



Innovation Spotlight: Sunshine Bouquet



Tent's Innovation Spotlight series features companies that are leveraging their core business operations to integrate refugees around the world in new, exciting ways. We hope it inspires your company to consider new ways to support refugees.

This spotlight may be most useful to companies involved in agriculture in refugee-hosting countries.

The project
in a nutshell



Hiring Venezuelan refugees in Colombia's flower industry

Sunshine Bouquet is a U.S.-headquartered company with operations in Colombia that grows and sells fresh-cut flowers in the international market. Due to a scarcity of agricultural workers in the areas where the company grows flowers, Sunshine Bouquet initially established a temporary hiring program at its flower farms to relocate and employ Colombian seasonal agricultural workers who sought work on the off-seasons of other crops, such as coffee. The additional workers boosted the company's production during busy months prior to Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. With the arrival of millions of Venezuelan refugees into Colombia in recent years, in 2017 the company started to expand this program to include Venezuelan refugees in Colombia and Colombian returnees from Venezuela.

Sunshine Bouquet adapted its existing relocation program to fit the needs of Venezuelan refugees. The hiring program involves: identifying and hiring Venezuelan refugees; providing accommodation, transportation and meals to address the needs of recently-arrived Venezuelans; and providing pathways to permanent employment. To identify candidates for the program and to comply with the legal requirements of hiring Venezuelans in Colombia, the company sought support from Colombian government agencies. Once hired, the company facilitated the relocation and housing of Venezuelan workers by collaborating with the UN Refugee Agency and other NGO partners. The company also provided Venezuelan employees with psychosocial support, as well as training in soft skills and financial literacy. To establish a welcoming environment, the company trained managers and staff on how to facilitate the integration of new Venezuelan employees.

The Innovation



Targeting Venezuelans to fill agricultural labor shortages

Sunshine Bouquet broke new ground by adapting an existing initiative that relocated and temporarily hired Colombian agricultural workers to include Venezuelan refugees. With many agricultural workers leaving rural areas to find employment in major cities, agribusinesses around the world face labor shortages. The seasonal relocation program that employed Colombian agricultural workers was successful, but only filled part of this labor gap. When the company's leadership took note of the hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans arriving in Colombia, they saw an opportunity to offer refugees employment while

closing this gap. The company identified Cucuta, a town on the Colombian-Venezuelan border, as the location where they would interview and hire the first group of 550 temporary Venezuelan workers. Once the company expanded its efforts to hire Venezuelans, it ran into legal and regulatory challenges, as Venezuelan refugees often lacked the documentation usually required by Colombian companies during the recruitment process. The company addressed this challenge by remodeling its hiring program, extending work opportunities to an underemployed population, while paving the way to permanent employment.

The Results



By shifting its hiring strategy, Sunshine Bouquet saw business benefits and positive social impact. Before bringing Venezuelan refugees to their seasonal work centers, the turnover rate for the work center was 39%; after including Venezuelan workers in the temporary hiring program, the turnover rate for the work center dropped to 10%, and absenteeism dropped from 9% to 1%. Productivity increased by 14% over this period. Venezuelan workers at this work center also had a learning curve that was four days faster than other employees.

The refugee hiring program has welcomed over 2,000 Venezuelans, 150 of whom have successfully made the transition from temporary to permanent employment after participating in the seasonal hiring program. In 2019, Sunshine Bouquet committed to hiring a further 360 temporary Venezuelans and an additional 100 permanent Venezuelan workers each year.

What made the project a success?



Sunshine Bouquet adapted its existing hiring processes to ensure that Venezuelans could be identified, hired, relocated, housed, and trained to work for the company. Although this adaptation had an upfront cost, senior leadership of the company provided support throughout the process. To ensure the success of the initiative, the company created internal alignment across all departments, and provided training for management and employees to facilitate Venezuelans' integration process. This internal strategy

promoted an environment of zero tolerance of discrimination and xenophobia. As Sunshine Bouquet's program has continued to grow, the company has sought support from the Colombian government, bilateral agencies and NGOs. With assistance from the U.N. Refugee Agency for logistical needs like transportation and accommodation, and GIZ, a German development agency, for training, the company was able to provide a comprehensive program that integrated Venezuelans into the business.

NEXT STEPS

To develop a similar project - or brainstorm about other ways your company can work with refugees - reach out to the Tent team at info@tent.org!



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