

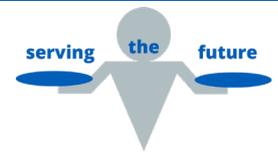


Workers' Experiences of Low-Paid Work: A Snapshot of the Hospitality Industry



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Serving the Future



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Background and Objectives

Serving the Future is a three-year action research project working with hospitality employers and workers. The project is seeking to understand, reduce and prevent in-work poverty and identify changes that could be made within the hospitality sector. By working directly with employers and people with experience of low-paid work, the project is taking a variety of approaches to identify changes that can take place at an organisational level as well as necessary policy or systems-wide changes that are required across Scotland. The objectives of the Serving the Future project are to:

- Identify actions that can be taken by individual businesses to reduce and prevent in-work poverty.
- Support employers to identify changes that will enable them to prevent their staff moving into poverty or to alleviate their levels of poverty.
- Identify and support transformational change to address issues of in-work poverty that can take place at an organisational level as well as necessary policy or systems-wide change.
- Provide businesses and their employees with the confidence to adapt to changing external conditions beyond the life of this study so that good practices are sustained beyond the project.
- Help Scotland to meet its statutory child poverty targets by engaging with both employers, parents, and caregivers working within the hospitality sector.

Serving the Future is a three-year research partnership project working with hospitality employers and workers, delivered by the Poverty Alliance, Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures, the Fraser of Allander Institute and the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship (University of Strathclyde).

Executive Summary

Overview

This briefing highlights findings from the Serving the Future project on hospitality workers' experiences of low-paid work in Scotland. In interviews with workers over a 12-month period, the research is seeking to understand:

- The demands and challenges of sustaining employment in the hospitality sector over time;
- The impacts of working in the hospitality sector upon the wider household, specifically children and families; and
- What needs to change for employees working in the sector.

The findings reported here are from the first set of interviews with 27 hospitality workers, conducted between September 2022 and March 2023. Participants who took part in the interviews work in a range of roles in the sector in urban and rural areas across Scotland. The workers interviewed for the research included 16 parents, 5 adults living with a partner, 4 single adults and 2 adults living with family.

Workers have a range of housing, health and financial circumstances. Nine households in the sample reported receiving means-tested benefits, one adult was receiving disability benefits and one had just applied for Adult Disability Payment. Housing circumstances include a mixture of private rent, social rent, home ownership, living with family and accommodation provided with employment. The majority of participants did not report any disabilities or health conditions.

What are the realities of working in the sector?

The 27 hospitality workers interviewed in the research reported mixed experiences around different measures of job quality.

- **Pay and hours:** Satisfaction with pay varied among participants, with many using their previous experience as a benchmark. For example, those with experience outside the hospitality industry tended to be critical of low pay in the sector. Pay at or above the real Living Wage was seen as very positive by some participants, who have previously been paid the minimum wage. Just over a third of participants reported that they are on zero-hour contracts or have not signed a contract.
- **Training and progression:** A lack of consistent line management, unclear or absent formal career progression processes and few options for formal training opportunities were cited as barriers to progression. Positive examples included opportunities to develop other skills (e.g., recruitment, interior design), training with brand representatives (e.g., wine and beer training) and internal progression pathways with options to undertake a qualification. Training or progression related opportunities workers would like to see included recognised certification of skills, qualification opportunities and management considering employees' recommendations regarding improvements.

- **Respect at work:** Participants felt that communication is one of the main ways that employers show them respect. Workers appreciate being kept in the loop with management and ownership decisions, and their ideas and concerns being listened to shows respect for their skills and knowledge in the workplace.
- **Experiences with managers:** Having managers who understand and recognise the individual needs of workers was cited as very important, playing a significant role in some workers', particularly parents', ability to continue working in the sector. Several workers in the research reported feeling anxious and highlighted tensions with their manager when requesting sick leave.
- **Late night working:** Participants with experience of late-night working highlighted issues around lack of transport, expense of taxis and safety as well as the physical and mental health impacts of working unsociable hours. Several participants working late night shifts also reported working unpaid time at the end of a shift.
- **Rural experiences:** Reduced hours out of season, shortages of staff and high staff turnover were raised by eight participants working in rural areas.

Low-paid work and individual impacts

Low pay is commonly associated with experiences of financial insecurity and precarity. Financial insecurity was a common theme across the interviews. All the participants reported being affected by rising costs of living to varying degrees. Concerns were shared around managing household costs including rents, mortgages and energy bills.

Families' experiences

Key challenges for parents in low-paid work in hospitality highlighted in this research include:

- A lack of affordable, flexible early years and out-of-school childcare provision available outside of traditional working hours in both rural and urban areas.
- A lack of financial and welfare support during pregnancy from the social security system and from employers.
- A lack of awareness of social security entitlement and missing out on social security through earning just above thresholds for entitlement to Universal Credit and therefore preventing access to key 'passport benefits' (e.g., Scottish Child Payment).
- Impacts on wellbeing including stress as parents juggle work with childcare and tiredness.

Challenges facing the sector

Similarly, to earlier research published by the Serving the Future project (Cowen et al., 2023; Serving the Future, 2023), workers reported a range of issues facing the sector as a consequence of COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. They also shared some of the effects on their jobs including having to take on extra hours because of staff shortages.

Spotlight on good practice

Using a range of job quality measures (Irvine et al., 2018), workers specified a range of factors that would feature in a ‘good job’ in the sector.

Figure 1: Spotlight on good practice



Worker's case study

Holly¹ is a single parent with a child aged nine and works as a waitress in a small restaurant. She has been working in the hospitality sector for several years. Holly is very limited in terms of support with childcare: she does not have support from wider family after her mum recently passed away and she describes the costs of local after school clubs as “astronomical”.

Holly is on a zero-hour contract, but transitioning to another full-time, salaried job in a large hotel. She has a good relationship with her current employer who is “accommodating” to her childcare needs; she explains that she can leave early, or her daughter sits and waits in the restaurant. However, quieter periods in her workplace have led to the owners sending staff home with no notice, without pay for the remainder of their shift. Holly said this creates challenges between employees as “we all need the money”.

She is looking forward to starting her new job. The new employer is offering a permanent salaried contract, better pay and conditions such as life insurance for Holly and opportunities for progression, training and development. However, she is worried about how she will manage childcare for her 9-year-old daughter.

This is going to be quite significant, trying to work round how I'm going to navigate with childcare, and how they're going to give me shifts, because I don't know what that's...what's going to happen.

Holly is also currently receiving Universal Credit and the Scottish Child Payment. She is not sure how her salary and tips will affect her Universal Credit claim which is causing her uncertainty and worry. The financial implications of moving from a weekly to a monthly income are also a source of concern for Holly as a single parent and she is concerned about her lack of savings to be able to deal with any emergencies.

Like switching between jobs was quite hard because I used to like weekly pay. And then I obviously signed this contract, and it moved onto a monthly. And that was like, oh, that was a bit...you know it's kind of frightening when you don't have any money.

¹ We have used pseudonyms throughout this briefing to protect the identity of participants.

Introduction

This briefing reports findings from the first wave of longitudinal research exploring hospitality workers' experiences of low-paid work. This research has been conducted as part of a wider project, *Serving the Future*, funded by The Robertson Trust's Partners in Change program.

The findings in this briefing are based on qualitative research, conducted between September 2022 and March 2023 involving interviews with 27 hospitality workers, who work in a range of roles in Glasgow, Edinburgh and rural areas across Scotland. Through interviews, the project aimed to better understand individuals' experiences and interactions with employment, with a specific focus on the experiences of families and parents and how employment circumstances of this group are impacting upon childcare, child wellbeing and poverty. A description of the research methodology is included in the appendix to this briefing.

- What are the demands/challenges of sustaining employment in the hospitality sector over time?
- What are the impacts of working in the hospitality sector upon the wider household, specifically children and families?
- What needs to change for employees working in the sector?

Central to this research project has been considering job quality using a range of job quality measures² developed by the Measuring Job Quality Working Group established by the Carnegie UK Trust and the RSA Future Work Centre in 2017 (Irvine et al., 2018).

² Job quality measures include: terms of employment (job security, minimum guaranteed hours, underemployment); pay and benefits (satisfaction with pay); health, safety and psychosocial wellbeing (physical injury and mental health); job design and nature of work (use of skills, control, opportunities for progression and sense of purpose); social support and cohesion (peer support and line manager relationship) and voice and representation (trade union membership, employee information and employee involvement).

Circumstances of participants

Socio-demographic data on the circumstances of the 27 participating hospitality workers was collected. The sample of workers in this research reflects Labour Force Survey data (for October – December 2019) regarding age and gender: the average age of workers in the accommodation and food sector is 34 and over 50% of employment in the sector is made up of women (Fraser of Allander Institute, 2020).

The sample of workers that engaged with this research reported the following characteristics are outlined in **Figure 2**.

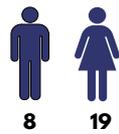
Workers taking part in Serving the Future have a range of roles across the industry with the largest number working in front-of-house as waiting staff and servers/bartenders (10). Workers also included kitchen chargehands (2), housekeeper (1), staff with multiple responsibilities (3), receptionist (1), tourism assistant (1) and a chef (1). Eight workers are in a range of senior or management positions, one of whom is self-employed.

All of the workers reported being affected by the cost-of-living crisis to varying degrees: A lot (struggling to meet basic needs or already struggling to meet basic needs) (4), A fair amount (had to cut back most/all of my non-essential spending) (13), A little (cut back on some non-essential spending here and there) (9), not at all (0), no response (1).

Figure 2: Socio-demographics on the circumstances of participating hospitality workers.

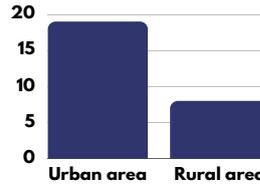
Sociodemographics

We spoke to 27 hospitality workers in Scotland.



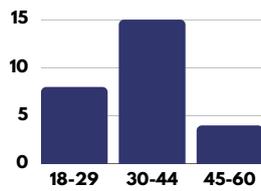
8 19
Sex

The majority of workers are women



Locality

The majority of workers live in cities or towns



Age

Most participants are aged 30-44



Private rent = 9
Owner occupier = 9
Social rent = 4
Seasonal acc. = 2
Other = 4

Housing status

Participants have varied housing circumstances



Ethnicity

The majority of the participants are from a White ethnic group



5 living with a partner



7 lone parents



9 couples with children



Single adult or with family (6)

Household

The sample includes a range of household circumstances



Health

The majority of the participants did not report any health conditions (24)



Social security

More than half the sample are not receiving any means-tested benefits (16)

What is low pay?

Low pay can be defined in different ways. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) definition of low pay – the value most often used in statistics – is defined as earning less than two-thirds of median hourly pay (OECD 2023). In Scotland, median hourly pay in 2022 was £15.03, which gives a low-pay threshold of £10.02 (NOMIS 2022). This is a similar measure to relative poverty – it gives an indication of income in relation to the middle of the spectrum, which tells us something about inequality.

However, like relative poverty, the OECD definition of low pay does not necessarily tell the full story. When thinking about in-work poverty and pay, we also need an understanding of sufficiency: is pay enough to sustain an individual and their family and keep them out of financial hardship? And is this level of pay different to the OECD low-pay threshold?

The real Living Wage (RLW) was partly created to answer this question. The RLW is calculated based on the price of a basket of goods which meets the basic needs of various household types (Living Wage Foundation 2023a). In 2022, this value was calculated to be £9.90 in the UK (excluding London). In September 2022, the RLW was raised to £10.90 to account for inflation and the rising cost of living. The final implementation deadline for accredited employers was May 2023. Since the RLW has to be calculated retroactively, it's likely that even those being paid the RLW could struggle to meet their needs at certain times of the year (such as winter 2022 / 23 when inflation of essentials such as food and energy soared before the RLW could catch up). We also have to account for the fact that the RLW has been averaged across the country, and different areas may have different costs. While the RLW gives us an indication of sufficient hourly pay, it's clear we need more nuance to understand whether individuals are being paid enough to meet their needs.

Factors other than pay can also affect poverty. The Living Wage Foundation have a campaign focused on 'living hours', which encourages employers to provide enough hours to workers to meet their needs (Living Wage Foundation 2023b). The accommodation and food services sector has the second highest incidence of insecure workers³ in the UK (41 per cent) (Richardson, 2023). Individuals in shift-based sectors like hospitality also face an 'insecurity premium' – when your job contains elements of insecurity such as short notice of shifts, you end up paying more to compensate for this in the form of transport, childcare etc. A 2022 survey reported that 32% of UK workers in full- or part-time work were given less than a week's notice of their shifts (Living Wage Foundation 2022). More contextual information on in-work poverty, fair work and the hospitality sector is provided in the appendix to this report.

Different circumstances in participants' jobs means that the same hourly pay may be sufficient for one person, and insufficient for another. Factors contributing to this include household makeup, geographical location, and various job quality aspects. We have considered all of these factors with our participants to show a more comprehensive image of in-work poverty. One key element ties our participants together: with a median hourly pay of £10 in 2022, hospitality is one of the lowest-paid industries in the country, which means participants are more at-risk of poverty and financial hardship than workers in other sectors.⁴

³ See Richardson (2023) for the Living Wage Foundation's definition of insecure work.

⁴ Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings Dataset 2022 Table 16.5a

Findings

In this section, we have brought together the key themes raised in the interviews, drawing on quotes from the workers taking part in this research. These findings reflect the experiences of the 27 workers who are taking part in the Serving the Future project.

Realities of working in the sector

Pay

Pay levels of hospitality workers lag significantly behind those of other sectors in the economy in Scotland and the UK (Baum et al., 2023). In this research, hourly pay of participants ranges from minimum wage (£9.50 per hour at the time of interviews) up to £16.78 per hour, with the median pay being £10.55 per hour (median hourly pay in the sector in the UK in 2022 was £10).⁵ The majority of the eight workers in senior/management positions in this research largely earn above median pay (with the exception of one team leader who we estimated earned the National Minimum Wage based on the information provided). The majority of participants in this research are paid on an hourly basis instead of receiving a salary.

Pay is often supplemented by tips, but the amount varies depending on shifts and season. Due to a service charge being placed on tables, Jack's wage of £10.50 per hour was regularly boosted by approximately £5 per hour due to tips. However, tips are often seen as an unreliable source of income by participants.

There could be some really good weeks in my old work where I was making, like, a hundred and fifty quid in tips [per shift], and sometimes when it was really quiet, it could be £40. That's why they always say don't rely on it to pay your bills and that, isn't it? But aye, I mean, the most I've seen in one night in my new work's about £35. I'd say they're probably down to about sixty, seventy a week now. (Jack, bar/pub, single adult, large urban area)

Satisfaction with pay varies among participants, with many using their previous experience as a benchmark.

The current one is paying me £12 ... which is amazing. I'm just a waiter, you know? It's not, like, supervisor or whatever, and the previous job, I was a waiter and then later on I became a supervisor, and they used to pay me minimum wage. (Aram, drink/food services, couple with child, large urban area)

I see over the years so many people come and go. They just stick at it for a couple of months, and then they're away. Because they think, 'why should I be killing myself like this, for this money, when I can go and work somewhere else where it's not so demanding, and not so stressful, and I can get a better wage.' (Suzanne, holiday accommodation, lives with partner, remote rural area)

⁵ Two participants were excluded from the calculation of median pay as one is self-employed, and we did not have enough information on another participant's income.

Pay at or above the real Living Wage is seen as very positive by some participants with previous experience of working in minimum-wage hospitality jobs. Generally, participants are critical of pay in the hospitality sector. However, some participants are satisfied with their pay, particularly where they had pay rises and felt valued by their employer. Some participants shared that they did not feel that their pay reflected their role and responsibilities. A few participants said that paying just the minimum wage acts as a push factor leading to people leaving the industry.

Hours

Over a third of our participants (n = 12) are either on a zero-hour contract or have not signed a contract. In the latest published statistics for January – March 2023, just under a third (29%) of workers in the accommodation/food services sector were on a zero-hour contract in the UK, higher than any other industry.⁶

The following quote from Holly describes the precarity zero-hour contract arrangements can cause.

These jobs are minimum wage jobs, and they're zero-hour contracts. And they can just phone you up and go, 'your shift's cancelled.' And you can't argue with it. And I mean, like the other night I was in Saturday at the, at the restaurant. And the owner came in, and it was like three of us on, it was quiet, it was quiet. And they were like, 'you have to send somebody home.' And I was like, and I started at five, this was eight o'clock, and I'm like... I was like, 'I'll go,' like because it was fine, I was quite tired anyway. But I was like... because the other girl wanted to stay on, she needed the money. The supervisor needs to stay on. And it's kind of like, why are... just because I've got a kid and but then this girl's a student, we all need the money... (Holly, drink/food services, lone parent, one child, large urban area)

For some, this uncertainty is compounded by weekly rotas being provided at very short notice – some only a day or two before the work week begins.

Other participants are working far more hours than they are contracted for on a regular basis. One participant is contracted for 8 hours per week when in fact they work at least 50 hours per week.

Fluctuating hours and cancelled shifts have an impact on participants' ability to plan both their time and their finances. While some participants on Universal Credit find the monthly calculation of entitlement based on hours better than the previous system, others report that the fluctuating entitlement makes it more difficult to plan for things. Those on variable hours told us they are often confused about their entitlement to benefits.

Respect at work

Participants feel that communication (or a lack of it) is one of the main ways that employers show them respect. Workers appreciate being kept in the loop with management and ownership decisions, and their ideas and concerns being listened to shows respect for their skills and knowledge in the workplace.

Another issue participants are dealing with in terms of respect is getting employers to recognise their individual needs. Having children, other caring responsibilities, or a long-term illness or disability means that workers need flexibility and understanding from their employer. Some

⁶ Labour Force Survey: Zero-hours contracts tables

participants' employers are handling this well by being flexible or accommodating individual needs; for example, we heard from parents whose employers had arranged their shifts during school hours. But we heard from four workers that their current employers had disregarded their needs (including requests for adjustments during pregnancy, lack of recognition and support regarding an illness, requests to work shifts around caring for a child and no response to experiences of verbal abuse from other staff and complaints about health and safety). Two of these participants shared that their employers had blamed or shamed them for their health condition or illness.

In extreme cases, the experiences of workers have crossed over into harassment and abuse. Seven of our participants openly discussed previous or current toxic workplaces, with issues ranging from an environment which encourages heavy drinking, to verbal abuse from both bosses and customers.

Progression and training

Hospitality workers were asked about training and progression opportunities in their current workplace. Earlier research by the Serving the Future project on the sustainability of the sector in Scotland highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for development, and education and training focused on hospitality specific skills (Cowen et al., 2023). Our research findings echo research conducted for the Fair Work Convention's Hospitality Inquiry: low pay and poor work conditions are seen as barriers to progression opportunities in the sector by workers (Stockland et al., 2023).

Workers also identified a lack of recognition and value of individual staff, limited training and certification opportunities and a lack of clear lines of progression. Limited extra pay for more senior positions was also raised. Several of the participants work for small businesses where there are limited opportunities to progress to higher paid roles with more responsibilities.

You can go into supervisor. I have been asked about that, but it's not worth it. For the job title you do, and the money you get, it's just not worth it for me. I prefer to just kind of go in, do my job, make money, and leave, that's it. (Izzy, drink/food services, lone parent, one child, city)

I think the training that, that is offered can sometimes make you feel like you're just a plate carrier or you're just a waiter, and you're just someone that cooks, and like I have qualifications that... I have an HNC in Hospitality Operations, which means that I can be a hotel manager... and I'm a qualified chef. But people will look at you and just think 'you're a cook, you carry plates'. (Alison, drink/food services, single adult, accessible small town)

In workplaces where positive examples of training and progression opportunities were shared, workers reported feeling more valued and describe enjoying their role.

I do get the sense that they are interested in like helping people progress in their career, and like really value high quality customer service and product knowledge, which is really nice. (Jack, bar/pub, single adult, large urban area)

Relationships with managers

Line manager relationships can have a significant impact on the well-being of workers (Fletcher, 2016).

Line managers often have responsibility for setting shift patterns for the workers they manage. Participants highlighted that the flexibility and understanding of some line managers to align shift patterns with personal commitments, such as childcare responsibilities, played a significant role in some workers ability to continue working in the hospitality sector.

We're all single mums, so some of the hotels in town want you to start work at, like, eight 'til five, but we've got it so that we all go in at nine and we're always finished by half two, so everyone can get to school. (Sarah, holiday accommodation, lone parent, three children, accessible rural area)

One of the lassies I work with does have a couple of kids. My manager's very flexible with her and allows her what time she needs. (Andrew, drink/food services, single adult, large urban area)

However, not all those interviewed experienced positive interactions with their line manager, particularly around the highly uncertain nature of shift patterns.

I wish some bosses were more understanding about parents working there. Because I'm the only, I'm the only parent that works in that bar. (Rose, drink/food services, lone parent, two children, other urban area)

Several participants also highlighted tensions with their line manager when requesting sick leave. In the UK, workers are entitled to Statutory Sick Pay if they are 1) contracted as an employee, 2) earn more than £123 per week, and 3) are ill for at least four consecutive days (UK Government, 2023). However, participants often reported feelings of resentment from their line managers when they called in sick, leading to issues like presenteeism.⁷

Instead of like phoning in sick about this pain and trying to rest, I went in and tried to work through it, and the whole time I was there I was in tears. (Rose, drink/food services, lone parent, two children, other urban area)

I understand it's not great if someone can't make the shift, but hospitality, as a general, is also great at blaming the person that called in sick. (Georgia, drink/food services, lone parent, one child, large urban area)

Those we interviewed often reported feeling highly reluctant to call in sick as shift rotations were often stretched thin. This transmitted into a feeling of guilt for taking days off when they were sick, even in instances of potential medical emergencies.

Recently I had like a really bad pain where my appendix is, and I, the doctor thought I might have had appendicitis... There's been little comments been made to me, passing-by comments from my boss being like, 'well I get migraines, and I get blurry vision, and I work through it'. I was a bit flabbergasted that she kind of said that because she was like 'it's not the first time that this has happened'. So, I just left, and I basically sobbed in the car like on the way home. (Rose, drink/food services, lone parent, two children, other urban area)

The issue of presenteeism can have negative effects for both organizations and individuals. At an

⁷ Presenteeism takes place when an individual chooses to go into work even when they are unwell (Arjona-Fuentes et al, 2019).

organization level, it can reduce productivity and business competitiveness as workers struggle to provide satisfactory levels of performance, and at an individual level, it can aggregate illness, leading to workers being unwell for longer, and potentially lead to the transmission of disease to colleagues and clients.

Late night working

Within the research, 11 participants talked about late night working and being part of the night-time economy. Shift patterns and roles across the sector mean that late night working is a regular part of many participants' lives and brings challenges in terms of work life balance and managing leisure time and caring commitments.

For those working late night shifts in pubs and restaurants, there are additional costs in terms of obtaining taxis when finishing shifts, largely due to a lack of availability with public transport options. Experiences of safety were also discussed.

If I am closing, it's probably like you're out about one, half one maybe. So that's a taxi, which is an expense. (Jason, pub/bar, lives with partner, large urban area)

Recently, there has been a local campaign within Glasgow in the hospitality sector to support people with access to travel. This saw a motion passed by Glasgow City Council that employers must provide taxis for workers finishing after 11pm. We hope to explore the impacts of this on hospitality workers in Glasgow in the second wave of interviews.

The phasing of shift patterns and being part of the night-time economy was often viewed as unrecognised or an invisible part of the hospitality sector by those experiencing it. Participants highlighted physical impacts, for example disrupted body clocks, less exposure to daylight, exhaustion, and stress on workers' mental health. A few participants also observed that alcoholism is a problem in the industry for late night workers. Jason, a single adult, shared how working late nights means that he is "pretty much tired all the time." Participants also shared the negative impacts of working unsociable hours on their social lives. Alison, a single adult, said: "oh, there's no social life. You're split days off. You work split shifts. You don't have weekends off." A few parents working late nights in the industry shared how the tiredness affects them. One parent who works until 11 or 12pm, is responsible for caring for his children during the day whilst his partner is working. He mentioned that they are unable to afford childcare.

I have to stay awake during the day to look after kids and stuff, and that's, I think that's the main challenge. (Chang, food/drink services, lives with partner, two children, large urban area).

Several participants working late night shifts also reported working unpaid time at the end of a shift. This raises issues around workers not being paid for their full shifts.

Rural experiences

Eight workers are working in rural areas in Scotland (areas with a population of less than 3,000 people). Two critical issues facing rural workers in this research are reduced hours out of season and shortages of staff and high staff turnover during the summer months. Four of the eight workers have reduced hours out of season and one worker's employment is seasonal between March and

December. She explained that she does not apply for Universal Credit for the months she is not working as *“I would rather just have it [money] be a bit tight than have to go through Universal Credit”* (Megan).

Rural hospitality workers shared that they often struggle financially with reduced hours during winter. One of the seasonal rural workers was currently in discussion with her employer about moving from an hourly wage to a salary so that she could have a consistent income throughout the year. Several of the workers face uncertainty about hours as sometimes their employer will close early on the day if the venue is quiet.

A lack of consistent breaks was a key theme across the interviews but in the rural interviews it was frequently mentioned during busy periods. Rural workers also shared issues around limited shopping options and high costs of food since the cost-of-living crisis.

Two of the rural workers had jobs in remote rural areas that include accommodation. Both jobs involve long hours and the lack of alternatives when staff are off sick can mean short notice covering of shifts. One of those workers said that her employer was one of the best she has worked for and despite the very rural location, live-in staff come back each year. She said: *“I feel like people maybe care a wee bit more there...like respect each other a bit more than in the city”* (Megan).

Case study: Carla (couple with children, working full-time)

Carla lives in a remote village with her partner and two children. She typically works 52 hours a week in a hotel with a range of responsibilities but is on a zero-hour contract. A quiet period during winter led to her employer cutting shifts. This uncertainty has led Carla and colleagues to take on additional hours in other parts of the hotel in case they lose their regular shifts. There are no childcare facilities that provide childcare for children under three within the local area. Carla describes herself as lucky that she has family nearby who can help with childcare. One of her greatest outgoings is her car which she has to have because of limited public transport in the area.

Low-paid work and individual impacts

Insecurity and instability

The hospitality workers taking part in this research are living in a range of circumstances with some experiencing higher levels of financial difficulty (e.g., debt, struggling to afford basic essentials) than others. Literature on the negative and often harmful outcomes associated with precarious work identifies stress, poor mental and physical health outcomes, relationship breakdown, housing insecurity, debt and delayed retirement as outcomes (Posch et al., 2020). Research by the Institute for Public Policy Research (2021) found four factors behind the growth in working family poverty, including spiralling housing costs among low-income households, low wages, a social security system that has failed to keep up with rental costs and a lack of flexible and affordable childcare. Critical components reported to contribute to financial insecurity and instability for households working in the hospitality sector in this research included unstable incomes, housing, and the cost-of-living crisis.

Low and unstable incomes

Analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that for those on the lowest incomes, the value of incomes has not risen significantly since 1995-98 (Cebula and Birt, 2023). As highlighted earlier in this report, hospitality workers are more at-risk of poverty and financial hardship than workers in other sectors due to low pay. In this study, most of the participants reported that they are only just getting by on their incomes, struggling to put any money into savings. Some households are in deeper levels of poverty, struggling to afford basic essentials and experiencing debt (a few participants had ‘priority debts’ including rent and council tax and five reported overdrafts). Childcare costs are a key contributor to financial worries for families in this research.

Workers in this research in seasonal positions, in rural areas in particular, struggle with the instability of their incomes. Two of the participants work during peak seasons only. Several other workers in rural areas shared how January and February can be difficult months as their hours and income are reduced. Christine, a single parent, works in a hotel in a remote rural area and goes from 40 hours a week during summer to 20 hours a week in winter. She described managing her income through “*always being pretty careful, because I’ve never had a lot of money, you know working in hotels, you don’t*”.

Our research shows that low-paid workers often rely on families for financial help or take on extra hours or another part-time job.

But I’m lucky that my parents have always been able to like, help me out a bit, and I really detest doing it. It brings me like a lot of like shame and stuff like that. (Anna, drink/food services, single adult, large urban area)

Because me and my husband, we both work extra hours every week to be afford- like to be able to afford to live kind of thing. Without the extra hours, we wouldn’t be able to survive. (Carla, holiday accommodation, couple, two children, remote rural area)

Housing

The lack of adequate and affordable housing in Scotland and the UK more widely impacts on all areas of life. Low-paid work and housing insecurity are interlinked, as reflected by the experiences of some of the workers in this research.

Of the eight participants who are homeowners, seven own their home with their partner/spouse. Only one lone parent is an owner occupier, as she recently inherited her parent’s house. Other lone parents live in a mixture of social rented (2), private rented (2), temporary (1) and mid-market rented (1) properties.

High private rents in Edinburgh and Glasgow were raised as a significant challenge for low-paid workers. Participants reported having to budget carefully to afford rent and other household costs:

“Going into like this new place that I’m renting, where I’m renting it on my own, I’ll be paying obviously more for rent and bills on my own. So I’m definitely a little more conscious of like having to kind of suss out exactly what my financial situation’s going to be, and like a little bit wary of it. As I’ve priced it out it’s, like it’s within my price range, but I do know that I’m going to have to like be pretty careful with my budgeting as well.” (Jack, pub/bar, single adult, large urban area)

Two of the private renters in the research had had to move several times over the previous four years due to a range of factors including issues with landlords and affordability. For example, Jason

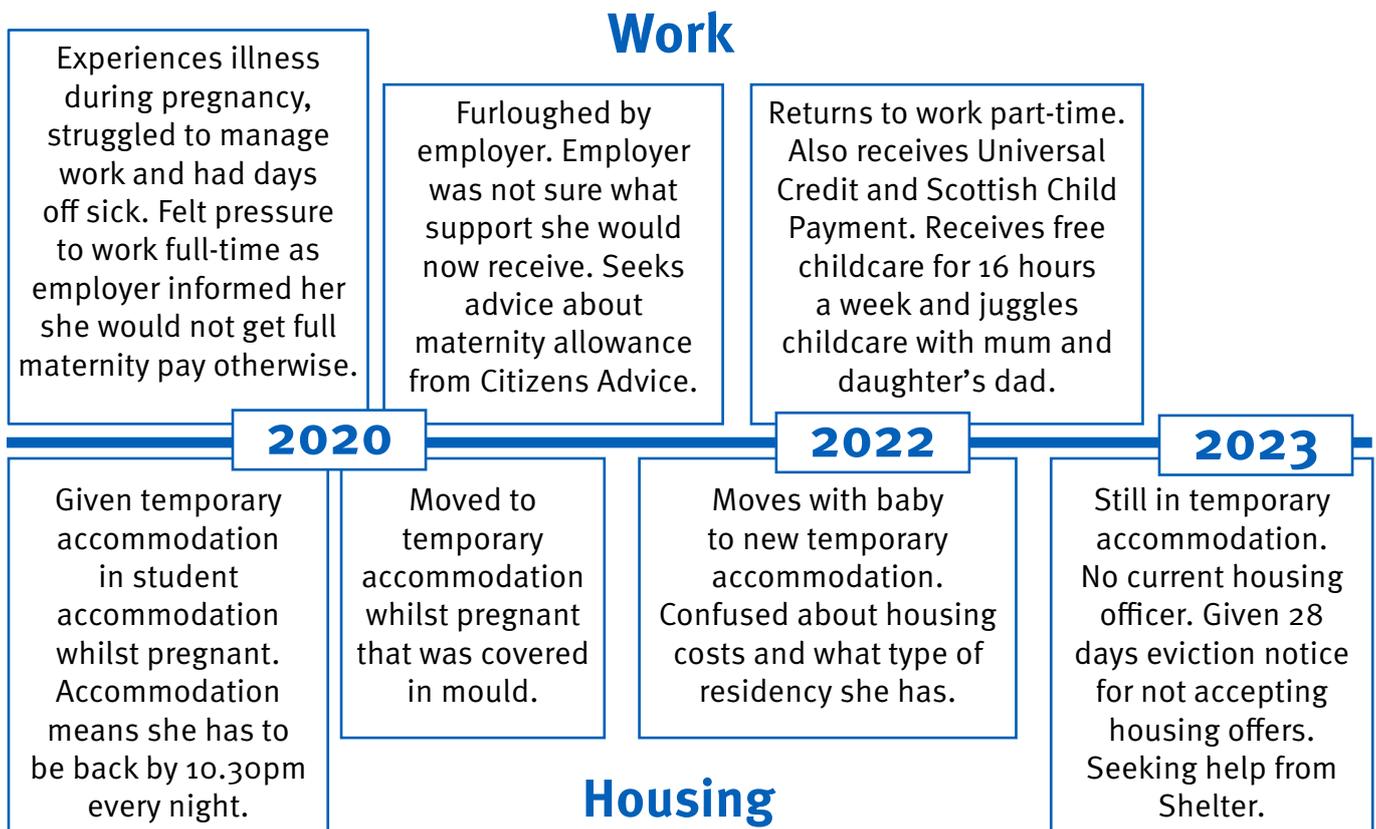
had experienced a brief period of homelessness whilst working in the sector and reported that he and his partner had struggled to get a privately rented flat despite their combined incomes. He said:

“But it’s too competitive. I think the universities have put in too many students and, you know, what I mean? And a lot of students still don’t have places to stay, either. Like there’s people still staying in hotels, you know what I mean? And there’s not enough affordable housing in the city as it is, and they’re not building it quick enough either.” (Jason, pub/bar, lives with partner, large urban area)

Long waiting times for social housing had been experienced by a few parents in the research. For example, Georgia, a lone parent with one child, homeless and living with her mum after the end of a relationship, shared that she decided to apply for private rent properties after finding out about the long wait times for social housing. She then faced constant hurdles trying to get a private rental flat for her and her toddler: she was told she must earn over £25,000 a year by two local estate agents and that landlords would not rent to anyone receiving benefits. Another lone parent with three children had spent years living in a privately rented property unaware that she could get help with housing costs through the social security system.

Joanne’s timeline below highlights her experiences of social housing in Edinburgh over three years and how this interacted with other stresses relating to her employment during her pregnancy and COVID-19. The timeline shows how at critical junctures in Joanne’s life (becoming pregnant, becoming homeless), she received a lack of support from her employer and inadequate housing and was left to navigate complex issues around her entitlement to maternity allowance and threatened eviction through seeking support from third sector organisations.

Figure 3: Joanne's timeline (lone parent with one child)



Cost-of-living crisis experiences

All 27 participants reported that they have been affected by the cost-of-living crisis to varying degrees. A common issue for households in this research is that their wages have not been increasing in line with inflation.⁸ Hospitality workers in this research reported struggling with a range of costs including rent, mortgage, energy bills, childcare costs, food costs and family activities. Mortgage and rent costs were a critical worry for households. Similarly to other research conducted by the Poverty Alliance, households reported a range of coping strategies to manage rising costs during winter; for example, cutting energy use and buying cheapest items in the supermarket, socializing less, and planning and budgeting (Robertson et al., 2022).

For Katy, whose household income includes her part-time salary and partner's full-time salary, managing bills and other outgoings has become a monthly, logistical challenge as she estimated their household income in Spring 2023 was £500 a month less than the year previously.

And just taking like a bit of an allowance, a personal allowance each, and then the rest will go to cover the household expenses... But everything else then will go to the household, so within the last six months, like our mortgage has gone up by I think £320 a month. We got absolutely humped with the new interest rates. And then obviously gas and electric bills, I'm sure everyone's sort of telling you the same, has gone up about 50%/60%. Food bills the same. (Katy, food/drink services, couple, one child, large urban area)

Katy's experience resonates with others in this research who spoke of just managing to get by and being left with limited monthly incomes after household bills and food. A sense of feeling lucky to be able to afford basic essentials and households' costs but nothing extra was a common theme.

We're definitely not struggling like to the point of being on the breadline, we're just more have to be very conscious. We've always had food, we've always had heat. Like we're very lucky in that way. Now we wouldn't be going buying like loads of Christmas presents, or like birthday presents are smaller, or we're not maybe treating people to a meal out.... (Katy, food/drink services, couple, one child, large urban area)

Financial insecurity leads to stress and uncertainty for low-paid workers, particularly in light of the current cost-of-living crisis, as illustrated in by Anna's experiences below.

Case study: Anna (single adult working full-time)

Anna has worked in the hospitality sector for fifteen years. Pressure in the workplace affected her mental health; she reduced her days from five to four and took a demotion. Her work-life balance and mental health improved but rising costs of living presented a constant worry. An increase in rent from £650 to £875, before the rent freeze in Scotland was introduced, was a critical cause of anxiety. She shared that she was now in rent arrears. Sporadic Universal Credit amounts have also caused uncertainty around Anna's monthly income.

I am in my overdraft. My rent, I'm late in paying rent.

I don't live an extravagant lifestyle... I think that's the thing that frustrates me the most is that I don't treat myself and I don't do this, and I don't do this. I just don't understand how people are going to be able to pay... I don't have the money.

⁸ The real Living Wage increased to £10.90 in September 2022 but employers did not have to implement this until May 2023.

Impacts on families

A key aim of Serving the Future is to explore the impacts of working in the sector on families. The appendix to this report provides contextual information on child poverty in Scotland. Sixteen participants taking part in the longitudinal research are parents; seven are lone parents and nine are couples with children. Key challenges for parents in low-paid work in hospitality highlighted include: a lack of affordable and flexible early years and out-of-school childcare; a lack of financial and welfare support during pregnancy from employers and the social security system; and a lack of awareness of social security entitlement.

The impacts of these challenges on parents and children are numerous. Uncertain and precarious incomes during pregnancy and early years in particular is affecting parents' wellbeing in this research. The busiest time of the hospitality industry coincides with school holidays putting stress on parents who work in the sector, particularly when local childcare provision during holiday periods is not affordable.

Childcare experiences

Adequate and accessible childcare provision is essential to support parents in-work both in the early years and out of school including during term time and holidays. Childcare is a valuable source of support for the whole family with clear evidence of childcare subsidies on a range of positive outcomes for low-income households on poverty, employment and reducing household costs (McKendrick et al., 2022).

However, few parents taking part in Serving the Future are accessing childcare provision, mainly due to a lack of affordability. For couples, juggling childcare around both parents' work patterns is a daily, logistical challenge. The seven lone parents in this research either work part-time within school hours or divide childcare responsibilities with an ex-partner or receive help from family. Two lone parents without support from wider family are particularly struggling: one had just resigned as she could no longer manage childcare with the demands of her employer and another shared that she must sometimes leave her older children at home alone.

Employer (in)flexibility

Having a flexible and understanding employer and being able to work hours that accommodate childcare needs is instrumental in making a parent's role work for them and their family, as illustrated by these two differing experiences. At the time of her interview, Georgia (lone parent, with one child) had just submitted her notice, after six months of dealing with frequent childcare and other caring challenges alongside a new line manager who had not been understanding about her circumstances. Living in a small and remote town, where hospitality is a key employer, Sarah (lone parent, with three children) said that there are few opportunities for single mums, but that her employer provided shift patterns that worked around childcare.

*So, I only just got put on weekends and things...which didn't fit in with (son's name) school time, nursery sorry...I really consider myself a very reliable worker. My circumstances have changed...And my mum and my little boy are my absolute priority, and sometimes I think people in hospitality and in management and higher up...they forget the human side.
(Georgia, food/drink services, lone parent, one child, large urban area)*

Sarah mentioned her "good luck" at several points during the interview at finding a job where the

hours worked for her and where she could bring her youngest child into work during weekends and holidays. However, she expressed concern that this might change in the future: *“So we’re really lucky that it’s the hotel policy that our boss lets us take them in, as long as they [the children] behave. We hope no-one comes in that will ruin it for everyone.”* There is no dedicated space for the children to go in the hotel.

A parent working full-time in a restaurant, with two children aged two and five, highlights the challenges of working in a sector that has high expectations around flexibility as a parent:

At the moment I’m finding it a bit impossible, to be honest. Because people, people automatically think because if you work in the hospitality, you must be young, or you must be a student, ... there’s so much expected of you, you’re supposed to give in so much time, and like come in at the drop of a hat if you want... like your boss wants you to come in earlier, which has happened plenty of times as well. Like I’ve been asked to go in on a Friday morning, or like a Friday afternoon, with an hour’s notice. Being like, “can you come in so I don’t need to come in on my holiday still?” I’m like, “well no, I’ve got kids to look after...” (Rose, food/drink services, lone parent, two children, other urban area)

Costs of childcare

There is a lack of availability of affordable childcare in Scotland outwith standard hours and during holiday periods. Whilst 30 hours free childcare provision is provided for 3-4-year-olds and eligible 2-year-olds in Scotland, there is no support with costs for families who are not in receipt of a qualifying benefit for 2-year-olds or from the end of maternity/paternity leave until a child reaches two. Most hospitality jobs include evening and weekend work presenting challenges for families to find sufficiently flexible childcare services. Table 1 summarizes the childcare arrangements of households with younger children in this research. Couples in this research are mostly managing by juggling childcare between their two jobs. Three parents in this research are paying a significant proportion of their monthly income on childcare. Katy (lives with partner, with one child, large urban area) said they are largely managing to get by on their income as they work out their shifts so that they don’t need to pay for childcare.

My partner did a whole Excel sheet...and with the nursery being so expensive...so that really was a big new expense that we didn’t have when I was just a full-time mother. You don’t realise how much, you know, money you’re saving by not having to pay a nursery. (Elena, drink/food services couple, one child, large urban area)

Aram spoke of the challenges of late-night working and juggling childcare with his and his partners’ jobs.

I would say it’s too much, it’s tiring. Sometimes, like, you just need to sleep, you know? We are trying our best. (Aram, drink/food services, couple, with one child, large urban area)

Table 1: Households' childcare costs

Participants	Childcare arrangements
Ali (couple with children, school aged)	Family provides childcare
Lucy (couple with children, aged 9 and 12)	Couple manage childcare with different weekday and weekend shifts
Holly (lone parent, primary school aged child)	Works part-time and is solely responsible for childcare. Moving into full-time new position and not sure how will navigate childcare.
Carla (couple with children, aged 2 and 5)	Family provides childcare
Rose (lone parent, children aged 2 and 5)	5-year-old is at nursery part-time. She used to juggle childcare with partner, but they have recently separated. Works night shift and does childcare during day.
Jackie (couple with baby)	Currently on maternity leave. Stressed about what they will do for childcare after maternity leave.
Katy (couple with pre-school child)	Work hours and location of participant is flexible so manage childcare
Elena (couple with child, aged 2)	Child is in nursery two days a week: £563 per month
Chang (couple with children, aged 1 and 3)	Couple manage childcare with different day and night shifts
Aram (couple with child, aged 1)	Child is in nursery two half days a week: £280 per month
Georgia (lone parent, pre-school aged child)	Free nursery provision for 2.5 days a week. Half a day private nursery a week: £140 per month
Sarah (lone parent, 3 children in primary and secondary)	Not accessing after school or holiday childcare for school aged children as cannot afford.

Availability of childcare

Connected to affordability are issues around availability of out-of-school childcare, particularly in more rural, remote areas in Scotland and for children with additional support needs. A recent survey of 344 parents found that nearly half had insufficient or no access to school aged childcare (Scottish out of School Care Network, 2023). There is a lack of understanding of the nature, extent and reach of holiday out of school provision in Scotland (McKendrick, 2021). The Scottish Government has introduced targeted funding for out of school childcare for low-income households in recent years (the Access to Childcare Fund 2020-2022, Summer Programme 2022). In May 2023, the Scottish Government announced a new fund for local authorities for out of school childcare provision and in the second wave interviews we hope to find out how this has been experienced at a local level by parents in this research. Early years provision concerns have also been raised around how provision is working for lower income families and/or those with irregular working patterns (Whyte et al., 2023). Small-scale research on rural childcare in Scotland highlighted a lack of choice of provision and a shortage of early years provision and childminders (Scottish Government, 2021).

A key challenge for parents working in the hospitality sector is the lack of out of school and early years childcare provision outwith traditional office working hours. In this research, parents often

relied on family members to look after children or planned out the week with their partner to juggle caring responsibilities. But for lone parent households or families who are not able to rely on relatives, parents are completely dependent on local availability of employment that fits around nursery and school hours. Corinne, who lives with her partner and two children, shared how she would not have been able to go back to work without the support of their parents:

When I first started going back to work, definitely if I didn't have support with that, I probably wouldn't have been able to go back to work. (Corinne, drink/food services, couple, two children, accessible rural area)

A lone parent, living in a small remote town, had to resort to leaving two of her children at home alone during school holidays, as there was no affordable school holiday provision locally. Whilst Sarah mentioned during that interview that she felt “lucky” that her employer lets parents bring children into work, she then mentioned that only one of her children goes into work with her.

My mum watched the kids. That was the plan, but then at the start of the summer last year she couldn't watch them anymore, so I hadn't planned anything. I hadn't got any arrangements, and when I looked at the things, it was, like, twenty-five pound a day. (Sarah, holiday accommodation, lone parent, three children, accessible rural area)

But I've got an eleven-year-old who's still in primary school, and she stays home alone because I've got no other – can't take two into work, so she just kind of gets left to – honestly, it's a bit of a nightmare at the moment. (Sarah, holiday accommodation, lone parent, three children, accessible rural area)

Gender inequality

Low-paid work is a gendered issue. Women are primarily caregivers and more likely to be in low-paid, precarious work than men. As outlined, childcare is a critical factor limiting women's employment opportunities. A few women in this research said that opportunities for progression were halted as they became mothers. Holly said that, in her line of work, management have responsibilities for opening and locking up which is not possible with childcare. Corinne had left her job and taken a demotion because the expectations of being a manager in hospitality (e.g., covering shifts when someone is off sick) meant that she felt like she hardly saw her children.

Guilt, worry and weariness are conveyed in the following quotes by two mothers:

And then now that we have a baby, and I was...[stutters] well I stopped working, obviously. My income is becoming less and less and less, which feels that my independence and freedom also, because I don't earn my own. I do because I work one day a week, two days a week, but I... I don't contribute that much to the household costs. And also I don't... then I'd feel guilty spending money for myself, because I don't barely earn. So I, it's not really the hospitality thing, but it's the whole becoming a parent, and as a woman who used to be independent money-wise, this is a challenge I find. (Elena, food/drink services, couple, one child, large urban area)

I miss out on a lot. I'll put it that way.... So then I overthink things as well, and then I overthink that because I'm so tired I can't play, but then because I'm so tired I can't tidy, but then because it's not tidy I can't play. (Rose, food/drink services, lone parent, two children, other urban area)

Mothers in this research had mixed experiences of support from their employer during pregnancy.

Jackie, who was on maternity leave, shared her experiences of working night shift in a hotel whilst coming up to the end of her pregnancy. Whilst her employer had done a risk assessment, appropriate support had not been put in place as illustrated by the following quote. She described the experience as “unacceptable”.

I think the last few weeks they said, “do you think you need a different chair?” And I said, “I’ve been saying for weeks I need a different chair.” ... So, I just started wheeling the office chair through, and sitting really low, and doing the computer like that. (Jackie, holiday accommodation, couple, one child, large urban area)

Challenges facing the hospitality sector

The hospitality industry has been hit by recruitment challenges during the pandemic. Rising costs of living have made it more difficult for hospitality employers to manage competing interests.

Cost-of-living crisis

Statistics from the Office of National Statistics (2023) show that the price of food rose by 20% in April 2023 relative to the previous year, whilst the price of energy was 84% higher in March 2023 than it was in March 2022. During the first wave of interviews, participants repeatedly highlighted the persistent financial pressures that the Scottish hospitality sector was under from the rising price of food and drink, as well as higher electricity and gas costs.

We interviewed one hospitality worker who is self-employed. Alison highlighted that the cost of her business’ food shop has increased by 38-50% since the onset of the cost-of-living crisis, with limited flexibility to pass these price increases on to her customers.

I’ve noticed that what used to be an £80 shop is now £110, £120 shop. I don’t have the resources to do a new menu, and put the prices up... And then I can’t afford to put the prices up too much, because the people that are coming in are expecting a coffee and a bacon roll for £5. (Alison, food/drink services, single adult, accessible rural area)

All the prices are going up, but my prices are staying the same, so my margins are getting thinner. (Alison)

Some workers reported that their employers were able to pass on these higher costs to consumers, raising prices by as much as 30% in some restaurants and bars. However, in other businesses that were not able to pass on rising costs to customers, some workers reported that their employers were remaining closed on additional days to keep costs down, whilst others were sending workers home early when the business was not busy.

Yes, [the business] is closed Tuesday and Wednesday, and sometime Mondays. Now, even the owner has decided to work some shifts instead of employing people, you know, instead of me or my other colleagues coming to work. (Lucy, food/drink services, couple, two children, accessible small town)

Sometimes in the evening, if it’s really quiet, it’ll close, you know, we’ll close early and people will have shorter shifts. (Suzanne, holiday accommodation, lives with partner, remote rural area)

In Alison's interview, she highlighted that January 2023 was the closest she has come to severe financial difficulties, where her business was not able to cover its costs and required a cash injection from her personal savings.

Last month was the closest [to going bankrupt], where I had to actually transfer money into the café's account to cover the bills (Alison, food/drink services, single adult, accessible rural area)

Examples like this highlight the financial pressures that the Scottish hospitality sector is facing, as well as the potential impact that this is having on the hospitality workers that they employ. As businesses remain closed for longer and cut shifts to save costs, some hospitality workers reported that they were working less and therefore receiving lower wages, multiplying the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and increasing pressure on their financial well-being.

COVID-19 impacts

The hospitality sector was one of the most significantly affected sectors of the Scottish economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the Scottish hospitality sector's Gross Valued Added (GVA)⁹ contracted by 41% relative to the previous year – the largest contraction of any of Scotland's industry groups (Office of National Statistics, 2023). Although some businesses in the Scottish hospitality sector have since recovered, many of those interviewed reported that they are still experiencing adverse impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic three years on from the first lockdown in the UK.

During the first set of longitudinal interviews, participants reported that businesses in the Scottish hospitality sector are facing increased financial pressures, with some of these pressures associating with the COVID-19 pandemic. Alison – an owner of a café that we interviewed - reported that her 'break a leg fund' which she accumulated to cover six to eight months of businesses expenses was exhausted during the COVID-19 pandemic, adding to the financial pressure she is now facing during the current cost-of-living crisis.

This month there's enough in the café accounts to pay for this month's bills, and then I have to work this month to pay next month's bills... There's no comfort zone. (Alison, food/drink services, single adult, accessible rural area)

Some participants also suggested that COVID-19 might have contributed to changes in customer trends, leading them to stay in more and visit hospitality venues less.

Once everyone, like, got the kind of like initial, like, fever out the way, you know what I mean? A lot of folk reverted back to the way they were before, drinking in the garden and stuff, didn't they? (Jason, pub/bar, lives with partner, large urban area)

⁹ Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the economic contribution of an industry, sector or region in the production of goods and services. It is a measure closely related to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Recruitment and retention

In April 2023, 42% of businesses operating in the Scottish hospitality sector reported difficulties recruiting workers (ONS, 2023). In Serving the Future's research with employers, employers highlighted that current business conditions were some of the most challenging they had faced, with particular issues associated with staff turnover and retention, as well as skills deficits in certain occupations (e.g., chefs) exacerbated by post-Brexit measures relating to immigration (Baum et al., 2023; Serving the Future, 2023). Hospitality and tourism are key industries in rural areas in Scotland and businesses have been facing significant challenges with recruitment in recent years. In Skye, a recent housing needs study found that two in five businesses who responded (78% involved in tourism or hospitality) were facing recruitment challenges, with accommodation issues presenting a significant issue (BBC, 2022).

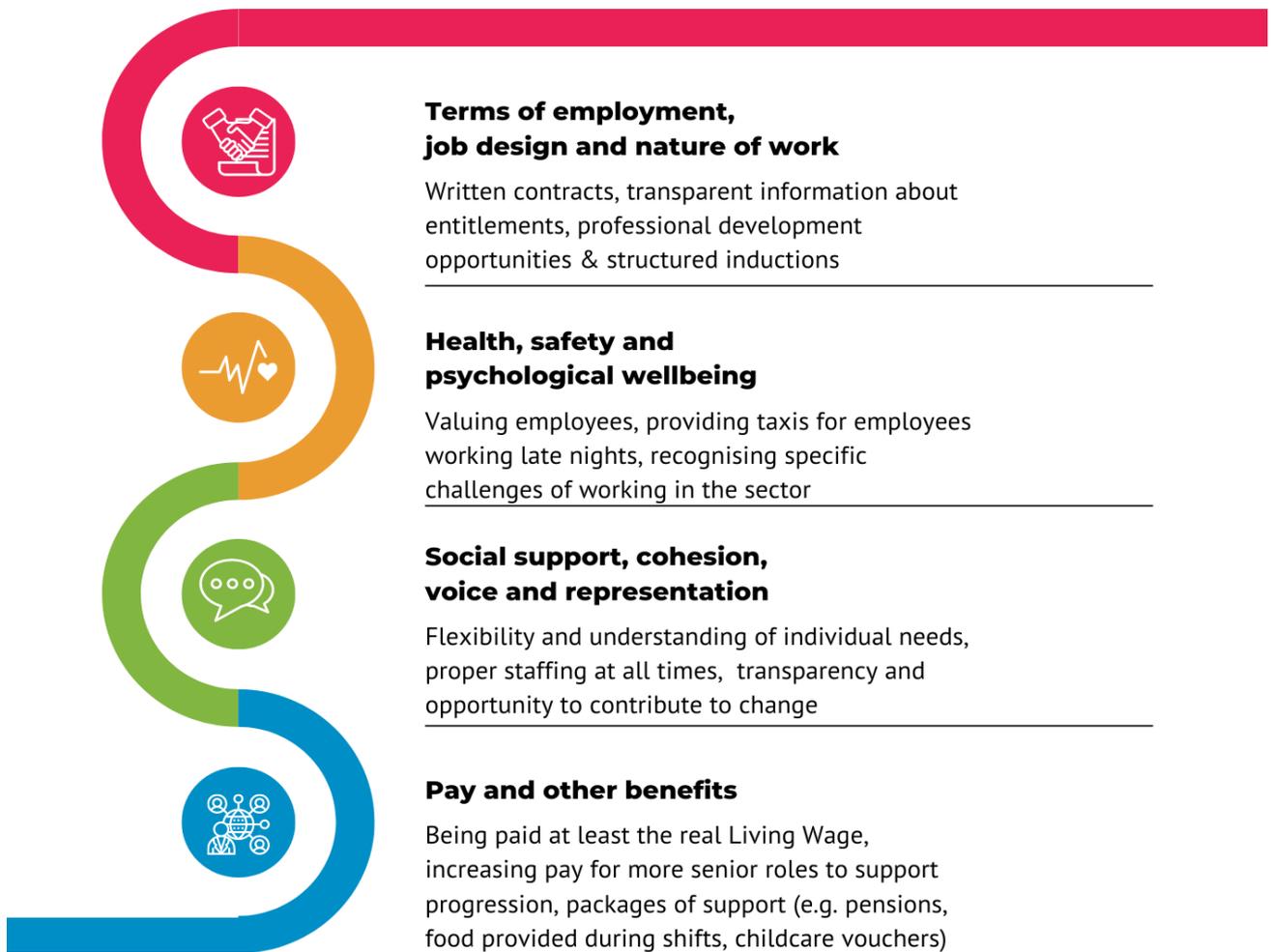
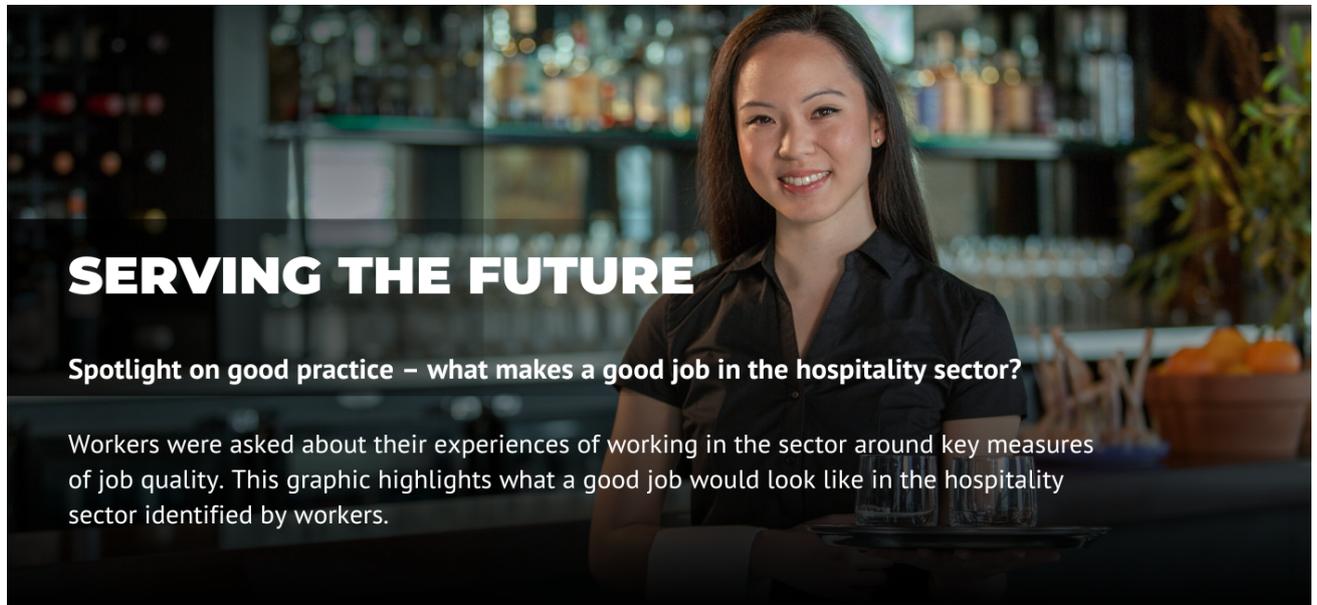
During our first wave of interviews, participants reported high levels of employee turnover and difficulties recruiting staff in the hospitality sector in both urban and rural areas. Several workers we interviewed reported having to deal with the consequences of staff shortages (e.g., by taking on extra hours).

Over the last six months I've had to take in a lot of trial shifts. A lot of people were offered jobs but didn't take them. (Andrew, food/drink services, single adult, large urban area)

We were extremely short staffed, so we were getting more than our forty hours every week, just to keep the, like the hotel opened, so that we could continue to work. (Carla, holiday accommodation, couple, two children, remote rural area)

Spotlight on good practice - what makes a good job in the hospitality sector?

Workers were asked about their experiences of working in the sector around key measures of job quality. This diagram highlights what a good job would look like in the hospitality sector identified by workers.



Conclusions

This research with hospitality workers reveals that experiences of working in the sector are mixed and complex: many workers reported positive examples of job quality and good practice, but this was mixed in with challenging and negative experiences of working in the sector. Whilst many of the participants reported enjoying several aspects of working in the sector, a range of issues, including low pay, staff shortages and lack of opportunities for progression alongside wider issues outside of work (e.g. lack of flexible, affordable childcare, the high costs of private rent), are making sustaining employment in the sector difficult.

Here, we share some conclusions from this first set of longitudinal interviews with workers.

Pay and terms of employment

Satisfaction with pay levels varied amongst the workers who took part in this research. However, overall, participants were critical of low pay across the sector. Pay at or above the real Living Wage is seen as positive. Workers frequently highlighted the positives of tips but also described tips as an unreliable source of income as amounts can vary month to month.

Workers described feeling valued through having employers who are understanding of their needs and individual circumstances (e.g. through offering shifts during schools hours).

Workers shared varying experiences of insecure hours in their employment. For workers on zero-hour contracts, experiences of fluctuating hours were common. The negative impacts of zero-hour contracts were evident in interviews including uncertainty and not being able to plan, compounded by weekly rotas being provided at very short notice. This research also shows that rural workers face significant periods of financial uncertainty and insecurity out-of-season when hours are reduced, or businesses are closed.

Findings from the research show that some of the participants struggled to understand their rights when it came to topics such as sick pay, financial support during pregnancy and access to social security entitlements.

Support for training and progression

The interviews highlighted shared views on barriers to progression amongst the workers taking part in the research. Whilst there were some examples of positive training opportunities and good structures around progression, the research provides evidence of multiple barriers to progressing in the industry including limited increases in pay for more senior positions in the sector and limited training and certification opportunities.

Financial insecurity

Working in the sector is not sustainable for a lot of the participants in the research: financial insecurity was a key theme in interviews with single adults, couples and families. Financial insecurity of households in the research is a consequence of a range of factors including insecure

hours, lack of awareness of social security entitlements, the high costs of childcare, earning above thresholds for Universal Credit and missing out on ‘passport benefits’ and struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

Support for families

For the parents who took part in the interviews, a range of challenges were shared. Whilst several parents reported that they were “lucky” to have an employer who recognised their needs (for example by providing shifts during school hours or letting parents bring their children to work), a lack of flexible and affordable childcare outside of traditional hours presents challenges for parents working in the sector, particularly for lone parents. Parents highlighted the impacts of long, unsociable hours on their family relationships, emphasizing how the tiredness from their work affects their household.

Gender inequality was another issue raised in the interviews. Women reported a lack of awareness of what they were entitled to during pregnancy and mixed experiences of support from employers.

Challenges facing the sector

Workers shared how they felt that the financial pressures that the Scottish hospitality sector is experiencing has had impacts on their job. Some workers reported that their employers were able to pass on these higher costs to consumers, but others reported that their employers were remaining closed on additional days to keep costs down, whilst others were sending workers home early when the business was not busy. Losing shifts or shifts finishing early brought negative financial implications to workers in this research.

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Appendix

1. In-work poverty in Scotland

In-work poverty describes households who live in relative poverty (earning 60% less than the median income) even though someone in the household is in paid work (Scottish Government, 2019).

Key facts: in-work poverty in Scotland

- Of the 250,000 children in Scotland living in poverty, more than two thirds of children (170,000 children each year) live in working households (Scottish Government 2023a).
- For those on the lowest incomes, the value of incomes has not risen significantly since 1995-98 (Cebula and Birt, 2023).
- Certain family household types are more likely to be in in-work poverty, including couples with children (where one or more is in part-time work), lone parents (in part-time work) and couples with children (where one is in full-time work and the other not working) (see Table 2).

Key facts: the hospitality sector¹⁰ in Scotland

- Pre-pandemic, food and accommodation services accounted for approximately 3% of Scotland's GDP and 8% of Scotland's jobs (Spowage and Black, 2020).
- Those that work in the sector are, on average, much younger than those who work in other sectors, with an average age of 34. Over 50% of employment in the sector is made up of women, and it is among the sectors with the highest proportion of women, compared to men (Fraser of Allander Institute, 2020).
- According to data published by the ONS, hospitality is the lowest paid sector in the economy, with pay in the sector around half the national average.
- According to DWP data, poverty rates in the sector are higher than the national average. The most recent data shows that around 25% of households with hospitality work are in poverty, compared to around 21% for all households.
- In 2022, 45% of accommodation and food service employees earned below the real Living Wage, compared to 9% of all employees in Scotland (Finnigan, 2022).

¹⁰ When we refer to the hospitality sector in this report, we technically refer to the Scottish accommodation and food services activities sector (as defined by the Standard Industry Classification Codes).

Table 2: Proportion of working family household types in poverty, Scotland

Economic status of child’s family by family type	Percentage in relative poverty after housing costs (3-year average – 2018-19, 2019-20, 2021-22)
Lone parent (in full-time work)	19.8%
Lone parent (in part-time work)	30.4%
Couple with children (one or more full-time self-employed)	27.8%
Couple with children (both in full-time work)	2.7%
Couple with children (one in full-time work and one in part-time work)	5.1%
Couple with children (one in full-time work and one not working)	30.1%
Couple with children (one or more in part-time work)	62.7%

Source: DWP Households below average income dataset – households with children under 16

2. Policy context

Fair work

In 2015, the Scottish Government set up the Fair Work Convention, an independent advisory body to Scottish Ministers. The Fair Work Convention’s vision is: “By 2025, people in Scotland will have a world-leading working life where fair work drives success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses and society.”

The Fair Work Framework was then published in 2016 setting out five key dimensions of fair work (effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect), specifically focusing on how each dimension could be achieved, not just by employers but by a range of stakeholders and levers (see **Figure 4**) (Fair Work Convention, 2016).

Two inquiries on fair work in the care sector and the construction sector were followed by the launch of the hospitality inquiry by the Fair Work Convention in 2022, which is due to make its final recommendations in early 2024. In 2022, the Scottish Government also established the Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group to support the aims of the long-term vision and outcomes outlined in the national tourism strategy, *Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible Tourism for A Sustainable Future*.

An early literature review for the inquiry on hospitality highlights that the characteristics of the industry create some tangible barriers to the delivery of fair work (Fair Work Convention, 2022). The workforce is made up predominantly of younger workers who enter the workforce with few formal qualifications. The work within the sector is generally low paid and insecure, with contracts not always reflecting the hours worked. Trade Union membership within hospitality is also low, about 9% in 2019-20. The sector is largely made up of SMEs and micro businesses meaning the capacity for implementing Fair Work policies within businesses is often limited as owners and managers have limited time to dedicate to implementation of new policies and may lack dedicated HR support to do so.

There are also limited recognised industry standards when it comes to pay and contracts, but industry bodies and unions such as Unite have developed their own charters to encourage best practice within the sector, largely focusing on security, fair pay, safety and respect.

Figure 4: Scotland’s fair work landscape: stakeholders and levers (Fair Work Convention, 2016)



The Scottish Government’s (2023b) Fair Work First agenda in practice includes applying fair work criteria to grants and funding via public contracts and procurement (e.g., payment of the real Living Wage). With Hospitality employers less frequently bidding for public sector contracts or public funding, there is a limited practical impact from this policy within the sector. The national *Fair Work First Guidance* includes criteria on flexible and family friendly working practices for all workers which states that “flexibility in hours and location can be invaluable for those with caring commitments” and “enhancing parental leave and pay provision can help support women to fully participate in employment and aid their career progression” (Scottish Government, 2023b, p. 24).

Child poverty

Growing up in poverty is a predominant human rights issue facing children and young people in the UK. In 2021, the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (2021) noted that *“poverty is the single biggest breach of children’s human rights in Scotland.”* Living in poverty as a child significantly affects the realisation of their human rights in many key areas required for children to develop and thrive into adulthood – including the right to an adequate standard of living (which includes housing, clothing and food), the right to education, and the right to benefit from social security.

In 2021, the Scottish Government unanimously passed a Bill to incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law. When enacted (expected in 2023), the incorporation of the UNCRC will place responsibilities on public authorities to act compatibly with children’s human rights, including socio-economic rights like those related to child poverty listed above. This will strengthen accountability and incentives to eradicate child poverty and introduce legal remedies for children whose rights are not being met.

Key policy developments under the child poverty agenda include:

- National child poverty delivery plans: As part of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, the Scottish Government must publish four yearly child poverty delivery plans, and report on these annually.
- Early years childcare expansion (2021): Free childcare provision for 3 and 4-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds (around 30 hours a week during term time).
- Social security (2016 onwards): Best Start Grants and Best Start Foods were introduced for low-income families between 2018 and 2019. In 2022, Scottish Child Payment, a weekly £25 top-up benefit, was extended to all children under 16 for households claiming Universal Credit.

The Poverty and Inequality Commission (2023, p. 5), an advisory public body which provides independent advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers on poverty and inequality, writes that whilst the Scottish Child Payment *“represents significant progress in tackling child poverty”*, it is unlikely that the Scottish Government will meet the 2023-24 interim target of 18%.

In addition, the latest Concluding Observations on the UK by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted *“with deep concern the number of children living in poverty”* and recommended that governments *“develop or strengthen existing policies, with clear targets, measurable indicators and robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms, to end child poverty”* (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2023, para 46).

3. Methods overview

The findings reported in this briefing are from longitudinal research, part of the Serving the Future project. Longitudinal interviews are being conducted to explore the experiences of hospitality workers over time to examine challenges and demands of working in the sector and the sustainability of working in the sector, considering participants’ experiences of work alongside their wider circumstances. The research comprises three waves of interviews: involving three semi-structured interviews with each participant over a 12-month period. This briefing reports the findings from the wave one interviews conducted between September 2022 and March 2023 by a team of four researchers from the Poverty Alliance and the Fraser of Allander Institute.

Semi-structured interview schedules focused on participants' households' circumstances and incomes; a timeline of their work and wider circumstances in the previous four years (e.g. housing, education, family changes); their current role (e.g., contracts and pay, experiences with their employer); impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on their household as well as the sector; and, recommendations for change. Interviews with parents also included questions on how their employment in the sector interacted with their home life and impacts on their household (e.g. childcare, child wellbeing). In advance of the interviews, we also asked participants to complete Entitledto (an online benefits calculator) which includes questions around income and household costs. Participants were asked if they could share the output from this in advance of the interview. However only 13 participants fully completed the form in advance. Where participants had not completed the form, we collected the information during the interview. Other socio-demographic data was also collected from participants via a screening questionnaire.

In each interview, we have created participant timelines, a tool also used by the Menu for Change project to examine routes in and out of food insecurity (MacLeod, 2019). To create the timelines, participants were asked about the last four years of their life focused on work, income and wider circumstances. During the interview, one of the researchers drew the timeline as the participant spoke through key events and changes in their circumstances. The timelines will be used in the second and third wave interviews to explore any changes in their circumstances during the project.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and on Zoom and lasted about one hour. We initially aimed to conduct all the interviews face-to-face but as some of the participants lived in very remote areas, we decided to conduct these interviews via Zoom. The majority of interviews were conducted by two researchers, with one primarily taking notes. Face-to-face interviews took place in the Poverty Alliance offices and in community venues in Edinburgh. Interviews were all recorded and fully transcribed. In recognition of participants' time and expertise, £25 shopping vouchers were given to each participant.

Recruitment and sampling

Our target sample included 13 parents and 12 single adults working in a mixture of roles in the sector. We did not recruit students working in the sector alongside studying. We aimed to recruit a diverse demographic sample of participants (including age, gender and ethnicity). We also sought to recruit participants affected by the cost-of-living crisis. To capture the experiences of hospitality workers in urban and rural areas in Scotland, we initially sought to recruit participants from two local authorities: Glasgow and Argyll and Bute. Challenges with recruiting the target sample led us to extend the research recruitment to any rural area in Scotland and Edinburgh City.

A range of approaches were adopted to recruit participants including via email to Poverty Alliance member organisations, through existing contacts through the research team and via social media. Interested participants then either completed an online screening form themselves or went through the form with a researcher on the phone. The screening form included socio-demographic questions, questions about roles and hours as well as questions about the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on households.

We were faced with challenges during recruitment due to fraudulent participants and internet bots. As a mitigation strategy, we added compulsory responses to the questionnaire including addresses, postcode of the place worked and phone number. We also informed participants that they would have to share their video on Zoom interviews, as early on we had a couple of calls where participants refused to share their camera.

Analysis

Thematic analysis using a largely deductive approach was adopted by the team to analyse the interviews. A coding framework was developed driven by our research questions, which included job quality measures developed by the Job Quality Working Group (Irvine et al., 2018). As the coding team involved four researchers, central to the development of the framework was defining each code so that there was consensus between the team. The coding framework was piloted by two of the research team using NVivo to analyse one interview. This led to revisions to the existing framework; for example, adding new codes and clarifying the definitions of others. The coding framework was then input into NVivo and transcripts were coded between March and May 2023. Using NVivo, we were also able to add attributes to the participants' transcripts (e.g., gender, age, receiving means tested benefits, housing situation, family type, urban/rural location) enabling us to delve into the experiences of subsets of the participants.

Ethics

This research was ethically approved by the University of Strathclyde. All participants have given their informed consent to take part in the longitudinal research and were given a research information statement before commencing the interviews. Participants in the research have been made aware that they can discontinue their participation in the research at any time. The interviews have all been recorded and transcribed.

In this research, participants have been asked to discuss sensitive topics such as their personal experiences of living on a low income and facing financial hardship. Prior to fieldwork commencing, we mapped core welfare and advice agencies that participants could be signposted to, should they find any aspect of the research to be distressing or to see advice.



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