HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

Temirov Akbarali
Student of Silk Road University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage
Raximjon Abdurashidov
Student of Silk Road University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage
Akbarqalandarov20@gmail.com

Annotatsiya. Turizm va mehmondo'stlik odamlarga bog'liq, ammo bu sohada uzoq vaqtdan beri yomon ish bilan ta'minlash amaliyoti mavjud. Ushbu maqola Keep va Mayhew (1999, Nickson, 2007 da keltirilganidek) tomonidan aniqlangan sakkizta takrorlanuvchi HRM muammolarini ko'rib chiqadi: past ish haqi, ijtimoiy bo'lmagan ish vaqti, yomon martaba tuzilmalari va tasodifiy mavsumiy ish, norasmiy yollashga haddan tashqari ishonish, yaxshi amaliyotdagi HRMning kam dalillari, kasaba uyushmalarining kamligi yoki umuman yo'qligi, yuqori ishchi kuchi almashinuvi va xodimlarni yollash va saqlab qolishdagi qiyinchiliklar. U asosan Niksonning (2007) adabiyotlarni sharhlashiga asoslanadi, bu esa mehnat bozori va sanoatning so'nggi ma'lumotlari bilan qo'llab-quvvatlanadi va muammolar bir-birini mustahkamlaydi, deb ta'kidlaydi. 2025-yil yanvar-noyabr oylarida 10,7 million xorijiy mehmonni qabul qilgan O'zbekistonning amaliy tadqiqoti tez o'sishni, mehmondo'stlik sohasidagi ish haqi milliy o'rtacha ko'rsatkichdan pastligini va o'qitishdagi sezilarli tafovutni ko'rsatadi, shu bilan birga ishdan bo'shatish va kasaba uyushmasiga a'zolik haqidagi ma'lumotlar yo'q. Maqola amaliy tavsiyalar va kelajakdagi tadqiqotlar uchun kun tartibi bilan yakunlanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: inson resurslarini boshqarish; turizm; mehmondo'stlik; ishchi kuchi almashinuvi; O'zbekiston

Introduction

In today's world the tourism sector is improving so well of course, HRM or human resource management play a huge role. Of course, we can not imagine a business without a human resource management sector playing a major role in the responsibilities of the human workforce.

The sector’s reputation as an employer is not great. Keep and Mayhew (1999, as cited in Nickson, 2007) summarised the recurring personnel problems as eight problems.

The aim is to show how these problems connect and what they mean in practice. A short literature review first sets out the HRM ideas used. The eight problems are then examined using Nickson's (2007) review plus more recent data. Taking account of this we are conducting research on human resources. How is it affecting the tourism sector in Uzbekistan? Then some challenges as well. So Improvements For tourism in Uzbekistan have improved very well after pandemic of 2020. At that time , many countries were closed because of the current situation. So Tourists start to look at new places to visit. Thus, lead to emerge of a new type of tourism types like (VR, Inclusive, Solo travel, and so on) to identify what

challenges to HRM facing in tourism sector we are using reliable data. Most of the evidence is British, and much of it relies on managers' views. Little of the material used here concerns emerging destinations such as Uzbekistan, which is one reason for the case study below.

Literature review

What HRM is, and two ways of doing it. Storey (1995, as cited in Nickson , 2007) describes HRM as a distinctive approach to managing employment that seeks competitive advantage through a highly committed and capable workforce, using a mix of cultural, structural and personnel techniques. Storey's (1987, as cited in Nickson, 2007) earlier distinction between "hard" and "soft" HRM is still useful. Hard HRM treats labour as a cost to be minimized and controlled. Soft HRM treats people as assets to be developed, with high trust and commitment. Both appear in tourism, sometimes in the same company. In the airline industry, for example, firms have cut staff sharply after shocks such as 9/11 and the SARS outbreak, treating employees as "shock absorbers", while also running "people first" programmes such as British Airways' *Putting People First* (Grugulis & Wilkinson, 2002, as cited in Nickson, 2007).

Best fit or best practice. A second debate asks whether there is one best way to manage people. "Best practice" writers argue that a bundle of high-commitment practices improves quality and productivity everywhere. For service quality, Redman and Matthews (1998, as cited in Nickson, 2007) list careful selection, retention measures, teamwork, training, appraisal linked to quality, rewards for quality, job security and employee involvement. "Best fit" writers argue that HRM must match the organization's strategy and market. Schuler and Jackson (1987, as cited in Nickson, 2007) link HRM to innovation, quality-enhancement or cost-reduction strategies. Lashley and Taylor (1998, as cited in Nickson, 2007) apply the idea to hospitality: a fast-food "service factory" such as McDonald's fits a scripted, command-and-control style, while a four-star hotel fits a softer approach with more discretion for staff.

Models versus reality. Nickson (2007) cautions that these are ideal types. Small and medium-sized enterprises dominate the sector and seldom have HR expertise. Boxall and Purcell (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) note that employers can usually avoid the "howlers" of bad practice but are constrained by industry and organizational economics from adopting a deluxe version of best practice. This is why the pessimistic literature stresses economic determinism (Riley et al., 2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007), while Hoque (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) shows that good practice does exist in larger hotels.

1. Generally low wages

Wel,l now there's a lot of job opportunities for everyone without even degrees but salary wages are pretty much low from standard level so this creates some

problems like dissatisfaction. In fact , the minimum salary in Uzbekistan is around 2.1million sum it is pretty much low compared to other countries. Many employers offer jobs to workers who will begin with bare minimum salary. While standard entry roles are poorly compensated, many owners pay special attention to specialized workers (like certified executive chefs, financial managers and others)

because they can flip the dynamic, thus leading and forcing employers to offer premium pay to attract top talent. And as we know tourism is a seasonal industry, plus with minimum wages workers driven to other sectors (like retailing , logistics, or remote work from home), leading to massive labor shortages in the tourism industry which causes remaining employees to suffer from extreme workload.

Firstly, by implementing Digital Tipping and Service Charges we can achieve both sides, as owners still give minimum wage while workers earn additional money from their service. In modern era, not many people use cash to pay instead use cad or other methods, with an implementation of platforms like (eTip digital platforms) or automatic service fees it will instantly boost employee take-home pay without heavily inflating the corporate payroll sums. Secondly, by offering non-monetary compensation as example some modern businesses can compensate for lower base salaries by offering creative activities, such as free shift meals, wellness stipends, earned wage, or guaranteed weekend rotations.

2. Unsocial hours and shift patterns

Unsocial hours and shift patterns that are not family friendly;unsocial what does it mean?

It means some actions that go against human nature. In tourism sector there are many job is like this, let’s take night job as an example usually shifts divided into two each usually 12 hours long one morning to evening and second shift evening to morning. Of course, night shifts pays more according to labour policy of Uzbekistan standard level of pay for night shift is 1.5 times more than regular one but it causes mental physical health problems. Worker after coming his/her night shift first thing to do is sleep after waking up he need to go work thus causes spending less time with family members. it's the main reason is it's causes a mental health and physical as well because you need to be awake the whole time when you suppose to be a sleep. (Chronically sleep) working against the body's internal clock causes to fatigue, sleep debt, and stress or depression.

Solutions will be like synchronous communication, using voice notes, video messages, calls or shared digital spaces to stay close to with family and friends without needing to be met or awake at the same time. As for the sleep workers can use "power nap" before starting an irregular shift it can rapidly restore your alertness even without disrupting your main sleep clock.

3. Poor career structures and casualised seasonal work

Non-existent career structures and use of casualized seasonal employment; first it all about seasonality. Because tourist demand is not stable, it can change sharply throughout the year, that is why organizations tend to treat labor cost as a variable cost rather than a long-term asset you can use. Impact from this is a heavy reliance on short-term, "casual" contracts. Of course we have negative feedback that the lack of career progression fosters lead to widespread public belief of tourism as a provider of "dead-end" or temporary jobs. This makes it incredibly hard for HR managers to recruit and retain highly qualified, professional talent in the tourism sector.

Rather than employing workers on extreme peak hours with monthly time or zero pay, we can just calculate total annual hours he/she worked. Under an

annualized working hours model, every employee works intense shifts during peak seasons but instead receives a flat-rate monthly salary distributed across the entire 12-month calendar. With this even workers didn't work in off-season, with this they get their salaries' portion. By offering standard achievement and return bonuses, seasonal workers who return next year are paid a small off-season monthly retainer or be guaranteed a higher starting pay next season, this leads to opportunities like massively slashing corporate onboarding and retraining expenses.

4. Over-reliance on informal recruitment

Not but not least fourth the problem will be word-of-mouth hiring often consider immediate filling position availability over actual alignment with the job. Employees tend to enter roles with unrealistic expectations, leading to job dissatisfaction over time, poor performance, and high attrition rates that disrupt seasonal operations system. When hotel hire staff informally without verified its job skill or competencies, their skill levels vary drastically in new field which they don't know. Without a formal process, new hires learn on the fly, causing its guest experiences drop, customer complaints, and damage to the brand's reputation.

The Solutions be like creating semi-formalized screening or Realistic Job Previews in short (RJPs). Even without a HR department, businesses can implement basic structured screening using simple, standardized capability checklists. Employees can experience in incorporating a brief, practical trial shift or a Realistic Job Preview (showing candidates the actual fast-paced environment before hiring) helps filter out individuals who are not a good fit for the demanding nature of hospitality work.

5. Little evidence of good-practice HRM

Much of the tourism literature reads like a long list of examples of what not to do. McGunnigle and Jameson (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) looked at hotels from the UK's top 50 hotel groups, picking those thought most likely to practise good HRM, and still concluded that corporately owned hotels had a long way to go before they could claim a "culture of commitment". Kelliher and Perrett (2001, as cited in Nickson, 2007) studied a "designer restaurant" that set out to compete on quality rather than price. It had modernised planning, training and appraisal, yet there was little real evidence that people were treated as a source of competitive advantage.

Why does this keep happening? Riley, Gore and Kelliher (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) argue that economics is the main driver. Thin margins, seasonal demand and a labour-intensive product push managers towards short-term fixes: fill the rota, train the basics, move on. Size matters too. In the UK hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector, 76 per cent of establishments employ fewer than ten people and 50 per cent fewer than five (People 1st, 2006, as cited in Nickson, 2007). A five-person guesthouse rarely has an HR department, a training budget or a career ladder.

There is also a gap in perception. The UK Department for Education and Employment (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) noted its surprise that employers described pay and conditions as "reasonable" or even "good" while reporting extensive recruitment problems, skills gaps and turnover. If managers do not see the problem, they will not fix it.

To be fair, the picture is not uniformly bleak. Hoque (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) surveyed 232 hotels and found that many used practices close to best practice, including selective recruitment, induction, empowerment and appraisal. But the sample averaged 125 employees per unit, far above the typical size of establishments in the sector, and relied on managers' views alone. Good practice exists; it just clusters in large, branded, city-centre properties.

6. Little or no trade union presence

Hospitality is one of the least unionised parts of the economy, and the numbers have been stark for a long time. A UK Labour Market Trends survey, reported by The Caterer (n.d.), found that only 5 per cent of workers in hotels and restaurants were union members, the lowest of any industry, compared with 29.4 per cent across all UK industries and 59 per cent in public administration. The figure is old and the article is undated, so treat it as an illustration of the pattern, not today's rate. Newer evidence points the same way. A Norwegian study found that hotels and restaurants, together with retail and wholesale, had the lowest union density among service industries, with just over 20 per cent of workers organised (Steen, 2018). In Europe, where hospitality and tourism employ more than 10 million people, researchers still describe low union density, widespread non-standard employment and poor pay (Central European Labour Studies Institute [CELSI], 2025).

The reasons are argued over. A union official quoted by The Caterer (n.d.) blamed employer hostility, which makes workers afraid to join. The employers' association replied that the industry's structure is the cause: so many staff are casual, seasonal or students who will not be around long enough to bother. Both can be partly right. Nickson (2007) notes that the British Hospitality Association has been openly sceptical of initiatives such as the minimum wage and the working time directive, which is hardly a welcoming attitude toward collective voice. At the same time, the sector's reliance on what the ILO (2001, as cited in Nickson, 2007) calls "marginal" workers, meaning women, young people, students, casual and migrant employees, makes organising difficult. Many of those workers are short-term and scattered across thousands of tiny workplaces.

The HRM consequence is simple. Without a union or any other channel for collective voice, pay, scheduling and grievances are settled one-to-one, and the employer holds most of the cards. Workers who are unhappy tend to leave instead of complaining, which feeds directly into the turnover problem in the next section.

7. High levels of labour turnover

If you have worked a summer in a hotel or restaurant, you already know how fast people come and go. Industry benchmarks put annual turnover for accommodation and food service staff at roughly 70 to 80 per cent, with hourly front-line roles such as housekeeping, food and beverage and front desk often between 50 and 80 per cent (Netchex, 2026). Two cautions apply. The 70 to 80 per cent range is attributed there to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics but without a report year, and the role-level ranges are the blog's own estimates, so use them as indicative, not exact. The scale of the problem is still clear. The same source cites a widely repeated estimate that replacing one hospitality worker costs 30 to 50 per cent of annual salary, which makes constant churn an expensive habit.

Why do people leave? Employers and employees tell different stories. In its international report, the ILO (2001, as cited in Nickson, 2007) found that employers' representatives generally blamed turnover on the transient nature of part of the workforce, namely students, young mothers and young people, and on the general difficulty of retaining staff. Employees, on the other hand, frequently cited low pay, and even more often a lack of career structure and benefits. That is the same disconnect the UK's DfEE (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) described, with employers calling conditions good while reporting extensive turnover.

Turnover also feeds itself. Redman and Matthews (1998, as cited in Nickson, 2007) warn about the "turnover culture" that develops in tourism and hospitality, where high exit rates come to be seen as normal. Managers then see little point investing in training or careers for people who are expected to leave, staff see no future, and they leave. Breaking that loop is one of the central tasks of good HRM in the sector.

8. Difficulties in recruitment and retention

Recruitment and retention are two sides of the same problem. The sector struggles to attract people, then struggles to keep the ones it gets.

On the attraction side, the starting pool is thin. In the UK, only 12 per cent of employees in hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism hold a degree or equivalent, compared with 29 per cent across all industries, and 15 per cent have no qualifications at all against 11 per cent overall (People 1st, 2006, as cited in Nickson, 2007). Employers lean heavily on students: nearly three quarters of working students are employed in retail and hospitality, mostly in front-line jobs such as waiting and checkout work (Curtis & Lucas, 2001; Canny, 2002, as cited in Nickson, 2007). Curtis and Lucas call this a "coincidence of needs", since students accept low pay and flexible hours. It suits both sides in the short run, but it fills the front line with people who see the job as temporary.

The sector's recruitment habits do not help. Keep and Mayhew (1999, as cited in Nickson, 2007) point to over-reliance on informal methods such as word of mouth, poor or non-existent career structures and casualised seasonal work. Riley et al. (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) add that managers' attention is pulled toward short-term responses (recruitment, selection and basic training) instead of longer-term development and career progression. Even the "designer restaurant" studied by Kelliher and Perrett (2001, as cited in Nickson, 2007), which had moved toward a more sophisticated HR approach, found that its practices were shaped mostly by the immediate difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff.

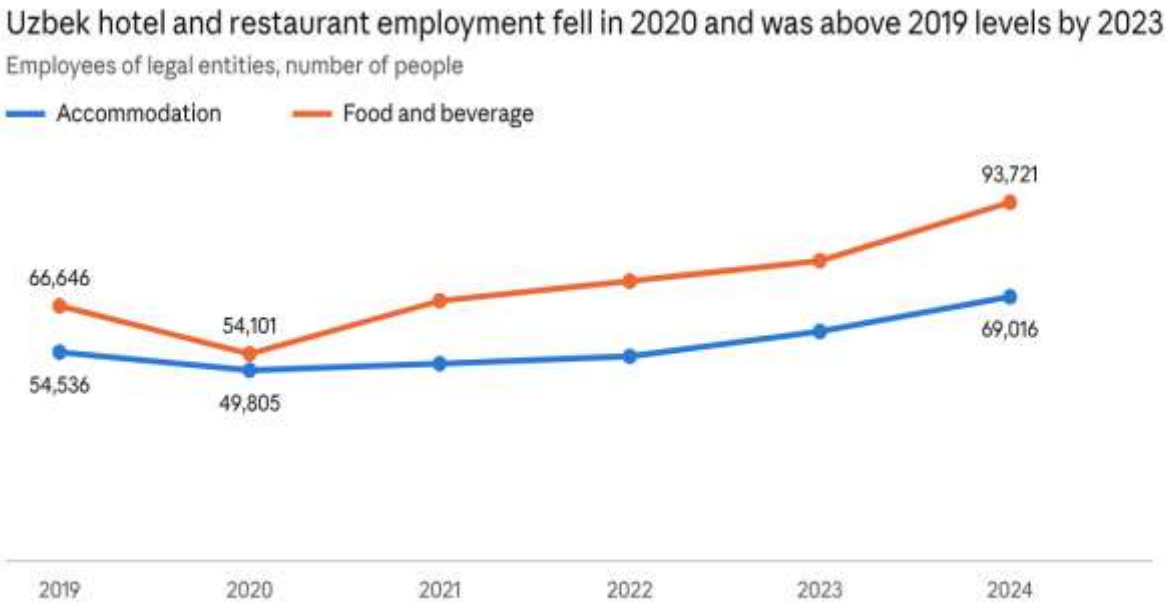
Retention is where pay, hours and careers meet. Redman and Matthews (1998, as cited in Nickson, 2007) suggest tools such as retention bonuses, multi-skilled teamwork and promises of job security as part of a high-quality service model. They are rarely affordable for a small operator running on thin margins, which brings us back to the economics of the sector.

The Uzbekistan case

Uzbekistan is a good test of these ideas because the sector is expanding faster than the workforce system behind it.

A boom in demand. Between January and November 2025 the country received 10.7 million foreign visitors, up 114 per cent on the year, and had 6,861 accommodation facilities with 183,900 beds, including 954 newly opened in the regions (Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025). UN Tourism data placed Uzbekistan among the seven fastest-growing destinations in the world, with arrivals 73 per cent above 2019 and average stays lengthening from 4 to 5 nights to 7 to 9 nights (Raxmonkulova, 2025). The momentum continued into 2026, when nearly 600 accommodation facilities opened in the first half of the year, about 90 of them medium or large hotels (Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2026).

More jobs, but fragile ones. Official figures for employees of legal entities show accommodation staff rising from 54,536 in 2019 to 69,016 in 2024 (up 27 per cent) and food and beverage staff from 66,646 to 93,721 (up 41 per cent) (Statistics portal of Uzbekistan, n.d.). Travel agencies roughly tripled, from 3,192 to 9,931. The same series shows how exposed these jobs are. In 2020 accommodation employment fell 9 per cent and food service 19 per cent, which shows how exposed these jobs are to shocks. Note that the series covers legal entities only, so the many small family guesthouses and informal operators are likely under-counted.



Source: Statistics portal of Uzbekistan, employees of legal entities, 2019-2024

Pay below the average. Hotels and restaurants paid an average of UZS 4.6 million a month in 2024 against a national average of UZS 5.36 million, or about 86 per cent of it (Kun.uz, 2025a). In January to September 2025 accommodation and food service averaged UZS 5.12 million against UZS 6.17 million nationally, about 83 per cent. Sector pay rose 10.1 per cent year on year while the national average rose 19.2 per cent (Kun.uz, 2025b). The gap therefore seems to be widening even as visitor numbers boom. The two comparisons cover different periods, so the ratios are the useful part, not the absolute levels.

A training gap. The visible shortfall is in skills. In January to November 2025 only 375 guides and tour escorts were trained, against 4,345 active in the country, under a tenth (Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025). Researchers argue that official training courses do not match the number of tourism companies and that short professional development courses for hospitality staff are lacking (Uzbekistan Hospitality Training Programs and Its Problems, n.d.). Ochilova (2023) makes the related point that staffing needs should be forecast and tied to state and regional development programmes, not left to chance. In July 2026 the Uzbekistan Hotel Association and Helvetas convened a working group on dual education, in which students split time between classroom and workplace. The stated priorities were stronger practical training and better qualified teaching staff, as new openings raised demand for qualified professionals (Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2026).

Conclusion

The eight problems in this article feed one another. Low pay, awkward hours and casual contracts, combined with little formal HRM, leave workers without clear careers, no collective voice means pay and hours are not negotiated, people leave, and recruiters keep refilling the same low-status jobs from the same marginal labour pool. None of this is inevitable. Hoque's (2000, as cited in Nickson, 2007) hotels show that quality-focused HRM can work, even if the best examples are large and well-resourced.

For Uzbekistan, which has grown quickly and now needs the workforce to match, three steps seem the most realistic. First, expand short, practical training for hospitality staff and guides, building on the dual education work under way. Second, give small guesthouses and restaurants simple HR tools, such as standard contracts, induction checklists and basic career paths, instead of expecting them to copy a five-star chain. Third, start collecting turnover and worker-voice data so that the next version of this debate can use Uzbek numbers instead of borrowed ones.

Recommendations for future research

This article rests mostly on secondary evidence from the UK and Europe, so the most useful next steps are empirical and local.

Measure turnover and retention in Uzbekistan - A survey of hotels, restaurants and guesthouses, split by size and by region (for example Tashkent against Samarkand, Bukhara or Khiva), would replace borrowed benchmarks with real ones.

Ask the employees - Much of the evidence cited here, including Hoque's (2000) hotel study, relies on managers' views (Nickson, 2007). Interviews with front-line staff would show whether pay, hours or careers drive people out.

Study worker voice - Little is known about how far unions, employer associations or informal groups represent tourism workers in Uzbekistan, or whether low union presence there has the same effects as in the UK.

Track pay over time - The widening gap between hospitality and national average pay deserves a longer series, adjusted for hours, tips and seasonality.

Follow the dual education graduates - Do students trained through the new dual education model stay in the sector, and for how long?

Include small and informal operators - Official figures count employees of legal entities only, so family guesthouses and informal workers need their own sampling.

Compare across countries - Setting Uzbekistan against other Central Asian and fast-growing destinations would show which problems are general and which are local.

References

1. Central European Labour Studies Institute. (2025, September 5). *New research findings on the state of trade unions and collective bargaining in hospitality and tourism in Europe*. https://celsi.sk/en/publications/detail/1081/new-research-findings-on-the-state-of-trade-unions-and-collective-bargaining-in-hospitality-and-tourism-in-europe/
2. International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Tourism, hotel and food and beverage services*. https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/industries-and-sectors/tourism-hotel-and-food-beverage-services
3. Kun.uz. (2025a, January 29). *Statistics Agency reveals average monthly salaries by region and sector in Uzbekistan*. https://monitor.kun.uz/en/news/2025/01/29/statistics-agency-reveals-average-monthly-salaries-by-region-and-sector-in-uzbekistan
4. Kun.uz. (2025b, October 27). *Average monthly salary in Uzbekistan up 19 percent to over UZS 6 million*. https://kun.uz/en/news/2025/10/27/average-monthly-salary-in-uzbekistan-up-19-percent-to-over-uzs-6-million
5. Netchex. (2026). *Hospitality turnover in 2026: Industry benchmarks and what they mean for your labor budget*. https://netchex.com/blog/hospitality-turnover-in-2026-industry-benchmarks-and-what-they-mean-for-your-labor-budget/
6. Nickson, D. (2007). *Human resource management for the hospitality and tourism industries*. Butterworth-Heinemann.
7. Ochilova, H. (2023). Analysis of the needs of the tourism industry for qualified personnel. *Economics and Innovative Technologies, 11*(4), 396–406. https://doi.org/10.55439/EIT/vol11_iss4/a41
8. Raxmonkulova, S. (2025, December 19). UNWTO: Uzbekistan ranks among world's fastest-growing tourism destinations in 2025. *Euronews*. https://euronews.com/travel/2025/12/19/unwto-uzbekistan-ranks-among-worlds-fastest-growing-tourism-destinations-in-2025
9. Statistics portal of Uzbekistan. (n.d.). *Employment in tourism industries (number of employees in legal entities)* [Data set]. https://siat.stat.uz/data/3333/?lang=en
10. Steen, J. R. (2018). *Recruitment and organising efforts in the service sector* (Fafo-report 2018:21, English summary). Fafo. https://www.fafo.no/images/pub/summaries/20673-summary.pdf
11. The Caterer. (n.d.). *Union membership running at only 5%*. https://www.thecaterer.com/archive/union-membership-running-at-only-5
12. Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2025, December 6). *Sustainable growth in the tourism sector*. gov.uz. https://gov.uz/en/uzbektourism/news/view/108609

13. Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2026, July 30). *Uzbekistan enhances tourism workforce training system in line with international standards*. gov.uz. https://gov.uz/en/uzbektourism/news/view/199521
14. Uzbekistan hospitality training programs and its problems. (n.d.). Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo repository. https://dspace.umsida.ac.id/items/340db253-e1c7-478e-9407-69d00e53cbfe
15. Note: sources marked "as cited in Nickson (2007)" are secondary citations; the original studies were not consulted directly.