

# CHAPTER 1

## DEVELOPMENTS IN HEALTH TOURISM DURING THE PANDEMIC PROCESS: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The pandemic announced by the World Health Organization in March 2020 continues to cause severe damage to health all over the world. The Turkish health sector, which has been trying to make breakthroughs in health tourism for years and has gained a place in the world in some particular areas, has also been negatively affected by this process, which also causes regression in terms of health tourism. The shrinkage in health services, which has an important place, especially in hair transplantation, eye surgeries, and eye disease treatments, with the effect of travel restrictions between countries, negatively affects health tourism and related sectors as well as the health sector. In this process, it will be possible to reach the targets in health tourism with the positive effects of the incentives and support that can be given on a sectoral basis in the relevant sectors. This study includes evaluations of the pandemic, the pandemic results, health tourism, the problems experienced with the incentives, and solution suggestions. The first part of the study analyzed the current situation of health tourism in Turkey, and the second chapter in the pandemic researched incentives given in health tourism areas during the pandemic. In contrast, in the third chapter, primary goals and problems and solutions experienced in health tourism in Turkey were examined.

**Keywords:** Health Tourism, Turkey, Incentives, Pandemic, Ophthalmology

## 1.Introduction

Health tourism in Turkey, investments in the health system infrastructure, and the expansion of city hospitals, in particular, have had an essential place in recent years, together with private hospitals and other investments. Turkey ranks ninth (9) among the ten (10) countries that foreign patients visit the most regarding their health preferences.

Turkey's most essential aspect of health tourism is that it has an essential place in service exports and has strategic importance in terms of economy, budget size, and added value. Health tourism is one of the most appropriate activities to provide higher income than holiday tourism and use idle capacity. If the right strategies are followed in health tourism, health tourism can be used in the tourism sector and the airlines, urban transportation, accommodation, food, etc. It has an essential place that can bring Turkey to the fore in service exports by positively affecting the sectors.

Another essential aspect of health tourism is that the sector is not seasonal but a type of tourism that spans 12 months of the year. Turkey's 2023 target for health tourism is 1.5 million health tourists and 10 billion dollars in income. Turkey's 5% share in world health tourism, which is expected to reach 143.6 billion dollars in 2027, is possible by evaluating the current opportunities and the advantages it has in the future. At this point, it is necessary to implement a tourism approach that will meet the demands of safe travel, safe accommodation, and safe service and make the required promotions in the field of health tourism.

Köksal Holoğlu, Chairman of the Board of the Health Tourism Development Council Association, stated that Turkey's health tourism has increased by 60% in the last five (5) years. However, After April 2020, it has decreased by 70% in the first six (6) months of 2020 compared to 2019 with the effect of the pandemic.

On the other hand, Turkish Health Tourism Association (TÜSATDER) President Specialist Dr. Servet Terziler stated that health tourism will close the year with a 20% loss in 2019 because of this Turkey's new target in health tourism is; there will be a search for new markets in countries such as India, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Japan in the Asian region. To satisfy this income loss in health tourism and develop the sector, some incentives are given by the government for this sector.

This study consists of three parts. In the first part, the current situation of health tourism in Turkey was investigated. In the second part, the pandemic, the effects of the pandemic on health tourism and the incentives given in the field of health tourism in this context, and in

the third part, the problems experienced in the field of health tourism, solution proposals, and primary objectives were analyzed.

## **2. Current Status of Health Tourism in Turkey**

The most general definition is health tourism, as people go to another place to be treated for health reasons (Uysal & Şahin 2018:278). Health tourism is the visit of individuals to a country other than their country of residence to receive preventive, curative, and rehabilitative health-promoting services. Health tourism is a sector that allows health institutions to grow by using the mobility potential for international health purposes (Tontus, 2019).

Those who go for treatment are called health tourists. Health tourism should not be considered as a type of tourism that only goes to hospitals for treatment, and it is necessary to accept all kinds of tourism that offer a healthy life as health tourism (Tontus, 2019).

Among the reasons for health tourism (Tontus, 2019);

1. Insufficient or no high-tech healthcare and professional human resources in patients' home country.
2. Realizing both treatment and vacation at the same time
3. Health services are more expensive in their own country
4. Desire to receive better quality health care
5. Wanting to hide his health problems (Aesthetic Surgery, Infertility treatment, etc.).
6. Tourism activity (going to countries with forests, plateaus, and historical and cultural richness) in the country where there is limited opportunity for a holiday in terms of climate and geography, the demand for a holiday in a country where there are primarily thermal facilities and thermal tourism opportunities.
7. The desire of the chronically ill, the elderly, and the disabled to go to other environments and be treated,
8. The desire of people with drugs and different addictions to be indifferent or more suitable environments,
9. The person desires to hold on to life and live.

We can classify Health Tourism into three categories, which will be explained below (Yılmaz et al.,2019:77):

**Advanced Age and Disabled Tourism:** It includes elderly care services for people over a certain age or disabled, rehabilitation services at the clinic hotel, treatment services, sightseeing tours, etc.

**Thermal Health Tourism and Spa -Wellness:** Physiotherapy, exercises, etc., by authorized personnel in Spa centers, for rehabilitation after certain diseases or for treating diseases that cause permanent problems. It is a tourism movement that includes therapies and supportive treatments such as thermal tourism, mineralized thermal water baths, and mud baths.

**Medical Tourism:** It includes medical check-ups, health screening, dental treatment, heart treatment, eye treatment, prosthesis implantation, cancer treatment, neurology, organ transplants, and other procedures that require qualified medical intervention to treat health tourists. In other words, they are applications made by doctors in health institutions for tourists with a specific disease for treatment purposes.

There are health institutions accredited at international standards in terms of health tourism (Joint Commissions International) in Turkey. Private, public, and university hospitals have high technology. In many hospitals in Turkey have got high-tech healthcare services are provided in oncological treatments, cardiovascular surgery, orthopedics, neurosurgery, pediatric surgery, aesthetic surgery, ophthalmology, and dentistry. All hospitals serve according to national accreditation criteria and are inspected two (2) times a year. According to the law, the Ministry of Health is responsible for all transactions and coordination related to health tourism. Turkey; provides services at European standards with its modern hospitals, trained workforce, specialist doctors, technological infrastructure, and experience. World-renowned accreditation bodies have approved the service quality of many private hospitals in Turkey. Turkey is a center of attraction in terms of health tourism with its geographical location, health institutions, trained and educated workforce in the sector, spas, and natural beauties.

In our country, health tourism came to the fore between 1990-2000. Between 2005 and 2008, medical tourism came to the fore. The Ministry of Health Health Tourism Coordinatorship was established in 2010, and the legislation on health tourism was amended in 2011. Then the regulations were published in 2011, and it was included in the government program by entering the 2023 vision of the Ministry of Health (Doğan & Aslan, 2019:399).

Today, there are 30 million people who go out of their own countries within the scope of health tourism and want to receive a higher quality health service in a shorter time. Health tourism expenditures in the world are approximately 500 billion dollars.

As shown in Table 1 below, Turkey ranks 9th among the ten most visited countries in the world within the framework of health tourism.

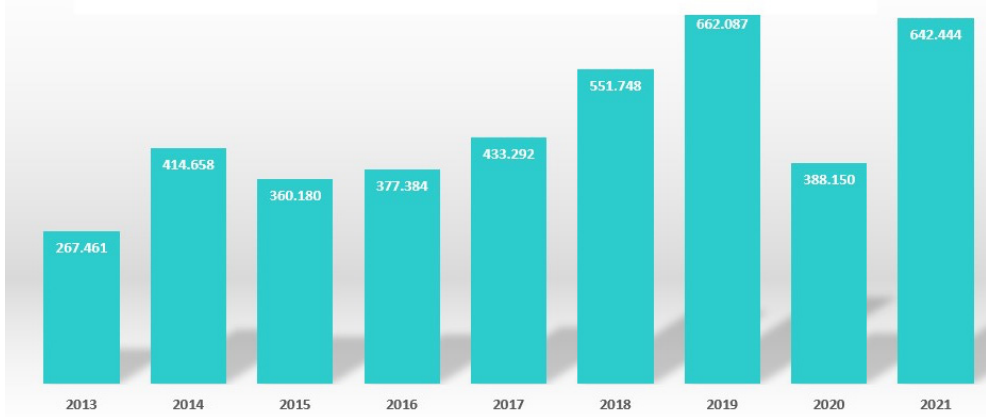
1. Costa Rica	6. South Korea
2. India	7. Taiwan
3. Malaysia	8. Thailand
4. Mexico	9. Turkey
5. Singapore	10. Turkey
<b>Source:</b> A. Dalen & S. Alpert, Medical Tourists: incoming and Outcoming, The American Journal of Medicine	

Turkey's 2023 target in health tourism is to obtain 1.5 million health tourists and 10 billion dollars in tourism income. Due to its location, Turkey has an essential location that appeals to approximately 1 million people and 57 countries within a 4-hour flight distance. With a national airline brand that flies to 120 countries, 299 cities and 302 airports via Turkish Airlines, it is an ideal region for health tourism thanks to its ease of transportation. In addition to the specialized doctors, human resources, and health personnel in our health facilities, it is the best in health tourism with its geographical structure, climatic conditions, health service quality, world-class technological and medical equipment, good price advantage compared to Europe, underground thermal resources, young population, and hospitality. It is among the most preferred countries (USHAS,2019).

In 2018, 551,748 patients received health services in our country within the scope of health tourism. The first three countries where international patients come to Turkey are Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Germany. The cities most preferred by international patients are Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya, Izmir, Erzurum, and Yalova.

As can be seen in Figure 1 below, 662,087 patients came to our country within the scope of health tourism in 2019. These patients came from the first three countries: Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. In 2019, our country's income from health tourism was 1 billion 65 million and 105 thousand US dollars. With the effect of the pandemic in 2020, there has been a severe decrease in the number of health tourists. Three hundred eighty-eight thousand one hundred fifty patients preferred Turkey to receive health services. Tourism income from foreign visitors coming for health tourism and medical reasons and citizens residing abroad decreased to 548 million 882 thousand dollars in 2020. In the first three quarters of 2021, 370,334 people received health services, and the income obtained from this amounted to 704 million 262 US dollars (USTAS, 2021)

Number of health tourists coming to our country



**Figure 1:** The Current Situation of Turkey in Health Tourism  
**Source,** USHAŞ, Health Tourism Data, 2021, www.usaş.com.tr

Table 2 below shows international patients coming to Turkey by country. Accordingly, Azerbaijan, which makes up 18% of the patients coming to Turkey, ranks first, while the least number of patients comes from Syria with 5%.

**Table 2.** Distribution of International Patients by Country of Origin

Azarbajjan	%18	Turkmenistan	%8
Irak	%17	Uzbekistan	%8
Germany	%13	Georgia	%8
Russia	%10	Libya	%6
Afghanistan	%8	Syria	%5

**Source:** The table was prepared by us, taking data from the Ministry of Health, General Directorate of Health Services-Health Tourism Department.

Mehmet Ali Kılıçkaya, General Manager of International Health Services Inc. (USHAŞ), stated that 66% of health tourists coming to Turkey are treated in the private sector and 34% in public hospitals, that USHAŞ is an organization established for health tourism. In this regard, the Ministry of Health has announced that a total of 632 health institutions, including 44 authorized intermediary institutions, 83 public health institutions, 4666 private health facilities, 19 public university hospitals, and 20 foundation university hospitals, have been authorized by the Ministry of Health.

Turkey; In the field of health tourism, it provides services in a wide range of European standards with its hospitals with technological infrastructure, qualified workforce, specialist doctors, and experience. In Turkey, both private health institutions and public hospitals

provide health services in many fields and branches. The medical services provided in Turkey are as follows (Doğan & Aslan,2019:403):

Eye surgeries

Dental surgeries

IVF applications

Aesthetic and plastic operations

Cardiovascular Diseases.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Clinical Patients Covered by 2015 Health Tourism by Services

Service/Clinic	Number	Percent (%)
General Surgery Service	12	29.3
Eye Service	4	9.8
Emergency	4	9.8
Neurology Service	4	9.8
Urology Service	4	9.8
Cardiology Service	3	7.3
Intensive Care Service	2	4.9
Plastic Surgery Service	2	4.9
Neurosurgery Service	1	2.4
Orthopedic Service	1	2.4
Ear Nose Throat Service	1	2.4
Internal Medicine Service	1	2.4
Bone Marrow Transplantation Service	1	2.4
Gastroenterology Service	1	2.4
Total	41	100

**Source:** Top et al., Health Tourism and Tourist Health Applications Cost Analysis by Patient Bills and Diagnosis-Related Groups, Finans Politik Economic Comments Journal, June 2018, www.ekonomikyorumlar.com.

Table 3 shows the distribution of patients receiving inpatient health care in Turkey according to the services (clinics) they receive service from. Accordingly, eye service is in second place. Of 41 patients, 12 (29.3%) were treated in the general surgery service, and 4 (9.8%) were treated in the ophthalmology, emergency, neurology, and urology services.

In addition, three patients were treated in the cardiology service and 2 in the plastic surgery and intensive care units. Patients from abroad usually come for treatment and surgery in surgical services.

Member of the International Council of Ophthalmology Assoc. Dr. Murat Uyar states that Turkey is among the world's leading countries in eye treatments. The number of patients coming to Turkey for eye treatment is increasing annually within the scope of general health tourism.

Uyar stated that the provinces of Istanbul, Antalya, and Ankara are mostly preferred for eye health tourism. Turkey, with its geographical structure, seasonal advantages, quality health services, technological and medical infrastructure, and an affordable price advantage of up to 60% compared to Europe, in addition to its talented human resources, mainly specialized in medical staff, are treated in hospitals in Turkey. He stated that Turkey is the most preferred country in the world, especially for eye treatments (NTV, 2019).

According to the information we obtained from the World Eye Hospitals Group website, one of the largest eye hospitals in Turkey, the hospital states that it performs eye surgery on an average of 6,600 foreign patients every month and brings more than 80,000 foreign patients to our country annually.

Omer Tantus, General Manager of Health Promotion of the Ministry of Health, states that Turkey is a country that holds first place in the world as one of the countries that accepts the highest number of patients from abroad in eye surgeries. He explained that while patients from England preferred Turkey for eye surgeries, Germany and the Middle East followed it and that approximately 25% of the patients who came within the scope of eye surgeries in health tourism preferred Turkey. He stated that the sector leader in Turkey followed India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

## **23. The Pandemic, Its Effects on Health Tourism, and Incentives for Health Tourism**

### **3.1 The Pandemic**

The new type of coronavirus (Covid-19) epidemic, which started in China in December 2019 and has affected the whole world since March 2020, has negatively affected social life, the economy, and many sectors. After increase in the size of the epidemic and its declaration as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), it continued to affect the whole world negatively. The coronavirus epidemic has caused us to meet the concept of pandemic and the economy of the pandemic.

Pandemic is the general name given to epidemic diseases that spread over a wide area and affect more than one country or continent worldwide. With some preventive measures, it is



possible to reduce the spread of the infection in society and thus reduce the number of people who will be infected in the early stages of the pandemic and the cases that will occur due to the pandemic. The pandemic is a name given to infectious diseases that threaten the health of people around the world.

The pandemic is declared by the World Health Organization (WHO). The fact that the newly emerged virus spreads quickly from person to person is an essential criterion. The impact of the pandemic at the community level; varies depending on the contagiousness of the virus, its ability to cause disease (virulence), the immune status of individuals in the community, the characteristics of inter-individual contact and inter-communal transportation, the presence of risk factors, the health services provided and the climate. Considering the rate of spread of the coronavirus and its effect on human health, a pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020 in order to increase protective measures in general (BBC News, 2021).

### **3.2 Effects of the Pandemic**

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) epidemic spread rapidly to the Far-East economies in the beginning and then to America, Europe, and the whole world. Putting a massive part of the world's population at risk, Covid-19 causes a rapid decline in production, domestic trade, and foreign trade in the global economy, especially in the tourism, industry, and services sectors. In this process, while significant decreases were experienced in consumer and producer confidence indices, decreases in budget revenues of states and extraordinary increases in expenditures began to occur, and unemployment increases accelerated.

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) spread has affected production, supply chains, and consumption while sharply contracting economic activities globally, bringing some sectors to a standstill. The increase in uncertainty about the epidemic's development worsens the problem.

Tightening financial conditions, loss of household income and deterioration in firms' cash flows lead to a significant weakening in demand. Social isolation measures implemented against the spread of the epidemic have significantly reduced the activities of the services sector. Financial problems, unemployment, decrease in demand, production difficulties, and uncertainty caused by the epidemic created more or less adverse effects in almost every economy in the world, causing a crisis environment and even the development of a recession process.

Along with the economic uncertainty, the pandemic continues to cause fluctuations in the stock market, the transition from education to distance education in schools, the decrease in travel due to flight bans, the closure of countries, and the end of tourism, albeit partially. With the quarantine and social distance, the consumption in the service sector, that is, eating and drinking outside, decreases, the fundamental priorities of people change due to the necessity of providing basic foodstuffs when the priority is health, and the demand for durable consumer goods such as housing and automobiles decreases. The change affects both supply and demand negatively in the economy.

During the pandemic, state aid and support continue under various headings in Turkey and all countries. Provided support and incentives are as follows (Yaslidag, 2020:20-28):

Arrangements in Tax Payments

Credit, Interest, and Financing Supports

Debt Deferrals

Support for Export

Support for Employment

Arrangements for Retired and Employees

Flexible and Remote Working Models

Short Working Allowances.

### **3.3 The Effects of the Pandemic Declaration on Health Tourism**

Covid-19 has caused a negative trend in International Health Tourism data. People's priorities have changed during the epidemic, and protecting their health has become almost the only goal. Tourists, other than international tourists, first want to travel to safe areas without anything that could threaten their lives. They would must contact foreign people during international travels, and due to the virus epidemic, they are reluctant to do so. Therefore, they decided to cancel or postpone their travels.

A significant reduction has been recorded in health tourism, except for those of great importance. As of 20 April 2020, 100% of the destinations worldwide have faced travel restrictions. Thus, the income from health tourism decreased, and the restrictions on the 217 destinations worldwide have made the process even more unfavorable.

Turkey is an area with high competitive power and potential in terms of medical health tourism. During the epidemic, it was seen that Turkey was in good condition regarding the capacity and qualifications of health institutions and created a positive image in the world. However, despite all these favorable situations, the epidemic has harmed health tourism for treatment purposes, and this situation continues as of April 2021.

According to the current 2019 data of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Turkey, an annual turnover of 100 billion dollars has been reached in health tourism worldwide. There are 51 hospitals accredited by Joint Commission International (JCI) in Turkey. With 51 health institutions, Turkey has 10% of all accredited hospitals worldwide and ranks 2nd in the world. There are 16 hospitals in India, 11 in Thailand, 16 in Singapore, 23 in Brazil, and 33 in Saudi Arabia with JCI accreditation (Ministry of Health, 2018). All state and educational research hospitals in Turkey have been affiliated with the Public Hospitals Institution of Turkey since 2011. A total of 42 of these hospitals in various provinces are priority hospitals in health tourism. Of the 51 JCI accredited hospitals, 36 are private hospitals and private health facilities that continue their activities in health tourism (Private Hospitals and Private Healthcare Facilities Data, 2020). There are 38 university hospitals in Turkey, and studies for health tourism are carried out in these hospitals (University Hospitals, 2020). Specialized health services are of great importance in terms of world health tourism. Four hundred forty-two facilities perform notable transactions in Turkey. Seventy-nine of these facilities carry out studies focused on health tourism (Ministry of Health, 2015). The pandemic has significantly affected the sector with such a vast area in Turkey. Special measures directly affecting the tourism sector are applied between 31 December 2019 and 10 March 2020. These measures include entry and exit bans to countries as a precautionary measure, quarantines used in regions where the epidemic was detected, entry bans to international sports and arts events, congresses, and travel restrictions. Many events were subject to cancellation. Therefore, tourists could not benefit from health services (Çınar & Özkaya,2020,35).

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute figures, tourism income in Turkey decreased by 65.1% in 2020 compared to the previous year and amounted to 12 billion 59 million 320 thousand dollars. 9 billion 998 million 320 thousand \$ of this year's income was personal expenditures, and 2 billion 60 million 999 thousand \$ was package tour expenditures. In the fourth quarter of 2020, while health expenditures decreased by 23.7%, they dropped by 48.5% annually (TUIK,2021).

### 3.4 Government Support and Incentives to the Health Sector

The Ministry of Commerce provides state support of up to 7 million dollars to Health Institutions and Health Tourism Intermediary Institutions that accept international patients. The following are considered Health Tourism Organizations:

Medical Tourism (Exam, Medical Center, Polyclinic, Hospital)

Thermal Tourism, SPA-Wellness

Advanced Age and Disabled Tourism

The institution must have a Health Tourism Authorization Certificate to benefit from health tourism support. The first step of the incentives for both the intermediary institution and the health institution is obtaining the document (Premium Danışmanlık, 2021).

Health tourism is a market that has been growing continuously and at high speed globally in the last ten years. Before the pandemic, approximately 700,000 health tourists came to Turkey for health tourism purposes. Although this volume shrank during the pandemic process, it is predicted that the upward trend will start again after the pandemic.

It is predicted that the health tourism market will reach 1 trillion dollars in 2023 on a global scale. Although the Ministry of Commerce monitors these developments in the sector, the sector is supported by incentives for health tourism to get a high share of the international health tourism market (USHAŞ, 2021).

Health Tourism Incentives are grouped under various headings and stated in the following table.

TOPIC	LIMIT	RATIO
Advertising Marketing Promotion Support	400.000 \$	%60
Translation Support (Health Tourism Personnel)	50.000 \$	%50
Patient Roadside Assistance Support	1.000 \$	%50
Agency Commission Support	100.000 \$	%50
Document Certificate Support	50.000 \$	%50
Product and Service Registration Support	50.000 \$	%50
Overseas Unit Support	120.000 \$	%60
Consulting Support	200.000 \$	%60
Supporting Individual Participation	15.000 \$	%50

**Source:** The data was obtained from Premium Consulting, and we prepared the table. <https://www.premiumdanismanlik.com/saglik-turizmi-tesvikleri.php>, Accessed on: 20 March 2021

### 3.4.1 Advertising-Promotion-Marketing Support

The support title given within the scope of Health Tourism Incentives and benefited most by the sector is advertising, promotion, and marketing support. Expenditure items for advertising, promotion, and marketing activities carried out by the Ministry of Commerce are supported in order for companies authorized for international health tourism to reach target markets they see as potential. It is supported up to 60% of Turkey-based companies operating in the health sector, digital advertising, sponsorship, international conference-event, advertising production, social media management, P&R activities, promotional materials, website, and all classical advertising expenditures of \$400,000 annually. (m3d Network, 2021).

The upper limit and rate of support are determined as 60% in expenditures related to advertising, promotion, and marketing activities and a maximum of 400,000 dollars per year. This support continues for four years.

Health Facilities and Intermediary Institutions that have received a Health Tourism Authorization Certificate from the Ministry of Health can benefit from this incentive.

Within the scope of Sample Promotion Expenses (Premium Consulting, 2021):

Media Ads

Google Ads Ads

Social media

Website Design

TV and Radio Advertisements

Sponsorship

Catalog

Billboard Ads

Bulk E-Mail / SMS / MMS Sending

Press Release

Cocktail

Seminar

Conference

### **3.4.2 Agency-Commission Support**

Commission expenses paid to agencies by Turkey-based companies operating in the health sector are supported at a rate of 50% up to \$100,000 annually. Commission payments made by the Intermediary Institutions Authorized by the International Health Tourism Authorized Health Facilities for bringing patients are within the scope of the support (General Directorate of Health Services, 2021). Health facilities that have obtained a Health Tourism Authorization Certificate from the Ministry of Health, which has signed a protocol with the Ministry, can benefit from this health tourism incentive. (m3d Network, 2021) Support upper limit and rate, commission payments made to agents for sales and distribution abroad, 50%, and a maximum of 100,000 USD per year are supported. The duration of the support is four years.

### **3.4.3 Translator and Staff Support**

The monthly gross wages of 2 (two) personnel working in international health tourism authorized health facilities, employed in the country and working as translators (Health Tourism Personnel), are supported. It is supported by up to \$50,000 annually for two translators employed by Turkey-based companies operating in the health sector and up to \$50,000 annually for interpreting services purchased. For health facilities to benefit from this support, they must obtain a Health Tourism Authorization Certificate from the Ministry of Health (İnovakademi, 2021). For each personnel employed by the health facility, 50% support can be benefited from over the upper limit of 25,000 USD gross wage. The duration of the support is determined as four years.

### **3.4.4 Patient-Road Assistance Support (Per Patient)**

Within the scope of International Health Tourism, economy class transportation expenses of international patients treated in Turkey are supported. This support can be used for every health tourist with this support title, which is within the scope of health tourism support and is registered within seven days. If the patients are brought to Turkey by scheduled flight to be treated by private health institutions or airline companies that have signed a protocol with the Ministry, plane or other transportation expenses are supported at 50% and a maximum of \$1,000 per patient.

Upper limit and rate of support for Health Facilities and Airline companies that have obtained Health Tourism Authorization Certificate by the Ministry of Health, which has signed a protocol with the Ministry:

In case of being brought to Turkey by scheduled flight, flight or other transportation expenses are 50% per patient and a maximum of 1,000 USD,

All transportation expenses, provided that they do not exceed 200 USD per patient, are paid if they are brought to Turkey by non-scheduled (charter) flights. The support is provided for four years.

### **3.4.5. Product and Service Registration Support**

All obligatory expenses such as Trademark Registrations and research and examination on behalf of the Company/Organization to be made by Authorized Health Facilities and Intermediary Institutions for the items specified abroad are supported. Facilities and Intermediary Institutions that have received a Health Tourism Authorization Certificate from the Ministry of Health can benefit from this support.

Support upper limit and rate: In Trademark Registrations, the expenses related to the registration and protection of the Product or Service abroad are determined as 50% and a maximum of 50,000 USD per year, and the period is four years.

### **3.4.6 Consulting and Report Support**

Export-oriented consultancy expenses of companies operating in the health sector, which can provide an advantage to the company in international competition, are 50% up to \$200,000 per year, up to 60% per year for market research, sector, country, international legislation, data mining reports, and up to \$200,000 per year is supported. Consulting Support Market research, sector, country, international legislation, data mining/data monitoring/evaluation activities, a foreign company or brand-oriented reports (including financial and legal reports), and consultancy services for foreign company acquisitions received/made from institutions and organizations deemed appropriate by the Ministry (financial and legal consultancy) related expenses are supported.

Facilities and Intermediary Institutions that have received a Health Tourism Authorization Certificate from the Ministry of Health can benefit from this support. Support cap and rate; expenses for product and service registration and the registration and protection of domestically registered trademarks abroad are applied at 50% and a maximum of 50,000 USD annually for four years. (Premium Consulting 2021)

### **3.4.7. Overseas Unit and Fair Support**

Up to 70% is supported annually, up to \$1,200,000 for the units opened abroad by Turkey-based companies operating in the IT sector. Companies participating in the fairs published in the list of the Ministry of Commerce are provided with the support of up to \$15,000 per fair (General Directorate of Health Services, 2021).

Participation expenses for fairs, congresses, conferences, and seminars organized abroad and included in the “Supported Individual Organizations List” are supported within the scope of Supporting Individual Participation.

Facilities and Intermediary Institutions that have obtained the Health Tourism Authorization Certificate from the Ministry of Health can benefit from this support.

Participation costs of beneficiary and cooperation organizations for individual participation and economy-class round-trip transportation costs of up to two representatives are supported at 50% and a maximum of 15,000 USD per event. The period determined for this support is four years (Inovacadeemy, 2021).

### **3.4.8 Document/Certificate Support**

Documents and certificates to be obtained abroad by Health Facilities and Intermediary Institutions with International Health Tourism Authorization Certificate which are supported:

Application and document review expenses

Certification audit expenses

Document usage fees

Mandatory registration fees

Consulting expenses

Education expenses

Surveillance expenses

Renewal expenses

Test/analysis expenses

Facilities and Intermediary Institutions that have received the Health Tourism Authorization Certificate from the Ministry of Health can benefit from the health tourism support under this heading. Support cap and rate are determined at 50% and a maximum of 50,000 USD per document. The support period is four years (Inovacadeemy, 2021).

### **3.4.9 Overseas Unit Support**

Gross rent (including tax/duty) and commission expenditures of the units to be established abroad by Health Facilities and Intermediary Institutions with International Health Tourism Authorization Certificate that wish to be physically present in the designated international



Target Markets are supported. Facilities and Intermediary Institutions that have received a Health Tourism Authorization Certificate from the Ministry of Health can benefit from this support. Support cap and rate; Gross rent (including tax/duty) and commission expenses are determined as 60% and a maximum of 120,000 USD per unit per year for four years. (General Directorate of Health Services, 2021).

#### **4. Problems and Solutions in The Field of Health Tourism in Turkey**

The main problems Turkey faces concerning Health (Medical) Tourism: (Çınar & Özkaya, 2021, p:43)

Qualified physicians and other health personnel prefer private health institutions more than public health institutions.

Due to the implementation of uncontrolled and unstable price policies, the bills issued to the citizens of the same country for the treatment of the same disease vary greatly.

Since the economic return of the patients coming from abroad is higher and the return of the patients in the country is lower, the quality of the services provided to the citizens of the country decreases due to the hospital's focus on the patients coming from abroad.

The probability of foreign patients coming for medical tourism to bring infectious diseases

After receiving health care, patients from abroad must return to their country without fully recovering. Consequently, their post-operative care needs and complications must be met in their own country.

Continuation of uncertainties and inadequacies in transportation and accommodation issues during the pandemic process

Additional costs that fluctuations in exchange rates will create within the scope of health transportation and accommodation.

In summary, health tourists experience hospital-related, patient-related, and Turkey-based problems in health tourism. Therefore, we can divide the solution to these problems into two: those that the hospital should resolve and those that the state should resolve. The solutions to be developed by the hospital should ensure that the patients are kept less in the hospital, give importance to customer relations management, increase the quality of personnel, and not make unfulfilled promises to the patient. The solution proposals to be developed by the government are transparent pricing, spreading the foreign language throughout the country, establishing a particular support unit for health tourists, increasing the inspections, not

allowing underground work, establishing health tourist information offices, placing English direction signs, increasing the quality and price in the country. It is necessary to prevent frequent fluctuations in exchange rates by ensuring stability (Altoy & Taştan Boz, 2019:127).

## 5. Conclusion

The importance of health tourism, which has an important place in the global economy, for the Turkish economy has increased in the last 15 years. In terms of the Turkish economy, health tourism is not only for the health sector but also for airlines, urban transportation, accommodation, food, advertising, marketing, etc. It acts as a catalyst for industries. Health Tourism is a sector that will enable Turkey to transition from a low-value-added production structure to a high-value-added structure.

Turkey has 51 JCI accredited health institutions at international standards. Private, public, and university hospitals, especially in Istanbul and Ankara, have advanced technological infrastructure and a sufficient number and quality doctors.

Although health tourism in Turkey has grown by 60% in the last five years, the sector shrank by about 50% after the World Health Organization declared a pandemic in March 2020. Health tourism, due to the investments made by Turkey in the health infrastructure in recent years, investments made in the field of city hospitals and private hospitals, and in the field of health, especially eye diseases, hair transplantation, aesthetic surgery, neurology, urology, neurosurgery, cardiovascular, pediatric surgery, etc. It has a considerable capacity in the world due to the success it has shown in the fields.

In the study, it was seen that Turkey is in ninth place among the ten most visited countries in the world within the framework of health tourism. Although it has been seen that the top three countries where the most health tourists come to Turkey are Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Germany, Turkey has made an effort to shift the health tourist market directly to Asian countries.

Turkey holds first place in the world as one of the countries that accepts the highest number of patients from abroad in eye surgeries. In eye surgeries, patients from England preferred Turkey first, followed by Germany and Middle East countries. Approximately 25% of the patients who came within the scope of eye surgeries in health tourism preferred Turkey. Turkey is the leader in the sector. Turkey is followed by India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

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In the sector, which has an important place in the Turkish economy, health tourists experience hospital-related, patient-related, and Turkey-based problems. Therefore, these problems should be solved by the hospital and the state. In this context, problems related to the desire of hospitals and the government's elderly, disabled, and chronically ill health tourists to go to other places, developing professional customer relations, shortening long waiting times, providing better quality and shorter service, developing the technological infrastructure in the field of health, reducing costs. Reduction, finding a solution to the economic stability problem caused by the fluctuations in the exchange rate, etc., areas need to find solutions.

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