



SDG LENS

Monitoring Sustainable Development
in Eastern Europe & South Caucasus



SPOTLIGHT REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



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INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 aims to «make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable». Azerbaijan is a country making efforts to achieve this goal through various initiatives. This report will provide a comprehensive overview of the progress made by the Government of Azerbaijan towards SDG 11, with a focus on the key areas of urban infrastructure, safe and affordable housing, environmental protection, waste management, sustainable transportation, access to the healthcare system, and green and public spaces.

The Government of Azerbaijan established the National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development (NCCSD) to make sure that national priorities and indicators correspond to the global goals and targets and that state programs and strategies covering socio-economic areas in the country have been brought in line with the SDGs.¹

In 2016 Azerbaijan signed the Paris Agreement and submitted its first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). Azerbaijan has a commitment in its first NDC to achieve a quantitative target of a 35% GHG emissions reduction by 2030 compared to 1990. In 2019, Azerbaijan joined the Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P), strengthening its cooperation on energy and environment goals via participation in several regional EU initiatives.²

As of 2022, eight Azerbaijani cities – Gazakh, Ganja, Sheki, Khachmaz, Mingachevir, Shamakhi, Yevlakh, Khirdalan and Icherisheher – are participating in the Covenant of Mayor's initiative supporting municipalities in their target to reduce CO2 emissions to 30% by 2030.³

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)⁴ is aligned with the government's strategic development priorities over the period of 2021 to 2025 and is directly linked to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda. It includes Priority Area 2: Stronger Institutions for Better Public and Social Services Delivery and Priority Area 3: Protecting the Environment and Addressing Climate Change. These priority areas are in compliance with the targets of SDG 11.

SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The government of Azerbaijan has made considerable efforts to improve the housing conditions for citizens. New housing units have been constructed, and existing housing stock has been renovated to improve energy efficiency and increase the comfort of residents. Additionally, the government has implemented policies to ensure that housing developments are built in a sustainable manner, with a focus on preserving the environment and minimizing the impact on the surrounding ecosystems.

Another goal of the social policy defined by the government of Azerbaijan is to improve the housing and communal conditions of citizens. The increase in the population of the country has made the issue of providing for the housing needs of citizens of Azerbaijan more urgent. In particular, the priority task was to solve the housing problems of low-income and middle-income citizens, as well as young families.

As a continuation of the reforms carried out in this area by the head of state, by Decree No. 858 dated April 11, 2016, the State Housing Development Agency under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established. Along with this, in order to ensure conditions for the construction of multi-apartment residential buildings in the country, create opportunities for citizens of the Republic to purchase apartments on preferential terms, organize and ensure the rational use of funds allocated for the construction of multi-apartment residential buildings, the limited liability company MIDA was established, subordinated to the State Housing Development Agency.⁵

According to the charter, the main goal of the Agency is to organize the construction of residential buildings and other construction projects on land plots transferred to be at its disposal, in a modern architectural style that meets environmental and energy efficiency requirements. This is in order to create conditions for citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan to purchase apartments on preferential terms (housing provision) at reasonable prices. The Agency aims to facilitate the participation and coordination of activities for the implementation of policies in the field of territorial planning, design and architecture on these land plots.

The main essence of the preferential terms is that the cost of apartments for sale will be lower than the average market value in the area. In addition, citizens will be able to pay the cost of an apartment monthly through a preferential mortgage loan from the Azerbaijan Mortgage Fund Open Joint Stock Company for a period of 3 to 30 years. It should be noted that the apartments are provided fully-renovated and equipped with kitchen furniture.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, through the portal through the portal on its [official website](#), has launched an online sale of apartments in new residential buildings in the Baku settlements of Ramana, Umid, Kurdakhani, in the Absheron and Samukh regions.⁶

The apartments are completely renovated, unused, and have a bill of sale. They can be purchased with a mortgage loan by contacting banks.

The action plans prepared for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda focus on national and regional governing organizations in terms of the importance of supporting the implementation of goals and targets at the central executive level and the significance of the role of regional and local governments in achieving the SDGs.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Azerbaijan is committed to protecting its environment and has implemented various policies to reduce air and water pollution. This includes regulations aimed at reducing emissions from industries and transportation, as well as the promotion of renewable energy sources. Additionally, the government has established protected areas to preserve the country's biodiversity and has implemented policies to reduce waste and promote sustainable resource management.

There are several long-term strategic documents, policies, and laws related to the protection of the environment in the Republic of Azerbaijan:

1. 'Azerbaijan 2020: vision for the future' Development Concept; (national policy document)
2. Strategic roadmaps for the national economy and key sectors of the economy; (national policy document)
3. Improving the Efficiency of Land Use and Protection for 2016-2020 (cross-sectoral policy document)
4. State Program on Industrial Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2015-2020; (sectoral policy document)
5. Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on ecological education and enlightenment of the population
6. Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the use of energy resources
7. Energy saving policy; (National policy document)
8. Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on approval of 'Rules on the increase of energy efficiency and saving energy resources on construction sites' (National policy document)

EU4Environment is providing assistance to the Azerbaijani government to develop green investment strategies, finalize the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) laws, reform regulatory regimes, promote compliance assurance, reinforce policy dialogues on green finance and investment, support public environmental expenditure management, assess and reinforce administrative capacity and develop Green Growth Indicators (GGIs).⁷

The 'Action Plan on reducing the negative impact of plastic packaging waste on the environment in the Republic of Azerbaijan for the period from 2019 to 2020' is in line with the 'Strategic Roadmap on the Production and Processing of Agricultural Products in the Republic of Azerbaijan', which was developed to reduce pollution based on an assessment of the negative impact the mass use of plastic packaging products has on plants, animals, land and water resources.

The lack of a modern sewage system in several places remains a pressing issue. It should be noted that the discharge of sewage from the Hovsan Canal into the Caspian Sea has remained an unresolved problem for many years. Moreover, not only the Caspian basin is polluted, but also the atmosphere - the stench from the sewerage spreads for many kilometers around⁸. According to the State Committee for Urban Planning and Architecture, as part of an increase in the capacity of the sewerage system, it is proposed to build four new local treatment facilities. The implementation of these projects will increase the efficiency of the wastewater treatment system in Baku by more than 2.5 times.

Climate change has affected both the availability and demand for water in recent years. The Kura River is an important source of fresh water for people living in cities and rural communities of Azerbaijan. The decrease in the water basin of the Kura River has already caused serious water problems in cities along the Kura River in the southern regions of Azerbaijan. Due to the reduction of freshwater resources for livestock and for the irrigation of agricultural lands, some rural residents migrate to the capital city for job opportunities. As a result, the income of the population in affected rural communities has decreased, which in its turn will increase the number of unemployed people who will need financial assistance from the governmental agencies.⁹

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

The government of Azerbaijan is taking steps to promote sustainable transportation and reduce the country's reliance on fossil fuels. This includes investments in public transportation systems, the promotion of electric vehicles, and the development of bike lanes and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Additionally, the government has implemented policies to reduce congestion and encourage the use of public transport.

By the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 21, 2015, the Baku Transport Agency was established under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated November 24, 2016, on some measures related to the improvement of public administration in the Republic of Azerbaijan, a public legal entity, the Baku Transport Agency, was established under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the legal status of 'Executive Authority'.¹⁰

At present, 34% of Baku's total bus fleet consists of CNG-powered vehicles, and as a result, 11% less harmful gas emissions are emitted annually. According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 73, from 2025 it will be possible to purchase only CNG-type buses in the capital.

There is also the Baku Intelligent Transport Management Center operating in the capital city. This was established to improve the transport system, improve the level of transport services, regulate public transport, and optimize traffic routes. In addition, the system allows the use of a single payment card for all public transport.

The Center has the world's largest monitor, with an area of 120 square meters, capable of displaying more than 600 images simultaneously. With this monitor, it is possible to view the traffic situation at 150 intersections, as well as display information from 192 surveillance cameras associated with the management of 2000 buses.¹¹

In addition to the above, the Center will monitor images received from 600 cameras of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The intelligent transport system consists of three stages, the first of which is the coverage of the main streets and avenues of the capital. The second stage involves the coverage of the territories of Greater Baku and Absheron with a total area of 2200 sq. km. At the third stage, these systems will control the transport infrastructure of the entire territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

A number of projects have been implemented in the field of providing quality services for passenger transportation, providing comfortable, fast, and safe transportation for the population at reasonable prices, and updating the infrastructure of stations and passenger stations in a modern way.

GREEN SPACES

Azerbaijan has made efforts to increase the use of green spaces in urban areas. This includes the creation of parks and green belts, as well as the preservation of existing green spaces. The government has also implemented policies to encourage the use of green spaces for recreation and to promote the health and well-being of its citizens.

It should be noted that in recent years, the volume of landscaping and construction works in Baku has been increasing. This includes the construction of modern parks and new green lanes for the recreation of the residents of the capital and tourists, the restoration of Baku's ancient historical architecture, and the construction and commissioning of modern buildings. At the end of 2022, a project for the registration and numbering of trees was launched in Baku. The main goal of the project, which is implemented in cooperation with the IDEA (International Dialogue for Environmental Action) Public Union, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, local executive authorities, and municipalities, is to ensure the protection of green spaces, conduct an accurate inventory, form and maintain a register, and strengthen public control. To register trees, a special application is used, which automatically adds GPS coordinates including the location, time, and date, as well as other necessary identification data to the photo taken with the help of this application. A special website containing information about registered green spaces has been created. On the website, the trees will be marked on a map with an image of each of them and all the relevant information.¹²

A total of six public beaches in the settlements of Shikhov, Goradil, Novkhani, Buzovna, Pirshagi, and Sahil were modernized by the IDEA. For the first time in the country, the necessary conditions for people with limited health opportunities were created on the Shikhov settlement beach. It is planned to create such infrastructure on other public beaches as well.¹³

One of the five top priorities of 'Azerbaijan 2030: National priorities for socioeconomic development' is Priority # 5 on Clean Environment and 'Green Growth', which also includes sub-goals '5.1. High-quality ecological environment' and '5.2. Green energy space'. This priority calls for "applying environmentally friendly technologies, the use of clean energy sources, waste recycling, and the rehabilitation of contaminated areas as an important contribution to efforts to maintain greenhouse gas emissions in line with international standards"¹⁴.

On October 16, 2019, the Port of Baku became the first port in the Caspian region awarded the European Sea Ports Organization (ESPO) PERS-EcoPorts certificate. The Port of Baku also has a strategy to expand the green zones in the port's 400-hectare area, planting more than 30,000 trees and plants.

URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Azerbaijan has made significant investments in the development of its urban infrastructure. This has led to the improvement of public transportation systems, the construction of new housing units, and the development of new commercial centers. The government has also implemented policies to ensure that new infrastructure is built in an environmentally friendly manner and to minimize the impact on the surrounding natural habitats.

Ganja, the second-largest city in Azerbaijan, joined EBRD Green Cities in 2020 with the goal of "building a greener and more sustainable vision for the future and improving the services it provides to residents". More than 300,000 people living in Azerbaijan's second-largest city could benefit from improvements in their urban environment, due to a partnership between the Regional Executive Authority and the EBRD. Through the adoption of a Green City Action Plan (GCAP), Ganja will take a systematic approach to address its urban environmental challenges with specifically tailored actions and visions. The first Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P) grant and loan agreement for Ganja Street Lighting was signed in September 2022.

However, despite active steps taken by state bodies, in the cities of Azerbaijan, and the capital in particular, there are still chaotic parking lots, and car placement on sidewalks provided for pedestrians, which greatly complicates their safe movement. In addition, a significant problem is the chaotic development of old yards, when huge balconies or entire shops are set up in places provided for the recreation of residents, especially children. The problem lies not only in irresponsible entrepreneurs, but also in some government officials that issue permits for this, or turn a blind eye to what is happening.

Azerbaijan was one of the world's first countries to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008). However, the involvement of PWD in the labor market is low compared with other countries in Western and Eastern Europe. There is a huge need to address issues to improve workplace accommodation and easy access to the workplace. There are many cases where PWD experienced problems since many business companies as well as governmental organizations do not have proper infrastructure both in the workplace and outside their office buildings to host potential employees with disabilities. Currently, only two recently built metro stations offer special lifts for PWD. Getting around the city in a wheelchair is not feasible either, because the sidewalks, underground passes, and traffic stops are not suitable for people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Azerbaijan is making progress toward the attainment of SDG 11, with a focus on urban infrastructure, housing, environmental protection, sustainable transportation, and green spaces. While the country has demonstrated a commitment to sustainable urban development and has taken concrete actions to improve the quality of life of its citizens, there is nonetheless still much work to be done. Here are some valid suggestions and recommendations that the authors have detailed for the main stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

- **In order to ensure the sustainable development of cities**, the government needs to create a favorable environment for the relevant structures to construct energy-efficient buildings, for the promotion of green transportation, for the provision of a constant water supply, and for the improvement of the natural environment of cities.
- **The use of 'smart' technologies** – The government needs to put in a significant investment to monitor the quality of the environment and to make it convenient to use environmental solutions. There is various contemporary equipment and systems, such as environmental early warning systems for adverse climatic conditions and air pollution, that could be used, not only in the specialized zones (factories, the oil industry, etc.) but also in the country's big cities.
- **Develop mechanisms** of tax and other financial incentives for companies to implement environmental and social practices into their daily working activities. Follow SDGs and actively collaborate with civil society organizations.

- **Creation of social and leisure opportunities for elderly people** - Relevant government authorities need to implement long-term initiatives in cities and rural communities that help ensure access to quality leisure time for elderly people. There is a need to establish special discount programs for elderly people to visit theaters, museums, concert halls, and other important social and public spaces.
- **Develop measures for the efficient use of water resources** in cities and rural communities. Prepare educational materials and hold town hall meetings with the involvement of all interested parties.
- **Financially support municipalities** that want to implement infrastructure projects that will provide easy access to buildings and easy movement on streets for people with disabilities and parents with strollers.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BUSINESS SECTOR

- **Green investment** – National and international business companies operating in Azerbaijan can establish 'green investment' funds to finance investment projects that target green technologies. These investments might be made both by the banking sector and large financial holdings. Supporting sustainable and innovative technologies will, in the long term, improve the lives of citizens living in urban and rural areas.
- **Establish corporate training programs** for middle and top management on contemporary labor policies and strategies that will promote inclusivity and help to improve the working environment in companies as well as ensure that all social groups will have equal access to job opportunities in the labor market.
- **Establish ESG** (Environment, Society, and Governance) specialist positions in large companies and SMEs to ensure the active involvement of businesses in the promotion of the SDG in their work.
- **Banks should integrate sustainability criteria** in investment project evaluation and due diligence processes, especially for construction projects, to make companies consider energy-efficient buildings, the use of environmentally friendly materials, waste management, and the reduction of air emissions.
- **Ensure that people with disabilities and parents with strollers** have easy access to shopping malls, business centers, hotels, and restaurants.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO NGOS

- **Create a coalition** among local NGOs that promote ideas of sustainable development, environmental and social protection.
- **Establish a networking platform** that will unite representatives of NGOs, governmental organizations, and the business sector to actively promote the application of the UN SDGs in daily life.
- **Organize a series of seminars and training** to raise awareness among young people and adults who are already working in various business companies and governmental organizations about green skills. This will help to equip the workforce with contemporary skills and competencies that employers need for a smooth transition to a 'greener economy'.
- **Collaborate with international organizations and NGOs** and collect information about the best international practices in sustainable development, and the protection of historical and cultural heritage. After gaining sufficient information in this field, local NGOs can promote these practices through various advocacy campaigns.
- **Active promotion of the SDGs among young people** – It is important to raise awareness of the SDGs among young people living and working in cities and regions and provide them the opportunity to learn more about sustainable development and its benefits for their communities.
- **Enhance the role of NGOs** in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and cooperate with governmental organizations to provide a foundation for solving existing social and environmental problems in compliance with the principles of the UN SDGs.
- **Organize workshops on the role of entrepreneurs in ensuring sustainable** economic development in Azerbaijan.

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