

Rising you

Rising You is a cooperative, a collaboration, between various partners who want to guide young talents to challenging jobs.

Together, we are concerned about the fate of socially vulnerable youth, and particularly of young refugees. We are struck by their often traumatic history and look on with admiration at their determination and resilience to build a better life. We found each other in an entrepreneurial, sustainable, and integrated approach that provides social value for young people, shareholders, and stakeholders. A warm, professional climbing club, top-notch training, and customer-oriented service strengthen our social ambitions.

At the Rising You Academy, young refugees can take courses that lead to employment. These courses are focused on jobs on a height, for example:

- Industrial painter at height
- Installer of high-voltage pylons and lines
- Telecom technician
- Scaffolding builder
- Solar panel installer
- Industrial cleaner

ARTICLE I



Refugees over the moon with high-altitude job - Twenty young people take a test as high-voltage mast painters by Hans Otten

Young refugees are looking for work, IRIS is looking for new workers. The term 'heavenly connection' takes on a new meaning in this case, as the company is specifically looking for painters for high altitudes. Even with safety harnesses and cables, it's still not a job for the faint-hearted.

On the premises of IRIS Group in Geel, a high-voltage mast without power cables tickles the low-hanging clouds. Although the mercury flirts with the freezing point, twenty young men are climbing the scaffolding with climbing hooks. In all their diversity, they share one characteristic: they arrived in our country as young refugees.

The initiative is a unique collaboration between IRIS Group, VDAB, and Rising You(th). The latter is a social enterprise that trains young refugees to work at heights or in hard-to-reach places. IRIS Group, known from the cleaning sector but also a specialist in painting high-voltage masts, is the first employer with whom a concrete employment project for this target group is established. *"Of the 34 candidates we initially brought together, 27 remained after an introductory day. Here in Geel, there are now nearly twenty refugees present to take the specific tests,"* says Jan Van Keirsbilck from VDAB.

62 Nationalities

Those tests consist of a written exam on the Contractors' Safety Checklist (VCA) and climbing the pylon under individual supervision as a practical test. It is not so much about courage, but rather about adhering to safety regulations. At the same time, it is a test for the young men themselves to see if they can really handle this work at dozens of meters high.

IRIS Group hopes to be able to hire twelve new employees from the group. *"Due to the adventurous nature, this work appeals to many men, but at the top of the mast, the reality is completely different from being safely on the ground,"* says Lotte Clijsters from IRIS. *"We are continuously looking for new people."*

"Why refugees?" "Why not? We now have 3,600 employees from 62 different nationalities. For us, it's normal to work with diverse cultures. These new recruits integrate smoothly. We are very much involved in this refugee project and I hope to be able to implement something similar in our cleaning departments."

"Scared? It's not that bad"

Amanullah feels solid ground under his feet and shows satisfaction. *"It's the very first time I've done such a climb,"* says the young Afghan. *"Scared? That wasn't too bad. I think it will go even smoother next time, you just need to get used to it. But I am athletic, I play soccer and cricket. I would really like to do this job. My past three years in Belgium, I have not found any work."*

"I have climbed before during holidays. I'm not afraid, you're well secured," Abdul testifies. *"I have been in Belgium for almost a year and a half now, but I previously stayed in Greece for four years. There, I did work for a while as a painter in a factory. This work is different. Here you need to keep your head in the game."*

Training program

For the selected lucky ones, an extensive training program will follow in the coming weeks. Rising You(th) will take them on a climbing training in the Ardennes. *"From our experience with this target group during climbing camps, we know that they have a suitable physique for it. Most young refugees are light, slender, and muscular,"* says Benjamin Gérard from Rising You(th). *"We are currently working on a second project with a telecom company, which places transmission towers on buildings, among other things. For youngsters who are unable to find work at IRIS today, we still have alternatives up our sleeve."*

Continuous coaching

The need for continuous coaching had been underestimated by IRIS Group. *"Many young people in our climbing program are traumatized by the war. They need an anchor point,"* says Benjamin Gérard, founder of Rising You. This social enterprise took on the personal guidance throughout the entire process. *"Without Benjamin, this wouldn't have worked,"* admits Lotte Clijsters. *"Even after the training, participants kept asking for him."* The value of such deep personal contact should not be underestimated by a company.

That the priorities of Flemish job seekers and asylum seekers differ has once again been demonstrated when the twelve trainees were offered a permanent contract. They had passed the language and technical safety tests, and the IBO had been successfully completed. A major celebration moment, IRIS Group thought. *"But they hesitated to sign,"* says the HR manager. *"They thought there was a slave contract in front of them."* *"In their countries of origin, the labor market is more informal, especially for low-skilled workers. Making agreements with unions or reporting your absence when you are sick, reading labor regulations, and such: we have to teach them all that,"* laughs Benjamin Gérard. The collaboration between Rising You and IRIS Group was a pilot project. Or as the driving force behind the climbing club puts it: *"We needed a flagship project to highlight our collaboration with the private sector."* Meanwhile, IRIS Group is continuing to fish in the pool of asylum seekers. Lotte Clijsters: *"Recently, one of the team leaders approached our director and said: a refugee isn't so bad after all."*