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Master's Thesis - Sustainability and Social Innovation

What Social Innovation Mechanisms Can Durably Address Hard-to-Fill Occupations?

The Case of Inclusive Hiring Practices in the French Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

France's hospitality industry faces a structural labor crisis: over 168,000 hard-to-fill positions remain unfilled each year despite active recruitment efforts, with annual turnover rates reaching almost 60% in hotels and an average replacement cost of €6,000 per hire. This paper investigates what social innovation mechanisms could durably address these hard-to-fill occupations, using inclusive hiring practices in the French hospitality sector as its empirical field. Based on a qualitative multi-case study of 28 organizations across hotels, restaurants, retail, inclusion, and public employment industries, this research identifies the barriers that prevent employers from adopting alternative hiring practices and the conditions under which those practices produce lasting outcomes. The central finding is that inclusive hiring could durably break the cycle of chronic turnover, but only when three conditions are continuously present: candidate assessment grounded in behavioral and motivational criteria rather than conventional ones such as prior sector experience; a trusted intermediary who absorbs the operational complexity of inclusive hiring on the employer's behalf; and structured post-placement support during the critical first days of employment. When any one of these conditions is absent, inclusive hires fail at rates comparable to conventional ones, and the failure is typically misattributed to the candidate profile, reinforcing employer skepticism in switching practices. The research further identifies three triggers of employer adoption: the financial awareness of turnover costs, a prior positive experience with an atypical hire, and the presence of a trusted intermediary, which is the most universally operative. These findings reframe the hard-to-fill occupation problem as an implementation gap rather than a supply or awareness gap, and point toward the design of a connector-of-trust model capable of holding the full chain from behavioral sourcing to follow-up after hiring. Practical recommendations are finally made for employers, public actors of the labor market and social innovators entering this space.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research context: persistent recruitment tensions in the French hospitality industry

Picture a restaurant HR director spending his Monday morning posting the same cook position for the fourth time in six months. The opening is live on job boards, the description is clear, the salary is competitive. Applications come in. Some candidates look promising on paper. A few candidates are invited for trial shifts. Most do not show up. One starts, lasts three weeks, and leaves without notice. The cycle begins again. And again. Each restart costs the establishment somewhere around 6000€ when recruitment fees, training time, productivity loss, and management burden are counted together. The position stays vacant. The team absorbs the pressure. The chef grows frustrated. The HR director wonders whether he is doing something wrong, or whether the problem is simply bigger than his tools.

He is not doing anything wrong. The problem is indeed, bigger than his tools.

France's hospitality and tourism industry is one of the most economically vital sectors in the country, employing over two million people and contributing to approximately 7.5% of GDP (France Travail, 2026). It is also one of the most structurally broken labor markets in the French economy. In 2025, a ministerial decree formally confirmed what HR professionals in the sector had known for years: cooks, waiters, housekeepers, receptionists, and kitchen assistants are officially labeled as hard-to-fill occupations across almost every French region (Ministère du Travail, 2025). Together, these roles represent approximately 336,000 annual recruitment needs, of which roughly half remain unfilled despite active job postings and theoretically available candidate pools (Le Chô Touristique, 2025).

The numbers behind this shortage are striking. According to France Travail's annual survey of employer hiring intentions, 50.1% of all planned recruits in 2025 were considered difficult to fill, representing over 1.2 million hard-to-fill positions across the French economy (France Travail, 2025). In hospitality specifically, annual turnover rates are consistently two to three times higher than the national average (Amossé and al., 2024). Among the 23 organizations interviewed for this research, average yearly turnover reached 57% across all sectors. One restaurant group reported an overall turnover rate of 115% in a single year. A restaurant chain rebuilt its entire frontline team twice in fourteen months. The average cost of a single hard-to-fill hire, when all direct and indirect costs are counted, came to around 6000€ across the sample.

And yet, despite these figures, most employers keep doing the same thing. They post on the same job boards, screen for the same prior experience, and reject candidates who do not fit the familiar template. When asked about it, many acknowledge the paradox themselves. As one HR director at a large hotel group put it: "the turnover is structural, it's a management issue, not a sourcing problem." That diagnosis is not wrong. But the conclusion drawn from it, that sourcing therefore does not matter, is precisely the blind

spot this thesis seeks to examine. Another, at a restaurant chain running 80% vacancy rates in kitchen roles, described the challenge as: "quality of candidates, always quality. We need people who stay." But neither had substantially changed their hiring process in years.

This thesis starts from a simple observation: the tools most hospitality employers use to recruit were not designed to solve the problem they are facing. Job boards and CV-based screening optimize for the transaction of the hire, using prior sector experience as an argument for suitability, when research consistently shows that past experience predicts neither performance nor retention in a new organization (Postlethwaite and al., 2019). The result is a sector that spends enormous resources recruiting the same kinds of profiles through the same channels, and keeps getting the same outcomes. The vacancy stays. The cost increases. And the cycle continues.

There is, however, a different way to think about this problem. Across France, a range of organizations, from nonprofit intermediaries to social business to innovative employers, have been quietly experimenting with something different: hiring people further from conventional employment pathways, assessing them on what they can do and who they are rather than where they have worked and their past life, and investing in their integration rather than assuming the market will take care of itself. These practices, loosely grouped under the label of inclusive hiring, are not driven by charity or compliance. They are driven by the recognition that the conventional candidate pool is exhausted, and that the sector's growth depends on finding a better answer to who gets hired and how.

This is where this research paper begins.

1.2 Personal motivation and positioning

My motivation for this research began in Cambodia.

In 2023, I spent six months working with Pour un Sourire d'Enfant, a French NGO operating in Phnom Penh that provides education and vocational training to children and young adults living in extreme poverty. The organization was founded by Marie-France and Christian des Pallières, whose life's work demonstrated something I had not fully understood before: that the most radical act of social change is often the most concrete one. What struck me most was not the scale of the deprivation, which was significant, but the mechanism through which lives changed. Education mattered. But what durably transformed a trajectory was access to a first job. A real one, with a real employer, that lasted long enough to become a foundation and a vocation. Children who had grown up on garbage dumps became cooks, mechanics, hotel staff. The job was not the end of the story, but the beginning of a different one. Marie-France and Christian became, in that sense, role models for how I wanted to orient my own professional life: toward social impact that is built to last.

I came back to France with a conviction: that professional integration is one of the most

powerful levers for exiting poverty that exists, and that it is dramatically underinvested in. Not in terms of good intentions, which are abundant, but in terms of operational solutions that actually work at scale. I wanted to build something that addressed this problem directly, not from the outside through advocacy, but from the inside through a business model that made inclusive hiring profitable for employers rather than purely charitable.

Over the following months, I began talking to everyone I could find who worked at the intersection of employment, inclusion, and business: HR directors, nonprofit leaders, public employment advisers, social entrepreneurs, and frontline managers. I was trying to understand where the real friction was, and what a viable solution might look like. What I heard, again and again, was something I had not anticipated: the problem was not getting people into jobs. It was keeping them there. Employers were not simply struggling to find candidates. They were watching candidates leave within weeks or months, reinitializing expensive recruitment cycles, and absorbing the operational and human cost of chronic instability. Turnover, not sourcing, was the central concern.

That insight suggested that the most valuable intervention was not simply widening the candidate pool, as most inclusive hiring initiatives focused on doing, but redesigning the process by which candidates were assessed and supported so that the right people ended up in the right roles and stayed. Those conversations raised questions that existing literature did not fully answer: why do employers continue using tools they know are underperforming? What actually makes an inclusive hire durable? Under what conditions do employers change their practices? The more I looked, the more I realized that the field had documented the problem well, but had not yet produced a grounded account of what works, for whom, and under what conditions. This thesis is my attempt to answer those questions rigorously, using the academic frameworks and empirical methods that the Sustainability and Social Innovation program has equipped me with.

I am aware that a researcher who arrives at an academic question through personal conviction must be particularly vigilant about confirmation bias: the temptation to find what I was already looking for. I have tried to manage this by interviewing employers across a wide range of sizes and attitudes toward inclusive hiring, and by grounding every analytical claim in data rather than in prior conviction.

1.3 Research question and objectives of the paper

The two preceding sections have established a paradox. France's hospitality industry faces a structural labor shortage that conventional recruitment tools have proven unable to resolve, despite years of effort and significant financial investment. At the same time, a range of inclusive hiring practices and social innovation mechanisms exist that offer a theoretically grounded alternative, one that is better aligned with what research shows actually predicts whether a worker will stay. The gap between these two realities is not a gap in awareness. Most employers know the tools are underperforming. It is a gap in understanding: of what works, why it works, and under what conditions it can be adopted at scale.

This thesis is therefore organized around the following research question:

> ***What social innovation mechanisms can durably address hard-to-fill occupations?***
> *The case of inclusive hiring practices in the French hospitality industry*

The question is deliberately sector-specific. While inclusive hiring social innovations have been studied in the French labor market more broadly, the hospitality sector presents a combination of constraints, extreme time pressure on hiring decisions, high and structural turnover, small establishment sizes with limited HR capacity, and a deeply embedded selectivity culture, that makes it a particularly interesting case. Understanding what works in this context produces insights that are both sector-relevant and likely to generalize to other hard-to-fill, high-turnover environments.

The question is also deliberately focused on mechanisms rather than practices. Documenting that a tool exists, such as the MRS or the POEI (described more precisely later in this paper), is not the same as understanding why it produces durable outcomes in some contexts and not others. This research aims to look beyond the list of available tools and find an explanation of the causal logic that makes inclusive hiring work: what needs to be in place, on the employer side, the intermediary side, and the candidate side, for a hire made through an inclusive pathway to last.

Practice refers to a concrete, observable tool or action deployed by an actor (the MRS, the POEI, a partnership with a non-profit, a 90-day follow-up scheme...).

Mechanism refers to the underlying causal logic that explains *why* a given practice produces, or fails to produce, a durable outcome (what needs to be in place for it to work).

The focus on durability is deliberate. Hard-to-fill occupations are partly hard to fill because employers are constantly re-recruiting for the same positions: when annual turnover reaches 59% among hotels, as observed in this study analysis, each position must effectively be filled almost every year. Inclusive hiring, when it produces durable hires, does not make a position easier to fill, it makes it need to be filled less often. A hire that lasts three weeks does not solve a hard-to-fill occupation, it defers it. The relevant outcome is therefore not whether a candidate is placed, but whether they stay long enough to offset the cost of recruiting them and to contribute meaningfully to the team they join.

Three specific objectives guide this investigation. The first is to identify the recurring mechanisms through which inclusive hiring initiatives produce durable employment outcomes in the French hospitality sector, drawing on both the academic literature and empirical data collected from 23 organizations. The second is to understand the conditions under which employers adopt and sustain these practices, including what triggers openness to

change, what organizational and cultural barriers slow adoption, and what role trusted intermediaries play in bridging the gap between available solutions and employer practice. The third is to translate these findings into practical recommendations for employers, public actors, and social innovators, providing actionable guidance on what works, for whom, and under what conditions, in a sector where the cost of inaction is both measurable and ongoing.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized into six sections.

This introduction has established the research context, my personal motivation, and stated the research question and objectives.

The literature review then examines the existing academic and institutional knowledge on social innovation applied to the labor market, inclusive hiring concepts and tools, and hard-to-fill occupations in French hospitality before identifying the gaps this research addresses.

The methodology section describes the qualitative multi-case choice, the sampling strategy, and the data collection and analysis methods.

The results section presents the empirical findings from 23 organizational interviews, organized around the barriers employers face and the mechanisms that produce durable outcomes.

The analysis section interprets these findings in light of the theoretical framework, proposes a mechanism-based model for effective inclusive hiring, and draws practical recommendations for employers, public actors, and social innovators.

Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the central contributions of this paper and opens questions for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review examines three interconnected bodies of knowledge that together frame the research question driving this thesis. It begins with the concept of social innovation, its definitions, its application to the labor market, and the multi-stakeholder architectures through which it produces durable outcomes. It then narrows to inclusive hiring as a specific form of social innovation applied to recruitment, examining the theoretical foundations that justify it and the concrete tools through which it is being implemented in France. Finally, it turns to the hospitality sector as the empirical terrain of this research, documenting why certain occupations in this industry remain chronically hard to fill despite high unemployment, and why conventional recruitment channels have proven structurally unable to solve this problem. The final section identifies the gaps that remain in the existing literature and positions the contribution of this research.

Social innovation and inclusive hiring are not two separate topics placed side by side. Inclusive hiring, as this review will show, is best understood as a form of social innovation: it reconfigures an existing process, recruitment, to address a social need that conventional market mechanisms have failed to meet, through a coalition of actors that extends beyond the individual employer. It's then important to first establish what social innovation means before examining what inclusive hiring does, and then grounding both in the specific constraints of the sector of hospitality where the stakes are particularly high.

This review is guided by the following question: What social innovation mechanisms make hiring more inclusive in the hospitality industry, and under what conditions do employers adopt them? Inclusive hiring does not simply layer on top of conventional practices, it raises deeper questions about how HR risks are conceptualized, who counts as a legitimate candidate, and what kinds of employer-candidate relationships are prioritized in hiring strategies. For many hospitality employers, ensuring operational continuity, customer satisfaction, and team stability is non-negotiable. Inclusive hiring therefore speaks directly to these concerns, by fostering the successful integration and long-term retention of a more diverse range of workers.

2.2 Social innovation applied to the labor market

2.2.1 Defining social innovation

The concept of social innovation has gained significant traction in both academic and policy world over the past two decades, yet it remains one of the most contested notions in the social sciences. Before applying it to the labor market and to inclusive hiring specifically, it is necessary to establish a working definition that is both theoretically grounded and operationally useful for the purpose of this research paper.

In the international academic literature, the most widely cited definition comes from Mulgan and peers, who describe social innovation as innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need, and that are developed and

diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social benefits rather than profit-maximization (Mulgan and al., 2007). This definition has the merit of clarity: it centers the concept on the intention to address unmet social needs, and distinguishes social innovation from technological or commercial innovation by the nature of the organizations that carry it and the goals they pursue. It does not, however, fully capture the processes and relational dimensions of social innovation, which French researchers have been particularly attentive to.

In the French academic papers, Richez-Battesti, Petrella and Vallade offer a more nuanced framing. They show that social innovation is not a stable or unified concept but a notion with multiple uses, mobilized across very different sectors: as a response to social problems that markets and the state have failed to solve, as a new form of organizational governance, and as a process of co-construction involving multiple stakeholders including the beneficiaries themselves (Richez-Battesti, Petrella and Vallade, 2012). This process-centered understanding is particularly relevant here: it shifts the analytical focus from what a social innovation produces as an output to how it reconfigures relationships between actors in order to produce that output.

In the French legal framework, social innovation was formally defined for the first time in article 15 of the *Loi Relative à l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire* of the 31st of July of 2014, which describes it as offering products, services or modes of organization that respond to social needs that are not or poorly met by the market or the public sector (notion of additionality), through innovative forms of enterprise, production processes, or work organization. (Loi ESS, 2014). This definition is significant because it gives social innovation a legal status in France and connects it explicitly to the broader ecosystem of the Economie Sociale et Solidaire (ESS), which includes associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, and social enterprises. The law further recognizes that consultation procedures involving the beneficiaries of such projects also fall within the scope of social innovation, reflecting a preference for participatory design without making it a strict condition.

Bringing these three perspectives together (international academic literature, french academic literature, and french legal framework), social innovation can be understood for the purposes of this thesis as a process through which new practices are developed by a coalition of actors, including employers, nonprofits, public bodies and beneficiaries, to address social needs that conventional market mechanisms have failed to meet. This working definition will serve as the analytical framework through which the inclusive hiring initiatives examined in this thesis are interpreted in sections 4 and 5.

Social innovation is understood in this thesis as a process through which new practices are developed by a coalition of actors, including employers, nonprofits, public bodies, and beneficiaries, to address social needs that conventional market mechanisms have failed to meet.

2.2.2 Multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approaches

A defining characteristic of the most impactful social innovations in the labor market is that they do not operate at the level of a single organization. The most durable initiatives tend to involve more than one actor, combining for example the operational knowledge of employers, the social proximity of nonprofit organizations, the regulatory and financial leverage of public bodies, and the lived experience of the beneficiaries themselves. Research on social innovation applied to the labor market confirms that this multi-stakeholder architecture is not simply a design preference but a condition for reaching populations that conventional institutions systematically fail to serve (Richez-Battesti, Petrella and Vallade, 2012).

In the French labor market, this multi-stakeholder logic is most visibly institutionalized in the sector of Insertion par l'Activité Economique (IAE). The IAE brings together the state, which provides regulatory recognition and partial financing, specialized structures including Entreprises d'Insertion (EI), Ateliers et Chantiers d'Insertion (ACI), and Associations Intermédiaires (AI), which create transitional employment and provide socio-professional support, and the beneficiaries themselves, who gain work experience and professional socialization in a supported environment. Its scale is significant: in 2021, 170 000 new contracts were signed within IAE structures across France. According to a DARES analysis of exit trajectories, 45% of people leaving an IAE pathway were in employment six months after their exit, of which slightly more than half were in durable employment (DARES, 2024). These results are meaningful for a population considered among the furthest from the labor market, and they point to the value of structured accompaniment over an extended period rather than a punctual placement intervention.

The more recent Territoires Zéro Chômeur de Longue Durée (TZCLD) experiment pushes the multi-stakeholder logic further. Launched in 2017 and expanded to 75 territories by 2025, it brings together local authorities, employers, nonprofit actors, and long-term unemployed individuals around a shared territorial commitment: the right to employment for anyone who wants to work, funded by the reallocation of passive unemployment spending toward productive activity. The evaluation conducted by the scientific committee mandated by the Ministry of Labor confirmed that the experiment improved employment trajectories and wellbeing outcomes for participants compared to control populations, including gains in health, social integration, and professional confidence (DARES, 2025). The experiment also illustrates a condition for effectiveness that the literature on multi-stakeholder social innovation consistently identifies: the importance of territorial anchoring and local governance, where actors who know the population and the local employment ecosystem coordinate around a shared outcome rather than each pursuing their own institutional mandate isolated.

These two examples illuminate a broader principle: the inclusive hiring tools more broadly described in section 2.3.2 tend to produce more durable outcomes when they are embedded in a multi-stakeholder architecture that distributes responsibility across sourcing, preparation, placement, and integration. What the French experience also reveals, however, is that this architecture has proven difficult to sustain beyond the placement moment. The

IAE exit data cited above shows that 55% of leavers are not in employment six months after their pathway ends, and the TZCLD evaluation, while positive, notes the significant cost and complexity of sustaining the model at scale. The mechanisms that enable durable labor market integration, particularly what happens in the period immediately following the hire, remain the least well understood and least well resourced part of the ecosystem.

These structural observations about social innovation in the labor market set the stage for the next section, which examines inclusive hiring as one specific and increasingly documented implementation of this logic, a mechanism through which the recruitment process itself becomes the object of social innovation.

2.2.3 Depth of change: systemic innovation

Not all social innovations produce the same depth of transformation. Westley and Antadze (2010) propose a widely used typology distinguishing three levels of impact. **Incremental innovation** improves an existing product, service, or process without altering the structures around it. **Institutional innovation** changes how a specific organization or set of organizations operates, for example by creating a new role, tool, or partnership. **Systemic innovation**, by contrast, alters the rules, norms, or resource flows that govern an entire system, shifting not just what individual organizations do, but the structural conditions that shape what all organizations in that system are able to do.

> **Systemic change**, in this thesis, refers to a transformation that alters the underlying rules, norms, or infrastructure governing a whole system, as opposed to a change confined to a single organization's practices or to one relationship between actors.

This distinction matters for the present research question. Documenting that inclusive hiring produces durable outcomes within individual organizations is, in Westley and Antadze's terms, evidence of institutional innovation. Whether these mechanisms also point toward systemic change, altering the technical and normative infrastructure that governs recruitment across the sector, is a question this thesis returns to in section 5.2.

2.3 Inclusive hiring: concepts and practices

2.3.1 Concepts, diversity, and equal opportunity

Inclusive hiring is the specific form of social innovation this thesis is concerned with. Applied to the recruitment process, it embodies the defining characteristics identified in the preceding section: it addresses a social need that conventional market mechanisms have failed to meet (access to employment for systematically excluded profiles), it reconfigures an existing process rather than simply adding a layer to it, and it tends to involve a coalition of actors (employers, intermediaries, public bodies, and candidates) rather than operating at the level of a single organization.

Inclusive hiring is a concept that circulates widely in French HR discourse but is rarely

defined with precision. It is frequently confounded with diversity policy, used the same way as equal opportunity, or reduced to compliance with anti-discrimination law. Before examining how inclusive hiring can address hard-to-fill occupations in hospitality, it is necessary to define these overlapping notions and to construct a working definition grounded in the academic and institutional literature.

In the French legal context, the principle of non-discrimination in employment is embedded in article L.1132-1 of the Labor Code, which prohibits difference of treatment on the basis of 25 protected criteria, including origin, age, sex, disability, and place of residence (Code du travail, 2024). Diversity policy extends this negative obligation into a more proactive commitment: it asks employers not only to avoid excluding protected groups but to actively seek to represent them within their workforce. Both frameworks are essentially compliance-oriented. They define success in representational terms: how many workers from minority backgrounds, how many people with disabilities, how many women are present at a given level of the organization. This framing is legitimate, and acts as a basis for understanding inclusive hiring as a labor market mechanism.

Inclusive hiring, as the concept is used in this research paper, refers to something broader and more operational: a set of practices that reconfigure the recruitment process itself in order to broaden access to employment for candidates who are systematically excluded by conventional hiring criterias. The profiles concerned are not defined by specific characteristics but by a shared structural position: they are candidates whose potential is not visible through the standard signals that conventional recruitment relies on, namely credentials, linear career histories, and prior sector experience (Marchal and Rieucau, 2010). This includes, but is not limited to, people returning to the labor market after an interruption, workers in professional reconversion, long-term unemployed individuals, candidates from disadvantaged areas, and more broadly anyone whose pathway does not conform to the template that ATS systems and CV-screening processes are designed to reward (Fuller and al., 2021).

Inclusive hiring, as used in this research, refers to a set of practices that reconfigure the recruitment process itself in order to broaden access to employment for candidates who are systematically excluded by conventional hiring criteria (candidates whose potential is not visible through standard signals such as credentials, linear career, or prior sector experience).

This process-centered understanding of inclusive hiring shifts the analytical focus from representation to selection logic. The central question becomes not who ends up hired, but what assumptions are embedded in the hiring decision and whether those assumptions are justified. Understanding why these assumptions persist, despite their documented inefficiency, requires engaging with the economic theory of discrimination. The dominant framework in French labor economics draws on the theory of statistical discrimination, first formalized by Phelps (1972) and Arrow (1973), which argues that employers facing imperfect information about individual candidates make probabilistic calculations about

their likely productivity based on observable group characteristics (Phelps, 1972); (Arrow, 1973). In fact, an employer who perceives that candidates without prior sector experience are on average less likely to perform well or remain in post is not acting irrationally: he is making a statistical bet, using available signals and knowledge to reduce the cognitive cost of a decision they must make quickly. The problem is not their logic but their data, as we established in the preceding section: prior sector experience correlates close to zero with subsequent turnover in a new organization (Postlethwaite and al., 2019). The correlation made is individually rational, but collectively dysfunctional, and empirically unfounded.

The consequences of this dynamic in the French context are well documented. Based on 57 qualitative interviews with recruiters across multiple sectors, Cortéséro and his colleagues show that discriminatory practices in recruitment are not primarily the product of explicit prejudice but of a rational calculus under constraint: recruiters facing time pressure and uncertainty mobilize criteria that reduce cognitive effort and signal reliability, even when those criteria correlate poorly with actual performance or retention (Cortéséro and al., 2013). This dynamic is reinforced by organizational inertia: selection criteria tend to reproduce themselves because they are embedded in job descriptions, ATS configurations, and hiring manager habits that are rarely questioned, even in sectors where their inadequacy is manifest. Marchal and Rieucau further show that the instruments through which candidates are evaluated, the CV, the unstructured interview, the reference check, are not neutral checks of competences but social constructs that encode existing norms of what a credible worker looks like (Marchal and Rieucau, 2010). Inclusive hiring, understood in this way, is not a correction applied after or during the selection process; it is a redesign of the process itself.

This redesign centers on replacing flawed indicators with assessment methods that have higher predictive validity for what employers actually care about: a worker who performs well and stays. The academic literature on employees selection has made significant progress on this question. In a landmark re-examination of 85 years of meta-analytic data, Sackett and his colleagues demonstrate that structured interviews, which assess behavioral responses to situational questions rather than career history, now rank as the strongest predictor of job performance across selection methods, ahead of cognitive ability tests and significantly ahead of years of experience (Sackett and al., 2022). Motivational fit, values alignment, and conscientiousness measures also show strong predictive validity for retention, independently of credentials. These findings have direct implications for hospitality hiring: the relational and service skills that define performance in frontline roles, the capacity to stay calm under pressure, to interact warmly with customers, to work reliably within a team, are not legible on a CV but are entirely assessable through structured behavioral conversation.

A further argument, less frequently made in the French literature but grounded in organizational psychology research, concerns the retention potential of candidates who are further from employment. Several converging mechanisms suggest that these profiles, when correctly matched and supported, may present stronger retention factors than candidates recruited through conventional pathways. Motivational engagement theory establishes that candidates for whom obtaining a position represents a high-value outcome demonstrate stronger initial commitment and longer tenure (Vroom, 1964, cited in Allen and Meyer,

1990). The job embeddedness framework further shows that workers with strong local anchoring, family ties, geographic stability, and community roots are significantly less likely to leave than mobile candidates with multiple alternatives (Mitchell and al., 2001). Research on newcomer adjustment establishes that candidates whose expectations are accurately calibrated before their first day show significantly lower early departure rates (Bauer and al., 2007). Finally, work on affective organizational commitment shows that employees who perceive that their employer has invested in their success develop a sense of reciprocity that translates into greater loyalty and longer tenure (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Taken together, these mechanisms suggest that inclusive hiring is not simply a way of widening the candidate pool. When implemented with appropriate assessment and post-placement support, it may produce hires that are more durably embedded in their roles than those selected through conventional credential-based screening.

Inclusive hiring is therefore not a concession to social objectives at the expense of operational ones. It is, on the evidence, a more accurate way of identifying workers who will stay and perform, precisely because it abandons the credentials and experience filters that research consistently shows to be poor predictors of the outcomes employers most need (retention, reliability and performance). The following subsection examines the concrete tools and mechanisms through which this redesign is being implemented today in the French labor market.

2.3.2 Existing tools and mechanisms

The preceding subsection established what inclusive hiring is and why it matters theoretically. This subsection maps the concrete tools through which it is being implemented today in the French labor market, and examines what existing evidence says about the conditions for their effectiveness.

The landscape of inclusive hiring tools in France is diverse and has developed gradually over two decades, through a combination of public policy initiatives, nonprofit experimentation, social businesses and employer-driven adaptation. These tools can be grouped into three broad categories: assessment-based sourcing methods, pre-hire training pathways, and partnership-based integration practices.

The first and most institutionally rooted tool is the Méthode de Recrutement par Simulation (MRS), developed by France Travail and in operation since 1995. The MRS replaces CV screening with practical exercises that reproduce the actual conditions of a job, assessing candidates on their observable and concrete skills needed to perform the role, rather than their credentials or prior experience (France Travail, 2024). The only prerequisite is basic literacy and numeracy. Applied across all sectors of activity and all types of positions, the MRS is directly aligned with the inclusive hiring logic described in the previous subsection: it evaluates what candidates can do, not what they have already done. The method has since been extended to digital formats to adapt to the evolving technological environments of modern workplaces. It does, however, require a close collaboration between the employer and France Travail advisers, which represents a non-negligible operational cost for small and medium-sized establishments, the most

common employer type in hospitality.

The second category of tools concerns pre-hire training pathways. The Préparation Opérationnelle à l'Emploi Individuelle (POEI) allows an employer who has identified a candidate to finance a training period of up to 600 hours before the hire takes place, bridging the gap between the candidate's current skills and the requirements of the role (France Travail, 2025). The employer commits to hiring the candidate after the completion of the training if the required competency level is reached. This practice is particularly adapted to hospitality, where technical skills such as food safety, or kitchen practices can be transmitted relatively quickly with structured support, but where employers are often reluctant to hire candidates they perceive as needing too much training time. The POEI directly addresses this reluctance by reducing the employer's risk before the contract is signed and helping then financially.

The Période de Mise en Situation en Milieu Professionnel (PMSMP) operates on a different logic: rather than training a candidate before recruitment, it allows them to experience the job first, on an immersion basis of up to one month, with no employment contract and no obligation on either side. The objective is to confirm mutual fit before a formal commitment is made. The results of this tool are well documented: according to France Travail's own evaluations, 72% of jobseekers who completed a PMSMP accessed employment within the twelve months following the end of the immersion, compared to 55% for a comparable control group. The gap is substantial and suggests that exposure to the actual job environment, and the mutual reassurance it produces, is a meaningful driver of hiring outcomes. In 2019, over 203,000 such immersions were carried out nationally, and 91% of beneficiaries said they would recommend the tool to others (France Travail, 2021).

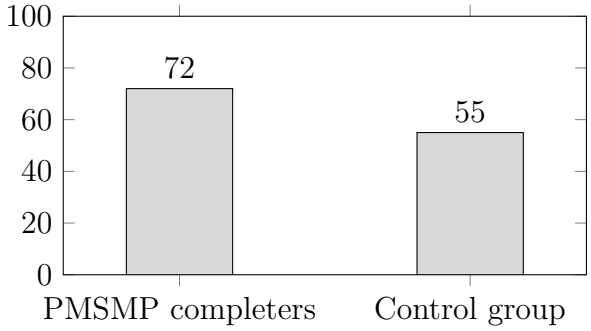


Figure 1: Employment access rate: PMSMP completers vs. control group (France Travail, 2021)

The third category concerns partnership-based integration practices: collaborations between employers and non-profits or social businesses specializing in populations further from employment. These partnerships take multiple forms. Some non-profits act as sourcing intermediaries, identifying and preparing candidates from disadvantaged neighborhoods, formerly incarcerated individuals, or people with recognized disabilities before connecting them with employers. Others provide accompaniment during the hiring process, maintaining contact with both the candidate and the employer to resolve early difficulties

before the hire. In the disability pathway specifically, the legal quota framework, which requires companies with more than 20 employees to employ at least 6% of recognized disabled workers under the OETH obligation, has created a structured incentive for employers to engage with specialized intermediaries such as Cap Emploi. More broadly, the growing recognition that disability-focused hiring requires dedicated support infrastructure reflects a wider shift in how inclusive hiring is understood: not as a one-time act of recruitment, but as an ongoing relationship between the employer, the candidate, and the intermediary (Shenoy, 2023).

Taken together, these tools represent a meaningful set of alternatives to conventional CV-based recruitment. Yet the literature reveals a consistent pattern in how they are evaluated: studies and institutional assessments tend to measure placement outcomes, meaning whether a candidate obtains a job, rather than retention outcomes, meaning whether that candidate stays. The PMSMP statistics cited above, for instance, measure access to employment in the twelve months following immersion, but do not address how long those hires remain in post. The evidence base on what happens after the hire, and on what intermediary support during the integration period might contribute to durable employment, remains limited. This gap between what the tools achieve at the moment of hire and what the sector ultimately needs in terms of workforce stability is one that the existing literature has not yet adequately addressed.

These tools have been developed and evaluated largely at the level of the general French labor market. The question that remains is whether and how they function within the specific constraints of a sector like hospitality, a sector whose operational pressures, selectivity culture, and structural turnover create a context that is qualitatively different from the settings in which most of this evidence was produced. The next section examines that context.

2.4 Hard-to-fill occupations in the French hospitality sector

2.4.1 Definition and characteristics

The hospitality sector is not simply a sector where inclusive hiring tools have yet to be applied. It is a sector which specific combination of constraints (structural turnover, extreme time pressure on hiring decisions, limited HR capacity in small establishments, and a deeply embedded selectivity culture) makes it a particularly demanding and revealing terrain for studying when and why inclusive hiring works. Understanding this context requires first documenting the scale and nature of recruitment difficulties in the sector.

Six out of ten occupations in France face significant or very significant tensions, particularly in operational and service roles.

An occupation is considered **durably hard to fill** when employers experience persistent recruitment difficulties despite active postings and theoretically available candidate pools. This definition, formalized by DARES and France Travail, rests on three objective criteria:

- The ratio between job offers and registered jobseekers
- The outflow rate of jobseekers from employment lists
- The share of recruitments anticipated as difficult by employers

Complementary indicators further capture the working conditions, employment stability, geographic mismatch, and wage attractiveness of each occupation.

At the national level, recruitment difficulties span multiple sectors. In 2025, French employers anticipated 2.43 million hires, of which 50.1% were considered difficult to fill, representing over 1.2 million hard-to-fill positions (France Travail, 2025). Tensions remain particularly acute in construction, automotive trade and repair, healthcare and social work, and hospitality. Their common characteristic is a structural paradox: high demand but low attractiveness, driven by demanding working conditions and pay that often fails to meet workers' expectations (DARES, 2024), (Ministère du Travail, 2025).

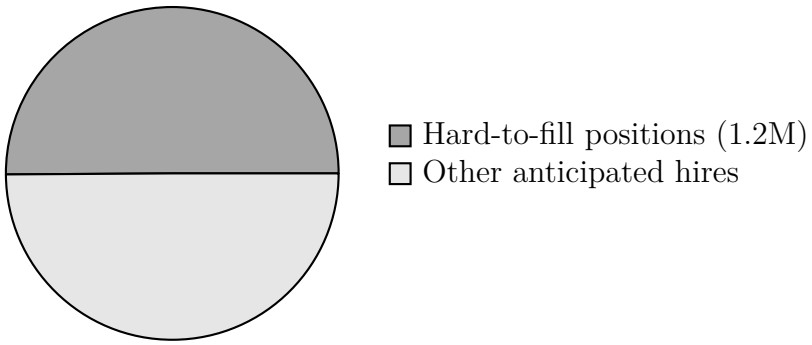


Figure 2: Share of anticipated hires considered hard-to-fill in France, 2025 (France Travail, 2025)

In the hospitality sector, these occupations are defined by constraints specific to the industry. The main hard-to-fill roles include cooks, waiters, receptionists, housekeepers, dishwashers, and bartenders. In 2025, the May 21st ministerial decree formally confirmed this status for hospitality occupations across all French regions, with cooks appearing on every regional list and other roles (waitstaff, housekeepers, kitchen assistants) recurring across a large majority of territories (GHR, 2025). Together, these positions represent approximately 336,000 annual needs in permanent and fixed-term contracts of over six months, of which roughly half remain difficult to fill (Le Chô Touristique, 2025).

These occupations share common features that explain their chronic tension. They tend to be low- to mid-skilled, with limited formal technical requirements but essential relational and operational competencies (fast-paced kitchen work, customer service, stress management). They involve atypical working conditions: evening and weekend shifts,

public holidays, intense rhythms, physical demands, and pronounced seasonality, especially in tourist areas (KYU, 2024). These positions are marked by persistently high turnover: staff rotation rates in hospitality are consistently two to three times higher than the national average, a structural feature of the sector that long predates the Covid crisis and has only intensified since (Amossé and al., 2024); (Forté and Monchatre, 2013). This chronic instability reflects both the demanding conditions of the work and a perceived lack of attractiveness that continues to drive away candidates, particularly younger and less qualified workers (Amossé and al., 2024).

Despite these difficulties, employers remain selective, favoring candidates with sector experience and demonstrated reliability, which only further shrinks the available talent pool. This paradox, a sector in shortage yet unwilling to lower its expectations, defines hard-to-fill occupations in hospitality, and makes the case for exploring more inclusive hiring practices.

2.4.2 Structural factors behind recruitment difficulties

The recruitment tensions described in the previous section are not the product of a temporary issue. They are the visible outcome of structural factors that have been building for decades and have only increased since the Covid crisis. Understanding them requires going beyond the statistical overview and examining why the sector struggles to attract and retain workers, even when unemployment remains high.

The first and most persistent factor is wage uncompetitiveness. Salary levels in hospitality have consistently grown more slowly than in other sectors of the French economy (KYU, 2024). Entry-level positions are often paid at (or near) the minimum wage, offering limited progression and few compensating financial advantages to counter-balance the demanding nature of the work. This gap is particularly big for younger workers, who increasingly compare hospitality wages against those available in other low-barrier sectors such as logistics or retail, where schedules tend to be more predictable and physical efforts less intense. The result is a growing unattraction, especially among new labor market comers, to commit to a sector that requires significant personal sacrifices for comparatively lower financial rewards (Pégourdie, 2024).

The second structural factor is the sector's image problem, which operates at two distinct levels. At the vocational level, hospitality programs have experienced a significant decline in enrollment over the past decade, as young people and their families increasingly perceive these careers as offering limited prospects and poor working conditions (Pégourdie, 2024). At the professional level, the sector suffers from a widespread perception among active job seekers that its working conditions, particularly the presence of split shifts, weekend and public holiday work, and physical demands, makes it incompatible with the work-life balance expectations of contemporary workers (KYU, 2024). The Covid pandemic significantly accelerated this dynamic: the forced closure of the sector between 2020 and 2021 prompted a large-scale exit of experienced workers who reconverted into other industries and, in many cases, did not return when restrictions were lifted (Amossé and al., 2024).

The third factor is the structural instability of employments within the sector. Hospitality positions are characterized by a high proportion of fixed-term and seasonal contracts, significant reliance on part-time contracts, and limited opportunities for stable, long-term employment pathways (KYU, 2024). This instability is not simply an inconvenience for workers; but for recruiters too. A candidate comparing a seasonal contract in a hotel against a permanent position elsewhere will often, quite reasonably, choose the second option. The sector's structural dependence on short contracts thus narrows its own candidate pool, creating a vicious cycle in which the need to recruit frequently is partly caused by the conditions that make recruitment difficult in the first place.

A fourth, and less frequently examined, factor concerns employer recruitment practices themselves. Research on hiring in tense low-skilled occupations shows that employers, facing uncertainty and time pressure, tend to look toward familiar strategies: proximity networks, referrals, and a strong preference for candidates with prior sector experience (Albandea and al., 2024). This preference for the known and the trusted, what Albandea and her colleagues describe as a logic of "domestic city", produces a self-reinforcing selectivity. Employers in shortage continue to reject candidates who fall outside their established criteria, even when those criteria become increasingly difficult to meet (Forté and Monchatre, 2013). The result is an apparent paradox: a sector with a documented deficit of candidates that simultaneously rejects a significant share of the candidates available. This paradox is not irrational from the individual employer's perspective, where the cost of a bad hire in a high-turnover environment feels severe, but it is collectively dysfunctional for a sector that urgently needs to widen the range of profiles it considers viable.

Taken together, these four factors, wage uncompetitiveness, image deterioration, employment instability, and selectivity rigidity, explain why recruitment difficulties in hospitality are durable rather than cyclical. They also begin to suggest where solutions might be found: not in recruiting harder through the same channels, but in rethinking what kinds of candidates are considered, and under what conditions they can be successfully integrated.

2.4.3 Limits of conventional recruitment channels

The persistence of hard-to-fill jobs in the French hospitality sector cannot be fully explained by structural factors alone. It is also sustained by the tools employers rely on to recruit, and by the assumptions those tools take about what makes candidate worth hiring. Conventional recruitment channels, which in hospitality primarily means online job boards, informal networks, and intermediaries such as France Travail, are not neutral instruments. They encode a particular logic: one that prioritizes speed and volume over quality, and that uses prior sector experience as the central argument for future fit. This section examines how existing literature explains why that logic is increasingly at odds with what the sector actually needs.

The first limitation of conventional channels is their structural orientation toward filling positions rather than retaining workers. Job boards generate large volumes of applications, but the criteria used to filter them, primarily CV-based screening for prior experience and

recognized credentials, are a poor proxy for what actually predicts whether a candidate will stay. A comprehensive meta-analysis of pre-hire work experience as a selection criterion found a corrected correlation of essentially zero between prior experience and subsequent turnover, and only a weak relationship between prior experience and job performance in a new organization (Postlethwaite and al., 2019). In other words, the credential that hospitality employers most consistently ask for is among the least predictive of the outcome they most urgently need: a worker who stays. The tools are built around the wrong variable.

The second limitation is the cost structure that conventional recruitment reproduces. Research on turnover costs in the hospitality industry has shown that selection expenses for low-complexity frontline roles absorb a disproportionately large share of total turnover costs, precisely because these positions are difficult to fill and require repeated recruitment cycles (Tracey and Hinkin, 2008). Each failed hire reinitiates the process at full cost: advertising, screening, training, and productivity loss during ramp-up. In a sector where turnover is structurally high, this creates a loop in which recruitment spending is high, hire quality remains mediocre, turnover persists, and the channel is used again. The tools do not address the problem, but they increase it.

The third limitation concerns the profiles that conventional channels systematically fail to show. Job boards and ATS (Applicant Tracking System) filtered pipelines are designed to process standardized career histories. They are poorly suited to candidates whose trajectories do not fit the expected pattern: people returning to the labor market after an interruption, career changers, people with non-linear pathways, or candidates further from employment whose motivations and soft skills may in fact make them stronger long-term hires than conventional pathway applicants. These profiles are not absent from the labor market. They are simply invisible to the tools employers are using, because those tools were not designed to find them (Fuller and al., 2021).

France Travail, the French public employment service, occupies a specific place in this landscape. Its scale and reach make it a potentially powerful intermediary, and some employers in the hospitality sector do use it as a sourcing channel, particularly for entry-level and seasonal roles. However, the mismatch between the profiles it registers and the expectations employers bring to the selection process is a persistent source of friction. Employers frequently report that France Travail candidates lack the sector experience they require, while France Travail advisers often struggle to prepare candidates for the specific demands of hospitality roles (Forté and Monchatre, 2013). The channel exists, but the interface between supply and demand remains poorly calibrated.

What all of these limitations share is a common cause: conventional recruitment channels in hospitality were designed to match key-words to job descriptions, not to predict retention. They optimize for a transaction, the hire, rather than for an outcome, the durable integration of a worker into a team and a role, which then lead to a diminution of hard-to-fill roles. This structural misalignment between what the tools measure and what the sector needs is not a marginal inefficiency, but the precise gap that inclusive hiring practices and social innovation mechanisms are positioned to address.

2.5 Gaps in the existing literature and positioning of this research

The literature reviewed across the preceding sections describes a consistent picture. Hard-to-fill occupations in French hospitality are not a temporary imbalance but a structural phenomenon, rooted in wage uncompetitiveness, image deterioration, employment instability, and a selectivity logic that excludes large portions of the available labor supply. Conventional recruitment channels perpetuate this exclusion because they are built around the wrong variable: they optimize for the transaction of the hire, using prior sector experience as a feature for suitability, when research consistently shows that experience predicts neither performance nor retention in a new organization. Inclusive hiring offers a theoretically sound alternative, grounded in behavioral and motivational assessment rather than credential matching. A range of tools exist to implement it, from the MRS and PMSMP to nonprofit partnerships and pre-hire training pathways. And social innovation frameworks show that the most durable outcomes emerge when these tools are embedded in multi-stakeholder architectures that distribute responsibility across sourcing, preparation, placement, and integration.

What the literature does not yet provide, however, is a clear account of the mechanisms through which these initiatives produce durable outcomes in practice, for whom they work, and under what organizational and sectoral conditions employers actually adopt them. This gap operates at three levels.

The first is a gap in sector-specific evidence. The existing research on inclusive hiring in France is largely multi-sector. Studies examine mechanisms at the level of the labor market in general, or focus on specific protected groups such as people with disabilities or long-term unemployed individuals, without examining how the constraints of a particular sector shape what is possible. Hospitality is a sector with very specific operational pressures: extreme time constraints on hiring decisions, high turnover that creates constant urgency, sometimes small establishment sizes that limit HR capacity, and a selectivity culture that is deeply embedded in professional identity. Whether and how inclusive hiring mechanisms function within these constraints has not been systematically studied.

The second is a gap in employer adoption conditions. The literature documents that inclusive hiring tools exist and that some produce positive placement outcomes. It says much less about what leads an employer to adopt them in the first place, what sustains that adoption over time, and what causes it to fail. The barriers identified in the literature, including manager reluctance, the stigma associated with profiles far from employment, and the absence of post-placement support infrastructure, are well described but rarely analyzed in relation to specific organizational contexts. Understanding which conditions make adoption possible is as important as understanding what the tools do.

The third, and most important, is a gap in retention outcomes. As noted across sections 2.2.2 and 2.3.2, the available evidence on inclusive hiring tools measures placement, not retention. The PMSMP statistics measure whether a candidate finds employment within

twelve months of immersion. The IAE exit data measures whether an exiting beneficiary is in employment six months after their pathway ends. Neither answers the question that matters most in a high-turnover sector: does the hire last? The mechanisms that operate in the period immediately following the hire, including onboarding quality, manager support, and intermediary accompaniment, remain the least well evidenced and least well resourced part of the ecosystem. However, in hospitality, a hire that leaves within three months represents a total loss of the investment made in sourcing, selection and training, and reinitializes the recruitment cycle at full cost.

These three gaps, the absence of sector-specific evidence on mechanism effectiveness in hospitality, the limited understanding of employer adoption conditions, and the near-total absence of evidence on retention outcomes after the hire, define the space this thesis occupies. The existing literature documents what inclusive hiring tools exist and describes the structural problems they are meant to solve. It does not yet provide a grounded account of how they work in practice, for whom, and under what conditions. That is the contribution this research will attempt to make.

These gaps identified allow us to refine the broad objectives stated in the introduction into three more precise research propositions that will guide the empirical investigation that follows:

Proposition 1: Inclusive hiring initiatives produce more durable employment outcomes when candidate assessment is grounded in behavioral and motivational criteria rather than conventional criteria.

Proposition 2: Employer adoption of inclusive hiring practices is conditioned by the existence of a trusted intermediary who absorbs operational complexity and demonstrates a measurable return on investment.

Proposition 3: Structured post-placement support during the first weeks of employment is a critical determinant of whether an inclusive hire becomes a durable employment relationship, particularly in high-turnover sectors such as hospitality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Social innovation, applied to the labor market, is understood here as new practices developed by a coalition of actors to address social needs that conventional market mechanisms fail to meet.
- Inclusive hiring goes beyond diversity policy and legal compliance: it reconfigures the recruitment process itself to reach candidates excluded by conventional signals (credentials, linear career, sector experience).
- Hard-to-fill occupations in French hospitality combine structural paradox (high demand, low attractiveness) with chronic turnover, driving persistent recruitment tension.
- The literature documents *what* inclusive hiring tools exist, but leaves three gaps open: sector-specific evidence in hospitality, the conditions of employer adoption, and retention outcomes after the hire : the space this thesis occupies.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research methodology: a qualitative multi-case study

Choice of qualitative methodology

This research adopts a qualitative multi-case study design. The choice of a qualitative approach is justified by the nature of the research question, which asks not whether inclusive hiring mechanisms work, but how and under what conditions they do so. As Dutton and colleagues demonstrate in their study of compassion organizing, a case study method fits a theory-building goal and an interest in documenting processes unfolding over time (Dutton and al., 2006). Answering a "how" and "under what conditions" question requires access to the lived experience of actors, the organizational context in which decisions are made, and the reasoning behind practices that are rarely documented in formal data. A qualitative approach is therefore the methodologically appropriate choice for an exploratory study such as this paper.

The research adopts a positivist paradigm, aiming to identify observable causal mechanisms and generate insights about the effectiveness of inclusive hiring initiatives across organizations. The methodology is ideographic by nature: rather than testing hypotheses through standardized measurement, it seeks to build understanding from the inside, through the subjective experience and reasoning of the actors involved. The goal is to identify recurring mechanisms and conditions across cases that could, with appropriate caution, inform practice in comparable contexts.

The multi-case study design

The multi-case design was chosen over a single in-depth case study for reasons of both rigor and scope. As Dutton and colleagues note, case studies usually offer limited generaliztion possibility to other contexts, and a single case selected as an instance of a specific phenomenon may be a limited or inflated example (Dutton and al., 2006). Studying 23 organizations allows the analysis to identify patterns that recur across cases, which provides a stronger basis for analytical claims than any single case could offer. At the same time, the depth of engagement with each case, through a 45-minute semi-structured interview covering the full arc of the organization's recruitment context, barriers, practices, and outcomes, ensures that the richness of individual experience is not lost in the cross-case comparison.

The unit of analysis is the organization. Each of the 23 organizations constitutes a bounded case, defined by its location, size, recruitment context, and degree of inclusive hiring adoption. The diversity of practices and attitudes within a single organization is treated within each case, not as a separate unit of analysis.

Sample composition and selection rationale

The sample is composed of 28 interviews across 23 employing organizations and 5 ecosystem actors. Among the employing organizations, 15 operate in hospitality, including 9 hotels

and 6 restaurant groups, consistent with the French legal definition of the sector (*hôtellerie-restauration*). The 8 remaining organizations operate in retail, and were included as a cross-sectoral comparative anchor. Retail shares the same structural characteristics that define hard-to-fill frontline labor markets: client-facing roles with limited formal skill requirements, high and structural turnover, and a chronic mismatch between employer expectations and available candidate pools. In the sample, 91% of retail positions were reported as hard to fill, compared to 87% in hotels and 93% in restaurants. The 5 ecosystem interviews were conducted with representatives of insertion structures operating in the Paris region, a representative of the DGEFP, the French directorate responsible for employment policy, and social entrepreneures innovating in inclusive hiring. These interviews were not treated as employer cases but as triangulation sources, providing the perspective of actors whose mission is explicitly oriented toward durable employment outcomes.

Justification for the cross-sectoral design

The inclusion of retail alongside hospitality requires explicit justification, given that the research question is sector specific. The gradient of turnover intensity across the sample, 59% in hotels, 54% in restauration, and 32% in retail, allows the analysis to examine whether mechanisms that produce durable outcomes also hold in a less extreme version, and whether the intensity of labor market tension modifies the conditions under which inclusive hiring is adopted. The core analytical focus remains hospitality, with retail serving as a comparative lens.

Sampling strategy

Organizations were selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Dutton and colleagues describe snowball sampling as a technique through which interviewees progressively refer the researcher to others who played a role in the phenomenon under study (Dutton and al., 2006). This approach is well suited to a field where access depends on relational trust, and where the most informative respondents are often those recommended by others already familiar with the research context. Purposive sampling ensured variation along three dimensions: location, organization size, and degree of inclusive hiring adoption. Of the 15 hospitality organizations, 5 are independent SMEs or SMEs within a larger group, and 10 are large corporations. Approximately half had already adopted at least one inclusive hiring practice at the time of the interview. This contrast between adopters and non-adopters is analytically central to the second research proposition, which concerns the conditions under which employers adopt inclusive practices. All organizations are referred to in this paper by sector and size category only, in compliance with the anonymization commitments made to participants at the time of the interviews.

3.2 Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews as the primary data source

The primary data source for this research is a set of 28 semi-structured interviews conducted between January and May 2026. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they combine the consistency of a shared thematic protocol with the flexibility to allow

interviewees to introduce dimensions I had not anticipated. As Dutton and her colleagues wrote, open-ended interview questions allow informants to provide their own view of events and processes in as much detail as possible, leading to richer and more authentic data than closed survey instruments (Dutton and al., 2006). In a field where the most important data concerns tacit reasoning, organizational habits, and the gap between stated and actual practice, this flexibility is methodologically essential. In several cases, interviewees also shared supplementary internal data, such as turnover figures, recruitment cost breakdowns, or ATS configurations, which enriched and cross-validated the verbal accounts provided during the interviews.

Interview participants

Of the 28 interviews, 23 were conducted with the people most directly responsible for recruitment decisions in each employer organization: HR directors, talent acquisition managers, or general managers depending on the size and structure of the organization. The remaining 5 interviews were conducted with ecosystem actors: two representatives of the DGEFP, the French directorate responsible for employment policy, one representative of UNAI (Union Nationale des Associations Intermédiaires), an IAE insertion structure, one representative of Each One, a nonprofit intermediary specializing in the professional integration of refugees, and one representative of France Travail. These ecosystem interviews were conducted to triangulate the employer perspective with the view of actors whose mission is explicitly oriented toward durable employment outcomes, and whose systemic understanding of the inclusive hiring landscape complements and challenges what individual employers report.

All interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, with an average duration of approximately 45 minutes. All were conducted with the informed consent of the participants and fully recorded. Recordings were subsequently fully transcribed. A summarizing table of all interviews, including organization sector, size, interviewee role, interview format, and duration, is provided in Appendix A. One complete anonymized transcript is provided in Appendix B as an example of the primary data collected. Participants are anonymized and are referred to in this paper by sector and organization size only.

Interview protocol

The interview protocol (fully shown in Appendix C) was structured around four thematic areas, applied consistently across all 23 employer interviews to enable cross-case comparison. The first area covered the organization's recruitment context: the positions most difficult to fill or retain, recent departure cases, average tenure in hard-to-fill roles, and the employer's diagnosis of why candidates leave. The second explored current recruitment solutions and their costs: which channels are used, what financial and operational costs are associated with each, and what the estimated total cost of a hard-to-fill departure represents for the organization. The third examined the perceived value of retention improvement and openness to change: what a more effective retention solution would mean for the organization, and what would be required to change existing recruitment habits. The fourth addressed experience with and attitudes toward inclusive hiring: whether the organization had already tried recruiting candidates further from employment, what

the experience had been, and what barriers or conditions shaped their openness to this approach.

This four-part structure ensured thematic consistency across all cases while leaving room for interviewees to develop answers in their own terms. Follow-up questions were used to explore their reasoning, request specific examples, and find dimensions raised spontaneously by the interviewee. The protocol was piloted on the first interviews and refined slightly before being applied to the remaining cases, particularly to add more explicit questions on post-placement practices and onboarding support, which emerged as a significant theme in the first couple interviews.

Data richness and saturation

Across the 28 interviews, a point of thematic saturation was progressively reached: from approximately the fifteenth interview onward, new interviews produced fewer new thematic dimensions and more confirmatory evidence for patterns already identified in earlier cases. This does not mean that later interviews added no value, as several introduced new examples or nuanced established themes, but it suggests that the sample size is sufficient to support the analytical claims made in sections 4 and 5. The five ecosystem interviews, conducted in parallel with the employer ones, added a distinct layer of perspective that did not saturate, as each ecosystem actor brought a structurally different viewpoint on the same phenomena.

3.3 Data analysis method

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the method described by Miles and Huberman and applied by Dutton in her qualitative case study of organizational responses to distress (Dutton and al., 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen because it is well suited to exploratory research where the goal is to identify recurring patterns across cases rather than to test pre-specified hypotheses. It is also flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of organizational contexts present in the sample, from a small independent restaurant group to a global hospitality corporation, without forcing the data into a predetermined analytical framework.

The analysis proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, each of the 28 interview transcripts were fully analyzed and the key elements of each interviewee's take were condensed into a structured summary covering the same thematic dimensions across all cases: the organization's recruitment context and main hard-to-fill roles, the channels and tools currently used, the costs associated with turnover and recruitment, the barriers to inclusive hiring as perceived by the employer, any inclusive practices already in place, and the conditions under which the employer expressed openness to change. This condensation phase transformed 28 full transcripts into a comparable set of case summaries, organized in a consistent format that allowed side-by-side reading across all organizations.

In the second stage, the condensed summaries were read thematically rather than case by case. Recurring patterns were identified across the full sample: arguments, contradictions,

and observations that appeared in multiple interviews regardless of sector or organization size. These recurring elements were grouped into thematic clusters, which progressively became the analytical categories used to organize the results section. The four main clusters that emerged from this process (employer perceptions of turnover and candidate reliability, dominant recruitment channels and their persistence, openness to alternative approaches and the conditions that trigger it, and cultural and organizational barriers to inclusive hiring) correspond directly to the subsections of section 4.

In addition to the thematic reading, a quantitative synthesis of key variables was conducted across the sample. For each organization, numerical data shared during the interview or in supplementary documents were recorded and aggregated: annual turnover rates, proportion of hard-to-fill positions, average cost per hire, number of annual recruits, ATS usage, and degree of inclusive hiring adoption. This aggregation produced a structured data table covering all 23 employer organizations, which served two purposes. First, it allowed the verification and cross-validation of qualitative observations: for instance, the claim that turnover is significantly higher in hospitality than in retail is grounded in the numerical data collected rather than in just reading of the transcripts. Second, it provided a set of descriptive statistics that contextualize the qualitative findings and strengthen their credibility for practitioner readers.

Once the thematic clusters and quantitative synthesis were established, the findings were examined in light of the three research propositions derived from the literature review. For each proposition, the data was read to assess whether the empirical evidence confirmed, nuanced, or challenged it. This confrontation between field findings and theoretical propositions is the analytical bridge between the results section and the analysis section: the results section presents what the data shows, and the analysis section interprets what it means in relation to the literature and the propositions. This approach follows the logic of what Dutton describes as developing a conceptual framework that integrates empirical themes into a coherent picture, addressing both descriptive questions about what was observed and explanatory questions about what enabled or constrained it (Dutton and al., 2006).

3.4 Ethical considerations and methodological limits

Ethical considerations

This research was conducted according to the standard ethical principles that govern qualitative research involving human participants. All interviewees were informed of the purpose of the research prior to the interview and gave their verbal consent to being recorded. No participant was under any obligation to respond to any question, and several chose not to share financial data, which was respected without follow-up pressure. No sensitive information is displayed in identifiable form in this paper. All organizations are referred to by sector and size category only, and all individual interviewees are anonymized. The research does not involve vulnerable populations and raises no significant ethical concerns beyond confidentiality obligations.

A specific ethical consideration arises from the researcher's dual positioning as both academic investigator and entrepreneur with a professional interest in the field. As noted in section 1.2, the questions driving this research emerged partly from field conversations conducted in a professional context. To manage the risk of confirmation bias that this positioning brings, the interview sample was deliberately constructed to include organizations across a wide range of attitudes toward inclusive hiring, including employers who are skeptical or indifferent, alongside those who are already engaged. The analysis used disconfirming evidence as deliberately as confirming evidence, and every analytical claim in sections 4 and 5 is grounded in data from multiple cases rather than in isolated observations.

Methodological limits

This methodology carries inherent limitations that should be acknowledged before the results are presented.

The first is geographic concentration. The large majority of organizations in the sample are located in the Île-de-France region or in major French cities. This reflects both my personal network and the concentration of corporate HR functions in urban areas. It means, however, that the findings may not fully capture the dynamics of rural or highly seasonal tourist areas, where labor market tensions in hospitality take a structurally different form: housing scarcity, geographic isolation, and extreme seasonal peaks create constraints that are qualitatively distinct from those faced by urban establishments. Findings should therefore be interpreted with caution when applied to these contexts.

The second limitation concerns self-selection bias. Organizations that agreed to be interviewed may be more reflective about their recruitment practices, more open to discussing difficulties honestly, or more interested in potential solutions than those that declined. This means the sample may overrepresent employers who are already somewhat engaged with the problem, and underrepresent those who are most resistant to change, which are potentially the most important cases for understanding adoption barriers. This bias is difficult to fully correct in qualitative research dependent on voluntary participation, but it is worth bearing in mind when interpreting findings about employer openness to inclusive hiring.

The third limitation is the absence of longitudinal data. This research captures employer perceptions and practices at a single point in time. It cannot measure whether inclusive hires made through the practices described actually lasted longer than conventional hires, because no retention tracking data was available across the sample. This is precisely the gap identified in section 2.5 as the most consequential absence in the existing literature, and this research does not fill it. What it does instead is document the conditions under which employers adopt inclusive practices and the mechanisms they report as effective, which constitutes a necessary precursor to the longitudinal studies that would be needed to measure retention outcomes directly.

The fourth limitation concerns the cross-sectoral design. The inclusion of retail alongside

hospitality enriches the comparative analysis but introduces heterogeneity that limits the precision of sector-specific conclusions. Some findings that appear to generalize across the full sample may in fact be specific to one sector, and the sample size within each sector is not large enough to systematically test for sector-level differences. The retail cases are therefore treated as a comparative lens throughout the analysis rather than as a co-equal subject of investigation.

These limitations are addressed in section 6.2, where their implications for the generalization of the findings and the recommendations for future research are discussed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- This research relies on a qualitative multi-case study: 28 semi-structured interviews, covering 23 employer organizations (hotels, restaurants, retail) and 5 ecosystem actors.
- Data was analyzed through two-stage thematic analysis: case-by-case condensation, then cross-case thematic reading, confronted against three research propositions derived from the literature.
- Three limitations should be kept in mind when reading the results: geographic concentration in urban areas, possible self-selection bias among interviewees, and the absence of longitudinal retention data.

4 Case studies and results

4.1 Presentation of cases and interviewees

The empirical material for this research is based on 28 interviews conducted between January and May 2026, covering 23 employer organizations and 5 ecosystem actors. The 23 employer organizations are part of three sectors: 9 hotels, 6 restaurant groups, and 8 retail companies. Together, the 15 hospitality organizations constitute the core sample directly aligned with the research question, while the 8 retail organizations serve as a cross-sectoral comparative anchor, as justified in section 3.1. The 5 ecosystem interviews, conducted with representatives of UNAI, the DGEFP (two interviewees), Each One, and France Travail, are not included in the case table below but inform the cross-case analysis in section 4.5.

The organizations in the sample vary substantially in size, ranging from independent SMEs with fewer than 65 employees to a global hospitality corporation employing over 290,000 people. This range is intentional: the literature reviewed in section 2.3 suggests that organization size may condition both the resources available for inclusive hiring and the degree of HR formalization that shapes recruitment decisions. By including both ends of the spectrum, the analysis can assess whether the barriers and mechanisms identified are universal or whether they manifest differently depending on organizational scale. Among the 9 hotel cases, 3 are SMEs or SMEs within a larger group and 6 are large corporations. Among the 6 restaurant cases, 2 are SMEs and 4 are large corporations. Among the 8 retail cases, 4 are SMEs or SMEs within a larger group and 4 are large corporations.

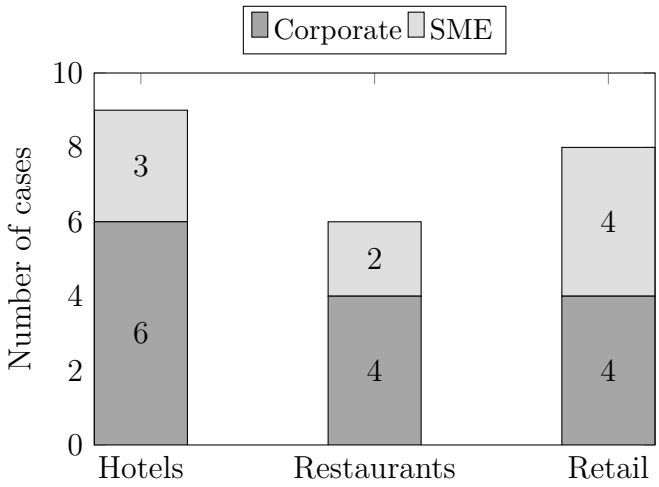


Figure 3: Sample composition by sector and organizational size (23 cases)

The interviewees were the people most directly responsible for recruitment decisions in each organization: HR directors, talent acquisition managers, general managers, or regional HR leads depending on the structure of the company. In smaller organizations, this was often the general manager or hotel director, who handles recruitment alongside operational responsibilities. In larger organizations, it was typically a dedicated HR or talent acquisition professional, sometimes supported by a central team. This variation in who owns recruitment decisions is itself an analytical variable: as the results will show, the degree of

centralization of hiring authority significantly shapes both the barriers encountered and the conditions under which inclusive practices are adopted.

The 23 employer cases are presented in Table 1, organized by sector. Each case is identified by a code (H for hotel, R for restaurant, Re for retail) and described along four dimensions: size category, annual turnover rate, ATS usage, and current degree of inclusive hiring adoption. The full detail of each case, including interviewee role, interview format, duration, recruitment channels used, specific hard-to-fill roles, and estimated cost per hire, is provided in Appendix A.

Across the full sample, turnover figures were weighted by the number of employees in each organization to avoid giving disproportionate weight to smaller cases. On this basis, average weighted annual turnover reached 59% among hotels, 54% among restaurant groups, and 32% among retail organizations, for an overall weighted average of 57% across the full employer sample. The proportion of positions considered hard to fill in operational roles stood at 87% in hotels, 93% in restaurant groups, and 91% in retail, for an overall average of 90%. These figures confirm that labor market tension in the sample is acute across all three sectors, while meaningfully more severe in hospitality than in retail.

Table 1: Summary of the 23 employer cases

Case	Size	Annual turnover	ATS used	Inclusive hiring
Hotels (H)				
H1	Corporate	30%	Yes	Partial
H2	Corporate	30%	No	None
H3	SME in group	80%	No	None
H4	Corporate	67%	Yes	Partial
H5	SME	40%	No	Partial
H6	Corporate	50%	No	None
H7	Corporate	High	No	Partial
H8	Corporate	60%	Yes	Active
H9	SME	High	No	Partial
Restaurant groups (R)				
R1	Corporate	50%	Yes	Partial
R2	Corporate	80%	Yes	None
R3	SME	115%	Yes	None
R4	SME	50%	No	None
R5	Corporate	5%	No	None
R6	Corporate	50%	Yes	Active
Retail (Re)				
Re1	SME in group	86%	Yes	None
Re2	Corporate	50%	No	Partial
Re3	SME in group	30%	Yes	Active
Re4	Corporate	50%	Yes	Active
Re5	Corporate	30%	Yes	None
Re6	Corporate	17%	Yes	None
Re7	SME in group	80%	Yes	None
Re8	SME in group	17%	No	None

Note: "High" indicates turnover was acknowledged as significant but not precisely quantified by the interviewee. Inclusive hiring adoption is coded as: None (no practice in place), Partial (one or two tools tried, not systematic), Active (structured inclusive hiring programme operational). Full case details are provided in Appendix A.

Several observations emerge immediately from Table 1. First, ATS usage is significantly more common among large corporations, where 63% of cases use one, than among SMEs, where only 25% do: the deeper the ATS integration, the higher the structural cost of changing recruitment channels. Second, inclusive hiring adoption remains marginal across the sample: only 4 organizations out of 23 have an active, structured inclusive hiring programme, while 12 have no inclusive practice in place at all. Third, and most strikingly, there is no direct correlation between turnover severity and inclusive hiring adoption: the organization with the highest turnover in the sample (115%) has no inclusive practice in

place, while one of the most structurally active adopters reports a moderate turnover rate of 60%. This paradox, a sector in acute shortage that has not responded by broadening who it considers, is precisely what the following sections set out to explain.

4.2 The recruitment status quo: channels, costs, and their limits

4.2.1 Dominant channels and why they persist

Across the 23 organizations in the sample, the landscape of recruitment channels is remarkably homogeneous. Indeed dominates as the primary sourcing tool in almost every case, used alone or in combination with HelloWork and LinkedIn by organizations across all three sectors and all size categories. These job boards account for approximately 80% of sourcing activity among the hospitality organizations in the sample, and a comparable share in retail. This near-universal reliance on a handful of platforms reflects not a deliberate strategic choice but a default: the path of least resistance in a market where speed and volume are the dominant constraints on HR teams.

The second most common channel is cooptation, or internal referral. Several organizations report cooptation as their most reliable source of quality hires, particularly for operational roles where team fit and reliability matter more than formal credentials. One restaurant group in the sample achieves a turnover rate of just 5% on its core operational roles, a figure that stands out sharply against the sector average. When asked about their recruitment approach, the interviewee attributed this directly to a stable community of workers from a shared cultural background, where trust circulates within the network and new recruits come pre-vetted by people who already know the work. This case illustrates both the power of cooptation and its structural limit: it works when a dense, stable social network exists, and it is very difficult to replicate or scale where it does not.

France Travail is the third most frequently cited channel, but its status in the interviews is distinctive: it is used not out of satisfaction but out of obligation or desperation. Across the sample, the perception of France Travail as a sourcing channel is almost uniformly negative. A large hotel organization describes its profiles as "mismatched and ethically problematic." A restaurant operator reports that France Travail is "completely ineffective", with profiles that are either foreign students available only part-time or candidates with no alignment with the managerial pipeline the employer needs. A fashion retailer noted that France Travail has no plug-in with its ATS, creating a double-platform burden that further discourages use. What emerges is a channel that is structurally present in the ecosystem but functionally disconnected from employer needs: the interface between supply and demand remains, as the literature predicted, poorly calibrated.

Interim agencies are used selectively, primarily for seasonal peaks in hospitality or to cover urgent short-term gaps in restauration. They are perceived as operationally useful but financially costly and strategically neutral: they fill positions without solving the underlying retention problem, and in several cases they contribute to it by reinforcing the culture of short-term arrangements that makes stable team-building difficult.

The question this data raises is not what channels employers use, but why they continue to use them despite widespread acknowledgment of their limitations. Three mechanisms explain this persistence. The first is ATS integration lock-in. Among the large corporations in the sample, job boards are deeply embedded in existing ATS infrastructure: job postings flow automatically from the ATS to Indeed, HelloWork, and aggregators, and incoming applications are processed through the same system. Changing the sourcing strategy would require either reconfiguring the ATS, a significant technical and organizational undertaking, or managing a parallel pipeline outside the system, which creates additional administrative burden that already-rooted HR teams cannot absorb. As one interviewee at a large hotel group summarizes: job board subscriptions alone cost between 15,000€ and 40,000€ per year per platform, yet the conversion rate from CV to hire is approximately 1%. The tool is expensive, inefficient, and indispensable all at once.

The second mechanism is the volume illusion. Job boards generate large numbers of applications, which creates a perception of activity and responsiveness even when conversion rates are poor. One fashion retailer receives up to 300 applications for a single sales advisor role, yet the vast majority are screened out at the CV stage, consuming significant HR time while producing few interviews and fewer hires. Volume is mistaken for performance because it is visible and measurable, while the quality deficit it creates, and the retention outcomes it fails to predict, are harder to quantify and easier to attribute to other causes.

The third mechanism is time scarcity. The HR teams and directors responsible for frontline recruitment in hospitality are operating under extreme time pressure. Testing a new channel, building a relationship with a nonprofit intermediary, or redesigning a selection process requires an upfront investment of time and cognitive effort that most interviewees report they simply do not have. The paradox is acute: the very intensity of the turnover crisis that would justify changing the approach also makes it impossible to step back and change it. As one hotel group HR director put it, the system is optimized for filling positions, not for solving the problem that makes positions need filling in the first place.

4.2.2 The cost of the status quo: turnover as a measurable problem

The financial cost of the turnover and recruitment cycle in hospitality is significant, structurally recurring, and largely underestimated by the employers who bear it. Most organizations in the sample do not calculate it precisely, and this absence of calculation is itself part of the problem.

To construct a reliable cost estimate grounded in the realities of the French hospitality and restauration market, a detailed cost model was developed and validated with five organizations from the sample: two hotel groups, two restaurant groups, and one retail company serving as a cross-sector reference point. The model decomposes the total cost of a single hard-to-fill departure into four categories. Direct costs include job board fees and ATS tools, recruiter time for job preparation, sourcing, and screening, interview time, and HR onboarding administration. Vacancy costs capture the value of productivity lost while the position remains unfilled. Inefficiency costs account for the reduced productivity of a new hire during the training period. Hidden costs, estimated at 10 to 15% of the subtotal,

cover manager stress, team demotivation, increased error rates, and client dissatisfaction.

Under conservative assumptions, the total cost of a single frontline departure reaches approximately 3,300€. Under more realistic parameters reflecting longer vacancy periods, higher manager involvement in onboarding, and more significant hidden costs, the figure rises to approximately 7,900€ per departure. These estimates are consistent with independent academic research: Tracey and Hinkin (2008), in their landmark study of turnover costs in the hospitality industry, established an average cost of approximately $5,864 per departure once all direct and indirect cost categories are accounted for (Tracey and Hinkin, 2008).

Table 2: Estimated cost of a single frontline departure in hospitality in France

Cost category	**Low**	**High**
Direct costs		
Tools (ATS, job boards...)	200 €	400 €
Recruiter time (10-12h at 25 €/h)	250 €	300 €
Interview time (5-6h at 25-30 €/h)	125 €	180 €
Onboarding admin (4-5h at 25 €/h)	100 €	125 €
Manager training (10-12h at 25-30 €/h)	250 €	360 €
Subtotal	**925 €**	**1,365 €**
Vacancy costs (value created per employee per day: 158 €)		
Vacancy period	2 weeks	6 weeks
Subtotal	**1,583 €**	**4,750 €**
Inefficiency costs (salary: 1,900 €/month)		
Training duration	0.3 months	0.5 months
Productivity during training	60%	70%
Subtotal	**456 €**	**570 €**
Hidden costs (10-15% of subtotal)		
Manager stress, team demotivation, errors	329 €	1,180 €
Subtotal	**329 €**	**1,180 €**
TOTAL COST PER DEPARTURE	**3,294 €**	**7,865 €**

Source: cost model developed and validated with five organizations from the sample.
Value created per employee per day estimated at 158 € based on the following formula: monthly SMIC (1,900 €) multiplied by a value creation factor of 2 (an employee generates twice their salary in value for the organization), divided by 24 working days per month.
Consistent with Tracey and Hinkin (2008), who established an average cost of $5,864 per departure in the hotel sector.

Applying these figures to the hospitality organizations in the sample reveals the scale of the problem. A large hotel group with close to 1,800 annual recruits, even at the lower end of the cost range, spends several million euros annually on recruitment and turnover-related costs alone. A corporate restaurant group reported 550 hires per year

at an average cost of approximately 800€ in direct fees alone, so it is already spending close to 440,000€ annually on job boards and selection processes, before any account is taken of vacancy time, training inefficiency, or hidden costs. An SME restaurant group with a 115% turnover rate and 200 employees is effectively replacing its entire operational workforce every twelve months, at a cost that, conservatively estimated, exceeds 600,000€ per year.

What the data also reveals is a pattern of systematic underestimation. When interviewees in hospitality and restauration were asked to estimate the total cost of a departure, most provided figures that covered only direct recruitment fees, and several acknowledged they had never calculated the full cost including manager time, training, and productivity loss. A corporate hotel group with a sophisticated HR infrastructure admitted that its cost tracking stops at direct recruitment fees and does not capture the broader operational impact. This is not a minor accounting gap. It means that the financial case for investing in a different approach, whether an alternative sourcing channel, a structured onboarding programme, or a partnership with an inclusion intermediary, is systematically harder to make internally, because the true cost of the status quo remains invisible.

This invisibility is consequential. As the following sections will show, the organizations in the sample that had most successfully adopted inclusive hiring practices were almost always those where someone, typically an HR director or a regional manager, had first taken the trouble to calculate what turnover was actually costing the organization. The cost calculation does not automatically produce change, but it creates the conditions under which change becomes thinkable. Without it, the urgency of the problem is felt operationally but not argued financially, and inclusive hiring remains a social proposition rather than a business one.

4.3 Barriers to inclusive hiring adoption

4.3.1 Operational complexity and manager resistance

The preceding sections have established that conventional recruitment channels are expensive, inefficient, and structurally misaligned with retention outcomes. The literature reviewed in section 2.3.1 further suggests that candidates further from employment, when correctly assessed and supported, may in fact present stronger retention potential than those selected through credential-based screening: their local anchoring, their motivation to secure and keep employment, and the expectation calibration that comes with a structured onboarding process are all factors that research associates with longer tenure. If this is the case, inclusive hiring is not simply a social response to an equity problem. It is a potential operational response to a retention problem. And yet the data from the hospitality and restauration interviews shows that most employers have not made this connection, and that even those who have made it encounter significant barriers when they try to act on it. This section examines the first and most pervasive of those barriers: operational complexity and manager resistance.

The most frequently cited barrier across the hospitality and restauration cases is not cost,

not image, and not a principled opposition to inclusive hiring. It is time. HR directors and group managers describe their operational reality in very similar terms: they are running recruitment processes continuously, filling the same roles every few months, managing teams that are perpetually short-staffed, and absorbing the day-to-day consequences of high turnover. In this context, any initiative that requires additional time upfront, whether building a relationship with a nonprofit intermediary, learning to navigate a public device such as the POEI, or redesigning a selection process, is experienced not as an investment but as an additional burden on an already overloaded system. As one HR director at a large corporate restaurant group described it, the inclusive hiring ecosystem is not only time-consuming to navigate but also fragmented and illegible, with up to 45 different associations contacted for a single operational need, each with its own processes, prerequisites, and administrative requirements.

This complexity problem is compounded by the structure of decision-making in hospitality and restauration. In most of the organizations interviewed, recruitment decisions for frontline roles are made not by central HR teams but by restaurant directors or hotel managers, who bear the operational consequences of every empty position and every underperforming hire. These managers are the people who would have to implement inclusive hiring in practice: welcoming a candidate with a non-linear trajectory, investing time in their onboarding, and managing the uncertainty that comes with a profile they would not have selected through conventional screening. Their resistance is not irrational. It reflects a rational calculation under constraint: in a high-pressure operational environment, the safest hire is a known quantity, someone with prior sector experience whose reliability can be inferred from their CV, even if that inference is, as the literature shows, empirically unfounded.

The gap between central HR openness and operational manager resistance is one of the most consistent patterns in the hospitality data. Several organizations describe a situation in which the HR team is willing to explore inclusive hiring, has identified tools or partnerships worth trying, and has received approval from senior management, but encounters systematic friction at the point of implementation because restaurant directors and hotel managers are not convinced. A large international hotel group reports that its ATS is configured in a way that makes it structurally difficult to process profiles that do not fit the standard pipeline: even when central HR wants to consider atypical candidates, the technology imposes the same filtering logic that the team is trying to bypass. A corporate restaurant group notes that its directors are resistant to any solution that adds complexity to their already demanding daily workload, and that any inclusive hiring initiative must be demonstrably simpler to use than the status quo to stand any chance of adoption at the restaurant level.

A related barrier concerns the perception of what inclusive hiring means for team dynamics. Several interviewees in hospitality express concern that onboarding a candidate further from employment will place additional demands on an existing team that is already stretched. The implicit assumption is that an atypical hire requires more support, more patience, and more management time during the integration period, and that this cost will be carried by employees who are not in a position to absorb it. This concern is not

unfounded as an operational observation. But it points directly to a structural absence in the current model: the post-placement support that would make the integration of atypical profiles less demanding for teams does not exist in most organizations. The absence of support infrastructure therefore turns a manageable challenge into a perceived operational risk, and this risk becomes a reason not to try. This dynamic is examined more directly in section 4.3.3.

4.3.2 The stigma of atypical profiles

The second barrier to inclusive hiring adoption in hospitality is more subtle than operational complexity but equally pervasive: a stigma attached to the label of profiles further from employment that operates at two distinct levels. At the organizational level, inclusive hiring is frequently perceived as a reputational risk rather than an operational opportunity. At the managerial level, the label itself, far from employment, is experienced as a signal of unreliability that conflicts directly with the quality and stability concerns that dominate recruitment decisions in the sector.

At the organizational level, the stigma takes the form of brand protection. Several hospitality organizations in the sample describe inclusive hiring as something they would consider only if it could be made invisible to customers and to the broader market. A premium hotel group expresses concern that associating the brand with candidates from insertion pathways would send the wrong signal about service standards, even though, as the interviewee acknowledges, the profiles in question would be in back-roles with no direct customer contact. A luxury independent hotel describes inclusive hiring as something it has simply never been approached about, and when asked to reflect on it, frames its hesitation primarily in terms of the brand coherence it has built around a specific type of team culture. The implicit logic in both cases is that recruiting differently would mean becoming something different, and that this transformation carries reputational risk that is not worth the operational benefit.

This perception is not limited to luxury hospitality. A corporate restaurant group describes the inclusive hiring ecosystem as one it finds difficult to engage with precisely because the framing of candidates as far from employment feels stigmatizing to the restaurant directors it would need to convince. The concern is not that atypical candidates cannot do the job, but that presenting them as a population requiring special support implies a lower standard of hire, and that this implication will be read negatively by the operational teams who will manage them. One interviewee captures this tension precisely: the organization is entirely open to hiring people who have had difficult trajectories, has done so successfully through word of mouth, but would not want those hires framed as an inclusion initiative because the label creates a different dynamic within the team.

At the managerial level, the stigma operates through a more practical mechanism: the association between atypical profiles and operational unreliability. Several hotel and restaurant managers in the sample describe their quality criteria in terms that implicitly exclude candidates further from employment: they want profiles who are motivated, reliable, and who "know what they are getting into". These are entirely reasonable criteria.

But the assumption embedded in them, that candidates further from employment are less likely to meet them, is not supported by the evidence reviewed in section 2.3.1. Research on job embeddedness and motivational fit suggests that candidates for whom access to employment has been difficult may in fact present stronger anchoring and commitment once placed in a role that genuinely matches their profile. The problem is not the criteria but the inference: managers systematically assume that conventional pathway candidates are more reliable, even as their actual experience of conventional hires is one of high turnover and early departure.

A particularly revealing pattern in the data concerns the language employers use when describing France Travail candidates. Across multiple hospitality cases, France Travail profiles are described not simply as mismatched but as problematic in ways that go beyond skills alignment: interviewees describe candidates who do not show up to interviews, who accept offers and then do not show up on the first day, or whose motivation they question. What is striking is that these descriptions are applied collectively to a category of candidates rather than to specific individuals, which is precisely the statistical discrimination dynamic described in section 2.3.1: employers use group-level inferences to screen out individuals, even when those inferences are based on unreliable proxies. The result is that France Travail, which represents the most accessible gateway to profiles further from employment, is treated as a last resort rather than a genuine sourcing channel, and the populations it serves are systematically underestimated as potential hires.

The implications of this stigma for inclusive hiring adoption are significant. Any solution that requires employers to publicly commit to hiring profiles further from employment, or that frames the initiative as an inclusion programme, faces a battle in most hotels and restauration organizations. The data suggests that the framing matters as much as the substance: organizations that have successfully adopted inclusive practices tend not to present them as inclusion initiatives at all, but as smarter sourcing, better matching, or more reliable pipelines. This reframing, from social proposition to operational solution, is one of the conditions that appears most consistently to enable adoption, and it will be examined further in section 4.4.1.

4.3.3 The absence of post-placement infrastructure

The third barrier to inclusive hiring adoption is the one most directly connected to the sector's core problem, and the least discussed in organizational practice: the almost complete absence of structured support for new hires in the weeks and months immediately following their arrival. This absence is not specific to inclusive hires. It is a general feature of the hospitality recruitment model, and more broadly of every recruitment processes. But its consequences are particularly severe for candidates further from employment, for whom the first weeks in a new role are the most fragile and the most decisive.

The evidence from the interviews is clear on this point. Across the hotels and restaurants cases, onboarding is described as minimal, informal, and largely left to the discretion of the immediate manager. In most organizations, a new hire's experience in their first weeks depends almost entirely on the availability, goodwill, and pedagogical capacity

of the person who manages them directly. There is no structured check-in protocol, no dedicated support resource, and no mechanism for identifying early difficulties before they become departures. The assumption they make is that if a candidate is good, they will adapt; if they leave, they were not the right fit. This logic is operationally convenient but analytically circular: it treats departure as evidence of unsuitability rather than as the outcome of a support failure that was entirely predictable and potentially preventable.

Research on newcomer adjustment establishes that approximately one third of new hires leave within the first 90 days (Jobvite, 2018), and that structured onboarding significantly reduces early departure risk (SHRM, 2015) (Bauer and al., 2007).The data from the hospitality interviews confirms this pattern with particular clarity. One restaurant operator attempted an inclusive hire through the MRS simulation format offered by France Travail: 6 out of 10 candidates selected through the process showed up for their first day, which the interviewee considered a promising start. Three months later, none remained. When asked to explain this outcome, the interviewee described a process in which the candidates were placed into operational roles with no dedicated onboarding, no check-in with HR, and no intermediary follow-up after the placement. The MRS had done its job of identifying candidates with the relevant aptitudes. But nobody had been responsible for what happened next. The inclusive hire had succeeded at the point of recruitment and failed at the point of integration, precisely where the literature identifies the highest concentration of early departures.

This pattern is not isolated. A large corporate restaurant group reports that its teams are simply not prepared to onboard atypical profiles, not because they are unwilling but because the operational pressure of running a restaurant leaves no time and capacity for the additional management investment that a non-standard hire requires. A large international hotel group acknowledges that it has no post-hire support infrastructure specifically designed for inclusive hires, and that candidates placed through inclusion partnerships are effectively absorbed into the same onboarding process as all other new hires, which is itself minimal. The representative of an IAE structure captures this dynamic with precision: the entire ecosystem, she said, is optimized for placing people, not for making them stay. The funding structures, the performance metrics, and the organizational attention all concentrate on the moment of hire. The period that follows, where the most departures happen and where the return on the investment in sourcing and selection is either realized or lost, is left largely unaddressed.

The consequences for inclusive hiring adoption are significant and somewhat paradoxical. The absence of post-placement infrastructure does not simply mean that inclusive hires sometimes fail. It means that employers who have tried inclusive hiring and experienced early departures attribute those departures to the profile rather than to the absence of support, which reinforces their skepticism about inclusive hiring as a concept and reduces their willingness to try again. The failure of the integration becomes evidence that the experiment itself was a mistake, when in fact it was the architecture around the experiment that was missing. This attribution error is one of the most consequential dynamics in the data: it creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which the absence of support produces failures, failures produce skepticism, and skepticism prevents the investment in support that would

break the cycle.

Addressing this barrier is therefore not an optional refinement to inclusive hiring practices. It is, as proposition 3 of this research anticipates, a structural prerequisite for making inclusive hiring work at all. The following section examines what the data shows about the conditions and mechanisms that can begin to address it.

4.4 Mechanisms that work: what the data shows

4.4.1 Conditions that trigger openness to change

The preceding sections have documented the barriers that make inclusive hiring adoption difficult: the operational burden it imposes on managers, the stigma that atypical profiles carry in employers' perception, and the absence of post-placement infrastructure to support new hires through the most fragile period. These barriers are real and consistently present across the sample. Yet they do not explain the full picture. A significant number of organizations in the sample have, at some point, moved beyond them. Understanding what made that movement possible is the first analytical task of this section.

Three conditions emerge from the data as the most consistent triggers of employer openness to change. They are not mutually exclusive and in the most convincing cases appear in combination, but each operates as an independent lever capable of shifting an organization's posture from passive resistance to active experimentation.

The first and most powerful trigger is the visibility of the cost of the status quo. Across the sample, the organizations that had moved furthest toward inclusive hiring were, without exception, organizations that had quantified what their current recruitment model was actually costing them. The most striking example comes from a retailer in the sample, whose HR team had calculated the total cost of a hard-to-fill departure, including direct recruitment fees, vacancy costs, training inefficiency, and hidden management burden. The interviewee described this figure as a "very strong" internal argument, one that had unlocked budget for alternative sourcing channels and structured integration support that would otherwise have been refused. This is consistent with the pattern observed more broadly: where cost is visible, the case for change can be made in the language that operational managers and finance teams respond to. Where cost remains invisible, or is absorbed as a structural feature of the sector rather than calculated as a decision variable, the incentive to change recruitment practices is structurally weakened. The practical implication is significant: making the cost of turnover explicit is not only a diagnostic exercise. It is, in itself, a condition for change. However, a luxury hotel interviewee articulates a nuance that has direct implications for the design of inclusive hiring solutions: the financial argument, though compelling as an internal justification tool, should not be the primary entry point when approaching HR teams. If the conversation starts with cost calculations, he argues, the employers who engage will do so instrumentally, without the cultural alignment that makes post placement support effective. The better entry point, in his view, is organizational culture and the inclusion argument: giving a second chance produces longer retention precisely because the hire carries a different kind of commitment to the role.

The second trigger is a prior positive experience with an atypical hire. Several organizations in the sample describe a specific moment at which their assumptions about inclusive hiring were revised by a concrete outcome. A corporate restaurant group that had participated in a POEI training pipeline describes the experience as having "worked", producing candidates who stayed longer and required less repeat recruitment than those sourced through conventional channels. A seasonal hotel that had partnered with a culinary training program for populations far from employment describes the pipeline as delivering candidates with stronger motivation and lower early attrition than the sector average. In each case, the prior positive experience functions as proof of concept: it transforms inclusive hiring from an abstract social responsibility argument into a demonstrated operational solution. Organizations without this prior experience must be convinced by evidence from elsewhere; organizations that have experienced it directly become, in several cases, the most credible internal advocates.

The third trigger is the presence of a trusted intermediary capable of absorbing operational complexity on the employer's behalf. A food retail group describes partnerships with two nonprofit organizations, Each One and Humando, as having produced a number of permanent contract hires in roles that had previously cycled through repeated short-tenure departures. The key feature of these partnerships, as the interviewee describes them, is not that the intermediaries supplied candidates, but that they managed the process: pre-screening, expectation calibration, and early follow-up were all handled externally, leaving the employer's teams with a validation role rather than an assessment role. A large hotel group describes similar dynamics with specialized intermediaries, noting that the partnerships that worked were those where the intermediary was willing to remain present after the hire, not simply until it. This finding converges with the structural analysis in section 4.3.1: the primary barrier to inclusive hiring adoption is not ideological resistance but operational bandwidth. A trusted intermediary that removes the operational burden does not only facilitate inclusion, it removes the principal reason employers give for not attempting it.

A fourth, secondary trigger also appears in the data: legal obligation, specifically the disability employment quota, which requires organizations with more than twenty employees to employ at least six percent of recognized disabled workers. Several organizations describe the quota as having initiated their first structured engagement with inclusive hiring, creating partnerships with specialized intermediaries and internal processes that consequently expanded beyond the disability perimeter. Legal obligation does not produce genuine openness on its own, and several organizations that cite it describe their compliance as mechanical rather than strategic. But it functions as an entry point that, in favorable organizational contexts, can evolve into something more genuine. The pattern suggests that regulatory pressure is most productive when it is accompanied by the other triggers described above: a visible cost argument, a prior positive experience, or a trusted intermediary who can translate compliance into operational value.

4.4.2 Sourcing and assessment practices

If the preceding section identified the conditions that make employers willing to try something different, this section examines what the data shows about what actually works when they do. The mechanisms that emerge from the interviews can be organized into three categories: assessment-based sourcing methods, pre-hire training pathways, and nonprofit partnership models. Each addresses a different point of failure in the conventional recruitment chain, and each produces distinct evidence on the conditions under which it succeeds or fails.

Assessment-based sourcing: behavioral criteria over credentials.

The clearest finding across the sample on assessment logic comes from organizations that had deliberately shifted away from CV-based screening toward behavioral and motivational criteria. A large international hotel group describes a recruitment approach that explicitly prioritizes observed behavior over documented experience: candidates are evaluated on how they communicate, how they respond to service scenarios, and whether their values align with the organization's culture before any consideration is given to their prior employment history. The interviewee describes this as values-based hiring, and frames it not as an inclusion initiative but as a response to a simple empirical observation: candidates selected on prior experience leave; candidates selected on behavioral fit stay. The HR director of a luxury independent Parisian hotel offers a concrete illustration of this logic in practice. Having come from a background in restaurant operations and experienced the consequences of poor HR management directly, he now recruits exclusively on transferable skills and cultural fit, without requiring prior hotel or restaurant experience. His most cited example is a former banker now working as a receptionist, who has been in post for two years and was recognized as employee of the month. The hotel's average employee tenure is five years and eight months, against a regional average of approximately one year in Île-de-France, which suggests the approach produces measurably different retention outcomes.

This finding is consistent with what the literature on employee selection predicts: structured behavioral assessment is a stronger predictor of job performance and tenure than years of sector experience (Sackett and al., 2022), and the field data from this sample adds empirical weight to that theoretical claim.

A critical counterpoint appears in the MRS data. A restaurant operator in the sample tried the MRS format once, selecting ten candidates through France Travail's simulation process for entry-level roles across her nine restaurants. Six out of ten candidates showed up on their first day. Three months later, none remained. The interviewee does not attribute this outcome to a failure of the MRS methodology, which she describes as well-designed and the candidates as credible. The failure was architectural: candidates were absorbed into operational roles with no dedicated onboarding, no HR follow-up, and no intermediary contact after the placement. The sourcing practice worked; the integration infrastructure did not exist. This case is analytically important because it demonstrates that the effectiveness of behavioral and simulation-based assessment tools is not intrinsic to the tool itself. It is conditional on what happens after the hire, a finding that connects directly to section 4.4.3.

Pre-hire training pathways: reducing employer risk before the contract.

The second category of practices concerns tools that bridge the gap between a candidate's current profile and an employer's role requirements before the hire takes place. The POEI (Préparation Opérationnelle à l'Emploi Individuelle) model emerges as the most consistently reported effective practice in this category. A corporate restaurant group in the sample describes POEI-based pipelines as having worked, producing candidates who reach operational competence faster and stay longer than those sourced through conventional channels, with the additional benefit that the training is entirely publicly funded, making the cost to the employer near zero. A logistics retailer in the sample similarly describes POEI as a strong retention lever, noting that the process of co-constructing the training content with the intermediary created a candidate profile that was precisely calibrated to the role's actual demands rather than its formal job description.

The Expert Retail model, used by a fashion retailer in the sample, combines a fifteen-day immersion internship with a structured POEI training sequence before any employment contract is signed. The interviewee describes this model as fully integrated into their recruitment practices for sales advisor roles, the highest-turnover position in their stores, and reports that candidates selected through this pathway show meaningfully higher retention rates than those recruited through job board applications, who frequently leave within the first sixty days. Critically, the fashion retailer is already managing up to 300 applications per role through conventional channels, of which the vast majority are screened out at the CV stage. The Expert Retail pipeline inverts this logic entirely: it begins with motivation and behavioral fit, adds a real-work immersion period, and produces a much smaller but far more reliable cohort of candidates.

The Thierry Marx culinary training pipeline, used by a seasonal hotel group operating in the South of France, offers a hospitality-specific illustration of the same principle applied to a harder-to-reach population. The pipeline trains formerly incarcerated individuals, recent immigrants or people far from the job market over two to three months in culinary and service skills, then places them with partner employers for seasonal roles. The hotel interviewee describes concrete seasonal-to-CDI conversions from this pipeline, which is a particularly significant outcome in a sector where seasonal positions almost never lead to permanent contracts. The mechanism that produces this outcome is not the training itself but the combination of skill preparation, expectation calibration during the immersion period, and the ongoing relationship between the training organization and the employer after placement.

Nonprofit and intermediary partnerships: sourcing with embedded support.

The third mechanism category concerns partnerships between employers and intermediary organizations that handle both sourcing and early integration support. The most detailed evidence comes from a restaurant group that has worked with a IAE, Humando, and a Société à Mission, Each One, to fill frontline store roles that had previously cycled through repeated short-tenure departures. The interviewee describes both partnerships as having produced permanent contract conversions in roles where that outcome had previously been rare. What distinguished these partnerships from a standard recruitment channel, in the

interviewee's view, was the presence of the intermediary after the hire: both organizations maintained contact with the candidate and the restaurant manager during the first three months, surfacing early difficulties before they became departures and providing a support resource that neither the candidate nor the manager would otherwise have had access to.

A large hotel group describes comparable dynamics with Les Cuistots Migrateurs and Banlieue Sans Frontières, both of which place candidates from refugee and immigrant backgrounds into kitchen and service roles. The interviewee notes that beyond the placement outcomes, the partnerships have had a tangible positive effect on employer brand within the organization's HR and management teams, creating an internal proof-of-concept that atypical profiles can succeed in demanding operational contexts. A large international hotel group in the sample reports an active partnership with Les Déterminés, framing it explicitly as a retention strategy rather than a CSR initiative, and describes the alumni cooptation dynamic it generates as one of the most reliable sources of long-tenure hires in their portfolio.

Taken together, the evidence across these three mechanism categories supports a consistent analytical finding: the sourcing and assessment tools that produce better retention outcomes are not more sophisticated versions of conventional recruitment. They operate on a different logic entirely, replacing credential matching with behavioral assessment, reducing employer risk through pre-hire preparation, and embedding post-placement support into the sourcing relationship itself. What distinguishes the mechanisms that work from those that fail is not primarily their design but the continuity they create between the moment of selection and the critical first weeks of employment. Where that follow up exists, the data shows better outcomes. Where it is absent, even well-designed tools produce the same early departures that conventional channels generate.

4.4.3 Integration and retention support

Section 4.3.3 documented what happens when post-placement infrastructure is absent. This section examines its counterpart: what structured integration support looks like in the cases where it exists, and what the data reveals about the conditions required for it to function. The cases range from resource-intensive corporate models to zero-cost practices in independent SMEs, and together they demonstrate that the logic of post-hire support is scalable across organizational contexts.

The most complete integration model in the sample comes from a large international hotel group operating across multiple French properties. Their onboarding process is structured around three components that operate in combination. The first is a buddy system, pairing each new hire with an experienced team member for the first four to six weeks, providing a relational anchor that is distinct from the hierarchical management relationship. The second is a sequence of structured onboarding milestones, with defined check-in points at the end of the first week, the first month, and the end of the probationary period, during which the Talent and Culture team meets jointly with the new hire and their direct manager to surface early difficulties before they become departures. The third is continuous communication between the HR teams and hotel operations on the status of recent hires,

maintaining organizational attention on the integration period rather than treating the hire as a closed transaction. The interviewee describes this model as producing measurably lower sub-one-year attrition than properties within the same group that do not apply it, and notes that the mechanism is not primarily about the new hire: it is about keeping the manager accountable for the integration, which is where most early departures originate.

A logistics retailer in the sample offers the most quantitatively striking evidence for the impact of post-hire support. At one of its distribution sites, a structured manager follow-up protocol extending across the full first year of employment, combined with a partnership with a local school feeding motivated local candidates into specific roles, produced a sub-one-year turnover rate of zero percent on that site, against a group average of seventeen percent for under-one-year departures and Paris region rates as high as fifty to seventy percent. The interviewee is explicit that this outcome was not driven by compensation, which remained at the group standard, or by working conditions, which were comparable to other sites. The difference was the continuity of managerial attention and the quality of the candidate-role match produced by the local school partnership. Together, these two elements eliminated the information asymmetry that produces most early departures: the candidate knew what the job actually required before starting, and the manager was held accountable for the relationship throughout the whole first year.

A lower-cost example in the sample comes from an independent restaurant SME whose owner describes a first-week rotation protocol that requires no budget and no external partner. Every new hire, regardless of their role, spends their first week working briefly in each position in the restaurant: kitchen, floor, bar, and support functions. The objective is not skill training but orientation. The new hire leaves their first day understanding what the dishwasher does, what the chef needs, and what pressure the floor team is managing during service. The interviewee attributes the practice with a significant reduction in early departures through two mechanisms. First, candidates who discover on day one that the environment is incompatible with what they had expected self-select out before any training investment has been made, which is a better outcome for both parties than a departure at week three. Second, candidates who stay begin their role with a social map of the team, which accelerates the social integration process that the literature identifies as one of the three core indicators of successful newcomer adjustment (Bauer and al., 2007). The practice requires only a manager who understands that integration begins before the first task, not after it.

Another case adds a dimension that the preceding examples do not fully address: the organizational investment required to sustain integration support over time. This logistics e-retailer has deployed POEI pipelines and partnerships with Les Déterminés alongside interim-to-CDI conversion programmes, with documented retention improvements across all three. But the interviewee is precise about the conditions that made this possible: a dedicated internal person whose role is specifically to manage the inclusive hiring ecosystem, and a set of internal advocates who support the approach against operational resistance from managers focused on short-term staffing gaps. Without this dedicated point of responsibility, the ecosystem cannot be maintained long-term regardless of the quality of the external partners. The lesson is not that post-hire support practices are complex to design.

It is that they require a person inside the organization who absorbs the coordination cost that managers cannot.

The HR director of a luxury independent Parisian hotel, whose retention outcomes have already been discussed in section 4.4.2, synthesizes the evidence across all of these cases with a formulation that the data consistently supports. Post-placement accompaniment, he argues, is not a support practice among others: it is the mechanism that most reliably explains why some hires last and others do not. Matching platforms, sourcing algorithms, and simulation tools are instruments. What determines whether a hire becomes a long-tenure employee is whether someone, inside or outside the organization, remains present and responsible in the weeks after the contract is signed. Across the sample, wherever structured post-hire support exists, even in informal or resource-constrained forms, retention outcomes are better. The sourcing and assessment work described in section 4.4.2 identifies the right person. The integration and retention work described in this section is what makes them stay.

4.5 Cross-case analysis and comparison

The preceding sections have examined the data thematically, tracing barriers to inclusive hiring adoption and the mechanisms that produce durable outcomes across individual cases. This section steps back from the individual case level to examine what the data shows when the 23 organizations are considered as a comparative set. Three dimensions of comparison emerge as analytically significant: sector, organizational size, and the relationship between the three research propositions and the empirical evidence. Together, they allow the findings of sections 4.2 to 4.4 to be synthesized into a transversal conclusion about what is required for inclusive hiring to work in practice.

4.5.1 Hotels and restaurants versus retail

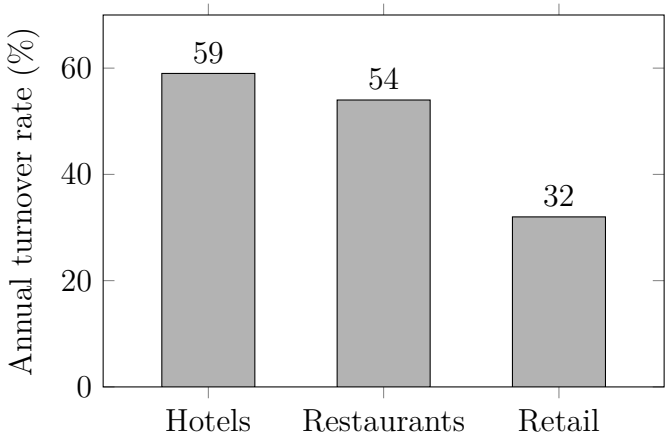


Figure 4: Annual turnover rate by sector across the sample

The inclusion of retail alongside hospitality in this study was designed as a comparative lens rather than a co-equal subject of investigation. The gradient of turnover intensity across the sample, 59% in hotels, 54% in restaurants, and 32% in retail, allows the analysis to examine whether the mechanisms that produce durable outcomes hold across contexts

with varying degrees of labor market tension. The short answer is yes, but with important differences in urgency and organizational capacity.

The barriers documented in section 4.3 are present across all three sectors. Operational complexity, manager resistance, stigma around atypical profiles, and the absence of post-placement infrastructure appear in hotel, restaurant, and retail interviews alike. What differs is their intensity. In hospitality and restauration, these barriers operate under conditions of strong and continuous pressure: HR teams are managing live vacancies, directors are running short-staffed operations, and the cost of every additional administrative burden is felt immediately. In retail, the same barriers exist but in a context where HR capacity is more developed, operations are led under less pressure, and the organizational distance between the person who decides to try inclusive hiring and the person who has to implement it is smaller. This difference in operational pressure partly explains why the retail cases in the sample show higher rates of active inclusive hiring adoption: not because retail employers are more enlightened, but because they have more time and capacity to absorb the upfront cost of experimentation.

The mechanisms that work are also structurally similar across sectors. Behavioral assessment over CV screening, pre-hire training pathways, and intermediary partnerships with embedded post-placement support produce better retention outcomes in retail and hospitality alike. A retail case, with turnover reduced from 50% to 30% through a structured training programme and manager investment, and the Thierry Marx pipeline producing seasonal-to-CDI conversions in a hotel group in the South of France, operate on identical logic: match on behavioral fit, reduce the expectation gap before the hire, and maintain relational follow up after it. The sector shapes the operational constraints, and not the causal mechanism.

4.5.2 SMEs versus large corporations

The second comparative dimension concerns organizational size. The sample includes both independent SMEs and large corporate groups across all three sectors, and the contrast between them reveals a structural tension that runs through the entire dataset.

Large corporations have the infrastructure that SMEs lack: dedicated HR teams, ATS systems capable of processing volume, legal and compliance functions that track disability quota obligations, and central D&I teams that can pilot inclusive initiatives at scale. Several of the most structurally ambitious inclusive hiring programmes in the sample, including the Expert Retail pipeline, the hotel values-based hiring framework, and the shop partnerships with Each One and Humando, exist precisely because these organizations have the organizational resources to build and sustain them. But infrastructure also creates rigidity. The ATS lock-in dynamic documented in section 4.2.1 is almost exclusively a large-corporation problem: the deeper the system integration, the harder it is to introduce a sourcing channel that does not fit the existing pipeline. And the gap between central HR ambition and operational manager resistance, described in section 4.3.1, is most acute in large groups where restaurant directors or store managers are structurally isolated from the inclusive hiring decisions made at headquarters.

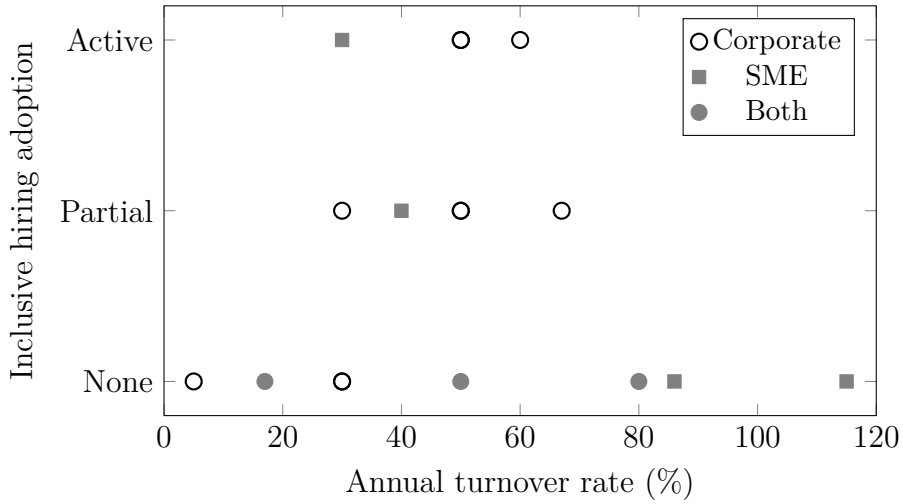


Figure 5: Turnover rate and inclusive hiring adoption by organization size (21 cases with quantified turnover)

SMEs present the inverse profile. Without ATS infrastructure, they have no lock-in to overcome. Without a central HR function, the person who decides to try something different is often the same person who implements it, which eliminates the translation gap between strategy and execution. The independent restaurant whose first-day rotation protocol costs nothing, the luxury hotel whose HR director personally recruits on behavioral fit, and the seasonal hotel whose owner built a direct relationship with the Thierry Marx programme are all SME cases where inclusive hiring works precisely because the organizational distance between conviction and action is short. The constraint is not willingness but resources: when the person managing recruitment is also managing operations, the upfront time cost of building a new partnership or learning a new device is genuinely difficult to absorb. This is why the trusted intermediary trigger identified in section 4.4.1 matters more for SMEs than for any other employer category: it is the organizational mechanism that makes adoption possible without requiring bandwidth that SMEs structurally cannot have.

4.5.3 The three research propositions

The empirical evidence from this study can now be assessed against the three research propositions set out in section 2.5.

Proposition 1, which holds that inclusive hiring produces more durable outcomes when candidate assessment is grounded in behavioral and motivational criteria rather than conventional ones, is *partially confirmed*. The cases where behavioral assessment is applied, from the hotel's transferable skills model to the other case's values-based framework to the MRS simulation methodology, consistently produce better retention indicators than CV-based screening. The former banker turned receptionist who has been in post for two years, the retail training programme that reduced turnover by twenty percents, and the seasonal-to-CDI conversions from the Thierry Marx pipeline all support the claim. The qualification is that behavioral assessment is not yet systematically measured as such by most employers in the sample: several organizations have moved toward it without labeling

it, and not all of them track the retention differential between behaviorally-selected and conventionally-selected cohorts with the rigour that would allow a precise quantitative claim. The proposition holds, but the evidence base remains observational rather than experimental.

Proposition 2, which holds that employer adoption of inclusive practices is conditioned by the existence of a trusted intermediary who absorbs operational complexity and demonstrates measurable return on investment, is *strongly confirmed*. Across the sample, the organizations that have adopted active inclusive hiring programmes almost without exception describe a trusted intermediary as the enabling condition. Each One, Humando, Weavers, Les Déterminés, the Thierry Marx programme, Expert Retail : in each case, the intermediary did not simply supply candidates. It absorbed the administrative complexity of the public device ecosystem, maintained presence after the hire, and provided a proof-of-concept that made internal advocacy possible. Conversely, the cases where inclusive hiring was attempted without an intermediary, most strikingly the restaurant operator's MRS trial, consistently produced the attribution error documented in section 4.3.3: the failure was assigned to the profile rather than to the absence of support, and the employer's openness to future experimentation was reduced rather than increased. The trusted intermediary is not a facilitating factor. It is, for most employers in this sample, a prerequisite.

Proposition 3, which holds that structured post-placement support during the first weeks of employment is a critical determinant of whether an inclusive hire becomes a durable employment relationship, is *confirmed by both presence and absence*. Section 4.3.3 documented the systematic pattern of failure when post-placement support is absent. Section 4.4.3 documented its mirror image: wherever structured post-hire support exists, even in minimal forms like the independent restaurant's first-week rotation, retention outcomes improve. The zero-percent sub-one-year turnover achieved in a case is the strongest quantitative confirmation of this proposition in the sample. The IAE representative's formulation, that the entire ecosystem is optimized for placing people rather than making them stay, captures the structural dimension of the gap that proposition 3 identifies.

4.5.4 The central transversal finding

Taken together, the comparative analysis points to a conclusion that the thematic sections showed but could not state completely. The mechanisms that produce durable inclusive hiring outcomes, behavioral assessment, pre-hire preparation, and post-placement support, are not unknown. They are well documented in the literature, practised by a minority of organizations in the sample, and described with precision by the intermediaries and social innovation actors who work with them daily. The deficit is not a knowledge deficit. It is an implementation deficit, driven by three structural conditions that the data consistently reveals: employers lack the time and capacity to absorb the upfront cost of experimentation; the mechanisms that would reduce that cost, trusted intermediaries who manage complexity on the employer's behalf, are present in the ecosystem but unevenly distributed and poorly connected to employer operational realities; and the post-placement infrastructure that would make inclusive hires stick is systematically underfunded and undersupported, by both employers and the public programmes that finance placement

but not retention.

The missing link, across sectors and across organizational sizes, is a connecting stakeholder of trust: an actor capable of translating the evidence base on what works into operational practice for employers who do not have the time, the knowledge, or the organizational capacity to do it themselves. Where that connector exists and is credible, inclusive hiring works. Where it is absent, the cycle documented in section 4.2 continues: the same channels, the same screening logic, the same early departures, and the same structural shortage that has defined this sector for a long time.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Employers continue to rely on underperforming recruitment channels because of three compounding mechanisms: ATS integration lock-in, the volume illusion, and time scarcity.
- Three barriers slow inclusive hiring adoption: operational complexity, the stigma attached to atypical profiles, and the absence of post-placement infrastructure.
- Three conditions consistently trigger employer openness to change: visible cost of the status quo, a prior positive experience with an atypical hire, and a trusted intermediary absorbing complexity.
- Across sectors and organizational sizes, the same causal logic holds: behavioral assessment, pre-hire training, and post-placement support produce better retention : the sector and the organization's size shape the operational constraints, not the underlying mechanism.

5 Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Confronting results with the existing literature

The empirical findings of this research were developed in explicit link with three parts of literature: social innovation theory, the academic research on inclusive hiring and employee selection, and the sector-specific literature on hard-to-fill occupations in French hospitality. This section examines how the field data relates to each of these parts of knowledge, identifying where the findings confirm theoretical predictions, where they challenge assumptions that the literature left unexamined, and where they extend understanding into territory the existing research had not yet mapped.

The literature on statistical discrimination, developed by Phelps (1972) and Arrow (1973) and applied to the French recruitment context by Cortéséro and colleagues (2013), predicts that employers facing time pressure and imperfect information will systematically rely on observable group characteristics as proxies for individual reliability. The field data from this study confirms this prediction with clarity. Across all 23 organizations in the sample, prior sector experience remains the dominant selection criterion for frontline roles, despite widespread acknowledgment that it does not reliably predict whether a candidate will stay. Several interviewees describe this explicitly as a statistical bet: they know the signal is weak, but they have no alternative that is both more valid and as fast to apply. The Postlethwaite and al. (2019) meta-analysis, which found a correlation of almost zero between prior experience and turnover, is thus empirically grounded in this sample: the organizations that had moved away from experience-based screening consistently reported better retention outcomes than those that had not, and none reported worse.

What the statistical discrimination framework does not fully anticipate, however, is the organizational inertia that sustains this logic even when employers know it is empirically unfounded. The ATS lock-in dynamic documented in section 4.2.1 goes beyond rational calculation under uncertainty: it is a structural mechanism that embeds the wrong screening criteria into the technology itself, making them costly to change even when decision-makers are persuaded of their inadequacy. Marchal and Rieucau's (2010) observation that recruitment instruments are social constructs encoding existing norms is confirmed here, but the field data adds a dimension the authors did not emphasize: those constructs are also technical artifacts, locked into ATS configurations and job board algorithms that reproduce them automatically, without requiring any deliberate act of discrimination by the humans operating the system. The implication is that addressing statistical discrimination in this sector requires not only changing how managers think about candidates, but reconfiguring or bypassing the technical infrastructure that makes the old thinking automatic.

The literature on employee selection reviewed in section 2.3.1, and particularly Sackett and al.'s (2022) re-examination of 85 years of meta-analytic data, establishes that structured behavioral interviews and motivational fit measures are stronger predictors of job performance and retention than years of sector experience. The field findings support this claim directionally and add sector-specific texture that the academic literature, which is predominantly multi-sector and quantitative, does not provide. The luxury independent

hotel case, with average employee tenure of five years and eight months against a regional average of approximately one year, represents the strongest in-sample illustration of what behavioral hiring produces when applied consistently and supported by organizational culture. The logistics retailer case, where a training programme grounded in behavioral and motivational criteria reduced turnover from 50% to 30%, provides a before-and-after comparison that the academic literature on behavioral assessment does not typically offer, because most studies measure association rather than change.

The field data also introduces a nuance that the employees selection literature does not address: the framing effect of behavioral assessment on employer adoption. The observation from a hotel interviewee that leading with the financial argument risks producing instrumental compliance rather than genuine cultural alignment points to a distinction the academic research has not yet examined systematically. Sackett and al.'s (2022) demonstrate that behavioral interviews predict retention; they do not address whether employers who adopt them for cost reasons embed them with the same depth as employers who adopt them for cultural conviction. The field data suggests the depth of adoption matters as much as the reason of adoption, and that inclusive hiring solutions designed around cost arguments alone may produce lower organizational change than those that also engage the employer's identity as an organization that gives second chances.

The organizational psychology literature reviewed in section 2.3.1 further predicts that candidates further from employment, when correctly matched and supported, may present stronger retention potential than conventionally recruited profiles, through mechanisms of job embeddedness (Mitchell and al., 2001), motivational engagement (Vroom, 1964, cited in Allen and Meyer, 1990), and affective organizational commitment generated by perceived employer investment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). The field data provides partial support for this prediction. The cases where inclusive hires produced long tenure (the culinary training pipeline generating seasonal-to-CDI conversions in a hotel group, the nonprofit partnerships at a restaurant group producing permanent contracts in chronically high-turnover roles, the transferable-skills hire at an independent hotel who remained in post for two years and was recognized as employee of the month) are consistent with the job embeddedness and motivational commitment mechanisms the literature describes. The qualification is that these outcomes are not automatic: they appear specifically in cases where the candidate was well matched and post-placement support was provided. Where support was absent, even well-motivated candidates from inclusive pipelines left early, as the restaurant operator's MRS trial documents. The literature's prediction holds, but conditionally: inclusive profiles present stronger retention potential when the full mechanism is in place, not simply when they are placed.

The social innovation literature, and particularly Richez-Battesti, Petrella and Vallade's (2012) process-centered framework, predicts that the most durable labor market outcomes emerge from multi-stakeholder architectures that distribute responsibility across sourcing, preparation, placement, and integration. The field findings strongly confirm this prediction and give it a more precise operational form. The partnerships that produced the best retention outcomes in the sample, across sectors and organizational sizes, were not those in which intermediaries supplied candidates and then withdrew. They were those in which the

intermediary remained present after the hire, maintaining contact with both the candidate and the manager during the first critical weeks. The distribution of responsibility that Richez-Battesti and al. (2012) describe at the architectural level is confirmed here at the operational level : what matters is not that multiple actors exist in the ecosystem, but that one of them owns the post-placement period that every other actor in the ecosystem has historically left unaddressed.

The same literature also observes that multi-stakeholder architectures have proven difficult to sustain beyond the placement moment, citing IAE exit data showing that 55% of leavers are not in employment six months after their pathway ends (DARES, 2024). The field data from this study both confirms and challenges this observation. It confirms that the post-placement gap is real and consequential: the representative of an IAE structure in the sample describes the entire ecosystem as optimized for placing people rather than making them stay, and the funding structures, performance metrics, and organizational focus all concentrate on the moment of hire. But the field data also shows that this gap is not impossible to overcome. The cases where post-placement support did exist (from the international hotel group's structured onboarding milestones to the retailer's year-long manager follow-up protocol to the independent restaurant's first-week rotation) consistently produced better outcomes. The implication is not that the multi-stakeholder architecture is insufficient, but that it has been systematically built until the wrong boundary: it stops at placement when it needs to extend to retention.

Finally, the sector-specific literature on hard-to-fill occupations in French hospitality, and particularly Forté and Monchatre's (2013) analysis of selectivity rigidity and Albandea and al.'s (2024) account of the domestic city logic, predicts that employers under time pressure will continue to recruit through familiar channels and familiar criteria even when those channels are demonstrably underperforming. The field data confirms this prediction as the baseline condition of the sample: twelve of the twenty-three organizations have no inclusive hiring practice in place, and most describe their current approach as default rather than deliberate. But the data also reveals what the sector-specific literature does not yet account for: the conditions under which employers break from this default. The financial trigger, the prior positive experience, and the trusted intermediary identified in section 4.4.1 are not present in the existing literature as a structured model of adoption conditions. They emerge from the field data as an empirical contribution that extends the theoretical account of why employers remain locked into ineffective practices by adding a perspective of what it takes to unlock them.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

This research makes three contributions to the existing theoretical frameworks described in section 2. Each addresses a gap that the literature identified but did not resolve, and each emerges directly from the empirical findings rather than from a prior position.

The first contribution concerns the mechanisms through which statistical discrimination persists in organizational hiring. The existing literature, from Phelps (1972) to Cortéséro and al. (2013), explains persistence through cognitive rationality under uncertainty: em-

ployers use group-level signals because they lack better individual-level information, and because the cost of acquiring it is too high under time pressure. This research confirms that mechanism but identifies a second, structural one that the cognitive aspect does not capture: the embedding of discriminatory criteria into automated technical systems. When prior sector experience is hardcoded into ATS filters and job-board ranking algorithms, it reproduces itself without requiring any deliberate decision by the manager operating the system. The implication for theory is significant: reducing statistical discrimination in high-turnover labor markets is not only a problem of changing manager cognition, it is a problem of redesigning or bypassing the technical infrastructure that automates the old logic. This distinction between cognitive and technical lock-in has not been articulated in the existing literature on discrimination in the French labor market, and it points toward a new research need on the role of HR technology in perpetuating exclusion independently of individual intent.

This finding also has implications for how the depth of this research's contribution should be read against the typology introduced in section 2.2.3. The three-condition model identified in this thesis, behavioral assessment, trusted intermediation, and post-placement support, operates primarily at the institutional level: it changes how individual employers and intermediaries behave, without altering the broader rules of the labor market itself. The ATS lock-in finding, however, points toward something closer to systemic change. Because prior sector experience is hardcoded into the technical infrastructure shared across employers, sourcing platforms, and job boards, addressing it requires intervening on the infrastructure itself rather than on any single organization's practice. This suggests that durable inclusive hiring outcomes require action at two distinct levels simultaneously: institutional change within employer organizations, and systemic change in the technical and regulatory infrastructure that currently reproduces exclusion by default. The connector-of-trust model proposed later on is designed to operate at the institutional level; whether it can also drive systemic change at scale remains an open question for future research, addressed in section 6.3.

The second contribution is an empirically grounded model of employer adoption conditions for inclusive hiring. The existing literature documents what inclusive hiring tools exist and provides theoretical reasons why they should work. It does not provide a structured account of the conditions under which employers actually adopt them. The field data from this study identifies three recurring triggers: the visibility of the financial cost of the current methods, a prior positive experience with an atypical hire serving as proof of concept, and the presence of a trusted intermediary who absorbs operational complexity on the employer's behalf. These three conditions do not appear in the existing literature as a structured adoption model, and their identification fills a gap. The model also introduces a sequencing implication: the trusted intermediary trigger is the most universally operative, functioning even in the absence of the other two, which suggests that intermediary design is the highest-leverage point for expanding adoption across the ecosystem. This finding connects the social innovation literature on multi-stakeholder architecture (Richez-Battesti and al., 2012) to the employer adoption literature in a way that neither had yet done independently.

The third contribution refines the multi-stakeholder framework by identifying the precise

boundary at which existing architectures fail. Richez-Battesti and al. (2012) argue that durable labor market outcomes require responsibility to be distributed across sourcing, preparation, placement, and integration. The field data confirms this architecture as a condition for success, but adds a finding the framework does not yet formalize: the distribution of responsibility consistently breaks down at the post-placement moment. Funding structures, performance metrics, and organizational attention all concentrate on the hire rather than on what follows it. The result is a systematic gap at the point where, as the data shows, the highest concentration of early departures occurs. This research proposes that the multi-stakeholder framework could be extended by a fifth dimension, post-placement continuity, defined as the maintained presence of at least one actor, internal or external to the employer, with explicit responsibility for the new hire's integration during the first ninety days. The cases in this sample where that continuity existed, even in minimal forms, consistently produced better retention outcomes than cases where it did not. Post-placement continuity is not a refinement of the existing architecture. It is the missing condition that determines whether the architecture produces the outcomes it was designed to generate.

5.3 Recommendations for employers, public actors, and social innovators

The findings of this research have different implications depending on the actor reading them. This section organizes recommendations around three distinct stakeholder groups: employers operating in the hospitality and retail sectors, public actors responsible for labor market policy and inclusion programme design, and social innovators building solutions at the intersection of employment and social need. Each group faces a different version of the problem documented in this research, and each has a different set of levers available to address it.

For employers, the central recommendation would be to reframe inclusive hiring as a retention strategy rather than a social responsibility initiative. The evidence from this study is clear: the organizations that achieved the lowest early-departure rates in the sample were not those with the largest diversity programmes, but those that had changed the logic of their selection process. The practical implications of this reframing are triple. First, employers should audit their current screening criteria against retention outcomes, not application volume. If a job board generates 300 applications and converts at 1%, the channel is not working, and the cost of maintaining it is almost certainly higher than the cost of building an alternative. Second, employers should identify one trusted intermediary partner and invest in that relationship rather than maintaining superficial contact with many. The evidence consistently shows that depth of partnership, measured by the intermediary's presence after the hire, matters more than broadness. Third, and most importantly, employers should treat the first ninety days of employment as a managed process rather than a passive one. This does not require significant resources: the independent restaurant's first-week rotation protocol is an example of a zero-cost intervention that produced measurable retention improvements. What it requires is a manager who understands that the recruitment is not complete on the day of signing the contract, and an organizational culture that holds managers accountable for integration outcomes, not only for filling vacancies.

A specific recommendation for larger organizations concerns the ATS infrastructure. The lock-in dynamic documented in section 4.2.1 is one of the most consequential barriers in the sample, and it is one that only HR leadership can address. Organizations should review whether their ATS configurations actively filter out candidates who lack prior sector experience, and whether those filters are producing the retention outcomes that justify their cost. Where they are not, reconfiguring the ATS to privilege motivational and behavioural criteria over credential criteria is a structural change that does not require hiring a single additional person. It requires a decision.

For public actors, the central recommendation concerns the boundary of publicly funded inclusion programmes. The IAE exit data, the POEI evaluation evidence, and the field findings from this study converge on the same diagnosis: existing programmes are funded to the point of placement, not to the point of retention. The result is a structural gap at precisely the moment where the investment in sourcing and preparation is most at risk of being lost. Public actors should extend the performance metrics of inclusion programmes beyond placement rates to include ninety-day and six-month retention rates, and should fund the post-placement accompaniment activities that produce those outcomes. This does not necessarily require new budget: it requires reorienting existing budget toward the period that follows the hire rather than the period that precedes it.

A second recommendation for public actors concerns the accessibility of existing tools, particularly the MRS. The evidence from this study shows that the MRS and POEI methodologies produce credible candidates when applied, but that their adoption is constrained by the time and coordination investment they require from employers. France Travail and its regional partners should explore whether the administrative burden of these processes can be reduced through pre-packaged sector-specific formats, and whether the follow-up responsibility after placements could be more explicitly assigned to a named actor. The restaurant operator's MRS trial, in which six well-selected candidates left within three months because no one was responsible for what happened after the first day, is not a failure of the tool. It is a failure of the architecture around it, and it is an architecture that public actors have the mandate and the resources to redesign.

For social innovators, the findings of this research point toward a specific product and service design implication. The connector of trust identified in section 4.5 as the missing link across the ecosystem is not a generic intermediary. It is an actor with four specific capabilities: the ability to source and assess candidates on behavioral and motivational criteria; the ability to prepare candidates for the specific operational realities of the role before the contract is signed; the ability to remain present after the hire and manage early difficulties before they become departures; and the credibility to demonstrate return on investment to employers in language that operational managers and finance teams find compelling. No single actor in the current French ecosystem combines all four of these capabilities systematically. The nonprofit intermediaries that come closest tend to lack the employer-facing commercial infrastructure to scale. The commercial recruitment actors that have the employer relationships tend to stop at placement. The public tools

that have the assessment methodology tend to lack the post-placement follow-up capacity. The design opportunity is to build something that holds the full chain together, from behavioral sourcing to post-placement continuity, in a model that is operationally accessible to employers and financially sustainable without depending entirely on public subsidy.

The findings of this research also carry a recommendation about sequencing for social innovators entering this space. The data consistently shows that employer adoption is triggered by proof of concept rather than by abstract argument. The most effective entry point is not a pitch about inclusion or about technology: it is a first hire that works, documented in terms that the employer can verify and share internally. Building the evidence base one durable placement at a time, and using each success to create an internal advocate rather than simply a repeat client, is the adoption strategy that the field data most consistently supports.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- This research adds three findings to the literature: a distinction between cognitive and structural (technical) lock-in behind statistical discrimination; an empirically grounded model of employer adoption conditions; and a refinement of the multi-stakeholder framework, identifying post-placement as its most consistent point of failure.
- For public actors, the priority is to fund and measure post-placement accompaniment, not only placement rates, and to reduce the administrative burden of tools like the MRS and POEI.
- For social innovators, the highest-leverage design opportunity is an intermediary combining behavioral sourcing, pre-hire preparation, and post-placement continuity, a combination no single actor in the current ecosystem fully provides today.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Synthesis: answering the research question

This thesis tried to answer a question that the existing literature had documented but not resolved: what social innovation mechanisms can durably address hard-to-fill occupations? The empirical investigation, conducted across 28 organizations in the French hospitality, retail, inclusion and public sectors through semi-structured interviews, produces an answer that is adding precision and conditions to what the literature had previously offered.

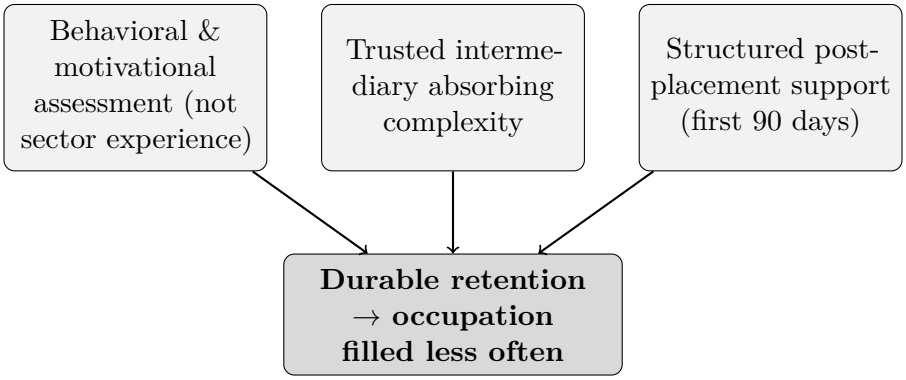


Figure 6: The three conditions for durable inclusive hiring outcomes

The central finding is that inclusive hiring can durably address hard-to-fill occupations, but only when three conditions are simultaneously met. The first is that candidate assessment is grounded in behavioral and motivational criteria rather than prior sector experience, which the literature consistently shows to be a near-zero predictor of retention. The second is that a trusted intermediary is present to absorb the operational complexity of inclusive hiring on the employer's behalf, providing both the organizational permission to experiment and the practical infrastructure to sustain it. The third is that structured post-placement support exists during the first ninety days of employment, maintaining the presence of at least one accountable actor between the candidate and the manager during the period where the highest concentration of early departures happen. When all three conditions are in place, the data shows better retention outcomes across sectors and organizational sizes. When any one is absent, the mechanism fails, and the failure is typically attributed to the candidate profile rather than to the missing condition, reinforcing the employer's skepticism and reducing the likelihood of future experimentation.

The link to the research question is direct. An occupation is hard to fill not simply because candidates are scarce, but because the same position must be filled repeatedly: when annual turnover reaches 59% among hotels, as observed in this sample, each role effectively needs to be recruited for almost every year. A hire that lasts three weeks does not solve a hard-to-fill occupation, it defers it. When inclusive hiring produces durable retention, it breaks this cycle at its root: the position needs to be filled less often, the recruitment cost is amortized over a longer tenure, and the operational stability that chronic vacancy destroys begins to be rebuilt. The mechanisms this research identifies do not make hard-to-fill occupations easier to fill. They make them need to be filled less often.

The research also answers a second question that the initial investigation raised but had not fully framed: why do employers continue using tools they know are underperforming? The field data identifies two compounding mechanisms. The first is cognitive: under operational time pressure, employers make statistical bets on observable group characteristics because they have no faster alternative that is demonstrably more valid. The second is structural: prior sector experience is hardcoded into ATS filters and job board algorithms that reproduce it automatically, without requiring any deliberate decision by the managers operating the system. Together, these two mechanisms create a lock-in that is simultaneously rational at the individual level and collectively dysfunctional at the sector level. Breaking it requires not only persuading managers to think differently, but reconfiguring or bypassing the technical infrastructure that makes the old thinking automatic.

The research further identifies the conditions under which employers do break from this default, which constitutes an empirical contribution not previously formalized in the literature. Three triggers emerge consistently: the visibility of the financial cost of the status quo, a prior positive experience with an atypical hire serving as an internal proof of concept, and the presence of a trusted intermediary who removes the operational barriers to experimentation. Of these three, the trusted intermediary is the most universally operative: it functions even in the absence of the other two, and its presence is the single factor most consistently associated with active inclusive hiring adoption across the sample.

Taken together, these findings reframe the problem of hard-to-fill occupations in French hospitality. The shortage is not primarily a supply problem: there are candidates available. It is not primarily an awareness problem: most employers know their tools are underperforming. It is an implementation problem, driven by the absence of a connector capable of translating what works into operational practice for employers who lack the time, the knowledge, and the organizational bandwidth to do it themselves. Where that connector exists and is credible, the data shows that inclusive hiring works. Where it is absent, the cycle of recruitment, early departure, and re-recruitment that has defined this sector for a while continues unchanged. The research question asked what mechanisms can durably address hard-to-fill occupations. The answer the data provides is: behavioral assessment, pre-hire preparation, follow-up after hire, and a trusted intermediary who holds the chain together. Not one of these alone but all four, in combination, consistently.

6.2 Operational implementation strategy

The findings of this research do not only describe a problem. They specify, with enough precision, the architecture of a possible solution. This section translates the empirical conclusions into an operational framework for implementation, identifying what such a solution would need to look like, what obstacles it would need to overcome, and how it could be financially sustained.

The core design implication of this research is that the missing actor in the French hospitality labor market is not a recruiter, not a training provider, and not a nonprofit

intermediary in the conventional sense. It is a connector of trust: an actor capable of holding the full chain from behavioral sourcing to post-placement follow up, in a model that is operationally accessible to employers and financially sustainable without depending entirely on public subsidy. No single actor in the current ecosystem combines these caracteristics systematically.

The operational logic of such a solution follows a architecture grounded directly in the three conditions identified in section 6.1. The first stage is behavioral sourcing and assessment: candidates are identified and evaluated not on prior sector experience but on observable behavioral dispositions, motivational fit, and practical constraints such as availability, geographic stability, and alignment with the physical and relational demands of the role. This assessment is conducted before the employer sees any candidate, shifting the employer's role from evaluation to validation. The second stage is pre-hire preparation: selected candidates undergo a structured immersion period, combining role-specific skills development with expectation calibration, ensuring that both the candidate and the employer enter the employment relationship with an accurate understanding of what it will require. This stage reduces the information asymmetry that produces most early departures, and it can be funded through existing public devices such as the POEI, making the cost to the employer near zero. The third stage is post-placement continuity: a named actor maintains regular contact with both the candidate and their direct manager during the first ninety days, surfacing early difficulties before they become departures, and providing a support resource that neither party would otherwise have access to. This stage is the most systematically absent from existing solutions, and the data consistently shows it to be the most consequential for retention outcomes.

Three obstacles stand between this architecture and widespread adoption, and each requires a specific mechanism to overcome it. The first is employer time scarcity. The paradox documented throughout this research is that the employers who most need a new approach are the least able to invest time in building one. The solution to this obstacle is absorption: the connector must take on the full operational burden of the sourcing, assessment, and preparation stages, presenting the employer with a validated candidate rather than a process to manage. The employer's time investment must be reducible to a single validation meeting and a commitment to the post-placement check-in protocol. The second obstacle is the ATS lock-in dynamic. For large corporations, integrating a new sourcing channel requires either reconfiguring existing ATS infrastructure or managing a parallel pipeline outside it. The mechanism to overcome this is plug-in compatibility: the solution should be designed to deliver candidates in a format that is absorbable by existing ATS workflows, rather than requiring employers to change their systems. The third obstacle is employer willingness to pay. Recruitment in hospitality has historically been treated as either a cheap activity, through job boards and internal HR teams, or a publicly subsidized one, through France Travail and nonprofit intermediaries. Asking employers to pay for an inclusive hiring service requires demonstrating return on investment in terms they find compelling: not diversity metrics, but retention rates, recruitment cost reduction, and time saved per hire. The mechanism to overcome this is an evidence-based commercial proposition: tracking retention outcomes at 30, 90, and 180 days for every placement, and presenting employers with a before-and-after com-

parison that makes the cost of the service visibly lower than the cost of the cycle it replaces.

On financial sustainability, the data suggests that a hybrid model is both realistic and appropriate, with a structural orientation toward employer funding over time. In an early phase, public co-financing through POEI and other subsidies can absorb the preparation and assessment costs, reducing the price point for employers and lowering the barrier to a first engagement. As the evidence base builds and retention outcomes are documented, the commercial proposition strengthens: employers who have experienced one durable placement have both the proof of concept and the internal advocate needed to justify a fee-based model to their finance teams. The target would be a service that is primarily employer-funded, with public co-financing reserved for the preparation of candidates from the most excluded populations, where the social return on investment justifies public investment independently of the employer's willingness to pay. This hybrid structure aligns the incentives of all three stakeholder groups: employers pay for a service that demonstrably reduces their turnover costs, public actors fund the social integration component that produces broader labor market benefits, and the solution provider has a revenue model that does not depend on the renewal of any single subsidy.

Finally, while this research was conducted in the French hospitality sector, the implementation framework it generates is not sector-specific. The three conditions for durable inclusive hiring, behavioral assessment, pre-hire preparation, and post-placement continuity, held across hospitality and retail in this sample, and the structural dynamics they address, statistical discrimination under time pressure, ATS lock-in, and the absence of post-placement infrastructure, are present in any hard-to-fill, high-turnover labor market. Logistics, cleaning services, home care, and construction all share the combination of chronic vacancy, credential-based screening, and minimal onboarding investment that this research identifies as the root cause of the problem. The connector-of-trust model described here is therefore not only a hospitality solution, but a labor market mechanism whose first proof of concept could be in hospitality, because the stakes are highest and the urgency most visible there.

6.3 Limitations and directions for future research

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged before its findings are generalized. The first concerns the sample. The 23 organizations interviewed were selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, which introduces a selection bias toward employers who were already willing to discuss their recruitment practices openly, and in several cases toward those who had already experimented with inclusive hiring. Organizations that had no interest in the topic, or whose practices were entirely conventional, are likely underrepresented. The findings on what works should therefore be read as evidence from organizations that had the organizational capacity and cultural openness to try something different, not as a representative picture of the sector as a whole.

The second limitation concerns the measurement of retention outcomes. The evidence on retention improvements reported in this study is drawn from interviewee views rather than from longitudinal administrative data. Employers report that their inclusive hires stayed

longer, that their turnover rates fell, and that specific partnerships produced durable placements. These facts are consistent and credible, but they are not systematically verified against payroll records or HR databases. A quantitative follow-up study tracking retention outcomes at 30, 90, and 180 days across a controlled sample of inclusive and conventionally recruited hires would significantly strengthen the causal claims this research makes.

The third limitation concerns temporal scope. The interviews were conducted between January and May 2026, capturing a snapshot of employer practices at a specific moment in a rapidly evolving labor market. The ministerial designation of occupations officially hard-to-fill, published in May 2025, is likely to accelerate both public investment in inclusion tools and employer experimentation with alternative sourcing channels. The conditions documented in this research may therefore shift faster than a qualitative study conducted at a single point in time can anticipate.

These limitations point toward three directions for future research. The first is a longitudinal quantitative study measuring retention differences between behaviorally assessed and conventionally recruited cohorts in hospitality, with enough sample size to control for role type, establishment size, and the presence or absence of post-placement support. The second is a comparative study examining whether the three-condition adoption model identified here, financial trigger, prior positive experience, and trusted intermediary, holds in other hard-to-fill labor markets such as logistics, home care, and construction, where the structural dynamics are similar but the organizational contexts differ. The third is an evaluation study of the connector-of-trust model described in section 6.2 as it is implemented in practice, tracking not only retention outcomes but the conditions under which employer adoption scales from a first placement to a sustained partnership. That study would transform the directional findings of this research into an evidence base strong enough to inform both public policy and private investment at scale.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Detailed Case Profiles

The table below presents the full profile of each of the 23 interviewees. Cases are identified by their sector code (H = Hotel, R = Restaurant group, Re = Retail) and ordered as in Table 1 of the main text.

Case	Size	Role	Turnover	Use of ATS	Inclusive Hiring	Hard-to-fill positions	Channels used
Hotels (H)							
H1	Corporate	Group HR Development Manager	30%	Yes	Partial	F&B	Journal des Palaces, Indeed, HelloWork
H2	Corporate	HR Director	30%	No	None	F&B, front office, housekeeping	Cooptation, Indeed, Journal des Palaces
H3	SME in group	HR Assistant	80%	No	None	F&B, front office	Indeed, interim agencies, Journal des Palaces
H4	Corporate	HR & Recruitment Assistant	67%	Yes	Partial	F&B, housekeeping, maintenance	Indeed, Hosco, Hôtellerie Restauration board, walk-ins
H5	SME	HR Manager	40%	No	Partial	F&B (post-Covid), entry-level roles	School forums, Journal des Palaces, alumni referrals, Les Déterminés
H6	Corporate	Talent Acquisition Manager	50%	No	None	F&B	Staff referrals (bonused), Journal des Palaces, career site, agencies
H7	Corporate	HR Manager	High*	No	Partial	F&B	Personal networks, spontaneous CVs, France Travail (incl. PMSMP), Indeed, LinkedIn
H8	Corporate	Global Talent Manager	60%	Yes	Active	F&B, housekeeping	Indeed, LinkedIn, Tent for Refugees, RiiSE, ILO Disability Network
H9	SME	HR Manager	High*	No	Partial	F&B, front office	Direct CVs, cooptation, job boards

Case	Size	Role	Turnover	Use of ATS	Inclusive Hiring	Hard-to-fill positions	Channels used
Restaurant Groups (R)							
R1	Corporate	People Project Manager	50%	Yes	Partial	Waiters, kitchen assistant	Indeed, LinkedIn, cooptation, job dating, POEI
R2	Corporate	HR Manager	80%	Yes	None	Cooks	LinkedIn, Indeed, specialist job boards, interim
R3	SME	HR Development Manager	115%	Yes	None	Polyvalent staff (cooks and waiters)	Indeed, ATS, disability-focused associations (occasional)
R4	SME	HR Director	50%	No	None	Entry-level staff, assistant managers, managers	Indeed, LinkedIn, France Travail, Facebook, word-of-mouth, MRS (tried once)
R5	Corporate	HR Manager	5%	No	None	Waiters, runners	Direct CVs, cooptation, Facebook groups, occasional Indeed
R6	Corporate	Talent Acquisition Specialist	50%	Yes	Active	Demi-chef, second, chef	Indeed (boosted), ATS, interim, culinary schools, Thierry Marx partnership
Retail (Re)							
Re1	SME in group	Store Director	86%	Yes	None	Sales staff	France Travail + BK Concept (training + immersion), HQ job postings
Re2	Corporate	HR & Learning Group Manager	50%	No	Partial	Logistics (order pickers, forklift operators, team leaders)	On-site interim agencies, POEI, Les Déterminés
Re3	SME in group	Recruitment Officer	30%	Yes	Active	Logistics	Indeed, HelloWork, France Travail + MRS, Weavers, École de la 2ème Chance
Re4	Corporate	Talent Acquisition Manager & Inclusive Recruitment Officer	50%	Yes	Active	Store managers, sales advisors, logistics agents	Indeed, HelloWork, Expert Retail (POEI), École de la 2ème Chance, ESAT, Simplon
Re5	Corporate	HR Director	30%	Yes	None	Skilled trade roles (butchers, fishmongers)	Internal job board, national sourcing team, Each One, Humando

Case	Size	Role	Turnover	Use of ATS	Inclusive Hiring	Hard-to-fill positions	Channels used
Re6	Corporate	HR Development Manager	17%	Yes	None	Logistics	Indeed, HelloWork, LinkedIn (80%), schools (10–15%), France Travail
Re7	SME in group	Store Director	80%	Yes	None	Sales, fishmonger, fresh departments	Internal referrals, in-store posters, France Travail, ATS multi-posting, job dating
Re8	SME in group	HR Manager	17%	No	None	Sales advisors	Direct applications, career site, local job forums

Note: "High" indicates turnover was acknowledged as significant but not precisely quantified. Inclusive hiring: ***None*** *= no practice in place;* ***Partial*** *= one or two tools tried, not systematic;* ***Active*** *= structured inclusive hiring programme operational. All interviews were conducted by video call and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, except Re1 and Re7 which were conducted in person.*

Appendix B: Sample Interview Transcript

*The following is an anonymised and translated transcript of an interview conducted with the People Project Manager of R1, a corporate restaurant group with approximately 1,100 employees and an annual turnover rate of 50%. The interview was conducted in French, by video call in February 2026, and lasted approximately one hour. The interviewer is referred to as **I** and the interviewee as **R**. Filler words and minor repetitions have been lightly edited for readability.*

I: Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me. Just to give you some context, I am a student at HEC Paris working on a thesis examining inclusive hiring practices in high-turnover sectors. I am currently in a field data collection phase, conducting interviews with HR and recruitment decision-makers across hospitality organizations in France, in order to understand how they recruit today, what the costs of turnover represent for them, and whether inclusive hiring mechanisms could constitute a structural response to chronic labour shortages. Could you start by telling me a bit about your role and about R1?

R: Of course. I come from the hospitality and restaurant world, I trained at a hotel school in Switzerland and joined R1 as an intern about a year ago. After six months of internship and a short-term contract, I am now on a permanent contract as People Project Manager. Concretely, that means I handle projects that the HR team does not always have time for, such as apprenticeships, disability inclusion, and a large digitalisation project right now. We have 34 restaurants and the group keeps growing, with new openings planned in the coming years. Paris is our headquarters for France, and we also have offices in London, Madrid, Milan, Berlin, and Dubai.

I: Which roles do you consider hard to fill?

R: Honestly, all the front-line operational roles. Runners (that is our term for waiters) and kitchen assistant are the two hardest. These are 100% operational, restaurant-floor roles.

I: Do you have data on your turnover rate?

R: Yes. This year it is around 50%. That sounds high, but in hospitality and restaurant it is actually very low. Last year our target was 55% and we came in just below it. This year we are targeting 50%. People do leave the restaurant sector, many do not make a career of it, but we try from the very beginning of the recruitment process to identify people who want to grow. We tell a runner: do you want to stay a runner your whole career, or do you want to learn, move up, and become a chef de rang, then a manager? We build a real action plan for that. Our CEO in France started as a runner nine years ago. One of my HR colleagues started as a barman six years ago. That kind of trajectory is very real here.

I: What keeps people from leaving, beyond internal mobility?

R: Internal mobility is a big part of it. We call it internal Erasmus, people can ask to go work in our Marseille restaurant for a few months, or we open positions in new countries and invite teams to apply internally. Dubai was a good example of that. But we also invest in employee benefits. One of the most valued is a subsidised gym membership,

employees pay around 20 euros a month and access a large network of sports facilities. That resonates strongly with younger generations who want something beyond just the job.

I: What are your main recruitment channels?

R: The primary channel is our ATS, we open a posting on it and it distributes automatically to all the platforms we want: Indeed, LinkedIn, and so on. Beyond that, word of mouth works very well, especially within the Italian community, the cousin of someone who works here comes in, that kind of thing. We also have a referral bonus: if you bring someone who passes their trial period, you receive a financial reward. Spontaneous CVs dropped off at the restaurants also feed into the pipeline, the restaurant sends them to us at headquarters and we follow up. We also organise job dating events. In September, we called all our partner associations and ended up with a queue of over 200 people waiting outside the restaurant for an interview. It was remarkable. The associations we work with include Arpège, Sport dans la Ville, France Travail, and several disability-focused organisations.

I: Do you have an estimate of the cost of a recruitment?

R: I don't have that figure to hand, but I can try to get it from our Talent Acquisition director, she would have it. If you send me an email with that question I will try to get back to you.

I: Moving on to inclusive hiring, I am trying to understand whether inclusive recruitment could be a structural solution to labour shortages in high-turnover sectors. Have you explored this at R1?

R: Yes, and I took over this topic about a year ago when it was quite disorganised. Since then I have been pushing for a more systematic approach. The argument I make internally is simple: yes, it might take a little more time at the beginning to onboard someone with a disability or from a marginalised background, but these are people who stay. We have five or six apprentices with disabilities right now that we absolutely want to keep: they are fantastic, and the whole team dynamic has changed for the better since they arrived. I still have restaurant directors who tell me it takes too much time. I tell them: it takes the same time as anyone else, except this person is more likely to stay.

I: What is the main barrier to inclusive hiring at the restaurant level?

R: There are several. First, team readiness. I would never place someone who needs extra support in a team that is understaffed, has just gone through high turnover, or is about to lose people. The person becomes a lifeline rather than a colleague, and that does not work for anyone. Second, motivation. For a kitchen assisstant position, I am happy to take someone with no experience, but they need to show me they are 100% motivated. I have plenty of experienced candidates applying too. Third, the financial argument is harder to make now. When we were under 250 employees, there were subsidies available for hiring people with disabilities. We now have around 1,100 people in France across all entities, and those subsidies no longer apply. Directors ask: why should I do this if there is no financial help? And I tell them: because it is the right thing to do, and because it

changes the team. R1 is a mission-driven company, our mission is to change people's lives, and that applies to the people we hire, not just the customers we serve.

I: Would a financial argument,for example, showing that inclusive hires have lower turnove, be convincing for those directors?

R: It could be, but only if the figures are very concrete. A director needs to see: "wait, I actually save money here." That is very hard to quantify. What I have found more effective is showing success stories. Once one or two directors see it working, others follow. On the financial side, we are also no longer eligible for most subsidies, which removes one layer of the argument. But I do think that if you could show, clearly and in numbers, that an inclusive hire reduces your recruitment frequency, if a hire that usually costs several thousand euros and has to be repeated every six months is replaced by someone who stays two or three years, that would work well.

I: How do you find the associative ecosystem, is it easy to work with?

R: It is very complicated. There are so many structures, and when I have a large recruitment need, I end up calling fifteen or twenty associations with the same pitch. If there were something like a LinkedIn or Indeed for inclusive hiring, where I post one offer and all relevant associations and candidates see it, with clear information about available subsidies and how to apply for them, that would be transformative. Right now, even initiatives that exist, like the POEI scheme through France Travail, are so administratively complex that small teams simply cannot use them. I am the only person handling disability topics at R1, and it is not my only responsibility. For a company that does not have even one dedicated person, it is simply not feasible.

I: Is the complexity a problem of awareness or of process?

R: Both, I think. Many companies do not even know what exists. I myself discovered entire categories of support I was entitled to only because an association contacted me and asked whether I was aware of them. And even once you are aware, the application process is very heavy. Everything could be so much simpler, a single website, a single contact person who handles the paperwork with you. That would make a real difference. We have also produced an internal disability handbook, a document that explains what different types of disability are, how to support a colleague with a disability, and how to declare a disability if you have one. Many employees are afraid to declare because they fear judgement. The handbook tries to address that directly. And in terms of training, it does not need to be a formal certification, just half an hour with a restaurant director to walk through the basics, explain the specific needs of the person being onboarded, and answer questions. That is often enough.

I: Thank you very much, this has been extremely useful.

R: My pleasure. It is great to see people working seriously on this topic.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

The following protocol was applied across all 23 employer interviews. It is structured around four thematic areas. Questions are written here as indication: the protocol was designed as a guide, not a rigid script, and follow-up questions were used to explore reasoning, request specific examples, and pursue dimensions raised spontaneously by the interviewee. The protocol was piloted on the first interviews and refined to add more explicit questions on post-placement practices and onboarding support, which emerged as a significant theme early in the data collection phase.

Introduction

Before starting the recording, I introduced the research context, confirmed the participant's verbal consent to being recorded, and clarified that the organization would be anonymized and referred to by sector and size category only. The participant was also informed that they were under no obligation to answer any question, and that financial data in particular would be treated with full confidentiality.

Block 1 - Recruitment context

Objective: understand the organization's labor market situation, the roles that are hardest to fill or retain, and the employer's own diagnosis of why candidates leave.

1. Could you start by describing your organization briefly, sector, size, and your own role in recruitment decisions?
2. Which positions are currently the most difficult to fill or to retain in your organization?
3. When you think of a recent departure in one of these hard-to-fill roles, what happened? How long did the person stay, and what was the reason for leaving?
4. What is the average tenure of someone in these roles in your organization?
5. In your view, why do candidates leave these positions?Is it primarily compensation, working conditions, career perspectives, or something else?
6. Do you see this as a temporary or structural problem?

Block 2 - Current recruitment solutions and their costs

Objective: map the channels and tools currently used, understand their financial and operational costs, and estimate the total cost of a hard-to-fill departure for the organization.

1. Which recruitment channels do you currently use for these hard-to-fill roles? (job boards, agencies, referrals, social media, France Travail, other)
2. Which of these channels works best for you, and why?
3. Do you use an ATS or any recruitment management tool? How does it fit into your process?
4. What does a single recruitment in a hard-to-fill role cost you, roughly, in direct costs (job boards, agency fees) and in HR time?

5. Beyond the direct recruitment cost, how do you estimate the full cost of a departure, including vacancy time, productivity loss during onboarding, and manager time?
6. How many times per year do you recruit for these positions?

Block 3 - Perceived value of retention improvement and openness to change

Objective: understand what better retention would mean concretely for the organization, and what conditions would be required to shift existing recruitment habits.

1. If you could reduce your turnover in these roles by 20 to 30 percentage points, what would that mean concretely for your organization, operationally and financially?
2. What would it take for you to change your current recruitment approach, what would need to be true about a new solution for you to adopt it?
3. Have you already tried any alternative recruitment approaches? What happened?
4. What are the main internal obstacles to changing your recruitment practices, budget, time, management, something else?
5. Is there anything you have always wanted to try but never had the resources or support to test?

Block 4 - Experience with inclusive hiring

Objective: explore whether the organization has already recruited candidates further from employment, what the experience has been, and what barriers shape their openness to this approach.

1. Have you ever recruited someone who was far from the labour market, for example, a long-term unemployed person, someone with a disability, a refugee, or someone coming out of a social reintegration programme?
2. If yes: how did you find them, and how did the experience go? Did they stay longer or shorter than a typical hire?
3. If no: is this something you have considered? What has stopped you?
4. Do you work with any associations, insertion structures, or public employment services (France Travail, POEI, PMSMP) for recruitment? How do you find these partnerships?
5. In your view, what would make inclusive recruitment more accessible or attractive for an organization like yours, better information, financial incentives, administrative simplification, something else?
6. If someone told you that candidates from inclusive hiring channels tend to stay significantly longer than standard hires, would that change your approach? What would you need to see to believe it?
7. Is there anything on this topic that you feel is misunderstood or overlooked in the broader conversation about labour shortages in your sector?

Closing

Thanking of the participant, confirmation again that the organization would be fully anonymized, and offer to share the final thesis when completed. In several cases, participants also shared supplementary internal documents (turnover figures, ATS configurations, recruitment cost breakdowns) at this stage or later by email.

Appendix D: Statement on the Use of AI Tools

This thesis was researched, conceptualized, and written by the author. All intellectual contributions are the author's. During the final stages of preparation, the author made use of Claude (Anthropic) for the following specific and limited purposes: paragraph-level language editing and stylistic revision of pre-existing drafts; translation of French-language material into English; and formatting of content in LaTeX. In all cases, the AI operated on material produced by the author and under the author's direction and judgment. No substantive intellectual decisions were delegated to or generated by the tool. AI-generated text was reviewed, edited, and approved by the author before inclusion.