

# Sectoral Brief

## Hotels, catering and tourism

### Gender

**60-70 per cent of workers in the hotels, catering and tourism sector are women. Yet, women earn less and less frequently occupy managerial posts than men. Some characteristics of the sector, such as informal work, fragmentation of the industry, and irregular working hours pose additional challenges for female workers. Working conditions for women are therefore characterized by a paradox: women form the majority of tourism employees, but yet constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of working conditions.**

Most of the jobs for women are for unskilled or semi-skilled work and subsequently wages and working conditions are poor. The average payment for female workers is around ¼ less for the same work than for a male worker. Women are, more often than men, faced with precarious types of jobs, violence at work, stress and sexual harassment.

In general, gender inequality in the labour market is closely connected to educational and professional, both vertical and horizontal, segregation. Thus, the labour market is divided into women's jobs and men's jobs, and women find it hard to access managerial posts. Certain aspects of employment patterns in tourism emphasize its classification into women's industry. First, tourism is associated with freedom and relaxation that have traditionally been visualized in marketing and PR with images of attractive young women. This may work as an incentive for employers to gather a female-dominated workforce especially at the customer interface. Many other tourism-related jobs, such as housekeeping, cleaning and other personal services, are perceived feminine as well.

Second, most occupations in tourism are also relatively low-skilled. This means that the skills needed for a certain job are obtained on the job quite quickly. This encourages quick employee turnover and leads to lack of encouragement for employers to invest in education. This effect is reinforced in the case of female employees because they are perceived to have more breaks in their career for family responsibilities. Many tourism organizations are small and operate on an informal basis, which has also been seen as a barrier for women's entry into managerial posts. Also unionization is fairly low, and in some studies union membership has been connected to equality of pay between men and women.

Gender issues have been a key part of discussions during tripartite ILO meetings. The following extract from the conclusions of the ILO tripartite on human resources development, employment and globalization in the hotel, catering and tourism sector (2001) states:

*“Women make a significant contribution to the HCT sector as they represent the majority of its labour force. More women would be attracted to and retained in the sector if their employment and working conditions, training and career development prospects could be improved. This could take the form of adjustment of daily working hours, facilitating transport to and from home at odd hours, and granting maternity benefits. Women should be offered particular training to facilitate their reinsertion in employment after a period of absence related to their special family responsibilities. Training for women should be enhanced with a view to prepare them for management positions, and also to enhance their capacities at all levels. Women's dignity and personal integrity should be protected. In particular, all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace should be eliminated.”*

Employability in tourism seems to increase with formal qualification for the sector. Furthermore, figures from the European Union indicate that inequality between men and women in terms of

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working conditions is not significantly worse than in the overall economy on average. Rather, many of the irregularities in tourism employment are a characteristic of the sector than attributable only to women. Thus, improving the sector's attractiveness in general may be an efficient way towards gender equality, too.

Globally, many additional difficulties arise. Women often work in informal posts and as domestic workers, which makes them more vulnerable for exploitation. Access to income, capital and loans may be prevented by paternalistic societal patterns and hinder women's escape from poverty through employment or entrepreneurship in tourism. Also cultural factors affect employment patterns, and in some parts of the world female employees form only a small minority among the tourism workforce.

In 2005-08, the ILO Portugal Office provided assistance to an EQUAL project called *Revalorize Work to Promote Gender Equality in Portugal*. A tripartite group developed a job evaluation method for the restaurant and beverage sectors where women predominate but do the jobs that are least well paid and least valued, including by the women themselves. The project seeks to redress the imbalance in particular occupations through the development of job evaluation methods that are free from gender bias; to modernize the sectors' occupational classification systems; and to establish remuneration systems based on transparent and gender-neutral criteria and procedures, in accordance with ILO Convention 100.

The ILO is working towards gaining more information and addressing women's working conditions in the hotels, catering and tourism sector globally.

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## Useful resources:

Tourism labour standards and their contribution to Gender Equality (pdf)

Revalorize Work to Promote Gender Equality in Portugal EQUAL Project

[http://www.ilo.org/public/portugue/region/eurpro/lisbon/html/portugal\\_equal\\_pt.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/portugue/region/eurpro/lisbon/html/portugal_equal_pt.htm)

Convention 100 Equal remuneration

<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C100>

ILO Bureau for Gender Equality

<http://www.ilo.org/gender/Aboutus/lang--en/index.htm>

Press release: UN Women's head commends tourism as engine for gender equality

<http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2011-06-09/un-women-s-head-commends-tourism-engine-gender-equality>