

Examining the contribution of tourism to employment in the European Union

Ilze Erzsebet¹

¹Eötvös Loránd University: Budapest, Hungary. <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5608-6840>

Abstract

This paper explores the significance of the tourism industry in generating employment within the European Union (EU). Using data from tourism industries (2021), employment across various economic activities was analyzed. It provides an overview of employment effects by economic activity, highlighting the substantial role of tourism in the labor market. This study indicates the proportion of individuals employed in the total and selected tourism industries relative to the total non-financial business economy. It also delves into the employment distribution by enterprise size within different economic activities in the EU, providing insights into how small, medium, and large enterprises contribute to employment in tourism compared to other industries. Additionally, this study presents data on hourly labor costs and gross hourly wages and salaries in the accommodation industry for 2020.

Keywords: Tourism, Employment, European Union

1. Introduction

Tourism's economic and social contributions can be examined in a wide range. In economic terms, tourism is an industry that directly generates income (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016; Hutchings et al., 2020). Tourists' spending contributes to local economies through accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, and entertainment services. These expenditures also trickle down to other industries in the supply chain, indirectly stimulating economic growth. From a social perspective, tourism increases cultural interaction, improves the living standards of local communities, and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage. Tourism helps increase tolerance and understanding by building bridges between different cultures.

The economic contributions of tourism can generally have direct and indirect impacts (Jeyacheya & Hampton, 2020; Vukovic et al., 2023). Direct economic impacts occur through tourists' spending on services such as accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, and entertainment. These expenditures provide significant revenue to the local economy. For example, while tourism contributes significantly to GDP in developed countries, it can also be an important driver of growth in developing countries. The indirect economic effects of tourism occur through expenditures and investments reflected in other supply chain industries (Alrwajfah et al., 2020; Dogru et al., 2020). For example,

when a hotel is built, it provides jobs for the construction industry. It contributes to other industries, such as food and beverage suppliers, cleaning services, etc., operating the hotel.

Social contributions are related to the effects of tourism on communities. Tourism contributes to the promotion and preservation of local cultures. Tourists experience cultural elements such as local handicrafts, music, dance, and traditional dishes, which help them understand the value of these cultures. This increases the motivation of local people to protect and maintain their cultural heritage. Additionally, the tourism industry promotes social equality and increases social welfare by creating employment opportunities, especially for women and youth.

Tourism is crucial for its employment creation capacity (Demir et al., 2021; Zhang, 2023). Millions of people worldwide are directly or indirectly employed in the tourism industry. Tourism's contribution to employment generally occurs through jobs in the service industry. Hotels, restaurants, tour guides, travel agencies, and transportation services are the primary sources of employment in the tourism industry. In addition, employment is also created in sub-industries supported by tourism (Camargo et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022), such as agriculture, fishing, construction, and handicrafts. The contribution of tourism to employment becomes more evident, especially in times of economic crisis and

*Corresponding author

E-mail: ilzeerzsebet2015@gmail.com

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regions with high unemployment rates (Figini & Patuelli, 2022; Ladkin et al., 2023).

The tourism industry requires relatively low capital investment and has the potential to create employment quickly. For this reason, tourism policies are considered an important component of the fight against unemployment and economic development strategies. Understanding how tourism's contribution to employment varies in different countries allows us to understand better the place and importance of this industry in the global economic system (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2013; Frye et al., 2020). While in developed countries, tourism is generally associated with high-quality services and luxury consumption patterns, in developing countries, it is seen more as a means of economic development and poverty reduction. In this context, it should be remembered that tourism's employment-creation capacity may vary depending on local economic conditions, tourism policies, and industrial dynamics. Tourism, a rapidly growing and developing industry worldwide, plays a vital role in the economic development strategies of many countries (Ioannides et al., 2021; Jung & Yoon, 2016). It is a dynamic industry that significantly contributes to employment through its economic and social dimensions. In this context, tourism attracts attention not only with its economic return but also with its capacity to create employment. This research aims to determine the effects of the tourism industry on employment and analyze how these effects vary in different countries.

2. Literature

Tourism is one of the important industries providing direct employment worldwide. Direct employment includes working in areas where tourists receive services, such as hotels, restaurants, tour guide services, travel agencies, and transportation services. Many studies (e.g., Demir, & Demir, 2023; Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2020; Self et al., 2016) show that the tourism industry has a high capacity to create direct employment. For example, according to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reports, the tourism industry provides direct employment to approximately 300 million people worldwide. This amounts to 10% of total global employment. One of the regions with the highest direct employment in the tourism industry is Europe. Europe is one region that attracts the most tourists globally, and the tourism industry is an essential source of employment here. Especially in countries such as Spain, France, Italy, and Greece, the tourism industry significantly contributes to GDP and offers employment opportunities to millions of people (Eurostat, 2024). The Asia-Pacific region also has a rapidly growing tourism industry, and the impact of tourism on direct employment is increasing, especially in countries such as China, Japan, Thailand, and Indonesia.

The tourism industry not only creates direct employment but also indirectly in many industries (Baum et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2024). Indirect employment refers to job opportunities in other industries that develop depending on

tourism (Baum, 2015; Moreo et al., 2023). These industries include agriculture, food and beverage, construction, handicrafts, transportation, logistics, retail, and entertainment (Aprigliano Fernandes et al., 2021; Goh & Jie, 2019). For example, hotel operations create jobs in many industries, from cleaning services to food supply. The agricultural industry is one of the important areas where tourism indirectly creates employment. The food and beverages tourists consume are provided by local agricultural products, which increases employment in the agricultural industry. Similarly, increasing accommodation and food and beverage demands in tourism regions increase the need for local food producers and suppliers. The construction industry is another vital area where tourism creates indirect employment. The construction, maintenance, and repair of tourist facilities create job opportunities for those in the construction industry.

Tourism services have an important role in terms of their impact on employment (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Sibanyoni et al., 2015). Tourism services such as accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment, guidance services, and transportation directly create employment. The quality and diversity of these services increase the attractiveness of tourism, contributing to attracting more tourists and, therefore, creating more employment. Large tourist facilities such as luxury hotels, holiday villages, and thematic parks especially offer wide employment opportunities.

The impact of tourism services on employment becomes stronger by increasing service quality (Law et al., 2013; Ramkissoon & Sowamber, 2020). Training and professional development of employees in the service industry increase the tourism industry's competitiveness and expand employment opportunities. For example, vocational training programs organized for those working in the field of tourism increase tourist satisfaction by improving the service quality in the industry, which in turn contributes to the creation of more employment by increasing the demand for the industry. Sustainable tourism policies should support raising the quality of service in tourism (Autor, 2015; Griffin, 2022), and it is important to include local people in these processes.

Tourism's contribution to employment varies regionally. Since the tourism industry develops differently in different regions, its effects on employment also vary. In developed countries, the tourism industry generally stands out as well-structured and professionally managed, providing high-quality services (Bowen & Morosan, 2018; Marcolin et al., 2019). Tourism contributes to qualified and permanent employment in these countries by offering higher wages and better working conditions. Tourism is important for economic development and poverty reduction in developing countries (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Liu et al., 2021). In these countries, tourism stands out as an industry that generally has lower wages but provides employment to larger masses. Especially in rural and poor regions, employment opportunities provided by tourism significantly contribute to economic and social development by increasing the income level of local people (Sahadev & Islam, 2005; Segovia-Pérez

et al., 2019). Tourism's impact on employment in these regions helps local people become economically empowered and improve their living standards. Regional differences also affect tourism's employment-creation capacity. For example, the Mediterranean region is vital in world tourism, and the tourism industry offers vast employment opportunities. Similarly, tropical regions such as the Caribbean and Southeast Asia have intense tourism activities throughout the year, creating significant employment opportunities in the tourism industry (Fieger et al., 2024; Ou et al., 2009). Tourism contributes significantly to employment in these regions and local economies' growth and development (Khan et al., 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2021).

3. Methodology

The study received approval from the University's Publication and Ethics Review Committee under protocol number SSR/2021:27 and adhered to the guidelines outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human subjects.

In this research, the data from European Union (EU) countries were evaluated through the employment statistics published by Eurostat (2024) to examine the contribution of tourism to employment. First, a literature review and previous studies were examined to understand the relationship between tourism and employment. In this process, the areas where tourism directly and indirectly creates employment, the impact of tourism services on employment, and regional differences were evaluated. The literature review was carried out to create the theoretical framework and determine the research questions by updating the existing information. The data covers direct and indirect employment rates in the tourism industry (e.g., accommodation services for visitors, other accommodation services, food and beverage serving activities, passenger transportation, travel agencies, other reservation services activities, and other tourism industries).

The research covers the areas where tourism directly and indirectly creates employment, the effects of tourism services on employment, and regional differences. In this way, the contribution of tourism to employment has been evaluated in various dimensions. However, the research also has some limitations. The statistical data used in the data collection process may be incomplete or outdated for some countries, which may affect the accuracy of the analyses. Particularly in developing countries, the lack or low reliability of data on tourism and employment may limit the research results. The results obtained should be interpreted within the framework of the accuracy and timeliness of the available data.

4. Results

The total number of people working in the tourism industry in the EU is more than 11 million (Table 1). More than half of them are employees in food and beverage businesses. These are followed by accommodation, transport, car rental,

and travel agency businesses. Food and beverage (F&B) establishments are crucial in generating employment within the tourism industry. These establishments range from high-end restaurants and cafes to street food vendors and bars, all contributing to the overall tourist experience. F&B establishments require a diverse workforce, including chefs, waitstaff, baristas, bartenders, managers, and cleaners. This creates many job opportunities for individuals with varying skill sets. Moreover, F&B outlets often hire seasonal workers to handle peak tourist seasons, providing temporary employment to local communities and students.

In addition to direct employment, F&B businesses indirectly stimulate job creation by supporting related industries such as agriculture, transportation, and hospitality. The demand for fresh produce, beverages, and logistical services boosts these industries, leading to further employment opportunities. Moreover, well-established F&B outlets can significantly enhance a destination's appeal, attracting more tourists and increasing demand for local services and products. This multiplier effect underscores the critical role of F&B establishments in providing jobs and bolstering the broader economy through tourism.

Figure 1 indicates the share of persons employed in total tourism industries and selected tourism industries in the total non-financial business economy. Greece has the highest tourism employment rate in the general economy (25.7%). The top five countries following Greece are Cyprus (17.5%), Malta (15%), Spain (12%), and Croatia (11.9%). A high proportion of employment in the tourism industry within a country's total employment indicates significant economic and social impacts. The tourism industry requires a diverse workforce, creating numerous job opportunities across various skill levels. Hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and transportation services employ many individuals, contributing to economic growth. High tourism employment directly and indirectly boosts the local economy. Tourists' spending stimulates local businesses, leading to new job opportunities and economic development.

The tourism industry often demands seasonal workers, providing temporary employment for students and those seeking short-term jobs. However, excessive reliance on tourism poses risks. Economic crises, natural disasters, or political instability can lead to sudden drops in tourist arrivals, causing high unemployment rates. Therefore, countries with high tourism employment should maintain economic diversification to mitigate these risks. A high proportion of employment in tourism holds great potential for economic growth and social development. However, a balanced and sustainable approach is essential to ensure long-term stability and resilience.

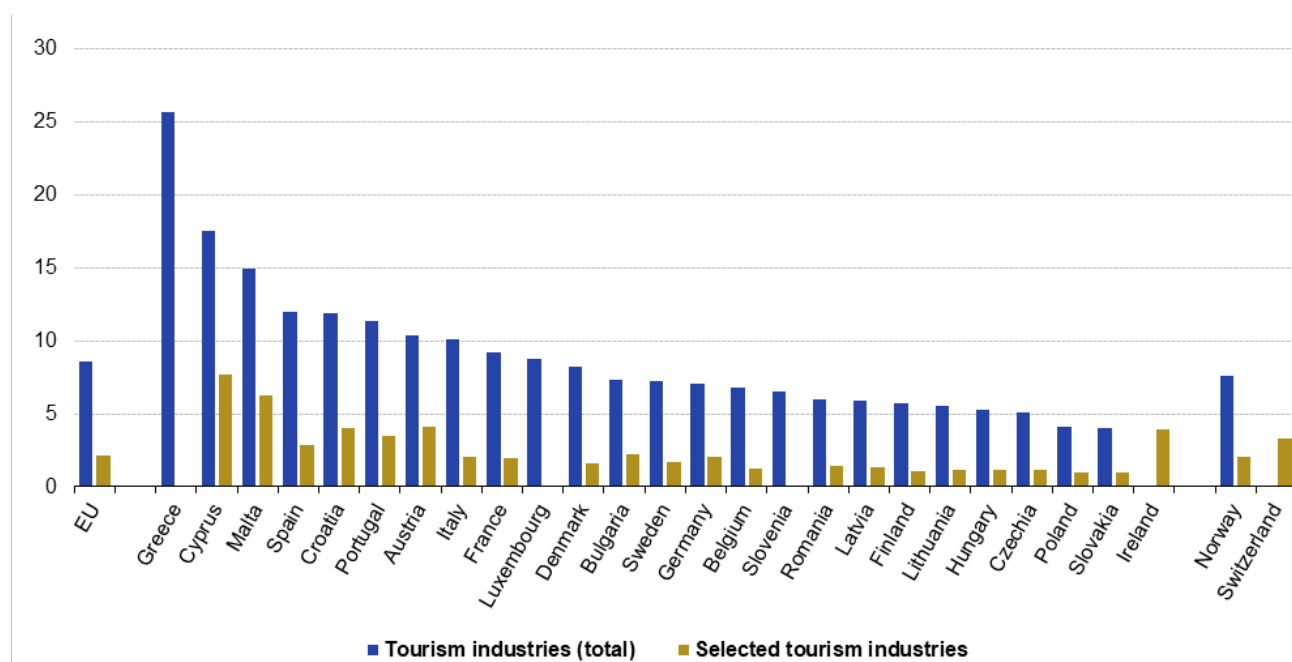
Figure 2 indicates the share of persons employed by enterprise size class by economic activity in EU countries. It is understood that businesses in air transportation generally have more than 250 employees and that there are businesses of different sizes in accommodation and travel services.

Table 1. Number of persons employed by economic activity, 2021

	Total non-financial business economy ⁽¹⁾	Services ⁽²⁾	Tourism industries (total) ⁽³⁾	Transport (total) ⁽⁴⁾	Accommodation (scope of Reg. 692/2011) ⁽⁵⁾	Food and beverage (total) ⁽⁶⁾	Car and other rental (total) ⁽⁷⁾	Travel agency, tour operators (total) ⁽⁸⁾	Selected tourism industries ⁽⁹⁾
EU	130 944 373	55 043 006	11 290 627	1 785 993	2 134 000	6 800 000	208 512	362 122	2 822 481
Belgium	2 989 482	1 465 234	202 233	48 839	23 170	118 058	5 217	6 949	36 612
Bulgaria	1 926 446	680 921	140 425	15 530	35 261	82 235	2 950	4 449	42 774
Czechia	3 768 898	1 236 192	190 456	29 560	28 433	120 135	2 353	9 976	42 560
Denmark	1 805 602	797 631	148 305	25 771	20 673	95 795	2 030	3 465	28 400
Germany	30 113 633	12 445 745	2 132 870	250 014	471 604	1 288 255	43 836	79 161	625 530
Estonia	465 205	189 423	:	:	5 191	15 385	839	1 318	:
Ireland	1 602 369	777 640	:	:	48 623	105 511	2 257	4 575	63 419
Greece	2 732 159	1 346 797	702 029	55 302	158 715	461 511	8 909	17 592	:
Spain	12 569 941	5 818 203	1 509 317	177 350	269 158	988 914	23 082	50 813	356 297
France	16 824 772	7 573 675	1 542 526	360 562	231 666	871 116	40 509	38 673	336 632
Croatia	1 099 216	404 029	130 452	17 312	34 441	68 712	3 676	6 311	44 042
Italy	15 351 442	6 372 960	1 545 706	166 060	253 498	1 064 286	19 640	42 222	316 263
Cyprus	289 386	137 999	50 700	2 312	20 486	25 385	920	1 597	22 266
Latvia	609 293	251 228	35 758	5 494	5 081	21 934	1 738	1 511	8 236
Lithuania	1 068 096	443 857	59 135	10 271	8 860	34 242	3 278	2 484	11 964
Luxembourg	302 179	157 725	26 517	:	:	14 115	:	:	:
Hungary	2 921 317	1 149 524	155 372	19 071	24 838	101 470	5 025	4 968	33 379
Malta	180 761	98 174	27 045	6 029	7 225	11 600	915	1 276	11 337
Netherlands	6 012 245	3 083 113	:	:	81 189	315 719	11 189	:	:
Austria	3 049 514	1 219 101	316 905	39 816	104 315	158 684	3 732	10 358	125 162
Poland	10 217 156	3 284 504	419 911	97 607	77 892	211 516	14 278	18 618	102 985
Portugal	3 567 806	1 600 898	404 129	46 463	100 872	238 478	6 103	12 213	125 397
Romania	4 321 564	1 504 047	260 252	77 673	42 761	126 134	5 510	8 174	60 976
Slovenia	677 344	237 872	44 290	3 903	13 321	24 484	669	1 913	:
Slovakia	1 618 562	578 125	64 849	8 708	10 920	40 714	1 893	2 614	16 375
Finland	1 434 713	632 058	82 238	21 847	7 719	48 013	1 617	3 042	15 888
Sweden	3 424 816	1 556 331	249 458	45 072	46 664	147 163	2 527	8 033	59 635
Norway	1 566 834	628 484	118 586	29 086	24 448	58 512	2 214	4 326	32 767
Switzerland	2 971 020	1 329 473	:	:	69 714	139 336	:	15 464	97 645

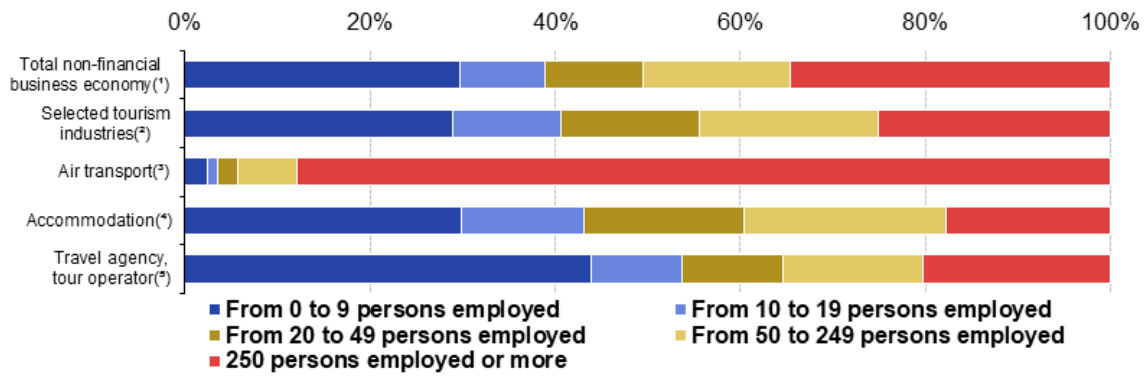
Source: Eurostat (2024).

Figure 1. Persons employed in total tourism industries and in selected tourism industries as share of those employed in total non-financial business economy, 2021



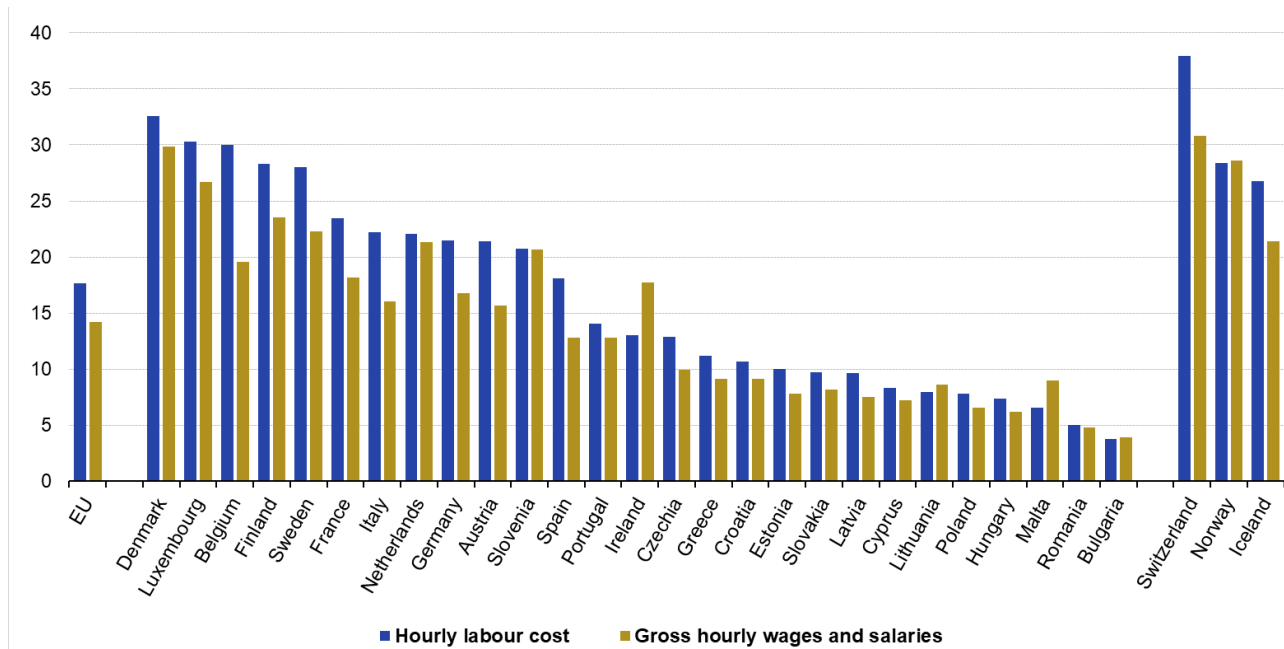
Source: Eurostat (2024).

Figure 2. Share of persons employed by enterprise size class, by economic activity, EU, 2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat (2024).

Figure 3. Hourly labor cost and gross hourly wages and salaries in the accommodation sector (NACE division I55), 2020



Source: Eurostat (2024).

Figure 3. indicates the accommodation industry's hourly labor cost and gross hourly wages and salaries. The highest wages appear to be in Switzerland, Norway, Denmark and Luxembourg. A high wage level in an industry significantly influences employment within that industry. Attracting skilled workers becomes easier as competitive salaries draw individuals seeking better compensation for their expertise and efforts. This influx of talent can boost the industry's productivity and innovation, further enhancing its growth and competitiveness. However, they may also challenge smaller firms and influence pricing dynamics.

5. Conclusion and implications

The literature review has comprehensively discussed the direct and indirect effects of the tourism industry on employment, the employment creation potential of tourism services, and the role of regional differences in these effects. In

addition to creating direct employment, the tourism industry stands out as an essential economic and social development tool by providing indirect employment opportunities in many sub-industries. Increasing service quality, providing vocational training, and involving local people in the process will further strengthen tourism's employment creation capacity.

For employees, working in hotels and similar establishments can provide steady income and job stability, particularly in regions with high tourism rates (Claudio-Quiroga et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2021). Employment in this industry often includes roles in management, housekeeping, front desk operations, and hospitality services, offering diverse career paths. For businesses, thriving accommodation services can lead to increased profitability and opportunities for expansion. Cities benefit from the influx of tourists who spend money on lodging, dining, and local attractions, boosting the local economy. On a national level, a robust accommodation

industry can enhance a country's attractiveness as a tourist destination, leading to greater foreign exchange earnings and improved global economic standing.

Employment in this industry can provide flexible and diverse job opportunities (Baum et al., 2016; Li & Wu, 2022), often in smaller, independently-owned businesses. Employees may enjoy a more personal work environment and engage closely with guests. For businesses, offering unique accommodation experiences can differentiate them in a competitive market and attract niche segments of tourists. Cities with diverse accommodation options can appeal to a broader audience, from budget-conscious travelers to luxury seekers, thereby enhancing tourism revenues. Nationally, the proliferation of varied lodging options can boost tourism, contribute to rural and urban development, and spread economic benefits across regions.

Employees in this industry benefit from numerous job opportunities, from chefs and waitstaff to management and logistics roles. This industry is known for its entry-level positions, providing a stepping stone into the workforce (Liang et al., 2017; Torres et al., 2017). For businesses, thriving food and beverage establishments can generate significant revenue and foster brand loyalty. Cities benefit from a vibrant dining scene that attracts visitors, enhances the local culture, and creates jobs. On a national scale, a strong food and beverage industry can enhance the country's culinary reputation, promote cultural tourism, and stimulate agricultural and food production industries, leading to broader economic growth.

Employment in the passenger transportation industry offers a range of opportunities, from drivers and pilots to maintenance and customer service roles. These jobs often provide good benefits and job security (Autor & Salomons, 2018; Williams, 2021). For businesses, efficient and reliable transportation services can increase patronage and profitability. Cities with robust transportation networks become more attractive to tourists and businesses, fostering economic development and enhancing the quality of life for residents. A well-developed passenger transportation system is crucial for economic integration, regional development, and international trade, contributing significantly to overall economic stability and growth.

Employment in travel agencies and reservation services offers careers in customer service, sales, and travel planning. These roles can provide job satisfaction by helping clients achieve their travel goals. For businesses, streamlining travel arrangements can enhance efficiency and client satisfaction. Cities benefit from increased tourism facilitated by these services and the local employment opportunities they create. A strong network of travel agencies can boost domestic and international tourism, increase foreign exchange earnings, and support allied industries such as hospitality, retail, and entertainment, contributing to economic diversification and resilience. Employment in these industries offers a variety of roles, from tour guides and entertainers to

management and operations staff (Book et al., 2019; Campanella et al., 2017). These jobs appeal to those passionate about culture, sports, and recreation. These industries present opportunities for businesses to capitalize on unique attractions and events, driving profitability and growth. Cities with vibrant tourism industries can become major tourist destinations, boosting local economies and creating many job opportunities. Diverse tourism industries enhance the country's appeal as a travel destination, support cultural preservation, and stimulate economic activity across various industries, fostering overall economic development and cultural exchange.

Regional differences play an important role in determining the effects of tourism on employment. The contribution of tourism to employment in developed and developing countries varies depending on local economic conditions, tourism policies, and industrial dynamics. Therefore, developing tourism policies that consider regional characteristics and needs is important in maximizing the contribution of tourism to employment. As a result, tourism is a dynamic industry that provides employment opportunities to millions worldwide. This industry's employment creation capacity should be considered an important component of economic development strategies. A better understanding of tourism's contribution to employment will contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable policies in this field.

5.1. Limitations and future research directions

The data used to examine the effects of tourism on employment are limited to the publications of Eurostat (2024). Although these methods effectively determine the relationship between tourism and employment, more is needed to reveal causal relationships. Therefore, it is recommended that the contribution of tourism to employment be examined more comprehensively by using more advanced statistical analysis techniques and methods in future research. Additionally, the scope of the research was limited to economic data only. Although tourism's social and cultural effects on employment are also important, this research does not address these dimensions. The employment creation capacity of tourism should be evaluated not only by economic indicators but also by social and cultural impacts. Therefore, future studies need to conduct more comprehensive analyses considering tourism's social and cultural dimensions.

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Author contribution

The author carried out the research design and implementation, analysis, and writing of the article himself without using AI applications.

Disclosure statement

The author reported no potential competing interest.

Ethics committee approval

The study received approval from the Budapest SSR Research Center Publication and Ethics Review Committee under protocol number SSR/2021:27 and adhered to the guidelines outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human subjects.