

STRUCTURAL DISPARITIES OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: This study analyzes the structural disparities of human resources in Romania's hospitality industry during the period 2008–2023, offering a comprehensive perspective on employment dynamics, salary evolution, and productivity across different regions and gender categories. The research highlights the central importance of human resources in ensuring service quality and customer satisfaction, emphasizing the significant contribution of well-trained personnel to maintaining the sector's competitiveness. Although the industry was profoundly affected by the global economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, it demonstrated remarkable resilience, quickly recovering losses and adapting to new economic and social conditions. The analysis reveals significant disparities between Romania's regions, influenced by economic, demographic, and infrastructural factors. Developed regions, such as Bucharest-Ilfov, North-West, and Center, experienced faster growth in employee numbers and salaries, supported by substantial investments and consistent demand for tourism services. In contrast, less developed areas, such as South-West Oltenia and North-East, recorded modest growth, constrained by deficient infrastructure and limited access to tourist markets. The upward trend in nominal net wages within the hospitality sector reflects a gradual professionalization of the workforce and an effort to attract and retain qualified employees. The COVID-19 pandemic caused an abrupt decline in employee numbers and productivity in 2020, but the sector demonstrated remarkable recovery capabilities. By 2023, both the number of employees and productivity levels had surpassed pre-pandemic values, underscoring the adaptability of hospitality companies through service diversification, the use of modern technologies, and the implementation of policies aimed at reducing employee turnover. The study also highlights the predominance of women in this industry, who accounted for over 60% of the workforce throughout the analyzed period. However, recent trends indicate a slight increase in male participation in roles associated with flexibility and physical effort, suggesting a gradual diversification of gender structure within the sector. Based on these findings, the paper recommends continued investments in professional training, retention policies such as creating attractive working conditions, and initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Additionally, the importance of leveraging human resource analysis for crisis management and implementing adaptive strategies to support sustainable growth and long-term competitiveness is emphasized.

Keywords: human resources, hospitality industry, Romania, structural disparities, employment, productivity, salaries

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INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry stands as a pivotal sector within the global economy, profoundly influencing consumer experiences through its reliance on human interaction to deliver high-quality services. At the heart of this industry lies human resources, which play an indispensable role in crafting, delivering, and sustaining memorable customer experiences. The meticulous analysis and study of these resources are paramount for the enduring success and sustainability of organizations operating within this domain. Human resources serve as the cornerstone of the hospitality industry due to the direct and continuous interaction between employees and customers. The caliber of services provided is intrinsically linked to the competencies, attitudes, and satisfaction levels of the workforce. In a sector that is inherently people-centric, employees transcend mere task execution; they shape brand perception, fostering customer loyalty and trust. Given that

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hospitality demands both adaptability and empathy, it is crucial to delve into the behaviors and needs of employees to uphold high service standards. One of the most significant outcomes of human resource analysis is the enhancement of service quality. By pinpointing training and professional development needs, companies can elevate employee skills, ranging from effective customer communication to adeptly handling challenging situations. A well-prepared and trained workforce directly contributes to customer satisfaction and, by extension, the success of the business.

Moreover, the productivity of the workforce is another critical aspect that benefits from thorough human resource analysis. Examining team dynamics and efficiency can lead to the implementation of optimal solutions, such as automating repetitive tasks or redistributing workloads more equitably. Employees who operate in a well-organized environment are more motivated and efficient, enabling companies to reduce operational costs.

Employee retention is another vital consideration in this sector. The hospitality industry is notorious for its high turnover rates, driven by factors such as stress, low wages, and limited advancement opportunities. Analyzing the factors that lead to employee attrition, such as working conditions or lack of recognition, helps in devising strategies to improve retention. Consequently, the costs associated with recruiting and training new employees can be significantly reduced.

Furthermore, human resource analysis plays a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusion. As a globalized industry, hospitality benefits from multicultural teams that bring diverse perspectives and creative solutions. By fostering diversity and creating an inclusive environment, companies can develop teams that are better equipped to meet the varied needs of their clientele. The analysis of human resources in the hospitality industry is more than an operational process; it is a strategic imperative for the sustainable growth and success of this sector. In an industry centered around people, understanding the needs, behaviors, and motivations of employees is key to ensuring service quality and customer satisfaction. By investing in human resources, hospitality companies can build more resilient, innovative, and competitively positioned organizations for the future.

The Importance of Analyzing and Studying Human Resources in the Hospitality Industry

The hospitality industry is one of the economic sectors with the greatest impact on consumer experience, relying on human interaction to create high-quality services. Human resources are at the core of this industry, playing a fundamental role in creating, delivering, and maintaining memorable experiences for customers. The analysis and study of these resources is an essential process for the success and sustainability of organizations in this field. The direct and constant interaction between employees and customers makes human resources the main pillar of the hospitality industry. The quality of services is directly dependent on the competencies, attitude, and job satisfaction of employees. In a sector highly focused on people, employees not only perform tasks but also influence brand perception, generating customer loyalty and fidelity (Herman et al., 2023; Bógdał-Brzezińska et al., 2023). Since hospitality requires adaptability and empathy, it is essential to study employee behaviors and needs to maintain a high standard of services.

Improving service quality is a crucial aspect of any organization's success, and the analysis of human resources plays a central role in this process. It allows for the accurate identification of training and professional development needs, providing companies with the opportunity to optimize their human resources (Stupariu and Josan, 2014). By implementing appropriate training programs, employees can acquire essential skills such as effective communication with customers, proactive problem-solving, and managing difficult situations. Well-trained staff not only ensure a positive customer experience but also contribute to strengthening the company's image in the market. This leads to increased customer loyalty, attraction of new opportunities, and enhanced competitiveness. Furthermore, employees who feel valued and supported in their professional development are more motivated, contributing to a more efficient work environment and better talent retention. In the long run, investing in employee training and development translates into tangible results: optimized processes, reduced costs associated with errors or conflicts, and a significant increase in organizational performance. Thus, human resource analysis becomes not only a diagnostic tool but also a driver of progress, aligning employees' individual goals with the company's strategic vision (Coyle and Dale, 1993; Campos-Soria et al., 2005; Keller and Bieger, 2007; Yasin and Yavas, 2008; Cai and Alaedini, 2018; Gaol et al., 2018; Bayad et al., 2021; Manohar et al., 2024).

Another major benefit of human resource analysis is the significant *increase in organizational productivity*. By studying team workflows and evaluating their efficiency, managers can identify both strengths and areas that need improvement. This information allows for the implementation of tailored solutions, such as automating repetitive tasks, using advanced technologies, or redistributing the workload evenly among employees. Automating repetitive processes not only frees up employees' time for tasks that require creativity and strategic thinking, but also helps reduce errors, thereby enhancing operational efficiency. At the same time, redistributing tasks ensures an equitable division of labor, preventing some employees from being overburdened and others from being underutilized. A well-organized and balanced work environment encourages employees to be more focused, motivated, and engaged in their tasks.

Moreover, streamlining workflows has a direct impact on operational costs. Reducing time lost on inefficient activities, lowering absenteeism rates, and improving the quality of final outcomes allow companies to save important resources, which can then be reinvested in development. In the long run, an optimized work environment supported by modern technology fosters innovation and competitiveness, turning increased productivity into a strategic advantage for the organization (Reich, 1997; Keller and Bieger, 2007; Lockyer, 2013; Benavides-Chicón and Ortega, 2014; Li, 2014; Sánchez-Ollero et al., 2015; Tveteraas and Falk, 2016; Szende et al., 2021).

Reducing employee turnover is a major challenge and an essential goal in the hospitality industry, known for its high employee departure rate. This trend is often driven by factors such as constant stress from interacting with diverse customers, perceived inadequate salaries, irregular work schedules, and a lack of clear career advancement opportunities.

These factors not only affect team stability but also compromise the continuity of services and the quality of the customer experience. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the causes behind employee turnover becomes a strategic priority. Factors such as working conditions, lack of recognition for employees' efforts, or a poorly defined organizational culture can be identified and addressed through specific strategies. For example, improving benefits packages, creating performance recognition programs, implementing clear career paths, and offering continuous training programs can significantly contribute to increasing employee loyalty. In addition to improving employee satisfaction and engagement, reducing turnover also brings significant financial advantages to companies. The direct and indirect costs associated with recruiting, integrating, and training new employees are considerable, and their high frequency can seriously impact an organization's budget. An attractive work environment, where employees feel valued and have real opportunities for development, not only reduces these costs but also contributes to building a stable and experienced team capable of providing high-quality services to customers. In the long run, such strategies support the strengthening of the company's reputation and provide a competitive advantage in the market (Davidson et al., 2010; Boella and Goss-Turner, 2012; Dusek et al., 2014; Bast, 2019; Boella and Goss-Turner, 2019; Jung et al., 2021; Al-Malood, 2023; Maqableh et al., 2023).

Human resource analysis plays a crucial role in *promoting diversity and inclusion*, fundamental aspects in a globalized industry like hospitality. Diversity, manifested through multicultural teams, brings a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and creative approaches that can significantly improve organizational performance. Employees from different backgrounds contribute to the development of innovative solutions and a better understanding of the diverse needs of customers, resulting in a more personalized and satisfying experience for them. Promoting diversity begins with a careful analysis of the workforce structure and recruitment practices. Identifying potential barriers in the hiring process, such as unconscious biases or lack of accessibility, enables companies to implement policies that attract and retain diverse talent. Additionally, training programs focused on diversity awareness and the development of intercultural competencies can enhance collaboration among employees and create a more harmonious work environment. Inclusion is complementary to diversity and involves creating an environment where all employees feel respected, valued, and supported in contributing to the organization's success. Companies can encourage inclusion through clear anti-discrimination policies, adapting work schedules to individual needs, and offering benefits that cater to cultural diversity, such as time off for specific holidays or customized menus. In the long run, an organizational culture based on diversity and inclusion not only stimulates creativity and innovation but also strengthens the company's reputation as a top employer. As a result, organizations can attract customers from diverse backgrounds, expand their consumer base, and respond more effectively to the demands of a constantly changing market. Diversity and inclusion thus become not just moral values but also essential strategic advantages for success in the hospitality industry (Madera, 2013; Suarez et al., 2015; Rhou and Singal, 2020; Bhutto et al., 2021; Gurinder et al., 2022; Legrand et al., 2022; Manoharan et al., 2023).

Human resource analysis involves exploring several essential dimensions that can significantly influence organizational performance. A fundamental aspect is the *evaluation of employees' qualifications and competencies*, which are critical for ensuring quality services. Identifying the current skill level of the staff provides a solid foundation for adjusting professional training programs to meet the increasingly complex and ever-changing demands of the industry. In addition to qualification levels, it is important to also analyze employees' adaptability to new technologies and processes. In a globalized economy marked by digitalization, professional training should include not only technical skills but also soft skills such as effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Such training contributes to the development of versatile teams capable of tackling challenges and creating added value for the organization. Furthermore, human resource analysis should include evaluating the level of employee engagement and motivation. A qualified but demotivated workforce can negatively impact organizational performance. Therefore, it is essential to identify the factors that influence job satisfaction and implement strategies that support the professional and personal development of employees (Balmuş-Andone, 2023). Another relevant aspect is managing diversity and promoting an inclusive environment. Intercultural competencies and sensitivity to the needs of a diverse workforce are crucial for creating a harmonious and high-performing work environment. At the same time, a focus on leadership development at all organizational levels can improve team coordination and alignment with strategic objectives. In the long run, a detailed and well-directed analysis of all these dimensions of human resources not only helps optimize internal processes but also contributes to positioning the organization as an industry leader. Companies that invest in employee skill development, motivation, and adaptation to market demands are better equipped to face competition and adapt to changes in the business environment (Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2011; William Angliss Institute of TAFE, 2012; Karatepe and Karadas, 2015; Goh and Lee, 2018; Boella and Goss-Turner, 2019; Pham et al., 2018; Nadda et al., 2022; Manglik, 2023).

Employee satisfaction is a crucial indicator of organizational performance, influencing not only internal productivity but also the quality of interactions with customers. Satisfied employees are more engaged, motivated, and dedicated to delivering high-quality services, which directly contributes to increasing customer loyalty and strengthening the company's reputation. To ensure a high level of employee satisfaction, organizations must address several critical factors. First and foremost, competitive salaries are essential, providing employees with the sense that their work is valued and appropriately rewarded. Fringe benefits, such as health insurance, vacation vouchers, or access to personal and professional development programs, add value to the compensation package and improve employees' perception of the workplace. Another important aspect is work-life balance. Flexible working hours, the possibility to work from home, or support for managing personal situations help reduce stress and create a more relaxed work environment. Employees who feel they have more control over their schedules are more motivated and efficient, which positively impacts the organization's performance. In addition to these tangible elements, a subtle yet extremely important factor is the atmosphere in the workplace. An organizational culture based

on respect, collaboration, and recognition of merit encourages employees to actively engage and contribute to achieving common goals. Positive feedback, opportunities for advancement, and support from leaders are factors that significantly increase satisfaction and the sense of belonging. Employee satisfaction is more than just an indicator; it is a driver of performance and long-term success. An organization that invests in the well-being of its employees not only reduces turnover but also creates a stable, loyal, and dedicated team capable of achieving exceptional results (Power, 2016; Ažić, 2017; Burke and Hughes, 2018; Book et al., 2019; Şule et al., 2019; Heimerl et al., 2020; Ghani et al., 2022; Marco and Bruno, 2024).

Motivation and employee engagement are essential pillars of a successful organization. Analyzing employee motivation not only highlights the factors that drive them to perform at their best but also provides insights into measures that can be implemented to enhance their involvement and enthusiasm at work. A motivated team is a productive team, capable of overcoming challenges and contributing to the achievement of organizational goals. Non-financial rewards play a particularly important role in this process. While salary and material benefits are essential, studies show that recognition and appreciation of employees' performance have a profound impact on their motivation. A simple thank-you message, an excellence certificate, or an internal ceremony recognizing achievements can strengthen the feeling of value and belonging. These gestures, though seemingly small, create a positive organizational culture in which employees feel respected and valued. Opportunities for advancement are another key element in boosting motivation. Employees who see clear prospects for professional development are more willing to invest time and energy in their work. Mentorship programs, continuous training, and clear career paths are tools that not only motivate but also strengthen employee loyalty to the organization. Moreover, creating a work environment that encourages autonomy and initiative can significantly contribute to increasing motivation. Employees who feel involved in the decision-making process and have the opportunity to influence how they carry out their tasks are more engaged and creative. This type of environment fosters innovative thinking and promotes a deep sense of responsibility for the success of the organization. Employee motivation and engagement are not only management objectives but also strategic investments that directly influence the organization's performance. By implementing measures that meet employees' needs, organizations can build dedicated, resilient teams focused on excellence (Bulut and Culha, 2010; Niu, 2010; Raub and Robert, 2012; Riley, 2014; Meyer, 2016; Burke and Hughes, 2018; Koo et al., 2019; Şule et al., 2019).

The impact of technology on human resources is a particularly relevant aspect in the context of the rapid transformations in the organizational environment. The automation of processes and the implementation of modern technologies are revolutionizing the way daily activities are carried out, fundamentally changing the requirements for certain roles and competencies. This dynamic demands a strategic approach to ensure an effective transition and to fully capitalize on the benefits of technology (Stoica, 2021). One immediate effect of adopting advanced technologies is the reduction of repetitive and administrative tasks, which allows employees to focus on higher-value activities such as strategic decision-making, innovation, or improving customer relationships. However, to work efficiently alongside new technologies, employees need to be reskilled. Training programs that integrate digital and technological competencies are becoming essential. These programs not only support staff adaptation but also enhance employees' confidence in their ability to cope with changes. Furthermore, the use of technology in human resources, such as artificial intelligence for recruitment, performance management platforms, or data analysis applications, is radically transforming the HR function. HR is transitioning from an operational role to a strategic One, focused on predictions, planning, and continuous process improvement. Automation of tasks such as candidate selection, monitoring employee engagement, or managing administrative requests frees up time and resources for activities with a greater impact.

In addition to reskilling, it is important for organizations to focus on developing soft skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and collaboration. These skills become critical in the context of a digitized work environment, where changes are frequent and collaboration between people and technologies is vital. Careful planning of the technological transition also involves transparent communication with employees. It is essential that they understand the benefits of new technologies, are involved in the change process, and receive ongoing support throughout the adaptation. An open and learning-oriented organizational culture is key to success in this process. The impact of technology on human resources is not only a challenge but also an opportunity to transform organizations in a profoundly positive way. Investments in reskilling, training, and adopting modern technologies prepare both employees and organizations for a future characterized by efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness (Law et al., 2014; Buhalis et al., 2019; Walker, 2021; Waluyo and Tan, 2022; Legrand et al., 2022; Valeri, 2023; Talukder et al., 2024).

Human resources analysis plays a crucial role in *adapting the hospitality industry to crises and rapid changes*, serving as a strategic tool for managing unexpected challenges. Recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or other threats in tourism (Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2024), have highlighted the need for a flexible, resilient, and well-prepared workforce capable of handling unprecedented situations. In this context, human resources analysis becomes a key factor in the success of organizations, enabling them to anticipate and respond effectively to market changes. One of the major lessons from recent crises is the importance of workforce flexibility. Companies in the hospitality industry that invested in diversifying employee skills were able to quickly redistribute tasks and optimize available resources. Detailed analysis of staff skills and capabilities helps identify strengths and areas for improvement, thus facilitating the implementation of solutions tailored to crisis situations. Furthermore, human resources analysis allows companies to adjust their recruitment and retention strategies according to market conditions. During times of uncertainty, retaining key employees becomes a priority, and implementing policies that support their well-being, such as flexible working hours or offering psychological support, helps maintain a high level of engagement and loyalty. In addition, utilizing data generated by human resources analysis supports informed decision-making, such as identifying emerging trends in

employee behavior or anticipating the impact of certain measures on organizational performance. With this information, companies can develop solid contingency plans, enabling them to respond quickly and effectively to new crises. Another essential aspect is adapting the organizational culture to new realities. Crises can create uncertainty and stress among employees, and a culture based on empathy, support, and open communication can significantly reduce anxiety and increase team resilience. Human resources analysis helps identify the cultural initiatives necessary to support employees during difficult times. Investing in human resources analysis is more than just a preventive measure; it is an essential strategy for adapting to rapid changes and maintaining long-term competitiveness. Companies that prioritize understanding and developing their human resources can build a solid foundation for successfully navigating future challenges while maintaining both stability and innovation (Hosie and Pforr, 2016; Brown et al., 2017; Breier et al., 2021; Foroudi et al., 2021; Ghaderi and Paraskevas, 2021; Wong et al., 2021; Kennell et al., 2022; Carvalho et al., 2024).

A satisfied and motivated team not only ensures better operational performance but also significantly contributes to *strengthening the company's positive image*, both among customers and in the labor market. Employees who feel valued and supported become true brand ambassadors, promoting it through their daily interactions, whether with clients or potential candidates for new positions. This positive reputation translates into attracting more customers and retaining existing ones, thus strengthening the business's success foundation. In a highly competitive sector like hospitality or services, the company's image plays a crucial role in differentiating it from competitors. Customers not only seek quality services but also a positive experience, which is directly influenced by the attitude and involvement of employees.

A motivated team, performing its duties with enthusiasm and professionalism, can transform a simple service into a memorable experience for the customer. As a result, the company not only maintains loyal clients but also benefits from promotions through their recommendations. In the labor market, companies that invest in human resources analysis and development attract top talent more easily. An organization recognized for its positive work environment, development opportunities, and respect for employees becomes a desired employer, facilitating the recruitment of professionals capable of adding value. Additionally, staff retention improves significantly, reducing costs associated with employee turnover and providing long-term stability. In the current context, where sustainability is becoming increasingly important, companies that prioritize human resources development build a long-term competitive advantage. By creating a healthy, motivating, and inclusive work environment, they demonstrate a real commitment to the well-being of employees and the community, attracting not only clients and employees but also business partners and investors. This competitive advantage is not only economic but also reputational, reinforcing the company's position in the market and ensuring its resilience in the face of change. A satisfied and motivated team is more than an operational element; it is a strategic asset that amplifies the company's success both with clients and in the labor market. By prioritizing human resources analysis and development, companies can build a strong brand and a sustainable competitive advantage, thus preparing for a prosperous future (de Grosbois, 2012; Martínez et al., 2014; Pantelidis, 2014; Camillo, 2015; Mmutle and Shonhe, 2017; Palacios-Florencio et al., 2018; Klein, 2022; Erum, 2024).

Human resources analysis in the hospitality industry is more than an operational process; it is an essential strategy for the success and sustainable growth of this sector. In a people-centered industry, understanding the needs, behaviors, and motivations of employees is key to ensuring service quality and customer satisfaction. By investing in human resources, hospitality companies can build more resilient, innovative organizations that are better positioned for the future.

METHODOLOGY

The study aims to identify the structural disparities of human resources in the hospitality industry in Romania. It also seeks to analyze the evolution of the number of employees, salaries, and productivity between 2008 and 2023. Another objective is to evaluate the impact of economic crises and the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector (Korinth and Wendt, 2021). Finally, the study proposes strategies to improve employee retention and promote diversity and inclusion.

The data were collected from official sources, such as the National Institute of Statistics (INS), government reports, and academic studies, covering the period 2008-2023. From the National Institute of Statistics, the following databases were used: FOM104F, Average number of employees by national economy activities (sections and divisions) CAEN Rev. 2, gender, macroregions, development regions, and counties; FOM106E, Average net monthly salary by national economy activities (sections and divisions) CAEN Rev. 2, gender, macroregions, development regions, and counties; and TUR105D, Overnight stays in tourist accommodation structures by type of structures, types of tourists, macroregions, development regions, and counties. The types of data analyzed include quantitative data on the number of employees, average monthly net salaries, productivity, and gender distribution. Descriptive analysis was used to present the evolution of human resources in the hospitality industry. Comparative analysis was used to compare data across different macroregions and counties, thus identifying regional disparities (Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2018). Temporal analysis assessed long-term trends and annual fluctuations in the number of employees, salaries, and productivity. Regression models were also used to identify the factors driving fluctuations in human resources and productivity.

The impact of the global economic crisis (2008-2011) was analyzed to evaluate its effects on the number of employees and salaries. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) was also assessed to understand the declines in the number of employees and productivity in the hospitality industry. To improve employee retention, the study identifies measures such as improving working conditions, recognizing performance, and offering advancement opportunities. The promotion of diversity and inclusion is addressed by developing policies that encourage cultural diversity and creating an inclusive work environment. Training and professional development programs are also proposed to improve employee skills and enhance service quality. The results of the study were compared with other

similar research to validate the conclusions. Industry experts were also involved to assess the relevance and applicability of the proposed strategies. Study limitations include the availability of complete and up-to-date data. Additionally, there are cautions regarding the generalization of conclusions at the national level, considering regional diversity.

HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Human resources in the hospitality industry are often considered the foundation of success in this industry. Employees in hospitality are those who interact directly with tourists, creating lasting impressions through their professionalism, attitude, and interpersonal skills. The overall experience of a tourist is profoundly influenced by how they are treated and how well their expectations are met. In this sense, hospitality staff contribute not only to the efficient functioning of the business but also to the overall image of a tourist destination. The hospitality industry faces challenges related to the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel, as quality services depend on dedicated employees with excellent communication and adaptability skills. In this context, investments in training and development become essential. Well-trained employees are better able to anticipate customer needs, solve problems, and contribute to memorable experiences. In Romania, as in other countries, this sector faces a range of challenges regarding recruitment, retention, and training of staff.

Disparity in the Average Number of Employees in Romania's Hospitality Industry

Between 2008 and 2023, the data shows a variable evolution of human resources, characterized by both increases and decreases that reflect economic, social dynamics, and possible political interventions. In 2008, the human resource pool was 118,306 individuals, and by 2023, it had reached 201,989, which represents a significant cumulative increase of approximately 70.7% over the entire period. Year by year, we observe a decline in human resources between 2008 and 2011, with a sharp decrease in 2010 of 8.057%, which may reflect the effects of the global economic crisis on this sector. This period was followed by stabilization and gradual recovery, marking a significant increase starting in 2012. After 2015, a continuous increase in human resources is observed, peaking with large growth values in 2016 (12.986%) and 2017 (12.304%). The growth during this period can be explained by an increased interest in the hospitality field, a possible intensification of tourism and service activities, and improvements in working conditions or demand in this sector. Regarding the share of human resources at the national level, it has consistently increased, from 0.525% in 2008 to 0.923% in 2023, highlighting the growing importance of this sector in the national economy.

Starting from 2012, the share shows a clear upward trend, confirming that the hospitality and related services sector has gradually gained more relevance in the overall economic structure. The year 2020 marked a notable decrease both in terms of the number of employees and their share at the national level, most likely due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This decrease was -9.303%, a significant reduction reflecting the pandemic's impact on the hospitality industry. After this decline in 2020, a gradual recovery is observed, with a moderate increase of 0.669% in 2021, followed by more accelerated growth of 9.137% in 2022 and 8.366% in 2023. This trend reflects both a recovery of the sector and a possible adaptation of human resources and hospitality activities to the new post-pandemic conditions. The growth in recent years also suggests a rebound in demand for tourist services and a potential expansion of accommodation and related service capacities (Figure 1).

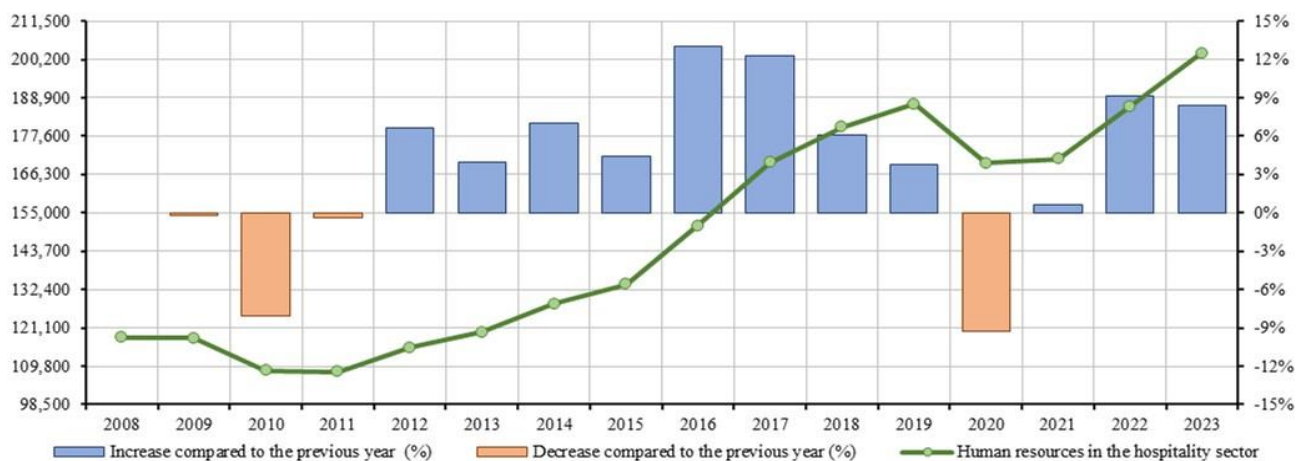


Figure 1. Human resources in Romania's hospitality industry from 2008 to 2023

(Data source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>)

The *North-West and Centre Regions* (Macroregion One) recorded a robust increase in the average number of employees in the hospitality industry, from 32,800 in 2008 to 56,938 in 2023 (+73.5%). This growth is primarily driven by cultural, mountain, and urban tourism, which has experienced accelerated development in the North-West and Centre regions. The North-West region stood out for the dynamic growth of Cluj County, which saw an increase of 96% (from 4,445 in 2008 to 8,717 in 2023). Cluj-Napoca, becoming an important academic and economic center, attracted tourists due to cultural events and modern hotel infrastructure. Other counties in the region, such as Bihor and Maramureș, benefited from spa, cultural tourism and transborder tourism (Wendt et al., 2021), with significant growth in resorts and historical destinations. The Centre region was the leader of the macroregion, with Brașov and Sibiu counties at the

forefront. Braşov grew by 48% (from 6,745 to 10,007), driven by mountain tourism and the historic city. Sibiu recorded a 56% increase (from 3,316 to 5,183), solidifying its status as a European tourist hub. Smaller counties like Covasna and Harghita showed more modest growth, focusing on rural and spa tourism (Figure 2).

In the *North-East and South-East Regions* (Macroregion Two), the average number of employees in the hospitality industry increased significantly, from 28,310 in 2008 to 50,416 in 2023 (+78%), but regional disparities are evident. The North-East region was marked by the dynamism of Iaşi and Suceava counties, where the number of employees grew by 88% (Iaşi, from 3,425 to 6,456) and 98% (Suceava, from 2,861 to 5,688). Iaşi, as a university and cultural center, benefited from significant hotel investments. In Suceava, religious tourism and cultural heritage promotion had a major impact. In the South-East region, Constanţa dominated with a 50% increase (from 8,879 to 13,356). The development of seaside tourism was crucial for the region, but seasonality remains a challenge, affecting employment stability. Counties like Brăila, Buzău, and Tulcea showed moderate increases due to the promotion of rural and eco-tourism.

The *South-Muntenia and Bucharest-Ilfov Regions* (Macroregion Three), the largest in terms of average number of employees, grew from 36,705 in 2008 to 59,183 in 2023 (+61%). The Bucharest-Ilfov region was the main driver of the macroregion, with a total of 40,024 employees in 2023. Bucharest, as the center of business tourism, attracted major investments in hotel and restaurant infrastructure. At the same time, Ilfov County grew by 101% (from 2,575 to 5,187), supported by the development of the metropolitan area. The South-Muntenia region showed steady growth, with Prahova and Argeş counties being the most dynamic. Prahova grew by 43% (from 4,059 to 5,836), thanks to mountain tourism and resorts like Sinaia and Buşteni. Argeş recorded a 76% increase (from 2,403 to 4,220), driven by recreational tourism and local investments (Figure 2).

Although contributing less in absolute terms, the *South-West Oltenia and West Regions* (Macroregion Four) saw a significant increase in the average number of employees in the hospitality industry, from 20,491 in 2008 to 35,452 in 2023 (+73%). In the South-West Oltenia region, Dolj County recorded the largest percentage increase (+135%, from 1,911 to 4,482), supported by infrastructure investments and diversification of the tourism offer. Vâlcea County, known for spa tourism, grew by 65% (from 2,895 to 4,789). The West region was dominated by Timiş County, which grew by 55% (from 5,001 to 7,762), thanks to its strategic location and economic development. Arad County also benefited from significant growth, linked to its location at the western border (Figure 2).

The evolution of the average number of employees in the hospitality industry highlights clear discrepancies between developed and less-developed regions. The Bucharest-Ilfov, North-West, and Centre regions benefited from massive investments and a steady flow of tourists, leading to rapid workforce growth. In contrast, regions dependent on seasonality, such as the South-East, and underdeveloped regions, such as South-West Oltenia and North-East, show slower growth, influenced by insufficient infrastructure and limited access to tourist markets (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Human resources in the hospitality industry in Romania in 2008 (left) and 2023 (right)
(Data source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>)

The distribution of the workforce by gender remained relatively stable throughout the analyzed period, with women consistently representing the majority of employees, accounting for over 60%. However, both gender categories were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a significant reduction in the number of employees in 2020 and 2021. The rapid recovery starting in 2022 led to a new historical peak in 2023.

Male employees. The average number of male employees in the hospitality industry in Romania increased from 43,735 in 2008 to 78,258 in 2023, representing a growth of 78.9%. The proportion of men among the total workforce fluctuated between 36.4% (in 2009) and 39.7% (in 2019). The highest percentage values for this category were recorded in 2018-2019, when the proportion of men approached 40%. The COVID-19 pandemic had a notable impact on the average number of male employees in Romania's hospitality industry. In 2020, the number dropped to 66,993, marking a decrease of 9.7% compared to 2019. However, the recovery was swift, and by 2023, the number of male employees reached a record high. This suggests a growing demand for roles traditionally associated with male employees, particularly those requiring flexibility or physical effort (Figure 3).

Female employees. The average number of female employees in the hospitality industry in Romania consistently represented the majority of the workforce, with a share of over 60% every year during the analyzed period. Their number grew from 74,571 in 2008 to 123,731 in 2023, recording an absolute increase of 65.9%. This predominance can be explained by the nature of the industry, which involves direct customer interaction and service activities, traditionally more associated with female employees. The COVID-19 pandemic also had a strong impact on this category. The average number of female employees in the hospitality industry in Romania decreased from 112,866 in 2019 to 102,662 in 2020, a reduction of 9%. However, the recovery was quick, and by 2023, women reached a new historic peak in the number of employees, thereby consolidating their dominant role in this sector (Figure 3).

Gender distribution. Over the 16 years analyzed, the proportion of women in the total workforce fluctuated between 60.3% (in 2019) and 63.6% (in 2009). Women consistently dominated the sector, reflecting a global trend in industries oriented toward personalized services. In contrast, the proportion of men never exceeded 40%, with the highest values recorded in the years before the pandemic, between 2018 and 2019. This stability in gender distribution indicates a clear structure in the hospitality workforce, with well-defined roles traditionally divided by gender. However, the faster growth in the number of male employees suggests a slow trend toward balancing gender participation in this sector (Figure 3).

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic had a disruptive effect on the hospitality industry, significantly affecting both genders. In 2020, the average number of employees decreased by over 9% for both categories, reflecting economic losses and restrictions imposed on tourism, restaurant, and other service activities. However, the sector demonstrated remarkable recovery capacity. By 2023, both men and women had surpassed pre-pandemic levels, reaching new historical highs. This recovery highlights the resilience of the industry and its adaptability to post-crisis economic conditions. The ability of businesses to innovate, diversify their services, and respond to changing customer needs played a crucial role in this successful rebound (Figure 3).

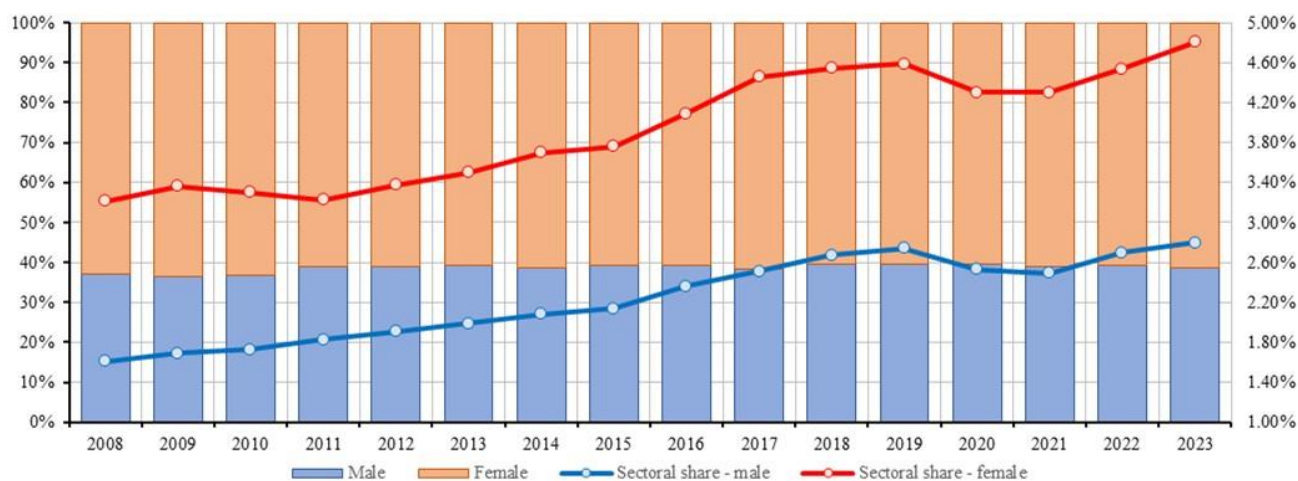


Figure 3. Human resources in the hospitality industry by gender in Romania from 2008 to 2023
(Data source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>)

In 2023, 38.7% of the employees in Romania's hospitality industry were men, and 61.3% were women, reflecting a significantly higher presence of women in this industry. Analyzing data by macroregions and counties reveals substantial differences in the distribution of employees, both in terms of gender proportions and the general structure of the industry.

In *Macroregion One*, which includes the North-West and Centre Regions, the employee structure is quite uniform in terms of women's predominance. Women make up 62.0% of the total workforce, with regional distribution varying between 57.5% (Cluj) and 75.7% (Sălaj). The North-West region, which includes counties such as Bihor and Cluj, stands out with a proportion of approximately 65-70% women, indicating a strong tendency to hire women in the industry, particularly in more economically developed counties. In Bihor, the county with the most women employed in this region (65.7% women), there is a high proportion of women working in hospitality, which may reflect a significant concentration of tourism in this area. However, in counties such as Sălaj, where the proportion of women reaches 75.7%, we can deduce a stronger orientation towards hiring women in the sector, possibly due to more region-specific requirements. In the Centre region, women represent the majority (59.1%), and in counties like Sibiu and Braşov, which are renowned for their mountain and cultural tourism, the proportion of women is significant, reaching 52-47%. These counties attract a large number of tourists, and this may favor a hospitality industry focused on high-quality services, requiring a diverse workforce, but with a slight tendency to hire women, likely due to flexibility requirements in working hours and hospitality (Figure 4).

In *Macroregion Two*, which includes the North-East and South-East Regions, a similar distribution is observed, with women comprising 66.5% of the total workforce in the industry. The North-East region is characterized by a slightly higher predominance of women, with counties like Suceava (62.9%) and Iaşi (62.0%). However, the county of Neamţ, with 73.9% women, stands out with an even higher concentration of female employees, suggesting an increasing demand for female labor in the industry, likely due to regional characteristics of tourism, such as cultural and leisure tourism. In the South-East region, the proportion of women remains high (67.7%), and counties such as Constanţa, with 67.1% women, reflect the fact that coastal tourism generally favors the employment of a female workforce due to the diversity of jobs in hospitality

modest increase of 36 lei compared to the previous year, and the share of wages in the hospitality industry compared to the national average dropped to 54.8%, the lowest level during the analyzed period. This stagnation reflects the devastating economic effects of the pandemic, which affected Romania's tourism sector and led to a decrease in demand for hospitality services (Figure 5). Starting in 2021, the hospitality industry experienced a rapid recovery, with a significant increase in wages, signaling that the sector began to stabilize and recover. The average wage in this sector increased by nearly 300 lei in 2021 and 2022, and in 2023, the increase was even more pronounced, with a rise of 689 lei compared to 2022. This reflects both the recovery of the economy and government measures to support tourism and hospitality, as well as the gradual return to high demand for tourism services following the lifting of pandemic restrictions. In this context, the hospitality industry saw significant revitalization, and employees in the sector experienced important wage increases (Figure 5).

A significant aspect of the evolution of wages in the hospitality industry is their relationship with the national average wage. The share of wages in the hospitality industry compared to the national average wage fluctuated throughout the 2008-2023 period but generally remained within a relatively constant range, varying between 54.8% and 60.9%. In 2008, wages in the hospitality industry represented 59.1% of the national average wage, and this share slightly decreased in the following years, reaching a low of 54.8% in 2020, in the context of the economic crisis and the pandemic. However, starting in 2021, the share of wages in the hospitality industry began to rise slightly, reaching 58.3% in 2023, suggesting a strong recovery and better alignment of this sector with the rest of the national economy. These wage increases may reflect not only an improvement in economic conditions but also a trend toward attracting and retaining the workforce in the hospitality industry, which has become increasingly important as tourism continued to develop (Figure 5).

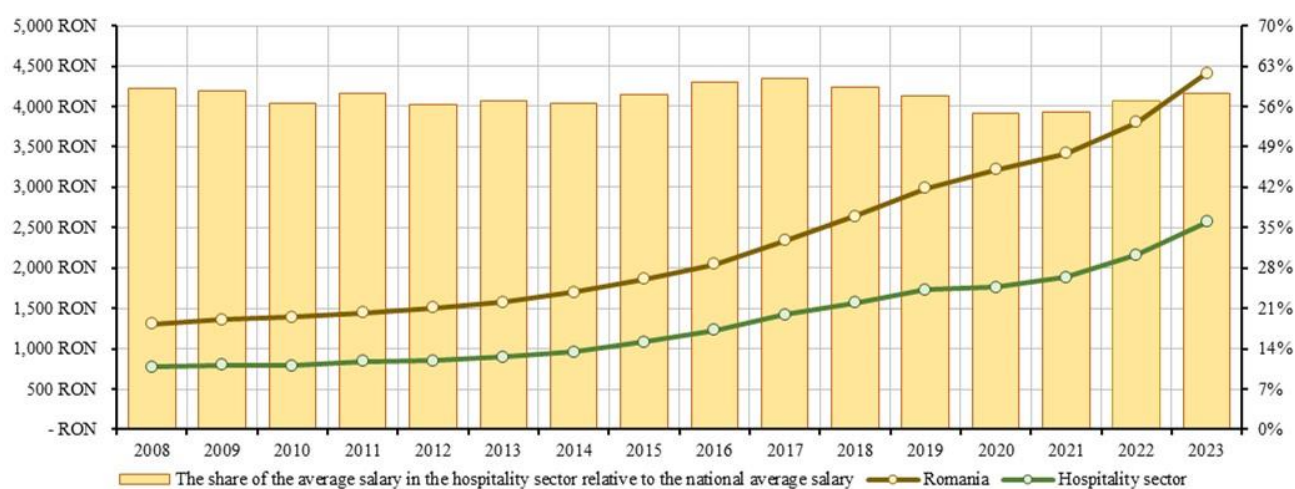


Figure 5. The average nominal net monthly wage of the human resources in the hospitality industry in Romania (2008-2023)
(Data source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>)

Analyzing the data regarding the average nominal net monthly wage of human resources in the hospitality industry in *Macroregion One* from 2008 to 2023, a general upward trend in wages can be observed, with notable fluctuations at different time intervals. In the early years of the period, between 2008 and 2012, wages in *Macroregion One* increased steadily, from 668 lei in 2008 to 806 lei in 2012. This period was marked by moderate growth, reflecting economic stabilization but also national economic challenges. From 2013 to 2016, wages continued to rise significantly, reaching 1,015 lei in 2016, and in the following years, from 2017 to 2020, there was a period of accelerated growth. By 2020, the wage reached 1,675 lei, and in 2023, it had reached 2,543 lei. The substantial increases from 2016 to 2023 reflect the continuous expansion of the hospitality industry in the context of a post-crisis stabilized economy and the development of tourism and related services. Wages increased by approximately 53% between 2016 and 2023, indicating both an increase in labor demand and improved working conditions and competitiveness within the sector. Within *Macroregion One*, there is also significant regional diversification regarding wages. For example, in the North-West Region, wages have generally been higher than in the Center Region, with notable differences in certain counties. In Cluj County, wages saw a significant rise, reaching 2,848 lei in 2023, while counties such as Bihor and Maramureș also experienced steady wage increases, reaching 2,474 lei in Bihor and 2,104 lei in Maramureș in 2023 (Figure 6).

Analyzing the data on the average nominal net monthly wage of human resources in the hospitality industry in *Macroregion Two* from 2008 to 2023, a constant upward trend is observed, with some interspersed fluctuations, especially during the economic crisis period and the years immediately following. From 2008 to 2012, the wage in *Macroregion Two* grew moderately, from 694 lei in 2008 to 800 lei in 2012. This slower growth can be attributed to the impact of the global economic crisis in 2008-2009, which affected the hospitality industry, as well as other internal economic factors. Although wages continued to rise after 2012, the increases were relatively constant until 2015, when the wage reached 965 lei. After this period, from 2015 to 2023, wages experienced an accelerated rise, reaching 2,395 lei in 2023, reflecting a significant expansion of the hospitality industry and an improvement in overall economic conditions. Within the regions of *Macroregion Two*, the data suggest significant differences between areas. In the North-East Region, wages increased steadily from 638 lei in 2008 to 2,301 lei in 2023, with remarkable increases in the counties of Bacău and Iași, which recorded the highest values, reaching 2,316 lei in Bacău and 2,439 lei in Iași. Additionally, Suceava and Vaslui saw an upward trajectory, with wages of

2,263 lei and 2,097 lei in 2023, respectively. In the South-East Region, wages followed a similar growth trend. For example, Constanța County had the highest wages in the region, reaching 2,610 lei in 2023. Other counties, such as Galați and Buzău, recorded constant increases in wages, reaching 2,406 lei in Galați and 2,263 lei in Buzău. Additionally, Tulcea and Vrancea also saw significant increases, with wages of 2,203 lei in Tulcea and 2,503 lei in Vrancea in 2023 (Figure 6).

Analyzing the data regarding the average nominal net monthly wage of human resources in the hospitality industry in Macroregion Three from 2008 to 2023, a constant increase in wages is observed, with some fluctuations during the economic crisis period, followed by a recovery and continuous wage expansion in recent years. Starting from 2008, the average wage in Macroregion Three was 977 lei, and in the following years, it experienced moderate growth, reaching 1,086 lei in 2012. After this period, from 2013, a more pronounced increase was observed, with values exceeding the 1,200 lei threshold in 2014 and continuing to rise significantly in the following years. Wages reached 2,889 lei in 2023, representing a considerable increase compared to the initial values. This growth can be attributed both to the economic development of the hospitality industry and the improvement of general labor market conditions.

Within the regions that make up Macroregion Three, there is significant diversity in wage development. In the South-Muntenia Region, wages started at 731 lei in 2008 and showed steady growth, reaching 2,468 lei in 2023. Among the counties in this region, Argeș saw the highest growth, with wages reaching 2,607 lei in 2023, reflecting sustainable economic development. Călărași County, although starting with a lower wage (572 lei in 2008), experienced a significant increase to 2,191 lei in 2023, indicating considerable improvement in the economic conditions of this area. The Bucharest-Ilfov Region recorded the highest wage values in Macroregion Three, with a steady rise from 1,066 lei in 2008 to 3,091 lei in 2023. This region, with a high concentration of economic and tourist activities, saw remarkable wage increases, particularly in Bucharest and Ilfov County. In Bucharest Municipality, wages grew from 1,083 lei in 2008 to 3,100 lei in 2023, reflecting both the growth of the hospitality industry and the economic and tourist appeal of the capital. Ilfov County also saw consistent increases, with wages reaching 3,032 lei in 2023 (Figure 6).

Analyzing the data on the average nominal net monthly wage in the hospitality industry in Macroregion Four between 2008 and 2023, a trend of steady growth is observed, with some fluctuations over the period. This evolution reflects the economic dynamics of the region and the hospitality industry, as well as the impact of various economic and social events. In 2008, the average wage in Macroregion Four was 683 lei, and over the years, growth was evident, with a slight acceleration after 2012. By 2023, the average wage had reached 2,326 lei, indicating significant growth. This increase can be explained by the development of the tourism and hospitality industry, alongside the improvement of working conditions and wages in general within this region. In the regions that make up Macroregion Four, there are significant variations in wage evolution. In the South-West Oltenia Region, for example, the average wage grew from 667 lei in 2008 to 2,293 lei in 2023, representing consistent growth. This region saw relatively steady increases, with a significant jump starting in 2013 when wages exceeded 1,200 lei. Dolj County in this region had notable performance, with wages rising from 652 lei in 2008 to 2,298 lei in 2023, reflecting the improvement in economic conditions and tourism infrastructure. Additionally, Mehedinți County saw remarkable growth, with wages increasing from 575 lei in 2008 to 2,124 lei in 2023. In the West Region, wage growth was also significant, with an increase from 694 lei in 2008 to 2,354 lei in 2023. The counties in this region, such as Arad, Timiș, and Hunedoara, had positive wage evolution, with Arad recording the largest increase, reaching 2,443 lei in 2023, compared to 641 lei in 2008. Timiș County, with its tradition of tourism and infrastructure development, had a solid wage evolution, reaching 2,473 lei in 2023 (Figure 6).

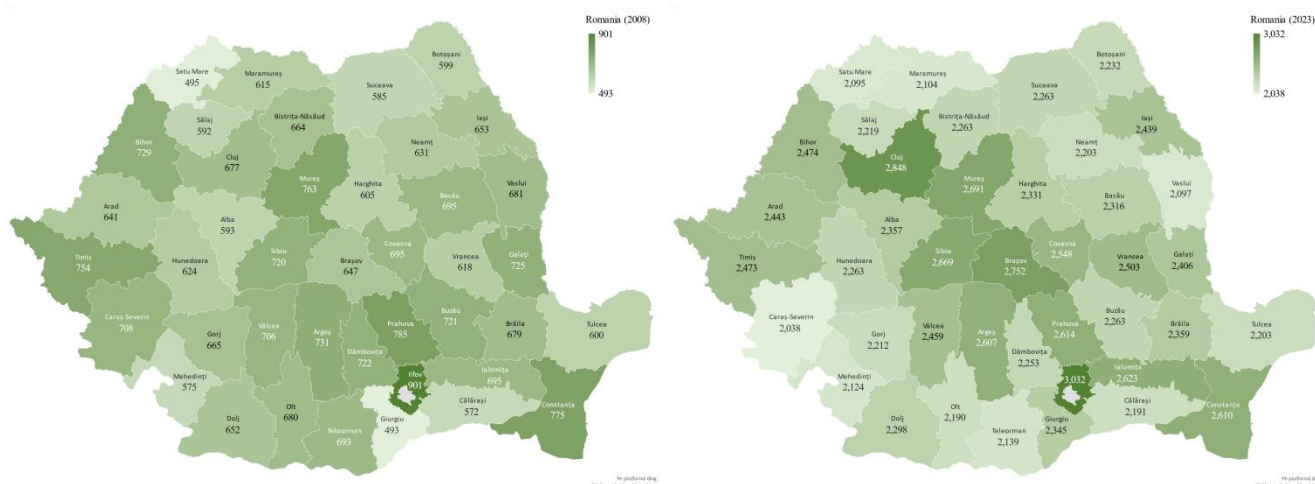


Figure 6. The average monthly net nominal wage of human resources in the hospitality industry in Romania in 2008 (left) and 2023 (right) (Data source: <http://statistici.inse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/inse-table>)

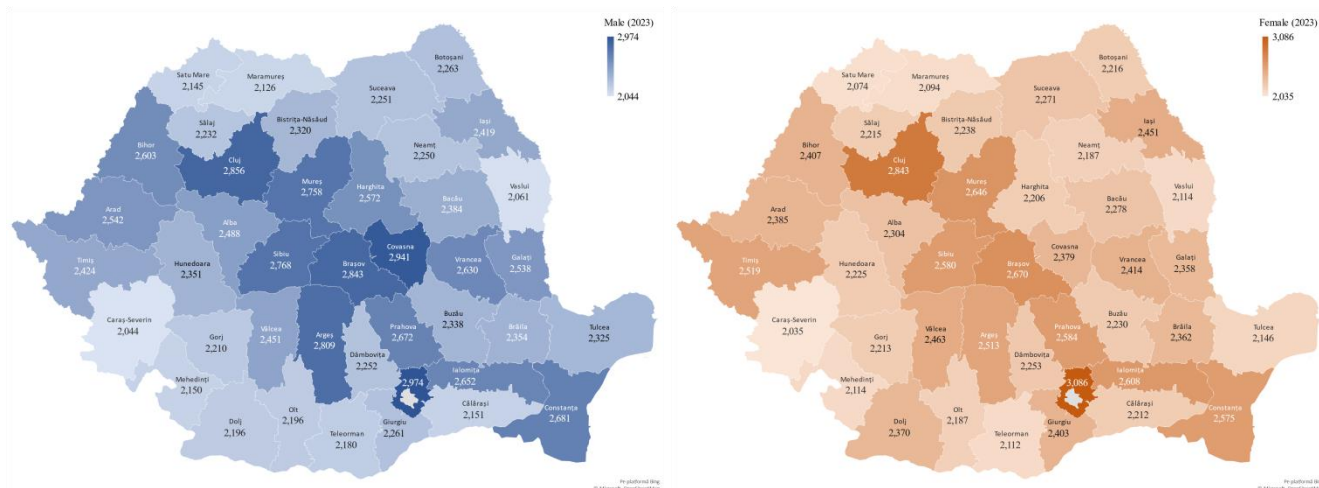
In 2023, the hospitality industry in Romania continued to show interesting differences between the average monthly net salaries of male and female human resources, with significant regional particularities. At the national level, the average monthly net wage for men was 2,329 lei, while for women it was 2,324 lei, indicating a relatively small difference of only 1%. This suggests a general trend of salary balance between the Two genders, even though the distribution of wages varies significantly depending on the region and the job structure within the hospitality industry.

In the South-West Oltenia Region, salary differences between men and women are evident, with women earning an average monthly net salary of 2,309 lei, higher than that of men (2,264 lei). This situation may be attributed to a higher number of women employed in administrative or management positions in hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality units in the region, roles that are often better paid. Moreover, regions such as Dolj recorded a higher average wage for women (2,370 lei), compared to men (2,196 lei), suggesting a possible concentration of better-paying jobs for women in certain sectors of the hospitality industry, such as luxury tourism or high-quality services (Figure 7).

Conversely, in other regions of the country, men earned higher average salaries than women. For example, in Arad County, the average salary for men was 2,542 lei, compared to 2,385 lei for women. This type of difference may reflect a higher presence of men in better-paid positions, such as management roles in large hotel units or in the food service sector, which may involve more responsibilities and specific requirements. Additionally, counties with a large number of large accommodation units, especially in high-traffic tourist areas, may favor higher salaries for men, considering their job structures, which tend to focus more on leadership and coordination positions (Figure 7).

On the other hand, in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, which includes the capital, hospitality industry wages were generally higher compared to the rest of the country, with minimal gender wage differences. In Bucharest, for example, men earned an average of 3,082 lei, while women earned 3,116 lei, with a difference of only 1%. This wage balance may reflect a more diversified and better-paid hospitality industry in the capital, where there is a higher concentration of luxury accommodation units and restaurants, offering both men and women equal opportunities to occupy management positions or other higher-paying roles (Figure 7).

At the national level, Romania's hospitality industry continues to display a balanced wage structure between men and women, although regional differences and job structures significantly influence average salaries. This suggests that in certain regions, women benefit from better salary opportunities, while in others, men are favored by the job structure in this sector. Economic, demographic, and market factors, such as the type of available jobs, the tourist structure of regions, and the specific requirements of the hospitality industry, continue to play an important role in shaping these wage differences.



In 2008, human resource productivity in Romania's hospitality industry was 175, and in 2009, it significantly dropped to 147, a decrease of approximately 16.2%. This reflects the impact of the global financial crisis, which led to a decline in the number of tourists and a less efficient use of labor. In 2010, human resource productivity in Romania's hospitality industry remained relatively constant at 148, showing a slight increase of 0.76% compared to the previous year, indicating that the sector was beginning to recover partially (Figure 8).

Between 2011 and 2013, human resource productivity in Romania's hospitality industry fluctuated slightly. In 2011, it increased by 12.46%, reaching 166, suggesting a recovery in tourism. However, in 2012 and 2013, productivity decreased again, reaching 166 (a slight drop) and 162 (a 2.8% decrease), which could be attributed to an economic stagnation and an increase in the number of employees relative to the number of overnight stays (Figure 8).

In 2014, human resource productivity in Romania's hospitality industry slightly dropped to 158, but in 2015, it saw a significant increase of 11.1%, reaching 176, reflecting an increase in tourism demand and a better correlation between the number of employees and tourism activity. This increase was followed by a slight drop in 2016, with a figure of 168, and another 5.2% decrease in 2017, when productivity reached 160. These fluctuations might indicate market instability and a relative increase in the number of employees without a proportional increase in tourism demand (Figure 8).

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, human resource productivity in Romania's hospitality industry dramatically dropped to 86, a decrease of almost 46.6% compared to 2019. This reflects severe restrictions in tourism, the closure of accommodation units, and a massive decline in the number of tourists, which significantly reduced the number of overnight stays, despite the large number of employees (Figure 8).

After 2020, human resource productivity in Romania's hospitality industry began to recover significantly. In 2021, it increased by almost 55%, reaching 133, and in 2022 and 2023, productivity continued to rise, reaching 145 and 147, with growth rates of 8.94% and 1.31%, respectively. This recovery is significant, suggesting that the hospitality industry managed to adapt to the new market conditions, reduce costs, and optimize the use of human resources in the context of health safety requirements and post-pandemic changes in tourist behavior (Figure 8).

The analysis of data from 2008 to 2023 shows that human resource productivity in Romania's hospitality industry has been volatile, heavily influenced by global economic crises and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the significant recovery in the last Two years suggests a positive adaptation of Romania's hospitality industry, with higher human resource productivity and a better correlation between the number of employees and the demands of the tourism market.

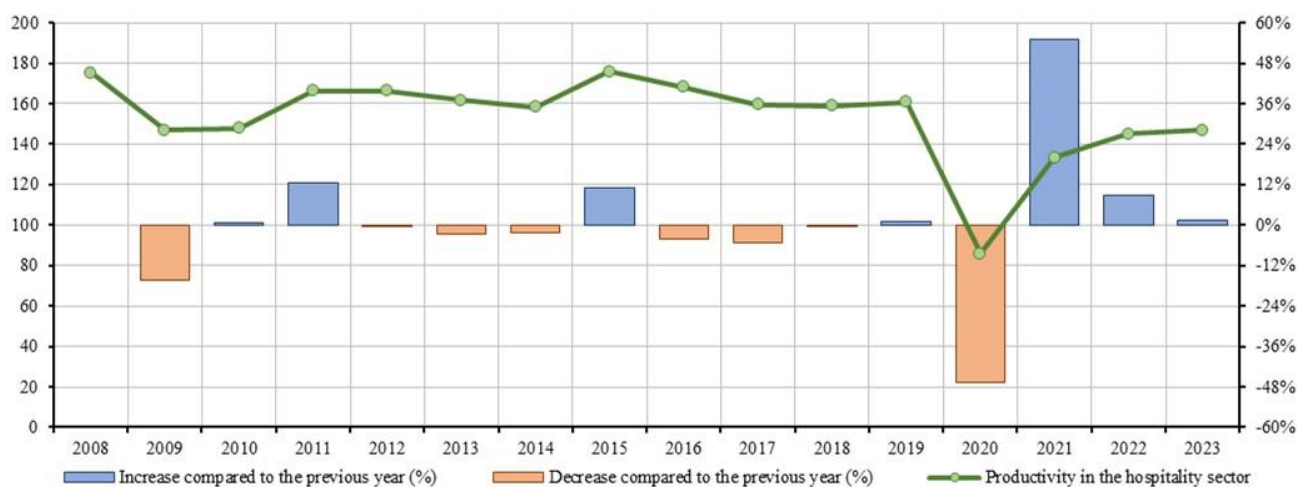


Figure 8. The productivity of human resources in the hospitality sector in Romania from 2008 to 2023

(Data source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>)

Analyzing human resource productivity in the hospitality industry in Macroregion One during the period 2008-2023, we can observe significant fluctuations across its component regions, as well as general trends of increase and decrease that reflect both economic and social changes, as well as specific factors for each region. In 2008, Macroregion One recorded a productivity of 173, and over the years, productivity showed an upward trend, reaching its peak in 2015, with a value of 209. This increase can be attributed to a period of expansion in the tourism sector, marked by growing demand for accommodation services and better utilization of human resources in the sector. After 2015, productivity began to slightly decline in 2016, reaching 196, but remained relatively stable until 2019, with values around 190. In 2020, a year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, productivity in Macroregion One dropped dramatically, reaching 98. This reflects the severe impact of travel restrictions and social distancing measures on the tourism sector, which directly affected the number of overnight stays. However, after this sharp decline, productivity began to recover, reaching 162 in 2021, and continued to rise slightly in 2022 and 2023, reaching 177 and 180, respectively. These increases in recent years suggest a recovery of the tourism sector in the context of relaxed restrictions and the gradual return of tourism demand. When analyzing the regions within Macroregion One, we observe notable differences in terms of productivity. For example, Bihor County consistently had high productivity, reaching 236 in 2008 and maintaining a relatively stable trend until 2019, when it recorded 227. Even in 2020, despite the pandemic, Bihor recorded a productivity of 118, significantly higher than the regional average. On the other hand, Bistrița-Năsăud and Sălaj counties experienced much higher fluctuations, with extremely low

productivity in certain periods. For instance, in 2020, Bistrița-Năsăud recorded a dramatic decrease in productivity, reaching 45, while Sălaj dropped to 20, reflecting the severe impact of the pandemic on tourism in these counties. After 2020, both counties began to recover slightly, reaching values of 79 and 32 in 2023, respectively. In contrast, Brașov County had constant and relatively high productivity throughout the analyzed period, reaching a peak of 319 in 2015 and continuing to remain above the regional average until 2023, with a value of 293. This is likely due to high tourism demand in Brașov, a county with significant tourist appeal, and good management of human resources (Figure 9).

Analyzing human resource productivity in the hospitality industry in Macroregion Two during the period 2008-2023, we observe a variable trend that reflects both economic and social conditions and the regional specificities of the tourism sector in this area. In 2008, Macroregion Two recorded a productivity of 247, One of the highest values during the analyzed period. Over the years, productivity showed significant fluctuations, reaching a minimum of 130 in 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, similar to the trends observed in other regions of the country. After this sharp decline, productivity began to recover in 2021, reaching 188, and continued to increase until 2023, reaching 180. This suggests a gradual recovery of the tourism sector as restrictions were lifted and tourism activities resumed.

Throughout the 2008-2023 period, the North-East Region, which includes Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava, and Vaslui counties, had significantly lower productivity compared to the regional average. For example, in 2008, the region's productivity was 144, and by 2023, it had decreased to 131, with larger fluctuations over the years. Botoșani County recorded the lowest values throughout the entire period, with a low of 20 in 2020, reflecting the severe negative impact of the pandemic on tourism in this less touristy area. In contrast, Suceava experienced positive growth, with increased productivity in most years, reaching 207 in 2023, reflecting a more active and better-adapted tourism sector.

In the South-East Region, which includes Brăila, Buzău, Constanța, Galați, Tulcea, and Vrancea counties, productivity had a more stable trend, but with significant differences between counties. For example, Constanța, a county with significant tourist offerings, recorded remarkable productivity, especially during 2008-2019, reaching a peak of 500 in 2008 and maintaining relatively high values until 2019. Even in 2020, despite the pandemic's impact, Constanța managed to maintain a productivity of 318, suggesting greater resilience in the tourism sector of this region, especially due to its tourist potential and attractions on the Romanian coast. Additionally, Brașov, a county with an important tourism offer, and Vrancea also had notable fluctuations, with significant drops in 2020 (from 87 in 2019 to 38 in 2020 for Brașov) and gradual recoveries in the following years (Figure 9).

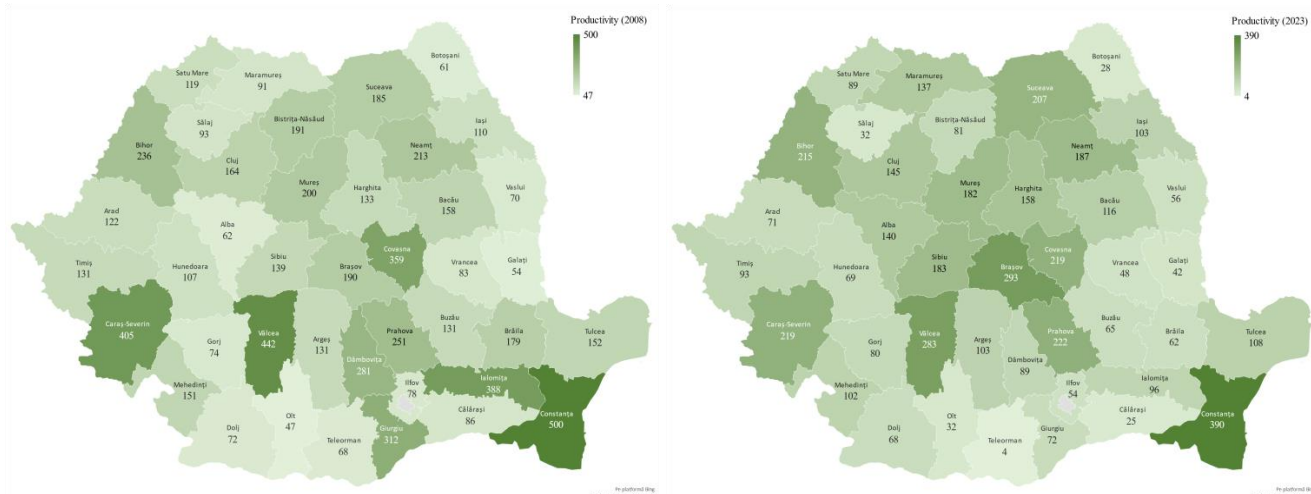


Figure 9. Human resource productivity in the hospitality industry in Romania in 2008 (left) and 2023 (right) (Data source: <http://statistici.inse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/inse-table>)

Analyzing human resource productivity in the hospitality industry in Macroregion Three during the period 2008-2023, a significant evolution is observed, largely influenced by the economic and social conditions of this region, with notable variations between different counties and regions that make it up. In 2008, Macroregion Three recorded a productivity of 118, and in the following years, it had a relatively stable trend, reaching a peak of 119 in 2015. After this point, productivity began to decrease, reaching 43 in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the hospitality industry. This decline clearly reflects the decrease in tourism activities across the region, as well as nationwide. Subsequently, starting in 2021, productivity began to recover gradually, reaching 105 in 2023, though it did not reach the levels prior to the pandemic. The South-Muntenia Region, which includes Argeș, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Prahova, and Teleorman counties, had relatively higher productivity compared to the regional average. For example, in 2008, the productivity of this region was 218, and in 2019, it reached a peak of 277, suggesting a period of expansion in the tourism sector and demand for hospitality services. However, like in other regions, 2020 was a critical year, with a significant drop in productivity, reaching 69. After this sharp decline, productivity saw continuous growth, reaching 105 in 2023, but without returning to pre-pandemic levels. Within the South-Muntenia Region, counties had varying performances. For instance, Giurgiu recorded one of the highest productivity levels in the region in 2008, with 312, but suffered a drastic decline in 2020, dropping to 17, reflecting the near-total collapse of tourism in this area. In contrast, Prahova, a county with high tourist potential due to mountain resorts and mountain attractions, recorded relatively

constant productivity from 2008-2019, peaking at 251 in 2018. After a decline in 2020, Prahova's productivity increased slightly in 2021 and continued to stay at higher values in 2023, reaching 222. In the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, productivity showed a similar evolution. Bucharest recorded high productivity values, starting with 82 in 2008 and reaching a peak of 106 in 2015. After a significant drop in 2020, Bucharest began to regain its productivity, reaching 104 in 2023, suggesting a recovery in urban tourism and demand for hospitality services in the capital. Additionally, Ilfov recorded a continuous decline in productivity from 2008-2020, from 78 in 2008 to 22 in 2020, but began to increase slightly in 2021, reaching 54 in 2023, indicating a moderate recovery of tourism in this county (Figure 9).

Analyzing human resource productivity in the hospitality industry in Macroregion Four during the period 2008-2023, a varied evolution is noted between the counties of this region, with significant differences in economic and tourism performance. Overall, Macroregion Four recorded a productivity of 181 in 2008, with a slight decline in the following years, reaching 155 in 2011, and starting with 2020, due to the impact of the pandemic, productivity dropped sharply to 77. After this severe decline, from 2021-2023, the sector began a recovery, reaching 118 in 2023, indicating that the hospitality industry is starting to recover from the global health crisis. In the South-West Oltenia Region, counties had distinct evolutions. In general, the region recorded higher productivity compared to the regional average. In 2008, it was 208, and in 2015, it reached a peak of 205, suggesting a period of expansion in the hospitality industry .

However, the 2020 pandemic severely affected this sector, and productivity dropped to 88 in 2020. After this point, the region began to recover, with a productivity of 134 in 2023, but not reaching the pre-pandemic levels. This suggests a moderate recovery of tourism and hospitality activities in Oltenia. At the county level in the South-West Oltenia Region, large differences can be observed. For example, Dolj had low productivity from 2008-2010, with values below 80, and in 2020, it reached the minimum value of 28. However, after this point, Dolj recorded a recovery, reaching 62 in 2023. Similarly, Mehedinți had a productivity decrease in 2020, but after that, it returned to 46 in 2023. The West Region, consisting of Arad, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara, and Timiș counties, had relatively high productivity values throughout the analyzed period, with a peak of 201 in 2008 and relatively constant growth until 2015, reaching a value of 205. After 2015, productivity decreased slightly, reaching 110 in 2020. Like other regions, the West Region saw a major decline in productivity in 2020, but it started to recover in 2021, reaching 119 in 2023 (Figure 9).

CONCLUSION

A detailed study of human resources in the hospitality industry in Romania, conducted over a 15-year period, from 2008 to 2023, provides a deep perspective on the evolution and dynamics of this sector, which is essential for the national economy. The analysis revealed a significant increase in the number of employees, from 118,306 in 2008 to 201,989 in 2023, marking a cumulative growth of approximately 70.7%. This positive development highlights the growing importance of the hospitality industry in Romania's economy, despite fluctuations caused by economic crises and the COVID-19 pandemic.

A crucial aspect identified in the study is the regional disparity in human resource distribution. Macroregions One, Two, Three, and Four experienced varied growth, influenced by factors such as the development of cultural, mountain, and urban tourism. For example, Macroregion One benefited from robust growth due to cultural and urban tourism in Cluj and Brașov counties, while Macroregion Two was marked by the dynamism of Iași and Suceava counties, where religious and cultural tourism had a major impact. These disparities highlight the need for regionally adapted policies to stimulate uniform development of the hospitality industry .The gender distribution of human resources shows a predominance of women in this sector, with women representing over 60% of the total employees throughout the analyzed period. This trend reflects the specifics of the hospitality industry, which involves direct customer interaction and service activities, traditionally associated more frequently with female employees. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected both genders, but the rapid recovery starting in 2022 led to a new historic peak in 2023, emphasizing the sector's resilience.

The evolution of the average net monthly nominal wage in the hospitality industry was marked by a steady increase, from 773 lei in 2008 to 2,570 lei in 2023. This increase of nearly 3.3 times reflects not only Romania's overall economic development but also a heightened recognition of the importance of this sector. However, there are significant disparities between macroregions and counties, with higher wages in developed tourist areas such as Bucharest-Ilfov and Constanța. These wage differences highlight the need for balancing measures to ensure a more uniform distribution of economic benefits within the sector. Human resource productivity, measured by the number of overnight stays per employee, fluctuated significantly over the analyzed period, influenced by economic crises and the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in 2020, productivity drastically dropped to 86, reflecting the severe impact of the pandemic on tourism. However, the significant recovery in the last Two years suggests a positive adaptation of Romania's hospitality industry , with higher productivity and a better correlation between the number of employees and the demands of the tourism market.

Another important aspect highlighted by the study is the impact of economic crises and the pandemic on the hospitality industry . The global economic crisis from 2008 to 2011 had a significant negative effect on the number of employees and wages, reflecting the sector's vulnerability to global economic fluctuations. The COVID-19 pandemic had an even more severe impact, causing dramatic decreases in employee numbers and productivity in 2020.

However, the sector demonstrated a remarkable recovery capacity, with a rapid rebound starting in 2021, underscoring the resilience and adaptability of the hospitality industry. The study also emphasizes the importance of continuous investment in employee training and professional development to maintain competitiveness and service quality. Companies in the hospitality industry need to identify training needs and develop training programs that enhance employee skills, from effective communication with clients to handling difficult situations. A well-trained and prepared staff directly contributes to customer satisfaction and, implicitly, to business success.

Additionally, the study highlights the need for effective strategies to improve employee retention. The hospitality industry is known for its high employee turnover, caused by stress, low wages, or lack of advancement opportunities. Analyzing the factors that lead to employee departures, such as working conditions or lack of recognition, helps implement strategies that improve retention. The costs associated with recruiting and training new employees can thus be significantly reduced.

Promoting diversity and inclusion is another essential aspect emphasized by the study. The globalized hospitality industry benefits from multicultural teams that bring different perspectives and creative solutions. By encouraging diversity and creating an inclusive environment, companies can develop teams better suited to the varied needs of customers. Diversity and inclusion not only improve organizational performance but also contribute to creating a positive image of the company in the job market and in front of clients.

The study underscores the importance of a strategic approach to managing human resources in the hospitality industry. Investments in employee training and development, implementing effective retention strategies, and promoting diversity and inclusion are essential to maintaining competitiveness and service quality. By understanding the evolving dynamics of human resources, hospitality organizations can better navigate future challenges and opportunities, thus building a sustainable competitive advantage. In an industry centered on people, understanding employees' needs, behaviors, and motivations is key to ensuring service quality and customer satisfaction. By investing in human resources, hospitality companies can build more resilient, innovative, and better-positioned organizations for the future.

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