

# AZERBAIJAN

## CREATING A SINGLE-WINDOW ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

It is hard not to notice the dynamism in ASAN's official Facebook page crowded with more than 70000 people. Updates on new services, feedback from citizens, and photos documenting state-citizen interactions populate its newsfeed. This burst of activity is not limited to a virtual space. ASAN's newest service center saw around 40,000 people applying for services within a month of its opening this May. The very rapid uptake of its services is a marker of the thirst for high quality, efficient and transparent public services.

### FEATURES OF THE INITIATIVE

In Azerbaijani, ASAN translates to "EASY" and was conceived as a one-stop shop where the services of various government agencies are provided. Azerbaijan was no novice to this idea, having been branded a top reformer by the World Bank's Doing Business Survey 2009 for setting up a similar one-stop shop for business registrations. With its application to a wider range of public services through ASAN, the President of Azerbaijan expected to improve State-citizen relations and move away from the Soviet legacy of corruption and inefficiency. Azerbaijan's commitment to increase the access of citizens to public services in the OGP National Action Plan helped maintain the momentum on ASAN's implementation.

Since ASAN starting functioning from January 2013, two service centers have opened in the capital, Baku, and a

third opened recently in Sumgait, the country's third largest city. In areas where the centers are absent, ASAN Mobile Services buses fill the gap. The buses travel to various regions and services are provided through cloud technology. There is also a website and a nationwide call center which provides information on ASAN's services. Together these work in a unified and coordinated manner to form the ASAN network of services.

Currently, nine government agencies are rendering 25 services through ASAN. Registering civil status, issuance and renewal of various IDs, notary services and tax and customs declarations are among some of the services that citizens can access. Private companies providing banking, medical, insurance and other subsidiary services that reach to 22 altogether are also represented. However to protect the best interest of citizens, these companies are required to charge less fees than they would outside the ASAN service center.

### EARLY RESULTS

The ASAN model brings a combination of features that ensure higher levels of transparency and efficiency in public services. First, the standardization of services for citizens reduces information asymmetry, which is so often the cause of petty corruption. That citizens can access many public services in one visit and know exactly which services they will receive and at what cost, means that government is now more interactive

and transparent. Vusal Huseynov, the Secretary of the Anti-Corruption Commission also highlights that "There are no hand-in-hand cash payments. All transactions in ASAN centers are either made online, through the post office or through pay-point kiosks. The procedures and transactions are continuously monitored thereby ensuring a more transparent environment".

Second, ASAN aims to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards both in letter and in spirit. Highly skilled and motivated public servants deliver the services seven days a week. The average age of people working in these centers is between 18 and 35. Young volunteers aged from 17 to 25 also help citizens who are unable to fill out applications on their own. This customer-centric outlook is paired with a financial reward mechanism for top-performers. Citizen feedback surveys are conducted regularly to identify those public servants who uphold the highest standards in transparency, efficiency, and courtesy, and factored into their monthly evaluations.

Third, ASAN prides itself on its unique legal structure. Its model of a one-stop shop clearly demarcates the role of the service provider and the



LOGO OF ASAN

quality controller. Established by the President, the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovation (State Agency) is responsible for providing the administrative space, standards setting, monitoring, and quality assurance of the ministries represented. The ministries on the other hand, have a say in the standard setting process. This arrangement is aimed at minimizing conflict of interest between the two entities, and ensuring efficiency and objectivity. "One is the 'shop owner', the other 'sells the goods'. To this end, they complement each other, separately constituting nothing", says Azad Cafarli, Director of International and Public Relations Department within the State Agency. These factors have changed the way the public sector thinks, acts, and interacts with the citizenry.

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## FACING CHALLENGES

Although a promising new service that he himself uses frequently, Gubad Ibadoglu from the Economic Research Center, a civil society organization (CSO) in Azerbaijan, notes that real challenges still lie ahead. A general survey done by the government so far shows that 82 percent of customers are satisfied with the services provided. While it is too early to conclusively quantify the

savings in time and money accruing to citizens, Gubad notes that the government should pay more attention to developing rigorous indicators to evaluate its progress. Another challenge is the low level of penetration of ASAN at the local levels and cooperation with local government agencies. "The OGP action plan is still a very centralized project that revolves around economic priorities in the country," says Gubad. ASAN plans to open three new service centers by the end of this year and hopes to cover the whole of Azerbaijan by the end of 2014. But in order to realize the scope of this project, the government needs to invite the active participation and ownership of its vision by all levels of government as well as non-state actors. For many independent CSO's in Azerbaijan, this space for engagement with the government has been shrinking. But there is a hope that the country's participation in the OGP will safeguard the government's commitments of transparency and accountability towards its citizens.



CITIZENS WHO ARE GOING TO BENEFIT FROM ASAN MOBILE SERVICE PRESENT THEIR ID, CHOOSE A SERVICE AND TAKE A QUEUE