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**ЭКОНОМИКА ТРУДА И ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКИЙ
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THE ROLE OF SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES IN JOB CREATION

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Abstract. This article analyzes the role of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the country's economy, particularly their achievements in ensuring employment nationwide and by region, using examples from foreign experience and Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Special economic zones, labor force, jobs, employment, regional analysis.

MAXSUS IQTISODIY ZONALARNING ISH O'RINLARINI YARATISHDAGI ROLI

Anvarxonov Abdulatifxon Jamshidxon o'g'li

Toshkentdagi Xalqaro Vestminster universiteti doktoranti

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada Maxsus iqtisodiy zonalarning (MIZ) mamlakat iqtisodiyotdagi o'rni, xususan, ularni mamlakatda va hududlar kesimida bandlikni ta'minlashda qanday natijalarga erishayotgani xorij tajribasi va O'zbekiston misolida tahlil qilingan.

Kalit so'zlar: Maxsus iqtisodiy zonalar, ishchi kuchi, ish o'rinlari, bandlik, hududiy tahlil.

РОЛЬ СПЕЦИАЛЬНЫХ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИХ ЗОН В СОЗДАНИИ РАБОЧИХ МЕСТ

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Аннотация. В данной статье на примере зарубежного опыта и Узбекистана анализируется роль специальных экономических зон (СЭЗ) в экономике страны, в частности, каких результатов они достигают в обеспечении занятости в стране и в разрезе регионов.

Ключевые слова: Специальные экономические зоны, рабочая сила, рабочие места, занятость, региональный анализ.

Introduction

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are generally viewed as an important tool for economic development and growth in most countries. In particular, the role of SEZs is of special significance in attracting local investments, increasing export potential, and creating additional jobs. The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 4, 2025, No. UP-41 "On Additional

Measures to Increase the Efficiency of Special Economic and Industrial Zones" also adopted target indicators for the development of SEZs, one of which is to increase the number of permanent jobs in SEZs to 12,000 [1]. Additionally, Appendix 1 of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated September 11, 2023 No. UP-158 "On the "Uzbekistan - 2030" Strategy" sets the goal of establishing SEZs in collaboration with 50 prestigious global brands [2]. The implementation of such plans will directly lead to the creation of additional jobs in the future, increase the income of the population, and ultimately achieve sustainable economic growth.

The World Bank's 2017 report emphasizes that Special Economic Zones (SEZs) serve as an important mechanism for attracting labor. They not only help production enterprises concentrate a large number of inexpensive workers in one place but also stimulate the emergence of new opportunities in the regional labor market. At the same time, in recent years, attention has been paid to the quality of jobs created through these zones. While in the initial stages SEZs typically relied on labor-intensive sectors, over time there has been a transition to technologically advanced manufacturing and service sectors. This has increased the demand for skilled labor and stimulated further diversification of the national labor market by expanding skills [3].

Literature review

One of the initial goals of establishing SEZs was to achieve sustainable economic growth and enhance the country's prosperity, as well as to ensure employment levels in the country, for which there is sufficient experience worldwide.

According to the 2019 analysis by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are an important instrument for direct job creation, with 90-100 million people worldwide employed in various types of SEZs. Moreover, the additional effects of direct jobs created through SEZs are also substantial. In areas where there are strong connections between zones and the broader economy, for each direct job created, indirect jobs can emerge at a ratio of 1.5-2 times or even more [4].

Research conducted in India demonstrates that the creation of new jobs in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) is one of the crucial factors contributing to the country's economy. In India, employment in SEZs nearly tripled from 600,000 to 1,680,000 people between 2008 and 2016. This illustrates the direct impact of SEZs on employment [5]. Moreover, the jobs created by these zones have yielded several positive outcomes. Wage rates within the zones were higher than those prevailing outside. Additionally, incentive packages including improved working conditions, transportation benefits, health care benefits for employees, and various food service perks, as well as social security systems, have proven to be superior to those in the informal sector outside the zones [6].

When examining African countries, although conditions in SEZs are somewhat better than those outside, high indicators have not yet been

achieved in terms of impact on overall employment. In the 12 African countries studied, SEZs account for only 1% to 5% of total employment in the national industrial sector [7].

By the end of 2017, the Katowice Special Economic Zone (SEZ) located in Poland had attracted over 550 large companies, which invested approximately 6 billion euros and created nearly 60,000 new jobs. Considering that each job within the zone generates 3-5 additional jobs outside the zone, the total employment impact was estimated at around 250,000 jobs. This demonstrates that SEZs have a significant impact on the labor market, not only directly but also indirectly [8].

Research methodology

Data from the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan was used to analyze the number of jobs created in SEZs across different regions of the country. The data has been available since 2018, which can be attributed to the fact that most SEZs were established in 2017. The statistical data provides information on the number of jobs in SEZs and their distribution by country and region.

The methodology employed descriptive analysis, utilizing indicators such as the distribution of jobs by region, dynamics, and growth rates. These indicators were compared and analyzed across different regions.

Analysis and results

The official website of the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan contains statistical data on SEZs for the years 2018-2024, which can be used to analyze the role of SEZs in the country's economy.

The table below shows the total number of employed people in Uzbekistan for the period 2018-2024, the number of jobs created in SEZs, and their share in employment (Table 1).

Table 1

Number of employed people and jobs in SEZs in Uzbekistan

Years	Number of employed people	Number of jobs in SEZs for the reporting period	Number of employed people (percentage)	Share of SEZs in employment (percentage)
2018	13,273,100	10,215	100	0.08
2019	13,541,100	23,667	100	0.17
2020	13,236,400	31,531	100	0.24
2021	13,538,900	34,806	100	0.26
2022	13,706,200	45,519	100	0.33
2023	14,014,200	46,860	100	0.33
2024	14,261,900	53,080	100	0.37

Source: Data from the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan

As can be seen from the table, the number of employed people is increasing year by year. Specifically, while it was 13.2 million people in 2018, by 2024 this figure is expected to reach 14.2 million people. Over 7 years, the number of employed people has increased by 0.99 million or 7.5%. This

growth can be attributed to natural demographic processes and the expansion of economic activity.

The number of jobs created in SEZs has also increased significantly, from over 10,000 in 2018 to more than 53,000 in 2024. Growth has increased 5.2-fold or by over 420% in 7 years. Consequently, the activities of SEZs have expanded considerably in a short period. In terms of share in total employment, it rose from 0.08 percent in 2018 to 0.37 percent in 2024, representing a 4.6-fold increase. Nevertheless, it's evident that jobs in SEZs still do not constitute a large share of the country's employment market.

The state of jobs in SEZs was also analyzed, showing that growth has increased significantly over 7 years (Figure 1).

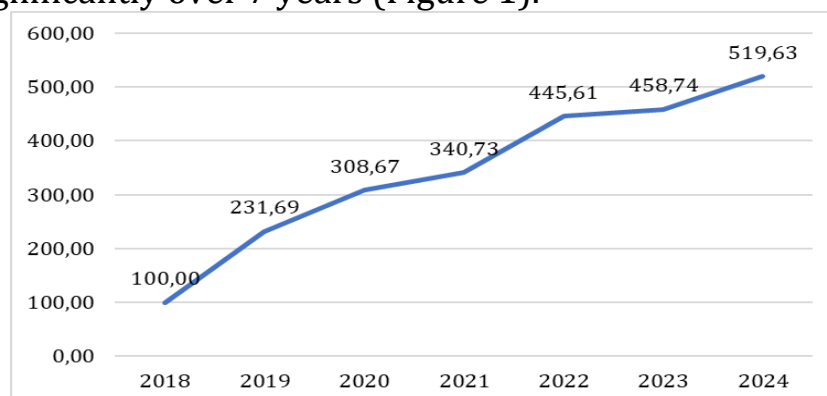


Figure 1. Growth rates of jobs in SEZs (in percent)

Source: National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan

Compared to the base year of 2018 set at 100%, the number of jobs created in SEZs increased sharply. It reached 231.69 percent in 2019, 308.67 percent in 2020, and 340.73 percent in 2021. Although a slight slowdown was observed in 2022-2023, a result of 519.63% was achieved in 2024, representing a 5.2-fold increase over 6 years. Consequently, SEZs are becoming an increasingly important factor in employment policy, but short-term slowdowns in growth rates have also been observed.

For the period 2018-2024, the 4 regions with the highest share of jobs in SEZs were analyzed (Figure 2). The remaining regions are not shown on the graph due to their relatively low indicators.

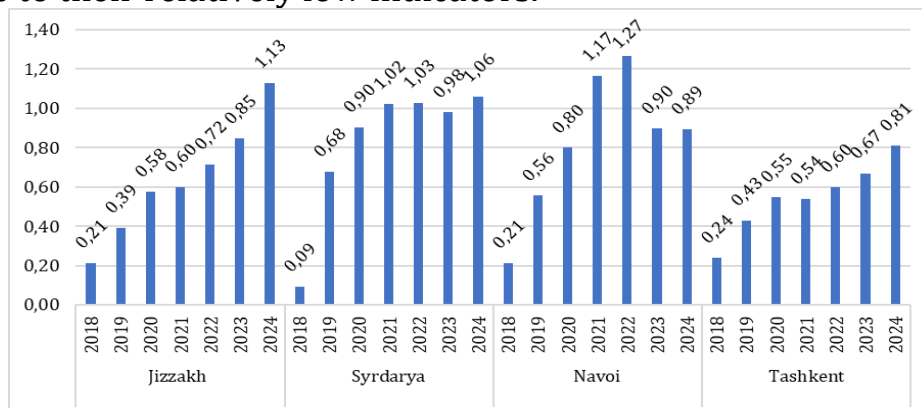


Figure 2. Share of jobs in FEZs in labor resources across regions of the Republic of Uzbekistan (in percent)

Source: Data from the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan

Among the regions, the highest indicator was observed in the Navoi region in 2022 at 1.27%. In 2024, the highest indicator was achieved in the Jizzakh region, amounting to 1.13%. In Jizzakh, Syrdarya, and Tashkent regions, the share also falls within the range of 0.5-1.0%. In some years, a decrease in share was observed, which may be associated with the phased implementation of projects or a temporary reduction in production.

The share of FEZ jobs in the total number of FEZ jobs created in the country by region in 2024 can be seen in Figure 3.

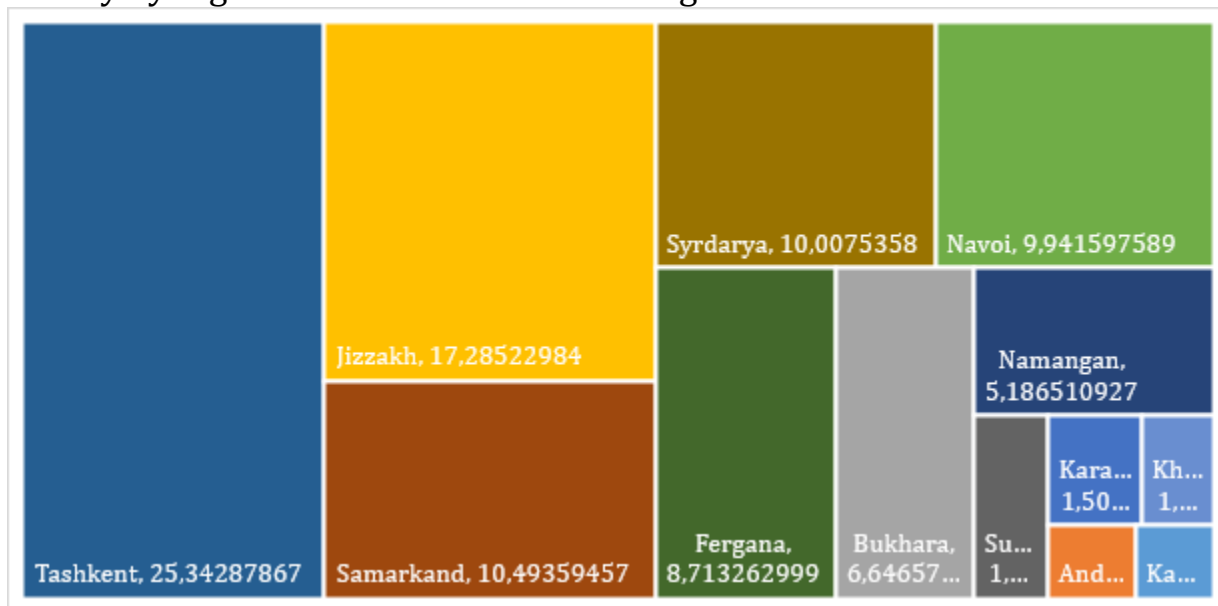


Figure 3. Regional distribution of jobs created in all FEZs of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2024 (in percent)

Source: Data from the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan

As can be seen from the graph, Tashkent (25.34%), Jizzakh (17.29%), and Samarkand (10.49%) regions have the largest share of jobs created in FEZs. The next places are occupied by Syrdarya (10.01%), Navoi (9.94%), and Fergana (8.71%) regions. The share of other regions is quite small (in the range of 1-7%). These indicators may suggest that a large portion of FEZ jobs are concentrated in several regions, indicating a territorial imbalance.

In terms of the number of jobs created in FEZs in the regions, Tashkent, Jizzakh, Samarkand, Syrdarya, and Navoi regions have shown high values from 2018 to 2024 (Figure 4).

Among the regions, the FEZs in Tashkent region are leading, with the highest indicator of over 13,000 jobs in 2024. The FEZs in Jizzakh region experienced high growth from 2021 to 2024, creating more than 9,000 jobs. In the FEZs of Samarkand and Syrdarya regions, there are approximately 4,000 to 6,000 jobs. In the FEZs of Navoi region, 6,000 to 7,000 jobs were observed in 2021-2022, followed by a decline in subsequent years. The indicators for other regions are relatively lower compared to the five regions mentioned above. Employment in FEZs is unevenly distributed across regions, with Tashkent, Jizzakh, and Samarkand emerging as the main centers.

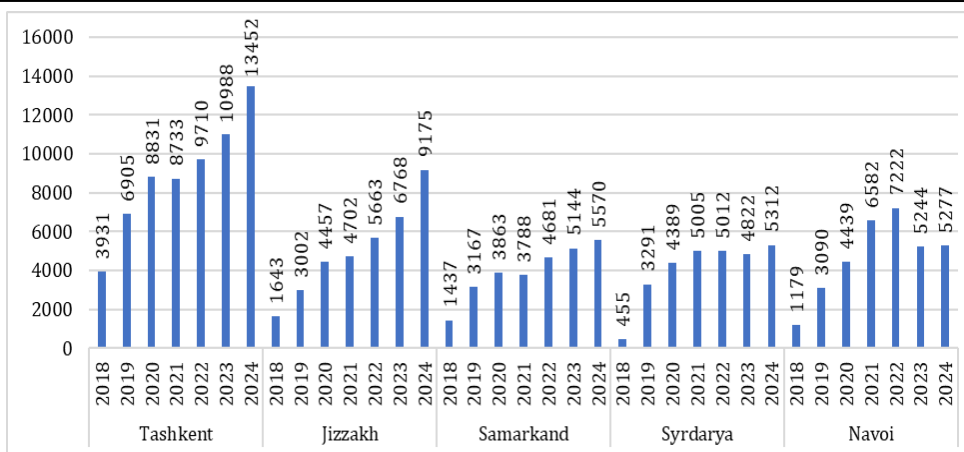


Figure 4. Number of jobs in FEZs across regions from 2018 to 2024 (positions)

Source: Data from the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan

Along with the role of FEZs in job creation across regions, the degree of their formality is also of significant importance. Below is a comparison of the ratio of total employed individuals in the country who possess work books, as well as the ratio of jobs in FEZs and those holding work books there (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Ratio of individuals with work books to the total number of employed and jobs in FEZs (in percent)

Source: Data from the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan

The ratio of those with work record books to the total number of employed people (blue line) increased from 33.49% in 2018 to 36.90% in 2024. The growth was relatively slow, rising by 3.4 percentage points. This indicates that among the total employed population, the number of those with official work record books is still relatively low, constituting only about one-third. Informal employment still persists, which may lead to a number of social challenges in the future.

The ratio of those with work record books in FEZs to the total number of jobs in FEZs (dark yellow line) was 95.72% in 2018, reached 97.25% in 2022 (the highest indicator), and stood at 95.08% in 2024. The indicator has consistently remained above 90%. This means that almost all jobs created in FEZs are formally documented with official work record books, which is considered a positive trend.

Conclusion

The analysis of employment indicators in the Republic of Uzbekistan from 2018 to 2024 and the dynamics of jobs created in FEZs shows that overall employment growth increased from 13.2 million people in 2018 to 14.2 million people in 2024, an increase of 7.5% over 7 years. A rapid growth in the number of jobs created in FEZs was observed, increasing from 10 thousand in 2018 to 53 thousand in 2024, more than a fivefold increase. This indicates that the potential of FEZs in ensuring employment is growing.

Despite the rapid growth in the number of jobs, the share of employment in FEZs in the country's total employment in 2024 was 0.37%. In FEZs, jobs are concentrated mainly in Tashkent, Jizzakh, Samarkand, Syrdarya, and Navoi regions. The share of other regions remains low.

At the national level, 33-37% of all employment was registered based on work record books, while in FEZs this figure was 90-97%. This indicates the significant role of FEZs in reducing informal employment and strengthening formal labor relations. In some years, there has been a decline in job and official employment indicators, which may be related to the external economic situation, the consequences of the pandemic, or the phased implementation of projects.

Based on the analysis conducted, the following proposals can be put forward:

1. Territorial diversification of FEZs. Since jobs are concentrated mainly in several regions, it is necessary to expand FEZ activities in other regions to ensure economic and social stability.
2. Strengthening employment policy through FEZs. New projects need to be developed to increase the share of jobs created in FEZs in total employment.
3. Creation of highly skilled jobs: Considering that mainly manufacturing enterprises operate in SEZs, it is important to create new jobs in high-tech and innovative sectors as well.

SEZs have achieved significant success in creating jobs within a short period and serve as an effective factor in increasing formal employment. However, their share at the national level is still small, and a more proactive policy in this area is necessary.

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