

# Gender Discrimination and Pay Gap on Tourism Labor Market

Alka Obadić

**Abstract**—The research concentrates on the role of tourism in generating female employment and on impact of gender discrimination in tourism sector. Unfortunately, in many countries there are still some barriers to the inclusion of women at all hierarchical levels of tourism labor market. Research analysis focuses on EU countries where tourism is a main employer of women. The analysis shows that women represent over third persons employed in the non-financial business economy and almost two thirds in core tourism activities. Women's gross hourly earnings in accommodation and food services were below those of men in the European Union and only countries who recorded increase of gender pay gap from the beginning of crisis are Bulgaria and Croatia. Women in tourism industry are still overrepresented in lower status jobs with fewer opportunities for career progression and are often treated unequally.

**Keywords**—Employment, gender discrimination, tourism, women's participation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE contraction of the primary sector during the 1960s reduced female participation and increased their rates of unemployment, but the expansion of the tertiary sector in the 1990s has offered females many employment opportunities and has increased their employment levels [3]. Employment provides income, economic and social empowerment, and health benefits for women and their families. Some forms of employment are exploitative, underpaid, and promote stereotypical women's work, but mainly employment provides women with a real opportunity to enhance the quality of their lives [1]. Women's participation in the labor market is an indicator of a country's economic development.

Tourism has experienced continued growth and diversification to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. It is an important "employer" for vulnerable groups which can often be underrepresented in the labor market, such for example women or youth. It provides more opportunities for women to participate in self-employed home-based work than other sectors.

Women in tourism have more chance to be employers in hotel and restaurant sector than there are in other sectors. For example, there are more ministerial positions in tourism held by women than in other areas. But unfortunately, at the same time, other not so rosy side of tourism labor market exists. Namely, women are not as well represented at the professional level as men. They are still not being paid as much as men and

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they are not receiving the same level of education and training in services as men. In some countries, these differences are very significant and as a result, gender discrimination represents huge problem. Namely, gender equality is a precondition for sustainable growth, employment, competitiveness and social cohesion. Therefore, the research in this paper concentrates on impact of gender discrimination in tourism sector. In order to do that, following indicators are taken into consideration: participation of women in the tourist work force, share of women in core tourism activities, gender wage gap by economic activity, and the hierarchical status of women in the tourism labor force sector. Unfortunately, women are still facing with different challenges and risks (such as low-status work, gender stereotyping, inequality etc.) working in tourism, not just in developing countries but also in developed one.

Globally, the overall percentage of women's participation in the tourism labor force is around 55% [12]. It is skewed because of the few countries with extremely low participation by women. Regional analyses may be more informative of the issue than a global average. Therefore, the research part of this paper concentrates on tourism employment in EU economies.

The paper is organized in five sections as follows: After introduction, the next section presents research objective and methodology. Third part is literature review which is divided in three main parts, analyzing the economic importance and characteristics of tourism industry, characteristics of tourism labor market, and gender stereotyping in the world tourism industry. Some concluding comments and recommendations are provided in the final section.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this paper is to provide main tourism employment trends in selected European countries emphasizing the role of women labor force that dominates within the gender structure of the overall workforce in tourism. The paper concentrates on the role of tourism in generating female employment. The purpose of this paper is to spread a better understanding of the position and opportunities of the women's employment in tourism.

The research is designed to address the following questions:

- Are women more represented in tourism employment than men?
- What are the key issues related to the role of women in tourism?
- Do tourism activities in the EU provide more part-time contracts or more stable jobs?
- Has gender pay gap in accommodation and food service

activities increased from the beginning of financial crisis?

The methodology of this paper has three main parts: literature review, analysis of selected indicators and the interpretation of the results. The literature review identifies key issues of women's status and role in the tourism labor market - different groups of women in different tourism sub-industries. Indicators analysis compares share of women employment in the tourism workforce, gender wage gap and occupational status in tourism industry.

The research relied on published articles and analysis of existing statistical databases. Employment data are analyzed according to activities and gender. The analysis in this article focuses on the three "core" tourism activities - accommodation, travel agencies/tour operators and air transport.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *A. The Economic Importance and Characteristics of Tourism Industry*

Tourism is an important and growing industry in the world economy. Today the business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles. In recent years, tourism business as a labor-intensive sector has been a fast growing economic activity in many countries. It creates added value and employment in receiving countries and can contribute to better knowledge or image of a country. Due to its formation, tourism as a highly fragmented economic activity, offers a variety of direct and indirect employment opportunities in almost all sectors of the national economy. This global spread of tourism in industrialized and developed states has produced economic and employment benefits in many related sectors – from construction to agriculture or telecommunications. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), global tourism will create 70 million new jobs in the next decade, and almost 70% of these will be in Asia [11].

Tourism also plays a major role in the EU economy. According to the European Commission, it is the third largest socio-economic activity in the EU (after the trade and distribution, and construction sectors), and has an overall positive impact on economic growth and employment. In its 2010 strategy paper on tourism, the Commission indicates that the tourism industry directly generates over 5% of EU GDP, and when taking into account other industries that produce tourism characteristic products, tourism's contribution to the economy is even higher: over 10% of EU GDP [9]. However, it has to be stressed that many jobs in tourism sector are seasonal, part-time, second job employment, multiple job, low paid and menial. Many employees in the tourism sector have irregular working hours and work on Sundays, in the evenings and at night. All these factors contribute to rapid turnover of staff and characterize so called secondary labor market [10]. In most tourist markets, employment is characterized by low wages, labor instability, reduced educational level, low educational returns and high occupational segregation [18].

As a labor intensive industry, a consequent growth of job

creation and development can be expected. Women and men are placed in different occupations – women are employed as receptionists, waitresses, room attendants, cleaners, travel agency sales persons, etc., while men are employed as barmen, porters, gardeners, maintenance staff, etc. They are concentrated in the lower levels in occupations with few opportunities for upward mobility while men dominate the key managerial positions [4]. In such way, tourism industry segregates women into areas of employment which commercialize their perceived domestic skills and "feminine" characteristics [5].

#### *B. Characteristic of Tourism Labor Market*

High degree of female workforce in the tourism industry is related with the fact that tourism is industry of hospitality and is based on welcoming, receiving and serving tourists, whereas it is important to meet their tourist demand. In the hotel industry, household activities, such as decorating a room, housekeeping and laundry services, are carried out mainly by women. That argument applies also with serving food and drink and working in the kitchen, at the front desk and in the administration and travel agencies. These are traditionally female jobs, and it is considered that women do such work better than men. There are many studies that are proving that gender plays a major role in employment in the tourism sector. For example, it is known that the staffs at the hotel, waiters and cooks are mostly female, while most tourist guides, taxi drivers and ship drivers are mostly men [13].

Hotels, catering and tourism is a large and fast-growing service sector, with an average female participation of 55,5% at global level and up to 70% at regional level. The countries with the lowest female participation in tourism employment are situated in North Africa or the Middle East. Cultural and religious aspects strongly affect overall access to employment, which is also reflected at a sectoral level [12], [19]. In this way, the tourism industry plays an important role in employment of women, because it offers greater opportunities for women. Women have possibilities to work in small-scale and informal types of tourism development, particularly home-based businesses such as those providing bed and breakfast accommodation because such work does not necessarily compromise women's other (re)productive duties within the household [19]. In the same time, tourism can provide a number of entry points for currently inactive women. There is a potential for the creation of various employment and self-employment opportunities.

Unfortunately, the data shows that there are still some barriers to the inclusion of women at all hierarchical levels of tourism labor market exist. Evidence confirms that [11]:

- women hold less than 40% of all managerial and supervisory positions in the international hospitality industry,
- women hold less than 20% of general management roles,
- women are identified as owners of less than 20% of hospitality business and only around 10% of hotels worldwide,
- women make up between 5% and 8% of corporate board

members of publically-quoted hospitality businesses.

Unskilled or semi-skilled women tend to work in the most vulnerable jobs, where they are more likely to experience poor working conditions, inequality or opportunity and treatment, violence, exploitation, stress and sexual harassment [12]. Women continue to be under-represented in senior positions and general management roles and when it comes to women in leadership roles the sector falls short of other industries that do not demonstrate the same advantage [11]. But, the times attitudes are changing. The imperative to have women in leadership roles is now mainstream and many multinational companies and sectors have initiatives and objectives which aim to make this possible. However, the hospitality and tourism industry clearly has not yet succeeded in promoting women in significant numbers into leadership positions [11]. However, it is observed that despite women being the majority of higher education degree holders in tourism, men hold upper-management and decision-making positions more often than women do, besides earning better salaries. The proportion of men in leadership positions almost doubles that of women [6]. Women are very much underrepresented in top-level occupations, especially in executive positions [14]. In key managerial positions, where the income is subject to individual negotiations, women tend to earn 20-30% less than men. Women do not invest in their own capital because they are less aware of the benefits [12].

### *C. Gender Stereotyping in the World Tourism Industry*

Many authors [1] found that majority of research discussed the positive impact of tourism employment on women. Along with opportunities, tourism brings also a risk and challenges to different groups of women in different tourism sub-industries (accommodation and food, air transport, travel agencies and tour operators, etc.). For example, in developing countries, (Bahamas and Jamaica) women mainly work in lower-paid clerical and cleaning jobs while men work as hotel and restaurant managers, machine operators, and gardeners [1]. In Singapore, only two females out of 77 made it to the general manager position in the hotel sector. The women often lack the opportunity to socialize with the top male managers and therefore do not benefit from the mentoring received by their male colleagues [1]. In Egypt, Kattara observed that women are less likely to be in top managerial positions in five-star hotels and resorts; they are more likely to reach the top in smaller hotels. The barriers to women's advancement in five-star resorts in Egypt were identified as gender discrimination, relationship at work, lack of mentor support, and lack of network access [2]. The main barrier to women's progression to senior management in Andalusian hotels and restaurants was seen as the difficulty in combining this type of work with family responsibilities, given the requirement to work shifts and long hours [18].

The airline industry is another example of a segregated sector. Women dominate sales, ticketing, and flight attendant positions, while the majority of airline CEOs, managers and pilots are men. Change is underway, however, and out of approximately 80,000 pilots worldwide, about 4,000 are now

women (5%) [1]. In many countries, tour guiding, is another area that has been hard for women to enter. Tour guiding is often regarded as a desirable profession in developing countries due to the generous tips provided by foreign tourists. In many societies, however, the profession is male-dominated, and women tour guides have faced significant discrimination [1].

Percentage of Women Hotels and Restaurants (H&R) Employees by Occupational Status (Professional, Clerk, Service) indicates the relative level of women in H&R employment compared to men. Three levels of employment status were reviewed in the H&R sector: professional, clerk, and service worker. The results show that women are more likely than men to work at clerical level in the H&R sector and less likely than men to reach the professional level. According to UNWTO data, only 36,8% of H&R professionals in World were found to be women [1].

The female participation results indicate that marital status in Greece is a factor affecting considerably the chances of participating in the labor market. In particular, it is found that married females have higher probabilities of participation than singles, divorced or widow females. On the other hand, singles have lower probabilities of participation as due to the structure of the Greek society, they are supported by their families, and, thus, have fewer incentives to be economically active [3]. Similar the so-called marriage premium effects are confirmed by Thrane in case of more than 100,000 Norwegian tourism employees. Married people typically earn a higher wage rate than their unmarried counterparts, all else equal [17].

The results of analysis of Portuguese tourism labor market show that women working in small and mid-size plants, in laborer positions, with longer tenure and with intermediate levels of education are the ones that are contributing the most to the total wage gap in tourism. They find that 45 percent of the gap is due to differences in attributes of male and female workers in tourism [14]. The human capital variables education and work experience are important determinates of tourism employees' annual wages. Investments in education pay off even in Norway, a country that, in a comparative perspective is known for its general low returns to education. Conclusion by Thrane is that educational investments appear to be more profitable for female tourism employees compared with male ones [17].

Muñoz-Bullón studied gender inequality especially with regard to wage inequalities in the Spanish hotel and restaurant sub-sector and found out that male workers earn on average 6.7% higher monthly wages than their socially comparable female counterparts. In relation to the discrimination component he also noted that men generally occupy jobs that require high qualifications, and in sub-sectors where wages are higher (restaurants versus tour guides in Spain) men are more often hired with open ended contracts [16].

## IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

This part of the paper concentrates on the descriptive statistical analysis of the main indicators which have been selected in order to explain women share and participation

status in the tourism labor market. Data collection for tourism industry is rather complicated, because tourism is not considered an economic sector itself, but rather a cluster of economic activities. Therefore, the closest alternative is to examine hotel and restaurant sector data as a proxy for the tourism sector.

In the European Union (EU), tourism industries (economic activities related to tourism, but not necessarily relying on tourism only) employed just over 12 million persons [8], equivalent to 9% of total employment in the EU nonfinancial business economy in 2013. The three industries that rely almost entirely on tourism (accommodation, travel agencies/tour operators and air transport) employed 3.3 million persons [7].

Compared with the non-financial business economy, in 2014, core tourism activities in the EU provided more part-time contracts (24% of employment in core tourism activities vs. 17% in the non-financial business economy) and less stable jobs (21% of temporary jobs vs. 14%). They also employed a more female (58% of persons employed in core tourism activities were women vs. 36%) and younger workforce (13% of persons employed were aged 15 to 24 vs. 9%), as shown in Fig. 1.

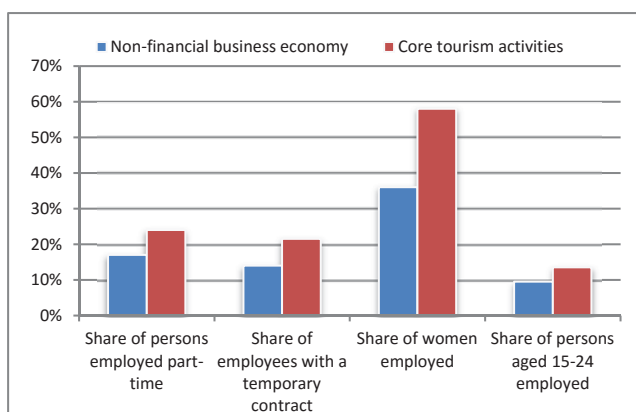


Fig. 1 Characteristics of employment in core tourism activities in the EU, 2014

Tourism is a main employer of women in the EU. While women represented in 2014 just over a third (36%) of persons employed in the non-financial business economy, core tourism activities employed predominantly female workers (58%) [7], whereas Table I shows those countries where the share of female employment in tourism industry is the highest. The highest proportions are seen in accommodation (60%), and in travel agencies and tour operators (64%) [8].

Women accounted for at least two-thirds of employment in core tourism activities in Latvia (72%, compared with 42% in the non-financial business economy), Lithuania (68% vs. 43%), Poland (67% vs. 36%), Slovakia (67% vs. 36%) and Estonia (66% vs. 40%). It has to be noted that women make up the largest proportion of employment in core tourism activities in all EU Member States, except Luxembourg, Malta and Belgium [7], where female employment accounts for less than 50% of tourism industry employment. At the same time

these countries usually employ the highest share of young people in core tourism activities.

In 2010 the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and UN Women published a Global Report on Women in Tourism. They found that women's pay in hotels and restaurants is closer to that of men than in other sectors and that tourism provides opportunities for women as employers and for self-employed work [1]. The data for gender pay gap presented in Table II confirm that results for EU countries.

TABLE I  
 EMPLOYMENT SHARE IN CORE TOURISM ACTIVITIES BY GENDER AND SELECTED AGE GROUP, 2014 [7]

	Share of women (%)	Share of persons employed aged 15-24 (%)
EU	58	13
Austria	63	19
Bulgaria	64	8
Croatia	62	7
Estonia	66	-
Finland	64	12
Germany	63	15
Hungary	61	12
Latvia	72	-
Lithuania	68	-
Poland	67	9
Romania	63	-
Slovakia	67	15

TABLE II  
 GENDER PAY GAP IN OVERALL ECONOMY AND ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICES (%) [15]

	All sectors		Accommodation and food services	
	2011	2013	2011	2013
EU-27	16.2	16.4	14.7	12.7

Table II illustrates that according to the Eurostat Database, gender pay gap decreased in two observed years in accommodation and food services and increased in the economy as a whole, but in both years the gender pay gap was smaller in accommodation and food services than in the overall economy. For the economy as a whole, in 2013, women's gross hourly earnings were on average 16.4% below those of men in the European Union (EU-28), [15].

After analyzing gender pay gaps at the level of the whole economy, a breakdown for the different sectors of the economy also reveals interesting patterns. In all EU Member States, the gender pay gap in the financial and insurance activities (NACE Rev. 2 section K) is higher than in the business economy as a whole (NACE Rev. 2 aggregate B to N). In 2013, the gender pay gap in the financial and insurance activities varied from 16.8% in Croatia to 44.9% in Estonia. Within the business economy as a whole, the highest gender pay gap was recorded in Estonia (29.0%) and the lowest in Slovenia (7.1%) [15]. Fig. 2 illustrates the gender pay difference in accommodation and food service activities (NACE Rev. 2 section I) from the beginning of financial global crisis.

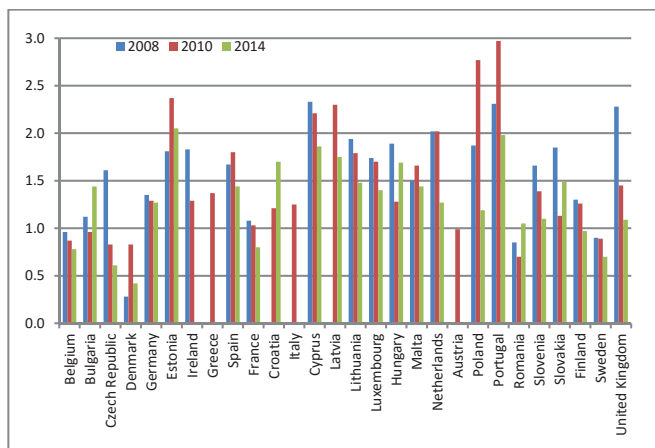


Fig. 2 Gender wage gap by economic activity (accommodation and food service activities, according to NACE), in %

The gender pay gap in accommodation and food service activities (NACE Rev. 2 section I) varied from just 2.8% in Denmark to 29.7% in Portugal in 2010. Between 2008 and 2014 the biggest slowdown in gender pay gap occurred in United Kingdom (from 22.8% to 10.9%) and only countries who recorded increase of gender pay gap from the beginning of crisis are Bulgaria and Croatia. This distribution is also reflected in earnings. The overall average wage difference in the EU-27 in tourism sector is 18.2% more for men than women. The difference is largest for professionals (37.8%) and craft workers (26.1%). Male service workers earn 16.9% more than women in this female-dominated category [12].

#### V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women in tourism industry are still overrepresented in lower status jobs with fewer opportunities for career progression and are often treated unequally or placed in some stereotypical occupations. The paper analysis gives answers on main research questions.

- Are women more represented in tourism employment than men?
  - Core tourism activities in EU employed a more female (58% of persons employed in core tourism activities were women vs. 36%) than men. The highest proportions are seen in accommodation (60%), and in travel agencies and tour operators (64%).
- What are the main barriers to the inclusion of women at all hierarchical levels in tourism labor market?
  - Women still hold less than 40% of all managerial and supervisory positions in the international hospitality industry, less than 20% of general management roles, are identified as owners of less than 20% of hospitality business and only around 10% of hotels worldwide, and make up between 5% and 8% of corporate board members of publically-quoted hospitality businesses.
- Do tourism activities in the EU provide more part-time contracts or more stable jobs?
  - Core tourism activities in the EU provided more part-time contracts (24% of employment in core tourism activities

vs. 17% in the non-financial business economy) and less stable jobs (21% of temporary jobs vs. 14%).

- Has gender pay gap in accommodation and food service activities increased from the beginning of financial crisis?
  - Between 2008 and 2014 the gender pay gap decreased in all EU countries and only countries who recorded increase of gender pay gap from the beginning of crisis are Bulgaria and Croatia.

In such way, it is recognizable that gender discrimination still exists also in advanced countries of EU. They are still not being paid as much as men and are not receiving the same level of education and training in services as men are.

To improve the status of women in tourism, it is important to stress women's participation in tertiary education, to provide support and training for women tourism entrepreneurs, and to ensure training and education which are free of gender bias. According to previous researches, conclusion is that educational investments appear to be more profitable for female tourism employees compared with male ones. Education and training are crucial to the alleviation of gender inequalities. Education brings increased choice, business expertise, and improved economic opportunity.

Gender discrimination and inequality can be overcome through pro-active gender-equality policies and training aimed at combating and overcoming gender stereotypes. Increase awareness that women play important economic role in tourism industry. Legal protection for women in tourism employment should be strengthening. Such protection should include minimum wage regulations and equal pay laws. More balanced representation of women on the boards of tourism companies will not fix gender inequality in the tourism industry, but it would be an excellent place to start. From social justice and a business perspective, the significance of gender discrimination in tourism industry cannot be overlooked.

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