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COVID-19 and its Economic Implications for Turkish Tour Guides

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The COVID-19 outbreak, which became one of the most stunning pandemics of the modern era, had a truly global effect on the world economy in a short period of time. Almost all countries were negatively impacted by the outbreak, which practically paralysed global life and resulted in negative dynamics, unprecedented conditions, and obstacles. Türkiye was not immune to this, having felt seriously negative consequences during this period. Tourism, nearly coming to a complete interruption for the first time since World War II in the 21st century, happened to be one of the hardest hit industries. The industry of tourism in Türkiye, steadily growing over the previous decade was subjected to this difficult process, bringing the situation to a near-standstill. Tour guides who are major front-line employees in the industry experienced this negativity and faced numerous job-related challenges. With these considerations in mind, the present study sought to uncover how the COVID-19 outbreak impacted Turkish tour guides. For this purpose, a sample of 26 certified tour guides associated with the Izmir Chamber of Tour Guides were interviewed using a semi-structured interview form in September 2021. The study findings reveal that the COVID-19 outbreak greatly affected tour guides, reducing their sources of income while maintaining most of their fixed expenses. To ensure their survival, tour guides require more supports, particularly financial ones.

Key Words: tourism, Coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, tour guides, Türkiye

Introduction

Throughout history, humanity has faced numerous epidemic diseases that have caused millions of people to suffer adversely. Spanish Influenza, Swine Flu, Black Plague, Ebola, Bird Flu, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) can be listed as some of the deadliest outbreaks with both short and long term consequences. In 2018, in a report titled 'Managing Epidemics: Key Facts about Major Deadly Diseases' The World Health Organization predicted that the history of outbreaks would repeat itself, emphasising that a new HIV, Ebola, Influenza or Plague whether transmitted by mosquito or other insects, via contact with animals, or person to person, were not mere possibilities (WHO, 2018). Subsequently, the COVID-19 outbreak, as a form of unusual pneumonia resulting in respiratory disorder

with some specific symptoms such as cough, fever, and difficulty in breathing in more serious cases (Ministry of Health-Türkiye, 2021) was first reported on December 31, 2019 in Wuhan, in China's Hubei province (Foo, Chin, Tan & Phuah, 2020; Ranasinghe *et al.*, 2020). This outbreak was announced as a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020) confirming this previously made prediction (Alaeddinoğlu & Rol, 2020).

The COVID-19 outbreak, which expanded at an alarming rate around the globe, had far-reaching consequences for the tourism industry, making it one of the worst affected industries in the world. Amidst this outbreak, all people including academics, scientists, politicians, and theologians were busy debating the effect of the COVID-19 outbreak on all aspects of life. Therefore, tourism scholars focused

their attention on the potential impacts, antecedents, and consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak on the tourism industry in general. In particular, academics focused on studies investigating the future of tourism and travel around the world. In the literature, studies have been published on how COVID-19 has impacted on the tourism industry and its ramifications for the economy (Alaeddinoğlu & Rol, 2020; Bahar & Çelik İlal, 2020; Çıtak & Çalış, 2020; Aylan, 2020; Acar, 2020), on hotel chains (Eryılmaz, 2020; Karadeniz, Beyaz, Ünlübulduk & Kayhan, 2020), on travel agencies (İbiş, 2020), on consumer behaviour (Aydın & Doğan, 2020; Kabadayı & Kardeş, 2020), religious tourism (Akbulut & Ekin, 2020), on medical tourism (Çınar & Özkaya, 2020), on domestic tourism (Yenişehirlioğlu & Salha, 2020), on sport tourism (Türkmen & Özseri, 2020), on rural tourism (Arslan & Kendir, 2020; Özçoban, 2020). However, there is limited academic research on tour guides, who are one of the most important stakeholders of the tourism industry (Grancay, 2020; Türker & Karaca, 2020; Düzgün & Kurt, 2020; Özkan & Yeşildağ, 2021). In tackling this deficit, this paper attempts to answer the following research question:

how did the COVID-19 outbreak affect Turkish tour guides in terms of economic perspectives?

More widely, this study seeks to explore the types of economic traces the COVID-19 outbreak left on Turkish tour guides, as discerned by tour guides themselves.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 Crisis

This calamity, as a new biological crisis was experienced by the entire world (Raj & Griffin, 2020). The unexpected COVID-19 outbreak struck the whole of humanity and caused dramatic uncertainty and chaotic circumstances in virtually all industries (Güliz, Uğur & Akbıyık, 2020), leading to considerable reductions in almost all types of social and economic activity (Deb & Nafi, 2020; Zammit,

2020), bringing the modern world to a standstill, with unanticipated and unexpected shocks to modern people's daily lives (Ranasinghe *et al.*, 2020). Tourism, as one of the afore-mentioned industries, is recognised as a labour-intensive industry in the economy (Raj & Griffin, 2020), acting as an umbrella industry by engaging with a number of other industries (Ranasinghe *et al.*, 2020). Tourism has highly vulnerable characteristics in relation to various drivers and is heavily influenced by environmental, political, and socio-economic factors such as; natural disasters, earthquakes, bushfires, terrorist attacks, volcanic eruptions, famines, floods, tsunamis and pandemics (Shuo Yeh, 2020; Wen, Kozak, Yang & Liu, 2020). Thus, tourism became one of the most profoundly victimised industries in this outbreak (Horaira, 2021; Raj & Griffin, 2020) and one of the worst affected of all economic sectors (UNWTO, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak dramatically eliminated demand for several tourism actors and stakeholders including accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment and transportation, which all resulted in negative consequences both economically and sociologically (Akduru, 2020).

The tourism industry, one of the largest and fastest growing global economic sectors as well as a strong pillar of the global social system (Riadil, 2020) took a serious hit in the twenty-first century; the COVID-19 outbreak paralysed the industry (Güliz, Uğur & Akbıyık, 2020; Olsen & Timothy, 2020). The decade of 2020 began with a shocking and unfortunate occurrence of a newly discovered disease (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021) that presented the tourism industry with an unprecedented challenge (Gürsoy & Chi, 2020) that ended up shutting down the modern world's economy almost overnight (UNWTO, 2020).

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization's previous prediction, international tourism underwent a decline of 20% to 30% in 2020 in terms of tourist arrival numbers, representing losses in international tourism receipts of US \$300-450 billion globally (UNWTO, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak which is 'a combination of a natural disaster, a socio-political crisis, an economic

crisis, and a tourism demand crisis' (Zenker & Kock, 2020:2) affected all people; no matter where they come from, irrespective of religion/belief, ethnicity, age or marital status etc. (Raj & Griffin, 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 outbreak not only targeted underdeveloped and developing countries, but also the most developed of countries, resulting in uncertainty. This might be regarded as the most significant characteristic distinguishing the COVID-19 outbreak from other pandemics in history (Ak, Bingül, Türk & Ak, 2020).

In the absence of an effective vaccination, countries took precautionary measures coupled with the introduction of non-pharmaceutical interferences, to attempt to flatten the COVID-19 outbreak and limit the need for medical interventions; the pressure was to halt the virus's spread in order to protect countries' health systems from collapse, as advised by the World Health Organization and guidance from expert scholars, academics, and intellectuals in the field. The most commonly implemented precautions were: quarantine, either voluntary or mandatory; worldwide travel restrictions; cancellation or postponement of public and private major / large gatherings, events, and activities; the closure of schools, universities and non-essential businesses / workplaces, as well as; significant restraints on public gatherings and community mobility (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020; Horaira, 2021; Abu Bakar & Rosbi, 2020; Deb & Nafi, 2020). Suspension of all flights happened in some territories while flight restrictions to specific countries were introduced elsewhere (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020). The prohibition of foreign national entry, border closures, 14-day isolation and symptom monitoring were all introduced for people arriving from countries under risk (Haryanto, 2020; Altuntaş & Gök, 2021). At a local level, mandatory or self regulated community lockdowns, stay-at-home orders, isolation, social distancing and travel / mobility limitations were introduced (Gürsoy & Chi, 2020; Sigala, 2020).

All of these strategies and precautions were used as anti-pandemic policies to bring the COVID-19 outbreak to a halt. However, they paralysed global tourism, travel, transportation, and leisure, resulting

in the closure of many tourism and hospitality businesses temporarily and a significant demand drop for those that were allowed to continue operating (albeit in more limited circumstances) (Bartik *et al.*, 2020).

Turkish Tourism and COVID-19

In Türkiye, the tourism industry plays a critical part in the country's development. Particularly, it plays a vital role in reducing the foreign trade deficit and increasing export revenues. Furthermore, it serves as an important source of employment as well as a means of reviving the national economy. According to the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies, international tourist revenue in Türkiye increased from US \$51 million in 1970 to US \$34 billion in 2019. Similarly, the proportion of tourism income accounts for a significant portion of Türkiye's total export; this was 8.8% in 1970, whereas it rose to 20.01% in 2019 (TURSAB, 2020).

The COVID-19 outbreak had a detrimental effect on Türkiye's tourism business, and as a result, the country underwent drastic negative changes, just like the rest of the world. According to Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the number of international arrivals was 51,747,198 with tourism receipts of US \$34.5 billion in 2019, representing an increase of 12.1% in terms of international tourist arrivals and 16.9% in terms of international tourism revenue when compared to the previous year (Atay, 2020). Furthermore, tourism income per capita increased from US \$647 in 2018 to US \$666 in 2019, indicating an increase of 3%. In 2020 when Türkiye hoped to host 58 million international tourist arrivals accompanied by US \$40 billion in tourism receipts, the tourism industry was hit by the COVID-19 outbreak. In March, 2020, the Ministry of Health in Türkiye issued an advisory which prompted several health and safety precautions, including entrance and exit checks and limitations on international travel, in an attempt to halt the virus's spread rate. (Özçoban, 2020). These precautions were evident in Turkish tourism statistics. For example, there was a decline of 19.87 % in the number of international tourists from January to March of 2020, a decrease

of 67.83% in March, 99.26% in April 2020, and a decrease of 85.90 % in July, a decrease of 71.74 % in comparison with the previous year (Ministry of Culture and Tourism-Türkiye, 2021).

Tour guides are important players (intermediary workers) in the tourism industry. According to the Turkish Union of Tourist Guide Chambers, there are 11,461 licensed tour guides in the country, operating in 7 regions, affiliated to 13 occupational chambers, and speaking in 38 main languages (TUREB, 2021).

Method

This study aimed to address the COVID-19 outbreak and its economic implications for Turkish tour guides and followed a qualitative research methodology. The first phase involved conducting a comprehensive literature review on the COVID-19 outbreak and its impacts on the tourism industry with secondary data gathered from a variety of sources. In the second phase, the authors utilised a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions to obtain in-depth primary data. Criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling techniques

were chosen as convenient purposive sampling techniques. These techniques are widely used in qualitative research methods (Palinkas *et al.*, 2013; Patton, 2002; Coyne, 1997).

The interview form was administered to 26 Turkish licensed official tour guides affiliated to the Izmir Chamber of Tour Guides in September 2021. For this purpose, the authors electronically sent the online interview form via e-mail to the possible informants who met the sample criteria. Digital interaction was chosen since face-to-face meetings were mostly unavailable during the pandemic. The primary data collected were subjected to content analysis.

With Content Analysis, a qualitative analysis technique, new concepts and relations within data can be explained (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Another analysis which was used is Descriptive Analysis which facilitates the summarising and interpretation of data which has been gathered via different data collection methods in accordance with the pre-determined themes. The target of this research tool is to present the uncovered findings in a summarised and interpreted way (Özdemir, 2010) once the data

Table 1: Open-Ended Semi-Structured Interview Prompts for Interviewing Turkish Tour Guides

(1)	What economic impact did the COVID-19 outbreak have on tour guides? What kind of financial issues did you face as a tour guide? Please compare your current status to the pre-pandemic period from an economic standpoint.
(2)	Did you receive any financial support during the COVID-19 outbreak? What was the attitude of public institutions, professional chambers, and organizations such as TUREB, IZRO, and others toward tour guides during the COVID-19 outbreak? How would you rate the level of support provided to tour guides?
(3)	What measures were in place to compensate tour guides for the financial losses they have suffered or are projected to suffer as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak?
(4)	Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, what types of concerns (financial and others) did you have while leading tours? Have you been concerned about becoming infected with COVID-19 virus while at work? How did you handle the issues at hand? What precautions have you taken to ensure the health of tourists and tour groups?
(5)	During the COVID-19 outbreak, how did you make a living? Have you done any extra work to make ends meet? If you did, how/what kind of work did you do? Are you planning on continuing your newly started profession/job after the COVID-19 outbreak is over? What economic measures would you take if you could go back in time before the COVID-19 outbreak? What changes can you expect in your consumption, working, and spending habits once the COVID-19 outbreak is over?
(6)	What should tour guides do to deal with their financial difficulties during the COVID-19 outbreak and other similar outbreaks? What are the lessons that tour guides should learn? How do you think the profession of tour guiding will be shaped in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak?
(7)	Please write if you have any further concerns or viewpoints on the subject. If you want to be kept up to date on the study findings, you might provide your e-mail address.
Note: Authors formulated the research questions following the literature review & expert opinions.	

collection process is completed. In order to keep the informants' identity confidential, the authors labelled each informant and represented them using the letter 'I' and a number from 1 to 26 [i.e. I.1, I.2, I.3 ... I.26]. The semi-structured interview form, which involved an introduction and seven open-ended questions did not put forward any answer and enabled informants to write whatever they wanted. The form was split into two parts; Part-I and Part-II.

The introduction part presented the main objective and sub-objectives of the study. It sought informants' socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, marital status, age group, and educational qualification. Furthermore, there were questions, which probed informants' occupation-related characteristics such as; guidance certificate, language(s) spoken, type of employment and working region, professional experience, social security, and working year. The second part of the instrument included seven-open ended questions. Authors undertook an extensive literature review to identify questions. After classifying the questions in terms of economic impact of COVID-19, expert opinions were sought from two main sources. Firstly, the authors' opinion based on previous studies of similar topics were collected. Then, questions were discussed with tour guides with deep professional experience. In accordance with the obtained feedback, the authors finalised the semi-structured interview form with its latest shape as an instrument. Table 1 depicts the research questions probing the study objective.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interview form, created in the context of this study using Google Forms, was sent to the potential informants' e-mail addresses obtained from Izmir Chamber of Tour Guides' website. Additionally, the interview form was posted in an IZRO WhatsApp group. The pre-determined criteria to screen potential informants included; being an IZRO-certified tour guide who worked actively as a tour guide for at least one of the following years; 2019, 2020 and 2021. The authors did their best to target the informants who would volunteer to respond

of their own volition, but would still respond to the interview formally. This was important in terms of the quality of the responses given to the questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016; Kozak, 2014).

Findings

The study findings focused on descriptive statistics of the informants' socio-demographic and occupational characteristics; Table 3 provides an overview of the informants' characteristics. The authors asked four questions to determine the informants' socio-demographic characteristics and seven additional questions to probe the informants' occupation-related characteristics.

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic and occupational characteristics of the informants. 61.5% of the informants were male and 38.5% were female. Out of 26 informants involved in the interview process, 65.4% were married while 34.6% were single. 30.8% of the informants were aged 56 years or more followed by 26.9% which were from the 36-45 age group and 23.1% were aged between 46-55 years old. The other two age groups were as follows: 11.5% of the informants were 26-35 years of age followed by 7.7% who were 25 years and younger.

With regard to educational qualifications, the main group have a Bachelor Degree (53.8% of the informants). The other three groups; High School, Two-Year Degree, and Masters and/or PhD Degree; all had 15.4% of the respondents. The most common guidance qualification was the national guidance certificate with 92.3% of the informants followed by 7.7% of the informants who possess a regional guidance certificate. In terms of the languages spoken by the informants the major language was English with 61.5% followed by 26.9% who speak German, 23.1% with French, 15.4% have Italian and lastly, 11.5% of the informants use Spanish as a guidance language. The other groups were 7.7% who spoke Japanese and Russian while Dutch and Chinese were spoken by 3.8% of the participants.

Table 2: Informants' Socio Demographic and Occupational Characteristics			
Informants' Socio Demographic and Occupational Characteristics		N	%
Gender	Male	16	61.5
	Female	10	38.5
Marital Status	Single	9	34.6
	Married	17	65.4
Age Group	25-under	2	7.7
	26-35	3	11.5
	36-45	7	26.9
	46-55	6	23.1
	56-over	8	30.8
Educational Qualification	High School	4	15.4
	Two-Year Degree	4	15.4
	Bachelor Degree	14	53.8
	Master and/or PhD. Degree	4	15.4
Guidance Certificate	Regional	2	7.7
	National	24	92.3
Languages Spoken*	English	16	61.5
	German	7	26.9
	French	6	23.1
	Italian	4	15.4
	Spanish	3	11.5
	Japanese	2	7.7
	Russian	2	7.7
	Dutch	1	3.8
	Chinese	1	3.8
Type of Employment	Freelancer	19	73.1
	Travel Agency <i>Contracted</i>	4	15.4
	Travel Agency <i>Employee</i>	3	11.5
Type of Region	Central Anatolia Region	1	3.9
	Mediterranean Region	3	11.5
	Marmara Region	4	15.4
	Aegean Region	18	69.2
Professional Experience	5 years-less	3	11.5
	6-10 years	4	15.4
	11-15 years	3	11.5
	16-20 years	4	15.4
	21 years-more	12	46.2
Social Security	Bağkur**	1	3.84
	Private Insurance	2	7.68
	Retirement Fund	5	19.2
	SGK/4a***	18	69.2
Working Year*	2019	23	88.5
	2020	16	61.5
	2021	15	57.7
Total		26	100.0

* Some informants reported multiple responses.
** Bağkur: Social security organization for artisans and the self-employed people.
*** SGK/4a: This is a type of insurance issued under Law No.5510 and covers people who pay premiums to the Social Security Organisation and refers to the working areas of people who work on a contract basis in a workplace.

The informants' current type of employment was classified into three categories. The largest group consisted of tour guides working as freelancers at 73.1% followed by 15.4% of tour guides working for travel agencies on a contract basis and lastly, 11.5% of the informants were working as an employee of a travel agency. Regarding the type of region where tour guides mostly worked, the informants reported that they predominantly worked in the Aegean Region - 69.2% followed by 15.4% working in the Marmara Region, 11.5% in the Mediterranean Region and lastly, 3.9% in the Central Anatolia Region.

When it came to the informants' professional experience, 46.2% of the guides had professional experience of 21 years and more followed by 15.4% that represented two groups - 6-10 and 16-20 years of professional experience and lastly, the final two groups; 11-15 and 5 years and less had 11.5% of the tour guides.

The informants' social security status was distributed as follows. 69.2% held SGK/4a followed by 19.2% who own a retirement fund, 7.7% of the informants specified had private insurance and lastly, 3.8% of the informants had Bağkur. Concerning the informants' year of guiding work, the main group was 88.5% of the informants who worked in 2019, followed by 61.5% who claimed that they were eligible to work in 2020 and lastly, 57.7% of the informants were eligible to work in 2021.

Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Turkish Tour Guides

The first question posed to informants sought to uncover the economic effects of COVID-19 on Turkish tour guides by looking at the financial challenges they underwent during this outbreak. In addition, the informants were asked to compare in detail, their financial status to that of the pre-pandemic period from an economic standpoint. Following Content Analysis, all informants mentioned that the COVID-19 outbreak had adverse impacts on them. In other words, the COVID-19 outbreak had **significant negative economic effects** on Turkish

tour guides, making them **feel financially insecure**. More broadly, the COVID-19 outbreak rendered the majority of the informants totally **unemployed**, with the exception of a small number of tour guides partially employed. Furthermore, some informants stated that they lost 70% of their annual income and more when compared to the pre-pandemic period because of the financial difficulties caused by the COVID-19 outbreak's lower employment rate. Mostly, tour guides do not have a regularly paid job except for those employed by travel agencies, tour operators, and so on. Almost all informants indicated that they were **caught completely unprepared** because they came across this outbreak at a time when the season was supposed to begin, claiming that they had **not put aside enough savings** in prior years. The following quotes put forth the intensity and severity of the economic challenges which Turkish tour guides went through during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In terms of economics, the COVID-19 outbreak had a negative impact on me, as it did on all other tour guides. The travel agency where I worked offered to pay only my insurance and not pay me a monthly wage in exchange for me working for them in the post-pandemic period and allowing me to work on a freelance basis. I was unable to apply for short-term working allowance-pay since I lacked enough paid premium days. Because I couldn't work like we used to during the normal season, my financial status deteriorated, resulting in major change in my living standards [I.17].

The COVID-19 outbreak had a significant negative impact on all tour guides. I had to make a living with the money I earned in previous years. Prior to the pandemic, I was financially secure. However I must decrease my spending expenses [I.20].

I had financial problems because of income losses. I lost 90% of my annual income when compared to the previous year. The guiding profession has come to a standstill and many tour guides changed their jobs [I.19].

As tour guides, we are in a much worse situation now than we were before the pandemic. My annual income gradually decreased; 60% in 2019, 80% in 2020, and finally 90% in 2021 [I.10].

State Institutions and Occupational Chambers' and Organisations' Attitudes

The second question was to understand whether respondents received any financial support or not during the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, the informants were asked to share their thoughts on how state institutions and occupational chambers, as well as organisations like TUREB¹ and IZRO² approached and/or supported tour guides during the COVID-19 outbreak. Following Content Analysis, most of the informants agreed that they were ***not financially supported*** or that no economic support was provided to tour guides. The informants specified that a public bank titled *Ziraat Bank* offered tour guides a bank loan / credit with interest up to 10,000 Turkish Liras (c.€550), which most of the informants did not consider as an economic help. Some informants refused to apply to the bank because it was not a monetary, non-refundable assistance or contribution and it required them to pay back. Tour guides were ***greatly disappointed*** by the state institutions' approach and expected non-refundable aid / money, similar to that given to artisans and craftsmen via economic support packages. Most of the informants shared a common view that the ***level of support was insufficient***. Some others claimed that there was no aid, and the so-called support was limited. They were ***dissatisfied*** with the approach of state institutions, occupational chambers and organisations during the outbreak.

Another important finding was that some informants believed that the guiding profession was not taken seriously, and that tour guides were ignored by the government since they claimed to be outside the scope of the economic support packages. Other informants claimed that ***occupational chambers***, and organisations such as TUREB and IZRO attempted to help tour guides during the outbreak; however,

they could ***do nothing noteworthy***. For instance, IZRO tried to help tour guides with their yearly contribution payments, which some tour guides did not regard as a help. For some other informants, the occupational chambers and organisations were entirely ineffective thus, did not play any significant role during this period.

Some tour guides stated that they could not apply for the short-time working allowance / pay since they did not meet the necessary criteria. Lastly, some informants reported that the COVID-19 outbreak was not something that only occupational chambers and organisations should handle and that public / governmental institutions should have taken more serious steps to assist tour guides. The following quotes reflect informants' points of view on approaches taken by the state institutions and occupational chambers and organisations towards tour guides during the outbreak.

I did not receive any financial assistance. There was a possibility to get bank credit initiated by the Ministry of Culture and Turkey and TUREB. I did not like applying for it since it required repayment [I.19].

I got no economic support during the outbreak [I.10].

Occupational chambers and organisations once again proved to be ineffective during COVID-19 outbreak. Was there any help available so that I could assess whether it was satisfactory or not? As usual, tour guides were forgotten [I.16].

The supports provided were insufficient [I.4].

Unfortunately, I did not make any use of support provided. Since I was working as an employee, I applied for the short-term working allowance / pay. However, I was unable to obtain it because I lacked sufficient premium paid days [I.24].

Which support? Was there any? [I.2]

1 **TUREB:** Turkish Union of Tourist Guides Chambers.

2 **IZRO:** Izmir Chamber of Tourist Guides.

Suggestions to Compensate Economic Losses of Tour Guides

The third question inquired informants to consider what precautions they have in mind to compensate tour guides' for the economic losses they suffered and would probably suffer from the COVID-19 outbreak. Following the Content Analysis, it was discovered that the informants developed several suggestions to overcome these economic losses. These suggestions are listed below.

Tour guides should not be required to pay annual contributions and the costs of annual licenses. The government should pay all of these costs to occupational chambers, and organisations during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Non-repayable economic aid should be provided. The government ought to set up an economic support fund for tourism employees including tour guides who have suffered greatly from the COVID-19 outbreak. For instance, tour guides could be given 30% or 40% of their annual income similar to how artisans and craft workers were treated. Short-time working allowance / pay should be given to all tour guides, regardless of the number of premium paid days.

TUREB and TURSAB³ should work together with central and local tourism authorities as well as municipalities, to organise some outdoor events in which tour guides could be employed partially for promotional facilities and get some financial benefit. For example, bicycle nature tours, national and international fairs, and translation services.

Tour guides' premium debts and credit debts should be postponed to the post-pandemic period with no interest.

Tour guides should make more savings when allowed to work freely so that they could live on them for at least one or two years. In addition, they should have an individual retirement

program or at least make some investments in financial instruments. Perhaps, tour guides should have a second job with regular and stable payment.

Occupational chambers, and organisations should establish an unemployment fund to help tour guides for rainy days including wars, outbreaks, natural disasters, various human-driven crises, and so on.

Occupational chambers, and organisations should play a more active role to solve tour guides' problems.

Tour Guides' Concerns about COVID-19

The fourth question asked informants to reveal tour guides' concerns about the COVID-19 outbreak. More widely, the informants were asked to state what type of concerns they had while leading tours, whether they were worried or not about being infected with the COVID-19 virus when at work. If yes, how they coped with these worries and what sort of precautions they took to ensure the health of the tour groups, and participants as well.

Following the Content Analysis, the informants pointed out that they were *greatly worried of being infected* with the virus on tours when they had to work. They expressed that they did not have much opportunity to work, with only a few exceptions. However, when they could work, they were worried. Talking more particularly, some informants stated that they *disliked working on package tours* which require accommodation for a number of days, instead they prefer short day trips. Informants also noted that they watched online information videos and general instructions; the circular letter on COVID-19 outbreak initiated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and Turkish Union of Tourist Guides Chambers for tour guides and tried their best to follow these rules and regulations when they had a chance to work. For instance, some informants expressed that they wore masks or even double masks, kept social distance and were fussy about hygiene; using the cologne and disinfectant, ventilation of

³ TURSAB: Association of Turkish Travel Agencies.

the bus, preventing overcrowding, cleaning their equipment often during tours. Some informants even stated that they made tour participants obey all the rules and instructions as well as giving constant warnings during tours. The following quotes reflect informants' points of views and concerns about the COVID-19 outbreak.

I also felt unsafe while conducting tours during the COVID-19 outbreak, which made me follow the standard precautions; wearing a mask, keeping social distance, and practicing good hygiene [I.7].

I was worried about being infected with the COVID-19 virus, so I had to work in a tense manner. I was concerned on behalf of myself, the tour group, and the tour participants. I sought to avoid any possible risk by making frequent warnings [I.15].

I tried to follow the normal rules set forth by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Turkey to ensure tourists' health safety via repeated cautions. ... I preferred visiting the places when there was no overcrowding [I.17].

Mask, social distance, and hygiene. In addition, I followed the 14 rules issued by the Ministry of Health to avoid potential risks. I also made the tour participants obey the rules as well [I.20].

I wore double masks at times, ventilated the bus frequently, and used cologne and disinfectant. Using a microphone, I provided information to tour participants from a safe distance [I.18].

Tour Guides' Life during COVID-19

The fifth question aimed to elicit information on how informants made a living during the COVID-19 outbreak. The informants stated that they **used up all their previous years' savings** because they did not have much opportunity to work and faced financial hardship to survive. Some informants even specified that they had to economise on many daily activities and **cut expenses** including clothing, shoes, telephone, accessories, and cosmetics. **Physical needs** such as food, beverages, and shelter were

limited. During COVID-19, most of the informants worked or attempted to **work to supplement income**.

The jobs / work ranged from taxi driver, cashier, or shop assistant in a supermarket to call centre employee, warehouse attendant, or other jobs from which, informants earned a daily income including translation services, giving private online language courses and mentoring about astrology, and even selling olive oil. Moreover, some informants claimed that they had to apply for bank loans several times during the outbreak. The **support of family members** was another source of revenue for some informants. The informants, at least some of them, specified that they would try to find a **more stable and regularly paid job** once the outbreak was over rather than continuing their newly started job which supplemented their additional income during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Another significant finding uncovered that; financially, **unmarried and childless tour guides suffered less** from the COVID-19 outbreak when compared with their married counterparts. Informants with a **pension** claimed something similar; they commented that they could live a little bit better and luckier in comparison with the informants who only had income from guiding, thanks to their monthly salary during the outbreak. Some informants even stated that they possessed **a second house whose rent helped** them to ease their financial pressures during the outbreak. About the economic precautions that informants could take if they had a possibility to go back in time before the COVID-19 outbreak; the informants specified that would try to have a more stable and more regularly paid job, work harder **to make more savings for rainy days**, and make reduce expenses by **cutting out unnecessary spending** which they had got used to. Some informants stated that they would make radical changes such as **quitting their job as a tour guide** and looking for a permanent regularly paid job in other industries in the post-pandemic period because they were primarily **hopeless about the future of the tour guiding profession**, particularly given the tourism industry's high level of sensitivity and fragility. The following quotes reflect informants'

points of view about the aforementioned questions.

Unfortunately, I was unable to make a living very easily without work. My family helped me. Being a single person and having no child gave me an advantage during the COVID-19 outbreak, at least when compared to my married colleagues, particularly those with child/ren [I.19].

In a large supermarket, I worked as a cashier and store attendant. Being a single person without any responsibility made it easier to minimise the negative impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak [I.20].

I was trained in astrology, so I gave online mentoring, and made many cuts on my expenses such as clothing, shoes, cosmetics, accessories etc. [I.26].

In the post-pandemic period, I will work harder and make more savings for rainy days [I.3].

When the outbreak is over, I plan to make some significant changes in my life. I will look for a more stable and consistent job, consume less, and spend less [I.9].

I cut on my consumption and spending habits. I applied for bank loans [I.13].

I was lucky. Because I am retired. [I.7]

I economised and used up all my previous savings [I.3].

How Tour Guides Theorise about COVID-19: Lessons Learned

The sixth question delved into informants' suggestions to deal with the economic or financial problems arising from the COVID-19 outbreak and similar outbreaks, as well as the lessons tour guides should take from the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, informants were asked to suggest how the profession of tour guiding might be shaped in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak. As a result of the Content Analysis, it was found that the majority of the informants agreed that the re-shaping of

tourism would take some more time since people would not be convinced so easily about traveling as it still might be a source of worry even when the outbreak is over. However, a few informants claimed the opposite by suggesting that people were already fed up with the stresses of sitting at home frequently and being engaged in indoor activities and events which, would encourage them to travel with enthusiasm - there may even be the possibility of a big boom in tourism.

Informants suggest that the **tour guiding profession will experience some major changes** too. For instance, **smaller groups with less people** under strict precautions will be more popular among people. Individual tour guiding might be promising especially for **family and private tour** groups. Moreover, **digital tour guiding** coupled with technology and smart phone applications could be another option for tour guides to use in the post-pandemic period.

In accordance with the remarks of some informants, the **future of the tour guiding profession seemed to be uncertain with its fragile structures** making them feel hopeless about whether to continue working as a tour guide or should they start looking for a more stable and regularly paid job. Because they believe that the guiding profession was not taken seriously by the government, this would motivate **many qualified tour guides to leave the profession**. In addition, some informants added that under these difficult circumstances to work as a full-time tour guide would not enable a person to make a living for themselves and their families, which would encourage tour guides to look for something else from which they could get a more stable economic income.

Regarding the lessons that tour guides could take from the COVID-19 outbreak, the informants suggested that they should try to find another more stable and more regularly paid job when the outbreak is over. Additionally, tour guides should make **more savings** for possible rainy days. For instance, at least **30% of their annual income**. They also should try to find other **alternative income**

sources particularly, during the COVID-19 outbreak and similar happenings. Further, a network of social assistance and solidarity, such an *unemployment fund* should be established to assist tour guides in times of emergency, such as wars, crises, pandemics, and so on. Lastly, tour guides should not accept to work for less than the wages determined annually by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism once the outbreak is over.

The informants stated that they were happy to be a part of the present study and willingly contributed to the study by adding that this type of academic study would increase hopefully in the near future. In this regard, collecting real data from guides will assist the guiding profession to grow, and more serious and important steps could be taken to protect the profession.

Conclusion

Unlike most previous disasters, crises, and pandemics, the COVID-19 outbreak, which began at the end of 2019 and has since spread to almost every country on the planet and is still ongoing, has affected the entire world. The international tourism industry, with its stakeholders and employees, became one of the most affected economic activities by the outbreak, reaching the point of collapse with a rapid decline in demand and an increase in job losses on a global scale. The Turkish tourism industry had its share of negative impacts from this outbreak, following the strictly taken precautions such as; increasing long-term quarantine precautions, imposing curfew enforcements, stay-at-home-orders, social distancing measures, community lockdowns, prohibiting international travel (travel and mobility restrictions) closing borders, cross-country and intercity travel restrictions etc. In particular, tour guides, who play an important role in tourism destinations' promotion and operation, were adversely affected by this outbreak.

This study attempts to address the economic implications of the COVID-19 outbreak on Turkish tour guides by coming up with qualitative evidence from a developing country, Turkey (Türkiye). The

study revealed that tour guides' economic status deteriorated in comparison to the pre-pandemic period, and they used a variety of ways to make a living during this period. For instance, they used up all of their previous savings, cut down on their expenses, they had to work somewhere else, applied for credit loans from banks and some of them approached their family for economic help. Being single, having no child, having a retirement salary, and having a second house for rent were all drivers mentioned by informants as factors, which eased the financial pressures during the outbreak. The informants commented that they would look for another more stable job and more regularly paid, make more savings for rainy days, cut down on their expenses if they could go back in time before the COVID-19 outbreak. Unfortunately, some tour guides lack optimism and passion about the future of the tour guiding profession. Some of the informants believe that the re-shape of tourism will take some more time to progress and thus, the tour guiding profession will undergo some major changes too. For instance, smaller groups with less people under the strictly managed precautions would be more popular for the guides. Individual tour guiding might be promising especially for family and private tour groups. Perhaps, some additional precautions would be deemed as appropriate. Moreover, digital tour guiding coupled with technology and smart phone applications could be another option for tour guides to use in the post-pandemic period. Tour guiding is a source of income for 11,461 tour guides coupled with their families. Considering the potential of Türkiye both in terms of international tourist arrivals and international tourism revenues, tour guides, acting as the backbones of the tourism industry are of vital value for Türkiye, the necessary steps should urgently be taken to protect the tour guiding profession for the future.

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Table 3: Overview of Interview Informants

No	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Education	Guidance Certificate	Languages Spoken	Type of Employment	Type of Region	Professional Experience (Year)	Social Security	Year***
1	M.	Married	56-over	Masters / PhD	National	French	Freelancer	Aegean	Nov-15	Retirement Fund	2019
2	M.	Married	46-55	Bachelor Degree	National	German	Freelancer	Aegean	21-more	SGK/4a	2019/20/21
3	M.	Single	56-over	Bachelor Degree	National	French	Freelancer	Central Anatolia	21-more	Retirement Fund	2021
4	F.	Married	46-55	High School	National	Dutch	Freelancer	Aegean	21-more	SGK/4a	2019
5	M.	Married	46-55	Bachelor Degree	National	English	Freelancer	Aegean	21-more	SGK/4a	2019/20/21
6	M.	Married	56-over	High School	National	English, German	Freelancer	Mediterranean	21-more	SGK/4a	2019
7	F.	Single	46-55	Bachelor Degree	National	Japanese	Freelancer	Marmara	21-more	SGK/4a	2019/20/21
8	M.	Married	56-over	Bachelor Degree	National	German	Freelancer	Aegean	21-more	SGK/4a	2019/20/21
9	M.	Married	36-45	Bachelor Degree	Regional	English	Freelancer	Aegean	5-less	Retirement Fund	2021
10	M.	Married	36-45	Bachelor Degree	National	English	Freelancer	Aegean	16-20	Bağkur	2019/20/21
11	M.	Married	56-over	Bachelor Degree	National	English, Italian	Travel Agency*	Aegean	21-more	SGK/4a	2019
12	M.	Married	36-45	Bachelor Degree	National	English, Chinese	Travel Agency*	Marmara	16-20	SGK/4a	2019
13	M.	Married	56-over	Masters / PhD	National	English, German, French	Freelancer	Aegean	21-more	Retirement Fund	2019/20/21
14	M.	Married	56-over	Masters / PhD	National	English, French	Freelancer	Marmara	21-more	SGK/4a	2019
15	F.	Married	36-45	High School	National	English, German	Freelancer	Aegean	Nov-15	Private Insurance	2019/20/21
16	M.	Married	46-55	Masters / PhD	National	English, French	Freelancer	Aegean	21-more	Retirement Fund	2020
17	F.	Single	25-under	Two-Year Degree	National	English, Russian	Travel Agency**	Mediterranean	5-less	SGK/4a	2019/20/21
18	F.	Single	26-35	Two-Year Degree	National	German, Spanish	Travel Agency**	Aegean	06-Oct	SGK/4a	2019/20/21
19	F.	Single	26-35	Two-Year Degree	National	English, Italian, Spanish	Freelancer	Aegean	16-20	SGK/4a	2019/20
20	M.	Single	26-35	Bachelor Degree	National	Italian, Spanish	Freelancer	Marmara	16-20	SGK/4a	2019/20
21	M.	Married	46-55	High School	National	English, Russian	Travel Agency*	Mediterranean	Nov-15	SGK/4a	2019/20
22	F.	Single	36-45	Bachelor Degree	National	English, Japanese	Freelancer	Aegean	16-20	Private Insurance	2019/20/21
23	M.	Married	36-45	Two-Year Degree	National	German, Italian	Travel Agency*	Aegean	06-Oct	SGK/4a	2019/21
24	F.	Single	25-under	Bachelor Degree	Regional	French	Travel Agency**	Aegean	5-less	SGK/4a	2019/20/21
25	F.	Single	46-55	Bachelor Degree	National	English	Freelancer	Aegean	21-more	SGK/4a	2019/20/21
26	F.	Married	36-45	Bachelor Degree	National	English	Freelancer	Aegean	16-20	SGK/4a	2019

*Tour guides who work for a travel agency on a contract basis.

** Tour guides who are recruited as an employee in the travel agency.

*** Working year when tour guides are able to work - registered in the previous year in accordance with Law. 6326; Tourist Guidance Occupational Law.