

MIGRANTS IN TOURISM SUFFER MORE THAN OTHERS DURING THE CORONA CRISIS



10% of all jobs worldwide are - or were until six months ago - dependent on tourism. Among these 330 million workers, a third could lose their jobs due to the Corona crisis, including a particularly large number of migrants. Far from their home countries, many of them are in a very difficult situation during the pandemic.

The tourism industry is one of the economic sectors that employs a particularly large number of migrant workers. The studies of the International Labor Organization (ILO) have found that migrants in tourism bring skills to the hotel industry that are often not available on the local labor market, and they are considered to be particularly committed.

“In some countries, migrant workers are significantly overqualified for the positions in which they are employed in tourism, and are more likely than average to be stuck in lower paid positions. **One could conclude that they are in demand as cheap labor,**” said Christiane Kuptsch, an expert on migration policy at ILO.

Naturally, the experience of migrants in tourism can vary greatly from country to country. Some experts see a gap between North and South in terms of the functions and responsibilities that foreign workers play in tourism. Migrants from poorer countries work in jobs that hardly require any qualifications, while those from richer countries occupy senior management and professional positions.

The tourism industry employs migrants in various functions with very different employment contracts and types of residence status. Many countries, whether developed or developing, have policies that welcome skilled migrants but allow less skilled migrants to come only on a temporary basis. As a result, a highly qualified hotel manager is very likely to have a permanent residence status and an employment contract that guarantees a decent income and social security, while a cleaning staff member is more likely to have a temporary work permit and may not even receive the legal minimum wage. So not all migrants are equally vulnerable.

“They are in a particularly weak position where they are tied to a particular employer, so in case of dismissal, they lose their right of residence. They endure that their rights are disregarded in order to keep their jobs, especially if they have gone into debt to go abroad to work,” said Ms. Kuptsch.

The Corona pandemic has clearly shown that many migrants depend on the goodwill of their employers for their safety at work, health and housing conditions. Much depends on the extent to which individual employers comply with the regulations. In many countries however, the capacity of the labor inspectorate is not sufficient to bring violations of statutory health and safety regulations to light.

Migrants in the tourism industry also often face the “no work, no income” dilemma. They are usually the first to be laid off or lose their jobs. Almost everywhere migrant workers have hardly any

savings, often because they transfer so much money home. They do not save for themselves for bad times, but send the money to their families and thus support many people in their home country.

“The tourism industry is known for the fact that informal employment relationships are the order of the day, so the “no work, no income” dilemma definitely exists in this sector. As a result, migrants in the pandemic are more exposed to health risks than average and are often tempted to work even when they are ill,” said Ms. Kuptsch.

Migrant workers are often excluded from wage subsidies, unemployment benefits and other social security benefits provided in response to the corona pandemic. Ms. Kuptsch believes that migrants should be included in national measures to overcome the consequences of the pandemic. She suggests extending visas or work permits as a way of preventing people from being forced into irregularity because they cannot return to their home country.

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