

13 Futures for hospitality work and call to action

*Irma Booyens, Tone Therese, Olga Gjerald and
Richard N.S. Robinson*

Abstract

In this chapter, we consider possible hospitality work futures. We reviewed literature, research, and industry and media reports on working conditions and global issues impacting the world of work to consider what this means for the hospitality workforce. We identified four themes *vis-à-vis* future conceptualisations of work; demographical change and diversity; the impact of digitalisation, robotisation and AI; and (social) sustainability concerns. Hence, we delineate 12 future scenarios for hospitality work and model these into three future horizons: *hopeful*, *nebulous* and *bleak*. We also offer a call to action for advancing fair hospitality work and provide recommendations for future research.

Introduction

The hospitality industry is bouncing back, it has already exceeded pre-Covid-19 pandemic levels in most of Europe and is expected to make a full global recovery, buoyed by resurgent tourism – up to 1.5 billion travellers in 2024 (OECD, 2024). Accordingly, hospitality employment continues to grow worldwide, from 330 million tourism jobs in 2023 to an estimated 449 million jobs by 2034 (Statista, 2024), dominated by hospitality sectors such as accommodation and food service. However, the continued growth of the industry worldwide exacerbates climate change and sparks concern about intensifying overtourism and pressure on host communities. The degrowth movement, as a response to the impacts of overtourism linked to neoliberal capitalist growth, seeks to redefine hospitality (and tourism) “to focus on the rights of local communities” and rebuild “social capacities” (Higgins-Desbiolles *et al.* 2019: 1926). Indeed, sustainability debates increasingly emphasise human rights and needs, ethics, equity, and social justice. At the same time, decent (or fair) work and worker well-being feature prominently in current workforce debates (Saito *et al.*, 2025).