Disability and Road Safety in Azerbaijan

Findings of Research on Accessible Mobility for People with Disabilities in Azerbaijan

east
Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport.

AZƏRBAYCAN MİLLİ AMAK AVTOMOBİL KLUBU

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms	3
Acknowledgements	4
Foreword	5
Introduction	6
Background	8
Methodology	12
Findings	16
Recommendations	25
Conclusion	30

ACRONYMS

AMAK	National Automobile Club of Azerbaijan
EASST	Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport
FIA	International Automobile Federation (the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SME(s)	Subject-matter expert(s)
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization
FG	Focus Group
RT	Round Table
CWD	Children With Disabilities
PWD	People With Disabilities
BTA	Baku Transport Agency
RTCs	Road Traffic Crashes
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
APS	Accessible pedestrian signals

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study on Accessible Mobility for People with Disabilities was made possible due to the support of the Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport (EASST).

AMAK would like to extend its gratitude to the broad array of collaborators who have contributed to the successful delivery of the project. In particular, the study mission appreciates the great work of the following subject-matter experts and local NGOs who contributed to the in-depth interviews, data collection, focus groups and roundtable discussions:

- *Ministry of Labor and Social Protection*
- *Ombudsman Apparatus*
- *Baku Executive Committee*
- *Ministry of Education*
- *State Traffic Police Department of the Republic of Azerbaijan*
- *Baku Transport Agency*
- *Baku Metropolitan*
- *Ministry of Transport, Telecommunication High Technologies*
- *State Committee on Family, Women and Children Issues*
- *Azerbaijan University*
- *Local NGOs: "Social Work" Public Union, Society of Disabled Women, Union of Disabled People Organizations, "Mushviq", "Independent Life", "Integration of PWD into Society" Public Union*
- *PWD and family members of children with disabilities*

In addition, AMAK is thankful to Zahra Hasanova, research specialist from Research and Training Center for Labor and Social Problems under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection for her direct involvement in generating SPSS outputs for statistical analyses of the survey findings.

Particular thanks to Aytakin Huseynli, Chair of Azerbaijan Social Work Public Union, Ph.D. Candidate, Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis for her immense contribution to the development of report of research findings.

Lastly, AMAK would like to acknowledge each and every one of the 350 respondents for the time and initiative they took to participate in the survey, in-depth interviews, focus groups and roundtable discussions, without which the research would not have been possible.

Opinions expressed in this report are those of authors and may not necessarily reflect the official position of the organizations they represented at the time of the interview.

FOREWORD

Raising social welfare is, first of all, linked to improved living standards for people with disabilities. Currently there are 620,000 people with disabilities in Azerbaijan. This is about 6 per cent of the country's population. 72,000 are children up to 18 years old.

In recent years, the creation of a new social services department in Azerbaijan, as well as substantial improvements in road and transport infrastructure, and the draft law on the "Rights of Persons with Disabilities" indicate a strengthening of state policy in this area. These reforms will further improve the social protection system and significantly increase the role of social services in solving the social problems of people living in difficult conditions.

Despite the extensive work done in this field, there are still difficulties that prevent the full participation of people with disabilities in society. Firstly, there is a need to improve road and transport infrastructure, making it accessible for persons with disabilities. There are misconceptions in the society that disability can only be caused by congenital conditions or as a result of disease. However, the reality is that the number of people with disabilities caused by traffic crashes is much higher.

I would like to note that the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities in transport-road infrastructure are one of the reasons for their self-isolation, as well as, their isolation from society. The National Automobile Club (AMAK) Public Union's research in this area is highly valued by me. The problems revealed by the research, such as the inaccessibility of road and transport infrastructure, general difficulties in access to public places, and misinterpretations about persons with disabilities should be recognized as a priority issue. The recommendations based on the findings of this research will contribute to a more effective execution of the obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Azerbaijan.

Ph.D. in Political Science, Prof. Hadi Rajabli

Chairman of the Labor and Social Policy Committee, Parliament of Azerbaijan Republic

INTRODUCTION

The National Automobile Club of Azerbaijan (AMAK) was founded in 1999. It received its mobility status in 2015 and became a member of the International Automobile Federation (FIA). Membership of the FIA has granted AMAK access to outstanding international experience and exchange of knowledge in the fields of automotive services and mobility in general. AMAK is able to participate in international projects and apply this experience in Azerbaijan.

AMAK regularly implements road safety awareness and education projects among children, youth and parents. In line with its education projects, AMAK has set its priorities by making sure that it works with all road users, including vulnerable road users by addressing accessible mobility issues of PWD, as well as raising awareness on the importance of child car safety and the knowledge of their correct utilization.

While implementing these projects, AMAK works very closely with the State Traffic Police, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health (ISIM), Baku city Mayor's Office, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Baku Transport Agency, Hayat Humanitarian Public Union, UK Embassy, European Union, Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport (EASST), International Automobile Federation (FIA), ADA and Baku Engineering Universities and many other entities.

AMAK realizes that a safe road and traffic environment is very important for the safety of citizens. Injuries caused by road traffic crashes (RTCs) have a major impact on morbidity, mortality and premature disability. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), every year there are over 1.2 million deaths due to road traffic crashes around the world. In addition to this, 20 to 50 million people sustain serious injuries, and more than 5 million remain permanently disabled. RTCs cause disability in the short and long term, and are the 9th leading cause of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) in the world - generating 41.2 million years of healthy life lost.

A safe road traffic environment is especially important for people with disabilities. It is required for sustainable and inclusive development and growth for all. According to the WHO, approximately 15% of the world's

population have some form of disability, of whom 2-4% experience significant difficulties in mobility. Today, levels of global disability are higher than previous WHO estimates, which date from the 1970s and suggest a figure of around 10%. This global estimate for disability is on the rise due to an ageing-population and the rapid spread of chronic diseases, as well as improvements in the methodologies used to measure disability.

Vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by disability. Results from the World Health Survey indicate that lower income countries have higher disability prevalence than higher income countries. People from the poorest sections of society, women, and older people also have a higher prevalence of disability. Moreover, people who have a low income, are out of work, or have low educational qualifications are at an increased risk of disability.

A lack of accessibility was identified one of the leading barriers by the WHO, which prevents PWD from being included in mainstream society. In many countries, public spaces and transport systems are built in a way that is not accessible to all. The lack of access to transportation is a frequent reason for a person with disability being discouraged from seeking work or accessing health care. Another leading issue identified by the WHO is a lack of rigorous and comparable data on disability. A lack of evidence on programs that work can also impede understanding and action.

Better understanding of the issues faced by PWD in accessing transportation and public spaces can help to design responsive policies and improve efforts to remove disabling barriers and provide services that enable PWD to participate in society. This kind of research carried out locally for each country can help to develop policies and services tailored to the environment, culture and needs of the PWD in that particular country. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to analyze the current situation related to accessible mobility in Azerbaijan and collect data from PWD on the challenges they face while using roads and public transport on a daily basis. The findings will be used to draw a set of recommendations that will be put to the government. The study used a mixed-method, exploratory and cross-sectional research design.

BACKGROUND

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol was adopted on 13 December 2006 by the United Nations, and was opened for signature on 30 March 2007. Azerbaijan ratified the CRPD and its Optional Protocol in January 2009, becoming one of the first countries in the region to do so. In line with the requirement under Article 31(1) of the CRPD, Azerbaijan submitted to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities a comprehensive state party report on measures taken to give effect to its obligations under the CRPD and on the progress made in that regard within two years after the entry into force of the CRPD for Azerbaijan in January 2011.

There are 624,000 PWD in Azerbaijan, which constitutes 6.3% of the population, and 72,000 of them are children.

Disability was seen as a sickness and a defect during the Soviet times. Services and social protections were minimalist and rehabilitative during the USSR. The approach to disability was predominantly medical and Soviet services for PWD did not try to empower them or include them within mainstream society. Azerbaijan inherited this approach, thus policy makers, specialists and the public often see PWD as "poor" people and feel sorry for them rather than providing them with services and policies to make them an equal part of society. After the collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijan joined many human rights conventions and treaties where it took on obligations to provide an environment for PWD to grow and develop. Slowly but gradually some improvements are becoming obvious. The Ministry of Transport, Communication and High Technologies together with other institutions has established information centers in three regions of Azerbaijan to expand access to information technologies for persons with physical disabilities (including visually impaired), which has benefited more than 60,000 PWD in the three regions. In 2009, the Association of Visually Impaired Persons of Azerbaijan with the cooperation of the Ministry of Transport, Communication and High Technologies established a Communication and Vocational Rehabilitation School.

Legislative review

The law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Road Traffic contains provisions concerning the movement of "visually impaired pedestrians" and other "persons with disabilities" and defines road signs for the safe movement of PWD. A number of other disability support programs exist in the State party, which are intended to support parents of children with disabilities through the provision of special education opportunities for children as well as social and home services:

i) All children with mental or physical disabilities receive extra assistance (psychological, medical) according to the Law on "Child Rights" as defined by the government of Azerbaijan;

ii) The time spent by parents caring for their children with disabilities is considered as work for pension purposes, and other benefits are accorded.

A law on "Education (special education) of Persons with Disabilities" was adopted in 2001 with the purpose of "adapting persons with disabilities to society by teaching necessary knowledge, skills and habits for self-service, labor activities and family life". This law was complemented by the "Development Program for organizing education for children with special needs (with impaired health) in the Republic of Azerbaijan (2005-2009)" adopted by the Government in 2005, as well as a number of other policies adopted by the Government to organize the provision of special education.

Home schooling is provided by teachers working for institutions for children with disabilities, and the local Education Department. There are also a range of special pre-school institutions while vocational and higher education for PWD is provided within mainstream education institutions and where necessary in special institutions.

Article 28 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan states that everyone has a right to social security in the case of disability. The "State Program for Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2008-2015" focused on social protection for PWD, children with limited health care resources, and the provision of new places of residence for PWD. The Law on "Labor pensions" provides for differentiated treatment of PWD in the allocation of pensions. The law on "Social Benefits" prescribes benefits for adults and children with disabilities.

On the basis of these laws: 1071 persons with disabilities received benefits in 2008; 1037 in 2009; and 554 in 2010. By October 2010, 127,634 families had received the so-called 'Targeted Social Assistance' and 3470 PWD were provided with flats. 857 cars were given free of charge to PWD for the implementation of the "State Program on Social and Economic Development of the Regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan" during the period 2009-2010.

More recently, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Azerbaijan has drafted a "Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities". The new draft law will cover issues related to the basic principles of state policy on PWD, habilitation and rehabilitation of PWD, their employment and more.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Centre for young PWD under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection has been operating since December 2013 in the Ramana settlement of Baku city. This educational institution organizes professional training for young people. The aim is to integrate them into society by developing skills demanded by the labor market, as well as, encouraging their creative abilities. This is a special kind of institution, which has no equivalent either in Azerbaijan or a number of other countries in the region. All services, including training, accommodation, and leisure activities are provided free of charge and financed from the state budget. The center is not limited to the training of students. Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) conduct seminars, excursions, concerts, and sport events for students with the support of line ministries, the Youth Foundation under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Council of State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations under the Auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The center's activities have even led to the creation of a sport club for the relatively young sport of "Boccia"[1]. And, with the support of the National Paralympic Committee of Azerbaijan, the center's team has successfully participated in various championships at both local and international levels.

Accessibility

In recent years, there have been considerable improvements to Baku's transport infrastructure. Founded in 2014, Baku Bus LLC provides

[1] Boccia is a precision ball sport played by people in wheelchairs.

accessible public transport for vulnerable road users (i.e. wheelchair users, elderly people, mothers with strollers, people with visual/hearing impairment) with an upgraded bus network in Baku city. However, these buses are not available in all areas of the city, which creates challenges for PWD in accessing existing social services - many of which are located in suburban areas not serviced by the bus route. There are currently no accessible buses available in the rayons - outside of the capital city.

Moreover, as of 2018, the Baku Transport Agency (BTA) has planned to build 421 ramps in public areas across five districts of Baku. This project will facilitate the movement of PWD, children and elderly people in public spaces and will positively influence the social lives of vulnerable people.

All the above-mentioned will allow Azerbaijan to respond with more flexibility to the challenges and socio-economic changes in society, as well as breaking down some of the barriers faced by PWD in terms of accessing professional education and employment. However, there are still gaps in many areas that prevent the full integration of PWD into society and block their access to existing services. There is a need for greater study to identify these gaps and address these issues, and governments and non-governmental organizations alike need to come together to provide solutions.

Through this project, therefore, AMAK has sought to provide a starting point for further study. The main goal is to analyze the current situation concerning accessible mobility in Azerbaijan by collecting data from PWD on the daily challenges they face while using roads and public transport.

This document reflects the current situation and presents the research findings, as well as setting out recommendations for relevant government authorities to take forward and address.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study was designed to explore the issues and challenges of using the road and public transportation on a daily basis from the perspective of PWD and professionals working in this field. Data was collected through surveys and in-depth interviews with PWD and professionals as well as through archival records such as governmental reports, publications from national and international agencies, published research, and statistics from relevant government agencies.

Study participants

The study involved 210 respondents including PWD, carers of PWD, and key players in field related to PWD in Azerbaijan. The participants were selected based on a purposive-sampling strategy to cover all sectors related to PWD. Purposeful sampling, which selects information-rich cases for in-depth study, is an appropriate way to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to this research. The main criteria for selection were participants who have a deep understanding of, and experiences in, the issues and challenges that PWD face in Azerbaijani society as well as a strong knowledge of the processes and protection systems in place for PWD in Azerbaijan.

In addition, the following organizations were represented through focus groups, roundtable discussions, and in-depth interviews:

- Baku Executive Committee
- Ministry of Labor and Social Protection
- Ministry of Education
- Baku Transport Agency
- Metropolitan, State Road Police
- Ministry of Transport, Telecommunication and High Technologies
- State Committee on Family, Women and Children Issues

- Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA) and Azerbaijan University
- WHO
- NGOs: "Social Work" Public Union, Society of Women with Disability, including its Ganja branch, Union of Disabled People Organizations (UDPO), United Aid for Azerbaijan (UAFA), "Integration of PWD into Society" Public Union, Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, DPO "Independent Life", Public Union for support of Children With Disability "Mushviq"

Measurement tools

The study used surveys and in-depth interview questions. Two types of questionnaires were prepared, one for PWD and one for their carers. Both questionnaires had 13 questions covering:

1) Personal Information
2) Challenges PWD and CWD face during visits to different public places, services
3) Types of transport used by PWD and CWD
4) Provision of accessibility for PWD and CWD

The in-depth interview included 9 questions developed specifically for this study based on a literature review and previous research in the field.

The initial version of the survey questionnaire included the following four questions:

1) Do you think one of the reasons of the problems PWD/CWD face in their everyday life is the result of challenges they face in transport infrastructure?
2) In your opinion, which entities PWD/CWD address in regard to their problems they face?
3) Do you think that the challenges PWD/CWD face in their everyday life, including transport lead to forming stereotypes, stigmatized and negative approach in society towards them? If yes, please explain.
4) Are you aware of any programs or laws ensuring inclusion of PWD/CWD into society?

This questionnaire did not initially work with respondents so all four questions were removed and instead addressed during focus group discussions where answers were recorded and analyzed. The results are included later in the report.

Both survey and in-depth interview questions were piloted with three respondents and necessary modifications were made. Questions explored respondents' views and experiences of PWD on the accessibility of public transportation and any issues or challenges they face. In-depth interviews were helpful to gain a deeper understanding of issues or topics raised.

Data collection

Data was collected in 2017. The questions were administered by the Lead Researcher and read aloud to the respondents. The participants were provided with a copy of the questions and had an opportunity to read questions when needed. All interviews were recorded by digital voice recorder with the permission of the respondents. The interviews took place in meeting rooms of the offices or premises of the respondents to provide quiet space and privacy.

Ethical Considerations

Oral consent was obtained from the participants, including assurance of confidentiality. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any time without any explanation.

Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed in IBM SPSS 27. After getting descriptive statistics, the data were analyzed around the questions chosen. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the in-depth interviews. All recordings of the interviews were transcribed. Two people cross-checked randomly selected recordings and transcripts in order to make sure that interviews were transcribed accurately. The transcripts have been kept in a confidential place and the names of the respondents were not recorded in order to protect their privacy and the confidentiality of

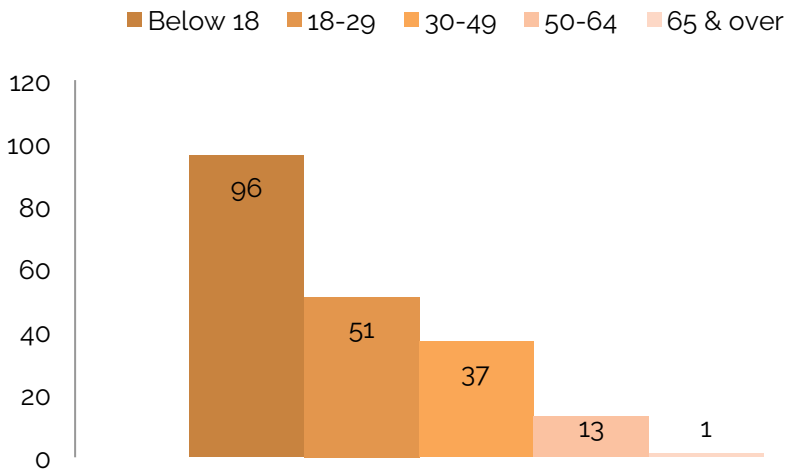
information given. Before entering transcripts to the TAMS Analyzer software they were read several times so that the Lead Researcher could become familiar with the data and identify any patterns that occurred. During this process, initial codes were generated and documented where similar patterns came up. The codes were then categorized under similar labels and combined under overarching themes. Themes that supported the research question for this paper were selected for reporting. As such, this paper reports on the themes related to the main issues and challenges given by the respondents.

FINDINGS

Description of study participants

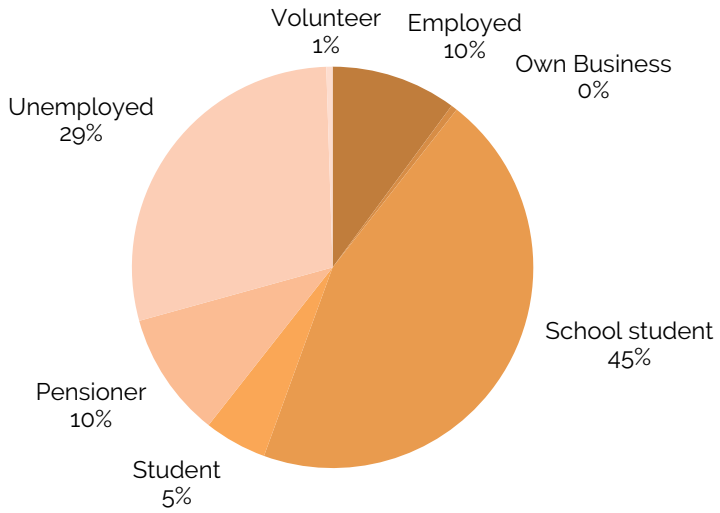
Two hundred people from Azerbaijan's two main cities - Baku and Ganja - participated in the survey. In addition, 150 people participated through in-depth interviews, round tables and focus groups. Of the people who participated in the survey, 100 were from Baku and 100 were from Ganja. The majority of participants were children or young people. 96 (48%) were below 18 years old and 51 (25.5%) were between 18-29 years old (see table below). In total, there were 96 women and 103 men. One respondent did not state their gender. 115 respondents were PWD and 85 respondents were carers. In general, survey participants tended to be men. However, of the caregivers, the vast majority were women (79 out of 85). The reason being that mothers, grandmothers and/ or professional caregivers often play a leading role in the care of the PWD involved in the survey.

Chart 1. Age of survey participants



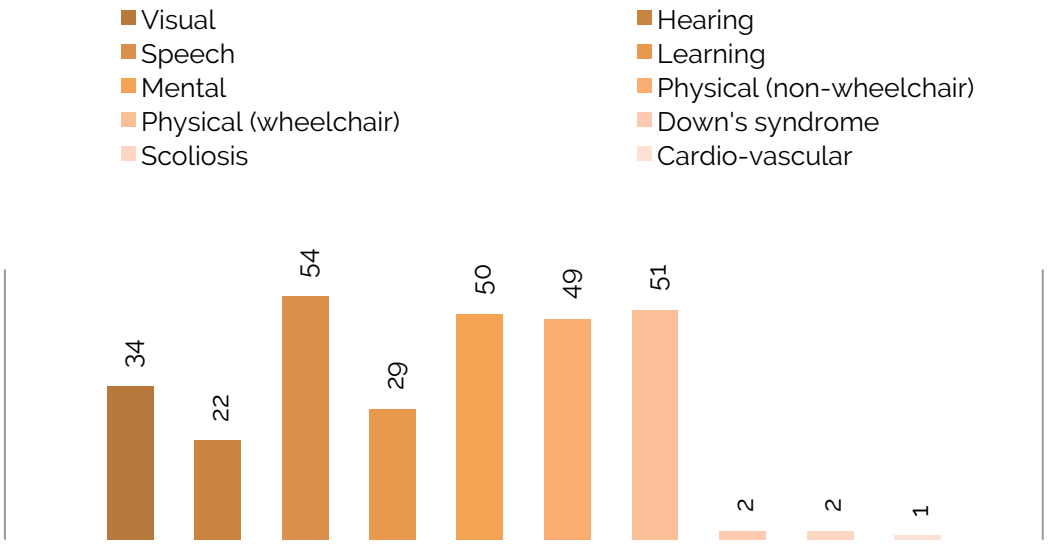
In terms of occupation, the majority of participants (45%) were school-students. The next biggest group were those who are unemployed, 57 (28%) participants. Only 10% of respondents were employed.

Chart 2. Occupation of survey participants



The following chart shows the type of disabilities the participants noted about themselves. Some indicated more than one type of disability.

Chart 3. Type of disabilities among survey participants



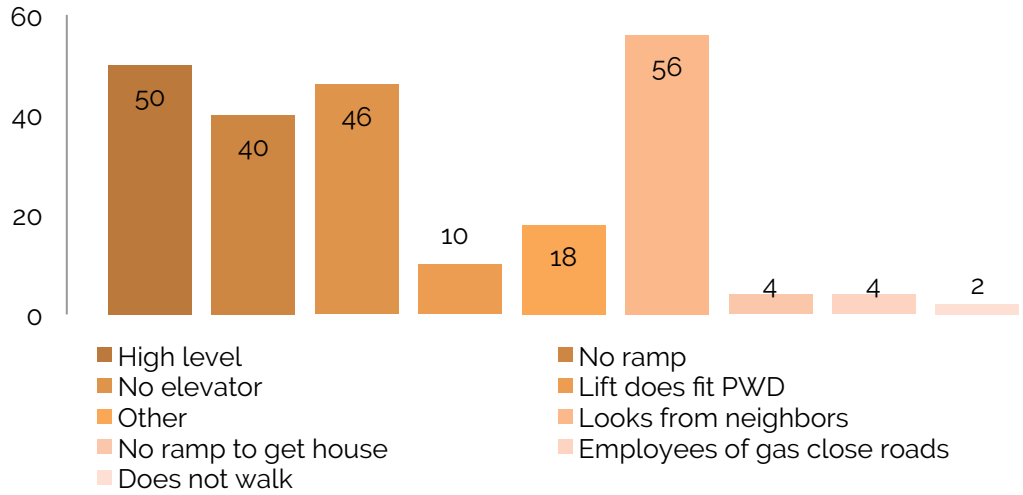
Accessing residential dwellings

More than the half of the participants (59%) lived in houses and 40.5% lived in apartments during the study. Eighty-two (41%) participants reported difficulties in accessing their own homes (based on 174 people who answered the question).

When respondents were asked to rate the difficulty in accessing their dwellings, only 130 answered the questions. One hundred out of 130 respondents stated that it was difficult and the rest, thirty respondents, indicated it was *impossible* for them to access to their place of living.

Participants were asked to list the types of the challenges they face in accessing or entering their home. Most (56) indicated that strange looks from neighbors prevented them getting in and out of their living places. 50 participants mentioned that they lived on the highest level of the building, 56 mentioned the absence of the elevator, and 40 indicated the absence of any ramps at the building's entrance.

Chart 4. Problems accessing place of living

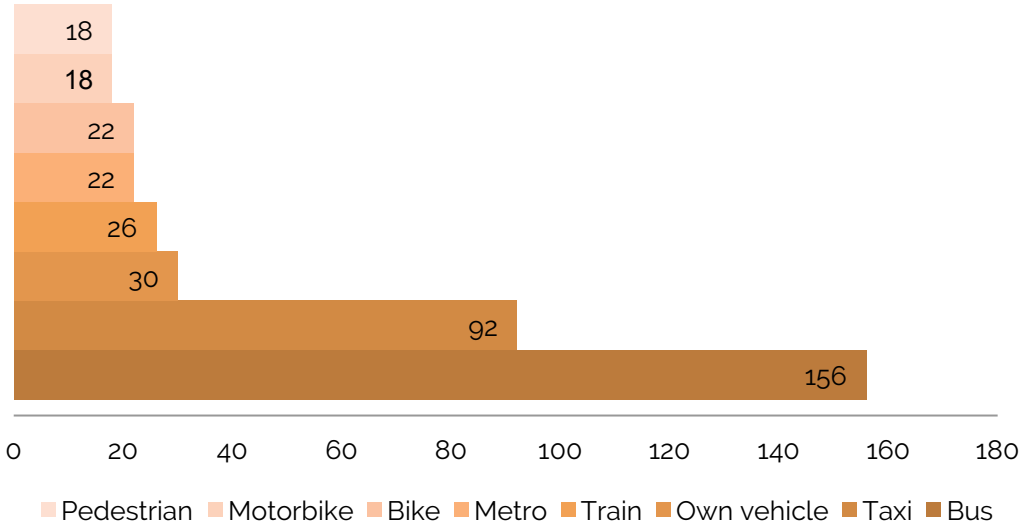


Accessing and using public transport and roads

The survey aimed to find out the extent to which public transport is used by people with disabilities in Azerbaijan and what types of transport are

most used. As we can see from the chart below, many of the study participants use public transport to some extent and most use the bus or taxi as their primary means of public transportation.

Chart 5: Type of public transport used by participants



BUS TRAVEL

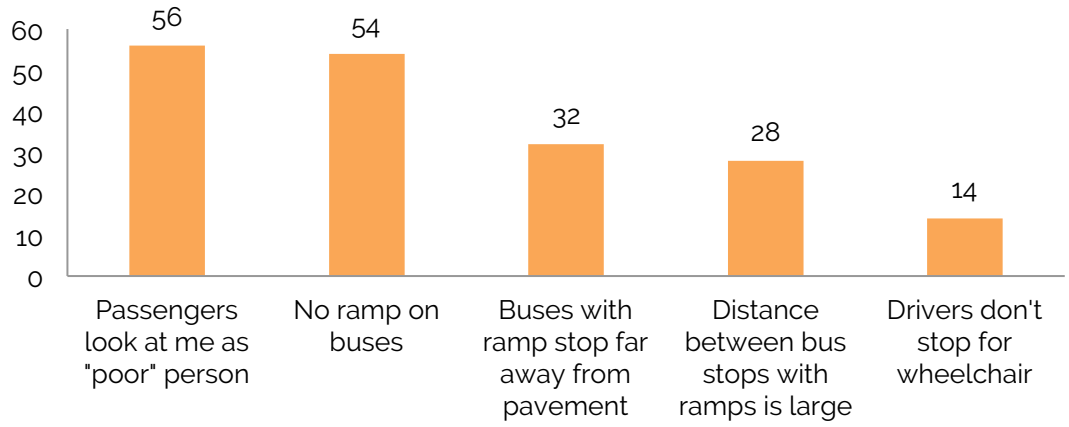
Participants were then asked to rate the extent to which they experience difficulties in accessing public transport. The responses, disaggregated by age, show a mixed picture in terms of bus use. For example, the majority of bus users are the younger generation of whom 34% reported no problem. The rest reported difficulties ranging from "very hard" to "impossible" while 15% reported that the bus was not accessible at all.

Table 1. How challenging is it to travel by bus?

		Not a problem	Very hard	Impossible	Not accessible	
Age	Below 18	35	23	5	9	72
	18-29	10	16	7	7	40
	30-49	8	16	1	6	31
	50-64	1	7	2	2	12
	Over 65	0	2	1	0	3
Total		**54**	**64**	**16**	**24**	**158**

When respondents were asked what makes it difficult to use the bus, the majority who answered indicated that public attitudes (i.e. other passengers viewing them as "poor") make it hard for. Other reasons included the absence, and/or low quality, of facilities.

Chart 6: Challenges using buses



One of the respondents who is currently living in the Vocational Rehabilitation Center for Youth with Physical Disabilities in Baku's Yeni Ramana district described her challenge using the bus:

> *"For instance, there is no Baku Bus [a new brand of bus in Baku] coming from Ramana to Baku, even there is not a bus stop for the bus to stop. There should be a bus stop which is a bit higher than road but they do not exist. Other buses that pass by Ramana have steps which are not appropriate for PWD and thus, it is not for people on wheel-chair to use."*

Another respondent reported that there are generally fewer buses in the neighborhood where she lives. When there are buses, most drivers would not stop because she has trouble getting on the bus without her mother's help. She described her case as below:

> *"We can't find buses to use where we live. If we use buses in other places, the drivers make annoyed faces to me and most of the time they do not stop when they see me. Even for those who stop for us, due to the lack of ramp, I cannot get on the bus or get hardly on it with the help of my mother and it takes a long time, which makes everyone unhappy including passengers. It is especially a big issue in rayons (suburban areas)".*

For many respondents, overcrowded buses are also a challenge. Overcrowded transport is not safe for them in terms of mobility.

METRO

Another popular means of public transport in Baku is the metro. However, again, most respondents reported that there were no metros in their neighborhood, or where there is, it is difficult to access. As a result, comparatively few people with disabilities in Baku use the metro. When asked to rate how challenging it is for them to use the metro, only 14% cited that there was no problem. For the majority, the metro is inaccessible.

Table 2: How challenging is it to travel by metro?

Not a problem	Very hard	Impossible	Inaccessible	Total*
25.8%	18.5%	13.0%	42.6%	100%

** Based on 108 people answering the question*

When respondents were asked why they do not use the metro, a lack of services enabling PWD to enter and leave the stations was cited as the main issue – as were challenges in entering and leaving the trains. In most stations, escalators or ramps are very low quality and do not meet the standards required for PWD to use them. For instance, one of the respondents said:

> *"I use the bus but when coming to the metro station, again there is no provision available for a wheelchair to get down to the trains: no escalators, no lifts which are appropriate for PWD in a wheelchair. The same is applicable for underground roads, and again escalators either do not work or they installed in a way that they do not lift person properly till the end."*

> *"I would like to use metro, but do not know how."*

Many respondents again mentioned public perceptions as a major reason that stops them from using the metro – feeling that other passengers consider PWD as "poor" people.

TRAVEL BY TAXI

Respondents frequently cited that other passengers and even taxi drivers pity them. In many cases, it was reported that taxi drivers would not charge them for using taxi service to show empathy to their disability. To avoid this stigma, many respondents avoid using taxi services. One of the respondents expressed his feelings when asked about his thoughts on this matter:

> *"It affects me very badly. If we are not visible in public, if we do not participate in mainstream social events, if TV does not give any information about us, if there is no information about us in books or magazines, then of course society will not properly understand us. If a person, who worked as a teacher for 20 years and then lost his leg in an accident and as a result he cannot go and teach at the same school, of course, society will pity him. For instance, I was in Saki city of Crimea and I saw the difference in public attitude there. I did not*

see that people were looking at me as a poor person when I was there. There I forgot all my insecurities. After this experience, in Azerbaijan if someone feels sorry for me and shows it obviously by 'pulling his ear' or giving me money as if I am a beggar, I do not care anymore. Nevertheless, others who are in the same situation get hurt by such behavior and internalize it. There are very easy ways to overcome these kinds of stigmas in the society, I should add".

In some cases, respondents also reported encountering micro- aggressive behavior by others, such as taxi drivers refusing to stop or accept their orders when they call for them. Some respondents also reported that in a few cases people leave the bus when they see them getting on. One respondent described her experiences with regards to people's attitudes while she was using a taxi:

"I was going to Barda from Ganja. We were two PWD. When we wanted to get in a taxi, there was a man and a girl. When they saw us wanting to get in the same taxi, they immediately left. I was not affected by it and I said to myself, well they showed "how well-behaved they are"".

RAIL TRAVEL

In terms of rail travel to other cities, 35.7% of respondents who addressed the question reported that it was either impossible or inaccessible for them to travel.

Not a problem	Very hard	Impossible	Inaccessible	Total*
25.7%	38.6%	17.1%	18.6%	100%

Table 3: How challenging is it to travel by rail?

** Based on 140 people answering the question*

When asked what prevents them from using rail travel, 20% mentioned that trains and train stations are not suitable for wheelchair users, while 18.5% reported difficulties in getting to the station in the first place. Indeed, for many respondents, the only means of travelling to the station is by taxi and this is not affordable.

WALKING AND CYCLING

As pedestrians, respondents with visual impairments noted that an absence of traffic lights makes it difficult for them to walk around the city. While, for others, crossroads and poor quality infrastructure were a major problem. One respondent shared her story:

> *"I am always faced with low quality facilities. For instance, the other day I had to cross the road in boulevard and the escalator did not work. I asked for it to be fixed. They fixed it, but when I got on it, it stopped working again. They do not work anyway. They put them there for decoration purposes or to show tourists that we have it".*

In terms of using a bicycle, there are generally no designated cycle lanes. This is a problem for everyone, but it especially affects PWD. Another big issue in terms of cycling or other similar means of transportation is the extent to which drivers violate traffic rules. It generally creates life risks for everyone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Republic of Azerbaijan was the first country in the region to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in January 2009. In doing so, Azerbaijan undertook its commitments to amend legislation and create new services to ensure the integration of disabled people into society. Promoting equality and ensuring user-friendly public transport and accessible roads is essential to achieving this and enabling PWD to access social services, employment, and education opportunities. Put another way, the integration of people with disabilities into society is impossible without an effective road-traffic safety system, and this has a profoundly negative impact on the overall development of the country.

Based on the findings of this report the National Automobile Club of Azerbaijan (AMAK) has prepared a set of recommendations (outlined below) aimed at solving or preventing a number of the problems identified in this report. These recommendations, if implemented effectively, will help with the integration of disabled people into society and make Azerbaijan a leading country in the region.

This research project has sought to identify the difficulties faced by disabled people using road-transport infrastructure in Baku and Ganja. It has found that a lack of accessible transport creates both physical and psychological barriers to disabled people participating fully in society. This limits people's access to public services (including medical services), employment and education, as well as restricting their participation in social and cultural events. These barriers make it difficult to ensure the social, political, and economic rights of persons with disabilities. As a result, people with disabilities often suffer from low levels of self-confidence, and mistaken thoughts are formed of and by society leading to isolation.

In particular, this report has found that poor access to buildings and public transport, as well as inadequate and poor quality road infrastructure creates a difficult environment for disabled people. AMAK has set out the following recommendations targeted at relevant government agencies and civil society organizations to consider in an attempt solve these issues.

ACCESSIBLE BUILDINGS

Most PWD do not feel that the current situation with regards to the accessibility of residential or other public buildings in Azerbaijan is fit for purpose. Often there are no ramps or elevators in buildings for the convenience of people with disabilities, including wheelchair users.

Local departments of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection can work with municipalities and Executive Committees to install elevators and ramps in old buildings. While, during the planning of new buildings, the construction of ramps for wheelchair users and lifts fitted to meet the needs of disabled people (i.e. wide doors and buttons at a reasonable height) should be a minimum requirement.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The research shows that one of the main barriers to mobility in Baku and Ganja is the difficulties people with disabilities face when they use public transport.

Many respondents noted that they were not able to use the metro because stations are underground and there are no escalators or elevators down to the trains. Respondents noted that entering the train itself was also difficult. For these reasons, elevators and special escalators should be installed in the Baku Metro, as well as ramps where needed.

In terms of rail travel, many respondents noted that it is impossible for them to even go to the railway station because there is no suitable public transport to take them there. For others, after reaching railway station, it is then very difficult to get on the train, which is not adapted for them to move around and or sit comfortably.

The provision of more public buses may help to bring disabled people from where they live to railway station. While trains should, where possible, be adapted so that people with disabilities can use them freely.

TAXIS

A number of participants mentioned a lack of accessible taxis fitted with ramps and/or special lifts for wheelchair users. In Baku, there are now a

number of so-called “London Taxis” which are fitted appropriately and this has partially resolved the issue. However, there is still a problem in Ganja. For this purpose, taxi companies are should be encouraged to have suitable cars in their fleets that are fitted for disabled people, especially in Ganja.

ROAD CROSSINGS, ROADS AND TRAFFIC LIGHTS

In recent years, special attention has been given to pedestrian safety in Azerbaijan. A large number of underground passages have been constructed and zebra crossings laid on the roads. These crossings are frequently monitored by the road police who can issue fines if they are not used properly. However, the underpasses often lack ramps or operational escalators making them inaccessible for people with disabilities. While, the crossings can be discriminatory for people with visual impairments as they do not have sound or touch capabilities to help them cross safely and at the right time.

Specific recommendations to improve infrastructure for people with disabilities in Azerbaijan:

- Conduct awareness training on the needs of people with disabilities for drivers;
- Conduct awareness training on the needs of people with disabilities for senior management and responsible employees of transport companies;
- When determining bus routes (and in particular bus routes used by buses with ramps), consideration should be given to where people with disabilities mostly live, as well as the areas where social service centers, education and healthcare facilities are located;
- Instruct public transport drivers to pull up close to the sidewalk;
- Provide announcements of stops in all buses for visually impaired people;
- Provide visual tables of stops in all buses for people with hearing impairments;

- Provide accessible transport for visually impaired people to educational institutions, rehabilitation centers, and workplaces;
- Ensure the accessibility of information boards for all types of disabled people at stops;
- Adapt stops for comfortable access of wheelchairs users and visually impaired people;
- Provide transport for disabled people from social service centers to the bus station, seaside park, and railway station;
- Install embossed and lighted barriers to separate trains from the platform in metro stations;
- Construct escalators and ramps at metro stations and underpasses and ensure they remain operational;
- Install modern traffic lights fitted with pushbutton locator tones, audible and vibrotactile walk indicators, tactile arrows, and automatic volume adjustment;
- Ramps should be constructed on all roads to facilitate the passage of disabled people.

AWARENESS

Many of the respondents of the study felt that there was a lack of awareness and understanding of the needs of people with disabilities in Azerbaijan. In some instances it was felt that public attitudes continued to be grounded in the 'medical' belief that a disability is an illness. It was felt that this attitude prevented a number of social solutions being sought to integrate people with disabilities into society. Greater awareness and understanding is needed therefore with regards to the needs of people with disabilities in order to transition from a medical-based to a social-based approach to supporting people with disabilities in society.

Specific recommendations to improve awareness of the needs of people with disabilities in Azerbaijan:

- Conduct public awareness campaigns to ensure recognition of the rights of people with disabilities;
- Promote recognition of the skills, dignity and abilities of disabled people, as well as their contribution to the workplace and the labor market;
- Promote respect for disabled people at all levels of the education system;
- Involve social workers and media organizations in the awareness process;
- Include lessons at all levels of education related to human diversity;
- Strengthen inter-ministerial cooperation and cooperation between government and non-government organizations to support people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to find out the main issues and challenges faced by PWD in Azerbaijan in accessing and using roads and public transport. About 350 respondents participated in the study. The study took place in Azerbaijan's two biggest cities, Baku and Ganja.

The study revealed that infrastructure issues with roads, public buildings and places of living make it challenging or sometimes even impossible for PWD to even enter and leave their own homes. Public transport such as buses, rail, metro, and taxis do not have the capacity, neither in the form of built-in infrastructure nor driver awareness, to accommodate PWD, especially wheelchair users. Public attitudes including issues of micro-aggression, over sympathy, seeing PWD as poor and helpless stood out as one of the biggest issues that prevent PWD from participating in public life.

Issues of infrastructure and public attitudes towards PWD are interlinked. The lack of visibility in public spaces, work places, mainstream schools, colleges, and universities that occurs as a result of poor infrastructure, make PWD "unknown" to the public. People see PWD taking part in social activities so infrequently that they assume PWD are different in some way than to themselves. As the respondents of this study pointed out, these kind of assumptions can be very dis-empowering and dis-heartening.

Implementing a comprehensive awareness campaign nationwide might help to accelerate the process of building accessible infrastructure and see more PWD included in everyday public life. If PWD are not able to access education, vocational training or other career information and skills because of poor roads and infrastructure, it decreases their welfare and creates a cycle of poverty. Indeed, 650,000 people living in reflects badly on the general development indicators of the country. Meanwhile, their isolation from society and lack of access to vital services is counter to UN Human Rights Conventions, the Constitution and many local legislations of Azerbaijan. Therefore, it is utterly important for policy makers to develop and implement policies and services that create an environment in which 6.3% of the country's citizens feel belonged and supported.