



# ISSUES IN ENSURING WORKFORCE AVAILABILITY IN TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines workforce security in the tourism industry. It focuses on seasonality, labor shortages, employee motivation, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tourism is highly vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations, which create an unstable labor market dominated by temporary, part-time, and migrant work. These conditions lead to high turnover and difficulties in retaining skilled employees. Low wages and poor working environments further reduce job satisfaction and morale. The study analyzes how these challenges affect both workers and employers, emphasizing the growing reliance on migrant labor in many regions. It also explores strategies to mitigate problems, such as improving motivation, offering better conditions, and adopting flexible employment models. In addition, the paper considers the long-term effects of COVID-19 on tourism employment, including shifts in demand, migration patterns, and new health and safety standards. The findings provide actionable insights for policymakers and industry leaders. They propose practical measures to build a more stable and sustainable workforce. By addressing the root causes of labor insecurity, the study contributes to developing effective workforce strategies and a more resilient labor market.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic activities on a global scale. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), the sector accounts for over 10% of global GDP and provides millions of jobs. However, securing a qualified and stable workforce has become an increasing

challenge, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Issues such as seasonality, low wages, labor shortages, migration flows, and generational differences reduce the attractiveness of tourism professions and threaten the long-term sustainability of the industry.

Main problems in securing the workforce are:

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1. The seasonal dynamics of tourism
2. Motivating employees
3. The shortage of skilled labor in the tourism industry
4. Migrant labor force
5. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging trends.

This research also carries clear policy relevance. It offers evidence-based insights to guide governments and institutions in stabilizing employment and strengthening workforce sustainability in tourism.

## 2 SEASONAL DYNAMICS IN TOURISM

Tourism is widely acknowledged as one of the economic sectors most significantly affected by seasonal fluctuations. Seasonality in tourism, a globally pervasive phenomenon, leads to substantial variations in the demand for tourism services, resulting in an uneven distribution of resource utilization throughout the calendar year (Weidner, 2009). The principal determinants of tourism seasonality include climatic conditions, national holiday schedules, and dominant cultural practices, all of which significantly shape travel behavior.

Among natural factors, climatic conditions exert the strongest influence, while socio-cultural determinants primarily include school vacations and periods of annual leave (Fernández-Morales et al., 2016). Despite continuous efforts to promote year-round tourism activities, the concentration of tourists flows during specific peak periods remains a prevailing pattern.

The consequences of such seasonality are multifaceted. During peak seasons, the tourism industry often experiences the overexploitation of human and material resources, whereas off-season periods are characterized by underutilization, resulting in reduced labor engagement, lower revenue generation, and inefficient consumption of operational resources such as food supplies, heating, and electricity (Fernández-Morales et al., 2016).

Strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of seasonality have focused on the development of alternative forms of tourism—such as cultural, wellness, and business tourism—and the stimulation of off-season travel through targeted

discounts and the organization of special events (Kotler et al., 2016). Within this framework, sustainable tourism management, supported by appropriate public policy measures, emerges as a critical strategy for reducing the sector's dependency on seasonal demand cycles.

## 3 MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

While the aesthetic and experiential appeal of the tourism sector plays a vital role in attracting workers, it is equally important for tourism employers to align their offerings with the expectations and needs of the labor force they aim to engage. Employment in tourism must be viewed not as a unilateral offer but as a bilateral relationship—one in which both the client and the employee hold significant stakes. In this context, the employer must establish a system built on the principle that “a satisfied customer is the result of a satisfied employee.”

The concept of “good service” in the tourism industry transcends mere functionality; it is not sufficient to assume that satisfactory service alone will prompt customers to recommend a business to others (Collier et al., 2018, p. 150). Instead, clients increasingly demand high levels of perceived effort, observable empathy, and unexpected positive experiences from service employees. This shift places a renewed focus not on *why* quality service matters, but rather on *how* organizations can support their employees in delivering flexible and customer-oriented service experiences.

Contemporary clients exhibit more sophisticated expectations than in previous decades, and their direct interactions with employees often represent the decisive factor in whether a service or establishment gains a favorable reputation. Therefore, ensuring the motivation of employees becomes crucial for service excellence.

To cultivate a workforce capable of delivering these elevated service standards, employers must first identify both motivational drivers and potential inhibitors within the workplace. One such motivational factor is job autonomy. Research indicates that even highly experienced and competent employees may refrain from displaying adaptive service behaviors if they perceive a lack of autonomy in their roles (Leischnig & Kasper-Brauer, 2015). Similarly, fostering employee

creativity contributes significantly to service quality, especially in a work environment where the definition of “personalized” service continues to evolve.

In response to these dynamics, effective leadership becomes instrumental. Leadership practices that emphasize empowerment—specifically through decentralization of authority and the delegation of responsibilities—can activate intrinsic motivation among employees and enhance the predictability of service-oriented behaviors (Lin et al., 2020). Such leadership approaches equip employees to navigate the complexities and broaden scopes of their roles more effectively.

Also, higher salary, permanent employment, training and professional development, better work environment, and work-life balance.

Ultimately, only by addressing these motivational dimensions can organizations secure a workforce that is both capable and enthusiastic in meeting the expectations of increasingly demanding clientele in the tourism sector.

#### **4 SKILLED LABOR IN TOURISM: SHORTAGES AND CHALLENGES**

The global tourism sector, a vital component of numerous national economies, has persistently grappled with a shortage of skilled labor. This challenge has become increasingly pronounced due to rising international tourist flows, heightened consumer expectations, and the rapid digitalization of tourism services. The lack of adequately trained personnel presents a significant obstacle for both developed and developing countries, undermining service quality, reducing competitiveness, and threatening the long-term sustainability of tourism enterprises.

A principal driver of this labor shortfall is the persistent misalignment between formal education systems and the practical needs of the tourism labor market. Many vocational and higher education institutions have failed to adapt curricula to reflect the evolving operational realities of the industry, thereby producing graduates whose competencies often fall short of industry requirements (Baum, 2012). This disjunction contributes to skills gaps that are not easily remedied through on-the-job training alone.

Compounding this issue is the widespread perception of tourism-related occupations as low-status, poorly remunerated, and lacking in long-term career prospects—a view particularly prevalent among younger generations (Richardson, 2010).

The seasonal and unpredictable nature of tourism employment further exacerbates labor instability. A significant proportion of jobs within the sector are characterized by temporary contracts, part-time hours, or dependence on fluctuating demand, all of which deter long-term commitment and investment in skill development (Joppe, 2012). Geographical imbalances also contribute to the challenge, with tourist destinations experiencing acute labor shortages during off-peak periods, despite surpluses during high-demand seasons (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011).

Technological transformation has redefined the skillsets required within the sector, introducing a growing demand for digital competencies, adaptability, and multilingual communication. Despite these shifts, education and training frameworks have been slow to respond, leaving many workers unprepared for roles involving online marketing, digital booking platforms, and smart tourism technologies. As a result, the demand for hybrid professional profiles, those combining traditional hospitality expertise with digital literacy—has increased sharply.

Migration trends have also significantly influenced labor supply dynamics. In many regions, skilled tourism workers have transitioned to higher-paying industries or migrated abroad, deepening domestic workforce deficits. Concurrently, the sector’s reliance on migrant and seasonal labor has grown, raising critical concerns regarding labor rights, working conditions, and the socio-cultural integration of foreign workers (Baum et al., 2016).

In response, a variety of remedial measures have been implemented, including the establishment of public-private training partnerships, employer branding strategies, and the promotion of more inclusive employment policies. Nevertheless, in the absence of strategic and sustained investment in human capital—and without structural reform in how tourism careers are framed, supported, and valued, these efforts have produced limited long-term results.

In conclusion, the skilled labor shortage in tourism during the 2010–2020 period reflects a complex interplay of factors, including educational inadequacies, precarious employment structures, technological change, and migration dynamics. Addressing this challenge in a post-pandemic context necessitates systemic reorientation toward workforce development and the repositioning of tourism as a viable, stable, and desirable career path.

## 5 THE ROLE OF MIGRANTS AS A WORKFORCE IN TOURISM

Migrant workers constitute an essential component of the labor force within the global tourism industry, particularly in economies experiencing persistent shortages of domestic labor for low-wage, low-skill, and seasonal positions. The tourism sector, characterized by its labor-intensive structure and pronounced fluctuations in demand, increasingly depends on migrant labor to maintain service continuity and operational flexibility during peak periods.

Migrants are commonly employed in a broad spectrum of occupational roles—including housekeeping, food and beverage service, kitchen support, logistics, and maintenance—many of which are regarded as unattractive by the local population (Joppe, 2012). These roles, though critical to the sector's functionality, often remain invisible in public discourse. As Joppe (2012) aptly describes, migrant workers serve as the “invisible heroes” of tourism, sustaining daily operations under often strenuous and undervalued conditions. Despite their contributions, migrant employees frequently encounter systemic challenges such as low remuneration, precarious employment, restricted access to social protection, and limited upward mobility.

In the European context, countries such as Spain and the United Kingdom exhibit particularly high reliance on migrant labor within their tourism economies. According to Baum et al. (2016), migrant workers play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between labor supply and seasonal demand, especially during peak tourist periods when domestic labor availability is insufficient. Nonetheless, migrant integration into the labor market is hindered by several barriers, including linguistic obstacles, discriminatory practices, and

exclusion from vocational training and skill development opportunities.

Beyond their functional role in service delivery, migrants contribute significantly to the cultural diversification of tourism services. Their presence facilitates the provision of authentic, multicultural guest experiences, supports multilingual communication, and enriches culinary diversity. However, without targeted institutional support and inclusive human resource policies, the sector often fails to capitalize on these advantages. As Ruhs and Anderson (2010) argue, the sustainable incorporation of migrant labor in tourism depends on the existence of supportive institutional frameworks and the consistent enforcement of fair labor standards.

In summary, migrant workers are indispensable to the structural and operational resilience of the tourism industry. However, realizing the full potential of their contribution requires more than functional engagement, it necessitates policy-driven efforts to ensure social inclusion, equitable labor conditions, and institutional recognition. A sustainable and mutually beneficial tourism workforce can only be achieved through the systematic protection and empowerment of migrant employees.

## 6 TOURISM, MOBILITY, AND LABOR PRECARIETY IN THE AFTERMATH OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented in its global scale and velocity, disrupted virtually every aspect of human mobility and economic life. Among the hardest-hit sectors was tourism, which—due to its intrinsic reliance on unrestricted movement and interpersonal interaction, was swiftly paralyzed by the international health crisis. Large-scale cruise operations and international air travel were identified as significant vectors in the early global spread of the virus (Chinazzi et al., 2020), triggering a cascade of restrictive public health interventions aimed at containment.

Governments worldwide implemented an array of emergency measures, including mandatory vaccination policies, national lockdowns, border closures, restrictions on public gatherings, and stringent limitations on tourism and hospitality services. In this context, the notion of “social distancing” became a normative social practice,

fundamentally altering the nature of interpersonal communication and public life (Long, 2020). The pandemic not only reconfigured the operational environment of the tourism sector but also challenged societal perceptions of the right to travel, a freedom long viewed in many industrialized societies as a normalized entitlement.

Although not formally codified as a legal right, tourism has been conceptualized as a form of social participation that ought to be accessible across socioeconomic strata. As McCabe and Diekmann (2015) argue, while "tourism may not be considered a human right and there is no legal basis to support such a right" (p. 202), it constitutes a vital component of social inclusion and well-being. The interruption of tourism, therefore, extended beyond economic loss—it also curtailed individual freedoms and deepened social inequities.

For many, the pandemic marked a pivotal period in their educational, professional, and social development. Online learning modalities replaced traditional instruction, while job insecurity and sectoral collapse significantly affected their participation in the tourism labor market. The suspension of international and domestic travel restricted not only leisure opportunities but also employment prospects, especially for younger cohorts entering or establishing themselves within the industry.

The tourism labor market experienced a dramatic contraction. With mass layoffs and business closures, the sector witnessed a migration of workers—both skilled and unskilled—toward other industries perceived as more stable or resilient (Robinson et al., 2019). As a result, employment within tourism became markedly precarious, with widespread displacement of labor and erosion of job security. This labor exodus has led to an enduring imbalance between supply and demand, posing significant challenges for post-pandemic recovery.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, industry continues to grapple with a dual crisis: a quantitative shortage of available workers and a qualitative gap in requisite skills. Despite gradual improvements in global mobility and the partial resurgence of tourist flows, an unresolved question remains—whether the labor force that

once powered the sector will return, and under what conditions. The path forward requires a reconsideration of employment structures, workplace protections, and long-term strategies to foster resilience, equity, and attractiveness in tourism-related professions.

## 7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Most of the questionnaires were administered online, facilitating efficient dissemination and enabling access to a broader and more diverse respondent pool. This method allowed the researchers to reach a larger sample size within a relatively short timeframe and with minimal financial resources. Furthermore, online participation ensured respondent anonymity, a factor known to increase the likelihood of receiving candid and accurate responses. To complement online distribution and enhance response diversity, a portion of the surveys was also conducted in person.

Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- A total sample size of 94 respondents, ensuring sufficient statistical validity.
- The questionnaire was structured into three distinct sections, with different kinds of questions.
- Section I focuses on demographic information, including five questions: (1) the tourism sector in which the respondent is currently or was previously employed, (2) their work experience in the tourism industry, (3) age group, (4) education level, and (5) gender issues.
- Section II examined participants' attitudes toward issues related to ensuring workforce availability in tourism. This section employed a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to evaluate perceptions of different coping strategies for occupational stress.
- Section III contains different types of questions: dichotomous (yes/no), multiple-answer questions, single-answer questions from the provided options, as well as one open-ended question.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1, covering gender, education level, age group, sector of employment in tourism, and work experience.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)
<b>Which sector of tourism do you work in or have worked in?</b>	Hospitality	42
	Travel Agencies	28
	Guide/Animator	10
	Restaurant Industry	5
	Other: _____	9
<b>How many years of experience do you have in tourism?</b>	Less than 1 year	11
	1–3 years	32
	4–6 years	26
	More than 6 years	25
<b>Gender</b>	Man	36
	Women	58
<b>Age group</b>	Less than 25 years	12
	25-35	31
	36- 46	28
	47-57	12
	More than 57	11
<b>Educational level</b>	High school	29
	First level of faculty	61
	Second level of faculty	4

Source: Authors' research

The data obtained from these demographic categories were analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' backgrounds and to assess their potential influence on the perceptions of the issues under investigation.

Subsequently, we constructed Table 2 based on the collected responses and calculated the mean score for each statement.

**Table 2. Selected Questions Related to Ensuring Workforce Availability in Tourism Issues**

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	$\bar{x}$
1	How much does seasonality affect your work/workplace?	5	9	30	33	17	3.51
2	How satisfied are you with the working conditions in the tourism sector?	9	24	38	19	4	2.84
3	How much do you think the government/institutions should be involved in solving the workforce shortage in tourism?	5	14	24	40	11	3.40
4	Do you think migrant labor is a solution to the workforce shortage?	19	28	5	0	42	2.18

Source: Authors' research

In the process of data collection through the survey, the responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For each question in Section 2 of the questionnaire, we calculated the mean score, which offered valuable insight into the general attitudes of respondents toward ensuring workforce availability in tourism issues. This statistical method enabled us to identify

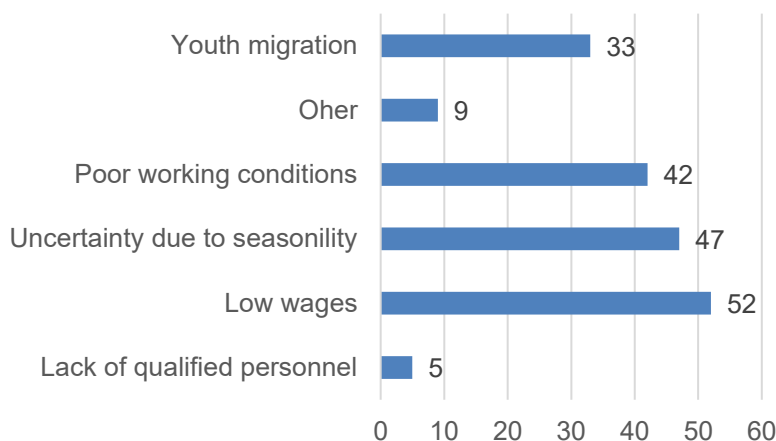
trends, recurring patterns, and notable variations across the responses. These findings will be further elaborated in the subsequent sections of the paper.

Finally, we present the questions from Section 3, along with a graphical representation of the given answers.

**Table 3. Dichotomous (Yes/No)**

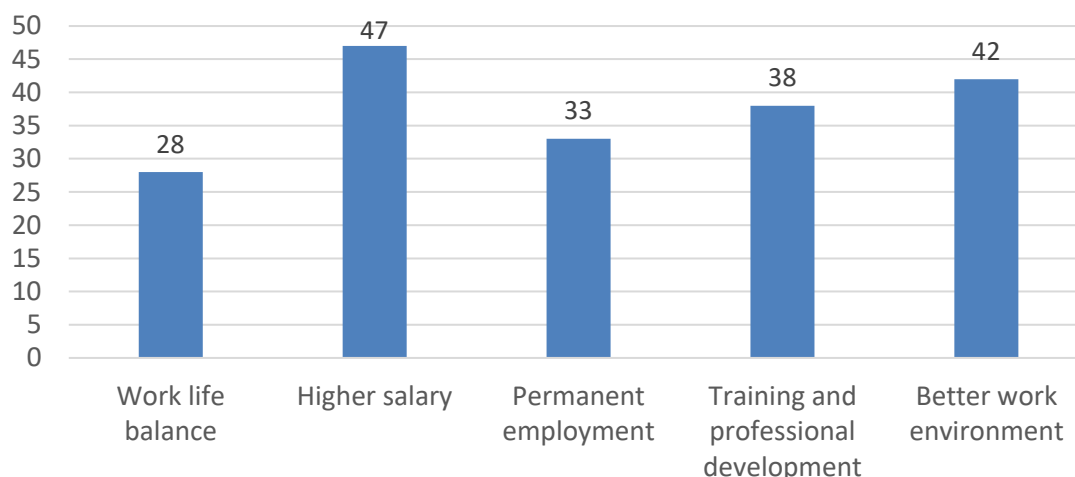
Questions	Yes	No
Have you ever been out of work due to the end of the tourist season?	47	47
Have you worked with migrant/foreign labor?	57	37
Are there still difficulties in finding the workforce in tourism after the pandemic?	57	37

Source: Authors' research



**Figure 1. What are the biggest challenges in securing the workforce in tourism?**

Source: Authors' research



**Figure 2. What would motivate you most to stay in the tourism industry?**

Source: Authors' research

Figure 1 illustrates the biggest challenges in securing a workforce in the tourism industry, based on the authors' own research. The challenges include factors like labor shortages, seasonality, and low employee motivation. This figure allows respondents to select multiple challenges that they believe are most significant in the tourism sector.

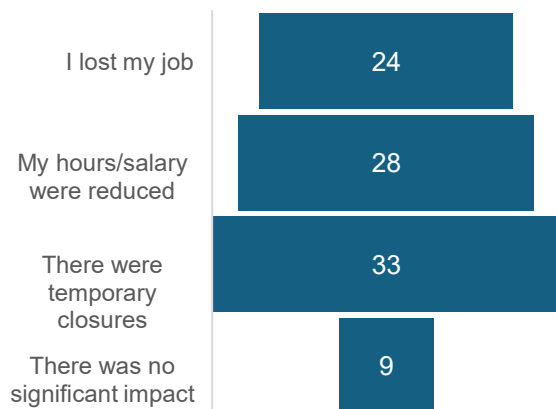
Figure 2 presents the factors that would most motivate individuals to stay in the tourism industry, based on the authors' own research. It highlights key motivators such as higher salaries, job

stability, and better work-life balance. Respondents were asked to select the factors they consider most influential in their decision to remain in the sector.

Figure 3 shows the key factors that would motivate individuals to stay in the tourism industry, with respondents prioritizing aspects like salary, job stability, and work-life balance. These factors were identified as the most influential based on the authors' own research.

And finally, the open-ended question was: "What measures would help the most in improving

workforce supply in tourism?" The responses obtained can be seen in Table 4.



**Figure 3.** How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your work in tourism  
 Source: Authors' research

**Table 4.** What measures would help the most in improving workforce supply in tourism

No.	Answer	Frequency (n)
1.	Better wages and benefits	39
2.	More stable employment contracts	16
3.	Better training and professional development programs	6
4.	Government incentives for businesses	5
5.	Improved working conditions	18
6.	Addressing migration patterns and youth retention	10

Source: Authors' research

## 8 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The results of the survey reveal the following key findings:

- Seasonality ( $\bar{x} = 3.51$ ): Most respondents acknowledge the significant impact of seasonality on their work, highlighting the cyclical nature of the tourism industry.
- Job Satisfaction ( $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ): Satisfaction with working conditions is notably low, suggesting dissatisfaction with current industry practices.
- Institutional Involvement ( $\bar{x} = 3.40$ ): Respondents emphasize the need for greater government involvement to address workforce shortages.

- Migrant Labor ( $\bar{x} = 2.18$ ): There is skepticism regarding the role of migrant labor as a sustainable solution to the workforce shortage.
- Dichotomous Responses:
- Seasonality-related Unemployment: 50% of respondents have experienced job loss due to seasonality, confirming the unstable nature of tourism employment.
- Migrant Labor: The majority have worked with migrant labor (57), reflecting the sector's reliance on migrant labor.
- Post-Pandemic Workforce Issues: 57 respondents agree that workforce challenges persist following the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating ongoing labor shortages.
- Key Challenges and Motivators:
- Biggest Challenges: The most significant challenges include low wages, lack of career progression, and high seasonality.
- Motivators to Stay in Tourism: Respondents are primarily motivated by improved wages, stable contracts, and career development opportunities.

## 9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Seasonality has a significant impact on the workforce. To mitigate its effects, tourism can be diversified by developing services that attract tourists even during off-peak seasons, such as cultural and wellness tourism.

It is crucial to improve working conditions in tourism, given the low satisfaction levels among employees. Employers should invest in enhancing the work environment, workplace safety, and providing skill development training.

The results show high expectations for greater government involvement in solving the workforce shortage. The government can offer financial incentives to businesses that hire local workers and provide educational programs to develop skills.

While some consider migrant labor a solution, it is appropriate to encourage less reliance on it by developing local talent. Policies should focus on retaining youth in tourism and offering long-term career paths.

To improve satisfaction and retain employees, tourism businesses should offer higher wages, stable employment contracts, and better working conditions, such as flexible working hours and work-life balance.

The pandemic has had lasting effects on the workforce. Employers should offer stability, career progression, and rebuild trust and interest in working in tourism by ensuring safety measures and clear health protocols.

Responses to the open-ended question indicate the need for better wages, stable contracts, and professional development. Employers should offer competitive compensation packages and invest in employee skill development.

## 10 CONCLUSION

The results of this study provide a thorough examination of the current challenges faced by the tourism sector in securing a stable and sustainable workforce. The demographic data revealed that a significant portion of respondents are employed in the hospitality sector, with many having between 1 and 6 years of experience. This indicates a relatively young and dynamic workforce but also highlights the vulnerability of the sector to workforce turnover and seasonal employment.

One of the most pressing issues identified in the survey is the impact of seasonality. The majority of respondents reported that seasonality significantly affects their work, leading to job instability and, in some cases, unemployment during the off-season. This seasonal pattern is detrimental to the overall job security within the tourism sector, as employees face periods of inactivity and income loss. This is further supported by the responses to the dichotomous questions, where 50% of respondents have experienced unemployment due to the end of the tourist season, emphasizing the precarious nature of employment in tourism.

In terms of job satisfaction, the respondents expressed notable dissatisfaction with the current working conditions in the tourism sector. The mean score for job satisfaction ( $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ) indicates that working conditions are a significant concern, with issues such as low wages, limited career progression, and lack of stability being common complaints. These factors contribute to high

turnover rates and challenges in attracting and retaining skilled labor. The call for greater government involvement ( $\bar{x} = 3.40$ ) reflects a widespread belief that institutional support is necessary to address these systemic issues, including workforce shortages.

The role of migrant labor in addressing workforce shortages also emerged as a key point of discussion. While migrant workers are commonly employed in the tourism industry, respondents expressed skepticism about migrant labor as a sustainable solution. The mean score for this question ( $\bar{x} = 2.18$ ) suggests that respondents view migrant labor as a temporary fix rather than a long-term solution to the sector's workforce needs. This raises concerns about the sustainability of relying on external labor sources, particularly given the current challenges in migration patterns and the need for a more stable domestic workforce.

Moreover, the post-pandemic labor shortage remains a critical issue. Despite the recovery in the tourism industry, respondents overwhelmingly reported ongoing difficulties in finding workers (57 respondents indicated 'Yes' to post-pandemic labor challenges). This suggests that the tourism sector has not fully recovered from the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and further measures are needed to address labor shortages.

The responses to the open-ended question on improving workforce supply in tourism revealed several recurring themes. The most commonly suggested measures include improving wages and benefits, offering more stable and long-term employment contracts, enhancing training and professional development programs, and improving overall working conditions. Respondents also highlighted the importance of government support in the form of incentives for businesses and addressing migration patterns to retain youth in the sector.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive reforms within the tourism sector to address the multifaceted issues related to workforce sustainability. The findings point to the necessity of improving working conditions, providing job stability, and increasing government involvement to create a more attractive and sustainable work environment for employees. These reforms are crucial for

addressing the ongoing challenges in securing a stable workforce, particularly in light of the seasonal nature of the industry and the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. By implementing these recommendations, the tourism sector can enhance workforce retention, reduce turnover, and ensure long-term growth and stability in this vital industry.

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