

Self-confident Women Working in Bakery

It's 11 o'clock in the morning at the Bakery Training Centre run by women in Mazar-e Sharif's northeast: small cakes, filled pastries and neatly sliced loaves of white bread are stacked on baking trays. Multiple ovens are giving off the pleasant aroma of freshly baked cakes and wholemeal bread. There are bowls on tables where women are already mixing the dough for the next batches.

The women have been at the training centre since eight o'clock preparing products for their customers – mostly food stores, people who run market stalls, and private households. The head of the training centre, Nasiba, 24 years old, is very satisfied: 'Our centre has only been up and running for half a year and we are already processing 50 kilograms of flour on normal days. Of course, we sell a lot more on holidays such as the Nowruz new year's festival or the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks Ramadan's end.'

However, the delicious items baked in the modern white building in the city's northeast are actually just a by-product of the main activity here: helping trainee bakers and established businesspeople from the six northern provinces of Afghanistan learn the art of baking or improve their existing skills. New recipes, baking techniques and sales methods are covered, too. With a firm focus on practical applications, the ten well-trained women employed by the training centre teach the participants how they can reinvigorate their businesses, create new products and use modern technology. The German government financed the Bakery Training Centre's construction and equipment, and Balkh province's Department of Women's Affairs provided the building site. Since the 100-square-metre centre was officially opened in September 2017, 40 men and women have already attended training courses here in the first six months. The new baking techniques and wide range of products have allowed them to establish or expand their own businesses.

Life has also changed for the training centre's ten female employees since they started their new jobs here. Farima, who is 20 years old, explains: 'We work in two shifts from 8 am to 4 pm. This means that I can also study part-time. I earn 5,000 Afghanis a month here, the equivalent of around 60 euros. With this money, I can cover a significant portion of my expenses and, at the same time, I have a job that I really enjoy.' All of the employees value their income a lot. The women can contribute to their household budgets, and their income gives them the opportunity to do new things with their own money. 'I was never able to finish my training because we never had enough money in my family. Now I can go to university with my



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own money. The women here are simply enjoying the fact that they are financially independent and can decide for themselves what they spend their money on,' Nasiba says self-confidently.

Following on from the training centre's great success, the women are now planning to open another sales outlet in Mazar-e Sharif to make their tasty products available to even more customers.

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