

# UNEQUAL WOMEN

A REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF PANDEMIC TERMINATIONS ON WOMEN OF COLOUR IN BC'S HOTEL INDUSTRY

DECEMBER 2021



Prior to the pandemic, Vancouver welcomed millions of visitors from across the globe with a well-deserved reputation for hospitality. A 2017 British Columbia Chamber of Commerce survey ranked tourism as the most significant sector over the next decade.

In 2019, BC's hotel industry generated \$3.2 billion and women working in our hotels contributed an estimated \$430 million in income taxes in. [1] Women make up the majority of the hospitality workforce in Vancouver and across BC, many of whom are women of color.

In March 2020 at the beginning of the COVID pandemic, approximately 50,000 hospitality workers were laid off. The CEO of the BC Hotel Association told the Vancouver Sun, "When business starts increasing, the first thing we're going to do is rehire our employees...because our greatest asset is our employees." (September 2020). Instead, hotels across the province permanently terminated long-term staff.

Despite a raft of government subsidies given to employers, they are under no obligation to ensure laid-off workers reclaim their jobs as business recovers. This has only exacerbated precarity for workers, especially for hotel workers in major urban markets like Vancouver, who were hit hard by layoffs.

This report takes a closer look at how those terminations have disproportionately affected women, especially women of color.

Since the onset of COVID, the hospitality industry has lobbied all levels of government for public relief. The provincial government has provided the sector with close to \$230 million in direct relief since December 2020, along with access to \$345 million in grants. B.C.'s hospitality sector also received more than \$1.2 billion in wage subsidies from the federal government between March 2020 and May 2021. [2]

[1] Income tax figure based on industry estimates.

[2] [https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/serv-info/tax/business/topics/cews/statistics/cews\\_p1-p15\\_tbl2j\\_bc\\_e.csv](https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/cra-arc/serv-info/tax/business/topics/cews/statistics/cews_p1-p15_tbl2j_bc_e.csv)

## HOW I GOT KICKED OUT FROM THIS LAND IS HOW MY ANCESTORS GOT KICKED OUT

I was heartbroken when we were fired. As a member of the Squamish Nation, I thought I deserved to stay on this land and work at the Pan Pacific. How I got kicked out from this land is how my ancestors got kicked out. This is wrong for everyone who lost their job just because of the pandemic.

**Stephanie Dan, Fired Room Attendant  
Pan Pacific Hotel, 7 years of Service**



## I JUST WANT MY JOB BACK WHEN THE PANDEMIC IS OVER.

I'm devastated that I was fired. I thought I was going to retire at Pan Pacific – but the hotel used the pandemic as an excuse to get rid of many of us. I'm 54 years old so it's hard for me to start again. I worked hard for my job and never came late to work. This isn't about money. I just want my job back when the pandemic is over.

**Jerty Gaa, Fired Public Area Attendant  
Pan Pacific Hotel, 11 years of Service**

# IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON WOMEN IN HOSPITALITY

Women have been disproportionately affected by job losses since the start of the pandemic. Almost 100,000 women aged 20 and up have exited the labour market entirely, compared with fewer than 10,000 men, according to a report by RBC. [2]

Pandemic job losses were overwhelmingly concentrated in the services sector in which women and racialized workers are overrepresented.

In travel services, women make up nearly 71% of the workforce. Women employed in accommodation and food and beverage services comprised over 60% of the total employees, according to a report from Destination Canada. Moreover, immigrants comprise 26% of Canada's tourism workforce, compared with 23.8% of the total labour workforce. [3]

Racialized and immigrant workers absorbed greater job losses, perhaps because of their concentration in industries affected by shutdowns. Chinese, South Asian, Filipino, Indigenous and Black Canadians experienced significantly higher rates of unemployment than their white counterparts during the pandemic. [4]

In BC, women in accommodation and food services experienced the largest pandemic-related loss of employment across industries – a decline of 55% in the spring of 2020, [4] While employment levels have risen and fallen as each wave prolongs the pandemic, women continue to experience the unequal impact of job losses in the sector.

By September 2021, there were approximately 22,000 fewer women working in hospitality, on average, than in the same period in 2019, a decline of 18%. By comparison, there were *more* men working in the sector in September 2021, an increase of 7%, than during the same period in 2019. [5]

While eased restrictions have prompted some gains in employment, this varies by region. For example, hotels in urban centers that are heavily reliant on international and corporate travel continue to lag behind. Experts don't predict a meaningful rebound in hotel bookings before 2022.

[2] <https://www6.royalbank.com/en/di/hubs/now-and-noteworthy/article/women-in-the-labour-force/kbs73ec9>

[3] <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2021/03/Women%20work%20and%20COVID.pdf>

[4] <https://ipolitics.ca/2020/08/07/july-labour-force-survey-shows-racialized-gap-in-unemployment-due-to-covid-19/>

[5] Comparison of average monthly employment in accommodation and food services between January-August 2019 and January-August 2021YTD, by sex. Data from Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0026-01 Employment by class of worker, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality (x 1,000)

# FINDINGS

# 94%

*Highest rate of fired women of colour  
at Pan Pacific Vancouver Hotel*

UNITE HERE Local 40 collected data across five BC hotels to determine the impact of the recent wave of terminations on women of colour,

Some of the key takeaways:

- Across hotels, the majority of workers fired are women.
- In 4 of the 5 hotels, women of colour comprise the majority of terminated women.
- Among the terminated women, the highest rates of women of colour are found in hotels in the Lower Mainland.
- Among the terminated women, the highest rate of women of colour was found at the Pan Pacific Vancouver Hotel at 94%. [6]
- The largest total number of jobs lost by women was 90 jobs at the Pacific Gateway Hotel. The hotel was taken over by the Trudeau government as a federal quarantine site in March 2020 through present. Approximately 73% of women fired are racialized.

[6] Westmont terminated employees at the owner's other two Vancouver hotels, the Fairmont Waterfront and the JW Marriott/Douglas hotel complex.



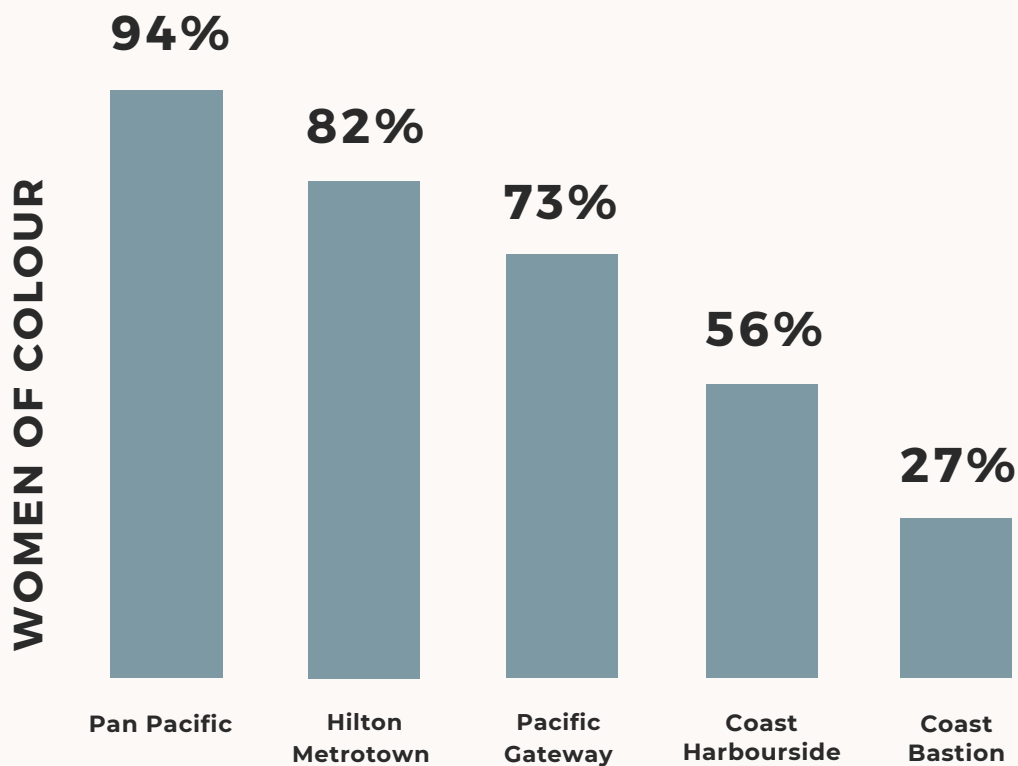
## WHY ISN'T THE GOVERNMENT HELPING US KEEP OUR JOBS?

My hotel laid me off when the federal government took over my hotel and contracted with Red Cross to train others to do my job, which was to clean rooms. I'm 69 years old. I worked all my life for my hotel, and this is how I am treated? I can't afford to retire right now. Why isn't the government helping us keep our jobs?

**Gangamma Naidu, Fired Room Attendant  
Pacific Gateway Hotel, 45 years of Service**



# TERMINATIONS OF WOMEN



Much news coverage has been given to the hospitality industry's concerns over labour shortages. Despite access to government wage subsidies, some employers who terminated workers during the height of the pandemic now find themselves in a labour crunch. This summer, the head of the BC Hotel Association declared the industry needs between 30,000 and 35,000 workers to make up for the shortfall. [7]

Meanwhile, workers like Gangamma Naidu, a terminated hotel housekeeper from Richmond's Pacific Gateway Hotel who spent over 40 years on the job, were forced out of work and have not found comparable pay or hours. In the hotel sector, women have lost ground partly because employers slashed housekeeping, and food and

beverage departments where women are concentrated. And fewer women have been recalled back to work.

For those who do return, workers may find the jobs more precarious over concerns about health and safety on the job, irregular shifts, and heavier workloads due to short staffing. Yet, many women who lost their jobs after investing years in their hotels want to return to safe, good quality jobs in the hotel industry.

Despite mass terminations of workers across BC's hotel sector, more than 2,500 unionized hotel employees across BC have negotiated extended recall rights through to the end of the pandemic. [8]

[7] <https://www.iheartradio.ca/ctv-news-content/b-c-tourism-industry-dealing-with-pandemic-wildfires-and-record-staffing-shortages-1.15642757>

[8] <https://www.bcunequalwomen.org/bc-travel-alert/>

# FIRED WOMEN'S YEARS OF SERVICE

## 350+

Terminated women at the **Hilton** accumulated over 350 years of service to the hotel, ranging from 1 up to 22 years of service.

## 1300+

Terminated women at the **Pacific Gateway** accumulated over 1300 years of service to the hotel, ranging from 1 up to 45 years of service.

## 450

Terminated women at the **Pan Pacific Hotel** accumulated nearly 450 years of service to the hotel, ranging from 1 to 35 years of service.

## 275+

Terminated women at **Coast Hotels** accumulated over 275 years of service at Coast Hotels, ranging from 1 up to 36 years of service.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Women of colour and immigrants who cook, clean and care for hotel guests are among the casualties of the pandemic. The hotel industry treated workers, particularly women of colour, as if they were disposable. Despite government subsidies, grants and other relief, the industry largely failed to commit to bring workers back as business recovers. We call on the hotel industry and government to step up and ensure those most impacted by jobs losses do not permanently lose economic ground. Women of colour, still largely invisible in the hotel industry, absorbed much of the job losses and deserve a pathway forward to more secure, sustainable work.

Moving forward, we strongly encourage the B.C. government to reconsider creation of a regulation within Employment Standards to provide recall protections to any worker laid-off as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The province could follow the recent legislative change in U.S. states like California which adopted a law to ensure that no hospitality employer can terminate long-term staff because of the pandemic. On the federal level, the government should condition employers' pandemic subsidies on worker retention to prioritize laid-off workers having first shot at returning to their jobs.

## METHODOLOGY

UNITE HERE Local 40 represents employees at the Hilton Metrotown, Pacific Gateway Hotel, Coast Bastion, Coast Harbourside, and is currently in negotiations for a first collective agreement at the Pan Pacific Vancouver Hotel.

The Union collected employee data directly from hotel employers. UNITE HERE Local 40 also interviewed employees to collect gender

and race information about the affected groups.

UNITE HERE Local 40 then spoke directly to employees to collect gender and race information on the affected employees.

UNITE HERE Local 40 advocates for approximately 50,000 hospitality workers across British Columbia.

For more information, visit [www.uniteherelocal40.org](http://www.uniteherelocal40.org).

