

Hidden Truths -

The reality of work in Ireland's hospitality and tourism sector

Before and during Covid 19



INTRODUCTION

Before the outbreak of the Covid 19 it was estimated that between 180,000 and 260,000 people were employed in the Hospitality and Tourism sector in the Republic of Ireland. The sector is recognised as a hugely important part of the Irish economy reported to be worth between €7.6 and €9.4 billion euros.

The Hospitality and Tourism industry is characterised by a relatively young workforce, predominantly female and with a significant number of migrant workers, estimated at between 33% and 40% of total employment in the sector. It is also a difficult and insecure sector for many people to work in being hugely precarious, rife with low pay, poor working conditions, short-term contracts and long unsociable hours. It is perceived as an area with little possibility of career progression and combined with extremely high costs of living in Ireland the sector is unattractive to workers.

Low trade union density, language barriers, lack of enforcement of workers' rights and over 40% of employees on part-time contracts have combined to create an imbalance in this industry operating against the interests of the workers and increasing their exposure to low pay and exploitation. In a global context, low trade union density directly correlates with inequality. Where workers have little or no organisation to represent their collective interests, employers will be easier able to exploit that lack of bargaining power. In the Hospitality and Tourism sector, a number of specific barriers present themselves to make union organising difficult. There are a significant number of small and medium-sized businesses in the sector, often with a young workforce and a high turnover of staff, and sometimes there can be a language barrier.

Despite these barriers, Unite the Union has established a Hospitality and Tourism branch in the Republic of Ireland and is hopeful that it will grow in size and strength as businesses begin to reopen in the aftermath of the global pandemic. As part of our work, we have undertaken a survey to learn more about how workers are experiencing pay and conditions across the sector as well as their experience during the health emergency in terms of the implementation of health and safety guidelines and access to the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

The survey was undertaken by Unite the Union's Tourism & Hospitality branch in June 2021. The survey was made available online on Unite's website for a four-week period. The link to the survey was shared internally to Unite members and on the union's social media platforms. Information about the survey was also delivered directly to some workers through leaflets distributed in Dublin and Cork, and both the survey and the information leaflets were circulated in Portuguese as well as English to reach the significant number of Brazilians working in the sector.

Unite recognises the pioneering work of Deirdre Curran from NUI Galway who has been conducting research in the sector for a number of years. Curran's recently published research can be read in conjunction with our survey as further evidence of poor working conditions in this industry.

We would like to thank Solange Cullen for her stellar work in compiling and analysing these survey results. Overall, 291 people from twenty locations in Republic of Ireland participated with the biggest cohort working in Dublin and Cork. The majority of respondents are in the 30-49 age group, and most have declared as hotel, bar and restaurant workers.

Those of you who read the following results may find them depressing but not shocking, as we know that Ireland has very poor basic standards for workers' rights compared to other EU countries. Among the results we discover that the majority of participants receive wages below the Living Wage of €12.30 per hour; this includes workers in a supervisor or managerial role. Participants

reflected that they were regularly denied basic rights and entitlements and regularly subjected to abusive behaviour. Over 50% said that Covid 19 health and safety guidelines were not adhered to. The majority experienced significant financial losses during the pandemic, and most don't see any prospect of staying in hospitality in the long term.

It is very important that we recognise and face up to the conditions for workers in this sector so that we can move forward collectively to campaign for better jobs.

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Findings

This section presents the findings of a survey-based study, aimed to record the experiences of employees within the hospitality and tourism sector. It focuses on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment and workplace conditions.

Demographics

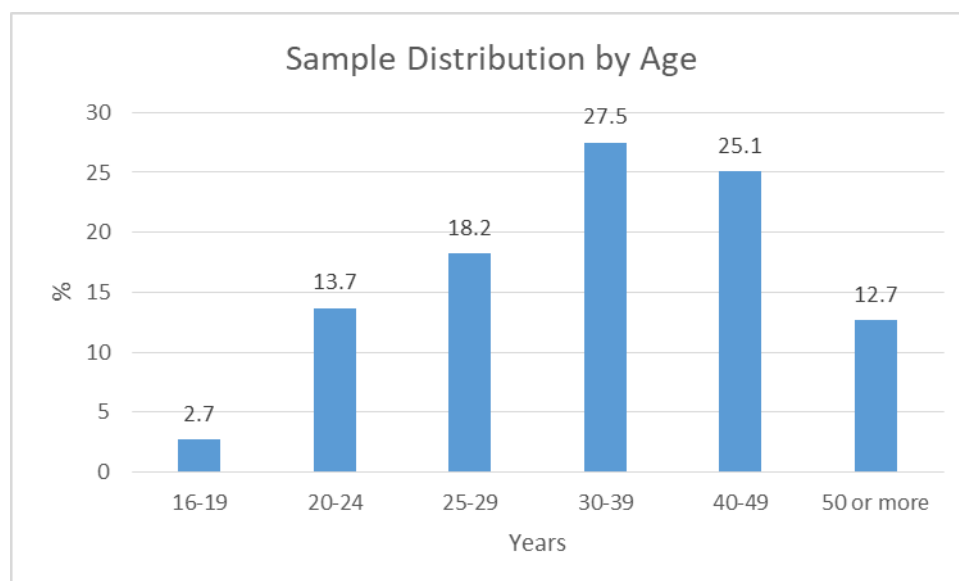
A total sample of n=291 were surveyed. Table 1 displays the distribution of the sample by gender. The gender distribution is 55% male and 41.6% female.

Table 1 Sample Distribution by Gender

Sample Distribution by Gender		
	n	%
Total Sample	291	100
<i>Gender of respondent</i>		
Male	160	55
Female	121	41.6
Prefer not to say	4	1.4
Prefer to self-define	6	2.1

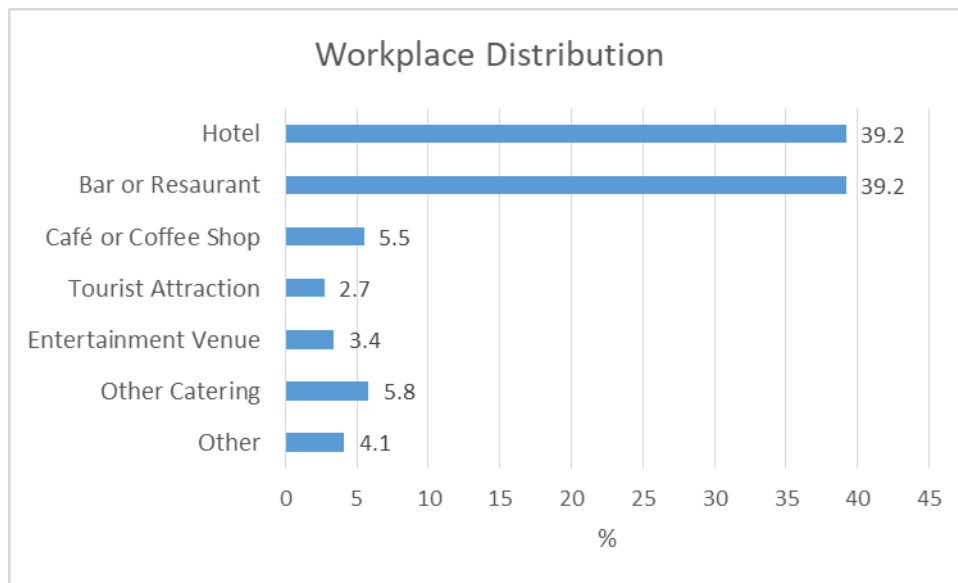
The age distribution of the sample ranges from 16 to over 50 years old. The majority (65.3%) are over the age of 30 years old. The distribution of the sample by age is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Sample Distribution by Age



The sample consists of employees from various workplaces within the hospitality and tourism sector. Hotel and bar and restaurant employees each represent 39.2% of the sample. The remaining workplaces are represented in Figure 2.

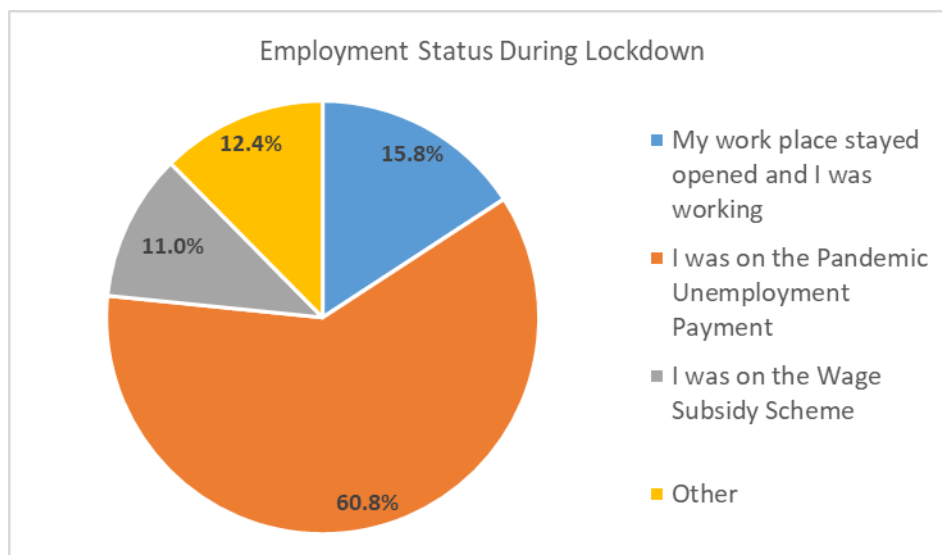
Figure 2 Workplace Distribution



Employment and Lockdown

Respondents were asked about their employment status throughout the lockdown periods of the pandemic. Figure 3 shows that 60.8% of employees received support from the Pandemic Unemployment Payment¹, 15.8% report that their place of work remained open, and continued to work. 11% of respondents participated in the Wage Subsidy Scheme², the remaining 12.4% consisted of 'other'.

Figure 3 Employment Status During Lockdown



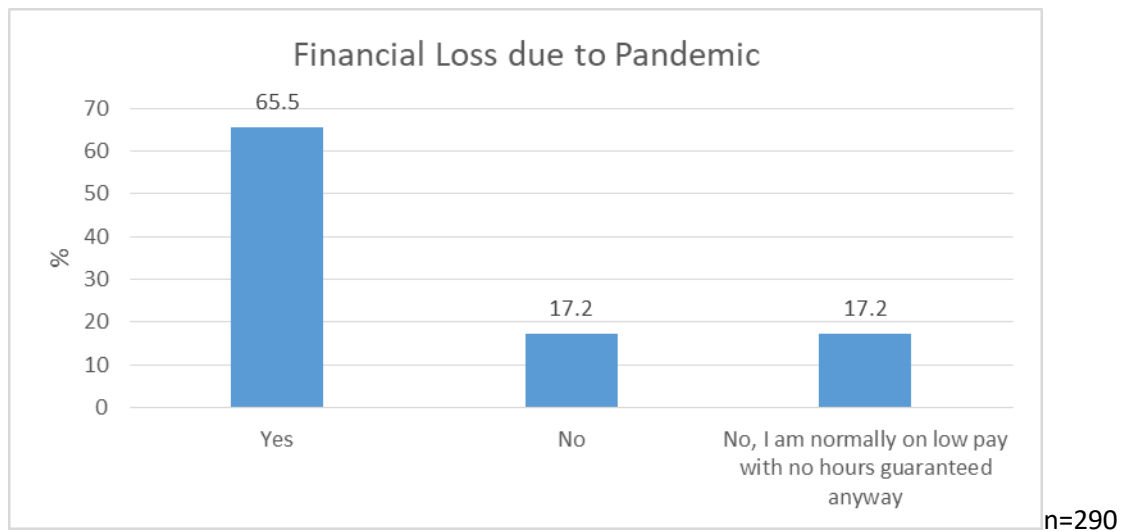
Of a total of 291 employees only 15.8% (n=46) remained in active employment over the lockdown period.

¹ The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) is a social welfare payment for employees and self-employed people who have lost all their employment due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

² Under the EWSS scheme, employers and new firms in sectors impacted by COVID-19 whose turnover has fallen 30% get a flat-rate subsidy per week based on the number of qualifying employees on the payroll, including seasonal staff and new employees. (Citizens Information, 2021)

When asked about financial losses experienced due to the pandemic, 65.5% of respondents reported that they had suffered financial losses of some degree. Figure 4 shows that 17.2% of employees did not experience losses, however, it was due to normally receiving a low wage and having unguaranteed working hours. The remaining 17.2% did not have any financial loss due to the pandemic.

Figure 4 Financial Loss due to Pandemic



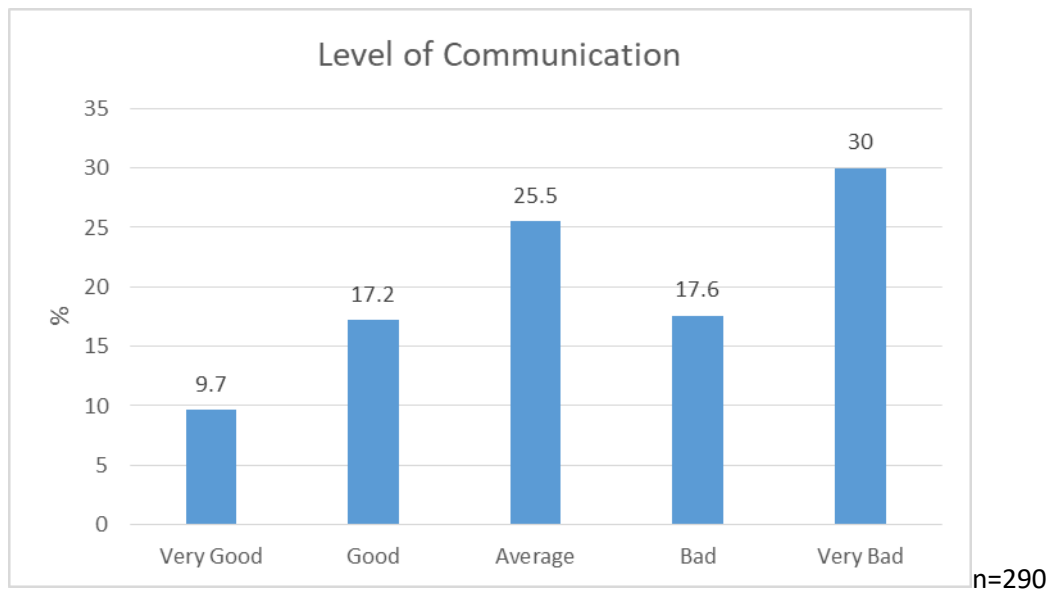
The severity of the financial loss experienced by 65.5%, ranges on average from less than €50 to more than €100 per week. Table 2 shows that of the 189 who reported losses, 58.2% lost more than €100 per week due to the pandemic, 24.9% lost €100 or less and 16.9% lost €50 or less.

Table 2 Average amount of financial loss per week

Average amount of financial loss per week	
	n=189
	%
€50 or less	16.9
€100 or less	24.9
More than €100	58.2

Respondents rated the level of communication and work-related updates they received from their employer during the pandemic. Figure 5 shows the results, 30% rated the level of communication as 'very bad'. Only 26.9% felt that the level of communication from their employers was above average.

Figure 5 Level of Communication



Return to Work

Restrictions were lifted in 2020 and business reopened. Certain resources were expected to be made accessible to employees. Table 3 shows what resources were available to respondents on returning to work in their place of employment. The most commonly accessible resources were; induction safety training covering new procedures to prevent spread of infection and pre-return to work forms. However, although most common, only 50.7% and 47.9% respectively, report having access to these resources.

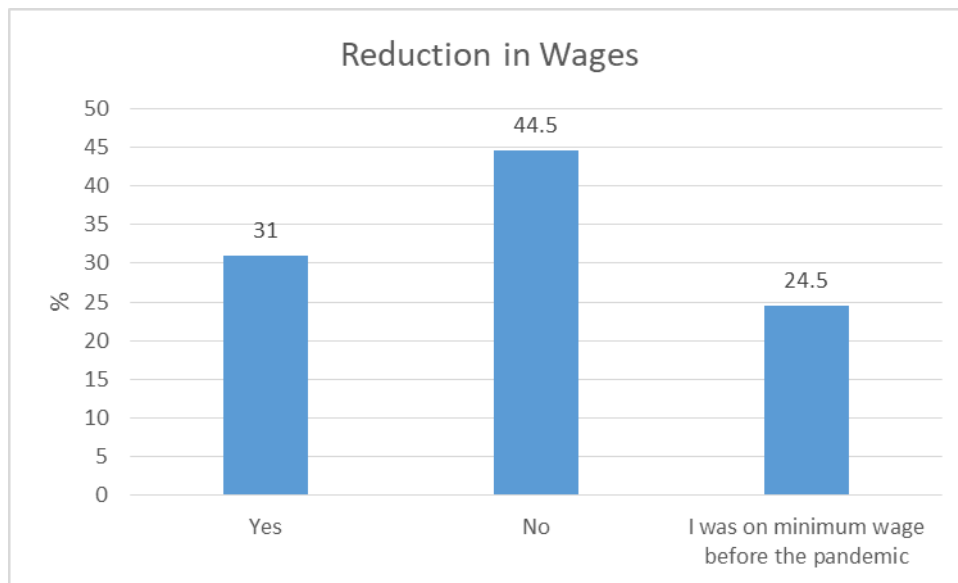
Table 3 Resources accessible in the workplace after 2020 reopening

Resources accessible in the workplace after 2020 reopening	
	n=286
	%
Pre-return to work form	47.9
Induction safety training covering new safety procedures to prevent the spread of infection	50.7
A nominated worker representative chosen by workers to communicate with management to fight the spread of Covid 19	22.0
Easy access to hygiene facilities	45.1
Constant supply of clean face masks and hand sanitizer	42.3
Implementation of social distancing rules	45.5
None of above	17.1
Other	4.9

The results in Table 3 show that 54.9% of employees did not have easy access to hygiene facilities, and merely 42.3% had a constant supply of clean face masks and hand sanitiser. There are 17% of respondents that returned to their workplace and had none of the above resources available to them. The result of 22% of employees having access to a nominated worker representative chosen to communicate with on matters of COVID-19, means 78% did not. This result correlates with the poor levels of communication reported in Figure 5.

The results shown in Figure 6 show that 31% of employees have had a reduction in their wages since the pandemic. 24.5% report to have been on minimum wage prior to the pandemic and 44.5% have seen no reduction.

Figure 6 Reduction in Wages



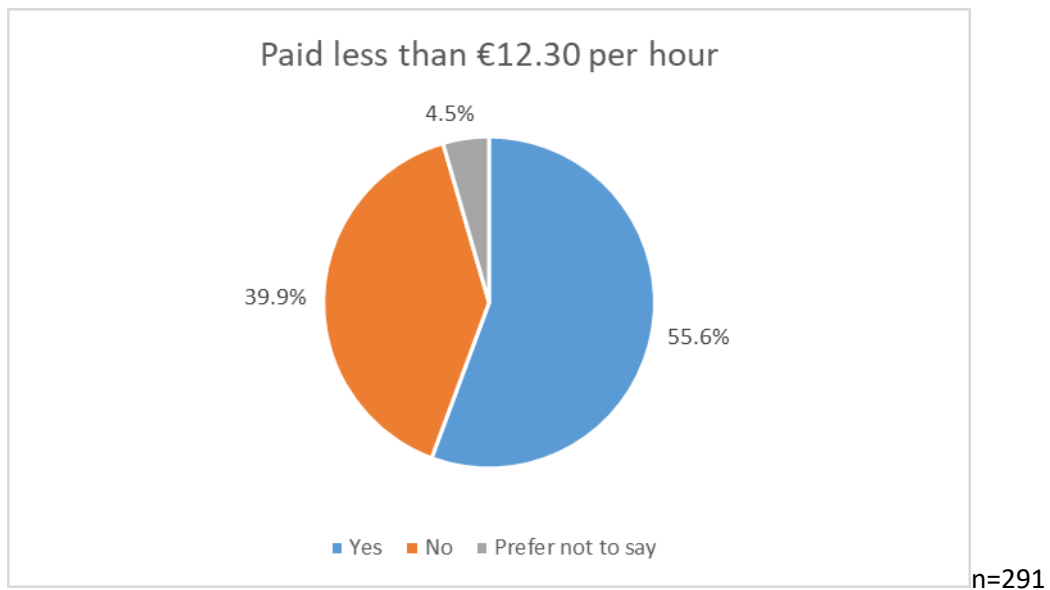
Overall, the impacts of the pandemic have had considerable negative impacts on respondents' employment. Just under 16% remained working, and 66% experienced weekly financial losses. Poor communication from employers created uncertainty for over 47% of the sample. When returning to work not one resource that was expected and required for the safety of public health and safe working conditions was available to more than 51% of respondents.

Pay and Position

Regarding their pay, respondents were asked if they were paid less than €12.30 per hour. All respondents answered. Figure 7 displays the results, 55.6% reported that they receive less than €12.30 per hour, 39.9% are paid equal to or more and 4.5% preferred not to say. These figures suggest that almost 56% of the sample who are currently working in the hospitality and tourism sector are paid below the living wage³.

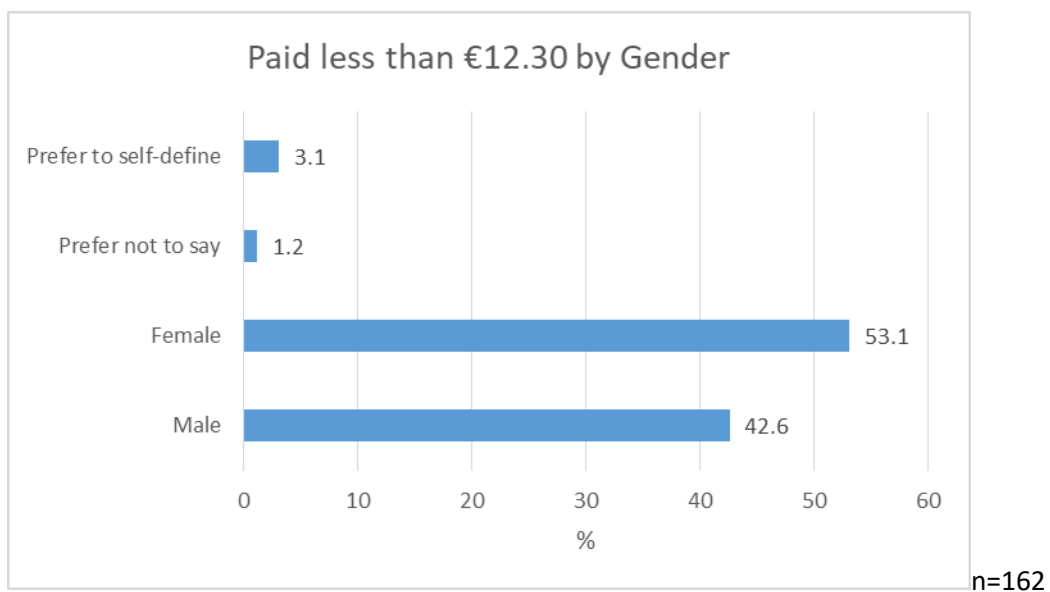
³ Living Wage is a wage which makes possible a minimum acceptable standard of living. It is evidence based and grounded in social consensus.(Livingwage.ie, 2021)

Figure 7 Paid less than €12.30 per hour



The total respondents who received less than €12.30 is 162 (55.6%). When disaggregated by gender, males represent 42.9% and females represent 53.1%. Figure 8 displays the breakdown of those paid less than €12.30 by gender.

Figure 8 Paid less than €12.30 by Gender



Respondents reported on their position within the workplace prior to the lockdown. Of the 290 respondents to answer, 37% were in a managerial or supervisory role before lockdown, 63% were not. The gender disaggregation of managers or supervisors before lockdown is shown in Figure 9. Of the 37% who were managers or supervisors, 65.7% are male, 31.5% female.

Figure 9 Gender of Managers or Supervisors

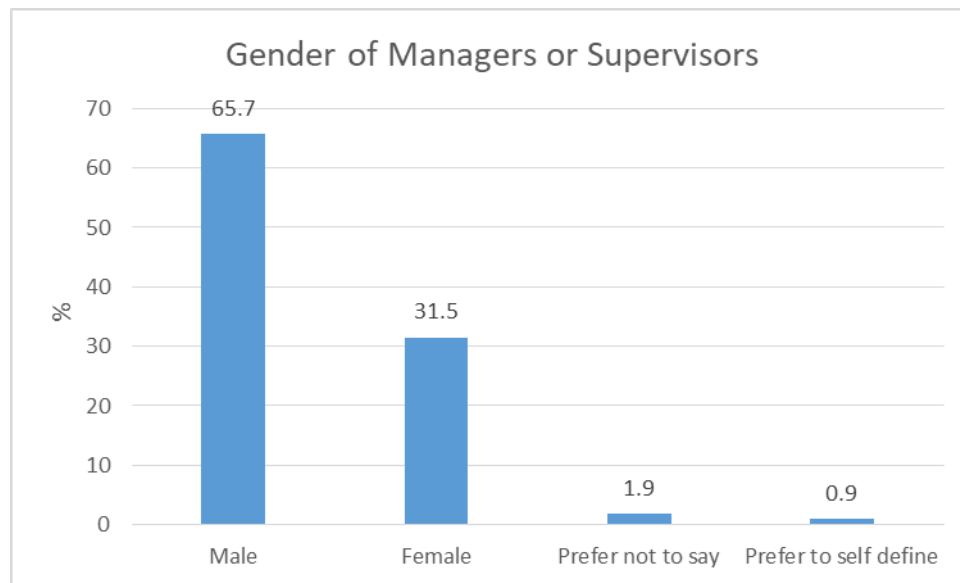


Table 4 shows the results of rate of pay within managing and supervising roles.

Table 4 Managers and Supervisor Rate of Pay

Managers and Supervisor Rate of Pay	
	n =108
	%
Paid less than €12.30	29.6
Paid equal to or more than €12.30	63
Prefer not to say	7.4

Of the 32 respondents who were managers and supervisors prior to lockdown and are paid less than €12.30, 50% are male and 50% are female. Of the 162 respondents receiving less than €12.30, 32 had been managers or supervisors and 129 were not.

Working conditions

Respondents were asked a series of questions regards their entitled working conditions. The following section presents the results.

Proper breaks were not afforded to 66.7% of respondents.

Table 5 Proper breaks during work

Were you always afforded a proper break during work?	
	n =291
	%
Yes	33.3
No	66.7

A minimum of 11 hours between shifts was not always given to 58.3% of respondents.

Table 6 Minimum of 11 hours between shifts

Did you always have a minimum of 11 hours break between your shifts?	
	n =288
	%

Yes	41.7
No	58.3

47.2% are certain that they always received the paid holidays they are entitled to.

Table 7 Paid holidays

Did you always get paid for the holidays you are entitled to?	
	n =290
	%
Yes	47.2
No	36.6
I don't know	16.2

Extra premium payment for work on Sunday was not received by 73.4% of respondents.

Table 8 Sunday Pay

Did you receive extra premium payment for work on Sundays?	
	n = 290
	%
Yes	23.4
No	73.4
I don't know	3.1

Extra premium payment for work on bank holidays was not received by 60.5% of respondents.

Table 9 Bank Holiday Pay

Did you always get extra premium payment for work on bank holidays?	
	n =291
	%
Yes	33.3
No	60.5
I don't know	6.2

Regular pay slips from employers were received by 86.3% of respondents.

Table 10 Regular Pay Slip

Do you receive a regular pay slip from your employer?	
	n =291
	%
Yes	86.3
No	13.7

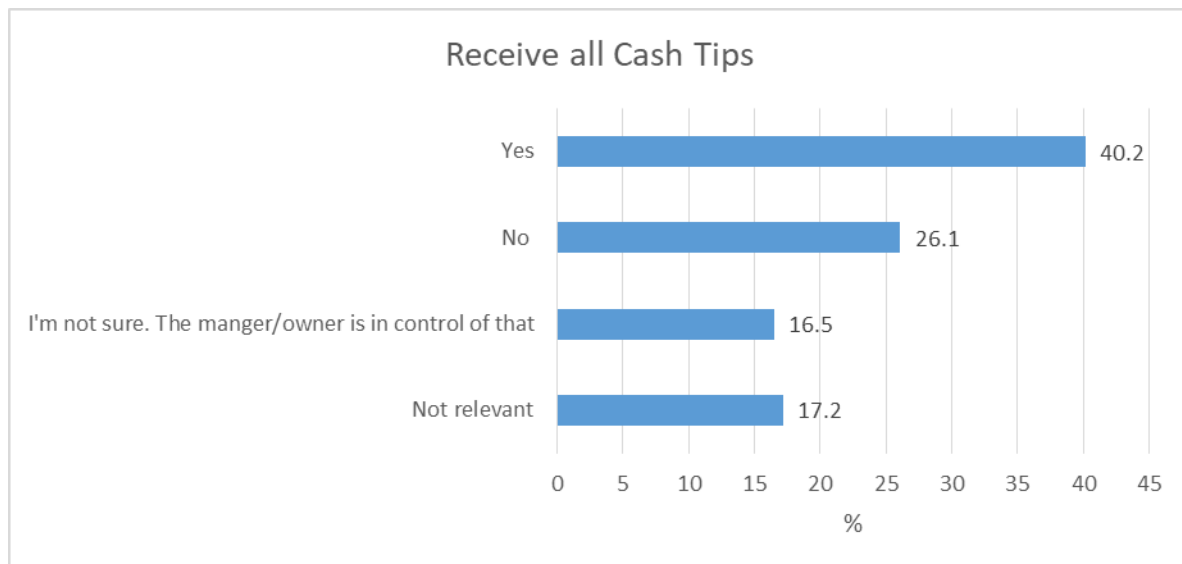
For questions relating to working entitlements such as; proper breaks in work, length between shifts, receiving paid holidays, receiving extra premium payments for Sundays and Bank holidays there was a positive response rate of less than 50% in each case.

Tips and Service Charges

This section looks at how tips and service charges are distributed to employees. In some workplaces and specific jobs within the hospitality and tourism sector the practice of tipping is not the general practice, those cases are referred to as 'not relevant' in this section.

When asked whether the employee receives the full amount of the cash tip customers leave for them, 40.2% reported that they do. Figure 10 displays the responses. 16.5% report that they are not sure of how their cash tip is distributed and is left to the discretion of their employer.

Figure 10 Cash Tips



Regarding payments from service charges, Figure 11 shows that 51.5% of employees do not get paid a contribution from service charges. Similarly, to cash tips, quiet a large percentage of respondents are unaware whether they receive payment from this source as the control over payment is with the employer. From a total of 219 respondents who are employed in workplaces where payment from service charges is expected only 7.9% received payment from their employers.

Figure 11 Service Charges

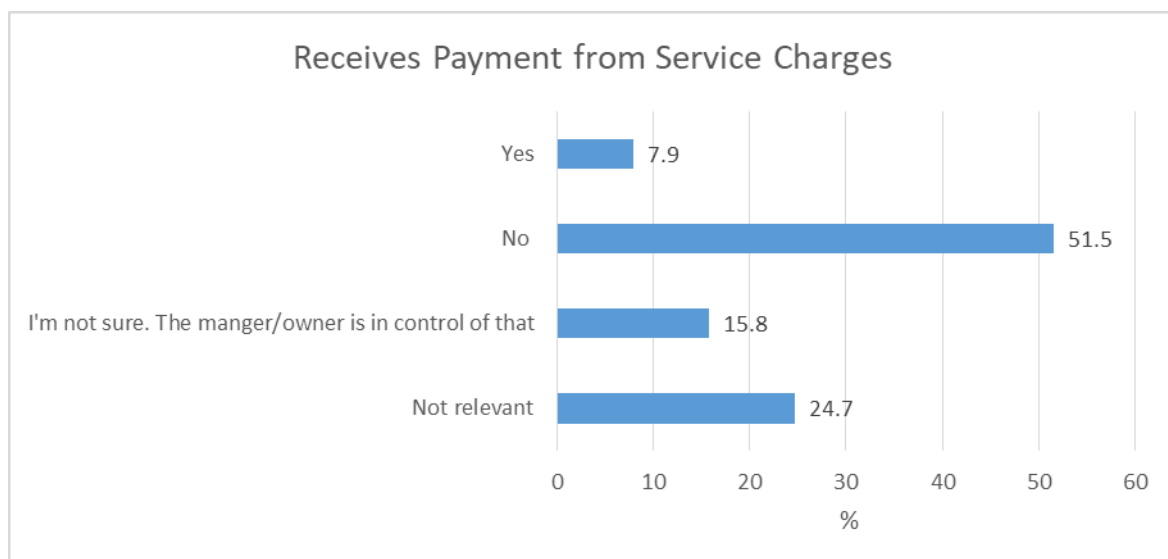
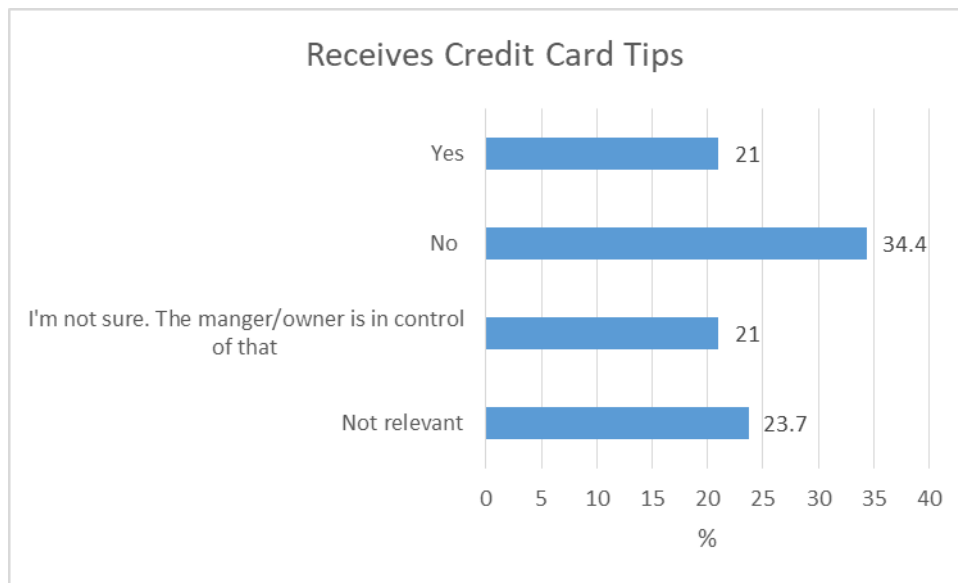


Figure 12 shows that 21% of respondents receive their credit card tips, 34.4% do not and 21% are unsure.

Figure 12 Credit Card Tips



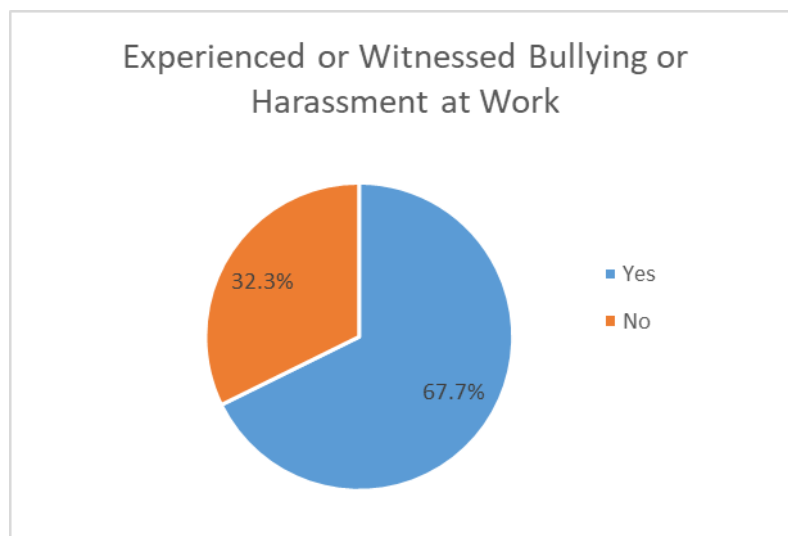
The percentage of employees not receiving their tips, both in cash and by credit card is matched by the percentage of employees who are not aware of how their employers distribute their tips earned. " I'm absolutely disappointed of the fact, that there are no laws which can stop owners and managers from collecting tip money from staff." Voice of a man working in the bar and restaurant industry who was threatened with employment termination for asking how the tips were calculated.

Bullying and Harassment

Respondents were asked about their experiences and witnessing of workplace bullying and harassment, questions were also posed around the reporting of such behaviour.

Figure 13 shows that 67.7% of respondents reported to have experienced or witnessed bullying or harassment at work.

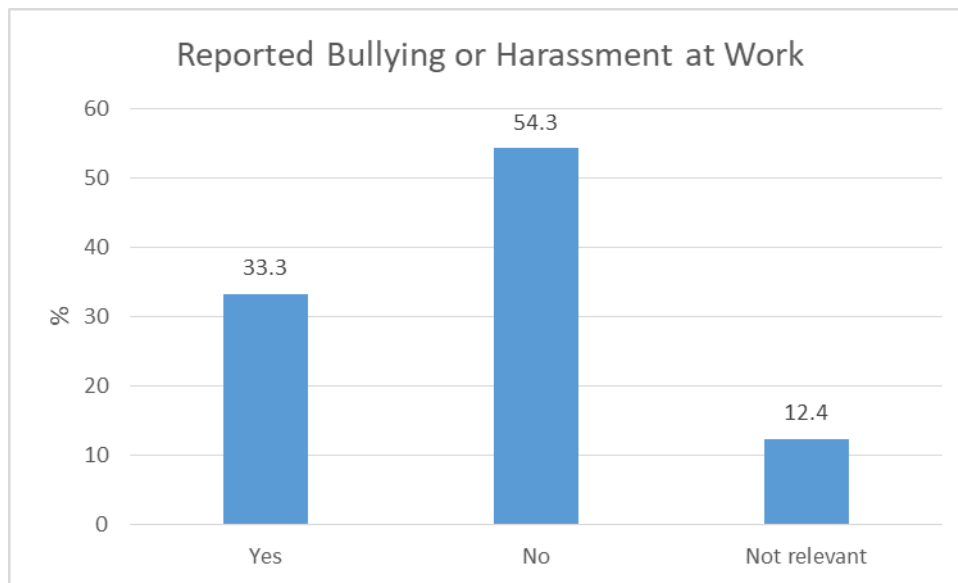
Figure 13 Experienced or Witnessed Bullying or Harassment at Work



Of those who reported having experienced or witnessed bullying or harassment at work 44.2% are female, 53.2% are male, and the remaining 2.5% prefer not to say or self-define.

Figure 14 shows the percentage of those who have reported an incident of sexual harassment, verbal abuse or bullying that they experienced or witnessed in the workplace. 33.3% reported, 54.3% did not.

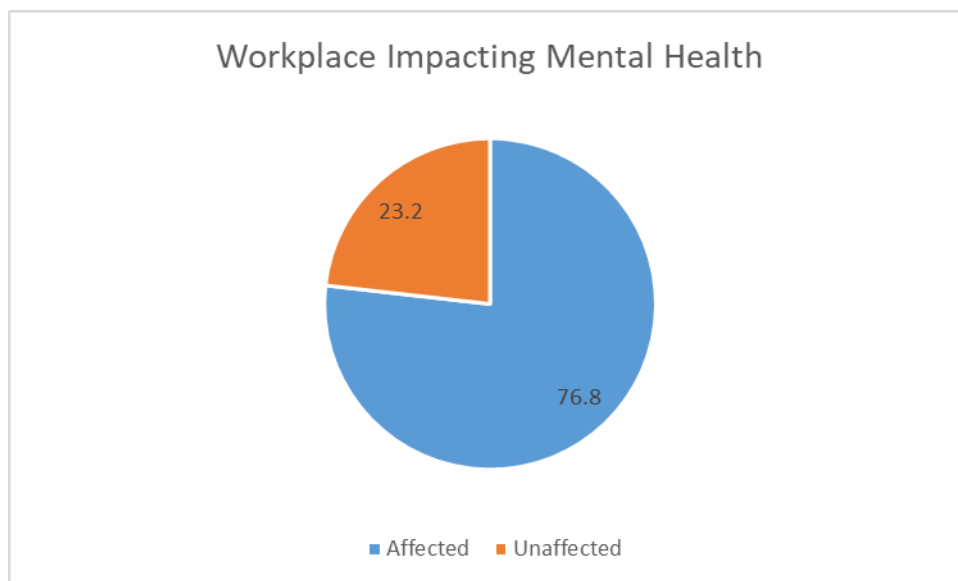
Figure 14 Reported Bullying or Harassment at Work



The gender disaggregation of those who reported bullying and harassment in the workplace is 49.5% female, 47.4% male and the remaining 3.1% prefer not to say or self-define.

When asked about the impacts of their work conditions and experiences on their own mental health, 289 responded. 76.8% reported that their employment affected their mental health, 23.2% reported that it did not. Figure 15 shows the percentage of people who feel like their work and employment affects their mental health.

Figure 15 Workplace Impacting Mental Health

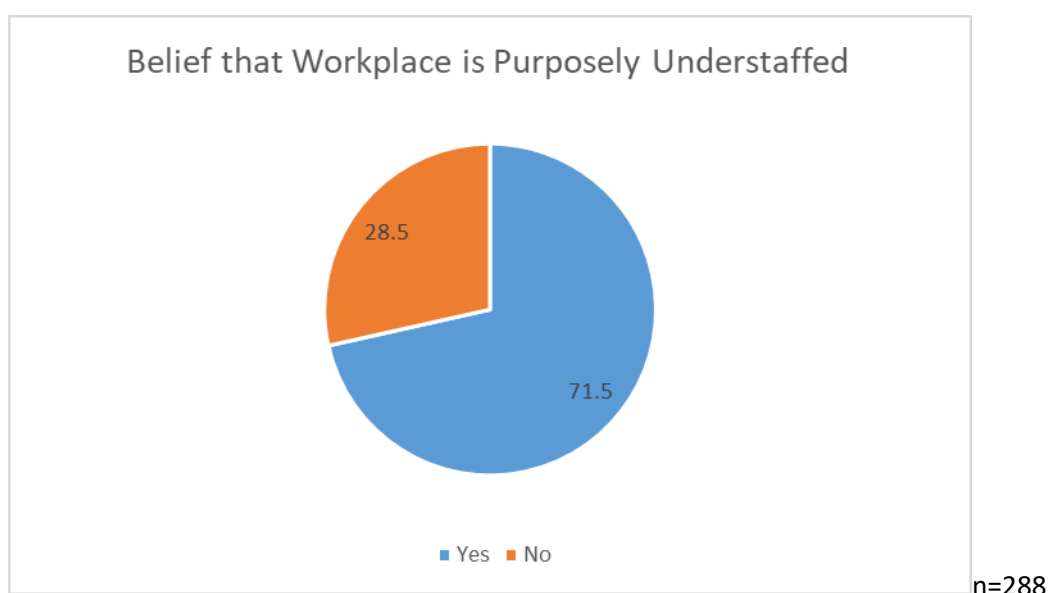


Thoughts on the Sector

Respondents shared their opinions and perspectives on working within the hospitality and tourism sector.

According to 71.5% of 288 respondents, their workplace is purposely understaffed in order to save on employees' wages, 28.5% did not believe this to be true, see Figure 16. One respondent describes their job as being extremely stressful and feels constantly under pressure because of doing the work of two people.

Figure 16 Belief that Workplace is Purposely Understaffed



Respondents were asked if they were offered to work in a different sector, would they prefer to remain in the hospitality and tourism sector or to change. Table 11 shows the results. Only, 12.8% are satisfied with both their job and their working conditions. 46.2% enjoy their job but feel the working conditions are not satisfactory, 32.4% dislike their job and feel the burden of pressure from both consumers and managers.

Table 11 Preferences to remain in the hospitality sector

Preferences to remain in the hospitality sector	
	n =290
	%
Yes, of course I like my job and I am happy with my working conditions and wages	12.8
No, I like my job but the working conditions and wages are not good enough	46.2
No, I do not like my job. I feel a lot of pressure from customers and managers with no benefits	32.4
Other	8.6

According to the opinions of the respondents the problems existing within the sector are ranked in Table 12. The most reported problem in hospitality and tourism is low wages. This is reflected in the results of Figure 7, with 55.6% of employees paid less than €12.30. The second and third largest problems are unsocial working hours and no work life balance respectively, again this reflects the results surrounding working conditions. The percentage of employees reporting lack of full-time contracts and no career progression suggests that there is a problem of unsecure employment within the sector. These results correlate with the 71.5% of respondents reporting work impacting their mental health.

Table 12 Problems in Hospitality and Tourism

Problems in Hospitality and Tourism		
		n = 290
Rank	Problem	%
1 st	Low wages	77.2
2 nd	Unsocial working hours	66.2
3 rd	No work life balance	65.9
4 th	Lack of full-time contracts	40.3
5 th	No career progression	38.6

6 th	Bullying and harassment	32.1
7 th	All listed responses	23.8
8 th	Sexual harassment	14.8
9 th	Other	5.9

Respondents were asked about their future careers in the hospitality and tourism sector. Of the total sample, 289 responded, 29.8% reported that they see a future career for themselves within the sector, 70.2% did not.

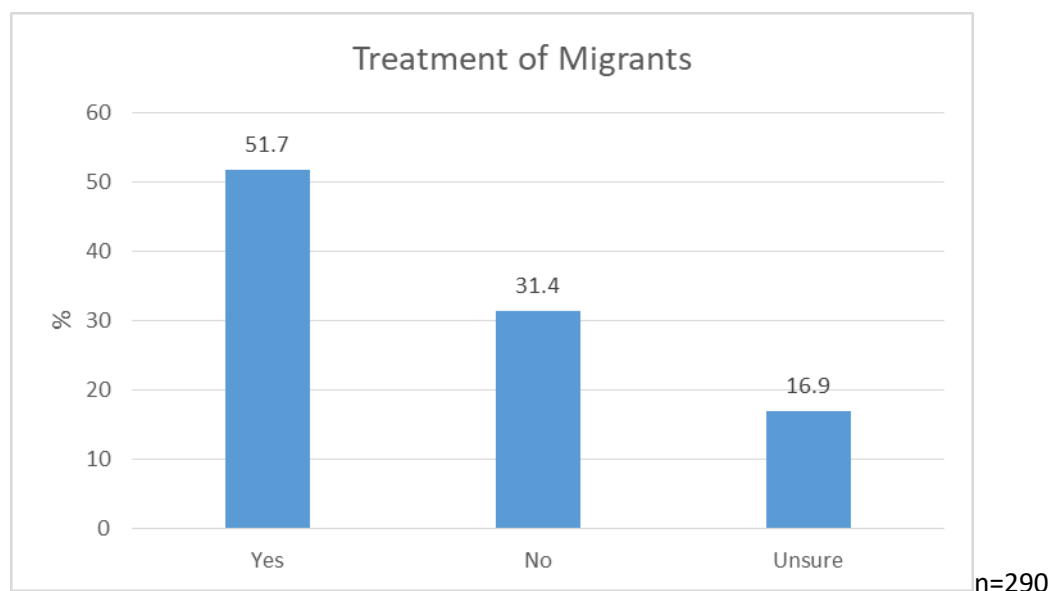
One man working in the bar industry described one problem within the sector is employers expecting employees to put their safety at risk due to the nature of their jobs. "As a bouncer, I am regularly asked to risk my safety".

Discrimination

Questions on discrimination within the workplace were asked, not only of their own experiences but respondents' perceptions on how others are treated.

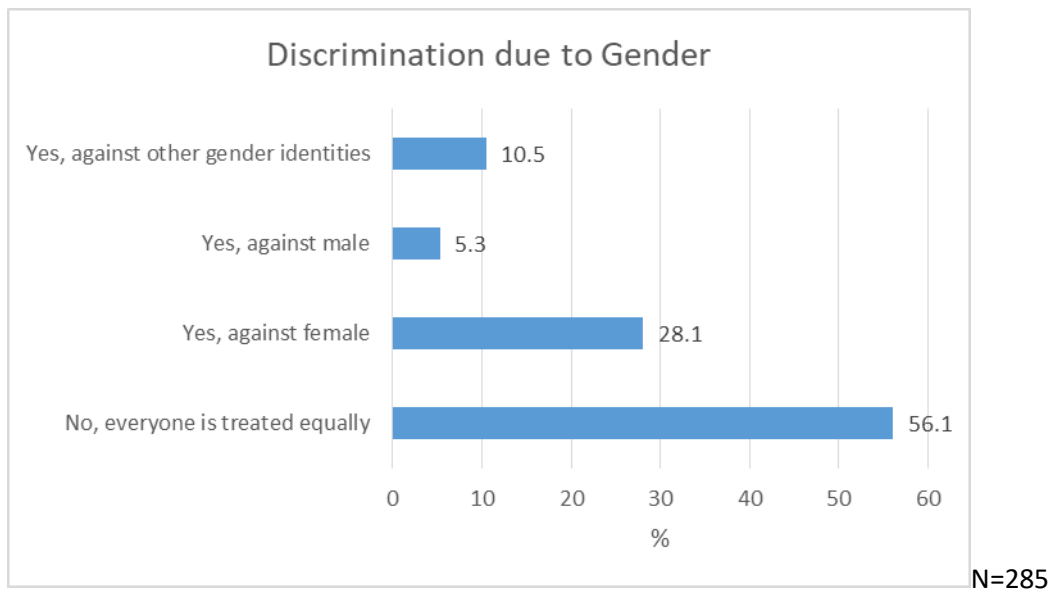
When asked whether migrant workers are treated worse than non-migrant workers over half reported yes. Figure 17 displays the responses when asked if migrants are treated worse.

Figure 17 Treatment of Migrants



Respondents were asked their opinion or experience on whether employees are discriminated against due to their gender identity. Figure 18 shows that 56.1% believe that there is no discrimination, and everyone is treated equally, 28.1% report discrimination against females, 10.5% against other gender identities, and 5.3% against males.

Figure 18 Discrimination due to Gender



Union membership

Of the total sample, 15.8% are current members of a trade union, 84.2% are not. Of those not a member 32.8% were interested in learning more about Unite the Union, 67.2% were not.

Statistical Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data was gathered through surveys. It was analysis using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics 23.

Conclusions

This survey adds to what we already knew about the poor working conditions in the hospitality and tourism sector. Most people are aware, through anecdotal evidence from friends and family, of the low levels of pay, long hours, and bad conditions experienced by workers in the industry. Surveys can help to provide a record of that, as well as giving some voice to the experience of workers themselves.

The data collected from a small sample here, combined with the research conducted by Deidre Curran at the School of Business NUI Galway, reveal some stark realities about the extent of abuse and exploitation in the sector. Although this research is based on a limited sample, it exposes patterns in the industry that should not be ignored by unions or by legislators.

We consider the following results to be particularly significant:

- 55.6% were paid less than the Living Wage of €12.30 per hour, including some on supervisor/ manager position
- 70% cited a lack of breaks during their working day.
- 75% do not receive premium payment for Sunday.
- 50% do not receive their tips and are unaware of practices in their workplace; they therefore have no control over where their tips go.
- 72% say their workplace is deliberately understaffed, leading to an overload of tasks and demands on workers.
- 70% experience bullying, with up to 55% not reporting incidents due to a fear of repercussions or lack of trust that anything will change.
- 80% of workers declared that working in the industry had a negative impact on their mental health and well-being.
- 52% of respondents believes that migrant workers were treated worse than non-migrant workers.
- 65% of workers surveyed said they had no work life balance and experienced unsocial working hours as a constant.

Inequality

Discrimination and inequality are serious issues in the sector which largely go unchecked and are particularly felt by women and migrant workers who make up a significant part of the workforce. Despite women making up to over half of the workforce in hospitality, our sample revealed that over twice as many men as women hold positions of power in the industry leading to a lack of opportunities for many. There is little to no progression for many workers in the industry, even though the sector employs a significant number of people.

Covid-19

Adding to the pre-existing problems faced by many in the sector, this survey found that, during the period of the pandemic, workers experienced financial loss, lack of proper communications from their employer and a lack of the required coherent health and safety guidelines, leading to workers' safety being compromised.

Trade unions

We reaffirm our belief that low trade union numbers correlates directly with inequality in society and in the workplace, and we would urge workers in the hospitality sector to engage with trade unions and work collectively to improve their terms and conditions.

Evidence informing change

In short, this survey has helped to uncover bad work practices and poor pay and conditions, as well as highlighting the lack of respect for basic workers' rights. It is our belief that, by publishing these findings, we can begin to have a conversation about the rights of workers and give a voice to the many workers who have for too long been silenced.

As we look toward rebuilding the hospitality and tourism industry post-Covid in a very changed environment, we must do so armed with knowledge that can bring about real positive changes in an industry that lacks so many basic rights for those it employs.

We believe that the findings of this survey, and other research such as that undertaken by Dr Deirdre Curran, can help inform measures to improve conditions in the industry.

Together, through this unique survey, we have taken what is mostly hidden and uncovered the truth behind the Hospitality Industry. We will continue to give a voice to those workers who are the backbone of one of Ireland's most important economic sectors.

We would like to thank all participants who took the time to respond to this survey.

Together we are Stronger!

Julia Marciniak, Hospitality & Tourism Coordinator Unite the Union (Republic of Ireland)

Karen Doyle, Branch Secretary, Hospitality & Tourism Branch, Unite the Union (Republic of Ireland)

