

GOAL 8: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



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PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

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ABSTRACT: The four pillars of the ‘Decent Work Agenda’ of the International Labour Organization (ILO) – employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue – are integral elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In quantitative terms, the positive contribution of tourism to job creation is undeniable. However, the quality of the jobs created and their effects on local populations are usually not considered. It is therefore necessary to place this debate in a wider and more complex context than the simple measurement of the jobs created.

INTRODUCTION

Decent work and the four pillars of the ‘Decent Work Agenda’ of the International Labour Organization (ILO) – employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue – are integral elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 8 calls for the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all – which are also (or should be) essential objectives from the perspective of the tourism industry.

In target 8.9, the 2030 Agenda specifically addresses the need of sustainability in tourism with regard to job creation, both directly in the tourism sector and indirectly, by focusing on local products: “By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products”.

Tourism-related job creation is one of the main reasons put forth by the business sector and international bodies such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to defend public authorities' favourable treatment for these activities. However, less has been discussed and far less researched regarding the quality of tourist employment. The ability to measure the evolution and impact of Goal 8 is one of the current major challenges.

Contextualising decent work in tourism

In quantitative terms, the positive contribution of tourism to job creation is undeniable. However, what tourism entails for places and people living in areas that become tourist destinations is normally not considered. The measures and policies that have provoked a crisis in rural areas, forcing the exodus of millions of people to seek alternative employment to be able to survive, are equally ignored. It is necessary to place this debate in a wider and more complex context than the simple measurement of the jobs created.

In recent decades, many coastal towns in impoverished countries have been transformed by specialising on tourism, thus becoming incorporated into the new “tourist peripheries”. The jobs created by tourism are usually precarious and are located at the lowest runs of the job ladder, especially in the construction sector and in services provided to tourists (cleaners, housekeepers, receptionists, cooks, gardeners, security staff and entertainment workers). Integral to the precarious nature of employment, workers are usually subjected to conditions of labour exploitation: low wages, irregularities in pay, subcontracting, police harassment, and labour insecurity and risks. At the same time, the ministries of labour and trade unions have weak protection structures, and workers systematically suffer from harassment by the business sector, thus making it difficult to form trade unions in tourist destinations.

This type of economic dynamics also attracts people who aim to “get by” in the informal economy, offering products and services directly to tourists (food, drinks, souvenirs, handicrafts, massage, etc.). Yet, their access to tourists is not always easy due to the restrictions and privatization dynamics created by a type of excluding tourism, which has metaphorically been labelled the “beach-sun bunker”.

An example of this type of situation was made clear in the 1st March 2010 protest in front of the Hotel Riu, organised by local inhabitants near the Matapalo Beach in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. They protested against the company prohibiting free access to the beach in front of the hotel, thus preventing itinerant vendors from getting access to the tourists. The protest was convened by the Guanacaste Brotherhood (Confraternidad Guanacasteca), the Conservation Federation (FECON) and the Student Federation of the Central American University.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

Several international bodies have acknowledged the relevance of adequate labour conditions for the progress towards sustainable tourism. The “Montreal declaration towards a humanist and social vision of tourism” by the International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO), adopted within the framework of the Labour Congress on Social Tourism, held from 9 to 12 September 1996, is one of these. Its article 6 affirms that “the tourism sector should both provide employment and guarantee the fundamental rights of all employees”.

In 1999, the International Labour Organization (ILO) presented the idea of decent work as an aspiration towards which efforts were required. Decent work was defined as “productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity, in which rights are protected and people have adequate pay and social protection”.

This concept of “decent work” focuses on the ILO’s four strategic objectives: employment, social protection, workers’ rights, and social dialogue. This entails a labour model in which sufficient employment exists that enables work with sufficient pay, security and healthy working conditions and also entails a system of guaranteed social protection. At the same time, fundamental labour rights should be respected, such as the freedom of association and the elimination of all forms of labour discrimination, forced labour and child labour ([>> Goal 16 Violence against Children](#)).

The aspirations associated with decent work are far from the conditions experienced by the vast majority of workers engaged in tourist-related work which violate this idea:

- » The low wages earned by many workers in the tourist industry are insufficient to be able to maintain a dignified standard of living. In many cases, workers live at the poverty threshold ([>> Goal 1](#)).
- » Employment is increasingly unstable, with companies having discretionary power to decide when and in what manner female workers’ contracts are renewed or when they are rehired. Women are forced to accept impositions with regard to their working hours, work days or holidays, which further result in more difficulty to balance work with their daily lives ([>> Goal 5](#)).
- » Changes in working hours and uncertainty in the days in which one works or when rest days or vacations can be taken makes it increasingly difficult to balance work with their personal lives.
- » The deterioration of workers’ physical and psychological health is accentuated by the increase in the work load, instability of contracts and new forms of outsourcing. There is a causal relation between job instability and the deterioration of workers’ health ([>> Goal 3](#)).
- » The conditions of hiring and the objective difficulty that the majority face to reach retirement age mark the erosion of social protection conditions. In this manner, guaranteed social protection measures are reduced.
- » Freedom of association is seriously affected in many locations, restricting the right to participation that is key to the idea of decent work, one of the Core Labour Standards and a human right.

Low wages and poor labour conditions affect the vast majority of workers in the tourist industry – and even more so those at the lower end of the job ladder, particularly women and immigrants who are particularly vulnerable. It is for this reason that some of these collectives, such as hotel housekeeping staff, have launched large international campaigns to denounce their situation.

Violation of Labour Rights and Trade-Union Freedom in Central America

One of the most serious problems denounced by trade union and human rights organisations in Central America is the difficulties that workers are facing to organize in trade unions to defend their rights and interests. A report by the Latin America Region of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) by Enildo Iglesias in 2008 and updated in 2011 contributed data on the extremely low level of trade unionisation in hotels with Spanish investments that are located in Latin America. In Costa Rica, for example, there was not a single Spanish-owned hotel in which a trade union had been created.

The attempt to organise an independent trade union is often a cause for dismissal or not renewing workers' contracts. Alba Suda, an independent research centre specialized in responsible tourism, has for many years been documenting cases of labour rights violations in the region.

In 2013, workers in three hotels in El Salvador decided to form a trade union in the sector, given the difficulties encountered to create trade unions in each of the hotels. Following its formation and the presentation of all the legal paperwork at the Ministry of Labour, workers' presented these to the management at their respective hotels. Two of these hotels in the Los Cóbanos region - Hotel Decameron, which is part of a Colombian chain, and Hotel Veraneras - fired all the workers who had formed the trade union. In the case of Hotel Decameron, many of the workers who had contact with the women workers who had spurred the trade union or those who had expressed any type of displeasure with the existing labour conditions did not get their contracts renewed. Despite the actions taken by Ministry of Labour inspectors and the denunciations lodged in different courts, more than three years later the workers who were fired have neither been reinstated in their positions nor have they received any compensation for the damage caused.

No Holidays for the Burmese

Out-sourcing is very common in the hospitality sector, especially in sections such as laundry, cleaning and housekeeping. Migrants, who predominantly work in those sectors, face discrimination and lack of social security, as research on Burmese migrants in Thailand shows. The Swedish organizations Schyst resande and Fair Action found significant degrees of exploitation of Burmese migrants in the Thai tourism hotspots of Khao Lak and Phuket. The migrants they interviewed often work below Thai minimum wages. They also stated that Thai workers have better accommodation and more free time, including provisions for sick leave and maternity leave.

No Holidays for the Burmese. A follow up study of the working conditions for Burmese migrants at hotels and their suppliers in Thailand. Schyst resande and Fair Action, 2015. fairaction.se/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/No-holidays-for-the-burmese_9-december-2015.pdf

TANGIBLE WAYS FORWARD

Tourism undoubtedly creates employment, but the sector faces a large challenge to move towards decent work. This entails questioning and paying attention to the quality of jobs created. Inclusive tourism necessarily involves the improvement of the labour conditions of both female and male workers engaged in this type of activity. Inspiring positive examples exist that can open the discussion on making real progress towards economic growth that is both sustainable and creates decent work.

IUF Global Campaign for Dignity and Decency for Workers employed in Hotel Housekeeping Services

The International Union of Food Workers (IUF) and other sectors of the industry such as hotel and tourism-sector workers started an international campaign, through union organisations, to denounce the conditions of exploitation and labour instability of hotel housekeeper workers. The campaign has had an impact in different countries on all continents, starting with Argentina where the Union of Workers in Tourism, Hotel and Gastronomic services (Unión de Trabajadores del Turismo, Hoteleros y Gastronómicos de la República Argentina – UTHGRA) was a pioneer in bringing the problem to public attention.

The campaign has been made visible with actions in the front of many hotels, but it has also gained force in social networks and the media. The distinct trade union demands in defence of dignified employment have also been presented in different international bodies such as the European Parliament and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Housekeepers are the workers who are responsible for the cleaning of rooms and common areas in hotels, in addition to providing personal attention to clients. Through the campaign and different actions taken by the trade unions and women workers, an almost previously unknown situation was brought to light. Some of the main problems that were detected include:

- » low salaries that prevent a dignified standard of living;
- » work overload;
- » job insecurity, with the loss of stable employment and the expansion of temporary employment, part-time work and outsourcing via third parties;
- » serious effects on physical (exhaustion, cervical and lumbar problems, carpal tunnel syndrome, etc.) and psychological (stress, depression, etc.) health;
- » difficulty in demanding rights and trade unions due to reprisals; and sexual harassment.

Link to the campaign: <http://www.iuf.org/show.php?tid=221&lang=en>

Rural Employment in Community Tourism

Community tourism is a management model in which the local population (especially indigenous peoples and peasant families) of a particular rural area and through their different collective organisational structures play a predominant role in the control of the design, implementation and management of tourism and in the distribution of its benefits. One of the main benefits has been the creation of non-traditional employment in rural settings. This has especially benefitted women and young people, enabling them to remain in their communities and not having to migrate to fulfil their aspirations for a better future.

The Los Pinos Cooperative is located alongside the Coatepeque Lake in El Salvador. It was founded in the context of the 1980 agrarian reform. The cooperative was mainly focused on the production and marketing of coffee when in early 2000 its nearly 100 members started a tourist project to expand their sources of income and employment. It has a restaurant, recreational activities and three cabins for rental. It basically targets local tourism, offering visits to the farm and the coffee plantation, swimming in the lake and dining in the restaurant.

Due to this initiative, the cooperative has 12 new jobs, which are held by members or their children. One of these workers is Marvin Vega, a young man who had worked in the United States and, with determination, was able to study gastronomy. He now manages his own restaurant in this community initiative, which beyond the creation of local jobs is in full compliance with the country's labour laws. He purchases from local producers.

FairHotel

The North American trade union Unite Here has initiated an ambitious system that allows customers to select their accommodation on the basis of information on the labour conditions of the staff. Choosing a FairHotel is a way for consumers to make a difference in the lives of hardworking people who make their beds or prepare the meals. Unite Here works to improve wages and benefits in the hospitality industry, creating jobs that sustain families and communities.

www.fairhotel.org

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