

## **Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Unemployment: Case Study - Jordan's Tourism Sector**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to investigate the impact of COVID -19 on unemployment in the tourism sector in Jordan. For the purpose of achieving the study objective, the researchers reviewed various previous articles that handled COVID -19 pandemic and its impact on unemployment in different countries in the world. The researchers reviewed all reports issued by the Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Tourism, Central Bank of Jordan and Statistics Department. All gathered data was reviewed to make a comparison of unemployment with the years prior to COVID -19. The study concluded that COVID -19 affected and increased unemployment in the tourism sector in Jordan, since more than 46% of tourism workers lost their jobs. The impact increased the unemployment rate from 19% in the year 2018 to 24% at the end of 2020. The study recommended that tourism parties in Jordan have to develop internal tourism programs to maximize the benefits of tourism in all governorates, in true partnership with the private sector, in addition to developing special plans to promote tourism, such as promoting domestic tourism, improving the quality of the tourism product periodically and conducting vaccination in the touristic areas for those who did not receive the preventive vaccination. The study results may help those who are concerned with the tourism sector as well as future researchers.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Tourism sector, Unemployment, Jordan.

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## أثر جائحة كورونا على البطالة: دراسة حالة - قطاع السياحة في الأردن

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### ملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي أثر جائحة كورونا على البطالة في قطاع السياحة في الأردن. ولغرض تحقيق هدف الدراسة، استعرض الباحثون العديد من الأبحاث التي تناولت جائحة كورونا وأثرها على التوظيف في مختلف دول العالم، وتم البحث في التقارير كافة الصادرة عن وزارة العمل، ووزارة السياحة، والبنك المركزي الأردني، ودائرة الإحصاءات العامة، وتمت مراجعة جميع البيانات لإجراء مقارنة مع البطالة في السنوات السابقة للجائحة. وخلص البحث إلى أن جائحة كورونا كانت ذات أثر ملموس على البطالة، حيث زادت نسب البطالة في قطاع السياحة في الأردن، وتبين أن أكثر من 46% من العاملين في قطاع السياحة فقدوا وظائفهم. وأظهرت النتائج أن تأثير الجائحة أدى إلى زيادة معدل البطالة من 19% في عام 2018 إلى 24% في نهاية عام 2020. واقتُرحت الدراسة في النهاية بعض التوصيات من أجل التخفيف من تأثير الجائحة على البطالة، كأن تقوم الجهات السياحية في الأردن بتطوير برامج سياحية داخلية لتعظيم الاستفادة من السياحة في جميع المحافظات، بالشراكة الحقيقية مع القطاع الخاص، بالإضافة إلى وضع خطط خاصة للترويج السياحي، مثل تشجيع السياحة الداخلية، وتحسين جودة المنتج السياحي بشكل دوري، وإطلاق حملة تطعيم في المناطق السياحية لمن لم يتلقَ المطعم الوقائي. وقد تساعد نتائج الدراسة المهتمين بقطاع السياحة والباحثين المستقبليين.

**الكلمات الدالة:** جائحة كورونا، قطاع السياحة، البطالة، الأردن.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is "the collection of activities, services and industries that deliver a travel experience, including attractions, transportation, accommodations, eating and drinking services, retail shopping, entertainment, business and other hospitality services provided for individuals or groups of travelers away from home" (Dayananda, 2014). Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries and an important source of income for most countries (Kakeesh and Ahmed, 2020). At the same time, the global tourism industry is very sensitive to external events, including recessions, terrorism, disease or natural disasters (Teitler-Regev et al., 2013). Tourism can be influenced positively and negatively by a series of social, economic, natural, political, technological or legislative events (Ursache, 2015). Tourism is considered one of the basic economic engines for world nations (Alhammad, 2020). It contributes around 9.5% of the global GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council: WTTC, 2019). Tourism can grow rapidly if the industry employs qualified staff which is considered as the heart for an excellent and quick service delivery system (Cristina and Goes, 2020). Tourism and hospitality create various employment opportunities in different sectors, such as accommodation, food and beverage establishments, transportation services, travel agencies, tour operation companies, natural and cultural attraction sites, among others (Aynalem et al., 2016).

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on 11 March 2020 that COVID -19 is a pandemic. According to the WHO, COVID-19 affected 218 countries. Most world governments announced an emergency state as of April 2020. According to such declaration, all world people were restricted from going out and were encouraged or obliged to "stay home". Most economic activities were forced to stop working or to reduce their working hours. This had economic impacts on different numerous domestic industries, including the tourism industry.

International tourism is among the most impacted

economic sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates a loss of 850 million to 1.1 billion international tourist arrivals, \$910 billion to \$1.1 trillion in export revenues and 100-120 million jobs. Most destinations were entirely closed in April and May 2020, opening only in some regions.

## Background

The tourism industry in Jordan is one of the greatest and fastest-growing industries. Jordan depends on tourism as the main source of national income (Al Omari and Alomari, 2018). The Jordanian tourism sector is considered the first source of hard currency. It provides the state's public treasury with around 450 million Dinars per year (Ministry of Tourism, 2019).

Tourism is one important sector in the Jordanian economy, constituting over 13% of the total GDP (MOTA, 2019). It is also the second-largest export industry and foreign currency earner supporting Jordan's balance of payments, after external remittances from Jordanian expatriates. Tourism employs more than 50,000 workers in the private sector (MOTA, 2019).

The unemployment rate in Jordan fluctuated due to economic and political conditions that the region has witnessed. In 1973, unemployment rate was approximately 11.1% and the rate began to decline dramatically since 1975 and remained within low limits until it began to increase dramatically from 1989 onwards, due to the economic crisis that the Jordanian economy witnessed in 1989, which caused a decrease in the exchange rate of the Jordanian Dinar. At the same time, Jordan's economy was exposed to the negative effects of the second Gulf War. The Gulf War caused a decline in foreign demand, in particular from Gulf countries, for Jordanian labor. The unemployment rate reached its

peak in 1993, amounting to 18.8% and then began to fluctuate until it reached 12.5% in 2008 and remained between 11.9-12.6% in the period 2010-2016, then it began to rise in 2017, where it reached 18.5% and started to rise in 2019, reaching 19.1% at the end of the year. With the onset of the COVID -19 pandemic and the accompanying closures of various economic activities and the layoff of many workers, the unemployment rate rose in the third quarter of 2020 to 23.9% (Bauer and Weber, 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

COVID-19 broke out in the first quarter of 2020, resulting in an impact on employment all over the world. The tourism sector was the most affected sector, since all touristic activities were locked down. The tourism industry has been exposed to hard measures taken by governments to face the pandemic. The International Labor Organization (ILO) indicated that the pandemic could cause 305 million job losses, many of which are in the tourism sector across the world.

The research problem statement is to answer the following questions:

- 1- What is the impact of COVID -19 on the tourism sector in general in Jordan?
- 2- Is there any relationship between COVID -19 outbreak and the increasing unemployment rate in Jordan?
- 3- What is the impact size of unemployment caused by COVID -19 outbreak?

### **Research Significance**

The importance of this research stems from the importance of the topic that it handles, since the COVID -19 outbreak affected the tourism industry in all of the world countries, increasing unemployment, since most tourism enterprises failed to continue paying wages for their employees. In addition, the research is expected to obtain results that may help those who are concerned with the tourism sector as well as future researchers.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to investigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment in the tourism sector in Jordan. In addition, it aims to find out the impact size related to the unemployment rate increase caused by COVID -19 and unemployment in the tourism sector.

### **Literature Review**

Aguayo (2011) aimed to investigate the impact of tourism on employment. The study showed a positive impact of tourism on the services sector. Tourism could be faster both in employment growth and regional development through the sectoral linkages within the region.

According to (UNWTO, 2011), tourism and hospitality support indirect employment in activities, such as restaurant suppliers, construction companies that build and maintain tourist facilities, as well as necessary infrastructure, aircraft manufacturers, various handicraft producers, marketing agencies and accounting services, all of which are more or less dependent on the companies providing direct employment for their revenues.

Due to COVID-19, a half of the world's population was subject to partial or total quarantine measures by April 2020 (Sandford, 2020). The preventive measures continued, leading to income or revenue declination in all economic sectors. Therefore, employment has been negatively influenced by declining incomes, which in turn led to job losses as a result of the insolvency of a large number of various companies in different economic sectors. COVID-19 pandemic posed many challenges to both developed and developing countries. Most, or even all, world countries used preventive measures for the purpose of fighting the virus spread. Lockdown and business shutdowns were the most used measures. These lockdown measures caused that

millions of people lost their jobs, which in turn raised unemployment (Blustein & Guarino 2020). Felix et al. (2020) argued that 705 million people lost their jobs all over the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sheldon (2020) indicated that in Switzerland, about 30,000 employees lost their jobs during March and April 2020 due to shutdown. He indicated that the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs currently expects the unemployment rate to average 4.1% in the next year to reach 7% if shutdown persists. Gabriela-Daniela & Florin (2020) indicated that large companies in Romania sent their employees into technical unemployment and most jobs were canceled, postponed or frozen. Bahri (2020) concluded that Indonesia experienced rising unemployment and poverty in ranges of (9-10) and (25-26) million people, respectively, by the end of 2020 depending on projected economic growth. Bahri (2020) suggested that existing financial aids are not sufficient to support rising unemployment and rising poverty levels. The International Labor Organization (ILO) stated that about 2.7 billion people, or 81% of the global workforce, are currently affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hotel and restaurant services are the most affected sectors. The Organization argued that strong reductions in total working hours are expected in the world; for example, in the Arab states, 8.1% of the total working hours, in Europe (7.8%) and in Asia-Pacific (7.2%). The ILO indicated that global working hours declined in the first quarter of 2020 by 4.5 percent, while it was expected to be 10.5 percent (<https://www.euractiv.ro/economic>), according to shorter working hours in some countries, suspension of employment contracts and technical unemployment in others and staff reduction and unemployment in others (ILO Monitor, 2020). Closing of almost all airports and land borders between April and May 2020 forced many world companies to lay off a number of their employees and reduce their work for the purpose of avoiding a complete collapse.

The tourism sector was the most affected sector in all world countries, since all countries banned traveling or

even closed their borders in the face of incoming or outgoing travelers. All flights were canceled and no tourists were traveling to other countries, which badly affected all tourism institutions. Many of them have reduced their employees to the minimum, due to a shortage in revenues (Akkerman et al., 2020). COVID-19 pandemic situation affected the tourism industry worldwide. Most touristic destinations in all world countries have been affected by countries' COVID-19 restrictions. In this regard, the World Tourism Organization indicated that COVID-19 pandemic caused a decline of millions of international tourist arrivals. Such decline reduced tourism revenues. The World Travel and Tourism Council mentioned that COVID-19 pandemic caused the cut of 50 million jobs with about 75 million jobs at risk worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, including preventing mass gatherings, conferences, sports events, business meetings, fashion shows and marriage ceremonies had a significant impact on tourism industry. The lockdowns in approximately most of the world countries caused lower tourism revenues. Tourists were absent in parks, museums and other attraction sites because of COVID-19 lockdowns. Alsarayreh (2017) found that there is a statistically significant impact of touristic education on reducing the unemployment rate. This study found that there is a statistically significant impact of the nature of work in touristic professional organizations on reducing the unemployment rate. Tabbosh (2016) focused on the problem of local development and touristic development as a solution, by determining the role played by policies, investments and public projects of tourism development in mobilizing local development through a study of the reality and prospects of tourism in the region of Bashar and what may be provided by the development of tourism sector of the region to ensure employment and thus reduce unemployment rate, activate the mobility of all

relevant sectors and activate the economic movement in the region. Mairna (2012) explored the current status of domestic tourism in Jordan and found that tourism acts as a vital economic sector; though, revenues generated by domestic tourism are far below the expected level. The research found that there are different factors affecting domestic tourism in Jordan, as well as its trends and attributes. Implications required to increase numbers and expenditures of domestic tourists were suggested.

A considerable increase in the number of unemployed people was caused due to COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to fight it. Unemployment has reached high levels based on the fact that a large number of employees have had their employment contracts suspended: 47.8% in France, 26.9% in Germany, 46.6% in Italy, 23.5% in the United Kingdom and 24.1% in Spain. The USA reached an unemployment rate of 14.7%. Toyotaro et al. (2020) found that layoffs for temporary workers in the tourism and airplane businesses increased 4.3 fold in the weeks following Spain's decision to close its borders.

### **Methodology**

The descriptive analytical method as well as central tendency methods, such as arithmetic averages and measures of dispersion based on historical data, were used to test the study hypotheses. The findings of the study provide a framework for tourism marketers to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector.

### **Impact of COVID -19 on Jordan Tourism Unemployment Rate**

The outbreak of the COVID -19 pandemic in March 2020 affected the numbers of incoming tourists to Jordan. In recent years, the hospitality and tourism sector in Jordan experienced a considerable growth, making it one of the main drivers of the economy. Until the first quarter of 2020, the tourism sector was the largest employer in Jordan and the biggest generator of foreign exchange. The sector grew rapidly over the past few years and had a great

potential for further growth. The tourism sector was one of the sectors most affected by the spread of COVID-19, as it negatively affected both the supply and demand sides as a result of travel bans and closures of airports and entertainment places as precautions to limit the spread of the virus. According to the World Tourism Organization, initial estimates indicated a sharp decline in international tourism due to the travel ban and the cancellation of many flights, which caused losses estimated at about 30 to 50 billion US dollars in tourism revenues (WTO, 2020).

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) reported 5.3 million visitors entering the country in 2019 compared to around 3.5 million visitors in 2016. The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated Jordan's tourism revenues at \$7.2 billion in 2019, equivalent to 17 percent of the GDP. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA), the tourism sector in Jordan was equivalent to about 12.5% of the GDP (2018). This ratio was expected to increase further in 2019. The third quarter of 2019 already registered an increase in tourist arrivals by 6.5% over the same quarter in 2018. The Central Bank of Jordan's (CBJ) figures revealed that tourism revenues in 2019 (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter) were equal to JD 1,290.7 million (an increase of 7.7% over the same period of the previous year). In addition, employment in tourism reached 53,389 people in the third quarter of 2019. International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in cooperation with the Institute for Labour and Social Research (Fafu) (2020) carried out a sample survey consisting of 1,190 enterprises. The study concluded that the research sample faced some challenges represented in low cash flow, reduced demand and supply and disruption in the value chains as a result of paying their employees' salaries in the context of measures responding to COVID-19. They concluded that 7 percent of the study sample

mentioned that they operate as usual at the survey time. 39 % were operating, but with either reduced staff or reduced working hours and 51% had closed temporarily. The study also concluded that 42% reported that they may be able to pay just only one month for their employees. 42% were able to pay for three months only. The ability to pay salaries differed among macro, small, medium and large enterprises, where (55,44,33 and 23%), respectively, were able to pay an additional month. The survey also concluded that 26.5% of the sample indicated that they would be able to stay working for less than a month, 30 % would be able to remain from 1 to 3 months, 5 % for 4 to 6 months and only 13% for more than six months.

According to the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) statistics from January 2020, tourism income increased by 10.2% in 2019 compared to 2018 and totaled US\$5.8 billion. Furthermore, the CBJ data indicated that revenues continued to increase during January 2020, reaching US\$501.3 million, which represents an increase of 11.4% compared to January 2019. The expectations for tourists' arrivals and revenues were high for 2020, until the appearance of the first COVID-19 case in March 2020.

Jordanian tourism income for the year 2018 was about 73.3 million Jordanian Dinars. It provided about 50,000 jobs in 2018 (Ministry of Tourism, 2018). Jordan Ministry of Tourism (2019) reported that the year 2019 witnessed the highest level of growth in the tourism sector, as the number of visitors reached 5,360,587 visitors and tourism income increased to 4,108.2 million Jordanian Dinars. In

January and February of the year 2020, the number of tourists witnessed an increase of 12.2% and 15.9%, respectively, compared with the same months of 2019.

A survey showed that the value of tourism revenues by the end of 2020 decreased by 81%, with an estimated loss of 3.3 billion Dinars, as the value of revenues for the sector amounted to 784 million Dinars until December 2020, compared to the same period in 2019 in which it amounted to 4.1 billion Dinars.

The survey indicated that since the beginning of the new COVID-19 pandemic, 60 official tourist offices have closed and this number is expected to double during the current year, in addition to dozens of hotels, tourist and popular restaurants, shops selling oriental antiques, where more than 400 tourist restaurants and 400 popular restaurants and cafes have closed. In addition, 14 thousand employees lost their jobs in tourist restaurants and cafes classified as tourism facilities.

The tables below show the effect of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in Jordan, which is reflected on unemployment in Jordan in the tourism sector. At the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2020, the Ministry of Labor published the number of companies that applied for support according to Defense Order No.6, as shown in the following tables.

**Table (1)**  
**Applications received to reduce the workers' wages by 50 percent**

	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Accepted</b>	<b>Rejected</b>
Number of applications	3,704	3,443	261
Number of workers	185,256	143,869	41,387
Number of workers whose wages will be reduced	124,817	108,030	16,787
Reduction percentage	67%	75%	40%

Source: ILO report, 2020.

Table (1) shows that a large number of enterprises in Jordan applied to reduce workers' wages due to difficulties that they face in paying workers' wages as a result of

closing and the absence of any activities which reduce or eliminate the decrease of revenues.

**Table (2)**  
**Applications for closure of businesses**

	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Approved applications</b>	<b>Rejected</b>	<b>Under processing</b>
Number of applications	406	197	164	45
Number of workers	9,775	3,192	5,623	960
Number of workers affected by closure	8,439	2,914	4,926	599

Source: ILO report, 2020.

Table (2) indicates the number of enterprises that applied to close or stop their business, which reflected on workers who are losing their jobs or whose wages will be cut. Such figures reflect the increased percentage of unemployment during the first months of COVID -19 pandemic outbreak.

Table (3) shows the unemployment rates in Jordan during the last three years as of 2018 to the end of 2020. The percent of increase between 2018 and 2019 in the first quarters of the two years is around 0.6 %, while the percent of increase for the same period in the years 2019 -2020 is 0.3 %, but the percent of increase in the last three quarters amounted to 5%. This increment reflects the impact of COVID-19 on unemployment. This result may be attributed to lockdown and the closing of different activities to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Table (3)**  
**Unemployment in Jordan - %**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	18.4	19.0	19.3
2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter	18.7	19.2	23.0
3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	18.6	19.1	23.9
4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter	18.7	19.0	24.0

**Table (4)**  
**Jordan's total tourism revenues during the period between December 2019 and December 2020 (million)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Amount/JD</b>	<b>Decrease</b>	<b>Percent</b>
2019	1854.5	1070.5	-57.72
2020	784		

Table (4) shows that tourism sector in Jordan was the most affected sector by COVID- 19 pandemic, where the revenues declined between 2019 and 2020 by JD 1070.5,

with a percentage of 57.72 % due to lockdown and stopping of all tourism activities. This declination is reflected on tourism-sector employment.



**Table (5)**  
**Total number of visitors during the period between**  
**December 2019 and December 2020 (million)**

Year	Number	Decrease	Percent
2019	2,438,584	1,441,858	-59.1
2020	997,726		

Table (5) shows the impact of COVID -19 on the number of visitors in 2020, where the number of visitors declined from 2,438,584 to 997,726. So, the declination size is 1,441,858 with a percentage of -59.1%. Such declination caused job loss for thousands of workers in the tourism sector.

### Conclusions

- Tourism income decreased by 37% in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020 and until the end of November of 2020. Jordan had lost 4 million visitors and 3 billion Dollars of income from the tourism sector.
- The total tourism income in Jordan amounted to about 819 million Dinars until the end of July of 2020, while it reached 2.3 billion Dinars for the same period of 2019.
- In Jordan, 60 travel and tourism offices closed their offices and declared bankruptcy in the first 10 months of the year 2020 out of 782 licensed offices until 2020.
- 46% of the workers in the tourism sector had lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Central Bank of Jordan confirmed that the volume of tourism income in Jordan decreased by 63.7% in the

first 7 months of 2020, to record 819 million Dinars.

### Recommendations

Jordan's government has to implement crisis management plans and should implement safety procedures in tourist facilities, whether being hotels, restaurants or tourism buses.

The researchers recommend that tourism parties in Jordan have to develop internal tourism programs to maximize the benefits of tourism in all governorates, in true partnership with the private sector. In addition, special plans should be developed to promote tourism. Moreover, Jordan's government is requested to support tourism establishments to develop their services, hospitality, security and the tourism product within the framework of the policies of transformation towards sustainable-development goals. Also vaccination must be comprehensively carried out in touristic areas for those who did not receive the preventive vaccination.

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