

STORYTELLING

“Maria Elena’s Smile”

The following story is about a young woman who has combined the **passion for a profession** with the great willpower necessary to **find the job opportunity** she had always looked for.

Maria Elena, 32 years old, graduated in Surveying and Mapping, after high school continued to work on her skills in order to cope with the great difficulties of finding a job in her home region in Italy, where the youth unemployment rate is very high.

THE TESTIMONIAL

European mobile worker: Maria Elena

Age: 32 years old

From: Italy

Engaged in: Malta

Contract: dental practice

Although she studied surveying, **Maria Elena has always cared about “people’s smiles”**; in fact, her only **great desire** has always been to **work as a dental assistant**. Maria Elena’s path was a difficult one, as she told us: “I started working at a dental practice in my home town with no prospects, with an undetermined working time and few job guarantees; but my desire to learn the job I had always dreamed of since I was a teen pushed me to take the challenge. After all, the scent of antiseptic, the feeling of cleanliness, calm, order and silence that belongs with dental studies had always fascinated me. On the other hand, however, I had to deal with the frustration of uncertainty, as **very often work reality is different from how you have imagined it.**”

After three years, Maria Elena decided she had had enough of that life and **decided to search for another job**. The period following that decision was, as she described it, “exhausting”. “For months all my spare time was dedicated to the job search: I even applied to jobs that were very far from home, contacting training and employment agencies operating in my region and nationwide I made a relentless and daily check of **on-line job offers**, but without success. I remember the moment I found a real professional opportunity clearly” – Maria Elena continues – “It was January 9, 2019, and I had just finished working after a very long shift; I was so **tired and unmotivated**. I started looking for over 30s work opportunities online; I had already visited the **EURES website** in the past and applied for some positions, but I had never focused on the **“Your first EURES job”** section. So, I decided to **upload my CV there**, looking for opportunities among English-speaking countries – I knew the English language quite well having obtained a linguistic certification. My research started by reading the offers in Ireland and in the UK, but no longer in the healthcare sector, so much had been the disappointment of the previous experience that had professionally drained me”. Yet her passion for the role of “Chairside Dental Assistant” and her aim to obtain that position in a big private dental facility stood out in her CV, so a few weeks after signing up to the YfEj website, **she received an e-mail directly from an Your first EURES job Adviser** who informed her that a healthcare company was looking for a dental assistant in the **Republic of Malta**.

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A few days later, the Adviser put Maria Elena in touch with the CEO of the dental clinic, a large organization which already had several offices in Italy and was expanding to other European countries, including Malta, the beautiful island located in the heart of the Mediterranean sea with cobalt blue waters, unique views and a thousand-year history.

“The job interview took place at the headquarters in Cagliari (Sardinia)” – says Maria Elena – “Where, among other things, I also was shown how to use the management software and spent the day assisting a few doctors. From the very next day the **YfEj Adviser** who was following me, **contacted me to find out how the interview had gone and continued to give me timely information on all activities**, supporting me with all the **benefits** provided by my recruitment path, starting with the reimbursement of all **travel expenses** for the interview, the contribution for the **relocation costs** up to the reimbursement of the **English course** I attended to certify my knowledge of the language before moving to Malta».

On May 2019 Maria Elena left for Malta and for her new job: it was not an easy choice, since she had to leave her friends, her family, the place where she lived, her habits, “It was like starting from scratch” – Maria Elena told us – “Fortunately, I have been **tutored by an extraordinary person** who used to work in Cagliari and helped me for a few months so as to facilitate my integration in the workplace and in the island». A meaningful presence for Maria Elena who, during the first weeks, greatly suffered the absence of her family and the loss of her habits but was helped to deal with what she called a real “jump into the void”.

One year later, Maria Elena has fully integrated into her role and runs the new dental practice where several doctors operate, from surgeons to orthodontists. Her tasks are very varied; in fact she deals with customer reception, quote collection, explanation of care plans, maintenance of work tools, delivery of dental impressions and collection of finished works from the technical lab, accountancy and all the other administrative duties related to the dental office with an average commitment of 8 hours a day and a permanent contract. Maria Elena, in her words, goes “happy at work” and feels at ease with the doctors, with whom – she told us – she has “a very fruitful collaboration”. Even the most difficult period, that of the recent pandemic, was experienced by her serenely, facing only dental emergencies and professionally managing the situation. After a few months her partner also, graduated in Sciences of Cultural Heritage, joined her in Malta and was hired at a museum.

Maria Elena certainly showed great fortitude and a strong motivation in pursuing her goals. Before saying our farewells, we asked her what she advises those who, like her, are looking for a job in a difficult economic situation such as the current one: «What I can advise is to **never give up**, especially if you feel uncomfortable in your current workplace, if you are being undervalued or lack any professional growth prospects. We must realize that there is no point in persevering just because we are cocooned in an apparent 'comfort zone'. **Keep on searching without leaving out any possibility**, even those that might lead you abroad. I would never have imagined I would one day work in Malta ... but here I am! So, I advise all youngsters looking for a job to take advantage, as much as it is possible, of the **opportunities presented by Europeans projects like YfEj**. Even if it's hard to find the perfect matching, what really matters is to keep on trying; don't let a “no” or a disappointment get you down. It took me five months to find this opportunity, and sometimes a 'no' just means that that was not your way and you have to go further than that.”