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['Cycling Friends' for migrant women \(Belgium\)](#)



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City:

Leuven

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Topic:

Walking and cycling

Mobility management

Description

Fietsvriendinnen or Cycling Friends is a training project whereby Belgian women help migrant women gain cycling skills and experience. The project matches up migrant and non-migrant couples who make cycling trips together for a period of 5 months.

Background & Objectives

Since 2008 the Integration Department of the city of Leuven has provided cycling courses aimed at migrant women to provide basic cycling skills. However, despite this initiative there still remains a huge barrier for migrant women to adopt cycling within the city.

The Cycling Friends project wants also to enhance the mobility options of migrant women. Every

year, it aims to match-up 10 couples of cycling friends including an experienced female non-migrant volunteer and migrant woman that had just completed the cycling course of the Integration Department. Every couple has to do at least 5 cycling trips together. The aim is to improve the migrant women's cycling skills, and confidence, make them aware of the positive effects that cycling has on their personal lives and help them better integrate into Belgian society.

Implementation

In 2008 the Integration Department of Leuven, Mobiel 21 (a Belgian NGO on sustainable mobility) and KVLV (a women's organisation) launched the Cycling Friends project in the city of Leuven. From 2011, Mobiel 21 aims to organise the project in three different municipalities every year, in collaboration with local migrant and socio-cultural groups.

Every year a recruitment call for non-migrant cycling friends is made through the Mobiel 21 website and newsletter, specialised media, channels of the partners, websites for volunteering. Immigrant woman are recruited via the Integration Department.

The project starts off with a 'happening' where the women meet and are matched into couples. The project initiators provide initial coaching and follow-up sessions with the couples (in monitor progress and address possible problems). In addition, three different workshops are held at each location concerning traffic regulations for cyclists, intercultural communication, small cycle maintenance and the importance and benefits of cycling.

Results and conclusions

Overall, for the 3 years that the project has been running, the results have been very positive. Most of the objectives were achieved in terms of the number of participating couples and cycle trips made. A key success factor relates to the cooperation between the different organisations- KVLV and Mobiel 21 who recruit non-migrant women and the Integration Department who recruits migrant women. Teaching 'traffic skills' to the migrant woman was a very rewarding experience for the non-migrant women.

Perhaps the main barrier to the initiative is the amount of effort involved to contact and recruit migrant woman. It was also important to ensure the migrant woman possessed sufficient cycling skills so they could participate in the project. Some migrant participants were reluctant to be photographed, which restricted publicity and communication of the project to other people. For non-migrant woman it was important to provide them with clear information regarding insurance and their liability in case of accidents.

Keywords

measures - awareness raising

user groups - leisure cyclists

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