



**"The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Tourism  
Business in Bulgaria: Policy Approaches and Introduction of  
Digital Tools to Mitigate the Negative Consequences"**

By  
Dimitar Dimitrov

Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of Romani Studies Program

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of International  
Interdisciplinary Romani Studies Postgraduate Specialization Program*

**SPECIALIZATION: PUBLIC POLICY**

Supervisor: Simona Torotcoi

*Budapest, Hungary*

2022

## COPYRIGHT NOTICE

I, the undersigned Dimitar Dimitrov hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where proper acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or nondegree program, in English or in any other language. This is a true copy of the thesis, including the final version.

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Name (printed) : Dimitar Dimitrov

Signature:

DocuSigned by:  
*Dimitar Dimitrov*  
B299B68864F74ED...

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to present the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism business in Bulgaria and the measures taken by the government, and on this basis to propose guidelines for dealing with the crisis, mainly through the use of digital technologies. The subject of the research work is the development of tourism from 2006 to 2021. The object of the study is the tourism business, which suffers the negative consequences of the unfavorable pandemic situation in the country and the world.

The development first presents the development of tourism in the period 2006-2019 before the introduction of restrictive anti-epidemiological measures in the country and respectively after 2020 and 2021. Second, it is presented a summary of how the pandemic affected tourism businesses and how owners reacted to protect their business. Thirdly, proposals have been made to overcome the negative impacts and overcome the crisis situation through the use of modern digital technologies. Fourth are the measures taken by the government in Bulgaria to support the tourism business and the tourism sector. In the fifth place, based on a study, recommendations were made to the Ministry of Tourism in Bulgaria on measures to consider their implementation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For writing this report, I would first like to express my sincere thanks to my Public Policy supervisor, Simona Torotçoi, from whom I learned a lot during the dynamic academic year at the Central European University in Budapest. Second, I would like to appreciate one of the most accurate English teachers I have ever met – Viktoria Vajnai, with whom we started from scratch and went as far as I ever imagined. I am also very grateful to my academic writing supervisors, Eszther Timar and Maya Jean Lo Bello, who supported me, encouraged me to write valuable academic papers, and led me to believe that everything could be better. I would like to thank the entire RGPP team for the chance to be an international student and to have the opportunity to meet so many people who have contributed to me being stronger and believing more in myself.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Genka Rafailova from the College of Tourism – Varna at the University of Economics – Varna, who has always supported me in academia, and for supervising me with her invaluable professional experience in writing this report. Thanks also to my family, who have always supported me in everything and believing that if I want, I can achieve the impossible. Lastly, I would like to thank myself for never giving up and always demanding much more of myself than I can give and for stepping out of my comfort zone, where I found many more opportunities for improving myself.

## Contents

<b>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN BULGARIA IN THE PERIOD 2006-2021 .....</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1. Development of tourism in Bulgaria in the period 2006-2019 before the pandemic ....	12
1.2. Development of tourism in Bulgaria after the announced pandemic situation after 2020	13
<b>2. IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM IN BULGARIA .....</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1. The negative impact of Covid -19 on tourism enterprises in Bulgaria .....	16
2.2. Practices and strategies applied by the Bulgarian tourism business to deal with the negative consequences .....	16
<b>3. USING DIGITALIZATION AND SMART SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THE CRISIS SITUATION IN TOURISM .....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1. Results from the survey .....	17
3.2. Suggestions for introducing digital technologies, that are needed to mitigate the working process in the tourism business.....	18
• Digital tool that provides real-time information .....	18
• Digital tools based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) .....	19
• Technologies offering hybrid check-in and accommodation process .....	19
• Contactless technologies and services .....	19
<b>4. GOVERNMENT MEASURES TAKEN TO MITIGATE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON TOURISM AND EXIT THE COVID-19 CRISIS .....</b>	<b>21</b>
4.1. Kind of measures that are already taken by the Bulgarian government .....	21
• Measure 9% VAT .....	21
• Measure 60/40 .....	21
• Measure 80/20 .....	21
• Measure “Employment for you” .....	22
4.2. Results from the survey .....	22
<b>5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>6. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>7. REFERENCE LIST .....</b>	<b>26</b>

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1. THE POSITIVE GROWTH OF THE INCOMING TOURIST FLOW IN BULGARIA IN PERCENTAGE BEFORE THE PANDEMIC BETWEEN 2006 AND 2019 .....	12
FIGURE 1. NUMBERS OF FOREIGN TOURIST VISITORS UNTIL 2019.....	12
FIGURE 2. DECREASE IN FOREIGN TOURISTS IN PERCENTAGE DURING SUMMER SEASON 2020.....	13
FIGURE 3. NUMBER OF TOURISTS WHO SPENT NIGHTS IN THE PERIOD JANUARY – SEPTEMBER 2020 .	14
FIGURE 4. DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE DIGITALIZATION? .....	18
FIGURE 5. FIGURE 5. WHAT DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE DONE FOR THE TOURISM SECTOR AFTER THE PANDEMIC AND BY WHOM? .....	23

## INTRODUCTION

According to the World Tourism Organization, the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed a loss three times greater than the global economic crisis in 2009. Based on official data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI) the decline in visits by foreign tourist in Bulgaria after the announced Covid-19 pandemic compared to 2019 is almost 70%. For mitigating the negative consequences, the policy approaches, taken by the Bulgarian government, and the usage of digital tools play a key role for improving the situation in the tourism sector. Digitalization is an important fact in the development of tourism before and after the pandemic, as it is one of the tools through which the Bulgarian tourism industry can reach international markets. It contributes to improving the quality of the tourist product, to creating new experiences, to saving time and money.

One of the purposes of this study are to present the impact of the pandemic on the tourism business in Bulgaria and the measures taken by the government, and on this basis to propose guidelines for dealing with the negative consequences mainly through the application of digital technologies. The next purpose of the study is to show how the owners acted to save their businesses from bankruptcy, what kind of digital tools were used during the working process and how they mitigated the negative consequences. The subject of the research work is the development of tourism from 2006 to 2021. The object of the study is the tourism business, which faces the negative consequences of the pandemic.

The reason why my research is developed by means of surveys is that I would like to explore what attitudes employers and employees have regarding the introduction and usage of technologies, and what they find strengths or weaknesses in this aspect. In tourist enterprises in Bulgaria, most of the services related to customer service in tourism are beginning to be digitalized and improved, and the pandemic caused this process to develop faster. As a result, contactless customer service has started to be offered, robots serve food in restaurants and for room service, technology is responsible for the cleanliness of the site and the safety of customers.

This research looks at some new concepts and trends for the tourism industry in the future. The prerequisites for their occurrence will be indicated. New highlights are the models of guest service, which create opportunities for communication, collaborations, and relationships, as

well as unique memorable moments for each guest. The trend for the digital development of tourism includes chatbots providing real-time information, artificial intelligence, contactless technologies, and many other modern technologies.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Digitalization refers to the continuously improved approaches and methods used for security, processing, analysis, storage, use and dissemination of information. In general, the concept of the development of the digitalization of tourism is based on the integration of information and communication technologies related to the value of tourism, constant mobile connectivity, and real-time information (Gretzel, 2014). Digitalization is the next level of e-tourism evolution, based on global reservation systems, pre- and post-travel experience sharing and on-site service (Gretzel, Reino, Kopera, Koo, 2015). Although the definition and key characteristics of digitalization in tourism have been widely discussed and studied, there are still gaps in the research of the practical approach. In this paper, digitalization refers to the continuously improved approaches and methods used for security, processing, analysis, storage, use and dissemination of information. According to Rafailova (2019), digitalization relates to the innovative technologies that are a basis for creating better value and achieving sustainability and is a key characteristic of development, which contributes to the steady competitiveness of tourist destinations.

Over the last twenty years, there has been an increase in research related to digitalization and the introduction of technologies in the field of tourism, but unfortunately, they are still scarce. Dimitrios Buhalis is one of the researchers who has developed two reports contributing to research in this field. The first report is an analysis of tourism in the context of digital technologies, focusing more on the strategic and operational management of the tourism industry. The second report presents cases of tourism businesses that have introduced digital technologies to achieve higher results such as supply, demand, profitability, etc. (Buhalis, 2003; 2008).

It is obvious that digitalization is a modern tool for the development of distribution channels (Molz, 2012). Several studies suggest that technology is a catalyst for the tourism industry by ensuring the survival of tourism organizations, facilitating the access of tourism products to many potential consumers, and ensuring the effectiveness of activities in the field (Mihajlovic, 2012; Bethapudi, 2013). Unfortunately, studies show that tourism professionals face several difficulties in implementing digital technologies, such as the lack of time, necessary skills, trained staff, and knowledge (Dumicic et al., 2016).

Digital technologies in rural areas are particularly important, especially in less developed countries, as there are difficulties associated with limited access to technology in these areas (Drdge et al., 2018). In other studies, competitiveness has been noted as an advantage that digitalization offers to tourism to reduce operating and transaction costs (Bojnec and Kribel, 2004; Buhalis and O'Connor, 2005). Other sources argue that competitiveness in the industry cannot be demonstrated (Mihalič, 2007). Despite the benefits of digital technology, there are studies that show the need to combine modern, virtual tools with the traditional promotion of tourist destinations (Dasgupta, 2011).

Digitalization involves the dissemination of information about services and products related to tourism, which has a specific impact on consumer behavior and the transition to e-tourism. Bajpai and Lee investigate the factors that identify the behavior of tourists about the whole process related to digitalization, starting from the moment of searching for a tourist product to the moment after using the product. The quality of the tourist product, of the information supplied, the security, and the functionality of the digital application, are identified, and these elements define the client as loyal (Bajpai & Lee, 2015).

As a modern tool the digitalization is an important fact about the development of the tourism industry. It provides a lot of advantages for the business and for the customers as well. One of the disadvantages of the digitalization is the fact that it is enough for reviving of tourism after pandemic. It cannot solve the problem with the outflow of personnel from the sector due to the fear and uncertainty, caution of tourists and last-minute reservations, search for bargains in competitive destinations.

## METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is aimed at defining the digitalization in the Bulgarian tourism sector, based on the determinants of a digitalized and smart destination. In this regard I developed a questionnaire which I addressed to the professionals in the tourism industry with the aim to explore their opinions about the fast-developing technology process. The survey was focused on issues such as what the advantages and challenges are that people face using modern digital tools, and it consisted of twenty-five open and closed questions. It was structured in five sections as follow: profile of the participants, employment status, workflow during a pandemic situation, digitalization within the working process and role of the Bulgarian government and the policy approaches it took. The survey form was opened between June 6 and June 10, 2022. It was developed in English and translated in Bulgarian. The way of sharing the survey with the respondents were the social medias as Facebook and Instagram.

In the survey participated 19 respondents between 18 and 61+ from whom 11 are female and 8 males. All participants reside throughout Bulgaria, including Sofia, Plovdiv, Burgas, Dobrich, Gabrovo, Balchik, but the majority is from the sea capital of Bulgaria Varna. Higher education completed 15 of the participants, two of them have a degree from secondary school and another two of them hold a Ph. D. and Docent specialization. Officially employed during the pandemic situation were 17 of them. All the respondents work in the field of tourism, as 10 of them work at the executive level and 9 are managerial level. My last question referred to how long they have been in the field, and I conclude that they have been working in the field for periods spanning from less than a year to more than 20 years of experience.

## 1. DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN BULGARIA IN THE PERIOD 2006-2021

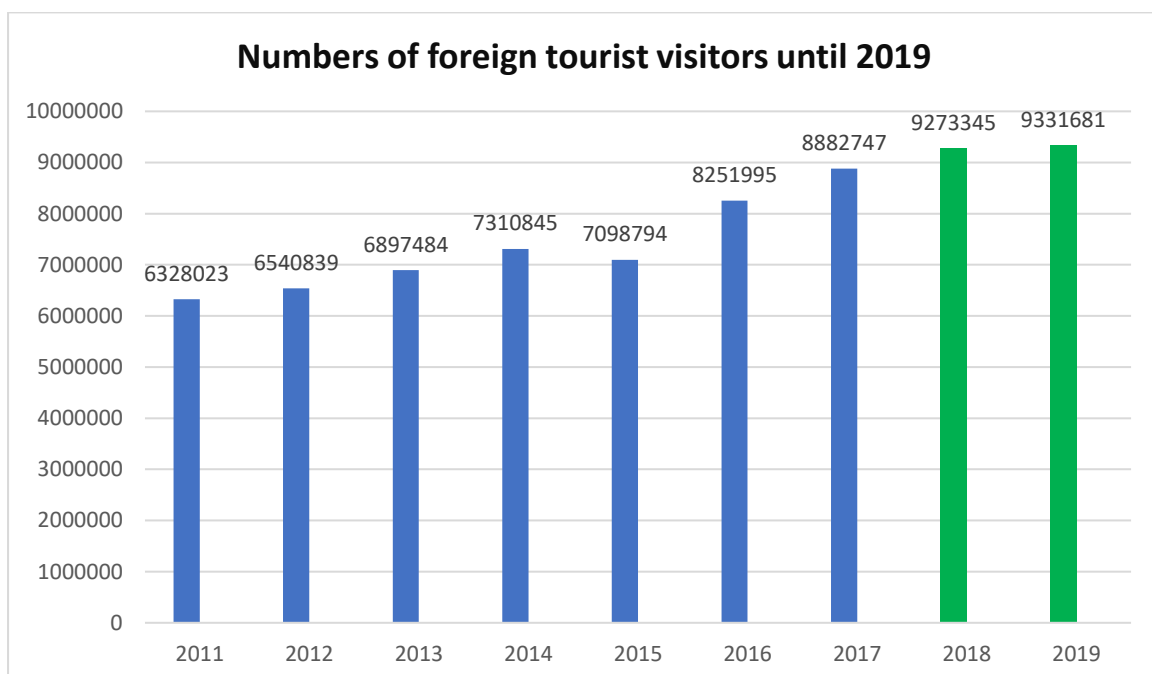
### 1.1. Development of tourism in Bulgaria in the period 2006-2019 before the pandemic

Bulgaria, as a tourist destination with an image of compliance between quality and price, is the reason for the period between 2006 and 2019 to note such an improved boom and stable development trend of tourism at an international level.

**Table 1. The positive growth of the incoming tourist flow in Bulgaria in percentage before the pandemic between 2006 and 2019**

Period	Growth in percentages
2006 – 2010	17.2%
2010 – 2014	20.9%
2014 – 2018	26.8%
2019	27.2%

*Source: The table was developed by the author based on data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI)*



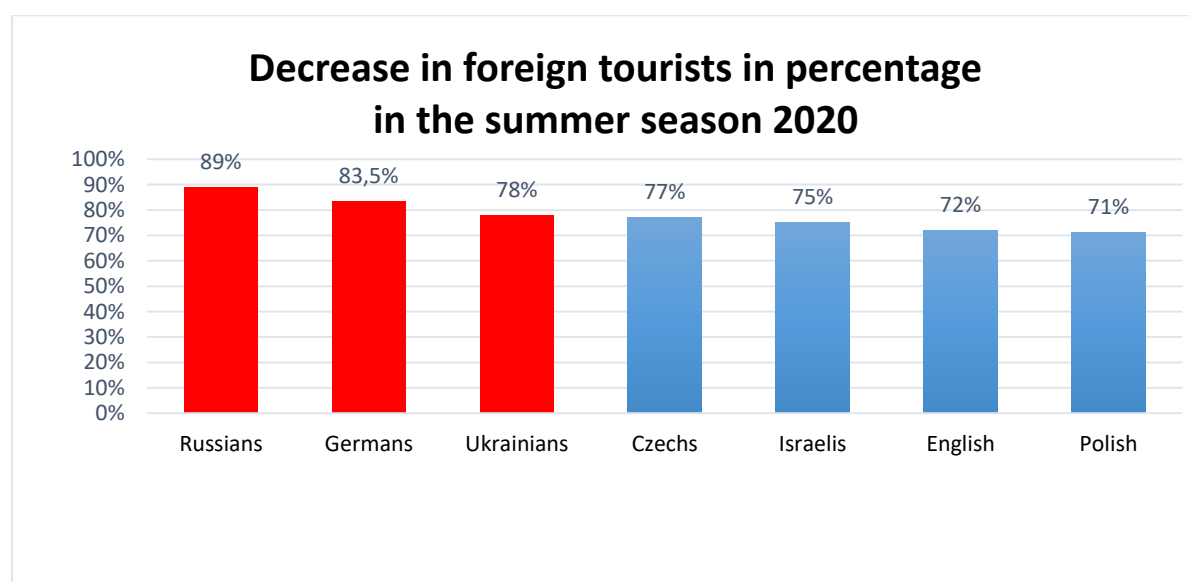
**Figure 1. Numbers of foreign tourist visitors until 2019**

*Source: National Statistics Institute*

As table 1 and figure 1 demonstrate, although the budget for marketing and advertising of the established independent Ministry of Tourism in 2014 was limited, the reason for the particularly serious growth of the tourist flow in the period 2014-2019 is that the quality of the product increased, together with the popularization of Bulgaria abroad as an attractive place for rest and recreation, thanks to the properly developed and successfully implemented marketing and advertising strategies. According to Eurostat, the country is among the top five destinations in the community in terms of the growth of overnight stays.

### **1.2. Development of tourism in Bulgaria after the announced pandemic situation after 2020**

After the beginning of the pandemic, the situation changed radically. In order to prevent the rapid spread of the virus, all countries introduced and observed extremely strict measures. After the state of emergency, declared on March 13, 2020, absolutely all planned trips were canceled which led to a serious collapse in the tourism industry both in Bulgaria and around the world. According to data from the National Statistical Institute, the decline in visits by foreign tourists in the first half of 2020 compared to 2019 is serious (figure 2). The most important countries as emotive markets are Russia, Germany and Ukraine.

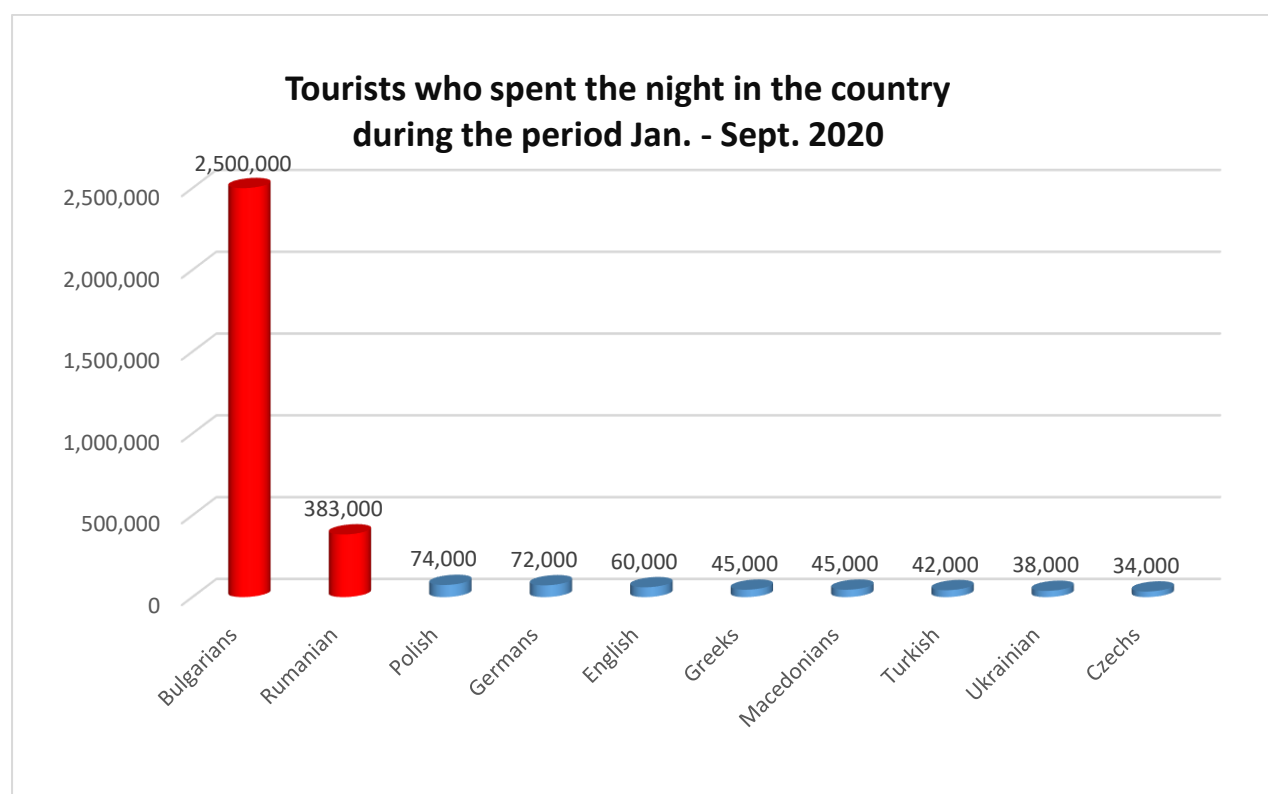


**Figure 2. Decrease in foreign tourists in percentage during summer season 2020**

*Source: The figure is created by the author based on data from the Annual Program for National Tourist Advertising 2020*

The recovery of domestic tourism begins after May 13, 2020. The decline in registered Bulgarian tourists for the period from January to July is a total of 41% as the most serious decline compared to domestic tourism was observed in April, May, and June 2020. Thanks to the changes that were introduced for Bulgarian tourists, preliminary estimates for their number were favorable for the end of July and the whole month of August, which contributed to reduced prices by hoteliers, consumer confidence that the resorts are safe and there is no danger of serious spread of Covid-19.

According to data from the Unified Tourist Information System (Figure 3) the realized overnight stays for the period from January to September 2020 can be traced, revealing that the main credit goes entirely to Bulgarian tourists who decided to make domestic tourism and our northern neighbor Romania.



**Figure 3. Number of tourists who spent nights in the period January – September 2020**

*Source: The figure is developed by the author based on data from the Unified Tourist Information System*

Compared to 2019, where the numbers of foreign tourists were more than 9.3 million, in 2020 the number of them was completely catastrophic - 1.2 million. The situation in 2021 was more

more favorable than expected where the number of foreign tourists exceeds 1.6 million for the period of January – September. There has also been an improvement in the development of domestic tourism compared to 2020, as the number of Bulgarian tourists who spent overnight stays in the country for the period January – August is over 1.8 million, and in 2021 more than 2.7 million.

## **2. IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM IN BULGARIA**

### **2.1.The negative impact of Covid -19 on tourism enterprises in Bulgaria**

Following the declaration of a state of emergency on March 13, 2020, all accommodation, catering and entertainment establishments have ceased operations altogether and closed their doors to visitors. Thus, the list of those affected by the declared emergency situation with Covid-19 does not stop and also affects the workforce in the tourism sector. Many companies outside the tourism sector have managed to restructure their work process and have had the opportunity to work remotely, but in the tourism sector this is not an effective process, as remote work can not replace the place of tourists and tourism users, which makes the business in this sphere meaningless. It is also particularly important that work from distance in this sector is very limited, workers' incomes are at risk and they have been in a hopeless situation.

### **2.2.Practices and strategies applied by the Bulgarian tourism business to deal with the negative consequences**

According to the results found in my survey, a variety of responses were made regarding how the pandemic situation affected their employment status. Six of the respondents were promoted, four lost their job, two were demoted or started their own business, and seven of them said that there was no change in their employment status. Out of the total respondents, twelve received material, financial and psychological support from their employers, the Bulgarian government and their family and friends. They were mostly motivated by their employers with a variety of approaches, including salary increases, additional bonuses, working in a safe and secure environment, provided digital platform, offering a variety of opportunities and training to work with innovations, digital technologies and other incentives and approaches.

Regarding how the workplace of the respondents was affected and what measures were introduced in many places the work process continued, but with taken measures or temporarily suspended businesses. One of the most commonly applied strategies is the introduction and strict observance of stricter measures and the provision of funds for safe work with clients. A small percentage of the respondents said that they used open space in their workplace due to the lack of such and that the staff was significantly reduced.



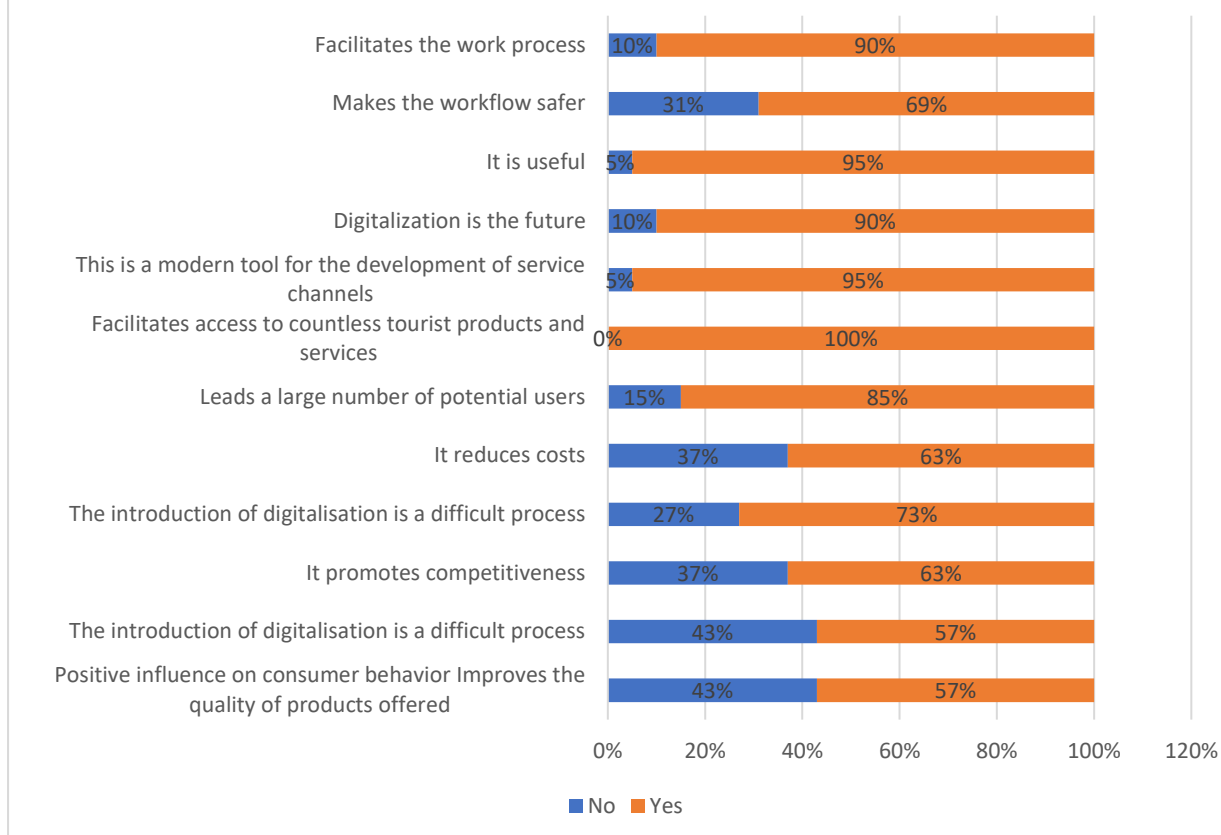
### 3. USING DIGITALIZATION AND SMART SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THE CRISIS SITUATION IN TOURISM

#### 3.1. Results from the survey

According to my survey about digitalization in most of the places the process has been introduced or has started to develop faster. This includes providing information to customers in real time, improved marketing, and advertising process on social media, and variety of contactless services. Another important tool that is considered as a main role in the digitalization process in the tourism sector is the mobile connectivity, robotized tools for disinfection and developing a special software which mitigates the working process.

The opinion of my respondents is that the digitalization process and its usage has impacted the working process but not effectively enough to solve all the problems the tourism sector has faced. **Digitalization rather has helped for mitigating the difficult situation of the negative consequences.** In those businesses which have had the opportunity to introduce smart solutions, a positive impact has been noticed but in those businesses which did not have the opportunity to do so, did not receive any change in the working process. As it can be seen in the following figure the majority of the responders consider that the digitalization in the tourism sector definitely brings more advantages than disadvantages and most of them do think that it impacts their work in a very positive way.

### Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the digitalization?



**Figure 4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the digitalization?**

*Source: The figure is developed by the author based on his research*

### 3.2.Suggestions for introducing digital technologies, that are needed to mitigate the working process in the tourism business

- **Digital tool that provides real-time information**

After the announced pandemic situation with Covid-19, one of the most modern trends is the rapid development and introduction of digital technologies and tools in most areas of business, where possible, including in the field of tourism. Thanks to the introduced digital technologies, everyone who wants to travel has access to real-time information and thus feels safe if they travel to a destination, as they are familiar with the requirements for entering a country, what is the situation on the border, what are the risks, the offered tourist products, etc. Examples of this in the tourism industry are applications that can be downloaded to mobile phones, chatbots in hotels and restaurants that provide information about the companies themselves, online booking options, etc.

- **Digital tools based on Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Artificial intelligence plays a very important role as one of the trends in the first place, because thanks to it a number of processes can be carried out in the tourism business, which it facilitates. This includes, for example, intelligent pre-booking systems, managing the crowding of many people during a pandemic, smart disinfection of premises, and so on. Artificial intelligence is at the heart of creating new tourism opportunities, models and services offered that have not been available in the tourism business so far, increasing the efficiency of the product offered, the safety of tourists and their satisfaction.

- **Technologies offering hybrid check-in and accommodation process**

One of the trends in the tourism sector according to the Annual Program of the National Tourism Program (2022, 66) is an alternative opportunity for hoteliers to attract more visitors by providing office space for collaboration, interacting with companies implementing homework policies. Using empty meeting rooms, lobbies or even guest rooms, hybrid accommodation allows people to work in places other than their home. In addition to renting space to provide a productive workspace, this different way of accommodation also includes virtual event organization. This form of cooperation also allows event organizers to guide their guests around the hotel with the help of a contactless butler of the event to avoid face-to-face interaction. Hybrid hotels offer companies another option for flexible working hours and space for their employees without the long-term rent obligations or large investments required for a large office<sup>3</sup>.

- **Contactless technologies and services**

When it comes to contactless technologies in tourism, contactless payment devices come first, as an extremely high percentage of customers either pay in advance online or pay on the spot through Google Pay, Apple Pay, Revolut and other options that do not require carrying debit or credit cards, which then facilitates the process of accounting for turnover and closing the business day. One of the reasons for the rapid introduction of contactless technologies in the tourism industry is due to the pandemic situation, which is related to the measures taken to prevent infection with Covid-19. Those businesses that had already introduced these types of technologies in their practice were one idea better prepared, while for those that had started to introduce these services, the process was faster.

The fact that contactless technologies provide a recognition service, the contact between employees and customers is minimal, in some places zero, facilitate the work many times more and increase security. For example, thanks to this service, when passing through the migration points at the airports, employees are protected from accidental infection with a person infected with Covid-19. In hotels, for example, face recognition allows access to the room using a digital key accessible to the guest's smartphone or through a fingerprint. Another thing that contactless technologies allow is the so-called "Internet of Things" ( IoT ), which is very convenient because it provides the ability to control the equipment in a hotel room such as TV, air-conditioning, lighting system, curtains, etc. with just one touch of the smartphone's touchscreen.

## **4. GOVERNMENT MEASURES TAKEN TO MITIGATE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON TOURISM AND EXIT THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

### **4.1. Kind of measures that are already taken by the Bulgarian government**

- **Measure 9% VAT**

One of the measures taken as an approach to prevent bankruptcy is **the reduction of VAT to 9%**, and this measure could be said to have a positive effect on businesses that have more employees, more capacity and are of a higher category than for small and medium-sized enterprises, with a negative effect, and for those companies that are not registered for VAT there is no effect, as they have low turnover. Most tourism businesses believe that this measure mostly protected them from bankruptcy and helped them offset the losses between the months when the state of emergency was declared (March, April, May). A very small percentage of companies say that the measure has motivated them to either keep or increase the number of employees, as well as to expand the services they offer.<sup>5</sup>

- **Measure 60/40**

Another measure taken to mitigate the effects of Covid- 19 is the so-called "**60/40**" **measure**, financed from the social security budget, and this measure is valid for almost all sectors of the economy, including tourism. This measure provides the employer with 60% of the income of the employees to whom they are insured, but the downside of this measure is that seasonal workers and those who work in the family business without being paid cannot take an advantage of it. The purpose of this measure is to preserve jobs and guarantee the income of employees, but some employers have not even benefited, due to the fact that they can not provide 40% of wages because they do not have the appropriate income.

- **Measure 80/20**

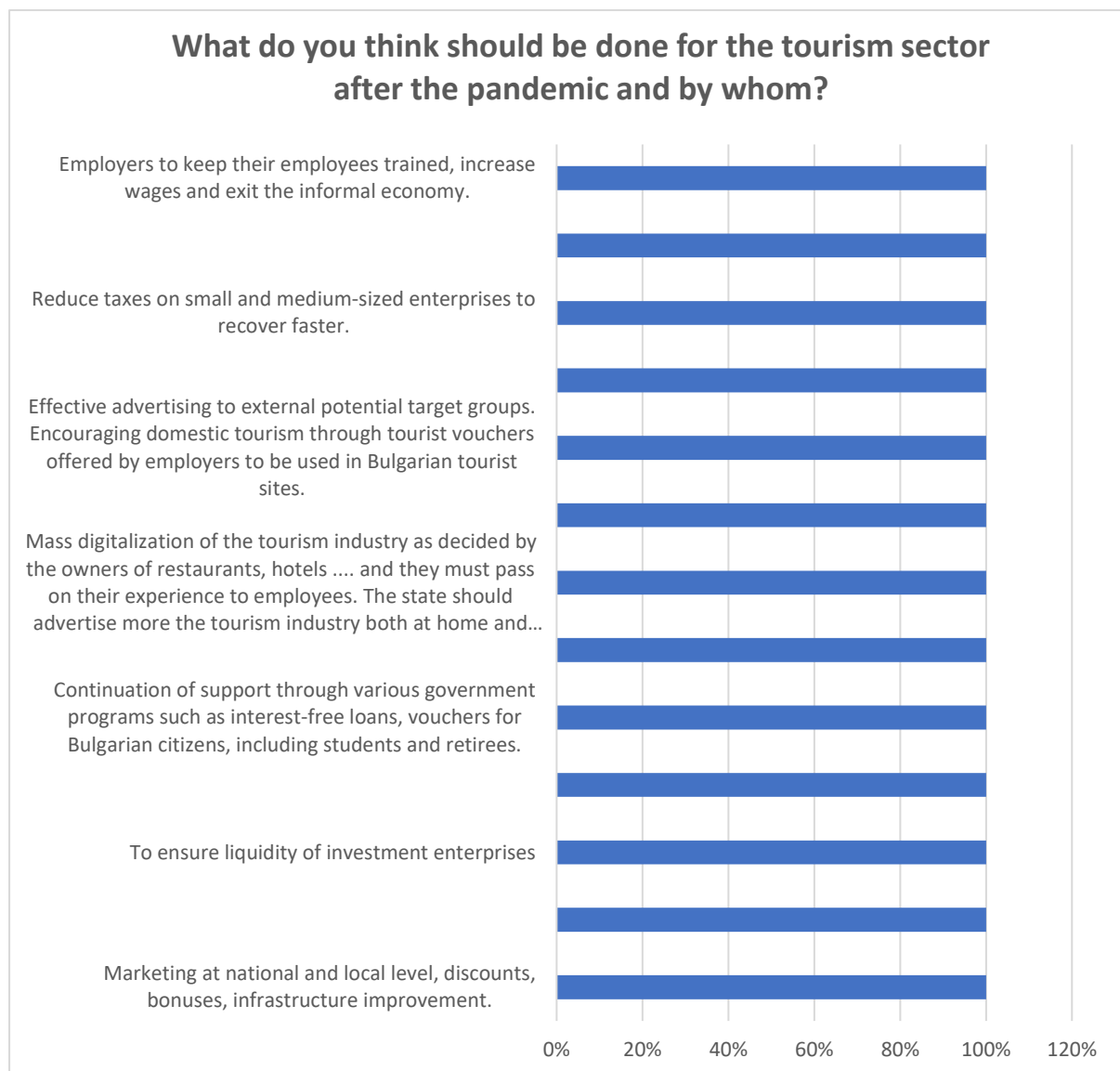
The next measure taken is called **80/20**, which is compensation of BGN 290 for each insured or insuring employee, and this compensation includes BGN 189 for salary and separately the funds for taxes and insurance at the expense of the employer and the employee, which is equal to the ratio 80/20. Some employers believe that the measure does not really correspond to what was officially presented.

- **Measure “Employment for you”**

The "**Employment for You**" measure aims to support the sufferers of the pandemic, who have lost their jobs, by paying the employer the minimum wage and insurance for each employee and to help employers hire employees with guaranteed wages, as this project contributes to the faster recovery of economic processes in the enterprise and to avoid long-term unemployment where possible<sup>6</sup>

#### **4.2.Results from the survey**

With the onset of the pandemic situation, the Bulgarian government had to come up with adequate solutions that would work successfully and alleviate the affected tourism sector as much as possible. Eighteen of the respondents of the survey form indicated that they were aware of the measures taken, or not to such an extent, while one of them answered that he/she was not aware. Unfortunately, some respondents indicated that they were either dissatisfied with the measures taken or satisfied, but not to such an extent. All the measures mentioned in the previous point are considered useful, but they all have their drawbacks due to the fact that some of them cannot benefit some groups of employers or employees. Therefore, the following figure describes the respondents' views on what measures they believe should be taken into account.



**Figure 5. Figure 5. What do you think should be done for the tourism sector after the pandemic and by whom?**

*Source: The figure is developed by the author based on his research*

## **5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Ministry of Tourism has a key role to play in mitigating and resolving the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, working hard, and making adequate decisions for the full recovery of the tourism business, which unfortunately will not be an easy and short process. Whatever measures are taken, a speedy full recovery will be difficult, time-consuming and will need strong monitoring. Based on the analysis of my survey and key findings from it, I in the following lines I will suggest some policy recommendations that should be taken in consideration by the Bulgarian government. First of all, the Government of Tourism in Bulgaria should work harder and concentrated for taking adequate approaches from which all the sectors in the tourism industry can benefit, without exceptions. Next, it is more than clear that digital tools play a really important role in the development of the tourism industry, mitigating the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and popularizing the tourist product on an international level. Unfortunately, this is too difficult a process for the majority of small and medium enterprises and small destinations. This is the reason why I would suggest the government invest in these enterprises for introducing digital technologies so they can be more attractive for attracting new target groups and clients. Of course, qualified employees will be needed to work with these new digital tools for them, that is why I suggest the government help or provide training for staff in tourism and also to work on strategies for extending the tourist season so that the situation to be favorable for the affected businesses.



## 6. CONCLUSION

The pandemic situation brought a lot of difficulties in the tourism business industry. All together the government, managers, and employees have come up with different approaches and strategies to deal with these difficulties and find solutions to how to contribute to the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The government has taken a variety of measures to answer the problems that Covid-19 brought. Some of them have worked, other particularly third were not accessible for all the affected. Managers have tried to answer also to the pandemic difficulties via different strategies and approaches and also via the introduction of modern digital technologies. The introduced digitalization couldn't solve the problems but has helped to mitigate the negative consequences.

After this difficult situation, now step by step the tourism industry in Bulgaria has started to recover, but this will be very long process while we enrich the improvement from the year 2019. Unfortunately, after the Pandemic situation comes a new problem: the war between Russia and Ukraine, which also will affect again the tourism industry due to the reason that there will be lack of tourists from their countries.

## 7. REFERENCE LIST

- Rafailova, G., (2019) *“Development of Varna as Smart Tourist Destination”* University of Economics – Varna, College of Tourism – Varna
- Stankova, M., Kaleychev, S., (2016) *“The application of information technology in tourism as a tool for personalizing the relationship with consumers”*, SWU “Neophyte Rilski”, Blagoevgrad
- Santana, H., (2020) *“Good Practices for e-Business in the Travel Agencies”*, University of Economics – Varna, Bulgaria
- Kadieva, S., Report published in a collection of scientific reports: *“Tourism in the new millennium - state and prospects*, College of Tourism – Varna, Bulgaria
- Kazandjieva, V., (2016) *“Trends and perspectives in the application of innovative technologies in tourism”*, University of Economics – Varna, Bulgaria
- Kostadinova, N. (2018) *“Digital solutions – the changed reality of hotels”*, Bulgarian Science” magazine
- Annual Program for National Tourist Advertising 2020 and 2021*
- Tam, W. (2019). *“5 key - technologies to enhance the guest life cycle”*
- Tutek, E., (2015), *“Tourism Megatrends: 10 Things You Need to Know About the Future of Tourism”*
- Buhalis, D. Xiang. Z., Tussyadiah, I., 2015, *Smart destinations: Foundations, analytics, and applications*, Journal of Destination Marketing & Management.
- Gretzel, Ulrike, 2018, *From smart destinations to smart tourism regions*, Journal of Regional Research
- Gretzel, U. & Scarpino Johns, M., 2018, *Destination Resilience and Smart Tourism Destinations*. Tourism Review International
- Gajdošík, Tomáš, 2017, *Smart tourism destinations? The case of Slovakia*, Faculty of Economics
- Bajpai, A. & Lee, Ch. (2015). *Consumer behavior in e-tourism services: a case of Taiwan*. Tourism and Hospitality Management, 21(1), 1-17.
- Buhalis, D. (2003). *eTourism: Information Technology for Strategic Tourism Management*. London: Pearson (FT/Prentice Hall).
- Маринов, Стоян., COVID-19 и антитуристически сезон „Лято 2020“ по Българското Ченоморие. Икономически университет – Варна (2020)

Ризова, Теодора., Последниците от пандемията на COVID-19 за туристическата индустрия - състояние и възможности. Нов български университет – София (2020)

Унджиева, Мария., Туристическата индустрия – позитивизъм по време на Ковид кризата. Икономически университет – Варна (2020)

Предизвикателства пред туризма в България в контекста на глобална пандемия от COVID-19, БАН, октомври 2020 г.

International Tourism and COVID-19, UNWTO, септември 2020 г., <https://www.unwto.org/international-tourism-and-covid-19>

Google Mobility Trends: How has the pandemic changed the movement of people around the world? Our World in Data, юни 2020 г., <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-mobilitytrends>

[https://21hoteliers.bg/news/revolyucionni-bezkontaktni-tehnologii-startirat-v-hoteli-na-marriott-international/?fbclid=IwAR02x9OkyOi9HePExLXqhhKbOmrU-\\_oqpf5bPLSUuDQnP2IB5LSjaCTUOqs](https://21hoteliers.bg/news/revolyucionni-bezkontaktni-tehnologii-startirat-v-hoteli-na-marriott-international/?fbclid=IwAR02x9OkyOi9HePExLXqhhKbOmrU-_oqpf5bPLSUuDQnP2IB5LSjaCTUOqs)

[https://21hoteliers.bg/marketing/user-experience/robotizacziya-v-hotelierstvoto-polzi-i-nedostataci/?fbclid=IwAR1-CzNrhh\\_apn4KM4IyJBRIZRLGztXIP\\_R2j2Oy-kapCnVLEBcelZs3hUA](https://21hoteliers.bg/marketing/user-experience/robotizacziya-v-hotelierstvoto-polzi-i-nedostataci/?fbclid=IwAR1-CzNrhh_apn4KM4IyJBRIZRLGztXIP_R2j2Oy-kapCnVLEBcelZs3hUA)

[https://21hoteliers.bg/useful/learning-materials/ehoteliers-i-avstralijski-universitet-s-bezplatni-kursove-po-liderstvo-v-hotelirskiya-biznes/?fbclid=IwAR08vjoAnYBEBv3bfFw8QGjjJLtMISakGoL36TVADm3per7sQHjDAVg3J\\_w](https://21hoteliers.bg/useful/learning-materials/ehoteliers-i-avstralijski-universitet-s-bezplatni-kursove-po-liderstvo-v-hotelirskiya-biznes/?fbclid=IwAR08vjoAnYBEBv3bfFw8QGjjJLtMISakGoL36TVADm3per7sQHjDAVg3J_w)

<https://21hoteliers.bg/news/eksperti-prognozirat-osnovnite-tendenczii-na-turisticheskiya-pazar-v-germaniya-prez-2021-godina/?fbclid=IwAR1TiIZ1BifuGrUAmahqEJrIG7AMUwvW9dUrmDhcGJKFIJRSwHJXiIUQmjk>

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-commission-tourism-transport-2020-and-beyond\\_bg.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-commission-tourism-transport-2020-and-beyond_bg.pdf)

[https://www.capital.bg/biznes/turizum/2020/12/24/4156283\\_10\\_tendencii\\_koito\\_shte\\_promeniat\\_turizma\\_sled\\_covid/](https://www.capital.bg/biznes/turizum/2020/12/24/4156283_10_tendencii_koito_shte_promeniat_turizma_sled_covid/)

<https://live.varna.bg/bg/news/pyrvi-doklad-za-vliqnieto-na-covid-19-vyrhu-ikonmikata-na-varna.html>