

Survival by 'Take-Away' in Germany

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My name is Senem, I am Turkish and have lived in Germany for many years with my daughter who is now 31. For the last 11 years I ran my own small cafe in Bremen, before that I worked in all sorts of cafes and restaurants, mainly in large hotels, as did my daughter.

When the Corona crisis began I was terribly worried that I would lose my business and my self confidence took a big knock. I had a hard time in the last few years because other cafes near me had set up, offering lower prices, but very recently they had gone bust. In order to keep going during those difficult years, I had worked full time at my cafe and also part time at a hotel, so at least I had been able to pay all my debts. When the lockdown began, the hotel shut down and I received some money from the job centre.

As it turned out, at the start of Corona my cafe was the only one still opening in the neighbourhood. School kids and employees of the nearby job centre had been my main customers, the schools closed, but the job centre kept going, though their own cafeteria was shut. So I started a take-away service, asking customers to bring their own containers. I saved money by not having to buy boxes, and less washing up. My employees all had to be sent home but got paid by the job centre. I could earn enough to pay my rent and did not need money to go shopping for fun as the shops were closed anyway.

There was no call for breakfast, all I served was lunch and that was great – at last I did not have to get up at 4:30am every day and I was home by 3pm! It was truly a dream come true that I finally had time to spend with my family and my garden. No stress with traffic jams and finding somewhere to park, juggling two jobs. I had worked about 300 hours a month before and always gone out to the theatre, concerts, meeting my friends. Now I was able to have time for myself, to read, to relax, and at last to rest and recuperate. I realised: You don't need all that action! Sometimes I even watched TV in the afternoon, I had more time for my partner and my daughter became the expert cream-cake baker.



In June the cafeteria at the job centre opened again and some students visited my cafe again. I have set up tables and chairs for 1,2 or 3 people at safe distances and everyone has to wear a mask except when they eat. I keep sanitizing everything and nobody can use the toilet. I am not too worried of becoming infected, but I have become careful. We are all wearing masks and keeping our distance, I do not hug anymore.

It will be difficult now to find jobs in hotels. I have decided to work less and spend less money, go to fewer restaurants and buy fewer expensive items, travel less. I will still go and see a few rock bands but all in all I will become more modest and have less a stressful life.

By Senem, June 2020