

## **Access of Orthopedically Disabled People to Sea and Beach Tourism in İzmir**

Seferihisar Disabled People and Orphans Alternative Water Sports, Youth and Sports Association (SEKADER), with this study, aimed to determine the access opportunities of the disabled for tourism and holiday areas such as sea and beach in İzmir center and its districts, to identify the deficiencies in disabled tourism and to draw the attention of public and local administrations to this issue. In other words, an area of advocacy for the disabled people's right to access tourism opportunities has been tried to be created locally. The final results are to produce policies to eliminate the deficiencies in the access of the disabled to their rights in these areas and to offer solution suggestions to the decision makers.

As a non-governmental organization working in the field of disability rights, we know that disabled people are one of the most vulnerable groups in society under all circumstances. We tried to identify and make visible the current situation in the local area, based on the "accessibility" rights of the disabled, who have difficulties in reaching their rights, which are clearly stated in Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, of which our country is also a signatory. Our starting point in starting to work was to remind people that the problem of disabled people, who are ignored in the society, forced to limit their lives to their homes, and always seen as in need of help, should be looked at on a rights-based basis. We aimed to listen to their needs regarding their access to their basic rights and to share them with relevant institutions. As SEKADER, we have been closely following the problems in the subject determined as monitoring work, with the service we have been providing for the disabled to benefit from the sea and beach facilities since 2010. With the support of Etkiniz EU Program, we tried to turn these observations into more concrete information. We tried to bring the issue to the agenda through the survey conducted within the scope of the monitoring study and interviews with the relevant NGO representatives and local government counterparts. We aimed to increase public awareness by sharing the results on social media.

The research on Access of the Orthopedically Disabled Persons to Sea and Beach Facilities in İzmir is planned in 3 different stages: a survey study to monitor the current situation, interviews with NGOs working in the field, and field visits to the areas where regulations were made regarding this issue. The survey, which was prepared with the opinions and suggestions of Etkiniz EU Program experts, was applied to 97 orthopedically disabled individuals living in İzmir between February 10 and March 10, 2021, through disability associations such as SEKADER, Association for Life Without Disability (Engelsiz Yaşam Derneği), Association for Tourism for All (Herkes İçin Turizm Derneği), and the City Council Disabled Assembly. In the questionnaire, besides demographic information, the participants were asked to answer questions about their experiences and suggestions. In addition, it was aimed to obtain information about good practice examples with the questions asked. After the survey was completed, an online interview was held with 5 NGO representatives working on the rights of persons with disabilities in İzmir. Their opinions on the current situation and solution proposals were received, and what could be done together for the future were discussed. While analyzing the results obtained after the meeting with the survey data and NGO representatives, a site visit was planned to the beaches and facilities with disabled access in Foça, Seferihisar and Urla, in order to see the current practices in place and to

understand the needs better, and these beaches were visited in May and June. Finally, the analysis of all the information obtained was shared with the relevant institutions. This report includes an assessment of all these steps. All practices regarding the access to tourism services of the disabled in İzmir were evaluated according to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We hope that this and similar studies will affect the policies of decision makers in eliminating the deficiencies in the field.

When we look at the general results of the research, most of the participants who responded to the survey say that in İzmir, which is a tourism city, people with disabilities cannot benefit from tourism opportunities sufficiently. In addition to financial constraints, unsuitable physical conditions are the biggest obstacle to their holiday plans in coastal areas. Insufficient accommodation with suitable conditions; the fact that there are very few arrangements for safe swimming for the disabled in places such as campsites and hotels; the fact that needs such as showers, dressing cabins, and sunbeds are not arranged in accordance with the needs of disabled individuals are stated as obstacles to the comfortable and independent movement of disabled individuals. In addition, the inaccessibility of sufficient information even at the planning stage, and limited travel options suitable for the disabled, apart from private vehicles, were also stated as obstacles in reaching tourism areas.

It is seen that the current situation in İzmir does not adequately meet the needs of the disabled, especially related to sea tourism. With the Red Flag application initiated by Izmir Metropolitan Municipality in 2013, certain arrangements have been made in public places. With a joint work involving SEKADER, one beach in each of Urla, Seferihisar and Foça has been made suitable for disabled access. However, it is seen that this number is quite insufficient, and disabled individuals with a ratio of 4-6% to the general population in a region like İzmir and other disabled individuals who want to benefit from tourism activities in summer months are limited to using only 3 beaches. We would like to point out that there are facilities in private enterprises, apart from these areas, where the physical needs of the disabled are met. The current situation in areas open to public access directs individuals with disabilities to these facilities. However, the beaches within the scope of our focus, which have free financial access and are/should be open to public use, cannot meet the need. The fact that hotels are among the holiday areas preferred by the participants in the last three years can be shown as an example of the result of the current inadequacies. It is observed that even in these choices, which are made considering that there are more suitable conditions, there are physical difficulties. It is understood from the answers that the arrangements made for the disabled in most enterprises are superficial and do not really meet the needs (only putting the disabled parking sign and not taking the distances into account; placing iron handles in the bathrooms but leaving no space to move with a wheelchair, sea entrance ramp, slopes, etc.).

As SEKADER, our recommendations for the elimination of these violations are as follows:

- It is seen that the current capacity is insufficient and there is a perception that a “privilege” has been made for the disabled in places where there is capacity. It is necessary to underline these services as a “right”, to make an assessment of situation and to implement the improvement plan by the responsible institutions.

- For accurate and sufficient determination in these studies, cooperation with non-governmental organizations that are directly involved in the issue should be made, and disabled individuals should be included in this process.
- With this monitoring study, which we carry out within certain limits, it is aimed to ensure that people with disabilities continue their lives on the basis of human rights, participate in social life and to draw attention to this issue that concerns the society in general. Based on the data obtained from the local area, a need assessment study related to this subject can be carried out for the regulations throughout the country. In the case of İzmir, where the participants shared their valuable views, the studies carried out by the local government should be reviewed.
- In the long period that has passed since the Law No. 5378 on the Disabled Persons came into force, some arrangements were made in some of the public transportation vehicles, ramps were built at the entrances of public institutions, and the problem was shown to be solved with regional regulations. However, it is necessary to consider the issue of access as a whole within the system and to bring mandatory solutions in every area where life continues. We believe that with permanent solutions instead of temporary clauses, the restrictions against the disabled persons will be lifted and their participation in social life will increase.