



Advancing Economic Security and Gender Equity

in Canada's Tourism Sector



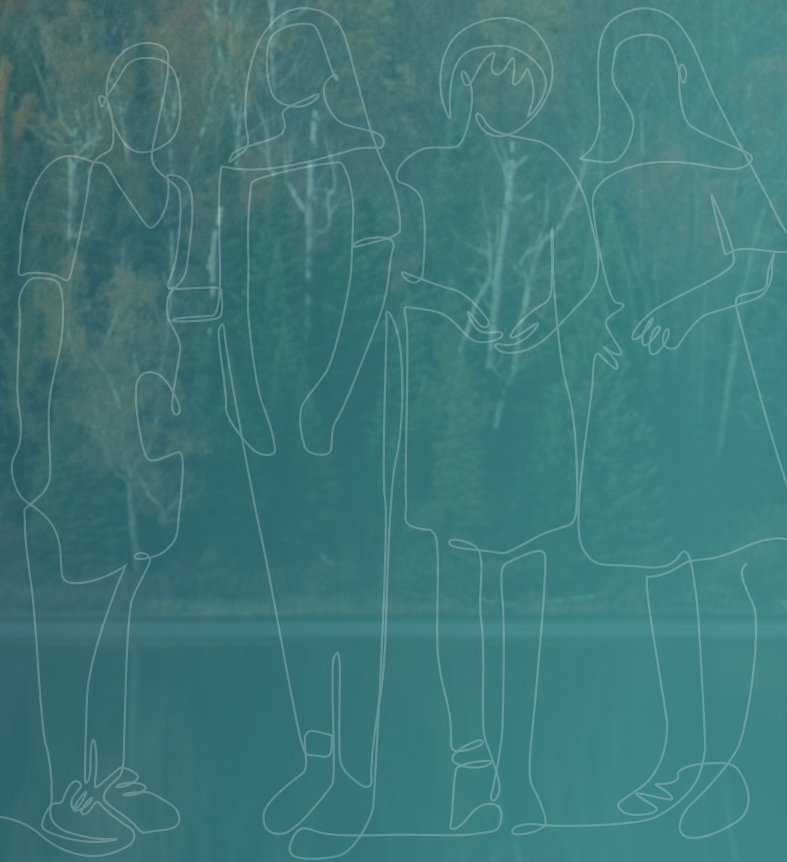
CANADIAN CENTER
FOR WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT

CENTRE CANADIEN
POUR L'AUTONOMISATION
DES FEMMES

Content Warning

This brief discusses the topics of gender-based violence and economic abuse. We encourage readers to care for their well-being while engaging with this content.

To people with lived/living experience and advocates, rest and taking time for healing are valid responses and are needed to dismantle the systems that perpetuate these harms. Knowing and honouring your emotional limits is part of the work and essential for your humanity. The fight to end systemic harms is collective. Take breaks, step away if needed, and return only when you have the capacity to do so. When you need to pause, others will carry the fight for you.



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Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Canada

CCFWE partnered with Tourism HR Canada, intending to strengthen the capacity of the tourism sector to foster inclusive workplaces and advance women's employment and leadership opportunities. The results of this partnership are included in this report in the primary research section. This research helped shape the gaps and opportunities in supporting women within the tourism industry, with a particular focus on the accommodations industry.

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About Tourism HR Canada

Tourism HR Canada is a pan-Canadian organization with a mandate aimed at growing a world-leading tourism workforce. Tourism HR Canada facilitates, coordinates, and enables workforce development activities that support a globally competitive and sustainable tourism sector and foster a dynamic and resilient labour market. Learn more: <https://tourismhr.ca/>



About the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE)

CCFWE is Canada's only nonprofit solely dedicated to addressing economic abuse and advancing economic justice. Through system change, research, policy leadership, and collaboration, we work to dismantle systemic barriers and build pathways to economic safety and inclusion. Learn more: <https://ccfwe.org/>



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CCFWE is located on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation, and we are honoured to be guests here. We extend our deepest respect to all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples who have made invaluable contributions to this land, both in the past and present. As our work focuses on economic abuse and financial exploitation, it is important to recognize that these harms are not new but embedded in the history and legacy of colonization in Canada. Efforts to prevent economic abuse must therefore also be seen in this context and aligned with ongoing work toward reconciliation.

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Message from the CEO

As Founder and Executive Director of the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment, I am proud to share *Advancing Economic Security and Gender Equity in Canada's Tourism Sector*. This report reflects not only CCFWE's mission, but also our conviction that economic equity is essential to safety, dignity, freedom, and long term well being. Women's economic participation must never be treated as secondary. It is central to the future of work, the strength of our economy, and the resilience of our communities.

The tourism sector represents both opportunity and urgency. It is one of Canada's most important employment sectors and a major source of work for women. Yet, participation alone is not equity. Real progress requires more than access to jobs. It requires fair and inclusive workplaces, strong protections, pathways to leadership, and systems that recognize the realities women face both inside and outside the workplace. If the future of employment is to be truly equitable, then opportunity must be matched with safety, stability, and the ability to grow.

We recognize that many women in the tourism sector continue to carry invisible burdens while trying to earn a living, care for others, and rebuild their lives. Some have experienced harm at home, some in the workplace, and some in both. Too many have had to navigate systems that failed to protect them, workplaces that did not respond, and opportunities that were denied or taken away. We hope that this report contributes further to a tourism sector where women who experience harm are believed, supported, protected, and given every opportunity to heal, work, grow, and lead with dignity.

This report is especially meaningful because it brings together research, lived experience, and practical recommendations that speak directly to the future of workforce inclusion in Canada. It highlights the potential of the tourism sector to become a stronger model of economic equity, while also making visible the structural barriers that continue to limit too many women, especially survivors of gender based violence, from thriving. For many women, employment is not simply about earning a wage. It is about rebuilding confidence, securing independence, and creating a foundation for long term economic security. Workplaces can be powerful sites of empowerment, but only when they are designed to support dignity, mobility, and protection.

One of the clearest lessons from this report is that economic equity cannot be separated from the conditions that shape women's lives. Women cannot fully participate in the workforce or advance into leadership when they are navigating violence, precarious employment, housing insecurity, discrimination, caregiving burdens, and unequal access to workplace protections. If we are serious about the future of employment, then we must also be serious about designing systems that respond to these realities with intention, fairness, and accountability.

This year, CCFWE also joined the National Employment Equity Council, an important milestone that strengthens our ability to advance economic equity, inclusive employment pathways, and systems level change across Canada. We see this as an important opportunity to continue building momentum, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring that women's economic security remains part of the national conversation on the future of work.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Women and Gender Equality Canada for funding this important work, and to Tourism HR Canada for their valued partnership and collaboration throughout this process. I am also deeply grateful to our dedicated CCFWE team, our authors and contributors, our volunteers, our Board, our task forces, and all the women and survivors whose insights, honesty, and courage helped shape this report. This work is stronger because it is grounded in both evidence and lived experience, and that is exactly what meaningful change requires.

At CCFWE, we believe that economic equity must be at the centre of Canada's future. We believe women deserve more than participation. They deserve access, protection, advancement, and the power to lead. My hope is that this report will encourage employers, policymakers, and sector leaders to take bold and practical steps toward a tourism sector, and a broader labour market, where women are not only included, but fully supported to thrive.

Together, we can help build a future of employment that is safer, more inclusive, and rooted in economic justice for all.

Meseret Haileyesus

Founder and Executive Director,
Canadian Center for Women's
Empowerment (CCFWE)



Executive Summary

Canada's tourism sector is a significant source of employment and economic activity across the country. It provides important entry points into the labour market for women, youth, newcomers, immigrants, and workers re-entering employment. However, the findings of this report indicate that women, particularly survivors of gender-based violence, continue to face structural barriers that affect workplace safety, career progression, income security, and long-term economic stability.

This report **Advancing Economic Security and Gender Equity in Canada's Tourism Sector** draws on interviews and focus groups with 27 women leaders in hospitality, a survey of 20 survivors of economic abuse, and a review of relevant policy and legislative frameworks.

The findings show that tourism can offer flexibility, mentorship, transferable skills, and career mobility. At the same time, participants identified persistent barriers, including male-dominated leadership cultures, outdated management practices, precarious scheduling, limited advancement pathways, and workplace harassment.

The policy review identified gaps in current labour and employment frameworks. Existing protections do not consistently recognize gender-based violence, coercive control, and economic abuse as workplace issues. These gaps are especially significant for part-time, seasonal, temporary, and migrant workers, who may have reduced access to benefits, leave provisions, and workplace protections.

Summary of Key Findings

1. Tourism can support women's economic empowerment when employment is safe, stable but flexible, fairly compensated, and connected to advancement opportunities.
2. Structural barriers continue to limit women's progression, including male-dominated leadership, gender bias, outdated workplace cultures, and inconsistent promotion and training pathways.
3. Gender-based violence and economic security have direct employment and housing impacts.
4. Over 80% of surveyed survivors did not feel comfortable disclosing their experiences of economic abuse to their employers.
5. Half of the surveyed survivors who experienced GBV while working in the tourism sector reported that it affected their career journey.
6. Current policy frameworks require modernization to better respond to GBV, economic abuse, coercive control, and employment-related safety risks.

Strategic Calls to Action

The findings point to one clear message: progress requires coordinated, sector-wide action. No single actor can address economic abuse, employment sabotage, gender-based violence, and workplace inequity alone.

Government and policymakers must modernize labour protections, strengthen income supports, improve employment equity reporting, and invest in survivor-informed workforce pathways.

Tourism employers must embed trauma-informed policies, confidential disclosure options, flexible accommodations, anti-harassment measures, and meaningful leadership pathways for women.

Tourism industry associations and sector leaders must drive sector-wide standards, training, certification, accountability, and national data collection on gender equity and workplace safety.

Women's and GBV organizations must be resourced as critical partners to strengthen referral pathways, deliver employer training, support wraparound services, and inform future research and evaluation.

Conclusion

Canada's tourism sector is well-positioned to become a national leader in gender-responsive and survivor-informed employment. To do so, policy, employer, and sector-level gaps must be addressed with urgency and accountability.

Advancing gender equity in tourism is not only about inclusion. It is central to workforce retention, productivity, safety, and long-term sector resilience. When women and survivors can work safely, advance professionally, and build economic security, the entire tourism sector becomes stronger, fairer, and more competitive.



Definitions

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Violence against a person because of their gender, including how they identify, express themselves, or are seen by others, driven by unequal power and harmful gender norms. This umbrella term includes intimate partner violence, economic abuse, and forms of violence such as physical, sexual, and emotional.

Pay Equity: the act of ensuring fair and livable compensation for all workers not only across gender, race, ethnicity, and other identity factors, but also in recognition of life circumstances that can limit one's ability to participate fully in the workforce. Pay equity seeks to eliminate systemic barriers and create pathways to economic security by valuing work based on its skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. It promotes equal pay for work of equal value.

Tourism Sector

Statistics Canada uses the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which is a standardized industry system between Mexico, Canada, and the US per NAFTA. While neither hospitality nor tourism are sectors identified in this system, Canada maintains a statistical definition of the tourism sector that is part of the System of National Accounts, called the Canadian Tourism Satellite Account (CTSA).

As such, this report uses the CTSA definition of **the tourism sector:**

Accommodations (e.g., hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, resorts, campgrounds)

Food and beverage services (e.g., restaurants, pubs, cafes, lounges)

Recreation and entertainment (e.g., arts and cultural facilities, sporting and recreation establishments, natural attractions, parks)

Transportation (e.g., air, water, and automotive transportation services); and

Travel services (e.g., travel information and booking businesses).

This means that the tourism sector in this report includes both tourism and hospitality.





Note on Language

CCFWE acknowledges that there is no single or universally adequate language to describe people's lived experiences. People who have experienced economic abuse may use different terms to describe themselves and their experiences, including "survivor," "victim," or other language that reflects their own understanding and agency. CCFWE respects self-identification and recognizes that language around gender-based violence, like the experience itself, is not fixed or uniform.

CCFWE strives to use gender-inclusive language wherever possible. However, this is not always feasible when engaging with research, data, or policy frameworks that are sex- or gender-specific due to the lack of studies on gender-diverse individuals. This paper has specifically focused on "women" due to access issues. This paper uses "sex" (female) and "gender" (women) as they appear within the original research or policy context.

Language is a practice of inclusion, and it is not a linear or perfect process. CCFWE remains committed to critically reflecting on and evolving our language to ensure it is equity-centred, survivor-led, and responsive to lived experience, particularly in the context of gendered economic abuse.

Introduction

The tourism sector employs a high proportion of women, many in roles that offer flexibility and varied career pathways, making it a prime area for advancing gender equity and economic inclusion.

Because of this, the sector presents a unique opportunity to support women who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV) through the creation of integrated pathways that address barriers to employment, leadership, and career advancement. Through these targeted training, mentorship, and supportive workplace practices, the tourism sector can foster safer, more inclusive environments for women experiencing GBV, while addressing risks of GBV that could happen within the sector. By leveraging these opportunities, tourism can become a model for how sectors with high participation of women can combine workforce development with holistic supports to strengthen both the industry and the lives of the people who sustain it.

For many women experiencing GBV, financial independence is essential not only to leave abusive situations but also to build long-term safety and stability. The tourism sector offers many opportunities for women to gain employment, develop skills, and advance in their careers. At the same time, certain aspects of the sector, such as seasonal employment, part-time work, front-line facing jobs, housing tied to employment and other precarious arrangements, can increase vulnerabilities if workplaces are not attentive to the needs of women and those who are experiencing GBV. This report highlights ways the tourism sector can leverage its strengths to create inclusive opportunities, protect financial independence, and reduce known risks, demonstrating how thoughtful policies and sector-specific practices can empower women while strengthening the industry as a whole.

This report presents an environmental scan and analysis focused specifically on the tourism sector to understand women's participation, workforce dynamics, and governance structures that may hinder their security and advancement. Drawing on consultations through interviews, focus groups and surveys, alongside academic research and policy reviews, it identifies gaps in policies and practices directly from women within the tourism sector, including those impacted by GBV. The report outlines best practices and recommendations to guide employers and policymakers on promoting gender equity, economic empowerment, and safer workplaces for women. The intended audience for this report is tourism sector employers and policymakers.

This report was led by the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE), which partnered with Tourism HR Canada to engage women currently employed in the sector. CCFWE also consulted with survivors of GBV through its programs and networks to understand their experiences and how they may differ from broader workforce realities. Drawing on these insights, the report highlights ways the tourism sector can create inclusive workplaces, reduce vulnerabilities, and support women's economic empowerment, reflecting CCFWE's broader mission to help women achieve financial freedom and independence so they are not forced to remain in unsafe environments.

Gender-Based Violence and Tourism Workplace

Gender-based violence (GBV) intersects with the tourism sector in two interconnected ways: exposure and response. First, the structural and labour conditions of tourism work, including public-facing roles, flexible and seasonal employment, and on-site work environments, can shape women's experiences of safety and increase vulnerability to GBV in the workplace. Second, these same conditions often limit the capacity of tourism workplaces to effectively respond to or support workers who are experiencing GBV, whether inside or outside of work.

Addressing one without the other leads to incomplete solutions. **Effective interventions must both reduce workplace-related risks and strengthen employment protections, income security, and trauma-informed supports.** Only by confronting these dual dynamics can the tourism sector create conditions that support women's safety, economic security, and sustained workforce participation.

Gender-Based Violence Within Tourism Workplaces

The tourism sector is characterized by gendered labour dynamics that shape workers' exposure to risk. Tourism is a major employer of women. Women are the majority of workers in accommodation and food services, while men remain overrepresented in transportation and leadership roles (Tourism HR Canada, 2021; Tourism HR Canada, 2023). Women, immigrants and newcomers, and younger workers are also more likely to hold part-time positions, contributing to uneven access to income stability and employment protections. Given the sector's strong reliance on front-line, part-time, and seasonal roles, this creates an important opportunity to strengthen job quality, stability, and pathways for women across the industry.

These workforce dynamics matter when examining GBV because job type, employment status, and work environment influence both vulnerability to harm and access to safety. Tourism work often involves public-facing roles, late or irregular hours, and interactions with customers in settings where power imbalances are heightened. In some regions, employer-controlled or communal housing arrangements further blur the boundaries between work and home. When GBV is occurring at work, these housing situations can increase women's exposure to harassment, coercion, and violence while simultaneously limiting their ability to leave unsafe situations. This exposure is even more pronounced in isolated or remote locations.

Evidence suggests that tourism-driven economies may face elevated risks of GBV due to their transient populations, seasonal labour forces, and reliance on service work. A study from the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children at Western University (2023) found that 55.6% of survey participants from the hospitality sector experienced sexual harassment and violence at work.¹

Survey respondents from the three sectors surveyed for the study (hospitality, gaming and airline sectors) pointed out that co-workers and other employees (34%) and third parties such as customers and other members of the public (25.7%) are the most frequent perpetrators of sexual harassment and violence (2023: 14). In the sectors that were studied (hospitality, gaming, and airline sectors), all three saw non-heterosexual workers and workers living with at least one form of disability being disproportionately affected by harassment and violence at work. It was also found that workers employed through a third party (e.g., temporary agency or subcontractor) were 1.5 times more likely to experience sexual harassment and violence as those who were employed directly. Hospitality workers in particular, experienced regular harassment in the job and talked about the lack of response from their managers. Workers in small- and medium-size restaurants mentioned having only their supervisor or manager to report to, even if that supervisor or manager was also their harasser. Also, non-unionized survey respondents were more likely to experience sexual harassment and violence at work than unionized ones.

¹ Western University's study defined the hospitality sector more restrictively than was defined in this report, comprising hotels, resorts, and food and drink services.

These issues continue to be reflected in a study done in Banff, Alberta, which has reported sexual assault rates higher than both provincial and national averages. Researchers have linked this pattern to the town's heavy dependence on tourism and its associated housing and labour structures (Wells et al., 2025). These conditions underscore how GBV in tourism is not incidental, but often embedded in the organization of work itself.

This recent research in Banff, Alberta, by [Made-In-Alberta Rural and Small Town Collaborative](#), illustrates how tourism-dependent communities can both heighten risk for gender-based and sexual violence and offer concrete entry points for prevention. With over 60% of the local workforce employed in tourism and hospitality, Banff experiences high workforce turnover, a large seasonal “shadow population,” and employer-controlled housing (Wells et al., 2025). These factors can increase women's vulnerability to violence while making harm harder to track and address. This research found that these structural conditions, rather than individual behaviour alone, shape patterns of perpetration and access to safety, particularly for women navigating precarious work, housing insecurity, and limited social supports.

At the same time, the Banff example demonstrates the potential of prevention strategies rooted in local leadership and cross-sector collaboration. By engaging tourism organizations, municipal partners, and women's shelters, the work identified opportunities to embed violence prevention directly within the tourism and hospitality sector, treat housing as a core safety issue, and use data alongside lived experience to inform proactive interventions. The key learning from Banff is not simply that tourism communities face unique risks, but that meaningful prevention is possible when cross-sectoral responsibility is addressed to creating safer conditions. Lastly, it shows that supports must extend beyond the support of just career development in general, but to the well-being of women outside of work.



Gaps in Supports for Workers Experiencing GBV

Beyond the risk of GBV occurring at work, tourism workplaces are also critical sites for support and intervention for workers experiencing GBV in their personal lives. Employment stability, income security, and workplace accommodations can directly affect a survivor's ability to seek safety or leave abusive situations, especially if they are experiencing economic abuse. However, the prevalence of precarious employment in tourism can significantly undermine this potential.

Temporary, seasonal, and part-time workers are often excluded from programs and regulatory protections designed to support safety and financial security, including paid leave, benefits, and job protections (HUMA Standing Committee, 2019). This exclusion is especially acute in the accommodation sector, where many women, particularly racialized workers and those participating in temporary foreign worker programs, experience compounded precarity.

Research highlights the importance of workplace-based responses to GBV. A study by the Canadian Labour Congress and the University of Western Ontario found that one in three workers has experienced domestic violence, with 82% reporting negative impacts on work performance and 53% experiencing violence at or near the workplace (Wathen et al., 2014). While not tourism-specific, these findings reinforce that workplaces have the opportunity to play a pivotal role in recognizing and responding to GBV. For racialized survivors experiences of abuse are often compounded by racism in the workplace. In a [survey conducted by WomanACT](#), 49% of racialized survivors reported that workplace discrimination worsened the trauma they experienced from abuse. Many participants also noted that workplaces that fail to take racism seriously are also unlikely to respond appropriately to intimate partner violence.

Gendered economic inequities further constrain women's ability to navigate GBV. Despite women's growing contribution to GDP, they continue to shoulder the majority of unpaid care work, accounting for 60.1% of unpaid household labour between 2015 and 2018 (Houle et al., 2017). Combined with underpaid work and high childcare costs, many women are forced to forgo higher-earning opportunities (Gu, 2022). During periods of GBV, these constraints can leave survivors with fewer financial options and increased dependence, making it harder to exit abusive situations. While the flexibility offered by jobs in the tourism sector can be helpful when trying to exit, that flexibility gets significantly restricted as workers move higher up into leadership positions.

The impacts of COVID-19 further exposed these vulnerabilities. A 2024 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives examining women in British Columbia's tourism sector found that racialized and immigrant women experienced the most severe economic and health impacts during the pandemic. Many were placed on precarious front lines with inconsistent public health protections, limited access to personal protective equipment, increased harassment from customers and employers, heightened workloads, and stagnant or reduced pay. Yet post-pandemic recovery funding has largely prioritized leadership and higher-paid roles. These are areas where women remain underrepresented, leaving much of the tourism workforce without targeted support (Federal Economic Agency of Southern Ontario, 2022).

A close-up photograph of two women, one Black and one White, looking at each other and talking. The Black woman is on the left, looking towards the White woman on the right. They appear to be in a professional or collaborative setting.

What we have heard: Women and Survivors in the Tourism Sector Workplace

Tourism HR Canada held a series of focus groups and interviews across Canada to explore the barriers women face in the tourism sector. These discussions centered on understanding opportunities and challenges related to career advancement, workplace dynamics, structural inequities, and industry-specific areas that affect women's employment and leadership opportunities.

While the focus groups engaged a broad group of women in the sector, CCFWE separately leveraged its network of survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and economic abuse to conduct a targeted survey. The survey was shared among graduates from CCFWE's program My Money, My Freedom, a financial empowerment program for Indigenous, Black and other racialized survivors of economic abuse. It was also shared with over 17 organizations that focus on service provision to this population group within Ontario. The survey included survivors who had worked in the tourism sector, as well as in other industries (health care and social assistance, educational services, construction, real estate and rental and leasing, administrative and support, waste management and remediation services, transportation and warehousing outside of tourism, etc.). It aimed to compare and contrast the experiences of women in general with those of survivors within the tourism industry, highlighting unique challenges and needs faced by survivors.

The combined findings from the focus groups and the survivor survey provide a nuanced understanding of the systemic and workplace barriers women encounter. These insights will inform CCFWE's efforts to promote effective, trauma-informed policies and interventions that foster safer, more equitable work environments and advance economic empowerment for all women, including survivors of GBV and economic abuse.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Methodology

The interviews and focus groups looked into the careers of women leaders in hospitality and collected narrative data around career development and advancement, the challenges and benefits of working in hotels, and strategies for how the industry could better support women's career progression.

A total of 27 women participated, representing four provinces: Alberta (5), British Columbia (11), Ontario (9) and Nova Scotia (3). Of the 27 participants, five took part in a focus group, and the remaining 22 were interviewed one-on-one. The preference for one-on-one interviews in this study is mainly due to scheduling constraints of trying to arrange focus groups with tourism professionals during high-season summer.

Participants were recruited through connecting with Tourism HR Canada's network of provincial tourism industry associations (Tourism Industry Association of Alberta, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia, and Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council), supported by connections through hoteliers who have previously participated in Tourism HR Canada research, and recommendations from Women of Recreation, Tourism & Hospitality (WORTH) Association.

Among the 27 participants, 21 were from large chain hotels and 17 women held senior-level or executive positions; however, women from smaller properties and those at earlier stages of their careers were also included. Participants also shared some of their prior experiences in different types or sizes of properties. One woman represented a privately-owned resort property that incorporated a water park, and another was the owner of a cottage rental management business; however, the majority were from comparable types of accommodations businesses, and so their observations have exerted a strong influence on this analysis. Eight women (29.6%) in this study explicitly mentioned they were immigrants.

A broad thematic analysis was conducted on the anonymized focus group and interview transcripts to identify themes and patterns in participants' experiences.



Tourism Business Models in Canada

Due to the high prominence of women in the accommodations business, it is important to outline the three main characteristics of accommodations businesses in Canada for understanding the employment experiences shared by participants in the interviews and focus groups: business ownership model, business size, and business type.

There are two distinct models of business ownership in accommodations in Canada, and each has a distinct profile in terms of approach to employment. The first are properties owned by hospitality groups or private companies, who tend to focus on service quality and guest experience. The second are those owned by Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), which are less involved in the business as a distinct operation, and instead focus primarily on maximizing dividends paid out to shareholders. This means that REIT properties tend to be less invested in retaining and developing their workforce than hospitality group owned properties, although there are of course many other factors that can affect employee experience. Within the hospitality group or private ownership category, there is a further distinction between privately owned hotels, which tend to be smaller and restricted to one or two properties, and those owned by larger hospitality groups, which often have multiple properties in various locations. We only interviewed employees working in non-REIT properties (see study limitations).

Business size is another key factor influencing work experiences and career opportunities in the accommodations industry.

Table 1 breaks down accommodation businesses with employees in Canada as of December 2024, which provides some distributional perspective on the scale and range of the industry at a national level.

Table 1: Accommodations businesses in Canada, December 2024²
(Statistics Canada, Business Register, custom tabulations)

Business size	Number of businesses	
Total (all accommodations businesses with employees)	10,254	100 %
1-4 employees	3,676	36 %
5-20 employees	3,616	35 %
21-100 employees	2,573	25 %
101+ employees	389	4 %

Generally speaking, larger companies are able to offer more opportunities for career advancement and therefore are more invested in retaining their talent. Very large businesses and hotel chains with centralized corporate offices offer an additional promotion pathway, allowing employees to move from property-level management into corporate management. Smaller independent properties often encourage a greater range of creativity than larger chain hotels, which have a layer of brand management that overlays the business practices. In Canada, many smaller hotels are located in more rural and remote areas, and these hotels tend to foster a more family-like work culture, shaped by the small-town realities of people knowing each other outside of work.

² From a data set purchased from Statistics Canada by Tourism HR Canada (not publicly available).



The following interview quotes illustrate these differences around business size, work experiences and career opportunities:

“The size and the options that we have allows for more growth quicker than I think maybe just a one-off hotel in town would have. Somebody staying in one hotel might have to wait a pretty long time to get their chance at an opportunity, right? Whereas we’re always evolving and there’s lots of opportunity within this company”

- Executive-level employee at an independent hotel

“It’s definitely a different culture. It’s kind of like a family when you’re out there because you’re doing everything together and you’re going through it together as well. You’re living at the same place. Even when you’re going into town, people know you work in that hotel”

- Senior-level employee at a chain hotel

The type of business is a final consideration, although to some extent this overlaps with both ownership model and business size. The accommodations industry includes resorts, hotels, casino hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, and campgrounds and RV Parks. Hotels are the most common business type in the Canadian accommodations industry, although it is important to recognize the diversity of employment opportunities afforded by different businesses.

There are a wide variety of jobs in the accommodations industry in Canada, although most people think primarily of service-oriented, entry-level roles. We tend to associate the industry with those people we have direct contact with – waiters, front desk agents, room attendants – and fail to realize the full complement of professional roles that are necessary to keep even a mid-sized hotel working. As the property increases in size, so do staffing requirements, which in turn necessitates more supervisors, managers, and executives to oversee all of the departments. On top of the obvious customer-facing departments, there are also administrative and HR departments, sales and marketing teams, logistics, maintenance and tradespeople, property development teams, accountants and financial roles across all departments, as well as corporate executives who work across properties.

Study limitations

Positive bias in findings

Focus groups' participants were mostly issued from senior-level positions and exclusively in the non-Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) properties, where the ownership/management philosophy is much more oriented to employee retention and success than in REIT properties. There were some comments and omissions from a handful of participants that suggested past experience working at a REIT-owned hotel, but they did not dwell on these experiences so it is not possible to extrapolate from the data how those experiences differed from an employment perspective. However, it is widely recognized in the accommodations industry that REITs tend to prioritize profit over workplace culture, and are more likely to view their employees as replaceable. This has to be taken into consideration when analyzing the focus groups findings, likely accounting for a positive bias in participants' experiences, given that they work in non-REIT properties and have senior-level positions. Including more entry-level and mid-career employees as well as REIT workers is necessary to get a representative, more complete picture of the sector.

Timing

The research was completed over the summer, which is the busiest time of year for hotels and hospitality across Canada. With these businesses facing ongoing staffing issues, the number of businesses able to accommodate supporting the research was relatively small, and limited primarily to employees with office-based jobs (as opposed to customer-facing roles). This said, most of the participants started their careers in customer-facing positions, so they were in principle able to speak to that experience.

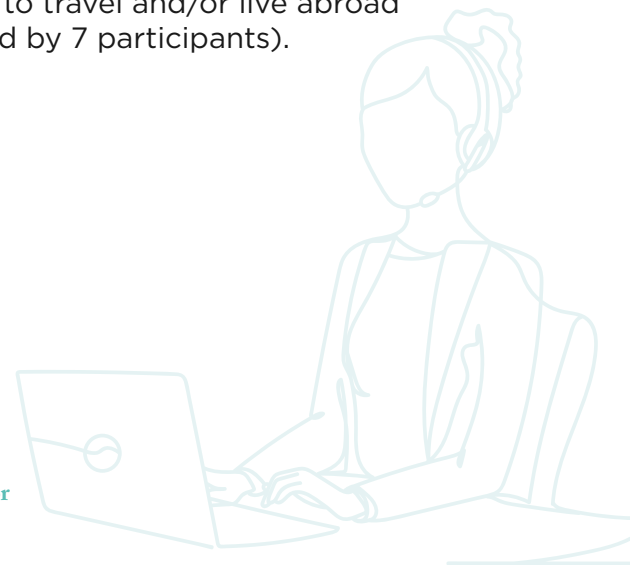
Lack of financial incentives offered to participants

No financial incentives were offered to industry participants, as this was outside the financial scope of the project. This meant that participants came from those businesses that saw value in allowing their employees to take part during business hours, and those who volunteered their personal time. This limited the participation of entry-level workers, given that they were often not able to be excused from their duties during their shift due to staffing constraints at their hotel, and their time was not compensated outside of work hours.

Focus Groups and Interviews Findings

Challenges in terms of career-personal/family life balance

Participants talked about positive aspects of working in hospitality that allow employees to potentially accommodate caregiving responsibilities, such as the flexibility of shift work (mentioned by 12 participants); the availability of remote and hybrid work for management and leadership positions (mentioned by 7 participants); a strong culture of mentorship and empathetic leadership (mentioned by 18 participants); and the opportunity to work in cities or communities that they wanted, with the possibility to travel and/or live abroad (mentioned by 7 participants).



At the same time, the challenges of balancing family and career delayed the decision to have children for 4 participants. In the words of one of them: “I didn’t want to have children at an early age because I knew it was going to impact my career.”

Women are better represented in administrative positions than operational ones in the management tiers, because staying in operations and having children means suspending or curtailing career progression, while it is easier to balance the two in the administrative roles.

One participant said: “I let myself be underemployed for the first 19 years of my career to prioritize family... I didn’t start taking more senior roles until my kids were in university... I didn’t want a constant war between career and family.”

Once they have child caregiving responsibilities, participants describe shifting their career from operations to administration/business areas in order to find a balance, often with support from their property managers.

Participants mentioned other aspects of working in the sector that can be difficult when it comes to work-life balance, such as entry level roles often requiring long hours, which can create conflict with other responsibilities (mentioned by 12 participants); relocation being necessary for advancement past a certain point (mentioned by 6 participants); and operational roles involving last-minute changes, which can be stressful (mentioned by 6 participants).

Male-dominated senior leadership positions and its effect on workplace culture

About half of the focus groups’ participants commented on the workplace cultural differences between having women in positions of senior leadership, and having those positions only occupied by men:

“I call it the old school mindset... all the owners and managers were all males. If there was one or two females on the board, that was a big deal.”

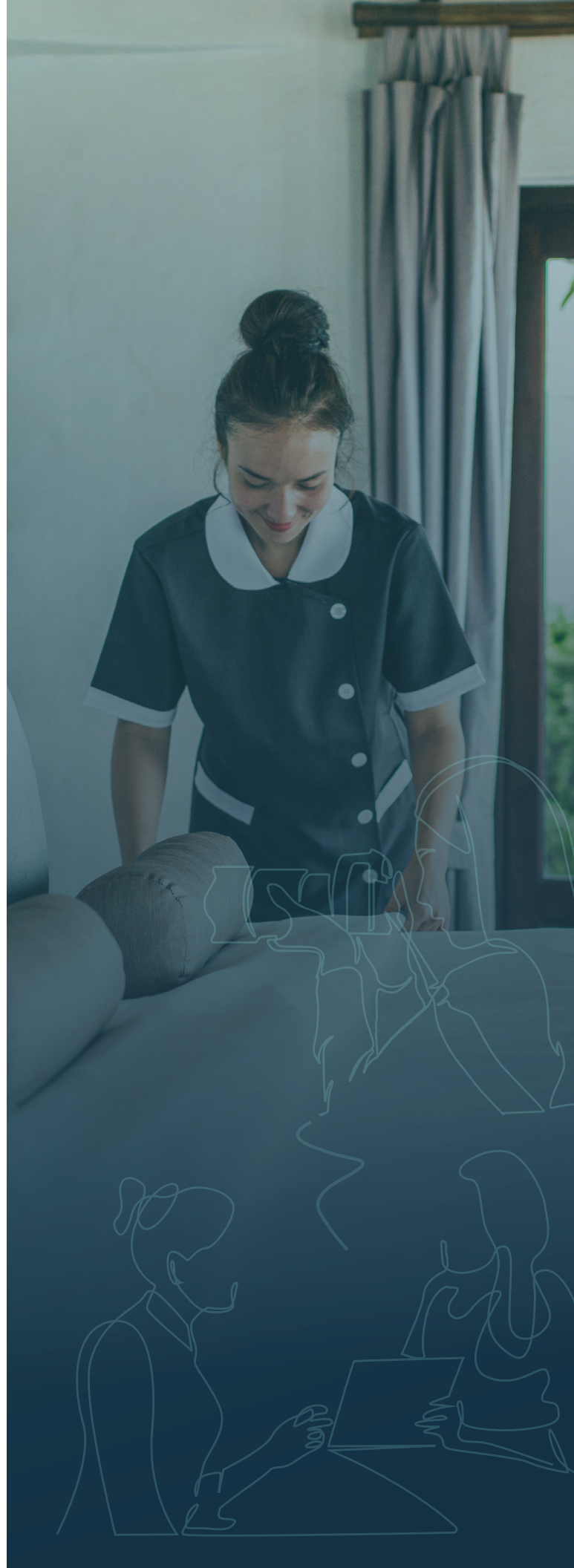
According to the Global report on women and tourism (2019), “while women are 54% of the tourism industry’s workforce globally, they hold less than 40% of managerial positions, less than 20% of general management roles and less than 8% of board positions. In all regions, the accommodation industry employs many women at the lower levels but very few in higher management. Moreover, women’s mean hourly rate is significantly lower than men across regions” (2019: 148).

With the majority of leadership positions still being occupied by men, the room for accommodations around work-life balance needs is more restricted than it would be if more women were in leadership positions. Five participants mentioned the male ‘old school’ management mentality in some properties that can be discouraging for women who want to progress. At the same time, there is a sense that things are changing in this regard, and that there will be more female senior leaders in the sector.

Emphasis on individual attitude for career success obscures the impact of structural factors

Despite recognizing the relevance of formal education to advance into senior roles, participants often brought up the relative importance of attitude and personality over specific experience or qualifications, particularly in entry-level roles: “Anyone who is willing to learn... that’s what they see. You don’t need post-secondary to build a career.” Similarly, another participant indicated that “It’s not about credentials — it’s about being a hard worker.” And yet another participant summarized the employer’s thinking in these terms: “We hire for the right personality and we’ll teach you the job.”

Willingness to learn, adaptability, and a strong work ethic (e.g. respect, integrity, accountability, etc.) were mentioned as highly valued qualities by most participants. This can also be an advantage for survivors who don’t have specific experience or qualifications to work in the sector, such as newcomers or those who want to start working again after not being in the job market for some time. This said, a focus on understanding career experiences exclusively as the result of individual traits and behaviors can obscure the impact of structural factors on individual trajectories. The findings of the survey below shed light on that impact for economic abuse survivors.



Survey

Methodology

The 31-question online survey was shared with over 100 graduates from **CCFWE's My Money, My Freedom**, a financial empowerment program for Indigenous, Black and other racialized survivors of economic abuse, and with over 17 organizations that focus on service provision to this population group within Ontario, including shelters, support providers, and advocacy organizations. We had 20 respondents to the survey collected in June and July 2025. When asked about their race or ethnicity, 8 participants described themselves as White, 4 as mixed-race, 2 as First Nations, 1 as East Asian and 1 as Black. When asked about their immigration status, 13 responded they were Canadian citizens, 2 said they were permanent residents, and one said they were a temporary resident (on a work or study permit).

The assumption underlying the choice to combine the focus groups and interviews with a survey was that participants might feel more comfortable sharing potentially difficult experiences through a survey, outside of their work context, than in personal conversations during interviews and focus groups carried out in connection to their workplace. A descriptive analysis of the data is presented below. The analysis focuses primarily on the answers of the 6 respondents that experienced GBV while working in the tourism sector, with some comparative references to the answers provided by the other survey respondents.

Survey Outcomes

Difficulties disclosing GBV experiences to employers

Over 80% of our survey respondents did not feel comfortable disclosing to their employers that they had experienced GBV.

This is true both for those who experienced GBV while working in the tourism sector and those from other sectors of activity. The reasons the respondents mentioned were:

- fear of being judged
- fear of speaking out or not being believed
- not seeing the problem at the time for what it was and personal characteristics (preferring to keep things for oneself)
- and feeling it was inappropriate to talk about their domestic life at work.

One of the respondents mentioned that their cultural background posed barriers for them to access employment or GBV assistance, including not wanting to disclose the experience of GBV beyond the family. The respondent that was comfortable disclosing it to their employers received support from their employers while experiencing it, but no support after.

Systemic barriers to find or maintain employment

A quarter of all the survey respondents report having experienced systemic barriers to finding or maintaining employment, including: discrimination; lack of family support being a single mom and part of a minority; being Indigenous; childcare not being accessible for children with disabilities; and not qualifying for assistance. While almost half of the respondents that experience gender-based violence in other sectors report it affected their ability to find or maintain employment, due to impacts on their self-confidence and overall mental health, and because of the time off/ unpredictable schedule of court procedures; only 1 out of the 6 respondents that experienced GBV while working in the tourism sector reported struggling with this. Keeping in mind that we are looking at a very small sample and therefore have to be cautious with raising conclusions, this could be an indication of a great opportunity for the tourism sector to model a response to GBV among its workers. Half of the respondents who experienced GBV while working in the tourism sector reported that it affected their career journey as it negatively impacted their:

- **well-being and mental health:** respondents report experiencing stress and self-blame, including about how they were able to handle the situation at the time and the financial impact of quitting their job; and
- **their career choices:** due to the difficulties they faced and the lack of support, they decided to go into the social services sector to support other survivors.

This said, half of the respondents who experienced GBV while working in the tourism sector said their experience did not limit their options for leadership

Impact of the participants' GBV experiences on their housing situation

When asked about the impact of their experiences on their housing situation, two of the participants who experienced GBV while working in the tourism sector said there was no impact, while one of them shared that their experience with GBV negatively affected their housing situation. They were evicted from a rental and lost their home because of not working as a consequence of abuse. As mentioned above in relation to the Banff study, experiences like this respondent's show how challenges faced by survivors of economic abuse in terms of employment, housing, and access to credit compound each other.





Policy Landscape: Gender Equity in Canada's Tourism Sector

This section examines the current landscape of legislation and programs shaping the tourism sector across Canada. It provides an overview of relevant federal, provincial, and territorial frameworks that influence employment conditions, workplace safety, and gender equity within the industry. By analyzing these existing measures, the section aims to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for policy recommendations and development that can better support inclusive and equitable workplaces for women, including survivors of GBV.

Federal Legislation

Federal work legislation primarily applies to private and public employees in federally regulated industries, such as banking, interprovincial transportation (air, rail, road), telecommunications and federal Crown corporations (as outlined in the Canadian Labour Code). Therefore, most tourism employees fall under provincial/territorial law, such as Ontario's Employment Standards Act. This means that when examining the Tourism sector's laws and policies, employee protections primarily fall under provinces and territories. However, there are still some relevant considerations at the federal level that could be amended to better support women, those experiencing GBV, and employees in the tourism sector. For a full overview see Figure 1.

Figure 1: Federal Bills Relevant to Women and those Experiencing GBV in the Tourism Sector

N.B. All these acts are relevant to federally regulated employees, which means airlines and interprovincial transport within the tourism sector. This does not include the hospitality sector.

Act/Regulation	Purpose	How to make the Act more supportive of women and those experiencing GBV
Canadian Labour Code	Mandatory workplace programs to prevent harassment and violence in workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require trauma-informed training for supervisors in client-facing roles Strengthen protections against retaliation following disclosure
Employment Equity Act	Promotes women's security and advancement in the workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require disaggregated reporting (gender, race, immigration status) Include GBV-related employment disruptions as a recognized barrier Tie equity plans to promotion, retention, and leadership pipelines
Pay Equity Act	Seeks to eliminate gender wage gaps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accelerate implementation timelines Expand coverage to include seasonal and part-time workers Require proactive pay equity audits in hospitality and service-heavy sectors
Canadian Human Rights Act	Protects from biased employment practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explicitly recognize GBV-related discrimination (e.g., job loss after disclosure) Improve accessibility of complaint processes for low-wage and precarious workers Strengthen remedies tied to job reinstatement and advancement

<p>Employment Insurance Act</p>	<p>Provides financial buffer during employment interruptions.</p> <p>Note: Tourism workers, especially women workers, are more likely to be seasonal, part-time, or precariously employed, which limits EI access when fleeing violence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow EI To be more flexible to meet the needs and realities of those experiencing GBV, including how long GBV impacts people • Allow EI access for workers leaving employment for safety reasons, not just job loss • Allow EI access for people part of the temporary foreign workers program.
<p>Criminal Code of Canada</p>	<p>Criminalizes acts of violence, harassment, stalking, and sexual assault.</p> <p>Note: This is a punitive approach that focuses on deterring harm through punishment rather than creating systemic and meaningful change to prevent harm and GBV.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen recognition of coercive control - see CCFWE brief
<p>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations</p>	<p>The IRPA governs the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and establishes that foreign workers have the same rights as Canadian and permanent resident workers.</p> <p>The Regulations were amended to introduce the Vulnerable Workers' Open Permit (VWOP) for migrant workers who are at risk or are experiencing abuse in their workplaces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End the closed permit system in favor of open work permits • Follow best practices in the treatment of cases of GBV for VWOP applications • Make information about workers' rights available and accessible to migrant workers through channels other than the employers (e.g., government and NGOs) and in languages that meet the needs of workers



The **Canadian Labour Code** establishes mandatory workplace programs to prevent harassment and violence, providing an important foundation that includes recognition of family violence (which includes GBV). However, there remains an opportunity to strengthen how GBV is addressed as a workplace health and safety issue. Requiring trauma-informed training for supervisors, particularly in client-facing roles, and strengthening protections against retaliation following disclosure would improve the Code's responsiveness for women in the tourism sector, where workplace risks can intersect with experiences of intimate partner violence and coercive control.

The **Employment Equity Act** is intended to promote equity, security, and advancement for women in the workplace, including through initiatives that can indirectly support the prevention of and response to GBV. The Employment Equity Regulations consider a range of employment types, including permanent full-time, part-time, and some temporary workers. However, coverage remains dependent on the nature and duration of employment and is limited to federally regulated workplaces. For the small subset of tourism workers who fall under this Act (primarily those in transportation) there are persistent concerns about its effectiveness. These include a lack of a dedicated Commissioner to oversee compliance and the narrow scope of designated equity groups. Casual and short-term workers employed for fewer than 12 weeks in a calendar year are excluded entirely, restricting access to protections related to inequitable working conditions and GBV. Moreover, the Act assumes stable participation in the formal economy, which further marginalizes workers in informal, seasonal, or precarious roles that are common across the tourism sector. Reforms such as requiring disaggregated reporting by gender, race, and immigration status, recognizing GBV-related employment disruptions as a structural barrier, and linking equity plans to promotion and retention outcomes would make the Act more responsive to the lived realities of women in tourism.

The **Pay Equity Act** seeks to eliminate gender-based wage gaps, a critical issue in a sector characterized by low wages, feminized roles, and high levels of part-time and seasonal work. While the Act represents an important policy lever, its current implementation timelines and scope limit its impact for tourism workers. Expanding coverage to include seasonal and part-time workers, accelerating implementation, and requiring proactive pay equity audits in hospitality and service-heavy sectors would strengthen its ability to address systemic wage inequities that compound women's vulnerability to economic abuse and GBV.

The **Canadian Human Rights Act** provides protections against discriminatory employment practices, including those based on sex and other protected grounds. However, it does not explicitly recognize GBV-related discrimination, such as job loss, reduced hours, or stalled advancement following disclosure of violence. Complaint mechanisms also remain difficult to access for low-wage and precariously employed workers, who may lack the time, resources, or job security to pursue formal remedies. Explicit recognition of GBV-related discrimination, improved accessibility of complaint processes, and stronger remedies tied to job reinstatement and advancement would enhance the Act's relevance for women in the tourism workforce.

The **Employment Insurance Act** is designed to provide temporary income support during periods of unemployment and to support workers through life events such as illness or caregiving. While it aims to promote economic stability and labour force attachment, significant gaps remain for workers experiencing GBV. The Act does not adequately reflect the realities of fleeing violence, as it often takes far longer than the standard benefit period for individuals to achieve safety and stability.

In the tourism sector, many workers are unable to accumulate sufficient insurable hours due to seasonal, part-time, or precarious employment, effectively excluding them from EI altogether. Greater flexibility in EI eligibility and duration, explicit access for workers leaving employment for safety reasons, not solely job loss, and inclusion of workers under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program would substantially improve income security for those experiencing GBV and tourism workers.

The tourism sector relies heavily on workers in Canada under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). Even though the **Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)** establishes that temporary foreign workers are guaranteed the same rights as Canadian and permanent resident workers, including minimum wage, access to healthcare, and safe working conditions, the reality is quite different. The closed permit system that structures the TFWP provides the opportunity for exploitation and abuse of employees.

Employers have the right to determine both the workers' migration status, with the program requiring applying for a new work permit if the worker wants to change employers, and their working conditions (Amnesty International, 2025 report). It is no coincidence that the most common victims of labour trafficking are workers on temporary visas (The Tyee, February 4 2026). A 2024 UN report referred to Canada's TPFW "a breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery, as it institutionalizes asymmetries of power that favour employers and prevent workers from exercising their rights" (United Nations report, 2024: 6). This includes leaving in the hands of employers a considerable part of the responsibility to inform workers of those rights, which raises a conflict of interest (CBC, August 14 2024).

Despite the introduction of the Vulnerable Workers' Open Work Permit (VWOWP) via the 2019 amendment of **Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations** to allow the issuing of open work permits to migrant workers who are at risk or in a situation of abuse in their workplace, the access to justice for migrant workers continues to be limited (Migrant Workers' Centre and The Law Foundation of British Columbia, 2022). Also, while the government has drastically reduced the number of permits issued under the TFWP since the end of 2025, the sector would certainly benefit from a close look at the program's effects specifically in hospitality. The existing assessments tend to focus mostly on the agricultural and caregiving sectors. Given the breadth of these issues, a comprehensive examination is beyond the scope of this report. However, this program must be reviewed in order to effectively address how GBV impacts people within the tourism sector.

Finally, the **Criminal Code of Canada** criminalizes acts such as violence, harassment, stalking, and sexual assault. While these provisions address individual acts of harm, the Criminal Code is predominantly punitive, focusing on deterrence through punishment rather than prevention or systemic change. This approach does little to address the structural conditions that enable GBV within the home and workplaces. Strengthening recognition of coercive control, as outlined in CCFWE's existing policy brief, would be a critical step toward aligning criminal law with the lived realities of women experiencing ongoing, non-physical forms of violence that profoundly impact their economic security and employment. However, non-carceral focuses are critical.



Provincial Highlights

Across provinces and territories, occupational health and safety and employment standards legislation are the primary framework protecting workers from workplace violence and harassment. Most jurisdictions require employers to implement policies, conduct risk assessments, and take reasonable steps to prevent and respond to incidents, with several also recognizing the impacts of domestic or family violence in the workplace. Some provinces and territories have job-protected leave related to GBV. However, the scope, consistency, and accessibility of these protections vary across jurisdictions. They also do not always fully account for the realities of gender-based violence, such as not reflecting the amount of time people truly need to stabilize post-GBV.

Given that legislative frameworks have already been widely documented, this section focuses instead on programs as more immediate, adaptable tools for addressing gaps and supporting women's economic empowerment in practice. Programs often provide more flexible, integrated responses that can better reflect the complex and evolving realities of gender-based violence.

These provincial programs either directly support women's economic security, women experiencing domestic violence or can be leveraged by women (including those in tourism) to improve their involvement, leadership, and economic outcomes. The intent is to highlight ways that leadership and economic empowerment can be supported through organizational and governmental programs, rather than show an exhaustive study of programs available across the country.

While these programs do not have publicly available impact or outcome reports, making it difficult to assess their effectiveness, documenting their existence remains valuable. They illustrate existing models, provide opportunities for shared learning and lessons learned across provinces and territories, and offer a foundation for governments to build, adapt, and strengthen future policy and program design.

Furthermore, **a consistent thread across these programs is the integration of wraparound, cross-sector support that extend well beyond skills training. These initiatives systematically embed mental health services, housing supports, legal access, childcare, transportation, and trauma-informed care as core program components.** This reflects a shared understanding that sustainable economic empowerment, particularly for survivors of GBV, depends on stabilizing the broader conditions of people's lives, not solely their employability.

Alberta

The [Escaping Abuse Benefit](#) provides one-time financial emergency support to help individuals safely leave an abusive situation and rebuild their lives. It can cover immediate costs such as transportation to safety, temporary accommodation, basic needs, and expenses related to securing and setting up a new home, as well as access to health, legal, and counselling support.

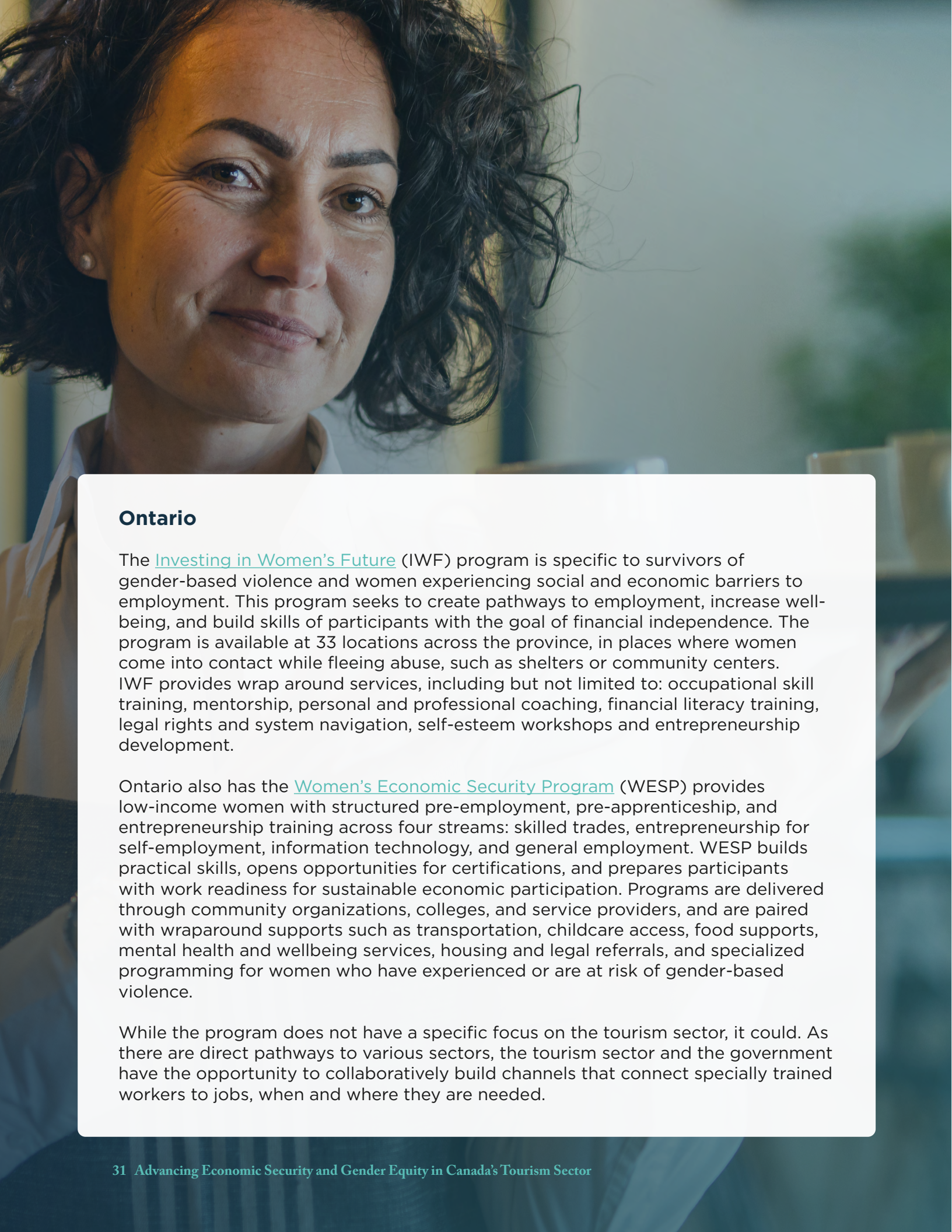
The [Community Support Fund](#) supports Indigenous-led initiatives that reduce violence and strengthen safety and economic security for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people across the provinces. While not tourism-specific, tourism-related projects are eligible where they align with these goals and demonstrate clear community benefit. The fund provides up to \$200,000 per project, considers multi-year initiatives, and prioritizes proposals that demonstrate Indigenous leadership, measurable outcomes, organizational capacity, sustainability, and clear community impact.

British Columbia

The [Individuals Facing Multiple Barriers program](#) supports unemployed or precariously employed British Columbians by providing targeted skills training and employment supports to help overcome complex barriers to sustainable work. The program serves people facing two or more challenges to employment, including housing instability, substance use and mental health needs, limited essential or English language skills, and lack of work experience. It includes tailored programming for populations such as recent immigrants, people with current or prior justice system involvement, individuals who have experienced violence and/or trauma, older workers, and persons with disabilities. The program is funded by the Government of B.C. through the Future Ready Action Plan and by the Government of Canada through the Canada-British Columbia Workforce Development Agreement.

Participants receive a combination of skills training and wraparound employment supports designed to remove practical and systemic barriers to work. This could include occupational skill training, certifications, and academic upgrading, alongside individualized supports such as employment coaching, counselling, mentoring, job placements, cultural and Indigenous supports, childcare, transportation, disability accommodations, work experience opportunities, wage subsidies, equipment, and other tailored services that enable sustained employment outcomes.

[The Persons Fleeing Abuse Hardship Assistance](#) - If a victim-survivor discloses that she is fleeing abuse to BC Employment and Assistance, applicable policies and exemptions are in place to ensure immediate safety needs are met. An initial interview can be scheduled to determine eligibility within one business day, and victim-survivors are not required to verify domestic abuse or violence. New applicants are exempt from the work search and employment obligation for up to 6 months. If not eligible for income or disability assistance, they will be evaluated for hardship assistance, a fund for applicants needing food, shelter or medical attention.



Ontario

The [Investing in Women's Future](#) (IWF) program is specific to survivors of gender-based violence and women experiencing social and economic barriers to employment. This program seeks to create pathways to employment, increase well-being, and build skills of participants with the goal of financial independence. The program is available at 33 locations across the province, in places where women come into contact while fleeing abuse, such as shelters or community centers. IWF provides wrap around services, including but not limited to: occupational skill training, mentorship, personal and professional coaching, financial literacy training, legal rights and system navigation, self-esteem workshops and entrepreneurship development.

Ontario also has the [Women's Economic Security Program](#) (WESP) provides low-income women with structured pre-employment, pre-apprenticeship, and entrepreneurship training across four streams: skilled trades, entrepreneurship for self-employment, information technology, and general employment. WESP builds practical skills, opens opportunities for certifications, and prepares participants with work readiness for sustainable economic participation. Programs are delivered through community organizations, colleges, and service providers, and are paired with wraparound supports such as transportation, childcare access, food supports, mental health and wellbeing services, housing and legal referrals, and specialized programming for women who have experienced or are at risk of gender-based violence.

While the program does not have a specific focus on the tourism sector, it could. As there are direct pathways to various sectors, the tourism sector and the government have the opportunity to collaboratively build channels that connect specially trained workers to jobs, when and where they are needed.



A Model for Empowerment: Supporting an Equitable Future for Women in Tourism

The recommendations provided here are the culmination of a multi-dimensional analysis designed to strengthen the tourism sector's capacity for gender equity and survivor support. Our focus groups and interviews with women in the industry highlighted that while the sector offers unique flexibility and mentorship, structural barriers such as male-dominated leadership and the "old school" management mindset continue to hinder women's advancement. Our survey of survivors of economic abuse revealed the stark reality of how gender-based violence (GBV) impacts employment, with over 40% of participants reporting that it directly impeded their ability to maintain work or find safe housing.

Furthermore, our policy scan identified significant gaps in the federal legislative framework, where key acts like the Canadian Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act fail to explicitly recognize GBV as a workplace safety issue or provide adequate flexibility for those fleeing violence. By bridging these insights, these calls to action provide a roadmap for governments and employers to respond towards gender equity and GBV issues within the workplace through a trauma-informed, systemic approach that empowers women and fosters long-term economic security.

Calls to Action

1. Government & Policy-Level Recommendations

Federal Government

These recommendations build on Figure 1 from the Policy Landscape section.

- **Provide subsidies to address basic barriers to employment:** to support the basic barriers of employment for the tourism sector (see below) to cover the costs of essential work needs such as uniforms, clothing, transportation, and childcare. Government 2025 Budget announced new funding that will support women's organisations in addressing deeply rooted barriers to women's economic prosperity and success, this is one way that this can be actualized.
- **Recognize GBV as a Workplace Health and Safety Issue:** Amend the Canadian Labour Code to explicitly include GBV and coercive control as workplace hazards, requiring mandatory trauma-informed training for supervisors, particularly in client-facing roles.
- **Modernize the Employment Equity Act:** Require disaggregated reporting (by gender, race, and immigration status) and recognize GBV-related employment disruptions as a formal barrier to advancement.
- **Protect Migrant Workers:** End the closed permit system under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in favor of open work permits to reduce the power imbalance that facilitates exploitation and abuse.
- **Reform Employment Insurance (EI):** Increase the flexibility of EI to allow workers to access benefits when leaving a job for safety reasons. This must include expanding eligibility for seasonal, part-time, and temporary foreign workers who are currently often excluded.
- **Support Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income:** One of the top reasons survivors return to an abusive living situation is because they cannot afford to leave. Fair wages that allow people to access life necessities are critical in allowing economic empowerment and safety.

Provinces and Territories

- **Have workforce development programs in every province and territory:** Have the Ministries of Labour expand the models of initiatives such as Ontario's Women's Economic Security Program (WESP) and British Columbia's Individuals Facing Multiple Barriers program. These programs should combine occupational skills training with wraparound supports, including counselling, mentorship, legal supports, financial literacy, and personal life services, ensuring women, particularly survivors of GBV, can build long-term career pathways in the tourism sector.
- **Create Tourism-Specific Pipelines:** Form direct partnerships between provincial governments and tourism industry leaders to create career pipelines specifically for survivors of GBV. These pipelines should only be created with tourism sector organizations that have proven they have implemented GBV prevention policies and set up structures to support survivors.

Municipal Governments

- **Implement the “Banff Model” of Local Leadership:** Municipalities should spearhead cross-sector committees that bring together local tourism associations, municipal planners, and women’s shelters to embed violence prevention directly into the town’s economic strategy.
- **Treat Housing as a Core Safety Infrastructure:** In “resort communities” or towns with a large “shadow population” of seasonal workers, municipalities must regulate employer-controlled housing through by-laws. This includes establishing safety standards and ensuring workers have access to housing that is not tied solely to their employment status, through partnerships for emergency housing through the municipality for these workers.
- **Coordinate Community Access Points:** Leverage municipal community centers and libraries as “safe disclosure zones” where tourism workers can access information about their rights and available GBV supports outside of the workplace.

2. Tourism Employer Recommendations

CCFWE agrees with what the [Survivors’ Agenda calls](#), “building power at work” for survivors (2020). It should enable workers to continue employment with fair, liveable wages that account for the realities of women’s lives, both as survivors and as people outside of work. This section’s recommendations were created with this concept as a foundational element.

There are three key areas where tourism employers can take action to strengthen workplace safety, stability, and inclusion in the context of gender-based violence (GBV). The following section outlines tangible examples within each of these areas.

HR Policies and Operations

Employers can embed GBV prevention and response into the foundational structures and day-to-day operations of the workplace by:

- **Embed violence prevention and support in workplace operations:** develop HR policies with clear accountability, processes, and preventative measures for GBV, ensuring accessibility for all employees regardless of part-time or full-time status, and in a culturally appropriate manner. This should include making environments better for disclosure, by having more than one pathway for flagging GBV, having clear protocols, and letting employees know their rights.
- **Leverage flexible workplace accommodations:** the tourism sector’s strength is that there are many different types of employment, in regards to scheduling, hybrid/in-person, and geographical location (e.g. people can relocate to different hotels). For people experiencing GBV, employers should leverage these flexible workplaces while reasonably encouraging and permitting staff to shift between full-time and part-time schedules, take leave for personal safety, adapt work hours as life circumstances change, and change site locations.

- **Encourage mobility:** if applicable, employers should encourage the opportunity for all staff to work in cities and communities that they wish to. This should be prioritized for those who have disclosed that they are experiencing GBV.
- **Address basic barriers to employment:** provide or subsidize uniforms, clothing, transportation, and childcare to remove obstacles that might prevent survivors of GBV from accessing or retaining employment.

Training and Leadership

Employers can strengthen workplace culture and internal capacity by:

- **Offer training and awareness programs:** partner with local GBV organizations and CCFWE to educate management and staff on recognizing EA and GBV, understanding survivor needs, and offering appropriate support and referral pathways.
- **Create mentorship and leadership pathways:** implement structured programs to develop skills, confidence, and career advancement opportunities for women, including those who have experienced GBV, ensuring equitable access to growth within the sector. These programs should take an intersectional approach to encouragediversified leadership.
- **Foster empathetic leadership:** executives and managers should be empathetic to the lived realities of their employees. This is why training programs should not just be done for staff, but amongst management as well. All mentorship programs should ensure empathetic leadership is one of the key elements in the selection process.

Partnerships

Employers can strengthen support systems and improve access to care by:

- **Collaborate with community organizations** to connect employees with wraparound supports and sector-specific workforce programs, ensuring seamless access to counselling, legal advice, and financial empowerment resources.

3. Women and GBV Organizations Recommendations

- **Institutionalize Referral Pathways:** Tourism employers and NGOs (specifically GBV and financial empowerment organizations) should establish formal, pre-negotiated referral pathways. This ensures that when a worker discloses abuse, the employer can immediately connect them to specialized legal, financial, and mental health resources rather than relying on an ad-hoc response.
- **Conduct further research:** There are still gaps that need baseline data to fully understand the scope of how GBV impacts various sectors, including tourism. For example, more needs to be done on explore the causation of why employees hired through third party experience higher levels of sexual harassment and violence than direct employees within the tourism sector.
- **NGO-Led Employer Training:** NGOs should offer “targeted services” to regional tourism employers, providing trauma-informed training for management on how to recognize signs of economic abuse and coercive control. This moves the burden of “attitude” and “personality” training off the survivor and onto the structural competence of the employer.

Conclusion

The tourism sector has a unique opportunity to lead the way in integrating workforce development with holistic survivor supports. As this report has shown, the industry's inherent flexibility and high participation of women make it a prime environment for advancing gender equity, provided that structural barriers, such as male-dominated leadership and precarious employment, are addressed through trauma-informed policies and systemic change.

For many women, particularly survivors of GBV, financial independence is the cornerstone of safety. Yet, this independence is often undermined by “basic barriers” to employment and a lack of recognized workplace protections. While the sector has the opportunity to take leadership on making a more equitable and safe work environment, it cannot do it alone, nor should it be the only sector pinned as responsible. It will need a shared structural responsibility where governments, municipalities, NGOs, and employers collaborate to create “wraparound” support systems, including laws and policies that truly understand the needs of the people they serve.

Through these calls to action the tourism sector can ensure that employment serves as a genuine pathway to safety and economic justice. Ultimately, a sector that prioritizes the economic security and well-being of its most vulnerable workers is one that will emerge more resilient, competitive, and inclusive for all.

Ultimately, a sector that prioritizes the economic security and well-being of its most vulnerable workers is one that will emerge more resilient, competitive and inclusive for all.

**Economic security
starts with safe work.**



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Appendix

Survey Questions

1. Have you experienced any forms of gender-based violence, including economic abuse, in the workplace or at home? Economic Abuse is a form of coercive control where an abuser restricts, exploits, or sabotages a survivor's access to financial resources, employment, or economic independence. This can include controlling money, preventing someone from working, building debt in their name, or withholding financial support.
2. Have you worked in the tourism industry? The tourism sector is often categorized into:
 - Accommodation (e.g., hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, resorts, campgrounds)
 - Food and beverage services (e.g., restaurants, pubs, cafes, lounges)
 - Recreation and entertainment (e.g., arts and cultural facilities, sporting and recreation establishments, natural attractions, parks)
 - Transportation, (e.g., air, water, and automotive transportation services);
 - Travel services (e.g., travel information and booking businesses)
3. Over the course of your working life, how much time have you spent working in tourism?
4. During your time working in the tourism sector, did you experience any forms of gender-based violence, including economic abuse, in the workplace or at home? Economic Abuse is a form of coercive control where an abuser restricts, exploits, or sabotages a survivor's access to financial resources, employment, or economic independence. This can include controlling money, preventing someone from working, building debt in their name, or withholding financial support.
5. What industry(ies) were you working in when you experienced gender-based violence? (Select all that apply)
6. During your working life, when was the most recent experience of gender-based violence - either in your personal life or at work - that impacted your work? (Select all that apply)
7. While you were experiencing gender-based violence, did you feel comfortable disclosing what was happening to your employer?
8. What made you feel comfortable when disclosing that you were experiencing gender-based violence to your employer?
9. What made you feel uncomfortable when disclosing that you were experiencing gender-based violence to your employer?
10. Did your employer or workplace provide any support while you were experiencing gender-based violence?

11. What kind of support did your employer or workplace provide while you were experiencing gender-based violence?
12. Did your employer or workplace provide any support after the period of gender-based violence had ended?
13. What kind of support did your employer or workplace provide after the period of gender-based violence had ended?
14. Has your experience with gender-based violence affected your ability to find or maintain employment?
15. What challenges have you faced in maintaining or finding employment because of your experience?
16. Have any systemic barriers affected your ability to access support or employment? Systemic barriers are structural obstacles within institutions, policies, and societal systems that create disadvantages for certain groups. These can include, but are not limited to, cultural norms, discriminatory practices, unequal access to resources, biased laws, and workplace norms that perpetuate inequality.
17. Have any cultural values or norms from your background influenced your ability to access employment or gender-based violence support?
18. Do you feel that your experience with gender-based violence has impacted the trajectory of your career?
19. How do you feel your experience with gender-based violence impacted the trajectory of your career?
20. If you have been interested in a leadership role in your career, do you think that your experience with gender-based violence has limited your options?
21. If you have ever experienced economic abuse, were there any specific factors in those experiences that impacted your ability to find or maintain employment, or to grow your career, that you would like to share?
22. Is there anything else you would like to share about how your experiences have impacted your housing situation?
23. What is your age?
24. What is your Race/Ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
25. What is your gender identity?

26. What is your immigration status?
27. What is your current employment status? (Select all that apply)
28. What is your current position type (Select all that apply)
29. What is your current household income?
30. Do you have dependents (e.g., children, elderly family members)?
31. What is your current housing situation? (Select all that apply)