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Cluster: Work, organizations and society

Theme: Sustainable and Inclusive Societies

Further Reading:

Curran, D. (2021) Inside-Out Hospitality: A study of working conditions in the hospitality sector in Ireland

http://www.nuigalway.ie/media/sc_hoolofbusinessandeconomics/files/INSIDE-OUT-HOSPITALITY.pdf

Curran, D. (2019) RTE Brainstorm

<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2019/0930/1079216-tip-not-included-how-some-restaurants-exploit-their-staff/>

Curran D. (2020) Drinks Industry Magazine Expert View

<https://www.drinksindustryireland.ie/invisible-me/>

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Read More About: For more information about the Work, Organizations and Society cluster click [here](#)

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The Case for Reform of the Culture of Hospitality Working in Ireland: Some Preliminary Evidence

The hospitality sector was uniquely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. While some establishments pivoted to food preparation and delivery, many were forced to shut down for over 16 months. Re-opening of in-door dining in July 2021 has led to extensive challenges of staff recruitment across the sector, along with claims by employers that this is stunting their ability to recover. Speculation as to the causes of labour shortages has ranged from the continuation of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), to migrant labour returning home, to the traditional precarious nature of hospitality work. To date, little research has been conducted in Ireland to explore the reality of hospitality work. This research explores the lived experience of hospitality workers in Ireland. The primary motivation behind the analysis is to give voice to workers, and to provoke debate about how hospitality could reform to become a more desirable career option.

Key Findings

The study presents evidence that workers do not always get the minimum legal protections available to them. For example 70% reported not getting a Sunday premium, 43% did not get a contract of employment on commencement and 52% did not get their basic entitlement to rest breaks. It is worth remembering that minimum legal standards are there for good reason. Rest breaks for example, reduce the likelihood of burnout and/or accidents at work. Testimonies of ill-treatment were also received in the course of the research with 77% reporting experiencing verbal abuse sometimes/often and 64% experiencing psychological abuse sometimes/often. Furthermore, 63% reported witnessing/experiencing bullying at work while 55% witnessed/experienced harassment, most commonly based on gender, race, or age. The report is peppered with direct quotes from respondents, as they are best placed to account for themselves. At times they make for disturbing reading. The respondents also offer a wide range of recommendations for change.

Policy Implications

Regulation, or more accurately adherence to regulation, appears to be an issue. A targeted campaign of inspections by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) would help to clarify the rate of non-compliance, and to encourage compliance. The research supports the anecdotal evidence that hospitality workers are reluctant to speak up, or to join a trade union. The establishment of a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) would help ensure at least representative voice for workers across establishments in the sector. The introduction of a wide range of apprenticeship programmes for hospitality roles could help to promote the sector as offering a career prospect, and provide workers with the tools needed to ensure they are accessing decent work (as per EU Commission/ILO descriptors). Finally, this research represents merely a first step in the empirical investigation of hospitality as an employment destination. Further study is needed in this regard so that policy and practice can be reformed on a solid evidence-based foundation.