



THE COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN
(OMBUDSMAN)

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BAKU



REPORT

ON THE RESULTS OF THE MONITORING
CONDUCTED BY THE OMBUDSMAN'S
MONITORING GROUP FOR THE PROMOTION AND
MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES REGARDING THE
ACCESSIBILITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CENTRAL
AREAS OF BAKU CITY

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INTRODUCTION

The adaptation of infrastructure for the use of persons with disabilities to ensure their full and equal participation in society is a key requirement of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the national legislation.

On 9 June 2023, pursuant to an amendment to the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan (hereinafter – the Constitutional Law), the Ombudsman performs the functions of an independent monitoring mechanism for the monitoring and promotion of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter - the CRPD).

It is known that, with the Ombudsman's proposals also being taken into account, our country acceded to the CRPD on 2 October 2008.¹ Independent monitoring is a mechanism enshrined in Article 33.2 of the CRPD. At the same time, this authority of the Ombudsman is enshrined in Article 38.4 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In recent years, special attention has been paid to building an inclusive society in our country, and various measures are being implemented to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities face various difficulties in accessing infrastructure objects. The lack of ramps in a number of public spaces, building entrances, the dangerous degree of incline of ramps installed alongside the steps in passages, the absence of elevators in some cases, or the malfunction of existing equipment are regularly reported by the mass media, and this topic is also raised on social media and websites.

Taking the above into account, as part of the Ombudsman's activities to monitor the implementation of the CRPD, initially, the independent monitoring group assessed the existing situation in parks, crossings, at entrances of recreational and catering facilities near these objects in terms of accessibility and the comfortable and safe use for persons with disabilities.

The independent monitoring was mainly aimed at identifying existing problems regarding the accessibility of infrastructure and any separate arrangements on the grounds of disability and promoting the creation of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in all areas of community life, without discrimination, on an equal basis with others. During the planning of monitoring, it was considered that 2026 was declared the 'Year of Urban Planning and Architecture' in Azerbaijan, and our country will host the 13th session of the World Urban Forum.

The area selected for monitoring encompassed locations in Baku that are major points of interest for both residents and foreign visitors, reflecting the city's historical character. Monitoring was carried out in the areas around the Seaside National Park, Fountain Square, the Maiden Tower, Khagani Park, and Azneft Square regarding the accessibility of infrastructure for people with disabilities.

¹ Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/15641>

1. TERMS AND CONCEPTS USED



Person with disability – a person who has a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, when encountering various barriers, prevents them from participating fully and effectively in the life of society on an equal basis with other persons

Accessibility – the conformity of the work, education, healthcare and other social environments, as well as public, transport and commercial infrastructure, to the needs of persons with disabilities

Inclusivity – ensuring access for a person with a disability to the work, education, and other social environments and infrastructure necessary for them to lead a dignified life in their community, regardless of the percentage of impairment, the type of disability, and the degree of restriction of their life activities.

Stationary ramp – a flat, inclined structure connecting surfaces at different levels (allows individuals using wheelchairs and trolleys to access various premises)

Portable ramp – a structure that creates a connection between different floors (levels) (allows individuals using wheelchairs and trolleys to access various premises)

Wheelchair – a mechanical or motorised rehabilitation device provided to ensure mobility for people with disabilities, taking into account their age, weight and height

Braille alphabet – a tactile writing system created for visually impaired people (named after its creator, Louis Braille)

Sign language – the expression of ideas by people who are completely deaf, using the arms, hands and fingers simultaneously

Surdo translation – a visual interpretation provided through sign language to enable people with hearing and speech impairments to access information

Typhlo translation – the presentation of information in audio format for visually impaired individuals

2. METHODOLOGY

The list of facilities monitored for accessibility under the Ombudsman's independent monitoring mandate included road and transport infrastructure; tourism, recreation, physical culture and sports facilities; underground and overground passages; traffic lights; leisure and entertainment infrastructure; sanitary facilities; boards for information provision and existing websites.

For the purpose of assessing accessibility, the presence of ramps and their incline level was reviewed at these premises. Where they were present, their gradient was measured to check its suitability for safe and independent use, and to determine whether the requirements of current standards were being met.

Assessment was carried out to ensure the provision of appropriate infrastructure for the unrestricted movement of persons with disabilities, and to evaluate the compliance of facilities in use with standards in accordance with the needs of persons with disabilities. The level of adaptation measures implemented for persons with visual, hearing, and speech impairments was also monitored.

During the monitoring, photographs of the facilities were taken, and these materials have been documented in this report. At the same time, interviews were conducted and websites were reviewed to obtain the necessary information about these facilities.

The facts obtained were analysed in accordance with existing national and international norms and standards.

Involvement of persons with disabilities:

In accordance with Article 13-3 of the Constitutional Law, the Ombudsman's independent monitoring group may involve civil society institutions, independent experts and specialists in the activities of its monitoring groups.

This monitoring involved Aydın Khalilov, Chairman of the Public Union "Centre for Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities", as a representative of a non-governmental organisation representing persons with disabilities and as an expert.

During the monitoring, interviews were also conducted with people with disabilities (using wheelchairs) who were using the infrastructure in those areas to gather information on the suitability of the facilities for their individual needs.

3. FACTS DETERMINED DURING THE MONITORING

During the monitoring, an inspection was carried out of the Seaside National Park, two large commercial premises located in the area and the existing sanitary facilities, as well as the surroundings of the Maiden Tower, Fountain Square, Khagani Park and Azneft Square, and the accessibility of the premises was assessed.

Primarily, the accessibility of the infrastructure for the independent participation of disabled people using motorised and manual wheelchairs and crutches in community life was assessed.

During the monitoring, it was observed that several disabled people using wheelchairs and their companions encountered difficulties using the installed ramps and inclines.

At the same time, accessibility must also be ensured for individuals with hearing, visual, and speech impairments. For instance, the use of Braille, the availability of assistive information technology, and the operation of audible traffic lights are essential in the areas being monitored. The absence of such facilities in itself creates a barrier to the independent living of groups with disabilities.

Several bus routes are available for passengers to travel to the monitored areas, particularly the Seaside National Park. As mainly new buses have been put into service in the city's central areas, attention has been paid to accessibility. The passenger buses introduced in recent years have designated spaces for people with disabilities and special equipment (drop-down ramps) for wheelchair access. However, the kerbs at the bus stops obstruct free movement for wheelchair users. Incidentally, for the visually and hearing-impaired, as well as for all passengers and foreign visitors, it is essential that bus stops are not only displayed on monitors but also announced verbally to ensure comfortable and unhindered travel.

The lack of accessibility for transferring to the Boulevard area by metro must be made clear, as there are restrictions on accessibility within the metro network itself, and also that the only means of access from the metro exit to the Boulevard area via the underground passage is by escalator and stairs, which does not meet the needs of the individuals in this group. In this regard, the continuation of the 'Accessible Metro' project and the installation of elevators when constructing new stations are of particular importance. However, in metro stations built in previous periods, including 'Sahil' station, the practice currently applied by the Baku Metro, which requires passengers with disabilities using a wheelchair to notify the metro of their intention to travel by contacting a specified number between 24 hours and one hour beforehand, constitutes restriction on their freedom of movement.² creates a serious restriction on their freedom of movement. Thus, this practice must be brought into compliance the requirements of the Convention and existing legislation in this field, which creates equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate in all areas of community life, without discrimination on the grounds of disability.

²<https://metro.gov.az/storage/files/file/6683/KQryEvShr7RYJFPlh5slWi55a8BeVmezYd4an3Yq.pdf>

Adaptive measures are also required at the entrances and exits of the underground car park for disabled people arriving at the Boulevard by private car.

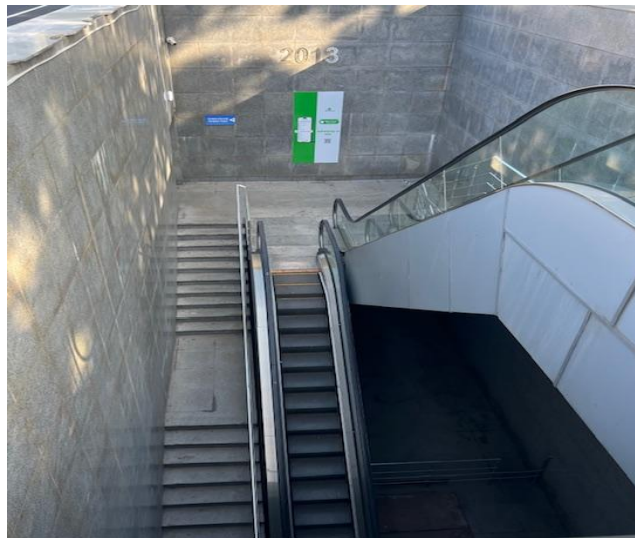


Photo 1

One of the pressing issues in ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities is that in some cases, only stairs exist in underground and overground passages, or the existing ramps are unsuitable for their free and safe movement. In this situation, using the underpasses can result in these individuals' need for assistance, or their attempt to use the ramps independently can pose a risk to their health and safety.

Observations have revealed that the ramp in the underpass providing access from the front of the "Hilton" hotel to the Seaside National Park is excessively steep (27 degrees), posing significant safety and functionality challenges. This situation poses a real risk and barrier for wheelchair users, people with temporary mobility impairments, the elderly, and people using baby strollers.



Photo 2

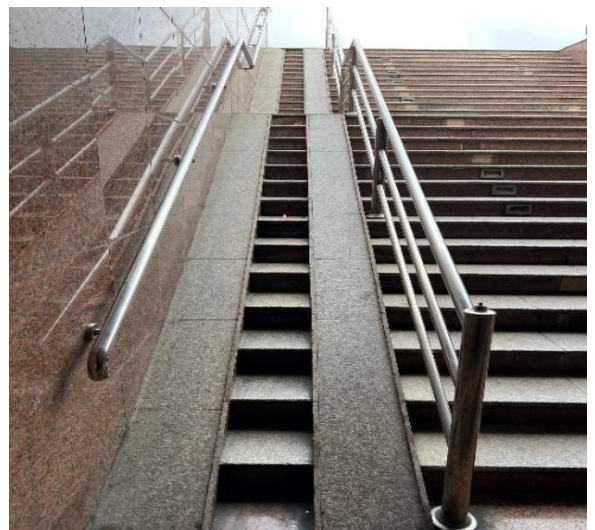


Photo 3

The difficulty experienced by a visitor in a wheelchair using the underpass visually confirms the practical impact of the deficiencies we recorded during the monitoring (Photos 4-5). For instance, it was observed that an elderly person using a wheelchair,

despite being accompanied by another person, was unable to use the ramp. Consequently, they were forced to go up and down the stairs with difficulty by using a walking stick.

In light of the above, it is considered appropriate to redesign and improve the ramp in accordance with accessibility and universal design requirements, or to take other necessary measures.



Photo 4



Photo 5

During the monitoring, it was determined that the ramp installed in the underground passage between the Seaside National Park and the Sahil metro entrance (Photo 6) does not meet current standards, and its marble surface covering is unsuitable for safe use as it is slippery. Likewise, although non-slip stones are used in the underground passage that provides access from the State Puppet Theatre to M.E. Resulzade Street and the White Lilies Park (Photo 7), the steep incline in the same form may cause concerns when using a wheelchair.



Photo 6

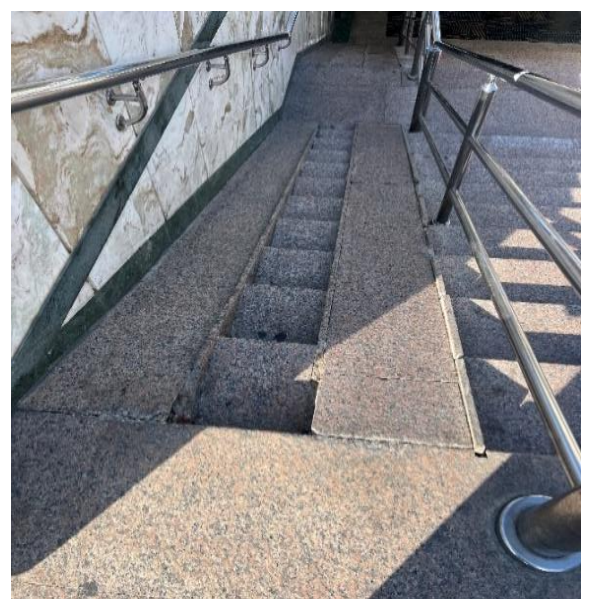


Photo 7

It should be noted that in recent years, pedestrian crosswalks have also been installed in those areas³, thereby providing alternative options. However, as this pedestrian crosswalk is located on Neftchiler Avenue, a road with heavy traffic, it is important to take this nuance into account in the traffic light's operating mode, also considering the limited mobility of persons with disabilities resulting from impairments of their musculoskeletal system.



Photo 8



Photo 9

Another issue that came to light during the monitoring concerned the difficulties faced by people with disabilities when using public transport. Observations made during the monitoring revealed that the existing infrastructure at the bus stop within the Seaside National Park does not enable wheelchair users to access public transport independently and without barriers. Specifically, the presence of high barrier kerbs between the bus stop and the road surface, and the absence of a ramp or other facility to overcome this level difference, prevents wheelchair users from boarding the buses directly and comfortably.

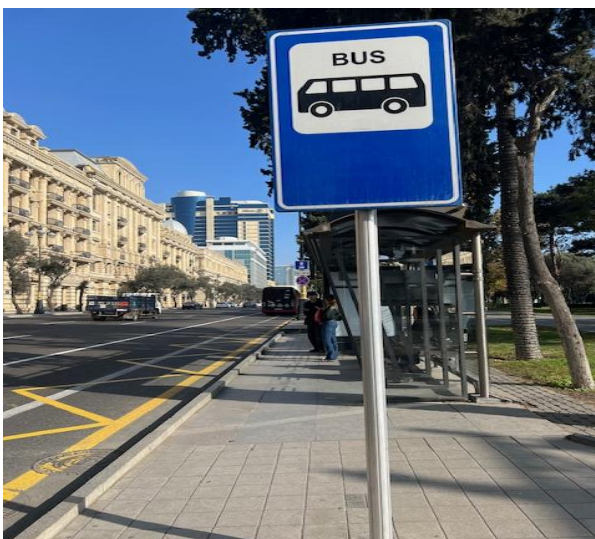


Photo 10



Photo 11

³https://www.instagram.com/p/DGzjIODNpVW/?img_index=1

The aforementioned cases do not comply with the principles of accessibility and equal use of public transport services and demonstrate the necessity of improving the relevant infrastructure.

Although the provision of a map of the area and information about existing facilities in the National Park is a positive step for visitors, it is also important to ensure that the information is accessible to persons with disabilities. Accessibility can be ensured by implementing methods such as providing audio versions of these informational boards, using Braille, and displaying short informational videos in Sign language.



Photo 12

It should be noted as a positive point that the ramp at the side entrance to the Park Boulevard Shopping and Leisure Centre meets accessibility requirements (a slope of 5 degrees) and is suitable for safe use.

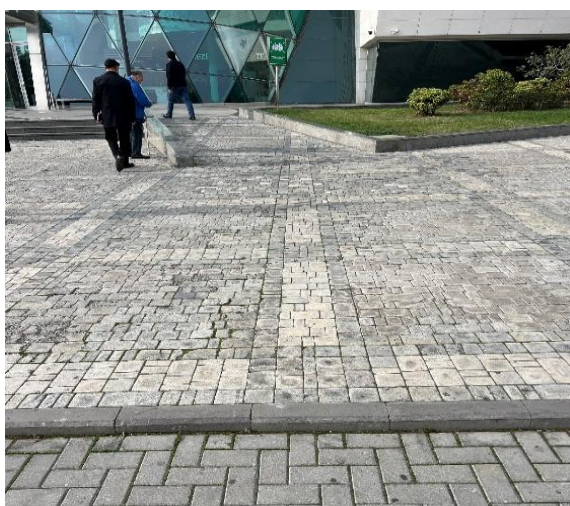


Photo 13



Photo 14

The entrance door and elevator entrance of this shopping and leisure centre, located in the Seaside National Park, are 80 cm wide. It should be noted that for wheelchair users to move freely, it is recommended that a wider door width (90 cm) exists, larger elevators are commissioned for the manoeuvring of wheelchair users and lower-mounted buttons are supplied. In the current situation, although the elevator is relatively spacious inside, its entrance is narrower. However, a sign near the doors states: "Priority in the elevator is for children and wheelchair users" (Photo 15).

Additionally, the buttons of the elevator inside this Shopping Centre also existed in Braille (Photo 16), ensuring accessibility for visually impaired individuals.



Photo 15



Photo 16

Although a notice board was displayed in the Shopping Centre informing of the presence of a toilet for disabled persons, it was found that in reality, no such toilet was in operation on the first, second, and third floors.



Photo 17



Photo 18

Furthermore, during the monitoring, it was discovered that the public toilets within the National Park are not accessible to wheelchair users or to individuals with temporary mobility impairments. The fact that the toilets are only accessible via stairs makes the facility inaccessible for this category of people. Furthermore, the spaces for movement within the facility are narrow, and the sanitary fittings have not been installed in accordance with regulatory requirements.



Photo 19

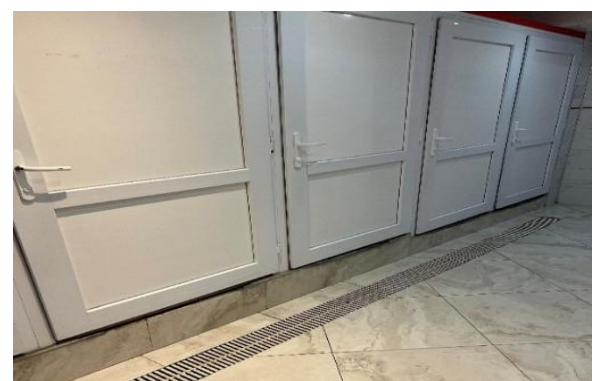


Photo 20

During the monitoring process, it was determined that a significant proportion of the existing ramps in the National Seaside Park are primarily intended for users of baby strollers and micromobility vehicles (bicycles and electric scooters). Based on the results of the assessment, a large proportion of the existing ramps do not meet the needs of wheelchair users.



Photo 21

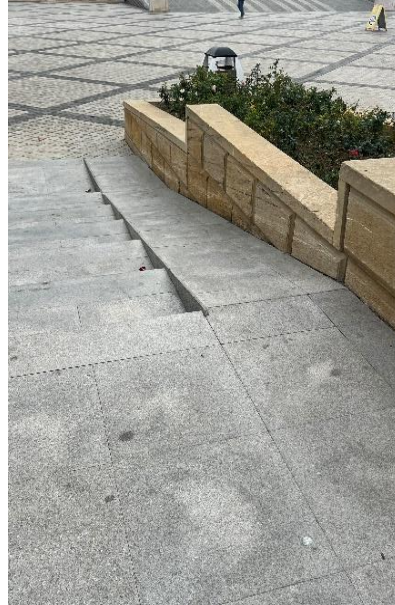


Photo 22

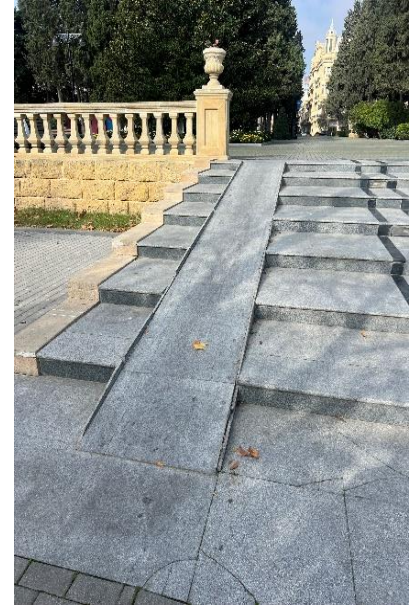


Photo 23

Therefore, individuals using wheelchairs on these ramps, including persons with temporary or permanent mobility impairment resulting from musculoskeletal disorders, cannot use these ramps safely and independently due to the ramp slopes being steeper than the regulatory requirements, the lack of safety railings on their sides, and their slippery surfaces.

It should be noted that disabled people who use manual or powered wheelchairs often face physical limitations associated with musculoskeletal conditions or injuries to their lower or upper limbs. In the current situation, the use of these ramps by people with reduced mobility is only possible with assistance, which both prevents them from moving independently and freely, and requires considerable physical strength from the person providing the support. Consequently, the deficiencies in these ramps create barriers for these individuals, failing to meet the requirements for inclusivity and accessibility.

Monitoring carried out revealed that another ramp was improperly placed in the area, breaching accessibility and safety requirements. Specifically, the ramp pictured below does not complete its intended path, but instead terminates directly against the sitting structure. This lack of a sufficient manoeuvring and turning area prevents a smooth transition for users of the ramp. This situation poses a significant barrier, particularly for wheelchair users, as well as the movement of baby strollers and individuals with temporary mobility impairments.



Photo 24



Photo 25

Due to this construction, these ramps lose their functionality and become factually unusable. These shortcomings negatively affect the inclusivity of the area's infrastructure and necessitate the redesign of the ramps and the provision of an unobstructed passage, in accordance with the relevant regulations.

However, it should be noted that some public catering establishments in the area in question provide accessibility for people with disabilities. Thus, the photos below show that the presence of a ramp at both entrances of the facility, installed in accordance with standards, facilitates access for wheelchair users. This case demonstrates that it is possible to create inclusive and accessible infrastructure in the area, provided that the relevant regulatory requirements are adhered to, and this can be considered a positive example for other facilities.



Photo 26



Photo 27

Alongside the necessary adjustments for people with disabilities, it is also important to create conditions for this population group to use recreational and entertainment infrastructure on an equal basis with all other people, enabling them to spend their leisure time effectively. For example, in the direct access to the shore of the Caspian Sea, wheelchair users with disabilities resulting from temporary or permanent impairments of their musculoskeletal system were generally not considered:



Photo 28

Another issue noted during the monitoring within the National Park is the lack of segregated zones for the movement of electric scooters and bicycles, which have recently become popular alternative means of transport, and special attention must be paid to the safety of people with both mobility and visual impairments.

One of the positive findings of the monitoring was the consideration of accessibility in the “Deniz Mall” shopping centre, located within the Seaside National Park.

The monitoring found that the availability of wayfinding signage, the width of the cubicles and the compliance of the sanitary fittings with regulatory requirements indicate that a barrier-free and safe environment has been created for wheelchair users, as well as for people with temporary mobility impairments. The existing conditions can be considered good practice for creating accessible environments in other public spaces.

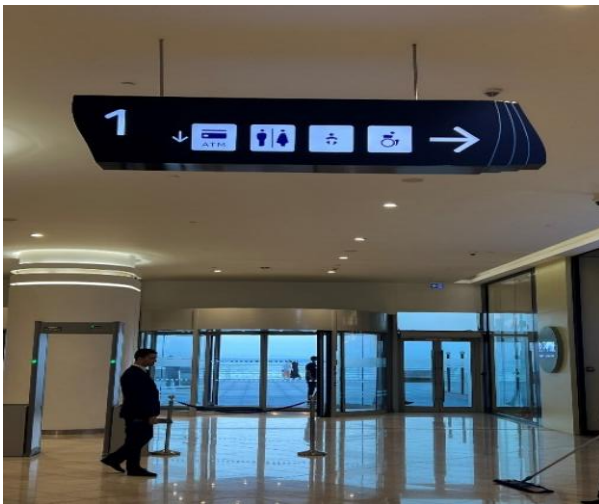


Photo 29



Photo 30

During a monitoring visit to the shopping centre, a person with a disability, S.B., who uses a wheelchair and is diagnosed with spastic paralysis, stated during a conversation that, the accessibility of the path leading to the shopping centre (within the Boulevard area) is poor, creating difficulties when moving about and forcing the wheelchair user to

sometimes use the road, despite it being dangerous. Furthermore, the presence of an accessible toilet in that particular shopping centre on the Boulevard was noted as a positive feature.



Photo 31

As is well known, since wheelchair users cannot use escalators, special elevators are installed at crossings to ensure their passage where there are no ramps.

During the monitoring, it was determined that the elevators installed in the underpass providing access from the front of the Four Seasons hotel to the Seaside National Park are not in working order. The dilapidated and unusable state of these devices, their disconnection from the network, and the presence of several more steps immediately after the staircase (Photo 34) make wheelchair users' access impossible.



Photo 32

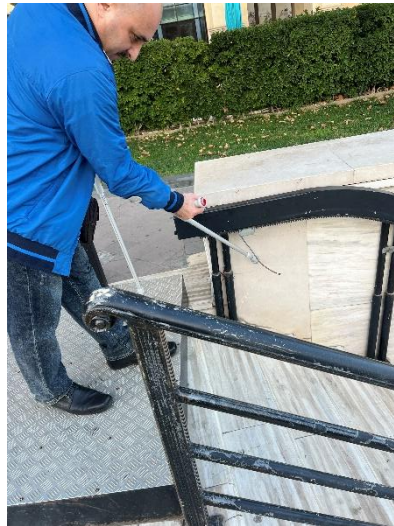


Photo 33



Photo 34

The above-mentioned underpass is also used to access the Old City (Icherisheher). Given that the area in question is located in the city centre and the passageway is intensively used daily by both local residents and foreign visitors, the non-functionality of the lifting equipment there creates serious mobility restrictions for wheelchair users. This

not only constitutes a breach of the principle of accessibility but also has a detrimental effect on the inclusivity of the urban environment.

Given the current situation, it is recommended that the lifting equipment installed at the crossings in the aforementioned area be inspected and restored for use as soon as possible. Furthermore, to prevent similar issues in the future, it is essential that such installations are regularly inspected and their operational functionality maintained.

Another negative point identified during the on-site observation was that the tactile paving installed in the area in question does not meet the universal functional requirements.

It is well known that tactile paving is designed to warn visually impaired people of a hazard or to indicate a change in direction. However, as can be seen from the photos below, placing tactile paving on the ramp both creates a slip hazard and negates its purpose for both groups: visually impaired people and disabled people who use wheelchairs. Tactile paving of this type should be installed at the start and end points of the ramp, before the hazard zone. Furthermore, as the colour contrast of the textured paving is poor, the current situation makes it difficult for visually impaired individuals to move safely and independently.



Photo 35



Photo 36

One of the positive findings from the monitoring was the repair work carried out on the existing stationary ramps parallel to the steps in front of the Maiden's Tower, and the creation of steeper ramps. This change serves to improve the accessibility of the area for wheelchair users, people using baby strollers, and other individuals with reduced mobility. However, it is considered advisable to carry out regular technical inspections to ensure the ramp complies with the relevant regulatory requirements and is safe to use.



Photo 37



Photo 38

During the monitoring of the city centre, the facilities created for people with disabilities at the Fountains Square were also inspected. Although the on-site observations noted the presence of ramps on most staircases, it should be noted that many of them require improvement in terms of functionality and compliance with regulatory requirements.



Photo 39



Photo 40

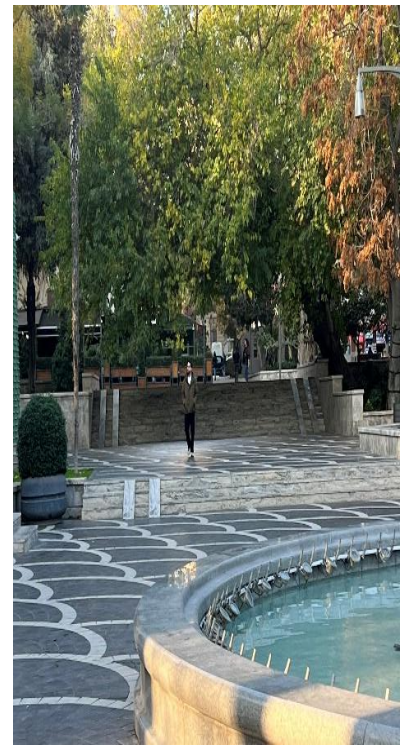


Photo 41

During the monitoring, it was observed that a tourist with a disability, using a wheelchair, attempted to use the ramp with the help of a parent (Photo 42); however, as they were unable to use it, they were forced to choose a different route. During the conversation with members of the monitoring group, these individuals reported experiencing difficulties using the ramps when walking in the city centre.



Photo 42

At the same time, it was observed that the ramps available in front of a number of public catering establishments did not meet the regulatory requirements. In some cases, it was found that ramps were either completely absent or had been planned incompletely, and that the width of the ramps was insufficient.



Photo 43



Photo 44

Furthermore, as the only access to the Azerbaijani cinema is via stairs, individuals with disabilities who use wheelchairs, as well as those with temporary physical impairments, are denied the opportunity to enter the premises freely and independently. This creates a barrier to them exercising their right to leisure, recreation and participation in cultural life:



Photo 45

Furthermore, although a ramp has been installed at the front of the public toilet block in Fountains Square (Photo 46), entry to the facility is only possible via the steps (Photo 48). As the problems listed above are repeated here, the facility is not accessible for use by people in this category.



Photo 46



Photo 47



Photo 48



Photo 49

As one of the positive examples recorded during the monitoring, it can be noted that in the area around the Khagani Garden, where reconstruction work has been carried out in recent years, the steps have been modified in a modern style to a gradient that allows access for wheelchair users.



Photo 50

4. LEGAL BASES AND ANALYSIS

International obligations:

In accordance with Article 9 (Accessibility) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

Paragraph b of subsection 2 of the same Article establishes it as one of the State's obligations to ensure that private entities offering facilities and services which are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Taking the aforementioned provision into account, the relevant bodies should monitor private enterprises in the areas under review to ensure they are taking appropriate measures and conduct ongoing awareness-raising.

Article 19 of the Convention, dedicated to independent living and inclusion in the local community, stipulates that the isolation or segregation of persons with disabilities from society shall not be permitted, and persons with disabilities have equal access to services and collective facilities generally intended for the population as a whole, and that they meet their needs.

Like everyone else, the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, organization of their leisure time and recreation, access to tourism, recreational and sporting activities should be ensured in accordance with Article 30 (Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport) of the CRPD.

In 2024, in its Concluding Observations on the periodic report of the Government of Azerbaijan, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities noted that standards related to infrastructure and vehicles are clearly defined in the country's legislation, however, at the same time, expressed its concern and made recommendations regarding the need to implement appropriate measures to bring a number of buildings and structures into compliance with these requirements.⁴

Requirements of national legislation:

As one of the key concepts used in the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, accessibility for persons with disabilities includes the conformity of the work, education, healthcare and other social environments, as well as public transport and commercial infrastructure, to the needs of persons with disabilities.⁵ Article 12 of that Law (Ensuring conditions for accessibility) states that the State shall create the conditions for persons with disabilities to enable them to lead an independent life and full participation in all aspects of life, and to use on an equal level, the physical

⁴<https://docs.un.org/en/CRPD/C/AZE/CO/2-3>

environment, transport, information and communication, including ICT and related systems, and other facilities and services open to or provided for the public.

Furthermore, Article 13 of the Law contains provisions for the needs of persons with disabilities to be taken into account during the design and construction of infrastructure facilities and Article 14 sets out the requirement for reasonable accommodation of the transport, communication, information, cultural, domestic and other social infrastructure facilities under their jurisdiction for use of persons with disabilities by the relevant executive authorities, enterprises and organisations.

Requirements for taking into account the needs of persons with disabilities in the design and construction process are also set out in the Urban Planning and Construction Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan (hereinafter referred to as the Code). In accordance with Article 57.2.7 of the Code, reasonable adjustments must be made to ensure that persons with disabilities and other persons with reduced mobility can use infrastructure freely (particularly in buildings intended for general use).⁶

Article 62 of the Code, in turn, stipulates that staircases, stairwells, gate entrances and exits, corridors, open walkways, ramps and elevators must be comfortable and safe for movement, and that reasonable accommodation must be provided for their use by persons with disabilities.

Decision No. 340 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 5 November 2021 on the approval of the "Rules for the Reasonable Adaptation of Infrastructure Facilities for Use by Persons with Disabilities" establishes the procedure for the reasonable adaptation of any facility for a person with a disability. According to this Decision, the Ministry of Emergency Situations shall exercise state supervision over the consideration of the needs of persons with disabilities during the design and construction phases, while local executive authorities shall exercise state supervision over the reasonable accommodation of facilities in operation.⁷

Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 11 September 2019, on the approval of the Rule on Control over the Consideration of Needs of Persons with Disabilities during the Design and Construction of Infrastructure Facilities and Residential Buildings and Reasonable Adaptation of Existing Infrastructure Facilities and Residential Buildings for Use by Persons with Disabilities provides for monitoring to be carried out by local executive authorities at least once every six months to ensure the reasonable adaptation of infrastructure facilities and residential buildings in operation for use by persons with disabilities.⁸

The facilities where independent monitoring was carried out covered the territory of the Sabail and Nasimi district administrations. Therefore, based on the aforementioned Rule, it is recommended to conduct a visual and instrumental inspection of the objects shown

⁵ Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/39591>

⁶ The Urban Planning and Construction Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/46958>

⁷ (Decision on the approval of the "Rules on the reasonable accommodation of infrastructure facilities for use by persons with disabilities"), <https://e-qanun.az/framework/48503>

⁸ Regulations on the supervision of the consideration of the needs of persons with disabilities during the design and construction of infrastructure facilities and residential buildings, and the reasonable accommodation of existing infrastructure facilities and residential buildings for use by persons with disabilities, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/43256>

in the given photos, as well as other areas, to compile a list of objects unsuitable for use by persons with disabilities, and to prepare proposals for reconstruction work.

"State Building Norms and Rules. Planning and Construction of Urban, Town and Rural Settlements" (AzDTN 2.6-1), clause 8.24, provides that in settlement areas, social service institutions for the elderly and persons with disabilities, where social service institutions for the elderly and persons with disabilities, medical institutions, and other establishments with large public gatherings are located, special access routes must be provided to allow for the movement of manual wheelchairs for persons with disabilities. Along these routes, the height of vertical obstacles (kerbs and projections) must not exceed 5 cm. Steep short ramps (above 100 ‰), as well as longitudinal gradients on pavements and footpaths exceeding 50 ‰, are not permitted. Along roads with a gradient of 30-60 ‰, horizontal sections of no less than 5 m in length must be provided at intervals of every 100 m.⁹

As can be seen from the photos above, these requirements have been violated in a number of cases, with high kerbs preventing wheelchair users from moving on from the kerb to board passenger transport.

Clause 8.25 of the above-noted Norms and Rules states that different-level crossings with steps and stationary ramps should be provided at intervals of 400-800 m on main roads with fast-moving traffic, on rapid tram lines and on railway lines; whereas on major streets with uninterrupted flow, they should be provided at intervals of every 300-400 m.

Furthermore, in the existing situation, although the number of crossings is adequate, there is no adaptation to the needs of disabled people on the ramps.

According to the "Multifunctional Buildings and Complexes. Design Norms" approved by the Decision of the State Committee on Urban Planning and Architecture of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 29, 2025, people with disabilities must have barrier-free access to vestibules, elevators, public facilities, and houses; ramps (or lifting equipment for the movement of people with disabilities using wheelchairs), as well as other facilities should be considered at the building entrance and corridors to access the elevator and waste pipes where there is changes in floor level for persons with disabilities.¹⁰

The provision of accessible and inclusive transport services was also set out in the "State Programme for the Improvement of Transport Infrastructure in Baku City and Surrounding Areas for 2025–2030" approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 30 January 2025.¹¹ The State Program also provides for the adaptation of public transport and infrastructure for various social groups, particularly people with disabilities and the elderly, as well as ensuring the population's access to public transport within a 500 m radius, ensuring their access to transport services, as well as taking the necessary measures to ensure safe movement and accessibility to transport services for children, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

The Decision on the approval of the "Requirements for motor vehicles to be used for the provision of scheduled bus services for the conclusion of a contract for bus transport services" adopted by the Collegium of the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 30 October 2025 has likewise established the necessary

⁹ "State Building Norms and Rules. Planning and Development of Urban, Town and Rural Settlements" (AzDTN 2.6-1), <https://e-qanun.az/framework/10957>

¹⁰ "Multi-functional Buildings and Complexes. Designing Norms", <https://e-qanun.az/framework/60341>

¹¹ "State Programme on the Improvement of Transport Infrastructure in Baku City and Surrounding Areas for 2025–2030", <https://e-qanun.az/framework/58857>

requirements in this regard.¹² Namely, it envisages requirements that road vehicles operating on regular routes must be equipped with mechanically or automatically operated ramps for persons with disabilities, buttons for reporting wheelchair-related information, and the presence of a soft backrest in the seats reserved for this category, in particular, the provision of lap belts to ensure stability during transit, and the installation of a monitor and audio system to inform persons with visual and hearing impairment of the next stop, have been established as requirements.

Furthermore, it should be noted that in accordance with the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on ensuring the activities of the Seaside Boulevard Administration, the organisation of the operation of stationary and portable sanitary facilities within the Seaside National Park is carried out by the Seaside Boulevard Administration.¹³ Given the general lack of accessible facilities for people with disabilities in the public toilets within the National Park, it is considered appropriate in the current circumstances to introduce portable toilets and make use of the existing infrastructure on Park Bulvar Mall, in order to take more flexible measures.

At the same time, making reasonable adjustments in this way will also ensure safe and comfortable movement for the elderly, people with health conditions or temporary mobility impairments, parents using baby strollers, and so on.

¹² Decision on the approval of the "Requirements for motor vehicles to be used for the provision of road transport services on regular routes for the conclusion of a contract for road transport services" <https://e-qanun.az/framework/60826>

¹³ Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the establishment of the Baku Sea Boulevard Administration, <https://e-qanun.az/framework/39663>

5. CONCLUSION

Results of the monitoring show that although some work has been done to take into account the rights and individual needs of people with disabilities in the Seaside National Park, one of the most visited recreational parks in the centre of Baku for both residents and tourists, as well as in the areas around Fountain Square, accessibility measures, need to be implemented at these facilities particularly for the independent movement of wheelchair users.

Observations indicate that while ramps have been installed in the monitored central areas of Baku, there are shortcomings in their compliance with standards. Overall, in such facilities, the steps should be of a uniform size, their height should comply with relevant regulatory requirements, the step surfaces should be fitted with non-slip materials, and the step edges should be marked with contrasting colours.

At the same time, to ensure safety, it is essential to install sturdy and secure handrails on both sides of the stairs and ramps. During the design process, the installation of suitably sized elevators in planned underground and overground passages will also make a positive impact on this area, contributing to the creation of an inclusive urban environment and equal access to public spaces for all.

Furthermore, in line with the strategy for the development of transport infrastructure, it is pertinent to assess the city of Baku from a pedestrian-oriented perspective to ensure their free and safe movement. In this context, dedicated zones for the movement of alternative means of transport (electric scooters and bicycles) must not restrict other road users' ability to walk. In particular, consideration must be given to individuals who use wheelchairs and have restricted mobility due to locomotor impairments and other reasons.

The practice of ensuring the accessibility of passenger buses, regular technical inspections, and involving drivers in continuous training on serving people with disabilities must be continued. Furthermore, the technical maintenance of these buses should be strengthened to ensure that the names of bus stops are announced audibly to passengers, in addition to being displayed on a monitor.

In general, problems could be significantly mitigated if the process of installing ramps involved this population group, and the design and construction were carried out with the direct participation or taking into consideration the recommendations of people with disabilities.

As it is important to consider the rights and all the needs of persons with disabilities during reconstruction work, it is considered appropriate to install a ramp or slope alongside the stairs for sanitary facilities, or to provide portable sanitary units.

Taking into account Baku's hosting the 13th Session of the UN World Urban Forum (WUF), it's of particular importance to give special attention to the issues raised in the report to undertake measures to improve the infrastructure from the perspective of the assessment by international organisations and visitors' convenience too.

The second national priority among the "Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Social-Economic Development", is about the realisation of a dynamic, inclusive and socially just society that requires the implementation of the aforementioned adaptive measures to create opportunities for free movement for persons with disabilities in our country and to ensure their equal participation in social life.

6. PROPOSALS

- *The development of a new single set of standards that are mandatory and cover more specific accessibility criteria (e.g., the dimensions of kerbs and ramps, entrance doorways, etc.);*
- *Allocation of the necessary financial resources for the installation of accessible infrastructure for persons with disabilities;*
- *Establishing a prioritised sequence for adaptation measures;*
- *Ensuring accessibility at crossings, installing elevators, maintaining the operational condition of individual lifting devices, and installing informational signs about their use;*
- *Providing visual information about parking spaces designated for people with disabilities and strengthening control at these spaces;*
- *Strengthening oversight by the responsible bodies to ensure the needs of people with disabilities are taken into account during construction and renovation works;*
- *The creation of a platform or additions to navigation apps showing the city-wide routes of accessible facilities for people with disabilities;*
- *Consideration of persons with disabilities in the existing modes of public transport (bus, metro, train, taxi) in the monitored area, as well as in the future design of tram lines in Baku;*
- *Conducting continuous awareness-raising work for staff of the relevant bodies;*
- *Ensuring direct participation of persons with disabilities and their representative NGOs in the design and construction processes;*
- *Strengthening the monitoring of existing information boards, including the display of next bus stop names on monitors and their announcement via an audio system in passenger buses;*
- *Provision of Braille interpreters or Braille-inscribed signs to meet the needs of persons with visual impairments, and of sign language interpreters or information boards with sign language interpretation to meet the needs of hearing-impaired person in public facilities;*
- *Taking necessary measures to ensure accessibility on official websites;*
- *Widespread use of accessible pedestrian signals;*
- *Installation of solar panels at level crossings, alongside reasonable adjustments, to support environmental protection and the use of alternative energy;*
- *Implementing adaptation measures in line with existing international standards and the practices of cities recognised as positive examples of accessibility worldwide;*
- *Utilising the potential of artificial intelligence to create accessible conditions in urban infrastructure that meet the needs of persons with disabilities.*

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