

TOURISM OF SPAIN: HOTEL EMPLOYMENT RISES ONLY 0.6% SINCE 2008



The engine that has driven the Spanish economy during the tough years of the economic crisis has broken down. Tourism in Spain has been the lifeline of the economy since the crisis exploded. According to data published by the National Statistics Institute (INE) last week, the 57 million visitor arrivals recorded in 2008, following a steady annual growth, have become more than 75 million.

The increase gained momentum after 2011 when European tourists, fearful of the outbreak of the Arab spring, headed towards a safer haven on Spanish shores.

One would think that employment would have followed suit and that more labor is needed to serve a thriving sector that already contributes 11% of the annual revenue generated in Spain. But according to the 2016 Tourism Activity Report presented by the CCOO trade union, this has not been the case. The number of foreign visitors has grown 35.7% since the onset of the crisis, but hotel employment rate remains frozen. For the union, this is the real downside of tourism in Spain.

"Since 2008, overnight stays have risen by 22.9%, and employment has only increased by a shameful 0.63%", according to the CCOO. And the fact is that INE statistics show that 199,323 hotel employees have become a mere 200,578 nine years later.

In other words, the same personnel is attending to a much larger wave of visitors. "This demonstrates that the growth and profitability of the Spanish hotel industry rests on the workforce insecurity."

"Tourism in Spain is the growth engine of the country's economy, but it is also the industry that is growing most in employment insecurity," indicated José María Martínez, General Secretary CCOO Services, during the presentation of the report.

"They're doing a whole lot more work with the same staff in an area such as the hotel sector which has a high turnover." In the last year alone, the best year in the history of Spanish tourism, the growth in hotel employment (+5.59%) was lower than the increase in overnight stays (+ 7.07%) and the increase in Revenue per available room (53.9 euros, up 10.68%). The average daily room rate, also rose by 4.6% to 82.3 euros.

Increasing productivity by increasing the workload is a solution that was adopted as a general rule in the Spanish economy during the crisis years. But the union report not only criticizes this; it also reveals that the situation of employees in this sector has worsened, that subcontracting leaves them helpless and that temporary and part-time employment involves elements of fraud; helplessness because of outsourcing and temporality.

Based on an analysis of the Labor Force Survey, the CCOO points out that 39.5% of tourism contracts are temporary, 13 points more than the country's temporality (26.5%), which last year had already reached its highest for the Rajoy administration.

"But the big fraud is occurring with part-time employment," said Gonzalo Fuentes, secretary for the union's Institutional Services Policy. "People are hired for a few hours, but then the hours are extended with overtime for which they are not always paid in a structured way. All housekeepers are hired in that way."

It is precisely this job - done part-time mainly by women - on which the union is turning the spotlight. "Under the collective bargaining agreement housekeepers should earn about 1,300 euros per month, but after the labor reform, company agreements were given precedence," Martinez reported. "That caused many companies to fire workers with 20 days' compensation and to outsource these tasks to multiservice companies which, because they need a profit margin, have reduced that monthly salary to about 750 euros."

The CCOO characterizes this movement as an "illegal transfer" of workers to intermediary companies, which have lowered the salary in this sector by 40% from where it was in 2008 under the hotel industry agreement. "It is indecent and disgraceful that a housekeeper earns 1.5 euros for cleaning a room," Gonzalo Fuentes complains.

If contracts are temporary, if wages are lower and workload is heavier, there is no study that could refute the claim that the quality of that work will deteriorate. **That is why experts constantly point to improvement in the quality of tourism in Spain as the outstanding issue in a sector that is currently experiencing its heyday**, with returns per room of 25.64%, rising to 40% in summer and winter.

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