

Success Story of HAPPY



1. Company profile

Happy Bar & Grill is a chain of daily restaurants in Bulgaria. The exclusive quality of food and the high standard of service account for the best-in-class brand Happy Bar & Grill. The chain is the largest number of restaurants in Bulgaria located in the heart of larger towns and cities, or along the highways and the main roads. This quality cannot be achieved without the Happy personnel which is trained to follow the high corporate standards. In the recent years there is a stagnation at the Bulgarian labour market which also affected the restaurant chain. That is why the company has opened the professional opportunities to different target groups which are socially or economically disadvantaged, especially for the positions requiring low-skilled labour.

2. Previous experience with refugees

Happy did not have previous experience with employing refugees before they met CATRO and the COME IN approach. During the initial talks with CATRO, the HR manager of Happy has showed great interest to provide professional opportunities to refugees and open-mindedness in terms of the difficulties they may encounter in the integration process. However, the HR manager had some concerns if the personnel will have prejudice to have a refugee colleague.

3. COME IN approach

The first contact to CATRO was on an event organized by UNHCR, on which the COME IN approach was presented to the HR manager. The company has shown great interest in hiring refugees but have never went through the whole recruitment process and did not know anything about the target group (their statute, work permission, cultural differences, etc.). That is why the HR manager has requested CATRO counseling and coaching services in order to help them contact the refugees and also explain them the legal and administrative procedures around refugees' employment. Furthermore, they took part in the COME IN workshop dedicated to topics like Competence validation and On-the-job training in order to prepare themselves.

4. Refugees' integration

The main goal of Happy is to provide professional opportunities to all refugees that are planning to stay permanently in Bulgaria and are willing to work as kitchen personnel. Unfortunately, in the beginning there was low interest from refugees. There were two ladies who has went through the Search and Selection process successfully but due to their religion and cultural norms – they did not accept the job offers. Their husbands insisted that they cannot work as there are women and have to stay at home and look after their children.

However, in May, 2019 a lady from Pakistan who had previous experience as a cook in her homeland, has started as a kitchen personnel responsible for the food preparations. The position is based in a restaurant in Sofia – Manastirski livadi district. The lady does not speak Bulgarian, but the Happy team has welcomed her warmly and they are managing to communicate with gestures. The restaurant manager has shared that she has expected to be difficult for the team and the lady to work together and for her as a manager to integrate the refugee at the workplace but with some ideas from the COME IN module about the On-the-job training (e.g. Training methods – Demonstration), she has managed to cope with the initial obstacles that were in place. In addition, Happy has made a compromise with the uniforms that every employee has work. Due to religious reasons, the refugee wanted to keep her hijab which was accepted by Happy. During her integration there were also some employment issues that have arisen as the refugee women did not understand the salary taxes and the way she will be paid. Here Happy has contacted Caritas (an NGO Organisation that support refugees) in order to find a translator who has help both sides – the employer and employee to communicate and discuss transparently the salary formation and the Bulgarian employment law. The refugee women is satisfied from the job she has, the flexibility and understanding from the Happy management and the way the other employees have integrated her.