

# Salary strategies in the Spanish Hotel management: Qualitative analysis of HR managers

PILAR TALÓN BALLESTEROS \* [pilar.talon@urjc.es]

CARLA SEGOVIA SAIZ \*\* [carlasegovia@isciii.es]

LYDIA GONZALEZ SERRANO \*\*\* [lydia.gonzalez@urjc.es]

CONCEPCIÓN DE LA FUENTE CABRERO \*\*\*\* [concepción.delafuente@urjc.es]

**Keywords** | Pay gap, occupational segregation, hospitality

**Objectives** | To determine the variables that set salary levels in the hotel sector performing two analyses: 1) the identification and evaluation of Human Resources (HR) compensation policies implemented by hotels and hotel chains, and 2) the identification of policies geared towards equality in compensation for men and women, currently being applied or planned for the future.

**Methodology** | The methodology is based on semi-structured in-depth 50 minutes interviews (a total of 16). Intentional sampling was developed. The interviewee sample was composed of 8 corporate HR managers from hotel chains (national and international, urban and vacational, medium and small) and 8 HR managers from hotels (4 from hotels owned by hotel chains and 4 from independent hotels). The 8 hotel chains represent approximately 40% of hotel chain beds offered in Spain. The evaluation of the interviews was conducted through thematic content analysis, always complemented with specific paragraphs from the interviews and by reviewing the literature.

**Main Results and Contributions** | In Spain, even though there are sector collective bargaining agreements at a national level (Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2015), and in some cases even at the autonomous region level, most companies in the hotel sector establish their own conditions by position and area as well as the corresponding performance evaluation. These conditions always have to be above sector agreement levels which guarantee minimums. It is within these areas where compensation differences can be favored and could result in proportionately higher or lower salaries determined by working hours, by the position held and more specifically by level of responsibility of the role.

\* **PhD in Advanced Marketing** from Rey Juan Carlos University (Spain). **Associate professor** in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law of the Rey Juan Carlos University (Spain).

\*\* **PhD student in Sociology** from the Lérida University (Spain). Health Institute Carlos III, Madrid (Spain).

\*\*\* **PhD in Economics and Business Administration** from the Complutense University of Madrid (Spain). **Associate professor** in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law of the Rey Juan Carlos University (Spain).

\*\*\*\* **PhD in Economics and Business Administration** from the European University (Spain). **Associate professor** in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law of the Rey Juan Carlos University (Spain).

Furthermore, the hotel sector is very demanding in terms of hours with limited schedule flexibility and rotational shifts. This highly impacts women making it significantly hard for them to have a work-life balance. The need of constant availability also translates into more working day reduction petitions and shift changes which eventually impact the salary (ILO, 2015). Interviewees have stated that women request more working day reductions than men, meaning that the former are the ones who pursue work-life balance more. Nonetheless, this trend is starting to change.

Women have lower hierarchical positions and lower salary ranges (Mazón Muñoz et al., 2014; Muñoz-Bullón, 2009). According to interviewees, it is because certain positions have been “stereotyped”, normally in areas with lower levels of responsibility. This leads to horizontal and vertical segregation of women.

Regarding vertical discrimination, some of the interviewed HR managers argued that women desist in pursuing leadership roles. In most cases the reasons are connected to work-life balance (Mazón Muñoz et al., 2014). It is important to bear in mind that availability as well as mobility are critical for hotel sector top management positions. Men do not usually reject higher positions in the hotel sector as they have less problems with work-life balance.

The majority of the interviewees had either not implemented yet any gender equality plans or had implemented them too recently to observe any impact.

**Limitations** | The main limitation of this study, even though it was promoted by the Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourist Accommodation, is the lack of transparency of the sector. Only hotel and hotel chain HR managers were interviewed, potentially making conclusions somewhat biased. Consequently, it would be important to compare the conclusions of this study against hotel employees' opinions.

**Conclusions** | The results show that there is no direct salary discrimination between men and women in hotels and hotel chains analyzed from the standpoint of HR plans. However, the area they work within in the organization, the position, the working hours and the level of responsibility all highly impact on the level of compensation. In this sense, since women tend to have lower hierarchically positions in the organization, their salaries are lower. Two main reasons explain this phenomenon: stereotyped jobs in the hotel sector and the difficulty of work-life balance in a sector with limited schedule flexibility, the need of constant availability and that requires geographical mobility.

Regarding bonuses, all HR managers stated that there is no discrimination between men and women given that they are paid based on performance. In most cases, the implementation of gender equality plans is recent and there are no results yet. However, these plans represent hope for the future.

## References |

- Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social (2015). *Acuerdo Laboral de ámbito Estatal para el sector de Hostelería (ALEH)*. España: BOE-A-2015-5613. Retrieved 2016, January 20, from <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2015/05/21/pdfs/BOE-A-2015-5613.pdf>
- International Labour Organization (2015). *Informe Mundial Sobre Salarios 2014/2015: Salarios Y Desigualdad De Ingresos*. Geneva: ILO.
- Mazón Muñoz, A., Ballester Talón, P., & Antón Rodríguez, J. M. (2014). Fuentes de información estadísticas para el análisis de la situación de la mujer en el entorno laboral. In M. S. Pérez & C. F. Domecq (Eds.), *Mujer y alta dirección en el sector turístico* (pp. 53-66). Madrid: Síntesis.

Muñoz-Bullón, F. (2009). The gap between male and female pay in the Spanish tourism industry. *Tourism Management*, 30(5), 638-649. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2008.11.007