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PRESS RELEASE

The social balance sheet 2014

The article on the social balance sheet centres on two main themes: the changes in the composition of the volume of labour – according to the characteristics of the reporting firms and their workers – and the movement in the wage gap between men and women, which can now be measured for firms submitting a full social balance sheet following the introduction of a breakdown by gender of hours worked and staff costs for financial years beginning on or after 1 January 2012.

Between 2000 and 2014, the volume of labour measured in FTEs in the analysed population of firms increased by around 193 000 units, or 12.3 %, to reach approximately 1 765 000 units. Over the same period the number of firms analysed increased from 69 939 to 85 572. This last rise is due largely to the greater number of social balance sheets filed by large and very large NPIs and foundations (active mainly in the health and social work sector), following the introduction of a special standardised reporting format with effect from the 2006 financial year. The volume of labour therefore expanded considerably in health and social work (+162 000 FTEs, including +72 000 in firms present in both 2000 and 2014), but also in other services (+69 000 FTEs) and more moderately in trade and transport (+18 000 FTEs). Conversely, it contracted in industry (-55 000 FTEs).

The social balance sheet reveals substantial changes in the composition of the volume of labour. For instance, the contribution of personnel employed as clerical staff rose sharply between 2000 and 2014 (up from 50.6 to 57.4 % of the total) while that of manual workers declined. Part-time workers now account for a larger proportion of the activity (24 % of the total volume in 2014, as opposed to 13.1 % fourteen years ago). On the other hand, the number of permanent staff has grown at much the same rate as the number of temporary workers, so that the proportion of staff employed on temporary contracts stood at around 6.2 % of the volume of labour in both 2000 and 2014. Consequently, the decline in job security is attributable more to the type of working arrangement rather than the workers' employment contracts. Women have become a major driving force in activity; their contribution to the volume of labour increased from 33.5 % to 41 % of the total between 2000 and 2014. The relative proportion of female labour increased in all branches, but the growth is most evident in trade and transport and in the other services branch. The volume of employment represented by male workers was down slightly over that period, as the expansion in health and social work and in other services was insufficient to offset the decline in industry and in trade and transport.

The increased proportion of female labour explains the simultaneous growth of part-time work. Still largely the preserve of women, a reduced hours regime has an impact on both career development and opportunities for salary progression. The social balance sheet data show that, on average, in firms submitting a full balance sheet, female staff are less expensive than male employees. The study is based on the results for a population of just under 2 000 firms for 2014, compared to a potential population of around 13 500 companies submitting a full balance sheet. Certain data are missing because, in order to protect privacy, the legal rules allow firms not to complete some items if they concern no more than three workers. Other data cannot be used because the reporting quality is inadequate. The consequences are regrettable, because that makes the findings less representative and the aim of the law – which was to permit comparison of the social profiles of the reporting firms – is not achieved.

In 2014, in the population analysed, the cost of an hour's labour was 13.9 % higher on average for men than for women. A bigger than average positive pay gap is seen in trade and transport and in other services; the gap is significantly smaller in industry; conversely, in health and social work it is negative. The firms' individual results show that, on average, hourly costs are higher for men than for women in 69 % of firms. The gap is 15 % or larger in one in four firms.

The movement in the wage gap between 2012 and 2014 was measured on the basis of a constant population of just over a thousand firms. There was little change in the dispersion of the wage gap observations between those two years, although wide variations in hourly labour costs for men and for women were recorded for some firms. The wage gap narrowed in 57 % of firms and increased moderately – by less than 5 percentage points – in 23.5 % of companies. Consequently, the firms in this constant population recording a positive wage gap were proportionately fewer in 2014, though they still represent a large share (68 % of the total, compared to 72 % in 2012).

The transposition into Belgian law of Directive 2013/34/EU will enable a larger number of companies to be classed as small firms (or even micro-companies) and to use the abridged social balance sheet format, so that less detailed information on staff will be available for a larger proportion of declarants. In some cases that information was not otherwise available. This easing of the reporting obligations must not be accompanied by a deterioration in quality. The social balance sheet is an economic policy tool that can be used to guide political decisions, because it reflects the social reality of firms. All parties concerned – and particularly firms, both large and small ones – therefore have a responsibility to contribute actively towards improving the quality of the statistical data submitted.