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School of Public and International Affairs

Master of Public Administration

**Lack of Inclusive Employment Strategies for Persons with Disabilities:
Policies and Initiatives to Promote the Inclusion of the Persons with
Disabilities in the Labor Market.**

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Abstract

This capstone project aims to examine inclusive employment strategies for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Azerbaijan as well as offer policy alternatives and initiatives to promote their inclusion into the labor market. Azerbaijan has been tackling the complex issues of disability and their inclusion into the labor market for decades. It also takes a prominent place in the national agenda of the country. The research has revealed that despite a number of projects and initiatives related to the protection and integration of the people with disabilities, the general public is not well informed about them. In the current study lack of effective inclusive education opportunities, societal attitudes, and misconceptions, inherent financial as well as infrastructure barriers have been identified as the main barriers in the inclusion of the people with disabilities into the labor market. In response to the above-mentioned challenges, the research proposes several policy alternatives such as arranging and developing special classes at educational institutions, conducting public awareness campaigns, provision of sheltered employment as well as reformation of the employment policies. These policy suggestions were further improved by the research as well as survey against five criteria: The paper concludes by providing the best policy suggestion as well as a set of recommendations that call for an urgent attention and collaboration of the government, public and private agencies as well as NGOs.

Keywords: *Azerbaijan, disability, employment, labor market, inclusivity.*

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 METHODOLOGY	8
CHAPTER 2. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION	13
2.1. LACK OF EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES.....	17
2.2. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES AND MISCONCEPTIONS	19
2.3. INHERENT FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT	20
2.4. INFRASTRUCTURE BARRIERS	21
CHAPTER 3. POLICY OPTIONS	22
3.1. ARRANGING AND DEVELOPING SPECIAL CLASSES AT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	23
3.2. CONDUCTING PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS	25
3.3 PROVISION OF SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT	26
3.4. REFORMATION OF THE EMPLOYMENT POLICIES	28
CHAPTER 4. POLICY EVALUATION.....	28
4.1 EVALUATION OF THE “ARRANGING AND DEVELOPING SPECIAL CLASSES AT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS” POLICY OPTION.....	30
4.2 EVALUATION OF THE “CONDUCTING PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS” POLICY OPTION.....	31
4.3 EVALUATION OF THE “PROVISION OF SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT” POLICY OPTION	32
4.4 EVALUATION OF THE “REFORMATION OF THE EMPLOYMENT POLICIES” POLICY OPTION	33
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	37

Chapter 1. Introduction

The protection and promotion of fundamental human rights and freedoms has always been a strategic priority for the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Under the motto “leaving no one behind”, Azerbaijan is making every effort to protect everyone's human rights, including people with disabilities. Addressing disability would pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous community where everyone can benefit from socio-economic growth. “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development”, which outlines the ambitious objectives of the country, puts an emphasis on building an inclusive society and ensuring everyone’s well-being (Talibli, 2023). Minimizing poverty, decreasing unemployment rate, increasing need-based assistance as well as providing more chances for social protection are at the forefront of this vision.

It is worth noting that Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocols in 2008 (World Bank, 2022). Article 4 of CRPD maintains that States Parties shall guarantee and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability (CRPD, 2006, art.4). Since 2008, the measures implemented encompass modifications to national legislation, strengthening the disability assessment system, enhancing access to education and other public services for persons with disabilities, developing public infrastructure, etc. (World Bank, 2022). According to Mr Davud Rahimli, president of the Union of Disabled People Organizations, since Azerbaijan’s accession to the UN Convention, some changes have been made to the legislation, yet their implementation leaves much to be desired (Zeynalova, 2017). The new National Socioeconomic Development Strategy (NSDS) 2022–2026 of Azerbaijan places a strong emphasis on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Its objectives are,

inter alia, improved social assistance, better public infrastructure accessibility, and integration of disabled people into the workforce (NSDS, 2022-2026).

According to the most recent data, there are 560.000 persons with disabilities in Azerbaijan which equals 5.6 percent of the total population (World Bank, 2022). However, only 60.000 of them, meaning only 11-12 percent, are employed whereas the percentage of working age PwDs being employed in the developed countries equals to 40 percent (Turan News Agency, 2017). KEKA survey results have demonstrated that 80 percent of the respondents with disabilities were unemployed and actively looking for a job; however, one in 10 PwDs had never applied for a position (Talibli, 2023). Here the question arises: to what extent they are living the life they dream about? According to the statistics, only 3 percent or 20.000 out of the total number of disabled people in Azerbaijan have a social life (Kekalov, 2021). Third-nine-years old Ms Gunay Mammadova who lost her sight says she had to say goodbye to her plans for a career and successful future and she is accompanied everywhere by members of her family (Zeynalova, 2017). Chairman of the Citizens' Labor Rights Protection League, Mr Sahib Mammadov, believes that it is difficult for a person with disability to find a job in Azerbaijan (Turan News Agency, 2017). He also adds that people with disabilities are often discriminated against during hiring (Zeynalova, 2017). Despite continuous efforts, numerous projects, and achievements in terms of legislation aimed at the inclusion of disabled people in the labor market, analysis shows that there has been a limited impact on their employment and there is still a need for effective employment strategies for persons with disabilities.

Before starting the evaluation, it's worth shedding light on who disabled people are in this policy paper. To make it clear, as per the definition, a person with a disability is a person with a permanent physical, mental, or emotional disorder that prevents him or her from participating fully and effectively in society on an equal footing with others (Law, 2018). The current study

aims to examine inclusive employment strategies for persons with disabilities in Azerbaijan as well as offer policy alternatives and initiatives to promote their inclusion into the labor market.

1.1 Methodology

The data presented in this policy paper has been collected through a mixed research method involving primary and secondary data. Primary data collection involves survey results from 1708 respondents. The survey has been designed in the Azerbaijani language to be able to reach a wider audience of both employees and employers as well as the target group of the disabled population.

Respondents of the survey comprise 1225 women and 483 men 96% of whom, which equals to 1639 individuals, are people of the age of 16-29, 3.3% (56 individuals) are of the age of 30-40, 0.6% (10 individuals) are of the age of 40-50 and 0.1% (3 people) are above 60 years. From the perspective of educational level, the most prevailing group consists of the individuals with a bachelor's degree which accounts for 68.6% and 1172 respondents (*see Figure 1*). The least number of respondents are the ones without any degree which is around 0.4% and 6 individuals (*see Figure 1*).

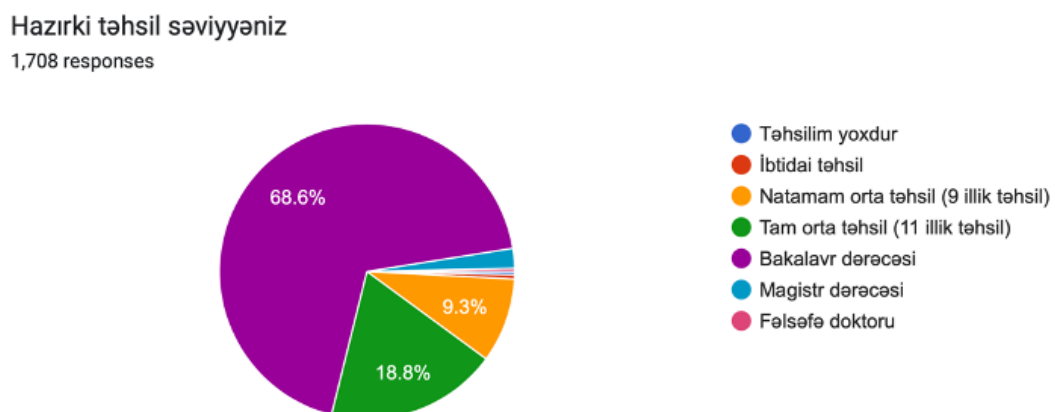


Figure 1

Primary aim of the survey was to reach a wider group of disabled people to be able to consider their perspective and concerns in the research which resulted in 346 responses from the target audience (see Figure 2). According to the Resolution no 187 by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2018), disabilities are classified based on the "criteria for determining disability" and the major categories of human daily activities and their levels of restriction as to 81-100 percent in case of 3rd degree, 61-80 percent in the case of 2nd degree, 31-60 percent in the case of 1st degree of limitation. Correspondingly, 191 individuals which accounts for 55.2% were people of the 1st degree of disability, 86 individuals which equals to 24.9% were people of the 2nd degree of disability and 69 people which is 19.9% were the people of 3rd degree of disability.

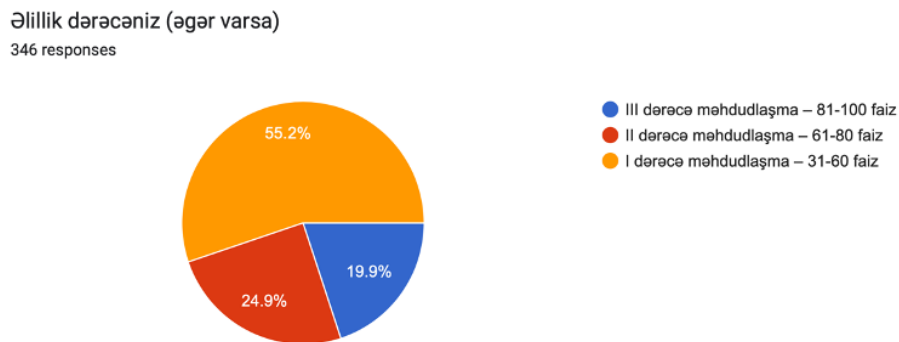


Figure 2

One of the main conclusions derived from the survey was the fact that 772 out of 1708 individuals, which accounts for 45.2%, are unaware of the initiatives by the government in regard to the people with disability (see Figure 3) and 1538 of the respondents, which is about 90%, have never taken a part in any program related to the disabled people initiated by the government, private agencies or NGOs (see Figure 4).

Azərbaycan hökumətinin əlilliyi olan şəxslərlə bağlı həyata keçirdiyi siyasət və təşəbbüslərdən xəbəriniz varmı?
1,708 responses

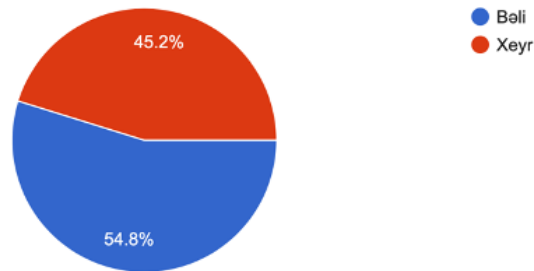


Figure 3

Əlilliyi olan şəxslərlə bağlı həyata keçirilən (dövlət, özəl və ya QHT) hər hansı bir proqramda iştirak etmişinizmi?
1,708 responses

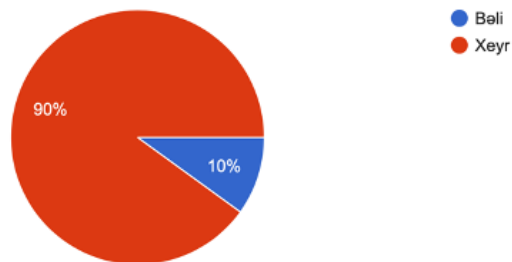


Figure 4

Based on the survey results, people consider that there is a room for improvement in terms of the inclusivity of the labor market. As per the ratings, 604 respondents (35.4%) consider that the labor market is slightly inclusive; however, there are 474 individuals who consider that it isn't inclusive enough or inclusive at all (see Figure 5).



Figure 5

Coming to the restrictions for entries of the disabled people into the labor market, most people consider that there is a lack of accessibility conditions in the workplaces as well as discriminatory attitude of the employers (*see Figure 6*). There are also 266 respondents who believe that lack of the necessary skills or knowledge is among the barriers to entry into the labor market. Lastly, 217 respondents have chosen the stigma and stereotypes related to the disability as a restriction for employment. There are 537 people who have been observers of discrimination against persons with disability at their workplace or educational institution (*see Figure 7*).

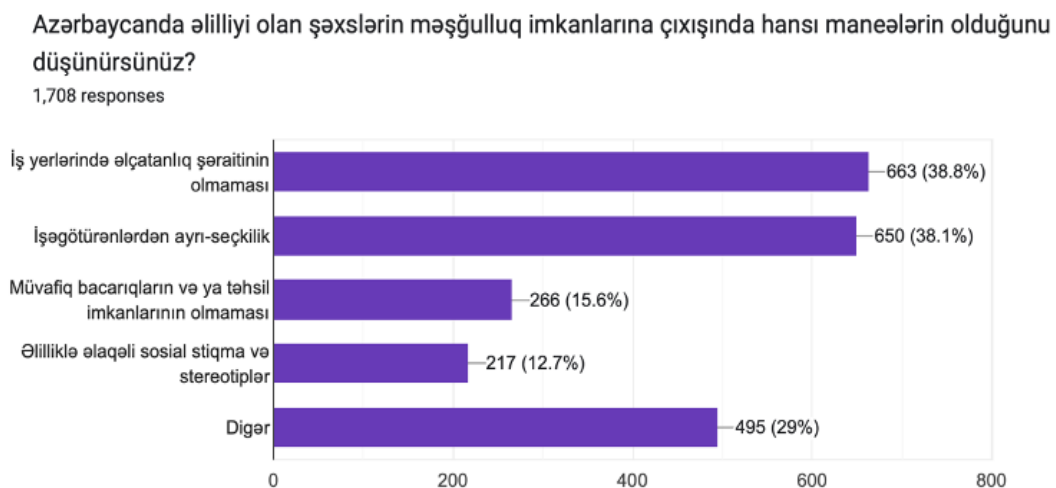


Figure 6

Nə vaxtsa iş yerində (və ya təhsil müəssisənizdə) əlilliyi olan şəxslərə qarşı ayrı-seçkiliyin şahidi olmusunuzmu?

1,640 responses

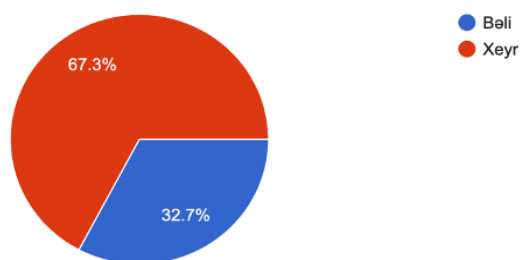


Figure 7

Besides primary data, this study comprises secondary data retrieved from the reports by governmental and non-governmental agencies, including the State Employment Agency under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as scholarly articles.

The first and main drawback of the study is the lack of data which makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions. Unfortunately, there is no access to the statistical reports related to the number of disabled people in Azerbaijan due to confidentiality issues. Another limitation of this study is the variability in disability types and severity, which may lead to overgeneralization of the disabilities although each of them constitutes a unique experience influenced by intersectional factors. Lastly, the analysis shows that only a few studies have been conducted on the inclusion of disabled people in the labor market in past years.

The current policy paper consists of five chapters split up into several subchapters. The study starts with an introduction to the theoretical and conceptual comprehension of the problem as well as defining the objective of the study. The second chapter focuses on the description of the current problem, namely, the lack of inclusive employment strategies for persons with disabilities, its roots and background. It is followed by the third chapter, which offers a number of possible solutions based on world practice. All policy alternatives offered

in the third chapter are evaluated in the fourth chapter based on several criteria. The last chapter of the study concludes the discussions made throughout the paper and provides a list of recommendations.

Chapter 2. Problem Description

As mentioned above, according to 2022 figures provided by the State Statistical Committee and cited by the World Bank, there were 560,000 PwDs in Azerbaijan, accounting for 5.6 % of the population (ibid.). Hasanov argues that these statistics actually do not represent the real figures because disability status of many people was “unfairly and unjustifiably rejected” and the real numbers are actually higher (Prokharova, 2024). The data provided by an independent source indicates that 80% of the people with disability respondents of the local survey were unemployed in January 2023, which stands in stark contrast with the national average of 5.5% (Kekalov, 2023; Marja.az, 2023). This is a mere manifestation of systematic challenges hindering the ability of the people with disability to be employed in the market and it is much lower for the countries with more robust inclusive employment policies. In Sweden, for example, the unemployment rate among the people with disability is 17%, while the rate is 20% for people with reduced work ability (Fipper & Holter, 2023). In the Netherlands, on the other hand, unemployed PwDs account for only 9.6% of the labor market, while this figure is only 4.5 for people without disabilities. According to the Union of Disabled Organizations, only 11-12% of disabled people are employed in Azerbaijan (APA, 2024). According to the State Statistical Committee, 488774 people received social payments in Azerbaijan in 2023 and independent sources also confirm that around 90% of the people with disability reported receiving social payments (State Statistical Committee, 2023; ibid.). State Social Protection Fund reported more than 261.5 thousand persons with disability receiving pension, more than

209.5 thousand receiving allowances and more than 75.7 thousand receiving Presidential stipend (Azertag, 2023).

The minimum wage has been set as 345 AZN, which equals to around 203 USD (Mehdiyev, 2023). The subsistence minimum, which is considered as a national poverty line in Azerbaijan, has been determined as 270 AZN for the country in general, and 222 AZN for people receiving social payments (Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the subsistence minimum, 2004; Presidential Administration, 2024). The average income of the people with disability is generated through social payments amounting to around 300 AZN (approximately 176 USD), and can increase up to an average of 415 AZN with some other allowances and donations, that many people with disabilities receive as a sign of good gesture from people (ibid.). For the employed PwDs, the income can range based on their workplace. "Regulation on the application of quotas for citizens with special needs for social protection and difficulties in finding work" and the "List of enterprises not subject to quotas" approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan (CabMin) regulate quotas for workplaces, according to which, it is determined that the quota does not exceed 5 percent of the average annual number of employees in enterprises depending on the conditions of the labor market, as well as the number of employees (Decision of CabMin, 2005). According to the information provided by the State Employment Agency, 6,635 people were employed based on this quota during 2017-2023, which is very low (ibid.). Even though an obligation for employers was defined in the initial versions of the decision, where administrative penalty had to be imposed for employers not abiding by the decision. However, the recent decision by CabMin removed this part from the decision (Decision of CabMin, 2024). This decision was not unexpected because independent sources reported that since the adoption of the decision in 2005, there have been no reports of any administrative penalty or other disciplinary measures for any enterprises on

this article, for any issues related to the rights of the persons with disability in workplaces or regarding fulfilling the quotas (Chinarli, 2023).

Also, the infrastructure-related and accessibility issues are yet another huge challenge for the persons with disabilities in workplaces, hospitals, schools, public transportation, and nearly in all aspects of their life, including finding jobs with accessibility considerations. Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, State Program on the Development of Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities, Decision by the Cabinet of Ministers on the Approval of the Regulation on Accessibility of Buildings for PwDs, as well as relevant building codes and standards, set obligations for accessibility consideration in infrastructure planning in Azerbaijan (2018; 2017; 2019). Despite these legal and normative frameworks, the implementation and enforcement of accessibility standards face reality challenges since these standards are either not applied at all or not applied properly.

Various cases of the persons with disability also illustrate the gravity of the problem and systemic barriers in ensuring their employment and decent work conditions responding to their accessibility and social needs. Second-degree visually impaired Shahmuradov, who works as an engineer at the Baku Heat and Power Center under "Azerenergy", struggled for 11 years to find a job, saying "Maybe I applied to more than 50 companies. Unfortunately, I got a negative response from all of them. The main reason for this is my disability" (Chinarli, 2023). Matanat Gudsi, a writer and poet, also a PwD also shares her remarks about her experience as a person with disability in one of her interviews saying "In general, the poor infrastructure on the streets, lack of accessible buses, low education, lack of accessible jobs, ambiguous attitude towards disabled people in the society, lack of financial resources, shortage of professional doctors in the field of rehabilitation are among the most common problems faced by people with disabilities. If these problems are solved, people with disabilities can easily build their lives" (Bayramova, 2017). Shahruz Agazadeh, who has first-degree visual impairment says, "I

was invited to interviews in some companies for work. During these interviews, I asked human resource specialists what the situation was. But unfortunately, there was no return to me. I have been registered as unemployed for 5 years. The reason for this is clear to me - my disability" (Karimli, 2024). These cases illustrate the ongoing challenges faced by the people with disability in Azerbaijan and problems with the inclusive employment policies, as well as other social policies in smooth integration of the people with disability into all aspects of life in society, particularly to the labor market with decent work.

Hence, this study aims to discover shortcomings of past and current actions taken by the government in ensuring equitable and effective inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labor market, who face significant barriers to inclusive employment due to policy shortcomings, financial constraints, lack of inclusive education, and social stigmas. To date, two main employment strategies have been adopted by the government of Azerbaijan, one covering the time period of 2006-2015 and another 2019-2030, respectively (2005; 2018). Both strategies aim to address the challenges of persons with disabilities in finding jobs tailored to their skills and economic needs with relevant infrastructure and policies conducive to ensuring a healthy working environment for them. Both the first strategy (2006-2015) and the second strategy, which is in force today (2019-2030), contain broadly defined objectives for the employability of people with disabilities. Both policies widely consider law and policy reforms, *inter alia*, promoting inclusive practices at workplaces, vocational rehabilitation, awareness campaigns, legal protection, and skills development for promoting the inclusion of the persons with disabilities in the labor market. However, the second strategy continued the infamous legacy of the former in lacking effective implementation, enforcement, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure tangible outcomes for the persons with disabilities in the labor market. Therefore, figures provided by governmental authorities, international organizations, as well as certain independent sources such as NGOs media outlets, reveal stark disparities between

non-disabled people and PWDs in their employment opportunities. The lack of effective strategies for the people with disabilities, which fall into the category of sensitive groups in Azerbaijan, exacerbates the issue, consistently widening the disparity. The law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," falls short in practicality and effectiveness, making its role vague for the effective integration of the people with disability into the labor market. In contrast, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the US sets a more robust framework in terms of anti-discriminatory measures for ensuring access of the people with disability into the labor market in the US for sustaining a decent life (Clark et al., 2020). Problems in disability rights enforcement are coupled with issues of inadequate accessibility in the workplace, lack of positive discrimination in hiring practices and workplace treatment, limited opportunities for skills development, and lack of effective vocational training tailored to the needs and abilities of PWDs. The issue of employment of the persons with disabilities has also been addressed in Azerbaijan's new National Socio-Economic Development Strategy for 2022-2026, where more concrete targets have been identified vis-a-vis second national priority on dynamic, inclusive and social justice society. Targets aim to increase the employment level of persons with disabilities by 3% and launch 5 new rehabilitation facilities for the persons with disabilities by 2026.

2.1. Lack of Effective Inclusive Education Opportunities

Quality education boosts the chances of people being employed by enterprises considering the ever-growing competition in the labor market, particularly for people with disabilities. Candidates with appropriate educational backgrounds who received a quality education meeting certain standards are usually given preference by employers since these credentials are linked with a particular degree of knowledge, skill, and dedication to personal growth. It was believed that children with disabilities need to get a separate education.

Nevertheless, recent studies demonstrate that there are beneficial social and educational outcomes for all parties when a kid with a disability attends courses with children without impairments (UNICEF, 2018). However, in Azerbaijan, there is a lack of schools providing inclusive education as well as curriculum, which arises from the inefficient legislation and regulations that must ensure students with disabilities may access and participate in school on the same basis as students without disabilities. Yet another challenge in delivering inclusive education is connected to the teachers who lack the skills to employ assistive technology in the classroom and who have not worked with students with disabilities in the past. Moreover, there are long-standing social and misinformed attitudes that set children with impairments apart. Due to these barriers, many individuals with disabilities are unable to obtain education, unless at their own expense.

The abovementioned State Program on the Development of Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2017, covering 2018-2024, is only a comprehensive framework that is to be concluded this year. The adoption of this program was a significant step towards building an inclusive educational system in Azerbaijan within the wide package of educational reforms. Even though the program had an impact on the inclusive consideration of the persons with disabilities in educational institutions to some extent, its success is under question since the policy has not been officially reviewed and announced to the public yet. The program included curriculum development, teacher training, infrastructure improvements, and awareness campaigns for building an inclusive educational system in Azerbaijan. However, it lacked specific and measurable targets, making its objectives vague and its success rate hard to measure. The program lacked strategies for even distribution of resources for having successful outcomes in the regions and rural areas. Shortage of trained staff and lack of consistent training for capacity-building of educators and educational workers exacerbated challenges for delivering successful outcomes to children with disabilities (CwD). Even though

a special emphasis is put on increasing assistive technologies, the issues with staff qualification and training, as well as the lack of full provision of necessary assistive technologies, also hindered the progress. Despite consideration of infrastructure development, many schools and educational institutions still lack accessible infrastructure. The program also entails vocational training and skill development for the persons with disabilities. But provisions on that are generic and have not generated much progress yet. Adopting dual vocational training practices in Germany, the program could have integrated on-the-job training with the educational process in classrooms, further contributing to the cultivating skills and development of the persons with disabilities for better access to the labor market (Pleul, 2024). These problems, coupled with insufficient funding and lack of resources added to the challenges of the program in ensuring inclusive education and an accessible educational environment for CwDs and PwDs in Azerbaijan. Thus, the new program covering the post-2024 period should take into account these drawbacks.

2.2. Societal Attitudes and Misconceptions

In Azerbaijan, societal norms and taboos play a crucial role in hampering the integration of the people with disability into the active social life and labor market. Historical context also plays a key role in having a strong influence on modern taboos and shaping the experiences of PwDs (World Health Organization, 2011). Several misconceptions and misbeliefs are prevalent in Azerbaijani society about people with disability. Many people think about the people with disability as being less productive than their non-disabled peers, requiring constant care to sustain their lives and work in a professional setting. Also, in most cases, social taboos turn disability into “shame”, leading to isolation of not only people with disability, but sometimes also their families turning it into “family shame”. Mainstream media neglects inclusivity and dominant narratives in society perpetuate predominant prejudices and taboos,

depicting persons with disability as victims in society and those to be pitied for the challenges they face.

With a lack of effective regulations and affirmative policies, employers are keen to hold on to negative stereotypes and prejudices about the employability of the persons with disability and their capabilities. Even if employed, hiring practices, workplace treatment, lack of inclusive public transport routes and means, and work infrastructure further discourage the people with disability from going to workplaces. Employers are reluctant to utilize digital tools for ensuring distant working conditions for the people with disability within general prejudices, making an issue a matter of disbelief, rather than transport and infrastructure challenges. Even though some universities and governmental agencies attempt to adopt inclusive regulations for encouraging the persons with disability, the lack of incentives for the private sector makes it challenging for the market itself to shape societal misconceptions with its scale and effects.

Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) can be used as a best practice for the case of Azerbaijan in eliminating stigmas and addressing other social challenges leading to the isolation of the people with disability in society, as a positive contribution to social fabric (Hummell et al., 2024). The Australian model in shaping societal attitudes and misconceptions is a good example for bolstering community engagement and public awareness for building and fostering a more inclusive society.

2.3. Inherent Financial Barriers to Employment

Financial constraints pose significant challenges to the people with disability in sustaining their lives and seeking employment in Azerbaijan. Their additional expenses, such as healthcare, assistance, and support devices aggravate the gravity of the myriad of challenges they face in finding jobs. According to World Health Organization, people with disability are likely to face more healthcare and associated costs such as regular therapies, medications, and

surgeries to sustain their lives (ibid.). With the abovementioned limited social payments and lack of employment, it is nearly impossible for them to ensure quality life standards. Those financial barriers are further exacerbated by the lack of additional financial support for inclusive accommodation and support devices by employers, hindering their ability to access and maintain decent work. They usually, unless otherwise agreed in workplaces, cover the costs of support devices and adaptive pieces of equipment used in workplaces. People with disabilities have to also cover the costs of finding jobs, which is also a costly process due to the fact that preparing professional attire, transfer costs and other linked costs such as accessing job portals. This process of finding jobs also includes vocational and professional development costs, which can be higher for the persons with disability due to limited availability and needed expertise, reducing the competitiveness of PwDs in the labor market. The abovementioned Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) entails tax credits to businesses for accessible hiring practices and job conditions. The usage of assistive devices and other equipment for the persons with disabilities is subsidized in Germany as per national obligations vis-a-vis the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (EP, 2018). These can serve as an example for tackling the challenges mentioned in this section in Azerbaijan for various financial constraints of the people with disability.

2.4. Infrastructure Barriers

Infrastructure barriers, and lack of physical accessibility, as mentioned above, significantly impede the ability of persons with disabilities in Azerbaijan to increase their low participation (11-12%) in the labor market. Public and private facilities, road crossings and sidewalks, public transport vehicles etc. lack accessible ramps, restrooms, elevators and other assistive devices. These challenges hinder the ability of the people with disability to move freely in public, get a proper education, attend at least interviews to have a chance of getting

jobs, and finally, work daily. Infrastructure barriers pose huge challenges to persons with disabilities in seeking and sustaining employment. The majority of buildings in Azerbaijan do not have accessible infrastructure for the persons with disability to move and operate freely. The problem persists more for the older buildings and for the facilities in the regions and rural areas. Crowded urban centers also lack accessible conditions for ensuring a secure and open environment for the persons with disability to have a safe zone in public. Mobility of the people with disability is greatly restricted due to a lack of accessible public transportation systems, mainly for buses and trains that are effective. Commuting to workplaces and attending job interviews, considering the already-dire financial situation of the people with disability, is nearly impossible under current circumstances. Audio and visual aids, screen readers, and mobility devices are lacking assistive systems that should be integrated into infrastructure in public transport vehicles, road infrastructures, buildings, and other facilities for moving freely and working efficiently. Due to the high costs of these infrastructure adjustments, government intervention and control are required to make these technologies and equipment readily available to persons with disabilities. As an example, comprehensive plans on ensuring accessible infrastructure have yielded positive results for workforce participation of the people with disability in countries like Canada (Accessibility Standards Canada, 2022)

Chapter 3. Policy Options

In the preceding chapters, the major problems that serve as a barrier and prevent people with disabilities from integrating into the labor market in Azerbaijan were discussed in detail. This specific chapter aims to suggest four attainable solution alternatives to cope with the lack of inclusive employment strategies for persons with disabilities in Azerbaijan that are rooted in the lack of inclusive education opportunities, societal attitudes and misconceptions, and inherent financial and infrastructure barriers to employment in Azerbaijan. Policies and

Initiatives to Promote the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Labor Market must be given top priority by the state, policymakers, and all stakeholders in order to establish an easy integration of the people with disability into the labor market.

The policies covered in this chapter largely depend on the wishes of the Azerbaijani government, since this particular issue is a matter of national concern and government undertakings play an important role in eliminating the lack of inclusive employment strategies for the persons with disability in the labor market.

3.1. Arranging and Developing Special Classes at Educational Institutions

To ensure that people with disabilities can easily integrate into the labor market, appropriate education is necessary from a young age. Based on Article 20.2 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, education, and professional training of persons with disabilities is carried out in the form of special and (or) inclusive education, on the basis of special educational programs and an individual curriculum. In cases where there are difficulties in the education of persons with disabilities without creating special conditions, their education is carried out in the form of home education, individual education, and distance education (ibid).

The first policy, arranging and developing special classes at educational institutions in Azerbaijan is the proposed policy option for achieving the development of the rapid integration of the people with disability into the labor market in Azerbaijan. The given policy suggestion should be implemented in several directions.

First of all, the government should arrange classes at schools for children with disabilities organized and designed in the most comfortable way for them considering their special needs. In these newly established classes, first of all, a special curriculum must be

developed so that people with disabilities can easily understand the provided materials without a need for any assistance. On the other hand, books, workbooks, and other educational materials should be specially prepared for people with disabilities. For instance, audiobooks containing the class program, and books with large fonts, or braille would be great examples of supporting the smooth and easy understanding of the class material by people with visual impairments.

Furthermore, while hiring teachers to lead the educational process in these classes, it is necessary to take into account and evaluate acquired knowledge about inclusive education, participation in training and seminars, as well as involvement in working with children with disabilities before assigning them to new classes. For instance, to organize the training of students with special needs within the framework of the implementation of educational standards, seminars aimed at increasing the professional level of teachers working in educational institutions are organized by the state (İnklüziv Siniflərdə Təlimin Təşkili, 2019). Teachers who have actively participated in such seminars and acquired the ability and knowledge of working with people with disabilities should be involved in the special classes to be organized.

As a result of the current policy, first of all, children with disabilities will spend their time in the same conditions as other school-age children, will not feel inferior, incapacitated, or excluded from society in the future, and will not be left behind by their peers. Secondly, people with disabilities will acquire all the necessary knowledge and skills by assimilating information taught in educational institutions and required to enter the labor market in the future. The creation of special classes would decrease the stereotypes against persons with disabilities since children communicate with the people with disabilities from early ages at school and witness that they are competent and knowledgeable. Years later, when those

children are in the role of an employer, they can correctly assess disabled people without being exposed to any stereotypes.

During the implementation process the educational objectives of special education would be identical to those of regular schooling the only difference is in the methods by which they are accomplished. The main purpose here is to ensure the right to education of persons with disabilities at the same level as other persons at all levels of education and to create an environment without obstacles for their education, to ensure that children studying in these classes develop certain knowledge and skills that are important for growing up as independent individuals, as well as for building a career and broadening their world outlook.

3.2. Conducting Public Awareness Campaigns

To ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy employment as every citizen and to eliminate the negative attitudes and difficulties they may face in society and at work, public awareness campaigns must be carried out regularly. It is necessary to organize public awareness initiatives to dispel stereotypes and prejudices regarding disabilities in the workplace, encourage positive representations of PWDs, and emphasize the advantages of employing a diverse workforce.

Information campaigns, training, seminars, and TED talks should be held in educational institutions as well as workplaces. Social videos should be produced and presented to the public through social media and television. The awareness campaigns may address issues like unconscious prejudice in the workplace and efficient methods for supporting individuals with disabilities.

As a part of this policy, people from diverse backgrounds and social statuses could be invited to discuss their experiences and points of view. That is a necessary point to help people develop empathy, analytical thinking abilities, and communication skills.

As a result of these campaigns, educating people about the people with disabilities, demonstrating their abilities, and sharing success stories will reduce ignorance, discrimination, and prejudice about these people and reduce the problems they may encounter in the work environment and labor market.

3.3 Provision of Sheltered Employment

Creating a suitable environment for people with disabilities in the workplace is a key point to ensure their productivity. Sheltered employment comprises various workshops that provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities with varying degrees of disability. Many European states have adopted sheltered employment and faced positive trends in the employment status of the persons with disabilities. For instance, according to “The Labour Market Situation of People with Disabilities in EU25” study, in Luxembourg and France, between the years 2000-2006, the employment of the people with disabilities had significantly increased due to the development of sheltered employment (Shima, et al. 2008, p. 5).

In parallel with the training, accessible recruitment procedures must be provided for the persons with disabilities in workplaces. This may include several steps such as ensuring that vacancy announcements are written in an easy-to-read format so that people with disabilities can get acquainted with the conditions and details without any problems, offering alternative application forms compiled in a convenient format, and allowing candidates to have a remote online interview.

Flexible schedules in a workplace offer employees more job satisfaction as it becomes possible to avoid time waste and costs; better well-being since people with disabilities can easily arrange other important appointments; help to keep the balance between better work and personal responsibilities and decrease the stress level since there are more opportunities for a comfortable environment (Need for flexible work arrangements, n.d.). Therefore, another suggestion is flexible work schedules should be arranged for the persons with disabilities to give them an option for choosing the best and appropriate timetable which can maximize productivity and job satisfaction of the persons with disabilities.

Finally, assistive technologies should be provided to the persons with disabilities to ensure comfortable integration into the work environment. Assistive technology supports a person's physical and mental well-being, and engagement by maintaining or enhancing their functioning in the areas of communication, mobility, and vision. According to the World Health Organization, assistive technology advancement may ensure the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and guarantee that no one is left behind. This can be achieved by the involvement of assistive technology users in their families and society (Assistive technology, n.d.). For instance, providing people with disabilities with hearing aids will support their communication skills and decrease negative effects on their employability and involvement in the community; or appropriate wheelchair provision will improve individuals' access to workplaces.

As a result of the implementation of the above-proposed policies, there will be a smooth and rapid integration of people with disabilities into the labor market.

3.4. Reformation of the Employment Policies

Reformation of the employment policies is another suggested policy to promote the integration of the persons with disabilities into the labor market. Disability-inclusive hiring practices create a condition that guarantees PWDs have equal access to employment opportunities. It should be noted that this is one of the most important points since in the absence of these policies, people with disabilities may face prejudice or any obstacles that prevent them from demonstrating their ability to secure employment.

Disability-inclusive hiring policies may include the availability of additional payment funds or tax incentives for employers. Tax credits, grants, or subsidies should be offered to employers who hire people with disabilities or make their jobs more accessible by making accommodations for their employees. If we look at the practice in Europe, in Slovenia, for example, companies are offered tax breaks varying in a range of 50-70% of the salary of employees with disabilities (Shima, et al. 2008, p. 15).

The availability of tax incentives or any extra payments may encourage employers to consider the applications of PWDs and actively recruit them. On one hand, due to this practice, employers will be interested in hiring and retaining the persons with disability as well as in prioritizing a diverse workforce. On the other hand, providing certain positive offers and concessions to employers who play an important role in the integration of people with disabilities into the labor market will lead to the spread of this situation to other employers.

Chapter 4. Policy Evaluation

Criteria/ Alternatives	Arranging and Developing Special Classes at Educational Institutions	Conducting public awareness campaigns	Provision of Sheltered Employment	Reformation of the Employment Policies
<i>Effectiveness (0.3)</i>	3	4	4	5
<i>Efficiency (0.3)</i>	2	4	2	3
<i>Equity (0.2)</i>	5	5	5	4
<i>Feasibility (0.1)</i>	3	3	4	5
<i>Flexibility (0.1)</i>	1	4	5	5
TOTAL	2.9	4.1	3.7	4.2

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the discussion and evaluation of each policy option respectively. The proposed policy alternatives will be assessed based on 5 categories that are effectiveness, efficiency, equity, feasibility, and flexibility. The weight assigned to each criterion is as follows: effectiveness 30%, efficiency 30%, equity 20%, feasibility 10%, and flexibility 10%.

The purpose of this evaluation is to choose the most convenient policy option that would contribute to the promotion of the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Labor Market.

4.1 Evaluation of the “Arranging and Developing Special Classes at Educational Institutions” Policy Option

As part of the State Program for the Development of Inclusive Education for People with Disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2018-2024, to ensure high-quality inclusive education in the country, a network of general education institutions is being created in which inclusive classes are organized. Support is being expanded to ensure the right to education of children with disabilities in Azerbaijan and also the quality of inclusive education is improving. Inclusive education is the inclusion of children in the same class at school with their peers, regardless of their physical, mental, intellectual, and other characteristics (İnklüziv Təhsil, n.d.).

In the mentioned policy, the organization of special classes is proposed as opposed to inclusive classes. The positive aspect of creating these special classes is that the persons with disability get a chance to study according to a specially designed curriculum for them. Additionally, preparing the teaching materials in a way that is convenient for the people with disability is another advantage of this policy. If we analyze the effect from a psychological point of view, it is very unlikely that a person with a disability will face any moral difficulties caused by external influences and bullying in the classroom. These advantages will enable a person with a disability to acquire knowledge and skills that are important to enter the labor market like any other individual in society, without feeling excluded from the community and without suffering psychological trauma. So, this policy in terms of effectiveness is expected to have profound results.

Although this proposed policy demonstrates positive and effective results, it is in lower places in terms of efficiency. One of the main reasons is that in newly established classes new educational materials are proposed to be used. This means that books, workbooks, and all other necessary materials are privately allocated and taught. This is a matter that requires a certain

amount of time and money. Additionally, to open these types of classes, certain planning and allocations should be done by districts, which is a more time-consuming task.

In terms of equity, this policy proposal is graded as successful and replaced on the top since the current policy directly targets the marginalized group, concerned with their involvement in society and specifically to create the ground for the integration into the labor market. The policy pursues the protection of the interests of persons with disabilities, full usage of all available resources, and ensures that people with disabilities are evaluated at the same level as other candidates while entering the labor market without being ignored.

Regarding the feasibility assessment, the policy depends on several factors such as state will, availability of technical and financial resources, administrative capacity, and proper planning. The state is organizing and developing inclusive education In Azerbaijan in the framework of the State Program for the Development of Inclusive Education for the persons with disabilities which demonstrates that the new proposal will be reasonably feasible. However, due to financial arrangements and budget share distributions, the implementation may face delays.

Finally, in terms of flexibility, the policy is less likely to rapidly respond to changes in preferences and circumstances in the short term (approximately until 1 academic year) since opening such special classes requires detailed analysis, planning, the launch of a special curriculum, printing books, and other manuals in advance, and the involvement of qualified professionals to work with the people with disabilities.

4.2 Evaluation of the “Conducting Public Awareness Campaigns” Policy Option

If public awareness campaigns are properly planned, designed, and implemented consistently in appropriate places, raising awareness about inclusion can effectively influence

the positive change of attitudes towards people with disabilities in society, among employers and employees. Of course, in order to achieve effective results, the purpose of awareness campaigns must be defined correctly, the target audience must be selected properly, and resources must be allocated correctly. If all these highlighted points are taken into consideration, there is no doubt that an effective result will be achieved.

In terms of efficiency, if efforts are made to expand the scope of events such as information campaigns, seminars, training, etc. with minimal costs through social media, proper planning, and strong partnership tools, this proposal can be evaluated as efficient.

The second proposed solution is a successful proposition from an equity point of view if the task of ensuring that public awareness campaigns are accessible to everyone, reaching every citizen regardless of social status, marginalized individuals, and most importantly, employers.

On the subject of feasibility, accelerated awareness campaigns are feasible if important factors such as the availability of monetary resources, proficiency of staff, technical conditions, infrastructure, and cooperation with relevant organizations and stakeholders are in place. The policy is already practicable in Azerbaijan; however, it needs an enhancement.

In terms of flexibility, public awareness campaigns are responsive to new changes, environments, and demands. Such campaigns, their organization, scope, topics, and priority points can be simulated according to each emerging situation without requiring special human resources, time, and large amounts of money.

4.3 Evaluation of the “Provision of Sheltered Employment” Policy Option

In terms of effectiveness, which is the first criterion, the provision of sheltered employment is expected to contribute to the establishment of an appropriate environment for PWDs in the workplace which is a key factor in ensuring their productivity. Creating a suitable

working environment for people with disabilities will lead to their rapid integration into the labor market and will have an effective result in increasing their employment.

In terms of efficiency, the provision of sheltered employment may demand extra costs for the establishment of a comfortable environment, particularly, the organization of workshops, the provision of assistive technologies, the creation of special application forms. However, the benefits of the current policy may prevail over the cost as a result of this policy there will be a smooth and rapid integration of the persons with disability into the labor market. So, considering the contribution of this policy, the efficiency requirement is achievable.

Coming to the equity aspect, this policy suggestion completely focuses on the establishment of a diverse workforce highlighting the establishment of the best possible environment that supports integration of people with disabilities into the labor market.

In terms of feasibility aspect, the policy has already been implemented by a number of European countries, and positive trends in the number of employments of the persons with disabilities have been recorded.

Finally, providing sheltered employment works in parallel with trends and is flexible as all of the policy implementation points detailed in the Policy Options section respond to changing labor market demands.

4.4 Evaluation of the “Reformation of the Employment Policies” Policy Option

The availability of extra payment funds or the application of tax benefits for managers employing PWDs is considered to be an effective policy since it would encourage employers to become responsive to PWDs' needs and hire them. As a result, the effect will quickly spread among other employers and the number of employed PWDs will increase.

In terms of efficiency, for the implementation of the given policy a financial supplement is needed. Equity is a criterion that exists at the core of this policy as it prevents persons with disability from being rejected from getting employed due to their condition.

In terms of feasibility, considering the State Program for the Development of Inclusive Education for people with disabilities in Azerbaijan for 2018-2024 the proposed policy may lead to the direct promotion and enhancement of workforce inclusion and PWDs' employment (İnklüziv Təhsil, n.d.).

Lastly, in terms of flexibility, the application of the given policy seems to be quite appropriate. So, if any kind of change occurs, it does not require additional effort to adjust and apply new rules to a policy in accordance with new requirements.

In conclusion, as a result of the detailed evaluation of all four proposed solutions and according to the given weight for every policy option, reformation of the employment policies is chosen as the best policy suggestion.

Chapter 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Addressing challenges related to the inclusion of the disabled people into the workforce has always been a top priority in the national agenda of Azerbaijan. The country works to establish accessible infrastructure for the persons with disabilities as part of its commitment to tackle the issues connected to disability. It has also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocols in 2008 which maintains that States Parties shall guarantee and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability. Azerbaijan aims to support these people to live a prosperous life, yet there is much work to be done. This paper targeted to examine inclusive employment strategies for persons with disabilities in Azerbaijan as well as offer policy alternatives and initiatives to

promote their inclusion into the labor market. The study has found out that despite efforts and legislative changes made in order to foster the inclusion of the disabled people into the labor market, there are still some gaps that should be addressed.

However, the research also ascertains that there is a lack of public awareness about policies and strategies aimed at building an inclusive society and addressing the interconnected challenges. This study comes to the conclusion that arranging and developing special classes at educational institutions, conducting public awareness campaigns, providing sheltered employment and reforming employment policies are the primary driving forces for fostering the inclusion of the people with disabilities into the workforce. Evaluation of the suggested policy alternatives acknowledged their significant role; however, some of the above-mentioned policies call for the attention of the government as well as public and private agencies.

Recommendations

- **Collaboration:** to encourage collaboration among government, private agencies, educational institutions, NGOs in arranging and developing special classes at the educational institutions.
- **Promotion of inclusive culture:** to finance the development of the training plan for establishing inclusive workplace culture.
- **Using correct terminology towards people with disabilities:** to promote correct wording like a “person with disability” instead of “victim”, “crippled”, or “invalid” through public campaigns and educational training.

Implications for further research

Further research should be developed in order to examine the roots of the barriers in the employment of the disabled people. Particularly, more studies should be done to determine

what might attract attention of public and private agencies as well as NGOs and encourage their collaboration for the inclusion of the people with disability into the labor market. More specifically, performing longitudinal research to observe the career paths of the people with disability across time, looking at the elements that result in career prospects as well as the obstacles and difficulties they encounter in finding and keeping a job would positively contribute to the research.

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