

# Vulnerable work in Gauteng:

## hospitality sector survey

The hospitality industry is one of the sectors where precarious work is common. While it is easy to get a job, it is also easy to get dismissed. Some workers have contracts whilst others have none. Wages are also so low that in some instances workers make more money from tips. **Edward Webster, Attiyah Loonat, Debbie Budlender, Leilanie Williams and Mark Orkin** investigate decent work in the hospitality sector in Gauteng Province in a recent research report whose snapshots are in this article.

### FINDINGS

In order to understand working conditions in the hospitality industry we combined a survey of 947 hospitality workers in Gauteng with in-depth interviews. The questionnaire used for the hospitality sector survey was, wherever possible, the same as that used for the earlier studies on farm workers and security guards. This approach was taken so as to facilitate comparisons across the sectors.

In addition to the survey, we conducted in-depth interviews with workers (majority being waitrons) in the hospitality industry. Hospitality work is often marked by emotional labour as it is primarily face-to-face interactive service work. As one respondent remarked, 'We have to make sure everything is in order as the customers have to get what they want.'

Workers who participate in emotional labour do more than their jobs, they play 'games'. In the words of waitress Bongiwe at

Carnival City, these games include, 'Being friendly and talkative. I would say an important skill is to be attentive to the customer.' Eating out is a bit like the theatre where hospitality workers have to put on a show for customers. This is best illustrated by Itumaleng, a waitress at Carnival City, who tries to impress her customers by using flaring.

Appearance is a crucial part of work in the hospitality industry. Mary captures the importance of appearance when she says: 'We are working with the customers, we are in the front, when they come they see us first so we have to look beautiful.'

Another waitress, Susan, mentions that, 'We must dress nice, we must look attractive'. Indeed in one of our interviews the waitron said that in his establishment at 35 you are too old. This raises questions about age discrimination in the industry. The concern about appearance is however not only an important aspect for women. Says Thando: 'You

have to look like someone who you wouldn't mind touching your food'. Thando adds: 'It is work and you have to look professional and different from the customers'.

A central feature of hospitality work which emerged from our interviews is surveillance. Patience, claimed that, 'Here they don't have cameras but they are always around so definitely they watch what we are doing'.

Mduduzi, a waitress, mentioned that 'Managers just stand around and tell us what to do'. Bongiwe adds that 'Management is always around making sure we do our jobs but even if they are not around we know we have to do our jobs because we could make more tips'.

### PROFILE OF EMPLOYEES

We used the online yellow pages to draw a sample of enterprises within the hospitality industry. To ensure a range of establishments we focused on three types; hotels, restaurants and coffee shops. A total of 947 workers were interviewed. Just over

half of the interviews were conducted with employees at hotels and approximately four in every ten (42%) with individuals in restaurants. Only 56 interviews were conducted with employees at coffee shops. This distribution of interviews in large part reflects the sampling strategy, in that four different types of workers were targeted for each hotel, three types of workers for each restaurant, and two types for each coffee shop. Thus the sample came from a total of 162 hotels, 140 restaurants and 35 coffee shops.

**Table 1. Number of interviews per establishment**

	Freq.	%
Hotel	498	53
Restaurants	393	42
Coffee shop	56	6
Total	947	100

More than half (54%) of the workers interviewed in the hospitality sector were female. Female workers constituted the majority in hotels (62%) as well as coffee shops (68%), while males dominated in the restaurant business (59%) as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Types of businesses in hospitality sector**

	Male	Female	Total	N
Hotels	38%	62%	100%	498
Restaurants	59%	41%	100%	393
Coffee shop	32%	68%	100%	56
Total	46%	54%	100%	947

Employees in the hospitality sector were fairly young with approximately three in every four (76%) younger than 40 years. Half of employees at restaurants (50%) and close on half (46%) of those at coffee shops were aged between 20 and 29 years. Hotel employees tended to be older than workers in the remaining categories in that approximately one in every four (23%) were aged between 40 and 49 years.

As seen in Table 3, approximately seven in every ten (73%) employees classified themselves as African, and approximately one in every four (25%) classified themselves as non-South African. More than eight in every ten (82%) non-South Africans were Zimbabweans, whereas one in every 12 (8%) were Malawian. African employees constituted a larger proportion of the employees in hotels (84%) than restaurants (60%) or coffee shops (61%). In contrast, non-South Africans were more likely to be employed in restaurants (38%) or coffee shops (32%) than in hotels (14%). White employees were more likely

to work in coffee shops (7%) than hotels (1%) or restaurants (2%). The number of coloured and Indian/Asian employees was very small.

With regard to the high percentage of foreigners within the hospitality industry, Patience, said: 'This job is kind of hard but I am used to it. Locals, they have opportunities so they don't want to be working here'. Thando, added: 'I am a foreigner, I have no choice but to go out there and work. I can't even save money by staying with my parents'.

**Table 3. Population group**

	Hotel	Res- taur- ant	Coffee shop	Total
African	84%	60%	61%	73%
Coloured	0%	0%	0%	0%
Indian or Asian	0%	1%	0%	0%
White	1%	2%	7%	2%
Non-South African	14%	38%	32%	25%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	498	393	56	947

Employees in coffee shops (48%) were more likely than those in restaurants (34%) and hotels (34%) to classify themselves as never married as shown in Table 4. Employees in coffee shops (29%) and hotels (31%) were less likely than those in restaurants (35%) to be in long-term relationships. There were gender differences in terms of relationship status, in that a larger proportion of males (36%) than females (21%) classified themselves as married. Females were more likely than males to be divorced or separated or widowed.

We asked all interviewees to indicate the number of people with whom they were sharing a dwelling, excluding themselves. They were asked to specify the number of male adults, female adults and children. Close on three in every ten respondents (29%) lived with four or more persons. About one-sixth of interviewees (16%) lived alone. In addition, we asked all interviewees how many of their own children (under 18 years of age) were living with them at the time of the study. Just over half of interviewees (52%) did not live with any of their own children. Close on one in every four (25%) interviewees lived with one child.

Table 4 shows that individuals who worked at coffee shops tended to have higher levels of education than those employed in hotels and restaurants. Approximately two in every three (66%) coffee shop employees had completed secondary education as opposed to just over half of hotel (54%) and close on half of restaurant workers (47%). In addition,

approximately one in every five (21%) coffee shop employees had a tertiary qualification compared to approximately one in every eight (12%) restaurant workers. The small proportion (1%) of employees with no formal education was mainly in the hotel and restaurant sectors.

**Table 4. Education levels in hospitality sector**

	Hotel	Res- taur- ant	Coffee shop	Total
No formal education	1%	1%	0%	1%
Less than primary completed	3%	2%	2%	2%
Primary completed	2%	3%	2%	2%
Less than secondary completed	40%	45%	30%	41%
Secondary completed	38%	36%	45%	38%
Tertiary	16%	12%	21%	14%
Other	1%	3%	0%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	498	393	56	947

Interviewees were asked if they were doing any other paid work or studies in addition to their employment at the hotel/restaurant/coffee shop. More than nine in every ten employees (93%) were not doing other work or studying. Employees at coffee shops were more likely than those in hotels or restaurants to be involved in other work or studies.

Approximately three in every ten (29%) employees interviewed were waitrons. This reflects the sampling approach in which waitrons were explicitly targeted for all three types of workplace. Slightly more than one in every four (26%) of the employees were employed as kitchen staff (other than chef/cook) or chefs/cooks (27%) respectively.

Males were more likely than females to be employed as chef/cook or waiter; whereas females were more likely than males to be employed to clean, i.e. they performed housekeeping or kitchen duties. Employees who performed duties other than those provided in the pre-specified categories, did mainly work across two or more of the specified categories (20) or bar tending (10).

More than half of employees in the hospitality sector (56%) were employed elsewhere prior to employment in the hotel/restaurant/coffee shop, but decided to leave that job. However, approximately one in every

five employees (19%) was unemployed and looking for work. This was the case for close to one in every four employees (23%) who worked in coffee shops. Employees in the hotel sector were less likely than those in restaurants or coffee shops to say they were forced to leave previous employment. Responses contained in 'other' included several employees who noted that they were transferred from another branch of the hotel/restaurant/coffee shop that employed them at the time of the study.

Approximately one in every five (21%) employees had worked in the hospitality sector for less than 12 months. Overall, on average, employees had worked in the hospitality sector for 4.3 years, with the median being three years. Employees who worked in hotels had a longer working tenure than those employed in restaurants or coffee shops.

Hotel employees (15%) were more likely than employees at restaurants (2%) to live where they worked. However, employees at hotels spent more time travelling to and from work each day than those at restaurants and coffee shops. The former spent on average two hours (median, 1 hour) travelling, while the latter spent on average one hour respectively. As expected, none of the employees at coffee shops indicated residence at the coffee shops. Employees at restaurants tended to live closer to work than employees at hotels and coffee shops. Thus a larger proportion (34%) of these workers than for other employees indicated a distance of less than five kilometers between work and home.

Employees at hotels tended, on average, to spend more money on transport to and from work on a monthly basis than employees at restaurants and coffee shops.

## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Half of the employees agreed that it was difficult to get a job at hotels, restaurants and coffee shops in Gauteng. Employees at coffee shops were undecided as equal proportions agreed and disagreed with the statement.

These comments illustrate the difficulties of getting a job in the hospitality industry. For Patience, as a foreigner, jobs in the hospitality industry were the easiest to get: 'I am a foreign person so normally they are the jobs that we can get and since I'm using a passport they are good with that. They say as long as I have a passport I do not need a South African Identity Document'. The hospitality industry is often seen as a job of last resort as Mbali comments: 'There was no job at the time. Even now there is no job. I am looking for a job. You don't find any so I'm stuck here'. This is reiterated through the comment made by Bongiwé, who claims: 'Well I wouldn't say I chose this job because I was desperate for work and this was the only job I could find'.



*Zimbabwean waiter serves customers in Soweto.*

Half of employees surveyed agreed that it was easier to get a job at hotels, restaurants and coffee shops than in construction. Hotel workers (35%) were more likely than restaurant (26%) and coffee shop (25%) workers to disagree with the statement.

There were higher levels of agreement compared to previous statements, especially amongst coffee shop and restaurant workers, with the statement that it was easier to get a job as a hotel/restaurant or coffee shop worker than to start one's own business.

### SECURITY AND STABILITY AT WORK

Interviewees were asked what, if any, procedure was followed if employers wanted to dismiss workers. For the most part employees, especially those in the hotel sector, noted a verbal or written warning as the procedure for dismissal. Employees at coffee shops were more likely than others to say that their employers did not follow a set procedure for dismissal.

The majority of those interviewed in the survey said that companies have a set procedure for dismissal but because of the liberal use of warnings, dismissal is relatively easy. This is illustrated in the interview with Lorraine: 'They have to first give us three warnings before they can fire us. But they give us warnings for everything. Everything wrong we do we must sign for it'.

One in every eight (14%) employees in the hospitality sector worked without a contract of employment. However, this was the case for approximately one in every four (23%) restaurant employees. Employees who worked in hotels (83%) were more likely than those employed in restaurants (48%) and coffee shops (59%) to have a written contract as the basis of their employment. Conversely, employees in restaurants (28%) and coffee shops (25%) to a larger extent than those in hotels (10%) had verbal agreements. There were no noteworthy gender differences in terms of possession of contracts.

Employees who were conducting housekeeping duties (81%) were more likely than kitchen staff (other than chef/cook) (58%), waitrons (65%), and chefs (71%) to have written contracts.

The incidence of contracts within the hospitality sector is mixed, as some workers have contracts while others do not. Patience is one such worker with no contract: 'No, I do not have a contract of employment, only the kitchen staff has contracts. We on the floor don't'.

Mduduzi, on the other hand has a contract: 'Yes, every year we sign a contract, basically 12 months. I can say I'm not a permanent employee; I'm a permanent casual because I sign a contract every year. It's just this year we haven't signed yet which means up until now I don't have a contract'.

From these comments, it becomes evident that employment

within the hospitality industry is insecure as even the incidence of a contract of employment does little in reducing the vulnerable nature of the job.

Employees at coffee shops (15%) were more likely than those employed in hotels (9%) and restaurants (9%) to work on a casual basis. Hotel employees (87%) were more likely than those employed in coffee shops (62%) and restaurants (75%) to hold permanent contracts. Seven out of 12 employees, who selected the category 'other', did not know the nature of their contracts.

Restaurant workers (50%) more so than hotel (44%) and coffee shop (45%) workers feared losing their jobs in the near future. Coffee shop employees (52%) felt more secure about their jobs than restaurant (39%) and hotel workers (45%).

Employees were undecided about the prospects of their being promoted in the near future since similar proportions agreed (41%) and disagreed (43%) with the statement. Coffee shop employees were less optimistic than hotel and restaurant employees about the possibility of being promoted as evident from higher levels of disagreement with the statement.

Although many workers employed in the sector see prospects of being promoted, the promotion itself may be difficult to come by. As Mbali mentions: 'We do apply for promotion, [but] they don't use us in here. They take people from outside to come and be our supervisors and our managers. If you go and ask why, they say we shortlist our managers'. Another participant, Benjamin, remarked: 'There is nowhere to go from here; this job cannot be our future'. <sup>LB</sup>

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# Marikana & end of honeymoon:

## thinking time for unions

In this second part of the interview **Tinyiko Sam Maluleke** recently appointed Deputy Vice Chancellor: Internationalisation, Advancement and Student Affairs at the University of Johannesburg talks about problems facing trade unions and how these were exposed at Marikana such as failing to service members, upward mobility, affiliate politics and dynamics of the tripartite Alliance of the African National Congress, Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). **Musawenkosi Malabela** continues the interview which was first run in the March/April issue.

**MM:** What does Marikana mean for unions and what should they do moving forward?

**TSM:** In some ways unions are victims of their own success. They have been very successful and too powerful in the past few years. The list of industrial and labour policy achievements of South African trade unions since 1994 is staggering. I recall some of the pre-1994 challenges facing trade unions as recalled by Ms Emma Mashinini (one of the founders of Cosatu) in a recent acceptance speech for an honorary doctoral degree at the University of South Africa. The battle for something as basic as union recognition was a long-drawn-out one in many sectors.

As they say, nothing succeeds like success. Workers are asking for more from the unions because they know what unions can achieve, and what they have been able to achieve until now. There is a sense in which two decades of

achievement and growth may have led many unions to complacency. Without them realising it, a gap may have been growing between them and their members. Allegations are widespread that union leaders have become too close to management, especially in the mining sector.

Another complicating factor is that some unions have invested very well over the past two decades with the result that they have become wealthy. This was wise and it has saved trade unions from being perpetual beggars of foreign funding. But the contrast between the wealth of unions and the poverty of their members – often reflected in the types of office occupied, salaries and perks received by their leaders – has become more pronounced in recent years.

Yet another difficult factor has been the Alliance relationship between Cosatu and the ruling party. This was a useful as well as

a politically brilliant decision – at least at the time when it was made. There is no doubt that this arrangement has benefited the workers as it has meant that their concerns have been firmly placed on the agenda of government.

However, in recent years, some workers have been feeling that this relationship has not been of much benefit to them. Some have started questioning the benefits and usefulness of the Alliance partnership for workers. Have the workers remained central to the mandate and mission of trade unions and their Alliance partners? Have the workers become the forgotten factor in alliance relations? What are unions for if not for workers?

My sense is that the Cosatu strategy of alliance with the ruling party and massive investments to secure financial stability and a future for itself and its member unions has yielded great results until now. However, the time may



have come for Cosatu to reconsider and redraft its basic strategies in light of current developments in the land. Such reconsideration may not necessarily mean a physical withdrawal from Alliance politics but certainly a tactical and ideological withdrawal from aspects of that relationship might be necessary.

The other contradiction is that if you look at what happened on top of that hill in Marikana on 16 August 2012 it was members of Cosatu who were killing each other. You had Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (Popcru) represented in the police force and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) represented in the workers. At Marikana you had members of two Alliance partners at war with one another. Admittedly some of the workers belonged to the Association of Mining and Construction Union (Amcu) while others claimed to belong to no union. The bottom line is that workers were on that hill, and workers represent Cosatu's core business.

Now how does Cosatu mediate? How does it intervene? If the federation intervenes in a particular manner Popcru would say: 'Aha... we are your members, what are you doing, you are misrepresenting us, you are attacking us'. If Cosatu intervenes and starts to say NUM ought to have done this... they can say: 'Ey... we are the biggest affiliate in Cosatu be careful of what you say about us'. If Cosatu tries to call the state to order then its Alliance partner the ANC might not take kindly to such. These are the contradictions that Cosatu has to live with. The position of Cosatu is both precarious and powerful.

**MM:** What can Cosatu learn from the Marikana massacre?

**TSM:** I think the message to Cosatu is that some of its affiliates have serious problems with their members. That all is not well in the ranks of some of the affiliates and that Cosatu cannot continue to operate under the assumption that *we are just a federation and assume that our affiliate members*

*are intact, that there are no issues to be addressed, all we need to worry about is the affiliation fee and affiliates participation in our forums.* Yet, this is a very difficult and sensitive thing because I assume that Cosatu cannot be seen to be interfering in the affairs of an affiliate.

For the affiliates I think it is time to return to the source and core business. I spoke about their main customer, the member and the worker. I think it is time to return to that and not to dismiss the concerns of the workers too easily. One of my fears is that there could be an exodus from NUM but I hope that this won't happen because if it is not managed very well this may be the case. You could see rival unions such as Amcu becoming majority unions in places where they were never majorities. To deal with that you can't just stop workers from deciding which union to join. You have to convince them that you have something to offer and Cosatu and its affiliates have got a long history which they can build on. In part, Amcu is a result of



*Workers celebrate May Day in Sharpeville but unions must do more to keep them happy.*

disagreements and failures within the NUM.

I also think that we need a little bit more sympathy or empathy from Cosatu than what we have seen in Marikana. For a trade union federation that has been at the fore-front of e-tolls, service delivery protests, and all sorts of national issues it was quite amazing to see how absent – relatively – they were in Marikana. That's the other lesson that they have to learn.

The cost of their Alliance with government is something that they would need to weigh-up: *What is the Alliance's worth?* They must do a cost-benefit analysis constantly. There is a perception that union leaders have become part of an elite. Workers become shop stewards, then office bearers, and eventually political leaders. From there they become cabinet ministers: some might even become presidents one day. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with this progression – especially at the individual level. Problems start when this begins to feel like a structural and structured arrangement.

I pulled Sakhela Buhlungu's book on Cosatu (A paradox of victory: Cosatu and the democratic transition in South Africa, UKZN Press) and its relation to the ruling party out of my shelf again and looked at it after Marikana. You could have said that some of the things that Buhlungu said were exaggerated at the time they were written; about the paradox that Cosatu finds itself in. Buhlungu might not have been as far off the mark as some thought.

**MM:** If it is no longer a paradox what has it become?

**TSM:** It seems to me that we have now moved beyond Sakhela's terminology of paradox. The terms now are 'contradiction' and 'confrontation'. A paradox speaks to a 'both, and' situation but contradictions and confrontations – as we are experiencing them in the mining sector today – can take us down an economic cliff sooner rather than later.

I think there is a lot of work for trade unions to do.

**MM:** What do you mean by social distance?

**TSM:** Although there are two gaps in the country we often talk of only one: that between the rich and the poor – which is a very important root cause of not just Marikana but the service delivery protests and other industrial actions in the country. But there is another gap, which we often neglect, and it's the growing gap between leaders and their followers – between the ANC and its members, and union leaders and their members.

I think that Marikana exposes these gaps very clearly. **LB**

*Musawenkosi Malabela is a researcher in organisational renewal with the National Labour and Economic Development Institute in Johannesburg. This is the second part of the interview with Professor Tinyiko Maluleke on the Marikana Massacre which took place in October 2012.*