

**IncluCities Transfer Workshop 7 February 2022 |
St Jean de la Ruelle (SJDLR) - Brussels (B)**

Meeting Report

Conducting a strategic assessment of the needs of migrant residents and developing an appropriate, gender-sensitive response

The Transfer Workshop began with an introduction and welcome by Maria Grazia Montella on behalf of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CCRE). A [video](#) was screened that set the scene for the day's discussions. Interviewees from St Jean de la Ruelle, the mentee city, described how they were learning about the needs of the city's migrant residents and looked forward to sharing what they learned during the project. For the French Association of the Council of European Municipalities (AFCCRE), a particular priority was meeting the needs of migrant women. Staff of BAPA, the City of Brussels' integration agency underlined their holistic approach and support for migrant women.



IncluCities Transfer Knowledge Workshop



Saint-Jean-de-la-Ruelle & City of Brussels

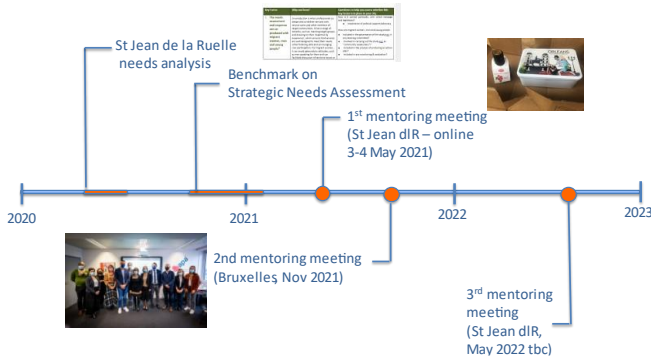


Picking up themes from the video, SJDLR's deputy mayor, Fabien Riviere da Silva explained the main characteristics of the city: situated about 130km south of Paris, adjacent to the city of Orleans, about 16,500 residents lived in an area of about 6 km². Two priority neighbourhoods were home to a high proportion of its migrant population, which came from 20 countries. Deputy mayor Olivia Bellizio underlined the diversity of communities and the challenge of ensuring their access to public services. Women were the first "victims" of this lack of integration. The staff of the city's services were not always well informed about migrants' specific needs and project participants had identified a need for better training and support.



MigrationWork consultant Richard Williams, who is facilitating the learning exchange, summarized progress to date.

The mentoring process so far



An initial desk-based needs analysis had been conducted. Although the French constitution severely limited the gathering of data based on ethnicity, available data showed disparities in outcomes for migrant women and girls, particularly in the area of employment.

Richard had led the development of a benchmark and then in May 2021, SJDLR had hosted the first mentoring visit, sadly online, because of COVID regulations. Preparations for the visit had required reaching out to stakeholders and partners, which had been useful in itself, and the process had identified some key themes to take forward in the next visit to Brussels.

Next on the agenda was the political vision of the mentoring work. Fabien Riviere da Silva pointed out that the next few weeks would be challenging in light of the impending Presidential election in April. The strength of Far Right candidates underlined the divisiveness of the migration issue, even in an open-minded city like Saint Jean de la Ruelle. That context was associated with cuts to funding for social work. Olivia Bellizio felt that that the media’s pre-occupation with the Far Right helped to spread their ideas, so it was crucial to rebut them: local and regional governments needed to take the lead in expressing solidarity.

AFCRE’s Valérie Loirat described how Saint Jean de la Ruelle had found the IncluCities method useful when developing an Action Plan. The prohibition of gathering data based on ethnic had been a challenge, but a combination of desk research, discussions and the study visit to Brussels, had led to an increasing focus on migrant women, with an emphasis on intersectionality. The ever more challenging political context in France meant that actions had to be straightforward to implement.

Ms Loirat was keen to learn from others how they dealt with a political and social environment that did not welcome migrants. A participant from Levadia observed that migrants had faced considerable hostility in Greece in the past, but people were now more used to migrants and understood that there was nothing to worry about: migrants simply wanted to make a living.





Mechelen, the Belgian city, had developed a long-term strategy over the past 15 years based on presenting a positive narrative. instance, the city implement a language policy, to adapt the languages in the administrative services (by offering training, information...).

The City of Brussels had much to offer as a mentor: a super-diverse city, 36% of its residents were born abroad, in 180 different countries. Christelle Sermon described BAPA’s holistic approach (social support, language courses, help with employment, housing etc) constantly developing and adapting services to clients’ needs. A current priority was digital exclusion. Nevertheless, even a mentor city had much to learn. Her colleague Gaëlle Timmerman had found the process of structuring the second visit along the themes that had emerged from the first visit (precariousness, employment, women, etc) had brought them together with new partners. BAPA were reframing and rethinking their work as a result. Valérie Loirat found the European dimension of the learning process particularly useful.

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Saint-Jean-de-la-Ruelle (AFCCRE)



City of Brussels (BRULOCALIS)



Following the presentation of a video of the visit to the City of Brussels, the discussion turned to the SJDLR’s **Action Plan**. On returning from Brussels, the team had been keen to target migrant women and respond to the real need that they knew was there. They decided to create a “Womens Centre” (*Maison des Femmes*) that would offer social support, practical information

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and advice on their rights, as well as French lessons. Barriers to access would be overcome by including a nursery and an interpreting service. Women who were well-known in their communities would be recruited to champion the project. Staff would include a social worker trained in the rights of migrants and violence against women and they would look at recruiting young volunteers. Funding would be sought either from national or European funds.

Participants from other mentoring schemes offered ideas and expertise. Giovanna, offered to meet to share the experience of the Women's Centre in Schaerbeek, while Michèle, from BAPA-VIA, described how their service had been co-created with its client group. It was noted that the SJDLR's context was very different from Brussels', with significantly less statutory funding. Nevertheless, SJDLR was determined to include beneficiaries in the process.

In the final session Richard Williams outlined the next steps towards implementation of the action plan. The French participants stressed that they wanted Saint Jean de la Ruelle to be an example of good practice. Many associations and women were already involved in tackling violence against women and they wanted to reach out to other stakeholders. The project needed to be approved by the city Council, but they were confident that it would move forward soon.



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