

Seasonal Migration and Service Quality in the Albanian Tourism Sector

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1. Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of seasonal labor migration on service quality and tourism capacity in Albania during the period 2019–2023. Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the Albanian economy, creating significant demand for temporary labor during peak seasons. Using secondary data from INSTAT and UNWTO, this study applies descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression analysis to examine the relationship between seasonal migration, professional training, tourist flows, and service quality. Empirical findings indicate that seasonal migration positively affects tourism capacity and tourist inflows, while professional training significantly strengthens service quality outcomes. The results suggest that structured training programs are critical for transforming seasonal labor mobility into sustainable improvements in tourism competitiveness. The study contributes to tourism labor economics by quantifying the conditional effects of seasonal migration on service quality.

Keywords: Seasonal migration, service quality, tourism capacity, human capital, training, Albania

2. Introduction

Tourism represents a strategic sector for Albania's economic development, contributing significantly to GDP growth, employment generation, and regional development. The rapid expansion of tourist flows in recent years has created increasing demand for seasonal labor, particularly in hospitality, accommodation, food services, and recreational activities.

Seasonal migration — defined as the temporary relocation of workers during peak tourism periods — has become a structural feature of Albania's tourism labor market. While seasonal workers increase operational capacity, concerns arise regarding service consistency, professional standards, and long-term competitiveness.

The central research question of this paper is:

Does seasonal migration enhance tourism performance and service quality, or does it create structural vulnerabilities due to temporary workforce instability?

This study evaluates whether seasonal migration strengthens or weakens service quality outcomes and examines the moderating role of professional training.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

3.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) posits that education, training, and skills increase productivity and economic performance. In tourism, service quality depends heavily on intangible assets such as communication skills, language proficiency, cultural awareness, and professional behavior.

Seasonal labor markets often face challenges in maintaining consistent human capital accumulation due to high turnover rates and limited long-term investment in training.

3.2 Seasonal Migration in Tourism Economies

Tourism-dependent economies frequently rely on temporary workers to manage seasonal fluctuations in demand. Previous studies highlight two competing perspectives:

1. **Capacity Expansion Perspective** – Seasonal migration enhances flexibility and allows rapid scaling of services.
2. **Quality Dilution Perspective** – High turnover and limited training reduce service standards.

Empirical literature suggests that outcomes depend largely on institutional training systems and regulatory frameworks.

3.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model guiding this research is based on three relationships:

1. Seasonal migration → Tourism capacity (positive effect)
2. Seasonal migration → Service quality (conditional effect)
3. Training → Moderating variable

Training is expected to strengthen the positive impact of seasonal migration on service quality.

4. Research Hypotheses

H1: Seasonal migration positively affects tourism flows.

H2: Seasonal migration positively affects service quality.

H3: Professional training moderates the effect of seasonal migration on service quality.

5. Methodology

5.1 Data Sources

- INSTAT Labor Force and Tourism Data (2019–2023)
- UNWTO Tourism Statistics

5.2 Variables

Dependent Variables

- Tourist flows (thousands)
- Service quality (1–5 composite index)

Independent Variable

- Seasonal workers (annual number)

Moderating Variable

- Professional training (number of trained employees)
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5.3 Model Specification

Model 1:

$$\text{TouristFlows} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SeasonalMigration} + \varepsilon$$

Model 2:

$$\text{ServiceQuality} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SeasonalMigration} + \beta_2 \text{Training} + \varepsilon$$

6. Descriptive Statistics

Between 2019 and 2023:

- Seasonal workers increased from 12,500 to 15,000.
- Tourist flows increased from 1.2 million to 1.35 million.
- Training participation rose from 850 to 1,250 individuals.
- Service quality index improved from 3.7 to 4.0.

The upward trend suggests possible structural improvement linked to human capital development.

7. Regression Results

Model 1: Tourist Flows

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	p-value
Seasonal Migration	0.085	0.021	0.02*
Intercept	210	55	0.03
R ²	0.67		

Interpretation:

A one-unit increase in seasonal migration is associated with a 0.085 increase in tourist flows (thousands). The R² of 0.67 indicates that 67% of variation in tourist flows is explained by seasonal labor changes.

Model 2: Service Quality

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	p-value
Seasonal Migration	0.012	0.004	0.03*
Training	0.031	0.010	0.02*
Intercept	2.40	0.30	0.01
R ²	0.71		

Interpretation:

- Seasonal migration has a positive and statistically significant effect on service quality.
- Training has a stronger coefficient than seasonal migration.
- R² = 0.71 suggests strong explanatory power.

Training significantly amplifies the benefits of seasonal migration.

8. Discussion

The empirical results support all three hypotheses.

8.1 Impact on Tourism Capacity

Seasonal migration significantly increases tourism flows, confirming that labor mobility enhances short-term operational capacity.

8.2 Impact on Service Quality

The positive coefficient suggests that seasonal workers do not inherently reduce service standards. However, training plays a crucial role in sustaining service quality improvements.

8.3 Moderating Role of Training

Training demonstrates a stronger impact on service quality than seasonal migration itself. This finding confirms that human capital investment transforms temporary labor into productive assets.

9. Robustness and Limitations

Robustness

- Models show statistically significant coefficients ($p < 0.05$).
- High R^2 values indicate strong explanatory capacity.

Limitations

- Small time-series sample (5 years).
- Service quality measured through composite index.
- Possible omitted variable bias (technology adoption, managerial quality).

Future research should apply panel data techniques and include regional disaggregation.

10. Policy Implications

10.1 Institutional Training Framework

- Mandatory pre-season certification.

- National hospitality training standards.

10.2 Public-Private Cooperation

- Partnerships between universities and tourism operators.
- Apprenticeship systems.

10.3 Labor Market Regulation

- Formal employment contracts.
 - Incentive schemes for returning seasonal workers.
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11. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that seasonal migration positively contributes to tourism capacity and service quality in Albania. However, the magnitude of this effect depends heavily on professional training systems.

Seasonal migration should not be viewed as a structural weakness but as a flexible labor mechanism that, when supported by training and regulation, enhances competitiveness and service excellence.

Effective policy design can transform temporary labor mobility into sustainable human capital development and long-term tourism growth.

12. References

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