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TERRITORIAL DISPARITIES IN EMPLOYMENT EFFICIENCY IN KHOREZM REGION: ASSESSMENT AND POLICY DIRECTIONS

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Abstract. Employment efficiency across 13 territories of the Khorezm Region is assessed using five criteria. Criteria K1–K4 are calculated based on 39 territory-year observations for 2022–2024, while K5 reflects employment dynamics over 2021–2024. The findings indicate that interterritorial disparities are more pronounced in formal employment and external migration than in overall employment coverage. Territories with similar composite scores may nevertheless exhibit substantial differences in their weakest dimensions. Accordingly, the composite index serves as a diagnostic tool for identifying territory-specific employment constraints, assessing spatial disparities in local labor markets, and selecting context-specific policy measures aimed at improving employment efficiency.

Keywords: regional employment, local labor market, employment efficiency, formal employment, vacancies, external migration, composite index, territorial disparities, place-based policy.

Аннотация. Эффективность занятости в 13 территориях Хорезмской области оценена на основе пяти критериев. Критерии K1–K4 рассчитаны на основе 39 территориально-временных наблюдений за 2022–2024 годы, тогда как критерий K5 отражает динамику занятости за 2021–2024 годы. Результаты исследования показывают, что межтерриториальные различия более выражены в показателях формальной занятости и внешней миграции, чем в общем охвате занятостью. При этом территории со схожими значениями композитного индекса могут существенно различаться по наиболее слабым компонентам. В связи с этим композитный индекс может использоваться в качестве диагностического инструмента для выявления специфических проблем занятости отдельных территорий, оценки пространственных различий на локальных рынках труда и выбора мер политики, учитывающих территориальные особенности и направленных на повышение эффективности занятости.

Ключевые слова: региональная занятость, локальный рынок труда, эффективность занятости, формальная занятость, вакансии, внешняя миграция, композитный индекс, территориальные различия, территориально ориентированная политика.

INTRODUCTION

Employment is both an outcome of the regional economy and a factor influencing its subsequent development. Therefore, assessing employment solely by the number of employed persons or the unemployment rate may not provide a comprehensive assessment. The formality of employment, effective demand from local employers, access to job opportunities for specific social groups, and the persistence of achieved results over time are also important.

This issue is clearly visible across the territories of Khorezm Region. Between 2019 and 2025, the number of employed persons in the region increased from 736.5 thousand to 840.1 thousand, while the unemployment rate declined from 9.1% to 4.7%. However, as of January–October 2025, employment coverage across territories ranged from 60.2% to 78.2%, formal employment from 44.5% to 90.5%, and external migration from 5.0% to 23.5%. These employment indicators are based on data provided by the Khorezm Regional Main Department of Employment [16].

International studies also show that regional labor markets produce different outcomes depending on economic structure, human capital, and local conditions. Martin et al. demonstrate that the employment response to economic shocks is related to the sectoral structure of a region [1], while Simões et al. identify the role of human capital in labor market resilience [2]. The OECD particularly emphasizes the need for place-based regional policy [3]. The ILO approach also stresses the importance of considering employment quality and formality alongside the quantity of employment [4, 5].

Labor resources, employment, and labor market issues have been widely examined in the economic literature of Uzbekistan [6–8]. Nevertheless, it remains practically important to assess small territories within a single region using common criteria and to identify the specific dimensions that determine the overall result.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following question: Are the main constraints on employment efficiency the same across the territories of Khorezm Region? The purpose of the study is to compare 13 territories using five criteria, identify their dimensions requiring further improvement, and propose policy directions that correspond to the actual economic conditions of each territory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two complementary perspectives can be distinguished in the literature on employment efficiency. The first examines labor market balance through the relationship among employment, unemployment, and vacancies. The second focuses on job quality, including income, formality, security, and equal opportunities. The ILO Decent Work Indicators, the UNECE framework on quality of employment, and the OECD Job Quality Framework develop this second perspective [4, 9, 10].

Studies in regional economics show that a single national or regional indicator may not fully reflect substantial internal differences. Martin et al. find that regions respond differently to employment shocks [1]. Borsekova and Korony demonstrate the importance of evaluating labor market efficiency using multiple indicators [11]. Simões et al. further establish the importance of human capital for regional labor market resilience [2].

The economic quality of newly created jobs also depends on the sectoral and occupational structure of a territory. Elekes et al. find that local access to skill-related, high-income jobs helps workers transition from low-wage employment [12]. Adam et al. show a relationship between economic complexity and employment outcomes [13]. These findings indicate that investment or the number of enterprises should be considered alongside the quality of jobs created.

Formal employment is a distinct issue for developing regions. ILO Recommendation No. 204 treats formalization not merely as administrative registration but as a process connected with legal protection and sustainable economic activity [5]. From this perspective, a territory may have relatively high employment coverage while still having opportunities to strengthen its labor market if the share of formal employment remains relatively low.

Composite indicators make it possible to summarize a multidimensional phenomenon in a single measure; however, different internal structures may be reflected in similar overall scores [14]. For this reason, the composite index in this study is not treated solely as a final ranking. The main emphasis is placed on identifying which criterion requires the greatest attention within the overall score.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study covers 13 districts and cities of Khorezm Region. Data on employment, labor resource balances, vacancies, and employment services were obtained from the Khorezm Regional Main Department of Employment [16]. Demographic, wage, sectoral, and other socioeconomic indicators were drawn from the Khorezm Regional Department of Statistics [15].

The assessment period was selected according to the comparability of data across territories. For K1–K4, 39 territory-year observations for 2022–2024 were used, while K5 was constructed from the short time series for 2021–2024. These employment indicators were formed using data from the Khorezm Regional Main Department of Employment [16]. Demographic, wage, and other general economic indicators available through 2026 were obtained from the Khorezm Regional Department of Statistics [15]. Because the time coverage of the 2025 indicators was not uniform, they were considered separately from the baseline composite index to ensure consistency in the assessment.

In selecting the five criteria, priority was given not to maximizing the number of indicators but to using comparable and verifiable measures available with the same meaning across territories. K1 captures the utilization of labor resources; K2 represents registered formal labor demand; K3 reflects employment formalization; K4 measures job-placement outcomes for women and youth who applied to employment services; and K5 captures the short-term direction of employment coverage and unemployment, together with the regularity of annual changes.

Table 1. Criteria for Assessing Employment Efficiency¹

Criterion	Meaning	Main indicator
K1	Labor resource utilization	Employment coverage and unemployment
K2	Formal labor demand	Registered vacancies per 100 unemployed persons
K3	Employment formalization	Share of formal employment in total employment
K4	Women/youth service outcomes	Job placement among women and youth applicants
K5	Short-term dynamics	Employment/unemployment trend and regularity of annual changes

Indicators measured in different units were normalized to the 0–1 range using the min–max method. For positive indicators, a higher initial value represents a better outcome; for negative indicators, a lower initial value represents a better outcome. This standardization approach is consistent with general recommendations for constructing composite indicators [14].

$$z = (x - x_{\min}) / (x_{\max} - x_{\min}) \text{ or } z = (x_{\max} - x) / (x_{\max} - x_{\min}) \quad (1)$$

The value of each criterion for a territory was obtained by averaging the relevant period results. K1–K5 were then combined with equal weights. Equal weighting was chosen to ensure balanced consideration of the individual criteria and to limit the possibility that a single highly dispersed indicator would dominate the overall result.

$$I_j = (K1_j + K2_j + K3_j + K4_j + K5_j) / 5 \quad (2)$$

The composite index shows the relative position of a territory but does not constitute a policy decision in itself. Therefore, at the next stage, the criterion requiring the greatest attention for each territory was identified. When two criteria were very close, the result was reconsidered using sensitivity analysis.

$$D_j = \arg \min \{K1_j, K2_j, K3_j, K4_j, K5_j\} \quad (3)$$

The robustness of the baseline calculation was tested using alternative weighting and changes in index composition. Spearman coefficients ranged from 0.852 to 0.940. This indicates that the overall territorial profile remains relatively stable under small methodological changes.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The structure of interterritorial disparities extends beyond employment coverage. During 2021–2025, the coefficient of variation for employment coverage ranged from 3.94% to 6.47%. For formal employment, it ranged from 21.66% to 32.59%, while for external migration, it ranged from 15.85% to 32.36% [16].

The January–October 2025 data make this difference particularly clear: the coefficient of variation for employment coverage was 6.47%, compared with 21.66% for formal employment and 32.36% for migration. Thus, districts and cities differ not only in the extent of employment coverage but also in the forms in which employment is organized [16].

¹ Source: Developed by the author based on the theoretical literature and the coverage of official statistics.

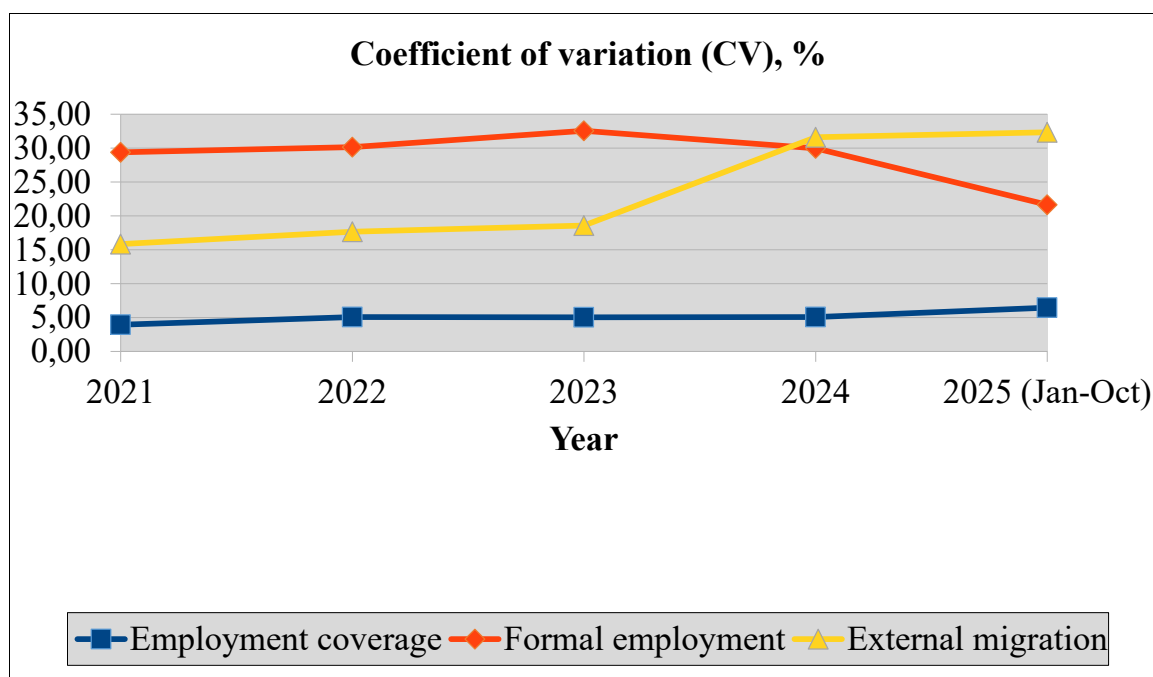


Figure 1. Interterritorial Disparities in Employment Coverage, Formal Employment, and External Migration in Khorezm Region (Coefficient of Variation, %), 2021–2025²

The composite results allow the territories to be compared within a common framework. Urganch City recorded the highest relative score at 0.528, while Yangiariq recorded a score of 0.294. However, the most important aspect of this comparison is not the ordering itself but the internal criteria underlying the scores.

For example, the composite indices of Yangibozor and Tuproqqal'a are almost identical at 0.476 and 0.475, respectively. In Yangibozor, K2 = 0.226 is the lowest value, indicating opportunities to strengthen local formal labor demand. In Tuproqqal'a, K4 = 0.217 is the lowest value. Thus, even when two territories have nearly the same overall score, differentiated policy measures may be more appropriate for addressing their respective employment conditions.

Table 2. K1–K5 Indicators and Composite Scores for the Territories of Khorezm Region³

Territory	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	Index	Weak criterion
Urganch C.	0.372	0.574	0.941	0.447	0.307	0.528	K1 + K5
Yangibozor	0.561	0.226	0.441	0.425	0.726	0.476	K2
Tuproqqal'a	0.765	0.397	0.458	0.217	0.539	0.475	K4
Khiva D.	0.567	0.283	0.114	0.543	0.647	0.431	K3
Urganch D.	0.675	0.329	0.136	0.583	0.401	0.425	K3
Qo'shko'pir	0.547	0.215	0.150	0.555	0.610	0.416	K3
Shovot	0.593	0.124	0.114	0.582	0.630	0.409	K2 + K3
Khiva C.	0.420	0.508	0.206	0.393	0.500	0.406	K3
Bog'ot	0.564	0.091	0.090	0.668	0.492	0.381	K2 + K3
Gurlan	0.576	0.148	0.171	0.547	0.428	0.374	K2
Xonqa	0.639	0.136	0.162	0.462	0.457	0.371	K2
Hazorasp	0.558	0.192	0.117	0.287	0.570	0.345	K3
Yangiariq	0.466	0.184	0.063	0.425	0.333	0.294	K3

² Source: Khorezm Regional Main Department of Employment; calculations by the author.

³ Source: Khorezm Regional Main Department of Employment; calculations by the author.

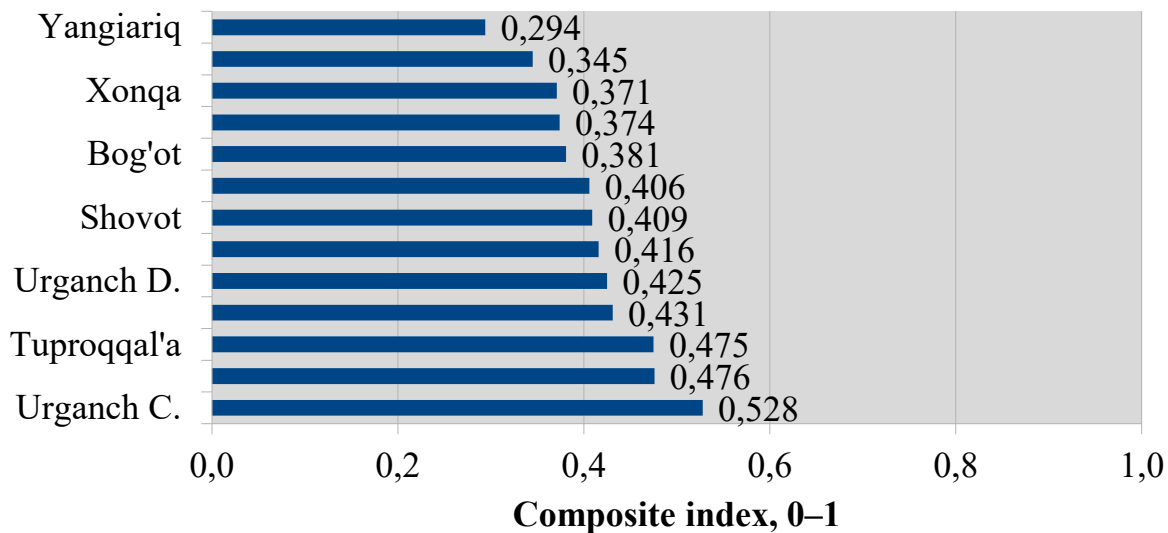


Figure 2. Composite Employment Efficiency Index for the Territories of Khorezm Region (0–1 Range)⁴

K3—the share of formal employment—was the criterion requiring the greatest attention in many territories. K2 was the lowest criterion in Gurlan, Xonqa, and Yangibozor; K4 in Tuproqqal'a; and K5 in Urganch City. This distribution indicates the importance of applying differentiated employment policy measures that reflect territorial characteristics.

In Bog'ot, K3 = 0.090 and K2 = 0.091, while in Shovot, K3 = 0.114 and K2 = 0.124, indicating very small differences between the two criteria. Therefore, considering formalization and vacancy capacity together provides a more comprehensive basis for assessing employment conditions in these districts. Both dimensions would benefit from simultaneous improvement.

The situation in Urganch City is different. Formal employment is high, and vacancies are relatively numerous, while employment coverage offers further potential for improvement. In January–October 2025, formal employment reached 90.5%, while employment coverage was 60.2%. The main task for the city is therefore to facilitate the greater integration of labor resources into the existing formal labor market [16].

Table 3. Verification of the Main Findings Using 2025 Data for Selected Territories⁵

Territory	Emp. coverage, %	Formal emp., %	Migr., %	Vac./100 unemployed (2024)	Weak dimension
Urganch City	60.2	90.5	5.0	91.8	K1 + K5
Bog'ot	74.6	47.5	21.6	28.8	K2 + K3
Shovot	76.4	47.8	19.1	36.1	K2 + K3
Yangiariq	75.4	44.5	18.3	41.2	K3
Tuproqqal'a	78.2	64.4	5.7	68.8	K4
Yangibozor	73.2	59.9	15.3	54.7	K2

The 2025 data substantively support the diagnostic results for 2022–2024. In Yangiariq, formal employment stands at 44.5%, indicating further potential for formalization; Bog'ot and Shovot show opportunities for improvement in both formalization and vacancy capacity, while Urganch City combines high formality with further potential to expand employment coverage [16].

In Tuproqqal'a, employment coverage and formalization are relatively strong, while job-placement outcomes among young people who applied to employment services offer opportunities for further improvement. The available data provide a basis for conducting additional analysis by occupation, shift

⁴ Source: Khorezm Regional Main Department of Employment; calculations by the author.

⁵ Source: Author's calculations based on the 2025 labor resource balance and vacancy data of the Khorezm Regional Main Department of Employment.

pattern, transport access, wage level, and the composition of applicants to identify the factors associated with this result [16].

The most important finding of the study is that employment coverage alone does not fully explain differences among the territories of Khorezm Region. The greater variation observed in formal employment and migration suggests that similar levels of employment coverage may be associated with different labor market models. This finding is consistent with the ILO and OECD approaches, which emphasize the importance of considering employment quality alongside employment quantity [4, 10].

The second important finding is that the composite index is most informative when considered together with its individual components. A composite score provides a concise overall picture, but, as the Yangibozor and Tuproqqal'a cases show, similar scores may reflect different underlying conditions. Therefore, policy decisions can be more effectively informed by the K1–K5 profile in addition to the exact index rank.

The third issue concerns place-based policy. Even among territories with relatively low K3 scores, the underlying economic context varies. In Khiva City, the formalization of tourism and seasonal services is particularly relevant; in Yangiariq, the transition of small-business activity toward formal hiring deserves particular attention; and in Hazorasp, strengthening the balance between local formal employment and migration-related employment opportunities is important. The OECD place-based policy approach likewise supports this type of territorial differentiation [3].

The Tuproqqal'a result requires careful interpretation. Strong industrial potential can create favorable conditions for expanding access to employment among women and youth. At the same time, the available statistics provide an opportunity for further analysis of the factors underlying the observed result. A relatively low K4 should therefore be treated primarily as a signal for further investigation rather than as a causal conclusion.

The method also has specific analytical boundaries. K2 captures registered vacancies; K4 measures outcomes among groups that applied to employment services; and K5 reflects the direction and regularity of a short time series rather than long-term resilience. Explicit consideration of these methodological characteristics supports a balanced and careful interpretation of the results.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results indicate that selecting measures according to the main dimension requiring attention is more appropriate than applying the same employment program to every territory. The name of a criterion is not a ready-made solution; rather, it indicates which relationship within the local economy should be examined.

Table 4. Main Issues and Practical Policy Directions for the Territories of Khorezm Region⁶

Territory	Weak K	Policy direction	Outcome measure
Urganch City	K1 + K5	Connect economically inactive people with existing formal job opportunities; expand professional and digital services	Employment coverage, economic activity, job placement
Gurlan, Xonqa, Yangibozor	K2	Expand formal labor demand through processing, services, logistics, and local procurement	Vacancies per 100 unemployed and vacancy filling
Khiva City, Khiva Dist., Urganch Dist., Qo'shko'pir, Hazorasp, Yangiariq	K3	Link existing economic activity with formal hiring, cooperation, and stable orders	Share of formal employment and informal segment
Tuproqqal'a	K4	Improve the match between vacancies and applicants in terms of occupation, shift schedules, transport, and working conditions	Job entry and job retention among women and youth
Bog'ot, Shovot	K2 + K3	Create new formal labor demand while simultaneously formalizing existing employment	Joint monitoring of vacancies and formal employment

In territories with a relatively low K2 score, the number of enterprises or projects should be considered together with their contribution to employment outcomes. The key question is whether economic activity generates real vacancies and subsequently leads to actual hiring. In territories with a relatively low K3 score, formalization should be supported not only through administrative measures but also through stable orders, cooperation, and improved market access.

⁶ Source: Developed by the author based on data from the Khorezm Regional Main Department of Employment.

In a territory with a relatively low K4 score, the relationship between employer demand and the capabilities of applicants should be identified before increasing the number of training courses. If the issue concerns occupation, appropriate training is required; if it concerns commuting, transport solutions are needed; and if it concerns shift schedules, more suitable working-time arrangements should be considered.

The practical value of the proposed approach is that a territory is not assigned a permanent label. When new data become available, K1–K5 can be recalculated. If the main dimension requiring attention changes, territorial priorities should also be revised.

1. The overall positive dynamics of employment in Khorezm Region do not imply that territorial labor markets have the same characteristics. Interterritorial disparities are considerably greater in formal employment and external migration than in employment coverage.

2. The five-criterion assessment makes it possible to identify not only the overall position of a territory but also the dimension that requires greater attention. The composite index should therefore be used not merely as a ranking but as a tool for revealing the territorial profile.

3. Although the composite results for Yangibozor and Tuproqqal'a are almost identical, formal labor demand requires greater attention in the former, while job-placement outcomes for women and youth require greater attention in the latter. This confirms that the same overall score does not necessarily imply the same policy response.

4. Formal employment remains the main dimension requiring attention in many territories. Therefore, alongside the creation of new jobs, transforming existing economic activity into formal and sustainable employment relationships should be treated as a distinct policy task.

5. The results indicate the importance of improving vacancy capacity and formalization jointly in Bog'ot and Shovot, while greater attention in Urganch City should be given to employment coverage and economic activity.

6. The broad stability of the results under alternative calculations confirms the robustness of the K1–K5 profile. Nevertheless, it is more appropriate to interpret the findings in relation to each territory's priority dimension and economic profile rather than solely as an exact ranking.

7. The study also identifies opportunities for further methodological development through the inclusion of comparable district-level data for the same period on real wages, job duration, occupation–vacancy matching, and labor productivity. If such data become available, the quality of territorial employment could be assessed in greater depth in future research.

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