



Reinventing the journey into hospitality

How redesigned employment pathways can unlock talent for
employers and opportunities for communities

For more than a decade, collaborating with clients and nonprofit partners, Accenture has been creating pathways to jobs as part of our commitment to helping our communities thrive. For this report, we partnered with the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (WSHA) to share real-world examples of how cross-sector collaboration can redesign employment pathways into hospitality, helping address a persistent industry-wide talent shortage while widening access to careers in the sector.

While the takeaways apply across hospitality, the examples in this paper focus on hotel roles, where Accenture and WSHA have worked alongside employers, digital learning partners and nonprofits to reduce barriers, build readiness and support people as they move into work and build a lasting career.

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01

Introduction

Priya helps run her family's small guesthouse outside Pune, India. She manages bookings, handles suppliers and, because she is fluent in three languages, helps people from many backgrounds feel at home. But she has always wanted to move to the city and build a career for herself beyond the family business. When she sees a post about an entry-level role at a hotel in central Pune, she's excited, until she realizes that the local bus can't get her to an induction that starts at 7 a.m., and temporary accommodation in Pune is not available. These logistics, not her ability to do the job, keep Priya from taking that promising step toward the future she envisions.

Priya's story is illustrative, but the pattern is real. With better employment pathway design, often through minor adjustments to how businesses attract and support candidates for entry-level roles, more people can launch the careers they seek. Employers, in turn, can reach untapped talent pools, helping to address persistent entry-level staffing gaps.



8.6million-workers
shortfall

Hospitality has long been one of the most important entry points into the working world. Supporting more than 350 million jobs worldwide, roughly one in 10 globally, the sector creates opportunities in communities at a scale few industries can match.¹ For many, it is more than a first job; it is a route to economic stability and a career worth building. Yet not everyone who could succeed in hospitality has the same ability to access those opportunities. Many of today's employment pathways inadvertently present barriers, excluding capable people before employers ever have the chance to see their potential. Some lack the exposure to imagine themselves in the sector to begin with. Others can see the opportunity but face practical obstacles that prevent them from pursuing it.

18%below required
staffing levels

The missed opportunity extends to communities, too. When fewer people can access stable work and achieve economic stability, community resilience becomes harder to realize.

(projected for hospitality
industry by 2035)

For hospitality employers, unfilled roles and early attrition are material business challenges. Roles that remain open stretch teams and compromise the guest experience, while rapid turnover erodes the return on the investment employers make in getting new workers hired in the first place. The World Travel & Tourism Council identifies recruiting and retaining talent as the greatest single workforce challenge facing the industry today. By 2035, the hospitality industry is projected to face a shortfall of 8.6 million-worker shortfall, leaving the sector roughly 18% below required staffing levels.²

The challenges are clear, but viable and replicable solutions are emerging. Drawing on the programs explored in this paper, we show how deliberately shaping employment pathways, the routes through which people discover, access, prepare for and enter work, can help organizations expand the talent pools they are able to recruit from.

1. World Travel & Tourism Council, The Future of Work in Travel & Tourism: The key trends shaping workforce strategies, September 2025

2. Ibid



02

Redesigning employment pathways to unlock new talent pools

A closer look at the hospitality industry's talent gap reveals why capable candidates are not always finding their way into open roles. Two barriers are especially common: practical obstacles that prevent interested candidates from applying or accepting roles, and limited exposure that prevents potential candidates from seeing hospitality as a career option in the first place.



For many, the practical barriers are tangible: a training schedule that conflicts with family responsibilities, transportation costs that make the commute impossible to afford, or safety concerns that make a role far from home feel too risky to accept.

Others may never consider the sector at all because they have had limited exposure to hospitality as a career option. Maybe there were no visible examples in their communities, school curricula or available career guidance. Lacking that exposure, they never had the chance to picture themselves in the sector, let alone build the confidence to take a first step toward a role within it.

These barriers are real, but they are not impossible. Addressing them does not require employers to lower hiring standards or carry the cost and complexity alone. Often, what's needed most is collaboration: employers working with community and industry partners who each have a stake in helping more people access, prepare for and succeed in hospitality roles.

WSHA has seen how practical barriers can intersect with questions of trust, safety and family support. One member of the Alliance, a hotel working with the TUI Academy in Sri Lanka, had offered a job to a qualified seventeen-year-old who was ultimately hesitant to accept. The hiring team asked about her concerns and learned that the hotel was far from her village, the hours felt unfamiliar and her family worried about her safety. She asked whether her mother could see where she would be working. They encouraged her to do so, and she and her mother walked the property together and met the security and support staff. Only then, with her mother's support, she was comfortable taking the role.

Recognizing such concerns as common among applicants, the hotel formally integrated family engagement into the hiring experience. Parents now attend the first day of induction as standard practice, and security teams walk trainees to their accommodation after late shifts. These relatively minor changes to the employment pathway helped address concerns that might otherwise have prevented candidates from accepting a role.

While this example shows how a relatively simple adjustment can help remove a barrier at the point of hiring, the same principle can also inform a more complete pathway model. In India, Accenture, Marriott International and local nonprofit partners designed an employment pathway into hospitality careers that addresses both the lack of exposure and practical barriers candidates face before they reach an interview. The program, launched in 2025, brings together community outreach, family engagement, a 45-day residential training period, paid internships and placement support into a single journey to employment.

Local nonprofit partners help build trust with families and communities, reframing hospitality as a meaningful career path rather than a temporary first job. Participants build role-specific skills through hands-on practice in hospitality labs, from guest service to front desk operations, while also strengthening communication, customer service, financial literacy and workplace readiness. Additionally, Accenture volunteers augment participant support through mentorship, real-world perspectives and interview preparation.

3,100+

young people
completed
training

In the program's first 12 months, more than 3,100 young people across India completed training and more than 2,500 entered hospitality roles, an 80% placement rate. The model has also attracted interest from other Marriott locations and expanded to include a partnership with the Oberoi Group in India.

Cross-sector collaboration has also proven effective in addressing the second barrier: limited exposure to hospitality as a career option. In the UK, for example, Accenture and Marriott International are working with Movement to Work, a youth employment coalition, and Springpod, a virtual work experience platform, to connect more young people with jobs in the hospitality industry.

2,500+

entered
hospitality roles

(in India, first 12 months
of the program)

The program starts where many young people need it to: by helping them understand what hospitality work can look like and whether they can see a future for themselves in the sector. Participants explore hospitality careers through two virtual work simulations, one focused on front-of-house roles and one on food-and-beverage. The format is flexible and on-demand, offering a low-pressure opportunity for young people to learn about the sector, build confidence and take a first step toward an in-person placement whenever they can find the time and wherever they are in the country.

~5,000

young people
completed the
program

Those who complete the virtual experience can then apply for the opportunity to progress into one-week, in-person placements in Marriott hotels. The shift from virtual to in-person is intentional: virtual access widens the top of the funnel, coaching helps turn interest into readiness and hotel placements provide real-world training. By starting their placements with a clearer sense of what the work involves, participants are better equipped to see hospitality as a career rather than a stepping stone, which can help reduce the risk of drop-off as they move from interest to placement. To date, nearly 5,000 young people have completed this program, and more than two-thirds have expressed strong interest in pursuing a career in hospitality.

2/3 +

interested in a
hospitality career
(in UK)

Across these examples, the design principle is consistent: identify what is keeping capable people out of the talent pipeline, then redesign the pathway around those barriers. Whether the barrier is exposure, safety, family trust, cost or confidence, intentional pathway design can help more people access hospitality roles while enabling employers to reach talent pools they may otherwise miss.

For employers, the return can extend beyond filling open roles. When pathways are designed around candidates' needs, people may be better positioned to see hospitality as a place to stay and progress.

Based on what we've seen, young people from underserved communities often value hospitality roles as a path to stability and progression. When the opportunity is clear and the right support is in place, they can be more likely to stay and grow than candidates who see hospitality as a temporary stepping stone.

Isabel Novoa, Head of Global Social Empowerment at the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

For employers facing candidate shortages, the implication is clear: the answer is not simply to compete harder for the same narrow set of candidates. It is to redesign the routes into work so that more capable people can see, access and sustain careers in hospitality.



03

From inspiring examples to coordinated action

Tackling hospitality's talent gap requires deliberate action on three fronts: helping more people enter the sector, building cross-sector partnerships that make these efforts more effective and scalable, and supporting new hires beyond day one in a rapidly changing environment.

These insights point to three broad priorities:

- **First: invest in employment pathway redesign**

The access gap is addressable, but only if employers understand the realities preventing capable candidates from applying for or accepting roles. That means identifying the barriers before someone reaches an interview, whether limited exposure to hospitality as a career option, cost of commute or accommodation, family trust, schedule design or safety concerns, and designing pathways that respond to those barriers.

- **Second: build for scale through partnership**

As the examples in this paper illustrate, success relies on a collaborative, cross-sector approach. The practical step is identifying the right partners for each barrier: community organizations and nonprofits that already hold trust with the people employers are trying to reach, organizations with a vested interest in creating employment pathways who can help design and scale them, training providers who can translate potential into work-readiness and industry bodies who can turn what works in one market into a model others can adopt. The employers who treat these relationships as strategic rather than supplementary are the ones who see durable results.

No single company can address this on its own. It requires collective action to widen access, create more visible pathways into hospitality careers and support people not just to enter the sector, but to grow once they are there.

Glenn Mandziuk, President and Chief Executive Officer of WSHA

- **Third: recognize that the pathway doesn't end at placement**

Getting people through the door is only the beginning. Across industries, the roles and expectations placed on workers are changing faster than the support structures around them. In hospitality, AI is already changing what the work involves, handling bookings, check-ins and routine guest queries at speed. But hotels are not factories. Much of the work happens in moments that are unpredictable by design: in guest rooms, on conference floors, during a maintenance call or in response to guest requests that no system can fully anticipate or script. In those settings, the human side of hospitality becomes more valuable, not less. Care, judgment, presence and problem-solving will remain central, especially in luxury service, where personal attention is part of the value proposition. That raises the bar for what happens after day one. Effective employment pathways are designed to include support that evolves with the work, helping new hires understand where technology can assist, where human judgment matters most and how to build confidence as expectations change.

The programs explored here show how redesigning the routes into work can expand access to both talent and opportunity. Employers fill open roles, more people find meaningful work and communities thrive. The organizations that commit to both getting more people through the door and supporting them once they start the job will not simply address today's vacancies. They will help build the next generation of hospitality talent while creating lasting value for workers, businesses and the communities at the heart of the industry.

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