

# SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM: COMPARATIVE ANALYZES AND RESPONSE POLICIES

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## Abstract:

*The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to the global economy. By the end of the first quarter of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had abruptly stopped international travel and had a significant impact on the tourism industry. Tourism is an important sector of the international economy, accounting for 10.3% of global GDP, 29% of world exports of services and about 300 million jobs globally in 2019. It is also an important source of income and employment for developed and developing countries. By October 2020, COVID-19 had infected more than 39.6 million people and caused the death of more than 1,108,000 worldwide, and globally the spread shows no signs of reduction. In this context, it is estimated that international tourist arrivals will fall by 60 to 80% in 2020, tourism spending will not return to the levels before the crisis by 2024 and more than 120 million jobs are in danger of being lost. The paper presents a brief comparative analysis of the potential economic and social effects of tourism stopping, in the short and medium term, in the main tourist destinations, as well as in those countries highly dependent on tourism (as a share of GDP).*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, tourism, economic impact, health crisis, social reactions, unemployment

**JEL Classification:** L83, Z32, Z38

## 1. Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the largest sectors in the world, determining socio-economic development and generating employment. The benefits of tourism have spread far beyond its direct impact in terms of GDP and employment; there are also indirect benefits generated by supply chain links with other sectors, as well as the impact it has induced.

In 2019, 1458 million international tourist arrivals were registered, and tourism revenues amounted to 1.478 trillion dollars, to which another 254 billion dollars from passenger transport is added.

The huge and immediate shock generated by the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry affects the economy in general. Health communication strategies and measures (eg social distancing, travel and mobility bans, community blockades, home campaigns, congestion limitation, etc.) have stopped travel, tourism and leisure worldwide.

Over time, tourism, being an industry extremely vulnerable to many environmental, political, socio-economic risks, has become accustomed and has become resilient in its recovery from various crises and outbreaks (eg terrorism, earthquakes, Ebola, SARS, Zika) (Novelli, Burgess, Jones and Ritchie, 2018). However, the unprecedented nature, circumstances and impacts of COVID-19 demonstrate that this crisis is not only different, but it can also have profound and long-term structural and transformative changes in tourism as a socio-economic activity and industry.

The revised scenarios of the various international organizations indicate that the shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic could mean a 58-78% decline in the international tourism economy in 2020, depending on the duration of the crisis and the speed with which travel and tourism. This would translate into a drop in visitor spending from \$ 1.478 trillion in 2019 to between \$ 310 and \$ 570 billion in 2020. More than 100 million direct tourism jobs are also at risk of closure, many of them in small and medium-sized enterprises that employ a large share of women and young people.

In the short term, domestic tourism is expected to provide the main chance to stimulate recovery and support the tourism sector, which is significant in many countries. Even though domestic tourism flows have been severely affected by restrictions on the movement of

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people, however, with the lifting of isolation measures it has begun to revive. However, the likelihood that domestic tourism will compensate for the decline in international tourism flows, especially in destinations heavily dependent on international markets, is very low.

Tourism losses actually mean significant macroeconomic effects in countries, regions and cities where this sector supports many jobs and businesses. Estimates suggest that the tourism shock could reduce global GDP by \$ 1.17 trillion (or 1.5% of GDP) in the most optimistic scenario (representing a four-month tourism stalemate) and up to \$ 2.22 trillion. dollars (2.8% of GDP), in the scenario of an eight-month stalemate. Due to supply chain links, the negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy could be three times worse than the loss of tourism revenues, and unemployment in some countries could increase by more than 20 percentage points.

## **2. Literature review**

International tourism is among the economic sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of the health crisis on tourism will be unequal in space and time. Crises can be a trigger for change, but, as Hall et al. (2020) show, no crisis has so far been a significant transition event for tourism.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates a huge global economic impact: international tourist arrivals are estimated to fall by 58-78%, causing a loss of between 910 million and 1.17 trillion dollars in export earnings in tourism and 100-120 million jobs in tourism. Compared to the impact of September 11, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are estimated to be seven times greater and are considered the largest decline in history (UNWTO, 2020).

In the pessimistic scenario of the OECD, global GDP growth will decline by 1.5% in 2020, and global trade volume will fall by as much as 3.75%, while other predictions indicate even more dramatic effects (McKibbin and Fernando, 2020).

The pandemic crisis has also negatively affected domestic tourism activities, with measures taken by various countries to reduce the spread of the virus leading to a sharp reduction in so-called "social consumption" (restrictions including domestic tourism, visits to cultural events, fairs, visits to restaurants, etc.) (Hoque et al., 2020).

Shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (declared as a pandemic by WHO, 12 March 2020), research has focused on the impact of the health crisis on tourism in certain areas of the Earth. Thus, Dinarto, Wanto and Sebastian (2020) investigated the impact of the pandemic on the tourism industry in Bintan (an island in the Riau archipelago in Indonesia); Centeno and Marquez (2020) estimated the losses in the Philippine tourism industry, Correa-Martínez et al. (2020) studied the effects of the spread of the virus in a ski area in Austria. Nepal's (2020) comments on travel and tourism in Nepal after COVID-19 also raise a number of issues related to the new configuration of this sector: "business as usual or opportunity to reset".

Studies conducted at European Union level (European Parliament, COVID-19 and the tourism sector, 2020) estimate that the EU tourism industry (which has around 13 million employees) will lose around € 1 billion in revenue per month as a result of COVID-19 outbreak. According to estimates by the Italian tourism federation, Assoturismo, Italy will lose about 60% of tourists this year.

Regarding the analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global tourism industry, few studies have been conducted. Thus, Gössling, Scott, and Hall (2020) evaluated the effect of global travel restrictions and stay at home behavior on tourism and projected global change, Niewiadomski (2020) analyzed the relationship globalization - post-COVID-

19 tourism industry, and Galvani, Lew and Perez (2020) assessed the sustainability of the industry.

Uğur and Akbıyık (2020) analyze in their paper the impact of CoVID-19 on the global tourism industry, making a trans-regional comparison.

Given the fact that the tourism sector is one of the world's largest employers (1 in 10 jobs are directly related to tourism, UNWTO, 2020) and for many countries it is the main contributor to GDP, worldwide, within the international organizations in the field, as well as within the academic environment, attempts are being made to use the pandemic as a transformative opportunity for the tourism industry (Mair, 2020). Other authors (McKinsey, 2020) consider that, in addition to the fact that it should recover losses, this sector of activity should also be reconfigured and reset according to the new conjuncture.

Gretzel et al. (2020) plead for transformative e-tourism research that can shape tourism futures by making value systems, institutional logics, scientific paradigms and technology notions visible and transformable.

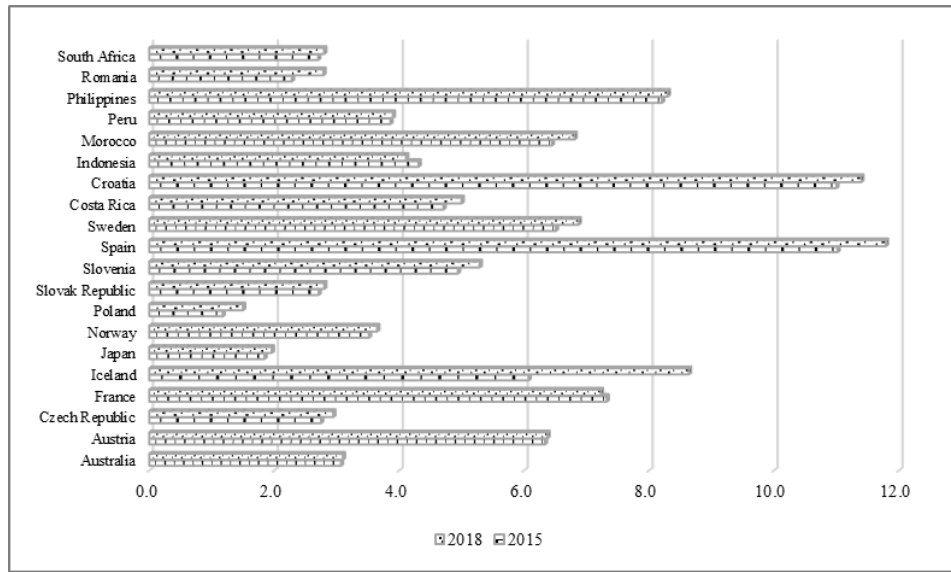
To revitalize the tourism industry, other researchers have suggested various approaches to the problem: inter-disciplinary (Wen, Wang, Kozak, Liu and Hou, 2020), multi-disciplinary (Gössling et al., 2020, Hall et al., 2020) or even anti-disciplinary (Sigala, 2018).

### **3. The socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism - comparative analyzes**

The current health crisis has generated national quarantines and global travel bans, leading international travel to a standstill. According to data collected internationally by the International Tourism Organization of the United Nations on April 27, 2020, of the 217 destinations worldwide, 156 (72%) have completely stopped international tourism. The COVID-19 crisis has thus led to the cancellation of business trips, holidays and weekend mini-holidays, which has severely affected the tourism industry.

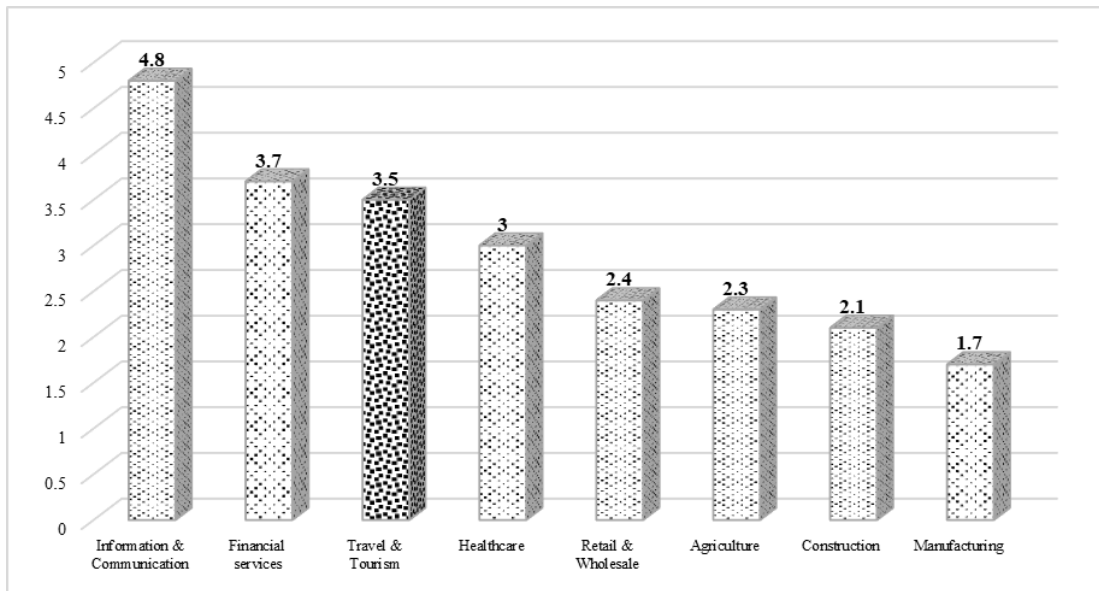
According to the seventh UNWTO report on travel restrictions (1 September 2020), a total of 115 destinations, representing 53% of all destinations worldwide, have reduced COVID-19 travel restrictions for international tourism. Thus, the number of tourist destinations increased by another 28, compared to 19 in July 2020.

According to World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) statistics, tourism generates 10.3% of global GDP, thus being an important factor in the world economy. In 2019, for countries such as Spain and Italy, the contribution of tourism to their GDP was even higher than the global average: 14.3% and 13.0% of their GDP, respectively. OECD statistics on the contribution of tourism to national GDP in 2018 show an upward trend in almost all countries for which data was available (Figure 1).



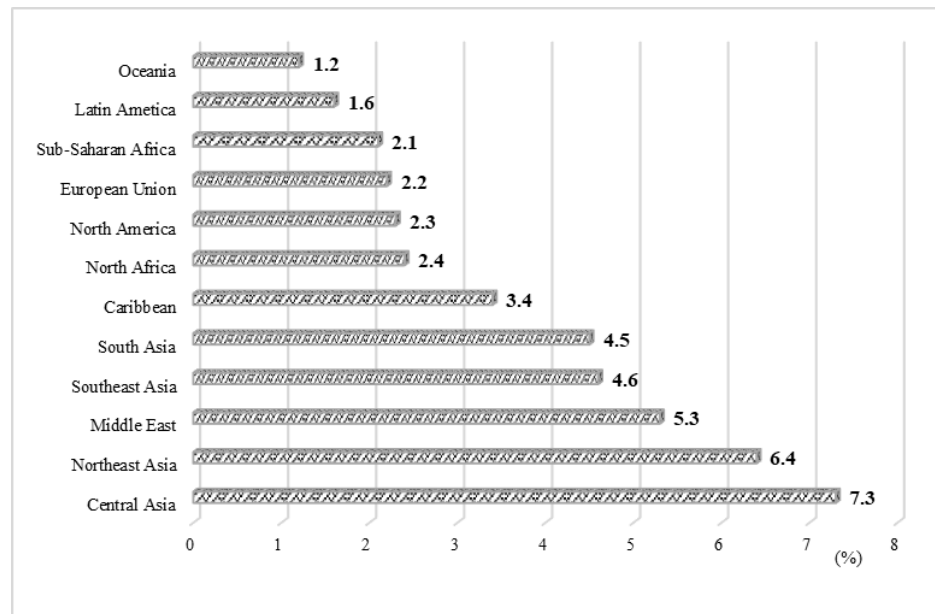
**Figure 1.** Contribution of tourism sector to national GDP, in 2018, (%)  
 Source: created by author based on OECD statistics

Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors and it is an important factor in economic growth and development. Thus, in 2019, the share of tourism in the global GDP increased to 3.5%, being much more significant than that of other economic sectors (Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Travel & Tourism GDP Growth Compared with other Sectors in 2019, (%)  
 Source: created by author based on Travel&Tourism Report data, Global Economic Impact & Trends 2020

At the level of the world's subregions, the contribution of the tourism industry is differentiated, the most significant contributions being registered in Central Asia (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Contribution of the tourism industry to the GDP, by large regions of the world, in 2019

Source: created by author based on Travel&Tourism Report data, Global Economic Impact & Trends 2020

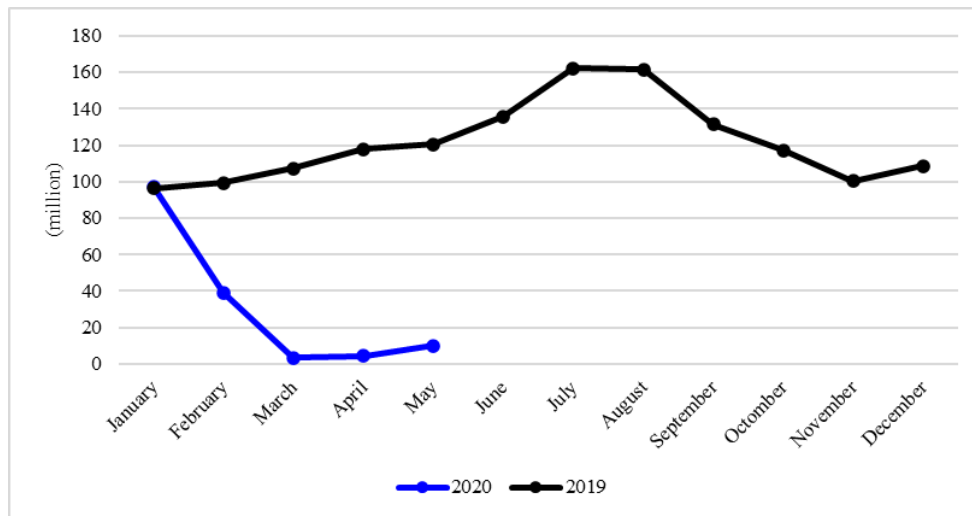
Tourism is also an important source of employment worldwide. According to the WTTC, tourism has supported 330 million jobs worldwide in 2019, which in the current context are at high risk. The tourism labor market has several particular features: a large proportion of jobs are held by women: 54% (significantly higher than in most other sectors) and young people, which makes the tourism industry considered inclusive. The fact that women are more likely to be entrepreneurs in tourism than in other sectors makes most women occupy low-skilled jobs in this sector and thus vulnerable to shocks.

The impact of the health crisis on tourism also has negative consequences on young people employed in this sector. In some OECD countries, young people aged 15-24 account for almost 21% of tourism employment, compared to 9% of the total economy (OECD, Supporting Quality Jobs in Tourism, OECD Tourism Papers, 2015). At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, there were 178 million young workers worldwide, four out of ten young people employed globally, working in severely affected sectors, including tourism.

According to World Labor Organization estimates, more than 1.6 billion informal workers out of 2 billion are significantly affected by lock-in measures and / or work in the most affected sectors, such as tourism. Self-employed workers and small businesses, which employ a large number of informal workers, also account for 60% of the accommodation and food subsectors.

The development of the tourism industry also involves the creation of a significant number of indirect jobs in construction, infrastructure development, the provision of food, beverages and souvenirs to tourists, as well as in travel agencies, airlines, ships, hotels, restaurants, shopping malls and various tourist attractions. .

To reduce the spread of the virus, travel restrictions and border closures have been imposed on almost all destinations around the world, especially in the second half of March and April (-97%) and May (-96%). In this context, in the first half of 2020, the arrivals of international tourists (overnight visitors) decreased by 65% compared to the same period last year, and in June 2020, a decrease of 92.6%, compared to June 2019 (according to World Tourism Barometer, Vol. 18, Issue 5, Aug / Sept 2020) (Figure 4).



**Figure 4** International Tourist Arrivals by month, worldwide

Source: created by author based on World Tourism Barometer data, Vol. 18 , Issue 5, aug/sept 2020

The massive decline in demand for international travel between January and August 2020 translates into a loss of 705 million international tourist arrivals, a loss of about \$ 730 billion in export earnings from international tourism, eight times more than the revenue losses recorded in 2009 amid the global economic and financial crisis.

The impact of COVID-19 on tourism, in the first six months of 2020, was strongest in the Asia-Pacific region, which saw a 72,2% decrease in foreign tourist arrivals. Europe (with a decline of 66.5%), Africa (-57.1%), the Middle East (-56.9%) and North America (-55.2%) were also largely affected.

The extended UNWTO scenarios for 2021-2024 indicate a change of trend in 2021, but in the conditions of gradual and linear lifting of travel restrictions and a significant increase in people's confidence to travel by mid-2021. This can only be achieved in the conditions in which there will be a reversal of the evolution of the pandemic and the availability of a vaccine or an effective treatment. UNWTO estimates show that even if the above conditions are met, however, it would take a period of 2½ to 4 years for international tourist arrivals to return to 2019 levels.

In this context, the global demand for air passengers also decreased (by 67% between January and July 2020). The slight improvement in global passenger demand in July (92% compared to 97% in June) might not continue due to increases in COVID-19 cases in several countries which will lead to the re-imposition of travel restrictions. A small recovery in global demand for air travel continues to be driven mainly by domestic markets, especially in Russia and China.

Europe has reported 213 million international arrivals lost by June 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. The highest reductions were in Southern and Mediterranean Europe (by about 72%) and Northern Europe (- 64%). In June 2020, there was a slight improvement in this indicator, which contributed to the slowdown in the reduction of arrivals in Western Europe (-63%) and Central and Eastern Europe (-62%). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism has resumed in many European countries, which reflects a still cautious attitude of people towards cross-border travel.

In Europe, international passenger demand (measured in revenue passenger kilometers) decreased by 68% in January-July 2020, traffic capacity decreased by 79% and the load factor decreased to 55%. In July 2020, there were significant reductions in revenue per available room (-66%) and the average daily rate (-21%).

To reduce the risk of the COVID-19 virus spreading, protected natural areas have also been closed, which has had a destructive impact on them and the communities that protect them.

According to data provided by the World Tourism Organization, 14 African countries generate about \$ 142 million from the protected areas entry fee. The closure of tourism activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic meant no income for staff serving these protected areas and for the communities living around them for several months, many being dependent on tourism for survival and without access to social protection measures. Without alternative opportunities, communities can resort to overexploiting natural resources, either for their own consumption or to generate income. Recently, there has already been an increase in poaching and robbery in some parks and protected areas, partly due to the low presence of tourists and staff.

Also, in response to the pandemic, 90% of countries have closed their World Heritage sites, with huge socio-economic impacts on communities that depend on tourism revenues.

The impact of COVID-19 on tourism exerts additional pressure on heritage conservation in the cultural sector, as well as on the cultural and social fabric of communities, particularly for indigenous peoples and ethnic groups. During the pre-crisis, the cultural and creative industries generated annual global revenues of \$ 2.25 trillion and exports of over \$ 250 billion.

The outbreak of the pandemic led to the closure of 90% of museums and many intangible cultural heritage practices, such as festivals and traditional gatherings, were also stopped or postponed, with important consequences for the cultural life of communities everywhere.

In May 2020, the UNWTO developed within the World Tourism Barometer three scenarios for the evolution of international tourism in 2020, assuming that the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic could be lifted in July or September or December 2020. As a result of recent developments to the pandemic, the reintroduction of lockdown and the adoption of other measures in response to the growing cases of Covid-19, UNWTO considers that the evolution of the tourism industry falls between Scenario 1 and 2. According to Scenario 2 a recovery of 2019 levels for tourism can be achieved in three years (end of 2023) and Scenario 3, the slowest, after 4 years (end of 2024).

The pandemic is also expected to have a longer-term effect on international tourism, while other economic sectors could return faster. Especially for countries where the national economy relies heavily on the tourism industry, it is crucial to closely monitor the situation and provide measures to protect the industry and mitigate the economic impact of this crisis.

#### **4. Measures to mitigate impact on tourism sector**

In order to mitigate the economic impact of this health and economic crisis and to protect the tourism industry, Governments and institutions have taken and continue to take several measures.

The magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on tourism requires strong measures to ensure the survival of businesses and support jobs. This is especially important for SMEs and the self-employed. For example, temporary waivers or rescheduling of taxes and other payments, special employment support schemes and credit conditions adapted to tourism could be considered, both in the short and medium term, in order to preserve the means of living and to prevent bankruptcies.

In summary, some examples of measures adopted by various countries to support enterprises and jobs in the tourism industry are presented in Table no. 1

**Table no. 1** Examples of measures taken to support tourism

<b>Country</b>	<b>Measures</b>
	<i>Postponement of taxes (taxes, rents or insurance payments)</i>
Egypt	- postponement of payment of all taxes related to tourist and hotel units; - exemption from rent until tourism resumes safely (bazaars and cafes located in archeological sites)
Bulgaria	Government funding of insurance payments due by employers for hospitality companies, travel agencies and tour operators, restaurants and fast food establishments, etc.
Italy	suspension of tax payments, social security and social contributions for the tourism sector and extended the measure to cultural enterprises
Mauritius	the training fee has been temporarily reduced from 1% to 0.5% for tourism operators
	<i>Direct support for companies</i>
Serbia, Slovenia and Slovakia	made direct payments to companies (or a percentage of wages) forced to close due to the pandemic
Jamaica	funding from multilateral partners and international institutions for small and medium-sized tourism enterprises
	<i>Special conditions for loans</i>
Egypt	to tourism companies, the Central Bank of Egypt provided low-interest funds (especially for the payment of employees' salaries), credit facilities with a repayment period of up to two years, as well as a grace period of six months from the date of granting, launched a funding initiative to support tourism.
Lebanon	allowed economic institutions to borrow interest-free money for five years to help them pay their salaries
Montenegro	granting subsidies to the salaries of entrepreneurs and SMEs in tourism
	<i>Employee support</i>
Greece	awarding compensation to workers whose employment contracts have been temporarily suspended
Argentina, Kuwait, Maroc, Mongolia, Samoa and Ungaria	- total cancellation of employers' payment obligations; - state financing of 70% of lost wages for three months for part-time workers
Gabon, Botswana and Republic of Korea	employees who are technically unemployed have received an allowance of 50% to 70% of their gross salary.
Cambodia	offered retraining and improvement programs for laid-off workers and announced plans to pay 20% of the minimum wage for workers employed in hotels, boarding houses, restaurants and travel agencies. Workers must attend a short course offered by the Ministry of Tourism before receiving government support.
Namibia	granting salary subsidies to support companies in tourism,



Country	Measures
	hospitality, travel and aviation to keep jobs.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- granting technical unemployment representing 75% of the gross salary during the emergency period;</li> <li>- for employees who have benefited from technical unemployment and whose employment relationships are maintained after the resumption of activity by employers until 31 December 2020, with the exception of seasonal workers, a payment of 41.5% of the basic salary corresponding to the job held will be supported for a period of three months, through the employer,</li> <li>- for persons over 50 years old as well as for those aged 16-29 who will be employed for an indefinite period and full time from June 1 to December 31, 2020, employers receive monthly, for a period of 12 months, 50 % of the employee's salary.</li> </ul>
The European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provides legal analysis to Member States and has set up a network of industry associations to facilitate the exchange of experience.</li> <li>- has set aside € 37 billion to provide liquidity to businesses and support those who have lost their jobs.</li> </ul>

Source: created by author

## Conclusions

In addition to the threat to public health, the economic and social disruption induced by COVID-19 threatens the long-term existence and well-being of millions of people, which is especially true for tourism-dependent means of living.

For every job directly in tourism, almost one additional indirect and induced job is created.

The tourism economy has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and measures have been introduced to limit its spread. Depending on the duration of the crisis, the revised scenarios indicate that the potential shock could range from a 58-80% decline in the international tourism economy in 2020.

Domestic tourism is expected to recover faster, thus providing the main opportunity to stimulate recovery, especially in countries, regions and cities where the sector supports many jobs and businesses.

The impact of the medical and economic crisis is felt on the entire tourism ecosystem, and the reopening and reconstruction of destinations will require a combined approach. Tourism businesses and employees benefit from stimulus packages across the economy, with many Governments introducing tourism-specific measures. These include considerations for lifting travel restrictions, restoring travelers' confidence and rethinking the tourism sector for the future.

These actions are essential, but in order to successfully reopen the tourism economy and get the business up and running, more needs to be done in a coordinated way, as tourism services are highly interdependent. The crisis is also an opportunity to rethink the tourism sector and its contribution to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

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