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SKILLS MISMATCH IN THE TOURISM LABOUR MARKET: TYPES, MEASUREMENT AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

The paper examines skills mismatch in the tourism labour market. Four types of mismatch are distinguished – vertical, horizontal, skill gap and skill shortage – and it is shown that each requires a different policy response, so that aggregate treatment of the problem leads to ineffective measures. Comparative assessment across five tourism segments reveals that horizontal mismatch exceeds vertical mismatch in every segment, with the widest gap in food service. The economic consequences of mismatch are decomposed into three channels: reduced labour productivity, increased training expenditure and elevated staff turnover. Measures addressing each type of mismatch are substantiated.

Keywords: Skills mismatch, tourism labour market, workforce potential, vocational education, qualification, staff turnover.

Introduction

The development of tourism is commonly constrained not by the absence of workers but by the absence of workers with appropriate qualifications. Employers report vacancies while graduates report difficulty in finding work, and the two observations coexist without contradiction.

This situation is described in the labour economics literature as skills mismatch. Its distinctive feature is that it cannot be resolved by increasing the volume of



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training: expanding enrolment without changing its structure or content reproduces the same imbalance on a larger scale.

Tourism is particularly exposed to mismatch for three reasons. Its occupational structure changes rapidly under the influence of digital distribution channels; a substantial part of the required competences is behavioural rather than technical; and seasonal fluctuation complicates the accumulation of experience.

The purpose of the paper is to distinguish the types of skills mismatch present in the tourism labour market, to assess their relative incidence and to substantiate differentiated measures for addressing them.

Research methodology

The study applies typological classification, comparative assessment and cost decomposition. Mismatch types are distinguished according to two criteria: whether the discrepancy concerns the level or the field of qualification, and whether it arises within the enterprise or in the market as a whole.

Incidence is assessed across five tourism segments: accommodation, food service, tour operation and guiding, transport and logistics, and cultural and excursion services. Segments are distinguished because their competence requirements differ substantially.

Economic consequences are decomposed into three channels, each measured by its own indicator: labour productivity, training expenditure and staff turnover. A limitation is acknowledged – the assessment relies on expert judgement and would require enterprise-level survey data for quantitative confirmation.

Analysis and results

Discussions of workforce shortage in tourism typically proceed as though the problem were homogeneous. In practice several distinct phenomena are grouped under a single label, and each of them arises from a different cause.



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Separating them is not a terminological exercise. A measure that addresses one type of mismatch may leave another entirely untouched, and expenditure directed at the wrong type produces no observable effect.

The classification below distinguishes four types according to the nature of the discrepancy (Figure 1).

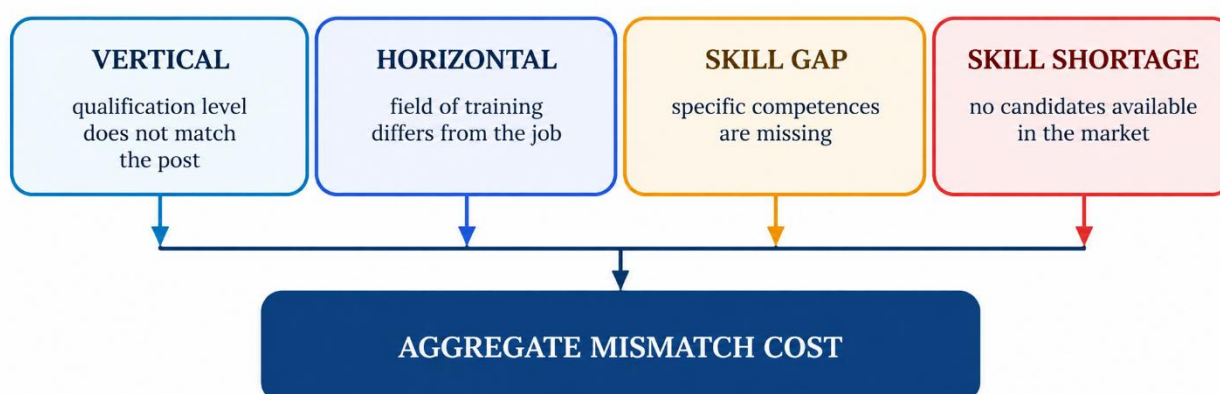


Figure 1. Types of skills mismatch in the tourism labour market

Vertical mismatch arises when the qualification level does not correspond to the requirements of the post. It includes both over-qualification, where a graduate performs work below their level of training, and under-qualification.

Horizontal mismatch concerns the field rather than the level: the employee holds an appropriate qualification level but in a different specialisation. In tourism this type is widespread because entry into many positions does not formally require a tourism qualification.

Skill gap describes the absence of specific competences within an otherwise appropriately qualified workforce. It is an internal problem of the enterprise and is addressed through training rather than through recruitment.



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Skill shortage is a market-level phenomenon: candidates with the required competences are not available at any reasonable wage. Unlike the preceding three types, it cannot be resolved at enterprise level and requires intervention in the education system.

The lower part of the figure states the central methodological point: the four types generate a single aggregate cost but require four different responses. Treating them as one problem is the principal reason why workforce measures in tourism frequently fail to produce results.

The relative incidence of the types determines where policy effort should be concentrated. If one type dominates, measures addressing the others will have limited aggregate effect.

Incidence differs across tourism segments, because their competence requirements and entry barriers are not the same. The comparison below covers the two types that can be measured through employment records (Figure 2).

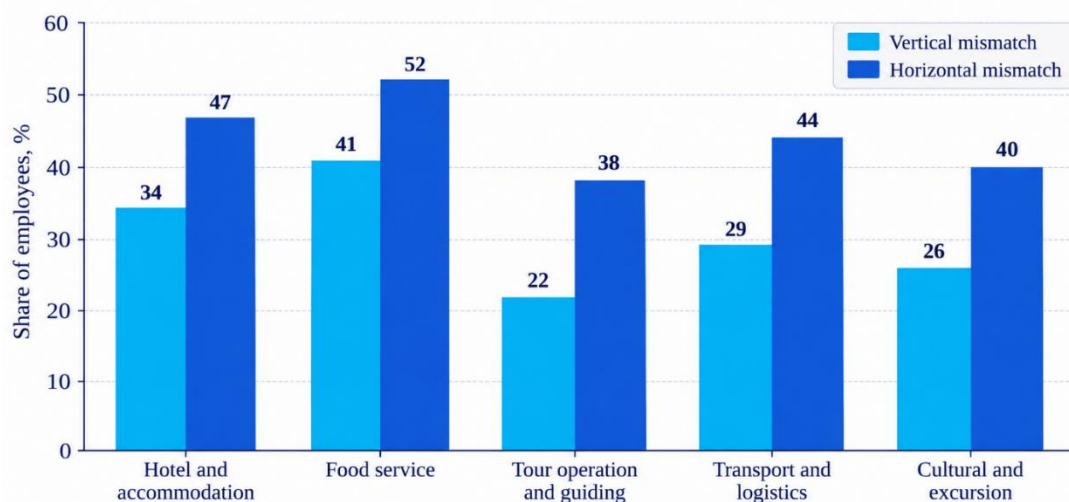


Figure 2. Incidence of vertical and horizontal mismatch across tourism segments



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Horizontal mismatch exceeds vertical mismatch in every segment without exception. The average gap is approximately fourteen percentage points, and in food service it reaches eleven points at the highest absolute level.

This pattern has a clear interpretation. Entry into tourism positions is not restricted by formal qualification requirements, so posts are filled by candidates trained in other fields. The level of education is broadly adequate; its content is not.

Tour operation and guiding shows the lowest incidence of both types. This segment has the most specific competence requirements — languages, destination knowledge, licensing — which act as a natural filter on entry.

The practical conclusion is that expanding enrolment in tourism programmes addresses only part of the problem. Where horizontal mismatch dominates, the binding constraint is the absence of mechanisms linking training content to employment, not the volume of training.

Table 1 Mismatch types, their consequences and corresponding measures

Mismatch type	Principal consequence	Level of resolution	Corresponding measure
Vertical	Reduced motivation and elevated turnover	Enterprise	Career paths; revision of job requirements
Horizontal	Extended adaptation period; lower productivity	Enterprise and education system	Short conversion courses; internship programmes
Skill gap	Quality failures and rework	Enterprise	Targeted in-house training; mentoring
Skill shortage	Unfilled vacancies; constrained growth	Education system and state policy	Adjustment of enrolment structure; new programmes



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The table shows that only two of the four types can be addressed at enterprise level. The remaining two require coordination with the education system, which explains why enterprise-level measures alone rarely resolve the problem.

The second row deserves particular attention, since horizontal mismatch is the most widespread type. Its resolution lies between the two levels: the enterprise can shorten the adaptation period through structured induction, but the underlying cause is the absence of alignment between training content and employer requirements.

The distinction between the third and fourth rows is also practically important. A skill gap indicates that suitable people are present but insufficiently prepared; a skill shortage indicates that they are absent from the market. The first calls for training expenditure, the second does not.

Conclusion

First, four types of skills mismatch are distinguished in the tourism labour market. They generate a single aggregate cost but require four different responses, and their aggregate treatment is a principal reason why workforce measures fail.

Second, horizontal mismatch exceeds vertical mismatch in every segment examined, with an average gap of approximately fourteen percentage points. The level of education is broadly adequate; its content is not.

Third, only two of the four types can be addressed at enterprise level. The remaining two require coordination with the education system, which limits the effectiveness of isolated enterprise measures.

Fourth, expanding enrolment in tourism programmes addresses only the shortage component. Where horizontal mismatch dominates, the binding constraint is the absence of mechanisms linking training content to employment requirements.



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