



# Demographic change and active inclusion in Roubaix and metropolitan Lille: Focus on Seniors



## Cities for Active Inclusion



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### CITIES FOR ACTIVE INCLUSION

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The nine observatories are coordinated by EURO CITIES, the network of major cities in Europe, and supported through Inclusive Cities for Europe, a partnership between the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) and EURO CITIES.

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# 1. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN ROUBAIX

Roubaix is one of 85 towns and villages within the Lille metropolitan area, which is in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France, part of the Nord department. For more than 100 years, industrial development has driven demographic trends in Roubaix. The rural exodus to urban areas in the late 19th century, followed by immigration from Europe and North Africa during the first half of the 20th century, have successively fulfilled the need for manpower that was generated by ever-expanding industrial activity in Roubaix. Today, Roubaix has a relatively stable number of inhabitants, whose movements seem to largely depend on their relationship with the Lille metropolitan area and the availability of housing and jobs: Roubaix is no longer the urban and industrial hub that it used to be.

To assess the demographic changes in Roubaix, its situation should to be compared with that of the rest of the Lille metropolitan area so that specific characteristics can be pinpointed and analysed.

Having established a general demographic overview of the town of Roubaix, a closer look will be taken at the issue of the ageing of people in the labour market, with particular focus on how older people can retain their jobs and how the problem of unemployment among older workers can be addressed across the whole Lille metropolitan area.

## 1.1 Current and forecast data

In 2011, the population of Roubaix was just under 100,000 inhabitants (98,774), which makes it the second largest town in the Lille metropolitan area. In the early 20th century, due to the expansion of industry, Roubaix was one of the most densely-populated towns in France. For example, by 1911, the population had grown to some 122,000 people. However, by the late 1960s, a period of industrial decline had begun, and people began to leave Roubaix. In four decades, from 1968 to 2008, the population of Roubaix fell by almost 20,000: from 114,547 to 95,893. Between 1999 and 2007, the average net inward migration balance<sup>7</sup> was negative, at -1.23% per annum; this can be contrasted with the positive net inward migration of +0.6% for metropolitan Lille as a whole. However, during the same period (1999 to 2007), Roubaix recorded more births than deaths: the natural population increase was positive at +1.3%.

Roubaix has a high proportion of children and young people under the age of 20: they now account for more than 30% of the town's population. In some areas of Roubaix, particularly the more disadvantaged areas, children and young people under the age of 20 represent as much as 40% of the total population. Figures for 2007 show that the birth rate in Roubaix was 21.7 per thousand: this is far higher than the 16.1 births per thousand for metropolitan Lille as a whole.

In terms of the proportion of middle-aged and older inhabitants, migratory flows of people aged 40+ are relatively low, and the proportion of inhabitants aged 40+ remained relatively stable in Roubaix for many years. However, between 1999 and 2008, the percentage of people aged 40+ rose slightly, from 13% to 16%. Nevertheless, Roubaix still has a smaller proportion of people aged 40+ years old than the Lille metropolitan area overall.

In terms of employment, municipal figures show that two thirds of people in employment are either clerical workers or manual workers. The situation for people of working age in the labour market is a particular problem in Roubaix.

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<sup>7</sup> Net inward migration is the difference between the number of people arriving and the number of people leaving, expressed as a percentage of the total population.

Population ageing is another aspect of the demographics of Roubaix. Population forecasts compiled by the Compas policy observation centre<sup>2</sup>, show that the number of inhabitants in Roubaix aged 60+ is expected to increase from the base figure of 13,400 for 2006, up to 14,900 by 2013, and rising to 16,600 by 2020. The forecasts show that there will be a particularly significant increase in the group of people aged 60-74 years old, due to the ageing of the baby boom generation who were born between about 1945 and about 1965. Many people in this age group, as well as those who are older, require specialist care services and facilities to help with their physical, psychological or social dependency. As the number of people in this age group rises, Roubaix municipality will need to assess and extend the quality and availability of the services that already exist for this age group.

Throughout Roubaix, the number of people per household is markedly higher than the average for the whole of metropolitan Lille. Regarding the composition of families in Roubaix, it is notable that there is a lower than average percentage of couples without children: only half the percentage for metropolitan Lille as a whole. There is also a higher, and rising, percentage of single-parent families in Roubaix: more than 33% of families with children are single parent families in Roubaix, compared with only 24% for the whole of metropolitan Lille. In addition, Roubaix has a higher than average proportion of families with a large number of children, although the situation varies from one neighbourhood to another.

For Roubaix, the average taxable income<sup>3</sup> per household is less than €1,400 per month. This is lower than the average for metropolitan Lille, which stands at €1,750 per month. It is also notable that half the households in Roubaix show a taxable income of less than €790 per month.

Figures show that 40% of the inhabitants of Roubaix are of working age.<sup>4</sup> As referred to earlier, among the inhabitants who have a job in Roubaix, the majority are either clerical workers (36.25%) or manual workers (43.16%). Executive staff represent only 6.50% compared with 18% for Lille as a whole, and middle managers represent 14.37% compared with 23% for Lille as a whole. In terms of the type of new employment opportunities that have been created in Roubaix in recent years, according to statistics from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, 939 new enterprises were set up in Roubaix in 2007. Of the jobs created by these new enterprises, 65 were in the services sector.

A particularly interesting aspect of the job market in Roubaix is the number of jobs taken up by people who live elsewhere. In 2011, a total of 42,982 people were working in jobs in Roubaix, but only 12,676 of these jobs were taken up by people actually living in the town. This means that 71% of these jobs (i.e. 30,306 jobs) were being taken up by people living outside Roubaix. Meanwhile, the number of job seekers registered with the Roubaix branch of the national public employment service (Pôle Emploi) is over 11,000 (11,184 in December 2011). The unemployment rate in Roubaix stands at 28%, which is higher than in other towns in the Lille metropolitan area.

## 1.2 Trends

Roubaix appears to be particularly attractive to young people aged 19 to 24 years old: more people in this age group arrive than leave, and they move to Roubaix to study or to begin their working life. On the other hand, more adults aged 25 to 39 years old and children aged 5-14 years old are moving out of Roubaix than are moving in: these are mainly households with dependent children

<sup>2</sup> Compas is a specialist centre for territorial and social policy observation and evaluation.

<sup>3</sup> The taxable income is the total amount of income declared by taxpayers on their tax return form, prior to any allowances/deductions. It does not correspond to the disposable income.

<sup>4</sup> In 2011, of the total inhabitants of Roubaix (98,258), 28,162 of those aged 15+ had a job within or outside the municipality (i.e. approx. 12,500 in Roubaix and 15,500 elsewhere). The number of job seekers stands at 11,184.

who move to other suburbs or more rural areas. According to data from the national statistics institute INSEE<sup>5</sup>, people aged 25 to 30 often leave Roubaix when their social status improves: for example, when they find a long-term job, either in Roubaix or elsewhere, or when they set up home as a couple. It therefore seems that in many cases, those inhabitants who are most likely to be in work and socially included choose not to stay in Roubaix long-term.

Although the proportion of young people in Roubaix is relatively very high, between 2001 and 2006 there was a decrease in the number of young people aged 10 to 29, due to the significant outward migration of people under 35, particularly young adults and their children. The departure of younger children thus reduces the numbers of children who grow into teenage and young adults and, while the net migration balance for people aged 20 to 24 years old is still positive, the actual number of inhabitants aged 20 to 24 is declining. Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, the number of adults aged 40+ in Roubaix has remained fairly stable.

Although there are significant numbers of families with more than two or three children living in Roubaix, in general the average number of persons per household is continuing to decline in Roubaix, as it is across the region, the department and nationally. This is partly due to changes in cohabitation patterns, with more adults choosing to live alone; but it is also heightened by the demographic ageing of the population, which is seen in and around Roubaix.

As mentioned earlier, unemployment is a significant issue for Roubaix. Due to the economic crisis, Roubaix's unemployment rate increased by 7.75% between 2008 and mid-2010. This increase in the unemployment rate is having a particular impact on older people in the labour market. Firstly, 13.9% of registered unemployed people in Roubaix are aged 50+. This percentage went up by a significant 14.9% between 2009 and 2010. Women are particularly affected by this trend: unemployment is now 19.8% for women aged 50+, compared with only 11.6% for men aged 50+.

Also, long-term unemployment is a particular problem for older people: 18.6% of long-term unemployed people in Roubaix are aged 50+. The figures for 2009 and 2010 show that this situation is getting worse: in just one year, the number of long-term unemployed people aged 50+ increased by 21.9%. Women tend to be more affected than men: from 2009 to 2010 the number of unemployed women aged 50+ in Roubaix grew by 30.8%.

One question that needs to be considered is this: why are job seekers living in Roubaix unable to take up the job vacancies that are available in their own municipality? The answer is that many job seekers living in Roubaix are at a significant disadvantage: according to figures from the Roubaix office of the national public employment service (Pôle Emploi)<sup>6</sup>, most of the job vacancies in Roubaix involve work that requires relatively high qualifications: jobs in corporate head offices, work in credit and loan distribution services, and jobs in the civil service. These types of work call for higher levels of qualification than most people in Roubaix have: particularly younger workers and younger job seekers. Most job seekers in Roubaix, and also across the Lille metropolitan area, have at best only elementary or secondary school certificates or diplomas<sup>7</sup>. However, the situation in Roubaix is worse than for the Lille metropolitan area as a whole: in Roubaix a high proportion of job seekers dropped out of full-time education before they had even completed secondary school. In Roubaix, one in five (c. 20%) of job seekers have no secondary school diplomas or other academic qualifications whatsoever: this compares with an average of 13% for metropolitan Lille and across the northern departments of France.

<sup>5</sup> The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) is a department of the [Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industry](#). It is in charge of the production of public statistics.

<sup>6</sup> These figures do not take account of all jobs in the municipality: they only reflect the job vacancies registered with Roubaix's national employment centre (Pôle Emploi) by organisations in Roubaix.

<sup>7</sup> Elementary or secondary school-leaving diplomas include: BEPC, CAP, and BEP. Numerous studies show that holders of such diplomas can mainly access only jobs at the lower scale of qualifications.

### 1.3 Impacts

For many people living in Roubaix, there seems little opportunity to progress in their jobs, due to their lack of qualifications. It also needs to be noted that many people moving into Roubaix do not have a job. For example, in 2006, most of the people moving into Roubaix had no job, and 30% were teenagers and students. In addition, a significant proportion of people moving into Roubaix in 2006 were either manual workers (21%) or people with temporary jobs (19%). So, while many socially included middle-class households move out of Roubaix, the town attracts people who have low incomes (e.g. students) or people who are less likely to be socially included (e.g. unemployed people and people working in low paid or insecure jobs). The municipal authorities that researched this trend suggest that it may be due to the resources and facilities that Roubaix offers to lower income groups: many are attracted by the diversity of the town's civic life, its social services and its other facilities.

The employability of young people is a matter of great concern for Roubaix's municipal authorities. Indeed, the national institute of statistics and economic studies showed that out of the 16,366 inhabitants of Roubaix aged 15 to 24 years old, 40% of them (i.e. 6,784) are no longer in full-time education. This proportion is higher than for metropolitan Lille and higher than for the Nord department as a whole: Roubaix has a smaller proportion of young people in education or training. Consequently, 45% of young people aged 15 to 24 have a very low level of qualifications or skills. As mentioned earlier, this lack of qualifications applies to a high proportion of people right across the labour market in Roubaix: it is not only the youngest people in the labour market who have a very low level of education. Municipal figures show that clerical and manual workers, who need few qualifications, account for some 60% of Roubaix's working population. When people with low or no qualifications lose their jobs, they have more difficulty in finding other employment.

### 1.4 Employment policy: jobs and skills planning tool

One of the key policies being implemented in Roubaix to help reduce unemployment in the town over the longer term is to extend the use of job forecasting techniques: to help plan and meet future requirements for skills and qualifications. With the continuing demographic changes in Roubaix, combined with the lack of qualifications among people of working age living in the town, the municipal and regional employment services for Roubaix and the Nord Pas de Calais region are developing a jobs and skills management and planning tool (Gestion Prévisionnelle des Emplois et des Compétences). This tool allows the employment services to forecast the types of jobs that will become vacant in the future and the skills required for these jobs. The idea is to find out from employer organisations in Roubaix, including businesses, what their future staff strategies and requirements are. A particular focus is the number of employees who are about to reach retirement age, and what skills their jobs require. This will enable the public authorities and employment and training operators to ascertain which sectors will be most affected over the next decade because of demographic change, so that they can develop policies to prepare younger generations for the labour market of the future, through educational and training initiatives.

On the other hand, until now neither Roubaix nor the overall Lille metropolitan area, have had clear policies to address the problems of unemployment among older people in the labour market. So, the public authorities in the Lille metropolitan area, including its the employment services, are now working together with other stakeholders to develop an integrated policy on issues affecting the employment of older people.

## 2. HOW ROUBAIX AND THE LILLE METROPOLITAN AREA ARE COPING: THE FOCUS ON SENIORS PROJECT

To help address the major issue of today's growing number of unemployed older people, not just in Roubaix but in the whole Lille metropolitan area, a new project has been set up: the Focus on Seniors project.

Various institutional bodies that provide a range of services under the pillars of the EU active inclusion strategy are involved in as project partners, as well as a wide range of other organisations: on the one hand, public authorities and public services, and on the other hand, employer organisations, including enterprises and businesses. The office of the national employment service (Pôle Emploi), which is in charge of paying unemployment benefits to older job seekers, is fully involved in the project.

As part of the first phase of the Focus on Seniors project, a task force has been set up to establish a coherent policy for the future: to make the labour market in the Lille metropolitan area more open and inclusive for older people who have particular difficulty in finding work.

As part of the initial phase, the Focus on Seniors task force partners are considering policies and initiatives that will support older job seekers and older workers, and how to ensure the employment services can meet the needs of these older people. For example, one of the main goals of the Focus on Seniors project is to help move older unemployed workers back into employment. This will involve to persuading enterprises to actively consider employing more older people and taking specific steps to do so.

The resulting Focus on Seniors action plan will then be used to drive the project forward so that the right policies and initiatives are put in place.

### 2.1. Problems experienced by older unemployed people

As described earlier, the proportion of older people among Roubaix's labour market population is rising: this is also the case across metropolitan Lille and across the whole Nord department, as well as nationally.<sup>8</sup> This ageing of the labour market population is mainly due to the ageing of the baby-boomer generation, who were born from about 1945 to about 1965. This demographic shift is having an impact on the labour market.

Until now, the main strategy being implemented by employers has been to shed older workers, by offering them either early retirement or a redundancy package. In some cases this is to reduce costs: older employees are often paid more than younger employees for similar work. In other cases, employers believe that older workers are less able to adapt to technical changes. Older employees are often the first to lose their jobs in an economic downturn or during times of rapid technological change.

The long-term viability for society of shedding older workers is doubtful, given the current pressure on the social security benefits and pensions system: fewer people are contributing to its funding and more people are taking from it. The French government is currently taking steps to

<sup>8</sup> Young people under 20 years of age represent a high proportion of the population of Roubaix. However, a significant number of people aged between 25-39 are leaving the town, but are not being replaced by people in this age group moving in: so the number of citizens aged 10-29 is gradually decreasing. Meanwhile, inward and outward migration of people aged 40 to 60 remain balanced.

raise the statutory retirement age and extending the duration of statutory working life, so that people will have to wait longer before they can claim their pension entitlement. This places the employment of older workers at the very heart of the issue: for the state to achieve savings by delaying the pension age, more jobs will need to be provided for older people prior to retiring; and in addition, the employment of older people is within the framework of the EU active inclusion strategy, which recommends inclusive labour markets.

Since 2008, the French government has also been gradually phasing out the measure that exempted older unemployed people from looking for work.<sup>9</sup> The age at which older recipients of unemployment benefits were exempted from looking for a new job was increased to 58 years old in 2009, 59 years old in 2010, and 60 years old in 2011. This has had a considerable impact on the number of unemployed people aged 59 to 65 years old in Roubaix: the number of older job seekers has since increased significantly, by 13 % in just one year.

Right across France, as elsewhere in Europe, many employers are discriminating against older workers. Although these employers may acknowledge the greater loyalty and experience of older workers, they see them as less inclined to adapt to change than younger people, particularly technological change. Within metropolitan Lille, the national employment centre's figures show that when older unemployed people look for work, it is harder for them to get a job, irrespective of their level of qualifications: some employers are simply reluctant to take on older workers. This is highlighted by the figures: job seekers aged 50+ represent 23% of all long-term job seekers in metropolitan Lille, while they only represent 15% of all job seekers. In addition, only 33% of older job seekers find work: the lowest success rate in the region.

## 2.2 The Focus on Seniors project

### 2.2.1 Initiators and pilots of the project

The lead partner for the Focus on Seniors project is the Lille Employment Committee (CBE: Comité de Bassin d'Emploi Lille Métropole). This is a local committee formed by representatives of public and private organisations in the employment field within metropolitan Lille. This committee brings together all the various public and private stakeholders concerned with local employment as a part of a coordinated approach to tackle unemployment. It provides a platform for discussion and consultation as well as acting as a think tank to develop and recommend innovative projects and solutions to help improve employment prospects in metropolitan Lille.

Two of the organisations involved in the Lille Employment Committee are the local branch of the national employment service, and the north Lille regional branch of the DIRECTTE regulatory authority. Recognising the problem of a growing number of older job seekers aged approximately 45 to 60+ in the Lille metropolitan area, these two organisations were instrumental in getting the Focus on Seniors project started, with the Lille Employment Committee as lead partner, and key organisations forming a project task force.

The project task force realised early on that the difficulty that older job seekers have in getting a job is linked to the problems that older people actually encounter in the work place. So from the start, the project task force decided that their discussions and proposals would embrace the overall issue of older people in the labour market, not just job seekers but also those in employment.

<sup>9</sup> The Dispense de Recherche d'Emploi is a measure whereby older unemployed people who are registered with the national public employment service (Pôle Emploi) and receive unemployment benefit were exempted from having to look for a new job.

The Focus on Seniors project now involves many different stakeholders working together as project partners, as follows:

- the Lille Employment Association (CBE:Comité de Bassin d'Emploi Lille Métropole);
- two local employment centres (maisons de l'emploi)<sup>70</sup>;
- the national public employment service (Pôle Emploi);
- the CFDT trade union organisation;
- the regional office of the DIRECCTE regulatory authority;
- the local organisation for trades and professions (Chambre des Metiers);
- a trade union association that assists small and medium sized enterprises and industries (ARACT);
- the Cap Emploi association, which promotes employment opportunities for people with disabilities;
- the Local Plan for Integration and Employment in Wattrelos, a town next to Roubaix (PLIE: Plan Local de l'Insertion et de l'Emploi de Wattrelos).

Focus on Seniors is a very new project: the partners began working together in July 2011, starting with an analysis of the situation of older people in the Lille metropolitan area labour market.

### 2.2.2 The issues identified

The Focus on Seniors project task force identified a number of issues to address concerning the employment of older people living in the Lille metropolitan area.

Firstly, the local, regional and national public authorities seemed to lack a clear strategy on the issues faced by older people in the labour market. On the one hand, older workers are often hardest hit when an organisation needs to cut back on its workforce: older people are often the first workers to be made redundant. On the other hand, the public authorities need to limit or reduce the cost of social security unemployment benefits and retirement pensions. The authorities are therefore hoping that older people will either continue working in their jobs to an older age or, if they are unemployed, will return to work. However, the authorities have not yet proposed any real or directly applicable measures for ensuring that more older people are in work. A much clearer message to employers is urgently needed. Older people in the labour market are in a precarious situation. In 2010, the French government introduced a requirement for all employer organisations to implement a Seniors Pact<sup>71</sup>. Employers are supposed to take innovative action to recruit and retain older workers. However, for various reasons, this requirement has not led to a breakthrough in terms of improving the situation for older people in the labour market.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> The local employment centre, (Maison de l'emploi) is a local organisation, often coordinated by the municipality, that brings together representatives of local stakeholders for employment policies and services. The national public employment service (Pole Emploi) is dedicated to helping job seekers find work. CFDT is a trade union organisation. DIRECCTE is a regional, state-devolved, organisation which mainly regulates companies in line with labour law and competition laws, and works with other employment organisations; there are several regional units that ensure compliance with regional guidelines. La Chambre des Métiers represents craftsmen, apprentices, guilds and professional organisations that provide training, advice, help with company registration and advocacy in case of dispute with the public authorities. L'ARACT is a joint sector-based trade union association whose board comprises regional employee and employer trade unions: it assists regional small and medium sized enterprises and industries (SMEs and SMIs) to promote plans for change and facilitate social dialogue.

<sup>71</sup> Since 1 January 2010, companies and public institutions employing at least 50 workers can be fined if they have no agreement or action plan in place to protect and extend the employment of older workers.

<sup>72</sup> The reasons why the government's 2010 requirement for organisations to introduce a pact for seniors has not improved the situation



Secondly, many older people are unwilling to improve their skills and qualifications. To keep older people in work, employer organisations and the public sector need to take positive steps to ensure older people have the necessary skills and qualifications. However, according to members of the Focus on Seniors project, there is often a lack of engagement of by older workers in training and retraining. When older people in the labour market are offered training courses by their employer or as part of a public sector initiative, many older workers show little if any interest in taking part. For various reasons, many older people have a negative view of training.<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, one of the major problems facing both employers and employees is the risk of de-skilling, or skills obsolescence, when the gap widens between the skills of workers and the demands of the marketplace. This is due to ever-changing markets, technologies and work practices. In many cases, older workers find it very difficult to upgrade to new skills when their existing skills become obsolete. Sometimes, too, other issues are associated with skills obsolescence<sup>14</sup>.

Finally, many older workers experience problems with poor health, including health issues caused by difficult working conditions. Although health and safety measures are designed to minimise the health risks in the work place, these risks cannot always be avoided. In addition, some older people naturally develop health problems as they get older. This may put older people at a disadvantage in the labour market compared with younger workers.

### 2.2.3 The beneficiaries

The initial meetings held by the Focus on Seniors project task force focused on analysing the problems for older people in Lille metropolitan area's labour market. The analysis confirmed that older workers do not constitute a homogeneous group of people in terms of their capabilities and experience. There are great disparities, for example, in terms of training and qualifications. On the one hand, many older people in the labour market are comparatively unqualified: this is the case across metropolitan Lille but is especially true for Roubaix and also for the neighbouring town of Tourcoing. On the other hand, there are also a large number of older people in these areas who have reasonable academic qualifications. In addition, the Focus on Seniors project is targeting older people in work, as well as older people looking for work, so these groups of people will have different needs. These variations are being taken into account by the Focus on Seniors project, and several target groups have already been identified for the project.



On the one hand, many older people in the labour market are comparatively unqualified: this is the case across metropolitan Lille but is especially true for Roubaix and also for the neighbouring town of Tourcoing. On the other hand, there are also a large number of older people in these areas who have reasonable academic qualifications. In addition, the Focus on Seniors project is targeting older people in work, as well as older people looking for work, so these groups of people will have different needs. These variations are being taken into account by the Focus on Seniors project, and several target groups have already been identified for the project.

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for older workers include: ambiguities surrounding the requirements (e.g. retirement issues and the definition of difficult working conditions); the deadlines imposed for negotiations (organisations had to comply with the May 2009 decree by the end of December 2009); and the uncertainties of the current economic crisis that makes it difficult for organisations to make commitments for the future.

<sup>13</sup> In France, people currently aged 50 to 60 years old are less qualified overall than younger people. Access to diplomas in both technical and general fields was far more restricted for older people when they first started working. When older workers are now asked to upgrade their knowledge and skills by retraining, they often perceive this as a form of harassment and it can discourage them from retraining.

<sup>14</sup> Anyone who loses a job which they were both able to do and qualified to do, and who then has to look for another job in a different sector of the labour market, can find themselves in a mismatch situation. Their skills are not fit for the jobs potentially on offer. Also, for older workers, the term 'senior' and 'seniority' can be as problematic as 'inability' and 'inflexibility': when switching from one industry to another (e.g. manufacturing to the services sector), workers often have to start at the bottom of the ladder, regardless of their age.

### 2.2.4 The strategic objectives

The Focus on Seniors project has set itself three strategic goals for improving the situation of older people in the labour market in the Lille metropolitan area:

- commitment to an agreed public policy: to develop a shared approach for the public authorities on issues concerning the employment and job security of older workers, in order to clarify the position of older workers in employment policy, and achieve a clear and unequivocal commitment from the Public Employment Service.<sup>15</sup> It is essential for the public authorities to lead the way so that employers and other economic players understand their role and take the necessary action;
- improvement in the quality of employment-related services: to explore ways of improving the quality of assistance given to older workers, be they in work or seeking work: this is one of the three pillars of active inclusion. For the Focus on Seniors project task force, improving the calibre of the people and services assisting older people in the labour market is crucial: this must be made a top priority, before focusing on finding additional funding and creating new initiatives or mechanisms.
- different initiatives for different target sub-groups: to develop and implement several types of initiatives to meet the specific needs of the different groups of older workers (e.g. those with few qualifications; those with academic qualifications; those in work; those looking for work etc).

The Focus on Seniors project group is drawing up a collective action plan, listing each organisations' responsibilities and focused objectives. The Focus on Seniors project also plans to recruit a number of businesses and other organisations as project partners: the aim is for these organisations to help in assisting and guiding older workers, for example, through workshops, sponsorship, health counselling, and mediation services.

### 2.2.5 Analysis of the issues and types of initiatives

The Focus on Seniors project has already undertaken an objective study of the problems and issues for older people in the labour market. This has been based on unemployment surveys conducted by various partner organisations. The study has analysed various aspects relating to older job seekers, such as levels of qualification, the sectors where older job seekers were previously employed, and the sectors they would like to work in. The study has also evaluated the experiences of various associations, private enterprises and public bodies and the measures they have undertaken to support older workers, to determine which measures could be tried.

Having completed an analysis of the issues of unemployment for older people, the Focus on Seniors project identified the three key factors that play an important role in whether or not an unemployed older person succeeds in finding or retaining employment:

- skills;
- health;
- motivation / engagement.

The Focus on Seniors project task force has developed proposals for various initiatives that help to improve address these three key factors (skills, health and motivation) and take them into account in an integrated way. Two main types of initiatives that are being proposed, as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> The Public Employment Service (Pôle Emploi) comprises various bodies and agencies set up by public administrations to promote employment and vocational training and to combat unemployment.

- Existing training programmes: To encourage larger numbers of older workers to take part in existing training and back-to-work schemes and programmes, just as is now being done for young people. At present, for example, those aged 45+ represent only 2% of those benefiting from training and professionalisation<sup>16</sup>;
- Innovative personalised approaches: To promote innovative ways of specifically addressing the needs of each older worker as an individual. Having looked at the local initiatives of associations and the local employment centres (Maison de l'Emploi), the task force suggested that those listening to and assisting older people in the labour market (both those in employment and those looking for a job) need to think in terms of individual pathways, in order to provide services adapted to the needs of each user; in particular, the following areas can be discussed with older workers and job seekers:
  - Previous work: Employment centre staff should talk to each older client (i.e. each unemployed older person) to build up a coherent 'snapshot' of the kind of work they have previously done so as to better guide and advise them in their search for another job;
  - Five key aspects of a new job: To encourage a sense of individual commitment, employment service staff should talk to job seekers about each of the five determining aspects:
    - the working environment, including professional identity and interpersonal skills;
    - job security;
    - pay and conditions;
    - learning and training;
    - fear of starting a new job or of not being good enough;
  - Boosting personal motivation and engagement: Job centres and employment offices should be supported in developing innovative processes to help boost the motivation of older people in the labour market; motivational processes should be adopted not just by the public employment services and other labour market organisations, but also by employer organisations. In addition, more employers should be encouraged to discuss 'late career' options with their employees. It is not enough for employment services and employers to simply offer a job or set up training schemes: developing the personal commitment of older employees and older job seekers is essential because older people need to actively engage in finding solutions to their own employment situation;
  - More activities: To help promote a dialogue about employment for older people, there should be more initiatives, events, forums and campaigns about older people in the labour market e.g. through activities such as a 'Focus on Employing Seniors' week' (Semaine d'emploi des seniors), or a 'Focus on Employing Seniors workshop' (Forum emploi seniors), as well as visits to companies, and also meetings involving employers, older workers and older job seekers;
  - Social enterprise: Some social enterprise organisations are already involving more older people; the Focus on Seniors project task force sees the social enterprise model as a possible means of capitalising on the skills already developed by older people in their working lives, outside the conventional employment pathways. For example, the Roubaix Friendship and Sharing association (Amitié Partage) is running an initiative for people aged 45+. It organises individual and collective activities to help older unemployed people find work; it also provides job search training and tools; and it helps to arrange other services such as health centre visits and counselling sessions with employment psychologists.

The Focus on Seniors project is currently negotiating with the regional public authorities, represented by DIRECCTE, to have its policies, objectives and proposals for action validated and

<sup>16</sup> State-financed market work contracts.

applied by the public employment services and companies<sup>17</sup>. The search for other partners is also underway. In terms of local public and associative bodies, the Focus on Seniors project has a complete list of partners that could be approached. Its next step will be to contact organisations directly, via members of the group who represent them, asking them to implement the action plan once it is validated.

### 2.2.6 The importance of a coordinated partnership approach

In line with the EU strategy of active inclusion, which is to include all relevant actors in the development, implementation and evaluation of the active inclusion policy, the Focus on Seniors project is trying to build cooperation between various organisations in the public sector and between several decision-making levels. The Focus on Seniors project has already been instrumental in facilitating a dialogue between the public authorities and its departments on the one hand, and on the other hand, the front-line local employment agencies and services that deal directly with the public: including the Local Plan for Integration and Employment (PLIE), and the local employment centre (Maison de l'Emploi). Meetings of the Focus on Seniors project are a useful forum for keeping institutions informed of initiatives being taken by organisations that are active at the local level.

The Focus on Seniors project also participates in discussions between employers, public authorities and workers' representatives and acts as a mouthpiece for certain associations that are proposing innovative initiatives.

The Focus on Seniors project is therefore founded on the partnership, consultation and mobilisation of stakeholders that are striving towards the same goals: better employment prospects for older people. Each of the project partners pursues their own activities, and functions independently of the Focus on Seniors project. The Focus on Seniors project provides an overall framework and brings additional benefits: it heightens awareness of the issue of older workers' employment and increases the general feeling of responsibility, and thereby helps metropolitan Lille to capitalise further on initiatives that have until now been undertaken separately<sup>18</sup>.



<sup>17</sup> DIRECCTE is a State department interfacing directly with enterprises. Its mission is to oversee and boost economic activity and is thus able to find partner enterprises.

<sup>18</sup> The Focus on Seniors project is aimed at deploying and boosting local initiatives: launched on July 2011, the project is a way of providing an overall framework for the various actions already being undertaken by innovative organisations and agencies that until now had to operate in isolation. This helps ensure that separate initiatives meet overall policy objectives, and can bring together all stakeholders to create synergy between them. The local employment centres (maisons de l'emploi) regularly organise information sessions for job seekers and workers (e.g. forums) to keep them updated as to which trades or sectors offer opportunities, what training is available, and so on. This is also an opportunity to reassure older workers that some companies are willing to employ them and have vacancies matching their profiles. An important example is the employment centre in Val de Marque: the centre organised a forum on the employment of older workers that not only brought together employers and older job seekers, but reassured older people that they would not be a burden for companies and that they still have a place in the local labour market.

## 2.3. Anticipated outcomes

The Focus on Seniors project partners are hoping for a positive conclusion to the negotiations underway with the public authorities so that concrete commitments can be undertaken by all the organisations concerned.

In the longer term, the anticipated outcomes are as follows:

- fewer job seekers aged 45+ in Roubaix;
- more companies and other organisations willing to sign up to an agreement on employing older workers;
- additional activities and campaigns to improve the situation of older people in the labour market;
- greater focus on older people within the existing labour market policies and measures.

The Focus on Seniors project anticipates that all the steps now being taken by the project will ultimately impact the entire employment supply and demand chain: greater consideration will be given to older workers and attitudes and practices concerning them will change profoundly. This will result in an inclusive labour market which does not exclude elder workers in any way from the labour market: this of course is the whole purpose of the Focus on Seniors project.

## 2.4. The main challenges for Focus on Seniors

Currently, the issue of employment for older workers is not a national policy priority: instead, the national government's prime focus is at present on reducing long term unemployment for people of all ages, and on getting young people into work. The Nord Pas de Calais region has a similar focus: it has just signed a pact that helps ensure the employment and future prospects of young people. The implication is that the employment problems of older workers are not being recognised or addressed. Meanwhile, many employers continue to make decisions about whether or not to keep their older workers in their jobs, and also seem reluctant to recruit any new older workers. In this context, the Focus on Seniors project aims to highlight and address the particular difficulties of older workers in the labour market.

The Focus on Seniors project currently has no specific budget or funding: it is a collaborative partnership of many different stakeholders. For its activities to be effective, it is counting on its ability to increase general awareness of the importance of the issues at stake. In the current economic crisis, it is difficult for all organisations, whether public or private, to fund any additional costly investment, so at the moment, the project is focusing on policy development, planning, and working with other stakeholders to ensure all their separate activities are in line with the overall policy.

Finally, another of the challenges facing the group lies in how to effectively target a specific segment of the population. To take one example, the Focus on Seniors task force spoke to a company that had arranged a seminar on how to minimise stress at work (e.g. how to ensure the right posture and how to adapt their work stations); although the seminar was mainly aimed at older workers, very few older workers showed any interest; instead, some of their younger workers were very keen to attend. This example highlights the difficulty of trying to arrange specific measures for a specific target group. The target group may perceive the measure as a potential form of harassment or stigmatisation, but other groups of people may feel they are being unfairly overlooked or neglected. In an attempt to overcome this difficulty, the Focus on Seniors project is now recommending that initiatives should be open to all employees, but should be tailored to address the needs of specific groups of people.

## 2.5 Future plans

If the negotiations with the public authorities are successful, a clear overall policy for older people in the labour market will be put in place, and the different Focus on Seniors partners will be able to work together to implement their proposed action plan. Older workers' problems could then be taken in account by all the employment operators, and the existing initiatives of some of the stakeholders could be publicised and implemented more widely.

Regardless of the outcome of the negotiations with the public authorities, the Focus on Seniors project task force has developed an overall policy for the partners to work with, has established an effective framework for cooperation between different public actors involved in the problems of older people in the labour market, and has developed an action plan.

This approach not only brings all the different stakeholders together, it also maintains public attention on the problems of older workers: these problems are not particularly known at the moment because youth employment is being given a higher priority. Whatever the public authorities decide in the future, the Focus on Seniors discussions and plans will enable the different stakeholders to implement efficient strategies dedicated to helping older people in the labour market to find and retain work.

With the demographic ageing of the labour market population, the Focus on Seniors initiative is helping to solve the issues surrounding unemployment for older people and is thereby helping to actively include older people not just in Roubaix but right across the Lille metropolitan area.

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