



Netherlands // CycleOn

Biking safely, aging beautifully: empowering seniors through safe cycling

The programme **CycleOn** organised by the Dutch Government acknowledges the importance of cycling as a means of transportation for the elderly in the Netherlands, keeping people healthy and included in their communities. However, elderly people are also the most at risk of cycling accidents. In response to this issue, CycleOn works with local social networks to promote safe cycling among the elderly.

Including everyone in the country of cyclists

The Netherlands is a country of cycling. There, the bike is an important means of transportation and elderly people are no exception to this. Cycling helps to keep people fit and included in their communities, but elderly people are unfortunately among the most at risk on a bike. The number of elderly cyclists injured in accidents has increased dramatically in the past 25 years. Therefore, under the motto “do not get off, but keep on pedalling”, CycleOn aims to ensure that elderly people are included in the Dutch cycle network, by motivating them to continue enjoying the health and pleasure benefits of cycling while focusing on safety.

Partners

Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management

Road safety was the main motivation for initiating the project, with a focus on behavioural

Introduction

Active travel

change rather than infrastructure. This initial emphasis on road safety quickly transformed into a broader project of promoting cycling among the elderly for the benefit of their health, happiness and social inclusion.

Cycling for health and community inclusion

Running for the last five years, the CycleOn programme collaborates with provinces and municipalities across the Netherlands to organise interventions and activities that encourage elderly people to cycle and help them to improve their own road safety. The Dutch government facilitates these interventions by providing materials, resources, information and training. The implementation of the project, however, is heavily decentralised, with municipalities having great freedom and space for creativity in how they carry out the project. Activities on the ground vary from cycle groups, workshops with bike mechanics, information services, safety campaigns, recreational cycling campaigns, trainings for e-bikes and sessions with physiotherapists who help people learn how best to cycle as the body gets older. CycleOn has also mapped a network of cycle routes which are safe and accessible for elderly cyclists, providing an important resource for them to enjoy longer leisurely cycles. These routes tend to be about 25 km long, with wide cycle lanes, lots of greenery and no dangerous interactions. A network of around 100 of such routes has now been put together.

The programme's activities take place as a large collaboration between many partners, such as cycling organisations, local sports groups, bike mechanics, physiotherapists and ergotherapists, organisations that support the elderly and social or religious organisations,

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such as the church or bridge clubs. The aim is to reach people where they are in a way that is accessible and enjoyable, promoting cycling in a safe and responsible way for the health and social benefits it can bring.

A national plan with a local flair

CycleOn is run by a small team at the national level and offers guidance to provinces and municipalities that carry out the programme. They provide toolboxes, communications and branding materials, a national website with accessible information and guidance on different interventions that can be made. Each participating municipality appoints a CycleOn coordinator whose task is to search for and connect with potential local partners who come into direct contact with elderly residents in that area. The coordinators are often people from the transport or health departments of local government. Along with the local partners, such as a bike repair shop or a physiotherapist, they then add step-by-step actions to existing activities, ensuring the local partners can work as independently as possible while also promoting the activities. Currently, around 220 municipalities are actively participating in the programme, with up to 3,000 participants in some areas.

The decentralised nature of the programme goes together with its strong focus on learning and knowledge-sharing. Municipalities can implement activities in their own way and even use the CycleOn resources to come up with their own interventions. When something is successful at the local level, that knowledge is brought to the national level and spread to the rest of the network.





The most easily targeted group for the programme is the elderly who have been cycling for their entire lives. However, it was soon noticed that some groups were being excluded, such as those with a migration background or those who had not cycled before. Therefore, trainings are now also offered for beginners to learn how to cycle.

One of the most popular events of the programme is the CycleOn Day. This is a large gathering of people with a strong focus on social activities. The day involves many local partners such as bike mechanics who install free bike mirrors, service bikes, promote the use of helmets

and give advice, for example about having the saddle at an appropriate height.

Representatives from the cycling union, Fietzersbond, organise fun quizzes about the rules of the road, physiotherapists teach mobility exercises that people can do at home and different bikes are presented, such as tricycles, e-bikes and cargo bikes. Although the goal is to encourage elderly people to cycle more, a central element of the programme is to ensure that this is done in a good way, with a focus on safety, education, and using suitable bicycles.

Despite CycleOn's success and broad reach, it is not an expensive programme. This is because it mainly relies on already existing networks and groups. The Dutch government does not provide direct finances to the participating municipalities. These tend to have a budget of around €10,000 per year to carry out activities. They build on what is already there in their communities, such as bike mechanics and social groups. Such participants get additional training in "Train the Trainer" programmes.

Many participating municipalities carry out surveys after their activities and have reported improvements in cycling safety as well as an uptake in the use of helmets among elderly residents. With everything that has been learned so far in the programme, CycleOn has developed a road map at the national level to provide inspiration and ideas for further projects at the local level. With a vibrant and diverse network of participants and a strong culture of learning and knowledge-sharing, there is no end in sight for the future development of the programme.



Next steps

CycleOn has just finished an evaluation period where its progress to date was reviewed and assessed. The responsible ministry has signed off on another 5 years of running the programme, so there is great potential for building on the progress that has been made so far.

Top tip

For municipalities that want to run a similar programme, it can be helpful to start with small pilots to get the programme going. Be action-focused and keep it simple. The experience of CycleOn shows that elderly cyclists are happy to participate in simple activities that let them socialise with others.

Key learnings

The reach of the programme was broadened once the core focus was switched from solely safety to fun and exercise. This also made participants and organisers more passionate.

The network established through the programme is close-knit, where everyone has a role. It is run in a bottom-up and welcoming way with a focus on knowledge sharing.

Behavioural change is slow so it takes time to see progress, but CycleOn is a learning programme under constant development.