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THE EVOLUTION OF MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS OF FAMILY TOURISM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE IMPACT ON THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF HOUSEHOLDS

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This study explores the evolution of family tourism in the European Union from 2014 to 2024, focusing on its impact on household well-being. Using Eurostat and UNWTO (UN Tourism) data, it analyzes key macroeconomic indicators such as tourism expenditure, employment, household income, and tourism's contribution to GDP across several EU countries. The findings reveal a steady growth of family tourism until 2019, a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), and a strong recovery by 2024, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. The research highlights shifts in post-pandemic consumer behavior and the role of family travel in fostering Europe's social and economic recovery. Its originality lies in merging economic and social perspectives through a cross-country comparative approach, offering insights for policy development aimed at promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism that enhances family welfare and contributes to balanced economic growth across the European Union.

Keywords: *family tourism, household well-being, tourism expenditure, employment in tourism, sustainable recovery.*

EVOLUȚIA INDICATORILOR MACROECONOMICI AI TURISMULUI FAMILIAL ÎN UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ ȘI IMPACTUL ASUPRA BUNĂSTĂRII ECONOMICE A GOSPODĂRIILOR

Studiul analizează evoluția turismului familial în Uniunea Europeană între anii 2014–2024, concentrându-se pe impactul acestuia asupra bunăstării gospodăriilor. Pe baza datelor Eurostat și UNWTO (UN Tourism), cercetarea examinează principalii indicatori economici — cheltuielile turistice, ocuparea forței de muncă, veniturile gospodăriilor și contribuția turismului la PIB — în diverse state membre ale UE. Rezultatele arată o creștere constantă a turismului familial până în 2019, o scădere majoră în perioada pandemiei (2020–2021) și o redresare rapidă până în 2024, depășind nivelurile anterioare. Lucrarea evidențiază schimbările în comportamentul de consum post-pandemie și rolul călătoriilor familiale în redresarea economică și socială a Europei. Originalitatea constă în combinarea analizei economice și sociale într-o perspectivă comparativă între țări, oferind concluzii utile pentru politici publice orientate spre dezvoltarea unui turism sustenabil, incluziv și favorabil bunăstării familiilor europene.

Cuvinte-cheie*:* *turism familial, bunăstarea gospodăriilor, cheltuieli turistice, ocupare, redresare sustenabilă.*

Introduction

Family tourism defined as holiday travel undertaken by members of a family, often including children – underwent significant changes in the European Union between 2014 and 2024. This decade has seen both a phase of sustained economic growth (2014–2019) that stimulated leisure travel by households, and the unprecedented shock of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021) followed by a robust recovery in tourism (2022–2024). Tourism plays an important role in the EU due to its economic and employment potential, as well as its social implications – family holidays are not only a form of recreation, but also an indicator of the economic well-being of households [1, 2]. Many European policies recognize tourism's contribution to regional development and cohesion, highlighting the need to understand how the growth of tourism (especially family tourism) influences the standard of living of the population [3].

The purpose of this article is to analyze the evolution of family tourism in the EU between 2014 and 2024 and its impact on the economic well-being of households. Trends in family vacations—both domestic and international travel with children—are examined through the lens of key macroeconomic indicators: household tourism expenditure, employment in the tourism sector, household income, and tourism's contribution to GDP. We will present comparative statistical data from official sources (such as Eurostat and

the World Tourism Organization – UN Tourism) for the period 2014–2024, including comparative figures and tables between major Member States (Germany, France, Italy, Romania, Poland, etc.), an aggregate analysis at EU level, and discussions on the implications of family tourism for the well-being of households in the Union.

Research methodology

The study is based on a quantitative longitudinal analysis of secondary data on tourism and related macroeconomic indicators, taken from official databases and reports. The main sources used include Eurostat statistics (e.g., Tourism Statistics Explained, Tourism Satellite Accounts, surveys on EU residents' tourism demand) and UNWTO (UN Tourism) reports, thus ensuring the comparability of data at the European level. The reference period 2014–2024 covers a complete cycle before and after the pandemic, allowing for the identification of long-term trends and short-term shocks.

We analysed indicators of tourism demand (number of tourist trips and overnight stays, population participation rate in tourism, holiday expenditure) and economic impact (value added generated by tourism, its share in GDP, number of employees in tourism industries and their share in total employment). To capture the specifics of family tourism, we focused on leisure (personal) tourism with at least one overnight stay, often taken in the context of school holidays or family vacations. Although official statistics do not explicitly distinguish all trips "with children," we have extrapolated the relevance of family tourism from data such as the age distribution of tourists (assuming that a large proportion of tourists under 45 are parents traveling with children) and preferences for domestic vs. international tourism among households.

The comparative analysis between countries focuses on five representative member states: Germany and France (the most populous countries, with mature economies and high rates of tourism participation), Italy (a major tourist destination in Southern Europe), Poland (the largest economy in Eastern Europe, with significant domestic tourism), and Romania (the Eastern European country with the lowest tourism participation, illustrative of the challenges of family tourism in lower-income regions). Time series graphs (2014–2024) were created to highlight general trends, and transnational comparative graphs/tables were created to highlight structural differences. The data were interpreted from an economic perspective, correlating changes in tourism with economic factors (disposable income, employment) and major events (e.g., the COVID-19 crisis) that directly influenced households' ability to engage in tourism.

Results and discussion

Between 2014 and 2019, European tourism—including the family tourism segment—experienced steady growth, supported by post-2008 financial crisis economic recovery and rising household disposable income. At EU level, the number of tourist trips with at least one overnight stay made by residents reached 1.1 billion in 2019 [4], marking a historic peak in domestic and external tourism demand. The number of nights spent by European tourists in accommodation establishments in the EU increased by around 40% between 2009 and 2019 [5]. This growth was driven in particular by international travel: nights spent by tourists abroad increased by 53% in the decade preceding the pandemic, compared with a 30% increase in nights spent on domestic travel [6]. The trend indicates that more and more families have been able to afford holidays abroad, taking advantage of cheap flights, European integration (free movement) and increasing prosperity.

Household tourism expenditure followed the same upward trajectory. In 2019, EU residents spent an average of 421 euro per trip [7], and the total estimated expenditure on leisure (personal) tourism amounted to hundreds of billions of euros. Most of this spending was on European destinations – around 85% of Europeans' tourism expenditure was within Europe (77% within the EU itself) [8] – a sign that family vacations are mainly taken on the continent, either in the country of residence or in other member countries. In the pre-pandemic years, European families preferred both short domestic stays (e.g., weekend trips in their own region) and international summer vacations (usually longer trips to the seaside or mountains, often with children, in other EU countries). This combination is reflected in the structure of expenditure: in 2019, Europeans spent an average of around 289 euro on a trip within their own country and around 1,013 euro

on a trip abroad [9], with families investing more in long holidays abroad. At the same time, households in developed countries spend significantly more on tourism: for example, Germany had the highest total expenditure on international travel among EU countries. In 2023 (after recovery), German residents spent around 106.8 euro billion on travel outside Germany – the highest level in the EU [10, 11], reflecting the pre-existing trend of German families (with high incomes) leading the way in foreign tourism. In contrast, Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Italy, and Greece benefited from significant amounts spent by foreign tourists, contributing positively to local economies and household incomes in tourist areas.

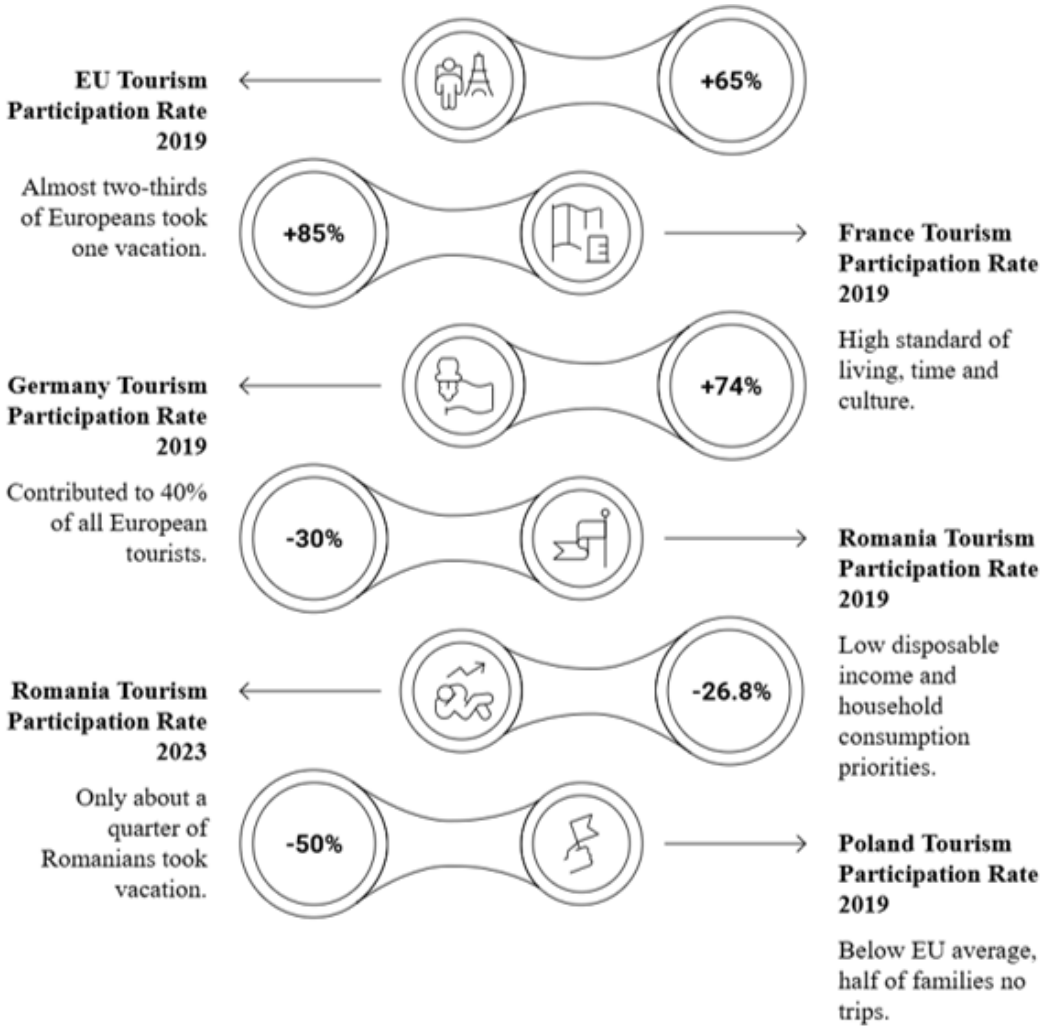

Figure 1. Tourism participation rate in Europe (2019)
Source: *Own elaboration based on Eurostat information* [12]

A relevant indicator for the population's involvement in leisure tourism is the tourism participation rate – the proportion of the population that takes at least one vacation trip per year (Figure 1). At EU level, this rate reached approximately 65% in 2019 [12], a sign that almost two-thirds of Europeans could afford at least one overnight vacation per year (whether domestic or abroad). However, these average hides major disparities between countries and population groups, which has direct implications for well-being: in higher-income families, an annual vacation is the norm, while in financially disadvantaged households, vacations are often an unaffordable luxury. For example, in 2019, France had one of the highest rates of participation in tourism in the EU—approximately 85% of French people had taken at least one trip [13]—due to the relatively high standard of living, available time (generous paid leave), and a vacation-oriented culture. Germany also had an above-average rate (around 74% [13]), contributing alongside France to almost 40% of all European tourists [14]. In contrast, eastern EU countries had much lower rates: Romania was in last place, with only about 30% of the population participating in tourism before the pandemic (similar

to the 2023 figure of 26.8% [12]). Thus, only about a quarter of Romanians could afford a vacation—an indication of the low level of disposable income and household consumption priorities (other strictly necessary expenses predominating). Poland had an intermediate situation: a considerable share of the population went on domestic holidays, but overall, the participation rate was below the EU average (in 2019, probably around 50–55%, according to national data), indicating that almost half of Polish families did not take any annual tourist trips.

These differences are also reflected in the structure of domestic vs. international family tourism. Countries with lower incomes and large areas tend to have predominantly domestic tourism: for example, residents of Romania and Greece spent over 70% of their tourism budget on domestic travel in 2019 [15], preferring holidays within their own borders (on the coast or in the mountains) for reasons of cost or accessibility. In contrast, small and/or wealthy countries have populations that travel abroad extensively: Luxembourg is an extreme case—almost 98% of residents' tourism spending is on travel outside the country [15]. Between these extremes, countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands combine a high volume of domestic tourism with a significant volume of international tourism, offering families multiple options. It should be noted that families with young children often choose destinations closer to home (domestic tourism), at least until the children grow up, for logistical and financial reasons. This is suggested by data broken down by age group: in 2023, Europeans under the age of 45 (a category that includes most parents with minor children) accounted for 47% of all tourist trips, but generated only 43% of expenditure [16] – spending on average less per trip than older tourists.

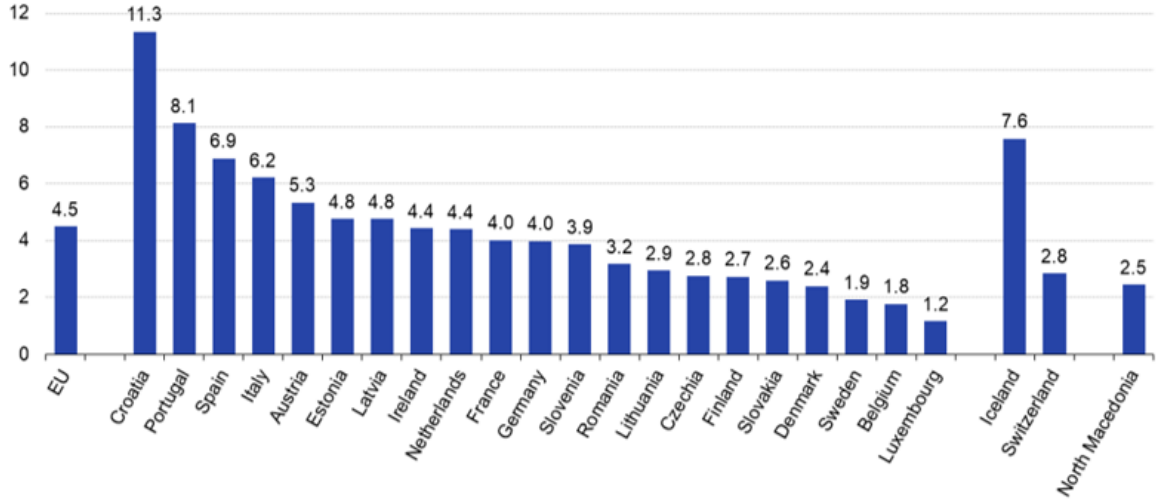

Figure 2. Tourism direct gross value added, as share of total gross value added in the economy (%, 2019)
Source: *Own elaboration based on Eurostat information* [18]

Pre-pandemic economic impact. By 2019, the tourism sector had become an important contributor to the EU economy and to the income of households involved. According to tourism satellite accounts, direct tourism generated around 4.5% of the EU's GDP in 2019 [17, 18] (direct value added of approximately 572 billion euro), highlighting the macroeconomic importance of this sector. The figure below shows the variation in tourism's contribution to GDP between countries: from over 10% of GDP in countries with strong tourism such as Croatia (11.3%) and Portugal (8.1%), to less than 2% in countries with modest tourism such as Luxembourg (1.2%) [18]. Italy and Spain – which have both famous tourist destinations and large populations that travel – each had approximately 6–7% of their GDP coming directly from tourism in 2019 [18]. In France and Germany, which have diversified economies, tourism accounted for around 4% of GDP [18], and in Romania around 3.2% (reflecting potential for growth). It should be noted that these figures are annual averages; seasonally, in peak months, tourism can rise significantly as a share of regional economic activity (e.g., in August in Mediterranean coastal areas). The contribution to GDP is also reflected in employment: in 2019, it was estimated that over 12.5 million people were employed in the EU tourism industries (accommodation, catering, travel agencies, tourist transport, etc.), representing around 11% of jobs in the service

sector [19, 20]. Italy, for example, had the highest number of tourism-related jobs in Europe (approximately 4.2 million according to some reports) due to both high domestic demand and the influx of foreign visitors. Thus, the well-being of many households depends directly on tourism revenues—either in the form of wages for seasonal employees in hotels and restaurants or in the form of profits for small family businesses (guesthouses, local operators) in tourist destinations.

In conclusion, the period 2014–2019 was marked by a boom in European family tourism: more and more households were able to afford vacations (as evidenced by the increase in the participation rate to 65% [12]), vacation spending increased, and local economies benefited from tourist flows (Figure 2). The annual vacation—often with the family—had become a natural part of the lifestyle for most Europeans, reflecting rising economic prosperity.

At the beginning of 2020, this upward trend was brutally interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and health fears caused the most severe decline in tourism in modern history. International tourism came to a near standstill in the spring of 2020, with the number of foreign tourist arrivals in Europe falling by approximately 97% in April 2020 compared to April 2019. Family vacations planned for 2020 were mostly canceled or postponed: families had to stay home in the summers of 2020 and 2021 or spend their vacations very close to home (local trips). Traveling with children was discouraged by health uncertainty, the temporary closure of tourist attractions, and families' fear of exposure. As a result, the tourism participation rate of the EU population fell to around 52% in 2020 (from 65% in 2019), with millions of Europeans giving up their vacations. The immediate economic impact was drastic: satellite accounts show that EU domestic tourism consumption fell by around 45% in 2020 compared to the previous year. Spending by foreign tourists plummeted by around 59%, and that of residents' domestic tourism by around 32% – reflecting the fact that few foreign tourists came to Europe, while some residents still managed to take domestic trips (often rural or nature trips, perceived as safer). Tourism's contribution to EU GDP fell by more than 1.3 percentage points: from 4.4% of GVA in 2019 to around 3.1% in 2020. In practical terms, the sector lost around 184 billion euro in GVA in a single year, equivalent to more than 500 million euro lost every day of 2020 in tourism activity compared to the previous normal. Employment in tourism has also suffered: the number of people employed in tourism industries fell by around 16% in 2020 compared to 2019, meaning the loss of around 2 million jobs (many of them seasonal). For example, there were approximately 12.5 million people directly employed in tourism in the EU in 2019, a figure that fell to 10.5 million in 2020. This has affected households that depended on tourism income: families of workers in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, or air transport have suffered furloughs, reduced income, or even complete job loss. Regions heavily dependent on tourism (islands, coastal areas in southern Europe, historic cities) felt the shock acutely in the well-being of local communities, while households in these areas had to adjust their consumption in the absence of the usual seasonal income.

Faced with restrictions, the behavior of family tourists has undergone adjustments. Data show a marked shift towards domestic tourism in 2020–2021: it is often easier and safer for families to travel by car somewhere in the country than to fly abroad. Countries have also encouraged staycations (holidays spent in the country) to support the local economy. For example, in the summer of 2020, the share of domestic tourism in total tourism expenditure increased significantly in almost all EU countries, partially offsetting the lack of international tourists. Families who did travel preferred more isolated destinations (hiking, mountains, rural areas) and accommodation in apartments or holiday homes (to minimize contact), a change also highlighted by data: in 2020–2021, campsites and short-term rentals saw smaller declines than traditional hotels, with some even recovering quickly (in 2023, nights spent in holiday accommodation exceeded 2019 levels by 12.5%). These adaptations reflect how family tourism has shifted towards safety and low budgets in the face of the crisis: many parents opted for trips by car to nearby destinations, either out of concern for their children's health or due to financial constraints (many households' incomes fell during the pandemic).

Another effect of the pandemic has been to accentuate regional differences. Countries heavily dependent on foreign tourists (e.g., Croatia, Portugal, Spain, Italy), where tourism accounted for 8-12% of GDP [18], suffered severe economic contractions and high unemployment in 2020. Households in these economies, which previously prospered thanks to family businesses in tourism (hotels, restaurants, guides, etc.), faced

financial difficulties. On the other hand, less touristy countries (e.g., Poland, Romania, Sweden) were affected more indirectly (through a general decline in mobility and consumption), but with a relatively smaller impact on national GDP. However, even in these countries, certain vulnerable segments of the population have emerged: for example, low-income families who previously barely managed to go on vacation gave up on them completely during the pandemic, widening the welfare gap with wealthier families (who may have been able to afford to rent a house in the mountains).

In summary, 2020–2021 represented an unprecedented crisis for family tourism in the EU, with a drastic decline in travel, major financial losses in the sector, and negative effects on the well-being of the households involved. However, this period also highlighted the resilience of tourists and the industry: families found ways to enjoy themselves in unusual circumstances, and once restrictions were lifted, their pent-up desire to travel paved the way for a strong recovery.

The gradual easing of restrictions and vaccination campaigns in 2021 kicked off a rapid recovery in tourism starting in 2022. After two years of restrictions, European families showed a desire for "revenge travel" — the desire to make up for lost vacations. In 2022, the number of tourists overnight stays in the EU reached approximately 2.75 billion, or about 96% of the pre-pandemic level (2019), and in 2023 it exceeded the 2019 figures for the first time, reaching almost 3 billion nights. Thus, 2023 became the best year for tourism in the history of the EU, and the trend continued positively in 2024 – when, according to quarterly data, a new record of over 3 billion nights was reached. The increase in 2023 compared to 2022 was +6.8% nights at EU level, and almost half a million additional overnight stays took place every day of 2023 compared to 2022.

The recovery was visible in both domestic and international tourism, albeit with slightly different dynamics: domestic travel recovered more quickly (many Europeans continued to prefer domestic destinations in 2022 out of caution), while international travel experienced a surge especially in 2023–2024, with the lifting of all restrictions and the reopening of intercontinental travel. Eurostat data show that in 2023 the number of EU resident tourists traveling abroad was only 2.5% below the 2019 level, almost completely recovering the loss. Some countries even consistently exceeded their pre-pandemic outbound tourist volumes: for example, Ireland had approximately 23% more tourists traveling abroad in 2023 than in 2019, and France had about 14% more domestic and foreign tourists combined than in 2019, a sign of an increased travel index. Tourist participation among the EU population returned to 65% in 2023, practically matching the 2019 level (after falling to 52% in 2020 and 56% in 2021). In other words, nearly 242 million European citizens took at least one vacation trip in 2023, confirming that the annual family vacation has once again become the norm for most households.

The profile of this recovery presents some interesting aspects for family tourism and household welfare:

Destination trends: In 2022–2023, there was a massive return of tourism to traditional Mediterranean family destinations (beaches in Spain, Greece, Italy, Croatia). For example, Spain recorded 500 million overnight stays in 2024, the highest figure in the EU [38], reconfirming its attractiveness as a favorite destination for families. Italy, France, and Germany each exceeded 400 million tourist nights in 2023. Countries such as Croatia, Cyprus, and Malta (heavily dependent on tourists) experienced accelerated post-pandemic growth, offsetting losses: for example, Ireland and Luxembourg had over 20% more tourist nights in 2023 compared to 2019. On the other hand, some Eastern European countries (Slovakia, Latvia) had still not reached 2019 volumes in 2023, suggesting that some households in these countries have not fully recovered financially to travel as before.

While families stayed close to home during the pandemic, in 2023 they returned to their pre-pandemic habits: the balance between one domestic and one foreign vacation per year was restored for many middle-class families. Eurostat reports that in 2023, about one-third of Europeans (32%) traveled only domestically, 10% traveled only abroad, and 20% traveled both domestically and internationally. In other words, around 30% of the population (the most financially vulnerable or the elderly) still did not travel at all, but the rest resumed their holidays in full, with a significant proportion traveling with their families both domestically and abroad in the same year. Family vacations with children returned to the forefront in the 2022 and especially 2023 summer seasons: seaside resorts, theme parks, and mountain areas reported inflows

at or above 2019 capacity. For example, in the summer of 2023, hotels in Disneyland Paris and major European parks recorded occupancy rates above pre-pandemic levels (according to industry data), indicating that families have made up for the two lost years. This turnaround has implications for well-being: on the one hand, it shows that households have regained the confidence and financial ability to spend on leisure, and on the other hand, it has brought psychological benefits—children and parents can finally spend quality time on vacation after the stress of the pandemic.

However, the recovery in demand also came against a backdrop of rising prices (high inflation in 2022–2023 also affected tourism services). As a result, average spending per trip rose to around 485 euro in 2023, compared to 421 euro in 2019 [7], an increase of approximately 5% that partly reflects inflation (higher prices for accommodation and transport) but also tourists' willingness to spend more on better experiences after the forced break. Families allocated increased budgets to vacations, saving in other years or benefiting from vacation vouchers (where available, e.g., in Romania, the voucher system stimulated domestic tourism). In total, EU residents spent approximately 555 billion euro on tourist travel in 2023, the highest annual amount ever recorded. This spending—on transportation, accommodation, and leisure—fuels the revenues of tourism companies and indirectly the salaries of employees, generating a virtuous circle in local economies.

With the return of tourist flows, the sector has resumed creating jobs and added value. In 2022, the number of employees in tourism industries rose to approximately 12.3 million (7.7% of the total workforce in the business economy), approaching the 2019 level. By 2023, the structural indicators (turnover, value added) of tourism had already exceeded pre-pandemic values in nominal terms. While comprehensive data for 2023 is still being finalized, preliminary estimates suggest that tourism's contribution to the GDP of the EU has risen to approximately 4%, up from 3.1% in 2020. This sector has once again become a crucial driver of economic growth, particularly in southern European nations. For instance, in 2023, international tourism revenue reached 85 billion euro in Spain, 66 billion euro in France, and 52 billion euro in Italy—figures that surpass those recorded in 2020-2021, thus positively influencing the balance of payments. Spain reported the highest tourism surplus, with a net gain of 58.8 billion euro in 2023, while Germany faced the largest deficit at 71.8 billion euro. This contrast clearly illustrates the differing impacts of tourism on economies; countries like Spain benefit from incoming tourists, whereas in Germany, households often spend more abroad. This growth in tourism has favourable implications for household welfare in nations such as Spain and Greece, where many workers have regained seasonal employment, leading to an increase in family incomes in tourist-dependent regions. Additionally, revenue from tourism may eventually support public services. In countries that predominantly send tourists, like Germany and those in Northern Europe, the income generated from tourism reflects the significant welfare of families who can afford to travel, without adversely affecting their standard of living domestically, as any tourism deficit is balanced by surpluses in other economic areas.

The recovery has not been uniform, reinforcing some structural differences. France stands out as the country with the highest proportion of the population engaging in tourism – approximately 85% in 2023 – confirming both its deep-rooted holiday culture and its post-pandemic recovery. Germany remained close to the average (an estimated 70%), but with the highest absolute volume of expenditure on foreign tourism [10, 11], with Germans continuing to be the "champions" of foreign travel. Italy, although it attracted many foreign tourists (it was the second most visited country in the EU in 2023 in terms of overnight stays), has a resident population with tourist behavior closer to the average (many Italians travel domestically instead of leaving the country—for example, in 2023, Italy recorded a significant decrease, over 25%, in the number of Italian tourists who traveled outside the country compared to 2019). Poland reached a record volume of domestic tourist overnight stays (almost 93 million in 2023 according to the national statistics office), a sign that Polish families were once again traveling extensively within the country. However, overall, the Polish population's participation in tourism remains below the EU average, with many Polish families preferring holidays with relatives or local activities to expensive trips. Romania has also recovered its domestic volumes (2023 was a record year for Romanian spa resorts and seaside resorts), but continues to have the lowest participation rate: only 1 in 4 Romanians engage in leisure tourism annually [12], indicating that the welfare of Romanian households, although growing, still does not allow for vacations for the majority. This situation raises issues of inclusion—vacation being an aspect of quality of life that is not equally accessible to all.

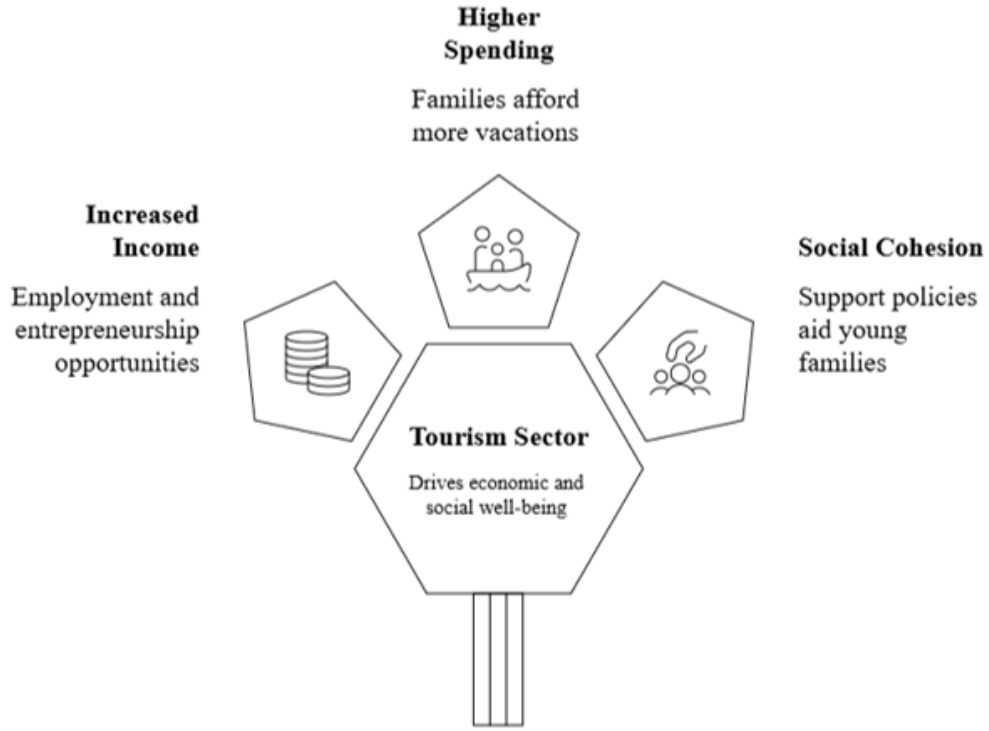

Figure 3. Tourism impact household ell-being in the EU
Source: *Own interpretation*

Analysis of the evolution of family tourism in the EU reveals complex links between the tourism sector and household well-being, which operate in two directions:

(a) Tourism as a consequence of household well-being: The level of participation in tourism and holiday spending reflects the economic situation of the population. When disposable income rises and unemployment falls (as was the case in 2014–2019), more households can afford family vacations, some even multiple times a year. In this sense, tourism acts as a "luxury": an indicator of prosperity. For example, the increase in the participation rate to 65% in 2019 (from around 60% in 2014) shows that hundreds of thousands of families who previously did not go on vacation were able to do so, thanks to improved incomes or cost reductions (e.g., low-cost airline tickets) [12]. The persistent contrast between France (over 80% participation) and Romania (approximately 27%) in terms of vacations is clearly related to differences in per capita income and socio-economic inequalities [12]. Where households struggle with basic expenses (housing, food), the budget for tourism is non-existent – reflecting a low level of well-being. Furthermore, family composition and size influence the possibility of traveling: families with young children have additional expenses and logistical constraints, which can reduce the frequency of tourism (e.g., the cost of a vacation for four people is much higher than for a couple). We thus observe that support policies (holiday vouchers, discounts for children, baby-friendly facilities) can increase the chances of young families enjoying holidays, which has implications for social cohesion and quality of life.

(b) Tourism as a source of economic well-being: On the other hand, the tourism sector contributes directly to household income through employment and entrepreneurship. Millions of Europeans work in tourism—a sector characterized by a high proportion of young people and women in the workforce (in 2023, 57.6% of tourism employees were women, well above the average for other industries). These jobs, from tour guides to chambermaids, from receptionists to leisure operators, provide income for employees' households. In many peripheral or rural regions, tourism brings otherwise non-existent employment opportunities, reducing migration and sustaining communities. The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated the importance of tourism for well-being in a negative way: the sudden disappearance of tourists left many families working in the sector without income. For example, in Spain and Greece, unemployment rose sharply in 2020 in tourist provinces, affecting the living standards of local households. However, the return of tourism

in 2022–2023 brought back jobs: in 2023, employment in European tourism was still slightly below 2019 levels, but rising—a sign that thousands of families are returning to financial stability as hotels, restaurants, and agencies reopen. Tourism also stimulates entrepreneurial income, with many family businesses (guesthouses, restaurants, souvenir shops) thriving thanks to tourist flows, with profits supporting the consumption of those households. According to structural data, approximately 99% of tourism companies are SMEs, most of them family micro-enterprises – which means that the revitalization of tourism after 2021 had a direct impact on the recovery of small family businesses in the field.

Tourism also brings prosperity to households indirectly, through its knock-on effect on the economy: increased tourist spending boosts demand for local products, construction (for tourism infrastructure), and transport services, thus generating jobs and income outside the strictly tourism sector. The World Tourism Organization notes that every euro spent by a tourist has a significant multiplier effect on GDP and income. Thus, the total (direct and indirect) contribution of tourism to the EU's GDP was estimated before the pandemic at over 10% (including induced effects) and at over 27 million jobs when all related industries are taken into account . These figures underscore that the macroeconomic well-being of the EU and its households is closely linked to a healthy tourism sector.

Last but not least, there is also a qualitative dimension to well-being, as family vacations contribute to the subjective well-being of household members. Sociological studies show that time spent on vacation improves family cohesion, mental health, and life satisfaction. From an economic perspective, these intangible benefits can translate into higher productivity (rested employees), reduced healthcare costs, etc. Therefore, the fact that more and more European households have been able to afford vacations over the last decade can be seen as a sign of increased well-being, not only in material terms but also in terms of quality of life.

However, the analysis also reveals possible tensions, as regional imbalances mean that regions that are heavily dependent on tourism (e.g., the Greek islands, the Dalmatian coast, Italian Alps) may have households with volatile incomes—very high during the tourist season, almost non-existent in the off-season or during crises—which requires social protection mechanisms and economic diversification. At the same time, over-dependence of family income on tourism can expose households to risks (see the COVID shock), so policies should also support workforce retraining and local economic resilience. On a social level, unequal access to tourism (poor families who cannot go on vacation at all) raises the issue of exclusion from rest and recreation, recognized by some states as a form of deprivation. Initiatives such as holiday vouchers for disadvantaged families or camps for children from poor backgrounds are important to ensure that the benefits of family tourism (cultural education, relaxation, family bonding) do not bypass entire segments of the population.

Conclusions

Family tourism in the EU experienced dynamic growth between 2014 and 2024, highlighting both the robustness and vulnerabilities of the sector in relation to household welfare. The period began with solid growth in tourism participation and expenditure, fuelled by overall economic progress: more and more European families were able to travel, benefiting from higher incomes and diversified tourism offerings. This expansion was abruptly interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis, which demonstrated the critical interdependence between tourism and well-being, with local economies and millions of households feeling the negative impact of the halt in tourism. At the same time, the pandemic highlighted the resilience of families and the industry (shift to domestic tourism, digitalization, new business models), laying the foundations for an accelerated recovery.

The post-pandemic recovery of tourism in 2022–2024 was remarkable, reaching record levels and confirming tourism as one of the EU's economic drivers. Family vacations made a strong comeback, and tourism's contribution to GDP and employment returned to near pre-crisis levels, demonstrating the sector's role as a generator of income and jobs. Differences between countries remained: southern and western countries show high rates of tourism participation and benefit from the economic influx from tourism, while in the east participation remains lower, suggesting a need to increase families' access to tourism and develop local tourism potential.

For the economic well-being of households, the main conclusion is that tourism plays a dual role: it is a barometer of prosperity (families travel when they have sufficient financial resources and confidence in the future) and also an active factor in well-being (through a significant contribution to income, employment, and quality of life). Public policies at EU and national level can enhance these positive aspects, for example through investment in sustainable tourism infrastructure, support for family-run SMEs in tourism, social tourism programmes for low-income families and vocational training in the field. At the same time, careful management of mass tourism is essential to prevent adverse effects (overcrowding, depletion of local resources, increased cost of living in very popular destinations) that can jeopardize the long-term well-being of local communities.

Looking ahead, family tourism in the EU remains a sector with growth potential, fueled by Europeans' continued desire to explore and spend quality leisure time with their families. Even in the face of emerging challenges – climate change, geopolitical tensions, or economic developments – households' propensity to allocate resources to holidays suggests that tourism will continue to be both an indicator of and a contributor to well-being. Ensuring the sustainability and accessibility of tourism for all categories of families will be key to ensuring that the economic and social benefits of this sector are widely felt across the European Union.

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