



Women's Leadership in Hospitality Businesses: The case of Greece

Magiaki Fotini

¹(Department of Economics and Management of Tourism University of Aegean Greece)

Lagou Maria

²(Department of Accounting and Finance Administration University of West Attica Greece)

Manta Aikaterini

³(Department of Pedagogy and Primary Education National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Greece)

Kottara Chara

⁴(Department of Business Administration University of West Attica Greece)

Corresponding Author: Lagou Maria

ABSTRACT: This article aims to investigate the presence and role of women in leadership positions, highlight the obstacles they encounter and propose practices and policies to advance gender equality. To achieve this objective, primary field research was conducted through non-probability sampling using structured questionnaires. The findings reveal that, despite high female workforce participation within the industry, women's representation in senior management positions remains limited. The study highlights phenomena such as the 'glass ceiling' and 'glass walls,' which act as invisible barriers to women's career advancement. Additionally, the research identifies a strong influence of gender stereotypes and organizational culture, alongside the challenges of balancing professional and family responsibilities, which often lead to stress, guilt, and career compromises. Comparing these findings with international literature indicates that while the challenges faced by women in Greece align with global trends, the Greek context is distinct due to its traditional social culture and the limited implementation of equality policies. The paper concludes with a series of policy and practical recommendations for both hospitality enterprises and the state, aiming to foster an environment of equal opportunities where gender equality becomes integral to hotel business development strategies.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Hospitality Enterprises, Women, Gender Stereotypes, Gender Equality, Greece

Received 14 July., 2026; Revised 26 July, 2026; Accepted 28 July, 2026 © The author(s) 2026.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality sector which encompasses hotel businesses, food services, travel services and other related activities constitutes one of the most significant employers of women worldwide. Globally, women represent 55–60% of the workforce in tourism and hospitality [1]. This high concentration is primarily explained by the nature of the sector itself, which demands skills related to customer service, care and communication, attributes traditionally associated with women [2]. However, this numerical participation does not automatically translate into leadership roles. According to research by the International Labour Organization [3], fewer than 25% of senior executives in the hospitality sector are women. This phenomenon is widely recognized as vertical segregation, where women are concentrated within lower and middle management levels while men dominate senior executive positions [4]. Simultaneously, horizontal segregation is also prevalent, with women mainly directed to departments such as housekeeping, front desk and marketing, whereas men dominate finance, management-related areas and food services [5]. This dual form of inequality explains why, despite strong initial representation, women's leadership presence remains critically low.

The study of female leadership within the hospitality sector is not merely an academic exercise but also carries profound practical implications. It is directly linked to organizational effectiveness, customer and employee satisfaction and broader issues of social justice. Gender equality is internationally recognized as a cornerstone of sustainable development, with organizations such as the United Nations incorporating it into the Sustainable Development Goals [6]. Within this context, enhancing women's presence in hospitality leadership

is not only a matter of equity but also a critical factor influencing competitiveness and innovation [7, 8]. At an international level, significant efforts have been made to promote female leadership in tourism. Organizations such as the UNWTO have developed targeted gender equality initiatives, while countries like Sweden and Norway have reinforced female representation through board quotas. Conversely, in many countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, deeply rooted stereotypes and limited social policies continue to act as institutional obstacles [7].

In Greece, the situation is comparable but characterized by even more pronounced contradictions. Women constitute approximately 58% of the workforce in the hotel and food services sector [9]. In large hotels, particularly in Athens and major tourist centres such as Crete and Rhodes, women form the majority in reception, housekeeping, administrative support and food and beverage roles. However, their presence in senior hotel management positions remains limited. Research [10] indicates that only 15% of general managers in large hotel units in Greece are women. Conversely, at middle management levels, this figure is considerably higher, reaching 35%. The discrepancy between these two percentages clearly demonstrates the existence of an invisible filter between lower and middle levels and the apex of the managerial pyramid.

The reasons underlying this imbalance are multifaceted. Indicatively, these include the prevalence of stereotypical perceptions that associate assertive or decisive governance with masculine traits, alongside the challenges of balancing family life and professional responsibilities. The latter is particularly pronounced for women with domestic commitments, given that senior management positions in the hospitality sector are frequently characterized by irregular hours and extensive travel [11]. Equally critical is the lack of mentoring and professional networking, as women often face restricted access to informal power networks where promotion decisions are traditionally made [4].

The hospitality sector represents one of the most dynamic and demanding pillars of the global economy. Greece, as a nation with extensive tourism activity, heavily bases its socioeconomic development on this sector, with Athens functioning as its central hub. Women have long maintained a significant presence in hospitality, occupying a high percentage of positions, particularly in roles related to customer service, operational support and management [7, 9]. Despite their strong numerical representation, women remain systematically underrepresented in senior management positions, giving rise to the so-called “female presence paradox” [2].

Athens presents a particularly significant case, as it concentrates a large share of the country's hotel capacity and hosts the headquarters of major hotel chains. Women work across all operational levels of hospitality in the capital. Also their presence in senior leadership positions is even lower than the national average. According to data from the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, only 12% of general management positions within hotels in Athens are held by women. Conversely, in departments such as reservations, sales or human resources, women hold significant managerial responsibility, ranging from 40% to 50%. This demonstrates a distinct form of leadership segmentation, where women undertake leadership roles in functional areas requiring organizational and communication skills but remain largely excluded from top-level general management roles.

Within this framework, the present research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of leadership within hospitality businesses through the lens of gender. By evaluating theoretical concepts and empirical studies, this study develops a conceptual framework that facilitates a deeper understanding of the challenges and prospects women face in senior leadership positions within Athens-based hospitality enterprises. Ultimately, this framework constitutes the structural basis for the subsequent research process and data analysis.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership theories seek to explain how and why specific individuals emerge as leaders. These theoretical frameworks frequently focus on the distinct attributes of prominent leaders, attempting to identify behavioural patterns that individuals can adopt to enhance their own leadership capabilities across diverse situations [12, 13].

Classical leadership theories, although differing in their respective approaches, compose a coherent historical continuum. This evolution shifts from the examination of individual qualities and innate personal traits [14, 15] to the empirical study of managerial behaviours [16, 17, 18] and subsequently to the recognition of the critical role played by environmental factors and interpersonal relationships [19, 20]. Conversely, contemporary leadership theories reflect the complex nature of modern business enterprises and organizations, placing greater emphasis on collaborative relationships, ethical dimensions, emotional intelligence and organizational trust [21,22].

Within the hospitality and travel industry, the application of these theoretical frameworks is exceptionally critical leadership now extends beyond merely guiding staff to fostering a comprehensive service culture, inspiring teams, managing workforce diversity and adapting to volatile operational conditions [23,24]. Extant research indicates that women tend to thrive in such environments, as the attributes central to

contemporary leadership theories including collaboration, empathy and open communication frequently align with their core leadership capabilities [25, 26 27]. In Greece, where tourism generates over 20% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the hospitality sector acquires a dual significance:

- Economic Pillar: It serves as a fundamental engine of socioeconomic growth and national development.
- Gendered Labour Market: It functions as an empirical field characterized by a highly gendered distribution of labour.

The hospitality sector represents one of the most dynamic and vital arenas of the Greek economy [28]. As one of the world's leading tourism destinations, Greece relies heavily on the quality and competitiveness of its hotel enterprises [29]. Within this context, leadership plays a decisive role, given that the decisions and strategic orientations of senior executives directly affect not only internal operations but also the overall customer experience, the country's global reputation and the long-term sustainability of the tourism product [30].

Despite the critical importance of leadership, women's representation in senior executive roles within Greek hospitality remains limited [31]. This phenomenon is neither isolated nor accidental, nor is it exclusively confined to Greece. Rather, it is embedded within a broader social context, wherein deep-rooted historical, cultural and organizational barriers have systematically contributed to persistent gender inequalities [32].

In Greece, this framework is further shaped by existing legislation concerning gender equality in employment, such as Law 3896/2010 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment. Although women constitute the majority of the hospitality workforce, they are disproportionately employed in lower-hierarchy positions, whereas senior management roles remain predominantly male domains. This phenomenon is widely recognized in international literature as the "glass ceiling", describing invisible yet real barriers that prevent women from reaching the highest ranks, even when they possess the necessary qualifications and experience [33]. Alongside this, the so-called "glass walls" also appear, restricting women to specific departments or functions, such as housekeeping or public relations, thereby excluding them from high-strategy areas such as finance, sales or operations [34]. Understanding the obstacles that women face may lead to the formulation of policies and practices that enhance their participation in senior leadership positions [35]. This can, in turn, boost business competitiveness and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable hospitality sector.

III. METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this research is to examine the role of women in senior leadership positions within the hospitality industry in Athens, to identify the structural barriers they confront and to propose strategic policies for the strengthening of gender equality [32].

Specifically, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What is the current state of women's participation in senior leadership roles within Athens-based hotels?
- What organizational, social and personal barriers do women encounter in their advancement efforts?
- How do employees (both women and men) perceive issues of equality, stereotypes and meritocracy?
- What policies and practices could be implemented to enhance women's presence in senior leadership positions?

The significance of this research lies in its focus on the case of Athens, which functions as the core of the Greek hotel industry. The capital hosts a wide range of hotel types, from small family enterprises to international brands, and serves as a hub for business tourism, cultural events and tourist flows [36]. Simultaneously, Athens constitutes a setting where traditional beliefs coexist with modern managerial trends, making it an ideal field for exploring the dynamics that affect female leadership [37].

The empirical objective was to achieve a final sample of 100 valid responses, a threshold considered statistically adequate for executing descriptive statistical analysis and basic hypothesis testing within IBM SPSS Statistics software [38]. The research instrument was developed digitally via Google Forms and distributed utilizing electronic mail and professional networks, including LinkedIn, tourism academy contacts and hotel associations. Additionally, printed hard copies were manually distributed across selected hotel units to ensure the inclusion of personnel without daily access to electronic communication channels. To maximize the response rate and guarantee ethical compliance, it was explicitly stated that participation was entirely anonymous and confidential. Furthermore, participants were assured that the gathered data would be utilized solely for academic purposes, that they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage, and they were provided with a comprehensive briefing on the research context before completing the informed consent protocols.

To ensure data relevance, specific sample inclusion criteria were established:

- Geographical placement: Active employment within a hotel enterprise operating in the Attica region.
- Professional tenure: A minimum of six months of continuous employment within the current role.
- Departmental alignment: Active placement within departments directly related to hospitality service provision.

According to [39], for descriptive analysis within the social sciences, a sample size ranging from 80 to 120 individuals is considered statistically adequate when there is a clearly defined target population and specific research questions. Consequently, the selection of 100 valid questionnaires ensured sufficient statistical power without requiring excessive data demands, whilst facilitating clear presentation through structured tables and graphs.

The research instrument comprised 23 items, systematically divided into three distinct sections:

- Demographic Profile (6 items): This section captured participant background attributes, including gender, age, educational attainment, operational department or organizational position, total years of professional experience and hotel size.
- Female Representation and Equity (7 items): This component evaluated the estimated percentage of women in senior leadership, general perceptions of fairness, recent promotional trends, individual experiences with promotion procedures and a comprehensive equality culture assessment.
- Barriers and Challenges (10 items): This section utilized Likert-scale statements to measure variables concerning societal stereotypes, family obligations, exclusive promotion networks, mentoring availability, gender discrimination, workplace sexual harassment (optional) and overall glass ceiling perceptions.

Most questions were closed-ended for ease of analysis, while key questions were open-ended to gather qualitative insights.

The methodology of statistical analysis consists of the following steps:

Step 1: Basic sample distributions

- Frequencies for demographic data such as gender, age, education, and job position.\
- Percentages (%) for distribution across hotel departments (Front Office, F&B, Housekeeping, Management).
- Means and standard deviations for the Likert scales.

Step 2: Correlation analysis

- Gender with Job position (to indicate vertical differentiation).
- Level of education with Perception of equal opportunities.
- Age with Experiences of discrimination.

For these analyses, the following were used:

- Crosstabs (crosstabulation tables).
- X² test (Chi-square test) for checking statistical significance.

Step 3: Analysis of differences between groups

- Independent Samples t-test to compare two groups (e.g., women vs. men).
- ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for comparisons of more than two groups (e.g., different work departments).

Before the final interpretation of the results, the consistency of responses on the scales was checked using Cronbach's Alpha. The goal was for the values to be ≥ 0.70 for satisfactory reliability. In this way, it was ensured that the scales reliably and consistently measure the phenomenon under investigation.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample.

The majority of the participants were women (62%), while men accounted for 38%. This reflects, to some extent, the increased presence of women in the sector, but also highlights the need for further investigation into their roles in leadership positions.

Participants' ages were distributed as follows: 18–29 years (28%), 30–39 years (36%), 40–49 years (22%) and over 50 years (14%)

The majority fall within the 30–39 age bracket, suggesting a relatively young yet professionally mature workforce within the sector.

In terms of educational attainment, 18% hold a high school diploma, 42% a higher education degree, and 40% possess a postgraduate or higher academic qualification. This high proportion of tertiary education graduates reflects the sector's growing demands for specialization.

Regarding job positions, 27% of the participants occupy senior management roles (e.g., department directors), 38% hold middle management positions, and the remaining 35% work in executive or support roles. This distribution indicates that although a considerable number of women reach leadership roles, they remain heavily concentrated in mid-level positions.

Professional experience is distributed as follows: 1–5 years (20%), 6–10 years (33%), 11–15 years (25%), and more than 15 years (22%). This demonstrates that the sample encompasses both early-career employees and experienced professionals with a long-standing tenure in the field.

B. Perceptions of Women's Role in the Hospitality Sector

According to the findings, the majority of respondents (68%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “women possess the same leadership qualities as men,” indicating a predominantly positive attitude toward female leadership. Conversely, only 12% disagreed, while 20% remained neutral. This pattern suggests that, at least regarding stated attitudes, women's capacity to lead effectively is widely recognized. Despite the general acceptance of women's competencies, opinions diverged when discussing real opportunities for advancement.

Specifically, 56% of participants believed that women have “fewer promotion opportunities” compared to men, whereas only 24% considered these opportunities to be equal. The remaining 20% were undecided. This contradiction, between the recognition of competence and the perception of limited opportunities, highlights the discrepancy between the theoretical acceptance of equality and its practical implementation in the workplace.

When participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which “women are more capable in human resource management and interpersonal relations,” 72% agreed or strongly agreed. This outcome suggests that women continue to be predominantly associated with so-called “soft skills”, namely interpersonal and communication abilities, as opposed to “hard” managerial skills (such as strategic planning or crisis management), which are traditionally attributed to men.

Similarly, 48% of respondents believed that “women tend to adopt a more collaborative and participatory leadership style.” This view aligns with international research [33], which identifies collaboration as a central trait of contemporary female leadership. This finding is particularly significant for the hospitality sector, where effective communication and teamwork are critical to service quality. Notable interest also surrounded the question of whether “women prefer to avoid leadership roles due to increased family responsibilities.” Approximately 41% of participants partially agreed, indicating that the social stereotype of the “double burden” continues to shape perceptions. The remaining 45% disagreed, suggesting a gradual shift in mentality, particularly among younger cohorts.

Regarding whether “women are more frequently subject to stereotypical comments or doubts about their leadership capabilities,” 63% of participants responded affirmatively. This finding is revealing; despite gradual progress, prejudices and micro-discriminations remain part of the daily reality for many female executives. Similar conclusions are documented in the international literature, where such phenomena are conceptualized as the “glass ceiling” or “glass cliff” [40].

In summary, the findings of this section indicate a mixture of progress and contradiction. Participants widely acknowledge women's leadership capabilities yet simultaneously perceive the environment as unequal in terms of advancement opportunities. This dual attitude reflects a “transitional phase” within the Greek tourism sector, shifting between a traditional, male-dominated culture and contemporary views of equality and inclusion.

C. Barriers and Challenges for Women in Leadership Positions in the Hospitality Sector

According to the results, 61% of respondents stated that “women in the hospitality sector are often excluded from strategic decisions due to stereotypes or biases.” Conversely, only 23% disagreed with this statement, while 16% remained neutral. This finding confirms that social perceptions of “male leadership” continue to significantly influence the organizational structure of hospitality enterprises. Equally concerning is that 58% of participants believed that “women in the tourism sector have fewer professional development opportunities and access to training programs.” Career advancement opportunities appear to be even more restricted for those with family responsibilities, as 64% agreed with the statement that “family obligations reduce women's chances of assuming leadership roles.” This confirms the prevalence of the “double burden” phenomenon, where women are required to balance professional and family life [41, 42, 43].

Beyond the familial dimension, a significant obstacle remains the lack of institutional support within organizations. Only 29% of participants reported that “their company implements equal opportunity policies or

mentoring programs for women.” This highlights the limited diffusion of empowerment practices and the absence of mechanisms capable of substantially reducing the gender gap. Similar findings are reported internationally [43], where the absence of such policies is directly linked to the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions. Another notable point concerns the attitude of male colleagues and superiors, with 47% of participants stating that “female leaders often need to prove their capabilities more than men.” This form of indirect discrimination, conceptualized in the literature as the “prove-it-again bias” [44], acts as a persistent barrier to women’s professional progression. Consequently, women are required not only to prove they are competent but to do so repeatedly, which increases psychological pressure and the risk of professional burnout.

Furthermore, 52% of respondents agreed that “the male-dominated nature of senior management teams acts as a deterrent to the promotion of women.” This is directly associated with the well-known phenomenon of the “glass ceiling” [40], which limits women’s advancement to top positions even when they meet all formal qualifications. An important finding pertains to self-confidence and professional security. Approximately 44% of female participants stated that they “feel less confident in seeking promotion compared to their male colleagues,” primarily due to stereotypes and fear of failure. However, 36% reported that their confidence has been strengthened through positive examples of female leadership, suggesting that changes, although gradual, are becoming more evident.

Regarding the representation of women in managerial positions, 59% of respondents agreed that “women predominantly hold leadership roles in departments related to human relations or customer service,” whereas only 21% believed that “women have a significant presence in strategic, sales, or financial management departments.” This vertical gender segregation indicates that professional differentiation continues to operate implicitly, despite companies often claiming adherence to equality principles.

In addition, 38% of participants reported having witnessed or been recipients of sexist comments in the workplace, with the rate being significantly higher among women (53%) compared to men (22%). Although such incidents are not always formally recorded, their existence reveals a cultural context still influenced by outdated perceptions.

Overall, the findings of this section demonstrate that the barriers faced by women in hospitality are both institutional and cultural. Despite improvements in legislation and corporate policies, genuine gender equality appears to be hindered by invisible yet persistent mechanisms of social reproduction. This underscores the importance of fostering inclusive organizational cultures that enable equal participation for all.

Subsequently, key correlations were examined between demographic variables (gender, age, years of experience, and educational level) and perceptions of female leadership, utilizing data processed via SPSS software (version 28). To this end, chi-square (χ^2) tests and Pearson’s correlation coefficients (r), where applicable, were conducted to investigate whether statistically significant relationships existed between variables. Although the sample size ($N = 100$) gives the results an indicative rather than conclusive character, certain clear trends were identified that help clarify the dynamics of the phenomenon. The first analysis showed that gender is significantly associated with perceptions of equal opportunities. Specifically, 72% of women agreed with the statement that “women have fewer opportunities for career advancement,” in contrast to only 32% of men ($\chi^2 = 10.41$, $p < 0.01$). This correlation suggests that women perceive the barriers they encounter in hospitality more strongly—possibly because they experience the effects of stereotypes and male-dominated cultures more directly.

Data analysis also indicated that younger employees (up to 35 years old) hold more progressive attitudes toward female leadership. A total of 81% stated that “women possess equally strong leadership skills as men,” compared to 56% in older age groups. This difference suggests that the younger generation has been influenced by the rise of gender equality and the internationalization of the tourism environment, where issues of inclusion are more prominently discussed ($\chi^2 = 7.12$, $p < 0.05$). A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$) was found between educational attainment and positive attitudes toward female leadership. Participants with university or postgraduate education showed clearly higher levels of acceptance of women in leadership roles compared to secondary education graduates. This finding confirms that education acts as a catalyst for social change, reducing stereotypical perceptions and strengthening belief in women’s abilities. Conversely, the analysis showed that professional experience has a rather negative relationship with more progressive attitudes. As years of experience increase, so does the belief that “senior management positions require masculine characteristics.” For example, only 41% of employees with more than 15 years of experience disagreed with this statement, compared to 68% among less experienced participants ($r = -0.36$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that more experienced workers may have been professionally socialized in environments dominated by more traditional views.

Another finding concerns the relationship between the existence of equality policies and levels of professional satisfaction. Participants working in companies with mentoring programs or equality policies reported in 79% of cases that they “feel more supported and secure regarding their potential for advancement.” Conversely, only 34% of employees in organizations without such policies expressed similar feelings. The

correlation ($\chi^2 = 12.87$, $p < 0.01$) is statistically significant and highlights the importance of institutional support in empowering women.

Overall, the results indicate that demographic and professional factors play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and perceptions toward female leadership. The younger generation and more educated participants express more positive and supportive opinions, while older professional groups remain more reserved. These correlations reinforce the need for targeted education and awareness-raising initiatives—both at corporate and institutional levels—to address the cultural inequalities that continue to persist.

V. DISCUSSION

At the international level, the literature confirms that the glass ceiling remains a global phenomenon within the hospitality industry. Studies conducted in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have systematically documented the underrepresentation of women in senior managerial positions, even though they constitute the majority of the sector's workforce [34, 32]. In these studies, women often represent more than 55% of employees but rarely exceed 30–35% in top management positions. This finding aligns with the quantitative results of the present research, where women occupy 58% of all positions but hold only 40% of the highest leadership roles. This similarity suggests that inequality in access to the upper levels of the hierarchy is not merely a Greek issue but forms part of a broader global trend that characterizes the hospitality industry [49].

However, the findings of this research revealed that within the Greek context, the glass ceiling is often more difficult to break due to the influence of factors associated with local culture. In the international literature, the presence of “male networks” (old boys’ clubs) and women’s limited access to mentoring and coaching are cited as major mechanisms that perpetuate inequalities [33, 31]. Similar patterns were observed in this study, with female leaders reporting that critical decisions are often made in informal settings from which they are excluded. Nevertheless, Greek participants indicated that this exclusion is linked not only to professional structures but also to deep-seated social and cultural norms that determine who is considered “entitled” to participate in such processes. The strong interaction between social and organizational factors thus appears to exacerbate the situation in Greece compared to other developed nations. Regarding gender stereotypes, international studies emphasize that they constitute a significant barrier to women's professional advancement. Research conducted in the United States and Europe has documented the “double bind” phenomenon, whereby female leaders face conflicting expectations: if they are assertive, they are perceived as overly strict, whereas if they are collaborative, they are seen as weak [45, 31].

This finding was fully corroborated in the Greek case, where women reported facing intense criticism for their leadership style. However, in Greece, the strength of these stereotypes appears to be even greater, due to a traditional social culture that continues to associate leadership with “masculine” traits. This is also supported by international comparative studies, such as [37] research, which ranks Greece highly in collectivism and traditional values-factors that tend to reinforce gender biases. Work–family conflict represents, according to the international literature, one of the most significant challenges for women in leadership positions [46, 47].

In sectors such as hospitality, characterized by irregular working hours and intense seasonality this issue becomes even more complex. International studies show that women are often forced to choose between career advancement and family responsibilities, resulting in limited ambition or withdrawal from the sector altogether. These findings are fully consistent with the results of the present research, where Greek female leaders described feelings of guilt, anxiety, and burnout, alongside a lack of support mechanisms from businesses. What differentiates the Greek case is the very limited implementation of family-supportive policies such as remote work or flexible schedules which have already begun to be established in other countries in recent years.

Another interesting point of comparison concerns the proposed measures for improvement. In the international literature, the most frequently recommended practices include the development of mentoring programs, the enhancement of transparency in promotion processes, staff training to address unconscious biases, and the creation of women’s support networks [34, 48, 24]. Strikingly, the exact same priorities emerged from the quantitative responses of employees in our research. This indicates that despite cultural differences, the needs to support women in leadership roles possess a global character. The key difference lies in the degree of policy implementation: while many countries have already institutionalized relevant programs, in Greece, such practices remain at an early stage or are entirely absent.

In summary, the Greek case presents significant similarities with international trends, confirming that the challenges faced by women in the hospitality sector are largely universal. At the same time, however, it is distinguished by specific characteristics that intensify inequality, such as a traditional social culture, limited state support, and the lack of systematic policies within businesses. Thus, the present research not only confirms international theories and findings but also makes an important contribution to the global literature by shedding

light on the challenges faced by women in countries with strong traditional norms and limited institutional infrastructures for gender equality.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMEDETIONS

The quantitative analysis clearly demonstrated that gender equality in the hospitality sector requires systematic and targeted interventions at the level of the enterprise, the industry, and society. The obstacles faced by women such as the glass ceiling, gender stereotypes, and the conflict between professional and family roles are not coincidental. On the contrary, they are the result of long-standing social and organisational practices that require a comprehensive strategic approach.

One of the most significant interventions is the creation of mentoring and coaching programmes. As recorded in the quantitative research, mentoring emerged as the top priority among employees, with a rate of 65%. Through structured mentoring programmes, new female employees can gain access to guidance, acquire knowledge and enhance their self-confidence. At the same time, the implementation of coaching sessions for executives already in leadership positions may contribute to the continuous development of leadership skills.

Equally important is transparency in promotion and evaluation procedures. The lack of clear criteria leads to feelings of unfairness and reinforces bias. Each hospitality business can adopt specific, measurable and publicly available criteria for promotions so that employees know what is required for career advancement. Furthermore, evaluation committees with balanced gender representation can help reduce unconscious biases.

Another critical issue is the support of work–family balance. As indicated, role conflict is one of the major factors that limit women's career progression. Businesses can offer solutions such as flexible working hours, the option of partial remote work for administrative staff, and partnerships with childcare facilities or the provision of childcare vouchers. Such provisions not only support women but also improve overall job satisfaction and employee commitment.

At the industry level, professional associations and large hotel chains can collaborate to create nationwide initiatives aimed at promoting equality. One example could be the establishment of an annual equality index, in which companies would be assessed and required to publish data on women's representation in leadership positions. In parallel, the organisation of conferences, seminars, and forums dedicated to female leadership would provide a space for knowledge exchange and best practice dissemination.

The state also has a critical role to play. Through legislative measures, it can reinforce equality by introducing incentives for businesses that implement inclusion policies. Such incentives could include tax benefits or subsidies for mentoring and family-support programmes. Moreover, the state can strengthen public childcare and eldercare services so that women do not disproportionately bear the burden of care responsibilities.

At the societal level, a broader shift in mentality is required. Awareness campaigns that promote positive examples of female leaders can contribute to breaking stereotypes. In addition, integrating gender equality topics into education, from school to vocational training, can gradually cultivate a new generation of workers with different perceptions and values.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

A key limitation concerns the sample's size and geographical focus, as the quantitative research was restricted to 100 employees within hospitality enterprises in Athens. Furthermore, the timeframe of data collection introduced temporal constraints. Another salient limitation involves the nature of the data. The quantitative findings rely on self-reported questionnaires, which carry an inherent risk of social desirability bias. Despite rigorous efforts to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, participants may still have responded in ways they perceived as socially acceptable, particularly regarding gender equality issues.

Further investigation into female leadership within the hospitality sector remains imperative for both academic advancement and policy development. First and foremost, expanding the research to a nationwide scale would be highly beneficial.

Additionally, future studies should investigate diverse hotel structures, such as small family-run accommodations, large multinational chains, or boutique hotels, given that organizational frameworks, roles, and policies vary significantly and may uniquely shape women's experiences. Incorporating the male perspective also represents a compelling direction; exploring the perceptions of male leaders and employees could yield critical insights into systemic barriers and the reproduction of gender stereotypes. Finally, comparative international research would offer valuable perspectives on cross-cultural and institutional variations.

REFERENCES

- [1]. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2019, Global Report on Women in Tourism – Second Edition. UNWTO & UN Women. Madrid. <https://www.unwto.org>.
- [2]. Baum, T., International Perspective on Women and Work in Hotels. Catering and Tourism, ILO Working Paper Series International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 2013.
- [3]. ILO (International Labour Organization), World Employment and Social Outlook Trend, Geneva. 2020
- [4]. Mooney, S. K. and Ryan, I., A Woman's Place in Hotel Management: Upstairs or Downstairs?. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 2020. **24**(3): p. 195-210.
- [5]. Ng, C. W. and Pine, R., Women and Men in Hotel Management in Hong Kong: Perceptions of Gender and Career Development Issues. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2003. **22**(1): p. 85-102.
<https://sdgs.un.org/topics/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>
- [6]. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2021, World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex, January 19(1). Madrid.
- [8]. Gousiou A. and Lagou M., Selecting Human Resources in Greek Tourism Enterprises. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 2023. **21**(2).
- [9]. ELSTAT, Labour Force Survey – Annual Results 2022, Hellenic Statistical Authority, Athens. Available from: <https://www.statistics.gr>.
- [10]. INE/GSEE, 2021. Annual Report on Employment and Gender Equality in Greece. INE/GSEE. Athens.
- [11]. Karamesini, M., Gender and Employment in Greece: Dimensions and Perspectives. Kritiki Publications. Athens. 2011
- [12]. Ahmed, F. and Harrison, C., Entrepreneurial Leadership Skills and Competencies: A Systematic Literature Review. *International Review of Entrepreneurship*, 2023. **21**(2): p.255.
- [13]. Fischer, T. and Sitkin, S. B., Leadership styles: A comprehensive assessment and way forward", *Academy of Management Annals*, 2023. **17**(1): p.331–372.
- [14]. Stogdill Ralph, Personal Factors Associated with Leadership: A Survey of the Literature, *Journal of Psychology*, 1948. **25**: p.35-71.
- [15]. Kouzes, J.M. and Posner, B.Z., *The Leadership Challenge: How to Keep Getting Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations*. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco. 1995
- [16]. Likert, R., *New patterns of Management*. McGraw Hill. New York. 1961
- [17]. Likert, R., *The human organization: its management and values*. McGraw-Hill. New York. 1967
- [18]. Derue, D.S. et al., Trait and Behavioral Theories of Leadership: An Integration and Meta-Analytic Test of Their Relative Validity, *Personnel Psychology*, 2011. **64**: p.7-52.
- [19]. House, R., Path-Goal Theory of Leadership: Lessons, Legacy, and a Reformulated Theory. *Leadership Quarterly* Autumn. 1996. p.323-52.
- [20]. Van Vugt, M. et al., Leadership, followership, and evolution: Some lessons from the past, *American Psychologist*, 2008. **63**(3): p.182–196.
- [21]. Hosmer, L. T., Trust: The connecting link between organizational theory and philosophical ethics, *The Academy of Management Review*, 1995. **20**(2): p.379–403.
- [22]. Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. and McKee, A., *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Harvard Business School Press. Boston. 2002
- [23]. Spanou, E., Encouraging women entrepreneurship in STEM: Policy insights from Greece, *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, 2021. **33**(3): p.334–346.
- [24]. Lagou, M. et al., Determinants of Employees Motivation in Greek Hotel Businesses, *Quest Journals of Research in Business and Management*, 2024. **12**: p.50-58.
- [25]. Dionysopoulou, P. and Aivaliotou, E. C. Women entrepreneurship in the tourism sector: The case of Greece. In *Gender and tourism: Challenges and entrepreneurial opportunities*. Emerald Publishing Limited. 2021
- [26]. Hossain, M. U. et al., Personality traits, social self-efficacy, social support, and social entrepreneurial intention: The moderating role of gender, *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 2024. **15**(1): p.119–139.
- [27]. Goncalves et al., Drivers for Women Entrepreneurship in Greece: A Case Analysis of Early-Stage Companies, *Businesses*, 2025. **5**(1).
- [28]. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), (2023), *International Tourism Highlights*, Madrid.
- [29]. INSETE, The contribution of tourism to the Greek economy and employment, Annual Report 2024, Athens.
- [30]. Kotter, J.P., *Leading Change*, Harvard Business Review Press Boston. 2012
- [31]. Catalyst, *Women in Leadership at S&P 500 Companies*, 2022 Report, New York, Catalyst.
- [32]. McKinsey & Company, *Women in the workplace 2023*. McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org. 2023
- [33]. Eagly, A. H. & Carly, L. L., *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders*. Harvard Business Review Press. Boston. 2007
- [34]. Burke, R. J. & Mattis, M. C., *Supporting Women's Career Advancement: Challenges and Opportunities*, Cheltenham. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2005.
- [35]. UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender snapshot 2023*. New York. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). 2023
- [36]. ELSTAT, Labour Force Survey – Fourth Quarter 2023. Hellenic Statistical Authority. Athens. 2024
- [37]. Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. I. and Minkov, M., *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (3th edition). McGraw-Hill. New York. 2010.
- [38]. Field, A., *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics* (5th edition). SAGE Publications Ltd. London. 2018.
- [39]. Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J. and Anderson, R. E., *Multivariate Data Analysis* (8th edition). Cengage Learning EMEA., Andover, Hampshire. 2019
- [40]. Ryan, M. K. and Haslam, S. A., The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions, *British Journal of Management*, 2005. **16**(2): p.81–90.
- [41]. Lymberaki, A., *Gender and Economy: Women in the Labor Market in Greece*, Center for Research on Equality Issues (KETHI). Athens. 2011
- [42]. Mouriki, A., *The position of women in the labor market: Inequalities, challenges and prospects*, GSEE Labor Institute (INE/GSEE). Athens. 2015
- [43]. Burke, R. J. & Mattis, M. C., *Supporting Women's Career Advancement: Challenges and Opportunities*. Cheltenham. Edward Elgar Publishing. 2005.
- [44]. Ely, R. J. et al., Taking Gender into Account: Theory and Design for Women's Leadership Development Programs, *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 2011. **10**(3): p.474-493.

- [45]. Heilman, M., Gender stereotypes and workplace bias", Research in Organizational Behavior, 2012. **32**: p. 113-135.
- [46]. Greenhouse, J. H. and Beutell, N. J., Sources of Conflict Between Work and Family Roles, Academy of Management Review, 1985. **10**(1): p.76-82.
- [47]. Derry, C. and Jago, L., Women in Tourism and Hospitality: Unlocking the Leadership Potential, Tourism Management Perspectives, 2015. **16**: p.23-31.
- [48]. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), (2022), World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex, November 20(6). Madrid.
- [49]. Asonitou, S., & Kottara, C., Sustainable development of skills for the tourism sector and its financial impact, In Strategic Innovative Marketing and Tourism: 7th ICSIMAT, Athenian Riviera, Greece, 2018. p. 1121-1129. Springer International Publishing.