

## Struggling the COVID-19 Pandemic of Professional Tourist Guides: A Case Study in Turkey<sup>1</sup>

*Profesyonel Turist Rehberlerinin COVID-19 Mücadelesi: Türkiye’de Bir Vaka Çalışması*

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### Abstract

Tourist guides are a key component of the tourism industry, contributing to the destination’ image, country-wide tourism, and the overall experience of tourists. They are one of the occupational groups most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to determine how and to what extent tourist guides are affected by the pandemic, what to expect from relevant institutions and organizations in possible crisis periods and to make suggestions in this regard. To this end, a case study was chosen as the study design, and the interview technique, which is one of the qualitative data collection methods, was preferred. The data were collected from 15 tourist guides who went on tours at least once during the pandemic period, and were subjected to content and descriptive analysis. The findings revealed that tourist guides were deeply affected by the pandemic in economic, psychological, social, and professional terms. Moreover, it was determined that tourist guides have expectations from relevant institutions, such as grant support and effective management during times of crisis. Based on the findings, some suggestions were made to stakeholders in the tourism sector.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 Outbreak, Crisis, Tourism, Tourist guide, Turkey.

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### Özet

Turist rehberleri destinasyonun imajına, ülke çapında turizme ve turistlerin genel deneyimine katkıda bulunan turizm endüstrisinin önemli bir bileşenidir. Turist rehberleri, COVID-19 pandemisinden en çok etkilenen meslek gruplarında biridir. Bu çalışma, turist rehberlerinin nasıl ve ne ölçüde etkilendiğini, olası kriz dönemlerinde ilgili kurum ve kuruluşlardan neler beklenebileceğini belirlemeyi ve bu konuda önerilerde bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla araştırma deseni olarak durum çalışması seçilmiş ve nitel veri toplama yöntemlerinden biri olan görüşme tekniği tercih edilmiştir. Veriler, pandemi döneminde en az bir kez tura çıkan 15 turist rehberinden toplanarak içerik ve betimsel analize tabi tutulmuştur. Bulgular, turist rehberlerinin ekonomik, psikolojik, sosyal ve mesleki açıdan pandemiden derinden etkilendiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca turist rehberlerinin kriz dönemlerinde hibe desteği ve etkin yönetim gibi ilgili kurumlardan beklentilerinin olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bulgulara dayalı olarak turizm sektöründeki paydaşlara önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** COVID-19 Salgını, Kriz, Turizm, Turist Rehberi, Türkiye.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is an extremely important sector for the economies of especially underdeveloped and developing countries (Do et al., 2021). The tourism sector provides multifaceted contributions to both regions and countries with its positive effects, such as creating new job opportunities, promoting equal development between regions, raising awareness about the importance of protecting cultural and environmental values, and contributing to global peace (Jenkins and Henry, 1982; Oppermann, 1993; Cole, 2006; Salazar, 2012). However, the tourism sector has a very fragile structure against social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political problems (Israeli et al., 2011). Crisis frequently occurs in the tourism sector, and many tourist regions are vulnerable to natural or man-made disasters. (Aliperti et al., 2019) Natural disasters, conflicts, pandemics, and political and economic problems occurring in various parts of the world seriously damage the tourism activities of the regions where they occur. Depending on the scale of the disaster, the effects can sometimes have international repercussions (Skare et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2021) For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on travel and tourism activities all around the world (Jiang and Wen, 2020).

Crises such as economic, political, and pandemic crises affect the tourism sector's hospitality, travel, food, and beverage services, as well as the tours that tourist guides work on. In other words, tourist guides are severely affected by all kinds of crises that impact tourism activities. Crisis-causing factors, such as national or international political conflicts, political disagreements, and acts of terrorism, have a severe impact on tourist guides, and they can't find tours during crises (Bayhan and Saldamlı, 2022). In crisis periods, the number of foreign tourists coming to the country and domestic tourism activities decrease. This situation causes tourist guides to become unemployed and creates economic problems. As tourist guides are uninsured and self-employed, their possibilities for developing strategies and making moves during crises are very limited. Therefore, tourist guides are in the position of being directly affected rather than directing national or international crises. In these processes, tourist guides have to wait for the crisis to pass by utilizing their extra knowledge or finding other jobs besides guiding. As a result, the crisis process is even more difficult for tourist guides (Çakmak, 2018). As a matter of fact, tourist guides are one of the occupational groups most heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. COVID-19 Outbreak and Tourism Sector**

In the past, terrorist acts in the USA, in some European countries, and in Turkey, as well as political conflicts in various Middle Eastern countries and pandemics in African and Asian countries, have had serious negative effects on international tourism activities (Sel et al., 2017). In the 21st century, there have been several pandemics, such as the Foot and Mouth Disease pandemic, the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak, MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome), the Avian Flu (H5N1) outbreak, Swine Flu (H1N1) outbreak, and the Ebola outbreak. These pandemics have had significant negative effects on the tourism sector, especially in the regions where they occur. The Foot and Mouth Disease pandemic adversely affected tourism activities in the United Kingdom in 2001 (Baxter and Bowen, 2004). The SARS pandemic caused a contraction in global tourism activities in 2003, damaging the image of the Asian continent as a safe tourism center and bringing the tourism sector of the affected countries to the point of collapse (McAlier et al., 2010). The Avian Flu (H5N1) pandemic, on the other hand, led to the shrinkage and bankruptcy of businesses in the tourism sector in the short and medium term (Page et al., 2006). Finally, the Ebola outbreak caused the closure of businesses operating in the tourism sector in West African countries, leading to a decrease in income from tourism and resulting in many tourism workers losing their jobs (Kongoley-Mih, 2014). These pandemics have affected the tourism and travel sectors of many countries globally or regionally (Russy and Smith, 2013; Berry et al., 2015; Hon, 2013). In addition to the aforementioned pandemics, the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in the city of Wuhan,

People's Republic of China, in December 2019, spread across continents in a short time and affected the entire world. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant economic and social downturn and has brought international tourism to a standstill (UNWTO, 2020).

Pandemics require measures to be taken at the international level, depending on their spreading power (Çetin and Ünlüönen, 2019). With the declaration of the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, many countries had to take extraordinary measures. Despite tourism's positive effects on the economy, many countries have taken measures such as border closures, travel restrictions, and quarantines to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases (Bedford et al., 2020). These measures taken to reduce the spread of the pandemic deeply affected tourism activities (Centeno and Marquez, 2020; Wanjala, 2020; Karim et al., 2020). Researchers and economists confirm that the tourism sector is the most affected sector by COVID-19 (Gursoy and Chi, 2020; Collins-Kreiner and Ram, 2020). The pandemic has shown its negative initial effects on the hospitality, travel, airline, and tourism sectors (Gössling et al., 2020). Due to this pandemic, the tourism industry has entered an uncertain future (Haywood, 2020; Darlak et al., 2020). In this process, airlines have parked their planes; airports, hotels, restaurants, and entertainment businesses have been closed; congress events have been cancelled or postponed, and tourism industry components such as hospitality businesses, catering businesses, transportation businesses, travel agencies, and tour operators are on the verge of bankruptcy (Baum et al., 2020; Deloitte, 2020; Filimonau, Derqui, and Matute, 2020; Haryanto, 2020).

According to the WHO, the COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest disaster of all time for the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2020). When examining studies in this field, it is observed that the effects of crises in the 21st century, such as the September 11 attacks, the SARS pandemic, the Ebola pandemic, the Swine Flu, the Bird Flu, the Tsunami, and the 2009 Global Economic Crisis, on tourism activities are much lighter than the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, during 2003 SARS pandemic, known as one of the biggest crises of the 21st century before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international tourists decreased by 0.4% compared to the previous year and by 4% due to the 2009 Global Economic Crisis (Rossello, Becken, and Gallego, 2020; Gössling, Scott, and Hall, 2020). In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was severe, the number of international tourists broke the all-time record and decreased by 73.9% (approximately 1 billion people). This rate is equal to 11 times the number of international tourists that decreased due to the 2009 Global Economic Crisis. In 2020, income from international tourism decreased by 1.3 trillion US dollars. Additionally, 100 - 120 million tourism workers lost their jobs. With these numbers, global tourism activities in 2020 regressed 30 years back to 1990 levels (UNWTO, 2021).

## **2.2. Tourist Guiding Profession**

According to the 3rd article of the Tourist Guiding Professional Regulation, which entered into force in 2014, a tourist guide is defined as a real person who is accepted into the profession and has the authority and right to provide tourist guidance services in accordance with relevant legislation and provisions. In Turkey, the profession of tourist guiding was legally registered with the Tourist Guidance Profession Law No. 6326 on June 22, 2012. Tourist guiding services, according to this law, involve promoting and showcasing the country's culture, tourism, history, environment, nature, social, or similar values and assets in line with cultural and tourism policies to individual or group domestic or foreign tourists, using the language they have chosen before the tour. It does not involve travel agency activities. The execution of tours is defined in the written documents of the travel agency by the tour program, and sold to the consumer, and managed on behalf of the agency. According to Köroğlu (2020), a tourist guide is defined as "a person who is certified by an authorized organization, gives information to tourists, guides, helps, contributes to the image of the country, and represents the travel agency for which he/she works". According to many researchers (Weiler and Ham, 2002; Bryon, 2012; Chan et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2015), tourist guides play a crucial role in the tourism sector. They represent their country, are the face of the country's tourism, provide visitors with the best description of a destination, and are the first and last point of contact for

tourists. They act as a bridge between cultures and affect the general image and success of the country's tourism. According to Çetin and Yarcan (2017), tourist guides have important roles such as information provider, educator, cultural representative, translator, artist, actor, storyteller, missionary, mentor, leader, facilitator, mediator, organizer, sales representative, and decision-maker. They are responsible for the overall satisfaction of tour services (Ap and Wong, 2001) and are an essential component of sustainable tourism (Weiler and Kim, 2011; Weiler and Black, 2015). So, they are the most crucial people for a destination and the most important stakeholder in tourism (Cohen, 1985). Therefore, it is vital to examine the situation of tourist guides during the COVID-19 pandemic period, as they are key people in the tourism sector who represent the destination and positively impact its image (Isaac and Abuaita, 2021).

### **2.3. COVID-19 Outbreak and Tourist Guides**

There are several studies in the literature examining the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on tourist guides. Aslan et al. (2020) stated at the II. International Cappadocia Social Sciences Student Congress that there was a drastic decrease in tours due to the closure of tourism businesses and people's anxiety, which led to economic and psychological problems such as unemployment of tourist guides, future anxiety, and burnout syndrome. On the other hand, Nyawo (2020) in his study, which investigated the support and measures implemented by the authorized institutions in South Africa during the pandemic process, reached the conclusion that tourist guides were completely ignored during the pandemic period. According to Eren, Sak, and Ekol Bayram (2021), tourist guides were one of the occupational groups most affected by the measures such as travel restrictions and curfews taken to reduce the impact of the pandemic. As a matter of fact, the study by Ren and Wong (2021), in which the professional loyalty of tourist guides during the pandemic in Macao was examined, reveals striking results. Tourist guides are indecisive about leaving the profession or not. In this process, while female tourist guides were dealing with a courier-like job, many guides entered the mini trading business. Those who continued to provide guidance worked for very low salaries. In addition, the tourist guides did not receive any social support from the relevant institutions. Özkan and Yesildag (2021) concluded in their study that tourist guides were negatively affected by the pandemic in socio-psychological and economic terms and had to do different jobs. According to Grancay (2020), tourist guides are the profession most affected by the pandemic as they are self-employed. The main concern of tourist guides is the decrease in the number of visitors and the demand for their services. In addition, the daily earnings of tourist guides who had the opportunity to work during the pandemic period decreased significantly compared to the pre-pandemic period due to the salary and payment policies of the travel agencies. On the other hand, according to the results of the study conducted by Brito and Carvalho (2021) in Portugal, tourist guides started organizing virtual tours by taking advantage of the power of social media. Additionally, they have started to offer nature tours, which are popular during the pandemic. Similarly, Akay (2021) mentions that unemployed tourist guides tried to earn income by individually organizing virtual reality tours on the internet. It seems that tourist guides are trying to adapt to the pandemic conditions. Türker and Karaca (2021) examined the possible changes that could be observed in the tourist guiding profession after the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of tourist guides. According to the results of this study, it was revealed that tourist guides experienced economic difficulties during the pandemic, were worried about being able to continue their jobs after the pandemic, and would have to adapt to new tourist behaviors after the pandemic. The results of the study by Bayhan and Saldamlı (2022), which examined the effect of perceived burnout levels of on their willingness tourist guides to leave work during the pandemic, are striking. In this study, it was determined that tourist guides were seriously affected by the pandemic, could not benefit from support at the desired level, had moderate burnout and a desire to quit, and the perceptions of burnout triggered their desire to leave the job. Additionally, tourist guides tried to meet their economic expenses with the help and debts of their relatives or friends during the pandemic period. Cokal, Ili, and Keskin (2022) discuss the experiences of tourist guides during the pandemic and mention that tourist guides, like other tourism stakeholders, are adversely affected by this process.

In this study, psychological and behavioral problems such as future anxiety, professional dissatisfaction, personal development, burnout, and negative effects on the performance of tourist guides were revealed. Çetinkaya and Öter (2022), in their study examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Turkish tourist guides, determined that the majority of tourist guides were unemployed, could not benefit from non-refundable grants and aid packages given to tradesmen, and that the government and professional chambers disappointed tourist guides in this process. Mbatha (2022) mentions in his doctoral thesis that the demand for tours decreased during the pandemic process, causing guides to become unemployed. Additionally, it is emphasized that the working conditions of tourist guides deteriorated during the pandemic, and some anxiety-like problems in guides showed up. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism businesses had to downsize their operations with practices such as salary cuts and layoffs, and this caused many employees in the tourism sector to lose their jobs. Tourist guides were one of the tourism workers most affected by this situation (Phin, Kler, and Dousin, 2022). Nazli (2022) revealed in his study that tourist guides were unemployed during the pandemic, and the guides had symptoms of depression, anxiety, and trauma.

As mentioned above, tourism sector is extremely vulnerable in the face of a crisis. The COVID-19 outbreak has caused serious damage to tourist guides as well as to tourism businesses. In this process, the flow of foreign tourists to the country was cut off, and domestic tourists had to stay at home due to practices such as the closure of borders, travel restrictions, curfews, and personal concerns. In this process, some tourist guides worked very little, and some couldn't at all. Therefore, they were unemployed for a long time, and their incomes decreased significantly. In addition to the economic problems experienced, it is thought that tourist guides have faced different problems in this process. In this context, it is considered important to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourist guides, who are key to the sector and a crucial profession for the tourism sector. The current study aimed to reveal how and to what extent tourist guides were affected by the pandemic, their attitudes and expectations towards the profession, and to make some suggestions. It is thought that determining how and where tourist guides are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic will guide practitioners and industry stakeholders. Finally, in this research, determining the expectations of tourist guides during crisis periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic will also provide insight into effective stakeholder support for enhancing the professional commitment of tourist guides. Hence, the research questions we are trying to address are,

RQ1. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected tourist guides?

RQ2. In what ways has the pandemic impacted the job security and income of tourist guides?

RQ3. What are the expectations of tourist guides during crisis periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

The research is being conducted in Turkey due to the importance of the tourism sector in the country. Prior to the pandemic, Turkey had a significant share of the growing tourism market. In 2018, Turkey earned \$29,512,926,000 and hosted 35,571,419 tourists. In 2019, Turkey got \$34,520,332 from tourism and hosted 40,719,786 tourists. However, due to the negative impact of COVID-19, the tourism income of Turkey decreased by 65.1% in 2020 compared to 2019 and got just \$12 billion, 59 million dollars (TUIK, 2021). Tourism income accounted for 17.5% of total exports in 2018 and 20.1% in 2019. Considering its positive effects on employment, the environment, interregional development, and socio-cultural structure, the tourism sector acts as a locomotive for developing countries such as Turkey. Therefore, tourism is one of the indispensable sectors in Turkey.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

In this study, a commonly used method in the social sciences, qualitative research, has been employed. Qualitative research is a method that uncovers individuals' behaviors and the underlying reasons behind these behaviors, providing a detailed understanding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The primary aim of qualitative research methods is to uncover and examine individuals' perceptions,

emotions, thoughts, and experiences, which are all aspects of being a social being. The experiences of individuals are obtained firsthand from the research sample using this research method. The goal is to achieve an in-depth understanding and knowledge of the problem. The findings and results obtained in the study are examined in detail (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Waller et al., 2016). Additionally, qualitative research should uphold fundamental principles, such as elevating the voices of marginalized and underrepresented groups. Working on sensitive topics is also seen as a fundamental purpose of qualitative research (Merriam, 2018). In this study, the aim is to reveal the challenges faced by tourist guides who were marginalized, forgotten, and provided no support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to all these factors, a qualitative research method has been adopted in this study.

In the study, a semi-structured interview technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used. This technique was designed to determine participants' perspectives on the research topic and places significant responsibilities on the researcher. Such a technique requires the researcher to ask all questions impartially, to listen carefully to the responses, and to use them as a reference for the next question. Additionally, the researcher avoids directing participants in a biased way and does not display attitudes such as approving or rejecting the responses (Patton, 2002; Boyce and Neale, 2006).

### **3.1. Data Collection Process and Analysis**

In the study, interviews were conducted with tourist guides who met the pre-determined criteria, held a Professional Tourist Guiding License issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, and possessed a work permit card issued by the tourist guides' association. Participants tourist guides had organized at least one tour during the pandemic period. The findings obtained from these interviews were thoroughly examined.

In the data collection part of the study, first, six tourist guides were interviewed to test the questions the researcher-created, which resulted from a literature review. This pilot study was conducted to ensure that the questions and the questionnaire were reliable. Overall, no results were found that could potentially change the course of the research through the pilot interviews. The study continued with a semi-structured interview form. The duration of the interviews varied depending on the participants' knowledge and interest in the topic. In qualitative research studies, data collection can be terminated when the data reaches a certain level and begins to repeat itself (Creswell, 2007; Robinson, 2014; Silverman, 2016). Therefore, data collection was terminated after reaching 15 participants.

The interviews were conducted between June 15th and July 10th, 2021. Before starting the interviews, the researcher introduced themselves and provided detailed information about the research objectives and content to the participants. Prior to beginning the interview, all participants were asked for their consent to be recorded, and it was emphasized that their personal information and responses would be strictly protected and used solely for scientific purposes. The researcher attempted to maintain an extended interaction process throughout the study; open-ended questions were asked to the participants during the interview, and the participants were not manipulated in any way, and no positive or negative comments were made about their responses. As a result, the interviews were completed as planned in a healthy manner.

### **3.2. Data Analysis**

In the first stage of data analysis, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim into computer files. All of the transcriptions were compiled into a single file for healthy analysis. The interviews were named P1, P2, P3... P15 according to the order in which they were conducted. Both content analysis and descriptive analysis were applied to the data obtained through semi-structured interviews. Content analysis is a data analysis method that allows for the categorization or classification of hidden thoughts or opinions in participants' responses in line with the research objectives (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). Descriptive analysis, on the other hand, involves

interpreting and organizing the collected data into predetermined categories before being used in the study. The collected data are brought together into predetermined categories, then summarized and interpreted (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). The process of dividing the data into themes and categories was carried out independently by two researchers, and finally, the two analyses were combined to obtain the final analysis.

**3.3. Validity and Reliability**

In qualitative research, there are several ways to ensure validity and reliability. These include using data triangulation techniques, reaching a consensus on findings with participants, discussing results with other researchers in similar fields, or presenting results to colleagues for approval (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996; Merriam, 2018). Other factors that can influence validity and reliability include the location, number of participants, number of questions, participants' characteristics, and timing of the research (Houser, 2015; Streubert and Carpenter, 2011). In this study, we used participant validation, discussed the results with two researchers in similar fields, and presented the results to an expert tourist guide. Finally, since the data began to repeat itself, 15 participants were deemed sufficient for the research.

**4. FINDINGS**

As a result of the content analysis of the data collected from the tourist guides, 15 categories were created under 5 themes: "Economic," "Psychological," "Social," "Professional," and "Tourist Guides's Expectations." These themes and categories, along with their frequencies, are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Created Themes and Categories.

<b>Main Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>f</b>
Economic	Unemployment	24
	Income Loss	15
	Grant Problem	19
Psychological	Pessimism	21
	Exclusion	12
Social	Asociality	14
	Migration	6
Professional	Performance	8
	Motivation	10
	Competence	8
Tourist Guides's Expectations	Grant	32
	Piggy Bank	11
	Social Security	9
	Effective Management	17

As shown in Table 1, tourist guides experienced unemployment and income loss during the pandemic. The impact of this process on tourist guides has also led to pessimism and exclusion, as

well as asocial behavior and migration. Some fluctuations have occurred in the performance, motivation, and competence of tourist guides. Finally, tourist guides expect grant support, a piggy bank, social security provision, and effective management from relevant organizations during potential crisis periods. The themes and categories obtained from the analysis, along with sample quotes, are given below.

#### **4.1. Economic**

All participants stated that they were seriously affected economically by the COVID-19 pandemic when asked about its impact on tourist guides. The vast majority of participants also reported being psychologically affected. Furthermore, the majority of participants stated that they became unemployed during this period.

##### **4.1.1. Unemployment**

The curfews, travel bans, and closures of museums and archaeological sites during the pandemic left tourist guides unemployed. Participants' opinions on the subject are as follows:

*"My colleagues and I have been unemployed for about 13-16 months. These people are unemployed; what can be worse than this? I keep saying that we are unemployed, my colleagues are unemployed." (P4)*

*"Since the beginning of the pandemic, over 10,000 qualified professionals (guides) have been unemployed." K13*

##### **4.1.2. Income Loss**

Tourist guides experienced income losses due to unemployment during the pandemic. Some participants expressed this situation as follows:

*"We were all affected economically and psychologically at first. Our colleagues have been unable to go on tours and earn money for almost one and a half years." (P10)*

*"I experienced an 80% loss in my income. I suffered a very, very significant income loss." (K4)*

##### **4.1.3. Grant Problem**

During the pandemic, many professions received grants, non-repayable loans, and other supports, but tourist guides were not included in these professions. Some participants expressed their opinions on this matter as follows:

*"So, support is being given to completely unrelated people, but we have not gotten anything. They could have helped us first and foremost. Of course, the ministry could have thought and helped us. There was no support at all." (K2)*

*"Besides, I'm single, but I know many guides who support their families. They couldn't get any support and had to get through this period by borrowing from friends or acquaintances." (K5)*

*"We waited a lot, and no one helped us, of course. I mean, financially, everyone struggled the most. I don't know how effective it would have been, but at least some support or vouchers that they could use at certain places to meet their needs could have been given, even in very small amounts." (K6)*

One participant said that many tourist guides are trying to voice their demands for grants on different platforms. The participant's statement is as follows:

*"Currently, there is a grant request that tourist guides have been carrying out on social media for the past two weeks. Let it happen to tourist guides, just like it happens to many tradespeople." (K3)*

One participant addressed the reasons why tourist guides cannot receive grants:



*"Well, first of all, let me say that one of the main reasons why we, as guides, cannot receive support is that we do not have insurance registration, so we don't have much of a say against the government." (K10)*

From the quoted examples, it is how devastating the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been on tourist guides. During this period, tourist guides became unemployed, and those who continued to work earned much less income than usual. Additionally, they could not benefit from the economic support provided to tourism businesses and other enterprises. This situation has further exacerbated the economic problems of tourist guides.

## **4.2. Psychological**

It has been reported that tourist guides have experienced various psychological problems along with economic due to difficulties the pandemic. These problems are categorized as "pessimism," "exclusion/being forgotten," and "suicide."

### **4.2.1. Pessimism**

During the pandemic, there are signs of anxiety among tourist guides about their profession, future, and general lives. Participants' statements regarding this issue:

*"I can say that the worry about the future has affected us very seriously. Tourist guides are experiencing serious anxiety about the future. There is no sense of guarantee about the future because our livelihood is dependent on this job." (K12)*

*"There is a loss of motivation, constant questioning in the mind, uncertainty about when work will start or whether it will start, inability to focus on research and work due to constantly feeling demotivated, situations such as leaving things unfinished due to those question marks even though one has managed to recover, and I hear from many guide friends that they are currently experiencing this." (K5)*

*"Everyone was emotionally affected to a great extent. People started to experience psychological problems, became pessimistic, and many changed jobs."*

*(K11) "There was a kind of pessimism, not being able to see the future, and a bit of uncertainty. Therefore, people are in a state of anxiety and pessimism, unable to see ahead." (K9)*

### **4.2.2. Exclusion/Being Forgotten**

Tourist guides have emphasized that they are not satisfied with the attention and care given to them by the organizations with whom they are affiliated, such as TUREB (Tourist Guides Association) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, during the pandemic. Participants expressed their opinion on this issue as follows:

*"We did not receive enough support from the associations or TUREB. I am not just talking about money, nobody even called and asked how we were doing." (K4)*

*"When the intra-professional funds do not match, people feel completely all alone; there is no one to rely on, even if not on someone's back, but where one can get some support. We are alone in our profession. Therefore, we are all unfortunately saddened." (K13)*

*"During the pandemic, guides became the most affected profession and were completely left alone. They feel both a life struggle and psychological abandonment." (K13)*

One participant expressed their view on this issue in a striking way:

*"Tourism ranks third in the country's income, and yet the people in this market or those belonging to this market are seen as if they do not exist during this process, and no positive recognition is given or any effort is made." (K5)*

### **4.2.3. Suicide**

Some participants have talked about tourist guides who ended their lives due to the adverse circumstances brought about by the pandemic. The participant's statement reveals how serious economic difficulties tourist guides have experienced during the pandemic. The statements are as follows:

*"Due to my position as a TUREB delegate, of course, I have heard things, and there have been tourist guides who have ended their lives due to the pandemic." (K2)*

*Unfortunately, some of our colleagues ended their lives due to financial difficulties during this process." K9*

Tourist guides have also encountered some psychological problems due to the conditions brought about by the pandemic. They have become more anxious about their profession and future plans. They think that they have been completely left alone and ignored during this process. The worst effect of the pandemic was some tourist guides ending their lives during this process."

### **4.3. Social**

It can be seen that tourist guides have also experienced social distress during the pandemic. According to the participants, these problems are categorized under the theme of "Social" as "Asociality" and "Migration."

#### **4.3.1. Asociality**

Tourist guides, who had to stay at home due to curfews and quarantine, faced an unfamiliar situation. Participants' statements on the subject reveal the reasons that lead to social problems in the general structure of the tourist guiding profession. Some expressions are as follows:

*"Since we are used to constantly being out, we felt like we were locked up in a cage or prison when we had to stay home for a while due to the bans. I felt that way." (P10)*

*"We are used to being on the road, traveling, and socializing with people. Since it was the opposite situation, we experienced a significant decrease in our social well-being." (P15)*

*"I have never stayed at home for three days straight. Even if I'm not working, I never stay at home for three days straight. Because I'm not used to sitting at home. We go somewhere, meet up with friends, and so on." (P11)*

#### **4.3.2. Migration**

Tourist guides, who faced serious economic problems during the pandemic period, experienced significant difficulties in covering their daily expenses. They could not pay their rent and bills, therefore, they had to change the city they were living in. Participants expressed this situation as follows:

*"I was living in Istanbul; I had a house; I had rented it; and I had bought all my belongings. We rented a house with a guide friend of mine. When the crisis hit, we said, Let's try to last for a month. We lasted, and then the second month came. I said this would continue like this. We sold almost everything, closed the house, and I went back to my mother's place." (P2)*

*"There were many guides who had to leave where they were completely and move to their families or hometowns and pursue different jobs there. I stayed with my family for 7 months. I had to stay because I had no income at all." (K5)*

In addition to economic and psychological difficulties, some tourist guides also faced social problems. Tourist guides, who constantly travel and socialize as part of their profession, were forced to stay at home during the pandemic, leading to asocial behavior. Moreover, some tourist guides who had difficulty sustaining their livelihoods had to leave the city they were living in.

#### 4.4. Professional

Tourist guides have encountered some problems related to their profession during the pandemic period. These problems have been divided into "Performance," "Motivation," and "Competence" categories under the theme of "Professional."

##### 4.4.1. Performance

It has been observed that there have been fluctuations in the performance of tourist guides who have had the opportunity to work during the pandemic process. These fluctuations are mainly due to concerns about catching the virus and the measures taken to protect against it. Here are some statements regarding the performance fluctuations caused by the second reason:

*"For example, sometimes tourists cannot understand me clearly while I am giving a speech because of the mask, which makes me struggle. The performance decreases in places where masks are mandatory. The ability to speak fast also decreases due to difficulties in breathing, feeling hot, and sweating. It affected me a lot during the summer. Yes, the COVID process affected my performance by 60-70% while giving tours." (P11)*

*"I have to take off my mask when I speak because my words should come out of my mouth clearly in a foreign language because of a slight accent difference." (P12)*

*"It is really difficult to speak with a mask on because my voice does not come out very loud normally, and I can't make my voice heard when I wear a mask." (P10)*

A participant who expressed that the fluctuation in his performance was caused by concerns about catching the virus stated it as follows:

*"Actually, I can't say that I give 100% performance. There is anxiety. For example, I go and come, it's going well, but if there is even a slight fatigue on the last day, I wonder if someone had it but didn't know or if it was passed on to me?" (P6)*

A participant explained why guiding tourists under the measures was more exhausting than usual:

*"I tried to be as meticulous as possible about this mask issue. But even so, this situation affected my performance. It seriously affected my breathing pattern. It makes me a little tired, more than it should. As I said, it affected my performance due to the precautions I had to take." (K9)*

##### 4.4.2. Motivation

During the pandemic, there have been fluctuations in the professional motivation of tourist guides. Some guides have started working in different professions during this period. Some statements on the subject are as follows:

*"Due to desperation, some guides have ended up in very difficult situations and have either left the tourism sector or started working in other fields" (P6).*

*"Guides who experienced economic difficulties found jobs in different fields or established their own businesses during this period" (P15).*

*"Some participants became teachers, cashiers, or started working in completely different professions. Some joined their family businesses. Some became milk or yogurt producers. I know many guides who have entered the regional food industry" (K11).*

*"Some colleagues of mine are considering taking a break or leaving the profession. Unfortunately, I have heard rumors to that effect" (P4).*

Some tourist guides who witnessed the sensitive nature of the tourism industry during the pandemic have expressed their desire to obtain a second job to earn income in case of a crisis.

*"I think we need to have a backup profession or something to do. Even if I prioritize guiding in the first place and think about what else I can do in the tourism industry as a backup, I believe*

*having a different option that we can use when things stall, or when tourism stops for a long time, is necessary" (P5).*

*"I have opened a second door for myself, even if I do not leave guiding. I am thinking of pursuing an academic path" (P9).*

Some guides who have been unemployed for a long time emphasize that there has been no fluctuation in their professional motivation despite all the problems they have encountered. Some statements on the subject are as follows:

*"I do my job with great love and passion. Yes, there have been many difficulties in the past, such as economic crises, wars, devaluations, etc. We are the group that is most affected at the beginning, but I have never thought of another profession" (P4).*

*"I have not thought of changing my profession. If I am not affected by these kinds of negative situations during the period when the pandemic is over or when things return to normal, I honestly do not have it in mind to completely leave the tourism sector and move to another industry" (P5).*

#### **4.4.3. Competence**

It has been observed that there have been fluctuations in the professional competence and skills of some tourist guides due to their inability to work in their profession for an extended period during the pandemic. Participants express this situation as follows:

*"We are losing our knowledge. People get rusty from not being able to work. We inevitably experience some professional deformation. Besides, we are also losing our foreign language, grammar. If we don't speak and use it, it decreases." (K2)*

*"We want the tours to start, but at the same time, I am afraid to go on a tour. I am not sure how much I remember the things. Unfortunately, everyone is somewhat affected by this fear, even if it is a region where I have continuously worked." (K5)*

The performance of tourist guides who worked during the pandemic has decreased due to the conditions brought by the pandemic. It has been observed that the professional motivation of tourist guides has decreased, and they plan to quit their profession or do additional work. Additionally, it has been expressed that the professional knowledge and skills of tourist guides have deteriorated because they have not worked for an extended period.

#### **4.5. Expectations of Tourist Guides**

In response to the question, "What are your expectations from relevant institutions and organizations during times of crisis?", categories were identified as "grants," "savings funds," "social security," and "effective management." Below are some statements from participants regarding these categories.

Some participants said that grants should be given to tourist guides in the face of crises that the tourism industry may encounter. Their responses are as follows:

*"I think there should be a budget allocated to this, like a contingency fund." (P9)*

*"For example, in case of accidents or emergencies, there should be intervention for guides who are not financially able to seek medical treatment. A fund can be established in the TUREB during these kinds of crisis periods." (P13)*

Some tourist guides expressed that a savings fund-like should be created in advance against possible crises in the tourism sector. There is consensus among participants that if they cannot work, the money accumulated in the savings fund should be given to the tourist guides at regular intervals.

*"For once, a savings fund needs to be created. Tourist guides need a savings fund for bad days. A savings fund for bad days is needed." (P1)*

*"I think a circulating capital can be established among the guides." (P2)*

*"Perhaps, based on their experiences, a guide's chest or something can be created, and they can be supported from here during bad times." (P8)*

Tourist guides are a professional group who work without insurance under the scope of freelancers. Based on this, tourist guides expect their social security to be provided by relevant institutions in times of crisis, such as pandemics. Participants' statements on the subject are as follows:

*"In these kinds of situations, I think we can deduct a share from the guides' daily wages and save it for bad days." (P6)*

*"For example, during this process, general health insurance for tourist guides could be covered and paid for. It could be for the first 6 months, and if we see that this process is prolonged, it could be extended for another 6 months." (P9)*

Some tourist guides think that relevant professional organizations were inadequate in terms of crisis management during the pandemic and that more effective and efficient management should be provided during possible crisis periods.

*"Perhaps more reasonable things that protect guides or the tourism sector can be created." (P12)*

*"My advice is that based on our experiences in COVID-19, there should be a crisis desk in the upcoming periods, and this crisis desk should take measures against possible crises. We always need to try to do our best by thinking the worst. Crisis desks should be established in the Ministry of Tourism and professional chambers in this way." (P15)*

Tourist guides who are not satisfied with the performance of relevant institutions during the pandemic expect new practices that will reduce the impact of the crisis on them in possible crisis periods. The most important point here is non-refundable grant support. Another important expectation that stands out is effective and efficient crisis management. It is believed that when effective management is provided, other problems will also be alleviated.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The prevention of human mobility caused by travel restrictions and quarantine measures has put the tourism sector in an unprecedented crisis globally. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has had serious impacts on tourist guides, who are one of the most important actors in the tourism sector. Due to the pandemic, tours have come to a complete halt, leaving tourist guides unemployed for a long time. Unemployed guides have faced not only economic problems but also psychological issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on tourist guides in terms of economic, psychological, and social problems caused by unemployment. Since the beginning of the pandemic, many tourist guides have not been able to go on tours. The economic loss of guides who have not been able to go on any tours during this period is 100%. The economic losses of tourist guides, who have had few opportunities to conduct tours during the pandemic, have reached up to 95%. Due to the halt in tours during the pandemic, tourist guides have become unemployed, and their irregular incomes have fallen to zero. Unemployed guides had to work in unskilled labor sectors and some of them have even quit their profession. Due to the devastating conditions brought on by the pandemic, some tourist guides committed suicide. In addition to the economic losses, anxiety and social problems are other issues that guides have faced during this period. Tourist guides, who constantly travel due to their profession, have faced psychological and social problems due to their long periods of staying at home. Moreover, the professional knowledge and experience of tourist guides who have not been able to go on tours for a long time have deteriorated. As seen, the impact of the pandemic on tourist guides has been devastating. In order to reduce the impact of the pandemic on guides, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or TUREB can organize online tours during this period. Tourist guides can provide online training to students in the Tourism Guiding Department with the

contributions of TUREB and the ministry. In this way, tourist guides can earn some income during crisis periods.

Due to the devastating impact of the pandemic and the fragile structure of the tourism sector, some tourist guides are considering quitting the profession completely and finding jobs in sectors that offer a more stable income and are less affected by the crisis. In addition, some tourist guides are also planning to pursue other professions alongside guiding, which they can use to generate income in case of new crises in the tourism sector. Undoubtedly, treating tourist guiding as a side job will lower the quality of tourist guides and harm the profession's image. It is believed that the departure of qualified tourist guides from the sector and their replacement with relatively less qualified ones will have a negative impact on the country's tourism revenue in the long run. To prevent these potential negatives, measures must be taken to retain qualified tourist guides in the sector.

The performance of tourist guides who conduct tours during the pandemic is lower compared to the pre-pandemic period. Concerns about contracting the virus and methods for preventing the spread of the pandemic are affecting the performance of tourist guides during tours. Additionally, there would be some changes in the profession of tourist guiding after the pandemic due to both the necessities of the era and the traces of the pandemic. The use of technology such as digital guides, virtual tours, and microphone headsets will increase in the guiding profession.

Many professional groups have received economic support during the pandemic, but tourist guides have not been able to receive economic support from the government or other relevant institutions. In this sense, they have become a forgotten professional group. Accordingly, tourist guides have some expectations from authorities in the tourism sector in the face of a long-term crisis. These expectations include grants, the initiation of a piggy bank-like system, the provision of social security, and more effective crisis management, which are the most important expectations and recommendations. Guides, like many other sectors, are also requesting grant support during the pandemic. As an alternative to grant support, it is recommended that the chambers they belong to initiate a piggy bank-like system where savings are accumulated during normal seasons and given to guides during crisis periods. The savings in this piggy bank can be provided by paying more than the annual fee paid by tourist guides to the chamber they are affiliated with. In times of crisis, tourist guides will be able to benefit from the savings accumulated in the piggy bank in case of negative situations such as being unable to work or health problems. In this way, they will be able to pass the transition periods with minimal damage. Freelance guides who pay their own insurance payments have been unable to pay their insurance during the pandemic as they have become unemployed and have been left uninsured during the pandemic period when they needed health insurance the most. It would be useful if their insurance payments could be temporarily paid by relevant institutions during times when they cannot work due to crisis situations. The economic power of TUREB or chambers may not be sufficient to meet the demands of the guides. At this point, TUREB may request economic support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and push for ways to receive this support.

Some tourist guides are not satisfied with management and criticize relevant organizations. One of the biggest expectations of tourist guides from TUREB and professional chambers during crises is to display more active management. Tourist guides not only expect economic support from their affiliated organizations but also to see them fight for their rights, have a healthy communication process, and be more transparent. In light of the experiences gained from the COVID-19 pandemic, relevant organizations should produce more constructive and useful solutions for tourist guides in a coordinated manner in the face of possible long-term crises that the tourism sector may face in the future. Many negative situations that may arise can be eliminated before they grow with effective management.

This research has some limitations. The first limitation is that it is a qualitative study, and, therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. Secondly, the findings of the study are limited to the

views of participating tourist guides. Therefore, public institutions and travel agency managers, regarding practices related to tourist guides can also consult the views of tourists who participate in tours about problems that occur during tours. In future research, how tourist guides adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 process and changes in their professional qualifications can also be investigated. In addition, a study examining the views of tourist guides after the COVID-19 virus is completely eradicated can be conducted. Furthermore, it is expected that the findings, results, and recommendations section of the research will not only enrich the literature during the COVID-19 pandemic process but will also be valid and guiding for any crisis that may affect tourism in the future.

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