TRENDS IN TOURISM EMPLOYMENT IN SERBIA – HIGHLIGHTING THE GENDER DIMENSION

DOI: https://doi.org/10.18509/GBP26331sg
UDC: 338.48:331.5-055(497.11)"2010/2024"

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ABSTRACT

Tourism employees face multiple challenges related to job stability, irregular working hours, seasonality, and wage adequacy. Nevertheless, according to the NACE Rev.2 classification, the number and share of persons employed in tourism industries in Serbia have been rising in recent period, except during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the noticeable gender divide, the aim of this paper is to shed light on tourism employment trends for men and women across different tourism sectors. We use annual data from the Labor Force Survey to assess current trends in tourism employment by sex in Serbia for the period 2010–2024, with particular focus on 2020, which was severely affected by the pandemic. Overall men's participation in tourism employment was almost double that of women during the analyzed period, with the greatest differences observed in land transportation (6 times on average), more than double in case of sports activities, amusement and recreation activities, but also air transport and creative, arts and entertainment activities (1,8 times each). Women represented 1,4 times more employed than men in accommodation, 1,7 times in activities of travel agencies and 1,4 times in libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities. The similar employment pattern is detected in food and beverage service activities and fairly same number in gambling and betting activities. Employment fell in 2020 for both sexes, but women maintained greater labor engagement, as the number of female employees decreased less during the pandemic. The vulnerability of tourism market employees is multifaceted, and the gender dimension in Serbia highlights that women employed in the tourism sector demonstrated greater resilience in pandemic years.

Keywords: tourism, employment, gender, COVID-19, Serbia

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry offers versatile possibilities for the employment, not only direct, but also indirect and induced, with varying tourism income multiplier. Researching tourism employment is a difficult task when compared to the other industries because it is characterized by seasonality, unsteady working hours, inadequate pay for family labor and informal or even illegal labor. Additional challenge is related to the rapid turnover of the staff that is closely related to the difficulties in climbing the corporate ladder and getting low pay while working late shifts and/or during weekends and/or holidays [1]. Seasonality can play important part in the decision to stay in tourism industry, as shown in Grobelna and Skrzeszewska [2] who analyzed perceptions of the students engaged in tourism industry and concluded that seasonality may relate to their employment aspiration after graduation. There is another important divide between more or less developed

countries, as tourism is regarded as more luxury associated behavior with expected high-quality products in countries with higher economic power, while in developing countries is more related to the economic development and poverty reduction [3]. Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal [4] tried to give an answer to the question whether the tourism development is associated with employment of low quality and concluded that institutional regimes play important role in improving the low quality of tourism occupations. Alongside the mentioned issues, Aynalem, Birhanu and Tesefay [5] also highlight the important factors for greater turnover in tourism employment: low education and training, undemocratic and rigid corporate culture, discrimination, sexual harassment and political instability. When summarizing the literature review on tourism and employment opportunities in developing countries, Mishra and Kaur [6] put emphasis on local residents, lack of training possibilities and need for proper education, but stress that poor pay and gender bias are characteristic for all countries regardless of their economic development.

Supplementary to the "gendered employee" and "gendered power" perspective [7], two important theoretical frameworks describe the female tourism employment, according to Obradić and Marić [8]:

- pyramid shape of female tourism employment, given that women occupy sessional and part-time jobs (bottom of the pyramid), while only few get to the managerial top positions (Richter)
- two-way segregation: horizontal - women occupy less paid jobs as receptionists, waitresses, room attendants, cleaners, travel agency sales persons; and vertical -men occupy key managerial positions while women are prevalent in posts with less influence (Parrett)

It has been documented that such wage discrimination and "occupational crowding" exist in Portugal where tourism employment means low wages, unsteady job and high feminization, followed by weak horizontal and pronounced vertical segmentation [9]. Recent literature review [10] revealed persistence of gender divide in tourism as women are still mostly in frontline service roles and men are mostly in leadership positions, which can be followed in six key themes: leadership barriers, work-life balance constraints, sociocultural norms, gender pay gap, limited career development and ineffective diversity policies. Alacron and Mulor [11] summarized five key issues in the gender analysis of tourism work: informal and precarious work, criteria for the selection of the labor force, wage gap and sexual harassment at work. While women easily enter into tourism labor market, they have harder time in getting in higher responsibility and pay positions, especially if their careers are interrupted by fertility intentions, making it important to create "develop women-friendly" policies [12]. As a consequence, women in tourism are "still underpaid, under-utilized, under-educated, and underrepresented" [13].

The importance of tourism activity is closely related to two Sustainable Development Goals: 5th – "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and 8th – "Decent work and economic growth" and their mutual relationship can be of utmost importance. Providing "the sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work" in case is tourism is conceptualized as a Target 8.9 - By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. The indicator that is used for the assessment of the development is - Indicator 8.9.1 Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate. This enables the continuity in the statistical monitoring of the tourism development, and as tourism industry is very sensitive activity, it is possible

to document the recent shock induced by the COVID-pandemic. Historically, in 2020 tourism sector was hit with the worst crisis as tourism's contribution to the global economy fell from 3,8% of GDP to only 1,8% in 2020 [14].

Since "there is no role, position, activity or process within tourism system that is immune to specific gender relations" [15], in order to achieve the targeted development in tourism, it is important to include the gender dimension, as tourism employment in heavily dependent on the female labor force. When giving the research context for the women empowerment in tourism work (Global Report on Women in Tourism) [16] discussed low-status jobs, gender stereotyping, informal employment, exploitation and decent work. Second Edition of the report [17] shifted the focus on possibilities and the Sustainable Development Goals, connecting them to the five important domains: employment, entrepreneurship, education and training, leadership, policy and decision making, and community and civil society.

Additionally, many other issues prevail, especially in terms of female entrepreneurship as literature review conducted by Figueroa-Domecq, Jong and Williams [18] showed that researchers are focusing on certain tourism industries, such as hotels and restaurants, compared to technology or management. There is also geographical divide, as more articles were from Global North and rural settlements, suggesting that women are not equally represented in research (and employment) in higher positions, less developed countries and urban areas. Obradić and Marić [8] put stress on Central and Eastern Europe, asking the important question – did tourism play important role in ex-communist societies for women employment, as unemployment rocketed during the transition? The conclusion is that both young and old, single mothers or divorced were able to find employment in tourism sector, a for some even meant starting their own business.

Still, it is an irrefutable fact that gender pay gap exists in the tourism sector [19], given that men would get bigger pay for equivalent work, something that also holds for Serbia as women's earnings as percentage of men's earnings is 94.69% in accommodation and food services [17]. This is to be expected, as Gajić and Ivkov Džigurski [20] showed that gender employee structure in Vojvodina consisted of 68% women and the young, emphasizing pay gradient for different tourism sectors (the biggest wages in airport subsector and the lowest in hotels subsector). Garača et al. [21] concluded that existence of gender inequality exists when it comes to hotel employment in Vojvodina, as 4/5 of their respondent believes that certain jobs are only for men (waiter, carpenter, locksmith, electrician, chauffeur, security), while others are just for women (cook, maid, hotel hostess, cleaning lady, receptionist) stating the reason for such opinion "the nature of business". Still, there is a reason for the optimism, as the recent study revealed the possible cracks in so-called glass ceiling in the hospitality industry in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina [22].

The goal of this paper is to encapsulate the sensitivity of tourism sector by using appropriate gendered tourism statistics in order to shed a light on tourism employment trends, but with special focus on gender dimension in Serbia for period 2014-2024. Since COVID-19 pandemic was great challange not only in medical sence, but also in many societal spheres, one of our research question integrates the severity of flop in employment trends in tourism in 2020 and 2021. In second part of the paper we describe the data sources and internationally comparable data from eurostat database we will be using in our research, and the methodological challanges in defining tourism employment. In third part of the paper, we focus on results from our study, highlighting the gendered tourism statistics in Serbia. In conclusion and disscusion, we focused on

importance of gender in trends of tourism employment and rebounce of women employment after COVID-19.

DATA SOURCES

While trying to define tourism employment, we encounter many obstacles, as it is quite hard to abstract only those employees directly involved in tourism activities. While hotels, restaurants, tour guides, travel agencies, and transportation services are the primary sources of employment in the tourism industry [3] it is hard to statistically capture only those employed in tourism industry. Alongside the challenges that stem from the seasonal variability on the job market, obstacles to define the "tourism employee" is further amplified in the effort to collect timely and high quality statistics of the tourism employment. According to the UNWTO [1], it is possible to overcame this by using one of the three major groups of data sources for (1) measuring labor demand, (2) measuring labor supply or (3) administrative records. For the purpose of our research, we will be consulting widely used and cross-national comparable survey on labor force which is household-based sample survey that falls into second category - Measuring labor supply. Since ILO [23] gave country specific data sources for employment in tourism industries, as recommended in case of Serbia, we are using Labor force survey (LFS) as main data source. The branches of economic activity (industry) at the time of this report was published were presented through NACE, rev. 1 classification. It is important to make a connection between old and new classifications, as nowadays NACE, rev. 2 is in use, we have to "translate" industry groups covered by NACE rev. 1 to NACE rev. 2. This is closely relating to the UNWTO [17, 24] categorization of tourism industries that typically produce characteristic tourism products and activities, and it is equivalent to the more colloquial term 'tourism sector'. Since we need data segregated by gender structure from Labor Force Survey, we will be using certain tourism sector categories more widely, namely:

1. Accommodation for visitors relates to I55
2. Food and beverage serving activities - I56
3. Railway passenger transport - H49
4. Road passenger transport - H49
5. Water passenger transport - H50
6. Air passenger transport - H51
7. Transport equipment rental - N77
8. Travel agencies and other reservation services activities - N79
9. Cultural activities - R90, R91
10. Sports and recreational activities - R92, R93
11. Retail trade of country-specific tourism characteristic goods; and
12. Other country-specific tourism characteristic activities.

For the purpose of this research, we used few data sources in order to answer the research question. The data are characterized by certain inconsistencies that we addressed in discussion. We obtained annual 2010-2024 for men and women in respective tourism sectors from Labor Force Survey [25] as a main source, but also we took data that are not gendered in order to follow the overall trend in tourism employment. These data include employment statistics from UNWTO [26] and Business demography by legal form [27] from Eurostat in order to capture the most direct employment in tourism sectors, as these data offer greater details in terms of classification, but are poor in terms of timeframe.

RESULTS

Depending on the data source, the number of employees in tourism sector varies, as the different subsectors can be viewed as those related to tourism activities. Even though the data for Serbia in UNWTO [26] exist, it is not gendered, making it important only for the overall summation of employment trend in tourism industry. According to this data source, the number of employees in tourism industries (Figure 1) has been on steady upward trend in period 2015-2023. In 2015, contingent of tourism employees encompassed 135 411 workers, and rose to the 178 516 in 2023. The highest relative increase between two years was 7% in 2018/2017, and during the period 2021/2020 there has been the same level of tourism employment in Serbia. Still, the recuperation is evident, as last available data shows 5% increase in 2023/2022.



Figure 1. Employed persons in the tourism industries, Serbia, 2015-2023 Source: UNWTO [26]

The data from business demography statistics from Eurostat (2022) shown in Table 1 reveal through 2-digit classification that tourism employees in Serbia are predominantly engaged in land transport and food and beverage services (around 75 thousand each). It is notable da less tourism employees are engaged in rest subsectors compared to most prominent ones. Around 14 thousand tourism jobs were occupied in accommodation and less than 4 thousand in travel agency and tour operator services. The data are available for only two years, making is hard to spot a trend, but still we can conclude that high steadiness exist between data sources. Unfortunately, these source does not offer data broken down by gender, which limits the analysis. Still, we can conclude that high resemblance of values from both UNWTO and Eurostat for overall tourism employment.

Table 1. Persons employed in selected tourism industries, Serbia, 2021 and 2022, business demography

	2021	2022
Land transport and transport via pipelines	75390	74991
Water transport	1071	1010
Air transport	1489	1618
Accommodation	14063	14340
Food and beverage service activities	75857	74328
Rental and leasing activities	2773	2897
Travel agency, tour operator and other reservation service and related activities	3975	3755
Total	174618	172939

Source: Eurostat [27]

Even though the more detailed data are from Labor Force Survey [25] depicted on Figure 2. showing the number of employees in various tourism subsectors, there is no classification beyond the 2 digits NACE rev. 2, so we are unable to get the most accurate picture. This means that used data source includes some of the employees that are not directly connected to the tourism sector, even though most of them work in service industries. The biggest subsector in terms of employment is Land transport and transport via pipelines, with a bit more that 100 thousand in 2024. By comparing these data with previously analyzed trends from Eurostat [27], we conclude that ¼ more employees from this subsector encompassed through household based labor survey than business demography source. This gives us corrective factor, which is important to adequate conclusions. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been steady rise in number of employees in land transport (except for 2015/2014), but after the pandemic and 2020/2019 fall, we can observe the notable rise in 2021/2020 and then 2-year falling. Only the last available data show that in 2024 compared to 2023, we are witnessing greater employment. When we consult the data on employees in different transportation means, we conclude that land transportation succeeds by far in terms of number, as there is only around 3 thousand employees in water transport and 6 thousand in air transport on average in period 2010-2024. Both are characterized by pronounced fluctuations in terms of labor participation, which can be also seen in pandemic period.

The second largest subsector is reserved for Food and beverage service activities, as last available data shows that around 80 thousand people are engaged in this subsector, and when we compare with number we already encounter in Table 1 for years 2021 and 2022, the values are almost exact match. Unlike the land transportation subsector, the food and beverages services is much more sensitive to the economic turbulence, as the number in this subsector fell in the period after the world economic crisis in 2008. Biggest rise was in 2015, when 27% more employees were recorded compared to previous year. On the other hand, COVID-19 pandemic had tremendous impact on this food and beverage subsector, as the number of employees fell for 11,2% in 2020 compared to 2019. The employment in this subsector remain in this "pandemic number" of around the 75 thousand, and just in 2024 rose for 5% compared to previous years.

In the Accommodation subsector there is also great accordance in the numbers of employees from different sources, as they are quite close. This subsector seems to be the most sensitive to external factors, as it shows greater fluctuations than previous two analyzed. After three years of similar employment, in 2013 it is recorded the great fall for 40% and then year after that great rise of 30%. Even more drastic situation happed in next years, with constant variations, with interesting fact that even though in first pandemic

year the number of employees fell for 16,5%, this is not the greatest difference between years in whole time series. Still, the biggest rise was recorded between 2021 and 2022 (40%).

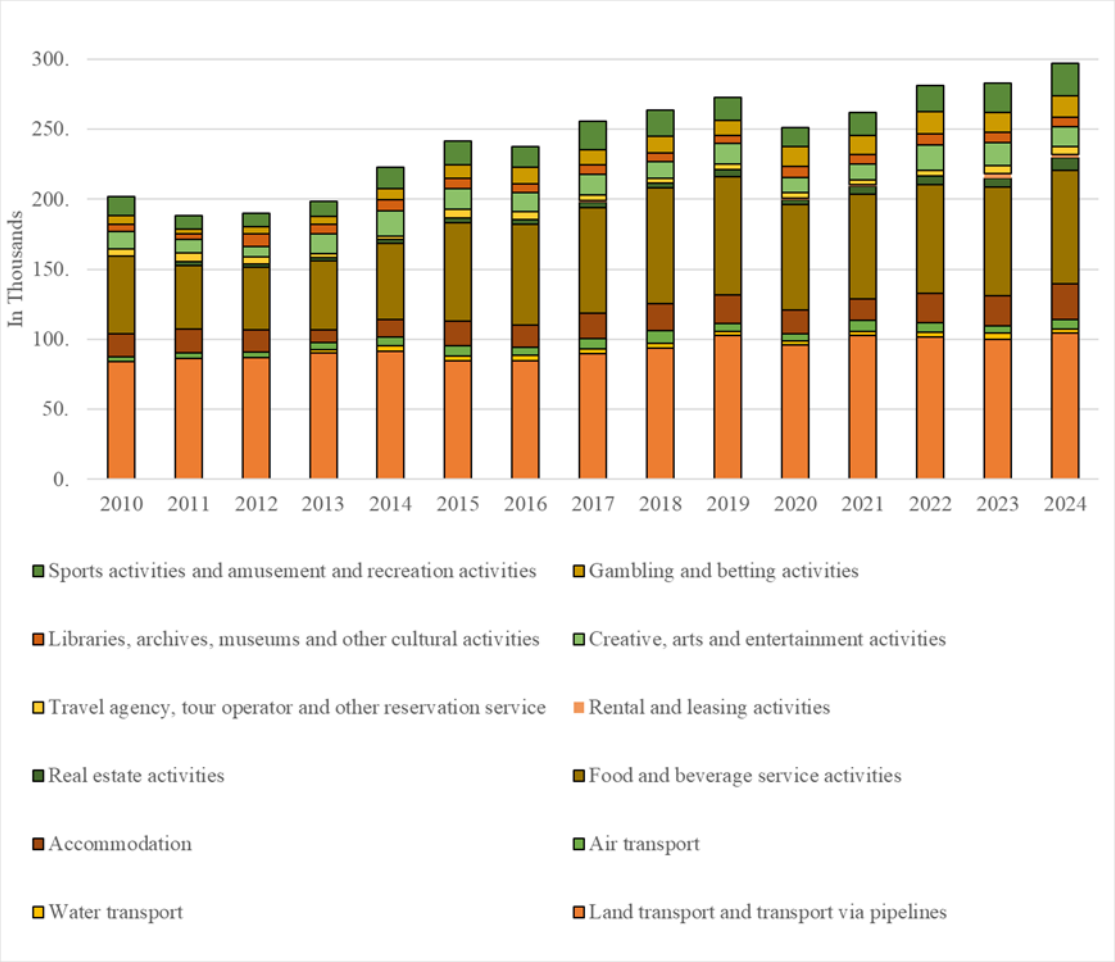


Figure 2. Employed persons in the tourism industries by subsectors, Serbia, 2010-2024 Source: LFS [25]

When it comes to the travel agency employment, the average number in period 2010-2015 was 4,7 thousand, but with quite pronounced fluctuations that are not following simple trajectory. The same situation is for subsectors connected to the culture and art related employment, where on average worked 13,5 thousand employees in Creative, arts and entertainment activities and 6,8 thousand in Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities. On the other hand, in the tourism activities close to sports, there are 16 thousand employees on average in Sports activities and amusement and recreation activities and 10 thousand Gambling and betting activities. The greatest relative increase in found in Gambling and betting activities between 2010 and 2024, with more than doubling the number of those engages in this subsector (139% increase).

In order to dive deeper into gender perspective in tourism employment in Serbia, the visual inspection of Figure 3. gives us an adequate glimpse. It is important to add that in case of some subsectors (water transport, real estate and rental and leasing activities) we don't have continuity in gender statistics, so we omitted them from the analysis. There is a pronounced difference in number of males and females engaged in tourism industry in Serbia, but with great differences between various subsectors. The greatest one is spotted

in land transportation, as more than six times higher male employment was recorded on average for period 2010-2024. This is main reason for overall difference in gender employment, because the other subsectors have much more balances ratios. The other subsectors characterized by predominance of males are air transport and creative, arts and entertainment activities (1,8 times each) and more than double in case of sports activities and amusement and recreation activities. On the other hand, there is 1,4 times more employed women than men in accommodation, 1,7 times in activities of travel agencies, 1,4 times in libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities. The similar number are seen in food and beverage service activities, with a bit more males included in this subsector and fairly same number in gambling and betting activities.

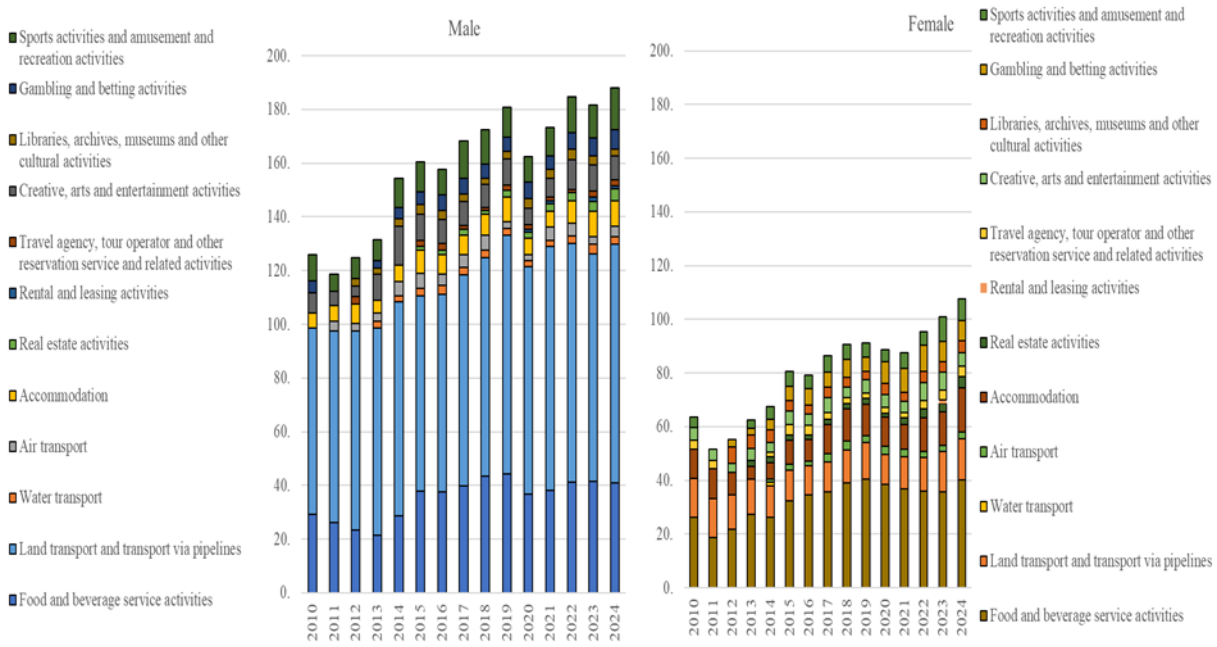


Figure 3. Employed persons in the tourism industries by subsectors by sex, Serbia, 2010-2024
Source: LFS [25]

There is an absolute difference in number of employees by gender in different subsectors, but land transportation had stunning divide, as average number in 2010-2024 for men are 80 thousand and for women 12,8 thousand. For air transport, there is on average 4 thousand man and 2,5 thousand women employed in this industry. In sports activities and amusement and recreation activities, there is pronounced gender divide, as around 10,8 thousand men and 5,5 thousand women work in this subsector. Similar is in creative, arts and entertainment activities with involved 8,7 thousand men and 4,8 thousand women. On the other hand, there is more women employed in accommodation subsector compared to men (10,3:7,3), travel agencies (2,9:1,8) and cultural posts (4,1:3,0). Vaguely the same numbers exist in food and beverage services, around 35 thousand men and 32.6 thousand women, gambling and betting services (5,3 thousand man and 6,1 thousand women).

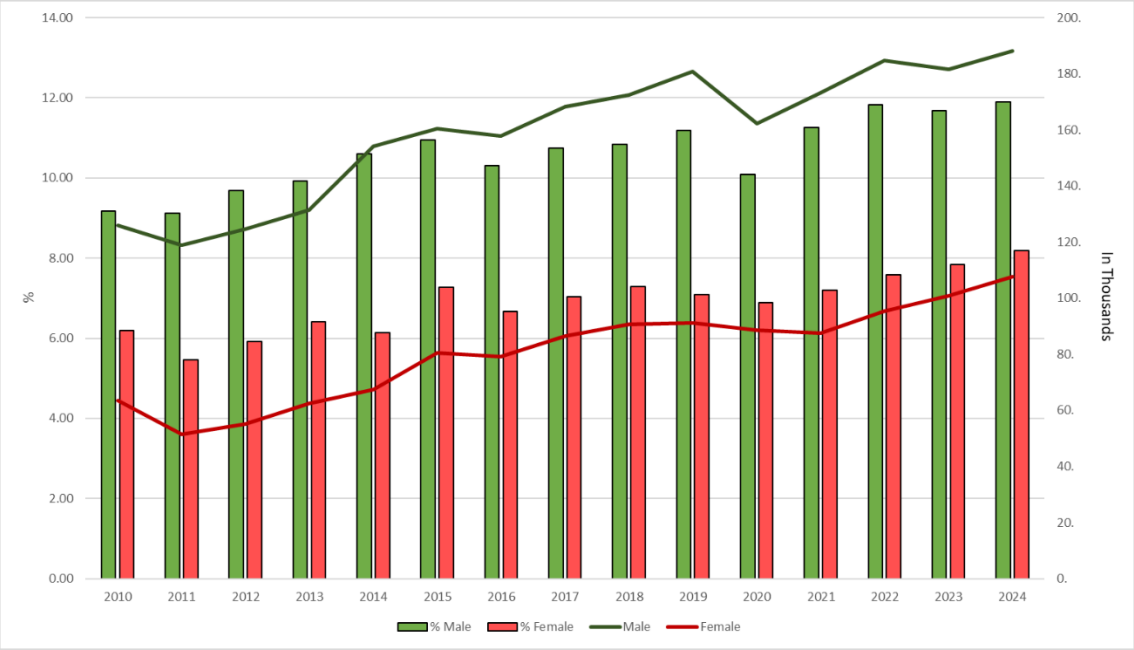


Figure 4. Number and share of employed persons in the tourism industries by sex, Serbia, 2010-2024
Source: LFS [25]

In order to capture the different employment vulnerability in tourism sector in term of gender during the COVID-19 pandemic, we will consult the data on overall male and female tourism employment, but also the shares of tourism employment in total number of employees of different gender. It is evident (Figure 4) that there is greater number of men engaged in tourism activities as we have already states, but it is interesting to stress that number and share of men employed in tourism experienced much more pronounced fall during the COVID-19 compared to women. While number of men employed in tourism industry decreased from 180 thousand in 2019 (11,2%) to 162 thousand in 2020 (10%), in case of women we have much steadier situation, as number fell from 91 thousand in 2019 (7%) to 88,6 thousand in 2020 (6,9%).

DISSCUSION AND CONCLUSION

The foundation for the gender research in tourism were set few decades ago, as Byrne Swain [28] stated in 1995 that "gender, as ideology and as relationships between the sexes, is a primary factor in human interactions, and is thus an important aspect of future tourism social science". Following rich literature in this topic, our objective was to give overview of tourism employment trends and to put into perspective gender structure of tourism employes in Serbia, using national statistics that can be comparable between countries. The findings from UNWTO [17] reveal that out of all tourism employees, 54% are women compared to 39% in broader economy. In case of Serbia, we are encountering different situation as, 2/3 of tourism employees are men, while in broader economy we have much more balanced shares (56% men and 44% women). This is showing that country specific situation exists, and thus calling for further future investigation. Given that women are predominately in lower pay and subordinated jobs as theory suggest, it is intriguing thought whether women in Serbia on purpose avoid tourism related jobs.

Importance of female engagement in tourism industries is closely related to many demographic aspects since fertility decision often make career gaps that puts women in unequal position. Also, education can play crucial role in preparation of future employees in tourism, and since more girls are involved in tourism studies, it is important to distinguish how this translate to less numbers of female tourism employees in Serbia. Still, it is important to stress that tourism plays great role in process of women empowerment, but we have to have in mind that women are "often concentrated in low-skilled or informal work, which affords them less access to social protection and puts them in a precarious position during a global pandemic" [29]. Tourism was one of the most heavily affected of all sectors [14] so the paper also places special emphasis on the significant health and economic shock caused by COVID-19, which had a disproportionate impact on the labor force by gender because women suffered smaller "employment shock" in Serbia.

When analyzing the gender "divide" in tourism industries, we found that jobs related to the traditional household maintenance are those where more women are employed, as suggested by Alarcón & Mullor [11]. There are more women employed compared to men in accommodation, travel agencies and libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities. On the other hand, traditional male occupations are reinforced also in tourism sector, such as drivers, pilots and those jobs related to sport. The equality in tourism employment by gender is found in food and beverage service activities, which partially deviates from the theoretical expectations. Still, the traditional gender roles that persist in household division of work, namely outside the employment sphere, seems to have penetrated into the employment patterns in tourism sector in Serbia.

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