used to factor in working time disparities – were on average 13% less for female employees than for their male counterparts in 2012, in the firms surveyed. The gap is somewhat smaller for full-time employees (9%) but a bit wider for part-timers (14%). More than half of the women employed in these firms had opted for reduced working time, compared with less than 12% in the case of men.

Although they have a higher average qualification level than men, proportionally more women are employed in the lower hourly pay grades: 63% of full-time female employees are working in firms where the average hourly wage for women is less than €40, compared with 47% for men. What is more, over half of full-time female workers are employed in companies where the average hourly wage for men is higher than that for women. This compares with barely 17% of male labour working in companies where the average hourly wage for women is higher than that of their male counterparts. Just over 31% of women and nearly 38% of men are employed in firms where the wage levels are very similar.

In the companies covered, 38% of the female employees had higher education qualifications in 2012, a percentage that was even close to 50% in the case of full-time female employees, whereas the figure was no higher than 31% for men. Access to continuing training is assumed to increase with educational level and the social balance sheets do indeed show that the number of women involved in training is logically almost the same as for men in the case of formal training and higher when it comes to informal training. However, in terms of duration and costs, women continue to be at a disadvantage: the training courses women have access to are shorter and less costly than those available to their male counterparts.

Employment trends in companies filing social balance sheets were analysed according to the data of a constant population of 48 385 companies. The number of people employed by these firms was 1 606 021 on average in 2012, or 0.9% higher than in 2011. Against the background of output contraction, the employment growth rate nonetheless slowed down during the year so that there was hardly any variation in the size of the workforce between late 2011 and the end of 2012. The level of employment stabilised in each of the country's three Regions.

Contrasting patterns are reported depending on the size and field of activities of the companies and depending on the job and employee profiles. Employment fell in large firms, while continuing to grow in SMEs. Job losses were reported in industry and in trade and transport, while more people were recruited in the case of health and social work and business services. The fall in the level of full-time male employment was offset by the higher number of women working part-time. More people were hired on permanent contracts at the expense of temporary staff. The breakdown of staff by job category also reveals that the lower level of economic activity took a heavy toll amongst manual employees, while the number of non-manual employees and, to a lesser extent, executives, has continued to grow.

Companies filing full-format accounts reported an increasing number of in-house staff in terms of annual averages but relied much less on out-of-company employees (agency staff and employees on secondment). More specifically, industry and the trade and transport branch of activity, which account for the bulk of agency workers, have cut their staffing levels by over 10% and 5% respectively. The number of in-house staff departures reported during the financial year hardly changed between 2011 and 2012 for companies filing full-format accounts, but there were fewer spontaneous departures (61% of all departures in 2012) owing to the gloomy economic climate, while the number of expired temporary contracts (26% of the total) rose sharply.

There is an increasing number of companies reporting employees undergoing training, particularly in the case of SMEs. This concerns 26% of the 48 385 firms covered, a rise of almost 3 percentage points in 2012. The participation rates in training were higher (43.5% for formal training and 26.3% for informal training) than the previous year's, while the initial training participation rate hardly changed (1.3%). Training costs accounted for 1.84% of overall staff costs in 2012, versus 1.78% in 2011, a rise which is primarily attributed to a sharp increase in the size of the budget for informal training. The working hours earmarked for training rose from 1.52 to 1.64% of the hours worked, as a result of extending the training time for each one of the three types of training.