

# Chapter 25

## COVID-19 and Its Employment Dimension in the Tourism Sector

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### **ABSTRACT**

*With its labor-intensive nature, the tourism sector is critically important for providing employment volume and foreign exchange reserves in the national economies. The tourism sector is influenced by the events such as economic crises, wars, and epidemics faster than other sectors. The world is facing an unprecedented global health, social, and economic emergency as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel and tourism are one the most impacted sectors with a great amount of decline of international demand amid global travel restrictions to constrain the virus. In this study, first of all, the literature on the effect of the COVID-19 virus on the workforce in the tourism sector was included. It identified the impacts of technology on the tourism sector with the pandemic, and suggestions for the future of employment in the tourism sector were presented.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The tourism movements, which tends to grow continuously in the absence of extraordinary circumstances, are among the economically priority livelihoods of many countries across the world. Although tourism mobility is an important economic resource for countries, it is not always possible to maintain its control. Many events such as war, terrorist incidents and natural disasters may interrupt tourism activity. Diseases and epidemics can be listed among these events. Likewise, tourism activities, which were affected by the epidemics such as Ebola, SARS, bird flu in the past, are now exposed to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic that broke out in Wuhan, China and spread nearly all over the world, and

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that was declared as a “pandemic” by the World Health Organization (Özaltın Türker, 2020: 208). The whole world is paying great efforts to combat this virus, and yet, it has led to hundreds of thousands of people losing their lives, the emergence of the most significant economic problem of the century, and the increase in the number of people who are unemployed, unhappy and worried about the future. This epidemic undoubtedly affects all sectors more or less. But perhaps it has caused the biggest damage to the tourism sector (Alaeddinoglu and Rol, 2020: 251).

The world has faced many economic crises, major and minor, over the last hundred years. The measures taken to prevent the spread of the epidemic have decreased the production volume, leading to a decline in supply. The measures for business life have reduced production and also caused millions of people worldwide to lose their jobs, in other words their income. Experiencing such a situation leads to a global weakness in demand (Bulut and Pınar, 2020: 222-223). Millions of workers in various labor markets around the world are seen to have severely been influenced by the pandemic through job and income losses as a result of the spread of the COVID-19. The fact that states close their borders and take measures to reduce human mobility inside and impose prohibitions for preventing the spread of the epidemic leads to restrictions on economic activity. Some businesses are downsizing, while others are closing temporarily or permanently (Kara, 2020: 279).

This study aims to provide information on effects of the COVID-19 epidemic that has engulfed the whole world on employment in tourism sector. This information gives details about the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic in Turkey and the world, and the impact of the epidemic on employment in the tourism sector and what can be done in this field in the future. It also examines the possible changes in the tourism sector in terms of technology during the pandemic. The study also provides international and national statistical information.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **COVID-19 and Employment in the Tourism Sector**

Tourism is a labor intensive and significant sector that creates employment for countries. The tourism sector has significant effects in leveling the balance of payments of a country, generating income, thus increasing the country’s foreign currency income, ensuring mobilization of many other related sectors (construction, food and beverage, entertainment, transportation, etc.), increasing the infrastructure and superstructure investments and most importantly, reducing the burden of unemployment problem by creating employment opportunities. (Yıldız, 2011: 69).

Generally, it could be argued that tourism sector creates solutions to unexpected problems. This sector is a major source of employment for low-skilled as well as high-skilled workers. A considerable number of seasonal, part-time, and temporary positions are available in the sector. Under normal conditions, the tourism sector could present various employment opportunities for diverse populations such as migrants, women, students and older workers. In addition, employment opportunities in the tourism sector are offered not just in major cities but also in rural areas including coastal cities and other areas where frail economic conditions lead to only limited employment opportunities. When share of tourism in total employment is considered in some European countries, it could be noted that this share is 15.7% in Iceland while it is 13.5% in Spain, 10.3% in Ireland, 10% in Greece, and 9.8% in Portugal. On the other hand, this rate is only 7.7% in Turkey (OECD, 2020: 5-6).

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