

A Current View of the Causes of the Increase in Turnover in the Field of Tourism

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Abstract

During the last three years, significant changes have occurred on the labour market. We focused our research on the development and current state of turnover in tourism, which over the past three years have gone through perhaps the most turbulent period in their existence - the period of restrictive measures to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 disease. The purpose of the research was to focus mainly on the hypothesis there is increasing tendency of turnover in this industry and on the hypothesis, that the priority in the reasons for turnover has changed. We analysed reasons according to employees with intention to point out on their quantification and qualitative definition and comparison with the current development. We chose a structured questionnaire as the research method, which we submitted to employees in the hotel industry who had terminated their employment in the touristic industry in 2022 – 2023 in the Slovak Republic. We expanded on the questionnaire method with a semi-structured and a free interview with managers of operations in the tourism industry. Obtained results are processed into statistical outputs and analysis focused on the reasons with the highest share of employee terminations. We compared our conclusions with previous published statistical findings and also specified some new conclusions that follow the current socio-economic situation. It can help management in tourism eliminate some working conditions that lead to increased employee turnover.

Keywords

turnover, employees, tourism, causes

JEL classification: J63, J53

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Introduction

Despite the fact that tourism in the Slovak Republic represents a relatively low share of the gross domestic product, its importance is indisputable, and the focus is to expand it and increase its share of GDP on a societal scale. Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism had the greatest difficulties in continuing its activity. This industry always experiences the hardest hits of various diseases, epidemics, seasonal influenza, and global pandemics. (Abbas et al., 2021). The hospitality sector, including restaurants and hotels, was forced to close and industry businesses began to lay off staff. (Wallace et al., 2023). To mitigate the effects of restrictive measures in the covid period, as well as the effects of the current energy crisis, there were provided some measures adopted within the SR legislation. Tourism is currently exposed not only to the challenge of renewing its activity and expanding it, but also to the challenge of employment. In gastronomy and accommodation services, according to the requirements of employers, there is currently an acute lack of quality workforce willing to work in this industry. It is important to analyse the changes that have occurred in the behaviour of employees and their approach to work in the tourism industry and find out their causes.

Theoretical basis

Turnover in labour relations and its causes

Employee turnover is the process by which the worker moves from one workplace to another. (Antalová, 2013). It can be understood as the entry and exit movements of workers that do not result from natural exit processes such as retirement or death. In fact, it is a process of a certain rotation of employees, in which employees are hired or leave for various reasons on the side of the employee or on the side of the employer. Turnover can be understood as: voluntary and involuntary, inside the company as internal rotation, or external rotation in meanings:

- external mobility of employees (leaving and incoming employees)
- leavings of employees - employee wastage or attrition (Olexová, 2015).

The process of voluntary job change can cause many negative effects in the company if its rate exceeds the natural state. In the company, high employee turnover causes increased costs, the risk of a lack of employees with an impact on the entire process of its activity and worsens its marketing image. Moreover, organizations with high employee turnover lose the valuable knowledge asset that an existing employee has. Not only an organization loses intangible knowledge and skills when an employee leaves an organization, but also it undermines the operational efficiency of an organization (Grotto, Hyland, Caputo, & Semedo, 2017). Past research indicates that turnover has different negative consequences for an organization, including, but not limited to, reduced employee performance (Al-Suraihi, Samikon, Al-Suraihi, & Ibrahim, 2021), and organizational performance (Wynen, Van Dooren, Mattijs, & Deschamps, 2019). Indeed, turnover in any form has been associated with rising economic cost and organizational disruption. Data on turnover indicate that the economic

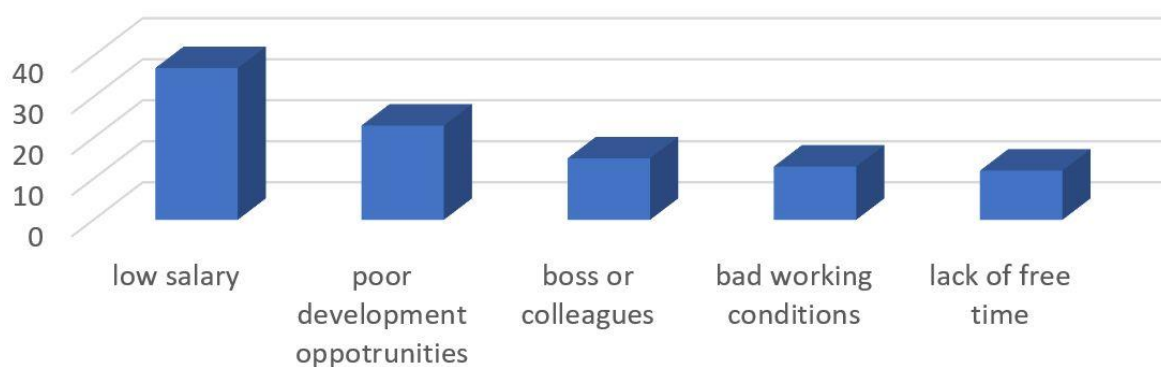
cost of employee turnover is huge, which varies between 90 to 200 percent of the salary of current employees in an organization (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010).

High employee turnover is a reality for the hospitality industry, with the industry leading private sector turnover rates prior to the pandemic (Dogru, 2023).

Turnover is so impactful on businesses that it is one of the most highly studied phenomena in the management and organization literature (Jex & Britt, 2014). Due to the high rate of turnover and its impact on firms' profitability, the topic is also widely discussed in the hospitality cannon, e.g., McGinley et al. (2020), McGinley and Shi (2022).

In the Slovak Republic, according to an analysis by the Profesia.sk portal, 21.5% of registered job applicants changed jobs in 2016-2017 (Profesia.sk, 2018), in tourism it was 36.2 %. At the same time, the analysis of the age structure of people who changed jobs revealed already in this period that the rate of job changes decreases with the age of employees, below 10% was recorded only at the age of over 40. In the following years, the turnover rate gradually increased, and in the post-covid period, this tendency became even more pronounced, especially in some sectors. According to the same source, as well as in accordance with the studies carried out, it has been established so far that the most frequent causes of fluctuation in the national economy of the Slovak Republic are: (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 The most common reasons for changing jobs. (Source: Profesia.sk, 2018)



The ratio between the causes of turnover changes depends on the age of the respondents who were included in the calculation of the percentage ratios of the causes of turnover. Younger employees consider their salary evaluation more important, older ones prefer other options, and age categories over 50 prefer more free time. Despite the fact that a change of job position is a natural phenomenon in the life of both the employee and the employer, in the last 10 years we can observe in the Slovak Republic that it reflects the development of the labour market, and is influenced by migration and labour requirements, especially within the European Union, and the overall societal situation. In the

last three years, there have been significant changes both as a result of anti-pandemic measures and the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict and the related energy crisis.

Turnover in tourism

Just like other areas of the labour market, tourism businesses are also subject to changes in employment. In the Slovak Republic, the share of tourism in the gross domestic product is a relatively low value - in 2019 it was only 2.86%, and in 2020 saw a drop to 1.45% with a gradual increase of 4.9% in 2021 - that is, to the level of 1.52% (Statistical office of the Slovak Republic). However, tourism services employ a higher proportion of employees, their number in total is at the level of 6-8%. In connection with the biggest restriction during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was precisely in catering and accommodation services that took place an enormous decrease in the number of employees in the tourist industry in 2020. During the closure of their establishments, many employers proceeded to terminate the employment relationship with their employees. During this period, the turnover development up to that point changed significantly in this industry.

The situation in the field of employment has changed not only in the Slovak Republic. "According to the American Hotel and Lodging Association's 2022, hotel occupancy was at a historic low in 2020. You can extrapolate that statistic and apply it to just about any aspect of the hospitality industry." (Garcia, 2022)

Rate of turnover

The turnover rate, otherwise known as the turnover index, expresses the relationship between the number of workers who started an employment relationship in the company and the number of workers who leave the company. Its result is the percentage of the change in the number of employees to the total number of company employees. (Bednář, 2017) Mathematically, the personnel turnover rate (IRP) is expressed by the formula:

$$IRP = ((X - Y) / Z) * 100$$

Where the individual variables are:

X – the number of employees who started an employment-legal relationship with the company in a given year,

Y – the number of employees who ended their employment relationship with the company in a given year,

Z – total number of employees.

The higher the value of the resulting indicator, the higher the turnover rate in the company. It is very appropriate to include this indicator in the analysis of the causes and consequences of fluctuation in the tourism industry.

There is no doubt that to higher turnover rate, to more negative impacts on the productivity of employer. Much mathematical research confirmed the connection between these indicators. E. g.

the research published in 2018 „confirmed the complex non-linear relationship such that organizations' labour productivity increased at low levels of turnover, reached a peak and decreased afterwards in a negatively attenuated fashion. Moreover, turnover volatility is negatively associated with labour productivity, suggesting that organizations find it especially difficult to deal with strong and frequent changes in turnover across time. Finally, volatility also moderates the relationship between employee turnover and labour productivity.” (Winne, Marescaux, & Sels, 2019).

Methodology

The purpose of the entire research was to determine the current rate of turnover in tourism businesses in two selected large regions of Slovakia in 2021-2022 and to focus on identifying the causes that lead to a lack of interest in working in this industry, or to constant change on the part of employees. Formulated conclusions can be very appropriately used to eliminate the state of excessive turnover and obtain stable employees.

Our hypothesis assumed that the employee turnover rate has been increasing in recent years in tourism. At the same time, as the basis of the research, we expressed the hypothesis that among the reasons, the amount of earnings is not a priority and hypothesis, that there exists correlation between voluntary turnover and dissatisfaction with job in tourism. As well we assume that the state in turnover relates to social changes and the situation in Europe and all over the world. Our hypothesis we tried confirming or refute.

To achieve the purpose of the research, we used the method of calculating the turnover rate in tourism businesses in the High Tatras and Liptov region and subsequent comparison with the average in the national economy. A total of 27 subjects in the High Tatras and Liptov region were included in the calculation. As a basis for calculating the turnover rate, we examined the total number of employees according to the notes of the financial statements of those companies that had the relevant data in the notes (Register of financial statements of the Slovak Republic) and by subsequently contacting some companies. In the case of several subjects, we used the statistical data provided to us. At the same time, in the period from May 2022 to May 2023, we asked employees who decided to end their employment in the tourism industry for reasons other than natural ones (retirement) to fill in a structured questionnaire, which was aimed at finding out the reasons for the early termination of employment. In the questionnaire, we also left space for their own expression of their feelings about the job. In total, we asked 124 employees for their opinion, and there were 112 completed questionnaires. We did not submit the questionnaire as a representative of the employer's management, but as an independent personnel-accounting company, which resulted in a more open approach on the part of the respondents. We also approached managers and business owners with a short, semi-structured questionnaire and interview to find out their opinion on the causes of the lack of quality workforce. The findings helped us better understand the causes of dissatisfaction on both sides. It needs be said that even though we used exact methods for the research, the output is not a purely exact

result. The solution to the serious lack of employees interested in working in the tourism industry lies in measurable problems, but also in the social area.

Results

Empirical analysis of the turnover rate in the selected subjects that we included in the research showed that the following results were reported in tourism businesses in individual years, to which we also present the average in the national economy according to the Trexima.sk portal and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic:

Table 1 Ratio of turnover in tourism in H. Tatras and Liptov region compared to the average of Slovak Republic - data in %. (Source: own processing)

Year	2021	2022	2023
Tourism	34.98	39.01	38.10
Average in SR	29.50	32.90	-

In the first 5 months of 2023 the turnover database is not available, but the prediction expects a stabilization of the situation comparable to last year. Within the tourism industry, family businesses show the lowest turnover rate, where almost all family members work in the business and external employees are represented to a lesser extent. Gastronomy and accommodation services are the second industry with the highest turnover rate within the Slovak Republic, while it reaches the highest level in the age category under 30. We also recorded a 100% rate in two companies in our research. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the reasons that lead people to their reluctance to work in the tourism industry. During the period when we conducted research in the form of questionnaires, the following results were recorded:

Table 2 Development of the reasons for voluntary turnover of employees in tourism in the period 2022 – 2023. (Source: own processing)

Development in the period Reason of voluntary turnover	Number of employees			Total	Share in %
	05/2022-08/2022	09/2022-12/2022	01/2023-05/2023		
Concerns about involuntary termination of employment	37	29	10	76	67.9
Unsatisfactory social climate	13	19	22	54	48.2
Dissatisfaction with work	11	15	16	42	37.5
Salary evaluation, irregular working time (overtime mostly in the season, spare time off in the off-season)	11	13	14	38	33.9
Threat of losing position by employing Ukrainians	6	10	8	24	21.4
Frustration at repeated job changes with constant feeling of dissatisfaction	4	7	8	19	17.0

According to the analysis carried out among the employees we approached the most important turnover reasons appear to be:

a) As many as 68% of the respondents who were involved in the study expressed as a reason for leaving the tourism industry, that they were afraid of the involuntary termination of employment because of the possible restrictive measures which, as in the first sector, may affect the tourism industry again. These employees terminated their employment as soon as they found work in another sector. This reason appeared more at the beginning of the research, i.e. in May 2022, and gradually this reason decreased. The reason is well-founded as during the period of inactivity of tourism businesses, most of them solved the lack of resources for employee wages by terminating the employment relationship. It was officially a voluntary departure of employees with a promise that they would be employed again after the resumption of activity. Most of these employees did not return to their original companies.

b) Unsatisfactory social climate, differences of opinion with co-workers on the current political, geopolitical, and economic situation, which also lead to open conflicts, is the reason for early termination of employment in up to 48% of cases. We assume that this new phenomenon appears in all types of employment, often also in family business and even in family relationships.

c) 38% of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with work, the feeling of too high demands for work performance and, after the period during Covid-19 with closed tourism businesses, and a reduction in work habits - employees admit that they no longer wanted to work as much as in the pre-Covid-19 period and expected a lower work pace. Also, a part of these respondents mentioned deteriorating health as the reason for reducing the work pace and finally leaving their job. Most of employees admit that it could be very helpfully to use new technologies in tourism to make the work less time-consuming.

d) Employees perceived their salary evaluation very similarly. In 34% of cases, employees considered their salary evaluation to be insufficient. In tourism businesses, it is an evaluation with zero benefits compared to businesses with more than 50 employees, which are required by law to provide certain benefits and concessions and in which the social policy towards employees is more favourable. In the tourism industry, we mostly meet micro-enterprises and small enterprises with the number of employees up to 50, which in turn cannot create sufficient space for the creation of a social fund that would cover some benefits (recreation allowance, 13th or 14th salary, reconditioning stays, etc.).

e) One-third of the employees stated that they are not at all willing to work overtime when they perceive this work to be underappreciated. As a more detailed reason, they state that they are not paid for any overtime, but they compensate it with spare time off in the off-season, which is not even lucrative for them (e. g. early spring or autumn).

f) As an absolutely new phenomenon, employees perceive a certain degree of threat to their own job positions by employed refugees - citizens of Ukraine. As many as 21% of employees expressed their fear that when the number of employees is reduced, preference will be given to refugees - citizens of Ukraine, for whom the employer has a lower overall labour price. For these employees, with incomes up to the minimum wage, health contributions are not paid, and this cost saving is attractive for every

employer. For the time being there are not many of these people in tourism industry employed and according to Association of hotels and restaurants of Slovakia they used to work on positions our employees did not prefer.

The other reasons did not have a high percentage representation and coincided with the previously formulated reasons of turnover, such as internal frustration, dissatisfaction, absent career advancement opportunities, unsuitable work environment or personal reasons.

Larger and smaller enterprises were involved in the research and no significant differences were found depending on the size of the employer. According to internet resources (Richterová, 2021) there were 62.7 % of employees were fired during Covid-19 pandemic from their jobs and only 26 % of them wanted to work back in the same enterprise they worked before and over 50 % did not want to be employed in tourism at all. The high proportion of employees who expressed concerns about layoffs was particularly relevant after the Covid-19 pandemic.

While even before 2020, there were stable administrative forces and management in tourism enterprises, these positions are also currently subject to turnover. At the same time, we are more likely to encounter reasons for financial underappreciation and disagreement with company policy and the overall direction of companies.

There is a correlation between the factors of voluntary employee turnover. Reluctance to work overtime also means dissatisfaction with salary evaluation. According to the analysis, employees prefer to work less, because they only have the option of taking unattractive time off during the off-season. At the same time as the fear of termination of the employment relationship decreases, the demand for an adequate salary will rise again. Calculating these correlations based on our analysis would not yield accurate data, the questionnaire was not aimed at finding out how their decision to terminate employment would change if certain working conditions were changed. Obviously, the order of factors will change and evolve over time. However, each of the factors is directly related to overall social dissatisfaction in interpersonal relationships.

On the side of managers and owners, on the contrary, the perceived trend is:

a) Unhealthy salary requirements of professions entering the labour market in the field of gastronomy and tourism. This reason for employee departure is perceived by up to 70% of managers in the gastronomy and hotel industry. When examining current job offers, we can state that this view is relatively objective. The offered salary for a cook is at the level of EUR 1,500-2,000 (Profesia.sk), while the salary of a university-educated economist is offered below EUR 1,000, most often at the level of EUR 1,200-1,300 per month, which, from the point of view of managers, created a large disproportion in the salary system that has been functioning so far. On the other hand, the salary of cooks and waiters is equal to the neighbouring countries of the European Union, where the leakage of these professions was high. For other professions it means a certain form of dishonouring of education.

b) Managers do not consider the company's requirements for employee performance to be high, as work performance should reflect the higher salary offered. In this context, they see the

possibility of potential benefits as an unjustified expense that will not bring effective results. This reason is given by up to half of the managers.

c) Many companies have focused their corporate policy on intensifying their work in an attempt to compensate for the losses from 2020-2021. Both in marketing, as well as in the services offered and in property restoration - the aim is to offer the client more and, of course, more expensively, but also to eliminate the effects of the current energy crisis. They also expect this point of view from employees, especially in the case of facility owners.

d) Managers do not perceive the negative climate in the work teams as a problem to be solved. Up to 70% of the respondents consider this problem to be a problem of the employees, in which they have no reason to be involved in any way. The only criterion is that the employees do not show themselves negatively in relation to the guests.

e) Employees in leading positions perceive (20%) a big change in communication with employees. The expected politeness disappears, a decent tone of voice and the threshold of mutual respect is lower. Managers perceive younger people in particular as unreasonably open and assertive.

Even if the analysis had an empirical character, the evaluation in percentage points would have a low informative value, because every formulated reason has social-psychological aspects at the same time. Interpersonal relationships need to be handled sensitively with a focus on reaching consensus on the part of all involved. We also examined the length of employment for employees who did not start as seasonal employees, but in the main employment relationship. We made the calculation on the same sample of companies. For the years 2019-2023 (until the end of May 2023) of the newly hired employees, up to 52% did not stay at work for more than 1 year. This rotation is extreme compared to the years 2016-2019, when only 12% stayed in employment for less than 1 year during the mentioned period.

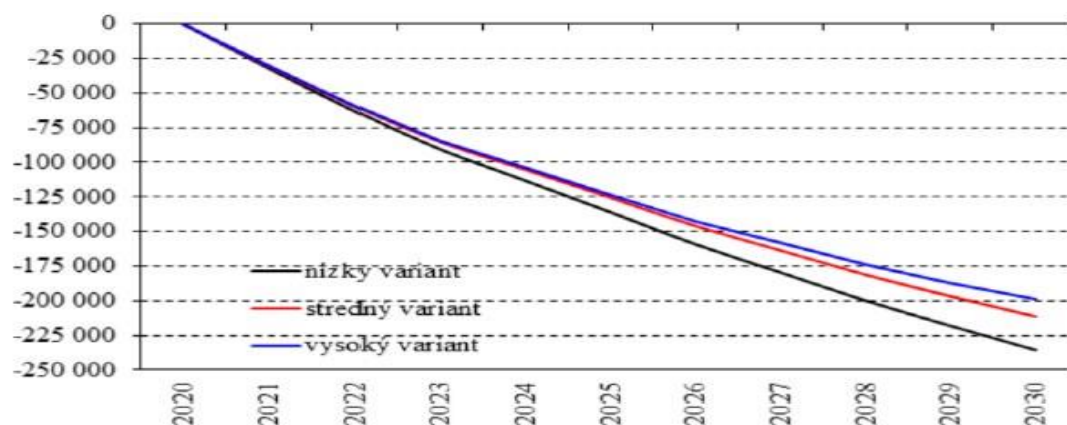
According to the results of the analysis, we can conclude that our hypothesis about the increasing turnover of employees in tourism has been confirmed, in some enterprises has turnover rate taken extreme dimension. It can also be stated that the hypothesis that there have been significant changes in the reasons for voluntary turnover of employees has been confirmed. The most important reason is not dissatisfaction with earnings, but more social reasons. As a new reason, concerns about job loss due to increased labour migration in Europe have been added.

We did not use statistical method of correlation analysis, but our results confirm as a test of reliability that in more than 50 % there is connection between unsatisfaction with workplace, social climate and salary and voluntary turnover of employees in tourism.

As a result of population demographic development in Slovakia, since 2020 on labour market is shortage in all sectors. While, according to Statistical Office of the SR, tourism was lacking in 2021 about 2,200 employees, in the same year there was a decrease of people of working age in national economy by almost 27 000 employees compared to 2020. According to the forecast until 2030, there will be a shortage of about 200,000 people in the productive population in national economy, while

in tourism this shortfall can be about 10,000 employees. Prognoses are different in a few variants, but all are with the same tendency (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Development of population in the age of 20 – 64 compared to 2020. (source: Lednárová, Dítětová, Baláž, & Šprocha, 2021)



Note: low scenario (black colour), middle scenario (red colour), high scenario (blue colour)

The situation is worsened by the current negative migration situation. Every year, more people of productive age leave the Slovak Republic to work abroad than come from abroad. More often go to work abroad qualified and educated employees.

Discussion

We often encounter the topic of turnover in literature, with many researchers dealing with and producing very stimulating studies and results. We tried to compare the results of our research with the conclusions of other authors and start a discussion on the mentioned topic. Research projects in the period before the anti-pandemic measures against Covid-19 differ in some points from our results, but in some they are very similar. In the area of turnover rate, the results of official sources (Trexima.sk, Profesia.sk and Statistical Office of the SR) are very similar to what we present in our analysis. Specifically for the field of tourism, the Profesia.sk portal reports a turnover rate of 38%, like our survey.

According to data on the actual lack of employees in the tourism industry (Hudec, 2022.), it was already established in 2022, that the citizens of Ukraine were willing to work in tourism, even if the employment rate was only predicted. The number of employees from Ukraine in the companies for which we processed the data, was around 8%. This is less than the expressed willingness of these people to work in the tourism industry, but at the same time it reflects the regional differences in the number of immigrated people from Ukraine. The development of employment with its decrease and subsequent increase during the pandemic and then in post-covid period has been overcome according to the SAV publication (Frank, & Morvay, 2022.). It is also shown according to the regions of Slovakia and fully correlates with our findings for the Tatras and Liptov region. The research carried out even in the pre-covid period (Tej, 2010) shows that low wages were first place as reasons for leaving work (35% of respondents), which is an almost identical result to our findings. Health reasons were cited by 29% of the respondents in the given study. In our study this reason is part of the employees' statement that they consider the work demands too high and do not want to work as intensively as is expected of them. The percentage in this case could be similar. However, in the aforementioned study, only 13% of employees considered interpersonal relationships unsatisfactory, while today they constitute the most serious reason for turnover. Likewise, in the aforementioned study, there was no reason for threats from the employer's interruption of activity or from employees immigrating from other countries.

In the world, according to research by Garcia (2022) the changed preferences in voluntary turnover of employees appears to. In the USA is the nature of the industry as the most important reason reported, but also toxic workplace culture and inflexibility of worktime.

The change of priorities in the decision to leave the job in the post-covid period reflects the current economic and energy crisis in connection with the geopolitical and social aspects existing on a global scale. Therefore, some causes of turnover are of a permanent nature and usually lead to normal turnover, which does not threaten the company in any way and can be rewarding for both parties.

Conclusion

The post-covid period brings new situations and changes in attitudes on both sides to employment relations, therefore we consider further studies and research in the area of excessive and unhealthy turnover of employees in tourism to be beneficial. The research hypotheses were confirmed. Turnover ratio has an upward trend. For the time of being the salary of employees appears not to be the most important reason for job changes. We did not focus directly on solving the problem of the increase in turnover, the effort was to point out the causes that led to employee dissatisfaction. The reasons formulated so far have changed in the post-covid period, and especially their priority has changed. The serious polarization of the collectives in their opinions, emerging conflicts and a feeling of dissatisfaction and frustration is formulated as the most serious problem and argument, and this in up to two thirds of the number of approached employees leaving their jobs. This is only a mirror reflection of the entire social climate and global phenomena. Just as in politics we can see increasing incorrect political communication, hard political fights, all over the world economy concerns about the effects of the crisis and war conflicts, so it is reflected in the social feeling of people and is transferred to the lowest level of work collectives, as well as to the relations between management and employees. Of course, it is impossible to generalize and perceive this trend for all businesses in the tourism industry.

Every owner and manager should become familiar with the causes of employee turnover in their own workplace. Every year, tourism companies deal with the holiday season by supplementing the workforce from among students and the unemployed. The number of such workers also increases in the off-season. Year-on-year, (2021 – 2022) we recorded an almost 20% increase in such workers in our research sample at the expense of stable employees. Some so-called season-workers replace stable employees when they conclude employment agreements in accordance with the applicable legislation for 12 calendar months in close succession one after the other, i.e. practically without interruption. These are not students in the dual education system. All formulated conclusions of our study, which are certainly not exhaustive, as well as the calculation in percentage points could contribute to solving a difficult situation.

The difficulties are not only in tourism but in all economy on labour market. Year to year we have in last time less productive people as result of population development, and we do not wait any progress. On the contrary, the tendency is decreasing. Productive - mostly young people after studies go abroad for work. There is no prediction that immigrated people can be a solution to the declining labour market and significantly replace the lack of employees in tourism in the Slovak Republic. Besides they are mostly in relatively unattractive positions.

The tourism sector is on the edge of interest from the point of view of society as a whole, it is not given the kind of attention that would help solve the ongoing difficult economic situation and increase the share of tourism in the GDP to the European level. According to statistical conclusions, the share of tourism in the European Union's GDP is 3.9% while employing 5.1% of the working population, and with associated industries the share reaches the level of 10.3%. (EU Fact Sheets,

2023). The insufficiently compensated increase in energy prices and the increase of the minimum wage and wage supplements, together with the lack of a quality workforce, is a serious barrier to doing business in the tourism industry. On the other hand, a step towards digitization, e. g. in the system of booking services and processing orders and payments are a great positive for the functionality of businesses. In the area of labour resources and their escape from tourism, the identified causes should be re-evaluated and lead to an attempt to work with them. The reluctance of the management to solve the situation in the collective has negative economic impacts on the entire company in the form of inefficient expenses for the ever-repeating process of finding new employees and reducing the quality of services provided. Over the past three years, the space between different understandings of work in tourism among employees and management has widened significantly. The effort to maintain businesses economically hinders managers in solving interpersonal relations. Reaching for professional or popular science literature (e.g. the author Carnegie offers several excellent tips for improving relationships and reducing polarity and tension in collectives) along with a return to various forms of employee motivation should be a matter of course along with inventive ideas.

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