Foreign experience in organising multi-level investment and export promotion systems: Lessons for uzbekistan

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Abstract. *The thesis compares how the Republic of Korea, Ireland, Singapore and China organise the central, regional and overseas tiers of investment and export promotion, and draws lessons for Uzbekistan. Four design features are identified: ownership of the overseas network, integration of trade and investment functions, the link between the national agency and the regions, and the type of performance measures. The comparison shows that successful systems assign clear ownership of results, set explicit regional targets for national agencies and measure realised investment rather than agreements.*

Keywords: *investment promotion agency; export promotion; KOTRA; IDA Ireland; regional development; multi-level governance.*

Annotatsiya. *Tezisda Koreya Respublikasi, Irlandiya, Singapur va Xitoyda investitsiyalar va eksportni rag‘batlantirishning markaziy, hududiy va xorijiy bo‘g‘inlari qanday tashkil etilgani taqqoslangan hamda O‘zbekiston uchun xulosalar chiqarilgan. Natijalarni aniq bir tashkilot zimmasiga yuklash, milliy agentliklar uchun hududiy ko‘rsatkichlar belgilash va kelishuvlar emas, amalga oshirilgan investitsiyalarni baholash muhimligi ko‘rsatilgan.*

Аннотация. *В тезисе сравнивается организация центрального, регионального и зарубежного уровней продвижения инвестиций и экспорта в Республике Корея, Ирландии, Сингапуре и Китае, сформулированы выводы для Узбекистана: закрепление ответственности за результат за одной организацией, региональные целевые показатели для национальных агентств и оценка по реализованным инвестициям, а не по соглашениям.*

INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan has built a multi-level system of trade and investment governance that includes the Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade (MIIT), regional and district departments headed by deputy khokims, project offices in 20 ministries and agencies, and trade and economic counsellors abroad [1]. The system has produced rapid growth of foreign investment, but official assessments also point to weaknesses: in 2026, 208 of 509 recently launched export-oriented capacities had not yet exported, and the performance of diplomatic missions in economic diplomacy was placed under review [2]. International research confirms that investment promotion agencies raise foreign direct investment, especially in countries with high information barriers [3], but their effect depends on design [4]. The purpose of this thesis is to identify the design features of leading foreign systems that are relevant for Uzbekistan.

METHODS

A comparative case study of four countries was carried out: the Republic of Korea, Ireland, Singapore and China. The cases were selected because they represent different models: an integrated trade and investment agency (Korea), an inward investment agency with regional targets (Ireland), a centralised statutory board in a city-state (Singapore) and a decentralised system with strong local

incentives (China). Official publications of the agencies and peer-reviewed studies were used. Four comparison criteria were applied: ownership of the overseas network, integration of functions, link with regions and performance measures.

RESULTS

Republic of Korea. The Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) is a single national organisation under the ministry responsible for trade and industry. It combines export promotion and investment attraction, including the Invest KOREA service launched in 2003, and operates 131 overseas offices in 85 countries [5]. In 2024 it had about 2,400 employees and worked with 32,000 active clients [5]. Overseas offices, domestic support centres and investment services are managed within one organisation, so information about a foreign investor or an export opportunity does not have to cross institutional boundaries.

Ireland. IDA Ireland is the national agency for inward investment. Its 2025–2029 strategy sets an explicit regional objective of 550 investments outside Dublin [6]. In 2025 the agency secured 323 investments, of which 183, or 57 percent, went to regional locations, and 68 were expansions of existing clients [7]. Over the 2021–2024 strategy it supported 973 investments, 121 percent of the target [8]. Regional targets are backed by a regional property programme that provides land, buildings and infrastructure in advance of investor demand [7]. The national agency is thus responsible for the regional distribution of investment, not only for its total volume.

Singapore. The Economic Development Board is a statutory board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry that combines investment promotion, industrial planning and investor facilitation in one body with offices abroad. The small size of the state removes the regional dimension, but the case illustrates the value of a single “account manager” relationship with each major investor over the whole project cycle.

China. China combines a national ministry of commerce with provincial and municipal commerce departments and investment promotion bureaus. Local leaders have strong incentives to attract investment because their career advancement has been linked to the economic performance of their territories [9]. This model has mobilised local initiative and allowed policy experimentation [10], but it has also produced competition among localities for the same investors and duplication of incentives.

Table 1 summarises the comparison and the corresponding situation in Uzbekistan.

Table 1

Design features of investment and export promotion systems

Feature	Korea	Ireland	China	Uzbekistan
Owner of overseas network	One agency (KOTRA)	One agency (IDA)	Ministry and local bureaus	Shared: MFA missions, MIIT, deputy ministers [1; 2]
Trade and investment	Integrated	Investment only (exports by a separate agency)	Separate channels	Within MIIT, but split across agencies

Feature	Korea	Ireland	China	Uzbekistan
				and tiers
Link with regions	Domestic support centres	Regional targets and property programme	Local leaders' career incentives	Deputy khokims; ambassadors attached to regions since 2019 [11]
Main measure	Results across trade and investment	Investments, jobs, regional share	Regional economic growth	Volume of investment; value of agreements

Source: compiled by the author from [1; 2; 5–11].

DISCUSSION

The comparison suggests four lessons for Uzbekistan. First, **clear ownership of results.** In Korea and Ireland one organisation is accountable for the overseas network and its outcomes. In Uzbekistan the counsellor at an embassy works under the mission, the coordinating ministry and the deputy minister responsible for the country group. A jointly approved country plan with a single responsible official would replicate the advantage of single ownership without changing institutional affiliation.

Second, **regional targets for the central and external tiers.** The Irish experience shows that a national agency can be made responsible for the regional distribution of investment. In Uzbekistan regional performance is the responsibility of khokims, while central and overseas actors are judged by national totals. Setting a share of investment for lagging regions in the targets of MIIT agencies and missions would align the tiers.

Third, **measurement of realised results.** Leading agencies count investments that have been decided or implemented and the jobs created, not the value of memoranda. Uzbekistan's practice of counting the value of agreements, such as the USD 213 billion of projects agreed during high-level visits [2], should be complemented by measures of realisation.

Fourth, **controlled local initiative.** The Chinese case shows that strong local incentives can accelerate investment but also create wasteful competition. Since Uzbekistan already applies strong sanctions and rewards to khokims [2; 11], coordination rules that prevent regions from competing for the same investor with additional concessions are needed. The institution of investment managers introduced in 2023 [1] can play the role of the Singapore-style account manager that follows the investor across regions and agencies.

These lessons should be adapted rather than copied. Korea and Ireland built their agencies over decades and operate in market economies with strong private sectors and well-developed statistics. In Uzbekistan the state still plays a leading role in preparing projects, and many regions lack the infrastructure that regional property programmes in Ireland provide. Regional targets for national agencies therefore need to be accompanied by investment in ready sites and by support to the capacity of district investment departments.

CONCLUSION

Foreign experience shows that the effectiveness of investment and export promotion depends less on the number of institutions than on how responsibility is assigned among them. For Uzbekistan, the most transferable elements are a single responsible owner for each country portfolio, regional targets for national and overseas actors, measurement of realised investment and exports, and rules that coordinate the initiative of regions. These elements can be introduced within the existing institutional framework.

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